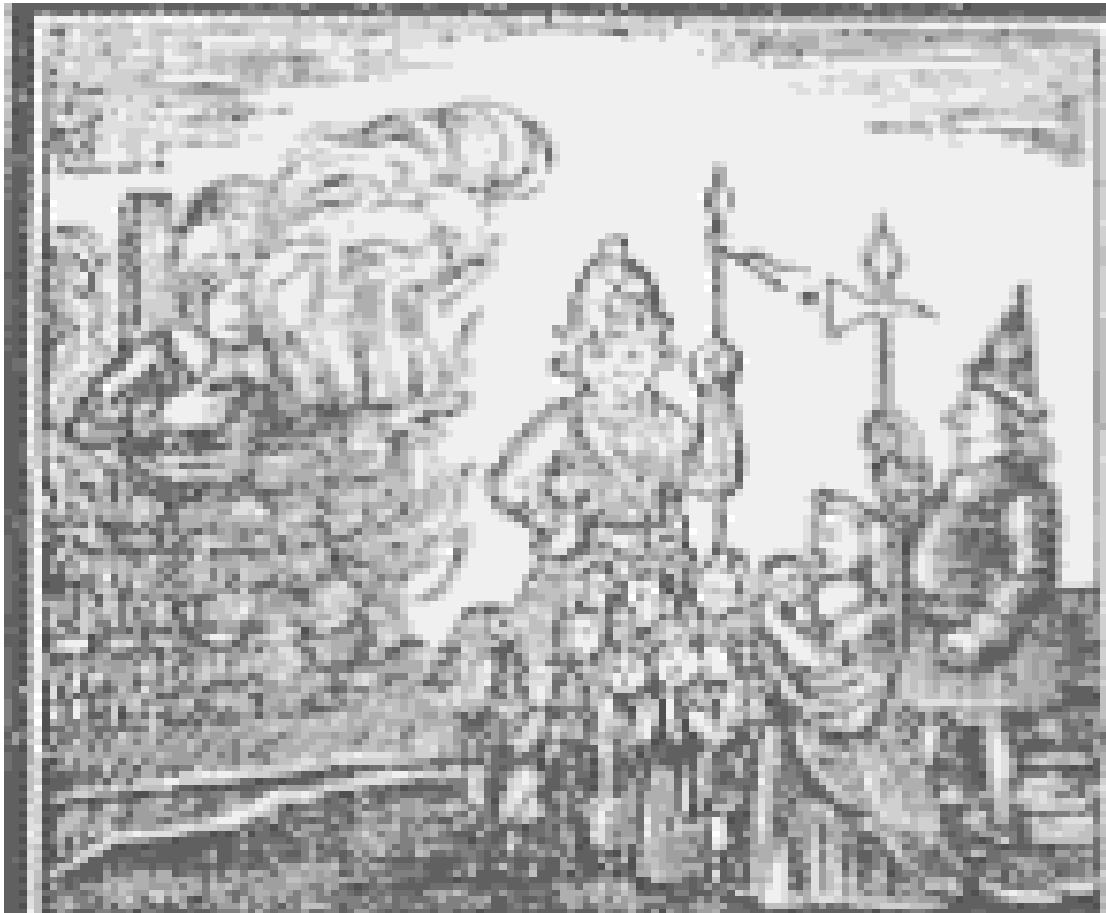


THE FIRST THOUSAND YEARS OF CHRISTIAN MARTYRDOM

FROM THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES TO 1000 A.D.



Adapted From ‘*FOX’S BOOK OF MARTYRS*’

J. Parnell McCarter

”Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of [cruel] mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and [in] mountains, and [in] dens and caves of the earth.” – Hebrews 11:33-38

*Dedicated to the Christians even now suffering persecution under the yolk of Islam,
Communism and Romanism.*

Compiled and edited by J. Parnell McCarter

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6408 Wrenwood

Jenison, MI 49428

(616) 457-8095

The Puritans' Home School Curriculum

www.puritans.net

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CHAPTER 1 : PERSECUTIONS DURING THE APOSTOLIC ERA (c. 30 A.D. – 100 A.D.)

Upon hearing Simon Peter's confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Christ uttered these most hopeful words: "upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." By these words Christ teaches us at least three things. First, that Christ will have a Church in this world. Secondly, that the same Church should mightily be opposed, not only by the world, but also by the uttermost strength and powers of all hell. And, thirdly, that the same Church, notwithstanding the uttermost of the devil and all his malice, should continue.

This prophecy of Christ we see wonderfully to be confirmed by subsequent history. First, we see that Christ obviously has set up a Church. Secondly, we see what force of princes, kings, monarchs, governors, and rulers of this world, with their subjects, publicly and privately, with all their strength and cunning, have bent themselves against this Church! And, thirdly, we see how the Church, all this notwithstanding, has yet endured! What storms and tempests it has overcome-wondrous it is to behold!

As it is not our business to enlarge upon our Savior's history, either before or after His crucifixion, we shall only find it necessary to remind our readers of the way the Jews were so disturbed by Christ's subsequent resurrection. Although one apostle had betrayed Him; although another had denied Him, under the solemn sanction of an oath; and although the rest had forsaken Him, unless we may except "the disciple who was known unto the high-priest"; the history of His resurrection gave a new direction to all their hearts, and, after the mission of the Holy Spirit, imparted new confidence to their minds. The powers with which they were endued emboldened them to proclaim His name, to the confusion of the Jewish rulers, and the astonishment of Gentile proselytes.

Stephen

Stephen suffered the next in order. His death was occasioned by the faithful manner in which he preached the Gospel to the betrayers and murderers of Christ. To such a degree of madness were they excited, that they cast him out of the city and stoned him to death. The time when he suffered is generally supposed to have been at the Passover which succeeded to that of our Lord's crucifixion, and to the era of his ascension, in the following spring.

Upon this a great persecution was raised against all who professed their belief in Christ as the Messiah, or as a prophet. We are immediately told by Luke, that "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem;" and that "they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."

About two thousand Christians, with Nicanor, one of the seven deacons, suffered martyrdom during the "persecution that arose about Stephen."

James the Great

The next martyr we meet with, according to Luke, in the History of the Apostles' Acts, was James the son of Zebedee, the elder brother of John, and a relative of our Lord. It was not until ten years after the death of Stephen that the second martyrdom took place. No sooner had Herod Agrippa been appointed governor of Judea, than, with a view to ingratiate himself with them, he raised a sharp persecution against the Christians, and determined to make an effectual blow, by striking at their leaders. An accuser of James had him arrested. As James was led to the place of martyrdom, his accuser was brought to repent of his conduct by the apostle's extraordinary courage. This accuser fell down at his feet to request his pardon, professing himself a Christian, and resolving that James should not receive the crown of martyrdom alone. Hence they were both beheaded at the same time. Thus did the first apostolic martyr cheerfully and resolutely receive that cup, which he had told our Savior he was ready to drink.

Timon and Parmenas suffered martyrdom about the same time; the one at Philippi, and the other in Macedonia. These events took place in 44 A.D.

Philip

Philip was born at Bethsaida, in Galilee and was first called by the name of "disciple." He labored diligently in Upper Asia, and suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified around 54 A.D.

Matthew

Matthew's occupation was that of a toll-gatherer. He was born at Nazareth. He wrote his gospel concerning the life, resurrection and testimony of Jesus Christ. The scene of his labors was Parthia and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd in the city of Nadabah around 60 A.D.

James the Less

James the Less was half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, being the son of Mary and Joseph. He was elected to the oversight of the churches of Jerusalem as one of the presbyters in the city. He was the author of the Epistle ascribed to James in the sacred canon. At the age of ninety-four he was beat and stoned by the Jews, and finally he had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.

Matthias

Matthias is less known than of most of the other Apostles of Christ. He was elected to fill the vacant place of Judas. He was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.

Andrew

Andrew was the brother of Peter. He preached the gospel to many Asiatic nations. But on Andrew's arrival at Edessa he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground like an 'X'. From the manner of the cross upon which this Apostle was crucified we have the term 'St. Andrew's Cross'.

Mark

Mark was born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Levi. He is supposed to have been converted to Christianity by Peter, whom he served as an amanuensis. (An 'amanuensis' is one who writes out a letter or book while another person dictates what its contents are to be.) Under the inspection of Peter, Mark wrote his Gospel account of Jesus Christ. Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria, at the great solemnity of Serapis their idol, ending his life under their merciless hands.

Peter

Among many other saints, the blessed Apostle Peter was probably condemned to death and crucified at Rome. Jerome says that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward. Apparently Peter requested this position at crucifixion, because he said he was unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord Jesus Christ was.

Paul

Paul, the apostle, who before was called Saul, after his great travail and unspeakable labors in promoting the Gospel of Christ, suffered also in this first persecution under Nero. Abdias declares that under his execution Nero sent two of his esquires, Ferega and Parthemius, to bring him word of Paul's death. They, coming to Paul as Paul was instructing the people, desired Paul to pray for them, that they might believe. The Apostle Paul told them that shortly after they should believe and be baptized at His sepulcher. This done, the soldiers came and led him out of the city to the place of execution. Paul, after he had prayed, gave his neck to the sword of his executioners.

Jude

Jude, the brother of James, was commonly called Thaddeus. He was crucified at Edessa, A.D. 72.

Bartholomew

Bartholomew preached in several countries, and having translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India, he propagated it in that country. He was at length cruelly beaten and then crucified by the impatient idolaters.

Thomas

Thomas, called Didymus, preached the Gospel in Parthia and India, where exciting the rage of the pagan priests, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear.

Luke

Luke, the evangelist, was the author of the Gospel which goes under his name. He traveled with Paul through various countries, and is supposed to have been hanged on an olive tree, by the idolatrous priests of Greece.

Simon

Surnamed Zelotes, Simon preached the Gospel in Mauritania, Africa, and even in Britain, in which latter country he was crucified in 74 A.D.

John

John, the "beloved disciple," was brother to James the Great. The churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira, were founded by him. From Ephesus he was ordered to be sent to Rome, where it is affirmed he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by miracle, without injury. Domitian afterwards banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Nerva, the successor of Domitian, recalled him. He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.

Barnabas

Barnabas was of Cyprus, but of Jewish descent. His death is supposed to have taken place about 73 A.D.

Waves of Persecution

Persecution of Christians during the period of the Roman Empire came in waves, depending upon the person who was emperor and his regional officers. Some Roman Emperors and their officials were quite cruel towards Christians and vehemently opposed to Christianity. Whereas others were more indifferent, giving Christians some respite from martyrdom. But until Constantine the Great none were Christian themselves nor did their duty to be a nursing father to Christ's church. None until Constantine fulfilled their God-appointed duty, as it is expressed in Isaiah 49:22-23 – *"Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in [their] arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon [their] shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with [their] face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I [am] the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me."*

The general pattern of the pagan Roman Emperors is best expressed in Psalm 2:2 as, *"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed."* Nevertheless, it was God's plan to redeem the world through and unto Christ over time. And so despite the persecution Christ's church was growing and marching forward, through the preaching of the Gospel empowered by the Holy Spirit. The message to the Roman Emperors, and ultimately to all Roman society, was simply, *"Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish [from] the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed [are] all they that put their trust in him."* God would not be stopped in implementing His plan that everyone and every institution-including government- should be subject to Christ and Christ's law.

The First Wave of Persecution, Under Nero, 67 A.D.

The first wave of persecution of the Church took place in the year 67 A.D., under Nero, the sixth emperor of Rome. This monarch reigned for the space of five years, with tolerable credit to himself, but then gave way to a horrible temper and to the most atrocious barbarities. Among other diabolical whims, he ordered that the city of Rome should be set on fire, which order was executed by his officers, guards, and servants. While the imperial city was in flames, he went up to the tower of Macenas, played upon his harp, sung the song of the burning of Troy, and openly declared that 'he wished the ruin of all things before his death.' Besides the noble pile, called the Circus, many other palaces and houses were consumed. Several thousand people perished in the flames. Many of these were smothered in the smoke or buried beneath the ruins.

This dreadful conflagration continued nine days. Nero, finding that his conduct was greatly blamed, and a severe odium cast upon him, determined to lay the blame for the incident upon the Christians in order to excuse himself. This terrible lie only added to Nero's cruelties. This was the occasion of the first persecution. The barbaric punishments perpetrated on the Christians were such as even excited the commiseration of the Romans themselves. Nero even refined his level of cruelty, and he contrived all manner of punishments for the Christians that the most

infernal imagination could design. In particular, he had some sewed up in skins of wild beasts, and then attacked by dogs until they expired. Others he dressed in shirts made stiff with wax, fixed to axletrees, and set on fire in his gardens, in order to illuminate them. This persecution was general throughout the whole Roman Empire, but it rather increased than diminished the spirit of Christianity. In the course of it, the Apostles Paul and Peter were martyred.

To their names may be added, Erastus, chamberlain of Corinth; Aristarchus, the Macedonian; Trophimus, an Ephesian converted by the Apostle Paul; Joseph, commonly called Barsabas; and Ananias, presbyter of Damascus.

The Second Wave of Persecution, Under Domitian, 81 A.D.

The emperor Domitian, who was naturally inclined to cruelty, first slew his brother, and then raised the second persecution against the Christians. In his rage he put to death some of the Roman senators. Some of these he had killed through malice, and others to confiscate their estates. He then commanded all the lineage of David- the Jews- be put to death.

Among the numerous martyrs that suffered during this persecution were Simeon, a presbyter of Jerusalem, who was crucified. In addition, there was the Apostle John, who was boiled in oil, and afterward banished to Patmos. Flavia, the daughter of a Roman senator, was likewise banished to Pontus. A law was also made at this time which said: "No Christian, once brought before the tribunal, should be exempted from punishment without renouncing his religion."

A variety of fabricated tales were, during this reign, composed in order to injure the Christians. Such was the infatuation of the pagans, that, if famine, pestilence, or earthquakes afflicted any of the Roman provinces, it was laid upon the Christians. These persecutions among the Christians increased the number of informers and many, for the sake of gain, swore away the lives of the innocent.

Another hardship was, that, when any Christians were brought before the magistrates, a test oath was proposed. If a Christian refused to take the oath, death was pronounced against him. And if he confessed himself a Christian, the sentence was the same.

The following were the most remarkable among the numerous martyrs who suffered during this persecution.

Dionysius, the Areopagite, was an Athenian by birth, and educated in all the useful and ornamental literature of Greece. He then traveled to Egypt to study astronomy, and made very particular observations on the great and supernatural eclipse, which happened at the time of our Savior's crucifixion.

The sanctity of his behavior and the purity of his manners recommended him so strongly to the Christians in general, that he was appointed a presbyter of Athens.

Nicodemus, a benevolent Christian of some distinction, suffered at Rome during the rage of Domitian's persecution.

Protasius and Gervasius were martyred at Milan.

Timothy was the celebrated disciple of the Apostle Paul, and a presbyter of a church in Ephesus, where he zealously governed the Church until 97 A.D. At this period, as the pagans were about to celebrate a feast called Catagogion, Timothy, meeting the procession, severely reproofed them for their ridiculous idolatry. This reproof so exasperated the people that they fell upon him with their clubs, and beat him in so dreadful a manner that he expired of the bruises two days later.

Summary

Notwithstanding all these continual persecutions and horrible punishments, the Church daily increased, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the Apostles and of the Prophets, and watered plentifully with the blood of saints. Christ built His Church during these early days despite much opposition. His kingdom was expanding despite the opposition of Satan and his cohorts.

CHAPTER 2 : PERSECUTIONS DURING THE SECOND CENTURY (101 A.D. – 200 A.D.)

The Third Wave of Persecution, Under Trajan, 108 A.D.

In the third persecution Pliny the Second, a man learned and famous, seeing the lamentable slaughter of Christians, and moved therewith to pity, wrote to Trajan, certifying him that there were many thousands of them daily put to death, of which none did any thing contrary to the Roman laws worthy of persecution. "The whole account they gave of their crime or error (whichever it is to be called) amounted only to this-viz. that they were accustomed on a stated day to meet before daylight, and to repeat together a set form of prayer to Christ as a God, and to bind themselves by an obligation-not indeed to commit wickedness; but, on the contrary-never to commit theft, robbery, or adultery, never to falsify their word, never to defraud any man: after which it was their custom to separate, and reassemble to partake in common of a harmless meal."

In this persecution suffered the blessed martyr, Ignatius, who is held in famous reverence among very many. This Ignatius was appointed to the presbytery (or otherwise known as the bishopric) of Antioch next after Peter in succession. Some do say, that he, being sent from Syria to Rome, because he professed Christ, was given to the wild beasts to be devoured. It is also said of him, that when he passed through Asia, being under the most strict custody of his keepers, he strengthened and confirmed the churches through all the cities as he went, both with his exhortations and preaching of the Word of God. Accordingly, having come to Smyrna, he wrote to the Church at Rome, exhorting them not to use means for his deliverance from martyrdom, lest they should deprive him of that which he most longed and hoped for. "Now I begin to be a disciple. I care for nothing, of visible or invisible things, so that I may but win Christ. Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!" And even when he was sentenced to be thrown to the beasts, and he heard the lions roaring which would devour him, Ignatius said: "I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread."

The Roman emperor Trajan being succeeded by Adrian, the latter continued this third persecution with as much severity as his predecessor. About this time Alexander, a bishop (or presbyter) of Rome, with his two deacons, were martyred. So were Quirinus and Hernes, with their families. In addition, Zenon, a Roman nobleman, was martyred, and even as many as ten thousand other Christians were as well.

In Mount Ararat many were crucified, crowned with thorns, and spears run into their sides, in imitation of Christ's passion. Eustachius, a brave and successful Roman commander, was by the emperor ordered to join in an idolatrous sacrifice to celebrate some of his own victories. But Eustachius' faith (being a Christian in his heart) was so much greater than his vanity, that he nobly refused it. Enraged at the denial, the ungrateful emperor forgot the service of this skillful commander, and ordered him and his whole family to be martyred.

At the martyrdom of Faustines and Jovita, brothers and citizens of Brescia, their torments were so many, and their patience so great, that Calocerius, a pagan, beholding them, was struck with admiration, and exclaimed in a kind of ecstasy, "Great is the God of the Christians!" for which he was apprehended, and suffered a similar fate.

Many other similar cruelties and rigors were exercised against the Christians, until Quadratus, bishop of Athens, made a learned apology in their favor before the emperor, who happened to be there. In addition, Aristides, a philosopher of the same city, wrote an elegant epistle defending the Christians and Christianity. These so affected the Emperor Adrian that he relaxed the severity of his persecutions against Christians.

Adrian dying A.D. 138, was succeeded by Antoninus Pius, one of the most amiable monarchs that ever reigned, and who stayed the persecutions against the Christians.

The Fourth Wave Persecution, Under Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, 162 A.D.

Marcus Aurelius succeeded Antoninus Pius as Roman Emperor about 161 A.D. Marcus Aurelius was a man of stern and severe nature. Although he was very adept in the study of philosophy and in the art of civil government, yet, toward the Christians he was sharp and fierce. He began the fourth wave of persecution against the Christians.

The cruelties used in this persecution were such that many of the spectators shuddered with horror at the sight, and were astonished at the intrepidity of the sufferers. Some of the martyrs were obliged to pass, with their already wounded feet, over thorns, nails, and sharp shells upon their points. Others were scourged until their sinews and veins lay bare. After suffering the most excruciating tortures that could be devised, they were destroyed by the most terrible deaths.

Germanicus, a young man, but a true Christian, being delivered to the wild beasts on account of his faith, behaved with such astonishing courage that several pagans became converts to a faith which inspired such fortitude.

Polycarp, the venerable bishop of Smyrna, hearing that persons were seeking for him, escaped, but was discovered by a child. After feasting the guards who apprehended him, he desired an hour in prayer, which being allowed, he prayed with such fervency, that his guards repented that they had been instrumental in taking him. He was, however, carried before the proconsul, condemned, and burned in the market place.

The proconsul then urged him, saying, "Swear, and I will release thee;--reproach Christ."

Polycarp answered, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who has saved me?" At the stake to which he was only tied, but not nailed as usual, as he assured them he should stand immovable, the flames, on their kindling the fagots, encircled his body, like an arch, without touching him. The executioner, on seeing this, was ordered to pierce him with a sword, when so great a quantity of blood flowed out as extinguished the fire. But his body, at the instigation of the enemies of the Gospel, especially Jews, was ordered to be consumed in the pile, and the request of his friends, who wished to give it Christian burial, rejected. They nevertheless collected his bones and as much of his remains as possible, and caused them to be decently interred.

Metrodorus, a minister, who preached boldly, and Pionius, who made some excellent apologies for the Christian faith, were likewise burned. Carpus and Papilus, two worthy Christians, and Agatonica, a pious woman, suffered martyrdom at Pergamopolis, in Asia.

Felicitatis, an illustrious Roman lady, of a considerable family, and the most shining virtues, was a devout Christian. She had seven sons, whom she had educated with the most exemplary piety. Januarius, the eldest, was scourged, and pressed to death with weights. Felix and Philip, the two next had their brains dashed out with clubs. Silvanus, the fourth, was murdered by being thrown from a precipice. And the three younger sons, Alexander, Vitalis, and Martial, were beheaded. The mother was beheaded with the same sword as the three latter.

Justin, the celebrated philosopher, fell a martyr in this persecution. He was a native of Neapolis, in Samaria, and was born 103 A.D. Justin was a great lover of truth, and a universal scholar. He investigated the Stoic and Peripatetic philosophy, and attempted the Pythagorean. But the behavior of its professors disgusting him, he applied himself to the Platonic, in which he took great delight. About the year 133, when he was thirty years of age, he became a convert to Christianity. Then, for the first time, he perceived the real nature of truth. He wrote an elegant epistle to the Gentiles, and employed his talents in convincing the Jews of the truth of the Christian rites. He next spent a great deal of time in traveling, until he took up his abode in Rome, and fixed his habitation upon the Viminal mount. He kept a public school, taught many who afterward became great men, and wrote a treatise to confuse heresies of all kinds. As the pagans began to treat the Christians with great severity, Justin wrote his first apology in their favor. This piece displays great learning and genius, and occasioned the emperor to publish an edict in favor of the Christians. Soon after, he entered into frequent contests with Crescens, a person of a vicious life and conversation, but a celebrated cynic philosopher. His arguments appeared so powerful, yet disgusting to the cynic, that he resolved on, and in the sequel accomplished, his destruction. The second apology of Justin, upon certain severe punishments, gave Crescens the cynic an opportunity of prejudicing the emperor against the writer of it. So Justin, and six of his companions, were apprehended. Being commanded to sacrifice to the pagan idols, they

refused, and were condemned to be scourged, and then beheaded. This sentence was executed with all imaginable severity.

Several during this time were beheaded for refusing to sacrifice to the image of Jupiter. Among these were Concordus, a deacon of the city of Spolito.

Some of the restless northern nations having risen in arms against Rome, the emperor marched to encounter them. He was, however, drawn into an ambush, and dreaded the loss of his whole army. Enveloped with mountains, surrounded by enemies, and perishing with thirst, the pagan deities were invoked in vain. Then the men belonging to the militine, or thundering legion, who were all Christians, were commanded to call upon their God for succor. A miraculous deliverance immediately ensued. A prodigious quantity of rain fell, which, being caught by the men, and filling their dykes, afforded a sudden and astonishing relief. It appears that the storm which miraculously flashed in the face of the enemy so intimidated them, that part deserted to the Roman army. The rest were defeated, and the revolted provinces entirely recovered. This affair occasioned the persecution to subside for some time, at least in those parts immediately under the inspection of the emperor.

But we find that the persecutions soon after raged in France, particularly at Lyons, where the tortures to which many of the Christians were put, almost exceed the powers of description. The principal of these martyrs were Vetius Agathus, a young man; Attalus, of Pergamus; Pothinus, the venerable bishop of Lyons, who was ninety years of age; Blandina, a Christian lady of weak constitution; Biblias, a weak woman, once an apostate; and Sanctus, a deacon of Vienna. Red hot plates of brass were placed upon the most tender parts of Sanctus' body when he was killed.

Blandina, on the day when she and the three other champions were first brought into the amphitheater, she was suspended on a piece of wood fixed in the ground, and exposed as food for the wild beasts. At this point, by her earnest prayers, she encouraged the others. But none of the wild beasts would touch her, so that she was remanded to prison. When she was again produced for the third and last time, she was accompanied by Ponticus, a youth of fifteen, and the constancy of their faith so enraged the multitude that neither the sex of the one nor the youth of the other were respected, being exposed to all manner of punishments and tortures. Being strengthened by Blandina, he persevered unto death. She, after enduring all the torments heretofore mentioned, was at length slain with the sword.

When the Christians, upon these occasions, received martyrdom, they were ornamented, and crowned with garlands of flowers. More importantly, they in heaven received eternal crowns of glory.

It has been said that the lives of the early Christians consisted of "persecution above ground and prayer below ground." Their lives are expressed by the Coliseum and the catacombs. Beneath Rome are the excavations which we call the catacombs, which were at once temples and tombs. The early Church of Rome might well be called the Church of the Catacombs. There are some sixty catacombs near Rome, in which some six hundred miles of galleries have been traced, and these are not all. These galleries are about eight feet high and from three to five feet wide, containing on either side several rows of long, low, horizontal recesses, one above another like berths in a ship. In these the dead bodies were placed and the front closed, either by a single marble slab or several great tiles laid in mortar. On these slabs or tiles, epitaphs or symbols are engraved or painted. Both pagans and Christians buried their dead in these catacombs. When the Christian graves have been opened the skeletons tell their own terrible tale. Heads are found severed from the body, ribs and shoulder blades are broken, bones are often calcined from fire. But despite the awful story of persecution that we may read here, the inscriptions breathe forth peace and joy and triumph. Here are a few:

"Here lies Marcia, put to rest in a dream of peace."

"Lawrence to his sweetest son, borne away of angels."

"Victorious in peace and in Christ."

"Being called away, he went in peace."

Remember when reading these inscriptions the story the skeletons tell of persecution, of torture, and of fire.

But the full force of these epitaphs is seen when we contrast them with the pagan epitaphs, such as:

"Live for the present hour, since we are sure of nothing else."

"I lift my hands against the gods who took me away at the age of twenty though I had done no harm."

"Once I was not. Now I am not. I know nothing about it, and it is no concern of mine."

"Traveler, curse me not as you pass, for I am in darkness and cannot answer."

The most frequent Christian symbol on the walls of the catacombs is the fish, the symbol of Christianity.

The Fifth Wave of Persecution, Commencing with Severus, A.D. 192

Severus, having been recovered from a severe fit of sickness by a Christian, became a great favorer of the Christians in general. But the prejudice and fury of the ignorant multitude prevailing, obsolete laws were put in execution against the Christians. The progress of Christianity alarmed the pagans, and they revived the stale calumny of placing accidental misfortunes to the account of its professors around 192 A.D.

But, though persecuting malice raged, yet the Gospel shone with resplendent brightness. Firm as an impregnable rock, it withstood the attacks of its boisterous enemies with success. Tertullian, who lived in this age, informs us that if the Christians had collectively withdrawn themselves from the Roman territories, the empire would have been greatly depopulated.

Victor, a bishop of Rome, suffered martyrdom in the first year of the third century, A.D. 201. Leonidus, the father of the celebrated Origen, was beheaded for being a Christian. Many of Origen's hearers likewise suffered martyrdom. Particularly two brothers, named Plutarchus and Serenus were martyred. Serenus, Heron, and Heraclides were beheaded. Rhais had boiled pitch poured upon her head, and was then burned, as was Marcella her mother. Potainiena, the sister of Rhais, was executed in the same manner as Rhais had been. But Basilides, an officer belonging to the army and ordered to attend her execution, became her convert.

Basilides being, as an officer, required to take a certain oath, refused, saying, that he could not swear by the Roman idols, as he was a Christian. Struck with surprise, the people could not, at first, believe what they heard. But he had no sooner confirmed the same, than he was dragged before the judge, committed to prison, and speedily afterward beheaded.

Irenaeus, a bishop of Lyons, was born in Greece, and received both a polite and a Christian education. It is generally supposed that the account of the persecutions at Lyons was written by him. He succeeded the martyr Pothinus as bishop of Lyons, and ruled his diocese with great propriety. He was a zealous refuter of heresies in general, and about A.D. 187, he wrote a celebrated tract against heresy. Victor, a bishop of Rome, wanting to impose the keeping of Easter there, in preference to other places, it occasioned some disorders among the Christians. In particular, Irenaeus wrote him a synodical epistle, in the name of the Gallic churches. This zeal, in favor of Christianity, pointed him out as an object of resentment to the emperor. Consequently, in A.D. 202 he was beheaded.

The persecutions now extending to Africa, many were martyred in that quarter of the globe; the most particular of whom we shall mention.

Perpetua, a married lady, of about twenty-two years was martyred. Those who suffered with her were, Felicitas, a married lady, big with child at the time of her being apprehended, and Revocatus, catechumen of Carthage, and a slave. The names of the other prisoners, destined to suffer upon this occasion, were Saturninus, Secundulus, and Satur. On the day appointed for their execution, they were led to the amphitheater. Satur, Saturninus, and Revocatus were ordered to run the gauntlet between the hunters, or such as had the care of the wild beasts. The hunters being drawn up in two ranks, they ran between, and were severely lashed as they passed. Felicitas and

Perpetua were stripped, in order to be thrown to a mad bull, which made his first attack upon Perpetua, and stunned her. He then darted at Felicitas, and gored her dreadfully. But not killing them, the executioner did that office with a sword. Revocatus and Satur were destroyed by wild beasts; Saturninus was beheaded; and Secundulus died in prison. These executions were in the 205, on the eighth day of March.

Speratus and twelve others were likewise beheaded; as was Andocles in France. Asclepiades, bishop of Antioch, suffered many tortures, but his life was spared.

Cecilia, a young lady of good family in Rome, was married to a gentleman named Valerian. She converted her husband and brother, who were beheaded; and the maximus, or officer, who led them to execution, becoming their convert, suffered the same fate. The lady was placed naked in a scalding bath, and having continued there a considerable time, her head was struck off with a sword, A.D. 222.

Calistus, bishop of Rome, was martyred, A.D. 224; but the manner of his death is not recorded. And Urban, bishop of Rome, met the same fate in 232 A.D.

CHAPTER 3 : PERSECUTIONS DURING THE THIRD CENTURY (201 A.D. – 300 A.D.)

The Sixth Wave of Persecution, Under Maximus, 235 A.D.

In 235 A.D. Maximinus was the Roman Emperor. In Cappadocia the president, Seremianus, did all he could to exterminate the Christians from that province.

The principal persons who perished under this reign were Pontianus, bishop of Rome; Anteros, a Grecian, his successor, who gave offense to the government by collecting the acts of the martyrs; Pammachius and Quiritus, Roman senators, with all their families; and many other Christians; Simplicius, senator;

Calepodius, a Christian minister, was thrown into the Tiber River. Martina, a noble and beautiful virgin, and Hippolitus, a Christian minister, were tied to a wild horse and dragged until he expired.

During this persecution, raised by Maximinus, numberless Christians were slain without trial, and buried indiscriminately in heaps, sometimes fifty or sixty being cast into a pit together, without the least decency.

The tyrant Maximinus dying, A.D. 238, was succeeded by Gordian, during whose reign, and that of his successor Philip, the Church was free from persecution for the space of more than ten years. But in A.D. 249, a violent persecution broke out in Alexandria, at the instigation of a pagan priest, without the knowledge of the emperor.

The Seventh Wave of Persecution, Under Decius, 249 A.D.

This persecution was occasioned partly by the hatred Decius bore to his predecessor Philip, who was deemed a Christian. The Roman Emperor Decius was also motivated in his persecutions by his jealousy concerning the amazing increase of Christianity. By this time the heathen temples began to be forsaken, and the Christian churches thronged.

These reasons stimulated Decius to attempt the very extirpation of the name of 'Christian'. It was unfortunate for the Gospel, that many errors had, about this time, crept into the Church. The Christians were at variance with each other; and self-interest divided those whom social love ought to have united. The virulence of pride occasioned a variety of factions.

The heathens in general were ambitious to enforce the imperial decrees upon this occasion, and looked upon the murder of a Christian as a merit to themselves. The martyrs, upon this occasion, were innumerable, but the principal we shall give some account of.

Fabian, the bishop of Rome, was the first person of eminence who felt the severity of this persecution. The deceased emperor, Philip, had, on account of his integrity, committed his treasure to the care of this good man. But Decius, not finding as much as his avarice made him expect, determined to wreak his vengeance on the good Christian church officer. He was accordingly seized, and on January 20, A.D. 250, he suffered decapitation.

Julian, a native of Cilicia, as we are informed by Chrysostom, was seized upon for being a Christian. He was put into a leather bag, together with a number of serpents and scorpions, and in that condition thrown into the sea.

Peter, a young man, amiable for the superior qualities of his body and mind, was beheaded for refusing to sacrifice to Venus. He said, "I am astonished you should sacrifice to an infamous woman, whose debaucheries even your own historians record, and whose life consisted of such actions as your laws would punish. No, I shall offer the true God the acceptable sacrifice of praises and prayers." Optimus, the proconsul of Asia, on hearing this, ordered the prisoner to be stretched upon a wheel, by which all his bones were broken, and then he was sent to be beheaded.

Nichomachus, being brought before the proconsul as a Christian, was ordered to sacrifice to the pagan idols. Nichomachus replied, "I cannot pay that respect to devils, which is only due to the Almighty." This speech so much enraged the proconsul that Nichomachus was put to the rack. After enduring the torments for a time, he recanted; but scarcely had he given this proof of his frailty, than he fell into the greatest agonies, dropped down on the ground, and expired immediately.

Denisa, a young woman of only sixteen years of age, who beheld this terrible judgment, suddenly exclaimed, "O unhappy wretch, why would you buy a moment's ease at the expense of a miserable eternity!" Optimus, hearing this, called to her, and Denisa avowing herself to be a Christian, she was beheaded, by his order, soon after.

Andrew and Paul, two companions of Nichomachus, the martyr, around 251 A.D. suffered martyrdom by stoning. They expired, calling on their blessed Redeemer.

Alexander and Epimachus, of Alexandria, were apprehended for being Christians. Confessing the accusation, they were beat with staves, torn with hooks, and at length burnt in the fire. We are informed, in a fragment preserved by Eusebius, that four female martyrs suffered on the same day, and at the same place, but not in the same manner, for these were beheaded.

Lucian and Marcian, two wicked pagans, though skillful magicians, becoming converts to Christianity, to make amends for their former errors, lived the lives of hermits, and subsisted upon bread and water only. After some time spent in this manner, they became zealous preachers, and made many converts. The persecution, however, raging at this time, they were seized upon, and carried before Sabinus, the governor of Bithynia. On being asked by what authority they took upon themselves to preach, Lucian answered, "That the laws of charity and humanity obliged all men to endeavor the conversion of their neighbors, and to do everything in their power to rescue them from the snares of the devil."

Lucian having answered in this manner, Marcian said, "Their conversion was by the same grace which was given to the Apostle Paul, who, from a zealous persecutor of the Church, became a preacher of the Gospel."

The proconsul, finding that he could not prevail with them to renounce their faith, condemned them to be burned alive, which sentence was soon after executed.

Trypho and Respicus, two eminent men, were seized as Christians, and imprisoned at Nice. Their feet were pierced with nails. They were then dragged through the streets, scourged, torn with iron hooks, scorched with lighted torches, and at length beheaded, February 1, 251 A.D.

Agatha, a Sicilian lady, was not more remarkable for her personal and acquired endowments, than her piety. Her beauty was such, that Quintian, governor of Sicily, became enamored of her, and made many attempts upon her chastity without success. In order to gratify his passions with the greater convenience, he put the virtuous lady into the hands of Aphrodica, a very infamous and licentious woman. This wretch tried every artifice to win her to the desired prostitution, but found all her efforts were vain. Agatha's chastity was impregnable, and she well knew that virtue alone could procure true happiness. Aphrodica acquainted Quintian with the inefficacy of her endeavors, who, enraged to be foiled in his designs, changed his lust into resentment. On her confessing that she was a Christian, he determined to gratify his revenge, as he could not his passion. Pursuant to his orders, she was scourged, burned with red-hot irons, and torn with sharp hooks. Having borne these torments with admirable fortitude, she was next laid naked upon live coals, intermingled with glass, and then being carried back to prison, she there expired on February 5, 251.

Cyril, bishop of Gortyna, was seized by order of Lucius, the governor of that place, who, nevertheless, exhorted him to obey the imperial mandate, perform the sacrifices, and save his venerable person from destruction; for he was now eighty-four years of age. The good minister replied that as he had long taught others to save their souls, he should only think now of his own salvation. The worthy minister heard his fiery sentence without emotion, walked cheerfully to the place of execution, and underwent his martyrdom with great fortitude.

The persecution raged in no place more than the Island of Crete. There the governor, being exceedingly active in executing the imperial decrees, the place streamed with pious blood.

Babylas, a Christian of a liberal education, became bishop of Antioch, A.D. 237, on the demise of Zebinus. He acted with inimitable zeal, and governed the Church with admirable prudence during the most tempestuous times. The first misfortune that happened to Antioch during his mission was the siege of it by Sapor, king of Persia. Having overrun all Syria, Sapor took and plundered this city among others. He treated the Christian inhabitants with greater severity than the rest, but was soon totally defeated by Gordian.

After Gordian's death, in the reign of Decius, that emperor came to Antioch, where, having a desire to visit an assembly of Christians, Babylas opposed him, and absolutely refused to let him come in. The emperor dissembled his anger at that time, but soon sending for the bishop, he sharply reproved him for his insolence. Decius then ordered Babylas to sacrifice to the pagan deities as an expiation for his offense. This being refused, he was committed to prison, loaded with chains, treated with great severity, and then beheaded, together with three young men who had been his pupils.

Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, about this time was cast into prison on account of his religion, where he died through the severity of his confinement.

Julianus, an old man, lame with the gout, and Cronion, another Christian, were bound on the backs of camels, severely scourged, and then thrown into a fire and consumed. Also forty virgins, at Antioch, after being imprisoned, and scourged, were burned.

In the year of our Lord 251, the emperor Decius having erected a pagan temple at Ephesus, he commanded all who were in that city to sacrifice to the idols. This order was nobly refused by seven of his own soldiers, viz. Maximianus, Martianus, Joannes, Malchus, Dionysius, Seraion, and Constantinus. The emperor wishing to win these soldiers to renounce their faith by his entreaties and lenity, gave them a considerable respite until he returned from an expedition. During the emperor's absence, they escaped and hid themselves in a cavern. When which the emperor was informed of this at his return, the mouth of the cave was closed up, and they all perished with hunger.

Theodora, a beautiful young lady of Antioch, on refusing to sacrifice to the Roman idols, was condemned to the brothels, that her virtue might be sacrificed to the brutality of lust. Didymus, a Christian, disguised himself in the habit of a Roman soldier, went to the house, informed Theodora who he was, and advised her to make her escape in his clothes. This being effected, and a man found in the brothel instead of a beautiful lady, Didymus was taken before the president, to whom confessing the truth, and owning that he was a Christian, the sentence of death was immediately pronounced against him. Theodora, hearing that her deliverer was likely to suffer, came to the judge, threw herself at his feet, and begged that the sentence might fall on her as the guilty person. But, deaf to the cries of the innocent, and insensible to the calls of justice, the inflexible judge condemned both. When they were executed accordingly, they were first beheaded, and then their bodies afterwards burned.

Secundianus, having been accused as a Christian, was conveyed to prison by some soldiers. On the way, Verianus and Marcellinus said, "Where are you carrying the innocent?" This interrogatory occasioned them to be seized, and all three, after having been tortured, were hanged and decapitated.

Origen, the celebrated presbyter and catechist of Alexandria, at the age of sixty-four, was seized, thrown into a loathsome prison, laden with fetters, his feet placed in the stocks, and his legs extended to the utmost for several successive days. He was threatened with fire, and tormented by every lingering means the most infernal imaginations could suggest. During this cruel temporizing, the emperor Decius died.

The Emperor Gallus, who succeeded Decius, engaged in a war with the Goths. During this time the Christians met with a respite. In this interim, Origen obtained his enlargement, and, retiring to Tyre, he there remained until his death, which happened when he was in the sixty-ninth year of his age.

Gallus, the emperor, having concluded his wars, a plague broke out in the empire. Sacrifices to the pagan deities were ordered by the emperor, and persecutions spread from the interior to the extreme parts of the empire, and many fell martyrs to the impetuosity of the rabble, as well as the prejudice of the magistrates. Among these were Cornelius, the Christian bishop of Rome, and Lucius, his successor, in 253.

Most of the errors which crept into the Church at this time arose from placing human reason in competition with revelation; but the fallacy of such arguments being proved by the most able divines, the opinions they had created vanished away like the stars before the sun.

The Eighth Wave of Persecution, Under Valerian, 257 A.D.

The eighth persecution began under Valerian, in the month of April, 257, and continued for three years and six months. The martyrs that fell in this persecution were innumerable, and their tortures and deaths as various and painful. The most eminent martyrs were the following, though neither rank, sex, nor age were regarded.

Rufina and Secunda were two beautiful and accomplished ladies, daughters of Asterius, a gentleman of eminence in Rome. Rufina, the elder, was designed in marriage for Armentarius, a young nobleman; Secunda, the younger, for Verinus, a person of rank and opulence. The suitors, at the time of the persecution's commencing, were both Christians. But when danger appeared, to save their fortunes, they renounced their faith. They took great pains to persuade the ladies to do the same, but, disappointed in their purpose, the lovers were base enough to inform against the ladies, who, being apprehended as Christians, were brought before Junius Donatus, governor of Rome, where, A.D. 257, they sealed their martyrdom with their blood.

Stephen, bishop of Rome, was beheaded in the same year, and about that time Saturninus, the pious orthodox bishop of Toulouse, refusing to sacrifice to idols, was treated with all the barbarous indignities imaginable, and fastened by the feet to the tail of a bull. Upon a signal given, the enraged animal was driven down the steps of the temple, by which the worthy martyr's brains were dashed out.

Sextus succeeded Stephen as bishop of Rome. He is supposed to have been a Greek by birth or by extraction, and had for some time served in the capacity of a deacon under Stephen. His great fidelity, singular wisdom, and uncommon courage distinguished him upon many occasions; and the happy conclusion of a controversy with some heretics is generally ascribed to his piety and prudence. In the year 258, Marcianus, who had the management of the Roman government, procured an order from the emperor Valerian, to put to death all the Christian clergy in Rome, and hence the bishop with six of his deacons, suffered martyrdom in 258.

Let us draw near to the fire of martyred Lawrence, that our cold hearts may be warmed thereby. The merciless tyrant, understanding him to be not only a minister of the sacraments, but a distributor also of the Church riches, promised to himself a double prey, by the apprehension of one soul. First, with the rake of avarice to scrape to himself the treasure of poor Christians; then with the fiery fork of tyranny, so to toss and turmoil them, that they should wax weary of their profession. With furious face and cruel countenance, the greedy wolf demanded where this Lawrence had bestowed the substance of the Church. Requesting three days' respite, he promised to declare where the treasure might be had. In the meantime, he caused a good number of poor Christians to be congregated. So, when the day of his answer was come, the persecutor strictly charged him to stand to his promise. Then valiant Lawrence, stretching out his arms over the poor, said: "These are the precious treasure of the Church; these are the treasure indeed, in whom the faith of Christ reigneth, in whom Jesus Christ hath His mansion-place. What more precious jewels can Christ have, than those in whom He hath promised to dwell? For so it is written, 'I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in.' And again, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' What greater riches can Christ our Master possess, than the poor people in whom He loveth to be seen?"

O, what tongue is able to express the fury and madness of the tyrant's heart! Now he stamped, he stared, he ramped, he fared as one out of his wits. His eyes like fire glowed, his mouth like a boar formed, his teeth like a hellhound grinned. Now, not a reasonable man, but a roaring lion, he might be called.

"Kindle the fire (he cried)--of wood make no spare. Has this villain deluded the emperor? Away with him, away with him: whip him with scourges, jerk him with rods, buffet him with fists, brain him with clubs. Jest the traitor with the emperor? Pinch him with fiery tongs, gird him with burning plates, bring out the strongest chains, and the fire-forks, and the grated bed of iron: on the fire with it; bind the rebel hand and foot; and when the bed is fire-hot, on with him: roast him, broil him, toss him, turn him: on pain of our high displeasure do every man his office, O ye tormentors."

The word was no sooner spoken, but all was done. After many cruel dealings, this meek lamb was laid, I will not say on his fiery bed of iron, but on his soft bed of down. So mightily God wrought with his martyr Lawrence, so miraculously God tempered His element the fire, that it became not a bed of consuming pain, but a pallet of nourishing rest.

In Africa the persecution raged with peculiar violence. Many thousands received the crown of martyrdom, among whom the following were the most distinguished characters:

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, an eminent minister and a pious ornament of the Church, was martyred. The brightness of his genius was tempered by the solidity of his judgment. With all the accomplishments of the gentleman, he blended the virtues of a Christian. His doctrines were orthodox and pure; his language easy and elegant; and his manners graceful and winning. In fine, he was both the pious and polite preacher.

In his youth Cyprian was educated in the principles of Gentilism, and having a considerable fortune, he lived in the very extravagance of splendor, and all the dignity of pomp. But about the year 246, Coecilius, a Christian minister of Carthage, became the happy instrument of Cyprian's conversion. On this account, and for the great love that he always afterward bore for the author of his conversion, he was termed Coecilius Cyprian. Previous to his baptism, he studied the Scriptures with care and being struck with the beauties of the truths they contained, he determined to practice the virtues therein recommended. Subsequent to his baptism, he sold his estate, distributed the money among the poor, dressed himself in plain attire, and commenced a life of austerity. He was soon after made a presbyter. Being greatly admired for his virtues and works, on the death of Donatus, in A.D. 248, he was almost unanimously elected a minister and bishop of Carthage.

Cyprian's care not only extended over Carthage, but to Numidia and Mauritania. In all his transactions he took great care to ask the advice of his clergy, knowing that unanimity alone could be of service to the Church. This was one of his maxims: "the bishop was in the church, and the church in the bishop; so that unity can only be preserved by a close connection between the pastor and his flock."

In A.D. 250, Cyprian was publicly proscribed by the emperor Decius, under the appellation of Coecilius Cyprian, bishop of the Christians. The universal cry of the pagans was, "Cyprian to the lions, Cyprian to the beasts." The bishop, however, withdrew from the rage of the populace, and his effects were immediately confiscated. During his retirement, he wrote thirty pious and elegant letters to his flock. But several schisms that then crept into the Church, and this gave him great uneasiness. The rigor of the persecution abating, he returned to Carthage, and did everything in his power to expunge erroneous opinions. A terrible plague breaking out in Carthage, it was as usual, laid to the charge of the Christians. The magistrates began to persecute accordingly, which occasioned an epistle from them to Cyprian, in answer to which he vindicates the cause of Christianity. In A.D. 257, Cyprian was brought before the proconsul Aspasius Paternus, who exiled him to a little city on the Lybian sea. On the death of this proconsul, he returned to Carthage, but was soon after seized, and carried before the new governor, who condemned him to be beheaded. The sentence was executed on the fourteenth of September, A.D. 258.

The disciples of Cyprian, martyred in this persecution, were Lucius, Flavian, Victoricus, Remus, Montanus, Julian, Primelus, and Donatian.

At Utica, a most terrible tragedy was exhibited. Three hundred Christians were, by the orders of the proconsul, placed round a burning limekiln. A pan of coals and incense being prepared, they were commanded either to sacrifice to Jupiter, or to be thrown into the kiln. Unanimously refusing, they bravely jumped into the pit, and were immediately suffocated.

Fructuosus, bishop of Tarragon, in Spain, and his two deacons, Augurius and Eulogius, were burned for being Christians.

Alexander, Malchus, and Priscus, three Christians of Palestine, with a woman of the same place, voluntarily accused themselves of being Christians, on which account they were sentenced to be devoured by tigers. This sentence was executed accordingly.

Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda, three virgins of Tuburga, had gall and vinegar given them to drink, were then severely scourged, tormented on a gibbet, rubbed with lime, scorched on a gridiron, worried by wild beasts, and at length beheaded.

It is here proper to take notice of the singular but miserable fate of the emperor Valerian, who had so long and so terribly persecuted the Christians. This tyrant, by a stratagem, was taken prisoner by Sapor, emperor of Persia, who carried him into his own country, and there treated him with the most unexampled indignity, making him kneel down as the meanest slave, and treading upon him as a footstool when he mounted his horse. After having kept him for the space of seven years in this abject state of slavery, he caused his eyes to be put out, though he was then eighty-three years of age. This not satiating his desire of revenge, he soon after ordered his body to be flayed alive, and rubbed with salt, under which torments he expired. Thus fell one of the most tyrannical emperors of Rome, and one of the greatest persecutors of the Christians.

In A.D. 260, Gallienus, the son of Valerian, succeeded him, and during his reign (a few martyrs excepted) the Church enjoyed peace for some years.

The Ninth Wave of Persecution Under Aurelian, 274 A.D.

There are only two martyrs left upon record during Aurelian's reign, as it was soon put to a stop by the emperor's being murdered by his own domestics, at Byzantium. One martyr was Felix, bishop of Rome. The other was Agapetus. Agapetus, a young gentleman, who sold his estate, and gave the money to the poor, was seized as a Christian, tortured, and then beheaded at Praeneste, a city within a day's journey of Rome.

Aurelian was succeeded by Tacitus, who was followed by Probus, as the latter was by Carus. This emperor being killed by a thunder storm, his sons, Carnius and Numerian, succeeded him, and during all these reigns the Church had peace.

Diocletian mounted the imperial throne, A.D. 284. At first he showed great favor to the Christians. In the year 286, he associated Maximian with him in the empire; and some Christians were put to death before any general persecution broke out. Among these were Felician and Primus, two brothers.

Marcus and Marcellianus were twins, natives of Rome, and of noble descent. Their parents were heathens, but the tutors, to whom the education of the children was intrusted, brought them up as Christians. Their constancy at length subdued those who wished them to become pagans, and their parents and whole family became converts to a faith they had before reprobated. They were martyred by being tied to posts, and having their feet pierced with nails. After remaining in this situation for a day and a night, their sufferings were put an end to by thrusting lances through their bodies.

Zoe, the wife of the jailer, who had the care of the before-mentioned martyrs, was also converted by them, and hung upon a tree, with a fire of straw lighted under her. When her body was taken down, it was thrown into a river, with a large stone tied to it, in order to sink it.

In the year of Christ 286, a most remarkable affair occurred; a legion of soldiers, consisting of six thousand six hundred and sixty-six men, contained none but Christians. This legion was called the Theban Legion, because the men had been raised in Thebias: they were quartered in the east until the emperor Maximian ordered them to march to Gaul, to assist him against the rebels of Burgundy. They passed the Alps into Gaul, under the command of Mauritius, Candidus, and Exuperis, their worthy commanders, and at length joined the emperor. Maximian, about this time, ordered a general sacrifice, at which the whole army was to assist; and likewise he commanded that they should take the oath of allegiance and swear, at the same time, to assist in the extirpation of Christianity in Gaul. Alarmed at these orders, each individual of the Theban Legion absolutely refused either to sacrifice or take the oaths prescribed. This so greatly enraged Maximian, that he ordered the legion to be decimated, that is, every tenth man to be selected from the rest, and put to the sword. This bloody order having been put in execution, those who remained alive were still inflexible, when a second decimation took place, and every tenth man of those living was put to death. This second severity made no more impression than the first had done; the soldiers preserved their fortitude and their principles, but by the advice of their officers they drew up a loyal remonstrance to the emperor. This, it might have been presumed, would have softened the emperor, but it had a contrary effect: for, enraged at

their perseverance and unanimity, he commanded that the whole legion should be put to death, which was accordingly executed by the other troops, who cut them to pieces with their swords, September 22, 286.

Alban, from whom St. Alban's, in Hertfordshire, received its name, was the first British martyr. Great Britain had received the Gospel of Christ from Lucius, the first Christian king, but did not suffer from the rage of persecution for many years after. He was originally a pagan, but converted by a Christian ecclesiastic, named Amphibalus, whom he sheltered on account of his religion. The enemies of Amphibalus, having intelligence of the place where he was secreted, came to the house of Alban; in order to facilitate his escape, when the soldiers came, he offered himself up as the person they were seeking for. The deceit being detected, the governor ordered him to be scourged, and then he was sentenced to be beheaded, June 22, A.D. 287.

The venerable Bede assures us, that, upon this occasion, the executioner suddenly became a convert to Christianity, and entreated permission to die for Alban, or with him. Obtaining the latter request, they were beheaded by a soldier, who voluntarily undertook the task of executioner. This happened on the twenty-second of June, A.D. 287, at Verulam, now St. Alban's, in Hertfordshire, where a magnificent church was erected to his memory about the time of Constantine the Great. The edifice, being destroyed in the Saxon wars, was rebuilt by Offa, king of Mercia, and a monastery erected adjoining to it, some remains of which are still visible, and the church is a noble Gothic structure.

Faith, a Christian female, of Aquitain, in France, was ordered to be broiled upon a gridiron, and then beheaded; A.D. 287.

Quintin was a Christian, and a native of Rome, but determined to attempt the propagation of the Gospel in Gaul, with one Lucian, they preached together in Amiens; after which Lucian went to Beaumaris, where he was martyred. Quintin remained in Picardy, and was very zealous in his ministry. Being seized upon as a Christian, he was stretched with pullies until his joints weredislocated; his body was then torn with wire scourges, and boiling oil and pitch poured on his naked flesh; lighted torches were applied to his sides and armpits; and after he had been thus tortured, he was remanded back to prison, and died of the barbarities he had suffered, October 31, A.D. 287. His body was sunk in the Somme.

CHAPTER 4 : PERSECUTIONS DURING THE FOURTH CENTURY (301 A.D. – 400 A.D.)

The Tenth Wave of Persecution, Under Diocletian, A.D. 303

Under the Roman emperors, commonly called the Era of the Martyrs, was occasioned partly by the increasing number and luxury of the Christians, and the hatred of Galerius, the adopted son of Diocletian, who, being stimulated by his mother, a bigoted pagan, never ceased persuading the emperor to enter upon the persecution, until he had accomplished his purpose.

The fatal day fixed upon to commence the bloody work, was the twenty-third of February, A.D. 303, that being the day in which the Terminalia were celebrated, and on which, as the cruel pagans boasted, they hoped to put a termination to Christianity. On the appointed day, the persecution began in Nicomedia, on the morning of which the prefect of that city repaired, with a great number of officers and assistants, to the church of the Christians, where, having forced open the doors, they seized upon all the sacred books, and committed them to the flames.

The whole of this transaction was in the presence of Diocletian and Galerius, who, not contented with burning the books, had the church levelled with the ground. This was followed by a severe edict, commanding the destruction of all other Christian churches and books; and an order soon succeeded, to render Christians of all denomination outlaws.

The publication of this edict occasioned an immediate martyrdom, for a bold Christian not only tore it down from the place to which it was affixed, but execrated the name of the emperor for his injustice. A provocation like this was sufficient to call down pagan vengeance upon his head; he was accordingly seized, severely tortured, and then burned alive.

All the Christians were apprehended and imprisoned; and Galerius privately ordered the imperial palace to be set on fire, that the Christians might be charged as the incendiaries, and a plausible pretence given for carrying on the persecution with the greater severities. A general sacrifice was commenced, which occasioned various martyrdoms. No distinction was made of age or sex; the name of Christian was so obnoxious to the pagans that all indiscriminately fell sacrifices to their opinions. Many houses were set on fire, and whole Christian families perished in the flames; and others had stones fastened about their necks, and being tied together were driven into the sea. The persecution became general in all the Roman provinces, but more particularly in the east; and as it lasted ten years, it is impossible to ascertain the numbers martyred, or to enumerate the various modes of martyrdom.

Racks, scourges, swords, daggers, crosses, poison, and famine, were made use of in various parts to dispatch the Christians; and invention was exhausted to devise tortures against such as had no crime, but thinking differently from the votaries of superstition.

A city of Phrygia, consisting entirely of Christians, was burnt, and all the inhabitants perished in the flames.

Tired with slaughter, at length, several governors of provinces represented to the imperial court, the impropriety of such conduct. Hence many were respited from execution, but, though they were not put to death, as much as possible was done to render their lives miserable, many of them having their ears cut off, their noses slit, their right eyes put out, their limbs rendered useless by dreadful dislocations, and their flesh seared in conspicuous places with red-hot irons.

It is necessary now to particularize the most conspicuous persons who laid down their lives in martyrdom in this bloody persecution.

Sebastian, a celebrated martyr, was born at Narbonne, in Gaul, instructed in the principles of Christianity at Milan, and afterward became an officer of the emperor's guard at Rome. He remained a true Christian in the midst of idolatry; unallured by the splendors of a court, untainted by evil examples, and uncontaminated by the hopes of

preferment. Refusing to be a pagan, the emperor ordered him to be taken to a field near the city, termed the Campus Martius, and there to be shot to death with arrows; which sentence was executed accordingly. Some pious Christians coming to the place of execution, in order to give his body burial, perceived signs of life in him, and immediately moving him to a place of security, they, in a short time effected his recovery, and prepared him for a second martyrdom; for, as soon as he was able to go out, he placed himself intentionally in the emperor's way as he was going to the temple, and reprehended him for his various cruelties and unreasonable prejudices against Christianity. As soon as Diocletian had overcome his surprise, he ordered Sebastian to be seized, and carried to a place near the palace, and beaten to death; and, that the Christians should not either use means again to recover or bury his body, he ordered that it should be thrown into the common sewer. Nevertheless, a Christian lady named Lucina, found means to remove it from the sewer, and bury it in the catacombs, or repositories of the dead.

The Christians, about this time, upon mature consideration, thought it unlawful to bear arms under a heathen emperor. Maximilian, the son of Fabius Victor, was the first beheaded under this regulation.

Vitus, a Sicilian of considerable family, was brought up a Christian; when his virtues increased with his years, his constancy supported him under all afflictions, and his faith was superior to the most dangerous perils. His father, Hylas, who was a pagan, finding that he had been instructed in the principles of Christianity by the nurse who brought him up, used all his endeavors to bring him back to paganism, and at length sacrificed his son to the idols, June 14, A.D. 303.

Victor was a Christian of a good family at Marseilles, in France; he spent a great part of the night in visiting the afflicted, and confirming the weak; which pious work he could not, consistently with his own safety, perform in the daytime; and his fortune he spent in relieving the distresses of poor Christians. He was at length, however, seized by the emperor Maximian's decree, who ordered him to be bound, and dragged through the streets. During the execution of this order, he was treated with all manner of cruelties and indignities by the enraged populace. Remaining still inflexible, his courage was deemed obstinacy. Being by order stretched upon the rack, he turned his eyes toward heaven, and prayed to God to endue him with patience, after which he underwent the tortures with most admirable fortitude. After the executioners were tired with inflicting torments on him, he was conveyed to a dungeon. In his confinement, he converted his jailers, named Alexander, Felician, and Longinus. This affair coming to the ears of the emperor, he ordered them immediately to be put to death, and the jailers were accordingly beheaded. Victor was then again put to the rack, unmercifully beaten with batons, and again sent to prison. Being a third time examined concerning his religion, he persevered in his principles; a small altar was then brought, and he was commanded to offer incense upon it immediately. Fired with indignation at the request, he boldly stepped forward, and with his foot overthrew both altar and idol. This so enraged the emperor Maximian, who was present, that he ordered the foot with which he had kicked the altar to be immediately cut off; and Victor was thrown into a mill, and crushed to pieces with the stones, A.D. 303.

Maximus, governor of Cilicia, being at Tarsus, three Christians were brought before him; their names were Tarachus, an aged man, Probus, and Andronicus. After repeated tortures and exhortations to recant, they, at length, were ordered for execution.

Being brought to the amphitheater, several beasts were let loose upon them; but none of the animals, though hungry, would touch them. The keeper then brought out a large bear, that had that very day destroyed three men; but this voracious creature and a fierce lioness both refused to touch the prisoners. Finding the design of destroying them by the means of wild beasts ineffectual, Maximus ordered them to be slain by the sword, on October 11, A.D. 303.

Romanus, a native of Palestine, was deacon of the church of Caesarea at the time of the commencement of Diocletian's persecution. Being condemned for his faith at Antioch, he was scourged, put to the rack, his body torn with hooks, his flesh cut with knives, his face scarified, his teeth beaten from their sockets, and his hair plucked up by the roots. Soon after he was ordered to be strangled, November 17, A.D. 303.

Susanna, the niece of Caius, bishop of Rome, was pressed by the emperor Diocletian to marry a noble pagan, who was nearly related to him. Refusing the honor intended her, she was beheaded by the emperor's order.

Dorotheus, the high chamberlain of the household to Diocletian, was a Christian, and took great pains to make converts. In his religious labors, he was joined by Gorgonius, another Christian, and one belonging to the palace. They were first tortured and then strangled.

Peter, a eunuch belonging to the emperor, was a Christian of singular modesty and humility. He was laid on a gridiron, and broiled over a slow fire until he expired.

Cyprian, known by the title of the magician, to distinguish him from Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, was a native of Natioch. He received a liberal education in his youth, and particularly applied himself to astrology; after which he traveled for improvement through Greece, Egypt, India, etc. In the course of time he became acquainted with Justina, a young lady of Antioch, whose birth, beauty, and accomplishments, rendered her the admiration of all who knew her. A pagan gentleman applied to Cyprian, to promote his suit with the beautiful Justina; this he undertook, but soon himself became converted, burnt his books of astrology and magic, received baptism, and felt animated with a powerful spirit of grace. The conversion of Cyprian had a great effect on the pagan gentleman who paid his addresses to Justina, and he in a short time embraced Christianity. During the persecutions of Diocletian, Cyprian and Justina were seized upon as Christians, the former was torn with pincers, and the latter chastised; and, after suffering other torments, both were beheaded.

Eulalia, a Spanish lady of a Christian family, was remarkable in her youth for sweetness of temper, and solidity of understanding seldom found in the capriciousness of juvenile years. Being apprehended as a Christian, the magistrate attempted by the mildest means, to bring her over to paganism, but she ridiculed the pagan deities with such asperity, that the judge, incensed at her behavior, ordered her to be tortured. Her sides were accordingly torn by hooks, and her breasts burnt in the most shocking manner, until she expired by the violence of the flames, December, A.D. 303.

In the year 304, when the persecution reached Spain, Dacian, the governor of Terragona, ordered Valerius the bishop, and Vincent the deacon, to be seized, loaded with irons, and imprisoned. The prisoners being firm in their resolution, Valerius was banished, and Vincent was racked, his limbs dislocated, his flesh torn with hooks, and he was laid on a gridiron, which had not only a fire placed under it, but spikes at the top, which ran into his flesh. These torments neither destroying him, nor changing his resolutions, he was remanded to prison, and confined in a small, loathsome, dark dungeon, strewed with sharp flints, and pieces of broken glass, where he died, January 22, 304. His body was thrown into the river.

The persecution of Diocletian began particularly to rage in A.D. 304, when many Christians were put to cruel tortures and the most painful and ignominious deaths; the most eminent and particular of whom we shall enumerate.

Saturninus, a priest of Albitina, a town of Africa, after being tortured, was remanded to prison, and there starved to death. His four children, after being variously tormented, shared the same fate with their father.

Dativas, a noble Roman senator; Thelico, a pious Christian;

Victoria, a young lady of considerable family and fortune, with some others of less consideration, all auditors of Saturninus, were tortured in a similar manner, and perished by the same means.

Agrape, Chionia, and Irene, three sisters, were seized upon at Thessalonica, when Diocletian's persecution reached Greece. They were burnt, and received the crown of martyrdom in the flames, March 25, A.D. 304. The governor, finding that he could make no impression on Irene, ordered her to be exposed naked in the streets, which shameful order having been executed, a fire was kindled near the city wall, amidst whose flames her spirit ascended beyond the reach of man's cruelty.

Agatho, a man of a pious turn of mind, with Cassice, Philippa, and Eutychia, were martyred about the same time; but the particulars have not been transmitted to us.

Marcellinus, bishop of Rome, who succeeded Caius in that see, having strongly opposed paying divine honors to Diocletian, suffered martyrdom, by a variety of tortures, in the year 324, comforting his soul until he expired with the prospect of these glorious rewards it would receive by the tortures suffered in the body.

Victorius, Carpophorus, Severus, and Severianus, were brothers, and all four employed in places of great trust and honor in the city of Rome. Having exclaimed against the worship of idols, they were apprehended, and scourged, with the plumbetae, or scourges, to the ends of which were fastened leaden balls. This punishment was exercised with such excess of cruelty that the pious brothers fell martyrs to its severity.

Timothy, a deacon of Mauritania, and Maura his wife, had not been united together by the bands of wedlock above three weeks, when they were separated from each other by the persecution. Timothy, being apprehended, as a Christian, was carried before Arrianus, the governor of Thebais, who, knowing that he had the keeping of the Holy Scriptures, commanded him to deliver them up to be burnt; to which he answered, "Had I children, I would sooner deliver them up to be sacrificed, than part with the Word of God." The governor being much incensed at this reply, ordered his eyes to be put out, with red-hot irons, saying, "The books shall at least be useless to you, for you shall not see to read them." His patience under the operation was so great that the governor grew more exasperated; he, therefore, in order, if possible, to overcome his fortitude, ordered him to be hung up by the feet, with a weight tied about his neck, and a gag in his mouth. In this state, Maura his wife, tenderly urged him for her sake to recant; but, when the gag was taken out of his mouth, instead of consenting to his wife's entreaties, he greatly blamed her mistaken love, and declared his resolution of dying for the faith. The consequence was, that Maura resolved to imitate his courage and fidelity and either to accompany or follow him to glory. The governor, after trying in vain to alter her resolution, ordered her to be tortured, which was executed with great severity. After this, Timothy and Maura were crucified near each other, A.D. 304.

Sabinus, bishop of Assisium, refusing to sacrifice to Jupiter, and pushing the idol from him, had his hand cut off by the order of the governor of Tuscany. While in prison, he converted the governor and his family, all of whom suffered martyrdom for the faith. Soon after their execution, Sabinus himself was scourged to death, December, A.D. 304.

Tired with the farce of state and public business, the emperor Diocletian resigned the imperial diadem, and was succeeded by Constantius and Galerius; the former a prince of the most mild and humane disposition and the latter equally remarkable for his cruelty and tyranny. These divided the empire into two equal governments, Galerius ruling in the east, and Constantius in the west; and the people in the two governments felt the effects of the dispositions of the two emperors; for those in the west were governed in the mildest manner, but such as resided in the east felt all the miseries of oppression and lengthened tortures.

Among the many martyred by the order of Galerius, we shall enumerate the most eminent.

Amphianus was a gentleman of eminence in Lucia, and a scholar of Eusebius; Julitta, a Lycaonian of royal descent, but more celebrated for her virtues than noble blood. While on the rack, her child was killed before her face. Julitta, of Cappadocia, was a lady of distinguished capacity, great virtue, and uncommon courage. To complete the execution, Julitta had boiling pitch poured on her feet, her sides torn with hooks, and received the conclusion of her martyrdom, by being beheaded, April 16, A.D. 305.

Hermolaus, a venerable and pious Christian, or a great age, and an intimate acquaintance of Panteleon's, suffered martyrdom for the faith on the same day, and in the same manner as Panteleon.

Eustratius, secretary to the governor of Armina, was thrown into a fiery furnace for exhorting some Christians who had been apprehended, to persevere in their faith.

Nicander and Marcian, two eminent Roman military officers, were apprehended on account of their faith. As they were both men of great abilities in their profession, the utmost means were used to induce them to renounce Christianity; but these endeavors being found ineffectual, they were beheaded.

In the kingdom of Naples, several martyrdoms took place, in particular, Januaries, bishop of Beneventum; Sosius, deacon of Misene; Proculus, another deacon; Eutyches and Acutius, two laymen; Festus, a deacon; and Desiderius, a reader; all, on account of being Christians, were condemned by the governor of Campania to be devoured by the wild beasts. The savage animals, however, would not touch them, and so they were beheaded.

Quirinus, bishop of Siscia, being carried before Matenius, the governor, was ordered to sacrifice to the pagan deities, agreeably to the edicts of various Roman emperors. The governor, perceiving his constancy, sent him to jail, and ordered him to be heavily ironed; flattering himself, that the hardships of a jail, some occasional tortures and the weight of chains, might overcome his resolution. Being decided in his principles, he was sent to Amantius, the principal governor of Pannonia, now Hungary, who loaded him with chains, and carried him through the principal towns of the Danube, exposing him to ridicule wherever he went. Arriving at length at Sabaria, and finding that Quirinus would not renounce his faith, he ordered him to be cast into a river, with a stone fastened about his neck. This sentence being put into execution, Quirinus floated about for some time, and, exhorting the people in the most pious terms, concluded his admonitions with this prayer: "It is no new thing, O all-powerful Jesus, for Thee to stop the course of rivers, or to cause a man to walk upon the water, as Thou didst Thy servant Peter; the people have already seen the proof of Thy power in me; grant me now to lay down my life for Thy sake, O my God." On pronouncing the last words he immediately sank, and died, June 4, A.D. 308. His body was afterwards taken up, and buried by some pious Christians.

Pamphilus, a native of Phoenicia, of a considerable family, was a man of such extensive learning that he was called a second Origen. He was received into the body of the clergy at Caesarea, where he established a public library and spent his time in the practice of every Christian virtue. He copied the greatest part of the works of Origen with his own hand, and, assisted by Eusebius, gave a correct copy of the Old Testament, which had suffered greatly by the ignorance or negligence of former transcribers. In the year 307, he was apprehended, and suffered torture and martyrdom.

Marcellus, bishop of Rome, being banished on account of his faith, fell a martyr to the miseries he suffered in exile, January 16, A.D. 310.

Peter, the sixteenth bishop of Alexandria, was martyred November 25, A.D. 311, by order of Maximus Caesar, who reigned in the east.

Agnes, a virgin of only thirteen years of age, was beheaded for being a Christian; as was Serene, the empress of Diocletian. Valentine, a priest, suffered the same fate at Rome; and Erasmus, a bishop, was martyred in Campania.

Soon after this the persecution abated in the middle parts of the empire, as well as in the west; and Providence at length began to manifest vengeance on the persecutors. Maximian endeavored to corrupt his daughter Fausta to murder Constantine her husband; which she discovered, and Constantine forced him to choose his own death. He preferred the ignominious death of hanging after being an emperor nearly twenty years.

Constantine was the good and virtuous child of a good and virtuous father, born in Britain. His mother was named Helena, daughter of King Coilus. He was a most bountiful and gracious prince, having a desire to nourish learning and good arts, and did oftentimes use to read, write, and study himself. He had marvelous good success and prosperous achieving of all things he took in hand, which then was (and truly) supposed to proceed of this, for that he was so great a favorer of the Christian faith. Which faith when he had once embraced, he did ever after most devoutly and religiously reverence.

Thus Constantine, sufficiently appointed with strength of men but especially with strength of God, entered his journey coming towards Italy, which was about the last year of the persecution in 313 A.D. Maxentius, understanding of the coming of Constantine, and trusting more to his devilish art of magic than to the good will of his subjects, which he little deserved, did not show himself out of the city, nor encounter him in the open field, but with privy garrisons laid wait for him by the way in sundry straits, as he should come. Constantine had diverse skirmishes with them, and by the power of the Lord did ever vanquish them and put them to flight.

Notwithstanding, Constantine yet was in no great comfort, but in great care and dread in his mind (approaching now near unto Rome) for the magical charms and sorcery of Maxentius, wherewith he had vanquished before Severus, sent by Galerius against him. Wherefore, being in great doubt and perplexity in himself, Constantine pondered what religious course he should take. In his journey drawing toward the city of Rome, he cast his eyes many times to heaven, in the south part, about the going down of the sun. There he believed he saw a great brightness in heaven, appearing in the similitude of a cross, giving this inscription, *In hoc vince*, that is, "In this overcome." Eusebius Pamphilus witnesses that he had heard Constantine himself oftentimes report, and also to swear this to be true and certain, which he did see with his own eyes in heaven, and also his soldiers about him. At

this sight he was greatly astonished. Consulting with his men upon the meaning thereof, in the night season in his sleep, Christ appeared to him with the sign of the same cross which he had seen before, bidding him to make the figure thereof, and to carry it in his wars before him, and so should he have the victory. While this account is dubious, nevertheless God used the circumstances to accomplish His ends.

Constantine established the peace of the Church for many years. So happy, so glorious was this victory of Constantine, surnamed the Great! For the joy and gladness whereof, the citizens who had sent for him before, with exceeding triumph brought him into the city of Rome, where he was most honorably received, and celebrated the space of seven days together. In the market place, his image was set up, holding in his right hand the sign of the cross, with this inscription:

"With this wholesome sign, the true token of fortitude, I have rescued and delivered our city from the yoke of the tyrant."

We shall conclude our account of the tenth and last general persecution with the death of St. George, the titular saint and patron of England. St. George was born in Cappadocia, of Christian parents. Giving proofs of his courage, he was promoted in the army of the emperor Diocletian. During the persecution, St. George threw up his command, went boldly to the senate house, and avowed his being a Christian, taking occasion at the same time to remonstrate against paganism, and point out the absurdity of worshipping idols. This freedom so greatly provoked the senate that St. George was ordered to be tortured, and by the emperor's orders was dragged through the streets, and beheaded the next day.

The legend of the dragon, which is associated with this martyr, is usually illustrated by representing St. George seated upon a charging horse and transfixing the monster with his spear. This fiery dragon symbolizes the devil, who was vanquished by St. George's steadfast faith in Christ, which remained unshaken in spite of torture and death.

Persecutions of the Christians in Persia

The Gospel having spread itself into Persia, the pagan priests, who worshipped the sun, were greatly alarmed, and dreaded the loss of that influence they had hitherto maintained over the people's minds and properties. Hence they thought it expedient to complain to the emperor that the Christians were enemies to the state, and held a treasonable correspondence with the Romans, the great enemies of Persia. The emperor Sapoors, being naturally averse to Christianity, easily believed what was said against the Christians, and gave orders to persecute them in all parts of his empire. On account of this mandate, many eminent persons in the church and state fell martyrs to the ignorance and ferocity of the pagans.

Constantine the Great being informed of the persecutions in Persia, wrote a long letter to the Persian monarch, in which he recounts the vengeance that had fallen on persecutors, and the great success that had attended those who had refrained from persecuting the Christians. Speaking of his victories over rival emperors of his own time, he said, "I subdued these solely by faith in Christ; for which God was my helper, who gave me victory in battle, and made me triumph over my enemies. He has likewise so enlarged to me the bounds of the Roman Empire, that it extends from the Western Ocean almost to the uttermost parts of the East. For this domain I neither offered sacrifices to the ancient deities, nor made use of charm or divination; but only offered up prayers to the Almighty God, and followed the cross of Christ. Rejoiced should I be if the throne of Persia found glory also, by embracing the Christians. In this way you with me, and they with you, may enjoy all happiness." In consequence of this appeal, the persecution ended for the time, but it was renewed in later years when another king succeeded to the throne of Persia.

Persecutions Under the Arian Heretics

The author of the Arian heresy was Arius, a native of Lybia, and a priest of Alexandria, who, in A.D. 318, began to publish his errors. He was condemned by a council of Lybian and Egyptian bishops, and that sentence was confirmed by the Council of Nice, A.D. 325. After the death of Constantine the Great, the Arians found means to

ingratiate themselves into the favor of the emperor Constantinus, his son and successor in the east; and hence a persecution was raised against the orthodox bishops and clergy. The celebrated Athanasius, and other bishops, were banished, and their offices filled with Arians.

In Egypt and Lybia, thirty bishops were martyred, and many other Christians cruelly tormented; and, A.D. 386, George, the Arian bishop of Alexandria, under the authority of the emperor, began a persecution in that city and its environs, and carried it on with the most infernal severity. He was assisted in his diabolical malice by Catophonius, governor of Egypt, and Sebastian, general of the Egyptian forces;

The persecutions now raged in such a manner that the clergy were driven from Alexandria, their churches were shut, and the persecutions practiced by the Arian heretics were as great as those that had been practiced by the pagan idolaters. If a man, accused of being a Christian, made his escape, then his whole family were massacred, and his effects confiscated.

Persecution Under Julian the Apostate

This emperor was the son of Julius Constantius, and the nephew of Constantine the Great. He studied the rudiments of grammar under the inspection of Mardonius, a eunuch, and a heathen of Constantinople. His father sent him some time after to Nicomedia, to be instructed in the Christian religion. There he was instructed by the bishop of Eusebius, his kinsman. But his principles were corrupted by the pernicious doctrines of Ecebolius the rhetorician and Maximus the magician. Constantius died in the year 361.

Julian succeeded Constantius and had no sooner attained the imperial dignity than he renounced Christianity and embraced paganism, which had for some years fallen into great disrepute. Though he restored the idolatrous worship, he made no public edicts against Christianity. He recalled all banished pagans, allowed the free exercise of religion to every sect, but deprived all Christians of offices at court, in the magistracy, or in the army. He was chaste, temperate, vigilant, laborious, and pious; yet he prohibited any Christian from keeping a school or public seminary of learning, and deprived all the Christian clergy of the privileges granted them by Constantine the Great.

Bishop Basil made himself first famous by his opposition to Arianism, which brought upon him the vengeance of the Arian bishop of Constantinople. He equally opposed paganism. The emperor's agents in vain tampered with Basil by means of promises, threats, and racks. But he was firm in the faith, and remained in prison to undergo some other sufferings, when the emperor came accidentally to Ancyra. Julian determined to examine Basil himself, when that holy man being brought before him, the emperor did every thing in his power to dissuade him from persevering in the faith. Basil not only continued as firm as ever, but with a prophetic spirit foretold the death of the emperor, and that he should be tormented in the other life. Enraged at what he heard, Julian commanded that the body of Basil should be torn every day in seven different parts, until his skin and flesh were entirely mangled. This inhuman sentence was executed with rigor, and the martyr expired under its severity, on June 28, A.D. 362.

Donatus, bishop of Arezzo, and Hilarinus, a hermit, suffered about the same time. Also Gordian, a Roman magistrate, suffered. Artemius, commander in chief of the Roman forces in Egypt, being a Christian, was deprived of his commission, then of his estate, and lastly of his head.

The persecution raged dreadfully about the latter end of the year 363. As many of the particulars have not been handed down to us, it is necessary to remark in general, that in Palestine many were burnt alive, others were dragged by their feet through the streets naked until they expired. Some were scalded to death, many stoned, and great numbers had their brains beaten out with clubs. In Alexandria, innumerable were the martyrs who suffered by the sword, burning, crucifixion and stoning. In Arethusa, several were ripped open, and corn being put into their bellies, swine were brought to feed therein, which, in devouring the grain, likewise devoured the entrails of the martyrs. In Thrace, Emilianus was burnt at a stake and Domitius was murdered in a cave, whither he had fled for refuge.

The emperor, Julian the apostate, died of a wound which he received in his Persian expedition in A.D. 363. Even while expiring, he uttered the most horrid blasphemies. He was succeeded by Jovian, who restored peace to the Church.

After the decease of Jovian, Valentinian succeeded to the empire, and associated to himself Valens, who had the command in the east, and was an Arian and of an unrelenting and persecuting disposition.

Persecution of the Christians by the Goths and Vandals

Many Scythian Goths having embraced Christianity about the time of Constantine the Great. The light of the Gospel spread itself considerably in Scythia, though the two kings who ruled that country, and the majority of the people continued pagans. Fritegern, king of the West Goths, was an ally to the Romans, but Athanarich, king of the East Goths, was at war with them. The Christians, in the dominions of the former, lived unmolested, but the latter, having been defeated by the Romans, wreaked his vengeance on his Christian subjects, commencing his pagan injunctions in the year 370.

In religion the Goths were Arians, and called themselves Christians. Therefore they destroyed all the statues and temples of the heathen gods, but did no harm to the orthodox Christian churches. Alaric had all the qualities of a great general. To the wild bravery of the Gothic barbarian he added the courage and skill of the Roman soldier. He led his forces across the Alps into Italy, and although driven back for the time, returned afterward with an irresistible force.

The Last Roman "Triumph"

After this fortunate victory over the Goths, a "triumph," as it was called, was celebrated at Rome. For hundreds of years successful generals had been awarded this great honor on their return from a victorious campaign. Upon such occasions the city was given up for days to the marching of troops laden with spoils. These dragged after them prisoners of war, among whom were often captive kings and conquered generals. This was to be the last Roman triumph, for it celebrated the last Roman victory. Although it had been won by Stilicho, the general, it was the boy emperor, Honorius, who took the credit, entering Rome in the car of victory, and driving to the Capitol amid the shouts of the populace.

Afterward, as was customary on such occasions, there were bloody combats in the Colosseum, where gladiators, armed with swords and spears, fought as furiously as if they were on the field of battle. The first part of the bloody entertainment was finished. The bodies of the dead were dragged off with hooks, and the reddened sand covered with a fresh, clean layer. After this had been done the gates in the wall of the arena were thrown open, and a number of tall, well-formed men in the prime of youth and strength came forward. Some carried swords, others three-pronged spears and nets. They marched once around the walls, and stopping before the emperor, held up their weapons at arm's length, and with one voice sounded out their greeting, Ave, Caesar, morituri te salutant! "Hail, Caesar, those about to die salute thee!" The combats now began again. The gladiators with nets tried to entangle those with swords, and when they succeeded mercilessly stabbed their antagonists to death with the three-pronged spear. When a gladiator had wounded his adversary, and had him lying helpless at his feet, he looked up at the eager faces of the spectators, and cried out, Hoc habet! "He has it!" and awaited the pleasure of the audience to kill or spare. If the spectators held out their hands toward him, with thumbs upward, the defeated man was taken away, to recover if possible from his wounds. But if the fatal signal of "thumbs down" was given, the conquered was to be slain; and if he showed any reluctance to present his neck for the death blow, there was a scornful shout from the galleries, Recipe ferrum! "Receive the steel!" Privileged persons among the audience would even descend into the arena, to better witness the death agonies of some unusually brave victim, before his corpse was dragged out at the death gate.

The sad show went on. Many had been slain, and the people, madly excited by the desperate bravery of those who continued to fight, shouted their applause. But suddenly there was an interruption. A rudely clad, robed figure appeared for a moment among the audience, and then boldly leaped down into the arena. He was seen to be a man of rough but imposing presence, bareheaded and with sun-browned face. Without hesitating an instant he advanced upon two gladiators engaged in a life-and-death struggle, and laying his hand upon one of them sternly reproved him for shedding innocent blood. Then, turning toward the thousands of angry faces ranged around him, he called upon them in a solemn, deep-toned voice which resounded through the deep enclosure. These were his words: "Do not requite God's mercy in turning away the swords of your enemies by murdering each other!"

Angry shouts and cries at once drowned his voice: "This is no place for preaching!--the old customs of Rome must be observed!--On, gladiators!" Thrusting aside the stranger, the gladiators would have again attacked each other, but the man stood between, holding them apart, and trying in vain to be heard. "Sedition! sedition! down with him!" was then the cry; and the gladiators, enraged at the interference of an outsider with their chosen vocation, at once stabbed him to death. Stones, or whatever missiles came to hand, also rained down upon him from the furious people, and thus he perished, in the midst of the arena.

His dress showed him to be one of the hermits who vowed themselves to a holy life of prayer and self-denial, and who were revered by even the thoughtless and combat-loving Romans. The few who knew him told how he had come from the wilds of Asia on a pilgrimage. They knew he was a holy man, and that his name was Telemachus. His spirit had been stirred by the sight of thousands flocking to see men slaughter one another, and in his simple-hearted zeal he had tried to convince them of the cruelty and wickedness of their conduct. He had died, but not in vain. His work was accomplished at the moment he was struck down, for the shock of such a death before their eyes turned the hearts of the people. They saw the hideous aspects of the favorite vice to which they had blindly surrendered themselves. From the day Telemachus fell dead in the Colosseum, no other fight of gladiators was ever held there.

CHAPTER 5 : PERSECUTIONS DURING THE FIFTH TO TENTH CENTURIES (401 A.D. – c. 1000 A.D.)

Persecutions to the Conclusion of the Seventh Century

Proterius was made a priest by Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, who was well acquainted with his virtues, before he appointed him to preach. On the death of Cyril, the see of Alexandria was filled by Discorus, an inveterate enemy to the memory and family of his predecessor. Being condemned by the council of Chalcedon for having embraced the errors of Eutyches, he was deposed, and Proterius chosen to fill the vacant see, who was approved of by the emperor. This occasioned a dangerous insurrection, for the city of Alexandria was divided into two factions. There was one faction to espouse the cause of the old minister, and the other of the new minister. In one of the commotions, the Eutychians determined to wreak their vengeance on Proterius, who fled to the church for sanctuary. But in A.D. 457 a large body of them rushed into the church, and barbarously murdered the minister. After this they dragged the body through the streets, insulted it, cut it to pieces, burned it, and scattered the ashes in the air.

Hermenigildus, a Gothic prince, was the eldest son of Leovigildus, a king of the Goths in Spain. This prince, who was originally an Arian, became a convert to the orthodox faith, by means of his wife Ingonda. When the king heard that his son had changed his religious sentiments, he stripped him of the command at Seville, where he was governor, and threatened to put him to death unless he renounced the faith he had newly embraced. The prince, in order to prevent the execution of his father's menaces, began to put himself into a posture of defense. Many of the orthodox persuasion in Spain declared for him. The king, exasperated at this act of rebellion, began to punish all the orthodox Christians who could be seized by his troops, and thus a very severe persecution commenced. He likewise marched against his son at the head of a very powerful army. The prince took refuge in Seville, from which he fled, and was at length besieged and taken at Asieta. Loaded with chains, he was sent to Seville, and refused to receive the Eucharist from an Arian bishop. The enraged king ordered his guards to cut the prince to pieces, which they punctually performed on April 13, A.D. 586.

Martin, bishop of Rome, was born at Todi, in Italy. He was naturally inclined to virtue, and his parents bestowed on him an admirable education. He opposed the heretics called Monothelites, who were patronized by the emperor Heraclius. Martin was condemned at Constantinople, where he was exposed in the most public places to the ridicule of the people, divested of all marks of distinction in the church, and treated with the greatest scorn and severity. After lying some months in prison, Martin was sent to an island at some distance, and there cut to pieces in A.D. 655.

John, bishop of Bergamo, in Lombardy, was a learned man, and a good Christian. He did his utmost endeavors to clear the Church from the errors of Arianism. Joining in this holy work with John, bishop of Milan, he was very successful against the heretics, on which account he was assassinated on July 11, A.D. 683.

Killien was born in Ireland, and received from his parents a pious and Christian education. He obtained the Roman pontiff's license to preach to the pagans in Franconia, in Germany. At Wurtzburg he converted Gozbert, the governor, whose example was followed by the greater part of the people in two years after. Persuading Gozbert that his marriage with his brother's widow was sinful, the latter had him beheaded in A.D. 689.

Persecutions from the Early Part of the Eighth to the Tenth Century and Beyond

Boniface, archbishop of Mentz, and father of the German church, was an Englishman. He is in ecclesiastical history looked upon as one of the brightest ornaments of the British nation. Originally his name was Winfred, or Winfrith, and he was born at Kirton, in Devonshire, then part of the West-Saxon kingdom. When he was only about six years of age, he began to discover a propensity to reflection, and seemed solicitous to gain information on religious subjects. Wolfrad, the abbot, finding that he possessed a bright genius, as well as a strong inclination to

study, had him removed to Nutscele, a seminary of learning in the diocese of Winchester. There he would have a much greater opportunity of attaining improvements than at Exeter.

After due study, the abbot seeing him qualified for the priesthood, obliged him to receive that holy order when he was about thirty years old. From this time he began to preach and labor for the salvation of his fellow creatures. He was released to attend a synod of bishops in the kingdom of West-Saxons. He afterwards, in 719, went to Rome, where Gregory II who then was pope, received him with great friendship. Finding him full of all virtues that compose the character of an apostolic missionary, he dismissed him to preach the Gospel to the pagans wherever he found them. Passing through Lombardy and Bavaria, he came to Thuringia, which country had before received the light of the Gospel. He next visited Utrecht, and then proceeded to Saxony, where he converted some thousands to Christianity.

During the ministry of this meek missionary, Pepin was declared king of France. It was that prince's ambition to be crowned by the most holy minister he could find, and Boniface was pitched on to perform that ceremony, which he did at Soissons in 752. The next year, his great age and many infirmities lay so heavy on him, that, with the consent of the new king, and the bishops of his diocese, he consecrated Lullus, his countryman, and faithful disciple, and placed him in the minister's office in Mentz. When he had thus eased himself of his charge, he recommended the church of Mentz to the care of the new bishop in very strong terms, desired he would finish the church at Fuld, and see him buried in it, for his end was near. Having left these orders, he took boat to the Rhine, and went to Friesland, where he converted and baptized several thousands of barbarous natives, demolished the temples, and raised churches on the ruins of those superstitious structures. A day being appointed for confirming a great number of new converts, he ordered them to assemble in a new open plain, near the river Bourde. Thither he repaired the day before. Pitching a tent, he determined to remain on the spot all night, in order to be ready early in the morning. Some pagans, who were his inveterate enemies, having intelligence of this, poured down upon him and the companions of his mission in the night, and killed him and fifty-two of his companions and attendants on June 5, A.D. 755. Thus fell the great father of the Germanic Church, the honor of England, and the glory of the age in which he lived.

Forty-two persons of Armorian in Upper Phrygia were martyred in the year 845. These were killed by the Saracens, who are otherwise known as Muslims. The circumstances of these transactions are as follows:

In the reign of Theophilus, the Saracens ravaged many parts of the eastern empire, gained several considerable advantages over the Christians, took the city of Armorian, and numbers suffered martyrdom. Flora and Mary, two ladies of distinction, suffered martyrdom at the same time.

Perfectus was born at Cordoba, in Spain, and brought up in the Christian faith. Having a quick genius, he made himself master of all the useful and polite literature of that age. At the same time he was not more celebrated for his abilities than admired for his piety. At length he took priest's orders, and performed the duties of his office with great assiduity and punctuality. Publicly declaring Mahomet an impostor, he was sentenced to be beheaded, and was accordingly executed in A.D. 850. After this his body was honorably interred by the Christians.

Adalbert, bishop of Prague, a Bohemian by birth, after being involved in many troubles, began to direct his thoughts to the conversion of the infidels. To this end he repaired to Danzig (which is in modern day Poland) where he converted and baptized many. This so enraged the pagan priests, that they fell upon him and killed him with darts on April 23, A.D. 997.

Alphage, archbishop of Canterbury, was descended from a considerable family in Gloucestershire, and received an education suitable to his illustrious birth. His parents were worthy Christians, and Alphage seemed to inherit their virtues. The ministerial office of Winchester being vacant by the death of Ethelwold, Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury, as primate of all England, consecrated Alphage to the vacant bishopric, to the general satisfaction of all concerned in the diocese. Dunstan had an extraordinary respect for Alphage. Therefore, when at the point of death, Dunstan made it his ardent request to God that he might succeed him in his church office in Canterbury. This accordingly happened, though not until about eighteen years after Dunstan's death in 1006.

After Alphage had governed in his new church office in Canterbury about four years, with great reputation to himself and benefit to his people, the Danes made an incursion into England, and laid siege to Canterbury. When the design of attacking this city was known, many of the principal people made a flight from it, and would have

persuaded Alphage to follow their example. But he, like a good pastor, would not listen to such a proposal. While he was employed in assisting and encouraging the people, Canterbury was taken by storm. The enemy poured into the town, and destroyed all that came in their way by fire and sword. He had the courage to address the enemy, and he offered himself to their swords, as more worthy of their rage than the people. He begged they might be saved, and that they would discharge their whole fury upon him. They accordingly seized him, tied his hands, insulted and abused him in a rude and barbarous manner, and obliged him to remain on the spot until his church was burned, and the monks massacred. They then decimated all the inhabitants, both ecclesiastics and laymen, leaving only every tenth person alive. They thus put 7,236 persons to death, and left only four monks and 800 laymen alive, after which they confined the archbishop in a dungeon, where they kept him close prisoner for several months.

During his confinement they proposed to him to redeem his liberty with the sum of 3000 pounds, and to persuade the king to purchase their departure out of the kingdom, with a further sum of 10,000 pounds. As Alphage's circumstances would not allow him to satisfy the exorbitant demand, they bound him, and put him to severe torments, to oblige him to reveal the treasure of the church. They assured him of his life and liberty if he would reveal this information, but the prelate piously persisted in refusing to give the pagans any account of it. They remanded him to prison again, confined him six days longer, and then, taking him prisoner with them to Greenwich, brought him to trial there. He still remained inflexible with respect to the church treasure. He continued to exhort them to forsake their idolatry, and embrace Christianity. This so greatly incensed the Danes, that the soldiers dragged him out of the camp and beat him unmercifully. One of the soldiers, who had been converted by him, knowing that his pains would be lingering, as his death was determined on, actuated by a kind of barbarous compassion, cut off his head. This put the finishing stroke to his martyrdom on April 19, A.D. 1012. This transaction happened on the very spot where the church at Greenwich, which is dedicated to him, now stands. After his death his body was thrown into the Thames, but being found the next day, it was buried in the cathedral of St. Paul's by the bishops of London and Lincoln. It was in 1023 A.D. removed to Canterbury by Ethelmoth, the archbishop of that province.

Gerard, a Venetian, devoted himself to the service of God from his tender years. He entered into a religious house for some time, and then determined to visit the Holy Land. Going into Hungary, he became acquainted with Stephen, the king of that country, who made him bishop of Chonad. Ouvo and Peter, successors of Stephen, being deposed, Andrew, son of Ladislaus, cousin-german to Stephen, had then a tender of the crown made him upon condition that he would employ his authority in extirpating the Christian religion out of Hungary. The ambitious prince accepted the proposal. But Gerard, upon being informed of his impious bargain, thought it his duty to remonstrate against the enormity of Andrew's crime. Gerard sought to persuade him to withdraw his promise. In this view he undertook to go to that prince, attended by three ministers, full of like zeal for religion. The new king was at Alba Regalis. As the four bishops were going to cross the Danube, they were stopped by a party of soldiers posted there. They bore an attack of a shower of stones patiently, when the soldiers beat them unmercifully, and at length dispatched them with lances. Their martyrdoms happened in the year 1045 A.D.

Stanislaus, bishop of Cracow, was descended from an illustrious Polish family. The piety of his parents was equal to their opulence, and the latter they rendered subservient to all the purposes of charity and benevolence. Stanislaus remained for some time undetermined whether he should embrace a monastic life, or engage among the secular clergy. He was at length persuaded to the latter by Lambert Zula, bishop of Cracow, who gave him holy orders, and made him a canon of his cathedral. Lambert died on November 25, 1071, when all concerned in the choice of a successor declared for Stanislaus, and he succeeded to the ministerial church office.

Bolislaus, the second king of Poland, had, by nature, many good qualities. But giving way to his passions, he ran many cruel persecutions against the Christians. At length he had the appellation of Cruel bestowed upon him. Stanislaus alone had the courage to tell him of his faults. When taking a private opportunity, he freely displayed to him the enormity of his crimes. The king, greatly exasperated at his repeated freedoms, at length determined, at any rate, to get the better of a Christian minister who was so extremely faithful. Hearing one day that the bishop was by himself, in the chapel of St. Michael, at a small distance from the town, he dispatched some soldiers to murder him. The soldiers readily undertook the bloody task. But when they came into the presence of Stanislaus, the venerable aspect of the minister struck them with such awe that they could not perform what they had promised. On their return, the king, finding that they had not obeyed his orders, stormed at them violently, snatched a dagger from one of them, and ran furiously to the chapel, where, finding Stanislaus at the altar, he plunged the weapon into his heart. The Christian minister immediately expired on May 8, A.D. 1079.

Summary of the First Millenium of Suffering for Christ's Sake

Christ had foretold during His ministry on earth that His disciples would have to endure many of the same persecutions He endured. He also had promised to build His church, such that the gates of hell should not prevail against it." These words were remarkably fulfilled in the first millennium of the Christian church's history. Many Christians suffered for the sake of Christ, but through it all Christ's kingdom endured and expanded. Many people were redeemed from their sins, and many nations became professedly Christian. Praise be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.