

Julian the Apostate

One of the historical truths is that the winners of wars or battles write the history. Obviously, being called "the apostate" is a derogatory term about Julian. It is because Christians wrote Julian's history. The term *apostate* is used for one who renounces, abandons, or rejects a religious or political principle. The Latin term was also used to designate a "runaway slave" or a "rebel." But its Greek origin means "defection." Apparently, he was not liked by the writers of later history, who were predominantly Christian.

If the Jews wrote the later history, he would have been called Julian the Hellenic. This referenced that he tried to revive Hellenism in the Roman Empire by restoring many aspects of Greek religion and culture. Among the Jews, he created an order of patricians who exercised juridical functions. He tried to rebuild the temple, but this could not be accomplished due to his short reign. Julian liked the Jews because, unlike the Christians, they did not cause the decline of the Empire.

Julian's dislike of Christians is because he was caught in a battle between his Christian relatives, who were known for their violence against him and other family members. (An age-old problem of people being turned off to Christianity by their family's actions.) He thought Constantine II was trying to trap him to eliminate him as a potential rival. Julian's information was faulty. The Christians, or "Galileans" as he called them, were not all bad. His actions give us a glimpse into the charitable programs of the 4th-century Christian Church. While he complained about them for their philanthropy, he tried to copy them in the pagan temples. He writes about the disease of Christianity and its antidote to a pagan priest. "We must pay special attention to this point, and by this means affect the cure. From when it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] temple priests, then I think that the impious Galileans observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy. And they have gained ascendancy in the worst of their deeds to the credit they win for such practices ... the Galileans also began with their so-called love feast or hospitality or service of tables, for they have many ways of carrying it out and hence called by many names and the result is they have led very many into atheism period."

His idea of atheism is people not worshipping the pagan gods, so by this reckoning they did not believe in God. Julian further complained to the Senate that many of the senators were allowing their wives to sponsor Christianity because they made efforts to feed people experiencing poverty. They took the food out of their houses and gave it to the houses of the Galileans. The Roman populous admired these senators' wives, those being fed were becoming goddess.

Unlike previous emperors, Julian did not persecute the Christians. He knew there were good and intellectual individuals among them. He was raised in a Christian household by his maternal grandmother. At age 20, he abandoned Christianity during the final years of Constantine the Great's reign. He was not ignorant of Christianity. One of his Christian tutors, George of Cappadocia, introduced him to the works of the classical pagan tradition. Years later, he remembered George's library as "very large and complete and contained philoso-

phers of every school." In 361, when becoming emperor, he demanded that George's entire library be brought to him. He was well-informed about Greek Philosophy.

Julian went to Athens and elsewhere to study and personally adopted as his own Greek philosophy, initiating himself into a cult in Greece and was a devotee of theurgy, the conjuring of beneficent spirits using an appropriate ritual to employ the superior powers of supernatural beings for earthly purposes. This magical practice is supposed to unite the human soul with the divine. He wrote a hymn to the mother of the gods: "Grant to the Roman people in general that they may cleanse themselves of the stain of impiety (Christianity); Grant them a blessed lot and help them to guide their empire for many thousands of years!" This restoration of paganism would restore the greatness of the Roman Empire.

Some historians believe that Julian had Gregory of Nazianzus as one of his teachers, who later opposed the teachings of Julian. Basil of Cappadocia was in the same school as Julian in Athens, so it's possible that they studied together and knew each other.

This influence did not significantly impact Julian because, as emperor, he started to remove Christians from where they could have secular influence. As previously noted, he did not persecute the Galileans, a term he got from earlier emperors. He stopped the tax exemption that Constantine gave them. He banned Christian academics from teaching, published tracts ridiculing them, and praised paganism and Judaism. He may have had some respect or at least thought they had a good idea for society. It was the care for the poor, and the sick Christians did for the Empire. He wrote to Atarbius, "I affirm by the gods that I do not wish the Galileans to be either put to death or unjustly beaten or to suffer any other injury but, nevertheless, I do assert absolutely that the God-fearing must be preferred to them." Even if he did not persecute Christians, he ignored the persecution of Christians by others. For example, in the city of Alexandria (Egypt), a massacre of Christians took place supposedly because they were mocking pagan gods in public. A mob attacked them with whatever weapons were available, so it was not planned. Then they descended to the main church, dragged Bishop Georgius outside, and tied him to a camel, and when they had torn him into pieces, they burnt him and the camel. A Christian scholar by the name of Socrates Scholasticus said that the bishop may have had it coming, for he had been "exceedingly obnoxious to all classes," which is sufficient to account for the burning indignation of the multitude against him. A pagan writer accused him of forgetting his calling.

Julian planned to diminish the influence of the Nicean Christians by promoting Arians, Donatists, and others to positions of influence. This would cause division among the Christians so that the Nicean Christians would lose power and influence in the Empire.

Flavius Claudius Julianus died at the age of 31 after a two-year reign. What Christianity would have looked like if he lived longer is a task for alternative history writers.

Fr Jonathan Morse