As will be shown in the first part of this article, there is sufficient evidence to reject the opinion that Julian the Apostate (361–363) persecuted the Christians. Nevertheless, it is sometimes argued, even by those who admit this, that the emperor ‘lapsed into violence against them on occasion’. In the second part of this paper I propose to show that at least in two notorious cases the emperor did not do so: I contest the views of those scholars who believe that Julian ordered Christians to be tortured and die a martyr’s death in Ancyra and in Caesarea.1

1 Chalcedon

Early in June 362 CE Julian and his army left Constantinople in order to travel eastwards in the direction of Antioch on the Orontes—in the Syrian capital Julian intended to prepare the expedition against the Persians which would end in disaster and which would cost him his life. According to some Christian sources the emperor met the old and blind bishop Maris of Chalcedon soon after his departure—Maris was really blind, whereas Chalcedon was often called ‘city of the blind’, because its first inhabitants had chosen the eastern bank of the Bosporus to found their city instead of the much more favourably situated western shore (where shortly afterwards Byzantium, later called Constantinople, arose). However, Maris’ handicap did not stop him from start-

* Thanks are due to Ines van de Wetering, who corrected my English.

1 Cf. G.W. Bowersock, Julian the Apostate (London 1978), 92: ‘Clever and cunning, Julian was now indisputably a persecutor’, and R.J. Penella, ‘Julian the Persecutor in Fifth Century Church Historians’, The Ancient World 24 (1993), 31–43 (31): ‘Even if he grew more and more impatient with Christians over the course of his reign, lapsed into violence against them on occasion, and threatened to unleash his anger upon them after returning from his Persian campaign, non-violence towards Christians apparently remained official policy through the whole of his reign.’
ing an argument with the emperor, whom he rebuked for his impiety, apostasy and atheism. Julian contemptuously replied that the bishop’s ‘Galilaean God’ would never cure him, whereupon Maris responded that he thanked the Lord for having taken away his sight, so that he could not see Julian’s impious face.²

Maris’ impertinent behaviour had no immediate consequences. Julian left the bishop alone and continued on his way. Zonaras, one of the authors who mention Julian’s encounter with Maris, relates the story without comment (Zonaras lived in the twelfth century, but is important because he used sources for his universal history which are lost to us). The fifth-century church historian Sozomen—who, improbably, places Julian’s altercation with Maris in Constantinople, not in Chalcedon—states that Julian deliberately reacted in this way, because he thought that paganism would be better promoted by a policy of leniency vis-à-vis the Christians than by punishment. Sozomen’s contemporary Socrates, who also wrote an ecclesiastical history, goes into much greater detail about the emperor’s behaviour and offers the following explanation: according to him Julian overlooked Maris’ boldness at the time, but had his revenge afterwards: ‘Julian had observed that those who died as martyrs under the reign of Diocletian were greatly honoured by the Christians, and he knew that many Christians had an urgent desire to become martyrs themselves. Refusing to grant them this pleasure he wreaked his vengeance upon them in