

Part I
The Early Church
(To the Council of Chalcedon, 451)

Section I

The Church and the World

I. REFERENCES TO CHRISTIANITY IN CLASSICAL AUTHORS

a. *Tacitus* (c. 60–c. 120)

The Trial of Pomponia Graecina, A.D. 57

Tacitus, Annales, xiii. 32

POMPONIA GRAECINA, a woman of high rank (the wife of Aulus Plautius,¹ who, as I have mentioned, was granted an ovation for his British campaign), was accused of foreign superstition and handed over to her husband for trial. He followed ancient precedent in hearing a case which involved his wife's legal status and her honour in the presence of members of the family, and pronounced her innocent. Pomponia's long life was passed in unbroken sadness; for after the death of **Julia**,² **Drusus's** daughter, she lived forty years in the dress of mourning with only sorrow in her heart. This escaped punishment in Claudius's reign, and thereafter was turned to her glory.

[The surmise that the 'foreign superstition' was Christianity is supported by third-century Christian inscriptions commemorating members of the *gens Pomponia*. And 'the retirement and sobriety of a Christian might well appear a kind of perpetual mourning to the dissolute society of the Neronian period' (Furneaux, *Tac. Ann.* ad. loc.).]

The Neronian Persecution, 64

Tacitus, Annales, xv. 44

But all the endeavours of men, all the emperor's largesse and the propitiations of the gods, did not suffice to allay the scandal or banish the

¹ Conquered the southern part of Britain A.D. 43-47.

² Great-granddaughter of Pomponia, d. of **Atticus**, probably a relation. Put to death A.D. 43 (**Dio**).

belief that the fire* had been ordered. And so, to get rid of this **rumour**, Nero set up² as the culprits and punished with the utmost refinement of cruelty a class hated for their abominations,³ who are commonly called Christians. Christus, from whom their name is derived, was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. Checked for the moment, this pernicious superstition again broke out, not only in Judaea, the source of the evil, but even in Rome, that receptacle for everything that is sordid and degrading from every quarter of the globe, which there finds a following. Accordingly, arrest was first made of those who confessed [sc. *to being Christians*]; then, on their evidence, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much on the charge of arson as because of hatred of the human race. Besides being put to death they were made to serve as objects of amusement; they were clad in the hides of beasts and torn to death by dogs; others were crucified, others set on fire to serve to illuminate the night when daylight failed. Nero had thrown open his grounds for the display, and was putting on a show in the circus, where he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or drove about in his chariot. All this gave rise to a feeling of pity, even towards men whose guilt merited the most exemplary punishment; for it was felt that they were being destroyed not for the public good but to gratify the cruelty of an individual.

b. *Suetonius* (c. 75–160)

The Expulsion of the Jews from Rome, c. 52

Suet. *Vita Claudii*, xxv. 4 (cf. Acts xviii. 2)

... Since the Jews were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome. ...

[This probably refers to quarrels between Jews and Christian teachers.]

The Neronian Persecution, 64

Suet. *Vita Neronis*, xvi

In his reign many abuses were severely punished and repressed, and as many new laws were instituted; a limit was set to expenditure; the public banquets were reduced to gifts of food; the sale of cooked food in taverns was forbidden, except for pulses and greens, whereas formerly every kind of delicacy was offered; punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a set of men adhering to a novel and mischievous superstition; he put a stop to the pranks of the charioteers, who from long

* The great fire of Rome, summer A.D. 64.

² *Subdidi*; used offraudulent substitution, or false suggestion. Tac. does not believe in their guilt.

³ Infanticide, cannibalism, incest, etc., were alleged against them. 'Three things are alleged against us; atheism, Thyestean feasts, Oedipodean intercourse.'—Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis*, iii, cf. p. 12.

immunity had assumed the right of ranging at large and cheating and robbing for amusement; the pantomimes and their companies were banished.

c. *Pliny (the Younger)* (62-c. 113)

Christians in Bithynia, c. 112

Plin. *Epp. X (ad Traj.)*, xcvi

It is my rule, Sire, to refer to you in matters where I am uncertain. For who can better direct my hesitation or instruct my ignorance? I was never present at any trial of Christians; therefore I do not know what are the customary penalties or investigations, and what limits are observed. [2] I have hesitated a great deal on the question whether there should be any distinction of ages; whether the weak should have the same treatment as the more robust; whether those who recant should be pardoned, or whether a man who has ever been a Christian should gain nothing by ceasing to be such; whether the name itself, even if innocent of crime, should be punished, or only the crimes attaching to that name.¹

Meanwhile, this is the course that I have adopted in the case of those brought before me as Christians. [3] I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment; if they persist I sentence them to death. For I do not doubt that, whatever kind of crime it may be to which they have confessed, their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy should certainly be punished. [4] There were others who displayed a like madness and whom I reserved to be sent to Rome, since they were Roman citizens.

Thereupon the usual result followed; the very fact of my dealing with the question led to a wider spread of the charge, and a great variety of cases were brought before me. [5] An anonymous pamphlet was issued, containing many names. All who denied that they were or had been Christians I considered should be discharged, because they called upon the gods at my dictation and did reverence, with incense and wine, to your image which I had ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, together with the statues of the deities; and especially because they cursed Christ, a thing which, it is said, genuine Christians cannot be induced to do. [6] Others named by the informer first said that they were Christians and then denied it; declaring that they had been but were so no longer, some having recanted three years or more before and one or two as long ago as twenty years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods and cursed Christ. [7] But they declared that the sum of their guilt or error had amounted only to this, that on an appointed day they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak,

¹ See previous note, p. 2.

and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by an **oath**,² not for the commission of any crime but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery and breach of faith, and not to deny a deposit when it was claimed. After the conclusion of this ceremony it was their custom to depart and meet again to take food; but it was ordinary and harmless food, and they had ceased this practice after my edict in which, in accordance with your orders, I had forbidden secret societies. [8] I thought it the more necessary, therefore, to find out what truth there was in this by applying torture to two maidservants, who were called deaconesses.³ But I found nothing but a depraved and extravagant superstition, and I therefore postponed my examination and had recourse to you for consultation.

[g] The matter seemed to me to justify my consulting you, especially on account of the number of those imperilled; for many persons of all ages and classes and of both sexes are being put in peril by accusation, and this will go on. The contagion of this superstition has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well; yet it seems capable of being checked and set right. [10] There is no shadow of doubt that the temples, which have been almost deserted, are beginning to be frequented once more, that the sacred rites which have been long neglected are being renewed, and that sacrificial victims are for sale everywhere, whereas, till recently, a buyer was rarely to be found. From this it is easy to imagine what a host of men could be set right, were they given a chance of recantation.

Trajan's Policy towards Christians

Trajan to Pliny (Plin. Epp. X. xcvi)

You have taken the right line, my dear Pliny, in examining the cases of those denounced to you as Christians, for no hard and fast rule can be laid down, of universal application. [2] They are not to be sought out; if they are informed against, and the charge is proved, they are to be punished, with this reservation—that if any one denies that he is a Christian, and actually proves it, that is by worshipping our gods, he shall be pardoned as a result of his recantation, however suspect he may have been with respect to the past. Pamphlets published anonymously should *carry no weight in any charge whatsoever*. They constitute a very bad precedent, and are also out of keeping with this age.

¹ 'carmen . . . dicere secum invicem'—'carmen,' generally translated 'hymn,' may mean any set form of words; here perhaps a responsorial or antiphonal psalm, or some kind of litany.

² 'sacramentum'—the word chosen by the Christians—might suggest to Romans a conspiracy. The Catilinarian conspirators took a 'sacramentum' (Salk Cat. xxii.).

³ 'ministrae,' probably represents the Greek δούκονοι. If so, this is the last reference to 'deaconesses' till the fourth century, when they attained some importance in the East. They seem to have been unknown in the West until the recent establishment of the office in the Anglican Church.

II. CHRISTIANITY AND ANCIENT LEARNING

a. *The 'Liberal' View—'The Light that lighteth every man'*

Justin, *Apology* (c. 150), I. xlvi. 1-4

But lest any, to turn men from our teaching, should attack us with the unreasonable argument that we say that Christ was born one hundred and fifty years ago in the time of Cyrenius, and that he taught what we affirm he taught thereafter in the time of Pontius Pilate, if, I say, they should find fault with us for treating as irresponsible all men born before him, let us solve this difficulty by anticipation. [2] We are taught that He is the reason (Word) of whom the whole human race partake, [4] and those who live according to reason are Christians, even though they are accounted atheists. Such were Socrates and Heraclitus among the Greeks, and those like them. . . .

Apol. II. xiii

For myself, when I learned of the wicked disguise which through false report was cast over the divine teaching of Christians by the evil demons in order to turn away others, I laughed at this disguise and at the opinions of the multitude; [2] and I declare that I prayed and strove with all my might to be found a Christian, not because the teachings of Plato are contrary to those of Christ, but because they are not in all respects like them; as is the case with the doctrines of the others, Stoics, poets and prose-authors. [3] For each discoursed rightly, seeing that which was kin to Christianity' through a share in the seminal divine reason (Word); but they that have uttered contrary opinions seem not to have had the invisible knowledge and the irrefutable wisdom. [4] Whatever has been uttered **aright** by any men in any place belongs to us Christians; for, next to God, we worship and love the reason (Word) which is from the unbegotten and ineffable God; since on our account He has been made man, that, being made partaker of our sufferings, he may also bring us healing. [5] For all the authors were able to see the truth darkly, through the implanted seed of reason (the Word) dwelling in them. [6] For the seed and imitation of a thing, given according to a man's capacity, is one thing; far different is the thing itself, the sharing of which and its representation is given according to his grace.

b. *The Negative View—'The Wisdom of This World'*

Tertullian (c. 160-240), *De praescriptione haereticorum* (c. 200), vii

It is this philosophy which is the subject-matter of this world's wisdom, that rash interpreter of the divine nature and order. In fact,

¹ τὸ συγγενές—perhaps 'what was suited to him,' cf. § 6, 'according to a man's capacity.'

heresies are themselves prompted by philosophy. It is the source of 'aeons,' and I know not what infinite 'forms' and the 'trinity of man' in the system of **Valentinus**.¹ He was a Platonist. It is the source of **Marcion's**² 'better God,' 'better,' because of his tranquillity. **Marcion** came from the Stoics. Again, when it is said that the soul perishes, that opinion is taken from the Epicureans. The denial of the restoration of the flesh is taken over from the universal teaching of the philosophers; the equation of matter with God is the doctrine of **Zeno**; and when any assertion is made about a God of fire, then Heraclitus comes in. Heretics and philosophers handle the same subject-matter; both treat of the same topics-Whence came evil? And why? Whence came man? And how? And a question lately posed by Valentinus-Whence came God? Answer: 'From *entbymesis* and *ectroma*'!³ Wretched Aristotle! who taught them dialectic, that art of building up and demolishing, so protean in statement, so far-fetched in conjecture, so unyielding in controversy, so productive of disputes; self-stultifying, since it is ever handling questions but never settling anything. ... What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? What between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? ... Away with all projects for a 'Stoic,' a 'Platonic' or a 'dialectic' Christianity! After Christ Jesus we desire no subtle theories, no acute enquiries after the gospel. ...

c. *Another 'Liberal'*

Clement of Alexandria (c. 200), *Stromateis*, I. v. 28

Thus philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness, until the coming of the Lord. And now it assists towards true religion as a kind of preparatory training for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. For 'Thy foot shall not stumble' if thou attribute to Providence all good, whether it belong to the Greeks or to us. For God is the source of all good things; of some primarily, as of the old and new Testaments; of others by consequence, as of philosophy. But it may be, indeed, that philosophy was given to the Greeks immediately and primarily, until the Lord should call the Greeks. For philosophy was a 'schoolmaster' to bring the Greek mind to Christ, as the Law brought the Hebrews. Thus philosophy was a preparation, paving the way towards perfection in Christ.

¹ See p. 36.

² See p. 37.

³ ἐνθυμησις, 'conception' (or, perhaps, 'mental activity'), plays an important but not easily explicable part in the complicated *cosmogony* and *theogony* of Valentinus. ἔκτρομα, 'abortion,' was a term applied to the chaotic material world, before its organization and endowment with an intellectual soul.

III. CHURCH AND STATE

(For the policy of Nero and Trajan, see above, p. 2 sq.)

a. *The Rescript of Hadrian to Caius Minucius Fundanus*,
Proconsul of Asia, c. 152

From the original given by Tyranian Rufinus (345-? 410) in his translation of Eus. *H.E.* IV. ix (Justin, *Apol.* I. *lxix*, gives a Greek translation).

I received the letter written to me by your predecessor, the most illustrious Serenius Granianus, and it is not my pleasure to pass by without enquiry the matter referred to me, lest the inoffensive should be disturbed, while slanderous informers are afforded an opportunity of practising their vile trade. [2] Now, if our subjects of the provinces are able to sustain by evidence their charges against the Christians, so as to answer before a court of justice, I have no objection to their taking this course. But I do not allow them to have recourse to mere clamorous demands and outcries to this end. For it is much more equitable, if any one wishes to accuse them, for you to take cognizance of the matters laid to their charge. [3] If therefore any one accuses and proves that the aforesaid men do anything contrary to the laws, you will pass sentences corresponding to their offences. On the other hand, I emphatically insist on this, that if any one demand a writ of summons against any of these Christians, merely as a slanderous accusation, you proceed against that man with heavier penalties, in proportion to the gravity of his offence.

b. *Tertullian on Persecution*

Tert. *Apology* (197), ii

If it is certain that we are the most guilty of men, why do you treat us differently from our fellows, that is, from other criminals? Since it is only fair that the same guilt should meet with the same treatment. When others are accused on the charges which are brought against us they employ their own tongues and hired advocacy to plead their innocence. They have full opportunity of reply and cross-examination; for it is not permitted to condemn men undefended and unheard. Christians alone are not allowed to say anything to clear themselves, to defend truth, to save a judge from injustice. That alone is looked for, which the public hate requires-the confession of the name, not the investigation of the charge. ...

c. *Christian Loyalty to the Emperor*

Apol. xxix-xxxii

xxix. ... We sin, then, against the imperial majesty in this, that we do not make him subject to his own possessions (sc. *the idols of the gods*);

that we do not perform a mockery by offering a service for his safety, when we do not suppose that safety to rest in hands soldered with lead. But you, to be sure, are religious in seeking it where it is not, in asking it from those who have it not to give, passing by him in whose power it lies. Moreover, you persecute those who know where to seek it, who, because they know, are also able to obtain it.

xxx. For we call upon God for the safety of the Emperor, upon God the eternal, God the true, God the living, whose favour, beyond all others, the Emperor desires. . . .

xxxi. But, you say, we merely flatter the Emperor; and we feign the prayers we utter, to evade persecution. . . . Examine God's words, our scriptures, which we do not conceal, and which many accidents put into the hands of those without [the Church]. Know from them that a superfluity of benevolence is enjoined on us, even so far as to pray God for our enemies and to entreat blessings for our persecutors.¹ Who are greater enemies and persecutors of Christians than those with treason against whom we are charged? But the Scripture says expressly and clearly, 'Pray for kings, and princes, and powers, that all may be peace for you.'² For when the empire is disturbed, then we, remote though we be from the disorders, find ourselves sharing in the calamity, in the disturbance of the other members.

xxxii. There is another and a greater need for us to pray for the Emperor, and, indeed, for the whole estate of the empire, and the interests of Rome. For we know that the great upheaval which hangs over the whole earth, and the very end of all things, threatening terrible woes, is only delayed by the respite granted to the Roman empire.³ Because we would not experience these things, we favour Rome's long continuance when we pray that they be delayed. . . . In the Emperor we reverence the judgement of God, who has set him over the nations. . . .

d. *The Neronian Persecution*

The Martyrdom of SS. Peter and Paul

Clement of Rome, *Ep. to Corinthians* (c. 95), v

Let us come to the heroes nearest to our times. . . . Let us set before our eyes the good apostles; Peter, who by reason of unrighteous jealousy endured not one or two but many labours, and having thus borne his witness went to his due place of glory. Paul, by reason of jealousy and strife, pointed out the prize of endurance. . . . When he had preached in the East and in the West he received the noble renown of his faith. Having taught righteousness to the whole world, even reaching

¹ Matt. v. 44.

² 1 Tim. ii. 2.

³ Cf. 2. Thess. ii. 6, 'that which restraineth,' generally interpreted in the early Church as the Rower of Rome.

the bounds of the West, and having borne witness before rulers, he thus left the world and went to the holy place, becoming the greatest pattern of endurance.

e. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Bishop of Smyrna, 155

From *Martyrium Polycarpi* [A letter from the Church of Smyrna. The first Martyrology]

I. II. [At the festival of Caesar a number of Christians were set to fight the wild beasts.]

III. . . . All the crowd, astonished at the noble conduct of the God-beloved and God-fearing race of Christians, cried out, 'Away with the atheists!'; let search be made for Polycarp.'

V. But the most admirable Polycarp when first he heard of this was not dismayed, but wished to remain in the city. The majority, however, prevailed on him to withdraw. And he withdrew to a small estate not far from the city. There he passed the time with a few companions, wholly occupied night and day in prayer for all men and for the churches throughout the world; as, indeed, was his habit. And while at prayer he fell into a trance three days before his arrest and saw his pillow set on fire. And he turned and said to his companions, 'I must needs be burned alive.'

VI. Now since they that sought him were persistent he departed to another estate. Then straightway they were upon him, and when they did not find him they apprehended two young servants. Of whom one confessed under torture; for it was impossible for him to escape, since they that betrayed him were of his own household. Then the **sheriff**,² who bore by God's appointment the same name (sc. as our Lord's judge), being called **Herod**, hastened to bring him into the stadium, that he might fulfil his own appointed lot by becoming a partner of Christ, and that his betrayers might undergo the punishment of Judas himself.

VII. So, on the day of the preparation, mounted police with their usual arms set out about supper-time, taking with them the servant, hurrying 'as against a thief.' And at a late hour they came up to the place and found him in a cottage, lying in an upper room. He could have gone away to another farm, but he would not, saying 'The will of God be done.' So, hearing their arrival, he came down and talked with them, while all that were present marvelled at his age and constancy, and that there was so much ado about the arrest of such an old man. Then he ordered that something should be served for them to eat and drink, at that late hour, as much as they wanted. And he besought them that they

¹ An epithet commonly applied to Christians because they refused to worship heathen idols and had no images or shrines of their own.

² εἰρηναρχός—'officer of the peace', 'chief constable'. Frequently mentioned in inscriptions.

should grant him an hour that he might pray freely. They gave him leave, and he stood and prayed, being so filled with the grace of God that for two hours he could not hold his peace, while they that heard were amazed, and the men repented that they had come after so venerable an old man.

VIII. When he had brought to an end his prayer, in which he made mention of all, small and great, high and low, with whom he had had dealings, and of the whole Catholic Church throughout the world, the time had come for him to depart. And they set him on an ass and led him into the city. Now it was a high Sabbath. And there met him the sheriff **Herod**, and his father **Nicetes**, who removed him into their carriage, and tried to persuade him, sitting by his side and saying, 'Now what harm is there in saying "Lord Caesar," and in offering incense, and so on, and thus saving thyself?' He at first made no reply, but since they persisted he said, 'I do not intend to do what you advise.' Then, failing to persuade him, they began to use threatening words; and they pulled him down hastily, so that he grazed his shin as he descended from the carriage. Without turning back, as if he had suffered no hurt, he went on with all speed, and was led to the stadium, wherein the tumult was so great that no one could be heard.

IX. Now, as he was entering the stadium, there came to Polycarp a voice from heaven, 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.' And no one saw the speaker, but the voice was heard by those of our people who were there. Thereupon he was led forth, and great was the uproar of them that heard that Polycarp had been seized. Accordingly, he was led before the Proconsul, who asked him if he were the man himself. And when he confessed the Proconsul tried to persuade him, saying, 'Have respect to thine age,' and so forth, according to their customary form; 'Swear by the genius* of Caesar,' 'Repent,' 'Say, "Away with the atheists!"' Then Polycarp looked with a severe countenance on the mob of lawless heathen in the stadium, and he waved his hand at them, and looking up to heaven he groaned and said, 'Away with the atheists.' But the Proconsul urged him and said, 'Swear, and I will release thee; curse the Christ.' And Polycarp said, 'Eighty and six years have I served him, and he hath done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?'

X. But the Proconsul again persisted and said, 'Swear by the genius of Caesar'; and he answered, 'If thou dost vainly imagine that I would swear by the genius of Caesar, as thou sayest, pretending not to know what I am, hear plainly that I am a Christian. And if thou art willing to learn the doctrine of Christianity, grant me a day and hearken to me.' Then said the Proconsul, 'Persuade the people.' Polycarp replied, 'Thee

* *Genius (fortuna, numen) Caesaris*. An oath invented under Julius Caesar (Dio Cassius, *xliv*, 6). Under Augustus certain days were set apart for worship of the Emperor's genius; and the practice grew under later Emperors.

I had deemed worthy of discourse, for we are taught to render to authorities and the powers ordained of God honour as is fitting. But I deem not this mob worthy that I should defend myself before them.'

XI. Then said the Proconsul, 'I have wild beasts; if thou repent not, I will throw thee to them.' But he said, 'Send for them. For repentance from better to worse is not a change permitted to us; but to change from cruelty to righteousness is a noble thing.' Then said the Proconsul again, 'If thou dost despise the wild beasts I will make thee to be consumed by fire, if thou repent not.' And Polycarp answered, 'Thou threatenest the fire that burns for an hour and in a little while is quenched; for thou knowest not of the fire of the judgement to come, and the fire of the eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why delayest thou? Bring what thou wilt.'

XII. As he spake these words and many more, he was filled with courage and joy; and his countenance was full of grace, so that not only did it fall not in dismay at what was being said to him, but on the contrary the Proconsul was astonished, and sent his herald to proclaim thrice in the midst of the stadium, 'Polycarp hath confessed himself to be a Christian.' When this was proclaimed by the herald the whole multitude of Gentiles and Jews who dwelt in Smyrna cried out with ungovernable rage and in a loud voice, 'This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, that teacheth many not to sacrifice nor worship.' They kept shouting this, asking Philip, the **Asiarch**,¹ to loose a lion at Polycarp. But he said that it was not lawful for him, since he had finished the sports. Then they decided to shout with one accord that he should be burned alive. For the matter of his vision of the pillow must needs be fulfilled, when he saw it burning while he was at prayer, and turned and said prophetically to his companions, 'I must needs be burned alive.'

XIII. And now things happened with such speed, in less time than it takes to tell; for the mob straitway brought together timber and faggots from the workshops and baths, the Jews giving themselves zealously to the work, as they were like to do. . . . They were about to nail him to the stake, when he said, 'Let me be as I am. He that granted me to endure the fire will grant me also to remain at the pyre unmoved, without being secured with nails.'

XV. When he had ended his prayer the firemen lighted the fire. And a great flame flashed forth: and we, to whom it was given to see, beheld a marvel. . . . The fire took the shape of a vault, like a ship's sail bellying in the wind, and it made a wall round the martyr's body; and there was the body in the midst, like a loaf being baked or like gold and silver being tried in the furnace. . . .

XVI. So at length the lawless ones, seeing that his body could not be

¹ The head of the confederation of chief cities in the province of Asia (the *Commune Asiae*). He presided at games as 'chief priest' of Asia.

consumed by the fire, bade an executioner approach him to drive **in** a dagger. And when he had done this there came out [a dove and] abundance of blood so that it quenched the fire, and all the multitude marvelled at the great difference between the unbelievers and the elect. . . .

ƒ. *Persecution at Lyons and Vienne, 177*

The Epistle of the Gallican Churches: ap. Eusebius, H.E. V. i

The servants of Christ who sojourn in Vienna and Lugdunum of Gaul to the brethren throughout Asia and Phrygia who hold the same faith and hope as we do of redemption; peace, grace and glory from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are not competent to describe the magnitude of the tribulation here, the extent of the rage of the Gentiles against the saints and the sufferings of the blessed martyrs. . . . Not only were we excluded from public buildings, baths and markets, but even the mere appearance of any one of us was forbidden, in any place whatsoever. . . .

First, they nobly endured all that came upon them at the hands of the jostling mob and rabble; they were hooted at, struck, dragged about, plundered, stoned, hemmed in; and all other indignities they suffered which an inflamed rabble is wont to **inflict on** its enemies and foes. At length, being brought into the forum by the **chiliarch**[†] and the chief men of the city, they were examined before the mob, and having confessed were put into prison until the arrival of the governor. . . .

They apprehended also certain heathen slaves **of ours**, for the governor ordered that we should all be examined in public. And they, through a lying in wait of Satan, fearing the tortures they saw the saints suffering, falsely accused us, when the soldiers so urged them, of Thyestean feasts and Oedipodean **intercourse**,[‡] and of things of which it is not lawful either to speak or think, nor even to believe that any such things were ever done among men. And when these statements were noised abroad all were inflamed against us, so that even such as were before moderate towards us through kinship were now greatly angered, and raged against us. Then was fulfilled that saying of our Lord, 'The time shall come wherein he that killeth you will think that he doeth God service.' . . .

Now the blessed Pothinus, who had been entrusted with the ministry of the bishopric of Lugdunum, and was more than ninety years of age and quite feeble in body . . . was brought to the judgement seat, escorted by the city magistrates and all the rabble, with all kinds of hooting. And being asked by the governor who was the God of the

† Literally 'commander of a thousand men'. A regular term for a **commander of a garrison of any size**.

‡ See above, p. 2. Thyestes in ignorance ate the flesh of **his** two sons; Oedipus in ignorance married **his** own mother.

Christians, he said, 'If thou be worthy, thou shalt know.' Whereupon he was pulled about without pity, those nearest maltreating him in every way with hands and feet, while those at a distance hurled at him whatever came to hand, every one thinking it a great neglect and impiety if any wantonness were left untried; for so they thought to avenge their gods. . . .

g. *Persecution under Decius, 249-251*

A **libellus** (certificate of sacrifice) discovered at Fayoum (Egypt), 1893; Milligan, *Greek Papyri*, 48

[The Edict of Decius, 250, commanded provincial governors and magistrates, assisted where necessary by local notables, to superintend the sacrifices to the gods and to the genius of the Emperor, to be performed by all on a fixed day. Many recanted; others bought certificates or had them procured by pagan friends. There seems to have been wholesale connivance by the officials.]

TO THE COMMISSIONERS FOR SACRIFICES IN THE VILLAGE OF ALEXANDER'S ISLAND, FROM AURELIUS DIOGENES, SON OF SATABUS, OF THE VILLAGE OF ALEXANDER'S ISLAND, AGED 72; SCAR ON RIGHT EYEBROW.

I have always sacrificed to the gods, and now in your presence, in accordance with the terms of the edict, I have done sacrifice and poured libations and tasted the **sacrifices**, and I request you to certify to this effect. Farewell.

PRESENTED BY ME, AURELIUS DIOGENES.

I CERTIFY THAT I WITNESSED HIS SACRIFICE, AURELIUS SYRUS.

Dated this first year of the Emperor Caesar Gaius Messius **Quintus** Trajanus Decius, Pius, Felix, Augustus, the 2nd of Epiph. (26 June 250).

h. *Persecution under Valerian, 253-260*

Cyprian, *Ep. lxxx. i*

[Valerian seems to have **favoured** Christianity at the beginning of his reign, and there were many Christians in his palace, '**Caesariani**' being mentioned in the Rescript (v. Dionysius of Alexandria ap. Euseb. VII. x. 3 ff.). The following extract gives the **drift** of his second Rescript. The first had ordered sacrifices to be made by bishops and priests and had forbidden Christians to assemble, or to use their cemeteries, on pain of death.]

. . . There are many various and unauthenticated **rumours** going about, but the truth is as follows; Valerian sent a Rescript to the Senate ordering that bishops, priests and deacons should forthwith be punished; that senators, men of rank and Roman knights should be degraded and lose their property, and **if**, having been deprived of their possessions, they should still remain Christians, then they should also lose their heads; that matrons should be deprived of their property and banished; and that any members of Caesar's household who had confessed before,

or should now confess, should lose their property and be sent in chains to forced **labour** on Caesar's farms.

i. *The Rescript of Gallienus*, 261

Euseb. *H.E.* VII. xiii. 2

[By an edict, the text of which is lost, in **260**, the basilicas were restored, the cemeteries **reopened** and freedom of worship granted. Christianity became a *religio licita*.]

The Emperor Caesar **Publius** Licinius **Gallienus**, Pius, Felix, Augustus, to Dionysius, Pinna, Demetrius and the other bishops. I have enjoined that the **benefit** of my bounty be put into execution throughout the world, that they may keep away from places of worship. And therefore you may act upon the order contained in my Rescript, so that no one shall molest you. And this which you are now lawfully permitted to accomplish has already for a long time been conceded by me. Therefore **Aulus** Cyrenius, the chief administrator, will observe this order which I have given.

j. *Persecution under Diocletian*, 303–305

[Diocletian seems to have been favourable at first. His **wife** and daughter were catechumens, and Eusebius tells of the great increase of the Church in the early part of his reign (*H.E.* VIII. i.). The change in his attitude was due (according to Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, XI) to the influence of **Galerius**. **Gallienus's** edict was repealed, **Valerian's** laws reenacted.]

Euseb. *H.E.*

IX. x. 8. ... It was enacted by their majesties Diocletian and **Maximian** that the meetings of Christians should be abolished. ...

VII. ii. 4. March 303. ... Imperial edicts were published everywhere ordering that the churches be razed to the ground, that the Scriptures be destroyed by fire, that those holding office be deposed and they of the household be deprived of freedom, if they persisted in the profession of Christianity. 5. This was the first edict against us. But not long after other decrees were issued, which enjoined that the rulers of the churches in every place be first imprisoned, and thereafter every means be used to compel them to sacrifice.

Euseb. *De martyribus Palaestinae*, iii. 2

April 304. ... Imperial edicts were issued, in which, by a general decree, it was ordered that all the people without exception should sacrifice in the several cities and offer libations to the idols.

k. *The Attempt to restore Paganism under Maximin*, 308–311

308. Euseb. *De m. P.* ix. 2

Therefore a host of letters from **Maximin** was issued everywhere throughout every province. The governors, and also the military

commander, by edicts, letters **and** public ordinances pressed the magistrates, generals and notaries to implement the imperial decree which ordered that the idols' ruins be rebuilt with all speed; that all without exception—men, women, slaves and children, even infants in arms—should sacrifice and offer oblations. ...

311. Euseb. VIII. xiv. g

Maximin ... ordered temples to be erected in every city, and the sacred groves to be speedily restored, which had fallen into ruin through lapse of time. He set idol-priests in every place and city, and over them he appointed in each province a high priest, one of the officials who had specially distinguished himself in all kinds of service, giving him a body of troops and a personal guard. ...

1. *Edict of Toleration*, 311

Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* XXXIV

[Issued by **Galerius** on his death-bed, after years of strenuous persecution, and bearing the names also of his colleagues Constantine and Licinius. The other colleague, **Maximin Daza**, ruler of Egypt and Syria, refused to sign.]

Among our other regulations to promote the lasting good of the community we have hitherto endeavoured to restore a universal conformity to the ancient institutions and public order of the Romans; and in particular it has **been** our aim to bring back to a right disposition the Christians who had abandoned the religion of their fathers. ...
3. After the publication of our edict ordering the Christians to conform to the ancient institutions, many of them were brought to order through fear, while many were exposed to danger. 4. Nevertheless, since many still persist in their opinions, and since we have observed that they now neither show due reverence to the gods nor worship their own God, we therefore, with our wonted clemency in extending pardon to all, are pleased to grant indulgence to these men, allowing Christians the right to exist again and to set up their places of worship; provided always that they do not offend against public order. 5. We will in a further instruction explain to the magistrates how they should conduct themselves in this matter. In return for this indulgence of ours it will be the duty of Christians to pray to God for our recovery, for the public weal and for their own; that the state may be preserved from danger on every side, and that they themselves may dwell safely in their homes.

m. *The 'Edict of Milan'*, March(?) 313

Lact. *De mort. pers.* XLVIII

2. When we, Constantine and Licinius, Emperors, met at Milan in conference concerning the welfare and security of the realm, we decided