What has Lyons to do with Rome?

The 'Martyrs of Lyons' as a second-century exemplar of Christian community in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius

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September, 2010.

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies.

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Abstract
The *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Casearea stands at the fore of Christian historiography. This first attempt at a comprehensive history of the Christian church was marked by both the aura of persecution in which Christian theology developed, and by the responsive apologetic literary tradition. The historiography of Eusebius was intentionally apologetic and prescriptive. It sought chronographically and theologically to convince its audience of the preeminence of the Christian message, as well as prescribing idealized figures and conduct, relevant for a fourth-century audience. A martyriological text preserved by Eusebius—the *Martyrs of Lyons*—serves as a nuanced and exemplary text. Apologetically, the *Ecclesiastical History* promotes Eusebius's distinct vision or theology of history. Eusebius emphatically promoted a theology of history which united Christianity and the Roman Empire. This historical vision was redemptive and triumphant. It anticipated Augustine's political theology of the City of God.

Résumé
L'Histoire Ecclésiastique d'Eusebius de Casearea est le commencement de l'historiographie chrétienne. Ce premier effort d'une histoire complète de l'église chrétienne a été marqué par l'aura de la persécution en laquelle la théologie chrétienne a été développée, et aussi par la tradition apologétique littéraire. L'historiographie d'Eusebius était intentionnellement apologétique et prescriptible. Cette Histoire recherchée a essaye de convaincre chrono graphiquement et théologiquement le peuple que le message chrétien était supérieur. En outre, l'Histoire Ecclésiastique a commémoré les individus idéalisés et prescrit les comportements appropriés pour les lecteurs du quatrième siècle. Un texte martyrological préservé par Eusebius—les Martyres de Lyons—est un exemplaire. Apologétique, l'Histoire Ecclésiastique favorise une vision de la théologie et de l'histoire qui est distinctement d'Eusebian. Eusebius emphatiquement a favorisé une théologie historique qui unifie la Christianité et l'empire romain. Cette vision historique était rédemptrice et triomphante. Elle a anticipé la théologie politique d'Augustinienne de la Cité de Dieu.

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my deep thanks to Dr. Torrance Kirby for supervising this thesis. It was completed via correspondence and despite the geographical distance I was afforded the same academic care and thoughtfulness as any student writing in the Birks building. I would also like to thank him for his editorial comments—I am a much better writer after this process, and for that I am grateful. I would also like to sincerely thank Dr. Daniel Cere and Dr. Jim Kanaris who provided much appreciated guidance and friendship over the past two years. Additional thanks to Dr. Victor Hori for aiding me with the thesis proposal process. Many thanks as well to Deborah McSorley and Francesca Maniaci, and all of FRS administrative staff, as well to Allen Youster for being the most interesting and the kindest librarian at McGill. Thank you to all of my professors from undergrad onwards, to my peers, especially Madison, for being thoughtful and fun. I extend my appreciation to all of my undergraduate students for boosting my confidence and continually impressing me. Finally, thank you to my family (to Ceira in particular), and to Alex, Kate, Sean, Thomas, my darling Taylor, and all other friends!

Abbreviations

EH *The Ecclesiastical History.*

Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Ecclesiastical History*. Ed. Philip Schaff. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Trans. Arthur Cushman. Series II, Volume I. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1890.

MLyons *The Number of those who Fought for Religion in Gaul under Verus and the Nature of their Conflicts.*

Book V, Chapter I. Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Ecclesiastical History*. Ed. Philip Schaff. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Trans. Arthur Cushman. Series II, Volume I. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1890.

INTRODUCTION

Contained in Book V of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* is a text titled "*The Number of Those Who Fought for Religion in Gaul Under Verus and the Nature of Their Conflicts*"; this text is commonly referred to as the *Martyrs of Lyons*. Expostulatory in its original form, this text details the (seemingly) spontaneous and vicious persecution of the Christian community in Lyons and Vienna during the late second century. *MLyons* contains significant political and spiritual messages for the Christian community contemporary with the writing and redaction of the *Ecclesiastical History*, a time marked by the 'Great Persecution'. The persecution of Diocletian – as with all widespread, 'official' persecutions – led to widespread situations of mass apostasy and recalcitrant Christians and churches. *MLyons* presents a nuanced understanding, idealization, and articulation of how a Christian community is to deal with persecution, imperial authority, pagan neighbours, and conflicts within their own community. Furthermore, attuned as it is to the complex and fluid state of political relations between the Christian church and the Roman Empire, *MLyons* is particularly attentive to the political sensitivities of the early fourth century.

As a text it is notably 'social' in emphasis, portraying the negotiation of relationships among Christians, between Christians and their pagan neighbours, and between Christians and imperial authorities. While the narrative of *MLyons* concerns events of the second century, Eusebius elected to include this martyrology in his *Ecclesiastical History* as it serves a dual function in his apologetic. In addition to its sensational martyrological impact, *MLyons* speaks to Christian concerns and situations specific to the late third – to early fourth century. Thus the narrative does not serve an

exclusively historical function; for fourth century Christians it is also exemplary and instructive. *MLyons* presents an idealized understanding of early Christians and early Christian identity. Furthermore, it instructs a Christian audience on how to behave during times of persecution, and how theologically and politically to make sense of the violence leveled against them. In *MLyons* the Christians are functioning community members; however, when faced with a choice between their faith and idolatry many of the Christians choose to privilege their religious identity over their personal or social one. Employing a 'prescriptive' historiographical method, the text affirms ideally how Christians are to view and interact with their non-Christian neighbours and with imperial authorities; how to understand and cope with persecution; and how to reconceptualize the political and theological consequences of this persecution. While *MLyons* is undoubtedly an 'historical document', it also speaks to Christian communities of the fourth century and remains both politically aware and pragmatically and spiritually pedagogical. In *EH* Eusebius carefully constructed an historical narrative through which he was able to 'portray' an exemplar of the faithful Christian community. Using texts like *MLyons* Eusebius was thereby able to 'prescribe' what his contemporary Christian community should strive to resemble.

As the first historian to attempt a comprehensive history of the ancient Catholic church from its beginnings, Eusebius of Caesarea had the good fortune to live at a critical juncture of Christian history. His lifetime was marked by experiences of 'The Great Persecution' under Diocletian, toleration under the Tetrarchy, and the eventual affirmation of Christianity by Constantine. Despite the designation of 'historian',

Eusebius is not a Thucydides, Polybius or a Josephus.[1] He is consciously attentive to themes of 'political theology' as well as the theological implications of the political. His history writing is reminiscent of some of the earlier Christian apologists, yet it is also actively a 'prescriptive history'. This study proposes to explore the grounds for Eusebius of Caesarea's decision to include the fantastical and luridly descriptive Gallican martyr-acts in Book V of his *Ecclesiastical History*. This text is more than an historical narrative of events. It consciously and actively negotiates the relationship maintained between Christianity and the broader community of the Roman Empire. The narrative of *MLyons* functions in part as a social commentary, reflective of Eusebius' own contemporary circumstance, marked as it was by the vigorous Diocletian persecution. His representation of this idealized historical community in Gaul also serves as a paradigmatic foil over and against the current Christian leadership of which Eusebius is critical. Ultimately, this text is indicative of Eusebius' historiographical method and intentions. Not simply a historical narrative of events, the *Ecclesiastical History* is written apologetically and prescriptively, imbued with Eusebius' 'theology of history'. This theology of history is centred in a firm theological belief in the predetermined union of Christianity and the Roman Empire. *MLyons* is an ideal text for underscoring and detailing Eusebius' methodology and nascent political theology.

While *MLyons* has been the subject of scholarly criticism, the manner in which the text functions within the broader narrative of *EH* has yet to be adequately explored. Consequently, the text must be treated with a degree of suspicion. We will establish the

[1] Doron Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius'* Ecclesiastical History (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 3.

terminology and methodology with attention focused chiefly on the concept of martyrdom and on Eusebius's use of ancient conventions of historiography, apologetics, and imperial rhetoric. The text of *MLyons* itself will then be subjected to a close reading focused on interactions among community members, with particular attention to both the familiar and atypical elements of the martyrology. This examination aims to draw out the edifying and politically informed elements of Eusebius's theology of history, as well as theological hopes implicit in his historical vision. In sum, *MLyons* serves a dual function: first, as with martyrologies in general, it serves both to idealize and to historicize the Christian experience of persecution; secondly, it acts as a foil over and against which fourth-century Christianity and the Great Persecution can be reconceptualized. As a text it is useful for informing a broader understanding of *EH* and Eusebius' historiographical techniques. Eusebius' work is particularly germane to issues of both religious and political identity, and *MLyons* serves as a didactic text for fourth-century Christians.

The principal studies employed in establishing the historical and critical groundwork for this investigation are by Robert M. Grant and T.D. Barnes. In order to complement and offer a counterpoint to Grant and Barnes, we will also draw upon Ramsay MacMullen and G.E.M. de Ste. Croix for differing and enlightening critical perspectives. While de Ste. Croix in particular is known for his open hostility towards Christianity, he nonetheless offers a mastery of the sources, and treats his material with a great deal of respect. His formidable scholarship when coupled with his hermeneutical suspicion, emphasis on social history, and distrust of classical historians such as Gibbon and Montesquieu, presents an opinionated challenge to the more neutral histories of

Grant and Barnes. His well known disputation with Sherwin-White over the initial cause of the pre-Decian persecutions will be explored. W.H.C. Frend will occasionally be drawn upon to establish general preliminary perspectives on martyrdom in the early Christian church. G.W Bowersock's *Martyrdom and Rome* and Daniel Boyarin's *Dying for God* offer helpful insight into the early history of Christian martyrdom. *Martyrdom and Memory* by Elizabeth Castelli will be invaluable for establishing a framework and perspective from which to approach the question of martyrdom and the 'writing' and collective and cultural memorialization of martyrdoms.

Robert M. Grant suggests that in composing *EH* Eusebius was initially unconcerned with theology or philosophy; he was primarily focused on a chronological structure, which could support his history of Christianity. This may be true, however only initially. *EH* underwent several redactions and revisions which indicate an increasing concern for 'the political' within his historical narrative. Examined with Eusebius' own situation and experiences in mind, *MLyons* serves to illuminate his view of Christian history, his historiographical agenda, his understanding of contemporary Christianity, and the church, which he strove to justify and defend to outsiders. He is critical of contemporary Christians. In the *Ecclesiastical History*, the period preceding Diocletian's rule is treated contemptuously by Eusebius. *MLyons* serves to contrast the noble and orthodox Christians of the past with the attitudes and practices of fringe rigorists like the Novatianists, Melitians, and Donatists. It is evident that he was unimpressed by the conduct and leaders of the Christian communities within the Empire at that time. The romanticized vision of a true, brave, and apostolic Christian community presented in *MLyons* offer a sharp contrast with the descriptions offered of

late third- and early fourth-century Christian leadership. The way in which Eusebius chose to portray non-Christians in *MLyons* is deliberate and inherently political.

The idealization of the past offers a critique of the present situation. The lapsed Christians described in *MLyons* are depicted by Eusebius with incredible severity. The myriad of ways in which they are described is unusually harsh. The lapsed Christians who betray their brethren are referred to as murderers, weak, undertrained, blasphemous, defiled, abortions, and were punished "twice as severely as the others".[2] These are clear warnings and directives presented by the text. However, those who truly repent are also forgiven. Following the end in persecution, the Christian church in Lyons rebuilds and forgives.

Throughout his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius was aware of the apologetic potentiality of this history with respect to both a Christian and a pagan Roman audience. For a non-Christian audience, *MLyons* presents a fantastical story of suffering and seemingly incomprehensible victory. For a Christian audience the familiar elements of a martyrology are all present: ironic language, the projection of the persecution onto a cosmic plane, a forensic confrontation, as well as the perseverance and final victory of the martyrs. The text can also be viewed as deliberately hortatory; it presents an idealized and romanticized historical vision which simultaneously served as a social critique and commentary.

In Late Antiquity in the context of the competition between the opposing rhetorics of Christianity and the Roman Empire, history writing is a pivotal medium through which control and authority are established. History writing truly becomes

[2] *EH*, 5.1.33

'history making'. The instances in which Eusebius indicates that he has elected to exclude information or narrative based on his own 'editorial' decision are manifold. These omissions indicate that Eusebius, as an historian, was actively selecting what was to be included, emphasized, remembered, and in many cases, what was to be forgotten. There were certain things that Eusebius deemed necessary to actively and consciously wiped from the 'orthodox' narrative of Christian history. His history was a social one – a history of people, institutions, and their inherent interactions. The relationship between Christian and pagan Romans is subtly parlayed throughout *MLyons*. Martyrologies present the negotiation of secular power, spiritual authority, and moral legitimacy.[3] Eusebius' own understanding of Christian history is marked by this dialectical tension. He is writing a decidedly Christian history *of* Christianity, however, as with other historians of antiquity, he is remarkably conscious of the political situation of the Roman Empire. Such political considerations inform the self-conscious and deliberate nature of Eusebius' writing, his selection of narrative material, and his editorial processes. His contemporary 'lived' situation indisputably influenced his production of *EH* and impacted his theological treatment of Christian history.

The insistent inclusion of *MLyons* underscores its privileged status within an Eusebian construction of history. While acknowledging Grant's point that chronological order was indeed of critical importance for Eusebius, the coordination of philosophy and theology were central to Eusebius' historical project. Eusebius holds to a firm belief in providential Christian history, and as an historian was concerned with establishing

[3] Jeremy Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 3.

this purposive progress; however, he also portrays a markedly romanticized and idealized vision of the past. Historical martyrologies are very much present in *EH*. A sixth of Book IV is devoted to the martyrdom of Polycarp, while a third of Book V is devoted to the Gallican martyrs. Eusebian rhetoric, while emulative of classical writing, was referential. For Eusebius martyrologies are inherently both theological *and* political texts. In the *Ecclesiastical History* martyr-acts were not simply historical – they were instructive. This is indicative of Eusbeius' ultimate intentions – his history sought to construct, instruct, and convince.

Summary and Division of Chapters:

My study will compromise five focussed and manageable areas of inquiry. The division of chapters serves to indicate the rationale of this dissertation. The first and second chapters will contextualize and inform the remainder of my argument. First and foremost, a concise summary of the text will be given to highlight key narrative points and themes. Subsequently the principal textual subject matter will be identified. The social and interactive elements of the text will be discussed in order to expand upon the specific function of *MLyons*. These elements include: interactions between community members – local pagans and local Christians; the Roman authorities and the Christian leaders; the Roman authorities and the non-Christian populace; and relations between Christians with particular attention paid to the 'lapsed' Christians. Issues such as dating and authorship will be addressed in order to situate the forthcoming analysis of *MLyons*.

In the second chapter key terms such as persecution, martyrology, and martyrdom will be explored and defined. Chapter 2 will also discuss the significance of

this martyrology within the broader context of the *Ecclesiastical History*. The reasons for the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire will be explored with attention given to the legal and literary discussions of Christians and Christianity. Finally, in establishing the primary focus of inquiry, the considerations of Eusebius' apologetic aim and the relevance of this narrative to his immediate political purposes will be highlighted.

The third chapter serves to underscore the broader historical, political, and literary contexts which mark Eusebius' apologetic aims and methodology. Eusebius was not by any means a 'typical' historian, and has been frequently lambasted for the lack of consistency, finesse, and focus found in his histories. Nonetheless, his *Ecclesiastical History* served as an authoritative template for historiography in the centuries to come. The *Chronicle* and the *Martyrs of Palestine* will be employed comparatively to explore the sources and approaches utilized by Eusebius in writing the *Ecclesiastical History*. Furthermore, the broader literary situation in which *MLyons* was originally written will be detailed. The second century was marked by apologetic literature which subsequently informed Eusebius' literary background. Both critics and defenders of the faith will be examined to situate *MLyons* as a text, and to situate Eusebius as an individual and as a historian. The implications of writing for two audiences – Christian and pagan – will be explored. The techniques and rhetorics of apologists will be examined.

Our fourth chapter will detail the political context and significance of *MLyons* in Eusebius' historical narrative. What practical and ultimate purpose did this text serve for our ancient historian? A topical reading of *MLyons* suggests it could have problematized Eusebius' apologetic aims; however, when understood in the broader

context of his theology of persecution and of history it may be viewed as an exemplar of Eusebian technique and intentions. It is in this chapter that we begin to understand Eusebius' theology of history. The impact – psychologically and literarily – of the Great Persecution will also be explored. Historic persecutions such as that of Lyons would resonate particularly with those who had just experienced the largest officially sanctioned persecution of Christianity.

The fifth chapter will elucidate the theological aspects of his perspective, as they are represented in *MLyons* and in the *Ecclesiastical History*. Similarly the way in which the narrative serves Eusebius's own critique and commentary of the church and of Rome will be asserted. Eusebius was no millenialist – his God was a god who acted in history. Witnessing and surviving the 'Great Persecution' only to reach the subsequent toleration and embrace of Constantine inspired and comforted our faith-full historian. This final chapter will be used to summarize and clarify Eusebius' theology of history. This understanding of history is irrevocably tied to the mythological construction of Rome as the eternal city and to Christianity's appropriation of that myth. For Eusebius' historical vision, the union of Christianity and the Roman Empire was redemptive and eschatological, awaiting and anticipating Augustine's political theology of the City of God.

CHAPTER I

The Text: *Martyrs of Lyons*

Martyrs of Lyons is an epistle preserved in the *Ecclesiastical History* addressed to churches in Asia and Phrygia. It details the events of a persecution which took place in 177 CE under the reign of Marcus Aurelius.[4] While there is no other record of such a sizeable persecution taking place as far west in the Empire as Lyons, the end of Marcus Aurelius' reign was marked by catastrophes and disasters. Such events may have contributed to anti-Christian hostility. Historical issues such as dating and authorship of *MLyons* will be dealt with, followed by a discussion of the situation of *MLyons* within *EH*. A summary of the text will highlight the textual elements significant for this dissertation. These key elements will then be discussed. Once the text and its context have been established, textual issues such as dating and authorship will be dealt with as will two related texts, namely *The Martyrs, beloved of God, kindly ministered unto those who fell in the Persecution* and *The Vision which appeared in a Dream to the Witness Attalus*.

Summary of the narrative

The text details a seemingly spontaneous persecution of the churches of Vienne and Lyons. The story is prefaced by an introduction in which Eusebius notes that a fuller account is contained within his *Collections of Martyrdoms*, an anthology of

[4] In *The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177*, by James Westfall Thompson, he suggests that 177 is an incorrect date for this text. He suggests Eusebius confused Marcus Aurelius with Aurelian, and that a later 3rd century dating is more likely based on the style of the narrative, the themes and images used. This dissertation accepts 177 CE as a probable date.

martyrologies which is unfortunately now lost. Eusebius states, "I will repeat here such portions of this account as may be needful for the present purpose."[5] His stated purpose is to record the "most peaceful wars," and to tell of "men doing brave deeds for truth rather than country," and above all will "hand down to imperishable remembrance" of the noble martyrs.[6] The text, as introduced by Eusebius is of a letter sent by the churches to their brethren in Phrygia, detailing the "account of the witnesses".[7] The root-cause of the persecution is established as the 'evil one', who sought to defeat the Christians.

As explained by the letter, Christians were first shut out from "houses and baths and markets," and soon forbidden "to be seen in any place whatever".[8] This initial social exclusion worsens and soon the Christians were harassed with "clamors and blows and draggings and robberies and stonings and imprisonments".[9] They are then dragged by a mob to the forum. Select Christians were examined and after confessing, were imprisoned to await the arrival of the governor. [10] Following the arrival of the governor, the imprisoned Christians were examined again, and many confessed, declaring themselves to be Christian. However, others among these "proto-witnesses" recanted, and denied being Christians, as they were "unprepared and untrained, weak as yet, and unable to endure so great a conflict."[11] The text states that more Christians were then collected from the two churches, and amongst them were several heathen slaves belonging to the accused Christians, who fearing torture and death bore false-witness

[5] *EH*, 5.1.2
[6] 5.1.4
[7] 5.1.5
[8] 5.1.5
[9] 5.1.7
[10] 5.1.8
[11] 5.1.11

and accused the Christians of orchestrating "Thyestean banquets and Oedipodean intercourse".[12] These accusations enraged the pagan community to such an extent that, "even if any had before been moderate on account of friendship, they were now exceedingly furious and gnashed their teeth against us."[13]

Following a dramatic description of the tortures inflicted upon Sanctus – a deacon from Vienne; Attalus – a Roman citizen and a Christian; and Blandina – a slave woman and the 'heroine' of the story, the text returns to the courtroom where the bishop Pothinus is interrogated by the governor and subsequently stoned and beaten by the mob, for "thus they thought to avenge their own deities".[14] Those who had initially recanted their Christian faith were imprisoned alongside the true confessors. For those who had confessed to being Christians, "no other accusation being brought against them," however, those who had denied their faith were treated "as murderers and defiled, and were punished twice as severely as the others."[15] The proto-martyrs were then led into the arena and tortured, although the governor upon learning Attalus is a Roman citizen, returned him to prison to await instruction from Caesar.[16] In the interim, many of those who had denied were inspired and "were rekindled with life, and learned to confess".[17] They were reaccepted by their condemned brethren and treated with kindness. The word of Caesar arrived and which commanded that: "they should be put to death, but that any who might deny should be set free."[18] Subsequently, the governor ordered the condemned to be brought before him on the first day of the games to

[12] 5.1.14
[13] 5.1.15
[14] 5.1.31
[15] 5.1.33
[16] 5.1.44
[17] 5.1.46
[18] 5.1.47

interrogate them in order to "make of them a show and spectacle for the multitude".[19] During this interrogation, at the urging of Alexander many more who had previously denied being Christians confessed their faith, further angering the mob. Alexander was then sentenced to face the beasts alongside Attalus, who, despite his Roman citizenship, the governor had condemned in order "to please the people".[20] Of the remainder, those who possess Roman citizenship were beheaded, and the others were sent to the beasts.[21]

The executions are detailed and luridly described. Eusebius dramatically and graphically narrated the bodily sufferings of the condemned Christians throughout the text, while at the same time paying heed to their joyous attitudes, and glowing countenances.[22] The last Christians to be executed were the 'noble' Blandina and Ponticus, a teenager of about 15 years old. As the author notes, "they had been brought every day to witness the sufferings of the others, and had been pressed to swear by the idols."[23] They remain steadfast, and refused, even under pain of torture, and eventually they too died.[24]

Despite the executions, the persecution was not over. The attitudes with which the martyrs reportedly went to their deaths, further enraged the populace and the governor. The Lyonnais pagans sought to punish the remaining community further by degrading and publicly displaying the corpses of the martyrs, casting the bodies of those who had died in prison to the dogs, and publicly exposing the corpses of those who had

[19] 5.1.47
[20] 5.1.50
[21] 5.1.47
[22] 5.1.35, "For the first went out rejoicing, glory and grace being blended in their faces, so that even their bonds seemed like beautiful ornaments, as those of a bride adorned with variegated golden fringes; and they were perfumed with the sweet savor of Christ".
[23] 5.1.53
[24] 5.1.54

died in the Arena.[25] Despite attempts by the Christians to retrieve the bodies through stealth and bribery, they were unsuccessful. After being exposed for six days, the bodies of the martyrs "were afterward burned and reduced to ashes, and swept into the Rhone by the wicked men, so that no trace of them might appear on the earth."[26] In closing, the author notes that the pagan community did so to ensure that the martyrs would have "no hope of a resurrection, through trust in which they bring to us this foreign and new religion, and despise terrible things, and are ready even to go to death with joy. Now let us see if they will rise again, and if their God is able to help them, and to deliver them out of our hands."[27]

Discussion

MLyons is in many ways a typical martyrology; however, it has three elements which are significant. Firstly, the Christians are presented as a diverse yet unified group, and also as a (relatively) large group. The Lyonnais Christians are in many cases prominent and identifiable community members and alternately, slaves and teenagers. Secondly, the pagan populace in Lyons is presented as being very aware of the Christian community in their midst. The persecutors are relatively well informed on Christian beliefs and practices. Thirdly, the pagan persecutors view this conflict as a religious conflict. Whether by actual historical occurrence or by authorial/editorial design the persecution is construed as a spiritual combat for both the Christians and the pagans.

[25] 5.1.59
[26] 5.1.62
[27] 5.1.63

The Christian community presented in the text is varied in its membership. The community as presented by Eusebius summarily dismisses the notion that Christianity was originally a religion of females, slaves, and the poor. The Christian community is composed of many high-ranking men, such as Vettius Epagathus who is declared to be "a man of distinction".[28] Attalus, is a Roman citizen and also a "person of distinction".[29] Alexander the Phrygian is a physician, and well known.[30] There are also unnamed Christians arrested who have many pagan slaves, which is indicative of some wealth and status.[31] As well as these prominent civic members, there are also martyrs such as Blandina who is a slave, yet her mistress remains nameless and is only identified in relation to her.[32] There are elderly Christians such as the ninety-year-old Ponthius, there are new converts such as Marturus,[33] and young Christians such as Ponticus, who is only fifteen.[34] Unlike in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, it is not only the bishop or prominent church-members who achieve martyrdom; martyrdom becomes the affair of all manner of Christians.[35]

MLyons presented a remarkably well-integrated and diverse Christian community. As the description of the persecution unfolds, it becomes clear that preceding the violence the Christians of Lyons were known as Christians to their pagan neighbours, and in some cases were even prominent community members. In spite of, or

[28] 5.1.10
[29] 5.1.43
[30] 5.1.49
[31] 5.1.14
[32] 5.1.18
[33] 5.1.17
[34] 5.1.53
[35] Boudewijn Dehandschutter, "A Community of Martyrs: Religious Identity and the Case of the Martyrs of Lyon and Vienne" in ed. Johan Leemans, *More than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity*. (Leuven/Paris: Peeters, 2005), 15.

perhaps because of the diversity of the Christian community, pagan members of the 'multitude' are clearly able to identify the Christians living in Lyons and Vienne. The first allusion to this occurs in v. 5 as the persecution begins: "…not only shutting us out from houses and baths and markets, but forbidding any of us to be seen in any place whatever."[36] The Christians are initially excluded socially, banned from using the public spaces of Lyons. In order to exclude them from the baths and the markets and the 'houses', those persecuting the Christians must have been able to identify who was Christian and who was not. The Christians were frequenters of the baths, and the markets, although they were known to dissent from the official religion. It would appear that the Lyonnais Christians had coexisted with their neighbours peaceably. Pothinus, the bishop, was ninety-years-old when the persecution occurred, and we can assume may have been a Christian for quite some time.[37] The statement that: "if any had before been moderate on account of friendship," is suggestive of the previously tolerant and friendly relationship between pagans and Christians.[38]

Following their public isolation, Christians are harassed and beaten by the mob.[39] The text gives no indication that any groups other than the Christian population were punished. The people call out Alexander, who was "well known to all on account of his love to God and boldness of speech".[40] There is also some evidence that they are able to identify Christians based on their prominence within the church, as Santcus (a deacon), Pothinus (the bishop), and Attalus ("a pillar and foundation,") are identified as

[36] *EH*, 5.1.5
[37] 5.1.29
[38] 5.1.15
[39] 5.1.7
[40] 5.1.49

having the "whole wrath of the populace, and governor, and soldiers," raised against them.[41] Later on, Attalus is again singled out by the crowd and "called for loudly by the people, because he was a person of distinction".[42] The pagan mob and audience are presented as being capable of individually identifying Christians, and are correctly able to distinguish Christians of importance.

Secondly, the persecutors appear knowledgeable about Christianity. The accusations brought against the arrested Christians by their slaves are chiefly those of cannibalism and incest.[43] These accusations are well attested by Eusebius and other sources as the typical crimes of which Christians are accused.[44] Following the execution of the Christians, the corpses are publicly displayed and the Christians are refused access despite their best attempts to secure the bodies. Those who witness these attempts are aware of the surviving community's desire to bury the bodies and deride their efforts.[45] As well as being cognizant of the Christian practice of burying their dead, the pagans also appear sensitive to the possibility of martyr cults arising, as the bodies of the martyrs "were afterward burned and reduced to ashes, and swept into the Rhone by the wicked men, so that no trace of them might appear on the earth."[46] Finally, the non-Christian community members are reported to have burned the bodies of the martyrs to ensure that they would have "no hope of a resurrection".[47] They ridicule the deceased Christians by stating "now let us see if they will rise again, and if their God is

[41] 5.1.17
[42] 5.1.43
[43] 5.1.14
[44] 4.7.11, See, Chapter III for a discussion of the accusations typically levelled against Christians and Christianity.
[45] 5.1.61
[46] 5.1.62
[47] 5.1.63

able to help them, and to deliver them out of our hands."[48] This seemingly indicates that the non-Christian individuals in Lyons had at least a tenuous awareness of some Christian beliefs, as it is evident they were aware of the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead. Whether the Lyonnais pagans were aware of Christian beliefs before or after the persecution is unclear, however, the text does present a pagan population at least somewhat informed on some Christian tenets, indicating a level or interaction and communication of ideas between the two groups. Given the earlier state of relations alluded to in the text, it is apparent that there was at least a modest level of interaction and integration of the pagan and Christian communities.

The final noteworthy feature of the text is that the pagans who persecute the Christians are construed as being immensely concerned with the victory of their own gods over the stubborn and strange Christians. Integral to the cultic practices of the Empire was the notion of the *pax deorum*, which maintained the well-being and security of the Empire.[49] It was never a choice to participate in the civic and religious rites of the Empire. To sacrifice to the gods and/or to the *genius* of the Emperor was simply what was done.[50] A refusal to participate in traditional civic religious rituals was understood as 'unpatriotic' at best, and seditious and dangerous at worst. Christianity refused recognition of any other religion, and considered Roman religion and cultic practices idolatrous. Indeed, Christianity declined to "countenance any form of paganism at all, and indeed rejected the pagan gods with disgust, either as evil demons or as altogether

[48] 5.1.63
[49] G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy.* eds. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[50] Note, in martyrologies it is commands to sacrifice *to the gods* which are problematic and rejected. Fewer martyr-acts involve actual *emperor worship* (most notably that of Polycarp).

non-existent and invented."[51] Pagans feared the displeasure of their own gods and Christian refusal to recognize the gods was cause for concern. The pagans "were naturally apprehensive that the gods would vent their wrath at this dishonour not upon the Christians alone but upon the whole community; and when disasters did occur, they were only too likely to fasten the blame on to the Christians."[52] Indeed, in *MLyons* the author notes the vehemence with which the pagans tried to force the Christians to sacrifice: "…they had been brought every day to witness the sufferings of the others, and had been pressed to swear by the idols. But because they remained steadfast and despised them, the multitude became furious,".[53] Even still the Christians were pressured to sacrifice.

The author of *MLyons* highlights this conflict between the 'old gods' and the 'new God' of the Christians. There are mentions in the text of concern for pagan gods, and the compulsion felt to 'avenge' their gods.[54] The final scene in which the pagan persecutors burn and dispose of the bodies of the martyrs indicates a concern for theological victory as well. While mocking the Christians attempt to retrieve the bodies of their executed brethren, the author notes that the pagans were "magnifying their own idols," and suggests that this was seen as a victory of the traditional Roman beliefs over the new *superstitio* of the Christians.[55]

[51] de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy,* 5.
[52] de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy,* 15.
[53] *EH*, 5.1.53-54
[54] 5.1.31
[55] 5.1.60

Dating

The Christian community in Lyons and Vienne was likely composed of or founded by new immigrants from the Eastern Empire (likely from Asia-minor), as evidenced by the opening address of the text. The date of 177 CE is almost universally accepted as authentic. Indeed, our *acta martyrum* is considered amongst the few authentic pre-Decian acta.[56] According to Barnes, there are nine pre-Decian *acta* which are widely accepted as authentic, however, he establishes only six as authentic and contemporary (written by eyewitnesses).[57] *MLyons* has been referred to throughout as a martyrology and as a martyr-act. These two terms have been used interchangeably thus far and will be throughout.

In a strict sense martyr-acts are marked by legal themes.[58] The *acta* typically represent legal proceedings before the proconsul and frequently reproduce the examinations. The inclusion of the legal proceedings was central to function of the text. Executions served to demonstrate the power of the state, enforced upon condemned. The trial, however, was a "contest about truth".[59] In the legal proceedings of the courtroom the accused was granted equal standing with the authorities as s/he was afforded the opportunity to argue the validity of his/her position. Martyr-acts are imbued with apologetic devices and potential. Other marytrological texts such as as passions and *martyria* traditionally give an account of the last days and deaths of the

[56] T. D. Barnes, "Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum", *Journal of Theological Studies*, xix (1968), 510.
[57] Barnes, "Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum", 528. The six authentic acta are: *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*; *The Martyrdoms of Ptolemaeus and Lucius*; *The Acts of Justin and his Companions*; *The Martyrs of Lugdunum* (*i.e. Lyons*); *The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*; *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*.
[58] J. Bridge "Acts of the Martyrs". in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved July 9, 2010 from New Advent: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09742b.htm)
[59] David Potter "Martyrdom as Spectacle" ed. Ruth Scodel, in *Theatre and Society in the Classical World*, (Ann Arbour, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 54.

martyrs, usually marked by a theological interpretation.[60] A further subgroup is that of legends, so-called 'pious fantasy' which are at the origin of the later hagiographic literature of the fourth and subsequent centuries.[61]

There have been two serious questionings of the date, although neither questioned the authenticity of the document. The first by James Westfall Thompson can be disregarded. He suggests a 3rd-century dating to the reign of Aurelian. However, his argument is primarily based on reading similar to what we would expect of Eusebius which contests that Marcus Aurelius was not a 'bad' emperor and could not have persecuted Christians.[62] However, Thompson was right in stating that "the weight of Eusebius' mere authority and his great reputation for learning, backed by inert tradition, have for centuries borne down criticism and led to a too uncritical acceptance of him,".[63] This critique must be appreciated. It is only in the last century that Eusebius' competency as a historian has been questioned. The second argument transfers the persecution to Galatia disregarding many of the linguistic features of the text.[64] However, there is no reason to question the veracity of the document as the text "clearly preserves the testimony of eye-witnesses".[65]

Both rejections depend upon a severe criticism of Eusebius' skills as a historian. In the last century and a half, Eusebian scholarship has transitioned from the blind acceptance questioned by Westfall Thompson, to occasional dismissal and finally to

[60] Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A comprehensive introduction*. Trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann, (Peabody Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 92.
[61] Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 92.
[62] James Westfall Thompson, "The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177" *The American Journal of Theology*, 16.3, (1912), 361.
[63] James Westfall Thompson, "The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177: A Reply to Certain Criticisms." *The American Journal of Theology*, 17.2, (1913), 259.
[64] Barnes, "Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum", 517.
[65] Barnes, "Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum", 517.

furious critique. At the end of the nineteenth century Eusebius was being occasionally denounced and condemned as "the first thoroughly dishonest historian of antiquity."[66] In the twentieth century these few dissenting voices have become dominant. No longer the authoritative first historian of the church, Eusebius has been characterized as, "a political propagandist, a good courtier, the shrewd and worldly adviser of the Emperor Constantine, the great publicist of the first Christian emperor, the first in a long succession of ecclesiastical politicians, the herald of Byzantinism, a political theologian, a political metaphysician, and a caesaropapist."[67] Many of these are perhaps cruelly accurate characterizations of Eusebius and there is no denying that there is a certain amount of 'flux' present in his historical works.[68] While the historiographic method of Eusebius will be taken up in a subsequent chapter, it must be noted that he was not above redacting his 'complete' history of the Christian church if it proved politically sage. The *Chronicle* of Eusebius and the *Martyrs of Palestine* must also be mentioned as they contributed to the structure and content of *EH*.

Authorship

Despite the questioning of Eusebius himself, there has been limited debate over the validity of *MLyons*. Accepted as an authentic second-century epistle, questions as to the origin of this text are salient. The date of 177 CE has been accepted for its composition.

[66] "*Er [Eusebius] ist aber der erste durch and durch unredliche Geschichtsschreiber des Altertums. Seine Taktik ...bestand darin, den ersten Beschiitzer der Kirche umjeden Preis zu einem Ideal fuirkiinftige Fuirstenzu machen*"; Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Constantins des Grosen*, 2d ed. (Leipzig: Kessinger Publishing, 1880), pp. 334-335, quoted in Michael J. Hollerich "Religion and Politics in the Writings of Eusebius: Reassessing the first court theologian" *Church History*, 59.3 (1990), 309.
[67] Hollerich, "Religion and Politics in the Writings of Eusebius", 309.
[68] Note, The historiographic method of Eusebius will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. The *Chronicle* of Eusebius and the *Martyrs of Palestine* will also be briefly mentioned as they contributed to the structure and content of *EH*.

Eusebius introduces the text as a letter sent from the surviving members of the churches of Lyons and Vienne to churches in Asia and Phrygia.[69] Following this brief introduction he notes, "I will give their own words".[70] There is no reason to doubt Eusebius' honesty here.

As to the original author of the text there are two opinions. The first and most widely accepted, suggests that *MLyons* is an example of epistolary literature similar to the earliest surviving martyrology, namely that attributed to Polycarp. As an epistle it was likely written collectively, with no individual author cited.[71] The second theory posits that Irenaeus is in fact the author of *MLyons*, asserted by Henri Valois (Valesius) in fifteenth century.[72]

Irenaeus succeeded Pothinus in the bishopric of Lyons following the persecution and is well known for his work *Adversus Haereses,* a polemic aimed at disproving Gnosticism and establishing doctrinal orthodoxy. Irenaeus was likely born of non-Hellenic origins; however, his place and date of birth remain uncertain. There is substantial disagreement on dating his birth with estimates ranging from 98 CE to 120 CE to 147 CE.[73] The most commonly accepted dating places his birth between 130 CE and 140 CE, although some suggest this dating may make him too young for the episcopate of Lyons in 177 CE.[74] The main argument for an Irenaean authorship is dependent upon literary similarities between a panegyric on peace in the subsequent

[69] *EH*, 5.1.2
[70] 5.1.2
[71] Dehandschutter, "A Community of Martyrs", 4.
[72] ftn. 1352, *EH* (Vol. II).
[73] Eric Osborn. *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.
[74] See: Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* and Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London/New York: Routledge, 1997).

chapter,[75] and a letter written by Irenaeus to Victor of Rome.[76] Many of the literary stylings and word choices are similar to those employed by the author of *The Martyrs, beloved of God, kindly ministered unto those who fell in the Persecution*. Furthermore, Irenaeus was the bishop of Lyons following the persecution, however, there is not concrete evidence to indicate he was the anonymous author of *MLyons*.

If Irenaeus was the author of *MLyons,* it is fairly likely that Eusebius would have been aware of this fact. Yet he remains silent, attributing the authorship only to "the servants of Christ residing at Vienne and Lyons, in Gaul… who hold the same faith and hope of redemption, peace and grace and glory from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."[77] Elsewhere Eusebius tells us that he has taken the text from his *Collection of Martyrdoms*.[78] There is evidence that martyrologies in *EH* are actively presented as anonymous or attributed collectively to a church, as with the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.[79] The uniform style and thematic allusions may refer to a single editor.[80] As we are unable to convincingly argue for Irenaean authorship, *MLyons* will be considered a collective work, exemplary of early Christian epistolary literature.

[75] NOTE: Please see the discussion below of *The Martyrs, beloved of God, kindly ministered unto those who fell in the Persecution*, for more detail.: 26 ff.
[76] Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, (Michigan: Claredon Press, 1980),119.
[77] *EH*, 5.1.3
[78] 5.4.3, "For whoever desires can readily find the full account by consulting the letter itself, which, as I have said, is recorded in our Collection of Martyrdoms. Such were the events which happened under Antoninus."
[79] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, 118. Note: *EH*, 4.15.1-2, "At this time, when the greatest persecutions were exciting Asia, Polycarp ended his life by martyrdom. But I consider it most important that his death, a written account of which is still extant, should be recorded in this history. There is a letter, written in the name of the church over which he himself presided."
[80] Dehandschutter, "A Community of Martyrs", 9.

A Note On: *The Martyrs, beloved of God, kindly ministered unto those who fell in the Persecution* and *The Vision which appeared in a Dream to the Witness Attalus*

It is acknowledged that *MLyons* or, *The Number of Those Who Fought for Religion in Gaul Under Verus and the Nature of Their Conflicts* may not be the entirety of the letter cited by Eusebius. This opening chapter of Book V of *EH* is followed by two chapters expanding upon the traumatic events in Lyons and Vienne. Eusebius notes that *MLyons* details the events which happened during the persecution, however, he finds that, "It is proper to add other selections from the same letter, in which the moderation and compassion of these witnesses is recorded in the following words".[81] These two antecedent chapters will be briefly discussed, as they are presented by Eusebius as a literary unity with *MLyons*.

The Martyrs, beloved of God, kindly ministered unto those who fell in the Persecution, details the attitudes of the martyred and speaks to their character. Of interest is the refusal of the condemned to be considered witnesses or martyrs.[82] As attested by the text, the martyrs insist that only Christ and previous martyrs are worthy of the title as they themselves have not been "made perfect".[83] The primary intention of this text is to attest to the worthiness and humility of their now deceased brethren. The text speaks to their nobility, love, compassion, humbleness, and peacefulness.[84]

[81] *EH*, 5.2.1
[82] 5.2.2,"…yet they did not proclaim themselves witnesses, nor did they suffer us to address them by this name. If any one of us, in letter or conversation, spoke of them as witnesses, they rebuked him sharply".
[83] 5.2.3, "They are already witnesses whom Christ has deemed worthy to be taken up in their confession, having sealed their testimony by their departure; but we are lowly and humble confessors… they besought the brethren with tears that earnest prayers should be offered that they might be made perfect".
[84] 5.2.1-6, "…they made plain their nobility through patience and fearlessness and courage… They humbled themselves under the mighty hand, by which they are now greatly exalted… the genuineness of their love… having the compassion of a mother… Having always loved peace, and having commended

There is one element of the text germane to our investigation of Eusebius' prescriptive historiography and that is the attitude of the martyrs and the community towards those who had 'fallen' during the persecution. This refers to those who had either denied their faith, or confessed and then recanted:

> But some appeared unprepared and untrained, weak as yet, and unable to endure so great a conflict. About ten of these proved abortions, causing us great grief and sorrow beyond measure, and impairing the zeal of the others who had not yet been seized, but who, though suffering all kinds of affliction, continued constantly with the witnesses and did not forsake them. Then all of us feared greatly on account of uncertainty as to their confession; not because we dreaded the sufferings to be endured, but because we looked to the end, and were afraid that some of them might fall away.[85]

The greatest fear of the community was not of the persecution itself, but the failure of many of their brethren to make true testimony. As previously noted, those who denied are described as being punished "twice as severely as the others," and treated as murderers and criminals.[86] Many are 'reborn' and confess, and are thus able to join the true witnesses. Those who maintain their denial are described as having forever lost "the one honorable and glorious and life-giving Name."[87] As well as eulogizing the martyrs and praising their character, *The Martyrs, beloved of God, kindly ministered unto those*

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peace to us they went in peace to God, leaving no sorrow to their mother, nor division or strife to the brethren, but joy and peace and concord and love."

[85] 5.1.11-12

[86] 5.1.33

[87] 5.1.35

who fell in the Persecution underscores the forgiveness granted to the fallen.[88] The martyrs "went in peace to God, leaving no sorrow to their mother, nor division or strife to the brethren, but joy and peace and concord and love."[89] The text clearly indicates that this acceptance and compassion remained in the church, although it is unclear what became of those who 'lost the Name'.

The second text we must address composes the third chapter of Book V of the *Ecclesiastical History*, entitled *The Vision which appeared in a Dream to the Witness Attalus*. Eusebius states that this is from the same letter and is worthy of remembrance.[90] This letter details the attempt of the ironically named ascetic Alcibiades, who attempted to maintain his same lifestyle in prison, "partaking of nothing whatever but bread and water".[91] Following his first contest in the Arena, Attalus receives a vision informing him of the struggle of Alcibiades to maintain his ascetic diet. Attalus assures Alcibiades that this is not necessary and, "Alcibiades obeyed, and partook of all things without restraint".[92] This is followed by an introduction to the Montanist controversy which had arisen in the East. There is nothing striking or relevant in this third chapter to our study, besides the prison-vision of Attalus, which is thematically reminiscent of the prison dreams of other condemned martyrs, most famously Perpetua.

Translations and editions of *The Martyrs of Lyons*, generally include only our major text, that is Chapter 1 of Book V of *EH*, although several also include Chapter 2,

[88] 5.2.6, "For they did not boast over the fallen, but helped them in their need with those things in which they themselves abounded, having the compassion of a mother, and shedding many tears on their account before the Father."
[89] 5.2.7
[90] 5.3.1, "The same letter of the above-mentioned witnesses contains another account worthy of remembrance. No one will object to our bringing it to the knowledge of our readers."
[91] 5.3.2
[92] 5.3.3

The Martyrs, beloved of God, kindly ministered unto those who fell in the Persecution.[93] Most editions elect to delete Chapter 3, as the story fits into the narrative only with difficulty.[94] Chapter 2 speaks to our interests, and Eusebius claims it is of the same origin. However, questions of its veracity remain. Additionally there are suggestions of suggestions of a later third century redaction complete with additions.[95] An ante-Decian dating would drastically alter the context of *MLyons*. *MLyons* is nearly unequivocally accepted as an authentic second-century eyewitness account of this persecution; however, this second chapter is not. It is for this reason that this second chapter is treated with caution. It is presented by Eusebius as being in literary and historical unity with *MLyons*, and thus must be considered when examining Eusebius' editorial intent and historiographical aim. It is not, however, wholly accepted as a 'continuation' of *MLyons*.

[93] See: H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), F. W. Weiddmann, "The Martyrs of Lyons" *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed R. Valantasis (Princeton, NJ/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[94] Dehandschutter, "A Community of Martyrs", 5.
[95] Dehandschutter, "A Community of Martyrs", 5.

CHAPTER II

Context: Martyrdom and Persecution

The question 'why were the Christians persecuted?' is one of the most heavily trodden areas of early Christian historical scholarship. Necessarily then, the historical context of the persecution of Lyons must be established, and the scholarly opinions on the subject explored. Martyrologies will be discussed vis-à-vis academic dialogue on the concept of martyrdom, as well as how martyrologies and martyrdoms function within the Eusebian corpus. The origins and definition of the very terms 'martyr' and 'martyrdom' will be discussed. Elizabeth Castelli asserts that martyrdom and its subsequent memorialization in martyrologies was integral for the construction of Christian identity and memory, obviously pertinent to any larger discussion of Christian historiography. The persecution of Christians did not take place in a void; it was created and supported by the *mores* of the Roman Empire. A discussion of public executions will demonstrate the way in which martyrologies combated and laid claim to the authority and structures of the Roman Empire. As the space of execution, the arena was fundamentally an assertion of the power of the Roman state. However, in the martyrological discourse the martyr is fundamentally victorious, effectively negating authority claims made by secular power. It is important to recall that Eusebius did not seek to overthrow Roman power. Martyrologies could challenge political authority. Eusebius was therefore very concerned with presenting martyrologies in a way that did not challenge secular powers.

Defining Martyrdom: Bowersock, Frend, Boyarin, Castelli

Martrydom can be understood as a visible death resulting from an ideological conflict in which the victim – in his or her own understanding – is always ultimately victorious. Martyrdom is inherently public. In order to be a martyrdom, a death had to be visible – whether in occurrence or through memorialization. As a symbolic and communicative event it requires an audience: "no early martyr was taken aside discreetly and executed out of sight."[96] Martyrdom was not simply an action or a death, it is symbolic: "martyrdom requires an audience (whether real or fictive), retelling, interpretation, and world – and meaning – making activity. Suffering violence in and of itself is not enough. In order for martyrdom to emerge, both the violence and its suffering must be infused with particular meaning."[97] Martyrdom as a public and spectacular death did not introduce anything new to the pre-existing social structures and urban life of the Roman Empire; however, martyrologies and the evolution of the concept of martyr as a religiously informed identity were critical to the construction of early Christian communities and Christian history.

In her book *Martyrdom and Memory* Elizabeth Castelli argues that martyrs are not the historical individuals executed for their commitment to Christianity. Instead, martyrs are consciously constructed ideals, produced by the matryrologies that preserve the death of the individual in question. These stories, despite their historical claims, were integral to the development of Christian identity and understandings of historical

[96] G. W. Bowersock. *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 50.
[97] Elizabeth Anne Castelli, *Martyrdom and memory: early Christian culture making* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 34.

persecution. At the heart of the conflict, she argues, is a dispute over "order and narrative, over whose sense of right relationship and justice would prevail, over whose story would dominate the cultural scene."[98] Castelli argues that martyrologies are inherently political texts and that their legacy permeates the entire Christian tradition (and subsequently the whole of Western culture), even in modern times.[99] The identification of martyrs and of an act labeled martyrdom was dependent on a ritualized reading of the structures of Imperial power.

Traditionally, there have been two polarizing perspectives on the origin of martyrdom. The first posits a Jewish origin, firmly supported by W. H. C. Frend.[100] Friend points to the books of Daniel and II Maccabees and IV Maccabees as precedents found within the Judaism. The alternate proposes a uniquely Christian origin dependent upon the institutions of the Roman Empire as articulated by G. W. Bowersock in his work *Martyrdom and Rome*. Bowersock asserts that martyrdom as it is commonly understood in Christianity was alien both to the Greeks and the Jews.[101] Bowersock rejects the Jewish origins of martyrdom as expressed by the phrase *quiddus ha-shem* (sanctification of the name), because this formula does not occur until after the

[98] Castelli, *Martyrdom and memory*, 35.
[99] Castelli, *Martyrdom and memory*, 172.
[100] Note: W. H. C. Frend in *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) cites the books of Daniel and II and IV Maccabees as evidence within Judaism for prototypical martyrs. The narrative descriptions of the deaths of Eleazar and the nameless mother and her seven sons are exemplary. In support of such a position it is clear that early martyrologies were interpreted in a framework at least supported if not inspired by biblical texts. Further supporting this position is the suggestion of resurrection presented by these three biblical texts. IV Maccabees 9:22 in describing the death of the tortured eldest son states that he was transformed by the fire "into immortality". Furthermore, there are narrative elements of martyrologies which bear similarities to those present in biblical texts such as the attribution of prophetic visions to the condemned prior to the execution, miraculous endurance or temporary invulnerability of the individual, angelic radiance of the face, and the admiration of onlookers and guards and executioners (See: de Ste. Croix, 197).
[101] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome,* 8.

Tannaitic period – considerably later than our period. For Bowersock, a central argument for distinguishing the emergence of martyrdom as a phenomenon is the "kernel of authentic documentation of the legal hearing".[102] This refers to the 'trial scene' consistently found in martyr-acts. The judge (or other authority) in martyrologies is tasked with forcing the defendant to either publicly admit to the charges of which s/he was accused, or "admit, in public, that he should submit to the dictates of society and honor society's gods as well as his own. Failure in either case was a defeat."[103] It is difficult to imagine the Christian martyrdom tradition without the public, rhetorical confrontations between the authorities and the accused Christian. Bowersock asserted that nascent Christianity 'owed' its martyrs to the mores and structure of the Roman Empire. For Bowersock, without the institutions of the Empire martyrdom was inconceivable.

More recently, Daniel Boyarin in his book *Dying for God* has suggested that the boundaries between Jew and Christian are far too indistinct and fluid to establish a fixed origin for martyrdom. He rejects the invention of martyrdom as evidence for Christian influence on Judaism or Jewish influence on emergent Christianity. Instead this 'invention' of martyrdom can be read as "evidence for the close contact and impossibility of drawing sharp and absolute distinctions between these communities or their discourses throughout this period."[104] It would be foolish to suggest that the concept of martyrdom evolved separately from the biblical tradition and literature out of

[102] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 27.
[103] Potter, "Martyrdom as Spectacle", 54.
[104] Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 8.

which Christianity evolved. It is nonetheless important to acknowledge Bowersock's claims, as it is inconceivable to consider early Christian martyrdoms apart from the pagan noble death tradition, the legal institutions of the Roman Empire, and public forums such as the arena. While acknowledging the challenges drawn out by Frend owing to the nature of the text in question the understanding of martyrdom presented by this paper has emerged from the 'Bowersock camp', with a nod to Boyarin. This dissertation is primarily focussed on addressing the interactions of martyrdom with the Roman Empire.

Why were the early Christians persecuted?

The 'historical' aspects of martyrdom must also be explored. The central question here is one which has dominated the study of early Christianity: why were the early Christians persecuted?

The foundational text for the study of early Christian persecutions is the correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the Emperor Trajan. Pliny was governor of Pontus and Bithynia until his death c. 112/113 CE. Pliny wrote to Trajan to request guidance on the issue of the Christians. Pliny had "never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent." [105] This text has been taken as indicative of the official Roman attitude and practice toward the Christians until the start of 'official' persecutions. The conclusion reached is that Christians are not to be sought out;

[105] Pliny the Younger, *The Letters of the younger Pliny.* Trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin Classics, 1969), 10.96-97.

however, if they are denounced and confess they are to be punished. However, those who deny and prove it "by worshiping our gods," will be given "pardon through repentance."[106] The debate between Sherwin-White and de Ste. Croix centres on this text and will be discussed below as it is a foundational debate in academic circles and informs our understanding of the historical precedent for the persecution at Lyons.

In "The Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again" Sherwin-White initially suggested that prior to the Decian edicts, Christians were specifically punished for their *contumacia* ('excessive obstinacy') and refusal to acknowledge or sanction official requests.[107] The 'sacrifice test' was a reasonable request and its refusal revealed *contumacia* which was a legitimate legal charge. The charges of *flagitia* were negligible, as they are rejected in Pliny's letter.[108] As for the religious aspects (rejection of the traditional gods, cult of the emperor, civic rituals, etc), Sherwin-White concluded that, "the Roman official is indifferent to the religious aspects in the known cases, provided that the Christian sheds his *contumacia.*"[109] In sum, the Christians were not persecuted for the name of Christian (*nomen*) nor for their past crimes (*flagitia*) so long as they would respect of the command of the governor and offer sacrifice. Christians,

[106] Pliny, *The Letters of the younger Pliny*, 10.96-97.
[107] A. N. Sherwin-White, "Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again," *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. III, (1952), 210.
[108] Pliny, *The Letters of the younger Pliny,* 10.96-97, "The sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food....I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition."
[109] Sherwin-White, "Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again" 211.

therefore, were persecuted "on the basis of gubernatorial discretion, not imperial edict," and were condemned on the basis of their *contumacia*.[110]

Despite his stated respect for Sherwin-White as a scholar of Roman law, these arguments failed to convince G. E. M. de Ste. Croix. His primary point of disagreement was over the sacrifice test. Pliny offered the sacrifice test to those who denied being Christians – effectively a test of their sincerity.[111] It is true that in later persecutions accused Christians were ordered to sacrifice; however, this is only after the actual trial had begun. There is no evidence from Pliny's correspondence that he ever asked "any self-confessed Christians to sacrifice," and that a refusal of this command would merit arrest and interrogation.[112] While *contumacia* might provoke the ire of a governor during the legal proceedings (as seen in *MLyons*) it was unlikely to be original charge for which the accused Christians were initially questioned. Therefore, the question needed to be reframed. De Ste. Croix sought to establish what the original cause of arrest was, and what the initial legal basis was for persecuting the Christians. Before being 'tested' there needed to be some grounds or cause for arrest. He believed that Christians had been persecuted for 'the name' beginning either in 64 CE with the fire of Rome, or at some point between 64 CE and 112 CE. However, he noted that this was not a legal charge in itself. He concludes that under the *congnitio* process of Roman law, "no foundation was necessary, other than a prosecutor, a charge of Christianity,

[110] Wayne C. Kannaday. *Apologetic discourse and the scribal tradition: evidence of the influence of apolgetic interests on the text of the canonical gospels.*(Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 202.
[111] de Ste Croix, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 125.
[112] de Ste Croix, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 125.

and a governor willing to punish on that charge."[113] Why the Christians were originally arrested remained contentious.

Sherwin-White asserted that it was the *contumacia* (or obstinacy) of the Christians which led to their arrest. De Ste. Croix argued, that this could not be the basis for arrest as *contumacia* could only be established once the Christians were in the custody of the authorities. It could not be the 'Oedipean intercourse or Thyestean banquets' – *flagitia* for which the Christians could be arrested since Pliny's correspondence indicates that it was known even by the early second century that these charges held little merit. The charges could not have been taken too seriously by the Roman authorities as de Ste. Croix coyly noted, "you do not pardon the cannibals simply because they tear up their membership cards of the Cannibals club."[114] While it could have been effective in stirring up anti-Christian sentiment and a concern to the less educated members of Roman society, it was likely not the driving force behind the arrests of Christians. De Ste. Croix concludes that it was not anything 'positive' about the Christians that aroused the fury of their neighbours – namely their beliefs, practices, etc – rather, it was the negative: "their total refusal to worship any god but their own. The monotheistic exclusiveness of the Christians was believed to alienate the goodwill of the gods, to endanger what the Romans called the *pax deorum* (the right harmonious

[113] de Ste Croix, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 123. For an expansion on the particulars of Roman Law see Sherwin-White, *Persecution and Roman Law Again*, which even de Ste. Croix acknowledges as "by far the best introduction to the study of the legal aspects of the early persecutions" (118), and ftn. 100.
[114] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", *Past and Present*, Vol. 27.1, (1964), 31.

relationship between gods and men), and to be responsible for disasters which overtook the community."[115] This exclusive monotheism was incomprehensible to the Romans.

De Ste. Croix rightly credits the 'great mass of the population of the Roman Empire' with possession of genuine religious feeling.[116] No official compulsion or command to participate in civic religion had previously been necessary because "until the advent of Christianity no one ever had any reason for refusing to take part in the ceremonies which others observed."[117] It was easy to suppose that the new *superstitio* of the Christians could be the cause of disaster and calamity. Roman state religion was public and very much a 'community affair'. If the *pax deorum* was unbalanced the gods might vent their wrath "not upon the Christians alone but upon the whole community".[118] An infamous quote from Tertullian's *Apology* may be used illustrates the main point:

> …they think the Christians the cause of every public disaster, of every affliction with which the people are visited. If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is famine or pestilence, straightway the cry is, 'Away with the Christians to the lion!'.[119]

[115] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 133-34.
[116] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 134.
[117] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 135. Note, excluding the Jews who were a special case. Exceptions were made for the Jewish residents of the Empire, as despite the existence of anti-Jewish sentiment, their religion was respected as ancestral and ancient. The Jews were seen as respecting the religion of their ancestors, while the Christians were seen as rejecting it.
[118] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 136.
[119] Tertullian, *Apology*, (ed. Menzies, trans. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3), Ch. 40.1-2.

No attempt was ever made to prevent the Christians from privately and personally worshipping their own God (although later Valerian and Diocletian forbade communal worship); it was rather the refusal to countenance any other deity that alienated the Christians from their neighbours. De Ste. Croix underscores the different treatment offered to Gnostic and 'orthodox' Christians, for it was owing to their willingness publicly to respect the pagan gods that the Gnostics were free from persecution.[120]

Sherwin-White at once responded to de Ste. Croix, affirming his treatment of the question; however, he accused de Ste. Croix of working 'backward historically': de Ste. Croix' central argument, that of godlessness or religious exclusivism, was dependent upon later sources, following the reign of Marcus Aurelius. As stated by Sherwin-White,

> the belief that "godlessness" was the core of the matter depends entirely upon the evidence of the later period, which is drawn not from Roman or official sources, but from the Christian "apologies" and the early martyr-acts, composed from a Christian view-point, though sometimes written in the format of a Roman court-record.[121]

Sherwin-White instead proposed to focus on the sources found in Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius. He underscored that, "in all three the only ground indicated for the proscription of the cult is its association with crimes and immoralities — *flagitia,*

[120] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 140.
[121] A. N. Sherwin-White, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - An Amendment" *Past and Present*, Vol. 27.1, (1964), 23.

scelera, malficia."[122] Furthermore, he alleged that despite his full treatment of the issue de Ste. Coix did not allow for "change and development in the attitude of the government to the Christians, as it learned more about them in the very long period of over 180 years which the intermittent lesser persecutions covered."[123] Sherwin-White's *contumacia* theory was intended to explain the change that took place which led to the transition from charges of *flagitia* to those of godlessness which marked later trials and persecutions.[124] Sherwin-White also asserts that the treatment of the Christian *superstitio* was comparable to, and based on precedents set by other 'mystery-cults' which had arisen periodically within the Roman Empire.[125]

Unfortunately, the clarifications by Sherwin-White failed to satisfy de Ste. Croix on a number of points. De Ste. Croix remained unconvinced by Sherwin-White's arguments in regards to *contumacia*, and was skeptical whether "sheer disobedience, as such, was ever a ground for the judicial condemnation of Christians."[126] He also rejected Sherwin-White's exploration of the Roman treatment of national or mystery cults. He discussed the suppression/persecution of the Bacchanalia cult in 186 BCE, in which the cult was persecuted for committing *flagitia;* however, the cult was never made altogether illegal, only temporarily sanctioned.[127] In his opinion, the actions taken by the Roman authorities contrast "strongly with the permanent ban on the mere

[122] Sherwin-White, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - An Amendment", 23. Pliny, *The Letters of the younger Pliny*, 10.96; Tacitus, *Annales,* (trans. Alfred John Church; William Jackson Brodribb; Moses Hadas, *The complete works of Tacitus*. New York, New York: Modern Library, 1942) 15. 44. 3-4, 8; Suetonius, *Nero* (*The Twelve Caesars*. London: Penguin Classics, 1957)*,* 16. 2.
[123] Sherwin-White, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - An Amendment"*,* 24.
[124] Sherwin-White, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - An Amendment", 25.
[125] Sherwin-White, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - An Amendment", 24.
[126] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 28.
[127] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 33.

profession of Christianity.*"*[128] The Baccanalian cult was also actually charged with a nd punished for *flagitia*. Furthermore, the sanction on the Bacchic cult was short-lived, as it was later freely tolerated.

De Ste. Croix believed that in both Pliny and Tacitus there was textual evidence that Christians could be condemned and punished merely on the basis of 'the Name*'*. He asserted that Trajan "betraying no surprise at the absence of *flagitia*, explicitly gave his official approval."[129] Trajan and Pliny were both willing to grant clemency to the apostates by accepting the sacrifice test. This, de Ste. Croix claimed, was another proof that the *flagitia* were not the crucial element. Rather, it was "having the *superstitio* which *made* the Christians dangerous, and *abandoning the superstitio* removed the cause of offense: get them to give up Christianity, and the likelihood of their wanting to go in for *flagitia* would disappear."[130] *Flagitia* was only influential in as much that the government might on occasion give into the demands of the populace to persecute.

De Ste. Croix's interpretation has proven dominant and has constituted the 'mainstream of discourse on the subject'.[131] Barnes attempted a new treatment of the question by searching for evidence of legislation against the Christians prior to 250 CE and the Decian persecution. Despite an "analytical trek through source references to emperors – among them Tiberius, Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, Septimus Severus, and Maximin – and what he

[128] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 33.
[129] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 31.
[130] de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? - A Rejoinder", 31. 'Wanting to go in for *flagitio'* is here referring to the phenomenon of voluntary martyrdom which marked the second and third centuries and will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter.
[131] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse,* 204.

considered the most reliable of martyr accounts produced little fruit,"[132] he concluded that until the official persecution by Decian, Trajan's prescript to Pliny remained the legal position of Christians within the Empire.[133]

With de Ste. Croix accepted as authoritative, we may turn to the persecution at Lyons which, as we have noted, must be treated with suspicion. It is clear that the pogrom in Gaul represents a break from the 'Rule of Trajan'. Indeed, in Lyons the Christians are actively sought out. Furthermore, it appears that the accused were charged with and punished on the grounds of the *flagitia*, the incest and cannibalism accused by the slaves.[134] Interestingly, even those who denied are still punished for the *flagitia.* The sacrifice test was typically offered as a test of sincerity of those who denied. The punishment of Christian apostates indicates another break from the traditional policy. Judicial torture had become more prevalent throughout the Roman Empire by the time of Marcus Aurelius, and was applied in most criminal trials regardless of citizenship or lack thereof.[135] It is clear that by the late second century the sacrifice test was something which was enforced (usually with the aid of torture) rather than available as a privilege; however, there is no reason to think that once an individual had performed the sacrifice that they were to be executed. As Tertullian noted, "you do not in that case deal with us in the ordinary way of judicial proceedings against offenders; for, in the case of others denying, you apply the torture to make them

[132] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 205.
[133] T. D. Barnes, "Legislation Against the Christians", *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 58.1-2, (1968), 48.
[134] *EH*, 5.1.15
[135] Ramsay MacMullen. *Christianizing the Roman Empire: AD 100 – 400* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986), 208.

confess— Christians alone you torture, to make them deny."[136] In sum, the intent of Roman policy was "to make apostates, not martyrs."[137] In Lyons, however, this was not the case. It was the *flagitia* which enraged the populace, however, it was their godlessness which they sought to defeat.[138] While 'Rule of Trajan' was principally in effect, it evidently could be disregarded. In Lyons, the apostates who had sacrificed to avoid death suffered the same treatment and imprisonment as those who confessed and refused sacrifice.

While the persecution in Lyons is atypical by comparison, the text presents many of its own reasons for the persecution. The religious undertones which mark the pagan response to the Christians and their executions have already been noted. De Ste. Croix emphasizes the religious concerns of the pagans, which are evident in our text.[139] Following the Lyonnais investigation, it becomes clear that the populace was quite worked up over the Christians in their midst, which is legitimate when taking de Ste. Croix' articulation of the importance of the *pax deorum* into account. The late second century was marked by plague, invasion, and disaster. The author of *MLyons* is clear to underscore the mistaken pagan belief in the *flagitia* of the Christians alongside the actual Christian innocence. Furthermore, the unusual harshness of the governor – condemning apostates, and executing Roman citizens by the beasts – is asserted, as is the importance of the sacrifice test to the authorities. The persecution in Lyons was

[136] Tertullian, *Apology*, 2.20
[137] de Ste. Croix, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 128.
[138] *EH*, 5.1.14
[139] de Ste. Croix, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 127.

furthermore a very public punishment of the Christians. If the governor acted to satisfy the public demand and opinion, then such punishment needed to be visible.

Excursus: *Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate* – An explanation for the persecution at Lyons in 177?

Given the local nature of the conflict of 177 CE the cause of this mass persecution has been questioned. While the *pax deorum* is the traditional reason asserted, there have also been alternative theories proposed, most notably that of James Oliver and Robert Palmer in their article "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate". In this article they have reconstructed and translated minutes of an act of the Roman Senate that detail an *acta urbis,* which served as communication or *commentarii,* of an *acta senatus*.[140] Prior to Marcus Aurelius the publication and distribution of important legislation, senatorial, or imperial clarifications was not common. The expense of engraving these *acta* alone was reason enough. The minutes reconstructed within this article are of particular historical note owing to the wide distribution of the engraved fragments of these minutes.[141] Furthermore, there are no remaining Gallic fragments of the minutes, so particular geographic interest cannot be the cause. The peculiarity of these minutes is highlighted by the authors, as there was no precedent for engraving and distributing the very minutes of an act of the senate; however, subsequently it became more common.

[140] James Oliver and Robert E. A. Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate" *Hesperia*, Vol. 24.4 (1955), 320.
[141] The authors note that the fragments are from provinces as distant as Baetica and Asia. Oliver and Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 321.

The minutes detail a special opportunity for imperial priests to obtain prisoners condemned to death to be used in the place of gladiators at a lowered cost. A prominent spokesperson had come from Gaul to argue for lowered costs for gladiators due to the expense of public spectacles and requested that these prices must apply "to those states in which the prices of gladiators have been flagrantly high".[142] The section of most interest to those examining the persecution in Lyons is reproduced below:

> As for the Gallic provinces, (the same limits on pries for gladiators apply). But also for *trinqui*, who because of an ancient custom of sacred ritual are eagerly awaited in the states of the most glorious Gallic provinces, let the *lanistae* not charge a higher price than 2,000 seserces apiece, since their Majesties the Emperors have announced in their oration that the policy will be for a procurator of theirs to hand over to the *lanistae* at a price of not more than six gold pieces a man who has been condemned to death.[143]

Lanistea or *lanista* was the word for the trainer or coordinator of a group of *gregarii* - gladiators who did not traditionally fight in single combat, but rather in a group. It has been suggested, although by no means with certainty, that *trinqui* is a Gallic word with religious undertones indicative of some sort of human sacrificial victims.[144]

According to the authors "Why this official persecution or prosecution of the Christians should have broken out under the mild but tired Marcus Aurelius precisely in

[142] *Text of the Aes Italicense*, trans. by James H. Oliver and Robert E. A. Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 1.46.
[143] *Text of the Aes Italicense*, trans. by James H. Oliver and Robert E. A. Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 1.46.
[144] Oliver and Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 326.

AD 177 and why it occurred precisely at Lyons have never been satisfactorily explained by others."[145] Palmer and Oliver highlight three important elements of *MLyons* that must be considered alongside these minutes:

1. The martyrs killed in 177 CE were executed at a festival of the Three Gauls, with imperial permission.[146]

2. The Christians were substituted for gladiators.[147]

3. There are elements in *MLyons* which suggest there was some sort of cultic or religious sacrificial rite involved in the public execution of the Christians.[148]

Oliver and Palmer suggest that in place of these voluntary sacrificial victims (the *trinqui*) condemned prisoners were used. A condemned prisoner could be obtained for six gold pieces and sold to priests for 2,000 sesterii.[149] The minutes record elsewhere that the cheapest gladiator was 3,000 sesterii to obtain.[150] Oliver and Palmer suggest that the Christians were killed at the festival of the Three Gauls just as *trinqui* would have been; exposed to the beasts, either for execution or combat, and executed in some sort of ritualized or sacrificial exercise, just as the *trinqui* would have been.[151] They conclude from the minutes and from *MLyons* that the Christians were killed in place of *trinqui* at the festival of the Three Gauls. Thus, in Lyons it is suggested that the

[145] Oliver and Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 324.
[146] *EH*, 5.1.47
[147] 5.1.40
[148] 5.1.40, 5.1.53
[149] Oliver and Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 337.
[150] Oliver and Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 341.
[151] Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 250.

Christians were conveniently arrested due to the shortage of prisoners, the expense of purchasing *gregarii*, and the demand for *trinqui* for the festival of the Three Gauls.

Pragmatically and economically, one can posit reasons for these gladiatorial 'discounts'. This period of Marcus Aurelius' reign was marked by pestilence, floods, and barbarian attacks.[152] The three provinces of Gaul supported the German provinces, which subsequently protected the Roman Empire against barbarian attacks, effectively acting as a buffer to both invasion and infiltration.[153] The loyalty of Gaul was thus integral to the Empire's security, and invasions had begun again in 167 CE, and in 170 CE barbarians had invaded Gallia Belgica.[154] Coupled with raids in Spain and the revolts in 175 CE of Syria and Egypt, the human and financial support of Gaul was welcome and increasingly necessary. Grand celebrations and *munera* treated the population to spectacles, affirming the superiority and generosity of the empire and the emperor. The lowly priced 'gladiators' would likely have been welcomed by influential landowners in Gaul.

T. D. Barnes rejects the assertions of Oliver and Palmer noting a key point: "unfortunately for these theorists, the letter of the Gallic churches depicts the Christians as being executed by the governor alone and does not so much as mention the priests of the imperial cult…. Hence no temporal relationship between the two can be established."[155] Furthermore, the minutes themselves make no mention of or allusion to

[152] Oliver and Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 327.
[153] Oliver and Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 326.
[154] Oliver and Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate", 326.
[155] T. D. Barnes, *Early Christianity and the Roman Empire* (London: Vaiorum, 1984), 519.

Christians; and *MLyons* makes no mention of this piece of legislation, which was evidently announced and distributed throughout the Empire.

Eusebius was not above eliminating or ignoring instances of history that disturbed his vision or his chronology, so it is possible that he might have purposefully eliminated mention of such legislation. Eusebius preferred to portray Marcus Aurelius as one of the 'good' emperors. However, without acknowledgement by another source, which specifically mentions the Christians, these *acta* cannot be considered sole cause of the persecution. Although such legislation, coupled with upheaval and insecurity, and the upcoming grand festival of the Three Gauls could have provided the situation in which the Christians were persecuted, however, this act of the Roman Senate did not cause the persecution. While these *acta* certainly could have enabled the hosts of the festival to use convicted criminals as spectacles during the games, it did not suggest that they root out Christians to convict. There was a fundamental and preexisting reason as to why the Christians appear to have been singled out and persecuted in 177 CE. The upheaval within the Empire may have caused many to question the *pax deorum* and convinced them that "the old gods had been alienated by neglect."[156] Under such circumstances it is possible that "the attitude of the Christians became more noticeable and offensive." [157] As evidenced by *MLyons* the pagan inhabitants of Lyons knew the Christian population, evidently even individually.[158] While perhaps the more simplistic argument, the upheaval and disasters that marked the Empire during this period coupled with a known and visible minority refusing to participate in civic rites, a 'cleansing'

[156] Barnes, *Early Christianity and the Roman Empire*, 327.
[157] Barnes, *Early Christianity and the Roman Empire*, 327.
[158] *EH*, 5.1.5, 5.1.31

aimed at reaffirming the *pax deorum*, is a more plausible case to argue for the occasion of this persecution.

Symbolic Deaths: Roman Power vs. Christian Reconceptulization

The spectacle of martyrdom existed within the established Roman framework for public executions. An execution served to reinforce the power of the state.[159] Executions were public and they were violent. Christianity functioned within the pre-existing social order that shaped it: "it ran its course in the great urban spaces of the agora and the amphitheatre, the principal settings for public discourse and for public spectacle."[160] Public executions in late antiquity served complex purposes. Underlying Roman capital punishment was the retributive basis of penal practice. Through criminal action one could injure a community and society at large. In the most extreme cases, when punishment was to be capital, the condemned were viewed as having a debt to society. While 'paying one's debt to society' still has contemporary resonance, in the Roman Empire this debt was paid not through incarceration or corrective practices, but through public entertainment. Criminal executions provided the 'man power' for the *munera* of the Roman Empire.

In the Roman Empire there was a transition which occurred between the second and the fourth centuries. Prior to 200 CE, there were seventeen offenses deemed capital for a myriad of offenses such as: arson, parricide, attacks on the emperor, cattle-rustling, slave offenses (pretending to be a citizen, enrolling in the army, being a traitor in a time

[159] Potter,"Martyrdom as Spectacle", 54.
[160] Tripp York, *The Purple Crown: the Politics of Martyrdom* (Scottdale/Waterloo: Herald Press, 2007), quoting Engin Isin, 17.

of war), and poisoning.[161] By the end of Constantine's reign the number of capital crimes has risen to above sixty.[162] Earlier this 'judicial savagery' has been restrained to the *humiliores* and slaves, however, by the fourth century 'distinguished men' and town councilors could easily be tortured, mutilated, and/or punished. MacMullen notes that such a change cannot be attributed to a singular cause. He does note, however, that there was increasing distance between "the men who ordered and the men who suffered violence...as men were distanced from each other, they might try to bend others to their will with even greater ferocity; for they could not imagine themselves ever having to suffer what they inflicted on their inferiors."[163] There are two important notions to be drawn from such a statement. Firstly, judicial action was an assertion of power. Once an individual was condemned s/he lost any standing and became wholly inferior.[164] Secondly, from the second to fourth century (our period of interest), there was a gradual distancing of the emperor and the elites from the average and lower class members of the Empire. This gap continued to grow, as did the gap between the Emperor and 'everyone else'.[165]

Crucial to understanding the Roman penal system and capital punishment was the distinction made between the different statuses of the offenders, distinguished as

[161] MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 205.
[162] MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 213.
[163] MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 215.
[164] Surviving mosaics which depict executions and games often feature *damnatii* who are clearly intended to look alien and foreign(Castelli, *Martyrdom and memory,*111). This separation between the condemned and society is integral to the function of the penal punishment, as well as the games. Indeed, the condemned 'performers' were physically distanced from society by the architectural structure of the arena, placed in full view of the observers, yet always separated. The spectators identified not with the condemned criminal - the *damnatii* - but instead with those who implemented justice.
[165] MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 215.

humiliores and *honestiores*.[166] Dating back to Hadrian, within this dual judicial system the *humiliores* were separated as offenders of low status.[167] Traditionally, the *humiliores* were marginalized members of society: slaves, foreigners, bandits, and prisoners of war. The punishments of *humiliores* are those derived from punishments deemed appropriate for slaves. It is evident from martyrologies that many Christians appear to have been executed as *humiliores*. This distinction between the *honestiores* and the *humiliores* underscores the opinion that "long-drawn-out agony culminating in death was suitable for slaves and other persons without *dignitas*; hence to humiliate and degrade them physically did not offend against any notions of propriety and was, indeed, part of the punishment."[168] The deterrent effect of such executions was confounded by Christian martyrs who in many cases behaved at their deaths in a manner reminiscent of noble Stoic sages.

Public execution was a ritualized display and reinforcement of Imperial power. While this ritual is primarily judicial, it cannot be separated from the religious, whether pagan or Christian. Attesting to the significance of religion to the pagan audience is the tradition in which the *damnatii* were dressed as gods and heroes.[169] In the Roman Empire, "...a society where mythology was the cultural currency, the ritual events of ordinary life might naturally be set in a mythological context... to put it more broadly, Greco-Roman mythology provided an all-encompassing frame of reference for

[166] MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 208.
[167] K. M. Coleman, "Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments", *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 80, (1990), 55. MacMullen notes that the judicial rights of the *honestories* were gradually degraded over the course of time, until they too were liable to be punished by torture or humiliating execution for crimes committed.
[168] Coleman, "Fatal Charades", 57.
[169] Coleman has aptly termed this phenomenon 'fatal charades'.

everyday Roman experience."[170] The *munera* became staging areas for the reenactment of myth and legend, as well as places of death and execution. As the Empire was blessed and sanctioned by her gods the arena thus became a staging area for appointed human agents to mete out punishment and justice using power granted to them by the gods. Christianity and its confounding martyrs further saturated the arena with cosmic and religious significance.

The Arena

As a ritual space, the Roman arena was a place of contest, athleticism, and of execution. The arena was a place for asserting the judicial, military, political, and religious institutions of the Empire and it must also be understood in terms of "the logic of imperial interests."[171] For the Imperial authorities, the arena's spectacles were "staged as ritual performance and as public entertainment...simultaneously acts of raw violence, gestures toward collective catharsis, and enactments of public power."[172] For the audience, the arena served to reinforce the power of the Empire. Roman state religion was inherently political, and thus public. Capital punishment was equally public. As noted earlier, no early martyr was ever taken aside and executed discreetly.[173]

The arena served to enforce justice and the boundaries and hierarchies of society. However, martyrdoms and martyrologists reconceptualized the arena in such a way that it became a place of spiritual contest and of victory. *MLyons* clearly utilizes the

[170] Coleman, "Fatal Charades", 67.
[171] Castelli, *Martyrdom and memory,* 111.
[172] Castelli, *Martyrdom and memory*, 111.
[173] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 51. See pg.

language of contest and athleticism that was used by Christian and pagan authors alike. "Both Maturus and Sanctus passed again through every torment in the amphitheater, as if they had suffered nothing before, or rather, as if, having already conquered their antagonist in many contests, they were now striving for the crown itself."[174] This reconceptualization of criminal executions as a glorified death can be understood as a ritualized form of memory making as "Christian authors recast suffering as salvation and transformed persecution into martyrdom and powerlessness into power."[175] As Castelli observes,

> to participate in the preservation of the memory of martyrdom is to enter into a discourse that lionizes suffering in its most extreme forms: suffering endured in the service of an idea and/or a communal identity; suffering undertaken willingly or, perhaps more accurately, through the sublimation of the will to that of another; suffering that requires an audience and an interpretation.[176]

The humiliating and excruciating public executions which early Christian martyrs experienced could not be understood by the remaining Christian community in the same way in which it was understood by 'outsiders'. The power of the Empire and judicial authority had to be reconceptualized.

Public executions and deaths were clearly highly charged and symbolic occurrences. Even in the executions of 'regular' criminals, the visible and dramatic

[174] *EH*, 5.1.38
[175] Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 9.
[176] Castelli, *Martyrdom and memory*, 197.

nature of the spectacle was surely impressionable. The reconceptualization of such ritualized space and events through Christian actions and literature was radical. Martyrdoms were understood as contests through which faith could be 'proved' and demonstrated before the true audience: the Christian community, and God. For Tertullian, the agent and overseer of martyrdom (and salvation) was God.[177] This understanding may be found in early Christian martyrologies such as those of Polycarp, Ignatius, the martyrs in Lyons and Viennes, and Perpetua and Felicitas. So dedicated were some early Christians to the concept of martyrdom, that for Tertullian "martyrdom was the only sure means to salvation".[178] As a true way to demonstrate one's faith martyrdom became something to strive for, as a true way to demonstrate one's faith. Furthermore, martyrdom and martyrologies were explicitly acknowledged as 'publicity' tools, useful in inspiring converts and increasing Christian numbers.[179] As the infamous declaration states: "the blood of Christians is the seed of the church".[180] Martyrdom, despite its sporadic occurrence festered in the minds and memories of those who witnessed it, whether Christian or pagan. Martyrologies ensured that images and experiences of persecution were fresh in the minds of Christians.

Voluntary Martyrdom and the Theology of Martyrdom

Voluntary martyrdom is a phenomenon which must be briefly addressed as it marks our text, and marks early Christian understandings and memorializations of martyrdoms.

[177] Tertullian, *Ad Martyres* (ed. Menzies, trans. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3).
[178] As quoted by Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 63.
[179] See *EH*, 6.4.1-7
[180] Tertullian, *Apology*, Ch. 50.

Voluntary martyrdom may be understood as the act of "a Christian who deliberately and unnecessarily provoked persecution and thus sought a death which he might have avoided without any sacrifice of the Christian principle."[181] Paul Middleton defines these radical martyrs as "those Christians who so desired death, that they intentionally sought out arrest and martyrdom."[182] While not necessarily evidence of a voluntary martyr, the pathological yearning for death present in the letters of Ignatius have often been remarked upon as a 'precursor' to this phenomenon.[183] He is described as lusting for death, and willingly to go to his death.[184] While it is not clear that he is a voluntary martyr, he is certainly accepting of his fate. The obstinacy of the Christians, and their seemingly reckless courting of death confused Marcus Aurelius, despite his stoicism.[185] Another noteworthy account was recorded by Tertullian in which many would be martyrs are foiled by a condescending proconsul:

> When Arrius Antoninus was driving things hard in Asia, the whole Christians of the province, in one united band, presented themselves before his judgment-seat; on which, ordering a few to be led forth to execution, he said to the rest, 'O miserable men, if you wish to die, you have precipices or halters.'[186]

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[181] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why were the early Christians Persecuted?" *Past and Present,* Vol. 26 (1963), 151.
[182] Paul Middleton. *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 1.
[183] de Ste. Croix, "Why were the early Christians Persecuted?", 133.
[184] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans,* (eds. Roberts and Donaldson, The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 1), esp. Ch. 2, 4, 5.
[185] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, (trans, Maxwell Staniforth. *Meditations*. New York, New York: Penguin, 1964), 11:3 "Happy the soul which, at whatever moment the call comes for release from the body, is equally ready to face extinction, dispersion, or survival. Such preparedness, however, must be the outcome of its own decision; a decision not prompted by mere contumacy, as with the Christians, but formed with deliberation and gravity and, if it is to be convincing to others, with an absence of heroics." It must be noted that this quote may very well be a later interpolation.
[186] Tertullian, *Ad Scapula*, (ed. Menzies, trans. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3), Ch. 5.

Eusebius recounts a similar tale in the *Martyrs of Palestine.* [187] While such aggravated demands for martyrdom were likely sporadic, there are nonetheless many other tales in which Christians seemingly court a violent end whether by provocation of officials or defense of condemned Christians.[188] In *MLyons* the actions of Vettius Epagathus and Alexander can be understood to be comparable.[189] Such acts undoubtedly contributed to pervasively negative feelings towards Christians.

Voluntary martyrdom or 'radical martyrdom' becomes intrinsically linked to the historiographical problem of Christian persecution. De Ste. Croix claims that this was not a minor aberration but a widespread phenomenon: "In all probability quite a substantial proportion of the 'noble army of martyrs' of the first three centuries consisted of volunteers."[190] While it is not at all clear that *most* of the early martyrs were volunteers, it must be acknowledged that there is ample evidence for some martyrs having courted death. While the persecution in Lyons was atypical and seemingly spontaneous, it must be noted that there was no necessary reason for the deaths of Vettius Epagathus and Alexander. De Ste Croix claims, "it is impossible to doubt that the prevalence of voluntary martyrdom was a factor which both contributed towards the

[187] Eusebius Pamphilus, "Martyrs of Palestine" (trans. Arthur Cushman. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series II, Volume I*. Ed. Philip Schaff. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1890), 3.3: Six young men,"having first bound their own hands, went in haste to Urbanus, who was about to open the exhibition, evidencing great zeal for martyrdom. They confessed that they were Christians...Immediately, after creating no ordinary astonishment in the governor and those who were with him, they were cast into prison." These six young men were later beheaded.

[188] See "Martyrs of Palestine", notably Ch. 2 in which Romanus harasses women and children offering sacrifice and is condemned 'to the fire'; Ch. 4, Apphianus 'rushed up' to Urbanus the prefect as he was offering libation and exhorted him to abandon false idols and embrace the 'one true God'; *EH* 8.9.5 in which upon the sentencing of one Christian dozens of others leapt from the audience to confess 'themselves to be Christians'.

[189] *EH*, 5.1.9-10, 50.

[190] de Ste. Croix, *Persecution and Martyrdom* 153.

outbreak of persecution and tended to intensify it when it was already in progress."[191] In a more cynical reading Gibbon notes, "the assurance of a lasting reputation upon earth, a motive so congenial to the vanity of human nature, often served to animate the courage of the martyrs."[192] Martyrdom was acknowledged, within Christianity, as a spectacular death, commendable, and worthy of memorialization. While voluntary martyrdom is largely condemned by early Christian writings, the tone in which the more 'voluntary' of martyr-acts are written was marked by praise and glorification, clearly sanctioning the actions of those radical Christians.

If one accepts the occurrence – if not the prevalence – of voluntary martyrdom, then one implicitly accepts the affect and admiration perpetuated by martyrdom in general. Martyrdom would not have been courted if it were not efficacious spiritually, politically, publicly, or otherwise. The attitudes of pagans towards Christians who yearned 'pathologically' for death can be easily imagined – the confusion of Marcus Aurelius, and disdain of Arrius Antoninus come to mind. However, the Christian understanding of martyrdom was notably different. The Roman pagans and the Christians of the Empire both saw the same events, the same rejection, persecution, and execution, however, they interpreted them differently on the basis of "the larger narratives they employed to describe events."[193] While Christians were dispatched by the Empire as criminals, the developing discourse and martyrdom narratives allowed the early martyrs and their fellow Christians to see "God, or Christ himself, as the agent of

[191] de Ste. Croix, "Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?", 151. Please note: here I would substitute 'prevalence' with 'existence'.
[192] Gibbon, Edward. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* (New York: Viking Press, 1952), Ch. 16, Vol. 2, 110.
[193] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 14.

their martyrdom, rather than the various governors that decree their deaths."[194] Martyrdom was constructed as a way of demonstrating and attesting one's faith. In later writings, martyrdom came to be considered a 'second baptism' for Christians.[195] So dedicated were early Christians to the concept of martyrdom that for some, "martyrdom was the only sure means to salvation".[196] For early Christians, through martyrdom one could secure true and everlasting life; attaining martyrdom and attaining God become synonymous.

Despite the zeal for martyrdom evident in early Christian sources, there was an official condemnation of voluntary martyrdom.[197] However, as de Ste. Croix notes, there are two situations in which voluntary martyrdom becomes permissible. The first is when a lapsed Christian sought to atone, and the second when a Christian witnesses several other members on the verge of lapsing and strives to prevent this by making a "voluntary confession at the decisive moment".[198] There are several surviving records of this, such as the epistles of Peter of Alexandria,[199] and of Cyprian.[200] The few mentions in the *Martyrs of Palestine* have been noted; however, there are also several

[194] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 52.
[195] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, 97.
[196] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 63.
[197] *EH*, 4.15.7-8, note: In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Quintus lapses despite having 'given himself up'.
[198] 4.15.7-8
[199] Peter of Alexandria, *Epistles*, Canon 8 (trans. James B.H. Hawkins. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6) "But to those who have been delivered up, and have fallen, who also of their own accord have approached the contest, confessing themselves to be Christians, and have been tormented and thrown into prison, it is right with joy and exultation of heart to add strength, and to communicate to them in all things, both in prayer, and in partaking of the body and blood of Christ, and in hortatory discourse; in order that contending the more constantly, they may be counted worthy of "the prize of their high calling."
[200] Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 19* (trans. Robert Ernest Wallis. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5) "You have judged quite correctly about granting peace to our brethren, which they, by true penitence and by the glory of a confession of the Lord, have restored to themselves, being justified by their words, by which before they had condemned themselves. Since, then, they have washed away all their sin, and their former stain, by the help of the Lord"; *Epistle 24*.

mentions of comparable situations in the *Ecclesiastical History.*[201] As already noted, our text features two examples of quasi-voluntary martyrs.

There were evidently competing discourses and theologies of martyrdom. What was Eusebius' 'theology of martyrdom'? Given the myriad of martyrologies present in his corpus it is impossible to distill one guiding principle to unify all martyr-acts; however, a few general observations may be made. Eusebius condemned voluntary martyrdom, however, no martyrologies were excluded other than on the basis of doctrinal orthodoxy - in the nascent Catholic church, schismatics could not be martyrs.[202] As we shall see in our later discussion of the Diocletian persecution, contemporary with Eusebius' own time, Eusebius was vulnerable to rebuke and criticism as he himself had carefully avoided persecution and suffering.

Martyrologies were particularly important to Eusebius. Grant notes that*MLyons* composes a full third of Book V of the *Ecclesiastical History*. They were iconic instances of faith, necessary to record. They constituted, a narrative which was instructive as well as historical, and were included as they "may be needful for the present purpose."[203] The martyrs and their actions could act as ideal models of behaviour and conduct for the later/contemporary Eusebian church. It was his duty as a historian to memorialize them, extending the efficacy of their actions. Eusebius was

[201] Notably, *EH* 6.41.22 "And as a certain person who was being tried as a Christian, seemed inclined to deny, they standing by gnashed their teeth, and made signs with their faces and stretched out their hands, and gestured with their bodies. And when the attention of all was turned to them, before any one else could seize them, they rushed up to the tribunal saying that they were Christians, so that the governor and his council were affrighted. And those who were on trial appeared most courageous in prospect of their sufferings, while their judges trembled. And they went exultingly from the tribunal rejoicing in their testimony; God himself having caused them to triumph gloriously."
[202] Cyprian*, De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, (trans. Robert Ernest Wallis. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5), 14.
[203] *EH*, 5 Introduction, 2.

consistently careful not to condemn the Roman Empire. Despite the conflict between 'church and state' in the early centuries of Christianity, Eusebius was in favour of the state – as long as it was not at the expense of the church.[204] Faith was praised; however, 'suicidal heroism' was not. The survival of the church depended upon the survival of her members. While martyr-acts could be inspirational and pedagogical texts, they needed authors and communities to preserve them. Eusebius' understanding of martyrdom was inherently pragmatic. His praise of martyrs but rejection of volunteerism was consistent with the 'orthodox' view of the church. The martyrial conviction and ultimate sacrifice was admired and memorialized – through their actions martyrs helped grow and solidify the church. Eusebius was certainly aware of the impact of martyrdom and martyrologies, however, it was necessary to protect the church. The legacy of the martyrs required a church to memorialize it.

[204] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, 123.

CHAPTER III

The Literary Culture of the *Ecclesiastical History* and the Historiography of Eusebius

The period from 177 CE to 302 CE marks a time of immense change, both practically and literarily for Christianity. Christianity spread throughout the Empire and became less inwardly focused and began to interact with its pagan surrounding. As an historian, Eusebius was influenced by the Christian literary tradition. Eusebius has been criticized as a historian, yet his history remained authoritative for centuries after his death. In order to situate the *Ecclesiastical History* and to underscore its historiographical aims and methodology, a summary of his apologetics will be given. The historiographical tradition and its implications for Eusebius will be discussed to illustrate the Eusebian objectives and techniques. Finally, the evidence and implications of writing for two audiences – Christian and pagan – will be touched on before being fully developed in the subsequent chapter.

Literary Context: Accusations and Hostility

Early (first century) Christian writings were marked by a focused interiority. Despite the missionary aspect of the early Christian church, surviving writings are focused primarily on stories of and about Jesus, the apostles (or other noteworthy Christians), liturgical, baptismal, or other important ritual actions. As summarized by Drobner, "The writings of the apostolic and post-apostolic times had restricted themselves mainly to the preservation and faithful transmission of the gospel of Jesus and to the institutions and

rules necessary for the Christian life of the congregations and of each individual."[205] Initially, "the establishment of basic as well as literary relations with the non-Christian environment seemed unnecessary, since, because of the *Naherwartung*, a continuing engagement with this world no longer seemed indicated." [206] Early Christianity soon became aware that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ was delayed to an unforeseen time. In the meantime, missionary activity had continued and Christianity had spread throughout the populace of the Empire. The sudden attention paid to Christianity by writers such as Lucian and Celsus indicate shifts in the relationship between Christianity and the pagan world.

This changing relationship is indicative of the growing presence and contention of Christianity. This study agrees with the view that, "Roman writers seem to have considered Christianity a topic of interest only when it became a perceived threat to Rome."[207] As discussed in the previous chapter, the infamous correspondence between Pliny and Trajan stated that Christians were not to be sought out, and if accused, were to be given the opportunity to deny and offer sacrifice, and as long as they were not found guilty of any other crimes they were to be released. It is clear that by the late first/early second century that imperial officials were aware of an organization referred to as 'Christianity', Sources do not indicate that there was an active policy of seeking out and persecuting Christians. However, there was a transition in the second century during which 'Rome' and the pagan intellectual world became decidedly more aware of Christianity. This is not to suggest that there was a sudden explosion of Christianity

[205] Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church,* 63.
[206] Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church,* 63.
[207] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse,* 200.

which presented a clear and concrete seditious movement; however, this developing relationship was not a positive one. Frend cites the persecutions in Smyrna (166-167 CE: see *Martyrdom of Polycarp*) and that in Lyons, as evidence that the more *laissez-faire* 'Rule of Trajan', was gradually being abandoned for a more active 'seeking out' of Christians.[208] Frend goes on to point out, however, that under Marcus Aurelius, recantation still earned the accused a pardon unless allegations of criminal behavior (*flagitia*) had also been charged.[209]

Literary Context: Critics and Detractors

The increased interaction of Christianity and the pagan intellectual world marked a time in which numerous Christian apologies were written. It is worth noting the attacks leveled against Christians by critics such as Suetonius, Celsus, Lucian, Porphyry, and the pagan Caecilius (with whom Octavius debates in Minucius Felix' *Octavius*). The attacks of these critics is indicative of public opinion in regards to Christianity – or at least indicative of opinions which were made public. The apologetic writings of the second century are often addressed to the emperor (who was the only one who could universally sanction Christianity); are firm in their rejection of the accusations leveled against them; seek to clear up the misconceptions surrounding Christianity by striving to explain the actual beliefs and rituals of their Christian brethren, and attempt to engage their opponents' position logically and undermine them. It is also important to note that this was often accompanied by "a missionary zeal to convert an opponent to

[208] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 199.
[209] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 199. Note we have already seen that the situation in Lyons was exceptional in this regard.

Christianity".[210] While the arguments were often vicious, Christian apologetic rhetoric was marked by a respect for imperial office and authority.

A primary attack leveled against Christianity is that of novelty. In describing the fire in Rome, Suetonius states that "punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition." [211] While the tone is derisive, the crime of the Christians seems to be the dangerous novelty of their superstition. Even as early as 64 CE, Suetonius evidently did not believe the fantastical accusations leveled at Christians. While the Christians may not have been incestuous cannibals, the educated elites in the Roman Empire held them in contempt. Superstition was always spoken of in derogatory terms; when Constantine rejected Roman religion in favour of Christianity, he condemned it as superstitious.[212]

Lucian notes the gullibility and stupidity of the Christians in his satire, *The Death of Peregrine*. The con-man Peregrinus travels to Palestine where he integrates himself with a community of Christians, whom he states "worship a *man* to this day- the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account."[213] The Christians are mocked as simple, superstitious, and gullible.[214] They are devoted to imprisoned members of their community, and adopt the dishonest Peregrinus as one of their own.

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[210] Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 73.
[211] Suetonius, *Nero*, 16.2
[212] Robert M. Grant, *The Sword and the Cross* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), 34.
[213] Lucian of Samosata, *The Death of Peregrine,* (trans. A M Harmon; K Kilburn; M D Macleod. The Loeb classical Library. New York, New York: Macmillen, 1967), v. 11-12.
[214] Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, v. 13, "these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws".

Celsus, another second-century critic of Christianity was particularly harsh in his rhetoric. His critiques of Christianity were manifold: he rejected the virgin birth and instead suggested that Jesus was the product of adultery;[215] stated that Christianity was a religion only appealing to the lowliest inhabitants of the Empire;[216] he criticized their absence from civic feasts as being indicative of a false or flawed god.[217] However, alongside his polemic was an appeal for Christians to re-enter the traditional beliefs and institutions of the Roman Empire:

> at the heart of his argument lay the basic belief that there existed from the foundation of the world a perennial truth (this is what he meant by 'true word') that was the common heritage of all humankind. The choice of Christians to estrange themselves from public festivals and rites that commemorated that eternal truth was proof that they had wandered astray.[218]

Despite the cruelty of his rhetoric, he urged Christians to return to civic life and its obligations: "to help the king with all our might, and to labour with him in the maintenance of justice, to fight for him; and if he requires it, to fight under him, or lead

[215] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, (trans. Crombie. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3) 1.28 "being born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child".
[216] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3.59 "they manifestly show that they desire and are able to gain over only the silly, and the mean, and the stupid, with women and children".
[217] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 8.21: "God is the God of all alike; He is good, He stands in need of nothing, and He is without jealousy. What, then, is there to hinder those who are most devoted to His service from taking part in public feasts."
[218] Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 32.

an army along with him."[219] In effect, it was a plea for the Christians to "re-enter the fold of traditional piety".[220] His main concern appears to have been that Christians had estranged themselves from the true tradition and religion of Rome.

Despite the majority of his great work *Against the Christians* having been lost, likely destroyed first under Constantine, and again under Theodosius and Valentian, Porphyry remains a known critic of Christianity.[221] Like many of the anti-Christian writings from the pre-Constantinian era, only fragments survive, preserved by those who sought to refute them. Subsequently, the reception of Porphyry's surviving fragments is contentious.[222] Celsus' work the *True Word* was preserved in Origen's *Contra Celsum*, and he was discussed by Eusebius, Methodius, Apollonaris, Jerome, and Augustine.[223] Likely published after 270 CE but prior to the Great Persecution, Porphyry attacked Christianity in a different manner than Celsus. While Celsus had

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[219] Origen, *Contra Celsum,* 8.73. See also: 8.75 where Celsus advocates that the Christians "take office in the government of the country, if that is required for the maintenance of the laws and the support of religion".

[220] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 32.

[221] T. D. Barnes, "Porphyry Against the Christians: Date and the Attribution of Fragments," *Journal of Theological Studies* 24.2 (1973), 424.

[222] See Barnes, "Porphyry Against the Christians". Arguments for the inclusion of 'new' fragments or statements of Porphyry: Harnack (Porphyrius, 'Gegen die Christen', 15 Biicher. Zeugnisse, Fragmente und Referate', *Abhand. d. kdn. preuss. Akad. d. Wiss.,* Phil.-hist. Kl. 1916), ('Neue Fragmente des Werks des Porphyrius gegen die Christen. Die Pseudo-Polycarpiana und die Schrift des Rhetors Pacatusgegen Porphyrius', *Sitzungsberd. Akad d. Wiss. zu Berlin,* Phil.-hist. Kl. 1921) asserts to the veracity of ninety-seven fragments which come from Macarius of Magnesia; five fragments reconstructed from a catena on the Gospels printed by Feuardentius from a mysterious manuscript no one before or after has ever seen, and from a fifth century refutation by Pacatus; F. Jacoby argues (*F.Gr.H.* ii. B, 1930) to include several 'conjectural fragments' not in Harnack; P. Nautin ('Trois autres fragments du livre de Porphyre *Contre les chretiens', Revue biblique,* lvii, 1950) argues for the inclusion of three quotations from Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*, normally attributed to Philo of Byblos to instead be attributed to Porphyry; F. Altheim and R. Stiehl ('Neue Bruchstiicke aus Porphyrios' *Kara Xpicrrtavovs'* [sic], *Gedenkschrift fur G. Rohde. AIIAPXAI:Unter- suchungen zur klassischen Philologie und Geschichte des Altertums,* iv, 1961) argue that there are traces of a Syriac translation of Porphyry present in one Arabic and two Syriac writers (al-Biruni, Barhebraeus, Bedjan); D. Hagedorn and R. Merkelbach ('Ein neues Fragment aus Porphyrios Gegen die Christen', *Vig. Chr.* xx 1966) and G. Binder ('Eine Polemik des Porphyrios gegen die allegorische Auslegung des Alten Testaments durch die Christen', *Zeitschrift Papyrologie und Epigraphik,* iii, 1968) argue for statements in Didymus to be attribued to Porphyry.

[223] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 33.

used his rhetorical skill and the philosophical position of antiquity, Porphyry attacked Christianity with an intimate knowledge of their writings, doctrines and theology:

> Porphyry confronts the Christians with their own primary weapon, the Bible ... he tries to expose the inaccuracies, the inconsistencies, and general relative character of the sacred books. He is frequently pedantic rather than profound, looking to trivialize errors and a means for upsetting the trustworthiness of the gospel and its authors.[224]

Porphyry too strove to demonstrate the novelty of Christianity and weaken its revelatory and prophetic value.

While the central charge leveled against Christianity is that of novelty, they were accompanied by accusations of sedition and atheism. Christians were attacked as stupid, ignorant and unlearned, however, the charges which seem to have held the most weight for the accusers, were those of civic disloyalty and atheism. For the pagan critics, these two charges were not mutually exclusive. A refusal to participate in civic and religious rites of the Empire was a rejection of the social institutions and duties of the empire, as well as a rejection of its traditions. Loyalty to the state was intrinsically linked to the ritual practice of Roman religion.[225] Foreign religions were obviously 'not Roman'. In describing advice given to Augustus, Dio Cassius notes the advice of Maecenas:

> Those who attempt to distort our religion with strange rites you should abhor and punish, not merely for the sake of the gods (since if a man despises these he will

[224] A. Meredith, "Porphyry and Julian Against the Christians". *ANRW*, II 23.2, (1980),1129.
[225] Grant, *The Sword and the Cross*, 10.

> not pay honour to any other being), but because such men, by bringing in new divinities in place of the old, persuade many to adopt foreign practices, from which spring up conspiracies, factions, and cabals, which are far from profitable to a monarchy.[226]

Christians were believed to be entirely 'anti-social'.[227] While it is unlikely (at least amongst the learned) that many believed the *flagitia* of which the Christians were accused, it is not hard to understand how they might be viewed as suspect, *mali homines*, and subsequently unpopular. [228] The charge of introducing and promoting a foreign cult in Rome was serious.

This opinion of Christians as 'unpatriotic' was sustained. The same accusations are leveled at Octavius by Caecelius in the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix: "you do not visit exhibitions; you have no concern in public displays; you reject the public banquets, and abhor the sacred contests; the meats previously tasted by, and the drinks made a libation of upon, the altars. Thus you stand in dread of the gods whom you deny." [229] He concluded that Christians did not understand their civic duty and certainly could not understand their religious duty, "they who have no capacity for understanding civil matters, are much more denied the ability to discuss divine."[230] The beliefs of the Christians were portrayed as superstitious, simple, and "inimical to the interests to the

[226] Dio Cassius, *Roman History* (trans. Earnest Cary. Loeb Classics Edition: 1914), 52.36.1-2
[227] Christians were mentioned by Tacitus as being men known for their 'hatred of the human race', *Annales*, 15.44.5
[228] As noted by de Ste. Croix, "Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?" 122, "they worshipped a man who had admittedly been crucified by a governor of Judea, as a political criminal, who thought of himself as 'king of the Jews'...they were always talking about the imminent end of the world; and one of their books spoke with bitter hatred of Rome, thinly disguised under the name of Babylon, and prophesied its utter ruin."
[229] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, (ed. Menzies, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis. *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 4) VII.
[230] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, VII.

state. This belief was shared by the people and the rulers alike, but only in times of crisis did it become a belief which required aggressive action... Christians were regarded as potentially but not actually dangerous to the peace and security of the Roman empire."[231] Roman religion was important to the Roman Empire. She existed as a dominant force because her gods had been successful in defeating the gods of the nations now conquered by Rome.[232] Challenging traditional Roman religion and rituals could easily be understood as unpatriotic. This convolution of the religious and the political was not unusual, nor was it peculiar to the Roman Empire.

Literary Context: Apologetics and Apologists

For Christianity, the literary landscape in the second century was marked by polemics and apologetics. We have explored the critics and detractors of Christianity, and now we turn to its defenders. Labelled apologists, these writers were initially concerned with rejecting the *flagitia* of which Christians were condemned, and subsequently pleading for civic toleration. Apologetics can be understood effectively as 'the art of persuasion' and emerged from the rhetoric of the lawcourts.[233] As a technique, apologists would often 'mimic' the philosophical discourse of universalism and in doing so were attempting to beat their philosophically minded critics 'at their own game'.[234] Apologetic literature is marked by the 'minority status' of the writers. The literature is a defense and an attempt to reconcile themselves – and their brethren – with the larger

[231] Grant, *The Sword and the Cross*, 16.
[232] Grant, *The Sword and the Cross*, 12.
[233] Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, "Miracles, Mission, and Apologetics: An Introduction", in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 6.
[234] Schott, *Christianity, Empire and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity,* 26.

culture in which they live. Grant notes, "apologists do not completely identify themselves with the broader society, but they are not advocates of confrontation or revolution. They address their contemporaries with persuasion, looking for links between the outside world and their own group and thus modifying the development of both."[235] The early apologist straddled the divide between the interiority of early Christianity, and the growing concern of greater pagan society, which asserted – in literature and in practice – a dislike and distrust of Christianity.

The few persecutions of the second century attest to this increasing interaction between Christianity and the culture and civic life of the Empire. Apologetic literature sought to interpret Christianity in a way that made it accessible, familiar, and friendly to the outsider. In its attempt to convince outsiders of the merits of Christianity, there is also an evangelical tone to the literature. The early apologists will be briefly examined to underscore the literary predecessors of Eusebius, as well as the apologetic themes and devices which he employed. The apologists surveyed are Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Digonetus, Melito of Sardis, Clement, Origen, and Minucius Felix.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr is unquestionably the most significant of early Christian apologists. A liminal figure, existing between the "boundaries between east and west, province and metropolis, barbarian and Greek," he was born circa 100 CE.[236] Justin hailed from Flavia Neapolis in Syria-Palestine, and self-identified as a Samaritan.[237] Justin's

[235] Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1988), 9.
[236] Schott, *Christianity, Empire and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity*, 31.
[237] Schott, *Christianity, Empire and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity*, 29.

writings were incredibly influential on subsequent early Christian writers and it is no great stretch to conclude that "Justin's heirs, prominently including Irenaeus, inherit Justin's repertoire of polemics, both using them and transforming them in order to deal with controversies that would emerge in later generations."[238] Justin originally converted to Platonism, likely in his late teens or twenties. After hearing accusations of Christian immorality but witnessing Christian bravery in the face of persecution and death he rejected the charges against them. Justin stated that he began his own personal quest for the true philosophy with an assumption comparable to the Hellenistic philosophers: "that a true philosophy is singular, perennial, and universal".[239] Justin's 'proprietorial' claim on philosophy forces him to maintain the distinction between Christianity (as true philosophy) and all that merely passes for it; this is accomplished by drawing on Pauline discourse and coupling it with his *logos*-theology.[240] Justin's *First Apology* was addressed to the Emperor, identified as Antonius Pius and his son Verissimus, presumably Marcus Aurelius.[241] The two dominant themes are the call for justice, and an attempt to demonstrate the rational basis for and truth of Christianity.[242] In his *Apology* he aruged that Christians are allies of the Roman emperors, and tries to clarify that the seditious sounding desires for a 'Christian kingdom' are not expectations of 'human kingdom'.[243] Justin rejected the condemnation of Christians on the basis of the name alone.

[238] Elaine Pagels, "Irenaeus, the 'Canon of Truth,' and the Gospel of John: 'Making a Difference' through Hermeneutics and Ritual," *Vigiliae Christianae,* 56 (2002), 340.
[239] Schott, *Christianity, Empire and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity*, 39.
[240] Schott, *Christianity, Empire and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity*, 40.
[241] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 38.
[242] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 38.
[243] Justin Martyr, *Apology*, (eds. Roberts and Donaldson, *The Apostolic Fathers* Vol. 1), Ch. 11.

Diognetus

The *Letter to Diognetus* is considered by Dulles to be 'the pearl' of early Christian apologetics.[244] The letter responds to three questions put to its unknown author by Diognetus:

1. What is this new cult which rejects the traditions of Rome as well as the superstitions of the Jews?
2. Why do the Christians love each other so deeply?
3. Why did the new religion come into existence now, so late in the world's history? [245]

In the *Letter to Diognetus* Christians are referred to as a 'new race' (or a third race), and Christian identity and citizenship is privileged above all else. The Christians emerge not only as a group of believers, but as a race. The construction of Christians as a distinct group is critical to apologetic arguments and to Eusebius' theologizing of history. In the *Letter to Digonetus*, Christian identity is privileged above all else.[246] The author of Digonetus argued strongly for religious toleration and attested to Christian piety. The religion of this 'new race' contained nothing seditious or detrimental to the Empire.

[244] Dulles, *A History of Apolgetics*, 28.
[245] Dulles, *A History of Apolgetics*, 29.
[246] *Epistle to Diognetus,*(eds. Roberts and Donaldson, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1) v. 5: "For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity...They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers."

Melito of Sardis

Melito of Sardis wrote an apology on behalf of the Christians sometime in the late second century – likely the decade beginning with 170 CE – addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Although only fragments survive, Melito was "the most diplomatically savvy of the Christian apologists".[247] Melito was an articulate spokesman arguing for toleration. Only the 'bad emperors' such as Nero and Dominitian – who by Melito's time were widely criticized - had openly attacked Christianity.[248] He noted that Christianity is good for the Roman Empire.[249] When the Empire persecuted Christians, the Empire suffered. This was Melito's most valuable and resonant contribution to Christian thought. Melito tied the success of the Roman Empire to the rise of Christianity, linking the rise of Christ with the success of Augustus, a critically important theme which was reiterated by later apologists.[250] Christianity was thus no more novel than the Roman Empire.[251] Kannaday suggests that Tertullian lifted this argument from Melito and used it in his own apologetic discourse, a claim also supported by Grant.[252] Rather than a threat to the Empire, Christians were in fact beneficial to its strength and security. This argument became the basis for understanding Christianity as an imperial religion. The historical link between of the rise of Christianity and the rise of the Empire was integral to Eusebius' own theology of history.

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[247] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 50; and Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, 187.
[248] Grant, *The Sword and the Cross*, 88.
[249] *EH*, 4.26.8
[250] 4.26.8: "And a most convincing proof that our doctrine flourished for the good of an empire happily begun, is this—that there has no evil happened since Augustus' reign, but that, on the contrary, all things have been splendid and glorious, in accordance with the prayers of all."
[251] Grant, *The Sword and the Cross,* 88.
[252] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse,* 50.

Tertullian

Tertullian, most infamous of the Latin apologists, was born in the mid-second century (c. 155 CE). A skilled rhetorician he is said to have been one "skilled in Roman Law",[253] though Barnes questions the validity of claims that Tertullian was ever a professional lawyer.[254] Likely the editor of *Perpetua and Felicitas*, Tertullian wrote passionately, and though later condemned for his Montanist leanings, he remains an important figure in the history of early Christianity.[255] Two of Tertullian's most important apologetic works are *To the Heathen* (or *Ad nationes*) and the *Apology*. *To the Heathen* proffers a defense of Christianity and "an assault on the moral and religious decay" which he associated with paganism.[256] *The Apology* was styled using judicial terminology and charged Christian accusers with immorality and "treasonous behaviour".[257] Like Melito, Tertullian also built upon the notion that the Empire benefited from the piety of Christians:

> For we offer prayer for the safety of our princes to the eternal, the true, the living God, whose favour, beyond all others, they must themselves desire…for he himself is His to whom heaven and every creature appertains. He gets his sceptre where he first got his humanity; his power where he got the breath of life. Thither we lift our eyes, with hands outstretched, because free from sin; with head uncovered, for we have nothing whereof to be ashamed; finally, without a monitor, because it is from the heart we supplicate. Without ceasing, for all our

[253] *EH,* 2.2.4
[254] T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1971), 22-29.
[255] de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, 191.
[256] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 55.
[257] Tertullian, *Apology*, 7.13

> emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Cæsar, an emperor would wish..[258]

Due to style and his legal terminology it has been suggested that Tertullian was not exclusively addressing other Christians. His writings appear geared to the pagan public, and aim to persuade.[259]

Clement

Clement of Alexandria, born c. 150 CE was one of the great masters of apologetics. Likely of Athenian origin, he appears to have received a Greek education, and later converted to Christianity.[260] Clement represented a break with earlier apologists: in his writing there is little defense of Christianity against the accusations of immorality which marked the earlier apologetic works. Instead he contributed "a new and better technique of persuasion...he illustrates how Christianity is able to fulfill and at the same time correct the religious aspirations and insights at work in human history."[261] No longer defensive, the apologetics of Clement instead sought to convince and convert.

Origen

Origen, the successor of Clement, marked the climax of the Alexandrian school of apologetics. Writing c. 246 CE, he responded to the *True Doctrine* of Celsus in his

[258] Tertullian, *Apology*, 30. Also note, *Apology* 39, "We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority".
[259] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse,* 56.
[260] Dulles, *A History of Apolgetics*, 32
[261] Dulles, *A History of Apolgetics*, 34.

famous tract *Contra Celsum*. Considered the "greatest scholar of Christian antiquity," he was a theologian, prolific author, and defender of Christianity who would be labelled a heretic by the church he had helped to protect and preserve.[262] Having already discussed Celsus, it is worth noting that *Contra Celsum* effectively serves as a 'compendium' of apologetic discourse: the majority of accusations, arguments and defenses of and against Christianity can be found within.[263] Origen defended Christianity against claims of disloyalty by claiming that Christians benefitted the state with their prayers.[264] Together with Clement, Origen marked a turning point in the apologetic tradition of early Christianity: the literature was no longer only a refutation of the accusations levelled against Christians, or a plea for toleration. No longer simply defensive, this new course of apologetic literature marked a counteroffensive.

Minucius Felix

Born in the late second century (fl. c. 150-270 CE—his exact dates are not known), little is known of the personal biography of the Latin apologist Marcus Minucius Felix. Jerome claims he was a lawyer, however, there is little evidence to confirm or deny this.[265] The renowned work of Minucius Felix is the *Octavius*, which closely resembles Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* in form.[266] The arguments of Caecilius and Octavius have been previously explored in the earlier section on 'Literary Context: Critics and Opponents' and will thus only be briefly mentioned here.[267] Unlike

[262] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 52.
[263] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*,53.
[264] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 8.73
[265] Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, (eds. Schaff and Wace, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6), 58.
[266] Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 54.
[267] Note: please refer to p. 53 above.

Tertullian, who claimed '*credo quia ineptum*', Felix tried to establish a rational argument for Christianity.[268] A work likely directed at pagan readers, it detailed a debate between three friends in which the pagan Caecilius contends that it is better to remain loyal to the traditional gods of Rome than to believe in the new god of the Christians. The greatness of Rome, which Caecilius expounds upon, does not depend on the fictitious gods of the Empire, captured deities of conquered foes.[269] Christianity is where true moderation and piety can be found. Relying on philosophy and rhetoric, the Christian defender Octavius convinces and converts his friend Caecilius.

Apologetics in Conclusion

The apologists briefly surveyed underscore the tradition of apologetics which Eusebius inherited and preserved. Indeed, his *Chronicle* and *Ecclesiastical History* contain at least fragments of nearly all of the second century apologists, and even quotes from a Greek version of the *Apology* by Tertullian.[270] The apologetic context of early Christianity was where the notion of Christianity as an imperial religion truly began to develop. Accusations of disloyalty and rebellion were leveled against the Christians repeatedly, and again and again they were denied and rebuffed. Even during the Domitian persecution, the author of *I Clement* advocated prayer for the Emperor and Empire.[271] For Christians, the conflict with Rome was religious rather than political, as

[268] Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, (ed. Menzies, trans. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3), 5.4.
[269] Minucius Felix, Octavius, Ch. 25.
[270] Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, 194.
[271] Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church,* 13. Also note, *I Clement*, (eds. Roberts and Donaldson, *The Apostolic Fathers* Vol. 1), 37.3-38:2, "All are not prefects, nor commanders of a thousand, nor of a hundred, nor of fifty, nor the like, but each one in his own rank performs the things commanded by the king and the generals. The great cannot subsist without the small, nor the small without the great. There is a kind of mixture in all things, and thence arises mutual advantage. Let us take our body for an example.

far as the two could be untangled. Underscoring the growth of Christianity and its increased interaction with its cultural milieu, the second century was a century of apologetics.

The sporadic and local persecutions of the second century were replaced by the more widespread and (occasionally) 'official' persecutions under Septimius Severus , Maximin of Thrace, Decius (and Valerian), and Aurelian (who at the very least threatened persecution). As persecutions increased, the commemorative martyr-texts increased as well, existing as local religious folklore or legend. Nonetheless, imperial power and the state itself remained widely respected in Christian literature and only rejected when faith demanded it. Within the apologetic tradition the attempt to link the well being of the Empire with the well being of the Christians was repeated. Contrarily, Lactantius's book *De Mortibus Persecutorum* underscores the ignoble, humiliating, and frequently painful ends that Christian persecutors came to.[272] While this vengeful retrospective is fantastically embellished and in many places simply erroneous, it underscores the view that positive relations between Christians and Romans were ultimately beneficial to all inhabitants of the Empire, whether bishop or Emperor.

The head is nothing without the feet, and the feet are nothing without the head; yea, the very smallest members of our body are necessary and useful to the whole body. But all work harmoniously together, and are under one common rule for the preservation of the whole body. Let our whole body, then, be preserved in, Christ Jesus; and let every one be subject to his neighbour, according to the special gift bestowed upon him. Let the strong not despise the weak, and let the weak show respect unto the strong."

[272] As noted by Grant in *The Sword and the Cross,* 122: "Under Nero, Peter came to Rome and attracted notice by his miracles; for this reason Nero, a detestable and harmful tyrant, had him crucified and also killed Paul. Nero was punished by not being buried. Some years later another tyrant, Domitian, came to the throne. Demons incited him to persecute the church and he was punished by the Senate, which condemned his memory and repealed his acts. The church recovered its rights and then enjoyed a very long period of peace, broken only by the 'detestable animal' Decius. Like Nero, he was not buried. Not much later, Valerian persecuted the church and was killed ignominiously by Shapur of Persia. Aurelian had planned a persecution but was killed before he could act. Diocletian and Galerius both persecuted the church; Galerius died in agony"

The acceptance of the state was theologically based. For an apologist, the possibility of Christian loyalty to the empire was implicit from the birth of Christianity. Jesus demands a double-allegiance to Caesar and to God.[273] Paul states that Christians are to submit themselves to the existing state (even one headed by Nero).[274] Melito of Sardis' argument for the mutual recognition of 'church and state' was made to edify the history and antiquity of the Church, and also to attest to the positive value of the state.[275] The Christian expectation was not for a human kingdom, but for a heavenly one. However, from a pagan perspective, the heavenly kingdom of the Christians undermined the divine status of the mythological *Roma Aeterna*. Despite Christian insistence to the contrary, with the growth of Christianity, came distrust and persecution. The vast historiographical project of Eusebius cannot be considered apart from its apologetic background, no more can it be considered untainted by the persecutions which occasionally occurred.

Literary Context: History, Historians, and Historiographies

As has become evident in our brief survey of early Christian apologetics, proving Christian antiquity was irrevocably tied to proving the theological validity of this new

[273] Matt. 22:21, RSV "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
[274] Rom. 13:1-7, RSV " [1] Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. [2] Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. [3] For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, [4] for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. [5] Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. [6] For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. [7] Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due."
[275] Grant, *The Sword and the Cross*, 127.

religious movement. The first task for a Christian historian was to provide, "an imposing historical background for the Christian faith and to establish the importance and antiquity of sacred history."[276] As well as defending against suspicious critics, this 'historicizing' of Christianity could also serve to attract new converts as adherents could point to their storied and imposing past. Furthermore, "In ages of political and social strife, the past perceived as a tranquil, good, and purposeful world has often become a source of pride, consolation, and guidance...in his time, Cato had defended the Rome of traditional virtues which, if it ever existed, was by now only a memory."[277] Glorifying and exalting Christian history, served to strengthen the present cause. As evidenced by the increased literary interaction between the Christian and pagan world in the second and third centuries, as expectations of the apocalypse became less immediate, Christian writers became less inwardly focused and gradually became more involved with the surrounding world. As summarized by John Burrow, "as expectations of an imminent apocalypse waned, it was beginning to become conscious note only of its present and future but also of its past."[278] Christianity and Christian historical identity were fundamentally influenced by the aura of persecution in which Christianity evolved and memorialized.

The formidable task which Eusebius undertook in composing his *Ecclesiastical History* was not without precedents. There were two extant world histories, those of

[276] Harry Elmer Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938), 45.
[277] Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Third Ed. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 513.
[278] John Burrow, *A History of Histories: Epics, Chronicles, Romances and Inquiries from Herodotus and Thucydides to the Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 2007), 188.

Diodorus Siculus and that of Pomepius Trogus.[279] One must also acknowledge Herodotus, Plutarch, and Thucydides.[280] In addition, Josephus had composed a general Jewish history.[281] However, obviously none of these were 'Christian' histories, and were instead (at least in Josephus' case) antagonistic to the Christian understanding of history. Christian history was based in Jewish antiquity; however, it had the challenge of proving both the fulfillment of and separation from the Judaism of its past. In essence, a Christian history had to provide: "a synthesis of the past which would give due weight to the alleged glories of Hebrew antiquity and would, at the same time show why the Jews were no longer worthy of their antique heritage."[282] Eusebius, as a Christian historian, could not address one pre-existing ethnic group, or one historical event. Appropriately, his historiographical method would have to contain Jewish and Graeco-Roman history but also the indelible mark of by the rise of Christ and the

[279] Diodorus's hellenistic history (c. 100 BCE) entitled *Bibliotheca historica* traces the histories of the peoples of the known world from their mythic origins, through the centuries until the Gallic War. Of the 40 books believed to have been written, only fifteen have survived (Buckley, Terry. *Aspects of Greek History*. New York, New York: Routledge, 1996) Pompeius Trogus, a first century BCE historian wrote *Historiae Philippicae,* now only preserved in fragments, and the epitome by Marcus Junianus Justin. Pompeius Trogus was a 'Romanized Gaul' and wrote a 'universal history' from the time of the Assyrians and the founding of Nineveh up until c. 9 BCE. See J.C. Yardley, *Justin and Pompeius Trogus: A study of the language of Justin's Epitome* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

[280] An earlier historian, Herodotus was born c. 484 BCE. His historiographic approach to writing *The Histories* was marked by a ranging attention paid to ethnography and geography. His *Histories* focused on the origins of the Greek-Persian conflict. Some suggest he began writing a ethnography/geographic work and it developed through the writing process into a history. Herodotus emphasized the cyclical rise and fall of empires, a pattern inherent to human history. He made use of oral, archeological, epigraphical, and literary evidence (Buckley, *Aspects of Greek History*, 10-12). Plutarch, born c. 45-50 CE (d. 120) was the author of *The Parallel Lives* which described the lives of preeminent Greeks and Romans, with an aim to "show that the generals and statesmen of Greek history had an equal claim to fame as their Roman counterparts" (Buckley, *Aspects of Greek History*, 17). Despite the historical value of his works, Plutarch himself stated that he was not writing a history, but a biography. See the life of Alexander in *The Parallel Lives*, Loeb Classical Library (New York, New York: Macmillan, 1926), 1.1-2. Thucydides (c. 460 BCE - 395), author of *The Peloponnesian War* set out to examine the event and argue that it was the greatest war in Greek history. Noted for his rigorous methodology, his self-stated aim was to "record the events of the war one after another, as they happened, by summer and winter" (*Thucydides*, Loeb Classical Library. New York, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923. 2.1), giving an account of the political and military events of the war.

[281] Titus Flavius Josephus, author of both *The Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*.

[282] H.E. Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, 45.

expectations of Christian theology. As the 'first' historian of the Christian church, Eusebius had to prove a case for Christianity both historically and theologically. Indeed, it was impossible to separate the two. His history had to demonstrate the presence and 'working' of God in a history marked by rejection and persecution.

Criticism of Eusebius' skills as a historian is manifold. There are chronological inconsistencies between the *Chronicle* and his *Ecclesiastical History*, he mixed up his Emperors, played fast and loose with dating, and was not above excluding events or individuals he found politically or theologically inconvenient.[283] Prior to an introduction of Eusebius' historiographical agenda and method, a brief over view of the writing of the *Ecclesiastical History* is necessary. In order to elucidate the process behind its composition, a brief examination of the *Chronicle* and the *Martyrs of Palestine* will be given. As they are widely acknowledged as the authorities in the field, Barnes and Grant will be relied on heavily. As stated by Grant, "the only way to understand the Church History is to view it as a process not a finished achievement."[284] Our own process begins with a quick survey of the *Chronicle* of Eusebius, as it formed the chronological basis from which the *Ecclesiastical History* was written.

The *Chronicle*, and *Martyrs of Palestine*

While the *EH* is the pinnacle of Eusebius' historical work, it owes a great deal to his earlier works. *EH* was preceded by his *Chronicon*, or the *Chronicle*, and supplemented with selections from the *Martyrs of Palestine*. This is obviously not the extent of the Eusebian canon, nor the only works which impacted the *Ecclesiastical History,*

[283] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian,* 1, 23-25, 155-157, 168-169.
[284] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian,* 10.

however, these two have had the most direct impact, and for the sake of brevity, our discussion must be thus limited.[285] The *Chronicle* survives only in a Latin edition – complied by Jerome – and an Armenian version, which is dependent upon Jerome's. The Armenian translation is likely of 6th century origin and is an intact version of the *Chronicle*; however, of the three manuscripts (one of which is clearly dependent upon the other two) none are written before the thirteenth century.[286] It has traditionally been held that the first edition of *Chronicle* was completed in 303 CE. Barnes, however, attests that this has no foundation and has argued for an earlier dating, c. 277 CE although this has found little support.[287] Jerome's translation ends in 325/6 CE with the *vicennalia* of Constantine. This Latin version was likely translated in 380/1 CE by Jerome and revised in 382 CE to include expansions upon existing entries and to "compensate for Eusebius' neglect of Roman political and literary history."[288] There is considerable debate over the dating of the first edition of the *Chronicle*, however, we follow Barnes when he states: "it will suffice to observe that, since the traditional date of the first edition of the *Chronicle* is vulnerable, the fact that the *History* alludes to and presupposes the *Chronicle* need not entail that Eusebius completed the *History* after 303 rather than before."[289]

The textual transmission of the *Chronicle* is equally complex, and has been lamented by Barnes as "at the most basic level, the transmission of the text has seriously

[285] Other important works include: the *Onomasticon* (or *On the Place-Names in the Holy Scripture)* which details the places and place-names mentioned in the Bible and has most consistently been described as a 'gazetteer'; the *Apology for Origen*, of which only one book has survived; the *Praparatio evangelica*, in which Eusebius' theology is more developed and explicitly discussed; the *Demonstratio evangelica* which is similar to the *Praeparatio*.
[286] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian,* 3.
[287] Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 277.
[288] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, 4.
[289] Barnes, T.D., "The Editions of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*. Vol. 21, (1980)*,* 193.

hindered a just appreciation of Eusebius' achievement: the textual tradition is complicated and defective."[290] The *Chronicle* is divided into two books: the *Chronography*, which involves a 'chronicle' from Abraham to the aforementioned *vicennalia* in 325/6 CE, and the *Canons* which were essentially parallel chronological tables set out noting important historical events mentioned in the *Chronography*. The *Chronicle* represents, "Eusebius' contribution to historical chronology for he correctly perceived that an accurate chronology is essential to historical studies."[291] While notably 'barebones' when compared to *EH*, "the historical development which these columns appear to depict is one of gradual, ineluctable movement toward the Christian era."[292] For constructing his *Chronicle* he relied on the New Testament (specifically *Acts*) and the writings of Josephus for the earliest period of Christian history; the *Chronographies* of Julius Africanus, for lists of bishops and emperors; Alexander Polyhistor; Abydenus; Manetho; Cephalion; Diodorus' Library; Cassius Longinus; Castor; Porphyry; Philo; Justin; Tatian; Theophilus; Irenaeus; Tertullian; Origen; and Clement of Alexandria.[293] While Eusebius names the sources he has used for his chronology, many of the works he relies upon are lost, existing only in fragments. Eusebius would have had accessed the majority of these writings in the library of Caesarea, which had been established by Origen.

The *Chronicle* effectively served to provide the framework and the chronological structure around which *EH* would be built. It was Eusebius' first attempt at crafting a history, and to establish a Christian history, "not through appeals to received authority

[290] Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 112.
[291] *Historians at Work: investigating and recreating the past* (eds. David Dufty, Grant Harman, Keith Swan. Sydney, Australia: Hicks Smith and Sons, 1973), 253.
[292] *Historians at Work*, 253.
[293] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian,* 4.

or pious hopes, but rather through the presentation of historical facts."[294] However, as stated by Grant, "if we compare the Christian (Eusebian) content of the *Chronicle* with the first seven books of the *Church History*, we find that – apart from the basic imperial-episcopal framework – there is not a strong correlation."[295] Indeed, there are five specific instances presented in both in which Eusebius' opinion changes from the *Chronicle* to *EH*.[296] Noteworthy for our study is the dating of *MLyons*: in the *Chronicle* the martyrdoms of Polycarp, Pionius, and those of in Vienne and Lyons are dated to 167 CE, not 177 CE. Grant suggests that this was in order to 'save' Marcus Aurelius from being blamed for the persecution, placing them instead in the reign of Lucius Verus. Like James Westfall Thompson, Eusebius appears unwilling to attribute a persecution to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, instead preferring to think of him as 'the most intelligent Emperor Marcus,' blessed by God with a rain miracle.[297] This is in line with the notion perpetrated by the early Church and its writers that only bad emperors persecuted Christians.

The *Martyrs of Palestine* survives in two 'recensions', a long and a short. The Long Recension can be found only in Syriac, while the short is preserved by four of the principle Greek manuscripts of *EH*, two of which insert it into the *History* between Books VIII and IX. The manuscripts themselves attest to the inclusion of the *Martyrs of*

[294] *Historians at Work*, 254.
[295] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, 6.
[296] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, 9: "First, Eusebius takes a story which Josephus had told about the departure of the divine presence from the Temple in Jerusalem, shortly before 66, and sets it about forty years earlier. Second, he rightly follows Josephus in setting the death of James the Just in about 61 and attributing it to stoning. Third, he held with Irenaeus that under Domitian the apostle John, banished to the island of Patmos, saw the apocalypse. John's hearers at a later time were Papias of Hierapolis, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Ignatius of Antioch. Fourth, the heresiarch Basilides lived at Alexandria in 133 and founded the Gnostic movement. (In the *Chronicle* there is no mention of any Gnostic except Basilides). Fifth, the martyrdoms of Polycarp and Pionius, as well as those of the Gallicans, are dated in 167, two years before the death of Lucius Verus".
[297] *EH*, 5.5.6

Palestine in *EH*, specifically in Book VIII.[298] This is not directly relevant for the dating of *MLyons* however, it does attest to the numerous changes and redactions *EH* (specifically the last three books) underwent from edition to edition.[299] The *Martyrs of Palestine* was not a comprehensive list of those who suffered martyrdom in Palestine during the Great Persecution. Rather, it was a work intended to preserve the memory of the martyrs whom he knew. [300] The Long Recension assumes the persecution is at an end, dating its completion likely to 310/11 CE perhaps with a redaction c. 313 CE.[301] While the *Martyrs of Palestine* is not necessary to investigate fully, it is worth noting as it attests to the importance of martyrologies for the early Church and to Eusebius as a historian. It illuminates the impact that the Great Persecution had, and underscores significance of memorializing martyrs.

Composition and Editions of the *Ecclesiastical History*

In addressing the composition history of *EH* one must establish whether there was an edition completed preceding the outbreak of the Diocletian persecution. Both the *Chronicle* and the *Martyrs of Palestine* contributed to *EH*. The first edition of the Chronicle may be dated to c. 303 CE. The *Martyrs of Palestine* clearly addresses the Great Persecution and as stated was likely completed c. 310/11 CE at the latest. Grant

[298] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, 12.
[299] Note: The first seven books of *EH* were traditionally treated as a singular edition, while the final three books were marked by alterations due to the tumultuous political climate of the early fourth century.
[300] Eusebius states this purpose in the introduction to the Long Recension: "As for those conflicts, which were gloriously achieved in various other countries, it is meet that they who were then living should describe what took place in their own country; but for myself I pray that I may be enabled to write an account of those with whom I had the honour of being contemporary, and that they may rank me also among them--I mean those of whom the whole people of Palestine is proud, for in the midst of this our land also the Saviour of all mankind himself arose like a thirst-refreshing fountain. (*History of the Martyrs in Palestine*, trans. William Cureton. London: Williams and Norgate, 1861) .
[301] Barnes, "The Editions of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History", 191.

believes that there were several editions of the text, which are noticeable, specifically when Books VIII-X are examined as they reflect many revisions.[302] The latest editions can likely be dated to 324-26 CE. The version that we have now concludes with Constantine's victory over Licinius in 324 CE. However, there are also passages in Book IX which represent Lincinius as Constantine's comrade, suggesting an earlier edition predating the animosity and civil war between Lincinius and Constantine.[303] Furthermore, there exists a Syriac version of *EH* which omits any reference to Crispus, the son of Constantine put to death on his father's orders in 326 CE.[304] The consensus for many years was that reached by Laqueur: the first edition of *EH* was published in 303 CE *prior* to the Great Persecution and was composed of books I-VIII, later when be began to write again (what would become Book X), Book VIII was so expanded by the inclusion of the *Martyrs of Palestine* that it was necessary to split it into two books; this final edition was completed in 324 CE.[305] Indeed, traditionally, Books I-VIII have been treated as a unity, with Books VIII-X composed as a later addition/edition.

Barnes proposed an alternate hypothesis which sought to explain why there are several editions of *EH* as well as two versions of the *Martyrs of Palestine*. He summarized his argument in six steps:

1. The first edition of *EH* completed in the 290s CE, comprised seven books ending with his *Chronicle.*

[302] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, 10.
[303] *EH*, 9.9.1
[304] Andrew Louth, "The Date of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*," *Journal of Theological Studies,* Vol. 40, (1990), 111.
[305] Louth,"The Date of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*," quoting Laqueur (*Eusebius als Historiker seiner Zeit* (Arbeiten zur Kirchen-ges- chichte, 11: Berlin and Leipzig, 1929), 113.

2. In 311 CE he wrote the *Martyrs of Palestine*, intended as an independent work to memorialize the martyrdoms he had witnessed.

3. The resumption of the persecution by Maximinus in 311/312 CE rendered this edition of the *Martyrs of Palestine* inadequate and incomplete.

4. When the persecution ceased in 313 CE Eusebius sought to integrate this work into the *EH*, the shorter recension of the *Martyrs of Palestine* being written for this purpose. Book IX was also written to account for the last years of Maximinus and his failure to honour Galerius' edict of toleration.

5. As this early version of the *Martyrs of Palestine* became incomplete and unsuitable as an account of the persecution it was 'replaced' with Book VIII as he added the initial version of Book X.

6. When Licinius was defeated in 324 CE, the last three books were 'touched up' to remove any allusions to him as a benefactor of the Christians.[306]

In sum, according to Barnes, there are four editions of *EH*. The first consists of Books I-VII (c. 295 CE), the second Books I-VII plus the introduction to Book VIII, the Short Recension of the *Martyrs of Palestine*, and the Galerian edict of Toleration (c. 313/314 CE), the third edition consists of all ten books ending with the documents quoted in Book X (c. 315 CE),[307] the fourth and final edition consisted of the present ten books with passages referring to Licinius altered or removed and the aforementioned documents removed.[308]

[306] Barnes, "The Editions of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History", 200-201.
[307] *EH*, 10.5-7 which consisted of 'imperial decrees of Constantine and Licinius' (10.5.1).
[308] Barnes, "The Editions of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History", 200.

It is evident that the last three books of the *Ecclesiastical History* underwent various alterations as the political landscape changed during the early years of the fourth century. Along with Barnes, both Laqueur and Harnack also held that the first seven books initially comprised a literary and editorial unity.[309] The consensus appears to be that the first edition of *EH* was completed by 303 CE. While Barnes argues for an earlier dating in the last decade of the third century, this earlier dating is based on his previously mentioned argument that an edition of the *Chronicle* was completed by 277 CE. This dating of 277 CE has gained little support as it implies that Eusebius had completed the first edition of the *Chronicle* before the age of 17 which seems unlikely at best.

Louth has responded to Barnes' argument, soundly rejecting the early dating of c. 290 CE for the first edition.[310] The composition of the two recensions of the *Martyrs of Palestine* is addressed, acknowledging that both the Short Recension and Book VIII appear 'aware' of the revive persecution under Maximinus, and refer to him in terms that would have been considered treasonous "were he not safely dead".[311] A later dating c. 303 CE is accepted for the first edition, with 324-326 CE accepted as the date for the last edition. As noted by Louth, a debate over the dating of the first edition of *EH* is not simply an argument over dates. Rather, it is "an argument about the fundamental nature of Eusebius' great work."[312] If the first edition were completed in the 290s CE, then it could have no foreknowledge or anticipation of the Diocletian persecution. Instead it might be marked by hope or joy at the success of Christian missionary activity during

[309] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, 14-15.
[310] Louth, "The Date of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*," 116.
[311] Louth, "The Date of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*," 116.
[312] Louth, "The Date of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*," 123.

the 3rd century, and the tenuous tolerance enjoyed by Christianity under Aurelian. There are direct allusions to the persecution in Book VII, which would also support claims for a later dating c. 303 CE.

When discussing the potential for persecution under Aurelian, Eusebius notes that "the rulers of this world can never find an opportunity against the churches of Christ, except the hand that defends them permits it, in divine and heavenly judgment, for the sake of discipline and correction, at such times as it sees best."[313] 'Discipline and correction' have been alternately translated as 'punishment and conversion'.[314] One must then ask of the text discipline and correction due to what? Punishment for what? Conversion from what? There is also direct mention of the Manicheans, who were condemned by Diocletian.[315] Subsequently, there are also the bishops who were 'overtaken' by the persecution.[316] While these anecdotes may be later additions, the flow and style of Books I-VII are distinct from the remaining three books, arguing for acceptance of Book I-VII as a literary unity.[317] Despite this discussion, what is critical is the evidence indicating the ease with which the Ecclesiastical History was updated, edited, and revised to accommodate political considerations and the state of the relationship between the church and the Roman Empire.

Ecclesiastical Historiography: An Eusebian innovation?

The *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius cannot be considered apart from its apologetic background, nor can it be considered apart from other Eusebian works. However, as an

[313] *EH*, 5.30.21
[314] Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, 20.
[315] *EH*, 5.31
[316] 5.32.2
[317] Louth, "The Date of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*," 114.

historical project, the methodology employed by Eusebius was innovative and uniquely Christian. While Eusebius was no doubt indebted to his predecessors in the historical genre such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus, and Josephus, the method he used was distinctly his own. Eusebian historiography was inherently apologetic, yet it was also prescriptive. Eusebius did not invent an radically new form of history-writing; he improved upon the work of his predecessors, and cast history in a particularly 'Christian way'. It was the theological assertions of his history writing which made it innovative, and successful.

The apologetic element of Eusebius' history is implied in the very act of its writing. As stated repeatedly, one of the attacks leveled against Christianity was that of novelty. The historical project of Eusebius set to prove the great age of the Christian tradition and to provide a chronology and historical narrative for it. Furthermore, as noted by Chesnut, "the typical Greek or Roman historian did not have to contend, as Eusebius did, with a story whose overall historical sweep extended back to the very creation of the world".[318] However, the span of the chronology Eusebius had to address provided the tools to argue for Christian antiquity. Eusebius articulated the design of Christian history stretching back to the creation of the world and the garden of Eden. In articulating his historical vision, Eusebius had more in common with the Greek historians than the Latin who were marked by romanticizing primitivism. As opposed to viewing history as an inexorable decline, Eusebius wrote a history of progress, despite its beginning with a 'fall'.

[318] Glenn E. Chesnut "Eusebius: The History of Salvation from the Garden of Eden to the Rise of the Roman Empire," in Jacob Neuser, ed., *The Christian and Judaic Invention of History* (Atlanta, Georgia: The American Academy of Religion, 1990), 78.

The history of Eusebius began in the garden of Eden, and sought to demarcate the 'Christianness' of historical progress. The patriarchs of the Old Testament were described as "Christians in fact if not in name."[319] Employing apologetic techniques, Eusebius argued for the existence of the divine logos (and subsequently Christianity) throughout history: "the divine Logos became the agent through which the human race was to be lifted out of savagery and superstition and was to be led gradually, over the centuries, to civilization and a rational religion."[320] A further apologetic technique was employed by Eusebius when he argued that Plato's best innovative ideas had been borrowed from Moses, allowing Christian history to make use of the antiquity of Judaism.[321] The Old Testament outdated classical Greek philosophy by centuries. By 'piggy-backing' on Jewish antiquity Eusebius was able to assert Christian historical priority, thus defeating any accusations of novelty.

The second apologetic element of the *Ecclesiastical History* is its attempt to convince and convert its audience. The prevalence of martyr-acts in *EH* attests to the potential for a non-Christian reader to be converted. While martyrologies were certainly included in order to memorialize the deaths of the martyrs, their sensational impact cannot be neglected. As underscored by Doron Mendels, martyrologies made excellent 'publicity tools', and could created 'celebrity martyrs'.[322] Martyrologies were memorialized both for posterity, and for effect. Eusebius did not recount every

[319] *EH*, 1.4.6
[320] Chesnut, "Eusebius: The History of Salvation from the Garden of Eden to the Rise of the Roman Empire," 83.
[321] *EH*, 1.2.23: "But when their law became celebrated, and, like a sweet odor, was diffused among all men, as a result of their influence the dispositions of the majority of the heathen were softened by the lawgivers and philosophers who arose on every side, and their wild and savage brutality was changed into mildness, so that they enjoyed deep peace, friendship, and social intercourse."; 6.13.7 "Moses and the Jewish race existed before the earliest origin of the Greeks."
[322] Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity*, 80.

martyrology he witnessed or heard of. He was selective in his inclusion, which heightened the effect of the select martyrologies recounted. As has previously been noted, "the blood of Christians is the seed of the church".[323] As with any proper apologetic text, the *Ecclesiastical History* and its wealth of martyr-acts sought not only to convince, but to convert.

A third apologetic thread runs throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*: the linking of the birth of Jesus with the rise of the Roman Empire. In the *Chronicle*, the multiple columns utilized by Eusebius to demarcate visually the parallel histories of the various nations and ethnic groups of the world are reduced down to only two columns following the birth of Christ: "one for the history of the Roman Empire and one for the parallel history of the growth of Christianity. For Eusebius, these two columns summed up all that was significant in the history of the centuries after the birth of Jesus."[324] The Christians are explicitly identified as a distinct nation, reminiscent of the 'third race' of the *Letter to Diognetus.* While the notion that the success of the Roman Empire was linked to the emergence of Christianity was not new (e.g., Melito of Sardis), it was asserted throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*. For Eusebius, monarchy and monotheism went hand in hand. The emergence of a 'Roman monarchy' confirmed Christian existence. This linking of Christianity with the Roman Empire is at the core of Eusebius' theology of history. Christianity was not simply beneficial for the Roman Empire, the Roman Empire was beneficial for Christianity.

[323] Tertullian, *Apology*, Ch. 50.
[324] Chestnut, Glenn "Eusebius: The History of Salvation from the Garden of Eden to the Rise of the Roman Empire," 86.

Christians were quite comfortable assimilating Jewish and pagan concepts and techniques. This ability to assimilate without become assimilated was central to the development and spread of Christianity. As a Christian historian Eusebius was able to examine the earlier forms of historical writing- the biographies of Plutarch, the political and military history of Herodotus, 'the national history' of Josephus – and assimilate the elements he found useful, while discarding those he found to be unsatisfactory.[325] However, to suggest he 'picked and chose' from whatever historical or rhetorical method he wanted is an overly simplified explanation. Christianity had a unique experience – one marked by Judaism and paganism, persecution, and heresy and orthodoxy. The *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius was inherently ecclesiastical. He viewed Christians as a nation, and was thus in a way writing a 'national history'. However, "his nation had a transcendental origin ... such a nation was not fighting ordinary wars. Its struggles were persecutions."[326] Such a history could not be 'typical'. If Eusebius was not writing a 'typical' history, then was what his intention?

Here we must turn to Eusebius for his self-stated purpose: he sought to discuss the sufferings of the Jews following the death of Jesus, the persecution of Christians, and the origins of heresy, and the mistakes therein.[327] He acknowledged the flawed and

[325] Arnaldo Momigliano "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D." in Jacob Neuser, ed., *The Christian and Judaic Invention of History* (Atlanta, Georgia: The American Academy of Religion, 1990), 110.
[326] Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.", 113.
[327] *EH*, 1.1.1-3, "It is my purpose to write an account of the successions of the holy apostles, as well as of the times which have elapsed from the days of our Saviour to our own; and to relate the many important events which are said to have occurred in the history of the Church; and to mention those who have governed and presided over the Church in the most prominent parishes, and those who in each generation have proclaimed the divine word either orally or in writing. It is my purpose also to give the names and number and times of those who through love of innovation have run into the greatest errors, and, proclaiming themselves discoverers of knowledge falsely so-called have like fierce wolves unmercifully devastated the flock of Christ. It is my intention, moreover, to recount the misfortunes which immediately came upon the whole Jewish nation in consequence of their plots against our Saviour, and to record the

incomplete nature of this history, and asks for the forgiveness of the reader as, "I am the first to enter upon the subject, I am attempting to traverse as it were a lonely and untrodden path".[328] According to Eusebius his method is based on his own discretion and selectivity.[329] Elsewhere in the *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius gives other clues as to his reasons for writing and of the usefulness of this history. The theme of persecution is of particular importance to Eusebius, as noted by him at the introduction to Book V.[330]

Eusebius emphasized what the audience is to pay attention to, and what he emphasized he hoped to idealize. As noted by MacMullen: "Hostile writings and discarded views were not recopied or passed on, or they were actively suppressed; and, by the overwhelming authority of Eusebius, the father of church historiography, matters discreditable to the faith were to be consigned to silence."[331] Nowhere is this more explicit than in Book VIII when Eusebius introduces the state of the church leading up to the Great Persecution.[332] The history written by Eusebius was implicitly prescriptive. It explained what the history of Christianity was, not just to insiders, but to outsiders as

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ways and the times in which the divine word has been attacked by the Gentiles, and to describe the character of those who at various periods have contended for it in the face of blood and of tortures, as well as the confessions which have been made in our own days, and finally the gracious and kindly succor which our Saviour has afforded them all"

[328] 1.1.4

[329] 1.1.5, "Having gathered therefore from the matters mentioned here and there by them whatever we consider important for the present work, and having plucked like flowers from a meadow the appropriate passages from ancient writers, we shall endeavor to embody the whole in an historical narrative"

[330] *EH*, Book V, Introduction: "Other writers of history record the victories of war and trophies won from enemies, the skill of generals, and the manly bravery of soldiers, defiled with blood and with innumerable slaughters for the sake of children and country and other possessions. But our narrative of the government of God will record in ineffaceable letters the most peaceful wars waged in behalf of the peace of the soul, and will tell of men doing brave deeds for truth rather than country, and for piety rather than dearest friends."

[331] MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 6.

[332] *EH*, 8.2.2 "But it is not our place to describe the sad misfortunes which finally came upon them, as we do not think it proper, moreover, to record their divisions and unnatural conduct to each other before the persecution."

well. As noted by MacMullen, it underscored what to remember, and what to forget. While the *Ecclesiastical History* was likely read almost exclusively by Christians, it was conscious of the historical and political relationship between church and Empire. The apologetic elements of the work make it appropriate for two potential audiences, Christian and pagan; the tact with which the Empire is addressed, and general lack of apocalyptic undertones allow for a non-Christian audience. Historically and politically it was sensitive to the possibility of being read by a non-Christian. To convince such a reader, it had both to firmly establish and document the history of the church and the Empire as inexorably linked. For a Christian reader, a text such as the *Ecclesiastical History* provided a storied past, and a historical narrative through which they could understand the present.

CHAPTER IV

MLyons and the *Ecclesiastical History*

The political context and significance of *MLyons* in Eusebius' historical narrative

While the text of *MLyons* appears to challenge Eusebian intentions, a theological and apologetic reading of the text reveals it to be compatible with the overall project of the *Ecclesiastical History*. Furthermore, far from simply being a historical occurrence worthy of commemoration, *MLyons* functions as an instructive text for Christians contemporaneous with Eusebius. Contextualized by the Great Persecution the historical Christian community in Lyons serves as a model community, exemplary in conduct and attitude in the face of severe persecution. As idealized as the community it represents the text itself is thoroughly Eusebian in its apologetic and prescriptive historiographical technique and demonstrates a commitment to an orthodox theology of martyrdom, persecution, and to Eusebius' broad theology of history.

MLyons: Why was it included? Textual and political problematics

As has been noted, *MLyons* appears to have caused some consternation for Eusebius. The dating of the persecution in the *Chronicle* varies from that in the *Ecclesiastical History*, yet Eusebius was intent on including it. As noted, Eusebius professed only to include 'important events'.[333] The historical events which he does elect to include are

[333] *EH*, 1.1.2

those which bear some instruction and usefulness for the current situation.[334] However, beyond the problem of dating *MLyons*, the text also initially appears to challenge the Eusebian theology of history.

As noted the initial problem of *MLyons* is a technical one. Eusebius was forced by his own chronology to date *MLyons* to the reign of Marcus Aurelius despite his attempts to date it to the earlier reign of Lucius Verus. This acquiescence problematizes the apologetic argument that only bad emperors persecuted Christians. As has been previously discussed, Eusebius preferred to think of Marcus Aurelius as an enlightened pagan ruler, friendly to the Christians, despite evidence to the contrary. The emperors condemned in *EH* are those who had also been condemned by popular opinion. For example, the emperors Nero and Domitian were not held in high regard following their deaths. This assertion was an important part of the Christian historical project. As noted in *De mortibus persecutorum* Lactantius recorded the humiliating ends of those who persecuted the church. Eusebius also recorded instances of 'divine vengeance' against the persecutors.[335]

The second and central problem of the text is its presentation of the persecution. The pagan residents of Lyons are portrayed as cruel and irrational.[336] The Christians are

[334] 1.1.4 "From afar they raise their voices like torches, and they cry out, as from some lofty and conspicuous watch-tower, admonishing us where to walk and how to direct the course of our work steadily and safely."
[335] Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.", 103.
[336] *EH*, 5.1.7 "they endured nobly the injuries heaped upon them by the populace; clamors and blows and draggings and robberies and stonings and imprisonments,and all things which an infuriated mob delight in inflicting on enemies and adversaries"; 5.1.17 "all the people raged like wild beasts against us, so that even if any had before been moderate on account of friendship, they were now exceedingly furious and gnashed their teeth against us."; 5:1.38 "They endured again the customary running of the gauntlet and the violence of the wild beasts, and everything which the furious people called for or desired, and at last, the iron chair in which their bodies being roasted, tormented them with the fumes."; 5.1.53 "the multitude became furious, so that they had no compassion for the youth of the boy nor respect for the sex of the woman.", etc.

condemned for crimes of which they are innocent, and are executed as slaves and criminals to the delight of the bloodthirsty crowd. The governor writes to the Emperor to inquire about the situation and the Emperor gives his instructions for the executions, effectively sanctioning the martyrdoms.[337] The governor is representative of Imperial law and power and by all accounts acts inappropriately: condemning those who had denied, and executing Roman citizens as slaves, a death legally beneath their status.[338] Furthermore, the pagans, referred to as 'wild and barbarous tribes,' by the author. [339] They act without reason or dignity, treating the bodies of the Christian deceased with disrespect, an insult that would be offensive to Christian and pagan sentiments alike. The text condemns the people as "lawless" and portrays them as savage and inhumane.[340]

Compared to the diplomatic manner in which Eusebius strove to unite Christian and Roman history, this text appears directly to challenge such a project. How could Christian readers of *MLyons* reconcile themselves to pagan neighbours if such neighbours could perpetrate such violence and humiliation upon them? This problem must be addressed if our analysis of Eusebius' prescriptive and apologetic historiography is to stand. The state of the church in Eusebius' own lifetime and the persecution which marked the dawn of the fourth century influence an analysis of *MLyons* as it functions in the *Ecclesiastical History*.

[337] 5.1.47 "For Caesar commanded that they should be put to death,but that any who might deny should be set free."
[338] 5.1.33: "But the first were treated afterwards as murderers and defiled, and were punished twice as severely as the others." 5.1.50 "For to please the people, the governor had ordered Attalus again to the wild beasts."
[339] 5.1.57
[340] 5.1.58

The Great Persecution: Origin and Impact

The Diocletian Persecution occurred suddenly and spontaneously. The late third century had been a time of relative tolerance for Christianity. By Eusebius' account, in the third century Christianity had become widespread and Christians were found throughout the various social stratum of the Empire.[341] The forty years prior to this large-scale persecution marked, "a great acceleration in the Church's spread in the Empire".[342] The rescript of Gallenius issued in 260 CE had created a level tranquillity, and the atmosphere of syncretism which marked the late third century ensured that generally speaking, "Christian peculiarities went unnoticed".[343] While growth and success were experienced by the Christians, the Empire itself was in a state of breakdown. The

[341] 8.1.1-6: "It is beyond our ability to describe in a suitable manner the extent and nature of the glory and freedom with which the word of piety toward the God of the universe, proclaimed to the world through Christ, was honored among all men, both Greeks and barbarians, before the persecution in our day. The favor shown our people by the rulers might be adduced as evidence; as they committed to them the government of provinces, and on account of the great friendship which they entertained toward their doctrine, released them from anxiety in regard to sacrificing. Why need I speak of those in the royal palaces, and of the rulers over all, who allowed the members of their households, wives and children and servants, to speak openly before them for the Divine word and life, and suffered them almost to boast of the freedom of their faith? Indeed they esteemed them highly, and preferred them to their fellow-servants. Such an one was that Dorotheus, the most devoted and faithful to them of all, and on this account especially honored by them among those who held the most honorable offices and governments. With him was the celebrated Gorgonius, and as many as had been esteemed worthy of the same distinction on account of the word of God. And one could see the rulers in every church accorded the greatest favorby all officers and governors. But how can any one describe those vast assemblies, and the multitude that crowded together in every city, and the famous gatherings in the houses of prayer; on whose account not being satisfied with the ancient buildings they erected from the foundation large churches in all the cities? No envy hindered the progress of these affairs which advanced gradually, and grew and increased day by day. Nor could any evil demon slander them or hinder them through human counsels, so long as the divine and heavenly hand watched over and guarded his own people as worthy."

[342] R. A. Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), 68.

[343] Grant, *Augustus to Constantine*, 247. Eusebius: *EH*, 7.12.1-3 :"Shortly after this Valerian was reduced to slavery by the barbarians, and his son having become sole ruler, conducted the government more prudently. He immediately restrained the persecution against us by public proclamations, and directed the bishops to perform in freedom their customary duties, in a rescript which ran as follows: "The Emperor Cæsar Publius Licinius Gallienus, Pius, Felix, Augustus, to Dionysius, Pinnas, Demetrius, and the other bishops. I have ordered the bounty of my gift to be declared through all the world, that they may depart from the places of religious worship. And for this purpose you may use this copy of my rescript, that no one may molest you. And this which you are now enabled lawfully to do, has already for a long time been conceded by me. Therefore Aurelius Cyrenius, who is the chief administrator of affairs, will observe this ordinance which I have given."

infrastructure of the Empire was in a state of disrepair; armies which were necessary for the maintenance and protection of the Empire needed to be paid; raids had turned towns into forts; and taxes had risen, coupled with the unprecedented collapse of the currency.[344] As suggested by Markus, this may have contributed to the surge in Christian numbers as the old gods lost favour.[345] Throughout the Empire pagan religion was being abandoned; people began reverting back to systems and ideas which preceded Greece and Rome, with Coptic and other regional languages and literature emerging.[346] Notably, the forces of persecution shifted during this period. De Ste. Croix underscores the fact that prior to 250 CE the calls for persecution had usually come from below, however, from 250 CE onwards persecution was initiated by the government and supported by imperial edict, "with little or no sign of persecuting zeal among the mass of pagans".[347]

The Great Persecution itself commenced in the winter of 302-303 CE. This persecution of the Christians had been preceded by one launched against the Manichaeans for the purpose of solidifying the 'moral discipline' of the Empire. Manichaeism was regarded as a "noxious import from Persia".[348] Soon after, initial measures were taken to expel Christians from the army.[349] The persecution was indeed a 'top-down' measure. The motivation for this persecution was an attempt to reassert traditional Roman values, a movement to rally the forces of Roman conservatism to

[344] W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1967), 108.
[345] Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World,* 71. This is attested by Porphyry's writings against Christianity.
[346] W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church,* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1982), 109.
[347] de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, 137.
[348] W. H. C. Frend, *Orthodoxy, Paganism and Dissent in the Early Christian Centuries* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate/Variorum, 2002), 831.
[349] Frend, *Orthodoxy, Paganism and Dissent*, 831.

inspire patriotism and reaffirm the power and history of the Empire. The reaffirmation of the traditional gods under a conservative revival was intended to reawaken the gods who had made Rome victorious in the past.[350] Diocletian had been emperor for 19 years and until 303 CE demonstrated little (if any) interest in the Christians. Frend and Markus both firmly assert that "conservative religious values and a desire to secure a minimum of conformity from the whole race of the Romans were clearly among the reasons that led Diocletian and his colleagues to try conclusions with the Christians."[351] The preceding persecution of the Manichaeans and the army attest to an elite desire to purge the Empire of foreign and novel elements.

The Great Persecution itself began February 23rd, 303 CE with an edict posted in Nicodemia which ordered all copies of scripture to be destroyed, churches dismantled, and meetings of Christians forbidden.[352] This was followed by a supplement which stripped Christians of the dignities they would have enjoyed were they citizens, effectively making them liable to torture and barring them from being plaintiffs in legal proceedings.[353] The first edict was aimed at reducing and containing the visibility of Christians and curtailing their ability to gather as a group. Following riots, a second edict was issued (likely during the spring of 303 CE) which ordered the arrest of the clergy and bishops, followed by a third (issued during September or November of 303 CE) which indicated that clergy were obligated to sacrifice; if they did they were

[350] See Johannes Ronaldus. *The Church in the Age of Constantine: the theological challenges* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2006), 28.
[351] Frend, *The Early Church*, 115. Also, see Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World*, 85.
[352] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Aspects of the Great Persecution", *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 47.2 (1954) 35-36.
[353] de Ste. Croix, "Aspects of the Great Persecution", 35-36.

pardoned and freed.[354] According to Frend, "no effort was spared to compel them to do so".[355] Many of the clergy gave in, and others were compelled to sacrifice. As de Ste. Croix notes, and seemingly confirmed by Eusebius, the majority were dismissed as having sacrificed in one manner or another.[356] The fourth edict ordered all inhabitants of the Empire to sacrifice on pain of death, likely issued in January or February 304 CE.[357] In the Western Empire the persecution likely lasted a limited time, perhaps only to 305 CE; however, in North Africa and the East the persecution continued until 313 CE. In the West where Christians were not as numerous, the persecution had very little impact, while in the East the number of martyrs was much higher. The phenomenon of voluntary martyrdom was visible in this persecution, particularly in the East. It is worth noting that many of the instances described by Eusebius entail the soon-to-be martyrs attempting to disturb or prevent sacrifices. It has been concluded by de Ste. Croix, and the 'average Christian' who did not "insist upon openly parading his confession of faith (the *stans)* was most unlikely to become a victim of the persecution at all."[358] While the

[354] de Ste. Croix, "Aspects of the Great Persecution", 37.
[355] Frend, *The Early Church*, 117.
[356] *Martyrs of Palestine*, 1.3-4: "Afterwards, in the same city, many rulers of the country churches readily endured terrible sufferings, and furnished to the beholders an example of noble conflicts. But others, benumbed in spirit by terror, were easily weakened at the first onset. Of the rest, each one endured different forms of torture, as scourgings without number, and rackings, and tearings of their sides, and insupportable fetters, by which the hands of some were dislocated. Yet they endured what came upon them, as in accordance with the inscrutable purposes of God. For the hands of one were seized, and he was led to the altar, while they thrust into his right hand the polluted and abominable offering, and he was dismissed as if he had sacrificed. Another had not even touched it, yet when others said that he had sacrificed, he went away in silence. Another, being taken up half dead, was cast aside as if already dead, and released from his bonds, and counted among the sacrificers. When another cried out, and testified that he would not obey, he was struck in the mouth, and silenced by a large band of those who were drawn up for this purpose, and driven away by force, even though he had not sacrificed. Of such consequence did they consider it, to seem by any means to have accomplished their purpose."
[357] Lactantius notes that Diocletian desired that this affair be conducted with as little bloodshed as possible. *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, (Ed., Trans. J.L. Creed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1984.), 11.8 "he attempted to observe such moderation as to command the business to be carried through without bloodshed; whereas Galerius would have had all persons burnt alive who refused to sacrifice."
[358] de Ste. Croix, "Aspects of the Great Persecution", 67.

number of Christians executed may not have been in the thousands, the impact of any widespread persecution would have been felt by both the Christian community and the pagan.[359] While Galerius issued an edict of toleration in 308 CE, the persecution would continue in the East under Maximian. During 312/313 CE confiscated property was returned to the church and toleration was eventually granted by Constantine and Licinius when they issued the Edict of Milan in 313 CE.

The persecution came to its final conclusion with the victory of toleration under Constantine. However, this persecution was marked by martyrdom, and by mass apostasy. Its impact would have been felt throughout the Christian churches of the empire. After the Edict of Milan, the church was able to function (officially) as an organization and a tolerated religion. It was necessary for the clergy and laity to be able to consider and process the events which had led up to the toleration of 313 CE.

Despite the state of (relative) peace prior to the outbreak of the persecution in 303 CE, in his introduction to the persecution Eusebius alludes to the divisions and fractures present in the church.[360] While his descriptions of martyrdoms and the *Martyrs of Palestine* are lurid in their details, the church itself is condemned for being partially responsible and deserving of the persecution.[361] The bishops arrested under the first

[359] Indeed, de Ste. Croix concludes that in the 8 years of persecution in the East there are only ninety-one martyrs noted, which while a large number of individuals who died, this is not an overtly high number of martyrs for the 'Great Persecution' if we take into account suggestions that c. 45 individuals suffered martyrdom in Lyons in 177 CE. See: de Ste. Croix, "Aspects of the Great Persecution", 65-66.

[360] *EH*, 8.1.7: "on account of the abundant freedom, we fell into laxity and sloth, and envied and reviled each other, and were almost, as it were, taking up arms against one another, rulers assailing rulers with words like spears, and people forming parties against people, and monstrous hypocrisy and dissimulation rising to the greatest height of wickedness, the divine judgment with forbearance, as is its pleasure, while the multitudes yet continued to assemble, gently and moderately harassed the episcopacy."

[361] 8.3.2-3: "But it is not our place to describe the sad misfortunes which finally came upon them, as we do not think it proper, moreover, to record their divisions and unnatural conduct to each other before the persecution. Wherefore we have decided to relate nothing concerning them except the things in which we can vindicate the Divine judgment. Hence we shall not mention those who were shaken by the

Diocletian edict either volunteered, or were compelled and considered to have sacrificed.[362] Many instances recorded by Eusebius note situations of many Christians offering sacrifice.[363] The Eusebian view of the church at the turn of the centuries was not overtly positive. It presents a fragmented church filled with false leaders and schismatics.[364] This presentation of the persecution is intriguing. Indeed, Eusebius was personally vulnerable in ecclesiastical circles due to his near complete avoidance of suffering during the persecution, despite the prevalence of persecution in Caesarea.[365] At the Council of Tyre Eusebius was attacked by Potamon who questioned Eusebius' failure to be a martyr or even a confessor during the persecution.[366]

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persecution, nor those who in everything pertaining to salvation were shipwrecked, and by their own will were sunk in the depths of the flood."

[362] *Martyrs of Palestine*, 1.3-4

[363] *Martyrs of Palestine*, Ch. 2, 4, as noted previously.

[364] 8.1.8: "those esteemed our shepherds, casting aside the bond of piety, were excited to conflicts with one another, and did nothing else than heap up strifes and threats and jealousy and enmity and hatred toward each other, like tyrants eagerly endeavoring to assert their power. Then, truly, according to the word of Jeremiah, "The Lord in his wrath darkened the daughter of Zion, and cast down the glory of Israel from heaven to earth, and remembered not his foot-stool in the day of his anger. The Lord also overwhelmed all the beautiful things of Israel, and threw down all his strongholds." (Lam. 2:1-2)"; See: *Martrys of Palestine*, 12.1, for a description of the church during the persecution: "the lust of power on the part of many, the disorderly and unlawful ordinations, and the schisms among the confessors themselves; also the novelties which were zealously devised against the remnants of the Church by the new and factious members, who added innovation after innovation and forced them in unsparingly among the calamities of the persecution, heaping misfortune upon misfortune".

[365] Frend, *Orthodoxy, Paganism and Dissent in the Early Christian Centuries*, 832. Eusebius was however, briefly imprisoned with his predecessor Pamphilus. He was released while Pamphilus was martyred in 309.

[366] Epiphanius, *The Panarion*, transl. Frank Williams (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1994), 68.8.3-4: "The blessed Potamon was a zealot for truth and orthodoxy, a free-spoken man who had never show partiality. His eye had been put out for the truth during the persecution. When he saw Eusebius sitting on the judge's bench and Athanasius standing, he was overcome with grief and wept, as honest men will. He shouted at Eusebius, "Are you seated, Eusebius, with Athanasius before you in the dock, when he's innocent? Who can put up with things like that? Tell me - weren't you in prison with me during the persecution? I lost an eye for the truth, but you don't appear to be maimed and weren't martyred; you stand here alive without a mark on you. How did you get out of jail, if you didn't promise our persecutors to do the unthinkable - or you didn't do it?".

MLyons: a second-century text for a fourth-century problem

As we have noted, the *Ecclesiastical History* was written for posterity's sake, and also in the hope of being useful for its contemporaneous audience. The church which was finally embraced by the Roman Empire was one marked by schism, division, and apostasy. Furthermore, the history of the church was decidedly marked by persecution. Through a conscious and determined writing of Christian history, highlighting proper belief and orthopraxy, Eusebius articulated an idealized vision of the past – a veritable golden age of Christianity. Through this romanticized historic vision, texts such as *MLyons* could bear instructive merit for the Christian church in the early years of the fourth century. Eusebius' historical project also had to take into consideration the new situation in which Christianity found itself, one of acceptance by Rome. Hostility, whether current or historicized, would hinder Christian progress. Any version of Christian history would have to be apologetic in its approach to the Roman Empire. *MLyons* effectively serves this dual purpose: it offers an idealized portrait of a persecuted community and details the impact of the persecution while also underscoring the continued existence of the surviving church at Lyons. It articulates a pragmatic and apologetic historical reflection on the relations between pagans and Christians. As a text it instructs its audience how to understand persecution and recuperate. In addition, it theologically and apologetically absolved contemporary pagans of any culpability, as well as those Christians who had apostatized.

Primarily, the text presents the Christian community as undeserving of punishment. For Eusebius the church at Lyons is idealized and represented as one of "the most celebrated churches in that country".[367] Dissatisfied with the state of the church in the late third/early fourth century, one could read the texts from the early church and romanticize this 'golden age' of Christianity, an age during which Christians leaders could speak of having met the disciples of Jesus, and the church was not torn by the heresy and schism of the present day.[368] Though innocent, the Lyonnais church (for the most part) deals with the persecution with grace and faith. Throughout the text the Christians are presented as being rational and noble, and thoroughly committed to their religion. The community itself is presented as to be accessible to a wide range of Christian readers – there are female martyrs such as Biblas, and noble slaves such as Blandina, young men such as Ponticus and old men such as Pothinus. Until the persecution, the Christians in Lyons had lived peacefully with their neighbours.[369] As we have noted, the Christians were known by sight to their pagan neighbours.

Eusebius might hope a Christian reader would be sympathetic to the situation in Lyons, however, how could a text which presents the pagans as savage and bloodthirsty barbarians be accepted by a non-Christian? As is evident in our discussion of *MLyons*, the crowds who sought out and persecuted the Christians are portrayed as acting irrationally, and the governor acted illegally in his improper execution of Attalus. The

[367] *EH*, 5.1.2
[368] 4.14.3-4 "But Polycarp also was not only instructed by the apostles, and acquainted with many that had seen Christ, but was also appointed by apostles in Asia bishop of the church of Smyrna.We too saw him in our early youth; for he lived a long time, and died, when a very old man, a glorious and most illustrious martyr's death, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, which the Church also hands down, and which alone are true."
[369] 5.1.15 "even if any had before been moderate on account of friendship, they were now exceedingly furious and gnashed their teeth against us".

text is imbued with a Christian theology of martyrdom. As death and persecution so indelibly marked early Christianity, the persecuted required a way in which to view their situation and to understand how their God could countenance this. An orthodox theology of martyrdom and persecution is presented clearly and reinforced throughout *MLyons*. The condemned Christians joyfully embrace this opportunity to achieve martyrdom.[370] Martyrdom was a responsibility and it was an opportunity to achieve the highest form of spiritual adulation.[371] A true theology of martyrdom understood it was not the pagan governor who martyred the Christians; it was rather the working of God who allowed the martyrs to obtain 'the crown' by defeating the daemonic powers sent against them.

Throughout the text there is repeated emphasis on the attempts by the crowds and authorities to get the condemned Christians to sacrifice.[372] The daemons are attempting to make apostates, not martyrs. Martyrs are true witnesses of the faith while apostates are those who forever lose the 'life-giving Name'.[373] In a rather roundabout way, the narrative implies that the pagans, and even the governor are no longer culpable in the deaths of the martyrs as the 'noble athletes' struggled not with beasts or gladiators, but with daemons and/or the devil in an attempt to obtain Christ.[374] An apologist could hope

[370] 5.1.35
[371] 5.2.3 "For they conceded cheerfully the appellation of Witness to Christ 'the faithful and true Witness,' and 'firstborn of the dead,'and prince of the life of God; and they reminded us of the witnesses who had already departed, and said, 'They are already witnesses whom Christ has deemed worthy to be taken up in their confession, having sealed their testimony by their departure; but we are lowly and humble confessors.' And they besought the brethren with tears that earnest prayers should be offered that they might be made perfect"
[372] 5.1.43 "They had been brought every day to witness the sufferings of the others, and had been pressed to swear by the idols."
[373] 5.1.35
[374] 5.1.41-42 "For they looked on her in her conflict, and beheld with their outward eyes, in the form of their sister, him who was crucified for them, that he might persuade those who believe on him, that every one who suffers for the glory of Christ has fellowship always with the living God... clothed with Christ

that a sympathetic pagan would understand the affront and horror felt by the surviving community over the indignities that the corpses of the martyrs were condemned to. As noted, the text is apologetic in nature; it seeks to convince. A fourth-century pagan would perhaps have known of the historic persecutions of the Christians and would have been aware of the contemporaneous persecution under Diocletian. It has been previously noted that there was not a great deal of enthusiasm for the persecution amongst the pagan masses. As with all martyrologies, the text inverts the balance of power by removing it from the authorities and granting it to the suffering Christians. As the authors of *MLyons* recast the suffering of their deceased brethren, Eusebius had to reconcile and thus reconceptualize the Great Persecution which he had witnessed.

A secondary feature of the text which speaks directly to fourth-century Christians living in the wake of the Great Persecution is the treatment of the 'fallen' Christians in *MLyons*. Persecution was always accompanied by apostasy. This is visible in *MLyons* and occurred in various persecutions throughout Christian history.[375] Following the Decian persecution the *libellatici* had been cause for inquiry and disagreement in the surviving church.[376] *MLyons* affirms that acceptance and toleration of the fallen was the appropriate Christian response.[377] Pragmatically, Christianity survived persecution not

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the mighty and conquering Athlete, she might arouse the zeal of the brethren, and, having overcome the adversary many times might receive, through her conflict, the crown incorruptible."

[375] On the persecution in Alexandria, 6.41.11-12 "All truly were affrighted. And many of the more eminent in their fear came forward immediately; others who were in the public service were drawn on by their official duties; others were urged on by their acquaintances. And as their names were called they approached the impure and impious sacrifices. Some of them were pale and trembled as if they were not about to sacrifice, but to be themselves sacrifices and offerings to the idols; so that they were jeered at by the multitude who stood around, as it was plain to every one that they were afraid either to die or to sacrifice. But some advanced to the altars more readily, declaring boldly that they had never been Christians. Of these the prediction of our Lord is most true that they shall 'hardly' be saved."

[376] Frend, *The Early Church,* 101.

[377] *EH*, 5.2.6: "For, through the genuineness of their love, their greatest contest with him was that the Beast, being choked, might cast out alive those whom he supposed he had swallowed. For they did not

because of its martyrs, but because of its survivors; they were necessary to continue the faith and memorialize their fallen brethren. Eusebius, as we have noted, was not warm in his description of the church preceding the Diocletian persecution. Indeed, this persecution is articulated as a punishment of God, and the martyrs who suffered are theologized as witnesses of the true faith in the face of schism and heresy.

The Constantinian toleration of Christianity following such a period of persecution could only be understood as a theological victory. Divisions and disagreement within Christianity would not benefit the surviving and vindicated church. Indeed, the prescription in *MLyons* underscored that survivors of a persecution must band together and rebuild, not be divided by strife.[378] Despite the severity of the persecution, in *MLyons* the church rebuilds and within a year or so, they are functional and have elected Irenaeus as their new bishop and sent him to Rome to convey their messages.[379] Following the Great Persecution divisions within the church would have been expected as they had marked the years following the Decian persecution. Eusebius has elsewhere utilized texts which affirm forgiveness of those who apostatized during times of persecution.[380] In this Eusebius, if anything, was orthodox. He was also

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boast over the fallen, but helped them in their need with those things in which they themselves abounded, having the compassion of a mother, and shedding many tears on their account before the Father."

[378] 5.2.7 "Having always loved peace, and having commended peace to us they went in peace to God, leaving no sorrow to their mother, nor division or strife to the brethren, but joy and peace and concord and love."

[379] 5.4.2 "...we have requested our brother and comrade Irenaeus to carry this letter to you, and we ask you to hold him in esteem, as zealous for the covenant of Christ. For if we thought that office could confer righteousness upon any one, we should commend him among the first as a presbyter of the church, which is his position."

[380] 6.42.5 ""These divine martyrs among us, who now are seated with Christ, and are sharers in his kingdom, partakers of his judgment and judges with him, received some of the brethren who had fallen away and become chargeable with the guilt of sacrificing. When they perceived that their conversion and repentance were sufficient to be acceptable with him who by no means desires the death of the sinner, but his repentance, having proved them they received them back and brought them together, and met with them and had fellowship with them in prayers and feasts."

politically conscious, and the Edict of Milan was a great victory for Christianity. A unified and committed church was much more politically amenable to Eusebius' theology of history.

CHAPTER V

The Eusebian Theology of History

The apologetic aspect of Eusebius' historiographic method allowed for the potential of a non-Christian reader while simultaneously edifying and articulating the historic Christian past. As he claims, Eusebius was a pioneer in the field of Christian history.[381] The *Ecclesiastical History* was written for posterity and for its contemporary utility.[382] Posterity, we have seen, can be understood as the apologetic goal of effectively 'proving' Christianity through a Christianization of history – convincing outsiders and providing insiders with a gloried past. Figures, churches, and events are worth remembering, however, they must be useful for the current purpose, and as such required an apologetic and orthodox reconfiguration.[383] The appropriation of Judaic history, pagan philosophy, and linking the rise of Christ with the rise of the Roman Empire were all apologetic techniques utilized by Eusebius in constructing a distinctively Christian history. 'Usefulness' encompasses his apologetic tendency – it was useful for Christianity to have a vindicating history – but it also refers to the prescriptive nature of his history. As we have seen, the time in which Eusebius was writing is reflected by the political messages of his history. The moderate approach taken to persecution (as viewed in *MLyons*) reflects a pragmatic stance in the wake of the Great Persecution and Edict of Milan. The orthodox stance on voluntary martyrdom

[381] *EH*, 1.1.4: "I am the first to enter upon the subject, I am attempting to traverse as it were a lonely and untrodden path."
[382] *EH*, Book V, Introduction "A record of this was written for posterity, and in truth it is worthy of perpetual remembrance A full account... which constitutes a narrative instructive as well as historical. I will repeat here such portions of this account as may be needful for the present purpose."
[383] See: *EH*, Book I, Introduction.

present in the *Ecclesiastical History* and the reconciliatory approach taken to pagan-Christian relations further attest to this. The lack of eschatological apocalypticism is indicative of Eusebius' progressive theology of history. This theology permeates the whole of his historical discourse and is an important starting point for later Christian political theology.

Tantamount to articulating the truth of Christianity was an assertion of its age. As we have discussed, criticisms of Christianity as a novel and sophomoric religion riled apologists to response. The *Chronicle* provided the chronological framework for the *Ecclesiastical History*, however, "the mortar holding the edifice together was a particular interpretation of history."[384] This interpretation was one which irrevocably linked Christianity and the Roman Empire. This was not an Eusebian innovation, indeed it was developed much earlier (in the second century by Melito of Sardis) and alluded to throughout the earliest of Christian texts. The apologetic 'movement' within early Christianity was at the origin of a reconciliation of Christian theology with imperial power.[385]

While sects of Christians deemed heretical were entirely and ultimately rejected, the authority of the state was accepted up until the point it explicitly demanded a compromise of faith. From an Eusebian perspective, the authority of the emperor came from God, and thus could not be denied unless acceptance of that authority implied apostasy. One must ask from a Christian perspective, how could the Roman Empire, which had persecuted Christians derive its power and authority from God? While

[384] Arthur J. Droge "The Apologetic Dimensions of the Ecclesiastical History", eds. Harold W. Attridge, Gōhei Hata *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1992), 492.
[385] Hugo Rahner, *Church and State in Early Christianity*, (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 1992), 10.

martyrologies undoubtedly presented a rejection of authority to the point of death on a topical level, the cause of persecution and death must be theologically understood from a Eusebian perspective. As we have seen in his describing persecution – whether locally, such as with *MLyons*, or broadly such as with the Great Persecution – despite the cruelty of the pagans and the Empire, the root cause is viewed as daemonic power in an acute struggle against the inevitable triumph of Christianity. For Christians, any rejection of imperial authority was a rejection of bad authority – essentially a rejection of the daemonic power which has spurred the persecutors on, testing the Christians.[386] Such was the case with the Roman governor in *MLyons*.

A complete rejection of the state, such as one seen in the Book of Daniel, or the writings of Hippolytus of Rome, was inherently apocalyptic.[387] This total rejection is absent in the *Ecclesiastical History*. In earlier persecutions, such as the one depicted in *MLyons,* a denial of the state apparatus and gubernatorial power was present, but only when the truth of Christian faith was challenged. Previously, Christians co-existed peacefully with their neighbours, and their religious identity was tolerated. However,

[386] *EH*, Book V, *Introduction*, "our narrative of the government of God will record in ineffaceable letters the most peaceful wars waged in behalf of the peace of the soul, and will tell of men doing brave deeds for truth rather than country, and for piety rather than dearest friends. It will hand down to imperishable remembrance the discipline and the much-tried fortitude of the athletes of religion, the trophies won from demons, the victories over invisible enemies, and the crowns placed upon all their heads."

[387] Hippolytus of Rome, *de Christo et Antichristo*, (eds. Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5), 25, "Then he says: "A fourth beast, dreadful and terrible; it had iron teeth and claws of brass." And who are these but the Romans? which (kingdom) is meant by the iron—the kingdom which is now established; for the legs of that (image) were of iron. And after this, what remains, beloved, but the toes of the feet of the image, in which part is iron and part clay, mixed together? And mystically by the toes of the feet he meant the kings who are to arise from among them; as Daniel also says (in the words), "I considered the beast, and lo there were ten horns behind it, among which shall rise another (horn), an offshoot, and shall pluck up by the roots the three (that were) before it." And under this was signified none other than Antichrist, who is also himself to raise the kingdom of the Jews. He says that three horns are plucked up by the root by him, viz., the three kings of Egypt, and Libya, and Ethiopia, whom he cuts off in the array of battle. And he, after gaining terrible power over all, being nevertheless a tyrant, shall stir up tribulation and persecution against men, exalting himself against them. For Daniel says: "I considered the horn, and behold that horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, till the beast was slain and perished, and its body was given to the burning of fire."

when push came to shove, religious identity and faith took precedence over loyalty to the authority of the governor, or the *genius* of the Emperor. Accusations of *flagitia* are firmly denied, and faith confessed with simplicity.

Artfully, Eusebius theologically construed the contemporaneous persecution under Diocletian as divine retribution for the schism and heresy of the bishops and authorities.[388] The state was not held responsible; it was the heretics who were condemned. It was not pagan critics who condemned Montanists, Novantists, Gnostics, Docetists and others, it was fellow Christians. Heresy was a later phenomenon against which accusations of novelty and ignorance were hurled, "according to Eusebius, orthodox Christianity is not only theologically superior to its heretical counterparts, it is also chronologically superior."[389] Heresy was accused of being a 'secondary phenomenon' responsible for the continuation of persecution.[390] By Eusebian standards, the early history of Christianity was a war against daemons.[391] Daemons were used to persecute the church throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*. They could take the form of

[388] *EH*, 8.2.2-3, "it is not our place to describe the sad misfortunes which finally came upon them, as we do not think it proper, moreover, to record their divisions and unnatural conduct to each other before the persecution. Wherefore we have decided to relate nothing concerning them except the things in which we can vindicate the Divine judgment. Hence we shall not mention those who were shaken by the persecution, nor those who in everything pertaining to salvation were shipwrecked, and by their own will were sunk in the depths of the flood."; 9.8.15, "After these things were thus done, God, the great and celestial defender of the Christians, having revealed in the events which have been described his anger and indignation at all men for the great evils which they had brought upon us, restored to us the bright and gracious sunlight of his providence in our behalf; so that in the deepest darkness a light of peace shone most wonderfully upon us from him, and made it manifest to all that God himself has always been the ruler of our affairs. From time to time indeed he chastens his people and corrects them by his visitations, but again after sufficient chastisement he shows mercy and favor to those who hope in him."
[389] Droge, "The Apologetic Dimensions of the Ecclesiastical History", 504.
[390] Droge, "The Apologetic Dimensions of the Ecclesiastical History", 505. Also note, *EH* 3.32.8, "But when the sacred college of apostles had suffered death in various forms, and the generation of those that had been deemed worthy to hear the inspired wisdom with their own ears had passed away, then the league of godless error took its rise as a result of the folly of heretical teachers, who, because none of the apostles was still living, attempted henceforth, with a bold face, to proclaim, in opposition to the preaching of the truth, the 'knowledge which is falsely so-called"
[391] *EH*, Book V, *Introduction*.

the old gods whom the pagans worshipped, persecuting emperors, or dangerously misleading heretics.[392] Any apparent rejection of Imperial power or the Empire, was always in actuality a rejection of daemonic power. As ties between Christianity and the Roman Empire strengthened, perception of the vehicles of daemonic barbarism and sin shifted from pagans to heretics.

Fundamentally, Eusebius' historical theology was an anticipation of the union of church and Empire. The two shared a common birth and a common destiny. Prior to the rise of Christ "the world was filled with polyarchy".[393] For Eusebius, the historically contemporary births of Jesus of Nazareth and Augustus were not coincidental. They were proof of what would be the eventual fulfillment of Eusebius' theology of history.[394] In Eusebius' *Chronicle* the structure of the *Canons* attest to the inevitable

[392] Chesnut, "Eusebius: The History of Salvation from the Garden of Eden to the Rise of the Roman Empire," 89. Also see, *EH*, 10.8.2 "But malignant envy, and the demon who loves that which is evil, were not able to bear the sight of these things; and moreover the events that befell the tyrants whom we have already mentioned were not sufficient to bring Licinius to sound reason."; 4.7.1-3, "As the churches throughout the world were now shining like the most brilliant stars, and faith in our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ was flourishing among the whole human race, the demon who hates everything that is good, and is always hostile to the truth, and most bitterly opposed to the salvation of man, turned all his arts against the Church. In the beginning he armed himself against it with external persecutions. But now, being shut off from the use of such means, he devised all sorts of plans, and employed other methods in his conflict with the Church, using base and deceitful men as instruments for the ruin of souls and as ministers of destruction. Instigated by him, impostors and deceivers, assuming the name of our religion, brought to the depth of ruin such of the believers as they could win over, and at the same time, by means of the deeds which they practiced, turned away from the path which leads to the word of salvation those who were ignorant of the faith. Accordingly there proceeded from that Menander, whom we have already mentioned as the successor of Simon, a certain serpent-like power, double-tongued and two-headed, which produced the leaders of two different heresies, Saturninus, an Antiochian by birth, and Basilides, an Alexandrian. The former of these established schools of godless heresy in Syria, the latter in Alexandria."

[393] Chesnut, "Eusebius: The History of Salvation from the Garden of Eden to the Rise of the Roman Empire," 86.

[394] *EH*, 1.2.23 "Then, finally, at the time of the origin of the Roman Empire, there appeared again to all men and nations throughout the world, who had been, as it were, previously assisted, and were now fitted to receive the knowledge of the Father, that same teacher of virtue, the minister of the Father in all good things, the divine and heavenly Word of God, in a human body not at all differing in substance from our own"

union of Christianity and the Roman Empire.[395] The polyarchy of the former era of history implied conflict and warfare, whereas the monotheistic theology of Imperial Rome implied peace. Even in instances of tumult and chaos, the Roman Empire was moving inexorably towards this union. Even Eusebius' account of the tetrarchs and their wars had "one obvious and primary goal; praise of the winner in the post-tetrarchic struggle and denigration of the losers."[396] Eusebius' extreme 'churchiness' and his 'monarchical' preference are well known. His resounding support for the monarchy of the Roman Empire was an argument for Christian monotheism:

> in Eusebius's thought *poly*theism and *poly*archy were linked together as necessarily as were *mono*theism and *mon*archy. In good Platonic fashion, one level of reality was merely the icon or image of the next higher level: the organization of humanity's secular political life mirrored on a lower plane the organization of its spiritual life.[397]

A strong, centralized monarchy resulted in peace. Similarly, a strong, centralized, and orthodox church resulted in peace. As noted by Burrow,

> Eusebius' own reading of even secular history was highly providentialist – understandably in someone who had witnessed what must have seemed the miracle of the Emperor's conversion immediately following the most severe and protracted persecution in the history of the Church. Constantine's conversion

[395] As noted, there are initially multiple columns depicting the parallel histories of Egypt/Rome/Athens/Sparta/Israel/etc, which are reduced until there are only two: the Roman and Christian.
[396] Robert M. Grant, "Eusebius and Imperial Propaganda", eds. Harold W. Attridge, Gōhei Hata *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1992), 679.
[397] Chesnut, "Eusebius: The History of Salvation from the Garden of Eden to the Rise of the Roman Empire," 87.

> became for Eusebius almost like a second Incarnation, and Constantine was clearly God's representative on earth.[398]

Unified authority – one God, one emperor – provided for peace, whereas multiple sources of authority and multiple deities created havoc and strife.[399] Contrary to the suggestions of detractors such as Celsus, Christians were the most loyal citizens of the Empire. Once the old, antiquated false gods of paganism were abandoned and the goal of Christian history realized, Christianity and Rome could unite, and peace would spread throughout the land. This is clearly articulated by Eusebius in the joyful conclusion of the *Ecclesiastical History*:

> Thus after all tyranny had been purged away, the empire which belonged to them was preserved firm and without a rival for Constantine and his sons alone. And having obliterated the godlessness of their predecessors, recognizing the benefits conferred upon them by God, they exhibited their love of virtue and their love of God, and their piety and gratitude to the Deity, by the deeds which they performed in the sight of all men. [400]

In the thought of Eusebius, the *pax romana* and the *pax dei* (which replaced the *pax deorum*) went hand in hand.

Eusebius' theology of history is one of progress. While theologically it began with 'the Fall', this was a fall into temporality, a fall into history. Eusebius's

[398] Burrow, *A History of Histories*, 189.
[399] Robert M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society: Seven Studies* (San Fransico: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 34.
[400] *EH*, 10.9.9 (closing line of the *Ecclesiastical History*).

Ecclesiastical History was lacking a clearly articulated eschatology.[401] Indeed, "Eusebius never allows the doctrine of Christ's second coming any importance in his historical scheme."[402] The pinnacle of Christian achievement – for Eusebius – was the triumph of the church as embraced by the reign of Constantine. Ultimately, his *Ecclesiastical History* was a celebration of historical events. Human (Christian) history has been a progressive building to this victory of the church in the world, "for Eusebius, the second coming provided a historical event which would recompense the evil that remained unaccounted for in the history of the world prior to it, including the time of Constantine's reign."[403] For Eusebius, the reign and conversion of Constantine affirmed his theology of history and confirmed his historical optimism.

This theology of history – the union of Rome and Christ as the culmination of historical progress – saturates the project that is the *Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius sought not only to report but to prove and to vindicate. His method and vision proved successful as "his successors sought only to continue, not to supplant it."[404] His history traced the church from its persecuted past to its victorious present. The Constantinian toleration 'proved' Eusebius' theology of history. Christianity – and the Empire – could now only be understood as 'divinely willed'.[405] Articulating the political philosophy of a Christian Empire, Eusebius' vision was pragmatically triumphalist and cautiously optimistic. The divine censure which had accompanied the Great Persecution could not be forgotten and heresy and disagreement still plagued the church as the Council of

[401] In other works, specifically *Proof of the Gospel* there are illustrations of some eschatology, however, even there his focus remained on history and supporting his theology of history.
[402] Frank S. Thielman, "Another Look at the Eschatology of Eusebius of Caesarea." *Vigiliae Christianae*, 41 (1987), 225.
[403] Thielman, "Another Look at the Eschatology of Eusebius of Caesarea", 234.
[404] Burrow, *A History of Histories*,190.
[405] Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, 84.

Nicaea would attest; however, Eusebius' theology of history would remain dominant for centuries of Christians.

Eusebius came close to affirming the traditionally pagan belief of Rome as the Eternal City. The union of Christianity and Rome was the ultimate fulfillment of this historical theology. As Christianity was eternal, so was the Roman Empire. In Eusebius' thought, the Empire was eternalized as a Christian empire and as the true monotheistic faith Christianity was placed in the context of the 'eternal' Roman Empire. Both church and Empire could be redeemed by this union.[406] Later in the century, Augustine would build upon the foundational interpretation of Eusebius. While not attempting to write a universal history of Christianity and the church, Augustine cast history as an entirely 'Christian drama'.[407] Influenced by his own historical circumstances, Augustine realized the error in linking Christianity too closely with the physical, temporality of the Roman Empire. He was well aware that the eternal and universal institution of the church could not be tied to any temporal state, city, or empire.[408] Yet, in separating these two 'metanarratives' of church and state Augustine did not seek to supplant the historical theologizing of Eusebius only to continue and improve upon it.

For Eusebius, a Christian empire was temporally realized. The myth of the Eternal City of Rome as proclaimed by Virgil found a new home in Christian history and political philosophy.[409] Omnipresent and eternal Christianity was embraced temporally by the earthly Roman Empire. It has long been argued that Christianity was beneficial to the Roman Empire. Mythologically, some of the immortality of

[406] *Historians at Work*, 254.
[407] *Historians at work*, 270.
[408] Breisach, *Historiography: ancient, medieval, and modern,* 84
[409] Burrow, *A History of Histories,*196.

Christianity could not help but mingle with the preexistent concept of *Roma Aeterna*. As noted by Burrow, "the eventual adoption in the west of the phrase 'Holy Roman Empire' only made explicit what had long been the dominant conception of Christian historiography."[410] Eusebius' entire historical project, from his *Chronicle* to martyr-acts such as *MLyons*, was prescriptive in that it underscored orthodox attitudes, and apologetic in that it professed a vision of Christian history which sought to supplant the pagan account and convince the Church's critics. For Eusebius, who died many years before the sack of Rome in 410 CE, Christianity and Rome were irrevocably and ultimately linked.

[410] Burrow, *A History of Histories*, 196.

CONCLUSIONS

Eusebius as a Theologian of History

While he had his predecessors, Eusebius was the first author of whom we know who wrote to establish the entirety of Christian history.[411] He wrote with motive and with belief, seeking to convince and to vindicate his theology of history; the *Ecclesiastical History* was both apologetic and prescriptive. Emerging from the literary tradition of the second century, Eusebius learned from the techniques of apologists such as Justin Martyr, the anonymous author of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, and Melito of Sardis. By appropriating Jewish history and Judaic patriarchal figures Eusebius was able to ensure that Christianity predated the classical Greek philosophers, and certainly predated the Roman Empire. He amassed a pastiche of Christian texts, many apologetic and included them at will to prove his point, and attest to the symbiotic relationship of Christianity and the Roman Empire. Prescriptively, the *Ecclesiastical History* offered advice and lessons to it's audience; Eusebius intended his history to be 'useful'. It instructed non-Christians on how to understand Christianity and presented a history which proved its validity and its vision. For Christians, it articulated a past, instructed them on how to understand the present, and alluded to a future.

MLyons underscores how an idealized and historicized Christian community deals with a persecution. Voluntary martyrs were not lauded (nor however, were they

[411] Book I, Introduction: "This work seems to me of especial importance because I know of no ecclesiastical writer who has devoted himself to this subject; and I hope that it will appear most useful to those who are fond of historical research."

condemned), those who lapsed were eventually forgiven unless they had betrayed their brethren. Those who were condemned but denied unto death, lost the hope of martyrdom, and lost the eternal truth of Christianity. Above all – as evidenced by \the continuation of both the *Ecclesiastical History* and the community of Lyons – the church will survive, and rebound. It instructs how 'regular' Christians are to understand historical persecutions: they are to support their brethren and the proto-martyrs, and are not to rashly seek out radical, voluntary martyrdom; and following a persecution they are to forgive and properly memorialize the martyrs and their contest.

The evolution of persecutions from a 'bottom-up' to a 'top-down' model in the third century, underscores the increase in Christian numbers and influence. *MLyons* describes a situation in which the local Lyonnais pagan populace launched an attack on the Christian community, sanctioned by imperial authority. Centuries later, the Great Persecution originated with an imperial edict, and was carried out by authorities with varying degrees of reluctance or enthusiasm. Early Christian literature such as *MLyons* and the *Ecclesiastical History,* were indelibly marked by persecution and as such were forced to develop a theology of persecution by which they could understand how God would sanction such discrimination and violence against His chosen people. Historical persecutions such as the one in Lyons could be understood as one of the wars fought by the 'Christian Empire' against the daemonic powers which sought to defeat the early church. The contemporaneous Diocletian persecution, occurring after a period of relative peace, stability, and positive growth, was construed as divine retribution for heresy, which was the new vehicle of daemonic evil powers. Such violence could only be understood if it was theologized properly. This project was more easily undertaken

and understood after the revolutionary Edict of Milan and Constantinian toleration. Throughout the *Ecclesiastical History* Christianity – like the historical martyrologies – was written to be ultimately and eternally victorious.

Eusebius had lived through the greatest persecution of the church and its greatest victory. The *Ecclesiastical History* was destined to be marked by such personal experience. It is easy to forgive his hopefulness, and his confident linking of Rome and Christ. Augustine, living through the first fall of Rome in nearly a millennium was able to reject Eusebius naive and 'sanguine optimism' and reject his identification of God's will in history as false.[412] While Eusebius has been dismissed as a propagandist and as a dishonest historian, his self-stated purpose was to write a history for (Christian) posterity that would be fundamentally 'useful'. This history was to provide Christian with a storied past and instruction on how to theologically understand their present situation. When his personal experience and his motives are highlighted, his apologetic and prescriptive historical optimism can be traced throughout his history. What appeared to be the ultimate victory of Christianity confirmed his theology of history as articulated in the *Ecclesiastical History*. Christianity's acceptance by and union with the great and eternal Roman Empire could have only further coloured his historical theology as triumphalist.

The historical project of Eusebius progressively built to the successful and preordained union of Christianity and Rome. For Eusebius' theology of history, it was no coincidence that Augustus and Christ were contemporaries. The power of any ruling authority was always ultimately given by God. As Jesus of Nazareth and his apostles

[412] Hollerich, "Religion and Politics in the Writings of Eusebius", 324-325.

spread word of the Kingdom of God, Augustus built the greatest earthly empire. The true monotheism of Christianity and the monarchy of the Empire went hand in hand, aimed at establishing peace on earth and a Christian empire. For Eusebius, the *pax romana* and the *pax dei* were destined to be united.

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