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TRIAL BY ORDEAL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NERONIAN PERSECUTION

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Introduction

The 64 CE fire of Rome was a catalyst for change, and in relation to Christians living in the city, it was brutal. Along with Rome's rebuilding, persecution was enforced on a grand scale. Paul and Peter were killed, as were many other Christians who had done little to convict themselves in relation to the fire other than belong to the Christian faith. As this article demonstrates, these and other Christians were scapegoats for the fire that burned Rome in 64 CE. As punishment, many were killed, ultimately upon Nero's decision. This article also argues that members of other groups may have also been executed in the chaos and bloodlust of the persecution. Most were Christians, however. Ultimately, for falling out of imperial favour, many Christians found themselves victims of an emperor's cruelty. For this, the persecution may have extended beyond the confines of Rome although the main area of focus appears to have been Rome. Explored also is the argument that Paul was executed not immediately after his trial but during the persecution itself. Peter's execution and the possibility he held Roman citizenship are also discussed. Finally, the legacy of the remains of Paul and Peter is reflected upon. In this article, biblical and extra-biblical evidence is investigated through the lens of modern scholarship to offer a historical analysis of the topics outlined above, presented together as a whole in one article for the first time. It is affirmed that Nero was responsible for the persecution, that Christians were persecuted during it in solid numbers, that the confines of the persecution may not have been just the city of Rome and that Paul and Peter died as a result of it. It will

also be affirmed that as Rome rebuilt, so did Christianity, with help from Christians further afield, including Antioch in Syria.

Blamed for the Fire

For the fire of 64 CE, Nero blamed a supposedly non-Roman religious group—the Christians—thereby seeking to galvanize support from patriotic religious Romans in his cause to eradicate the group from the city and to condemn it to persecution. As to who was responsible for suggesting to Nero to use these Christians as scapegoats, debate exists. As early as 1898, Philippe Fabia suggested that Poppaea Sabina, Nero's wife from 62–65 CE—whom Josephus described as a 'God-fearer' (θεοσεβής) at a time when Jews and Christians were at loggerheads in Rome over the trial of Paul in 63 CE—was the most likely candidate.[1] In 1959, Smallwood challenged this idea, pointing out that it was Poppaea who had Gessius Florus appointed procurator over Judea from 64–66 CE on account of her friendship with his wife—a procuratorship that would result in the outbreak of the First Jewish War (66–70 CE)—hardly the behaviour of a Jewish sympathizer.[2] Florus was an associate of G. Gessius Gallus, who was the Roman governor of Syria from 63 CE or 65 CE up to his death in 67 CE. While Florus was an antagonist towards the Jewish people at times, stirring Judean sentiment towards revolt against Rome, Gallus took an active role in the war that was to follow. At the outbreak of the war, Florus was replaced as procurator by Marcus Antonius Julianus over proceedings in Judea. These men worked with Florus in order to spark the outbreak and the First Jewish War in an administrative, orchestrated manner. Thus, it may be argued with some confidence that the appointment of Florus to the procuratorship of Judea was not the wisest move by Nero—and by implication, Poppaea—but was rather superficial, and not well thought through or considerably God-fearing in its extent.[3] In light of such a character profile

1. Josephus, *Ant*. 20.195; Philippe Fabia, 'Le Règne et la Mort de Poppée', *Revue de Philologie, de Littérature, et d'Histoire Anciennes* 22 (1898), pp. 333-45 (336-37).

2. E.M. Smallwood, 'The Alleged Jewish Tendencies of Poppaea Sabina', *JTS* 10 (1959), pp. 329-35.

3. On Florus, see Josephus, *War* 2.14.5-9; 6.4.3; *Ant*. 20.11.1. On Gallus, see Josephus, *War* 2.14.3-4; 2.19.2, 9; *Ant*. 20.11.1; Tacitus, *Ann*. 5.10, 13; Suetonius,

of Poppaea, throughout the twentieth century most historians accepted that she was most likely the one who in a fickle manner suggested to Nero to use the Christians as scapegoats. However, it is often held that while Poppaea certainly encouraged Nero to officially blame the Christians, the idea may have been first broached to her and to Nero by the praetorian prefect at the time of the fire, Tigellinus.[4]

Poppaea is likely to have been born in Pompeii in Italy, given that her father's family, known to history as the Ollii, derived from there as local property owners.[5] In fact, the *gens Poppaea* owned at least five houses in Pompeii, and Poppaea herself owned brick works property in nearby Oplontis.[6] This renders Poppaea's family of affluent, but still fairly humble origins compared to the wealth and prestige of Nero, whom she married—leading to an influx of wealth and prestige into her own life in the city of Rome, as she became empress over the Roman Empire. Her life was an example of impressive upward mobility through the ranks of Roman society. The intelligence that inspired her to achieve this upward mobility marked her as an influential character in the court of Nero. This influence over Nero had been emerging strongly for many years leading up to the persecution of the Christians in 64 CE. Thus, Tacitus states she became an intimate counsellor of Nero from that time onwards.[7] However, the third-century CE Roman historian Cassius Dio also states that this influence extended to persuading Nero to execute his own mother, and punishing his wife at the time.[8] Thus, while her influence over others at the court of Nero included modelling lifestyle—to the point of having fashionable beauty practices named after her—it also extended over Nero to the point of killing. Poppaea died in 65 CE. She re-

Vesp. 4; E. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1891), pp. 368-69.

4. M. Cary and H.H. Scullard, *A History of Rome Down to the Reign of Constantine* (New York: Bedford Books, 1983), p. 359; W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 109; Michael J.G. Gray-Fow, 'Why the Christians? Nero and the Great Fire', *Latomus* 57 (1998), pp. 595-616.

5. M. Della Corte, *Case ed abitante di Pompei* (Naples: Faustino Fiorentino, 3rd edn, 1965), p. 59.

6. Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 102.

7. Tacitus, *Ann*. 15.61.

8. Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 61.12; 62.13.1, 4.

ceived a public funeral, and was embalmed and buried rather than cremated in the traditional Roman style; she was later deified by Nero.[9]

It is clear that Poppaea could not have foreseen the disaster that was Florus's governorship, having him appointed on the strength of her friendship with his wife alone, and although Poppaea did not embrace all Jewish traditions she most certainly admired and sympathized with Judaism. In 61 CE, she was instrumental in having Nero acquit the Jerusalem leaders in the 'Wall Case', which the Roman procurator Porcius Festus had brought against them for building a wall that screened-off the Temple from the Antonia.[10] Then, in 64 CE, at the request of a young Josephus, she persuaded Nero to pardon some Jewish priests sent to Rome a number of years earlier by the procurator Antonius Felix.[11] According to Pliny the Elder, Poppaea was obsessed with fashion, and in the words of Margaret H. Williams, who is to say this preoccupation of hers did not 'extend also into the sphere of religion'?[12] Indeed, given that Paul states in his letter to the Philippians that there were some of 'Caesar's household'—that is, occupiers and staff—that were new converts to the Christian faith, she may have heard of Christianity from them, and unhappy that this breakaway sect that undermined Jewish tradition had penetrated the palace, struck upon them as a group for Nero to blame after the fire.[13]

Precursors

Whatever Poppaea's role might have been, Nero took a leading role in his own decision making. He could see for himself Christianity's unpopularity in Rome, and knew full well the details with the aid of official records of how the tensions had reached flash point between Jews, Christians, and Romans during the principate of Claudius.[14] For, as the second-century CE Roman

9. Juvenal, *Sat*. 1.155; Tacitus, *Ann*. 16.6; Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 62.28.1-2; 63.26.3; Griffin, *Nero*, pp. 101, 103.

10. Josephus, *Ant*. 20.182-196.

11. Josephus, *Life* 13-16.

12. Margaret H. Williams, 'θεοσεβὴς γὰρ ἦν—The Jewish Tendencies of Poppaea Sabina', *JTS* 39 (1988), pp. 97-111 (111).

13. Phil. 4.22; Smallwood, 'Alleged Jewish Tendencies', p. 330.

14. Daryn Graham, 'A World Aflame: Nero's Persecution of the Christians in AD 64', *Vox Reformata* 85 (2020), pp. 89-114 (94).

biographer Suetonius states, as a number of Jews repeatedly orchestrated disturbances 'at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome'.[15] Suetonius made this brief statement without any chronological markers, which makes it difficult to pinpoint the year this expulsion took place.[16] To complicate matters, Cassius Dio records another, separate event that took place under Claudius in 41 CE which has confused some scholars into thinking Dio and Suetonius described the same event.[17] These texts have also often been used to shed light on each other.[18] According to Dio, in the first year of Claudius's reign, the emperor wished to curb the Jewish presence in Rome, but could not expel the Jews from the city on account of their many numbers; he decided to ban their public meetings there instead. As Dio states,

> τούς τε Ἰουδαίους πλεονάσαντας αὖθις, ὥστε χαλεπῶς ἂν ἄνευ ταραχῆς ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου σφῶν τῆς πόλεως εἰρχθῆναι, οὐκ ἐξήλασε μέν, τῷ δὲ δῆ πατρίῳ βίῳ χρωμένους ἐκέλευσε μὴ συναθροίζεσθαι.
>
> As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city [Rome], he [Claudius] did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings.[19]

The differences between this text and Suetonius's statement are evident. In Dio's passage, Claudius curbs his wish to expel the Jews while in Suetonius expulsion from Rome is carried out. This has prompted Slingerland to conclude that Dio and Suetonius describe different events—in 41 CE

15. Suetonius, *Claud*. 25.

16. Dixon Slingerland, 'Suetonius' "Claudius" 25.4 and the Account of Cassius Dio', *JQR* 79 (1989), pp. 305-22 (306).

17. A. Momigliano, *Claudius* (Greenwood, CT: Westport, 1981), p. 31; E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule from Pompey to Diocletian* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), p. 215.

18. B. Baldwin, *Suetonius* (Amsterdam: M. Hakkert, 1983), p. 356; Slingerland, 'Suetonius' "Claudius" 25.4', p. 306.

19. Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom*. 60.6.6-7.

Claudius banned Jewish gatherings in Rome for concern of their growing presence there, while at a later date he carried out his expulsion.[20]

As to what that later date may be, two hypotheses exist. The first of these was proposed by Smallwood, who creatively argues that given Tacitus recorded a similar expulsion of Jews from Rome under Tiberius in 19 CE, it therefore makes sense that he also recorded the expulsion under Claudius. But, given our texts of Tacitus include only the years 46 CE to 54 CE of Claudius's principate, Tacitus must have placed it somewhere during the lost years of 41 CE to 46 CE of Claudius's reign.[21] Added to this, Smallwood argues that a comment by the first-century CE Jewish philosopher Philo provides credibility to this scenario. In his praise of Augustus, Philo—writing under the early reign of Claudius—states that Augustus 'neither ejected them [the Jews] from Rome…'.[22] Smallwood suggests that this shows the Jews were expelled by Claudius during the years covered by the lost sections of Tacitus's *Annals* in juxtaposition to Augustan policy.[23] However, as Slingerland points out, because we no longer possess these lost sections we cannot know this for certain. Furthermore, Philo might equally have been alluding to the expulsion under Augustus's immediate successor Tiberius, not Claudius.[24]

The second hypothesis relies on the testimony of the fifth-century CE historian Orosius, as he was preparing historical material for Augustine of Hippo for his mammoth *City of God*. According to Orosius, Josephus recorded that in the ninth year of the principate of Claudius, 'the Jews were expelled by Claudius from the city [Rome]'.[25] Although no such statement by Josephus exists in any of his extant works, Orosius's matter-of-fact language, and the verifiability of his claims at the time, make it likely that his attribution was

20. Slingerland, 'Suetonius' "Claudius" 25.4', p. 322; Dixon Slingerland, 'Suetonius Claudius 25.4, Acts 18, and Paulles Orosius' "Historium Adversus Paganos Libre VII": Dating the Claudian Expulsion(s) of Roman Jews', *JQR* 83 (1992), pp. 127-44 (128, 144); Graham, 'A World Aflame', p. 96.

21. Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, pp. 212-13.

22. Philo, *Leg*, 23.243.

23. Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, pp. 213-14.

24. Slingerland, 'Suetonius', pp. 129-32.

25. Orosius, *Hist. adv. Pag*. 7.6.15.

legitimate.[26] In support of this hypothesis is the fact that Corinth was a Roman colony during those times, and thus was a likely destination for numbers of refugees expelled from Rome itself. Acts states that Aquila and Priscilla had been part of Claudius's expulsion, and had met Paul in Corinth during the proconsulship of Seneca's brother, Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeanus, over Achaea in 51–52 CE,

> Μετὰ ταῦτα χωρισθεὶς ἐκ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ἦλθεν εἰς Κόρινθον. καὶ εὑρών τινα Ἰουδαῖον ὀνόματι Ἀκύλαν Ποντικὸν τῷ γένει προσφάτως ἐληλυθότα ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας καὶ Πρίσκιλλαν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, διατεταχέναι Κλαύδιον χωρίζεσθαι πάντας τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἀπὸ τῆς Ῥώμης
>
> After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.[27]

Because Acts actually states they came to Corinth from Italy, this may mean that they were part of the expulsion, which probably did take place in 49 CE, but sojourned throughout Italy for several years afterwards before leaving Italy for Corinth.[28]

As to whom 'Chrestus' might be, several theories exist. As pointed out by Koestermann and Benko, 'Chrestus' was a name that was very popular among slaves in Rome. Thus, these scholars argue, he must have been a historical person. But who that historical person might be, they argue, is unknowable.[29] Slingerland, however, through use of a different interpretation

26. Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), pp. 11-16; Bernard Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome: The First Three Centuries* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 25; Graham, 'A World Aflame', p. 97.

27. Acts 18.1-2.

28. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth: Text and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), p. 159; Graham, 'A World Aflame', p. 97.

29. E. Koestermann, 'Ein folgenschweres Irrtum des Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44.2f)', *Historia* 16 (1967), pp. 456-69; Stephen Benko, 'The Edict of Claudius of 49 CE and the Instigator Chrestus', *TZ* 25 (1969), pp. 406-18; Stephen Benko, *Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 18.

of Suetonius's language, argues this Chrestus may have been an adviser who influenced Claudius to expel the Jews.[30] However, a third more popular theory holds that Suetonius's 'Chrestus' was a garbled form of 'Christus'. As Tertullian of Carthage pointed out in the second century CE, 'Christus' was typically pronounced 'Chrestus' by Romans on account of their accent, which had flow-on effects in historical sources as Roman writers consistently recorded 'Christianos' as 'Chrestianos';[31] on this view the riots among Jews that caused Claudius's decree of expulsion had their origins in the preaching of the message of Jesus Christ by Christians also living there.[32] Most certainly, there are many accounts in Acts of Jewish Diaspora populations rioting at the introduction of the gospel by Paul to their parts of the world. Disturbances took place in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonika, Beroea, and Corinth.[33]

This theory is, however, rejected by Green, who argues that since Dio states there were too many Jews to be expelled by Claudius in 41 CE, this must still have been the case in 49 CE.[34] Furthermore, since Acts names Christians Aquila and Priscilla, who were leaders of the Christian Church, as among those expelled, it must have been the Christians living in Rome who were expelled, not the Jews. Thus, whereas in Acts it is Paul and Barnabas who were expelled from the cities they preached among, in this case the entire Christian population of Rome was expelled.[35] Lampe agrees that Christians were expelled, but argues that since Aquila and Priscilla were key figures in the expulsion in Acts, Claudius's expulsion might have been confined to Christian leaders from Rome;[36] when Acts remarks that '*all* the Jews' were expelled from Rome (Acts 18.2), the word '*all*' (πᾶς) can be seen as 'redactionally exaggerated': it was a preferred Lukan term, appearing 172 times in Acts, and 157 times in Luke.[37] However, Green's and Lampe's arguments

30. Slingerland, 'Suetonius' "Claudius" 25.4', pp. 133-44.

31. Tertullian, *Apol*. 1.3; *Nat.* 1.3; Tacitus, *Ann*. 15.44; Graham, 'A World Aflame', p. 99.

32. Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 66; Graham, 'A World Aflame', p. 99.

33. See Acts 13.44–18.17.

34. Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, p. 26.

35. See Rom. 16.3-5; 1 Cor. 16.19; Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, p. 27.

36. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 14.

37. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 14.

are rejected by Slingerland, who points out that there is no evidence in Suetonius's statement that 'Jews' ought to be replaced with the word 'Christians'.[38] Thus, it may be argued that those expelled were most likely those who, as ringleaders of Jewish and Jewish-Christian circles, took part in the riots themselves, for there were many Jews in Rome who did not take part in the disturbances, and in any case were Roman citizens and who therefore could not be expelled from Rome lightly.[39]

The whole episode of 49 CE would leave a bitter taste not only between Jews and Christians living in Rome, but also Romans as well, and this spite would last up to 64 CE. Thus, in 61 CE, upon Paul's arrival in Rome, Acts states the local Jewish leaders there asked Paul with trepidation and curiosity, '… we would like to hear from you what you think, for regarding this sect we know that people everywhere speak against it'.[40] In these words we find evidence that disfavour by verbal condemnation was experienced by Christians in Rome as in other places throughout the empire by the time of the 64 CE persecution. No doubt, this disfavour, an aftertaste of events in 49 CE, independently inspired Nero to use the Christians in Rome as scapegoats for the Great Fire.[41] Whatever hand his wife Poppaea Sabina had in the affair, Nero was himself most certainly the leading and driving force in his choice of using Christians as scapegoats for the Great Fire. For good reason Tacitus states, 'Nero fabricated scapegoats.'[42]

The Persecution

As to what came next, Tacitus states,

> ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat… sed per urbem etiam quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluent celebranturque.

38. Slingerland, 'Suetonius', p. 143.
39. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, pp. 13-14; Graham, 'A World Aflame', p. 100.
40. Acts 28.22.
41. Graham, 'A World Aflame', p. 100.
42. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44; Graham, 'A World Aflame', p. 100.

> Nero fabricated scapegoats—and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called) … in Rome. All degraded and shameful practices collect and flourish in the capital.[43]

So reads our modern English translation of Tacitus. In fact, all modern versions of the Neronian narrative of Tacitus's *Annals* derive from a single manuscript from Monte Cassino, and some hypothesize that the section on Nero's persecution of the Christians has been inserted by a Christian copyist centuries ago.[44] Griffin has argued that on account of their protest against taking part in the state endorsed pagan religious ceremonies performed to appease the gods following the fire, the decision that Christians were guilty of the fire was fastened upon them by the Roman imperial court—at least, ostensibly and publicly for that reason.[45] According to our current version, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information given through interrogation—which meant torture—large numbers of others were arrested and condemned, as well. Tacitus does not state if these were more secretive Christians or if they were Christians at all; only that they were collectively despised as anti-social—a charge which could apply to Christians, but also to other groups as we shall see.[46]

According to Dando-Collins, clues to whom the original text of the *Annals* states were really arrested and condemned by Nero are found in the types of public executions meted out to them. According to Tacitus, those condemned were dressed in animals' skins and torn to pieces by dogs, while others were either crucified or impaled and set alight to serve as street lights at night. Nero hosted these spectacles in his own Gardens and in the Circus Flaminius.[47] Griffin argues that punishing these Christians with use as living torches fitted the crime of incendiarism—a charge with which Christians were charged *en bloc*.[48] Dando-Collins has also hypothesized that these types of punishments

43. Tacitus, *Ann*. 15.44.

44. Kelly Shannon, 'Memory, Religion and History in Nero's Great Fire: Tacitus, Annals 15.41-7', *ClQ* 62 (2012), pp. 749-65 (753, 758); Richard Carrier, 'The Prospect of a Christian Interpolation in Tacitus, Annals 15.44', *VC* 68 (2014), pp. 264-83 (264, 272, 281).

45. Griffin, *Nero*, pp. 132-33.

46. Tacitus, *Ann*. 15.44.

47. Tacitus, *Ann*. 15.44.

48. Griffin, *Nero*, p. 132.

would be more pertinent if they were meted out to Isis devotees, rather than Christians, and that a more accurate translation of the original text of the *Annals* should read, 'Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, followers of the cult of Isis, called Egyptians by the populace, which had taken root in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful find their centre and become popular.'[49] Dando-Collins points out that Isis devotees portrayed Egyptian gods and goddesses with animal characteristics, including Anubis, god of the dead, who had the head of a dog or jackal. Devotees of this sect also scorned touching dead animal products and wore only linen and papyrus clothing. Thus, Tacitus's statement that those arrested were dressed in wild animal skins and torn to pieces by dogs would have been of greater insult to an Isis devotee than any other religious group in Rome. Fire, also, played a key part in the religious observances of Isis devotees, and using it to kill those devotees that were condemned would have set a sobering example to other devotees of this sect in Rome and around the empire that Roman power was not to be trifled with. Given also that many of the arrested were crucified indicates that they were not Roman citizens, for crucifixion was banned for Roman citizens, which could imply that the majority of those arrested and condemned were 'Egyptians' as Dando-Collins argues.[50]

Dando-Collins thus casts doubt that Tacitus was referring to Christians when he states that 'large numbers of others were condemned'.[51] This line of argument is also endorsed by Shaw.[52] Jones, however, argues this line by pointing out that Paul's epistle to the Romans describes their faith as famous, apparently for their numbers as well as intensity of belief (Rom. 1.8)[53] Nonetheless, Dando-Collins draws attention to the many more devotees of Isis that resided in Rome. The cult of Isis had a long history of finding imperial disfavour in Rome. In 21 BC, Marcus Agrippa banned the cult in Rome,

49. Stephen Dando-Collins, *The Great Fire of Rome: The Fall of the Emperor Nero and His City* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2010), p. 13.

50. Dando-Collins, *Great Fire of Rome*, pp. 13, 107-9.

51. Tacitus, *Ann*. 15.44.

52. Brent D. Shaw, 'The Myth of the Neronian Persecution', *JRS* 105 (2015), pp. 73-100 (96); Brent D. Shaw, 'Response to Christopher Jones: The Historicity of the Neronian Persecution', *NTS* 64 (2018), pp. 231-42.

53. Christopher P. Jones, 'The Historicity of the Neronian Persecution: A Response to Brent Shaw', *NTS* 64 (2017), pp. 146-52.

and under Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius, devotees of the cult were expelled from the capital. Finally, Dando-Collins puts forth, the term 'Christian' is a later name, and does not belong in the first century, and was not even used by the first-century Christians themselves.[54]

However, there are reasons to question Dando-Collins's eclectic argument. First, two first-century CE Christian biblical books, Acts and 1 Peter both use the term 'Christian' when describing Jesus' followers (Acts 11.26; 26.28; 1 Pet. 4.16). Intriguingly, this term has unique origins. According to Acts, Christians were first called by that term, by outsiders in the city of Antioch where many Christians lived, for following Jesus, whom they called Christ (Greek for 'Messiah') (Acts 11.26). This fact accounts for why the Christians of the Bible did not often call themselves Christians—it was a term used by others to refer to them. Most Christians described themselves with other labels, such as 'believers' (Acts 2.44), 'children of God' (Rom. 8.16), 'children of light' (Mt. 5.14; Lk. 11.35; 2 Cor. 6.14; Eph. 5.8-11; 1 Thess. 5.5) and members of 'The Way' (Acts 9.2, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22), so used because Jesus taught that he is 'the way, the truth, and the life' (Jn 14.6) and as one converts one becomes one with the Spirit of Jesus (Eph. 1.22-23). Thus, when outsiders including Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny the Younger labelled 'Christians' by that term, they confirmed the Acts account.[55]

Moreover, when we turn to other facts in the story, we find more complications with Dando-Collins's scenario. The 'large numbers' of 'others' (*multitudo ingens*) Tacitus states were arrested and condemned need not have implied numbers as large as one might initially imagine, for elsewhere in his *Histories* Tacitus uses similar language to describe just twenty executions (*immense strages*). However, in this case Tacitus was probably referring to more than those numbers, and only in regard to Christian ringleaders that were rounded up and executed, not simply their executed followers—who could have constituted a large number.[56] Hence, in his *Annals* Tacitus rhetorically evokes mental imagery of crowds of many victims being arrested and condemned, but in fact such a dramatization exaggerates the number of those

54. Dando-Collins, *The Great Fire of Rome*, pp. 8-13.

55. Josephus, *Ant*. 18.3; Pliny the Younger, *Ep*. 10.96; Tacitus, *Ann*. 15.44; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.

56. Tacitus, *Hist*. 1.47.2.

executed, as was his aim in his *Histories*.[57] As for the methods of rounding up, no extant ancient literature records it. However, Clement states that 'envy' (ἔριν) and 'strife' (ζῆλος) brought down Paul, and they may have done so in regard to other Christians, in Rome, at the time of the persecution (1 Clem. 5). This statement is of consequence, because Paul states in Philippians that he was opposed in Rome by Christian preachers who preached the gospel out of 'envy' (ἔριν) and 'rivalry' (θρόνον). Although Paul tried to reconcile with them, it may be argued they had something to do with those who informed on him as to his whereabouts, to Nero or to other Roman authorities, leading to his arrest, and eventual execution. Peter may have suffered the same fate. They were, after all, public figures in Rome, and as leaders of the Christian church there, they were technically speaking, ringleaders of Nero's propagated enemies. If so, these and others like them, including pagans and Jews in Rome, could very well have done likewise, and informed on Christians hiding throughout Rome, to Roman authorities (Phil. 1.15).

The number of those executed in this persecution need not have been only Christians. Christian numbers were still relatively small in Rome—compared to the rest of the population of Rome—however, the large numbers of 'others' also rounded up, according to Tacitus, were so precisely because they were 'detested' for their similar 'anti-social tendencies'. These 'others' might have included devotees of Isis, even many, which would mean that what we have here are Christians and Isis devotees being associated and linked together in blame and condemnation: first Christians, then Isis worshippers. Being dressed in animal skins may not have been meant as a religious insult, either, at least to the Christians among the condemned—these Christians may have been dressed in them simply in order to invite the dogs' appetites, by which they were executed. Crucifixion, as well, would have evoked the image of the death of Jesus by crucifixion in many onlookers' minds, adding to their torment. Finally, being lit up at night was a regular penalty for incendiarism, and might have been a method used by Nero to mock the Christian teaching that Christians were sons of light, not darkness (Mt. 5.14; Lk. 11.35; 2 Cor. 6.14; Eph. 5.8-11; 1 Thess. 5.5).[58] If this scenario is accurate—which endorses our current translation of Tacitus as correct and not doctored by a medieval Christian copyist—then these punishments would have added to the insult to both

57. Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, p. 52.

58. B.H. Warmington, *Nero: Reality and Legend* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), p. 126.

Christians in Rome, and to the many 'others' that Tacitus states were executed throughout Rome, including perhaps a number of Isis devotees.[59]

Nero's persecution was not an empire-wide systematic proscription. Or, so it seems. It appears to have been confined to the city of Rome, largely. However, according to Bible commentators, there is some evidence of abuse of Christians throughout the empire in 1 Peter. According to Thurston, Peter's reference to the 'fiery ordeal coming upon you' in that letter, written to the early Christians of Asia Minor, among others, must be a reflection of the same punishments Nero inflicted upon the Christians of Rome coming upon the Christians of Asia Minor too (1 Pet. 4.12).[60] Others see a causal link between Peter's reference to the suffering 'for the name [of Christ]' and Pliny the Younger's query to the emperor Trajan in 110 CE as to whether or not Christians in Bithynia be punished for the 'name itself' (1 Pet. 4.14).[61] Peter's statement is to be 'prepared to give a defence', which has been argued by Williams to imply that Peter was readying Christians in Asia Minor for formal judicial interrogation before Roman magistrates (1 Pet. 3.15).[62] But others view Peter's words, 'the same sufferings being experienced by your fellow Christians throughout the world', to be proof that Nero's persecution was an official empire-wide policy of persecution. In any event, although the bulk of the persecution may have derived from, appeared in, and been elongated in Rome, because Christians fell out of imperial favour there, the possibility that violence against Christians besmirched the entire empire cannot be discarded lightly (1 Pet. 5.9).[63]

Pliny's correspondences with Trajan reveal that there was no official policy proscribing Christianity up to that time in 110 CE.[64] The 'fiery ordeal' that Peter describes may have been a reference to the kind of punishments he saw being inflicted on Christians in Rome, which he suspected were immanent for the Christians in places like Asia Minor, at the time of writing (1 Pet.

59. The authenticity of this passage is endorsed by Warmington, *Nero*, p. 126; Jürgen Malitz, *Nero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 69.

60. R.W. Thurston, 'Interpreting First Peter', *JETS* 17 (1974), pp. 171-82.

61. Pliny the Younger, *Ep*. 10.96; Martin Williams, *The Doctrine of Salvation in the First Letter of Peter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 6.

62. Williams, *Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 6.

63. Williams, *Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 6.

64. Pliny the Younger, *Ep*. 10.96-97; Williams, *Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 6.

4.12).[65] Peter's reference to abuse 'for the name', and a need to give a 'defence', may be more likely closely linked to the verbal abuse that Christians suffered around the empire at the time that Peter, which Peter refers to throughout the letter, for there is no mention explicitly of physical attacks. But of course, verbal attacks can sometimes lead to physical violence.[66] As for Peter's comment that other Christians 'throughout the world' were undergoing the same sufferings as those in Asia Minor, this may denote that the same verbal abuses levelled at Christians around the empire were experienced by the Asian Christians, as well.[67] In short, Peter wrote his letter to encourage Christians in Asia to stand firm in the face of the attacks and to not escalate matters. They faced these attacks on account of their association with Christ, at the time, and the unpopularity from falling from imperial favour, during Nero's persecution, which is evidenced from his repeated references to verbal attacks against Christians throughout the letter (1 Pet. 2.11-12, 23; 3.9, 16; 4.3-4).[68]

Connecting Nero with the Fire and the Persecution

Pliny the Elder, Suetonius and Cassius Dio do not suggest that there were any Christians punished on the premise of proof for lighting, and spreading, the fire. Pliny refers briefly to the fire, but makes no mention of the Christians at all in his *Natural History*.[69] Suetonius describes the fire and Nero's actions against the Christians in separate chapters of his life of Nero.[70] Dio includes a detailed description of the fire but makes no mention of Christians in relation to it.[71] In more recent times, Shaw has argued that the persecution of the Christians under Nero did not happen in the way that Tacitus describes it, at all.[72] Wilken and Shaw both point out that under Nero, the term 'Christian',

65. Larry H. Helyer, *The Life and Witness of Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), p. 163.

66. Williams, *Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 6.

67. Williams, *Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 6.

68. Williams, *Doctrine of Salvation*, pp. 7-8; Helyer, *Life and Witness of Peter*, p. 163.

69. Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 7.1.5-6.

70. Suetonius, *Nero* 16, 38.

71. Cassius Dio, *Hist. rom.* 62.16-17.

72. Shaw, 'Myth of the Neronian Persecution'.

used by Tacitus, was not widely used by followers of Jesus to describe themselves at the time.[73] Of course, though early Christians in the first century CE clearly used the term 'Christian' to describe themselves at times, Paul describes them in his letter to the Romans as simply 'brothers and sisters', 'saints', and those 'called to belong to Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom. 1.6; 14-15; Acts 11.26; 26.28; 1 Pet. 4.16). Still, Wilken has argued that Tacitus somehow used a second-century CE term which he drew from Pliny the Younger during the latter's tenure as governor of Bithynia in the 110s CE—during which time Tacitus composed his *Annals*.[74]

However, these omissions in Pliny, Suetonius and Dio can be accounted for. Pliny described the 64 CE fire as 'the Emperor Nero's conflagration', but his linking Nero with the fire served to cast the new Flavian dynasty in a more favourable light. In his early career, Pliny served as a fellow officer of Titus. Later, he was a member of Vespasian's advisory council, and around 77 CE dedicated his *Natural History* to Titus. It was in his and the Flavian dynasty's interest, therefore, to cast Flavian rule against the alleged low codes of moral behaviour of their predecessor, Nero.[75]

Suetonius, too, had reasons not to mention the Christians. It was also characteristic of him to write value-laden biography, although he did clearly make use of official records, and other valuable ancient literary sources.[76] Thus, Suetonius focuses on Nero's morals and personality, or lack thereof as the case may be, glossing over major items and including scandal and gossip to 'impose order on the facts'—to put it in Wallace-Hadrill's words—while painting his literary portrait of Nero.[77] As far as Christianity was concerned, Suetonius saw fit to gloss over its existence, for as a Roman, he held that worship was a matter of ritual, not belief as espoused by early Christians. Therefore, blaming Nero for the fire served Suetonius's purposes to erase Christianity from history and enhance the dramatic defects of Nero's life, thus keeping this emperor 'within the bounds of mortality' as Momigliano puts

73. Shaw, 'Myth of the Neronian Persecution', p. 89.

74. R. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 48-49.

75. Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 17.5; John F. Healy, *Pliny the Elder: Natural History. A Selection* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. ix-x, xiii.

76. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1983), pp. 110, 141.

77. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, pp. 13, 122-23, 202.

it.[78] Such drama was expected by Suetonius's equestrian readers, who found titillation and entertainment in the theatricality and melodrama of Nero's life. Suetonius delivered this to them in spades.[79]

Cassius Dio, like Suetonius, also seemingly abhorred Christianity. For Dio, innovations in religion like that of the Christians and the devotees of the cult of Isis were irrelevant to the traditional Roman social order.[80] For the period covered by this article in his *Roman History*, Dio does not refer to Christianity once. Perhaps his original references to Christianity were so hostile they were omitted by later Christian excerptors and epitomists of his work that have come down to us, or more likely, perhaps Dio felt Christianity deserved Roman persecution and thereby left out it of the pages of his traditional Roman history.[81]

Although Tacitus is our only main ancient historical source to draw a connection between the fire and the punishment of the Christians by Nero, he was not in fact the only ancient writer to do so. In fact, many early Christian writers also drew the same connection. The biblical source Hebrews mentions persecution under Nero as being 'full of suffering' (Heb. 10.32-33), and 1 Peter likens Rome at the time to Babylon (1 Pet. 5.13). Revelation—another first-century biblical source—also refers to 'the Beast' waging 'war against the saints' (Rev. 13.3-14), while the end of John's Gospel also alludes to the violent deaths that were to come to Jesus' disciples (Jn 21.18). More specifically, in addition to these biblical sources, *1 Clement*, written at the end of the first century or start of the second century in Rome itself, describes the persecution and execution of those Christians who lived under Nero, includ-

78. A. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 100. See also Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, pp. 190, 202; Tomas Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 271.

79. Donald Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999), pp. 149, 152-54.

80. Fergus Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 108; Adam A. Kemezis, *Greek Narratives of the Roman Empire under the Severans: Cassius Dio, Philostratus and Herodian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 280.

81. Millar, *Study of Cassius Dio*, p. 179.

ing Peter and Paul (1 Clem. 5).[82] Furthermore, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, a Syrian manuscript dated to 70–120 CE, also refers to Nero's persecution against 'the plant which the Twelve Apostles of the Beloved will have planted'.[83] Likely from Rome from around the same time, the *Shepherd of Hermas* makes clear reference to the 'crucifixions, and wild beasts for the sake of his [Jesus'] name'[84]—precisely the same punishments Tacitus states were used by Nero in the aftermath of the Great Fire—while the *Apocalypse of Peter*, a manuscript from Syria or Alexandria from 115–50 CE, talks about Nero as 'the son of the one who is in Hades' and as a persecutor of the Church.[85] Of course, this last source may base its claims upon a reading of Tacitus. However, the designation of Nero appears original. In fact, it may be argued that each built upon earlier written and oral historical traditions, with their own unique features, that may not be entirely unhistorical embellishments. Furthermore, although these early Christian references to the persecution under Nero are highly stylized and religious in tone, Lans and Bremmer conclude they clearly stem from a historical persecution of the Christians by Nero for their alleged incendiarism of the Great Fire, for 'it is highly unlikely that Nero made such an impact on the early Christian imagination if the link between him and the Christians was the result only of a later incidental association'.[86]

82. O. Zwierlein, *Petrus in Rom: Die literarischen Zeugnisse* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 245-331; O. Zwierlein, *Petrus und Paulus in Jerusalem und Rom: Vom neuen Testament zu den apokryphen Apostelakten* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), pp. 89-104, 276-79, 285-90.

83. *Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 4.1-4.

84. Herm. Vis. 1.1.1.

85. T. Nicklas, 'Jewish, Christian, Greek? The Apocalypse of Peter as a Witness of Early Second Century Christianity in Alexandria', in L. Arcari (ed.), *Beyond Conflicts: Cultural and Religious Cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the 1st and 6th Century CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), pp. 27-46; Jan N. Bremmer, 'The Apocalypse of Peter as the First Century Martyr Text: Its Date, Provenance and Relationship with 2 Peter', in J. Frey, M. den Dulk and J. van der Watt (eds.), *2 Peter and the Apocalypse of Peter: Towards a New Perspective* (Biblical Interpretation, 174; Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 75-98.

86. Birgit Van der Lans and J.N. Bremmer, 'Tacitus and the Persecution of the Christians: An Invention of Tradition?', *Eirene* 53 (2017), pp. 299-331 (316).

In addition to these sources, later during the mid-second century CE, Melito, Bishop of Sardis, stated that Nero made many false accusations against many Christians, and was persuaded to do this by many malicious slanderers, who might have been a group of mainstream Jews in Rome at the time.[87] Around the same time, Tertullian of Carthage also stated that Nero persecuted many Christians.[88] A century and a half later, Eusebius of Caesarea also recorded that Nero persecuted the Christians of Rome, after the Great Fire of 64 CE.[89] Lactantius also, around the same time, recorded that Nero persecuted the Christians.[90]The fourth-century CE Roman emperor, Julian the Apostate, did not leave behind any blame for the 64 CE fire on the Christians, in any of his extant writings, either.[91] Finally, in the fifth century CE, Orosius reported that Nero had been responsible for the fire, and complicit in its extent, and compliant to his own desires to persecute the Christians of Rome immediately after the Great Fire of 64 CE. These sources appear to build upon the claims made by earlier sources, with largely unique evidence not entirely made explicit by Tacitus and Clement. Thus, all of these sources appear not to be following each other blindly, but to be supporting each other through similar, though not entirely the same, historical claims. All of this evidence, compiled with the evidence in Tacitus, contextualizes it to such a degree as to conclusively show that Nero was responsible for the Great Fire of 64 CE, and the aftermath, including the persecution of the early Christians of Rome in that year, and for a duration afterwards.[92]

Paul and Peter

There is some interesting circumstantial evidence that suggests that Paul might have died sometime shortly afterwards following his first hearing—an

87. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.13.18; 4.26.2-14.

88. Tertullian, *Apol.* 2.6; 5.3; *Scorp.* 15.3; *Nat.* 1.7.8.

89. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25.4; 3.1.2; 3.33.1-4.

90. Lactantius, *Mort.* 2.5-7; 12-15; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 8.6; J. Rougé, 'L'incendie de Rome en 64 et l'incendie de Nicomédie en 303', in *Mélanges d'histoire ancienne: Offerts à William Seston* (Publication de la Sorbonne, 9; Paris: E. de Boccard, 1974), pp. 433-41; Shaw, 'Myth of the Neronian Persecution', p. 93.

91. Anthony A. Barrett, *Rome Is Burning: Nero and the Fire that Ended a Dynasty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 290 n. 100.

92. Orosius, *Hist. adv. Pag.* 7.7.

argument presented by McKechnie. For, between 62 CE and 65 CE, Poppaea Sabina, Nero's wife, had been a holder of Jewish beliefs and held clout among palace officials and to a degree over Nero himself. At her apparent request, Nero ruled in favour of Jewish Temple priests over others in every trial brought before him. Thus, McKechnie argues that Paul's trial was decided in this same way, and that Nero ruled in favour of Paul's accusers. This would apparently mean that Paul was beheaded shortly thereafter, a full year prior to the outbreak of the Neronian persecution.[93] In support of McKechnie's conclusion is the notion that there is certainly no direct ancient information, contemporaneous with Paul, about the outcome of his trial. Most certainly, as Haacker puts it, the trial's 'outcome is left open to the imagination (or the memory) of the readers'.[94] However, as Wilson points out, Acts was completed before Paul's trial began.[95] Furthermore, there is the early tradition that Paul was executed during the persecution of 64 CE—a tradition that draws upon many ancient sources, both written and oral, kept alive in the source material that is extant.[96]

In contravention to McKechnie's argument, according to the first-century CE Christian leader Clement of Rome, Paul was acquitted by Nero. He then adds that Paul then went ahead on a mission to Spain as he had hoped to do while penning his letter to the church in Rome (Rom. 15.24, 28; 1 Clem. 5).[97] Needless to say, Clement's proof about Rome is not conclusive, but rather informs us that by the time *1 Clement* was written, Clement and others believed he had travelled west to the Iberian peninsula deliberately on a mission to the 'limit of the west', as Clement reported.[98] These words may be based on nothing more than Paul's brief statement in Romans that he had wished to

93. Paul McKechnie, 'Judaean Embassies and Cases before Roman Emperors, AD 44–66', *JTS* 56 (2005), pp. 339-61.

94. Klaus Haacker, 'Paul's Life', in James D.G. Dunn (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 19-33 (31).

95. A.N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1997), p. 248.

96. F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), p. 441.

97. Bruce, *Paul*, p. 447.

98. David L. Eastman, *Paul the Martyr: The Cult of the Apostle in the Latin West* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), pp. 18-19, 144-46.

travel to Spain to teach there (Rom. 15.24, 28).[99] Or, arguably, Clement was trying to give hope, and direction, to Christians fearful or suffering during, or after, Domitian's (reigned 81–96 CE) contemporaneous persecution against the Christians in Rome. This tradition continued well into the second and third centuries. In the *Acts of Peter*, a Gnostic historical work written around 180 CE, and the *Muratorian Fragment*, from a list of New Testament books drawn up in Rome in the late second century CE, most particularly in the Varcelli manuscript in Latin, Paul was acquitted. Then, he travelled to Spain from Italy, immediately following his acquittal by Nero's court.[100]

Although we do not possess a detailed account or explanation of the proceedings of Paul's trial in 63 CE, leading up to the persecution, specifically since public records of hearings were discontinued as a phenomenon in Rome around 50 CE, we do know details of how Nero conducted trials.[101] Acts does not record how Paul was tried, perhaps to leave out a parallel trial with Jesus Christ's own, and perhaps because Luke was not there to witness it and had no access to eye-witnesses, which he often relied upon when writing Acts (Lk. 1.2).[102] Still, Suetonius provides us with data on how Nero conducted his trials. Every trial lasted for one day, after which on the following day Nero would deliver his verdict and findings. Each trial Nero conducted opened with the prosecution team delivering evidence, arguments and findings. After their case was heard, the defence team would then present their own and any overriding evidence. Finally, Nero would write-up his deliberations before retiring and delivering his verdict and sentence the following day.[103] Accusers on the part of the plaintiff would accuse the defendant of breaking Roman law (*iniuria*).[104] Paul could have been accused by any number of these. However, if an accuser was found to have accused falsely (*calumnia*)

99. Bruce, *Paul*, p. 447.

100. Bruce, *Paul*, p. 449.

101. Bruce W. Winter, 'Acts and Food Shortages', in D.W.J. Gill and C. Gempf (eds.), *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting: Volume 2. Graeco-Roman Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 59-78.

102. J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 70.

103. Suetonius, *Nero* 15.

104. O.F. Robinson, *The Criminal Law of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 50.

before Nero, he was open to prosecution himself, and the punishment for this was death (Acts 24.1-2).[105]

As for the defendant, it was permissible for him or her to be present in the court, as a legal right. Defence could present witnesses, even if subpoenas were not enforced, and present documents, including official and unofficial government records, official complaints, official and unofficial letters, and any business memoranda;[106] the stakes were extremely high. Under Nero, the outcome could mean execution for either side. For instance, inciting public riots (*vis*), whether by Paul or the officials of states he travelled around, had the penalty of execution, and assembling a crowd or mob to do violence to an individual like Paul, or to the Roman state (*maiestas* and *perduellio*) by someone like Paul, also carried the death penalty.[107] In order to help him reach his verdict after each case was presented, Nero had the benefit of a panel of jurists, called a *consilium*—although their role was not to deliver the verdict, but to simply advise Nero as he formulated his if required (Acts 25.12).[108] The internal evidence in Acts and the New Testament does not repudiate the case that Paul was arguably tried before Nero in this traditionally Neronian manner (Acts 25.11; Eph. 6.19-20; Col. 4.3).[109]

As to who represented the apostle as his leading attorney, Mauck suggests it may have been Theophilus, to whom Luke's Gospel, and its sequel Acts, were addressed. Theophilus was a Roman official who sought from Luke his 'orderly account' to reach 'certainty' concerning Paul and his Christian faith.[110] Mauck detects that he held investigator (*cognitionibus*) powers and the skills of a rhetorician.[111] Mauck and Haacker argue that Luke composed his 'brief' to Theophilus on Paul's behest, and also to convert each reader and

105. Robinson, *Criminal Law*, pp. 5, 99, 102.

106. Winter, 'Acts and Food Shortages', p. 309; Robinson, *Criminal Law*, p. 5.

107. Robinson, *Criminal Law*, pp. 74-75, 78, 80; Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting: Volume 5. Diaspora Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 6; John W. Mauck, *Paul on Trial: The Book of Acts as a Defense of Christianity* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), pp. 12-13.

108. Robinson, *Criminal Law*, p. 10.

109. Mauck, *Paul on Trial*, pp. 14-17.

110. See the salutation 'Most Excellent' (Lk. 1.3; Acts 23.26). On Luke's purposes to write Theophilus defence material for Theophilus on behalf of Paul, see Lk. 1.1-4; Mauck, *Paul on Trial*, pp. ix, 21-23.

111. Mauck, *Paul on Trial*, pp. 26-28.

listener to faith in Christ, as his mentor Paul tried to do while providing a defence before Agrippa I (Acts 26.28).[112] This explains why Luke so heavily incorporated defence material against any potential charge that could have been brought against Paul.[113] Among those included are the discourses that proved Paul did not incite rebellion against the Jewish Temple or against Rome itself, nor that his Christ had any designs on strict temporal power, either. In all, some fifty-nine arguments laid bare by Luke refuting all incriminating evidence and charges have been detected in Luke's account of Paul's life in Acts by Mauck.[114]

We also have solid biblical evidence of the adventures of Paul after his trial, before the persecution. 1 Timothy and Titus appear both to have been written in Macedonia. In Paul's letter to Titus, Paul leaves Crete after a visit there and heads to Macedonia. In 1 Timothy, Paul asks Timothy to meet up with him later in Nicoplis in Epirus. Possibly both epistles were written at around the same time in Macedonia, after a visit to Crete and just before a visit to Epirus (1 Tim. 1.3; Tit. 1.5; 3.12). Then, in 2 Timothy, Paul mentions his visits to the city of Corinth and Troas by the Aegean, before a visit to Miletus, another island of the Aegean Sea (2 Tim. 4.13, 20). In 2 Timothy, Luke is with Paul (2 Tim. 4.11). From there, Paul next appears in Rome as a victim of Nero's persecution. If he did find his way to Rome from Asia or Miletus, it is possible he was arrested, as Peter warned against in 1 Peter, when he requested Christians to be prepared to give a formal defence before antagonists and authorities, at around that time. Or it may be argued Paul journeyed by ship and land to Rome itself. It was at that time the Christians there faced pressure of many types owing to the escalating persecution, and Paul, as a leader of the Roman church together with Peter, and writer of the letter to the Romans—a scriptural letter—may have believed he needed to be there. In Acts 14:19-21 Paul was nearly killed in Lystra, or rather just outside it after preaching there. Then he recovered and re-entered the city and kept preaching, and won large numbers there over a period of time. Later, throughout Syria and Cilicia, after finding hardships in some of those parts, he returned 'strengthening the churches' (Acts 15.41). Furthermore, after being re-

112. Mauck, *Paul on Trial*, p. ix; Haacker, 'Paul's Life', p. 31.

113. Mauck, *Paul on Trial*, pp. 5-8.

114. See the 'Chart of Fifty-Nine Arguments in Defense of Paul' in Mauck, *Paul on Trial*, pp. 34-40.

leased from prison in Philippi, he returned to the believers in the city and encouraged them before leaving (Acts 16.40).

Indeed, in Romans, Paul dictated to his secretary, Tertius, that he (Paul) had hoped for so long to travel to Rome and spend some time there before sailing or trekking overland to Spain to preach and evangelize. Perhaps, he had hoped this journey to Rome would be a short one before making his way to Spain. In any event, although Paul had some time to go to Spain between his acquittal and the persecution, Paul's Pastoral letters do not mention any fond memories of Spain, nor any plans to go there in the immediate future. This silence is possibly evidence that Paul did not go to Spain and that Clement contrived the story, or heard of it, and presented it to other Christians under Domitian, in the hope to give them direction in the face of Domitian's persecution and perhaps a hint as to where to go to flee and find safety (Rom. 15.23-24).

These Pastoral letters have been the subject of conjecture for many years. The earliest copy of any of these letters comes from Egypt and is housed in the John Rylands University Library. It contains on one side excerpts of Titus 1:11-15, while on the other is part of Tit. 2:3-8. It is the earliest we have and is dated to around 200 CE, or slightly earlier. However, Polycarp's *Letter to the Ephesians* also makes many mentions of these letters, called the 'Pastoral Letters' by convention. This epistle is usually dated to around 120 CE.[115] Tertullian of Carthage notably wrote that Marcion (c. 85–160 CE) knew of these letters, but purposefully rejected including them in his canon of scripture. His contemporary Tatian (c. 120–80 CE), however, accepted them as worthy literature, but only Paul's letter to Titus as canonical Scripture.[116] The 'Pastoral Letters' bear striking resemblances to other Christian and Jewish writings, such as the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and the Gospels and Acts.[117] They also have some traits similar to *Didache* (c. 100), *Didescalia Apostolorum* (200s CE), *Apostolic Church Order* (c. 300 CE),

115. K. Berding, 'Polycarp of Smyrna's View of the Authorship of 1 and 2 Timothy', *VC* 53 (1999), pp. 349-60; Paul Hartog, *Polycarp and the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001); Raymond F. Collins, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (London: John Knox, 2002), pp. 1-2.

116. Tertullian, *Marc.* 5.21; Collins, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, p. 2.

117. See the farewell discourses of Lk. 22.25-38; Jn 13–16, and Acts 20.18-35; Collins, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, p. 6.

Apostolic Constitutions (fourth century CE), and *Testamentum Domini* (fifth century CE).[118]

Some believe it is impossible to date the 'Pastorals' precisely even if their language in Greek has much in common with first-century Hellenistic literature stylistically.[119] However, Witherington believes they can be dated, in their present form, to between 65 CE and 95 CE. He has noticed that of the three-hundred-and-six Greek words used in Greek literature and the 'Pastorals', 278 come from works dated to prior to 50 CE. Furthermore, he notices that if Marcion knew of the epistles by the early second century, when he drew up his canon of scripture, then he knew and read them for many years prior to drawing it up.[120]

The 'Pastoral Epistles' are relevant when these letters' dates of authorship by Paul are repeatedly, and consistently, determined to be after his acquittal.[121] Eusebius and a consensus of commentators and modern historians place them after Paul's acquittal and before his death, during the persecution of 64 CE.[122] Still, some consider these 'Pastoral Epistles' to have been compilations of Paul's teachings, by friends and disciples, presented in a pseudonymous manner, with Paul as the 'author'.[123] But, of course, it is to be expected that some teachings in the Pastorals may have been longstanding, but other messages, like that which states that Paul expected his life to soon be poured out like a libation, more recent in inspiration (2 Tim. 4.6).[124] It is true, of the 901 words contained in the Pastorals, only 306 of these appear in other biblical Pauline letters—and of these, 121 appear in the second-century

118. Collins, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, p. 6.

119. Collins, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, pp. 9, 13.

120. Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*: *Volume II. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1–2 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), pp. 53, 61.

121. Bruce, *Paul*, p. 443.

122. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.22.2-8; M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 3, 15-20, 126-32, 152-62.

123. P.N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 93-97, 115-20; P.N. Harrison, *Paulines and Pastorals* (London: Villiers Publications, 1964), pp. 106-12; Arland J. Hultgren, 'The Pastoral Epistles', in James D.G. Dunn (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 141-55 (144).

124. Bruce, *Paul*, p. 443.

CE Apostolic Fathers and Apologists.[125] Most likely, the style of the Pastorals stands in partial juxtaposition to those of other biblical Pauline letters because Paul and Luke worked on these letters together. After all, in 2 Tim. 4.11, only Luke was with Paul, during the time of that letter's dictation and taking-down.[126] Indeed, the three 'Pastoral Epistles' are, as Harding notes, 'sufficiently similar in style to commend the view that they were written by the same person'.[127] In other words, Paul was released, wrote the Pastorals or dictated them to Luke, and was then arrested a second time, and executed in 64 CE. Therefore, the possibility that these letters were written by Paul in around 63 CE, and later slightly edited by Luke, who survived Paul, or by later followers of his between 65 CE and 95 CE, resulting in their present form, is an interesting scenario that cannot be easily discounted.[128]

Bruce suggested that Paul was acquitted by Nero and then travelled to the eastern Mediterranean before heading for Spain in the Mediterranean Sea's west. After that, he was arrested a second time by Nero during his persecution and killed.[129] Later, Murphy O'Connor reversed this order and says that after leaving Rome, Paul took a mission to Spain and then returned to his more familiar East, before dying at the hands of Nero.[130] But it is interesting that, in juxtaposition, *1 Clement* gives no mention of Paul's eastern activities, and the 'Pastorals' give not even the slightest hint that Paul even arrived in Spain. If *1 Clement* is based upon Paul's brief comment that he wished to visit Rome on the way to Spain, a mission that the New Testament nowhere refers to as taking place, then this would make Clement's proof redundant. In other words, the 'Pastorals' are realistic and reliable accounts to Paul's activities after his trial and pardon by the emperor Nero. For good reason, Clement stated Paul was heroic—a sentiment used by Eusebius in his estimation of the

125. Hultgren, 'Pastoral Epistles', p. 142.

126. C.F.D. Moule, 'The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles: A Reappraisal', *BJRL* 47 (1964–65), pp. 430-52 (430-36); A. Strobel, 'Schreiben des Lukas? Zum sprachlichen Problem der Pastoralbriefe', *NTS* 15 (1968–69), pp. 191-210 (191-94).

127. Mark Harding, 'The Pastoral Epistles', in Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (eds.), *All Things to All Cultures: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 328-52 (335).

128. J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London: A. & C. Black, 1963), p. 9; Bruce, *Paul*, p. 444.

129. Bruce, *Paul*, pp. 441, 445-46, 448, 450.

130. Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, pp. 359-65.

apostle being victorious. Intriguingly, Revelation calls each martyr the recipient of a victor's crown—the crown of life. That is, eternally. No doubt he received that too, as a worthy apostle on earth throughout his life (Rev. 2.10; 3.11; 1 Clem. 5).[131]

The Fates of Paul and Peter in Rome

From the Aegean region, Paul next appears in Rome as a victim of Nero's persecution. According to Gaius, a Christian writing in the late second century CE, Paul was arrested by guards in Rome and beheaded upon Roman authorities' orders, during the 64 CE persecution, beside the Ostian Way.[132] This is confirmed by parallel tradition in the *Acts of Peter and Paul*, from future decades, that Paul was beheaded at Aquae Salviae (now Tre Fontane), near the third milestone, on the Ostian Way, outside Rome's ancient Julio-Claudian walls (*Acts Pet*. 80). By the late second century CE, a monument had been erected on the site of Paul's tomb, a mile closer to Rome's walls than the site of his execution.[133] According to the *Calendar of Philocalus* (354 CE) and the *Liber Pontificalis* (530 CE), the body of Paul had been interred inside a catacomb by the Appian Way by the year 258 CE.[134] In the late fourth century CE, Ambrose of Milan associated this road with Paul and Peter. Pope Damasus (366–83 CE) declared that the bodies of Paul and Peter had been interred in this same catacomb, in the part that extended under the Appian Basilica Apostolorum. Chadwick and Bruce also argue that this was temporarily so, due to the persecutions under the emperor Valerian (253–60 CE), especially in the year 258 CE.[135]

However, after the demise and death of Valerian, Paul's body was repeatedly moved back to his traditional tomb. Peter's was moved back to his on the Vatican Hill, also reputedly. Over Paul's original tomb, Constantine 'the Great' built a small basilica, around 324 CE. This was replaced in the late fourth century by a larger basilica. This structure remained in place until 16th

131. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 2.25.

132. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 2.25.7; 3.31.4.

133. Bruce, *Paul*, pp. 450-51.

134. H. Chadwick, 'St Peter and St Paul in Rome: The problem of the Memoria Apostolorum ad Catacumbas', *JTS* 8 (1957), pp. 31-52 (31-38).

135. Chadwick, 'St Peter and St Paul in Rome', p. 41 n. 2; Bruce, *Paul*, p. 451.

July 1823, when it sustained serious fire damage. It was rebuilt, and publicly reconsecrated, on 10th December 1854. It is now called 'The Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls'.[136]

As Potter has noted, Constantine 'the Great' often dedicated new churches throughout the city of Rome, at times converting old buildings that had public importance into new buildings for Christian worship. Thus, he built his basilica over the site of this earlier sacred site to Paul. The tradition surrounding this site was not his own invention, but rather built upon the existent tradition surrounding it. Thus, at once Constantine set in place his ambitions for Paul's reverence in this part of Rome, while setting it within his own ambitions to produce an 'architectural ode' that celebrated them as well.[137] For, as Drake has pointed out, as *pontifex maximus* Constantine was head of the Roman state religion. Therefore, under his reign, politics and religion were intertwined, as the emperor sought to encourage, through various means, correct belief (orthodoxy).[138] It was not to be the only church building built upon a sacred site to Christianity in the Roman world under Constantine. The 'Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem', the 'Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives', and the 'Church of the Holy Sepulchre', which were dedicated by the emperor's mother Helen and Bishop Macarius of Jerusalem, are three of the most notable church buildings built for Christian worship over older worship sites under Constantine 'the Great'. All of the buildings, including that which was built by Constantine 'the Great' over this sacred site to Paul, were built for various reasons, chief among them being the desire to honour the martyrs as a spur to fortitude under any future persecution that might eventuate throughout the Roman world.[139]

136. E. Kirschbaum, *The Tombs of St Peter and St Paul* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1959), pp. 165-72.

137. D. Potter, *Constantine: The Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 163-65.

138. H.A. Drake, 'The Impact of Constantine on Christianity', in N. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 111-36 (114, 123).

139. J.W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992). See also G. Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), p. 57; M. Edwards, 'The Beginnings of Christian-

Stephenson argues that other reasons on the part of Constantine to produce churches over sacred Christian sites, in Rome and elsewhere, included a desire to instill a 'coherent moral framework' with 'Christianity as a common faith'. This policy was set in place in order to appease God, while venerating houses of worship utilized by bishops and other clergy that were subordinate to Constantine, and his own religious powers as emperor and *pontifex maximus*.[140] As Drake points out, Constantine viewed bishops and clergy as fellow-players 'in the game of empire'.[141] With these newly dedicated places of Christian worship, together with bishops and clergy subordinate to him, Constantine set about putting into place the religious transformation of the Roman world. Toleration and freedom of worship for Christians throughout Rome and its empire were of paramount importance to him, raising the political and social status of Christians under his banner of imperial rule, and thereby consolidating power in his hands further.[142]

During excavations of 'The Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls', two slabs were found underneath the position of the high altar, bearing the words PAVLO and APOSTOLO MART (To Paul, Apostle and Martyr). Epigraphists have dated the lettering to the reign of Constantine. It is believed they once belonged to a memorial that was once situated somewhere in Constantine's basilica for Paul on this site. Of course, there may have been damage to Paul's bones if they had survived the centuries and still remained there by the nineteenth century. However, they may have been reinterred underneath the new high altar, upon the church's direction.[143] If so, they may still be there. In 2006 a stone sarcophagus was discovered, underneath the new high altar, into which Vatican archaeologists drilled. Inside, they found ancient purple linen, gold, blue textiles, red incense, protein, limestone, and fragments of bone. Pope Benedict XVI announced in 2009 that these once

ization', in N. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 137-58 (144-45).

140. P. Stephenson, *Constantine: Roman Emperor, Christian Victor* (New York: Overlook Press, 2015), pp. 234, 256, 258.

141. H.A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 73.

142. T. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 49-52, 56-57; T. Barnes, *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2014), pp. 84, 93.

143. Kirschbaum, *Tombs*, pp. 179-84; Bruce, *Paul*, p. 451.

belonged to someone who lived in the first or second centuries CE. Whilst it cannot be established that these belonged to Paul, it is possible that bone traces found inside this sarcophagus might have, once.[144]

Peter's death is just as interesting, if not more macabre. Crucifixion was a form of execution used by Nero for Christians during his persecution. Early tradition states that Peter was crucified upside-down. Tertullian mentions Peter being executed by crucifixion.[145] This is confirmed by Eusebius, who in the early fourth century CE recorded that Peter was crucified head-down upon request,[146] and Jerome confirms this also, writing around the same time, that he was executed by these means and buried somewhere in the Vatican hill.[147] Although it cannot be ruled out that Peter purchased Roman citizenship, allowing him to take a more central role within the church in Rome, crucifixion was not usually reserved for Roman citizens. But Helyer reflects that 'occasionally Roman soldiers did crucify people in various positions just to satisfy their sadistic impulses'. Thus, Helyer concludes, the idea that Peter was executed under Nero's persecution by crucifixion—which may have been extremely rare for Roman citizens to undergo, or perhaps Roman citizens by birth—is not implausible.[148]

Rome Rises from the Ashes

The damage done to Rome by Nero's persecution was immense, especially to Christians living there. Still, Christians rebuilt a new church there together with Christians from abroad, most notably from Syria.[149] After Peter's death,

144. Stephen Brown, 'Pope Says Bone Fragments Found in St Paul's Tomb' (June 28, 2009), see online: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-saint-bone-idUSTRE55R22O20090628.

145. Tertullian, *Scorp*. 15.

146. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 3.1.

147. Jerome, *Vir. ill*. 1.

148. Seneca the Younger, *Dial*. 6; Josephus, *War* 5.449-551; Y. Yadin, 'Pesher Nahum (4QpNahum) Reconsidered', *IEJ* 21 (1971), pp. 1-12; Helyer, *Life and Witness of Peter*, p. 197.

149. Juvenal, *Sat*. 3.62. On the rise of Christianity in Antioch generally, see Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation between Judaism and Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Linus presided over the running of the church in Rome, and after him, Anenclitus. After him, there ascended the brilliant Clement. He had known Paul, as had perhaps the previous leaders of Rome. He was a gifted rhetorician, a learned teacher of the Bible and literature, and a wise Christian. He too was a man who was all things to all people, like Paul. In *1 Clement*, he tells the story of the Phoenix: an Arabian bird that lives in Arabia, but flies west over the Red Sea to die and be reborn in Heliopolis ('City of the Sun' in Greek) in Egypt. Like a butterfly, the Phoenix re-emerges new, and as it grows bird-like it becomes a great Phoenix—a king of a bird that sings. According to Clement this bird is a symbol of the resurrection (1 Clem. 25). Very cross-like: life from death, and also very much like the church in Rome, which came back to life after the persecutions of Nero and Domitian, who died in 98 CE. Clement may have learned the story of the Phoenix from Paul. After all, Galatians states that Paul spent much time in Arabia after his conversion, and as someone who lived in Gentile Tarsus in Cilicia, and elsewhere throughout the Gentile world, Paul probably knew such myths. It could be argued that Paul had given instructions to Clement to spread the story of the Phoenix, to help the people have hope in the resurrection before, during and after times of persecution (Gal. 1.17).

By the end of the first century CE, Clement wrote to the churches of Corinth, not just as the church leader in Rome, but with authority as a universal teacher and pastor, giving advice to Christians living there. Although *1 Clement* displays signs of originative and emergent primacy of the Roman church over others,[150] the primacy of the church in Rome over all others of the Roman Empire in the late first century CE was not firmly established. Therefore, it cannot be confirmed, for that early stage.[151] However, *1 Clement* is a communal letter, written to the large Christian community of Corinth at that, which led the churches of all of Achaea. Therefore, the Roman church most certainly reserved the right to much honour over other Christian communities around the world.[152] *The Shepherd of Hermas*, also believed by modern historians to have been written in Rome in the late first century CE to

150. L.L. Welborn, 'Roman Political Ideology and the Authority of First Clement', in Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (eds.), *Into All the World: Emergent Christianity in its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), pp. 372-92 (374).

151. Welborn, 'Roman Political Ideology', p. 373.

152. Welborn, 'Roman Political Ideology', p. 377.

early second century CE, likewise exhibits interests in the administration, running and conduct of Christian churches, throughout Rome and foreign places.[153] Thus, by the time these works were written, the church in Rome showed more than signs of surviving. It was also thriving, empowered among Christians, within the city of Rome and throughout the empire. This indicates the tenacity of its love for God, for themselves and for others—and for the message of Christ, intended for all the world. For this, one can give much credit to the likes of Paul and Peter. Their message of the gospel was based on God and the themes of Jesus Christ—the re-emergent life from apparent death into the kingdom of God, and the resurrection for us at the end of time, once again into the kingdom of God.[154]

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that Christianity is like a phoenix rising from the ashes: it lives on despite Nero's persecution. It thrives, in part due to the likes of Paul and Peter who paid the ultimate price during Nero's persecution for their part in the promotion and development of Christianity in Rome and perhaps elsewhere. Their legacy continued even in Rome, as Rome rebuilt and rose from the ashes of the past, afresh and anew. No doubt, Christians were instrumental in the eventual rebuilding of Rome, following the fire of 64 CE, only to be persecuted in Nero's persecution. However, many Christians clearly survived in Rome despite the persecution and were in time joined by other Christians from around the empire, including Antioch, in support for their presence in Rome, if not their lives. The bodies of Paul and Peter were revered after their deaths, which is evident in a still-present Christian community, both during and after the persecution, and the reverence they were held in during their lives and times in the city of Rome itself. But, in the mayhem of Christianity's official disfavour in Nero's eyes, Roman society turned against the Church, and they died as a result. Still, their memory lived on, and

153. William L. Lane, 'Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity during the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, 1 Clement', in Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (eds.), *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 196-244 (236-37); Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, pp. 52-56.

154. Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, pp. 52-56.

many clamoured to rebuild the church of Rome, along with Rome itself, in the aftermath of the persecution, and indeed even the fire. That, in itself, is testament to the glowing examples of Paul and Peter to change people's lives for the better in Rome while still alive, and beyond. It is also testament to the lives of other Roman Christians, who followed their teachings and who followed Jesus Christ as Christians, but who lost their lives in the persecution. Their lives were also glowing examples of how the Christian faith changed the lives of many people for the better, who, while mortal, had hope beyond mortal death.