

# PERSECUTION OF THE DHIMMIS

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Al-Tabari's representation of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil's decree in 850 against the dhimmis as translated and edited by Bernard Lewis (*Iran: II: Religion and Society*, Walker & Company, New York, 1974, pp. 224-5) is very revealing of the lot of the minorities until our own times more or less:

In the year (235/850), al-Mutawakkil gave orders that the Christians and the *dhimmis* in general be required to wear honey-colored hoods (*taylasan*) and girdles (*zunnar*); to ride on saddles with wooden stirrups and with two balls attached to the rear; to attach two buttons to the conical caps (*qalansuwa*) of those who wear them and to wear caps of a different color from those worn by the Muslim; to attach two patches to their slaves' clothing, of a different color from that of the garment to which they are attached, one in front on the chest, the other at the back, each patch four fingers in length, and both of them honey-colored. Those of them who wear turbans were to wear honey-colored turbans. If their women went out and appeared in public, they were only to appear with honey-colored head scarves. He gave orders that their slaves were to wear girdles, and he forbade them to wear belts (*mintaqā*). He gave orders to destroy their churches which were newly built and to take the tenth part of their houses. If the place was large enough, it was to be made into a mosque, if it was not suitable for a mosque, it was to be made an open space. He ordered that wooden images of devils should be nailed to the doors of their houses to distinguish them from the houses of the Muslims. He forbade that their children attend Muslim schools or that any Muslim should teach them. He forbade the display of crosses on their Palm Sundays and Jewish rites in the streets. He ordered that their graves be made level with the ground so that they should not resemble the graves of the Muslims. (Al-Tabari, iii, pp. 1389-1390).

What remarks Lewis quotes of Ibn al-Fadl (circa 902) is very suggestive of the plight of the common man especially if they did not convert to Islam as the society was divided into four classes: kings, raised up by their right to rule; viziers, distinguished by understanding and judgement; upper classes, raised up by affluence and middle classes, linked with them by education. "The rest of mankind are

vanishing scum, floating refuse, vile men and women bound to  
meanness, whose only concern is to eat and to sleep.” (p. 198).