

**The Blood of the Martyrs: The Attitudes of Pagan Emperors and Crowds Towards
Christians, From Nero to Julian**

Domenico Miletti

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Department of Classics and Religious Studies
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
University of Ottawa

Abstract

This MA thesis will discuss the reception of common, non-scholarly polytheists (pagans) to the persecution of Christians from the early empire until the Great Persecution (303-313, 322-324). Though modern scholars have addressed this issue and asserted that there was a change in attitude, many have not developed this into anything more than a passing statement. When chronologically analyzing the Christian acts, passions, letters, and speeches recounting the deaths of martyrs deemed historically authentic, and accounting for the literary and biblical topoi, we can demonstrate that the position of non-Christians changed. The methodology of this thesis will chronologically assess the martyr acts, passions, speeches, and letters which are historically accurate after literary and biblical topoi are addressed. These sources are available in the appendix. Throughout this analysis, we will see two currents. The primary current will seek to discern the change in pagan reception of anti-Christian persecution, while the second current will draw attention to the Roman concept of *religio* and *superstitio*, both important in understanding civic religion which upheld the *pax deorum* and defined loyalty to the Roman order through material sacrifices and closely connected to one's citizenship. *Religio* commonly denoted proper ritual practices, while *superstitio* defined irregular forms of worship which may endanger the state. As we will see, Christians were feared and persecuted because it was believed that their cult would anger the gods and disrupt the cosmological order. The analysis will begin with a discussion centered on the "accusatory" approach to the Christian church during the first two centuries when the Roman state relied on provincial *delatores* (denouncers) to legislate against the cult. During the first two centuries persecution was mostly provincial, sporadic and was not centrally-directed. We will see that provincial mobs were the most violent during the first two centuries. During the third century the actions of the imperial authority changed and began following an "inquisitorial" approach with the accession of Emperors Decius and Valerian, the former enacting an edict of universal sacrifices while the latter undertook the first Empire-wide initiative to crush the Christian community. It is during the third century that the attitude of non-elite pagans may have begun to change. This will be suggested when discussing the martyrdom of Pionius. When discussing the fourth century Great Persecution under the Diocletianic tetrarchy, it will be suggested that the pagan populace may have begun to look upon the small Christian community sympathetically. The thesis will conclude with the victory of Constantine over Licinius and the slow but steady rise of Christianity to prominence, becoming the official *religio* of the empire with traditional paganism relegated to the status of a *superstitio*.

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Introduction

Much scholarly work has been devoted to the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. Attention has been devoted primarily to the legislative history against the Christian communities and the actions that followed. Most academics draw attention to the attitudes of the rulers of the Roman world toward Christians, be they the *principes* of the early imperial period, or the *domini* of the later era. In antiquity the vast majority of the empire's inhabitants did not have the ability to reach high levels of education and therefore anti-Christian writings of philosophers should not be considered an indicator of the feelings of the general populace. Can a reorientation of pagan attitudes be perceived in relation to the persecution of Christians from the early empire until the Great Persecution (303-313, 322-324)?

One may be able to answer this question when chronologically assessing historically authentic martyr sources. Some scholars are sceptical as to the reliability of many of these accounts, while others have defended the accuracy of some of them. T.D. Barnes has studied and discussed ancient Roman hagiography and his work will be of use for this analysis. Barnes has critiqued the martyr lists of Van Gebhardt (1902), Knopf-Krüger ([1929] 1965), Lazzati (1956), and Musurillo (1972), compiling his own canon of Christian martyr acts which he deems "historically authentic." Within this thesis, the works of other scholars will be utilized in order to discuss the various literary topoi which found their way into the martyr acts deemed historical.¹ Throughout this analysis, one must bear in mind that literary exaggerations and topoi do appear within the ecclesiastical literature because succeeding compilers edited the accounts. Though the thesis will not be centered on the editorial decisions of Christian writers, literary tropes will be accounted for when they arise. C. Moss has written about the biblical imagery and allusions within martyr acts deemed historically authentic.² Furthermore, despite the extensive works of both Barnes and Moss, D. Mendels and S. Mitchell, among others, have also explored the compositions of Christian histories and martyrs acts.³

Modern scholarly literature suggests that a decline in enthusiasm for persecution on the part of non-Christians occurred. Unfortunately many have not developed this into anything more than a passing statement when recounting the martyrdoms of Christians. Furthermore, the change

¹ Barnes (2010: 355-9). T.D. Barnes had previously discussed authentic Christian acts in an article (a. 1968).

² Moss (2010: 539-574); Moss (2012); Moss (2013).

³ Mitchell (1982: 93-113); Mendels (1999).

in the sentiment of non-Christians is hardly discussed when all the martyr acts, passions, letters, and speeches are studied individually and chronologically.

The works by W. Frend chart the history of persecution against Christians in the Roman Empire, suggesting that a loss of enthusiasm occurred by the time the tetrarchs initiated the Great Persecution, while denunciations of Christians become restricted to eastern cities such as Gaza.⁴ Though Frend does explore the proliferation of Christianity amongst some members of the ruling elite while mentioning a change of attitude on the part of the populace in generalizing terms, the historicity of the martyr sources is not evaluated.

R. Lane Fox discusses pagan and Christian religiosity in the context of civic life in the late Roman Empire. While drawing attention to martyred Christians he nonetheless asserts a change in attitude of non-Christians following the mid-third century. This assertion is brought up only after the reader is presented with the names of targeted Christians and left to take his suggestion at face value. Lane Fox gives a specific examples, like Theodotus of Ancyra, the Edessan martyrs Shmona, Guria, and Habbib, more widely known Christians such as Polycarp, Pionius, Justin Martyr, the martyrs at Lyons and Vienne, Perpetua and Crispina, but does not attempt a chronological analysis of their interactions with the non-Christian community.⁵

G. de Ste. Croix refers to a change in the attitude of non-Christians during times of persecution in his article.⁶ Besides drawing attention to reasons for Christian persecution, de Ste. Croix suggests that after the mid-third century, with the growth of the Church, polytheists outside of the educated, governing elite generally no longer believed the outlandish rumors previously circulated about Christians.⁷

H. Gra anin explores the religious policy and the policing of religion during the tetrarchic era and briefly explores the degree of participation of the non-Christian population. Gra anin covers the whole period of the Great Persecution and notes that the pagans of the empire became "passive participants" of the bloodshed of the period. Gra anin argues that the promulgation of the four anti-Christian edicts during the persecution point to the failure of the initiative because pagans might have been unwilling to give active and consistent support. Despite observations to

⁴ Frend (1959: 10-30); Frend (1965: 498, 506-8, 520-1).

⁵ Lane Fox (2006: 552, 598-601).

⁶ The article by Geoffrey de Ste. Croix has been of widely cited by scholars when discussing hostility against the Christian community.

⁷ De Ste. Croix (2006: 129, 137-8).

the *Acta Sanctorum*, which is taken at face value without discussions on historicity, Gra anin does not propose reasons for the lack of support from the pagan populace.⁸

Religio, Superstitio, Christianity and Paganism

This following section will briefly describe two subjects: what Roman society considered to be "religion," and the word "pagan." Though this thesis will not focus on Roman religion *per se*, the terms "religion" and "pagan" will be used throughout for the sake of simplicity even if both might seem problematic because they cannot possibly describe all the intricacies of the Greco-Roman religious landscape and may be seen as simplistic. Alongside the main current of the thesis, in order to explore any reversal in pagan attitudes, however modest, in the course of the tetrarchic persecution, one must keep in mind the religious change that occurred during the middle of the third century. During the republican and early imperial era, the civic religion upheld the *pax deorum* and defined loyalty to the Roman order and was closely connected to one's citizenship. This desire to define loyalty and who was a "good" Roman became greatly accentuated during the third century.⁹ The 212 *Constitutio Antoniniana* further defined the parameters by which one could demonstrate loyalty to the state while the anarchy of the third century permitted the creation of a political theology under the tetrarchic college.¹⁰ But what of the members in society who did not engage in religious rites meant to sustain the peace of the gods? The notion of loyalty to Rome must be taken into account because Christians did not engage in material sacrifices, drawing the ire of many. Though volumes can be written concerning the sacrificial rites of the Greco-Roman cults, this section will permit the reader to grasp the cosmological worldview of many pagans of the period.

What did Roman society consider to be "religion?" Proper attention must be given to the word itself as many can confuse Roman *religio* with the modern term "religion." When discussing Roman religion, the popular assumption is that religion and faith have been timeless and present to some degree in most ancient and modern cultures. The modern assumption is that religion is a type of inner disposition and concern for salvation conceived in opposition to the

⁸ Gra anin (2014: 143-62).

⁹ Kahlos (2009: 28).

¹⁰ The *Constitutio Antoniniana* will be explored in greater detail in the second chapter. The chapter by Neothlich (2015: 17) briefly addresses the initiative, suggesting that during the reign of Decius, the emperor's drive towards an imperial religion and edict of universal sacrifice was built upon the previous *Constitutio Antoniniana* because the subsequent edict could have only been possible when all (or most) freedmen of the empire had become citizens.

secular "areas" of life. It is suggested that ancient cultures viewed their spirituality differently.¹¹ For most of the polytheists in antiquity, religion was a public matter, though occasionally corralled by the ruling elites in an effort to uphold public equilibrium - i.e. the *pax deorum*. It did not guarantee the salvation of the soul as opposed to the Abrahamic religions which professed salvation after death, along with being universalist and egalitarian. Throughout this work, the modern term will be used while retaining the ancient definition.

Romans employed *religio* and *superstitio* as two key terms when debating correct religious behaviors.¹² The modern concepts "religion" and "superstition," though originating from their Latin variants, are misleading here and developed their current definitions through ecclesiastical writers during the imperial period. The *Institutiones Divinae* by the Christian historian Lactantius best echoes the evolution of *religio* and *superstitio*:

Well? Religion is of course worship of what is true, and superstition is worship of what is false. And what you worship is absolutely important, more so than how you worship or what you should pray. But because worshippers of gods think they are religious when in fact they are superstitious, so they cannot distinguish religion from superstition or explain the meaning of words.¹³

Lactantius redefined "religious" and "superstitious" in an attempt to claim that practices differing from Christian worship were not just inferior, but false. The polytheists of the Roman Empire would not have possessed this distinction between both terms and did not believe there was truth and falsehood in relation to worshipping the gods. During the high empire, discussions amongst Romans as to the nature of *religio* and *superstitio* revolved around differing forms of human relations with the gods. Generally speaking (though Lucretius appears to differ), *religio* was meant to denote the proper, traditional pagan piety towards the divine, while *superstitio* was an excessive form of behavior and an irregular religious practice which endangered the stability of the state.¹⁴ Alongside prescribing what types of religious practices were deemed acceptable, *religio* and *superstitio* were also used to refer to rites of foreign peoples. In the words of M. Kahlos, "for the Romans, their own religious tradition was *religio* whereas the traditions of other peoples were often considered *superstitiones*." Though clearly ethnocentric, such terminology

¹¹ Cf. Nongbri (2013: 20-4).

¹² Ktzler (1952-3: 2-18); Michaels (1976: 36-77); Grodzynski (1974: 36-60); Janssen (1979: 31-59); Sachot (1991: 351-94); Beard et al. (2004: 215).

¹³ Lactantius. *Institutiones Divinae*. 4.28.11 (Tr. A. Bowen and P. Garnsey).

¹⁴ Beard et al. (2004: 216-17).

was used by the elites to measure one's loyalty to the Roman order.¹⁵ Perhaps, when observing *religio* and *superstitio* within a purely Roman context outside the bounds of ethnicity, it is best to turn *De Clementia* by Seneca who stated that "*religio* does honor to the gods, while *superstitio* wrongs themí "¹⁶

Ancient authors referred to the traditional honors paid to the gods by either the state or private individuals as *religio*. Pliny the Younger praised Trajan's piety in a first century senate panegyric because the emperor devoted himself to the *religiones* of the gods.¹⁷ Valerius Maximus stated in his *Facta et dicta memorabilia* that the Roman state believed *religio* took precedence over everything. He also mentioned that a member of the Roman upper class in North African Timgad dedicated a statue to the Goddess of the City in a celebration of public *religio*.¹⁸ Good emperors were thought to display outstanding care and *religio* towards the gods, while those who ignored the *religiones* were criticized for impiety.¹⁹ Although there is no evidence to suggest that private citizens were obliged to engage in public worship, or whether there were laws enforcing the participation in public rites, political leaders in the Roman Empire were expected to partake in public cults.²⁰ Within *De rerum natura*, Lucretius altered the definition of the word and employed the term *religio* to denote either "rule," "worship practice" or an "excessive concern about the gods."²¹ *Religio* as a "rite" is further used by Tertullian when describing the sacrifice of Abel, made pleasing by Abel's "reverence for the Sabbath" (*sabbati religione*).²² Minucius Felix, while composing his dialogue *Octavius*, used the character Caecilius to provide the viewpoint of one who worships pagan deities and claims that they protect their cities with "sacred rites."²³

¹⁵ The quote is from Kahlos (2009: 13). Recently, Kahlos (2011: 259-60, 266-7) briefly revisited this notion and further delved into the concept of Ancient Roman *superstitio* when discussing proper religious observances because it constituted one's membership within the Roman community and was a prime marker of loyalty.

¹⁶ Seneca. *De Clementia*. 2.5.1 (Tr. J.W. Basore).

¹⁷ Pliny the Younger. *Panegyricus*. 74.5.

¹⁸ Valerius Maximus. *Facta et dicta memorabilia*. 1.1.9, 1.6.13, 2.4.4, 5.2.1; Gordon (1990: 235-8).

¹⁹ Suetonius. *Divus Julius*. 59, *Tiberius*. 69, *Nero*. 56, *Otho*. 8.

²⁰ Suetonius. *Divus Augustus*. 35.3; Eusebius, writing in the fourth century claimed that Christian officials were permitted to forgo their duties in honoring the pagan gods of the province they were stationed in, Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 8.1.2. For a general overview of Roman Consuls partaking in civic rituals see Polo (2011: 21-57). For Roman senators participating in the imperial cult within a military context see Várhelyi (2010: 136-9).

²¹ Lucretius. *De rerum natura*. 1.63, 1.932, 4.7, 5.82-88, 6.58-64 (Tr. W.H.D. Rouse). Cf. Nongbri (2013: 28).

²² Tertullian. *Adversus Iudaeos*. 4.6. In discussing Tertullian's *Adversus Iudaeos* and the sacrifice of Abel, Nongbri (2013: 29) refers to the text of E. Kroymann in *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera: Pars II*. Turnhout. 1954.

²³ *Octavius*. 6; Nongbri (2013: 28).

The ancient Greek *threskeia* and *deisidaimonia*,²⁴ themselves the equivalent of the Latin *religio* and *superstitio*, can be seen in the works of Herodotus, Josephus, and Eusebius. The earliest appearance of the term comes from the *Histories* of Herodotus and described a type of ritual worship.²⁵ Josephus employed the word when describing the sacrificial rites of the Second Temples Judaeans, the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, and the practice of refraining from work on the Sabbath.²⁶ When Eusebius composed the *Vita Constantini*, the older meaning of "rituals" persisted.²⁷

As previously explained, *superstitio* can be defined as either excessive devotion towards rituals or greed for divine knowledge. This was a more fluid concept throughout Roman history.²⁸ Seneca, whose definition of *religio* is easiest to understand, composed *De Superstitione*, a treatise now known to modern historians and classicists through Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. Sadly, a balanced look at Roman *superstitio* and paganism will be hard to find within Augustine's work.²⁹ Seneca, a Stoic, criticized some traditional Roman myths and practices such as public displays of devotion at the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. As mentioned previously, practices and myths of foreign peoples were also criticized, such as the displays of grief in the myth of Osiris and circumcision in Judaism, a practice considered bodily mutilation by Romans. It is with this in mind that one can begin to see how fluid the scope of *superstitio* can be. Moreover, this may have been an attempt by Seneca to demonstrate that the Roman elite did not engage in excessive devotion.³⁰ Despite the wider scope that a writer like Seneca gave to *superstitio* as opposed to *religio*, its definition appears to have widened

²⁴ Kahlos (2009: 37) mentions Greek *superstitio* as *deisidaimonia* when discussing the opinions of the tetrarchic Emperor Maximinus towards the Christians.

²⁵ Herodotus. 2.18; 2.37;2.64; Nongbri (2013: 35).

²⁶ Josephus. *Bellum Judaicum*. 1.146, 2.198, 1.150, 4.275 and *Antiquitates Judaicae*. 12.253; Nongbri (2013: 35).

²⁷ Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 3.53; Nongbri (2013: 36).

²⁸ Salzman (1987: 172-5, 177-82) argues that Romans had originally called any religious practice outside Italy a *superstitio*, whereas in the later fourth century, when Roman legislators began to persecute pagans and heretics, they did not resort to calling the rites of their theological enemies solely by that term. Not once within the *Codex Theodosianus* is *superstitio* used to refer to divination or magical practices exclusively. Earlier pagan writers such as Cicero had used the term *superstitio* to describe overly-excessive fear of the divine, while later writers like Ammianus Marcellinus borrowed that same definition when he accused Constantius of corrupting the simple religion of the Christians. Christians had been accused by earlier writers like Tacitus of practicing a *superstitio*. The term was appropriated by Christians as a tool when passing legislation against heretics. Although the state in the fifth century continued to outlaw magic, this practice was not referred to as *superstitio*; rather, a large range of terms were used: *haruspicina*, *mathematicus*, *hariolus*, *maleficus*, *error*, *tractatus*, and even *religio*.

²⁹ Augustine. *De Civitate Dei*. 6.10; Beard et al. (2004: 217-8).

³⁰ Beard et al. (2004: 218). For Seneca's religious position see Mazzoli (1984: 953-1000); Hutchinson (1993: 222-39).

considerably after the first century. The concept of magic became the ultimate *superstitio* as its principles were in opposition to a true *religio*.³¹ Though a full assessment of the evolution of magic is too large in scope for this thesis and will not detain us here, one thing to remember is that magic was seen as coercive towards the gods, whereas traditional rituals were looked upon as entreating the gods.³²

During the closing decades of the Roman Republic, the religion of the Roman people, particularly those on the Italian peninsula, was less concerned with personal devotion and was associated more as a national cult. Loyalty to the national religion precluded any participation in other, foreign cults unless sanctioned by the senate or received from one's ancestors.³³ Many believed that practicing the rites of an *externa religio* which had not been accepted by the senate would cause outrage amongst the gods. Just like a man could not be the subject of two states, a Roman citizen could not accept two religions without state consent.³⁴ Both *maiestas* and *sacrilegium* were linked to the acceptance of alien cults unacceptable to the national tradition. Early Christianity was amongst the religious movements Roman authorities deemed unacceptable.³⁵ Under Emperor Augustus, Roman religion became messianic and universalist as Rome sought to bring peace and order to a chaotic world. The *Aeneid* of Virgil attests the desire of Augustus to see the triumph of Roman religion over the foreign, bestial divinities of Egypt under the Ptolemies.³⁶ Beside the desire of Augustus to fulfill the secular worldly ambitions of men, what would a crucified rebel from Judaea have to offer?³⁷ Suetonius described the conservative attitude of Augustus towards religion in a frank manner by writing that "he [Augustus] treated with great respect such foreign rites as were ancient, and well established, but held the rest in contempt."³⁸

With the exception of Judaism, which Augustus permitted to exist on account of its antiquity, a community of Jews following the teachings of a executed man would find no such

³¹ Beard et al. (2004: 219).

³² For a definition of magic during the Roman high empire see Pliny the Elder. *Naturalis Historia*. 30.1-18; Frazer (1963). The theory by Frazer suggests that magic was an inferior and prior form of "true" religion. This has been largely discredited by more recent scholarship. For recent assessments of Greco-Roman magic see Segal (1981: 349-75); Gordon (1987: 59-95); Versnel (1991: 177-97); Dickie (2001); Rives (2003: 313-39).

³³ Cicero. *De Legibus*. 2.8.19; Livy. 25.1.12. Cf. Frend (1965: 106).

³⁴ Cicero. *Pro Balbo*. 11.28. Cf. Frend (1965: 106).

³⁵ Frend (1965: 106-7); Kahlos (2009: 13-4).

³⁶ Virgil. *Aeneid*. 8. 675; Gransden (1976: 17)

³⁷ Cf. Frend (1965: 115).

³⁸ Suetonius. *Vita Divi Augusti*. 93 (trans. J.C. Rolfe).

favor in the imperial court. Roman *religio* was looked upon by many as a contract, a *pax deorum* between the Roman people and their ancestral gods. The belief in the treaty between the mortal and the divine was what Romans thought permitted the success of their city and empire. Any deviation or offense to the established order was thought to bring about their ruin.³⁹ Roman piety made an impression on the conquered peoples of the Mediterranean, particularly Greek historians like Polybius. Writing around 150 BC, Polybius asserted that the religious devotion of the Romans was one outstanding quality the Italic conquerors had over the vanquished cities of Greece.⁴⁰ Polybius was echoed a century later during the collapse of the republic and the rise of Augustus by Cicero, Sallust, Horace, and Virgil; the last poet composing *Aeneid*, the pinnacle of Golden Age Latin proclaiming that Augustus, a pious ruler and (adopted) son of the deified Julius Caesar, would rule the known world.⁴¹

We may now discuss the reasons as to why polytheist Romans were suspicious of the Christian Church. The hostility the vast majority of Romans (and some Jews) felt towards the community can be best summed up in three points: (1) Christians were perceived as antisocial because they did not participate in the normal social life of their communities; (2) they committed sacrilege when they refused to worship the traditional gods; and lastly (3) they were seen as dangerous since it was believed that the gods would not take kindly to towns and cities that harbored people who failed to perform *religio*. Christian gatherings and rituals were private in nature. Christianity, like all Abrahamic religions, was exclusionary and distinguished itself by engaging in a hard-line rejection of both Judaism and paganism. This permitted some, like Celsus, to describe the community as acting in a sectarian manner.⁴² This aroused suspicion among the pagan population which had long been accustomed to rituals as a public event. Private meetings gave way to rumors that Christians committed *flagitia*, *scelera*, and *maleficia* ô "outrageous crimes", "wickedness", and "evil deeds" specifically, cannibalism and incest. The charges of cannibalism and incest arose on account of the misinterpretation of Christians "consuming the blood and body of Christ" and the way converts referred to each other as

³⁹ Plautus. *Mercator*. 678; Lucretius. *De rerum natura*. 5. 1227; Livy. 3.5.14; Frend (1965: 105); Liebeschuetz (1979); Wells (2010: 229-43); Moss (2013: 171-2).

⁴⁰ Polybius. *The Histories*. 6. 56.6-12; Astin (1967: 14-20); Walbank (1972: 8-13); Beard et al (2004: 108-9).

⁴¹ Cicero. *De natura deorum*. 2.3.8; Sallust. *Jugurtha*. 14.19; Horace. *Odes*. 3.6.5; Virgil. *Aeneid*. 6. 791-807, at 792-3: "Augustus Caesar, divi genus, aurea condet saecula.." See Jonhston (2012: 98-100). For a brief view into Aeneas' piety see Perkell (1999: 36-7).

⁴² Beard et al. (2004: 275, 309-10). For Celsus' view that the Christian Church had "sectarian tendencies" see Origen. *Contra Celsum*. 8.68.

"brothers" and "sisters."⁴³ The Christian refusal to participate in traditional public *religio* was problematic to both the general populace and the elite because it was believed that failing to properly worship the gods hindered the *pax deorum*.⁴⁴

Jews may not have supported the traditional Roman pantheon, but they were able to congregate in private religious associations since the era of Julius Caesar and perform sacrifices to their god in the hope that the emperor would be protected.⁴⁵ As Christians did not engage in sacrifices to their own god, whom they claimed was the one true deity, this complicated their position within the cosmological order of the Roman Empire. If Christians were incapable of supporting the traditional Roman pantheon, and sacrificing to their god was not allowed, how could they possibly support the emperor? For emperors, governors, and the civic elite, the maintenance of the social, political, and hierarchical order was of paramount importance. Public rituals and sacrifices in honor of the imperial cult defined and established relationships of power within the Empire. For the Christian community to disregard the established order was, in the eyes of most Romans, a deliberate effort by them to stay outside the boundaries of acceptability.⁴⁶

De Vera Doctrina by Celsus, the earliest known comprehensive polemic against Christianity, appeared around 180. Though the work itself has been lost, many passages were preserved in the 240 rebuttal by Origen, *Contra Celsum*. Celsus argued that the rites of the Christians were totally unacceptable within the Roman order and were deviations from Judaism, themselves further deviations from ancient Egyptian cult practices.⁴⁷ The Jews, though a defeated nation which did not recognize the Roman pantheon, were tolerated by the central authority on account of their antiquity and occupied a place within the cosmological order by engaging in rites that allowed for prayers of health for the emperor. Christians did not enjoy such a position. Furthermore, Judaism believed itself to be the only acceptable form of worship and further held out that this worship was exclusively for a "chosen people" and did not possess the

⁴³ For accusations of Christians engaged in magic see Tertullian. *Ad Uxorem*. 2.5.3; Origen. *Contra Celsum*. 1.6, 4.38-40, 8.60; *Passio Sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. 16.10 in Musurillo (1972: 106-31). For accusations of Christians engaged in various crimes, atheism, and the explanation of Christian beliefs see Athenagoras. *A Plea for the Christians*. 3, 4, 31-35; Minucius Felix. *Octavius*. 9.5-6. For modern scholars discussing the claims against the Christians see Benko (1984: 54-78); Edwards (1992: 71-82).

⁴⁴ Latourette (1953: 82).

⁴⁵ Ben Zeev (1998: 471-81); Schwartz (2001: 187); Kahlos (2009: 14-9);

⁴⁶ Price (1984: 220-2)

⁴⁷ Origen. *Contra Celsum*. 1.9, 3.55; Wilken (1984: 118-20); Beard et al. (2004: 277).

proselytizing spirit of Christianity.⁴⁸ Celsus accused the Christians of severing the traditional bond between religion and state in an age where a "nation" or people were ethnically linked to their ancestral cults. For pagans like Celsus, a group of people voluntarily binding themselves together through a religious allegiance with their own traditions, beliefs, and history and divorced from ethnic or national identity was not only an alien concept, but perhaps a revolutionary one as well.⁴⁹

Lastly, Christians claimed that their god was the one true deity and that the Roman pantheon was composed of illegitimate entities. Though Christianity owed a great deal to Jewish monotheism, it differed from Judaism in its proselytizing spirit. Christians believed that theirs was the only proper form of worship and that it was incumbent on mankind to accept the tenets of Christian beliefs; converts were expected to reproach their non-Christian neighbors.⁵⁰ Attitudes like this made Christianity look like an uncivilized religion that acted excessively, thus engaging in *superstitio* and threatening the stable religious order the empire desired. For non-Christians (with the exception of the Jews) the empire comprised a wide assortment of different people with various religious organizations linked to geography, class, and ancestry. Such a wide range of "religions" was not conducive to creating a single-minded population capable of forming itself into a pan-pagan "religion" in the same way Christianity was able to transcend class and ethnicity. For the non-Christian, it was believed that religion was a public matter in which a variety of creeds existed side by side and any type of devotion depended on one's own ancestry or nation. There was not one "true" way to understand the divine. If desired, a non-Christian could be a devotee of the Greco-Roman Olympians while also worshipping the Syrian Magna Mater (Cybele), the Egyptian Isis and Osiris, or local rustic deities from the hinterlands. To the pagan, the assertion that Christians possessed the true word of god was troubling and threatened the social fabric of the empire.⁵¹ As a result the community suffered slander at the hands of intellectuals of the high empire. As Christians thought the gods were illegitimate, Greek writers accused them of being godless, or *atheoi*, while the Roman authorities did not bother

⁴⁸ Philo. *Legatio ad Gaium*. 157, 317. Philo, writing when the Jewish temple in Jerusalem still stood, mentioned that Augustus permitted the Jewish practice of sacrificing to their own god in his honor and even went as far as to pay for the sacrifices. For differences in religious opinion see O'Donnell (1979: 50).

⁴⁹ Origen. *Contra Celsum*. 5.35; Nock (1933: 18); Wilken (1984: 124-25); Kahlos (2009: 26-7).

⁵⁰ Origen. *Contra Celsum*. 8.68.

⁵¹ For pagans receiving many gods, what some might call "spiritual overinsurance" see Kirsch (2004: 61-2). O'Donnell (1979: 48, 51-2).

with the Christian god and simply classified the worship of the deity as a *superstitio* and not a *religio*.⁵² This was a sentiment echoed in the works by Tacitus and Pliny the Younger, though the latter recounted that nothing out of the ordinary could be found concerning the Christians during his investigations as governor of Pontus-Bithynia.⁵³ While Christian beliefs may have been either hard to comprehend or unknown to many Roman elites during the early principate, public ceremonies to the gods were seen as crucial to the social and political wellbeing of both towns, provinces, and empire. Deviation from the established belief system was looked upon as dangerous to the Roman order. Many pagans believed that Christians would bring the wrath of the gods to any community which harbored them. This pagan belief was so strong that many natural disasters like droughts and earthquakes were blamed on Christians.⁵⁴ Perhaps the *Apologeticus* of Tertullian echoes the opinion of pagans during the principate:

If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is famine or pestilence, straightaway the cry is, "away with the Christians to the lion!"⁵⁵

As we reach the last section of the introduction, what are we to make of the term "pagan?" Within this thesis, "pagan" will be used (occasionally interchangeably with "polytheists") to describe any non-Christians or non-Jews during antiquity. The word "pagan," from the Latin *paganus*, is an all-embracing term developed by Christians in an effort to designate their community from polytheists as ignorant country dwellers in the Latin west. In the Greek east the term *Hellene* was used. The word "pagan" could be found in earlier Latin works, like Ovid's *Fasti*, which described rustic villages and farmers, whereas later writers like Tertullian used the term to distinguish civilians from a soldier [of god].⁵⁶ As mentioned

⁵² Beard et al. (2004: 225).

⁵³ Tacitus. *Annales*. 15.44.5; Suetonius. *Nero*. 16.2; Pliny the Younger. *Epistulae*. 10.96.8; Kahlos (2009: 20-1).

⁵⁴ The Mediterranean, particularly the east, bore witness to droughts of varying severity. For the cycles of drought in the Aegean during the Bronze and up until the twentieth century see Bryson et al. (1974: 46-50). The research carried out by Bryson at fifteen weather stations for the period of 1952-1966, concluded that a common pattern recurred which dominated the winter of 1954-55, suggesting that climactic anomalies created drought conditions in the ancient Aegean. Because the Roman near east had large Christian communities and was a place with shifting climate (and prone to earthquakes), the fear of pagans towards their Christian neighbors was a self-fulfilling prophecy. For the nature of provincials see De Ste Croix (2006: 135-36).

⁵⁵ Tertullian. *Apologeticus*. 40.1-2 (Tr. Rev. S. Thelwall)

⁵⁶ Ovid. *Fasti*. 1.669-670. In Tertullian's *De Corona Militis*. 11, the author writes "Apud hunc tam miles est paganus fidelis quam paganus est miles fidelis" (A civilian who believes counts as a soldier, just as a soldier who believes counts as a civilian). According to Cameron (2011: 15) Tertullian portrayed Christians as soldiers of Christ more than most ecclesiastical writers, but only chose to use the word "paganus" both times to denote "civilians." For the

previously, the proselytizing spirit of Christianity put the community in opposition to the wide spectrum of beliefs within in the empire.⁵⁷ They believed that all of mankind must be given their truths. The wide assortment of non-Christians made it easy for ecclesiastical writers to lump together all who they opposed into an artificial category called "pagans." Creating one category was a useful intellectual method by which the Church was able to distinguish itself from being other than a near eastern mystery cult.⁵⁸

Polytheists of the empire possessed no designation for themselves and their various cults. Even the third century tetrarch Diocletian had to contend with using the vague phraseology of *vetus religio* and *veteriores religiones*, best translated as "traditional practices," to refer to paganism. The Christianization of the Roman Empire permitted the growth of a non-Christian identity, which was seen most vividly with Emperor Julian's use of the term "Hellenes" to denote non-Abrahamic religious communities. Furthermore, there also existed a form of "pagan monotheism." Though some have been tempted to see this as the preserve of philosophers and the intellectual elite, the cult of Theos Hypsistos suggests the phenomenon was more widespread than previously believed.⁵⁹

earliest usage of the term "pagan" in Roman law see *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.2.18, 16.10.13. For modern assessments see O'Donnell (1977: 163-9); Lane Fox (2006: 302); Cameron (2011: 14-17).

⁵⁷ For the wide religious beliefs of polytheists see O'Donnell (1979: 50-2); Kirsch (2004: 61-2).

⁵⁸ Cf. O'Donnell (1979: 48-9).

⁵⁹ For Diocletian's designation of Rome's "traditional practices" see *Comparison of the Laws of Moses and the Romans* in Lee (2000: 66-7, 3.2). For an overview of the Julianic term "Hellenes" see North (1992: 188-9). For the philosophical notion of a single god see Frede (1999 a: 56). For the Neoplatonic idea of a single god see Edwards (2000: vii-xxix). For the cult of Theos Hypsistos and the widespread inscriptions related to the cult see Mitchell (1999: 125-6, 128-47). Cf. Lee (2012: 164-5).

Chapter 1

From the First Century to the Antonines

Those who attempt to distort our religion with strange rites you should abhor and punish not merely for the sake of the gods (for if a man despises these he will not pay honor to any other being), but because such men by bringing in new divinities in the place of the old, persuade many to adopt foreign practices from which spring up conspiracies, factions and cabals which are not profitable for a monarchy. Do not therefore permit anyone to be an atheist or a sorcerer.⁶⁰

The words of Dio Cassius, put into the mouth of Maecenas during the reign of emperor Alexander Severus (222-235), reflects attitudes towards cults whose rites were seen as offensive by the Roman elite.⁶¹ By the time Dio Cassius wrote his *Historia Romana*, the empire had already existed for the better part of two centuries and the imperial cult was well entrenched. When Augustus assumed the reins of power after defeating Marc Antony, he renewed the archaic cultic practices of Rome, restoring, in the words of John Scheid, "the ancestral form of the *res publica*, and in this political construction, *pietas* towards the gods was restored along with *pietas* among citizens."⁶² By the time Dio wrote, the educated class of the empire had a passive knowledge of who the Christians were, even if their opinions were possibly colored by slanderous rumors about the community ranging from magic to cannibalism. Since this thesis will explore the attitudes of the non-elite pagans of the empire during the Great Persecution (303-313, 316-324) the opinions of the elite will not detain us here. However, in order to trace the evolution of the tetrarchy policy towards the Christians, we must first explore the preceding centuries and observe the policy towards the community during the High Empire.

⁶⁰ Dio Cassius. *Historia Romana*. 52.36.2-3 (Tr. E. Cary).

⁶¹ Frend (1965: 117) quotes the above passage from the history of Dio Cassius, translated by E. Cary and I have chosen to include in the introduction to this chapter. According to Sage (1975: 171-2) Dio advanced his own religious ideas through a conservative understanding of tradition. He believed that it was imperative for the emperor to foster traditional worship and arrest all efforts at distortion or the introduction of strange rites.

⁶² Scheid (2005:175-196) has composed a short, but well-written chapter in which he argues that Augustus (called Octavian during his initial religious reforms of 33 and 28 B.C.) sought to legitimize his own power during and after the civil war which followed the assassination of Julius Caesar, by restoring what his enemies had neglected, the correct rituals to the gods. *Pietas* was of upmost importance, regardless of the ritualistic nature of Roman religion which saw *pietas* as having nothing to do with salvation or truth (as in the Abrahamic religions) but with the proper cultic obligations to the gods. Augustus ordered the construction of a temple to Apollo after the battle of Naulochus (36 BC) on the Palatine hill. He also restored a long-forgotten priesthood, the *fetiales*, when he declared war on Cleopatra (32 BC). Augustus further awarded the *fratres arvales* a public grant and elevated them to senatorial level (29 BC). According to Tacitus. *Historiae*. 2.95, Augustus held the legendary King Romulus as a model. Just as the priests, the *sodales Titii*, had been dedicated to the cult of Titus Tatius by Romulus, Augustus created another priesthood, the *sodales Augustales* to care for the Julian family (27 BC).

In this chapter, we will see that between 64 to 192, the policy of the Roman state towards the Christian Church was "accusatory" and not "inquisitorial."⁶³ Popular reactions to Christians occurred in the provinces, and emperors of the Principate were content to have governors deal with anti-Christian petitions and not seek out Christians on their own accord. The Roman Empire of the Principate was consistent in its policy and there was no centrally-directed effort to arrest the growth of the Christian community. Accusations, trials, and executions were regional, and sporadic.

Attention will first be drawn to historical precedents during the Roman Republic. The suppression of cult of Cybele and the succeeding Bacchanalian conspiracy from the latter half of the Republican era will be discussed along with the eradication of the Druids during the Roman military conquest of Britannia. It can be argued that the Roman state had already dealt with religious groups deemed a threat to public piety with actions undertaken by the Republican and early Imperial state.

The persecution of the Christians following the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64 during the reign of emperor Nero will also be explored. If the work by Tacitus is to be believed, this was the first time in which the Roman government directly targeted Christians. It will be suggested that the inclusion of the term "Christians," within the Tacitean history may be a corruption of the word "Chrestians" meant to denote a violent Jewish sect from the reign of Claudius, or be indeed an anachronism.

The correspondence between Emperor Trajan and Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia-Pontus, will be an important part of the chapter. The letters between the emperor and governor will present the reader with the policy followed by the Roman state of the High Empire that would continued into the third century. As mentioned, the popular reactions to Christians was not an area to which the central authority thought to get involved. Following the actions of Pliny in the face of provincial petitions, the reign of Hadrian will be discussed as following the same polices as his predecessors. The regime of Emperor Antoninus Pius continued the approach favored by Trajan. As will be discussed, Antoninus Pius attempted to placate angry mobs in the east and sent rescripts to the cities of Greece, particularly Athens, Larissa, and Thessalonica; the eastern cities affected by earthquakes that the superstitious populace had blamed on the Christians. Furthermore, we will observe that some governors ignored imperial rescripts, as was

⁶³ De Ste. Croix (2006: 120).

the case in Smyrna. During the rule of Emperor Marcus Aurelius and that of his son Commodus, the ban on condemning zealous *delatores* (denouncers) was lifted but it is difficult to claim that either emperor directly issued any severe edicts against Christians. The atrocities that occurred during the reign of these two emperors were, most famously, the deaths of Justin Martyr, the Christians of Lyons, Vienne, and Scillium.

Precedents to the Actions Against Christianity

When Rome came into contact with a sect of Jews that followed the teachings of an executed holy man from Judea, in which the Roman state saw as threatening to public piety and order, Roman lawmakers already had historical precedents upon which to draw as a result of previously persecuting minority cults. From the Republic until the High Empire, Rome had incorporated foreign deities within its own pantheon. In the Celtic provinces, with the exception of the Druidic rites, Rome accepted both Teutates and Tanaris into the Roman pantheon, while in Africa, the Carthaginian Baal-Hammon assumed the name Saturn, to name a few.⁶⁴ With the expansion of territory and the increased wealth following the defeat of Carthage and the subjugation of Greece, Rome was flooded with immigrants. These migrants were mostly Asians, Jews, and Phrygians and they settled in blocks around the Tiber, Aventine, and the Caelian hills and organized *collegia* attached to their cults and the practice of their *religiones*, drawing the condemnation of some.⁶⁵ The senate always feared that religious disorder would lead to social revolution as had previously occurred in Sicily when peasants revolted in 134 BC under the leadership of a devotee to a Syrian goddess.⁶⁶ Romans had their limits and the elites of the late Republic and early Empire perceived alien cults and their followers as possible wellsprings of political subversion because they operated outside their control.⁶⁷

When Rome dealt with Christians during the first to second centuries, the state, according to H. Wendt, inflicted punishments directed at the community within a larger program of legal

⁶⁴ Suetonius. *Divus Claudius*. 25.5 mentioned that the cults of the Druids in Gaul were restricted to non-Romans by Augustus, while Emperor Claudius banned them entirely. Frensd (1965: 107); Levick (1990: 170-2); Russell (2016: 272-3).

⁶⁵ Within *Satires*. 15.1-13, Juvenal, writing during the imperial period, stated that foreign cults, especially those from Egypt, were still looked down upon during the high empire. Juvenal also sneers at Jews (*Satires*. 6.543-547, 8.159. 14.96-106). Furthermore, Juvenal draws attention to the Phrygian priesthood (*Satires*. 2.110-116) and Phrygian seers (*Satires*. 6.585-587). Beard et al. (2004: 230, 271-2).

⁶⁶ Florus. *Epitome*. 2. 17.4.

⁶⁷ Gruen (1996: 41); Kahlos (2009: 11).

measures directed at religious "freelance" experts.⁶⁸ Though the work by Wendt is too broad and detailed to be properly explained here, parts of her argument must be used in order to frame the repression of Christianity within Roman history. Wendt's definition of a "freelance" expert is someone who, unlike a traditional Roman priest who is granted a title on account of his social standing and institutional affiliation, operated outside the established boundaries of traditional religion and earned recognition through a demonstration of skill. Therefore one can describe the early followers of Christ (or according to Wendt, the apostle Paul) and early Christian leaders as having been freelance religious experts.⁶⁹ Before continuing, though Wendt focuses her analysis on the first two centuries of imperial rule before exploring Paul's missionary work, one must first draw attention to previous historical precedents during Rome's republican past in which freelance specialists were targeted. Two instances of the Roman Republic curtailing the growth of a foreign form of *religio* can be seen in the suppression of the cult of the Phrygian Great Mother (Magna Mater) Cybele and the Bacchanalian conspiracy of 186 B.C.

During the Second Punic War, with the arrival of Carthaginian Hasdrubal in Italy in 205-204, the Senate permitted the introduction of the black stone of the Phrygian Magna Mater (Cybele) from Pergamum to Rome following a suggestion from the Sibylline Books, the first time a cult from outside Greece was allowed to enter the city.⁷⁰ To the relief of many, the battle of Metaurus was won and both Hasdrubal and Hannibal were defeated, and a permanent temple to the cult was constructed on the Palatine hill, inside the *pomerium*.⁷¹ But once the rites of the Phrygian priests, the *galli*, became known, such as flogging and self-castration, the senate ordered their practices and priesthood to be segregated from the Roman citizenry.⁷² For the Roman state, Cybele was already regarded as a Roman goddess with many believing that she was one deity that had aided the founder of the Roman people, Aeneas, in reaching the shores of Italy. For the Roman elite, acceptable aspects of the cult were deemed to be "Roman," whereas

⁶⁸ Wendt (2015: 183-202) argues that within the first two centuries of imperial Roman rule, the punishment of Christians is best understood within a wider phenomenon of state-sanctioned actions against freelance religious experts who fell outside the range of what was deemed religiously acceptable.

⁶⁹ Wendt (2015: 185).

⁷⁰ Beard et al. (2004: 96).

⁷¹ Frend (1965: 107); Gruen (1996: 5-33); Rauhala (2011: 52-5).

⁷² Beard et al. (2004: 97-8, 261) discuss the segregation of "native-born Romans" from the priesthood of the cult, and draws attention to Dionysius of Halicarnassus. *Antiquitates Romanae*. 2.19.

any undesirable practices, such as the self-castration of the *galli*, were referred to as "Phrygian," or effeminate.⁷³

The historian Livy recounted the persecution of the Bacchanals of 186 BC, reflecting the fears of the Late Republican senatorial aristocracy towards foreign cults.⁷⁴ The response of the Roman state towards the cult was harsher than its previous legislation directed at the worshipers of the Magna Mater. According to Livy, the Bacchic cult was first brought over to Italy by a Greek sacrificer and seer (*sacrificulus et vates*), that magistrates had the responsibility to stop the introduction of foreign *sacra* into the city, and that the only form of sacrifices acceptable were ones according to Roman custom.⁷⁵ It was claimed that conspiracies, poisonings and sexual promiscuity occurred on account of the cult and even those belonging to the upper classes were not immune to the allure of impious acts disguised under the cover of religion.⁷⁶ The senate, acting on the testimonies of informants within the cult who confessed to Consul Spurius Postumius Albinus, ordered an investigation into the affair *extra ordinem*. Once Albinus had completed his investigations, the senate protected the lapsed members of the cult and suppressed the Bacchanals throughout Italy. The priesthood was persecuted and many elites accused of being members of the cult were arrested and executed.⁷⁷

If Cicero, writing about the laws of Rome, is to be believed, the Roman fear of nocturnal rites and orgies of men and women were the reasons for the suppression of the Bacchic cult at Rome in 186 BC.⁷⁸ Though much has been written about the account given by Livy of the

⁷³ Beard et al. (2004: 197-8). Rauhala (2011: 55-59) cites both Vergil and Ovid when arguing for the acceptance of the Cult of Cybele within the *pomerium* at Rome. Vergil. *Aeneid*. 2.693-7, 6.784-7, 7.139, 9.77-122, 10.157-8, 10.252-5. According to Ovid, the ships that delivered the cult of the Magna Mater to Rome were made from the same trees as those under the command of Aeneas, and both armadas followed the similar course, Ovid. *Fasti*. 4.249-59, 4.273-90. When discussing the "otherness" or the "effeminate" nature of the *galli*, Rauhala asserts that since the priests of the cult were castrated, they were not considered to be men in legal terms and points to the work by Valerius Maximus and Vergil, the former discussing their loss of inheritance, while the latter claiming that the Goddess Juno wanted Italians to retain their manly speech and dress. Valerius Maximus. *Facta et dicta memorabilia*. 7.7.6. Vergil. *Aeneid*. 4.215-16, 9.614-20, 12.97-100, 13.825.

⁷⁴ Livy. 39.8-19; Frend (1965: 109).

⁷⁵ Cf. Wendt (2015: 287) who cites Livy. 39.16.8-9.

⁷⁶ Takács (2000: 305). The Bacchanalia was a Greek import and was led by the Campanian priestess Paculla Annia and was initially open only to women. The rites of the cult were held on three days of the year in daylight. In the northern region of Etruria, a nocturnal variant was established by a Greek priest of Dionysius in which wine, dancing, and feasting were preceded by the mingling of men and women. Livy goes on to state that Paculla Annia corrupted the morally acceptable Bacchic cult at Rome by including the rites from the Etruscan variant and performing nocturnal meetings five times a month, which were open to all sexes and social classes.

⁷⁷ The events described by Livy, while crucial, have had a problematic relationship with the events of the second century B.C. See North (1979: 85-103); Gruen (1996: 34-78); Beard et al. (2004: 92).

⁷⁸ Cicero. *De Legibus*. 2. 36-37.

suppression of the Bacchanals, the social conservatism of the author may have colored this account.⁷⁹ Much has been written concerning the ancient descriptions of the Bacchanalian persecution, so further exploration into this topic will not detain us here.⁸⁰ Despite the conservatism of Livy's work, the persecution of the cult illustrates the fear that many within the Roman elite of the late Republic had towards religions that deviated from what was acceptable. The Bacchic cult had all the trappings of a *prava religio* and the presence of such a cult endangered the city of Rome, while the black magic believed to accompany such rites risked polluting the Roman gods themselves. A similar image of a hostile cult would be painted in the minds of the authorities during the succeeding centuries after Rome encountered the Christian Church. Once the Roman government of the third and fourth centuries decide to target the early Church directly, the state was engaging in actions for which there had been precedents which would not be matched in ferocity until the reign of the Tetrarchs of the fourth century against the Christians.⁸¹

According to Wendt, the emperors of the early Principate directed legislative actions against freelance religious experts before the rise of Christianity. Augustus prohibited private forms of Egyptian cult from the *pomerium*, regulated the prophecies of the *manteis*, and confiscated the writings of the Sibyl.⁸² Emperor Tiberius, upon learning that the priests of Isis had been accused of seducing an aristocratic woman, along with a group of Judaeans posing as experts on Mosaic wisdom, acted against freelance religious experts. He enacted legislation against *magi*, *goētes*, *venenarii*, *malefici*, *haruspices*, *mathematici*, *Chaldaei*, *harioli*, while curtailing the circulation of books such as the *Oracula Sibyllina* and the *fatidici libri* along with expelling four thousand practitioners of *ea superstitio*, Egyptian and Judean cults, from Rome.⁸³

⁷⁹ Beard et al. (2004: 93). The history recounted by Livy owes much to the plots of Roman Satyr plays than the rites of the Bacchic cult.

⁸⁰ The speeches given by the people recounted in the history of Livy can be suggested as being heavily fabricated and Paculla Annia may not have introduced all of the Etruscan rituals into the Roman Bacchic cult as previously believed. For more on the research concerning the artistic tropes employed by Livy see Rousselle (1987: 193-8); Walsh (1996: 190); Orlin (2002: 2); Pagán (2004: 61665).

⁸¹ Cf. Frend (1965: 113-4). For the ferocity of the tetrarchy see Burkert (1987: 52).

⁸² Wendt (2015: 187-8) utilizes the works of Dio Cassius, Suetonius, and Tacitus when discussing the legislation of Augustus against freelance religious experts. Augustus prohibiting Egyptian cult from the *pomerium*: Dio Cassius. *Historia Romana*. 40.47.3-4, 53.2.4, 54.6.6. The regulation of the prophecies of the *manteis*: Dio Cassius. *Historia Romana*. 56.25.2; Suetonius. *Tiberius*. 63. The confiscation of the Sibylline books: Suetonius. *Divus Augustus*. 31.1; Tacitus. *Annales*. 2.32.

⁸³ Wendt (2015: 188) cites the works of Tacitus, Suetonius, Josephus, and Dio Cassius. Tiberius discovering that priests of Isis had seduced an aristocratic woman and that Judaeans were posing as Mosaic freelance experts: Josephus. *Antiquitates Judaicae*. 18.65-84. Tiberian legislation against *magi*, *goētes*, *venenarii*, *malefici*, *haruspices*,

Furthermore, Emperor Claudius, following the conquest of Britain, forbade Druidic practices in 54. Not only was it believed that the Druids practiced human sacrifice, but the rites of the Celtic priests were seen as a *superstitio*, along with the fear that native populations in Gaul and Britannia might rebel under the leadership of their priesthods.⁸⁴

Nero

During the early first century, the Imperial Roman government did not identify the new religious community as "Christians," nor were the elites of the empire (for the most part) aware of their existence.⁸⁵ Any actions undertaken against Christians are recounted by Tacitus. Tacitus recounted that the Great Fire of 64, which ravaged all but four of the fourteen districts of the city, was blamed upon the Christians; the marginalized community bearing the brunt of the punishment, though some ancient historians believed Nero (54-68) had been the perpetrator.⁸⁶

According to Tacitus:

Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.⁸⁷

According to the historian, Nero had some victims wrapped in animal skins and thrown to beasts, while others were drenched in tar and set alight as human torches. Though the emperor, famous for his irrationality, *may* have inflicted such horrors upon a helpless community, we must treat the account by Tacitus with some caution. Though one cannot deny

mathematici, Chaldaei, harioli and books such as the *oracula sibyllina* and the *fatidici libri*: Tacitus. *Annales*. 2.85, 6.12; Suetonius. *Tiberius*. 36.1.63; Dio Cassius. *Historia Romana*. 56.25.5, 57.15.8, 57.18.3-5, 57.18.5a. Tiberius expelling practitioners of *ea superstitio* (Egyptian and Judean cults) from Rome: Tacitus. *Annales*. 2.85.11-17.

⁸⁴ For the Roman belief that the Druids conducted human sacrifice see Pliny the Elder. *Naturalis Historia*. 30.13. Kahlos (2009: 14) draws attention to the Roman attitude towards any revolt of the Gauls and British under their Druidic priests. She points to Tacitus. *Historiae*. 4.54, which told of a Druidic prophecy claiming the fire that destroyed a portion of the Capitoline hill was a divine warning to Rome and that the Empire would be unseated by an Alpine nation (the Gauls). In 69, Germanic tribes revolted against Rome. For a modern assessment see Beard et al. (2004: 233-4, 341).

⁸⁵ Tacitus. *Annales*. 15.44 does not make a distinction between Jews and Christians. Josephus. *Antiquitates Judaicae*. 20.201 does not refer to James as Christian when recounting his martyrdom under the High Priest Ananus. See L. ssl (2010: 63-4).

⁸⁶ For ancient historians who blame Nero for the Great Fire of 64 see Suetonius. *Nero*. 38.1; Pliny the Elder. *Naturalis Historia*. 27.5; Dio Cassius. *Historia Romana*. 62.16.2.

⁸⁷ Tacitus. *Annales*. 15.44 (Tr. J. Jackson).

that there may have been people who were punished by the imperial authorities for the fire, and Christians *may* have been amongst the ranks of those who were apprehended, one must realize that Tacitus was writing his account of the fire around 115-20, decades after the event. There is nothing to suggest that by the time the Great Fire of Rome had occurred, members of the Christian community would have referred to themselves as "Christians." A community identifying itself by this name would emerge about until the end of the century.⁸⁸ Therefore it is hard to believe that Nero would have even known of the community at all. Tacitus may have chosen to use the term "Christians" anachronistically in an attempt to reflect his own time when members of the Church were identifiable and drew the suspicion of many. It is with this in mind that it can be suggested that the Roman state of the first century was not interested in rooting out Christians or making them scapegoats for the calamities that may have befallen Rome.⁸⁹

Some modern scholars have chosen to dissent from the prevailing view that members of a small, yet growing community of Christians were targeted directly following the fire. Both R. Carrier and B.D. Shaw have drawn somewhat similar conclusions to this episode of Christian persecution. Carrier asserts that although the passages in *Annales* are authentically Tacitean, the inclusion of the word "Christians" may have been "Chrestians," a violent sect of Jews expelled from the city during the reign of Claudius, and that the latter word denoting the followers of Christ was inserted into its present position during the fourth century.⁹⁰ As for Shaw, he argues that although the work by Tacitus is genuine and believes that the ancient author was reflecting

⁸⁸ Horrell (2007: 361-81).

⁸⁹ Cf. Moss (2013: 138-39).

⁹⁰ Alongside the passages by Tacitus, Carrier (2014: 264-83) evaluates the works by Pliny the Younger, Pliny the Elder, and Suetonius. Pliny the Younger, in his correspondence with Emperor Trajan (AD 110-120) appears to be ignorant of a group of people called "Christians" (Pliny the Younger. *Epistulae*. 10.96). He was a contemporary and friend of Tacitus and being that he never attended a trial of any accused Christians is quite telling of the man's overall ignorance of the group. The younger Pliny was an admirer and reader of his uncle's work, the Elder Pliny. Though the latter lamented the fire of Rome and placed the blame on Nero (Pliny the Elder. *Naturalis Historia*. 17.1.5) he did not mention Christians as the culprits. Therefore, his nephew never knew of the cult. Suetonius, on the other hand, does mention a persecution of Christians under Nero, but does not connect this initiative occurring on account of the Great Fire of 64 (Suetonius. *Nero*. 16.2). Suetonius does draw attention to the expulsion of (some) Jews from the city by Emperor Claudius following riots caused by a certain Jewish demagogue "Chrestus" who was probably well known to the historian. Carrier further suggests that the book by Tacitus recounting the reign of Claudius, now lost, may have detailed the riots by Chrestus and that any mention of Pontius Pilate may be a later interpolation attempting to alter the passage from "Chrestians" to "Christians." According to Carrier, Tacitus' usage of the past tense *appellabat* ("called") when describing that the scapegoats were "called Chrestians" by the people may point to the suggestion that the group, once extant, no longer existed during his day. Therefore, Tacitus may have been describing the Chrestians mentioned in Suetonius.

ideas and prejudices of his own time as opposed to the reality of the first century. The notion of Nero as the "first persecutor" should be removed from the histories of the early Church.⁹¹

Within his work, Tacitus is rather ambiguous as to the true attitude of the general populace towards the Christians. He stated that the horrific punishments meted out to the scapegoats in Nero's private gardens and in the amphitheatre made many express pity for the culprits who were not executed in defense of the state but on account of the emperor's ferocity.⁹² If Tacitus was writing anachronistically, then perhaps the attitudes of the Roman populace towards those executed should be placed within the context of the succeeding century.

The Correspondence Between Pliny and Trajan

Following the claims of Tacitus, one can identify the early second century as the beginning of the Roman legislative activity towards the Christians.⁹³ Actions against the

⁹¹ Shaw (2015: 73-100) appears to draw upon the same primary sources as Carrier (2014). Shaw argues that there is no contemporary evidence that definitely indicates punishments meted out to Christians following the fire at Rome. Prominent sources, such as those by Suetonius (*Nero*. 38.1-3) and Dio Cassius (*Historia Romana*. 62.16-18) do not connect Christians with the Great Fire, while the ignorance of Pliny the Younger is also drawn upon (*Epistulae*. 10.96). The blame placed on the shoulders of the Christians may have developed later and reflected the realities of the second century. Followers of Christ in the early first century would have still considered themselves to be Jewish and the term "Christian" only became widespread following its repeated usage by Ignatius of Antioch, Boin (2015: 23-5).

⁹² Tacitus. *Annales*. 15.44.

⁹³ It is debated whether Emperor Domitian (81-96), who ruled following the death of his brother Titus, was a persecutor of Christians towards the end of his reign on account of the executions of Domitilla, Clemens, and Acilius Glabrio who were, according to Eusebius, Christians. Despite what is said by Eusebius in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the "persecution" of Christians during the reign of Domitian did not amount to very much. For more on this topic see Brown (1997: 805-809) who asserts that The Book of Revelation stated a Christian martyrdom occurring, though many modern historians have debated such claims, as can be seen in Thompson (2003: 296-30). Furthermore, some modern scholars have written that there was a lack of anti-Christian activity during the reign of Domitian and any sort of sources accounting for persecution may be unreliable. For more on the lack of reliable source during the reign of Domitian see Barnes (1968 b: 35). Frend (1965: 216-7) has written about the evidence suggesting the possibility that Domitian was not a persecutor. Excavations undertaken by de Rossi of the *Coemeterium Domitillae* on the Ardeatine Way in the 1860s and 1870s sought to validate the claims of Eusebius in that the human remains uncovered in the Christian tomb were that of Domitilla. The *Coemeterium Domitillae*, a deep catacomb, was found on land once owned by Domitilla for her freedmen. An inscription was also discovered bearing the words "neptis Vespasiani." Though the human remains had been identified as Domitilla herself, Styger proved de Rossi wrong as the depth of the catacombs was not in line with the archaeological record. Styger employed an accurate measure and suggested that in an effort to not cross over land barriers, ancient diggers dug chambers six feet, six inches in height before once again descending downwards to construct another chamber when the Christian community needed more burial space. It was suggested that the ancient catacombs were not hidden sanctuaries for Christians and that the deeper tombs were later than the first century. On account of the work by Styger, it is now believed that the earliest recorded catacombs in the *Coemeterium Domitilla* are from the mid-second century, well after the events described by the ancient historians. Furthermore, being that Domitilla was a member of the wealthy and politically-connected upper class of the empire, it would of been out of the question for her to have shared a burial space alongside freedmen and slaves. Therefore, the *Coemeterium Domitilla* would not have contained her body regardless of the date. For more information regarding the archaeology surround the

community occurred provincially and were not centrally directed. By far the best evidence available to modern historians is the correspondence between Emperor Trajan (98-117) and Pliny the Younger, governor of Pontus-Bithynia. Trajan had sent Pliny to administer the province in the summer of 111 as *legatus pro praetore*.⁹⁴ The governor engaged in a lengthy correspondence with the emperor and asked the sovereign for advice in dealing with the petitions against the Christians in his province when he reached Amastris in 112.

The correspondence between the emperor and the governor concerning the anti-Christian petitions occurred in two phases. First, Pliny was confronted with petitions by pagans and was unsure whether the act of being a Christian was a punishable offence or whether acts associated with the cult were punishable. Upon investigation, the defendants who pleaded guilty to being Christians, after they had been questioned three times, were led off to execution if they were not citizens, while those who possessed the Roman franchise were sent to Rome to face trial.⁹⁵ After the first trial had been settled, complications arose with the appearance of an anonymous petition with the names of various persons accused of being Christians. When questioned by the governor, those on the list either confessed to being Christian or claimed to have once counted themselves as members of the community. For the second phase of the Christian affair, Pliny employed a test of sacrifice. The accused were to perform a *supplicatio* - an offering of incense and wine to the imperial statue of Trajan and the gods, after which the accused were ordered to denounce Christ. It was believed that a *real* Christian would recoil from such a demand. If any of the accused did what was demanded, they were released.⁹⁶ Pliny investigated further and mentioned in his letter to the emperor that he believed that regardless of his efforts to forbid the existence of Christian clubs, the "superstition" had penetrated not only the cities, but was present

(supposed) tomb of Domitilla see de Rossi (1865: 34-40); Marucchi (1914: 80); Styger (1933: 64); Hertling et al. (1960: 22-9). For more other modern assessments of Domitian lack of interest towards Christians see Jones (1992:114-7); Welborn (2004: 210).

⁹⁴ Frend (1965: 217-8).

⁹⁵ Pliny the Younger. *Epistulae*. 10.96.1-4. Sherwin-White (1966: 694-700); Sherwin-White (1967: 174-6); Winsbury (2014: 206-7). Pliny hesitated to order the execution of Christians who possessed the Roman franchise, much like the legate of Gallia Lugdunensis who asked Marcus Aurelius on how to proceed before being instructed to have Roman Christians executed by the sword.

⁹⁶ Pliny the Younger. *Epistulae*. 10.96. 5-6; Sherwin-White (1966: 700-2); Sherwin-White (1967: 176); Bennett (2001: 123-4). Winsbury (2014: 213-4) draws observations to Pliny's test, and notes that although emperor-worship began to manifest more widely over 150 years later, during the reign of Trajan, disrespect towards the emperor, even his image, was a legal offense.

amongst the villagers in the countryside and further action could arrest its growth.⁹⁷ The response by Trajan was frank. Though the emperor was pleased with Pliny's judgment, resources of the Roman state were not to be used to seek out Christians. Any sort of interference on the part of the provincial authorities should only come about if a denunciation, a *delatio nominis*, was brought forward; the standard procedure in the prosecution of Christianity was "accusatory" and not "inquisitorial."⁹⁸ Furthermore, Christianity was a crime in the present. This meant that if someone was accused of practicing Christianity, and if the accused confessed to the charge and sacrificed, then the Christian was to be released. This procedure was the opposite to the standard practice of dealing with criminals. Other criminals (thieves, counterfeiters, witches, etc.) were guilty regardless of confession and liable to prosecution.⁹⁹ Though Christians were not to be treated like common criminals, Christianity was not a *religio licita* and therefore the members of the community were liable to be punished if they drew too much attention to themselves.¹⁰⁰

The emperors of the pre-Decian era were content to allow provincial governors to placate angry provincials by arresting and (possibly) executing Christians who refused to sacrifice to the traditional gods. Provincials, superstitious in their daily lives, looked upon the small Christian groups with a mixture of suspicion and fear. Their refusal to sacrifice to the traditional gods, participate in the imperial cult, and the confusion surrounding their habits (the "eating" of the flesh of Christ for example) made many non-Christians anxious.¹⁰¹ Once distinguished from Judaism, Christianity was no longer seen as simply a bizarre cult from Judaea but was looked upon as a *superstitio*.¹⁰² As discussed in the introduction, Romans considered *superstitio* dangerous to society.¹⁰³

The private rites of the Christians may have driven people to believe that the community was involved in nefarious acts. The private sphere was created through acts of exclusion whereas the public domain was seen as historically and ontologically primary. Public religious life in a

⁹⁷ Pliny the Younger. *Epistulae*. 10.96.7-10; Sherwin-White (1966: 709-10); Sherwin-White (1967: 176-8); Sordi (1986: 59).

⁹⁸ Pliny the Younger. *Epistulae*. 10.96-97. For a brief discussion on the "accusatory" versus "inquisitorial" procedure against Christians see De Ste. Croix (2006: 120).

⁹⁹ Barnes (1968 b: 48); Canfield (1968: 86699); Benko (1986: 5613); Sordi (1986: 63); Goodman (2012: 351); Winsbury (2014: 208-9).

¹⁰⁰ Frend (1965: 220).

¹⁰¹ De Ste. Croix (2006: 134).

¹⁰² De Ste. Croix (2006: 135).

¹⁰³ Janssen (1979: 138).

Roman city was looked upon as a powerful communal and normative component.¹⁰⁴ For governors who administered Roman provinces with small, but growing, Christian communities, the level of persecution experienced by the Church depended upon how threatening the local authorities deemed this new *superstitio* to be. Government officials would not have been enthusiastic to allow Christians beliefs the same amount of respect and toleration allowed to other groups. As we have already explored in the introduction, Christian practices deviated from what the populace expected from a religious community. If a group decided not to engage in the traditional material sacrificed and uphold the *pax deorum*, then how could such an organization be trusted to be loyal to the state as they put their whole town in danger of divine wrath? Therefore, provincial administrators were eager to calm the hysterical masses in order to complete their tenure in a peace.

When a governor was sent to administer a province he was charged with clearing the province of *mali homines*, and making sure the area was "settled and orderly."¹⁰⁵ An angry mass of provincials would not have been in the best interests of local authorities. Therefore, one primary interest of any governor would be to keep provincials content. When any jurisdiction was rocked by outcries against Christians, a governor who desired peace would appease the mob, provided that Roman and provincial jurisprudence was adhered to.¹⁰⁶ The policy of Trajan appears to have become the standard by which governors felt they had to treat Christians following the publication of the letters and their circulation amongst educated Romans.¹⁰⁷ As we will see below, this procedure was occasionally ignored during the Antonine era.

Hadrian

The reign of Emperor Hadrian (117-138) witnessed what would be the nearest to an edict of toleration for the Christians until the end of the Valerianic persecution in 260.¹⁰⁸ Hadrian, who succeeded Trajan, was confronted with a situation similar to his predecessor when dealing with Christians. In 123/4 the Proconsul of Asia, Licinius Granianus, dispatched a letter to the emperor asking for advice concerning accusations brought against the Christians. Asia Minor, along with Cyprus, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Mesopotamia had been scarred by a bloody Jewish

¹⁰⁴ Ando (2012: 124).

¹⁰⁵ *Digesta*. 1.18.13; De Ste. Croix (2006: 121).

¹⁰⁶ *Digesta*. 47.11.9; Saturninus, in *Digesta*. 48.19.16.9; De Ste. Croix (2006: 122).

¹⁰⁷ De Ste. Croix (2006: 118).

¹⁰⁸ Frend (1965: 225).

insurrection that raged from 115 to 117 under the leadership of a rebel named Andrew (Lukuas), who was hailed as the King of the Jews and sought to wage war against Rome.¹⁰⁹ Trajan suppressed the revolt with much bloodshed.¹¹⁰ Since Hadrian made no real distinction between Jews and Christians, the end of the war may have encouraged provincials to bring accusations against the community.¹¹¹

Once Hadrian had received the letter from Granianus, his successor, Caius Minucius Fundanus received a reply. Granianus had believed it was unjust to kill Christians without a trial. The rescript of Hadrian sought to prevent the harassment of people by informers while restoring public order. Petitions and denouncements by *delatores* were not to be recognized. Furthermore, if any one accused Christians of criminal deeds, a proper investigation of the accusation was to take place, whereas if accusations were brought forth in order to slander an innocent Christian, then the accuser was to be prosecuted with a heavy penalty.¹¹² This was not a departure from the policy of Trajan.¹¹³ Though not belonging to a *religio licita*, they were protected (to a degree) from slander.¹¹⁴ Attacks on Christians by informers were made more difficult by the *calumnia* procedure, by which the accused, if acquitted, could see his accuser subjected to the same penalty that he would have been made to endure.¹¹⁵ For someone to be accused of a capital charge, the accuser would have to travel to the provincial capital or wait until the governor visited the city. Planning to wait until the governor and his retinue arrived or traveling to the provincial capital would have been costly, time-consuming, and hardly a viable option for most as only governors were permitted to pass a death sentence.¹¹⁶

Judaea became a battleground during the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135). The Jews, this time under the leadership of Simon Bar Kokhba (132-135), sought to cast off the yoke of Roman rule and prevent the rebuilding of the Jewish temple as a pagan variant in honor of Jupiter Capitolinus and the transformation of Jerusalem into the Roman colony Aelia Capitolina. The

¹⁰⁹ Dio Cassius. *Historia Romana*. 68.32.1-3; Orosius. *Historiae Adversus Paganos*. 7.12.6-7; Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 4.2.4. Schäfer (2003: 141-2)

¹¹⁰ Bennett (2001: 201); Goodman (2007: 477-80); Goodman (2012: 75).

¹¹¹ Frend (1965: 223).

¹¹² Eusebius covered the correspondence between Granianus and the imperial authority in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Granianus feeling it was unjust to kill Christians without a trial (4.8.6). The disregarding of denouncements from *delatores* (4.9). The proper investigation of Christians (4.9.3). For modern assessments see Frend (1965: 224); Keresztes (1967: 120-29); Millar (1977: 558-9); Everitt (2009: 135-7, 217-9).

¹¹³ Sordi (1986: 66-7); De Ste. Croix (2006: 118-9).

¹¹⁴ Frend (1965: 225).

¹¹⁵ *Digesta*. 50.16.2.33.

¹¹⁶ Sherwin-White (1952: 212-3).

Jewish insurgents targeted the followers of Jesus because the community had not risen up in rebellion and many were perceived as possibly hostile to the cause of Jewish liberation. Once the revolt had been crushed, the Roman victor wasted no time in persecuting the vanquished Jews, while also re-naming the Jewish homeland *Palestina*.¹¹⁷ It is with the policies towards the defeated Jews that one can further frame the situation of the Christian community. As in the case during the Great Jewish Revolt (66-73) and the bloody revolt under Trajan, the revolt of Bar Kokhba once again cast the Jews as the enemies of the Roman Empire. Justin Martyr recounts that the Christians risked being treated cruelly at the hands of the Jewish rebels:

In the recent Jewish war, Bar Kocheba, the leader of the Jewish uprising, ordered that only the Christians should be subjected to dreadful torments, unless they renounced and blasphemed Jesus Christ.¹¹⁸

The claims of Justin Martyr are given more credence when observed along with a letter from Bar Kokhba. This letter was found in a cave at Marabba' at, 16 km south-east from Jerusalem, and regarded the Christians (called "Galileans") as hostile.¹¹⁹ Perhaps the attitude of the insurgents towards the Christian community is not surprising because the earliest followers of Jesus had been targeted by angry mobs in Judea during the early first century.¹²⁰ A passage

¹¹⁷ Goodman (2007: 481-2, 484-91); Everitt (2009: 279-80, 296-305); Bazzana (2010: 85-109); Goodman (2012: 281-2).

¹¹⁸ Justin Martyr. *First Apology*. 1.31 (Tr. T.B. Falls).

¹¹⁹ Milik (1953: 276-94); Rabinowitz (1954: 191-92); Cross (1956: 45-9); Capponi (2010: 123). L. ssl (2010: 73-4). Birley (1997: 271-2) briefly discusses the claims made by Justin before drawing attention to the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius a century later, in which Bar Kokhba (called Cochebas) ruthlessly killed the Christians who refused to help overthrow the Romans (4.6.2).

¹²⁰ Recently, Moss (2013: 131-4) has written a concise summary on the targeting of Christians by the Jewish authorities following the crucifixion of Jesus in the first century. Moss argues that between the crucifixion of Jesus and the writings of the historian Tacitus, not many Jews who followed the words of Jesus would have called themselves "Christians." In the opening decades of the first century the small community was still a sect of Judaism and the vast majority of its members saw themselves as Jews. Whole volumes have been written about the first "Christian martyrs" dying at the hands of Jews in Roman-dominated Judea following the death of Jesus, such as Stephen, an early believer in the Acts of the Apostles who was stoned to death. The author of the Acts used a number of literary parallels between the deaths of Jesus and Stephen: both are accused in a similar fashion as both alluded to the destruction of the temple and the overturning of the established order (Acts 6:14; Luke 21: 5-6), both are interrogated by a high priest, the men refer to the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:55; Luke 22:69), both cry out upon dying (Acts 7:60; Luke 22:69), and lastly, Stephen commends his spirit to Jesus in the same fashion that Jesus commended his spirit to God (Acts 7:59; Luke 23:46). Interestingly, the author of the Acts has also decided to include both men begging for the forgiveness of the ones who had persecuted them (Acts 7:60; Luke 23:34). Moss further asserts that it is highly unlikely that the similarities between the deaths of Jesus and Stephen are just mere coincidences. Further observations may suggest that the author of the Acts sought to include such parallelism as a method for casting the death of Stephen as the death of Jesus. The author sought to send across a message to the early followers of Jesus that they will be persecuted for their beliefs. We might never know the full historicity of the death of Stephen, as it can be suggested that any historical Stephen may not have even been present at the death of Jesus and was possibly informed of the crucifixion by one of the twelve apostles. His death does not

from Origen in *Contra Celsum* draws the attention of modern historians to the position of the Christians after the revolt. Samaritans and others outside the Jewish community were banned from circumcising their children because this was seen as bodily mutilation by the Roman authorities. People who continued this practice were put to death, whereas Christians were given the chance to recant by taking an oath and sacrificing.¹²¹ At this point in time, though Christianity was not a *religio licita*, as long as the Christians did not draw attention to themselves or rise up against Rome, they were (for the most part) left alone. In the eyes of modern scholars, there existed a "parting of the ways" between Christianity and Judaism following the revolt. Israeli historian Y. Baer has stated that "with the Bar Kokhba rising, the final rift between Judaism and Christianity was complete." This is also echoed by J.D.G. Dunn who notes that "after the second revolt [132-35] the separation of the main bodies of Christianity and Judaism was clear-cut and final, whatever interaction there continued to be at the margins."¹²² The mutual hostility exhibited at this time between Jews and Christians contributed to a separation of both groups in the eyes of pagans, as seen most clearly when Hadrian forbade Jews to enter Jerusalem, the emperor recognizing the distinction by granting full permission to the Christians.

Antoninus Pius

Antoninus (138-161) succeeded Hadrian. The regime of the new emperor was more than content to follow Trajanic policy. Generally speaking, Christians were left alone by the authorities up to circa 150.¹²³ During the reign of the first Antonine emperor, the Christians were left in peace as long as they did not draw too much attention to themselves. In the eyes of many pagans in the government, the Christian community was eventually looked upon as separate from the Jews. The drift from being associated as sect of Jews was aided by the restoration of the pre-130 status of Judaism as a *religio licita*, though restricted to narrow national limits.

point to the presence of a community of people calling themselves "Christians." Furthermore, C. Moss states that the stoning of Stephen may have occurred on account of intra-Jewish rivalry. During the first century, Judaism possessed many different branches, which at times violently disagreed with one another. It must be mentioned again that at this point in time a community called "Christians" did not exist. The followers of Jesus considered themselves Jewish and there is no evidence that following the death of Jesus his followers wanted to be anything other than Jews. The Jews of Roman-dominated Judaea did not persecute the followers of Jesus in the same manner that many have come to imagine as a distinct community did not exist. The violence of the Jews resembled an angry lynch mob, and not a concerted effort by the Jewish authorities to stamp out a Jewish sect.

¹²¹ Origen. *Contra Celsum*. 2.13. Goodman (2007: 492-500).

¹²² Baer (1961: 82); Dunn (1991: 238). Both are cited in Boyarin (2004: 91).

¹²³ Frend (1965: 236).

From Eusebius modern historians learn that Antoninus Pius attempted to stay the hand of angry mobs who may have wanted to lynch Christians in the provinces. The emperor sent rescripts to the cities of Greece, particularly Athens, Larissa, and Thessalonica. Formal petitions against individual Christians could be made, though the rescripts were aimed at curbing riots.¹²⁴ One rescript from the emperor, answering a petition sent by the Council of Asia accusing Christians of bringing danger to the community, is preserved in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius. In the rescript, Antoninus tells the provincial administration that accusing Christians of atheism will only alienate the community further and drive them deeper into their beliefs. Furthermore, the emperor informed the council that during the earthquakes which had struck the east, the Christians prayed to their god, while the pagans had forsaken their idols and indulged in immoral acts. The rescript concluded that Christians are only to be targeted if there was evidence of a plot against the Roman government and that any slanderous accuser would be punished.¹²⁵ The magistrates addressed in the rescript knew that they did not have the power to inflict the death penalty. The sentence of death could only be ordered by a proconsul.

As for the earthquakes mentioned in the rescript, there had been several severe tremors in Asia circa 152.¹²⁶ As would be expected in a superstitious society, Christians were targeted by angry provincials in the wake of natural disasters.¹²⁷ Regardless of the liberal Roman policy towards the Christians during the reign of Antoninus Pius and some provincial hostility towards the Church, there was little to no encouragement to those who wanted to denounce the community regardless of the illegality of Christianity.¹²⁸

Evidence suggests that governors were content in neglecting orders of the emperor in an effort to placate mobs of angry provincials calling for the prosecution of Christians. The reign of Antoninus Pius may have been more peaceful and tolerant than his predecessors, but persecution did flare up, albeit sporadically. The death of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, which took place in 155 or 156 demonstrates how a Roman proconsul, though he knew his duty, still permitted himself to be swayed by popular anger. Though the source recounting the martyrdom was probably written at a later date and is not an eyewitness account, Polycarp was apprehended by the authorities and executed in the middle of the second century.

¹²⁴ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 4.26.10; Millar (1977: 559-61); Sordi (1986: 68); Grant (1994: 44).

¹²⁵ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 4.13.

¹²⁶ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 4.15.15.

¹²⁷ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 4.15.18-24.

¹²⁸ Frend (1965: 255).

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was a Christian who had enjoyed a privileged position in his community, owned slaves, and even counted members of the proconsul's staff amongst his congregation. The Christian community, though tolerated, became part of the eastern landscape. Along with Polycarp at Smyrna, one Christian notable, Germanicus, had been apprehended because of popular hostility. According to the source of the martyrdom, the proconsul, having to interrogate Germanicus, pleaded for the man to renounce his faith and save himself. Germanicus, steadfast in his convictions, was sent to the arena and forced to pull an unwilling beast onto himself. Within this *martyrium*, a modern reader can discern that some officials, though catering to provincials, were unwilling persecutors. The spectators, a mass of pagans and Jews, angered by the conduct of the Christian, shouted that their city must be cleansed of "atheists" and that Polycarp should be sought out.¹²⁹

Polycarp, fearing the mob, hid in a farmhouse before being apprehended by the city constable, the *irenarch* Herod. Polycarp was treated with respect by his guards and given a chance to pray in peace. Herod attempted to persuade Polycarp not to be a victim of the mob's bloodlust and give up his faith. Polycarp refused to swear by the genius of the emperor and was cast into the arena under the threat of being mauled by a lion before convincing the crowd that he must be burned - fulfilling an image of his death he had seen in a dream. The Jews of Smyrna built a pyre to immolate the bishop. When the fire failed to kill Polycarp, the crowd commanded the executioner to stab him to death. Once dead, the bones from the martyr's corpse were collected for burial and veneration.¹³⁰

The martyrdom of Polycarp is acknowledged as the earliest surviving account of a Christian martyrdom, and survives in two forms: one attributed to Pseudo-Pionius and another by Eusebius in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.¹³¹ The earliest written account of the martyrdom was a letter within the personal library of Ireneus, which was later copied by Gaius the scribe, then

¹²⁹ See *The Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp* in Musurillo (1972: 2-21). For the apprehension of Germanicus, the pleading of the proconsul, and his ordeal in the arena and the anger of the crowd (3, 9, 12). Barnes (1968 a: 510-4); Bowersock (1995: 59); Lane Fox (2006: 435, 472-3, 485). Mendels (1999: 58-70) argues that Eusebius reconstructed Polycarp's death as a media event in order to make the martyrdom more marketable by including literary topoi and novelistic elements. Eusebius, when composing the martyrdom of Polycarp, accidentally associated the death of the martyr with the reign of Marcus Aurelius instead of Antoninus Pius. This has since been corrected. See Bruch et al. (2012: 489).

¹³⁰ Polycarp being treated with respect (7). Polycarp in the arena surrounded by crowds of Jews and pagans (11-12). The death of Polycarp (14-17) and collection of his bones as possible relics (18). Bowersock (1995: 44-46, 83); Lane Fox (2006: 435, 446, 481).

¹³¹ Moss (2012: 69).

recopied by Socrates, whose reproduction was then found and further recopied by Pseudo-Pionius. Other than the version of Eusebius, which summarized the copied version, the Pseudo-Pionian text is preserved within seven Greek manuscripts, that of Atheniensis (10th c.), Parisinus (10th c.), Hierosolymitanus (11th c.), Baroccianus (11th c.), Chalcensis (11th c.), Vindobonensis (11-12 c.), and Mosquensis (13th c.), along with a paraphrastic Latin translation from the tenth century.¹³² C. Moss has argued that although Polycarp was a historical figure, the surviving narratives, themselves either the preserved version by Pseudo-Pionius or that of Eusebius, are not eyewitness accounts and may be called "pious frauds."¹³³ The surviving account of the martyrdom produced by Pseudo-Pionius, though historical, was heavily influenced by biblical scriptures and possessed third century anachronisms. Polycarp presiding over a final meal and praying before his arrest (7.2-3) can be paralleled with Matthew 26:36-46. The martyr being escorted by to Smyrna on a donkey (8.1) is further connected to the New Testament with observations to Matthew 21:1-11. His interrogation by Roman authorities (9.2-10.1) is similar to John 18.28. Polycarp being betrayed by a Judas-like friend (6.1-2) is similar to Matthew 26:47-49. Furthermore, the appearance of the *irenarch* (police captain) Herod (8.2-3) is a clear allusion to the Jewish client king in Luke 23:6-12. Jews rallying at the arena and proclaiming death to Polycarp (12.2-13.1) is similar to John 19:12-16.¹³⁴

Concerning third century anachronisms, one can point to anti-Montanist sentiments within the source along with the collection of the martyr's bones after his execution. Anti-Montanism is present when the text by Pseudo-Pionius describes Quintus, a Phrygian, cowardly turning away in the face of wild beasts after rushing forward to be martyred.¹³⁵ The author must have wanted to make the readers of the text believe that Quintus was a Montanist, a sect of Christians from Asia Minor who openly sought out martyrdom. The *martyrium* may have been composed after Montanus begin to prophesy in 168. Furthermore, the portrayal of Quintus as a coward may have been a method by which the author could slander the theological adversaries of

¹³² For a brief and general overview of the various edition of the martyrdom tradition see Jefford (1996: 85) and the introduction to *The Apostolic Fathers*, edited and translated by B.D. Ehrman (2003: 361-3). A. Stewart-Sykes (2002) has edited and translated an anonymous *vita* recounting the life of Polycarp, though many consider this to be a mid-fourth century fake. Stewart-Sykes argues that the *vita* is from the earlier third century. This chapter will draw upon the version of *The Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp* in Musurillo (1972: 2-21), a text produced from the version of Pseudo-Pionius and not the one found within the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius.

¹³³ For the historicity of the martyrdom of Polycarp see Moss (2010: 539-574). For "pious fraud" see Moss (2013: 104).

¹³⁴ Moss (2010: 551-7).

¹³⁵ *The Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp*. 4 in Musurillo (1972).

orthodox Christianity because later Christians, such as Clement of Alexandria, condemned voluntary martyrdom.¹³⁶ When reading about the collection of the martyr's bones after his execution, the practice of preserving holy relics was not widespread during the era of Polycarp's death and only became prevalent in the succeeding third century. Furthermore, the inclusion of such an episode in the *martyrium* may have been a way by which the Church at Smyrna could have explained the reasons for not possessing any of the martyr's remains when the account was put to parchment.¹³⁷

L. Gaston has argued that the anti-Christian fervor of the Jews within the martyrdom of Polycarp may not reflect the reality of the second century. Gaston suggests that although there may have been religious tensions within cities like Alexandria, recent archaeological excavations at Sardis demonstrate that a large Jewish community lived in peace with their Christian neighbors and felt no need to persecute them.¹³⁸ Furthermore, one can suggest that the presence of Jews in the martyrdom may constitute a literary topos, which A. Stewart-Sykes calls "anti-Jewish."¹³⁹

Despite the reservations of some scholars regarding the hostility of the Jews at Smyrna in 155/6, observations to the martyr act may absolve more orthodox Jews. There would have been a greater probability of "normalized" Jews being present, those which had integrated themselves into Greco-Roman society. Within the *martyrium*, it is mentioned that Polycarp entered the arena at Smyrna on the Sabbath day.¹⁴⁰ This is significant because I. Abrahams has attempted to discredit the story by claiming that if Polycarp had been brought to the arena on the Sabbath, then the Jews of Smyrna would not have been present or brought wood for his pyre.¹⁴¹ If all the Jews in Smyrna at the time were orthodox, then such an assertion would be valid. One can suggest that if any Jews were present during the martyrdom of Polycarp, then hostile Jews were either lowly members of their community, or "Hellenized" (lapsed) Jews that were common in the Near East during this period.¹⁴² The presence of lapsed Jews becomes more apparent by

¹³⁶ For Clement condemning voluntary martyrdom see *Stromata*. 4. 16-17; Moss (2013: 100-2).

¹³⁷ For the earliest accounts of Christian relics see *Passio Sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. 21 in Musurillo (1972), *Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani*. 5 in Musurillo (1972), and Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 76.2. Moss (2013: 103) believes that the third century accounts of relics are less developed.

¹³⁸ Gaston (2005: 17-24).

¹³⁹ Stewart-Sykes (2002: 42) writes that "the anti-Judaism of *Martyrium Polycarpi* is well known and often noticed."

¹⁴⁰ *The Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp*. 8 in Musurillo (1972).

¹⁴¹ Abrahams (1924: 67).

¹⁴² Parkes (1961: 137); Schwartz (2001:129-61).

observing an inscription from the reign of Hadrian noting that "former Judaeans" may have lived in Smyrna. Some like R. Lane Fox say that such Judaeans, though not necessarily lapsed, may have "come to Smyrna 'formally' as a group among donors to the city's amenities."¹⁴³ In this case, though Jews at Smyrna may not have been totally responsible for the carnage inflicted upon the Christians, one must not discount the probability that some may have been at the arena. As we will come to see in the next chapter with the martyrdom of Pionius, there was a growing Jewish presence in the civic life in Smyrna.¹⁴⁴

Even though the *martyrium* of Polycarp may have been written decades after the event took place, the execution of this Christian can still be described as authentic. According to C. Moss "Polycarp was almost certainly executed by the Romans, but we really don't know anything about the circumstances of his arrest, trial and death."¹⁴⁵ Regardless of the literary or rhetorical themes, and topoi present in the martyrdom, if one does not focus on the religions of the townsfolk, be they Jewish or pagan, anti-Christian sentiment can be suggested to have existed in Smyrna, simmering below a calm exterior.

It is noticeable that some Roman provincial authorities did not possess the same bloodlust as the provincials. Both the proconsul and the police constable Herod (though in reality he may have had a different name) sought to persuade Polycarp not to accept his defeat at the hands of the mob. With the exception of some governors disregarding imperial edicts in the eastern provinces, Christians during the rule of Antoninus Pius lived relatively peaceful lives. The imperial policy, regardless of the fact that Christianity was not a *religio licita*, generally continued during the early reign of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus.

Marcus Aurelius and Commodus

Antoninus Pius was succeeded by Marcus Aurelius (161-180). The rescript from Trajan to Pliny was the main source for the procedure dictating the treatment of Christians and was followed by Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius. Christians were not to be sought out and for petitions to be successful, legal proof of their crimes was imperative.¹⁴⁶ According to Eusebius, the

¹⁴³ Lane Fox (2006: 481) cites C.I.J. 742 and Kraabel (1982: 455). Smallwood (2001: 507-8).

¹⁴⁴ Lane Fox (2006: 481-2). For Jewish ownership of a building in Sardis see Kraabel (1978: 13-33).

¹⁴⁵ Moss (2013: 104).

¹⁴⁶ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 4. 13. Keresztes (1968: 321-41) argues that the two waves of "persecution" during the reign of Marcus Aurelius were popular reactions which arose indirectly out of a promulgation of an imperial edict of 167. This edict ordered all to sacrifice to the gods following a terrible plague and the German war. Bruch et al (2012: 489) who discusses the reception of the emperor in Christian literature, argues that Eusebius,

apparent leniency of the Trajanic regime gave way to more severe legislation by Marcus Aurelius:

In this time the persecution of us in some parts of the world was rekindled more violently by popular violence in the cities, and to judge from the events in one nations, myriads were distinguished by martyrdom.¹⁴⁷

The Aurelianic persecutions that Eusebius describes occurred primarily from 164 to 168 and from 176 to 178. Eusebius goes on to state that the treatise *On the Passover*, addressed to the emperor and compiled by Clement of Alexandria responding to a similarly-titled apologetic of Melito, related how Christians were being treated in the East. It appeared that the previous restrictions which had been in place preventing the slandering of Christians had been ignored.¹⁴⁸

Eusebius, quoting the work by Clement, stated:

It has never before happened as it is now that the race of the religions should be persecuted and driven about by new decrees throughout Asia. For shameless informers and lovers of other people's property have taken advantage of the decrees, and pillage us openly, harrying night and day those who have done nothing wrong.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, Athenagoras, writing to the emperor, bemoans that Christians became targets of unjust and false accusations, causing many to lose their property.¹⁵⁰ Denunciations, of which we have no knowledge, were issued. Marcus Aurelius saw no problem with the proliferation of many gods, granted that the ones who introduced new gods and cults had done so with the permission of the state. Aurelius was a Stoic philosopher and a religious conservative who slaughtered hecatombs of animals in honor of the gods after his successful campaigns against Germanic nations, and sacrificed at home on the *dies nefasti*.¹⁵¹ The emperor had nothing but disdain for both Jews and Christians, calling the former dangerous and unpleasant while the latter he proclaimed were misguided exhibitionists.¹⁵²

writing over a century later and immersed in an atmosphere of persecution, turned Marcus Aurelius into a persecutor on account of the death of Polycarp. On occasion, Eusebius was not interested in total historical chronological truth, but wished to trace back the persecutors of Christianity.

¹⁴⁷ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.1.1 (Tr. K. Lake).

¹⁴⁸ Frend (1965: 268); Grant (1994: 41-6).

¹⁴⁹ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 4.26.5 (Tr. K. Lake).

¹⁵⁰ Athenagoras. *A Plea for the Christians*. 1.

¹⁵¹ Dio Cassius. *Historia Romana*. 72.34.25; Ammianus. Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 25.4.17.

¹⁵² Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 22.5.4; Den Beoft et al (1995: 61); Marcus Aurelius. *Meditations*. 11.3; Frend (1965: 269).

It is clear from Eusebius, Clement, and Athenagoras that throughout the empire there was a pursuit of the Christians beyond the watchful eye of the state. The ban against *delatores* (denouncers) was lifted and successful convictions were rewarded. There is a possibility that the rescript of Hadrian to Fundanus or the letters between Trajan and Pliny laid down no official rules to be followed.¹⁵³ One must also note that while it is impossible to claim the emperor issued severe edicts against the Christians, the persecutions may have occurred on account of a gubernatorial weakness in the face of ferocious provincials or a total indifference to the previous policy. It is inconceivable that, if Marcus Aurelius had been a bitter enemy of the Christians, Tertullian, writing little more than twenty years later, should have been so ignorant as to represent him as not hostile to the church.¹⁵⁴

In Asia between 164-168, the proconsul Sergius Paulus oversaw the trial and martyrdom of Sagaris of Laodicea.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, an unnamed proconsul oversaw the executions of Papyrus, Carpus, and Agathonicê at Pergamum. Both martyrs, much like Polycarp, were initially persuaded by the proconsul to save their lives. Their provocative attitude and refusal to sacrifice would lead to their condemnation to be burnt alive.¹⁵⁶ Even at the point of their death, some of the bystanders reacted at the harsh sentence, suggesting non-uniform sentiment towards Christians on behalf of some.

By 160, Rome was the only major city in the western empire in which Christians were numerous and well-organized enough to finally begin attracting attention, as opposed to the East where tensions had been simmering.¹⁵⁷ At Rome in 165, the Christian apologist Justin Martyr fell victim to a grudge by his personal enemy, the Cynic philosopher Crescens. The most famous work by Justin (as most of his writings are lost), the *First Apology*, defended the morality of the Christians whom he believed were being targeted by slanderous persecutors and was meant to convince Antoninus Pius to defend the community from attacks. Crescens had been a very

¹⁵³ Sordi (1986: 70-3); De Ste. Croix (2006: 119) argues that the policies of previous emperors towards Christians in the provinces were not (technically) definitive.

¹⁵⁴ Tertullian. *Apologeticus*. 5.6. Bruch et al. (2012: 488-9) briefly and concisely discusses the opinion of Tertullian and states that contrary to what later writers would say about the emperor, Tertullian, in his *Apologeticus*, called him a "protector" (guardian) of the Christians. During the Macromannic Wars, the prayers of Christian troops helped to turn the tide of battle and that Marcus Aurelius was grateful to them.

¹⁵⁵ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 4.26.3. Boddens Hosang (2010: 86).

¹⁵⁶ *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonicê* in Musurillo (1972: 22-9). For the proconsul attempting to persuade Papyrus, Carpus, and Agathonicê (1-10). The provocative attitude of the martyrs (20-25). Esler (2000: 438); Lane Fox (2006: 491). Barnes (1968 a: 514-5) thinks the martyr act is unauthentic.

¹⁵⁷ Frend (1965: 255).

prominent anti-Christian and both he and Justin had engaged in lengthy arguments. The apologist had upbraided the Cynic ten years before the composition of another work, the *Second Apology*.¹⁵⁸ Crescens never forgot and denounced Justin to the authorities during the reign of Marcus Aurelius when a plague came to the city.¹⁵⁹ Ironically, the *Second Apology* told the story of a Christian, Ptolemy, being denounced on account of a grudge from an angry pagan husband whose wife had been converted to Christianity by the accused. Justin was tried before the prefect of the City, Q. Junius Rusticus, a Stoic and a member of the inner circle of the emperor.

The details of the trial, which survive in the form of two recensions probably from the age of Constantine, document the opening of the proceedings against Justin and his fellow Christians, Chariton, Charito, Euelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, and Liberian. Rusticus ordered the accused to "obey the gods, and make submission to the princes." Justin refused. Rusticus then interrogated the others who proudly proclaimed themselves to be Christians. After all the accused had confessed to being Christians, the City Prefect Rusticus, following the same procedure as Pliny, gave the Christians the chance to pay homage to the gods and the emperor in exchange for their release. Justin and his companions refused and they were scourged and beheaded.¹⁶⁰

The two recensions have been viewed as authentic eyewitness accounts of the trial (even though they do not describe themselves as such) on account of their brevity, and ordinary writing style. The earliest version of the trial, recension A, appears to be the most authentic. One scholar, G. Bisbee, an expert on Roman court transcripts, has compared the account of Justin's trial with a cache of preserved transcripts found at Oxyrhynchus. He noticed that the martyr acts, though preserving important elements from the trial (such as the verdict), meander and fail to follow the complicated formula indicative of Roman court documents. Therefore, Bisbee has drawn the conclusion that although the accounts of Justin's trial *may* be derived from an authentic court document, the surviving account has entire sections of later interpolations. T.D. Barnes has argued against the assertion by Bisbee by suggesting that the act is authentic. Barnes bases his claim on the a single term , "let them [Justin and his companions] be beheaded,"

¹⁵⁸ Justin Martyr. *Second Apology*. 3; Eusebius. *Historia. Ecclesiastica*. 4.16.1; Frend (1965: 253); Grant (1994:119-200); Birley (2000: 152-3).

¹⁵⁹ Grant (1955: 82).

¹⁶⁰ *The Martyrdom of Saints Justin, Chariton, Charito, Euelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, Liberian, and their Community* in Musurillo (1972: 42-7). Justin interrogated by Rusticus (2-5). The accused are given the chance to repent (5). Justin is executed (6). Barnes (1968 a: 515-7); Edwards (2012: 208).

which he claims is a literal Greek translations of the Latin word *ducantur*. According to Barnes, since Roman Christians would have understood the final verdict, they therefore translated the Latin *ducantur* into the Greek variant in order for the account to be accessible to a Greek-speaking audience. According to C. Moss, who also agrees with the authenticity of the act, specifically recension A, one should not focus solely on one word. Because intertextual editing seems likely, the remaining text demonstrates that whoever preserved the account of the trial, however edited, may have been familiar with Roman court transcripts.¹⁶¹

One of the bloodiest episodes of persecution during this period occurred against the Christians of Lyons and Vienne in Gallia Lugdunensis 177.¹⁶² The account of the martyrdoms in Gaul is exclusively and partially preserved within the fourth century *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius, quoted verbatim from a letter sent to the churches of Asia and Phrygia from the Christians of Gaul. No other separate document recounting the bloody episode is attested until the medieval period. There is a possibility that although the account may be authentic, it can be suggested that Eusebius had heavily altered the contents of the letter.¹⁶³ Three things within the source should be noted. First, the accusation against the Christian martyrs is brought forth by slaves who were not tortured. This is significant because the torturing of slaves was standard Roman practice in order to authenticate their charge.¹⁶⁴ Secondly, the referral of the martyrs to the church being their "mother" () is an anachronism. The concept of defining the church as one's mother did not develop until the succeeding late third century. This can be seen most notably within the *Symposium* of Methodius of Olympus.¹⁶⁵ And thirdly, the sufferings of the martyrs in Gaul were referred to as warranting "everlasting remembrance." Eusebius employed the same expression within his *De Martyribus Palestinae*.¹⁶⁶

Despite editorial alterations, when reading the account of the Gallic martyrdoms, we can glimpse a governor who chose to disregard the previous procedure laid down by Trajan (and followed by most governors) and ordered a search for Christians. The Christians martyred at

¹⁶¹ Cf. Moss (2013: 110-12) who cites Bisbee (1983: 129-57), Bisbee (1988) and Barnes (2010: 63-4).

¹⁶² Though Barnes (1968 a: 517-9) appears to argue that the letter recounting the martyrdom of the Christians from Lyons and Vienne is authentic and contemporary, interestingly, he does not include the martyrs in his own canon of authentic sources decades later (2010: 356-9). Grant (1994: 45); Bowersock (1995: 85, 98); Birley (2000: 200-3); Goodine (2008: 9-11); Harvey (2008: 604); Goodman (2012: 351); Moss (2013: 112-4).

¹⁶³ Cf. Moss (2012: 111); Moss (2013:112-4).

¹⁶⁴ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.1.14-15; Moss (2013: 113).

¹⁶⁵ Methodius of Olympus. *Symposium*. 3.8; Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.2.8; Moss (2013: 113).

¹⁶⁶ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.1; Eusebius. *De Martyribus Palestinae*. 2.28.

Lyons and Vienne suffered at the hands of hostile pagans in the marketplace before being apprehended by the tribunes, questioned, and imprisoned. The names of the martyrs were Vettius Epagathus, Sanctus the deacon of Vienne, Maturus, Attalus, Blandina, Biblis, Pothinus, Alexander and Ponticus. Once slaves had been falsely accused the martyrs of cannibalism and incest, "Thyestean banquets and Oedipodean intercourse, and things of which it is not right for us to speak or think..." the group was apprehended. Such accusations were commonly believed by many pagans who did not understand the true meaning of Christian practices. Throughout the entire source one can perceive the hostility of the crowds in a way not seen in earlier martyrdoms. All the Christians apprehended are brutally tortured in the arena in front of a maddened crowd. When it became known to the governor that Attalus was a Roman citizen, Marcus Aurelius was consulted and replied that if Christian Roman citizens refused to apostatize, they should be tortured to death. The governor had all enfranchised Christians beheaded, save for Attalus, who was cast to the wild beasts in a blatant disregard of the imperial authority. It is interesting to note that the emperor followed protocol as set down by Trajan: Christianity was a crime in the present and a confession of guilt followed by a sacrifice was sufficient to secure release. The imperial authority deviated from standard practice by permitting Roman citizens to undergo physical torture. Furthermore, the disregarding of an imperial pronouncement on the part of the governor suggests that emperors could not always determine what was done in the provinces. In the end, the majority of the Christians were martyred, most famously Blandina being placed in a basket and gored by a raging bull. The final insult to the bodies of the dead Christians can be seen in the actions of the authorities who left the bodies of the martyrs exposed but guarded in order to prevent Christians from giving the victims a proper burial.¹⁶⁷

On 17 July, 180, at Scillium in North Africa, the proconsul, Vigellius Saturninus oversaw the trial and execution of a group of martyrs. Marcus Aurelius had died on 17 March of that same year and therefore the execution of the Scillitan martyrs does not fall under his reign but under that of his son and successor, Commodus. Vigellius, according to Tertullian, had been the

¹⁶⁷ Eusebius recounts the entire episode of the Gallic martyrs in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.1.14-63; Christians harassed by a hostile mob (5.1.5-9). The accusations against the Christians (5.1.14-15). The torture of the Christians in the arena (5.1.38). The disregard of Attalus' Roman citizenship (5.1.43-45). The death of the martyrs and the goring of Blandina (5.1.52-57). The bodies of the martyrs left exposed and guarded (5.1.59-60). For modern assessments see Birley (2000: 202-3); De Ste. Croix (2006: 408, 436). For the disregarding of an imperial pronouncement see Millar (1977: 559); Birley (2000: 203); Winsbury (2014: 210).

first African proconsul to begin persecuting Christians.¹⁶⁸ The proconsul had previously executed native-born African Christians - Namphamo, Miggin, Lucitas, and Sanae - but a record of the trial has not survived. The Christians martyred were seven men and five women: Speratus, Nartzalus, Cintinus, Veturius, Felix, Aquilinus, Laetantius, Januaria, Generosa, Vestia, Donata, and Secunda and were drawn from a mix of native and non-native people of the North African province.¹⁶⁹ Saturninus asks the Christians to swear by the genius of the emperor. All the condemned were resolute in their refusal to sacrifice. The proconsul then permitted the Christians a chance at a reprieve from the trial for thirty days in order for them to contemplate whether or not they will honor the emperor or face execution. The Christians reaffirmed their commitment to their faith and were led away and beheaded.¹⁷⁰ Though scholars like C. Moss and T.D. Barnes argue for the authenticity of the source, the account of the martyrdoms, though short, has been slightly edited. The accused carry with them holy books, an anachronism from later centuries because references to authorities handling Christian texts occurred only from the fourth century onward. Furthermore, the martyrs make vague allusions to Paul and speak for one another, which may be an attempt by the author to construct the act as an interpretation of Paul's writing, the ancient disciple previously telling Christians in 1 Corinthians 12 to be as one body and speak with one mind.¹⁷¹

Not all Roman governors resorted to executing Christians who refused to sacrifice to the gods or swear allegiance to the genius of the emperor. In Asia Minor circa 185, a mob of Christians travelled to the villa of the governor C. Arrius Antoninus and demanded to be martyred. Roman governors were more interested in making apostates than martyrs. Arrius Antoninus, annoyed by the group during one of his assize tours, sent a few to be executed and snapped at the rest, "O miserable men, if you wish to die, you have precipices or halters!"¹⁷²

During the reign of the successor and son of Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, the Christian Church once again entered a period of relative calm and the horrors of Gaul were not to be

¹⁶⁸ Tertullian. *Ad Scapulam*. 3.

¹⁶⁹ Frend (1965: 313).

¹⁷⁰ *Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum* in Musurillo (1972: 86-9). The Scillitan martyrs refuse to sacrifice and are executed (15-30). According to Birley (1966: 329-30) the execution of the martyrs at Scillium occurred after the death of Marcus Aurelius and during the reign of Commodus. This suggests that the new emperor did nothing to modify the policy of his father and that anti-Christian sentiment persisted. Barnes (1968 a: 519-20); Grant (1994: 46); Bowersock (1995: 36); Harvey (2008: 604).

¹⁷¹ Moss (2013: 115-7).

¹⁷² Tertullian. *Ad Scapulam*. 5.1 (Tr. Rev. S. Thelwall); De Ste. Croix (2006: 132); Moss (2013: 144).

repeated for some time. The calm experienced by the Church during the reign of Commodus is summed up by Eusebius:

In the reign of Commodus our treatment was changed to a milder one, and by the grace of God peace came to the church throughout the whole world.¹⁷³

The only major act against a Christian that is worthy of note was in Rome between 183 and 185. The senator Apollonius was denounced as a Christian by his slave and prosecuted under the praetorian prefect Tigridius Perennis. The prosecution of a senator before a *praefectus praetorio* as opposed to the *praefectus urbi* indicates the importance of the accused.¹⁷⁴ Tertullian states that in this period many proconsuls in Africa took pity on condemned Christians. In 190, the proconsul Cincius Severus sent secret messages to Christians at Thydrus with forms of words which he would accept as a means of them avoiding death. Another proconsul, Vespronius Candidus, refused to judge a Christian delivered to him by an angry mob claiming that satisfying the angry populace would break the peaceful equilibrium of the community.¹⁷⁵ It is clear from the events in Africa that there existed popular anti-Christian hostility and many Roman notables refused to cater to angry crowds. Commodus was assassinated in 192, and a civil war soon followed which did not affect the Church.¹⁷⁶

Conclusion

Within this chapter, we have seen that between 64 to 192 the Roman state chose to follow an accusatory approach when dealing with the Christian community. Though the Christians were looked upon as following a *superstitio* which risked breaking the *Pax Deorum*, state resources were not to be used in seeking them out for prosecution. The attitudes of non-elite pagans appears to have been hostile towards the Church and the correspondence between Trajan and Pliny set the standard by which all emperors, save with a few gubernatorial exceptions,

¹⁷³ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.21 (Tr. K. Lake).

¹⁷⁴ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.21.2; Frend (1965: 315); Frede (1999 b: 225-7). According to De Ste. Croix (2006: 113) no evidence from well-known Christian trials were ever conducted before the emperor and always took place in the presence of a *praefectus urbi* or a *praefectus praetorio*. Barnes (1968 a: 520-1) argues that the martyr act may be suspect and that the surviving Greek and Armenian texts both exhibit great divergences, while the version known to Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.21) differed further. Barnes cites Conybeare (1894: 35) and von Gebhardt (1902: 44) which provide an English (and German) translation of the Armenian text. Furthermore, Barnes (1968 b: 46-8) asserts it is impossible to discern which elements within the Act are original or historical.

¹⁷⁵ Tertullian. *Ad Scapulam*. 4.

¹⁷⁶ Tertullian. *Ad Scapulam*. 2.5; Frend (1965: 319).

would follow in their dealings with sporadic bouts of persecution in the provinces as petitions brought before governors by *delatores*, or denouncers. For the Roman state, suppressing religious organizations which were deemed a threat to public piety and the state was not news with precedents to laws against the Church could be found in the repression of the cult of Cybele and the Bacchanalian affair. Furthermore, emperors had previously dealt with freelance religious experts. Tiberius enacted legislation against *magi*, *goētes*, *venenarii*, *malefici*, *haruspices*, *mathematici*, *Chaldaei*, *harioli*, limited the circulation of books related to the *oracula sibyllina* and the *fatidici libri* and expelled practitioners of Egyptian and Judean cults from Rome while Claudius banned Druidic practices in 54. Following the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64, the Christian community was probably still comprised of Jews who would not have considered themselves anything other than Jewish. Modern scholarship has suggested that although the passages by Tacitus in his history are genuine, the notion that Christians were solely punished for the fire may either be an anachronism from the second century, or a corruption of the word "Chrestians," a violent Jewish sect from the reign of Claudius. If this is correct, then the attitudes of Roman citizens who witnessed Nero's carnage following the fire may be a reflection of the attitudes of the pagan citizenry from Tacitus' own time. Hadrian followed a similar Trajanic approach when he sent a rescript to the proconsul of Asia Caius Minucius Fundanus whereas Antoninus Pius sent rescripts to the Greek cities of Athens, Larissa, and Thessalonica in an effort to stay the hand of *delatores* who sought to attack the Christian community following natural disasters, though later governors, as in Smyrna, ignored imperial rescripts. Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus were both accused of lifting the ban on zealous *delatores* though it is difficult to claim that either emperor directly issued any severe edicts against the Church. Christians were martyred at Lyons, Vienne, and Scillium during their reign but nothing was centrally-directed. Even some administrators refused to have blood on their hands, such as C. Arrius Antonius who, in 185, refused to execute Christians and Cincius Severus who sent secret messages to Christians at Thysdrus in 190. Others, such as Vespronius Candidus, refused to yield to provincial pressure and execute Christians. In the succeeding chapter, we will see that the state would begin to take a more inquisitorial approach to the Church.

Chapter 2

The Severan Dynasty to the Edict of Toleration Under Gallienus

We will continue the discussion begun in the previous chapter with observations concerning the situation faced by the early Christian Church from the Severan dynasty to the reign of Valerian. Under the Severans, spontaneous persecutions of Christians occurred in the provinces while the central authority did not engage in any centrally planned initiative. Two emperors who arose during the "Third Century Crisis," Decius and Valerian, began employing a more inquisitorial approach towards the Christian Church, with the latter targeting the community with greater ferocity as the initiative for persecution switched from popular denunciations from below to imperial edicts from above.¹⁷⁷ The edict of universal sacrifice directed towards the religions of the empire by Decius was not uniform but had profound effects on the Christian community which came to *feel* persecuted. The Decian edict was not directed solely at Christians and no primary evidence has come to light suggesting that the emperor sought to single-out the community with his decree, notwithstanding the opinion of the ecclesiastical writer Eusebius. Concerning Valerian, two edicts were issued during his reign which *were* meant to specifically target Christians. The reign of Valerian is significant because for the first time the state used its own resources to apprehend Christians. The first rescript was intended to prosecute and jail members of the clergy in order to extinguish Christian practices, while the second was enacted to execute remaining Church notables and punish Christians of high social rank who refused to renounce their beliefs.

The Severan Dynasty

The Severan dynasty, begun under Septimius Severus (193-211) was not known for an overtly hostile attitude towards the Christian Church. Although some anti-Christian violence occurred, disturbances of the sort were sporadic and provincial. Apart from the years 202-203, the reign of the Severans was generally tolerant. Septimius Severus allowed the enforcement of policies already long-established which meant that Roman authorities did not seek out Christians. If one was accused of being Christian, cursing Jesus and making an offering to the Roman gods was sufficient to secure a pardon. Furthermore, wishing to encourage religious

¹⁷⁷ Cf. De Ste. Croix (2006: 137).

harmony through syncretism, Severus tried to limit the spread of Christianity and Judaism, two communities which refused to yield to his vision, by outlawing conversion to both groups with an edict from 202. Regardless of the edict, there was no general persecution during the reign of Severus, and no contemporary writers from the period attest to any state-sectioned violence.¹⁷⁸

During the reign of Severus, Jews were targeted by the state on account of a rebellion in the east when Rome was engaged in a war with Parthia (198-199). The Jews became the enemies of the empire as they displayed a preference for the eastern kingdom. The pacification of (the re-named) Palestine between 200-201 may have encouraged the promulgation of the 202 edict forbidding the conversions to Judaism and Christianity.¹⁷⁹ Regardless of the laws forbidding conversions, Christians were found within the imperial court and the emperor even employed a Christian nurse for his son Caracalla. Many men and women of high rank, whom the emperor knew, were also Christians; Severus occasionally protecting them from raging mobs.¹⁸⁰

Individual officials would proceed as previously when presented with anti-Christian petitions by provincials. Naturally the emperor, with his strict conception of law, did not hinder such actions which took place in sporadic outbursts. Some ancient writers have dubbed the actions undertaken against the Christians during this period as the "Severan Persecution," though a more accurate assessment of the violence against the Church clearly demonstrates that only elite members of the community were affected and that only governors oversaw their prosecution.¹⁸¹ Few major cities witnessed actions against the Church. The most violent acts occurred at Carthage, Alexandria, Rome, Corinth, and Antioch. Though actions against

¹⁷⁸ Sordi (1986: 79-80) asserts that no contemporary writer (Dio Cassius, Herodian, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, or Tertullian) discussed any sort of persecution under Septimius Severus. The lack of any accounts of overt persecution can be contrasted with the works by Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.1), Sulpicius Severus (*Chronicles*. 2.32.1-2), Orosius (8.17.4-5) which all assert that a persecution did occur. For suggestions that Septimius Severus was a devotee of the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis see Davies (1954: 73-6); Birley (1988: 35, 135, 138, 178, 200).

¹⁷⁹ Frend (1965: 320-21) mentions that during the Severan era, Jews and Christians were still viewed as part of the same people and culture in the eyes of many. Therefore their inclusion in this law probably stemmed from that belief. The edict had more effect on the small Christian community than on the Jews. Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.12.1) states that during this period, a Domnus of Antioch had converted from Christianity to Judaism, possibly to avoid the attention that the Church received. Furthermore, Dio Cassius (*Historia Romana*. 37.17) remarks that during his own time (c.225) the Jewish community had grown even after the Roman state had defeated and punished them with burdensome taxes. Frend also goes on to state that some Christians secretly claimed to be Jewish. This may have accounted for the rise in the number of Jews. For another assessment, see Bruce (1973: 179).

¹⁸⁰ Tertullian. *Ad Scapulam*. 4.5-7; Sordi (1986: 80). For Christians serving the Severan household see Lampe (2003: 337).

¹⁸¹ Hippolytus. *Comment on Daniel*. 6.51.

Christians in Antioch were limited, some were imprisoned, such as the future bishop, Asclepiades.¹⁸²

The martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas, two young *catechumens* and their companions Revocatus, Saturninus, and Secundulus occurred at Carthage on either 2 or 7 of March 203 in North Africa, and has been preserved in an ancient Greek diary.¹⁸³ On occasion, local notables, such as judges or magistrates, driven by pagan piety initiated actions against local Christians. It can be suggested that Hilarianus, the administrator who sentenced Perpetua and her companions to death, may have been motivated by his own religiosity.¹⁸⁴ According to the *martyrum*, the governor interrogated the Christians who refused to offer sacrifices to the pagan idols.¹⁸⁵ Throughout the whole trial and their eventual condemnation to the beasts in the arena, the soon-to-be martyrs were mocked by the bloodthirsty crowd at Carthage, much like the mobs at Lyons.¹⁸⁶ The martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas, though a historical account for anti-Christian persecution in North Africa, can be suggested as having been altered by succeeding editors on account of similarities to the older *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, itself written at the end of the second century and possibly known to Tertullian who dismissed it because Thecla allowed women to teach men.¹⁸⁷ Both Perpetua and Thecla are members of the societal elite and both rebuke their powerful family members. Perpetua rejects her father's demands in court while Thecla abandons her fiancé and turns her back to her mother. Both women appear to shift genders, seen most clearly when Perpetua turns herself into a man in one of her holy visions and when Thecla dresses herself in men's clothing. Even within the arena both women are described as undergoing baptismal deaths. Perpetua is described as "well washed" whereas Thecla throws herself into a pool of carnivorous seals in an act of baptism. Furthermore, both women engage in ritual kisses before their deaths. And lastly, both women pray for and aid in the postmortem salvation of the recently deceased. In the case of Perpetua, her prayers were effective in healing the corpse of her dead brother Dinocrates while Thecla prays for the Queen Tryphaena.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸² Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.11.4-6.

¹⁸³ Dodds (1965: 48-9); Sordi (1986: 83); Shaw (1993: 45); Lane Fox (2006: 312, 439-40, 469); Farina (2009: 4-7).

¹⁸⁴ Rives (1996: 1-25).

¹⁸⁵ *Passio Sactarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. 6 in Musurillo (1972:106-31). For the Perpetua in prison see Salisbury (1997: 85-92).

¹⁸⁶ *Passio Sactarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. 18, 21 in Musurillo (1972: 106-31). For spectators see Salisbury (1997:124-34). Lane Fox (2006: 420-1).

¹⁸⁷ Tertullian. *De Baptismo*. 17.5; Moss (2013: 123).

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Moss (2013: 122-3) who cites Bremmer (1996: 36-59), Moss (2010: 141-3). For Perpetua being described as "well washed" see *Passio Sactarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. 21 in Musurillo (1972:106-31). For the scared body of

Further editorial choices are not confined to comparing the *martyrium* of Perpetua and Felicitas to other acts, but with succeeding editors seeking to infuse the work with theological themes. Perpetua, though high-born, rejects her marital status and is described as a bride of Christ. She leaves her young child in the care of her new Christian "family," and not with her husband. This is significant because Roman custody laws dictated that women had to place their child into the care of her husband's family if anything conflict arose. Here, Perpetua is breaking the link she had with her previous family and embracing the Christian community. She further accentuates her new identity by deciding to be executed alongside fellow Christians in the arena.¹⁸⁹

Alexandria also witnessed atrocities carried out against the Christians on behalf of the local governor Laetus, with both Clement and Eusebius documenting the events that transpired in later histories, the former claiming that roasting, impaling, and beheadings become common, while the latter catalogued horrific punishments meted out to Christians.¹⁹⁰ Some of the more notable victims were Origen's father, Leonidas, along with many of his contemporaries such as Plutarch, Serenus, Hero, Heraclas, Herais, and the majority of the pupils of the catechetical school presided over by Clement.¹⁹¹ Regardless of some attacks on Christians, under Septimius Severus friendly encounters were still possible between pagans and Christians, most notably amongst some members of the educated classes.¹⁹²

In Rome, Hippolytus perhaps an eyewitness to the bloodshed, recounted that Christians became the targets of vicious mobs. Men were cast to the flames, some were condemned to the beasts in the arena, women and virgins were assaulted, and pagans set dogs upon children. Cemeteries and church property was also vandalized. Although Hippolytus was an ecclesiastical writer, who composed his commentary on Daniel in 202 when anti-Christian violence was high, he exonerates Severus, comparing him to the Persian Darius who had been forced by this regional *satraps* to throw Daniel to the lions. Therefore, Septimius Severus was like Darius, beholden to magistrates, provincials, and informers.¹⁹³

Perpetua's brother and his eventual postmortem healing see *Passio Sactarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 7-8. For the prayer to Queen Tyrphaena see *The Acts of Paul* in Elliot (2005: 350-87).

¹⁸⁹ Moss (2013: 118-20).

¹⁹⁰ Clement. *Stromata*. 2.20.125; Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.2.2-3.

¹⁹¹ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.1.1, 6.2.13-15; Potter (2014: 204).

¹⁹² Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.3.1-2.

¹⁹³ On actions against Christians see Tertullian. *Ad Scapulam*. 3.1. On accusations against Christians and which were stopped by gubernatorial initiative in the provinces see Tertullian. *Ad Scapulam*. 4.6. For Hippolytus as an

Lastly, at Corinth, Christians were denounced by pious pagans who accused the community of slandering the gods; the most widely known story is recounted within the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius and concerns a Christian noblewoman who was denounced for impiety, condemned to a brothel, and eventually martyred.¹⁹⁴

In general it can be suggested that the position of the Christian Church under Septimius Severus was the same as under the Antonines. With the accession of Caracalla in 211, there may have been brief sparks of persecution but these did not last long and were possibly limited in scope. The *Constitutio Antoniniana*, enacted in 212, granted all freedmen of the empire, with the exception of *dediticii*, Roman citizenship.¹⁹⁵ The ancient historian Dio Cassius believed that Caracalla bestowed the Roman franchise to all freedmen as a method of raising greater taxes.¹⁹⁶ Regardless, the *Constitutio* also possessed a religious component despite being mentioned by few contemporaries.¹⁹⁷ An excerpt from the 212 edict, from a papyrus published in 1910, though badly damaged, is as follows:

Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Augustus Antoninus Pius proclaims: [í] rather [í] the causes and the reasons [í] that I render thanks to the immortal gods for preserving me [when the conspiracy occurred], in that way I believe that I should be able [magnificently and reverently] to appropriately respond to their majesty, [if] I were to lead [all who are now my people] with all others who should join my people [to the temples] of the gods. I give all of those [who are under my rule throughout] my whole empire, Roman citizenship. [though the just claims of communities] should remain, with the exception of the [*dediticii*]. Because it is suitable that the [whole populace] ought not only [í] already to share in the victory [í] my edict will expand that majesty of the Roman [peopleí] PGiss. 40 = col. 1.1-12)¹⁹⁸

Mentioned previously, Roman religious rituals were performed publicly and "the rites of the Roman people" were conducted by magistrates on behalf of the citizen body.¹⁹⁹ The idea that both unity and peace were possible within a religiously heterogeneous empire was starting to be thought of as increasingly difficult and a different approach was needed. It was believed that the universal observance of traditional Roman rites was one way in which greater unity could be achieved. Since the age of the Republic, victorious Roman generals had turned to the local elites

eyewitness to the events and his angry passage in his commentary on Daniel, to which he points out the existing persecution of Christians see Frend (1965: 323); For Hippolytus comparing Septimius Severus to Darius see Sordi (1986: 81), though Barnes (1968 a: 43) believes that the emperor cannot be identified, asserting that the commentary of Hippolytus cannot be definitively dated to 202/3.

¹⁹⁴ Palladius. *Historia Lausiaca*. 65; Frend (1965: 323); Frend (2014: 511).

¹⁹⁵ Hekster (2008: 45,47).

¹⁹⁶ Dio Cassius. *Historia Romana*. 78.9.

¹⁹⁷ Dio Cassius. *Historia Romana*. 78. 9. Beard et al (2004: 241).

¹⁹⁸ Hekster (2008: 123).

¹⁹⁹ Scheid (1985: 41-53); Ando et al. (2006: 4-13); Ando (2012: 55).

of conquered cities as a source of pro-Roman collaboration. Thus the notables of newly acquired territories were granted Roman citizenship and tasked with administration. Rome soon had to contend with the reality that new territories had different legal systems which also reflected different religious observances. Politics and religion were intertwined in many communities and various cities sought the protection of local deities. The Severan emperors realized the difficulty in holding together diverging laws and localized cults by a Roman thread. Therefore, jurists were summoned in an effort to construct a more united domain. Constructing a political theology would bind the population of the empire under the rites of the Roman gods which would ensure the continued worship of the deified emperors and the prosperity of the state.²⁰⁰ It can be suggested that Christians, upon waking up to find themselves Roman citizens, would have been appalled at having to engage in pagan ceremonies. Regardless of Christian attitudes in the wake of the promulgation of the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, whatever aims the Severan emperors had in bringing all the inhabitants of the empire under the aegis of Roman religion was not accomplished in the short term. We will revisit this in the next chapter.

The Roman government under Elagabalus (218-222), following the short reign of Macrinus (217-218) after Caracalla had been assassinated, viewed the Christians much in the same way it viewed Jews and Samaritans. The three communities were looked upon as different sects of one type of cult.²⁰¹ Unfortunately the passive attitude of the emperor could not stop a Roman mob from lynching the bishop of Rome, Callistus, in the summer of 222 and flinging his body into a well.²⁰² This was an isolated incident and not centrally directed. The short reign of Elagabalus was followed by the rule of Alexander Severus (222-235) which was looked upon by Christian writers as a sort of respite from the paranoia of the previous decades.²⁰³ Alexander Severus appeared to have been impartial towards Christians.²⁰⁴ Even Eusebius commented on the relaxed attitude at the imperial court, relating that the mother of the emperor, Julia Mamaea, a very religious woman, hosted Origen and provided him with a military escort in order to discuss religious matters.²⁰⁵ The reign of Alexander Severus came to an end on March 19 235 when he

²⁰⁰ Digeser (2000: 3-4); Heskter (2008: 48).

²⁰¹ *Historia Augusta. Elagabalus.* 3.5. Sordi (1986: 88) writes that Elagabalus included both Abraham and Jesus among his household gods and even wanted to erect a temple to Christ, including him among the gods of Rome.

²⁰² Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica.* 6.21.

²⁰³ Frend (1965: 329).

²⁰⁴ *Historia Augusta. Alexander Severus.* 22, 29, 43, 45, 49.

²⁰⁵ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica.* 6.21.3-4.

was replaced by commander of the Pannonian legions, Gaius Julius Verus Maximinus (Thrax - the "Thracian").²⁰⁶

Decius

The overthrow of Emperor Alexander Severus by the Pannonian legions and the rise of Maximinus "the Thracian" ushered in an era known as the Third Century Crisis, or the "Military Anarchy" from AD 235 to 284.²⁰⁷ Although there existed a climate of popular hostility against Christians in the provinces before the reigns of Decius and Valerian, there was no centrally-planned persecution of the community. No legislation existed requiring Christians to do anything other than acknowledge the genius of the emperor prior to 250.²⁰⁸ Decius (249-251), whom the senate proclaimed emperor following the death of Philip in the wake of an army revolt, issued a decree in 250 ordering every Roman citizen in the empire to sacrifice in honor of the emperor's genius.²⁰⁹ As we have seen, since the reign of Caracalla and the passing of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212, nearly all inhabitants of the empire were citizens.²¹⁰

Decius came to power in the same fashion as most of the emperors of the third century, through a coup d'état. Roman emperors had become vulnerable during this period of crisis and Decius had much to be worried about as he too risked being overthrown. Rome, upon its millennial birthday under Emperor Philip "the Arab," controlled an empire whose union was under strain. The emperor needed to unify a sprawling domain, contend with political rivals, deal with Germanic raids along the northern borders, and demonstrate his own legitimacy.²¹¹ As the empire was beset by crises, could the perceived loss of divine protection have been attributed to the Christians and other groups? During the chaos of the third century, the priests and oracles of

²⁰⁶ Southern (2015: 83)

²⁰⁷ For debates surrounding the term "crisis" and whether or not this period was a time of crisis or not, see Liebeschuetz (2007: 11-20). Military commanders were proclaimed emperor in quick and bloody succession on behalf of their troops. Civil wars, barbarian invasions, plagues, shifts in climate, economic depressions, the decline of trade, and seceding provinces electing imperial pretenders rocked the empire, almost leading to the collapse of the Roman order. For more on these topics see, Chastagnol (1994: 37-90); Witschel (2004: 251-81); Bruun (2007: 201-17); Giardina (2007: 757-64); Jongman (2007: 183-99); Nappo (2007: 233-44); Ando (2012: 3-6).

²⁰⁸ Moss (2013: 145).

²⁰⁹ Many have debated the date when the order of universal sacrifice came into effect. Alf Ildi (1938: 323-48) gave the senate's recognition of Decius as the proper date, while Potter (1990: 261) has suggested a date as early as the death of Philip in 249, whereas Clarke (2005: 625-34) has argued that the date for the decree was January 30 250. Regardless of modern scholarly debates, Rome appears to have been the place of the promulgation of the edict as arrests of those who failed to sacrifice, mostly Christians, happened on 14 or 25 December 249.

²¹⁰ Selinger (2002: 59).

²¹¹ Aurelius Victor. *De Caesaribus*. 29; Zosimus. *Historia Nova*. 1.20.5; Molthagen (1970: 73-74); Sage (1975: 176-7); Brent (2010: 119-21); Potter (2014: 239).

the Rome's official religions blamed the proliferation of plagues, wars, draughts, famine, locusts, mice and storms on the Christians, and many times members of the community were labeled *hostes publici*, public enemies.²¹² The 212 *Constitutio Antoniniana* laid the legislative foundation by which Decius would seek to renew the *pax deorum* and stabilize the Roman Empire - universal sacrifices, an apotropaic rite (*supplicatio*); such an initiative only being possible because most freedmen were citizens.²¹³

During this period, Greco-Roman paganism became increasingly pluralistic, with many cults turning away from material sacrifices such as blood, incense, or libations. These cults comprised Neo-Pythagoreans, Hermeticists, and Neo-Platonists and they all subscribed to a belief in a hierarchy of sacrifices and looked upon blood offerings as only placating daemons. Libations of wine and the burning of incense, though more acceptable, were only second to spiritual (bloodless) sacrifices which were the most highly prized forms of worship. During the high empire, worshipers at the temples dedicated to the cults of Zeus (Jupiter), Asclepius, Dionysus, Isis, and Hecate all employed bloodless sacrifices.²¹⁴ The importance of bloodless sacrifices within the pagan temples of the empire had been decreasing for the past two centuries. For the Christians, the once small cult had grown and the Church displayed a level of aggressive proselytism, and voluntary martyrdom which many pagans, such as Emperor Marcus Aurelius, thought was overly theatrical.²¹⁵ Interestingly, though Gnostics bore a cosmetic appearance to Christians, they were immune from prosecution on account of their unexclusive nature and the

²¹² Mertaniemi (2011: 141) who cites Arnobius. *Adversus nationes*. 1.1.3. Kahlos (2011: 262) cites Lactantius. *De mortibus persecutorum*. 14 who says that Christians were denounced as "public enemies" during the fourth century persecutions under the tetrarchs.

²¹³ The chapter by Brent (2010: 193-249) discusses Decius' initiative along with the reception of the entire episode and how Church fathers responded to it, while also drawing attention to scholarship surrounding the edict's implementation. The chapter by Noethlichs (2015: 17), though not entirely centered on the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, does mention that Caracalla's legal initiative was the foundation for which the succeeding Decian edit of universal sacrifices was made possible. He also goes on to state that Decius, in enforcing universal sacrifices, rendered the distinction between the *sacra privata* and the *sacra publica* invalid.

²¹⁴ Stark (1996: 191-208), though a sociologist, has argued that the Roman Empire experienced an increase in polytheistic pluralism that may have weakened paganism. This will be discussed in the next chapter as some hypotheses will be put forth as to the reasons why some pagans may have turned away from their traditional cults in favor of Christianity just as their attitudes towards the Abrahamic church began to change. For the decrease in the importance of material sacrifice, see Nilsson (1945: 65). Bradbury (1995: 334-36) attests that the cults of Zeus (Jupiter), Asclepius, Dionysus, Isis, and Hecate all came to employ bloodless sacrifice and draws upon the work by Nilsson (1945:63-9) and Robert (1968: 568-99, at 597) to support his claim. For the state religion and the edict of Decius, see Athanassiadi (2010: 44, 46, 50-1); Athanassiadi (2015: 29-30).

²¹⁵ Marcus Aurelius. *Meditations*. 11.3; Athanassiadi (2010: 48).

willingness to offer sacrifices when necessity arose.²¹⁶ For Decius, a conservative, the empire could only be saved if *all* its inhabitants engaged in sacrificial rites. It was not important which god the people of the empire chose to worship, but rather that they took part in the act of sacrifice, itself a demonstration of loyalty to the emperor.²¹⁷ Later ecclesiastical writers, such as Eusebius, accused Decius of targeting the Church because his predecessor, Philip, had been a secret Christian, though this is hard to prove.²¹⁸ The bishop of Alexandria, Dionysius, spoke of mob violence against Christians occurring in the Egypt a year before the accession of Decius, which was the last recorded major outburst of popular violence against the Church. Such provincial violence may have been a reason for the Decian edict, but we cannot know for sure.²¹⁹ From the era of the Severan dynasty to the reign of Justinian, the debate concerning the proper definition of *what* it meant to be a "good" Roman was increasingly framed within a religious dimension. Though discussions surrounding a later Christian emperor like Justinian will not be explored here, the Decian edict, along with the succeeding legislation under the tetrarchs may have been part of this trend to define who was a proper Roman.²²⁰ This attempt at unity will be continued and explored in the following chapter.

Decius' imperial decree on universal sacrifice has been lost to modern historians. The decree ordered that sacrifices were to be supervised by a Roman magistrate who would provide

²¹⁶ De Ste. Croix (2006: 140) believes that most sects of Gnostic Christians experienced complete immunity from persecution as they were not an exclusive religion like their orthodox Christian counterparts and had no problem in taking part in pagan religious ceremonies on demand.

²¹⁷ Though we cannot know Decius' personal religiosity, De Ste. Croix (2006: 139-40, 142-44) argues that although the main motive behind the persecution of Christians was mostly religious, there may have also been a secular component to such a policy. Though a soldier-emperor, Decius was not entirely uneducated and may not have even adhered to, in the words of De Ste. Croix, "the more grosser forms superstition" (p.139) as many members of the elite during the third century may not have even felt the superstitious horror around Christians. Though some elites may have sought to break down the Church because their motives were based more in the conservative nature of the Roman life and not entirely religious. The aim of many later persecutors had always been to force the Christians to acknowledge the traditional Roman gods but not force them to denounce their own or worship him in private, though measures were taken to prohibit Christians from congregating by Valerian and Diocletian. De Ste. Croix draws attention to the works by Cicero in arguing that the elites of the empire, even if they did not adhere entirely to the rites of the traditional Roman cults, chose to persecute the Christians on account of "political motives." Cicero described his ideal commonwealth as beginning with *ius divinum* (*De legibus*. 2.18-22) and argued that Rome's ancestors had an emotional feeling for Roman religion as the *ius divinum* was the foundation of the state (*De Natura Deorum*. 3.5-6). Furthermore, Cicero, himself an augur, mentioned that past augurs had the political clout needed to annul past laws (*De legibus*. 2.14.31). Therefore, religion was a tool by which Roman elites were able to control and direct the state. For another modern assessment of the Decian edict of universal sacrifice, see Beard et al. (2004: 239); Hekster (2008: 68, 70-2); Kahlos (2009: 29-31).

²¹⁸ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6. 39.1. Barnes (1968 a: 43) disputes the claim that Philip was secretly Christian. Sage (1975: 173); Brent (2010: 128-30).

²¹⁹ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.41.1-9; Sage (1975: 179); Millar (1977: 567); De Ste. Croix (2006: 137); Lane Fox (2006: 451-2).

²²⁰ Kahlos (2009: 28).

the subject with a certificate proving their piety, called a *libellus*. Forty-four *libelli* have survived from antiquity. This is one of the surviving *libelli*:

1st hand. To the commission of the village of Alexandru Nesus, chosen to superintend the sacrifices. From Aurelius Diogenes, son of Satabous, of the village of Alexandru Nesus, aged 72, with a scar on the right eye brow. I have always and without interruption sacrificed to the gods, and now in your presence in accordance with the edict's decree I have sacrificed, and poured a libation, and partaken of the sacred victims. I request you to certify this below. Farewell. I Aurelius Diogenes, have presented this petition.

2nd hand. I Aurelius Syrus saw you and your son sacrificing.

3rd hand. ...Onos...

1st hand. The year one of the Emperor Caesar Gaius Messius Quintus Trajanus Decius Pius Felix Augustus, Epeiph 2 (June 26, 250).²²¹

All the surviving *libelli* follow the same pattern. One might assume that the religious affiliation of the participants would be present on the *libelli*, but this is not the case. Therefore, it can be suggested that the regime of Emperor Decius was not at all concerned with the religious practices of the population (assuming that those who partook in the sacrifice followed a *religio licita*). Those who participated in the sacrifice had to pour a libation and taste sacrificial meat.²²²

The universal edict of sacrifice was intended as a test of loyalty. The *libelli* helped prove that one had performed a sacrifice in honor of the genius of the emperor while emphasizing religious and social conformity in an age of unstable imperial rule. The appearance of Decius' name on the *libelli* may have been meant to legitimize the emperor's position as one who stood in the long line of sovereigns who displayed pagan piety, with the names Trajanus, Pius, Felix, and (not surprisingly) Augustus being added to Decius' name.²²³ The desire of the emperor to unite all his subjects by engaging in sacrifices, though not directly targeting any one particular group, appalled Christians and alienated them from the wider Roman community as they were forced to choose between compliance or apostasy. Decius sought to uphold traditional Roman values in the face of instability. For Christians, sacrificing cattle on pagan altars and tasting their meat was a terrifying proposition. Ancient writers such as Cyprian and Dionysius both describe the apostasy of lapsed Christians to the sacrifice of animals, the Christians being spontaneously taken to the altars and made victims themselves.²²⁴ Furthermore, the participants had to recite a

²²¹ Tr. Knipfing (1923: 363-64).

²²² Selinger (2002: 46).

²²³ Moss (2013: 146).

²²⁴ Cyprian. *De lapsis*. 8; Dionysius quoted by Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.41.11.

prayer at the altars or recite the contents of their *libelli*.²²⁵ For the Christians who found themselves at pagan temples and forced to engage in sacrifice, the prayers demanded of them were equated to a denial of faith, a renunciation of Christ, and blasphemy.²²⁶ As one can see from the *libelli* that the emperor did not have any particular religious community in mind, it can be suggested that ecclesiastical writers may have stretched the truth. Since Neo-Pythagoreans, Hermeticists, and Neo-Platonists took a stance against blood sacrifices, then the Christian community was not the only group targeted by Decius.²²⁷

When the Decian edict was promulgated, we can observe in the African provinces that the law affected some but not others. African Christians either committed apostasy or went into exile, such as Cyprian of Carthage, who later redeemed his reputation during the reign of Valerian through his own martyrdom. The apostasy of African Christians, the *lapsi*, would later come to haunt the African church as many who remained had no desire to follow morally compromised leaders.²²⁸ Concerning the Christians unaffected by the decree, Cyprian speaks of the *stantes*. These were Christians who either did not possess *libelli* or merely stayed home, not lapsing into apostasy in order to save their lives.²²⁹ Alexandria, one of the most populous cities of the empire, bore witness to attacks on Christians on account of a zealous governor. Alexandria had always been known as a religiously and ethnically diverse city whose population lived in a form of permanent unrest with riots being common. Religious, political, and philosophical debates increased the tensions in the city and some Christians had been attacked during the reign of Septimius Severus.²³⁰ Under Emperor Philip a violent riot engulfed Alexandria and Christians were attacked by pagan mobs. A pogrom against the Church almost descended into full-scale civil war. Once the edict of universal sacrifice had been promulgated, the governor of Egypt ordered a *frumentarius*, a special agent who headed an armed column of centurions and legionaries, to be dispatched to Alexandria in order to apprehend the bishop of city, Dionysius; the bishop escaped with the help of some sympathetic citizens. The governor targeted the community and sought to break the will of the Christians with distinctions made according to status, sex, and age. In the city, old women and mothers were not tortured, though the young

²²⁵ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.41.7-9; Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 30.3.1

²²⁶ Cyprian. *De lapsis*. 8, 24, 35; Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.41.12, 15.

²²⁷ Sage (1975: 174-5); Pohlsander (1986: 1826-42); Sordi (1986: 100-1); Brent (2010: 177-92).

²²⁸ Moss (2013: 148).

²²⁹ Cyprian. *De lapsis*. 3.

²³⁰ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.1.1; Selinger (2002: 75).

were not so fortunate. Soldiers were simply beheaded on account of their service and status.²³¹ The letters of Cyprian, composed right after the edict of universal sacrifice was promulgated, present modern historians with a fragmented picture at Carthage. His presbyters and deacons were not in any immediate danger, and those who did find themselves in prison were visited by other Christians and permitted to hold mass within their cells.²³² At Carthage, some Christians engaged in sacrifices, and some, like Cyprian, found them at fault in their actions.²³³ But some pagan mobs did riot, stoning and burning Christians, most famously Numidicus, an African confessor.²³⁴ At Carthage, death was never used as a legal measure by the governor and many Christians either suffered exile, confiscation of property, or died on account of torture which was meant to force them to sacrifice and not to end their lives.²³⁵

In Asia Minor, one important Christian, Pionius, was arrested with Sabina, Asclepiades, Macedonia, and Limnos and martyred at Smyrna on 23 February 250.²³⁶ The source recounting the trial and death of Pionius and his companions is lengthy and the details will not detain us here but three aspects must be discussed. First, the anti-Semitism in the *martyrum*, though some suggest is a mere literary topos inserted as a later date, can be suggested as being possibly reflecting a historical reality. Secondly, support against Christians appears to have switched from popular actions to imperially-directed initiatives from above and are not overtly hostile as in previous centuries. And thirdly, the interrogation of the Christians undertaken by the proconsul Quintillian suggests that imperial authorities were not interested in *whom* the Christians prayed to, but *how* they worshipped their deity.

The Christians, led by Pionius, pass the night in prayer and fasting and fasten chains around their necks. In the *martyrum* the non-Christians are not overtly hostile as in Lyons. On the following Saturday, Polemon the temple verger led the Christians into the town forum in the midst of Greeks (pagans) and Jews. That day was the Sabbath and was therefore considered a holy day by Smyrna's large Jewish population. Polemon attempts to convince Pionius and the

²³¹ The bloody events at Alexandria are recorded in Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* (6.40.1-9; 6.41-23). A Roman *frumentarius* apprehending Dionysius (6.40.1-9). Distinctions made to sex, age, and status when prosecuting Christians (6.41.15, 17, 20, 21). The torture of the young (6.41.18). The beheading of soldiers (6.41.16, 22-23). For a modern assessment of the events at Alexandria see Selinger (2002: 76-7).

²³² Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 5.2.1, 14.2.1.

²³³ Cyprian. *De lapsis*. 8, 24-26; Burns Jr. (2002: 137-8).

²³⁴ Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 40.1.1.

²³⁵ Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 10.1.1, 10.4, 11.1, 13.4.1, 19.2.3, 22.2, 24.1.1, 38.1.2, 66.4.1, 66.7.2; Cyprian. *De lapsis*. 2, 10, 13.

²³⁶ Barnes (1968 b: 529-31); Lane Fox (2006: 460-8, 71-2).

Christians to sacrifice "like everyone else" but the presbyter refuses and speaks to the crowd. He beseeches the Greeks not to gloat over the condemned but has them remember the words of Homer and then turns to the Jews and quotes Moses and Solomon to achieve the same effect. Groups of pagans visit the Christians in prison in an effort to convince them to give in and sacrifice in order to save their lives.²³⁷

When Pionius was first cast into the town square, he chided the Jews because many had gloated over the Christians who had sacrificed and committed apostasy. He then verbally attacked them for inviting Christians into their synagogues.²³⁸ Pionius believed that the Jews took the occasion to win converts among the Christians as they believed that many would rather join the Jewish fold than eat sacrificial meat. Pionius concluded that the Jews would expose them to slanderous comments about Christ and spread the rumor that the resurrection of Jesus was evidence for necromancy practiced on a criminal's soul.²³⁹ According to R. Lane Fox, the Jews at Smyrna subscribed to the pagan view that the violently deceased were easily conjured up by means of sorcery and therefore Jews slandered the Christian community as one which harbored sorcerers. Lane Fox states that Pionius "rose to the occasion" and lambasted the Jews, and retorted that an undead criminal would not have filled the world with disciples and miracles.²⁴⁰

But why did Pionius feel the need to attack the Jews of Smyrna? Some might suggest that the anti-Semitism in the martyr act is a literary topos common to acts of the Christian martyrs. Though such anti-Semitic lines can be ascribed to a later fourth-century editor, one must keep in mind that there existed a Jewish community at Smyrna and closer observations of the third century reality of the town suggests that hostility between both Jews and Christians during Pionius' lifetime may have been possibly contemporary and common. Smyrna possessed a sizable Jewish community with "elders," "rulers," and, as mentioned by Pionius, "rulers of Sodom," and a "secretary of the host," who served the "host of Gomorrah," himself a Roman

²³⁷ *The Martyrdom of Pionius the Presbyter and his Companions* in Musurillo (1972). The Christians praying and fasting in chains (2). The Christians led by the temple verger into the town forum filled with pagans and Jews (3). Pionius giving a speech to the Jews (4). Pagans visiting the jailed Christians in an effort to make them sacrifice and save their lives (12). Lane Fox (2006: 474, 479-83, 88-9) discusses the martyrdom of Pionius, especially the presence of the Jews.

²³⁸ Lane Fox (2006: 478) who cites Parkes (1961: 144-5).

²³⁹ *The Martyrdom of Pionius the Presbyter and his Companions*. 13 in Musurillo (1972). Lane Fox (2006: 479-80).

²⁴⁰ Cf. Lane Fox (2006: 480). For Pionius' response to the Jews who claimed the resurrection was necromancy, see *The Martyrdom of Pionius the Presbyter and his Companions*. 13 in Musurillo (1972).

citizen.²⁴¹ During the 250's, a relaxed relationship existed between the Jews and pagans in Smyrna as can be suggested with an inscription on a family tomb in relation to a woman named "Rufina," the "head of the synagogue." From this inscription, we can see that a prominent Jewish family was able and willing to take advantage of pagan civic facilities while their pagan neighbors were prepared to help in the guarding of their family tomb.²⁴² Though we do not have enough evidence to view and chart all variations to Jewish reactions towards the growth of the Christian community, one can suggest that there may have been a degree of hostility towards them. During the first centuries, Jews did persecute Christians, but levels of sporadic violence decreased during the succeeding centuries, though, in the words of Lane Fox "a war of words continued."²⁴³

Pionius was martyred in the spring of 250 when a famine occurred at Smyrna. This was proof to many of divine anger. During the 160's, the people of Smyrna had shouted for the execution of Polycarp, whereas during the middle of third century, there appears to have been a change in attitude. No drive for persecution on the part of provincials had occurred during the famine until Emperor Decius promulgated his edict of universal sacrifices. The people, listening to Pionius in the forum, may have come to regret their decision and visited him in prison in an effort to have him offer sacrifices. This is a significant shift. It appears that the people of Smyrna may have been content to permit the Christians in their midst to live unmolested even in the face of a calamity and were only driven to persecute when the government gave them the chance.

The Proconsul Quintillian came to Smyrna to question Pionius. It is towards the end of the Act that one can see the perspective of the interrogating official:

The Proconsul asked: "What is the cult or the sect to which you belong?"

"The Catholic," He [Pionius] answered.

"What do you mean, the Catholic?" asked the Proconsul.

"I am presbyter," said Pionius, "of the Catholic Church."

"Are you one of their teachers?" asked the Proconsul.

"Yes," answered Pionius, "I was a teacher."

"You were a teacher of foolishness?" he asked.

"Of piety," was the answer.

"What sort of piety?" he asked.

He answered, "Piety towards God the Father who has made all things."

²⁴¹ Cf. Lane Fox (2006: 481) who cites C.I.J. 739 and Robert (1960 a: 260-2).

²⁴² On Jewish inscriptions and symbols at Smyrna see Lane Fox (2006: 481) who cites C.I.J 740-1, 743; Goodenough (1953: 79-81). On the origins of Rufina see Reinach (1883: 166). On Jewish buildings in Smyrna see Robert (1960 b: 391)

²⁴³ Cf. Lane Fox (2006: 482) cites Tertullian. *Adversus Marcionem*. 3.23, Tertullian. *Adversus Judaeos*. 1.13. Justin Martyr. *Dialogue with Trypho*. 17.1.

The Proconsul said: "Offer sacrifice."
 "No," he answered. "My prayers must be offered to God."
 But he said: "We reverence all the gods, we reverence the heavens and all the gods that are in heaven. What then, do you attend to the air? Then sacrifice to the air?"
 "I do not attend to the air," answered Pionius, "but to him who made the air, the heavens, and all that is in them."
 The Proconsul said: "Tell me, who did make them?"
 Pionius answered: "I cannot tell you."
 The Proconsul said: "Surely it was the god, that is Zeus, who is in heaven; for he is the ruler of all gods."²⁴⁴

The exchange between the proconsul and Pionius is significant as one can see that the official is not interested in who Pionius and his companions sacrificed to as long as a pagan rite was performed. The official Roman standpoint was remarkably flexible, but Pionius using the simple noun "god" baffled his interrogators. Quintillian wanted little more than to know that Pionius was religious, even if that meant sacrificing to the air in honor of the emperor.²⁴⁵ For his refusal to sacrifice, Pionius was executed. As for the townsfolk, one can observe growing sympathy for the Christian community. The people of Smyrna had once called for the persecution of Polycarp during the second century. A century later, and during the midst of a famine, the inhabitants of the city did not appear to want to seek out Christians until the Decian edict was promulgated. Furthermore, once Pionius had spoken in the town's forum, he was visited in prison by many townsfolk who sought to sway him to sacrifice in an effort to save his life.

Despite the slow change in the provinces, one must also draw attention to the actions of government officials at Rome during the reign of Decius. One would imagine that the aim of the imperial authority for religious conservatism would make the capital a hostile place for Christians. According to Cyprian, this is not entirely true. Though the authorities did order the execution of some Christians, such as the bishop Fabian who met his end at Rome on 20 January 250, the vast majority of those who were imprisoned were released without facing further punishment.²⁴⁶ Decius' attempt at universal sacrifice and the force that such an edict entailed actually failed in the capital city which had a tradition of religious tolerance, such coercive policies becoming seen as distasteful to many pagans. Even the emperor himself, who oversaw

²⁴⁴ *The Martyrdom of Pionius the Presbyter and his Companions*. 19 (Tr. H. Musurillo).

²⁴⁵ Ando (2012: 137-38).

²⁴⁶ For the martyrdom of Fabian, see Sage (1975: 178); Kelly (1986: 16-7); Sordi (1986: 102); Duval (2000: 157-72); Selinger (2002: 32-3). For the claims by Cyprian, who says that many Christians were released see Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 49, 54.2.

the interrogation of Celerinus, did not order a heavy sentence, and the accused was later released.²⁴⁷ Cyprian even goes on to state that at Rome many Church notables were successful in keeping away members of their flock from sacrificing at the altars.²⁴⁸

Concerning the Roman near east, the number of bishops and other Church notables who died during the reign of Decius is quite small and much of the detail surrounding their deaths is meager. Fabian died at Rome while Babylas of Antioch and Alexander of Jerusalem both died in prison in their respective cities.²⁴⁹

If Christians were jailed for their failure to partake in sacrifices, then they were being *prosecuted*, not persecuted. Furthermore, the surviving *libelli* do not require the participant to mention their religion. Many Christians refusing to obtain a *libellus* in order to save their lives suggests that the imperial administration did not actively seek out Christians and may not have possessed bureaucratic mechanisms strong enough to enforce such a decree to its full extent. Therefore, it is with this in mind that one can propose some later writers, like Eusebius, who sought to cast Decius as a thorough persecutor, might have stretched the truth as a plot against the Christians.²⁵⁰ The edict of universal sacrifice would have been hard, but not impossible to accomplish but the implementation of the decree might have been inconsistent. Census registers would have been the most logical tool available to imperial bureaucrats in the enforcement of the decree. Modern scholars are divided on whether or not there was a well-established bureaucratic process by which to enforce the law. J. Rives believes that the Roman state possessed such machinery while R. Lane Fox appears to disagree.²⁵¹ Regardless of the scholarly debates on the strength of the state to fully enforce the Decian edict, it does not appear that Christians were actively hunted down. Furthermore, Roman authorities tasked with enforcing the sacrificial initiative were not above corruption. Officials sold false *libelli* to Christians who were not ready to renounce their beliefs, greatly undermining the dignity of the state.²⁵²

²⁴⁷ Cf. Sordi (1986: 104). For Celerinus see Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 21, 22.

²⁴⁸ Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 8.2.3.

²⁴⁹ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 6.39.1-4; Selinger (2002: 70).

²⁵⁰ Lössl (2010: 201-3).

²⁵¹ Lane Fox (2006: 455-56); Rives (1999:148-151).

²⁵² Sordi (1986: 105).

Valerian

Two years after the death of Decius, who died in battle at Abritus in 251, Valerian ascended to power at Rome with the support of the army and the senate. The new emperor soon took his son Gallienus as a colleague. The empire still faced many problems along its far-flung borders. Gallienus was dispatched westward, while Valerian marched on the eastern provinces to confront the Sassanians in an effort to re-take Antioch from Shapur I.²⁵³

During the first five years of Valerian's reign, Christians were not harassed by imperial fiat.²⁵⁴ When on campaign in Syrian, Valerian composed two letters regarding the Christians and dispatched them to the senate at Rome. The motive behind the emperor's actions against the Church might be seen as answering to the fears of a superstitious populace. The "plague of Cyprian (251-66)" was claiming five thousand people a day in the capital city, and incursions of Goths and Persians along the frontiers (Decius was the first emperor to be killed in battle) troubled many.²⁵⁵ Dionysius of Alexandria, mentioned by Eusebius, stated that Valerian's advisor turned him towards the hatred of the Christians, though such an assertion seems doubtful.²⁵⁶

The first edict of Valerian was composed in 257 and issued to the provincial governors soon after. Valerian was more direct as to who he intended to target and opted for an inquisitorial approach as the means of prosecuting Christianity. The rescript has not survived, but evidence of its contents were recorded within the *Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani*:

When the Emperor Valerian held the consulship for the fourth time with Gallienus, who held it for the third, on the thirteenth day of August at Carthage the Proconsul Paternus spoke to Bishop Cyprian in his private chambers: "The most revered emperors Valerian and Gallienus have graciously sent me a document in which they order all those who do not practice Roman beliefs to acknowledge the Roman rites. I made some inquiries, then, in your connection. What have you to say to me?"²⁵⁷

Furthermore, Valerian not only demanded that Christians observe pagan rites, but ordered that Christians no longer be allowed to hold assemblies or gather in cemeteries.²⁵⁸ The fact that the imperial staff had knowledge of the Christian practice of assembling in cemeteries is interesting. They knew the Christian word for grave, "the cemetery." This was a direct assault on

²⁵³ Ando (2012: 158-60).

²⁵⁴ Selinger (2002: 83).

²⁵⁵ For five thousand people dying every day at Rome during the "plague of Cyprian" see Smallman-Raynor et al (2004: 73), Stark (1996: 76-7). For Goths and Persians amassing along the frontiers and the Valerian's fears see Sordi (1986: 109).

²⁵⁶ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 7.10.2-9; Selinger (2002: 84). For quick overviews of the period see Sage (1975: 340-1); Schwarte (1989: 107); Keresztes (1989: 75-6); Pietri (1995: 166-69).

²⁵⁷ *Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani*. 1.1 (Tr. H. Musurillo). Millar (1977: 568-9); Beard et al. (2004: 241).

²⁵⁸ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 7.11.4, 10-11.

a Christian practice and the community was forced to oblige.²⁵⁹ Enemies of the Church, like Valerian, were quick to realize that in order to combat the religion, or any groups deemed to be harmful to the wellbeing of the empire, old laws which only pertained to personal religious transgressions no longer applied. The Church was now a community organization.²⁶⁰ Valerian's assault on the Church was officially inquisitorial. It is from the *Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani* and other contemporary documents that it can be suggested that the first of the Valerian edicts sought to single out only the higher Christian clergy, such as bishops, presbyters, and deacons.²⁶¹ At Alexandria, Christian clergymen who had refused the orders of the edict and acknowledge the Roman gods were exiled from the city to Kephro in the Libyan desert, while Christian leaders at Carthage were sent to the port of Curubis.²⁶²

Christian leaders were banished to specific areas in order that their appearance would be assured in court.²⁶³ Both Dionysius and Cyprian would be moved again following their arrest. Dionysius was moved from Kephro to Kolluthion, while Cyprian was delivered from Curubis to Carthage.²⁶⁴ It can be suggested that the detention of high Christian clergy depended on their wealth and status within the community because there is evidence of some Christians being condemned to the mines. Nine bishops from Numidia along with groups of priests, deacons, women and children died from this sort of manual labor.²⁶⁵ With the promulgation of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 there appeared two distinct social classes: the *honestiores* (the more honorable) and the *humiliores* (the more humble). Though both were Roman citizens, there soon came to exist different penalties pertaining to both classes. Those who suffered the fate of being cast into the mines were possibly *humiliores*, the "more humble." Previously, only non-citizens were able to be punished in this fashion but after 212, members of the lower classes could face this penalty despite the fact that they had the Roman franchise.²⁶⁶

²⁵⁹ Beard et al. (2004: 271); Lane Fox (2006: 551).

²⁶⁰ Cf. Sordi (1986: 105).

²⁶¹ Sage (1975: 342); Schwarte (1989: 114-15, 117-19); Selinger (2002: 89).

²⁶² Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 7.11.10; *Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani*. 1.17, 2.11 in Musurillo (1972: 168-75); Sage (1975: 343).

²⁶³ Sordi (1986: 114); Selinger (2002: 87).

²⁶⁴ Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 81; Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 7.11.14-16.

²⁶⁵ Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 76-79. Sage (1975: 343-4).

²⁶⁶ Ando (2012: 183-6). For centuries Roman citizens were protected from such punishment. With the universal grant of citizenship during the Severan dynasty, many people found themselves grouped into either the *honestiores* (more honorable) or the *humiliores* (more humble) classes. Though both classes were made up of citizens, the "more humble" could be forced to endure different types of punishments under the law as a form of social status developed

In 258, Emperor Valerian issued a second edict to the Roman senate which enacted further measures against the Christians. As with the previous proclamation, the original has not survived. Cyprian summarized the second Valerianic rescript is as follows:

...Valerian had sent a rescript to the Senate that bishops and priests and deacons should be punished immediately, but senators and outstanding men and Roman knights should lose their rank and should also be deprived of their goods and, if, after their means had been taken away, they still persevered as Christians, they should also be deprived of their heads; that matrons should have their goods taken away and be sent into exile; but the people of Caesar's household, whoever either had confessed before or now confessed, should have their goods confiscated and be sent as prisoners, assigned to Caesar's estates.²⁶⁷

It can be suggested that many Roman governors had encountered problems in enforcing the first Valerian law on account of the high status of many of the Christians targeted. People within the imperial court and the high echelons of the state may have played a role in protecting many high-ranking Christians. Though we cannot know for certain the reason behind the second edict, Roman governors may have been hesitant to come to judgments on their own and may have fallen under the influence of those within their inner circle. It can be suggested that Valerian was reacting to a similar problem.²⁶⁸ The second Valerianic edict was explicit.

The governors of North Africa banished clergy to areas under their direct control in order to be more easily dealt with.²⁶⁹ On 14 September 258, Cyprian was delivered to the governor at Carthage and executed, becoming the first African bishop to be martyred.²⁷⁰ In Numidia, both the deacon Marian and the reader James were executed along with their companions at Lambesa on the 6 May 259 or 260. The condemned Christians were first held at Muguae, a suburb of Cirta, in the same fashion as previously seen with other executed Christian notables.²⁷¹ The Christians were then viciously attacked by the garrison soldiery, centurions, and the magistrates of Cirta.²⁷² After many days in jail, Marian and James were brought before the city magistrates who then ordered the Christians to be sent to Lambesa to be forced to sacrifice under the watchful eye of the *legatus* of Numidia (called a "mad prefect") C. Macrinus Decianus.²⁷³

on account of the universal franchise. Torture and hard labor, two punishments meted out to non-citizens and slaves, now became a penalty to which Roman citizens could be subject.

²⁶⁷ Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 80.1 (Tr. Sis. R.B. Donna). Millar (1977: 182-3); Sordi (1986: 111); Beard et al. (2004: 292).

²⁶⁸ Sage (1975: 347-8); Kelly (1966: 31-68).

²⁶⁹ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 7.11.14-16.

²⁷⁰ *Acta Proconsulaia Sancti Cypriani*. 3-4 in Musurillo (1972: 168-75); Sage (1975: 348-52).

²⁷¹ *Passio Sanctorum Mariani et Iacobi*. 2.1-3 in Musurillo (1972: 194-213); Sage (1975: 352-3).

²⁷² *Passio Sanctorum Mariani et Iacobi*. 5.1-5 in Musurillo (1972: 194-213).

²⁷³ *Passio Sanctorum Mariani et Iacobi*. 9-10 in Musurillo (1972: 194-213); Christol (2002: 259-69).

Marian and James were beheaded in a valley near the river Pagydus for their failure to sacrifice. A bloody revolt at Carthage caused the procurator Solon to arrest and execute eight local Christian notables instead of the guilty rioters. Those apprehended were Montanus and Lucius along with their companions Flavian, Julian, Victoricus, Primolus, Renus, and Donatianus, who were Cyprian's clergy.²⁷⁴ All were beheaded. As for those unfortunates who had been condemned to the mines, no supplementary legislation was necessary and the Numidian bishops had probably already died before the second Valerianic edict was promulgated.²⁷⁵

Other than the Numidians, ordinary Christians were not affected by Valerian's second order.²⁷⁶ It is interesting to see that the Valerianic rescripts targeting the Christian clergy were surprisingly efficient. With the exception of the few condemned to the mines, Christians who did not occupy a high status went unnoticed. If there had been an empire-wide effort to stamp out the Church in all levels of society, as was the case during the era of the tetrarchy, then all Christians regardless of social status would have been targeted. The source recounting the martyrdom of the Spanish bishop Fructuosus indicates that once night fell, local Christians entered the amphitheatre where the execution had taken place, and poured wine to quench the flames of the smoldering remains and collected the ashes.²⁷⁷ Perhaps this occurred because the pagan populace was indifferent? The source mentions that the pagans who came to witness the trial and execution of Fructuosus and his companions sympathized with the bishop as he was "much beloved by pagans and Christians alike."²⁷⁸ The martyrs from North Africa, Marian, James, Montanus, and Lucius did not fare so well in the eyes of local pagans. The magistrates at Cirta encouraged the torture of Marian and James, while at Carthage a mob followed the proceedings and shouted that the condemned Christians be tortured.²⁷⁹

Martyrdom also occurred in Roman Europe during this period. At Rome, bishop Sixtus and four deacons were arrested and executed. The charge against them was their refusal to stop congregating in cemeteries.²⁸⁰ Mentioned above, in Hispania the second edict of Valerian led to

²⁷⁴ *Passio Sanctorum Montani et Lucii*. 2 in Musurillo (1972: 214-39); Sage (1975: 353).

²⁷⁵ Selinger (2002: 93).

²⁷⁶ Schwarte (1989: 148-50).

²⁷⁷ *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Fructuosi Episcopi, Auguri et Eulogi Diaconorum*. 6.11-18 in Musurillo (1972: 176-85).

²⁷⁸ *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Fructuosi Episcopi, Auguri et Eulogi Diaconorum*. 3.20-23 in Musurillo (1972: 176-85).

²⁷⁹ *Passio Sanctorum Mariani et Iacobi*. 5-6 in Musurillo (1972: 194-213); *Passio Sanctorum Montani et Lucii*. 13, 18, 20 in Musurillo (1972: 214-39).

²⁸⁰ Cyprian. *Epistulae*. 80.1.4

the apprehension of the bishop Fructuosus and the deacons Augurius and Eulogius by soldiers and their eventual execution on 21 January 259 under the consulship of Aemelianus and Bassus.²⁸¹

In 260, after several years of defending the eastern provinces from the Goths and the Sassanian Empire, a truce was arranged between Valerian and the Sassanian king Shapur I. Unfortunately for Valerian, Shapur used the meeting to seize the Roman emperor as a prisoner.²⁸² Following the death of Valerian, Gallienus revoked the anti-Christian legislation of his father, granting the Church forty years of peace. The edict of toleration by Gallienus permitted Christians to openly profess their faith, accumulate wealth, rise to high rank, and recover property that had been confiscated.²⁸³

Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, it can be suggested that an inquisitorial approach to the Christian Church occurred during the middle of the third century. The reign of the Severan dynasty, though not a time of overt persecution, was still a period in which popular hostilities towards Christians existed much in the same fashion as during the first and second century. Emperor Septimius Severus did not direct any centrally-planned initiative against the Church. The promulgation of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* by his son, the Emperor Caracalla in 212, though conferring Roman Citizenship to all the freedmen in the empire, also possessed a religious component by which all new citizens would be united in traditional Roman religious practices. The *Constitutio Antoniniana* would lay the legislative foundations which permitted Emperor Decius to enact his edict of universal sacrifices. During his short reign, Christians became prosecuted, not persecuted as the legislative action of Decius did not intend to solely target the Christian community. Furthermore, the martyrdom of Pionius at Smyrna, along with the bishop Fructuosos in Hispania, suggest that the opinions of pagans may have started to change in relation to the Christians. When observing the mob at Smyrna, during the second century they bayed for the blood of Polycarp, whereas when Christians were apprehended in the mid-third century, one can suggest that the common populace needed imperial initiatives in order

²⁸¹ *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Fructuosi Episcopi, Auguri et Eulogi Diaconorum*. 1-2 in Musurillo (1972: 176-85).

²⁸² Lactantius. *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. 5. The emperor, according to the colorful (and possibly dubious) description from Lactantius, died in captivity, was skinned, and stuffed with straw to be displayed by the Sassanian ruler as a human trophy.

²⁸³ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 7.13.1.

to be emboldened enough to anti-Christian sentiment. When Valerian ascended to the throne, he implemented a more thorough inquisitorial program with the composition of two imperial letters to the senate. This emperor was concerned with stamping out the Christian community by persecuting its leaders. As we will see in the following chapter, the desire to construct a more spiritually unified empire, itself holding dominion over a heterogeneous population, will conclude with the creation of a political theology by the tetrarchic regime of Diocletian and his colleagues, which would usher in the bloodiest persecution ever brought upon the Christian community

Chapter 3

Diocletian, the Tetrarchy, and the Great Persecution

The Third Century Crisis came to an abrupt end with the coup d'état of Diocletian against the dynasty of Emperors Carus, Carinus and Numerian between 283 and 284.²⁸⁴ Within the first two sections of this chapter, we will observe that the emperors of the late third and early fourth century renewed the Roman Empire after nearly fifty years of civil strife. They sought to construct a political theology in an effort to strengthen and maintain the *pax deorum*, along with utilizing art and architecture to demonstrate the unity of the ruling college. With the reconfiguration of the state, the trappings of the principate was cast away and the era of the dominate began. What we will see is that one's adherence to the political theology of the empire came to be associated with loyalty to the Roman order. This would have consequences for the Christian community. As we have already discussed, the religious practices of the Christians were perceived as being in opposition to the cosmological view of the universe and Rome's place in it. Therefore, the Great Persecution was undertaken by the tetrarchic college in order to stamp-out the community. Furthermore, the attitudes of the non-elite pagan populace of the empire will be observed and it will be suggested that many had come to view the Christians sympathetically. In order to demonstrate that the opinions of non-Christians changed, the martyr Acts, Passions, Letters, and Speeches from this period which are less prone to literary exaggeration and possessing factual accuracy will be reviewed individually and chronologically.

The End of the Third Century Crisis

The war of Diocletian against his predecessors would usher in a new regime, a "rule of four," which effectively ended the military anarchy of the third century.²⁸⁵ Unity and reorganization was attempted through the creation of a permanent ruling college in order to

²⁸⁴ For accounts of the ancient historians see Eutropius. *Breviarium*. 9.18-20; Aurelius Victor. *De Caesaribus*. 38.3; Festus. *Breviarium*. 25. For modern overviews concerning the rise of Diocletian see Barnes (1981: 4); Williams (1985: 35636); Bowman (2005: 67-69); Harries (2012: 27). Emperor Marcus Aurelius Carus met his end while campaigning against the Sassanian Empire outside the city of Ctesiphon. The propaganda of the usurper Diocletian claiming he fell victim to a lightning strike. Numerian, the successor of Carus, was discovered dead in his coach once his army reached Bithynia. Diocletian was proclaimed emperor by the troops under the command of Numerian's generals and he soon blamed the death of Numerian on Aper, the father-in-law of the dead emperor. For a full assessment concerning the suspected intrigues surrounding the death of Aper see Bird (1976: 127-32); Chastagnol (1994: 91-4). Mitchell (2009: 48-9).

²⁸⁵ Williams (1985: 65).

facilitate an effortless imperial succession, a bureaucracy by which civil and military roles were separate, and a change in the administrative divisions of the empire, followed by government intervention in the economy.

Ruling colleges had been previously attempted.²⁸⁶ Between 284 and 286, Diocletian held sole power as *augustus* before appointing Maximian as his colleague. Under this division, Diocletian ruled as *augustus* in the east while Maximian governed the west as co-*augustus*. In 293 Diocletian appointed Galerius as a junior partner, or *caesar* in the east, while Constantius Chlorus joined Maximian as *caesar* in the west. The arrangement of these four men, two *augusti* aided by two *caesares*, remained until 305, though there was no fixed division of the empire.²⁸⁷ The ruling college permitted the four emperors to focus on securing the borders while allowing for a predictable and stable imperial succession. The tetrarchs defeated foreign incursions along the borders, contended with usurpers in Britain and Egypt between 297 to 298, and in 299 the chief *augustus*, Diocletian, signed a peace treaty with the Sassanian Persians.²⁸⁸

The reforms of Diocletian altered the concept of a Roman ruler. Gone were the plain-robed, senatorial emperors who sought to cast themselves as an Augustus, Trajan or Antoninus Pius. Diocletian and the tetrarchs no longer sought to be the *principes* of old - the "first amongst

²⁸⁶ To treat Diocletian's government as wholly original is wrong. For precedents of shared imperial rule see Harries (2012: 31-2). The appointment of Maximian as co-*augustus* was already an established practice. One area by which Diocletian garnered novelty is on the effort placed on the college and the desire to overturn the state of Augustus, establishing a more centralized method of succession, and later, retiring. Diocletian's cabal of four leaders would not have seemed politically odd. It followed a long line of other historical instances in which a sovereign shared power. Precedents of shared imperial rule occurred as early as the first century AD with the Flavian dynasty of Vespasian and his son Titus as *caesar*. The second century witnessed the partnership between Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (the *divi fratres*) as joint *augusti*; the death of Verus prompting Marcus Aurelius to share power with his son Commodus. Septimius Severus bestowed the title of *augustus* upon his son Caracalla, while two familial dynasties from the Third Century Crisis, those of Valerian and his son Gallienus along with the dynasty of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian, are also examples of collegial rule. Leadbetter (2009: 5-6) has argued that Diocletian, his co-rulers, along with ancient historians contemporary with the events never called the new state a tetrarchy, and that such a term, as applied to the Diocletianic regime is modern.

²⁸⁷ L'Orange (1965: 42-5); Williams (1985: 65-68); Chastagnol (1994: 99-104); Van Dam (2007: 228, 239); Corcoran (2012: 40-5). New administrative centers were established in Nicomedia, Mediolanum, Antioch, and Trier, which were closer to the frontiers than the traditional capital at Rome. Although it can be suggested that Diocletian did not wish to impose a rigid territorial division of the Empire, much points to the suggestion that a "rule of four," in which two senior *augusti* would retire and appoint their junior *caesares* to the top imperial post respectively, may have been his aim. The main objective for the territorial divisions of the empire was a desire for a manageable division of imperial powers. For more on the manageable division of power see Aurelius Victor. *De Caesaribus*. 39.30; Mitchell (2007: 55).

²⁸⁸ Chastagnol (1994: 101-2); Bowman (2005: 70-74). The tetrarchy defeated the Sarmatians, the Gallic Bagaudae, the Carpi, the Alamanni, and Galerius was able to successfully defend the eastern borders against threats from the Sassanian Empire.

equals" - but rather absolute *domini* (masters) separated from their subjects. This may have been an attempt to orientalize the monarchy.²⁸⁹ This will be explored in greater depth later.

Diocletian enlarged the bureaucracy and separated both civil and military roles within the government by 300, continuing a trend that had started in the previous half-century of political anarchy.²⁹⁰ The bureaucracy was effectively professionalized and militarized, though some have attributed the final stages of these reforms to Constantine.²⁹¹

The army was also affected by the new regime, though all of Diocletian's achievements are difficult to assess because much of the information that has come down to modern historians is from the reign of Constantine. The army was increased in size, much to the chagrin of the historian Lactantius.²⁹² Generally speaking, Diocletian focused on the frontier areas, though no large scale constructions can be discerned, and increased professionalization through the strengthening of elite forces and the creation of the *auxilia palatina* and the *scholae*.²⁹³ Barbarians were recruited in larger numbers following problems which arose from payments related to the *aurum tironicum*, or recruitment money.²⁹⁴ Furthermore, during this period troops were billeted in greater numbers in or near towns along the frontiers than in previous centuries.

²⁸⁹ Aurelius Victor. *De Caesaribus*. 39.4; Eutropius. *Brevarium*. 9.26; Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 15.5.18; Stern (1954: 184-9).

²⁹⁰ Lo Cascio (2005 a: 156-69).

²⁹¹ Carrié et al. (1999: 184-88); Mitchell (2007: 165). Diocletian continued the division of power between the civilian and military posts of the Roman Empire with the appearance of armed forces under the command of a *magister militum* (master of soldiers) along with other senior commanders like the *comites* and *duces* (an equestrian officer), and civilian matters under a *praeses*. Elton (2006: 330) attributes the changes to Constantine. MacMullen (1967: 49-50, 54-70) argues that during this period, the word "militia", though never losing its original definition, became synonymous with accountants, secretaries, and record keepers. Furthermore, the responsibilities of soldiers during the fourth century was a far cry from the Antonine age in which soldiers had limited activities outside the army. With the rise of the Severan dynasty, soldiers wrested jurisdiction from the civil government; the civil government never being able to regain those powers again. One of the most important new roles that soldiers assumed was the collection of taxes. The aggressive tax collection of the later Roman empire, now in the hands of the army, may have cast soldiers as the principle enemy of the pockets of the ordinary citizenry. The rise of the militarized bureaucracy enabled the rise of more civilian jobs handled by procurators with military backgrounds, whom in turn would bestow favors to fellow military men. By the time of the Diocletianic Tetrarchy, men of military stock were solely sought out for the position of *procurator*.

²⁹² Lactantius. *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. 7.2-3; Depeyrot (2012: 240-1).

²⁹³ Speidel (1996: 163-70); Southern (2001: 155, 158); Le Bohec (2006: 16).

²⁹⁴ Landowners, or associations of smaller land holders, had to pay a sum based on the size of their property or furnish one or more recruits. Normally, landowners would send the state recruits from the class of *coloni* (peasants) or from their stock of slaves. Very often money was paid to the imperial authorities in order that landowners could keep their workers and slaves, suggesting that the frequent monetary levies forced the state to press barbarians into service. For ancient sources describing the practice see, *Codex Theodosianus*. 7.13.7, 7.13.20; Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 19.11.7. For modern assessments see, Brunt (1990: 213); Cosme (1998: 207); Nicasie (1998: 94-96).

This trend became more widespread during the fourth century and will be explored later on in the chapter.

With the reorganization of the Roman Empire, each ruler headed his own administration, even if Diocletian was the nominal head of the college. The number of provinces in the empire was doubled to 101 and for the first time Italy lost its non-provincial status. The provinces were grouped into twelve larger units called dioceses (*dioecesis*) supervised by a vicar (*vicarius*). The vicars answered to praetorian prefects. *Praesides*, or governors, were entrusted with administering justice and collecting taxes.²⁹⁵ With smaller administrative units under Diocletian to contend with, governors concentrated more on regional issues and were more militarily secure and better able to collect taxes. The older system of taxation from the *principate* was disorganized in many places and thus became easier to manage. The reforms of Diocletian altered tax collection from 297 onwards as imperial taxation was standardized, made more equitable, and levied at higher rates.²⁹⁶ In November of 301, Diocletian issued the Edict on Maximum Prices, which was an attempt at curbing the maximum prices charged for goods and services, even though the overall welfare of the army was paramount when it came to the purchasing of goods for military purposes. Forty epigraphic versions of the edict survive, but (so far) the dissemination of the edict is known to historians from only five provinces: Egypt, Achaia, Crete, Cyrenaica, and Caria and Phrygia. Lactantius was very critical of the edict and attacked it as a failure.²⁹⁷

What we have observed is the drive for the reorganization of the Roman state by Diocletian and his colleagues following the anarchy of the third century. The new state of Rome was further altered when the ruling college created a political theology in order to secure their hold on the empire and strengthen the *pax deorum*.

²⁹⁵ L'Orange (1965: 53-5). For a more recent overview of provincial developments, see the appendices to chapter eight in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Wilkes (2005: 704-13). Corcoran (2012: 46-9).

²⁹⁶ L'Orange (1965: 55-8); Williams (1985: 191-21, 126-39); Carrié et al. (1999: 190-210); Lo Cascio (2005 b: 170-83); Goldsworthy (2009: 169); Harries (2012: 51, 61). Taxes became assessed in two units: the land tax (*tributum soli*) and the poll tax (a tax of heads, the *tributum capitis*). The term *capitio* meant different things in different provinces: in Egypt only men were counted, as opposed to both men and women in Syria and Illyricum. Regardless of the local variations between provinces, a uniform system was imposed throughout the whole empire. It is totally unclear how the whole system functioned. What is known is that many of the taxes were levied in the form of goods, which in turn helped to protect the system from inflation. Both payment and provisioning for soldiers in the army, whose prominence in Roman life during this period had increased significantly.

²⁹⁷ Lactantius. *De mortibus Persecutorum*. 7.6-7; L'Orange (1965: 58-62); Duncan-Jones (1990: 105-17); Corcoran (2000: 209); Corcoran (2012: 50); Harries (2012: 65-70).

The Tetrarchs - Renewal of Tradition?

Within this section, it will be suggested that the reigning tetrarchs, following their recalibration of the state, altered traditional Roman piety and established a political theology in an effort to reinforce the unity of the empire through an assertion of divine protection, the codification of Roman law, and the sponsoring panegyrics, along with art and architecture.²⁹⁸ Furthermore, the tetrarchic political theology, itself an evolution from the previous attempts by Roman rulers to synchronize the cults of the empire, continued to act as a litmus test of loyalty to the Roman order and who was a "good" Roman and who was not. As mentioned previously, Christian religious practices feel outside of what was considered acceptable and therefore a persecution would be enacted against them.

The tetrarchs styled themselves *domini* as opposed to *principes*. Centuries before, the Roman Republic had spread eastwards and absorbed the Hellenistic states once ruled by kings who had appropriated the court ceremonials of oriental despots. When Augustus had defeated Mark Antony and Cleopatra, the first Roman emperor could have dropped the trappings of a conservative republican and ended his association with the senate. Instead, Augustus chose not to be elevated above his soldiers and the senate by openly associating himself with the divine, as had been the case with Alexander the Great and his successors. Such a move on the part of Augustus could have curtailed the power of his generals, but such an act would have been politically unpopular.²⁹⁹ Rome was to be ruled by men, not living gods. Only after he died did the senate have him deified.³⁰⁰ Augustus was not concerned with religious reformation or the deepening of faith. The religious actions of Augustus were, in the words of J. Scheid, "merely a reaction against the neglect of the public ritual duties and of temples, due to the disorders of the civil wars. And these restorations were part of his political goals." Such a topic is too large in scope to be fully explored here, but one thing must be noted. Augustus, presenting the Roman people with a restored emphasis on cult practices that he claimed had been neglected by his enemies, gave himself the political opportunity to display his *pietas* towards the gods. Roman religion was highly ritualistic and *pietas* had nothing to do with faith or salvation, but was concerned with giving the gods their proper honors.³⁰¹ Augustus was careful not to align his

²⁹⁸ "Reinforcing the unity of the empire" is taken from Kahlos (2009: 31).

²⁹⁹ Eder (2005: 18-27); Van Dam (2007: 231).

³⁰⁰ De Palma Digeser (2000: 21-2).

³⁰¹ Cf. Scheid (2005: 177).

image too much with the divine and only permitted himself to be associated with Apollo and dedicated a temple to the divine Julius Caesar.³⁰² Only the worship of his genius and his household gods would be permitted at Rome and such rituals would go on to become the foundations for the imperial cult that proliferated in the Greek east, while also being present to a lesser degree in the west.³⁰³

In the previous chapter, it was discussed that Severan jurists were tasked into bringing most the empire's cults into syncretism through the promulgation of the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. When Rome expanded, many gods from neighboring Greece were equated with their Italic variants, along with old deities from Syria and Anatolia, though the Romans still considered some barbaric.³⁰⁴ The *Constitutio Antoniniana* had two indirect consequences: Roman citizenship made the Roman gods and the emperor more central and important in the lives of citizens and accentuated the sense of what it meant to be "Roman." Pagan attitudes to the emerging new order which placed increasing importance on the Roman gods within the imperial center can be seen with two inscriptions from the empire's periphery and with the appearance of a civic temple to Zeus Kapitoliios at Ptolemais Euergetis in the Egyptian Fayum.

The civic temple to Zeus Kapitoliios is significant because cults to Zeus Kapitoliios (along with games called "Kapitolia") were previously only found scattered throughout Asia Minor and Greece and were tied to either *coloniae* or cities with strong links to Rome. One thing to keep in mind is that between the end of the Augustan era and the second century, new *coloniae* were rarely created. Roman citizenship continued to be granted during the early part of the *principate*, but spread dramatically following the promulgation of the 212 *Constitutio Antoniniana*. The cult temple to Zeus Kapitoliios in the Egyptian Fayum was erected after the 212 edict. This suggests that provincials were responding to the religious rhetoric of Caracalla on account of "Kapitolios" being used to connect Ptolemais Euergetis to Rome because the capital city possessed the temple

³⁰² Scheid (2005: 178).

³⁰³ Wardman (1982: 67-79); Fishwick (1991: 7, 9263, 97-149, 230). Fishwick states that the first western cults outside Italy in honor of Augustus were established around 19 BC in north-western Hispania. Within the western provinces, only twice was the imperial cult commission on account of a provincial initiative and both times the cities requesting a cult were from Iberia during the reign of Tiberius. Furthermore, western variations of the imperial cult, *concordia*, emerged on the part of provincial elites in an effort to Romanize themselves. Between 12 and 10 BC, the first Roman cult center to emerge in the western provinces was in Lugdunum. For the Iberian city of Tarraco requesting a cult on account of provincial initiative see Tacitus. *Annales*. 1.78. For the imperial cults in north-western Hispania see Pliny. *Naturalis Historia*. 4.111; For Augustus associated with Apollo see Suetonius. *Divus Augustus*. 52-53.

³⁰⁴ Mattingly (1942: 172).

of Jupiter Capitalinus. The adherents of Zeus Kapitolios in the Egyptian Fayum engaged in sacrifices for January 1, Rome's birthday, eight times for the reigning emperor and twice for his father and mother. Though connected to Rome religiously, on the one hand the people in the Fayum signaled their foreignness by using the un-Roman "Kapitolios" while also celebrating local Egyptian gods (Souchos, Harpokrates, the Nile, and Serapis), and on the other hand integrated themselves into the Roman religious order.³⁰⁵

The two inscriptions from the empire's periphery, Apulum in Dacia and Cologne in the north, are significant because these places were subject to widespread violence. Both inscriptions were both set up "for the safety of the empire." It is from these two inscriptions that one can suggest that the Roman Empire had become a much clearer entity, commanded loyalty from its citizens, and that some people felt the empire was under threat.³⁰⁶ Diocletian, lacking any legitimizing power other than the army, which could overthrow him, revisited the idea of a political theology of divine association previously begun by Emperor Aurelian who had shown a preference for Sol Invictus (the unconquered Sun).³⁰⁷ Emperor Aurelian believed that such a move would give the empire greater stability.

From 271 to 273, Emperor Aurelian believed, like many rulers before him, that he enjoyed a special relationship with Jupiter, chief of the Roman pantheon.³⁰⁸ During the latter part of his reign, copper coins were minted with the emperor's portrait on the obverse and the image of the god on the reverse. But in 274, Aurelian effectively broke with previous Roman tradition when he returned from the east after defeating the Palmyrene Empire in 273. The emperor ordered a temple dedicated to Sol Invictus to be erected on the Campus Agrippae and instituted a new college of priests, the *pontifices Dei Solis*. Aurelian, in the words of J. Bardill, sought "to restore unity to the Roman world after the disasters of the 250s and 260s." Though Sol did not overtake Jupiter as the supreme Roman deity, Aurelian stressed that the chief Roman god, through Sol, made him a divine representative on earth. This can be seen on rare coins from that

³⁰⁵ Cf. Beard et al. (2004: 362-3). though not clearly specified by the authors of the book, other than being an "un-Roman 'Roman' title, "Kapitolios" is un-Roman on account of the "K," itself being Greek.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Hekster (2008: 55).

³⁰⁷ For the power of the army during this period see Aurelius Victor. *De Caesaribus*. 37.5. On the influence of soldiers and the senate see Corcoran (2000: 26-35). L'Orange (1965: 62) briefly touches upon the place of Sol Invictus within the center of Roman religion from Severan era and during the reign of Aurelian.

³⁰⁸ Sordi (1986: 122) mentions that by the reign of Gallienus, the religious concept of "solar syncretism" had begun to grow to the point that during the latter part of the third century, the selection of the strongest god became a political problem for emperors.

period, perhaps from Rome or Serdica, which bore the legend SOL DOMINVS IMPERI ROMANI - "Sol [the Sun] lord of the Roman Empire." This was the first time in Roman history that coins minted in honor of a reigning emperor expressed such sentiments and may have been a reflection of Aurelian's beliefs. Previous emperors, keeping in mind the fate of Julius Caesar, avoided claiming such a close association with the divine. Though Aurelian's death in 275 may have slowed the growth of the Sun cult as the central axis of Roman religion, the ambition to unite the empire remained and the tetrarchic college articulated and modified this idea.³⁰⁹ The emperors would not be divine, but would claim that they possessed a special relationship with the gods as there developed a tendency to link all religions to the imperial cult. Diocletian and his colleagues created a political theology centered around the traditional gods, thus reinventing Roman religion and the method by which one would show loyalty to the empire.³¹⁰

At the beginning of 286, coins were minted with the first inscriptions pointing to Diocletian's drive for divine legitimacy. Jupiter became the "savior of Augustus" (*Juppiter conservator augusti*), the master of the cosmological world protecting a terrestrial ruler.³¹¹ This drive for a political theology became more apparent the following year when both Diocletian and Maximian proclaimed themselves *Jovius* (Jupiter-like) and *Herculius* (Hercules-like) respectively.³¹² As in myth, in which the cosmological universe was ruled by Jupiter, aided by his son Hercules, so too would the early diarchy of Diocletian and Maximian be ordered. The rulers of the Roman Empire claimed legitimacy by means of their association with the gods. No longer would soldiers have the upper hand in electing their commanders to the imperial purple as divine rulers were now free to choose their own successors.³¹³ In a pre-industrial society in which belief in the divine was strong, how could simple soldiers possibly contemplate usurping the cosmic order? The tetrarchs sought to project a god-like image. Diocletian and his colleagues wore robes studded in rare jewels and encouraged prostration in their presence whereas visitors

³⁰⁹ Cf. Bardill (2012: 62-3). For images of Aurelian and Jupiter on copper coins between 271 and 273 see RIC V.1, Aurelian nos. 48, 129-32, 174, 225-8, 259-66, 346, 394-5; Watson (1999: 186-7). On the construction of the temple dedicated to Sol Invictus at Rome in 274 see Ward-Perkins (1981: 417). For the *pontifices Dei Solis* see Beard et al. (2004: 259). For Aurelian and a divine representative on earth see RIC V.1, Aurelian nos. 319-22; Watson (1999: 190-1). On Aurelian's claim to rule by divine birthright see Turcan (1978: 1032-33, 1055); Clauss (1999: 186); Watson (1999: 187-8); Fowden (2005: 558).

³¹⁰ Mattingly (1942: 175-76); L'Orange (1965: 62-3); Sordi (1986: 122). For the "reinvention of Roman religion, see Mitchell (2009: 241) who quickly notes the reform as occurring before the onset of the Great Persecution.

³¹¹ For coinage proclaiming Jupiter as the savior of Diocletian see RIC V.2, Diocletian nos. 221; De Palma Digeser (2000: 27).

³¹² Van Dam (2007: 233).

³¹³ Chastagnol (1994: 96); Van Dam (2007: 231-2); Corcoran (2012: 51).

would fall to their knees at the presence of the emperors, offering prayers and supplications. Surrounding the elevated emperors would have been an intimidating cadre of advisors and court eunuchs. Furthermore, the bureaucratized and itinerant nature of the tetrarchic regime permitted the emperors to order an *adventus* (arrival at a city) at any given moment when they sought to project their god-like splendor before their subjects, a tradition that would continue well after Diocletian retired by later emperors.³¹⁴ Such processions were highly stylized forms of imperial theatre in which a city's elite would arrive to greet and escort the emperor through the city streets lined with crowds of clapping onlookers.³¹⁵

Once the four-man tetrarchy came into fruition in 293, two Diocletianic jurists, Gregorius and Hermogenius, delivered two compilations of Roman imperial rescripts in four years (291-295), the *Codex Gregorianus* and the *Codex Hermogenianus*. Both bodies of law stressed the worship of the traditional gods as the means for continued Roman peace and unity.³¹⁶ Both jurists had drawn heavily upon the work by Ulpian, whose *Institutes* linked religious practices to the foundations of the Roman polity. The opening passage survives in the sixth-century *Digest* of Emperor Justinian:

Of this subject there are two divisions, public and private law. Public law is that which has reference to the administration of the Roman government; private law is that which concerns the interests of individuals; for there are some things which are useful to the public, and others which are of benefit to private persons. Public law has reference to sacred ceremonies, and to the duties of priests and magistrates. Private law is threefold in its nature, for it is derived either from natural precepts, from those of nations, or from those of the Civil Law.³¹⁷

Though some modern scholars have struggled with the concept of the *ius publicum* set down by Ulpian, many have increasingly come to suggest that public law defined the foundation and identity of the Roman Empire and that such laws identify the observance of divine worship as an integral part of the foundation of the state.³¹⁸

As the ruling *augusti* acquired the trappings of the divine, establishing the concept of divinely-associated rule onto a people who had experienced half a century of civil and political strife, the tetrarchic political theology expanded to include laudatory speeches (panegyrics).

³¹⁴ For the *adventus* of later emperors such as Constantine I, Theophilus, Nicephorus II, and Constantine IX (to name a few) see McCormick (1986: 84, 92-3, 147, 156, 169, 197, 209-10, 233).

³¹⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*.10.1-3; Rees (2004: 48).

³¹⁶ Honoré (1994: 163681, 191); Corcoran (2000: 25-42); De Palma Digeser (2000: 3-4, 27); Hekster (2008: 48); Corcoran (2012: 50-1).

³¹⁷ *Digesta*. 1.1.1.2, as cited in De Palma Digeser (2006: 70), though the translation of the Justinianic *Digesta* (1.1.2) is that of S.P. Scott.

³¹⁸ Leuregans (1975: 225-57); Anselmo (1983: 445-787); De Palma Digeser (2006: 69-70).

Observing the surviving twelve Latin Panegyrics (*Panegyrici Latini*) from Late Antiquity, one can see the political theology, divinity, and collegial unity of the ruling *augusti* best illustrated within panegyrics ten and eleven, both dedicated to Maximian: the *Panegyric of Maximian* and the *Genethliacus of Maximian Augustus*. The two Gaulic panegyrics from around 291 commemorate the success of the emperor.³¹⁹ Both proclaim emperor Maximian as "most sacred emperor" (*sacratissime imperator*) four and ten times respectively.³²⁰ Both orations describe the emperor as "invincible" (*imperator inuicte*), along with his fraternal association with Diocletian as the earthly embodiment of the relationship between Jupiter and Hercules.³²¹

The collegial image of the tetrarchs can also be seen in surviving works of art and architecture. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of surviving tetrarchic portraiture are the statue groups of the tetrarchs in St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice and the Vatican in Rome. The unity of the college is most striking when observing the Venetian porphyry group because the emperors are sculpted with identical stern visages, harsh angles, and clasp each other in fraternal union with their rights hands while gripping the hilt of their swords with their left - an image of martial initiative. The tetrarchic statue groups sought to portray a union of rulers, group *concordia*, and a ruling college who possessed the ability to overcome the harsh trails of an empire reeling from civil strife. Individuality was suppressed in favor of group equilibrium.³²²

The Arch of Galerius in Salonica, though heavily eroded, is one of the best surviving tetrarchic monuments and once formed a part of the emperor's palace. The arch is triumphal in nature and was constructed in order to celebrate victory over the Persians in 297. On the arch's eastern face are carved reliefs depicting a Roman cavalry charge, the capture of a harem, and the flight of the Persian army. On the southern face, a battle scene is depicted followed by the submission of the enemy army and the *adventus* of the victorious tetrarch. One again, the identity of the individual tetrarchs is suppressed. On the east face of the south pier, a carved panel depicts a ceremonial sacrifice conducted by Galerius and Diocletian. On the north face of the south pier,

³¹⁹ Nixon, et al. (1994: 41, 76); Van Dam (2007: 235-6).

³²⁰ *sacratissime imperator* in *Panegyrici Latini* 10 (2), 1.1, 1.5, 8.6, 13.5; in *Panegyrici Latini* 11(3), 1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 3.8, 5.1, 6.1, 8.5, 13.1, 15.3, 19.1.

³²¹ For *imperator* (or *principes*) *inuicte* see the *Panegyrici Latini*. 10(2), 1.4, 7.6, 11.1. For Tetrarchic divinity and connection to the divine Hercules see the *Panegyrici Latini* . 10(2), 1.1-4, 2.1, 2.3, 4.2, 11.2-3, 11.6-7, 13.3, 13. 4; the *Panegyrici Latin* . 11(3), 3.4-6, 4.2, 6.1-3, 6.7, 10.4, 10.5, 11.1-5, 14.4, 16.2, 17.4, 19.3. For the fraternal bond between Maximian and Diocletian as an earthly embodiment of the association between Hercules and Jupiter see the *Panegyrici Latini* . 10(2), 3.1-2, 8.6, 9.1-2, 9.3-5, 11.1-1, 13.1-3; the *Panegyrici Latini*. 11(3), 3.4-5, 6.1-3, 6.7, 7.1-1, 10.5, 11.1-5, 14.4, 16.2.

³²² L'Orange (1965: 46-53); Rees (1993: 183); Rees (2004: 49,72-6).

the four emperors are depicted. The senior *augusti*, Diocletian and Maximian are seated upon thrones, flanked by their junior *caesares*, Galerius and Constantius. Though the arch celebrates the victory of Galerius over the Persians, the monument is not solely dedicated to Galerius alone, but permits the other members of the imperial college to partake in the victory, reflecting group unity.³²³

It can be suggested that the tetrarchic drive for political and theological unity developed from a belief that the Roman Empire was in dire need of a renewal after a half century of strife. Unlike Decius and Valerian, both of whom sought to impose religious uniformity through actions and legislation, Diocletian had been in power for nearly twenty years before his thoughts turned to the persecution of religious minorities. In either 296 or 302, the Roman state enacted measures against the Manichaeans, followers of the Babylonian prophet Mani who were believed to be supporters of the Sassanian Empire.³²⁴ Diocletian condemned the religious community as un-Roman fifth columnists who practiced depraved rites.³²⁵ Diocletian ordered the apprehension and immolation of many Manichaeans and their sacred scriptures.³²⁶ The burning of books had long been seen as an ancient civic ritual of purification which transmitted to the masses of the empire the religious and ideological message of the emperor.³²⁷ After the tetrarchy had burned the scriptures of the Manichaeans, they soon turned their attention to the Christians.

The Great Persecution

The Great Persecution has usually been described as occurring in two installments: 303-305, which ended with the retirement of Diocletian and Maximian, and 306-313 culminating in the edict of toleration promulgated by Constantine and Licinius. Within this analysis, we will observe that the Great Persecution can be seen as tripartite: 303-305, 306-313, with a re-ignited persecution under Licinius in the east between 316 to 324. Before the first stage of the persecution, Christians had already drawn the ire of the tetrarchs, but no empire-wide initiative had been enacted. The chief *augustus* had already appointed many Christians to high rank along with his own wife and daughter being sympathetic to the movement. Lactantius suggests that the

³²³ Cf. Rees (1993: 181-2) who cites Kinch (1890: 11); Van Dam (2007: 240-1).

³²⁴ L'Orange (1965: 65); Sordi (1986: 124-5). According to Rees (2004: 58), who cites Barnes (1982: 55) and Corcoran (2000: 135-6), the letter on the Manichaeans is now to be put at 31 March 302, discounting 297, which used to be the preferred date, while 287 and 307 are still unlikely.

³²⁵ *Comparison of the Laws of Moses and the Romans*. 3 in Lee (2000: 66-7, 3.2).

³²⁶ *Comparison of the Laws of Moses and the Romans*. 6 in Lee (2000: 66-7, 3.2). see Chuvin (1990:18).

³²⁷ Sarefield (2008: 160); Herrin (2009: 209).

origins of the tetrarchic persecution lay in the military purge of 299 when both Diocletian and Galerius were in Antioch following their campaign against the Sassanian Empire.³²⁸ At Antioch, Diocletian and Galerius consulted *haruspices* in an attempt at divination. Both ecclesiastical writers, Lactantius and Eusebius give similar accounts. Lactantius asserted that the chief *haruspex* claimed that "profane persons were present at the sacred ceremonies."³²⁹ Christians within the imperial retinue were accused of making the sign of the cross and disturbing the process of divination, causing Diocletian to fly into a rage. He declared that all members of the imperial court had to perform sacrifices. Both emperors then sent letters to their military officers demanding that the army and *palatium* display pagan piety by sacrificing to the gods or face discharge. According to Lactantius, following Diocletian's orders, nothing else was done in relation to the Christians.³³⁰ Eusebius recounted the event in a more detailed manner and stated that nearly all soldiers unquestionably performed sacrifices in order to preserve their rank and privileges, save one or two.³³¹

For the years 302 to 303, modern historians are at odds as to which emperor, Diocletian or Galerius, was the chief instigator of the Great Persecution and whether or not philosophers at court may have engaged in anti-Christian lobbying. Though this will not be of major importance, some attention will be given to this topic before moving forward. Amongst scholars, and the current prevailing theory, the persecution occurred because Galerius came to dominate an aging

³²⁸ Potter (2014: 330) cites both Eusebius and Lactantius who give the names of those within the imperial service who were Christians. Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 7.32.3, 8.1.4 (Dorotheus), 8.1.4 (Gorgonius), 8.6.2-4 (Peter), 8.9.7 (Philoromus), 8.11.2 (Adauctus). For Diocletian's daughter Valeria and his wife Prisca, see Lactantius. *De mortibus persecutorum*. 15.2. When discussing the time the emperor took in finally dealing with the Christians, Davies (1989: 92) in his dissenting view on Diocletian being the chief instigator of the persecution (and not Galerius) suggests that Egypt, one of the more populous provinces, was heavily Christianizing and the Persian Empire (at that time) treated its Christians moderately well. After the Egyptian revolt and the peace with Persia, Diocletian could afford to lose some soldiers. In the eye of Diocletian, Christianity was the antithesis to *Romanitas*, and therefore, needed to be wiped-out.

³²⁹ Lactantius. *De mortibus persecutorum*. 10.3-4 (Tr. J.L. Creed).

³³⁰ Lactantius. *Institutiones Divinae*. 27.4-5; Lactantius. *De mortibus persecutorum*. 10. 5; Millar (1977; 574); Lane Fox (2006: 594).

³³¹ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 8.4.2-4. Two modern scholars, Peter Davies and David Woods take different stances on the accounts of both Lactantius and Eusebius. Davies (1989: 92) suggests that although Eusebius was describing the same episode as Lactantius, he may have acquired knowledge about the events at the imperial palace at Antioch from second-hand sources. Furthermore, Davies claims that the responsibility for purging the army of Christians lays at the feet of Galerius and not Diocletian as the chief *augustus* had left his army in Egypt to put down a rebellion and the Antiochenes would have assumed that Galerius, who had stationed his army at Antioch, was the prime instigator of the purge. Woods (2001: 588-9) asserts that passages from Eusebius' *Chronicon* were corrupted upon their translation into Latin from Greek and that the original text referred to military martyrs at a fort in Betthorus (modern day El-Lejjun, Jordan).

Diocletian.³³² Furthermore, the piety of the chief *augustus* may have played a part as Diocletian sent a *haruspex* to consult the oracle of Apollo at Didyma to ask whether action against the Christians should be taken as he wished to avoid violently repressing the community for fear of a tarnished legacy.³³³ According to Lactantius, Apollo replied that the emperor should treat Christianity "as one would of the enemy of the religion of God." Constantine would later claim that Diocletian was the more zealous persecutor within the pages of Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*.³³⁴ One dissenting view, that of P. Davies, argues that Diocletian was the instigator of the Great Persecution.³³⁵

Concerning the lobbying of the elite, we cannot know for sure whether philosophers were actually present at the imperial court in Nicomedia when Diocletian presided over the persecution conferences of 302-303, or whether their anti-Christian works were produced within the atmosphere of tension endemic of the late third and early fourth centuries.³³⁶ During the period, Lactantius and Eusebius claim two philosophers were prominent: Hierocles and Porphyry. Both ecclesiastical writers appear to place Hierocles at Nicomedia, claiming that the philosopher presented his anti-Christian arguments to the emperors while also being politically influential during this period. Furthermore, Lactantius states that an unnamed "pamphleteer," who was a priest of the highest god and a preacher of abstinence, was also present at the conference. This may have been Porphyry as the Neoplatonist philosopher had previously written a text entitled *On Abstinence from Animal Food*.³³⁷ Perhaps viewing the events at court within a "pagan versus Christian" dualistic approach is far too simplistic and maybe that the Late Antique

³³² Perhaps the anti-Christian sentiment of Galerius stemmed from his lower position in relation to the other emperor, as Lactantius states that he desired a more prominent place in the imperial hierarchy if Diocletian died or retired. Possibly megalomaniacal in nature and wanting to be seen as a second Romulus or "son of Mars." Furthermore, his mother Romula had been vehemently anti-Christian as she had been a pagan priestess in Dacia. On the suggestion that Galerius wanted to climb the imperial hierarchy and his desire to be seen as a second Romulus, see Lactantius. *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. 9.9. For the mother of Galerius as a Dacian priestess, see Lactantius. *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. 11.1-2.

³³³ Frend (1965: 489); Kahlos (2009: 32-3).

³³⁴ Lactantius. *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. 11.7; Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 2.50-1. Constantine places the blame of the final decision to persecute the Christians on Diocletian and does not mention Galerius. For the suggestion that Diocletian needed consultation see (1981: 15-27); Corcoran (2000: 260-2); Lane Fox (2006: 595); Mitchell (2009: 65); Humphries (2009: 24-5); Kahlos (2009: 32-3); Potter (2014: 330).

³³⁵ Davies (1989: 66-94) Davies argues that Diocletian was not as "passive" as would have been earlier believed and may have taken a more active role in the enactment of anti-Christian legislation.

³³⁶ Schott (2008: 52-3).

³³⁷ On the presence of Hierocles at court see Lactantius. *Institutiones Divinae*. 5.2.15; Millar (1977: 573). For the political influence of Hierocles see Eusebius. *Reply to Hierocles*. 4. On the "pamphleter" see Lactantius. *Institutiones Divinae*. 5.2.12. All are cited in Magny (2014: 5).

religious and philosophical landscape was more complex, as has been argued by both E. De Palma Digeser and B. Caseau.³³⁸ Regardless of the influence from anti-Christian philosophical schools of thought, the tetrarchs would come to enact legislation against the Christian Church.

Once Diocletian had spoken to Galerius, and consulted the oracle of Apollo at Didyma, along with his military officers, and (possibly) philosophers, the first of four anti-Christian edicts was promulgated during the festival of the Terminalia on February 23, 303 from the imperial residences at Nicomedia. The emperors decreed that all Christian holy places were to be destroyed, all Christian scriptures and property confiscated, all Christian meetings to be banned, Christian senators and *equites* to be denied exemption from juridical privileges, and torture to be employed on all accused of being Christians regardless of status.³³⁹ The main Christian church in Nicomedia, which stood directly opposite the imperial residence, was destroyed along with all its scriptures.³⁴⁰ The Great Persecution had begun. A second edict was issued in the summer which ordered the arrest of all Christian clergy in an effort to damage the Church hierarchy and expunge Christians from the echelons of the state.³⁴¹ The emperors enacted a third edict in the middle of November which coincided with Diocletian's *vicennalia* in which all imprisoned clergy would be granted a general amnesty if they were to perform a sacrifice.³⁴²

With the promulgation of the three anti-Christian edicts in 303, one can start to discern a change in pagan attitudes following the retirement of the first *augusti*, Diocletian and Maximian, and the rise of Galerius and Maximinus Daia. Below we will discuss historically authentic martyr acts, passions, letters, and speeches. Within the appendices these sources have been

³³⁸ Magny (2014: 8-9) draws observations to two works, those of De Palma Digeser (2012) and Caseau (1999). De Palma Digeser argues that on the eve of the Great Persecution Porphyry was engaged in a philosophical war with his student, Iamblichus, along with the Origenists over the right to advise emperors on shaping their legislation to conform with divine law and therefore, creating "philosopher kings." Porphyry argued against religions, such as Christianity, which claimed to hold knowledge of the divine truth and salvation. Some pagan zealots may have taken Porphyry's work and used it to persuade a lenient *augustus* to promulgate anti-Christian edicts. Caseau, on the other hand, has argued that the Christian began to overtake the Late Antique, and previously pagan, religious landscape in order to avoid sacred pollution and therefore, the logical conclusion of such a program was the appearance of a Christian emperor and administration.

³³⁹ Lactantius. *De mortibus persecutorum*. 13.1; For the enforcement of the edict in Palestine between March and April, see Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 8.2.4, 5.1. For modern assessments of the first edict see Frend (1965: 491); Sordi (1986: 127); Chuvin (1990: 18); Rees (2004: 62); Humphries (2009: 13); Khalos (2009: 32); Mitchell (2009: 65); Potter (2014: 330).

³⁴⁰ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 8.2.1; Lane Fox (2006: 595); Sarefield (2008: 167-8).

³⁴¹ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 8.2.5, 6.8-9; Frend (1965: 492); Rees (2004: 63); Humphries (2009: 13); For the Christians being removed from the elite see Kahlos (2009: 32) who cites De Ste. Croix (1954: 75-6) and Sordi (1986: 127-8).

³⁴² Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 8.2.5, 8. 6.10; Frend (1965: 492); Rees (2004: 64); Humphries (2009: 13); Kahlos (2009: 32); Potter (2014: 332).

separated into two separate charts. The first chart focuses on martyr sources which occurred throughout the empire during the Great Persecution, while the second will center on the Christians who lost their lives in Palestine, documented by Eusebius in his *De Martyribus Palaestinae*.

The persecution of the Christians in the Roman near east, such as in Palestine, was bloody. Eusebius composed *De Martyribus Palaestinae* in three versions in this order: a long recension which has survived as a Syriac translation, a shorter version, and book VIII in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, itself a shorter revision of the second composition. When recounting the deaths of the martyrs in Palestine, collected in the appendices, I have chosen to utilize the longer, Syriac version because it was the first history of the events in Palestine which Eusebius put to parchment. Furthermore, the only noticeable editorial change to the original work by succeeding editors have been, in the words of T.D. Barnes "minor verbal changes" along with a brief speech attributed to Theodosia and the miracle of Romanus being able to speak after having his tongue cut out. Eusebius did not produce a work which was meant to record *all* the instances of Christian martyrdom in the Roman near east during the period, but rather sought to write a memorial history dedicated to the victims he was acquainted with.³⁴³ Therefore, one must keep in the mind that there may well have been others who met bloody ends at the hands of the Roman authorities along with some who may have received aid from the pagan populace. The long recension of *De Martyribus Palaestinae* may be described as a snapshot of the persecutory edicts within Roman Palestine seen through the eyes of Eusebius, whom T.D. Barnes describes as bequeathing to prosperity "a written record of 'the conflicts which were illustrious' in each province."³⁴⁴

³⁴³ For a short explanation of the three versions of *De Martyribus Palaestinae* and the editorial decisions of Eusebius see Barnes (1981: 148-63) and (2010: 387- 92). Mendels (1999: 101-2) discusses the assertion by T.D. Barnes that Eusebius may have been "sloppy" in his composition of book VIII of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. He states that the history of the martyrs in Palestine was rewritten to be shorter and less complicated in order to be consumed by a larger audience. According to Patrich (2011: 259, 261-2) who cites Lawlor (1973: 179-80), the persecutions in Palestine took the form of five onslaughts against the Church during the tetrarchic Great Persecution. The first attack on the Church lasted from June to November 303, while the second and third assaults on the community were brief and occurred between March 305 to April 306. The last was long and lasted from November 307 to July 309. The last bout of persecution in Palestine lasted from November 309 to March 310. Interestingly, the martyr, Silvanus, died in 311.

³⁴⁴ Barnes (2010: 387) who cites Eusebius. *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 1.8.

When recounting the 303 execution of the first Christian martyr in Palestine, Procopius, Eusebius does not mention anything concerning the actions of the pagans or the Christians.³⁴⁵ The presence of polytheists is first described later that year, when he reports the martyrdoms of Alpheus, Zacchaeus, and Romanus. Alpheus and Zacchaeus were both executed at Caesarea while Romanus met his end at Antioch. During the trial of Alpheus, pagans are implied as being present as the condemned man begged the crowd to abandon the gods. Eusebius does not mention whether or not the pagans were incensed by Alpheus and does not mention their presence during the trial of Zacchaeus or Romanus.³⁴⁶

In Asia Minor, Athenogenes was martyred in Cappadocia. In Cappadocia, the proconsul had ordered a festival to be held in honor of the gods, much to the chagrin of the Christians in Sebastea who bore witness to the execution of Athenogenes.³⁴⁷ In African Carthage, the proconsul C. Annius Anullinus oversaw the trial and beheading of Felix. The martyr passion of Felix does not describe the actions of the pagans or Christians.³⁴⁸

During the following spring of 304, a fourth edict was promulgated ordering all inhabitants of the empire to offer sacrifices and libations in honor of the gods.³⁴⁹ That same year, Christian's were executed in Africa and Europe. In Africa, Gallonius and Crispina were martyred in Timida Regia and Theveste respectively, the former being burned alive while the latter was beheaded under the auspices of the proconsul C. Annius Anullinus.³⁵⁰ In both sources, nothing is written about the reaction of pagans or Christians. In Europe, Agapê, Irenê, and Chionê, along with Agatho, Cassia, Philippa, and Eutychia were apprehended in Saloniki, Macedonia, and executed under the prefect Dulcitus.³⁵¹ Within this *martyrum* nothing is mentioned concerning the attitudes of pagans or Christians.

In 304 Catania, Sicily, Euplius was martyred by the proconsul Calvisianus. The events recounting the martyrdom of Euplius has come down to modern researchers in both a Greek and

³⁴⁵ Eusebius. *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 1.1-2; Barnes (1981: 150-1).

³⁴⁶ Eusebius. *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 1.4-2.1; Barnes (1981: 151)

³⁴⁷ *Passio Athenogenis* in Maraval (1990: 30-83); Barnes (2010: 147-8).

³⁴⁸ *Passio Sancti Felicis Episcopi* in Musurillo (1972: 267-71).

³⁴⁹ Frend (1965: 492-3, 498-9). Humphries (2009: 13) argues that the fourth edict is probably mentioned by Lactantius in *De mortibus persecutorum*. 15.4. Corcoran (2000: 182); Rees (2004: 64); Kahlos (2009: 32); Mitchell (2009: 65); Potter (2014: 332).

³⁵⁰ *Acta Galloni* in Chiesa (1996: 241-38); *Passio Sanctae Crispinae* in Musurillo (1972: 302-9); Barnes (2010:125, 129-30, 136-7).

³⁵¹ *The Martyrdom of Saints Christians Agapê, Irenê, and Chionê at Saloniki* in Musurillo (1972: 280-93); Barnes (2010: 140).

a Latin recension. The first part of the Greek *Acta Eupli* possesses the most contemporary material for the modern researcher, though this version cuts off abruptly after a few exchanges between the governor and the accused.³⁵² The attitude of the pagan populace is not mentioned in the Greek *martyrum*, but within the Latin recension it is alleged that Christians carried away the body of the martyr and covered it with spices before burial. This is significant as one can suggest that the proconsul Calvisianus may have not have found it a problem permitting Christians to collect the body of the martyr. Though we do not know whether this was official policy or Calvisianus' own doing, the Greek version of the martyrdom is the least interpolated and the most authentic recount of Euplius' trial. Therefore one must practice caution when discussing the part played by Catania's Christians. Executions of Christians and the destruction of Church property did take place in Spain and Italy as a result of the promulgation of the February 303 edict.³⁵³ In Ferentinum, 75 kilometers south-east of Rome, scores of churches were set ablaze during this period, with the Greek *Acta Eupli* being attested as the most unaltered court transcript available for late antique Italy.³⁵⁴

Diocletian and his co-emperor Maximian retired in 305 and the persecution of the Christians ceased in the western provinces following the elevation of Constantius Chlorus and Galerius as *co-augusti* along with Flavius Valerius Severus and Maximinus Daia as *caesars* respectively. Severus, along with Constantine, the son of Constantius, both had imperial ambitions. Constantius died in a battle at York in 306 and his troops acclaimed Constantine *augustus*, though Galerius managed to calm the situation and had Severus declared *augustus* in the west and Constantine as *caesar*. Beyond the deterioration of the imperial college, blood continued to flow in Palestine with martyrs such as Timothy suffering at the hands of pagans in Gaza in 305. He was later delivered to governor Urbanus in Caesarea who had him executed by burning.³⁵⁵ In Egypt, a priest named Stephanos was tried and executed in 305 at Lenaios in the Antinoite nome during the proconsulship of Satrius Arrianus.³⁵⁶ The source is fragmentary and all that remains is Stephanos' interrogation, his sentencing and eventual condemnation to be burnt alive. The *martyrium* of Stephanos is the earliest account of a Christian martyr written in

³⁵² *Acta Eupli* in Musurillo (1972: 311-14); Barnes (2010: 126).

³⁵³ Sordi (1986: 128).

³⁵⁴ *Supplementa Italica* 1.59.

³⁵⁵ Eusebius. *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 3.1.

³⁵⁶ Van Minnen (1995: 13-38); Barnes (2010: 141-2).

Coptic and recounts the trail and death of an unknown priest in a town in Middle Egypt, whose identity was forgotten when the town disappeared.³⁵⁷

In 306, Maxentius, who had been acclaimed *augustus* by the army and the senate at Rome, granted religious toleration to all the Christians in Rome, but Galerius continued persecuting the Church in the east until 311 while Maximinus Daia pursued a similar course of action, first as *caesar* (305-309) and then as *augustus* (309-313).³⁵⁸ In the west, Constantius had not even appropriately enforced the first rounds of anti-Christian edicts in Gaul and Britain.³⁵⁹ H. Gra anin has even suggested that the fact that there were four separate anti-Christian edicts may point to the conclusion that the persecution was, at best, a failure.³⁶⁰ With the "second tetrarchy" firmly in power in 306, the eastern *augustus* Galerius and his junior *caesar* were content with continuing the persecution.³⁶¹ In 306, Maximinus Daia published his own edicts demanding all inhabitants of his eastern provinces be registered and perform sacrifices.³⁶² In 306, Apphianus suffered under Urbanus in Palestinian Caesarea, the martyr being executed by drowning. The events surrounding the death of Apphianus, described by Eusebius, does not explicably mention pagans but their presence is implied when imperial officers beat Apphianus after he had thrown himself before Urbanus who was attempting to pour a sacrificial libation.³⁶³

The following year, Agapius and Thekla were martyred in Caesarea. The 307 martyrdom is interesting because the two Christians had previously been condemned to die in a hunting spectacle staged by Urbanus in 305, before governor suspended the gruesome display in order to execute seven other Christians: two Alexanders, two Dionysii, Timotheus, Romulus, and Paesis. The seven were beheaded after they confronted the governor following the proclamation of the impending deaths of Agapius and Thekla.³⁶⁴ The deaths of Agapius and Thekla occurred on 307 during the birthday celebrations of Emperor Maximinus Daia (20 November 307) who was visiting Caesarea. The Christians are mauled by a bear in the arena before being drowned in the

³⁵⁷ Cf. Van Minnen (1995: 27). The governor of the Thebaid, Satrius Arrianus, though attested in other hagiographical texts as a persecutor, was not previously known to have been in the Thebaid as papyri name him as *praeses* until 307. See Jones et al. (1971: 14); Barnes (1982: 148).

³⁵⁸ Sordi (1986: 129); Rees (2004: 65); Kahlos (2009: 33); Corcoran (2012: 52).

³⁵⁹ De Ste. Croix (1954: 92, 95); Sordi (1986: 128).

³⁶⁰ Gra anin (2014: 151-2).

³⁶¹ Keresztes (1983: 384).

³⁶² Eusebius. *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 4.8; Frend (1965: 507); Rees (2004: 66).

³⁶³ *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 4.1-15; Frend (1965: 507); Barnes (1981: 152).

³⁶⁴ *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 3.2-4; Barnes (1981: 151).

sea.³⁶⁵ According to the work by J. Patrich, it had long been the tradition to entertain a visiting emperor with various spectacles such as singing competitions, aerobatic displays, or performances with wild beasts, which in this instance would have involved the devouring of commended Christians.³⁶⁶ Though Eusebius is silent on the opinions of the crowd, which one can easily suggest were pagan, the appearance of a reigning emperor would have drawn supporters.

The 307 trial and martyrdom of Phileas, the bishop of Thumis in Egypt is recounted in separate accounts in the protocol style.³⁶⁷ Two letters recounting the martyrdom, a Greek version by Eusebius as the *Espistula Phileae*, and a Latin version by Rufinus, the *Versio Rufini Latina*, exist. Two other *Acta* concerning the martyrdom of Phileas, in both Greek and Latin respectively, are found within the Bodmer Papyrus. The Greek *Acta Phileae* from the Bodmer Papyrus, though it cuts abruptly, is the most authentic and supplies modern researchers with more detail than the previous letters. The prefect at Thumis remains anonymous, but the prefect of Alexandria is named as Culcianus. Phileas was tortured at Thumis before suffering severe beatings at Alexandria. The final execution is not mentioned as the *Acta* breaks off abruptly. The Latin version reveals that he, along with a tribune Philoromus, was beheaded. Pagans, though not stated specifically, are implied as being present in the court. One thing that is significant is that the lawyers and the *logistes*, all possibly pagan, beg the Alexandrian Prefect to allow Phileas some time for reflection as the bishop refused to be coerced.³⁶⁸

In 308 Maximinus promulgated an edict demanding universal sacrifice for a second time, insisting that all goods in marketplaces should be sprinkled with sacrificial blood or libations, and ordered the reconstruction of pagan temples and the appointment of high priests throughout his eastern possessions.³⁶⁹ This might have been a desire on the part of the emperor to reorganize

³⁶⁵ *De Martyribus Palestinae*. 6.1-7; Barnes (1981: 152).

³⁶⁶ Patrich (2011: 276-8). The work by Jastrow (1971: 1392) asserts that Rabbinic sources draw attention to a *kynegion* as a place in Caesarea used for hunting spectacles and a similar name given to an amphitheatre in Byzantium/Constantinople constructed by Septimius Severus. Though Eusebius does not mention the name of the arena, it would have been logical that the original hunting spectacle would have taken place at the *kynegion* (oval amphitheatre) or Caesarea. The place was one of the structures damaged during the earthquake of April 2, 306. So therefore, the event took place at the stadium of Caesarea. See Reifenberg (1950: 40-6); Negev (1966: 144); Roller (1982:43-52).

³⁶⁷ Barnes (2010: 142).

³⁶⁸ The reliable Greek *Acta Phileae* along with the less reliable *Recensio Latina* are both in Musurillo (328-44). The *Acta Phileae* recounts the torture and beatings of Phileas (1-2), and the begging of the *logistes* and the court (12-13), while the *Recensio Latina* mentions that the tribune Philoromus was executed alongside the bishop (7-9).

³⁶⁹ Frend (1965: 507); Cf. Barnes (1981: 153).

the pagan priesthood in an effort to preserve the *pax deorum* or reinvigorate a degenerated paganism.³⁷⁰ According to Eusebius:

These persons [the priests] brought a great zeal to bear on the worship of the gods whom they served. Certainly, the outlandish superstition of the ruler was inducing, in a word, all under him, both governors and governed, to do everything against us in order to secure his favor; in return for the benefits which they thought to secure from him, they bestowed upon him this greatest of boons, namely, to thirst for our blood and to display some more novel tokens of malice towards us.³⁷¹

The ancient Church historian appears to have conceded that the emperor and the high priests were sincere in their devotion to the gods.³⁷² The year 308 is significant. As we will see below, the persecutions in the east became, in the words of M. Sordi, "deceitful, subtle and in a certain sense modern, and was aimed at eliminating Christianity without making any martyrs." Maximinus Daia employed defamation against the Church with the forged *Acts of Pilate* being obligatory reading in schools in an effort to slander Christianity.³⁷³ Perhaps the reception towards the cruel forms of punishments meted out to the Christians became unpopular. In that case, it would be logical for the emperor to have changed his tactics against the community. Though the death penalty was briefly abrogated, possibly on account of a decline in popular support for executions, bloodshed in the provinces of Maximinus Daia, and the persecuting authorities would, for a time, resort to maiming and condemning hundreds of Christians to toil in mines.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ Eusebius. *De Martyribus Palestinae*. 9.2; Frend (1965: 506); Keresztes (1983: 384); Corcoran (2000: 185-6); Rees (2004: 67); Lane Fox (2006: 596-7). Two accounts recounting the priestly reforms of the tetrarch come from Lactantius and Eusebius, both of whom bore witness to the Great Persecution. Eusebius, who lived in the eastern province of Palestine under Maximinus Daia, asserted that high priests were appointed in every city (Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.4.2-3). Those who were granted their position were from the echelons of the elite, had distinguished themselves politically, and were as zealous in their pagan devotion as the emperor. Lactantius, though he did not live in the provinces controlled by Maximinus, recorded similar priestly reforms as those described by Eusebius (Lactantius. *De mortibus persecutorum*. 36. 4-5). Lactantius described Maximinus appointing high priests who, along with performing traditional rituals, became responsible for stamping out Christian gatherings and arresting those who refused to sacrifice. Furthermore, the emperor ordered high priests to be garbed in white linen cloaks. For a modern assessment of the white dress of the pagan priesthood under Maximinus Daia, see Nicholson (1994: 7) who argues (amongst other things) that the "churches of Maximinus Daia" differed from the reformed paganism of Julian the Apostate as the former sought the preservation of the *pax deorum* while the latter may have wanted to emulate Christian philanthropy and piety amongst the pagan priesthood. Nicholson further mentions that the white cloaks of the pagan priests can also be described as being in line with tetrarchic bureaucratic uniforms of the period. Cavalrymen wore white chlamys, along with members of the imperial retinue. Nicholson also draws attention to the mosaic of Justinian and Theodora at the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna in order to suggest the continued and consistent usage of such garb.

³⁷¹ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.4.2-3 (Tr. J.E.L. Oulton).

³⁷² Nicholson (1994: 9).

³⁷³ Frend (1965: 506-7); Sordi (1986: 130-1) who cites Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.5.1 when discussing the *Acts of Pilate*.

³⁷⁴ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 8.12.10-11; Patrich (2011: 271)

In 309, a hundred confessors from the Thebaid in Egypt were brought to Lud in Palestinian Diocaesarea, under the governorship of Firmillianus who had succeeded Urbanus. There, a hundred Christians were maimed by being deprived of the use of their left leg and were blinded in the right eye before being condemned to the mines.³⁷⁵ Jews are described by Eusebius as looking on as the Christians were condemned by the governor, but he does not describe their attitude during the bloody episode. Shortly after, over a hundred and thirty Christians suffered disfigurement in the same fashion as the previous group from the Thebais, before being sent to Cilician mines.³⁷⁶ Eusebius's account for 309 suggests a level of disgust at the punishments meted out to the Christians in Palestine on behalf of the pagan populace. Four martyrs, Antonius, Zebinas, Germanus, and Mannathus were condemned to the beasts in the arena under Firmillianus. According to Eusebius the administration of Caesarea ordered the bodies of the martyrs to be left in the arena in order that they not be carried away by Christians and given a proper burial. Eusebius wrote that the bodies of the dead were consumed by birds and dogs, with pieces of the corpses cast around the city, and that "even upon those who were alien from us in our faith [pagans] there came great distress and sorrow at those things which their eyes beheld. For there lay before of the city the terrible spectacle of human corpses devoured by wild beasts."³⁷⁷

An increasing sense of sympathy can be discerned when observing the martyrdom of Peter and Asclepius, a Macrionite bishop in 310. His confession in court was admired by the judge while many onlookers surrounded him, begging that he comply with the authorities in order to save himself.³⁷⁸ That same year, seven martyrs were executed. This episode is significant. Whereas the corpses of the 309 martyrs were left to lie in the arena to be eaten by dogs and birds, in 310 Firmillianus permitted the Christian community to gather the corpses and give the executed Christians a proper burial.³⁷⁹ Perhaps the public outcry over the bloody affair surrounding the bodies of Antonius, Zebinas, Germanus, and Mannathus was great enough to alter the policy of the governor.

³⁷⁵ *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 7.8-8.1; Barnes (1981: 153).

³⁷⁶ *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 8.13; Barnes (1981: 154).

³⁷⁷ *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 9.4-13. Quote at 9.10-11 (Tr. H.J. Lawlor, J.E.L. Oulton); Grant (1980: 124).

³⁷⁸ *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 10.2-3; Barnes (1981: 154).

³⁷⁹ The seven Christians were Pampilus, Vales, Seleucus, Paul, Porphyry, Theodulus, and Julianus. *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 11.1-29.

The martyrdom of Shmona and Guria took place at Edessa in 309/10 during the reign of Galerius, the martyr act wrongly stating the ruling *augustus* as Diocletian.³⁸⁰ The death of both these men is significant as the governor, Mysianus, ordered the soldiers who execute Shmona and Guria away from the city limits in order to avoid upsetting the Edessenes. Mysianus, having been called by the emperor to Antioch, was a reluctant persecutor and may have shown a level of leniency had it not been for imperial persuasion, failed to coerce Shmona and Guria to either sacrifice, cast incense, or pour a libation in honor of the gods. Upon refusing, both were tortured. Again summoned to a tribunal, the judge ordered Shmona and Guria to be beheaded. Soldiers, under the cover of darkness, escorted both men far from the city, north of Edessa at the knoll of Beth Alah Kikla, before the rest of population awoke up in order to avert a public tumult. On their trip back to Edessa, the soldiers were met by a throng of townsfolk inquiring about the whereabouts of the two men. The soldiers told the people that the Christians were executed at Beth Alah Kikla. The townsfolk recovered the bodies, wrapped them in shrouds, balms and spices and laid them to rest in graves while singing psalms and hymns.³⁸¹ In the words of R. Lane Fox the townsfolk "were so sympathetic to the victims that they had to be killed in secret, and then their bodies became the concern of large crowds."³⁸²

The last two years of the Great Persecution in Palestine ended with over one hundred Egyptian and Palestinian Christians being cast into the copper mines of Phaeno, while some were sent to Zoar, and others to "other districts" along with the martyrdoms of Peleus, Nilus, Paternuthius, Elias in 310 and Silvanus with a company of others in 311.³⁸³ Eusebius does not mention the attitude of the pagans when recounting these last bouts of brutality.

³⁸⁰ *Martyrdom of Shmona and Guria, Confessors of Edessa* in Burkitt (2007: 90-110); The exact date of the martyrdom of Shmona and Guria is hard to gauge on account of the suggestion by Burkitt that the fourteenth year of the reign of Diocletian is AD 297, too early for this martyrdom to have taken place. Burkitt asserts that a better date for the persecution should be 309. Lane Fox (2006: 600-1) draws attention to the martyrdom and suggests that the attitudes of pagan may have begun to change.

³⁸¹ For all events mentioned above see the *Martyrdom of Shmona and Guria, Confessors of Edessa* in Burkitt (2007: 90-110). Shmona and Guria ministering to the Christian faithful (3), the apprehension of both men by the governor and their refusal to offer sacrifices (4, 8-11, 20-27), Mysianus called to Antioch (16-17), Shmona and Guria ordered to be beheaded (52), the execution of Shmona and Guria (62-64), the townsfolk confront the soldiers (66), the townsfolk give Shmona and Guria a proper burial (67-68); Ross (2001: 109,124,141) asserts that the martyrdom of Shmona and Guria is genuine and that Mysianus was a reluctant persecutor.

³⁸² Lane Fox (2006: 601).

³⁸³ For the condemnation to the mines of over one hundred Egyptians and many Palestinians see *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 13.1-3, quote at 13.3 (Tr. H.J. Lawlor, J.E.L. Oulton). For the martyrdom of Peleus, Nilus, Paternuthius, Elias see *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 13.3. For Silvanus see *De Martyribus Palaestinae*. 13.4-10; Barnes (1981: 154).

As mentioned previously, Maximinus Daia attempted to ignite pagan religiosity with his edict on sacrifices. His program to appoint head priests for every region had some pagan support. During 311, petitions were sent to the emperor from the provincials of Lycia, Pamphylia, and Antioch which lobbied the sovereign to rid their towns of Christians.³⁸⁴ According to Eusebius, the emperor had engraved tablets erected in order to deliver his answer in support of the petitioners.³⁸⁵ The *curator* of Antioch, Theotecnus, who had previously led an embassy to the emperor, erected a stature of Zeus Philios and established a purificatory mystery cult in the city.³⁸⁶ Petitions to the emperor during this period are significant. On the one hand there were Christians who believed that the petitions were forgeries devised by Maximinus himself, whereas on the other hand it must be noted that such embassies to the emperor were a large undertaking and more often the product of priests and philosophers who worshipped at the feet of cult images.³⁸⁷ It can be suggested that during the latter years of the Great Persecution, some pagan members of society became more sympathetic towards Christians, such as the Edessenes, though some who had a vested interest in the traditional cults were probably less sympathetic. During the first two centuries, the populace had called for the suppression of the Christian Church, only to be occasionally rebuked by the state, whereas two large-scale persecutions under Valerian and the tetrarchs began to be met with a slow dissociation of the pagan masses.³⁸⁸ According to Eusebius, in the west Emperor Maxentius stopped persecuting Christians at Rome in order to appear more favorable to the citizenry who had become appalled by the bloodshed. Athanasius even wrote that during this period pagans in Egypt hid Christians in the face of being apprehended themselves.³⁸⁹

Galerius, the senior *augustus* maintained his policy of repression until his promulgation of a general edict of toleration issued from Nicomedia on April 311, which is preserved by Eusebius and Lactantius.³⁹⁰ Though Galerius appeared to grudgingly admit his failure in attempting to stamp out Christianity, his edict implies that he was returning to the previous

³⁸⁴ Eusebius claimed that the emperor sent the petitions to himself (*Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.2.1).

³⁸⁵ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.7.1-14; C.I.L. 3.12132; Lane Fox (2006: 598).

³⁸⁶ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.2.2.

³⁸⁷ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.5.1; Lane Fox (2006: 598-9). Barnes (1976: 251-2) writes that Theotecnus created oracles in an effort to banish Christians from the city. Kahlos (2009: 45)

³⁸⁸ Cf. Sordi (1986: 131); Chuvin (1990: 20).

³⁸⁹ For the tolerance of Maxentius see Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 8.14.1; Millar (1977: 578). For Egyptian pagans hiding Christians see Athanasius. *Historia Arianorum*. 8.64. Kahlos (2009: 46).

³⁹⁰ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 8.17.2-11; Lactantius. *De mortibus persecutorum*. 34; Millar (1977: 578-9); Keresztes (1983: 392-3); Rees (2004: 67); Kahlos (2009: 33-4).

equilibrium with the Church that had existed during the reign of Gallienus, while redefining loyalty to the Roman order based on prayer and not sacrifice. With the edict, being a good Roman, displaying loyalty to the empire, and maintaining the *pax deorum* had evolved from being previously concerned with material sacrifices to prayer towards any deity for the goodwill of the emperor. For Galerius, a lack of religious observance was deemed more harmful than subscribing to Christianity.³⁹¹

Once Galerius died his edict was upheld by Constantine in the west and his successor Licinius in the east. By this time Maximinus Daia had been elevated to the rank of *augustus* in competition with Licinius and resumed the persecution after six months, though many eastern governors upheld the Galerian edict.³⁹² Maximinus marched on Armenia in 311/12 and during that conflict the eastern provinces of the empire experienced a plague and severe famine which Eusebius claimed was divine retribution for the brazen tablets that the emperor had erected in response to anti-Christian petitions.³⁹³ Furthermore, it was during this episode that the pagan populace continued to display an increasingly sympathetic disposition towards the Christian community. When the cities of the east were ravaged by plague and famine, Christians began distributing bread to the starving and offering burial services to the dead, Eusebius stating that "they [pagans] glorified the God of the Christians, and, convinced by the deeds themselves, acknowledged that they alone were truly pious and God-fearing."³⁹⁴ By 312, the tetrarchy no longer functioned and Constantine marched on Italy and defeated Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian bridge. This marked a crucial turning point for Christianity because Constantine appeared to have put his support behind the Church. According to Lactantius, on the eve of the battle, Constantine abandoned all the traditional deities of Rome in favor of the Christian god, ordering the "heavenly sign of God" to be marked on the shields of his troops before setting out to meet Maxentius in battle.³⁹⁵ Though the conversion of Constantine can be seen as a stunning turn of events in the history of the Church, most questions surrounding his sincerity, how far he conflated Christianity with the traditional cults, or even exact date when he threw his support

³⁹¹ Frend (1965: 511); De Palma Digeser (2000: 120); De Palma Digeser (2006: 69); Kahlos (2009: 33-4).

³⁹² Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.1.1-6; Corcoran (2000: 148-9); Rees (2004: 68); Kahlos (2009: 34-5).

³⁹³ For Maximinus Daia's war against Armenia see Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.8.2. For divine retribution upon the emperor see Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.8.3-4, 8.13. For the hardships faced by the populace see Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.8.5-12.

³⁹⁴ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.8.14.

³⁹⁵ Lactantius. *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. 44.5 (Tr. J.L. Creed); Millar (1977: 580); Lane Fox (2006: 618); Potter (2014: 349).

behind Christianity are difficult to answer. Despite this, Constantine's later actions can tell modern historians that he would come to be, in the words of M. Kahlos a "reluctant forbearer." He may have had disdain for pagan practices but we will come to see that although he did not totally hide his allegiance to Christianity, for the sake of unity he portrayed a religiously ambiguous image.³⁹⁶

During this period, the hagiographical tradition states that two Christians, Sergius and Bacchus, were martyred in the province of Augusta Euphratensis in 311/12.³⁹⁷ Some scholars, such as D. Woods, believe that the account of the two military martyrs is largely a fiction and the author of the *martyrum* included elements surrounding two Christian confessors who may have been exiled during the reign of Emperor Julian, though E. Key Fowden believes that the account under Maximinus Daia reflects a contemporary event.³⁹⁸ The martyrs were punished under the auspices of the dux Antiochus. Bacchus died after being flogged at the fortress of Barbalissus/Beth Blash while Sergius lasted longer, being subjected to run wearing shoes spiked on the inner sole before being beheaded. During this period, it can be suggested that most of the soldiers in the army were pagans, but within the *martyrum* it is not specified whether or not the throng of people that gathered to witness the execution of Sergius for instance, was wholly pagan.³⁹⁹ The episode of Sergius' execution, itself a public spectacle, is significant. After the execution, Christians came to recover his body in order to give him a proper burial, while some time later, relics were reportedly taken from his grave. Perhaps the regional dux was not a zealot. Perhaps his presence as a tool of imperial power and the enforcer of the emperor's religious policies did not frighten the local Christian population.

³⁹⁶ Cf. Beard et al. (2004: 366); Kahlos (2009: 58, 62) briefly draws attention to three scholarly trends that surround Constantine's religious devotion: Constantine was a committed Christian who was straightforward in his opposition to paganism; Constantine was ambiguous and changed his personality and action over time; Constantine strove to build consensus between Christians and pagans. Kahlos, not interested in what Constantine thought or would have believed, has focused her work on what Constantine *did* in order to argue for forbearance. A more recent article by Flower (2012: 287-305) discusses the sharp divide within Constantinian scholarship which arise from differing interpretations of his reign, policies, and methodologies, focusing on the works by Barnes (2011), Girardet (2010), Harries (2012), Van Dam (2011), and Veyne (2010).

³⁹⁷ Van den Gheyn (1895: 373-95); for a summary of the martyrdom see Key Fowden (1999: 8-10).

³⁹⁸ Woods (1997: 335-67) argues that although recent archaeology had proven the existence of a cult in honor of Sergius during the mid-fifth century (c. 425), the author of the account of the martyrdom of both Sergius and Bacchus may have developed his narrative account during the reign of Julian because soldiers were humiliated by being forced to wear women's clothes during his reign. This is a vital clue along other anachronisms such as: the frequency of sacrifices, the rule of a single emperor, religious dissent within the *scholae gentilium* (to which both Sergius and Bacchus were members, and a confrontation between soldiers and emperor in Antioch, particularly at the temple of Zeus. For another assessment see Key Fowden (1999:11-17).

³⁹⁹ For all events mentioned above see the summary in Key Fowden (1999: 8-10).

In 312 in Asia Minor, Theodotus was martyred at Ancyra.⁴⁰⁰ Christians in Ancyra were lynched by pagan mobs once the first edict had been promulgated. Many of their homes were destroyed and "libertines" viciously raped seven Christian virgins who are later forcibly drowned in a deep pond after refusing to partake in a ceremony dedicated to Athena and Artemis. Though Theodotus was beheaded under the orders of the proconsul Theotecnus, a local priest and friend of the martyr contacted a garrison of Roman soldiers in order to collect relicts related to Theodotus from their campsite.⁴⁰¹ This is significant as Roman soldiers, who enforced the wishes of pagan authorities, did not apprehend a Christian in their midst. S. Mitchell has argued in favour of the historicity of the account, whereas T.D. Barnes appears to disagree.⁴⁰²

S. Mitchell asserts that the *martyrium* should be treated as a historical document which recounts the persecutions under Maximinus Daia. Mitchell states that the author, Nilus, often included more than a simple description of the geography and this may suggest that the author had profound knowledge of the area. When comparing ancient Malos, near Ancyra, to descriptions of modern travelers, one can further argue for the historicity of the martyrdom because the regional topography has not changed dramatically. Mitchell argues that the church of St. Theodotus was already built around the buried remains of the man when the *martyrium* was composed, soon after 360.⁴⁰³ Nilus may have been in his early twenties when Theodotus was executed and was in his 60s when he put pen to parchment. Furthermore, the narrative includes elements that may be indicative of the reign of Maximinus Daia whom attempted to impose a more state-centered paganism. Within the account, Theodotus, a leading citizen, was encouraged by his persecutors to become the high priest of Apollo, suggesting that the source is a "highly plausible picture of the way in which leading Christians might have been treated during the persecution of Maximinus [Daia]." The local governor of Galatia Prima based in Ancyra, Theotecnus, himself a zealous pagan and enforcer of Maximinus Daia, is also a figure which Eusebius claims was the *curator* of Antioch. Mitchell asserts that many Christians, upon hearing

⁴⁰⁰ Grégoire et al. (1951: 165-84).

⁴⁰¹ *The Life of Saint Theodotus* in Delehaye (1903: 320-8). The drowning of the seven virgins (13-19), death of Theodotus (20-31), the collection of Theodotus' belongings from the soldier's camp (32-6).

⁴⁰² Barnes (2010: 155-9); Mitchell (1982: 93-113).

⁴⁰³ Mitchell (1982: 101).

that Theotecnus had assumed the governorship, fled most cities in the area, taking refuge in the countryside. A similar event is mentioned in the *martyrium*.⁴⁰⁴

In spring 313 both Constantine and Licinius united to wage war on Maximinus who had come to accept Galerius' edict. Following his defeat with Licinius on the 30 April at the battle of Tzirallum, and before his death at Tarsus, Maximinus promulgated his own edict of toleration granting Christians the rights of assembly, building churches and the restoration of their confiscated properties.⁴⁰⁵ Before the battle, both Constantine and Licinius presided over a conference at Milan. The emperors discussed much, including religious affairs and a month before Licinius marched eastward, the Edict of Milan was published at Nicomedia in 313, proclaiming universal religious toleration for all.⁴⁰⁶ One significant aspect of this edict was, much like the previous Galerian edict of toleration, the notion that religion was a defining factor in what constituted a good Roman. It would be prayer, not sacrifice, that would be the acceptable way in which one could display loyalty to the emperor and maintain the *pax deorum*.⁴⁰⁷ Furthermore, prayers from both pagans and Christians alike to a "supreme deity" (*summa divinitas*) was a compromise which might have been acceptable to both religious solitudes to whom, by the fourth century, appeared to agree on the transcendence and ineffability of a supreme God.⁴⁰⁸ The tetrarchic desire for a political theology had not ended, but rather the vehicle of such a project changed, and would pave the way for Constantine's successors to further redefine what it meant to be a good Roman during the closing decade of the fourth century.

Though the Great Persecution was largely over when the empire was left in the hands of Licinius in the east and Constantine in the west, bouts of violence against the Church still occurred. As mentioned previously, the tetrarchic persecution of the Christians can be observed as being tripartite in nature, since Licinius would become a persecutor in the Roman east between 316 to 324. When both Licinius and Constantine had decided the religious fate of the

⁴⁰⁴ For Theotecnus see Mitchell (1982: 107-9) who cites Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.2.1, 9.9.4; Millar (1977: 445-6).

⁴⁰⁵ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 10.7-11; Lactantius. *De mortibus persecutorum*. 45-49; Frend (1965: 520); Corcoran (2000: 189); Rees (2004: 69); Mitchell (2009: 62).

⁴⁰⁶ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 10.5.2-4; Frend (1965: 518); Corcoran (2000: 158-60); Rees (2004: 69-70); Kahlos (2009: 56-8); Potter (2014: 360).

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Kahlos (2009: 57); Inglebert (2002: 244-5).

⁴⁰⁸ Inglebert (2002: 244-5) argues that prayer to a "supreme god" remained a maker of loyalty even until the reign of Justinian whereas Athanassiadi et al. (1999: 1-20) discusses the growth of a pagan monotheism.

empire, Licinius, a pagan, would tolerate Christians only when necessary but had no intention of respecting the law dictating the return of their stolen property.⁴⁰⁹ In 316, Licinius had all the Christians at the court in Nicomedia purged.⁴¹⁰ Between 317 and 320, Licinius promulgated two anti-Christian edicts. Firstly, he prohibited bishops from communicating with each other and from presiding over synods, and secondly, he prohibited men and women from attending Churches together, banned the religious education of young girls, and restricted Church services to outside city walls.⁴¹¹

In late 322, the governors of the eastern provinces began persecuting Christians, while in December, Christians were forced to engage in pagan sacrifices.⁴¹² The deacon Habbib (Abibus) of Edessa was martyred in 322.⁴¹³ The death of the deacon is significant as the Edessenes were openly sympathetic to the martyr. According to the events of the *martyrum*, Emperor Licinius ordered the governor Ausonius to enforce the law on sacrifices. When the imperial orders reached Edessa, Habbib's relatives and fellow townsfolk were imprisoned. Habbib escaped but soon returned and encountered Theotecna, the chief guardsman. Theotecna informed the deacon that he should not worry as the governor would not harm the inhabitants of the town and that he should remain in hiding. The deacon persuaded Theotecna to bring him before Ausonius. A change in attitude towards the Christians can be discerned as an armed soldier was willing to let a fugitive deacon go free. Furthermore, during Habbib's trial some Christians lauded his steadfastness while some pagans insulted him. It is suggested that hostile pagans were part of a minority because some may have helped give the charred remains of Habbib a proper burial.⁴¹⁴ There may have been a pagan presence at Edessa well after the acts of the Edessan martyrs were composed because the *Doctrine of Addai* admits that a great pagan altar lay at the center of the town and continued to stand undisturbed even after many of the priests had converted to

⁴⁰⁹ Lane Fox (2006: 621).

⁴¹⁰ Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 1.52.

⁴¹¹ Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 1.51-2.2; Bowder (1978: 31-2).

⁴¹² Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 2.1; Christians being forced to sacrifice is glimpsed within the *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.2.5.

⁴¹³ *Martyrdom of Habbib the Deacon* in Burkitt (2007: 112-28).

⁴¹⁴ For all events mentioned above see the *Martyrdom of Habbib the Deacon* in Burkitt (2007: 112-28). Ausonius to enforce the law on sacrifices (1), the kin of Habbib or imprisoned (6), Theotecna offers to let Habbib escape (9-10), Christians cheer on Habbib while some pagans insult him (35), Habbib given a proper burial by the populace after his execution (38-39).

Christianity.⁴¹⁵ Once Habbib had been executed, a crowd of Christians, Jews and pagans gave him a proper burial. The position of the Jews within Edessa also suggests the sympathy to the plight of martyred Christians.

The Christians of Mesopotamia, particularly the Church of Edessa, were under the influence of two cultural strains: Jewish and Eastern. The Church of Edessa became somewhat remote from the rest of Christendom on account of its vaunting of Syriac (though many elites still spoke Greek), and to the moral and theological resources of the Jews because the latter group had a profound cultural and intellectual influence in northern Mesopotamia as seen in the writings of Aphraates.⁴¹⁶ Many Christians in this area maintained Jewish practices such as eating unleavened bread during Passover and consuming meat only once the blood had been removed. Another point worth noting is that the border between upper Mesopotamia and the Roman Empire was not only porous, a characteristic exploited by many Christians who were either deported to Persia or fled voluntarily along with some Jews, but was a frontier that experienced endemic warfare between both Roman and Sassanian Empires. Therefore, it makes logical sense that Mysianus and Ausonius were reluctant persecutors when taking geography into account. Regional administrators would not want to enflame the passions of Christians and Jews in a heavily Christianized area in which both groups appeared to share cultural similarities.⁴¹⁷ Only in 363, with the treaty signed between the Roman Empire and Persia would the Jews of Edessa become reviled, but this will not be explored here.⁴¹⁸

Regardless of the Licinian persecution, his initiatives were probably not as severe as the persecuting edicts of the earlier tetrarchs, and there is no evidence for polarization during this period.⁴¹⁹ The civil war between Licinius and Constantine would result in the latter's victory at

⁴¹⁵ According to Segal (1970: 105-6) in the fifth century, idol sanctuaries were still to be found at Edessa before their destruction by Bishop Rabbula. In 382, Emperor Theodosius I permitted the pagan temple of Osrhoene at Edessa to remain open, but the ban of sacrifices involving divination would be enforced. See the *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.7.8.

⁴¹⁶ Segal (1970: 100-1, 115). For a brief allusion to the vaunting of Syriac and the bilingual nature of Edessa's elite, amongst other cultural influences see Gillman et al (1999: 34).

⁴¹⁷ Greatrex (2014: 20-3) discusses in his chapter that during the persecution of the mid-third century, many Christians crossed the border into Persian territory, and many others found themselves deported in the wake of Persia's capture of Antioch. Furthermore, heavily Christianized area, coupled with the atmosphere of renewed hostilities, may have accounted for the uneven persecutions near the Mesopotamia under the tetrarchs in contrast with the bloodshed in Palestine for instance.

⁴¹⁸ Segal (1970: 100-1, 115).

⁴¹⁹ Mitchell (2009: 242) argues that Eusebius may be exaggerating when he asserts that Licinius revived the systematic persecution of the Christians.

the battle of Chrysopolis on the Bosphorus in 324. Licinius would be strangled to death in custody many months later.⁴²⁰

Conclusion

With the end of the Great Persecution, how are we to judge the changing attitudes of the pagan population? Within this chapter we have observed that by the beginning of the second tetrarchy of Constantius Chlorus and Galerius (306-311) in which the persecution continued with ferocity in the eastern provinces, one can argue that a change in attitude on behalf of the pagan populace is discernible. By 308/9 the eastern *caesar* was content with punishing Christians through maiming and condemnation to the mines. Maximinus Daia sought to rob the Christian Church of martyrs, and to engage in a propaganda war with the forged *Acts of Pilate*, all the while attempting to reinvigorate the eastern priesthoods. M. Sordi has claimed that by 308 there were "clear signs that the persecutors were beginning to be aware of the irreversible change that had taken place in public opinion."⁴²¹ During the first two centuries the populace had vocally supported the persecution of Christians at places like Bithynia, Lyons, Vienne, and Smyrna, while by the time of the Great Persecution, the people became, in the words of H. Gra anin, "more or less passive participants in the persecution, spectators and witnesses to the martyrs' glory."⁴²²

Volumes can be written about the evolution of polytheistic opinions towards the Christians. Since this chapter has attempted to focus on ancient sources recounting the trials and tribulations of the martyrs which are less prone to literary exaggeration and more historically authentic, perhaps one can suggest that the Christian community was no longer seen as a threat and that these people should not be killed if they refused to worship the traditional gods.⁴²³ Provincials only became quick to engage in persecution if there was an earthquake or famine, two events that were commonly associated with divine anger. But interestingly, when a famine struck the east during the final phase of the persecution when Maximinus Daia marched against Armenia, the Christian community made no distinction between their own and the pagans in cities struck with hardship. In the eyes of the non-Christians, such charitable acts may have made

⁴²⁰ Lane Fox (2006: 632); Mitchell (2009: 243).

⁴²¹ Sordi (1986: 131).

⁴²² Gra anin (2014: 152).

⁴²³ Cf. Lane Fox (2006: 599).

the difference in their declining support for the persecutory policies of the emperors.⁴²⁴ That's not to say that charity was alien to Greco-Roman society. Quite the contrary. Pagan charity existed but was based around the principle of service to one's community.⁴²⁵ For polytheists, the gods were not ultimately concerned with the salvation of the soul through good deeds, did not impose ethical demands on the populace, and it was believed that they were only angered when neglected or if their adherents failed to perform proper ritual procedures. Pagans priests could not preach that failing to be charitable to the less fortunate risked some losing the chance at eternal salvation because Greco-Roman cults (with the exception of mystery cults) did not provide an escape from morality or mortality.⁴²⁶

During the reign of Emperor Julian (the apostate) there was an attempt to constitute the pagan priesthood and emulate the charity of the Christian Church. Julian desired a pious priesthood concerned with philosophy and engaged in *philanthrôpia* - charitable deeds.⁴²⁷ It would have been too unrealistic for pagan priests to emulate their Christian counterparts in universal charity because Greco-Roman paganism was not suited to the universalist, egalitarian world view of Christianity.⁴²⁸ The Christian Church far outmatched the charitable capabilities of the pagan temples.

⁴²⁴ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 9.8.14. Cf. Lane Fox (2006: 599).

⁴²⁵ Within the Greek-speaking provinces, pagan *philanthrôpia* demanded that elites protect the civic equilibrium by upholding law, justice, preserving the privileges of cities, along with engaging in generous public expenditures. Cabouret-Laurioux (2010: 95) discusses the Christian incorporation of *philanthrôpia* into their Church. The pagan variant was concerned with upholding pagan cultural concepts like hospitality and the guest-friend relationship, *xenia* in the Greek east and *hospitium* in the Latin west. Ancient pagan charity was not a free-for-all but a method by which urban elites sought to uphold civic concord and equilibrium.

⁴²⁶ Cf. Stark (1996: 88) who cites MacMullen (1981: 58). When discussing instances of pagan salvation, one can draw attention to gold tablets, commonly called "Orphic tablets" which are, rather simplistically called "passports for the dead." See Kotansky (1991: 116).

⁴²⁷ Within the fragmentary *Letter to a Priest*, Julian discussed his ideal priesthood: godly reverence and piety (297 a), frequent prayer (299 b), bodily purity (302 a-d), a devotion to philosophy (304 b), the wearing of magnificent dress within temples but the refraining of opulence in public, not visiting theaters, and their selection from the most upright of society (305 a-b). In another four sections within the *Letter to a Priest*, Julian details his desire to have the pagan priesthood embrace *philanthrôpia* (289 b., 290 d., 291 c., 305 b-c). Within the lines of the *Letter to the High Priest Arsacius*, Julian discusses methods my with the pagan priesthood could seek to imitate the Christian priesthood (430 a., 430 b-d., 431 c-d). Interestingly, Van Nuffelen (2001:131-50) argues against the authenticity of the *Letter to the High Priest Arsacius*.

⁴²⁸ Cf. O' Donnell (2015: 174); Lane Fox (2006: 323). Pagan elites were increasingly concerned with displaying how wealthy they were, whereas Christian churches sought to demonstrate their generosity. According to Stark (1996: 147-62, 203-4) the Greco-Roman cults were, by function, non-exclusive religious firms. By this definition, anyone would be permitted to partake in the rituals of any pagan deity while not being exclusively committed to the worship of the god or gods in question. Christianity and Judaism for instance, were exclusive religious firms and established a more cohesive community. For Christians, being poor became a metaphor for reality: the ideal of the poor servant of Christ contrasting with the rich, elite lifestyle of pagan notables made Christianity an attractive option for under classes across ethnic lines. Cabouret-Laurioux (2010: 96) points to the oracular and medical sanctuaries of Cos and

Perhaps the goodwill of the Christian community was not the lone deciding factor of the change, however modest, of the opinions of the pagan populace. The reign of the tetrarchs ushered in a militarized bureaucracy which may have encroached on the lives of many. As we have come to see, the Edessenes for example, became angry at the soldiers following the executions of local Christians. Perhaps provincials became more concerned at soldiers in their midst than with Christians.⁴²⁹ From the rise of the Severi up until the military monarchy of the fourth century, the Roman bureaucracy became militarized and soldiers were billeted in greater numbers in or near towns along the frontiers than in previous centuries, though this trend became more widespread during latter fourth century.⁴³⁰ Furthermore, along with defending the empire's borders, soldiers became tasked with law enforcement and arrested Christians during the Great Persecution.

The desire of the tetrarchs to reconstruct the Roman state was aggressive and tax collection was placed in the hands of the army. This might have cast soldiers as the principle enemy of the ordinary citizenry. A local *procurator*, though the title was used generously by the populace, employed soldiers to help supervise provincial finances.⁴³¹ Can one suggest the militarization of the Roman bureaucracy and the increased presence of soldiers in the daily lives of provincials for a change in the attitude of the general populace?⁴³² The vast majority of the

Pergamum in an attempt to draw attention to some instances of pagan priests helping those in need, although not entirely in the Christian manner.

⁴²⁹ Lane Fox (2006: 600).

⁴³⁰ On the one hand, army men were a fairly affluent class which injected money into local economies, but on the other hand soldiers were notorious for their rough manner and the trouble they caused. For instances of troops troubling the local populace see Fronto. *Letter to Lucius Verus*. 19, Historia Augusta. *Avidius Cassius*. 5.5, *Aurelian*. 7.8, Libanius. *Oration*. 47. 5-6, 33. For penalties meted out to soldiers who wander the country side away from their camps see, *Codex Theodosianus*. 7.1.12, 17.1.16.

⁴³¹ MacMullen (1963: 61, 68-70).

⁴³² Harries (2012: 62) describes the letters from the procurator of the Thebaid, Aurelius Isadore, which revealed alleged flaws in the earlier census declarations: arrears in paying over taxes in wine over the last two indictions were now to be made up. In another letter, date to 16 February, 300, Isadore publicly castigated the corrupt behavior in the collection of the *annona militaris* by demanding payment in coin, alongside overweighing scales in order to extort more produce. For the corrupt behavior of those tasked with collecting the *annona militaris* from 300 see P. Beatty Panop. 2, 229-44 in Rees (2004: 156-7, no. 21); Corcoran (2000: 176). It is suggested that even though tax collectors were looked upon as "oppressors" some of these bureaucrats may have fallen prey to violence on behalf of angry mobs. One instance of this can be seen in the life of Plutammion from the Abinnaeus Archive, a collection of correspondences from the 340s, during the reign of Constantius II. For Plutammion becoming scared on account of accidentally giving horses instead of money see *Abinnaeus Archive*. 13. On Plutammion complaining that his grandson was attacked by thirty angry thugs from Hermopolis see *Abinnaeus Archive*. 15. Furthermore, for local grain collector, Demetrius, being violently assaulted by Athenodorus, a drunken soldier see *Abinnaeus Archive*. 28. 1-15. According to Harries (2012: 63) believes that "corruption" (when discussing tax collectors) is a loaded term and can change based on cultural practices or social assumptions and that the pieces of evidence from the period may not paint the picture of the failings of the whole system.

empire's inhabitants were far from wealthy and extreme wealth was often concentrated in the hands of a few noble families in every province. When soldiers enforced tax collection, it can be suggested that the increase militarization of the Roman bureaucracy extended into an area of the people's lives that many wished would have gone unnoticed.⁴³³

The new Roman state, with its militarization, census gathering and increased administrative apparatus, made an impression on many that can be best echoed in a fourth-century anecdote preserved within the Babylonian Talmud:

The sages said in the name of Rav: If all the seas were ink, all reeds were pens, all skies parchment, and all men scribes, they would be unable to set down the full scope of the Roman government's concerns. And the proof? The verse, said R. Mesharsheya, "Like the heaven for height, and the earth for depth, so is the heart of kings unfathomable" (Prov. 25:3).⁴³⁴

Perhaps the grinding, militarized bureaucracy of the era played a role in the changing opinions of many who came to see members of the Christian hierarchy as harmless, educated people leading a charitable monotheistic community.⁴³⁵

⁴³³ For taxation during the fourth century reign of Galerius see Lactantius. *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. 23.1-3. Since Lactantius, a Christian writer, was overtly hostile to the tetrarchs it can be suggested that the account of the census will be exaggerated. One thing that the modern researcher can gain from the source is not so much the authors bias, but the suggestion that the later Roman Empire had the ability to order census officials to assess the population on a wide scale. The source by Lactantius, though describing what can best be described as a horrible situation to befall the citizens counted, however distorted, can still suggest that the state under the tetrarchs may have employed rough measures.

⁴³⁴ This excerpt from the Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 11a is taken from Ando (2012: 179).

⁴³⁵ According to Stark (1996: 29-47) Christianity was not a solidly "proletarian" movement. If it had been, the Roman state would have perceived it as a political threat and would not have spared any expense in rooting it out, instead of treating it as a *religio illicita* (a illicit religion). Furthermore, Stark draws attention to many scholars who have also revisited the idea that the early followers of Christianity were overwhelmingly part of the educated classes before the lower members of society became converts. New Testament historians, like Scroggs (1980), assert that Christianity was first centered around the middle and upper classes. Danielou et al. (1964: 240) discusses the early Church being patronized by rich donors. Grant (1977: 11) argues that the early church, though small, was a composed of clusters of intense, middle class groups. Malherbe (1977: 29-59) has asserted that when observing the language of the early Church fathers, one can suggest that they were addressing the educated elite. Both Theissen (1982: 97) and Lane Fox (2006: 311) draw attention to the early community as possessing affluent members of the upper class. Though leaders of the Church were wealthy (to a certain degree), the vast majority of Christians were not. For poor widows supporting the Church in the mid third century AD, see, Minucius Felix. *Octavius* 12.2. Celsus, in his polemic against the Christians, caricatures the community as a rabble of ill-educated artisans, poor children, and women. Though Origen counters the claims by Celsus, the attack on the poverty of the community is not disputed by the ecclesiastical writer, Origen. *Contra Celsum*. 3.55; Beard et al. (2004: 295-6).

Epilogue

Christianity had grown substantially since its beginnings in the first century and became legal and protected throughout the whole empire under Constantine following the defeat of Licinius. Before hostilities, both emperors had declared religious toleration with their 313 edict. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Edict of Milan had, much like the Galerian edict, redefined what it meant to be a "good" Roman. Following the tetrarchic desire to construct a political theology, loyalty to the emperor and the maintenance of the *pax deorum* would no longer be based solely on a civic religion which revolved around material sacrifices. But rather prayers to the *summa divinitas*, the "highest god," was a compromise between both pagans and Christians. Despite the change, religion was still the defining factor of acceptance into the Roman order. But what about Constantine and his fourth century successors? As an emperor of the *dominate*, he too would stress the unity of an empire that, at best, was still mostly polytheistic. In the words of P. Veyne, "Constantine lead a pagan-cum-Christian empire. But his great plan was still to bring about the mystic triumph of Christ and, in concrete fashion, end the reign of false gods."⁴³⁶

Under the reign of the new emperor Christianity spread but there was no sudden decrease in paganism. The emperor had to rule a domain comprised of polytheists with a small but growing Christian minority. What we will see in this epilogue is that Constantine was an emperor, who on the one hand desired the unity of the populace by assimilating the Christian god with a solar deity, while on the other hand, displaying a preference for the conversion of pagans but rejecting coercion. Furthermore, any sort of legislation directed at traditional religious practices by Constantine and his immediate successors were not an attack on paganism but rather a renewal of previous legislative initiatives against practices deemed illicit, such as magic and private divination. But paganism was not dead. The attempted pagan revival of Emperor Julian would coincide with a series of short and bloody instances of mob violence against Christians, with the emperor turning a blind eye to carnage. Pagans who may have harbored feelings of ill-will against the Christian community were only confident enough to engage in acts of violence if they felt certain that a sympathetic emperor sat on the throne. But in the end, Julian's revival failed. Much like the *res publica* of old, and the empire of the tetrarchs which sought to construct

⁴³⁶ Veyne (2010: 89).

a political theology in order to bolster unity, so too would the later Christian emperors embrace the tradition that loyalty to the political community was based on one's adherence to the civic religion. In the case of the emperors who ruled before the onset of the fifth century, that religion would be Nicene Christianity.

Constantine

Following his defeat of Maxentius in Rome in 312, and in the wake of the 313 Edict of Toleration, Constantine engaged in the unheard of practice of bestowing donations to the Church from the imperial treasury, granting clergy exemptions from civic and military duties, legalizing ecclesiastical courts under Roman law, and the permitting the Church to receive and hold property.⁴³⁷ Galerius had hoped that Christians would offer prayers for the goodwill of the emperor and state, whereas Constantine, following this logic, permitted the Christian clergy to focus on observing their own laws in order that they may not be drawn away by "any error of sacrilegious fault from the worship which they owe to the Divinity" Since all the inhabitants of the empire were now free to worship and pray for the goodwill of the emperor and state however they saw fit, so too would the Christian clergy. This suggests that Constantine believed that the safety and success of Rome was no longer entrusted solely to the traditional cults.⁴³⁸

During this period, paganism was not in decline despite the previous theory of J. Geffcken who believed that the decline of carved commemorative inscriptions to the gods during the mid-third century, coinciding with the third century crisis, prompted a "loss of faith" in the traditional deities.⁴³⁹ This assertion is not entirely true and four points must be taken into account. Firstly, in times of hardship, which pagans believed constituted divine anger, adherents of the traditional cults did not merely abandon their temples and rites but sought to appease the aggrieved deity. Secondly, though economic difficulties may have reduced the amount inscriptions, such a reduction did not necessarily reflect people's faith as it was stone-cutters and not priests who were affected by the economic downturn. Thirdly, the province of Egypt was still a place in which pagan festivals and cults continued even in the face of economic travails. And lastly, the argument by Geffcken does not take into account that a growing number of cults, such

⁴³⁷ Hyde (1946: 193).

⁴³⁸ Constantine writing to the pagan governor in North Africa, Anullinus, in Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 10.7.2; Millar (1977: 581); Beard et al. (2004: 367-8); Lane Fox (2006: 623).

⁴³⁹ Geffcken ([1920] 1978: 25-30).

as that of Theos Hypsistos, were either less dependent on euergetism or did not demand material (blood) sacrifices.⁴⁴⁰ Previously, scholars had believed that the empire's pagans cried out against the patronage of the Church by Constantine, though modern historians have now suggested that no such outcry occurred, with F. Winkelman suggesting that pagans may have looked at Constantine's support of the Christians as a "bearable evil."⁴⁴¹ One thing was certain, paganism would come to die a slow death and was alive and well in the hinterlands of the empire well into the reign of Justinian I (527-565).

Constantine may have thrown his support behind the Christian Church, but as we will see, he had to rule both pagans and Christians. On the one hand, he protected the Christian Church, but on the other hand he remained *pontifex maximus* and utilized the imagery of Sol Invictus, striving to unite both religious solitudes of the empire and believing that the solar deity was compatible with the Christian God. Constantine had first associated himself with Apollo as early as 310, before embracing the solar symbolism of Sol Invictus.⁴⁴² Constantine's association with Sol is significant because he began his reign overtly associated himself with the god before making any identification ambiguous later on. From as early as 310, the words SOL INVICTO COMITI ("To the Unconquered Sun, the protector") were minted, as seen on a copper *nummus* from London. The usage of the term *comes* ("protector") emphasized Constantine's dependence on the god. Between 312 and 313, a golden *aureus*, minted in Ticinum, had SOL INVICTO AETERNO AVG. ("To the Unconquered Sun [and] to the eternal Augustus") inscribed on the reverse.⁴⁴³

Furthermore, during the emperor's *decennalia*, the senate and the people of Rome dedicated a triumphal arch to Constantine, one of the most important monuments of the Constantinian era, which permits modern scholars a chance at glimpsing Constantine's attempt at assimilating his image with a protective deity. Nothing in the artistry of the arch suggests

⁴⁴⁰ For the pagans not abandoning their traditional temples in the face of hardships see Lane Fox (2006: 574-8). For the reduction in divine inscriptions see MacMullen (1981: 127). For the continuation of pagan festivals and cult in Egypt see Lane Fox (2006: 578-82) even though Bagnall (1993: 261-73) argues that temple dedications were in decline. For the cult of Theos Hypsistos see Mitchell (1999: 127). For the decline in euergetism see Bradbury (1995: 331-356). Cf. Lee (2012: 167-8).

⁴⁴¹ Winkelman (1961) in Drake (2000: 246-7); Cf. Stark (2007: 189).

⁴⁴² Bardill (2012: 57).

⁴⁴³ Bardill (2012: 86-9). For the copper *nummus* from 310 see RIC VI index p. 704. For the gold *aureus* see RIC VI, Ticinum no. 113.

Constantine's Christianity.⁴⁴⁴ The arch of Constantine possesses sculptures meant to assimilate Constantine, and his father Constantius Chlorus, to Sol by not only showing the reigning emperor with his right hand raised in imitation of the god, but having the heads of both rulers inscribed by a *nimbus* - a cloud, itself symbolic of solar imagery. The sun god Sol appears in the arch himself. A carved representation of the deity is on the west side of the east passage, balanced on a bust of Constantine being crowned by Victory, and on a historical frieze on the west side of the arch and carved on a relief on the base of a column. Additionally, two out of the eight roundels used in the construction of the arch display images of Sol; the other six being reused pieces of Trajanic origin. Despite the assimilation of Constantine with the imagery of Sol Invictus on the triumphal arch at Rome, the entire structure is further associated with the deity because of its alignment with Nero's colossal statue of the sun god, which Emperor Hadrian had ordered moved near the temple of Venus and Roma.⁴⁴⁵

Some scholars, such as N. Baynes have propagated the theory that Constantine continued to use numismatic images of Sol, alongside monumental representations, since he was unable to openly announce his support for Christianity on account of his (then) co-ruler Licinius being pagan. J. Bardill disagrees and believes that Constantine did not hesitate to declare his religious inclinations. When the relationship between both emperors broke down, Licinius minted coins with Jupiter as his *conservator* while Constantine struck coins displaying the imagery of Sol. Therefore, asserting his own beliefs was not troubling to Constantine. Bardill goes on to suggest that the solar deity was originally associated with Constantine when the emperor believed that the Sun god was compatible with the Christian god, rather than Christ. It can be suggested that associating the image of Sol on the Constantinian coins mentioned above with the God of the Christians may have been Constantine's goal. Since the Old Testament, along with the works of ecclesiastical writers utilize solar imagery, it can be suggested that Constantine, rejecting divine tetrarchic titles and realizing that many of his non-Christian subjects possessed a henotheistic

⁴⁴⁴ Lane Fox (2006: 620-1) suggests that although the "neutral" artwork on the arch of Constantine in Rome did not suggest the emperor's Christian sympathies, it should not necessarily be observed as a tactful evasion of the emperor's true religious inclinations. He further claims that images like the Sun and the Moon, themselves present on the Constantinian arch, were common in other forms of tetrarchic art and that a 291 tetrarchic panegyric spoke about the "two lights of the universe" (the Sun and Moon) lending the emperors their chariots "Night and Day."

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Bardill (2012: 94-9). For Constantine being assimilated with the image of Sol as a protective deity see L'Orange (1935: 335, 340-1, fig. 3); L'Orange (1953: 145-7); Peirce (1989: 407); Marlowe (2006: 235-6). On the raised right hand of the emperor meant to imitate Sol see Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 10.9.4; Bastien (1992-1994, II, 559-72), though Bastien is wrong in his assessment that the Sol cult is oriental in origin.

worldview, exploited the imagery of Sol Invictus in an attempt to unite pagans and Christians under the worship of a single solar god.⁴⁴⁶

Though the emperor had thrown his support behind the Christian Church, Constantine also supported the construction and funding of pagan cults, while also permitting pagan philosophers at the imperial court.⁴⁴⁷ Observing Constantine's attitude towards traditional cults, his reign can be divided into two periods: years 312-24 and 324-37.

Between 312 and 24, Constantine placed restrictions on practices that had already been deemed illicit such as private magic and limited the activities of private diviners, though *haruspices* used in state functions were permitted. As mentioned in the first chapter, Julio-Claudian emperors like Tiberius and Claudius, promulgated legislation against *magi*, *goētes*, *venenarii*, *malefici*, *haruspices*, *mathematici*, *Chaldaei*, *harioli*, limited the circulation of books related to the *oracula sibyllina* and the *fatidici libri*, expelled practitioners of Egyptian and Judean cults, and prohibited Druidic practices. Therefore, Constantine's actions were not regarded as running contrary to what was stated in the 313 Edict of Milan and were in the long-standing tradition of imperial action against *superstitio*.⁴⁴⁸ Various groups had always debated the difference between *religio* and *superstitio*, and during the fourth century the latter term became a useful tool for those seeking to discredit certain communities in Roman society. Since

⁴⁴⁶ Baynes (1972: 95-6, 103). Cf. Bardill (2012: 328-30) utilizes all the ecclesiastical sources to be mentioned. For the Israelite god, Yahweh, acquiring some trappings of Near-Eastern deities see Wallraff (2001: 19-26). For the god of the Old Testament being called (metaphorically) "a sun and shield" and "my light and my salvation" see sun and shield: Psalms 84:11, light and salvation: Psalms 27:1. For Christians using the sun as a metaphor for God see Dvornik (1966: 631). For Tertullian writing that Christians pray towards the east and make Sunday a day of rest and festivities see Tertullian. *Ad Nationes*. 1.13. For Justin Martyr describing Christ in the same terms as light from the sun see Goodenough (1923: 148-51); Wallraff (2001: 44-7); Van Dam (2007: 269-70). Farina (1966:39-40) states that Eusebius utilized solar imagery in suggesting that the Logos was not crafted by the father, but instead, emanated from him. Furthermore, Eusebius, at the council of Nicaea associated Christ with light, Socrates. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 1.8.38; Pohlsander (2004: 109). Eusebius also stressed that the Father begot his Son, Christ, like a ray of light on earth, Ayres (2004: 58). The image of God birthing forth Christ like a ray of light is further drawn upon by Eusebius in his oration *In Praise of Constantine*. 1.1, 3.6. Lactantius connecting Solar imagery with Christ, *Institutiones Divinae*. 6.8.5. Potter (2014: 355).

⁴⁴⁷ For the funding of temples see Geffcken ([1920] 1978: 120). For pagan philosophers at Constantine's court see Drake (2000: 247-8).

⁴⁴⁸ For laws against magic see Zosimus. *Historia Nova*. 2.29.1; *Codex Theodosianus*. 9.16.1-9.16.3; 16.10.2; Bradbury (1994: 120-39); Beard et al (2004: 372). For the Constantinian laws against magic within a marriage see *Codex Theodosianus*. 3.16.1 (331). Grubbs (1993: 127-8). This law states the reasons by which a man or woman may divorce a spouse. The law explicitly states that if a woman wished to divorce her husband, the state would recognize the criminal charges of homicide, sorcery, or the destruction of tombs. If a man wanted to divorce his wife, he too would be subjected to restrictions and government authorities would investigate only the charges of adultery, sorcery, or if his wife had been a procuress. The law allowed a woman to receive praise if she proved to be correct in accusing her husband, but suffer exile and forfeit of property if he was accused for any other reason. Cf. Lee (2012: 171-2).

Christians began calling their creed a *religio* during the third century, what was a *superstitio*? Such a flexible term remained ambiguous during Constantine's reign. Therefore the emperor, who was *pontifex maximus* regardless of his favorable overtures to Christianity, may have been content to exploit the ambiguities of the word. Constantine was able to satisfy Christian sensibilities with a 323 regulation against forcing Church clergy to attend the rites "of another's *superstitio*."⁴⁴⁹ During this period, Constantine continued to associated himself with solar imagery. Two gold coins were minted, one in Arles and another at Sirmium in 317 and 321 respectively, the former displaying the image of Sol Invictus handing Constantine a globe on the reverse, while the latter presents the sun god crowing the emperor.⁴⁵⁰

For the years 324-37, the situation appears to be more complex. In 324, Constantine composed his *Letter to the Eastern Provincials*, reproduced by Eusebius, and asserted that pagans had "the violent rebelliousness of injurious errorí obstinately fixed in their minds" and were in need of healing. The emperor composed the latter because he was concerned about Christians who might have wanted to attack traditional cults as revenge for the Great Persecution.⁴⁵¹ The letter is significant because on the one hand it displays the emperor's preference for Christianity with the hope that pagans would convert, while on the other hand eschews the overt coercion of non-Christians. This Constantinian letter becomes, in the words of M. Kahlos "a mirror image of Maximinus' letter in 311. Thus Constantine joins the ranks of reluctant forbearers alongside Galerius and Maximinus Daia."⁴⁵²

Despite Constantine writing that pagans had the right to practice their cults, Eusebius recorded five instances during the emperor's reign of temples being destroyed: the temple of Aphrodite in Jerusalem, Heliopolis, Aphaca, the temple of Asclepius at Argae, and a shrine at Mamre in Palestine. Regardless of the destruction of those temples, there is no reason to suggest the five episodes in question constituted an empire-wide policy against paganism as there were many long-established temples that survived unscathed, even though Constantine was accused of plundering the coffers of some to fund his construction of Constantinople.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. Beard et al (2004: 371). For the 323 regulation of Constantine see the *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.5.1.

⁴⁵⁰ For the coin from Arles see RIC VII, index, p. 737, 752. For the coin from Sirmium see RIC VII, Sirmium nos. 3, 21-22 (321), 31 (322-23). Bardill (2012: 106).

⁴⁵¹ The citation is from Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 2.59-60 (Tr. Cameron et al). For Constantine desire to avert a Christian backlash see Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 2.60.1; Cameron et al. (1999: 244); Cf. Lee (2012: 173).

⁴⁵² Kahlos (2009:62).

⁴⁵³ Lane Fox (2006: 666) argues that Constantine's language was not a language of tolerating equals. Barnes (1981: 210) agrees that Constantine's language was harsh and that such a man would not be expected to tolerate paganism

Despite some temple destruction during the latter half of his reign, Constantine was not against the construction of temples in honor of himself and the imperial family when he granted permission to the Italian community of Hispellum (Spello) in 333/5 to build an imperial cult temple. Constantine permitted the construction of the temple, itself an expression of imperial loyalty, provided that blood sacrifices (called "deceits of any contagious *superstitio*") were not performed within.⁴⁵⁴ Even during the latter part of his reign Constantine continued to play upon the ambiguities of *superstitio* as the pagans of Hispellum would have interpreted the ruling to denote imperial disfavor of illicit divinatory sacrifice, while Christians would have seen the ruling to imply that no pagan sacrifices were permitted within the temple.⁴⁵⁵ For pagans, the imperial cult was still seen as a vehicle by which one could assert their loyalty to the emperor, suggesting that the attachment to the Roman civic cult which arose during the previous centuries persisted even when Christianity was beginning to spread.

Constantine, despite his call for the religious toleration of paganism, was still an emperor of the *dominate* who, much like Diocletian, Galerius, and Maximinus Daia before him, subscribed to the idea of imperial and divine unity in order to maintain the *pax deorum*, albeit this time the emperor adhered to an Abrahamic religion. Church unity appears to have been Constantine's prime concern and in the late 320s, the emperor issued rulings against Christian heretics and dissidents, while also attempting to resolve the strife which arose from the North African Donatists who were against Christian unity.⁴⁵⁶ In 324, he composed a letter to the bishops of Alexandria, Alexander, and Arius, arguing that both men must keep the divergent views of the faith to themselves in order that *homonoia* (concord) would reign among Gods' servants, bringing peace. For Constantine, the theological differences that persisted were futile and the rhetoric of Christian unity was heard loudly during his opening speech before the 325

for long because many of his Christian supporters found pagan practices offensive. For a first-hand account of Constantine permitting pagan cults to remain untouched see Libanius. *Oration* 30.6. For the destruction of the five temples see Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 3.26-7, 51-3, 55-6, 58. For Constantine plundering the coffers of pagan temples see Libanius. *Oration*. 30.6; Jones (1964: 1083). Cf. Lee (2010: 174).

⁴⁵⁴ CIL 11.5265 (*ILS* 705) in Lee (2000: 92-3); Gasco (1967: 655-6); Van Dam (2007: 19-34, 112-8); Harries (2012: 163).

⁴⁵⁵ Beard et al (2004: 371-2).

⁴⁵⁶ For Constantine's labeling of heretics and dissenters as the enemies of truth see Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 3.64.1-2; Barnes discusses the dating of the ruling (1981: 224). For more concerning Constantine and the Donatists see Frend (1952: 10-23, 159-63); Drake (2000: 212-31); Harries (2012: 168-71).

Council of Nicaea, though his desire to suppress dissention within the Church only accentuated divisions.⁴⁵⁷

As mentioned previously, though Constantine ruled both pagans and Christians, he had believed that Sol was compatible with the Christian God. Such a move became problematic to some Christians because many would not have wanted their god associated with a pagan deity, and in the words of J. Bardill, Constantine "decided that Sol had to go." By 318-319, images of Sol had been removed from all copper coinage. Between 324-325 the last image the solar deity appeared on a gold *aureus* and the solar crown made its last appearance on a gold medallion of the emperor minted at Antioch in 326.⁴⁵⁸ The erection of colossal statues of Constantine in both Constantinople and Rome during the 330s with radiant crowns, holding globes and spears, demonstrate that even though Sol had been removed from the numismatic representations of the emperor, Constantine still shared the luminosity of the Supreme Deity under whose protection he ruled.⁴⁵⁹ Though Constantine came to openly reject the association with Sol, he still believed in divine protection from the god without any verbal or visual references. Thus, large radiant statues of the emperor became acceptable to both pagans and Christians.⁴⁶⁰ Furthermore, J. Bardill has advanced the radical notion that Constantine sought to equate himself with Christ. M.C. Odahl disagrees, suggesting that based on Constantine's letters, the emperor saw himself as a servant of God who would be his slave in the afterlife and Christ as his savior, making it more probable that Constantine wanted to be the "thirteenth Apostle" or an *isapostolos* ("equal of the Apostles") like Saint Paul.⁴⁶¹

Constantine's successor's Constantius II (337-361), Constantine II (337-340) and Constans (337-340) proclaimed adherence to Christianity.⁴⁶² Constantius II was the most severe

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. Kahlos (2009: 62-4). For Constantine following in the same path as Diocletian and the other tetrarchs in relation to divine unity and the *pax deorum* see Norderval (1988: 113-50); Cameron et al. (1999: 43-4, 250-1); Drake (2000: 245, 283, 285). For Arianism and the theological differences concerning this sect, see Kannengiesser (1983: 456-75); Williams (2001: 48-91); Gwynn (2006: 169-249). Kahlos (2009: 176) mentions that most of the evidence from the time period comes from the mainstream side and is therefore possibly biased. For Constantine's attendance and opening remarks during the Council of Nicaea see Eusebius. *Vita Constantini*. 3.12; Beard et al. (2004: 370-1). For the dissention and chaos that followed the Council of Nicaea see Barnes (1981: 225); Drake (2000: 254-71); Harries (2012: 175-7).

⁴⁵⁸ Bardill (2012: 57, quote on p. 331). For the last gold *aureus* with the image of Sol Invictus see RIC VII, 48 with n.6. For the last appearance of the solar crown from a golden medallion minted at Antioch, see RIC VII, 42 with n.2, Antioch 70.

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. Bardill (2012: 105-6).

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. Bardill (2012: 331-2) who cites McCormick (1986: 104),

⁴⁶¹ Bardill (2012: 338-96); Odahl (2013: 199-202).

⁴⁶² Kahlos (2009: 65).

in his legislative tendencies and continued to prosecute private forms of divination. Constantius II ruled as *augustus* for twenty-four years and was, according to the description supplied to modern historians by Ammianus Marcellinus, paranoid and unglamorous in appearance as opposed to the more attractive Julian (the apostate). Regardless of some successes, the reigns of Constantine's successors had begun with instability caused by a dynastic civil war. Ammianus recounted that swift and harsh penalties befell those who were accused of magical arts at the court of Constantius.⁴⁶³ In 357, after having been sole *augustus* for seven years, Constantius II enacted two laws which decreed that consulting soothsayers, astrologers, diviners, augurs, seers, and Chaldeans was prohibited under pain of death along with the criminalization of magical acts made to awaken the spirits of the dead.⁴⁶⁴

The following year, Constantius decreed to the Praetorian Prefect Taurus that all officials within the echelons of the Roman state accused of practicing wizardry were to suffer severe punishment.⁴⁶⁵ This law encapsulates the paranoia of the emperor because those believed to control black powers may have been looked upon as agents of instability and usurpation. The law stated that anyone within the inner circle of the emperor was exempt from torture, save those who practiced magic. If one observes the laws against the practitioners of private divination and magic during the years of 357 and 358, it can be suggested that the laws promulgated were not aimed at harmless forms of magic, but were concerned with punishing people who sought to predict the future and harm others.⁴⁶⁶ Constantius II, much like his father, was concerned with outlawing illicit acts that were seen as *superstitio* and not with stamping out paganism. Though legislation was promulgated forbidding sacrifices, venerating statues, and ordering temples closed under pain of death, such laws were not always extended to the city of Rome and were enacted on specific occasions and limited to certain regions, while outside the capital, temples were left unspoiled and pagan festivals continued.⁴⁶⁷ Furthermore, Constantius had to be an

⁴⁶³ For Ammianus Marcellinus' description of Constantius II along with a study of other imperial rulers see Rohrbacher (2010: 92-116). For the penalty of death leveled at those who engaged in magic in court see Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 16.8.2.

⁴⁶⁴ *Codex Theodosianus*. 9.16.4 (357); 9.16.5 (357).

⁴⁶⁵ *Codex Theodosianus*. 9.16.6 (358).

⁴⁶⁶ Dickie (2001: 255).

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Kahlos (2009: 65-6). For the closure of temples during the reign of Constantius II see *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.10.4, which Heather et al. (2001:52-3, 56) suggest only occurred because the emperor found out about the sacrifices within the temple and that some temples destructions during this period were the exception and not the rule. For the continued use of temples outside the capital of Rome (342) for entertainment purposes see *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.10.3.

emperor of pagans as well as Christians. Despite being an Arian Christian, he retained the title of *pontifex maximus* and in 356, appointed new priests from Rome's senatorial caste.⁴⁶⁸

Julian the "Apostate"

Roman Emperor Julian "the apostate" reigned as sole *augustus* following the death of Constantius II from 361 to 363. In the words of M. Marcos, "Julian definitely did not want to be a new Diocletian and thus he made it known to his collaborators [Secundus Salutius], who occasionally needed to remind him of the fact."⁴⁶⁹ Julian, if not an outright persecutor, was an intolerant prince.⁴⁷⁰ Julian was a "Hellene" who embraced paganism. Julian may have been intolerant towards the Christians and regarded paganism as the only true religion, *theosebeia*, accusing the Christians of going astray and being afflicted by a disease, but did not order physical attacks upon them. Rather, he believed that they had to be persuaded back into the pagan fold, a mission he considered divine.⁴⁷¹ Later ecclesiastical writers attempting to explain why Julian did not use physical violence against the Church, settled on the notion that the emperor sought to deprive the community of martyrs. Though the anti-Christian violence that did occur during his reign was sporadic, attacks may have been initiated by pagans who assumed a sympathetic emperor would not prosecute them.⁴⁷² Though religiously intolerant, Julian did seek to cultivate the image of a tolerant ruler. Much like Constantine and Maximinus Daia before him, the former ordering pagans and Christians to act moderately, while the latter, though contemptuous of Christianity, granted them religious toleration, Julian displayed condescending forbearance.⁴⁷³ When he had been illegally bestowed the title of *augustus* by his troops in Gaul, the young emperor had previously reflected on the qualities of a philosopher-prince in a letter to

⁴⁶⁸ Beard et al.(2004:372-3).

⁴⁶⁹ Marcos (2009: 198). For Secundus Salutius reminding Julian at Antioch of his desire to be seen as tolerant, see Rufinus. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 10.37; Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.20; Theodoret. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.11.

⁴⁷⁰ Bidez (1914: 406-61); Scicolone (1979: 420-34); Bowersock (1978: 92); Cf. Marcos (2009: 196).

⁴⁷¹ Cf. Kahlos (2009: 76). Marcos (2009: 200) cites the work by Julian when suggesting the emperor believed in his mission to persuade the Christians was divine, saving as many as possible: *Against the Cynic Heraclius*. 226d-234c; *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*. 180a-c; *Hymn to King Helios*. 157d.

⁴⁷² For Julian's tolerance explained as a mask to cover his evil intentions, see. Rufinus. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 10.34; Socrates. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.21; Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.4; Theodoret. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.15. For Julian's "gentle persecution" as a method to advance paganism, see Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.4. On Julian depriving the Christian Church of martyrs, see Socrates. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.12; Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.4; On the positive image the emperor sought to cultivate, see Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.17; Theodoret. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.4; Philostorgius. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 7.4. All these ancient sources are drawn upon in Marcos (2009: 204).

⁴⁷³ Cf. Kahlos (2009: 76-7).

Themistius before his program of religious toleration was made public through a 362 panegyric in which he contrasted the violence () of coercion, with justice (), fairness (), freedom (), humanity (), goodness (), moderation (), a civilized character (), and persuasion ().⁴⁷⁴

Once on the throne, the young emperor of the Christian Flavian dynasty attempted to arrest the process of Christianization and restore the traditional cults within society and the Roman state. From what will be observed, there still existed some anti-Christian attitudes among the population as instances of mob violence or gubernatorial zealotry will be observed below. Sadly for Julian, as we will come to see from his sojourn in Antioch, his vision of paganism appeared to be out of touch with the reality of the Later Empire. Julian's preference for material blood sacrifices was tied to his philosophical ideals and an older, archaic form of Hellenism. A detailed analysis of Julian's anti-Christian legislation is large but such a topic can be broken down into three general points.⁴⁷⁵ First, Julian granted amnesty to Christian sects which had suffered repression at the hands of the Arian Constantius II, hoping that internal dissension among the various Christian parties would weaken Christianity and reverse the fortunes of paganism. Julian's desire to sow dissension within the Christian community was not lost on ancient historians.⁴⁷⁶ Secondly, on account of the perceived lack of effectiveness of the previous policy, in 362 Julian revoked the privileges of the Christian clergy granted to them under Constantine, along with exemption from curial taxes, and curtailed their judicial powers.⁴⁷⁷ And lastly, the education law enacted in 17 June 362 attempted to aggressively turn the tide against the Christians, forbidding them to teach grammar and rhetoric; the emperor hoped that such a law would push the Church to the margins of acceptable society.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Marcos (2009: 197-8) who cites *Panegyrici Latini*. 11 (3) in Lieu (1986). For another translation see Blockley (1972: 437-50).

⁴⁷⁵ Marcos (2009: 195-97) summarizes the legislation by Julian towards the Christian Church.

⁴⁷⁶ See, Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 22.5.3-4; Sozomen. *Ecclesiastical History*. 5.5; Philostorgius. *Ecclesiastical History*. 7.4.

⁴⁷⁷ Within the *Codex Theodosianus*. 15.1.3, we can see the Julianic decree ordering that provincial governors to restore ruined pagan temples before all others. Furthermore, a law from 13 March 362 (*Codex Theodosianus*. 12.1.50) ordered that members of the clergy had to be re-inscribed into local curiae. A letter by Julian, (*Julian, Letter*, 114) deprived members of the clergy from jurisdiction in the Church. On the curtailing of the Church's privileges, see, Sozomen. *Ecclesiastical History*. 55; Theodoret. *Ecclesiastical History*. 1.11, 4.4; Philostorgius. *Ecclesiastical History*. 7.4.

⁴⁷⁸ Direct legislation on behalf of the emperor can be seen in, *Codex Theodosianus*. 13.3.5. This law was criticized by Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 22.10.7; Den Boeft et al. (1995: 193-5). For the reaction of ecclesiastical writers, see, Gregory of Nazianzus. *Oration*. 4.5, 4.96; Rufinus. *Ecclesiastical History*. 10.33; Socrates. *Ecclesiastical History*. 3.12; Sozomen. *Ecclesiastical History*. 5.8 The burning of the temple of Apollo at Daphne

Anti-Christian violence during the reign of Julian was sporadic and not encouraged by the imperial authority and ecclesiastical writers very rarely blame for bloody attacks on the emperor.⁴⁷⁹ This is significant because during the mid-fourth century, though anti-Christian disturbances were sporadic and not centrally-directed, pagans needed the belief that they had a sympathetic emperor on the throne in order to commit heinous acts. This can be contrasted with provincial initiatives prior to the 250s. During the first two centuries, provincials engaged in local initiatives to rid their communities of Christians, believing the Church constituted a threat to the *pax deorum*, by sending petitions to their local governor.

The first episode of anti-Christian violence during this period occurred at Alexandria in December 361. George of Cappadocia, the bishop of Alexandria, was lynched and murdered by a pagan mob. The bishop, hated by the pagans in the city, had slandered many through his speeches and prevented them from performing their traditional sacrifices and engaging in feasts, and he had permitted Artemius, the Christian *Dux* of Egypt, to destroy various pagan idols.⁴⁸⁰ George was granted permission to erect a new Church on the foundations of a derelict temple. In an effort to purify the site, Christians found a deep chamber full of human remains and other pagan paraphernalia which was soon paraded throughout the city. Pagans, incensed by this, began to riot and attacked Christians before turning their fury on George, who was fastened to a camel, torn to pieces, and burned.⁴⁸¹ Julian, though he did not punish the rioters, rebuked the actions of the Alexandrian mob. He stated that the people should not have taken actions into their own hands and judges should have been consulted and that "the state as a whole ought to be well governed and you ought to obey the laws and not transgress those that from the beginning were wisely established."⁴⁸² Julian was not necessarily indifferent to the bloody riot of the Alexandrians and Ammianus Marcellinus, a contemporary, stated that the emperor would have been able to suppress the mob but was warned against undertaking any actions. On the other

may have aggravated the anti-Christian feelings of the emperor as he turned a blind eye to pagan violence against Christians.

⁴⁷⁹ Marcos (2009: 197) mentions that Julian mobilized the Jews against the Christians (Gregory of Nazianus. *Oration*. 5.3; Theodotus. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.20) and encouraged the Christians of Bostra in Arabia Petrea to expel their bishop (Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.15; Julian. *Epistulae*. 114), Theodotus mentions that he was rarely and instigator (*Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.6, 3.20).

⁴⁸⁰ For George slandering pagans preventing them from performing their traditional rites, see Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 4.30. For the destruction of pagan idols and the temple of Serapis by Artemius, see Theodoret. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.14;

⁴⁸¹ Socrates. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.2. Bowersock (1978: 80).

⁴⁸² Julian. *Epistulae*. 21.380a-b (Tr. W.C. Wright); Teitler (2014: 83).

hand, the ecclesiastical writer Socrates asserted that this violent episode angered the emperor. Politically speaking, it would have been costly for Julian to punish Alexandria so early in his reign.⁴⁸³

Attacks on the Christian community would continue to occur in Rome's near eastern provinces as a result of either mob actions or gubernatorial initiative.⁴⁸⁴ Gaza and Heliopolis witnessed bloody episodes. Virgins were seized by rioters, disemboweled, filled with grain, and thrown to starving pigs to be eaten, while the deacon Cyrillus was himself cut open and had his liver feasted upon, though one can assume that such an event may be exaggerated.⁴⁸⁵ Eusebius, Nastabus, and Zeno all met gruesome fates in Gaza when they were seized by pagan mobs and mercilessly beaten before having their heads crushed and their bodies burned; Zeno escaping to Anthedon before being chased back to Gaza, only to die of his wounds.⁴⁸⁶ Eupsychius of Caesarea was martyred while the monk Hilarion was fortunate enough to escape the carnage.⁴⁸⁷ Interestingly, H.C. Teitler has drawn attention to Sozomen who claimed that Eupsychius was put to death following the anger of the emperor when the temple of Tyche was destroyed. One must take into account that Julian was not in Caesarea at this point, but was in Antioch. Teitler does mention that although the letters of both Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil mention a martyr by the name of Eupsychius, perhaps this was either an earlier personage or a Christian notable who was put to death by regional administrators. Either way, Julian cannot be blamed for his death.⁴⁸⁸ The most vivid description of an anti-Christian attack during this period is of the ordeal faced by Mark of Arethusa. Mark was attacked by the Arethusans who violently dragged and beat him throughout the town, cut-off his ears with fine ropes, and doused his body in a sweet honey mixture to be stung and consumed by wasps and bees when after being hoisted up into a fish basket. Despite all this, he survived.⁴⁸⁹ Julian did not punish the people of Gaza and Heliopolis,

⁴⁸³ Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 22.11.11; Socrates. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.2. Marcos (2009: 198).

⁴⁸⁴ Bouffartigue (1998: 88-90); Marcos (2009: 197).

⁴⁸⁵ For the virgins martyred at Heliopolis, see Gregory of Nazianzus. *Oration*. 4.87; Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.10. For the death and cannibalization of the liver of the Deacon Cyrillus, see Theodoret. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.3. In Theodoret. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.3, the virgins who are thrown to be eaten by pigs were martyred at Askalon in Gaza.

⁴⁸⁶ For the martyrdom of Eusebius, Nastabus, and Zeno, see Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.9.

⁴⁸⁷ For the martyrdom of Eupsychius of Caesarea, see Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.11. For the escape of the monk Hilarion, see Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.10.

⁴⁸⁸ Teitler (2014: 86-9).

⁴⁸⁹ For the attack against Mark of Arathusa, see Gregory of Nazianzus. *Oration*. 4.88; Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.10; Theodoret. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.3. Chuvin (1990: 44).

but merely deposed the governor who was spared the death sentence on account of imperial clemency.⁴⁹⁰

In Asia Minor, sources report that governors took a more active role in the persecution of Christians. In Phrygia, Macedonius, Theodulus, and Tatian were three Christians accused of destroying idols in a temple of Misos and were executed on a flaming gridiron after refusing governor Amachus' request that they offer sacrifices to the gods.⁴⁹¹ In Ancyra, both Basil and Busiris were seized by the local governor. The former was executed while the latter had his sides ripped by iron rods but survived this ordeal and lived until the reign of Emperor Theodosius.⁴⁹² Across the Bosphorus at Dorystolum in Thrace, the governor Capitalinus had Aemelianus executed on a flaming pyre.⁴⁹³

From what has been described, it can be suggested that pagan hostility still existed towards the growing Christian community, particularly within Rome's eastern provinces. In some instances, the pagan populace of a certain town would violently lynch Christians, while the emperor would hardly punish those who ran riot. Although these episodes of anti-Christian violence were sporadic and not centrally-planned, these attacks are significant because pagans may have believed that Julian was sympathetic and would be lenient if he chose to punish them for their actions. In other instances, such as in Asia Minor and Thrace, governors executed Christians themselves, albeit only after they had committed acts of vandalism and refused to offer sacrifices.

As mentioned previously, Julian was a "Hellene" and believed that one's Hellenism cannot be separated from one's paganism and observations to the work by Gregory of Nazianzus further draw this conclusion. Gregory of Nazianzus, a contemporary of Julian, and a fellow pupil at Athens during his youth, was hostile to the emperor not only on account of Julian's apostasy, but also in response to the ruler's insistence that only pagans can be *Hellenes* and properly appreciate the classical works. Gregory believed that one could find beauty in the classical verses while still being a Christian.⁴⁹⁴ Julian, though born a Christian, received a traditional classical

⁴⁹⁰ For the lack of action by Julian, see Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.9.

⁴⁹¹ For the martyrdom of Macedonius, Theodulus, and Tatian, see Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.11.

⁴⁹² For Basil and Busiris, see Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 5.11. The account of the death of Basil by Sozomen is argued by Teitler (2014: 76-89) as tallying better and being more historically useful than the subsequent *passio s. Basilii prespyteri*, which he calls "historically worthless," whereas Woods (1992: 31-9) appears to disagree.

⁴⁹³ For the martyrdom of Aemelianus, see Theodoret. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.3.

⁴⁹⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus. *Oration*, 4. 5. For Julian, the pagan works of the past should be as sacred to pagans as the bible was to the Christians as mentioned in *Epistulae*. 36. Homeric myths were considered by many of the Ancient

education in Nicomedia in 338 under a tutor (*paidagogos*), a Scythian eunuch named Mardonius who had previously instructed the young emperor's mother.⁴⁹⁵ Julian's "conversion" to paganism may have stemmed from his youth when he was under the tutelage of Mardonius and Maximus of Ephesus. Mardonius introduced Julian to the Homeric myths, permitting the young prince to escape the court bloodshed which saw most of his immediate family killed while becoming a surrogate father to him, and Maximus introduced him to theurgy, the magical aspect of Neoplatonism which may have aided in his conversion in 351.⁴⁹⁶ Another aspect of Julian's Hellenism, alongside his philosophical and religious interests, was his desire to create a new Hellenic religion as a blend of philosophy, pagan ritual, and myth. Though a form of Hellenism,

Greeks to be an educational guides for the young. Plato believed that the Homeric myths were a bad influence on the young in this famous work *The Republic*. Heraclitus, a stoic and a Platonist, looked at some of the problems within the Homeric myths and suggested that Homer was not allegorical, but impious. In Late Antiquity, men like Porphyry came to rehabilitate the reputation of Homer within the scholastic sphere, as can be seen in *On the Cave of the Nymphs*. Porphyry describes the cave as an allegory of the cosmos and refers to Homer as a theologian. Many of the Christians, such as Basil of Caesarea, sought to redefine how the "pagan" classics should be taught and appreciated by young Christians. For a modern assessment and history of the allegorical interpretation of Homer, see Lambert (1986: 1-43). Limberis (2000: 373-400) argues that for Julian, along with both Libanius and Gregory of Nazianus, had both bound their individual religious allegiances within their identification of Hellenism and therefore, all three considered themselves Greek. Lamberis goes on to state that the reigns of Constantine and his successors allowed for a semblance of relative peace between pagans and Christians to the point that many second-generation Christians, like Gregory of Nazianus, were able to enjoy and identify with the Classical literature that permeated their society while at the same time incorporating their religious affiliation which had not been part of the previous Greco-Roman cultural koine. For a study concerning the circumstances in which Julian passed legislation banning Christian teachers from instructing the Classics see McLynn (2014: 120-36).

⁴⁹⁵ For Julian and his instruction under Mardonius, see, Julian. *Misopogon*, 352 a-354a; Bowersock (1978: 23-4); Smith (1995: 25-6); Tougher (2007: 22-5). Though it can be suggested that someone so heavily versed in the knowledge of the classical Homeric texts may have been a pagan, some might counter this assertion with the simple fact that a Christian family, particularly the imperial family, would not have hired a pagan. Seeing that Julian had nothing but respect and admiration for the man, one can suggest that if he was a pagan, then his pagan piety must have been hidden rather well from the imperial authorities.

⁴⁹⁶ Libanius. *Oration*, 18.11. For Julian's admiration for Mardonius, see Julian. *Misopogon*, 351 c-352 a. Within these lines Julian comments that his tutor had encouraged him to look to the Homeric myths when constructing the image of the outside world and drew upon examples such as the wooded island of Calypso, the caves of Circe, and the garden of Alcinoos. Mardonius said he should "be assured that you will never see anything more delightful than these." (Tr. W.C. Wright). Mardonius encouraged Julian to escape the bloody court intrigues by imagining places outside the bounds of the imperial stronghold to which he lived, installing within the young boy the notion that the epics were more real than his own bloody reality, as Mardonius become a surrogate father to him. In *Misopogon*, 352 c-d, Julian makes it known to the Antiochenes that Mardonius "won him [Julian] over" to his [Mardonius'] way of thinking (Tr. W.C. Wright). For the notion that Mardonius was a surrogate father to Julian see Bouffartigue (1989: 530); Athanassiadi (2010: 82-3). For Julian's embrace of Neoplatonic theurgy see Julian. *Epistulae*. 8, To Maximus the Philosopher; Bowersock (1978: 27-9); Smith (1995: 26-9, 91); Tougher (2007: 26-7). He studied rhetoric under Nicoles and Hecebolius. After studying at Nicomedia in 348 or 349, Julian passed into Pergamum and was introduced to Aedesius, who taught the works of Plato as interpreted by Plotinus and Porphyry. Porphyry's own disciple, Iamblichus, had been Aedesius' teacher and thus, Julian, at a very impressionable stage in his life, became a staunch proponent of Neoplatonic thought. Julian, as a follower of the Neoplatonic ideas of Iamblichus and his cosmological view of the universe, believed that material, blood sacrifices were of the utmost importance in order to connect with the power of the divine.

it was considered excessive in its emphasis on blood sacrifice and was too austere for the common masses because it disallowed them the ability to preserve some of their own local, idiosyncratic customs.⁴⁹⁷

Emperor Julian is best known as attempting to reaffirm the role of the traditional cults in an attempt to arrest the advance of Christianity and reconstitute the pagan priesthood. As the majority of the inhabitants of the empire were still polytheistic, his efforts were a failure because the wishes of the imperial authority were not realistic. In the previous chapter, the religious ambitions of the emperor were briefly touched upon. Julian wished the pagan priesthood to embrace *philanthrôpia* - charitable deeds as a method by which the traditional temples would challenge the Christian Church. As mentioned, this would not have been a realistic option for the traditional priestly elite. Furthermore, Julian also desired to detach the pagan priesthood from the state. This would not have been possible as most traditional priestly colleges were held by the pagan upper-classes. Since the Late Republic, temple custodianship had been nearly monopolized by the elite, making any detachment from the Roman state difficult.⁴⁹⁸ This can be contrasted with the Christian Church, whose growth can be ascribed to the support it enjoyed, both financially and spiritually from the lower members of society.⁴⁹⁹ There was an attempt to

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. Lamberis (2000: 378-86); Cabouret-Lauriou (2010: 90).

⁴⁹⁸ Julian further desired the pagan priesthood to become a caste separated from the sinews of the state as can be seen *The Letter to the High Priest Arsacius*. 431 c-d. Jones (1940: 229) asserts that pre-Christian priests practiced "mechanical" ceremonies and functions. Stark (1996: 206) suggests that non-exclusive religions "firms" such as traditional pagan cults became weak on account of their lack of "belonging" felt by their clients, along with a gradual decrease in credibility. Writing during the waning days of the Republic, Cicero in *De Domo Sua* can best describe the intermixing of men in both politics and religion (Cicero. *De Domo Sua*. 1). Leading priests acquired their posts when they were young, and surviving lists of priests are filled with the names of some of the most successful and powerful generals and politicians of their day. For prominent figures appointed to priesthoods, see, North (1990: 533). The careers of various priests, see Szelmer (1972: 182-8). Beard, et al. (2004: 359) discusses many of the most lucrative pagan priesthoods in Late Antiquity, specifically in the Greek-speaking east (a tradition continued from the Hellenistic era), Spain, southern Gaul, and Asia Minor. People sought priesthoods in the Imperial cult as a method for entering the Imperial administration if a senatorial appointment appeared difficult. Major priesthoods were also a stepping stone into the world of politics at Rome itself. Pagan priest enjoyed exemptions from serving on town councils, the promise of free meals at a city's expense, or a chance at the best cuts of meat from a temple's sacrifice. Lane Fox (1986: 77-8) argues that in some cases, priesthoods were simply purchased and became hereditary, permitting a single family to possess a priestly post for a few generations. On the sale of pagan priesthoods, see Debord (1982: 63-9). On the pagan priesthoods in Egypt, see Evans (1961: 275). For table offerings given to pagan priests, see Gill (1974:117). For banquets and inaugural gifts bestowed to towns by pagan priests, see Schmitt-Pantel (1981: 90).

⁴⁹⁹ The charity practiced by the Christian Church contributed to its growth. Justin Martyr. *First Apology*. 67; Beard et al. (2004: 288) asserts that along with the Jews, the Christians practiced charity as a central tenet. The Christian emphasis on charity grew all the more stronger following the end of the Severan dynasty. The granting of universal citizenship following the promulgation of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* by Emperor Caracalla in 212 worsened the divisions between rich and poor. The various cults which comprised Greco-Roman paganism were directed by and relied heavily on the richest members of the Empire's towns and cities. This can be contrasted with Christianity. The

alter the stature of the pagan priesthood during the reign of Maximinus Daia, but the tetrarch sought to have priests elected from the higher echelons of society, thus constructing something different than Julian.⁵⁰⁰ The pagan priesthood would not be able to become more reoriented than what had been attempted during the tetrarchy.

Julian was also initiated into the Neoplatonic mysteries by Maximus of Ephesus. Julian's Neoplatonism embraced the hierarchical model of sacrifices advocated by both Plotinus. But Iamblichus, whose school Maximus of Ephesus belonged to, did not reject the importance of material blood sacrifice as it was believed that since the gods had created the ritual and introduced it to man, blood sacrifice was paramount as the purifying fire from the sacrifices had the ability to draw the worshipper into the embrace of divine beings.⁵⁰¹ For Iamblichus, material gods should be worshipped materially as they presided over the material world, and therefore, those who wished to revere such deities should do so theurgically.⁵⁰² Julian became an enthusiastic supporter of material blood sacrifices and much to the chagrin of Ammianus Marcellinus and the inhabitants of Antioch, was called a "slaughterer" (*victimarius*) on account of his over-zealous performance of such rites.⁵⁰³

Perhaps two sections from the emperor's *Misopogon* can best echo the religious reality of the empire, particularity at Antioch and the disappointment felt by Julian on account of fourth

Christian Church, though led and directed by an elite of sorts, was not heavily dependent on the goodwill of the rich as there had existed an atmosphere surrounding the community which fluctuated between overt hostility and suspicion during the first four centuries. The Church grew, albeit underground, gaining a degree of redistributory powers from the mass of its adherents in the form of small donations accumulated over time. The Church depended on its rank and file. The leaders of the Christian Church did not proclaim to be the custodians of arcane secrets, but were friends, teachers, and servants. Nothing within places of Christian worship was meant to be purchased but established by character. This is echoed by Tertullian, who states "There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he is able; for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary, these gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund" (Tertullian. *Apologeticus*. 39). This quotation is discussed in Stark (1996: 207-8).

⁵⁰⁰ Nicholson (1994: 1-10) discusses and contrasts the reforms of both Maximinus Daia and Julian, asserting that the previous tetrarch encouraged the pagan priesthood to be drawn from the elite and to become embedded parts of the state bureaucracy, while the priesthood under Julian should embrace a more detached relationship towards the state.

⁵⁰¹ Porphyry. *On Abstinence from Animal Food*. 1.18-36; Bradbury (1995: 338). The Philosopher Porphyry had originally believed in the importance of blood sacrifice before changing his belief under the guidance of Plotinus, later coming to abstain from eating animal meat. For the philosophical arguments of Iamblichus see Iamblichus. *On the Mysteries of Egypt*. 5.7-9. For the philosophical currents concerning sacrifices within Neoplatonism during the early fourth century, see De Palma Digeser (2012). On the embrace of the divine through sacrificial fire, see Iamblichus. *On the Mysteries of Egypt*. 5.25; Janowitz (2002: 5-7,10-11, 128).

⁵⁰² Iamblichus. *On the Mysteries of Egypt*. 5.14.

⁵⁰³ Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 22.14.3; Den Boeft et al (1995:244). Ammianus also criticizes the Emperor for being excessive in his blood ritual while also calling him "superstitious." Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 25.4.7

century Hellenism, and the resentment of some towards his rule. It can be suggested that the city of Antioch was, by the time Julian's sojourn in the city, heavily Christianized and may have had a degree of religious fluidity between both Christians and pagans. The elites of the city intermingled with one another regardless of their own religious persuasion, and the proliferation of civic festivals, both religious and secular, provided Christians and pagans enjoyment of equal measure.⁵⁰⁴ A full assessment of the religious and cultural exchanges in the city is too large in scope for this analysis and will be discussed here. But one thing that can be suggested is that both Christians and pagans within the city may have been united in their contempt for the emperor. There was a vibrant and growing Christian community within Antioch and one can suggest that the pagans, particularly those who were rich and politically connected within the city *curia*, may have gotten along quite well with their Christian counterparts.⁵⁰⁵ Perhaps, when seeking to describe the Christians at Antioch, one can turn to G.W. Bowersock who states that Christian life in the city had "a pagan zest to it."⁵⁰⁶

Within the sections 346 b to c of *Misopogon*, three things can be noted: the emperor's zealous observance of the civic cults,⁵⁰⁷ Julian's lament at the depressing state of the Daphne shrine which had been neglected by the Antiochenes and later destroyed by either arson or lightning,⁵⁰⁸ and the festivities of the Syrian New Year.⁵⁰⁹ This is significant because Julian

⁵⁰⁴ Liebeschuetz (1972 : 224, 227, 231); Stark (1996: 158-61) suggests that Antioch was one of the more heavily Christianized cities of the Empire on account of three major trends: frequency of natural disasters which plagued the city and the surrounding country side, the constant flow of people who sought to live there as the Roman state was keen for the city to never be neglected because of its close proximity to the Persian frontier, and the charity work of the Christians in the city as they responded to the needs of a population dealing with hardship.

⁵⁰⁵ Julian makes a point to call the members of the city council "atheists" as it can be suggested that the greater part may have been Christians. According to Liebeschuetz (1972: 227), both pagans and Christians openly associated with one another within Antioch's higher echelons and within the *curia* to the point that distinguishing between both parties may have become rather hard while hardly any animosity existed between them. Julian berated the members of the *curia* by stating that their wives give excess goods from their households to the "Galileans" who fed the poor at their expense and allowed for the proliferation of "godlessness" amongst those in need (Julian. *Misopogon*. 363 a).

⁵⁰⁶ Bowersock (1978: 94).

⁵⁰⁷ The emperor, upon entering the city, was eager to perform the rites accorded to the temples of Zeus, Demeter, and Fortune (Tyche). According to Libanius (*Oration*, 12.80), Julian appeared to rejoice in his position as the priest of the Roman people, as he was *pontifex maximus*, and excelled in his efforts in performing pagan rites just as he had in statecraft. He participated in the entirety of the rituals and far exceeding the Greeks in the sacrifices he offered. As mentioned previously, Julian draped his Hellenism with his religious responsibilities and he believed that one's Hellenism was inseparable from paganism. For Julian partaking in the full ritual, see Libanius. *Oration*, 12. 82.

⁵⁰⁸ Julian, also visited the shrine of Daphne, which he believed would be thronged with devotees offering sacrifices and libations, but was disappointed. The temple grounds were utterly void of parishioners and the lone custodian had only a goose to offer the god (Julian. *Misopogon*. 361 d- 362 a). For a modern assessment see Bowersock (1978: 97). The emperor, angry at the lack of respect towards the temple, castigated the city *curia* for spending their funds

contrasted his own pagan piety with the festive nature of Antioch when he witnessed the city's inhabitants coming together during the yearly occasion regardless of religious affiliation.⁵¹⁰ As mentioned previously, Julian believed that one's Hellenism was inseparable from paganism.

A second section of lines from Julian's *Misopogon*, 357 a-d, continue to describe the religious situation at Antioch, while also alluding to the resentment towards the emperor. The local saying "the *Chi* never harmed the city in any way, nor did the *Kappa*,"⁵¹¹ draws attention to

on luxuries and not on cult sacrifices (Julian. *Misopogon*. 362 b-c). It is here that modern readers can discern Julian labeling the guardians of the temple as "careless." Julian would visit Daphne one more time in order to consult the oracle of Apollo near the Castalian spring, but soon discovered that the oracle lay silent. The emperor's half-Brother Gallus, a zealous Christian, had ordered the bones of Saint Babylas to be re-interred in the vicinity of the temple and spring, thus causing the grounds to be polluted and the oracle to lay silent. Bowersock (1978: 99) discusses Julian ritually purifying the temple grounds by moving the bones back to their original grave, much to the elation of Antiochene Christians who took the opportunity to celebrate the power of their local saint. Following this episode, the temple at Daphne burned down on account of unknown causes, though suspicion fell upon the Christians. The community stated the cause for the fire was lightning while some asserted the fire was caused by the candle of a visiting philosopher (Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 22.13.1-3). It can be suggested that Julian may have thought that Christians arsonists were the cause of the fire as he stated in his tirade that the temple was destroyed by "audacious acts of godless men." Julian, along with many pagan intellectuals considered the Christians to be *atheoi*, or atheists as they refused to acknowledge the traditional Greco-Roman gods. Den Boeft et al. (1995: 228-33).

⁵⁰⁹ Julian also had an issue with the Syrian New Year festival at Antioch. The city, on account of its location, was a focal point for regional trade. Libanius stated that such a characteristic, together with the proliferation of holidays, made the city a festive place (Libanius. *Oration*, 11. 265-266). The New Year festival became a great annoyance to the emperor. Liebeschuetz (1972: 228-9) discusses the civic holiday, and asserts that both pagans and Christians celebrated together with the latter participating in some secularized pagan practices to which many ecclesiastical writers, like John Chrysostom, vainly spoke out against. Furthermore, Julian was met with the local tradition of ridiculing imperial power during festivals such as the Syrian New Year. Such a tradition, along with many other unfavorable insults, forced the emperor's hand in his composition of the *Misopogon*. Gleason (1986: 106-19) has written about the composition of the *Misopogon* and explores why the ancient text may not have shocked ancient readers much in the same way it shocks modern historians. Gleason draws attention to the fact that "holiday abuse" was not uncommon in fourth century Syria. Such traditions were meant to ease social tensions. Julian could have responded in a variety of ways, as had been the case in the heavy-handed treatment of insults directed towards Emperor by Antiochenes under Caracalla, Septimius Severus, Gallus, and (eventually) Theodosius. Gleason goes on to state that Julian practiced imperial "chastisement" instead of a harder approach. Julian was not the first Emperor to rebuke his subjects by written texts as precedents of such actions can be seen as far back as the era of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Interestingly, the tradition of the Antiochenes did not ease tensions between the ruler and the ruled. Sandwell (2007: 167) writes that the Antiochenes may have taken glee in their tradition.

⁵¹⁰ Julian. *Misopogon*, 346 b-c.

⁵¹¹ The lines of the *Misopogon* are as follows: "'The *Chi*,' say the citizens, 'never harmed the city in any way, nor did the *Kappa*.' Now the meaning of this riddle which your wisdom has invented is hard to understand, but I obtained interpreters from your city and I was informed that these are the first letters of names, and that the former is intended to represent Christ, the latter Constantius" (357 a-b. trans W.C. Wright). Constantius II, himself an Arian Christian, may have been popular at Antioch as the majority of the Christians within the city were of the same denomination as the previous emperor. As the Antiochenes, regardless of religious affiliation, possibly embraced a similar view of the emperor as Julian's economic policies to be explained below) may have hindered their livelihood. For a modern assessment see Bowersock (1978: 103).

the anger that many had towards him regardless of their religion, while emperor's policies ran afoul of the city elites.⁵¹²

Upon his death on the Persian frontier in 363, Julian's desire for a reconstituted paganism died with him and his legacy became a point of contention among ancient writers, both secular and ecclesiastical.⁵¹³ In the end, Julian failed to reverse the growth of the Church. Perhaps the (would be) failure of the Julianic reforms should not be placed solely at the feet of the emperor. Julian's short reign and the lack of a powerful pagan successor would not have made his desired reforms a reality. With the death of Julian in 363, Secundus Salutius, a close friend and confident of the emperor, seemed the logical successor as he was backed by the military elite. But he declined the role and Jovian, a military man and a (nominal) Christian, took up the purple, becoming a short-lived emperor who tolerated most religious deviants.⁵¹⁴ During this period, euergetism, the lifeblood of paganism, had been in decline. The urban rich, whose responsibility it was to donate to temples in order to uphold the traditional pagan rites, found themselves in a dire financial situation. Furthermore, the edicts promulgated by Constantine and his successors against pagan rituals in the public sphere also had an effect on pagan temples. Many who at one

⁵¹² Julian, in his tirade against the people of Antioch, also fell afoul of the ruling elites of the city (Julian. *Misopogon*, 357 d). Julian drew attention to the fact that during his time at Antioch, the relationship between the elites in the *curia* and himself had deteriorated. Julian, in his adherence to the notion of Hellenism, attempted to increase the strength of the local city councils of the empire, such as in Antioch. Many problems remained with the local *curia* as the richest inhabitants of the city exploited loopholes left behind from the reign of Constantine's successors. Bowersock (1978: 96-8, 100) draws a picture of a naive emperor who failed to comprehend the levels of corruption in the city. He states that Julian drew the ire of the local elites as Antioch was experiencing a dire famine. The emperor, in attempt to refresh the dwindling number of *curiales*, decreed that eligibility in the council can pass through both parental lines. On September 3rd, he further decreed that all inhabitants of the city of eligible rank must be called up for curial duty. Unfortunately, the richest were able to bribe their way out of service and soon people were dragged from the market place to fill the *curia*. On September 18th, Julian ordered the Praetorian Prefect to investigate the corruption taking place and most of the new nominations became void. Furthermore, Julian attempted to court favor with the starving Antiochenes. The elites had been accused of hoarding grain and selling off their portion of the valuable staples to the starving populace at inflated prices. The emperor sought to offset the famine by establishing fixed prices for everything. He also imported grain from other parts of Syria and from Imperial holdings in Egypt and sold this grain at artificially depressed prices in Antioch, but did not bother to extend this fixed prices outside the city limits. The rich came in from the countryside, bought large quantities of grain at low prices, and resold the grain at higher-than-market prices outside the city. Julian, once the temple of Daphne had been destroyed by fire, berated the members of *curia* and accused them of spending their funds on excessive luxury instead of on the temples.

⁵¹³ Bowersock (1978: 1-11); Tougher (2007: 3-11). When discussing ancient historians who were either favorable or hostile to the reign of Julian, two camps generally appear. Those who were favorable to his regime: Ammianus Marcellinus (though he can be critical at times), Libanius, Eunapius, Zosimus, and Claudius Mamertinus. Those who were hostile to Julian: Gregory of Nazianus, Ephraem the Syrian, John Chrysostom, Socrates (the church historian), Sozomen, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus.

⁵¹⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 25.5.1; O' Donnell (1979: 47,54); Cf. Kahlos (2009: 79) who cites Socrates. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. 3.25.

time would have sacrificed at the altars of their ancestral cults found themselves members of a shrinking minority in many cities. Though the pagan rites that Christians found offensive were still widely practiced in the rustic hinterlands, many pagan altars of the cities lay bare.⁵¹⁵ Julian had attempted to swim against the current of a changing religious landscape.

The Nicene Religio

The short reign of Jovian was followed by Valentinian I (354-375) and Valens (364-378) who both decreed that all inhabitants of the empire were free to adhere to their own *religiones*. Valentinian remained neutral in religious disputes despite being a devout Nicene Christian. Both emperors sought a return to the previous religious equilibrium which had existed during the reigns of Constantine I and Constantius II and continued to promulgate legislation against rituals that were deemed a threat to the state such as magic, but permitted public soothsaying and traditional *haruspicina*.⁵¹⁶

The overlapping reigns of Emperors Gratian (375-383), Valentinian II (375-392), and Theodosius I (379-395) ushered in a new period of intense religious policies in support of religious unity. Rome had always considered proper religious rituals which posed no threat to the *pax deorum* to be *religio*, and thus adherence to the civic religion meant that one was a good Roman and loyal to the emperor. During the course of the fourth century, the notion of what constituted a good Roman began to be reflected in the Christianizing policies of the state and by the closing decade of the fourth century Nicene Christianity was defined as the *religio* of the empire. Other religions, be they polytheistic cults, Judaism, and certain Christian heresies became *superstitiones* and equated with being foreign, a danger to public piety, and un-Roman. The Christianizing Roman Empire embraced the old tradition of the previously polytheistic state

⁵¹⁵ Bradbury (1995: 331-356) explores the (attempted) pagan revival of Julian along with discussing the hierarchy of sacrifices which developed during the first century and eventually becoming widespread during the *Dominate*. Furthermore, Bradbury suggests that along with the financial problems faced by the Roman elite during the reign of Julian, further hindering evergetism, the fear that many pagans possibly had of their reduced status in towns and cities may have also had an adverse effect on the survival of pagan cult worship. It can be suggested that the fear pagans may have had arose out of a combination of anti-pagan edicts promulgated by Constantine's successors along with the growth in strength of zealous members of the Christian clergy. Furthermore, these factors may have contributed to the "secularization" of previously religious pagan festivals, most notably those in Antioch.

⁵¹⁶ Cf. Kahlos (2009: 80) states that although the decree of toleration of Valentinian and Valens is not extant, succeeding emperors have cited it (371). See *Codex Theodosianus*. 9.16.9. For Valentinian impartiality of religious disputes and religious toleration see Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae*. 30.9.5; O'Donnell (1979: 53-4). For the continued existence of *haruspicina* see *Codex Theodosianus*. 9.16.9. For the banning of magic, and nocturnal sacrifices, see *Codex Theodosianus*. 9.16.7. For the banning of astrologers, and all forms of sacrifice see *Codex Theodosianus*. 9.16.8.

which dictated that membership in the civic community meant adherence to the civic religion regardless if the religion had changed.⁵¹⁷ On 27 February 380, Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica, or *Cunctos populos*, which decreed that Nicene Christianity was to be the official state religion of the empire.⁵¹⁸ Though the emperor still remained the *pontifex maximus*, in 382 Gratian abandoned the title and under the influence of powerful Christian leaders, such as Ambrose of Milan, ended the flow of state subsidies to traditional cults and the privileges of the pagan priesthood, removed the altar of Victory from the senate house (though it had once been removed by Constantius II before being replaced), and confiscated the revenues of temples.⁵¹⁹

The reign of Theodosius I, first as leader of the eastern provinces (379-392) and then as the sole *augustus* of the whole Mediterranean basin (392-395) witnessed what some have come to describe as the "final battle" between paganism and a "Christianizing" Empire, though many debate whether such an event should be called a "battle" at all.⁵²⁰ The early part of Theodosius' reign did not experience profound anti-pagan legislation that one would equate with a battle between religions because the emperor appeared to have been more interested in sorting-out doctrinal differences between various Christians, such as Arians, than with polytheistic cults.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁷ Kahlos (2009: 88-9).

⁵¹⁸ *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.1.2; Potter (2014: 542-3).

⁵¹⁹ Hyde (1946: 215); Cf. Beard et al. (2004: 374); Potter (2014: 546).

⁵²⁰ Brown (1995: 4-6); Harries (1999: 95-6); Gaddis (2005: 176-8); Cameron (1999: 109-21); Cameron (2011); Cameron (2012: 18); Moss (2013: 215-22). The Battle of the Frigidus River (A.D. 394) is often (and romantically) described as the "final battle" between paganism and Christianity. To be frank, what battle? It can be suggested that there was no real intransience towards paganism in the sense of a final battle between two seemingly opposing spiritualities. Any sort of open conflict between paganism and Christianity, along with "problems of Christianization" arose out of the narrative generated by Christian historians, polemics and preachers in the early fifth century. Any "pagan last stand" should be observed through the historical lenses of Christian historians who attempted to create a narrative structure of the final triumph of Christianity over the older pagan religions of the Empire, ushering in a new age. For some time, modern historians have seen the Christianization of the Later Roman Empire in terms of conflict. Was there an armed conflict? There is no doubt that Late Antique Christians possibly saw themselves engaged in a battle with Greco-Roman paganism, even if the latter was dying a slow death and its adherents did not (on average) see themselves in open confrontation with Christianity. It can be suggested that many pagans of this period probably wished that Christianity had never entered the veins of the Empire, but, if they did desire an end, or even a curtailing of Christianity, what "victory" could they have asked for, save the preservation of their temples and co-existence within a New Order. Paganism was already a decreasing force within the Roman Empire during the short reign of Julian (more so in the East) and its demise increased by the time Theodosius I ushered in legislation against its existence at the end of the fourth century. For the laws of Theodosius meant to eliminate pagan practices see Bury (1958: 368-70); Errington (2006: 233-37); Cameron (2011: 59-74); Lee (2013: 52-3).

⁵²¹ A 386 law from the reign of Theodosius I, stipulates that in Christian clergy were exempted from being chosen to the position of chief civil priest (archierosyna), and that although it is illicit for temples to be overseen by those who are Christian, pagan temple are still permitted and functioning, *Codex Theodosianus*. 12.1.112; Bury (1958: 368); Errington (2006: 233).

The late sixth century historian and pagan, Zosimus, asserted that even though Theodosius was presiding over an increasingly Christianizing Empire, the emperor appointed Eutolmius Tatianus from Lycia, himself a Pagan, to the post of Praetorian Prefect of Egypt.⁵²² Furthermore, imperial tolerance, for the time being, was extended to the Jews of Callinicum in 388, because their synagogue was burned by a mob of Christians led by their bishop.⁵²³ Theodosius ordered the bishop to supervise the rebuilding of the synagogue, while others were to be tried and punished. Regardless of the successful lobbying of Ambrose of Milan to have members of the Christian mob set free, the attempt at a degree of religious toleration on the part of Theodosius, a pious Nicene Christian, should be of notice.⁵²⁴

Concerning paganism, the first years of the Theodosius' reign can be observed as a time in which the only attention the emperor might have given to non-Christian groups was in following the example of Gratian and Valentinian II in rejecting the title of *pontifex maximus*. Initial attempts by Theodosius to curb the practices of paganism occurred between AD 381-388. On 21 December 381, legislation was enacted which reiterated the Constantinian ban on prognostication through blood sacrifices throughout the eastern provinces under the praetorship of Florus. On May 385, the same ruling against sacrifices was repeated to the praetorian prefect of the East, Cynegius, himself a pious Christian. In 382, a law was issued to Palladius, the dux of Osrhoene, concerning the famous temple of Edessa in which the ban on sacrifice was repeated and the temple allowed to remain open on account of its artistic beauty.⁵²⁵

Despite the Theodosian laws enacted against the blood sacrifices that Christians found offensive, the state did not enact any legislation against personal pagan worship, but the emperor decreed that maintaining temples became the prerogative of the pagans themselves, and not through state subsidies.⁵²⁶ This would soon change. Between AD 389 and 391, Theodosius, having solved the Arian crisis to some degree, appeared to follow a long-mediated decision to finally eliminate paganism.⁵²⁷ Addressing the officials in Rome and Alexandria, the legislation of

⁵²² Zosimus. *Historia Nova*. 4. 45.

⁵²³ Kahlos (2009: 91); Lee (2013: 56). During this period many church fathers, such as John Chrysostom attempted to whip up anti-Jewish sentiment in their sermons, though the Roman tried to prevent a backlash as seen in a 393 law decreeing that the Jewish religion is not prohibited and Jews were free to assemble, *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.8.9.

⁵²⁴ Lee (2013: 54-55).

⁵²⁵ *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.10.8; Bury (1958: 368); Errington (2006: 234); Kahlos (2009: 90).

⁵²⁶ *Codex Theodosianus*. 12.1.112.

⁵²⁷ O'Donnell (1979: 54); Fowden (1997: 549, 553-4); Kahlos (2009: 90).

Valentinian II in 391, under the direction of Theodosius I and influenced by Ambrose of Milan, not only reaffirmed the stance against blood sacrifices, but also banned government officials from accessing pagan temples, effectively severing the link to Rome's pagan past.⁵²⁸ Another law was issued in 392 which banned venerating a *lar* with fire, pouring libations of wine to a *genius*, honoring the *penates* with odor, burning of incest on altars and suspending wreaths.⁵²⁹ As mentioned above, it has long since been believed that Ambrose may have had an influence over Valentinian II and Theodosius I. Some scholars have been critical of such a stance as N.B. McLynn argues that the role of Ambrose in aiding to see such laws come to fruition can be exaggerated because the laws pertaining to sacrifices did nothing to hasten the slow death of paganism, along with the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria (an event which occurred within the same timeframe as the laws of Valentinian II and Theodosius I) was a local initiative. Furthermore, A. Cameron, whose argument asserting the diminished importance of such laws, agrees with McLynn in that the influence of Ambrose over the two Emperors at that time may have been exaggerated.⁵³⁰

Theodosius decreed in 391 CE that state subsidies for civic paganism would cease as the eternal fire in Rome at the Temple of Vesta was extinguished, the Vestal Virgins were disbanded, and those who performed auspices and witchcraft would be punished.⁵³¹ Pagan members of the senate in Rome, such as Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, appealed to the Emperor to practice accommodation, tolerance, and to restore the Altar of Victory in the senate house, of which the Emperor refused.⁵³²

At this point we can see that Roman *religio* has come full circle. When Christianity was just a small cult drawing the ire of many in the empire, it was derided as a *superstitio* and placed outside the margins of what was religiously acceptable. Though we have already explored the changing opinions of the pagan populace towards the Christian community during the Great Persecution, what also changed was the Christianity's place within the religious landscape. The Roman state of the high empire was supported by adhering to the proper rituals accorded to the traditional gods and any deviation was deemed a threat to public piety. Within three centuries the

⁵²⁸ *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.10.10, 16.10.11; Bury (1958: 369); Lee (2013: 52-53).

⁵²⁹ *Codex Theodosianus*. 16.10.12; Kahlos (2009: 90); Lee (2013: 53).

⁵³⁰ Hyde (1946: 216) briefly touches upon the burning of the Serapeum. Lee (2013: 52-4); McLynn (1994: 331-3); Cameron (2011: 63-64).

⁵³¹ Bury (1958: 369-370).

⁵³² Lee (2013: 50-52).

small, exclusive cult grew, suffered persecution under emperors who sought to create a political theology, before being granted official toleration and by the end of the fourth century was declared the *religio* of the state. Religion was still a defining factor in who was a good Roman. But during the closing years of the fourth century, a good Roman was a Nicene Christian.

Conclusion

At the end of this analysis, what have we to say concerning the attitudes of the non-elite pagan populace of the Roman Empire from the first century to the Great Persecution? The martyr acts, passions, speeches, and letters which are historically accurate, and after literary and biblical topoi were addressed, have been assessed chronologically. These sources are available in the appendix. It can be suggested that there was a discernible change, however modest, in the opinions of the general populace during the Great Persecution, particularly at the onset of the "second tetrarchy" under Constantius Chlorus and Galerius as co-*augusti* with Flavius Valerius Severus and Maximinus Daia as *caesars* respectively. The main current of this analysis has been an assessment and discussion of the changing attitudes of the common populace, whereas the secondary current, the Roman belief in *religio*, *superstitio* and what constituted a loyal and "good" Roman, was briefly examined because Christians were persecuted on account of their practices falling outside of what Roman society considered acceptable.

The Roman state had always legislated against groups which threatened the *pax deorum*. "Freelance religious experts," along with foreign cults whose practices shocked respectable Roman society, such as the cult of Cybele and the Bacchanals, were either banned or their practices restricted only to non-Romans. For the Roman state, *religio* denoted proper rituals performed in honor of the gods, whereas *superstitio*, itself a flexible term, was an excessive form of behavior and an irregular, inappropriate practice which endangered the stability of the state. Not only was it believed that the Roman state's survival depended on the maintenance of the *pax deorum* by placating the gods, but civic religion, and the performance of sacrifices for the goodwill of the emperor and state was a method by which one could show loyalty to Rome.

During the first two centuries of Roman Imperial rule of the Mediterranean, the authorities engaged in an "accusatory" approach towards the Christian Church. Violent actions and petitions against the Christians were sporadic, provincial, and not centrally-directed by the imperial authority. What we have observed is that the correspondence between Emperor Trajan and Pliny, governor of Bithynia-Pontus, set the standard by which provincial authorities and emperors dealt with *delatores*. Action would only be taken if petitions were brought before imperial administrators, and therefore, state resources were not utilized in prosecuting Christianity. Christianity was illegal in the present which meant that if one was accused of belonging to the

Christian community, renouncing Christ and performing either a sacrifice or a libation was enough for a dismissal, as opposed to other criminals who were always liable for prosecution. Regardless of the *laissez-faire* attitude exhibited by Emperor Trajan, the accusatory policy was generally upheld by the rulers of the *principate*, though some regional administrators were content to ignore imperial rescripts, as was the case in Lyons, Vienne, and Smyrna.

The secondary current, though not the main focus of this thesis, is nonetheless important. As the centuries passed, the Roman Empire attempted to foster a sense of religious syncretism in order to strengthen the unity of an ethnically and religious heterogeneous empire. This initiative would eventually lead to the construction of a political theology under the tetrarchic college of Diocletian. During the mid-third century, Emperor Decius (249-251) enacted a decree of universal sacrifice in an attempt to renew the *pax deorum* on account of the crises that afflicted the empire during that century. Such an initiative was possible because one of Decius' predecessors, Caracalla, had promulgated the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, which not only bestowed the Roman franchise on most freedmen of the empire, but possessed a religious component which sought to unify Rome's traditional beliefs. As the Roman state aggressively attempted to dictate who was a loyal subject to the Roman state and who was not, the small Christian community, itself a target of superstitious, provincial mobs who believed that the religious outsiders brought about divine anger, was perceived as being outside the bounds of acceptability. Though Decius sought to order all to engage in sacrificial rites, his edict was not directed solely at Christians but was also concerned with other groups which did not engage in material sacrifices. By the third century, the ancient rite had been in decline and groups like Neo-Pythagoreans, Hermeticists, and Neo-Platonists either eschewed material sacrifices or subscribed to a belief in a hierarchy of sacrifices in which material offerings only placated lesser deities.

This period is significant because the events in Asia Minor suggest that the attitudes of the common populace may have begun to change. When Decius promulgated his edict, and those who did not offer sacrifices were being appended, one Christian notable, Pionius, was executed at Smyrna. Through an observation of the death of Pionius, one can begin to discern that the masses may have begun to feel sympathy for the accused. No longer were pagans mobs baying for the blood of the Christians as they had previously done during the first two centuries, but rather, needed imperial pronouncements in order to display any persecutory zeal, a zeal that was easily softened once Pionius spoke to the crowd, leading many to visit him in a vain attempt to

make him sacrifice in order to save himself. A truly centralized and inquisitorial approach was enacted by Emperor Valerian (253-260) which only ended when Gallienus (260-268), the emperor's son, repealed his father's legislation following the former's capture by the Sassanian Persians.

It has been suggested that one can see a continued decline in the support for persecution on behalf of the general populace during the Great Persecution. Though the reasons for the change can fill volumes, perhaps the charity of the community, along with the grinding militarized bureaucracy of the tetrarchic government, may have helped turn the tide. Perhaps some, like the Edessenes, may have been more concerned with soldiers in their midst than with Christians.

The edicts of toleration promulgated by Emperors Galerius, Maximinus Daia, Constantine, and Licinius at the beginning of the fourth century altered what the Roman state considered religiously acceptable when maintaining the *pax deorum*. No longer would loyalty to the Roman order be based on material sacrifices to the civic religion. With the promulgation of the tolerance edicts, all freedmen were free to practice their respective *religiones* while offering prayers, not material sacrifices, to the *summa divinitas*, the "highest god." The reign of Constantine permitted the slow progression of Christianity towards becoming the official *religio* of the empire and the method by which one can profess loyalty to the emperor. Though Constantine, himself a patron of the Church, may have been against the traditional pagan sacrifices, he was a reluctant forbearer much in the same manner as the tetrarchic rulers who realized that their attacks against the Church were futile. He enacted legislation meant to curtail illicit practices like the Julio-Claudian emperors had before him, and his successors would follow likewise. Emperor Julian "the apostate" (360-363) briefly reigned and attempted to turn the tide of Christian ascendancy through legislation and the reorientation of the pagan priesthood. During the Julian's reign, the polytheistic cults, far from being in decline, still had many adherents who were willing to engage in acts of violence against the Christian community. The episodes of violence during this period are significant because many pagan mobs may have felt confident that a sympathetic emperor on the throne would not punish them. But Julian's death on the Persian frontier ended any attempt at a religious reversal. The closing decades of the fourth century witnessed the rise of Emperors Gratian (375-383), Valentinian II (375-392), and

Theodosius I (379-395) and the implementation of Nicene Christianity as the official *religio* of the empire.

Appendix

**Historically Authentic Christian Martyrs
(The Great Persecution: AD 303-13, 322-24)**

Name	Yr.	Location	Emp(s)	Pagans	Christians
Felix	303	Carthage	Dioc. Maxim.	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Athenogenes. Ten disciples	303	Sebastea	Dioc. Maxim.	Nothing mentioned, but implied. A Pagan festival is ordered, but most citizens of Sebasteae were Christian	Yes. The majority of the inhabitants were Christians and they refused to partake in celebrations honoring the pagan gods.
Euplus (Greek)	304	Catania	Dioc. Maxim.	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Euplus (Latin)	304	Catania	Dioc. Maxim.	Nothing mentioned	Yes. Christians carried away the body to anoint it with spices and buried it.
Gallonius	304	Timida Regia	Dioc. Maxim.	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Crispina	304	Theveste (Tebessa)	Dioc. Maxim.	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Agapê Irenê Chionê (Agatho Cassia Philippa Eutychia)	304	Saloniki	Maxim.	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Stephanus	305	A village in the Antinotte nome.	Val.Sev. Maxim.	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Phileas (Eusebius)	307	Alexandria	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Phileas (Rufinus)	307	Alexandria (possible)	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned

Name	Yr.	Location	Emp(s)	Pagans	Christians
Phileas (Bodmer Papyrus) *cuts off*	307	Thumis to Alexandria	Max. D	Yes. The people in court, the lawyers, and the <i>Logistes</i> , all pagan, beg the prefect to allow Phileas time to reflect and to offer sacrifices to the god and save himself	Nothing mentioned
Phileas Philoromus (Latin)	307	Alexandria (possible)	Max. D	Yes. Lawyers, all pagan, tried to convince Phileas to act reasonably in order to save his life.	Nothing mentioned
Shmona and Guria	309 Or 310	Edessa	Max. D	Nothing really, but anger is implied. The governor ordered the soldiers to execute Shmona and Guria outside the town in order to not upset the townsfolk. After the execution, the townsfolk rushed out to confront the soldiery in order to collect the bodies of the two martyrs. The townsfolk then give both men a proper burial.	Though not explicitly mentioned, Edessa had a mixed population of pagans, Jews and Christians. The crowd sang psalms, and therefore the presence of Christians can be implied.
Theodotus and seven virgins	312	Ancyra (Galatia)	Max. D	The pagans of Galatia began to lynch Christians and destroy their homes. Many Christian women were attacked. The seven virgins were raped by "libertines" who were eventually brought to tears by their pleads.	Christians who fled the area were informed by Theodotus, on the road to Malas, before he was beheaded.

Name	Yr.	Location	Emp(s)	Pagans	Christians
Sergius and Bacchus	312	Bacchus - Barbalissus/Beth Blash Sergius - Rusafa	Max. D	Most of the soldiers were pagans. Maximinus Daia ordered his troops to sacrifice in honor of Zeus. When Sergius is brought to be beheaded, people gathered to witness the execution, though it is not specified whether the crowd was wholly pagan or not.	After Bacchus had died from torture, monks came to retrieve his body. Some witnesses to the execution of Sergius gave the martyr a proper burial, while some time later, Christians came to recover relics from his grave.
Habib	322	Edessa	Licinius	Theotecna, the guard, did not want to apprehend Habib. The townsfol either denounced or supported him. After his execution pagans helped to shroud his corpse.	As Habib was being led away to execution, Christians followed him and cheered because he had not been swayed by the interrogators.

Christian Martyrs - "The Great Persecution" (303-13, 322-24)
Eusebius - *The Martyrs in Palestine*

Name	Yr.	Location	Emp(s)	Pagans	Christians
Procopius	303	Baishan and Caesarea	Dioc.	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Alpheus Zacchaeus Romanus	303	Alpheus to Eleutheropolis then brought to Caesarea. Zacchaeus to Gadarna and then brought to Caesarea. Romanus to Antioch.	Dioc.	Nothing, but their presence during the trial of Alpheus is implied as the martyr sought to tell them to abandon the gods. No pagans are mentioned during the trial of Zacchaeus. Pagans not mentioned during the trial of Romanus	Nothing mentioned
Timothy	305	Gaza, brought to the governor at Caesarea.	Dioc.	Palestinian pagans had already attacked and harassed Timothy before but were not present at the trial.	Nothing mentioned
Agapius Thekla	305	Caesarea	Dioc.	Nothing mentioned specifically. Rumor of their apprehension spread. Both Agapius and Thekla were spared until 306.	Nothing mentioned
Alexander Alexander Dionysius Dionysius Timotheus Romulus Paesis	305	Caesarea	Dioc.	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned

Name	Yr.	Location	Emp(s)	Pagans	Christians
Apphianus	306	Caesarea	Dioc. Max. D	Though not mentioned, when the governor is about to pour a libation, Apphianus restrains him, possibly in the midst of other pagans. The officers of the governor were possibly pagan and began to assault Apphianus.	Christians assembled to see the punishment of Apphianus. The inhabitants of Caesarea came to witness the death of Apphianus, who was thrown into the sea, though their attitude is not mentioned. The people of Casarea witness the body being washed up from the sea.
Aedesius	306	The copper mines of Palestine and Alexandria	Dioc. Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Agapius Thekla	307	Caesarea	Max. D	Pagans some to witness the martyrdom	Nothing mentioned
Theodosia	308	Caesarea	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Domninus	308	Caesarea	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
100 conf- essors	309	Brought from the Thebais in Egypt to Lud (Diocaesarea) in Palestine	Max. D	Nothing mentioned, but it is said that the Jews were the most numerous population in the city.	Nothing mentioned
Valentina Ennatha	309	Lud (Diocaesarea)	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Paul	309	Lud (Diocaesarea)	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
130 mart- yrs	309	Some were sent from Egypt to the Palestinian mines while others were sent to Cilicia.	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned

Name	Yr.	Location	Emp(s)	Pagans	Christians
Antonius Zebinas Germanus Ennathas	309	Caesarea	Max. D	It is mentioned that some were ordered to make sure that the bodies of the martyrs were not carried away but were consumed by birds after the beasts had eaten their fill. Dogs and animals tore at the remains and then littered the streets of Caesarea with bloody remains, in turn disturbing the greater part of the populace.	The city possessed a large Christian population which was prevented from recovering the bodies of the martyrs by the pagan authorities.
Ares Promus Elijah	309	Ashkelon	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Peter Asclepius	310	Caesarea	Max. D	Peter's confession was admired by the judge, and all the spectators of the trial were (possibly) pagans. They later tried to talk him out of his own impending death.	Nothing mentioned
Pamphilus Vales Seleucus Paul Porphyry Theodulus Julianus	310	Caesarea	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	The bodies of the martyrs, having been exposed, were left untouched. Firmillianus turned a blind eye to the bodies being given a proper Christian burial.
Hadrianus Eubulus	310	Caesarea	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
100 Egyptian martyrs.	310	Phaeno	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned

Name	Yr.	Location	Emp(s)	Pagans	Christians
Peleus Nilus Patrimyth- eus Elias	310	Phaeno and Zauara	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned
Silvanus	311	Caesarea	Max. D	Nothing mentioned	Nothing mentioned

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