



Polycarp's Martyrdom

In the year 156 an 86 year old man was brought before a Roman official and asked to renounce his atheism. He was no atheist by our standards. Rather he was the devout Christian bishop Polycarp. To the Romans however he was an atheist, for he refused to worship the emperor as a god along with the other gods of Rome.

Polycarp knew denial would mean a painful death – either being thrown into the arena with a wild animal or burned alive on a pyre. Three times he was questioned, three times invited to renounce his “atheism”, but no renunciation of Christ would he make. “Swear and I release; curse Christ” urged the Roman official, to which Polycarp replied “Eighty-six years have I served him (Christ), and he has done me no wrong: how then can

I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

Polycarp was not spared. A pyre was built and he was burned alive, but his words echo down through time to us: “Eighty-six years have I served him (Christ), and he has done me no wrong: how then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

Source: Based on a text from Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers* cited in *A New Eusebius. Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337.*