

Imitating the mysteries that you celebrate:  
martyrdom and Eucharist in the  
early Patristic period

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The Ghent Altarpiece, painted by the van Eyck brothers for the church of St Bavon in Ghent, was completed in 1432. One of the largest panels in this triptych depicts the Adoration of the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem. The artists effectively illustrate the scene from chapter seven of the Book of Revelation (Rev 7:9–17). On the central altar stands the Lamb of God. From his wounded side a stream of blood and water flows into a chalice, also positioned on the altar. A group of kneeling angels encircle the altar. Some hold the instruments of the passion such as the Cross, the crown of thorns, the spear, the hyssop stick and the pillar of the scourging. Others kneel in worship, while the two in the forefront wave censers before the Lamb.

Various groups of individuals, positioned diagonally in the scene, are depicted either kneeling before the altar or converging towards it. Among these certain members carry palm branches in their hands. Some are dressed in white robes. In front of the altar lies a fountain with flowing water, while above the altar a dove is depicted, hovering over the whole scene, as if in answer to an epiclesis. Rays emanate from the dove, touching the altar and the four assembling groups.

As Ysabel de Andia notes, 'the image of blood is a red thread running through the entire book [of Revelation]'.<sup>1</sup> Jesus Christ, the faithful and true witness (cf. Rev 1:5, 3:14), is the focus of the ever-expanding liturgical ripples in the heavenly Jerusalem, as depicted in the Book of Revelation. The Ghent Altarpiece depicts the Lamb and the chalice as the focal point of this heavenly liturgy. One of the elders explains to John: 'These are the people who have been through the great persecution, and because they have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb, they now stand in front of God's throne and serve him day and night in his sanctuary' (Rev 7:14–15). The Lamb is also the guiding Shepherd, leading his faithful witnesses to the springs of living water (cf. Rev 7:17).

This text from the Book of Revelation, and the van Eyck brothers' masterpiece, place before us the message of the union of the martyrs with Christ's passion and their share in his victory over suffering and death. Seer and artists alike

give their message a liturgical context. Prominent in this is the eucharistic cup and the reference to the blood of the Lamb. It is as if the Lord's command: 'Do this in memory of me' (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24–25) constitutes an invitation not only to celebrate the Eucharist, but also to imitate its message and lay down one's life for others in imitation of the Good Shepherd's love (cf. Jn 10:11, 15, 17–18).

The martyrs Cosmas and Damian are among the list of martyrs whose names feature in the Roman Canon. While we know relatively little about these martyrs, they are traditionally regarded as having endured martyrdom in the great persecution of Diocletian in AD 303. The offertory prayer from the Mass for their memorial on 26 September reads as follows:

Lord,  
we who celebrate the death of your holy martyrs  
offer you the sacrifice  
which gives all martyrdom its meaning.  
Be pleased with our praise.<sup>2</sup>

This prayer implies a close link between the celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice, with its memorial of the paschal mystery, and the sacrifice involved in martyrdom itself. The martyrs are the ones whose particular path of discipleship involves a radical *imitatio Christi*. In a special way they reveal themselves as the ones who imitate the mysteries that they celebrate.

In this paper I wish to explore the linkages between the Eucharist and martyrdom in the early Patristic period. By so doing I shall try to enter into the mind of the persecuted and describe something of the spiritual motivation that led so many martyrs to face death courageously for the sake of Christ's name. I limit my comments to four fathers, three of whom died as martyrs in the period prior to the Great Persecution of Diocletian: Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna and Cyprian of Carthage. Our final witness will be Augustine of Hippo, who did not die as a martyr but had to deal with the problem of false martyrs among the Donatists in the aftermath of the Great Persecution. Furthermore, Augustine contributes significantly to the theological understanding of martyrdom and the cult of the martyrs in the early Church, including some important comments on the interrelationship of Eucharist and martyrdom.

ST IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

Ignatius of Antioch ranks as one of the most famous martyrs of the early Church. We are left in the dark as to the precise reasons that led to his arrest at Antioch and his being brought to Rome, under military escort, to face death in the Flavian

<sup>1</sup> Y. de Andia, 'Martyrdom and truth: from Ignatius of Antioch to the monks of Tibhirine', *Communio* 29 (2002) 62–88, at 65.

<sup>2</sup> From the Proper of Saints for 26 September, Memorial of SS. Cosmas and Damian, *The Roman Missal* (Alcester & Dublin, 1975), p. 632.

amphitheatre c.AD 107, during the reign of the emperor Trajan. As G.W. Bowersock noted in his Wiles Lectures in 1993, despite Ignatius' zeal for death at the hands of the Roman authorities, his seven letters are 'wholly untouched by the language of martyrdom'.<sup>3</sup> The word μάρτυς had not yet evolved from his secular meaning of a 'witness' to the more specific designation of the one who bears witness to Christ by the shedding of their own blood. However, Ignatius' famous letters, written en route to his 'sanguinary demise' at Rome, will be significant milestones in influencing that change of meaning of the term 'martyr'.

#### *Disciple and imitator*

Throughout his seven letters Ignatius' favourite terms of self-description are those of the disciple (μαθητής) or the imitator (μιμητής) of Christ, the Master. The dynamic language of striving 'to attain' or 'to imitate' God is common place in the letters.<sup>4</sup> Ignatius will often include personal disclaimers concerning his own unworthiness or imperfection as disciple and imitator of Christ. Thus, in his opening address to the Ephesians he states:

I am a prisoner for the Name's sake, but I am by no means perfect in Jesus Christ as yet; I am only a beginner in discipleship, and I am speaking to you as fellow-scholars with myself.<sup>5</sup>

He also informs the Ephesians that his encounter with the wild beasts at Rome will be a boon, enabling him to become a true disciple (*Ad Eph.* 1).

Ignatius' passionate concern for death, as perfecting his discipleship, has often been insensitively misinterpreted by subsequent commentators. He has been accused of displaying 'a pathological yearning for martyrdom'.<sup>6</sup> In charting some of the potential Stoic influences on Ignatius, Tanner refers disapprovingly to Laeuchli's interpretation of Ignatius' martyrdom as 'masochistic and pathological'.<sup>7</sup> In his fine study of the *imitatio Christi* theme in Ignatius' mysticism, Tinsley refutes Théo Preiss' thesis on the predominance of Gnosticism in Ignatius' outlook, especially in his motives for imitating Christ's passion.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Christocentricity of Ignatius' thought*

The deep Christocentricity of Ignatius' thought is evident in his self-description as 'a prisoner for the Name's sake' (*Ad Eph.* 1,3). Re-echoing a characteristic

3 G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 77. 4 For a good analysis of this theme see R. Darling Young's article 'Ignatius of Antioch: "Attaining the Father"', *Communio* 26 (1999) 333-42. 5 Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Eph.* 3. The English translation of Ignatius' letters is taken from M. Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings* (London, 1968). 6 Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 6, referring to the views of G.E.M. de Ste. Croix. 7 R.G. Tanner, 'Martyrdom in St Ignatius of Antioch and the Stoic view of suicide', *Studia Patristica* 16 (1975) 201-5, at 201. 8 E.J. Tinsley, 'The *imitatio Christi* in the mysticism of St Ignatius of Antioch', *Studia Patristica* 2 (1955) 553-60.

Johannine theme he states: 'For we have no life apart from Jesus Christ', and again, 'Apart from him, nothing else should have any other value in your eyes' (*Ad Eph.* 3,11). He describes himself as being full of 'humble devotion to the Cross' (*Ad Eph.* 18). It is the Lord's passion and death which constitutes the very mystery which summons people to become believers and to endure tribulations with patience as genuine pupils of Christ, the only teacher (*Ad Mag.* 9).

Ignatius displays a regular concern to counteract Docetic interpretations about Christ, his incarnation, passion and death, and the Eucharist itself. Consequently he often stresses the full and true reality of Christ's passion and death.<sup>9</sup> Christians prove the authenticity of their lives by being Christians in reality and not just in name (*Ad Mag.* 4). Ignatius can advise the Magnesians: 'Unless we are ready and willing to die in conformity with his passion, his life is not in us' (*Ad Mag.* 5). Clearly this constitutes the key to understanding Ignatius' own desire to die for Christ, in conformity with Christ.

It is through imitating and sharing in Christ's passion that Ignatius can endure his own sufferings with serenity: 'But it is only in the name of Jesus Christ, and for the sake of sharing his sufferings that I could face all this; for he, the perfect man, gives me strength to do so.'<sup>10</sup> Writing to the Philadelphians, Ignatius can describe Christ's cross, death and resurrection, and the faith that comes through him, as his 'sacrosanct records'. By these and the prayers of the community he hopes to be justified (*Ad Phil.* 8). Towards the end of his letter to the Trallians we meet Ignatius combining the mystery of the cross creatively with the Pauline notion of the Body of Christ, while castigating those who espouse Docetic beliefs:

They are none of the Father's planting; if they were, they could at once be known for true branches of the cross, and there would be no corruption in their fruit. It is by the cross that through his passion he calls you, who are parts of his body, to himself. A head cannot come into being alone, without any limbs.<sup>11</sup>

Because of his intense devotion to Christ and his passion, Ignatius can regard his chains as 'spiritual pearls' – τοὺς πνευματικοὺς μαργαρίτας (*Ad Eph.* 11). It is through patient forbearance with persecution, privation and contempt that the true disciple imitates the Lord (*Ad Eph.* 10). By trying to walk in Paul's footsteps Ignatius hopes to come to God (*Ad Eph.* 12). Paul himself had deeply espoused the twin themes of the *imitatio Christi* and conformity to the paschal mystery. So Ignatius can urge the Philadelphians to be 'imitators of Jesus Christ' as he was of the Father (*Ad Phil.* 7).

#### *Ignatius' Letter to the Romans – the martyr's vade mecum*

Ignatius' *Epistola ad Romanos* ranks as his most famous letter. It differs from the other six in its silence about certain doctrinal themes, so characteristic of the other

9 Ignatius, *Ad Mag.* 11; *Ad Smyr.* 2,7; *Ad Phil.* Salutation; *Ad Trall.* 10. 10 Ignatius, *Ad Smyr.* 4. 11 Ignatius, *Ad Trall.* 11.

letters, and in its explicit concern with his forthcoming martyrdom. This letter enjoyed enormous popularity and an independent circulation in the early Church, effectively acting, as Bishop Lightfoot states, as 'a martyr's *vade mecum*'.<sup>12</sup> Throughout this letter we witness Ignatius' repeated plea that the Roman community not intercede to rescue him from his imminent martyrdom. Should they intercede on his behalf he will become a mere 'meaningless cry' unto God. If his wishes are observed he will become 'an intelligible utterance of God' (*Ad Rom.* 2). This letter is unique also in the manner in which eucharistic imagery and motifs predominate in Ignatius' passionate description of his approaching death. It is as if the passion of Christ, the Eucharist and Ignatius' own death are interwoven perichoretically.

#### *A libation being poured upon an altar*

While Ignatius speaks in a number of places of his life as an 'offering' or *antipsycho* (ἀντίψυχον),<sup>13</sup> in the letter to the Romans he uses the Pauline notion (cf. Phil 2:17; 2 Tim 4:6) of his life being like a sacrificial libation being poured upon an altar: 'This favour only I beg of you: suffer me to be a libation poured out to God, while there is still an altar ready for me' (*Ad Rom.* 2). The Christians are to form a choir around him, singing hymns of praise in Jesus Christ to the Father. If Ignatius has elsewhere in his letters referred to the sole valid Eucharist being one where the united community gathered around their bishop, tunefully in harmony like strings of a harp,<sup>14</sup> here he portrays himself as consummately realising this ideal in his forthcoming martyrdom.

#### *God's wheat – purest bread for Christ*

Bowersock notes how Ignatius is often 'more comfortable and more explicit when he writes in metaphors'.<sup>15</sup> This is especially noteworthy in the letter to the Romans. Ignatius wrote to the Ephesians that his encounter with the wild beasts at Rome would be 'a boon that would enable him to become a true disciple' (*Ad Eph.* 1). Convinced of the genuineness of Christ's sufferings he could justify to the Trallians (*Ad Trall.* 10) and to the Smyrneans (*Ad Smyr.* 4) his prayer for combat with the lions and other punishments. Writing to the Romans Ignatius moves into a different literary register, rich in eucharistic overtones:

Pray leave me to be a meal for the beasts, for it is they who can provide my way to God. I am his wheat (σῖτος εἰμι θεοῦ), ground fine by the lions' teeth to be made purest bread (καθαρὸς ἄρτος) for Christ.<sup>16</sup>

12 J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers – Part II: St Ignatius and St Polycarp* (London & New York, 1889), pp 186–7. 13 Ignatius, *Ad Eph.* 21; *Ad Smyr.* 10; *Ad Polyc.* 2,6. See Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 79–81. 14 Ignatius, *Ad Smyr.* 8; *Ad Phil.* 4; *Ad Eph.* 20. 15 Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 78. 16 Ignatius, *Ad Rom.* 4.

In this celebrated passage Ignatius continues by referring to the beasts in the arena as his sepulchre, devouring his body until no scrap remains visible. Then, and only then, will he 'truly be Christ's disciple'. This, as Tinsley notes, refuting Théo Preiss' study, represents no Gnostic despising of the body or matter, but the passionate plea of one engaged in the *imitatio Christi* to a consummate degree.<sup>17</sup> Ignatius pleads with the Romans not to prevent him being a sacrifice (θυσία) to God (*Ad Rom.* 4).

#### *Imitating the Passion of my God*

In imitation of Christ, who though harshly dealt with bore it humbly, Ignatius, too, pleads his readiness to endure the horrible drama of the arena:

Fire, cross, beast-fighting, hacking and quartering, splintering of bone and mangling of limb, even the pulverising of my entire body – let every horrid and diabolical torment come upon me, provided only that I can win my way to Jesus Christ!<sup>18</sup>

Despising things of the earth, Ignatius speaks movingly of his sole desire being Jesus Christ who died and rose again for us. He speaks of the 'birth-pangs' that are upon him as he strains to attain 'the light, pure and undefiled'. As if reaching a crescendo, we witness Ignatius exclaim: 'Leave me to imitate the passion of my God' (*Ad Rom.* 6).

#### *Fain for the Bread of God – Craving love imperishable*

In section 7 of the *Epistola ad Romanos* Ignatius refers to himself as 'yearning for death with all the passion of a lover'. He describes his detachment from earthly desires in his readiness to face death. With decided Johannine echoes we meet Ignatius contrasting things mundane, earthly and perishable, with things spiritual and imperishable, all in a eucharistic context:

Earthly longings have been crucified; in me there is left no spark of desire for mundane things, but only a murmur of living water that whispers within me: 'Come to the Father'. There is no pleasure for me in any meats that perish, or in the delights of this life. I am fain for the bread of God (ἄρτον θεοῦ), even the flesh of Jesus Christ, who is the seed of David, and for my drink I crave that blood of his (τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ) which is love imperishable (ἀγάπη ἄφθαρτος).<sup>19</sup>

The food and drink that he longs for here are clearly the Eucharist itself. In his letter to the Trallians he had encouraged them to intensify their grip on their faith,

17 Tinsley, 'The *imitatio Christi* in the Mysticism of St Ignatius of Antioch', p. 555. 18 Ignatius, *Ad Rom.* 5. 19 Ignatius, *Ad Rom.* 7.

which he equated with the flesh of the Lord, and their love, which he linked with the life-blood of Jesus Christ (*Ad Trall.* 8). In his salutation to the Philadelphians Ignatius refers to a joy that is characterized as 'eternal and unfailing', associated with Christ's blood. However, it is in the letter to the Ephesians that we meet a reference to the Eucharist that is closest in sentiment to his comments in section 7 of the *Epistola ad Romanos*. Here, characteristically emphasizing the theme of unity, he urges the Ephesians to meet for one common breaking of bread: 'the medicine of immortality (φάρμακον ἀθανασίας), and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Jesus Christ for evermore.'<sup>20</sup>

Following the fourth evangelist, Ignatius sees in the Eucharist the pledge of eternal life, the great antidote to death. Hence, on the threshold of his martyrdom he can long for the bread of God and Christ's blood as his *viaticum*. The manner in which he describes himself as being ground into flour, so as to become pure bread for Christ, bespeaks a mysticism of unity with the mystery of the Eucharist itself. As Tanner observes, Ignatius' desire to be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts was no pure masochism. Rather, it reflects his belief that his sacramental ingestion of Christ, complemented by his own obedience unto death, renders him into a deep unity with Christ.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Eucharist and martyrdom*

Ignatius is at pains to sketch himself as being an imitator and disciple of Christ. The path of discipleship only reaches perfection by passing through the crucible of martyrdom. It is by his martyrdom that he hopes 'to attain to God', imitating the passion of his God. His passionate concern for ecclesial unity finds its focus in the Eucharist. This works at two complementary levels. On the one hand, there is the vision of the members of the Church united harmoniously around and with their bishop in the celebration of one common Eucharist. At another level, there is the emphasis on the personal level of union in faith and love of each member of Christ with their Head, brought about by the Eucharist itself. The authentic living of Christianity involves our willingness to die in conformity with Christ's passion. Apart from doing this Christ's life is not in us. Not surprisingly, the *Epistola ad Romanos*, the letter where Ignatius speaks at length about his martyrdom, is also the letter where his mind is most focused on the Eucharist.

While acknowledging Ignatius' use of sacrificial language in the *Epistola ad Romanos*, Schoedel tends to downplay the eucharistic associations or resonances of Ignatius' thought. He prefers to attribute some Ignatian emphases to Gnostic, pagan or secular influences.<sup>22</sup> Schoedel regards it as 'unlikely that Ignatius regards himself as a kind of Eucharist'. A more sensitive appraisal of Ignatius' thought occurs in Richard Johanny's comment on the same letter:

<sup>20</sup> Ignatius, *Ad Eph.* 20. <sup>21</sup> Tanner, 'Martyrdom in St Ignatius of Antioch and the Stoic view of suicide', p. 204. <sup>22</sup> W.R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: a commentary on the Letters of Ignatius*

The entire thinking of Ignatius in this matter is a dynamic prolongation of the eucharist. Like the eucharist, and on the basis of it, martyrdom derives its value from the passion of Christ and leads to the resurrection. Through identification with Christ and through the complete gift of self that martyrdom entails, Ignatius will fulfil in himself the radical meaning of the eucharistic sacrifice; as far as possible, he will make real in himself the eucharistic mystery that is celebrated in the sacrifice of the altar.<sup>23</sup>

Likewise, Ysabel de Andia, in her study of martyrdom in the Patristic and contemporary eras, refers to Ignatius' Letter to the Romans as 'the principal document that confirms the eucharistic interpretation of martyrdom'.<sup>24</sup> She notes, as does Lightfoot, that Ignatius' *Epistola ad Romanos* appealed to St Irenaeus who cites section 4 of this Ignatian letter in his *Adversus Haereses* V 28.4, interpreting Ignatius' martyrdom in a similar eucharistic sense.

For Ignatius of Antioch, his path of discipleship found its perfection in his martyrdom. The *imitatio Christi* involved him in a radical and costly solidarity with Christ. His faith in Christ and love of him led him to crave the bread of God, the medicine of immortality, and the love imperishable, which he associated with Christ's blood. Martyrdom and Eucharist alike were intimately connected with Christ's passion. Ignatius is an important early witness as to how the one was interpreted by reference to the other, thus keeping both in close association with each other.

#### ST POLYCARP OF SMYRNA

One of Ignatius of Antioch's letters was addressed to his younger contemporary Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp followed in Ignatius' steps, dying as a martyr some fifty to sixty years later at the age of 86.<sup>25</sup> Polycarp is an important milestone in the history of martyrdom since with him we have the first written account of a martyr's death. Furthermore, this account bears witness to the public cult of the martyr and his relics following his martyrdom.<sup>26</sup>

The account of Polycarp's martyrdom was composed by the Smyrnaean community and sent to the church at Philomelium, but was also intended for a wider

of Antioch (Philadelphia, 1985); for his commentary on the Letter to the Romans, see pp 165–91. <sup>23</sup> R. Johanny, 'Ignatius of Antioch', in W. Rordorf et al., *The Eucharist of the early Christians* (New York, 1978), pp 48–70, at p. 65. <sup>24</sup> de Andia, 'Martyrdom and Truth: from Ignatius of Antioch to the monks of Tibhirine', p. 74. <sup>25</sup> *Martyrium Polycarpi* 18. The precise date of Polycarp's martyrdom has been much disputed. See L.W. Barnard, 'In defence of Pseudo-Pionius' account of Saint Polycarp's martyrdom', in P. Granfield & J.A. Jungmann (eds), *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster Westfalen, 1973), i, 192–204, at 192, for a note on the disputed dates. <sup>26</sup> *Martyr. Polyc.* 18.

audience. The concluding section of the account makes reference to one Marcion who had made 'this brief summary', followed by the name of Evarestus the scribe. The surviving manuscript of the *Martyrium* also bears additional copyists' notes and names. A further version of the *Martyrium* is preserved in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* IV 15, with occasional variations from the account we find in Pionius.<sup>27</sup> Barnard has convincingly refuted H. von Campenhausen's theory of interpolations in the account of Polycarp's martyrdom, von Campenhausen having held the view that Eusebius' account was the original and that this text had undergone alterations at the hands of later redactors. The details of Barnard's careful refutation of von Campenhausen need not detain us here in our more limited task of examining the eucharistic undertones of the account of Polycarp's martyrdom.

#### *A mirror to Christ's passion*

In the course of Barnard's study he lists eighteen parallels between the account of Polycarp's passion and that of our Lord in the gospels. These cover such details as the names of the officials involved, the theme of betrayal, Polycarp's prior prophecy of his martyrdom, his patience, the heavenly voice bringing encouragement, the manner of his death, and the piercing of his side.<sup>28</sup> As Barnard perceptively notes, if Polycarp had urged the Philippians to imitate Christ (*Ad Philipp.* 8), 'it is wholly probable that his own followers would have seen this reflected in his own martyrdom'.<sup>29</sup> Details of our Lord's passion narrative and imagery associated with the Eucharist colour, or at least provide the best means of describing, the account of the venerable Polycarp's martyrdom. Indeed the account states that: 'He was to fulfil his destiny by sharing the experiences of Christ' (*Martyr. Polyc.* 6).

#### *Sacrificial ram and burnt offering*

Following the account of Polycarp's arrest and interrogation by the governor, we meet the following description of Polycarp: 'Bound like that, with his hands behind him, he was like a noble ram taken out of some great flock for sacrifice; a goodly burnt offering all ready for God.'<sup>30</sup> This description of Polycarp being ready for sacrifice acts as a prelude to his final prayer, which is rich in eucharistic resonances.

#### *Polycarp's prayer*

The author of the account of Polycarp's martyrdom is at pains to portray him as a man of deep prayer. In his seclusion prior to his arrest he is described as 'doing

<sup>27</sup> See Barnard, 'In defence of Pseudo-Pionius' account of Saint Polycarp's martyrdom', and D. Tripp, 'The prayer of St Polycarp and the development of anaphoral prayer', *Eph. Lit.* 104 (1990) 97-132, for discussion of the variants. <sup>28</sup> Barnard, 'In defence of Pseudo-Pionius' account of Saint Polycarp's martyrdom', pp 194-5. <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195, n. 8. <sup>30</sup> *Martyr. Polyc.* 14. The English translation is taken from *Early Christian writings*, trans M. Staniforth (London, 1968).

nothing else day and night but praying for us all, and for churches all over the world, as it was his usual habit to do' (*Martyr. Polyc.* 5). It is in the context of such prayer that he has a prophetic vision of his imminent martyrdom and the precise form that it will take. At the moment of his arrest, one of his petitions was 'to be allowed an hour to pray undisturbed' (*Martyr. Polyc.* 7). Those who witnessed him at prayer were struck with awe at such a saintly old man. However, it is the prayer that he uttered just prior to his death that has attracted most attention and comment.

As early as 1899 J. Armitage Robinson drew attention to the 'liturgical echoes' present in Polycarp's prayer prior to his martyrdom.<sup>31</sup> He noted parallels with certain formulations in various Egyptian Church Orders, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and the *Canons of Hippolytus*. Other verbal similarities to the *Didache* and *1 Clement* were also noted. Whatever the provenance of Polycarp's prayer, whether representing his *ipsissima verba* or that of a prayer placed on his lips by the author of the *Martyrium Polycarpi*, Armitage Robinson typified the prayer as being 'full of echoes of the liturgical language of the Church'.<sup>32</sup> In later studies this same author refuted Dom Cagin's view that Polycarp's prayer represented a close equivalent to the earliest known Apostolic anaphora. He furthermore doubted the authenticity of Polycarp's prayer, feeling that its concluding doxology was doctrinally anachronistic, given the early date of his martyrdom.<sup>33</sup>

Barnard's study also noted the 'substantial second century parallels to Polycarp's prayer', most notably in the *Didache*, *1 Clement*, Justin's *First Apology*, the later *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, and additional Egyptian liturgical sources.<sup>34</sup> David Tripp's more recent study once again examines Polycarp's prayer in detail in the wider context of developing patterns of anaphoral prayer.<sup>35</sup> Based on a careful comparison of vocabulary between Polycarp's own *Letter to the Philippians* and the text of the prayer attributed to him in *Martyrium Polycarpi* 14, Tripp is of the opinion that the prayer may not represent the *ipsissima verba* of Polycarp, but rather the mind of Evarestus, the scribe whose name is affixed to the martyrdom account. On the basis of his analysis, and comparison with other liturgical texts, Tripp concludes that Evarestus quite probably followed the established pattern of eucharistic anaphora, which he uses as a model for Polycarp's prayer.<sup>36</sup> He further suggests that the themes of the short prayer match well the theological emphases of Evarestus. These he typifies as being twofold. Firstly, his predilection for sacrifi-

<sup>31</sup> J.A. Robinson, 'Liturgical echoes in Polycarp's prayer', *Expositor*, 5th Series, 9 (1899) 63-72, at 66-9. <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. <sup>33</sup> J.A. Robinson, 'The "Apostolic Anaphora" and the prayer of Polycarp', *JThS* 21 (1920) 97-105, at 101-5. The reference was to Dom Cagin's *L'Anaphore Apostolique et ses témoins* (Paris, 1919). See also J.A. Tyrer and F.E. Brightman, 'The prayer of St Polycarp and its concluding doxology', *JThS* 23 (1922) 390-2; J.A. Robinson and R.H. Connolly, 'The doxology in the prayer of St Polycarp', *JThS* 24 (1923) 141-4 and 144-6. <sup>34</sup> Barnard, 'In defence of Pseudo-Pionius' account of Saint Polycarp's martyrdom', pp 200-3. <sup>35</sup> Tripp, 'The prayer of St Polycarp and the development of anaphoral prayer'. <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

cial imagery in describing Polycarp's martyrdom. Secondly, his treasuring of the privilege of communion and participation with the martyrs and the saints.<sup>37</sup> Tripp sees the reference to the veneration of Polycarp's remains, and the associated theme of communion, as anticipating the *Communicantes* of the later Roman Canon.

Turning our attention to the actual prayer itself, let us examine some of its themes. Polycarp's short prayer falls into three consecutive sections, which Tripp calls: (a) thanksgiving, (b) petition, and (c) praise and doxology. The thanksgiving section has two foci. Firstly, thanks is offered to God for divine being and for the revelation received from God through Christ 'his beloved child'. The second section of thanksgiving makes explicit reference to the theme of martyrdom, linked with the eucharistic cup:

I bless you that you have granted me this day and this hour that I may share among the number of the martyrs in the cup of our Christ for the resurrection to eternal life both of soul and body in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit.

The second petitionary section of the prayer has recourse to the language of sacrifice and refers back to the communion of martyrs in the second thanksgiving section:

May I be received among them before you this day as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you have prepared beforehand and revealed beforehand and have fulfilled, O God never lying but true.<sup>38</sup>

Tripp regards Polycarp's prayer as revealing *one* form of anaphoral prayer, and not *the* original anaphora, or pattern of anaphora, if such ever existed.<sup>39</sup> Tripp suggests several potential functions for Polycarp's prayer being inserted into the account of his martyrdom. Among these his final four functions have a particular relevance for the theme of this paper. Firstly, he suggests that it offers an interpretation of martyrdom itself as a participation in Christ's sufferings. Thus we meet the phrase; 'that I may share among the number of the martyrs in the cup of our Christ'. Presumably the 'cup' here refers to the cup offered to the sons of Zebedee (cf. Mk 10:38–39), the cup of the agony in Gethsemane (cf. Mt 26:39), and the eucharistic cup. Secondly, Tripp sees the prayer as an act of worship which God is asked to accept graciously. Thirdly, as the *Martyrium Polycarpi* was being sent by the Smyrnaeans to the church of Philomelium and elsewhere, it was intended to be read out in the course of a liturgical assembly. As Tripp notes: 'This prayer obviously expects to be echoed in the prayers that will be uttered in

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102. <sup>38</sup> *Martyr. Polyc.* 14. The text of the prayer is taken from Tripp's article. <sup>39</sup> Tripp, 'The prayer of St Polycarp and the development of anaphoral prayer', 98. He thus concurs with J.A. Robinson in refuting Dom Cagin's thesis on the paleoanaphora.

the liturgy of those churches.' Finally, Polycarp's prayer sets the interpretation of martyrdom in the context of the Eucharist. Thus, as with his fellow martyr Ignatius, martyrdom is seen as sharing alike in Christ's sufferings and in the deepest reality of the Eucharist.<sup>40</sup>

Tripp argues that the references to the Spirit and incorruptibility seem misplaced in Polycarp's prayer, interrupting the normal flow of the anaphora-style prayer. However, Polycarp is really here being depicted as sharing Ignatius' conviction about the Eucharist as a *φάρμακον ἀθανασίας*. The Spirit effecting the change in the eucharistic elements, changes the martyr's mortality into immortality. The author of the account of Polycarp's martyrdom twice refers to him gaining 'the crown of immortality' (*Martyr. Polyc.* 17,19). Polycarp's admiring pupil Irenaeus will later stress the very gift of immortality as one of the fruits of receiving the Eucharist itself.<sup>41</sup>

#### *Like bread being baked in an oven*

Polycarp's prayer is followed immediately by the final stages of his martyrdom being described by an eyewitness. The author builds on eucharistic imagery in describing Polycarp the martyr being enveloped by the flames as if he were in an oven:

A great sheet of flame blazed out. And then we who were privileged to witness it saw a wondrous sight; [...] the fire took the shape of a hollow chamber, like a ship's sail when the wind fills it, and formed a wall round about the martyr's figure; and there was he in the centre of it, not like a human being in flames but like a loaf baking in the oven, or like a gold or silver ingot being refined in the furnace.<sup>42</sup>

Ignatius may have passionately desired to become 'purest bread for Christ', but here we see a related motif in the description of Polycarp, unharmed by the flames, like a loaf being baked in the oven. Furthermore, building on the earlier description of Polycarp as a 'sacrificial ram' being prepared for 'a burnt offering', the author continues: 'And we became aware of a delicious fragrance, like the odour of incense or other precious gums'. The choice of language here is a deliberate borrowing from the ritual of sacrifice and its accompanying prayer.

#### *The piercing of Polycarp's side*

A high point in the Johannine passion narrative is represented by the piercing of Christ's side (cf. Jn 19:34), whence flowed blood and water. This text was redo-

<sup>40</sup> Tripp, 'The prayer of St Polycarp and the development of anaphoral prayer', 97–8. W. Rordorf in his article 'Aux origines du culte des martyrs', *Irenikon* 45 (1972) 315–31, also explores the eucharistic allusions or imprints in the account of Polycarp's martyrdom, see especially 317, n. 5 and 318, n. 1. <sup>41</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV 18,5; V 2,3. <sup>42</sup> *Martyr. Polyc.* 15.

lent with sacramental associations for the fathers from the Greek, Latin and Syriac traditions alike. It comes as no surprise to find an allusion to this detail in the account of Polycarp's martyrdom. His *imitatio Christi* involved a re-enactment of this detail of the passion:

Finally, when they realised that his body could not be destroyed by fire, the ruffians ordered one of the dagger-men to go up and stab him with his weapon. As he did so, there flew out a dove, together with such a copious rush of blood that the flames were extinguished.<sup>43</sup>

The power of Christ's blood to achieve momentous events in the drama of salvation finds an echo here in the power of the martyr's blood to vanquish the flames seeking to annihilate him.

#### *The veneration and cult of Polycarp and his relics*

Following Polycarp's death we witness his faithful followers wishing to rescue his mortal remains. Polycarp 'the peerless martyr' had gained 'the crown of immortality' (*Martyr. Polyc. 17,19*). The Jews and other officials feared their future cult of Polycarp as a substitute for Christ. However, Polycarp's followers make clear the distinction between the veneration of Polycarp and his remains and the honour due to Christ:

Little do they know that it could never be possible for us to abandon the Christ who dies for the salvation of every soul that is to be saved in all the world – the Sinless One dying for sinners – or to worship any other.

The text continues:

It is to Him, as the Son of God, that we give our adoration; while to the martyrs, as disciples and imitators of the Lord, we give the love they have earned by their matchless devotion to their King and Teacher. Pray God we too may come to share their company and their discipleship.<sup>44</sup>

The account of the martyrdom of Polycarp is important for the early reference to the cult of the martyr and his relics. The remains of Polycarp, 'more precious to us than jewels, and finer than pure gold', were carefully gathered and laid to rest in a secure place. This location becomes the focus for the community's subsequent assembly, commemoration and celebration:

<sup>43</sup> *Martyr. Polyc. 16*. The reference to the dove here, representing the human spirit or soul, is regarded as a later addition to the original text. It is absent from Eusebius' account of the martyrdom. <sup>44</sup> *Martyr. Polyc. 17*.

There we shall assemble, as occasion allows, with glad rejoicings; and with the Lord's permission we shall celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom. It will serve both as a commemoration of all who have triumphed before, and as a training and a preparation for any whose crown may be still to come.<sup>45</sup>

We are not told what particular form this commemorative gathering at the martyr's shrine would take. Within a short while, as we shall see with Cyprian, the cult of the martyrs on their *dies natalis*, will be linked with a eucharistic celebration at their place of martyrdom or burial.

#### *The becoming Eucharist of the martyr*

Cardinal Ratzinger, commenting on the *Martyrium Polycarpi*, has referred to it as being depicted as liturgy, 'indeed as the becoming Eucharist of the martyr, who enters into full communion with the pasch of Jesus Christ and thus becomes Eucharist with him'.<sup>46</sup> Having referred, like Armitage Robinson, Barnard and Tripp, to the eucharistic themes in Polycarp's prayer, Cardinal Ratzinger comments on the three-fold miracle that accompanied the venerable martyr on the pyre 'in which once again the liturgical character of the occurrence is portrayed in its diverse significance.' The enveloping flames take the form of a ship 'with billowing sails that transport the martyr across the boundaries of earth into the hands of God'. The martyred body of Polycarp takes the appearance of baked bread rather than that of charred flesh. Finally, the scent of incense or some precious aroma replaces the smell of burnt flesh. Cardinal Ratzinger notes that such a pleasant odour in Scripture is both 'a constituent ingredient of the theology of sacrifice' and a witness to 'a life that has become pure, no longer exuding the stench of the lie and corruption, the decaying smell of death'. The cardinal concludes his reflections on Polycarp by describing the martyr's union with the eucharistic mystery:

Thus the image of the pleasant aroma and that of becoming bread belong together, the martyr has become like Christ; his life has become an offering [...] Surrender into the body of Christ has triumphed over the power of death: the martyr lives and gives life, precisely through his death, and so himself has entered into the eucharistic mystery.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Martyr. Polyc. 18*. <sup>46</sup> J. Card. Ratzinger, 'Eucharist and mission', *ITQ* 65 (2000) 245–64, at 258. This article represents the text of an address given by Cardinal Ratzinger to the Eucharistic Congress of the diocese of Como in September 1997. I am grateful to Fr D.V. Twomey SVD, the translator of the article, for bringing it to my attention. <sup>47</sup> Ratzinger, 'Eucharist and mission', pp 258–9.

## ST CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE

The early stages of Cyprian's episcopate coincided with the Decian persecution (AD 250–1), during which he went into hiding. By adopting this strategy he sought to continue support, encouragement and leadership of his flock through his various letters and emissaries, a strategy that he would have to defend against Roman criticism (*Ep.* 20). The aftermath of the Decian persecution saw Cyprian involved in decisions about the reconciliation of the lapsed, the case of the Novatianist schism, and the re-baptism controversy, all taking place under the renewed threat of further persecution under Gallus in 252. His nine-year episcopate terminated with his martyrdom at Carthage in 258 during the third wave of persecution under Valerian.

The various periods of persecution were also times when Cyprian had to deal with issues related to the *confessores*. We witness Cyprian exhibiting a twofold strategy in their regard. On the one hand he lauds their heroism, gives them the pledge of prayerful support, and displays solicitude for their access to the Eucharist while in prison. On the other hand, we witness his concern over the liberal issuing of *libelli pacis* by certain confessors and their claim to effect reconciliation and even celebrate the Eucharist, by virtue of their special status as confessors, rather than being ordained ministers. This has been analysed in detail in Allen Brent's recent study of Cyprian's correspondence with Lucianus, and the case of Celerinus, whom Cyprian specifically appointed as a lector, following his brave confession of the faith under torture during one of the waves of persecution.<sup>48</sup>

*Exhorting the 'milites Christi' to martyrdom*

Always a devoted student of the Bible, Cyprian addressed his *De exhortatione martyrii* to Fortunatus, bishop of Thuccaloni in AD 257, just at the outbreak of the persecution under Valerius. Ever fond of describing Christians as *milites Christi*, Cyprian states the aim of this work:

bringing together from Scripture exhortations for the preparation and strengthening of minds of the brethren, with which I might animate the soldiers of Christ for the spiritual and heavenly struggle.<sup>49</sup>

In this work, which Cyprian acknowledges to be hurried in composition, and therefore incomplete, he outlines thirteen theses and uses these as pegs on which to hang relevant scriptural texts, all aiming to train the *milites Christi*. His various theses deal with such topics as the dangers of idolatry, the divine punishments awaiting those

48 A. Brent, 'Cyprian's reconstruction of the martyr tradition', *JEH* 53 (2002) 241–68. 49 Cyprian, *De exhort. martyr.* 1 (CSEL 3.1, 317, ed. G. Hartel). English translation from R.J. Deferrari (FOTC 36, 313).

who sacrifice to idols, scriptural predictions of periods of trial and persecution, the providential purposes of these periods that Christians may be proved, the importance of perseverance and hope which bring one to the final reward of the palm and the crown. Especially noteworthy is Cyprian's sixth thesis:

We, redeemed and quickened by the blood of Christ, should place nothing before Christ, because neither did he place anything before us and he on account of us preferred evil things to good things, poverty to riches, servitude to domination, death to immortality ...<sup>50</sup>

Those awaiting martyrdom must keep their focus on the joys of Paradise, eternal sovereignty and rule, immortality, God and Christ. Cyprian's words of advice here, and their strong Christocentric focus, find a close parallel in his slightly earlier composition, *De Dominica oratione*. Commenting on the third petition of the Lord's prayer, dealing with the accomplishment of God's will, he states:

To place nothing at all before Christ, because he placed nothing before us, to cling inseparably to his love, to stand bravely and faithfully at his cross; when there is a struggle over his name and honour to exhibit the constancy in speech with which we confess, under investigation the confidence with which we enter combat, in death the patience for which we are crowned; this is to wish to be a co-heir with Christ; this is to do the commandment of God; this is to fulfil the will of the Father.<sup>51</sup>

Cyprian's treatise of exhortation to Fortunatus makes no explicit reference to the Eucharist in preparing and strengthening Christ's soldiers for battle. The memory of Christ's sufferings and passion, and his costly love for his disciples leading to victory over death, is his primary focus. However, among Cyprian's letters we find many precious and important connections between martyrdom and the Eucharist. In what follows I shall seek to outline some of his particular points of emphasis.<sup>52</sup>

*Not blushing to drink Christ's blood*

Cyprian's famous *Letter 63* (c.AD 253) to Caecilius, bishop of Biltha, aims to refute the practices of the Aquarii who substituted water for the traditional mixture of wine and water in the eucharistic chalice. Arguing from a whole catena of Scriptural texts, Cyprian explains that the union of water and wine in the chalice symbolises and expresses our integral unity with Christ in the Eucharist (*Ep.* 63,13). Urging

50 Cyprian, *De exhort. martyr.* 5 (CSEL 3.1, 320; FOTC 36, 317). 51 Cyprian, *De Dom. orat.* 15 (CSEL 3.1, 277–8; FOTC 36, 140). 52 For good studies of the themes of martyrdom and Eucharist, separately or in combination, in Cyprian, see the following sources: A. D'Alès, *La*



Caecilius to observe what Dominical precept and tradition advocate, Cyprian warns of those who fear receiving the blood of Christ in the Eucharist lest, 'redolent of the blood of Christ through the savour of wine', they might fall easy victims to detection and persecution by the pagan authorities. To be ashamed of Christ's blood and his bloodshed in the passion only runs the risk of holding us back from that passion. Cyprian ends this section of the letter to Caecilius by stating: 'How can we shed our blood for Christ, if we blush to drink Christ's blood?'<sup>53</sup> If the eucharistic elements themselves express the powerful goal of unity (*Epp.* 59,5; 63,13), the recipient and Christ must be brought into close unity by the Eucharist. This is especially true for the *milites Christi* on the threshold of their martyrdom.

#### *Having access to the Eucharist*

In a letter to his presbyters and deacons, written to them from his place of hiding during the Decian persecution, Cyprian displays solicitude for the confessors in prison. His particular concern is that adequate provision be made, with suitable discretion, for the celebration of the Eucharist for the confessors while in prison:

And so take counsel and care that moderation makes visiting safer; in particular the presbyters who celebrate the offering there before the confessors should take it in turns to go individually, accompanied each by a different deacon, because the risk of resentment is diminished if the people who visit and meet together change and vary.<sup>54</sup>

This letter bears interesting early historical witness to presbyters celebrating the Eucharist, rather than the bishop.

Similar sentiments and concerns prevail throughout a contemporaneous letter addressed to Cornelius of Rome by Cyprian and forty-one other African bishops. In this letter Cyprian defends his pastoral policy of reconciling those who had lapsed in time of persecution, provided that they have done due penance. Just as he had advised Fortunatus that Christ's soldiers should be prepared for battle, here we meet Cyprian stressing that receipt of the Eucharist is part and parcel of their preparation, in times where fresh persecution is threatened:

*Théologie de Saint Cyprien* (Paris, 1922), 360–77 [on confessors and martyrs], 249–71 [on Eucharist]; E.L. Hummel, *The concept of martyrdom according to St Cyprian of Carthage*, *Studies in Christian Antiquity* 9 (Washington, 1946); M. Pellegrino, 'Eucharestia e martirio in san Cypriano', in *Convivium Dominicum* (Sicily, 1959) 133–150, Idem, 'Le sens ecclésial du Martyre', *RSR* 35 (1961) 151–75; R. Johanny, 'Cyprian of Carthage', in W. Rordorf et al. (eds), *The Eucharist of the early Christians* (New York, 1978), 156–82; E. Mazza, *The celebration of the Eucharist: the origin of the rite and the development of its interpretation* (Collegeville, MN, 1999), 134–7. 53 Cyprian, *Ep.* 63,15, *Quomodo autem possumus propter Christum sanguinem fundere, qui sanguinem Christi erubescimus bibere?* (CSEL 3.2, 714). 54 Cyprian, *Ep.* 5,2 (CSEL 3.2, 479). The English translation is taken from G.W. Clarke's edition of Cyprian's letters (ACW 43, 62).

Nor is communion to be given by us to the dying but to the living that we should not leave unarmed and naked those whom we stir up and exhort to the battle, but should fortify them with the protection of the blood and of the body of Christ. And, since the Eucharist is appointed for this that it may be a safeguard for those receiving, let us arm with the protection of divine food those whom we wish to be safe against the adversary.<sup>55</sup>

Cyprian continues by noting how reception of the eucharistic cup enables those who have been reconciled to drink of the cup of martyrdom also:

For how do we teach or incite them to shed their blood for the confession of His Name if we deny the Blood of Christ to those who are about to fight? Or how do we make them fit for the chalice of martyrdom (*martyrii poculum*) if we do not first admit them to drink the Chalice of the Lord (*poculum Domini*) in the Church by the right of Communion?<sup>56</sup>

#### *Christ's soldiers to be armed for battle*

In a letter addressed to the people of Thibarisis in AD 252, Cyprian again urges Christ's soldiers to be prepared for battle. We have already seen that in his *De exhortatione martyrii* and in his *De Dominica oratione* Cyprian stressed close union with Christ at all times, if we wish to accomplish God's will. In *Letter* 58 this theme recurs with explicit reference to the Eucharist and the invitation to imitate Christ:

the soldiers of Christ ought to prepare themselves, considering therefore, that they daily drink the Chalice of the Blood of Christ so that they themselves may also be able to shed their blood for Christ.<sup>57</sup>

Cyprian continues here by citing 1 John 2:6 and Romans 8:16–17, on the theme of imitating what Christ both taught and did. To abide with Christ we must walk as he walked, suffer with him in order to be glorified with him. Throughout this moving letter Cyprian repeatedly focuses on Christ who endured everything first so as to enable the martyrs to follow in his footsteps.

55 Cyprian, *Ep.* 57,2, *Et cum ad hoc fiat eucharistia ut possit accipientibus esse tutela, quos tutos esse contra adversarium volumus, munimento dominicae saturitatis armemus* (CSEL 3.2, 652). The English translation is from Sr R. Donna's edition of Cyprian's letters (FOTC 51, 159). 56 Cyprian, *Ep.* 57,2, *Nam quomodo docemus aut provocamos eos in confessione nominis sanguinem suum fundere, si eis militaturis Christi sanguinem denegamus? Aut quomodo ad martyrii poculum idoneus facimus si non eos prius as bibendum in ecclesia poculum Domini iure communicationis admittimus?* (CSEL 3.2, 652; FOTC 51, 159). 57 Cyprian, *Ep.* 58,1, *... parare se debeant milites Christi, considerantes idcirco se cotidie calicem sanguinis Christi bibere ut possint et ipsi propter Christum sanguinem fundere* (CSEL 3.2, 657; FOTC 51, 163).

Cyprian also encourages Christ's soldiers to emulate the example of Abel, Abraham, the Maccabees, and the Holy Innocents, in being ready to enter the Lord's fight (*Ep.* 58,5–6). His letter concludes by building on the spiritual armoury suggested by Paul in Ephesians 6:12–17. Among the spiritual and heavenly safeguards advocated, Cyprian once again refers to the protective power of the Eucharist:

And let us arm with the sword of the Spirit the right hand that it may bravely reject the deadly sacrifices, that the hand which, mindful of the Eucharist, receives the Body of the Lord may embrace him, afterward to receive of the Lord the reward of the heavenly crowns.<sup>58</sup>

#### *Barnfloor and winepress*

In *Letter 37* (c.AD 251) Cyprian addresses two incarcerated Roman confessors, Moyses and Maximus, and their companions. He seeks to encourage them, assuring them of remembrance in prayer, both personal and communal. Conscious of their lengthy incarceration, Cyprian poetically refers to the changes in the seasons and the growth of the spring flowers. Those awaiting martyrdom endure the winter of persecution, but they do not lack their own spring flowers, the emblems of martyrdom:

Winter was succeeded by the mildness of spring, glad with roses and garlanded with blossoms, but as for you, you had roses and blossoms from the delights of paradise and heavenly wreaths crowned your heads.<sup>59</sup>

Continuing still in poetic mode, Cyprian refers to the autumn harvest, the threshing floor, granary, and winepress. Using decidedly eucharistic imagery, which he uses elsewhere to remind his flock of ecclesial unity symbolised in the eucharistic loaf and cup (*Epp.* 59,5; 63,13), Cyprian compares the incarcerated confessors to grain being stored in a granary and clusters of grapes in a winepress:

Stationed as you now are on the threshing floor of the Lord you can see the chaff being burnt in unquenchable fire whilst you yourselves, already tested and stored like winnowed grains or wheat and precious corn, regard your lodgings in prison as your storehouse.

Likewise, with reference to the succulent grapes in the winepress, the martyrs are being crushed by persecution to yield a precious vintage in the cup of martyrdom:

<sup>58</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 58,9, *Armemus et dexteram gladio spiritali, ut sacrificia funesta fortiter respuat, ut eucharistiae memor quae Domini corpus accepit ipsum complectatur, postmodum Domini sumptura praemium caelestium coronarum* (CSEL 3.2, 665; FOTC 51, 170). <sup>59</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 37,2 (CSEL 3.2, 577; ACW 44, 50).

Outside the vintage is being pressed, and in the vats the grape is being trodden, which afterwards will enrich the cups: whereas you like rich clusters from the Lord's vineyard, bunches of fruit now ripe are being trodden beneath the violence of worldly pressure. Prison is our winepress. You can feel its crushing turns, and instead of wine you pour forth blood. Courageous in the face of sufferings you have to endure, you gladly drain the cup of martyrdom.<sup>60</sup>

#### *Hidden treasure and spiritual sacrifice*

Writing to nine fellow bishops, confined to the mines of Sigua (*Ep.* 76), Cyprian once again has recourse to vivid imagery. The confessor bishops are referred to as 'gold and silver vessels'. Paradoxically they are being given back to the mine, the normal home of these precious metals. He notes, too, that the Christian body, hoping firmly in the *lignum crucis* is not terrified by being harshly treated with clubs. Reminiscent of Ignatius of Antioch's boast that his chains were but 'a string of spiritual pearls' (*Ad Eph.* 11), Cyprian speaks of the confessors' chains as 'ornaments'. Their spirits are invincible and their gold cannot be tarnished by contact with iron.

In section three of this deeply moving letter, Cyprian turns his attention to the Eucharist. The confessors must not lament that they are presently deprived of opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist:

But dearly beloved brethren, there can be felt no loss of religion or of faith in the fact that an opportunity is not now given there to the priests of God of offering and of celebrating the divine sacrifices.<sup>61</sup>

Cyprian consoles his addressees by explaining that they offer in their own bodies and sufferings, a daily and uninterrupted sacrifice to God. They are effectively living out the eucharistic mystery:

You celebrate, indeed, and offer a sacrifice to God equally precious and glorious and most profitable for you who are about to receive the recompense of heavenly reward. ... You offer this sacrifice to God; you celebrate this sacrifice without intermission day and night, having been made victims of God and exhibiting yourselves holy and immaculate victims ...<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 37,2, ... *vini vice sanguinem funditis, ad passionis tolerantiam fortes martyrii poculum libenter haunitis* (CSEL 3.2, 578; ACW 44, 50). <sup>61</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 76,3, *Sed nec in illo, fratres dilectissimi, aliqua potest aut religionis aut fidei iactura sentiri quod illic nunc sacerdotibus Dei facultas non datur offerendi et celebrandi sacrificia divina* (CSEL 3.2, 830; FOTC 51, 316). <sup>62</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 76,3, *Celebratis immo adque offertis sacrificium Deo et pretiosum pariter et gloriosum et plurimum vobis ad retributionem praemiorum caelestium profuturum [...] Hoc vos sacrificium Deo offertis, hoc sacrificium sine intermissione die ac nocte celebratis, hostiae facti Deo et vosmet ipsos sanctas adque immaculatas victimas*

Cyprian's comment here is supported by three significant Scriptural texts: Psalm 50:19 (on the sacrifice of a contrite heart); Romans 12:1–2 (presenting one's body as a sacrifice, living and holy, and pleasing to God; and Psalm 115:3–4, 6 ('Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful'), a favourite Psalm text associated with martyrdom, and one also cited in his *De exhortatione martyrii*, in association with his twelfth thesis.<sup>63</sup> The incarcerated confessors are truly 'gold and silver vessels' offering a continual spiritual sacrifice to God. They have effectively become a eucharistic offering themselves as they await their martyrdom.

*The martyrs commemorated in the celebration of the Eucharist*

We have earlier noted how Cyprian reminded Moyses and Maximus of their being remembered – *quando in sacrificiis precem cum pluribus facimus*, but also day and night in his personal prayer (*Ep.* 37,1). This element of prayerful remembrance, both personal and liturgical, was not confined to confessors awaiting their martyrdom. We often find Cyprian, even when in exile, anxious to have details of the latest victims of actual martyrdom, so that their cherished names may be incorporated into the Church's liturgical commemorations at the eucharistic sacrifice.

In *Epistola* 12 we meet Cyprian praising 'his most faithful and devoted brother Tertulus' for keeping him informed, while in exile, of 'the days on which our blessed brothers in prison depart in glory from this life and enter into immortality'. Cyprian urges his fellow presbyters and deacons:

Accordingly you should keep note of the days on which they depart this life, we will then be able to include the celebration of their memories in our commemoration of the martyrs ... And here in their memory we celebrate the offerings and sacrifices which, under God's protection, we shall soon celebrate there with you.<sup>64</sup>

We witness here an indication of the cult of the martyrs in North Africa, already established prior to Cyprian and continuing down to Augustine's day. It was customary to read the *Acta* or the *Passio* of the martyrs during the commemorations. Their names appear to have been included in the diptychs read in the course of the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>65</sup>

Cyprian's *Letter* 39 informs his presbyters, deacons and people of the appointment of the courageous young confessor Celerinus as lector, while entertaining

*exhibentes* ... (CSEL 3.2, 830; FOTC 51, 316). <sup>63</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 76,3–4 (CSEL 3.2, 830–831; *De exhort. martyrii* 12 (CSEL 3.1, 344). <sup>64</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 12,2, *Denique et dies eorum quibus excedunt adnotate, ut commemorationes eorum inter memorias martyrum celebrare possimus* [...] *et celebrenter hic a nobis oblationes et sacrificia ob commemorationes eorum, quae cito vobiscum Domino protegente celebrabimus* (CSEL 3.2, 503–4; ACW 43, 82). <sup>65</sup> V. Saxer, 'Martyr – Martyrdom: II. Cult of martyrs, saints, relics', in A. Di Berardino (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the early Church* (Cambridge, 1992), i, 532.

the sure hope of later ordaining him as a presbyter. In recounting Celerinus' family tree, where his grandmother Celerina and two of his uncles, Egnatius and Laurentius, were already celebrated martyrs, Cyprian notes: 'As you recall we never fail to offer sacrifices on their behalf every time we celebrate the anniversary dates of the sufferings of these martyrs.'<sup>66</sup> G.W. Clarke, in the notes accompanying his translation of the letters of Cyprian, suggests that the liturgical commemoration of the *dies natalis* of the martyrs was the Christian equivalent of the pagan *parentalia* ceremonies.<sup>67</sup> If Cyprian understood the Eucharist in terms of the Church's offering of the Lord's passion – *passio enim Domini sacrificium est quod offerimus* (*Ep.* 63,17) – it was only natural for him to associate the passion of the martyrs with the powerful source that sustained and supported them in their resolve to follow in Christ's footsteps.

Raymond Johanny has noted that the whole movement of Cyprian's thought is eucharistic. He describes three interrelated strands in Cyprian's synthesis: (a) the Eucharist is understood as a memorial of Christ's passion; (b) the Eucharist is seen in relation to the Church; (c) the connection between the Eucharist and martyrdom.<sup>68</sup> He further notes that for Cyprian:

Logically, then, it is very important that those who offer the eucharist and those who partake of it should conform their lives ever more fully to that of Christ; they must become like him to the point of being wholly united to him by martyrdom.<sup>69</sup>

For Cyprian, the worthy recipients of the Eucharist will never distance themselves from Christ's passion which is being commemorated. He envisaged the Eucharist as a vital element in the spiritual armour of those facing persecution. Being nourished by the Eucharist the martyrs learned how to pour forth their own blood in imitation of their Master. He poetically describes the union of the persecuted with the eucharistic mystery. They are the ones who truly imitate the mysteries that they celebrate. The Church cherishes the memory of the martyrs, commemorating them in the liturgical celebration of the Lord's passion, knowing that, in the words of Psalm 115, 'Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful.' They have shown us that they preferred nothing to Christ.

ST AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Unlike our three previous witnesses, Augustine did not die as a martyr himself. Living in the aftermath of the Great Persecution he is an important source of the-

<sup>66</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 39,3, *Sacrificia pro eis semper ut meministis offerimus quotiens martyrum passiones et dies anniversaria commemoratione celebramus* (CSEL 3.2, 583; ACW 44, 55). <sup>67</sup> G.W. Clarke, *The letters of St Cyprian* (ACW 43, 252). <sup>68</sup> R. Johanny, 'Cyprian of Carthage', p. 156. <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 165. E. Mazza, *The celebration of the Eucharist*, p. 135, makes a similar point with reference to Cyprian.

ological reflection on martyrdom. His numerous sermons on the martyrs bear witness to the widespread devotion to and cult of the martyrs, both universal and local, in the North African Church. The earlier studies of Cardinal Pellegrino sketch both the ecclesial and Christological significance of martyrdom in Augustine's thought.<sup>70</sup> The specific terminology used by Augustine in referring to the martyrs has been examined by A. Bastiaensen.<sup>71</sup> Carole Straw gives us a valuable summary of some of the major themes that characterize Augustine's understanding of martyrdom.<sup>72</sup> She notes that the earliest works of Augustine show relatively little explicit interest in martyrs or martyrdom. His ideas, however, are well developed when they find expression in his various treatises and sermons elicited by interaction with the Manichees, the Donatists, and the pagans.

#### *Honouring the martyrs*

In his *Contra Faustum* Augustine refutes Faustus' charge that the Christians worship the martyrs in the place of idols. Developing a distinction that we already met in the *Martyrium Polycarpi*, and anticipating the later teaching of the Second Council of Nicaea in the wake of the iconoclastic controversy, Augustine states:

It is true that Christians pay religious honour to the memory of the martyrs, both to excite us to imitate them, and to obtain a share in their merits, and the assistance of their prayers. But we build altars not to any martyrs, but to the God of martyrs, although it is to the memory of the martyrs. No one officiating at the altar in the saints' burying place ever says: 'We bring an offering to you, O Peter, or O Paul, or O Cyprian!' The offering is made to God who gave the crown of martyrdom while it is in memory of those crowned. The emotion is increased by the association of the place, and love is excited both towards those who are our examples, and towards him by whose help we may follow such examples.<sup>73</sup>

Augustine continues here by speaking of *latreia*, the worship that is due to God alone, reserving the terms 'devotion' and 'affective intimacy' for what is the appropriate disposition towards the martyrs.<sup>74</sup>

70 M. Pellegrino, 'Chiesa e martirio in Sant' Agostino', *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 1 (1965) 191-227; 'Cristo e il martire nel pensiero di Sant'Agostino', *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 2 (1966) 427-60. 71 A.A.R. Bastiaensen, 'Quelques observations sur la terminologie du martyre chez Saint Augustin', in A. Zumkeller (ed.), *Signum Pietatis: Festgabe für C. P. Mayer OSA* (Würzburg, 1989), pp 201-16. 72 C. Straw, 'Martyrdom', in A. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the ages: an encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge, 1999), pp 538-42. 73 Augustine, *C. Faust.* XX 21 (PL 42, 384; NPNF 4, 262). 74 For similar treatment of this theme see Augustine's *Sermo* 273,3 and 7 (PL 38, 1249 and 1251), a sermon contemporaneous with the *C. Faust.*, and his discussion of sacrifice in *De civ. Dei* X 3-6 (CCSL 47, 274-9), and the cult of the martyrs in *De civ. Dei* VIII 27 (CCSL 47, 248-9).

#### *True martyrs preserve the unity of charity*

A major pastoral problem facing Augustine in the early years of his episcopate was the Donatist controversy. The exclusivist ecclesiological stance of the Donatists, precipitated by their reaction to the *traditores* in the aftermath to the Great Persecution, led them to see themselves as the true and holy Church. They prided themselves in being the true heirs of Cyprian and even boasted of their own martyrs among the *circumcelliones*. In one of his early *Tractatus in Ioannis evangelium*, therefore from the anti-Donatist period, we meet Augustine contrasting the true and the false martyr. The criterion of love, as enunciated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:2-3, is the distinguishing hallmark of the true martyr:

It was by charity those martyrs who suffered in times of persecution did this; but these men do it of their vanity and pride; for in the absence of a persecutor, they throw themselves headlong into destruction. Come, then, that you may have charity. 'But we have our martyrs!' What martyrs? They are not doves; hence they attempted to fly, and fell over the rock.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly in *De baptismo* II 1,2, Augustine argues that Peter and Cyprian confessed the faith and died for Christ 'in the unity of charity'.

#### *Sanctorum martyrum corporibus plena*

Augustine's writings bear witness to an extensive cult of the martyrs in North Africa in his own day. In *Epistola* 78,3, written to his clergy and people while absent at a council in Carthage in AD 404, he makes reference to the shrines of the saints and the fact that Africa was *sanctorum martyrum corporibus plena*. His various writings make abundant reference to the practice of anniversary celebrations on the *dies natales* of the martyrs. These often took the form of a eucharistic celebration which took place at the *memoria* of the martyr or in basilicas erected in their honour. Augustine exhibits concern to restrain the excesses in festivity that often followed these celebrations.<sup>76</sup>

Augustine preached frequently on the martyrs' feast days. Analysis of his many sermons on these occasions allows us to partly reconstruct the liturgical calendar of Hippo Regius and its environs and to detect some of the lectionary readings and psalms employed.<sup>77</sup> He often refers to the *Acta* or the *Passio* of the martyr

75 Augustine, *In Io. ev. tr.* 6,23, *Charitate fecerunt martyres illi qui in tempore persecutionis passi sunt; charitate fecerunt: isti autem de tumore et de superbia faciunt; nam cum persecutor desit, seipso praecipitant. Veni ergo, ut habeas charitatem. Sed nos habemus martyres. Quos martyres? Non sunt columbae, ideo volare conati sunt, et de petra ceciderunt* (PL 35, 1436; NPNF 7, 47). 76 See *Epp.* 22,3 and 29,10 (CSEL 34.1, 56-57 and 120-121); *Confessiones* VI 2,2 (PL 32, 719-20); *De civ. Dei* VIII 27 (CCSL 47, 248-9); and J. Quasten, 'Die Reform des Märtyrerkultes durch Augustinus', *Theologie und Glaube* 25 (1933) 318-31. 77 On the liturgical calendar see C. Lambot, 'Les

being read to the assembly. We also find reference to the martyrs' names being specifically mentioned in the course of the prayers at the altar: 'In the recitation of names at the altar of Christ, their names are recited in the most honoured place; but for all that, they are not worshipped instead of Christ.'<sup>78</sup> In what follows I wish to explore the links between Eucharist and martyrdom in Augustine's thought, limiting myself to a selection of texts, chiefly drawn from his sermons.

*Partaking of the eucharistic cup unto a heavenly reward*

In book 2 of his *Contra litteras Petilianus* Augustine refutes Petilianus' claim to cite Psalm 22 in support of the Donatist cause. Citing 1 Corinthians 11:29, Augustine warns those who drink from the *calix Domini* unworthily. The Donatists, by lacking the love that seeks ecclesial unity, derive no benefit from the Lord's cup. This is sharply contrasted with the case of the true martyr:

These words [Ps 22] are not used except by those who, with converted heart, receive the cup of the Lord unto eternal life; not by those who eat and drink damnation to themselves, as the Apostle says (cf. 1 Cor 11:29); and yet, though they are not one, the cup that they receive is one, exerting its power on the martyrs that they should obtain a heavenly reward, not on the Circumcellions that they should mark precipices with death.<sup>79</sup>

Once again we witness Augustine contrasting the true martyr, guided by love of unity, with the false motivations among the Donatist martyrs.

*Calix inebrians*

Psalm 22 was an important text for Patristic reflection on the Eucharist.<sup>80</sup> It contains the line – *calix inebrians quam praeclarus est* (Ps 22:5). Augustine often associates this line with the power of the eucharistic cup as experienced in the life of the martyrs facing their deaths. We earlier noted that Cyprian expressed the view that partaking of the eucharistic cup enabled the martyrs to shed their own blood for Christ. Augustine expresses the same idea, often linking it with Psalm 22:5 and with other psalm texts where the word 'cup' is mentioned.

Commenting on Psalm 55, where the psalmist invokes God's help in a situation of feeling trodden down by others (cf. Ps 55:1), Augustine invites us to con-

Sermons de saint Augustin pour les fêtes de martyrs', *Analecta Bollandiana* 67 (1949) 249–66. For his lectionary readings see A.M. La Bonnardière, 'Les *Enarrationes in Psalmos* prêchées par saint Augustin à l'occasion de fêtes de martyrs', *Rech. August.* 7 (1971) 73–104. <sup>78</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 273,7, *In recitatione ad altare Christi loco meliore recitantur; non tamen pro Christi adorantur* (PL 38, 1251; WSA, trans. E. Hill, III/8, 20). On the mention of the names at the altar see F. Cabrol, 'Diptyques', in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie* (Paris, 1921), iv, cols 1051–2. <sup>79</sup> Augustine, *C. litt. Petil.* II 47,110, ... *inebrians ad capessanda coelestia martyres, non ad funestanda praecipita Circumcelliones* (PL 48, 298; NPNF 4, 559). <sup>80</sup> See J. Daniélou, *The Bible and the liturgy* (London, 1956), pp 177–90.

sider whom we call upon and by whose example we are made strong. Christ is compared to the first vine cluster being crushed in the winepress, whence flow the contents of the inebriating cup. He next turns to the members of Christ's body, reminding them that patient endurance of persecution for Christ is part of leading a godly life (cf. 2 Tim 3:12). The members are warned that on entering the winepress they must prove to be juicy grapes, not shrivelled ones. Empowered by the eucharistic cup they, too, must yield a pleasing vintage.<sup>81</sup>

An additional development of this theme is commonly employed by Augustine. The state of seeming drunkenness allows the martyr, who partakes of the eucharistic cup, to become forgetful of family ties and the other affectionate bonds that might deter the martyr from following Christ courageously. Thus, in his commentary on Psalm 35, one of his favourite psalms, Augustine cleverly links together several important Scriptural texts, Psalm 35:8; Psalm 22:5 and Psalm 115:12–13:

'They shall be drunken with the fullness of your house' (Ps 35:8) ... wherefore also in another psalm it is said: 'Your inebriating cup, how excellent it is' (Ps 22:5). With this cup were the martyrs drunk when going to their passion, they knew not their own (*suos non agnoscebant*). What so drunken as not to know a wife weeping, not children, not parents? They knew them not, they thought not what they were before their eyes. Wonder not! They were drunken. Wherewith were they drunken? Lo, they had received a cup wherewith they were drunken (*acceperunt calicem unde inebriarentur*). Wherefore, he also gives thanks to God saying: 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I shall take the chalice of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord' (Ps 115:12–13).<sup>82</sup>

Psalm 115, of course, was a classic text frequently employed as a chant in Augustine's celebrations of the martyrs.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, in his *Enarratio in Ps 74,12* Augustine also refers to the drunkenness of the martyrs. Oblivious to family ties and earthly allurements, seeking to deflect them from their heavenly reward, their hearts were changed and their minds were alienated from this world.

Augustine's *Sermo* 284 was delivered on the *dies natalis* of two Numidian martyrs, the deacon James and the young lector Marianus, martyred under Valerian and Gallienus in AD 262. Once again, using Psalm 35:8, Augustine reflects movingly on how the drunkenness of these two young martyrs made them oblivious to family ties:

<sup>81</sup> Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 55,4, *Cum autem coepis in Christi pie vivere, ingressus es torcular; praepara te ad pressuras; sed noli esse aridus, ne de pressura nihil exeat* (PL 36, 649). See also M.F. Berrouard, *Oeuvres de St. Augustin: Homélie sur l'Évangile de saint Jean XVII–XXXIII*, note complémentaire 74, 'Euchariste et force des martyrs' (BA 72, 834–6). <sup>82</sup> Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 35,14 (PL 36, 351–2; L.Frs. 24, 416–17). <sup>83</sup> See La Bonnardière, 'Les *Enarrationes in Psalmos* prêchées par saint Augustin à l'occasion de fêtes de martyrs', 102, n.123. Cyprian had also employed the text in this regard in his *De exhort. marty.* 12 and *Ep.* 76,4.

So it is from here then, from here that our martyrs drank: from here they were made so drunk (cf. Ps 35:8), that they did not recognise their nearest and dearest. How many holy martyrs, I mean to say, as the time for them to suffer drew near, were tempted by the coaxing of their nearest and dearest, striving to call them back to the temporal, and vain, and fleeting sweetness of this life?<sup>84</sup>

Augustine may well have had the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 3–5 in mind here, since it records Perpetua's courageous spirit in remaining untouched by her father's repeated pleas to abandon her goal of martyrdom. Augustine in this sermon contrasts the drunkenness of the martyrs with those seeking to dissuade them. The latter are merely drunk on the wine of error – *vino erroris ebrios*. Mary, the mother of the young lector Marianus, is favourably compared to Mary, the mother of Jesus. She did not grieve at the apparent loss of her young son, conscious that he was merely being sent ahead. She was full of eagerness to follow where he was going (*Sermo* 284,2). Continuing the metaphor of these two Numidian martyrs being drunk, Augustine refers to them both 'belching forth Christ' in their confession of faith – *Christum confitendo ructabant*. The same verb is used of the beloved disciple in who 'belched forth' what he had secretly imbibed while reclining at the Lord's breast (Jn 13:23).<sup>85</sup>

One final example of this motif of the drunkenness of the martyrs occurs in one of Augustine's Pentecost day sermons. Scripture itself (cf. Acts 2:13) had described the Apostles as being seemingly drunk after the advent of the Spirit (*Sermo* 272B,1 = *Sermo Mai* 158,1). Augustine describes the Apostles as being like new wineskins containing a new wine. The fermenting Spirit within filled them with charity. Towards the end of his sermon he refers directly to the martyrs:

If we let ourselves be made into new wineskins, we wait attentively for his grace; we shall then be filled in great style with the Holy Spirit, and through the Holy Spirit we shall have charity within us. That is when we have already started fermenting with the new wine, and got drunk on its intoxicating and splendid chalice (cf. Ps 22:5), so that we forget those secular things that used to hold us in thrall, in the way the martyrs forgot them when they went to their deaths.<sup>86</sup>

In this particular sermon the martyr is depicted as being drunk through being full of the Spirit. Alive with charity, the martyr faces death serenely, not held back by any earthly ties.

84 Augustine, *Sermo* 284,2 (PL 38, 1288–1289; WSA III/8, 88). 85 On Augustine's use of the verb *ructare* see D. Dideberg, 'Saint Jean, le disciple bien-aimé, révélateur des secrets du Verbe de Dieu', in A.M. la Bonnardière (ed.), *Saint Augustin et la Bible*, Bible de Tous les Temps (Paris, 1986), iii, 189–201, at p. 195. 86 Augustine, *Sermo* 272B,7 = *Sermo Mai* 158,7 (PLS 2, 527; WSA III/7, 308).

### Seated at the Table of the Mighty

Suzanne Poque has drawn our attention to Augustine's exegesis of Proverbs 23:1–2 (LXX), a text that he commonly used in reflecting on the martyrs.<sup>87</sup> She notes that this text has rarely been commented upon in Patristic literature prior to Augustine.<sup>88</sup> Poque considers Augustine's usage of the text to exhibit 'coherence, richness and originality'. He employs the text some seven times, with a possible allusion in a further text. The Proverbs text, in its LXX rendition, refers to a guest being invited to the table of a mighty person – *cenare ad mensam potentis*. The guest is invited to do two things. Firstly, they are to observe carefully what is placed before them on the table. Secondly, they are to stretch forth their hand, knowing that they must prepare a similar fare when their own day comes. Poque notes the three inter-related themes of the reciprocal invitation, the meal, and the imitation theme. Augustine invariably links the text with several other key Scriptural texts in his homilies on martyrdom. The text from Proverbs seems to have been one of the lectionary readings employed for the memoria of the martyrs on some occasions.

Augustine delivered *Sermo* 329 on the occasion of the birthday of some unnamed martyrs. It is an extremely rich sermon on martyrdom, in which he links together several important Scriptural texts and themes. The fact that the death of the Lord's faithful is precious in his sight (cf. Ps 115:15) is coupled with Christ's teaching about the dying wheat grain (cf. Jn 12:24) in the opening section of the sermon. Augustine then proceeds to speak about the vast transaction accomplished by Christ on the cross. The purse containing the price of our redemption was rent and the price of the whole world flowed out. He continues with reference to the martyrs:

[The martyrs] have paid back what was spent for them, and they have fulfilled what St John says: 'Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so we, too, should lay down our lives for the brethren' (1 Jn 3:16). And in another place it says: 'You have sat down at a great table. Consider carefully what is set before you, since it behoves you to prepare the same kind of thing yourself' (Prov 23:1–2).

Augustine here moves from the drama of the cross to its sacramental commemoration in the Eucharist. At this banquet the Lord is simultaneously host, food, and drink (*mensa magna est, ubi epulae sunt ipse dominus mensae*). At this *mensa Domini*

87 S. Poque, 'L'exégèse augustinienne de Proverbes 23,1–2', *Rev. Bén.* 78 (1968) 117–27. 88 *Ibid.*, 124–6. Ambrose comments on the text only once (*De offic. min.* I 30–32), Cassian once (*Conlatio* II 1.1), Paulinus of Nola once in his *Carmina* 27, ll. 187–99, and Origen twice (*In Lev. Hom.* 13,4; *In Ex. Hom.* 2,3). Poque suggests some further references in a Proverbs commentary attributed to John Chrysostom, but possibly coming from Evagrius. I have not found any references to the Proverbs text in the works of Tertullian or Cyprian.

the guests are invited to an *imitatio Christi*, as 1 John 3:16 so clearly states. With reference to the martyrs Augustine observes: 'So the martyrs recognised what they ate and drank, so that they should give back the same kind of thing'.<sup>89</sup> Pondering on all that the Lord has done, the psalmist asks what return should be made to the Lord (Ps 115:12). The martyrs take seriously the neighbouring verse of this psalm, which mentions the *calix salvationis*, and they call upon the name of the Lord. Augustine links the *calix salvationis* with the cup involved in the agony in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:39) and the cup offered to the sons of Zebedee (Mt 20:22). The martyrs were confident in Christ's victory (cf. Jn 16:33) in them (*Sermo* 329,2). Elsewhere Augustine speaks of the union of Christ's passion with that of the martyr.<sup>90</sup> The genuine *imitatio Christi* involves Christ transforming the martyr into himself.<sup>91</sup>

In a sermon for the feast day of the Roman martyr Laurence, Augustine notes that this deacon administered the sacred chalice and also shed his own blood for Christ's name (*Sermo* 304,1). Laurence is praised for having been prudent in approaching the *mensa potentis*. Citing both Proverbs 23:1–2 and 1 John 3:16, Augustine states: 'Saint Laurence understood this, brothers and sisters, and he did it; and he undoubtedly prepared things similar to what he received at that table. He loved Christ in his life, he imitated him in his death.'<sup>92</sup> Augustine's twenty-seventh *Tractatus in Iohannis evangelium* was delivered on the feast day of Laurence the deacon. Conveniently Augustine was just commenting on the Bread of Life discourse. He refers to Laurence's slow and lingering death. His perseverance in such trials was possible *quia bene manducaverat et bene biberat*. Laurence was one who feasted on the eucharistic food and was intoxicated with the cup – *tamquam illa esca saginatus et illo calice ebrius, tormenta non sensit*. The power of the Eucharist enabled his perseverance as the Lord's martyr.<sup>93</sup> Augustine invites his flock to demonstrate their love for Christ by 'following in his footsteps' (1 Pet 2:21), as Laurence did. The bridge which the martyrs crossed has not been cut down, neither has the fountain from which they drank dried up (*Sermo* 304,2).

In *Sermo* 332,1 the martyrs are described as the friends of Christ. They are the ones who observe the Lord's command of mutual love, to the point of laying down their lives for their friends, in imitation of Christ (cf. Jn 15:13; 1 Jn 3:16). Like one of the poor (Ps 22:26) we approach the Lord's table, knowing that it behoves us to imitate what we receive from the table. Once again Augustine interprets Proverbs 23:1–2 by linking it with 1 John 3:16. We prepare a similar fare to what we have received in the Eucharist if we are ready to lay down our lives in

<sup>89</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 329,1, *Agnoverunt ergo martyres quid comederent et biberent, ut talia redderent* (PL 38, 1455; WSA III/9, 182). <sup>90</sup> Augustine, *C. Faust.* XII 28 (PL 42, 269); *Enarr. in Ps.* 40,1 (PL 36, 454). <sup>91</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 140,10.27, 13.35 (CSEL 44.3, 178, 184–185). <sup>92</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 304,1, *Intellexit hoc, fratres, sanctus Laurentius; intellexit, ac fecit: et prorsus qualia sumpsit in illa mensa, talia praeparavit. Amavit Christum in vita sua, imitatus est eum in morte sua* (PL 38, 1395; WSA III/8, 316). <sup>93</sup> Augustine, *In Io. ev. tr.* 27,12 (PL 35, 1621; NPNF 7, 178).

love for each other (*Sermo* 332,2). Conscious that all is gift (cf. 1 Cor 4:7), Augustine encourages his flock to ask for an increase in charity, relying on the martyrs' intercession:

It was from him that the martyrs received the grace that they should suffer for his sake; you must believe it, they receive it from him. The Master of the house gave them the means of entertaining him. We have him, let us ask for things from him. And if we are not so worthy to receive, let us ask through his friends who entertained him from his own gifts. May they pray for us, so that he may give them to us, too.<sup>94</sup>

Augustine's eighty-fourth *Tractatus in Iohannis evangelium* is devoted to a brief commentary on John 15:13, on the theme of mutual love. It is very similar to *Sermo* 332, and we witness Augustine employing the same catena of Scriptural texts, including Proverbs 23:1–2 in conjunction with 1 John 3:16. Here Augustine gives quite a detailed commentary on the Proverbs text:

For what is the table of the ruler, but that from which we take the body and blood of him who laid down his life for us? And what is it to sit thereat, but to approach in humility? And what is it to consider intelligently what is set before you, but worthily to reflect on the magnitude of the favour? And what is to put to your hand, as knowing that you are bound to make similar preparations, but as I have already said, that, as Christ laid down his life for us, so we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren?<sup>95</sup>

Augustine continues by citing the related text 1 Peter 2:21, on following in Christ's footsteps, and speaks of the martyrs as the ones who implement the teaching of Proverbs 23:1–2:

This is what the blessed martyrs did in their burning love; and if we celebrate their memory in no mere empty form, and, in the banquet whereat they themselves were filled to the full, approach the table of the Lord, we must, as they did, be also ourselves making similar preparations.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 332,3, *Paterfamilias dedit illis unde illum pascere* (PL 38, 1462; WSA III/9, 195). <sup>95</sup> Augustine, *In Io. ev. tr.* 84,1, *Nam quae mensa est potentis, nisi unde sumitur corpus et sanguis ejus qui animam suam posuit pro nobis? Et quid est ad eam sedere, nisi humiliter accedere? Et quid est considerare et intelligere quae opponitur tibi, nisi digne tantam gratiam cogitare? Et quid est sic mittere manum, ut scias quia talia te oportet praeparare, nisi quod jam dixi, quia sicut pro nobis Christum animam suam posuit, sic et nos debemus animas pro fratribus ponere?* (PL 35, 1846–7; NPNF 7, 350). <sup>96</sup> Augustine, *In Io. ev. tr.* 84,1, *Hoc beati martyres ardenti dilectione fecerunt: quorum si non inaniter memorias celebramus, adque in convivio quo et ipsi saturati sunt, ad mensam domini accedimus, oportet, ut quemadmodum ipsi, et nos talia praeparemus* (PL 35, 1847; NPNF 7, 350).

The commemoration of martyrs is different, Augustine explains, from that of those who have died. We do not pray for the martyrs, 'but rather that they should do so for us'. They have already attained the fullness of love: 'For such tokens of love they exhibited for their brethren, as they themselves had equally received at the table of the Lord' (*In Io. ev. tr.* 84,1).

In an earlier tractate, commenting on the Good Shepherd, Augustine also employs Proverbs 23:1-2 with the customary associated texts. Christ's sheep have been purchased by the costly shedding of his blood. Others have imitated the Good Shepherd, but they did so only because of Christ's union with them as part of the one vine (Jn 15:5). Christ has made us debtors by first setting an example for us to copy. Here he introduces Proverbs 23:1-2 and states: 'You know what is meant by the ruler's table: there you find the body and blood of Christ; let him who comes to such a table be ready with similar provision.'<sup>97</sup> Augustine concluded this tractate by observing that Christ in commissioning Simon Peter to feed his lambs and care for his sheep (cf. Jn 21:15-19), also prophesied about his eventual martyrdom. Feeding the Lord's sheep would involve laying down his life for them, in imitation of the Good Shepherd.

Psalm 125 was another favourite text both in reflecting upon and liturgically celebrating the martyrs. In an early sermon on this psalm Augustine employs an apparent conflation of Proverbs 23:1-2 and Sirach 31:12, typically explained by reference to 1 John 3:16. Following the example of the martyrs we should imitate Christ and prepare similar things to what we have received from the *mensa potentis* (*Sermo* 31,2). The final instance of Augustine's citation of Proverbs 23:1-2 occurs in *Sermo* 340A, a sermon preached at the episcopal ordination of Anthony or Antonius of Fussala. Having wonderfully sketched the virtues of service and humility in the earlier part of the sermon, Augustine, as in *Tractatus in Iohannis evangelium* 47,2, introduces the example of Peter who was both to feed the Lord's sheep and suffer for them (*Sermo* 340A,3). The rivalry of the sons of Zebedee is introduced as a warning to Antonius. The new bishop is invited to drink from the *calix humilitatis*:

This then is what we should pay attention to in the Lord; let us mark his humility, let us drink the cup of his humiliation, let us constrict ourselves to his limits, let us meditate on him. It is easy enough to think about grandeur, easy enough to enjoy honours, easy enough to give our ears to yes-men and flatterers. To put up with abuse, to listen patiently to reproaches, to pray for the insolent, that is the Lord's cup, that is sharing the Lord's table. 'Have you been invited by a great personage? Consider that you are obliged to prepare the same kind of thing.'<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Augustine, *In Io. ev. tr.* 47,2, *Mensa potentis quae sit, nostis; ibi est corpus et sanguis Christi; qui accedit ad talem mensam, praeparet talia* (PL 35, 1733; NPNF 7, 260). <sup>98</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 340A,5 = *Sermo* Guelf. 32,5 (PLS 2, 641-2; WSA III/9, 299).

While there is no explicit reference to martyrdom in this sermon, the usage of Proverbs 23:1-2 applies with equal relevance. Bishop and martyr alike are called to consider and imitate what they receive from the Lord's table. Both are invited to prepare a similar repast, which can, as in the case of Peter, involve the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep. Then he truly feeds them.

Augustine's exegesis of Proverbs 23:1-2 is quite unique, and consistently based on an association with a cluster of thematically related texts. As noted earlier, this Proverbs text received scant comment among Augustine's predecessors and contemporaries. Among the isolated references that we find in Ambrose, Cassian, Paulinus of Nola, and Origen, the text is never interpreted with an implied reference to martyrdom.<sup>99</sup> Poque has suggested the use of the Proverbs text in Gregory of Nyssa's two *Eulogies for Forty Martyrs*, delivered in March 383, but her argument is based on rather scant evidence. Certainly we do not see Gregory employ the text in any way similar to Augustine. The characteristic scriptural orchestration of Proverbs 23:1-2, so characteristic of Augustine, is conspicuous by its absence in Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>1</sup>

Two major themes characterise the different Augustinian texts that we have explored. Firstly, the Eucharist is associated with the *calix inebrians* of Psalm 22:5. It acts to fortify the martyrs approaching their death. Their apparent drunkenness makes them oblivious to all those factors that would naturally deflect them from their desired goal of martyrdom. Secondly, he linked martyrdom and the Eucharist together through his use of Proverbs 23:1-2 and a characteristic cluster of related texts from Scripture. Careful consideration of what one receives from the *mensa Domini* is a challenging invitation to mutual love and a pattern of discipleship that involves readiness to die as a martyr, in imitation of Christ the Good Shepherd. The deacon Laurence merited the martyr's crown for doing just this.

While Augustine himself did not die as a martyr, the closing words of book 10 of his *Confessions* leave us in no doubt as to the depths of mystery that he glimpsed in the Eucharist:

<sup>99</sup> Ambrose (*De offic. min.* I 31,162-4; 32,165-6) links the text with being fed at the table of the Scriptures. Cassian (*Conl.* II 1) associated it with Abbot Moses' teaching on the quest for the grace of discretion. Paulinus of Nola (*Carmen* 27, ll. 193-7) applied the text to himself, as recipient of blessings from his patron, Felix of Nola, and in his quest for a response to the admiration of his visitor Nicetas of Remesiana. Origen in his homilies on Leviticus linked Proverbs 23:1-2 with Leviticus 24:6, on the arrangement of the special loaves on a clean table before the Lord, but also linking it with St Paul and his reliance on God's strength (*In Lev. hom.* 13,4). Elsewhere Origen gave an entirely different interpretation to the text, associating it with Pharaoh's persecution of the Israelites prior to the exodus. The newly baptized face similar perils, but Christ has opened up a pathway to victory for them (*In Ex. hom.* 2,3). <sup>1</sup> Poque, 'L'exégèse augustinienne de Proverbes 23,1-2', 127. She refers to two passages in Gregory of Nyssa's *Eulogies for forty martyrs*. In one there is a reference to a text from Proverbs being a lectionary reading for the commemoration of the martyrs (PG 46, 749). In the other there is an allusion to a rich spiritual table (PG 46, 757).



For the price of my redemption is always in my thoughts. I eat it and drink it and minister it to others; and as one of the poor I long to be filled with it, to be one of those who 'eat and have their fill'. And 'those who look for the Lord will cry out in praise of him' (Ps 21:27).<sup>2</sup>

In a sermon delivered on the occasion of the memoria of some female martyrs of Thuburbo, and with a probable allusion to Proverbs 23:1–2, Augustine stated: *Da quod accepisti, redde quod bibisti*.<sup>3</sup> Not only must one, as Augustine said in a eucharistic catechesis to the *infantes*, 'Become what you receive' – *Estate quod videtis* (*Sermo* 272) – one must also make a return for what one both sees and receives – *Da quod accepisti*.

#### CONCLUSION

The martyrs have always been regarded as the real heroes and heroines of the faith. In Tertullian's celebrated phrase: *Etiam plures efficimur, quotiens metimur a vobis: semen est sanguis Christianorum*.<sup>4</sup> Jungmann notes that in the emerging shape of the liturgical calendar it was the martyrs who were the first to be given any special honour. Other saints only hesitatingly entered the calendar at a later stage.<sup>5</sup> The author of the *Martyrium Polycarpi* stated that the veneration of the martyrs had a two-fold function, to commemorate those who had fought the fight and to train and prepare those who would yet fight for Christ's name. We have seen above Cyprian's vigilance concerning the dates of the martyrs' deaths and their liturgical commemoration at the offering of the sacrifices. The large number of Augustine's sermons devoted to the martyrs bears eloquent testimony to their importance in the liturgical life of the North African Church. In his *De civitate Dei* VIII 27 Augustine outlines a rich theology of the cult of the martyrs. He is careful to stress the adoration due to God alone, and the veneration we give to the martyrs – 'They are not gods for us; their God is our God.' The purpose of veneration is that we might be led to emulate their achievements. As he states elsewhere, we should 'take delight in imitating them by following in their footsteps' (*Sermo* 285,1). We do not pray for the martyrs in church, but entrust ourselves to their prayers as our advocates in union with Christ, our Advocate with the Father (*Sermo* 285,5).

Liturgical commemoration of the martyrs usually took the form of a eucharistic assembly. Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine bear clear evidence to this fact.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* X 43,70 (PL 32, 810). The English translation of the passage is taken from, *Saint Augustine – Confessions*, trans R.S. Pine-Coffin (London, 1961), p. 252. <sup>3</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 345,6 = *Sermo Frang.* 3 (PL 46, 979; WSA III/10, 64). <sup>4</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum* L 13 (CCSL I, 171). <sup>5</sup> J. Jungmann, *The early liturgy: to the time of Gregory the Great* (London, 1959), pp 175–87, at pp 180–1.

The accompanying liturgy of the word often involved the reading of the *Acta* or the *Passio* of the martyrs, and a carefully chosen selection of Scripture texts focused on the theme of martyrdom. Significantly these eucharistic assemblies took place on the *dies natales* of the martyrs, often at the place of their actual martyrdom or in the place where they were buried. Later developments such as the inclusion of relics of the martyrs in the altar stone and the insertion of the martyrs' names into the actual text of the eucharistic prayer, as in the case of the Roman Canon, helped stress the interconnectedness of the Eucharist and martyrdom.<sup>6</sup> Jungmann typifies these developments as the expression of the desire to offer the eucharistic sacrifice in union not only with the whole Church on earth but also in union with the heavenly Church, including the apostles and the martyrs.

Ignatius of Antioch saw his martyrdom as the means to 'attain to God' and so perfect his discipleship. He wished to be reduced to fine flour by the lions' teeth, in order to become 'purest bread for Christ'. Polycarp, too, prayed to be deemed worthy to share the cup of Christ with the martyrs. The account of his martyrdom is strongly tinged with eucharistic references. Cyprian envisaged an integral union between Christ and the faithful, not only in the mixing of water and wine in the chalice, but also by the *milites Christi* preferring nothing to Christ and being prepared to give their blood for his name. Augustine constantly kept the price of his redemption before his eyes as he fed, like one of the poor, on the Eucharist. It was from the *mensa Domini* as from a *mensa potentis* that the martyrs received the inebriating cup and the heavenly food that enabled them to reproduce the pattern of what they had received.

In his book *Lay People in the Church*, Yves Congar refers to a scene in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Kharamazov*. The novice Alyosha has just left the presence of the elder Zossima with a burning urge to go out and 'kiss the face of the earth'. Congar links this sentiment with both prayer and the Eucharist:

It is right and proper that we should come from prayer or the Eucharist with a longing – like Dostoyevsky's Alyosha – to kiss the earth: for we have just communed with the source of all fellowship and with the will of him who day by day, together with the day's bread, gives us all things for our task.<sup>7</sup>

The martyrs were truly fed at the Lord's table and went forth not only to kiss the face of the earth, but also to water it with their blood – *semen est sanguis Christianorum*. William of Durandus (1230–96), medieval bishop and author of the *Roman Pontifical*, penned the following line in the course of his admonition to ordinands to the presbyterate: *Agnoscite quid agitis, imitemini quod tractatis*.<sup>8</sup> Ordinands

<sup>6</sup> For detail on these developments see Saxer, 'Martyr – Martyrdom: II. Cult of martyrs, saints, relics', p. 532; Cabrol, 'Diptyques', cols 1051, 1063–6; Jungmann, *The early liturgy*, pp 181–2. <sup>7</sup> Y. Congar, *Lay people in the Church* (London, 1953), 433. <sup>8</sup> M. Adrieu, *Le Pontifical Roman*

are advised to know what they are doing and to imitate the mysteries they celebrate. The martyrs are models for emulation here.

Perhaps we can leave the final word to Rabbula, bishop of Edessa at the beginning of the fifth century. Even if the authenticity of the text is doubted, its eloquent poetic expression is surely in the best Syriac tradition of Ephrem and Cyrillona, who both wrote eloquently of the vine and its fruit:

Blessed martyrs, you are like grapes on God's vine,  
and the Church is drunk with the wine you make.  
You are God's lamps, and how brightly you shine!  
You welcomed your sufferings as though they were pleasures:  
yours is the triumph, not theirs who put you to death.  
Glory to the Power who helped you in the struggle!  
May the God who came to save us have pity on us.  
When the saints were preparing for their feast of suffering,  
they drank the wine that the Jews had made in the winepress of Golgotha,  
and so they came to know the mysteries of God's house.  
Therefore we sing: Praise be to Christ, who made the martyrs drunk  
with the blood that came from his side!<sup>9</sup>

*au Moyen Age*, t. 2, *Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand* (Città del Vaticano, 1940), 366. The full text and translation of Durandus' admonition, *Consecrandi*, is given in Appendix 5 of D.N. Power, *Ministers of Christ and his Church* (London, 1969), pp 199–200. <sup>9</sup> A. Hamman, *Early Christian prayers*, trans. W. Mitchell (Chicago & London, 1962), pp 184–5. The passage is also cited in B. Ramsey, *Beginning to read the Fathers* (London, 1985), pp 127–8. For some relevant Syriac texts on the Eucharist see S. Brock, 'The mysteries hidden in the side of Christ', *Sobornost* 7 (1978) 462–72.

## The origin of the cult of St George

David Woods

The legend of St George, perhaps the most famous of the alleged victims of the Great Persecution, continues to fascinate. George is most familiar to us today as the patron saint of England where the Royal Mint still issues gold coins depicting him in his guise as a dragon-slayer. He has been the subject of several recent popular works, and the number of children's books devoted to his story suggests that he has a long future ahead of him, if not as a figure of veneration, then at least as a figure of entertainment.<sup>1</sup> As we will see, the earliest versions of the passion of St George describe his martyrdom under a king by the name of Datanus. It is only the later versions of his passion which describe his execution under the emperor Diocletian. This change seems to have been made in attempt to rationalize the early passion and to reconcile it with known historical facts, and had already occurred by the time that St Andrew of Crete (c.660–740) composed his two sermons in praise of St George.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the story of how George killed a dragon represents a relatively late addition to his legend, by the end of the sixth century at earliest.<sup>3</sup> The development of the legend of St George over the centuries does not directly concern us here, although it does provide a good example of the temptation felt to attribute all martyrs whose date was uncertain to the Great Persecution in particular. The purpose of this paper is to explain the origin of the cult of St George, and to lay to rest any lingering suspicion that St Andrew of Crete and others may have been right to attribute St George to the reign of Diocletian, even if they did so for the wrong reason.<sup>4</sup> To be more precise, I intend

<sup>1</sup> Popular works include S. Riches, *St George: hero, martyr, and myth* (Stroud, 2000) and C. Stace, *St George: patron saint of England* (London, 2002). Children's books include G. Hronas, *The life of the great martyr St George* (Minneapolis, 1997), A. Cooney, *The story of St George: the life and legend of England's patron saint* (Cheltenham, 1999), G. McCaughrean, *St George and the dragon* (Oxford, 2000), and A. Ganeri, *The life of St George* (Chicago, 2004). <sup>2</sup> For the first sermon, see the Bollandist *Acta Sanctorum, Aprilis T. III* (Antwerp, 1675), XX–XXV. For the second, see PG 97, cols 1169–92, at 1173c. <sup>3</sup> The date depends on the dating of some wall-paintings in Cappadocia. See C. Walter, *The warrior saints in Byzantine art and tradition* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 125. Initially, St Theodore of Euchaita had been the dragon-slayer par excellence rather than St George. See C. Walter, 'Saint Theodore and the dragon', in C. Entwistle (ed.), *Through a glass brightly: studies in Byzantine and medieval art and archaeology presented to David Buckton* (Oxford, 2003), pp 95–106. <sup>4</sup> E.g. D.H. Farmer, *The Oxford dictionary of saints* (3rd ed., Oxford, 1992), 197, dates the death of George c.303; F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (eds), *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed., Oxford, 1997), p. 664, suggests that he is the anonymous figure referred to by Eus., *H.E.* VIII 5 who tore down the first edict of persecution when it

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# The Great Persecution

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