



Roman Christians had to disobey the Roman law which stated that no one may worship in secret. The Roman Empire allowed various religions, but all religions were supposed to be registered with the government. No religion could be considered greater than others, and all religion had to be practiced in public, never in private homes. Of course, Christians never ask governments for permission to worship God, for they know their religion is the only true one.

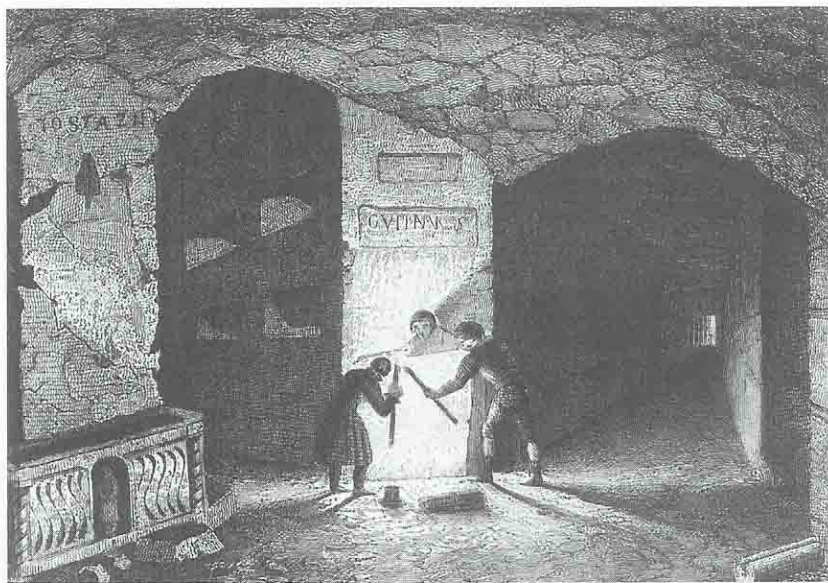
The common people also supported the persecution of Christians, especially at first. The Christians were different. They did not share the same interests that most people had, and they did not freely take part in

their neighbors' social activities. It is easy for people to be suspicious of those who are different from themselves.

Besides, when troubles come, humans are quick to look around for someone to blame. If there was a flood, a drought, an earthquake, or a famine, people said it was the Christians' fault. Christians were easy to persecute, for they did not fight back.

The Christians of Rome had an excellent hiding place that helped them escape some persecution. Around Rome is an area of soft stone called tufa (TOO fuh). The Christians and others cut many tunnels into this stone for use as underground cemeteries. Graves were dug into the sides of the tunnels, and most of them were closed with marble or other stone. These manmade passages and caves are called *catacombs* (KAT uh kohmz).

In the catacombs, the Christians were able to hide from their persecutors and to hold worship services. Since the miles of winding, intersecting passageways were confusing to strangers, the Christians were fairly safe. Besides, most Romans did not care to invade the catacombs because they considered burying places to be sacred.



Notice the graves dug into the catacomb walls. It is not clear what the men in the picture are doing. Perhaps they are writing on the stone or reading something engraved there.