A Church of Martyrs?

A study of the development of Christian martyrdom and its role in shaping Christian identity

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Department of Religion

by
Adeeb Syed

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Introduction

> I was to see that sight again, but once was enough. Flames were coming from a human being; his body was slowly withering and shriveling up, his head blackening and charring. In the air was the smell of burning flesh; human beings burn surprisingly quickly. Behind me I could hear the sobbing of the Vietnamese who were now gathering. I was too shocked to cry, too confused to take notes or ask questions, too bewildered to even think....As he burned he never moved a muscle, never uttered a sound, his outward composure in sharp contrast to the wailing people around him.
>
> David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*

The reader may find it odd to see a picture of a Buddhist monk committing self-immolation in a study of early Christian martyrdom. However, this photo captures perfectly the spectrum of feelings that martyrdom incites in us: shock, confusion, disgust, wonder, amazement, and even admiration. In fact, when I first saw this picture several years ago, the powerful image of Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation never left me. Perhaps my utter

confusion upon seeing the image has resulted in my desire to study the phenomenon of martyrdom in more detail—to find meaning and understanding in an act that can appear meaningful and meaningless at the same time.

Though he is a Mahayana Buddhist, Duc's martyrdom—if we can even appropriately call it "martyrdom"—provides a useful analogue for discussing the phenomenon of martyrdom in Christianity. Duc "burned himself to death at a busy intersection in downtown Saigon to bring attention to the repressive policies of the Catholic Diem regime that controlled the South Vietnamese government at the time. Buddhist monks asked the regime to lift its ban on flying the traditional Buddhist flag, to grant Buddhism the same rights as Catholicism, to stop detaining Buddhists and to give Buddhist monks and nuns the right to practice and spread their religion."[1] After his death, Duc was said to have been re-cremated. However, something curious occurred—Duc's heart remained intact, and it then became a powerful and venerated relic among Buddhists. In any case, his death seems to have all the necessary ingredients of a "martyrdom" in our contemporary modern consciousness: the threat of persecution, the public nature of death, the proclamation of political and religious ideals in the face of injustice, the uncanny ability to endure in the face of extreme pain, and some sort of posthumous transcendence of the limits of an ordinary human death.

While this description of "martyrdom" seems neat and unproblematic, martyrdom in Christianity is understood differently from martyrdom in contemporary consciousness and other religious traditions. Common and general conceptions of "martyrdom" fail to capture the specificity and complexity of the phenomenon in early Christianity. Smith notes that, without a doubt, the martyr is "far too elusive a creature to be caught in the coarse net of social-scientific

generalizations or class divisions. Not only do martyrs defy easy categorization, but also much depends on a society's definition of abnormal behavior."[2]

In addition, we are faced with the limits of language itself. Language is not stagnant and unchanging. Terms that describe a particular phenomenon have a life of their own and change their meaning over time in response to social, religious, and political developments within a society or culture. Moreover, when we consider the huge gap between a modern and ancient worldview, the linguistic problems are made worse. The problem of distinguishing a modern definition of martyrdom from an ancient one can be seen by means of an example. Imagine that acclaimed evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who parades his own brand of militant atheism, was the victim of a gruesome attack by religious fundamentalists at odds with his anti-religious program. I think the media would immediately call him a "martyr," one who dies for intransigently holding a particular view or ideology. Though Dawkins would probably turn in his grave at such a religiously-charged posthumous description, this example captures the sense of martyrdom present in the modern consciousness. The ordinary sense of the term, charged with religious overtones, has been secularized and extended in its scope in our modern consciousness to simply describe "dying for a cause." The Christian martyr, in contrast, is fundamentally different, and throughout this work I will steer away from a modern conception of martyrdom which can pollute a thoroughgoing analysis of Christian martyrdom.

Martyrdom's etymological origins in the Greek word for "witness" (martys) may seem straightforward. Those who would not renounce their religion and proselytize to another were "witnesses" to their faith by often intentionally yielding their lives for their faith. However, as we will see, this term fails to capture the complexity of the term in the Christian tradition.

In this study, I will be exploring how the concepts of "martyr" and "martyrdom" developed and were used in a special way by Christians. These concepts developed alongside various conceptions of what it meant to be a Christian. Thus, the concept of martyrdom influenced the concept of Christianity, and vice versa. It would be anachronistic to apply the concept of martyrdom in the early 4th century to the early Christian phenomenon of dying for the faith. Martyrdom, by the 4th century, had been discussed widely and the concept present at that time was the end result of much development, debate, and discussion. Before that time, the concept of the "martyr" and "martyrdom" was fluid. The concept underwent several shifts throughout early Christianity: there were tensions in its meaning, contradictions in its use, and vagueness when applied in certain contexts. For example, some people who died rather than renounce their faith are not explicitly called martyrs. At the same time, there were people who were called martyrs by certain Christians, but other Christians denied them this title. In addition, there are numerous discussions of what constitutes a true martyrdom and a false martyrdom. All these shifts in the concept of martyrdom can be fully appreciated by understanding the development of early Christianity itself.

As Moss nicely puts it: "The construction of the linguistic category of 'martyr' took place alongside and in dialogue with the construction of the category 'Christian.' Nowhere is this more evident than in the martyrdoms themselves, where the declaration 'I am Christian' is inextricably tied to the process of becoming a martyr. This is not to say that, as linguistic and conceptual categories, *martys* and *Christianismos* are not constantly being produced; rather, in their *initial* production they were constantly being coproduced."[3] To be a martyr in early Christianity, then, is bound to the experience of being a Christian. Martyrdom necessarily entails a discussion of Christian identity and enables the phenomenon of martyrdom "to serve the

production of 'group identity and self-definition….The confession "I am a Christian" binds the martyr with all Christians everywhere."[4] Thus, due to the fluidity of the concept of martyrdom in early Christianity and to avoid confusion, we will use "martyr" and "martyrdom" in a nontechnical sense, keeping in mind that these concepts were developing alongside various conceptions of what it means to be a Christian.

There are a number of approaches scholars have taken in defining martyrdom. "In the history of scholarship, the twin aims of identifying the historically 'reliable' martyrdom account and locating the origins of martyrdom have been the primary focus of scholarly interest."[5] One such approach seeks to define martyrdom by attempting to discover its origins, whether linguistic, religious, cultural, or a combination of all the above. There are two main theories as to the origins of martyrdom, which we can call the Frend thesis and the Bowersock thesis.[6] Along with Boyarin, I find both of these theories insufficient and problematic for defining martyrdom in the context of the Christian tradition.

William H.C. Frend posited that "martyrdom is a practice that has its origins securely in Judaism, and the Church prolongs and supersedes the Jewish practice."[7] It was the "ideological encounter between Hellenism and Judaism" which fostered the emergence of the concept of martyrdom "as an instrument of religious warfare. The Jews…were the first to use [martyrdom] as a means of national inspiration and to endow its hideous suffering with eschatological purpose."[8] For Frend, this nationalistic element is what separates Jewish martyrdom from the Christian kind. What the Jew really wanted "was less individual salvation as such than a personal share in the golden future for the Jewish nation."[9] Christ's "conquest of death" gave this Jewish notion of martyrdom "a transcendent and universal application" which Jewish martyrdom lacked.[10] For, "the claims of Judaism as a national religion clashed with its claims to

be the religion of mankind."[11] Christianity, then, rejected and superseded the Jewish notion of martyrdom because Jesus "rejected the current idea of a warrior messiah overthrowing the idolatrous occupying power by force, and chose for Himself the way of the Cross."[12]

On the other hand, Glen Bowersock argues that "Christian martyrdom has virtually nothing to do with Jewish origins at all. It is a practice that grew up in an entirely Roman cultural environment and then was borrowed by the Jews."[13] Bowersock argues that martyrdom "first came into being in the Roman Empire and was inextricably rooted in a society and culture peculiar to that world."[14] Moreover, Bowersock charges Frend and others of practicing "a kind of crude and antiquated literary criticism to emphasize banal coincidences in various narratives of resistance to authority and heroic self-sacrifice as if every such episode constituted martyrdom."[15] In contrast to banal coincidences in various narratives, Bowersock argues that "never before has such courage been absorbed into a conceptual system of posthumous recognition and anticipated reward, nor had the very word martyrdom existed at the name for this system."[16] It is true that the Jews never had such a sophisticated conceptual system of posthumous recognition. However, just because such a system developed at a later time, that is, in the Roman world when Christianity had sufficiently distinguished itself from Judaism, rather than at an earlier time when it was difficult to distinguish between Christian and Jew, it does not follow that the Roman world was the *sole* origin for such a sophisticated ideology of martyrdom.

Boyarin criticizes each of these theories for not taking into account the "complexities and nuances of its history."[17] He argues that the Frend and Bowersock theses "are founded on the same assumption, namely, that Judaism and Christianity are two separate entities, so that it is intelligible to speak of one (and not the other—either—one) as the point of origin of a given practice."[18] I agree with Boyarin's contention here that Judaism and Christianity were not neatly

divided into separate entities early on. In fact, we can take this point further: early Christianity itself was not a single entity, but rather there was an assortment of early Christianities comprising diverse beliefs on what it meant to be Christian.

While studying the origins of martyrdom does yield some insights, there is never enough strong and reliable historical evidence to reach indisputable conclusions. Moreover, accounts of the origin of martyrdom detract from the complexity of the phenomenon. Both the Frend and Bowersock theses oversimplify a complex phenomenon that was formed in a complex context. To find the single origin of something presupposes that the thing is itself, single, clear, and precise. Early Christianity, however, is multiple, indeterminate, and indistinct. To seek a single origin of such a complex phenomenon is necessarily futile.

This paper uses historical methods to examine early Christianity in its ancient context. For this reason, then, I must briefly explain the nature of early Christianity and the flawed fundamental premise which has dominated the historical study of Christianity and which needs much re-examination. This fundamental premise, more theologically driven than historically accurate, assumes that the development of Christianity is neat, orderly, and unchanging. For the last century or more, however, historians have been demonstrating that early Christianity—or rather, early Christianities—are multiform and evolving.

Walter Bauer, in his seminal work *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, pointed out this serious problem with the study of Christianity; one that has dominated the study for centuries. The traditional view which comprises the flawed fundamental premise is explained thoroughly by Karen King, who follows Bauer's thesis. According to King, the most widespread view of early Christian beginnings can be called the "master story." It can be summed up as follows: Jesus reveals the "pure doctrine" to his apostles, who, after Jesus'

departure, each spread the "unadulterated gospel" to their determined areas of land. After the death of the apostles, the gospel continues to spread while the devil, who "sows weeds in the divine wheat field," incites conflicts within Christianity causing the Christians who are blinded by him to "abandon the pure doctrine." This master story thus asserts that the "unbroken chain" from Jesus to the apostles to the successors of the apostles, (i.e., bishops, priests, etc.), "guaranteed the unity and uniformity of Christian belief and practice."[19]

The master story is "poor history" in that it is "incomplete and noticeably slanted." In addition, the logic of the master story is fallacious because it is "circular." The New Testament and the Nicene Creed define orthodox Christianity anachronistically; that is, the master story asserts that the orthodox position existed before it was even formed during approximately the fourth century. The master story thus constitutes an oversimplification of a Christian history as a stark contrast between orthodoxy and heresy which "misrepresents the experience of early Christians."[20] Indeed, Moss perceptively points out that "the anachronistic introduction of canon by scholars into the first century reveals that what is really at stake here is a latent vulgar Catholic and Protestant divide. Canonicity in the first century is not the concern of the historian; it is the anxiety of the believer."[21]

King stresses that the real situation, therefore, was much more complex with "multiple levels of intersection and disjuncture" among the early churches. During the time of these first Christians, "all of the elements we might consider to be essential to define Christianity did not yet exist." In fact, "the Mediterranean world in which Christianity appeared was in a period of rapid social change and religious experiment" in which "traditional values and ways of life were being challenged and reshaped."[22] During this time there was no New Testament, Nicene Creed, Apostles' Creed, commonly established church orders or chains of authority, church buildings,

and even no single understanding of Jesus. Thus, King states: "Far from being starting points, the Nicene Creed and the New Testament were the end products of these debates and disputes; they represent the distillation of experience and experimentation—and not a small amount of strife and struggle."[23]

Whereas the master story has "provided a myth of origins which casts the early Church as a place where true, uniform, and unadulterated Christianity triumphed," in actuality, the picture of early Christianity is one in which the "communities [were] working through issues of conflict and difference,"[24] engaged in "experimentation, compromise, collaboration, and synthesis,"[25] all the while trying to establish what it really means to be a Christian.

The plurality of early Christianities, then, tells us there was a battle for Christian identity with the word "heretic"[26] being thrown around by all sides. Early Christians attempted to define what it meant to be a Christian not only in opposition to other "Christians," (of which "Jewish-Christians" are a part), but these early Christians also tried to set themselves apart from the Romans. Thus, although Bowersock's thesis may oversimplify the role Roman culture played in shaping Christian martyrdom, and thus Christianity, we should not totally disregard his contribution completely. As they become relevant, I will be discussing the characteristics of the dominant Roman culture in which these martyrs operated, the very culture that persecuted the Christians and the culture that the Christians attempted to dominate themselves.

For lack of a better method for terming these various Christianities, I will use the term "Christian" in a loose sense in order to conveniently denote individuals who can reasonably be thought to have considered themselves Christians. When making a distinction is crucial to a discussion of Christian identity, however, I will say so and make the necessary distinction.

In contrast to the views of Frend and Bowersock's methodology, Boyarin proposes that instead of thinking about the nature of martyrdom by tracing it to its origins (which is no doubt an important consideration and one that should not be totally disregarded) we should rather "think of martyrdom as a 'discourse,' as a practice of dying for God and of talking about it, a discourse that changes and develops over time and undergoes particularly interesting transformations."[27] In fact, Salisbury notes that "what was most influential was not the death of any martyr but people's recollection of the death. It is memory, not the past, that transforms the future, and memory was preserved in texts."[28] Perkins, also, mentions that a "culture's discourse represents not the 'real' world, but rather a world mediated through the social categories, relations and institutions operating in the specific culture." Thus, the representations of martyrs in a particular way reflected a "cultural interest."[29] The cultural interest in question, I will be arguing, is that the discourse of martyrdom created cultures in which early Christians, and also the Church itself, could find their identity.

Thus, I will not be focusing on the intersection of linguistic and conceptual definitions or the origins of "martyrdom." In speaking of martyrdom as a discourse, "it is not particularly relevant whether the authors of these texts themselves worked with an understanding of definition of the term *martys* that can be directly mapped onto our own. What is relevant, however, is the way that these cultural and intellectual influences served to construct ideologies of martyrdom in which martyrdom becomes inextricably linked to the notion of imitating Christ."[30] In sum: "Being killed is an event. Martyrdom is a literary form, a genre."[31] According to Castelli, the memory that martyrs created of their "experience of persecution and martyrdom was a form of culture making, whereby Christian identity was indelibly marked by the collective memory of the religious sufferings of others."[32]

In addition, the discourse of martyrdom was used by early Christians as a tool in conversion and the spread of Christian beliefs: in public readings the martyr acts became infused with authority and power and there is evidence suggesting that they were used in catechetical contexts to gain converts and instill endurance and Christly virtue in the faithful.[33] In addition, it was also used as "epistolary communiqués and thus as part of a program of intra-ecclesial dialogue," such as the Martyrdom of Polycarp.[34]

So far, we have seen that defining martyrdom itself is very problematic. The sheer complexity of early Christianity itself only exacerbates the difficulty of understanding martyrdom. Admittedly, there are several lenses from which we can analyze the development of early Christianity. In this work, my main focus is to analyze the development of early Christianity through the lens of the different discourses on martyrdom that the early Christianities produced. Furthermore, just as these different early Christianities coexisted and had incompatible and even downright contradictory beliefs, these different coexisting discourses of martyrdom reflect a similar tension.[35] It seems that both these early Christianities and these discourses of martyrdom fought to be heard and to faithfully proclaim what they believed being Christian meant.

In this study, I will trace the continuities and discontinuities of the early positions on martyrdom, the later orthodox Catholic position on martyrdom, and whatever is in between. Whether these continuities and discontinuities are compatible or incompatible, and whether they solved problems or created new unsolvable problems, depended on the nature of the growing church and their insistence on ecclesiastic organization. Such an insistence may be a due to the delay of immediate apocalyptic expectations and the Second Coming, which required Christianity to reinterpret itself and led to an increasing commitment to compromise, conciliate,

and accommodate with the world around them—for, if they would not be martyrs and travel to Paradise, then they must try to find a way to live in this world and still be Christian.

Thus, the fundamental question is: Why didn't the church become a Church of Martyrs? For it seems that the early Christians viewed themselves as such and were developing in that direction, which showed that they felt that to be a Christian was incompatible with the world around them. However, as time passed and other Christians continued to reinterpret what it meant to be a Christian, there was a growing need for a Christianity that was compatible with the world. This brand of Christianity, which eventually attained a position of dominance and authority, controlled the message of the early martyrs by reinterpreting martyrdom by institutionalizing and domesticating it. Other "pure" Christians, who never let go of the early Christian mindset of a community of persecuted sufferers that rejected the world and lived in constant expectation of the apocalypse, were branded as deviating sects that threatened the precious unity of the church. In the end, in the absence of persecution and in the "triumph" of a Christian Empire, it seemed that martyrs were no longer necessary. However, the martyr spirit that was so cherished by the early Christians survived, not only in an institutionalized form under the control of ecclesiastical Christian authority, but it was also channeled into the "bloodless martyrdom" of extreme moral strictness and the ascetic rejection of the world by the desert monks.

Chapter 1: The Persecution of Christians

A necessary prerequisite for martyrdom is persecution. In this chapter, I will outline the history of early Christian persecution. First, however, a word of caution. Though it takes two to persecute, the points of view of the persecutors and those that are persecuted may differ greatly. Obviously, the point of view of the persecuted will contain exaggerations and distortions of the truth.[36] Castelli remarks that "read through Christian lenses, the story of the Christian encounters with their Roman others is a cosmic battle narrative in which the opposition embodied by the Roman authorities takes on demonic auras and resonances. Read through Roman lenses, this same story is often an incidental account of a minor set of skirmishes with unruly subjects—or, indeed, a story that does not even merit being recorded."[37] It is therefore important to present both sides of the history of persecution: Christian and Roman. For Christians, the persecution, whether real or perceived, "played a pivotal role in the generation of Christian culture in the early centuries of the church."[38] Persecution not only created and sustained Christian solidarity, but also led to schisms. For the Romans, in contrast, the so-called persecution of Christians was actually "the prosecution of individuals deemed to be a threat to the state."[39]

Several aspects of the context of the persecutions need to be addressed before we begin. Smith notes that, "initially, the pagan world had difficulty differentiating Christian from Jew. During the first generation after Christ, possibly even during the second, if Christianity was noted at all, it was seen as a rather perverse Jewish splinter group which fell under the protection of the special treatment offered Judaism by Rome." Jews were considered "licensed atheists" because their God was "at least ancestral, a part of Jewish history" which the pagan world respected and understood.[40]

Following St. Croix, we must also distinguish between the Greco-Roman world in general and "the government," which includes the emperor and provincial governors. Throughout the discussion, I will be discussing the motivations of each. As a general overview, we can divide the persecutions into 3 distinct phases: (1) the first ending just before the great fire at Rome in 64, (2) from the fire at Rome in 64 to the first general persecution in 250, and (3) the first general persecution in 250 until the Edict of Toleration in 313.[41]

Before 64 C.E., persecution was on a small scale and mainly due to Jewish hostility. The Roman government was uninterested in inconsequential religious "squabbles" among the Jews, as they found it difficult to distinguish between Jews and Christians.[42] However, if riots did erupt and cause disruption in local communities, provincial governors would step in to settle the dispute.

By 64 C.E, however, "pagan society had awakened to the realization that Christians were not Jews and could not claim legal status as a privileged religious group."[43] As discussed in Tacitus' *Annals*, in 64 C.E., there was a great fire in Rome and Nero, in order to quash the rumor that he had started the fire, "falsely accused and savagely punished the Christians."[44] Although Tacitus did not believe that the Christians started the fire, his statement that the Christians had "a hatred for the human race" shows that Roman society had a negative view of Christianity. The Christians' "morally outrageous conduct" included "cannibalism [during the Eucharist]; their secret meetings were said to practice incest and child murder and to resort to group sex when the lights were turned down in the church." Their "atheism" was the fundamental cause for their distrust: "If god was dishonored, he might send his anger against the community, in the form of famine, plague or drought. 'No rain, because of the Christians,' had become proverbial by the mid-fourth century."[45]

In 112 CE, Emperor Trajan set a precedent for dealing with Christians in his correspondence with Pliny the Younger, the proconsul of Bithynia. However, this correspondence also displays the "ambiguity of the charges against Christians."[46] Pliny begins his letter by stating it is his custom to refer to the Emperor questions which cause him doubt. In particular, he is doubtful of "whether it is the name Christian, itself untainted with crimes, or the crimes which cling to the name, which should be punished." In addition, Pliny's doubt concerns those Christians who have lapsed. These Christians stated they were Christians but had then "denied their allegiance" to Christ. When asked, they "worshipped your [i.e., Emperor Trajan's] statue and images of the gods, and blasphemed Christ."[47]

Pliny's description of his procedure in the cases of Christians that were brought before him gives us an insight to how local persecutions were carried out: "I asked them whether they were Christians. If they admitted it, I asked them a second and a third time, threatening them with execution. Those who remained obdurate I ordered to be executed, for I was in no doubt, whatever it was which they were confessing, that their obstinacy and their inflexible stubbornness should at any rate be punished."[48] First off, this passage shows that Christians were brought to Pliny, he did not seek them out, which is characteristic of these local persecutions. Second, the mention of repeatedly asking them whether or not they are Christians shows that Pliny did not desire to execute these Christians. Furthermore, when describing the Christians' intransigency, the word used is *contumacia*, which is "willful disobedience to a judicial command" which was a crime to the Romans.[49] Trajan replies that "Christians are not to be sought out. If brought before you and found guilty, they must be punished, but in such a way that a person who denies that he is a Christian and demonstrates this by his action, that is, by worshipping our gods, may obtain pardon for repentance, even if his previous record is

suspect."[50] From Nero's persecution and Pliny's letters, we can estimate that persecution "for the Name" began either in 64 or sometime between 64 and 112.[51]

Between 64 and 250, the persecutions were local, isolated, and sporadic; they were not official, empire-wide decrees. From a Roman perspective, then, the persecutions of this period were not very important. Christians, naturally, had a rather different view, and some famous martyrs come from this period. For example, Ignatius of Antioch is martyred sometime between 107-117 C.E., during the reign of Trajan (98-117). Polycarp of Smyrna is martyred ca. 155 C.E., during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161). And lastly, Perpetua is martyred ca. 203 C.E., during the reign of Septimus Severus (193-211). These are all very prominent martyrs during a period in which persecution was sporadic and local.

The random nature of the persecutions during this period is the subject of much debate. Cadoux explains that "individual Emperors varied in their attitude to Christianity, (some even going so far as to grant it a de facto toleration), as the popular hatred would flame out and die down at different times and in different places." The motivation for persecution in this period is further complicated by the "large discretionary powers" of provincial governors who also differed "widely in their personal views."[52]

In addition, the provincial governors were dependent upon "practical precedents and general guidelines for proper government that then required interpretation in particular situations."[53] Thus, in between these sporadic persecutions, extensive regions of the Roman Empire would not engage in persecution and in certain geographic areas Christians would enjoy a time of peace, while others would not.

Before the middle of the third century, the motivation for persecution came "from below," that is, from the persecuting zeal among the mass of pagans, which incited provincial

governors to take action. From 250 onwards, however, persecution comes "from above," that is, from the government and is "initiated by imperial edict."[54] The first of these general persecutions from above is the Decian persecution from 250 to 251 C.E.[55] A key point that Fox cautions us to remember is that Decius "wanted worshippers of [his] own gods, not martyrs for a faith."[56]

In 250, Decius first ordered an edict for the arrest of members of the higher clergy and his second edict called for a widespread sacrifice to the gods; it is important the he does not name Christians explicitly. After an individual had performed the sacrifice, he or she would receive a certificate stating he or she had done so. After certain Christians had performed the sacrifice, they bribed Roman officials for a certificate to escape being persecuted. Others lapsed and made the sacrifice. Some fled, including bishops (such as Cyprian). Some were martyred. In 251, Decius died in battle and the persecution slowly dwindled away. "His edict has usually been judged a failure which was abandoned, but Decius had wanted worshippers, not martyrs."[57]

However, Decius' edict was not a complete failure. The first edict of a general persecution "presented special tests to the bishops' and clergy's authority."[58] Decius' persecution came after "a long period of peace for the churches. Prosperity and ease had started to soften the Christians, and it appears that most of them were not trained and prepared for suffering and sacrifice."[59] This is why many lapsed. But after the persecutions had ended, many of the apostates would come back to the church asking for forgiveness and readmittance. The mass lapsing "posed a much greater threat to the church than the persecutions that had taken relatively few lives in the previous century and a half."[60] Ton emphasizes that the "problem of how to deal with the apostates was one of the most difficult problems ever faced by the Christian church."[61]

When Decius died and the persecution was stopped, the soon-to-be-martyrs were released from prison. They were now called "confessors," living martyrs who "had endured the tortures and had been waiting to seal their martyrdom in the arena," but nonetheless "were already in possession of all the rights and prerogatives of the martyrs despite the fact that they had been spared."[62] One of the powers associated with martyrs was the "power of the keys," the power to bind and loose, to forgive the sins of others. Thus, the lapsed Christians flocked to the confessors and asked for a remission of sins.

The growing authority of bishops was thus subverted by the confessor-martyrs and the "dangerous…open visas to escape from hell" they granted."[63] Influenced by the lapsed Christians, other Christians also began to pray to confessors; in some cases praying to the confessors "became more important than praying to God, since prayers to them were believed to be more efficacious than petitions to God; the [confessor-martyrs] were considered more accessible, easier to convince, and more merciful and understanding of human weaknesses."[64]

In addition, Christians could not agree on whether the lapsed Christians should be readmitted into the church. Fox notes that by causing "so many Christians to lapse, Decius' edict split the Church in an argument over its image of itself: was it a school for sinners or a narrower society of saints?"[65] The conflict between rigorist approaches to martyrdom and accommodation to the Empire resulted in "schisms in the late ancient Church. Novatianism, Donatism, and the Meletian schism were all products of such conflicts."[66]

The next persecution began in 257: the Emperors Valerian and Gallienus sent an edict to their provincial governors ordering "that bishops and elders should be punished and that no Christians should hold a meeting." In the summer of 258, a second Imperial edict "enlarged on the matter and specified the penalties of death, exile and forced labor for Christians in various

higher classes."[67] This persecution was apparently a "response to general panic at the invasion of the empire by the Goths and to the particular incident where Christians supposedly refused to come to the defense of the empire in Pontus."[68]

The Valerian persecution was an improvement over the Decian persecution in that it seemed more likely to wipeout Christianity. Whereas Decius only disturbed them in general and intended to benefit the gods, Valerian learned to strike directly at the Christians' weak points: "their leadership, meetings and upper-class supporters…For the first time, Christians were not merely obliged to compromise. Their worship and common life were threatened with extinction." For Christians, Valerian's new approach "had an unintended consequence. By focusing on bishops and elders, it closed the gap between two types of authority. It offered Church leaders the prestige of becoming confessors, while denying the honor to lesser men."[69]

The persecution ends in 260, when Gallienus becomes emperor and the Christians enjoy a time of relative peace once again. Between 260 and the 290s, "we have no knowledge of martyrdoms, as opposed to Christian fictions of them. When we then find Christians being martyred, they are soldiers in the army. The charge against them is not their religion and their refusal to sacrifice, but their refusal to serve in the ranks, an offence which was punishable on other grounds. This charge is quite different from the older accusations of the 'Christian name.'"[70]

The "Great Persecution" began in 303 when Emperor Diocletian issued an edict calling "for the destruction of churches and the burning of sacred books," another edict calling "on provincial governors to arrest and imprison the clergy," a third calling "for the clergy to offer sacrifice," and a fourth calling "for all persons to offer sacrifice."[71] The persecution ended in

313 (in both ends of the Roman Empire), according to the Edict of Milan. From the Christian point of view, Constantine's "conversion" and the end of the era of persecution was a "triumph."

However, the persecution did not end quite yet. The first of Diocletian's edicts that called for the handing over and burning of sacred books would cause yet another schism within the church. The Donatist Schism occurred after the Christian "triumph," and thus the persecution of Donatist Christians was now carried out by the Christianized Roman Empire. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: The Gospel of Mark and the Epistles of Ignatius

In the last chapter I outlined the history of Christian persecution. Initially, to the Romans, the persecution of Christians probably did not have much importance. However, in the minds of the Christians on the receiving end of the persecution, it was very important and formative for Christian identity. These considerations are reflected in the texts that Christians produced. In this chapter, I deal with two early texts: the Gospel of Mark and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. They may provide a clue as to how early Christians perceived themselves, and they are very important for tracing the development of how Christians would later perceive themselves in the face of persecution.

Before turning to the Gospel of Mark, some groundwork is needed on scholarly methods in studying the synoptic gospels. According to Ehrman in *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, the synoptic problem is the source-critical problem of how to explain the wide-ranging agreements and disagreements, or source relationship, among the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke). One solution to the synoptic problem is the idea of Markan Priority, that is, that Mark is a source for Matthew and Luke. Mark is the shortest gospel and was written in Greek, around 65-70 C.E., by an anonymous author who was probably living outside of Palestine and who had heard numerous stories about Jesus before writing his account. In addition Mark implies that Jesus did not to come in power to overthrow the forces of evil aligned against God and his people, but to suffer and die at the hands of these forces.

Moss notes that "in the study of martyrdom accounts, the use of scriptural texts is acknowledged but rarely analyzed."[72] Donald Riddle provides such an analysis and argues the Gospel of Mark is a primitive martyrology.[73] In his analysis of Mark, he finds a "martyr motif"

which is evident, among other things, through the problem of proportion: "why is more than one-half the Gospel devoted to the passion story?" Another consideration in favor of his argument is the dating of the Gospel: "it would be extremely significant...that the Gospel according to Mark appeared in immediate sequence to the set of calamities beginning with the so-called persecution of Nero." This leads Riddle to conclude that "the function of the martyr motif in Mark assists in the understanding of the entire work as intended to guide its readers in this unfamiliar situation of persecution." This situation is unfamiliar because the Christians had never faced a persecution on a large scale as they had during the Neronic persecution. Mark accomplishes this by presenting Jesus "as an example of martyrdom."[74]

Perhaps there is a clear exhortation to martyrdom in the Gospel of Mark itself. For example, how would early Christians have understood these verses in Mark:

> If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.
>
> (Mark 8:34-36)

Despite the apparent straightforwardness of this passage, a "literal interpretation has been rejected by a number of scholars in favor of spiritualized or figurative readings of the phrase…that the phrase 'take up one's cross' is meant figuratively to imply willfully subjecting oneself to the shame and ridicule of following Christ." For a literal reading seems to suggest that "Jesus exhorts his disciples to follow him to crucifixion and death." Moss argues that "the phrase 'take up your cross and follow me' can be read as literal instruction that employs the image of the cross as a figure for death. For first-century readers familiar with the narrative of the death of Jesus, it seems difficult to imagine that the barbaric image of the cross could *not* have conjured up the image of the brutal death of Jesus."[75] Passages such as Mark 8:34-36, Riddle contends, show that "the way of the anointed is the way of the cross. And, most

significantly, moreover, that the way of the cross was not for Jesus only, but is for his followers."[76]

From Riddle's discussion of the martyr motif in the Gospel of Mark, we may reasonably conclude that: "The representation of Jesus' death in the Gospels exercised a powerful influence on the imagination of the early Christian martyrs and those who preserved their memory. Behind every martyrdom lay the self-sacrifice of Jesus himself."[77] In the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, we can see how "the Jesus created by his earliest followers became the paradigm for Christians to imitate" and that by presenting Jesus as a martyr, "the indoctrination was effected whereby the follower of Jesus was equipped to follow him to the death."[78]

On his way to be martyred in Rome sometime between 107-117 C.E., Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, wrote letters to seven churches he passed along the way. These seven letters not only express the martyr impulse as tied to an imitation of Christ, but show how martyrdom is necessary to be a disciple, as a tool in combating deviating "heretical" beliefs, an exhortation to unity, and even the beginnings of strengthening the power of the bishops.

The most salient aspect of Ignatius' letters is the shocking and gruesome descriptions of what he hopes to attain in his martyrdom. His vulgar descriptions have led most scholars to label Ignatius' desire for martyrdom as an unnerving pathological desire to die. One such example, in the Epistle to the Romans, is worth quoting at length:

> I write to the Churches, and impress on them all, that I shall willingly die for God, unless you hinder me. I beseech of you not to show an unseasonable good-will towards me. Allow me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may be no trouble to any one. Then shall I truly be a disciple of Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body. Entreat Christ for me, that by these

> instruments I may be found a sacrifice [to God]…. May I enjoy the wild beasts that are prepared for me; and I pray they may be found eager to rush upon me, which also I will entice to devour me speedily, and not deal with me as with some, whom, out of fear, they have not touched. But if they be unwilling to assail me, I will compel them to do so. Pardon me [in this]: I know what is for my benefit. Now I begin to be a disciple….Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones; let cutting off of members; let shatterings of the whole body; and let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ.
>
> (Epistle to the Romans, Chapters 4-5)

Before analyzing this passage, I should first mention that nowhere in Ignatius' letters is the term "martyr" used. His letters "antedated the creation of the terminology" of martyrdom.[79] Bowesock stresses that Ignatius' "example suggests that, although the sacrifice and death that we associate with martyrdom was already appreciated and sought after, it had not yet received a name."[80] However, this does not mean that Ignatius was not a martyr and that he did not perceive himself as one, either, for it is reasonable to think that "a text may assume a phenomenon without naming it."[81]

What is even more interesting than a lack of martyr language is how Ignatius describes the martyr impulse in the absence of such terminology. "For Ignatius, his suffering and imminent martyrdom are viewed through the lens of imitation, discipleship, and attaining to God."[82] Moss suggests that it is by imitating Christ that Ignatius becomes a true disciple, a true Christian—in fact, it is "the means of being a perfect Christian."[83] Moreover, she claims that it is Ignatius' "ardent desire for a Christly death that exemplifies the early Christian preoccupation with mimetic suffering."[84] Thus, Ignatius earnestly pleads for what he perceives to be the necessary characteristic of being a Christian in *Epistle to Romans*: "Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God." For Ignatius, then, "discipleship and imitation are intertwined with one another."[85]

We should keep in mind that Ignatius is writing these letters as he is being led to Rome to be martyred. He describes in vivid and horrific detail what he expects, or rather, what he yearns for, in Rome. Thus, his words, "Now I begin to be a disciple" have a different reading in this context. Moss maintains that "repugnant though it seems, the conclusion is inescapable; for Ignatius, discipleship *is* martyrdom."[86] For Ignatius, then, being a Christian means being a martyr.

This is not the only message Ignatius tries to display in his letters. In every letter, Ignatius exhorts the church to which he is sending the letter to remain unified, avoid heresy, and follow the lead of the bishop there. Understanding why Ignatius mentions these things, which he does in every letter, will help understand why he focuses on such gruesome details when describing his upcoming martyrdom. The "heretics" that Ignatius is combating in his letters are the Docetists, whose name derives from *dokesis*, "appearance" or "semblance." According to Salisbury, this group "shared with the Gnostics the belief that Christ's humanity was only a disguise worn….that the flesh and blood that witnesses to the crucifixion saw were only an illusion, and that Christ felt no bodily pain. Therefore, at Christ's resurrection, his body continued to be an illusion, and it was his divine spirit that ascended into heaven. They concluded, therefore, that in imitation of Jesus, only our souls will be resurrected, leaving the body behind."[87] But, as Ignatius' gruesome details show, the sufferings of the martyrs "were profoundly physical. Their tortures called attention to every part of their body, and their resilience and victory was a physical one. Could a belief in resurrected spiritual bodies give sufficient credit to the tortured flesh" of a martyr?[88] In his *Epistle to the Trallians* he delivers a polemic against such beliefs:

> Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was *truly*

> born, and ate and drank. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was *truly* crucified, and *truly* died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also *truly* raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life. But if, as some that are without God, that is, the unbelieving, say, that He *only seemed to suffer* (they themselves only seeming to exist), then why am I in bonds? *Why do I long to be exposed to the wild beasts? Do I therefore die in vain? Am I not then guilty of falsehood against [the cross of] the Lord?* Flee, therefore, those evil offshoots [of Satan], which produce death-bearing fruit, whereof if any one tastes, he instantly dies. For these men are not the planting of the Father. For if they were, they would appear as branches of the cross, and their fruit would be incorruptible. By it He calls you through His passion, as being His members. The head, therefore, cannot be born by itself, without its members; God, who is [the Saviour] Himself, having promised their union.

Thus, "for the martyrs it was essential that [Jesus] should have suffered, and Saint Ignatius would have no part of the Docetist doctrine that Christ was too divine to have felt the pain of martyrdom."[89] It was the blood of the martyrs, Salisbury claims, "and the respect they garnered by their sufferings that ensured that the views of the Gnostics and Docetists would not prevail."[90] Tied to this "anti-heretic" polemic, however, is also the issue of urging "the obedience of each Christian community to the church structure, established in a hierarchy of bishop, presbyters, and deacons."[91]

It is quite possible that we can interpret Ignatius' exhortation to follow the bishop as a form of the later orthodox Catholic position; but we can also read this in light of the fact that following the bishop will ensure that Christians do not fall into the "heresy" of the Docetists. For example, in the *Epistle to the Trallians*:

> Be on your guard, therefore, against such persons. And this will be the case with you if you are not puffed up, and continue in intimate union with Jesus Christ our God, and the bishop, and the enactments of the apostles. He that is within the altar is pure, *but he that is without is not pure; that is, he who does anything apart from the bishop*, and presbytery, and deacons, such a man is not pure in his conscience.

And to be clear on this point, Ignatius says without equivocation in *Epistle to the Philadelphians* that "If any man follows him that makes a schism in the Church, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If any one walks according to a strange opinion, he agrees not with the passion of Christ."

In this chapter I have considered two early Christian writings that pre-date martyrology proper. The Gospel of Mark and Ignatius' letters both show that, to Christians of the first and early second centuries, there was a strong tendency to view Christianity as a religion of martyrs. This was not the only view, for Christianity during the early second century also began to reshape itself away from the sectarianism of the first Christian generations toward some form of accommodation with participation in society. There are questions that have been lurking throughout this entire discussion: Given these two coexisting views of a Christianity, the first being a view that sought to accommodate with the world and the second being a view that rejected the world and embraced martyrdom, why did the first view prevail, while the second view was thoroughly re-interpreted so that it was compatible with the first? Do these two early texts show that earliest Christianity was a religion of martyrs? Was earliest Christianity a religion that rejected the world? We may find a clue to answering this question in an important remark in Ignatius' *Epistle to the Magnesians*:

> Seeing, then, all things have an end, these two things are simultaneously set before us— death and life; and every one shall go unto his own place. For as there are two kinds of coins, the one of God, the other of the world, and each of these has its special character stamped upon it, [so is it also here.] *The unbelieving are of this world; but the believing have, in love, the character of God the Father by Jesus Christ, by whom, if we are not in readiness to die into His passion, His life is not in us*.

Again, Ignatius communicates a rejection of the world in *Epistle to the Romans*:

> All the pleasures of the world, and all the kingdoms of this earth, shall profit me nothing. It is better for me to die in behalf of Jesus Christ, than to reign over all the ends of the earth. For what shall a man be profited, if he gain the whole world,

> but lose his own soul? Him I seek, who died for us….Do not speak of Jesus Christ, and yet set your desires on the world…. I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ.

Moss argues that although the canonical New Testament abounds in the idea that Christians should seek to imitate the actions of their savior, New Testament scholars have "exhibited an astonishing and often unjustified reluctance to speak of the imitation of Christ as a theme in the earliest Christian literature." This "*imitatio* anxiety" among scholars can be attributed to two main reasons: "the Christological convictions threatened by the concept, and the inescapable but repugnant conclusion that dying for Christ may be a central, rather than a peripheral, part of the Christian experience."[92]

Christology, which explains the nature of Christ, was in a state of development in early Christianity, as we have already seen in Ignatius' polemics against the Docetists. In fact, even after the Christianization of the Roman Empire, church fathers struggled to agree on a particular Christological view, resulting in a number of different heresies. Eventually, after repeated attempts to settle the issue at councils, the Chalcedonic Christological view prevailed. Thus, Moss suggests that "post-Chalcedonian Christological assumptions" are a motivation "behind the rejection of *imitatio Christi*. The extent to which individual scholars see a particular Christly action as imitable is directly connected to their own Christological views. As caveats to their own discussions of *imitatio Christi*, many scholars will express their belief in the inability of the Christian to imitate Jesus in terms of his uniqueness, that is to say, in his 'preexistent life' or his postmortem exaltation."[93] This, however, is clearly anachronistic when applying it to the *imitatio Christi* of early Christians.

Another motivation for rejecting *imitatio Christi*, according to Moss, is the fundamental motivation that is under discussion in this study: "the unnerving idea that martyrdom is not an

optional extra in the Christian experience. If Christians are exhorted to imitate the actions of Christ, if discipleship entails suffering like Christ, and if Christ the true martyr blazes the way for his followers, then dying for Christ was not just a possibility; it was an obligation. For moderns, martyrdom lies on the periphery outside the scope of normal Christian experience. Bringing martyrdom inside the vibrant and living New Testament makes for uncomfortable reading."[94] What this suggests is that early Christians perceived themselves primarily as a religion that lived in a state of persecution from the evil, polluted world and which thus required martyrdom.

Lastly, it is worth considering the influence of both these texts among the early Christians and how they are represented in martyr acts and other writings. Moss notes that Luke's redaction of Mark 8:34-36 is significant. She suggests that Luke rejects the literal interpretation of Mark 8:34-36: "'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and *take their cross daily* and follow me.' The addition of the phrase 'every day' here transforms the saying so that it cannot be read martyrologically. The redaction betrays a Lukan anxiety about the demands of discipleship. Clearly Luke intends that the idea of taking up the cross must be read figuratively, not literally….That Luke needs to alter his source indicates that there were those at the time who read Mark as a call for suffering and death...The Gospel of Luke tends to shy away from an interpretation of Mark that promotes following Christ to the death."[95]

In addition, Moss mentions that Origen, in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, uses Mark 8:34-36 "to support his arguments that the work of Jesus is continued through the deaths of the early Christian martyrs."[96] Lastly, in the martyr act, the *Acts of Euplus*, Euplus enters the court of the governor "carrying the holy Gospels with him."[97] This martyr act suggests that it was written in a time period when the four canonical gospels were well known and established, for the narrator mentions that "he had read from the holy Gospels according to Matthew, Mark,

Luke, and John."[98] Or, it could be the case that the core of the martyr act was written early on but later redacted by someone during the time when there were the canonical gospels. Whenever the reference to the Gospels was written is not the main point here. What is important is that when asked to read from the Gospels, Euplus opens the book and reads: "Whoever wishes to come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me."[99] Even in the martyr acts, then, we see this important passage in Mark used, and not the Lukan redaction that rejects a literal reading of Mark's insistence to follow Jesus to martyrdom.

If we recall that Ignatius wrote his letters to churches on the way to his martyrdom and that they were circulated by churches after his death, we would expect to see a profound influence. However, as I have discussed in this chapter, and as I will discuss more in the succeeding chapters, Ignatius' letters teeter very close to a message that the Post-Constantinian Church did not like, that is, Ignatius seems very much like a voluntary martyr. If there was an influence of Ignatius' letters, they do not appear in any martyr acts. However, there are two instances of influence that are worth mentioning.

First of all, Ignatius composed a letter to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, one of the most well-known Christian martyrs. It is not unsurprising to think that Ignatius' letter to Polycarp could have influenced Polycarp to go to his own martyrdom. In addition, St. John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) delivered a homily on St. Ignatius. The fact that a prominent Christian of the 4th century would devote a homily to this martyr shows that he must have had a place of prominence among the churches he sent his letters to and that this prominence continued to be felt until the time of Chyrsostom. However, this homily, characteristic of the view of martyrdom of a church that has grown accustomed to the world, is greatly re-interpreted to detract from the voluntary nature of Ignatius' martyrdom.

Chapter 3: The Martyrdom of Perpetua

In the last chapter I discussed the Gospel of Mark and the Epistles of Ignatius. The former has been described as a "primitive martyrology" and the latter displayed what it meant to be a Christian for a prominent bishop in the early second century. In this chapter I will discuss the *Martyrdom of Perpetua*, which falls under a new kind of sophisticated account of the martyrs: a martyr act.

A martyr act purports "to recount the trials of the martyrs." However, they are probably "not verbatim transcripts of the court proceedings but are based on witness' recollections; most retell the dialogues between the confessors and the judges. These *acta* were heavily rewritten over the centuries and must be used with caution as historical sources."[100] In addition, according to Moss, martyr acts are significant because they "do not simply reproduce biblical narrative, [but] 'interpret' and offer a 'reading' of it."[101]

Though this may suggest that these accounts are not historically reliable accounts of actual martyrs, the lack of historical reliability is not an issue here. As mentioned in the Introduction, we should think of martyrdom as a discourse, a narrative that was produced by and for these early Christians. Thus, the acts of the martyrs "cast light on the development of historical doctrines about the status and nature of Christ, on anthropology in the early church, and on the mechanics of salvation."[102] In fact, by presenting martyrs in a particular light, (as imitators of Christ, for example), "the martyr acts construct their own portraits of Christ and martyrological ideals."[103] Thus, narratives of martyrdoms had an influence on how Christians viewed Christ and therefore helped shape Christianity to some extent.

At the same time, Moss suggests that the martyr acts provide "early evidence of the development of different theories of salvation, not merely as a means of filling in the lacunae in

reconstructions of the history of ideas, but as forces that generated and shaped theological traditions." Furthermore, she states that the martyr acts demonstrate that "theology is not exclusively the territory of a cadre of intellectual bishops; rather, it was available as part of the unregulated and uncontrollable cult of the saints."[104]

In addition, the variety of different models of redemption in the martyr acts were often dependent upon the geographic location of the early churches that were involved in the formative act of developing Christianity. Because the martyr acts come from a variety of social settings and specific geographic locations, "they not only provide us with a view of specific churches but also allow us to construct a geographical picture of the diverse forms of Christianity in the early church."[105] In sum, martyr acts form a heterogeneous group and the "imitation of Christ in the *acta* reveals the diverse ideologies of martyrdom at work in the second and third centuries."[106] One of the most important ideologies of martyrdom is presented in the *Martyrdom of Perpetua*.

The *Martyrdom of Perpetua* is a gem in the study of early Christian martyrdoms. Though the introduction and ending of this martyr act is redacted by an editor, the core of the martyr act appears to be the prison diary of Perpetua herself, which is supported by widespread scholarly consensus as to its historical reliability. In addition, we should not take lightly the fact that this is from a Christian woman's perspective during the early 3rd century in North Africa. The martyr acts lack such an empowered female perspective, and when this is added to its historical authenticity, this martyr act becomes all the more unique.

Though the *Martyrdom of Perpetua* may be unique and extremely important to historians, to early Christians its reception was mixed. Some feared the implications of her martyrdom, as the issue of the excessive zeal of voluntary martyrs strongly associated with the teachings of the Montanists, traces of which can be found in this martyr act, were incompatible with a church that

was growing more and more accommodated to the state and was learning how to live in the world, thus leading martyrdom to become increasingly marginal.

Before we can see how *The Martyrdom of Perpetua* can be seen as a Montanist-influenced text, we must first understand what Montanism is. Montanus was a convert to Christianity who lived in the region of Asia Minor known as Phyrgia. Frend notes that "Montanus himself had been a priest of Cybele, the traditional cult of Phyrgia which had its roots far back in the worship of Hittite Kubaba. Its priests were credited with the gift of prophecy and they enforced a rigorous standard of ritual purity on her worshippers….This puritanical native cult formed one aspect of the background to Montanism."[107] Around 170 CE, he began to proclaim to his fellow believers that he was a prophet and thus Montanism rose and began to spread during the end of the second century. It was called by its followers "The New Prophecy."[108]

The problem with the Montanus is that he claimed he received a *new* prophecy. He and his companions, including two female leaders, Priscilla and Maximilla, "represented a revival of the apocalyptic spirit and announced the forthcoming end of the world. The Lord was about to return, and the new Jerusalem would be set up in the vicinity of the town of Pepuza in Phyrgia." The Montanists "saw themselves in a relation of complete alienation from the world" and felt that their "calling was martyrdom, and their duty was to hope for it and never flee from persecution." Thus, again we see a connection between martyrdom and a rejection of the world. In addition, "they purified themselves and cut themselves loose from their attachments to society," prompting Priscilla and Maximilla to leave their husbands.[109]

Smith asserts that the Montanists believed that "the ecstasy of the spirit needed no institutional intermediary; it spoke directly to and for God," and was thus "dangerously

individualistic."[110] Furthermore, Frend insists that the Montanist movement protested against "both compromise with the world and the continued institutionalization of the Church."[111]

As we will see, some church fathers preferred that "God speak discreetly and modestly through proper ecclesiastical channels."[112] But for one prominent church father, this was not the case. Montanism "made its most illustrious convert in the North African Christian writer Tertullian, who was attracted to it not so much by its apocalypticism as by the seriousness and moral rigor which it required of Christian believers. To [Tertullian], Montanism represented the pure church, uncorrupted by compromise with the world and endowed with the living presence and authority of the Spirit."[113]

Unlike other martyr acts, *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*, Smith asserts, "was not a public document, and it makes a troublesome Christian morality tale because it is so personal and so steeped in pagan symbolism."[114] Perpetua was martyred in Carthage ca. 203 C.E. during the reign of Septimus Severus (193-211). According to her martyr act, she was 22 years old and "a newly married woman of good family and upbringing" with "an infant son at the breast."[115] Smith elaborates and mentions that she "lived in or near a city where a peculiarly virulent and fiercely ascetic variety of Christianity, one that glorified suffering and martyrdom, was spreading rapidly."[116] The introduction to her martyr act, by an unknown redactor, (although some scholars believe the redactor is none other than Tertullian after he had become a Montanist), is very interesting and uncharacteristic of most martyr acts.

One portion of the introduction reads thus:

> "Let those then who would restrict the power of the one Spirit to times and seasons look at this: the more recent events should be considered the greater, being later than those of old, and this is a consequence of the extraordinary graces promised for the last stage of time. For *in the last days, God declares, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh and their sons and daughters shall prophesy and on my man servants and my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit, and the young*

> *men shall see visions and the old men shall dream dreams*. So too we hold in honor and acknowledge not only *new prophecies* but new visions as well, according to the promise. And we consider all the other functions of the Holy Spirit as intended for the good of the Church; for the same Spirit has been sent to distribute all his gifts to all."[117]

In this passage, we can clearly detect a Montanist influence. We should keep in mind that this martyr act is not a Montanist martyr act, for Montanism was not mainstream Christianity. However, the Montanist influence evident in this martyr act lends credence to the view sketched earlier that there were multiple discourses of martyrdom. The redactor addresses those who wish to "restrict the power of the one Spirit" and the apocalyptic expectation "promised for the last stage of time." In addition, there is the mention of "new prophecies." At the outset, then, the redactor, if it is, in fact, Tertullian, seems to be motivated to convey a Montanist martyrdom. The redactor continues: "For these new manifestations of virtue will bear witness to one and the same Spirit who still operates."[118] However, his motivation does not require much work, for the main body of this martyr act is the authentic diary of Perpetua, who the redactor sees as already embodying Montanist-influenced beliefs.

Perpetua begins her diary by discussing her shaky relations with her father because of her decision to be a Christian. In one scene, Perpetua's father arrived at the prison and begged: "Do not abandon me to be the reproach of men. Think of your brothers, think of your mother and your aunt, think of your child, who will not be able to live once you are gone."[119] One can understand Perpetua's father's words if we consider the threatening effect the Christians had on Roman society. Smith emphasizes the important point that Christians created their own society "within the Roman one, and their loyalties were to each other rather than to the family structures that formed the backbone of conservative Roman society. Their faith led them to renounce parents, children, and spouses, and Romans believed this actively undermined the fabric of

society."[120] Thus, in this passage, Perpetua's new identity as a Christian allows her to present herself as "overcoming her father, the *pater familias*, the pivot of legitimate authority in the Roman system."[121]

Perpetua followed "the example of Christ and [did] not let considerations of family, society, or cultural continuity get in the way. She took seriously Jesus' call to leave worldly concerns behind."[122] Perpetua, similar to how the Montanists Priscilla and Maximilla left their husbands, leaves not only her husband and family, but her own newborn infant.

Perpetua's martyr act also shows that, according to Ton, "the merit of the martyrs was so great that it gave them special prerogatives. They now had the privileges of interceding efficaciously with God for sinners, of forgiving the sins of other people, of communicating directly with God, and of having special visions and revelations…foreign to the teachings of the Bible."[123] These visions not only showed that the martyrs had an extraordinary power that differed from the ordinary Christian, but the bestowal of a vision was a sign that a martyr has been chosen, that they have been sanctioned by God's will to be a martyr. Thus, a fellow Christian in the prison says to Perpetua: "Dear sister, you are greatly privileged; surely you might ask for a vision to discover whether you are to be condemned or freed."[124]

One such vision, or prophetic dream,[125] that is particularly illuminating is the one she has of her brother Dinocrates who presumably died as a young pagan boy with cancer of the face. She describes seeing him "coming out of a dark hole, where there were many others with him, very hot and thirsty." Perpetua makes a prayer for him and she describes a vision reminiscent of a baptism: "Where Dinocrates stood there was a pool full of water; and its rim was higher than the child's height, so that Dinocrates had to stretch himself up to drink." Perpetua awakens and realizes that her brother was suffering. She continues to pray for him for several days and then

has another vision of Dincorates. This time, he is "clean, well dressed, and refreshed…and the pool that [she] had seen before now had its rim lowered to the level of the child's waist…Dinocrates drew close and began to drink from it, and yet the bowl remained full. And when he had drunk enough of the water, he began to play as children do. Then [she] awoke, and [she realized that he had been delivered from his suffering."[126] These two visions[127] show that Perpetua, as a martyr, acquired the power to forgive sins. Her brother, Dinocrates, who had died without being baptized, is granted salvation through her earnest prayers.

Another vision Perpetua has portrays how, according to Moss, "martyrdom is reconceived as cosmic battle."[128] Before her planned execution by being condemned to the beasts, Perpetua describes how she became "a man," and, in surprising detail, how she fought with an Egyptian, whom she defeats by flying into the air and wounding him. After she woke, she "realized that it was not with wild animals that [she] would fight, but with the Devil."[129] In fact, Moss perceptibly notes that "the cosmic battle motif is particularly strong in the North African martyrological tradition, beginning with the early third-century *Perpetua and Felicitas* and continuing in the fourth-century Donatist *acta.*" Thus, there is a geographic factor here. Moss asserts that when we cross the "linguistic divide from Greek to Latin, we encounter an explosion of cosmic battle imagery in the Latin *acta.*"[130] So much so that "references to the devil in early Greek *acta* appear to be inserted largely by later redactors or translators," perhaps to "bring the martyrdoms into line with the taste and worldview of later Latin hagiographic audiences who become accustomed to this idea in their own martyrdom accounts."[131]

One final vision is given by Saturus, a Christian companion in the prison. He describes his vision that after they died, they were carried in the air by four angels to a beautiful garden. On arriving, Saturus remarks that "This is what the Lord promised us. We have received his

promise."[132] In this garden, they "meet Jucundus, Saturninus, and Artaxius, who were burnt alive in this same persecution, together with Quintus who had actually died as a martyr in prison."[133] Saturus continues: "And there we began to recognize many of our brethren, martyrs among them. All of us were sustained by a most delicious odor that seemed to satisfy us."[134] In this vision, we encounter the belief that martyrs inhabit Paradise.

According to Salisbury, this last vision leads Tertullian to the belief that "martyrs went directly to paradise to receive their reward, and they were the only souls who could do so…The sufferings of the martyrs was so intense that Tertullian's fierce sense of justice required that they receive immediate reward."[135] Thus, Christians saw a link between martyrdom and "their own resurrection of the flesh," which occurred immediately after their death; no wait for the Final Judgment was necessary.[136]

The picture of martyrdom presented in *The Martyrdom of Perpetua* is one that is highly individualized. According to Smith, these types of martyrs "did not regard themselves as part of some national destiny. They did not see themselves as defenders of an institution because the church as a hierarchical organization that demanded total allegiance and obedience was only slowly taking shape."[137] Rather, these "martyrs were men and women filled with the Holy Spirit who did immediate and violent battle with Satan and reaped the rewards of their victory." But is this type of martyrdom compatible with a church that was concerned with establishing a home, even if temporary, in this world, and not the martyr's Paradise?

Though the blood of the martyr is often considered the seed of the church, there is a "baffling paradox" here:

> Martyrs such as Perpetua were filled with the Holy Spirit…But the church as an institution could not afford to forsake any of these, let alone build upon the spiritual anarchy of men and women who claimed to possess the gift of vision and prophecy. The intense individualization, the overwhelming self-interest of

> Perpetua, the conviction that to her alone had been revealed the wonders of heaven, were extremely dangerous to the church, which was in the process of constructing an ecclesiastical organization modeled far more on the bureaucratic and class divisions of this world than of the equality of the next.[138]

We can see this danger more clearly from the perspective of the orthodox Catholic Church. Due to the immense popularity of *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*, Saint Augustine, in the fifth century, "had to warn that it should not be viewed as comparable to the Gospels."[139] Smith notes that what the church desired was an "institutional martyr," a martyr "who died defending the political safety of the church and the honor of God as defined by legalists and administrators, not by rebellious wives and daughters."[140]

Chapter 4: The Martyrdom of Polycarp

In the last chapter I discussed *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*, which described a martyr who was very individualistic and potentially harmful to a church growing increasingly in size and organization. It was hard for the ecclesiastical leadership to control such martyrs, as they held such a powerful sway over ordinary Christian believers. Thus, the martyr discourse presented in *The Martyrdom of Perpetua* was especially strong and appealing. However, recall that martyrdom is a discourse, and these discourses not only varied, but evolved over time. To counteract the development of a "common martyr," (for lack of a better term), like Perpetua, who was, in fact, only a catechumen upon being arrested, there developed a new martyr that we can call the "institutional martyr." The latter tried to restrict and control the appeal that the common martyr had over the mind of the average Christian. The common martyr did not follow an organized church, and, in fact, did not even care for one—but rather cared for the next world. The discourse of martyrdom embodied by common martyrs like Perpetua characterized a Christianity in which Christians were sojourners in this world. Their true abode was Paradise, "out" of this world. In contrast, this new type of institutional martyr, a powerful tool for an organized church, embodied a discourse in which there was a sense of growing participation and a desire to be "in" the world, and is displayed in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. In this chapter I will be discussing this martyr act, and the continuities and discontinuities between Perpetua's martyrdom and Polycarp's martyrdom.

Before turning to a discussion of Polycarp, it will be useful to keep in mind a general pattern emerging among the martyr discourses. In particular, we can see two strains embodying two different tendencies towards martyrdom developing side by side, the result of geographical differences, economic and social pressures, and different views concerning the relation between

the Church and State, all taking place concurrently with the growth of Christian membership across the Empire. During times of persecution, Christians in general were more apocalyptic and more eager for martyrdom, resulting in a rigorous view of Christianity which encouraged a rejection and uncompromising view of the world. On the other hand, in times of peace, Christians in general were less apocalyptic, less eager for martyrdom, resulting in a lax view of Christianity which encouraged a desire to compromise and accommodate with the world.

The martyr grew in importance during times of persecution and lost significance during times of peace. In addition, recall that during the beginning of the second century, Christians in general began to lean towards accommodating with the world. During times of peace, then, the Church was able to consolidate its power and organize itself into an ecclesiastical hierarchy. As we saw in chapter 2, however, persecution often frustrated the development of this ecclesiastical organization, for many Christians lapsed, including bishops. The problem of the lapsed caused schisms and allowed the common martyr, who grew in importance during times of persecution, to challenge the growing authority of the bishop. However, the growing power of the organized Church realized the strength that the martyr held and began to use it as a tool to their own advantage. Thus, the later the composition of a particular discourse of martyrdom, it is evident that there is a growing tendency for incorporating the institutional martyr into the program and message of the ecclesiastical church, while the common martyr is gradually becoming marginalized.

Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna and was martyred ca. 155 CE. It may confuse the reader that I have discussed Perpetua's martyrdom, which took place ca. 203 CE, before Polycarp's, which took place almost half a century earlier. The explanation for this requires a discussion of the dating of *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*.

Bowersock states that the account of Polycarp's martyrdom is extremely important among scholars because it is purported to contain "the earliest appearance of the words 'martyr' and 'martyrdom' in the clear sense of death at the hands of hostile secular authority."[141] We saw in the second chapter that nowhere in Ignatius' letters was this terminology used. In fact, Polycarp and Ignatius were contemporaries, and Ignatius even sending a letter to Polycarp.

It is truly extraordinary that Ignatius wrote his letters around ca. 107-117 C.E., and that Polycarp's martyrdom, occurring perhaps ca. 155 C.E., not written that long thereafter, could display such stark differences in the ideology of martyrdom. In fact, I find this *too* extraordinary to be true. The dating of Polycarp will drastically effect how one interprets it, so it is worth briefly considering the dating of this most important of martyrdom accounts. Moss notes that "its place as the 'the first Christian martyrdom' and the presumed connection between Polycarp and the Apostolic age has led to a scholarly commitment to an early dating."[142]

However, Moss, adroitly wielding Ockham's razor, provides convincing evidence that *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* does not have as early a dating as most scholars think, but that the martyr act "in its extant form can be dated no earlier than the middle part of the third century and the persecution of Decius. It was then edited in the fourth century, when references to the cult of saints and the 'catholic church' were added."[143]

First, this martyrdom account "contains quotations from nearly every book in the canonical New Testament….Were [*The Martyrdom of Polycarp*] composed in the second century, we would hardly expect such comprehensive familiarity with the as yet nonexistent canon to the exclusion of noncanoncial texts." Second, this martyr account displays an "extremely sophisticated and nuanced view on martyrdom. The author is conscious of potential

misunderstandings of the martyr's imitation of Christ and goes to some lengths to distinguish between the status of Christ and of the martyr. Were this, as is claimed, the first text to use the term *martys* in a technical sense, we would hardly expect to find such caution and nuance. To believe that [*The Martyrdom of Polycarp*] is the first martyrdom account is to believe not only that it inaugurates a paradigm shift in the understanding of the term *martys* but that with this new development in thought the authors became instantly aware of potential pitfalls of the veneration of martyrs, even though the category had only just come into existence!" [144]

Lastly, though scholars refer to this martyr act as a "genre-creating" text, there is a "lack of evidence that the martyrdom had any *literary* impact before the second part of the third century."[145] Thus, although there is a historical Polycarp who was martyred sometime in the mid-second century, the martyr act attributed to him should be dated to sometime around the mid-third century. If we are to consider martyrdom as a discourse, how the martyrdom is portrayed and what views it presents is more important than its historical authenticity. To read and interpret *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* before this time would be anachronistic and greatly skew our understanding of how the church developed and how it understood its martyrs in a particular context.

In this martyr act, we again return to the issue of Christian identity, and also confront the new issue of controlling the martyr's message. In the introduction, the narrator describes that Polycarp's martyrdom exemplifies "a witness in accordance with the Gospel…Just as the Lord did, he too waited that he might be delivered up, that we might become his imitators."[146] This seems to imply that there were martyrs that were *not* according to the Gospel, and that these martyrdoms were not true martyrdoms. Thus, Polycarp seems to exemplify a true martyrdom,

while characteristics that are the opposite of Polycarp's martyrdom are not true martyrdoms at all.

The first characteristic of a true martyrdom seems to be "to desire not only one's own salvation, but also that of all the brothers."[147] When we consider the highly individualized nature of Perpetua's martyrdom, we can see why such a remark was included in the introduction of this martyr act. At the same time, however, one may argue that Ignatius' martyrdom was also quite individualized and thus in opposition to the institutional martyr. However, we must remember that Ignatius was a bishop and argued that the bishop should be shown obedience, which are major components of the ecclesiastical program and a main characteristic of the institutional martyr. But again, we must treat Ignatius' case carefully. His letters pre-date not only the formulation of the term "martyr," but also the sophisticated development of a theology of martyrdom. In connection to the two strains of martyr discourses discussed above, we can find both in Ignatius' letters. He was a common martyr in the sense of his individualization, his lust for martyrdom, and his rejection of the world. At the same time, he was an institutional martyr in arguing for the power of the bishops, his exhortation for strict obedience to them, and his repeated demands for unity, signaling a desire to be "in" the world. The discourse on martyrdom has developed considerably since the composition of his letters.

In *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, we are immediately given a face with which to put the false "anti-martyr":

> There was a Phyrgian named Quintus who had only recently come from Phyrgia, and when he saw the wild animals he turned cowardly. Now he was the one who had given himself up and forced some other to give themselves up voluntarily….This is the reason, brothers, that we do not approve of those who come forward of themselves; this is not the teaching of the Gospel.[148]

The reference to "Phyrgia" and "Quintus" here is quite interesting. In the preceding chapter, I discussed that Montanism, the "New Prophecy," originated in Phyrgia. The Montanists were especially zealous for martyrdom, and *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* endeavors to show that the case of the voluntary martyr, is not a true martyrdom according to the Gospel. Interestingly, the name Quintus, although a very common name meaning "fifth," is also used in *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*—perhaps only a coincidence.

In order to show that Polycarp's martyrdom is a true martyrdom according to the gospel, the martyr act abounds in gospel parallels: Polycarp had "betrayers in his own household;" The police captain that sought out Polycarp is named "Herod;" Polycarp predicts his own death: "Three days before he was captured he fell into a trance while at prayer; he saw his pillow being consumed by fire. He turned and said to his companions: 'I am to be burnt alive'"; Polycarp has his own "Last Supper" prior to his arrest: "Polycarp ordered food and drink to be set before them, as much as they wished, even at this hour."[149] These gospel parallels lend credence to the view of Mark as a "primitive martyrology" in Chapter 2, for "the parallels to the passion of Jesus, which were consciously adduced in the martyrologies in describing martyrdoms, shows how the gospel narrative was normatively used as primitive martyrology."[150]

In the last chapter, I described Perpetua's vision as a sign that she has been chosen for martyrdom, a divine sanction. Perpetua claimed that God spoke to her and sent her visions, and thus her martyrdom was according to the will of God. The problem with such a claim is that it is hard to prove—in fact, to even accuse a cherished martyr of being insincere in their prophetic visions and messages from God could be very dangerous, especially when they eventually die for the faith. If this insincerity was a practice that was rampant among ordinary Christians, we can see how it could be problematic, as any Christian could claim this and find themselves with

power and respect similar to a leader of the church. In addition, if we recall Quintus, who lapsed and did not become martyred, we can imagine a situation in which Christians were claiming that God spoke to them, signaling that they were chosen, but then lapse in the face of persecution. Explaining how such a divine sanction could be false, how God could choose a martyr yet be wrong, must have been a difficult concern to address.

In this martyr act, however, we see a shift in the ideology of martyrdom and a controlling of such dangerous claims to a private and individualized divine sanction. "As Polycarp entered the amphitheater, a voice from heaven said: 'Be strong, Polycarp, and have courage.' No one saw who was speaking, but those of our people who were present heard the voice."[151] The latter sentence of this passage is very interesting when we consider the individual, common martyr's claim of receiving the Holy Spirit and speaking to God. In this passage, however, a divine voice is heard for *all* to hear, not just Polycarp. This seems to be the proper and surefire way of truly showing that a martyrdom is according to the will of God—and ensuring that not every Christian could claim that God was whispering in their ear.

The narrative continues: "For we have been taught to pay respect to the authorities and powers that God has assigned us (for this does not harm our cause)."[152] This is drastically different from *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*. There is no accommodation whatsoever made to the State—only an outright rejection and a desire to attain the bliss of Paradise. Thus, martyrs, whose blood is the seed of the church and who are immensely respected and revered, are now used as mouthpieces of the organized Church to disseminate their own views in an attempt to consolidate their own power. This passage is an instance of Polycarp as the institutional martyr, exhorting the readers and listeners of his martyr act to compromise with the State, support the organized church, and no longer eagerly seek martyrdom voluntarily.

Furthermore, when they were attempting to nail Polycarp down so that he would not flinch in the fire, Polycarp orders them: "Leave me thus. For he who has given me the strength to endure the flames will grant me to remain without flinching in the fire even when without the firmness you will give me by using nails." These descriptions do not contradict those given in Perpetua's martyr act. It seems that it is still necessary that the martyr endure great pain until death, also an explanation for why the false, voluntary martyr lapses due to the fact that God is not present within them.

Part of his final words were: "I bless you because you have thought me worthy of this day and this hour, to have a share among the number of the martyrs in the cup of your Christ, for the resurrection unto eternal life of both the soul and the body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received this day among them before your face."[153] This description also does not contradict those given in Perpetua's martyr act. It seems that it is still believed that the martyr immediately travels to Paradise upon death. In fact, it would be difficult to see how even an organized church could deprive their precious martyrs from such a great boon.

After Polycarp's death, the narrator describes how "the jealous and envious Evil One…seeing him now crowned with the garland of immortality and the winner of an incontestable prize, prevented us even from taking up the poor body, though so many were eager to do so and to have a share in his holy flesh." The injunction against taking Polycarp's body is attributed to the Jews because they believed the Christians would "abandon the Crucified and begin to worship [Polycarp]."[154] The narrator explains, however, that "little did they know that we could never abandon Christ, for it was he who suffered for the redemption of those who are saved in the entire world, the innocent one dying on behalf of sinners. Nor could we worship anyone else. For him we reverence as the Son of God, whereas we love the martyrs as the

disciples and imitators of the Lord, and rightly so because of their unsurpassed loyalty towards their king and master."[155] It is striking that the narrator has to make a distinction between the piety and worship that is to be shown to the martyrs and to Jesus. It is not too farfetched to think that some Christians were worshipping the martyrs the same way that they worshipped Christ. Whatever the reason for this curious passage, it can be read as another exhortation to worship Christ first and foremost; putting any martyr before Christ is, of course, a danger to the organized church.

The narrator ends the act by mentioning that Polycarp's martyrdom is "both as a memorial for those who have already fought the contest and for the training and preparation of those who will do so one day." Thus, this martyr act is a sort of "martyr manual" on how to be a true martyr, and to decide who and who is not a true martyr. "[Polycarp] was not only a great teacher but also a conspicuous martyr, whose testimony, following the Gospel of Christ, everyone desires to imitate. By his perseverance he overcame the unjust governor and so won the crown of immortality."[156]

Suffering in imitation of Christ was not an invention of the authors of the martyr acts, but rather a textual representation, a discourse, an "ideology of discipleship in the Jesus movement and a foundational element of membership in the Christian community."[157] In this chapter, however, we have seen that presenting the martyr as an imitator of Christ "was a delicate theological balancing act." In this martyr act, Polycarp, the true martyr according to the gospel, is contrasted with the "unevangelical enthusiasm of Quintus, who eagerly offers himself for martyrdom." Thus, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* communicates that "only certain kinds of martyrdom are to be emulated." However, the narrator also "differentiates between Polycarp and Christ," showing that the martyr does not reach the status of Christ in imitation of Christ. As

Moss perceptively notes, “regulating the imitation of Christ is, in this text, a question of defining what should be imitated and what that imitation is.”[158]

Chapter 5: The Donatist Martyrs

In the preceding chapters, I discussed how the discourse of martyrdom shifted as a church that favored ecclesiastical organization and accommodation to the State began to grow. In opposition to the discourse representing the common martyr, the institutional martyr presented a counter-discourse. In this chapter, we will encounter an interesting development: a quasi-synthesis between the characteristics of the common martyr and the institutional martyr. However, the institution in question is not the orthodox Catholic Church that was supported by the Post-Constantinian Roman Empire, but rather the Donatist Church that split from them. In the Donatist martyr acts, the martyr is again used as a tool by an organized Church, but one that is eager for martyrdom and against accommodation with the world.

After the conversion of Constantine it seemed that Christianity entered upon a new world in which, in the absence of persecution, there was no longer a need for martyrs. For Christians in earlier centuries, however, the martyrs, though causing schisms among the Christians, also acted as a social and divine glue among Christians. Martyrdom not only bonded Christians together in opposition to the Romans, but bonded particular brands of Christians together.

Bowersock comments that "the formative period of martyrdom was over by the early fourth century, when the empire became Christian, there could be no more documents of the struggles of the early Church against an intolerant and polytheist bureaucracy. The golden age of Martyr Acts was not to come again, even though the Church could go on registering new martyrs down to the present time."[159]

However, this is only true from the "orthodox" Catholic position. In reality, the martyr discourse continued to flourish in Carthage and in the North African back-country through the Donatists. Tilley argues, however, that because the "orthodox" Catholic church acquired a

position of dominance, historians "have better access to the Catholic version of the [Catholic-Donatist] struggle and the Catholic version became *the* story of the conflict."[160] Thus, Tilley continues, the Donatists are portrayed as "an intransigent, monolithic, and millenarianist sect of Christianity which never adjusted to the end of the Roman persecutions, for that is the portrait their opponents in the fourth and fifth centuries painted of them."[161] To understand the Donatist position and their martyr discourse, we need to understand the controversy that sparked the schism and their subsequent persecution by the "orthodox" Catholic majority. Furthermore, through the controversy we can trace the development of the Catholic institutionalized martyr as *the only* true Catholic Christian martyr.

The key incident in understanding the Donatist Schism occurred in 304 in Carthage. When Christians arrived at a prison to visit their fellow arrested Christians, these Christian rustics were beaten. However, they were beaten not by the local Roman authorities, but by troops employed by Mensurius, the Christian bishop of the city, and by Caecilian, his deacon, who, for reasons which remain obscure, did not want people visiting their friends and neighbors in jail. This "occasion represents the first time that North African Christians conspired with the state to harass other Christians."[162]

Recall that during the Diocletianic persecution, Christians were ordered to hand over their sacred books, and some Christians did hand "over the sacred books, vessels, and other church goods, rather than risk legal penalties." The Donatists believed that the "books were not merely paper and ink, wood and vellum or parchment. They were the very Word of God. Handing over the Bible and handing over the martyrs were faces of the same coin, the coin of treason to the Church." Such people were called *traditores*, which has several layers of meaning for Donatists: those who have deserted to the side of the enemy and handed over (tradere)

themselves, or the scripture, to the enemy. The term also refers to the Christians who left the true (in Donatist eyes) church and became members of the church affiliated with the Empire. Moreover, the "term *traditores* was applied not only to the persons who literally engaged in these acts, but also to their ecclesial descendants, generation after generation, i.e., the persons they ordained. Hence, they were not only *traditores*, but members of the church of the *traditores*, the Catholic Church."[163]

In 311, Mensurius, the Bishop of Carthage died, and the bishops in North Africa congregated to decide who would be the next bishop. But Mensurius, during the Diocletianic persecution, had handed over scriptures to be burned, and Caecilian, his deacon and successor, was also suspected of being involved. Thus, to the Donatists, Caecilian, who was ordained by a *traditor*, was a *traditor* himself and had no legitimate claim to the bishopric.

The Donatists appealed to Constantine to settle this problem, and "a commission of bishops which sat at Rome in 313 and an appeals commission which met at Arles in 314…both vindicated Caecillian's election."[164] The council of Arles also provided that "when the bishop of a city died, the next senior bishop, Donatist or Catholic, should be recognized as Primate."[165] The Donatists continued to persist in their rejection of Caecillian, and they were subsequently persecuted. The persecution was comprised of "periods of especially severe repression, specifically from 317 to 321 and from 346 to 348" which led to the creation of heroic Donatist martyrs instead of subservient new Catholics.[166]

Before turning to the Donatist martyr stories, I should note that during 321-346, "Donatists and Catholics achieved a *modus vivendi*. Some areas were primarily Catholic, others Donatist." Thus, "Donatism grew without significant state interference until 346."[167] However, we should be cautious and not exaggerate the differences between Donatists and Catholics:

"Both read the same Bible, professed the same creed, and celebrated an identical liturgy. The Donatists only refused to recognize the domination of the Catholic Church. Against the Catholic claim to universality the Donatists claimed integrity."[168] At the same time, however, differences did exist. Neither side recognized the other's clergy and the Donatists argued that the Catholic sacraments were invalid unless their priests were personally holy. However, the picture of Christianity portrayed by each side depicts them as opposite and completely incompatible.

In *The Acts of Saint Felix Bishop and Martyr*, Felix refuses to hand over the scriptures to be burned and claims "It is better for me to be burned in the fire than the sacred scriptures, because it is better to obey God than *any human authority*…The Lord's command takes priority over human authority."[169] In this excerpt there is an obvious jab towards the Catholic position and their compromising stance with the State.

In *The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, the narrator remarks that he has written this account in order "to distinguish the holy communion from the unholy. These [records] were inscribed in the indispensable archives of memory lest both the glory of the martyrs and the condemnation of the traitors fade with the passing of the ages."[170] The polemic against the Catholic Church continues in this passage. The Donatists view themselves as pure and holy, the opposite of the Catholic church.

Later in this martyr account, we find language reminiscent of *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*, (also in the North African tradition): "Truly the living Spirit, the Holy Spirit, directed the minds of the confessors by infusing them with eternal and divine discourse."[171] The Holy Spirit, once under the power of individual Christians like Perpetua, then later channeled through the Church to martyrs like Polycarp, has again returned to the power of the individual martyr. Furthermore, the confessor-martyrs in the prison in this martyr account say: "'If anyone

communicates with the traitors, that person will have no part with us in the heavenly kingdom.' And they endorsed this verdict of theirs by the authority of the Holy Spirit." The Donatist martyrs then refer to themselves as "the church of the martyrs" and the Catholics as "the conventicle of traitors."[172]

Moss notes that "language of unity was an important part of the rhetorical program of 'orthodox' Christians in Carthage who sought to combat schismatic elements in the church." In this passage, we see the Donatist writers' response "to ecclesiastically grounded calls for unity by composing martyrdom accounts in which *unitas* was demonized."[173] In the following passage, such a demonization of *unitas* is not only unmistakable, but an exhortation to be a schismatic:

> Therefore, one must flee and curse the whole corrupt congregation of all the polluted people and all must seek the glorious lineage of the blessed martyrs, which is the one, holy, and true Church, from which the martyrs arise and whose divine mysteries the martyrs observe. She and she alone broke the force of infernal persecution; she preserved the law of the Lord even to the shedding of blood. In her the virtues of the people are cultivated in the presence of the Holy Spirit, saving baptism is performed, life is renewed forever.[174]

The Donatists and the Catholics were engaged in a textual battle over which was the true church, and the main weapon was the martyrdom discourse. We have seen the Donatist side, reminiscent of the early Christian view of martyrdom. Tilley notes that "by keeping alive the memory of the martyrs, the stories accomplished several purposes: they kept alive the sense of the Donatist Church as a church in touch with its roots in the pre-Constantinian persecuted Christianty; they kept alive animosity for the Catholics who persecuted them in league with the Roman government…they kept alive a heritage of resistance not only to physical force but to the economic and social pressure to conform to state-sponsored Catholicism."[175]

Moreover, Salisbury asserts that the Donatists fall under what she calls "congregations of the pure," and in line with Tilley, Salisbury argues that the characteristics of the pure were shared by the members of the early church. Characteristics of congregations of the pure are as follows: they kept themselves outside society; since it was difficult to dramatically separate form all contact with a polluting society, they tend to believe in an imminent end of time; because of their focus on the end of the world, congregations of the pure concentrated on salvation and martyrdom. Salisbury notes, however, that these characteristics, which led the Donatists to rather die than join forces with the Catholic Church who allied with the evil empire, were "no longer relevant in Augustine's world of the mixed cities."[176]

In fact, Salisbury notes that the Donatist struggle was part of what stimulated Augustine, a church father of the orthodox Catholic Church, to articulate his own vision of the relationship between the church and the world:

> The great bishop claimed that from Adam's fall, humans had been divided into two 'cities'—one served God and His angels and the other served the devil with his minions. The early Christians and the Donatists agreed and were certain they could identify the two 'cities'—that the faithful with their martyrs were the city of god, and the Roman state led by the emperor, even the Christian emperor, was the city of the devil. Augustine explained that things were neither that simple, nor that clear. For him, the two cities were inextricably mixed on earth, even within an individual's heart, and the cities would only be separated on Judgment Day. At that time, the two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem, would appear, one on the left and the other on the right. Then, and only then, would the inhabitants of the two cities separate; then, and only then, could there be a church of the pure. In the meantime, for Augustine, Christians would live in a world that mingled good and bad. They should accommodate with the world (and the state) while longing for the heavenly city that would come in God's own time."[177]

Now that we have considered the groundwork of Augustine's views, we can now consider his response and position on martyrdom[178] in relation to the Donatists. We will see that

his view is reminiscent of the "true martyr" line of argumentation we saw in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*.

Salisbury notes that the Catholic Church found itself in an awkward position: "so recently a church that credited its victory to the blood shed by martyrs, was now confronted with a moral dilemma: How to condemn people who felt called to death by their faith?" Perhaps the Donatist controversy and the problem of how to deal with them was one of the motivations behind Augustine's theory of just war. For Augustine, just wars had to meet certain conditions. First, "they must be led by someone in legitimate authority; that is, private persons mat not call a just war"; second, "hostilities must be motivated by charity; in this case, the desire to bring the Donatists back into the fold of the orthodox"; third, "this cause must be just," but nevertheless, "the penalties imposed on Donatists were severe and sadly reminiscent of the persecutions under Diocletian." The Donatists were fined heavily, children could not inherit unless they converted to Catholicism, and they were prohibited from meeting and the houses in which they did meet were confiscated, not to mention that they were tortured.[179]

But force does not seem to have worked immediately, for it only fostered a strong martyr tradition among the Donatists. It is ironic how the Roman persecution of the Christians had the same effect. Thus, "If force didn't end martyrdom, how about disinformation? Could changing texts control martyrs? In his struggles against the Donatists, Augustine discovered that martyrdom can be a powerful force against the social order, and thus he and others were ready for the age of martyrs to end. The church was victorious and thus had no more need of martyrs; it could simply celebrate those who already died heroically for the faith."[180]

Augustine achieved this by re-defining martyrdom. He "refused to recognize as martyrs those Donatists who had chosen deaths rather than submit to the Catholic Church. Death and martyrdom were not the same, according to Augustine, for what is good in the hands of Christians becomes a bad thing in the hands of heretics. The death of a heretic is never a true martyrdom." Augustine declared: *Martyres veros non facit poena sed causa* ("Punishment does not make true martyrs but the reason [for the punishment]").[181] If a martyr does not suffer for the right cause, in this case, the Catholic faith, then he or she is not a true martyr.

Thus, the strong "orthodox" Catholic position that developed in the early 5th century allowed Augustine to re-interpret martyrdom as a "true" martyrdom according to the Catholic faith, and, hence, re-interpret the Donatists as false martyrs. From this we can conclude that the side that wields the dominant discourse will eventually prevail, and unfortunately for the Donatists, the Catholic Church had the dominant discourse. There are a few key reasons that led to their achieving control over the dominant discourse. As I mentioned in chapter 4, in the absence of persecution, Christians generally became more lax and the martyr impulse and apocalyptic expectations faded into the background. With the Christianized Roman Empire, there would be no more general persecutions of Christians. Thus, the majority of Christians would now enjoy a time of peace—at least from an external threat, for the Church continued to struggle internally—and become laxist. With these conditions present, the Catholic Church was able to effectively use their discourse of institutional martyrs such as Polycarp to influence the minds of Christian believers.

Chapter 6: The Monk and the Martyr

Throughout this study, we have discussed the development of the martyr impulse that was so significant to early Christians and the role the martyr impulse had in the development of Christianity. As apocalyptic expectations gradually began to sink into the recesses of the Christian mind, the excessive zeal of early Christian martyrdom's rejection of the world slowly gave way to the idea of a union of Church and State. Constantine's Edict of Toleration and the subsequent legalization of Christianity required that Christians re-think "their traditional standpoint towards secular society."[182]

In the absence of persecution, the excessive zeal of the early martyr impulse was short-lived, as the case of the Donatists shows. The world of Post-Constantinian Christianity no longer required such ardent Christians willing to die for the faith. However, the martyr spirit survived in other, less violent, ways.

Even though the Christian world no longer required martyrs, their importance was not completely forgotten. The martyr's relics still held a powerful sway over the Christian imagination. They were sources of healing, uncanny power, and the motivation behind many pilgrimages. Since martyrs were "immediate travelers to Paradise, martyrs were a unique point of contact between heaven and earth."[183] Indeed, the logic was that if they passed immediately to Paradise, immense value was "attached to the parts of their earthly body."[184]

The veneration of martyr's relics[185] were not a new phenomenon of Post-Constantinian Christianity. Several martyr acts describe the power of a martyr's remains. Rather, in the absence of persecution, the respect and admiration of the martyr ideal survived in these relics. The remains of martyrs were no longer open to the public, but, as a manifestation of the institutional martyr program, the church brought these relics into the churches. Thus, the

organized church not only controlled the dominant discourse of martyrdom, but they now controlled the holy relics themselves. Countless Christians flocked to certain churches that had the relic of a martyr and sought miracles, healings, and communication with God. The desire for relics was so strong that Churches gained prominence depending on whose martyr relic they had obtained or "found." Indeed, as Peter Brown states, "so many of the miracles associated with the tombs of the saints are miracles that made visible the invisible refreshment of the saints; they are the early-Christian imagery of Paradise in action."[186]

There was another phenomenon that also came to fruition in the absence of persecution. So far, I have discussed two major martyr discourses, that of the excessive zeal of the common martyr that longs for an exit from this world and entrance into Paradise, and the state-controlled institutional martyr that desires to remain in the world and supports the organized church hierarchy. A third strain of the various martyr discourses was that of the spiritual martyr embodied in the Christian ascetic. Though it was only around the 4th century that the Christian monk would emerge, the ideology behind it developed much earlier.

Clement of Alexandria, around the end of the 2nd century, conceived of martyrdom in this spiritual sense. Essentially, Clement's view was that of a domestication of martyrdom; a martyrdom sought in everyday life. Before turning to a full discussion of his views, we should understand Clement's context and some other views that Clement held. First of all, the geographic location of where Clement lived is important for understanding his views. Alexandria was a great city and a great center of culture and trade. The multicultural atmosphere probably bred a tolerant and liberal view in Clement. Alexandria was also where certain forms of Gnosticism flourished, and a Gnostic influence is evident in his writings.

In “Clement’s eyes, Christians live quite comfortably in the world. They did not have to withdraw with a besieged mentality of would-be martyrs, but instead they should marry, work, and bask in the love of God.”[187] Clement, then, does not adhere to the early Christian martyr discourse that rejects the world. In addition, “Clement goes on to say that it is right to flee from persecution, not because one is afraid to die, but simply because one would not want to participate in the evil of persecution.”[188] In fact, when Emperor Septimus Severus began his persecution of Christians ca. 202 and it approached Alexandria, Clement did, in fact, flee.

Frend notes that Clement is “the first Christian writer who placed the ascetic ideal on the same level as that of the martyr.”[189] He tried to “harmonize the spiritual appeal of Gnosticism with the traditional teaching of the Church.”[190] For Clement, “true martyrdom was the emancipation of the self from the bodily passions.”[191] In Book IV of his work, *The Stromata*, Clement argues for such a martyr: “We call martyrdom perfection, not because the man comes to the end of his life as others, but because he has exhibited the perfect work of love.”[192] Furthermore, Clement continues: “If the confession to God is martyrdom, each soul which has lived purely in the knowledge of God, which has obeyed the commandments, is a witness both by life and word, in whatever way it maybe released from the body—shedding faith as blood along its whole life till its departure.”[193] Gnostic martyrdom, for Clement, is embodied in the “man who has conducted himself according to the rule of the Gospel, in love to the Lord…in order to lead a life free from passion.”[194]

Thus, Clement “wants to establish that martyrdom in the true sense does not necessarily involve death at all. It is rather an expression of one’s commitment to the Christian God.”[195] Though Clement “attempted to tone down the believers’ zeal for martyrdom by ‘spiritualizing’ it” through monasticism, there remains a tension with this view.[196] For, “if monasticism is

interpreted as a martyrdom, then evidently, this kind of martyrdom is not only *self-provoked* but *self-inflicted*, as well."[197] Therefore, according to *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the voluntary nature of this spiritual martyrdom, that is, monasticism, is not according to the gospel.

Frend asserts that the monk and the martyr "each fought the demons in his own way, the martyr as witness to Christ, the ascetic in his struggle to maintain his spiritual ascent to Christ. This was the challenge of the desert where the demons had their abode. The extremes of mortification and self-torture to which the monk subjected himself might be compared to the pangs endured by the martyr...the daily struggle against the demons of idolatry, heresy, sex, boredom, and gluttony, the monk became the man of the Spirit, armed by Him with the same weapons as had served the martyr."[198]

Frend's characterization of the monk and martyr is evident in *The Life of Antony*. Antony was an Egyptian who retreated into the desert ca. 270 CE, and his biography is written by Athanasius. In this work, we can see the influence of various martyr discourses; but in particular, that of Clement discussed above. For example, there are numerous references to Antony's battle with the devil. This is a continuity with the cosmic battle with the devil that we discussed in the martyr acts, such as that of Perpetua. The devil that appears in most late martyr acts has found a home in the daily battle of the monk.

In addition, there is a very rigorist element in Antony's asceticism: "if we are lax even one day, the Lord will not forgive us on the basis of past performance, but will direct his wrath against us because of our neglect."[199] Moreover, Antony suggests there is a sort of mental aspect to the ascetic that is tied to moral rigorism: "in order that we not become negligent, it is good to carefully consider the Apostle's statement, *I die daily*. For if we so live as people dying daily, we will not commit sin. The point of the saying is this: as we rise daily, let us not suppose that

we shall not survive till evening, and again, as we prepare for sleep, let us consider that we shall not awaken…If we think this way, and in this way live—daily—we will not sin, nor will we crave anything."[200]

Antony also "yearned to suffer martyrdom, but because he did not wish to hand himself over, he rendered service to the confessors both in the mines and in the prisons….he also prayed for martyrdom. He seemed, therefore, like one who grieved because he had not been martyred, but the Lord was protecting him to benefit us and others, so that he might be a teacher to many in the discipline."[201] In this passage, we can see a hint of the institutional martyr. Antony refuses to voluntarily give himself to the authorities, just like Polycarp. In addition, Antony's asceticism is described as a benefit to others, a parallel with the similar description of the Christian brethren that are a source of motivation for Polycarp's martyrdom.

Lastly, Antony is described as, in his cell, "there daily being martyred by his conscience, and doing battle in the contests of the faith."[202] This is a perfect description of the spiritual martyr who commits a white, bloodless martyrdom. The ideal of self-denial and self-mortification, which can be performed everyday, replace the lust for a bloody death in the absence for a persecution. The martyr spirit is channeled to the monk without losing its power of effectiveness.

Conclusion

In this study, I have traced the development and interaction between various discourses of martyrdom, which was a major component in developing Christian identity. I have focused on three main tendencies, which we can call the (1) the common martyr, an example of which is Perpetua, (2) the institutional martyr, an example of which is Polycarp, (3) and the spiritual martyr, an example of which is Antony. These three martyr discourses are not completely distinct. Recall that early Christianity was multifarious and hard to define. The division into these three discourses are useful terms for guiding us through a study of how different discourses operated and developed in early Christianity. We should not assume that they are concrete; there will inevitably be a degree of fluidity between the three depending on which ancient Christian source is being analyzed. Moreover, they all seem to progress temporally from earliest Christianity to Post-Constantinian Christianity.

First, the common martyr reflected the earliest views of how Christians viewed themselves in relation to martyrdom. The Christians that embraced this type of martyr discourse were apocalyptic, that is, they expected Jesus' return to be imminent, they perceived themselves as sojourners of this world, they were eager for martyrdom because they longed to be united with Christ in Paradise, and finally, they saw themselves as pure and rejected the world, including pollution through compromise with the state. Thus, they were hard to control, especially because they perceived themselves to be guided constantly by the Holy Spirit with no intermediary, and were thus highly individualistic. The common martyr eventually becomes extinct. Although martyr acts of common martyrs still exist, they are re-interpreted by later Christians and given a new meaning that is conformable to a time when this type of martyr is no longer necessary.

Second, the institutional martyr develops slightly after, and yet, coexists with the common martyr up to a certain point. The Christians that embraced this type of martyr discourse gradually became less apocalyptic and therefore had to re-interpret what being a Christian meant. If Christ's return was not imminent, they must learn how to live "in" this world until he returned. Naturally, Christian apologetic literature coincided with the development of this view around the early second century. The Apologists, for the most part, defended Christianity because they needed to try to co-exist with their neighbors to whatever extent possible. The Christians who became increasingly organized and structured in a church hierarchy favored this martyr because his discourse was an effective tool in controlling the mass of Christians without losing any of the strong faith and respect that were given to the martyrs. The Holy Spirit no longer appeared to the ordinary Christian, but it was now channeled through the proper hierarchy of the church. Instead of the Holy Spirit speaking through the individual, common martyr, the institutional martyr now became a mouthpiece for the church. In effect, the institutional martyr discourse was a type of propaganda that helped to prepare a Church that was ripe for adapting to the world.

Lastly, the spiritual martyr developed fully after both the common and institutional martyrs. However, it existed in a primitive state and was held by some Christians very early on. The absence of persecution and the development of other discourses of martyrdom were required for it to blossom fully. The spiritual martyr partakes in a white, bloodless martyrdom through severe self-denial. They are, in a sense, "living martyrs" who suffer for Christ daily. Much of the imagery used in the two other martyr discourses survives in the descriptions of monks. The monk as a successor to the martyr was the height of a Christian ideal that was realistically achievable in a world without persecution.

This study has tried to show that the complexity of early Christianity can be better understood by analyzing its history through the lens of martyrdom. There were many things that contributed to the growth and development of the Christian faith, but martyrdom is a phenomenon that has been neglected as only secondarily important. I have tried to show that this is not the case. The discourses of martyrdom, at least in the first 300 years of Christianity, was instrumental in developing and shaping Christian identity. Perhaps, even, certain beliefs of Christians and how they identify themselves as Christians in the modern world can be understood better through the phenomenon of martyrdom and how this strong vehicle for undying faith has survived throughout the centuries.

ENDNOTES

Introduction

[1] Burning Monk-The Self Immolation [1963]." N.p., 27 Apr. 2007. Web. <http://www.worldsfamousphotos.com/2007/04/27/burning-monk-the-self-immolation-1963/>.

[2] Lacey B. Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World* (New York: Northwestern University Press,1997), 18

[3] Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10

[4] Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 109

[5] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 8

Furthermore, Moss notes that:
"The task of locating the origin of martyrdom often hinges on scholarly definitions of 'martyr' and 'martyrdom' and the extent to which these definitions rest upon semantic or conceptual foundations. While scholarly consensus maintains that the term *martys* only beings to resemble our own term 'martyr' in the second century, the majority of scholars have moved away from linguistic definitions toward broader conceptualist notions of martyrdom. To be sure, the linguistic focus…is limited in scope, yet it draws our attention to the distinctive ways that the term 'martyr' was discursively shaped by various Christian communities. There is chronological development, but there are also geographical distinctions and cultural nuances. The term was employed differently in different social, geographic, and chronological moments, and describing these nuances should be the task of the scholar" (10).

[6] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 93

[7] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 93

[8] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 45

[9] W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 68

[10] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 68

[11] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 68

[12] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 80

[13] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 93

[14] Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xi

[15] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 26-27

[16] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 5

[17] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 94

[18] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 93

[19] Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (California: Polebridge Press, 2003), 158-159

[20] King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 160

[21] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 22

[22] King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 158-160

[23] King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 6

[24] King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 190

[25] King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 169

[26] Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 137: "The terms *orthodox* and *heretical* were part of the lexicon of polemic, used by individuals and communities to condemn their *Christian* opponents and adversaries. The terms were employed as a means of self-definition vis-à-vis the *proximate other*: to claim for a particular community the privilege of being a 'true church' over against the competing claims of other Christians. For the historian to brand, say, the Montanists as 'heretics' and Polycarp as 'orthodox,' as if often done, is to retroject the views of a much later period into an earlier one. In the first three or four centuries there were no normative definitions of orthodoxy and heresy."

[27] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 94

[28] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2-3

[29] Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3

[30] Moss, *The Other Christs*,11

[31] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 116

[32] Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 4

[33] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 13-15

[34] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 15:

Furthermore, Moss notes that:
"The textual overlap between apologetic and martyrological discourse…confirms the proposition that martyrdom and apologetic occasionally served as overlapping genres in the early church. Like apologetic literature, martyrdom accounts are concerned with the construction of Christian identity and establishing boundaries between the Christian family and those outside it. Defining what it means to be Christian in intra-ecclesial dialogue was as important as establishing boundaries with outsiders" (16).

[35] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 176:
"Contrasting views about salvation, heaven, and the martyr's death and status demonstrate the way in which ideas about martyrdom were shaped differently by their particular communities. The heterogeneity should be a boon to the scholar rather than something to gloss over. These differences enable us to trace the contours of Christianity in

particular socioeconomic groups and geographic locations. Just as there was no singular view of Christ, there was no homogenous view of the other Christs—the martyrs."

Chapter 1

[36] Lacey B. Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World* (New York: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 100: How many Christians died, at the hands of Rome and outraged public opinion that varied from province and decade to decade, is impossible to say. Depending on time and place, the contemporary estimate range from Origen's view that 'only a few whose number could be easily enumerated, have died occasionally for the sake of the Christian religion' to Eusebius' statement that 'innumerable martyrs obtained the crown.'"

[37] Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 22

[38] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 39

[39] Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 1

[40] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 97

[41] G.E.M. De Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" *Past & Present* 26 (1963), 6

[42] De Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" 7

[43] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 97

[44] De Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" 8

[45] Robin L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 425-427

[46] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13

[47] P. G. Walsh, *Pliny the Younger: Complete Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 278

[48] Walsh, *Pliny the Younger*, 278

[49] Walsh, *Pliny the Younger*, 369

[50] Walsh, *Pliny the Younger*, 279

[51] De Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" 10

[52] Cecil John Cadoux, *The Early Christian Attitude to War*: *A Contribution to the History of Christian Ethics*, (London: Headley Brothers, 1919), 91

[53] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 42

[54] De Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" 10

[55] Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 473: "With hindsight, fourth century Christian authors explained the edict as Decius' response to the growth in Christian numbers. They are most unlikely to be right. There is no good evidence for such an alarming growth in Christianity before 250; the core of the edict ordered a 'sacrifice to the gods' without naming Christians explicitly; had Decius feared the Church's increase, he would have acted directly against its meeting places, rites and leaders. However, the edict does seem to have anticipated opposition, and hence it prescribed the local 'special commissioners.' The Jews were exempted, and the only opponents, therefore, would be Christians. Though not a cause, they do seem to have been recognized as a problem from the start."

[56] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 426

[57] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 426

[58] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 458

[59] Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Illinois: The Romanian Missionary Society, 1997), 361

[60] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 21

[61] Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, 355: The third and fourth centuries were marked by painful debates and splits in the churches on this issue. In the end, the entire church was divided by this great question, and the Donatist movement emerged as the rigorist wing, opposing the restoration of the ones who had apostatized."

[62] Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, 361

[63] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 458

[64] Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, 370

[65] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 549

[66] Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 66

[67] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 550

[68] Maureen A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), xxvi

[69] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 551

[70] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 553

[71] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, xxviii-xxix

Chapter 2

[72] Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5

[73] Donald W. Riddle, "The Martyr Motif in the Gospel According to Mark." *The Journal of Religion* 4 (1924), 401: "by no means [is Mark] a martyrology in the complete sense of the type, and it had other purposes other than the martyrological."

[74] Riddle, "The Martyr Motif in the Gospel According to Mark," 398-399

[75] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 30

[76] Riddle, "The Martyr Motif in the Gospel According to Mark," 404

[77] Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 119

[78] Riddle, "The Martyr Motif in the Gospel According to Mark," 402

[79] Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6

[80] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 16

[81] Marc Brettler, "Is There Martyrdom in the Hebrew Bible?" In *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4

[82] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 41

[83] Robin L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 33

[84] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 3

[85] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 42

[86] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 43

[87] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 37

[88] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 42

[89] Lacey B. Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World* (New York: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 95

[90] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 38

[91] Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 191

[92] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 22

[93] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 22

[94] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 23

[95] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 31-33

[96] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 31

[97] Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 312

[98] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 312

[99] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 315

Chapter 3

[100] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4: "A second form of martyr accounts were 'passions,' which were descriptions of the last days and death of a martyr. Some of these are highly imaginative."

[101] Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6

[102] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 7

[103] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 173

[104] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 175

[105] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 5

[106] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 176

[107] W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 290-291

[108] Williston Walker and Richard A. Norris, et al., *A History of the Christian Church*, (New York: Scribner, 1985), 69

[109] Walker and Norris, et al., *A History of the Christian Church*, 70

[110] Lacey B. Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World* (New York: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 104

[111] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 291

[112] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 104

[113] Walker and Norris, et al., *A History of the Christian Church*, 70

[114] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 113

[115] Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 109

[116] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 102

[117] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 107

[118] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 131

[119] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 113

[120] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 16

[121] Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian* Era, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 105

[122] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 118

[123] Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Illinois: The Romanian Missionary Society, 1997), 349

[124] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 111

[125] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 84: How to know who was selected for a prophetic dream? One easy answer was confessors. People whom God had chosen for martyrdom were believed to be filled by the Holy Spirit. Thus, believers accepted their dreams as having been sent by God….Consequently, the experience of martyrs enhanced the reputation of dreams just as their dreams contributed to their own reputation for holiness"

[126] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 117

[127] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 88: "Perpetua's second and third dreams also contributed a great deal to Christian images of the afterlife. These paired dreams concerned the fate of Perpetua's younger brother who had died of cancer of the face when eh was seven years old…In these dreams, Perpetua revealed an afterlife separate from the wonderful garden inhabited by white-clad martyrs. Here was a location where someone might continue to suffer, and perhaps, more important, a place where prayers of the living could alleviate the pain of the dead. This vision significantly shaped later ideas of purgatory as a location for souls to rest in varying degrees of comfort, and it contributed to the idea that the Christian community extended beyond the grave. Many Christians believed Perpetua's dream diary foretold the geography of the afterlife."

[128] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 88

[129] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 119

[130] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 97

[131] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 89

[132] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 121

[133] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 123

[134] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 123

[135] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 46

[136] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 45

[137] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 94

[138] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 114

[139] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 115: "But it also may not be an accident that the actual manuscript of her *Passion* was lost, not to be fully recovered and printed until the seventeenth century. Instead, the growing church needed "martyrs who spoke for a socially constructed earthly ecclesia that administered the channels of salvation and grasped firmly the keys to the gates of paradise"

[140] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 115

Chapter 4

[141] Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14

[142] Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 196

[143] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 197

[144] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 197

[145] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 197

[146] Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 3

[147] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 3

[148] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 5

[149] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 7

[150] Donald W. Riddle, "The Martyr Motif in the Gospel According to Mark," *The Journal of Religion* 4 (1924), 408-409

[151] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 9

[152] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 11

[153] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 13

[154] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 15

[155] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 15-17

[156] Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 17

[157] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 173

[158] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 4

Chapter 5

[159] Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 24

[160] Maureen A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), vii

[161] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, viii

[162] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, xi

[163] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, ix

[164] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, xv

[165] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, xvi

[166] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, xv-xvi

[167] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, xvi

[168] Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 168

[169] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 10

[170] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 27

[171] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 45

[172] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 46

[173] Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52

[174] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 48

[175] Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, xxxvi

[176] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence*m, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 163

[177] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*,162-163

[178] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 166: "Between 390 and 401, Augustine appears disinterested in martyrdom….In the course of his entanglement with the Donatists (410-415), Augustine is forced to address martyrdom more directly. The Donatist focus on martyrdom and their ability to harness the charisma of martyrs force Augustine to react strongly against the martyr-centered practices. He attempts to contextualize martyrs within orthodoxy arguing that martyrdom cannot exist outside the love of the church. From 415 onward, Augustine switched positions largely due to his acquisition of the relics of Stephen. The possession of a portion of the relics of the illustrious protomartyr brought relic power to Augustine's episcopacy and enabled him to benefit from the authority and power of Saint Stephen."

[179] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*,160-161

[180] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*,176

[181] Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 170

Chapter 6

[182] W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 552

[183] Robin L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986),

[184] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 446

[185] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 447: "How new were these beliefs in the power of martyrs' remains? There was nothing comparable in pagan cult: had Jews already retained relics and fragments of past martyrs for their faith?....It is possible to trace this difference to a fundamental difference of ideas. Among the Jews, idea of the immortal martyr had developed late in a religion whose Mosaic law had declared a grace to be unclean for the living. In Christianity, however, the dead were a primary focus of hope and interest from the beginning, 'sleeping,' merely, until the restitution or transformation of their former bodies….The new Christian attitude to the dead and their relics marked a break in previous religious life."

[186] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*,(Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1981), 75

[187] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 197

[188] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 197

[189] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 356

[190] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 359

[191] Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Illinois: The Romanian Missionary Society, 1997), 345

[192] Clement, *Stromata: Book IV*, Translated by William Wilson. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co. 1885), 5

[193] Clement, *Stromata: Book IV*, 5

[194] Clement, *Stromata: Book IV*, 5

[195] Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 67

[196] Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, 373

[197] Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, 377

[198] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 548

[199] Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 21

[200] Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, 21

[201] Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, 44

[202] Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, 44

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