Martyrology: A Critical Examination of the Role of Theological Traditions in the Narrative Construction of the Martyr



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This thesis represents the conclusion to seven years studying Theology at the University of Oxford. As with many people's fondness for a subject, mine can be traced back to an inspirational teacher. That teacher was Andy Wilkinson who taught me Religious Studies at school. His passion for the subject ignited mine and inspired the excitement in it that motivated me to apply to read Theology. It has now culminated, many years later, in this thesis. Another pivotal figure in reaching this point is my college tutor and friend Andrew Teal. His guidance, support and above all friendship during my time at Oxford, particularly as an undergraduate, has been a great influence. Andrew not only made the subject interesting but emphasised and embodied in a most emphatic fashion the far greater importance of enjoying the experience of studying it. There is great truth to that philosophy. I am therefore enormously grateful to my friends for my enjoyment of the years producing this thesis and the laughter, cheer and wisdom they have provided me. Their greatest gift to me in that time was a sense of perspective. This thesis was finished not because it is terribly important; but because they reminded me that in reality it is not. My thanks must also extend to my supervisor Graham Ward who showed great trust in me throughout my DPhil and who supported my approach to the subject at every turn. I also thank my parents for their indefatigable assistance and reassurance. Particular thanks are due to my mother who demonstrated tremendous industry in proofreading this entire thesis in two days.

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To Ruby

Martyrology: A Critical Examination of the Role of Theological Traditions in the Narrative Construction of the Martyr

– Short Abstract –

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This thesis presents a socio-theological analysis of the process by which a martyr is made and presents an analytical framework for a theological analysis of martyrdom, as well as demonstrating the fruits that such analysis can bring. Building on the social constructivist view that the martyr is a narrative construct and martyrdom a particular way of imagining an individual's death rather than an historical event, this thesis demonstrates the operation of theological conceptualisations of the meaning and significance of martyrdom, which it terms martyrologies. These martyrologies profoundly affect how the martyr is imagined and consequently the model of discipleship they represent to others. Martyrs have a unique power to validate a cause and to embody the possibility of extreme conviction and resistance in a way which can mobilise and radicalise their communities.

This thesis argues that critical analysis of these martyrologies is therefore imperative if we are to understand their role in defining the martyr and therefore shaping the way that the martyr's community interpret and engage with their reality. Four martyrologies, rooted in the emergence of martyrdom in the early church, are presented and, through their critical examination, a methodological framework for their future analysis is exhibited and recommended. The theological ideas sustaining these martyrologies are shown to be radicalising, morally challenging, and logically and theologically incoherent. Most importantly, this thesis attends to the phenomenon of popular martyrdom, particularly prevalent in Latin America. It explains the martyrology responsible and, controversially, shows why this martyrology is in fact entirely orthodox, challenging the Church's opposition to it. It also shows, however, that its claim that the basis for martyrdom can be a political cause makes this martyrology not only a threat to political theology, but even a potentially radicalising tool.

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Martyrology: A Critical Examination of the Role of Theological Traditions in the Narrative Construction of the Martyr

– Long Abstract –

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Broadly speaking, there are currently two prevailing approaches to martyrdom. The orthodox conceptualisation of martyrdom held by the Roman Catholic Church defines martyrdom as an historical event. Who the martyr is, therefore, is merely a question of how martyrdom is defined. In recent years, however, a social constructivist view of martyrdom has emerged. Scholars such as Paul Middleton have responded to the indiscriminate variance of the term's use in history by suggesting that martyrdom is a social construct and the martyr a literary figure belonging to a particular narrative about death. *Who* the martyr is must be understood as a product not of the historical details of an individual's death, but of how that death is imagined, remembered and told by the martyr's community. The martyr exists as a social type within the socially-constructed versions of reality; a character in a dramatisation of reality. To study martyrdom, these theorists believe, is really to study who makes martyrs and why, and this has been described as a sociological turn in the study of martyrdom.

This divergence is critical to any conceptual examination of martyrdom for it determines precisely what it is one is studying and how one approaches the field. This thesis defends the latter model, helping to elucidate it by drawing together strands of sociological analysis to aid our understanding of the nature of these narratives and of the martyr's place in them. As importantly, however, attention is drawn to the difficulties in this model and consequently areas for further research are highlighted. This thesis refines and develops this social constructivist account. Where it differs is in arguing that martyrdom is more accurately seen as a socio-*theological* construct. It observes that although, as the sociological approach holds, any death might be imagined as martyrdom, not *any* imagination of that death could be martyrdom. The question then is: how must a death be imagined if it is to be martyrdom? What makes such a narrative specifically a *martyr* narrative? It is this question which forms the basis of this thesis' first contention. My contention is that not *any* imagination of an individual's death can be known as martyrdom. This imaginative construction can only become a martyr narrative when it coheres with a theological conceptualisation of the meaning and significance of martyrdom; what I term a *martyrology*. The martyrology is therefore the major analytical mechanism that structures this thesis.

This thesis suggests that these martyrologies can be brought into view by studying the emergence of martyrdom in the early church. It is suggested that to do so is to ask two questions: what did witness mean to the early church, and how was its relationship with

death understood? This thesis does not attempt a definitive answer to this question and indeed this is not necessary. The purpose is rather to understand the broad strands of tradition that were brought together in the emergence of 'the martyr'. The analysis shows, crucially, that from its very origins, the martyr is a narrative construct. The martyr emerges in the early church as a metaphorical figure within an extended metaphor used to dramatise the experiences of the early church. By examining the New Testament's inheritance of Old Testament witness traditions, particularly in The Gospel of John and Acts, we show that witness was understood either as witnessing *to* Christ through public confession or witnessing *as* Christ by recapitulating and fulfilling his ministry through *imitatio Christi.*

Elsewhere in the New Testament, most notably the Epistles and Revelation, we show how the early church's characterisation of this figure of the witness hurriedly underwent development in response to the pastoral pressures of persecution and death. We examine two characterisations: the suffering-witness and the conqueror-witness. In both, we show how through these characterisations, witness narratives increasingly became martyr narratives in the early church as witness came to be more closely associated with death. Importantly, however, we note a tension in the way that this relationship between the death of the μάρτυς and their witness was understood. We demonstrate that death was understood either as the context for authentic Christian witness and merely its cost at a time of persecution, or as a constitutive part of a new understanding of Christian witness.

This analysis uncovers a quadripartite model of how martyrdom was understood and it is submitted that these defined the martyrologies that permeate Christian martyrdom tradition: martyrdom could be understood either a cost of or constitutive of witness *to* Christ or *as* Christ. A chapter is devoted to the analysis of each of these martyrologies. These serve the first contention of this thesis detailed above by demonstrating the role that these martyrologies have had in the formation of martyr narratives martyrs. More than this, however, this model provides an analytical framework for the study of these martyrologies that works towards the second contention of this thesis. This model, and the analysis it facilitates and structures, is presented as illustrative of the *theological* approach that can and ought to be undertaken to commence a critical evaluation of the socio-*theological* definition of martyrdom that this thesis presents. It is an attempt, therefore, to show how theologians can contribute analytically to the examination of an understanding of martyrdom which risks being secularised as the province of sociology and psychology. Furthermore, the analysis that this thesis adopts hopes to illustrate the fruits of such an approach.

The second major contention of this thesis emerges from this analysis. It seeks to respond to the question of the nature of these religious traditions and their role in who the martyr is and, therefore, the model for discipleship that they establish. To this end, this thesis seeks to evaluate these traditions, both by analysing the internal coherence and strength of the traditions themselves, and also by drawing attention to and assessing the wide-ranging implications and consequences they have on the immediate community and beyond. In particular, because of the role that martyrs play in Christian theology as models for discipleship, this critical evaluation is especially sensitive to the way that these traditions dictate not only who the martyr is, but also what it means to imitate them, and therefore the impact they have on conceptualisations of Christian discipleship. The conclusion that this

thesis draws is that these traditions are, to varying degrees, radicalising and extremist, logically and theologically incoherent, and morally challenging.

The radicalising and extremist nature of these traditions, for instance, is demonstrated by illustrating how they can encourage suicidal voluntary martyrdom, acts of extreme and violent self-renunciation, and can even incite violent and revolutionary political praxis. Their logical and theological incoherence is evidenced, for instance, by showing how the belief that death represents the ultimate price paid for one's witness gives death a sacrificial value that undermines the very cost of death on which the religious significance of this martyrology depends. This thesis demonstrates how these traditions can be morally challenging by showing, for instance, that if martyrdom is seen as privileging Christ-like passive sacrificial suffering over resistance to persecution, this might be seen as colluding with the oppressive projects of the persecutor.

These are robust conclusions and the analysis that supports them is similarly forceful. The present threat that these traditions pose to Christian theology, as well as society at large, is demonstrated by reference to examples of modern martyrs and to the prevalence of these traditions in modern theology. To that end, references are made to Archbishop Romero, Ludwig Bonhoeffer, Charles de Foucauld and Archbishop Desmund Tutu, among others. These figures, and their theology, demonstrate that these challenging traditions, and the martyrs they sustain, are very much alive in modern Christian theology.

In and through defending these contentions, this thesis devotes a significant proportion to the study of the modern phenomenon of popular martyrdom that has erupted in importance and prevalence over the last few decades. In brief, this modern popular martyrdom understands the martyr as having died for witnessing as Christ by pursuing causes, such as justice, charity and compassion, that were Christ's causes during his ministry. It is made clear that this popular martyrdom must be at the forefront of the theological analysis of martyrdom for which this thesis calls for it represents the vanguard of modern martyrdom tradition. It would accordingly be remiss for this thesis to present a methodological framework for a theological analysis of the role of martyrologies in the social-constructivist account of martyrdom and not to devote a significant amount of analysis to this martyrology. The two contentions of this thesis, when applied to this form of martyrdom, are particularly contentious and, at times, controversial. This thesis argues that there is a coherent martyrology operative even in these popular martyr narratives. Crucially, we assert that this martyrology is in fact an entirely authentic expression of orthodox Christian martyrdom tradition and that the Roman Catholic Church's opposition to it is based on a misreading of the authoritative texts as well as an oversight of early church history.

I defend this assertion by showing that this martyrology is entirely consistent with both Thomas Aquinas' classic discussion on martyrdom in the *Summa Theologica* and even in Benedict XIV's paradigmatic and authoritative text on martyrdom, the *Opus de Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* which is the basis of the Church's conceptualisation of martyrdom with which this martyrology is negatively contrasted as heretical. This thesis claims that Benedict XIV's text has been maligned and misrepresented as an obstructive relic to this martyrology when in fact its status as the *locus classicus* of the Church's orthodox understanding of martyrdom belies its support for the claims that this

martyrology makes *against* its Church detractors. Benedict XIV is, I argue, better imagined as an apologist for this martyrology rather than an authority for its illegitimacy. This thesis argues forcefully, therefore, that the orthodoxy of this martyrology must now be accepted.

The analysis of this martyrology in defence of the second contention of this thesis, however, shows that it rests upon an extremely challenging political theology. Because the martyr is said to be killed for causes which are necessarily theo-*political*, this martyrology challenges a weak political theology which attempts to divorce religion from politics in public life, alleging that it is docetic. Instead, this martyrology requires a strong political theology which recognises the concrete politico-historical realities that Christ's causes demand. We show, however, that there are three central ambiguities which open this martyrology to extremist interpretation. Firstly, what causes might Christ's ministry represent? Secondly, by what political causes are these causes instantiated in history? Thirdly, what are the political praxes by which these causes might be imagined as being legitimately pursued? The result is that potentially extremist political causes and praxes may become spiritualised as the theopolitical realisation of Christ's ministry. We show that this poses a difficult dilemma for modern Christian political theology. A strong political theology risks political causes being spiritualised with the religious significance of martyrdom, and this martyrology provides a vehicle for that process. On the other hand, a weak political theology fails to realise the theopolitical nature of Christ's causes, and leads to a docetic witness of Christ's ministry.

The thesis concludes by reflecting on the relevance of this analysis in light of the recent canonisation of Archbishop Romero. It is asserted that this canonisation should occasion a dramatic reconsideration of what an orthodox understanding of Christian martyrdom entails and the authorities on which this relies. This thesis submits that this analysis will reveal that this martyrology of popular martyrdom is an orthodox and authentic part of Christian martyrdom tradition and therefore needs to be confronted and reckoned with rather than dismissed as heretical. We also highlight, however, the enthusiasm for this martyrology that Romero's canonisation is likely to excite and the veneration of other popular martyrs that it is likely to inspire. The dangers of the theopolitical implications that this thesis argues that this martyrology has makes the critical evaluation of this martyrology proposed and demonstrated by this thesis all the more urgent.

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Introduction

Introduction

To many, martyrdom evokes images of Christians being tortured and fed to the beasts in Roman arenas or burned at the stake during the Reformation. These scenes from a remote and largely arcane history now belong, at least in the popular imagination, to a colourful mythic Christian past, enduring as stories to which ordinary people nevertheless relate. This has conferred upon martyrdom a diffuse sense of distant, mysterious inscrutability that is nevertheless familiar and evocative. In a popular imagination that has become increasingly secularised by a prevailing vogue that religion is outmoded and obsolete, ‘the martyr’, like ‘the knight’ or ‘the slave’, intuitively inhabits a distant literary world very different from our own. In recent years, however, this has radically changed. Its global prevalence in both the Christian and Islamic worlds, from Middle Eastern conflicts to Latin American revolutions, and its traumatic domestic presence as a conceptualisation of international terrorism has meant that martyrdom has now become an undeniably modern phenomenon. ‘The martyr’, far from inhabiting a literary and mythic universe, has become concretised in geopolitical human history.

The prominence of martyrdom in the geopolitical events of especially the past thirty years has undermined this fashionable secularisation of social and political discourse that has seen the significance of religious motivations, traditions and ideas increasingly disregarded in public debate. In the West, martyrdom reminds us of the significant role that religion plays in the way that people imagine, interpret, and engage with their reality, and therefore of the parochial nature of the secularisation hypothesis. By demonstrating that

these ideas represent concerns for which people are willing to kill and die, martyrdom shatters the notion that public discourse should be expurgated of religion and bursts the bubble of a myopic naïveté that public life has been sanitised of it. As Elizabeth Castelli inventively puts it; "…as the twentieth century's secularism hypothesis sits irrelevantly in the wings, 'religion' returns to centre stage. The martyr, meanwhile, is one of this drama's most contentious yet riveting stars, the one who packs the house for every performance."[1]

Accordingly, martyrdom has been plunged into the public consciousness, where it commands the attention of the popular imagination and emerges there as something primitive and chilling; a frightening yet fascinating foreign anachronism from another century, aberrant and inscrutably jarring to our comfortable and self-regarding Western sensibilities. In so doing, martyrdom provides a rude awakening from the slumber of this complacency, reminding us of the prevalence and significance of religious ideas in our societies and compelling us to recognise them as an irresistible and potent force in public life.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that martyrdom has become an increasingly popular topic of study. The martyr's existence in the popular consciousness as an eccentric feature of European history has been reflected in its treatment in academic literature where martyrdom has typically been treated as a purely *historical* phenomenon rather than a *conceptual* one. That is to say, martyrdom rarely has a conceptual depth in the interpretive framework of historians, and even theologians, beyond 'dying for one's faith'[2]; a description broad enough to defer responsibility for the content and meaning of this term to the historic narrative in which it occurs. Traditionally, therefore, a great deal has been written *involving* martyrdom; that is, strictly vis-à-vis the historical situations in which the term is applied, but

[1] E. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004), p. 9.
[2] The Oxford English Dictionary, for instance, describes a martyr as "a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs."

there has been little reflexive, systematic analysis to recognise martyrdom as a concept which has some theoretical existence outside of history, about which *conceptual* questions, not specific to the historical context from which it emerges, can be asked. As such, the history, prevalence, reception and impact of martyrdom across Europe over the last two millennia has been well attended to. Likewise, the ubiquitous variance with which the term is here used has also produced diachronic, horizontal studies of the term's application – often attempting some form of charitable taxonomy – but an oversight of its vertical, conceptual dimensions.

As Candida Moss has discerned, however, "In recent years the study of martyrdom has experienced something of a renaissance."[3] Not only has the application of a 21st-century enquiry revisited many of these historical topics with greater vigour, revising and challenging many traditional assumptions, but also the phenomenon of martyrdom itself has been subjected to academic enquiry. Predictably, martyrdom has also excited the secular faculties of sociology, psychology and terrorist studies, among others. In sociology, for instance, fascinating research has been conducted illuminating the important sociological dimension of the martyr as a narrative construct, exploring notions such as collective memory, myth-making, social narratives, and spectacle. Similarly, the psychology of the martyrs themselves has been scrutinised and even pathologised, and their role in conflict well-examined. These studies have been most revealing and edifying, but to a degree they demonstrate the reductive secularisation of a religious discourse which has been poorly attended to by theologians themselves. As Flanagan and Jupp observe; "In the field of theology and religious studies in the United Kingdom, up to recently, the study of martyrs was also a neglected topic."[4]

[3] C. R. Moss, "Current Trends in the Study of Early Christian Martyrdom," *Bulletin for the Study of Religion*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2012, pp. 22-29, p. 22.
[4] K. Flanagan and P. C. Jupp, "Martyrs and Martyrdom," in *Mortality*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2014, pp. 105-116, p. 106.

What makes a victim a martyr? Who decides? What motivates the martyr? What does it mean to witness? What does it mean to die *for* something? Should martyrdom be pursued? These questions are not mere abstractions, but reflections informed by a critical evaluation of the term's appearance in history; revealing the inchoate fragility of the term when it is subjected to critical and conceptual scrutiny. Most crucially, however, these are *theological* questions and they represent the theological nature of a discourse over which theologians have not taken sufficient possession. It is this theological approach that this thesis aims to provide. In what follows I will outline the argument of this thesis and explain how this argument will be developed in the forthcoming chapters.

Aims and Methods of the Thesis

This thesis makes two primary contentions about martyrdom which are developed throughout the chapters of this thesis. The first concerns how we should understand the role of religious traditions in martyrdom and how martyrs are made. The second concerns the nature of these religious traditions. In what follows I will briefly outline these contentions before explaining how this thesis develops and structures its argument for them.

Throughout this thesis, the focus remains on martyrdom in a strictly *Christian* context. Whilst martyrdom, broadly conceived, certainly has some analogous counterparts in Islam and, to a far lesser degree, in Judaism, martyrdom itself is, as we shall see, a Christian term, invented to describe a Christian phenomenon, occurring in a Christian context, expressed and made sense of in Christian tradition. Because martyrdom emerged and burgeoned around the time of Christ, this context in Christian history and the traditions it established offer an excellent scope for its analysis and, it is submitted, the necessary starting point for any conceptual analysis of martyrdom. Certainly, where these traditions

resonate with those in other faiths, the forthcoming analysis will have some significance, but any thorough analysis of martyrdom in Islam, for instance, must not in fact begin with martyrdom, but instead *šahīd* whose theological origins belong to this Christian past. In this thesis, therefore, martyrdom is taken to refer not to an historical, sociological or anthropological phenomenon which exists in many faiths and none, but to its meaning in and through Christian tradition, history and experience.

The First Contention

What is martyrdom? This is the central question to which this thesis responds. It does so by presenting a new way to understand the mechanism and process by which a martyr is made and demonstrates how this provides an analytical framework for a *theological* analysis of martyrdom. Broadly speaking, there are two prevailing approaches to martyrdom. The orthodox conceptualisation of martyrdom defines it as a set of historical circumstances with religious significance, and argues that the martyr emerges when an individual is identified as having died in this manner. This approach is manifest in the martyr-making process of the Roman Catholic Church[5] for whom the martyr is a matter of fact, reality and history. When the Church venerates someone as a martyr, they are not strictly *making* them a martyr, they are *recognising* them as being such already; for the conditions for the possibility of martyrdom exist as objective historical events which can be met without the Church's acknowledgment. *Who* the martyr is, therefore, is merely question of how martyrdom is defined.

[5] In this thesis, "Church" will be used to refer to an institutional Church and is primarily used therefore to refer to the Roman Catholic Church.

In recent years, some scholars have instead presented what might be termed a social constructivist account of martyrdom. Spearheaded by figures such as Paul Middleton, this movement responds to the indiscriminate variance of the term's use in history, which rebels against the Catholic Church, and others' insistence on a rigid and Realist definition of what constitutes a martyr. Arguing that this phenomenon of 'popular martyrdom' – the widespread use of the term notwithstanding the lack of any ecclesial warrant – opposes any attempt to see martyrdom as something that can be defined, they have instead proposed that the martyr is a social construct. *Who* the martyr is must be understood as a product not of the historical details of an individual's death, but of how that death is imagined, remembered and told by the martyr's community. Martyrdom, then, is not reducible to a set of historical conditions, but is rather a particular way of understanding and narrating death; one that usually ministers to the experiences of the martyr's community. To study martyrdom, these theorists believe, is really to study who makes martyrs and why. The martyr exists as a social type within the socially-constructed versions of reality that these interpretive frameworks imagine; a character in these dramatisations of reality.

This thesis refines and develops the latter model. Where it differs is in arguing that martyrdom is more accurately seen as a socio-*theological* construct. It observes, for instance, that although, as the sociological approach holds, any death might be imagined as martyrdom, not *any* imagination of that death could be martyrdom. The question then is: how must a death be imagined if it is to be martyrdom? It is the first central contention of this thesis that it is impossible to answer this question and, therefore, to understand martyrdom or how martyrs are made, without understanding the role of theological traditions both in shaping the reality these frameworks imagine, and in understanding the individuals within it as martyrs.

What I seek to prove in and through the first contention of this thesis is therefore the elemental role that religious traditions play in the narrative construction of an individual's death as being that of a martyr. My contention is that not *any* imagination of an individual's death can be known as martyrdom. This imaginative construction can only become martyrdom when it coheres with a theological conceptualisation of the meaning and significance of martyrdom; what I term a *martyrology*. The martyrology is therefore the major analytical mechanism that structures this thesis.

What are these martyrologies that are allegedly so foundational to martyr narratives? To answer this question, it is not sufficient merely to catalogue common theological tropes in martyr narratives in the Christian canon. After all, it is the martyrology that produces the martyr narrative, not *vice versa*. Rather, it is instead necessary to go behind these narratives to examine closely the emergence and development of the conceptualisations of martyrdom these narratives employ by looking at the origins of Christian martyrdom. This thesis contends that a study of the emergence and development of Christian martyrdom traditions in the early Church reveals two predominant issues in the emergence of Christian martyrdom: firstly, the question of whether one witnesses *to* or *as* Christ, and secondly, whether death constitutes the martyr's witness or is its cost and sacrifice. This thesis argues that this doctrinal ambiguity gives rise to four separate ways in which the meaning and significance of Christian martyrdom was conceptualised. These are not necessarily definitive or exhaustive of the martyrologies in the Christian tradition, but they demonstrate the fruitfulness of a theological analysis of martyrdom to a more nuanced understanding of the social-constructivist view.

This thesis therefore contends that Christian martyrdom can be understood as a narrative of an individual's death conforming to martyrologies belonging to a quadripartite doctrinal scheme by which the meaning and significance of Christian martyrdom is

understood. This scheme is introduced in chapters 1 and 2 and developed in successive chapters.

This quadripartite scheme not only provides a contribution to the question of how martyrs are made by structuring the role of theological ideas that this thesis contends are absolutely pivotal to the martyr's creation and existence, but it also provides a structure by which to analyse these theological ideas. The second contention of this thesis concerns the *nature* of these martyrologies and emerges from the *evaluation* of the religious traditions which the first contention argues is at the core of a martyr narrative.

The Second Contention

What is the nature of these religious ideas and of their contribution to martyr narratives? This thesis aims to use this quadripartite scheme not only to model and illustrate the role of religious traditions in the formation of martyrdom, but also to structure a critical evaluation of these traditions. If the role of theological ideas in martyr narratives is accepted as being critical to the social constructivist account of martyrdom then, theological ideas being their native expertise, the duty incumbent upon theologians to analyse these theological ideas is unquestionable. As we shall see, different martyrologies have sent people to battle, led individuals to inflict unimaginable pain on themselves and others, and inspired entire ideologies and political movements. Today, martyrdom, like no other theological phenomenon, has proven its power to impel human action, and to shape the affairs of entire regions of the world. Given the significant impact that martyrdom has on so many aspects of a community and society's existence, it is absolutely imperative that theologians critically engage with the sophisticated theological ideas sustaining martyrdom and indeed to realise their responsibility to do so once their role has been elucidated.

This quadripartite model, and the analysis it facilitates and structures, is presented as illustrative of the *theological* approach that can and ought to be undertaken to commence a critical evaluation of the socio-*theological* definition of martyrdom that this thesis presents. It is an attempt, therefore, to show how theologians can contribute analytically to the examination of an understanding of martyrdom which risks being secularised as the province of sociology and psychology. The analysis that this thesis adopts therein hopes to illustrate the fruits of such an approach.

Any critical examination of these religious traditions must, therefore, include scrutiny of their impact on the way that individuals consequently interpret and engage with their reality. We began this thesis by illustrating that martyrdom is not only a theological but a profoundly socio-political phenomenon. To this end, this thesis seeks to evaluate these traditions, both by analysing the internal coherence and strength of the traditions themselves, and also by drawing attention to and assessing the wide-ranging implications and consequences they have on the immediate community and beyond. In particular, because of the role that martyrs play in Christian theology as models for discipleship, this critical evaluation must be especially sensitive to the way that these traditions not only dictate who the martyr is, but also what it means to imitate them, and therefore the impact they have on conceptualisations of Christian discipleship.

This critical approach is therefore very much multifaceted, but it is largely centred around three questions asked of the martyrologies: i) Whom do they make into a martyr? ii) What implications do they have on discipleship and the way that Christians interpret and engage with their reality? iii) How logically coherent and theologically consistent are these traditions?

By and through this analysis, this thesis makes a second major submission in answer to these questions. It argues that the analysis this thesis provides of these religious traditions

and their role in martyrdom are, to varying degrees, i) radicalising and extremist; ii) logically and theologically incoherent; and iii) morally challenging. Before moving on to explaining how the structure and content of this thesis will develop these contentions, it is necessary briefly to define and illustrate what we mean by these terms.

i) *Radicalising and Extremist*

This is not the space for an extended discussion about the difficult question of what might be meant by radicalisation and extremism. Radicalisation has come in recent years to have a specific context within a particular field where it refers to violent political expressions of Islamic extremism. In this thesis, however, I use the term in the broad sense that Pisoiu explains: "By and large radicalisation has been conceptualised as a process of individual evolution towards certain ideas, in some cases accompanied by a corresponding behaviour and of violence."[6] Developing this, this thesis interprets radicalisation as follows: the process of coming to develop extremist beliefs – those deviating markedly from traditional norms and expectations – and a profoundly uncompromising conviction towards them which approves of praxis that contravenes the norms of behaviour and which is often therefore expressed through the approval or use of violence towards oneself or others in the name of advancing these beliefs. I therefore use 'extremist' to refer to the nature of these beliefs, and 'radical' to refer more directly to the uncompromising attitude towards them and its consequences for the way these beliefs are interpreted and acted upon.

Clearly, there are many ways that radicalism and extremism can be understood, and it is complicated by the close relationship that exists between these terms and

[6] D. Pisoiu, *Islamist Radicalisation in Europe: An Occupational Change Process*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), p. 11.

fundamentalism.[7] Nevertheless, this thesis does not claim to be about these terms or to contribute to their understanding or evolution. It seeks only to show that, thus defined, extremism and radicalisation aptly describe some of the interpretations, implications and consequences that the religious traditions sustaining martyrdom discourse can elicit. For instance, it is a key observation of this thesis that the martyr represents an incarnation of ideal discipleship and their death its consummate expression. One of the ways, therefore, that this thesis demonstrates that these ideas are radicalising and extremist is not just in whom it makes the martyr, but also what impact this has on the praxis of discipleship. We shall see that these traditions can encourage suicidal voluntary martyrdom, acts of extreme and violent self-renunciation, and can even lend support to violent and revolutionary political praxis.

ii) *Logically and Theologically Incoherent*

The coherence of these religious traditions will be investigated by examining both their logical and theological consistency. This analysis will find them at times logically incoherent because, involving the contradiction of propositions which are essential to their claims, they often seem paradoxical and self-defeating. For instance, the belief that death represents the ultimate price paid for one's witness gives death a sacrificial value that undermines the very cost of death on which the religious significance of this martyrology depends.

. By theological consistency, we mean the degree to which the claims martyrdom makes problematise, undermine or contradict important traditions in the Christian faith. For

[7] For a helpful discussion of the subtle differences between these see ibid. pp. 12-14. Fundamentalism refers more explicitly to the return to fundamentals and need not, therefore, involve either extremism or radicalism.

instance, we will see how the martyrology that understands a martyr as one who dies embodying Christ's ministry can problematise the relationship between religion and politics by asking what political causes and praxes are legitimate expressions of this ministry.

iii) *Morally Challenging*

Finally, by referring to these traditions and their implications as morally challenging, this thesis deliberately tries not to make moral value judgements about them, nor to imply or prescribe a normative ethics for the martyr's community. It seeks only to highlight the implications and consequences these traditions can have and to draw attention to the difficulties that they may raise and the way that these may challenge the coherence of a community's ethos and values. For instance, this thesis asks whether, if martyrdom is seen as privileging Christ-like passive sacrificial suffering over resistance to persecution, this might be seen as colluding with the oppressive projects of the persecutor. It then asks what sort of a moral instruction this provides and whether this coheres with the values of the community from which the martyr emerges. For instance, how would such a focus on subjugation cohere with the ethos or values of a community which advances liberation?

The Structure and Development of This Thesis

This thesis, therefore, has two aims. It seeks to model and explain the role that theological conceptualisations of the significance of martyrdom – martyrologies – have in martyrdom, and also to provide a critical analysis of these traditions. Chapter 1 introduces and contrasts the two prevailing approaches to martyrdom and the martyr-making process from which the first contention distinguishes itself. I introduce the orthodox approach by

analysing the martyr-making process of the Roman Catholic Church. I show how the Church's judicial martyr-making process evolved to slow the proliferation of popular martyrs throughout medieval Europe and, therefore, how this conceptualisation of martyrdom has always existed in tension with the opposing popular view. This led to an increasingly clear delimitation and codification of what constitutes martyrdom, culminating in a famous work by Pope Benedict XIV whose writings I translate and analyse and whose account of martyrdom continues to this day to guide a judicial process of "exact science", as it has been described. By exploring this process and providing examples of its method, I show that this approach involves a realist understanding of the martyr and necessitates a Correspondence Theory of Truth which procures an objective bivalence that allows the Church to be so uncompromising in its exactness.

I contrast this with the emerging and modern social constructivist account which has led to insightful contributions which help to elucidate the mechanism by which the martyr emerges. Writers such as Castelli, Leemans and Weiner show that the martyr exists as a social type within a socially-constructed imagination of history. Building on important contributions to the field of sociology, they argue that our memory of the past, and indeed our imagination of the present, is always socially-constructed as an alternative version of reality quite apart from the positivist narrative of objective history. Societies see their reality and history through interpretive frameworks and these radically shape the way that they imagine and remember it. I illustrate, however, that whilst this account ably demonstrates the martyr-making process on a sociological level, in order to understand what it is the process is making, an acknowledgement of the role of theological ideas is necessary. The critical conclusion in Chapter 1, is that this social constructivist account is incomplete without realising the role of theological ideas in constructing the martyrologies that narratives of a victim must cohere in order to become martyr narratives. Crucially, although

any death might be imagined as martyrdom, not *any* imagination of that death is martyrdom. To understand how martyrs are made, therefore, Chapter 1 introduces the martyrology as a critical element in this process.

Chapter 2 aims to justify and substantiate the ambitious claims made in Chapter 1 regarding the socio-*theological* nature of martyrdom by proposing an approach to, and framework for, analysing these martyrologies. It advances the view that these martyrologies are rooted in the emergence of martyrdom in the early church. The chapter is accordingly structured with two central questions: what did witness mean to the early church, and how was its relationship with death understood? The central resource for this analysis is the New Testament where witness theology and the emergence of the martyr has a prominent place. The aim of the chapter is not to produce an exhaustive or definitive account of how martyrdom was understood, but to draw together some distinct strands of tradition in a way that is indicative of the fruitfulness of the theological approach to martyrdom recommended in Chapter 1. The analysis shows, crucially, that from its very origins, the martyr is a narrative construct. The martyr emerges in the early church as a metaphorical figure within an extended metaphor used to dramatise the experiences of the early church. By examining the New Testament's inheritance of Old Testament witness traditions, particularly in The Gospel of John and Acts, we see that witness was understood either as witnessing *to* Christ through public confession or witnessing *as* Christ by recapitulating and fulfilling his ministry through *imitatio Christi.*

We then turn elsewhere in the New Testament, most notably the Epistles and Revelation, to see that the early church's characterisation of this figure of the witness underwent development in response to the pastoral pressures of persecution and death. We examine two characterisations: the suffering-witness and the conqueror-witness. In both, we show how through these characterisations, witness narratives increasingly became martyr

narratives in the early church as witness came to be more closely associated with death. Importantly, however, we note a tension in the way that this relationship between the death of the μάρτυς and their witness was understood. We demonstrate that death was understood either as the context for authentic Christian witness and merely its cost at a time of persecution, or as a constitutive part of a new understanding of Christian witness. We show that this conceptual ambiguity exists even as the term 'martyr' takes on that of a *terminus technicus* in the second century.

Chapter 2 proposes that these two interpretations of the role of death, applied to the two conceptualisations of witness, provide four broad, and necessarily generalised, accounts of the way that martyrdom was interpreted. The early church's conceptualisation of the martyr was highly inchoate; the martyr did not emerge fully-formed, but hurriedly emerged as a pastoral response to persecution. It is submitted that these four conceptualisations – that martyrdom is either a cost of or constitutive of witness *to* Christ or *as* Christ – defined the fault lines for how Christian martyrdom would develop. They thereby constitute four martyrologies by which martyr narratives may be understood and these structure the analysis in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

These subsequent four chapters aim to demonstrate the two contentions of this thesis for each martyrology in this quadripartite model. This is achieved firstly by modelling, explaining and defending the role that theological conceptualisations of the significance of martyrdom – martyrologies – have in martyrdom; and secondly by providing a critical analysis of these traditions. Therefore, this thesis will, in each chapter, explain and show how each martyrology has defined, and continues to define, who the victim becomes in this dramatisation of history when they are imagined as a 'martyr'. In other words; it will address the question 'who is the martyr?' It will do so also by drawing on modern martyrs to show the enduring relevance of these martyrologies. Again, it must be reiterated that this thesis

does not claim to propose a definitive or exhaustive account of the martyrologies which participate in the creation of martyr narratives. It aims rather to substantiate the broader claim regarding the socio-*theological* nature of martyr narratives, and therefore to illustrate the role that these martyrologies have. This is achieved by illustrating the role of the four martyrologies that we argue emerge from the analysis in Chapter 2.

This thesis will then unpack and explore the religious traditions that sustain these martyrologies, explaining thereby those that are most significant in making a martyr. Finally, it critically evaluates these traditions to show that each martyrology involves theological traditions which are, to different degrees and in different ways, radicalising and extremist, incoherent and morally challenging.

We will show that whilst the early church was characterised by a fascination with the notion of death being constitutive of the religious significance of martyrdom, changes in the community's needs prompted the opposite belief. Whilst in the case of witnessing *to* Christ both roles given to death emerged concurrently in the early church, in the case of witnessing *as* Christ it was not fully and authentically realised until the 20th century, where this quadripartite system was thereby fully realised.

It is of course true that these martyrologies are not mutually exclusive; martyrdoms as famous as Polycarp's, Cyprian's or indeed Romero's were and are interpreted in many ways across the Christian world. As Moss writes, "The tendency to speak of martyrdom as though it were a homogeneous ideology and practice is undermined by the richness of ideas present in writings about martyrs."[8] This heuristic separation in these four chapters should not, therefore, imply a strict distinction in the theological traditions of martyrs. The point is not, therefore, to provide a strict formula for the martyr-making process. The aim is rather

[8] C. R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 176.

to provide a model which can both help to understand the role of theological ideas in this process and which can structure the necessary theological investigation that the presence of these theological ideas demands. More generally, as the conclusion explains, this thesis aims to recommend this theological approach and to emphasise its importance.

Even though we are examining martyrologies which have been formative to the construction of martyr narratives throughout Christian history, the early church will be especially important to our analysis of these martyrologies throughout these four chapters. It is in that crucible of Christian theology that the traditions that continue to sustain martyr narratives today were not only formed, but also received the greatest expression both in theological reflection and in the rich martyr narratives contained there. Cunningham is right, then, that "No account of contemporary martyrdom, however, can ignore the background of ancient and early martyrdom in the Christian tradition if only to understand how more recent understandings of martyrdom stand in contrast to, or, conversely, as a mirror of, the ancient martyr tradition."[9] As their first embodiment, the martyrs of the early church shaped and defined these martyrologies, and their example provides much of the characterisation of the martyr that prevails to this day.

That said, in order to prove the enduring relevance of these traditions and their importance to subsequent and future martyrdoms, we need to refer to modern experiences of martyr-making and show how these traditions, named and developed centuries earlier, continue to define modern martyrs. Of course, historical differences between sources and contexts problematise any diachronic and comparative study of martyrologies, but the emphasis is instead on investigating those traditions in which the martyr is first named in the early church and showing how they continue to sustain martyr narratives to this day and

[9] L. S. Cunningham, "On Contemporary Martyrs: Some Recent Literature", *Theological Studies*, vol. 63, no. 2 2002, pp. 374-381, p. 375.

supply the identity of the martyr in these narratives. This will be demonstrated by referring to modern martyrs such as Matthew Shepard and Charles de Foucauld whose dependence on these traditions is considerably less obvious. These examples, used by those who sponsor the social-constructivist approach, are referenced in order to demonstrate the gulf that exists between the historical facts and the created narrative in order to show that the phenomenon exists in the way reality is told and not in the way it unfolds.

The first martyrology we examine in Chapter 3 understands the martyr as one whose death is constitutive of their witness *to Christ* through a public confession of the faith. We show how this martyrology's conception of the role of death is sustained by contemporary early church beliefs that death could represent the apotheosis of Christian witness and discipleship, and that it achieves something for the martyr which distinguishes them sharply from the confessor. In evaluating these traditions which gave such religious significance to a particular sort of death, this thesis finds them highly problematic. I show firstly how the sanctification of death on which it relies leads to an increasingly extremist threefold radicalising progression towards voluntary martyrdom, even to the point of a total disregard of the witness for which the death is meant to be endured. I consider the radicalising effect this has both on who can be made and called a martyr, and also the example for discipleship that the glory the martyr achieves established.

I further argue that this zeal for death can be guilty of collusion with the persecuting projects of the oppressor in privileging passive suffering over resilience, and I demonstrate the contradiction that appears to exist between this and the claims of liberation theology. Finally, I show that, by making death constitutive of the glory the martyr receives, the logical coherence of this martyrology is undermined because it subverts the traditional categories of life and death, and persecutor and victim on which part of the religious significance of martyrdom is established. Because this martyrology is so prominent, the chapter concludes

with a discussion about the concerns that this analysis raises for modern martyrdom which this martyrology continues to sustain. By looking at Bonheoffer, Romero and Tutu, among others, we illustrate the prevalence not only of this martyrology but the dangers attendant on it, in the modern era and sound a note of caution about the trajectory of theological reflection on martyrdom which represents a call for urgent theological reflection.

In Chapter 4, the second martyrology and therefore a second conception of the role of death in witnessing *to* Christ is analysed. This martyrology, we show, is sustained by traditions which elicit an altogether different understanding of the religious significance of martyrdom. I show that this conceptualisation problematises the role of death in this martyrology, threatening to undermine its necessity to the religious significance of martyrdom altogether. This section begins, therefore, by trying to understand the role of death in this martyrology. It shows that death has an epistemic role in this martyrology. The role that death plays is necessary for a witness to become a *martyr's* witness, but it does not give this witness its religious significance. It is from this role that I believe difficult problems arise. I show that whilst the role that death plays is necessary to martyrdom, death is not itself necessary to perform this role; indeed, I reach the perhaps unintuitive and ambitious conclusion that it is a role to which it is ill-suited. I demonstrate that death on this conceptualisation has a dispensability which leads to the belief that martyrdom's religious significance can be proven by other practices. I show how these can lead to a radicalisation towards extremist practices of violence, both to oneself and others, and I illustrate the devastating consequences this can have on both who can be called a martyr as well as on conceptions of discipleship in the modern example of Charles de Foucauld. Finally, I demonstrate the logical incoherence of this notion by explaining the paradoxical nature of the observation made by many that greatest self-abnegation would be to give up the desire for martyrdom itself.

These two ways of understanding death's role are then applied to the conceptualisation of the martyr as witnessing *as* Christ. Because these ways of understanding the role of death fundamentally change what it means to witness as Christ, this gives rise to two very different martyrologies which are discussed in chapters 5 and 6, respectively. Chapter 5 explores the belief that to witness as Christ was to die as Christ, a belief very common in the early church. Chapter 6, however, represents the dramatically different view that death is the cost of witnessing as Christ through the praxis of one's discipleship and the *imitatio Christi* of the causes one pursues. This martyrology was comparatively uncommon in the early church, though I show that it is prevalent in theological reflection on martyrdom in the Middle Ages. Crucially, however, it has undergone a sudden resurgence from this dormant state in the 20th century and has risen to profound importance as the *de facto* martyrology in the modern phenomenon of popular martyrdom and it therefore deserves the much-extended treatment it is given in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 illustrates the belief that to witness *as* Christ was to *die as Christ.* I illustrate just how ubiquitous this martyrology is not only with references from the *Acts* and by demonstrating its role in making the modern martyr Matthew Shepard, but also by showing how different interpretations of Christ's death modified the way that the martyr was presented. I look at the nature of the ontological participation the martyr achieves as they die in and with Christ to try to understand how imitating Christ's death was able to sustain such extraordinary theological claims that included the belief that suffering like Christ meant participating in his crucifixion body. I show the difficult implications on discipleship this has by demonstrating how it can lead to the view that the enduring legacy of Christ's ministry and the model for discipleship this establishes is properly embodied and consummated in suffering and death. I similarly show how the subjective and interpretive nature of both Christ's death, and what it means to imitate it, admits of the possibility of

extremist interpretations of *imitatio Christi* which can give rise to radical martyrs and, therefore, radical views on discipleship.

As we have said, these first three conceptualisations of martyrdom lie at the heart of Christian martyrdom and have been pivotal in martyr narratives throughout Christian history, as proven by their prominence in the writings and definition of Benedict XIV and subsequently, the canon law of the Roman Catholic Church. The fourth, however, is very much nascent in its popular articulation and realisation. In Chapter 6, we explore this martyrology and show that the belief that the martyr could be conceptualised as one who has died for witnessing *as* Christ through the praxis of their discipleship has only been realised seriously in the 20th century. This martyrology sees the martyr as one who dies embodying and practising the principles and values of the faith, such as social justice. I show that it actually has orthodox roots not only in early church understandings of witness, but also in orthodox Christian reflections on martyrdom, as found in the works of Augustine, Aquinas and even Benedict XIV, whose inclusion of this martyrology has, I argue, been overlooked. I show that it is this martyrology that has been responsible for more martyr narratives than any other in the 20th century, being the central martyrology in the proliferation of popular martyrs in this period owing to the breadth it provides for who can be imagined as a martyr.

I explain and respond to the classic objection to this martyrology, which says that in these cases the victim has not been killed in *odium fidei*. This formulation represents a prejudicial perspective which illegitimately privileges the cause of the perpetrator over the cause of the victim. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that this martyrology raises a great many more issues. In particular, by locating the religious significance of martyrdom in the martyr's *cause*, it challenges the traditional relationship between religion and politics by asking what social or political activities are legitimate expressions of the Christian faith. This is especially important as I show how powerful martyrdom narratives are at legitimising and

lending support to the cause for which the martyr is imagined to have died, so that, with this martyrology in particular, the effect that the narrative has on conceptions of discipleship in the community are of great significance.

The prevalence of this martyrology in modern martyrdom and the paucity of theological reflection on it justifies the considerable analysis it is given in Chapter 6, which is longer than previous chapters. The prevalence of this martyrology, its highly political nature, and the extremist and radicalising views to which the analysis in this chapter shows that it gives rise defends the contention that it is *this* martyrology above all others that ought most urgently to capture the attention of theologians.

This thesis therefore presents a revision of the social constructivist account of maryrdom and the making of martyrs by arguing for the role that theological traditions play in this mechanism. It evaluates these ideas and their role in order to show that because martyrdom, like so much theological discourse, responds to the demands of the community, and because it emerges from traumatic community contexts, involves the articulation of theological ideas which are incoherent, radical and extremist, and morally problematic.

Among so many other problems we will analyse, martyrdom privileges death over life radicalising attitudes towards death and undermining the sacrificial value of one's life, it problematises the relationship between victim and persecutor, its eschatological claims unite religion and politics, and the equivocality of its cause means that its claims can be exploited for extremist purposes. Perhaps most dramatically, these problems are multiplied by the effect that the claims made of martyrdom have on discipleship. Martyrdom, this thesis argues, is a red flag issue for theologians. I present an approach to the study of martyrdom which empowers theologians to engage with the martyrdom discourse equipped with a critical deconstruction of its theological and philosophical bases and, perhaps most importantly, which puts them in a position to assess the legitimacy of claims to martyrdom

and to evaluate the risks and imports of these claims. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the ongoing appreciation of the power of theological ideas and of the responsibility theologians must take over them.

Chapter 1: Making Martyrs

Martyrdom is a category of both ostensible simplicity and inscrutable complexity and to begin examining martyrdom we first need to establish what sort of a phenomenon it is we are studying. In this chapter, we will contrast the two very different approaches to martyrdom, evaluating the effect these different ways of conceptualising martyrdom have on what it means to study martyrdom and how a martyr narrative develops. The first is analysed through the prism of the Roman Catholic Church's view on martyrdom, whilst the second represents an altogether different, sociological, or more specifically a social-constructivist, approach. The model that this thesis proposes takes the latter approach, though it revises and builds on it by elucidating the importance that religious ideas have in what ought to be considered a socio-*theological* construct.

Defining and Discovering the Martyr

Martyrdom: An Ecclesial Process

> The proceedings throughout are conducted with much greater care and formality than the most important suit at law. The history of secular jurisprudence can show us nothing approaching the extreme circumspection observed in these investigations…In the processes of canonization everything is reduced to an exact science.[10]

Throughout the Middle Ages, the veneration of an individual as either a saint or a martyr was largely untrammelled by any due process or protocol. It was customary for the

[10] Canon Macken, *The Canonization of Saints*, (Dublin: M.H. Hill and Sons, 1910), pp. 35-36. Quoted in K. L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't and Why*, (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 77.

small communities of the European medieval period to venerate the subject of a local tale and for this tale to share in the particular cultural-religious milieu of the community from which it arose. Alongside those whose celebrity qualified them for inclusion within the later ecclesial martyrologies of the Middle Ages such as Thomas Becket, it was not uncommon for numerous local saints and martyrs, most often themselves denizens of the communities which venerated them, to enjoy relative anonymity and obscurity further afield, and as Gábor Klaniczay writes; "Their shrines became sources of local pride, symbols of local identity."[11] The lack of any rigorous or uniform process of discernment was therefore a boon to this medieval cult of saints which, whilst often diverse and disparate, was populous and proliferated with pilgrimages, relics and other cultic paraphernalia. Anachronistically, popular martyrdom, we might say, flourished.

Portents for the seismic changes that were later to be enforced were materialising with greater papal involvement throughout the latter half of the Middle Ages. John XV's validation of the veneration of the Bishop Ulrich of Augsburg in 993 was matched by Pope Urban II's demand for eye-witnesses to the alleged miracles of Abbot Gurloes in the 11th century. Later, in 1180, Pope Alexander III ordered that papal authority was required for even local veneration, and in 1234 Pope Gregory IX declared in his *Decretales* absolute papal jurisdiction over matters of saints. Through these measures, as Winstead observes, "…the Church attempted to stem what many perceived as an alarming democratization of sainthood."[12]

[11] G. Klaniczay, "Using Saints: Intercession, Healing, Sanctity", in J. H. Arnold, (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[12] K. A. Winstead, "Fear in Late-Medieval English Martyr Legends", in J. Leemans, (ed.), *More than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), p. 209.

This trajectory, punctuated by the gradual introduction of categories such as *Beati and Sancti*[13] and mechanisms such as the Congregation of Rites and requirements for the authorisation of a local bishop, reached its peak following the pressure mounted on what Luther called the pagan cult of saints during the Reformation. Despite the Council of Trent's affirmation of the cult, significant changes would follow which would not only codify a process by which one becomes a saint, but, in their emphasis on standards and requirements, these developments would also come to shape the ecclesial understanding of what a saint or martyr really is and the import of calling them as such.

Under the pontificate of Urban VIII, the procedures of beatification and canonisation, whose foundations were laid in the previous three centuries, began to materialise. Perhaps the most conclusive movement on this course to an official and decisive ecclesial mechanism for determining saints came between 1734-1738 when Prospero Lambertini, later Pope Benedict XIV, refined and ratified the processes for becoming a saint in his famous five-volume work.

The result is the process of "exact science" referred to by Canon Macken above which persisted until 1983 when John Paul II made radical changes in order to expedite what he saw as a lengthy and cumbersome process. Recently, writers have uncovered and popularised the otherwise conventionally covert process so that the traditionally obscurantist procedures, both old and new, have been laid bare.[14]

The traditional process began when a local Bishop, having waited 50 years to confirm that the saint or martyr's holiness has been established and having determined that the case has merit, resolves to initiate the Ordinary Process. This involves establishing a local tribunal to collect witness accounts and testimonies in order to present to a committee

[13] *Beati* was permitted for those who were venerated locally, whereas *Sancti* was restricted to those whom the Pope had declared a saint.
[14] K. Woodward, op. cit., see also L. S. Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

deputised by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints – the Vatican authority on the process – who determine whether or not the evidence is sufficient to initiate a formal process. If they assent, then responsibility for the cause is assigned. A Postulator, of which there are over 200 residing in Rome, represents the petitioners of the cause alongside an advocate of canon law. A Promoter of the Faith, often given the soubriquet *Devil's Advocate,* is then assigned to challenge the cause. Counsel for both sides initiate a written adversarial process which often lasts many years and culminates in a published document called the *positio* which is then submitted to a committee for approval.

Upon the agreement of a body of cardinals and official prelates to whom this *positio* is submitted, the cause passes into the jurisdiction of the Holy See. A fresh investigation is launched involving a new local tribunal run directly by the Vatican to verify the information in the previous *positio.* The sources are translated into an official language of the Holy See and a Decree on the Validity of the Process is issued. A second round of adversarial advocacy ensues and these written exchanges culminate with an *informatio* which is then studied by members of the Congregation. The process once again repeats itself before a third process, this time with the Pope present. If the cause for the candidate, hitherto known as a 'Servant of God', is said to be legitimate, then the candidate may be called 'venerable.'

During this time, the candidate must pass a judgement of orthodoxy which involves the analysis of all sources by the candidate, and a *nihil obstat*, a test introduced in the 1940s to ensure that there is nothing disparaging about the candidate on the Vatican records. Since its introduction in 1930 by Pope Pius XI, a historical investigation is also launched to scrutinise any historical elements relating to the cause. During this process the corpse is examined, and processes are instigated to enquire into and inspect any miracle claims, including the involvement of a team of medical experts. Before beatification is possible, a candidate must have two miracles attributed to them and between beatification and

canonisation another two intercessionary miracles. Miracles before beatification are dispensed with for candidates for martyrdom. Following the verification and attestation of these miracles, and still at his discretion, the Pope orders a Bull of Canonisation officially declaring that the individual must be venerated as a Saint throughout the universal church.

In his first 11 years, Pope John Paul II officiated more beatifications than the sum of those of all previous 20th-century predecessors. A crucial part of his Papacy, John Paul II sought to expedite the process with a raft of new measures and changes to the centuries-old tradition. Under the new system, ratified on January 25, 1983, the legal, adversarial court-room model of which Macken speaks with such acclamation, is substituted for an academic model. The Ordinary Process and the Apostolic Process are combined so that the local Bishop is charged with gathering all of the necessary evidence before this is sent directly to the Congregation. Upon their approval, responsibility for the cause is delegated to a *Postulator* and the new position of a *Relator*. The new measures disregard the written adversarial exchanges. Instead, an individual from the College of Relators is commissioned to write the *positio* in its entirety, building on the information provided by the Bishop. Whilst this still involves the collection of testimony and evidence, the emphasis is on the construction of a historico-critical document which gives expression to the details of the candidate's life, heroic virtue or martyrdom. This *positio* is examined by a panel of eight theologians selected by a prelate theologian where an acquiescence of six or more passes the cause to the board of cardinals and bishops upon whose approval the cause finally passes to the Pope himself. Among a host of other efficiency changes[15], the commission of the *positio* to an individual, the meetings through which it must pass and the halving of the

[15] E.g. a significant shortening of the prejudicial wait, the expansion of the number of consultors and the division of the Congregation's cardinals into two groups.

required number of miracles has significantly speeded up the process to the point that *Relator* Fr. Ambrose Eszer exclaims in an interview: "We're becoming a factory here."[16]

The reason for describing the above process in such detail is that it is very revealing of the conceptualisation of martyrdom operative in the Roman Catholic Church. The existence of an exacting process which follows a legal, court room model, underscores the fundamental belief that there is something definite to be discovered about the individual before they can be called a martyr; something which the emphasis on witnesses, evidence and tribunals shows has a basis in historical fact. This process, therefore, positions the Congregation of the Causes of Saints as the adjudicator of *fact.* As Kenneth Woodward, who spent over a year with the Congregation investigating and uncovering its work, explains "…the congregation follows the strict guidelines established by Pope Benedict XIV more than two centuries ago,"[17] and this dependence on Pope Benedict XIV is an observation that has frequently been corroborated.[18]

Pope Benedict XIV and the Emergence of a Definition

Pope Benedict XIV's extensive work is so foundational not only because it ratified the process by which the Church decided whom to venerate as a martyr and saint, but because in so doing, his delimitations gave rise to a strict and well-outlined definition of what a martyr is and one that, for the Church, persists to this day. Before his pontificate, Prospero Lorenzo Lambertini (1675-1758), had a distinguished career as a theologian and,

[16] Interview with K. Woodward, op. cit.., p. 120.
[17] Ibid., p. 167.
[18] Ibid., p. 130. See also A. Nichols, *Abortion and Martyrdom: The Papers of the Solesmes Consultation and an Appeal to the Catholic Church*, (Leominster: Gracewing, 2002), p. 104; A. Petersen, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War*, (New York: University of New York Press, 1997), p. 93 and E. Bannon, *Refractory Men, Fanatical Women: Fidelity to Conscience During the French Revolution*, (Leominster: Gracewing, 1992), p. 200.

among other positions, Promoter of the Faith, canon lawyer and assessor of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. It was in these years, between 1734-38 that he wrote his most significant work *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* (*On the Beatification of Servants of God and the Canonization of Blesseds*). His section on martyrdom, contained in his third volume, sections XI-XXI, is, like much of his work, an attempt to respond to the contemporary pressures mounted by the increasing diversity and plurality of saints being venerated each year in the medieval boon of popular martyrs.

Drawing on examples of martyrs from the Patristic period to those whose cause was in consideration at the time of writing, Lambertini attempts not to articulate a revisionist or new definition of martyrdom, but rather to read the martyrdom traditions of the Catholic Church and distil the essential qualities of the martyr, thereby offering the definitive account of the martyr according to the way it has emerged in the Church and has been established within its traditions. It is the aggregate of the most salient features that emerge from this process of discernment that shapes the definition of the martyr in Benedict's writings and that has prevailed as an expression of orthodoxy in the ecclesiastical process ever since.

It is interesting to note that despite the importance of Benedict XIV as the author of these still prevailing ideas, an authorship which as we have seen is widely attested, explicit extracts and translations of his work are very infrequent. Instead, occasional references pay superficial tribute to his contribution and render him as occupying the almost mythic status as the *locus classicus* of principles which now have a very active existence outside the text. What follow briefly are the dominant features of the martyr that the Roman Catholic Church has adopted into their ecclesial process as we find them articulated in the 18th-century text. Later, in Chapter 6, however, we will analyse the writings of Benedict XIV in greater detail to show that a more nuanced, but highly controversial, interpretation is preferable and that the current received understanding of his views on martyrdom is a grave misrepresentation.

This shows that there is more to the text than the ideas and phrases which have since enjoyed such celebrity. This revisionist approach offers fresh and relevant interpretations of martyrdom which challenge the orthodoxy of this received but remote reading.

In his opening section on martyrdom, Benedict XIV's first lines read;

> Martyrdom expresses a true witness to the divine faith and is the voluntary endurance of death on account of one's faith in Christ or some other act of virtue relating to God. Two distinct persons are required for martyrdom, namely a persecutor and a martyr.[19]

The remainder of Benedict XIV's twenty chapters are spent elucidating the particular elements that determine this martyr. Firstly, Benedict XIV describes true martyrs as witnesses to the Christian faith signifying that by their death they must witness to the faith by voluntarily enduring suffering and death on its behalf. This sacrifice and the comportment of patience, charity and fortitude[20] required of those who make it, is initially prefigured and instituted by Christ, whose own death the true martyr imitates. Benedict writes in no uncertain terms that "One cannot be a martyr unless that which is to be endured imitates Christ."[21] It is on the basis of these strict requirements made of the putative martyr that Benedict's insistence on two witnesses being present at their death[22] to testify the manner in which they died, has been upheld by the Church. We will see in the next chapter how this requirement has its roots in the juridical traditions of the Old Testament and the understanding of witness found there.

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[19] Pope Benedict XIV, né Prospero Lorenzo Lambertini, *Opus de Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione*, Vols I-VII in *Opera Omnia*, (Prato: Typographia Aldina, 1839-1847), Lib. III. Cap. I.I: "*martyrium vero testimonium fidei divinae significat, et est voluntaria mortis tolerantia propter Christi fidem, vel alium virtutis actum, relatum in Deum. Duae distinctae personae requiruntur ad martyrium, persecutor videlicet, et martyr.*" All translations of this work are my own.

[20] Ibid., Cap. XV.I.

[21] Benedict XIV, *Index Locupletissimus Rerum et Nominum*, vol. VIII in *Opera Omnia*, ibid, "Martyr,": "*Martyr esse nequit, nisi Christum patiendo imitetur*."

[22] Benedict XIV, *Opus*, op. cit., Cap. V.X: "*martyrium duobus testibus de visu.*" See also Cap. III.I: "*at in causis martyrum testes de visu mortem illatam satis comprobant.*"

Furthermore, particularly noticeable is the important role that is afforded to the persecutor, or *tyrant* as they are called, whose involvement in the act of martyrdom is the subject of much critical focus by Benedict XIV. The attention paid to the persecutor, which the Church also inherits, is evident in a later passage where Benedict XIV writes;

> Two things are required of the persecutor to make a true martyrdom. First, that they inflict a natural death, or the cause of death be precipitated by the punishment. Secondly, that they should do so out of hatred of the faith, or anything else pertaining to the faith.[23]

The significance of this latter point is emphasised in the agreement he acknowledges with Augustine when he writes that "A martyr is made not by the punishment, but by the cause and for martyrdom it is required both for the martyr and for the persecutor."[24] That is to say, the cause in defence of which the martyr voluntarily sacrifices their life must be the cause in enmity of which the tyrant kills them. Because, as we have seen, the proper cause in the name of which the martyr's death bears witness, is faith, so too the cause that Benedict XIV describes, but more pertinently, the cause that the Roman Catholic Church has accordingly since asserted, as the proper cause in the mind of the tyrant, is hatred of the faith; *odium fidei.* The centrality of this crucial determining factor, reiterated numerous times elsewhere[25], is demonstrated both in Benedict XIV's plain assertion that "If you are killed in hatred of the faith, you are a martyr,"[26] and, conversely, the startlingly prescient account he provides

[23] Ibid., Cap. XII.I: "*Duo in persecutore requiruntur ad verum martyrium constituendum. Primu, ut mortem naturalem inferat, vel causam mortis necessariam poenat. Alterum, ut id faciat ex odio in fidem, vel in aliud ad fidem pertinens*."
[24] Ibid., Cap. XIII.I: "*Martyrem non facit poena, sed causa, et haec quidem ad martyrium sufficiens requiritur tam in martyr, quam in persecutore*."
[25] E.g. Cap. XIII.XI and Cap. XIV.VI, XIII.
[26] Ibid., Cap. XVI.III: "*in odium fidei occisus, martyr sit.*"

describing a cause which was rejected because, "it was not possible to know…that the death arose from hatred of the faith and not some other principle."[27]

These are the principal components of the working orthodox definition of martyrdom used by the Catholic Church for the ecclesiastical process described; derived directly from Pope Benedict XIV and written into Canon Law in 1917. Accordingly, Harvey, Finn and Smart note; "Pope Benedict XIV…codified the church's main requirements for bestowing the title of martyr," and "this treatise," they observe "continues to guide the official Catholic definition of martyrdom to this day."[28] Imitating Christ, a martyr is one who has been killed voluntarily sacrificing their life in witness to the faith and whose death was brought about by a tyrant motivated by their hatred for the same faith to which the martyr's death witnesses. It is clear that several different conceptualisations of martyrdom are actually present in this definition. The next chapter will explain how these notions of – such as witness, *imitatio Christi*, *odium fidei*, voluntary sacrifice – represent martyrologies which emerged from the early church. The focus for the time being, however, is rather on the manner in which these martyrologies are employed.

It is my contention that classifying the martyr thus has meant that a certain definition has emerged which has potentiated and precipitated the sort of precise, legalistic mechanism that we have described. More pertinent to this discussion, I believe that this codification has actually changed the conceptual nature of martyrdom, and the epistemological and linguistic import of statements about martyrs, that this process involves.

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[27] Ibid., Cap. XIV.XIV: "*non provenisse ex odio in fidem, cum tyrannus interficcessit religious, unius, non alius alterius instituti.*"
[28] A. Harvey, R. Finn, and M. Smart, "Christian Martyrdom: History and Interpretation," in B. Wicker, (ed.), *Witnesses to Faith: Martyrdom in Christianity and Islam*, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), p.45.

Martyrs are Real: An Analysis of the Church's Conceptualisation of the Martyr

The judicial process, the practical inheritance of Benedict XIV's definition of the martyr, and the exactitude required of the cause, all of which we have detailed, bespeak a certain conceptualisation of the martyr established in the Church and operative in its canonisation process which is responsible for the details of this process. They also indicate the Church's claim to be both the province and provenance of martyrdom and to possess unique and definitive authority to declare true martyrs.

It does so by operating with an abstract but realist conceptualisation of the model Martyr, established by Christ, embodied in the bygone martyrs of the Church, and its character realised and articulated by Benedict XIV. The Martyr is more than a concrete noun pertaining to an individual in whom certain qualities are instantiated or various criteria fulfilled. Through Christ and the subsequent witness of the martyrs, in whom it was both incarnated and engendered, the Martyr emerged; a distinct reality not just in history as a type of person, but in the traditions and conceptual framework of the Church as an idea, an office or an identity. The Martyr developed as having an existence abstracted from the martyrdoms of individuals in history, who are instead seen as manifesting and participating in what we might speak of in platonic terms as the form of the Martyr. Recognition of this conceptual Martyr has existed within Christian history ever since the Martyr became a conceptual as well as linguistic category in the early church; prompted in all likelihood by the urgency of reflecting upon it that was precipitated by debates about martyrs, confessors and the lapsed. Reflecting on seventeen-hundred years of martyrs, Benedict XIV's realisation and articulation of the paradigmatic form in which they all share has prevailed as the ecclesiastical expression of orthodoxy on this form of the Martyr ever since.

Returning to the ecclesial process, we can see how this conceptualisation of the Martyr, understood as a distinct, well-defined object with abstract existence gives rise to the epistemological particularities of the methodology of the Church's investigative process. Crucially, it is this realist conceptualisation of the Martyr which provides the truth condition for any claim to martyrdom. It is realist because the truth condition is not a proposition of what martyrdom is,[29] but a set of historical circumstances delimited and described by the model and Form of the real martyr established by Christ and revealed to us through the example of the martyrs of the Church and articulated in the writings of Benedict XIV. This therefore entails a correspondence theory of truth whereby someone is a true martyr if, and only if, the narrative of their death corresponds with that of the real Martyr which delineates the necessary historical conditions for the use of the term. It is precisely the objective bivalence that this conceptualisation of the martyr procures that entitles the Church to be so uncompromising in its investigative process.

This relationship between the conceptualisation of the martyr and the method to which it gives rise is evidenced in a letter Benedict XVI wrote to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in 2006:

> The martyrs of the past and those of our time gave and give life…freely and consciously in a supreme act of love, witnessing to their faithfulness to Christ, to the Gospel and to the Church…*It is of course necessary to find irrefutable proof* of readiness for martyrdom, such as the outpouring of blood and of its acceptance by the victim. It is likewise necessary, directly or indirectly *but always in a morally certain way, to ascertain the odium fidei of the persecutor*. If this element is lacking there *would be no true martyrdom* according to the perennial theological and juridical doctrine of the Church.[30]

[29] Such a view would entail a coherence theory of truth.
[30] Pope Benedict XVI, Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants of the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, April 24, 2006 quoted in O. E. Valiente, "Renewing the Theology of Martyrdom", *Irish Theology Quarterly*, vol. 79, no. 2, 2014, pp. 112-127, p. 114. Italics are mine.

This letter, a further example of the enduring relevance of Benedict XIV's articulation, shows that because the Church maintains such a clear, sharp-edged view of what a martyr is, it also possesses an equally certain expectation of the historical particularities that any narrative of any martyr must contain. It is proving the consonance of these narratives beyond any doubt that is the burden which falls to the cause.

Whilst to commentators such as Woodward the requirement of what he sees as a process of very important box-ticking can lead to an appearance of squeezing the cause through the "judicial narrows"[31] of the process, to the Church, with its realist understanding of the Martyr, the epistemic certainty necessary for canonisation depends on these historical particularities corresponding to the Church's fixed conceptualisation of the Martyr. Modern scholar on martyrdom, Brian Wicker, clearly endorses this approach when he writes that to call someone a martyr involves two concerns: "The first is what the martyr him or herself was and did…the second aspect…involves theological questions: namely, how far do these qualities measure up to the requirements for martyrdom?"[32]

This is not to say of course that there is no debate about some of the elements involved in our understanding of the Model martyr and therefore what is required of martyrdom; far from it, as the writings of several Catholic authors such as Rahner[33], Sobrino[34] and Nichols[35] show. Fundamentally, however, the basis upon which the martyr can be canonised remains nothing less than the certainty that the individual's death corresponded to that of the model Martyr, the debate is merely what constitutes the model Martyr. It is on

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[31] K. Woodward, op. cit., p. 40.
[32] B. Wicker, "The Drama of Martyrdom: Christian and Muslim Approaches", in B. Wicker, (ed.), *Witnesses to Faith*, op. cit., p. 105.
[33] K. Rahner, "Dimensions of Martyrdom: A Plea for the Broadening of a Classical Concept", *Concilium*, no. 163, 1983/3, pp. 9-11.
[34] J. Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2003) and "Political Holiness: A Profile", trans. D. Livingstone, *Concilium*, no. 163, 1983/3, pp. 18-23.
[35] A. Nichols, *Abortion and Martyrdom*, op. cit.

this basis that we can understand the comments of Father Gumpel, appointed as historical judge[36] on the case of Maximilian Kolbe, to whom we will return in greater detail later in Chapter 6. Commenting on discussions that took place in the rooms of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger regarding Kolbe's cause which led to its dismissal, Gumpel remarks, in a fashion consonant with the words we have looked at belonging to the former Cardinal when he would become Pope:

> The question was whether Kolbe had died as a martyr for the faith. I personally never said he was not a martyr. What I did say was *we have no absolutely certain proof* that he was a martyr in the classical sense, and in these cases you have to be absolutely certain.[37]

As with Benedict XVI above, the Church's own certainty of what a martyr is, therefore, translates to the certainty demanded that the cause conforms to this. Not only does this illustrate the role that a certain conceptualisation of the martyr has and the standard to which it is elevated as a model, but it also illustrates some of the epistemological implications of this realist approach. Concomitant with this idea of realism is the epistemologically realist position that Gumpel demonstrates when he concedes that Kolbe could be a martyr even if he has no proof. As Craig explains, "realism takes truth to be correspondence with fact and our knowledge of truth to be a separate matter."[38] Therefore, whilst the truth of one's martyrdom is a matter of correspondence to fact, the Church's knowledge of this correspondence, on the basis of which it uses the word, is entirely ancillary to the truth or fact of its existence. Accordingly, by insisting that the martyr is one who meets a certain ecclesiastical definition, or conforms to a certain model, the conditions

[36] In an attempt to expedite the process, Pope John Paul II appointed a philosophical judge and a historical judge.
[37] K. Woodward, op. cit., p. 146. Italics are mine.
[38] E. Craig, "Realism and Anti-Realism", in E. Craig, (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1998), vol. 8, p. 117.

for the Church's use of the word exist independently and can be satisfied independently of the Church's use. As Brian Wicker explains; "Anyone whose acts and dispositions leading to death are of the required kind, in the appropriate situation, will be a martyr *whether or not the Church knows this*."[39] So the Church is only acknowledging and confirming what is in fact already the case, and this approach underpins much of the Church's martyrdom discourse.

The Church openly concedes, therefore, the possibility that martyrdom and martyrs are a recognition-transcendent fact, and therefore that there are martyrs it does not, and is not able to, know about, even if it retains the right to declare officially those identified as such. So, the Church can say that whilst not all martyrs are canonised, all those canonised are martyrs. Postulator Redemptus Valabek, for instance, remarks regarding the cause petitioned by nuns of their foundress: "Look, I believe that these women are holy and in heaven. I just don't believe that the Church has need of that model of sanctity."[40] It is, therefore, the Church's insistence that 'martyr' be restricted to conformity with an external, real and defined model of the martyr that means that this conformity, and therefore the martyrdom it entails, exists independent of the Church and the Church allows the possibility of *anonymous martyrs.* As with the requirement of miracles, which minister to the Church's need to be sure that the saint is in heaven, so with the narrative of the martyr. The process of canonisation, then, is a purely epistemic rather than creative exercise, even though the martyr this process verifies is said to participate *ontologically* with Christ's own martyrdom.

This shows, therefore, that the Church does not in fact *make* martyrs as the title of Woodward's book suggests. Nor does the Church, through its processes of beatification and canonisation, seek to *describe* someone, in any creative sense, as a martyr. Rather, equipped

[39] B. Wicker, "The Drama of Martyrdom", op. cit., p. 105. Italics are mine.
[40] K. Woodward, op. cit., p. 109.

with a very clear idea of the conditions under which one might be called a martyr, the Church seeks merely to *discover* and *reveal* whether someone is a martyr by uncovering the facts of their narrative and observing whether a correspondence exists with the required facts; the facts of the Martyr. It is precisely the objective certainty of martyrdom and the subjective doubt in examining the cause that means the investigation has to be so exacting.

I have outlined the conceptualisation of martyrdom that the Roman Catholic Church adopts and which is manifest in the ecclesial processes it has developed in order to adjudicate claims to martyrdom. The Roman Catholic view, however, is emblematic of a wide range of opinions which share the traditional conviction that martyrdom is something definitive; a historical phenomenon with transcendental significance to which others can aspire. As we shall see, this traditional view has prevailed – not only within churches outside the Roman Catholic Church, for whom martyrdom is a matter of ecclesial orthodoxy, but also among theologians – even as modern conversations about martyrdom place increasing pressure on the integrity and relevance of these definitions.

Narrating the Martyr

Popular Martyrdom and the Problem of Definition

Notwithstanding numerous ecclesial attempts to delimit the meaning of the word in the way we have observed, 'martyr' has been used throughout history with staggering variance. Indeed, it is to this popular variance with which the term is used that the ecclesial definitions have responded. The term has described those who willingly sacrifice themselves, those who die in battle, victims of secular genocide and even those who die of natural causes. The unrestrained historical diversity of the term's meaning can be illustrated

by its thirteenth-century application to St Guinefort of Lyons – a *dog* – who enjoys the motley company of those such as Samson, Socrates, Guru Arjan Dev, King Charles I, suffragette Emily Davison and civil rights campaigner Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This ostensibly unrelated assembly is drawn from examples in the short work on martyrdom by Jolyon Mitchell in which he quite pertinently concludes from this multiplicity that "Martyrdom is a slippery term that is hard to define."[41] The 20th and 21st centuries in particular have witnessed an explosion in the use of the term whose proliferation during this time has comprised both a continued diversification of the term's usage and its increased popularity. Largely responsible for this has been the burgeoning phenomenon of popular martyrdom – the application of the term without official authority – and the broadening of traditional definitions of martyrdom that this has both required and advanced.

Because this represents a transfer of the power to decide whether someone is a martyr from central authorities to popular groups, this can be seen as a democratisation of the term. Of course, as we have seen, it has always been the case that it is the ordinary people of the martyr's community that are first to describe someone as a martyr and initiate the cause for their beatification and canonisation. What this term 'democratisation' describes, however, is the view, increasingly common in the 20th and 21st centuries, that this popular designation as martyr is *sufficient* to establish their status as martyrs; that is represents an *already* rather than a *not yet.*

This democratisation of the term poses a serious challenge to those who insist that martyrdom can be neatly defined and therefore the limits of its use delimited. Nevertheless, far from undermining these attempts, it has in fact renewed efforts to wrestle with this seemingly volatile concept. Baumeister, for instance, maintains there is something concrete to the martyr in spite of the diversity of its usage. He writes that "The way in which the term

[41] J. Mitchell, *Martyrdom: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 1.

martyr is taken for granted both inside and outside the Church can make us forget sometimes that the image of the martyr that we are used to represents a historical phenomenon which we can observe coming into being."[42] Indeed, as we have noted, Benedict XIV's definition of martyrdom was a distillation of the features present in pre-existing martyr narratives and, in a large part, its *raison d'être* was to respond to popular usages of the term.

In the face of this seemingly indiscriminate usage, two responses have predominantly emerged from those who maintain the orthodox approach to martyrdom as a matter of definition. The first has been to proportion the definition to this growing martyrology by casting the net even wider and offering a looser, more charitable definition of martyrdom which accommodates more of those described as martyrs. This is clearly the more liberal, accommodating theological approach. Like any definition, these attempts never succeed in being all-inclusive, but they seek to revisit, revise and redefine martyrdom in the face of the growing plurality of meanings. In this vein, for instance, scholars such as Sobrino,[43] Valiente[44], Rahner[45] and Boff[46] have sought to define martyrdom in such a way as to pay respect to and oblige those who name victims of Latin American violence as martyrs. Similarly, Herzberg[47] has argued that our understanding of martyrdom should extend to victims of the holocaust, whilst Johnson and Zurlo attempt to articulate a definition which describes as martyrdom the deaths of 160,000 Christian martyrs a year and includes victims of genocide and mass killings.[48] Such attempts lead to broad definitions such as that by Van Van Henten and Avemarie who define a martyr as: "a person who in an extremely hostile

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[42] T. Baumeister, "Martyrdom and Persecution in Early Christianity", trans. R. Nowell, *Concilium,* no. 163, 1983/3, pp. 3-8, p. 3.
[43] See footnote 27.
[44] O. E. Valiente, op. cit.
[45] K. Rahner, op. cit.
[46] L. Boff, "Martyrdom: An Attempt at Systematic Reflection", trans. P. Burns, *Concilium*, no. 163, 1983/3, pp.12-17.
[47] A. Herzberg, "Did the Holocaust of the Jews count as Martyrdom?", *Concilium*, no. 163, 1983/3, pp. 70-73.
[48] T. M. Johnson and G. A. Zurlo, "Christian Martyrdom as a Pervasive Phenomenon", *Society*, vol. 51, no. 6, 2014, pp. 679-685.

situation prefers a violent death to compliance with a demand of the (usually pagan) authorities.[49] Definitions such as this have unsurprisingly accelerated the democratisation and popularisation of the term.

The second response has seen a counter-gesture of rejecting the democratisation of the meaning of the term and of articulating and defending definitions which seek not to include new martyrs into the canon but to reinforce their exclusion. Naturally, for the Church, for whom martyrdom is a matter of orthodoxy, this is a large part of the reasoning behind the emergence and continued existence of a strict and exclusive definition. In modern debates however, this reasoning has appealed to others for several interesting reasons. One concern has been to preserve the integrity and significance of the term 'martyr' which advocates of this position argue is undermined the wider it is applied. Accordingly, Cunningham writes that "the word 'martyr' has become bandied about in the popular press somewhat promiscuously with the result that the concept itself is not only frequently used flabbily but the precise meaning of the word becomes blurred."[50]

Cunningham goes on to highlight another concern which arises when the term is applied in modern conversations about terrorism, suicide bombers and violence. Cunningham argues that the application of the term to suicide bombers would "evacuate the meaning of the term in any Christian way of understanding it."[51] Michael Budde similarly observes that "some notions of martyrdom (such as that of a suicide bomber) are incompatible with Christian martyrdom *rightly understood.*"[52] This concern has of course been thrown into the spotlight with its use in discussions about global terrorism, particularly

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[49] J. W. van Henten and F. Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.
[50] L. S. Cunningham, "Christian Martyrdom: A Theological Perspective", in M. L. Budde and K. Scott, (eds.), *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), p. 18.
[51] Ibid., pp. 16-18.
[52] M. L. Budde, "Introduction", in M. L. Budde and K. Scott, (eds.), op. cit., p. vii.

following the 9/11 attacks which has prompted a renewed focus on Islamic martyrdom.[53] In reality, however, the concern of popularising and potentiating the legitimising power of martyrdom to baptise an immoral or evil act, or indeed merely a contrary belief, is as old as the martyrdom tradition itself. Writers such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian and Lactantius all attempted to rearticulate martyrdom in order to exclude voluntary martyrdom, whilst in the Donatist schism there was great trepidation around martyrdom as an empowering category.[54] As we have shown, Brian Wicker also represents this tradition of attempting to say something material and concrete about martyrdom, writing in the introduction to his work that his efforts seek to "counteract a false ideology of martyrdom wherever it rears its head."[55]

Martyrdom as a Narrative Construct

Therefore, those who espouse the view that the martyr has an existence which can be defined have sought either to draw up positive or negative definitions in order to include or exclude additional popular martyrs from the martyrological canon. In the last few decades, however, the growing diversification of the term's usage and its defiance in being restricted to a certain definition has prompted an altogether different approach to the question of martyrdom. It is this approach that this thesis develops and refines and it is therefore important to lay it out in detail.

[53] See D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[54] See M. Gaddis, *There is no Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
[55] B. Wicker, (ed.), *Witnesses to Faith*, op. cit., p. xi.

This new school of thought has been largely pioneered in the United Kingdom by the works of Paul Middleton[56] whose initial work on early Christian martyrdom has led to successive important contributions to the still nascent field of studies on martyrdom and the shaping of a new method of enquiry. Middleton complains that "too much time and ink has been spilled in attempting to define martyrdom,"[57] concluding rather bluntly in another work that "the quest for an adequate objective definition of martyrdom is doomed to failure."[58] How, then, are we to make sense of the question 'what is martyrdom?' Rather than the traditional approach of examining martyr stories to find the common historical traits of the martyr to get some sense of what it is that word refers to, Middleton instead looks for commonality in the contexts from which they emerge.

The novelty of Middleton's approach is the suggestion that martyrs are products not of the individual's conformity with a set of historical particularities, but solely of the way they are remembered and interpreted by their communities. Whether or not death is martyrdom depends not, as is conventionally believed, on the manner of the death but entirely, Middleton argues, on the manner in which this death is *narrated;* that is, interpreted, imagined, remembered and told. So, Middleton can say that "To become a martyr a particular death needs to be recounted in a certain way; it requires a martyr narrative."[59] For Middleton, "in this understanding of martyrdom, the individual martyr becomes a secondary concern," even to the point that what the martyr actually does, the details of their death, are "besides the point."[60] This removes the control and initiative for martyrdom from the would-be martyr and confers it upon others. Middleton emphatically announces, therefore, that

[56] Middleton's most important ideas are contained within P. Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, (London: T&T Clark, 2006); *Martyrdom: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (London: T&T Clark, 2011); and "What is Martyrdom?", *Mortality*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2004, pp. 117-133.
[57] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. 190.
[58] P. Middleton, "What is Martyrdom", op. cit., p. 118.
[59] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. 24.
[60] Ibid., p. 17.

"Martyrs are not defined; they are made."[61] As we shall see, unlike Woodward's use of that term with reference to the Church's approach, on this account, martyrs really are *made.*

The flaw in the approach of authors such as Cunningham, Budde and Wicker, among others, therefore, is to believe that martyrdom is something which can be narrowly defined and therefore denied to some and granted to others. Middleton shows that the martyr is a product not of historical fact but of narrative interpretation. Indeed, often, as Felix Wilfred explains, "In the creation of martyrs there is a conflict to control the meaning of death."[62] The narrative of *terrorist* is only a competing narrative against that of the martyr; it cannot be any more objectively true because there is no objective reality of martyrdom against which to test the claim. As Julia Smith explains; "sanctity is in the eye of the beholder…it was negotiated, contested and shaped as much by the needs of the audience as by the experiences of the saint in question."[63] The designation of the assailants at 9/11 as terrorists, for instance, just like their designation as martyrs, hinges not merely on the facts of their actions, but on way that these facts are interpreted within the interpretive framework of the narrating communities. These interpretive frameworks are shaped and defined by an enormous blanket of ideas, traditions and, as Julia Smith explains, social pressures.

The notion that martyrs are *made* turns the attention towards the maker; towards the narrator rather than the narrative. This has a profound effect on what it means to study martyrdom. As Middleton himself says,

> Therefore the question, 'what is martyrdom?' is really, 'who makes martyrdom and for what purpose?'[64]

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[61] Ibid., p. 17.
[62] F. Wilfred, "Martyrdom in Religious Traditions," *Concilium,* 2003/1, pp. 75-83, p. 76.
[63] J. Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c.780-920," *Past and Present,* no. 146, 1995, pp. 3-37, p. 5, quoted in A. B. Mulder-Bakker, "Gendering Medieval Martyrdom: Thirteenth-Century Lives of Holy Women in the Low Countries", in J. Leemans, (ed.), *More Than a Memory,* op. cit., pp. 233-234.
[64] P. Middleton, "What is Martyrdom?", op. cit., p. 118.

"Martyr", Middleton argues, is a term whose variance can tell us next to nothing about an individual and only ever something about the community that narrates, and therefore interprets, their death. We must remember, in other words, as Leemans puts it, that "the authors of this discourse had their own *Sitz im Leben*, interests, agenda and purposes which were reflected in their writings."[65] This focus on what Leemans calls the *Sitz im Leben* might be said, therefore, to involve a reductive turn as the proper study of martyrdom understood in this way is recognised more accurately as the study of a community and the sociological and psychological factors that determined the way that the death was narrated. On this methodological shift, Flanagan and Jupp agree that "Middleton's emphasis on the importance of martyrdom in relation to group identity propels the issue of 'martyr making' in a sociological direction."[66] This turn relegates the importance of psychological studies into why people become martyrs and instead advances the sociological question: "why make someone a martyr?" This question is enormous in scope and involves discussions on what making martyrs achieves and why a community would profit from achieving this which this thesis clearly does not have the scope to host.

In an illustrative section, Middleton observes;

> …the death [of the martyr] is normally interpreted within the framework of a far wider conflict, which may itself be external to the narrative or report. This conflict may be regional, global or even cosmic. The martyr becomes a symbol of the community's desires and hopes, or for that matter, their terrors and fears, but in either case, the martyr is representative of a larger struggle. This struggle might be political, spiritual, or often both. Usually some final outcome is envisaged and the martyr contributes in some way to that larger end.[67]

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[65] J. Leemans, "Introduction", in J. Leemans, (ed.), *More than a Memory*, op. cit., p. xiv.
[66] K. Flanagan and P. C. Jupp, op. cit., pp. 112-113.
[67] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

Suffering and death become martyrdom when they are interpreted, remembered and told as participating in an "external" framework which supplies the "cause" for which the martyr is said to have died. Because these external frameworks are not always religious, the cause for martyrdom can be secular as Mitchell's examples of martyrs given earlier demonstrates. As Louis French, whose work on Sikh martyrdom exhibits a similar methodology, writes; "It is this ability to transform a death into a sacrifice for a cause which plays the crucial role in the 'creation' of a martyr."[68]

These uses to which martyr narratives could be put are vast; martyrdom could be invoked in order to legitimise a cause, advance or discourage a spiritual or political concern, discredit a group, elicit guilt, memorialise someone, minister to pastoral needs, add meaning to death, malign a person, group or cause as a persecutor, and the list could go on. This is not even to mention the sociological and political consequences that can result from martyrdom even if the martyrologist did not intend them. Much ink has been spilled examining the sociological and psychological motivations of both would-be martyrs themselves as well as their martyrologists.[69] Examples of these will be manifest throughout this thesis but the essential point is that martyrs are made when there is an advantage to be made from this interpretation; either positively, such as the legitimacy procured for the suffragette movement by the 'martyrdom' of Emily Davison, or negatively such as the remunerative use the term had when, accompanied with certificates and financial compensation, it was applied to relieve the anguish of the parents of soldier martyrs in the Iran-Iraq war in the eighties. Most often, of course, it is both; the latter example helped to quicken the pace of recruitment, for instance.

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[68] L. E. French, "Martyrdom and the Execution of Guru Arjan in Early Sikh Sources", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 121, no. 1, 2001, pp. 20-31, p. 30.

[69] For a remarkably comprehensive bibliography see E. Weiner and A. Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction*, (Atlanta: Scholars press, 1990). For more on the sociological dimensions of martyrdom see D. W. Riddle, *The Martyrs: A Study in Social Control*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931).

This approach has encouraged fascinating research into the historical contexts for martyrdom, the fruits of which can be observed in Mulder-Bakker's gripping analysis of Saint Dympna in the Middle Ages. She explains that in order to conduct this research: "I have to turn over the traditional research approach concerning martyrdom. I do not start from the 'martyrs' themselves, those virtuosi of the faith, because for me as an historian, there is no such thing as a 'neutral' martyr saint, existing '*in se*'. A martyr can only exist thanks to the conviction of believers that this particular dead person deserves to be called a martyr."[70] Instead, therefore, she asks in a fashion displaying the fundamental difference between this and the orthodox approach to martyrdom: "why do people create martyrs and who are to be held responsible for shaping this image?"[71] She shows that Dympna was canonised in order to challenge prevailing fascinations with *living* saints and in particular the *mulieres religiosae* whose example contradicted "Ecclesiastical expectations concerning male and female behaviour"[72] which, especially after the Gregorian Reform, saw the *vita contemplativa* as the proper province of women. The veneration of Dympna allowed the example of the virgin-martyr to "tame" these *mulieres* and "pressured them in the direction of the cloister."[73]

Martyr narratives, then, are meant not only to venerate the victim; they minister to the needs of that victim's community, in this case the Church. To alter a well-worn adage – if martyrs did not exist, they would need to be invented, and as we have seen, this tactic of using saints to endorse a certain conceptualisation of sanctity remains commonplace in the ecclesial saint-making process to this day. As de Valk explains:

[70] A. B. Mulder-Bakker, op. cit., pp. 233-234.
[71] Ibid., p. 229.
[72] Ibid., p. 239.
[73] Ibid., p. 235.

> In the modern and contemporary history of the Catholic Church canonizations rarely happen by chance. They are expensive and lengthy affairs and consequently the subjects will be chosen with great care. In most cases they carry an explicit message and have to be analysed in a doctrinal, ideological or even political context. New saints and their cult often speak out to the world. Internally, too, they function as important signals. Upcoming doctrinal opinions and judgement can thus officiously be established, existing ones emphasised. Saints are role models, they can direct the faithful to new forms of spirituality and religious life, or demarcate the sphere of influence occupied by national, ecclesiastical or ideological pressure groups inside the church.[74]

This demonstrates the stark contrast between this view and that espoused by the Roman Catholic Church. The social constructivist account of martyrdom is profoundly anti-realist. Proponents of this view emphasise that the historical events of the individual's death have little or nothing to do with whether or not that victim become a martyr. As Castelli writes; "The rhetorical and discursive character of martyrdom has challenged the scholarly focus on questions of 'what really happened' and obsessions with separating the historical kernel from the chaff of legend."[75]

Despite their claims to authority in the ecclesial process, Middleton, Castelli and others do indeed speak of the Roman Catholic Church 'making' martyrs since they argue that the process the Church uses is nothing more than an assertion of the conditions under which *their* martyr narrative operates. The Church has done nothing more than elucidate the dominant tropes of its interpretive framework; but it is still this interpretive framework, not any historical circumstances, that makes the martyr, as is demonstrated by the phenomenon of popular martyrdom to which the strict codification of the Church's approach responds. As Middleton says, "…no institution has the ability to determine who is and who is not a martyr."[76] They do, however, have the ability to decide who *their* martyrs are and, therefore,

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[74] H. de Valk, "History Canonized: The Martyrs of Gorcum between Dutch Nationalism and Roman Universalism (1864-1868)", J. Leemans, (ed.), *More than a Memory*, op. cit., p. 378.
[75] E. Castelli, op. cit., p. 173.
[76] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. ix.

the features of the narrative that make them. Accordingly, to this social-constructivist account, the notion of anonymous martyrs is meaningless. Since the martyr is a narrative not historical product, as an *interpretation* of a historical individual's death, the martyr cannot not have an existence independent from its community.

The Martyr as a Social Construct: Elizabeth Castelli and Collective Memory

For Middleton, therefore, martyrdom is a social and literary construct, much like 'villain' or 'hero'. 'Martyr' refers only indirectly to historical individuals, emerging as a particular way in which that individual is imagined. Foremost among this school of thought in North America, a very helpful contribution to this understanding of martyrdom as a social construct comes from Elizabeth Castelli in her excellent book entitled *Martyrdom and Memory*.[77] Here, Castelli revisits and develops the ideas of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, himself a student of Émile Durkheim, on the notion of "collective memory." Collective memory, Castelli explains, is the view that memory "is a socially constructed version of the past."[78] The inherently social nature of our existence means that the way that we imagine the past is always referred to the manner in which it is collectively discussed and interpreted. Whilst we might have personal memories, Castelli explains, even then, and more importantly, "Their meanings derive their intelligibility from context and collectively generated frameworks of significance."[79] Therefore, even if *what* we are remembering was a personal experience, the manner in which we do so, and therefore our personal consciousness of the past, is instructed by our society, and therefore collectively and socially constructed.

[77] E. Castelli, op. cit.
[78] Ibid., p. 12.
[79] Ibid., p. 11.

This construction of a "version of the past" means that there is a "…stark division between collective memory (a social construction) and objective history (as a positivist narrative)."[80] It is this division which is so helpful in understanding the relationship that the 'martyr' has to the historical individual imagined and constructed as such; the martyr's historical counterpart. Castelli believes that collective memory can help to explain the creation of the martyr by understanding the martyr as a construct within this socially-constructed version of the past rather than as part of objective history. Castelli forcefully writes;

> Martyrdom is not simply action…Suffering violence in and of itself is not enough. In order for martyrdom to emerge, both the violence and its suffering must be infused with particular meanings…Martyrdom always implies a broader narrative…By turning the chaos and meaninglessness of violence into martyrdom, one reasserts the priority and superiority of an imagined or longed-for order and a privileged and idealized system of meaning.[81]

The martyr emerges as a product of the way that societies collectively construct the past and the way the past is thus socially constructed is defined by *interpretive frameworks*. These interpretive frameworks within which suffering and death can be seen as martyrdom are instructed by larger meta-narratives involving powerful tropes which condition the interpretive framework. Going to the source of Christian martyrdom in the early church, Castelli summarises;

> From the earliest sources onward, it becomes clear that Christians positioned the historical experience of persecution almost immediately within a framework of meaning that drew upon broader metanarratives about temporality, suffering and sacrifice, and identity...Early Christian writers seeking to preserve the story of

[80] Ibid., p. 21.
[81] Ibid., p. 34.

> Christian martyrdom…wrote with a broad meta-narrative in mind, which framed every detail and interpretation.[82]

Castelli believes that this collective memory begets an entirely new narrative: an interpretive, collectively-constructed version of the past which participates in and contributes to the larger meta-narratives from which it arises. This she calls *myth.* In a similar vein, Leemans who has made a valuable contribution to this discussion in examining "the reciprocal relationship between martyrdom and Christian identity",[83] explains that martyrdom is "more than a memory" because it helps construct the Christian identity of the *Sitz im Leben* from which it emerges.

Finally, for Castelli, even in instances of voluntary martyrdom, and more broadly speaking the *vocational* view of martyrdom which sees it as something of which the victim is very self-aware, self-identifies as and aspires to, the martyr contributes to the social construction of themselves. Castelli examines the autobiographical writings of the early church in the examples of examples of Ignatius, Perpetua and Pionius. Castelli, astutely I believe, observes that contrary to Foucault's views on the technologies of the self, writing becomes increasingly inward looking during this period. She writes that "these texts…attempt to create and control the memories they preserve. Rather than being writings devoted solely to the generation of a private self, they are self-writings that produce a public self."[84] Therefore, whilst the *martyr* is a social construct, that does not necessarily prohibit the *victim* from shaping the manner in which they are interpreted and collectively remembered. By being self-reflective and understanding themselves within meta-narrative interpretive frameworks, the victim can *self-narrate* and therefore construct their own narrative or "public" self in the same way that they might do another. By their actions, they

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[82] Ibid., p. 25.
[83] J. Leemans, "Introduction", op. cit., p. xvi.
[84] Ibid., p. 78. See chapter 3 for discussion and response to Foucault.

can *perform* this role and contribute to the power that the spectacle of martyrdom has in shaping our interpretations of it.

The Martyr as a Social Type

The notion that the martyr exists not directly as a historical individual but as an interpretation of that individual within a collectively-constructed version of reality raises the question of the nature of the martyr's existence within this narrative and the relationship between the socially-constructed narrative they inhabit and the positivist narrative of objective history this dramatises. What are we referring to by the term 'martyr', and what sphere of discourse does that term belong to? As this deals with the status and ontology of persons within social narratives, this is a fundamentally sociological question. It is on this topic that E. and A. Weiner[85] have been especially instructive in introducing sociological categories to help to explain the martyr's existence within these dramatisations of history. Advancing the thesis that martyrdom is indeed "socially constructed"[86], they believe that the martyr is accordingly best understood using George Simmel's idea of the "social type."[87]

This notion of the social type is perhaps best explained by Arditi:

> In the concept of social type the person is perceived as the possessor of a character. This character is social in the sense that it originated because of structural arrangements of the society. The person is not an actor, someone 'who comes forward to play certain parts on the stage of society,' he or she is 'someone irretrievably within the play.' The character lives within the play, and the play comprises the essence of his or her reality. 'The actor leaves the stage' the character really may not do so. The actor belongs to the same world as the author and participates in the making of a fiction; the character is in a closed world. [88]

[85] E. Weiner and A. Weiner, op. cit., p. 3.
[86] Ibid., p. 3.
[87] See G. Simmel, "The Stranger" in ed. K.H. Wolf, *The Sociology of George Simmel*, (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1950).
[88] J. Arditi, "Role as a Cultural Concept", in *Theory and Society*, vol. 16. no. 4, 1987, p. 572.

The clever contrast that Arditi draws in the theatrical metaphor between the actor's *role* as a character and the character itself is especially useful to understanding the relationship between the martyr and the victim, as the martyr too is a literary creation. The metaphor is invoked to draw the distinction between what sociologists classify as social *types* and social *roles.* A social *role* is a characterisation that an individual *performs* in history; this "character" that the individual adopts is merely the role that the *actor* performs, and at all times he retains his identity and agency as an actor in history performing the role of a character on a historical stage.

Where the actor inhabits the world of history and appropriates characters from dramatic worlds to *roles* he then performs, the character inhabits the world of the drama itself. The *social type* refers to the character itself within the drama that unfolding history is imagined as. When Simmel articulates the social type of the Stranger[89], or Park's Marginal Man,[90] or Klapp's Fool[91], these writers are not precisely and directly referring to specific individuals within history. Rather, they are referring to characters in the dramatisations of history that their sociological accounts of the way that people perceive their reality provide. As Arditi shows, individuals within society do not relate to these characters in the same way that actors relate to characters through roles in a play, and yet the individual and the character do, in a sense, *correspond.* If not that between an actor and a character, what is the correct relationship that exists between the historical individual existing in the world of the author and the character existing in the world the author imagines? This is a very elusive question. They might be seen as historical *versions* of these characters in some sense since it is they that the characters are dramatising. Yet, their existence as characters in an altogether

[89] G. Simmel, "The Stranger" in K. H. Wolf, (ed.), *The Sociology of George Simmel*, (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1950).
[90] R. E. Park, "The Marginal Man," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 33, no. 6, 1928, pp. 881-893.
[91] O. Klapp, "The Fool," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 55, no. 2, 1949, pp. 157-162.

different dramatic universe gives this existence an independence and integrity which makes it very difficult to conceptualise a relationship between it and that of the historical individual.

These characters in social narratives do not have *counterparts* in history any more than the actor represents the character's counterpart on stage. Individuals are therefore no more the characters in these dramas than actors are the characters in the dramatic universe they perform. As these narratives are socially constructed, they are in fact more accurately seen as the *authors* of these dramas, even though it is their own reality they dramatise; they create the imaginative universe in which these characters exist, but they cannot inhabit it themselves.

It is in this respect that E. and A. Weiner argue the martyr is a social type. Whereas the victim refers to an individual in history, the martyr can be viewed as a character in a social narrative that dramatises this history. To refer to a martyr, therefore, is not *directly* to refer to a historical individual at all. It is to shift the domain of discourse to a stylised construction of historical reality and it is within this dramatic world that the martyr exists. The willing victim can only ever hope to perform the *role* of the martyr; but they can never hope to become the martyr any more successfully than the actor can ever hope to become the character. A principal aim of this thesis is to examine who this construction 'martyr' is.

The foregoing discussion highlights the interesting conceptual questions which the social-constructivist account of martyrdom raises and which have yet to be explored fully in this field of study and which require further investigation. Its consequence is that it leads to the peculiar but irresistible conclusion that the historical suffering victim enduring torments under their persecutor is in fact not to be identified as the martyr at all. The notion that martyrdom is solely a literary phenomenon seems to undermine the significance and reality of the experiences of the historical individual. The question of the correct way to conceptualise the relationship between the socially-constructed narrative the martyr inhabits

and the positivist narrative of objective history this narrative dramatises raises more fundamental epistemological questions about the relationship between the past and collective memory; between the literary and the real; and between narrative and history.

These difficulties are only compounded when the linguistic dimensions are explored. Does the victim, we might ask, *become* the martyr in the interpretation? Would it be more accurate to say that whilst the martyr is indeed the object of the verb, the victim is not its subject, for this would imply a causal relationship which roots martyrdom back in history? This also challenges our conventional semantics. Perhaps 'martyr', when used as a verb, ought to have as its subject the narrator, not, as is conventional, the killer within the narrative. French and E. and A. Weiner compromise, preferring the term "martyrologist,"[92] which accurately conveys the sense in which the martyr has its existence in a martyrology rather than in history, although this helpfully avoids the question of the martyrology's relationship with history.

Therefore, this new constructivist model of martyrdom has only exacerbated the already problematic truth that, as Middleton puts it, "the question of how we speak of martyrdom is a minefield."[93] This thesis does not have the remit to analyse these fascinating questions, but these possible trajectories help to demonstrate just how radical this social constructivist account is, how much it challenges the received view on martyrdom, and how much scope for new research this account has.

Theology in the Social Constructivist Account of Martyrdom

Observing this sociological trajectory the study of martyrdom has taken, Flanagan

[92] L. E. French, op. cit., p. 30, and E. Weiner and A. Weiner, op. cit., p. 12.
[93] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. 5.

and Jupp observe that "The elusive properties surrounding the definition of the martyr are not necessarily fatal to its academic exploration and recognition."[94] The spirit of enquiry represented by scholars such as Middleton and Castelli shows convincingly, I believe, that far from being fatal, the defiance martyrdom demonstrates to traditional attempts to define it has prompted responses which have greatly advanced its study and more accurately explained what the phenomenon of martyrdom is. Where the model that this thesis adopts differs from the aforementioned, however, is in the belief that a critical dimension of this constructivist account has been hitherto under-attended, though not completely ignored. The explicit rejection of the traditionally *ecclesial* conceptualisation in favour of a social-constructivist model with its emphasis on the sociological context for the narrative can, I believe, lead to an abrogation of theology and a secularisation of the martyrdom discourse. This is illustrated, I believe, in the methodology that E. and A. Weiner adopt: "In our analysis our objective is to map out the social conditions and structures of group consciousness which first lent plausibility to the emergence of the martyr figure."[95]

It is not only important but imperative, I believe, to acknowledge and study the role of theological ideas in this narrative construction of the martyr. In bringing these into light, this thesis argues that their study, alongside the other secular forces at work, is essential to an analysis of martyrdom and to an understanding of the process by which martyrs come into being. That martyrdom is a social-construct does not mean that its examination is exhausted by a social analysis; religious ideas are themselves, of course, remarkably powerful in social discourse and imagination. Martyrdom is not reducible to sociology as a field of study. I hope to contribute to this social constructivist account by showing how its

[94] K. Flanagan and P. C. Jupp, op. cit., p. 113.
[95] E. Weiner and A. Weiner, op. cit., p. 28.

aims can profit from a closer investigation of the theological dimension of martyr narratives and the bulk of this thesis is an attempt to demonstrate the fruitfulness of this approach.

Because the martyr is a narrative construct, there are two essential elements to martyrdom: the construct *the martyr* and the narrative world they inhabit. Or, to employ the analogy used earlier: the character and the play. Clearly, martyr narratives are a very particular type of narrative. Not any imagination of an individual's death could be understood as martyrdom; similarly, not any interpretation of an individual's death could imagine it in a way that *could* be understood as martyrdom. Both the narrative and the way it imagines death are of a certain type. It is my contention that it is religious traditions that both define who the martyr in the narrative is and shape the imagination of reality in which they exist. It is religious ideas, in other words, which distinguish martyrdom from other imaginations of death, and religious ideas too that distinguish the martyr's imaginative universe from any other. I shall elaborate each of these briefly.

If a martyr, as Middleton, contends, "…is created when a narrative about death is told in a particular way"[96] then the next question we must surely ask is: what is this particular way? Similarly, Castelli believes martyrs are a version of the historical victim constructed by collective memory. But what makes this socially constructed alternative version of the individual a martyr? What makes a collective memory of the past a martyr narrative? To answer these questions it is crucial to perceive that martyrs are not made in theological vacuums. Martyr narratives, as Middleton, says, "…do more than simply report a death; they contain the interpretive framework by which that death should be understood"[97] If the martyr emerges from a specific *interpretation* of death, then the use of the term "martyr" implies a clear sense of what the victim has been interpreted *as*. Martyr narratives must, therefore,

[96] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. x, and "What is Martyrdom?", op. cit., p. 130.
[97] Ibid., p. 17.

depend upon pre-existing conceptions of *who the martyr is*; these I call martyrologies.[98] What makes this socially-constructed narrative character a *martyr*, therefore, is a fundamentally *theological* question. The martyr may therefore belong to a socially-constructed imaginative universe, but who the martyr is in that universe and therefore what it is that communities are collectively imagining is a matter for theologians.

Martyrdom, then, is neither correspondence with a realist conception of the martyr, nor an entirely relativist matter. Rather, martyrdom consists in a narrative's coherence with an accepted conceptualisation of the meaning of martyrdom. This *coherence* with pre-existent ideas of martyrdom contrasts with the *correspondence* with the real because, as Kirkham explains, coherence theories of truth "make truth a matter of a truth bearer's relations to other truth bearers rather than its relations to reality."[99] These other truth bearers are theological traditions which articulate some notion of the meaning and significance of martyrdom. It is this dimension of the construction of the martyr that I wish to probe in this thesis and in doing so show that the so-called sociological nature of this constructivist theory need not exclude it from serious theological investigation.

Conclusion

To conclude, therefore, there are two dominant ways to conceptualise martyrdom: either as something real that happens to individuals in history and which has transfigurative power; or as a narrative construct. This thesis builds on the latter. It argues that martyrdom

[98] "Martyrology" is traditionally used to refer to refer to collections of martyrdom in the manuscript literature. I am aware, therefore, of the lexical ambiguity my use of this term may create. Since the word refers to a tradition which understands martyrdom in a certain way, it seems, however, to be an appropriate term and I use it in the same way that E. and A. Weiner use it; see op. cit. I hope this clarification assuages Moss' concern that the use of this word in the literature represents "a lack of familiarity" with this other usage. See C.R. Moss, "Current Trends", op. cit., p. 29.

[99] R. L. Kirkham, "Truth, Coherence Theory of", in E. Craig, (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, op. cit., vol. 9, p. 470.

describes a particular way of imagining death that is delimited and described by theological traditions; martyrologies. Martyrdom emerges when death is collectively constructed by communities whose interpretive frameworks imagine it in such a way that it conforms to these martyrologies. The martyr, then, is a character in an imaginative and collectively constructed dramatisation of history and can be understood in a way analogous to the way that sociologists understand the social type in social narratives. Theological ideas, I argue, not only define the particular way of imagining death as martyrdom, but also influence the interpretive frameworks which help to shape the reality these conceptualisations of the martyr can inhabit. In what follows, then, a central aim will be to justify the prominence I give to the role of these theological ideas and to show their importance to the narrative construction of the martyr.

Chapter 2: The Beginnings of Martyrdom and the Emergence of Martyrologies

The first contention of this thesis is that a martyr narrative is a very particular type of narrative; one which imagines an individual's death as cohering to theological conceptions of the meaning and significance of martyrdom – martyrologies. As we said in the introduction, as well as arguing for the prominence of martyrologies in the martyr-making process, this thesis also contends that these martyrologies are rooted in the emergence of martyrdom in the early church and the diversity of meanings that it had in its development there. This thesis contends that the traditions in and through which martyrdom developed wove the strands of meaning that martyrdom had when it emerged in the early church, and that these strands determined and elucidated martyrologies which would go on to define Christian martyr narratives thereafter and to the present day.

Accordingly, in this chapter, we turn to the emergence of martyrdom in the early church in order to uncover what these strands of meaning might have been and to demonstrate their role in the construction of the martyr, always cognisant of Moss' observation that this involved a "linguistic shift that was varied, graduated, and irregular."[100] We cannot hope to provide a comprehensive analysis of this question or to be definitive about how martyrdom was understood. As we shall see, the martyr did not emerge from a process of theological discernment, but emerged hurriedly in response the early church experiences of persecution. Conceptualisations of martyrdom in the early church are consequently broad and inchoate. We aim to do no more than to propose some broad strands of meaning that martyrdom had, and these will be fourfold.

[100] C.R. Moss, "Current Trends", op. cit., p. 23.

The prominent role that these four martyrologies play in Christian martyrdom constitutes the first contention of this thesis and this will then be demonstrated in the subsequent four chapters where these martyrologies are analysed. Again, the aim is not to be definitive, but to illustrate the role that martyrologies such as these play, and thereby to demonstrate the efficacy and importance of a theological approach to the analysis of martyrdom, and of theology to the social-constructivist account of martyrdom more broadly. By and through this analysis we are then able to substantiate the second contention of this thesis regarding the nature and implications of these martyrologies. This chapter, therefore, aims ultimately to conclude with a model of Christian martyrologies derived from its emergence in the early church which subsequent chapters can then defend and subject to analysis

The particularities of the emergence and understanding of the term 'martyr' in the early church is a source of great debate. In the first instance, opinion is broadly divided on whether or not martyrdom as a *phenomenon* broadly understood can be traced back to pre-Christian Graeco-Judaic traditions or whether it emerged as a quintessentially Christian phenomenon. Classic texts such as those by Baumeister[101] and Frend[102], as well as those by modern authors such as Moss[103], employ literary criticism to argue that without the theology, vocabulary and motifs of Graeco-Judaic thought, such as that found in the story of Socrates and the books of Judges, Daniel and Maccabees, "a Christian theology of martyrdom would" as Frend puts it "scarcely be thinkable."[104] On the other hand, Delehaye[105], von

[101] T. Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980).
[102] W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).
[103] C. Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Church Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2013).
[104] W. H. C. Frend, op. cit., pp. 56-71.
[105] H. Delehaye, *Les passions des martyr et les genres littéraires*, (Subsidia Hagiographica, 13B; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1921).

Campenhausen[106], and more recently Bowersock[107] and Boyarin[108], suggest instead that no such connection exists, with Bowersock arguing forcefully that "there is no reason to think that anyone displayed anything comparable to martyrdom before the Christians."[109] A matter on which there is far greater consensus is that the *term* 'martyr' only emerged within the Christian tradition.

'Martyr' derives from the Greek word μάρτυς meaning 'a witness'[110]; a term that Islam would inherit through its translation to the Arabic equivalent *šahīd*, which also came to mean martyr. Its usage in Greek was broadly analogous to our own, but at some point in the first or second century of Christianity's existence, as we shall see, the term came to refer to the phenomenon we now understand as martyrdom, and it was this meaning that passed into Latin with the transliteration *martyrium.*[111]

In understanding the emergence of martyrdom and its meaning to the early church, specifically two issues arise, and this chapter divides into two parts in analysing them. Firstly, what was meant by witness in an early church in which those who died doing so became known as martyrs? Secondly, what role did death play and what relationship did it have with witness such that witnesses became martyrs?

In the first part of this chapter, to answer the question 'who is the martyr?' we will ask 'who was the witness?' To do so, we turn both to the New Testament uses of witness that were contemporaneous with the emergence of martyrdom, and to the Old Testament traditions that informed their meaning. We will see that the conception of *witness* from

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[106] H. von Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1936).
[107] G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[108] D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
[109] G. W. Bowersock, op. cit., p. 7.
[110] Other significant forms are μαρτυρείν meaning "to witness", μαρτυρία meaning the act of witnessing, and μαρτύριον meaning "testimony".
[111] For the avoidance of doubt, I will use *witness* to refer to μάρτυς without the connotations of Christian martyrdom and *martyr* to refer to the Christian application of μάρτυς to the Christian phenomenon of martyrdom.

which the *martyr* first emerged appears as an extended juridical metaphor, inherited from Old Testament legal traditions, and used to dramatise the conflict and controversy of the early church. Crucially, the meaning of witness inherited from the Old Testament was applied widely in the early church in a missionary context where its meaning was broadly twofold: either witnessing *to* Christ or witnessing *as* Christ. It is necessary, therefore, to begin with this Old Testament meaning to see what it was that the early church inherited.

The second part of this chapter considers the relationship between witness and death and some of the theological traditions that coloured the characterisation of the μάρτυς as the *martyr*, rather than merely the witness. Again, here, a twofold understanding of the relationship between death and the witness appears to emerge from the contemporaneous traditions; that death is the necessary and inevitable cost of Christian witness, and the more radical notion that it is constitutive of it.

We will conclude by showing, therefore, that not only does this analysis advance our understanding of the meaning of martyrdom and the narrative possibilities of imaginations of the martyr, but also that it defends the social-constructivist account of martyrdom. For, from its very origins, the martyr emerges as a juridical metaphor in an interpretive narrative of history used to dramatise conflict, where both the identity and function of the martyr within this narrative is informed by contemporary understandings and expectations of witness. Of greatest importance, however, is that the two understandings of witness and the two relationships it was understood to have with death generate four strands of meaning for the term martyrdom. The chief aim of this chapter, therefore, is to outline the four ways in which martyrdom was and could be understood in the early church so that the subsequent four chapters can prove both this thesis' first contention regarding the role that each of these have played and continue to play in making martyrs, and its second contention regarding the nature of these traditions as radicalising, morally dangerous and incoherent.

Witness in the Early Church: witnessing *to* and witnessing *as* Christ

The most fruitful resource for studying early church conceptions of witness is the New Testament, where μάρτυς and its derivatives[112] appear over 200 times, most especially in later books. As we shall see, the New Testament's usage is inherited from the Old Testament which is very much a product of life in ancient Israel. It is, therefore, with the latter that we must begin. Much excellent work has been done on the concept of witness in both the New and Old Testament, and foremost among these is Allison Trites[113] who, drawing principally from the works of Gemser[114], Köhler[115] and McKenzie[116], demonstrates the influence of Old Testament traditions on New Testament meaning. It is necessary, therefore, only to distil from this scholarship the chief lines of thought and biblical evidence given in support.

Witness in the Old Testament

The Forensic Application

Witness in the Old Testament has a forensic application whose meaning is entailed by the juridical context of legal assembly in ancient Israel. Here, legal disputes were resolved by judicial proceedings at the town gate. When a legal contention arose, the plaintiff would

[112] See footnote above.
[113] A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
[114] B. Gemser, "The *rîḇ* or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality", in M. Noth and D. W. Thomas, (eds.), *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, (Leiden: Brill, 1960), pp. 120-137.
[115] L. Köhler, *Hebrew Man*, (London: SCM, 1956), pp. 149-175.
[116] D. A. McKenzie, "Judicial Procedure at the Town Gate", *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 14, 1964, pp. 100-104.

level a prosecuting charge against a defendant at a legal assembly conducted in an open space, usually near the town gate, where the case would be heard by the town elders. (Deut. 25: 7-10; Josh. 20:4). To prove their case, each side would present witnesses in support of their cause. As Maccini explains, "Israel's jurisprudence relied heavily on human witnesses, and treated the deposition of their testimony with the upmost gravity."[117] Unlike Greek courts, the accused could only be condemned on the basis of "two or three witnesses" but never one (Deut. 17:6; 19:15). False witnesses were strongly prohibited by the Decalogue (Exod. 20:16; Deut. 5:20) and faced the *lex talionis* by receiving the punishment of the sentence their testimony was trying to establish (Deut. 19:16-19).

The nature of this oral testimony, however, was markedly different from our modern understanding of the word, and this is crucial in understanding how the early church understood their call to witness. As Trites explains:

> The chief method of proof was the testimony of witnesses. These witnesses were not in any sense merely objective informants. Their role was similar to that played in a modern lawsuit by the counsel for the defence and the counsel for the prosecution…In the Old Testament legal assembly the same man was both witness and advocate. He did not attempt to win a verdict from the judge but to convince his opponent and elicit an acknowledgement of surrender from him.[118]

Witnesses therefore both testified to what they had seen or heard and advocated for the cause they represented. The Book of Job, whose controversy is formally structured as a lawsuit, illustrates this role of the witness. In chapters 3-31, witnesses from both sides (Job and his friends) interchangeably give speeches attempting not merely to present evidence, but to persuade the other side of their position.

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[117] R. G. Maccini, "Testimony/Witness", in T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner, (eds.), *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), p. 812.
[118] A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

As well as the element of advocacy, it is also crucial to a proper understanding of the New Testament's inheritance of these witness traditions to note that juridical witness did not only consist exclusively of oral testimony. It referred also to anything which was claimed to bear testimony to a contested truth. So, in Exodus 22:13, we are told that if the animal entrusted to a man is killed by wild animals, he should bring for his defence the carcass as a witness to this event. The use of witness, including objects, extended to matters outside of a live trial where arrangements such as agreements or promises were given legal validity. Therefore, in Genesis 31:52, even a heap of stones and a pillar are witnesses to an agreement, and in Genesis 21:30, seven lambs are witness to work being carried out. This conception of witness would influence New Testament notions that the signs of Christ and subsequently of his apostles could also constitute testimony.

The Juridical Metaphor

In ancient Israelite life, therefore, legal validity was established on the basis of witness. As Dale Leschert explains, however, "Although this activity originated in legal contexts, its vocabulary quickly expanded to other social and religious settings."[119] The vocabulary and practices of the judicial witness were soon appropriated as metaphors for contests of truth; in particular, *religious* truth.

The most significant impact on the New Testament's inheritance of witness traditions was the use of the juridical practice of *rîḇ* (a lawsuit) as a metaphor to dramatise religious controversies, for instance those between Yahweh and the pagan nations, so that religious truth itself was put on trial. These become especially prevalent in the age of the

[119] D. L. Leschert, "Witness", in D. N. Freedman, A. C. Myers and A. B. Beck, (eds.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), p. 1384.

prophets[120] and the most developed metaphor is found in the controversies dramatised in Deutero-Isaiah (40-55). Trites has outlined meticulously the lawcourt imagery employed here.[121] The most dominant theme positions Yahweh against the pagan gods contesting claims to true divinity.

Yahweh summons the nations to court, accusing them of having fake gods and insisting upon his own primacy. Following the procedures of the ancient Israelite legal assembly, Yahweh demonstrates his divinity by appealing to his involvement in history (Isa. 41:2-4) and his power over nature (Isa. 41:17-20). The foremost argument he makes, however, is to fulfilled prophecy. Here, Yahweh challenges his opponents to give examples of past predictions which have materialised (Isa. 41:22-23), and likewise claims predictive prophecy as proof of his own divinity (Isa. 42:9; 43:9, 18-19). Yahweh challenges the gods of the pagans to produce witnesses to testify to prophecies, which they cannot. Then, in a passage which Ricoeur says "allows us to read all the aspects of meaning [of witness], new and old, in a single breath,"[122] Yahweh turns to the Israelites and summons them as witnesses to the fulfilment of prophecy and – in keeping with the legal traditions of ancient Israel, the truth of Yahweh's divinity that this demonstrates:

> Let them bring their witnesses to justify them
> and let them hear and say, "It is true."
> *You are my witnesses*, says the Lord,
> *and my servant* whom I have chosen,
> so that you may know and believe me
> and understand that I am he.
> Before me no god was formed,
> nor shall there be any after me.
> I, I am the Lord,
> and besides me there is no saviour.

[120] E.g. Amos 2:4-16; Hosea 4, 5, 12:2-4; Isaiah 1:1-18; 3:13-15; Micah: 2:6-11 and Ezekiel 17.
[121] See A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, op. cit., pp. 35-39.
[122] P. Ricoeur, "The Hemeneutics of Testimony", in L. S. Mudge, (ed.), *Essays on Biblical Criticism*, (London: SPCK, 1981), p. 131.

> I declared and saved and proclaimed,
> when there was no strange god among you;
> *and you are my witnesses*, says the Lord.
> I am God, and also henceforth I am He;
> there is no one who can deliver from my hand;
> I work and who can hinder it?[123] (Isa. 43:9-14).

In this passage, which is as remarkable for its challenge to henotheism as its "innovative use of lawsuit or controversy language"[124], Israel is called to be Yahweh's witness and to testify to his divinity by recalling "the former things" predicted by Yahweh. Yahweh repeatedly exclaims, "You are my witnesses" (Isa. 43: 10, 12; 44:8). What is so significant here is that because of what witness entailed in the Old Testament legal assembly – the dual role of witness and advocate – the word here has radical implications for Israel's activity in history. Whilst this role of witness exists purely as a character in a metaphorical construction of a religious dispute, this passage, as Muilenburg explains, is really "describing Israel's mission in the world."[125] That is, in this legal drama, where the contested proposition is that Yahweh is the one God, the witness that Israel is called to give really amounts to the missionary activity of public confession to the pagan nations. It is this understanding of witness as public confession in a religious controversy dramatised using a juridical metaphor which provides a model for the New Testament's understanding of the term

Whilst the witness is therefore one who is *called* to *proclaim* and *confess* a religious truth, it is important to note that the seeing-and-telling nature of witness – what Ricoeur calls the "narrative kernel" – is not eclipsed by this confessional activity. Rather, the confession

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[123] Translation is from the NRSV, italics are mine.
[124] A. A. Trites, "Witness", in K. Doob Sakenfeld, (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 5, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), p. 876.
[125] J. Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah, chapters 40-60", in G. A. Buttrick, (ed.), *The Interpreter's Bible*, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951-1957) vol. 5, p. 263. Quoted in A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, op. cit., p. 42.

of Yahweh as God retains its grounding in the historical witness of fulfilled prophecy. As Ricoeur writes;

> We would be tempted to say that the confession of faith has eliminated the recital of things seen…Such is not the case…The case par excellence is the faith of Israel which, at first, confessed Yahweh by relating the facts of deliverance which punctuate the history of its liberation…It is not possible to testify *for* a meaning without testifying *that* something has happened which signifies that meaning. A tension is thus created between the confession of faith and narration of things seen…There is therefore no witness of the absolute who is not a witness of historic signs, no confessor of absolute meaning who is not a narrator of the acts of deliverance.[126]

This tension in the dynamic between the narrative and confessional dimensions of witness is also inherited by the New Testament in the insistence, particularly evident in the Book of Acts as we shall see, that witness involve not only confession of religious truth but witness to the things done and done in Christ's ministry.

It is crucial, therefore, that two key observations are made about this Old Testament usage as we turn to its inheritance by the early church. Firstly, that even in its earliest usage, witness was used as part of a narrative metaphor used to imagine and dramatise religious conflicts in history. Secondly, that in this metaphorical dramatisation of reality, witness has the meaning that it had in ancient Israel's juridical traditions. In Ancient Israel a witness not only provided evidence, but advocated on behalf of truth in trials at the gate, and witness also describes the evidence itself which testifies to truth. This meant that, particularly in the age of the prophets, when religious truth itself was dramatised as being on trial, the witness' role, defined by these juridical customs of ancient Israel, took on the historical significance of confessing Yahweh to the pagan world. As we now turn to the New Testament, we can

[126] P. Ricoeur, op. cit.., pp. 133-134.

see how this understanding of witness influenced that of the New Testament and therefore ultimately came to characterise the identity and activity of those called martyrs.

Witness in the New Testament

As the primary resource for early Christian theological reflection, as well as the backdrop for many martyr narratives, the New Testament is the most important source of evidence for the way that the early church understood "witness" and therefore how the martyr's witness was understood. Throughout the New Testament the forensic application of witness is retained. The trial of Jesus, for instance, broadly follows the form of a trial at the gate and it is made clear that Jesus' sentence required the testimony of witnesses (Mk. 14:55-63) and witness is also used to refer to those who provide evidence at Stephen's trial (Acts 7:58). Similarly, the requirement for multiple witnesses for legal validity and sentencing is attested frequently (2 Cor. 13:1; Heb. 10:28) and indeed by Christ himself in the Gospel of Matthew, where he says that sins must be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses (Mt. 18:16).

Witness predominantly features in three books of the New Testament; The Gospel of John, The Acts of the Apostles, and The Revelation of John. We will begin by reviewing the meaning of witness in John's gospel and Acts, where the idea of apostolic and early Christian witness is most fully developed and articulated. Here, the meaning of witness is not solely forensic, but inherits the Old Testament understanding as a juridical metaphor dramatising the conflict that Christ's mission, and that of the apostles and the church at large, embodies. This cannot be the place for a thorough exploration of trial motifs in the New Testament. It is sufficient merely to illustrate the broad conceptualisations of witness, and to make observations about what witness therefore meant to both the early church

communities from which these books emerge, as well as the communities in which they were disseminated. We will see that two conceptions of witness emerge from the inheritance of these traditions and their application in the early church; the notion of witnessing *to* Christ, and the notion of witnessing *as* Christ.

The Gospel of John

John's gospel is pre-eminently concerned with the question and controversy of who Jesus is. The very gospel itself, we are told, is "written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" (Jn. 20:31).[127] For some time now, scholars have argued that this central message is dramatised and framed using a juridical metaphor,[128] so that the truth that John seeks to explore and establish – the identity of Christ – is put on trial. As one of its more recent advocates explains,

> …this major metaphor is arguably the most distinctive, pervasive and comprehensive motif…this metaphor of a lawsuit on a cosmic scale is the most distinctive characteristic holding many of the elements of its plot and discourse together.[129]

The language of witness is extremely widespread in John's gospel; μαρτυρία and the verb μαρτυρείν occur fourteen and thirty-three times, respectively, compared to only four times and twice in the synoptics. Its usage gives an excellent insight into how the Old Testament

[127] Some consider this to be the end to a pre-Johannine Gospel of Signs, c.f. R. T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), but since this gospel is also said to prove the identity of Christ, the point remains.
[128] This school of thought largely emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s with several writers seemingly working independently from one another. C.f. J. M. Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970); S. Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975); A. E. Harvey, *Jesus on Trial*, (London: SPCK, 1976); A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, op. cit.; and, most recently, A. T. Lincoln, *Truth On Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000).
[129] A. T. Lincoln, *Truth On Trial*, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

understanding of witness was inherited and applied by the early church to its particular context in the first century. Clearly, this chapter cannot hope to give a comprehensive account of witness theology in John's Gospel; rather, the aim is merely to gain a broad sense of what witness involved for early Christians.

According to this lawsuit motif, John uses the tradition, established in Deutero-Isaiah, of presenting a historical religious contest as a lawsuit and, therefore, presents Christ's entire ministry as a trial to establish the contested truth of "the Messiahship and divine sonship of Christ."[130] Christ is depicted as God's representative and agent (Jn. 6:38; 12:49-50) who "came to the world in order to testify to the truth" (18:37) against the world; represented both by "the Jews" (Jn. 5:18), and the Devil (Jn. 12:31). Several witnesses from both sides (c.f. Jn. 15:27 and Jn. 18:23) are called to attest to and advocate for the contested truth. John is eager to prove his case by honouring the Old Testament tradition (Deut. 19:15) of providing multiple attestation; Jesus quotes the rule (Jn. 8:17), and his own testimony is not considered valid without others (Jn. 5:31). John therefore introduces a number of "witnesses" to prove the truth he seeks to establish; and crucially, as we shall see, these follow the traditions of the Old Testament legal witness. Alongside God's chief witness and advocate Christ (Jn. 8:14; 18:37), John's corroborating "panel of witnesses"[131] includes John the Baptist (Jn. 1:34; 3:32), the Father (Jn. 8:18; 5:37), the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:39), the crowds (Jn. 12:17) and the beloved disciple (Jn. 19:35).

As with the Old Testament jurisprudence, however, "witness" is not restricted to oral testimony, but also any evidence which corroborates Christ's claims. Therefore, both Christ's works (Jn. 5:36; 10:25) and his fulfilment of scripture (Jn. 5:39) are, alongside those who testify to them, themselves said to testify to the truth of who Jesus is (Jn. 9:33; 20:30).

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[130] A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, op. cit., p. 78. Some scholars, such as Lincoln, argue not only that John draws inspiration for this presentation from Deutero-Isaiah, but that he actually presents the trial of Christ's ministry as continuing and reconstituting this trial between Yahweh and the nations.
[131] R. G. Maccini, op. cit., p. 812.

Crucially, because John draws from these Old Testament legal traditions, the witnesses' depositions contain not only things seen and heard of Christ's ministry, but also their significance as well as *arguments* for the proposition this significance is perceived to have established. This is illustrated best in the witness of John the Baptist, whose depiction is utterly dominated by his role as witness, unlike his portrayal in the synoptics. John's words and actions are said to be testimony (Jn. 1:6, 8, 15, 19, 32, 34) and these contain not only the eye-witness of verse 32 but also its significance in the confession that "this is the Son of God" (Jn. 1:34) and, most importantly, we are told that he "came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him" (Jn. 1:7).

Witness in John, therefore, means not only reporting things experienced but *persuading* others of their significance. As with Deutero-Isaiah, when this significance is a religious truth as it is in John, witness, as Lincoln puts it in his commentary, "serves primarily as a functional equivalent of believing and confessing."[132] The same is, of course, found in the ministry of Christ, who in John's gospel attempts to argue and persuade his opponents of the truth of the witness he brings (Jn. 5:30-47; 10:32-38). John the Baptist and Jesus, as Old Testament witnesses *par excellence*, show that witness involves both testimonial evidence and advocacy, which in the context of a religious dispute amounts to an understanding of witness as public confession.

The trial of Christ's ministry ends with the climax of the crucifixion where Christ completes his final great work saying, "it is finished" (Jn. 19:30, c.f. 17:4). Yet, in verse 19:35 the gospel twice refers to the beloved disciple's eye-witness of this as testimony. As Lincoln asks, "Why formulate the beloved disciple's confession in terms of witness when the trial of Jesus is over?"[133] The answer is that John's gospel also refers to a "post-

[132] A. T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John*, (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 24.
[133] A. T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, op. cit., p. 26.

resurrection lawsuit"[134] in which his apostles and, ultimately the martyrs of the early church, would be enlisted. That is, after Christ's death, the truth of his claims are still being contested, and it is this early church contest after the death of Christ that John also dramatises as a cosmic trial. This provides a more direct connection to the witness of the early church martyrs.

After the death of God's chief witness (Jn. 18:37) in Christ, new witnesses are needed to satisfy the rigorous multiple attestation needed for legal validity (Jn. 8:17; c.f. Deut. 19:15). In the latter half of John's gospel, Christ, knowing his death is imminent (Jn. 13:1), calls new witnesses to his cause; the apostles and the Holy Spirit are to be witnesses to truth in the early church (Jn. 15:27-28). Because this *prescribes* the role of witness for disciples of the early church, this is perhaps the most important use of the term in John's gospel for understanding its early church meaning and the meaning it would have for martyrs.

Although their commissioning as witnesses is deferred until this post-resurrection trial, Christ really calls the apostles before his ministry even begins (Jn. 1:35-51) so that, as witnesses, they are uniquely placed as the original and consummate eye-witnesses to his ministry "from the beginning". (Jn. 15:26). Christ's apostles are, therefore, called *before* Christ's ministry to be witnesses *after* it to what they saw *within* it and this role is to be programmatic for further Christian witness (Jn. 17:20). To what are the apostles asked to bear witness? It is clear that the content of Christ's entire ministry is meant to act as evidence of his claims; both the testimony of things he has said (Jn. 8:14, 18; 15:22; 16:29-30) and his works (Jn. 5:36; 10:25; 15:24).

Central to this is the testimony that Christ gives of himself (Jn. 5:19-47; 6:27-70) on the basis of which people believe (Jn. 4:42; 8:30; 16:29-30). This is corroborated by Christ's signs (Jn. 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-47; 6:1-14, 16-21; 9:1-41; 11:1-57) which are said to elicit

[134] A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, op. cit., p. 113.

faith in the disciples (Jn. 2:11) and those who see them (Jn. 2:23; 3:2; 6:2; 9:33), and are used as proof of who Christ is (Jn. 20:31). The apostles can also testify to the events of Christ's ministry that fulfil prophecies he makes within it. So, for example, he predicts the manner of his own death (Jn. 8:28; 12:32), the resurrection (Jn. 2:19-22) and the betrayal of Judas (Jn. 13:18).[135] Just as with the evidence brought forward in Deutero-Isaiah, Jesus makes these predictions to his disciples to act as evidence to his ability to prophesy (Jn. 13:19; 16:4) and their fulfilment succeeds in eliciting belief among the disciples after his death (Jn. 2:22). Christ also explains that scripture testifies on his behalf (Jn. 5:39) and the apostles "remembered that these things had been written of him" (Jn.12:38) after Christ's crucifixion.

Witness, therefore, is understood as a witness *to* Christ and the truth of his ministry; evidenced by the words, events and signs within it and the prophecies it fulfilled. As with Ricoeur's analysis of witness in the Old Testament, therefore, the narrative understanding of witness is never entirely eclipsed by a confessional understanding. An example is the Gospel of John itself which we are told is the testimony of a disciple (Jn. 19:35; 21:24). Accordingly, the Gospel recalls in detail the testimony supplied by Christ's ministry: it details a sample of his signs to elicit belief (Jn. 20:31); it frequently draws the reader's attention, by a parenthesised postscript, to Christ's fulfilment of his own prophecy (Jn. 6:71; 7;39; 12:33; 18:32); and details Christ's fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, often by using the formula "ἵνα ἡ γραφὴ πληρωθῇ" (Jn. 13:18; 17:12; 19:24, 36). The gospel is itself an example of the witness of the apostles *to* Christ and demonstrates the dual role, drawn from the jurisprudence of ancient Israel, of depositions being both empirical reports (Jn. 19:35) and persuasive (Jn. 17:21; 20:31).

[135] See ibid., p. 88 and 115 for a comprehensive list of fulfilled prophecy in John's gospel.

The second witness called is the Holy Spirit (Jn. 15:27), who is given the name Παράκλητος (literally "advocate") and whose role as such sheds light on the witness of the apostles. The Holy Spirit's role as an advocate in the manner of Old Testament jurisprudence is indicated not only by its given name, but is clearly stated; the paraclete is said to "prove" (Jn. 16:8) the case of Christ. How it does so, however, is very instructive.

As "the Spirit of truth" (Jn. 15:27), the Holy Spirit "will guide you into all truth" (Jn. 16.13) and "will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn.14:26). Therefore, the apostles are to be reminded of the full details of Christ's witnessing ministry we have just outlined and to which they, who have been with Christ since the beginning (c.f. Jn. 15:27; 1:35-51), were uniquely able to experience. As Ricoeur says, the narrative element to witness is not eclipsed by its theological significance.

Whilst the Holy Spirit is to assist in the apostles' witness *to* Christ in the post-resurrection lawsuit, another understanding of early church witness emerges from an analysis of its role in this juridical dramatisation of early church conflict. Christ commissions the apostles by breathing upon them the Holy Spirit, saying, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn. 20:21-22; c.f. 17:18). Just as Christ was God's agent and witness through whom God's own testimony was both expressed and corroborated; so too the apostles are now called to embody this relationship so that they and the spirit are one, just as God and Christ are one (Jn. 17:11). The apostles are therefore both God's witnesses (Jn. 15:27) and the agents through whom the Holy Spirit now testifies and makes his case against the world, so that dual testimony is actually established on the same grounds as Christ's (Jn. 8:17). Thus Christ says, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:21-23).

The witness of the apostles is therefore not only the corroborating witness *to* Christ alongside the Holy Spirit; but, as the new primary agents of God in this continued cosmic

trial, the apostles step into the role Christ played in his ministry of persuading the world of truth as God's advocates (Jn. 17:18). The apostles, therefore, witness not only *to* Christ, but *as* Christ. In Christ's role, they can, therefore, expect to meet the same resistance: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (Jn. 15:20; c.f. 7:7; 17:14), and, like Christ, it is this world they are called to persuade. The prevalence of this idea in the early church, particularly in contexts of persecution is borne out by the Synoptic Gospels where the apostles are told when they are brought before courts to testify, that "it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 13:11; Mt. 10:20; Lk. 12:12; 21:15).

In John's gospel, therefore, the apostle's witness was understood not only as witnessing *to* the truth of Christ's own witnessing ministry through a public confession of the truth of his claims, his signs, the fulfilment of prophecy and the resurrection. Witness was also understood as witnessing *as* Christ by fulfilling Christ's role as God's advocate in the unfolding cosmic trial to which Christians are called to give testimony. To witness as a Christian in the early church was therefore not only to witness *to* Christ through public confession; it was to witness *as* Christ through the *imitatio* of recapitulating his role as God's witness on earth. We can corroborate this analysis further by briefly analysing the understanding of witness in Acts.

The Acts of the Apostles

In Acts, this post-resurrection lawsuit has begun and the period of hostility in which the claims of Christ are being contested is here too dramatised as a trial. Again, the language of witness is widespread, as μάρτυς and its other forms appear thirty-nine times. As the

persecutions of the Messianic Age unfold,[136] however, this metaphor becomes especially pertinent as the conflict it dramatises materialises into real trials and the case the apostles bring is heard in real courtrooms. In Acts, we can therefore see how the call to witness *to* and *as* Christ was understood as it was transposed into the historical setting of trial and persecution from which the martyr emerges.

Witnessing *to* Christ is placed front and centre in Acts. Eye-witness testimony is placed at the heart of apostolic witness, as it is elsewhere in the apostolic letters (1 Cor. 15; Jn 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:16). The apostles' witness contains "all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning" (Acts 1:1; c.f. Lk. 1:2; Jn. 15:27). In the discussion about who should replace Judas as an apostle, therefore, the strict criterion is that whosoever should "become a witness" must have been there at the "beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us" (Acts. 1:22). "It is clear" as Petersen writes, "that being a witness of the resurrection is the heart of the matter."[137] The resurrection is presented as the predominant and most important part of the apostles' eye-witness (Acts 4:33; 5:30; 13:30; 17:18) so much so that Paul too is an eye-witness to what he has "seen and heard" (Acts 22:15) on the basis of having witnessed the resurrected Christ. As we have seen, therefore, *narrative* witness remains indispensable to witness.

As in the Gospel of John, however, the apostles' witness consists not only of recounting the facts of Jesus' ministry, but also of explaining their significance and persuading others of the truth they establish. In the speeches the apostles give, the facts of Christ's ministry serve the purpose of elucidating the theological significance they contain. As Leschert explains; "Driven by deep conviction and missionary zeal, they thrust their lives into persuading the world of not only the historical events of the gospel but also their

[136] It is unlikely, however, that there was a state-sponsored campaign of persecution until at least the reign of Decius.
[137] D. G. Petersen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), p. 126.

theological significance, which they regarded as no less factual."[138] The witness to the ministry and resurrection of Christ is therefore at once the profession that Christ is "Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36); the "Saviour" (Acts 13:23), "the Holy and Righteous One" and "Author of Life" (Acts 3:14-15. Paul is said to have "argued" with unbelieving Jews, "explaining and proving" to them the message he brings (Acts 17:2-3) and the apostles do "not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 5:42) as Christ had commanded them (Acts 10:42). The witness of the apostles is ultimately concerned, therefore, with "testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus" (Acts 18:5). Through both the Gospel of John and Acts, therefore, it becomes clear that, because of its inheritance of Old Testament's juridical traditions, to witness *to* Christ was understood as public confession.

The Holy Spirit also provides validating witness both to the claims and authority of the apostles (Acts 5:32; c.f. John 15:26). The Spirit is sent to the apostles (Acts 1:5, 8; c.f. Jn. 14:26; 16:13) so that "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). The apostles are to act both as witnesses *to* Christ, and as the agents of the Spirit's own witness; just as Christ both testified himself and was the agent of God's own testimony (Jn. 8:17), a relationship Peter recognises (Acts 2:22). As in the Gospel of John, the witness of the apostles, therefore, consists not only in their own witness *to* Christ through confession, but in their witness *as* Christ by recapitulating his role in their relationship to the Spirit. Therefore, as God testified to Christ through mighty works wrought through him (Jn. 5:36; 10:38; Acts 2:22; 10:38), so the Spirit testifies to both the authority of the apostles and the truth of their witness "by granting signs and wonders to be done through them" (Acts 14:3; c.f. 5:12) as Christ had predicted (Jn. 14:12). Just as those done through Christ brought people to faith (Jn. 3:2; 9:33) so too the signs performed through the apostles succeed to the same purpose (Acts 5:14; 9:35).

[138] D. L. Leschert, op. cit., p. 1384.

Conclusion

Through both the Gospel of John and the Book of Acts we can see how witness was understood in the early church and therefore how early Christians understood the witness of the martyrs. In the early church, "witness" was used as part of an extended juridical metaphor, inherited from the Old Testament, which dramatised the conflict of Christ's ministry and the experiences of the early church as a trial over the contested claims of Christ.

The traditions of Ancient Israelite jurisprudence that the early church inherited meant that there is therefore a "profound unity between testimony about facts and events, and testimony about meaning and truth."[139] Witness here refers not only to the recitation of the facts of Christ's ministry and resurrection, but also a defence of the truth they establish. Witness therefore entails not only witnessing as we understand it, but a public *confession* of the faith so that, as Ricoeur says, "The confession that Jesus is the Christ constitutes the testimony par excellence."[140]

More than this, however, in both John and Acts, Christ's own role as witness is seen as instructive to and programmatic for Christian witness. Christian witness is therefore understood both as witnessing *to* Christ and witnessing *as* Christ. Acts presents the early church disputes not only as *a* trial in which the apostles are called to give witness *to* Christ through confession, but as a recapitulation of *the* trial of Jesus' ministry, wherein the apostles are asked to fulfil and recapitulate Christ's role as witness. As Jesus was sent by God to be both his witness and one through whom God himself testified, so too the apostles are now also to be those through whom God, in the Holy Spirit, testifies in this ongoing trial. As with Christ, the Spirit constantly guides them (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12), empowers them to

[139] P. Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 136
[140] Ibid., p. 134.

perform great works, and gives them the divinely-inspired words with which to bring God's case against the world. Just as Christ's witness ended with persecution at the hands of the world, however, so too those who step into his shoes can expect the same (Acts 5:18; 12:2; 21:30).

Witness in the early church, therefore, consists not only of witnessing *to* Christ through a public confession of the truth which their own eye-witness testimony of Christ's ministry, signs, resurrection and fulfilment of prophecy established. It also consists of witnessing *as* Christ by recapitulating his role as witness. As Trites puts it, as witnesses, "…the disciples take Christ's place on earth."[141] It is these two meanings of witness that characterise the early church's understanding of the witness of the martyrs and which therefore provide the first two strands of tradition by which martyrs were imagined.

The martyr, however, is not merely a witness; they are a witness who has died for their witness. How this connection occurred and what it can teach us about how to understand the relationship between the martyr's witness and their death is the subject of the analysis to which we must now turn.

Death and Witness

From Witness to Martyr

We have explored how witness was understood in John and Acts and seen that whilst it had come to describe both the role Christians were called to perform as well as Christians who did so, there is no sense yet that this involved or necessitated death and suffering. Yet, very shortly afterwards, the martyr had emerged as an entity distinct in characterisation and

[141] A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, op. cit., p. 132.

meaning from merely the witness. Whether or not one believes it occurred in all but name prior to this, historians generally agree that the first unequivocal usage of μάρτυς as a *terminus technicus* as opposed to *witness* occurred very shortly afterwards with the famous martyrdom of Polycarp in the 2nd century A.D,[142] which we receive from Eusebius' report of Evarestus' letter to the Church of Philomelium. Here we read;

> We are writing to you, dear brothers, the story of the martyrs [τοὺς μαρτυρήσαντας] and of blessed Polycarp who put a stop to the persecution by his own martyrdom [δια της μαρτυρίας] as though he were putting a seal upon it…Blessed indeed and noble are all the martyrdoms [τὰ μαρτύρια πάντα] that took place in accordance with God's will…For even when [the martyrs] were torn by whips until the very structure of their bodies was laid bare down to the inner veins and arteries, they endured it, making even the bystanders weep for pity.[143]

As we shall see in Chapter 5, this is a martyrdom account which is especially loyal to the New Testament and yet evidently by this point (about 150 A.D.) μάρτυς had been understood in a radically different way from what we have examined; that is, as *martyr* rather than *witness.*

There is no question given the context that μάρτυς and its cognates in this passage are meant to convey death, but there is a subtlety masked by the translation to "martyr" which requires analysis. When we read τοὺς μαρτυρήσαντας, we are asked to assume two things: that Christian witness has been carried out and that those who have done so have died. Why and how is it that *"*those who have witnessed*"* have necessarily died? Nothing in the witness traditions that we have examined so far has implied or required this meaning. Are they τοὺς μαρτυρήσαντας because by their deaths they have witnessed; or because it is on account of their witness that they have died? Is martyrdom a witness through death or is

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[142] E.g. N. Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer; Untersuchungen zur frühchristlichen Zeugnis-Terminologie*, (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1961) and T. Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, op. cit.

[143] *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 1-2. trans. H. Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 3. All the *Acta* are from the above work.

death the cost of one's witness? This textual question bespeaks a larger conceptual question of great importance: what is the relationship between these two elements – witness and death – in martyrdom? This might seem to be merely a question of emphasis but it is more fundamentally a question of meaning and religious significance. Does the meaning and religious significance of martyrdom reside in the witness achieved in death, or the witness for which the martyr dies?

Broadly speaking, two interpretations of the witness-death relationship seem to have emerged in the early church; that of the independence of witness from death; and that of the inseparability of witness and death. As we shall see in the subsequent four chapters, these produced divergent interpretations of martyrdom, which legitimised and potentiated new martyr narratives. The former saw martyrdom as referring to the death that a witness suffers for their witness. Τοὺς μαρτυρήσαντας are those whose witness underwent the ultimate test and paid the ultimate cost. The witness of the martyr is no different from the witness of the confessor but comes to be μαρτυρία when it is borne to death. The second strand, however, sees the term "μαρτυρία" as divesting itself of its original meaning and coming to refer to an altogether new witness that emerges in the first and second centuries of Christianity, one given and achieved in the death the witness suffers.

The second part of this chapter now looks at this transition that the term μάρτυς undergoes in the early church. It aims to evidence these divergent relationships with death and show how they emerged. We begin by looking at the way that witness was characterised broadly across the New Testament before turning to developments evident in The Book of Revelation. This cannot be the place for a detailed examination of early church conceptualisations of death and the multitude of traditions from Graeco-Roman to Jewish influences that shaped how the martyr was understood. As Frend says, "the idea of suffering and even death being involved in the act of witnessing…goes far back in the Jewish

religion."[144] The interest is rather on observing and elaborating the influence of these traditions on the nature of the relationship that μάρτυς was seen to have with death in that crucial century between Jesus' death and Polycarp's.

The thesis in this section is that the μάρτυς became the martyr through a new and evolving characterisation and dramatisation of the early church witness which was meant to minister to the persecution experience of the early church. We will look at two such characterisations; the suffering-witness and the conqueror-witness. Like the first part of this chapter; two conclusions emerge which defend the first contention of this thesis. Firstly, once again, we demonstrate that martyrs exist as narrative constructs within dramatisations of reality that minister to the external need of the community. Secondly, by indicating how the witness came to be characterised as the martyr, we will uncover the tension in these traditions between these two conceptualisations of the role of death in martyrdom which, as we have seen, is not yet resolved by the time of Polycarp's martyrdom. These indicate the subsequent two strands of martyrology emerging from the early church that this chapter presents.

Witness and Persecution in the New Testament

A dominant theme in much of the New Testament is that Christ's church is a persecuted church and that the experience of Christian discipleship involves, and to some degree *is,* an experience of persecution. To minister to the pastoral needs of an early church suffering persecution, the Christian witness called to give testimony in the cosmic trial of truth over the claims of Christ's ministry became characterised as a *suffering-witness.* The suffering-witness assuaged the fears of the early church with two parallel conceptualisations

[144] W. H. C. Frend, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

of the significance of suffering to the Christian experience. Firstly, that as the proper context for Christian witness, it was a necessary cost of the Christian's call to witness and therefore a hallmark of authentic Christian discipleship. Secondly, that death represented the consummation of this authentic Christian witness and was therefore constitutive of it. Within the characterisation of the suffering-witness, therefore, the ambiguity regarding the two competing conceptualisations of the role of death evidenced in Polycarp's martyrdom is present.

Firstly, Christ not only anticipates that persecution will come to his followers (Mt. 24:9; Jn. 15:20) but even says that it will "give you an opportunity to testify" (Lk. 21:13; c.f. Mk. 13:9; Mt. 10:18). This has several very significant implications for a relationship between witness and death. Christ's prophecy that persecution will come to his followers, whom he calls to be witnesses, makes this persecution a condition for the possibility of true discipleship and witness. The manner in which persecution therefore becomes a hallmark of the authentic witness to Christ is perhaps best illustrated in Luke, where Christ insists that "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:27).

The notion that persecution offers an opportunity to testify not only reflects a belief that persecution was part of the role of witness, but also that it is the proper and authentic context for Christian witness. This tradition located witness strictly within a context of persecution so that witness became lexically as well as historically inseparable from the experience of death. This gives μάρτυς one of its most dramatic expressions in the death of Stephen (Acts 22:20). Here, μάρτυς is used explicitly of a martyr, thereby establishing this lexical tradition. The witness, therefore, became characterised as the suffering-witness through traditions which make suffering both the hallmark and sole context for Christian witness. Clearly, death is not constitutive of witness in this tradition – witness remains distinct from death – the expectation is clear, however, that authentic witness will suffer the

cost of death. Indeed, the suggestion is that witness is only authentic *because* it suffers the cost of death.

Secondly, another strand of tradition in the New Testament, and particularly prevalent in the epistles, understands death itself as constitutive of witness. Early Christians are reassured that when they witness "it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 13:11; c.f. Mt. 10:19-20; Lk. 21:15). This reflects a tradition which we have examined in great detail through its prevalence in John and Acts that part of the way that witness was understood was not only as witnessing *to* Christ but witnessing *as* him by recapitulating and fulfilling the testimony of Christ's ministry in the life of the disciple. *To witness* meant to embody the testimony supplied by the ministry of Christ. Crucially, this testimony involved Christ's death. For all writers in the early church and in the New Testament, the crucifixion is at the very heart of Christ's mission, ministry and purpose. As Lincoln explains; "This [Christ's] testimony to the truth takes place through his deeds and words, the signs and discourses, and supremely his death."[145] The witnesses of Christ are called to reproduce this testimony, and therefore alongside the words they speak and the deeds and signs they perform by the power of the Holy Spirit, their testimony, like Christ's, must ultimately be consummated in their death (Jn. 19:30; c.f. 15:20).

This theme is most prevalent in the New Testament epistles, which are replete with the belief that suffering is the hallmark of authentic Christian witness precisely because it constitutes its consummation. They explain that persecution is "what we are destined for" (1 Thes. 3:3) and that "all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Suffering is said to be "granted as a privilege (ἐχαρίσθη)" (Phil. 1:29) and evidence of "the righteous judgement of God" (2 Thes. 1:5). The basis of the overwhelming prominence of this expectation in the epistles is this notion that to be a witness is to embody

[145] A. T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John*, op. cit., p. 61.

an *imitatio Christi* which is consummated in recapitulating the death of Christ. Suffering is something to celebrate because, as 1 Peter explains, "For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example, so that you should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh", 1 Peter instructs, "arm yourselves also with the same intention" (1 Pet. 4:1; c.f. Jn. 15:20). 2 Corinthians similarly observes that death is part of embodying the life of Jesus; "…we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:11) and Hebrews exhorts its readers saying; "Let us then go to him…and bear the abuse he endured" (Heb. 13:13).

Clearly, the belief that Christian witness involved the recapitulation of Christ's ministry supported the idea that Christ's death was paradigmatic for Christian witness. Like Christ, to witness accordingly meant to suffer persecution and die, not merely because persecution and death were the necessary cost of authentic Christian witness, but because it constituted it. The New Testament epistles overwhelmingly testify to the belief that to suffer as Christ is, as Kelly explains, "an inescapable ingredient of the Christian vocation."[146]

The expectation of suffering that these traditions attempt to inculcate was mollified and ultimately justified by the riches furnished upon the suffering-witness which characterised the witness in a way which anticipates the martyr. The suffering-witness is said to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 5:10) and receive eternal life with Christ (Mk. 10:30; Jn. 12:25). In the epistles, Paul explains, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5; c.f. Phil. 3:10; Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:15). That this characterisation was responsible for and formative to in the evolution of the martyr is shown by the prominence of these ideas in the

[146] J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963), p. 200.

Acts of the Martyrs themselves. These very passages are quoted in the *Acts* by Euplus[147] who uses them to justify his own resilience, and Justin, for instance, explains; "We are confident that if we suffer the penalty for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved."[148] Moreover, by suffering *like* Christ, Christ was believed to suffer in the witness and the witness become Christ-like. In Galatians 2:19-20 we read; "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." This characterisation was also formative to the evolution of the martyr. In the martyrdom of Sanctus, we read that "Christ suffering in him achieved great glory."[149] This complicated theology of imitation will be explored in Chapter 4.

Therefore, the notion that death is merely the context for μαρτυρία and the notion that it is constitutive of it can be attributed to the traditions of seeing persecution either as the authentic context for witness (Lk. 21:13; c.f. Mk. 13:9; Mt. 10:18) or as consummating the witness' recapitulation of Christ's own ministry (1 Pet. 4:1; 2 Cor. 4:11).

If we are to understand how the characterisation of μάρτυς developed in a way that more closely resembled the martyr, however, we must turn to the Book of Revelation whose intimate and immediate reflections on Christian witness in these periods of persecution provide a representation of the way that Christian conceptualisations of μάρτυς responded to this context and therefore showcase some more of the traditions by which the early church characterised the martyr; in particular, the notion of the conqueror-witness.

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[147] *The Acts of Euplus*, The Latin Recension, 1.5, op.cit., p. 315.
[148] *The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs Justin, Chariton, Charito, Evelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, and Liberian*, Recension B, 5.6, op. cit., p. 53.
[149] *The Martyrs of Lyons*, 1.23, op.cit., p. 69.

The Book of Revelation

It is the increasing violence with which Christian witness of the nascent early church was met that the Book of Revelation both emerges from and responds to in its dramatisation of this encounter between Christian witness and persecution. It therefore provides an excellent insight into how the early church's understanding of witness altered to minister to this context and it is this response that prompted the characterisation of the witness which ultimately led to the martyr. Trites is right to highlight the pastoral nature of the book's treatment of witness when he writes;

> The *Sitz im Leben* helps to explain the prominence of the idea of witness in Revelation. Christians are about to face a time of severe testing and persecution, and John as a faithful pastor seeks to prepare them for it.[150]

Alongside the suffering-witness, this pastoral concern prompts a new and sustained characterisation of the witness as conqueror-witness which attempts to give meaning and purpose to both one's witness and the suffering it would increasingly, if not yet inherently, involve. This concern is captured in one passage early on in Revelation in which the entire pastoral message the book intends to deliver to suffering witnesses is encapsulated:

> I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich!...Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown (Rev. 2:9-10).

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[150] A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, op. cit., p. 155. See also S. Woodman, *The Book of Revelation*, (London: SCM, 2008); B. Witherington III, *Revelation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). M. E. Boring believes the book can be seen as "a kind of pictorial narrative theodicy" – M. E. Boring, "The Theology of Revelation: 'The Lord Our God the Almighty Reigns'", *Interpretation*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1986, pp. 257-269.

The palliative that John offers to the expectation of suffering is the introduction of an eschatological militaristic metaphor which regards Christian witnesses as engaged not only in a cosmic *trial* for truth, but a cosmic *battle* for it. Whilst this cannot be the place for an analysis of the aetiology of these traditions, it is this pastorally-motivated characterisation of the witness as not only an actor in human history, but an embattled figure in a juridical-martial dramatisation of salvation history, that brings the witness closest to the martyr. After all, death is more naturally associated with the soldier than with the witness; and what better way to glorify death than to imagine it as a victory? Whilst Revelation may not yet use μάρτυς in the sense it would come to have in the early church, its characterisation of the μάρτυς is highly formative to this later development. Crucially, this characterisation demonstrates the same tension between the two conceptualisations of the relationship between death and witness that characterise early church understandings of martyrdom; that death represents the cost of the martyr's witness, or that it is constitutive of it.

"Witness" is used frequently in Revelation and, like John and Acts, both Christ and his followers are described as witnesses (Rev. 1:5; 3:14; c.f. 2:13; 11:7; 17:6). Christ is the "faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14; 19:11) and the testimony of his ministry, which culminated in his death (Rev. 1:5), is positioned as programmatic for apostolic witness (Rev. 3:21). What is distinctive is the way in which witness is used of the mission of the apostles,[151] or early church Christians more broadly.[152] When "witness" is used of the apostles in Revelation, it is only ever done so in the context of the persecution they face on its account and the death they suffer for it (Rev. 2:13; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11; 17:6; c.f. Acts 22:20). Consequently, Revelation explains that witness involves holding fast to the testimony of Christ and not denying the faith in the face of persecution (Rev. 2:13; 6:9; 12:11). The most

[151] See A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, op. cit., p. 155.
[152] For continuity I will continue to use the term "apostles", though in Revelation it is possible that early church Christians are intended.

preeminent expression of this witness comes in this juridical phrase τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ ("the testimony of Christ" – Rev. 1.9; 12:17; 20:4). It is clear from the context, particularly in Rev. 1:2, 9 that it is Christ's testimony (the subjective genitive) that is intended here, rather than the apostles' testimony about Christ (the objective genitive).

It is clear, therefore, that in Revelation, witness does not refer simply to the deposition of testimony, but to maintaining Christ's testimony in the face of persecution and death. If this presentation makes witness and death seem inseparable, that it because they were. Revelation responds to a context in which witness was increasingly met with persecution and therefore *was* an experience of suffering and death. Revelation provides the pastoral and exhortative response that Christian witness involves resistance and resilience in the face of this experience. Accordingly, there is a concomitant emphasis on the disposition that witness involves; Christ himself calls for endurance (Rev. 13:10; 14:12) and praises those who show such "patient endurance" (Rev. 2:3; 3:10) for having "kept the word" and "not denied the name" (Rev. 3:8, 10), holding fast to the "faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12). This set the trajectory for the emergence of μάρτυς as a *terminus technicus* with a meaning which necessarily entails death. This subsequent lexical inseparability between witness and death was only the natural product of their historical inseparability and pastoral responses to that.

John also ministers to and prepares his readers for this reality with the introduction of a new metaphor which characterises witness given in this context as having the highest religious significance. Revelation dramatises the context of persecution in which this witness is given using both juridical and martial imagery so that the metaphorical courtroom on which this conflict plays out is the scene not only of a trial, but a great battle. God, therefore, judges, destroys and avenges (Rev. 11:18; 19:2). Christ is the "faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14) who carries the sharp two-edged sword (Rev. 1:16; 2:12) and leads the

"armies of heaven" (Rev. 19:14) against Satan who is both the accuser (Rev. 12:10) and the beast who gathers his armies to make war against Christ (Rev. 19:19). The apostles, by holding fast to their witness to Christ even until death, are said to *conquer* (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 28; 3:5, 21; 21:7) as Christ conquered (Rev. 3:21), and through the very words uttered in resilience to persecution "fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foe" (Rev. 11:5).

The effect of this is clear; the trials and persecution which Christian witnesses undergo are given meaning and mollified by being seen as part of a cosmic battle where witnesses are conscripted as *miles Christi* against the forces of Satan and they are spurred to conquer him by not yielding to his torments. This "rallying cry to Christians",[153] as Boxall calls it, is also found in the epistles where in Ephesians 6:11 readers are told to "Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," and in 1 Peter 5:8 are reminded that when they enter the arena "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him."

As conquerors, these witnesses are rewarded once they die: "be faithful until death", Christ says, "and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10; c.f. 3:11). They are promised that they will eat from the tree of life (Rev. 2:7); they will be given authority to rule (Rev. 2:26) and sit on Christ's throne (Rev. 3:21) as they rule with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). This symbolic glorification, and the drama within which it occurs, helps to inculcate in the imagination of the early church an altogether new characterisation of μάρτυς as not only the suffering-witness, but also the *conqueror-witness.*[154]

This characterisation of the conqueror-witness, which draws from a broad range of theological traditions, utterly dominates the presentation of apostolic witness throughout Revelation. Crucially, it is only those who succeed in conquering – those who hold on to the

[153] I. Boxall, *The Revelation of St John*, (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 13.
[154] For further detail about these themes in the construction of martyr narratives in the early church see P. Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, op. cit.

testimony of Christ to death – that are ever called witnesses in Revelation (Rev. 2:13; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11; 17:6) and it is this to which Christ calls his church. Revelation 2:13, for instance, reads, "Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you."

It is this characterisation of the μάρτυς that brings it closest to the martyr. The claim here is certainly not that Revelation intends "martyr" by its use of μάρτυς and its cognates. In a persuasive article Trites has shown, through an analysis of their appearance in Revelation, that the terms are still lexically distinct from the experience of death.[155] Through this characterisation, however, the religious significance of the μάρτυς is defined specifically vis-à-vis their death; to witness no longer means merely to confess or imitate Christ, but to conquer and defeat, and the μάρτυς conquers not merely by witnessing, but by not surrendering the testimony of Christ in the face of death. Though it may be anachronistic to translate them as such,[156] the witnesses of Revelation *are* in fact martyrs, and the use of μάρτυς to describe them establishes this lexical tradition. Of Revelation 2:13, therefore, Bowersock writes; "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."[157]

Therefore, in order to minister to the experiences of the witnessing Christian communities by giving religious significance to their suffering, the Book of Revelation provides a new characterisation of the persecuted witness which reassures its readers, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer" (Rev. 2:10). They are the soldiers of Christ whose resistance to the assaults of Satan's agents achieves victory over Satan and secures eternal glory reigning with Christ. For Frend, so formative is this characterisation of μάρτυς to the

[155] A. A. Trites, "Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study", *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1973, pp. 72-80.
[156] Indeed, the KJV commits this anachronism by translating μάρτυς as "martyr" in Rev. 2:13.
[157] G. W. Bowersock, op. cit., p. 15.

terminus technicus martyr that he confidently asserts that "the martyr-idea which profoundly influenced the first three centuries of Christian history, was given its final meaning in the tense and exalted Apocalyptic."[158]

Whilst this discussion shows how this characterisation brings us close to the early church conception of martyrdom, it also reveals the ambiguity in the relationship between the witness of the μάρτυς and their death. The question remains: what is the role of death in the early church's understanding of μάρτυς as represented in Revelation? Does the μάρτυς conquer through dying for their witness, or for holding their witness until death? Precisely the same ambiguity found in the previous section emerges. Witness, as we have said, remains lexically distinct from the experience of death so that, whilst μάρτυς is only used of those witnesses who *have* died, their witness and their death appear conceptually separate. On the other hand, the characterisation of the μάρτυς as conqueror-witness understands the μάρτυς as conquering not through their witness, but only and precisely through their death and the endurance and resistance to submission it represents.

Conclusion

This thesis cannot be the place for an exploration of the traditions that influenced this characterisation and the narrative world that the witness is said to inhabit; a great range of traditions may have influenced the way that the early church chose to characterise Christian witness. Nevertheless, we can observe that the New Testament shows that the early church developed a thrilling and theologically-charged characterisation of both the suffering-witness and the conqueror-witness as a pastoral response to a context in which witnessing *to* and *as* Christ was increasingly met with death and persecution. The suffering-

[158] W. H. C. Frend, op. cit., p. 91.

witness was developed by imagining suffering and persecution as both the hallmark of authentic Christian witness and as representing its final consummation. The conqueror-witness, on the other hand, emerged from a martial-metaphor which imagined witness as soldiers holding fast to the testimony of Christ until death and in doing so achieving victory in a cosmic war against Satan. These characterisations provided an irresistible lexical resource for the phenomenon of martyrdom to later generations and illustrate one part of the emergence of the concept.

That these are indeed the characterisation of μάρτυς that evolved into the martyr is, as we shall see, evidenced in the *Acts of the Martyrs* themselves. Perhaps no motif is as common as the notion that the martyrs will receive rewards for their suffering[159] and Lucian explains that this encouraged voluntary martyrdom.[160] The martyrs' endurance is likewise praised[161] and they are frequently described as the *miles Christi*[162] involved in a cosmic war against Satan.[163] Clearly, the characterisations found in the New Testament of the suffering-martyr and the conquering-martyr who receive rewards for their service proved to be incredibly powerful at continuing to minister successfully to the needs, aspirations and desires of the early church and therefore became central to their conceptualisations of the martyr. As three modern writers put it, characterisations such as these "structure the moral imagination of early Christians, shaping and interpreting the ecclesial experience of persecution so that it became bearable for the community."[164]

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[159] E.g. *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, 1.41, op. cit., p. 75.
[160] Lucian, *Death of Peregrinus*, 13, in L. Cassion, (ed., trans.), *Selected Satires of Lucian*, (New York: Norton, 1962), p. 369.
[161] E.g. *The Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus and Agathonice*, 35, op. cit., p. 27, 33; *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 21.9, op. cit., p. 131.
[162] E.g. *The Martyrdom of Saints Marian and James*, 10.3, op. cit., p. 209.
[163] E.g. *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, op. cit.; *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 10:13-14, op. cit., p. 119; *The Martyrdom of Julius the Veteran*, 2.6, op. cit., p. 263.
[164] A. Harvey, R. Finn, M. Smart, op. cit., p. 41.

Within these two characterisations, however, two divergent accounts of the relationship between witness and death involved in the use of the term μάρτυς appear. The first imagines death itself as constitutive of Christian witness, whilst the second imagines death as the cost of authentic Christian witness. These competing accounts are as alive in Revelation as they are in the rest of the New Testament and demonstrate that no clear understanding of the role of death and its relationship with witness in martyrdom has been resolved by the time the word achieves the status of a *terminus technicus* in the second century and the martyrdom of Polycarp.

Conclusion

The central purpose of this chapter has been to build on the ambitious claims of the previous chapter which introduced the first major contention of this thesis. This contended that martyrs are socio-*theological* constructs; introducing the notion of the martyrology and arguing for the centrality of these theological conceptualisations of the martyr within the social-constructivist account of martyrdom. This chapter has attempted to make good on this claim by proposing that these martyrologies are rooted in the emergence of martyrdom in the early church. It suggests that the various strands of tradition in and through which the martyr developed can help to elucidate the various ways that martyrdom was and is understood and therefore the martyrologies central to the narrative construct of the martyr. To that end, this chapter has attempted to answer two questions which go to the heart of the origins of martyrdom: what did witness mean to the early church, and how was its relationship with death understood?

Before the results of this analysis are summarised, an important observation from the foregoing analysis must first be made that substantiates and justifies the method of this thesis

and the fundamental assumptions it makes about the particular social-constructivist account of martyrdom developed in the previous chapter.

The emergence of the phenomenon of martyrdom this chapter has studied is fundamentally the story of the early church's evolving characterisation of the metaphorical figure of the witness and the imaginative universe they inhabit which dramatised the experiences of the early church. It has not been possible to explore the varied traditions which shaped the contours of this imaginative landscape. It is sufficient to note, however, that the martyr figures in a highly-stylised juridical-martial dramatisation of history whose layers eschatological, Christological and soteriological meaning drawn from diverse theological traditions gives the human history of the early church a theological significance that ministered to the difficult experiences it underwent. It becomes increasingly clear, therefore, that the social constructivist account of martyrdom proposed in the previous chapter is indispensable to any analysis of the emergence of martyrdom and more broadly to the way that the early church reflected upon and understood their own experiences.

Our analysis has detailed two central meanings that witness had in the early church: witnessing *to* Christ through public confession, and witnessing *as* Christ by recapitulating and fulfilling his ministry through *imitatio Christi*. It would be these understandings of witness that would be carried by the term μάρτυς into successive narratives which increasingly characterised and dramatised these depositions and those making them in the way which ultimately made these witness narratives become martyr narratives. In analysing this process and how witness narratives came to be associated with death in this way, we observed the emergence of the characterisations of the suffering-witness and the conqueror-witness. Here, we saw that two divergent accounts of the relationship between witness and death existed and prevailed until the first usage of μάρτυς as martyrdom: that death is the context for and cost of authentic Christian witness, and that it is constitutive of it.

In summary, therefore, the early church had broad and inchoate conceptualisations of witness and its relationship with death. The martyr did not emerge as a complete and fully-formed entity and the product of a process of theological discernment. The martyr emerged in response to crisis and the early church's struggles to interpret and understand their experiences. The conclusions that this chapter has reached, therefore, are necessarily generalisations of the hugely diverse way in which these traditions were understood. Nevertheless, they are generalisations about strands of tradition that help us to organise a framework of theological tradition by which martyrdom was understood. The martyr was, broadly, understood as one who witnesses *to* or *as* Christ and dies *for* their witness, or whose death *is* their witness *to* or *as* Christ. These conceptualisations – with their dual understanding both of witness and its relationship with death – consequently create a fourfold analysis of how the martyr was imagined which structure the subsequent four chapters of this thesis which analyses each in turn.

The following four chapters demonstrate that these conceptualisations of witness and its relationship with death, formed in the early church, established the fault lines for the development of Christian martyrdom, setting its trajectory through Christian history and ultimately defining the martyrologies by which martyrs in the Christian tradition have been imagined. To reiterate, this fourfold scheme does not claim to be definitive or exhaustive. It claims to be indicative of the fruitfulness of a theological analysis of martyrdom and, therefore, support for the broader contention that theology is indispensable to this social-constructivist account of martyrdom. In and through these chapters, the second contention of this thesis concerning the nature of these martyrologies, and therefore the responsibility that theologians have to provide this theological analysis, is revealed.

Chapter 3: Witnessing *to* Christ Through Death

In this chapter, we begin the analysis that aims to substantiate the two contentions of this thesis. In this chapter and the next, we begin with the conceptualisation of the martyr witnessing *to* Christ through public confession, and we aim to prove the relevance of the two martyrologies to which this gives rise in shaping how the collectively-constructed narrative of an individual's death is imagined as martyrdom and therefore who the martyr is imagined as. As we explained in the previous chapter, there is an ambivalence in how to understand the relationship between death and witness on this conceptualisation of witness and where to locate its religious significance. The analysis of this understanding of martyrdom as witness *to* Christ therefore divides into two martyrologies discussed in this and the next chapter. In this chapter, the analysis probes the belief that death is constitutive of the martyr's witness *to* Christ. The next chapter, however, sees death as merely the context for authentic Christian witness and therefore the cost of the martyr's witness to Christ. As we shall see, this has a significant impact on the meaning and significance of martyrdom. Whilst this chapter's martyrology understands the meaning and significance of martyrdom as located in both the martyr's confession and the death they suffered on its account, the following chapter's martyrology believes that it is the conviction demonstrated by the martyr's death that encapsulates the religious significance of the martyrology.

The martyrology of this and the next chapter therefore share the same conception of witness, and, unlike the two conceptualisations of the role of death in witnessing *as* Christ examined in chapters 4 and 5, the differences between the role and significance that death plays on this account of witness are subtle in their impact on the narrative itself. These two markedly different understandings of the role and significance of death to martyrdom need not *necessarily* alter the way that the narrative is told. When we come to analyse these

martyrologies in the bulk of this chapter and in the next, however, we shall see that they represent profoundly different understandings of martyrdom with profoundly different implications.

The analysis of these two interpretations of this conceptualisation of martyrdom as witnessing *to* Christ will prove that the ideas by which it is sustained and which it therefore promotes are radicalising and extremist, threaten the values of the martyr's community, and are logically incoherent. Despite the two contrasting ways in which this martyrology may be understood, we do see that similar criticisms appear which therefore suggest that they strike at the very heart of martyrdom. Whilst one interpretation's emphasis on death, for instance, can lead to voluntary martyrdom, the contrasting belief that suffering demonstrates one's conviction can also lead to extremist practices to demonstrate that conviction. What is clear, therefore, is that, whatever role is given to death, the prize that martyrdom confers makes it attractive and this threatens to radicalise conceptions of discipleship. We will also see that the attraction to suffering that this martyrology promotes, despite the contrasting opinions on its role, threatens its logical coherence and theological consistency by undermining the sacrificial value of this suffering on which the religious significance of martyrdom is based. In brief, therefore, these two very different ways of conceiving the martyr as one killed for their public confession illuminate, in different ways, difficulties which allow us to be able to make evaluative conclusions about the theology of this martyrology – and even martyrdom – more generally.

Witnessing *to* Christ Through Death

The conceptualisation of the martyr being one who dies witnessing *to* Christ through public confession is likely to be that which is typically held up as most archetypal of early

church martyrdom, where Christian witnesses were required to confess Christ, and persecuted for this confession or their refusal to surrender it at pain of death.[165] Witnessing *to* Christ was so commonplace in the *Acts* that Cunningham can write; "In early Christianity, 'who is the martyr?' is an easy question: "…a martyr is anyone who confesses his or her faith openly and dies as a direct result of that confession."[166] In the *Acts* these expressions take many forms: refusals to renounce the faith,[167] serve in the army,[168] hand over scripture,[169] or sacrifice.[170] However historically accurate as fiats against Christians, these demonstrate how early church martyr narratives imagine Christians dying because of their confession and their refusal to surrender it.

The first martyrology to which this gives rise, and which is the focus of this chapter, sees death having a constitutive role in the martyr's witness to Christ and their designation as such. It is the pivotal role that death plays in distinguishing the martyr from the confessor that besets this martyrology with difficulty. For an understanding of martyrdom which recognises death as the *sine qua non* of authentic martyrdom and promises glory to those who achieve it can radicalise to voluntary martyrdom and the active pursuit of death, even to the point of a total collapse of the very witness for which the death is meant to be suffered.

I will demonstrate how the evolution of this seemingly uncontroversial understanding of martyrdom radically changed *who* the martyr is and radicalised what it meant to imitate one. The martyrs this martyrology can legitimise are, minimally, bordering on suicidal mania, and guilty of collusion with the persecuting projects the martyr is meant to be resisting. Moreover, the theological inconsistency and logical incoherence wrought by the subversion of the traditional categories of victim/persecutor and life/death that this

[165] Chapter 5 will detail this more nuanced history in greater detail.
[166] L. S. Cunningham, "Christian Martyrdom: A Theological Perspective", op. cit., p. 14.
[167] *The Martyrdom of Pionius*, 9-10, op. cit., p. 149.
[168] *The Acts of Maximilian*, 1, op. cit., p. 245.
[169] *The Martyrdom of St. Felix*, 12-15, op. cit., p. 269.
[170] *The Martyrdom of Pionius*, 19, op. cit., p. 161.

voluntary martyrdom can elicit threatens to undermine the very religious significance it pursues. These traditions, articulated first in the early church, continue to shape and underpin martyr narratives to this day, and this analysis, therefore, helps to substantiate the thesis that the narrative construction of the martyr often depends upon the existence of theological ideas which are radicalising and extremist, logically incoherent and theologically inconsistent, and challenging to the values of the martyr's community.

The Religious Significance of Witness and Death

One account of the relationship between death and witness in this martyrology, understands the martyr's witness as consisting both of their witness to Christ through public confession for which they are killed, and also their death endured for the sake of that witness. Witnessing *to* Christ through confession therefore only becomes a *martyr's* witness when it is consummated by death, because it is this death that is also constitutive of the martyr's witness, and their designation as such. It is this that distinguishes it from that of the confessor. The sanctity of martyrdom, its religious significance, therefore consists not merely in the witness to Christ for which the martyr dies, but also this very death itself. It is on this point that this chapter's martyrology most sharply contrasts with the next chapter's.

This conceptualisation of martyrdom is very common in the early church and very prevalent in the *Acts* where the death the martyr suffers is often given equal, if not greater, importance than their witness through confession. For instance, Agathonicê, after giving confession and being then threatened with death declares: "Do what you will. But this is what I have come for, and this is what I am prepared for, to die for Christ's name."[171] Flavian

[171] *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonicê*, Latin Recension: 3:1, op. cit., p. 35.

is said to be "overjoyed" when he is given his sentence,[172] whilst Justin explains, "here I take my stand and in it I want to die for Christ."[173] Who the martyr is, therefore, is very much a product not merely of the public confession for which they die, but the death they suffer for that confession and it is this death that consummates the witness to Christ through confession as a *martyr's* witness.

How was it that a particular sort of death came to be seen as holy and worthy of the veneration and esteem that we have observed was lavished on the martyrs? This essay does not have the scope to explore early church conceptualisations of death that might help to explain the ways that this death was understood and sanctified. Influences ranging from Graeco-Roman notions of an athlete's death[174], to Old Testament traditions of sacrifice, such as we find in Polycarp[175], can all be found in motifs of the *Acts* as ways of lauding the death of the martyr. What we know, however, is that part of the way that the martyr emerged from the characterisation of μάρτυς in the early church involved the articulation of theological traditions which saw death as religiously significant.

As we saw in the previous chapter, this death fulfilled Christ's prophecy, it was the hallmark of authentic witness, it conquered Satan, and it was glorified with the promises of eschatological rewards. These multifarious traditions, largely motivated, as we have seen in the previous chapter, by the pastoral concern to minister to early church communities, helped to shape an early Christian milieu in which theological significance was given to a death suffered in persecution of the faith, and it ultimately gave rise to a Christian thanatology. Christian reflections on the role and importance of witness are therefore working alongside Christian reflections on discipleship, persecution and death. These traditions ultimately

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[172] *The Martyrdom of Saints Montanus and Lucius*, 21.1, op. cit., p. 235.
[173] *The Martyrdom of the Saints Justin, Chariton, Charito, Evelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, and Valerian*, Recension C, 2.2, op. cit., pp. 55-56.
[174] *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonicê*, Greek Recension:1.36, Latin Recension: 3.5, op. cit., p. 27, 32.
[175] *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 14.1-2, op. cit., p. 13.

meant that martyrdom represented not only the apogee of Christian witness, delivered in the costliest of circumstances, but also a death which was the apotheosis of Christian discipleship.

This provides one way of understanding the early church distinction between the confessor and the martyr. Whilst the confessor had also publically confessed the faith, unlike the martyr, they had not been killed as a result. Eusebius illustrates the strictness of this distinction in referring to the confessors in the following way:

> But if ever any one of us called them martyrs either in a letter or in speech they rebuked him sharply…they reminded us of the martyrs who had already passed away, and said 'they are already martyrs, whom Christ vouchsafed to be taken up at their confession, and sealed their witness by their departure.[176]

Clearly then, it is not just the idea of confession, but death also that helped to distinguish the martyr both from its etymological root *witness* and its historical contemporary the *confessor.* The emphasis cannot be solely on the witness through confession that the martyr and the confessor provides, for each does so under the same circumstances. Eusebius describes the witness as being "sealed" by death, suggesting that a confessor's witness becomes a *martyr's* witness when it is *completed* or *perfected* by their death. Death is a pre-requisite and ingredient of the martyr's witness. The witness, then, is seen to be incomplete, or partial, unless consummated by death. Baumeister provides a slightly different metaphorical expression to this when he writes that in the case of martyrdom "witness…must therefore be ratified by death."[177] No confession, however faithful, can become a *martyr's* confession without death.

[176] Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V.ii.2-4, op. cit., p. 439.
[177] T. Baumeister, "Martyrdom and Persecution", op. cit., p. 4.

For the martyr's death to have the religious significance that tradition has procured for it, the victim must be imagined as having suffered death because of their witness and, therefore, be killed by the *odium fidei* of a persecutor directly provoked by this witness. What is peculiar about this is that Christians are only capable by their own initiative of becoming confessors. For whilst the witness must clearly be freely and willingly given, the death must be passively endured; whether the confessor is killed for their confession is the prerogative of the persecutor. To be imagined and remembered as a martyr, the confessor needs a compliant persecutor. That the martyr does not depend on his confession, or indeed himself, for his own martyrdom is, I believe, where the problems this thesis argues beleaguer martyrologies begin to arise. We begin the analysis of these difficulties with the observation that this martyrology can lead to voluntary martyrdom.

Voluntary Martyrdom

J. D. Crossan writes that martyrdom must be an "unfortunate necessity, an unwanted inevitability of conscious resistance to systematic evil. Otherwise resistance itself colludes with the violence it opposes. Such collusion may entail, minimally, desiring or provoking martyrdom (but every martyr needs a murderer)."[178] In his parenthesised quip Crossan alludes to the danger of this form of martyrdom which, as another author puts it; "depended on finding a willing executioner."[179] An understanding of martyrdom which sees passive death at the hands of the persecutor as a prerequisite to martyrdom inexorably leads to a longing for this death which ultimately evolves and radicalises into its provocation. History, as we shall see, is replete with examples of how the juxtaposition of the necessity of death

[178] J. D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Early Years Immediately after the Crucifixion of Jesus*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 285.
[179] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. 107.

alongside the prize it carried led individuals to seek out this prize by *engineering* a narrative of their own passive victimhood.

In the *Acts,* three progressively radical manifestations of provoked martyrdom can be observed; supplied and legitimised by commensurately thinly-stretched interpretations of the notion of victimhood which increasingly diminish the passivity of the martyr. In each, *who* the martyr is fundamentally changes. In the first case, the martyr volunteers himself to the judicial mechanism knowing his death will ensue. In the second, the martyr initiates this mechanism against himself. In the third, the passivity of victimhood rests only in the instrumentality of the fatal blow, as the martyr commits suicide, albeit at the hand of another. This radicalisation that the focus on the formative role of death in martyrdom brings ultimately results in a notion of martyrdom which subsumes into itself, and therefore in a sense does away with, the notion of witness to Christ through confession altogether. We will see, therefore, how the idea that a particular conceptualisation of death is important to martyrdom, can lead to the view that death is exhaustive of martyrdom and this radically alters who a martyr is.

We see an instance of the first case in Eusebius' records of the martyrs of Phrygia.

> Thus as soon as sentence was given against the first, some from one quarter and others from another would leap up to the tribunal before the judge and confess themselves Christians; paying no heed when faced with terrors and the varied forms of tortures, but undismayedly and boldly speaking of the piety towards the God of the universe, and with joy and laughter and gladness receiving the final sentence of death; so that they sang and sent up hymns and thanksgivings to the God of the universe even to the very last breath.[180]

In this case, an opportunity for death presented itself and Christians seized this opportunity. We see, therefore, that a martyrological narrative which locates the passivity in the practical

[180] Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VIII.ix.5, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 277.

instrumentality of the execution event is one that is particularly susceptible to counterfeiting. The tone of Eusebius' account conveys an almost comical sense in which Christians see themselves as standing before a stage onto which they need only "leap up", perform the role, "confess themselves Christians", and the scene will play out as martyrdom. The "joy and laughter and gladness", therefore, results from the realisation that the judicial machinery of the Roman Empire can become part of the economy of salvation.

More than this, there is a pride in exhausting this machinery through the sheer volume of deaths accumulated. Eusebius boasts that "the murderous axe was dulled and, worn out, was broken in pieces, while the executioners themselves grew utterly weary."[181] It would not be too much to read a sense of brinksmanship in Eusebius' tone which evidences the outlandish extent to which narrators went to claim death as a victory of resistance for Christianity. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is consistent with the Book of Revelation's characterisation of witnesses as conquering through death. We see the same in the account of Cyprian where opportunistically "the crowd of brethren cried: 'Let us also be beheaded with him.'" Although the initiative is with the persecuting authorities, Bowersock is right to say that this amounts to suicide, albeit a passive one; "a suicide to be arranged by an external agent but with the clear complicity of the victim."[182]

Beyond this we have a second form of provoked martyrdom, exemplified in the account of Euplus. Rather than being merely imitative of the experiences of martyrs, he *initiates* his death by presenting himself to the Prefect bearing books to prove his guilt: "Outside the veil in front of the prefect's council chamber, a man named Euplus shouted out to them and said, 'I want to die; I am a Christian.'"[183] It is not difficult to see how such a scenario develops from merely using the pre-existing penal mechanism to then attempting

[181] Ibid. See also *The Martyrdom of Saints Marian and James*, 12.1, op. cit., p. 211.
[182] G. W. Bowersock, op. cit., p. 61.
[183] *The Acts of Euplus*, 1.1 (Recension B), op. cit., p. 315.

to engineer the narrative yourself. Rather than confessing his guilt, Euplus even calls the trial against himself and instructs the persecutor as his prosecutor. Tertullian records a similar case in *Ad Scapulam:*

> Your cruelty is our glory…we do not feel ourselves constrained to rush forth to the combat, if only to prove that we have no dread of them, but on the contrary, even *invite their infliction*. When Arrius Antonius was driving things hard in Asia, the whole Christians of the province, in one united band, presented themselves before his judgement-seat; on which, ordering a few to be led forth to execution, he said to the rest, 'O miserable men, if you wish to die, you have precipices or halters.[184]

From an ostensibly uncontroversial notion of death completing a martyr's witness, we are now able to see its most extreme implications and realisations. As we shall see, some, such as Cyprian, Origen and Clement who were most influenced by the Platonic criticism of suicide, opposed voluntary martyrdom. For others such as Tertullian, however, it represented the witness' zeal and was considered a noble act and something to "invite". As Bowersock says in attempting to explain this divergence of opinion; "there is something distinctively Roman in Tertullian's attitude to martyrdom,"[185] explaining that Tertullian's attitude is more suggestive of the Roman traditions of Seneca, Stoicism, and Cynicism. In *De Fuga,* Tertullian writes that the Spirit "incites almost all to go and offer themselves in martyrdom."[186]

With this incitement, it is clear that we must now begin to speak of radical voluntary martyrdom, of the martyrs killing themselves and, therefore, of suicide. Far from locating the voluntary nature, by which the martyr proves the free willingness of the sacrifice they bear for their witness, in a subtle sense of reluctant readiness, now the act is so clearly

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[184] Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 5, in Rev. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. xi, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, vol. 1, trans. Rev. S. Thelwall, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), p. 51. Italics are mine.
[185] G. W. Bowersock, op. cit., p. 64.
[186] Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione*, 9, op. cit., p. 369.

instigated by the martyr that the only way to maintain the passivity necessary for the martyr's victimhood is to reduce it to the specific instrumentality of killing.

This brings us onto the third and most extreme manifestation of voluntary martyrdom which challenges Daniel Boyarin's objection to the term. "Provoked martyrdom", he writes, "is a better term in my opinion, than 'voluntary martyrdom' – if martyrdom is not voluntary it is not martyrdom."[187] To provoke implies to remain a passive victim but to incite one's own passive victimhood as in the previous example. The third radicalisation, however, does not even provoke and satisfies the need for passivity of victimhood in the narrowest possible sense. It can be demonstrated in the account of Agathonicê who is said to have left her son after witnessing the executions of Christians in her area and

> …raised her voice at once, 'Here is a meal that has been prepared for me. I must partake of this glorious feast.'…and taking off her cloak, she threw herself joyfully upon the stake.[188]

Just as death at the hands of the Roman stake was sufficient to make oneself a victim of persecution so too with Perpetua. Of her it is written that "she took the trembling hand of the young gladiator and guided it to her throat."[189] Far from provocation, this is voluntary *active* martyrdom – suicide. Here, the passive victimhood of the martyr is taken to breaking point as Agathonicê and Perpetua *actively* kill themselves at the site of their persecution, but using the tools of the persecutors; the stake and the knife.

There has been much debate about how best to understand the extent and significance of this phenomenon in the early church. Writers such as de Ste. Croix and later Droge and

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[187] D. Boyarin, *Dying for God*, op. cit., p. 121.
[188] *The Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus and Agathonice*, 42-44, op. cit., p. 36. That this volunteerism was considered distasteful even by the early church is witnessed by the redaction the text later received which sees her arrested with the other martyrs and receiving a trial.
[189] *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 21.9, op. cit., p. 131.

Tabor, G.W. Bowersock and Middleton argue that this radical voluntary martyrdom was very widespread and represented a recognised form of martyrdom which intensified and quickened the pace of persecution.[190] Scholars such as Buck, Reasoner and Ferguson[191], on the other hand, challenge that this did not represent the normative understanding of submissive martyrdom. Whilst this debate is not central to this discussion,[192] it is sufficient to recognise that even if, as Reasoner argues, it was not "an established tradition within the Christianity which became identified as orthodox", it certainly appears that it was widespread enough seemingly to have been taken for granted by some, even if the term itself represents an anachronistic imposition of a new category. Tertullian bears this out, boasting: "It would take me too long to enumerate one by one the men who at their own self-impulse have put an end to themselves."[193] It appears to be the case that in the early church the notion of radical martyrdom developed so seamlessly from the martyrologies before it that those writers such as Clement who *do* draw a distinction which recognises voluntary martyrdom as a different type are in the minority.

What we see, therefore, and what we will continue to see in other martyrologies, is the desire for martyrdom fuelling a revision in the understanding of martyrdom and, invariably, a radicalisation of the sort of martyrdom, and therefore *martyr*, that this understanding of martyrdom legitimises. As Felix Wilfred has observed; "…the ideal of

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[190] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?", *Past and Present*, vol. 26, no.1, 1963, pp. 6-38, p. 21; "Aspects of the 'Great' Persecution", *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1954, pp. 75-133; A. J. Droge and J. D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity*, (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); G. W. Bowersock, op. cit.; P. Middleton, "Early Christian Voluntary Martyrdom: A Statement for the Defence", *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, vol. 64, no. 2, 2013, pp. 556-573; *Radical Martyrdom*, op. cit.

[191] P. L. Buck, "Voluntary Martyrdom Revisited", *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, vol. 63, no. 1, 2012, pp. 125-135; M. Reasoner, "Persecution", in R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (eds.), *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1997); E. Ferguson, "Early Christian Martyrdom and Civil Disobedience", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1993, pp. 73-83.

[192] See C. Moss, "The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern", *Church History*, vol. 81, no. 3, 2012, pp. 531-551.

[193] Tertullian, *Ad Martyras*, 4, op. cit., p. 4.

martyrdom is refashioned and deployed to ever new and changing circumstances. In this process there takes place often a shift of emphasis and emergence of new foci."[194] What we have observed is three gradations of extremism in the way that martyrdom is understood. This occurs because the desire for martyrdom bends conceptualisations of martyrdom, within their conceptual limits, to fit practical realities. This martyrology reduces the passive victimhood required of the martyr to the mere instrumentality of their killing to facilitate the desire for martyrdom. Consequently, death having a constitutive role in the martyr's witness encouraged those who desired martyrdom to comply with their persecutors and even to coax and cajole their persecutors.

Therefore, the role that this martyrology provides death is contorted in order to legitimise the extremist interpretations that the zeal for martyrdom induces. Not only, therefore, does this martyrology radicalise who the martyr is, but it is itself radicalised by responding to these new and extreme contexts. This pattern culminates in a conceptualisation of martyrdom which sees death itself as sufficiently constituting the martyr's witness, so that death not only consummates and perfects the martyr's witness, it subsumes it. The practical obtainability of death at the hands of a persecutor makes this an attractive conceptualisation for those who seek martyrdom.

Death as the Martyr's Witness

This radicalising change in emphasis from death having a constitutive role in the martyr's witness by consummating it, to death subsuming this witness altogether, is evident in the martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch. The value of this narrative in exploring the way that martyrologies are understood is rare since, as Frend explains, "he is the first Christian

[194] F. Wilfred, op.cit., p. 80.

martyr…who has left us evidence of his state of mind as he went on the long journey under guard."[195]

> I am writing to all the Churches to tell them all that I am, with all my heart, to die for God – if only you do not prevent it. I beseech you not to indulge your benevolence at the wrong time. Please let me be thrown to the wild beasts; through them I can reach God. I am God's wheat; I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts that I may end as the pure bread of Christ. If anything coax the beasts on to become my sepulchre and to leave nothing of my body undevoured so that, when I am dead, I may be no bother to anyone. I shall be really a disciple of Jesus Christ if and when the world can no longer see so much as my body. Make petition, then, to the Lord for me, so that by these means I may be made a sacrifice to God. …Still, if I suffer, I shall be emancipated by Jesus Christ and, in my resurrection, shall be free.[196]

We have here a truly startling passage. Ignatius refers to the mutilation of his body as the site of his martyrdom. Death has totally subsumed the martyr's witness in this account so that martyrdom is reduced to death itself, independently of the witness for which it is suffered. As Ignatius later says in the letter, it is through death that he is "now beginning to be a disciple."[197] Martyrdom and the martyr's witness are not constituted, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, by a particular sort of death, so much as death itself, for itself.

There is a concern, however, that this conceptualisation of martyrdom can motivate a radicalisation even within this notion of death itself. Middleton explains that "Suffering and death were necessary prerequisites to share in Christ's glory to be revealed at the *parousia.*"[198] Once it becomes not merely a requisite but sufficient to securing the martyr's crown, the would-be martyr turns their zeal to death itself which can undergo the same process of radicalisation as we saw voluntary martyrdom in the previous section. The

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[195] W. H. C. Frend, op. cit., p. 197.
[196] Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans*, 4, in F. X. Glimm, J. M.-F. Marique, G. G. Walsh, (eds.) *The Fathers of the Church: Volume 1: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. G. G. Walsh, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), pp. 109-110.
[197] Ibid., 5, p. 110.
[198] P. Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. 138.

fetishisation of death that can ensue as the martyr seeks to prove their zealous commitment. Ignatius welcomes "Fire and cross and battling with wild beasts, their clawing and tearing, the breaking of bones and mangling of members, the grinding of my whole body, the wicked torments of the devil."[199] H.B. Workman's observation that "there is a manifest tendency to pile up the horrors"[200] reflects a strand of martyrdom which can appear almost voyeuristic towards the violence of the act. The horrors of Blandina, for instance, are graphically described:

> And after scourging, after the beasts, after the gridiron, she was at last put in a net and thrown to a bull. She was tossed about a long time by the beast, having no more feeling for what happened to her…and the heathen themselves confessed that never before among them had a woman suffered so much and so long.[201]

This is by no means the most graphic that descriptions of martyrdom became[202] and the last line suggests why restraint might have been exercised. There appears to be a tone of celebration at the extent of the torments Blandina had to endure; as though the prize was greater the worse the suffering became. This idea is confirmed by *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* where Saturninus is reported to have "insisted that he wanted to be exposed to all the different beasts, that his crown might be all the more glorious."[203] Rather than the witness being validated by death, the death itself seems to be validated to an extent commensurate with the atrocities involved. The extent of the suffering was not the only feature of martyrdom that was understood as having some significance.

In an early process of Church discernment of what martyrdom involved, the attitude of the martyrs was also carefully scrutinised. Scholars have pointed to the notion of

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[199] Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans*, 5.3, op. cit., p. 110.
[200] H. B. Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 120.
[201] Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, v.i.56, op. cit., p. 435.
[202] C.f. ibid. VIII.viii.1-9, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 275-276 for examples of Eusebius' most graphic accounts.
[203] *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 19.2, op. cit., p. 127.

endurance (ὑπομονή) in the martyrdom experience. Endurance was one of the chief qualities admired in martyrs, as it was in athletes in the arena, and had to be practised in suffering (Romans 5:3-5). Papylus is celebrated as "a noble athlete" when "he too was hung up and scraped and endured three pairs, but did not utter a sound."[204] Alongside this is the notion of fearlessness, exemplified in the martyrdom of Perpetua where in the final act "she took the trembling hand of the young gladiator and guided it to her throat."[205] The disempowerment and infantilisation of the trembling gladiator positions Perpetua as the vicarious parent who overcomes the fear of the infant to carry out their responsibilities.

The notions of endurance and fearlessness pervade martyrdom accounts and make the martyr's prize contingent on a certain countenance towards death. Certainly, reading the *Acts of the Martyrs* one could be forgiven for believing that the worse the torture and the greater the composure, the more esteemed the martyr. The focus remains very much on the victim during their sufferings. The more abhorrent the torture, the more dramatically the martyr bears witness to the reversal of life and death by which their enthusiasm is demonstrated, and the more composed, the more the martyr appears to endorse this reversal. By deriving value from the graphic minutiae of the martyrdom, some have argued that these accounts "have a tinge of the pornographic about them."[206] This seems pertinent given that it involves the exhibition of extreme violence for the gratification, indulgence and even delectation of the reader. Similarly, it is designed to appeal to, entertain and motivate similar attitudes and actions.[207]

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[204] *The Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus and Agathonice*, 35, op. cit., p. 27, 33.
[205] *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 21.9, op. cit., p. 131.
[206] L. S. Cunningham, "Christian Martyrdom: A Theological Perspective" op. cit., p. 13. See also T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 124 and M. Gaddis, op. cit., p. 166.
[207] It is noteworthy too, however, that this is also observed in academic literature which also seems to delight, perhaps for the reader's benefit, in the graphic details of the martyr narratives. See, for example, K. A. Winstead, op. cit.

Clearly, this martyrology has once again witnessed a process of radicalisation. The reluctant acceptance of suffering as a sign of authenticity has mutated into the notion that this death can subsume and even do away with witness. With only death required of the martyr, the status of the martyr and proof of their zeal is advanced instead by an eroticisation of this suffering sustained by the tacit implication that it is commensurate with one's status as a martyr, and, therefore, perhaps in heaven. Who the martyr is, therefore, has become more an exercise in thanatology than theology, and with it the net of martyrdom is cast even further afield into dangerous waters. To modern theologians, these views are, as Donald W. Riddle describes them, a form of brainwashed insanity.[208] Likewise, Ignatius' letter itself has been called "repugnant to the ordinary feelings of human nature,"[209] and Ignatius himself as having an "abnormal mentality"[210] and as "neurotic", "abnormal", "pathological", and "bordering on mania."[211] Nevertheless, these scholars do not show a similar disparagement to the veneration of Ignatius as a martyr. This is perhaps emblematic of a cognitive dissonance that governs much theological reflection on martyr narratives; the glory of the martyr and the repulsion at their extremist practices are held in an uneasy tension.

Collusion with Persecutors

We now move onto the claim that the abdication of passive victimhood that this martyrology's emphasis on the religious significance of the martyr's death encourages also raises the suspicion of collusion. We recall that Crossan explains that martyrdom must be

[208] D. W. Riddle, op. cit.
[209] E. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire: A New Edition in Four Volumes*, ed. H-F. Mueller, (New York: Modern Library, 2003), p. 300.
[210] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" op. cit., p. 24.
[211] See J. Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 33.

an "unfortunate necessity" and an "unwanted inevitability of conscious resistance to systematic evil."[212] We have seen, however, that these qualities are contrary to the disciple's *desire* for martyrdom, and obstructive to their attempt to achieve it. A martyrology which gives religious significance to death does little to encourage a disposition of acquiescence to death and instead inspires one of hopeful enthusiasm. If not "conscious *resistance* to systematic evil", what is the correct way to understand the relationship the martyr has with the persecutor if, by their enthusiasm, the martyr forfeits their victimhood? This prompts the allegation that Flanagan and Jupp level; namely, that "Martyrs die, not by fate, but by choice" and *willingly* comply with the persecutor's project so "they collude in their own demise."[213]

This became a fiercely contested issue in the early church when discussion surrounded the appropriate response to persecution. The debate can be illustrated in the conflicting views of Clement and Tertullian. Tertullian, as we have seen, mocked those who fled as lions in peace and deer in flight[214], seeing persecution instead as an opportune moment for martyrdom and encouraging it as a means of attaining a heavenly crown. Clement, on the other hand, in a similar vein to Cyprian and Origen, invoked Matthew 10:23; "When they persecuted you in this city, flee to another." Believing persecution failed to prove the victimhood of those who did not flee sufficiently, Clement inveighed against the martyrdom of the early church as being guilty of this collusion. Clement was a fierce critic of voluntary martyrdom; in what must have been an incendiary passage to many of his contemporaries, he writes;

[212] See J. D. Crossan, op. cit., p. 285.
[213] K. Flanagan and P. C. Jupp, op. cit., p. 106.
[214] Tertullian, *De Corona*, 1, op. cit., p. 334.

> Now we, too, say that those who have rushed on death (for there are some, not belonging to us, but sharing the name merely, who are in haste to give themselves up, the poor wretches dying through hatred to the Creator) – these, we say, banish themselves (ἐξάγειν ἑαυτον)[215] without being martyrs (ἀμαρτύρως), even though they are punished publicly.[216]

Clement draws an equivalence between suicide, which the Platonic traditions to which he frequently draws attention condemn, and voluntary martyrdom. By making it clear in the final words of this passage that being killed publicly at the hands of a persecutor does not preclude voluntary martyrdom (and therefore suicide), Clement paves the way for his extension of this equivalence to those who choose not to flee from persecution whom he also regards as suicidal voluntary martyrs:

> [Christ] wishes us neither to be the authors nor abettors of any evil to anyone, either to ourselves, or the persecutor, or the murderer…If he who kills a man of God sins against God, he also who presents himself before the judgement-seat becomes guilty of his death. And such is also the case with him who does not avoid persecution, but out of daring presents himself for capture. Such a one, as far as in him lies, becomes an accomplice in the crime of the persecutor. And if he also uses provocation, he is wholly guilty, challenging the wild beast.[217]

We have in these words a particularly rigorous notion of complicity which is sustained by an additional equivalence which sees voluntary martyrdom not only as tantamount to suicide, but also thereby to murder. The voluntary martyr is therefore as guilty of the suicidal murder of himself as would be a persecutor. As Bowersock says, "Clement could hardly be clearer in stating that violent martyrdom should under no circumstances represent an initiative on the part of the martyr."[218] Crucially, Clement insists that knowingly

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[215] Bowersock explains how here Clement "uses a familiar periphrasis for suicide in later Greek." C.f. G. W. Bowersock, op. cit., p. 68.
[216] Clement, *Stromateis*, iv.4.16.3, op. cit., p. 147.
[217] Ibid., iv.4.10.76f., p. 173.
[218] G. W. Bowersock, op. cit., p. 71.

and willingly confronting the persecutor is a fundamentally *active* act which surrenders any claim to the authentic passive victimhood which might vitiate suicide, and this means that those who do not flee are voluntary martyrs.

Clement challenges this particular claim to martyrdom by arguing that it destroys the true passivity of the martyr, compromising his victimhood. The merely instrumental passivity on which he recognised this concept of victimhood hung, is overwhelmed and destroyed by the very *active* characterisation Clement provides of the martyr colluding with the persecutors. That your death is at the hands of someone else is not sufficiently constitutive of the passivity victimhood requires if you have willingly and knowingly engaged that persecutor. Doing so makes you "wholly guilty" of the murder they perpetrate. Through a process of equivalence which sees suicide being a form of murder; voluntary martyrdom as being a form of suicide; and choosing not to flee persecution as being akin to volunteering oneself, Clement manages to sustain the view that those who do not flee persecution are guilty of murder and therefore not only the "accomplice" and "abettor" but even the "author" of their own death.

By saying that Christ does not want us to be the abettors of any crime, Clement also makes a more charitable point. That is, he believes that voluntary martyrdom and not fleeing from persecution amount to a form of entrapment for the persecutor who is compelled to commit an act of murder. The moral opprobrium is directed, therefore, not just at the murder of themselves, but at the necessary enlisting of a persecutor to maintain the thin veneer of victimhood central to the supposed sanctity of the martyr's destructive aims. The persecutor is conscripted, therefore, to commit the crime. In doing so, they are made a murderer so that the guilt of the martyr's death is conferred upon them too. This point is echoed by Aquinas

who says that just as "It is not praiseworthy to court martyrdom…Nor ought a man to give another an occasion of acting unjustly."[219]

Clement's claim that the victimhood of those who do not flee is compromised rests on the assumption that *inaction* can, in instances of persecution, be active rather than passive. It rests, in other words, on the equivalence of the one who "presents himself before the judgement seat" and "him who does not avoid persecution." Rather than seeing the choice the Christian faces as being between fleeing and not fleeing, Clement suggests that in the face of persecution, the Christian is forced into a decisive moment where only active alternatives remain open to him: flight or collusion. The Christian cannot abdicate their responsibility to make this pivotal decision: to stay or to flee. Karl Rahner elucidates this active characterisation of martyrdom when he writes that "by his or her active witness and life this kind of martyr has conjured up the situation in which he or she can only escape death by denying his or her faith."[220]

Clement identifies the tension that exists in one's refusal to comply with the demand to sacrifice and one's willingness to allow oneself to be brought to the feet of the persecutors. If the martyr refuses to renounce God then they should not put themselves in a position where they are forced to. An easier and more dignified way of not renouncing the faith is not to be asked to; to flee. This, however, is precisely the rub. Since the term 'martyr' only applies to those who *are* asked on pain of death to renounce the faith, those desiring martyrdom *wish* to be forced on pain of death to do something they do not want to do simply to prove they won't do it. Those who do not flee are, therefore, no different from voluntary martyrs. This irreconcilable dissonance involved in martyrdom will be explored in the next section.

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[219] T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.II, Q.124, (London: Burns & Oates, 1947), pp. 1715-1716.
[220] K. Rahner, op. cit., p. 10.

This is a powerful and contentious conclusion that Clement has reached. In times of persecution, the lack of evasive or resistant action might in fact entail collusion. The fundamental problem this points to in describing martyrdom which relies on passive victimhood is making a virtue of this passivity. It is not always the case that passivity in the face of resistance constitutes passive *resistance*. There is a fine line between passive suffering and compliance. There is equally a burden of moral responsibility over this passivity when it advances the interests of the persecutors. For the willingness to engage the persecutor risks undermining the insistence on the persecutor's *odium fidei* from which the demand to witness stems and on which the martyr narrative is established. Should the persecutor not be met with defiance and resistance if that appellation is to stand? Does the appellation stand at all if they are welcomed enthusiastically by the victim and conscripted in the latter's aspirations to martyrdom? Are they rather not a *servant* then, rather than a persecutor? Therefore, by privileging victimhood over resistance, martyrdom makes a strong political statement. A difficulty in a martyrology which understands death as having religious significance is therefore doing so in a way which retains the passive victimhood of the martyr so central to its sanctity, but without colluding with, or advancing the interests of, the persecutors or obstructing the course of justice or liberation.

The Paradox of Sacrifice: A Logical Objection

As well as leading to a radical and radicalising pursuit of death which undermines the victimhood of the martyr, and possibly advances the interests of the persecutor, this martyrology's conception of death as constitutive of the martyr's witness also problematises the logical coherence and theological consistency of martyrdom. The tension emerges, I believe, from a dissonance that this martyrology maintains in fundamental attitudes towards

life and death. To demonstrate the incoherence and inconsistency it leads to, we will therefore begin by unpacking this dissonance.

Life and Death: A Paradoxical Dissonance in Martyrdom

The religious significance of the martyr's witness resides in the martyr's willingness to confess *in spite of*, rather than *because of*, death. St. Anthony, however, describes his great disappointment when the presiding official at his trial refused to execute monks.[221] Likewise, Carpus "smiled as he was nailed down,"[222] and on several occasions the martyr is shown to have "offered his neck" to the persecutor.[223] The prize that martyrdom promises makes it the apogee of Christian discipleship in a way that motivates this voluntary martyrdom and this creates a tension in the way that life and death are perceived. How do we reconcile the cherishing of life necessary for its sacrifice to have religious significance in martyrdom, with the desire to sacrifice it for one's witness to Christ? Celebrating the martyr's death undermines the significance of this sacrifice, whilst despairing of death undermines the victory of the martyr's witness and conviction over death that this sacrifice purports to illustrate. To the martyr, death must be both everything and nothing.

This dissonance is realised in perceptions of the role of the executioner. The executioner is both the persecutor of Christians whose demands the martyr refuses to accede to, and the enabler of martyrdom without whose demands and punishment, martyrdom would be impossible. The executioner is therefore responsible both for the death of the martyr, but also the martyrdom this death achieves. Is death therefore something the

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[221] Athanasius, *The Life of St. Anthony*, 47, trans. R. T. Meyer, (New York: Newman Press, 1978), p. 60. Italics are mine.
[222] *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonicê*, The Greek Recension, 1.38, op. cit., p. 27.
[223] *The Acts of Euplus*, The Latin Recension, 3.3, op. cit., p. 319. See also *The Martyrdom of Saint Crispina*, 4.2, op. cit., p. 309.

executioner *inflicts* or *confers* upon the martyr? This martyrology appears, therefore, to cast the persecutor as both servant and villain in this narrative. This dissonance is revealed when Cyprian tells his friends to give his executioner twenty-five gold pieces.[224]

Martyrdom itself, then, is at once a victory and defeat, or, as Bowersock says, "The paradox is that in defeat lies victory."[225] As Walbert Bühlmann has remarked, "…the Church…lives in dialectical tension in the face of martyrdom: on the one hand, throughout history, it has rejoiced in the martyrs triumph…on the other hand, it must revolt against and denounce the persecution and killing of Christians."[226] This tension severely challenges the theological consistency of this martyrology. It requires that a coherent description of the religious significance of this suffering is articulated, and so we must turn to an analysis of this dialectical tension.

The Religious Significance of Voluntary Suffering

To begin this analysis, we first need to start from the question of in what sense voluntary suffering might be meaningful. In an excellent paper[227], Verbin analyses the logical coherence of voluntary suffering by examining a case from the Talmud of Rabbi Aqiva's martyrdom. Here he points to three relationships involving suffering subjects: the sadist, the masochist and the sacrificial servant. This is, I believe, a helpful framework by which to analyse the logical coherence of the dissonance that seems to exist between suffering and pleasure and the forthcoming analysis will therefore take them in turn.

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[224] *The Acts of St. Cyprian*, 5.4, op. cit., p. 175.
[225] G. W. Bowersock, op. cit., p. 62.
[226] W. Bühlmann, "The Church as Institution in the Context of Persecution", *Concilium*, no. 163, 1983/3, pp. 58-62, p. 58.
[227] N. Verbin, "Martyrdom: A Philosophical Perspective", *Philosophical Investigations*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2012, pp. 68-87.

Firstly, the notion that the martyr's suffering is sadistic certainly maintains the necessary malevolence that must be attributed to the persecutor for the martyrdom to have religious significance. It fails, however, to account for the complexity we have described in the victim's relationship with this suffering. The voluntary martyr is not the *unwilling* victim that sadism requires. Indeed, where the contrary seems to be the case, the notion that that martyr's suffering is better seen as masochism prevails since, as Deleuze says, "a genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim."[228]

Secondly, the belief that the martyr, especially the voluntary martyr, is a masochist is not uncommon. In *Unheroic Conduct,* Daniel Boyarin considers the submission to God a "clinical masochism – eroticisation of the pain itself,[229] and Salisbury similarly refers to the torture by the persecutor as "sadomasochism."[230] From the texts we have examined, this certainly seems a legitimate observation. The martyr derives happiness from their own suffering, or as Boyarin says, "pain is transformed into pleasure."[231] Still, whilst the masochistic tendencies of the martyr reject a sadist reading, masochism must also be rejected since as Verbin says, "the masochist's conception of happiness as involving various types of pain renders his willingness to endure such types of pain religiously insignificant."[232] What makes the witness so significant is that it is given *in spite* of death. The suffering that the martyr endures cannot satisfy a desire to suffer without diminishing the sacrificial significance of martyrdom.

Thirdly, therefore, Verbin instead proposes that martyrdom is understood using the relationship between a servant and his master. The servant believes that by submitting

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[228] G. Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, in G. Delueze and L. Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism,* trans. J. McNeil, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 40.
[229] D. Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man,* (London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 114.
[230] J. E. Salisbury, "Witness, Women's Bodies, and the Body of Christ," in M. L. Budde and K. Scott, (eds.), op. cit., p. 67.
[231] D. Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, op. cit., p. 114.
[232] N. Verbin, op. cit., p. 78.

himself to suffering he will be doing the master's will. Though this relationship involves suffering, it is not sadistic because the servant submits himself to pain, and it is not masochistic because it is not pain *per se* that the subject desires. Rather, pain is a necessary cost of submitting to the master's will. In other words, Verbin shows that martyrdom can only have religious significance when it is understood as a *sacrifice.* Verbin describes this martyr thus:

> …the martyr who feels the pain and ascribes significance to his pain, considering it an offence that compromises his happiness, but nevertheless rejoicing at the prospect of enduring the pain as a means of expressing his love for God.[233]

It is crucial, as Verbin points out, that the martyr ascribe significance to pain; for a sacrifice is only as meaningful as the value of that which is sacrificed. Martyrdom, giving up that which one holds dearest, is the zenith of the servant's love to his master.

This characterisation of the martyr as the sacrificial servant is astute, and of course theologically pertinent with relationship between Christ's own death and the suffering servant motif in Isaiah 53. When we analyse it further, however, we see that, as Verbin himself is quick to point out, this "loving relationship…embodies a paradox."[234] The notion of sacrifice is perfectly logical: one can both love something and be willing to sacrifice it for something one loves even more. The paradox emerges when the sacrifice is itself valued. For one cannot without contradiction put a premium on both the life one sacrifices and its sacrifice; otherwise, the martyr loves both his life and its destruction. This martyrology's conceptualisation of death as constitutive of the martyr's witness does just that. By bestowing religious significance upon death and the sacrifice of life itself, in a paradoxical irony, it undermines the religious significance of the sacrifice it celebrates. It is for this

[233] Ibid., p. 81.
[234] N. Verbin, op. cit., p. 77.

reason that Aquinas insists that martyrdom cannot, as this martyrology does, make death constitutive of the martyr's witness:

> …martyrdom, which consists in the due endurance of death, cannot be the most perfect of virtuous acts, because endurance of death is not praiseworthy in itself, but only in so far as it is directed to some good consisting in an act of virtue, such as faith or the love of God, so that this act of virtue being the end is better.[235]

In the next chapter, we will examine Aquinas' opposing belief that death should rather represent the cost of the martyr's witness. We now turn to consider another logical difficulty that the religious significance given to this martyrology leads to.

Sacrifice: The Subversion of the Categories of Life and Death

What we see from the early church is that the religious significance given to this sacrifice also elicits a subversion in how the categories of life and death are traditionally perceived. This creates an additional logical contradiction. Because the religious significance of the martyr's sacrifice depends on a traditional conceptualisation of life and death, it undermines the value of that which is sacrificed and therefore the religious significance of doing so.

Purely theoretically, it is easy to see how repeatedly venerating the preference of one value (witness) above another (life) can result in the relegation of the lower value and, even more, the depreciation and collapse of that value. Because value is relative, in the context of persecution, death offers such a high reward that it is preferred over and above life. In the early church, both the appreciation of death and depreciation of death are very clear. In one

[235] T. Aquinas, op. cit., p. 1717.

of the more fervid descriptions, the martyrs in prison write to Carthage the following description of the day of their deaths:

> After that night we spent a very happy day…Ah what a joyous day! The glory of being in bonds! The chains that were the object of our prayers. Iron more noble and precious to us than the finest gold! Ah, the clanking of the chains as they were drawn over one another! Our consolation was to talk of what was going to happen to us; but to prevent us from dwelling on this pleasure, we were led back and forth.[236]

Similarly, as we have seen, Ignatius beseeches his readers to let him die, he longs for the beasts and considers them his sepulchre. Tertullian describes chains as ornaments[237] and prisons as retirement. In Lyons, the martyrs' bodies were said to release a fragrant odour so that people believed that the body had been anointed with myrrh.[238]

Middleton, then, is right when he writes that "One of the most striking and consistent interpretive manoeuvres used by the Christians was the…redefining of the categories of life and death…the early Christians were able to sustain a belief not only that those who died were alive, but that those who were currently alive were dead."[239] Middleton's second point here is important. The corollary to the foregoing glorification of death is the depreciation of life. This is something even the non-Christian Lucian perceives in his satirical account of the death of Peregrinus, where he writes:

> …the poor devils have convinced themselves they are all going to be immortal and live forever, which makes most of them take death lightly and voluntarily give themselves up to it.[240]

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[236] *The Martyrdom of Saints Montanus and Lucius*, 6.1-4, op. cit., p. 219.
[237] *The Martyrs of Lyons*, 1.35, op. cit., p. 73.
[238] *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, 1.35, op. cit., p. 73.
[239] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. 75.
[240] Lucian, *Death of Peregrinus*, 13, op. cit., p. 369.

Lucian illustrates how the certainty of immortality made death preferable to life because it was an act of faith which achieved *eternal* life. When we reflect again on the passage from Ignatius' letter to the Romans we see the justification of this impression. In the bluntest elucidation of this idea, Ignatius writes: "for alive…my longing is for death."[241] This idea is supported by scripture where Paul explains that "dying is gain…my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is much better" (Phil. 1:21-24) grounded in the common view that "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn. 12:25). It is no surprise, therefore, that this theology is found frequently in the *Acts* where Julius, for instance, says that he has chosen death so that he might live forever.[242] This radically subverts the traditional notions of life and death which, as we shall now explain, are used as the basis for understanding the sanctity of martyrdom.

Clearly then, the premium placed on martyrdom and the sacrifice of life it involves reverses the conventional polarity between life and death. Crucially, however, it is this conventional polarity that sustains the religious significance of this sacrifice in the first place. What value does martyrdom have if all it entails is giving up that whose negation is preferable? Carole Straw rightly points out that "Augustine shatters this classical heroic ideal"[243] when he writes:

> If we loved death it would be nothing great to bear it for the faith…if people succumb to their desires, do we praise them for courage or patience? We praise the martyrs precisely because they bear what they do not love: suffering.[244]

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[241] Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans*, 7, op. cit., p. 111.
[242] *The Martyrdom of Julius the Veteran*, 3.6, op. cit., p. 265. See also *The Martyrdom of Saints Agapê, Irenê, and Chionê at Saloniki*, 2.1, op. cit., p. 283.
[243] C. Straw, "Martyrdom and Christian Identity", in W. E. Klingshern and M. Vessey, *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique and Culture in Honour of R. A. Marku*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 251.
[244] Augustine, *Sermons*, 299.8, in J. E. Rotelle, (ed.), *Sermons 273-305A*, trans. E. Hill, in *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, (New York: New City Press, 1990-1997).

The sanctity of martyrdom is therefore contingent on the sanctity of life. If the categories of life and death are subverted then death becomes a masochistic indulgence evacuated of all religious significance. There is therefore a theological inconsistency between the attitude towards death that the sacrificial value of martyrdom expects, and the attitude that martyrdom – because it glorifies this sacrifice – adopts.

This reminder that martyrdom derives religious significance from the sacrifice paid for fidelity and love of God prompts another logical objection to the notion of sacrifice. If the principle of martyrdom is that one gives up what one holds dearest as a sacrifice to an even greater principle, then the would-be martyr does not give up what they hold dearest. The greatest sacrifice they could make is not to participate in this dialectical relationship at all. Verbin explains:

> In seeking to give himself to God, to sacrifice whatever he holds dear so that he may be able to love God with all his soul…He cannot lose his self while wishing to give it to God…In other words…[the martyr's] willingness to give himself to God is a logical impediment to his ability to do so.[245]

Verbin's astute observation is important; self-renunciation is self-defeating if it achieves something even greater for oneself. Martyrdom, therefore, cannot be voluntarily sought through self-renunciation without contradiction. One cannot therefore subvert the categories of life and death and not subvert one's notions of sacrifice without evacuating martyrdom of all meaning. Once again, however, this leads to a paradox. The ultimate sacrifice is depriving oneself of the ultimate sacrifice; in order to give up what one values most one must renounce that very principle.

[245] N. Verbin, op. cit., p. 86.

Concerns for Modern Martyrdom

We have seen, therefore, that the theological traditions of the early church which gave religious significance to death as a badge of discipleship and sign of unity with Christ dramatically shaped the interpretations of martyrdom that emerged. They have done so, however, in a way that has led to a radicalisation of this martyrology and, therefore, also of both who the martyr is, and the meaning and possibilities of Christian discipleship. The distorted notions of the martyr these traditions produced legitimised and encouraged voluntary martyrdom and the suicidal mania and fetishisation of death to which this gave rise. They privileged passive victimhood over defiance and resistance in a way which risked submissiveness and collusion with the evil projects of the persecutors. More than this, however, these traditions, by so radically redefining the significance of life and death, evacuated martyrdom of all religious significance. It is, nevertheless, these traditions of the early church that continue to shape the narratives of modern martyr and their challenges and dangers resonate in modernity.

The same subversion of the traditional categories of peace and persecution and life and death can be illustrated by a statement from Archbishop Desmund Tutu in 1983 during South African Apartheid:

> In many ways, Jesus declares, the attitude of the world and its authorities will help to determine his true followers…suffering is the badge of all our tribe. In my view, since the cross is so central to the life and work of Jesus Christ…the cross and suffering must be central also to the life and work of the Christian…A Christian or a Church that does not suffer is a contradiction in terms…a Church that does not suffer cannot be the Church of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.[246]

[246] D. Tutu, "Persecution of Christians Under Apartheid", *Concilium*, no. 163, 1983/3, pp. 63-69, p. 64.

This quotation represents a modern expression of the same tradition which helps to sustain the conceptualisation of martyrdom we have analysed, a tradition which Bonhoeffer too promulgates as he writes; "Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship…Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is not therefore surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact, it is a joy and a token of his grace."[247]

These traditions, which gave meaning to martyr stories of the early church, continue to be used to legitimise and enable the narrative construction of modern martyrs. For instance, it was a common trope in martyr narratives in El Salvador during the civil war. Here, those who suffered were said to prove the authenticity of their discipleship and the church. Archbishop Romero explained to his congregation that "true Christians desire death."[248] Most interestingly, the dependence on these early traditions we have discussed are made explicit. Romero explains, "no one should be surprised that the church is being persecuted…Christians have been subjected to persecution from the very beginning."[249] He adds, in a way reminiscent of Euplus' identical invocation[250] that this teaching is substantiated by the New Testament which teaches that "suffering will be a characteristic of the Church and of the true followers of Christ."[251] This provides compelling evidence for the first contention of this thesis – that the ideas sustaining these martyrologies, whilst forged in the experience of the early church, continue to have a profound influence on martyr-making in the present day. It therefore emphasises the need to confront and analyse these traditions in the way that this chapter has attempted to do so. In what follows, we provide some reflections gleaned from the analysis this chapter has provided.

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[247] L. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (London: SCM, 2015), p. 45.
[248] O. Romero, *A Prophetic Bishop Speaks to His People: The Complete Homilies of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero*, trans. J. Owens, SJ, (Miami, FL: Convivium Press, Vol 1-3, 2015, Vol. 4-6, 2016), September 24, 1978.
[249] O. Romero, *2nd Pastoral Letter: The Church, the Body of Christ in History*, August 6, 1977, in O. Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*, trans. M. J. Walsh, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 79.
[250] *The Acts of Euplus*, The Latin Recension, 1.5, p. 315.
[251] O. Romero, *Homilies*, op. cit., September 16th, 1979.

This theology, drawing on the same theological traditions as the early church, brings the observations we have made into sharp focus. Both Tutu and Romero seek to minister to a pastoral need in promulgating this theology. They seek to beguile the victims in their congregations of their anguish by reminding them that it is a sign of grace. In so doing, however, they introduce a martyrology which invites their communities to imagine these victims as martyrs. With this, the same dangers that are present in the early church are risked in modern theological discourse.

Particularly in light of the analysis we have provided of the martyrology these traditions are part of in the early church, how are we to evaluate their prominence in a more modern context? On several accounts, it is very difficult. Firstly, in aligning authentic Christianity with suffering it is difficult to avoid a sentiment of approval for this suffering.

The notion that persecution during apartheid in South Africa legitimises your Church, or even, as Tutu goes on to say, should be a "cause for pride,"[252] is shocking. To the modern theologian, so attuned to modernity's tyrants and oppressors, it suggests a permissibility. Is this suffering to be welcomed as the early martyrs welcomed it? Ought the church, as they did then, to rejoice in its experience of persecution? This would strike many readers as pathological and maniacal. It threatens to have the same implications that it did in the early church where the understanding of martyrdom it licensed quickly radicalised to the extremism of voluntary martyrdom. Recent years have already seen this radicalisation of theological tradition in the case of Islam. In words which eerily resemble those of Ignatius, Mohammed Siddique Khan, architect of the London bombings on the 7th July, 2015, explains in a chilling video message that "we love death as you love life", a quotation which has become a mantra among Islamic terrorists since Osama Bin Laden used the phrase

[252] D. Tutu, op. cit., p. 65.

in 2001[253] and which motivates Raffaello Pantucci's recent book on the matter of the same name.[254]

Another concern, however, is not that the relationship with death that martyrdom emerges from is necessarily radicalising, but that it involves, and therefore, sponsors, a docetic relationship with suffering. Langer explains this point well in reference to the martyrdom as a way of memorialising holocaust victims:

> When we speak of the survivor instead of the victim and of martyrdom instead of murder, regard being gassed as a pattern for dying with dignity, or evoke the redemptive rather than the grievous power of memory, we draw on an arsenal of words that urges us to build verbal fences between the atrocities of the camps and ghettos and what we are mentally willing – or able – to face.[255]

As a way of remembering a victim, martyrdom evokes traditions which imagine death as a triumph; in their victory, the martyr sits resplendent with Christ for eternity. Langer reminds us that whilst this can minister to the pain of a grieving community, it can risk a docetic memorialisation which glosses the devastating but important realities the victims faced. Martyrdom constructs a version of reality that in the rawness of grief a community might prefer, but one that might beguile them of the reality it consists of.

Moreover, the early church's sensationalism with regards to violence should also give cause for concern; for the modern era is not without its counterparts and nor does it disavow that fascination. The sense of spectacle in the narrative of the martyr remains an important part of modern martyr stories, albeit to a lesser extent. The reason why Vietnamese monk Thích Quảng Đức is remembered as a martyr is not because of his self-immolation, but rather the iconic and graphic photograph that Malcolm Browne took of it. The popularity

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[253] R. Stengel, "Osama Bin Laden and the Idea of Progress", in *Time Magazine*, December 21st, 2001. The phrase appears again by the perpetrators of the Madrid train bombings, 2014 and Paris Massacre, 2014.
[254] R. Pantucci, *We Love Death As You Love Life*, (London: C.Hurst & Co, 2015).
[255] L. L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 6.

of this photograph is part of a popular modern fascination amongst audiences for violent spectacle.

We are likewise reminded that these views have political implications in history which are especially pertinent to modern martyrdom contexts. Such a view encourages and glorifies the self-identification as oppressed, victimised, persecuted and condemned. This is scandalous to the modern liberation projects which preach freedom from exactly this sort of persecution. Instead, it risks privileging submission to tyranny and oppression over defiance, resistance and liberation. The succour that this claim that suffering is a sign of authenticity brings can therefore pale next to the suffering that an outlook of permissibility can hasten, and this has particular relevance in twentieth-century political discourse. For instance, Romero's reassuring messages about persecution and martyrdom slowly led to a growing feeling that the Church was obstructing the route to political and theological liberation. It would be this pressure that would soften Romero's opposition towards armed resistance later in his ministry.[256]

Conclusion

In this section, we have begun this thesis' analysis of the theological underpinnings of one of the most prevalent martyrologies in Christian history: the interpretation that understands death as consummating and perfecting the martyr's witness. By and through the analysis of this understanding, we have demonstrated the two contentions of this thesis. Namely, we have proven the prevalence this martyrology has, both in the early church and even in a modern context, and its importance in shaping how a community imagines, interprets and memorialises a martyr. Moreover, the analysis of this martyrology has shown

[256] See A. L. Petersen, op. cit.

that the privileged role it gives to the martyr's death creates a host of difficulties which prove this thesis' second contention that not only are these martyrologies central to how we imagine martyrs, but they involve ideas that can be radicalising and extremist, morally dangerous to the martyr's community, and logically incoherent and theological inconsistent.

We saw, for instance, that the belief that martyrdom is achieved by a particular sort of death can provoke and encourage extremist attempts to pursue martyrdom voluntarily and notwithstanding the passive victimhood the martyr must retain. We saw too that this emphasis on the martyr's death can cause several difficulties which imperil the martyr's community. Specifically, it can lead to a sense of the martyr's collusion with their persecutors, and can represent and propagate a permissibility of oppressive suffering which can be obstructive both to political projects and to liberation theology. More than this, the role this martyrology gives to death can subvert the traditional conceptualisations of life and death in a way which fundamentally undermines the sacrificial value of the martyr's death on which the religious significance of martyrdom is based. This martyrology embodies a paradoxical dissonance which threatens to undermine its sanctity.

Perhaps most crucially, however, by using the examples of Bonhoeffer, Tutu and Romero, among others, we illustrate that this martyrology, the theological ideas sustaining it and therefore the problems attendant on it that we have explored in this chapter, is very much alive in the modern era. The chapter ends, therefore, on this cautionary note and an attempt at foregrounding the urgency there now is for theological reflection on martyr narratives, the theological ideas sustaining them and the implications that these have.

In the next chapter, we move on to a martyrology which instead understands the martyr's death as merely the cost of their witness. Alongside fresh difficulties that this different understanding invokes, we see that familiar problems we have encountered here

also arise. Through this analysis, therefore, we begin to discover difficulties which appear to strike at the very heart of martyrdom.

Chapter 4: Witnessing *to* Christ at the Cost of Death

In the last chapter, we began our analysis of the quadripartite model introduced in Chapter 2 by analysing an understanding of Christian martyrdom as witnessing *to* Christ and the first martyrology to which this can give rise. This saw the martyr as one whose death participated in the martyr's witness *to* Christ. In this chapter, we now move on to analyse an alternative understanding of the role of death in martyrdom which gives rise to an alternative account of the meaning and significance of martyrdom and the second martyrology in the quadripartite model. According to this alternative analysis, the religious significance of martyrdom resides not in the least in death itself, but rather in the absolute conviction to their witness that the martyr's willingness to accept death for it demonstrates.

We will begin the analysis by exploring the religious significance of this martyrology and distinguishing the role that death plays in this conception of martyrdom. The irresistible conclusion this analysis reaches is that whilst the *role* that death plays is necessary to this martyrology in making known this conviction, death itself is not only unnecessary to fulfil this role, it is actually ill-suited to it. The belief that death is dispensable to martyrdom gives rise to the view that the sanctity of martyrdom can be achieved without death, and we explore the popularity of this idea in the early church. This early church context, and the flourishing of this idea after the cessation of state persecution, provides a cautionary narrative. It demonstrates that the belief that alternative praxes can demonstrate the absolute conviction of the martyr provokes a radicalising search for extremist practices which can suitably fulfil death's role. The way that this can radicalise and distort who the martyr is and how one conceives discipleship is demonstrated by modern examples where death is replaced by highly radical acts of violence to oneself and others. These examples help to demonstrate the ongoing prevalence of this martyrology even in modern times. Finally, as with the

previous chapter, this martyrology is highly compromised by the theological inconsistency and logical incoherence involved in its pursuit.

A Martyr's Conviction

Van Henten and Avemarie say that the martyr is "a person who in an extremely hostile situation prefers a violent death to compliance with a demand of the (usually pagan) authorities."[257] In doing so, these writers represent an alternative analysis of the religious significance of this martyrology of confession. On this account, the meaning and religious significance of martyrdom fundamentally lies in the *conviction* to one's witness that the *preference* for suffering over renunciation reveals, not the suffering itself. One of the foremost advocates of this notion of martyrdom is Aquinas and we shall continue to reference his section on martyrdom in the *Summa Theologica* throughout this chapter as emblematic of this martyrology. "A man's love for a thing," Aquinas explains, "is proved to be so much the greater, according as that which he despises for its sake is more dear to him, or that which he chooses to suffer for its sake is more odious."[258] The strength of this conviction is measured and proven by what it can withstand and the lengths to which it will go. When it is death that is the cost of this conviction, the witness becomes the martyr.

Paul Ricoeur in his celebrated *Hermeneutics of Testimony* provides a helpful elucidation of this conceptualisation of martyrdom:

> …the witness seals his bond to the cause that he defends by a public profession of his conviction, by the zeal of the propagator, by a personal devotion which can extend even to the sacrifice of his life. The witness is capable of suffering and dying

[257] J. W. van Henten and F. Avemarie, op. cit., p. 3.
[258] T. Aquinas, op. cit., p. 1717.

> for what he believes. When the test of conviction becomes the price of life, the witness changes his name; he is called a martyr.[259]

This martyrology's religious significance therefore, like the former, understands death as that *in spite of which* not *because of which* witness is given. Death, however, or more specifically, the threat of it, is merely, as Ricoeur says, "a test, a limit situation,"[260] but has no constitutive role in the martyr's witness. According to this understanding, therefore, Ricoeur continues; "A man becomes a martyr because he is first a witness…the disciple is martyr because he is a witness, not the inverse."[261] According to this martyrology, therefore, the martyr's witness is complete *before* their death, even if they have not yet qualified for that designation through death.

Why is death the especially significant test that gives the martyr's conviction this religious significance? Aquinas goes on to explain;

> But it is evident that of all the goods of the present life man loves life itself most, and on the other hand he hates death more than anything, especially when it is accompanied by the pains of bodily torment…And from this point of view it is clear that martyrdom is the most perfect of human acts.[262]

Death does not merely illustrate a willingness to die; rather, because life is typically regarded as one's supreme value, death is seen to represent the *ultimate* sacrifice, and therefore the willingness to accept it as a cost of one's witness really signifies the willingness not merely to die but to do *anything* in pursuance of one's convictions.[263] The *martyr's* conviction, in

[259] P. Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 128.
[260] Ibid., p. 128.
[261] Ibid., pp. 128…132.
[262] T. Aquinas, op. cit., p. 1717.
[263] Indeed, proving the willingness to die alone would not prove a great deal as we have seen in the previous section since the premium placed on martyrdom gives death a value that makes it attractive.

other words, is an absolute conviction. Bonner explains how this is distinguished from the understanding of martyrdom analysed in the previous chapter:

> The essential element in martyrdom is not the physical act of dying but rather a disposition of the will to live for Christ, with the necessary corollary that, by a strange and wholly Christian paradox, living for Christ may involve the necessity to lay down one's life for him.[264]

Unlike the previous conceptualisation of death as constitutive of the martyr's witness, it is not the sacrifice of life itself that has religious significance as what he describes as "the essential element in martyrdom", but rather the conviction it demonstrates. It is important to observe that the concept of voluntarism is central to this martyrology. That is, the martyr must be perceived as one who could have avoided their fate had they chosen not to confess, but instead, in full knowledge of the consequences, did so nonetheless. This is so because for the conviction to demonstrates the *willingness* to suffer, this suffering must not be *willing*; not forced irresistibly upon the martyr, but freely chosen. Had the victim not known that their confession would cost them their life, then it remains possible that they may have renounced their faith and their absolute conviction would not be demonstrated.

In many ways, this articulation of the martyr is intuitive to the modern reader who, lacking knowledge of antiquity's understanding of a good or noble death, tends to focus on the strength of conviction that the martyr's resilience and willingness to undergo pain bespeaks. This understanding of the significance of martyrdom also pervades the *Acts* as a crucial way that martyrdom was understood in the early church. We are told, for instance, that early Christians "love the martyrs…and rightly so because of their unsurpassed loyalty towards their kind and master."[265] It is this that might help to add a functionality to the

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[264] G. Bonner, "Martyrdom: Its Place in the Church", *Sobernost*, vol. 5. no. 2, 1983, pp. 6-21.
[265] *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 17.5, op. cit., p. 17.

graphic descriptions of suffering that embroider martyr narratives, as we have seen. Narrators may have wished to exaggerate and inflate the cost of the martyr's witness to enhance the proof of their conviction.

In the analysis that follows, I will explore this martyrology in greater detail to show that its premises – both theological and logical – are highly problematic. I will begin by ascertaining the precise role death plays, showing that this martyrology must be seen to give death a role which renders it oddly dispensable to martyrdom. It is this dispensability that exposes the problems inherent in this conception of martyrdom. We see that death is not only not necessary for martyrdom, but it cannot even guarantee the martyr's conviction. It follows, therefore, that other experiences can appropriate this function, which leads to the belief in martyrdom without death. I show that, like the previous chapter, this has a radicalising effect, for it leads to extreme practices designed to demonstrate the martyr's conviction that this martyrology celebrates. Finally, I show that the practices that this leads to are ultimately paradoxical as, in attempting to prove their absolute conviction, the individual in fact indulges their foremost desire; martyrdom.

The Role of Death

In brief, therefore, whilst the previous chapter looked at a martyrology which saw the meaning and significance of martyrdom as located in both the martyr's witness through confession and the death they suffered on its account, this chapter's martyrology believes that it is the conviction of one's witness, demonstrated by the martyr's death that encapsulates the religious significance of martyrdom. The challenge we can level, therefore, is as follows: is this conviction – and therefore Christian witness – any more significant in the martyr than it is in the *living* witness; the confessor? If the religious significance of

witness resides in an absolute conviction then there seems to be no difference between the confessor's willingness to die for their faith, and the martyr's actually doing so, provided that both were truly willing. So long as the religious significance lies in the conviction that this willingness demonstrates, the subsequent question of whether or not this conviction costs their life seems by comparison incidental and ancillary to the essence of martyrdom. Indeed, it can have no more evaluative or theological import than whether Abraham had *actually* killed Isaac or merely proven his willingness to do so. Here too, the religious significance lay in Abraham's *willingness* to sacrifice his son, and this willingness was not diminished by not in fact doing so. To give to the martyr a religious significance that is deprived to the confessor, therefore, is to give *death itself* in the Roman arena a religious significance that we do not give it on Mount Moriah.

If the only difference between the *martyr's* conviction and the confessor's is the fact that the former has been verified and proven, then it seems that the most that we can say regarding death's importance to the religious significance of this martyrology is that it is epistemically necessary but constitutively ancillary. The role death plays is that of illuminating the reality of an independent theological and existential truth in which the religious significance of martyrdom truly lies. Death has no bearing, however, on the martyr's conviction itself. This leads to the conclusion, which flouts traditional conceptions of martyrdom, that death does not confer any religious significance either on the martyr or their witness which did not exist already. Death is therefore of no consequence to the religious significance of martyrdom *per se.* Death is necessary for a witness to become a *martyr's* witness, but it does not give this witness its religious significance and is not constitutive of what makes a confession Christian witness. In the forthcoming analysis, we will see that some authors in the early church defended this dissolution of the difference in religious significance between the confessor and the martyr on this very basis. It would not

be long, as we shall see, before this analysis was used to argue that martyrdom could be achieved without death.

Whilst death does not confer any religious significance upon the witness' absolute conviction, whether they are a confessor or a martyr, death *is* necessary to impute to any individual possession of this conviction successfully. Why is the demonstrability of the witness' conviction that death provides so important? We return to the social-constructivist account of martyrdom. Because the martyr is not strictly a historical figure, but a narrative construct interpreting and characterising a historical figure, nothing can be religiously significant about the martyr which has not been made known. Just as there are no anonymous martyrs, martyrs cannot possess anonymous attributes. Whether or not you can call someone a martyr, therefore, is tantamount to whether or not they are one on the social-constructivist view. To identify the imaginative construction of an individual as a martyr, we must have reason meaningfully to impute to this individual the martyr's absolute conviction. For whilst it is true that whether or not we know if an individual has this conviction does not alter whether or not they in fact do; whether we are able to prove they do does affect how meaningfully we can attribute it to them, and ultimately, therefore, whether or not we can call them a martyr. Death may not, therefore, be necessary to the *existence per se* of the martyr's conviction; but, as the condition for the possibility of this conviction being verified as absolute, it supplies meaning to the claim that such conviction exists at all. The *role* death plays, therefore, remains necessary for the designation of this conviction as a *martyr's* conviction.

It is this role, however, which I believe problematises this martyrology. The foregoing analysis only proves the necessity of a test limit which can prove the absolute conviction of the martyr. The *role*, therefore, that death plays is necessary for martyrdom, but it is another thing altogether to suggest that death is necessary to perform this role. What

I will show is not only that death is *not* necessary to perform this role, but it is often ill-suited to it. Death is therefore dispensable to martyrdom and its role is better performed by other experiences and practices. I will show both how these can lead to radical interpretations of martyrdom, and also the adoption of extreme practices in the discipleship it inspires.

The Dispensability of Death

In order to examine the success with which death can perform this role of revealing the martyr's conviction, we must begin with the question of how it is that death claims to do so. Leonardo Boff explains this well when he writes;

> …martyrdom is possible because there are those who prefer to sacrifice their very lives rather than be unfaithful to their own convictions. The martyr has absolutes…Normally life is regarded as the supreme value, but the *sacrifice* of life through martyrdom points to something which is of a still higher value.[266]

Similarly, of the early church, Workman writes that their deaths illustrated that "…the martyrs were witnesses to the absoluteness of the Christian faith."[267] In other words, referring to the same martyrology in two very different contexts, the notion that death is capable of evincing an absolute conviction is premised on the belief that life represents the highest value and that death therefore represents the ultimate sacrifice. It rests fundamentally, therefore, on an equivalence between a willingness to die and an absolute conviction. It is easy to show, however, that these premises are false. Death is not necessarily, or even often, able to prove this absolute conviction and this severely

[266] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 12…16. Italics are mine.
[267] H. B. Workman, op. cit.., p. 142.

undermines the theological significance of traditional conceptions of martyrdom and furthermore insists upon the belief that other experiences can demonstrate this conviction more successfully.

Sacrificial death can prove nothing more than a willingness to die and therefore a preference of one's conviction over one's life. The religious significance of this preference, however, will vary depending on the value attached to life. Because theological traditions have put a premium on the sacrifice of one's life in martyrdom, martyrdom is especially vulnerable to attracting individuals whose aspiration for it has subverted the traditional attitudes towards life and death as we saw in the previous chapter. As with Augustine's criticism we gave earlier, however, this desire for martyrdom undermines its sacrificial value. For those who seek martyrdom, or would profit from it, death does not represent a great cost to be borne for the faith. Their martyrdom cannot – without flouting the principle that the sacrifice is only as significant as the value of that which was sacrificed – be held in the same esteem as they who really do value life above all else and are yet prepared to sacrifice it for their witness. Death may not even, therefore, represent a particularly costly sacrifice which might allow *some* religious significance to be given to the martyr.

Moreover, it is a principle witnessed throughout history that there are causes for which people would readily give their lives. Death is often preferred to shame, harm to others, cowardice and patriotism, among other values. Therefore, Aquinas's justification for the equivalence between the willingness to die and an absolute willingness that "men are wont to despite both their kindred and all they possess, and even to suffer bodily pain, rather than lose life"[268] is simply not universally true. It is no less clearly the case that individuals willingly suffer death in order to *avoid* a worse suffering. That people are regularly willing to sacrifice their lives for these principles or to avoid this suffering discredits the claim that

[268] T. Aquinas, op. cit., p. 1718.

life can be taken for granted as the highest value and that its sacrifice proves an absolute conviction. It might, however, be said that whilst life cannot represent the ultimate sacrifice, it at least guarantees some religious significance for the martyr's conviction. Not only does voluntary martyrdom contest this, but also, the role that death traditionally plays cannot be conceived as merely representing any cost borne for the faith. The religious significance history and theology have bestowed upon the martyr is such that they are an individual whose death represents the cost of a willingness to endure *whatever* was required for the faith rather than to renounce it, as Aquinas testifies.

What, then, is the cause of this prejudicial privileging of death as proving the martyr's conviction? The answer must be what this thesis attempts to show lies at the centre of the emergence of martyrologies; it ministers to an external need, in this case, a pastoral need. Death is given this unjustified, ultimate validating authority because then it can potentiate a narrative of conviction for those who have suffered death, often against their will. It ennobles their death as not only a sacrifice, but the greatest sacrifice, and this conviction allows the memorialising power of a martyrdom narrative to emerge. Once again, people's great desire to make martyrs fundamentally alters the way martyrdom – and therefore who the martyr is – is understood; in this case, however, at the expense of the religious significance it aims to bestow.

Once we realise that the willingness to die does not guarantee an absolute conviction and, therefore, that death is not especially apt at performing the role it assumes in martyrdom, two conclusions follow. Firstly, the religious significance of martyrdom is highly diminished because death does not necessarily procure it in the way suggested. Secondly, death loses its uniqueness in this role, and consequently martyrdom according to this martyrology not only allows for the possibility, but in fact *requires*, that other experiences perform the role asked of death even more successfully. This gives rise to the

controversial but irresistible conclusion that the religious significance of the martyr, and therefore martyrdom itself, can be demonstrated without death, and it is this that we turn to.

Martyrdom Without Death

The belief that death's role can be supplanted and fulfilled by other experiences represents an evolution in the martyrology which is particularly attractive to both martyrologists and would-be martyrs for whom death is either not available or represents something too foreboding to endure. As we saw in the previous chapter with the evolution from voluntary martyrdom to the notion of the martyr's death as their witness, in this section we show how this martyrology's understanding of the dispensability of death was able to create a new school of martyrs – those whose conviction is demonstrated independently from their death. This demonstrates the principle to which Ernesto Valiente bears witness when he writes that the "understanding of martyrdom has not remained static throughout history, but rather has been reinterpreted according to changes in cultural, political, and historical circumstances."[269]

In the early church, these cultural, political and historical circumstances were, it seems, threefold and they provided the conditions for this martyrology's understanding of the religious significance of martyrdom to develop a radically different understanding of martyrdom; namely, *living* martyrdom. The first of these was the need to address the perceived injustice visited upon confessors whose suffering was great but whose martyrdom was denied because, through no initiative on their part, they survived their torments. The second was the need to challenge the enthusiasm towards voluntary martyrdom to which this fixation on death gave rise. Finally, the third was to supply a means by which ardent

[269] O. E. Valiente, op. cit., p. 114.

disciples could attain the martyr's crown once persecution, and the availability of death it supplied, diminished.

An excellent example of the first external urgency and of the equality with death that other types of suffering were believed to have comes from Cyprian who, like Clement and Origen, believed that the religious sanctity of the martyr should not be restricted only to those who have died. Driven by the insistence that the experiences of confessors are no less worthy of martyrdom than traditional martyrs, he writes;

> Let there be also a more zealous watchfulness and care bestowed upon the bodies of all those who, although they were not tortured in prison, yet depart thence by the glorious exit of death. For neither is their virtue nor their honour too little for them also to be allied with the blessed martyrs. As far as they could, they bore whatever they were prepared and equipped to bear. He who under the eyes of God has offered himself to tortures and to death, has suffered whatever he was willing to suffer; for it was not he that was wanting to the tortures, but the tortures that were wanting to him.[270]

In this quotation we have one of the first instances of the word *martyr* being used for individuals who had not died; a linguistic shift undergirded by Cyprian's prescient conceptual understanding of the essence of martyrdom being independent from death. The confessor who suffers in prison is no less a martyr because, like the martyr, they too have endured *whatever they were prepared and ready to endure.* As Cyprian's pithy final quip shows, if the confessor failed to demonstrate the martyr's level of conviction then this is the fault of the test, not the conviction it was testing. The conviction of the martyr is no less significant in the confessor simply because it was not tested in the same way. We can see, therefore, that this change in the use and understanding of martyrdom is precipitated by precisely the analysis explained above.

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[270] Cyprian, *Epistolae*, xxxvi.1, in Rev. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. viii: *The Writings of Cyprian*, trans. Rev. R. E. Wallis, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), p. 101.

With a different motivation, Clement, inveighing against a perceived enthusiasm for death, demonstrates the second urgency when he writes;

> If the confession to God is martyrdom, each soul which has lived purely in the knowledge of God, which has obeyed the commandments, is a witness both by life and word, in whatever way it may be released from the body.[271]

Clement wants to return to an earlier understanding of μαρτυρία, with its emphasis on witness and confession, against *martyrium*, which arrogated to itself, and bestowed religious significance upon, Roman notions of death. As Bowersock observes; Clement "wants to establish that martyrdom in the true sense does not necessarily involve death at all. It is rather an expression of one's commitment to the Christian God."[272] This underpins Clement's criticism of voluntary martyrdom and the refusal to flee persecution that we explored in the previous chapter. Clement believes that what was initially the cost of one's witness came erroneously, in the Roman context of persecution, to be perceived as formative to and constitutive of an altogether new concept of *martyrium.* Instead, Clement too believes that death is one of many ways that what is religiously significant about *martyrium*, namely one's μαρτυρία, can be made known.

> …but those who perform the commandments of the Lord, in every action 'testify' by doing what He wishes, and consistently naming the Lord's name; and 'testifying' by deed to Him in whom they trust.[273]

In using the language of "testify", it is particularly significant that he invokes the language of witness to imply that these practices are able, no less so than death, to manifest the religious significance of martyrdom.

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[271] Clement, *Stromateis*, iv.4.15.3, op. cit., p. 146. Italics are mine.
[272] G. W. Bowersock, op. cit., p. 67.
[273] Clement, *Stromateis*, iv.7.43.4, op. cit., p. 159.

Understood thus, Clement and Cyprian were particularly forward-looking, since it would only be later in the history of the early church that this conceptualisation of martyrdom gained most traction in debates about post-persecution martyrdom and the emergence of monasticism. Here, the question was simple and the need urgent: martyrs represent the peak of Christian discipleship, but how does one become a martyr without persecution? This, the third urgency, was answered in a way which was paved by this understanding of martyrdom, used so cleverly by both Cyprian and Clement to minister to their respective needs.

Cyprian and Clement had used this martyrology to propose that the essence of martyrdom lay in the conviction of the witness and that this conviction could be demonstrated by means other than death. New challenges could therefore be devised – and met – to attest to the same indomitability, integrity and tenacity of *their* faith as that celebrated in the martyrs. The martyrology of Tertullian might not be possible, but the martyrology of Clement and of Cyprian still was. Indeed, the prevalence of these theological reflections is corroborated by the concurrent emergence in the middle of the 4th century of the Cult of the Confessors. In a sense, therefore, the ascetics and monks of the 6th century share much in common with the voluntary martyrs of the 3rd. Both emerge when strong external motivation to make martyrs seize upon revised and broadened understandings of who the martyr is, potentiated by the seemingly uncontroversial conceptualisations of the 1st and 2nd centuries.

Scholars such as Malone have explained how it was asceticism and monasticism that emerged as the new *living martyrdom* during this time in response to the diminishing of persecution which came with Christianity being adopted by the Roman Empire.[274] Lössl, for

[274] See especially E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950) and T. M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity*, (Minneapolish: Augsburg Fortress, 1998).

instance, writes that "Both asceticism…and martyrdom, were inextricably linked. As Christianity became more popular…the question how to re-enact martyrdom, for instance in ascetic or pious practices, too, became more urgent."[275] Perhaps the foremost examples of this come in the middle of the fourth century when Athanasius wrote his famous biography *Life of St. Anthony*, often described as the first great work on Christian monasticism, and St. Jerome wrote *Life of St. Paul the Hermit.* Here, we learn that Anthony was zealous to obtain the martyr's crown and disappointed when the presiding official at his trial refused to execute monks. In one of the most oft-quoted passages of the work entitled "Daily Martyr of the Monastic Life", we learn that

> He left and went back to his solitary cell; and there he was a *daily martyr* to his conscience, ever fighting the battles of the Faith. For he practised a zealous and more ascetic life.[276]

We have here an explicit understanding of monasticism supplanting death as *living martyrdom*, which evokes Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:1 to become a "living sacrifice". This evolution of martyrdom would be utterly incomprehensible within the martyrology which gives to death a constitutive rather than revelatory role. Because the *role* that death played was seen as necessary, but not death itself, it could be replaced by other practices which achieve the same demonstration of absolute conviction.

The reason we have explored the evolution of this martyrology in the early church is that it illustrates the changes in conceptualisations of martyrdom that this understanding of the role of death can elicit, as well as the forces that drive such change. More importantly, however, it also illustrates the implications this evolution has. It shows that the

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[275] J. Lössl, "An Early Christian Identity Crisis Triggered by Changes in the Discourse of Martyrdom: The Controversy between Jerome of Strido and Vigilantius of Calagurris" in J. Leemans, (ed.), op. cit., p. 98.
[276] Athanasius, *The Life of St. Anthony*, 47, op. cit., p. 60. Italics are mine.

dispensability of death to the role given to it by this martyrology leads to the belief that martyrdom can be achieved through practices which demonstrate one's absolute conviction to the faith. Most concerningly, this leads also to disciples attempting to perform these practices through their own initiative so that, as Cunningham puts it, in the fourth century "the desert ascetic became the *beau ideal* of the Christian life,"[277] in a way that would conflict with the values of many modern Christian communities. It is the radical martyrs this development in the martyrology produces and the extremist practices adopted in its name to which this analysis now turns in a way which draws alarming parallels with the analysis of the previous chapter.

Extremist Alternatives to Death

The foregoing analysis has illustrated the process by which this seemingly uncontroversial interpretation of the role of death in the martyrology of witness by confession can be understood in such a way as to legitimise and sustain altogether unimagined martyr narratives. I wish to evaluate this martyrology critically by showing how it can therefore severely distort the martyr into a radical figure who therefore has profound implications on the praxes of discipleship. In this way, the analysis demonstrates that, despite the differences in the way this martyrology is understood, both this understanding and that which sees death itself as having religious significance illustrated in the previous chapter, show that the premium placed on martyrdom leads irresistibly to the adoption of extremist practices in the radical pursuit of it.

[277] L. S. Cunningham, "Causa non Poena: On the Contemporary Martyrs", in J. Leemans, (ed.), op. cit., p. 462.

The belief that other practices which can demonstrate an absolute conviction to the faith can substitute death can lead to martyrs who have adopted violent and self-destructive practices. Alongside a body of scholars in this field,[278] York shows that "Mortification of the flesh and severe forms of asceticism in general became more common forms of practice for Christians attempting to suffer with Christ."[279] Indeed, we have already seen that one of the most radicalising and dangerous aspects of martyrdom is the formula that the greater the cost, the greater the sacrifice; and the greater the sacrifice, the greater the religious significance. With a martyrology which sanctified death, this led to a voluntary assisted suicide and a consequently enthusiastic relish of violence. With a martyrology which understands suffering and death as the *cost* of one's witness, however, the consequence is described by one of its advocates, Aquinas; "it belongs to martyrdom that a man bear witness to the faith in showing by deed that he *despises all things present.*"[280] If the exhortation in Luke 9.23 – "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross *daily* and follow me," – is taken as programmatic for this self-renouncing ascetic vision of martyrdom, as it was in the monastic period of the early church, the concern is that this martyrology advocates something resembling masochism. Demonstrating this trend in the 6th century, Gregory of Tours, for instance, observes;

> The confessors of Christ…have become their own persecutors, in order to be thought worthy of God. They have charged themselves with various crosses of abstinence, and in order to live with Jesus Christ they have mortified their flesh.[281]

[278] See E. Malone, op. cit., and T. M. Shaw, op. cit.
[279] T. York, "Early Christian Martyrdom: Witnessing For or Against the Empire?" in M. L. Budde and K. Scott, (eds.), op. cit., p. 40.
[280] T. Aquinas, op. cit., p. 1718.
[281] Gregory of Tours, *Life of the Fathers*, 2.1, 2nd ed., trans. E. James, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), p. 11.

The language of confessors becoming their own persecutors is powerful and shows how complete the substitution of martyrdom for self-renunciation has become, facilitated by this martyrology. The attempt to undergo physical destruction equal in cost to the physical and metaphysical destruction involved in death, however, is a race to the bottom. Every comfort, desire, or prospect of happiness represents a further cost that could be borne. The true martyr sees each possible torment as an opportunity, and each happiness as an opportunity cost. This mortification of the flesh of which Gregory of Tours speaks demonstrates the path of self-annihilation this can, and did, lead to. Where does this end when with each torment conceived, the ascetic presents a new challenge to their conviction? Once again, we reach the paradoxical point where because death would be preferable to a life lived thus, it would be no sacrifice to give up one's life at all. Clearly, this drastically alters who the martyr is imagined as; the martyr can become a highly radical figure of self-annihilating masochism. More significantly, however, this figure has profound implications on discipleship; not only by sanctifying these practices as part of the martyr's model for discipleship, but also by inculcating the notion that their imitation can achieve martyrdom. The extremist and radicalising nature of this martyrology begins to unfold.

It might seem cynical and even hyperbolic to imply this degree of influence, but this radicalisation of this martyrology has real and enduring effects on individuals. Its effect on conceptions of discipleship can be exemplified by the modern example of Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916). De Foucauld became a Trappist monk, before living a life of extreme asceticism on his own in Southern Algeria to attain a greater level of self-renunciation which he believed could achieve the martyrdom he so desired. When a papal order slightly relaxed the dietary rules of the Trappists, he was outraged, explaining "A little less mortification

means so much less offered to the Good Lord."[282] The irresistible implication being that the greater the self-renunciation, the greater the offering to God. De Foucauld was obsessive about his own self-renunciation; one journal entry reads; "Think that you are going to die a martyr, stripped of everything, stretched out on the ground, naked, hardly recognisable, covered with blood and wounds, violently and painfully killed…and wish it to be today."[283]

This example illustrates the continued relevance to modern martyr-making of an understanding of martyrdom which allows extreme self-mortification to illuminate the martyr's conviction. It shows how profoundly this influences the question of both who the martyr in the narrative is, and also the praxes by which these martyrs are imitated.

Because this martyrology places no theoretical restriction on how, or for what cause, this conviction is evinced, both the cause and the praxis a conviction in it inspires are vulnerably to radicalisation. Once the proof of conviction is not the willingness to die, but, as Cyprian says, the willingness to do *whatever,* this martyr can become a radical. When we consider the extremism evident in the self-abnegating practices by which this absolute conviction is made known, a commensurate fanaticism evidenced in *active* praxis has devastating possibilities. Can killing as well as dying evidence one's strength of conviction? In those who aspire to martyrdom, we must repeat the constant refrain that a radicalisation of what it means to be a martyr radicalises what it means to try to become one. What chilling models for discipleship does this martyrology have the potential to sustain?

Speaking of the subjectivity of the classification *martyr* in the example of the September, 11th, terrorist attacks in 2001, Elizabeth Castelli offers a powerful reminder:

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[282] Quoted in R. Ellsberg, "Little Brother of Jesus", in S. Bergman, (ed.), *A Cloud of Witnesses: 20th Century Martyrs*, (London: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 293.
[283] Ibid., p. 297.

> But if the nineteen hijackers were simply mass murderers and not martyrs, their perversion of the term 'martyr' nevertheless points to the ethical danger embedded in the category itself.[284]

What Castelli demonstrates is that part of the problem in the distinction between the martyr and the suicidal terrorist is an ethical danger involved in a martyrology which makes an absolute conviction in one's beliefs sufficient for martyrdom, without delimiting the causes or the means by which these causes are pursued. Clearly, this demonstrates the importance of taking into consideration the martyr's cause to which this conviction is attached and, therefore, to Augustine's dictum *Martyrem non facit poena sed causa.*[285] Doing so, however, creates problems of its own and we will turn in much greater detail to its importance in Chapter 6.

The Martyr's Conviction: A Logical Objection

Finally, as well as this development in martyrology leading to a radicalisation of who it means to be a martyr and what it means to imitate one, the logical coherence and theological consistency of this evolution can be questioned in a fashion similar to that observed in the previous chapter. The ascetic martyr is established on the basis that they have demonstrated their conviction by renouncing all other pleasures. To do so, however, in fact introduces a new value – the desire for martyrdom; a value by definition higher than those renounced, because it is the very value for which all other values are renounced. *Self*-renunciation in the pursuit of an absolute-renunciation therefore becomes contradictory since the renunciation of self serves a desire which itself must be renounced.

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[284] E. Castelli, op. cit., pp. 200-201.
[285] Augustine, *Epistolae*, no. 89:2, *PL*, 33:310.

T. S. Eliot dramatises this paradoxical conflict in his play *Murder in the Cathedral.* Here, the fourth tempter says to Thomas:

> Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest
> On earth, to be the high in heaven.[286]

Identifying even martyrdom itself as a temptation, Thomas responds;

> The last temptation is the greatest treason:
> To do the right deed for the wrong reason.[287]

In overcoming the tempter, Thomas makes a pertinent point, saying;

> …the true martyr is he who…no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.[288]

The seemingly paradoxical corollary of this is that theoretically the true ascetic, by foregoing their greatest pleasure, renounces their own asceticism, otherwise ascetism itself is an indulgence of one's desires. Workman is right when he warns of the danger when renunciation itself becomes the cause for which you surrender pleasures: "The danger of all forms of self-renunciation is the mistaking the means as an end in itself."[289] What this demonstrates is the observation made earlier that the martyr must always be a willing victim, but also a *reluctant* one. For, as we saw with St. Anthony, the eager victim can still have their victimhood taken away from them, but the reluctant victim has relegated even their

[286] T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, 4th edn., (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), p. 30.
[287] Ibid., p. 34.
[288] Ibid., p. 49.
[289] H. B. Workman, op. cit., p. 139.

desire for martyrdom and therefore demonstrated true conviction. Wicker explains this objection well, proposing that martyrdom must therefore be seen as a gift:

> Martyrdom is the ultimate abnegation, because it is not only giving up your life, but also giving up all your *desire* – even, and perhaps especially, including the desire to be a martyr. For that desire is the last gasp of the overwhelming, perpetual temptation to do what *you* want to do, rather than doing what God wills for you. So the essence of martyrdom is the conquest of desire itself. The mere will to live has already been overcome, but this is not enough. The will to die has to be conquered also.[290]

Wicker's analysis is compelling, but is this conquest of desire possible without defeating the martyrology? Of the individual who is killed for their confession *without* knowing that death would be its cost, it can be said that they were not acting in pursuit of their own desire for martyrdom; since knowledge that death will be its cost may be an inducement to confess. On the other hand, how can the martyr's death demonstrate their absolute conviction if they were not aware that it would be the cost of their witness?

Therefore, although this martyrology operates with a profoundly different understanding of the role of death, the same problem emerges. Whether death is seen as having a constitutive or instrumental role in the martyr's witness and the martyrology of confession, the belief that death is central to martyrdom problematises its claim to having sacrificial religious significance.

Conclusion

Earlier, this understanding of the religious significance of martyrdom residing not in the experience of death but in what that death, willingly entered into, reveals about the

[290] B. Wicker, "The Drama of Martyrdom: Christian and Muslim Approaches", in B. Wicker, (ed.), *Witnesses to the Faith*, op. cit., p. 107.

martyr's conviction, was described as intuitive. I have attempted to show how this seemingly uncontroversial understanding of martyrdom undergoes a process of revision and reconstruction so that the martyrs whose narratives it underwrites are far different from those that might initially have been imagined. This process realises that whilst the role that death plays is necessary to martyrdom by revealing the martyr's conviction, death is neither necessary, nor especially suitable, to perform this role. This both undermines the religious significance of martyrdom and leads irresistibly the idea of other experiences supplanting death and, therefore, martyrdom without death.

We saw how this process developed in the early church, but we also pointed out the implications that this evolution had on both who the martyr is, and the discipleship it inspires. Because an absolute conviction must be demonstrated by practices which are by their nature extreme, this martyrology can potentiate a radicalisation both in the identity of the martyr and also, therefore, in the practices that this inspires. We showcased the realities of this conceptual shift in modern martyrdom using the example of Charles de Foucauld. When this was subjected to scrutiny, however, the logical coherence of pursuing the ultimate sacrifice was once again shown to be a central concern of this martyrology. As with the first martyrology we studied in the previous chapter, the *desire* for martyrdom fractured the theological consistency of the martyr's attitude towards death and this made the notion of sacrifice which gives this martyrology its religious experience logically incoherent.

In this and the previous chapter, we have looked at the first two martyrologies in the quadripartite model introduce in Chapter 2. These have represented two competing notions of the religious significance of death in the martyr witnessing *to* Christ. In the following two chapters, these competing analyses are then applied to the view that the martyr dies witnessing *as* Christ. This gives rise to two drastically different martyrologies. The first martyrology embodies the belief that to witness as Christ is to die as Christ. As we will see,

this belief was very popular in the early church. The drastically different martyrology developed in Chapter 6, however, understands death as the cost of witnessing *as* Christ. This gives rise to a profoundly different martyrology which has really only emerged in earnest in the phenomenon of popular martyrdom in the 20th century. Its modern prominence as the vanguard of popular martyrdom means that it warrants the extended analysis it is given in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Witnessing *as* Christ Through Death

This chapter moves on to examining a conceptualisation of martyrdom frequently employed both in the narratives of the early church and those throughout Christian history. This martyrology emerges from the alternative understanding of μαρτυρία as witnessing *as* Christ. Like its understanding of witnessing *to* Christ through confession, the role of death in this understanding of witness may be interpreted as either constitutive of or the cost of this witness. This has given rise to two divergent martyrologies and their analysis is broken into two chapters. This chapter will examine the former. The martyr witnesses *as* Christ by dying as Christ.

I will begin by revisiting the emergence of this martyrology in the early church and will showcase its prominence in martyr narratives there. I will prove the centrality of this martyrology to the construction and imagination of martyrs not only by showing its prevalence in martyr narratives, but also by explaining how the mechanism of this martyrology functions in constructing new martyrs on the basis of different interpretations of Christ's death and what it means to imitate it. Only after thus exploring the role that this martyrology has in constructing martyrs will a critical evaluation of this martyrology be possible. This will show that the mechanism by which it imagines the martyr admits of the possibility of conceptions of *imitatio Christi* which can encourage highly controversial martyrs and thereby endorse radicalising notions of discipleship.

Martyrdom as an *Imitatio* of Christ's Death

Witnessing as Christ in Death

As Chapter 2 illustrated, in the early church the belief that the witness not only testified *to* the claims of Christ by confession, but also testified *as* Christ in the continued and unfolding post-resurrection trial in history, gave rise to the belief that embodying Christ was a legitimate expression of Christian witness. To be a μάρτυς was to take Christ's place in the cosmic trial that was imagined to be unfolding in the events of history by embodying, recapitulating and re-enacting the witness of Christ's own ministry. To this all Christians were called. As Valiente observes, therefore, "The connection between Christian martyrdom and the *imitatio Christi* is evident in the earliest narratives on martyrdom."[291] What does it mean to die *as Christ?* Does martyrdom represent a death in *imitatio Christi* or does it represent the death suffered for one's *imitatio Christi*? What, in other words, does the *martyr's imitatio* consist of: does the martyr die like Christ, or do they die *living* like Christ?

Each of these represents a very different martyrology; rather than dealing with these two perspectives in one chapter, we shall examine each in this and the proceeding chapter. As we shall see, these questions have significant implications for perceptions of, and assumptions about, Christian discipleship; for the martyr's *imitatio* establishes a precedent and expectations for the *imitatio* to which all disciples are called.

It is a central observation of this thesis that martyrologies are based on religious traditions that respond to a community's needs. In Chapter 2 we saw how the climate of hostility and persecution that characterised much of the early church experience predisposed

[291] O. E. Valiente, op. cit., p. 115.

the early church to emphasise the importance of death as constitutive of the martyr's witness and indeed the consummation of their witness *as* Christ. Workman describes this abrogation of the consequence of an *imitatio* of Christ's teaching ministry and the focus instead on the *imitatio* of Christ's death well;

> In the early Church the imitation of Christ, as a formal principle in ethics, played but a secondary part, so far, any rate, as the average member was concerned. The martyrs and confessors alone were thought of as actually following and imitating Jesus; they were pre-eminently the 'true disciples' of the Master.[292]

For a host of theological and historical reasons, many discussed in Chapter 2, it was therefore Christ's *death* that was given prominence as the dominant feature of the witness expressed through his ministry. In the early church's climate of persecution, the notion of living like Christ was relegated in significance to the notion of *dying* like Christ as an expression of one's Christian μαρτυρία and discipleship. It was therefore *suffering* like Christ that became the prerequisite for authentic discipleship and it followed therefore that the martyr was established on the basis that the disciple witnessed *as* Christ by dying *as* Christ.

It would only be much later in the church's history that the complementary understanding emerged of the martyr as one whose death represented the cost of witnessing *as* Christ by embodying the teaching, purpose and message of Christ's ministry. Just as the belief that death represented the cost of witnessing *to* Christ through confession emerged through changing community demands, as we shall see in the next chapter, so too this later martyrology, which understands death as the cost of witnessing *as* Christ emerged when the demand for it was overwhelming in the 20th century. In this chapter, however, we examine

[292] H. B. Workman, op. cit., p. 9.

the belief that the martyr's *imitatio Christi* consisted in their dying as Christ died. The martyr not only dies for their μαρτύριον, but their μαρτυρία *is* death; Christ's death.[293]

Imitatio Christi and Making Martyrs

In Chapter 2 we noted that the belief that imitating Christ's death was normative for early Christians and early Christian witness is very prevalent in the New Testament, exemplifying Moss' observation that "…*suffering* like Jesus was a foundational element of membership in the communities of Jesus' followers and an essential component of Christian identity."[294] It is perhaps Peter's First Letter which illustrates this best, since it is here that we find an extended discussion of the centrality of suffering to the experience of being Christian. Responding to this experience, Peter explains that suffering need not only be thought of as punishment for evil; suffering can be holy when suffered unjustly for the faith, because then it fulfils the disciple's call to imitate Christ's suffering.

> But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example, so that you should follow his steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

This text is an especially illustrative example because the view that Christians should "rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings" (1 Pet. 4:13) demonstrates that an understanding of Christian μαρτύριον as imitating Christ's suffering was used to confer religious significance to Christian suffering and to minister to this aspect of the early church experience. It is precisely this quality that anticipates its utility as a martyrology.

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[293] For the significance of the role of *imitatio Christi* in martyrologies of the early church see especially: C. R. Moss, *The Other Christs*, op. cit.; D. Boyarin, *Dying for God*, op. cit.; E. Castelli, op. cit., and most especially W. H. C. Frend, op. cit., who gives it an almost central role.
[294] C. R. Moss, *The Other Christs*, op. cit., p. 18.

When it comes to the *Acts of the Martyrs,* the application of this conceptualisation of witness to the narrative's construction of the martyr is all-pervasive. As Harvey, Finn and Smart say, the belief that the Christian μάρτυς witnessed *as* Christ became a central justification for their martyrdom: "…it is this novel form of witness – the imitation of Christ's suffering understood as participation in that mystery – which defines martyrdom: the authors present the 'martyrs' as 'disciples and imitators of the Lord.'"[295] The dominance of the role of *imitatio Christi* as a necessary feature of martyr narratives in the early church can be easily demonstrated.[296] Writing about the *Acts of the Martyrs,* for instance, Moss rightly points to the innumerable narrative resemblances between the deaths of the martyrs and that of Jesus, saying; "The similarities with the Gospels are so overt that the *Acta* have an almost plagiaristic quality…that martyrs imitate Christ is obvious. The preponderance of allusions, quotations and statements…render this statement banal."[297] Trite though any comment about this almost ubiquitous martyrology might be, Moss complements this statement with an entire chapter devoted to highlighting elements of even minute parallels between Jesus' death and those of the martyrs.

Christ's death therefore not only represented the apotheosis of Christian witness, but also thus established it as an exemplary prototype of proper and sacred Christian death. *Imitatio Christi* was therefore used to consecrate the death of the martyrs alongside other martyrologies, for no account of a martyr's death would forgo the opportunity to present the martyr's death in the form of Christ's own paradigmatic death. As Workman says, the early church martyr narratives "are manifestly the production of an age which could scarcely conceive of a perfect renunciation which did not issue in the cross."[298]

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[295] A. Harvey, R. Finn, M. Smart, op. cit., p. 38.
[296] See the work of Réne Girard, in particular his work on mimesis, sacrifice and the scapegoat mechanism; R. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Y. Freccero, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
[297] C. R. Moss, *The Other Christs*, op. cit., pp. 45-46.
[298] H. B. Workman, op. cit., p. 9.

The role that this thesis claims this type of martyrology has in interpreting and memorialising an imagination of death as martyrdom can perhaps be best illustrated qualitatively rather than quantitatively. That is, not by appealing to the volume of resemblances between Christ's death and that of the martyrs', but by taking a very mean example where the only feature of Christ's death sustaining the *imitatio* of the martyr is not an interpretation, but a very specific aesthetic motif, specifically the form of the cruciform pose.

> Blandina was hung up on a post and exposed as bait for the wild animals that were let loose on her. She seemed to hang there in the form of a cross, and by her fervent prayer she aroused intense enthusiasm in those who were undergoing their ordeal, for in their torment with their physical eyes they saw in the person of their sister him who was crucified for them, that he might convince all who believe in him that all who suffer for Christ's glory will have eternal fellowship in the living God.[299]

What is fascinating about this particular account is the effect within the narrative that the cruciform pose has; Blandina's death takes on new significance, both within the narrative and to the reader, once she begins to *appear* Christ-like. This is not to say that this was the moment at which Blandina became a martyr, rather; at this point a *new martyrology* is introduced. Not only is Blandina witnessing to Christ but she is imitating him, inflecting the martyrdom with interpretative content; she is now also witnessing *as* Christ. There is something fundamentally different theologically once the imitation of Christ is introduced. We see that onlookers see Christ participating in Blandina's suffering and we will explain this theological tradition below.

The enduring relevance of this martyrology and the role this thesis argues it has even to this day of interpreting the imagination of the victim specifically as a *martyr* can be

[299] *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, 1.41, op. cit., p. 75.

illustrated in an example from the 20th century where precisely the same cruciform pose allowed a martyr narrative to emerge. On the 6th October, 1998, Matthew Shepard, a gay student in Wyoming, was robbed, tied to a fence and brutally assaulted leaving him with injuries from which he would later die in hospital. Ostensibly this appears to be a particularly brutal act of criminality, but very quickly the language of martyrdom was attached to Shepard's death. His story was memorialised, he was seen as a martyr for gay rights and his name now belongs to a gay-rights political foundation. Shepard was not, however, a gay rights activist; his designation as martyr emerged because he was found strewn across a wooden fence and this was used to invoke the crucifixion. Shepard did not *become* a martyr because of this; but this *imitatio Christi*, procured by the cruciform pose in which he died, made it possible to see his death as martyrdom. At his funeral, Shepard's godfather made this explicit:

> There is an image seared upon my mind when I reflect upon Matt on that wooden crossrail fence. However, I have found a different image to replace that with and that is the image of another man, almost 2,000 years ago.[300]

There was nothing overtly religious about Shepard's death; he was not killed for his faith, nor were his killers motivated by theirs; it was a terrible but ostensibly secular event. Castelli and Middleton use this as an example of a situation in which, despite almost no theological content, people still *made* a martyr by narrating a death as such, thereby proving their claim that the martyr is a sociological construct. This is correct, but it is impossible to believe that Shepard would have been imagined as a martyr without the observation that he died like Christ.[301] What Moss observes in the case of Blandina is true in that of Matthew

[300] Quoted in M. Thernstrom, "The Crucifixion of Matthew Shepard", *Vanity Fair*, (March, 1999).
[301] See ibid.

Shepard: "the effect of the cruciform pose is almost mystical in its ability to transform the martyr into Christ."[302]

In the martyrdom narratives of the early church, as Middleton observes, "…behind every martyrdom was the death of Jesus,"[303] and examples abound as we have seen of an almost ritualistic obligation to inflect the narrative with some, however (and often) subtle suggestion or motif of *imitatio Christi*.[304] It is clear, therefore, that one of the ways that a victim is memorialised as a martyr is by imagining, interpreting and retelling their death as an imitation of Christ's. The next question to look at, then, is what made anyone think that *imitatio Christi* was so significant, that, in the words of Moss, it transformed the disciple into Christ?

The Religious Significance of Suffering Like Christ

In Chapter 2 we briefly looked at the traditions that meant early Christian conceptions of μαρτυρία came to involve being and becoming Christlike and why the μάρτυς's μαρτύριον was consummated in the ultimate witness of Christ's death. What was it, however, that consecrated *imitation* of Christ as being especially religiously significant? Why would mimicking Christ transfigure the μάρτυς into the hallowed *martyr* as the early church believed? Clearly this chapter does not have the scope to cover theological conceptions of *imitatio* in any exhaustive manner, but it is important to get a sense of what beliefs are driving its religious significance and therefore its application to martyrdom. This

[302] C. R. Moss, op. cit., p. 62.
[303] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. 65.
[304] Moss draws particular attention to the incident in the temple, the crucifixion, the committal of the spirit, the flow of blood and water, the conversion of the centurion at the cross.

can be achieved by looking at the nature of the ontological participation that the early church believed the martyr achieved by dying like Christ.

By understanding and unpacking these theological claims we can begin to evaluate the traditions that sustain this belief in an *imitatio Christi* of Christ's death as constitutive of martyrdom and prove the second contention of this thesis that this martyrology, like those of the preceding and proceeding chapters, relies on religious traditions which are extremist, radicalising, morally problematic and logically and theologically incoherent. We will show that they are theologically problematic by challenging the primacy of Christ's own crucifixion, extremist in the way they privilege death as part of the role of a disciple, and radicalising in the influence this has on discipleship.

Ontological Participation

The early church understanding of this mimesis and of what it achieves can be seen in the letters of the New Testament from which the early church and martyrologists of the *Acts* learned the language and theology of imitation. Here, imitating Christ is understood as an ontological participation in the body of Christ and this is demonstrated through the belief, repeated throughout the epistles, that, in the words of Romans, "if we have been united with him in a death like this, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like this." (Rom. 6:5; c.f. Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Cor.1:5; 4:8-12; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). The ontological claim that by dying *like* Christ, the disciple is "united with him" sustained subsequent eschatological and soteriological claims that they would similarly participate in his glory. By imitating Christ, in other words, the disciple participates in Christ's death and shares accordingly in his glorification. Romans, for instance, explains; "We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17).

It is this understanding of the soteriological and eschatological dimensions of this tradition of participatory mimesis that bestowed upon the witness the religious significance that powered its trajectory towards a martyrology and the prevalence of this theology is widespread throughout the *Acts.* In *The Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* we read:

> There is no way we may receive eternal life and reign with Christ, unless we do what he commanded us to do…we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ, provided that we suffer with him so that we may be glorified with him.[305]

This use of familial, particularly fraternal, language to describe the martyr's community and con-formity with God and Christ is very common in the martyr acts, as is the language of inheritance.

Similarly, a common element of this ontological participation is to emphasise its mutuality, and this too contributes to the theological importance of the martyr. Prevalent in the epistles of the New Testament is the notion that through this mimesis, not only does the disciple share in the crucified, and therefore redeemed, body of Christ, but Christ himself is accordingly made manifest in the body of the imitative disciple. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, for instance, we read;

> We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:8-12).

[305] *The Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius*, 10.4-8, op. cit., p. 223.

The apogee of con-formity with Christ is that Christ himself becomes present in the tormented flesh of the μάρτυς; because by imitating Christ the flesh of the μάρτυς shares in the flesh of Christ, Christ too co-penetratively shares in the flesh of the imitative disciple. So, in Galatians 2:19-20 we read; "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."

This theme is equally prevalent in the *Acts.* From Sanctus' martyrdom we learn that he was "firm in his confession of faith, cooled and strengthened by the heavenly fountain of water of life that flows from the side of Christ…but Christ suffering in him achieved great glory."[306] This illustrates the common trope that by imitating his death and therefore participating in his crucifixion, Christ's passion actually becomes present in the body of the martyr where Jesus takes their cup and suffers on their behalf. In *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas,* the latter explains: "now I am the one who suffers what I suffer, but then another will be within me who will suffer for me, because I shall be suffering for him."[307] To imitate Christ's death is to participate in him and his own death and, therefore, and to reveal Christ in your suffering flesh. So, Origen can write that "As we behold the martyrs coming forth from every Church to be brought before the tribunal, we see in each the Lord Himself condemned."[308] In the early church, therefore, by dying in imitation of Christ, the martyr was seen not only to die *for* and *as* Christ, but *in* and *with* Christ.

Frend summarises the significance of *imitatio* theology in the early church when he writes;

> They were seeking by their death to attain to the closest possible imitation of Christ's Passion and death. This was the heart of their attitude. Christ himself suffered in the martyr. Love of Christ and hope of salvation through Christ alone was their

[306] *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, 1.23, op. cit., p. 69.
[307] *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas,* 15.6, op. cit., p. 122.
[308] Quoted in H. B. Workman, op. cit., p. 9.

> inspiration and the essence of their faith. The martyr was the 'true disciple of Christ'…Death was the beginning of true discipleship…This crown was the climax of the Christian's earthly life.[309]

By imitating Christ's suffering and death, the disciple's body is transfigured into the crucified body of Christ. Just as the disciple shares in the sufferings of Christ in this recapitulation of the cross, Christ bears these sufferings in the body of the disciple. The conformity with Christ that this imitation achieves means that the disciple is not only transfigured into the tormented body of Christ, but shares also in his exaltation.

The Problem of Imitation as Recapitulation

Some of this language, however, seems to imply not so much an imitation of *Christ* as a repetition of a pattern established and performed by Christ. This becomes clearer in a passage from Philippians 3:10-11:

> I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Here the participation is understood as something closer to the Irenaean recapitulation; the martyr does not so much imitate Christ, as repeat and re-enact the pattern of experiences that Christ underwent in the belief that they will achieve the same eschatological results. This lends support to Lucy Grig's observation that in the early church, the belief was that "Christ was the first, archetypal, proto-martyr."[310] Problematically, this suggests that Christ is one

[309] W. H. C. Frend, op. cit., p. 15.
[310] L. Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, (London: Duckworth, 2004), p. 16.

of many; that his glorification is achieved as the product of a series of experiences of suffering to which his imitating disciples have equal access and from which they can therefore expect the same results. Christ's exaltation is a function not of who Christ is but of what he experiences, and, by making these experiences available to imitating disciples, this exaltation is repeated in the disciple.

This leads inexorably to the conclusion that if Christ's exaltation is a product of experiences which can be recapitulated by imitative disciples, what might seem to resemble a theology of adoption becomes a theology of theosis; to imitate Christ in your suffering is to achieve and share in the Christ's exaltation. This is illustrated in particular in Ignatius' letter to the Romans where he says he desires "no longer to live a purely human life" (7) and speaks of "reaching Jesus Christ" (5), wanting "the bread of God which is the flesh of Christ" (7) and, most forcefully, speaks of "new birth" and "new life" (6). This suggestion of ontological participation with Christ was not especially prevalent in the early church, but one present in writers such as Victricius of Rome who would go so far as to argue that martyrs participate in Christ's divinity.[311]

This destroys the notion of *primus inter pares* making Christ's primacy merely chronological rather than Christological; the pattern of experiences responsible for Christ's exaltation being equally available to his disciples. In the early church, this import of neo-Platonic metaphysics on mimesis sparked significant debate with Augustine being the foremost spokesperson for a moderation of the attitude towards martyrs. He insisted on the ontological difference between them and Christ, at points arguing that martyrs could only

[311] Victricius, *De Laude Sanctorum*, quoted in G. Clark, "Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1999, pp. 365-399.

ever have parity with Christ's *humanity* but never his *divinity* and therefore deserve *veneration* but never *worship.*[312]

The Role of Imitatio Traditions in Making Martyrs

By looking briefly at the significance of imitation and the import it was said to have, we see that for the early church, mimesis, whilst ostensibly aesthetic, was understood as being able to sustain existential and even ontological beliefs which radically challenged orthodox Christology. The precise theoretical mechanism of the how aesthetic imitation became ontological transfiguration remains beyond the scope of the present work, but it is enough to recognise that the conformity with Christ that this imitation achieves means that the disciple is not only transfigured into the tormented body of Christ, but shares also in his exaltation. By imitating Christ's death, the disciple is united in both Christ's crucifixion and the glorification this guarantees. We can now show how these theological ideas potentiate martyr narratives and highlight the problems of their doing so.

The role that these theological traditions play in the model for the construction of the martyr that this thesis presents can be demonstrated by showing their prevalence in a more modern context. Not only has this martyrology persisted throughout the history of the Church, its theological traditions have also been especially significant in the last century. Their renaissance has been prompted by post-holocaust theology and their propagation has led to a proliferation of martyr narratives. This theology, embodied in the works of writers such as Moltmann, has emphasised the urgency that the holocaust experience demands to recognise the presence of the crucified Christ in the sufferings of people in history. "A

[312] Since H. von. Campenhausen's *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936), the reading that Augustine is preventing the cult of martyrs consuming the cult of Christ has come to dominate interpretations of his views on martyrdom.

theology which did not speak of God in the sight of the one who was abandoned and crucified", Moltmann writes, "would have had nothing to say to us then."[313]

The renewed vigour with which this belief that Christ was revealed in the body of the suffering disciple was expressed brought this martyrology of *imitatio Christi* into great prominence and unleashed a host of martyr narratives in the 20th century which seized on the belief promulgated that Christ suffered with and through victims. Inspiration for this is evidenced in a statement on martyrdom made by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Reflecting upon martyrdom in the new 20th-century context of the Church, one of its chief documents *Lumen Gentium,* explains:

> Since Jesus, the son of God, showed his love by laying down his life for us . . . martyrdom makes the disciple like his master, who willingly accepted death for the salvation of the world, and through it he is conformed to him by the shedding of blood.[314]

This important quotation reveals the Church, in full awareness of its 20th-century context in the wake of World War Two, emphasising a Christocentric conceptualisation of martyrdom as conformity with Christ through suffering. In El Salvador, this martyrology was crucial to the way that the martyrs of the civil war and their counterparts across Latin America were understood. The quotation above, for instance, is quoted in an essay on modern martyrdom by El Salvadoran theologian Ernesto Valiente as well as by Archbishop Romero himself.[315] Theological frameworks which imagined the crucified Christ in the suffering bodies of persecuted El Salvadorans – frameworks popularised as a pastoral response after World War Two – made the veneration of these victims as martyrs irresistible for the religious

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[313] J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, (Minneapolis; Augsburg Fortress, 1993), p. 1.
[314] Lumen Gentium 42, in A. Flannery, (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1, (New York: Costello, 1996), 400–401.
[315] O. Romero, *Homilies*, *op. cit.*., May 11th, 1978; O. E. Valiente, op. cit.

significance which the imitation secured – conformity with Christ in suffering – was already established.

These traumatic experiences demanded a palliative theology which could give them religious meaning and, just as in the early church, this need was ministered to by a theology which stressed the revelation of Christ in the suffering victim. The religious traditions sustaining this martyrology were invoked in order to provide a pastoral response to trauma in the martyr's community. As so often is the case, the martyr depends upon theological traditions which respond to crisis. Just as in the early church, so too in the 20th century, the belief that Christ suffered in victims was promulgated to assuage the trauma of persecution and this became the foundation for martyr narratives when it was disseminated in similar contexts in the third world. This provides an excellent demonstration of the role of martyrologies. Firstly, it shows how religious traditions and beliefs which generate martyrologies provide a crucial and necessary role in the making of martyrs and are the basis for the narrative's imagination of a victim as a martyr. Secondly, it shows that these traditions are invoked in order to respond to a community's needs; in this case, to provide a pastoral response to trauma.

Discipleship as Imitatio Christi

Turning a critical eye to these beliefs, the above example can be shown also to demonstrate the second contention of this thesis. The following analysis shows that the theological traditions at the heart of these martyr narratives are extremist and radicalising. Furthermore, not only are these religious beliefs formative to a certain conceptualisation of martyrdom, they are also responsible for a certain conceptualisation of discipleship. This martyrology's palliative claims that suffering like Christ achieves community and

conformity with Christ have a chilling effect on the notions of discipleship that invariably follow from the exemplary role that martyrs play as paragons of Christian discipleship. In order to minister to the pastoral needs of the community, these traditions position a certain type of suffering as the consummation of authentic discipleship, but in so doing they make it programmatic for Christians.

This can be demonstrated by Ludwig Bonhoeffer's reflections on this tradition's instruction for Christians. Commenting on the traditions we have examined, he writes;

> The acts of the early Christian martyrs are full of evidence which shows how Christ transfigures for his own the hour of their mortal agony by granting them the unspeakable assurance of his presence. In the hour of the cruellest torture they bear for his sake, they are made partakers in the perfect joy and bliss of fellowship with him.[316]

For Bonhoeffer, the traditions underpinning the religious significance of this martyrology of *imitatio Christi*, observed in the *Acts*, claim something for the martyr which is paradigmatic for *all* Christians – fellowship with Christ. If it is the martyr's death that achieves this fellowship with Christ, then this is instructive for successive Christians. Bonhoeffer concludes, therefore, that;

> Following Christ means *passio passiva* suffering because we have to suffer…If we refuse to take up our cross and submit to suffering and rejection…we forfeit our fellowship with Christ.[317]

This quotation reveals just how significant how we make and understand martyrs is to our notions of discipleship. Because martyrs are described by martyrologies – *theological* conceptualisations of martyrdom – the martyr represents the embodiment of a theology

[316] L. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., pp. 45-46.
[317] Ibid., p. 45.

which is seen as exemplary for all discipleship. As with the previous chapters' analysis of a martyrology of confession, the theology upon which this martyrology depends leads to the notion that suffering and death is something to celebrate and aspire to. Suffering and death are the hallmark of an authentic Christian, the only opportunity to share in Christ, to reveal fully his presence in our human flesh, and to achieve what all disciples desire – fellowship with Christ. Put simply, the view that "suffering was an imitation of the passion of Christ', as Carole Straw puts it, "glorified suffering for its own sake."[318]

In El Salvador we see this too. The theology which helped to imagine victims of state persecution as martyrs meant, as Romero himself says, that "Every Catholic has to be a martyr."[319] Therefore, by the same logic Bonhoeffer employed, these theological claims made of the martyrs meant, as Romero explains, "true Christians desire death."[320] Martyrdom does not just respond to and emerge from radical theologies of death, it incarnates them in the dead and venerates this embodiment. In so doing, martyrdom acts as a powerful vehicle for promoting and prescribing this theology, as Bonhoeffer illustrates in his belief that early Christian martyrdom reveals the consummation and ambition of Christian discipleship.

Ultimately, as we saw in the previous two chapters, martyrdom's function of ministering to the experiences of suffering and death depends upon theologies which, by ineludibly making this course attractive and even a prerequisite to the aims of ordinary Christians, must, in doing so, be considered both extremist and radicalising. Often, as we shall see in the next section, this hortatory effect is the reason for its invocation in the first place. As we have noted, Ignatius' desire to become Christ-like has been called pathological

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[318] C. Straw, "A Very Special Death: Christian Martyrdom in its Classical Context, in M. Cormack, (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 43.
[319] O. Romero, *Homilies*, op. cit., November 27th, 1977.
[320] Ibid., September 24th, 1978.

and maniacal and yet it is precisely a theology which understood suffering like Christ as being of great religious significance that sustained his pathological desire. It is important, therefore, to make a cautionary note that consolation for the martyr is aspiration for the disciple. The grander the theological claims providing this consolation are, the more ardently disciples will to receive the same fate.

The privileging of death over earthly ministry that this martyrology therefore invariably entails returns us to the problems of voluntary martyrdom, collusion, moral danger and logical incoherence that we confronted in the previous chapters. We are beginning to see that *any* successful account of martyrdom requires the cognitive dissonance of celebrating and sanctifying a particular sort of persecution and death and this invariably requires, endorses and therefore inculcates radicalising and extremist ideas and subsequently practices about the relationship between life and death. More than this, a theology which prioritises a Christ-like death as the consummation of Christian witness, such as the one this martyrology celebrates, diminishes the significance of Christ's teaching ministry making this death-oriented conceptualisation of Christian witness reductive. It encourages attitudes and practices that we call pathological in Ignatius and risks abrogating much of that which defines what it means to be a Christian following and embodying Christ. This is all quite aside from the problem that we now go on to look at: namely, what does it even mean to imitate Christ's death?

It is hoped that these modern examples, like those given in Chapter 3 relating to Desmond Tutu and Archisbop Romero, and those in Chapter 4 relating to Charles de Foucauld, demonstrate how martyr narratives represent the vehicle for these extremist theological views. They seek to show the urgency of theological reflection on these traditions and, therefore, on theological involvement with the social-constructivist account of martyrdom more broadly.

Martyrology and Christology

Returning now to the mechanism of this martyrology in light of the analysis we have provided about how it is theologically understood, we must recall that this thesis attempts to prove that martyrs are imagined and constructed on the basis of theological conceptualisations of who the martyr is. The martyr, according to this martyrology, is one whose death in history is imagined as imitating Christ's on Calvary. The imagination of a victim as a martyr on the basis of this martyrology therefore, involves two elements: firstly, it requires a conceptualisation of the object of imitation – *Christi* – and this is a Christological question. Secondly, it involves the imagination of the subject as this object – *imitatio.* A martyr narrative constructed on the basis of this martyrology therefore requires both an account of what happened on Calvary, and that the victim's death be imagined death thus.

The role that this martyrology of *imitatio Christi* plays in the way that the victim is imagined as the martyr can be proven by demonstrating how different understandings of Christ's death elicit and account for the different presentations of the victim as a martyr. With a different understanding of Christ's death, that which the martyr imitates changes and therefore the manner in which the victim is imagined as a martyr by the martyrologist also changes. A considerable number of difficulties emerge, I argue, in this process because the first element, Christ's death, admits of multiple interpretations; and the second element, the matter of what it means to imitate it, is equivocally left to the inclination of the martyrologist working within equally radical interpretive frameworks.

I will first demonstrate the role that this *imitatio Christi* has in the construction of the martyr by proving the maxim that *every Christology admits a new martyrology*, before

highlighting the difficulties that this creates in the next section. It will show that the subjectivity involved in this martyrology, both in the Christology and what it means to imitate it, provides for the very real possibility of creating highly controversial martyrs who therefore establish a model for discipleship that many would consider radical. This reminds theologians of the power of theological conceptualisations of Christ's death when it is precisely these interpretations that can determine who the martyr is and how they are to be imitated in discipleship. There is a crucial link, therefore, between perceptions of Christ's death, the martyr, and models of discipleship.

To begin, it is necessary to illustrate this relationship between interpretations of Christ's death and *who* the martyr is by demonstrating the simple maxim: *each Christology admits of a new martyrology.* If the martyr narrative's interpretive construction of the victim depends upon the death imitating Christ's, then each interpretation of Jesus' death creates a new pattern for the martyr, multiplying the conditions for the possibility of the victim's martyrdom, and thereby proliferating the identities of martyrs. As Moss says, "Imitating something or someone involves an understanding of what that thing or person is, an interpretation of his or her significance.[321] The significance of this fundamental principle for martyrdom is illustrated by observations like those made by Elaine Pagels who points to the way that more docetic Christologies diminish the importance of physical suffering in *imitatio Christi* martyrologies.[322] The martyr is created in Christ's image; but what is Christ's image? To illustrate this point, I wish to examine a Christology of Jesus death.

[321] C. R. Moss, *The Other Christs*, op. cit., p. 4.
[322] E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, (New York: Random House, 1979).

Christology of a Cosmic Battle

In 1931 Gustaf Aulén published *Christus Victor*[323] where he argued for a recapturing of the spirit of what he called "the classic theory of atonement"; that the soteriological significance of Jesus' death lies in his death liberating the world from its cosmic enemies, in particular in his defeat of the devil. "The central idea of *Christus Victor*", writes Aulén, "is the view of God and the Kingdom of God as fighting against evil powers ravaging in mankind."[324] As we have seen, this theme was very prevalent in the early church and dominates the understanding of Christ's programmatic and exemplary witness in the Book of Revelation. Here, Christ carries the sharp two-edged sword (Rev. 1:16; 2:12) and leads the "armies of heaven" (Rev. 19:14) against the Beast and his armies (Rev. 19:19) whom Christ first conquered on the cross (Rev. 3:21). This interpretation of Christ's death would validate as martyrs those victims whose deaths were similarly imagined by contemporary interpretive frameworks which emphasised the cosmic and martial significance of their persecution.

This account of Christ's death was fundamental to the way that early Christians interpreted their own experiences. Christ's followers were told to take up his cross, to expect suffering, to see it as a hallmark of authentic discipleship, and to witness by recapitulating and embodying the witness of Christ's own ministry, consummated in his death. When we look at how their suffering was similarly dramatised and understood in the early church, we see just how paradigmatic this presentation of Christ's death was. In Revelation, Christ's disciples are similarly called to conquer Satan and his adversaries by holding fast to their witness to Christ (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 28; 3:5, 21; 21:7).

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[323] G. Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert, (New York: Macmillan, 1969).
[324] Ibid., ix.

The effect of this martial portrayal of Christ's death on perceptions of Christian discipleship and witness can also be seen elsewhere in the New Testament. The Letter to the Ephesians exhorts Christians to

> Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armour of God so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness...With all these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:11-17; c.f. 1 Pet. 5:8-11).

Clearly, then, one of the ways that the early church understood Christ's death, and by extension the subsequent experiences of all those who took up his cross, was within an interpretive framework which imagined these deaths as part of a cosmic war against Satan. As Workman explains; "The Christians, influenced by the words of Jesus and of St. Paul, had from the first adopted the conception of the Church as the *Militia Christi*, the army of Christ. They were 'soldiers' in a 'holy war' which should bring in 'with violence' the kingdom of heaven."[325]

In the *Acts,* we see that a common way in which the martyr's death is established and recognised is precisely on the basis of this interpretive framework, which imagines it in the same vein as Christ's – as a victory over Satan in a cosmic battle. The victim's death, in other words, is imagined in such a way that it can be understood as imitating Christ's, an *imitatio* made possible by this conception of Christ's own death, and it is on this basis that

[325] H. B. Workman, op. cit., p. 75.

it is therefore a *martyr's* death.[326] The martyr's death is frequently dramatised, therefore, using this martial language:

> The adversary swooped down with full force…He went to all lengths to train and prepare his minions against God's servants….These then charged into battle, holding up under every sort of abuse and torment; indeed, they made light of their great burden as they sped on to Christ.[327]

Firstly, the martyr's persecutors are dramatised as the forces of Satan or Satan himself. So, in Julius' martyrdom we are told: "the Devil's servant struck the blessed martyr with a sword and brought his life to an end,"[328] and the soldier's salary is referred to as "the money of Satan."[329] Similarly, In *The Martyrs of Lyons*, the adversary has "instruments of torture" and when these fail turns to "other devices."[330] After Perpetua's dream, she says: "When I awoke I realized that it was not with wild animals that I would fight but with the Devil; but I knew that I would win the victory."[331] This reminds us of Peter 5:8-11 – "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour."

The martyrs themselves, meanwhile, are, in Tertullian's words, *militia Christi*[332]; they are the soldiers of Christ[333] fighting against the devil in the cosmic war in which Christ's own death featured and which is programmatic for the eschatological war forthcoming. Armed with resilience and endurance they "charged into battle, holding up under every sort

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[326] For a full treatment of this topic see P. Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, op. cit.
[327] *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, 1.4-6, op. cit., p. 63.
[328] *The Martyrdom of Julius the Veteran*, 2.6, op. cit., p. 263.
[329] Ibid., p. 265. See also *The Martyrdom of Marian and James*, 5.1., op. cit.
[330] *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, *1*.27, op. cit., p. 71. See also *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 2.4-3.1., op. cit.
[331] *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 10:13-14, op. cit., p. 119.
[332] See Tertullian, *Ad Martyras*, 3, op. cit., p. 3.
[333] E.g. *The Martyrdom of Saints Marian and James*, 10.3, op. cit., p. 209.

of abuse and torment."[334] In a passage from the Abitinian Martyrs we find the following passage, which rivals only the Ephesians passage in its detailed verisimilitude:

> They [the martyrs] stood in battle formation, steadfast and brave. Their steadfastness in the Lord beat back the blows of the raging devil. But when the fury of the Devil could not prevail over all the soldiers of Christ together, he demanded them in combat one by one.[335]

Like Christ's death, the martyrs are always seen as victorious and Moss accurately summarises the way that this trope dominates *The Martyrs of Lyons,* writing, "The triumph of Christ over Satan is programmatic and instructive for other Christians who are drawn into the cosmic battle by his example. Christians do not stand helpless on the sidelines as Christ battles the devil; they are the battlefield on which Christ and the devil contest with one another, and they are soldiers in the war on Satan."[336] This is largely evidenced by the intimacy that Christ has with his martyrs at all points and the way the conflict is framed as being led by the 'generals' Christ and the devil throughout.[337]

It is abundantly clear, therefore, that a Christology that saw Christ's death as a blow against Satan in a cosmic war went on to influence what it meant to witness as him and therefore the *imitatio Christi* that was the basis for their imagination as martyrs. We see this again in *The Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* which directly links the achievement of Christ with the accomplishments of the martyrs writing that "to God's servants it is nothing to be killed; and hence death is nothing when the Lord crushes its sting, conquers its struggle, and triumphs by the trophy of the cross"[338] showing that the martyr's conquest of the devil

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[334] *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, 1.4-6, op. cit., p. 63.
[335] *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, 4, trans. M. A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in North Africa*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996).
[336] C. R. Moss, *The Other Christs*, op. cit., p82.
[337] The account's dependence on Revelations 12 is responsible for much of this focus.
[338] *The Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius*, 4.4-5, op. cit., p. 217.

is grounded in Christ's conquest at the cross.[339] More than merely illustrating the role of conceptions of Christ's death in how the martyr is imagined, what this example also demonstrates is how radical some of these conceptions of *imitatio Christi* can be. A certain conception of Christ's death, therefore, gives rise to an *imitatio* which casts martyrs in the role of cosmic soldiers in a holy war; and this can affect the praxis of discipleship for those striving for the fellowship with Christ that martyrdom secures who are enjoined to pick up their swords and join the fight.

This example also serves to illustrate the relationship this thesis highlights between theological ideas, the interpretive frameworks they condition, the imagination of reality they construct, and the martyrologies by which individuals are consequently imagined as martyrs. Here, religious views about the cosmic significance of Christ's death shaped an interpretive framework in which the early church saw itself participating in an eschatological struggle and where those who died for this struggle could be imagined as defeating Satan's forces in a way which could, because of a certain conceptualisation of Christ's own death, be seen as *imitatio Christi.*

As well as the significance of interpretive frameworks and their religious traditions, what this also reminds us of is the danger these religious frameworks can pose. Not only does this framework imagine Christians as a *miles Christi*, but it incarnates the foes they are required to defeat in the bodies of people in history. As York writes, this conception of Jesus' death imagines human history as a place where "A battle raging in the heavens is taking place in the very bodies of those who are Christian and those who are hostile to Christianity."[340] It is easy to imagine, therefore, how these frameworks can shape not only the way that people interpret their reality but also the way they engage with it. In a reality

[339] See also for instance *The Martyrdom of Marian and James*, 5:10 and *The Martyrdom of Agape, Chione and Irene*, 1.1., op. cit.
[340] T. York, op. cit., p. 33.

that is imagined as a cosmic battleground, this can encourage highly radicalised praxis. When the disciple is exhorted to put on the armour of God and do battle against the foes of God; who those foes are and what it means to do battle is of paramount importance and this is determined by the interpretive framework. Therefore, this martyrology can be rooted in Christological accounts of the meaning and significance of Christ's death which give rise to extremist notions of *imitatio.* As Wilfred has written,

> There is a metamorphosis of martyrdom when religions try to view it as part of a cosmic war. This is another way of spiritualizing martyrdom, but with serious ambiguous consequences. Placed within the framework of cosmic war, dying and inflicting death often get justified. What is at work is a religious vision of a universal battle of good over the evil or Satan to end in the final triumph of good. The cosmic war is something that has lent support to many acts of violence and killing of many innocent by religiously militant groups.[341]

The Equivocality of *Imitatio Christi* and the Danger of Radical Martyrs

The foregoing section has demonstrated that who the victim becomes when they are imagined as a martyr is a product both of *what* is being imitated – how Christ's death is interpreted – and also *how* it is imitated. It can be shown, however, that the fundamentally subjective nature of both what Christ's death signifies and what it means to imitate it are especially vulnerable to radicalising interpretations and, therefore, to the very real danger of producing radical martyrs who establish a commensurately radical conception of discipleship. For, as we said before, whatever the martyr achieves, the disciple desires; and however it is achieved is pursued by the disciple.

[341] F. Wilfred, op. cit., p. 79.

Radical Conceptions of Christ

The danger of the first element is very clear. Christ's death, on which the martyr's death is modelled, is open to multiple interpretations some of which can be radical as we noted above. Karl Boff points to this ambiguity as he writes:

> Jesus was put to death because of his message and his practice. It can be read in different ways; as punishment for blasphemy and contempt for the law (Pharisees); as the failure of a subversive and revolutionary political course (Romans); as the price paid for liberating and saving mankind.[342]

What Boff illustrates is that Christ's death is an event subject to a wide spectrum of interpretations, each entailing a corresponding spectrum of *imitatio* and, therefore, enjoining different conceptions of discipleship. As the previous section illustrated, whether Christ dies as a revolutionary, a political insurgent, a stoical sufferer or as a sacrifice to liberation shapes what it means to imitate him and therefore determines both who can be legitimately imagined as a martyr and what constitutes authentic discipleship. He also illustrates that these interpretations can be highly controversial and because Christ's death can be interpreted as a radical event, the martyrs and paths for discipleship it legitimises can likewise be seen as radical and extremist. Christologies of resistance and liberation have inspired *imitatios* involving revolutionary socio-political praxis in the name of liberation, just as Christologies of sacrifice have inspired radical acts of self-renunciation.

Boff is especially sensitive to these concerns since, as we shall see, Latin America has borne witness to the emergence of some of the most radical post-conciliar Christologies

[342] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 13.

and, therefore, the recognition of some of the most extreme forms of praxis as an expression of *imitatio.* So, El Salvadoran theologian Jon Sobrino writes:

> Martyrdom cannot be understood without bringing in this element of violence, just as the death of Jesus cannot be understood without it, since, at least objectively, Jesus made use of moral violence.[343]

These contexts are important reminders that Christology, like so much theological discourse, is responsive to the needs of the community. How a community interprets Christ is, to varying degrees, a function of whom it wants and needs Christ to be, and which interpretations of Christ's ministry resonate most with the context of the congregation. In the example of Latin America, Christologies that emphasised the political and revolutionary dimensions of Christ's mission and death were popular at ministering to the situation there. Martyrs are made in the image of the Christ that the community believes ministers best to its context. Because martyrs by definition emerge from extreme situations where suffering and death are present, these contexts are often radical and dangerous and so too, therefore, are the Christologies necessary to serve their demands. As a result, martyrs become the embodied realisations of the theology of its community; a theology expressed through whom it makes its Christ and motivated by all the community's social, cultural and political concerns.

Who the martyr is therefore becomes an indirect expression of whom the community wants to resurrect Christ into and whom it wants to make a martyr. Sometimes, how a community interprets Christ's death may also be a direct response to whom it wants to venerate as a martyr. This means that Christologies are articulated in order to make possible the *re*interpretation and *re*memorialising of someone's death. Jon Sobrino in the El Salvador

[343] J. Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Orbis: Mayknoll, N.Y., 1984), p. 170.

context makes plain that it is his clear intention to argue that the deaths of thousands of El Salvadorans ought to be seen as martyrdom and he is explicit regarding the fact that the Christology he articulates is designed to minister to this aim.[344] What this illustrates is something the martyrology in the following chapter will develop in greater detail; the power that basic articulations of theology, such as what the significance of Christ's death is, can have on the way that people interpret and engage with their reality.

The danger is not only, however, that this equivocality will be exploited to create radical martyrs who legitimise radical causes, but also that it allows martyrologies so universalistic that they create a banality of martyrdom. Just as Christ's death can be interpreted in such a way as to produce radical martyrs, so too it can be interpreted to render the deaths of millions of individuals' deaths in *imitatio Christi* in a way which threatens to undermine the sanctity of martyrdom. Sobrino and Boff, for whom martyrdom is a pastoral urgency as we have explained, have cultivated more universalistic Christologies that attempt to understand the victims of persecution as having died in *imitatio Christi*. For them, martyrdom is necessary both as a palliative to the victims' communities, but also in order to recognise and validate these victim's struggle for liberation. Boff, for instance, argues: "The poor, the oppressed races, natives, proletariat all share in his passion."[345] While their aims are noble, some may find the notion that a martyrology grounded in a Christology such as this could render almost any death at the hand of a persecutor a martyrdom and therefore devalue martyrdom's theological significance.

[344] J. Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom,* op. cit., and "Political Holiness", op. cit..
[345] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 15.

Radical Conceptions of Imitatio

Who the martyr is according to this martyrology of *imitatio Christi* is not only a function of the conception of Christ they imitate, but also the manner in which they are imagined as having done so. Moving onto this second element, we see that it also raises similar problems because imitation is not an objective phenomenon but, like Christology, it too is fundamentally interpretive. To illustrate this, we might take Boff's example of a Christology which sees Christ's death as the "price paid for liberation". What does it mean to imitate such a Christ and what would it involve? What sort of liberative project, cause or praxis would become a legitimate expression of authentic discipleship and witness to Christ? This equivocality procures for the martyrologist great interpretive and imaginative scope as to what it means to imitate Christ and, therefore, who the martyr is and what example they set for discipleship.

The breadth each conception of Christ's death provides for the interpretations of its legitimate imitation means that it is possible that even uncontroversial Christologies are imagined as having been imitated by individuals and praxes which are highly controversial and radical. The death of an armed revolutionary could, for instance, be said to represent the price paid for liberation. Or to use another of Boff's examples, the death of a terrorist may be seen as the failure of a subversive and revolutionary political course. These narratives may never become martyr narratives, but so long as the imagination of the victim's death as that of the martyr's rests on its imitation of Christ's, when both what that death represents and how it can legitimately be imitated are equivocal, it remains possible that these highly radicalised figures *are* seen as martyrs. Since, as we have said, martyr narratives respond to demand, where there is an external demand for such a narrative, these narratives will emerge to minister to the community's needs.

Whether or not a narrative establishes that the victim's death imitated Christ's – as it must according to this martyrology in order for that death to be imagined as martyrdom – is therefore increasingly a matter of perspective. With this power to imagine an individual's death as *imitatio Christi,* one not only has the power to make a martyr, but also thereby to resurrect a certain conception of Christ in the body of the martyr and, in so doing, legitimise that individual, and the particular events of their death, as a rightful expression of *imitatio.* Moss explains how this can therefore be a highly political act:

> The performance of Christ in the body of the martyr serves the social, theological, liturgical, rhetorical and political needs of the communities…It endowed those who shaped the martyr's memory with the authority to…promote particular values, ethics and doctrines…Rhetorically, then, resurrecting Christ in the martyrs was a powerful move that invoked the unassailable character of the Saviour to promote a particular agenda.[346]

The equivocality of this martyrology therefore allows the martyrologist to harness the powerful theological ideas involved in imitation and martyrdom to promote certain values and praxes and to inculcate a belief about what it means to imitate Christ in the popular consciousness of the martyr's community. Whose death the martyrologist imagines as *imitatio Christi* will serve the needs of the community both by engendering the conceptualisation of Christ it needs, and also by baptising particular courses of action and praxes as *imitative* of this Christ. The claim that an armed revolutionary imitates Christ, for instance, not only resurrects a certain conception of Christ as a revolutionary in the body of the now-martyr, but in so doing, it sacramentalises armed revolutionary praxis as Christlike.

[346] C. R. Moss, *The Other Christs*, op. cit., pp. 174-175.

Conclusion

This chapter's analysis has demonstrated the two central contentions of this thesis. Firstly, it has demonstrated the role that this martyrology – and the theological ideas described by it – has in defining how martyrs are made, by showing that a death can become a martyr's death when it is imagined as having imitated Christ's. We elaborated on this by showing how different conceptualisations of Christ's death induce different imaginations of death as martyrdom and how the theological underpinnings of this martyrology shape the way that a martyr's narrative is told.

Secondly, it has demonstrated that how this martyrology defines the martyr narrative can be deeply problematic. We saw how a martyrology which relies on an interpretation of Christ's death can create highly radical martyrs. Moreover, in unpacking the religious significance of *imitatio,* we saw that it is attended by a belief in the intimacy and conformity with Christ that that martyr's death by *imitatio* achieves. This martyrology is therefore particularly powerful in establishing a model for discipleship by presenting *imitatio* as the apotheosis of Christian discipleship and the way of achieving ontological participation in and with Christ. We noted how this theological tradition was operative in making martyrs after World War Two and in the Latin American conflicts of the 1980s-90s. We also saw how these traditions inculcated the chilling notion, observed in previous chapters, that death was the consummation of the Christian disciple's aim to be united with Christ.

This martyrology by definition makes a certain conceptualisation of death the consummation of Christian witness. For each Christology, we showed, there is accordingly martyrology. The martyr, therefore, depends both on the conception of Christ and the manner in which it is imitated. We saw, however, that the significance of Christ's death and what it means to imitate it are matters of perspective which respond to a particular

community's demands. Because martyrs emerge in times of trauma or crisis, these demands, and the interpretations they therefore induce, can be radical and political; and so too therefore can the martyrs they produce and the vision of discipleship this induces. This martyrology therefore provides an important reminder of the power of theological ideas in influencing the way that people interpret and engage with their reality.

Chapter 6: Witnessing *as* Christ Through Praxis

In the preceding chapter, we examined the martyrology by which the martyr is imagined as one whose death is constitutive of their witness *as* Christ. In this chapter, we move on to examining and evaluating the final part of the four-part model of Christian martyrdom we outlined in Chapter 2. This martyrology imagines the martyr as one whose death is a cost of witnessing as Christ. Unlike those discussed in the previous chapters, however, this martyrology was not dominant in the early church and does not have the same rich pedigree in Christian theology. Instead, this martyrology has developed in popularity in the 20th century where it has been a driving force of popular martyrdom and has been promulgated predominantly by liberation theologians presenting a 'new' martyrdom for a new context of Christian theology. It has been strongly opposed, however, by mainstream theology and the Roman Catholic Church who challenge its legitimacy as an expression of authentic Christian martyrdom.

In order to defend this thesis' primary contention that martyr narratives are imagined according to martyrologies which can be understood according to a four-part model emerging from the notion of witness in the early church, this model needs to be defended and this martyrology represents its most controversial constituent. This chapter will therefore differ from those of previous chapters. In order to justify this martyrology's place in this thesis as an important theological apparatus in the sociological construction of the martyr, the authenticity and validity of this martyrology within the four-part schema needs to be defended. It is necessary to show that this martyrology is not a new-fangled construction of an offbeat tradition of contemporary theology, but is rather an essential expression of Christian martyrdom without which no analysis of Christian martyrdom can be complete. Part of this chapter, therefore, aims to defend this martyrology and reinstate it

in Christian martyrdom discourse from which I show it has been forgotten. For this reason, this chapter is significantly longer than those that precede it. In order to evaluate this martyrology as an essential part of Christian martyrdom, I first need to defend it as an essential part of Christian martyrdom.

This chapter is in three parts. In the first part, I prove the first contention of this thesis by introducing this martyrology and demonstrating its role in the martyr narratives of the 20th century. Crucially, I demonstrate the coherence of its claims with the analysis of witness in Chapter 2 and I also provide a defence of its consistency with the teachings of two of the foremost authorities on Christian martyrdom; Benedict XIV and Aquinas. I show, therefore, that far from being *invented* in the 20th century, it has merely been *remembered.*

The second part of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of this martyrology. I provide a robust defence of this martyrology against its retractors by examining the chief criticism levelled against it – that its martyrs are not killed in *odium fidei.* I show firstly how this criterion is contrary to the traditions of the church by providing a stark revisionist reading of Benedict XVI from which this criterion is drawn. I show that Benedict XVI's work in fact supports the claims of this martyrology. Secondly, I illustrate that this objection is contrary to a logical analysis of what it means to be killed for the faith. Finally, by reviewing the literature on early church persecution and showing that the martyrs of the early church were not killed out of *odium fidei*, I demonstrate that this objection is contrary to ecclesiastical history and to the most fundamental understanding of Christian martyrdom. What emerges from this analysis, therefore, is a clear understanding and defence of the notion that a martyr may also be killed in *odium fidei* but *indirectly* for the faith and this is precisely the understanding that this martyrology adopts. I therefore provide a novel defence of this martyrology and contribution to the burgeoning literature on this subject by expounding the conceptual frameworks of this martyrology.

In the final part of this chapter, I turn to evaluating this martyrology in order to prove the second contention of this thesis. I show that the conceptual framework we outlined in part two – that the martyr is killed *indirectly* for the faith – makes this martyrology profoundly political. This martyrology therefore demands what I term a strong political theology which recognises the theopolitical nature of the Christian faith and the political responsibilities that this confers. I show how this raises a serious challenge to a weak political theology which sees religion and politics as two autonomous and separate entities. I go on to show, however, how this martyrology, by allowing the political causes and praxis for which the martyr is *directly* killed to be imagined as *theopolitical* and a profession of the faith, allows for the possibility that these might be extremist, and therefore, that this martyrology might have a profound radicalising effect on the martyr's community. By challenging a weak version and representing the dangers of a strong version, this martyrology therefore presents a dilemma to contemporary political discourse.

Witness as Praxis

Remembering the Martyrology

The 20th century has seen the emergence of a newly-articulated, quickly burgeoning, and highly controversial martyrology. We have already observed how new interpretations of martyrdom arise in response to a community's needs, as in the case of the Cult of Confessors and the ascetic *living* martyrdom of the 4th century, discussed in Chapter 3. Similarly, this martyrology[347] has been largely pioneered by liberation theologians seeking

[347] I will frequently refer to the martyrology under discussion in this chapter as "this martyrology". Other martyrologies will be referred to by chapter.

to minister to the urgent pastoral needs of their congregations in the third world. These authors call for a radically new understanding of the meaning and religious significance of martyrdom which recognises as martyrs those who lose their lives struggling for the justice and socio-political liberation that their theology urges. This martyrology has been highly prevalent in areas such as Latin America in the wake of the emergence of liberation theology after the Second Vatican Council. It has consequently been responsible for the imagination as martyrs of countless individuals seen to have died struggling for liberation in the phenomenon of popular martyrdom to which Chapter 1 referred. For reasons we shall explore, however, it has not found much traction with the Roman Catholic Church to which the members of these martyr communities, and the martyrs themselves, often belong.

This martyrology's first thorough articulation in print came in the 20th century in a special edition of *Concilium* in 1983 entitled *Martyrdom Today.*[348] In what has since become a burgeoning tradition, this edition is now perceived as a seminal moment as it introduced what seemed to be a challenging and radically new understanding of martyrdom. On the 20th anniversary of this issue, *Concilium* published a commemorative edition entitled *Rethinking Martyrdom*[349] which explored this martyrology which had since witnessed an eruption in popularity, significance and controversy, as we shall see. Since 1983, this martyrology has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention and consequently several significant works have given further expression and supplied an ever more rigorous defence of this martyrology, as well as cataloguing the new modern martyrs to which it gives rise.[350] The resulting success and prevalence it has had in revolutionising the way that martyrdom has since been conceptualised is testified by the ten 20th-century modern Christian martyrs sculpted in stone

[348] *Concilium*, no. 163, 1983/3.
[349] *Concilium*, 2003/1.
[350] E. g. *Mortality*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2014; D. Dewar, *All for Christ: Some Twentieth Century Martyrs*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); S. Bergman, (ed.), op. cit.; M. L. Budde, and K. Scott, (eds.), op. cit. For a review of this literature see L. S. Cunningham, "On Contemporary Martyrs", op. cit.

relief above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey all of whom are products of this martyrology.[351]

Witnessing as Christ

In Chapter 2, we explained that in the early church several understandings of "witness" can be detected within the juridical metaphor in which it arises, and these defined the trajectories of martyrdom. Chiefly, these saw witness either as witnessing *to* Christ through confession, signs and proclamation, or witnessing *as* Christ by taking Christ's role in the ongoing cosmic trial by embodying his ministry in and through one's discipleship. We have also noted and illustrated throughout the preceding chapters, that another major fault line in the theology of martyrdom was the relationship between witness and death in martyrdom; death was understood as either constitutive of the martyr's witness or its cost. This creates a quadripartite model of martyrdom. In Chapter 3, our analysis was split between death being constitutive of or a cost of witnessing *to* Christ through confession, both of which were common in the early church. Similarly, in Chapter 4 we evaluated the belief that the martyr dies witnessing *as* Christ and here in the early church the preeminent understanding was that death was constitutive of this witness so that the martyr witnesses *as* Christ by dying as Christ. It has taken many centuries of Christian history and tradition, but the fourth and complementary understanding of martyrdom as the cost of *witnessing* as Christ has only emerged as a popular and authentic understanding of martyrdom in the 20th century.

[351] From left to right these are: Maximilian Kolbe, Manche Masemola, Janani Luwum, Grand Duchess St. Elizabeth of Russia, Martin Luther King, Jr, Óscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Esther John, Lucian Tapiedi and Wang Zhiming.

Whilst a largely 20th century phenomenon, this martyrology has not, therefore, been *created* in the 20th century; rather, it has been *forgotten* from the 1st. I contend that it is therefore most appropriately seen as the *renaissance* of a trajectory of martyrdom which was defined and potentiated in the early church by the way that Christian witness was understood, but never properly realised. Freyne is therefore right to remark that "It is only in the post-conciliar era that the Lukan and Johannine significance of the term…has been *retrieved*,"[352] whilst Valiente correctly observes that this martyrology "reaches back to the *imitatio Christi* that was so central to the early church's understanding of martyrdom."[353] One of the aims of this chapter, therefore, is to reinstate this martyrology within Christian martyrdom discourse and to defend its authentic, but forgotten, place alongside other martyrologies. This is especially important not only because of its predominance in making modern martyrs, but because of the dangers it carries, as we shall see.

As this martyrology's most fervent advocate, Jon Sobrino, therefore explains;

> Jesus martyrs are not, strictly speaking, those who die *for* Christ, or *because* of Christ, but those who die *like* Jesus and *for the cause of* Jesus.[354]

According to this martyrology, the martyrs are not corroborating witnesses *to* Christ, but take on Christ's own role as lead counsel in the unfolding cosmic trial used to characterise the experience of Christian discipleship. It is *Christ's* role, not that of his corroborating witnesses, that defines the martyr. Accordingly, these authors insist that it is Christ, not Stephen, who is "the original sacrament of martyrdom"[355], "the martyr *par excellence*" and

[352] S. Freyne, "Jesus the Martyr", *Concilium*, 2003/1, pp. 49-58, p. 50. Italics are mine.
[353] O. E. Valiente, op. cit., p. 121.
[354] J. Sobrino, "Our World: Cruelty and Compassion", trans. P. Burns, *Concilium*, 2003/1, pp. 15-23, p. 19.
[355] Ibid., p. 20.

"the prototype martyr."[356] Christ's death establishes and defines Christian martyrdom and the martyr is consequently understood in this vein; not as one who, like Stephen, dies *for* Christ, but one who dies *as* Christ, re-enacting and fulfilling Christ's own martyrdom. The martyrs this new martyrology produces are accordingly known by several authors as "Jesus martyrs."[357]

An analysis of Christ's death is therefore essential to this martyrology. It is highly significant, however, to distinguish this martyrology from that of the previous chapter, that Sobrino qualifies dying *like Jesus* as dying *for the cause of Jesus*, for a central contention of this martyrology is that, as Burke explains, "…the salvific power of Jesus' death and resurrection is connected to his life."[358] It is impossible, this martyrology maintains, to understand Christ's martyrdom – and therefore to re-enact it – without understanding the cause for which he was killed. Karl Rahner's now classic essay arguing for a broadening of the classical understanding of martyrdom illustrates this:

> First of all, the death Jesus "passively endured" was the consequence of the struggle he waged against those in his day who wielded religious and political power. He died because he fought: *his death must not be seen in isolation from his life*.[359]

Christ died because of how he lived. If to die *as Christ* is to die for the same cause as Christ, as this martyrology insists, then to die as Christ is to die for *living* as Christ. It becomes clear, therefore, how this martyrology, in contrast to that explored in Chapter 5, understands the martyr's death as the cost of witnessing *as* Christ in life. Just as Christ's

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[356] O. E. Valiente, op. cit., p. 113. Rahner also describes Christ as the "witness *par excellence"*, c.f. K. Rahner, op. cit., p. 10. See also J. Hernández Pico, "The Hope Born of the Martyr's Love," trans. P. Burns, *Concilium,* 2003/1, pp. 131-138; and J. Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom*, op. cit., p. 2.
[357] E.g. T. Okure, J. Sobrino, and F. Wilfred, "Introduction", *Concilium,* 2003/1, pp. 7-11; Sobrino also calls them 'Jesuanic Martyrs' for the same reason in J. Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom*, op. cit., p. 123.
[358] K. F. Burke, "The Crucified People as 'Light for the Nations': A Reflection on Ignacio Ellacuría", *Concilium*, 2003/1, pp. 123-130, pp. 127-128.
[359] K. Rahner, op. cit., p. 10. Italics are mine.

own death was the cost of his ministry, so too the death of the Jesus martyr must similarly be the cost of embodying, fulfilling and promoting Christ's ministry. Sobrino expresses the importance of both Christ's life and death to this martyrology well as he explains: "martyrs are above all those who die like Jesus because their lives, words, and praxis have been…like those of Jesus. They suffer a violent death for being Jesus."[360] This martyrology therefore demands, as Valiente explains, that we "pay sufficient attention to the connection between a martyr's death and the way he or she chose to live"[361] in a way which its proponents argue accords with the famous dictum attributed to Augustine that *martyres veros non facit poena sed causa.*[362] Martyrs do not, as we saw in Chapter 5, die as Christ, they *live* as Christ, and for this they die.

Christian Praxis

According to this martyrology, then, the martyr is the consummate disciple who dies as Christ for embodying and promoting the cause for which Christ himself struggled and ultimately died. Christology is therefore crucial to this martyrology. As Valiente says, "the basic structure of Jesus' life and the spirit with which he lived become the paradigm that grounds our criteria for identifying a Christian martyr."[363] The meaning and significance of Christ's mission determines what it means to witness *as* Christ, and is accordingly normative for this "exemplary discipleship of the Christian martyr."[364] As we saw in the previous

[360] J. Sobrino, "Our World: Cruelty and Compassion", op. cit., p. 19.
[361] O. E. Valiente, op. cit., p. 113.
[362] Augustine, *Epistolae*, no. 89:2, *PL*, 33:310. Leonardo Boff, for instance invokes this; c.f. L. Boff, op. cit. Anne Dillon has pointed out that this was taken from Cyprian, *De Unitate Ecclesiae.* C.f. A. Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535-1603,* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 18.
[363] O. E. Valiente, op. cit., p. 126.
[364] Ibid., p. 122.

chapter, Christ's mission can be interpreted in a number of ways. Because this martyrology has been chiefly advanced by exponents of liberation theology, this tradition has produced the conceptualisations of Christ's ministry that have typically defined the Jesus martyr's discipleship.[365] Accordingly, Valiente writes;

> ...followers of Jesus are given the same mission entrusted to Christ: to pursue the fullest realization of God's reconciling kingdom.[366]

Similarly, Boff writes that martyrs therefore

> …belong to the cause that was Christ's, the kingdom; they laid down their lives for those values that embody the utopia of the kingdom, such as truth, justice, love of God and of the poor.[367]

In the tradition of liberation theology, therefore, the Jesus martyr dies for continuing to advance what is characterised as Christ's mission of realising the Kingdom of God in history by pursuing the virtues of truth, social justice, and liberation from oppression, poverty and deprivation. Where this martyrology represents a fundamental and controversial shift in traditional Christian martyrdom is that, in contrast to the martyrologies discussed in previous chapters, the martyr does not merely die for these values, but rather dies *actively* pursuing them through the pursuit of historical causes and Christian praxis. Karl Rahner's essay, for instance, strongly challenges the traditional conceptualisation of the martyr as a passive advocate of the faith, and calls for "the recognition of martyrdom with regard to a Christian engaged in an *active struggle.*"[368] The Jesus martyr does not just die for their belief

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[365] See J. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological View*, trans. P. Burns and F. McDonagh, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007).
[366] O. E. Valiente, op. cit., p. 123.
[367] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 12.
[368] K. Rahner, op. cit., p. 10. Italics are mine.

in the truth Christ's cause and the virtues it represents, they die actively struggling to advance and effect this cause and for the *praxis* it demands. These martyrs die because they actively *defend* the weak, *fight* for social justice and *struggle* for liberation. The disciple's call to embody, fulfil and continue Christ's ministry through discipleship is therefore fully concretised and effectuated by Christian praxis performing what Boff describes as "virtuous *actions* in the spirit of Christ"[369] and in pursuit of those moral principles the Christian faith sanctifies. As we shall now see, this conceptualisation of martyrdom might be contrary to traditional conceptualisations of martyrdom, but it is in fact well-established in the most orthodox traditions of the Church.

An Orthodox Martyrology: Aquinas and Benedict XIV

This martyrology imagines the martyr as one who bears the cost of witnessing *as* Christ by pursuing Christ's cause through active praxis. The key features of this martyrology, then are threefold. Firstly, apropos Augustine's dictum quoted above, whether the victim is imagined as a martyr depends not on their death, but on the cause for which they are perceived to have borne the cost of death. Secondly, because this martyrology understands the martyr as witnessing *as* Christ, this cause is legitimate if it is imagined to be Christ's cause. Finally, the martyr witnesses thus by actively pursuing this cause through Christian praxis. We have already described the second and third of these points as controversial. Traditionally, as we saw in Chapter 1, the Church conceptualises the martyr as one who dies witnessing passively to the faith itself, not a cause it demands, and certainly not witnessing actively by pursuing this cause through praxis. This martyrology therefore does great violence to modern orthodox conceptions of martyrdom embraced by the Church.

[369] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 15.

In the next section, for instance, we shall examine the criticism of this martyrology presented by the Church, that these martyrs cannot be said to have died for the faith on account.

What I seek to show here, however, is that this martyrology, and the controversial features is contains, has a rich pedigree in theological tradition and in the Church. I do so in order to defend its position as part of the quadripartite model that I advance in this thesis that governs the imagination of the martyr in the sociological construction of a martyr narrative. This martyrology has, as I will show, been forgotten from Christian theology and ecclesiastical history. In order to defend its role in this thesis, therefore, I wish to reinstate it and solidify its place in Christian martyrdom discourse. This martyrology is not, I believe, a radical and unorthodox invention of the 20th century. This martyrology should be taken seriously as not only following directly from an analysis of witness, as I have shown in this chapter and in Chapter 2, but it should be taken seriously as established in the traditions of Christian theology and ecclesiastical history. As we said above, in order to evaluate this martyrology as an essential martyrology in martyr narratives I first need to defend it as an essential martyrology.

I do so by briefly showing how the features of this martyrology outlined above are propounded in both Thomas Aquinas' classic discussion on martyrdom in the *Summa Theologica* and even in Benedict XIV's paradigmatic and authoritative text on martyrdom, the *Opus de Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* which, as we saw in Chapter 1, is the basis of the Church's conceptualisation of martyrdom with which this martyrology is negatively contrasted. By pointing to the prevalence of these features in the works of these writers, I seek not only to provide a defence of the orthodoxy of this martyrology, but, in so doing, to refute what must now be perceived as an unjustifiable one-sided reading of the Catholic Church's foremost sources of authority on martyrdom. We will return to these texts in the next section when we begin to evaluate this martyrology and we

examine the Church's critique of it. Part of the problem seems to be a superficial acceptance of the Church's reading of these texts without analysis of the primary texts themselves. I seek to propose a radically new interpretation of these texts, more loyal to the text itself, which challenges their inheritance as an authority for the Church's notions of the orthodoxy of their understanding of martyrdom.

Reading of Pope Benedict XIV's famous work on martyrdom, so formative to the Catholic Church, one notices a dearth of references to the primary text and a sudden proliferation of unreferenced quotations.[370] The received wisdom evidenced here is that the current canonical understanding of martyrdom practised by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints derives legitimacy from this text, whilst this martyrology, which is compared unfavourably against it, is not present in it, or is even proscribed by it. As we will show, nothing could be further from the truth. In the next section too, we shall see that the Church's objection that these martyrs are not killed for the faith because they do not die *in odium fidei* has no basis in this text either, contrary to common academic misbelief. Part of the problem has been the lack of any translation of this text, as well as its density and difficulty.

To understand Benedict XIV's view, however, it is helpful to begin with Aquinas, whose work he quotes and by which he is clearly inspired. Of the martyr's cause, Aquinas writes,

> Wherefore the cause of all martyrdom is the truth of faith. But the truth of faith includes not only inward belief, but also outward profession, which is expressed not only by words, whereby one confesses the faith, but also by deeds, whereby a person shows that he has faith according to James ii.18, *I will show thee, by works, my faith*...Thus all virtuous deeds, inasmuch as they are referred to God, are professions of the faith whereby we come to know that God requires these works of us, and rewards us for them: and in this way they can be the cause of martyrdom.[371]

[370] E.g. K. Woodward, op. cit., p. 130 and A. L. Petersen, op. cit., p. 93.
[371] T. Aquinas, op. cit., p. 1719.

Aquinas therefore invokes his position on justification to illuminate martyrdom. Since faith, he says, involves not only inward belief expressed by words, but outward professions expressed through deeds, a *profession* of the faith, for which the martyr is killed, can manifest either through *confession* or *virtuous deeds.* In the 20th century, liberation theologians advocating this martyrology give expression to this distinction with their call for a focus on ortho*praxis* alongside orthodoxy[372], and this binary conception of how the faith is professed informs their martyrology in precisely the way it does Aquinas' analysis.

For both Aquinas and liberation theologians, therefore, this notion of martyrdom follows *necessarily* from a more fundamental belief about what it means to be a Christian:

> A Christian is one who is Christ's. Now a person is said to be Christ's not only through having faith in Christ, but also because he is actuated to virtuous deeds by the Spirit of Christ…Hence to suffer as a Christian is not only to suffer in confession of the faith, which is done by words, but also to suffer for doing any good work, or for avoiding any sin, for Christ's sake, because this all comes under the head of witnessing to the faith.[373]

Aquinas draws a distinction between two aspects of the Christian faith which are professed through confession and praxis, respectively. Inspired by Aquinas, Benedict XIV's own explication of martyrdom develops Aquinas' thought here and expresses this distinction more clearly:

> Therefore some of the truths of the faith are principles (*theoretica*) and some practical (*practicas*). The principles declare knowledge of God and of his perfection and his attributes, and also that Jesus Christ is our saviour. Someone who dies on account of these things has done so for the faith and most truly has died for the true

[372] See, for instance, G. Guttiérez, *A Theology of Liberation,* (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1973) p. 10: "The intention, however, is not to deny the meaning of orthodoxy…the intention is to recognize the world and importance of concrete behaviour, of deeds, of action, of praxis in the Christian life."
[373] T. Aquinas, op. cit., p. 1719.

> cause of martyrdom… The practicals, the rules prescribed to the Christian to be worked, consist in praxis (*operatione*): and *these are also the stuff of martyrdom*, so that a true martyr of Christ is he who dies on account of an act of Christian virtue or hatred of sin…These truths differ because we ought to give thanks to principles simply by words, and practicals with praxis [374]

The truth of the faith is both *propositional,* and is to be *believed* and professed through *confession;* and also *practical,* and is to be *performed* and professed through the *praxis* of morally *virtuous actions.* Because both aspects of the faith are central to being a Christian, both forms of profession are legitimate causes for dying as a Christian, as martyrdom requires. Both Aquinas and Benedict call this praxis *virtuous.*

The *practical* moral dimension to the faith is therefore expressed and realised through these Christian virtues professed through praxis, so that Benedict XIV very often says;

> …the cause of martyrdom can be an exercise of virtue in that which has been commanded or by the commendation of the faith.[375]

As a result,

> Many martyrs are honoured on account of having been killed for power, freedom, defence of the immunity of the church, on account of justice, chastity, compassion and charity.[376]

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[374] Pope Benedict XIV, *Opus*, Cap. XIX. 7.8, op. cit. (*Veritates itaque fidei aliae sunt theoreticae, aliae practicae. Theoreticae indicunt cognitionem Dei eiusque perfectionum, et attributorum, necnon Jesu Christi Salvatoris nostri. Si quis propter has moriatur, pro fide, adeoque, pro vera martyrii causa moreretur… Practicae, quae operandir regulas christianis praescribunt, consistunt in operatione: et hae quoque sunt materia martyrii adeoque verus Christi martyr es, qui moritur propter actum christianae virtutis, vel detestationem peccati…differunt hae veritates, quod theoreticas ore duntaxat, practicas etiam operatione confiteri debemus*).

[375] Pope Benedict XIV, *Rerum*, "Martyrii causa ex parte Martyris", (*causa potest esse exercitium virtutis, in quam cadit praeceptum, aut consilium Fidei*).

[376] Ibid., (*Plures coluntur ut Martyres, propter potestatis, libertatis, et immunitatis Ecclesiasticae defensionem, propter iustitiam, castitatem, misericordiam, et charitatem interempti*).

To be killed for these virtues is therefore indirectly to be killed for the faith, and because the proper and authentic profession of these virtues is *praxis,* to be killed for performing deeds inspired by these virtues of justice, chastity or freedom, for example, is no less to be a martyr than to be killed for professing the truth of the Christian faith through confession. Both Aquinas and Benedict XIV use the example, surprisingly not commonly invoked my modern writers, of John the Baptist who "suffered death", as Aquinas, says, "not for refusing to deny the faith, but for reproving adultery."[377] It was "not directly for the sake of the faith that he was killed", as Benedict XIV explains, "but for a virtue relating to the faith."[378] Crucially, for both Aquinas and Benedict XIV, like the 20th-century advocates of this martyrology, these virtues are delimited, as Aquinas says, by "the spirit of Christ." This provides the inspiration and expression for Boff's own belief that martyrs are those who die for "virtuous actions in the spirit of Christ."[379]

In Chapter 1, we explained that in academic literature on martyrdom, Benedict XIV's work has an almost mythic status as the *locus classicus* of the Church's canonical conceptualisation and definition of martyrdom. As we will see in the next section, it is precisely this understanding which has been used to discredit and denounce the modern martyrology which is the subject of this chapter. What we have demonstrated by uncasing it from this exhibit, however, is that it is not as it has typically been remembered. On the contrary, like Aquinas, Benedict XIV's conceptualisation of martyrdom defends the core features of the martyrology of this chapter outlined above. Both writers accept that the martyr's cause is central and that this must unequivocally be the Christian faith. This faith is authentically professed by Christians through both confession and praxis, reflecting two dimensions of the Christian faith, and both may therefore be the cause of martyrdom.

[377] T. Aquinas, op. cit., p. 1719.
[378] Pope Benedict XIV, *Opus,* Cap. XIX., op. cit., (*etsi non directe pro fide sed pro virtute ad fidem relata occisus fuerit*).
[379] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 15.

Christian praxis consists in performing actions actualising the Christian virtues defined by Christ.

Not only do these writers therefore endorse this martyrology; rather, they see it as a necessary postulate of an authentic understanding of the Christian faith and discipleship. In so doing, they therefore testify to the two conceptions of Christian witness that this thesis explores; witness *to* Christ through confession, and witness *as* Christ by either death or Christian praxis. When Christians suffer death for this witness, both are legitimate causes of martyrdom. To both these writers, this modern martyrology is nothing if not traditional. Far from being *invented* in the 20th century, therefore, as we observed earlier, the question is how and why this martyrology has come to be *forgotten.* This is not a question this thesis can hope to answer, as it is no doubt a product of changing theological emphases on faith and justification, possibly during the Counter-Reformation,[380] but as we explore its implications and challenges, some explanations for the Church's selective understanding of martyrdom begin to emerge. Woodward is right, therefore, to join with other authors in noting with respect to this martyrology that the "door has been there for a very long time waiting to be opened."[381]

The Role of This Martyrology in Modern Martyrdom

The role of this martyrology in imagining martyrs can be demonstrated by its success in the proliferation of popular martyrs concurrent with the articulation of this martyrology in recent decades. That it has hitherto been chiefly involved in the imagination of *popular*

[380] E.g. J. I. González Faus, "Witnesses to Live, Killed by Hatred of Love" trans. P. Burns, *Concilium*, 2003/1, pp. 59-66.
[381] K. Woodward, op. cit., p. 150. See also A. L. Petersen, op. cit., pp. 94-95; K. Rahner, op. cit., p. 10,; J. I. González Faus, op. cit., p. 61, and T. L. Schubeck, "Salvadoran Martyrs: A Love That Does Justice," *Horizons*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2001, pp. 7-29, p. 11.

martyrs is unsurprising since it openly challenges, and calls for the revision of, the traditional ecclesial conceptions of martyrdom that popular martyrs often defy, as we outlined in Chapter 1. Indeed, part of the argument marshalled by its proponents points to this existing and increasing prevalence which it enjoys in popular martyr narratives. As we saw in Chapter 1, advocates of the social constructivist account of martyrdom argue that the democratisation evident in this popular use of the term indicates that martyrdom is a social construct that cannot be delimited by traditional theological expressions of its meaning. The contention this thesis aims to substantiate through this chapter, however, is that these popular martyrs are often imagined on the basis of this martyrology and, therefore, that, far from proving that martyrdom is an entirely social construct, the proliferation of popular martyrs illustrates the prevalence and significance of this martyrology in imagining many of the modern martyrs of today. Popular martyrs are most certainly imagined on the basis of theological conceptualisations of martyrdom, even if these are not *ecclesial*; and this represents an erroneous conflation between the two which is often made in the social constructivist account.

In order to prove this martyrology's role in making these modern popular martyrs, it is sufficient merely to explain that in the 20th century the reason it has been articulated is to defend the role this thesis claims it has. That is, its purpose is to prove the legitimacy of the martyrs its exponents venerate; the very martyrs this thesis claims it is responsible for imagining. As we have noted, Latin America has been at the centre of the explosion in popular martyrdom, sparked especially by the deaths of many clergymen during the conflicts of the latter half of the 20th century. As Petersen explains:

> In Central America alone, at least forty nuns and priests and one archbishop were murdered between 1971 and 1990. More than half of those killings occurred in El Salvador, the smallest country in Latin America.[382]

The designation of these individuals as martyrs became widespread, particularly among the ecclesial base communities of the popular churches. This phenomenon was most pronounced in El Salvador where most of these deaths occurred and where this popular martyrdom coalesced and became typified in the figure of Oscar Romero who not only promulgated the view that these victims were martyrs, but whose own martyrdom became emblematic and paradigmatic of this new wave of popular martyrs that swept the region. It was here in response to the deaths of friends and colleagues, that theologians in Latin America began to explain the theological justification for the increasingly popular designation of these dead as martyrs, and it is unsurprising, therefore, that the chief exponent of this popular martyrdom was El Salvadoran Jon Sobrino.

In *Witnesses to the Kingdom*,[383] a classic text on Latin American martyrology, Sobrino examines the popular martyrs of El Salvador. Chief among them, alongside Romero, are the priests Rutilio Grande, Rafael Palacios and Alfonso Navarro; the four Maryknoll sisters; and the Jesuits working at the University of Central America, close friends of Sobrino. Sobrino not only provided an exhortation to venerate these individuals as martyrs, but, with his colleagues across the region, he defends the existing extra-ecclesial popular designation of these dead as martyrs. They do so by articulating and defending the martyrology of the Jesus martyr that we have been examining and on whose basis these martyrs are imagined. These martyrs are perceived to have died because, in response to sin, they adopted a Christian praxis inspired and modelled by Christ which attempted to

[382] A. L. Petersen, op. cit., p. 63.
[383] J. Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom*, op. cit.

effectuate the liberating realisation of God's kingdom and the values of justice and truth that this involves.

This martyrology has not therefore been *developed* by its professional exponents; rather, it has been revealed, articulated, defended and consequently recommended by these writers. Sharing common cause with their congregation, they have given voice to the popular martyrology by which these martyrs were imagined. Why is this significant? By championing the legitimacy of these popular martyrs by defending and explicating the martyrology on the basis of which their martyrdom is understood, these theologians evidence the role this martyrology has in making these popular martyrs. The existence of this martyrology in the interpretive frameworks of modern popular martyrologists, therefore, can hardly be in doubt when the validity of imagining these individuals as martyrs is defended on the basis of the very martyrology whose existence we seek to prove.

That this martyrology has been so rigorously defended and therefore revealed to us is ironically a product of the Catholic Church's resistance to it. Not content with popular extra-ecclesial martyrdom, these Catholic theologians, such as Valiente, Sobrino, Boff and Rahner, venture to defend the theological coherence, orthodoxy and legitimacy of this martyrology in order to commend it to the Church and secure ecclesial recognition for these martyrs. This has not only drawn attention to the role and prevalence of this martyrology, but the theological authenticity to which they aspire, and which they achieve, has also illustrated that even popular martyrs, often imagined in periods of community trauma, are imagined on the basis of interpretive frameworks in which highly sophisticated theological ideas operate. The analysis of this martyrology is therefore of inestimable benefit to an analysis of popular martyrdom and helps to substantiate this thesis' claim that such theological conceptualisations of the meaning and significance of martyrdom, rooted deep

in the martyrdom traditions of the early Christian church, are involved in any Christian imagination of an individual as a martyr.

Latin American theologians have clearly illuminated the role of this martyrology in imagining their own popular martyrs, and its effect can also be observed in martyr narratives elsewhere around the world. This has been particularly prevalent as this martyrology has become increasingly popularised by the legitimacy these theologians have procured for it. The martyrs to which it gives rise are therefore increasingly being documented in modern martyrologies.[384] Three further examples from entirely different contexts and involving praxis which realises very different Christian virtues, can be offered to illustrate the diversity of martyrs to which this martyrology can be seen to have given rise and to exhibit the martyrs it has imagined outside of the Latin American context. As these examples will be drawn upon in the evaluation of this martyrology, alongside the martyrs of Latin America, they help to preface the analysis this chapter conducts.

A now classic example of a modern martyr is the case of Maximilian Kolbe, the controversy around whose martyrdom we will come to shortly. Maximilian Kolbe was a Polish Franciscan Friar interned in Auschwitz in 1941. On July 30th, 1941 ten prisoners from cell block 14 were selected to die by starvation in an underground bunker after a prisoner from their cell block had escaped. When Franciszek Gajownniczek was chosen he cried out "My wife! My children!" Kolbe volunteered to take his place, explaining that he was a priest. He died weeks later by lethal injection.[385]

Another example that has become a classic of modern martyr narratives, appearing in both Dewar and Bergman's modern martyrologies, is the story of Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, Roger Youderian, Ed McCully and Peter Fleming.[386] These were college friends working as

[384] See footnote 379.
[385] See D. Dewar, *Saint of Auschwitz: The Story of Maksymilian Kolbe*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982) and P. Mariani, "16670", in S. Bergman, op. cit.
[386] D. Dewar, *All For Christ*, op. cit. and S. Saint, "A Cloud of Witnesses," in S. Bergman, op. cit.

missionaries in Ecuador. In 1955, they chose to take the Gospel to the Huaorani people, an Amazonian tribe of Ecuador whom they knew were fiercely defensive and had killed every outsider they had encountered. After several visits dropping and receiving presents to make acquaintance with the tribe, the young men landed their plane and were killed by members of the tribe.

Finally, this martyrology has also imagined Stephen Biko as a martyr.[387] Biko was a South African anti-apartheid and civil rights activist who is now considered the father of the Black Consciousness Movement which campaigned for universal suffrage and the empowerment of black people, and organised resistance to the apartheid regime. After being arrested for breaking a travel restriction, he was brutally beaten by a police security officer and died in a prison cell on 12th September 1977.

Alongside these could be added equally well-known names such as Maria Goretti or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for what these martyr narratives all have in common is that their subject is imagined as a martyr on the basis that they died in the course of pursuing a Christian cause modelled or inspired by Christ. Out of compassion and charity, Kolbe sacrificed his own life for another; he has been called a "martyr of charity".[388] The Ecuadorian missionaries "had a burning desire to literally follow Jesus' command to take the gospel message to the world,"[389] they were martyrs to their mission. Stephen Biko "was a martyr to the cause of justice"[390] because this cause, as Archbishop Tutu's funeral sermon explains, is Christ's cause; "this young man, God's own son, Jesus Christ, had come preaching the good news of God's love for all his children…set them free from all that would make them less than he wanted them to be, fully human persons as free as Jesus Christ showed himself to be."[391] These, then,

[387] P. Elie, "A Bump on the Head", in S. Bergman, op. cit.
[388] K. Woodward, op. cit., p. 146.
[389] S. Saint, op. cit., p. 146.
[390] P. Elie, op. cit., p. 97.
[391] Quoted in ibid., pp. 98-99.

represent the martyrs that this martyrology imagines. The legitimacy and implications of doing so can only be evaluated after a critical analysis of this martyrology. This is what we turn to now.

Non Facit Poena Sed Causa

As we said in the introduction to this chapter, having introduced this martyrology in the first part of this chapter, we now move on to analysing it. We do so for two predominant reasons. Firstly, as we have said, it is clear that this fourth conceptualisation of the martyr's death being a cost of witnessing *as* Christ has been underdeveloped and even forgotten from Christian theology and ecclesiastical history. In order to substantiate the four-part model this thesis presents, therefore, this chapter aims to defend and explain this martyrology in order to reinstate it and justify its role in this thesis and in Christian martyrdom discourse. I want to show why it is that it is a legitimate expression of Christian theology and entirely consistent with Christian martyrdom discourse. This part therefore follows a different tack from those of previous chapters, for our analysis consists not first of a criticism of this martyrology but a *defence.*

It begins by outlining and responding to the chief objection levelled against it, which comes from the Roman Catholic Church and concerns the cause for which the martyr is, according to this martyrology, killed. This thesis finds this objection to be contrary to Church teaching, logically incoherent, and theologically inconsistent. Whilst invalid, this objection does raise a series of very important questions regarding this martyrology and responding to these questions illuminates and elucidates some of the features and implications of this martyrology which have hitherto been underdeveloped. Because this martyrology is very

much a live and urgent subject in modern theological discourse, this analysis therefore aims to contribute to the burgeoning work on this martyrology and its relationship with the Church

Secondly, however, because this martyrology has been so underdeveloped, this analysis is essential in order to foreground the requisite conceptual features necessary in order to prove the second contention of this thesis in the evaluative third part of this chapter. This is because the analysis of this martyrology, prompted by the questions this objection raises, reveals and draws out claims and substructures of this martyrology which bring to light other, more serious, difficulties, which the next section can then develop. This section's analysis is therefore indispensable, because it highlights and foregrounds the conceptual foundations of this martyrology which can then be the basis for a more rigorous critique.

This section begins, therefore, by explaining the traditional criticism of this martyrology, defended by the Church and rooted in Benedict XIV's classic text. This argues that the martyrs of this martyrology cannot be imagined as having died for the faith because they were not killed *in odium fidei.* We demonstrate this objection in the case of Maximilian Kolbe, whom we referred to earlier. For the Church, this is a matter of theological tradition and theological principle, and accordingly the refutation of this objection follows likewise. I find it erroneous on three counts, showing that it is: i) contrary to the very Church teaching on which it is based, ii) logically incoherent by providing a fallacious understanding of the martyr's cause, and iii) theologically inconsistent by being equally applicable to martyrs the Church does venerate.

Firstly, I demonstrate that the appeal to the *locus classicus* of this principle of *odium fidei* – Benedict XIV – to defend its use in this objection relies on a misrepresentation of the original text. In a highly revisionist analysis of this text, I show that Benedict XIV by no means believes that the martyr must be killed in *odium fidei* in any sense the term has come to imply and certainly not the sense I demonstrate it has for the Church. The truth of Benedict

XIV's use of the term represents a shocking revelation to those that would use it to undermine this martyrology because this use supports the belief that these martyrs are killed for the faith. This objection does, however, raise very interesting questions of principle: what does it mean to be killed for a cause and how is the martyr's cause therefore determined?

Secondly, therefore, I provide an analysis of these questions, and this illustrates that whilst the Church's objection represents a logical error, Benedict XIV's analysis is defended as a logically coherent position. The Church, I show, draws a fallacious equivalence between being killed for the faith and being killed *directly* for the faith. This results in a similarly erroneous conflation of a victim's cause with a persecutor's *odium*. I argue that one can also be killed *indirectly* for the faith and I explain the implications this has on what determines the martyr's cause. I do also show, however, that a proper analysis of these questions, whilst defending the claims of this martyrology against the Church, does impose certain conceptual restrictions on this martyrology in order for its claim that the martyr is killed *indirectly* for their faith to be legitimate. In demonstrating how this claim *can* be logically coherent, therefore, I attack its failure to be so in certain martyrs it has imagined.

Finally, the third criticism demonstrates the theological inconsistency of this objection. By reviewing the literature on early church persecution, we show that the martyrs of the early church were killed *indirectly* for their faith. They are therefore imagined as such on the basis of precisely the understanding of martyrdom this objection opposes. Most importantly, however, by and through these three responses to this objection, we begin to understand the conceptual underpinnings of this martyrology and to see that the basis upon which the martyr *is* understood to be killed for the faith is actually logically sound, entirely consistent with theological tradition and in fact a crucial part of Christian martyrdom history. Furthermore, however, whilst defending it from the Church's objection, this analysis also illuminates and foregrounds the conceptual foundations of this martyrology in a way which

allows the next section to explain and criticise the profound implications it has. To begin with, we turn to this objection.

Odium Fidei: An Objection

In a letter addressed to the Congregation of the Causes of Saints in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI observes that the contexts for Christian persecution have changed, warning that an aversion to the faith can often simulate different reasons of a political or social nature. Nevertheless, he emphasises:

> It is likewise necessary, directly or indirectly but always in a morally certain way, to ascertain the *odium fidei* of the persecutor. If this element is lacking there would be no true martyrdom according to the perennial theological and juridical doctrine of the Church.[392]

This expression "*odium fidei*" (hatred of the faith) derives from Benedict XIV's classic text on martyrdom to which we referred in Chapter 1, and it is now its most enduring feature in modern martyrdom discourse. This text is therefore perceived to be the basis in tradition for the doctrine of the Church to which Pope Benedict XVI refers, where it is believed to establish the principle that the persecutor's *odium fidei* is a requirement for martyrdom.

It is on the basis of this central requirement that this martyrology has been opposed by the Roman Catholic Church. Because its putative martyrs pursue and are directly killed for causes such as social justice and liberation, it is not clear that they are killed in *odium fidei,* and not for hatred of the cause or action they perform in pursuance of it. Furthermore, this is seen to be established on the basis of theological principle, as some scholars have

[392] Pope Benedict XVI, *Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants of the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints*, April 24, 2006.

noted.[393] Without the persecutor's *odium fidei*, it is uncertain that these individuals died for the faith and, therefore, that their deaths have any religious significance. It is impossible to say that the martyr has been killed for the Christian faith when the Christian faith was not persecuted. This case is strengthened by the fact that many of these putative martyrs – such as the popular martyrs of Latin America – are killed by persecutors who clearly do not harbour a hatred of the faith, because they themselves are Christians, indeed Catholics like them. It is said that it is not therefore sufficient to be killed *as a Christian*; rather, one must be killed for being a Christian if one's death is to claim the religious significance of martyrdom.

The Church's insistence on *odium fidei* comes into conflict with this martyrology in the case of Maximilian Kolbe. In response to great pressure from Polish Bishops, Pope Paul VI beatified Kolbe on October 17th, 1971. He told a delegation at the Vatican, however, which included Archbishop Karol Wojtyla, later Pope John Paul II, that Kolbe was a "martyr of *charity*." This construction was unsatisfactory to many and peculiar as it has no meaning to the Church and no judicial standing in Canon Law. Martyrs are martyrs of *the faith*; their cause being determined by the persecutor's hatred of the *faith.* Therefore, implicit in this designation was the suspicion that Kolbe's cause was not the faith because he was not killed *in odium fidei.*

This suspicion is confirmed in the later history of this case. As Archbishop of Kracow, whose Archdiocese had included Auschwitz where Kolbe died, Pope John Paul II defied convention by appointing a twenty-five-member commission to hear reports from two specially-appointed judges to determine if Kolbe could be venerated as a martyr. When asked about this in an interview,[394] Father Gumpel, one of the two judges in this case,

[393] E.g. T. Schirrmacher, "A Response to the High Counts of Christian Martyrs Per Year," in W. Taylor, et. al., (eds.), *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), pp. 37–42.
[394] Documented in K. Woodward, op. cit.,

explains that it was the difficulty of ascertaining that Kolbe had been killed *in odium fidei* that was the reason that the commission, in the rooms of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, quoted as Pope Benedict XVI above, decided overwhelmingly that Kolbe was not a martyr. He was neither arrested for his faith, and nor was there any evidence, after extensive analysis from witnesses, that Nazi Commandant Fritsch was motivated to kill him because he said he was a priest.

Nevertheless, Pope John Paul II disregarded this advisory commission and, on October 10th, 1982, with Franciszek Gajownniczek present, whose life Kolbe saved, canonised Kolbe as a martyr, mentioning neither that he was a martyr of the faith nor a martyr of charity.

This story illustrates how this criterion of *odium fidei* objects fundamentally with the most basic claim of this martyrology: that the martyr can be killed for the praxis they perform in pursuance of a cause inspired by the faith. What makes this impossible is the Church's belief that the persecutor's hatred defines the martyr's cause. Father Gumpel does not just look for *odium fidei*, he explains that by doing so the commission were trying to ascertain "whether Kolbe had died as a martyr for the faith."[395] An equivalence is therefore drawn between the persecutor's cause for killing (the *odium* by which it was motivated) and the cause for which one is killed. Because a martyr must be killed for the faith, an equivalence is also consequently drawn between *odium fidei* and martyrdom. Because martyrs of this martyrology are killed for resisting a government, protesting or speaking out against injustice, these, not the faith, are seen as their cause because they are the persecutor's *odium* motivating their killing. Because this is a secular cause, which might be promoted by those who are not inspired by the faith, and hated by those who love it, this cannot be the basis for claiming the putative martyr was killed for the faith.

[395] Ibid., p. 146.

Benedict XIV and Odium Fidei

As we have said, Benedict XIV's classic work on martyrdom is held as the *locus classicus* of this expression "*odium fidei*" and of its application in Canon Law to determine authentic martyrs. We have already explained that the belief that this text presents an orthodox definition of martyrdom which is inimical to this martyrology is a common misconception. Equally widespread is a misapprehension that the Church's understanding of the term and the belief that it represents a necessary condition for martyrdom, so injurious to this martyrology as we have shown, can be traced, like the expression itself, back to Benedict XIV. This is profoundly false. Examples of this are ubiquitous within the literature on this martyrology, even among proponents of this martyrology who would profit from dispelling this myth. Valiente, for instance, writes that "this treatise, which continues to guide the official Catholic definition of martyrdom to this day, stresses…the killer's unambiguous hatred for the faith."[396] My concern is that Benedict XIV's text has been maligned and misrepresented as an obstructive relic to this martyrology when in fact, as we shall again show, it actually supports the claims that this martyrology makes *against* its Church detractors. He would, I argue, be better imagined as an apologist for this martyrology.

We have already observed that the key features of this martyrology are supported by this text. Benedict XIV clearly states that because the martyr's cause must be a profession of the faith, and because the faith can be professed either through confession or through virtuous deeds commanded by it, either can be a cause of martyrdom. The question to ask, however, is: did Benedict XIV believe, with the Church, that these professions of the faith

[396] O. E. Valiente, op. cit., p. 20.

only become the martyr's cause when the faith it professes is hated? In other words, whilst all Christians profess the faith in these ways, is a profession of the faith only a *martyr's* cause – which Benedict XIV, accepting Augustine's dictum, believes determines a legitimate martyr – when the persecutor is motivated by a hatred of the faith that it professes rather than merely the profession itself? An analysis of his use of the word across his work shows that the answer is clearly in the negative.

It is true that Benedict XIV insists on the necessity of the *odium fidei* of the persecutor. He writes; "If you are killed in hatred of the faith, you are a martyr."[397] Indeed, so insistent is he that, like the contemporary Church, he warns that we must be sure "that the death arose from hatred of the faith and not some other principle."[398] This is important because, again like the Church, Benedict XIV also believes that the martyr's cause must be the persecutor's cause, so that the martyr's cause cannot be the faith if he is killed for "some other principle." Quoting Augustine, he writes; "A martyr is made not by the punishment, but by the cause and for martyrdom it is required both for the martyr and for the persecutor."[399] Like the Church, then, Benedict XIV believes that the martyr's cause – the cause for which they are killed – can only be the faith if hatred of it was the cause of the persecutor. Crucially, however, he qualifies what he means by *odium fidei* on numerous occasions, and here it becomes clear that the Church's interpretation of the term, attributed to him, is wildly different from his own.

Benedict XIV defines *odium fidei* as follows;

> Finally the name hatred of the faith is universally understood as a direct criticism of the faith, so that the faithful denied it, or that violated divine law. *Also any criticism*

[397] Benedict XIV, *Opus*, op. cit., Cap. XIV. 13.14: (*in odium fidei occisus, martyr sit*).
[398] Ibid., Cap. XIV. 13.14: (*mortem scilicet non provenisse ex odio in fidem…non alius alterius instituti*).
[399] Ibid., Cap. XIII. 1: (*Martyrem non facit poena, sed causa, et haec quidem ad martyrium sufficiens requiritur tam in martyr, quam in persecutore*).

> *on account of work required by Christ's teaching* or anything proceeding in a certain way from the promulgation of the faith, or defending it or illuminating it.[400]

Not only is this definition included in several instances in the main body of the text,[401] but Benedict XIV repeats it in his glossary of terms.[402] This shatters the traditional understanding of *odium fidei* and undermines any attempt to claim Benedict XIV as the traditional authority of this understanding. Clearly a revisionist approach to this text is necessary. Benedict XIV does *not* suggest that for the martyr's cause to be their profession of the faith, the persecutor's cause must be a direct hatred of the faith they profess.

Rather, what Benedict XIV means by suggesting that the martyr and the persecutor must have the same cause is that if the martyr's cause is to be the faith, then that which the persecutor hates must be a profession of the faith. In other words, the persecutor need not hate the faith *directly,* but that which they do hate must be a profession of the faith. This represents a subtle, but highly critical difference on which the very basis of this martyrology rests. In the former, the martyr's cause is discerned by the perspective of the persecutor. In the latter, it is discerned by the perspective of the victim.

If the martyr's cause is therefore the faith, and the faith is professed through both confession and praxis, as Benedict XIV explains, then for that which the persecutor hates to be a profession of the faith, they may hate either the faith itself or any action by which it is professed. That is, hatred either of the faith *or,* contra the modern interpretation by the Church, *its profession* would mean that what the persecutor hated was indeed a profession of the faith. Benedict XIV explains this when he writes that if the martyr's cause is "the faith of Christ or any other act of virtue related to God" then "the cause on the part of the tyrant

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[400] Ibid., Cap. XIV. 1: (*Demum nomine odii in fidem universim intelligitur directa fidei insectatio, ut fideles eam negent, vel divinam legem violent. Item insectatio alicuius propter opus ex Christi doctrina necessariam, aut aliquot modo tendens ad fidem propaganda, vel tuendam, aut illustrandam*). Italics are mine.
[401] E.g. ibid., Cap. VII. 1; Cap. VIII. 2, 3.
[402] Benedict XIV, *Rerum*, op. cit., "Odium" and "Martyrii causa ex parte Martyris".

ought to be hatred of the faith, or of any work that it prescribes."[403] The difference, as we will demonstrate in the next section, is that the faith is not *directly* but *indirectly* attacked.

As a consequence, because the faith itself need not be hated, but merely an action commanded and prescribed by the faith, Benedict XIV explains that "The martyr's tyrant can be a gentile or a heretic or even a Catholic."[404] He uses the example of John of Napomuk killed under the orders of King Wenceslaus IV for refusing to reveal the secrets of the confessional. Clearly it was not the Christian faith that drew the ire of his persecutor, but the action it motivated. It *was* a profession of the faith that led to his death, but it was the *profession*, not the faith it professed for which he was killed. Benedict XIV therefore declares that "John of Napomuk was killed by Catholics out of hatred of virtue (*odio in virtutem)* for a practice related to the faith."[405] The same could also be said for a considerably more well-known martyr: Thomas Becket. The *odium* of the persecutor was an action the victim performed or a cause they pursued; but because this action was seen to be a virtuous action professing the faith or this cause was seen to fulfil a cause of Christ's, the victim can be called a martyr.

This, we observe, represents precisely the position of this new martyrology, and its proponents should be emboldened by its corroboration by the very text used to object to it. This, and in particular the example of John of Napomuk, directly contradicts the Vatican's objection that since the Nazis showed no public hatred of the faith, Kolbe cannot be said to be a martyr, and the same applies to this objection in the context of Catholic persecutors in Latin America. As long as that which the persecutor does hate is a profession of the faith – either through confession of virtuous deeds – then one can be said to have been killed for the faith and be declared a martyr. The conflation between *odium fidei* and being killed for

[403] Benedict XIV, *Opus*, op. cit., Cap. XIII. 2.
[404] Ibid., 3: (*Tyrannus pro martyrio esse potest gentilis haereticus, vel etiam catholicus*).
[405] Ibid.: (*Joannes Nepomucenus a catholicis ex odio in virtutem, practica relatam ad fidem, occisi*).

the faith is not therefore one that Benedict XIV makes. Now we turn to illustrating why it is an erroneous one and why, therefore, Benedict XIV's position is the logically consistent one.

A Logical Objection to Odium Fidei

This objection from the Church raises some very interesting conceptual questions. Quite aside from the question of whether it is consistent with the tradition on which it relies, it is important to evaluate independently whether the objection is a legitimate one and whether Benedict XIV's account is legitimate. Doing so will not only vindicate Benedict XIV's position by elucidating some of the observations he makes in a logical way, but it will also clarify the conceptual implications of this martyrology. According to Augustine's dictum, which both parties in this contest accept, it is the cause for which one is killed that determines whether the victim is a martyr, and this cause must be the Christian faith, willingly professed.[406] The question we must first analyse, therefore, is: what does it mean to be killed for a cause? Now, the Church, as we have seen, provides a response to this question. They argue that to be killed for a cause is to be killed out of direct hatred of that cause, so that to be killed for the faith, as the martyr must, they must be killed out of a persecutor's *odium fidei.* In what follows, we will present what we believe to be a more thorough analysis of the questions this objection raises and which are crucial to understanding this martyrology.

We begin with the question of what it means to be killed for a cause. The Church's objection responds that to be killed for your cause is to be killed directly for your cause as an attack on that cause. We will show, however, that this represents a false equivalence by

[406] See the discussion in chapter 3 about why it must be willing.

demonstrating that one can not only be killed directly for one's cause, but also *indirectly.* To be killed for a cause, we will argue, entails being killed as a cost of expressing or pursuing one's cause. This may be *directly* because of the cause pursued or *indirectly* because of how it is pursued. The notion that one can be killed *indirectly* for one's cause destroys the conflation between the persecutor's *odium* and the victim's cause, and so we then move onto an analysis of a second question: what *does* determine the victim's cause in this case? We will see that the Church's position gives an illegitimate privilege to the perspective of the persecutor in determining the victim's cause; a privilege which this conceptualisation of martyrdom repatriates to the martyr. Whether that for which the victim was killed was a profession of their cause can only be determined by the cause the *victim* was perceived to be following.

What Does It Mean to be Killed for a Cause?

There are, I contend, two logical ways to understand what it means to be killed for a cause. To be killed for a cause is to be killed as a cost of pursuing that cause. One may be killed for one's cause either *directly* because of the cause one pursues, or *indirectly* because of how that cause is pursued. To be killed *directly* for a cause is how the Church understands being killed for one's cause. It is to be killed as an attack on the cause one pursues, motivated by disapproval or hatred of that cause. To be killed *indirectly* for a cause, however, is to be killed as an attack on that by which and through which a cause is pursued. One is killed for that cause because the action for which one is *directly* killed was both necessitated by, and is therefore inseparable from, the cause it pursued, and would not have been undertaken were it not for this cause. The killing, therefore, remains the cost of the cause pursued, even if it was not directly motivated by the cause pursued by the actions it attacked. Clearly, this

martyrology adopts the view that its martyrs are killed indirectly for their faith. This section intends to elucidate this concept. When we provide a more probing analysis of what it means to be killed *indirectly* for a cause, however, we see that it is only justified on grounds which *do* present a challenge to this martyrology and we can finally move to that challenge in the third part of this chapter.

In order for the notion of being indirectly killed for a cause to be logically coherent, however, it is crucial that two features are observed. These are often lacking in martyr narratives inspired by this modern martyrology, as we shall demonstrate with each using the examples of popular martyrs we have already introduced. Whilst I do not believe that this is necessarily evidence of this thesis' second contention that there is a logical incoherence to this martyrology, it does, I believe, demonstrate that this martyrology has been improperly understood. The result is that some martyrs it has imagined do not meet the claims made of them; specifically, that they are killed for their faith. The foundational principle of being killed *indirectly* for the faith is that that which the persecutor hates must be an intentional profession of the faith. Two principles follow necessarily from this. Firstly, to be killed indirectly for a cause it must be clear that the praxis was motivated by the cause. Secondly, it must be clear that the killer was motivated by the actions performed in pursuance of this cause. Without these, it cannot be said that the victim has been killed for their profession of the faith, even indirectly.

In the first instance, one is not killed for a cause merely because they are killed for performing actions which pursue it. One is only killed for the cause these actions are *intended* to pursue. They may, after all, be performing these actions in pursuance of a difference cause. One is not, for instance, killed for the cause of justice simply because they are killed for denouncing an unjust regime. An example of this is the martyrdom of Stephen Biko. Biko may well have been killed not only because he was black but because of the war

he waged against injustice in South Africa; a cause which Archbishop Tutu is unquestionably right to identify as a Christian cause. It is another thing altogether, however, to say that Biko was killed for his profession of the Christian faith. Indeed, whilst Biko's views on Christianity were complicated, there are times when, far from being inspired by the Christian faith, he is highly disparaging of it. He describes Christianity as a "cold cruel religion"[407] and inveighs against it for failing to meet the demands of the experiences of black people in South Africa. In an excoriating invective, he writes;

> In a country teeming with injustice and fanatically committed to the practice of oppression, intolerance and blatant cruelty because of racial bigotry; in a country where all black people are made to feel the unwanted stepchildren of a God whose presence they cannot feel; in a country where father and son, mother and daughter alike develop daily into neurotics through sheer inability to relate the present to the future because of a completely engulfing sense of destitution, the Church further adds to their insecurity by its inward-directed definition of the concept of sin and its encouragement of the *mea culpa* attitude. Stern-faced ministers stand on pulpits every Sunday to heap loads of blame on black people in townships.[408]

Clearly, then, there are at least times when Biko saw his fight for racial justice as being waged *in spite of* rather than *because* of the Christian faith. The belief that he is a martyr to the Christian faith, then, cannot be based solely on his pursuing a Christian cause without evidence that it was this cause that he intentionally pursued.

Similarly, in the second instance, one is not killed *for* a cause simply because they are killed pursuing it. One is not killed for the cause of justice simply because they were killed whilst speaking about against injustice. They must be killed *for* speaking out against injustice. An example of this is in another example we have already drawn upon: the

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[407] T. S. Maluleke, "May the Black God Stand Please!: Biko's Challenge to Religion," in A. Mngxitama, A. Alexander, and N. C. Gibson, (eds.), "*Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*", (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), quoted on p. 122.
[408] Ibid., p. 123.

Ecuadorian missionaries. Steve Saint, son of Nate Saint, one of the deceased, continued to have interactions with the Huaorani tribe that murdered his father. He later learned that the reason they were killed was tribal politics. One of the members of the tribe had eloped with a girl he intended to marry. When they were apprehended by other members of the tribe, including the girl's brother who disapproved of the marriage, the couple concealed their elopement by claiming that they were fleeing from the *cowodi*, the missionaries. The missionaries were killed as a result of a protective fear whipped up by a lie.[409] Therefore, the reason why the missionaries were killed was not because of hatred of some praxis they committed in pursuit of their cause, but for an altogether different reason.

Neither Biko nor the missionaries can therefore be properly imagined as having been killed, even indirectly, for their cause. What, therefore, *does* it mean to be killed indirectly for your cause, as this martyrology maintains? What the preceding two features demonstrate is that, just as with being killed *directly* for your cause, there must, precisely as Benedict XIV explained, be a *conjunction* between the cause of the victim and the cause of the persecutor. One is indirectly killed for a cause if, and only if, the persecutor's cause for killing – the object of the persecutor's *odium* – was the praxis the victim willingly undertook in pursuance of this cause. Only thus can one be imagined to have been killed as a *cost* of pursuing that cause.

To return now to the *martyr's* death, we can observe that the martyr is killed for the faith if they are killed as a cost of their willing profession of the faith. To be killed *directly* for one's faith is to be killed out of hatred of the professed faith itself, whilst to be killed *indirectly* for the faith is to be killed out of hatred of the *profession* itself. Applying the foregoing analysis to the latter case, which this martyrology adopts, one is therefore only killed indirectly as a cost of professing their faith if that which the persecutor hates is indeed

[409] S. Saint, op. cit.

a profession of this faith. This, we note, is precisely the formulation used by Benedict XIV. There must be a conjunction between the persecutor's *odium* and the praxis by which the victim's faith is professed. In the case of Biko, the persecutor's hatred of Biko's praxis was a profession of something besides the faith; and in the case of the missionaries, the missionary praxis by which the faith *was* professed was not what the persecutor hated. In both cases, therefore, there was no such conjunction: their deaths were not the cost of professing the Christian faith. Biko was not professing the faith, and the deaths of the missionaries were not the cost of their doing so.

It is important to note that the social constructivist approach that this thesis supports means that we cannot deny that this invalidates a martyrdom, and, therefore, that Steve Biko and the Ecuadorian missionaries are not martyrs. They have been imagined as martyrs and the martyrology this chapter explores remains the martyrology by which they are thus imagined. Nevertheless, an analysis of what it means to be killed for your faith – a principle this martyrology relies upon – reveals that there is a logical incoherence to their martyrdom which undermines its religious significance. They cannot, I submit, be said to have been killed for their faith. It remains the case that this is a criticism that is true for many popular martyrs, even if it is not fatal to this martyrology and certainly not for the reason the Church believes. The foregoing analysis therefore represents a revision to this martyrology which would not only substantiate, but advance the legitimacy of its claims.

What Determines the Martyr's Cause?

The objection raised by the Church therefore involves an invalid conflation between being killed *directly* for a cause and being killed for a cause, affirming erroneously, I contend, that one can only be killed for a cause *directly.* This error also, however, conceals

an equally untenable equivalence necessitated by this between the persecutor's *odium* and the victim's cause; for if one can only be killed for a cause out of hatred of that cause, then the persecutor's *odium* defines the victim's cause. Once these false equivalences are corrected, however, and we recognise that one can also be killed *indirectly* for a cause, then what, if not the persecutor's *odium,* defines the cause for which one is indirectly killed? Here, it follows from the previous analysis that the victim's cause becomes the cause in pursuance of which the praxis that the persecutor hated, and for which the victim was killed, was performed. To ascertain the cause those actions pursued, it would now be preposterous to refer to the *persecutor's* motivation. Rather, we must consult the cause in the mind of the victim. What establishes whether this cause is a *martyr's* cause – which is properly understood to be the Christian faith – is therefore not the *odium fidei* motivation of the persecutor, but whether it is the Christian faith that can be perceived to have been the cause pursued by the praxis for which the victim is killed. That is, whether these actions were a profession of the faith. Again, therefore, we see that this is entirely consistent with Benedict XIV's analysis.

In an interesting essay comparing martyr counts of the 21st and 20th century, Johnson and Zurlo take up this question of what it means to be killed for the faith. They too recognise that one can be killed indirectly for the faith, explaining that "When Christians are killed as a result of actions related to their faith, they fit our definition of martyr."[410] What is more telling, however, is their acknowledgement that to recognise an attack on these actions as an indirect attack on the faith "the motives of the victims are considered more important than those of the killers in identifying a martyrdom situation."[411] Traditionally, the Church's misconception about what it means to be killed for the faith has conferred a prejudicial

[410] T. M. Johnson, G.A. Zurlo, op. cit., p. 684.
[411] Ibid., p. 681.

privilege on the perspective of the persecutor in defining the martyr's cause which has disregarded how the martyr themselves might construe the cause for which they die. What Johnson and Zurlo recognise is that a more nuanced analysis rectifies this asymmetry by allowing the cause the martyr pursued in life to be the cause for which they died.

The Theological Inconsistency of Odium Fidei

We have observed that the objection raised by the Church is contrary to a rigorous analysis of its own tradition in Benedict XIV. We have also demonstrated that a more thorough analysis of the questions this objection raises shows that the claims of this martyrology that it attacks are not only consistent with the teachings of Benedict XIV, but also supported by an independent examination of the questions this objection raises. The martyrs this martyrology imagines, therefore, can indeed be said to have been killed for the faith. In this section, we seek to illustrate that the *odium fidei* objection is theologically inconsistent and contrary to ecclesiastical history. That is, it is an objection that the Church does not apply to martyrs they themselves venerate. We evidence this by returning to the crucible of Christian martyrdom, the early church. We illustrate, as scholars have forcefully argued, that it cannot be unassailably proven that Christian persecutors were motivated by *odium fidei*. Indeed, we will see that the weight of opinion and evidence is to the contrary.

What this analysis of the persecutor's real motivation demonstrates is that the only way to imagine these victims as martyrs is to adopt this martyrology's conceptualisation of them being killed *indirectly* for their faith. The example of the early church martyrs is important, therefore, not only in demonstrating the self-defeating nature of the Church's objection, but also in representing the importance of the very conception of martyrdom this martyrology advocates and which this objection opposes. It is clear, therefore, that the

Church are adopting a criticism which has historically and traditionally been no barrier to legitimate martyrdom and which they defy by the veneration of these martyrs. The modern understanding of *odium fidei* used to object to this martyrology, therefore, has been highly distorted in a way which would be inconceivable when reflecting on the martyrs of the early church. Another conclusion also follows. Our analysis demonstrates that this martyrology was in fact operative in the early church. The forthcoming discussion, therefore, highlights the contribution that this modern martyrology can make to early church history. It positions modern popular martyrs in the company of the orthodox martyrs of the early church.

Christian Persecution in the Early Church

We have already observed that there are examples of martyrs whom the Church venerates, such as Thomas Becket, John the Baptist, John of Napomuk and Maria Goretti, whose persecutors harboured no direct *odium fidei,* and who are therefore killed indirectly for their faith, even by other Christians. In order to evaluate whether the same is true for the martyrs of the early church, who embody the model of orthodoxy for Christian martyrdom, we must look to the persecutor's motivation for killing these martyrs. As we will see, these motivations are broad, manifold, and sometimes contested. The point is not, therefore, to provide a definitive explanation for why the early Christian martyrs were killed. Rather, the point is to observe the absence of the unambiguous hatred of the faith we would expect to find given the Church's modern insistence on it as a criterion for legitimate martyrdom. Fortunately, a broad consensus has been reached on the most likely and most common motivation for killing the Christians and it is therefore sufficient merely to demonstrate, drawing briefly on the evidence of a few authors, that hatred of the faith cannot without

dispute be imputed to the persecutor, and indeed that the dominant view has long been to the contrary.

Clearly, this thesis does not have the scope to enter into this massive field and the fascinating questions surrounding early Christian persecution.[412] Fortunately, within this large field, there are several questions with which we need not concern ourselves. We need not focus, for instance, on juridical questions such as the legal nature of the charges brought against Christians, the specific legal instrument on which this accusation was founded, the legal institutions by which it was employed, or other elements of the judicial process. Though, for context, we may begin by explaining those uncontroversial conclusions that broad scholarly consensus has arrived at from the contributions of Roman historians and experts in Roman Law, alongside ecclesiastical historians.

It is now widely accepted that there was no general imperial mandate, edict or law which proscribed Christianity or which contended with Christians as members of a *collegium illicitum.* Instead, scholarly agreement is that a correspondence in 122 A.D. between the Emperor Trajan and Pliny, the Governor of Bithynia, demonstrates the existence of an imperial rescript that *allowed*, but did not *require*, Christians to be persecuted. Whether to do so was at the behest of the local Provincial Governor who, in lieu of any existing legal instrument, acted using a *cognitio extra ordindem*, a power, derived from their *imperium*, which allowed them to bring charges against citizens within the imperial *mandata* in force in his province. The specific nature of this rescript and the legal grounds for the charges it permitted to be brought against Christians is the matter of a famous scholarly debate

[412] For a review of recent literature on this topic see C. R. Moss, "Current Trends", op. cit.

contained in the thrilling exchange between G. E. M. de Ste. Croix[413] and A. N. Sherwin-White[414] on their respective interpretations of this Pliny-Trajan correspondence.

It has become conventional to split Christian persecution into three periods. The death of Jesus until the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64; the Great Fire until 250 A.D; and the persecutions begun under Decius in 251 A.D. until the Edict of Toleration in 311. What concerns us is the Cult of the Martyrs which arose from the persecutions in the second and third stages of this history. It is widely agreed that the persecution under Nero in the second stage was initiated by the Emperor in order to scapegoat Christians for the crime of incendiarism and divert attention away from the rumours that he himself had started the fires.[415] By the correspondence of 122, Pliny writes to Trajan that Christians were charged "with being Christians".[416] The question we must concern ourselves with, therefore, is: what motivated this persecution against Christians, both in the existing rescript and the continued discretionary persecution exercised by Provincial Governors? What was it about Christians that earned them this fatal condemnation?

Why Were the Christians Persecuted?

The *mandata* by which these Governors were commanded to exercise their judicial power gave broad responsibilities; for instance, it commanded the Governor to rid the province of *mali homines*, and to ensure it was kept *pacata atque quieta* ('settled and

[413] See G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" op. cit., and "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted: A Rejoinder", *Past and Present*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1964, pp. 28-33.
[414] A. N. Sherwin-White, "The Christian Persecutions and Roman Law Again", *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1952, pp. 199-213; "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? An Amendment", *Past and Present*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1964, pp. 23-27.
[415] We receive this from the only contemporary authority, Tacitus. See. *Annals*, xv. 44.5.
[416] Pliny, *Epistolae*, x. 96-97.

orderly').[417] Given the innumerable factors that may have threatened the *pacata atque quieta*, there was consequently a "great latitude that Roman governors enjoyed in the conduct of their trials."[418] Accordingly, summarising the literature on this topic, Moss judiciously explains that; "A medley of individual perspectives, religious, political, and social motivations, and personal competition fanned the flames of the persecutor's fires."[419] Before moving onto the dominant view for why the Christians were persecuted, it is worth briefly mentioning a rival theory, proposed by Sherwin-White, which takes account of different evidence.

Sherwin-White believes that the dominant view that Christians were persecuted for the political implications of their monotheism, which we will come onto shortly, does not sufficiently account for the motivation of persecutors in the early periods of persecution. He draws on evidence from contemporary writers Tacitus, Pliny and Suetonius, noting their unique authority; Tacitus and Pliny having been Governors in areas where Christians were prevalent, and Suetonius having been the chief imperial secretary for provincial affairs in Rome.[420] Sherwin-White writes;

> In all three the only ground indicated for the proscription of the cult is its association with crimes and immoralities - *flagitia, scelera, maleficia.*[421]

It is not clear how seriously these crimes of incest and cannibalism were believed, but given the preoccupation with refuting them that the Christian apologists show, it is possible that they were common among the public whom these Provincial Governors wanted to appease. Whilst this theory is fiercely and convincingly repudiated by de Ste. Croix, he does concede

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[417] G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" op. cit., p. 16.
[418] J. B. Rives, "Piety of a Persecutor", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1996, pp. 1-25, p. 1.
[419] C. R. Moss, "Current Trends", op. cit., p. 25.
[420] A. N. Sherwin-White, "An Amendment", op. cit., p. 23.
[421] Ibid. Pliny, *Epistolae*, x.96.2; Tacitus *Annals*, xv.44.3-4 and Suetonius, *Nero*, 16.2.

that its popular belief among the masses certainly *may* have been a motivating factor in a persecutor's striving to appease them, as it was a factor in choosing Christians as Nero's scapegoats. If it *was* relevant, then what is significant is that on this account, Christians were not persecuted out of an *odium fidei*, but out of a disgust at the practices they adopted. In particular, it is especially noteworthy that in his letter to the Emperor, Pliny asks whether or not he should prosecute merely for the *nomen Christianum* or for the *flagitia cohaerentia nomini.*

The prevailing view among scholars, however, is represented and defended in de Ste. Croix's landmark essay, and is described even by his opponent, as one with which "few will disagree."[422] Why were the Christians persecuted?

> The answer is clear: it is given to us over and over again in the sources. It was not so much the positive beliefs and practices of the Christians which aroused pagan hostility, but above all the negative element in their religion: their total refusal to worship any god but their own. The monotheistic exclusiveness of the Christians was believed to alienate the goodwill of the gods, to endanger what the Romans called the pax deorum (the right harmonious relationship between gods and men), and to be responsible for disasters which overtook the community.[423]

Much is said in this laconic explanation, and in order to illustrate the significance of retelling this history in this section, we must probe a little further. To understand why the Christians were killed for failing to worship the gods, we must appreciate the significance of doing so in Roman society. Only then can we unpack the various elements in this quotation above and illuminate the *nature* of the persecutor's motivation.

In Roman society, the gods occupied an important political and socio-cultural space, as well as their decreasingly theological space. As Frend writes, "The gods in their totality

[422] A. N. Sherwin-White, "An Amendment", op. cit., p. 23.
[423] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" op. cit., p. 24

were the guardians of Rome. Failure to give them their proper due, embodied in rites handed down from time immemorial, could bring disaster to Rome and her achievement."[424] Whenever chaos of some sort struck, it was attributed to discord in this balance. For this reason, for instance, after the pestilence of 463 B.C., universal sacrifice was commanded as a restorative measure. The Roman masses were not so much pious, therefore, as "deeply superstitious."[425] Because, as de Ste. Croix explains, "the whole of the Roman state religion was very much a community affair,"[426] religious rites such as worshipping the gods were perceived as a societal ritual and a crucial part of public and civic life. They kept the harmony of the *pax deorum* which in turn ensured the stability and prosperity of Rome. Failure to worship the gods threatened this *pax deorum.* The Roman state appeared to have a system of toleration which permitted freedom of religion, provided one's religious duties to the *pax deorum* were fulfilled. In what de Ste. Croix calls "the most illuminating single text in all the ancient sources, for the understanding of the persecutions",[427] Paternus explains to Cyprian that the emperors have decreed that "Those who do not profess the Roman religion must not refuse to take part in Roman religious ceremonies."[428] The Christians, however, did just that.

In a famous passage, Tertullian explains how, within this context described, the Christians' refusal to worship was believed to threaten the *pax deorum* and was held responsible for the ills that befell Rome:

> …they think the Christians the cause of every public disaster, of every affliction with which the people are visited. If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an

[424] W. H. C. Frend, op. cit., p. 105.
[425] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" op. cit., p. 24
[426] Ibid., p. 25.
[427] Ibid., p. 24
[428] Quoted in ibid., p. 31.

> earthquake, if there is famine or pestilence, straightaway the cry is "Away with the Christians to the lion!"[429]

With the help of Tertullian's invective, we are now in a position to evaluate the *nature* of Christian persecution. Christians were not persecuted, as Ste. Croix says, for any "positive beliefs or practices." Neither the Christian faith itself, nor its beliefs or practices, were perceived as warranting criminal charges, and indeed, practising Christianity privately was not illegal. Rather, as the sacrifice test demonstrates, the criminal act was the lack of *pietas* demonstrated by "their total refusal to worship any god but their own."[430] This was a criminal charge because of the threat it was believed to pose to civic order, as we described above.

Nor was it the religious belief this refusal demonstrated that was attacked. As Cunningham writes;

> …Romans were notoriously indifferent to what people actually believed except when their belief threatened the power of the state: one is on safe ground saying that the disapproval of the Christian movement by the Roman state is best understood as *politically and not religiously inspired*.[431]

The Christians' refusal to sacrifice represented a refusal to conform to a Roman tradition and crucial aspect of public life believed to safeguard a prosperous and peaceful society. By their refusal to perform a basic civic rite, Christians were a danger to society and a menace to the orderliness of Roman society for which the Provincial Governor was responsible. Workman observes; "…the State preferred, as a rule, to proceed against the Christians, not as members of an illegal guild, but as *political* agitators or anarchists of the

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[429] Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 40, op. cit., pp. 121-122. See also Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, IX, op. cit., p. 436.
[430] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted", op. cit., p. 24.
[431] L. S. Cunningham, "Christian Martyrdom: A Theological Perspective", op. cit., p. 7. Italics are mine.

most dangerous form."[432] Wilken supports this reading, arguing that the Romans saw Christians as a *superstitio* rather than a *religio.*[433] Accordingly, as Ste. Croix says, "Probably the main reason why some martyrdoms – perhaps many martyrdoms – took place was that they were thought to be necessary if the province were to be kept '*pacata atque quieta.*'"[434] Christians disobeyed their civic duty to the welfare of the community and were consequently deemed political subversives. For this they were killed, as would anyone else who threatened the *pax deorum.* The foremost objector to this reading is Sherwin-White. Yet, even he believes the motivation was political, arguing that Christians were killed when they refused to sacrifice not because of the threat that posed to the *pax deorum,* but because "the test was reasonable and its refusal revealed *contumacia*"[435] ("obstinacy") towards the Governor's authority.

Odium Fidei and the Martyrs of the Early Church

Through this analysis, the theological inconsistency of the Church's objection to this modern martyrology is brought very clearly into focus. For what is significant in reviewing this analysis is that in each of the three motivations we have examined for persecuting Christian martyrs – i) their *flagitia*; or for their refusal to worship, either ii) because of the threat that posed to the *pax deorum,* or iii) the *contumacia* it demonstrated – a direct *odium fidei* is most certainly not evident. As Workman emphatically says, "Christians were not persecuted because of their creed."[436] Rather, they were persecuted for the political causes

[432] H. B. Workman, op. cit., p. 32. Italics are mine.
[433] R. L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
[434] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted", op. cit., p. 16.
[435] A. N. Sherwin-White, "The Christian Persecutions and Roman Law Again," op. cit., p. 210.
[436] H. B. Workman, op. cit., p. 28.

and praxis that creed motivated; a praxis that was inimical to the Roman authorities, even if the cause which inspired it was not the focus of their enmity.

In their *odium fidei* objection, therefore, the Church is guilty of a profound double-standard. Modern martyrs are asked to meet a test of legitimacy that the canonical martyrs of the early church would fail. This demonstrates that the *odium fidei* principle, as defined by the Church, is not only, as we have seen, contrary to theological tradition and logically incoherent, but it is also opposed to the very meaning of Christian martyrdom. For as we saw in Chapter 2, so central are these martyrs of the early church to the subsequent evolution and definition of martyrdom, that what cannot be said of their martyrdom cannot be said of Christian martyrdom.

Accordingly, we may go further and propose on this basis that however the cause of these early martyrs is understood must, therefore, be a legitimate conceptualisation of martyrdom. Because, as we have shown, the martyrs were killed for political reasons, they cannot be imagined as having been killed *directly* for the faith.

It is clear, I contend, that in order to defend the claim that these martyrs *have* been killed for their faith, as Christian theology surely must, they must be imagined as having been killed *indirectly* for this faith. That is, they were killed as a cost of the praxis they adopted in pursuance of the faith. The cause of the persecutor may have been entirely political – an attempt to ensure civic order – but because that for which the victims were killed *was* a profession of the Christian faith, they can be said to have been killed for this faith. In this instance, the faith was professed through a resolute and exclusive monotheism which manifested in a refusal to worship any other god. It seems, then, that the Church is forced to accept the legitimacy of the principle of the persecutor's *indirect* hatred of the martyr's faith as a basis for martyrdom, or else they undermine the very concept of martyrdom they strive, by this objection, to safeguard. Since this is precisely the

conceptualisation of martyrdom that the Church, by their *odium fidei* objection, oppose, by their veneration of the early church martyrs, the Church implicitly supports the theological and conceptual claims made by this martyrology.

For proponents of this martyrology who believe that martyrs witness *as* Christ, it is, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Christ's own martyrdom that is most formative to this Christian concept. It is therefore how Christ himself can be imagined as having been killed for his faith that is instructive for future martyrs. Crucially for them, as González Faus, a proponent of this martyrology, laconically explains; "Jesus was not killed out of hatred of the faith."[437] Indeed, as Freyne elucidates, Jesus was "condemned on an explicitly political charge."[438] It is the fact that Jesus himself is killed only *indirectly* for the faith and *directly* for political reasons, that not only means that the Church's objection is invalided by the highest authority, but that this notion of being killed *indirectly* is established on it.

How is it that the Church has come to adopt an understanding of *odium fidei* which runs so contrary to its own theological and ecclesiastical tradition? Given the significance of its opposition to this martyrology, I suspect research into this question would yield fascinating results. González Faus has argued that its current meaning reflects a change that underwent during the Counter Reformation which emphasised the *theoretica* of the faith over the *practica.*[439] Clearly this thesis does not have the scope to enter into this discussion, though in the next section we will see that readdressing this balance creates significant problems for the Church, particularly in political theology, that may explain their reticence to endorse it. Whatever the cause, and however prudent, therefore, we might suggest that there was at least some expediency in the Church's insistence on the persecutor's hatred of the principles of the *faith* rather than its expression through praxis. By the insistence on its

[437] J. I. González Faus, op. cit., p. 59.
[438] S. Freyne, op. cit., p. 54.
[439] Ibid., 60.

current understanding of *odium fidei*, the Church has hitherto managed to avoid the substantial issues that we will show its correct understanding raises.

The Purpose of This Analysis

A lot has now been said about the *odium fidei* objection. At the commencement of this section it was asserted that this analysis represented not merely a novel contribution to the work on this martyrology, but was essential in order to foreground certain features of this martyrology which help to illuminate its difficulties. It is now time, therefore, to bring into focus the key features of this analysis and to demonstrate how it develops the argument this thesis makes by preparing the way and providing a context for the subsequent criticisms we submit.

In this section, we have presented the dominant objection to the martyrology this chapter explores, and characterised it as representative of the Church's opposition to it. The objection opposes this martyrology on the basis that its putative martyrs cannot, as they must, be imagined as having been killed for the Christian faith because to have been so, the Church argues, is to be killed out of *direct* hatred of the faith (*odium fidei*). On this basis, the Church has excluded this martyrology from Christian martyrdom discourse. Clearly, this thesis, by attempting to defend its role in this discourse, has defended this martyrology's orthodoxy against this challenge. This objection raised a number of interesting and important questions for this martyrology, chiefly concerning the martyr's cause and what it means to be killed for the faith. Following three very different evaluative approaches, the belief that the martyr must necessarily be killed *directly* for their faith was found to be i) contrary to the tradition of Benedict XIV on which it is based, ii) logically incoherent, and iii) theologically inconsistent.

It was unmistakably clear from each of these three lines of enquiry that the *direct* hatred of the faith this martyrology is charged with lacking, does not *exclusively* capture what it means to be killed for the faith and cannot, therefore, be used as the *sine qua non* of authentic and legitimate Christian martyrdom. For what instead emerged from these analyses is a very clear elucidation of what it means for the martyr to be killed *indirectly* for their faith. That is, it became clear that a victim may legitimately be a martyr not only if they are imagined as having been killed *directly* for their faith, but also *indirectly* for the praxis by which that faith was pursued and professed. Whether or not one can be imagined as a martyr depends, therefore, on whether or not the praxis for which they were killed can be imagined as having been performed as a profession of the faith or in pursuance of a cause commanded by the faith.

This understanding was compellingly borne out by the threefold analysis we have provided of the Church's claim that the martyr must be *directly* killed. Firstly, this understanding was seen to be entirely consistent with the classic teachings of the Christian faith. Both Aquinas and Benedict XIV argue that the faith may be professed either through words or through praxis, virtuous deeds, and the pursuance of causes inspired by the faith. Contrary to common misbelief, Benedict XIV explains in no uncertain terms that one may therefore be said to have been killed for one's faith not only *directly* out of hatred of the faith, but also *indirectly* out of hatred of those means by which it is professed. Secondly, a rigorous analysis of what it means to be killed for a cause showed that the Church's objection represented a false equivalence. This analysis defended the notion of the martyr being killed *indirectly* for the faith as logically coherent, if conceptualised appropriately. Finally, and most convincingly, our third analysis demonstrated that the martyrs of the early church were most likely killed *indirectly* for their faith, establishing this conceptualisation as not only

consistent with, but central to, the experiences of the Christian faith and its understanding of martyrdom.

Indeed, what emerged from this analysis was the observation that martyrs are actually very rarely killed *directly* for their faith alone. Certainly, we showed that this could not be proven in the martyrs of the early church, Christ himself, and several high-profile martyrs such as John the Baptist and Thomas Becket. This analysis has therefore shown, as Boff has already perceptively observed, that "It is not simply their faith that is hated…Christians are not, normally, hated because they call themselves Christians."[440] Far from being a *sine qua non* of legitimate martyrdom, therefore, the notion of being killed *directly* for the faith may represent a conception of martyrdom that is true to a minority of martyrs. This observation is important to the analysis in the rest of this chapter because it suggests that there is often and already a process of discerning the actions and causes that can legitimately be conceived as professions of the faith.

How does this analysis develop this chapter's *analysis* of this martyrology? This section's examination of the Church's belief that the martyr must be killed *directly* for the faith has had two primary purposes. Firstly, it has drawn our attention to the alternative understanding this martyrology adopts of how the martyr is killed *indirectly* for the faith. In evaluating the Church's objection to this martyrology and the questions it raises, therefore, we have, perhaps counter-intuitively, arrived at a considerably clearer apprehension of this martyrology's understanding of the martyr's cause. Secondly, it has unambiguously demonstrated that this belief is consistent with church teaching, logically coherent, and consistent with the experiences and tradition of Christian martyrdom. Far from being disavowed by it, therefore, this understanding is absolutely central to Christian martyrdom and therefore one with which Christian theology must reckon. We have, therefore, defended

[440] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 14.

the inclusion of this martyrology in this thesis' discussion on Christian martyrdom and insisted on its inclusion in Christian martyrdom discourse and therefore its relevance in the construction of martyr narratives. In so doing, we have provided a novel contribution to its analysis in contemporary Christian theology.

How do these observations advance the *evaluative* aims of this chapter? They are indispensable to the submissions this chapter makes. For I contend that it is this understanding of being killed *indirectly* for the faith, and its centrality to Christian martyrdom, that makes this martyrology so controversial and which presents great difficulties for Christian theology. For instance, in the forthcoming analysis I will show that the belief that the praxes and causes for which an individual is killed are sufficient to establish martyrdom if they are perceived to have been undertaken in pursuit of the Christian faith collapses the distinction between secular and religious causes in a way which has profound implications for political theology. As we shall show, it makes martyrdom a political statement about the praxes and causes by which the faith can be professed, and asks: what does the faith demand of us politically? The foregoing section has therefore shone a light on the aspects of this martyrology that provide the basis for its critique in this next section. More than this, however, because we have demonstrated the universal nature of this martyrology – operative as it is in so many martyr narratives – the forthcoming analysis has been prefaced by an elucidation of its profound relevance to martyrdom broadly conceived. What follows, therefore, may not unfairly be represented as a critique of Christian martyrdom.

The Martyr's Cause

In the third and final part of this chapter, we begin to evaluate this martyrology in light of the analysis we have provided in the second part. We begin by illustrating that the observation we have made showing that the martyr is only *indirectly* killed for the faith makes this martyrology profoundly political. Because the martyr is killed *directly* for broadly-speaking political[441] causes and praxis, this martyrology involves the *theopolitical* affirmation that this *direct* cause for which they were killed was a profession of the faith. In what remains of this chapter, I seek to outline why the political character of this martyrology is particularly contentious and why it raises serious problems for contemporary political theology. In brief, I show that these political claims assume an especially robust political theology which is able to recognise the political realities and responsibilities of the Christian faith. It is this political character and the strong political theology which it demands which problematises this martyrology, and therefore also contemporary political theology more broadly, by forcing it into a dilemma between two problematic conceptualisations of theopolitical discourse. Because this section is quite extensive, a brief outline will aid in following its structure.

I begin by showing how this martyrology challenges what I term a *weak* political theology which attempts to draw a sharp distinction between religion and politics as two independent, distinct discourses and which has come to typify characterisations of public discourse. I show that, because this martyrology privileges and assumes the perspective of the victim, for whom the political cause for which they are perceived to be killed *is* a *theopolitical* religious cause, this martyrology collapses the distinction on which this

[441] I use the term in a broad sense encompassing legal, civil, economic, moral and socio-cultural issues as well as more strictly *political* questions.

political theology depends. I show how this perspective not only represents a contrary political theology but also presents a serious challenge to a *weak* conceptualisation of contemporary Christian political theology. It reveals it to be complacent, inconsistent, docetic with respect to the realities in which the Christian faith is practised, as evidenced by the martyrs this martyrology imagines. Instead, this martyrology demands of Christian theology a robust *strong* political theology which can validate this martyrology by affirming these theopolitical causes and actions as legitimate professions of the faith.[442]

In the following section, therefore, we briefly examine how proponents of this martyrology have expressed this view, calling for what Sobrino calls Political Holiness. I show, however, that, far from bolstering its legitimacy and approval, it is precisely the strong political theology this martyrology's political claims demand that makes it so dangerous. In particular, I examine two questions I believe illustrate this: what causes and what praxis may constitute a legitimate profession of the faith? These questions are particularly pertinent, as I briefly demonstrate the power that martyrdom has in legitimising, propagating and attracting others to the martyr's cause. I show that a strong political theology allows for the possibility that extremist political causes and actions, including violence, might be spiritualised and baptised as legitimate professions of the faith and, because of the power of martyrdom, have a profound radicalising effect on the community.

[442] I use "weak" political theology to refer to a theology which broadly considers religious causes those which are exclusively religious and which draws a sharp distinction between religion and politics as independent and autonomous discourses. A "strong" political theology is one which sees a far greater overlap in concern between the two discourses. These two models of political theology are replicated in different terms by Scott and Cavanaugh who see three possible conceptualisations of political theology. The first, which I call "weak" believes that "Politics and theology are…two essentially distinct activities" whilst the third, what I call a "strong political theology", believes that "theology and politics as essentially similar activities." See. P. Scott and W. T. Cavanaugh, "Introduction", in P. Scott and W. T. Cavanaugh (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 2. See also for different ways of modelling the aims and discourse of political theology: H. de Vries and L. E. Sullivan, (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Relations in a Post-Secular World*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006) and O. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

The evaluative analysis in this third part therefore aims to prove this thesis' contention that this martyrology, like the others we have examined in previous chapters, involves theological ideas which are extremist and potentially radicalising, and these objections come about as a result of the political theology it demands.

I demonstrate, therefore, that this martyrology presents a strong case against a weak political theology, but that it is when we investigate its political character in dialogue with the strong political it instead calls for that we realise the difficulties and dangers of this martyrology. As well as showing, therefore, why political theology makes this martyrology problematic, I also show why political theology is consequently imperilled by this martyrology. I conclude that this analysis also therefore makes a unique contribution to the burgeoning field of political theology by representing a dilemma for contemporary Christian political theology. This martyrology highlights the pitfalls of a weak political theology by illustrating how it risks becoming docetic by abrogating its most fundamental responsibilities to the Christian faith and to the realities in which its message is preached and practised, which these martyrs represent. Yet, our analysis shows that this martyrology also embodies the dangers of the strong political theology that is necessarily articulated to legitimise the victim's cause as a profession of the faith. It makes this martyrology potentially extremist in the causes and practises it legitimises, and radicalising in the effect it has on the way these are perceived by the martyr's community.

This chapter clearly does not have the scope for an extended discussion on political theology, and that is certainly not its intention. This is not a discussion about political theology *per se;* rather, it is a discussion about the challenges that this martyrology raises, and these present difficulties specifically within theopolitical discourse.[443] We do not

[443] Others prefer the term "politico-theological", but I think the theological interest in the political is better conveyed by "theopolitical".

therefore intend to come to any firm conclusions about the merits of a weak or strong articulation of political theology. Rather, the point is merely to explain the contribution that an analysis of this martyrology presents to theopolitical discourse. It is especially apt at highlighting the inadequacy of a weak political theology and the dangers of a strong one, and ought therefore to provide a check against two extremes of theopolitical discourse.

The Political Nature of This Martyrology

In order to begin evaluating the features of this martyrology that the previous analysis has brought into focus, it is helpful first to summarise how this analysis helps to describe how this martyrology understands and justifies its claim that the martyrs it imagines are killed for the faith. We will then be in a position to look at the political implications of this understanding and this for Christian theology and the problems it presents.

Can it be claimed that the martyrs this martyrology imagines are killed for the faith? The analysis we have provided in the previous section of how one might understand this in a way that is grounded in Christian tradition, logically coherent and theologically consistent demonstrates, I contend, that the answer *must be* unequivocally in the affirmative. These martyrs profess their faith by answering the call of discipleship made to all Christians to witness *as* Christ by pursuing causes, such as justice, charity and compassion, that were Christ's causes during his ministry. They pursue certain politico-historical causes and adopt a praxis performing virtuous actions in the spirit of Christ in order to effectuate the change Christ's causes demand. For these causes and the praxis they demanded, they are killed. They are not killed *directly* because of the faith these actions and causes profess, but they are killed *indirectly* for the faith; because, by being killed for the actions and causes by which this faith is so professed, they can still be said to have been killed for their profession

of the faith. That which motivated the martyr's persecutor to kill was therefore nothing less than a clear profession of the Christian faith because it was an expression of a Christian's responsibility to be guided by and fulfil Christ's ministry on earth. In being killed thus, these martyrs die for their faith in a manner consistent with the theology of Aquinas and Benedict XIV as did John the Baptist, the early church martyrs, Thomas Becket and, among countless others, Christ himself. That these martyrs did indeed die for the faith does not, therefore, represent a conclusion that we can draw with hesitancy, but one on which we must insist.

When one considers these two notions of the *direct* cause and the *indirect* cause, it becomes clear that this martyrology has a very *political* character. Because the martyr is killed *indirectly* for the faith, this martyrology makes the designation 'martyr' a profoundly *political* statement, because it affirms, with the victim, that the cause and the praxis that the victim undertook, and for which they were *directly* killed, was indeed a profession of the Christian faith as a witness of Christ's ministry. In other words, because the cause or praxis for which the victim is *directly* killed is by definition not exclusively religious, it has a broadly-speaking *historico-political* dimension. The matter of whether they are killed *indirectly* for the faith therefore raises the question of whether or not this cause, or the political dimension of this cause, can be identified as a profession of the faith and therefore as properly *religious*. This martyrology therefore raises a critical and contentious debate within political theology regarding the political realities and responsibilities of the Christian faith and the relationship between the *theological* and the *political.* Crucially, this martyrology, by affirming this cause as religious, implies and demands a political theology which recognises the thick historico-political realities and responsibilities of the Christian faith and which is accordingly able to affirm that the political cause and action for which the victim is *directly* killed is indeed a profession of the faith.

In the analysis that follows I move into this dialogue between the claims of this martyrology and political theology. I show how this martyrology therefore provides a strong challenge to a political theology which does *not* recognise the political realities of Christian causes and which has therefore traditionally opposed this martyrology. This I term a *weak* political theology. By and through this analysis, therefore, I show how it makes a compelling case for the alternative strong political theology it demands. Later we will see, however, that this strong political theology makes this martyrology potentially extremist and highly radicalising. I therefore begin this section by introducing this *weak* political theology which I describe as typifying contemporary characterisations of public discourse. By illustrating the challenges that this martyrology presents to it, I show how disruptive this martyrology therefore is to conventional societal perceptions of the relationship between religion and politics. I show that this martyrology highlights this weak political theology's inability to accommodate the historical and political realities of the Christian faith in a way which invokes and justifies the charge of Docetism, and which makes the resulting abstract and wholly-spiritual understanding of the faith supine, irrelevant and absent to the contexts and experiences in which it is lived.

A Weak Political Theology

A weak political theology draws a strict distinction between the political and the religious, which it views as two separate, independent and autonomous spheres of discourse. This view, celebrated by some scholars,[444] has become very typical of the unmistakably secular characterisation of public discourse. This "modern idea of religion as a realm of

[444] E.g. M. Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics and the Modern West*, (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 2007).

human activity inherently separate from politics",[445] as Cavanaugh describes it, has drawn a sharp border and built a high wall between religion and other – now secularised – spheres of public discourse, fortifying the latter against religious influence. This "*cordon sanitaire*" as O'Donovan refers to it,[446] represents what Kirwan perspicaciously sees as "the modern insistence on keeping religion in quarantine…that has in our time kept religious and political discourse distinct from one another, so as to avoid mutual contamination."[447] Understandably, from this perspective, any cause which is not *exclusively* religious, such as those pursuing social justice, civil rights, or structural socio-economic change, belongs to its respective *non-religious* discourse, which is secularised as wholly independent from, and inaccessible to, religious concern. When, inspired by their faith, individuals pursue these causes, they are therefore instinctively interpreted as non-religious actors in non-religious spheres of public life. When they die for these causes, they cannot therefore be imagined as martyrs.

I term this a "weak" political theology not as a value judgement, but as a description of the dilution of politics and religion. The way it understands the Christian faith and the causes it demands of its disciples is generally *weak* on politics and *strong* on theology. Because politics and religion are viewed as distinct and mutually-exclusive discourses, the political character of a particular cause is overshadowed and overlooked by a more abstract, spiritual understanding which emphasises its exclusively theological nature over which Christian theological discourse can accordingly claim sole authority. In other words, it prefers a *theological* understanding of a cause over and above a *theopolitical* understanding, seeing the latter as the usurpation of, and incursion into, another field. As we have seen in the objection to this martyrology, the Catholic Church, for instance, has eschewed certain

[445] W. T. Cavanaugh, "Destroying the Church to Save It: Intra-Christian Persecution and the Modern State," in M. L. Budde, and K. Scott, (eds.), op. cit., p. 143.
[446] O. O'Donovan, op. cit.
[447] M. Kirwan, *Political Theology*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), p. 6.

causes on the grounds that they are understood or pursued in a manner which is not exclusively religious. Pope John Paul II, for instance, seems to represent this weak political theology when he warns against the spiritualisation of the political sphere that would otherwise ensue:

> You are priests and religious; you are not social or political leaders or officials of a temporal power…Let us not be under the illusion that we are serving the Gospel if we dilute our charism through an exaggerated interest in the wide field of temporal problems.[448]

This disavowal of a religious interest in "temporal problems" is consonant with a disavowal of theopolitical discourse; instead privileging the *theo* over the *political* so that the practical and political implications of the causes of the faith are diminished in significance.

The implications for this martyrology of the designation of the political as a secular discourse are clear. Because, as we said above, this martyrology necessarily involves the identification of a political cause as a profession of the faith, it insists upon the theopolitical nature of the Christian faith which this political theology rejects. This is demonstrated in the example of the popular martyrs of Latin America, such as Oscar Romero. Their pursuit of liberation and justice inspired by the Christian faith were *political* causes pursued by *political* revolutionaries, and this was seen to *prohibit* their designation as martyrs. Even Romero himself, whilst articulating what is unquestionably a very strong political theology, recognises that Rome saw politics and religion as "two autonomous entities" and accordingly publically declares them so.[449]

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[448] Quoted by F. Claver, "Persecution of Christians by Christians and the Unity of the Church", *Concilium*, no. 163, 1983/3, pp. 24-28,, p. 24.
[449] O. Romero, *Homilies*, October 28th, 1979.

As Cavanaugh says, "This objection continues to see politics and religion as two essentially different human activities that can be – and should be – sorted out."[450] Cavanaugh argues, however, that this perceived polarity and its denial of theopolitical discourse in favour of secular political discourse merely represents the "'migration of the holy' from church to state."[451] It's important to note, however, as we will return to the point in our analysis of a strong political theology, that this "migration of the holy" in the secularisation of political discourse has protected religion from identifying with, and claiming responsibility for, causes of which people disapprove enough to kill. Christian theology has therefore benefitted from this weak political theology and its characterisation of public discourse which has protected it against the politicisation that it fears the spiritualisation of the political will invariably bring.

Calling these individuals martyrs, for example, would be tantamount to baptising their anti-government revolutionary cause and the, often violent, praxis invoked to achieve it as legitimate professions of the faith. As Burke says, "Analysing global systems in terms of historical sin is politically dangerous."[452] Not only would this amount to nothing less than a theological *endorsement* of their politics, but it would thereby establish a *Christian* political theory and a Christian political ideology which all Christians would therefore be asked to follow. This would be one which promoted certain economic structures and condemned others and supported certain political leaders and denounced others. When these conflicts were being characterised by some as capitalism vs. communism, and fascism vs. democracy, it is clear why any Christian church would wish to renounce any proprietorship over these theopolitical causes. Put simply, these are the "temporal problems" of which Pope John Paul II warned. Churches would essentially be outlining a political manifesto by virtue

[450] W. T. Cavanaugh, "Destroying the Church to Save", op. cit., p. 149.
[451] Ibid., p. 144.
[452] K. F. Burke, op. cit., p. 125.

of whom it made its martyrs. As Jon Sobrino polemically, but perceptively, observes; "For instance would the Catholic Church that would canonize Romero be ready, in the last analysis, to follow in his footsteps. I don't think today the Vatican wants that."[453]

Secular and Religious Causes: A False Antithesis

We now to turn to the challenge that this martyrology presents to this characterisation of theopolitical discourse, showing that it provides a compelling case for a strong political theology which *does* recognise the political realities and responsibilities of the Christian faith and beginning to demonstrate the dilemma it accordingly presents for contemporary political theology. We begin by demonstrating that a deeper analysis of this martyrology shows that it collapses the distinction that this weak political theology depends upon between political and religious causes, and as we shall see, this gives rise to the very serious charge that this weak political theology is docetic.

According to this martyrology, a victim can be said to be killed *indirectly* for the faith if the cause or praxis for which they are *directly* killed is perceived *by them* to be a profession of the faith. What is crucial, therefore, is that the martyr is *directly* killed for a reason that is perceived by the persecutor not to be related to the faith. This martyrology therefore defines the victim's cause according to how *they as the victim* perceive the causes and praxis for which they are killed, and this makes the victim the ultimate arbiter of the nature of their cause. González Faus is right therefore to observe that this martyrology is "focussed more on the *motives of those who die and not exclusively on the motives of those who kill…*paying more attention to the victim than to the executioner."[454] Consequently,

[453] Quoted in K. L. Woodward, op. cit., p. 48.
[454] J. I. González Faus, op. cit., p. 62

whilst the direct cause such as social justice may, in the mind of the persecutor, be perceived as a secular cause, in the mind of the victim this same cause may be perceived as religious. By definition, in the case of a martyr imagined on the basis of *this* martyrology who is killed indirectly for the faith, this is precisely what happens. This martyrology, therefore, collapses the *either/or* distinction between secular and religious on which this weak political theology is predicated by imagining the victim as a martyr on the basis of the victim's own perspective, from which this distinction does not exist.

The collapse of this *either/or* antithesis between secular and religious causes that this martyrology initiates is explored and illustrated in Thomas Quartier's paper addressing the martyrology behind the martyred Trappist monks of the Algerian village of Tibhirine in 1996.[455] Quartier asks: "Were they martyrs in the classical sense, who gave their lives for the sake of their religious identity? *Or* were they martyrs in a secular, humanitarian sense who lost their lives because they were committed to a better world?"[456] Clearly the *either/or* nature of this question eminently demonstrates how a weak political theology dominates public discourse. Quartier, however, astutely observes that this question breaks down in the face of this martyrology as the *either/or* antithesis it supposes does not exist from the perspective this martyrology adopts. Quartier therefore rejects this explaining that "…when it comes to the kind of martyrdom suffered by the monks of Tibhirine, it is a *false antithesis* to contrast their spiritual commitment with their social involvement."[457]

Put simply, the monks' "humanitarian" concerns, far from being seen as the monks' secular involvement, *were* their spiritual concerns and their commitment to a better world *was* their religious identity. In his paper, Quartier shows this by examining the monastic principles governing the lives of the monks proving not just that the so-called

[455] T. Quartier, "Monastic Martyrs of Compassion: Murdered Trappist monks in Algeria and the Different Meanings of Martyrdom", *Morality*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2014, pp. 224-242.
[456] Ibid., p. 225. Italics are mine.
[457] Ibid., p. 230. Italics are mine.

"humanitarian" concerns are features of the monastic life, but also that through the Benedictine Rule of *stabilitas* we can describe their motivation as religious. While I disagree with Quartier that "It would be impossible to maintain [this] stability…unless it is based on divine inspiration,"[458] he is right, I would argue, that "we can discern a synthesis of the monks' humanitarian mission and their religious motivation. The two are inextricably linked."[459]

This martyrology, therefore, by affirming the *religious* perspective of the victim, directly opposes the characterisation of theopolitical discourse offered by a weak political theology. This martyrology demands a political theology which does not see spheres such as politics, law or economics as wholly distinct from religion, but which imagines them as concentric or overlapping circles within which many causes belong to a great deal of common space. Issues such as injustice, for instance, are indeed political, moral, economic, and legal concerns; they are also, however, profoundly *religious* concerns. As several of the examples we have examined illustrate, therefore, religious faith involves the pursuit of causes which are not exclusively religious but which have other dimensions and resonate in other spheres of discourse. Middleton is right then to observe that "the distinction between secular and religious can be overplayed; it is not clear injustice would be regarded principally as a secular concern within either Islam or Christianity."[460] Indeed, injustice is no less an exclusively religious issue and no more an exclusively political issue than worshipping the Roman gods was for the early church. This is a powerful reminder that the perspective this martyrology provides is therefore one that the Church, as we have seen, already implicitly accepts, even if it may disavow it for the reason we mentioned above. This suggests that the Church's complaint is rather with the particular political causes that

[458] Ibid., p. 232.
[459] Ibid., p. 236.
[460] P. Middleton, *Martyrdom*, op. cit., p. 5.

are said to be professions of the faith, rather than the notion that political causes can represent such professions.

With the perspective this martyrology affirms, therefore, these causes are inseparable from religion and the religious convictions that inspire them. As Margaret Gouin says in the context of self-immolation in Tibet; "Where might 'religious' stop and 'political' begin, or vice versa? A distinction between the two may be made in analytical terms, but would it mean anything to the Tibetans themselves?"[461] Designating these causes "political", therefore, merely represents a heuristic partition to indicate the nature of the religious cause and the particular stage on which it is to be pursued. We might therefore identify the moment a *political* theology emerges by recognising the shared political and religious dimension of a cause, but we cannot separate the two in any way that implies a mutual exclusivity or opposition, upholding Quartier's contention that "the dimensions are not *separable* but they are *distinguishable*."[462]

Clearly, therefore, a weak political theology is opposed to the most fundamental claims of this martyrology because the notion of an indirect cause necessarily implies a theopolitical discourse that this weak political theology rejects. This martyrology, however, is not only incompatible with this weak political theology, but this perspective, which recognises theopolitical causes, places a significant burden on a political theology that would eschew these causes by asking whether their designation as strictly *theological* causes is morally or theologically defensible.

[461] M. Gouin, "Self-Immolation and Martyrdom in Tibet", *Mortality*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2014, pp. 176-183.
[462] T. Quartier, op. cit., p. 239. Italics are mine.

The Charge of Docetism

In our introduction to a weak political theology, we saw that Pope John Paul II discouraged "an exaggerated interest in the wide field of temporal problems." Clearly, however, we have seen that this martyrology considers these temporal problems to be religious problems. To imply, therefore, by designating them "temporal problems", that they are secular is consequently made untenable. The force of this martyrology is not only to present this alternative perspective, but to highlight how any theology which takes these causes seriously must recognise this temporal dimension. This martyrology therefore shines a spotlight on the temporal realities of the causes its martyrs pursue in a way which disturbs this traditional indifferent detachment from the theopolitical and rouses churches and communities from what advocates of this martyrology would perceive as a complacent and negligent slumber. In an emphatic statement expressing the profoundly political nature of the Christian faith that this martyrology illuminates, Boff writes;

> Not a few Christians…because of the Gospel, make a preferential option for the poor, for their liberation, for the defence of their rights. In the name of this option they stand up and denounce the exercise of domination and all forms of social dehumanisation. They may be persecuted, arrested, tortured and killed. They, too, are martyrs in the strict sense of the word.[463]

This vehemently challenges any impartiality on these issues. Are destitution, social dehumanisation, violation of human rights, and crippling oppression "temporal", secular problems to Christians? Is a preferential option of the poor, socio-political liberation, defence of these rights and denunciation of the exercise of this domination an "illusion that we are serving the Gospel" and an "exaggerated interest…in temporal problems"? These are

[463] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 14.

the practical, historical and *political* realities of the Christian faith. Liberation theology has been asking these questions for many decades, but this martyrology acts as a particularly forceful and inescapable challenge to Christian theology because it asks: I am fighting against oppression and injustice, am I doing the work of God? I am resisting the exploitation and reification of the poor, am I doing the work of God? It is when someone is killed performing certain actions that the question of whether this action is, as they themselves believed it was, a profession of the faith cannot be overlooked.

A weak political theology does not of course fail to condemn destitution, injustice and oppression as sins; but, in order to distance itself from the "wide field of temporal problems", and retain a strictly *theological* understanding of these concerns, it often stops short of condemning their socio-economic, political and historical realities. Similarly, therefore, this political theology does not of course disavow, or even fail to promote, the causes of justice and liberation, which do indeed share common cause with Christ's ministry. Its aversion to making these causes political, however, means that it fails to recognise the *political* responsibilities that these causes confer; and accordingly, it disclaims and disowns the socio-political praxis by which these causes are actually pursued and effectuated. In other words, as we saw, this weak political theology sees these causes in a which is heavy on theology and light on politics; it prefers to view these causes as *theological* concerns, abstracted from their political realities.

In doing so, however, this heavily *theological* approach to *theopolitical* discourse divests these causes of their very meaning. These causes *are* temporal concerns; they have no meaning abstracted from the historico-political realities in which they are experienced. Sobrino is right to observe that "by not taking this reality seriously we may come dangerously close to Docetism."[464] A theology that is light on the *politics* of causes such as

[464] J. Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom*, op. cit., p. 3.

hunger, oppression and injustice is simply a theology that is light on these causes. To diminish the *political* aspects of these causes is to diminish their reality in a way which is indeed docetic. These causes, whilst undoubtedly *theological* concerns, cannot be spiritualised. They must be understood, pursued and implemented *politically* in history – where they exist. Since, as Roger Scruton laconically puts it, "The reality of politics is actions",[465] these causes must be pursued by *action.* If Christian theology believes in ending hunger, it must be prepared to feed the hungry. A theology of hunger without a *theopolitics* of hunger *is* undoubtedly docetic; and more than this, it is obstructive to a successful pursuit of this cause. One therefore must sympathise with Francisco Claver when, responding to this political theology, he asks;

> What *is* the Gospel way…of involving ourselves precisely in temporal problems, especially when these…dehumanise, destroy, kill?[466]

By shining a spotlight on those individuals who *do* recognise the political realities and responsibilities of these Christian causes, this martyrology offers a particularly penetrative criticism of this weak political theology by showing just how docetic, irrelevant and indolent a political theology that would abjure their praxis as illegitimate professions of the faith is. As Cunningham writes, "the reality of such deaths militates against a kind of ecclesial and Christological Docetism that fails to see the thick reality of the Incarnation and its meaning for all humanity."[467] That is, it shows that this weak political theology is unable to fulfil and deliver the causes and promises of Christ's ministry because it remains *theological* in issues which are *theopolitical,* and in so doing, its commitment is abstract and insubstantial to causes which are concrete, material and physical. Put more strongly, this

[465] R. Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), p. 1.
[466] F. Claver, op. cit., p. 25.
[467] L. S. Cunningham, "Cause Non Poena", op. cit., p. 460.

political theology is unable to meet the reality of the demands of *its own* causes. Clearly, this political theology would be devastating to missionary work and liberation projects around the world. It is precisely this political theology, therefore, which liberation theology castigates for privileging orthodoxy over orthopraxis[468] and failing to recognise the very concrete and historical reality of witnessing as Christ, and therefore not fulfilling the responsibilities that these Christian causes demand.

One of the most profound and telling illustrations of the impotence of this docetic theopolitical discourse is reflected in the fact that these causes are no longer identified with the Christian faith. In a very powerful section of Boff's essay, he writes;

> Therefore all those who have died, and those yet to die for these causes regardless of their ideological allegiance, are truly martyrs through the spilling of their blood because they perform virtuous actions in the spirit of Christ. *They are not martyrs of the Christian faith*, not heroes of the Church; they are martyrs of the kingdom of God, martyrs to the cause that was the cause of the Son of God when he was in our midst. They help to carry on God's policy in history.[469]

By dying for pursuing Christ's causes, these individuals are martyrs to the cause that was Christ's and they are martyrs to the kingdom of God, but they cannot accordingly be considered martyrs of the Christian faith. This is a startling distinction to draw, and is highly indicative of the theopolitical discourse within which this faith is understood. Furthermore, Boff is not alone here; several authors have distinguished between the Christian faith and the cause for which they instead perceive the martyr to have been killed. Sobrino says these martyrs are killed *in odium iustitiae,* and are martyrs of *justice;* González Faus and Valiente have described them as martyrs of love, killed in *odium amoris*[470]*;* whilst others have

[468] See footnote 401.
[469] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 14.
[470] O. E. Valiente, op. cit., p. 120; J. I. González Faus, op. cit., p. 62.

preferred to see them as martyrs of charity, killed in *odium caritas*.[471] Indeed, even the Catholic Church accepts this distinction, claiming, as we saw, that Kolbe was not an authentic martyr, merely a martyr of charity. Speaking to the father of Don Puglisi, Pope John Paul II explains, "your son is a martyr for justice and indirectly a martyr of the faith."[472] Not only is this quotation revealing for its acceptance of the notion of being killed *indirectly* for the faith, but the very fact that the faith is imputed only indirectly once again implies a separation from the cause of justice.

There is surely no stronger challenge that this martyrology levels at a weak political theology than the fact that theologians, and even the Church, find it necessary to distinguish between the Christian faith and these "temporal" causes of justice, love and charity embodied by the ministry of Christ. The fact that these causes cannot be identified with the faith is indicative of an understanding of the faith which is unable to accommodate the political realities of these causes. Rahner shrewdly reminds us that "Faith includes Christian moral teaching…Faith can involve the entirety of the Christian confession of faith or merely one single truth of Christian teaching on faith and morals."[473] By suggesting that these martyrs cannot be said to have died for the *faith,* therefore, the implicit suggestion is that the cause for which they *are* killed is not a truth or moral of the Christian faith at all.

Is this what a weak political theology leads to? Must it demand the secularisation and separation of causes such as justice, love and charity when these are understood in such a way that makes their deliverance meaningful? Does the Christian faith's responsibility begin at recognising these causes, but end before trying to pursue or deliver them? This dichotomy is made even more pressing by the examples, in El Salvador for instance, of political leaders exploiting the Church's position to chastise and rebuke those members of

[471] L. S. Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, op. cit., p. 15. We also saw that the Catholic Church referred to Maximilian Kolbe as a "martyr of charity" as opposed to the faith.
[472] Quoted in L. S. Cunningham, "Cause non Poena", op. cit., p. 456.
[473] K. Rahner, op. cit., p. 9.

the Church, such as Romero, who chose to oppose injustice on the grounds that it represented an interference in politics. The state, therefore, used the Church's own procedural political neutrality as a shield against liberation attempts in one hand, whilst in the other they wielded a sword of injustice and oppression unchecked. A weak political theology might protect the Church from identifying with political causes, but it protects oppressors from being rebuked as persecutors.

Furthermore, there is a theological inconsistency that this distinction reveals which would problematise any account of Christian martyrdom. As we have made clear in the earlier parts of this chapter, the notion of being *indirectly* killed for your faith is well established in Christian theology and central to any understanding of Christian martyrdom. To be killed *indirectly* for the faith is to be killed *directly* for the cause or praxis that this faith led you to pursue. To be killed *indirectly* for the faith, therefore, *is* to be killed for a *temporal* concern. As we have seen, the martyrs of the early church, for instance, did not merely *approve* of exclusive monotheism, they pursued this cause with a full understanding of its *theopolitical* character. They understood that this faith brought certain responsibilities that, in the context of Roman society, were *political* in character. They practised this faith by the highly political act of refusing the authority of a Governor to worship the gods This faith disrupted civic society, undermined the institution of the *pax doerum,* and challenged the authority of the Governor. These were the causes for which they were *directly* killed; *political* causes reflecting the *political* demands of the Christian faith. As Davis therefore remarks;

> Nothing could be more absurdly untrue to Christian history than the contention that the Christian religion as embodied institutionally in the Church is apolitical or above politics…The Christian religion has always been thoroughly political, with social

> and political action the major vehicle of the distinctively Christian religious experience.[474]

The implied separation of the causes of justice, love and charity from the faith suggests, however, that martyrs are only explicitly killed for the faith itself and returns us to the objection we challenged earlier. As we have shown through this example and others, however, this is plainly not the case. As Boff rightly observes of Christian martyrs; "It is not simply their faith that is hated, but that particular type of…faith-praxis."[475] Because Christian theology evidently cannot eschew the notion of faith-praxis from martyrdom without radically undermining its own traditions, the rejection of the martyrs of Latin America, for instance, seems rather to be motivated by the particular brand of political faith-praxis manifest there and churches' reluctance to become too closely aligned with it. The Church's position seems to be less one of principle, and more one of expediency; or, perhaps more cynically, political choice.

There is no need to repeat what we have said earlier regarding the centrality of this understanding of martyrdom to Christian theology. With that in mind, however, we might, with a temperance which recognises the gravity of such a statement, suggest that any comprehensive understanding of Christian martyrdom which is to reflect and accommodate Christian martyrdom tradition to which this notion of being killed *indirectly* for the faith is so central, demands a strong political theology which is able to recognise the *temporal*, *historical* and *political* realities and responsibilities involved in professing the faith and for which the martyr is, more often than not, directly killed.

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[474] C. Davis *Religion and the Making of Society: Essays in Social Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 58.
[475] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 14.

A Strong Political Theology

This martyrology therefore makes a compelling case for a *strong* political theology which recognises the historico-political realities and responsibilities of the Christian faith and which is therefore able to identify the cause for which the martyr is killed as a *theopolitical* cause. In this section, we now move on to examine the political character of this martyrology and the strong political theology that it therefore demands. To that end, we begin by very briefly outlining the key features of the political theology which proponents of this martyrology have called for. Before evaluating this martyrology in dialogue with this political theology, we include a very brief section outlining the force martyrdom has on how a cause is perceived. This section is crucial in understanding the stakes, and the stakeholders, of the causes that this martyrology demands a political understanding of, and is indispensable to the subsequent analysis because it allows us to understand the import of the martyr's cause being political.

The chief analysis aims to evaluate the impact that this strong political theology might have on two difficulties this martyrology raises: what causes and what praxis can be imagined as legitimately professing the faith. I will show that the result is that this martyrology is potentially extremist in the causes and practises this strong political theology legitimises, and radicalising in the effect martyrdom has on the way these are perceived by the martyr's community. We will then be able to conclude by demonstrating the dilemma that this martyrology therefore creates: it impugns the weak political theology that opposes it but represents serious difficulties for the strong political theology it demands.

Political Holiness

We have already said much concerning the strong political theology that this martyrology necessarily involves by recognising the Christian faith as an indirect cause of the martyr's historico-political persecution. Therefore, it is only necessary to review the key features of this political theology using the words of those who advance it.

A strong political theology sees theology and politics not in "binary, oppositional terms"[476], but as two mutually-dependent discourses which are indispensable to the proper analysis and function of one another. A strong political theology is so-called because it recognises the profoundly historico-political dimension to the Christian faith and to many of the causes to which Christ's ministry calls Christians to witness in discipleship. In order to fulfil and pursue these causes, this strong political theology accordingly believes that these causes must be understood as *theopolitical*; that is, the meaning and fulfilment of these causes must be understood in a way which takes serious note of their political realities and therefore of the political responsibility they demand.

By understanding these causes as theopolitical, the theological is not in any way diminished; rather, it is actually complemented and fulfilled by the political because the political helps to illuminate the realities of these causes and therefore to pursue them effectively. Indeed, as we saw Quartier says, the theological and the political "are not *separable* but they are *distinguishable*,"[477] and this distinction merely recognises the historical and material realities of these causes which are not *exclusively* religious but which likewise cannot be *separated* from religion. The theological does not therefore appeal to, trespass or usurp the political sphere; rather, it recognises these political realities as part of the immanence of the Christian faith and as being consequently indispensable to a proper and therefore *theological* understanding of these causes. As O'Donovan says, "Theology is

[476] M. Kirwan, op. cit., p. ix.
[477] T. Quartier, op. cit., p. 239. Italics are mine.

political simply by responding to the dynamics of its own proper themes."[478] If theology is to be attentive to the realities and dynamics of its causes and not docetic, then, as Kirwan explains, "political theology is not only possible, but necessary,"[479] because their reality is political.

As Job Sobrino explains in a noteworthy essay articulating the political theology necessary to confront the realities of the Christian message that these martyrs illustrate, the profoundly political reality of these Christian causes means that "many Christians feel that the area of political action is the right place to seek holiness."[480] Sobrino, with other writers such as Michael Kirwan[481] and Kees Waaijman[482], have described this coming together of the political and religious in the religious life of the disciple as "political holiness" and "political love"; a political extension of what McGuire calls "lived religion."[483] As Sobrino writes of the Christian mission to the poor, for instance;

> They are the poor in the material sense. What needs to be eradicated is not just the inner shame to which they are subjected but their material poverty…For this reason, political love must also share – in very different ways – in the struggle of the poor, which takes place on the ideological and social level but also the political level and – in strictly limited cases – the military.[484]

A strong political theology which recognises the concrete political realities of Christian causes therefore gives rise to what Boff calls a "Faith-Praxis"[485]; a discipleship and praxis which responds to and immerses itself in these realities. "Political love", as Sobrino says,

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[478] O. O'Donovan, op. cit., p. 3.
[479] M. Kirwan, op. cit., p. 42.
[480] J. Sobrino, "Political Holiness", op. cit., p. 18.
[481] M. Kirwan, op. cit.
[482] K. Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).
[483] M. B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[484] J. Sobrino, "Political Holiness", op. cit., pp. 19-20.
[485] L. Boff, op. cit., p. 14.

"tries to be effective" and this "requires an awareness of responsibility" to the *political* nature of these religious causes and the political nature of the Faith-Praxis which is therefore necessary to pursue them.[486] Because historical, political, economic and social analysis and praxis, therefore, is necessary to a successful understanding and, most importantly, fulfilment of these causes, these are necessary to Christian theology. They are not *theological*, they are *theopolitical*; but as we said above, the theopolitical is necessary for theology to be effective, real and to avoid Docetism. Given that Christ's causes aim to be effective, it might be argued even more radically that only a theopolitical approach to these causes is legitimate.

The theopolitical nature of these causes, however, means not only that Christian theology must take on a political character, but also that politics should take on a specifically Christian character. As Sobrino says, "Thus politics today offers a sphere for holiness and holiness makes political action more humanising."[487] Therefore, whilst political holiness may, as Sobrino says, involve revolution, activism, and even violence, "the person with political holiness is one who always keeps in view the ideal of the kingdom of God and the God of the kingdom with which to conform history and his own practice."[488] This way, as we said above, a strong political theology sees politics and theology as mutually-dependent.

It is clear why it is this political theology that this martyrology assumes and therefore demands; for, as Kirwan says, "…martyrdom is, after all, one model of political holiness, perhaps even its definitive expression."[489] This martyrology imagines the political causes and praxis for which the martyrs are *directly* killed not as *strictly* political causes but instead as *theopolitical* causes, and this represents an interpretation only possible with the political theology we have elucidated above. It is now possible to show, however, that it is this strong

[486] J. Sobrino, "Political Holiness", op. cit., p. 19.
[487] Ibid., p. 18.
[488] Ibid., p. 22.
[489] M. Kirwan, op. cit., p. 192.

political theology that makes this martyrology dangerous and problematic, and this means that this martyrology also offers a unique contribution to modern theopolitical discourse by embodying a challenge to this strong political theology as well as presenting the objection to a weak one that we have observed.

The Power of the Martyr's Cause: Conviction and Legitimacy

In order to examine this martyrology's strong political theology and its assertion that the political cause and praxis for which the martyr is killed can be imagined as a *theopolitical* profession of the faith, we first need to understand the import of the cause for which the martyr is seen to have been killed. In this section, therefore, we very briefly interrupt our evaluation of this martyrology in order to foreground for the reader some simple observations regarding the power martyrdom has on perceptions of a cause and therefore the social implications it has within the martyr's community. Equipped with these observations and therefore a sense of the *significance* of the martyr's cause, we will then return to this martyrology to explain why this martyrology's claim that these causes are *political* is consequently potentially so devastating.

In Chapter 1, we observed that martyr narratives embody a judgement about the cause for which the martyr is seen to be killed. In the 4th century, Augustine encapsulated this contest over truth in his insistence that *Martyrem non facit poena, sed causa.* A martyr narrative therefore belongs to those who affirm the cause for which the martyr died, and this explains why one man's terrorist can be another's martyr. Martyr narratives do not only *reflect* perceptions of causes, however, they also *engender* them. The ways in which they do this is far too large a topic for this section, we aim only to make some basic observations to give a sense of proportion to the social significance of martyrdom.

In their work *The Martyr's Conviction,* sociologists Eugene and Anita Weiner confidently explain some of the sociological impacts of martyrdom on the martyr community's perceptions of their cause. Because they demonstrate a willingness to die for their cause, the martyr, they explain, is the "virtuoso of conviction,"[490] and this conviction, they laconically write, "is both validating and contagious."[491] Martyrdom certainly has a compelling legitimising power; that an individual is willing to undergo great suffering for a cause is a persuasive reason indeed to suppose there might be something important, if not true, to it. At the very least, it brings attention to that cause and creates intrigue about the reason why someone was prepared to die for it. This is especially true when observers consider their own unwillingness to die for causes that they know are true and which they already hold dear. Martyrdom simply represents a level of conviction which seems to insist upon the truth of a cause. Ricoeur accordingly adds the increasingly necessary and urgent refrain in his discussion of martyrdom that "a cause which has martyrs is not necessarily a just cause."[492] The very fact of this refrain points to the power martyrdom possesses to convince otherwise, as testified by the pertinence of Oscar Wilde's quip that "a thing is not necessarily true because a man dies for it."[493]

Martyrdom not only validates a cause, but, what perhaps makes it more compelling, it sanctifies it. It is not only, as E. and A. Weiner explain, that "the martyr's cause inspires reverence because he or she was willing to die for it."[494] Rather, dying for something is a profoundly *religious* phenomenon for whose interpretation we draw on religious tradition and this tradition has a powerful effect. Moreover, the martyr narrative itself, as this thesis argues, is always accompanied by layers of theological tradition. Martyrdom therefore

[490] E. Weiner and A. Weiner, op. cit., p. 53.
[491] Ibid.
[492] P. Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 128.
[493] O. Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr W. H.* (1889) in *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, (Ware: Wordsworth, 1997), p. 231.
[494] E. Weiner and A. Weiner, op. cit., p. 60.

imagines that cause as participating in not only a historical contest of truth, but a cosmic and ultimately religious one. Because martyrdom is by definition an affirmation of the truth of the victim's cause, it therefore suggests that the cause has a theological and sacred truth to it. So, Klausner writes, "Martyrdom imbues economic and political conflict with sacred meaning."[495]

As we have remarked, martyrdom necessarily involves the affirmation of the truth or legitimacy of a cause. As well as validating this cause and attracting outsiders to it, however, E. and A. Weiner show how martyrdom has a powerful effect on group formation to those in the martyr's community who assent to the cause. Martyrdom elicits a profusion of emotional responses which modify attitudes towards the cause for which the martyr is perceived to have died. The collective loss and shared grief brings a community together in a way which commemorates both the martyr and their cause. The loss of life that this cause costs crystallises the group's conviction in the truth and validity of this cause in order to justify this loss and to ensure that it has not been in vain. This can foster a sense of allegiance which enjoins others to take up the fallen banner and pursue this cause themselves. As Petersen observes in the wake of martyrdom in El Salvador, this loss can also foment resentment, vengeance and hatred, commenting that "the anger and pain of losing loved ones often spur people to defy the regime."[496]

The martyr is "a living proof that the group has a purpose worthy enough to elicit extreme acts of loyalty."[497] Someone has considered this cause worthy enough to die for, and this death can therefore act as a testament to the power, legitimacy and truth of the cause in a way which "provides greater credibility to the group purposes."[498] This is a phenomenon

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[495] S. Z. Klausner, "Martyrdom", in L. Jones, (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. 8, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 5737-5744. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 20 June 2016, p. 5738.
[496] A. L. Petersen, op. cit., pp. 137-138.
[497] E. Weiner and A. Weiner, op. cit., p. 56.
[498] Ibid.

that religious groups throughout history have realised, encapsulated in Tertullian's epigrammatic phrase that "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Through this death, however, martyrdom also expresses "the feasibility of defiance"[499] in the name of this cause. As well as representing the truth and legitimacy of their cause, martyrdom itself embodies and dramatises the defiance that this cause demands and incarnates and concretises its struggle in history. The martyr exemplifies this defiance and the overcoming self-interest and fear in the name of this cause. In so doing, they provide a model of conviction and resistance that becomes normative for the group whose community becomes defined not only by this cause, but by the specific response it elicits. As Petersen observes, "Martyrdom forges both a community of believers and a tradition of resistance."[500]

Because this defiance takes the extreme form of death, martyrdom can therefore have a radicalising effect on members' relationship with this cause and group expectations of their conviction to it. As E. and A. Weiner explain;

> After their sacrifice, martyrs continue to serve as a measure of group devotion and commitment. This is the price exacted from future adherents to the group. It is a standard of loyalty to the group's convictions.[501]

Martyrdom not only dramatises the conviction and loyalty that one member has shown towards this cause, but it establishes a normative group response which reflects the extremity of the attachment and conviction that martyrdom represents. The martyr's extreme expression of their own commitment to the cause therefore becomes highly symbolic and emblematic of allegiance to this cause. E. and A. Weiner explain, therefore, how this can have a highly radicalising effect. "One of the paradoxes of martyrdom," they say, "is that

[499] Ibid.
[500] A. L. Petersen, op. cit., pp. 142.
[501] E. Weiner and A. Weiner, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

the group is strengthened when individual members die as martyrs."[502] That is to say, this embodiment of the expected devotion and conviction to the cause gives rise to a "winnowing" of the weak members and a corresponding "ascendency of the resolute."[503] E. and A. Weiner describe this effect this has; "When groups experience the ascendency of the resolute, it is a powerful process which encourages extremism and lack of compromise."[504] The group therefore becomes defined by an increasingly extreme expression of one's commitment to this cause which can harden into fervent zealotry.

Another well-observed feature of martyrdom is that a martyr narrative not only creates a martyr, it also creates a persecutor. This manufacturing of the 'persecutor' type helps to construct an oppositional relationship which imagines two sides in a conflict between good and evil. This helps to overcome the sense of deviance and dissidence, as the group's identity becomes defined vis-à-vis this persecutor as beleaguered, assailed victims of a just cause against an unjust, menacing and oppressive tyrant. This antagonistic relationship helps to vindicate and legitimise this cause and supporters of it, unifying the group around it and reinforcing their commitment to it. As Klausner perceives, this antagonism "leave[s] few individuals on the sidelines," and consequently, "Martyrdom further unifies and strengthens the group in its struggle."[505] This conflict, however, also engenders hostility, and this entrenches both a hardened allegiance to this cause and a consequent enmity towards one's opponents.

The power of this characterisation 'persecutor' and its effect on perceptions of the cause is demonstrated by Evers in a paper concerning martyrs in Asia.[506] Evers describes the

[502] Ibid., p. 62.
[503] Ibid.
[504] Ibid.
[505] S. Z. Klausner, op. cit., p. 5740.
[506] G. Evers, "The Problem of Martyrdom in Missionary Countries", trans. J. Bowden, *Concilium*, 2003/1, pp. 87-95.

"vigorous opposition"[507] with which Pope John Paul II's beatification of 17 Vietnamese martyrs who died between 1745 and 1862 was met by the Communist government of Vietnam. They perceived the implicit condemnation of the government of the time whose actions they deemed justifiable as "an insult to the honour of the whole Vietnamese people."[508] With 'martyr' therefore comes 'persecutor' and the moral opposition they establish has a profound effect on the way that the martyr's cause is perceived.

The religious and sociological implications and dimensions to martyrdom are clearly extensive, and our observations here therefore only scratch the surface. We have aimed only to make some cursory remarks regarding the socio-political implications of martyrdom on the way that a cause is perceived and its role in defining and shaping the community from which the martyr emerges. Whilst by no means exhaustive, therefore, the above observations are at least sufficient to equip us with an understanding of the import of the cause for which the martyr is perceived to have died. This gives us a sense of the stakes of martyrdom and, therefore, to proceed to show why this martyrology's *political* claims are so dangerous.

The Dangers of a Political Martyrology

When we consider the foregoing analysis in dialogue with the preceding examination of the strong political theology that this martyrology's political character assumes and demands, we begin to see why this martyrology is so problematic and even, as I have called it, dangerous. Martyrdom, as we have shown, represents a compelling testament to the perceived truth, significance and even reverence of the martyr's cause and this validates Petersen's observation that "martyrdom strengthens the commitment of current members

[507] Ibid., p. 90.
[508] Ibid.

and attracts new ones."[509] Martyrdom does not just validate a cause, it unifies a community around this cause and crystallises both their conviction in it and their allegiance to it. The martyr is also a powerful symbolic figure for this cause who embodies the possibility of resistance and can therefore both mobilise a community and also radicalise it by representing an extreme expression of conviction in this cause which can become normative and emblematic for the community. These effects of martyrdom explain why, throughout history, there have been those who have attempted to *avoid* martyr narratives and offer counter-narratives instead. The bodies of the dead have been hidden, starving prisoners kept alive, execution stayed and concessions made in order to avoid this characterisation of conflict, so powerful is its effect on the way this conflict is perceived.

This chapter has explained in great detail that the defining conceptual feature of this martyrology is the understanding that the martyr is killed *indirectly* for the faith. The historico-political causes or praxis for which they are *directly* killed are imagined as the political realities and responsibilities of a *theopolitical* cause rooted in Christ's ministry and can therefore be imagined as a profession of the faith. What this means, therefore, is that by and through this martyrology, the profoundly validating, unifying, popularising, sanctifying, mobilising and radicalising power of martyrdom is unleashed on *political* causes on the basis that they can be understood as *theopolitical*. Provided that it can be imagined as pursuing a cause of Christ's ministry and therefore witnessing as Christ, this martyrology allows that any political praxis or cause may be deemed *theopolitical* and become the cause of martyrdom and have the implications we have described. As we shall show, this proviso of pursuing Christ's causes does not sufficiently delimit these political causes or praxis in a way which prevents them from including those that are extremist.

[509] A. L. Petersen, op. cit., p. 137.

What makes this martyrology particularly dangerous is not only its spiritualisation of the political and this profound power that martyrdom brings to political causes, as we have described. We must also remember, as explored in Chapter 1, that martyrdom is a sociological construct. Martyrs do not appear necessarily or organically in history, they are *made*, and made for a purpose. This purpose is inspired by the implications and meaning martyrdom brings. This means that the observations we have made above are not only the social *implications* of martyr narratives on perceptions of the cause and on group formation, they can be their social *function.* The power that these narratives possess are their very *raison d'être*. This means that martyrs can be made precisely *in order to* validate a political cause, entrench political division, mobilise political resistance, arouse hostility and conflict, and to induce any other social effects that martyrdom has. Flanagan and Jupp observe this phenomenon when they write;

> The conferral of the title 'martyr' on those who died for a cause seemed a propitious means of tapping into the ultimate sympathies of followers of a political cause. The rhetoric of Catholicism could be applied to political martyrs to suggest that they also spilt blood for a noble cause in acts of self-sacrifice which deserve commemoration. Such forms of memorialisation supplied valuable means also for mobilising revolutionary sentiment… the plight of the martyrs can be utilised for propaganda purposes, again illustrating the potency of martyrdom in the context of modernity.[510]

That martyrdom is socially-constructed, therefore, makes this martyrology especially dangerous because its political character means that it can be used not only to memorialise and sanctify an individual's death or to assuage the loss of a grieving community, but also as a political instrument. Martyrdom, as Flanagan and Jupp go on to say, "could be *deployed*

[510] K. Flanagan and P. C. Jupp, op. cit., p. 111.

to supply followers of a cause with an image of self-sacrifice, one that would confirm the hallowed basis of a political cause."[511]

It is not too cynical to observe that this explains the articulation of this martyrology in the latter half of the twentieth century. This martyrology has been promulgated and defended largely by liberation theologians in order to legitimise, sanctify and ultimately endorse the political causes and praxis that they see their particular brand of liberation theology as demanding. As we remarked earlier, Jon Sobrino, for instance, is perfectly candid about his efforts to articulate the notion of "Martyrs of the Kingdom" for this very purpose. In one place, he writes;

> …the cruelty that death deals to millions of human beings is not taken seriously by society or by the church and is very often ignored by theology in its re-thinking of martyrdom.[512]

In another, he adds;

> If the spilt blood of so many bishops, priests, nuns, catechists, teachers, and also of Christians who are peasants, workers, trade unionists and fighters, is not a convincing argument that the political is a proper sphere for holiness and moreover that at the moment holiness normally means involvement with politics, then there is no theological discourse which could convince.[513]

Clearly, Sobrino's "re-thinking of martyrdom" is aimed very directly at validating the Political Holiness he perceives in the political activism and praxis that these individuals perform. Sobrino senses that this theopolitical liberation theology needs martyrs, and he wants to give them to it. The notion that martyrs might be made in order to bring the power

[511] Ibid. Italics are mine.
[512] T. Okure, J. Sobrino, F. Wilfred, op. cit., p. 9.
[513] J. Sobrino, "Political Holiness," op. cit., p. 20.

of martyrdom to bear on the cause for which they are perceived to have been killed is therefore already evidenced in the very articulation of this martyrology.

Because martyrdom has this overwhelming power on causes – a power which, as we have seen, can be harnessed – the scope of political causes this martyrology could sanctify is of critical importance in evaluating the threat it presents. Could it be used to sanctify extremist causes and violent praxis? In order to evaluate the political implications of this martyrology and therefore the danger it presents, the central question we must therefore ask is: what are the political realities and responsibilities – that may become the basis of a martyr narrative – of following and pursuing Christ's causes in history? In the analysis that follows, we show that this martyrology's claim that the martyr witnesses as Christ by pursuing his causes in history does not sufficiently delimit this political scope of the *theopolitical* cause of martyrdom. The result is that highly significant and potentially extremist political causes and praxis may become the theopolitical basis of these martyr narratives, and as the tremendous power of martyrdom is therefore conferred on these causes and unleashed on the believing community, this martyrology may provoke, and indeed be used to provoke, political radicalisation.

We conduct this analysis by asking what causes Christ's ministry represents, what the political causes by which these causes are fulfilled are in the present, and what the political praxis by which these might therefore be legitimately pursued is. We show that the causes of Christ's ministry, the political realities and responsibilities they demand, and the praxis by which they are legitimately pursued are all too subjective to prohibit extremist interpretations. In other words, both the *what* and the *how* of Christ's causes permit a broad scope of causes and praxis by which extremist actions can be imagined as a profession of the faith.

The Political Realities of Christ's Causes

Political causes can become *theopolitical* causes if they are imagined as the historical incarnation and fulfilment of a cause of Christ's ministry. What causes Christ's ministry represents is therefore the starting point of this martyrology and the foundation for the subsequent questions of what political causes this sanctions and how they are pursued. Christology is essential, therefore, to defining the parameters of the martyr's cause. As Sobrino therefore argues, "The analysis of contemporary martyrdom should not begin with the word *martyr* which means witness; rather it should be an analysis of the *reality* of 'faithfully following Jesus', of being 'like Jesus.'"[514] What causes does Christ pursue in his ministry? We have already looked at this particular question in the previous chapter where we saw that this cannot provide a firm basis for a delimitation of martyrdom. We do not need to repeat what was said and so it is sufficient merely to review the conclusions we drew.

We saw that how Christ is understood has a direct impact on how the martyr is subsequently imagined, but we observed that Christology is a highly contested discourse whose fundamentally interpretive nature permits a range of interpretations of what the central significance of Christ's ministry and life was. In evaluating the cause of Christ's death, for instance, we saw that it can be viewed as the cost of a ministry chiefly focussed with charity to the poor, defence of injustice, proclamation of the Kingdom, liberation from oppression and even political revolution. Crucially, however, we also saw that these Christologies can be promulgated and defended *in order* to establish a particular *imitatio* and this resonates strongly with what we have said in this chapter about the use of this martyrology to support a particular political cause. The fact, therefore, that martyrdom may

[514] J. Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom*, op. cit., p. 123.

be harnessed for political advantage is bolstered by the fact that the Christology by which it is legitimised and made possible may be too. It is clear, therefore, that "Christ's cause" is a concept that is far too ambiguous to delimit the martyr's cause in any meaningful way and its subjective nature means that this ambiguity procures a broad scope of interpretation.

Notwithstanding the ambiguity of what Christ's causes might be, if these are to be understood as *theopolitical* causes, we must then ask another question which only multiplies this ambiguity: what are the *political* causes in history that Christ's causes demand and by which these causes can be perceived to be fulfilled in human history? Even if we accept that Christ's ministry pursued the ostensibly uncontroversial causes of justice and liberation, for instance, the question of their political realities and therefore the political responsibilities that this confers is another matter altogether. What are the *political* causes by which the justice and liberation Christ's ministry calls for are achieved? It is when we try to incarnate these causes in history that the ambiguity of political discourse only proliferates the ambiguity of Christological discourse and some of the political causes that this ambiguity thereby licenses can consequently be extremist. It is at this point, I contend, that the political implications of this martyrology, and the problems that this presents, start to become apparent.

In the analysis of the injustice and oppression which these causes call Christians to struggle against, for instance, liberation theologians have provided varying accounts of what is chiefly responsible. Predominantly, these have adopted a very specific socialist political ideology. In a single edition of *Concilium,* for instance, Tamez identifies the problem as "consumer society created by the present globalized free-market system."[515] Casaldáliga too blames the "free-market"[516] and Okure too says that "Under the free-market

[515] E. Tamez, *Martyrs of Latin America*, trans. P. Burns, *Concilium*, 2003/1, pp. 31-37, p. 36.
[516] P. Casaldáliga, "Open Letter to Our Martyrs", trans. P. Burns, *Concilium*, 2003/1, pp. 149-151, p. 150.

banner…Globalization…is still producing poverty, oppression, exclusion and victimization and doing so on the scale of millions."[517] Mesters is even more specific, identifying the chief culprits as "the financiers, the directors of multinationals, the rulers of the world, the industrialists, the absentee landowners, the aristocrats."[518]

What these authors represent is one analysis of the political realities of injustice and poverty and clearly this analysis profoundly changes what it means to pursue Christ's cause. By this analysis, any cause which struggles against capitalism and globalisation fulfils Christ's cause. Such causes begin to align notions of witness and discipleship not only with political aims, but with political *ideologies* and therefore necessarily with political parties too. As we will see shortly, these *political* causes also recommend or necessitate certain political praxes. The political realities of these causes, however, are highly contested. There is simply no definitive political programme or cause to bring about the eradication of poverty, tackle injustice, or achieve liberation from oppression which may be directly aligned with Christ's cause, and this means that for each of these causes and others, the field of political possibilities is vast. The eradication of poverty may, for instance, be best served by anti-capitalist movements which liberation theologians defend, or it may be better served by the empowerment of women and the control over reproduction that universal access to contraception would procure. Clearly, these political causes could produce two very different, and contested, martyrs.

This chapter does not intend to provide a general appraisal of this political theology and of the political realities of the Christian faith, only to illustrate the *political* power that it procures for martyrdom. It does, however, want to observe that the breadth of political possibilities licensed by a theopolitical understanding of Christ's causes invariably leads to

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[517] T. Okure, J. Sobrino, F. Wilfred, *Introduction*, op. cit., p. 7.
[518] C. Mesters, "The Servant of Yahweh: The Patient Endurance of the Poor, Mirror of God's Justice", trans. P. Burns, *Concilium*, 2003/1 pp. 67-74, p. 74.

those that are more extremist, and that this therefore makes this political power especially significant. Oscar Romero of El Salvador, for instance, explains in his 4th Pastoral Letter that only profound structural change would fulfil these causes in history. He writes;

> To preach and encourage the urgent need for profound structural changes in the social and political life of our country…the full liberation of the Salvadoran people… demands a thorough change in the social, political and economic systems.[519]

By what cause would such structural change be achieved? In a homily delivered to his congregation in San Salvador, Romero explains;

> I believe that the conditions for insurrection exist here in El Salvador...When political interests and those who are able to take control of an insurrection believe that the conditions pointed out by the Church have been fulfilled – and these conditions have been fulfilled – then we have a case for legitimate insurrection. Thus we state clearly the position of the Church: we have the right to rise up in insurrection and the insurrection is legitimate.[520]

Romero's call for political insurrection and the revolutionary overhaul of existing socio-economic structures shows how ostensibly uncontroversial causes rooted in Christ's ministry might be seen to be historically engendered in highly controversial political causes.

El Salvador provides an especially apposite case study as it can very much be seen as the nucleus of this martyrology and its lived experience in recent times, and it has been argued, successfully I believe, that this popular martyrdom in El Salvador contributed to the revolutionary movement there during the civil war. This demonstrates the political power we have explained that martyrdom can have on the political cause for which martyrs are

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[519] O. Romero, 4th Pastoral Letter: "The Church's Mission Amid the National Crisis," 6th August, 1979, published in English in O. Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless*, op. cit. p. 138.
[520] O. Romero, *Homilies*, op. cit., October 21st, 1979.

seen to have died; in this case, a cause demonstrated by the quotation from Romero above.[521] This is, we should stress, no mean example; Archbishop Romero has been beatified by the Roman Catholic Church. His belief that revolution was necessary and justified is quite typical of the political realities of the liberation theology promulgated in Latin America.

It is clear, therefore, that the political realities of Christ's causes are no less interpretive and therefore ambivalent than the causes whose realities they describe. A theopolitical understanding of these causes – which, as we have seen, is necessary in order to avoid the charge of Docetism and pursue them effectively – only casts the net of martyrdom even further by licensing a range of interpretations of *political* causes by which Christ's causes are fulfilled, including those that are extremist and upon which martyrdom therefore has a profoundly radicalising effect.

Christian Praxis: The Political Responsibilities of Witnessing as Christ

We have observed, therefore, that this martyrology's claim that the martyr witnesses as Christ by pursuing the causes of Christ's ministry does not successfully delimit the cause for which the martyr is directly killed; not only because the causes of Christ's ministry are a matter of contention and interpretation, but because their political realities are highly disparate and admit of even further interpretation. The result is that potentially extremist political causes may become the foundation of a martyr narrative on the basis that they are quite legitimately imagined as pursuing a cause that is imagined as Christ's. We have hitherto spoken primarily about the *ends* of the martyr's pursuit of Christ's cause; but a martyr's pursuit of a cause, and therefore the example they provide to Christian discipleship

[521] A. L. Petersen, op. cit. See also P. Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions*, (London: SCM, 1984).

and to their community, is as much a product of the *means* by which this cause is pursued as it is the cause itself. That is, the pursuit of a cause is constituted not just by the *what* of the cause itself, but by the *how* of its pursuit.

It is necessary, therefore, in what remains of this section, to illustrate briefly why, when we consider the political *responsibilities* that the political realities of these causes might be imagined as conferring, the praxis by which the martyr pursues their cause further problematises this martyrology's political power. It allows the possibility that potentially extremist practices might be perceived as the political means by which one witnesses as Christ. *How* these causes are pursued therefore even further multiplies the political possibilities of martyrdom and empowers martyrdom to influence not only people's political hopes, but their political activity. What, we therefore ask, are the political *means* by which these theopolitical causes might be imagined as being pursued?

It is eminently clear that there are a multiplicity of means by which a political cause can be pursued and, therefore, a great range of political actions which could be conceived as justified by a particular cause. To illustrate the possibility that extremist practices might be justified as a means to achieve these ends, we can return to the example of El Salvador to examine the relationship between means and ends in the characterisation of liberation we provided there. In another expression of the major structural change the Christian faith demands, Romero preaches to his congregation:

> I also tell you to fully support the social, economic, and political transformation that in light of the gospel arises from the depths of our people. This will signal the true liberation of our country and thus will be opposed to any form of imperialism that some might desire to impose on us.[522]

[522] O. Romero, *Homilies*, op. cit., November, 25th, 1979.

Clearly for Romero, a theopolitical connection is made between the liberation the Gospel promises and the social, economic and political transformation for which he calls; but by what means is this achieved? Or, rather more precisely, what means *could* this end justify? In his third pastoral letter, *The Church and the Popular Political Organisations*, where he examines the role of the Church in the political struggle of the day, Romero candidly answers this question, explaining that "…the church is interested only in one thing: if the aim of the struggle is just, the church will support it with all the power of the gospel."[523] What Romero says here is very revealing; the struggle is justified by its aims, and this is precisely the danger of this martyrology. The martyr's praxis does not need to be *morally* justifiable on its own terms, it simply needs to be seen to pursue a legitimate cause and, therefore, to be justified by that cause. This test of legitimacy is what licenses the possibility that extremist acts, such as violence, might be seen as justified by the cause they pursue.

Romero's characterisation of oppression as a form of imperialism makes this concern about the resort to violence especially pertinent because it implies that liberation requires decolonisation, something that has historically been associated with the *seizing*, rather than the negotiating, of power, and the revolutionary violence that this necessarily entails. This relationship between liberation, decolonisation and revolution is a common theme in liberation theology.[524] This demonstrates how the theological vocabulary of liberation, justice and humanisation used to describe Christ's causes can entail and justify – not morally, but practically – the political vocabulary of revolution, conflict and even violence to describe the political responsibilities they might be seen to confer. The notion that violent praxis might be justified by the theopolitical cause of liberation is not merely speculation, it

[523] O. Romero, 3rd Pastoral Letter: "The Church and the Popular Political Organisations," 6th August, 1978, published in English in O. Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless*, op. cit., p. 97.
[524] See, for instance, the numerous references to Franz Fanon in the liberation theology of Enrique Dussel. See E. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Martinez and Morkovsky, (New York: Orbis, 1985) and F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington, (London: Penguin, 2001).

is already a common trope in liberation theology and, as we have said, has arguably already been a major driving force of armed revolutions there at the end of the 20th century.

Staying in El Salvador, for instance, Romero exhorts his congregation to join popular political organisations calling for revolution, explaining that "this is not the time for passivity"[525] and that "True Christians are not cowards and know how to fight when it is necessary."[526] In the course of this fight "the church allows for violence in legitimate defence"[527] which extends to "seditious violence"[528] used to liberate oneself from oppression. At the same time, those who died in the conflict these groups would become involved in were remembered as martyrs.

S. J. Emmanuel provides an illuminating case illustrating how this martyrology is used to validate extreme violence as a profession of the faith by pursuing the Christian cause of liberation. Writing of the Tamils in Sri Lanka's civil war who used suicide bombing in their violent secessionist campaign, he defends the view that, despite their extreme violent praxis, they should still be considered martyrs because the cause they pursued was just. He writes;

> When three decades of non-violent protests and democratic attempts to win their basic human rights failed miserably, the Tamil people, faced with further genocidal measures, resorted to a militant struggle against the oppressive forces of the state… Without attempting to explain away, justify or encourage violence in any form, one can easily understand how a struggling people and their leaders are forced by the oppressor and his war-machinery to react to state injustice and state terrorism through suicide bombings, even in the face of damage to innocent lives.[529]

[525] O. Romero, *Homilies*, op. cit., November, 25th, 1979.
[526] Ibid., September 17th, 1978.
[527] O. Romero, 3rd Pastoral Letter, op. cit., p. 108.
[528] Ibid., p. 107.
[529] S. J. Emmanuel, "Martyrdom in an Asian Struggle for Life and Dignity: Tamils in Sri Lanka", *Concilium*, 2003/1, pp. 24-30.

What is clear, therefore, is that this martyrology makes *killing*, as well as *dying* for one's cause, part of the theological grammar of martyrdom in a way which brings it much more, in line with the extremist trajectories in Islamic martyrdom discourse. It thereby fiercely challenges a strand of moral self-righteousness in Christian martyrdom discourse which suggests that the martyrdom traditions of other religions such as Islam present a dangerous version of martyrdom inimical to the Christian understanding. Cunningham, for instance, writes that "To apply the word "martyr" to a suicide bomber is "…to evacuate the meaning of the term in any Christian way of understanding."[530] In this chapter, however, we have defended the place of this martyrology in Christian martyrdom tradition and therefore demonstrated that theologians need to recognise that the same dangers and distortions exist within the Christian tradition even if they have hirtherto been less manifest.

Politically, the violence that liberation theologians such as Emmanuel, Romero and Sobrino sometimes defend may be necessary in order to achieve the democratic power and popular liberation they promote. Proponents might argue, with Emmanuel, that in the face of the political realities of these struggles, pacifism would be docetic. Nevertheless, the *principle* that this martyrology could be used to imagine an act of violence as a legitimate pursuit of a cause of Christ and become the basis of a martyr narrative – with all the import that we have seen this entails – makes this martyrology very dangerous. One final example can illustrate the peril of this principle prevailing.

In 1994, Paul Hill approached an abortion clinic in Florida whereupon he killed abortion doctor John Britton and his bodyguard. His defence was that he was acting in the cause of preventing the doctors from committing murder, and his final words before he was sentenced to death were to that effect: "If you believe abortion is a lethal force, you should

[530] L. S. Cunningham, "Christian Martyrdom: A Theological Perspective", op. cit., p. 17. See also B. Wicker, (ed.), op. cit., and L. Hurtado, op. cit.

oppose the force and do what you have to do to stop it."[531] He argued that by executing him the state was making a martyr of him for it was God's work he was carrying out. He was executed in 2003. Hill is not considered a martyr by any major church, but his self-proclaimed status as a martyr faithfully follows the principle this martyrdom endorses. This case illustrates the danger of the fundamental claims of this martyrology that this chapter has outlined. Hill was killed in pursuit of a cause that he saw as central to the Christian faith. He may have been *directly* killed for the extremist murderous praxis he adopted, but because that praxis was inspired by a commitment to the teachings of Christ, it would appear that this martyrology could indeed be used in the way Hill himself articulates it to imagine him as a martyr.

This case represents the danger of the direction in which this highly political martyrology takes martyrdom. It was articulated and reimagined in the 20th century with the intention of honouring and memorialising the liberative praxis of those who realise the political realities and responsibilities of the faith and risk their lives to fulfil the promises of Christ's ministry. The conceptual claims and strong political theology needed in order to justify their martyrdom, however, have given this martyrology a political character which is extremely dangerous. The fundamental claims of this martyrology not only allow for the possibility, but in fact *have* allowed, that extremist political praxis such as violence be imagined as the pursuit of the faith. We must remember the significance that martyrdom brings to the extremist political causes and extremist political praxis that this martyrdom could, and has, sanctified. Karl Rahner perceives this when he asks whether martyrdom should move in the direction of this martyrology and allow political praxis to be seen as a profession of the faith:

[531] http://www.clarkprosecutor.org/html/death/US/hill873.htm.

> This question is of considerable weight for the life of individual Christians and of the Church, because the recognition of martyrdom with regard to a Christian engaged in an active struggle or fight would mean a significance official recommendation by the Church of this kind of active struggle as an example worthy of imitation by other Christians.[532]

Not only does this martyrology make martyrs of individuals pursuing these extremist causes in extremist ways, but it unleashes the overwhelming power of martyrdom on these causes and this praxis with a potentially devastating effect. It legitimises them, sanctifies them, concretises and unifies a community's conviction in them, and endorses this praxis as a means of resistance to those who disapprove, whom it demonises as persecutors. This martyrology, therefore, can be profoundly radicalising; even more so when we remember that martyr narratives can be made precisely in order to induce these effects. As Flanagan and Jupp say, "political causes often need martyrs to galvanise a cause and give it a mobilising focus."[533] This martyrology ministers well to that need and therefore provides for the alarming possibility that it may be used as an instrument for this radicalisation to extremist causes.

Conclusion: A Dilemma For Christian Theology

In this section, therefore, we have shown why the conceptual framework we outlined in part two and which this martyrology depends upon is so problematic. Because it allows that the martyr can be imagined as having been killed *indirectly* for their faith if the political cause for which the martyr is *directly* killed is imagined as *theopolitical*, this martyrology is, as Wilfred says, "packed with political message."[534] We saw how this martyrology

[532] K. Rahner, op. cit., p. 9.
[533] K. Flanagan and P. C. Jupp, op. cit., p. 114.
[534] F. Wilfred, op. cit., p. 81.

presents a robust challenge to a weak political theology which seeks to separate politics and religion as two distinct autonomous entities and deny the existence of the theopolitical. It does so by adopting the religious perspective of the victim for whom this distinction represents a false antithesis, and by demonstrating that this political theology disregards the political in a way which makes Christian theology docetic and unable to fulfil or even give meaning to causes whose very essence is concrete and historical, such as justice and liberation.

This martyrology instead, therefore, insists upon a strong political theology which recognises the political realities of these *theopolitical* causes and accordingly believes that they confer certain political responsibilities. It is this notion of political holiness which described the martyr's cause as political that we have seen problematises this martyrology. We began to explain how by very briefly foregrounding the considerable impact that martyrdom has on perceptions of the cause for which the martyr is killed and the effect it has on the martyr's community. These effects are considerable and we noted that they were even further problematised by the central contention of this thesis which is that martyrdom is a sociological construct. This means, as Middleton explains, that "martyrs can be appropriated or even 'created' in order to legitimate religious or political causes."[535] The nature of those political causes consequently became extremely important. With this in mind, we turned to the political character of this martyrology in order to examine the nature of the political causes and praxis to which it would bring this legitimising and sanctifying power of martyrdom. As we have just observed, the desire to avoid Docetism and to incarnate theology in the thick political realities in which the faith is experienced has given this martyrology a political power which allows it to imagine extreme political causes and

[535] P. Middleton, "What is Martyrdom?", op. cit., p. 128.

extreme political praxis as a legitimate form of witnessing as Christ and the basis for a martyr narrative.

We said at the beginning of this section that this martyrology thereby provides a unique contribution to the burgeoning field of political theology. Through this analysis, I believe we begin to see not only how this martyrology is problematised by its political character, but also how this martyrology's political character consequently represents a serious and unique challenge to political theology. This martyrology profoundly raises the stakes of *theopolitical* discourse because the formidable theological and social implications martyrdom carries represent the potential import of an articulation of the *theopolitical.* This analysis has not intended to evaluate this strong political theology; however, by examining the dangers of a martyrology that depends on it, we have highlighted and demonstrated its potential implications, and therefore provided an indirect and unique contribution to its discussion. This martyrology represents the dangers of a strong political theology because it provides a vehicle by which the spiritualisation of the historical and political, on which theopolitical discourse relies, may become radicalising.

This martyrology therefore seems to present a dilemma to contemporary Christian theology. It compellingly highlights the pitfalls of a weak political theology by showing that it fundamentally abrogates the necessarily theopolitical nature of the causes to which it attempts to draw attention and therefore abdicates the political responsibilities these causes confer. Yet, this martyrology embodies and represents the dangers of the strong political theology that it *does* call for to avoid this Docetism and to recognise the political realities of these causes. I contend, therefore, that an analysis of this martyrology represents an important contribution to contemporary theopolitical discourse because it warns against two extreme poles of this discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to prove the two central contentions of this thesis. Firstly, that martyr narratives are imagined according to martyrologies which can be understood according to a four-part model emerging from the notion of witness in the early church. Secondly, that these martyrologies contain theological ideas and conceptual frameworks which make these martyrologies highly problematic. Much of this chapter, unlike those preceding it whose martyrologies are uncontroversial and universally accepted within Christian martyrdom discourse, has therefore been devoted to defending the role of this martyrology within this four-fold schema. I have demonstrated the role of this martyrology in martyr-narratives of the 20th century and in particular I have illustrated its centrality in the phenomenon of popular martyrdom. I have also proven the validity and authenticity of this martyrology. Chiefly, this has been done by showing that its notion that the martyr may be killed *indirectly* for the faith and *directly* for some cause or praxis by which that faith is professed, is firmly established within Christian martyrdom discourse and ecclesiastical history. In particular, this chapter has provided a revisionist account of Benedict XVI to show that his use of *odium fidei* supports, rather than rejects, this martyrology. Furthermore, I also shown that this notion is testified in ecclesiastical history by the example of the early church martyrs.

This analysis was also necessary in order to foreground the key features of this martyrology so that they could be subjected to evaluative criticism in the third part of this chapter. Here, we have demonstrated the second contention by demonstrating that this notion of being killed *indirectly* for the faith that we defended in part two of this chapter, makes this martyrology highly political. The belief that political causes and praxis might be justified and sanctified as professions of the faith has the potential to take this martyrology in a dangerous direction. As we have just seen, it has the potential to spiritualise extremist

acts such as violence and, by making these the basis of a martyr narrative, to radicalise others to pursue these political causes and adopt this praxis.

We can see, therefore, why the Church might object to this martyrology. As Katongole says, for instance, "…it is obvious why the church might be unable or even reluctant to engage the conversation about [these] martyrs in a lively, ongoing way. For doing so involves accepting and welcoming the threat martyrs offer."[536] This threat is substantial. That martyrdom is socially-constructed and may therefore be instrumentalised to induce these radicalising effects makes this martyrology no less a threat to public life, and therefore religious discourse, than extremist Islamic martyrdom which has been used for precisely this purpose with devastating effect. The Church's objection to this martyrology represents a disownership of the darker side of Christian martyrdom; a disownership that has allowed contemporary Christian discourse to propound a pious and reverential perception of martyrdom totally averse and disassociated with the perverted understanding of this term used elsewhere. This chapter, however, has shown that this darker side is very much part of Christian martyrdom discourse. It shows that Christian martyrdom traditions have the potential to create martyr narratives as extremist, radicalising and threatening to public life as those that are traditionally believed only to exist within the distorted and unholy traditions of other religions. This martyrology shatters this complacency and superiority and shows that these dangerous traditions are very much alive within Christian martyrdom discourse. This chapter, like this thesis, calls theologians to respond.

[536] E. M. Katongole, "'Threatened with Resurrection': Martyrdom and Reconciliation in the World Church," in M. L. Budde, and K. Scott, (eds.), op. cit., p. 203.

Conclusion

This thesis began by proposing two contentions. Firstly, it proposed to develop the social-constructivist account of martyrdom by introducing the notion of the martyrology, arguing that this account was incomplete without an elucidation of the role of theological conceptualisations of the meaning and significance of martyrdom. Secondly, it sought to evaluate these ideas, arguing that doing so would reveal them to be radicalising, morally dangerous and logically and theologically incoherent. It is hoped, however, that in and through this analysis a broader purpose has become apparent, serving a wider aim within modern theological discourse. These contentions aim to demonstrate the urgent need for theological reflection on the role of theological ideas in the narrative construction of the martyr, highlighting the devastating consequences that these ideas can have and the responsibility that this confers, but also showing the fruitfulness of the theological approach that this thesis recommends.

In this conclusion, I will summarise how this thesis has defended its key contentions, in particular with the aim of drawing out the distinctive and novel contributions that this thesis has made. Finally, after explaining where the contentions of this thesis leaves us, I end by illustrating briefly where they take us, by indicating further research that should now be undertaken.

The First Contention

The first contention was introduced in Chapter 1 by proposing the ostensibly simple question: what is martyrdom? I contrasted the positivist approach endorsed by the Church with the social-constructivist account which has emerged in recent years, spearheaded by

writers such as Paul Middleton and Elizabeth Castelli. This understands the martyr, not as an historical individual to be *discovered* by the Church, but rather as a narrative construct existing within a literary universe collectively-imagined by the martyr's community. This thesis accepted the fundamental tenets of the social-constructivist approach, but aimed to develop and refine it. Critically, I asserted that the martyr cannot be merely a social construct, but must rather be a socio-*theological* construct because although any death might be imagined as martyrdom, not *any* imagination of that death could be martyrdom. A key aspect of the social-constructivist view, therefore, was lacking; that is, the observation that martyr narratives must operate with some conception of the meaning and significance of martyrdom, and this is what this thesis has called martyrologies.

What are these martyrologies and where do they come from? This thesis not only argues for the role of martyrologies, but recommends an approach to their discovery and analysis, attempting to demonstrate how theologians might begin to confront analytically the presence of theological traditions in the social-constructivist account of martyrdom. In Chapter 2, I suggested that one approach to uncovering these martyrologies and discovering their effect on martyr narratives was to examine the emergence of martyrdom in the early church. I suggested that how martyrdom was understood as it emerged in the early church established the fault lines for the development of Christian martyrdom, setting its trajectory through Christian history and ultimately defining the martyrologies by which martyrs in the Christian tradition have been imagined since. The approach was therefore to look at how martyrdom emerged. To do so, I looked at two questions which go to the heart of the origins of martyrdom: what did witness mean to the early church, and how was its relationship with death understood? First and foremost, this analysis gave further credence to the social-constructivist account because it showed that the martyr emerges in the early church as a

developing characterisation of the witness; a figure within a highly-stylised juridical-martial metaphor used to dramatise the experiences of the early church.

The results of our analysis produced a fourfold model of how martyrdom was understood in the early church. The martyr was, broadly, understood as one who witnesses *to* or *as* Christ and dies *for* their witness, or whose death *is* their witness *to* or *as* Christ. It is not suggested that this is exhaustive of Christian martyrologies, but these four conceptualisations of martyrdom were subsequently used as a framework to test and justify the claim that they are an essential component of the social-constructivist account of how martyrs are made, and therefore to illustrate the fruitfulness of the approach recommended and adopted in Chapter 2. This played out over the subsequent four chapters. Each chapter convincingly demonstrated the role that these martyrologies have in the narrative construction of the martyr, showing how individual martyr narratives are constructed in order to make the narrative of the individual's death cohere with these conceptualisations of who the martyr is. The effect that this had on *how* the martyr was described in the narrative became clear. In chapters 3, 4, and 5 I used examples both from the early church *Acta* and more recent examples, including Mathew Shepard and Charles de Foucauld, among others.

In Chapter 6, I turned to the modern phenomenon of popular martyrdom; a subject that no modern analysis of martyrdom can now overlook. Is there a martyrology underpinning these narratives, or were they purely social constructs designed to minister to community need? Is this martyrology, as is commonly understood, a modern invention which conflicts with the approach recommended in Chapter 2, or can it too be rooted in the early church? We saw that with respect to this martyrology, the first contention of this thesis is supported by those advocating for the theological legitimacy of these martyrs. These proponents, such as Boff, Rahner, Sobrino and Valiente have extensively justified and elucidated the theological basis for the designation of these victims as martyrs and this has

helped to uncover the martyrology operative in these narratives; the martyrology of the Jesus martyr. We outlined the key thinkers in this burgeoning field and detailed their understanding of this martyrology. We identified its role in making not only the popular martyrs of Latin America – where this martyrology has mostly emerged – but also used the examples of Maximilian Kolbe, the Ecuadorian missionaries, and Stephen Biko.

It was submitted that the phenomenon of popular martyrdom and theological attempts to justify their legitimacy has actually done great service to the first contention of this thesis because it has highlighted the role of theological tradition in the narrative construction even of popular martyrs, so fiercely opposed by the Church. This thesis, however, went on to make a further ambitious claim. It asserted that the martyrology responsible for the proliferation of popular martyrs in the 20th and 21st centuries was also derived from the fourfold model outlined in Chapter 2. It proposed, controversially, that the novelty of this martyrology is based on a misunderstanding. Rather than being invented in the 20th century, it has merely been remembered from centuries past. This martyrology, I said, was in fact an authentic expression of orthodox Christian martyrdom tradition and that the received wisdom which said otherwise was based on a misreading of the authoritative texts as well as a baffling oversight of early church history.

I defended this by showing that this martyrology is entirely consistent with both Thomas Aquinas' classic discussion on martyrdom in the *Summa Theologica* and even in Benedict XIV's paradigmatic and authoritative text on martyrdom, the *Opus de Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* which, as we saw in Chapter 1, is the basis of the Church's conceptualisation of martyrdom with which this martyrology is negatively contrasted as heretical. To this end, I translated these writings to illustrate that the opposition that this martyrology is said to have to orthodox accounts of Christian martyrdom is entirely false. I showed that Benedict XIV's text has been maligned and misrepresented as an

obstructive relic to this martyrology when in fact it actually supports the claims that this martyrology makes *against* its Church detractors. He is, I argue, better imagined as an apologist for this martyrology rather than an authority for its illegitimacy.

This represents a bold claim and so I went further and explained in detail the basis for the Church's opposition to this martyrology. This argues that the martyrs of this martyrology cannot be imagined as having died for the faith because they were not killed *in odium fidei*; rather, they were *directly* killed for a political praxis that faith inspires. This objection is iterated repeatedly by critics of this new martyrology and it has been a serious barrier to the Church's acceptance of these martyrs. Accordingly, this criticism was comprehensively dismantled with three objections. Firstly, we returned to Benedict XIV's text, the *locus classicus* of the *odium fidei* objection. We saw, once again, that this text's understanding of *odium fidei* very clearly accepts that the martyr may be killed only *indirectly* for the faith by being killed for its profession, not the faith it professes. Secondly, a logical analysis of what it means to be killed for a cause showed that the Church's objection represented a false equivalence between being killed for the faith and being killed *directly* for the faith, and therefore between the persecutor's motivation and the martyr's cause. Finally, the third criticism demonstrates the theological inconsistency of this objection. By reviewing the literature on early church persecution, we show that the martyrs of the early church were themselves killed *indirectly* for their faith. Therefore, the orthodoxy of this martyrology was defended on the basis of authority, analytical rigour, and theological and historical consistency.

This represents a radical revision of traditional thinking on martyrdom and is perhaps the most audacious claim that this thesis makes. That is: this thesis claims not only that this popular martyrdom is governed by a coherent martyrology, but that this martyrology must be central to Christian martyrdom tradition. This thesis argues forcefully that the orthodoxy

of this martyrology must now be accepted. This will only help theologians to confront the more challenging aspects of martyrdom which this martyrology reveals and from which the Church has therefore been protected in recent years. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of popular martyrdom and the democratisation of martyrdom spoken of in Chapter 1 illustrates why theologians and the Church cannot hide from this martyrology any longer. If it represents a threat then this is a threat that needs to be confronted, not ignored on the erroneous basis that it is heretical to Christian theology. This challenging, potentially radicalising and highly political martyrology is part of the Christian inheritance; it belongs to Christian theology, history and popular belief. This confers a responsibility on theologians to confront this martyrology and the difficulties that it brings.

The Second Contention

Having established the role of theological ideas in the social-constructivist account of martyrdom, this thesis conducted an evaluation of these ideas. The contention was that they would be found, to varying degrees, i) radicalising and extremist; ii) logically and theologically incoherent; and iii) morally challenging. The broad aim of this contention was firstly, to recommend a critical approach to critically evaluating these theological ideas and their role in martyrdom; secondly, to demonstrate thereby the fruitfulness of this critical approach; and thirdly, and perhaps above all, to highlight the urgency with which these ideas need to be understood and challenged and the duty incumbent on theologians to do so.

Particular attention has been paid in this thesis to scrutiny of the impact of these ideas on the way that individuals in the martyr's community consequently interpret and engage with their reality. A major theme in each chapter has been the notion of discipleship. It is axiomatic in the Christian faith that martyrs provide an example to fellow Christians and

embody the ideals of the Christian faith and Christian praxis. Indeed, as Chapter 1 illustrated, this can be the very *raison d'être* of the narrative. Therefore, how martyr narratives portray their martyrs is of enormous significance. In the introduction, for instance, we noted that different martyrologies and the theological traditions underpinning them have sent people to battle, led individuals to inflict unimaginable pain on themselves and others, and inspired entire ideologies and political movements. The analysis that this thesis has conducted has drawn out the theological traditions responsible. This is the first step to confronting and challenging these ideas.

In the first two chapters we examined the two martyrologies emerging from an understanding of the martyr witnessing *to* Christ through public confession. It was clear, however, that despite these very divergent conceptualisations of the role of death, these martyrologies involved theological ideas whose analysis led to similar conclusions. In Chapter 3, for instance, we saw that the notion that the martyr's witness is consummated and constituted by their death led to a zeal for voluntary martyrdom, which we characterised according to a threefold radicalising progression towards outright suicide. This culminated in the extremist view that the martyr's death subsumed their witness altogether. This led to an extreme glorification of death which some characterised as a pornography of violence and led to a suicidal zeal for self-destruction. It was also noted, however, that this martyrology might accordingly encourage collusion with the persecuting projects of one's oppressor in privileging passive suffering over resilience.

Similarly, in Chapter 4, we analysed the role of death as the cost of the martyr's witness. We concluded that the religious significance of this martyrology lay in the martyr's absolute conviction that their willingness to die reveals. Death, therefore, was seen to have an epistemic function. It was shown, however, that death was not only not necessary to discharge this function, but was not especially well-suited to do so. Its role is predicated on

the belief that there is an irrebuttable presumption that life is an absolute virtue. We showed, however, that this presumption simply does not necessarily, or empirically, hold true. This martyrology gives death a role which made it dispensable and meant that it became substituted by other practices which could better exemplify the martyr's conviction. As with Chapter 3, this led to a zeal for self-renunciation as we examined the self-destructive practices aimed at achieving this 'living martyrdom.'

These objections may *prima facie* appear theoretical; perhaps even hyperbolic. A modern reader may think it a fanciful notion that would-be martyrs will take to such extreme practices of self-annihilation as we find detailed in the *Acts.* It is important, therefore, to incarnate these ideas in reality; what is more, in modern reality. To that end, we saw that these ideas resonated in modern theology and highlighted the concern that this therefore raises to modern theological discourse. Bonhoeffer explains that "Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact, it is a joy and a token of his grace."[537] Archbishop Tutu argued that "suffering must be central also to the life and work of the Christian" and is a "cause for pride."[538] Likewise, Archbishop Romero asserted that "true Christians desire death."[539] These views are shocking; not only because they encourage the sort of suicidal mania and fetishisation of death that we observed in the early church, but because they normalise and glorify a self-identification as oppressed, victimised, persecuted and condemned in a way which scandalises modern liberation projects by privileging submission to tyranny and oppression over defiance, resistance and liberation. The effect that these views can have on the praxis of individuals and the martyrs' communities was illustrated in the example of Charles de Foucauld. These concerns, then are not just hypothetical or theoretical, they are

[537] L. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 45.
[538] D. Tutu, op. cit., pp. 64-65.
[539] O. Romero, *Homilies,* op. cit., September 24, 1978.

real. Since it is theological ideas that are ultimately responsible, theologians should be attentive to the promulgation of these ideas and their radicalising possibilities.

We also demonstrated that both conceptualisations of death led to logical incoherence. In both cases, the attraction to suffering and death problematised the martyrology's claims to religious significance. In Chapter 3, we saw that the martyrology is governed by a dissonance: death is at once desirable as a prerequisite to martyrdom and yet the religious significance of this martyrology is predicated on the presumption that its sacrifice is costly. Therefore, the premium placed on martyrdom and the sacrifice of life it involves reverses the conventional polarity between life and death on which the religious significance of this sacrifice is based. In Chapter 4, we saw that similarly, the pursuit of self-renunciation is futile since this pursuit is motivated by a desire for what that self-renunciation achieves – martyrdom – which itself represents something that the true ascetic should renounce. As Brian Wicker indicated; "Martyrdom is the ultimate abnegation, because it is not only giving up your life, but also giving up all your *desire* – even, and perhaps especially, including the desire to be a martyr."[540]

In Chapter 5, we saw that the notion that a death could be imagined as martyrdom on the basis that it imitated that of Christ's was governed by two crucial ambiguities which opened this martyrology up to extremist interpretations. Firstly, there is an inherent ambiguity in how to interpret Christ's death; we compared, for instance, the notion that his death represents a sacrifice with the view that it was part of a cosmic war against Satan. Secondly, there is similar ambiguity in what it means to imitate Christ's death. This allows the possibility that extremist interpretations of Christ's death will endorse similarly extremist practices justified as imitations of this death. Because Christ's death can be interpreted as a radical event – and we highlighted the highly political Christologies

[540] B. Wicker, "The Drama of Martyrdom", op. cit., p. 107.

articulated in liberation theology – the martyrs and paths for discipleship it legitimises can likewise be politically charged, radical and extremist. Christologies of resistance and liberation have inspired *imitatios* involving revolutionary socio-political praxis in the name of liberation, just as Christologies of sacrifice have inspired radical acts of self-renunciation.

In Chapter 6, we examined a martyrology which understood the martyr as one whose death was a cost of their witness *as* Christ. On this account, the martyr is imagined as having witnessed as Christ by pursuing causes, such as justice, charity and compassion, that were Christ's causes during his ministry. To this end, they pursue certain politico-historical causes and adopt praxes in order to effectuate the change Christ's causes demand, and for this they are killed. The martyr is therefore killed only *indirectly* for the faith and *directly* for the profession of the faith that their witness *as* Christ involves. We saw that because these professions are necessarily theo-*political*, this martyrology challenges a weak political theology which attempts to divorce religion from politics in public life. Instead, it requires a strong political theology which recognises the concrete politico-historical realities that Christ's causes demand.

Like Chapter 5, however, this martyrology's claim that the martyr witnesses as Christ by pursuing his causes in history does not sufficiently delimit this political scope of the *theopolitical* cause of martyrdom. As with Chapter 4, we saw that this martyrology was governed by a threefold ambiguity: firstly, what causes might Christ's ministry represent? Secondly, by what political causes are these causes instantiated in history? Thirdly, what are the political praxes by which these causes might be imagined as being legitimately pursued? The result is that potentially extremist political causes and praxes may become spiritualised as the theopolitical realisation of Christ's ministry. Again, we illustrated the very real incarnation of these ideas using the modern example of Archbishop Romero. In response to government oppression, Romero declared that Christ's causes required the "social,

economic and political transformation", explaining that "insurrection is legitimate."[541] The conclusion that killing as well as dying for the faith could become the basis for martyrdom becomes irresistible once violence in pursuit of these political causes is justified. Indeed, Romero writes; "true Christians are not cowards and know how to fight when it is necessary"[542], endorsing the "seditious violence" necessary to escape oppression. We used the example of Paul Hill to explain the radical extremism that this martyrology could legitimise.

Of perhaps greater significance, however, was our analysis of the impact of a martyr narrative on a community's perception of and relationship towards the martyr's cause. We saw that martyrdom does not just validate a cause, it unifies a community around this cause and crystallises both their conviction in it and their allegiance to it. The martyr is a powerful symbolic figure for this cause, who embodies the possibility of resistance and can therefore both mobilise a community and also radicalise it by representing an extreme expression of conviction in this cause which can become normative and emblematic for the community. This was particularly pertinent because martyrs, as we noted in Chapter 1, are made for a specific purpose. This means that the implications of this martyrology can become its function so that martyrs can be created *in order to* legitimise a political cause or encourage and normalise a certain response. When these causes and the praxis by which they are pursued are extremist, this martyrology becomes frighteningly powerful.

This final martyrology illustrates, therefore, the dilemma that political theology must confront. A strong political theology risks political causes being spiritualised with the religious significance of martyrdom, and this martyrology provides a vehicle for that process. On the other hand, a weak political theology fails to realise the theopolitical nature

[541] O. Romero, *Homilies*, op. cit., October 21st, 1979.
[542] Ibid., September 17th, 1978.

of Christ's causes, and leads to a docetic witness of Christ's ministry. This thesis' analysis, therefore, provides a contribution to modern theopolitical discourse.

Further Research

It will be clear from this conclusion that the most contentious aspects of this thesis concern Chapter 6 and the bold contention there that this martyrology is both orthodox and highly controversial. The recent canonisation of Archbishop Romero represents a watershed moment in the emergence of this martyrology and Romero accordingly represents an apt vehicle for future developments for this research. It could be argued that for the first time in its modern history, the Church has unequivocally accepted a theopolitical cause as the cause for martyrdom. This brings this martyrology truly into focus and gives Chapter 6 a very material relevance. This is certain to shine a spotlight on the discussions concerning the validity of this martyrology and, therefore, of the Church's canonisation process outlined in Chapter 1. It is clear that now is the time to make the case boldly for the claims made in Chapter 6 concerning the orthodoxy and legitimacy of this martyrology and, therefore, for Romero's canonisation to signal a dramatic renaissance in the Church's understanding of martyrdom. This thesis has attempted to minister to this aim, but further work is needed in this area. Too much attention has been paid to the pastoral need for such a martyrology, and not enough to the theological rigour and orthodoxy of such an understanding.

As Chapter 6 illustrates, however, Romero's Canonisation is also a moment of great challenge to Christian theology and most specifically political theology. Does Romero's canonisation endorse a potentially radicalising political theology? The hagiography that will now follow must be tempered by a sober reflection on the grave implications of a theopolitical martyrology raised in this thesis. Romero's canonisation makes further

research into the relationship between martyrdom, political theology and radicalisation more urgent than ever. Petersen's research in El Salvador has already indicated a relationship between martyrdom there and the revolutionary response. Now that Romero's works will be translated and disseminated broadly, the role that the promulgation of his theology through his homilies and pastoral letters had on the way that people not only interpreted their reality but also engaged with it must be considered. What are the political implications of a martyrology which canonises Romero? To ascertain this we have to consider Romero's role in the political events of his ministry. What role did the promulgation of his theology through his homilies and pastoral letters have on the popular theology of El Salvador and the way that people not only interpreted but engaged with their reality? Does Romero's canonisation now baptise and sanctify a political theology which mobilised a congregation to revolution?

Martyrs are made; they are made purposively, and they are made to serve the political, emotional and psychological needs of their communities. How they are imagined affects not only how they are remembered, but what their community views as a model for imitation. But martyr narratives are also dangerous. They involve radical subversions of traditional categories such as life and death, they radicalise individuals to perpetrate acts of violence against themselves and others, and they possess an unequalled power at legitimising a political cause and spiritualising a course of action. This thesis has illustrated the role that theological ideas have in the social-constructivist account of martyrdom and therefore their responsibility in the danger martyrdom presents; they shape who the martyr is, how they are imagined, and how they are imitated. It has proposed a methodological apparatus by which these ideas might be identified and scrutinised. Above all, however, it has attempted to demonstrate why doing so is of critical importance. The role of theological ideas in a phenomenon as widespread, radicalising and powerful as martyrdom confers a

duty on theologians to understand, evaluate and challenge these ideas. This thesis has attempted to demonstrate not only the possibility, but the necessity, of doing so by indicating the role that these theological traditions play and the dangerous, radicalising and extremist effect they have.

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