

Humanities and Social Sciences

State and Church of Roman Empire

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Background of Research

After conversion to Christianity as a result of the efforts made by the Christians who overcame a long and hostile history of persecution, the classical period of European world shifted to the Christian medieval time, and then with the intervention of Protestantism, Europe entered the modern time era – I have been skeptical about such a naïve, self-exalting historical viewpoint held by the church. Although every society has experienced cultural transformations in history, I have been thinking that European society in medieval time, not to mention modern time, cannot be flatly termed as a Christian society, and therefore its history needs to be reviewed and methodologically reexamined from the foundational concepts used in the studies on ancient history, such as “Christianity” and “classical era.”

Achievements of Research

By minutely examining how the Roman Empire and the church responded to each other when it comes to the cases of conflict between themselves, we have made clear the following: the relational history between the empire and church was not developed and shaped around the dichotomy between paganism (mainly Greek and Roman religions) and Christianity, nor did the conflict between them end with the victory of the latter; rather, the empire achieved the intended results from the great persecution in the beginning of the fourth century, and continued its traditional tolerant policy (while partially amended) which was implemented since the empire’s early period until at least the first half of the fourth century, and when doing so, the Christianization of the empire, not to mention the establishment of Christianity as a state religion was not intended at all.

We also verified that the dichotomy did not exist on a private-sector level either from the analysis of documents, epigraphy, iconography and coins, and demonstrated that most of the Christians in the third and fourth centuries did not show a socially and ethically exclusive attitude but rather adopted conciliatory stance, and therefore it is necessary to conceptually separate Christianity into the intellectual group and ordinary group of believers in a historical analysis.

In addition, by integrating the microscopic observations regarding the development and process leading to policy-making decisions and thus taking a macroscopic view of the

matter, the effect and transformation of the “spirit of era” that transcends the dimension based on individuals have been confirmed. In other words, the concept of mutual acceptance (do ut des) that was universal to the ancient and medieval times was gradually transformed and took on exclusivity, and the emphasis was shifted from practice of piety to punishment of impiety.

Prospect of Research

If the assumed dichotomy did not historically exist, the establishment of the church in the end of the fourth century would have been an unexpected contingency to the empire’s leadership (probably including Emperor Theodosius). The reason for that can presumably be, at a microscopic level, the church’s transformation into a pressure group due to the continuing tolerant policy and the state’s passive confirmation of the church’s requests, and at a macroscopic level, the transformation of the mutual acceptance concept. The transition of emphasis to punishment of impiety remarkably matches in substance with the commencement of active oppression on the pagans undertaken by the sixth century Justinianus system that was conceptually based on the exclusive holiness as well as the transformation of the monks who came to hold a position of authority into execution forces of religion oppression, presenting a conceptual connecting point to the medieval world. The lack of the dichotomy also reveals defects of M. Weber research methods with regard to the process of modernization. This is because a church sect did not necessarily maintain social and ethical uniformity within the sect, and therefore the general laymen could occasionally demonstrate a behavioral mode which deviated from the economical ethics crystallized in the theological writings.