THE QUESTION

Did any early Christians hold high rank in the Roman Empire?

Asked by a THF member on August 22, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 6 numbered quotations · the 20 early Christian passages and 6 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-any-early-christians-hold-high-rank-in-the-roman-empire

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Yes, some did. Cyprian shows that senators, Roman knights, and members of the emperor's household were Christians in his day, and Origen says people of rank welcomed Christian teachers. These passages do not, however, name any Christian provincial governor; Tertullian names officials who treated Christians kindly but does not call them believers.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 5

Senators and knights faced punishment as Christians

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Cyprian reports an order from Emperor Valerian. It set out penalties for senators, men of rank and Roman knights who kept on being Christians. Such a rule only makes sense if believers were found in those high ranks.

1

> “But the truth about them is this: Valerian had sent a written order to the Senate stating that bishops, presbyters, and deacons should be punished at once; but that senators, men of rank, and Roman knights should lose their position and also be deprived of their property.”
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> “And if, after their wealth was taken away, they still persisted in being Christians, then they should also be beheaded.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 19, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 2 OF 5

Believers served in the emperor's own household

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The same order names members of Caesar's household who had confessed Christ. They were to lose their property and be sent in chains to the emperor's estates. Christians were serving close to the throne itself.

2

> “Moreover, people of Caesar's household, whoever among them had either confessed before or should now confess, should have their property confiscated and should be sent in chains, assigned to Caesar's estates.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 19, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

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POINT 3 OF 5

Origen says people of rank welcomed teachers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Answering a pagan critic, Origen says the church had grown so large that rich men, people of rank and high-born women received Christian teachers. He also says that being a Christian still brought more shame than honor in society.

3

“Indeed, at the present time, because of the large number of Christian believers, not only rich men but also people of rank, and refined and high-born ladies, receive the teachers of Christianity.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 9 **Source 15, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
(c. 215–254 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 5

Some officials went easy on Christians

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian, writing to a governor, names other officials who helped accused Christians or threw out false charges. He uses them as examples of fair rulers. He does not say these men were Christians themselves.

4

“Cincius Severus did so at Thysdris, when he himself suggested the remedy and showed the Christians how they should answer so that they might be acquitted.”

later in the same passage

“Pudens also at once dismissed a Christian who was brought before him, because he saw from the indictment that it was a case of malicious accusation.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *To Scapula* 4 **Source 13, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
(c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

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POINT 5 OF 5

Christians honored rulers as appointed by God

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Theophilus says the king is a man appointed by God to judge justly, to be honored but not worshipped. Polycarp tells a proconsul that Christians are taught to give due honor to authorities ordained by God. Christians respected public office even while refusing to worship rulers.

5 “He is not a god, but a man appointed by God, not to be worshipped, but to judge justly.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Theophilus of Antioch,** *To Autolycus* 11 (c. 169–183 AD) **Source 6, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

6 “But Polycarp said, "To you I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]; for we are taught to give all due honor (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities which are ordained of God. But as for these, I do not consider them worthy of receiving any account from me."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not name any Christian who served as a provincial governor.
- They do not show how many high-ranking Christians there were, or what offices they held.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 20 early Christian passages and 6 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–20, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (source 21, in Bible order), then 5 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain).

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"… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *20 passages from 13 writers*

Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · source 1*

1 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** "when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, "Swear by the fortune of Cæsar," he answered, "Since thou art vainly urgent that, as thou sayest, I should swear by… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *First Apology* (1885 English; on point 4) "such persons, some others also of the governors of provinces wrote to my most divine father… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *First Apology* "to the gods of my country. But, as they did not respond, I called upon those among us known as Christians. Upon investigation, I found a great number and multitude… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Address to the Greeks* 4 (1885 English; on point 5) "the sovereign order the payment of tribute, I am ready to render it… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Diatessaron* 41 (1885 English) "John 12:42 And many of the rulers also believed on him… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · source 6*

6 *To Autolycus* 11 **Quote 5, page 4** "king is His title and it is not lawful for another to use it… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · source 7*

7 *A Plea for the Christians* 37 (1885 English; on point 5) "who are more deserving to obtain the things they ask, than those who, like us, pray for your government, that you may, as is most equitable, receive the kingdom, son… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 8–10*

8 *Against Heresies: Book V* (1885 English; on point 5) "to whomsoever I will, I give them." For by the law of the same Being as calls men into existence are kings also appointed, adapted for those men who are… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Against Heresies: Book V* (1885 English; on point 5) "whatsoever they do to the subversion of justice, iniquitously, and impiously, and illegally, and tyrannically, in these things shall they also perish… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English; on point 2) "as to those believing ones who are in the royal palace, do they not derive the utensils they employ from the property which belongs to Cæsar… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 11–13*

11 *To Scapula* 2 (1885 English; on point 5) "whose well-being moreover, he must needs desire, with that of the empire over which he reigns so long as the world shall stand — for so long as that shall… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Apology* 33 (1885 English; on point 5) "why dwell longer on the reverence and sacred respect of Christians to the emperor, whom we cannot but look up to as called by our Lord to his office… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *To Scapula* 4 **Quote 4, page 3** Cincius Severus did so at Thysdris, when he himself suggested the remedy and showed the Christians how they should answer so that they might be acquitted. Vespronius Candidus dismissed a… [continues online] **read ›**

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Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 14*

14 *Refutation of All Heresies* 5 (1885 English; on point 2) “happened to be a domestic of one Carpophorus, a man of the faith belonging to the household of Caesar… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 15–16*

15 *Against Celsus* 9 (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** “if at any time they were pressed by a necessity of this sort, were contented with the mere supply of their wants, although many were willing to share (their abundance… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Against Celsus* 75 “if those who govern in the Church, and are called rulers of the divine nation—that is, the… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 17*

17 *Epistles and Epistolary Fragments* (1885 English) “who were engaged in the public service, were drawn into compliance by the very necessities of their official duties… [continues online] **read ›**

Gregory Thaumaturgus, *c. 240–270 AD · source 18*

18 *Metaphrase of Ecclesiastes* 10 (on point 5) “is also right to obey kings and rulers or potentates, and not to be… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 19*

19 *Epistles* **Quotes 1, 2, page 2** “of their property. And if, after their wealth was taken away, they still persisted in being Christians, then they should also be beheaded. But matrons should be deprived of their… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 20*

20 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) “Let a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, who goes to the army, and desires to retain both the Roman government and the sacerdotal administration, be deprived… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *1 verse, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

21 **Romans 13:1** Let every soul be in subjection to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *5 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Ecclesiastes 10:1

Mark 12:17

Acts 5:39

1 Timothy 2:1

Titus 3:1

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Did any early Christians hold high rank in the Roman Empire?” on August 22, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY