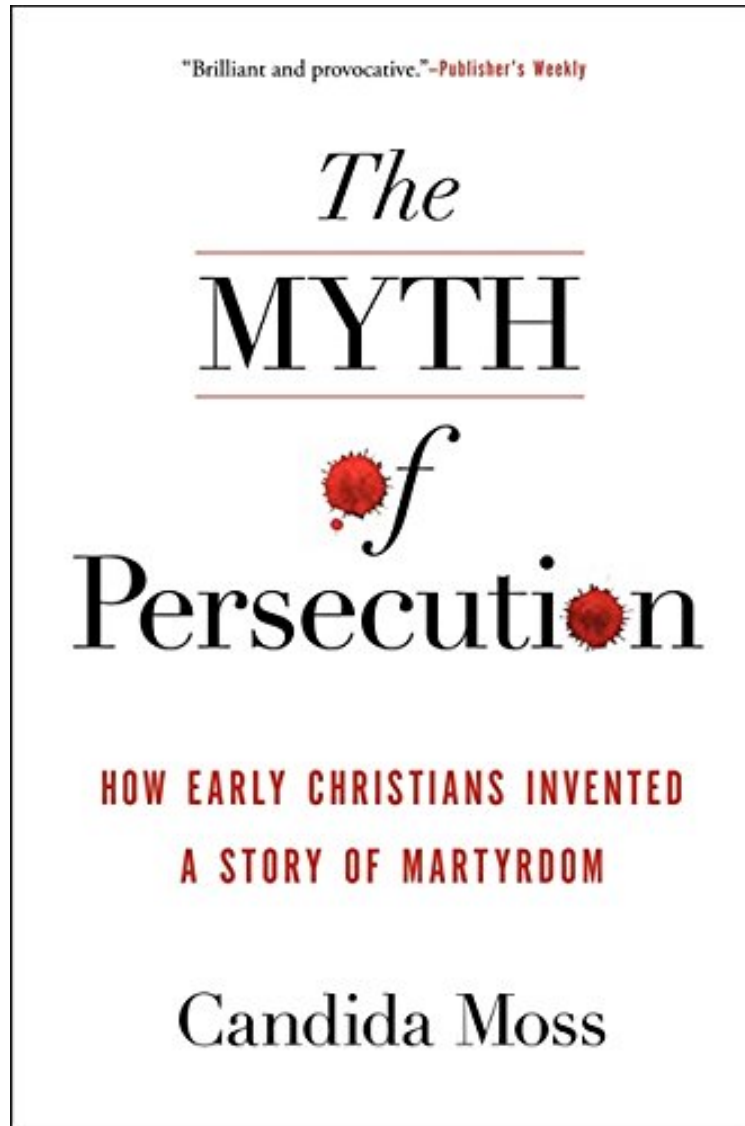


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The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom

Candida Moss

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Candida Moss : The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Persecution Complex By The Peripatetic Reader Oh, how I love revisionist histories! Especially well-written, informative and enlightening books like this one here. There is an added

bonus in that it is an extremely well-written book, with no filler material. This revisionist evaluation of the myth of persecuted Christians has two virtues: One, it is a good revisionist history. A good revisionist history will lift the layers of self-serving historical lies and reveal the historical record. In this case the historical lie is that on a regular basis Christians were fed to the lions, tortured, persecuted and mistreated by cruel, godless pagans. The historical record is more nuanced. The historical truth is that persecution of Christians were at least exaggerated or at worst fabrications. Prosecutions did in fact exist. Much like today where whenever possible hegemonic empires will use the legal process to prosecute terrorists, in ancient times Christian groups and movements engaged in illegal activities; in other cases, on an individual level, legal authority was sometimes challenged; and in other instances, persecutions on a larger scale went on. These activities paled in comparison to pogroms practiced by Christian authorities against minority groups or beliefs deemed to be heresy. This book also contains no filler material, It represents the best of both worlds. Historical accounts written by academics intending to reach a wide readership often fall flat on their faces. The reason, for a variety of reasons, usually the absence of existing historical facts, the accounts are positively stuffed with filler material. These academic attempts to tell gets bogged down with a load of material extraneous to the story. That is not the case here. The account given by author, Candida Moss, here is relevant and sticks to the facts. This is a book of cogent historical analysis. She perhaps overstates the case about the myth of Christian persecution. At times I personally wondered if she was engaging in Christian bashing. Every time that occurred, however, there she was, supporting her assertion with a historical reference. This book is a dose of fresh air. Highly recommended. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. How myth shapes history By E.P. McLean Interesting book on how the stories of martyrs were shaped to meet political agendas. In some cases story have no relation to reality. Author does a good job of examining the various ways stories were used. Though perhaps outside her purpose I would have liked more consideration given to whether many of these martyrs existed at all or were invented for propaganda purposes. 1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Informative By An old 20th century gal Interesting. Seems rather stretched. A worthwhile read, especially for Roman Catholics.

In *The Myth of Persecution*, Candida Moss, a leading expert on early Christianity, reveals how the early church exaggerated, invented, and forged stories of Christian martyrs and how the dangerous legacy of a martyrdom complex is employed today to silence dissent and galvanize a new generation of culture warriors. According to cherished church tradition and popular belief, before the Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal in the fourth century, early Christians were systematically persecuted by a brutal Roman Empire intent on their destruction. As the story goes, vast numbers of believers were thrown to the lions, tortured, or burned alive because they refused to renounce Christ. These saints, Christianity's inspirational heroes, are still venerated today. Moss, however, exposes that the Age of Martyrs is a fiction there was no sustained 300-year-long effort by the Romans to persecute Christians. Instead, these stories were pious exaggerations; highly stylized rewritings of Jewish, Greek, and Roman noble death traditions; and even forgeries designed to marginalize heretics, inspire the faithful, and fund churches. The traditional story of persecution is still taught in Sunday school classes, celebrated in sermons, and employed by church leaders, politicians, and media pundits who insist that Christians were and always will be persecuted by a hostile, secular world. Moss urges modern Christians to abandon the conspiratorial assumption that the world is out to get Christians and, rather, embrace the consolation, moral instruction, and spiritual guidance that these martyrdom stories provide.

From *Booklist* Countering politicians and interest groups claims that Christians are as persecuted now as they were before Roman emperor Constantine legalized Christianity (313 CE), Moss, an expert on martyrdom, shows how right they are by demonstrating how wrong they are. They're wrong, first, when they say martyrdom is particularly Christian, for the early martyrdom literature is, besides wildly improbable, modeled on accounts of the deaths of Socrates and other philosophers, of noble Roman suicides like Lucretia, and of faithful-unto-death Jews in the Maccabean period. Christians experienced anything resembling persecution in a mere 12 nonconsecutive years between Jesus and Constantine; only in the last bout of so-called persecution were Christians targeted, and even then it was for political nonconformity, not religion. Eusebius, the early-fourth-century historian of the faith, invented the still-prevalent concepts of persecution and martyrdom to bind the faithful together in support of the rising institutional church. The downside to this effort was that it encouraged among Christians an us-versus-them, all-or-nothing attitude that can lead to violence, for example, against abortion providers. Historical argumentation at its most cogent. --Ray Olson Brilliant and provocative Drawing on close readings of traditional martyr stories and on deep historical research, she convincingly demonstrates that little evidence exists for the widespread persecution of Christians by the Romans. (*Publisher's Weekly*) Compellingly argued and artfully written, Moss reveals how the popular misconception about martyrdom in the early church still creates real barriers to compassion and dialogue today. An important book and a fascinating read. (Archbishop Desmond Tutu) This is the best sort of history: delightfully accessible yet based on prodigious scholarship, deeply serious, yet entertaining and enlightening. Above all, it shows the reader the importance of sweeping away myth, in order that we do not behave badly in the present, using the past as our excuse. (Diarmaid MacCulloch, Professor of the History of the Church at Oxford University and author of *Christianity: the*

First Three Thousand Years)A tour de force addition to the literature of sacred violence; a case study in how bold scholarship can dismantle it. Candida Moss's religious history will change religion, and, if Christians heed it, history, too. (James Carroll, Author of Jerusalem, Jerusalem)Moss dismantles the wall of righteousness that some Christians erect in order to justify their conflict with others. Without this persecution narrative, we will be better equipped to work together in our complex and pluralistic world. (Sister Simone Campbell, Executive Director of NETWORK)This is a timely and eye opening book. Moss carefully researched and readable account corrects and clarifies an important feature of a history that has been fictionalized for too long. (Harvey Cox, Hollis Research Professor of Divinity at Harvard, and author of The Future of Faith)In engaging prose and with scholarly acumen, Moss pulls back the curtain on one of Western history's best-kept secrets-that Christians were never subjects of sustained persecution. Read this book and rejoice as Moss turns history on its head and points the way beyond religious violence. (Diana Butler Bass, author of Christianity After Religion)Not only has Candida Moss reminded us that much of what we accept uncritically is pious legend, but that such myths poison the religious and political rhetoric of our time. There is something here to offend everyone, which is the first sign of groundbreaking work. (Rev. Dr. Robin R. Meyers, UCC Minister and author of The Underground Church: Reclaiming the Subversive Way of Jesus)Historical argumentation at its most cogent. (Booklist)FascinatingOne of the most enlightening aspects of The Myth of Persecution is Moss's ability to find contemporary analogies that make the ancient world more intelligible to the average reader. (-- Salon.com)Like the ancient poets, Moss at once instructs and entertains. She also transgresses the boundary between historian and theologian and calls the church to repentance. She contends that the martyrdom narrative poses grave dangers, having contributed to everything from mild alienation to outright atrocity throughout the church's history. (Christian Century)Fascinating.beyond simply recasting ancient stories in a new light, the book provides a hopeful outlook for a world in which modern Christians could drop the myth of their persecuted past. (U.S. Catholic)Exhaustively researched, yet accessibleMoss's book lays bare that truth and presents us with the opportunity to, instead of retelling myth, begin to explore the actual history of this era. (Portland Book)From the Back CoverAccording to cherished church tradition and popular belief, early Christians were systematically persecuted by a brutal Roman Empire. In The Myth of Persecution, Candida Moss reveals that the "Age of Martyrs" is a fictionthere was no sustained three-hundred-year-long effort by the Romans to persecute Christians. While there were some martyrs, most of these stories were pious exaggerations and even forgeries designed to marginalize heretics, inspire the faithful, and fund churches. Moss encourages modern Christians to get the history of persecution right and embrace the consolation, moral instruction, and spiritual guidance that these martyrdom stories provide.