

St. Polycarp (c. AD 69-c. AD 155)

Polycarp resided in Asia Minor as bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp was martyred c. AD 155

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (modern Izmir, Turkey), disciple of St. John the Apostle and friend of St. Ignatius of Antioch was a revered Christian leader during the first half of the second century.

St. Ignatius, on his way to Rome to be martyred, visited Polycarp at Smyrna, and later at Troas wrote him a personal letter. The Asia Minor Churches recognized Polycarp's leadership by choosing him as a representative to discuss with Pope Anicetus the date of the Easter celebration in Rome—quite a controversy in the early Church.

Only one of the many letters written by Polycarp has been preserved, the one he wrote to the Church of Philippi, Macedonia.

At 86, Polycarp was led into the crowded Smyrna stadium to be burned alive. The flames did not harm him and he was finally killed by a dagger. The centurion ordered the saint's body burned. The "Acts" of Polycarp's martyrdom are the earliest preserved, fully reliable account of a Christian martyr's death. He died in 155.

Below you will find:

- 1) The Martyrdom of Polycarp
- 2) The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians
- 3) St. Ignatius of Antioch's Letter to Polycarp
- 4) Others Referring to Polycarp
- 5) Catholic Encyclopedia on Polycarp

For a website with the writings of Polycarp and of all the Early Church, click [here](#).

The letter of the Smyrnaeans or the Martyrdom of Polycarp

Translated by J.B. Lightfoot. Adapt. and mod. (c) 1990. ATHENA DATA PRODUCTS

Polycarp prologue

The church of God which sojourneth at Smyrna to the Church of God which sojourneth in Philomelium and to all the brotherhoods of the holy and universal Church sojourning in every place; mercy and peace and love from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ be multiplied.

Polycarp 1:1

We write unto you, brethren, an account of what befell those that suffered martyrdom and especially the blessed Polycarp, who stayed the persecution, having as it were set his seal upon it by his martyrdom. For nearly all the foregoing events came to pass that the Lord might show us once more an example of martyrdom which is conformable to the Gospel

Polycarp 1:2

For he lingered that he might be delivered up, even as the Lord did, to the end that we too might be imitators of him, not looking only to that which concerneth ourselves, but also to that which concerneth our neighbors. For it is the office of true and steadfast love, not only to desire that oneself be saved, but all the brethren also.

Polycarp 2:1

Blessed therefore and noble are all the martyrdoms which have taken place according to the will of God (for it behoveth us to be very scrupulous and to assign to God the power over all things).

Polycarp 2:2

For who could fail to admire their nobleness and patient endurance and loyalty to the Master? seeing that when they were so torn by lashes that the mechanism of their flesh was visible even as far as the inward veins and arteries, they endured patiently, so that the very bystanders had pity and wept; while they themselves reached such a pitch of bravery that none of them uttered a cry or a groan, thus showing to us all that at that hour the martyrs of Christ being tortured were absent from the flesh, or rather that the Lord was standing by and conversing with them.

Polycarp 2:3

And giving heed unto the grace of Christ they despised the tortures of this world, purchasing at the cost of one hour a release from eternal punishment. And they found the fire of their inhuman torturers cold: for they set before their eyes the escape from the eternal fire which is never quenched; while with the eyes of their heart they gazed upon the good things which are reserved for those that endure patiently, things which neither ear hath heard nor eye hath seen, neither have they entered into the heart of man, but were shown by the Lord to them, for they were no longer men but angels already.

Polycarp 2:4

And in like manner also those that were condemned to the wild beasts endured fearful punishments, being made to lie on sharp shells and buffeted with other forms of manifold tortures, that the devil might, if possible, by the persistence of the punishment bring them to a denial; for he tried many wiles against them.

Polycarp 3:1

But thanks be to God; for He verily prevailed against all. For the right noble Germanicus encouraged their timorousness through the constancy which was in him; and he fought with the wild beasts in a signal way. For when the proconsul wished to prevail upon him and bade him have pity on his youth, he used violence and dragged the wild beast towards him, desiring the more speedily to obtain a release from their unrighteous and lawless life.

Polycarp 3:2

So after this all the multitude, marvelling at the bravery of the God-beloved and God-fearing people of the Christians, raised a cry, 'Away with the atheists; let search be made for Polycarp.'

Polycarp 4:1

But one man, Quintus by name, a Phrygian newly arrived from Phrygia, when he saw the wild beasts, turned coward. He it was who had forced himself and some others to come forward of their own free will. This man the proconsul by much entreaty persuaded to swear the oath and to offer incense. For this cause therefore, brethren, we praise not those who deliver themselves up, since the Gospel doth not so teach us.

Polycarp 5:1

Now the glorious Polycarp at the first, when he heard it, so far from being dismayed, was desirous of remaining in town; but the greater part persuaded him to withdraw. So he withdrew to a farm not far distant from the city; and there he stayed with a few companions, doing nothing else night and day but praying for all men and for the churches throughout the world; for this was his constant habit.

Polycarp 5:2

And while praying he falleth into a trance three days before his apprehension; and he saw his pillow burning with fire. And he turned and said unto those that were with him: 'It must needs be that I shall be burned alive.'

Polycarp 6:1

And as those that were in search of him persisted, he departed to another farm; and forthwith they that were in search of him came up; and not finding him, they seized two slave lads, one of whom confessed under torture;

Polycarp 6:2

for it was impossible for him to lie concealed, seeing that the very persons who betrayed him were people of his own household. And the captain of the police, who chanced to have the very name, being called Herod, was eager to bring him into the stadium, that he himself might fulfill his appointed lot, being made a partaker with Christ, while they--his betrayers--underwent the punishment of Judas himself.

Polycarp 7:1

So taking the lad with them, on the Friday about the supper hour, the gendarmes and horsemen went forth with their accustomed arms, hastening as against a robber. And coming up in a body late in the evening, they found the man himself in bed in an upper chamber in a certain cottage; and though he might have departed thence to another place, he would not, saying, The will of God be done.

Polycarp 7:2

So when he heard that they were come, he went down and conversed with them, the bystanders marvelling at his age and his constancy, and wondering how there should be so much eagerness for the apprehension of an old man like him. Thereupon forthwith he gave orders that a table should be spread for them to eat and drink at that hour, as much as they desired. And he persuaded them to grant him an hour that he might pray unmolested;

Polycarp 7:3

and on their consenting, he stood up and prayed, being so full of the grace of God, that for two hours he could not hold his peace, and those that heard were amazed, and many repented that they had come against such a venerable old man.

Polycarp 8:1

But when at length he brought his prayer to an end, after remembering all who at any time had come in his way, small and great, high and low, and all the universal Church throughout the world, the hour of departure being come, they seated him on an ass and brought him into the city, it being a high Sabbath.

Polycarp 8:2

And he was met by Herod the captain of police and his father Nicetes, who also removed him to their carriage and tried to prevail upon him, seating themselves by his side and saying, 'Why what harm is there in saying, Caesar is Lord, and offering incense', with more to this effect, 'and saving thyself?' But he at first gave them no answer. When however they persisted, he said, 'I am not going to do what ye counsel me.'

Polycarp 8:3

Then they, failing to persuade him, uttered threatening words and made him dismount with speed, so that he bruised his shin, as he got down from the carriage. And without even turning round, he went on his way promptly and with speed, as if nothing had happened to him, being taken to the stadium; there being such a tumult in the stadium that no man's voice could be so much as heard.

Polycarp 9:1

But as Polycarp entered into the stadium, a voice came to him from heaven; 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.' And no one saw the speaker, but those of our people who were present heard the voice. And at length, when he was brought up, there was a great tumult, for they heard that Polycarp had been apprehended.

Polycarp 9:2

When then he was brought before him, the proconsul enquired whether he were the man. And on his

confessing that he was, he tried to persuade him to a denial saying, 'Have respect to thine age,' and other things in accordance therewith, as it is their wont to say; 'Swear by the genius of Caesar; repent and say, Away with the atheists.' Then Polycarp with solemn countenance looked upon the whole multitude of lawless heathen that were in the stadium, and waved his hand to them; and groaning and looking up to heaven he said, 'Away with the atheists.'

Polycarp 9:3

But when the magistrate pressed him hard and said, 'Swear the oath, and I will release thee; revile the Christ,' Polycarp said, 'Fourscore and six years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?'

Polycarp 10:1

But on his persisting again and saying, 'Swear by the genius of Caesar,' he answered, 'If thou supposest vainly that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as thou sayest, and feignest that thou art ignorant who I am, hear thou plainly, I am a Christian. But if thou wouldest learn the doctrine of Christianity, assign a day and give me a hearing.'

Polycarp 10:2

The proconsul said; 'Prevail upon the people.' But Polycarp said; 'As for thyself, I should have held thee worthy of discourse; for we have been taught to render, as is meet, to princes and authorities appointed by God such honor as does us no harm; but as for these, I do not hold them worthy, that I should defend myself before them.'

Polycarp 11:1

Whereupon the proconsul said; 'I have wild beasts here and I will throw thee to them, except thou repent' But he said, 'Call for them: for the repentance from better to worse is a change not permitted to us; but it is a noble thing to change from untowardness to righteousness'

Polycarp 11:2

Then he said to him again, 'I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, if thou despisest the wild beasts, unless thou repent.' But Polycarp said; 'Thou threatenest that fire which burneth for a season and after a little while is quenched: for thou art ignorant of the fire of the future judgment and eternal punishment, which is reserved for the ungodly. But why delayest thou? Come, do what thou wilt.'

Polycarp 12:1

Saying these things and more besides, he was inspired with courage and joy, and his countenance was filled with grace, so that not only did it not drop in dismay at the things which were said to him, but on the contrary the proconsul was astounded and sent his own herald to proclaim three times in the midst of the stadium, 'Polycarp hath confessed himself to be a Christian.'

Polycarp 12:2

When this was proclaimed by the herald, the whole multitude both of Gentiles and of Jews who dwelt in Smyrna cried out with ungovernable wrath and with a loud shout, 'This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the puller down of our gods, who teacheth numbers not to sacrifice nor worship.' Saying these things, they shouted aloud and asked the Asiarch Philip to let a lion loose upon Polycarp. But he said that it was not lawful for him, since he had brought the sports to a close.

Polycarp 12:3

Then they thought fit to shout out with one accord that Polycarp should be burned alive. For it must needs be that the matter of the vision should be fulfilled, which was shown him concerning his pillow, when he saw it on fire while praying, and turning round he said prophetically to the faithful who were with him, 'I must needs be burned alive.'

Polycarp 13:1

These things then happened with so great speed, quicker than words could tell, the crowds forthwith collecting from the workshops and baths timber and faggots, and the Jews more especially assisting in this with zeal, as is their wont.

Polycarp 13:2

But when the pile was made ready, divesting himself of all his upper garments and loosing his girdle, he endeavored also to take off his shoes, though not in the habit of doing this before, because all the faithful at all times vied eagerly who should soonest touch his flesh. For he had been treated with all honor for his holy life even before his gray hairs came.

Polycarp 13:3

Forthwith then the instruments that were prepared for the pile were placed about him; and as they were going likewise to nail him to the stake, he said; 'Leave me as I am; for He that hath granted me to endure the fire will grant me also to remain at the pile unmoved, even without the security which ye seek from the nails.'

Polycarp 14:1

So they did not nail him, but tied him. Then he, placing his hands behind him and being bound to the stake, like a noble ram out of a great flock for an offering, a burnt sacrifice made ready and acceptable to God, looking up to heaven said; 'O Lord God Almighty, the Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers and of all creation and of the whole race of the righteous, who live in Thy presence;

Polycarp 14:2

I bless Thee for that Thou hast granted me this day and hour, that I might receive a portion amongst the number of martyrs in the cup of [Thy] Christ unto resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and of body, in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit. May I be received among these in Thy presence this day, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as Thou didst prepare and reveal it beforehand, and hast accomplished it, Thou that art the faithful and true God.

Polycarp 14:3

For this cause, yea and for all things, I praise Thee, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal and heavenly High-priest, Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, through whom with Him and the Holy Spirit be glory both now [and ever] and for the ages to come. Amen.'

Polycarp 15:1

When he had offered up the Amen and finished his prayer, the firemen lighted the fire. And, a mighty flame flashing forth, we to whom it was given to see, saw a marvel, yea and we were preserved that we might relate to the rest what happened.

Polycarp 15:2

The fire, making the appearance of a vault, like the sail of a vessel filled by the wind, made a wall round about the body of the martyr; and it was there in the midst, not like flesh burning, but like [a loaf in the oven or like] gold and silver refined in a furnace. For we perceived such a fragrant smell, as if it were the wafted odor of frankincense or some other precious spice.

Polycarp 16:1

So at length the lawless men, seeing that his body could not be consumed by the fire, ordered an executioner to go up to him and stab him with a dagger. And when he had done this, there came forth [a dove and] a quantity of blood, so that it extinguished the fire; and all the multitude marvelled that there should be so great a difference between the unbelievers and the elect.

Polycarp 16:2

In the number of these was this man, the glorious martyr Polycarp, who was found an apostolic and prophetic teacher in our own time, a bishop of the holy Church which is in Smyrna. For every word which he uttered from his mouth was accomplished and will be accomplished.

Polycarp 17:1

But the jealous and envious Evil One, the adversary of the family of the righteous, having seen the greatness of his martyrdom and his blameless life from the beginning, and how he was crowned with the crown of immortality and had won a reward which none could gainsay, managed that not even his poor body should be taken away by us, although many desired to do this and to touch his holy flesh.

Polycarp 17:2

So he put forward Nicetes, the father of Herod and brother of Alce, to plead with the magistrate not to give up his body, 'lest,' so it was said, 'they should abandon the crucified one and begin to worship this man'-- this being done at the instigation and urgent entreaty of the Jews, who also watched when we were about to take it from the fire, not knowing that it will be impossible for us either to forsake at any time the Christ who suffered for the salvation of the whole world of those that are saved--suffered though faultless for sinners--nor to worship any other.

Polycarp 17:3

For Him, being the Son of God, we adore, but the martyrs as disciples and imitators of the Lord we cherish as they deserve for their matchless affection towards their own King and Teacher. May it be our lot also to be found partakers and fellow-disciples with them.

Polycarp 18:1

The centurion therefore, seeing the opposition raised on the part of the Jews, set him in the midst and burnt him after their custom.

Polycarp 18:2

And so we afterwards took up his bones which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and laid them in a suitable place;

Polycarp 18:3

where the Lord will permit us to gather ourselves together, as we are able, in gladness and joy, and to celebrate the birth-day of his martyrdom for the commemoration of those that have already fought in the contest, and for the training and preparation of those that shall do so hereafter.

Polycarp 19:1

So it befell the blessed Polycarp, who having with those from Philadelphia suffered martyrdom in Smyrna--twelve in all--is especially remembered more than the others by all men, so that he is talked of even by the heathen in every place: for he showed himself not only a notable teacher, but also a distinguished martyr, whose martyrdom all desire to imitate, seeing that it was after the pattern of the Gospel of Christ.

Polycarp 19:2

Having by his endurance overcome the unrighteous ruler in the conflict and so received the crown of immortality, he rejoiceth in company with the Apostles and all righteous men, and glorifieth the Almighty God and Father, and blesseth our Lord Jesus Christ, the savior of our souls and helmsman of our bodies and shepherd of the universal Church which is throughout the world.

Polycarp 20:1

Ye indeed required that the things which happened should be shown unto you at greater length: but we for the present have certified you as it were in a summary through our brother Marcianus. When then ye have informed yourselves of these things, send the letter about likewise to the brethren which are farther off, that they also may glorify the Lord, who maketh election from His own servants.

Polycarp 20:2

Now unto Him that is able to bring us all by His grace and bounty unto His eternal kingdom, through His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, be glory, honor, power, and greatness for ever. Salute all the saints. They that are with us salute you, and Euaestus, who wrote the letter, with his whole house.

Polycarp 21:1

Now the blessed Polycarp was martyred on the second day of the first part of the month Xanthicus, on the seventh before the calends of March, on a great Sabbath, at the eighth hour. He was apprehended by Herodes, when Philip of Tralles was high priest, in the proconsulship of Statius Quadratus, but in the reign of the Eternal King Jesus Christ. To whom be the glory, honor, greatness, and eternal throne, from generation to generation. Amen.

Polycarp 22:1

We bid you God speed, brethren, while ye walk by the word of Jesus Christ which is according to the Gospel; with whom be glory to God for the salvation of His holy elect; even as the blessed Polycarp suffered martyrdom, in whose footsteps may it be our lot to be found in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Polycarp 22:2

This account Gaius copied from the papers of Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp. The same also lived with Irenaeus.

Polycarp 22:3

And I Socrates wrote it down in Corinth from the copy of Gaius. Grace be with all men.

Polycarp 22:4

And I Pionius again wrote it down from the aforementioned copy, having searched it out (for the blessed Polycarp showed me in a revelation, as I will declare in the sequel), gathering it together when it was now well nigh worn out by age, that the Lord Jesus Christ may gather me also with His elect into His heavenly kingdom; to whom be the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen. {2*** THE THREE PROCEEDING PARAGRAPHS AS READ IN THE MOSCOW MS. ***}2 {9

Polycarp 22:2

This account Gaius copied from the papers of Irenaeus. The same lived with Irenaeus who had been a disciple of the holy Polycarp. For this Irenaeus, being in Rome at the time of the martyrdom of the bishop Polycarp, instructed many; and many most excellent and orthodox treatises by him are in circulation. In these he makes mention of Polycarp, saying that he was taught by him. And he ably refuted every heresy, and handed down the catholic rule of the Church just as he had received it from the saint. He mentions this fact also, that when Marcion, after whom the Marcionites are called, met the holy Polycarp on one occasion, and said 'Recognize us, Polycarp,' he said in reply to Marcion, 'Yes indeed, I recognize the firstborn of Satan.' The following statement also is made in the writings of Irenaeus, that on the very day and hour when Polycarp was martyred in Smyrna Irenaeus being in the city of the Romans heard a voice as of a trumpet saying, 'Polycarp is martyred.'

Polycarp 22:3 From these papers of Irenaeus then, as has been stated already, Gaius made a copy, and from the copy of Gaius Isocrates made another in Corinth.

Polycarp 22:4

And I Pionius again wrote it down from the copy of Isocrates, having searched for it in obedience to a revelation of the holy Polycarp, gathering it together, when it was well nigh worn out by age, that the Lord Jesus Christ may gather me also with His elect into His heavenly kingdom; to whom be the glory with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

THE EPISTLE OF POLYCARP

Translated by J.B. Lightfoot.

Polycarp prologue:1

Polycarp and the presbyters that are with him unto the Church of God which sojourneth at Philippi; mercy unto you and peace from God Almighty and Jesus Christ our Savior be multiplied.

Polycarp 1:1

I rejoiced with you greatly in our Lord Jesus Christ, for that ye received the followers of the true Love and escorted them on their way, as befitted you--those men encircled in saintly bonds which are the diadems of them that be truly chosen of God and our Lord;

Polycarp 1:2

and that the steadfast root of your faith which was famed from primitive times abideth until now and beareth fruit unto our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured to face even death for our sins, *whom God raised, having loosed the pangs of Hades; on whom,*

Polycarp 1:3

though ye saw Him not, ye believe with joy unutterable and full of glory; unto which joy many desire to enter in; forasmuch as ye know that it is *by grace ye are saved, not of works,* but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.

Polycarp 2:1

Wherefore gird up your loins and serve God in fear and truth, forsaking the vain and empty talking and the error of the many, for that ye have believed on Him that raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave unto him glory and a throne on His right hand; unto whom all things were made subject that are in heaven and that are on the earth; to whom every creature that hath breath doeth service; who cometh as judge of quick and dead; whose blood God will require of them that are disobedient unto Him.

Polycarp 2:2

Now *He that raised Him from the dead will raise us also;* if we do His will and walk in His commandments and love the things which He loved, abstaining from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, false witness; *not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing or blow for blow or cursing for cursing;*

Polycarp 2:3

but remembering the words which the Lord spake, as He taught; *Judge not that ye be not judged. Forgive, and it shall be forgiven to you. Have mercy that ye may receive mercy. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again;* and again *Blessed are the poor and they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.*

Polycarp 3:1

These things, brethren, I write unto you concerning righteousness, not because I laid this charge upon myself, but because ye invited me.

Polycarp 3:2

For neither am I, nor is any other like unto me, able to follow the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who when he came among you taught face to face with the men of that day the word which concerneth truth carefully and surely; who also, when he was absent, wrote a letter unto you, into the which if ye look diligently, ye shall be able to be builded up unto the faith given to you,

Polycarp 3:3

which is the mother of us all, while hope followeth after and love goeth before--love toward God and Christ and toward our neighbor. For if any man be occupied with these, he hath fulfilled the commandment of righteousness; for he that hath love is far from all sin.

Polycarp 4:1

But the love of money is the beginning of all troubles. Knowing therefore that *we brought nothing into the world neither can we carry anything out*, let us arm ourselves with the armor of righteousness, and let us teach ourselves first to walk in the commandment of the Lord;

Polycarp 4:2

and then our wives also, to walk in the faith that hath been given unto them and in love and purity, cherishing their own husbands in all truth and loving all men equally in all chastity, and to train their children in the training of the fear of God.

Polycarp 4:3

Our widows must be sober-minded as touching the faith of the Lord, making intercession without ceasing for all men, abstaining from all calumny, evil speaking, false witness, love of money, and every evil thing, knowing that they are God's altar, and that all sacrifices are carefully inspected, and nothing escapeth Him either of their thoughts or intents or any of the secret things of the heart.

Polycarp 5:1

Knowing then that *God is not mocked*, we ought to walk worthily of His commandment and His glory.

Polycarp 5:2

In like manner deacons should be blameless in the presence of His righteousness, as deacons of God and Christ and not of men; not calumniators, not double-tongued, not lovers of money, temperate in all things, compassionate, diligent, walking according to the truth of the Lord who became a *minister (deacon) of all*. For if we be well pleasing unto Him in this present world, we shall receive the future world also, according as He promised us to raise us from the dead, and that if we conduct ourselves worthily of Him *we shall also reign with Him*, if indeed we have faith.

Polycarp 5:3

In like manner also the younger men must be blameless in all things, caring for purity before everything and curbing themselves from every evil. For it is a good thing to refrain from lusts in the world, for every *lust warreth against the Spirit*, and *neither whoremongers nor effeminate persons nor defilers of themselves with men shall*

inherit the kingdom of God, neither they that do untoward things. Wherefore it is right to abstain from all these things, submitting yourselves to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ. The virgins must walk in a blameless and pure conscience.

Polycarp 6:1

And the presbyters also must be compassionate, merciful towards all men, *turning back the sheep that are gone astray, visiting all the infirm, not neglecting a widow or an orphan or a poor man: but providing always for that which is honorable in the sight of God and of men*, abstaining from all anger, respect of persons, unrighteous judgment, being far from all love of money, not quick to believe anything against any man, not hasty in judgment, knowing that we all are debtors of sin.

Polycarp 6:2

If then we entreat the Lord that He would forgive us, we also ought to forgive: for we are before the eyes of our Lord and God, and we must *all stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, and each man must give an account of himself.*

Polycarp 6:3

Let us therefore so serve Him with fear and all reverence, as He himself gave commandment and the Apostles who preached the Gospel to us and the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of our Lord; being zealous as touching that which is good, abstaining from offenses and from the false brethren and from them that bear the name of the Lord in hypocrisy, who lead foolish men astray.

Polycarp 7:1

For every one *who shall not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is antichrist*: and whosoever shall not confess the testimony of the Cross, is of the devil; and whosoever shall pervert the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts and say that there is neither resurrection nor judgment, that man is the firstborn of Satan.

Polycarp 7:2

Wherefore let us forsake the vain doing of the many and their false teachings, and turn unto the word which was delivered unto us from the beginning, *being sober unto prayer* and constant in fastings, entreating the all-seeing God with supplications that *He bring us not into temptation*, according as the Lord said, *The Spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.*

Polycarp 8:1

Let us therefore without ceasing hold fast by our hope and by the earnest of our righteousness, which is Jesus Christ who *took up our sins in His own body upon the tree, who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth*, but for our sakes He endured all things, that we might live in Him.

Polycarp 8:2

Let us therefore become imitators of His endurance; and if we should suffer for His name's sake, let us glorify Him. For He gave this example to us in His own person, and we believed this.

Polycarp 9:1

I exhort you all therefore to be obedient unto the word of righteousness and to practice all endurance, which also ye saw with your own eyes in the blessed Ignatius and Zosimus and Rufus, yea and in others also who came from among yourselves, as well as in Paul himself and the rest of the Apostles;

Polycarp 9:2

being persuaded that all these *ran not in vain* but in faith and righteousness, and that they are in their due place in the presence of the Lord, with whom also they suffered. For they *loved not the present world*, but Him that died for our sakes and was raised by God for us.

Polycarp 10:1

Stand fast therefore in these things and follow the example of the Lord, *being firm in the faith and immovable, in love of the brotherhood kindly affectioned one to another*, partners with the truth, *forestalling one another* in the gentleness of the Lord, despising no man.

Polycarp 10:2

When ye are able to do good, defer it not, for *Pitifulness delivereth from death*. *Be ye all subject one to another, having your conversation unblamable among the gentiles, that your good works* both ye may receive praise and the Lord may not be blasphemed in you.

Polycarp 10:3

But *woe to him through whom the name of the Lord be blasphemed*. Therefore teach all men soberness, in which ye yourselves also walk.

Polycarp 11:1

I was exceedingly grieved for Valens, who aforetime was a presbyter among you, because he is so ignorant of the office which was given unto him. I warn you therefore that ye refrain from covetousness, and that ye be pure and truthful. Refrain from all evil.

Polycarp 11:2

But he who cannot govern himself in these things, how doth he enjoin this upon another? If a man refrain not from covetousness, he shall be defiled by idolatry, and shall be judged as one of the Gentiles who *know not the judgment of the Lord, Nay, know we not, that the saints shall judge the world*, as Paul teacheth?

Polycarp 11:3

But I have not found any such thing in you, neither have heard thereof, among whom the blessed Paul labored, who were his *letters* in the beginning. For *he boasteth of you* in all those *churches* which alone at that time knew God; for we knew Him not as yet.

Polycarp 11:4

Therefore I am exceedingly grieved for him and for his wife, unto whom may the Lord grant true repentance. Be ye therefore yourselves

also sober herein, and *hold not such as enemies* but restore them as frail and erring members, that ye may save the whole body of you. For so doing, ye do edify one another.

Polycarp 12:1

For I am persuaded that ye are well trained in the sacred writings, and nothing is hidden from you. But to myself this is not granted. Only, as it is said in these scriptures, *Be ye angry and sin not*, and *Let not the sun set on your wrath*. Blessed is he that remembereth this; and I trust that this is in you.

Polycarp 12:2

Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal High-priest Himself the [Son of God Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth, and in all gentleness and in all avoidance of wrath and in forbearance and long suffering and in patient endurance and in purity; and may He grant unto you a lot and portion among His saints, and to us with you, and to all that are under heaven, who shall believe on our Lord and God Jesus Christ and on His Father *that raised him from the dead*.

Polycarp 12:3

Pray for all the saints. Pray also *for kings* and powers and princes and *for them that persecute* and hate you and for *the enemies of the cross*, that your fruit may be *manifest among all men*, that ye may be perfect in Him.

Polycarp 13:1

Ye wrote to me, both ye yourselves and Ignatius, asking that if any one should go to Syria he might carry thither the letters from you. And this I will do, if I get a fit opportunity, either I myself, or he whom I shall send to be ambassador on your behalf also.

Polycarp 13:2

The letters of Ignatius which were sent to us by him, and others as many as we had by us, we send unto you, according as ye gave charge; the which are subjoined to this letter; from which ye will be able to gain great advantage. For they comprise faith and endurance and every kind of edification, which pertaineth unto our Lord. Moreover concerning Ignatius himself and those that were with him, if ye have any sure tidings, certify us.

Polycarp 14:1

I write these things to you by Crescens, whom I commended to you recently and now commend unto you: for he hath walked blamelessly with us; and I believe also with you in like manner. But ye shall have his sister commended, when she shall come to you. Fare ye well in the Lord Jesus Christ in grace, ye and all yours. Amen.

IGNATIUS to Polycarp

CHAPTER 0

0:0 Ignatius, who is also Theophorus, unto Polycarp who is bishop of the church of the Smyrnaeans or

rather who hath for his bishop God the Father and Jesus Christ, abundant greeting.

CHAPTER 1

1:1 Welcoming thy godly mind which is grounded as it were on an immovable rock, I give exceeding glory that it hath been vouchsafed me to see thy blameless face, whereof I would fain have joy in God.

1:2 I exhort thee in the grace wherewith thou art clothed to press forward in thy course and to exhort all men that they may be saved. Vindicate thine office in all diligence of flesh and of spirit. Have a care for union, than which there is nothing better. Bear all men, as the Lord also beareth thee. Suffer all men in love, as also thou doest.

1:3 Give thyself to unceasing prayers. Ask for larger wisdom than thou hast. Be watchful, and keep thy spirit from slumbering. Speak to each man severally after the manner of God. Bear the maladies of all, as a perfect athlete. Where there is more toil, there is much gain.

CHAPTER 2

2:1 If thou lovest good scholars, this is not thankworthy in thee. Rather bring the more pestilent to submission by gentleness. All wounds are not healed by the same salve. Allay sharp pains by fomentations.

2:2 Be thou prudent as the serpent in all things and guileless always as the dove. Therefore art thou made of flesh and spirit, that thou mayest humour the things which appear before thine eyes; and as for the invisible things, pray thou that they may be revealed unto thee; that thou mayest be lacking in nothing, but mayest abound in every spiritual gift.

2:3 The season requireth thee, as pilots require winds or as a storm-tossed mariner a haven, that it may attain unto God. Be sober, as God's athlete. The prize is incorruption and life eternal, concerning which thou also art persuaded. In all things I am devoted to thee -- I and my bonds which thou didst cherish.

CHAPTER 3

3:1 Let not those that seem to be plausible and yet teach strange doctrine dismay thee. Stand thou firm, as an anvil when it is smitten. It is the part of a great athlete to receive blows and be victorious. But especially must we for God's sake endure all things, that He also may endure us.

3:2 Be thou more diligent than thou art. Mark the seasons. Await Him that is above every season, the Eternal, the Invisible, who became visible for our sake, the Impalpable, the Impassible, who suffered for our sake, who endured in all ways for our sake.

CHAPTER 4

4:1 Let not widows be neglected. After the Lord be thou their protector. Let nothing be done without thy consent; neither do thou anything without the consent of God, as indeed thou doest not. Be stedfast.

4:2 Let meetings be held more frequently. Seek out all men by name.

4:3 Despise not slaves, whether men or women. Yet let not these again be puffed up, but let them serve the more faithfully to the glory of God, that they may obtain a better freedom from God. Let them not desire to be set free at the public cost, lest they be found slaves of lust.

CHAPTER 5

5:1 Flee evil arts, or rather hold thou discourse about these. Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands in flesh and in spirit. In like manner also charge my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives, _as the Lord loved the Church._

5:2 If any one is able to abide in chastity to the honour of the flesh of the Lord, let him so abide without boasting. If he boast, he is lost; and if it be known beyond the bishop, he is polluted. It becometh men and women too, when they marry, to unite themselves with the consent of the bishop, that the marriage may be after the Lord and not after concupiscence. Let all things be done to the honour of God.

CHAPTER 6

6:1 Give ye heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. I am devoted to those who are subject to the bishop, the presbyters, the deacons. May it be granted me to have my portion with them in the presence of God. Toil together one with another, struggle together, run together, suffer together, lie down together, rise up together, as God's stewards and assessors and ministers.

6:2 Please the Captain in whose army ye serve, from whom also ye will receive your pay. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism abide with you as you shield; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as your body armour. Let your works be your deposits, that ye may receive your assets due to you. Be ye therefore long-suffering one with another in gentleness, as God is with you. May I have joy of you always.

CHAPTER 7

7:1 Seeing that the church which is in Antioch of Syria hath peace, as it hath been reported to me, through your prayers, I myself also have been the more comforted since God hath banished my care; if so be I may through suffering attain unto God, that I may be found a disciple through your intercession.

7:2 It becometh thee, most blessed Polycarp, to call

together a godly council and to elect some one among you who is very dear to you and zealous also, who shall be fit to bear the name of God's courier -- to appoint him, I say, that he may go to Syria and glorify your zealous love unto the glory of God.

7:3 A Christian hath no authority over himself, but giveth his time to God. This is God's work, and yours also, when ye shall complete it: for I trust in the Divine grace, that ye are ready for an act of well-doing which is meet for God. Knowing the fervour of your sincerity, I have exhorted you in a short letter.

CHAPTER 8

8:1 Since I have not been able to write to all the churches, by reason of my sailing suddenly from Troas to Neapolis, as the Divine will enjoineeth, thou shalt write to the churches in front, as one possessing the mind of God, to the intent that they also may do this same thing -- let those who are able send messengers, and the rest letters by the persons who are sent by thee, that ye may be glorified by an ever memorable deed -- for this is worthy of thee.

8:2 I salute all by name, and especially the wife of Epitropus with her whole household and her children's. I salute Attalus my beloved. I salute him that shall be appointed to go to Syria. Grace shall be with him always, and with Polycarp who sendeth him.

8:3 I bid you farewell always in our God Jesus Christ, in whom abide ye in the unity and supervision of God. I salute Alce, a name very dear to me. Fare ye well in the Lord.

Others' Comments on Polycarp

In *Adv. Haer.* V.33.4, Irenaeus describes Papias as "the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp."

Irenaeus mentions Polycarp in *Adv. Haer.*, III.3.4.

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time, a man who was of much greater weight, and a more stedfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics. He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles, that, namely, which is handed down by the Church. There are also those who heard from him that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, "Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within." And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said, "Dost thou know me?" "I do know thee, the first-born of Satan." Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters

of the truth; as Paul also says, "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." There is also a very powerful Epistle of Polycarp written to the Philippians, from which those who choose to do so, and are anxious about their salvation, can learn the character of his faith, and the preaching of the truth. Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.

Irenaeus also mentions Polycarp in his letter to Florinus.

These opinions, Florinus, that I may speak in mild terms, are not of sound doctrine; these opinions are not consonant to the Church, and involve their votaries in the utmost impiety; these opinions, even the heretics beyond the Church's pale have never ventured to broach; these opinions, those presbyters who preceded us, and who were conversant with the apostles, did not hand down to thee. For, while I was yet a boy, I saw thee in Lower Asia with Polycarp, distinguishing thyself in the royal court, and endeavouring to gain his approbation. For I have a more vivid recollection of what occurred at that time than of recent events (inasmuch as the experiences of childhood, keeping pace with the growth of the soul, become incorporated with it); so that I can even describe the place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit and discourse-his going out, too, and his coming in-his general mode of life and personal appearance, together with the discourses which he delivered to the people; also how he would speak of his familiar intercourse with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; and how he would call their words to remembrance. Whatsoever things he had heard from them respecting the Lord, both with regard to His miracles and His teaching, Polycarp having thus received [information] from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life, would recount them all in harmony with the Scriptures. These things, through, God's mercy which was upon me, I then listened to attentively, and treasured them up not on paper, but in my heart; and I am continually, by God's grace, revolving these things accurately in my mind. And I can bear witness before God, that if that blessed and apostolical presbyter had heard any such thing, he would have cried out, and stopped his ears, exclaiming as he was wont to do: "O good God, for what times hast Thou reserved me, that I should endure these things?" And he would have fled from the very spot where, sitting or standing, he had heard such words. This fact, too, can be made clear, from his Epistles which he despatched, whether to the neighbouring Churches to confirm them, or to certain of the brethren, admonishing and exhorting them.

Irenaeus also mentions Polycarp in his letter to Pope Victor.

For the controversy is not merely as regards the day, but also as regards the form itself of the fast. For some consider themselves bound to fast one day, others two days, others still more, while others [do so during] forty: the diurnal and the nocturnal hours they measure out together as their [fasting] day. And this variety among the observers [of the fasts] had not its origin in our time, but long before in that of our predecessors, some of whom probably, being not very accurate in their observance of it, handed down to posterity the custom as it had, through simplicity or private fancy, been [introduced among them]. And yet nevertheless all these lived in peace one with another, and we also keep peace together. Thus, in fact, the difference [in observing] the fast establishes the harmony of [our common] faith. And the presbyters preceding Soter in the government of the Church which thou dost now rule-I mean, Anicetus and Pius, Hyginus and Telesphorus, and Sixtus-did neither themselves observe it [after that fashion], nor permit those with them to do so. Notwithstanding this, those who did not keep [the feast in this way] were peacefully disposed towards those who came to them from other dioceses in which it was [so] observed (although such observance was [felt] in more decided contrariety [as presented] to those who did not fall in with it; and none were ever cast out [of the Church] for this matter. On the contrary, those presbyters who preceded thee, and who did not observe [this custom], sent the Eucharist to those of other dioceses who did observe it. And when the blessed Polycarp was sojourning in Rome in the time of Anicetus, although a slight controversy had arisen among them as to certain other points, they were at once well inclined towards each other [with regard to the matter in hand], not willing that any quarrel should arise between them upon this head. For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp to forego the observance [in his own way], inasmuch as these things had been always [so] observed by John the disciple of our Lord, and by other apostles with whom he had been conversant; nor, on the other hand, could Polycarp succeed in persuading Anicetus to keep [the observance in his way], for he maintained that he was bound to adhere to the usage of the

presbyters who preceded him. And in this state of affairs they held fellowship with each other; and Anicetus conceded to Polycarp in the Church the celebration of the Eucharist, by way of showing him respect; so that they parted in peace one from the other, maintaining peace with the whole Church, both those who did observe [this custom] and those who did not.

Jerome provides the following summary in *Illustrious Men* 17.

Polycarp disciple of the apostle John and by him ordained bishop of Smyrna was chief of all Asia, where he saw and had as teachers some of the apostles and of those who had seen the Lord. He, on account of certain questions concerning the day of the Passover, went to Rome in the time of the emperor Antoninus Pius while Anicetus ruled the church in that city. There he led back to the faith many of the believers who had been deceived through the persuasion of Marcion and Valentinus, and when Marcion met him by chance and said "Do you know us" he replied, "I know the firstborn of the devil." Afterwards during the reign of Marcus Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus in the fourth persecution after Nero, in the presence of the proconsul holding court at Smyrna and all the people crying out against him in the Amphitheater, he was burned. He wrote a very valuable Epistle to the Philippians which is read to the present day in the meetings in Asia.

St. Polycarp Martyr (A.D. 69-155).

Our chief sources of information concerning St. Polycarp are: (1) the Epistles of St. Ignatius; (2) St. Polycarp's own Epistle to the Philippians; (3) sundry passages in St. Irenaeus; (4) the Letter of the Smyrnaeans recounting the martyrdom of St. Polycarp.

The Epistles of St. Ignatius

Four out of the seven genuine epistles of St. Ignatius were written from Smyrna. In two of these -- Magnesians and Ephesians -- he speaks of Polycarp. The seventh Epistle was addressed to Polycarp. It contains little or nothing of historical interest in connexion with St. Polycarp. In the opening words St. Ignatius gives glory to [God](#) "that it hath been vouchsafed to me to see thy face". It seems hardly safe to infer, with Pearson and Lightfoot, from these words that the two had never met before.

The Epistle of St. Polycarp to the Philippians

The Epistle of St. Polycarp was a reply to one from the Philippians, in which they had asked St. Polycarp to address them some words of exhortation; to forward by his own messenger a letter addressed by them to the [Church of Antioch](#); and to send them any epistles of St. Ignatius which he might have. The second request should be noted. St. Ignatius had asked the Churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia to send a messenger to congratulate the [Church of Antioch](#) on the restoration of peace; presumably, therefore, when at Philippi, he gave similar instructions to the Philippians. This is one of the many respects in which there is such complete harmony between the situations revealed in the Epistles of St. Ignatius and the Epistle of St. Polycarp, that it is hardly possible to impugn the genuineness of the former without in some way trying to destroy the credit of the latter, which happens to be one of the best attested documents of antiquity. In consequence some extremists, anti-episcopalians in the seventeenth century, and members of the Tubingen School in the nineteenth, boldly rejected the Epistle of Polycarp. Others tried to make out that the passages which told most in favour of the Ignatian epistles were interpolations.

These theories possess no interest now that the genuineness of the Ignatian epistles has practically ceased to be questioned. The only point raised which had any show of plausibility (it was sometimes used against the genuineness, and sometimes against the early date of St. Polycarp's Epistle) was based on a passage in

which it might at first sight seem that [Marcion](#) was denounced: "For every one who does not confess that [Jesus Christ](#) has come in the flesh is [antichrist](#); and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is a devil, and whosoever perverteth the oracles of the Lord (to serve) his own lusts, and saith there is neither [resurrection](#) nor [judgment](#), this man is a [first-born](#) of [Satan](#)." St. Polycarp wrote his epistle before he had heard of St. Ignatius' martyrdom. Now, supposing the passage just quoted to have been aimed at [Marcion](#) (whom, on one occasion, as we shall presently see, St. Polycarp called to his face "the [first-born](#) of [Satan](#)"), the choice lies between rejecting the epistle as spurious on account of the anachronism, or bringing down its date, and the date of St. Ignatius' martyrdom to A.D. 130-140 when [Marcion](#) was prominent. Harnack seems at one time to have adopted the latter alternative; but he now admits that there need be no reference to [Marcion](#) at all in the passage in question (Chronologie, I, 387-8). Lightfoot thought a negative could be proved. [Marcion](#), according to him, cannot be referred to because nothing is said about his characteristic errors, e.g., the distinction between the [God](#) of the [Old](#) and the [God](#) of the [New Testament](#); and because the [antinomianism](#) ascribed to "the [first-born](#) of [Satan](#)" is inapplicable to the austere [Marcion](#) (Lightfoot, St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp, I, 585; all references to Lightfoot (L), unless otherwise stated, will be to this work).

When Lightfoot wrote it was necessary to vindicate the authenticity of the Ignatian epistles and that of St. Polycarp. If the former were forgeries, the latter, which supports -- it might almost be said presupposes -- them, must be a forgery from the same hand. But a comparison between Ignatius and Polycarp shows that this is an impossible hypothesis. The former lays every stress upon episcopacy, the latter does not even mention it. The former is full of emphatic declarations of the doctrine of the Incarnation, the two natures of [Christ](#), etc. In the latter these matters are hardly touched upon. "The divergence between the two writers as regards Scriptural quotations is equally remarkable. Though the seven Ignatian letters are many times longer than Polycarp's Epistle, the quotations in the latter are incomparably more numerous, as well as more precise, than in the former. The obligations to the New Testament are wholly different in character in the two cases. The Ignatian letters do, indeed, show a considerable knowledge of the writings included in our Canon of the New Testament; but this knowledge betrays itself in casual words and phrases, stray metaphors, epigrammatic adaptations, and isolated coincidences of thought ... On the other hand in Polycarp's Epistle sentence after sentence is frequently made up of passages from the Evangelical and Apostolic writings ... But this divergence forms only part of a broader and still more decisive contrast, affecting the whole style and character of the two writings. The profuseness of quotations in Polycarp's Epistle arises from a want of originality ... On the other hand the letters of Ignatius have a marked individuality. Of all [early Christian writings](#) they are pre-eminent in this respect" (op.cit., 595-97).

Various passages in St. Irenaeus

In St. Irenaeus, Polycarp comes before us preeminently as a link with the past. Irenaeus mentions him four times: (a) in connection with Papias; (b) in his letter to Florinus; (c) in his letter to Pope Victor; (d) at the end of the celebrated appeal to the *potior principalitas* of the Roman Church.

In connection with Papias

From "Adv. Haer.", V,xxxiii, we learn that Papias was "a hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp".

In his letter to Florinus

Florinus was a Roman presbyter who lapsed into heresy. St. Irenaeus wrote him a letter of remonstrance (a long extract from which is preserved by [Eusebius](#), II, E., V,xx), in which he recalled their common recollections of Polycarp. "These opinions ... Florinus are not of sound judgment ... I saw thee when I was still a boy in Lower Asia in company with Polycarp, while thou wast faring prosperously in the royal court, and endeavouring to stand well with him. For I distinctly remember the incidents of that time better than events of recent occurrence ... I can describe the very place in which the Blessed Polycarp used to sit when he discoursed ... his personal appearance ... and how he would describe his intercourse with John and with the rest who had seen the Lord, and how he would relate their words ... I can testify in the sight of [God](#), that

if the blessed and apostolic elder had heard anything of this kind, he would have cried out, and stopped his ears, and said after his wont, 'O good [God](#), for what times hast thou kept me that I should endure such things?' ... This can be shown from the letters which he wrote to the neighbouring Churches for their confirmation etc.". Lightfoot (op.cit., 448) will not fix the date of the time when St. Irenaeus and Florinus were fellow-pupils of St. Polycarp more definitely than somewhere between 135 and 150. There are in fact no data to go upon.

In his letter to Pope Victor

The visit of St. Polycarp to Rome is described by St. Irenaeus in a letter to Pope Victor written under the following circumstances. The Asiatic [Christians](#) differed from the rest of the Church in their manner of observing [Easter](#). While the other Churches kept the feast on a Sunday, the Asiatics celebrated it on the 14th of Nisan, whatever day of the week this might fall on. Pope Victor tried to establish uniformity, and when the Asiatic Churches refused to comply, [excommunicated](#) them. St. Irenaeus remonstrated with him in a letter, part of which is preserved by [Eusebius](#) (H. E., V, xxiv), in which he particularly contrasted the moderation displayed in regard to Polycarp by Pope Anicetus with the conduct of Victor. "Among these (Victor's predecessors) were the presbyters before Soter. They neither observed it (14th Nisan) themselves, nor did they permit those after them to do so. And yet, though not observing it, they were none the less at peace with those who came to them from the parishes in which it was observed. ... And when the blessed Polycarp was at Rome in the time of Anicetus, and they disagreed a little about other things, they immediately made peace with one another, not caring to quarrel over this matter. For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp ... nor Polycarp Anicetus But though matters were in this shape, they communed together, and Anicetus conceded the administration of the Eucharist in the Church to Polycarp, manifestly as a mark of respect. And they parted from each other in peace", etc.

There is a difficulty connected with this visit of Polycarp to Rome. According to the [Chronicle of Eusebius](#) in St. Jerome's version (the Armenian version is quite untrustworthy) the date of Anicetus' accession was A.D. 156-57. Now the probable date of St. Polycarp's martyrdom is February, 155. The fact of the visit to Rome is too well attested to be called into question. We must, therefore, either give up the date of martyrdom, or suppose that [Eusebius](#) post-dated by a year or two the accession of Anicetus. There is nothing unreasonable in this latter hypothesis, in view of the uncertainty which so generally prevails in chronological matters (for the date of the accession of Anicetus see Lightfoot, "St. Clement I", 343).

In his famous passage on the Roman Church

We now come to the passage in St. Irenaeus (Adv. Haer., III,3) which brings out in fullest relief St. Polycarp's position as a link with the past. Just as St. John's long life lengthened out the Apostolic Age, so did the four score and six years of Polycarp extend the sub-Apostolic Age, during which it was possible to learn by word of mouth what the Apostles taught from those who had been their hearers. In Rome the Apostolic Age ended about A.D. 67 with the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul, and the sub-Apostolic Age about a quarter of a century later when St. Clement, "who had seen the blessed Apostles", died. In Asia the Apostolic Age lingered on till St. John died about A.D. 100; and the sub-Apostolic Age till 155, when St. Polycarp was martyred. In the third book of his treatise "Against Heresies", St. Irenaeus makes his celebrated appeal to the "successions" of the bishops in all the Churches. He is arguing against heretics who professed to have a kind of esoteric tradition derived from the Apostles. To whom, demands St. Irenaeus, would the Apostles be more likely to commit hidden mysteries than to the bishops to whom they entrusted their churches? In order then to know what the Apostles taught, we must have recourse to the "successions" of bishops throughout the world. But as time and space would fail if we tried to enumerate them all one by one, let the Roman Church speak for the rest. Their agreement with her is a manifest fact by reason of the position which she holds among them ("for with this Church on account of its *potior principalitas* the whole Church, that is, the faithful from every quarter, must needs agree", etc.).

Then follows the list of the Roman bishops down to Eleutherius, the twelfth from the Apostles, the ninth from Clement, "who had both seen and conversed with the blessed Apostles". From the Roman Church, representing all the churches, the writer then passes on to two Churches, that of Smyrna, in which, in the

person of Polycarp, the sub-Apostolic Age had been carried down to a time still within living memory, and the Church of Ephesus, where, in the person of St. John, the Apostolic Age had been prolonged till "the time of [Trajan](#)". Of Polycarp he says, "he was not only taught by the Apostles, and lived in familiar intercourse with many that had seen [Christ](#), but also received his appointment in Asia from the Apostles as Bishop in the Church of Smyrna". He then goes on to speak of his own personal acquaintance with Polycarp, his martyrdom, and his visit to Rome, where he converted many heretics. He then continues, "there are those who heard him tell how John, the disciple of the [Lord](#), when he went to take a bath in Ephesus, and saw [Cerinthus](#) within, rushed away from the room without bathing, with the words 'Let us flee lest the room should fall in, for [Cerinthus](#), the enemy of the truth, is within'. Yea, and Polycarp himself, also, when on one occasion [Marcion](#) confronted him and said 'Recognise us', replied, 'Ay, ay, I recognise the [first-born](#) of [Satan](#)'".

The Smyrnaean letter describing St. Polycarp's martyrdom

Polycarp's martyrdom is described in a letter from the Church of Smyrna, to the Church of [Philomelium](#) "and to all the brotherhoods of the holy and universal Church", etc. The letter begins with an account of the persecution and the heroism of the martyrs. Conspicuous among them was one Germanicus, who encouraged the rest, and when exposed to the wild beasts, incited them to slay him. His death stirred the fury of the multitude, and the cry was raised "Away with the [atheists](#); let search be made for Polycarp". But there was one Quintus, who of his own accord had given himself up to the persecutors. When he saw the wild beasts he lost heart and apostatized. "Wherefore", comment the writers of the epistle, "we praise not those who deliver themselves up, since the Gospel does not so teach us". Polycarp was persuaded by his friends to leave the city and conceal himself in a farm-house. Here he spent his time in prayer, "and while praying he falleth into a trance three days before his apprehension; and he saw his pillow burning with fire. And he turned and said unto those that were with him, 'it must needs be that I shall be burned alive' ". When his pursuers were on his track he went to another farm-house. Finding him gone they put two slave boys to the torture, and one of them betrayed his place of concealment. Herod, head of the police, sent a body of men to arrest him on Friday evening. Escape was still possible, but the old man refused to flee, saying, "the will of [God](#) be done". He came down to meet his pursuers, conversed affably with them, and ordered food to be set before them. While they were eating he prayed, "remembering all, high and low, who at any time had come in his way, and the Catholic Church throughout the world". Then he was led away.

Herod and Herod's father, Nicetas, met him and took him into their carriage, where they tried to prevail upon him to save his life. Finding they could not persuade him, they pushed him out of the carriage with such haste that he bruised his shin. He followed on foot till they came to the Stadium, where a great crowd had assembled, having heard the news of his apprehension. "As Polycarp entered into the Stadium a voice came to him from heaven: 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man'. And no one saw the speaker, but those of our people who were present heard the voice." It was to the proconsul, when he urged him to curse Christ, that Polycarp made his celebrated reply: "Fourscore and six years have I served Him, and he has done me no harm. How then can I curse my King that saved me." When the proconsul had done with the prisoner it was too late to throw him to the beasts, for the sports were closed. It was decided, therefore, to burn him alive. The crowd took it upon itself to collect fuel, "the Jews more especially assisting in this with zeal, as is their wont" (cf. the Martyrdom of Pionius). The fire, "like the sail of a vessel filled by the wind, made a wall round the body" of the martyr, leaving it unscathed. The executioner was ordered to stab him, thereupon, "there came forth a quantity of blood so that it extinguished the fire". (The story of the dove issuing from the body probably arose out of a textual corruption. See Lightfoot, Funk, Zahn. It may also have been an interpolation by the pseudo-Pionius.)

The officials, urged thereto by the Jews, burned the body lest the [Christians](#) "should abandon the worship of the [Crucified One](#), and begin to worship this man". The bones of the martyr were collected by the [Christians](#), and interred in a suitable place. "Now the blessed Polycarp was martyred on the second day of the month of Kanthicus, on the seventh day before the Kalends of March, on a great Sabbath at the eighth hour. He was apprehended by Herodes ... in the proconsulship of Statius Quadratus etc." This subscription gives the following facts: the martyrdom took place on a Saturday which fell on 23 February. Now there are two possible years for this, 155 and 166. The choice depends upon which of the two Quadratus was

proconsul of Asia. By means of the chronological data supplied by the rhetorician Aelius Aristides in certain autobiographical details which he furnishes, Waddington who is followed by Lightfoot ("St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp", I, 646 sq.), arrived at the conclusion that Quadratus was proconsul in 154-55 (the proconsul's year of office began in May). Schmid, a full account of whose system will be found in Harnack's "Chronologie", arguing from the same data, came to the conclusion that Quadratus' proconsulship fell in 165-66.

For some time it seemed as if Schmid's system was likely to prevail, but it has failed on two points:

- Aristides tells us that he was born when Jupiter was in Leo. This happened both in 117 and 129. Schmid's system requires the later of these two dates, but the date has been found to be impossible. Aristides was fifty-three years and six months old when a certain Macrinus was governor of Asia. "Now Egger (in the Austrian 'Jahreshefte', Nov., 1906) has published an inscription recording the career of Macrinus, which was erected to him while he was governing Asia, and he pointed out that as the birth of Aristides was either in 117 or 129, the government of Macrinus must have been either in 170-171, or 182-183, and he has shown that the later date is impossible". (Ramsay in "The Expository Times", Jan., 1907.)
- Aristides mentions a Julianus who was proconsul of Asia nine years before Quadratus. Now there was a Claudius Julianus, who is proved by epigraphic and [numismatic](#) evidence to have been proconsul of Asia in 145. Schmid produced a Salvius Julianus who was consul in 148 and might, therefore, have been the Proconsul of Asia named by Aristides. But an inscription discovered in Africa giving the whole career of Salvius Julianus disposes of Schmid's hypothesis. The result of the new evidence is that Salvius Julianus never governed Asia, for he was proconsul of Africa, and it was not permitted that the same person should hold both of these high offices. The rule is well known; and the objection is final and insurmountable (Ramsay, "Expos. Times", Feb., 1904. Ramsay refers to an article by Mommsen, "Savigny Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte", xxiii, 54). Schmid's system, therefore, disappears, and Waddington's, in spite of some very real difficulties (Quadratus' proconsulship shows a tendency to slip a year out of place), is in possession. The possibility of course remains that the subscription was tampered with by a later hand. But 155 must be approximately correct if St. Polycarp was appointed bishop by St. John.

There is a life of St. Polycarp by pseudo-Pionius, compiled probably in the middle of the fourth century. It is "altogether valueless as a contribution to our knowledge of Polycarp. It does not, so far as we know, rest on any tradition, early or late, and may probably be regarded as a fiction of the author's own brain" (Lightfoot, op.cit., iii, 431). The postscript to the letter to the Smyrneans: "This account Gaius copied from the papers of Irenaeus ... and I, Socrates, wrote it down in Corinth ... and I, Pionius again wrote it down", etc. probably came from the pseudo-Pionius. The very copious extracts from the Letter of the Smyrneans given by [Eusebius](#) are a guarantee of the fidelity of the text in the [manuscripts](#) that have come down.