

of such expedients; capital punishment, according to the comprehensive formula of a third century jurist, “consists in being thrown to the beasts, or undergoing similar sufferings, or being beheaded.” Those “other similar sufferings” meant for the Christians every suffering which human cruelty could invent when inspired by hell.

I shall add nothing more to this picture, which I have just drawn for you. Can the fact of such sufferings, so various in their horror, and undergone not merely during a short period of enthusiasm and by a few, but during nearly three centuries, and by thousands of men, women, and even children, belonging to every country of the Roman world—each one of whom could have by word or sign escaped all this pain—can such a fact be humanly explained? I do not feel myself in a position to answer this question. However, the witnesses of the martyrdoms, and the martyrs themselves, have long since furnished the answer. The Christians of Smyrna describe to us several martyrs in the amphitheatre of the town “so torn by whips that their veins, their arteries, all the inner parts of their bodies were laid bare, and who yet remained so constant that the onlookers were touched with pity and wept, though the martyrs themselves allowed never a complaint of murmur to escape their lips.” “It was manifest,” adds the writers, “that at the very hour when they were being tortured, the witnesses of Christ were rapt out of their body, or rather that the Lord was near them and speaking with them.” When Felicitas whilst yet in prison was seized with the pains of childbirth, she could not restrain her cries, but on one of

those present saying to her: “If thou canst not endure pain now, what wilt thou do when attacked by the beasts? She replied, “It is I who now suffer, but then another will be in me who will suffer for me, because I will be suffering for Him.” A commentary on such words would be useless. This much, however, may we say: the historical fact of the long, cruel sufferings willingly undergone by the martyrs is an extraordinary fact, a unique fact, which cannot be matched by anything similar in the annals of any other religion or people. Beyond this I will draw no inference from the data I have placed before you today.

Reference: Paul Allard, *Ten Lectures on the Martyrs*, (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & CO., London 1907), pp. 277-283.

**The Evangelization Station**

Hudson, Florida, USA

E-mail: [evangelization@earthlink.net](mailto:evangelization@earthlink.net)

[www.evangelizationstation.com](http://www.evangelizationstation.com)

Pamphlet 178

## **The Death of Early Church Martyrs**

Paul Allard

Crucifixion, a mode of punishment, which Christ’s death had forever hallowed, but which by the Romans was considered an ignominious penalty, was often inflicted on the martyrs.

The most celebrated case, after that of Christ, of the use of the cross was the crucifixion of St. Peter. In the first and second centuries, Clement of Rome and Dionysius of Corinth speak of Peter’s martyrdom at Rome but not of its mode. Tertullian is the first to state that St. Peter “underwent a passion similar to that of the Savior,” and that he “was crucified.” Origen adds, “He was crucified head downwards.” However strange this may appear, such a manner of crucifying was not unknown in the time of Nero. “I see,” says Seneca, “crosses of different types, some are crucified head downwards.” Origen, however, ascribes this reversal of the ordinary manner of proceeding to a reason other than the cruelty of the executioner: “Peter,” he writes, “out of humility, requested to be thus crucified.”

In the first century, other Christians met a like death. Many were crucified at the awful festival in Nero’s gardens. At the beginning of the second century, under Trajan, St. Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem, was crucified. A hundred years later, the pagan whose conversation was put on record by Minucius Felix, said triumphantly to the

Christian with whom he was holding a friendly discussion: "This is no longer the time to adore crosses, but to ascend them." In some of the passages quoted from Justin, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, mention is made of the crucifixion of Christians. The names of a few who perished by this means in the last persecution have been preserved. Claudius, Asterius, Neon, Calliopius, Theodulus, Agricola, Timothy, Maura; Eusebius also tells us that many of the Egyptian Christians, whose names were lost, died on the cross.

Some of the latter were crucified as St. Peter had been. "The others," says Eusebius, "had been nailed to the cross after the usual manner with malefactors; but some were, with exquisite cruelty, nailed head downwards." The fourth-century historian adds, "They remained alive until they died of hunger on their gibbets." Instead of giving the crucified the *coup de grace*, the Romans usually left them to perish slowly on the cross/ One *Passion* tells of two martyrs, man and wife, who were crucified face to face, and who lived for nine days struggling against unconsciousness and burning with thirst, in their last dreams being pursued as by diabolical temptations with visions of cooling drinks.

Another mode of death by which many Christians perished in the last persecution was death by drowning, a cowardly penalty which in the Reign of Terror was used anew in France.

In 303, soon after Diocletian's first edict, "innumerable" Christians, so Eusebius testifies, were bound and carried out to the open sea, where they were thrown

overboard. At Rome, in 304, two martyrs were cast into the Tiber from a bridge below the isle of Æsculapius. In Egypt, others were thrown into the sea. At Cæsarea, a girl of eighteen years was similarly treated. In Pannonia, Quirinus, Bishop of Siscia, was thrown with a millstone round his neck into the Savus [river].

In Palestine, Ulpian was sewn up in a bullock's skin with a dog and an asp, and in Cilicia, Julian was tied up in a sack filled with earth and reptiles, and were drowned. Drowning was not a regular penalty, through parricides, according to the law, were to be sewn up in sacks with noxious animals and then drowned. However, as no law or edict had prescribed its use for Christians, its application to them was utterly illegal, but we should be hard put to find any respect for law at a period when the Emperor Galerius, if we may believe Lantantius, had abolished beggary in his states by drowning all the beggars.

It is weary work enumerating the modes of death which pagan hatred never wearied inflicting on the Christians.

Sometimes the latter fell victims to riots; at Carthage, the mob attacked Numidieus, his wife, and a group of faithful; some were burnt and others stoned; at Alexandria, in like manner, St. Meta and St. Quinta were stoned. While Serapion was thrown from the top of a house, at Rome a band of pagans walled up the opening of a subterranean passage, leaving the Christians within to perish.

But the frigid cruelty on magistrates was much worse than the blind anger of the populace. "Thy ferocity, thy inhumanity,"

writes St. Cyprian to an African magistrate, "is not content with the usual tortures; thou art wickedly ingenious; thou invented new penalties." Eusebius, too, speaking of the magistrates of the East during the fourth century, says that they invent for the sake of the Christians sufferings until then unknown, each one striving to outdo in cruelty his colleagues.

At Antioch, the deacon Romanus's tongue was first cut out—"a new torture," Eusebius remarks—and then he was strangled. At Nicomedia, Dorothea, Gorgonius, and others were also strangled. In Arabia, the faithful were slaughtered with axes, a form of punishment forbidden by the law. In Cappadocia, their legs were broken. In Mesopotamia, they were hung heads down over a slow fire. At Alexandria their nose, ears, and hands were cut off. In Pontus, reeds were forced beneath their fingernails, molten lead was poured on their backs, and their entrails were torn out. In the province of Thebes they were scratched with broken crockery, women deprived of their clothes were slung up head downwards by the aid of machinery; men had their legs tied to stout bent branches which, when allowed to spring back, tore the bodies in train. In Roman Armenia, forty Christian soldiers were made to spend the night on a frozen lake, and were then cast into the fire. About the same time, about the year 320, *i.e.* at the very end of the persecutions, and under Licinus, Christians were cut in slices with swords and thrown piecemeal to the fishes.

There was no contrivance, which at some period or other was not applied to the martyrs. Possibly the law permitted the use