In my discussion why Christians claimed the Jewish Bible for themselves (and argued it no longer belonged to Jews), I’ve been focusing strictly on the relationship of Jews and Christians, for obvious reasons. But as it turns out, there is more to it than that. Here is an issue that is hardly ever talked about in the scholarship on the rise of anti-Judaism in early Christianity, let alone among lay people wondering about why mainstream Christianity became opposed to Jews and the religion they practiced in antiquity (leading to the anti-Judaism and then the antisemitism of later times.) This issue involves Christians’ relations not with Jews, but with pagans, and the rejection of the new Christian faith by the world at large.

As is well known, apart from Jews and Christians, everyone in the Roman empire was pagan - that is, everyone followed one or more of the polytheistic religions of that world. I do not need to detail the various kinds of pagan religion found throughout the Roman Empire. But a couple of important features can explain what Christians confronted once they emerged as distinct religious groups outside of both paganism and Judaism. One notable feature of pagan religions is that they were by and large tolerant of religious difference. All pagans realized that ...

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