

Bio for  
**Polycarp**  
**The Bishop of Smyrna**  
**(AD ~69 – ~155 or ~166)**

Prepared by Jason Labonte

- Polycarp was likely a pupil of John the Apostle along with his friend Ignatius.
  - Both Tertullian and Jerome claim that he was anointed by John the Apostle as the bishop of Smyrna.
  - Eusebius believed that the John who wrote the book of Revelation was not John the apostle and that Polycarp was actually the disciple of this other John.
  - Usher suggested that he was the “messenger of the church in Smyrna” in the book of Revelation.
- Irenaeus was a pupil of Polycarp and wrote much about him.
- Eusebius claims that he traveled to Rome on one occasion to discuss the date of the celebration of Easter with the Bishop of Rome.
  - Rome wanted to change the date of Easter to be distinct from that of Passover.
  - Polycarp wanted to keep it in line with the Jewish calendar.
  - They were unable to come to an agreement.
- Polycarp is also known for his strong disagreement with the Gnostic teacher Marcion, considering him a heretic.
- Polycarp wrote a letter to the Philippian church.
  - It was in response to their writing him.
  - The letter was written in Greek, but we are missing large portions of the Greek manuscripts and must rely on Latin translations in some cases.
  - He discusses how to deal with a sinful elder named Valens, who was misusing the church’s finances.
  - He may make reference to an excerpt from Ephesians as being Scripture.
  - He asks about the details of Ignatius’ death. It was therefore probably written within a few months after Ignatius’ death in 107.
  - As an addendum to his letter to the Philippians, he attached the two letters he had received from Ignatius.
- A document, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, describes his death in Rome under Emperor Antoninus Pius from burning and/or stabbing, but the authenticity and date of this document are debated. It is the earliest written description of a martyrdom outside of the New Testament.

Sources:

<http://www.earlychurch.org.uk>

<http://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.html>

[http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/history/church\\_fathers.htm](http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/history/church_fathers.htm)