

Persecution and the Early Church:
a series of three Zoom Sessions
Thursdays March 4th, 11th, 18th: 7 pm to 8 pm



March 4th: **"The destroyers of our Gods": pagan motives and their consequences**

The Romans were not in general intolerant of strange religions, so why did they persecute the Christians? What did the Christians do to deserve it? Or was it what they did not do?

Reading: Pliny the Younger *Letters* X, 96-7. Emperor Maximinus Daza: Rescript to the City of Tyre of 312 AD (in Eusebius *HE IX*, 7, 2-15 = 283-85)

March 11th: **Fear, apostasy, flight and defiance: the range of Christian reaction**

Our idea of the persecutions is dominated by the passions of individual martyrs, but many of these are fiction. Even the authentic passions record only the last stages of the martyr's trial and execution; it is as if all we had of *Hamlet* was the pile of bodies at the end of the final Act. A more rounded picture of Christian experience under persecution, especially of the fear that it engendered, can be gleaned from reading a wider range of sources.

Reading: Letters of Dionysius Patriarch of Alexandria (*HE VI*, 40-42 = 205-10)
Peter, Patriarch of Alexandria *Canons of Easter* 306

March 18th: **"Being made perfect": the spirituality of the martyrs**

The *inspirata patientia* of the martyrs, their 'inspired endurance', aroused admiration. Where did the inspiration come from?

Reading: Extracts from Origen *Exhortation to Martyrdom*
Passion of Polycarp (Musurillo 3-21 odd)
Passion of Phileas (Musurillo 330-345 or 353 odd)