

Zeitschrift: Theologische Zeitschrift
Herausgeber: Theologische Fakultät der Universität Basel
Band: 25 (1969)
Heft: 6

Artikel: The Edict of Claudius of A.D. 49 and the Instigator Chrestus
Autor: Benko, Stephen
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-878697>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 22.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The Edict of Claudius of A.D. 49 and the Instigator Chrestus

The purpose of this study is to examine the well known sentence of *Suetonius* in which the word "Chrestus" occurs. It is interesting to note that while much has been written on Claudius and his policy toward the Jews, including certain aspects of the *Suetonius* passage, the material regarding Chrestus has not yet been collected in a single study¹. In the first part of this paper we shall therefore review the problem and summarize the most prominent opinions concerning it. In the second part we shall put forward a hypothesis which in our opinion may hold the key to the solution of this riddle.

1.

The familiar passage, *Suetonius*, *Claudius* V, 25, 4, reads: "*Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit.*" An edict concerning the Jews is also mentioned by *Dio Cassius* LX,6,6, who says: "As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city, he did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings. He also disbanded the clubs, which had been reintroduced by *Gaius*."² The obvious difference between the statements of the two historians made some persons assume that there were in fact two edicts concerning the Jews: first, the one

¹ In addition to the literature quoted below see regarding the problem especially *H. Janne*, *Impulsore Chresto: Annuaire de l'Institut de phil. et d'hist. or.* 2 (1934), p. 531-53; *G. May*, *La politique religieuse de l'empereur Claude: Nouvelle rev. hist. de droit français et étranger* 17 (1938), p. 37-45; *E. Bammel*, *Judenverfolgung und Naherwartung: Zeitschr. f. Theol. u. Kirche* 56 (1959), p. 295-297; *F. F. Bruce*, *Christianity under Claudius: Bull. of the John Rylands Libr.* 44 (1962), p. 309-326; *W. H. C. Frend*, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1967), p. 121-122. Concerning the reign of Claudius see *V. M. Scramuzza*, *The Emperor Claudius* (1940); *M. P. Charlesworth*, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Claudius and Nero* (1951); *A. Momigliano*, *Claudius: the Emperor and his Achievement* (1962).

² The Loeb Classical Library, VII, p. 382ff.

which Dio mentions, and then later on a second, related by Suetonius³. Unfortunately, Tacitus is completely silent on this issue and thus we must rely on our own hypotheses to bring the two accounts into harmony with each other. One argument that must be considered is that the forbidding of Jews to hold meetings, as Dio reports, gave them little other choice than to go to places where they *could* hold meetings. Consequently, the edict even in Dio's words was for all practical purposes equal to expulsion. This is supported also by the fact that Dio ascribes the action of Claudius to the great increase of the Jews in the city and the same thing is given as the reason for the expulsion during Tiberius' reign in A.D. 19. About this Dio says: "As the Jews had flocked to Rome in great numbers and were converting many of the natives to their ways, he banished most of them."⁴ Very probably, therefore, we are faced here with a renewal of Tiberius' edict, which was perhaps phrased in somewhat more diplomatic terms.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that Dio obviously places the date of the edict at the beginning of Claudius' reign, i.e. somewhere around A.D. 41. This conflicts with the report of Josephus, *Antiquities* XIX, 278ff., according to which Claudius at that time extended many privileges to the Jews. Among these were restoration of the rights and privileges which Jews enjoyed in Alexandria and which were taken from them by Gaius⁵, and an edict sent to other provinces in which the same rights and privileges were confirmed for other parts of the Roman empire. The Jewish prince Agrippa was rewarded with a large kingdom. Alexander Lysimachus, alabarch of the Jews in Alexandria (the brother of Philo and father of Tiberius Alexander, successor of Fadus as procurator of Judea) was immediately released from prison where he had been sent by Gaius because of the Alexandria riots three years earlier⁶. It is indeed unlikely that under these circumstances a restrictive ordinance would have been placed upon the Jews previously in Rome, which

³ So e.g. Frederic Huidekoper, *Judaism at Rome B.C. 76 to A.D. 140* (1876), p. 228; Bo Reicke, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte* (1965), p. 178; English translation: *The New Testament Era* (1968), p. 239.

⁴ Dio, *History*, LVII, 18, 5. The Loeb Classical Library, VII, p. 163.

⁵ See regarding this the critical remarks of Louis H. Feldman in the Loeb Classical Library, Josephus, IX, p. 344ff., and Bibliography on p. 583ff.

⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities* XIX, 276.

would have been most embarrassing to Agrippa and to the Jews elsewhere. A secondary source, the Christian historian Paulus Orosius, in his *Historiae adversus paganos*⁷ VII,6, 15f., places the edict in the ninth year of Claudius' principate, which would be A.D. 49. This is now the generally accepted date of the edict⁸ and in the following we shall also work with this hypothesis, i.e. we shall assume that there was only one edict concerning the restriction of the Jews in Rome during Claudius' reign and that it was issued in A.D. 49.

The general impression has been that the "Chrestus" mentioned by Suetonius refers to Christ; that "Chrestus" was just another way of spelling "Christus". Actually we do find some passages in ancient Christian literature which seem to confirm the assumption that there were alternate spellings. Tertullian in his *Apologeticum* 3 says that some pagans did spell the name this way: "But Christian, so far as the meaning of the word is concerned, is derived from anointing. Yes, and even when it is wrongly pronounced by you 'Chrestianus' for you do not even know accurately the name you hate, it comes from sweetness and benignity."⁹ Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* IV, VII, 5, similarly says: "But the meaning of this name must be set forth, on account of the error of the ignorant, who by the change of a letter are accustomed to call him Chrestus."¹⁰ Since Suetonius died around A.D. 150 and Tertullian wrote his *Apologeticum* in A.D. 197 it is not impossible that Tertullian's scornful remark refers to the statement of Suetonius. If this is the case, Tertullian was the first Christian theologian to identify the "Chrestus" of Suetonius with Jesus Christ of the Christians.

⁷ Written in A.D. 417/8. CSEL 5, 451; MPL 31, 469. See also Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II, 18.9.

⁸ See e.g. A. D. Nock, in the *Cambridge Ancient History* X, p. 500 and F. F. Bruce (n. 1), p. 317. For a different position, however, see Th. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* 3 (1909), p. 466f.

⁹ Written in A.D. 197. *Corpus Christianorum* 1, p. 92: "*Christianus vero, quantum interpretatio est, de unctione deducitur. Sed et cum perperam 'Chrestianus' pronuntiatur a vobis (nam nec nominis est certa notitia penes vos) de suavitate vel benignitate compositum est. Oditur itaque in hominibus innocuis etiam nomen innocuum.*"

¹⁰ Written in A.D. 304/13. CSEL 19, 293; MPL 6, 466. "*Sed exponenda huius nominis ratio est propter ignorantium errorem, qui eum inmutata littera Chrestum solent dicere.*"

The identification is commonly made today by almost everybody and on the basis of this identification the hypothesis is put forward that the reason for the edict of Claudius was the prevalence of a theological dispute among the Jews of Rome which sometimes took on violent proportions. Some of the Jews accepted that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, i.e. "Christus", others did not and out of this debate disturbances broke out¹¹. We read of such disturbances in the Book of Acts several times, e.g. 13:44ff. and particularly in 17:1-9, where it is actually reported, that because Paul and Silas preached in the synagogue of Thessalonica that Jesus was the Messiah, some Jews became jealous ("Ζηλώσαντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι", 17:5), and set the whole city in uproar. Moreover they dragged a person named Jason, probably a Jew who was converted by Paul, "and some of the brethren" with him before the city authorities. Here they accused them that they proclaim Jesus to be king instead of Caesar. This was a charge which could easily be classified as treason ("*maiestas*") and Jason and the others had to clear themselves from this accusation. In itself, therefore, it is not impossible that Messianic disputes would lead to riotous conditions among the Jews. But the hypothesis that Claudius' edict was somehow connected with the Christian movement is based upon a number of suppositions which are contradictory and confusing.

For what does Suetonius say? He says simply that in A.D. 49 the Jews of Rome were incited to riotous actions by someone called

¹¹ This is the judgment of E. Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People*, 2, 2 (1897), p. 233, and Momigliano (n. 1), pp. 31ff. The position of modern Christian church historians has been well summarized by F. V. Filson, *A New Testament History* (1964), p. 66: "... it is possible and even probable that what happened in Rome was a series of riots or excited disputes between Jews who believed in Jesus as the Christ and Jews who rejected that claim: Suetonius mistakenly thought that the riots were stirred up by a Roman Jew named Chrestus." Similarly also Reicke (n. 3), p. 153, 184. See also R. M. Grant in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, I, p. 640; or A. Wikenhauser, *New Testament* (1958), p. 399f. Adolf Hilgenfeld, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (1875), identifies Chrestus with Christus, but names several early and middle nineteenth century historians who deny this hypothesis and prefer to think "an einen unbekannten Ruhestörer"; see p. 303 and especially footnote 4. Compare with that also M. Goguel, *The Life of Jesus* (1933), p. 97-98. The suggestion of R. Eisler, *Ἰησοῦς βασιλεὺς οὐ βασιλεύσας* 1 (1929), p. 132-133, that Chrestus was Simon Magus, seems to be far fetched.

Chrestus. In the face of this in itself simple statement it is maintained that Suetonius probably misspelled the name Christus, because he did not know that the person of Christus (i.e. the identity of the Messiah) was the cause of the trouble. But if he misspelled the name, then he really must have believed that Christus-Chrestus was still alive in A.D. 49 and that he was at that time active in Rome. And if Chrestus is, after all, not a misspelling (as F. V. Filson, footnote 11, finally concludes), then how do we know that the matter of the Christ was involved at all.

Obviously, the similarity between the words *χριστός* and *χρηστός* cannot be ignored. There is only one letter difference between them and in primitive Christian circles it was a common homiletic device to use this similarity as a play on words. Already in I Peter 2:3, *εἰ ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστός ὁ κύριος*, if we change *χρηστός* to *χριστός* the meaning will become "you have tasted that Christ is the Lord" instead of "that the Lord is good". In Justin Martyr's *Apologia* I, 4 a similar play on words occurs twice in one chapter¹² and the same play on words can also be seen in Theophilus' *To Autolycus* I, 1¹³. Clemens Alexandrinus uses it several times, e.g. in *Protreptikos* IX, 87, 4 where he quotes Psalm 34:8 (33:9) and reads *χριστός* for *χρηστός*, and he does this also in *Stromata* V, X, 66¹⁴. In *Paedagogus* I, VI, 44 he quotes I Peter 2:3 the same way¹⁵ and in *Stromata* II, V he writes: "Now those who believe in Christ both are and are called *Chrēstoi* (good)." ¹⁶ But if these examples prove anything at all, it is the fact that the words *χριστός* and *χρηστός* were not confused.

Furthermore, the existence of a proper name Chrestus, derived from the Greek *χρηστός* – "useful", "good", is more than amply attested in ancient Latin documents. It appears to have been a widely used name¹⁸. Here is just one example. Cicero, in a letter

¹² MPG 6, 332 and 333, ANF I, 163 and 164.

¹³ MPG 6, 1024–1025, ANF II, 89.

¹⁴ Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, I, p. 65 (footnote); ANF II, 196.

¹⁵ GCS, II, p. 370 (footnote); ANF, II, 460.

¹⁶ GCS, I, p. 116 (footnote); ANF, II, 220.

¹⁷ GCS, II, p. 122: "οἱ εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν πεπιστευκότες χρηστοί τε εἰσὶ καὶ λέγονται." ANF II, 351. Compare Tertullian and Lactantius above.

¹⁸ See *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae. Onomasticon*, 2 (1907–1913).

dated from Athens, July 6, 51 B.C., wrote to a certain M. Caelius Rufus: "Well, do you really think that this is what I commissioned you to do, to send me reports of 'gladiatorial pairs', 'the adjournment of trials', 'burglary by Chrestus', and such tittle-tattle as nobody would have the impertinence to repeat to me when I am at Rome?"¹⁹ Several other quotations could be made to demonstrate how widely the name was used but instead of multiplying these it may be more profitable to observe that, although Christians, doubtless out of respect to Jesus, are not known to have assumed the name of Jesus for themselves or their descendants, the name Chrestus was commonly used by many of them. We know of a Chrestus who was bishop of Syracuse and to whom Emperor Constantine wrote a letter concerning a synod to be held for the purpose of creating unanimity among the bishops²⁰. Then there was a Chrestus who was elected bishop of Nicaea in 325 when the previous bishop, Theognis, was convicted of Arianism and banished. However, after Theognis recanted in A.D. 328 he was reinstated and Chrestus expelled²¹.

These facts prove sufficiently that the name "Chrestus" was a quite common one and that Suetonius understood it as such. There is no hint in the text that he is trying to put down a name of which he was not quite sure. Now, here the argument could be raised, that this is just the point: Suetonius was so familiar with the name Chrestus, that when he heard about Christus, he thought that the correct spelling of the name was with an "e". But that would involve the supposition that Suetonius was utterly ignorant of the existence of a new religion called Christians, and this is, of course, impossible, since in Nero VI, 16, 2 he writes: "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of man given to a new and

¹⁹ *Epistula ad Familiares* II, VIII, 1. The Loeb Classical Library, I, p. 117. According to the note in this volume M. Caelius Rufus was a young nobleman whom Cicero defended in 56 B.C.; he was a plebeian tribune in 52 and praetor in 48. According to Goguel (n. 11), p. 97 footnote 3, there is a list of more than eighty inscriptions in which this name occurs (Linck, *De antiquissimis*, p. 106, n. 2). See also Frend (n. 1).

²⁰ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* X, 5, 21. NPNF Series II, i, 381.

²¹ Socrates, *Church History* I, 14; Sozomen, *Church History* I, 21; II, 16. NPNF Series II, 3, 56. See also *A Dictionary of Christian Biography* edited by William Smith and Henry Wace (1877).

mischievous superstition.”²² He knows, therefore, how to spell Christian, and if he had thought that Claudius’ edict had anything to do with this “new and mischievous superstition”, he certainly would have known how to spell the name Christus. Moreover, C. Tacitus (c. 55–c. 120) who was active before Suetonius, already knew the origin of the name and its correct spelling. He wrote in the *Annals* XV, 44: “Christus, from whom the name (Christians) had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...”²³ The widely read and conscientious researcher Suetonius would hardly confuse an ignominious Roman Jew of the year A.D. 49 with the founder of a new religion which in his time, i.e. the first part of the second century, was only too well known by everyone. But it is entirely possible that, according to the information that Suetonius gathered, there was indeed a Jew named Chrestus in Rome around A.D. 49 and that he was a rabble-rouser who incited the Jews to various riots.

It is also to be considered whether in A.D. 49 some disturbances in a Jewish community and measures taken to check them did necessarily have something to do with the Christian movement? The only reason why the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Claudius may be connected with the Christian movement is because of the occurrence of the name Chrestus in Suetonius. Otherwise the years leading up to the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66–70 are filled with Jewish-Gentile clashes in various parts of the empire and with various measures against Jewish excesses which had absolutely nothing to do with Christianity. As far as expulsion from Rome is concerned we know of at least three of them. As early as 139 B.C. the Jews were expelled from Rome for “attempting to corrupt Roman morals by the cult of Jupiter Sabazius”²⁴. In A.D. 19 Tiberius expelled them, according to some historians, because four

²² “...afflicti suppliciis Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novae ac malefaciae...” The Loeb Classical Library, II, p. 110f.

²³ “Ergo abolendi rumori Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat. Auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat...” The Loeb Classical Library, 4, p. 282f.

²⁴ Valerius Maximus, 1, 3, 3.

of them stole an offering from a Roman matron named Fulvia²⁵ at which time also four thousand Jews were sent to Sardinia and some were executed. Thirty years later Claudius repeated the ban because of the activities of Chrestus. That at this time some Christians, as members of the Jewish community, may also have been affected, is probable. But this is nothing but a hypothesis, since we have no proof at all that Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18:2, who went to Corinth "because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome", were already Christians in Rome or became Christians only afterwards.

2.

This summary of the controversy over the identity of Chrestus has demonstrated one thing: we do not have a sufficient reason to doubt that Chrestus was a real *person* who lived in *Rome* during Claudius' reign, rather we must assume that Suetonius made no error in his statement. If this is so, we should raise the question:

In what sort of activities was this Chrestus involved in Rome that finally led to a wholesale banishment of the Jews from the city? The most likely answer is that Chrestus was a member of that Jewish religious-political movement which expected the kingdom of God to come through violence²⁶. Whether we are right to call this group with the all-inclusive name "Zealots", or whether it should be called the "*sicarii*" as a group different from the "Zealots" or "the fourth philosophy" is not within the scope of this paper to decide. One thing is certain: these Jews were the activists of their time who did not believe in toleration and in patiently waiting for the betterment of the fate of their nation. They were emotionally high-strung people, violently anti-Roman, whose primary purpose

²⁵ Josephus, Ant. XVIII, 83; Suetonius, Tiberius 36; see however Dio Cassius above, footnote 2.

²⁶ For Zealotism see Albert Stumpff in Theologisches Wörterbuch, 2 (1935), p. 879-890. For additional Bibliography see L. H. Feldman (n. 5), p. 564. Add to that O. Cullmann, Der Staat im Neuen Testament, 1956 (1961³); O. Cullmann, Die Bedeutung der Zelotenbewegung für das Neue Testament: Vorträge und Aufsätze, herausgegeben von Karlfried Frölich (1966), p. 292-302; Bo Reicke, Diakonie, Festfreude und Zelos (1951), p. 233-387; S. Zeitlin, Zealots and Sicarii: Journ. of Bibl. Lit. 81 (1962) p. 395-398.

was removal of the Roman rule from Palestine. Extreme nationalism and patriotism characterized their political philosophy and while most of their activity took place in Palestine proper there is no reason to believe that there was none of them in other parts of the Roman empire. There is also evidence that these extremists considered the head of the Roman empire as the chief opponent of God, an idea which eventually developed into the conception of the Antichrist²⁷.

The events preceding Claudius' reign were disturbing enough for the Jews to make them suspicious about every little sign that they could fit into their messianic expectations. The attempt of Gaius to put up his statue in the temple of Jerusalem was not easily forgotten, nor the treatment of the Alexandrian embassy in Rome by the same emperor. It would be quite natural to assume that the Jews saw in Gaius an enemy of God, and Tacitus is our witness that at the death of Gaius the Jews were by no means liberated from their fears that another emperor would attempt to do the same thing²⁸.

²⁷ The Apocalypse of Baruch 39; 40, 1: "The last regent" here means very probably the emperor of Rome, see P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 3 (1926), p. 637f., also 1, (1922), p. 11 note c. Schürer (n. 11), p. 164 also shows that the messianic hope of the Jews included the conception that the last attack of the hostile powers against the people of God will be under the leadership of an adversary of the Messiah, an Antichrist. Based upon Old Testament passages, such as Dan. 11, this expectation survived into later rabbinic times and became also part of the later writings of the New Testament (I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 7; Rev. 13). There can be little doubt that ἀνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας in II Thess. 2:3 also refers to the Antichrist. The Sibylline Oracles 3, 63ff. could very well fit the time of Gaius Caligula and Claudius (see Huidekoper [n. 3], p. 138ff., who sees in the verses allusions to Caligula, Claudius and his wife Agrippina) but the dating of these verses is uncertain. The whole book 3 in its original form is generally considered to be a genuinely Jewish work, which was probably worked over by an Alexandrian Jew (or Christian?) sometime around A.D. 140. In 3, 63ff. references to Anthony, Octavian, Lepidus and Cleopatra are discovered by other authors, see E. Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, 2 (1900), p. 182 f.; Schürer (n. 11) 2, 3 p. 283ff.; W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 (1965), p. 703; further literature also here. For Jewish prototypes of the Antichrist there is a good summary by M. Rist in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, I, p. 141.

²⁸ Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 54: "It is true that the Jews had shown symptoms

Is it not possible that the extremists saw in the emperor (note the remark by Tacitus that the Jews were especially afraid of the emperor!) an incarnation of the Antichrist and that Chrestus in Rome was one of them? If this hypothesis is true, then we must place the riotous activities of Chrestus within the framework of Jewish patriotism and "zealotism" and not necessarily within the Christian movement. The disturbances which broke out in Rome, a result of which was the edict of A.D. 49, were in this case only a few among the many violent eruptions of the "Kulturkampf" between Jews and the Greco-Roman population. Chrestus was an extremist who took an aggressive attitude toward his Greco-Roman neighbors and believed that in particular the emperor was the personification of all evils that befell the Jews. If Chrestus did nothing more than spread such ideas and gather a group of followers, that alone would have been reason enough for the Roman government to have taken strong measures for its own protection.

The "Kulturkampf", however, led to violent outbreaks in other parts of the empire too, around this time. We do not need much imagination to see that an instigator like Chrestus must have stood behind them all. In some cases we even know the name of the instigator. The best known example is that of Theudas, who, about A.D. 45 or 46, incited a number of people to come with him to the Jordan where he told them that he would divide the waters and that they could all cross dry-footed. Many were deceived by him, says Josephus²⁹, but Fadus, the first procurator after Agrippa's death, took drastic action. He sent a troop against them, killed many Jews and captured Theudas, who was later executed and whose head was carried to Jerusalem³⁰. But even before that, there was a certain Annibas who, right at the beginning of the procuratorship of Fadus, led a number of armed Jews from Perea against the people of Philadelphia, which was, of course, a Hellenistic city. Annibas was executed by Fadus and two of his conspirators banished³¹. Immediately after that, Josephus relates,

of commotion in a seditious outbreak, and when they had heard of the assassination of Gaius, there was no hearty submission, as a fear still lingered that any of the emperors might impose the same orders."

²⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* XX, 97-98.

³⁰ Compare Acts 5:36, 37.

³¹ Josephus, *Ant.* XX, 3-4.

Tholomaeus, the "arch-brigand", terrorized Idumea and Arabia, until he too was captured and executed³². There can be little doubt that Tholomaeus was an extremist guerrilla leader and that the other two belonged to the same radical group.

After all that, one only wonders that the "Kulturkampf" did not break out in Rome earlier than the time of Claudius. In order to show how things gradually came to a head we give a brief chronological breakdown of Jewish-Gentile clashes during the fifteen years preceding the edict of Claudius:

- A.D. 36 Stephen, one of the first seven Hellenistic deacons in Jerusalem, executed, and simultaneously the Hellenistic branch of the Christian movement dispersed (Acts 6-7).
- A.D. 38 Jewish and Greek clashes in Alexandria on the occasion of the visit of Agrippa. Gaius demonstrates preference for Hellenistic culture.
- A.D. 38 The Greeks put up a statue of Gaius in Jamnia, the Jews break it down.
- A.D. 38 Jewish-Gentile clashes in Mesopotamia and Babylon (Jos. Ant. XVIII, 310ff.).
- A.D. 39 Gaius orders his statue to be put up in Jerusalem.
- A.D. 41 Claudius' edicts concerning the Alexandrian and other Jews living in the empire (Jos. Ant. XIV, 280ff.).
- A.D. 42 James, the son of Zebedee, is killed and Peter imprisoned, probably because of the Gentile contacts of the church (Acts 12).
- A.D. 44 Claudius abolishes the Jewish kingdom after the death of Agrippa and makes Judea a province; Jewish resentments.
- A.D. 44 Citizens of Caesarea and Sebaste celebrate joyfully the death of Agrippa and abuse his daughters (Jos. Ant. XIX, 354ff.).
- A.D. 44 Fadus, first procurator of Judea, puts the sacred garments of the Jewish high priests under Roman protection. Jewish restlessness in Jerusalem, Claudius returns the vestments (Jos. Ant. XX, 6ff.).
- A.D. 45 or 46 The extremists, Theudas, Annibas, Tholomaeus make disturbances (Jos. Ant. XX, 97-98; XX, 3-5).
- A.D. 46 Tiberius Alexander, a renegade Jew from Alexandria, appointed procurator of Judea. Two extremists, sons of Judas of Galilee, are crucified by him (Jos. Ant. XX, 100-102).
- A.D. 48 Cumanus appointed procurator. Armed Jews attack Samaria. Various disturbances in the land (Jos. Wars II, 223-247; Ant. XX, 105-137).
- A.D. 49 The "Apostolic Council" in Jerusalem. The Jewish-Gentile "Kulturkampf" reaches critical point in the church in Jerusalem, which is under heavy pressure from nationalistic Judaism (Gal. 2:1-10; Acts 15:1-29).

³² Josephus, *loc. cit.*, 5.

A.D. 49 The extremist Chrestus instigates the Jews in Rome. Edict of Claudius.

When we look over this chronological list we see immediately how the extremist movement was gaining ground among the Jews and how the increase in any given part of the empire intensified the "Kulturkampf" between Jews and Gentiles. We remember again that both the edict of Tiberius of A.D. 19 and the edict of Claudius, according to Dio, specifically mention the numerical increase of the Jews in Rome. It is therefore logical to assume that the disturbances in Rome were similar in character to those in other cities of the empire where the "Kulturkampf" broke out in violence.

Was Messianism a contributing factor in Rome? Probably yes, as far as Messianism was part of this radical Jewish religious-political philosophy.

*

But Jesus was neither a Zealot nor a member of the "*sicarii*" and, even though there were Zealots among his early disciples, after the first Pentecost the *Christian* and radical *Jewish* movements developed along lines which grew farther and farther *apart*. About nine years after the edict of Claudius, Paul wrote his letter to the Romans (A.D. 58) in which he expressly rejected extremism ("ὡς ἐν ἡμέρα εὐσχημόνως περιπατήσωμεν, μὴ κώμοις . . . μὴ ἔριδι καὶ ζήλῳ", 13:13), urged the Roman Christians to obey the Roman authorities (13:1ff.), and warned them against Jewish customs (2:17-29). The Christian church did not take part in the Jewish-Gentile "Kulturkampf" just as later it refused to go along with the Jewish revolt. It would be a mistake to involve Christianity in any political-religious rebellion in Rome in A.D. 49. But we have yet another argument, which seems to settle the question beyond doubt: In Acts 28: 17-30 we read the story of Paul's captivity in Rome. Three days after his arrival there he called the local leaders of the Jews together to explain to them his situation and theology. At this occasion the Jews of Rome showed their complete ignorance of the essence of Christianity, and their initial reaction to Paul's statement was merely this: "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brethren coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what

your views are; for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against" (v. 21-22). This was around the year 60 – eleven years after the edict of Claudius. Unless we take the position that Luke is not reliable at this point we must be convinced that if the Christian controversy was in any way connected with the disturbances of A.D. 49 then the Jews, who returned to Rome, soon after the death of Claudius, would have remembered more about it.

In our review of the present day opinions concerning the Suetonius passage we have seen that none of them offer a satisfactory solution. We offer, therefore, this hypothesis – and it is indeed nothing more than a hypothesis based upon the arguments that we presented in the second part of this study – that the edict of Claudius from A.D. 49 can best be understood within the general framework of the Jewish-Gentile "Kulturkampf" and consequently Chrestus, in all probability, was an extremist ("zealot") leader in the Jewish community of Rome.

Stephen Benko, Fresno, California