

MARTYRDOM AND THE FURTHERANCE OF GOD'S PLAN:  
THE VALUE OF DYING FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

by

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## ABSTRACT

This work deals with how God's purpose is furthered through the martyrdom event, appealing primarily to Scripture in formulating a conclusion. The construal, which appears to best summarize the biblical evidence, is the following: *Martyrdom, in respect to its contribution to the plan of God, can be described as a moment of climax or clarification in the ongoing struggle between the kingdoms of God and Satan, where the best and worst are brought out in all participants in the event; as a point of crescendo in the musical score of salvation history, where the full vibrancy of each instrument is clearly heard; as a foretaste of the so-called "Great Divide," where the dramatic polarization between good and evil takes place; and, consequently, as a "reality check" for observers or hearers of the event, reminding them that there is no middle ground between the kingdom of God and the domain of darkness.*

This conclusion was reached by examining the significance of martyrdom for all participants and observers (or later learners) of the event—namely, for the martyr himself or herself, for the persecutor, for God, for Satan, and for both believing and unbelieving observers. It can be demonstrated that each participant has a dramatic, even climatic experience: (1) the martyr experiences the ultimate test of faith, the ultimate identification with Christ, and gives the ultimate expression of devotion to Him, (2) the persecutor displays blatant hatred and rejection of God, which provides solid grounds for divine judgment, (3) the power of God's grace is brilliantly displayed through the martyr's endurance, and (4) Satan is publicly disgraced through his inability to overcome the martyr's perseverance. Thus, martyrdom can be rightly termed a *moment of climax*. The effect on observers, subsequently, is to challenge to conversion (unbelievers) or to radical commitment (believers), forcing a polarization between those who side with God, and those who side with Satan. Hence, martyrdom, for observers or learners of the event, provides a *moment of clarification*.

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## CHAPTER 1: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

In this dissertation we will embark on an investigation of an integral but little understood aspect of Christian faith and life--the experience of martyrdom. Particularly, we hope to discover what goals God is pursuing in allowing martyrdom, and how to conceptualize His purposes in a way that would enable believers today to grasp the significance of the event. Toward that end this introduction will acquaint the reader, among other things, with the basic goals and methodology of this study.

### *Thesis and Justification of Study*

The word “martyrdom” usually conjures up grotesque images of sufferers impaled on stakes, stretched out on the rack, crucified upside down, or given over to some other unimaginable torture. Martyrdom has been graphically described as “a word full of pain and blood, of the smell of death.”<sup>1</sup> Such a perception of martyrdom generally causes the average believer to shun the topic altogether and thus miss out on the positive contribution a proper understanding of martyrdom makes to a total Christian worldview.

Without denying the reality of suffering in martyrdom, a need exists to further develop a biblically based model of martyrdom by which the believer, by embracing such a model, can grasp the essential nature of the event. The believer who associates “martyrdom” simply with “pain and blood” does not have a healthy or proper perception of the experience. Yet evangelical theology provides little by way of a more theologically developed alternative.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it may still seem odd to dwell on a topic that some might consider irrelevant to the Western church, since centuries have passed since the last large-scale persecution of English-speaking believers. Yet martyrdom plays an important role in church history and is a doctrine that helps us better understand what living out the Christian faith may fully entail. Consequently, without understanding martyrdom one cannot form a complete Christian worldview.

Also, many believers outside the United States are dying for their faith today.<sup>3</sup> In this age of instant access to global information martyrdom is not so far removed as before. Additionally, martyrdom is not only a relic of the past and a present reality in far off lands, but also a possible element in future Christian experience in the Western world. Herbert Scholssberg, in his book *Called to Suffer, Called to Triumph*, cautions:

There was a time in the memory of people still living in countries represented in this book when Christians were not persecuted for their faith. Persecution came where it

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<sup>1</sup>Alvaro de Silva, “Martyrdom and Christian Morality,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 287. Yet on the same page de Silva also describes it as a word full of “glory and splendor.”

<sup>2</sup>We may note, for example, the absence of an article devoted to martyrdom either in Elwell’s *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* or in his *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, and the absence in any modern evangelical systematic theology text I have reviewed of a section or sub-section entitled “martyrdom.”

<sup>3</sup>David Barrett estimates that presently 163,000 individuals die yearly for Christ, although Paul Marshall thinks this is an overestimate. See Paul Marshall, “Present Day Persecution of Christians,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 24 (2000): 30. According to Chuck Colson, “More Christians have been martyred for their faith in this century alone than in the previous nineteen centuries combined.” See Nina Shea, *In the Lion’s Den*, with a forward by Chuck Colson (Nashville: Broadman, 1997), ix.

did not exist earlier, that is why we in other lands must not become complacent. Their world is not our world, but ours could become much like theirs.<sup>4</sup>

Finally coming to grips with martyrdom provides great practical benefit for believers living in peaceful times. De Silva claims that “martyrdom, or rather, ‘a readiness for martyrdom,’ is the very foundation (*quoad nos*) of the Christian moral life.”<sup>5</sup> That is, unless a person is ready to die for Christ, he or she is not ready to live for Him.

The purpose of this study, then, is to make a contribution to an overall biblical model of martyrdom by accentuating the positive contribution martyrdom makes to the plan of God. In other words, what is the value of martyrdom in respect to how God’s purposes are being worked out in those who participate in, observe, or learn of the event?

An initial consideration is whether or not there is a “biblical model” of martyrdom to which one can contribute. In my view, a model can be derived (or theme developed) for any topic on which the Scriptures devote considerable attention. Thus the success of this dissertation hinges on my demonstrating that there are sufficient biblical data on God’s purpose in martyrdom to justify the development of this theme. I am convinced that adequate material does exist and will discuss what may count for evidence in a later section of this chapter on methodology. In addition, material from extra-biblical sources, such as church history, may be employed to “fill out” the framework supplied by Scripture.

It is also necessary to explain briefly what I mean by the phrases “the plan of God” and “the purpose of God.” Formally defining and defending this concept would require the writing of another dissertation. So for the sake of efficiency I will propose an understanding of the plan of God as a presupposition for this study. God’s plan has two aspects. First of all, He is seeking a relationship of love with (and between) people (see Mark 12:28-31). Secondly, all that occurs, even the rejection of His love, results in God’s glorification, either through the demonstration of His goodness in salvation (see Eph 1:6, 12, 14) or through the demonstration of His wrath toward sinners (see Rom 9:22). Thus when I speak of how martyrdom “benefits the plan of God,” I have in mind how it either brings God glory or leads people into a deeper relationship with Him.

I believe it can be demonstrated that martyrdom has very specific repercussions in respect to the plan of God for all participants or observers of the event; that is, martyrdom glorifies God or enhances relationship with Him by providing:

1. in respect to the martyr--the ultimate test of faith and the ultimate opportunity for identification with Christ and expression of devotion to Him,
2. in respect to the persecutor--the demonstration of his or her extreme rejection of God and consequent grounds for divine judgment,
3. in respect to God Himself--a unique opportunity to demonstrate the power of His grace through the conduct of the martyr,
4. in respect to Satan--a crushing defeat in his failing to secure the martyr’s apostasy in spite of the extreme pressure he was allowed to apply,

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<sup>4</sup>Herbert Scholssberg, *Called to Suffer, Called to Triumph* (Portland: Multnomah, 1990), 15.

<sup>5</sup>De Silva, “Martyrdom and Christian Morality,” 290.

5. in respect to the believing observer--a compelling challenge to evaluate his or her faith,
6. in respect to the unbelieving observer--a compelling challenge to respond to the gospel.

If the above claims can be substantiated, it becomes clear that in the martyrdom event each participant or observer has some type of ultimate (climactic) experience, demonstrates some type of extreme (good or bad) behavior, or is summoned to some type of radical decision. Consequently, in seeking to summarize and conceptualize these observations, I suggest that the following construal, which will be further elaborated in my conclusion, is both helpful and appropriate: *Martyrdom, in respect to its contribution to the plan of God, can be described as a moment of climax or clarification in the ongoing struggle between the kingdoms of God and Satan, where the best and worst are brought out in all participants in the event; as a point of crescendo in the musical score of salvation history, where the full vibrancy of each instrument is clearly heard; as a foretaste of the so-called "Great Divide," where the dramatic polarization between good and evil takes place; and, consequently, as a "reality check" for observers or hearers of the event, reminding them that there is no middle ground between the kingdom of God and the domain of darkness.*

Consistent with the overall goals of systematic theology, I plan to go beyond simply contributing to a biblical model of martyrdom (a descriptive task), but will also seek to apply my findings to present day Christian life (a prescriptive task). I feel the most valuable contemporary application of my thesis is expressed in the last clause of the preceding paragraph--martyrdom as a *reality check*--and plan to develop this thought in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

Within the discipline of systematic theology this investigation could be classified as a study of the doctrine of God, specifically His providence in human suffering, or theodicy. More specifically, it deals with the religious problem of evil--probing the question of why evil events occur in certain specific situations, as opposed to the philosophical/theological problem of evil, which seeks to formally justify the existence of suffering *per se* in a world created by a good, all-powerful God. The answer to the philosophical/theological question, from an Arminian point of view, is provided by the free-will defense--God allows evil acts to preserve the individual's free choice. My goal, however, is of a more practical nature--to identify how God works these evil deeds, which He permits, into His good plan. For those troubled existentially by the question of God's purpose in martyrdom this dissertation can hopefully provide insight, comfort and inspiration.

Additionally, one could classify this study within the doctrine of sanctification, due to martyrdom's sanctifying effects on both individual believers and the church as a whole.

### *Theological Parameters*

I will approach this study respecting the following theological parameters. I accept the Bible as the fully and verbally inspired, authoritative revelation of God's will to man, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon. The Scriptures are true not only in matters of Christian faith and practice, but are historically and scientifically reliable as well, taking into account the use of generalizations, phenomenological language, possible corruptions in copies

from the original autographs, free quotations of the Old Testament in the New, and other similar sources of apparent inaccuracy.

The Scriptures should be interpreted using the historico-grammatical method, respecting authorial intent. I acknowledge the author's freedom to use figures of speech, yet the context should clearly indicate that the author intended such a usage. Also, authorial intent does not exclude an occasional typological application of Scripture (within the canonical context), intended by the divine co-author of Scripture, yet not fully known to the human author at the time of writing. Scripture should also be interpreted in light of progressive revelation, where elements of God's plan are more clearly explicated in latter portions of Scripture. Yet this development in meaning does not imply that later revelation can or will contradict earlier revelation.

My approach to Scripture, in distinction from liberal thought, affirms the operation of God's "transcendence" in revelation. That is, concepts expressed by biblical figures or writers are *not necessarily* dependent upon their understanding of that concept derived from earlier sections of the canon or from extra-biblical sources.<sup>6</sup> For example, Jesus' self-understanding of His sacrificial death is not dependent upon the intertestamental understanding of the atoning power of the martyr's death.<sup>7</sup> His understanding, rather, was "transcendently" derived by His own divine self-consciousness in fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. I affirm that God gives special revelation directly and not by "immanent" means such as the evolution of religious thought over time.

In regard to objectivity in interpretation, I recognize that the interpreter is affected by culture and by the Fall, which complicate the process of interpretation. Yet these barriers do not ultimately prevent the interpreter from making truth claims that apply to all people everywhere. Through diligent study, with reliance on the Holy Spirit and corporate input from the Church, the interpreter can achieve a high degree of objectivity in interpretation. He or she can regard the results of his or her research as true unless and until other proposals, that rationally or empirically refute his or her conclusions, are convincingly advanced.

A basic position of continuity between the testaments will be assumed in this study, allowing the interpreter to apply Old Testament prophetic and legal material to the church, as adapted and qualified by New Testament writings.

Finally, I affirm the Arminian views of incompatibilistic human freedom, prevenient (resistible) grace, the inability to do good without the help of grace, the divine will for the salvation of all, predestination based on God's foreknowledge, universal atonement and the possible apostasy of genuine believers.

### *Methodology and Progress of Study*

The primary source for evidence to support my thesis will be Holy Scripture, yet at the same time I will be interacting with authors on martyrdom from both ancient and modern times. I will employ two approaches to Scripture to obtain the available evidence. The first

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<sup>6</sup>Yet later biblical teaching will always be *consistent* with earlier biblical teaching.

<sup>7</sup>The basic elements of this approach to understanding Jesus' sacrificial death are summarized in Theofried Baumeister, *Genese und Entfaltung der altkirchlichen Theologie des Martyriums*, Traditio Christiana, ed. André Benoît, Franco Bolgiani, John Gordon Davies, and Willy Rordorf, no. 8 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991), xiii-xiv.

approach will be to examine exegetically those instances in Scripture where an instance of martyrdom is described or some comment on its significance is made.

Many of these references to martyrdom are located in narrative passages. A question arises, then, how to handle this narrative material. Although one has to exercise caution, I would nonetheless assert that narrative material can contribute toward forming a theological conclusion. The Apostle Paul, when referring to the Old Testament (a great part of which is narrative), comments, "All Scripture is profitable for teaching . . ." (2 Tim 3:16).

The best scenario is when the narrator himself gives his inspired, authoritative commentary on the significance of the events. Unfortunately, none of the narratives on martyrdom contain such a commentary from the narrator. In the Book of Revelation, however, we do find an "inspired commentary" by other characters in the apocalyptic narrative--an angel and a voice from heaven relate that the martyrdom of God's witnesses serves as grounds for divine judgment. Rev 16:6 records the angel's words, "They have poured out the blood of saints and prophets and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it."

In the absence of an inspired commentary the next best scenario is when a didactic principle stated elsewhere in Scripture is applicable to the narrative in question. Since martyrdom is a deliberate killing of the innocent, God's commandment against murder would indeed apply here. This again demonstrates that martyrdom provides grounds for divine judgment. Martyrdom is also a clear example of rejecting God. Didactic passages outline the consequences of rejecting God, and various biblical narratives illustrate how those consequences befall people who have done so.

Other techniques can also be applied to the narrative that can yield helpful observations, but less than definite results. First of all, one can look for literary clues that indicate what the author's intent may have been in recording the narrative (that is, what he was trying to teach by it) even though his purpose may not be explicitly stated. Second, one can uncover what effects the martyrdom event *appears* to have on the participants or on subsequent events. The validity of such observations is strengthened to the degree that the same associations are seen in other cases as well. Although one cannot claim a definite cause-effect relationship between the martyrdom and these apparent effects, one can at least say that there is a certain probability that the events are associated with one another. Such evidence, albeit ultimately inconclusive, might still be useful in supporting the overall construal.

My second approach to Scripture involves an investigation of God's purpose in righteous suffering in general. Here I will appeal to general, well-accepted Scriptural principles concerning righteous suffering that may or may not specifically mention the martyrdom event. It can be safely assumed that principles of Scripture that apply to righteous suffering will apply, with some exceptions, to martyrdom as well.

For example, the Bible clearly teaches that one way of understanding the Christian life is as the imitation of Christ, and that sometimes this identification involves sharing in His sufferings. Correspondingly, we often see an imitation of Christ in instances of martyrdom. On the other hand, the oft-cited "character building" aspect of righteous suffering appears to be excluded for the martyr on logical grounds. The actual act of martyrdom is instantaneous, not allowing time for character development. Certainly, the time leading up to martyrdom can



have a character building affect,<sup>8</sup> but the character thus attained is of limited practical use since the martyr is about to leave the earthly arena and attain perfection in glory. Also, the time between sentencing and execution may be brief.<sup>9</sup>

After several introductory chapters the study will progress in accordance with chapter divisions that highlight the various participants in the martyrdom event.

1. Preliminary considerations
2. Definition of martyrdom
3. The historico-theological backdrop of martyrdom
4. Martyrdom and the primary participants: martyr and persecutor
5. Martyrdom and the secondary participants: God and Satan
6. Martyrdom and the observers of the event: believers and unbelievers
7. Final conclusions and applications

Material gathered from the methodological steps outlined earlier will appear in chapters 4 through 6 in sections entitled “Contributions from didactic passages,” “Contributions from narrative passages,” and “Contributions from general principles of righteous suffering.”

The material in the sections “Contributions from general principles of righteous suffering” will be supplemented at times with supporting evidence from such sources as church history, logic, or psychological/sociological analysis. This will give us the opportunity to benefit from works written about the value of martyrdom from these perspectives as well.

In appendix one to this dissertation I will discuss the development of the μάρτυς wordgroup, from which our term *martyr* is derived, in the canonical writings and their antecedents. Some authors feel that μάρτυς obtained the technical meaning *martyr* in the canonical writings. If this is so, then investigating those passages where μάρτυς was so used would yield significant results for our study. It is my conclusion, though, as demonstrated in the appendix, that μάρτυς never quite obtained the technical meaning *martyr* in the canonical writings. Thus we will not be able to appeal to the μάρτυς wordgroup to provide primary evidence for our study. Nevertheless, as also shown in the appendix, the groundwork is clearly laid in Scripture for the term’s later technical meaning to develop. Consequently, investigating how the μάρτυς wordgroup developed helps us to recognize the growing association in the canonical writings between one’s verbal and public confession of Christ and the fatal consequences it can entail. This observation can be useful in our discussions of the definition of martyrdom (chapter 2) and the martyr’s role as witness (chapter 4). Consequently, reference to appendix one will be made in these chapters.

Appendix two responds to the objection that Christian martyrdom has little apologetic value for defending the truth of Christianity because there are other people who have died for their religions and/or philosophical beliefs—an objection that appears to undermine the claim that only Christianity can inspire the confidence and courage that martyrdom entails. This topic is related to the discussion in chapter 6 of martyrdom’s value in evangelism, but since the

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<sup>8</sup>The effect of imminent death on character formation can be traced in such works as John Hus’s *The Letters of John Hus*, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

<sup>9</sup>Christians who observe and reflect on the martyrdom event, however, can certainly develop character as a result.

relation of martyrdom to an overall apologetic for Christianity goes beyond the aim and purpose of this dissertation, this discussion is not included in the body of the paper.

### *Analysis of Previous Works*

In the course of this investigation I will be interacting with a number of authors who have contributed brief discussions on various aspects of martyrdom. Yet to date I have discovered only one monograph written in modern times that pursues an in depth understanding of God's purpose in martyrdom--Josef Ton's *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*,<sup>10</sup> a publication based on his doctoral dissertation. Ton himself recognizes the unique character of his work: "Protestant theologians unfortunately have never articulated a systematic and universal investigation of suffering and martyrdom."<sup>11</sup> His stated goal is to "discover the goals God desires to achieve *through the martyr in this world*, and the things He wants to achieve *in the martyr himself* through the martyrdom."<sup>12</sup> It is appropriate, then, to devote special attention to a review and critique of Ton's work in this introductory chapter.

In the body of his book Ton provides detailed examination both of various martyrdom events and of commentaries on the significance of martyrdom starting from the Old Testament and continuing throughout Church history. We will refer to some of Ton's comments on these individual cases in the course of this paper. It will suffice for now to focus on and evaluate his conclusions.

Ton provides the following broad categories for describing God's purpose in martyrdom. The first is "Martyrdom and the Triumph of God's Truth," which refers to the power of martyrdom for effective evangelism. The second is "Martyrdom and the Defeat of Satan." The martyr defeats Satan in two senses--by his refusal to yield to temptation and by the evangelistic influence of his death on unbelievers. The third is "Martyrdom and the Glory of God," where martyrdom provides a unique platform for God to demonstrate His glory. Finally, and most central, is martyrdom as a test for the martyr. According to Ton, martyrdom, and righteous suffering in general, form the character of the believer and provide a test of his or her loyalty. The purpose of this character formation and test of loyalty is to prepare and qualify the martyr for a high-ranking position in the future kingdom of God. Thus, God's primary purpose in allowing martyrdom, according to Ton, is to establish a ruling class for His eschatological kingdom; "only in this way can they qualify for the highest positions of ruling."<sup>13</sup>

Consistent with his view of martyrdom Ton emphasizes that the plan of God, in general, is not merely to save lost sinners, but to restore man to a position of ruling and reigning with Him. He asserts,

Throughout the course of earthly history God has been at work shaping his children, forming their character, preparing them for ruling, and testing their faithfulness and reliability. . . . We must see suffering and martyrdom as an integral part of this

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<sup>10</sup>The concluding chapter of Ton's book is published as Joseph Tson, "Towards a Modern Protestant Theology of Martyrdom," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 24 (2000): 50-62. His name is spelled differently in the article than in the book.

<sup>11</sup>Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Lanham, N.Y.: University Press of America, 1997), vii.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

ultimate purpose of God with humankind. More exactly, suffering and martyrdom should be perceived as two of the best means by which God achieves his purposes with man. Both suffering and self-sacrifice in the service of Christ produce the character traits that will bring a child of God to the closest likeness of Christ. This should be *our* goal because a Christlike character is the essential qualification for reigning with Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, a biblical understanding of martyrdom can help believers in that “they will not see the trials and afflictions that have come over them as unfortunate calamities, but as the greatest gift and privilege they could ever have received from their Lord.”<sup>15</sup>

In some ways Ton’s conclusions coincide with my own. He recognizes the value of martyrdom in respect to unbelieving observers (his “Martyrdom and the Triumph of God’s Truth”), its value in respect to victory over Satan (his “Martyrdom and the Defeat of Satan”), its value in respect to God’s glory (his “Martyrdom and the Glory of God”), and its value for testing the martyr’s faith. I would add to this martyrdom’s positive effect on believing observers or learners of the event (including present day believers) and its effect for indicting the persecutor. Thus far, there is significant overlap in our findings, which provides some confirmation of their validity.

My difference with Ton lies more at the level of the general construal of God’s plan in martyrdom. In my view, martyrdom is primarily a *moment of climax* for participants in the event leading to a *moment of clarification* for observers/hearers of the event, alerting the latter to the irreconcilable spiritual struggle between the kingdom of God and the domain of darkness, demonstrating the true character of both sides of the conflict, and leading to a decision on the part of the observer to side with God. As noted, Ton views its main value in preparing a ruling class for God’s kingdom. Here I would like to note some significant weaknesses in Ton’s approach.

First, we must discuss whether Ton actually attempted a unified conceptualization of martyrdom in the way I am attempting it here. He may simply be providing an unsystematized list of items concerning the value of martyrdom, giving great prominence to the value of martyrdom in relation to ruling with Christ. If this is the case, then in attempting such a construal my work would be an advancement over Ton’s.

Additionally, if Ton’s goal was only to enumerate the benefits of martyrdom, I feel his list is not sufficiently comprehensive. In his conclusion he does speak of the relation of martyrdom to the martyr, to God, to Satan and to the unbeliever (in respect to evangelism), but omits mention of its value in respect to the church and its utility in indicting the persecutor. Although these aspects are mentioned in the course of his larger discussion in the body of the text, he apparently does not deem them significant enough to devote a subsection of his conclusion to them.

If Ton did mean to propose a unified conceptualization of martyrdom, I feel his construal lacks cohesiveness. As mentioned above, he correctly lists several aspects of the importance of martyrdom in relation to various parties, but his heavy emphasis on the exaltation of the martyr does not adequately incorporate these other elements or assign them proper priority in

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<sup>14</sup>Tson, “Theology of Martyrdom,” 51.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 61.

the general construal. They thus become appendages to God's main purpose of preparing a ruling class for His kingdom.

Finally, I would take issue with Ton's main contention, that exaltation in God's kingdom is the primary value of martyrdom. Ton appeals to numerous New Testament passages in order to demonstrate his thesis. For example, Jesus promises His persecuted disciples "great reward" in heaven (Matt 5:11). They must lose their life to "find it" (Matt 16:25), which Ton interprets as ruling with Christ. Along with humility and service martyrdom is an ingredient for greatness (Mark 10:38). Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 17 and His claim to "all authority" in Matt 28:18 are ways of preparing His disciples for martyrdom by giving them a glimpse of future glory.

Ton sees the same theme in Paul's writings. Our response to tribulations proves our worthiness to participate in the kingdom (2 Thess 1:5) and determines the rank we will enjoy. To reign with Christ we must suffer with Him (Rom 8:16-17; 2 Tim 2:12). According to Ton, the 2 Timothy reference indicates that rulership is limited to martyrs. Additionally, self-humiliation leads to exaltation (Phil 2:5-11). This exaltation in God's kingdom is what Paul strives for (Phil 3:12-14) as he faces martyrdom (Phil 2:17). According to Ton, Paul hopes to participate in a special resurrection for the martyrs (Phil 3:11), described later in Rev 20:4.

It appears difficult to substantiate Ton's conclusions based on the evidence he offers. Characteristically, he tends to interpret general references to suffering or rewards as specific indications that martyrdom leads to advancement in rank. Cases in point are that "finding one's life" means reigning with Christ, and that Paul had a special martyr's resurrection in mind in Phil 3:11. He does rightly note an association between suffering and rewards in Scripture, which is especially clear in Rom 8:16-17 and 2 Tim 2:12, but neither of these verses speaks specifically of martyrdom.

The relationship between suffering and rewards is better understood in the light of the believer's union with Christ. Our future exaltation is related to our positional status "in Christ," which God has graciously granted to us. But being "in Christ" also requires sharing in His sufferings in this life. Thus the New Testament links suffering and rewards not because the first necessarily leads to the second, but as one means of encouraging believers to patiently endure the sufferings that accompany Christian discipleship so as to remain in position to later inherit the more "positive" or pleasant benefits of union with Christ—such as reigning with Him. Chafer states that a "glorious crown and reward will be given to the faithful because of their copartnership with Christ."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1947-1948), 7:299-300. In his comments on Rom 8:17 Moo initially appears to advance this view as well: "Because we are one with Christ, we are his fellow heirs, assured of being 'glorified with him.' But, at the same time, this oneness means that we must follow Christ's own road to glory, 'suffering with him'" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon Fee [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 505). Yet later he speaks of suffering as a condition for inheritance as being an "unbreakable law of the kingdom," as if they had a direct correspondence (ibid., 506). We find more direct support from Murray on Rom 8:17, who qualifies his statement, "There is no sharing in Christ's glory unless there is sharing in his sufferings," by explaining that suffering is not as much a prerequisite to glory as simply an expression of the believer's union with Christ (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968, reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 299 [page numbers from reprint edition]).

We must acknowledge, with Ton, that some will inherit a higher position than others in Christ's kingdom. But Ton greatly oversimplifies or possibly even distorts this idea in asserting that martyrdom is the primary way to exaltation. The Scriptures appear to teach that God rewards faithfulness in general (not just faithfulness in persecution) with authority in His kingdom. One can appeal to the parable of the talents in Luke as an example (Luke 19:11-19; see also Luke 16:10-12). Also, Matt 19:30-20:16 reveals that kingdom rewards, being based on grace, may be awarded in ways we do not expect.

A passage Ton uses in support of his thesis, Mark 10:35-40, actually complicates his proposal significantly. In this passage Jesus states that James and John must "drink His cup" of suffering (martyrdom?) in order to reign in His kingdom. Yet, as explained above, suffering and reigning as separate aspects of union with Christ is likely in view here.<sup>17</sup> Also, the fact that James was martyred but John was not casts doubt on the interpretation that the "cup" equals martyrdom here. In addition, Jesus reveals that even suffering for Him cannot guarantee the highest positions of authority, since they are "for those for whom it has been prepared" (Mark 10:40), showing that other considerations besides suffering may determine rank in the kingdom.

France voices a similar objection that Mark 10:40 "undermines the whole premise on which the request was based, that status in the kingdom of God can be bestowed as a favour, or even earned by loyalty and self-sacrifice."<sup>18</sup> Later France writes, "The cup and the baptism thus prove not to be qualifying conditions at all, but rather a way of indicating that their whole conception of δόξα and of the way it is to be achieved is misguided. It cannot be earned even by the extreme suffering he must undergo and which they in their turn will indeed share."<sup>19</sup> Edwards, also commenting on this passage, writes, "Disciples of Jesus did not decide to accept or reject hardships on the basis of the future rewards accruing from them. They accept suffering on the sole basis that it is the way of Jesus."<sup>20</sup>

Ton must be credited with doing some groundbreaking study into a topic long neglected in Protestant scholarship. Yet, in light of the discussion above, we can feel justified in attempting a further contribution toward a biblical model of martyrdom.

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<sup>17</sup>Note that Jesus does not say they must drink "a cup," but "My cup" (Matt 20:23). Lenski also feels that here Jesus is identifying the sufferings of His disciples with His own (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943], 788).

<sup>18</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 414.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>20</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 323.

## CHAPTER 2: DEFINING MARTYRDOM

Before attempting to contribute toward a biblical model of martyrdom we must define the concept in question. David Barrett expresses the traditional definition of martyrdom thus: “A Christian martyr is a believer in Christ who loses his or her life, prematurely, in a situation of *witness*, as a result of human hostility.”<sup>21</sup> Every aspect of this traditional definition, however, is under challenge. First of all, it has been debated whether martyrdom requires death or not. Also, authors discuss whether death must be for confession of Christian faith, or whether it can be solely for moral acts. If the latter is allowed, does the martyr necessarily have to be a Christian? Also, is only passive acceptance of death considered martyrdom, or does active resistance of evil leading to a violent death also count?

Three rival conceptions of martyrdom appear to be dominant in theological discussion today, the first being the traditional one outlined above—death in the defense of Christian faith. The other two “contenders” expand this concept to include in the martyr’s role either those who suffer great deprivation for the sake of Christ (short of death), or those who die for any good cause (like defending the rights of the poor). Deciding between these options is complicated by the fact that all three of the phenomena just mentioned can likely be found in Scripture, yet none of them is specifically identified there as *martyrdom*.

In this dissertation we will prefer the traditional conception of martyrdom, as outlined by Barrett, with some additions and qualifications to be described in the course of this chapter. In the following section I hope to show that, with some exceptions, martyrdom has been so understood in the course of church history. Therefore, by preserving the traditional definition we: (1) show respect for church tradition; and (2) are able to maintain consistency in the use of theological terms in the church over time.

### *The Concept of Martyrdom and Church Tradition*

My goal in this section is to show that what I have called above the “traditional conception of martyrdom” is in fact the understanding of martyrdom that has predominated in the course of church history. I will devote particular attention to how the “fatal” and “confessional” aspects of the traditional conception have been prominent in the church’s understanding of martyrdom.

### The “Fatal” Aspect of Martyrdom

Many have suggested that something less than death could qualify as martyrdom. Murphy, for example, includes the one who merely “exposed his life in testimony to the

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<sup>21</sup>David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 2:665. For a similar definition see F. W. Danker, “Martyr,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3:267; Joseph H. Mayfield, “Martyr, Martyrdom,” in *Beacon Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Richard S. Taylor (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1983), 329; and John Henry Blunt, ed., “Martyrs,” in *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 447-48.

truth.”<sup>22</sup> Ton includes those who lose their minds from being subjected to tortures.<sup>23</sup> Figura recognizes as martyrdom a “consistent following of Jesus.”<sup>24</sup> Robeck suggest two levels of martyrdom—the traditional type, and then those who “are called upon to give up something else by virtue of what they do, things like position, reputation, prestige, or even acceptance within their own Christian communities.”<sup>25</sup>

This is not merely a contemporary challenge—it has a long history. During the time of Constantine, after the early persecutions had ceased, the church began to recognize “non-fatal” martyrdoms.<sup>26</sup> Monasticism became the primary substitute for traditional martyrdom.<sup>27</sup> The medieval church accepted three kinds of martyrdom: (1) white martyrdom is giving up all one’s wealth and becoming a monk; (2) green martyrdom is living an austere life (supposedly without monastic vows); and (3) red martyrdom involves the shedding of blood.<sup>28</sup> Even during the Roman persecutions, those exiled to “unhealthy islands” or sent to work the mines (a usually fatal occupation) were designated as martyrs even before their death.<sup>29</sup> The later Luther (who struggled with the fact that he himself was never martyred) likely also expanded his idea of martyrdom to include the lifelong suffering of all faithful believers.<sup>30</sup>

On closer examination, though, these appeals to history are less substantial than they might appear. The medieval church, although expanding the concept of martyrdom, nevertheless made a distinction between those who died and those who did not (red versus green or white martyrdom). They did not obliterate this distinction, as some moderns are attempting, by designating both fatal and non-fatal cases with a single term. Neither does the early church practice of applying “martyr” to those sent to the mines or “unhealthy islands” seriously challenge our view, since the assumption was that their death was imminent; thus this cannot be used in defense of “non-fatal” martyrdoms. Also notable is that Luther’s expanded definition appears to have arisen not from careful Scriptural investigation or historical observation, but from his own personal disappointment in not having died for the faith himself.

In addition, substantial historical evidence can be advanced for reserving the term for those who die. First, we may cite what is likely the earliest reference to martyrdom in the Church Fathers, found in the fifth chapter of 1 Clement, written at the close of the first century. (Additionally we note here that a word from the μάρτυς wordgroup specifically refers to the phenomenon.)

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<sup>22</sup>F. X. Murphy, “Martyr,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 6:312.

<sup>23</sup>Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 53.

<sup>24</sup>Michael Figura, “Martyrdom and the Following of Jesus,” *Communio* 23 (1996): 108.

<sup>25</sup>Cecil Robeck, “When Being a ‘Martyr’ Is Not Enough: Catholics and Pentecostals,” *Pneuma* 21 (1999): 3-10.

<sup>26</sup>E. Ferguson, “Martyrdom,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1988), 413.

<sup>27</sup>Agnes Cunningham, “Martyr,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 630.

<sup>28</sup>Michael Nazir-Ali, “Martyr and Martyrs—Questions for Mission,” *Anvil* 16 (1999): 121.

<sup>29</sup>Paul Allard, *Ten Lectures on the Martyrs*, trans. Luigi Cappadelta (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1907), 253-54.

<sup>30</sup>David Bagchi, “Luther and the Problem of Martyrdom,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed. Diana Wood, *Studies in Church History*, no. 30 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 218.

Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him (καὶ οὕτω μαρτυρήσας ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὸν ὀφειλόμενον τόπον τῆς δόξης). Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects (μαρτυρήσας ἐπὶ τῶν ἡγουμένων). Thus was he removed from the world, and went into the holy place, having proved himself a striking example of patience.<sup>31</sup>

Here we note that Clement's understanding of martyrdom was one of "departure," being "removed from the world"--that is, a fatal event.

Some challenge the idea that a definite "martyr concept" is in mind here, designated by the μάρτυς wordgroup. Günther feels that here μαρτυρήσας refers to either the "witness of preaching" that the great apostles engaged in and fulfilled, or the enduring of hardships they experienced throughout their careers.<sup>32</sup> Yet the close association of the term μαρτυρήσας with the deaths both of Paul and Peter makes this interpretation suspect. Also, contrary to Günther, the aorist tense here does suggest a climactic act such as martyrdom. Hocedez correctly asserts that here we must translate "suffering of martyrdom."<sup>33</sup>

The mid-second century *Martyrdom of Polycarp* clearly depicts the martyr as a "witness unto death." Numerous passages (1.1, 2.1-2, 13.2, 14.2, 15.2, 17.3, 18.3, 19.1, 21.1) describe Polycarp's death by employing the μάρτυς wordgroup, here clearly carrying the technical sense of "martyr."<sup>34</sup> In the early third century Origen relates, "But it has come to be the custom of the brotherhood . . . to keep the name of martyr more properly for those who have borne witness to the mystery of godliness by shedding their blood for it."<sup>35</sup>

Eusebius records a letter from the saints of Vienne and Lyons to the churches of Asia and Phrygia, in which the former describe the attitude of persecuted believers:

Though they had attained such honor, and had borne witness, not once or twice, but many times,--having been brought back to prison from the wild beasts, covered with burns and scars and wounds,--yet they did not proclaim themselves witnesses

<sup>31</sup>Greek inserts from Ernst Günther, "Zeuge und Märtyrer," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 47 (1956): 160.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 159-60.

<sup>33</sup>E. Hocedez, "Le concept de martyr," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 55 (1928): 89. Translation mine. Strathmann feels a martyrological sense might have been intended here, but finds the meaning unclear. See H. Strathmann, "μάρτυς," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:505.

<sup>34</sup>Many feel, contrary to what we have shown in regard to 1 Clement 5, that *Martyrdom of Polycarp* provides us with the first instances of μάρτυς used in a technical sense. See Günther, "Zeuge und Märtyrer," 150; Hocedez, "Le concept," 89; and Theofried Baumeister, "Martyrdom and Persecution in Early Christianity," *Concilium* 163 (March 1983): 3.

<sup>35</sup>Origen, *Comm. on John* 2.28. Italics mine. Quotation from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10 (n.p.: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885-1887), CD-ROM edition, Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, 1997. Hereafter, this volume will be referred to as *ANF*.



(μάρτυρες), nor did they suffer us to address them by this name. If any one of us, in letter or conversation, spoke of them as witnesses, they rebuked him sharply. . . . they reminded us of the witnesses who had already departed, and said, "They are already witnesses whom Christ has deemed worthy to be taken up in their confession, having sealed their testimony by their departure; but we are lowly and humble confessors."<sup>36</sup>

Again, "martyr" is strictly reserved for those who lay down their lives. This distinction between "confessor" and "martyr" was maintained during the years of Roman persecution.

In addition, Aquinas, whose theology was essentially canonized in the Roman tradition, also argued for so restricting the term: "Now as long as physical life remains, a man has not yet shown in action a complete indifference to temporal things. For men usually despise both kin and all possessions, and even endure physical pain, to preserve their lives."<sup>37</sup>

Martyrdom is still understood as a fatal event by many today.<sup>38</sup> Thus I affirm, with Gilby, that "those who ardently desire to die for Christ (but do not actually die), or who accept or choose a life of suffering for His sake, are not technically martyrs."<sup>39</sup>

### The Confessional Aspect of Martyrdom

Many writers, especially among contemporary Catholics, are appealing to expand the traditional martyr concept to include not only those who die due to their verbal confession of Christ, but also those who die defending the poor and oppressed of the world.

Various arguments are advanced in favor of this proposal. Kubis argues that Matt 5:10 extols those who suffer solely for the sake of righteousness.<sup>40</sup> Hall states that identifying with the sufferings of Christ means identifying with the suffering of the world that He came to save.<sup>41</sup> Chandler adds that witnesses of the resurrection witness "also to the person who has been resurrected, his values, his priorities and his moral demands," which includes forgiveness, aid for the poor, compassion and deliverance.<sup>42</sup>

There is an appeal as well to precedents in church history. Dionysius of Alexandria, for example, was willing to class with the martyrs those who died serving victims of the plague.<sup>43</sup> Origen said, "Now every one who bears witness to the truth, whether he support it by words

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<sup>36</sup>Eusebius *Ecc. Hist.* 5.2.2-3. Quotation from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d series, vol. 1 (n.p.: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885-1887), CD-ROM edition, Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, 1997. Hereafter, this volume will be referred to as *PNF-2*.

<sup>37</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a 2ae 24. Quotation from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Thomas Gibby and T. C. O'Brian (New York: Blackfriars & McGraw-Hill, 1964), 42:53. In subsequent references this work will be abbreviated *ST*.

<sup>38</sup>See footnote 1 of this chapter for a small sampling of adherents to this view.

<sup>39</sup>T. Gilby, "Theology of Martyrdom," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 6:314. Parenthetical explanation mine.

<sup>40</sup>Adam Kubis, "La theologie du martyre au vingtieme siecle" (Ph.D. diss., Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1968), 199.

<sup>41</sup>Douglas John Hall, *God and Human Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 137-38.

<sup>42</sup>Andrew Chandler and Anthony Harvey, "Introduction," in *The Terrible Alternative: Christian Martyrdom in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Andrew Chandler (London: Cassell, 1998), 4.

<sup>43</sup>Dionysius wrote, "This form of death, through the great piety and strong faith it exhibited, seemed to lack nothing of martyrdom." See Eusebius *Ecc. Hist.* 7.22.8 in *PNF-2*, vol. 1.

or deeds, or in whatever way, may properly be called a witness (martyr)."<sup>44</sup> In medieval times Aquinas argued, "All virtuous actions, insofar as they are related to God, are professions of the faith by which we know that God demands such works from us, and rewards us for them. In this sense such actions can be a cause of martyrdom."<sup>45</sup>

In recent years the Catholic Church has taken clear steps toward redefining martyrdom in a direction consistent with liberation theology. John Paul II asserts that "there are truths and moral values for which one must be prepared to give up one's life,"<sup>46</sup> and that martyrdom can "include those public acts of witness by which Christians stand against the countervailing forces of culture."<sup>47</sup>

Most advocates of this expanded definition assure us that it is consistent with the traditional one. Fisichella claims that the "truth of the gospel" includes the "saving proclamation of the dignity and sanctity of human life."<sup>48</sup> Quéré affirms that "the cause of the poor . . . is also a confession of Christ."<sup>49</sup> Others are ready to extend the martyr's crown to non-Christians as well. Boff feels that God's imminence in society makes it possible for defenders of justice to be considered martyrs "regardless of their ideological allegiance."<sup>50</sup>

Yet in spite of the more substantial historical evidence in support of this expanded definition (more substantial in comparison to that cited in support of non-fatal martyrdom) this proposal nonetheless runs contrary to what appears to be the majority understanding among early Christians and believers of the Reformation time. Figura writes that one of "the essential aspects of the theology of martyrdom in the early church" was that "they die *for the truth of the Christian Faith*."<sup>51</sup> Kemp summarizes Optatus, bishop of Milevis (fourth century), "There can, he says, be no martyrdom apart from the confession of the name of Christ."<sup>52</sup>

Gregory, in his exhaustive work on martyrdom during the Reformation, repeatedly stresses that those who perished on all sides of the conflict, whether Protestant, Catholic or Anabaptist, were "dying for doctrines."<sup>53</sup> Kolb, writing from the Lutheran perspective, asserts that the conflict between Satan and God at that time was in the area of doctrine.<sup>54</sup> Among the many who embrace this understanding today, Allard defines martyrs as "those who witnessed by their blood to the reality of the Gospel-facts and the constancy of Christian tradition."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Origen, *Comm. on John* 2.28, in *ANF*, vol. 1.

<sup>45</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a 2æ 24, in *ST*, 42:59.

<sup>46</sup>John Paul II, "Veritatis Splendor," *Origins* 23 (1993): 325.

<sup>47</sup>Lawrence S. Cunningham, "Saints and Martyrs: Some Contemporary Considerations," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999): 535.

<sup>48</sup>Rino Fisichella, "Martyr," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 628-29.

<sup>49</sup>France Quéré, "The Unity of Martyrdom and Communion with Christ," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 24 (2000): 44.

<sup>50</sup>Leonardo Boff, "Martyrdom: An Attempt at Systematic Reflection," trans. Paul Burns, *Concilium* 163 (March 1983): 15.

<sup>51</sup>Figura, "Following of Jesus," 103. Italics mine.

<sup>52</sup>Eric Waldram Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1948), 14. He cites Optatus *Libri VII*, 3.8.

<sup>53</sup>Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1999), 7.

<sup>54</sup>Robert Kolb, *For All the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University, 1987), 19.

<sup>55</sup>Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 6-7.

Those who claim that the essence of the Christian tradition, for which one should be ready to die, consists in social justice and concern for the poor<sup>56</sup> are misguided, speaking from a perspective that reflects neither historical Christian tradition nor mainstream contemporary Christian thought. A final consideration is that Scripture devotes little attention to honoring those who die for moral causes in comparison to those who die in defense of the faith.<sup>57</sup> Such recognition is not lacking, as noted by Kubis in Matt 5:10, but the other Scriptural arguments advanced by advocates of an expanded definition are based on somewhat suspect inferences from Scripture.

Neither does the persecution of Old Testament prophets, who often preached a message of moral reform, lend strong support for an expanded definition, since they ministered during a unique time in salvation history where societal concerns and kingdom concerns overlapped in the theocratic kingdom of Israel. In New Testament times, where a separation of church and society exists, we see little encouragement for believers to engage in general societal reform or special recognition for those dying for its advancement.

Although I have given a negative assessment to this proposal for an expanded definition of martyrdom, we should not minimize the great good being done by those championing the cause of the poor or defending other noble causes. A possible mediating solution would be to apply the term *martyr* to any who dies for a good cause. But the designation *Christian martyr* can and should be reserved for those whose deaths are directly related to their verbal confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.<sup>58</sup>

### *Refining the Definition*

We will next attempt to refine our understanding of the traditional definition by further interacting with the discussion in the literature on the definition of martyrdom. We may begin with the following provisional, working definition: *a martyr is a believer who dies as a consequence of the confession of his or her Christian faith*. I will employ the same categories of investigation used previously--the "confessional" and "fatal" aspects of martyrdom. I will also include a third issue that is often encountered in the literature--the "voluntary" nature of martyrdom. I will adopt those suggestions from the literature that provide my provisional definition with more precision and yet at the same time are consistent with the conventional, historical understanding of martyrdom and the biblical portraits of those who actually laid down their lives for the faith.

### The "Confessional" Aspect of Martyrdom

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<sup>56</sup>Such as Franklyn J. Balasundaram, "Martyrs in the History of Christianity," in *Martyrs in the History of Christianity*, ed. Franklyn J. Balasundaram (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 11; Walbert Bühlmann, "The Church as Institution in the Context of Persecution," trans. Graham Harrison, *Concilium* 163 (March 1983): 59; and Jon Sobrino, "Die Bedeutung der Märtyrer für die Theologie," in *Reflektierter Glaube*, ed. Hans-Ludwig Ollig and Oliver J. Wiertz (Egelsbach: Verlag Dr. Markus Hänsel-Hohenhausen, 1999), 200.

<sup>57</sup>One might also note here the use of the *μάρτυς* wordgroup in Scripture in close association with those who die for their faith, as described in appendix 1. Those killed for their faith in Scripture are active in verbal witness.

<sup>58</sup>Suggested by John Feinberg during his review of this section.

Although most authors talk about those who die confessing Christian faith, I feel our definition should not exclude Old Testament and intertestamental Jews who were also faithful until death to the Old Testament revelation. In the next chapter we will note continuity between the Old and New Testament presentations of the suffering witness. Also, we can cite several New Testament passages where the prophets' suffering and death are associated with suffering for Christ (Matt 5:12; Luke 11:49; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15). We also note that Hebrews 11 lists suffering saints of the Old Testament in order to inspire the Church of Christ to withstand hostility for the gospel's sake (see vv. 35-38).

In addition, Manson relates that the Church Fathers conventionally included slain Old Testament and intertestamental saints in the martyrs' role.<sup>59</sup> Augustine, commenting on the Maccabean martyrs, writes that just as the Old Testament is a "veiled" New Testament, so the confession of the Maccabean martyrs was a "veiled" confession of the Christian martyrs.<sup>60</sup> In addition to this, the Catholic Church claims to have preserved relics from the Maccabean martyrs.<sup>61</sup> Moule rightly affirms that "we are bound to add that the sufferings of those who lived before Christ must also be gathered up and reckoned in the process. If the church's sufferings are in this sense a sharing of Christ's sacrifice, so was Israel's sufferings an anticipation of it."<sup>62</sup>

Martyrdom may involve not only death for confession of Judeo-Christian belief, but for refraining from actions which, if done, would constitute a virtual denial of the faith. Musurillo and Chadwick, for example, record that early Christians perished for refusing to offer pagan sacrifices.<sup>63</sup> The Catholic Church rightly recognizes as martyrs "those who died for refusing to give up their faith, both those who were pressured to make a formal denial and those who would not perform some act inconsistent with faith or morals."<sup>64</sup>

There are still other instances where people perished not for the defense of the faith or for preaching the message of salvation *per se*, but for proclaiming a special prophetic message for which God commissioned them. Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (2 Chr 24:20-22) and Uriah the son of Shemaiah (Jer 26:20-23), for example, were killed for bringing a prophetic rebuke. One could include John the Baptist in this category as well. We also recall the account of Stephen. Although his death is certainly related to his confession of Jesus as "the Righteous One" (Acts 7:52), his martyrdom involved more than his confession of Christ alone. We note that no other believers were being arrested at that time, and that gospel preaching was taking place unhindered. What prompted Stephen's execution was his rebuke of the Jewish religious establishment (Acts 7:51-53) in a manner similar to prophets of old.<sup>65</sup> These cases give us precedence to include as martyrs those who bring a special prophetic word from the Lord and

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<sup>59</sup>T. W. Manson, "Martyrs and Martyrdom," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 39 (1956-1957): 481-82.

<sup>60</sup>From Augustine's Sermon 300 (*In solemnitate martyrum Machabaeorum*), cited in Donald F. Winslow, "The Maccabean Martyrs: Early Christian Attitudes," *Judaism* 23 (1974): 82.

<sup>61</sup>Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death* (London: Routledge, 2002), 45.

<sup>62</sup>C. D. F. Moule, *The Sacrifice of Christ*, Facet Books Biblical Series, ed. John Reumann, no. 12 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1956; reprint, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 24 (page citations are to reprint edition).

<sup>63</sup>Herbert A. Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1972), xix, xxxix, xli; Henry Chadwick, "The Early Christian Community," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, ed. John McManners (Oxford: Oxford University, 1990), 41.

<sup>64</sup>Robert Royal, *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 13.

<sup>65</sup>His arrest was also on these grounds (see Acts 6:11-14).

perish as a result of its proclamation. Baumeister writes, "One can designate as martyrs the prophets killed in the execution of their commission."<sup>66</sup>

Finally, the existence of different Christian confessions, each affirming their own version of Christian faith, complicates the proposal that a universal definition of Christian martyrdom can be established. One possible solution is to reserve the title "Christian martyr" for those individuals who die in defense of tenets accepted by the consensus of Christian confessions (e.g. the Trinity or the historicity of Christ's resurrection), and employ other terms, such as "Catholic martyr," "Protestant martyr," or "Anabaptist martyr," for those individuals who die for tenets unique to those respective movements. Since the primary purpose in this dissertation for establishing a definition of martyrdom is to locate in Scripture instances of genuine martyrdom for investigation, such a qualification will not injure our study, since divisions in Christendom did not exist in the first century.

### The "Fatal" Aspect of Martyrdom

Another qualification I would embrace is the traditional Catholic position that the martyr must die *in odium fidei*, that is, as a result of opponents' hatred toward the faith.<sup>67</sup> This aspect is also reflected in Barrett's phrase "as a result of human hostility."<sup>68</sup> Thus, individuals like Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30), although "he was sick to the point of death," "came close to death for the work of Christ," and is held "in high regard," would nonetheless not be considered martyrs if they die in the course of serving Christ.<sup>69</sup> Correspondingly, we must exclude any minister who simply "dies in the course of duty," such as from accident or illness.<sup>70</sup>

A second qualification I will accept is that death does not need to occur immediately during the persecution event, but can occur soon afterward as a result of insults received during persecution.<sup>71</sup> For example, we may cite the account (the historicity of which, though, is debated) of Flavian, bishop of Constantinople, who supposedly died as a result of ill treatment he received at the "Robbers' Synod" of Ephesus when he opposed the teaching of Eutyches.

Finally, we must consider here the cases of Daniel and the three Hebrews, recorded in Daniel chapters 3 and 6. Although they did not die for their faith, they exhibited their willingness and readiness to die up to the final moment, and were rescued only by God's miraculous intervention. Technically, they cannot be considered martyrs, but we may nonetheless gain insight into God's purpose in martyrdom by studying these passages. Daniel chapters 3 and 6 will, consequently, be included in our later discussions.

### The "Voluntary" Aspect of Martyrdom

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<sup>66</sup>Theofried Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie, ed. Bernhard Kötting and Joseph Ratzinger, no. 45 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980), 12. Translation mine.

<sup>67</sup>See Royal, *Catholic Martyrs*, 13; Gilby, "Theology of Martyrdom," 6:314; and Cunningham, "Martyr," 629.

<sup>68</sup>Barrett and Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2:665.

<sup>69</sup>Unless their service for Christ provokes hostility from opponents of the gospel, resulting in their being killed.

<sup>70</sup>W. E. Sangster raises this issue for consideration in *The Pure in Heart* (New York: Abingdon, 1954), 63. Also see James and Marti Hefley, *By Their Blood: Christian Martyrs of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Milford, Mich.: Mott Media, 1979), viii-ix, for a related discussion. Quote from Sangster.

<sup>71</sup>As per Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 53. Origen also voiced such a view (see Cunningham, "Martyr," 629).

When reading discussions of the definition of martyrdom one usually encounters the claim that the martyr must embrace death freely. This is usually understood in the sense that the individual can escape martyrdom by renouncing his or her faith, but chooses rather to die. In this vein Allard notes that during a martyr's trial there was never any need for witnesses for the prosecution--the sentence depended entirely on the martyr's confession. Observers were acutely aware that the martyr could abort the event at any moment.<sup>72</sup> Owen writes, "What was so remarkable about the trial of a Christian was that he condemned himself. He had only to offer the pinch of incense, and he was free."<sup>73</sup>

We can justify including a "voluntary" aspect in our definition of martyrdom since it is consistent with the "confessional" aspect of martyrdom outlined above. The option is always open to the confessor to avoid punishment by simply renouncing his or her faith. The confessor freely makes the choice to hold fast his or her testimony and therefore voluntarily brings the consequent suffering upon himself or herself. Even if no formal opportunity is given to recant, the confessor is usually aware of the possible consequences of his or her stand, but continues in the faith nonetheless. Thus individuals like John the Baptist, Zechariah (2 Chr 24:20-22) and Uriah (Jer 26:20-23), although they were given no formal opportunity to recant, could have forestalled their deaths had they taken the initiative to retract their accusations against their kings.

In the context of voluntary martyrdom we often encounter discussions of several extreme practices: (1) those who provoke antagonism in the hope of gaining a martyr's crown; (2) those who commit suicide to avoid persecution; and (3) those who engage in armed conflict with their doctrinal adversary. My contention (as well as that of church tradition) is that such individuals, should they die, are not to be considered martyrs.

In the case of deliberate provocation, we must first of all admit that even true martyrs display provocative behavior, or else they would not be persecuted in the first place. The difference between legitimate and non-legitimate provocation is one of motive. The true martyr's motive is to testify boldly to the truth of Christ, whatever the consequences may be. The false martyr's motive is to die and be regarded as martyr.

Provocation has been an issue in church history. During the Roman persecutions many actively sought death for Christ.<sup>74</sup> Droge and Tabor report, "The surviving evidence shows that many Christians often went beyond what was expected of them by their communities and turned themselves over to the Roman authorities of their own free will or by acting in a deliberately provocative manner."<sup>75</sup> Chadwick confirms, "Some enthusiastic Christians courted martyrdom by smashing religious images or, under cross-examination, appearing contumacious, dissident, and disrespectful to the governor."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 90, 246, 305.

<sup>73</sup>E. C. E. Owen, ed., *Some Authentic Acts of the Early Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927), 17.

<sup>74</sup>Some go to the extreme of charging that all the early persecutions were provoked by the overenthusiasm of Christians. See the lengthy discussion in Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance*, ed. Simon Harvey, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, ed. Karl Ameriks and Desmond M. Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 36-42. Rompay lists other scholars who hold this view in Lucas van Rompay, "Impetuous Martyrs," in *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. M. Lamberigts and P. van Deun (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University, 1995), 363-69.

<sup>75</sup>Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 134.

<sup>76</sup>Chadwick, "Early Christian Community," 42-43.

Various motives may have prompted such actions. Some sought the high esteem afforded to martyrs.<sup>77</sup> Others died to identify with suffering brethren; “martyrdom proved infectious.”<sup>78</sup> Others were those who had apostatized and wanted a second chance.<sup>79</sup> One might also theorize a “Masada” complex,<sup>80</sup> where believers could develop a persecution-paranoia and exacerbate an otherwise reconcilable conflict.

Another issue is those who commit suicide in connection with their confession of faith. Eusebius records several examples where believers either threw themselves into the flames prepared by the executioner (*Ecc. Hist.* 6.41.7, 8.6.6) or ladies killed themselves when threatened with sexual abuse (*Ecc. Hist.* 8.12.3-5, 8.14.16-17). Samson is mentioned as an example of justifiable suicide. It is proposed that God approved of his action, giving Samson supernatural strength to destroy the Philistine temple.<sup>81</sup>

One can find justification of martyr-suicide in extra-biblical sources as well. Such a “noble death” was glorified in Roman culture.<sup>82</sup> In intertestamental Judaism Rasis provides an example of martyr-suicide (2 Macc 14:37-46), as do four hundred youths “carried off for immoral purposes,” who drowned themselves (*b. Gittin* 57b). Additionally, Josephus records how nearly a thousand besieged revolutionaries killed themselves at Masada, and some priests jumped off the temple when Pompey captured Jerusalem.<sup>83</sup>

The Donatists not infrequently advocated suicide-martyrdom. A Donatist leader, Gaudentius, taught that “there is a certain limit of suffering beyond which the body cannot endure. When faced with persecution, the Christian should die voluntarily for God, either by killing himself or by hurling himself into a ravine, in order to escape suffering and the risk of apostasy.”<sup>84</sup>

The early Fathers, though, condemned the practice of seeking martyrdom and, with the exception of Tertullian, suicide to avoid persecution as well.<sup>85</sup> Ambrose and Jerome, however, felt a woman could kill herself to avoid defilement,<sup>86</sup> and Augustine made an exception if one received a direct divine command, as in the case of Samson.<sup>87</sup> I would also exclude the practices of seeking martyrdom and committing suicide to escape persecution as cases of true martyrdom since Scripture gives us no justification for such behavior either by teaching or example. Samson is better classified as a warrior who died fighting God’s battle than one who attained martyrdom through suicide. Luther wisely counsels that a person does not need to seek martyrdom; “it comes to them if God so wills.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 3.

<sup>78</sup>Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 433.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup>Alter discusses how the Jewish expectation of hostility can produce an overreaction in threatening situations, in Robert Alter, “The Masada Complex,” *Commentary* 56 (July 1973): 19-20.

<sup>81</sup>Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 55.

<sup>82</sup>Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 72-73.

<sup>83</sup>See Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 86-91.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>85</sup>See Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 62-65; Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 13-14; and Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 169.

<sup>86</sup>Also in Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a 2æ 24.

<sup>87</sup>Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 178.

<sup>88</sup>Douglas C. Stange, “A Sketch of the Thought of Martin Luther on Martyrdom,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 37 (1966): 642.

On the other extreme we have those who perish in active physical (often armed) resistance to an enemy. Attwater chronicles that in the history of the church some have been canonized as martyrs for being “slain in battle against the heathen,” such as St. Oswald and St. Edmund of the East Angles.<sup>89</sup> Even the famous reformer Zwingli perished in armed conflict against the Catholics.<sup>90</sup> Rahner argues in favor of this type of martyrdom, stating that the death of Jesus, although passively accepted, was prompted by an active opposition to evil: “His death must not be seen in isolation from his life.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, Rahner asserts, death as a consequence of active resistance cannot be ruled out as true martyrdom.<sup>92</sup>

Yet, several convincing arguments can be advanced for excluding such individuals. First, Jesus taught the principle of non-resistance to personal enemies (Matt 5:39-41), and demonstrated that principle when He rebuked Peter for trying to defend Him with force at Gethsemane (John 18:10-11). Also, no cases exist in Scripture where violence was advocated or used against antagonists to the gospel. O'Neill makes the insightful observation that Jesus, in instructing His disciples to “take up their cross,” could not have been calling for political instigation, since the condemned insurgent had no choice but to take up his cross.<sup>93</sup> The example of the early Mennonites is also instructive. They refused to acknowledge as martyrs Protestants who perished in the defense of Münster since they used arms to assert their independence.<sup>94</sup> Calvin rightly comments on Peter’s death, “It is not probable, indeed, that when it became necessary to glorify God by death he was driven to it unwilling and resisting; had it been so, little praise would have been due to his martyrdom.”<sup>95</sup> Or, as Green says, “To exert coercive force, would be to adopt a style of life consistent with the Roman way, not with the way of this new kingdom breaking into the world.”<sup>96</sup>

In closing this section we will touch on Robeck’s suggestion, based on 1 Cor 13:3, that the act of martyrdom must be done in love; otherwise the person “gains nothing.”<sup>97</sup> I would hesitate to include this in our definition since this verse has significant textual difficulties, and could well be translated “to boast” instead of “to burn.”<sup>98</sup> Also, in all possible cases of

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<sup>89</sup>Donald Attwater, *Martyrs* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1958), xvii.

<sup>90</sup>Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (N. p.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 8:179-85 (page numbers from the reprint edition).

<sup>91</sup>Karl Rahner, “Dimensions of Martyrdom: A Plea for the Broadening of a Classical Concept,” *Concilium* 163 (March 1983): 10.

<sup>92</sup>Although we do recognize Jesus as a martyr, Rahner’s proposal is nonetheless unconvincing. Jesus showed no active *physical* resistance to his enemies at the time of His execution; His resistance to his enemies consisted of debate and rebuke, and even that essentially ceased when His time to die had arrived.

<sup>93</sup>J. C. O'Neill, “Did Jesus Teach That His Death Would Be Vicarious as Well as Typical?” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), 12.

<sup>94</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 216-17.

<sup>95</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 3.8.10. Quotation from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, CD-ROM edition, Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, n.d. In subsequent quotations this work will be abbreviated *Institutes*.

<sup>96</sup>Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, New Testament Theology, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), 121.

<sup>97</sup>Robeck, “Being a ‘Martyr,’” 5. Similarly, Kemp cites Optatus (*Libri VII* 3.8), “Without charity martyrdom can neither be named nor have any existence,” in Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 14.

<sup>98</sup>For the former: Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1043; and Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament,



martyrdom recorded in Scripture we do not see evidence of impure motives, so none of them would be excluded from our study on these grounds. Finally, in cases of martyrdom in church history it is difficult to discern whether the martyr is truly motivated by love.

### Conclusion

In conclusion I propose the following definition of Christian martyrdom: *Christian martyrdom is voluntarily, but without deliberate provocation by the victim, losing one's life to those hostile to the faith in proclamation or defense of Judeo-Christian belief,<sup>99</sup> for abstaining from actions that would constitute a denial of the faith, or in execution of a special prophetic commission by God.*

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ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 629-35. In favor of the later: F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 126 (page numbers are taken from reprint edition); and J. K. Elliott, "In Favour of καθήσομαι at I Corinthians 13:3," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 62 (1971): 297-98.

<sup>99</sup>As qualified on page 32.

### CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORICO-THEOLOGICAL BACKDROP OF MARTYRDOM

Having defined martyrdom, our next step is to paint the historico-theological backdrop of martyrdom, that is, to describe the spiritual conflict which provides the context for these martyrdom events. In this overview I hope to accomplish three goals: (1) to demonstrate how humanity is and always has been polarized between, in Augustine's terms, the City of God and the City of This World; (2) to show how the people of God typically fill the role of the persecuted and oppressed in this great drama; and (3) to acquaint the reader with individual martyrs who will become the objects of closer examination in later chapters.

I will demonstrate this polarization first of all by citing clear scripture references that indicate that people are in allegiance either to God or to Satan. Then, this spiritual dichotomy will be highlighted in a sequential examination of persecution and martyrdom during the major epochs of biblical and church history, showing how in each epoch one can see both the City of God and the City of This World represented by certain prominent, even typological antagonists.<sup>100</sup> Although in our first two examples, Cain versus Abel and Canaan versus Israel, martyrdom *per se* is not recorded, they are nonetheless valuable for tracing the continuity of the historico-theological backdrop of martyrdom back to its earliest stages.

I will not attempt to outline the development of the theology of martyrdom in the thought of biblical and intertestamental writers. Such an approach is already well discussed in the literature, and its liberal presuppositions limit its usefulness for our study.<sup>101</sup>

#### *The Kingdom and the World*

Few who are acquainted with Scripture would challenge the claim that it paints a picture of this present age as one of conflict between two great (although unequal) spiritual powers, God and Satan. Their respective kingdoms are repeatedly contrasted with one another in Scripture, reflecting their mutual antagonism and incompatibility (see Col 1:13, Eph 6:12-13; Matt 12:25-28). This spiritual conflict involves people as well, who either belong to "the kingdom of God," or the "domain of darkness" (Col 1:13). John writes, "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Jesus came into the world as light into darkness, polarizing humankind into those who "receive Him" and those who "do not receive Him" (John 1:4-11). The latter belong to the κόσμος, the anti-god

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<sup>100</sup>This chapter follows the tradition of the Reformation martyriologists, who also sought to show continuity between various persecutions of God's people. It especially resembles the work of Lutheran martyriologist Ludwig Rabus, who traced persecution back to Cain and Abel. See discussion in Hugh R. Boudin, "Les martyrologes protestants de la réforme. Instruments de propagande ou documents de témoignage?" in *Sainteté et martyre dans les religions du livre*, ed. Jacques Marx, Problèmes d'histoire du Christianisme, ed. Jacques Marx, no. 19 (Brussels: University of Brussels, 1989), 71.

<sup>101</sup>The approach usually begins with the Book of Daniel (assuming a second century B.C. date) and proposes that the theology of martyrdom found there "arose from the necessity to explain the time of persecution for the faith and to understand in a meaningful way the violent death of the stalwart" (see Baumeister, *Die Anfänge*, 22). The early Church accepted and further modified Daniel's theology of martyrdom in light of both the Maccabean literature and Christ's teaching concerning suffering for His name. Finally, early Christian writers applied the "legendary" persecution of Old Testament prophets to round out this martyrdom motif.

system that dominates fallen people, who lie in the power of Satan, the “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4).

Scripture clearly confirms the spiritual dichotomy that Augustine later indicated by the terms “The City of God” and “The City of This World.” We will now trace the historical development and manifestation of this phenomenon, giving special application to the question of martyrdom.

### *Cain and Abel*

Those who have reflected on biblical history and the history of humanity often trace the contrast between good and evil persons back to the account of Cain and Abel (including Abel’s “replacement,” Seth). Beginning with these individuals humanity is commonly divided into the “wicked” and the “righteous,” of whom these brothers serve as prototypes.

In the Genesis account there are suggestions that moral character was associated with physical lineage. We note that in the seventh generation from Adam Lamech (from Cain) kills a man, whereas Enoch (from Seth) walks with God. Although Gen 6:1-4 is a difficult passage, a number of scholars understand the “sons of God” to represent the godly descendants of Seth, while the “daughters of men” are from the wicked line of Cain.<sup>102</sup>

The Cain versus Abel/Seth contrast, however, is usually applied allegorically to represent the “wicked” and the “righteous” in general, and is witnessed by the New Testament. First of all, we note that in Hebrews 11 Abel is presented as an example of faith, while Jude describes sinners of his day as having “gone the way of Cain” (Jude 11); in Matt 23:35 (par. 43 Luke 11:51) Abel is listed first among the righteous sufferers of Old Testament fame.<sup>103</sup> More notable is John’s usage of Cain as the prototype of those who persecute believers (1 John 3:12-14).

Dodd describes this key passage as follows: “The two primeval brothers become representatives of the evil world over against the family of God. As Cain hated Abel to the point of killing him, because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous, so the pagan world hates Christians, and for the same reason; because of the inherent opposition of wickedness to goodness.”<sup>104</sup> Grayston concurs: Cain “represents the world which kills, or threatens to kill, Christians.”<sup>105</sup> Delitzsch writes, “Cain is the representative of the class of men

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<sup>102</sup>Adherents include Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and, among modern commentators, Kenneth Matthews (see Ray E. Clendenen, ed., *The New American Commentary*, vol. 1A, *Genesis 1-11:26*, by Kenneth A. Matthews [Nashville: Broadman, 1996], 329). Josephus also links character to lineage: “The posterity of Cain became exceeding wicked, every one successively dying one after another more wicked than the former,” while Seth left “children behind him who imitated his virtues” (*Ant.* 1.66, 68). Quotation from William Whiston, ed., *The Works of Josephus* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987), page number not noted. In subsequent references this work will be abbreviated *WJ*.

<sup>103</sup>These passages, however, do not refer to Cain and Abel in a typological sense, since other characters are listed in the contexts as examples of good and bad behavior as well.

<sup>104</sup>C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary*, ed. James Moffatt (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), 82

<sup>105</sup>Kenneth Grayston, *The Johannine Epistles*, *New Century Bible Commentary*, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984), 111.

which is ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ (1 John iii. 12), and Abel is the representative of the Church, which is hated by the world and persecuted even unto blood.”<sup>106</sup>

This Cain-Abel/Seth typology was common during the intertestamental period. In 4 Macc 18:11, as in Matt 23:35, Abel is listed first among righteous sufferers. Jub 4:2-5 applies Cain’s curse to him who “smites his neighbor treacherously.” The Testament of Benjamin declares, “Until eternity those who are like Cain in their moral corruption and hatred of brother shall be punished with a similar judgment.”<sup>107</sup>

Philo offers by far the most developed Cain-Abel/Seth typology. In his *On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by Him and by His Brother Cain*, Cain represents those who commit “everything to the mind,” while Abel represents those “attributing to God all the consequent work of creation as his own” (v. 2). Every detail of the story of Cain and Abel, from their occupations to the order their names are listed, has significance for Philo in respect to the contrast of good and evil. In his *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile* he writes that men “who love virtue and piety . . . may be classed under Seth as the author of their race” (v. 42), while Cain’s race shows “a life of plotting, and cunning, and wickedness, and dissoluteness” (v. 43). Philo devotes an entire work to the theme, *That the Worse Are Wont to Attack the Better*, claiming that self-lovers like Cain “never cease struggling against them (God-lovers like Abel) with every kind of weapon, till they compel them to succumb, or else utterly destroy them” (v. 32, parenthetical insertion mine).<sup>108</sup>

Among the church fathers Cyprian claims that Abel “initiated martyrdom.”<sup>109</sup> Later in Church history the Anabaptists also recognized the contrast between the two sons of Adam, attributing to Cain the “first attack of the Serpent,” and to Abel the “first advance in the direction of Christ.”<sup>110</sup> In more modern times Delitzsch comments, “A chasm is now established within humanity itself between two kinds of seed, one man placing himself on the side of the seed of the woman, the other upon that of the seed of the serpent.”<sup>111</sup>

We recognize, too, that the conflict between Cain and Abel went beyond human factors and motives. It was not simply the record of ancient tensions between “pastoral and agricultural ways of life,”<sup>112</sup> or even the result of Cain’s jealousy toward Abel. But as Hamilton notes, “Cain was not acting totally independently”; his action “was an external manifestation of the grip that Satan had on his life.”<sup>113</sup> In like manner, higher forces motivate the conflict between the “moral descendents” of these two brothers to this day.

### *Israel and the Descendents of Ham*

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<sup>106</sup>Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 184.

<sup>107</sup>*Test. Ben.* 7:5. Citation taken from Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 241.

<sup>108</sup>Quotations from Judaeus Philo, *The Works of Philo*, revised ed., trans. C. D. Yonge (Philadelphia: Hendrickson, 1995), CD-ROM version, Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

<sup>109</sup>Cyprian, *Epist.* 55.5, in *ANF*, vol. 5.

<sup>110</sup>Ethelbert Stauffer, “The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 19 (1945): 190.

<sup>111</sup>Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, n.d.), 1:184.

<sup>112</sup>William F. Albright and David N. Freedman, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 1, *Genesis*, by E. A. Speiser (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 31.

<sup>113</sup>R. K. Harrison, ed., *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, by Victor P. Hamilton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 244.

We encounter the next Old Testament representations of the conflict between the kingdoms of God and Satan among the sons of Noah. Immediately after the Flood obliterated the dichotomy between the descendents of Seth and Cain, a new rivalry appears--the descendants of Ham versus the descendents of Shem. From Ham descended three great enemies of pre- and early-monarchical Israel: Mizraim (Egypt), son of Ham; Canaan, son of Ham; and the Philistines, descendants of Mizraim. We will give particular attention to the first two of these.

The conflict between Israel and Egypt,<sup>114</sup> as described in the first part of the book of Exodus, is well known. In light of our proposed paradigm, it is not difficult to assign the role "The City of This World" to Egypt, the oppressor of God's people. The "Evil City" is even more clearly represented by Pharaoh, especially in his dramatic confrontation with Moses and Aaron, representatives of "God's City." The narrator of Exodus also reveals that this conflict was not merely between mortals, but had a "cosmic" dimension as well. The last plague God sent on Egypt was directed not only toward Pharaoh and his subjects, but against the "gods of Egypt" as well (see Exod 12:12).

Earlier in the canon, in Genesis 12, Canaan is cursed to be the servant of his uncles as a result of his father Ham's sin. Thus, the "cursed" race of Cain is replaced by the "cursed" race of Canaan.<sup>115</sup> Later on in the narrative the descendants of Shem are traced to the patriarchs of Israel, while the descendants of Canaan include "the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite and the Hivite" (Gen 10:16-17), Israel's enemies during the years of conquest (Josh 3:10). The repeated warnings in the Pentateuch against associating with the Canaanites accentuate the moral and spiritual distinction between the two groups. Matthews provides this helpful observation:

Israel understood the contrast between the godly seed of Seth and that of Cain, whose descendants founded an expanding urban civilization marked by godlessness. Israel saw itself as the godly seed in the earth, chosen by the Lord, but it too faced the "Cains" and "Canaans" of its times who had built up its towers and cities opposing the Hebrews seeking refuge in the land.<sup>116</sup>

This distinction, not only with the Canaanites but also with all pagan nations, was evident in the rite of circumcision. In the Old Testament we frequently see that non-Israelites are generalized under the derogatory rubric "the uncircumcised" in connection not only with their physical condition, but also with their moral degradation.

The conflict between the descendents of Shem and Ham is consistent with our unfolding biblical picture of the division between the "City of God" and the "City of This World," and further depicts the greater conflict raging between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, and the persecution of the former by the latter.

### *Israel and Her Prophets*

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<sup>114</sup>Material suggested by Graham Cole in reviewing this chapter.

<sup>115</sup>Matthews notes the parallel between the curse of Cain (Gen 4:11) and the curse of Canaan (Gen 9:25). See Clendenen, ed., *The New American Commentary*, 1:423.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid*, 1:187.

During the time when Israel was less threatened by her Canaanite neighbors another dichotomy between true servants of God and servants of Satan came to the forefront--the conflict between Israel and her prophets.<sup>117</sup> The people of Israel, in rebellion against God, become persecutors of the prophets. Thus the people who had been distinguished from the surrounding nations by the rite of circumcision are themselves considered "uncircumcised" (Jer 9:25-26), thus indicating their change of allegiance from the City of God to the City of This World. This tension between people and prophet, of course, dates back to the beginning of Israel's history when the people contended with Moses. But it was during the time of the monarchy, when prophetic activity was at its height, that this antagonism reached the point of active persecution of the prophets.

We must acknowledge that the distinction is not technically between the people of Israel and their prophets, but rather between the general population and the righteous remnant, which the prophets publicly represented.<sup>118</sup> Consequently, we can find references to righteous suffering outside of the writings or experience of prophets. Bromiley notes, "The Psalms, too, are full of pleas to God made by those who suffer persecution because of their faithfulness to God and His commandments (e.g., Pss 119:84-87, 150, 157, 161)."<sup>119</sup> We could also mention Ps 44:22, which is applied in Rom 8:36 to persecution,<sup>120</sup> and Ps 69:7-9, where the Psalmist also suffers "for Your sake." Also, not only is righteousness found outside of the prophets, but iniquity is also found among them--Bright notes the division between true and false prophets in Israel.<sup>121</sup> Yet since the dichotomy is most frequently depicted in Scripture by the simple "prophet versus people" or "prophet versus king," we will employ this scenario to illustrate our point.

We must also acknowledge that during the monarchical period Israel was not always in a backslidden state, and that prophets arose only periodically, "in times of national crises, whether in the form of national apostasy or in the form of imminent war."<sup>122</sup> Thus the picture

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<sup>117</sup>Tertullian also recognizes the persecution of the prophets as a continuation of the Cain-Abel conflict: "As soon as God has begun to be worshipped, religion has got ill-will for her portion. He who had pleased God is slain, and that by his brother. . . . ungodliness made the object of its pursuit, finally, that not only of righteous persons, but even of prophets also." (Tertullian, *Scorp.* 7, in *ANF*, vol. 3). Fischel concurs, "The whole history of the prophets from Abel on seems to be linked by a chain of genuine and exemplary martyrdoms." See H. A. Fischel, "Martyr and Prophet," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 37 (1947): 274.

<sup>118</sup>Elijah is reminded of this. See Rom 11:3-4.

<sup>119</sup>G. W. Bromiley, "Persecution," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3:772.

<sup>120</sup>Although Calvin and others date Psalm 44 during the Maccabean persecutions, others convincingly argue that the Psalm simply records Israel's quest to understand their defeat in battle when they had done nothing to deserve it. Nonetheless, even in the latter proposal the element of persecution is preserved in that Israel's suffering was in part because of the Gentile hatred of their religion. See Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, *Psalms-Song of Songs*, by Willem A. VanGemeren, Allen P. Ross, J. Stafford Wright, and Dennis F. Kinlaw (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 337, 441; Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Psalms*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. Samuel R. Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), 376, 381; and A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, New Century Bible, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (London: Oliphants, 1972), 1:337, 341.

<sup>121</sup>William F. Albright and David N. Freedman, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 21, *Jeremiah*, by John Bright (New York: Doubleday, 1965), xx-xxi.

<sup>122</sup>John S. Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, ed. Bruce D. Chilton, no. 6 (Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield, 1985), 27.

of a constant, ongoing struggle between people and prophet is somewhat artificial. Yet the conflict between them was frequent enough that Stephen could make the sweeping accusation that the Jews “are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” (Acts 7:51-52). Similarly, Jesus rebukes Jerusalem, which “kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her” (Matt 23:37). Thus we are justified in including the “Israel versus prophet” scenario in our unfolding persecution paradigm.

In connection with the persecution of the prophets a difficult question arises--how many of the prophets were actually killed for their message? The New Testament seems to indicate that many, if not all, eventually experienced martyrdom.<sup>123</sup> Baumeister comments, “In Jesus’ day the idea was in circulation that not just this prophet or that but all prophets had died a violent death as a result of what they had done.”<sup>124</sup> Generally, commentators object that this is an exaggeration based on accounts of prophetic suffering in Jewish midrash,<sup>125</sup> which was supposedly popularized in the early Church to show that the Jews had killed not only the prophets but the Messiah as well.<sup>126</sup> Pobee claims, “Clearly at this point the prophet-martyr motif has moved from the realm of sober history to that of theology.”<sup>127</sup>

We do note that in the Old Testament only two instances of a prophet being killed are recorded. The first is found in Jer 26:20-23 where Uriah the prophet is slain with the sword by King Jehoiakim. This incident is mentioned in passing during Jeremiah’s trial after his arrest for preaching against Jerusalem.<sup>128</sup> Like Jeremiah, he had preached judgment against Judah; but, unlike Jeremiah, he had perished as a result.<sup>129</sup> The second is in 2 Chr 24:19-25 where Zechariah the priest is stoned by order of King Joash after rebuking the king’s apostasy.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>123</sup>See Matt 21:33-40 (par. Luke 20:9-19); Matt 22:1-14, 23:29-39 (par. Luke 11:47-51, 13:34-35); Acts 7:52; Heb 11:37; and 1 Thess 2:15. Gilliard strenuously, but unconvincingly argues that in 1 Thess 2:15 Paul had “Christian prophets” in view. See Frank Gilliard, “Paul and the Killing of the Prophets in 1 Thes. 2:15,” *Novum Testamentum* 36 (1994): 259-70.

<sup>124</sup>Baumeister, “Early Christianity,” 6.

<sup>125</sup>See, for example, Hans-Joachim Schoeps, “Die jüdischen Prophetenmorde,” *Symbolae Biblicae Upsalienses* 2 (1943): 1-22; Betsy Halpern Amaru, “The Killing of the Prophets: Unraveling a Midrash,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983): 153-80; and Baumeister, *Die Anfänge*, 6-7.

<sup>126</sup>Schoeps, “Die jüdischen Prophetenmorde,” 22; Amaru, “The Killing of the Prophets,” 153.

<sup>127</sup>Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 28.

<sup>128</sup>Bright objects, not to the historicity of this event, but to its timing in the reign of Jehoiakim since Jeremiah’s trial occurred early in this king’s reign. He also argues that this is a later insertion since it apparently contributes nothing to the argument at hand. See Albright and Freedman, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, 21:172. On the other hand, Holladay defends the integrity of the text based on strong linguistic evidence. See William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia, ed. Frank Moore (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 109.

<sup>129</sup>Holladay notes that the *hitpa’el* “prophesied,” used of Uriah in verse 20, is elsewhere used in Jeremiah for false or “mad” prophets (14:14, 23:13, 29:26) and concludes that Uriah was simply “a contemporary of the narrator” who “made prophetic claims” and “nothing at this point is implied about the rightness or wrongness of his message.” See Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 109. One can respond that “nothing else in the passage supports Holladay’s interpretation of the *hitpa’el* form as an indication that Uriah was prophesying falsely. In fact, the *nifal* of the same verbal root is used in the second half of the verse. R. Wilson’s explanation of the *hitpa’el* of נָבֵא as ‘act the way prophets act’ is appropriate here (R. Wilson, *Prophecy*, 335–36).” From David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 27, *Jeremiah* 26-52, by Gerald Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers (Dallas: Word, 1995), 29.

<sup>130</sup>Although Zechariah is not called a prophet in Scripture, his prophetic rebuke resulted in his death, and he is recognized as a prophet by the rabbis (see *Lam. R.* 2.4, 4.16). Also notable is his being “clothed” with the Spirit (v. 20), a phrase that “refers to the exercise of a prophetic gift” (Martin J. Selman, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, The Tyndale

Other passages record prophetic deaths. We read, for example, how Jezebel killed the Lord's prophets (1 Kgs 18:4, 13, 19:10, 14; 2 Kgs 9:7). Montgomery calls this "the first, although indirect, reference to a systematic persecution of the sons of the prophets."<sup>131</sup> It also implies an "organized prophetic resistance" to Baal worship.<sup>132</sup> Also, two other key Old Testament passages strongly imply a more widespread killing of prophets in Israel. First, in Nehemiah 9 the people's prayer of confession acknowledges that Israel "killed Your prophets who had admonished them" (Neh 9:26).<sup>133</sup> One has to admit, with Clines, that "the factual basis for this generalization is slender as far as our evidence goes," but we need not conclude with him that "it may be rhetorical heightening of Israel's rejection of the prophetic word."<sup>134</sup> The New Testament confirms the acknowledgment in Neh 9:26 that Israel consistently resisted prophetic ministry and persecuted the prophets (see verses listed earlier). It appears, then, that sufficient persecution took place to warrant this generalization.

The second key passage is found in Jer 2:30. We read:

In vain I have struck your sons;  
They accepted no chastening.  
Your sword has devoured your prophets  
Like a destroying lion.<sup>135</sup>

Here again, a hostile attitude towards God's prophets, resulting in their execution, is described.<sup>136</sup>

Various emendations to Jer 2:30 have been suggested. Jerome and Duhm, following the Septuagint, feel the "sword" is God's punishment of false prophets--if they were true prophets, we would read "My prophets" instead of "your prophets."<sup>137</sup> Yet McKane responds, "We

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Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman [Leicester: IVP, 1994], 455). Some feel his designation as a prophet may have arisen due to the confusion in the Jewish and early Christian literature (and apparently also in Matt 23:35) of this Zechariah with Zechariah the son of Berechiah (Zech 1:1), Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah (Isa 8:2) and even Zechariah the father of John the Baptist. See discussion in Amaru, "The Killing of the Prophets," 167-69.

<sup>131</sup>James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, ed. Henry S. Gehman, The International Critical Commentary, ed. Samuel R. Driver, Alfred Plummer and Charles A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 299.

<sup>132</sup>John Gray, *I and II Kings*, The Old Testament Library, ed. G. Ernest Wright, John Bright, James Barr, and Peter Ackroyd (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 347.

<sup>133</sup>Kidner correctly observes that although this accusation corresponds chronologically in the prayer of Nehemiah 9 to the times of the judges, it projects a perspective on the prophets beyond that time. See Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester: IVP, 1979), 112.

<sup>134</sup>D. J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 197.

<sup>135</sup>Septuagint: "In vain I struck your children; you accepted no instruction. A sword has devoured your prophets as a destroying lion, and you were not afraid." Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), CD-ROM edition, Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems.

<sup>136</sup>Jeremiah may have had in view here the pogrom of Manasseh recorded in 2 Kgs 21:16. See Hubbard and Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, 27:183; and Albright and Freedman, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, 21:16. Josephus also accuses Manasseh, "Nor would he spare the prophets, for he every day slew some of them" (*Ant.* 10.3.1, in *WJ*, 269).

<sup>137</sup>Cited in William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, The International Critical Commentary, ed., J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 51.



should suppose that the second person plural suffix emphasizes Israel's responsibility for the treatment meted out to these prophets."<sup>138</sup> Hoffmann suggests another emendation, "In vain have I smitten *my children* (בני to בניכם) that have received no correction. *My sword* hath devoured *you* (בכם to נביאיכם) like a destroying lion," noting that lions are usually punishment from God in Jeremiah (Jer 4:7, 5:6, 49:19, 50:17), as is the sword (Jer 12:12, 14:13, 15, 18, 25:16, 29, 47:6), and that the verb שחַת ("destroy") is often used for punishment of the people (Jer 5:10, 13:7, 9, 14, 14:10, 18:4, 36:29).<sup>139</sup>

One would prefer to see, however, some textual confirmation for an emendation of such significance. We must also consider whether non-canonical sources have any historical value for indicating prophetic martyrdoms. The *Lives of the Prophets*, a Palestinian Jewish work (with "Christian expansions") of the 1st century A.D., describes the violent death of several Old Testament figures.<sup>140</sup> According to the *Lives* Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh,<sup>141</sup> Micah the Morashtite was thrown from a cliff by Joram, Amos was beaten to death by the son of Amaziah, Jeremiah was stoned by Jews in Egypt,<sup>142</sup> and Ezekiel was killed by the Jewish leadership in exile.<sup>143</sup>

In addition to these more substantial claims, an eleventh century midrash by Hadarshan lists Shemiah and Ahijah the Shilonite as prophetic martyrs. Shemiah was apparently slain by King Baasha of Israel, and Ahijah by King Abijah of Judah. But historical discrepancies in these accounts and weak support in the rabbinic literature make Hadarshan's claims suspect.<sup>144</sup> A Jewish legend of even more questionable historical value depicts Hur as a martyr, having died for opposing the Golden Calf.<sup>145</sup>

Heb 11:37 provides some substantiation for these non-canonical accounts: "They were stoned, they were sawn in two, . . . they were put to death with the sword." Schoeps feels that these plural verbs are poetic and not to be taken literally. He simply sees here references to the deaths of Zechariah and Jeremiah (stoned), Isaiah (sawn in two) and Uriah (slain with the sword).<sup>146</sup> This assumption appears reasonable. At the same time, this means that Hebrews confirms the execution of Isaiah and Jeremiah as historical and makes more plausible the assumption that not all prophetic deaths are recorded in the canon.

Admittedly, we do not find many *concrete* cases of the killing of a prophet in the canonical Scriptures. Yet, the additional and more general references to prophetic deaths, both canonical and non-canonical, listed above are substantial. Also, I would consider the New Testament references to the frequent killing of prophets in Old Testament Israel to be reliable

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>Y. Hoffmann, "Jeremiah 2:30," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977): 20. Supported by Holladay. See William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia, ed. Frank Moore (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 106-7.

<sup>140</sup>See Charles Cutler Torrey, ed., *The Lives of the Prophets* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1946). Schoeps gives the "pre-expanded" *Lives* a B.C. date. See Schoeps, "Die jüdischen Prophetenmorde," 9-10.

<sup>141</sup>This account is also described in *b. Sanh.* 103b and other Talmudic references (as per Schoeps, "Die jüdischen Prophetenmorde," 7), reported in the pseudepigraphical *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, possibly alluded to in Heb 11:37, and endorsed by Origen in his *Com. on Matt.* 10.18.

<sup>142</sup>See *Paraleipomena Jeremio* 9; Endorsed by Tertullian in *Scorp.* 8.

<sup>143</sup>Also in *Visions of Paul*, 49.

<sup>144</sup>Amaru, "The Killing of the Prophets," 154-66.

<sup>145</sup>*Lev R.* 10.3; *Exod R.* 41.7, 48.3; *b. Sanh.* 7a.

<sup>146</sup>Schoeps, "Die jüdischen Prophetenmorde," 21.

and not simply an uncritical acceptance of unhistorical Jewish midrash. I would share with Origen (*Com. on Matt.* 10.18) the conviction that New Testament authors accepted as historical some of the non-canonical accounts of prophetic deaths, such as those mentioned in the *Lives of the Prophets*. Their inspired endorsement of this tradition validates, in general, its historicity. Thus we can embrace the “Israel versus prophet” theme not only as a legitimate continuation of our persecution paradigm, but also as a significant intensification of it, more closely approximating classical martyrdom.

### *Israel and the Gentile Empires*

The period of the monarchy ends with both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel going into exile, introducing the next stage of Israel’s history--its domination by Gentile Empires. As noted by Fischel, the depiction of the prophet as martyr continued to develop in this period, only under different conditions: “The course of events also preserved and soon gave prominence to the idea of the prophet-martyr who suffers under a *foreign* tyrant.”<sup>147</sup> Now, the contrast is not so much righteous Israel against backslidden Israel, but rather a united Israel against pagan oppressors.<sup>148</sup>

Even before the dawning of this epoch God had been preparing His people to face this new challenge. The Book of Daniel not only predicts the coming Seleucid persecution, but also provides prototypes of righteous suffering--Daniel and his three companions.<sup>149</sup> Many have noted the pedagogical value of the Book of Daniel in preparing God’s people for suffering.<sup>150</sup> Chapters 3 and 6 lay the foundation in describing how God is able to deliver his people from persecution. In chapters 11 and 12, however, God’s people are massacred: “Daniel and his friends had been delivered by unusual divine interventions and death, but the warning here is that this will not always be the case.”<sup>151</sup>

Since God’s ability to deliver has already been established, it is implied that a greater purpose is being worked out in allowing these later saints to perish. This is confirmed by the

<sup>147</sup>Fischel, “Martyr and Prophet,” 272.

<sup>148</sup>As in the previous section, this generalization must also be qualified--there were evil Jews abusing their secular authority to oppress their fellow countrymen. See 2 Maccabees 3-5, for example. Consequently, the Qumran community portrayed the conflict at this time as between false and true Israel. See discussion in Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, trans. John E. Alsup, ed. Ferdinand Hahn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 131.

<sup>149</sup>Pobee cites many intertestamental and rabbinic references to Daniel as the “ideal” martyr: 1 Macc 2:60; 4 Macc 13:9, 16:3, 21, 18:13; *Jos. Ant.* 10.260-63; *Gen. R.* 34; *b. Ab. Zar.* 8b. The three Hebrew youths are also mentioned in *b. Sanh.* 93a; *b. Ab. Zar.* 3a; *Ta’am* 18b; *Pes.* 118a, 94a; 1 Macc 2:5; 4 Macc 13:9, 16:3, 21, 18:12; *Cant. R.* 7.8; *Pal. Targumim Gen* 38.25. See Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 14. Although many assert that the events of Daniel 3 and 6 never took place, I affirm with Leupold that we must respect the historicity of these stories since “a purely fictional deliverance is small comfort to one confronted by a factual peril of death. Solid words of God or solid facts alone avail under such circumstances.” See H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (No city: Wartburg, 1949; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 133 (pages citations are to reprint edition).

<sup>150</sup>See Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel*, The Old Testament Library, ed. G. Ernest Wright, John Bright, James Barr, and Peter Ackroyd (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 55; John Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 194, 402; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester: IVP, 1978), 66; and Ulrich Kellermann, “Das Danielbuch und die Märtyrertheologie der Auferstehung,” in *Die Entstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie*, ed. J. W. van Henten (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1989), 57-58.

<sup>151</sup>Baldwin, *Daniel*, 196. Porteous notes that the qualification “and if not” in chapter 3 already prepares the reader for this possible outcome. See Porteous, *Daniel*, 55.

frequent references to “time” in the latter chapters of Daniel: “The period of time in which the temple is defiled and the righteous are oppressed is predetermined, established according to the divine timetable. The individual righteous person is at the mercy of the larger historical designs of God.”<sup>152</sup>

The eventual deliverance of the martyrs is promised, however, through the resurrection of chapter 12.<sup>153</sup> Collins summarizes, “There is an evident parallel here with the stories in Daniel 3 and 6, but there is also a profound difference. The apocalyptic vision no longer entertains the hope for miraculous deliverance in this life. The hope for salvation is beyond death.”<sup>154</sup> Kellerman sees a literary transition occurring in the book of Daniel from the typical “salvation history” of the Old Testament, where salvation equals deliverance (Daniel 3 and 6), to the “martyr history” of intertestamental times, where salvation equals resurrection (Daniel 11 and 12).<sup>155</sup>

Another important feature of the Book of Daniel is how earthly persecutions reflect the greater heavenly conflict. One can note, for example, the many references to angels and evil “princes” in the book of Daniel. The same is noted in intertestamental writings as well. Wintermute summarizes the thinking of Jubilees: “The hostility between Israel and the surrounding nations may be seen as a conflict between good and evil.”<sup>156</sup>

The predictions of Daniel 11 and 12 find partial fulfillment in the persecutions by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C., as recorded in the Maccabean literature. In 2 Maccabees 4-14 we read of numerous killings of Jews who would not compromise their faith, with special attention on the martyrdom of Eleazar (6:18-31) and the seven brothers (7:1-42).<sup>157</sup> These same martyrdoms receive further elaboration in 4 Maccabees.<sup>158</sup>

Besides the actual cases of persecution in the intertestamental period mentioned above, we may note how an intertestamental writer, the author of the *Book of Enoch*, in symbolic (and supposedly prophetic) form depicts the age-old conflict that we have been describing in this chapter. In 1 Enoch 85-90 the struggle between the true people of God and their enemies is pictured sequentially as: (1) a black and red bull (Cain and Abel); (2) twelve white sheep

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<sup>152</sup>Barry Smith, “Suffering,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 751.

<sup>153</sup>Porteous, *Daniel*, 55. Collins, not respecting the historicity of Daniel, goes so far as to suggest that the deliverances of chapters 3 and 6 metaphorically represent the future resurrection of chapter 12 (Collins, *Daniel*, 194).

<sup>154</sup>Collins, *Daniel*, 402

<sup>155</sup>Kellermann, “Das Danielbuch,” 57-58.

<sup>156</sup>O. S. Wintermute, ed. and trans., “Jubilees,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2:35-142 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 2:48. Pobee lists other reference to “the cosmic battle” such as Song of Three Youths 26; Est 10:7, 11:6; Ps Sol. 2:29; and when Satan entices Manasseh to kill Isaiah in the *Martyrdom of Isaiah*. See Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 46.

<sup>157</sup>Another death during the Maccabean period is recorded in the Testament of Moses, chapter 9, where Taxo and his sons flee to the wilderness to escape persecution and die there. Still another is described in *Gen R.* 65.22 where Joseph Meshitha refused to enter the temple to plunder it for the Syrians and was sawn in two.

<sup>158</sup>Hadas defends the historicity of these events, feeling the varying accounts among rabbis (*Lam R.* 1.50; *b. Gittin* 57b; *Seder Eliyahu R.* 29) reflect independent historical sources. The rabbis, however, tell only the story of the seven brothers and, when time is indicated, locate the story in the time of Hadrian. See Moses Hadas, ed. and trans, *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees*, Jewish Apocryphal Literature, ed. Solomon Zeitlin (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 99-100, 133. Bowersock claims to see literary evidence that these accounts are later insertions into 2 Maccabees. See Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 11-12. Thus, although the accounts of Eleazar and the seven brothers are likely historical, there is some uncertainty as to exactly when they occurred.

among wolves (Israel in Egypt); (3) sheep and other animals (Israel in Canaan during the time of the judges); (4) sheep against sheep (backslidden Israel against the prophets); and (5) shepherds against the sheep (heathen empires oppressing Israel). This all leads to an eventual apocalyptic judgment where the sheep are finally rescued.

The history of Israel and her predecessors gives us grounds to conclude that the dichotomy between the City of God and the City of This World clearly extends back to the first human family. Although at times this dichotomy was represented by parties within Israel itself, to a large degree the nation of Israel was the representative of God's kingdom.

### *The New Testament Church and the Jews*

The coming of Christ causes an even more radical polarization of the Cities of God and of this World--He comes as "light into the darkness." The Gospels record how Jesus was ever conscious of His inevitable clash with evil. Even at the height of His ministry's popularity He began to prepare His disciples for the suffering He was about to endure (Mark 8:31). Even though the suffering of Christ was preordained by God for our redemption, we should not confuse the ultimate cause of Christ's suffering, the plan of God, with its effective means--the opposition of Satan and the world. The positive and redemptive results of Christ's death in no way minimize the intensity of the spiritual conflict that brought it about (Luke 22:53). Thus the crucifixion of Christ presents us with yet another, and likely the most extreme example of the world's opposition to and rejection of God. In Stauffer's words, "The death of the Messiah is the climax of the persecution of all the saints."<sup>159</sup>

Jesus did more than oppose the kingdom of this world; He called others to join His side. Those who responded, though, would be subject to the same rejection that He Himself endured. This rejection, as we will soon see, will initially come from the Jews, the previous representatives of the City of God.

The Synoptics provide us with numerous examples of the fate of Jesus' disciples.<sup>160</sup> We may begin with the so-called "Little Apocalypse" of Mark 13, the atypical character of which has prompted much discussion among exegetes.<sup>161</sup> Here, among various end time predictions, Jesus forecasts future tribulation and persecution for his followers (Mark 13:9-13, par. Matt 24:9-14 and Luke 21:12-19). These very same warnings of rejection are also found in Matt 10:16-22 (par. Luke 12:11-12), and there apply to the upcoming preaching ministry of the

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<sup>159</sup>Stauffer, "Theology of Martyrdom," 180.

<sup>160</sup>Among the Synoptic evangelists Matthew emphasizes persecution the most, followed by Mark. Luke, through some apparently redactional moves, somewhat "softens" the persecution scenario. See discussion of Luke in Brian E. Beck, "'Imitatio Christi' and the Lucan Passion Narrative," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), 34-35, 46; and Boudewijn Dehandschutter, "La persecution des chrétiens dans les Actes des Apôtres," in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, redaction, théologie*, ed. J. Kremer, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, no. 48 (Leuven: Leuven University, 1979), 542.

<sup>161</sup>The length and prophetic nature of the discourse appears atypical for Mark's depiction of Christ. But Collins dismisses the theory that chapter 13 was a later insertion to explain the delay of the Parousia. See Adela Y. Collins, "The Eschatological Discourse of Mark 13," in *The Four Gospels, 1992*, ed. F. Van Segbroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, and J. Verheyden (Leuven, Belgium: University Press, 1992), 2:1125-26. Verheyden, along with Collins, views it as a combination of traditions with redaction by Mark. See Jozef Verheyden, "Persecution and Eschatology," in *The Four Gospels, 1992*, ed. F. Van Segbroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, and J. Verheyden (Leuven, Belgium: University Press, 1992), 2:1141-52.

twelve disciples.<sup>162</sup> Another, more cryptic indication that the disciples' witness would be accompanied by rejection is Mark's placement of the account of John the Baptist's martyrdom between Jesus' sending of His disciples and their return (Mark 6:7-32). According to Edwards, "The sandwich structure draws mission and martyrdom, discipleship and death, into an inseparable relationship. . . . whoever would follow Jesus must first reckon with the fate of John."<sup>163</sup>

Not only ministry, but even discipleship can result in persecution. In Mark 8:34-37 (par. Matt 16:24-26 and Luke 9:23-25) Jesus depicts Christian discipleship "in terms of suffering and persecution."<sup>164</sup> Plummer observes that these words are preserved nearly verbatim in all three gospels, concluding, "We may believe that it was regarded as one of the chief treasures among Christ's remembered Sayings."<sup>165</sup> Many observe that the mention of the cross in this passage, while not exclusively referring to martyrdom, strongly implies it.<sup>166</sup>

The Synoptics also stress the continuity between the suffering of the prophets and that of the disciples, further reinforcing our persecution paradigm. Gundry observes how the disciples will be rejected like the prophets "who were before them" (Matt 5:12).<sup>167</sup> This puts them "in the true succession of God's faithful servants."<sup>168</sup> In Matt 23:29-36 Jesus further elaborates on the persecution of the prophets, predicting also the future rejection of the disciples He is sending "in the same role."<sup>169</sup> Cunningham, after his exhaustive review of persecution in both Luke and Acts, reaches the same conclusion: "The persecuted people of God stand in continuity with God's prophets."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>Noted by Barnabas Lindars, "The Persecution of Christians in John 15:18 – 16:4a," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), 51. Luz insightfully notes that after the instructions for ministry in Matthew 10 there is no record of the Twelve going out to preach--the discourse is meant for the entire church. See Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 77.

<sup>163</sup>Edwards, *Mark*, 189. Similar conclusion in France, *Mark*, 246.

<sup>164</sup>W. R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, New Testament Theology, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 219. O'Neill ("Did Jesus Teach," 11, 16) wrongly concludes that the teaching about taking up the cross was "restricted in application to a limited number of followers and was not meant for all." He himself recognizes that Luke writes about taking up the cross "daily," and Mark records how Jesus addresses the crowd with this challenge as well. France writes, "Their inclusion in the audience asserts that the harsh demands of the following verses apply not only to the Twelve but anyone else who may wish to join the movement. . . . This is not a special formula for the elite, but an essential element in discipleship" (France, *Mark*, 339). A similar conclusion is found William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 306.

<sup>165</sup>Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1914; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 206 (page citations are to reprint edition).

<sup>166</sup>See Lane, *Mark*, 307-8; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 200; and Lenski, *Matthew*, 645. Additionally, Lenski correctly observes that "the cross is that suffering which results from our faithful connection with Christ," not any kind of suffering, as is popularly understood (*ibid.*, 644).

<sup>167</sup>Gundry, *Matthew*, 74.

<sup>168</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Leicester: IVP, 1985), 112.

<sup>169</sup>France, *Matthew*, 330.

<sup>170</sup>Scott Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series, ed. Stanley E. Porter, no. 142 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 14, 290.

The Fourth Gospel also clearly depicts the moral/spiritual dichotomy we have been describing in this chapter. Here it is seen in the contrasting metaphors of light and darkness, above and below, life and death. In the Gospel of John Jesus comes into the world as light into darkness, which the darkness unequivocally rejects (John 1:5-10). Only those chosen out of the world become partakers of the light, and the consequence for this exodus from the world is to receive its hatred and rejection (John 15:18-25). This antagonistic relationship with the world can have fatal consequences for the disciples (John 16:2). In particular, this appears to be Peter's destiny (John 21:18-19).<sup>171</sup>

The Book of Acts demonstrates, from beginning to end, not only the successful expansion of gospel preaching, but also the consistent rejection and hostility of the unbelieving world.<sup>172</sup> As Cunningham writes, "Persecution is an almost omnipresent plot device in Luke's second volume."<sup>173</sup> As the story of the Acts unfolds we see repeated trials, imprisonments and the first Christian martyrdoms of Stephen and James. It is "through many tribulations" that we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).<sup>174</sup> Here (as well as in Acts 9:16) we see the "particle of necessity" (δεῖ) in connection with Christian suffering.<sup>175</sup> The apostle Paul testifies that in every city "bonds and afflictions await me" (Acts 20:23). We note that the Book of Acts ends with Paul in prison—an omen for the future destiny of the Church.

Beyerhaus observes, "From her origin to her perfection, it is central to the very nature of the faithful Church to be hated and persecuted by the world."<sup>176</sup> Similarly, Royal concludes, "Persecution of Christians was not an odd occurrence, but the normal course of affairs in a world where good and evil are in competition with each other for our ultimate allegiance."<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>171</sup>Peter's martyrdom is recorded by Tertullian (*Scorp.* 15) and Eusebius (*Ecc. Hist.* 3.1.2). The basic historicity of the event is endorsed, among others, by Cullmann. See Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple—Apostle—Martyr*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (London: SCM, 1953), 152. The text in John also appears to confirm the record that he was crucified. Many have responded convincingly to the objection that John 21:18 simply describes Peter in old age after a long life of Christian service. See Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary of the Gospel of John, Chapters 7-21*, trans. Robert W. Funk, ed. Robert W. Funk and Ulrich Busse, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 226-32; and David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 36, *John*, by George R. Beasley-Murray (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), 408-9. Potter relates, along with that of Peter, the traditions regarding the martyrdoms of Philip, Matthew, James the Just, Matthias, Andrew, Mark, Simeon, Bartholomew, Thomas, Luke, Simon the Canaanite, Timothy and Barnabas. See F. L. Potter, *Martyrs in All Ages* (Waukesha, Wis.: Metropolitan Church Association, 1907), 13-24.

<sup>172</sup>Petersen, because of the tight literary structure of Acts, rejects its historicity, feeling the author is simply relating a theology of persecution in narrative form. See Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, ed. Dan O. Via (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 90-91. Yet a structuring of historical information does not automatically invalidate its historicity. Also, Gaventa writes, "Lukan theology is intricately and irreversibly bound up with the story he tells and cannot be separated from it. An attempt to do justice to the theology of Acts must struggle to reclaim the character of Acts as a narrative." See Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Toward a Theology of Acts," *Interpretation* 42 (1988): 150.

<sup>173</sup>Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations*, 287.

<sup>174</sup>Cunningham rightly notes that this passage is located in a context of persecution and therefore refers "to the prospect of persecution for the sake of the faith of the disciples, and not to general troubles and trials of humanity." *Ibid.*, 245-46.

<sup>175</sup>Noted by Brian Rapske, "Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 247.

<sup>176</sup>Peter P. J. Beyerhaus, *God's Kingdom and the Utopian Error* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1992), 163.

<sup>177</sup>Royal, *Catholic Martyrs*, 5.

The New Testament implicates the Jews as those primarily responsible for the opposition to Christianity in its early years.<sup>178</sup> Frend concurs that one could characterize the initial conflict as a “fratricidal clash between rival groups of Jews,” in which “the Roman authorities were only indirectly concerned.”<sup>179</sup> It is the “Jews” who cry for Christ’s execution before a pagan Roman governor who had hoped to release Him (John 19:7-12). Peter’s arrest also pleases the “Jews” (Acts 12:3). The “Jews” are constantly stirring up the Gentiles against Paul’s ministry (Acts 13:50, 14:2, 19, 17:5, 13, 18:12) and plotting to put him to death (Acts 9:23, 20:3, 19, 21:11, 27, 23:12). It is the Jews who “both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out” (1 Thess 2:15). They are the allegorical Ishmael, “born according to the flesh,” who persecutes Isaac, born “according to the Spirit” (Gal 4:29). Zumstein writes,

*The opposition to the Word is the unbelieving Jews, personified notably by the Sanhedrin. . . . these are not only the Jews of Jerusalem, but of the whole Empire (6:9). . . . the chosen people, disseminated through the whole inhabited earth, find their unanimity not only by rejecting the Word, but also by persecuting its messengers.*<sup>180</sup>

Besides the biblical record, Jews reportedly killed Christians during the Bar-Cocheba revolt.<sup>181</sup> Also, in the late first century A.D. a rabbinic anathema, the Eighteenth Benediction or *Birkath ha-Minim*, was issued against the “Minim,” who are generally identified with followers of Jesus.<sup>182</sup>

As noted in the previous footnotes, several authors have strenuously argued that the Jews waged no *persistent*, organized persecution against believers in the Messiah. Parks<sup>183</sup> attempts to document that Jews actively opposed Christianity only in the first century. In reviewing the earliest of the *Acta Sanctorum* he notes that although the Jews still had hostile feelings toward the church during the Roman persecutions, cases of actual Jewish-led persecution were rare. He interprets the initial persecutions by the Jews documented in Acts as simply their attempt to rid the synagogues of Christian influence.

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<sup>178</sup>Not all Jews, of course, rejected Christ; His first disciples were all Jewish. Yet this is not an improper generalization, since the New Testament itself, as we shall see, characterizes the Jews as enemies of the early church. The New Testament does this not to indict every ethnic Jew, but to depict the nation of Israel as the prime antagonist of God’s kingdom at this time, that is, as the “City of This World.”

<sup>179</sup>W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 154.

<sup>180</sup>Jean Zumstein, “L’Apôtre comme martyr dans les actes de Luc,” *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 112 (1980): 375. My translation.

<sup>181</sup>Herford feels the Jewish killing of five disciples, recorded in *b. Sanh.* 43a, took place during the revolt, but asserts that outside of this time the Jews undertook no other formal persecution of Christians. See R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, Library of Religious and Philosophical Thought (Clifton, N.J.: Reference Book, 1966), 90-94. Hare also acknowledges the Jewish killing of Christians at the time of Bar-Cocheba, but argues that it was political and not religious--the Christian’s lack of participation in the war was considered treasonous. See Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, ed. Matthew Black, no. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1967), 38.

<sup>182</sup>The Benediction reads, “For the renegades let there be no hope, and may the arrogant kingdom soon be rooted out in our days, and the Nazarens and the *minim* perish as in a moment and be blotted out from the book of life and with the righteous may they not be inscribed. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant.” From C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (London: S.P.C.K., 1956; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 167 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>183</sup>See James Parks, *The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1961), 132, 137-41, 149.

Hare<sup>184</sup> also asserts that the Jews killed few Christians, and that these suffered from mob-violence, not from a judicial decision.<sup>185</sup> He attributes the killings of James, son of Zebedee, to Herod alone, and that of James the Just to a “personal vendetta” by a jealous high priest. Matthew, according to Hare, was reacting in his gospel to the failure of the mission to Israel and their rejection of the gospel when indicting the Jews for persecuting the faith.

We may accept the assertion that soon after the New Testament period the Jewish persecution lessened. A new player, as we will soon see, represented the domain of darkness after this time--the Roman Empire. During the New Testament period, however, the consistent biblical witness reviewed above should not be undervalued. The Bible faithfully portrays unbelieving Israel of New Testament times as the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9), aggressively opposed to Christianity. During this period they represent “The City of This World,” the primary antagonist of the “City of God.”

### *The Early Church and Rome*

Although the Scriptures, giving their inspired interpretation of history, provide us with the most authoritative basis for establishing a “persecution paradigm,” a brief glance at church history can provide further confirmation, as did our glance at intertestamental times. After the New Testament period Christianity sufficiently distanced itself from Judaism (geographically, ethnically and doctrinally) so that the latter ceased to be its major threat. In its place the Roman Empire became the main agent of persecution in the West.<sup>186</sup> Allard reports that in the years before Constantine the church underwent persecution about half of that time.<sup>187</sup> Workman characterizes the persecution more as “intensive” than “extensive,” with a significant escalation from the mid-second century. At times the number of deaths per day could average from one hundred (as per Eusebius) to five thousand (as per Jerome).<sup>188</sup>

Early on believers began to record and compile various individual accounts of martyrdom, the *Acts of the Martyrs*. Modern scholars have carefully investigated these records for historical accuracy. In an extensive work entitled *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Herbert Musurillo summarizes twenty-eight martyr accounts he feels to be reliable.<sup>189</sup> Timothy Barnes focuses on martyrdoms before A.D. 250 and endorses a number of those listed by Musurillo, while challenging the historicity of others.<sup>190</sup> E. C. E. Owen also defends the historicity of many accounts, appealing for support to accurate dates, proper judicial procedures, proper use of terms, and the general absence of the supernatural, except for extraordinary faith.<sup>191</sup> Among the most popular and controversial of the *Acts* is the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, the supernatural elements of which have aroused skepticism, especially among those with anti-

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<sup>184</sup>See Hare, *Jewish Persecution*, 20-22, 30-34, 125-29, 164-66.

<sup>185</sup>He claims a dual tradition of Stephen’s martyrdom, arguing that the “judicial-execution” tradition (Acts 6:12-7:1) is unhistorical, and the “mob-lynching” tradition (Acts 7:54-58) is historical.

<sup>186</sup>In the East Christians suffered as well. An estimated 190,000 Christians were martyred in Persia by the fifth century. See Chandler and Harvey, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>187</sup>Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 80-81. Traditionally ten great persecutions under Rome are listed. See Augustine, *City of God* 18.52.

<sup>188</sup>Herbert B. Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church* (London: Charles H. Kelley, 1906), 200-3.

<sup>189</sup>See Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1972), xii.

<sup>190</sup>Timothy Barnes, “Pre-Decian *Acta Martyrum*” (*Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 19 (1968): 509-31.

<sup>191</sup>Owen, *Authentic Acts*, 13.



supernaturalistic presuppositions.<sup>192</sup> Although some may challenge the Acts historicity on the grounds of its similarity to Jewish and pagan martyr accounts, van Henten aptly defends the thesis that the similarities are likely due to common experience and not literary dependence.<sup>193</sup>

Conflict with Rome, according to Healy, was inevitable and totally irreconcilable: "Since Christianity struck at the very existence of the pagan creeds and cults and sapped the foundations of political and social life, the hostility it provoked came from such causes and was of such a nature that it could never cease until such time as Christianity had triumphed over the established order or had itself been annihilated."<sup>194</sup> In addition to this, however, we must affirm with Frend that the struggle was ultimately "cosmic," not political, against Satan, not Rome: "The persecution they were suffering was the sure precursor of the time of Antichrist which in turn would usher in the Millennium of the Saints."<sup>195</sup>

Beyond reflection on the persecutions themselves, our persecution paradigm is supported by writers who lived during this period as well. Lesbaupin relates that the Church Fathers in general viewed persecution as the normal fare for God's people. He summarizes Hippolytus, for example, as teaching that "the church should be poor, without possessions, and in permanent conflict with the world."<sup>196</sup> This opinion was still voiced even after the cessation of hostilities. Straw, summarizing Gregory the Great, writes that from Abel "endurance of persecution distinguishes God's elect throughout time: their defining essence lies in suffering and sacrifice."<sup>197</sup>

The most celebrated work of this period on this topic is Augustine's *City of God*.<sup>198</sup> Beginning from Genesis 1 Augustine sees a separation of good from evil when light (good angels) was separated from darkness (evil angels) (11.19). Augustine then argues that Cain, with his descendents, "belonged to the city of men," while Abel, with his descendants, belonged to the city of God." (14.1). He then contrasts Shem, "of whom Christ was born in the flesh," with Ham, who signifies "the tribe of heretics" (16.2). Consequently, "Genuine godliness had survived only in those generations which descend from Shem through Arphaxad and reach to Abraham" (16.10). After tracing the City of God to the nation of Israel, Augustine begins to make a distinction between carnal Israel and true Israel; these sides are personified in Saul and David. Finally, the Jewish nation is divided between those who accept Messiah Jesus and the "wicked Jews" who do not (Book 17). During the post-apostolic age, persecutors and heretics represent the City of This World. Antichrist is to usher in the final persecution (Book 18).<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>192</sup>See comments in Owen, *Authentic Acts*, 17; and Mary R. Lefkowitz, "The Motivations for St. Perpetua's Martyrdom," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 (1976): 418.

<sup>193</sup>Jan Willem van Henten, "The Martyrs as Heroes of the Christian People," in *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. M. Lamberigts and P. van Deun (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University, 1995), 303-13.

<sup>194</sup>Patrick J. Healy, *The Valerian Persecution* (Boston: Mifflin and Company, 1905), 2.

<sup>195</sup>Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 15, 20.

<sup>196</sup>Ivo Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983), 45-46.

<sup>197</sup>Carole Straw, "Martyrdom and Christian Identity: Gregory the Great, Augustine, and Tradition," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1999), 255. Straw cites *Mor.* 3.17.32; *Homeliae in Hiezechielem* 2.3.16; and *Hom. Ev.* 2.38.7.

<sup>198</sup>Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series (n.p.: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886-1889), CD-ROM edition, Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

<sup>199</sup>In spite of Augustine's allegorizing he is generally accurate in his construal.

## *Protestantism and Roman Catholicism during the Reformation*

The Church enjoyed a time of relative peace during the Middle Ages (although one wonders how faithfully it represented the City of God at this time). The Reformation, however, introduced unprecedented conflict within confessing Christianity. This period of time resembles the monarchical age in Israel, when the opposition was not from an “outside” agent, but between true members of God’s people and nominal ones.

Gregg reports that about 4400 Protestants were martyred in the sixteenth century.<sup>200</sup> The events of this period were recorded and interpreted in martyrologies. The most notable protestant versions were written by Ludwig Rabus (Lutheran), Jean Crespin (Reformed), Adriaen Cornelis van Haemstede (Reformed), John Foxe (Anglican) and Thieleman J. van Braght (Anabaptist). Boudin basically confirms the historicity of these accounts, arguing that although the goal was to gain support for their cause, this does not necessarily imply gross falsification of facts. If significant distortions of the historical facts were written to near contemporaries of the events, the martyrologies would have immediately been discredited.<sup>201</sup>

Haemstede is credited with being the first to link the sufferings of the Protestants with that of the early church, and even that of the Old Testament prophets.<sup>202</sup> He felt that “the true Church has always been a suffering, and often a persecuted, remnant, existing among a fallen people repeatedly.”<sup>203</sup> Rabus traced the history of martyrdom back to Abel, including the Maccabean martyrs as well.<sup>204</sup> The Protestant martyrologists also “canonized” medieval non-conformists such as the Waldenses and Lollards in response to the Catholic charge that Protestants were reintroducing their heresies. The Protestants, with some qualifications, gladly identified with these “medieval martyrs,” since they provided yet another link in the ongoing chain of persecution of the true, “suffering” church.<sup>205</sup>

As we have consistently noted in other periods, the Protestant martyrologists also acknowledged the “higher level” conflict. Rabus and Foxe, for example, both claimed that the true struggle during the Reformation was between God and Satan.<sup>206</sup> Van Braght saw two great distinct “congregations and churches, the one of God and from heaven, the other of Satan and from the earth.”<sup>207</sup>

Not only the martyrologists, but the Reformers themselves also taught along the lines of the persecution paradigm we are presenting here. Luther felt that the Church “had always

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<sup>200</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 6.

<sup>201</sup>Boudin, “Instruments de propagande,” 73-74.

<sup>202</sup>In the French Reformation the Huguenots also saw themselves in continuity with the early martyrs. See Penny Roberts, “Martyrologies and Martyrs in the French Reformation: Heretics to Subversives in Troyes,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed. Diana Wood, Studies in Church History, no. 30 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 221.

<sup>203</sup>As per Andrew Pettegree, “European Calvinism: History, Providence, and Martyrdom,” in *The Church Retrospective*, ed. R. N. Swanson, Studies in Church History, no. 33 (Suffolk: Boydell, 1997), 238, 240.

<sup>204</sup>Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 60.

<sup>205</sup>See Euan Cameron, “Medieval Heretics as Protestant Martyrs,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed. Diana Wood, Studies in Church History, no. 30 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 188-91.

<sup>206</sup>See John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 32-35; and Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 84-89.

<sup>207</sup>Thieleman J. van Braght, *Martyr’s Mirror*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale, Penn.: Mennonite Publishing, 1951), 21.

been persecuted” and “would be persecuted to the end of the world.”<sup>208</sup> In Luther’s words, “Those who have the true Word of God must suffer for it.”<sup>209</sup> Luther also says, “Nor is there any better proof that the Protestants are the true Church than the stranglings, drownings, and hangings inflicted upon them, as the Cross on their Lord.”<sup>210</sup> Persecution is their “*criterion of faithfulness*.”<sup>211</sup> Luther also recognized the cosmic nature of the struggle—the persecutions were authored by Satan.<sup>212</sup> In like manner, Calvin felt persecution to be a mark of the true church. Therefore, “To suffer persecution for righteousness’ sake is a singular comfort.”<sup>213</sup> He always saw himself as part of a minority, even when he headed Geneva.<sup>214</sup>

The Anabaptist theology of martyrdom was integrally tied with their strong dualistic view of history as an ongoing conflict between the kingdoms of darkness and light.<sup>215</sup> According to the Anabaptists, “The path of martyrdom” marks the way “of the people of God through history.”<sup>216</sup> This history traces back to Abel and includes the Jewish intertestamental martyrdoms as well.<sup>217</sup> They also see persecution as satanically inspired: “The hatred which raged against the head of all martyrs is not only the hatred of the children of this world against the people of God but the very hatred of Darkness against the Light.”<sup>218</sup>

Nonetheless, my attempt to cast Reformation Protestants as the persecuted, “true” church, the representatives of the City of God, is complicated by the fact that about three hundred English Catholics also perished at Protestant hands,<sup>219</sup> as did many Anabaptist martyrs. Gregg’s work *Salvation at Stake* describes this time as a period of confusion, where rival doctrinal claims were supported by rival martyrdom claims. Christians of various confessions “died for their fidelity to Christ, but they disagreed about what it meant to be a Christian.”<sup>220</sup> Both sides claimed that their martyrs validated their cause.

Since both sides could claim martyrs, attempts were made to distinguish true from false martyrs. Features like the manner in which they died, their social or education status, and the eventual fall of their persecutors were used as distinguishing marks. Yet apparently none of these criteria was convincing: “Catholic and Protestant have died with equal constancy in defense of their creed.”<sup>221</sup> As Gregg writes, “Attempts to find non-doctrinal criteria for telling

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<sup>208</sup>Comment on Luther’s thought by Bagchi, “Luther,” 211.

<sup>209</sup>Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, ed. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 2:1005.

<sup>210</sup>From *Luther’s Works* (WA 51.484), cited in Peter Matheson, “Martyrdom or Mission? A Protestant Debate,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 80 (1989): 155.

<sup>211</sup>Danièle Fischer, “La Notion du martyre dans la théologie de Luther,” *Etudes théologiques et religieuses* 57 (1982): 515. Italics original. My translation.

<sup>212</sup>Stange, “Martin Luther on Martyrdom,” 640; and Robert Kolb, “God’s Gift of Martyrdom: The Early Reformation Understanding of Dying for the Faith,” *Church History* 64 (1995): 408.

<sup>213</sup>Pettegree, “European Calvinism,” 252.

<sup>214</sup>*Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>215</sup>See Robert Friedman, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, ed. J. C. Wenger, no. 15 (Scottdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1973), 41.

<sup>216</sup>Stauffer, “Theology of Martyrdom,” 187.

<sup>217</sup>*Ibid.*, 188-90.

<sup>218</sup>*Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>219</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 6.

<sup>220</sup>*Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>221</sup>Blunt, ed., *Martyrs*, 449.

true from false martyrs were hesitant and ultimately unsuccessful.”<sup>222</sup> Consequently, “Martyrdom began and ended with divergent views of Christian truth.”<sup>223</sup>

Doctrinal differences between Lutheran and Reformed also cloud the picture of a united front against medieval Catholicism, the representative of the City of This World. According to Gregg, the writings of martyrologists tend to imply a “unity that Protestants themselves knew did not exist.”<sup>224</sup> Also, contrary to expectations, the primary Reformers were spared martyrdom.<sup>225</sup> Luther struggled not only with this fact, but also that “heretic” Anabaptist martyrs met death with great bravery.<sup>226</sup> Swiss Calvinists also struggled with the political success they enjoyed in their domains, and continually sought to “reinvent themselves as a minority.”<sup>227</sup> After the Reformation period proper the confusion further increased as to who was really “on God’s side” as Separatists and other non-conformist groups suffered at the hands of the (now protestant) Church of England.<sup>228</sup>

These observations appear to challenge my application of the “Protestant verses medieval Catholic” scenario to our persecution paradigm. Yet several things can be said in defense. First, the Catholic martyrs numbered about one tenth of the Protestant martyrs. Although this does not excuse the Protestants’ ill treatment of Catholics, we see here a greater bent toward violence from the Roman side. That the Catholic martyrs perished in England is also significant in light of Henry VIII’s *Act of Supremacy*, which made it treason to refuse an oath acknowledging him as head of the Church of England.<sup>229</sup> Clearly the issue was political loyalty as much as or more than religious conviction. One could also easily question the authenticity of Henry’s personal Christian faith.

Concerning the persecution of Anabaptists, it has been noted that “the most blood was shed in Roman Catholic countries.”<sup>230</sup> Cornelius reports, “In Tyrol and Goerz . . . the number of executions in the year 1531 reached already one thousand; in Ensisheim, six hundred. At Linz seventy-three were killed in six weeks.”<sup>231</sup> By comparison, in Zwingli’s Zurich, where the Anabaptist movement began, there were only six Anabaptist executions from 1527 to 1532.<sup>232</sup> Luther “expressed his dissent from the harsh and cruel treatment of the Anabaptists, and maintained that they ought to be resisted only by the Word of God and arguments, not by fire and sword.”<sup>233</sup> This is in stark contrast to the sentiments of Catholic leadership toward Protestantism.

Thus, in the Reformation time we continue to see evidence of the polarization between the City of God and the City of This World and the antagonism of the latter toward the former in the persecutions of Protestants by the Roman Catholic Church. The limited, but unfortunate

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<sup>222</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 320.

<sup>223</sup>*Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>224</sup>*Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>225</sup>Zwingli’s death in battle against Catholic forces would not qualify under the conditions for martyrdom outlined in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>226</sup>Bagchi, “Luther,” 212-13.

<sup>227</sup>Pettegree, “European Calvinism,” 249-51

<sup>228</sup>Knott, *Discourses*, 120-22, 134-35.

<sup>229</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 255.

<sup>230</sup>Schaff, *History*, 8:684.

<sup>231</sup>*Ibid.* Schaff cites C. A. Cornelius, *Die Wiedertaufe*, Leipzig, 1860, 67.

<sup>232</sup>*Ibid.*, 8:83.

<sup>233</sup>*Ibid.*, 7:610.

persecution of Catholics by Protestants can be explained as essentially political and not religious. Persecution of more “progressive” Protestants, such as Anabaptists and English Separatists or Puritans, by earlier Protestant movements is consistent with our persecution paradigm as well, in that previously persecuted parties can quickly become the persecutors of the next move of God.

### *Antichrist and the End-Time Church*

We now bring our survey to modern times and beyond. From a Western perspective, the Church presently seems to be enjoying great peace and prosperity. But the picture of Christianity on a worldwide scale is quite different. Authors commonly refer to the twentieth century as “one of the great ages of Christian martyrs.”<sup>234</sup> Twentieth century martyrs number well into the millions.<sup>235</sup> Dana writes, “No century has mounted so vast or sustained an attack on Christianity as the present one.”<sup>236</sup> Beyerhaus confirms that “*Our 20th century is the bloodiest in the entire history of Christianity.*”<sup>237</sup> Even Christians now enjoying political recognition and protection must be forewarned that the “proportion of legal Christianity is rapidly decreasing.”<sup>238</sup>

Although the enemies of Christianity in modern times have been several, atheistic Communism has likely provided the clearest representation of the City of This World in the last century. Their efforts both to exterminate Christianity locally and expand their influence worldwide presented a significant threat. With the fall of the Soviet Union, Islam may become the next major antagonist, seeing how Islamic Fundamentalists are taking a more aggressive posture internationally.

Although we can only tentatively predict the next great opponent of the church, we can with certainty anticipate her ultimate confrontation. Many evangelicals anticipate a final and climatic manifestation of Satan’s kingdom at the end of time in the enigmatic person of Antichrist. His coming will usher in the most intense struggle between the Cities of God and This World, which finds its resolution in the physical return of Christ.

The Man of Lawlessness’s campaign against the church is most clearly depicted in the Book of Revelation, where we see “the final battle between the opposing kingdoms of Christ and Antichrist.”<sup>239</sup> Here the demarcation between the kingdoms of darkness and light is

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<sup>234</sup>Manson, “Martyrs and Martyrdom,” 471.

<sup>235</sup>See David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *Our World and How to Reach It* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1990), 18; and Royal, *Catholic Martyrs*, 1.

<sup>236</sup>Dana Gioia, “To Witness Truth Uncompromised,” in *Martyrs: Contemporary Writers on Modern Lives of Faith*, ed. Susan Bergman (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 326.

<sup>237</sup>Beyerhaus, *Utopian Error*, 167. Italics original. Carson rightfully observes, however, that the large numbers are partially due to the larger world population and larger number of Christians. See D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 69.

<sup>238</sup>Barrett and Johnson, *Our World*, 44. In assessing Barrett’s comment, however, one must take into consideration the 1990 date of this book, before the fall of the Soviet Union.

<sup>239</sup>Beyerhaus, *Utopian Error*, 166.

sharply drawn--the world is depicted as "implacably hostile" to the church.<sup>240</sup> There is no middle ground or third option--one must choose Christ or Antichrist.

Michelle Lee discerns this tension in the chiastic structure of the Apocalypse. She locates the central (emphatic) elements of the chiasm in Rev 13:1-18 and Rev 14:1-20, entitling both a "Moment of Decision."<sup>241</sup> These sections present a striking portrayal of the "choice between martyrdom and eternal life or earthly life and eternal torment."<sup>242</sup> The text causes readers "to identify their own place in the cosmic drama and forces them to choose sides in the battle between good and evil."<sup>243</sup>

Revelation not only predicts tribulation for God's people--it presents this time as the climax of the historical struggle we have been outlining. As Boring comments, the Old Testament allusions in Revelation cast the end-time persecution in the context of "God's mighty acts in history": "The present persecution is in continuity with the history of the people of God in the past, in which anti-God powers of oppression and injustice which seemed to be in control of the world were overthrown by the liberating act of God."<sup>244</sup> Beyond simply predicting persecution, the Book of Revelation speaks much of martyrdom; one author entitles it "A Handbook for Martyrs."<sup>245</sup> The book contains many clear references to martyrdom (2:10, 13, 6:11, 11:7, 13:7, 16:6, 17:6, 20:4). Yet the "triumph" of the City of This World is only temporary, as many other passages in Revelation make clear.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

In this chapter I have argued that the people of God have typically been set in contrast to and persecuted by the City of This World. The "World" is represented in Scripture and history by various prominent oppressors: Cain, Egypt, Canaan, backslidden Israel, Antiochus Epiphanies, unbelieving Jews of the first century, the Roman Empire, the medieval Roman Catholic Church, Communism and, eventually, Antichrist.

One can easily object, however, that there are many times of peace and security for God's people both in biblical history and afterwards. Actually, this observation is totally consistent with my presentation of martyrdom as involving *periods of clarification*, where the existence and true nature of the ever-present spiritual conflict is made evident. During more tranquil periods both God's people and the people of the world can be lulled into thinking that they have more in common than they actually do. Therefore, it is necessary at times, for both the church and the world, that this conflict escalates into violent persecution in order to demonstrate that the antagonism between the kingdoms of God and Satan is still present and active, and will be until the end.

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<sup>240</sup>G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 44 (page citations are to reprint edition).

<sup>241</sup>Michelle V. Lee, "A Call to Martyrdom: Function as Method and Message in Revelation," *Novum Testamentum* 40 (1998): 174.

<sup>242</sup>*Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>243</sup>*Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>244</sup>M. Eugene Boring, "The Theology of Revelation: 'The Lord Our God the Almighty Reigns,'" *Interpretation* 40 (1986): 263.

<sup>245</sup>See Martin Rist, "Revelation, A Handbook for Martyrs," *Iliff Review* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1945): 269-80.

## CHAPTER 4: MARTYRDOM AND THE PRIMARY PARTICIPANTS -- MARTYR AND PERSECUTOR

In this chapter we will examine how the purposes of God are furthered in martyrdom in respect to the primary participants--the martyr and the persecutor. Separate sections in this chapter will be devoted to each. I will draw evidence for my conclusions from didactic and narrative passages on martyrdom found in Scripture as well as from implications derived from general principles of righteous suffering. For ease of reading and clarity of organization I will at times forgo the formal requirement to insert text between subheadings, since they are self-explanatory.

### *Martyrdom and the Martyr*

In this first section I will demonstrate that, in relation to the martyr, martyrdom contributes to the plan of God by enhancing the martyr's relationship with God. This is accomplished in the following ways: (1) by providing opportunity to demonstrate genuine faith toward God; (2) by providing opportunity to demonstrate devotion in discipleship; and (3) by allowing the martyr to experience intimate identification with Christ. In addition, it will be shown that martyrdom provides opportunity for the *ultimate* expression of the martyr's faith and devotion, and an *ultimate* experience of identification with Christ. These observations will be helpful for later (in my conclusion) depicting martyrdom as a "moment of climax/clarification."

Martyrdom also gives the martyr opportunity to witness to his or her faith. This aspect, however, overlaps with our goal of chapter 6, which is the value of martyrdom in moving unbelievers to repentance and faith. We will devote some attention to the theme of martyr as witness in this chapter, but will provide a more thorough discussion on the effectiveness of that witness in chapter 6.

### Contributions from Didactic Passages

#### *Synoptic Gospels*

Matthew 10 provides us with our first passage for discussion, where Jesus is instructing his disciples about ministry.<sup>246</sup> He warns that in the course of ministry the disciples can expect opposition and instructs them on how to respond to persecution. The first martyrological reference is in verse 21, where Jesus predicts that even the disciples' closest relatives will betray them to death. Verse 22 reveals that the purpose for the trials mentioned in this context is a test of faith: "But it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved."<sup>247</sup> This test is an intense one, as evidenced by the fact that: (1) one's closest relatives may be the agents of persecution (v. 21); and (2) the vast majority will side with the opposition (v. 22a). The Matthean version of Jesus' apocalyptic discourse communicates the same sense of testing, intensifying the situation even more: apostates will betray true disciples, false prophets will

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<sup>246</sup>The parallel passage in Mark 13 adds little to our discussion not already explicit from Matthew 10.

<sup>247</sup>Commentators disagree about the referent of the word "end," some feeling it means "the end of the age" (Gundry, *Matthew*, 193-94), while others feel it means "the end of life" (France, *Matthew*, 183; Lenski, *Matthew*, 405). The reference to death immediately preceding it in verse 21 supports the latter view.

deceive, and love will grow cold (Matt 24:10-12). Yet in spite of all this the disciples are called to remain faithful (Matt 24:13).

Jesus continues to speak of the threat of martyrdom in Matt 10:28-31, encouraging his disciples not to fear those who can “kill the body,” and comparing their “fall” in martyrdom to sparrows who “fall to the ground.” His use of positive and negative reinforcements to stimulate endurance reveals that a “testing” motif is again in view. In a positive sense the disciples can rely on their Father to sustain them (vv. 29-31), and in a negative sense they must fear the One who has power to condemn if they fail the test (v. 28).<sup>248</sup>

A further reference to martyrdom in Matthew 10, also found elsewhere in the Synoptics, is the figure of the cross (vv. 38-39). Although the phrase “take up the cross” likely refers to all the demands of discipleship, one can certainly not miss the martyrological connotation here as well.<sup>249</sup> Here the test of faith is again in view—one must take up his cross to “be found worthy” of Christ. But the figure of the cross is certainly also proleptic of the death Jesus Himself will suffer. Hence another aspect of God’s purpose in martyrdom is here introduced—identification with Christ. The following verse (v. 40) reinforces this concept, as does the phrase in verse 38, “follow after Me.”<sup>250</sup> Morris rightly comments that the cross means, “In some sense Christ and His people are one.”<sup>251</sup>

Another significant passage is Mark 8:34-38 (parallel, Matt 16:24-27; Luke 9:23-26). Here again we see a reference to taking up the cross, yet now the motif of identification or imitation appears first: “if anyone wishes to come after Me.” Jesus had just predicted His own death in commitment to fulfill the plan of His Father. In like manner, the disciples must follow Jesus in suffering and possibly death in order to identify with Him and His mission. Beyond identification, the idea of “coming after Me” connotes dedication and devotion as well.

According to the previous verse, followers of Christ must “set their minds on God’s interests,” that is, be devoted to Him and His agenda. The concept “devotion” is certainly closely related to “identification,” yet differs in that “devotion” flows from love and admiration, while the desire to imitate Christ may come not only from that, but from a desire

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<sup>248</sup>The threat of condemnation for denying Christ is made explicit in the following verses (vv. 32-33). Morris comments, “They are warned that eternal issues hang on their reaction” (Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986], 141). Trites and Frend note that Luke actually appears to equate apostasy with blasphemy of the Holy Spirit in Luke 12:10 (Trites, *Concept of Witness*, 182; Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 79). Still, Keener reminds us that the example of Peter offers hope for apostates. See Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 328.

<sup>249</sup>Luke may be an exception here. With the term “cross” he appears to emphasize the long-term commitment of discipleship. This is evident in both of his usages: (1) in Luke 9:23 we read “take up his cross *daily*”; and (2) in Luke 14:27 the term “bear his cross” translates βαστάζω, one sense of which is “to continue to bear up under unusually trying circumstances and difficulties” (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2d ed. [New York: United Bible Society, 1989], 1:308). This contrasts with Mark and Matthew, who use αἶρω, “take up his cross” or λαμβάνω, “receive his cross,” likely emphasizing the initial act of commitment and possibly alluding to martyrdom as well.

<sup>250</sup>Others have noticed possibly more subtle references to identification with Christ in Matthew 10. Gundry posits that Matthew uses the term “whipping” (μαστιγύω) instead of the Marcian “beating” (δέρω) from Mark 13:9 to link the disciples’ suffering with Jesus’ (see Matt 20:19). See Gundry, *Matthew*, 192. Ton sees an allusion to the Suffering Servant in Jesus’ characterization of His disciples as “sheep among wolves” (Matt 10:16). See Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 76. One can also add the more obvious “like disciple/like teacher, like master/like slave” motifs of vv. 24-25.

<sup>251</sup>Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 393.



for personal achievement as well. Also, devotion does not always express itself in imitation. Finally, in the subsequent verses of this Marcan passage Jesus moves from the motifs of imitation and devotion to testing, repeating the warnings from Matthew 10 discussed earlier.

Finally, a key passage found in all three Synoptics highlights the martyr's role as a witness to Christ. Jesus predicts that His disciples (some to become, according to the context, future martyrs as well) will be called before courts to give testimony to rulers (Mark 13:9; Matt 10:18; Luke 21:13).

Many debate the nature of this testimony, whether it is accusatory (dative of disadvantage) or evangelistic (dative of advantage). Trites notes the same construction (εἰς ἀπέρτιον αὐτοῖς) in Mark 1:44 (parallel, Matt 8:4; Luke 5:14) and in Mark 6:11 (but in parallels Luke 9:5 has εἰς μαρτύριον ἐπ' αὐτούς, and Matt 10:14 omits the phrase). Luke 4:22 has a similar construction, ἐμαρτύρουν αὐτῷ.<sup>252</sup> In Mark 1:44 (and parallels) αὐτοῖς could be taken as a dative of advantage, since the testimony is useful to the priests in rendering their verdict that the leper was cleansed. The dative of advantage can also be posited for Luke 4:22. Mark 6:11, however, is clearly a dative of disadvantage.

Concerning our passage in question, only the Mark 13 version could possibly be understood as accusatory.<sup>253</sup> Matthew writes that the testimony is not only for the rulers (αὐτοῖς), but for the Gentiles as well (καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν), clearly evangelistic.<sup>254</sup> We can also note that just prior to the Matthean version of our verse in question (10:18) we find the reference to "shaking the dust off your feet" (10:14) without the Marcan variant εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς ("for a testimony against them"). Matthew may have omitted this phrase in verse 14, among other reasons, in order to avoid giving the impression that he has a dative of disadvantage in mind in the neighboring verse 18 as well. The parallel in Luke has a different construction, ἀποβήσεται ὑμῖν εἰς μαρτύριον ("it will lead to a testimony for you"), again evangelistic.

Some propose a double meaning for this expression. Coenen feels the disciples give an evangelistic witness, but does not rule out accusation as well.<sup>255</sup> Trites feels it is evangelistic if the rulers accept the testimony, and accusatory if they do not.<sup>256</sup> I see no reason to posit a double meaning, or to understand the Mark 13 passage in an accusatory sense, especially since the following verse speaks of evangelism. Likely the expression is evangelistic in all three Synoptic passages, highlighting believers on trial (some of whom will subsequently become martyrs) as witnesses for Christ.

*Paul*

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<sup>252</sup>See Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 69-71.

<sup>253</sup>Lane (*Mark*, 461) and France (*Mark*, 515) consider it so. France bases this on the negative connotation of the phrase elsewhere in Mark. Plummer (*Mark*, 296) and Ton (*Rewards in Heaven*, 72), however, take it evangelistically. In support of the latter view we can note that the next verse reads, "And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations" (Mark 13:10).

<sup>254</sup>Gundry feels the plural "governors and kings" in Matt 10:18 indicates how the gospel will spread to various regions (Gundry, *Matthew*, 193). Also noted in Keener, *Matthew*, 323-24.

<sup>255</sup>L. Coenen, "marturiva," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Collin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:1043.

<sup>256</sup>Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 184.

The epistles of Paul provide us further insight into God's purpose for the martyr in martyrdom. In the Corinthian correspondence we read, "We were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Cor 1:8b-9). First we note that here we have a case of threatened martyrdom rather than actual martyrdom. Yet this passage is useful for our investigation since it reveals what kind of response God expects in cases of actual martyrdom.

At first glance this appears to be another statement, so often encountered in these letters, of how God's grace is manifested in human weakness.<sup>257</sup> But a closer inspection shows that Paul has in view here "passing the test" of faith. Paul relates that they were "burdened excessively, beyond our strength," "despaired of life," and they "had the sentence of death within ourselves," that is, they could see no human means of escape and were anticipating death. This forced them into a position where their faith in God would be put to the test ("in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God"), that is, a test to show whether their confidence in the God "who raises the dead" could sustain them through a martyr's death.

In this particular instance God intervened to deliver them before death, as recorded in verse 10. Yet Paul repeats the word "deliver" three times in this verse and gives it a double sense--to indicate both physical rescue from that particular calamity and also faith in the ultimate deliverance after death anticipated through the resurrection. Thus, the hope of the resurrection was a sustaining force for Paul in this "non-fatal" trial of faith, which was a precursor to and foreshadowing of his ultimate test before Nero in Rome.

In Philippians 1 Paul reflects on the theological significance of his first Roman imprisonment and its personal meaning for him as a disciple. In verses 18-26 his thoughts turn toward the possibility of his death, which, if resulting either from execution or the imprisonment itself, would qualify as martyrdom. Again, admittedly, we have a case here of threatened martyrdom rather than an actual one. But at the same time Paul gives here his inspired counsel as to how a believer should view martyrdom and respond to its threat, a response that is arguably identical to the desired response to the actual event.

Key to understanding this passage is correctly defining "deliverance" (σωτηρία) in verse 19. Hawthorne asserts that Paul here refers to release from prison,<sup>258</sup> while Silva, comparing this passage with 2 Tim 4:18, feels the "primary reference" is to perseverance in salvation: "Paul's deliverance does not depend on whether he lives or dies."<sup>259</sup> Silva's view is the more convincing in light of the following: (1) although "your prayers" could be a means of either physical deliverance or spiritual strengthening, the "Spirit of Jesus Christ" is more likely associated with the latter; and (2) Paul expresses uncertainty and even ambivalence about the outcome of his trial at the end of verse 20.<sup>260</sup> Additionally, Fee, commenting on the parallel

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<sup>257</sup>Baumeister appears to understand it this way. See Baumeister, *Genese und Entfaltung*, xvii.

<sup>258</sup>David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 43, *Philippians*, by Gerald F. Hawthorne (Dallas: Word, 1983), 40.

<sup>259</sup>Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 78-80. Melick concurs: "He hoped that he would have the courage to live or die as a true Christian should." David S. Dockery ed., *The New American Commentary*, vol. 32, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, by Richard R. Melick Jr. (Nashville, Broadman, 1991), 83.

<sup>260</sup>We could also note the example from 2 Cor 1:10 just discussed, where Paul used "deliver" (there ῥύομαι) in a very fluid manner to refer both to immediate and eschatological deliverance in the same verse.

structure of Hawthorne,<sup>261</sup> asserts that he strains the last clause and misses the point of the verse; Fee feels the second ὅτι explicates the previous clause.<sup>262</sup>

Paul seeks the above described spiritual strengthening so that, according to verse 20, he would “not to be put to shame.” Here we likely have a reference to Christ’s words of warning for apostasy (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). Paul’s concern in this passage, then, is that he will “pass the test” of faithfulness during his hour of trial, and the threat of martyrdom is here perceived by him as a test of faith. Additionally, in verse 30 Paul further refers to this test as an ἀγών, a word used in athletic competition.<sup>263</sup> He views his suffering and possibly impending martyrdom as a “contest of wills” between himself and the tempter.

Another pertinent discussion of martyrdom is found in 2 Tim 4:6-8. Paul, speaking as if he had already passed through martyrdom, compares his Christian life and ministry to a “good fight” which he has won and a “course” which he has run. The context clearly implies that Paul includes his impending martyrdom in his “fight” and “course,” thus again depicting it as a test of his faithfulness to his Christian confession and calling.<sup>264</sup> Correspondingly, in verse 8 Paul reflects on the reward awaiting those who stay true.

In verse 6 we encounter an interesting expression where Paul compares his impending martyrdom to a “drink offering.” The use of the present tense “poured out” likely represents the “certainty of the event,”<sup>265</sup> or, even better, that “Paul was aware that he was slowly dying in God’s service, and he felt that the shedding of his blood in martyrdom would complete the drink offering to God.”<sup>266</sup> We may compare this passage with Paul’s earlier reference to being poured out as a drink offering in Phil 2:17, where martyrdom was less of a certainty (see Phil 2:24), and Paul was thinking more of his “slowly dying in God’s service.” This understanding aids us in avoiding the erroneous conclusion that Paul regarded his death as a sacrifice having atoning value.<sup>267</sup> It is better to understand, as Lea, that Paul “compared the pouring out of his

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<sup>261</sup>Hawthorne’s version: “For I know: (1) that (ὅτι) this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope,” and (2) “that (ὅτι) I shall not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

<sup>262</sup>Fee’s version: “For I know that (ὅτι) this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope,” *that is* “that (ὅτι) I shall not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” See Gordon Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 129, footnote 10.

<sup>263</sup>Lightfoot also notes its use in this sense in 1 Tim 6:12 and 2 Tim 4:7. See J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Philippians* (London: MacMillan, 1913; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953), 107 (page numbers from reprint edition). Silva notes that Paul does not always use ἀγών as an athletic metaphor (e.g. Col 2:1; 1 Thess 2:2), but the verb συναθλέω, “strive together,” in verse 27 supports the conclusion that the metaphor is meant in this context. See Silva, *Philippians*, 99.

<sup>264</sup>Note, again, the use of ἀγών, yet here intensified as a cognate accusative of the verb ἀγωνίζομαι.

<sup>265</sup>George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 458.

<sup>266</sup>David S. Dockery, ed., *The New American Commentary*, vol. 34, 1, 2 *Timothy, Titus*, by Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. (Nashville, Broadman, 1992), 247.

<sup>267</sup>Contra Kelly, who writes that Paul “thinks of his death as a sacrifice; behind his language lies the Jewish belief (cf. 4 Macc. vi. 28f.; xvii. 21f) in the atoning value of the martyr’s death” (J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick [New York: Harper & Row, 1963], 208).

energy in ministry to the pouring out of the wine of an Old Testament drink offering.”<sup>268</sup> Securing atonement through his personal death is far from the mind of the man who championed the message of salvation by faith alone in Christ’s redemptive work.

For completeness sake we may briefly mention three passages in Paul which some have incorrectly taken to refer to martyrdom. In 1 Thess 4:14, where we find the phrase “those who have fallen asleep in Jesus,” the word “in” translates the preposition διὰ, which can mean “for the sake of” or “on account of” Jesus, indicating martyrdom.<sup>269</sup> Yet here διὰ is followed by a genitive noun, and therefore is best translated “through” or “in.” A martyrological reference would more likely have διὰ with the accusative.<sup>270</sup>

In Philippians 3:10 Paul speaks of knowing the “fellowship of (Christ’s) sufferings” and being “conformed to His death.” Opinions differ as to whether the phrase “Christ’s sufferings” refers merely to appropriating Christ’s redemptive sufferings for the purpose of sanctification,<sup>271</sup> or may also include hardships connected with discipleship.<sup>272</sup> If the latter is true, “being conformed to His death” may have martyrological connotations. In light of the context it appears “conformed to His death” does not refer to martyrdom, but rather is related to the moral “perfection” which Paul mentions in the subsequent verses and toward which he is striving.<sup>273</sup>

Some also see a specific reference to martyrdom in 2 Tim 2:11-13. The general context of this epistle would favor this view--Paul is about to die. Hendriksen argues that the four lines of the poem (stylistically all beginning with ἐλ) are structured in two synthetic parallels, the first two describing loyalty to Christ, and the last two disloyalty. Concerning the first pair he writes, “The persons who are assumed to have died with Christ are also the ones who endure, being faithful to death.”<sup>274</sup>

As attractive as this proposal may seem, several difficulties prevent its acceptance. Quinn and Wacker feel that: (1) the past tense “died with Him” rules out martyrdom; and (2) this is likely a “sacramental dying with Christ” as in Romans 6.<sup>275</sup> Additionally, Knight argues that there is no other New Testament example of referring to martyrdom as dying with Christ--the phrase always refers to dying to sin.<sup>276</sup> Also, Kelly observes that “endure” should be future tense if referring to martyrdom--the present tense here indicates a lifestyle of faithfulness.<sup>277</sup> Thus, this passage likely refers to righteous suffering in general.

### *Hebrews and General Epistles*

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<sup>268</sup>Dockery, ed., *New American Commentary*, 34:247.

<sup>269</sup>As per Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 114.

<sup>270</sup>See D. E. Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 194.

<sup>271</sup>See Hubbard and Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, 43:144.

<sup>272</sup>See Silva, *Philippians*, 191.

<sup>273</sup>Fee also rules out martyrdom, but for a different reason. He feels “suffering” here does refer to troubles connected with gospel ministry, but that “conformed to His death” means the same as “carrying about . . . the dying of Jesus” in 2 Cor 4:10--a “living death.” See Fee, *Philippians*, 333, footnote 65.

<sup>274</sup>William Hendriksen, *I-II Timothy-Titus*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 256.

<sup>275</sup>Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, The Eerdmans Critical Commentary, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 650-51.

<sup>276</sup>Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 403.

<sup>277</sup>Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 180.

The primary martyrological passage in the Book of Hebrews is Heb 11:35b-38, where Old Testament and intertestamental martyrs are mentioned. The contents of this well-known chapter have earned it the title “The Hall of Faith.” The heroes listed in this chapter have the common characteristic of outstanding faith, demonstrated either in appropriating the miracle-working power of God, in fulfilling some commission, or in enduring rejection and suffering.<sup>278</sup> The goal of their endurance is clear: to “obtain a better resurrection” (v. 35). The nature of their suffering, then, can be regarded as a test of faith, which in their cases was found “approved” (v. 39).

In chapter 12 the author turns his attention to the faith and endurance of his readers, comparing their struggle with an athletic contest (notice ἀγών in verse 1), and pointing to Jesus as the final and greatest example of faithful endurance. The overall context of chapter twelve seems to indicate that the believer’s struggle described here is against sin (e.g., vv. 10, 14). Nonetheless, the reference to “hostility by sinners” (v. 3) and an earlier reference to persecution (10:32-34) may indicate that the phrase “shedding blood” in verse 4 may connote martyrdom as well as striving for holiness.

Delitzsch concurs: “Sin is regarded as an opponent in pugilism: they are to resist till blood flows, and not give over then”; but also the saying “is to be taken literally (as all agree) in reference to the death of martyrdom.”<sup>279</sup> This observation is consistent with the book’s general tone, which consists of a warning to Jewish Christians not to revert back to Judaism to escape persecution. Thus apostasy may be one aspect of the “sin” the church is exhorted to struggle against at the end of verse 4. If martyrdom is in view here, its obvious “value” in regard to martyrs is again an opportunity to demonstrate faithfulness in trial, as their Old Testament predecessors did.

Finally, some comments on Peter’s epistles. Peter makes figurative references to his impending martyrdom in 2 Pet 1:13-15, yet his reflection yields no pertinent information about the martyr’s experience in martyrdom. As in our treatment of possible Pauline references to martyrdom, we must also in Peter eliminate from consideration passages some have mistakenly understood as martyrological.

Some have seen a reference to martyrdom by comparing Peter’s statement “if you are reviled for the name of Christ” (1 Pet 4:14) with a statement in Pliny’s letter to Trajan, where the former asks “whether it is the mere name of Christian which is punishable, even if innocent of crime, or rather the crimes associated with the name?”<sup>280</sup> Knox notes how Pliny’s distinction of punishment for the name of Christ from punishment for other crimes is similar to the distinction Peter makes in 4:14-16.<sup>281</sup> Knox goes on to compare Peter’s exhortation that the Christian defense should be “with gentleness and reverence” (3:15) with Pliny’s complaint to Trajan, “I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakeable obstinacy ought not to go

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<sup>278</sup>Schrage aptly observes, that suffering *per se* is not the theme here, but suffering as a “mode of faith.” See Wolfgang Schrage, “Suffering in the New Testament,” in *Suffering*, trans. by John E. Steely, Biblical Encounter Series (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 147.

<sup>279</sup>Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. 2, 3d ed., trans. Thomas L. Kingsbury (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883), 309-10. Same conclusion in Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, New Testament Theology, ed. J. D. G. Dunn (New York: Cambridge University, 1991), 113; and James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. Samuel R. Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924), 199.

<sup>280</sup>Pliny, *Letters and Panegyricus* 10.96.2.

<sup>281</sup>John Knox, “Pliny and 1 Peter: A Note on 1 Pet. 4:14-16 and 3:15,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72 (1953): 187.

unpunished.”<sup>282</sup> We must also note that Pliny was administrator in northern Asia Minor, the region mentioned in Peter’s greeting (1 Pet 1:1).

Goppelt gives further support to the proposal that Peter is preparing his readers for martyrdom. He notes Peter’s warning in 1 Pet 4:15 that Christians should not suffer as murderers—an offense that was punishable by death. Goppelt then assumes that the threat of capital punishment carries over into verse 16, where Peter speaks about suffering for Christ. He also sees in the phrase “entrust their souls” (4:19) a reference to execution.<sup>283</sup>

Knox’s view is problematic because it requires a second century date for 1 Peter, which renders the epistle pseudepigraphic (that is, a forgery) and thereby undermines its canonical authority. In refutation of Knox’s view Filson rightly notes that government is spoken of positively in the epistle (2:13-17) and that no clear mention of martyrdom is made.<sup>284</sup> The text does not say the believers “die” for the name of Christ—their suffering consists in being “reviled” (cf. 1 Pet 4:4). Selwyn and Bechtler also shy away from the suggestion that Pliny’s persecution is in view.<sup>285</sup> Martin summarizes, “Modern study—with a few exceptions—has reached a conclusion that the references to suffering in this epistle have much more to do with local outbursts of opposition than with an official state policy of punishing Christians as such, that is, a profession of their faith as subversive.”<sup>286</sup>

### *John and Revelation*

In John chapter 16 Jesus warns His disciples of those who will kill them in the “service of God” (v. 2). He begins the context by stating, “These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling” (v. 1), and closes it with a similar exhortation in verse 4.<sup>287</sup> This structure yields an illocutionary force of “warning.” The danger at hand is the possibility to σκανδαλίζεσθαι, which Lindars traces to the Synoptic tradition.<sup>288</sup> In the Synoptics the verb can describe (in the active voice) causing one to sin (e.g., Mark 9:42-47), or (in the passive voice) taking offense at Christ (e.g., Mark 6:3) or, most significant for our purpose, falling away due to persecution (Mark 4:17/Matt 13:21; Mark 14:27-29/Matt 26:31-33; Matt 24:10). These Synoptic passages deal with revealing true faith (or its absence) in time of trial, and this is likely the implication in John 16:1 as well.

Additionally, as He frequently does in the upper room discourse, Jesus identifies with His disciples, this time in rejection and suffering. The reason the enemies of the gospel will kill the

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<sup>282</sup>Knox, “Pliny,” 189; Pliny, *Letters and Panegyricus* 10.96.3.

<sup>283</sup>Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 324-27.

<sup>284</sup>Floyd V. Filson, “Partakers with Christ: Suffering in First Peter,” *Interpretation* 9 (1955): 402-4.

<sup>285</sup>Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 2d ed. (London: MacMillan, 1947, reprint, London: MacMillan, 1974), 97 (page numbers from reprint edition); Steven Richard Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community and Christology in 1 Peter*, SBL Dissertation Series, ed. Michael V. Fox and E. Elizabeth Johnson, no. 162 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 87, 91.

<sup>286</sup>Ralph P. Martin, “The Theology of Jude, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter,” in *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude*, by Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin, New Testament Theology, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 120.

<sup>287</sup>Lindars considers the words “I have said to you” in verses 1 and 4 an inclusio, with the repetition of ποιήσουσιν in verses 2 and 3 completing the chiasm. The nodal element, then, is “whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” See Lindars, “The Persecution of Christians,” 64-65.

<sup>288</sup>*Ibid.*, 65. Outside of the Synoptics the verb is only found twice in Paul and once more in John (John 6:61 – where it describes taking offence at Christ).

disciples is because “they have not known the Father or Me” (v. 3). So, in this passage we see two of the same elements of the martyr’s experience noted in the Synoptics--testing of faith and identification with Christ.

Another clear reference to martyrdom is John 21:18-22. Here it is portrayed as part of following Christ or identifying with Him. After Jesus predicts Peter’s martyrdom, His next words are “follow Me.” Haenchen sees a double meaning in Christ’s invitation--not only to come with Him at that moment, but also to follow Him in martyrdom.<sup>289</sup>

Somewhat less obvious is the link between this passage and Jesus’ reference to Peter’s previous three-fold denial of Him, located in the previous context. Jesus’ thrice-repeated question, “Do you love Me?” certainly recalls Peter’s denial. Immediately after this “do you love Me” dialogue with Peter, Jesus turns to the subject of his future martyrdom.

Thus, Peter “failed” the first test of faith, but will be given another chance at a later time. Agourides writes, “It seems that the disciple who denied his Master and shrank before the maid-servant of the high priest must end his life by a public confession and a heroic death for his Lord.”<sup>290</sup> So, in John 21 we see the same two elements in the martyr’s experience that are also present in John 16--the trial of faith and imitation of or identification with Christ.

Our first glance at martyrdom in John’s Apocalypse, Rev 2:10, also yields the same result. The devil is about to “cast some of you into prison,” calling for faithfulness “until death.” Here the motif of testing is explicit: “so that you may be tested.”<sup>291</sup> Also, Jesus characteristically introduces Himself to each of the churches of Asia Minor in a manner corresponding to their experience. In the introduction of this letter to Smyrna Christ is the one “who was dead, and has come to life” (v. 8). Thus, the Smyrna martyrs’ experience is a reproduction (imitation) of what Christ Himself previously endured.<sup>292</sup>

In the letter to Pergamum Jesus mentions “Antipas . . . who was killed among you” (2:13). He was killed during a time of testing, evidenced by his being commended, along with the other saints of Pergamum, for having “held fast My name” and “not denying My faith.” Additionally, identification with Christ is in view as well. Antipas is called ὁ μάρτυς μου, ὁ πιστός μου, “My witness, My faithful one,” words that certainly recall the earlier description of Christ as ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, “the faithful witness” (1:5).<sup>293</sup>

The next martyriological reference is Rev 6:9-11--the martyrs’ imprecation. We observe here the martyrs’ position beneath the altar, reminiscent of Paul’s comparison of his impending martyrdom to a “drink offering” (2 Tim 4:6). I dismiss the idea that the martyrs’

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<sup>289</sup>Haenchen, *John 2*, 227.

<sup>290</sup>Savas Agourides, “The Purpose of John 21,” in *Studies and Documents*, ed. Jacob Gearlings, vol. 29, *Studies in the History and Texts of the New Testament*, ed. Boyd Daniels and M. Jack Suggs (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1967), 131. Same conclusion in B. W. Bacon, “The Motivation of John 21:15-25,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50 (1931): 78.

<sup>291</sup>Beasley-Murray comments that the concept of testing “would indicate that the suffering is permitted to ensure the approvedness of those for whom the kingdom is prepared.” See Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 81.

<sup>292</sup>Boring asserts that Christians are closely identified with Christ throughout the Book of Revelation, and that identification with Christ in both life and mission means “suffer and die.” See M. Boring, “Theology of Revelation,” 267.

<sup>293</sup>Trites correctly concludes that Christ is the “true paradigm” for those “facing persecution and the peril of death.” Allison A. Trites, “Witness and the Resurrection in the Apocalypse of John,” in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 272-73.

deaths were atoning (see discussion in chapter 6), but these passages in Revelation and 2 Timothy seem to infer that it is in some way considered an offering to God.<sup>294</sup> The other types of offerings prescribed in the law, besides atoning ones, were offerings of thanksgiving or special consecration. This recalls a point made in our consideration of Mark 8:34-38--martyrdom, like an offering of consecration, can express special devotion to God.

The martyrdom of the "two witnesses" in Rev 11:3-13 yields little in regard to the value of martyrdom for the martyr himself. Two "loose" links to imitation of Christ can be observed: (1) they were killed "where also their Lord was crucified" (v. 8);<sup>295</sup> and (2) they were caught up in a cloud after their resuscitation (v. 12).

In chapter 12 of Revelation we read of those who overcame Satan, in part, because "they did not love their life even when faced with death" (v. 11).<sup>296</sup> This is a picture of a test of faith, contest with Satan, a battle of wills in which the saints, though slain, came away victorious.<sup>297</sup> The wording resembles Jesus' call to costly discipleship in Mark 8:35, another context where, as demonstrated earlier, the test of faith is in view.

The next major martyrological context stretches through chapters 13 and 14. Here the beast is given authority "to make war with the saints and to overcome them" (13:7). One element of the beasts "reign of terror" is the execution of those who do not "worship the image of the beast" (13:15). This theme is resumed in Rev 14:9-12, where a warning is given to those who "worship the beast and his image, and receive a mark." The severity of the warning, which threatens eternal torment to unbelievers and apostates alike, is likely meant to counterbalance the terrible prospect of martyrdom. God's purpose for the martyr is then explicated in Rev 14:12-13; these events demonstrate "the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." Those who hold on and pass the test of faith are considered "blessed" since "their deeds follow with them."<sup>298</sup>

Two other passages in Revelation have been misinterpreted in regard to martyrdom. Some regard the "great multitude from the tribulation" in Rev 7:9-17 as the company of end-time martyrs. In support one might appeal to the terms "tribulation" (cf. Rev 2:10) and "white robes" (cf. Rev 6:11), which were previously used in martyr-contexts. On the other hand, the

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<sup>294</sup>As Osborne writes, "It is clear that the martyrs are pictured as blood sacrifices poured around the base of the altar." See Grant R. Osborne, "Theodicy in the Apocalypse," *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 14 (1993): 75. According to Sweet, "The death of the martyred was conceived as a sacrifice on the altar of the heavenly temple." See J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries, ed. D. E. Nineham (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 142. See same in Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 135. On the other hand, the following rabbinic axiom of *b. Shabbath* 152b differs in detail significantly, and does not explain the origin of our passage: "R. Eliezer said: The souls of the righteous are hidden under the Throne of Glory, as it is said, *yet the soul of my Lord shall be bound up in the bundle of life.*"

<sup>295</sup>Noted by Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. William A. Jurgens (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1976), 2.100.

<sup>296</sup>Although the passage is located in a context recounting angelic warfare, the referent of the pronouns here is more likely the "brethren" of verse 10 rather than the "angels" of verse 7 for the following reasons: (1) "overcoming" is frequently used in Revelation in reference to the saints (see Revelation 2-3); (2) angels are never "faced with death"; and (3) the "blood of the Lamb" provides no benefit to angels (see Heb 2:16), but only to believers.

<sup>297</sup>Osborne writes, "The paradox is that the martyrdom of the saints is their victory." See Osborne, "Theodicy," 75.

<sup>298</sup>Revelation 17 also refers to martyrs, yet yields no information about their personal experience. These passages will be introduced, therefore, in a later section.



sufferings of these saints are described in verses 16-17, and death is not mentioned. Also, Sweet contends that “washing their robes” refers to “the sharing of Christ's death which is begun at baptism.”<sup>299</sup> It is likely that martyrs are included in this company, but we have insufficient grounds to consider them exclusively such.<sup>300</sup>

Finally, in Rev 20:4-6 beheaded martyrs are raised to reign with Christ. This is not to be understood, as some claim, as indicating a special reward of rulership for martyrs.<sup>301</sup> We note that John “saw thrones, and they sat upon them.” The subject of ἐκάθισαν is left ambiguous, but likely recalls Rev 3:21, “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne,” a reference that applies to all believers.<sup>302</sup> In Rev 20:4 these unnamed rulers appear to be distinguished from the martyrs by the coordinating conjunction καὶ. The martyrs likely represent only a sub-group of all who are raised to rule.<sup>303</sup> They are mentioned here likely in recognition of their long-awaited vindication, for which they cried in Revelation chapter 6.<sup>304</sup>

### Contributions from Narrative Passages

#### *Old Testament*

Old Testament martyrdoms, that is the death of prophets, are infrequently described in the narrative. Even less is said about the personal experience of the prophet-martyr. We can profit, however, from a brief examination of Daniel 3 and 6. Although neither Daniel nor the three Hebrews were actually martyred, they nonetheless freely surrendered themselves to death and were rescued at the last moment by God. These narrations, therefore, may yield useful information concerning God's purpose in martyrdom.

The issue in chapter 3 is the Hebrews' refusal to worship any God but their own--they were convinced that there was no God but Yahweh. Standing against the king's wrath, threatened by death, and in contrast to their colleagues' condescendence, their action clearly reflected the genuineness of their faith and depth of their devotion.<sup>305</sup> The event also

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<sup>299</sup>Sweet, *Revelation*, 151.

<sup>300</sup>Same conclusion in Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 145.

<sup>301</sup>As in Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 283. Even more radical is Rist, who sees Revelation as a propaganda tool by Christian leaders to motivate believers for martyrdom by promising them great rewards after death or threatening them with awful punishments for apostasy. See Rist, “Revelation,” 269-80.

<sup>302</sup>Noted in NASV cross-reference. Ton's assertion (*Rewards in Heaven*, 301-9) that the “overcomers” of Revelation 2-3 are exclusively martyrs is weakly based on similarity of terms in these chapters with terms used in clearly martyrological contexts (e.g., “white robes,” “ears to hear,” etc.). Beasley-Murray notes numerous features that indicate that the letters of chapters 2-3, including the references to “overcomers,” apply to all believers. See Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 77-78.

<sup>303</sup>Same conclusion in Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 295.

<sup>304</sup>One must also consider whether the martyrs mentioned in 20:4 are those earlier executed by the beast in Rev 13:15. The closer proximity of this latter passage supports this connection. But at the same time the martyrs of chapter 6 cannot be excluded since: (1) the descriptions of the martyrs in chapters 6 and 20 are very similar; and (2) one can understand the martyrs' cry for vindication in 6:10 as answered by the judgment of their enemies and the martyrs' subsequent exaltation to rulership. Sweet, agreeing with these observations, writes, “The main point is that the souls under the altar (6:9-11) at last have their reward” (see Sweet, *Revelation*, 288; also Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 91).

<sup>305</sup>Porteous insightfully notes the maturity of their faith, which was “beyond the need of a manifest vindication” (Porteous, *Daniel*, 61). This is especially remarkable at a time when the doctrine of the resurrection was not as clearly revealed.

provided an opportunity for public testimony. In light of chapter 4, where God's sovereignty over Nebuchadnezzar and all human kings is emphasized, it is clear that God permitted this trial.<sup>306</sup> Yet in the account of the three Hebrews the motif of testing was superseded by another--God receives glory as a result of a miraculous deliverance (Dan 3:28-30).

The same observations apply to Daniel in chapter 6. Again we see an account of a faithful follower of Yahweh pressured to compromise his faith combined with an emphasis in an adjacent context on God's sovereignty (see Dan 5:25-28). Thus, we conclude that God permitted this event as a test of Daniel's faith and devotion.<sup>307</sup> Yet again, the final outcome was God's name being glorified among the nations through a miraculous deliverance (Dan 6:25-27).

## Acts

In Scott Cunningham's monograph on the theology of persecution in Luke-Acts he concludes that Luke emphasizes six aspects of persecution in his writings. The two that address God's purpose for the martyr essentially correspond to our observations thus far: imitation of Christ and the test of faith.<sup>308</sup> The former of the two--imitation or identification with Christ--appears most prominently, and we will focus on this feature in this section.

The Book of Acts continues the theme of suffering in imitation of Christ seen in the Gospels but does so in a subtler manner.<sup>309</sup> It does so by drawing parallels between the passion of Christ and the sufferings of two prominent individuals in this book: Paul and Stephen--both of whom eventually become martyrs.<sup>310</sup> We will draw primarily from Cunningham's observations for this discussion.<sup>311</sup> The following parallels can be noted between Christ and Stephen: (1) their miracles (Luke 4:40; Acts 6:8); (2) their trials before the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66; Acts 6:12); (3) their being cast out of the city (Luke 23:33; Acts 7:58);

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<sup>306</sup>There is no contextual justification for the assertion in the apocraphal *Song of the Three Young Men* that God was punishing them for their sins or the sins of their people. This reflects later rabbinic thought.

<sup>307</sup>There is no contextual justification for Di Lella's understanding that Daniel and the three Hebrews were seeking self-realization "at the deepest level of one's reality and being," to achieve a "truly human and humane existence" (William F. Albright and David N. Freedman, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 23, *The Book of Daniel*, by Louis F. Hartman (chps 1-9) and Alexander A. Di Lella (chps 10-12) [New York: Doubleday, 1977], 104). This is an imposition of existential presuppositions on the text.

<sup>308</sup>In Cunningham's words, "Persecution is an integral consequence of following Jesus," and "Persecution is the occasion of the Christian's perseverance." See Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations*, 14.

<sup>309</sup>Dehandschutter overstates the case by claiming that Acts does not thematically relate the suffering of the disciples to Christ's sufferings at all. Nevertheless he makes the helpful observation that no direct connection is made between the two in order to preserve the essential feature of the gospel message that the apostles are preaching--the sufferings of Christ *alone* are salvific. See Dehandschutter, "La persecution," 546.

<sup>310</sup>Acts records Stephen's martyrdom, while Paul's is only anticipated--possibly it had not yet occurred when Luke wrote. In light of Dehandschutter's suggestion above, though, a comment by O'Neill may have some value: in spite of the parallels drawn between the sufferings of Paul and Christ, Luke does not record Paul's martyrdom since "he would have obscured the gospel message: the spiritual conquest of the Empire depended on Jesus' death and resurrection in Jerusalem, not on Paul's death in Rome". See J. C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in Its Historical Setting* (London: SPCK, 1961), 176

<sup>311</sup>Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations*, 209-12, 269-72. Others who have made similar observations include Beck, "Lucan Passion Narrative," 28-29; Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. John E. Alsup, ed. Jürgen Roloff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-1982), 2:279-80; Petersen, *Literary Criticism*, 84-87; and Zumstein, "L'Apôtre comme martyr," 386.

(4) their testimonies about the Son of Man (Luke 22:69; Acts 7:56); (5) their request for God to receive their spirit (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59); and (6) their forgiveness of their persecutors (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). Schelkle adds that both were (7) falsely accused (Matt 26:60; Acts 6:13); and (8) considered blasphemers (Matt 26:65; Acts 6:56-57).<sup>312</sup>

In Paul's case we note: (1) both make a long, final journey, "setting their face" to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51; Acts 20:22); (2) both were bound (Matt 27:2; Acts 22:29) (Paul in body and "in spirit" – Acts 20:22); (3) both were handed over to the Gentiles (Luke 23:1; Acts 23:27); and (4) the friends of Paul, like Jesus, pray for God's will to be done (Luke 22:42; Acts 21:14). Zumstein adds: (5) both were the cause of an incident in the temple (Luke 19:45-46; Acts 21:27-29); (6) the Roman prosecutors sought to free them both (Luke 23:16; Acts 26:30); and (7) for each their passion is predicted three times (Luke 9:22, 9:44, 18:31-33; Acts 20:22-23, 21:11, 23:11).<sup>313</sup>

Beyond these external similarities of common experience, Steven Hamon analyzes the martyrdom of Stephen from an inner, psychological point of view, concluding that Stephen went beyond self-preservation and self-actualization to "transcendent actualization." This is a state in which one identifies with Christ to such a degree that one seeks his self-actualization as a person in the context of his position "in Christ." He writes,

I suggest that it was not self-actualization that kept Stephen intact during his last moments but a spiritual interaction beyond self-actualization. . . . Through the educative work of the Holy Spirit, one is brought to an increasing awareness of one's position 'in Christ' and of the fulfillment of one's own uniqueness as a person. . . . An integration occurs in which one learns to understand oneself in terms of what one has been and what one is becoming 'in Christ.'<sup>314</sup>

In addition, suffering in the Book of Acts is consistently linked with the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41, 9:16, 15:26, 21:13), indicating identification with Him. Also, Jesus directly identifies with His suffering church when He announces to Saul, "Why are you persecuting *Me*?" We must conclude, with Cunningham, that "the persecution of Jesus is carried on in the persecution of his disciples,"<sup>315</sup> which, at times, results in a martyr's death.

### Contributions from General Principles of Righteous Suffering

#### *The Test of Faith*

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<sup>312</sup>Schelkle, *Theology*, 2.100.

<sup>313</sup>Zumstein, "L'Apôtre comme martyr," 386. Though the parallelism between Christ and Paul is not as "tight" as that with Stephen, I am not convinced by Conzelmann's assessment, that "the often quoted parallelism between the account of the end of Jesus' life and of Paul's consists only in details, and it breaks down at the decisive point. The story of Stephen does not lead us to alter this view." See Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 217, footnote 2.

<sup>314</sup>Steven Hamon, "Beyond Self-Actualization: Comments of the Life and Death of Stephen the Martyr," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 5 (1977): 296.

<sup>315</sup>Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations*, 186.

As we have seen in our examination of key passages, Scripture seems to emphasize more the proving of the martyr's faith than other aspects of the martyr's experience. Faith, according to Heb 11:1, is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Yet, as the Anabaptists remind us, "an 'untested faith' is no real faith at all."<sup>316</sup> The book of James, among others, vigorously advances the idea that faith is tested through suffering. Commentators on James claim that "a trial is a challenge to the faith of the believer,"<sup>317</sup> and "true faith is faith that lasts in testing."<sup>318</sup> When one is firmly convinced of God's promise of eternal life in Christ (or His threat of damnation without Him) he or she is motivated to hold fast in trial. A lack of perseverance, conversely, evidences lack of faith.<sup>319</sup>

Chandler and Harvey aptly describe the influence of genuine faith: for the martyrs Christianity provided "an expectation of life after death so fervent that suffering for one's faith even to the point of death seemed amply compensated for by the certainty of the reward which awaited the martyr in heaven."<sup>320</sup> When one has genuine faith in God's great promises, "no threats or tortures of the adversary can shake him."<sup>321</sup> Conversely, the threat of eternal punishment, also embraced by faith, provides equal incentive: "Martyrs measured temporal pain against eternal gain and drew the logical conclusion. Torture and death were surely horrific--but incomparably less so than eternal suffering."<sup>322</sup>

The testing of faith is a very pervasive theme in Scripture, dating back even to Eden. As in Eden, so in martyrdom, the ideas of testing and temptation overlap. As Manson notes, persecution provides opportunity for a "moral temptation . . . the incentive to apostasy, the worst sin known to Judaism or the early Church."<sup>323</sup> This conceptual overlap is clear in the "testing" terminology of Scripture, where the same words can refer either to God's "testing to determine the inner quality of a person," or negatively to the devil's "enticement into sin."<sup>324</sup>

The primary New Testament "testing/temptation" term, *πειράζω*, is found in a martyrological context in Rev 2:10. This term and its cognates appear in other persecution contexts as well.<sup>325</sup> Kromminga comments on the double-sense of the term: "The same phenomenon may be viewed from two aspects. The *peirasmon* is a trial of one's faith controlled and, even in some sense, sent by God. But God is not the author of the prompting to

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<sup>316</sup>Friedman, *Theology of Anabaptism*, 34.

<sup>317</sup>Peter H. Davids, *James*, New International Bible Commentary, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989), 13.

<sup>318</sup>Andrew Chester, "The Theology of James," in *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude*, by Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin, New Testament Theology, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 27.

<sup>319</sup>Gregory is misguided at this point, asserting that strength of faith and depth of commitment do not always correspond to willingness to suffer: "Many people believed deeply, moved in the same circles as martyrs, and professed their complete steadfastness, yet recanted rather than face torture or death" (Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 111). His later qualification, that the faith of the martyrs was distinguished from that of other believers by its "uncompromising seriousness," appears to undermine his earlier assertion (p. 137).

<sup>320</sup>Chandler and Harvey, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>321</sup>Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Marsh (New York: MacMillan, 1955), 186.

<sup>322</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 123.

<sup>323</sup>T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1937, reprint SCM, 1964), 170 (page numbers from reprint edition).

<sup>324</sup>D. W. Wead, "Tempt," In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 4:784.

<sup>325</sup>See Luke 8:13, 22:28; Acts 20:19; Jas 1:2, 12; 1 Pet 1:6, 4:12.

sin that such trial seems to bring with it.”<sup>326</sup> Consequently, the threat of martyrdom, which is manifestly an attack of the devil to lead to apostasy (Rev 2:10a), serves at the same time as an opportunity for God to prove faith (Rev 2:10b).

Also interesting to note is James’s usage of *πειρασμός* in chapter 1 of his epistle. In verses 2 and 12 the term appears to be used in the sense of “trial/tribulation.” Then, within the same context, *πειρασμός* clearly takes on the meaning “temptation” in verses 13-14. In choosing *πειρασμός* in verses 2 and 12 (instead of, for example, *θλίψις*) James appears to be appealing to the conceptual link between testing and temptation we have been discussing here.<sup>327</sup>

One question arises, however, in connection with the test of faith. Does fleeing persecution mean one has failed the test? Sharp disagreements arose in the early church over this question.<sup>328</sup> It is important to emphasize that in persecution contexts Jesus Himself taught that it was permissible to flee when faced with danger (Matt 10:23; Mark 13:14-16). In Paul’s case, Reimer relates that “he used every legal means that he had in order not to suffer.”<sup>329</sup> Thus fleeing persecution *per se* is not tantamount to denying Christ.

On the other hand, Barth comments that the believer is obligated to continue to witness and minister in his or her new location, and, most likely, opposition will arise there as well.<sup>330</sup> Roberts also rightly notes that “once captured, then was the time for commitment to the cause, unless another opportunity presented itself for evasion.”<sup>331</sup> Gundry sees a “balance between perseverance in discipleship and preservation of life. The balance avoids tipping into the laxity of antinomianism or the self-righteousness of obsession with martyrdom.”<sup>332</sup> Keener correctly comments, “Most people could distinguish between fleeing and openly denying their faith.”<sup>333</sup>

### *Identification with Christ*

As we have seen earlier, the concept of identification with Christ is a highly prominent feature in the martyr’s role. When one thinks of the martyr’s identification with Christ the

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<sup>326</sup>C. G. Kromminga, “Temptation,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1073. Ciocchi writes, “Any trial of faith functions as a temptation to sin--since there is always the temptation to fail the test--and any temptation to sin functions as a trial of faith.” David M. Ciocchi, “Understanding Our Ability to Endure Temptation: A Theological Watershed,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (1992): 470.

<sup>327</sup>Paragraph suggested by John Feinberg in his review of this section.

<sup>328</sup>Tertullian, for example, opposed flight, while Clement of Alexander did not (noted by Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 54). Pettersen summarizes Athanasius’s defense of fleeing: (1) successful escape can be a positive testimony to divine provision; (2) evil should be resisted, not passively embraced; (3) Jesus taught that one should flee; (4) refusal to flee may be simply pride; (5) we do not know the appointed time of our death and so cannot presume it has come; (6) God would allow capture if it was His will; (7) surrender to martyrdom is tantamount to suicide; (8) fleeing was also an experience of hardship and trial for Christ’s sake. See Alvyn Pettersen, “To Flee or Not to Flee’: An Assessment of Athanasius’s *De Fuga Sua*,” in *Persecution and Toleration*, ed. W. J. Sheils, *Studies in Church History*, no. 21 (No city: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 29-39.

<sup>329</sup>From an interview with Reg Reimer, director of World Evangelical Fellowship’s Department of Church and Society, by Kim A. Lawton, May 6, 1996, cited in Shea, *Lion’s Den*, 15.

<sup>330</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), 4.3.626-27.

<sup>331</sup>Roberts, “Martyrologies and Martyrs,” 228.

<sup>332</sup>Gundry, *Matthew*, 194.

<sup>333</sup>Keener, *Matthew*, 324.

term *imitation* often comes to mind: “by their sufferings they were most intimately conformed to the example of their Lord.”<sup>334</sup> This is a clear theme in the early Christian records of the martyrs’ deaths: “Behind their action lies the whole theology of martyrdom in the early Church. They were seeking by their death to attain to the closest possible imitation of Christ’s Passion and death.”<sup>335</sup> Imitating Christ leads to the same consequence the Lord Himself encountered: “Sooner or later conformity with Christ will thus evoke the hostility which leads to oppression and suffering.”<sup>336</sup> When conflict arises, though, Christ is manifest in those who imitate Him in suffering: “When Christians are exposed to public insult, when they suffer and die for his sake, Christ takes visible form in his Church.”<sup>337</sup>

I would propose, however, that this identification goes beyond simple imitation--suffering can be an expression of the believer’s union with Christ. The concept of union with Christ, especially as conceptualized by the phrase “in Christ,” has been understood in various ways: as a “domain,” a “sphere,” “Christian life in the Spirit,” or “a personal or mystical relation.”<sup>338</sup> These latter, “relational” aspects of union with Christ correspond to the claim that the martyrdom experience is one of great personal intimacy with Christ. Kubis writes, “Between Christ and the martyr there is a special relationship: a personal and intimate union.”<sup>339</sup> This claim finds further confirmation in the connection between intimacy with Christ and suffering in general. Beyerhaus writes, “From NT times until the present, Christians’ experience has been that Christ is never so consciously close to them as when they are conformed to him in their trials.”<sup>340</sup> Feinberg concurs that suffering “gives intimacy with God.”<sup>341</sup>

Other authors, however, accentuate a different aspect of union with Christ--our “positional status” in Him during His passion events. Murray describes it as Christ being “united to his people and his people to him when he died upon the accursed tree and rose again from the dead.”<sup>342</sup> The result of this union for believers is “that His death is reckoned their death, His resurrection their resurrection, and His session at the right hand of the Father their session with Him. Then the Scripture says we shall be glorified together with Him.”<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>334</sup>Blunt, ed., *Martyrs*, 447.

<sup>335</sup>Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 15.

<sup>336</sup>Hendrikus Berkhoff, *Christian Faith*, trans. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 463.

<sup>337</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 6th ed. (London: SCM, 1959, reprint, London: SCM, 1969), 273, (page numbers from reprint edition).

<sup>338</sup>Fritz Neugebauer, “Das Paulinische ‘in Christo,’” *New Testament Studies* 4 (1958): 124. For more discussion of “in Christ” as a *domain* or *sphere* see M. A. Seifrid, “In Christ,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Kenneth DeRuiter (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1983), 433-34. For a discussion of other, less plausible variants, see Lewis B. Smeads, *Union with Christ*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 60-66.

<sup>339</sup>Kubis, “La theologie du martyre,” 199.

<sup>340</sup>Beyerhaus, *Utopian Error*, 170.

<sup>341</sup>John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 344.

<sup>342</sup>John Murray, *Redemption--Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955, reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 162-63 (page numbers from reprint edition).

<sup>343</sup>Albert N. Martin, *Union with Christ*. Lecture series at Toronto Baptist Seminary, February 15-17, 1978, 29.

This is related to the Old Testament idea of “corporate personality/solidarity,”<sup>344</sup> which many feel underlies Paul’s “in Christ” concept.<sup>345</sup>

Most discussions on union with Christ by the just-mentioned authors focus on its effects on sanctification. One must also note, however, that along with dying, rising, being seated and being revealed with Christ, the believer also shares in His sufferings. Erickson succinctly states, “Being one with Christ also means that we will suffer.”<sup>346</sup>

Although it is the lot of all those “in Christ” to suffer as He did (2 Tim 3:12), this suffering can be experienced in various ways and to various degrees by different individuals. We are reminded here of Peter’s question to Jesus about the fate of John the apostle after Jesus had just predicted Peter’s martyrdom: “Lord, and what about this man?” (John 21:21). Jesus’ reply reveals that martyrdom, one manifestation of suffering as a result of union with Christ, is not necessarily God’s will for all. This idea is further confirmed by Paul’s statement in Col 1:24 that he does his “share . . . in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” There appears to be a “quota of suffering” for the church as a whole to experience as a result of its union with Christ.<sup>347</sup> Yet its members contribute differently to that quota--some via martyrdom.

### *Devotion to Christ*

A third feature of the martyr’s experience is that in death he or she demonstrates total devotion to God. This aspect differs from those previously discussed. In “testing of faith” the martyr values the reward for those who endure and the punishment for those who do not. In “identification with Christ” his motive is intimate fellowship with Christ, both sensing His nearness and experiencing suffering similar to His. In this third aspect we focus more on the martyr’s desire to show loyalty and express love to the One who laid down His life for him or her, without thought of personal benefit. This introduces a healthy balance into the martyr’s attitude,<sup>348</sup> since, as the early Lutheran martyrologist Rabus noted, “The suffering of His church shows that it is God’s will that His people love and obey Him . . . simply because they love God

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<sup>344</sup>The seminal discussion is found in H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, revised ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). A latter elaboration and defense was made by Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, Supplemental Series of the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, no. 196, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>345</sup>See, with others, Russell P. Shedd, *Man in Community: A Study of St. Paul’s Application of Old Testament and Early Jewish Conceptions of Human Solidarity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); and R. David Rightmire, “Union with Christ,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 789-92.

<sup>346</sup>Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 416. See also Schrage, “Suffering in the New Testament,” 181-83; and Morna D. Hooker, “Interchange and Suffering,” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), 77.

<sup>347</sup>See W. F. Flemington, “On the Interpretation of Colossians 1:24,” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), 87; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 486; and (for partial support) C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary, ed. C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1957; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1977), 76 (page numbers from reprint edition).

<sup>348</sup>At the same time, though, I am not insisting that all three of these aspects of the martyr’s attitude must or will be present in every martyrdom experience.

and want to serve Him,”<sup>349</sup> or, applied in a different way, suffering gives us opportunity to show Satan that we serve God out of love.<sup>350</sup>

Interestingly, this goal of the martyr, which seems driven by a purer and higher motive than the previous ones, receives, as we have seen, less direct attention in Scripture. Yet we may reinforce this aspect with the help of general scriptural principles that apply to it. Love for God is arguably among the most prominent of biblical principles, being itself the fulfillment of the Great Commandment of Christ (Mark 12:29-30). Love, in turn, finds its greatest opportunity for expression when forces seek to undermine it. As Baker notes, without opposition “the idea of loyalty would lose its meaning, because there could never be any stress or pressure sufficient to justify one in speaking of it.”<sup>351</sup>

This idea of expressing love and loyalty is sometimes depicted in the image of a sacrificial offering.<sup>352</sup> The comparison of Christian devotion to a sacrificial offering is well established in Scripture (cf. Rom 6:13, 12:1; 1 Pet 2:5). In two passages this image is directly applied to martyrdom (2 Tim 4:6; Rev 6:9-11). The Old Testament apocryphal literature also advanced this theme.<sup>353</sup> It continues in the post-apostolic time: Ignatius hopes that “by these instruments (the teeth of wild beasts) I may be found a sacrifice (to God),”<sup>354</sup> and Polycarp prays to “be accepted this day before Thee as a fat and acceptable sacrifice.”<sup>355</sup> In the Reformation, Luther, Foxe and the Anabaptists also used the figure.<sup>356</sup>

Love and loyalty are expressed not only in sacrifice, but in the obedience of discipleship as well (cf. Luke 6:46; John 14:15). Correspondingly, we find a strong connection between martyrdom and discipleship (cf. Mark 8:34-35 and parallels). In this vein Fisichella writes, “Following Christ means joining in his mission and hence in sharing his sufferings and death.”<sup>357</sup> Oden calls the readiness for martyrdom a “distinguishing mark of discipleship.”<sup>358</sup>

The Anabaptists gave special emphasis to the feature, since conversion and discipleship in the Anabaptist faith carried a high fatality rate. Gregory notes, “From the earliest years of their movement, Anabaptists understood martyrdom as the anticipated result of commitment to Christian discipleship. It was never far from being the essence of being Christian.”<sup>359</sup> For new converts “even to ponder becoming an Anabaptist was ipso facto to think about martyrdom.”<sup>360</sup> Stauffer insightfully notes how baptism, the initiatory act of discipleship, carried for the Anabaptist a clear martyrological connotation, not only because of the image of

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<sup>349</sup>Rabus’s thought here summarized by Kolb, *Confessing the Faith*, 87.

<sup>350</sup>See J. S. Feinberg, “Pain,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2d ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 883.

<sup>351</sup>John Austin Baker, *The Foolishness of God* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970), 62.

<sup>352</sup>Later in this dissertation I will refute the suggestion that the image of “offering” indicates a belief in atonement through martyrdom. It finds its proper context here, in a discussion of personal devotion.

<sup>353</sup>Adrian Schenker notes Wisdom 3:6 and the Theodotion version of Dan 3:38-40 in “Et comme le sacrifice de l’holocauste il les agréa: les premières comparaisons du martyre avec un sacrifice dans l’ancien testament,” in *Treasures of Wisdom*, ed. N. Calduch-Benages and J. Vermeulen (Leuven, Belgium: University Press, 1999), 351.

<sup>354</sup>Ignatius, *To the Romans* 4, in *ANF*, vol. 1. First parenthetical insertion mine.

<sup>355</sup>*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14, in *ANF*, vol. 1.

<sup>356</sup>See Luther, *What Luther Says*, 2:1036; William B. Forbush, ed., *Fox’s Book of Martyrs* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1926), 222, 228, 249; Stauffer, “Theology of Martyrdom,” 199.

<sup>357</sup>Fisichella, “Martyr,” 623.

<sup>358</sup>Thomas Oden, *The Word of Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 266.

<sup>359</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 249.

<sup>360</sup>*Ibid.*, 198.



burial, but also because that was the issue for which they were being persecuted: “Baptism stands at the beginning of the way whose end is martyrdom.”<sup>361</sup>

### *Opportunity for Evangelism*

In chapter 6 we will devote a discussion to the effect of martyrdom on unbelievers. In this section our goal is to show, particularly from a historical point of view, how the martyrdom event often provides the martyr himself or herself a prime opportunity to testify publicly of his or her faith.

First, Allard notes that usually trials were held in public.<sup>362</sup> Bowersock adds that up to the fourth century, Roman execution of Christians usually took place in large cities, often on feast days. The result is obvious: “From the Christian point of view, martyrdom in a city provided the greatest possible visibility for the cause of the nascent Church.”<sup>363</sup> During the trial the confessors utilized the opportunity to evangelize through their testimony: “One is able to affirm that the confessors of the faith, in stark contrast to the other religions of antiquity, not only bear testimony to Christian doctrine with firmness and confidence, but they also try to propagate it universally, including to the authorities, who are persecuting them to death.”<sup>364</sup> Consequently, the martyr has been characterized as a missionary who is actively seeking converts through his or her dramatic testimony. Lampe writes, “The Christian was essentially a missionary, and martyrdom was for him the supreme and most effective mode of evangelism.”<sup>365</sup>

Dawson dramatically describes this phenomenon in relation to the persecution of Scottish Reformers: “The general policy of putting on a grand, national performance for the heresy trials and executions suited the defendants as much as their accusers. . . . They positively welcomed the trials as a battle of wits and a platform to express their views.”<sup>366</sup> She continues, “The heretics were usually articulate, determined people, who were capable of stealing the show. By a virtuoso solo performance, they could change the theatre of death into the theatre of martyrdom.”<sup>367</sup> In his *Letters* John Hus also reveals his desire to “deliver my sermon” during his trial.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>361</sup>Stauffer, “Theology of Martyrdom,” 207.

<sup>362</sup>Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 237.

<sup>363</sup>Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 41-48. Potter, however, appeals to the martyrdoms of Cyprian, Marian and James, Lucian, the Montanists and others to contend that the authorities often tried to keep the affair as quiet as possible. He writes, “They had to allow the Christians their moment in court, but it is clear that they sought to make this brief and to execute their prisoners with as little fanfare as possible. . . . The imperial authorities seem to be restraining the desire of the martyrs for very public displays in death.” See David Potter, “Martyrdom as Spectacle,” in *Theater and Society in the Classical World*, ed. Ruth Scodel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1993), 62. Yet the majority of scholarly opinion seems to affirm Bowersock’s view.

<sup>364</sup>Domingo Ramos-Lissón, “La conversion personnelle dans la littérature des martyrs dans l’antiquité chrétienne (I-III siècles),” *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997): 106. Translation mine.

<sup>365</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, “Martyrdom and Inspiration,” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), 119.

<sup>366</sup>Jane E. A. Dawson, “The Scottish Reformation and the Theatre of Martyrdom,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed. Diana Wood, *Studies in Church History*, no. 30 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 262.

<sup>367</sup>*Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>368</sup>John Hus, *The Letters of John Hus*, ed. Herbert B. Workman and R. Martin Pope (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 184-85.

The reader may here note also the use of the μάρτυς wordgroup in Scripture in connection with those who die for the faith, as described in appendix 1. This association, along with the material to be presented in chapter 6, further supports our characterization of the martyr as a witness.

### Distorted Views of the Martyr's Role

In contrast to those proposals having clear biblical support, we may examine several aberrant views, some widely held. A martyrological theme found frequently in the rabbis and to some degree in early and medieval Christianity is martyrdom as a punishment for personal sins. Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel, for example, attributes his impending martyrdom to an instance of taking pride in teaching the Torah.<sup>369</sup> Similarly, the martyrdoms of Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion, his wife and his daughter are thus explained: the Rabbi used to pronounce the Tetragrammon publicly, his wife allowed him to do it, and his daughter was flirtatious.<sup>370</sup> The same perspective is imposed on biblical figures who were martyred. Zechariah died because he “stood above the people” to prophecy, indicating his pride.<sup>371</sup> Isaiah, while being sawn in two, perished when the saw reached his mouth. This “(was his penalty) for having said, ‘And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.’”<sup>372</sup>

Similarly, in Judaism death by martyrdom can atone for corporate sins of the nation, as seen in the tradition of the “Ten Martyrs.” According to post-Talmudic tradition, ten men died for Judaism at the hand of the Romans (although the lists identifying these individuals differ) in order to atone for the sins of the ten brothers of Joseph, who were never punished for oppressing their brother.<sup>373</sup> The Maccabean literature also features this understanding of martyrdom as corporate atonement (see 2 Macc 6:12-17, 7:18).

Still, we must remember that the martyrs died for a message that declared *Christ* as sin-bearer--they did not imagine that they were bearing their own sins or the sins of others. Even a passage like Col 1:24, which some feel includes Paul in Christ's redemptive suffering, does not support this view since: (1) this understanding contradicts Paul's teaching elsewhere about Christ's unique atoning work, and (2) Paul never uses θάψις for Christ's suffering on the cross.<sup>374</sup>

A related distortion is martyrdom as a means of obtaining general forgiveness of personal sins. The remission of sins through suffering or martyrdom was prominent not only in rabbinic Judaism, intertestamental thought, and among the Qumran community,<sup>375</sup> but in the teaching of early Church Fathers as well. Tertullian claims that through martyrdom one “may obtain from God complete forgiveness, by giving in exchange his blood . . . For that secures the remission of all offences.”<sup>376</sup> Correspondingly, a catechumen who was killed before baptism

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<sup>369</sup>As per Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Comparing Spiritualities: Formative Christianity and Judaism on Finding Life and Meeting Death* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 2000), 106.

<sup>370</sup>*b. Abodah Zarah* 18a.

<sup>371</sup>*Ecc. R.* 10:4.

<sup>372</sup>*b. Yebamoth* 49b. Quotation from Isidore Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino, 1938), page number not noted. In subsequent citations this work will be abbreviated *BT*.

<sup>373</sup>Nelson Glueck, “The Story of the Ten Martyrs” (Thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1923), 65.

<sup>374</sup>Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 104.

<sup>375</sup>See 1QpHab 8.1.

<sup>376</sup>Tertullian, *Apology* 50, in ANF, vol. 3.

was considered to have received a “baptism of blood.”<sup>377</sup> This thinking persisted even in the mind of John Hus, for whom martyrdom would serve for “the blotting out of my sins.”<sup>378</sup> Again, we can attribute this distortion to a poor theological grounding in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, a defect that infected the Church very early in its history. I conclude with Schlatter, that when martyrdom is properly understood “the notion that martyrdom is the best guarantee of salvation is never what gives rise to Christian longing for death,” since the believer already has the assurance of salvation through faith in Christ.<sup>379</sup>

Another significant distortion is the Greco-Roman concept of the “noble death.” In this approach, martyrdom’s value is found in the demonstration of the personal integrity and courage of the martyr. Socrates, for example, refuses to placate the court at his trial out of concern for personal integrity: “I much prefer to die after such a defense than to live after a defense of the other sort.”<sup>380</sup> Plato echoes his teacher: “If it were necessary either to do wrong or to suffer it, I should choose to suffer rather than do it.”<sup>381</sup> Aristotle feels such self-sacrifice leads to ultimate personal fulfillment: “For he will surrender wealth and power and all the goods that men struggled to win, if he can secure nobility for himself.”<sup>382</sup> Maybe most outspoken is the Stoic Seneca: “I should prefer to be free from torture; but if the time comes when it must be endured, I shall desire that I may conduct myself therein with bravery, honour, and courage.”<sup>383</sup>

When the concept of “noble death” is embraced by Judaism or Christianity, it results in martyrdom being considered an act of virtue that earns merit before God. Mayfield notes that for the Pharisees “suffering and death for the law were considered to be unexcelled works of piety.”<sup>384</sup> Agus advances the theory that martyrdom was a “short-cut” to salvation as opposed to life-long Torah observance: “In martyrdom the demands of the divine law recede in awesomeness as God draws back before the heroism of man, but man may step back at the last moment from martyrdom by bearing the yoke of the Law, because the Law obviates the terrible need for martyrdom.”<sup>385</sup>

Similarly, in Catholic theology, “Martyrdom is treated by moral theologians as the chief act of the virtue of fortitude.”<sup>386</sup> For Catholics of the Reformation time martyrdom “realized

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<sup>377</sup>Cunningham, “Martyr,” 629.

<sup>378</sup>Hus, *Letters*, 190.

<sup>379</sup>Adolf Schlatter, *The Theology of the Apostles*, trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 407.

<sup>380</sup>Plato, *Apology* 39a-b. Quotation from Plato, “Apology,” in *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. Harold North Fowler, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. T. E. Page (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1914; reprint, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1966), 137. In subsequent references, the Loeb library will be abbreviated LCL.

<sup>381</sup>Plato, *Gorgias* 469c. Quotation from Plato, “Gorgias,” in *Plato: Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, in LCL, 335.

<sup>382</sup>Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8.9. Quotation from Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, revised ed., trans. H. Rackham, in LCL, 555.

<sup>383</sup>Seneca, *Epistles* 67.4. Quotation from Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, ed. and trans. Richard M. Gummere, in LCL, 2:37. Similar sentiments in Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.2.21; and Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 2.22.52-53.

<sup>384</sup>Mayfield, “Martyr,” 329.

<sup>385</sup>Aharon Agus, *The Binding of Isaac and Messiah: Law, Martyrdom and Deliverance in Early Rabbinic Religiosity*, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism and Religion, ed. Michael Fishbane, Robert Godlenberg, and Arthur Green (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), 45.

<sup>386</sup>Gilby, “Theology of Martyrdom,” 6:315.

fortitude, charity, and obedience in the highest degree.”<sup>387</sup> Even earlier, Aquinas argued that martyrdom is “an act of courage,” “an act of virtue,” and “an act of the highest perfection.”<sup>388</sup> Augustine also felt that “the sanctification of the martyrs is completed. In virtue of their sacrificial deaths they have reached the summit of perfection.”<sup>389</sup> One can trace this concept back as far as Ignatius, who regarded his martyrdom as the means to “become a disciple,”<sup>390</sup> become “perfect in Jesus Christ,”<sup>391</sup> and “attain to God.”<sup>392</sup>

In response to the concept of “noble death” we must acknowledge that the martyr does exhibit courage and preserve personal integrity in the martyrdom event. But the nature of Christian martyrdom is such that these aspects are in no way meritorious but naturally flow from faith. Persevering in suffering is simply acting consistently with one’s convictions concerning the promises of God—if they are really true, then they are worth suffering for. The merit, then, is not in the martyr’s courage or fortitude, but in God’s faithfulness to His promises, which undergirds the martyr’s perseverance. Additionally, as we shall see in chapter 5, even the martyr’s strength to persevere is a result of God’s grace and to His credit. When these considerations are ignored, human boasting results. Thus, Sutcliffe’s critique of Seneca (and, by extension, of other adherents of “noble death”) is accurate: their teaching “springs from human self-sufficiency.”<sup>393</sup>

A further feature of the “noble death,” one drawing significant attention in modern times, is the aspect of *freedom*. Both Cynics and Stoics viewed voluntary death as “the assertion of human freedom.”<sup>394</sup> Philo devotes an entire work to the theme *Every Good Man is Free*, in which he lauds those who refused to be bent to the will of another, but preserved their freedom even if it involved choosing voluntary death by martyrdom or suicide. In modern times the main advocate of martyrdom as an expression of human freedom appears to be Karl Rahner, who defines freedom as “not the power to be able to do this or that, but the power to decide about oneself and to actualize oneself.”<sup>395</sup> Accordingly, he claims that in martyrdom “the whole of life has gathered into one burning moment of ultimate freedom. . . . The death of martyrdom is a death of free liberty.”<sup>396</sup>

A consideration that seems to be omitted here, though, is that the Christian martyr looks beyond himself or herself to the object of his or her devotion and faith. As Turner writes, the martyrs seek “not to do as they themselves wished . . . but to do the bidding of something greater.”<sup>397</sup> Hamon provides a very helpful construal in describing the martyrdom experience not as self-actualization, but as “transcendent actualization.” He points out that Jesus called

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<sup>387</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 280.

<sup>388</sup>Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a 2æ 24, in *ST*, 42:41-51.

<sup>389</sup>From Augustine, *Sermons* 285.5, translated from H. Delehaye, *Les Origines du culte des martyrs*, pages 113-14, cited in Paul Molinari, *Saints: Their Place in the Church*, trans. Dominic Maruca (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 114.

<sup>390</sup>Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 1, in *ANF*, vol. 1, Ignatius, *To the Romans* 5, in *ANF*, vol. 1.

<sup>391</sup>Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 3, in *ANF*, vol. 1.

<sup>392</sup>Ignatius, *To the Romans* 1, 2, 4, in *ANF*, vol. 1.

<sup>393</sup>Edmund Sutcliffe, *Providence and Suffering in the Old and New Testaments* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), 15.

<sup>394</sup>Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 35.

<sup>395</sup>Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978), 38.

<sup>396</sup>Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. Charles H. Henkey (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), 106.

<sup>397</sup>James Turner, *The Shrouds of Glory* (London: Cassell, 1958), 5.

His disciples not to actualize themselves, but to deny themselves. In that self-denial for His sake, they would find actualization, but of a “transcendent” nature.<sup>398</sup> The martyr realizes and demonstrates his or her individuality “in a life that (points) toward the reality of a belief in Jesus as the Messiah.”<sup>399</sup>

Several final, unsubstantial understandings of the martyr’s experience can be summarized in conclusion. Mary Lefkowitz sees value in how martyrdom equalizes the role of men and women.<sup>400</sup> Admittedly this is so, but Scripture gives no emphasis to this aspect of persecution, failing even to record one instance of female martyrdom. The Weiners suggest that the martyr is motivated by a desire to reform society,<sup>401</sup> and by group-loyalty.<sup>402</sup> Yet these aspects are also absent in Scripture--the martyr lays down his or her life “for Christ’s sake,” or “for the gospel’s sake,” not for society or church, although both of the latter do indeed receive benefit. Howard Muson cites psychologist Kenneth B. Clark’s suggestion that the martyr’s tendency to self-sacrifice is biologically determined, related to the size of the brain’s frontal lobe.<sup>403</sup> Yet this is unconvincing even from a scientific point of view--the number of cases actually documented anatomically must be extremely small.

Finally, some suggest that martyrs were psychologically deranged or were seeking escape from personal troubles. In response, first of all, we can appeal to Tam’s critique, in which he notes that such views employ “depth psychology,” ascribing everything to inner drives, and ignore other and better models, like the “psychology of meaning,” where people are motivated by forming of meaning: “Christian faith, for the early martyrs, was ultimate and final; it provided meaning to their existence. Thus loss of faith is loss of meaning.”<sup>404</sup> If the referent of this “meaning” for martyrs truly corresponds to reality, then their actions are perfectly justifiable and understandable; they are in no way deranged or deluded. The derangement is actually present in the analyst who disregards Christian faith as a meaningful object of ultimate devotion, or as Gregory writes: “To accuse the martyrs of fanaticism is simply a tacit admission that no acceptable explanation for their actions can be found.”<sup>405</sup> The martyr’s death is therefore not fanaticism, but a sober “statement about or judgment on life itself, both here and in the hereafter.”<sup>406</sup>

## Conclusions and Final Clarifications

In our investigation of didactic passages, three aspects of martyrdom in respect to the martyr stand out. In almost every context the test of faith was either directly stated or clearly

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<sup>398</sup>Hamon, “Beyond Self-Actualization,” 295-97.

<sup>399</sup>*Ibid.*, 297. Parenthetical insertion mine.

<sup>400</sup>Lefkowitz, “St. Perpetua’s Martyrdom,” 419-21.

<sup>401</sup>A martyr can be understood as “a calculating social reformer willing to risk his or her own life in order to have an impact on humanity” (Eugene Weiner and Anita Weiner, *The Martyr’s Conviction: A Sociological Analysis*, Brown Judaic Studies, ed. Jacob Neusner, no. 203 [Atlanta: Scholars, 1990], 71).

<sup>402</sup>In this scenario the “individual becomes superfluous and the cause becomes all. This is the generative moment when the cause creates martyrs” (*Ibid.*, 86).

<sup>403</sup>Howard Muson, “The Biology of Martyrdom,” *Journal title not noted* 13 (November, 1979): 39-43.

<sup>404</sup>Ekman P. C. Tam, “Are Christian Martyrs Abuse Victims, Neurotics, or Suidical? Comments on the Psychological Study of Christian Martyrdom,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 25 (1977): 464.

<sup>405</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 101.

<sup>406</sup>Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 6.

implied. In addition, identification with Christ is seen in Jesus' call to "follow Him" to death (Mark 8:34-38; John 21:19), in Jesus' identification with His disciples in John 16, in the parallel between Christ and Antipas in Rev 2:13, and in other instances. Also, devotion to Christ is clear also in the exhortation to "follow Me," as well as in the references to martyrdom as an offering to God (2 Tim 4:6; Rev 6:9).

Our narrative passages further confirm the above conclusions. In Daniel 3 and 6 the would-be-martyrs demonstrated devotion to God and persevering faith. In the Book of Acts, identification with Christ is emphasized by the parallels between the passions of Christ, Stephen and Paul. Our section on general principles further expanded these same three aspects and excluded other widely accepted, but unscriptural views. Thus we conclude that the value of martyrdom in respect to the martyr is that it provides opportunity to prove one's faith, intimately identify with Christ, and express love and devotion for Him. Martyrdom also has value as an opportunity for witness, but again, this topic will be more fully engaged in chapter 6, when we examine martyrdom's effect on observers of the event.

At the same time, it seems that the threat of martyrdom did not always benefit the would-be-martyr: "Alongside the striking witness of martyrs and confessors, there were innumerable instances of defeat, fear, retreat, and betrayal."<sup>407</sup> Is there some benefit nonetheless for those who fail to pass the test? I would propose applying the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20) to respond to this question.<sup>408</sup> In this parable four groups of people (types of soil) receive the word (seed), but the second group falls away during trial because of the shallowness of their faith and corresponding commitment. Only the fourth group receives the word in such a way that it produces fruit.<sup>409</sup> Thus, persecution makes evident not only who has faith and who does not (i.e. the distinction between true and false brethren), but also whose faith is of such quality that it will go on to bear good fruit and whose is not. Since God is interested not only in our confession of faith, but in the fruit we bear as well (cf. John 15:1-6; Jas 2:14-26), it is necessary to reveal the quality of each person's faith.

If someone does fail the test of threatened martyrdom, this can be, in fact, a benefit to them since they can now recognize their shallowness and take measures to strengthen faith and deepen commitment. At a later time, then, they may be ready to pass the test. This was, indeed, the case for many believers who recovered from apostasy and were later restored,<sup>410</sup> the apostle Peter being the prime example. Those who do not seek restoration after apostasy have made the willful choice that the cost of following Christ is too high, and thereby they effectively denounce their faith. The early Fathers came to a similar conclusion, feeling that repeated lapses demonstrated "that such individuals, too attached to their possessions, family, or one's own person, and 'loving their own life more than Christ,' gave evidence of ineptitude for the Christian Life."<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>407</sup>Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted*, 40. Also see Eusebius, *Ecc.Hist.* 5.1.11; Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 189; and Workman, *Persecution*, 339.

<sup>408</sup>Although the parable is not devoted to martyrdom *per se*, it does help explain people's response to persecution (see Mark 4:17), of which the threat of martyrdom is one type.

<sup>409</sup>Luke adds that they "hold it fast" and bear fruit "with perseverance," using persecution terminology. Origen affirms that those who endure martyrdom prove to be seed in good soil (Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 7.192).

<sup>410</sup>See Eusebius, *Ecc.Hist.* 5.1.46; Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 63; Workman, *Persecution*, 341.

<sup>411</sup>Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted*, 59.

In conclusion I would assert that not only is martyrdom a test of faith, an element of union with Christ and an expression of devotion to Christ, but that it is the *ultimate* earthly expression of all these. The act of dying consciously is arguably the most intense of all human experiences, and voluntary death involves overcoming the most basic human instinct of self-preservation.<sup>412</sup> Martyrdom is rightly called “the highest renunciation.”<sup>413</sup> Thus it can be argued that martyrdom provides the *ultimate* test of faith, the *ultimate* earthly experience of one’s union with Christ, and the *ultimate* expression of love for God.

I am not alone in this conclusion. Concerning the test of faith, the fathers of early Christianity considered martyrdom the “the supreme manifestation of . . . patience.”<sup>414</sup> Nothing else could so well “test the reality of faith as the call to the great renunciation.”<sup>415</sup> In the Reformation it was also “the Supreme test.”<sup>416</sup> Concerning identification with Christ, Bonhoeffer calls the experience “the supreme fellowship of martyrdom.”<sup>417</sup> Concerning devotion to Christ, it has been called “the ultimate loving gift,”<sup>418</sup> “the highest form of love for God,”<sup>419</sup> and an “ultimate and final confession of love for Christ.”<sup>420</sup>

Yet at the same time, viewing martyrdom as the ultimate expression of love and devotion to God does not imply that those who do not experience martyrdom necessarily love God less. The same intensity of love and devotion likely resides in non-martyrs as well; martyrdom simply provides the opportunity for that love to be manifest in a dramatic fashion, and God chooses some to die a martyr’s death so that this love will be publicly manifested. This radically manifested love, in turn, contributes to God’s ultimate purpose for martyrdom in providing a “moment of climax/clarification,” which we will further discuss in the conclusion of this dissertation.

### *Martyrdom and the Persecutor*

In this second section I will demonstrate that, in respect to the persecutor, martyrdom contributes to the plan of God in providing further basis for God’s judgment of sin. Often in Scripture we see God allowing sinners (who repeatedly refuse to repent) to advance into more severe degrees of sin for the purpose of providing a more convincing basis for their eventual judgment (e.g., 2 Thess 2:10-12; Rom 1:24-2:2). In their judgment God is glorified through the manifestation of His power, justice and wrath against sin (Rom 9:17).

As we progress we will see evidence that martyrdom is indeed a “more severe degree of sin,” because it provokes God’s wrath more than most any other transgression. This is due to the extreme rejection of God exhibited by the persecutor. Corresponding, we will see how the Scriptures consistently depict those instigating martyrdom as men or women of deeply depraved character.

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<sup>412</sup>Bühlmann, “The Church as Institution,” 58.

<sup>413</sup>Workman, *Persecution*, 3.

<sup>414</sup>Thomas Halton, ed., *Messages of the Fathers of the Church*, vol 17, *Divine Providence and Human Suffering*, by James Walsh and P. G. Walsh (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1985), 102.

<sup>415</sup>Workman, *Persecution*, 338.

<sup>416</sup>Matheson, “Martyrdom or Mission?” 155. Also see Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 158.

<sup>417</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 38.

<sup>418</sup>Robeck, “Being a ‘Martyr’,” 5.

<sup>419</sup>Sobrino, “Die Bedeutung der Märtyrer,” 203.

<sup>420</sup>Gilby, “Theology of Martyrdom,” 6:315.

I must also clarify that my intent in this chapter is to show the character and fate of *unrepentant* persecutors (or of eventually-repentant persecutors *before* their repentance). The structure of this work is better served by reserving discussion of repentant persecutors for the chapter discussing martyrdom and the unbelieving observer. There, the entire question of martyrdom's power to convert sinners will be dealt with in proper depth.

## Contributions from Didactic Passages

### *Old Testament*

Our first biblical passage in respect to martyrdom and the persecutor is Jer 2:30. Chapter 2 is a prophetic reflection on Israel's rebellion against God and their covenant unfaithfulness. Verse 30 seemingly diverges from the main thrust of the context, which is a rebuke of apostasy and idolatry and does not otherwise address persecution. It is not necessary, though, to emend the verse to better fit the context.<sup>421</sup> It is better to regard, with Huey, that Israel's killing of the prophets is "one evidence of their rebellion."<sup>422</sup> McKane and Bright discuss the possibility that the alleged martyrdom of prophets by Manasseh may be in view here.<sup>423</sup>

The passage itself is in the form of a legal complaint by God against Israel.<sup>424</sup> In particular, it is a charge of an overlord against a rebellious subject.<sup>425</sup> Some commentators feel that the reference to killing the prophets represents an escalation in Israel's aggression against Yahweh's lordship. Thompson asserts that usually "in the secular realm when a great king visited an erring vassal with some kind of punishment the vassal would come to heel." But Israel would not receive correction; "rather, they turned on Yahweh's representatives and spokesmen the prophets and destroyed them. . . . The persistence of the attack is compared to that of a destructive lion."<sup>426</sup>

McKane, noting the Septuagint addition καὶ οὐκ ἐφοβήθητε ("and you did not fear") at the end of verse 30, feels it might be "a secondary comment evoked by such impiety rather than a corruption."<sup>427</sup> He further explains, "It is an expression of horror that there should be such a lack of reverence for the prophetic office."<sup>428</sup> Our first glimpse, then, of the scriptural portrayal of the persecutor accentuates the vicious character he or she displays in the martyrdom event, reflecting a depraved spiritual condition.

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<sup>421</sup>On pages 51-52 I defended the integrity of this text.

<sup>422</sup>E. Ray Clendenen, ed. *The New American Commentary*, vol. 16, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, by F. B. Huey (Nashville: Broadman, 1995), 68.

<sup>423</sup>McKane, *Jeremiah*, 51; Albright and Freedman, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, 21:16. Also see Josephus *Ant.* 10.3.1.

<sup>424</sup>McKane notes in particular the use of legal term *byr* in v. 29, though used here in an ironic sense as if Israel had a contention against God. See McKane, *Jeremiah*, 49.

<sup>425</sup>Thompson notes such characteristic features as: (1) the heavens and earth called as witnesses; (2) "questions with implied accusations"; (3) "past benefits received and specific charges made"; (4) "the vanity of hoping in other sources of help"; and (5) "announcement of guilt and threat of punishment." See R. K. Harrison, ed., *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 23, *The Book of Jeremiah*, by J. A. Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 160.

<sup>426</sup>Harrison, ed., *NICOT*, 23:182-84.

<sup>427</sup>McKane, *Jeremiah*, 50. The phrase καὶ οὐκ ἐφοβήθητε has been considered a corruption of the first words of v. 31, הָדוֹר אַתָּם, into וְלֹא יִרְאֶתֶם, since the words הָדוֹר אַתָּם ("O generation") are lacking at the beginning of verse 31 in the Septuagint.

<sup>428</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.



## *Synoptic Gospels*

Next, we turn to the missiological discourse of Matthew 10, where several predictions of martyrdom have already been noted. In verse 15 it is significant how Jesus describes the punishment appropriate to those who reject gospel preachers: "It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah." This would apply even more so to those who murder the evangelists. Later, we see a commentary on how the character of the persecutor is revealed in martyrdom. In verse 21 Jesus points out that even family members will deliver believers over to death. By so doing Jesus reveals the degree of hostility that persecution can reach--no human bond, no matter how close, can restrain the persecutor's violent opposition to God and His representatives.

We receive another glimpse into fate and character of the persecutor in Jesus' parables of Matthew 21 and 22, where the vine growers and invited wedding guests kill their master's messengers. Keener's commentary on Matthew 21 brings out the seriousness of this act: "In antiquity, all sides regarded as treacherous the killing of unarmed messengers, or heralds. . . . An audience would hardly expect the violence depicted here, and would undoubtedly have responded with indignation."<sup>429</sup> Commenting on Matthew 22 he asserts that killing the messengers of the king "constituted a revolutionary act. . . . The parable's audience would naturally applaud the king's rage. . . . Nothing less than such vengeance as verse 7 depicts would satisfy his honor."<sup>430</sup>

A further reference to killing God's messengers is found in Matt 23:34, where Jesus predicts the rejection of the "prophets, wise men and scribes" he is sending the Jewish religious leadership.<sup>431</sup> First we notice in the previous verses Jesus' severe characterization of this group, including his appellation "you brood of vipers" (23:33). Also, Lenski makes a significant observation in noting that Jesus is sending these envoys with the foreknowledge of their rejection. He does this for the purpose of accelerating their persecutors' decline into judgment.<sup>432</sup> The result clause in the following verse, "so that upon you may fall all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah," confirms Lenski's observation.<sup>433</sup> We also note the final (climactic) position of this accusation in this imprecatory chapter, and the fact that no specific reference to judgment is made (except for a subtle reference at the end of verse 15) until martyrdom is mentioned.<sup>434</sup> Martyrdom can thus provide God with the ultimate grounds for judgment for those with a lifelong history of rebellion against Him, and actually hasten that judgment.

## *Hebrews*

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<sup>429</sup>Keener, *Matthew*, 512.

<sup>430</sup>*Ibid.*, 520-21.

<sup>431</sup>The accusation is also applied proleptically to "Jerusalem," a metonymy for the Jewish religious establishment, in verse 37.

<sup>432</sup>Lenski, *Matthew*, 917

<sup>433</sup>Additionally, France notes how in the accounts of both Abel and Zechariah "the call for vengeance is explicit." See France, *Matthew*, 331.

<sup>434</sup>Verse 14 is an interpolation. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: American Bible Society, 1994), 50.

Hebrews chapters 11 and 12 also yield helpful insights into how the martyrdom event makes manifest the character of those who kill God's saints. First, in Heb 11:35b-37 we note the types of torments (torture, mocking, scourging, chains, imprisonment) and methods of execution (stoning, sawing in two, slaying with the sword) used to persecute God's saints and prophets. The passage goes on to describe how their persecutors relentlessly pursued them. Hughes rightly comments that Hebrews 11 not only demonstrates the faith of the victims, but also "the fierce hatred of the unbelieving world in its guilty hostility to the truth as it ruthlessly hunts and assaults those whose trust is in the immutability of the divine promises."<sup>435</sup>

In Heb 11:38 the author makes the parenthetical comment that "the world was not worthy" of the prophets whom they persecuted. Here the author creates a contrast that accentuates the heinousness of the persecution. Instead of responding to God's messengers with the respect and honor they were due, the persecutors responded in an opposite manner--they reject them to the highest degree.

A little later, in Heb 12:3, where Jesus serves as an example of enduring "hostility" from sinners, the author of Hebrews employs the term ἀντιλογία. This word, which can mean either "contradiction/dispute" or "rebellion,"<sup>436</sup> is used in the New Testament outside of Hebrews only once (Jude 11), where it has the latter meaning. Its two other usages in Hebrews (6:16, 7:7) both correspond to the first definition "contradiction/dispute." Possibly the author refers here not only to "rebellion/hostility," but also to the incongruity ("contradiction") of rejecting those most worthy of respect, as seen in Heb 11:38.

### *John and Revelation*

In John 16:2 again we gain insight into the character of the persecutor as a result of the martyrdom event--the enemies of Christianity will consider the execution of Christians as service rendered to God. The previous statement, that "they will make you outcasts from the synagogue," suggests that the persecutors are unbelieving Jews, the group who earlier considered the claims of Christ Himself blasphemy against the God of Israel. At first glance, the attempt by unbelieving Jews to defend (howbeit mistakenly) God's truth through persecution may appear excusable as an honest mistake in religious judgment, but a closer examination reveals the opposite to be true. Christ is not here excusing the actions of these persecutors as an honest mistake, but expressing incredulity that the true messengers of God should be killed in the name of God. In verse 3 Jesus explains this incongruity, "These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me." In other words, the unbelieving Jews of that time had ceased the worship of the true God and formed a "conceptual idol" of their own design. So strong was their self-delusion that their encounter with the true God and His Word aroused in them hostility to the ultimate degree.

Several key passages for the relationship of martyrdom and the persecutor appear in the Book of Revelation. In Rev 6:10 the martyrs complain about God's lack of intervention in avenging their blood. God's answer was that they were to wait until the full number of martyrs had been killed. Here we must introduce a much-discussed topic--the "quota of suffering" that belongs to the end times, the so-called "messianic woes." According to this

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<sup>435</sup>Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 515.

<sup>436</sup>Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 89.

conception, prior to the final judgment the people of God must endure a certain amount of suffering and rejection, which will usher in God's end time retribution.<sup>437</sup> This is related to the Old Testament concept "the cup of wrath," which slowly fills over time and, when full, overflows in divine judgment.<sup>438</sup>

This theme continues to develop later in Revelation as God responds to the cry of the slain martyrs.<sup>439</sup> In chapter 16 the "bowls of the wrath of God" are poured out.<sup>440</sup> After the third bowl of wrath, the only one connected with a detailed indictment, the angel of the waters (which had been turned to blood) exclaims, "They poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it" (16:6). After the seventh and final bowl a specific reference to God's "cup of wrath" is made in reference to the so-called "Mystery Babylon," whose sins were "remembered before God" (16:19). In the following chapters these sins are explicated in detail. In Rev 17:6 Babylon is pictured as "drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus." In the list of vices mentioned in chapter 17 this item fills the final, climactic position.

In chapter 18 a similar indictment against Babylon is made,<sup>441</sup> again in climactic, final position: "And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who have been slain on the earth" (18:24). The same feature is noted yet another time in chapter 19, where a brief indictment of Babylon concludes with the words "and He avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her" (19:2). The frequent repetition of this indictment and its emphatic position demonstrate that the end-time martyrdoms complete the "messianic woes," and are a key factor in ushering in God's eschatological judgment.

Finally, we can note which individuals Revelation indicts for the killing of God's saints: the beast (11:7, 13:7), the false prophet (13:15) and Mystery Babylon(s) (17:6; 18:24; 19:2), the great end-time enemies of God's kingdom. The fact that killing God's saints is associated with such heinous figures further underscores the vicious character of this act.

### Contributions from Narrative Passages

#### *Old Testament*

We may begin our investigation with the account of Cain and Abel, which, although not strictly fulfilling the criteria for martyrdom outlined in chapter 2, nonetheless deserves consideration due to its later prominence in the New Testament's teaching on persecution (cf. Matt 23:35 and 1 John 3:12). The Genesis account attributes Cain's actions to jealousy--Abel's offering was accepted, while Cain's was rejected. Yet the New Testament's depiction of the

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<sup>437</sup>Dunn lists numerous biblical and extra-biblical passages that support this concept: Dan 7:21-27, 12:1-3; Jub 23:22-31; 1QH 3.28-36; *Test. of Moses* 5-10; 4 Ezra 4:33-43; Mark 10:38, 13:8; Mt 3:11/Lk 3:16; John 16:21; Acts 14:22; Rom 8:18-23; Rev 6:9-11. See James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I Howard Marshall, W. Ward Gasque, and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 115; and Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 486.

<sup>438</sup>See Job 21:20; Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15

<sup>439</sup>Sweet concurs that, as we shall now demonstrate, the cry of the martyrs is answered in the "judgment of the great harlot" and, additionally, in "the coming of a new order." Sweet, *Revelation*, 141.

<sup>440</sup>Note the similarity to the "cup of wrath," but the volume is now greater.

<sup>441</sup>Some dispute whether the same Mystery Babylon from chapter 17 is in view here. Yet even if they are different entities, it little effects my conclusions here.

event, especially in John's epistle, points to Cain's deep-seated rebellion against God--he becomes the prototype for future persecutors of God's people.

Besides Cain and Abel, all other narrative accounts of the killing of saints take place within the time frame covered by the book of Kings. House properly describes this time as "the lowest ebb in Israel's national history,"<sup>442</sup> a time when we would expect to see Israel at its worst. This observation is consistent with my assertion that the martyrdom event reveals an extreme rejection of God.

The first martyrdoms mentioned in Kings are the killing of the Lord's prophets by Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4, 13, 19: 10, 14). For our purposes in this chapter the divine commentary on Jezebel's actions, found in 2 Kgs 9:7, is more useful. In commissioning Jehu to execute God's judgment on the house of Ahab, the prophetic messenger enumerates only one of the many evils of Ahab's reign--Jezebel's killing of the prophets. One may possibly assert that God considered this act the most offensive of all and the most substantial grounds for judgment. The judgment is severe in light of the value systems of that day--childlessness for Ahab and no burial for Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:8-10).<sup>443</sup>

We may consider the murder of Zechariah (2 Chr 24:20-22) by King Joash another genuine instance of martyrdom.<sup>444</sup> This account illustrates the principle of divine retribution against the persecutor, in this case King Joash. The text directly links the subsequent assassination of Joash with his execution of Zechariah (v. 25).

Other features underscore this theme of retribution.<sup>445</sup> First, the same term (הרג) describes both Zechariah's and Joash's murder. Also, Zechariah's imprecation is literally "may God see and seek (דרש)," (that is, "seek retribution"). The terms "seek" and "forsake" are used antithetically in Chronicles, and we see such a contrast here as well. Joash had "forsaken" God

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<sup>442</sup>E. Ray Clendenen, ed. *The New American Commentary*, vol. 8, 1, *2 Kings*, by Paul R. House (Nashville: Broadman, 1995), 64.

<sup>443</sup>One comment made in defense of Jezebel's actions deserves rebuttal. Cogan feels that Jezebel is being unfairly caricatured in the narrative--the intolerance she apparently displayed "is inconsistent with pagan thought" since polytheists usually tolerated various forms of worship. The actual issue, he feels, must have been "a political response to the opposition raised by the local servants of YHWH to the foreign cults that have been introduced" (William F. Albright and David N. Freedman, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 10, *1 Kings*, by Mordechai Cogan [New York: Doubleday, 2001], 447). What Cogan fails to appreciate, however, is the satanically inspired hatred of true worshippers of God, as described in chapter 3 of this dissertation, which can cause persecutors to act inconsistently with their own belief systems.

<sup>444</sup>Japhet, observing several features of the text, proposes that Zechariah's execution had political undertones reflecting a conflict between royalty and the priestly class (Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, The Old Testament Library, ed. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen [London: SCM, 1993; reprint, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993], 849-50 (page citations are from the reprint edition). These features include: the extreme reaction of Joash to a relatively mild rebuke from Zechariah; the relatively mild assessment of Joash's misdeed by the chronicler; and the mention of "conspiracies" both against Zechariah and the king. This creative proposal, however, lacks adequate textual support to be convincing. Also, Jesus interprets this event in a religious sense as an example of rejecting God's messengers (Matt 23:35/Luke 11:51). Equally untenable is the rabbis' suggestion that Zechariah perished due to personal pride in that he "stood above the people" to prophesy (v. 20). See *Ecc. R.* 10:4.

<sup>445</sup>Noted by Selman, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 456-57.

(v. 20), especially through Zechariah's murder (v. 21), and now God will "seek" retribution (v. 22).<sup>446</sup>

Through contrasting ironies this account also reveals Joash's hardened condition, demonstrated in the murder of Zechariah. Most obvious is that Zechariah was the son of Jehoiada, the priest who saved the young king's life and restored to him the throne of Judah at great personal risk. Also, the execution took place "at the command of the king" in the temple courtyard, the place where Jehoiada both refused to execute Joash's persecutor, Athaliah (2 Chr 23:14),<sup>447</sup> and where he anointed the young Joash king (2 Chr 23:8-11).<sup>448</sup>

Another narrative passage, a post-exilic prayer found in Neh 9:5-37, further reflects on the sins of Israel, in particular their killing of the prophets. The key verse for our purpose is verse 26. As noted previously, Kidner explains this reference to killing prophets during the times of the Judges by arguing that it projects a perspective on the prophets beyond that time.<sup>449</sup> Here, in this penitential prayer reflecting on Israel's sins, martyrdom is again recognized as grounds for divine chastisement. Several other grounds for chastisement are also listed in this prayer: (1) "disobedience and rebellion" (v. 26); (2) disregard of the Law (v. 26); (3) "doing evil" (v. 28); and (4) stubborn arrogance (v. 29). Some literary features suggest, however, that the killing of the prophets is given prominence among them.

First of all, killing the prophets is equated with "committing great blasphemies."<sup>450</sup> Admittedly, the same phrase describes the making of the golden calf in verse 18, yet our passage differs from verse 18 in that the latter incident is not specifically referred to as a basis for judgment as the killing of the prophets is. Second, emphasis is indicated by the setting off of the clause containing the items "killed Your prophets" and committed great blasphemy" from the chain of preceding verbs in the *waw*-prefix conjunction construction by use of the suffix conjugation verb הָרַגוּ. Additionally, this verb is preceded by its direct object "Your prophets," also indicating emphasis. Finally, this feature is listed last in verse 26, after the references to rebellion and disregard of the Law, indicating movement toward a climax.<sup>451</sup>

We might mistakenly underestimate the severity of God's judgment for killing the prophets here, though, seeing that Israel, in spite of this horrible act, was nonetheless restored. But one must make a distinction between national Israel, to whom God remained faithful in covenant relationship, and the individuals who committed these acts. The restoration of the nation brought no benefit to those individuals who occasioned its downfall.

Daniel chapters 3 and 6 may offer further insights about martyrdom and the persecutor as it did in the previous section concerning the persecuted. In chapter 3 several features highlight the degree of arrogance to which Nebuchadnezzar exalted himself in creating the golden image, even to the point of blasphemy. First, it is likely that the image resembled the image Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream of chapter 2, the head of which represented him. Next, we

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<sup>446</sup>The rabbis, exaggerating the theme of retribution, assert that the blood of Zechariah was still "seething" at the time of Nebuzaradan's conquest of Jerusalem and was appeased only when the pagan commander cried out to the deceased Zechariah out of compassion for Judah. See *b. Sanh.* 96b; *b. Gittin* 57b; *Ecc. R.* 3:16.

<sup>447</sup>Noted by Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 850.

<sup>448</sup>Noted by Selman, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 456.

<sup>449</sup>Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 112.

<sup>450</sup>Clines confirms that the phrase "great blasphemies" refers "to the despising of God's word spoken through the prophets." See Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 197.

<sup>451</sup>The same argument can apply to verse 30. Although the killing of the prophets is not specifically mentioned here, the phrase "they would not give ear (to the prophets)" may imply the same.

note that frequent repetition of the term קוּם, which in the Aramaic *haf'el* (or *af'el*) aspect means “to set up,” but in *pe'al* means “to stand, arise.”<sup>452</sup> In verse one it is recorded that King Nebuchadnezzar set up (אֶקְיִמָּהּ) the image. Afterwards the image is almost exclusively referred to (8 times) by the cumbersome phrase “the image that I/you/he (i.e., King Nebuchadnezzar) had set up.”<sup>453</sup>

Besides making an obvious reference to the initiator of the project, the author may be suggesting here that Nebuchadnezzar’s insistence on setting up this image (*haf'el* of קוּם) reflects his personal ambition to exalt himself as an object of worship (*pe'al* of קוּם). Ironically, the final time this verb is used in this chapter is when Nebuchadnezzar “rises up” upon learning that fire did not harm the three men. Yet this time he is in no position to exalt himself, but rather is about to be humbled.

The author gives further indications of Nebuchadnezzar’s arrogance. After the three Hebrews’ first refusal to bow to his image, Nebuchadnezzar’s condition is described as “rage and anger” (v. 13). After their second refusal, he was “filled with wrath and his facial expression was altered (v. 19).” Here we see a depiction of a man who thought it incomprehensible that he, who was deified in his own eyes, could be defied by men. Finally, and most remarkable, is Nebuchadnezzar’s claim that no god “can deliver you out of my hands” (v. 15). In summary, in this passage the persecutor is characterized as an egomaniac, who exalts himself above both man and God.<sup>454</sup> At the same time, the author holds out hope for even the most arrogant of persecutors--Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges God in the end.<sup>455</sup>

The situation in Daniel 6 is a bit more subtle and complex. It is clear, as Leupold notes, that the incident is “prompted by envy,”<sup>456</sup> and not “so much religious persecution as an attempt to bring an individual to fall on a religious charge that is especially trumped up because no other type of charges is available.”<sup>457</sup> Yet some of the same features of egomania can be noted here as well. First, that the officials of the king suggested a ban on prayer reflects their disdain for the worship of any god. Their personal ambition for greatness in the kingdom eclipsed the respect that is due a Higher Being. Thus, in a sense, they are exalting themselves above God. The king, although generally presented sympathetically, also falls to the same temptation in that he approved the decree that permitted prayer only to him. As Collins notes, the decree gave “the king divine status.”<sup>458</sup>

### *Synoptic Gospels and Acts*

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<sup>452</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), CD-ROM version from Logos Research, Oak Harbor, Wash.

<sup>453</sup>Once it is called simply the golden image (v. 10), and once “the image that I have made” (v. 15).

<sup>454</sup>Leupold correctly recognizes that there was a political agenda in Nebuchadnezzar’s initiative as well. But in light of the observations presented above I cannot agree that “that the *religious* significance of this act of general homage by the assembled officials was largely incidental.” See Leupold, *Daniel*, 146.

<sup>455</sup>It would be difficult to cite these cases in Daniel as examples of successful evangelism through martyrdom (our topic in chapter 6 of this dissertation) not only because no one was killed, but also because Nebuchadnezzar and Darius acknowledged God as a result of witnessing a miraculous deliverance. One could easily posit that had Daniel and his three friends perished, these kings would have been even more confirmed in their arrogance.

<sup>456</sup>*Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>457</sup>*Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>458</sup>Collins, *Daniel*, 267.

We turn first to the account of Stephen. The Sanhedrin's behavior at his trial gives us a glimpse at the satanic rage against the gospel and its heralds, and the degree to which the Jewish leaders were given over to the devil's influence. The effect of Stephen's testimony is described by the phrase διεπρίοντο ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν (literally, "they were sawn to their hearts," that is, deeply convicted).<sup>459</sup> Thus, the word penetrated so deeply that we would expect their reaction to reflect their true character. Their response, "they *began* gnashing their teeth at him," speaks to the quality of their character. The expression "gnashing of teeth" is found only eight times in the New Testament (but not in the Septuagint), and in every other occurrence describes the anguish of the condemned.<sup>460</sup> Thus, the narration compares the depth of emotion experienced in the Sanhedrin's rejection of the gospel with that experienced by those facing eternal torment.

Verse 57 continues to describe how the character of Stephen's persecutors is demonstrated in this event. After hearing Stephen relate his heavenly vision of the Son of Man, the Sanhedrin "cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and . . . rushed upon him with one impulse." Remarkable here is the total response of rejection/aggression--vocal, auditory and motor. One may posit that the persecutors, in this instance, were totally given over to Satan's control.

The account of the apostle James's death at the hands of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12) allows us to further investigate the character and fate of the persecutor. Herod's motive for assaulting the church is not stated, except that the death of James "pleased the Jews" (v. 3). Later in chapter 12, Herod's love for admiration becomes more explicit. After the people of Tyre and Sidon acclaim him a god, "he did not give God the glory" (v. 22). The narrative interprets this act as blasphemy, which was summarily punished by death. Cunningham considers that the proximity of these two accounts allows us to draw parallels between them: "The narrator suggests that his death is divine retribution against one who also 'did not give glory to God' in his persecution of God's people."<sup>461</sup> Thus we may propose that the blasphemous character of Herod's execution of James in the beginning of chapter 12 becomes clear in the light of his explicitly blasphemous act at the end of the chapter.

Finally, we will look briefly at the account of another persecutor in the New Testament narrative--Herod the tetrarch. The Marcan account treats Herod quite sympathetically. Herod "was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe" (Mark 6:20). After the daughter of Herodias asks for John's head, "the king was very sorry" (v. 26). This account is very similar to Darius and Daniel, where the true instigator was not the king, but someone close to him. The wicked character of the instigator of John's martyrdom, Herodias, is made evident by the grotesque manner of his execution--his head presented on a platter. At the same time, there are indications of Herod's willing involvement in John's execution as well. Matthew writes, "Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared

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<sup>459</sup>The term διαπρίω ("to saw through") is found again in the New Testament in a very similar context--when the Sanhedrin heard Peter's testimony in Acts 5:33.

<sup>460</sup>See Matt 8:12, 13:42, 50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Luke 13:28. The final reference shows that the expression was so used earlier by the author of Acts.

<sup>461</sup>Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations*, 240.

the crowd.” Herodias’ request, in this scenario, simply provided Herod the impetus to overcome his fear of killing John.<sup>462</sup>

### Contributions from General Principles of Righteous Suffering

The primary biblical principle that applies to this section is God’s retributive justice both for shedding innocent blood and for slaying His servants. Murder was a punishable offense since the beginning of history (Gen 4:9-12), was specifically prohibited at the time of Noah (Gen 9:6), and was later codified in the Decalogue (Exod 20:13). Especially serious is when political leaders employ execution to achieve personal ends (Lev 19:15-16; Deut 16:18-20; 1 Kgs 21). Even more diabolical is when either mob violence or “legal” execution is used to eliminate God’s messengers, as the citations discussed above make clear.

Knowing this principle gave martyrs confidence to boldly predict the fall of oppressors. The mother and seven sons of 2 Maccabees 7 repeatedly renounce Antiochus: “thou shalt have no resurrection to life” (v. 14); “he will torment thee and thy seed” (v. 18); think not . . . that thou shalt escape unpunished” (v. 19); “thou . . . shalt not escape the hands of God” (v. 31); and “thou . . . shalt receive just punishment for thy pride” (v. 36).”

Beyond this type of general rebuke, both Jews and Christians felt that martyrdom hastened God’s judgment on their oppressors.<sup>463</sup> To cite a particular case, Luther was convinced that God would bring down the papacy “in the blood of the martyrs.”<sup>464</sup> This idea of “hastening judgment” brings us again to an examination of the concept of the “messianic woes.” Pobee offers the following definition:

The Messianic Woes are the eschatological birthpangs out of which the Messianic age is to be born. The Messianic Woes are marked by apostasy and persecution. In the period just before the Day of the Lord evil is expected to come to a height because in God’s inscrutable purpose the full sum of sins must be completed before the eschaton.<sup>465</sup>

The biblical basis for this concept was introduced earlier in the chapter. Barry Smith gives additional biblical evidence for an “eschatological necessity of suffering.”<sup>466</sup>

The rabbis and intertestamental writers perceived this concept of the messianic woes. In the Talmud it is called “the birth pangs (preceding the advent) of the Messiah.”<sup>467</sup> Interestingly, the book of 4 Ezra links the end of this period with the completion of the number of martyrs. When Ezra asks an angel when the end of the age will come, the angel responds:

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<sup>462</sup>There is no basis in the text for Keener’s assertion that from Herod’s point of view this was not a moral question, but a political one--John representing a “potential political threat.” See Keener, *Matthew*, 399.

<sup>463</sup>Noted by Chandler and Harvey, “Introduction,” 6.

<sup>464</sup>Kolb, “God’s Gift,” 403.

<sup>465</sup>Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 38-39.

<sup>466</sup>He cites Matt 10:19-23, 20:22-23, 24:9-10; John 7:6-11, 15:18-25, 17:14; Rom 8:16-18; Gal 3:3-4; Phil 1:27-30; 1 Thess 1-3; 2 Thess 1:4-10; Heb 10:32-34; Jas 5:11; 1 Pet 2:18-20; 3:13-4:19; Rev 2:10; 4-22. See Smith, “Suffering,” 752..

<sup>467</sup>*b. Sanhedrin* 98b, in *BT*, 12:665.



Did not the souls of the righteous in their chambers ask about these matters, saying, “How long are we to remain here? And when will come the harvest of our reward?” And Jeremiel the archangel answered them and said, “When the number of those like yourselves is completed; for he has weighed the age in the balance, and measured the times by measure, and numbered the times by number; and he will not move or arouse them until the measure is fulfilled.”<sup>468</sup>

Similarly, 1 Enoch predicts the end of a period of persecution when the full number of martyrs are slain:

And in those days the prayer of the righteous and the blood of the righteous will have ascended from the earth before the Lord of Spirits. . . . And in those days I saw the Head of Days sit down on the throne of his glory, and the books of the living were opened before him, and all his host, which (dwells) in the heavens above, and his council were standing before him. And the hearts of the holy ones were full of joy that the number of righteous had been reached, and the prayer of the righteous had been heard, and the blood of the righteous had been required before the Lord of Spirits.<sup>469</sup>

Frend relates how Christianity also advanced the conviction of a “predetermined period of natural disaster, war, confusion and persecution before the arrival of the End.”<sup>470</sup> Correspondingly, many feel Paul’s reference to “filling up the sufferings of Christ” (Col 1:24) refers to his personal participation in the messianic woes.<sup>471</sup> Frend also notes that for Christians martyrdom was considered the prime indicator of the approaching eschaton: “By the end of the first century A.D. the suffering for which he (i.e. the believer) had been warned in the Gospels and the witness which the approaching End demanded had become synonymous in the term ‘martyrdom.’”<sup>472</sup> These observations are consistent with and provide confirmation of our observations above, that martyrdom, as the climax of the messianic woes, can be considered a fundamental basis for God’s eschatological judgment due to the severity of the offense against God and His people.

A final insight into the severity of instigating martyrdom comes from Fretheim’s observations on God’s identification with the prophet, whom Fretheim calls a “metaphor of God.”<sup>473</sup> If this be so, then an attack upon a prophet is an attack upon God, and to kill a

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<sup>468</sup>4 Ezra 4:35-37. Quotation from Bruce M. Metzger, ed. and trans., “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 4:35-37. In subsequent references *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* will be abbreviated *OTP*.

<sup>469</sup>1 Enoch 47:1-4. Quotation from Michael A. Knibb, ed., *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 2:132-133.

<sup>470</sup>Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 86.

<sup>471</sup>See Moule, *Colossians and Philemon*, 76; Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 106; Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 486; Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, New Century Bible, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (London: Oliphants, 1974), 70. This view is complementary to the “union with Christ” interpretation advanced earlier.

<sup>472</sup>Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 87. Explanatory parenthesis mine.

<sup>473</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter Brueggemann and John Donahue, no. 14 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 156.

prophet is tantamount to killing God.<sup>474</sup> Again we see martyrdom portrayed as extreme expression of rejecting God.

### Conclusions and Final Clarifications

In our examination of didactic passages we have seen how they often connect killing the saints with God's judgment. This is especially prominent in Revelation, where the repeated placing of martyrdom in a final, climactic position among other indictments accentuates the severity of the offense. This crescendo effect confirms the suspicion that end-time martyrdoms significantly contribute to the completion of the messianic woes and the ushering in of God's eschatological judgment. Correspondingly, martyrdom and judgment are often directly linked (Rev 6:10, 16:6, 18:20, 24, 19:2). Several narrative passages also confirm this finding--Ahab's house is indicted especially for killing the prophets (2 Kgs 9:7), and in the penitential prayer of Nehemiah 9 instigating martyrdom stands out as the offense most deserving of punishment.

Our corollary theme of martyrdom as a demonstration of the vile character of its instigator is also clearly demonstrated. The Synoptics class such individuals with a brood of vipers (Matthew 23), with those who kill innocent messengers (Matthew 21 and 22) and even with those who would betray their own family members (Matt 10:21). The vicious nature of their activity is graphically described in Heb 11:35b-38. They can be so deceived that they think they are actually serving God (John 16:2). They commit the same heinous act as such eschatological fiends as the beast, the false prophet and Mystery Babylon(s).

In the narratives, Joash's murder of Zechariah demonstrates his extreme hardness of heart in light of the benefits he had received from Zechariah's father (2 Chronicles 20). The "would-be" murderers of Daniel and his three friends demonstrate an egomania that seeks to displace faith in the only true God (Daniel 3 and 6). Herodias reveals the quality of her character by asking for John the Baptist's head on a platter (Matt 14:8). The extreme behavior of Stephen's persecutors was also noted (Acts 7). Finally, Herod's killing of the apostle James is essentially equated with blasphemy (Acts 12).

Yet one may object that martyrdom is not always a hostile expression of rejecting God, but can often be understood as merely an unfortunate consequence of prevailing political or economic conditions. This objection can be divided into three basic claims: (1) Christians are martyred because they present a political threat to the State; (2) Christians are martyred incidentally because they are associated with others who present a political threat to the State;<sup>475</sup> (3) Christians are martyred because they threaten the economic interests of people of influence.<sup>476</sup> To substantiate my claim that martyrdom conventionally demonstrates deep human depravity on the part of the persecutor and serves as an important basis for God's judgment, I must address this issue.

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<sup>474</sup>This is likely the line of thinking Jesus followed in His parable of the landowner (Matt 21:33-39).

<sup>475</sup>Killingray illustrates with martyrdoms of African Christians who were killed because "they were identified with alien rule." David Killingray, "To Suffer Grief in All Kinds of Trials': Persecution and Martyrdom in the African Church in the Twentieth Century," in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed. Diana Wood, Studies in Church History, no. 30 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 469.

<sup>476</sup>Schrage gives examples like Jesus' cleansing of the temple, the deliverance of the fortune-teller in Acts 16, and the idol makers instigating a riot in Acts 19, See Schrage, "Suffering in the New Testament," 200-201.

First of all, it is difficult to respond to such an objection from a historical perspective since, not having exhaustive information on every individual martyrdom event, one cannot prove that all or even nearly all cases of martyrdom evidence a deliberate and extreme rejection of Christ and the gospel. We must, therefore, rely primarily on the scriptural data gleaned above, which consistently give the impression that those who kill God's saints reveal a deep-seated hatred of God and His kingdom. Although the total number of references to martyrdom in Scripture is admittedly small, yet they are sufficiently spread out in respect to time, place and culture to reinforce the validity of my generalization.

Other arguments may be employed as well. Concerning claim (1) above, we can first note that the claim that Christian martyrdom is the result of political rather than spiritual factors creates a false dichotomy--both factors can be involved.<sup>477</sup> Additionally, I endorse Bergman's statement that often a "political or racial difference *layered over* the issue of direct spiritual opposition."<sup>478</sup> That is, the true underlying issues were not political, but spiritual. The Roman persecutions can be cited here. Many have observed that the main contention was loyalty--it was the Christians' refusal to give total and unquestioned allegiance to Rome that was interpreted as a threat to the Roman State.<sup>479</sup> Workman comments, "The Christians were condemned . . . because of their supreme loyalty to a law and throne outside the Roman law and throne."<sup>480</sup> It may be argued that any government or social system that demands total allegiance to the point of denying personal faith has overstepped the bounds of legitimate regulation and as established itself as an object of worship. Thus, the real issue is religious, not political, and involves the rejection and replacement of the true God.

In addition, it can often be shown that these so-called political charges were spurious. Eusebius records how slaves were tortured in Roman times to falsely accuse their Christian masters of social irregularities.<sup>481</sup> Musurillo, also commenting on the Roman period, writes, "Even the Romans themselves would have been hard put to explain the legal foundations of what they did. For the constant *assumption* was that the *nomen Christianum* meant trouble--sedition, treason, riot, no one knew clearly what."<sup>482</sup> This quotation introduces another key consideration--the often irrational behavior of persecutors. In chapter 5 of this dissertation I will discuss this point more. The evidence presented there will further undermine the pretension that Christian persecution is merely political in nature.

Concerning claim (2) above, one can argue that those who incidentally persecute Christians because of an apparent "guilt by association" are themselves guilty of an over-obsession with their cause to the point where discriminating true from apparent enemies becomes inconsequential. To apply measures as severe as mass execution of individuals who may in fact present no political threat reveals more than political allegiance on the part of the persecutors: it shows a fanatic, religious obsession with their cause. They thus evidence a hostile rejection of the One who is the only legitimate object of such zeal.

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<sup>477</sup>Suggested by John Feinberg in his review of this section.

<sup>478</sup>Susan Bergman, "Twentieth-Century Martyrs: A Meditation." in *Martyrs: Contemporary Writers on Modern Lives of Faith*, ed. Susan Bergman (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 4. Italics mine.

<sup>479</sup>Potter, "Martyrdom as Spectacle," 54; Boff, "Martyrdom," 14; Paul R. Hinlicky, "Theology of a Martyr: Proclaiming Christ from the Pastoral Epistles Today," *Pro Ecclesia* 7 (1998): 756.

<sup>480</sup>Workman, *Persecution*, 191.

<sup>481</sup>Eusebius, *Ecc.Hist.* 5.1.14.

<sup>482</sup>Musurillo, ed., *Christian Martyrs*, lxii. First italics mine.

Concerning claim (3) above, one may assert that the threat Christianity presents to economic issues is part of a wider question of conflicting worldviews. The secular worldview is one where financial gain overshadows nearly every other consideration, and all means are justified in obtaining it. The Christian worldview, though, emphasizes heavenly riches and denies that ends justify means. Thus, the real conflict here is between secular and Christian worldviews, and the martyrdom of Christians for supposed economic reasons displays a rejection of Christianity *in toto*, and that to the ultimate degree.

At the same time, we must refrain from claiming that instigators of martyrdom are beyond the reach of God's grace, or unable to repent. The Scriptures give us the examples of both Nebuchadnezzar, whose story I have related, and Saul of Tarsus, who not only aggressively persecuted the Church, but "when they were being put to death," he cast his vote "against them" (Acts 26:10). Yet, after his conversion, he explains that he was "shown mercy" because he "acted ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim 1:13). So, although the typical biblical portrayal of the instigator of martyrdom is one of cruel hatred of God and church, exceptional cases can be cited. Also, by way of qualification, we must note the Scriptures testify to a spiritual state that is beyond repentance (Heb 6:4-6), which is usually equated with the "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 12:31).

In light of the previous paragraph, then, it is difficult to assert that instigating martyrdom is the *ultimate* rejection of God. I must qualify my conclusion in this section to say that killing God's saints is certainly an *extreme*, though possibly not the *ultimate* expression of hatred and rejection of God.

## CHAPTER 5: MARTYRDOM AND THE SECONDARY PARTICIPANTS - GOD AND SATAN

In this chapter we will examine the “value” of martyrdom in respect to the secondary participants--God and Satan, the spiritual powers who stand behind and enable the primary participants. This chapter will progress in a fashion similar to the previous one, where each participant will be discussed separately. As before, conclusions will be drawn from didactic passages, narrative passages and general principles of righteous suffering.

### *Martyrdom and God*

Investigating how martyrdom benefits the plan of God in respect to God may sound redundant--every aspect of the martyrdom experience in the long run serves God’s purposes. My goal here is to show how martyrdom provides God a unique opportunity to manifest His grace in the exemplary conduct of the martyr, thereby bringing Himself glory.

#### Contributions from Didactic Passages

##### *Synoptic Gospels*

In the Synoptics I find no direct reference where the exemplary behavior of the martyr is attributed to God’s grace. Several possible indirect references, though, merit attention. We note that those who perish because of their witness are “sent” by Jesus (e.g., Matt 10:16, 23:34). The fact that they are sent with God’s foreknowledge of their fate likely implies His readiness to strengthen and equip them in the hour of trial. Second, the suffering disciples are often compared with the Old Testament prophets (Matt 5:11, 23:31-33), whose ministries in general are characterized by supernatural enablement. Third, in Mark 13:11 Jesus promises supernatural aid to those testifying to their faith in court. Then, after a reference to martyrdom in verse 12, comes a warning that only those who endure will be saved (v. 13). It seems safe to assume that the same Spirit who aided the witnesses before the court also gives them strength to endure the consequences of their inspired witness.

Lenski also points out another significant feature in Matthew. In Matt 10:16 Jesus sends his disciples as “sheep among wolves.” This is a clear allusion to the disciples’ helplessness before their enemies and subsequently to their need to depend on God’s sustaining grace in ministry<sup>483</sup> (and, if necessary, in martyrdom). France concurs: sheep “are in constant danger, and have no capacity for self-defense; they depend on the shepherd.”<sup>484</sup>

##### *Paul*

In several key passages the Apostle Paul, when under the threat of martyrdom, reveals his dependency on God’s grace. In the Corinthian correspondence a frequent theme is the power

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<sup>483</sup>Lenski, *Matthew*, 399.

<sup>484</sup>France, *Matthew*, 181. Barth adds that not only the “sheep and wolves” reference, but the fact that the disciples are sent out without support (Matt 10:10) and that they were not to prepare their defense at court (Matt 10:19) also underscores their dependency on God’s grace. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.3.630-31.

of God manifest in human weakness.<sup>485</sup> This is especially prominent in 2 Corinthians, where Paul is defending his ministry against accusations of personal weakness, but the discussion is already anticipated in the first epistle.

In 1 Corinthians 4 Paul is responding to the over-realized eschatology of the Corinthian church: “The Corinthians conceived of high status and success as an indication that they were under God’s favor. Paul counters that the opposite is the case; those who are condemned by the world and rejected as nobodies are God’s genuine messengers.”<sup>486</sup> Accordingly, “God has exhibited us apostles last of all as men condemned to death” (1 Cor 4:9). Barrett explains that the apostles are “presented by God to the world like the wretches brought on at the close of the display in the arena, men who are already condemned to death, and are sure to perish by combat with one another, or with gladiators, or with wild beasts.”<sup>487</sup>

Although Paul is not in immediate danger at this time, his assessment of the apostles’ fate is not hyperbolic—he recognizes the very real possibility of martyrdom in connection with apostolic ministry. Most significant for our purposes is the observation that Paul considers this part of the divine plan for the apostolic calling. As Schreiner comments, “Paul responds that his sufferings are chartered by God himself.”<sup>488</sup>

Consequently, one can easily infer that God’s grace will sustain the apostle through all suffering connected with the ministry He has appointed him to, including martyrdom. In Phil 1:19-21, as we discussed in chapter 4, Paul is concerned with remaining faithful if he should undergo martyrdom. His expectation for “deliverance” (v. 19) does not refer to release from prison but rather to perseverance in trial.<sup>489</sup> Later in verse 19 Paul gives the grounds for his expectation—not personal willpower, but “your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Additionally, Fee notes the frequent use of the passive voice and impersonal construction in this passage, which he correctly identifies as the divine passive, and which further indicates God’s anticipated intervention in Paul’s situation.<sup>490</sup> Because Paul depends on God’s grace he can look upon his coming trial with optimism and confidence, as reflected in this passage.

This passage also provides us with one of the few direct references to God being glorified through a martyr’s death: “Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” Although Paul does not specifically describe *how* Christ will be exalted, textual features aid our interpretation. The choice of the verb *μεγαλύνω*, unusual for Paul,<sup>491</sup> over *δοξάζω*, which Paul uses 11 times, might connote not only “declared great” (glorified), but also “made great” (manifested). Thus Paul may expect Christ to manifest His power and grace “in his body” through martyrdom and thereby glorify Himself.

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<sup>485</sup>See discussion in Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity, 2001), 96. Also, Dunn writes, “It was precisely *not* experiences of power leaving behind bodily weakness which Paul saw as the mark of grace, but experiences of power in and through bodily weakness” (Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 483).

<sup>486</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 93.

<sup>487</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 110.

<sup>488</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 96.

<sup>489</sup>See discussion on page 87 of this dissertation.

<sup>490</sup>Note the following examples: “this shall turn out,” “not be put to shame,” “be exalted in my body.” See Fee, *Philippians*, 129, footnote 11.

<sup>491</sup>Only here and in 2 Cor 10:15, where the meaning is “enlarged.”

In 2 Timothy, Paul's final personal commentary on martyrdom, we have already encountered the statement that he has "fought the good fight" and "kept the faith." This assertion appears somewhat boastful and contrasts with the attitude of dependence on God's grace we have seen so far. Yet Hendriksen correctly reminds us, based on a wholistic view of the Pastoral Epistles, that "Paul is not boasting in himself, but in what the grace of God can do in 'the chief of sinners'."<sup>492</sup> Also, Kelly notes Paul's confidence in God's "rescue from every evil deed" in 4:18, which refers to "spiritual rather than physical protection," and again demonstrates Paul's attitude of dependence on grace in times of trial.<sup>493</sup>

Considering a final passage in Paul, Peter Wagner claims, on the basis of 1 Cor 13:4, that martyrdom is a spiritual gift, noting that the verse is located in a context listing other spiritual gifts (1 Cor 13:1-3). Wagner writes, "The gift of martyrdom is a special ability that God has given to certain members of the Body of Christ to undergo suffering for their faith even to death while consistently displaying a joyous and victorious attitude that brings glory to God," adding, in jest, that it is a gift "you use only once!"<sup>494</sup> Although I can affirm that martyrdom, like spiritual gifts, requires supernatural enablement, no text identifies martyrdom as a spiritual gift--it is here simply mentioned in the sense of being another heroic feat for Christ.

### *John and Revelation*

John chapter 16 provides yet another indication of God's gracious intervention on the martyr's behalf. In John 16:2 Jesus predicts that his followers will be killed for their testimony to Him. This passage is located in a context that highlights the work of the Holy Spirit, implying that the same Spirit who testifies of Christ (15:26), convicts the world (16:8) and guides the believer (16:13) will also aid the believer at the time of martyrdom. This proposal is supported by noting that the believer's testimony of Christ (15:27), for which he is persecuted (16:1-2), is associated with the testimony of the Spirit (15:26). As the believer shares in the testimony of the Spirit, he can certainly expect to experience grace from the same Spirit when under trial and the threat of death for that testimony.

Lindars makes the same observation, stating, "John has organized his material in such a way (i.e. placing the martyrdom passage in Jesus' discourse on the Spirit) as to bring assurance to his readers (of the Spirit's help) during their time of testing and to restore their morale."<sup>495</sup> He also insightfully notes the Synoptic parallel, where the Spirit aids the believer during his or her testimony at court (cf. Mark 13:11).<sup>496</sup>

The Book of Revelation gives little direct indication of God's supernatural intervention in the experience of the martyr. Revelation prefers to emphasize the test of faith that suffering and martyrdom present to the believer. The accent in Revelation on God's sovereignty in persecution, to be discussed more in the next section, may nonetheless imply a dispensation of His grace to those chosen and allowed to suffer.

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<sup>492</sup>Hendriksen, *I-II Timothy-Titus*, 314.

<sup>493</sup>Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 220.

<sup>494</sup>C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, revised ed. (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1994), 61. Also see Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 317.

<sup>495</sup>Lindars, "The Persecution of Christians," 63-64. Explanatory parenthetical insertions mine.

<sup>496</sup>*Ibid.*

*John*

John 21:18-19 contains the second direct reference to martyrdom as a means of glorifying God that we have encountered (the first being Phil 1:20). The context, however, does not make clear exactly *how* Peter's death would glorify God, only by "what kind of death"--crucifixion. Jesus' following injunction, to "follow Me," might imply glorification through imitation, but this is not certain.<sup>497</sup>

*Acts*

The Book of Acts provides a very dramatic example of God's grace at work in connection with the martyr's experience in the death of Stephen. Stephen, whose life and ministry were characterized in general by the fullness of the Spirit (Acts 6:5), continued to benefit from the Spirit's help up to and throughout the martyrdom experience. After his obviously inspired defense, he is greeted by "gnashing of teeth," the significance of which I discussed in the previous chapter. But Stephen appears unaffected by this demonstration of hostility--he is "full of the Holy Spirit."<sup>498</sup> The Spirit not only provided Stephen with inner strength for the moment, but another supernatural incentive to persevere--a heavenly vision of the Son of Man, ready to receive the soon-to-be martyr.<sup>499</sup> In light of the supernatural grace at work in Stephen we can more easily account for not only his heroic bravery, but also his pity and compassion for his attackers (v. 60).

Hamon, whose psychological assessment of Stephen the martyr was mentioned in my previous chapter, further comments on the role of the Spirit during Stephen's execution. According to Hamon, the fullness of the Spirit was "crucial to Steven's maintenance of integration under stress."<sup>500</sup> He continues,

Shaken to the very center of himself, Stephen caught hold of the self-unifying concept and sought the One in Whom his faith was fixed. This was something more than personal integrity, more than inner fortitude. For Stephen this was a plea to the power which, in presence, was very really his but which, in essence, was quite beyond himself.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>497</sup>Carson seems to prefer this view, writing, "Peter himself came to recognize the principle: whenever any Christian follows Christ to suffering and death, it is a means of bringing praise to God (1 Pet. 4:14-16)." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1991), 680.

<sup>498</sup>The construction ὑπάρχων δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου ("being, then, full of the Holy Spirit"), with the present participle and adjective πλήρης, likely refers to a continual state of fullness--that is, at least throughout the duration of the trial and, assumedly, the execution as well. The construction typically used in Acts for a momentary filling with the Spirit for a special demonstration of power employs the aorist of πίμπλημι (see Acts 4:8, 31, 13:9).

<sup>499</sup>Ton and Hamon concur that the vision was, in part, to counteract the pain of execution. See Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 121; and Hamon, "Beyond Self-Actualization," 294.

<sup>500</sup>Hamon, "Beyond Self-Actualization," 293.

<sup>501</sup>*Ibid.*, 294.



Finally, the Book of Acts taken as a whole is a testimony to a supernatural endurance by the church as a whole. In light of the pervasive pneumatology of the book Rapske's assessment is worthy of acceptance, that the church persevered in trial not "because of human tenacity but by divine empowerment."<sup>502</sup>

### Contributions from General Principles of Righteous Suffering

Besides the specific passages discussed above, we can appeal to several general principles that support the proposition that God manifests His grace on behalf of the Christian sufferer.

#### *The Sovereignty of God*

We have previously noted several instances where righteous suffering is discussed in the context of God's sovereignty. The Book of Daniel, for example, clearly demonstrates God's ability to bestow rulership "on whomever He wishes" (4:32), yet rulers are still allowed to persecute Daniel and his friends. The Book of Revelation, a book punctuated by various visions of God's majesty, nonetheless records the Antichrist's vicious oppression of the saints; yet God controls the duration of his activity (13:5). Thus, persecution and martyrdom are within the boundaries of God's permissive will. Moreover, other passages relate that God directly chooses those who will suffer. In Acts 9:16 Ananias is told that God will show Saul "how much he must suffer for My name's sake."<sup>503</sup> Peter is shown "by what kind of death he would glorify God" (John 21:19). Peter, writing in general about suffering for Christ, relates that such trials come "if necessary" (1 Pet 1:6) and "if God should will it so" (1 Pet 3:17).<sup>504</sup>

The fact of God's sovereignty in righteous suffering allows us to infer, in view of the righteous and faithful character of God, that His grace will be available to sustain the believer through any trial that His will has ordained or permitted him or her to endure, even martyrdom. Jesus' promise to Paul, that "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor 12:9) to cope with the "thorn in the flesh," certainly extends to other cases of righteous suffering that God permits in the life of a believer.

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<sup>502</sup>Rapske, "Opposition," 235.

<sup>503</sup>Noted by Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 116-17. Ton also writes, "Martyrdom is the function God gives to some of his elect to literally die for the sake of Christ and his gospel" (ibid., 53).

<sup>504</sup>Noted by Schrage, "Suffering in the New Testament," 236. The conclusions of other authors confirm my observations about God's sovereignty in martyrdom. See Franklyn J. Balasundaram, "Martyrs in the History of Christianity," in *Martyrs in the History of Christianity*, ed. Franklyn J. Balasundaram (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 1; Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1987), 401; John Paul II, "Veritatis Splendor," 325. This idea is also reflected in rabbinic thought--the *Martyrdom of Isaiah* records how Isaiah, predicting his future martyrdom by Manasseh, prevented Hezekiah from killing his son by saying, "With this calling have I been called" (*Martyrdom of Isaiah* 2.13; quotation from "The Martyrdom of Isaiah," *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles [Oxford: Clarendon, 1913, reprint, Oxford: Clarendon, 1979], 2:161, abbreviated hereafter *APOT*). At the time of his execution he sent the other prophets away with the injunction, "For me only hath God mingled the cup" (*Martyrdom of Isaiah* 5.13, in *APOT*, 2:162). When Rabbi Juda ben Baba was being led off to execution he refused the offer of a substitute since he was the one decreed to die (Glueck, "Ten Martyrs," 89). Concerning the martyrdom of Rabbi Ishmael, God Himself exclaims, "What am I to do for my son? It has been decreed, and none can annul it" (ibid., 70).

The principle that God's power is revealed in human weakness can further support the proposal that God intervenes in the martyr's experience. The classic statement of this principle is the words of Paul, that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Cor 4:7).<sup>505</sup> Throughout his Corinthian letters Paul repeats this theme. He first preached in Corinth "in weakness and much fear," yet had the "demonstration of the Spirit and power" (1 Cor 2:3-4). He was always "carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested" (2 Cor 4:11). He prefers to "boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor 12:9), for "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). Smith relates Paul's general view on ministry-related suffering: "Paul writes that suffering has the effect of ensuring his dependence on the power of God in his apostolic labors."<sup>506</sup>

We may appeal to other Scriptural examples of this principle. Great Old Testament saints were often brought to (or taken from) a place of personal weakness before they became instruments of God. Joseph was exalted to prime-minister after spending time in prison. Moses became Israel's deliver only after his self-reliance was broken by years of exile. Gideon, when called to lead Israel against Midian, acknowledged his personal ineptitude (Judg 6:15). David was taken from tending sheep to shepherd God's people. Great prophets hesitated to accept their prophetic call due to feelings of personal inadequacy (Isa 6:5; Jer 1:6). These individuals exemplify the principle outlined above, that God places His treasure "in earthen vessels," that is, He manifests His power best through human weakness.

Based on the above it is reasonable to infer that when the believer is at the point of greatest personal weakness, facing imminent death for the sake of Christ, he or she can depend on God to manifest His power on their behalf, preserving them (although not necessarily rescuing them) in their hour of trial. Gregory masterfully expresses the paradox of victory through surrender, and standing through yielding:

Christ had not abandoned the martyrs, but draws close to them in their suffering-- indeed, his strength displaced their weakness. He grew more powerful in them as they relied less on themselves. . . . The voluntary nature of martyrdom was profoundly paradoxical: the martyrs' agency depended upon relinquishing control, their strength upon a naked admission of their utter impotence and total dependence on God. . . . The prospect of perseverance came not from gearing up, but rather from emptying out.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>505</sup>The "treasure" Paul refers to is his insight into and commission to preach the gospel (see 2 Cor 4:1-6). The challenge of preaching the gospel effectively in the face of opposition exceeded Paul's human capability, yet the power of God was sufficient to meet the challenge. Similarly, the challenge of remaining faithful under threat of death exceeds what can usually be expected from frail human nature, yet God's grace can sustain the believer.

<sup>506</sup>Smith, "Suffering," 751.

<sup>507</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 132-33. The conclusions of other authors confirm mine here. See Schrage, "Suffering in the New Testament," 210; Feinberg, *Many Faces of Evil*, 78; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.3.630; John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II On The Christian Significance of Human Suffering," in *Messages of the Fathers of the Church*, ed. Thomas Halton, vol. 17, *Divine Providence and Human Suffering*, by James Walsh and P. G. Walsh (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1985), 247; and C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1940), 90.

Furthermore, the lives of actual martyrs dramatize this principle in action. The martyrological records consistently testify to the martyrs' acknowledgement of their personal weakness and dependency on God. Commenting on early church martyrdoms Chadwick writes, "The extant Acts of the Martyrs (where based on contemporary records and not legends) do not portray the martyrs as human heroes, but as very frail mortals who are being given supernatural strength."<sup>508</sup> Gregory states the same concerning martyrs of the Reformation.<sup>509</sup> He points to prayer as one evidence of this dependency: "Of their prison activities, martyrs mentioned prayer most often. . . . Martyrs prayed prior to torture or interrogation."<sup>510</sup> Similarly, one can note the frequent reference to prayer in John Hus's letters from prison.<sup>511</sup> Scholssberg makes the same observation about modern martyrs: "If we look closely at Christians living in the countries of persecution, we can recognize that they are not too different from us . . . they show a confusing combination of saintliness and sin, courage and fear, wisdom and foolishness--just as we ought to expect."<sup>512</sup>

This principle of God's power manifest in human weakness allows us to correct a common misconception about suffering and martyrdom--that the Christian must adopt a stoical attitude toward suffering and life in general. Adherents of stoicism purposely develop their resolve and emotional stamina, and take pride in their ability to withstand pressure.<sup>513</sup> As we have demonstrated earlier, though, Paul's attitude toward suffering is totally opposite to that of the Stoics. Schrage writes, "What sustains Paul is not his own ultimate will to resist; instead, the one who preserves him from falling into the ultimate depths is God alone."<sup>514</sup> Similarly, Barrett observes how in 2 Corinthians Paul glories in his humiliation, whereas the stoics took pride in their courage.<sup>515</sup>

Calvin was especially outspoken against stoicism. He held that God allows suffering "so that we might turn from our 'perverse confidence' in ourselves."<sup>516</sup> Also,

We indulge a stupid and empty confidence in the flesh, and then trusting to it wax proud against the Lord himself; as if our own faculties were sufficient without his grace. . . . Therefore, he visits us with disgrace, or poverty, or bereavement, or disease, or other afflictions. Feeling altogether unable to support them, we forthwith, in so far as regards ourselves, give way, and thus humbled learn to invoke his strength, which alone can enable us to bear up under a weight of affliction.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>508</sup>Chadwick, "Early Chirstian Community," 45.

<sup>509</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 111.

<sup>510</sup>*Ibid.*, 130-31.

<sup>511</sup>Hus, *Letters*, 173, 184-85, 190, 206, 211, 253, 272.

<sup>512</sup>Scholssberg, *Called to Suffer*, 14-15.

<sup>513</sup>See Philo's description of the philosopher's lifestyle in Philo, *Every Good Man Is Free* 106-7. Also see Plato, *Phaedo* 67c-68b.

<sup>514</sup>Schrage, "Suffering in the New Testament," 212.

<sup>515</sup>Barrett, *First Corinthinans*, 110.

<sup>516</sup>Peter J. Leithart, "Stoic Elements in Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life: Part II, Mortification," *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 202. Quotation from Calvin's *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* at Ps 30:7(8).

<sup>517</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 3.8.2.

In contrast, “The Stoic sage, when faced with adversity, relies on the inner strength of his own character. While the Christian cries out in prayer, the Stoic clenches his teeth and refuses to beg.”<sup>518</sup>

This contrast with stoicism brings out still another factor dramatizing the miraculous nature of Christian martyrdom. The Stoics (and Cynics) develop an indifference to and detachment from earthly things, which eases somewhat the emotional pain of losing one’s life.<sup>519</sup> In contrast, I affirm with Straw that “precisely because the martyrs loved this sweet life, they needed God’s grace to be able to despise it. . . . Victory now focuses on God’s grace, so magnificent and encompassing that it can overcome the most natural human disposition.”<sup>520</sup> Wright shares this view, “The Stoic was fairly cynical about life anyway. The Christian affirmed its goodness, but was ready to leave it in obedience to an even greater good.”<sup>521</sup>

At the same time, a disciplined Christian life is to the advantage of the future martyr, as Lesbaupin explains, “Training for confession and martyrdom was not physical. It was the Christian life, daily and intense. It was the depth and interiority of this life--the capacity for self-renouncement, humility, detachment from earthly goods, service, and vital self-donation in the everyday life.”<sup>522</sup>

### *The Holy Spirit in Martyrdom*

Our general goal in this first section of the present chapter is to demonstrate how God is glorified by the manifestation of His grace in the conduct of the martyr. We acknowledge that the grace of God is communicated to the martyr by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, connections drawn between the conduct of the martyr and the work of the Holy Spirit will contribute toward our goal.

Generally speaking, Scripture gives the believer abundant assurance that the Spirit is ready to aid us in our every endeavor for God. He is our “Helper” (John 14:16), who continually indwells and guides (Rom 8:9, 14). The early disciples were forbidden to embark on their preaching mission until the Spirit came to empower them (Acts 1:5). He was their

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<sup>518</sup>Leithart, “Stoic Elements,” 203. Quotation from Calvin’s *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* at Ps 39:4(5).

<sup>519</sup>An extreme example of detachment is seen in the account of Anaxarchus, who, when his body was being beaten, cried out, “Pound, pound, the pouch containing Anaxarchus; ye pound not Anaxarchus” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 9.59). Clement of Alexandria considered some degree of detachment an asset in preparing for martyrdom. He regarded Stoics as “objects for admiration” in attaining a life “free from passion.” See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.3-5 in *ANF*, vol. 2.

<sup>520</sup>Straw, “Martyrdom and Christian Identity,” 252.

<sup>521</sup>N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 364-65. Calvin also considers the Stoic detachment inappropriate and unhealthy: “You see that to bear the cross patiently is not to have your feelings altogether blunted, and to be absolutely insensible to pain, according to the absurd description which the Stoics of old gave of their hero” (Calvin, *Institutes* 3.8.9). Or, in the words of Bonhoeffer, “Everything has its time, and the main thing is that we keep step with God” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 3d ed., ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 111.

<sup>522</sup>Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted*, 38. Augustine also advocated a more balanced approach. On the one hand, “Only false martyrs seek suffering of the body,” but on the other hand necessary mental and emotional preparations need to be made. See Straw, “Martyrdom and Christian Identity,” 251, 259-60. Tertullian goes a step further to advocate frequent fasting as a preparation for martyrdom (*On Fasting* 12). One must be on guard, however, since the more that preparation is made, the greater is the temptation to rely on personal discipline rather than on God.

constant source of guidance and strength throughout the Acts of the Apostles (or, the “Acts of the Holy Spirit”), and continues to energize the church and believers today. One would clearly expect the Spirit to be active in a Christian’s life when he or she faces the greatest challenge of all—laying down one’s life for Christ.

In addition, we noted earlier several passages that either directly or indirectly refer to the Holy Spirit’s activity in Christian martyrdom. In Acts 7 Stephen is “full of the Spirit” during the time of his trial and, arguably, through the time of execution as well. In Phil 1:19 Paul, under possible threat of death, counts on the help of the Spirit for deliverance. In John 16 Jesus’ warning of His disciples’ martyrdoms is located in His discourse on the work of the Holy Spirit, likely implying the Spirit’s involvement in this event as well. Thus, we can confidently conclude that the Holy Spirit is active in the experience of the martyr, imparting His grace. This grace, in turn, is responsible for the success of the martyr, for which God receives praise.

Some writers, noting this association of martyrs with the Spirit, construe the martyr as a prophet in the sense of a “Spirit-filled” individual. This construal may appear somewhat speculative, but is worthy of consideration nonetheless.

Lampe calls the martyr a “Spirit-possessed and prophet-like person,”<sup>523</sup> noting how both martyr and prophet exercised great boldness in speech and suffered for their message. He notes, as I briefly discussed in chapter 3, that several key New Testament passages place the suffering disciples of Jesus in the line of the prophets, who were also rejected for their ministry. Lampe concludes, “This inclusion of the disciples and missionary witnesses of Jesus within the succession of prophet-martyrs sets the keynote for the presentation of the Christian confessor in the New Testament writings as a person inspired and possessed by the Spirit in a special degree.”<sup>524</sup>

In addition, the frequency of visions associated with martyrdoms adds support to this construal.<sup>525</sup> Workman, in his extensive investigation on early Christian martyrdom, notes their frequent occurrence.<sup>526</sup> Specific examples can be cited from the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*,<sup>527</sup> the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*,<sup>528</sup> and the *Life of Cyprian*.<sup>529</sup> Later in church history this phenomenon continues. John Hus records having a number of dreams during his imprisonment, which all came to pass.<sup>530</sup>

Fischel also links martyrs and prophets, “Not only was every prophet believed to be a martyr, but far-reaching progress had also been made toward the idea that every martyr was a prophet.”<sup>531</sup> But regardless of whether or not the Scripture writers intended to develop a

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<sup>523</sup>Lampe, “Martyrdom and Inspiration,” 122.

<sup>524</sup>*Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>525</sup>This is not meant to imply that only prophets have visions, but simply that visions are a common aspect of their ministry and provide one more point of correspondence between martyr and prophet.

<sup>526</sup>Workman, *Persecution*, 321-24. A substantial list of references in early Christian literature is also provided in James E. Bradley, “Miracles and Martyrdom in the Early Church: Some Theological and Ethical Implications,” *Pneuma* 13 (1991): 70-71.

<sup>527</sup>*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 5, 9.

<sup>528</sup>*Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 1.3. Mühlenberg asserts that due to the supernatural elements of the *Passion* its redactor clearly “considers martyrdom to be a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit.” See Ekkehard Mühlenberg, “The Martyr’s Death and its Literary Presentation,” *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997): 92.

<sup>529</sup>*Life of Cyprian* 12.

<sup>530</sup>Hus, *Letters*, 222.

<sup>531</sup>Fischel, “Martyr and Prophet,” 363.

“martyr as prophet” construal to underscore the martyr’s Spirit-filled state, evidence presented earlier in this section certainly depicts the martyr as one under the influence of the Spirit of grace.

### *The “Spirit of Glory” in Suffering*

Peter, although not referring specifically to martyrdom, speaks of how God may be glorified through the suffering believer. He directs his readers to “glorify God” through their suffering for the Name (1 Pet 4:16). There are several ways God could be glorified through the suffering believer according to this context. First, it may involve the believer’s verbal praise of God as in verse 13: “Keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.”

Second, the persecution situation may highlight the moral behavior of the believer, since no “legitimate” grounds for punishment can be found (see 3:15 and 2:12, 15). Or, verse 16 may be understood in connection with verse 14, a verse that relates how sufferers are blessed because “the Spirit of glory and of God rests” on them. This is a promise of a special presence and activity of the Spirit during persecution--the reason sufferers are blessed is that they can experience this special manifestation of the “Spirit of glory.” Possibly in this way, through the manifestation of His Spirit in the sufferer’s behavior, God is glorified in the believer’s suffering (4:16).

### *Parallel with Justification by Faith*

Schrage insightfully notes how the manifestation of God’s grace in martyrdom is consistent with the cardinal doctrine of Protestant Christianity--justification by faith alone.<sup>532</sup> Many key passages (e.g. Eph 2:8-9; Rom 3:21-26; Gal 2:16; 3:24), as well as the entire scope of salvation history, demonstrate God’s gracious disposition toward His people and his readiness to accept them on the basis of faith (Hebrews 11). A relationship with God is not only begun in faith, but is maintained and nurtured in it as well (Rom 5:2; Col 2:6-7). Since martyrdom is (for some at least) one aspect of the total Christian experience, we might expect the same principle of reliance on God’s grace to be operative here as well.

Luther also appears to connect martyrdom and justification in that in both cases the grace of God appears where human need is the most desperate. In Luther’s thought “the Christian life is a continual martyrdom since it is lived in the shadow of the cross.”<sup>533</sup> Luther’s so-called “theology of the cross” strongly supports the idea of God’s intervention in martyrdom. Since God reveals His “power and wisdom in what the world considers to be impotence and foolishness, (Luther) could define martyrdom as a gift from God.”<sup>534</sup> Accordingly, in his *Works* Luther clearly ascribes the endurance of the martyrs to the work of the Spirit.<sup>535</sup>

### *Historical Reflection*

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<sup>532</sup>Schrage, “Suffering in the New Testament,” 211.

<sup>533</sup>Fischer, “La notion du martyre,” 504.

<sup>534</sup>Kolb, “Gift of Martyrdom,” 411 (parenthetical insertion mine).

<sup>535</sup>See summary in Stange, “Martin Luther on Martyrdom,” 643.

In this final section we will consider testimonies from church history concerning the extraordinary conduct of believers undergoing martyrdom. The authors who relate these testimonies claim that the grace of God was the responsible factor. I feel their assessment of these events is accurate for the following reasons: (1) the conduct of the martyrs clearly exceeds all expectations of what was humanly possible, testifying of a supernatural source of aid; (2) the testimonies are sufficiently numerous and involve a sufficiently large variety of people to rule out the possibility that these were simply isolated, exceptional cases; and (3) the martyrs themselves were depending on God for grace and help (as noted earlier in this chapter), and it is reasonable to expect that God answered their prayers for help. These factors convincingly point to God's intervention in these martyrdom events, and therefore provide supplemental support for our main contention in the section--that the grace of God is demonstrated in the martyr's conduct.

Workman, in describing martyrdom in the early church, mentions that "the absence of all fear . . . is one of the notes of the early church."<sup>536</sup> Additionally, "At the bar the assurance of the Christians was overwhelming."<sup>537</sup> Herbert Musurillo, commenting on *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, notes, "Foremost, of course, is the portrayal of the martyr's courage in the face of the most vicious torture and humiliation, a courage shared by both sexes, by both slave and free."<sup>538</sup> Eusebius, citing the letter from Vienne and Lyons, relates a classical example of this supernatural courage--the slave girl Blandina:

For while we all trembled, and her earthly mistress, who was herself also one of the witnesses, feared that on account of the weakness of her body, she would be unable to make bold confession, Blandina was filled with such power as to be delivered and raised above those who were torturing her by turns from morning till evening in every manner, so that they acknowledged that they were conquered, and could do nothing more to her. And they were astonished at her endurance, as her entire body was mangled and broken; and they testified that one of these forms of torture was sufficient to destroy life, not to speak of so many and so great sufferings.<sup>539</sup>

Allard summarizes the Roman persecutions: "We then find ourselves faced by the question whether the perseverance of so many thousands of every sex and age who willingly bore for the space of three centuries such sufferings, can be explained by merely human strength."<sup>540</sup>

The testimony of Reformation martyrdoms is the same. John Foxe, martyrologist for the English Reformation, considered the endurance of the faithful a "miracle."<sup>541</sup> Schaff, commenting on Anabaptist martyrdoms, reports, "Hundreds of them of all ages and both sexes

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<sup>536</sup>Workman, *Persecution*, 305.

<sup>537</sup>*Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>538</sup>Musurillo, *Christian Martyrs*, liii. Similarly Lesbaupin comments, "Often enough, adolescence of both sexes conducted themselves impeccably in the face of interrogation, torture, and martyrdom," Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted*, 18; and Royal writes of the Roman persecutions, "Old men, women and children made up a large percentage of those killed" (Royal, *Catholic Martyrs*, 7). Similar comment in Roberts, "Martyrologies and Martyrs," 228.

<sup>539</sup>Eusebius, *Ecc.Hist.* 5.1.18, in *PNF-2*, vol. 1.

<sup>540</sup>Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 338.

<sup>541</sup>As per Knott, *Discourses*, 81.

suffered the pangs of torture without a murmur, despised to buy their lives by recantation, and went to the place of execution joyfully and singing psalms.”<sup>542</sup>

In other specific cases we read of Polycarp, who, when about to be nailed to the stake on which he would be burnt, declares, “Leave me as I am; for He that giveth me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile.”<sup>543</sup> Further narration in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* confirms his prediction. Concerning John Hus, throughout his long imprisonment he displayed “a heroic courage rarely seen even in the annals of martyrdom,”<sup>544</sup> and at his execution he “kneeled and prayed ‘with a joyful countenance,’” and smiled when the mocking crown of devils fell off his head.<sup>545</sup>

Polsky comments on the martyrdom of Alexei Stavrovsky, a Russian Orthodox priest who offered himself as a substitute for another priest chosen by the Communists for execution: “We marvel at the grace of God, which gave such a man so much spiritual power to go to voluntary sacrifice.”<sup>546</sup> In conclusion, we cite again the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* for this fitting summary of martyrdoms of the early second century:

(The martyrs), when they were so torn with scourges, that the frame of their bodies, even to the very inward veins and arteries, was laid open, still patiently endured, while even those that stood by pitied and bewailed them. But they reached such a pitch of magnanimity, that not one of them let a sigh or a groan escape them; thus proving to us all that those holy martyrs of Christ, at the very time when they suffered such torments, were absent from the body, or rather, that the Lord then stood by them, and communed with them. And, looking to the grace of Christ, they despised all the torments of this world.<sup>547</sup>

### Conclusions and Final Clarifications

In the preceding pages I have argued that martyrdom provides the opportunity for a manifestation of the grace of God in the exemplary behavior of the martyr during torture and death. Paul specifically relates how he depends on the “provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19) when threatened with martyrdom (see also 2 Tim 4:18).<sup>548</sup> Both Paul and the Synoptics talk of God’s having ordained the suffering of His messengers, implying a corresponding dispensation of grace. John’s gospel places martyrdom in the greater context of the helping ministry of the Holy Spirit (see John 16:2 in the context of John 15:26-16:15). In the narratives, the martyrdom of Stephen is remarkable for the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. In the section on general principles we noted how the discussions of: (1) God’s sovereignty; (2) God’s power displayed in human weakness; (3) the assistance of the Holy Spirit; (4) the Spirit of glory in suffering; and (5) justification by grace through faith further

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<sup>542</sup>Schaff, *History*, 8.84.

<sup>543</sup>*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 13, in *ANF*, vol. 1.

<sup>544</sup>Oscar Kuhns, *John Hus: The Witness* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1907), 126.

<sup>545</sup>Hus, *Letters*, 279.

<sup>546</sup>Michael Polsky, “No Greater Love,” *Orthodox Word* 36 (2000): 27.

<sup>547</sup>*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2, in *ANF*, vol. 1. Parenthetical insertion mine.

<sup>548</sup>Although tradition affirms that Paul was released from the Roman imprisonment mentioned in Philippians, he nonetheless relates that the threat of death was real at this time (see Phil 1:20-21).



reinforce our proposal. Finally, historical cases were cited for confirmation. In view of this evidence we must affirm with Workman that the martyrs were granted “a grace of God which dulled the pain, turning agony into victory.”<sup>549</sup>

We must here address an apparent contradiction between the conclusions reached here and in the previous chapter. In chapter 4, I concluded that martyrdom served as a test of faith. But if God provides supernatural grace to endure martyrdom, how can it be considered a test of the individual’s faith?<sup>550</sup> In answer to this question we must first of all recognize that the Scriptures affirm both aspects to be true. In addition, we may consider different mechanisms that might resolve the apparent contradiction. First of all, it is possible that the test of faith consists in the confession of faith that results in martyrdom, but not the martyrdom itself. When a believer, knowing the fatal results of his or her confession, nonetheless publicly acknowledges Jesus Christ, he or she has “passed the test” of faith. After that point, the grace of God begins to operate in a special way to aid the individual through the martyrdom experience. The difficulty with this scenario is that not infrequently individuals who acknowledged Christ under the threat of death subsequently renounce Him while undergoing torture. It appears, then, that there is a divine-human cooperation throughout the martyrdom experience. As Straw observes, “It remains to each to respond freely with the will and cooperate with the grace of God” in martyrdom.<sup>551</sup>

A second proposal is that the individual’s faith and the grace of God work together in a symbiotic fashion. The individual’s personal faith provides him or her with the conviction that he or she *must* hold on to the faith no matter what the cost. This is a clear demonstration of faith since the individual values the promise of God and the hope of eternal life more than earthly life or personal safety. But at the same time, in recognition of the need for grace, the martyr acknowledges that he or she *cannot* hold on to the faith without divine aid. This inner tension between the *I must* and the *I cannot* provides the environment where martyrdom can serve both as a test of faith and as a demonstration of God’s grace. The *I must* aspect drives the martyr to prayer and dependence upon God, who abundantly supplies grace to compensate for the *I cannot* aspect.<sup>552</sup>

In conclusion I would like to assert that martyrdom presents God an *exceptional* platform on which to demonstrate His grace. As Luther said, through martyrdom God has “provided us with fresh and new examples of His own life.”<sup>553</sup> Since, in Jesus’ words, one can show no greater love than to lay down his or her life (John 15:13), the martyr’s death is arguably the greatest outward demonstration of the grace of God, which inspires that love, in the life of a human individual. We recall the statement from Vatican II, that martyrdom is the “greatest

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<sup>549</sup>Workman, *Persecution*, 303-4.

<sup>550</sup>In light of the discussion in this chapter I cannot support Sanders’ contention when, in speaking of God’s testing Jeremiah, he claims that to experience a true test the prophet must “feel that God had abandoned him.” See Jim Alvin Sanders, *Suffering as Divine Discipline in the Old Testament and Post-Biblical Judaism* (Rochester, N.Y.: Colgate Rochester Divinity School, n.d.), 73.

<sup>551</sup>Straw, “Martyrdom and Christian Identity,” 264.

<sup>552</sup>Schrage reconciles these aspects of martyrdom in a similar way: “God’s helping presence does not dispense one of his own responsibility to bear and to stand fast, which therefore is connected with faith” (Schrage, “Suffering in the New Testament,” 215). Another proposed mechanism suggests that the grace of God itself is involved in energizing the martyr’s faith. Though this is likely so, this proposal is complicated by the Calvinist-Arminian debate over how and to what degree God’s grace contributes to the believer’s faith.

<sup>553</sup>Luther, *What Luther Says*, 2:1036.

testimony of love.”<sup>554</sup> Similarly, Beyerhaus feels God imparts to victims of martyrdom “a degree of sustaining grace which surpasses all blessings we receive through the means of grace under normal conditions.”<sup>555</sup> Ton adds, “The glory of God shines through the beauty and splendor of self-sacrifice as nowhere else.”<sup>556</sup>

As we encountered in our discussion of martyrdom and the persecutor, it would be improper here as well to suggest that martyrdom provides an *ultimate* demonstration--in this case, the ultimate demonstration of God’s grace. Few would disagree that the greatest manifestation of God’s grace took place on Calvary. Yet, based on what has been said above, martyrdom certainly presents God with an *exceptional* platform on which to demonstrate His grace through the conduct of the martyr.

### *Martyrdom and Satan*

Part two of this chapter discusses martyrdom’s value for the plan of God in respect to Satan. When I speak of martyrdom’s “value” in respect to Satan, I do not mean to imply that Satan receives any permanent “benefit” from killing God’s saints. Rather, God’s purpose is furthered as, in His wisdom and power, He frustrates Satan’s agenda and defeats him through the endurance of the saints.

My contention in this section is that God demonstrates His victory over Satan in martyrdom through the perseverance of His saints through violent death. This contention follows from the conclusions of the previous section. There we discovered that God’s grace is demonstrated in and responsible for the martyr’s endurance. In turn, the martyr’s endurance defeats Satan’s purpose to lead him or her into apostasy and to destroy his or her testimony--the martyr’s testimony is, in fact, enhanced. In this way the believer’s victory over Satan in martyrdom is, in truth, God’s victory, bringing Him glory and inspiring the faith of others.

To demonstrate this contention, we will examine passages where martyrdom is depicted as a conflict between the believer and Satan over the issue of faithfulness to God. In examining these passages we will often see in the background a conflict between Satan and God Himself, in which the latter triumphs through the endurance of the martyr or would-be martyr. Seldom will we see all of these components together in a single passage, but correlating these instances together provides us with the whole picture of God’s triumph over Satan in martyrdom.

In this section we will also discuss passages dealing with God’s sovereignty as they occur in connection with passages on martyrdom. Our goal here is to underscore that the conflict with Satan expressed in martyrdom is foreknown by God and under His sovereign control. This implies that by some means God secures victory over Satan in the martyrological event; otherwise He would not allow it to occur. The nature of that victory cannot be discerned, of course, by simply observing the conjunction of sovereignty and martyrdom in key passages. Other passages, such as those described in the preceding paragraph, are needed to delineate the nature of the victory.

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<sup>554</sup>*Lumen Gentium*, 42. Citation from Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II*, 401.

<sup>555</sup>Beyerhaus, *Utopian Error*, 170-71.

<sup>556</sup>Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 56.

### *Synoptic Gospels*

One feature common to all didactic passages on martyrdom in the Synoptics is that they occur in contexts emphasizing God's sovereignty. We find such passages: (1) in apocalyptic contexts (Mark 13; Matthew 24; Luke 21), where God "breaks into" history in order to punish His enemies and vindicate His suffering people; (2) in missiological contexts (Matthew 10), where Jesus intentionally sends His servants into hostile situations, knowing full well the fatal outcome for some; and (3) in discipleship contexts (Mark 8; Matthew 16; Luke 14), where suffering persecution is an integral aspect of a disciple's calling. Commenting on Mark 8, France underscores the importance of seeing Satan's attacks from God's perspective: "(The disciples') natural human repugnance in the face of what appears to be defeat and disaster must give way to the divine logic which turns human valuation upside down."<sup>557</sup>

### *Paul*

As in the gospel accounts, God's sovereignty undergirds Paul's theology of martyrdom as well. A case in point is his figurative reference to martyrdom in 1 Cor 4:9, where Paul, commenting on the character of apostolic ministry, writes, "God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death." Immediately we notice that God has established the consequences of apostolic ministry--it is not primarily determined by the Enemy. Angels may "observe the spectacle" (v. 9), but they are not directing the show.<sup>558</sup>

A more significant Pauline passage is Rom 8:31-39. The reference to martyrdom in this passage is easily recognizable in verse 35--the "sword" cannot separate us from the love of Christ.<sup>559</sup> Immediately after this Paul cites Ps 44:22, which he takes in a martyrological sense. The Romans passage goes on to proclaim the victory of the believer over all trials and opposition (including martyrdom) in the saying, "In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (v. 37). Murray poignantly writes,

Martyrdom seems to be defeat; so it is regarded by the perpetrators. Too often we look upon the outcome of conflict with the forces of iniquity as mere escape, perhaps by the skin of our teeth. In truth it is victory and that not merely but completely and gloriously. The designs of the adversaries are wholly overthrown and we come off as conquerors with all the laurels of conquest. . . . In every encounter with adversity, even with the hostility that is unto death, the victory is unqualified.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>557</sup>France, *Mark*, 333. Parenthetical insertion mine.

<sup>558</sup>The term "angels," in conjunction with κόσμος, may well indicate a reference to fallen angels. Barrett notes how the single article uniting "world," "angels" and "men" reveals that "angels and men" describe the contents of the "world." See Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 110.

<sup>559</sup>The reference to "death" in verse 38, as Moo notes, likely refers to "physical death in any form" and not specifically to the martyr's death. See Moo, *Romans*, 544-45.

<sup>560</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 331.

Also significant for our consideration here is that the believer's victory over opposition is rooted in Christ; we conquer "through Him who loved us." So, in some sense, the victory of the believer in martyrdom reflects Christ's victory as well.<sup>561</sup>

Over whom is this victory won? In this context several references are made to the conflict between Satan and the believer. In verse 33 the answer to the rhetorical questions, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" and "Who is the one who condemns?" is arguably Satan, whose work of accusation was well known to Paul from Old Testament teaching (cf. Job 1-2; Zech 3:1). The references to "angels" and "principalities" in verse 38 are even more explicit. Yet Paul comes short of stating explicitly that Satan is the one who wields the "sword" of persecution and martyrdom mentioned in this passage. In spite of this, the passage is nonetheless valuable for establishing that the believer's victory in martyrdom is Christ's victory as well, as noted above.

### *John and Revelation*

The accent on God's sovereignty continues in John's writings as well. The fact that Jesus predicted both the disciples' martyrdoms in John 16:2 and the martyrdom of Peter in John 21:18 (in contrast to John, who is spared violent death) demonstrates again Christ's control over the persecution situation, implying that His purpose will be accomplished despite and even through the attacks of Satan.

In the Book of Revelation we get the clearest indication of the source of the persecution of Christians. We immediately notice the emphasis on the "cosmic" nature of the conflict. The issues are not simply political or economic, but spiritual. Behind the human persecutors, whether unbelieving Jews or eschatological fiends, stands Satan, the archenemy of the church. When unbelieving Jews plan to persecute the saints in Smyrna they are identified as a "synagogue of Satan" (2:9). Antipas is killed "where Satan dwells" (2:13). The dragon, who is identified as "the devil and Satan" (12:9), wages war against those who "hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). The beast from the sea, instigator of the great end-time persecution, receives his power and authority from the dragon (13:2). The contest in Revelation is clearly between God and Satan, with human participants acting as their agents.

Another overriding feature of Revelation is the theme of "triumph." Morris's remarks are helpful here. He observes that, contrary to later martyrologies, "There is no tendency to dwell on the physical agony of the saints"; they are featured "only in the way in which they bear on the furtherance of the divine plan. And in any case, while suffering is real, and is insisted upon, the major emphasis of the book is placed on triumph."<sup>562</sup> Similarly, Osborne writes, "The theme in the Apocalypse is not the fact of martyrdom but God's vindication of the martyrs."<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>561</sup>Although Paul's main purpose in this passage is not to portray Christ's victory through the believer, it is nonetheless an underlying theme in all of his writings that whatever the believer accomplishes or experiences is done or experienced "in Christ" and to His glory. The "in Christ" phraseology in this context ("with Him freely give us all things," "conquer through Him," "the love of God . . . in Christ Jesus") confirms this observation.

<sup>562</sup>Morris, *The Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 380.

<sup>563</sup>Osborne, "Theodicy," 75.

This theme of “triumph” is apparent in the strong militaristic motif of Revelation.<sup>564</sup> In this “war motif” the martyrs at first appear to be casualties, whom the beast “overcomes” (notice the term νικάω in 11:7 and 13:7).<sup>565</sup> This “overcoming” by the beast is answered *politically* by Christ’s coming to wage war and “overcome” (νικάω) the beast and his allies (17:14). Superimposed on this military campaign, though, is a spiritual conflict, expressed by the same νικάω terminology. Christ has “overcome” sin (5:5), and now the martyrs become spiritual “overcomers” by not compromising their faith (12:11, 15:2). Thus, while the martyrs are being “overcome” (νικάω) physically by their enemies, they are themselves “overcoming” (νικάω) spiritually through their endurance.<sup>566</sup>

In contrast to Christ’s *eschatological* victory, it is well noted that the triumph of God *through the believer* does not come by political or military aggression. Beasley-Murray, commenting on Rev 13:9, asserts that Christians must face opposition and persecution in the “same spirit” as Jesus did, not with violence like Peter.<sup>567</sup> Similarly, Trites writes, “The victory of Christ was won through suffering self-giving love.”<sup>568</sup>

Revelation 12 contains a martyrological reference in verse 11, where certain individuals “did not love their lives even when faced with death.” In light of the numerous mentions of martyrdom in this book and the conflict between Satan and believers highlighted in this context, the reference to death here does not likely refer to natural death, but the violent death of martyrdom. Those faced with (or experiencing) martyrdom here are clearly believers, since the threat of death is connected with their “testimony” and the “blood of the Lamb.”<sup>569</sup> Thus, this passage provides us with a direct description of martyrdom as a conflict between the believer and Satan, which the believer wins (“overcomes”) by his or her perseverance.

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<sup>564</sup>Ton notes several “war” passages: 7:4-8, 11:7, 12:17, 13:7, 16:14-16, 17:14, 19:11-19 (Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 281-83). Bauckham refers to Revelation as a “war scroll” of Christianity. This theme is developed in Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 76-108 (page citations are from the reprint edition); and also in Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 210-37.

<sup>565</sup>This is reflected in Grayston’s comment on 6:9-11: it is “as if God had calculated the likely battle casualties before launching the decisive attack on the enemy” (Kenneth Grayston, “Atonement and Martyrdom,” in *Early Christian Thought in Its Jewish Context*, ed. John Barclay and John Sweet [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996], 260). But reducing martyrs to mere “casualties” robs martyrdom of its positive significance in God’s plan. It is better to view, with Boring, that martyrdom is “the penultimate act in the drama of God’s redemptive history” (Boring, “Theology of Revelation,” 262).

<sup>566</sup>Bauckham makes the same observation and writes, “The same event--the martyrdom of Christians--is described both as the beast’s victory over them and as their victory over the beast. In this way John poses the question: who are the real victors?” See Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 90. The political and eschatological triumph of Christ described above includes, of course, vindication of the martyrs and condemnation of their persecutor, Satan, as described in Revelation 20. Revelation 20, therefore, highlights a key aspect of Christ’s victory over Satan in martyrdom. Yet I do not develop this aspect since my goal here is to show how God defeats Satan in the actual martyrdom event itself, not in the martyr’s future vindication.

<sup>567</sup>Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 215.

<sup>568</sup>Trites, “Witness and the Resurrection,” 282.

<sup>569</sup>Even though Revelation 12 is highly symbolic and contains many symbolic representations, there seems no reason to take the references to the devil, the brethren, and the conflict between them which can result in martyrdom, in other than a literal sense. One can, in fact, view verse 11 as a parenthetical comment in the angel’s proclamation (note the natural connection between verses 10 and 12). Since a parenthetical comment is usually explanatory, we would expect here literal as opposed to symbolic language.

The sovereignty of God is a very prominent theme in Revelation as well. One indicator is the frequent use of “Almighty.” Nine of the ten New Testament occurrences of παντοκράτωρ are found in Revelation.<sup>570</sup> The term θρόνος (“throne”) appears forty-seven times in Revelation of its total sixty-two New Testament occurrences. The general tone of God’s sovereignty in Revelation leaves the impression that the persecution and martyrdom recorded there also lie within His providence. He is Lord of both persecuted and persecutor, whether human or demonic. The “consummation of His rule” will come even “in spite of suffering, persecution, and even martyrdom.”<sup>571</sup>

Besides this contextual backdrop of God’s sovereignty, several passages explicitly describe how persecution and martyrdom occur only in accordance with the permissive will of God. For example, no one can kill the two witnesses of Revelation 11 until they have “finished their testimony” (v. 7). Also, it is “given” to the beast to wage war on and overcome the saints (13:7). According to Rev 6:11 there are a certain number elected by God to martyrdom.<sup>572</sup> The enemy does not take the martyrs’ lives in contradiction to the plan of God; on the contrary, martyrdom results in the furtherance of that plan.

### Contributions from Narrative Passages

#### *Old Testament*

Elements of God’s victory over Satan in martyrdom are also depicted in the book of Daniel. First of all we note how, in a book that devotes much attention to the theme of martyrdom (or threatened martyrdom), the sovereignty of God is strongly emphasized. Two chapters that directly address the issue of God’s lordship over human rulers, chapters 4 and 5, separate the two accounts of threatened martyrdom in chapters 3 and 6. The accounts in chapters 3 and 6 themselves demonstrate God’s power to deliver from death. Other indicators of God’s sovereignty in the book of Daniel are the eventual overthrow both of the persecutors of God’s people (11:45) and of human governments in general (2:44-45). Even the days the persecution is allowed to continue are numbered and determined by God (12:7, 11-12).<sup>573</sup> God even brings the victory when his people are at their lowest point, after “the power of the holy people” is shattered (see Dan 12:7).<sup>574</sup>

The “martyrdom” account in Daniel 3 also contributes valuable information. The key passage in this regard is Dan 3:16-18, the confession of the three Hebrews before Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>575</sup> The goal of the king is the submission of these insubordinate Hebrews,

<sup>570</sup>Noted by Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 272; and Boring, “Theology of Revelation,” 259.

<sup>571</sup>W. Hall. Harris, “A Theology of John’s Writings,” in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 242.

<sup>572</sup>Although this verse does not explicitly speak of a “quota of martyrs,” the construction ἕως πληρωθῶσιν (“until they [future martyrs] should be fulfilled”) strongly implies it. Many commentators support this conclusion. See Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 163; Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 277; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 134. Whether the passage refers solely to tribulation martyrs or martyrs of all time, God’s sovereignty is still demonstrated in limiting their number.

<sup>573</sup>Noted by Leupold, *Daniel*, 574.

<sup>574</sup>*Ibid.*, 541; Baldwin, *Daniel*, 208.

<sup>575</sup>There is an interesting textual feature of this passage, since the text literally reads הֵן אִיָּהּ . . . יָכֹל לְשַׁבֵּחַ אֱלֹהֵינוּ (“If our God exists . . . He is able to deliver us”). Baldwin explains the particle הֵן as an emphatic marker,

and the greatest weapon at his disposal is the threat of violent death. His challenge in verse 15 implies that since no god can deliver them they have no choice but to comply. The Hebrews, although acknowledging God's ability to deliver them, are nonetheless not necessarily counting on His immediate intervention. Their faith in God transcends death and therefore goes beyond the reach of Nebuchadnezzar's power. Thus the king's goal is frustrated, and he is defeated in the battle of wills even before the attempted execution commences. As Porteous writes, "The tyrant is defeated on ground of his own choosing, whether God intervenes to work a miracle or not."<sup>576</sup> He is forced to recognize, as Kellermann notes, the limitations of his power.<sup>577</sup>

Thus martyrdom (or, in this case, threatened martyrdom) is clearly a "battle of the wills," here between Nebuchadnezzar and the Hebrews, but on a larger scale, in light of the entire book of Daniel and Scripture in general, also between Satan and God.

## Acts

Two prominent themes that weave through the narrative of Acts are confession and conflict, or preaching and persecution. Although unbelieving Jews and Gentiles are depicted as the primary enemies of the gospel, key references reveal that Satan stands behind the opposition to the church (13:10, 5:3), which seeks to free people from his oppression (26:18, 10:38). Thus, we can posit that the struggle between the church and its human persecutors is in reality a contest between God and Satan.

Examining Acts from a literary point of view, many have observed how these themes, preaching and persecution, are related to one another. Dehandschutter, for example, feels the purpose of the persecution in the Book of Acts is to show that "no human opposition is capable to stop the missionary activity of the first Christians. That the disciples are put in prison, persecuted, even put to death only illustrates the divine aid."<sup>578</sup> Persecution not only fails to hinder the spread of the gospel, it demonstrates God's ability to accomplish His will in spite of the worst that Satan can do. Marshall writes, "God's declared purpose will be fulfilled, no matter what the opposition.

Acts is the story of the triumphant progress of the Word of God."<sup>579</sup> Cunningham comes to a similar conclusion, "Persecution is the occasion of divine triumph."<sup>580</sup> According to Zumstein, "The witness is an imprisonable prisoner; even the strictest measures are not able to lay hold on his liberty. . . . All measures taken to block the diffusion of the Gospel only hasten its propagation."<sup>581</sup> Furthermore, Rapske feels Luke's aim in his second volume was to dispel doubts in his readers that the church's missionary program was failing by showing that "the

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and translates, "If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery burning furnace and from your hand, O king, he will save us" (Baldwin, *Daniel*, 104). Yet this implies that if God does not deliver them, then He is not able. Wood makes the necessary qualification, "The young men were not voicing any uncertainty as to God's ability, but only as to His willingness. . . . The overall story makes clear the fullness of their faith in God's power" (Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973], 88).

<sup>576</sup>Porteous, *Daniel*, 61.

<sup>577</sup>Kellermann, "Das Danielbuch," 55.

<sup>578</sup>Dehandschutter, "La persecution," 543.

<sup>579</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Leicester: IVP, 1980), 29.

<sup>580</sup>Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations*, 14.

<sup>581</sup>Zumstein, "L'Apôtre comme martyr," 383.

Christian witness is of God because it prevails through all opposition and persecution by means of divine tokens which prepare, assist and encourage them.”<sup>582</sup>

As discussed in regard to the Synoptics, the sovereignty of God is also emphasized in key places in Acts in order to demonstrate that Satan can do nothing against the saints without God’s permission. In chapter 12 we note that James is killed but Peter is supernaturally released. Also, in the closing chapters of Acts Paul is in time and again miraculously rescued from mortal danger only to, according to tradition, eventually die a martyr. Hence, death has no claim on God’s servants until God’s purpose so determines.

Additionally, Ton notes the significance of the disciples’ prayer in Acts 4 in this regard.<sup>583</sup> In response to their first encounter with opposition the disciples acknowledge God’s lordship over creation and His sovereignty over those who killed Christ, whose persecutors accomplished “whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur” (4:28). Consequently, in regard to their own persecution the disciples ask not for relief, which their sovereign God could supply, but instead for boldness and power in ministry.

Possibly the most remarkable indication of God’s victory over Satan in Acts is the conversion of Saul, whom Dehandschutter considers “almost the personification” of persecution, and who himself becomes “an ardent witness for the way which he persecuted.”<sup>584</sup> Zumstein insightfully notes how God is able, at a moment’s notice, to immobilize the most aggressive persecutor. Saul’s conversion shows that Christ is the Lord of the history of conflict which is taking place to the degree that he literally casts the adversary to the ground. This authority of Christ over the persecutors and the persecuted implies that the suffering endured by the witness is not futile, not accidental, but an expression of divine design, choosing to reveal itself in weakness.<sup>585</sup>

Although not all persecutors are converted in Acts, Saul’s case is a striking example of Christ’s control in the persecution situation.

### Contributions from General Principles of Righteous Suffering

This section will discuss some of the same aspects of God’s victory through martyrdom just discussed, but more from the perspective of general scriptural and historical principles than from a detailed discussion of individual passages. The following subsections list these general principles in a logical sequence, each one building on the previous.

#### *Satan as the Source of Persecution*

The general teaching of Scripture points to Satan as the great adversary of the believer and the church. He “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8), to whom we are to give no opportunity (Eph 4:27). He is that “serpent of old” (Rev 20:2) who incessantly tries to lead our minds away “from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (1 Cor 11:3). In Revelation he accuses the brethren “day and night” (Rev 12:10), and wages war with those who “hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17).

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<sup>582</sup>Rapske, “Opposition,” 236.

<sup>583</sup>Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 115.

<sup>584</sup>Dehandschutter, “La persecution,” 544.

<sup>585</sup>Zumstein, “L’Apôtre comme martyr,” 379. Translation mine.



Hence it is no surprise when specific passages, such as those in Acts and Revelation we examined above, incriminate Satan as the source of persecution and martyrdom. We may safely, with Schrage, regard Christian suffering as ultimately the work of Satan.<sup>586</sup> More specifically, as Mayfield claims, martyrdom is a “conflict with Satan and/or his agents.”<sup>587</sup> Workman properly perceives that the early persecutions were not a political struggle but a spiritual one, not against Rome, but against Satan.<sup>588</sup> Reformation thinkers reached the same conclusions.<sup>589</sup> Consequently, when we encounter persecution and martyrdom in passages where Satan is not specifically mentioned, one may nonetheless regard him, if not the primary instigator, at least a very willing and eager participant.

Some historical and logical observations are also consistent with the scriptural claim that Satan is the author of martyrdom. The irrational character of Christian persecution supports the conclusion that persecution and martyrdom were not ultimately humanly initiated or motivated. Barth, for example, relates the irony of persecution: the Christian has good news that is perceived as bad news; he is a good citizen who is perceived as a bad citizen. He “is accused of *odium humani generis*, and he is also the target of *odium humani generis*.”<sup>590</sup>

Tertullian notes how philosophers of his day, who advanced some of the same moral principles for which Christians were suspected of sedition, were for some reason immune from persecution:

These are the very things, it says, the philosophers counsel and profess--innocence, justice, patience, sobriety, chastity. Why, then, are we not permitted an equal liberty and impunity for our doctrines, . . . they (the philosophers) openly overthrow your gods, and in their writings they attack your superstitions; and you applaud them for it.<sup>591</sup>

When Christians display the bravery demonstrated by earlier pagan martyrs, it is regarded as recklessness:

The rest of your charge of obstinacy against us you sum up in this indictment, that we boldly refuse neither your swords, nor your crosses, nor your wild beasts, nor fire, nor tortures, such is our obduracy and contempt of death. But (you are inconsistent in your charges); for in former times amongst your own ancestors all these terrors have come in men’s intrepidity not only to be despised, but even to be held in great praise. . . . But in your own instance you account such deeds glorious, in ours obstinate.<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>586</sup>Schrage, “Suffering in the New Testament,” 239-40.

<sup>587</sup>Mayfield, “Martyr,” 329. Same conclusion in J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 1:137. Lampe conceptualizes this as the “demonology of martyrdom.” See Lampe, *Suffering and Martyrdom*, 122.

<sup>588</sup>Freud, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 15. As a case in point, the persecuted churches of Vienne and Lyons related, “With all his might the adversary fell upon us.” (Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.* 5.1.5).

<sup>589</sup>See Luther’s views in *What Luther Says*, 1:282; Stange, “Martin Luther on Martyrdom,” 640; and Kolb, “Gift of Martyrdom,” 403; and those of the Lutheran martyrologist Rabus in Kolb, *Confessing the Faith*, 84. Also see Friedman, *Theology of Anabaptism*, 131-32.

<sup>590</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.3.624.

<sup>591</sup>Tertullian, *Apology* 46, in *ANF*, vol. 3. Parenthetical insertion mine.

<sup>592</sup>Tertullian, *To the Nations* 1.18, in *ANF*, vol. 3.

Furthermore Tertullian argues that even if Christianity does introduce distortions, the penalty is outrageous compared to the offense:

For they are just (in that case) like many other things on which you inflict no penalties-- foolish and fabulous things, I mean, which, as quite innocuous, are never charged as crimes or punished. But in a thing of this kind, if this be so indeed, we should be adjudged to ridicule, not to swords, and flames, and crosses, and wild beasts.<sup>593</sup>

Allard relates that the forms of capital punishment in Roman times, in order of increasing severity, were beheading, wild beasts or the stake, then crucifixion.<sup>594</sup> Christians who were not Roman citizens characteristically received the severest forms.<sup>595</sup>

A concluding observation by Royal correctly indicts a higher, more diabolical power behind the persecution of Christians: "As is still the case, in worldly terms, martyrdoms were absurdly out of all proportion to any conceivable offense, suggesting something unusual lay behind them."<sup>596</sup> Justin Martyr also links the persecutor's irrational behavior with demonic influence: "Yielding to unreasoning passion, and to the instigation of evil demons, you punish us without consideration or judgment."<sup>597</sup>

The conclusions of Royal and Justin Martyr are justifiable. Such widespread, irrational behavior on the part of numerous individuals over time excludes the explanation that we are dealing here with acts of isolated, mentally unstable individuals. More probable is that a common supernatural force whose goal was to exterminate Christianity influenced them all. In the Christian worldview no one else fits that description better than Satan.

### *Characterizations of the Conflict with Satan*

Having recognized Satan as the ultimate source of Christian persecution, we may go on to examine some common characterizations of this conflict in Scripture. Two metaphors are often employed--athletics and war. In chapter 4 I highlighted how ἀγών is used as an athletic metaphor to describe enduring persecution and martyrdom. In Philippians 1 Paul's imprisonment and threat of martyrdom is portrayed as an athletic competition (ἀγών), in which the Philippian believers participate as well through the persecutions they endure (Phil 1:30). In 2 Timothy Paul proleptically speaks of having "fought the good fight (ἀγών)" as he prepares for the final round--martyrdom (2 Tim 4:7). In Hebrews the believers' combat with temptation and affliction is a "race (ἀγών)" set before them (Heb 12:1).

Earlier I emphasized the subjective aspect of the ἀγών concept--whether or not the believer would pass the test. In athletics, though, one is always pitted against an opponent,

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<sup>593</sup>Tertullian, *Apology* 49, in *ANF*, vol. 3.

<sup>594</sup>Drowning was also sometimes employed. Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 279.

<sup>595</sup>*Ibid.*, 258-59.

<sup>596</sup>Royal, *Catholic Martyrs*, 6.

<sup>597</sup>Justin Martyr, *Apology I* 5, in *ANF*, vol. 1.

and in the arena of persecution and martyrdom, as demonstrated in the previous section, the opponent is Satan.<sup>598</sup>

The metaphor of war is at least equally prominent. Brownlee develops this theme in his article "From Holy War to Holy Martyrdom."<sup>599</sup> He relates how in the Old Testament God is portrayed as a God of war. We see such a depiction in Isaiah, where God marches out to redeem His people and recompense His enemies (Isa 66:1). Also, the prophet Zephaniah encourages Judah, "The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior" (Zeph 3:17). Brownlee further contends that Yahweh prepares His people for battle: "Israel appears in the Wilderness period to be a cultic organization preparing for Holy War."<sup>600</sup> Here we note that indeed God did commission Israel to fight His wars (see Deut 7:24, 25:17-19).

Brownlee further notes that in the New Testament Jesus, as the divine warrior, wages war with the works of Satan. Jesus Himself frames His conflict with Satan during His earthly ministry in military terminology (Matt 12:25-29), and the Book of Revelation gives that conflict cosmic dimensions (Rev 19:11-20:3). The Matthean passage is especially significant in that it points out the spiritual nature of Christ's "warfare" with Satan, as opposed to the political and military character of holy war in the Old Testament. Additionally, in Luke 22:53 Jesus views His death as another part of this ongoing struggle with the devil. Later in the New Testament, Paul reveals how through Christ's death God "disarmed principalities and powers." These observations substantiate Brownlee's subsequent claim that in His death as a "human martyr" Jesus was fulfilling the role of a "holy warrior."<sup>601</sup>

Now, according to Brownlee, the believer is "called upon to enter His holy war" in propagating the salvation Jesus obtained.<sup>602</sup> We note that the New Testament abounds in military descriptions of the Christian's contest with Satan (e.g. Eph 6:11-17; 2 Cor 6:7, 10:3-5; 1 Pet 5:8-9). This war motif is directly connected with instances of martyrdom in Rev 13:7-10. Thus Brownlee appears justified in applying the metaphor of holy war to Christian martyrdom. As others have similarly claimed, "the witness unto blood is a combatant"<sup>603</sup> in a "cosmic battle,"<sup>604</sup> located "in the forefront of the battle."<sup>605</sup>

### *The Nature of the Victory over Satan*

Having identified the martyr's opponent, Satan, and having characterized his struggle with the devil as an athletic contest or military campaign, what remains is to specify the goal of the contest or campaign. What is at issue?

Our previous discussion of Daniel chapter 3 is helpful here. We discussed how Nebuchadnezzar failed to secure the submission of the three Hebrews by threats of violent death, and thus lost the battle of the wills. The Hebrews' willingness to die rather than submit

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<sup>598</sup>See other discussions on martyrdom as an athletic contest in Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 436; Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 189; and Strathmann, "μάρτυς," 507.

<sup>599</sup>William H. Brownlee, "From Holy War to Holy Martyrdom," in *The Quest of the Kingdom of God*, ed. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 281-92.

<sup>600</sup>*Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>601</sup>*Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>602</sup>*Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>603</sup>Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, 187.

<sup>604</sup>Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 110.

<sup>605</sup>Blunt, ed., *Martyrs*, 448.

put them beyond the reach of Nebuchadnezzar's power, since the king could do nothing more against them. Thus, even in death, the Hebrews would have come forth victorious.

A similar scenario is portrayed in the Book of Job.<sup>606</sup> Although this work has no reference to martyrdom, the same dynamic is taking place--a battle of wills between Satan and a child of God. Satan strikes repeated blows against Job's family, livelihood and health in an attempt to secure a "recantation" of sorts (Job 2:5). Although Job, unlike the martyr, is unaware of the identity of his assailant, he nonetheless faces the same issue the martyr faces--faithfulness to God in spite of suffering.

Also, on a broader scale, the Book of Job portrays not only a contest between the devil and Job, but between Satan and God. We are informed in chapters 1 and 2 that Satan's assaults were occasioned by the challenge he presented to God. Satan wanted God to prove that He was a worthy enough object of devotion to secure a follower's faithfulness through the severest of trials. Thus the conflict has two levels: Satan against Job, and Satan against God. Consequently, Job's victory over Satan becomes God's victory over Satan as well. Similarly, in martyrdom the martyr's faithfulness to death is not only a personal victory for himself or herself, but a victory for God, who was the object of that faithfulness.

Tertullian expresses masterfully the principle we have just demonstrated--martyrdom as a battle of the wills. He addresses persecutors of Christianity in these words:

As though all you can do to us did not depend upon our pleasure. It is assuredly a matter of my own inclination, being a Christian. Your condemnation, then, will only reach me in that case, if I wish to be condemned; but when all you can do to me, you can do only at my will, all you can do is dependent on my will, and is not in your power.<sup>607</sup>

This understanding leads Tertullian to the crescendo: "Therefore we conquer in dying; we go forth victorious at the very time we are subdued."<sup>608</sup> The narrator of Ignatius' martyrdom similarly celebrates the martyr, who "trode under foot the devil."<sup>609</sup> Beyond victory in the battle of the wills, the martyr wins on several other fronts. One is the evangelistic influence he exercises on unbelievers, to be discussed more in chapter 6. Another is the beneficial effect of martyrdom on fellow believers, also to be discussed in chapter 6.

Defining the nature of the conflict with Satan as a "conflict of wills" safeguards the church from an incorrect application of the metaphorical depiction of martyrdom as "holy war." As discussed and defended in chapter 2 of this dissertation, the church does not combat Satan or his human allies by the use of violence or physical force. We are reminded particularly of Jesus' teaching of non-retaliation (Matt 5:38-42), His rebuke to Peter in the garden of

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<sup>606</sup>Material suggested by John Feinberg.

<sup>607</sup>Tertullian, *Apology* 49, in *ANF*, vol. 3.

<sup>608</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>609</sup>*Martyrdom of Ignatius* 7, in *ANF*, vol. 1. For other descriptions of martyrdom as a battle of the wills between martyr and persecutor see Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted*, 24; and Potter, "Martyrdom as Spectacle," 64.

Gethsemane (John 18:10-11), and the absence of any New Testament example of the use of force.<sup>610</sup>

Of a historical note Allard observes that as Christianity grew in power and gained influential followers, it had the potential to successfully resist Rome, politically and militarily. I would affirm with Allard that Christians did not stir up rebellion because “Christ who had sent them ‘as sheep into the midst of wolves’ wished their conquest of the world to be effected by peaceful means.”<sup>611</sup> By any military action “they would have lost the very character which endears them to us and rendered them admirable even in the eyes of the pagans.”<sup>612</sup>

### Conclusions and Final Clarifications

We have been able to demonstrate, both by specific passages and general principles, all aspects of our construal of God as victor over Satan in martyrdom, as described in the introduction of this section of the chapter. Specifically, in didactic passages the sovereignty of God in martyrdom was clearly evident (Synoptics, Paul, John, Revelation). Paul’s teaching on overcoming through Christ in Romans 8 includes references to martyrdom, showing that martyrdom can indeed be considered a victory both for the believer and for Christ. Revelation 12 also depicts the martyrs as overcomers through death, as did the νικάω motif of Revelation. Additionally, Revelation clearly demonstrates that Satan is the ultimate antagonist behind Christian persecution and martyrdom.

In our section on narrative passages we noted how the Books of Acts and Daniel further reinforce the concept of sovereignty. In addition, Daniel dramatizes clearly the nature of the martyrological conflict--a battle of the wills with the prosecutor/persecutor. Our section on general principles further reinforced these points. Satan was again identified as the instigator of persecution. The experience of Job demonstrates again that the victory lies in the battle of wills, and that the victory of the believer is God’s victory as well. Thus our proposal, that God demonstrates His victory over Satan in martyrdom through the perseverance of His saints through violent death, is confirmed.

One may object, however, that persecution and martyrdom have served Satan’s purpose in many cases by causing believers to apostasize or betray one another. In response we can first note that the objection relates to the *threat of martyrdom* and not to martyrdom itself, the latter being the subject of this dissertation. Those who apostasize or betray brethren while under the threat of martyrdom do not, in fact, immediately contribute to God’s victory over Satan. Yet if the *martyrdom event itself* takes place, victory is secured. Second, as I discussed earlier in this dissertation, a failure under the threat of martyrdom may lead the apostate to re-evaluate his or her commitment to Christ and receive new strength, resulting in future victory.<sup>613</sup> Even without the rehabilitation of the apostate, however, God’s ultimate, eschatological victory over Satan and those in allegiance to him remains in force.

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<sup>610</sup>Also see O. Palmer Robertson, “Reflections on New Testament Testimony Concerning Civil Disobedience,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (1990): 331-51, for a more detailed examination of the theme of non-violence in the New Testament.

<sup>611</sup>Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 172.

<sup>612</sup>*Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>613</sup>See the more detailed discussion on the point on pages 125-26 of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 6: MARTYRDOM AND THE OBSERVERS/LEARNERS OF THE EVENT- BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS

In this final main chapter of this dissertation we will examine the value of martyrdom in respect to those who either directly observe or later learn of the event. Again, we are looking at the “benefits” of martyrdom from the perspective of the accomplishment of God’s plan. The effect of martyrdom on believers and unbelievers will be handled in separate sections of this chapter.

### *Martyrdom and the Believing Observer*

Again, to determine the effect of martyrdom on believing observers the pertinent didactic and narrative passages will be examined as well as general principles of righteous suffering. After the section on “general principles” we will look at common misperceptions of martyrdom as related to the church.

### Contributions from Didactic Passages

#### *Old Testament*

The first didactic passage directly addressing God’s purpose in martyrdom, Dan 11:33-35, reveals the effect of martyrdom on God’s people. The first part of chapter 11 speaks of the future oppression and persecution of Judah by Antiochus Epiphanies. During this time, according to verse 33, “those who have insight among the people” will “fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder.”<sup>614</sup> That religious persecution is in view is clear from verses 31-32, where Antiochus will “desecrate the sanctuary,” “do away with the regular sacrifice,” “set up the abomination of desolation,” and “turn (people) to godlessness.” In response to this attack on true religion, the “people who know their God will display strength and take action,” and “those who have insight . . . will give insight to the many.” Therefore, the retaliation by Antiochus, where his opposition “falls by sword and by flame,” is a reference to martyrdom.<sup>615</sup>

In verse 35 those who “fall” (the same verb, כשל in *nif'al*, is used) are specified as “some (that is, not all) of those who have insight.” Likely, the term “fall” here has the same sense as it did in verse 33 and includes the experience of martyrdom. Later in verse 35, the purpose for their “falling” is stated, לְצַרְפוֹ בָּהֶם וּלְבַרְרָם וּלְלַבֵּן, “in order to refine them, purge, and make pure.”<sup>616</sup> This result clause provides us with a clear statement of God’s purpose in martyrdom.

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<sup>614</sup>The other possible antecedent of the verb construction “they will fall” is “the many.” Yet the structure of the sentence, וְיִבְיֹנוּ לְרַבִּים וְנִכְשְׁלוּ, favors the interpretation that the participle “those who have insight” is the subject of both verbs “give insight” and “fall.”

<sup>615</sup>Di Lella comments on the use of the *nif'al* כשל (“fall”) here, which literally means “to stumble,” that “since the Hebrew translator correctly rendered the passive of the Aramaic *taql* by the *nif'al* of Hebrew *ksl* in 11:14-19, he mechanically, but incorrectly, rendered it in the same way in 11:33-35, 41.” See Albright and Freedman, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, 23:271. It is more likely that the author provides an intentional contrast with the Syrian monarch in 11:19, who “stumbled and fell” (וְנִכְשַׁל וְנָפַל), while the Jewish martyrs only temporarily stumble (כשל), but do not fall (נפל) in an ultimate sense as the pagan kings.

<sup>616</sup>Baumeister concurs that the term “fall” in v. 35 is explicated in v. 33, and that the subsequent infinitives denote result. See Baumeister, *Die Anfänge*, 18.

Of immediate interest is identifying the antecedent of the pronoun “them,” that is, the ones being purified. The nearest possible antecedent is the implied pronoun “some” (represented by the preposition *מִן*). Yet it is difficult to see how the martyrs themselves are “refined, purged and made pure.”<sup>617</sup> This would imply personal merit through martyrdom. Another possible antecedent is the object of the preposition *מִן*, “those who have insight.”<sup>618</sup> Support for this option is found in the preceding verse, where “those who have insight” are joined by many “in hypocrisy,” thus creating a need for purging false from true devotees of Yahweh. According to this scenario, the death of “some” of Judah’s teachers purified the rest, causing each to count the cost of their confession of Yahweh.<sup>619</sup>

This proposal, however, is complicated by the temporal references in the text. It is “during their fall” (*וּבְהִכָּשְׁלָם*) that many join them in hypocrisy. It initially appears that the persecution is not repulsing the insincere, but that they are joining the movement *during* the persecution. This difficulty is lessened, though, when we notice that the insincere join the movement when the true teachers “are given a little help” (v. 34).<sup>620</sup> It is reasonable to recreate the situation thus: the initial gains by the Maccabees encouraged opportunists to join the renewal movement while there was still room to get in “on the ground floor.” But the prophecy warns that the persecution will last “for *many* days” (v. 33). This factor, not reckoned on by the opportunists, will eventually result in their departure from the movement in fear for their lives.

### *Paul*

In Paul’s reflection on martyrdom in 2 Tim 4:6-8 we observe its benefit in relation to the young minister, Timothy. The coordinating conjunction *καὶ* begins the section, indicating that verses 6-8 provide the basis for what precedes. In verses 1-5 Paul exhorts Timothy to preach the word, endure hardship, and fulfill his ministry. Paul’s suffering and death (verses 6-8) will provide an inspiring example for Timothy to imitate.

At the same time, Paul’s other reflection on martyrdom in Phil 1:19-25 somewhat qualifies the value of martyrdom for believing observers. When deliberating on the choice between death by martyrdom and continued ministry, Paul reveals that the church receives greater benefits from the latter. Since for Paul, “what matters . . . is the mission,” he desires to remain on and exercise “the grace of his own missionary calling.”<sup>621</sup> The repetition of the verb μένω (in the form παραμένω) in verse 25 emphasizes that Paul’s continuation in ministry especially

<sup>617</sup>Contra Collins, *Daniel*, 386. Baumeister also excludes the possibility that the martyrs themselves are purified, or that their death is a purifying atonement for others. See Baumeister, *Die Anfänge*, 19-20.

<sup>618</sup>Baumeister concurs. See Baumeister, *Genese und Entfaltung*, 3, footnote 5.

<sup>619</sup>As Baldwin writes, “Persecution eliminates the waverers.” See Baldwin, *Daniel*, 195. Leupold comments, “Facing the issue of death and bringing the supreme sacrifice would serve the purpose of ‘smelting’ and ‘sifting’ and ‘purifying’ the teachers.” He considers that *וּבְהִכָּשְׁלָם* is constructed with a partative *beth*, indicating that the false teachers were purged *from among* the true. See Leupold, *Daniel*, 508-9. Baumeister also takes the preposition this way and writes, “The death of certain members of the group effects a purging in it. . . . Through the death of some the group takes on a religious-moral quality” (Baumeister, *Die Anfänge*, 19). Porteous also feels the martyrs’ deaths “contributed to the purifying of the community” (Porteous, *Daniel*, 168).

<sup>620</sup>This is usually understood to refer to the Maccabean rebellion. See Porteous, *Daniel*, 386; Baldwin, *Daniel*, 196-97.

<sup>621</sup>Lampe, “Martyrdom and Inspiration,” 132.

benefits the church in that he can provide *ongoing* oversight. A single act of martyrdom may have a great initial effect, but ongoing ministry will have a greater effect long-term.

## Hebrews

Without question the author of Hebrews includes a reference to martyrs at the end of chapter 11 to inspire his readers to the same faithfulness in trial that these previous martyrs demonstrated. The martyrological verses themselves (11:35-37) do not inform us about the effect of martyrdom on the believing observer, but their application in 12:1 makes a significant contribution. Some confusion about 12:1, though, requires us to make some preliminary comments on it.

Here the reader is exhorted to be aware of the “cloud of witnesses surrounding us.”<sup>622</sup> This passage is often understood to mean that the cloud of witnesses (νέφος μαρτύρων) is observing our race of faith. This certainly matches the imagery of an audience in a circular coliseum observing a sporting event. Yet this interpretation introduces an anomaly not found elsewhere in Scripture--the idea that deceased saints actively observe our progress in faith.

An alternate interpretation can be advanced. The term μάρτυς, which conventionally refers to one witnessing an event, may have an atypical use in 12:1. In Hebrews 11 we frequently encounter the cognate verb μαρτυρέω in the aorist passive or perfect passive, which literally means “to have obtained a witness/testimony,” or is sometimes given the sense “gained approval” (NASB). Consequently, it is not unreasonable to understand the designation μάρτυς in 12:1 as referring not to those who themselves “witness” something, but to those who have “obtained a witness” or “gained approval” through their faith.

Even more likely is that in 12:1 μάρτυς refers to those Old Testament saints who “saw” something by faith in the future.<sup>623</sup> Noah, for example, was warned about things “not seen” (v. 7), Abraham did not know “where he was going” (v. 8) and was “looking for the city” (v. 10), the parents of Moses “saw he was a beautiful child” (v. 23), and Moses was “looking for the reward” (v. 26) and endured, “seeing Him who is unseen” (v. 27). In summary, they “saw” the promises and “welcomed them from a distance” (v. 13).

If we accept one of the two final interpretations, we can conclude that the expression “cloud of witnesses” does not describe spectators of our race, but faith-witnesses of unseen realities which motivated them to sacrifice and endurance, resulting in their obtaining “a testimony” of their faithfulness from God. Thus they (including the martyrs of 11:35-37) serve as examples for us: “It is what we see in them, not what they see in us, that is the writer’s main point.”<sup>624</sup> Our prime example, according to 12:2, is Christ Himself.

## Revelation

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<sup>622</sup>The “cloud of witnesses,” however, includes all those mentioned in the previous chapter, not just those who suffered. Therefore, it is difficult to concur with Moffatt, who feels that μάρτυς (“witness”) here is “beginning to shade off into the red sense of ‘martyr.’” See Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 193.

<sup>623</sup>The following examples are not martyrs, but still are part of the “cloud of witnesses” to which the martyrs of Heb 11:35-37 belong, and whose activity in Heb 12:1 we are trying to identify.

<sup>624</sup>Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 192-93.



In John's Apocalypse we continue our search for God's purpose in martyrdom for the believing community. Rev 2:10 is noteworthy, where "the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested." The implication is that, even though only some (ἐξ ὑμῶν) will be imprisoned (and possibly martyred), all will be tested (πειρασθῆτε). It does not say, "they (the imprisoned *some*) will be tested," but "you (*all*) will be tested." This is similar to what we observed in Daniel 11, where "some" of those with insight fell (died) in order to test the others.

The following passage confirms this observation. Jesus commends the church in Pergamum for holding onto the faith "even in the days of Antipas . . . who was killed among you" (2:13). Martyrdom placed an extra stress on the church, forcing them to count the cost of their commitment. Yet they held true, meriting Christ's special commendation.

### Contributions from Narrative Passages

In our examination of biblical narrative we do not find explicit examples of the effect of martyrdom on other believers. The following examples, however, present a picture that is consistent with the teaching of the didactic passages discussed above.

#### *Old Testament*

We can turn to the narrative of Jezebel's killing the prophets of Yahweh for an example of how martyrdom might possibly affect other believers. The main character in the account (from the point of view of involvement in the martyrdom event) is Obadiah. Obadiah, whose name appropriately means "servant (or worshipper) of Yahweh,"<sup>625</sup> was a royal official of wicked king Ahab. The phrase עַל־הַבַּיִת ("over the household") may indicate that Obadiah held "a very prominent and influential position in government, perhaps second only to the king."<sup>626</sup>

Yet at the same time Obadiah "feared the Lord greatly" (1 Kgs 18:3). He was stirred to action by the persecution of his fellow Yahwists and became, in Brueggemann's terms, an "undercover agent for Yahwism."<sup>627</sup> He not only hid a hundred prophets from Jezebel, but continually provided for them, increasing each day his risk of being discovered.<sup>628</sup>

One cannot avoid perceiving in this text the tension Obadiah must have felt between his position at court and his support of God's prophets. As House rightly comments, "He is a man who has tried to live his life in two worlds, and he may not be able to do so much longer."<sup>629</sup> The abrupt appearance of Obadiah in the narrative (he is mentioned only here) may be, among other things, for the purpose of dramatizing the polarizing effect of persecution and martyrdom. Loyalty to Yahweh compels one to side with Him during a mortal confrontation of this nature, yet the desire for personal safety and status pulls in the opposite direction. The abrupt disappearance of Obadiah from the narrative leaves us wondering which side he

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<sup>625</sup>Noted in Montgomery, *Kings*, 298; and Walter Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, ed. R. Scott Nash (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 221.

<sup>626</sup>Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 221.

<sup>627</sup>Ibid.

<sup>628</sup>Cogan posits an iterative sense for the waw-suffix conjugation וַיִּכְלֶם ("provided for them"), following the string of prefix conjugations that precede it. See Albright and Freedman, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, 10:437.

<sup>629</sup>Clendenen, ed., *New American Commentary*, 8:216.

eventually chose, and possibly invites us to put ourselves in his place in order to answer that question for ourselves.

Another martyrdom narrative of the Old Testament, Jehoiakim's murder of Uriah described in Jer 26:20-23, provides us with another reflection on the possible effect of martyrdom on other believers. This account is related by some of the elders of Judah during Jeremiah's trial.<sup>630</sup> It describes an event that must have recently taken place since Jeremiah's trial occurred "in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim" (Jer 26:1). It is interesting to note that the officials of Judah come to Jeremiah's defense during the trial against the priests and prophets who were accusing him (v. 16). Yet likely these same officials were close to the events connected with Uriah's martyrdom (v. 21).<sup>631</sup> The text may be implying that the officials had a change of heart after witnessing Uriah's death, and became active supporters of God's prophets.

This feature is possibly underscored by the mention of Elnathan, the son of Achbor, who led the expedition to Egypt in search of the fugitive Uriah (v. 22).<sup>632</sup> Elnathan, like Obadiah, possibly had very close links to the throne of Judah.<sup>633</sup> He, too, apparently underwent a character change since the next time we meet him in the narrative he is pleading with King Jehoiakim not to burn Jeremiah's scroll (Jer 36:25).

### *Gospel of John*

Although there is no direct reference to the effect of Peter's martyrdom, which Jesus predicted in John 21, on other believers, some commentators feel John recorded Jesus' prediction with that intent. In Beasley-Murray's opinion, because of his martyrdom "the shame of Peter's denials of Jesus will have been obliterated by his blood, and the renown of his leadership in the Church brought to a notable climax with the gaining of the martyr's crown."<sup>634</sup> Similarly, Agourides feels the prediction of Peter's death will rid him of the reputation of being a hireling who flees from danger (John 10:12-13) and qualify him as a good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11) in fulfillment of the commission Jesus had just given him (John 21:15-17).<sup>635</sup> In a slightly different vein, Carson sees Peter's death as exemplary for Christian discipleship, in accordance with Jesus' call to "follow Him" in John 21:19.<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>630</sup>The historical integrity of this text was defended earlier in this dissertation. See page 50, footnote 27.

<sup>631</sup>The Septuagint (Rahlfs, ed.) even asserts that the officials also plotted against Uriah. Note the plural verb ἐζήτουν ἀποκτείνειν αὐτόν ("they sought to kill him"). But the erratic nature of the Septuagint of Jeremiah makes most references suspect.

<sup>632</sup>The Septuagint (Rahlfs ed.) omits the phrase "Elnathan the son of Achbor and *certain* men with him *went* into Egypt," and some consider the Masoretic Text to be conflated here (see discussion in Hubbard and Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, 27:5). Yet one must wonder why a scribe or later editor would provide a more precise historical account than the original.

<sup>633</sup>Huey notes that according to 2 Kgs 24:8 a certain Elnathan was Jehoiakim's father-in-law (Clendenen, ed., *The New American Commentary*, 16:239), and Thompson notes that a certain Achbor was active in the reforms of Josiah (Harrison, ed., *NICOT*, 23:527). Keown, Scalise and Smothers feel Elnathan "was a member of a prominent Judean family" (Hubbard and Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, 27:4).

<sup>634</sup>Hubbard and Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, 36:409.

<sup>635</sup>Agourides, "The Purpose of John 21," 130.

<sup>636</sup>Carson, *John*, 667.

The martyrdom of Stephen provides us helpful insights for this question of martyrdom's effect on believing observers. In the narrative we note first that Stephen's martyrdom occurred during a period of relative peace for the church (Acts 6:7). We also note that the believers were, to some degree, practitioners of both Christian and Jewish faith (Acts 3:1). We observe that Stephen was not martyred for his confession of Christ *per se* (no other believers were arrested), or even his preaching of Christ (which took place unhindered at that time). Stephen's death was prompted by his rebuke of the Jewish religious establishment (Acts 7:51-53) in a manner similar to prophets of old.<sup>637</sup> One might suggest that his death forced into the open the unresolved tension between the two "factions" of Judaism--Messianic and non-Messianic. In this scenario the widespread persecution that resulted likely forced Jewish believers in Christ to evaluate their loyalties--when "push came to shove" would they identify with traditional Judaism or Christianity? In a similar vein, Cunningham, commenting on Luke's treatment of persecution in general, writes that persecution "leads the community to questions of self-understanding."<sup>638</sup>

In addition, it is very plausible that Stephen's martyrdom had a marked effect on stirring the church to evangelism. It was those "who had been scattered" by the persecution initiated by Stephen's martyrdom who "went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). As Dehandschutter writes, "Thanks to this event the orientation toward the mission to the gentiles (by way of the mission to Samaria) is effected."<sup>639</sup> This persecution-aiding preaching becomes characteristic for the Book of Acts: "Persecution, instead of accomplishing its intended goal of squelching the witness of the gospel, ironically will achieve the opposite effect, that of increasing opportunities for the dissemination of the Word."<sup>640</sup> Zumstein aptly names these apparent setbacks "providential failures."<sup>641</sup>

### Contributions from General Principles of Righteous Suffering

In the above studied passages we can discern definite beneficial effects of martyrdom on the church, the most outstanding being a testing or challenge to choose sides (Revelation 2; Uriah, Obadiah, Stephen), with a resulting purging of the church (Daniel 11), and encouragement for fellow or future sufferers (2 Timothy 4; Hebrews 11-12). In this section we will briefly look at general principles that reinforce these ideas, as well as propose other potential benefits derived from general principles of righteous suffering.

### *Purging*

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<sup>637</sup>His arrest was also on these grounds (albeit by false accusations). See Acts 6:11-14.

<sup>638</sup>Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations*, 27, who summarizes F. Schütz, *Der leidende Christus, die angefochtene Gemeinde und das Christuskerygma der lukanischen Schriften*, BWANT 89 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969).

<sup>639</sup>Dehandschutter "La persecution," 544. Translation mine. See also Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations*, 214.

<sup>640</sup>Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations*, 135.

<sup>641</sup>Zumstein, "L'Apôtre comme martyr," 378.

Persecution and martyrdom can improve the spiritual quality of the church as a whole by purging out those whose commitments are shallow or insincere. This was the main thrust of the key passage examined above in Daniel 11. Other passages confirm the need for such a purging. John writes that not all who are with us are truly “of us” (1 John 2:19). Peter and Jude also speak of “false brethren” (Jude 4; 2 Pet 2:1). Jesus’ parable of the sower demonstrates that not all who initially respond to the gospel receive it in sincerity (cf. Mark 4:16-19). Significant here is that Jesus specifically mentions persecution as one means of revealing the insincerity of the insincere (Mark 4:17).

### *Enhancing Christian Spirituality*

Related to spiritual purging, a second result of persecution and martyrdom is to deepen spirituality in the community of faith. A well known biblical principle is the enhancement of spiritual life through suffering, which can be traced through both testaments.

In the Old Testament this was usually the suffering of chastisement, which brought God’s people to repentance and restored relationship with Him. An important exception to this is the Book of Job, where suffering, although interpreted by Job’s friends as chastisement, was in fact permitted as a test. Job, having endured the test, not only secured victory over the tempter (as discussed in chapter 5), but also benefited by a greater knowledge of and deepened relationship with God. His sufferings and searchings led him into a personal, life-changing encounter with God. Job confesses, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You” (Job 42:6).

In the New Testament several passages directly link suffering and spiritual growth (Jas 1:2-4; Rom 5:3-5; 2 Cor 4:10-11). The church’s “trials and tribulations” mentioned here certainly include persecution and martyrdom (the latter in the sense that the church suffers a loss when a beloved member is taken away). Paul speaks of “tribulation” in a very generic sense in Rom 5:3, allowing a wide application, which would certainly not exclude the tribulations associated with persecution and martyrdom. Similarly, James speaks of “trials” very generically in Jas 1:2, even qualifying it with the adjective “various.” The “dying of Jesus” that Paul experiences in 2 Cor 4:10 refers to the afflictions associated with his ministry he just mentioned in verses 8-9. The result is a manifestation of the “life of Jesus” in the sufferer, our understanding of which need not be limited only to greater success in ministry, but an enhanced overall spirituality as well.

Martin Luther, who personally observed the church both in peace and under fire, concluded that the worst time for the Church is “the time of peace”:<sup>642</sup> “Through persecution Christendom grows; conversely, Christians become lazy and lax when conditions are peaceful and quiet.”<sup>643</sup> Martyrdom, then, can be a therapeutic measure for a lackadaisical Church. Fox interestingly points out that both Cyprian and Origen, who also observed firsthand the church in peace and under fire, held this view--their observation of the poor spiritual condition of the church even led them to predict the persecution of Decius.<sup>644</sup> Lesbaupin adds that in the

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<sup>642</sup>Luther, *What Luther Says*, 1.281.

<sup>643</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.1040.

<sup>644</sup>Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 451.

subsequent persecution under Valerian “the attitude of Christians became generally more solid.”<sup>645</sup>

Based on other historical observations, though, Galli questions whether persecution always leads to deepened spirituality.<sup>646</sup> Relating the aftermath of persecution in Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he reports significant theological decline among the survivors--the Trinity consisted of the Father, Mary and Christ, and there was little understanding of why Jesus died on the cross. In my personal experience working with ministers and students of theology in the former Soviet Union I can attest that the years of isolation took a significant toll in the spiritual vitality of the Russian Church. It appears Galli is correct in concluding, “Some persecutions are successful. Some martyrdoms do not unify or purify or grow the church.”<sup>647</sup>

Thus, we have indications that persecution leads to spiritual growth in some cases, but apparently not in others. We can conclude, then, that the potential for spiritual growth is available through suffering, persecution and martyrdom, but that result is not guaranteed. Nonetheless, one explanation of this discrepancy that I find logically compelling is that the negative effects listed by Galli above may be the result of restrictive measures applied to the church over a long period of time: denying believers access to Bibles, Christian education, church attendance, and other means of spiritual growth. The martyrdom event itself, when examined in isolation from the entire persecution complex, need not necessarily lead to this kind of spiritual deprivation. Galli himself acknowledges this distinction, citing a Presbyterian missiologist, Samuel Moffett, “Sharp persecution breaks off only the tips of the branches. It produces martyrs and the tree still grows. Never-ending social and political repression, on the other hand, starves the roots; it stifles evangelism and the church declines.”<sup>648</sup>

### *Encouragement for Fellow or Future Sufferers*

Martyrdom can inspire courage and endurance in true believers and prepare them for possible martyrdom in the future. We noted this feature in 2 Timothy 4 and in Hebrews 11-12. This principle is also supported by Acts 4:23-31, which records the church’s response to its first confrontation with opposition. Immediately after the apostles relate the events surrounding their arrest and interrogation by the Sanhedrin, the church, instead of retreating in fear, prays for greater boldness and effectiveness in ministry.

A study conducted by Wood, Pilisuk and Uren, however, casts some doubt on the claim that martyrdom inspires fellow believers. In their experimentally-contrived martyrdom situation they observed that, although most were favorably impressed by the martyr’s behavior, there “was more in a change of attitude in admiring the martyr than an actual change in behavior inspiring a person to imitate that behavior.”<sup>649</sup> Yet certain factors were

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<sup>645</sup>Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted*, 43.

<sup>646</sup>Mark Galli, “Sometimes Persecution Purifies, Unites, and Grows the Church. Sometimes It Doesn’t,” *Christianity Today* 19 May 1997, 16-19.

<sup>647</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>648</sup>*Ibid.* No reference to the Moffett citation provided.

<sup>649</sup>Donald Wood, Marc Pilisuk, and Emmanuel Uren, “The Martyr’s Personality: An Experimental Investigation,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 25 (1973): 186.

lacking in their evaluation, such as a Christian motivation to participate in martyrdom and the help of God's grace.

In spite of these positive indications of martyrdom's beneficial effect of inspiring courage, we must recognize that such a result is not guaranteed. We note that the passages cited in support of this principle are narrative or exhortative; that is, there is no promise that positive results will always ensue. We see a significant counterexample, in fact, in the case of Paul's second Roman imprisonment, where, instead of rallying around the apostle, "all deserted me" (2 Tim 4:16). So, we can confidently state that persecution and martyrdom can potentially inspire courage in others, but such a result is not always guaranteed.

### *Enhancing Christian Identity*

Next, martyrdom can aid the church by helping identify those issues that are essential for Christian faith and discipleship, and that consequently must be defended to death. We may substantiate this claim by first noting that in persecution contexts the Scriptures are careful to define the cause being defended. Jesus instructs His disciples to rejoice when they are persecuted "because of Me" (Matt 5:11). In Jesus' call to radical discipleship it is not simply those who lose their lives that are commended, but those who lose their lives "for My sake and the gospel's" (Mark 8:35). Paul's first Roman imprisonment and threatened martyrdom was specifically "in the cause of Christ" (Phil 1:13). Peter also expresses concern that his readers are suffering for the right cause: "Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or as a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers *as a Christian* . . ." (1 Pet 4:15-16).

In each of the above situations, the sufferer is encouraged to identify the specific reason for his or her suffering to be sure that it is in the cause of Christ. A complicating factor, though, is that it may not always be clear which elements of the cause of Christ must be defended to the death. For example, persecution was one of the stimuli in the formation of the New Testament canon--believers had to decide which books merely contained good material for Christian edification and could be surrendered to the authorities for destruction, and which books were inspired and needed to be preserved at all costs. The Reformation was an especially perplexing time since all parties involved claimed to represent the cause of Christ. Because of the high price believers had to pay to defend their unique doctrines, martyrdom and the threat of martyrdom forced the Reformers to clearly define what essential Christianity entailed. As Boudind notes, in the Reformation martyrdom "furnished a more exact definition of the reformed community and a more precise identity of the faithful."<sup>650</sup>

### *Enhancing Christian Concern*

The following benefit of martyrdom is more related to the church's response to the threat of martyrdom than to martyrdom itself--enhancing mutual concern among believers. Several biblical references reveal how New Testament saints demonstrated mercy to those under possible threat of martyrdom: Paul receives support in prison (Phil 4:10-14); the recipients of

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<sup>650</sup>Boudind, "Instruments de propagande," 68. Translation mine.

Hebrews “showed sympathy to the prisoners” (Heb 10:34); and the author of Hebrews instructs his readers to “remember the prisoners” (Heb 13:3).

Historically, many writers acknowledge how imprisoned believers received support from those outside.<sup>651</sup> One striking example comes from the pen of Lucian, an early critic of Christianity. He writes about the imprisonment of Peregrinus, “Indeed, people came even from the cities of Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succor and defend and encourage the hero. They show incredible speed whenever any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all.”<sup>652</sup>

### *Distorted Views of Martyrdom and the Church*

In connection with the effect of martyrdom on believers, many unscriptural conceptions have arisen and now enjoy widespread acceptance in some circles. It will be worthwhile for us at this point to examine and refute these claims.

### *Atonement through Martyrdom*

A frequently encountered theme, especially among liberal authors, is that early Christians (and Christ Himself) understood martyrdom as a means of atonement for the sins of God’s people. According to this approach, the concept of vicarious suffering blossomed in the intertestamental literature, particularly in 2 and 4 Maccabees, yet signs of its development appeared earlier. Fretheim claims, for example, that Moses, Jeremiah and Ezekiel in a sense “bore the guilt” of Israel, providing “an important conceptual framework . . . for further development.”<sup>653</sup> Sanders, speaking more generally, feels that “the sufferings of the great of the Bible were at times so intense that it seemed they must have been efficacious for others.”<sup>654</sup> This development climaxes in the Old Testament in Isaiah’s Suffering Servant.

Key verses in the Maccabean literature for atonement through martyrdom are 2 Macc 6:12, 15, 7:18, 37-38 and 4 Macc 1:11, 6:28-29, 9:24, 17:21.<sup>655</sup> One of the seven brothers, for example, prays “that in me and my brethren the wrath of the Almighty, which is justly brought upon our nation, may cease” (2 Macc 7:18). Similarly, Eleazar intercedes, “Be merciful to your people, and let our punishment suffice for them. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs” (4 Macc 6:28-29). Another intertestamental reference, Enoch 47:1, 4, places atonement through martyrdom in a more eschatological context.<sup>656</sup> 1QS 8:1-8 testifies that the Qumran community believed to receive atonement through the suffering (non-fatal) of its leaders. Zeitlin argues, though, that atonement through martyrdom was not the view of normative Judaism of intertestamental times, but entered mainstream Judaism

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<sup>651</sup>See Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 229; Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 112-19; Knott, *Discourses*, 84. Hus, in particular, personally thanks those who stood by him. See Hus, *Letters*, 287.

<sup>652</sup>Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, 13. Quote from *Lucian*, trans. A. M. Harmon, in *LCL*, 5:15.

<sup>653</sup>Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 163-64.

<sup>654</sup>Sanders, *Suffering as Divine Discipline*, 116.

<sup>655</sup>Smith lists other intertestamental references to atoning suffering: *Test. Mos.* 9.6-10.1; *Sir* 2:4-5; *Sipre Deut* 6:5 [32]; and *Mek. Bahodesh* 10.1-86. See Smith, “Suffering,” 751.

<sup>656</sup>Noted by John Downing, “Jesus and Martyrdom,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 14 (1963), 284, who also feels that the decorating of the prophets’ tombs (Matt 24:29) may be further evidence for belief in the atoning efficacy of the Old Testament martyrs’ deaths.

later via Christianity.<sup>657</sup> Downing confirms that such an understanding is not seen in the rabbis until after the Bar Cocheba revolt of A.D. 135.<sup>658</sup>

Another element in redemptive suffering is the *Aqedah*, or binding of Isaac,<sup>659</sup> who was considered a martyr whose death had atoning value.<sup>660</sup> O'Neill feels the *Aqedah* tradition contributed to the Christian understanding of Christ's atonement, and that the "carrying the cross" saying (Mark 8:34) is based on the midrashic description of the bundle of wood Isaac carried as a "cross" (cf. *Gen. R.* 56.3 and *Piska* 31.2).<sup>661</sup> Yet Davies observes that no evidence exists for the *Aqedah* tradition in Jewish literature before New Testament times and concludes it was derived from the early Christian use of Isaac-typology.<sup>662</sup>

Downing is another writer who attributes "Jesus' self-understanding" to the intertestamental view on the vicarious suffering of martyrs. According to Downing, Jesus perceived His eventual fate as a typical, rejected prophet, and "it was from this expectation that he would die as a martyr *against* his people that he came to see himself as the martyr in the sense of one who expiates for the sins of others by his death."<sup>663</sup>

We will not further examine Jesus' self-consciousness since our topic is not Christ's redemptive sufferings. What is significant here is the suggestion that this concept continued its development beyond Christ, so that Christian martyrs were considered vicarious sufferers as well. Several writers see an atoning significance in the martyrdoms of Revelation, especially in connection with the martyrs beneath the altar (Rev 6:9-11). Grayston claims that the image of souls beneath the altar implies that "their expected death is the price that must be paid for the preservation or restoration of genuine worship."<sup>664</sup> Rist ascribes to the altar a "sacrificial and intercessory significance."<sup>665</sup> Frend writes that "the Christians saw themselves as the People chosen to prepare the way for the Millennium by their suffering and by their martyrdom to earn its enjoyment forever."<sup>666</sup>

Certain Church Fathers, such as Origen and Gregory of Nazianzus, also saw the blood of Christian martyrs as atoning.<sup>667</sup> This conviction was and continues to be held in Catholic theology.<sup>668</sup> One final proposal along this line comes from Eli Sagan, who makes the interesting observation that only complex societies (as opposed to primitive ones) practice

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<sup>657</sup>*The Second Book of Maccabees*, trans. Sidney Tedesche, Jewish Apocryphal Literature, ed. Solomon Zeitlin (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 94.

<sup>658</sup>Downing, "Jesus and Martyrdom," 280.

<sup>659</sup>The term *Aqedah* is derived from the verb עָקַד, "to bind," which appears only in Gen 22:9. It was also used in the Mishna to describe how the daily sacrifice should be bound (*m. Tamid* 4.1). Noted in Philip R. Davies, "Martyrdom and Redemption: On the Development of Isaac Typology in the Early Church," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982): 653.

<sup>660</sup>See Philip R. Davies, "Passover and the Dating of Aqedah," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 59. Notable also are the many comparisons of the Maccabean martyrdoms to the "sacrifice" of Isaac (see 4 Macc 7:14, 13:12, 14:20, 15:28, 16:20, 18:10).

<sup>661</sup>O'Neill, "Did Jesus Teach," 14.

<sup>662</sup>Davies, "Dating of Aqedah," 66-67.

<sup>663</sup>Downing, "Jesus and Martyrdom," 286.

<sup>664</sup>Grayston, "Atonement and Martyrdom," 260.

<sup>665</sup>Rist, "Revelation," 279.

<sup>666</sup>Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 182.

<sup>667</sup>See Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 5.172; and Winslow, "The Maccabean Martyrs," 84.

<sup>668</sup>See Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 283; and Figura, "Following of Jesus," 103. For a protestant adherent see Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, 188.



human sacrifice. His discussion is related to martyrdom in that he notes that Christians are not appalled by human sacrifice “as long as it was an offering to the right god.”<sup>669</sup> He feels that Christian martyrdom, in part, satisfies this basic need for substitutionary death inherent among complex societies.

In spite of the contention advanced by the above-cited authors, no Old Testament or New Testament text teaches by precept or example that a martyr’s death has atoning significance.<sup>670</sup> In the course of this dissertation we have examined every passage with martyrological significance and have found no support for this proposal. Those passages that some may claim in support of atonement through martyrdom can be explained: (1) Paul’s reference to “filling up” Christ’s sufferings in Col 1:24 refers either to his identification with Christ or his participation in the messianic woes (or both), as described on pages 111, 118 and 146 of this dissertation;<sup>671</sup> (2) Jesus’ words that the disciples (specifically James and John) will share his “cup” of suffering (Matt 20:23) do not indicate participating in His atoning death--the fact that James was martyred but John was not casts doubt on the interpretation that the “cup” equals martyrdom in this passage at all;<sup>672</sup> (3) the occasional allusion to Christian martyrdom as an “offering” (Phil 2:17; 2 Tim 4:6; Rev 6:9-11) is better understood as an expression of Christian devotion, as discussed on pages 88, 89 and 97 of this dissertation.

### *Martyrs as Intercessors*

Another pretension concerning martyrdom and the church that lacks scriptural warrant is the martyr’s role as intercessor. As early as the mid-second century A.D., Christians began yearly commemorations of a martyr’s death, celebrated at his or her tomb.<sup>673</sup> Later, relics were transferred to local churches and venerated there. Such eminent fathers as Origen,<sup>674</sup> Jerome,<sup>675</sup> Ambrose<sup>676</sup> and Augustine<sup>677</sup> promoted their veneration. Eventually a martyr was

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<sup>669</sup>Eli Sagan, “Towards a Theory of Human Sacrifice,” *Psychohistory* 10 (1982): 124.

<sup>670</sup>Also the conclusion of Grayston, “Atonement and Martyrdom,” 256-58; Oden, *The Word of Life*, 379; and Rivkah Duker, “Summary of the Article: Martyrdom in Second Temple Judaism and in Early Christianity,” by David Flusser, *Immanuel* 1 (1972): 38.

<sup>671</sup>Schreiner advances yet another possible interpretation. He notes that the passage is located in a context of mission, and that Paul repeats the key word “filling up” (ἀναπληρώω) in verse 25 (as the simpler πληρώω) in reference to fulfilling his calling to preach. He concludes, “What is lacking in Christ’s afflictions is that the benefit of those afflictions had not yet been proclaimed among the Gentiles. . . . And like Christ, Paul heralds a message advanced in and through his suffering. Paul’s sufferings, in other words, are a corollary of Christ’s.” Schreiner, *Paul*, 102. Similar suggestions in Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 102-3; and Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 185.

<sup>672</sup>Also see Lenski, *Matthew*, 788; Edwards, *Mark*, 323; France, *Mark*, 416; and Lane, *Mark*, 379-80 for similar conclusions. Hodge well summarizes the view of evangelical theology: “The sufferings of martyrs, patriots, and philanthropists, although endured for the good of the Church, the country, or of mankind, are not vicarious” (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2.475).

<sup>673</sup>See *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18.

<sup>674</sup>See Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 7.195.

<sup>675</sup>See Jerome, *Against Vigilantius* 1-12.

<sup>676</sup>See Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 3-4.

<sup>677</sup>Augustine, initially skeptical, became a devotee after he witnessed miracles attributed to the remains of St. Stephen. See Tarcisius J. van Bavel, “Cult of Martyrs in St. Augustine,” in *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. M. Lamberigts and P. van Deun (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University, 1995), 361.

thought to have the “prerogative to intercede with God” and that his or her death was atoning; the martyr “was said to win by his death the capacity to forgive sins.”<sup>678</sup>

The Reformation marked a change in attitude toward martyrs. Protestant writers esteemed the early martyrs as examples of endurance and regarded them as predecessors of the Reformation martyrs. Yet they refused them the role of mediator with God or to recognize the miracles associated with their relics.<sup>679</sup> Calvin, appealing to New Testament teaching, refutes the Catholic claims: (1) remission of sins is given only in Christ’s name, not in the names of saints or martyrs (Acts 10:43); (2) the blood of Christ, not of martyrs, cleanses from sin (1 John 1:7; 2 Cor 5:21) and purchases us for God (Acts 20:28); (3) Christ, not the martyrs, died for the Church (1 Cor 1:13); (4) Christ provides sanctification for believers--it is not “perfected by martyrs” (Heb 10:14).<sup>680</sup> Additionally, the Catholic teaching robs Christ of his unique function as mediator (1 Tim 2:5) and violates the universal principle of Scripture, that prayer is to be directed to God alone. Besides these discrepancies with Scripture, this doctrine also introduces a logical inconsistency. The church, in venerating the martyrs, commits an act akin to that which the martyrs themselves died in defiance of--idolatry.<sup>681</sup>

### *Extreme Reactions to Martyrdom*

Just as individuals can take extreme positions in regard to martyrdom, from actively provoking it to justifying the use of violence by it, the church can have extreme reactions as well. On the one hand, Shea advocates that the church should use all measures possible, including political leverage, to abolish Christian persecution.<sup>682</sup> She opposes the “fatalistic or even romantic” view of martyrdom embraced by most Christians. Shea acknowledges that Jesus predicted persecution, but feels this does not justify a passive attitude toward it. Jesus also said the poor would always be with us--yet we strive to abolish poverty and should do the same to end persecution as well.<sup>683</sup> She also argues that while Peter was in prison, the entire church was in prayer (supposedly for his release).

Shea’s comments are insightful and deserve consideration. From a human standpoint, we would always desire the release of Christian prisoners and their escape from martyrdom. This is especially true of a Christian leader, whose ministry would be greatly missed (cf. Phil 1:24-26). This was likely the motivation out of which the believers in Acts 4 prayed for Peter. Yet we have clearly demonstrated in the course of this study how martyrdom is an aspect of God’s plan. Since we usually do not know God’s plan for every individual in every situation it is always reasonable to pray and work for the safety and release of Christian prisoners. At the same time our expectations should be realistic--the “time of his or her departure” may have arrived.

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<sup>678</sup>Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 366. Reid correctly observes that this hierarchy of saints was likely inspired by the influence of Neo-Platonism. See W. S. Reid, “Martyr,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenny (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 4:103.

<sup>679</sup>See discussions in Knott, *Discourses*, 41; Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 141; and Kolb, *For All the Saints*, 2-4.

<sup>680</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 3.5.2.

<sup>681</sup>Also noted by Workman, *Persecution*, 345.

<sup>682</sup>Shea, *Lion’s Den*, 8-15.

<sup>683</sup>Shea credits Diane Knippers, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, for this comment (Shea, *Lion’s Den*, 16).

On the other hand, instead of seeking to abolish martyrdom, some may seek to capitalize on it. The Weiners comment, "In the hands of a skilled propagandist, martyrdom and the convictions it represents can be manipulated to attain predetermined aims. The capacity of the martyr to infuse meaning and to inspire commitment can be used by astute leaders to manipulate sentiments during times of stress."<sup>684</sup> They note the use of martyrdom-propaganda in the French Revolution and in Nazi Germany.<sup>685</sup> Riddle proposes that a major goal of both Jewish apocalypse and Christian martyrology was "controlling their adherents," the apocalypses by appealing to community solidarity, and the martyrologies by appealing to individual rewards and punishments.<sup>686</sup>

Again, there is truth in Riddle's proposal, but some qualification is in order. Undoubtedly the Christian martyrologists hoped that their writings would inspire the church to courage and faithfulness. But inspiration or encouragement differs from control or manipulation. The former involves motivating someone toward a goal that is in their best interest, employing a genuine, non-exaggerated rationale. "Control" and "manipulation," on the other hand, carry a negative connotation, often involve deceit, and imply that someone else's interests are being served at the expense of the victim. One does not have to be cunningly coaxed into martyrdom. It is a great honor, if God so wills, and serves the best interests of God, church and martyr.

### Conclusions and Final Clarifications

From the didactic passages examined in this section several points have become clear. According to Daniel 11, martyrdom serves to test the faith community and purge true from false devotees of Yahweh. The same theme is echoed in Revelation 2. In 2 Timothy 4 Paul's impending martyrdom will inspire Timothy to personal steadfastness in Christian life and ministry. Hebrews 11-12 encourages believers in the same way. In Philippians 1, however, we are cautioned that the ongoing ministry of a Christian leader provides a greater long-term benefit to the church than martyrdom.

The narrative accounts of Obadiah (1 Kgs 18), the officials of Jehoiakim (Jer 26:20-23), and Stephen (Acts 7-8) all appear to associate martyrdom with a challenge to personal decision to side with God. We can consider these narrative expansions of the theme found in Daniel 11 and Revelation 2--martyrdom provides a test of loyalty, compelling confessing believers to identify with God's kingdom during perilous times at personal risk. If the interpretation of John 21 suggested earlier in this chapter is correct, it introduces another benefit of martyrdom in respect to the church--it restores confidence in Christian leaders and legitimizes their ministry.

Our examination of general principles reinforced the themes just listed, particularity in regard to purging out insincere adherents, deepening spirituality and inspiring courage in those who remain behind, preparing them for possible martyrdom. Additional features introduced in this section include strengthening Christian identity and enhancing mutual concern.

In summarizing these observations we may conclude that, in essence, martyrdom provides the church with a radical challenge to all out commitment. It provides a test for the entire

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<sup>684</sup>Weiner and Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction*, 87.

<sup>685</sup>Ibid., 88-125.

<sup>686</sup>Donald R. Riddle, "From Apocalypse to Martyrology," *Anglican Theological Review* 9 (1926-1927): 263-75.

church and forces believers to clearly define their faith by identifying the issues they are willing to die for. Those who positively respond to the challenge will be inspired and encouraged by the example of the martyr, deepened spiritually and stirred to action in providing assistance to others still suffering for the faith. Those who negatively respond to the challenge, however, will fall away. Yet even this benefits the church by purging and purifying it.

### *Martyrdom and the Unbelieving Observer*

In this final major section of this chapter the value of martyrdom for evangelism will be investigated. This will include not only how witnessing the martyrdom event may directly move an individual to repentance, but also how martyrdom aids evangelism by making its message more accessible or compelling. This last consideration--martyrdom making the gospel more accessible or compelling--does not guarantee, of course, a response from all unbelieving observers. But, based on analogies to be presented later, we can claim that enhancing the gospel message will likely result in a greater overall response. Thus, whatever ways martyrdom contributes to a greater response to the gospel are valid items for investigation in this section.

### Contributions from Didactic Passages

#### *Synoptic Gospels*

In the Synoptic accounts one sees little indication of how martyrdom may affect the unbeliever *per se*. At the same time much is said about the need for enduring persecution and martyrdom so that the gospel can reach the unbelieving world. In the Synoptics one can easily note a connection between gospel preaching and persecution/martyrdom, leading to the conclusion that the "disciples' suffering is inseparable from their witness."<sup>687</sup> If the lost are to be reached in a world in rebellion against God, persecution can be expected. Morris notes how propagating the message of salvation through the cross requires bearing the cross oneself.<sup>688</sup> Similarly, Ton writes, "The cross of Christ is for propitiation, whereas our crosses are for propagation."<sup>689</sup>

This concept is brought out most clearly in the missiological discourse of Matthew 10 where the disciples are sent out as sheep among wolves (10:16).<sup>690</sup> They can expect opposition all along the way, from one city to the next (10:23). In Jesus' apocalyptic discourse as well, persecution occurs in the context of gospel preaching (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10).<sup>691</sup>

#### *Paul*

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<sup>687</sup>Keener, *Matthew*, 573.

<sup>688</sup>Morris, *The Cross*, 393.

<sup>689</sup>Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 90. Ton credits a friend, Leith Samuel, for the expression.

<sup>690</sup>Even though Mark does not have a similar missiological discourse, in his discourse on bearing the cross in discipleship he uniquely includes the phrase "for the gospel" (Mark 8:35). Noted by Lane, *Mark*, 308; France, *Mark*, 341.

<sup>691</sup>Gundry feels a major goal of Matthew's gospel as a whole was to "keep persecution of the church from stymieing evangelism. He reminds true disciples of their duty to obey Christ's law and make it known despite persecution" (Gundry, *Matthew*, 9).

Just as the preaching ministry of Jesus' disciples, described in the Synoptics, was accompanied by opposition and persecution, Paul experienced the same conflict in his efforts to reach the lost. Paul is ready to "endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 2:10). Schreiner writes,

Paul's suffering is vital to his mission as the apostle to the Gentiles. We should not conceive of Paul as engaging in mission and experiencing the unfortunate consequence of suffering in the process, as if his difficulties were unrelated to his mission. On the contrary, the pain Paul endured was the means by which the message of the gospel was extended to the nations.<sup>692</sup>

In Phil 1:19-20, where Paul clearly reflects on martyrdom, some see an evangelistic motif in connection with the "exaltation" of Christ in Paul's "body." Fee, for one, feels that the gospel will be vindicated when Christ is glorified through Paul's death.<sup>693</sup> Ton similarly writes,

To have Christ magnified; to stand in his chains and in his martyrdom in such a way that unbelievers might clearly see the beauty and greatness of Christ, His goodness and grace, and ultimately the divinity of Christ! Paul did not simply want to die because it would be 'very much better' for him personally (Phil. 1:23); rather, he wanted his martyrdom to have maximum effectiveness for the cause of Christ.<sup>694</sup>

Hawthorne notes in support of this conclusion Paul's use of the word παρρησία ("boldness") in verse 20,<sup>695</sup> which he associates with gospel preaching in 2 Cor 3:12 and Eph 6:19, and is also associated with gospel preaching in Acts 4:13 and 28:31.

We will also give attention to one passage where some mistakenly feel that Paul specifically links martyrdom with efforts to reach the lost. In 1 Cor 4:13 Paul characterizes the apostles as "the scum (περικαθάρματα) of the world, the dregs (περίψημα) of all things." The term περικαθάρμα, which basically means "dirt, refuse, off-scouring," was also used to describe a community scapegoat (human sacrifice) who bears the guilt of the people,<sup>696</sup> leading some to conclude that Paul was describing apostolic ministry in this way.<sup>697</sup> The term is so used in the Septuagint's Prov 21:18: περικαθάρμα δὲ δικαίου ἄνομος ("The lawless is ransom for the righteous"). Similarly, περίψημα was also used for an expiatory sacrifice.<sup>698</sup> I prefer, along with Fee, the straightforward (non-martyrological) meaning for this verse, since Paul does not typically describe his sufferings as substitutionary. Also, as Fee concludes, "The

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<sup>692</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 87.

<sup>693</sup>Fee, *Philippians*, 130-31.

<sup>694</sup>Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 188

<sup>695</sup>Hubbard and Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, 43:43.

<sup>696</sup>BAGD, 801.

<sup>697</sup>In favor of this extended meaning: Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 51; Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 112-13; and several listed by Fee (BAGD, TDNT, Lightfoot, Weiss, Héring). Advocating the simple meaning "refuse" only: Fee, *First Corinthians*, 180; and several listed by Fee (Robertson-Plummer, Allo, Conzelmann).

<sup>698</sup>BAGD, 808. Here, however, Barrett prefers the straightforward meaning. See Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 113.

lexical evidence is not as strong as its proponents make it out to be, and the ordinary usage to refer to what is contemptible fits the context without the need for expiatory overtones.”<sup>699</sup>

### *John and Revelation*

The Gospel of John also testifies that suffering and persecution await those who preach the gospel (John 16:2, 21:18), but does not specifically address the question of martyrdom’s direct effect on unbelieving observers. Many see in the Book of Revelation, however, the theme of evangelization through martyrdom.<sup>700</sup> To this issue we must now turn.

A key passage in this discussion is Rev 11:11-13, where, as a result of the resuscitation of the two witnesses, “the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” Some assert that this refers to a mass conversion of the nations.<sup>701</sup> I find the arguments for this position unconvincing, especially in light of the character of the Apocalypse--evangelism and conversion are scarcely if at all mentioned except for a few angelic warnings of judgment (14:7, 9-12) which appear to go unheeded. But even if this interpretation of Rev 11:11-13 is correct, it does not directly address our question, since it was not the martyrdom event *per se* that turned the nations to God, but rather a miraculous demonstration of resurrection power.

Beyond reference to this verse alone some nonetheless posit a general theme of “victory through suffering” in the book of Revelation, beginning with the death of Christ and continuing through the death of the martyrs, that eventually convinces the world of the truth of the gospel. Sweet,<sup>702</sup> for example, sees a dual theme in Revelation of punishment and gathering in of the nations--the former theme is eventually replaced by the latter. Christ’s death “is the ground of his ‘conquest,’ which entitled him to break the seals and set the final drama going--its momentum maintained by Christian maintenance of his μαρτυρία ἄχρι θανάτου.” The suffering of the martyrs, then, is “God’s action or Passion into which men are caught up,” leading to the conversion of the nations. But Sweet also recognizes that it is not the testimony and suffering itself, but God’s vindication of the martyrs that leads to the nations’ conversion.<sup>703</sup>

Bauckham, on the other hand, feels the martyrs do not have to rise from the dead in order to convince the nations. The nations must merely perceive the martyrs’ participation in Christ’s triumph over death. In fact, the way that Christian martyrdom, in the early centuries of the church, impressed and won people to faith in the Christian God, was precisely thus. The

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<sup>699</sup>Fee, *First Corinthians*, 180.

<sup>700</sup>I will be citing Considine, Bauckham, Trites, Ton and Sweet. A brief synopsis of Sweet’s view will help us understand the seeming contradictory quotations from him that will appear in this chapter. First of all, Sweet insists that for evangelism “the effect lies in the *testimony, not in the moral effect of the suffering* that the testimony incurs” (Sweet, *Maintaining the Testimony*, 108, italics mine). It seems here that martyrdom does not effect conversion. Yet he does not appear consistent in his position. Later he writes that this witness, when “*consummated in death and vindicated by God*, shatters the Babel of human arrogance and complacency” (p. 110, italics mine). Now, martyrdom aids the testimony. Still later he describes Christian suffering as “God’s action or Passion into which men are caught up” (p. 114). Now, martyrdom is the “the ground of victory” (p. 115).

<sup>701</sup>See Considine, “The Two Witnesses,” 392; Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 84; Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 169-70; Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 285-90; and Sweet, “Maintaining the Testimony,” 109.

<sup>702</sup>Sweet, “Maintaining the Testimony,” 111-15.

<sup>703</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

martyrs were effective witnesses to the truth of the Gospel because their faith in Christ's victory over death was so convincingly evident in the way they faced death and died.<sup>704</sup>

Bauckham's position is also unconvincing. I do acknowledge a clear "victory" theme in Revelation, but, as I discussed in chapter 5, this theme consists in the martyr's spiritual victory over Satan's temptation to apostasy and of Christ's military victory over the Antichrist at His return, but does not concern success in evangelism. It is true that the "nations" are included in the eschatological kingdom (see 15:4, 21:24-22:5), but one must consider that the constitution of the church from "every tribe and nation" can satisfy this eschatological expectation as well (Rev 5:9-10, 7:9).

Thus the proposal that martyrdom leads to mass conversion in Revelation breaks down at three key points: (1) the overall emphasis of Revelation is not on conversion but on judgment; (2) the identity of the "nations" in Revelation 21-22 and the means of their conversion is oblique; and (3) there are no direct references in Revelation to conversion through martyrdom. Rev 11:11-13, if it speaks of conversion at all, speaks of conversion in response to a miracle. Bauckham's position, as cited above, is based on a historical argument, not an exegetical one.

### Contributions from Narrative Passages

#### *Acts*

The two martyrdom incidents recorded in Acts, Stephen and the apostle James, do not record specifically how their deaths affected unbelievers.<sup>705</sup> One often hears the suggestion that the martyrdom of Stephen contributed to Saul's later conversion,<sup>706</sup> but the text gives no support for this view. Immediately after Stephen's death Acts 8 records that "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death" (v. 1), and later that "Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison" (v. 3).<sup>707</sup> The only indication that Saul may have been somehow moved by the event is the reference to Saul's "kicking against the goads" in Acts 26:14, if that is to be understood as a guilty conscience.<sup>708</sup> But the reference here is too vague to build a conclusion on it alone. The unanimous witness of Acts is that Saul's conversion resulted from his Damascus Road vision (see Acts 9, 22, 26).

### Contributions from General Principles of Righteous Suffering

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<sup>704</sup>Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 87-88.

<sup>705</sup>Ton makes the plausible case that the combination of Stephen's testimony of his vision, his being full of the Spirit, and his mercy toward his persecutors would have positively affected the observers for the gospel (Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 120-22). Unfortunately, the text leaves us only to speculate on this point.

<sup>706</sup>Frend, for example, asserts, "Stephen's death raised questions in the minds of men like Saul the Pharisee who were already wondering whether the Law was the final answer to sinful man's quest for reconciliation with God." Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 153.

<sup>707</sup>Also note the  $\delta\epsilon$  in verse 3, which contrasts Saul's actions with those of "devout men," who responded to Stephen's death by burying him. Saul's reaction was the opposite.

<sup>708</sup>Rapske's understanding of the phrase is more plausible--it refers to Saul's growing awareness that opposing the gospel is futile. Rapske, "Opposition," 239.

In this section I will address martyrdom's value in evangelism from a broader biblical and historical context. Some of the subsections will present material in support of the contention that martyrdom aids evangelism, while others will qualify that contention or respond to objections against it.<sup>709</sup> I will exclude discussion on the value of martyrdom for introducing social change, which is often discussed by adherents of Liberation Theology,<sup>710</sup> since my concern here is how martyrdom may affect unbelievers in the sense of bringing them to faith.

### *Martyrdom Enhancing the Evangelistic Message*

This discussion is based on the premise that anything that enhances gospel preaching and causes it to be more compelling to the listener will result in more effective evangelism, even though in the examples given actual instances of conversion may not be cited. In support of this premise we may appeal to the apostles' constant appeal to the church to "adorn the doctrine" with their good behavior (Titus 2:9-10; 1 Pet 2:11-12, 3:1-2)<sup>711</sup>, anticipating greater evangelistic success as a result. Acts testifies that the quality of preaching effects results in evangelism; in Iconium the apostles "spoke *in such a manner* that a large number of people believed" (Acts 14:1, italics mine). When signs and wonders enhance gospel preaching, greater results also ensue (Acts 8:5-6, 9:32-43). Therefore, as stated above, any whether good behavior, powerful preaching or signs and wonders, makes evangelism more feature that enhances gospel preaching and causes it to be more compelling to the listener, effective and contributes to the conversion of souls. If features of martyrdom also enhance gospel preaching, then we can conclude that it also positively contributes to evangelism. What aspects of martyrdom, then, can make the gospel more compelling?

First, John's Gospel teaches that evangelism is enhanced by love and unity among believers (John 13:35, 17:21). Earlier in this chapter we saw how martyrdom enhances such unity and mutual concern. Next is the persuasive power of the martyr's verbal testimony. In Acts, as noted, conversions result from powerful preaching combined with miracles (see also 1 Thess 1:5 and Col 4:5-6). Since Christ promised disciples on trial supernatural utterance from the Spirit, we would expect their testimony to be especially compelling. Ramos-Lissón provides us with historical confirmation. After researching the early martyrological literature he concluded that the martyr's speech, including the tone of voice and gestures, proved more convincing to unbelievers than any other aspect of the martyrdom event.<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>709</sup>One specific objection is that in assessing the value of Christian martyrdom for defending the truth of Christianity, some think it proves little because there are other people who have died for their religions and/or philosophical beliefs. Since this issue (the relation of martyrdom to an overall apologetic for Christianity) goes beyond the aim and purpose of this dissertation, I will not discuss it here. For those interested in the apologetic issue, please consult appendix 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>710</sup>See discussion in Javier Jiménez Limón, "Suffering, Death, Cross, and Martyrdom," trans. Dinah Livingstone in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), 702-15; Muhima, "Suffering under Idi Amin," 110-12; Royal, *Catholic Martyrs*, 6; Sobrino, "Die Bedeutung der Märtyrer," 213-15; J. A. T. Robinson, "The Saint of the Secular," in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 3d ed., by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 9-11; and Franklin Sherman, "Death of a Modern Martyr," *The Expository Times* 76 (1964-65): 204-7.

<sup>711</sup>The passages in 1 Pet 3:1-2 and 2:11-12 are especially significant since they concern good behavior before those who reject or actively oppose the faith, similar to what we see in martyrdom.

<sup>712</sup>Ramos-Lissón, "La conversion," 107-8.



Another way martyrdom enhances evangelism comes to light when we examine Paul's contention that his sufferings legitimize his ministry (cf. 2 Cor 11:21-29). His willingness to suffer and risk death demonstrates his depth of the conviction concerning the truth of his message, and he employs this feature to convince the Corinthian church of his true apostolic calling. In a similar way, the martyr's death reveals an equally deep level of conviction that can add persuasiveness to the gospel message he or she represents.<sup>713</sup> Tertullian, wanting to go further, claims that this depth of conviction confirms that the martyr's cause is true: "The suffering of its defenders themselves bespeak trust for it, because nobody would have been willing to be slain but one possessing the truth."<sup>714</sup>

The obvious objection here is that the martyr can be sincere but misguided in his or her conviction. Craig further develops this objection: "Not all the beliefs for which men and women have been prepared to die can be true; some are demonstrably false and some are mutually contradictory. The final judgment about the truth of those beliefs must rest on other grounds than the willingness to forfeit one's life for their sake."<sup>715</sup> Accordingly, Mühlenberg suggests that every martyr-movement needs an apologist to demonstrate that the cause for which the victims died was legitimate; the apologist's vindication, in turn, depends on whether or not the cause is successful in the end.<sup>716</sup>

In light of this objection arguments more sophisticated than Tertullian's may be employed. Fisichella compares martyrdom to language and asserts, "The witness, in proportion to the honesty with which he expresses the content of his experience, reveals his own truthfulness or lack of it; the person receiving the testimony, for his part, having assessed the degree of reliability of what has just been communicated to him, ventures to put his trust in the other party." Since martyrdom is a very deep expression of conviction it should inspire great trust.<sup>717</sup> Chandler and Harvey use similar reasoning: someone can "establish their trustworthiness only by the consistency of their lives and their activities with what they proclaimed. The ultimate test of this consistency might be their willingness to endure death."<sup>718</sup>

At first glance, the arguments of Fisichella, Chandler and Harvey appear inadequate to overturn the abovementioned objection--the martyr could still be sincere, yet mistaken. Nonetheless, the martyrdom experience should compel the thoughtful individual to consider what could have inspired such a strong assurance in the martyr, and should lead him or her into a more serious reflection on the claims of the martyr. This line of reasoning is especially convincing when the issue is not personal conviction, but historical testimony. The alleged martyrdom of eyewitnesses of the resurrection, one of which (James) is recorded in Acts and others of which are supported by tradition, vanquishes the objection that all martyrs are sincere but misguided--these died not for what they merely believed, but for what they

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<sup>713</sup>See similar conclusions in Braght, *Martyr's Mirror*, 359; Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 60-61; Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 442; and Chadwick, "Early Christian Community," 43. Interestingly, the psychological experiment conducted by Wood, Pilisuk and Uren to assess the effect of a "contrived martyrdom" on observers did conclude that it produced a positive change of attitude toward the martyr (Wood, Pilisuk, and Uren, "The Martyr's Personality," 186).

<sup>714</sup>Tertullian, *Against Scorpion* 8, in ANF, vol. 3.

<sup>715</sup>Mary Craig, *Candles in the Dark: Six Modern Martyrs* (London: Sodder and Stoughton, 1984), 9.

<sup>716</sup>Mühlenberg, "The Martyr's Death," 85.

<sup>717</sup>Fisichella, "Martyr," 624.

<sup>718</sup>Chandler and Harvey, "Introduction," 3.

claimed to have seen. Oden expresses well the power of Christianity's basis in historical testimony:

In the period of persecution, the church could not have survived had the incarnation been based upon myth. It is a mockery of the martyrs and failure to listen to the testimony of their lives to assume that their faith was only in a man, not God-man. No hypothesis explains the church's survival of the genocidal history of martyrdom more adequately than that God was in Christ.<sup>719</sup>

At the same time, Christian martyrs have been negatively assessed. Frend feels that often from an unbeliever's perspective the martyrs "appeared to gain nothing. Their God did not rescue them. The gods whom they had insulted were vindicated. Outwardly, in the minds of their contemporaries, the pagan cults had triumphed."<sup>720</sup> This finds confirmation in the letter from the churches of Vienne and Lyons recounting the persecutions among them:

Others laughed and mocked at them, magnifying their own idols, and imputed to them the punishment of the Christians. Even the more reasonable, and those who had seemed to sympathize somewhat, reproached them often, saying, 'Where is their God, and what has their religion, which they have chosen rather than life, profited them?'<sup>721</sup>

According to Bowersock, the martyr's behavior was not always seen as exceptional; rather "pagans could to some degree understand the role of martyrs since they fill the role of the sophist in their life and the agonist in their death. . . . besides, the Greco Roman world had always taken a lively interest in freakish behavior."<sup>722</sup> The most classic example of disdain for Christian martyrdom comes from the pen of Marcus Aurelius,

What a soul that is which is ready, if at any moment it must be separated from the body, and ready either to be extinguished or dispersed or continue to exist; but so that this readiness comes from a man's own judgment, not from mere obstinacy, as with the Christians, but considerately and with dignity and in a way to persuade another, without tragic show.<sup>723</sup>

At the same time, these negative considerations do not defeat the contention that martyrdom enhances evangelism since "enhancement" implies increased success, not total success. Even the most effective evangelization will not convince or convert everyone.

### *Reported Conversions Due to Martyrdom*

Historical testimonies do exist concerning individuals who converted as a result of witnessing the martyrdom event. Delehay specifically lists nearly a dozen converts from

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<sup>719</sup>Oden, *The Word of Life*, 48.

<sup>720</sup>Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 13.

<sup>721</sup>Eusebius, *Ecc.Hist.* 5.1.60, in *PNF-2*, vol 1.

<sup>722</sup>Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 66.

<sup>723</sup>Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 11.3.

martyrdom gleaned from martyrological literature.<sup>724</sup> Eusebius mentions an additional two: the soldiers who led James the Just<sup>725</sup> and Potamiaena<sup>726</sup> to execution. The celebrated church fathers Justin Martyr<sup>727</sup> and Tertullian<sup>728</sup> were converted due to the influence of martyrs. Speaking more generally, Ramos-Lissón feels conversion through martyrdom must have been common because such accounts became “commonplace in the hagiographic literature.”<sup>729</sup>

### *Martyrdom and Church Growth*

It is a long-standing conviction that martyrdom leads to church growth. In this section we will observe, by surveying various authors, how widespread this conviction has been in church history. Then we will make some needed qualifications, leading to the conclusion that this claim in unsubstantiated.

The oft-quoted phrase, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,” traces back to Tertullian, who wrote, “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; *the blood of Christians is seed.*”<sup>730</sup> Before Tertullian, Justin expressed the same:

For it is plain that, though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but the more such things happen, the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful, and worshippers of God through the name of Jesus. For just as if one should cut away the fruit-bearing parts of a vine, it grows up again, and yields other branches flourishing and fruitful; even so the same thing happens with us.<sup>731</sup>

Clearly, the early church valued the apologetic efficacy of martyrdom, on a par even with miracles: “If one surveys the early literature in its entirety, simply in terms of the frequency of references, the Christians’ willingness to die for Christ in martyrdom was an equally prominent apologetic theme as miraculous displays of power.”<sup>732</sup>

Reformation writers echo this thought as well. Luther says, “The church has always grown by blood; she has been irrigated and planted by blood,”<sup>733</sup> and, “The more people oppress it,

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<sup>724</sup>“ . . . Anatolius and Protoleon in the Acts of St. George; Antiochus and Patricius in those of St. Theodore; Aphthonius, one of the executioners of St. Acindynus; Félix the officer sent to capture St. *Eleuthère* and later three others; Denys and Callimachus, the torturers who tore the body of saint Paphune. It is not rare that these lead still others to conversion. Celsus, an officer of Licinius, confessed Christ with the entire troop which he commanded; the same (occurred with) Anatolius, whose battalion was comprised of not less than 3099 men. At the head of their soldiers, Nicostratus and Anatolius were converted and submitted to martyrdom.” From H. Delehay, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (n.p.: Brussels, 1921), 249-50. Cited in Ramos-Lissón, “La conversion,” 104, footnote 12. Translation mine.

<sup>725</sup>Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.* 2.9.2-3.

<sup>726</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.5.4-6.

<sup>727</sup>Justin, *Apology II* 12.

<sup>728</sup>See Ton, *Rewards in Heaven*, 349.

<sup>729</sup>Ramos-Lissón, “La conversion,” 104. Translation mine.

<sup>730</sup>Tertullian, *Apology* 50, in *ANF*, vol. 3.

<sup>731</sup>Justin, *Dialogue* 110, in *ANF*, vol. 1.

<sup>732</sup>Bradley, “Miracles and Martyrdom,” 72.

<sup>733</sup>Luther, *What Luther Says*, 1.282.

the more it spreads and prospers.”<sup>734</sup> John Foxe also believed that the church grew through martyrdom.<sup>735</sup> Modern writers, like Strong, continue the tradition, “Christianity rises in spite of, nay, in consequence of opposition, like a kite against the wind. . . . The sufferings of martyrs add to the number of the church.”<sup>736</sup>

Several substantial objections to the “martyrdom as seed” concept, however, have been voiced and deserve consideration. First, one must acknowledge that this claim is based on the historical correspondence of martyrdom and church growth. Bauckham insightfully observes that we may not have sufficient historical information to assess all the factors that could have contributed to church growth during times of persecution.<sup>737</sup> Killingray, commenting on persecution in Africa, notes that there, too, church growth occurred during times of opposition, yet he attributes the growth to “economic and social change and instability, and the movement of people,” which “tend to fracture traditional institutions and call into question indigenous beliefs, while providing a climate for the reception of new ideas, including new religious beliefs and values.”<sup>738</sup>

In addition, historical arguments have been advanced to support the opposite thesis—that persecution and martyrdom hinder church growth. Gregory attributes the small number of Anabaptists to their political vulnerability and severe persecution.<sup>739</sup> Shea notes the decline of Christianity in the Middle East.<sup>740</sup>

Galli relates several disturbing reports.<sup>741</sup> During the 1500’s and early 1600’s the 300,000-member church of Japan was reduced to a handful due to martyrdom and apostasy. In the Maghrib (Northwest Africa) the number of bishoprics declined from over thirty in 780 to six in 1015. By 1400 there were none. The expansion of the evangelistically active Eastern Orthodox Church was limited from the mid-fifteenth century on due to pressure from Muslims and Tartars. Galli summarizes,

These are not the kinds of martyr stories we love to hear about or talk about. . . . To be sure, at times and places, each of those principles can be seen at work in history of the church. But just as often our utilitarian grid for understanding the worth of martyrdom has shown to be forced and contrived.<sup>742</sup>

These above mentioned concerns are substantial. We must then conclude that until evidence is produced that can statistically demonstrate consistent church growth during

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<sup>734</sup>Ibid., 1.396. Similar statements in Luther, *What Luther Says*, 2.1035; 2.1040. See also Fischer, “La Notion du martyre,” 514.

<sup>735</sup>Noted by Knott, *Discourses*, 37.

<sup>736</sup>Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907; reprint, Philadelphia: Judson, 1945), 442 (page numbers from reprint edition). See also Wagner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 199; Figura, “Following of Jesus,” 109; Blunt, ed., *Martyrs*, 447; and Cunningham, “Saints and Martyrs,” 534.

<sup>737</sup>Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 151. Workman and van Rompay note mass conversions during peaceful times as well. See Workman, *Persecution*, 241; and Rompay, “Impetuous Martyrs,” 371.

<sup>738</sup>Killingray, “Martyrdom in the African Church,” 466.

<sup>739</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 249.

<sup>740</sup>Shea notes the following: Iraq, from 35 percent to 5 percent; Iran, from 15 to 2; Syria, from 40 to 10; Turkey, from 32 to 0.2. The time period of this decline apparently was not noted by the author, but likely refers to the period from the beginning of the Moslem conquests until the present time. See Shea, *Lion’s Den*, 15.

<sup>741</sup>Galli, “Sometimes,” 16-19.

<sup>742</sup>Ibid., 16

periods of persecution and martyrdom, accounting for other possible contributing factors, the contention that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” remains unsubstantiated.

### Conclusions and Final Clarifications

From both our didactic and narrative passages we can conclude that persecution and martyrdom are sometimes consequences of evangelistic gospel preaching, and that martyrdom provides a unique opportunity to make known the claims of Christ. But we find no direct scriptural evidence to support that martyrdom itself moves people to conversion. Sweet makes a similar assessment of the exegetical evidence (or rather, lack of it) in the New Testament for this aspect of martyrdom and evangelism:

It is no doubt true that underserved suffering and death, lovingly borne, works on men’s consciences and turns their hearts, but in Revelation, and in the rest of the New Testament, just as the suffering of the μάρτυρες is not the content of the μαρτυρία, so it is nowhere said that the awareness of their *suffering* brings men to repentance. Even in 1 Peter, where there are more references to suffering for righteousness’ sake than anywhere else, this is nowhere inculcated for its saving effects on the persecutor--it is simply what Christians are called to, in imitation of Christ; the prelude of judgment on the persecutors and of glory for the Christians.

Even in the Gospels it is hard to find any suggestion that the sight of innocent *suffering* turns men’s hearts.<sup>743</sup>

Appeal to general principles does lend some support. There we reasoned that any feature that makes the gospel message more compelling, such as the scriptural examples of good behavior, powerful preaching and signs and wonders, may positively contribute to evangelism and the salvation of souls. Martyrdom does possess such features such as enhancing concern among brethren, the Spirit-inspired testimony of the martyr, and that suffering can demonstrate the sincerity of and validate ministry.

This final feature is especially compelling when the sufferer is testifying not to personal convictions, but to a historical event he or she claimed to witness, such as the resurrection of Christ, since it would appear inconceivable to any thinking person that one (or, in the case of the resurrection, many) would undergo torment and death in defense of a claim he or she knew to be fabricated. The fact that some unbelievers, Marcus Aurelius for example, come away unimpressed by Christian martyrdom does not defeat this argument. No one would claim that to be considered effective an approach or argument must convince everyone.

The fact that testimonies exist ascribing conversion to martyrdom directly confirms that it does add a degree of persuasiveness to evangelism. Unfortunately, historical evidence is too inconclusive to claim that it is a major factor in church growth. Also, in contrast to the other facets of martyrdom we have investigated in this dissertation, we lack explicit scriptural testimony that witnessing martyrdom directly stirs the heart and moves people to conversion.

All this leaves us with somewhat tentative conclusions regarding martyrdom’s effectiveness in regard to evangelism--a curiosity in light of the fact that of all the aspects of

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<sup>743</sup>Sweet, “Maintaining the Testimony,” 108.

martyrdom discussed, conversion through martyrdom is likely the one most firmly held in the popular mind.

## CHAPTER 7: FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATIONS

### *Summary of Findings*

In concluding this study I will attempt to further develop the conclusions reached in the previous chapters and combine them into an overall construal regarding God's purpose in martyrdom. A section on how the martyr concept might impact contemporary evangelical Christianity will follow.

When we looked at the experience of the participants in the martyrdom event we discovered that certain "benefits" are achieved in respect to the furtherance of God's plan (which we earlier defined as consisting of the glory of God and a relationship of love between God and people). Martyrdom advances God's plan in respect to the martyr by providing him or her the opportunity to demonstrate faithfulness to God, experience intimate identification with Christ, and express devotion to Him.

A fourth aspect also mentioned in connection with the martyr's experience, but developed in a later chapter, was his or her witness to Christ. These aspects of the martyrdom experience clearly enhance the martyr's relationship with God. We have also noted the "radical" nature of the martyr's demonstration of faith and devotion, and of his or her experience of identification with Christ--martyrdom provides the arena for these features to be expressed or experienced to the highest degree.

Next, we examined the participation of the persecutor in the martyrdom event. We saw that the rejection and murder of God's servants provides God with grounds for judging the persecutor, through which He will receive glory for the display of His power and justice. In addition, we discovered substantial evidence that martyrdom provokes God's judgment possibly more than any other single factor. Although, as discussed in chapter 4, we are not able to claim that instigating martyrdom is the ultimate rejection of God, yet we can safely claim, based on multiple passages, that it is an extreme example of a person's depraved character and hatred of God and His people.

In chapter 5 the value of martyrdom in respect to God was highlighted, where it was shown that in the martyrdom event God manifests His grace on behalf of the martyr, enabling the latter's heroic endurance. As a result, God receives glory and His purpose is thereby advanced. Furthermore, we stated that the martyrdom event places God's grace on display to a remarkable degree, arguably greater than any other single act in a human individual's life (excluding the life and redemptive work of Jesus Christ).

Also in chapter 5 we concluded that Satan's involvement in the martyrdom event contributes to God's plan in that God is glorified by Satan's defeat in the "battle of wills" with the martyr. Satan's defeat in martyrdom, of course, is less climactic than his eventual eschatological judgment. Yet one might argue that, on this side of eternity, Satan suffers no greater defeat in an individual's life than when he is free to use nearly every instrument of torture and coercion available to him and still does not secure a believer's recantation.

In chapter 6 we concluded that the example of the martyr challenges other believers to re-examine their commitment to Christ and deepen their dedication to Him. Martyrdom may benefit unbelieving observers in a similar way--by moving them to repentance and faith. Yet our conclusions in regard to the unbeliever are admittedly more tentative since we lack direct biblical evidence for the effect of martyrdom for turning hearts to faith.

## Synthesis of Findings

As stated in the first chapter of this dissertation, a major goal of this paper is not only to determine the specific ways that martyrdom furthers the plan of God in respect to the individual participants and observers of the event, but also to contribute toward a general construal or biblical model of martyrdom. This will require attempting a synthesis of our findings. In seeking such a synthesis, one must determine what common feature or features appear in the experiences of all the participants or observers of the martyrdom event. Upon surveying the conclusions from our separate investigations, the features that appear most evident are the related ideas of *climax* and *clarification*. We will begin with the idea of *climax*.

We note that the experiences of all the primary and secondary participants in the martyrdom event, namely the martyr, the persecutor, God and Satan, can be characterized as exceptional or climactic. The martyr, for example, undergoes the ultimate test of faith, has an ultimate experience of identification with Christ, and shows ultimate devotion to Him. The persecutor, although not displaying the most radical rejection of God possible (in comparison, for example, with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit), nonetheless demonstrates extremely depraved behavior, and provokes God's judgment to an extreme degree. God displays His grace in a remarkable way in the life of the martyr, arguably surpassed only by the demonstration of His grace through Christ.

Finally, Satan's defeat in martyrdom is likely unparalleled in this present age since, in spite of the great freedom he is granted to oppress the martyr, he is unable to overcome the latter's perseverance. In regard to both believing and unbelieving observers or learners of the event--they are challenged to make a major life decision in regard to their faith and total direction in life, a decision that could result in them someday facing the same hatred and hostility that they witnessed or learned of in the martyrdom event. Such a decision could also be characterized as climactic.

In viewing martyrdom from the point of view of *climax*, what next becomes apparent is the contrast between the climactic experiences of the participants in the martyrdom event. God and the martyr, on the one hand, demonstrate such positive virtues as devotion, faithfulness and victory through grace. Satan and the persecutor, on the other hand, display the contrasting qualities of cruelty, injustice and ineptitude. Since these features are demonstrated to an extreme degree on both sides of the contrast, the *climax* becomes a *polarization* between God and the representatives of His kingdom on one side, and Satan and the representatives of his domain on the other. This is the same polarization that was independently demonstrated in chapter 3 of this dissertation, "The Historico-Theological Backdrop of Martyrdom," where the age-old conflict between the "City of God" and the "City of This World" was highlighted. Martyrdom sets God's kingdom in sharp contrast to its rival realm and makes the combatants in this cosmic struggle more distinctly recognizable.

Thus, we are justified in speaking of martyrdom as a *moment of climax* in the unfolding of salvation history, in which the kingdom of God is on brilliant display via the martyr's conduct and the demonstration of God's grace, and where the wicked nature of the forces of evil is also clearly evident. Yet at the same time it is advisable to qualify our description here, and refer to martyrdom as a moment of *pre-eschatological climax*, in order to avoid giving the impression



that we are assigning to martyrdom a status equal to the ultimate climax of salvation history--the second coming of Christ and His subsequent judgment and rule.<sup>744</sup>

Thus, the climactic nature of the martyrdom event demonstrates the polarization that exists between the kingdom of God and the domain of darkness. This observation leads to the final feature of martyrdom useful for our general construal--martyrdom not only as a moment of *climax*, but also as a moment of *clarification*. As shown in chapter 6, the example of the martyr challenges other believers to re-examine their commitment to Christ and deepen their dedication to Him. In light of our discussion above, martyrdom possibly produces such an effect because believers perceive in the martyrdom event the stark contrast between good and evil, between darkness and light.

Consequently they are compelled to recognize the cosmic conflict underway and side with God in opposition to Satan and the world. Thus, all "gray zones" are removed, and areas of compromise with the world are revealed. In this way, the *moment of climax* becomes a *moment of clarification* for the believing observer--in the light of the martyrdom event he or she is able to better understand the nature of the cosmic conflict and his or her proper relation to it.

Martyrdom may benefit the unbelieving observers in a similar way. They, too, can observe the bravery, integrity and virtue of the martyr, who is supernaturally enabled by God, in distinction to the cruelty, injustice and ineptitude of the persecutor. Thus, this *moment of climax* can serve as a *moment of clarification* for them as well. How effectively this experience turns their hearts to God, however, is more difficult to establish. Our examination in chapter 6 of pertinent passages failed to firmly establish a solid connection between martyrdom and conversion. It appears that, although martyrdom provides a *moment of clarification* for saint and sinner alike, it is more efficacious for the former.

This can possibly be explained by the fact that the believing observer benefits from a worldview that recognizes the spiritual conflict between God and Satan, church and world. Thus they can more easily perceive in martyrdom the dramatization of this conflict and are consequently compelled to choose sides. The unbelieving observer, though, does not share this worldview and therefore may more easily misinterpret martyrdom as simply a political issue, a tragic event in the lives of certain exemplary individuals (the martyrs), or an example of the cruelty of certain exceptional individuals (the persecutors), whose depravity is not seen as a reflection of a fallen nature common to all humanity.

In light of the material presented in this dissertation and summarized in the preceding pages, I contend that the thesis, stated in my introduction, is substantiated: *Martyrdom, in respect to its contribution to the plan of God, can be described as a moment of pre-eschatological climax or clarification in the ongoing struggle between the kingdoms of God and Satan, where the best and worst are brought out in all participants in the event; as a point of crescendo in the musical score of salvation history, where the full vibrancy of each instrument is clearly heard; as a foretaste of the so-called "Great Divide," where the dramatic polarization between good and evil takes place; and, consequently, as a "reality check" for observers or hearers of the event, reminding them that there is no middle ground between the kingdom of God and the domain of darkness.*

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<sup>744</sup>At the same time, eschatology has a present aspect--it "breaks in" to our everyday life. In experiencing or observing martyrdom, one is participating in a quasi-eschatological event, and experiencing, in an anticipatory fashion, the eschaton itself. (Comment suggested by Willem VanGemeren upon review of this chapter.)

### *Contemporary Applications*

The remaining matter to consider is the relevance of these findings for the contemporary evangelical church. Certainly, for those segments of the Body of Christ presently suffering persecution and undergoing martyrdom the application of this study is straightforward. Such believers can benefit from a biblical model of martyrdom for interpreting their experience, giving meaning to their suffering, inspiring endurance and appreciating the beauty of God's plan.

For the non-suffering church, however, different applications can be suggested. Reflection on martyrdom, as discussed in the first section of chapter 6, has a multiplicity of benefits. In addition to those mentioned there, it can inspire endurance not only for the ultimate sacrifice, but for the many smaller sacrifices Christians are called to make each day. It can forge unity between rival evangelical groups as we appreciate our common doctrinal heritage won and preserved for us by the martyrs' blood.

Martyrdom also plays a useful role in the perpetual tension between what one might call the "theology of creation" and the "theology of redemption." The "theology of creation" emphasizes unity and mutual respect between all people as creatures of one Creator, whereas the "theology of redemption" recognizes the dichotomy and inevitable conflict between the regenerate and unregenerate. The contemporary evangelical church appears at the present time to be moving toward a renewed emphasis on the doctrine of creation. Chandler and Harvey refer to this trend:

Most of the faithful have sought to reconcile a resolve to be distinct from the wider environment with a wish to be part of it, and to redeem it. Once Christians assured themselves that the whole world was the creation of God, and that it was good, that it lives in his care and under his judgment, they found themselves participants, not abstainers, in its great questions.<sup>745</sup>

This can be viewed as a welcome trend, since the doctrine of creation has not received sufficient attention in past generations. Yet a balance between the doctrines of creation and redemption must be maintained. Although believers may have much in common with the world at large, martyrdom reminds us that we are also engaged in an intense spiritual struggle with the forces of darkness that control this present world system and unregenerate people. No event more dramatically portrays this conflict than the martyr's death.

Possibly most significant is the check martyrdom provides on the relativistic tendencies prevailing in many societies today, and in certain segments of Christendom. In today's relativistic milieu, where flexibility, compromise and toleration are championed, martyrdom appears, at best, as an oddity and, at worst, as pathological rigidity.

Eugene and Anita Weiner provide valuable insight into how martyrdom is likely perceived by many today:

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<sup>745</sup>Chandler and Harvey, "Introduction," 2.

In the modern Western world, the psychological climate discourages total commitment and martyrdom. Individuals willing to martyr themselves for a cause strike us as irrational and motivated by psychological problems. . . . the individual who is irrevocably committed to particular convictions seems needlessly inflexible.<sup>746</sup>

They relate the concern by some that behavior patterns exhibited by martyrs are “dangerous to the democratic process which is based on a rational give and take and on a process of compromise.”<sup>747</sup>

In an interesting article in *Mennonite Life*, Melvin Goering expresses an opinion radically divergent from original Mennonite (Anabaptist) thinking about martyrdom during the Reformation period.<sup>748</sup> He relates that in the past Mennonites staunchly held to a “two kingdoms” view, similar to what was described in chapter 3 of this dissertation. Their proclamation and defense of the “truth” was uncompromising:

Martyrs project a clarity of belief, a sense of being correct against all odds. They are right and they know it, no matter the degree to which they are in a numeric minority. . . . One can profess a position or witness to another person if one has the truth in one's possession. Martyrs provide a witness, not a serious quest for truth or the meaning of faithfulness in conversation with those outside the church. If you have the answers you evangelize, if not you dialogue.<sup>749</sup>

Goering attributes this earlier dogmatic attitude to social/psychological factors such as social isolation, suspicion of authority and passion for personal piety at the expense of the greater social concern. He feels such thinking is outdated and inappropriate for today's Mennonite. There is a greater need now to learn how to be faithful “in the *midst of culture*.”<sup>750</sup> Goering feels that in the future martyrologies should promote “obedience with flexibility, beliefs without dogmatism, faithfulness within culture, ethical leadership within institutions, love and justice within social structures, conviction in the midst of ambiguity, dialogue without arrogance, care without condensation, openness without disintegration.”<sup>751</sup> Although there are positive elements in Goering's proposal, a concern arises about how far “beliefs without dogmatism” and “faithfulness within cultural” are being taken.

The dangers of relativism to conservative evangelical faith are clear: the compromise of essential truth and abandonment of aggressive evangelization for the sake of peaceful coexistence with dissenting groups. The attitude of believers in the Reformation period provides a stark contrast. Gregory notes that Reformation theologians were “horrified and disgusted” at the concept of religious toleration: “They *preferred* a world in which truth did battle . . . It is mistaken to think then they might have shelved their competing commitments

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<sup>746</sup>Weiner and Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction*, 1.

<sup>747</sup>Quotation from Vree, “Stripped Clean--Berrigans and Politics of Guilt and Martyrdom,” *Ethics* 85, no. 4 (date of publication not noted): 271-87, cited in Weiner and Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction*, 21.

<sup>748</sup>Melvin Goering, “Dying to Be Pure: The Martyr Story,” *Mennonite Life* 47, no. 4 (December 1992): 9-15.

<sup>749</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>750</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>751</sup>*Ibid.*, 14-15.

to Christian truth for the sake of peaceful coexistence.”<sup>752</sup> Theologians of that time did not give “peaceful coexistence priority over God's truth.”<sup>753</sup>

Martyrdom, as traditionally understood and defended in this dissertation, is antithetical to relativism. Martyrdom asserts, in the most dramatic way humanly possible, that absolute standards do exist, and that one can have the assurance of truth to such a degree that death appears a small price to pay in its defense.

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<sup>752</sup>Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 346. A key aspect to emphasize here is Gregory's statement that “truth” does battle. A battle for “truth” does not necessarily need to involve armed conflict, or in any way justify acts of violence such as those perpetrated by some Islamic fundamentalists. In earlier chapters I made clear that both scriptural teaching and early church tradition denounce the use of violence in the propagation or defense of Christianity, a principle that, unfortunately, not all participants in the Reformation applied.

<sup>753</sup>*Ibid.*, 347.

## APPENDIX 1: DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARTUS WORDGROUP IN CANONICAL LITERATURE AND ITS ANTECEDENTS

### *Μάρτυς in Greek Literature*

Originally, μάρτυς was a forensic term, designating a witness, testimony or evidence.<sup>754</sup> Another notable usage, seen as early as Plato, is μάρτυς as a witness to convictions.<sup>755</sup> Aristotle used it to refer to interpretation of facts as well as relating of facts.<sup>756</sup> Most significantly, μάρτυς was used when philosophers defended their convictions under threat of death.<sup>757</sup> Coenen writes, “The Cynic or Stoic philosopher regarded himself as a witness called to give evidence on behalf of divine truth, in that he testified to the truth of his ideas and doctrines by his conduct in adverse circumstances.”<sup>758</sup> By far the most progressive thinker in this regard was Epictetus. He speaks of a philosopher as “a witness summoned by God. God says, ‘Go you and bear witness for Me; for you are worthy to be produced by Me as a witness’.”<sup>759</sup>

Epictetus rebukes those who would complain if ill-treated on account of their witness: “Is this the witness that you are going to bear, and is this the way in which you are going to disgrace the summons which He gave, in that He bestowed this honour upon you and deemed you worthy to be brought forward in order to bear testimony so important?”<sup>760</sup>

Based on the above we can claim that μάρτυς terminology in ancient Greece referred to verbal testimony, which was sometimes given in a hostile context. Whether or not the term actually developed the nuance “suffering witness,” though, is unclear.

### *Μάρτυς in the Old Testament*

The occurrence of μάρτυς and its cognates in the Septuagint almost completely coincides with the טוע wordgroup in the Hebrew text,<sup>761</sup> and thus the terms share essentially the same semantic field of meaning. The major exception is the phrase τῇ σκηνῇ τοῦ μαρτυρίου, “the tent of testimony,” which frequently translates אהל מועד “tent of meeting,” and is thought to be a scribal error, the scribe mistaking מועד for a variant of טע.<sup>762</sup>

Terms in the טוע wordgroup can designate essentially one of three things. First, they can refer to evidence or material items that symbolize an agreement (see Gen 31:52). The two tablets of stone, on which the Ten Commandments were written, might be considered this type of “witness.” They are called the “tablets of the testimony” (Exod 5:16, 31:18, 32:15,

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<sup>754</sup>Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:476.

<sup>755</sup>Coenen, “μαρτυρία,” 3:1039-40.

<sup>756</sup>Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 7-8.

<sup>757</sup>Günther, “Zeuge und Märtyrer,” 145, who cites J. Geffcken, *Hermes* XLV, 1910: 493-97.

<sup>758</sup>Coenen, “μαρτυρία,” 3:1039-40.

<sup>759</sup>Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.29.47-50, in *LCL*, page number not noted.

<sup>760</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>761</sup>Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:482.

<sup>762</sup>Lewis, Jack P., “טע,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:389. Same conclusion in Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:482.

34:29) which “represented God’s covenant with Israel.”<sup>763</sup> They were located in the “ark of the testimony” (Exod 25:22), a term synonymous with the “ark of the covenant.”<sup>764</sup> The sanctuary is sometimes called the “dwelling place,” “tent,” or “tabernacle” for the testimony (Exod 38:21; Num 9:15, 10:11), and the inner veil is once called the “veil of testimony” (Lev 24:3). Thus, the tablets, and their associated objects, were physical “evidence” of God’s covenant with Israel.

The second referent for the *τιω* wordgroup is the eyewitness.<sup>765</sup> Beyond the common legal usage, God is often depicted as a witness of the deeds of men; sometimes of good deeds (1 Sam 12:5; Job 16:19), but more often of evil ones (Ps 50:7; Jer 29:23; Mic 1:2; Mal 3:5). Conversely, Israel can be eyewitnesses of the acts of God, thus establishing His uniqueness and the claim that He alone is God (Isa 43:8-10, 44:8).

Thirdly, the *dw[* wordgroup can designate a simple “command” or “warning” without legal connotations or appeal to evidence or testimony.<sup>766</sup> This usage continues in the rabbinic writings, where “witness” can refer to teaching, carrying the sense “proclamation.”<sup>767</sup>

Some special features in the use of *τιω* seem to anticipate the later New Testament usage of *μάρτυς*. First, it has been noted that in Old Testament thought the witness not only presented evidence, but also took sides in the dispute and tried to convince the opposition: “In the Old Testament legal assembly the same man was both witness and advocate.”<sup>768</sup> This understanding has special application to God’s “special witnesses,” namely the prophets, who represented God before the people. Their message is not infrequently referred to as “testimony.”<sup>769</sup>

There are two possible explanations of the nature of the prophet’s “witness.” It could be related to the meaning of *τιω* as “command/warning” since this was the typical character of the prophet’s message. The Septuagint translators apparently favored this option, nearly always translating *τιω* and its cognates in such contexts with *διαμαρτύρομαι*. This Greek term conventionally carries the simple sense of “declaring emphatically,” whether a warning, promise, or commandment.<sup>770</sup>

It is possible, though, that the prophets are relating God’s testimony of events He has witnessed and are serving as His advocates.<sup>771</sup> We note, for example, that in Jer 42:5 the remnant in Palestine invokes God as witness if they do not obey the counsel of Jeremiah concerning their planned migration to Egypt. When the people rebel, however, Jeremiah “testifies against” them (Jer 42:19) as if he is communicating God’s witness. Since prophets receive God’s witness by revelation, one might also conclude that they are witnesses to

<sup>763</sup>Carl Schultz, “*עוּד*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:649.

<sup>764</sup>It is called the “ark of the covenant” 43 times and the “ark of the testimony” 14 times, or sometimes simply the “Testimony” (see Exod 16:34, 27:21, others).

<sup>765</sup>See, for example, Exod 20:16, 23; Lev 5:1; Jer 32:10-12.

<sup>766</sup>See Gen 43:3; Exod 19:23, 21:29; Deut 32:46; 1 Kgs 2:42; 2 Kgs 17:13-15; Neh 13:15, 21.

<sup>767</sup>Coenen, “*μαρτυρία*,” 3:1042.

<sup>768</sup>Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 21-22.

<sup>769</sup>See Deut 8:19; 2 Kgs 17:13-15; Neh 9:26-34; 2 Chr 24:19; Amos 3:13; and Jer 42:19.

<sup>770</sup>Strathmann, “*μάρτυς*,” 4:511-512.

<sup>771</sup>Similarly, Chisholm writes, “In theological contexts Yahweh’s prophets sometimes function as his witnesses who testify and/or accuse” (Robert B. Chisholm, “*עוּד*,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997], 3:336).

revelation--they “bear witness to what they have been admitted to see and hear in the Council of Yahweh.”<sup>772</sup>

Whatever the nature of the prophetic witness might be, the response to their witness is consistently rejection, often accompanied by active persecution. It may be noteworthy that in two of the six places where the prophet’s message is referred to as “witness” we find in the immediate context one of the rare occurrences where the killing of a prophet is recorded in the Old Testament (2 Chr 24:19; Neh 9:26).

Although we can see some similarities between the usage of the *τιν* wordgroup (and consequently of *μάρτυς* in the Septuagint) and the traditional martyrological conception of “dying for the faith,” the technical usage of *μάρτυς* as *martyr* is absent in the Greek Old Testament.<sup>773</sup> The martyrological conception is present,<sup>774</sup> but the term *μάρτυς* does not specifically refer to it.

### *Μάρτυς in the Intertestamental Literature*

We will go on to examine briefly *martyr* terminology in the intertestamental period. Ernst Günther<sup>775</sup> notes a usage of the *μάρτυς* wordgroup during this period that resembles what we described in the previous section as the “prophet witness.” In the Book of Jubilees Moses, Enoch, Noah and Abraham are transmitters of heavenly revelation. Although they are not called “witnesses” *per se*, witness terminology is nonetheless employed. For example, in Jub 6:38 God addresses Noah, “For this reason I command and testify to thee that thou mayst testify to them.”<sup>776</sup> These men serve as “apocalyptic witnesses,” declaring the eschatological judgment of God. Günther goes on to note that this construal of the “heavenly, apocalyptic witness” is echoed in the Fourth Gospel’s portrayal of Jesus as witness of the Father.

Such intertestamental writers as Josephus and Philo contribute little new to our understanding of *martyr* terminology. Strathmann reports that they limit their usage of the *μάρτυς* wordgroup to the basic, forensic meaning of the terms.<sup>777</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls add little to our discussion as well.<sup>778</sup> It is significant that the Maccabean literature, which abounds with accounts of dying for the faith, essentially refrains from *μάρτυς* terminology (see exception below).

To conclude our consideration of the intertestamental literature we may note two significant passages. The first is in Recension B of the *Testament of Abraham*, where it is

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<sup>772</sup>Manson, “Martyrs and Martyrdom,” 469.

<sup>773</sup>W. F. Dicharry, “Martyr (in the Bible),” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 6:314; Coenen, “marturiva,” 3:1042.

<sup>774</sup>As Trites writes, “Just as it was the destiny of the Old Testament prophets to experience persecution, suffering and death for the sake of their message, so it is also the lot of the prophetic witness of Jesus” (*New Testament Concept*, 160). Like the later New Testament martyrs, “the prophets sealed their testimony with their blood.” (Gustav Friedrich Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* [Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1873; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1978], 413 [page citations are to reprint edition]).

<sup>775</sup>See Günther, “Zeuge und Märtyrer,” 153-56.

<sup>776</sup>O. S. Wintermute, ed. and trans., “Jubilees,” in *OTP*, 2:35-142.

<sup>777</sup>Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:488-89.

<sup>778</sup>See Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 52-53. In 1QS 8:1-8 we do find reference to those who “preserve the faith in the Land with steadfastness” and suffer “the sorrows of affliction.” These “shall be witnesses to the truth at the Judgment.”

written of Abel: οὗτος ὁ Ἄβελ, ὁ ἐν πρώτοις μαρτυρήσας καὶ ἤνεγκεν αὐτὸν ὥδε ὁ θεὸς κρίνειν, “This is Abel, the one who bore witness in the beginning, and God has brought him here to judge.”<sup>779</sup> The other passage is 4 Macc 16:16, where the mother of the seven brothers slain during the Seleucid persecutions cries out this word of encouragement to one of her perishing sons, “My son, noble is the contest to which you are called to bear witness for the nation. Fight zealously for our ancestral law.” In both passages a member of the μάρτυς wordgroup is associated with a righteous sufferer who died a violent death. Although the term is not used in the technical sense of *martyr*, it is notable that, at least in the case of 4 Maccabees, the righteous sufferer dies because of his witness.

### *Μάρτυς in the New Testament*

To investigate the usage of the μάρτυς wordgroup by various New Testament authors we will initially draw on the work of A. A. Trites.<sup>780</sup> Trites finds the usage in the Synoptics and Paul basically unremarkable--for the most part we find, with some variation, the basic forensic meaning.<sup>781</sup> An important exception is Mark 13:9 (and parallels), which we will discuss later. The General Epistles present such variation in meaning that one is unable to make any generalizations about the word usage in these books. Luke/Acts and John, however, both develop an extensive theology of “witness,” employing the μάρτυς wordgroup.

In Luke/Acts, the issue is providing a convincing case for Christianity based on historical evidence. Three lines of evidence are advanced: the apostolic witness of the resurrection, the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. Trites provides this helpful summary:

The witness of the apostles guarantees both the historic facts of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the authoritative form of their transmission and communication. The witness of the Spirit makes possible the boldness of the apostles and other Christians, and enables them to perform signs and wonders which provide external confirmation of their testimony. The witness of both the apostles and the Spirit is strengthened by a third witness, that of the Old Testament Scriptures (10:43), which serves to confirm and corroborate the evidence presented by the other two sources. When taken together, Luke maintains, the witness of the apostles, the Spirit and the Old Testament constitute a compelling case for the claims of Christ as Lord and Messiah.<sup>782</sup>

In connection with the Book of Acts, much discussion has arisen about the character of Paul’s witness. He was not an “eyewitness from the beginning,” as were the twelve apostles, yet his preaching is nonetheless called “testimony” (Acts 22:18, 23:11, 26:22). Acts 22:15 and 26:16 make clear that Paul’s “witness” was connected to his visionary experiences, both on the

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<sup>779</sup>Michael E. Stone, *The Testament of Abraham: The Greek Recensions*, Texts and Translations: Pseudepigrapha series, ed. Robert W. Funk, no. 2 (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 79.

<sup>780</sup>The following discussion, through my page 263 (unless otherwise noted) is based on Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 78-210.

<sup>781</sup>In Paul the wordgroup is also used in the sense of “exhortation.” See Eph 4:17; 1 Thess 2:11; Gal 5:3.

<sup>782</sup>Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 153.



Damascus Road and later. Trites and Hocedez feel that Paul qualifies as a witness of Christ's resurrection like the other apostles by virtue of these visions.<sup>783</sup> Strathmann, however, feels that such experiences do not qualify him as a *historical* witness. He proposes that in the ministry of Paul the meaning of "witness" as "confessor" begins to predominate--Paul is a witness *to Christ*, not *of Christ*.<sup>784</sup> We will comment later on this important transition in meaning from "eyewitness" to "confessor."

The witness of the believers in Acts sparks hostility from opponents of the gospel. A climatic point in the persecution is the death of Stephen, whom Paul calls μάρτυς in his prayer to Christ in Acts 22:20 even though Stephen was not a witness of Christ's resurrection. We will return to this point a bit later.

The "forensic" character of John's Gospel is evident. We often encounter terms such as *judge, cause, judgment, accuse* and *convince*. The frequent use of questions also hints at judicial process. Also, the term *Paraclete* primarily means "advocate." Thus, John portrays the ongoing contention between Jesus and the Jews (representing the unbelieving world) primarily in legal terms. "Witness," consequently, becomes a central theme.

John's "theology of witness" has some common features with Luke's. The issue is still "the Messiahship and divine Sonship of Jesus."<sup>785</sup> Again, Jesus has certain advocates: the Father, John the Baptist, Scripture, His works (here called "signs," meaning "evidence"), and later the witness of the apostles and the Spirit. The disciples suffer the hatred of the world for their mission of witness, just as Jesus suffered for His.

To Trites's discussion here we can add insights from Strathmann's work. He rightly contends that in the writings of John the testimony to Jesus goes beyond the historical facts of his life and is directed toward "the nature and significance of his person." He cites 1 John 4:14-15 and 1 John 1:1-3 as examples where eyewitness testimony and confession of faith merge. The aspect of eyewitness testimony is not abandoned, but the sense goes deeper to include personal conviction--it is "not merely or primarily in the sense of external historical attestation but in the sense of witness to what faith has come to know of Jesus."<sup>786</sup> In this latter sense any believer can be a witness.

Others have noted another significant aspect of John's usage of witness terminology. In John's gospel Jesus is not only the object of the witness, but the witness itself. He is a witness of the truth (John 18:37) and of heavenly things (John 3:11, 32-33). Coenen writes, "Jesus himself is the mediator of the testimony, i.e. of the revelation of God to the world."<sup>787</sup> This "good confession" (1 Tim 6:13) qualifies Jesus to be called "the Faithful Witness" (Rev 1:5, 3:14).<sup>788</sup> Thus, Jesus fills the role of the Old Testament prophet *par excellence*, who delivers God's revelation to men in the form of "testimony."

This last consideration leads into a discussion of an important aspect of witness terminology in the book of Revelation--the unique phrase ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, "the testimony of Jesus," encountered five times, and only in the Apocalypse. The vital question here is whether

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<sup>783</sup>Ibid., 142; Hocedez, "Le concept," 85.

<sup>784</sup>Strathmann, "μάρτυς," 4:493-94.

<sup>785</sup>Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 78.

<sup>786</sup>Strathmann, "μάρτυς," 4:497-500 (quotation on p. 500). See similar conclusion in Merrill C. Tenny, "The Meaning of 'Witness' in John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975): 230.

<sup>787</sup>Coenen, "μαρτυρία," 3:1045.

<sup>788</sup>Suzanne de Diétrich, "You Are My Witnesses," *Interpretation* 8 (1954): 276.

the genitive should be taken as objective, “testimony about Jesus,” or subjective, “Jesus’ testimony (of the Father).” First of all, Strathmann notes, based on usage in other contexts, that μαρτύριον with the genitive can be either subjective or objective.<sup>789</sup> Coenen argues for an objective genitive in light of its parallel usage with “the Word of God,” which speaks of receiving revelation “about” someone.<sup>790</sup> I find arguments for the subjective genitive more convincing.<sup>791</sup> Trites argues that the genitive in the parallel phrases, “the Word of God” and “commandments of God” are both subjective. Also, the phrase “holding the testimony of Jesus,” can be understood as the receiving and defending of an already established testimony--the witness Jesus bears of the Father.

Taking the phrase as a subjective genitive is also consistent with the idea of the “testimony of Jesus” as the “spirit of prophecy.” Just as the Old Testament prophet passed on his heavenly revelation, which we identified as “God’s witness,” the believer now fills the role of the prophet in proclaiming Jesus’ witness of the Father to the world.

In the Book of Revelation, then, this transition in meaning from witness as “eyewitness” to witness as “confessor,” “preacher,” or “prophet” is clearly recognizable. Hocedez is especially insightful in this regard, making a distinction between the *apostolic* testimony, which is an eyewitness testimony of Christ’s earthly career, and the *prophetic* testimony, which can apply to anyone proclaiming the truth of Christ.<sup>792</sup> This also sheds light on occasional references earlier in the canon, where the “testimony” is equated with the gospel (2 Thess 1:10; 1 Cor 1:6, 2:1; 2 Tim 1:8). It also helps us to characterize the ministry of the two witnesses of Revelation 11--they bore a “prophetic” witness.

It is important to emphasize, however, that the prophetic witness is based upon the historical apostolic witness and not on subjective experience or philosophical contemplation. Trites wisely comments, “The frequent use of the witness-theme in the NT stresses the importance of the historical foundations of the Christian religion . . . it was of supreme significance to the New Testament writers that the apostolic teaching was not based on a collection of myths, but on the experience of eyewitnesses.”<sup>793</sup>

At times the concepts of prophetic testimony and forensic testimony coincide, creating what has been called a “live metaphor.”<sup>794</sup> A classic example is found in the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:9; parallels in Matt 10:18 and Luke 21:13). Here Jesus predicts that His disciples would someday give their prophetic witness in courts of law.<sup>795</sup>

In summary, there are three basic directions in the usage of the μάρτυς wordgroup in the New Testament, which, by the way, coincide with the usage of the ΤΙΝ wordgroup in the Old Testament: (1) physical evidence; (2) warning or solemn declaration (almost exclusively διαμαρτύρομαι in the Septuagint and New Testament); and (3) verbal testimony. I have demonstrated that in the New Testament, just as in the Old, the “prophetic witness,” or

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<sup>789</sup>Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:504.

<sup>790</sup>Coenen, “μαρτυρία,” 3:1046.

<sup>791</sup>In support, see Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:500; Trites, *New Testament Concept*, 156-59; and Sweet, “Maintaining the Testimony,” 104.

<sup>792</sup>Hocedez, “Le concept,” 84-88.

<sup>793</sup>Allison A. Trites, “μαρτυρία,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Collin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:1047; Diétrich, “My Witnesses,” 277-78.

<sup>794</sup>Trites, “μαρτυρία,” 3:1049.

<sup>795</sup>Hocedez notes how the Spirit giving them special utterance in their testimony (Mark 13:11) underscores the prophetic nature of their witness. See Hocedez, “Le concept,” 94.

preaching of the gospel, is best related to the third definition--verbal testimony. Jesus has borne witness of His Father's nature and plan, and the believer, as His prophet and advocate, proclaims that good news to the world.

The final passages we will consider concern the connection of μάρτυς with the concept of a "suffering/dying witness." In Acts 22:20 Stephen is called ὁ μάρτυς σου, "Your witness." One suggested explanation is that Stephen is so named because he witnessed Christ in His glory in a vision before his death. Yet this would be quite an atypical application of the term, since one can find few parallels, either in the New Testament or the post-apostolic literature, of a similar use of μάρτυς as one who testifies to a special heavenly vision.<sup>796</sup> A more plausible explanation is that Stephen was a witness of Christ in the "prophetic" sense described above.

We must acknowledge that the later technical meaning of *martyr* is not intended here. Danker asserts, concerning both Stephen and Antipas (Rev 2:13), that they are called μαρτυροῖ because of their "sterling and selfless testimony, not because they died in giving it."<sup>797</sup> In support of this we note that Paul had just used the term in its common sense in Acts 22:15.<sup>798</sup>

At the same time others have noted that "Stephen is called this in an emphatic and distinctive way because by suffering death he gave final proof of the seriousness of his confessional witness. . . . The usage here prepares the ground for the later technical use in the church."<sup>799</sup> Frend concurs: "The distinction between witnessing and suffering on account of that witness was becoming a fine one, and it could only be a matter of time before actual persecution would equate them."<sup>800</sup> Bowersock also agrees: "This, in my view, is the one passage in the entire New Testament that might have effectively encouraged the sense of martyrdom as it was to develop."<sup>801</sup>

The first μάρτυς of the Apocalypse is Jesus Himself (Rev 1:5, 3:14). I have already suggested that Jesus' witness, according to John's Gospel, is His testimony of the Father. In addition, I agree with Trites, that "this passage is obviously set against the background of the death of Christ,"<sup>802</sup> who made the "good confession" before Pilate (1 Tim 6:13). The fact that Christ is the first to be so named in Revelation may create the expectation that others who bear this title in the book will also "maintain the same testimony even at the sacrifice of life itself."<sup>803</sup> In the same vein Baumeister writes, "In a martyrological interpretation of Rev. 1:5 and 3:14 the title is reserved for Christ and those who have sealed their witness through death."<sup>804</sup> Schelke insightfully notes that in order to link the death of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 with Jesus' death the author mentions that they were killed "where also their Lord was crucified" (Rev 11:8).<sup>805</sup>

Antipas (Rev 2:13) is the next μάρτυς of the Apocalypse. Again, the general principle for the application of this term in such contexts applies here as well: "Antipas in 2:13 is not a

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<sup>796</sup>See Hocedez, "Le concept," 93; his conclusions are drawn from F. Kattenbusch, *Der Märtyrertitel*, in *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1903): 115.

<sup>797</sup>Danker, "Martyr," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 346.

<sup>798</sup>Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 15.

<sup>799</sup>Strathmann, "μάρτυς," 4:494.

<sup>800</sup>Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 88.

<sup>801</sup>Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 15.

<sup>802</sup>Allison A. Trites, "Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse," *Novum Testamentum* 15 (1973): 79.

<sup>803</sup>Trites, "μαρτυρία," 3:1047.

<sup>804</sup>Baumeister, "Early Christianity," 4; similar conclusion in Danker, "Martyr," in *ISBE*, 3:267.

<sup>805</sup>Schelke, *Theology*, 2:100.

witness because he is put to death; he is put to death because he is a witness.”<sup>806</sup> Danker correctly observes that the modifying phrase “who was killed among you” implies that this aspect is not already understood in the term μάρτυς.<sup>807</sup> Yet we can recall the comments made in our discussion of Acts 22:20, that the emphatic sense of μάρτυς in these two passages connotes special recognition. The appositional modifier “My faithful one” also recalls Christ as the “Faithful (Martyred) Witness” in Rev 1:5, as does the expression “faithful until death” in Rev 2:10.

Revelation 11:3 describes the two great eschatological witnesses. The term here clearly means “prophetic witness” and not “witness unto death.” Trites points out that they are killed *after* their witness is complete (11:7).<sup>808</sup> Still, we see here another example from Revelation where the term μάρτυς is applied exclusively to witnesses who are killed.

Finally, μάρτυς is found in Revelation 17:6. Again, the term is used in relation to people who die for the faith. A special feature here is that the μαρτυροῖ are apparently distinguished from other saints who die for Christ. One possible explanation is that the phrase “with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” is simply appositional to the phrase “with the blood of the saints,” the καὶ between them to be translated adverbially as “even.” This would remove the distinction between the two groups.

Strathmann and Danker, however, see two groups here. Strathmann explains the distinction in that μάρτυς “is reserved for those who are at work as evangelistic witnesses.”<sup>809</sup> Similarly, Danker feels it refers to “a special type of witnessing.”<sup>810</sup> Strathmann and Danker claim further support in noting that believers in Rev 6:9 and 20:4 who are killed for merely “holding the testimony” are not given the distinction μάρτυς, supposedly because they were not evangelistic in their witness.

Yet whether a person in Revelation dies with the designation μάρτυς, or simply for “holding the testimony (μαρτυρία)” does not seem to be a highly significant difference. Quoting Dragas, “In the Apocalypse μάρτυς refers to those who witness through death and that both Antipas and Jesus himself are thereby the true witnesses. Such a connection cannot therefore be ruled out also in the expression ‘to have τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ’.”<sup>811</sup> Strathmann himself relates that not only μάρτυς, but also μαρτυρία begins to take on a “martyriological nuance.”<sup>812</sup> Also, since the number of passages that appear to establish such a restricted application of μάρτυς is very small, one might suppose that if more cases of killed saints who were “holding the testimony” were included, or if more was said about the cases we have, μάρτυς might have been used for them as well.<sup>813</sup>

### *Conclusions Concerning Μάρτυς*

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<sup>806</sup>Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:495.

<sup>807</sup>Danker, “Martyr,” in *ISBE*, 3:267.

<sup>808</sup>Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom,” 78.

<sup>809</sup>Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:495.

<sup>810</sup>Danker, “Martyr,” in *ISBE*, 3:267.

<sup>811</sup>Dragas, “Martyrdom and Orthodoxy,” 292.

<sup>812</sup>Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:502.

<sup>813</sup>Admittedly, this last point is an argument from silence.

Our investigation has shown how the μάρτυς wordgroup developed from the basic meaning of eyewitness to facts to the extended meaning of testimony to convictions or revelation--the "prophetic witness." Thus, any believer can be considered a "witness." Toward the end of the canon, the wordgroup becomes increasingly associated with those whose witness is confirmed by death. Paul's reference to Stephen certainly carries the connotation that Stephen was a witness *par excellence*. The Book of Revelation makes repeated connections between terms in the μάρτυς wordgroup and dying for the faith. These observations have led some to conclude that μάρτυς indeed acquires the technical sense of *martyr* within the canon.<sup>814</sup>

On the other hand, the lack of even one clear instance, in Old Testament or New, where the term specifically means "dying witness" makes this suggestion unlikely.<sup>815</sup> Still, one cannot deny that the lexical development of the term clearly lays the groundwork for the technical meaning to emerge. Baumeister comments, "It could indeed be that it was precisely the New Testament's use of the terminology of witness (*martureîn*) that was a reason for seeing it in a new light and applying it particularly to those among the persecuted who were regarded with the greatest respect (that is, to those who died)."<sup>816</sup>

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<sup>814</sup>Dicharry, "Martyr (in the Bible)," 6:314; Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 91; and Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 6.

<sup>815</sup>See Strathmann, "μάρτυς," 4:494; Trites, "Μάρτυς" and Martyrdom," 80; and Danker, "Martyr," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 346.

<sup>816</sup>Baumeister, "Early Christianity," 4. Parenthetical insertion mine.

## APPENDIX 2: THE QUESTION OF “PAGAN MARTYRS”

The unbelieving observer may fail to be impressed by Christian martyrdom because others have died in defense of other creeds or causes as well, the so-called “pagan martyrs.” The goal of this discussion is to present evidence that can be useful in responding to this objection; that is, to demonstrate that Christian martyrdoms have potentially more convincing power than non-Christian ones. This can be attempted by showing that: (1) the Christian faith has power to create death-defying conviction in a larger number and broader spectrum of people; and (2) the Christians’ conduct, both in their ability to endure suffering and in their merciful attitude toward their persecutors, is exemplary in comparison to “pagan martyrs.” A thoughtful unbeliever, observing these features of Christian martyrdom and comparing them to conventional human behavior and the record of non-Christian martyrdoms, may be led to consider what makes Christian martyrdom unique, and, subsequently, may be led into more serious reflection on the faith claims of the martyr.

In our investigation we must first acknowledge that the church’s assessment of pagan martyrs was not always negative; the Fathers often cited them as examples for Christians to imitate.<sup>817</sup> It appears that the phenomenon of martyrdom among ancient peoples was limited to Greek (especially Stoic) philosophers, adherents of Judaism and Christians.<sup>818</sup> Borghouts, in explaining the absence of martyrdom in ancient Egypt, relates a principle that likely explains its absence in other ancient peoples as well:

This is less a matter of religious tolerance than the conviction transpiring from theological argumentation of every period of Ancient Egypt that the divine powers are multifarious and call for a diversity of approaches and explanations. . . . Thus the ground for a doctrinal attitude which might crush alternative or foreign convictions was never trodden; even foreign gods easily found a place in cultic life.<sup>819</sup>

Concerning Stoic martyrs,<sup>820</sup> Chrysostom argues that they are dwarfed by the number of Christian martyrs: “But among them also, it will be said, many have been found contempters of death. Tell me who? Was it he who drank the hemlock? But if thou wilt, I can bring forward ten thousand such from within the Church.”<sup>821</sup> Others do not share Chrysostom’s assessment.

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<sup>817</sup>See, for example book 4 (especially chapter 8) of Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata*, chapters 5 and 10 of Justin Martyr’s *Apology I*, and chapter 50 of Tertullian’s *Apology*. Yet Musurillo reports that this attitude did not prevail in the early church—philosophers were generally perceived negatively. See Herbert A. Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*, Greek Texts and Commentaries, ed. W. R. Conner (Oxford: Oxford University, 1954; reprint, New York: Arno, 1979), 245-46 (page numbers from reprint edition).

<sup>818</sup>Valentinians (Gnostics), according to Irenaeus, lacked martyrs as well, “with the exception, perhaps, that one or two among them . . . have occasionally, along with our martyrs, borne the reproach of the name.” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.33.9, in *ANF*, vol. 3. On the other hand, Dehandschutter notes in some Gnostic writings (especially the *Apocryphal Epistle of James*) references encouraging martyrdom. Yet he also acknowledges that encouragements to martyrdom do not necessarily indicate that actual martyrdoms were taking place among them. See Dehandschutter, “Le martyre de Polycarpe,” 666-67.

<sup>819</sup>J. F. Borghouts, “Martyria: Some Correspondent Motifs in Egyptian Religion,” in *Die Entstehung der Jüdischen Martyrologie*, ed. J. W. van Henten (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1989), 197.

<sup>820</sup>Examples of Greek and Stoic martyrs are available from Musurillo, ed., *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*; and Henten and Avemarie, *Noble Death*, 11-21.

<sup>821</sup>Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Cor.* 4.7. (Source not noted.)

Droge and Tabor feel that in Seneca's time "voluntary death was an almost daily occurrence and a common means of protest among the philosophical opposition to the Roman emperors."<sup>822</sup> Boyarin asserts, "Already in antiquity, various religious groups had contended over the merits of their respective martyrdoms."<sup>823</sup> Frend also writes, "The Hellenistic period saw a growing emphasis on the value of self-sacrifice for a cause, either philosophical or national. . . . Josephus exaggerated when he claimed that no Greek philosopher would ever die for his philosophy."<sup>824</sup>

Yet Droge and Tabor include suicide in "voluntary death," an act which falls outside our definition of martyrdom. Boyarin cites as examples of "various religious groups" Montanists and Jews, groups much more closely related to the true gospel than pagan Greeks or Romans. Frend acknowledges that this "growing emphasis" never became a mass movement in the direction of martyrdom among the pagans.<sup>825</sup> We must, then, conclude with Royal (and Chrysostom), that "the Socratic/Platonic way was for a special few. Christianity inspired multitudes."<sup>826</sup>

Besides the comparatively few Stoic martyrdoms, one may contrast the nature of their deaths with Christian martyrdom as well. The death of Socrates was often heralded as exemplary, but several features weaken this position. Chrysostom argues that Socrates, in distinction from Christian martyrs, had no choice but to drink the poison hemlock after his condemnation, while Christians go to death of their own free will. He also contrasts the passive death by poisoning with the tortures endured by Christians.<sup>827</sup> Additionally, Tertullian notes how Socrates, before his death, ordered a pagan sacrifice, made in contradiction to his teaching against such Greek superstitions.<sup>828</sup>

Additionally, Fischel appeals to the behavior of both pagan and Christian martyrs before their respective judges.

In the Hellenistic *acta* . . . the martyrs' speeches are merely defensive or abusive. The Jewish and Christian *martyria* frequently include the forecast of the future punishment of the tyrant, pronounced by the martyr. Although this condemnation of the tyrant is frequently very offensive, it is more dignified than the Hellenistic attack, owing to its theological basis.<sup>829</sup>

Also, Christian martyrs came from both sexes, and all ages and social classes, in distinction from the more "professional" Stoic martyrs. Finally, several writers have also pointed out that Greek/Stoic deaths were more political statements than demonstrations of religious

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<sup>822</sup>Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 36.

<sup>823</sup>Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 101-2.

<sup>824</sup>Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 65.

<sup>825</sup>*Ibid.*, 66

<sup>826</sup>Royal, *Catholic Martyrs*, 8.

<sup>827</sup>Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Cor.* 4.7. (Source not noted.)

<sup>828</sup>Tertullian, *Apology* 46.

<sup>829</sup>Fischel, "Martyr and Prophet," 370, footnote 119.

conviction.<sup>830</sup> Zeno, for example, was arrested for plotting against a tyrannical ruler,<sup>831</sup> and Anaxarchus insulted the ruler of Cyprus.<sup>832</sup>

Next, we can compare Christian martyrdom with martyrdom in defense of rabbinic Judaism. Unquestionably, martyrs for Judaism, both in the pre-Christian and Christian eras, make a more impressive statement than the Greeks did.<sup>833</sup> Nonetheless, some authors seek to prove the superiority of Christian martyrdom over Jewish by positing that the latter was to defend personal faith, while the former was to propagate the message of salvation to the world.<sup>834</sup> This argument fails, however, for the following reasons: (1) the missionary mandate of the church was much more urgent than that of Israel; (2) Christians also died in defense of personal faith; and (3) the courage and conviction displayed by martyrs for rabbinic Judaism is comparable to that of Christians.

One might defend the superiority of Christian martyrdom over martyrs for Judaism on the basis of greater numbers. This factor is complicated, however, by our uncertainty as to the actual number of those who died in defense of the Torah (excluding those who died as combatants). Only seven martyrs for Judaism during the Christian era are mentioned by name in the Talmud, and several more in later Jewish legends. Yet Henten and Avemarie propose that these few examples do not indicate “that death in persecution was a marginal phenomenon in ancient Judaism,” but rather that they were selected because they illustrated the main lessons to be learned from martyrdom.<sup>835</sup>

At the same time, one gets the overall impression that the number of Christian martyrs was substantially (and proportionally) larger--numerous detailed Christian martyrologies have been compiled in comparison to a few Talmudic references.<sup>836</sup> Also, we note in Christianity a wide spectrum of victims, not simply from the professional religious (rabbinic) class. From a Christian perspective it is certainly not unexpected that martyrs for rabbinic Judaism should rank second to Christians--they too are defending God’s revelation in the Torah, and likely are aided by divine grace in that defense.

In spite of my more positive assessment of martyrdom for Judaism, we may nonetheless regard Bowersock’s comments a fitting conclusion to our examination of “comparative martyrdom” in antiquity:

Martyrdom was not something that the ancient world had seen from the beginning. What we can observe in the second, third, and fourth centuries of our era is something entirely new. . . . never before had such courage been absorbed into a conceptual system of posthumous recognition and anticipated reward, nor had the very word

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<sup>830</sup>See Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 66; Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death*, 5; Ramos-Lissón, “La conversion,” 107; Reece, *A Compendious Martyrology*, 478.

<sup>831</sup>See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 9.5.26.

<sup>832</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.58.

<sup>833</sup>Josephus writes in a dramatic, panoramic fashion of heroic deaths in defense of Jewish faith in Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.232-33. Frend also writes of how Jewish martyrdoms were “a phenomenon unknown elsewhere in the Classical world” (Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 54).

<sup>834</sup>Allard, *Ten Lectures*, 2-3; Lampe, “Martyrdom and Inspiration,” 118. In this vein Strathmann observes that the μάρτυς wordgroup is never used for Jewish martyrdom. Strathmann, “μάρτυς,” 4:487-88.

<sup>835</sup>Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death*, 133.

<sup>836</sup>Examples such as the Jewish holocaust in Germany are excluded, since theirs was not a voluntary “martyr’s” death that could have been averted by recantation.



martyrdom existed as the name for the system. . . . There is no reason to think that anyone displayed anything comparable to martyrdom before the Christians.<sup>837</sup>

Going beyond antiquity, we can recall our discussion from chapter three concerning martyrdoms during the Reformation, and the pre-eminence of Protestant and Anabaptist martyrdom over Catholic. In modern times as well Christian martyrdom is without peer. The claim that "Communism, too, has its warriors and martyrs and celebrates them,"<sup>838</sup> reflects a totally different perspective--these are militants who perish as a result of armed resistance. Also, according to Barrett's statistics, Moslem "martyrdoms" throughout history outnumber Christian (70 million to 40 million),<sup>839</sup> but Islam's definition of martyrdom differs radically from that proposed in this dissertation. Islam considers martyrdom "the willingness to struggle to the death of defense of the cause of Allah,"<sup>840</sup> which usually involves armed conflict and conquest.<sup>841</sup> But those who are killed in an attempt to kill others do not present as compelling a testimony to truth as those who passively and voluntarily accept the consequences of their convictions. Neither does mass suicide, as in the case of Jim Jones and similar extremists, present a compelling case for truth--such actions are universally regarded as abnormal and deranged, whereas martyrdom is generally lauded as heroic and honorable.

So, as noted above, Christian martyrdom is without peer, providing a potentially strong apologetic and evangelistic appeal. Rahner summarizes: "Christianity has been very rich in such a ready-to-die fidelity to the faith, in fact, has been so much richer than any other persuasion or ideology that the spirit of martyrdom."

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<sup>837</sup>Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 5-7.

<sup>838</sup>Bühlmann, "The Church as Institution," 58.

<sup>839</sup>Barrett and Johnson, *Our World*, 18.

<sup>840</sup>A. Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam," accessed summer 2002; available from <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/Concept-Ezzati.htm>; Internet.

<sup>841</sup>Anciaux defines a Sunnite martyr, primarily, as "those who die in participation in *jihâd*, the holy war, the just war, conducted in the cause of Allah." See Robert Anciaux, "Le concept of martyre et de sainteté en Islam Sunnite," in *Sainteté et martyre dans les religions du livre*, ed. Jacques Marx, Problèmes d'histoire du Christianisme, ed. Jacques Marx, no. 19 (Brussels: University of Brussels, 1989), 152. Translation mine.

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