

THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT POLYCARP BISHOP OF SMYRNA

The Church of God which resides as a stranger at Smyrna,¹ to the Church of God residing at Philomelium,² and to all the communities of the holy and Catholic Church, residing in any place: *may mercy, peace, and love* of God the Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ *be yours in abundance!*³

1. We are sending you, brethren, a written account of the martyrs and, in particular, of blessed Polycarp, whose witness to the faith as it were sealed the persecution and put an end to it.⁴ By almost every step that led up to it the Lord intended to exhibit to us anew the type of martyrdom narrated in the Gospel. 2 For instance, just as the Lord had done, he waited to be betrayed,⁵ that we, too, might follow his example, *not with an eye to ourselves alone, but also to our neighbors.*⁶ It is certainly a mark of true and steadfast love, not only to desire one's own salvation, but that of all the brethren as well.

2. To begin with, blessed and heroic are all the martyrdoms that have taken place according to the will of God; for, of course, we must be reverent enough to attribute to God the right to dispose of everything. 2 And indeed, is there anyone who would not admire their heroism, their patient endurance, and their love of the Master? Some of them were cut up by scourging until the anatomy of the body could be seen down to the veins and arteries within; and still they remained steadfast, so that even the bystanders would take pity on them and weep aloud. Some, again, proved themselves so heroic that not one of them uttered cry or moan, and thus they made it clear to all of us that in that hour of their torture the most noble martyrs of Christ were no longer in the flesh, or rather that the Lord stood beside them and conversed with them.⁷ 3 And so, their minds fixed on the grace of Christ, they despised the world's torments and in the space of a single hour purchased eternal life.⁸ To them the fire of their inhuman torturers was cold, for what they envisaged was escape from the eternal and unquenchable fire. With their mind's eyes they gazed upon the good things reserved for those who persevere—*things which neither ear has heard nor eye seen nor human heart conceived;*⁹ but to them—no longer men, but already angels—a glimpse of these things was granted by the Lord. 4 In like manner those condemned to the wild beasts underwent frightful torments: they were bedded on sharp shells and subjected to various other kinds of punishment, in the hope that the executioner¹⁰ might, if possible, induce them to deny the faith by the prolonged torture.

3. Numerous, at any rate, were the stratagems which the Devil employed against them; but, thanks be to God, he did not prevail against any of them.¹¹ The most noble Germanicus strengthened their natural timidity by the patient endurance he exhibited. He also gloriously wrestled with the beast: when the proconsul¹² wished to persuade him and urged him to have pity on his youth, he forcibly dragged the beast toward him,¹³ desiring to get away the more quickly from the utter depravity of those people! 2 At this moment the whole mob, astonished at

the heroism of the God-loving and God-fearing race of the Christians, shouted: "Away with the atheists!"¹⁴ Let Polycarp be searched for!"

4. One, however, Quintus by name, a Phrygian lately arrived from Phrygia, lost heart at the sight of the beasts. But he was one that had intruded himself and had pressed others to come forward of their own accord. The proconsul earnestly entreated this man and persuaded him to take the oath and offer incense. For this reason, then, brethren, we do not commend those who volunteer to come forward, since this is not the teaching of the Gospel.¹⁵

5. The most wonderful Polycarp, on the other hand, was not at all disturbed when the news reached him, and, in fact, his impulse was to tarry in the city. But the majority were in favor of his withdrawal; and so he withdrew to a farm not far from the city, where he stayed with a few friends.¹⁶ Day and night he did nothing but pray for all and for the Churches throughout the world, as was his custom.¹⁷ 2 And it was in prayer, three days before his arrest, that he had a vision: he saw his pillow consumed by fire; and, turning to his companions, he declared: "I must be burnt alive."

6. While the search for him continued, he had no sooner removed to another farm when his pursuers came upon the scene.¹⁸ Since they did not find him, they arrested two young slaves, one of whom confessed under torture. 2 It was really impossible for him to escape detection. Those who were ready to betray him were of his own household; and besides, the chief of police, who providentially bore the same name as Herod, was in a hurry to bring him into the arena. In this way he was to fulfill his own destiny by entering into partnership with Christ, while his betrayers were to meet with the same punishment as Judas.

7. Taking, then, the slave with them, mounted policemen set out on Friday at about supertime, armed in their usual way,¹⁹ *as though they were in hot pursuit of a robber.*²⁰ Closing in upon him late in the day, they found him hidden in a small room under the roof. Even there escape to another place was still possible; but he decided against it, saying: "*God's will be done!*"²¹ 2 So when he heard of their arrival, he came down and conversed with them. The onlookers were wondering at his age and his composure, and that there was so much ado about arresting a man so old. Then, late as it was, he at once ordered food and drink to be served them as much as they wished, and begged them to allow him an hour for undisturbed prayer. 3 They granted his request; and there he stood,²² rapt in prayer, so overflowing with the grace of God that for two hours he was unable to stop speaking! Those that heard him were struck with admiration, and many were sorry they had come to fetch so old a man of God.

8. When he had at last ended his prayer, in which he remembered all that had met him at any time—both small and great, both known and unknown to fame, and the whole world-wide Catholic Church²³—the moment of departure arrived, and, seating him on an ass,²⁴ they led him into the city. It was a great Sabbath. 2 He was met by Herod, the chief of police, and his father Nicetas. They had him transferred to their carriage and, seated at his side, tried to win him over.

“Really,” they said, “what harm is there in saying ‘Lord Caesar,’²⁵ and offering incense”—and what goes with it—“and thus being saved?”

At first he did not answer them; but when they persisted, he said: “I am not going to do what you counsel me.”

3 So they failed to win him over, and with dire threats made him get down so hurriedly that in leaving the carriage he bruised his shin. But without turning round, as though he had suffered no injury, he walked briskly as he was led to the arena. The uproar in the arena was so tremendous that no one could even be heard.

9. As Polycarp entered the arena, a voice was heard from heaven: *Be strong, Polycarp, and act manfully.*²⁶ Nobody saw the speaker, but those of our people who were present heard the voice. When he was finally led up to the tribunal, there was a terrific uproar among the people on hearing that Polycarp had been arrested.

2 So when he had been led up, the proconsul questioned him whether he was Polycarp, and, when he admitted the fact, tried to persuade him to deny the faith.

He said to him, “Respect your age,” and all the rest they were accustomed to say; “swear by the Fortune of Caesar;²⁷ change your mind; say, ‘Away with the atheists!’ ”

But Polycarp looked with a stern mien at the whole rabble of lawless heathen in the arena; he then groaned and, looking up to heaven, said, with a wave of his hand at them: “Away with the atheists!”

3 When the proconsul insisted and said: “Take the oath and I will set you free; revile Christ,” Polycarp replied: “For six and eighty years I have been serving Him, and He has done no wrong to me; how, then, dare I blaspheme my King who has saved me!”²⁸

10. But he again insisted and said: “Swear by the Fortune of Caesar.”

He answered: “If you flatter yourself that I shall swear by the Fortune of Caesar, as you suggest, and if you pretend not to know me, let me frankly tell you: I am a Christian!²⁹ If you wish to learn the teaching of Christianity, fix a day and let me explain.”

2 “Talk to the crowd,” the procounsul next said.³⁰

“You,” replied Polycarp, “I indeed consider entitled to an explanation; for we have been trained to render honor, in so far as it does not harm us, to magistrates and authorities appointed by God;³¹ but as to that crowd, I do not think it proper to make an appeal to them.”

11. “Well,” said the procounsul, “I have wild beasts, and shall have you thrown before them if you do not change your mind.”

“Call for them,” he replied; “to us a change from better to worse is impossible; but it is noble to change from what is evil to what is good.”³²

2 Again he said to him: “If you make little of the beasts, I shall have you consumed by fire unless you change your mind.”

“The fire which you threaten,” replied Polycarp, “is one that burns for a little while, and after a short time goes out. You evidently do not know the fire of the judgment to come and the

eternal punishment, which awaits the wicked. But why do you delay? Go ahead; do what you want.”

12. As he said this and more besides, he was animated with courage and joy, and his countenance was suffused with beauty. As a result, he did not collapse from fright at what was being said to him; the proconsul, on the other hand, was astounded, and sent his herald to announce three times in the centre of the arena: “Polycarp has confessed to being a Christian.”² Upon this announcement of the herald, the whole multitude of heathens and of Jews³³ living at Smyrna shouted with uncontrolled anger and at the top of their voices: “This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods! He teaches many not to sacrifice and not to worship!” Amid this noisy demonstration, they called upon Philip, the minister of public worship in Asia,³⁴ to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. But he replied he had no authority to do so, since he had already closed the hunting sports.³⁵ **3** Then they decided with one accord to demand that he should burn Polycarp alive. Of course, the vision that had appeared to him in connection with the pillow—when he saw it on fire during his prayer and then turned to his trusted friends with the prophetic remark: “I must be burnt alive”—had to be fulfilled!³⁶

13. Then the thing was done more quickly than can be told, the crowds being in so great a hurry to gather logs and firewood from the shops and baths! And the Jews, too, as is their custom,³⁷ were particularly zealous in lending a hand. **2** When the pyre was prepared, he laid aside all his clothes, unfastened the loin cloth, and prepared also to take off his shoes. He had not been in the habit of doing this, because the faithful always vied with each other to see which of them would be the first to touch his body. Even before his martyrdom, he had always been honored for holiness of life. **3** Without delay the material prepared for the pyre was piled up round him; but when they intended to nail him as well, he said: “Leave me just as I am. He who enables me to endure the fire will also enable me to remain on the pyre unbudging, without the security afforded by your nails.”

14. So they did not nail him, but just fastened him. And there he was, with his hands put behind him, and fastened, like a ram towering above a large flock, ready for sacrifice, a holocaust prepared and acceptable to God! And he looked up to heaven and said:

“O Lord God, O Almighty,³⁸ Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the knowledge of you—*God of angels and hosts and all creation*³⁹—and of the whole race of saints who live under your eyes! **2** I bless Thee, because Thou hast seen fit to bestow upon me this day and this hour,⁴⁰ that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, the cup⁴¹ of Thy Anointed and *rise to eternal life*⁴² both in soul and in body, in virtue of the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be accepted among them in Thy sight today as a rich and pleasing sacrifice,⁴³ such as Thou, the true God that cannot utter a falsehood, hast prearranged, revealed in advance, and now consummated. **3** And therefore I praise Thee for everything; I bless Thee; I

glorify Thee through the eternal and heavenly High Priest Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, through whom be glory to Thee together with Him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages yet to come. Amen.”⁴⁴

15. When he had wafted up the *Amen* and finished the prayer, the men attending to the fire lit it; and when a mighty flame shot up, we, who were privileged to see it, saw a wonderful thing; and we have been spared to tell the tale to the rest. 2 The fire produced the likeness of a vaulted chamber, like a ship’s sail bellying to the breeze, and surrounded the martyr’s body as with a wall; and he was in the centre of it, not as burning flesh, but as bread that is baking, or as gold and silver refined in a furnace! In fact, we even caught an aroma such as the scent of incense or of some other precious spice.

16. At length, seeing that his body could not be consumed by fire, those impious people ordered an executioner to approach him and run a dagger into him. This done, there issued [a dove and]⁴⁵ a great quantity of blood, with the result that the fire was quenched and the whole crowd was struck by the difference between unbelievers and elect. 2 And of the elect the most wonderful Polycarp was certainly one—an apostolic and prophetic teacher in our times, and a bishop of the Catholic Church at Smyrna.⁴⁶ In fact, every word his lips have uttered has been, or will yet be, fulfilled.

17. But the jealous and malicious rival, the adversary of the race of saints, had witnessed the splendor of his martyrdom, had seen that his life was blameless from the beginning, and now saw him adorned with the crown of immortality and carrying off an incontestable prize. And so he busied himself preventing even his poor body from being laid hold of by us. Many, of course, were eager to do so and have a share in the possession of his holy remains.⁴⁷ 2 He therefore instigated Nicetas, Herod’s father and Alce’s brother,⁴⁸ to plead with the magistrate not to deliver up his body; “or else,” he said, “they will abandon the Crucified and worship this man in good earnest.” This he said at the urgent representations of the Jews, who were again on the alert when we intended to take him out of the fire. They did not realize that we shall never bring ourselves either to abandon Christ, who suffered for the salvation of all those that are saved in the whole world—the *Innocent for sinners!*⁴⁹—or to worship any other. 3 Him we worship as being the Son of God, the martyrs we love as being disciples and imitators of the Lord; and deservedly so, because of their unsurpassable devotion to their King and Teacher. May it be our good fortune, too, to be their companions and fellow disciples!

18. When the centurion noticed the contentiousness of the Jews, he declared the body public property⁵⁰ and, according to their custom, burnt it. 2 And thus it came about that we afterwards took up his bones, more precious than costly stones and more excellent than gold, and interred them in a decent place. 3 There the Lord will permit us, as far as possible, to assemble in rapturous joy and celebrate his martyrdom—his birthday⁵¹—both in order to commemorate the heroes that have gone before, and to train and prepare the heroes yet to come.

19. Such is the story of blessed Polycarp. Although he suffered martyrdom at Smyrna with eleven others from Philadelphia,⁵² he alone is universally remembered by preference, so much so that even the heathen speak of him in every place. Not only was he a celebrated teacher, but also an outstanding martyr, whose martyrdom all desire to imitate because it was in accord with the Gospel of Christ. **2** By his patient endurance he overcame the unjust magistrate, and thus won the incorruptible crown; and now, exulting with the Apostles and all the saints, he glorifies God and the Father Almighty, and blesses Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls, the Captain of our bodies, and Shepherd of the world-wide Catholic Church.⁵³

20. You asked, it is true, for a more detailed account of the events, but for the present we are giving you only a summary report through the good offices of our brother Marcion.⁵⁴ Take note, then, of the contents and forward the letter to the brethren farther on. They too, should glorify the Lord, who makes His choice from among His servants.

2 To Him who is able, by His bountiful grace, to bring us all into His eternal kingdom through His Son Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten, be glory, honor, might, and majesty forever. Greetings to all the saints. Those who are with us and especially Evarestus, who committed this letter to paper, with his whole family, wish to be remembered to you.

21. The day of blessed Polycarp's martyrdom is the second of the first half of the month of Xanthicus, the seventh before the kalends of March.⁵⁵ It was a great Sabbath;⁵⁶ the time was two in the afternoon. He was arrested by Herod, when Philip of Tralles was high priest, and Staius Quadratus proconsul, during the unending reign⁵⁷ of Our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him belongs the glory, honor, majesty, and an eternal throne from generation to generation. Amen.

22. We say farewell to you, brethren. Make the teaching of Jesus Christ, as expressed in the Gospel, your rule of life. Together with Him be glory to God—the Father and the Holy Spirit—for the salvation of the holy elect. It was thus⁵⁸ that the blessed Polycarp suffered martyrdom. May we be privileged to follow in his footsteps and arrive in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

¹ The best commentary on this expression, so unusual to us, is found in Chs. 5 and 6 of the *Ep. to Diognetus*. See also Clement of Rome, inscr. and n. 2: ACW 1. 103 f. Lit., 'a Church that is in a state of pilgrimage' (in the sense explained in Heb. 13:14); hence, as it were, 'God's pilgrim Church at Smyrna.' The noun *παροιμία* ('settling in a strange place' or 'in a foreign country') came to be a common term for a Christian community in any place. From it our word 'parish' is derived. See E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London 1947) 118.

² The early Christian communities took a lively interest in each other's affairs; their catholicity of outlook and the consequent brisk inter-diocesan exchange of news are abundantly illustrated by the Ignatian letters. See e.g., Ignatius, *Philad.* 10. 'The Catholic Church': see below, n. 46.

³ Cf. Jude 2; see also 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2.

⁴ ‘Sealed the persecution’: compare the same Greek word in Matt. 27:66; Apoc. 20:3. Here ‘to seal’ means ‘to close, as it were, by a seal.’ After Polycarp’s martyrdom the Smyrnaeans seem to have enjoyed a respite from persecution.

⁵ The writer is particularly interested in Polycarp because of the resemblance between his martyrdom and the Passion of Christ, which is ‘the martyrdom narrated in the Gospel.’ Christ, too, was a ‘martyr’ (a ‘witness’ to the truth); see John 18:37; Apoc. 1:5; 3:14. H. Delehay, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels 1921) 27 ff., shows that the idea of resemblance between Christ’s Passion and the sufferings of the martyrs was familiar to the early Christians. There is a special point in noting that Christ and Polycarp ‘waited to be betrayed’; Quintus’s self-intrusion (see Ch. 4) was disastrous. Some of the points of resemblance noted in the narrative are somewhat remarkable, though not strange enough to pronounce them legendary.

⁶ Cf. Phil. 2:4.

⁷ This idea is taken up in many later *acta martyrum*: cf. Eusebius’s account of the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne, *Hist. eccl.* 5. 1. 51, 56; *Passio SS. Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 4; *Acta Pauli et Theclae* 24; etc.

⁸ Compare 11. 2 below. ‘The unquenchable fire’: cf. Matt. 3:12; etc.; also Ignatius, *Ephes.* 16. 2. ‘Eternal life’: Matt. 25:46.

⁹ 1 Cor. 2:9; Isa. 64:4; 65:16. ‘Already angels’: that is, no longer subject to the infirmities of the flesh, but already disembodied. Cf. Hermas, *Vis.* 2. 2. 7 and *Sim.* 9. 25. 2; Tertullian, *De res. carn.* 26; 62.

¹⁰ This subject is not actually expressed in the Greek. Some editors (Zahn, Funk, etc.) inserted ‘the tyrant’; but this is supported only by the authority of a scribe and, moreover, is anachronistic, since such appellatives for proconsuls and other presiding officials were not used in the *acta* until a later date. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers. Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp* (London 1889) 3. 368, suggests that ‘the Devil,’ mentioned in the sentence immediately following, is the subject to be supplied.

¹¹ ‘Over any of them’: that is, of the group of twelve mentioned in 19. 1; or, ‘over all of them,’ if we include the unfortunate Quintus mentioned in Ch. 4. For the view that the sufferings of the martyrs were the work of the Devil, see Ignatius, *Rom.* n. 18: ACW 1. 136. See below, 17. 1.

¹² Lucius Stadius Quadratus, who was also a rhetorician. See below, 21.

¹³ Cf. Ignatius, *Rom.* 5. 2.

¹⁴ The charge of atheism was commonly leveled against Christians: cf. Justin, *Apol.* 1. 6, 13; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 3 ff. To be an atheist, not to believe in the pagan gods, was a crime against the Roman state religion. See n. 27 below.

¹⁵ Quintus’s self-intrusion was not ‘according to the will of God’ (see above, 2. 1); Polycarp’s conduct was in harmony with the Gospel teaching: Matt. 10:23; John 7:1; 8:59; 10:39; Acts 13:51; 17:14. It may well be that the reference to Quintus’s nationality is not without some significance. Zahn (*Ignatii et Polycarpi epistulae, martyria, fragmenta* [Leipzig 1876] 138 f.) pointed out that his impulsiveness and ardor are native qualities identical with the religious fanaticism and exaggerated asceticism that marked Phrygian Montanism a decade or two later. Again, as Lightfoot (*op. cit.*, 369) remarks, the present incident illustrates the proverbial cowardice of the

Phrygians; cf. Tertullian, *De an.* 20: 'comici Phrygas timidos illudunt.' But Phrygians could also die heroically for their faith; thus the physician Alexander among the martyrs of Lyons: Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5. 1. 49–51. 'To offer incense': see n. 25.

¹⁶ Compare Cyprian's flight from Carthage during the persecution of Decius in 250. The same martyr was also said to have had a vision foretelling him his impending execution; cf. Pontius, *Vita Caecil. Cypriani* 12.

¹⁷ And this is what he himself had urged: *Phil.* 12. 3. It is noteworthy that this account frequently touches upon the subject of prayer and contains several prayers and doxologies.

¹⁸ That is, at the farm he had just left. 'Of his own household': cf. Matt. 10:36. The Jews, too, were eager to do away with Christ: Matt. 26:5. See above, n. 5. 'Herod': another point of resemblance between Christ's Passion and Polycarp's martyrdom.

¹⁹ See n. 5 and compare Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; John 19:31.

²⁰ Cf. Matt. 26:55.

²¹ Cf. Matt. 6:10; Acts 21:14.

²² Ancient Christianity prayed standing and facing the East. Cf. Matt. 6:5. See the remarks by J. C. Plumpe, ACW 5 (1948) 198 n. 29.

²³ See n. 46.

²⁴ Note again the parallel to an incident in Christ's Passion. 'A great Sabbath': see below, n. 56.

²⁵ The expression 'Lord Caesar' was offensive to Christians because it seemed to imply that Christ was not 'Lord' (see Phil. 2:11; also 1 Cor. 12:3). Cf. Tertullian, *Apol.* 34: 'I am of course willing to call the emperor "Lord" in the common acceptation of the term and only when I am under no constraint to call him "Lord" in place of God.'

'Offering incense': this is Lightfoot's attractive suggestion (see *op. cit.* 3. 376 f.) in place of 'offering sacrifice.' Besides the excellent references he gives (Porphyry, *De abst.* 2. 58; Josephus, *Bell. Iud.* 7. 3. 3; etc.), cf. 3 Kings 12:33. For the general custom of offering incense to emperors, cf. Tertullian, *Apol.* 30; Arnobius, *Adv. nat.* 7. 36; Pliny, *Ep.* 10. 97; etc. 'And what goes with it': that is, such other tokens of worship as accompanied the offering of incense; or, *saying* such other things as they were accustomed to say, as in 9. 2.

²⁶ 'A voice was heard from heaven': that is, from God; or, less probably, 'a voice rang out in the sky.' See John 12:28. For the text, see Jos. 1:6, 7, 9; Deut. 31:6, 7, 23; Ps. 26:14; 30:25.

²⁷ 'The Fortune of Caesar': the Roman goddess Fortuna was the special protectress of the emperors. See W. F. Otto, in *Pauly-Wissowa's Real-Encyclopaedie* 17 (1912) 36 ff.; for her identification with the *genius* of the emperors, see *ibid.* 1164 ff. 'The atheists': note the use of this term in two different senses here and later in 9. 2. See above, n. 14.

²⁸ See Polycarp, *Phil.* Intro. 73.

²⁹ The usual formula of Christians confessing adherence to their faith. See, e.g., the replies given by the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5. 1. 19, 20; *Passio SS. Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 6. 4. For the first appearance of the word 'Christian,' see ACW 1. 127 n. 15a.

³⁰ Being rather well-disposed toward the venerable Polycarp, the proconsul wants him, by a set appeal, to incline the crowd in his favor, so that he could release him. This recalls Pilate's ineffectual efforts to release Jesus (John 19:12); see above, n. 5.

³¹ 'To render honor to magistrates': cf. Rom. 13:1, 7; 1 Peter 2:13. See also the noble prayer for state officials set down by Clement of Rome 61, and my remarks: ACW 1. 116 f. 'In so far as it does not harm us': that is, not conflict with our conscience.

³² Here Polycarp evidently extends a gentle invitation to the proconsul 'to change to what is good,' to become a Christian.

³³ 'The Jews living at Smyrna': see Apoc. 2:9. Polycarp, it seems, was 'the angel of Smyrna' mentioned in the verse preceding. See n. 37.

³⁴ Here called Asiarch. This Roman official was the head or president of the *Commune Asiae*, a confederation of the principal cities of the Roman province of Asia. His authority in matters of religion is indicated below (21), where he is called the high priest; he also presided at games. Cf. the long excursus by Lightfoot, *op. cit.* 3. 404–15.

³⁵ This type of sport (*venationes*), normally held in the amphitheatre, involved any kind of exhibition or contest in which wild beasts took part. Usually beasts were pitted in battle against one another or against professional beast fighters, the *bestiarii*. During the persecutions, their place was taken by Christians, who, because addicted to a forbidden religion, were treated like criminals. Since the program of such 'hunting' was filled for that day, the Asiarch said he was not empowered to introduce an additional number.

³⁶ See above, 5. 2; also John 18:32.

³⁷ See above, 12. 2, and below, 17. 2 and 18. 1. The part often taken by Jews in fomenting persecution of Christians, is succinctly stated by Tertullian, *Scorp.* 10, speaking of Jewish Synagogues as 'fountainheads of persecutions' (*fontes persecutionum*).

³⁸ For this solemn formula, see Apoc. 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 21:22.

³⁹ See Ps. 58:6; Judith 9:12, 14. 'The saints who live under your eyes': the Christians. Cf. Luke 1:75.

⁴⁰ Cf. John 12:27.

⁴¹ Cf. Matt. 20:22, 23; 26:39; Mark 10:38, 39. 'Your Anointed': cf. Luke 2:26; 9:20; 23:39.

⁴² Cf. 5:29. 'In soul and body, in virtue of, etc.': a terse expression of the Christian belief in the resurrection and of its cause.

⁴³ Cf. Ps. 19:4.

⁴⁴ See J. A. Kleist, "An Early Christian Prayer," *Orate Fratres* 22 (1948) 201–6.

⁴⁵ The words 'a dove and' seem to be a later addition. In the early Church the dove was a symbol of the soul of a saint just leaving the body.

⁴⁶ The earliest occurrence of the expression 'the Catholic Church' is in Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 8. 2, written some forty years before *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*: "Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church." See ACW 1. 93; and my remarks, *ibid.* 141 f. The writer of *The Martyrdom* uses the term in the same sense as Ignatius. It occurs in inscr.; 8. 1; 16. 2; 19. 2. The text in 16. 2 is not quite certain. Most of the Greek manuscripts and Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4. 15) speak of 'the Catholic Church at Smyrna'; but the old

Latin translation and the Moscow Greek manuscript use the word 'holy' in place of 'Catholic.' If the expression 'the Catholic Church at Smyrna' is genuine, it means that group of Smyrnaean Christians whose belief was the same as that of the universal Church and, therefore, orthodox, in opposition to the doctrines of local heretical or schismatic innovators. It follows that the writer of *The Martyrdom* used the same language that a modern Catholic writer uses when, for example, he speaks of 'the Catholic Church at St. Louis.' To him the expression means that group of Christians, living at St. Louis, whose faith is the same as that of the universal Church and, therefore, orthodox. For a thorough discussion of the references to 'the Catholic Church' in Ignatius and in the *Martyrium Polycarpi*, see G. Bardy, *La théologie de l'Eglise de saint Clément de Rome à saint Irénée* (*Unam sanctam* 13, Paris 1945) 64–67.

⁴⁷ It appears that here we have an indication—the first testimony of this kind in early Christian literature—that the remains or 'relics' of martyrs were venerated. The devout Smyrnaeans 'took up the bones' of Polycarp and interred them in a decent place (18. 2 f.), where the Christians assembled each year on the anniversary of his death to praise God for the saint's heroic defense of the faith. See P. Séjourné, "Reliques," *Diet. de théol. cath.* 13. 2 (1939) 2318 ff. Note in the following the precision with which the writer distinguishes between the worship of God and the veneration of relics: 'Him we worship—as being the Son of God; the martyrs we love—as being imitators of the Lord.' That a memorial Mass was celebrated at Smyrna on the anniversary, is conjectured by F. J. Dölger in a reference to the passage below (18. 3): ΙΧΘΥΣ 2 (2nd ed., Münster i. W. 1928) 567 f.

⁴⁸ Alce must have been a Christian at Smyrna, probably the same person to whom Ignatius sent greetings: *Smyrn.* 13. 2; *Pol.* 8. 3.

⁴⁹ Cf. 1 Peter 3:18.

⁵⁰ Lit., 'he placed it in the middle': made is accessible to all, or, in the context, withdrew it from private ownership; he confiscated the body in the name of the State.

⁵¹ This is the oldest record of the ancient Christian concept which regarded death (and especially a martyr's death) as a birth, and the day and anniversary of death (especially of a martyr) as a birthday; but the underlying sentiment, that death is in reality a passage to life, is already indicated in Ignatius of Antioch, *Rom.* 6. 1 ('The *birth* pangs are upon me'), 2. 2 ('May I *rise* in His presence'), and 7. 2 ('There is in me a *Living Water*'). In the Roman Martyrology the word *natalis* (*dies*) denotes the day of a martyr's death. See the very interesting discussion of this subject by A. C. Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity* (Stud. in Christ. Ant. 1, Washington 1941) Ch. 4: "Death as a Birth. The Day of Death as *Dies Natalis*." 'The heroes': see Clement of Rome, n. 25: ACW 1. 105.

⁵² One of these was Germanicus, mentioned in 3. 1.

⁵³ Christ is called 'the Shepherd of our souls' in 1 Peter 2:25.

⁵⁴ Marcion composed the account; Evarestus, mentioned later, committed it to paper. "To the brethren farther on": see n. 2.

⁵⁵ 'The seventh day before the kalends of March': the 22nd (or, in a leap year, the 23rd) of February. See the discussion of the problem in Harrison, *op. cit.* 269–83.

⁵⁶ 'A great Sabbath': an obscure expression; according to Lightfoot (*op. cit.* i. 711), the writer seems to mean 'any sabbath which coincided with a festival or other marked day in the Jewish calendar.'

⁵⁷ A striking addition, perhaps used to avoid mentioning the reigning emperor. Compare Luke 3:1.

⁵⁸ In 1. 1, the writer had spoken of Polycarp's martyrdom as being 'of the type narrated in the Gospel.' He—or, more probably, a second writer—now exhorts the readers to make Christ's teaching, expressed in the Gospel, their rule of life; and ends by saying that it was 'thus,' that is, in accord with the Gospel, that Polycarp suffered martyrdom.