

# COLOSSIANS 1:24 AND VICARIOUS SUFFERING IN THE CHURCH

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Colossians 1:24 has throughout church history presented problems of interpretation. This thesis investigates the possibility that the author expresses a belief in vicarious suffering within the church, and begins with a thorough linguistic analysis of the text and vocabulary to produce a radical fresh translation which emphasises Paul's ministry of suffering on the church's behalf. Two chapters investigate the reception history of the passage, with particular emphasis on three periods: the Church Fathers, the Protestant Reformation, and the modern era. Following evaluation of the many interpretations, an excursus on attitudes to suffering in modern Western evangelical churches, and a discussion whether the passage applies only to Paul or is of universal Christian relevance, three key topics are investigated in depth: the 'woes of the Messiah' and related eschatological issues; attitudes to substitution in the ancient world; and the 'common life' or *koinonia* expressed in Pauline descriptions of the church. This study indicates the probability that the author and his first readers shared cultural and religious understandings which comfortably accommodated a belief in vicarious suffering. In conclusion, the theological implications of such a belief are discussed, and the consequent repercussions for pastoral care.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

1QS	Community Rule (Qumran)
Apoc. Bar.	Apocalypse of Baruch
ASV	American Standard Version
AV	Authorised Version
Bar.	Baruch
bChul.	Babylonian Talmud Hullin
bKeth.	Babylonian Talmud Kethuboth
bPes.	Babylonian Talmud Pesahim
bSabb.	Babylonian Talmud Shabbath
bSanh.	Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin
ca.	circa
CD	Damascus Document (Qumran)
CEV	Contemporary English Version
ch.	chapter
Chron.	Chronicles
col.	column
Col.	Colossians
Cor.	Corinthians
CSEL	<i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum</i> (in progress; Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866-)
d.	died
Dan.	Daniel
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Ecclus	Ecclesiasticus
ed., eds.	editor, editors
edn	edition
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistle</i>
Eph.	Ephesians
Esdr.	Esdras
Esth.	Esther
ESV	English Standard Version
Ex.	Exodus
Ezek.	Ezekiel
fol.	folio
Gal.	Galatians
GNB	Good News Bible
GNT	Good News Translation
Hag.	Haggai
Heb.	Hebrews
Hos.	Hosea
Ignatius	
<i>Eph.</i>	<i>Ephesians</i>
<i>Mag.</i>	<i>Magnesians</i>



	<i>Rom.</i>	<i>Romans</i>
	<i>Smyr.</i>	<i>Smyrnaeans</i>
	<i>Tral.</i>	<i>Trallians</i>
Isa.		Isaiah
Jas		James
JB		Jerusalem Bible
Jer.		Jeremiah
Josh.		Joshua
Jub.		Jubilees
Judg.		Judges
Kgs		Kings
Lam.		Lamentations
Lev.		Leviticus
LXX		Septuagint
Macc.		Maccabees
Mal.		Malachi
Matt.		Matthew
Mekh. Ex.		Midrash Mekhilta Exodus
Mic.		Micah
Midr. Ps.		Midrash on Psalms
MS, MSS		manuscripts, manuscripts
mSota		Mishnah Sota
n.		footnote
Nah.		Nahum
NASB		New American Standard Bible
NCV		New Century Version
NEB		New English Bible
Neh.		Nehemiah
NIRV		New International Readers' Version
NIV		New International Version
NKJV		New King James Version
NLT		New Living Translation
no.		number
NT		New Testament
Num.		Numbers
Obad.		Obadiah
<i>OED</i>		<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OT		Old Testament
p., pp.		page, pages
Pet.		Peter
<i>PG</i>		J.-P. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca [Patrologia graeca]</i> (161 vols.; Paris: Migne, 1856-66)
Phil.		Philippians
<i>PL</i>		J.-P. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina [Patrologia latina]</i> (217 vols.; Paris: Migne, 1844-55)
Prov.		Proverbs
Ps., Pss.		Psalms, Psalms
Pss. Sol.		Psalms of Solomon

Qoh.	Qoheleth, Ecclesiastes
R.	Rabbi
rev.	revised
Rev.	Revelation
Rom.	Romans
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version
Sam.	Samuel
Sib. Or.	Sibylline Oracles
Sipre Deut.	Sipre Deuteronomy
TBenj.	Testament of Benjamin
TDNT	Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964)
TDOT	G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (trans. John T. Willis; in progress; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-)
TGad	Testament of Gad
Thes.	Thessalonians
Tim.	Timothy
TJos.	Testament of Joseph
TNIV	Today's New International Version
Tob.	Tobit
trans.	translated by
TSim.	Testament of Simeon
TZeb.	Testament of Zebulon
UBS	United Bible Societies
v., vv.	verse, verses
vol., vols.	volume, volumes
Wis. Sol.	Wisdom of Solomon
Zech.	Zechariah
Zeph.	Zephaniah

### **A note on translations**

Translations from Hebrew and Aramaic are taken from the following sources:

Old Testament              NIV

Apocrypha	NEB Apocrypha
Pseudepigrapha	James H. Charlesworth, ed., <i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983)
Mishnah	Jacob Neusner, <i>The Mishnah: a New Translation</i> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)
Talmud	I. Epstein, ed., <i>The Babylonian Talmud</i> (35 vols.; London: Soncino, 1935-59)
Mekh. Ex.	Jacob Z. Lauterbach, trans., <i>Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael</i> (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society of America, 1976)
Qumran	G. Vermes, ed., <i>The Dead Sea Scrolls in English</i> (London: Penguin, 3 <sup>rd</sup> edn, 1987)

Translations of the Greek pseudepigrapha are likewise taken from Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*.

All other translations, except where otherwise stated, are my own.

## **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 The issues and objectives**

The aim of this research is to investigate the possibility that the apostle Paul may have held beliefs on the vicarious value of believers' suffering, and the starting-point and primary focus of my work is the statement on sufferings and afflictions in Col.1:24,

Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ  
ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ  
σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία,

which the NIV, for example, translates:

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what  
is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body,  
which is the church.

#### **1.1.1 Personal motivation for this research**

My reasons for researching the background and meaning of this much-disputed verse are threefold. In chronological order of occurrence – and also, I would maintain, in order of importance - they are: first, as a Christian and Bible-reader I have for long been tantalised by the implications of this passage, yet frustrated by the contradictory interpretations in commentaries and other literature as well as its near-total neglect in preaching; second, as a pastor serving people undergoing trials and sufferings of many kinds, I long (as did apparently the author of this passage) that both they and I might have a very real and practical understanding of the possible purposes of suffering; and third, having witnessed intense suffering close at hand,<sup>1</sup> and yet at the same time seen how it can be embraced positively and through it the church grow and be built up, I hope to discover more about the connection between the two experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> My first wife Susie died in 2004, aged 42, after a long and very painful illness from a rare cancer.

### **1.1.2 The problem with Colossians 1:24**

Historically this passage has been the subject of much debate and widely divergent interpretation. It has been described variously by commentators as ‘this remarkable statement’ (Bruce);<sup>2</sup> an ‘exegetical crux’ (O’Brien);<sup>3</sup> a ‘difficult verse’ (Houlden);<sup>4</sup> ‘startling words’ (Maclaren);<sup>5</sup> and a ‘cryptic phrase (Wall).<sup>6</sup> Lincoln calls it ‘one of the more enigmatic verses of the entire New Testament’ and a ‘daring and puzzling assertion’.<sup>7</sup> Others have been more forthright: Pokorný admits, ‘For interpreters this verse is a puzzle’;<sup>8</sup> Carson calls them ‘words that have probably exercised commentators more than any other passage in this Epistle’;<sup>9</sup> while Dunn states: ‘The words have caused bewilderment to generations of translators and commentators.’<sup>10</sup> Schweizer adds, ‘The fact that Col. 1:24 does not appear in either the Apostolic Fathers or the Apologists shows how difficult the verse had already been found to be by that time.’<sup>11</sup>

My personal experience is that this verse is most often skirted round, if not viewed with some apprehension, in modern evangelical and charismatic churches; the ultimate

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2 F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 82.

3 Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary, 44; Nashville: Nelson, 1982), p. 75.

4 J.H. Houlden, *Paul’s Letters from Prison* (Pelican New Testament Commentaries; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 176.

5 Alexander Maclaren, *The Epistles of St Paul to the Colossians and Philemon* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 9<sup>th</sup> edn, 1899), p. 118.

6 Robert W. Wall, *Colossians & Philemon* (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), p. 87.

7 Andrew T. Lincoln and A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 38.

8 Petr Pokorný, *Colossians: a Commentary* (trans. Siegfried S. Schutzmann; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), p. 96.

9 Herbert M. Carson, *The Epistles of Paul to Colossians and Philemon* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1960), p. 50.

10 James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (New International Greek Testament commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 114; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), p. 486.

11 Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: a Commentary* (trans. Andrew Chester; London: SPCK, 1982), p. 101, n. 12. However, the opposite might also be argued (see for example below. 8.1): that it was unproblematic to the earliest readers, since they shared background understandings, both religious and secular, which are not expressly drawn out in the verse, and which have been lost to later readers.

frustration for me came during a series of Bible studies providing an otherwise outstanding and thorough exegesis of the whole epistle, when the speaker, on reaching 1:24, asked, with characteristic humility, ‘and who can understand this next verse?’ before skipping nimbly over it to v. 25.<sup>12</sup>

The everyday relevance of the whole subject of suffering to Christians is very evident, however, not just in the churches, but also in the continuing volume of literature. A recent visit to a medium-sized Christian bookshop found no less than 21 titles relevant to the topic,<sup>13</sup> not counting a large range of books of comfort and whole sections on bereavement and divine healing.

### **1.1.3 The theological implications of Colossians 1:24**

Two reasons for evangelical apprehensions are not hard to identify. First, the very hint that

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12 Terry Virgo, New Frontiers Leaders’ Conference, Brighton, November 1998.

13 Wesley Owen, Edinburgh, 18 November 2008. Titles found were: Ronald Beasley, *Letters to God from the Wilderness* (Edinburgh: Shoving Leopard, 2006); Leonardo Boff, *The Lord is my Shepherd: Divine Consolation in Times of Abandonment* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006); D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Nottingham: IVP, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2006); Dudley J. Delffs, *Healing the Wounded Heart* (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, 2004); Roger Ellsworth, *The God of All Comfort* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2004); Ajith Fernando, *The Call to Joy and Pain: Embracing Suffering in your Ministry* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008); Nicky Gumbel, *Searching Issues* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2001 [chapter: Why does God allow suffering?]); Gerard J. Hughes, *Is God to Blame? The Problem of Evil Revisited* (Dublin: Veritas, 2007); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr, *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2004); David Leyshan, *Sickness, Suffering and Scripture* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008); Megan McKenna, *The Hour of the Tiger: Facing our Fears* (Dublin: Veritas, 2008) [chapters on war, pain, suffering, disease and disaster]; Warren McWilliams, *Where is the God of Justice? Biblical Perspectives on Suffering* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005); Lena Malmgren, *Barbed Wire and Thorn: a Christian’s Reflections on Suffering* (trans. Richard J. Erickson; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007); Pablo Martinez, *A Thorn in the Flesh: Finding Strength and Hope amid Suffering* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007); David Pawson, *Why Does God Allow Natural Disasters?* (Bradford-on-Avon: Terra Nova, 2007); John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006); Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope* (trans. Margaret Wilde; Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004); Joni Eareckson Tada, *When God Weeps: why our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); Melvyn Tinker, *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People? A Biblical Look at the Problem of Suffering* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1997); David Wilkerson, *Triumph through Tragedy: how Christians can Become More than Conquerors through Suffering* (Lindale: World Challenge, 2001); Philip Yancey and Paul Brand, *The Gift of Pain: why we Hurt and what we can Do about it* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

there might be any deficiency in the atoning sufferings of Christ would appear completely non-Pauline. As Houlden writes, ‘It is easy to see Paul as here exposing himself to the charge that he regards Christ’s sufferings as somehow an insufficient sacrifice for human sin’;<sup>14</sup> whereas O’Brien notes: ‘This verse ... appears to express ideas that go beyond Paul’s statements elsewhere and which seem to have no parallel in the rest of the NT.’<sup>15</sup> Holtzmann went further: ‘No-one familiar with Pauline thinking gets past Col. 1:24 without offence’,<sup>16</sup> while Hübner is much more specific in characterizing such reactions:

This expression appears at first glance to be a decisive denial of Pauline soteriology. Did *Christ* indeed die for our sakes, ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, Rom.5:8?! ... [Paul] does it for the Body of Christ ..., that is the church – despite 1 Cor. 1:13 [‘Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul?’]! It’s no wonder then, that in the history of the exegesis of Col. 1:24, such a way of speaking has repeatedly been understood as a blasphemous violation of Pauline soteriology.<sup>17</sup>

Fortunately, this latter kind of over-reaction is much less common nowadays, but nevertheless in the absence of a clear understanding of the passage, a wariness of straying into unorthodoxy still prevails amongst evangelical Christians.

Second, this text forms a substantial plank in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the ‘treasury of merits’, and the consequent doctrine of indulgences, which became a key issue in the Reformation, and remains a part of that Church’s teaching to this day. Under the heading ‘Indulgences’, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* states:

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14 Houlden, *Paul’s Letters*, p. 177.

15 O’Brien, *Colossians*, p. 75.

16 ‘Kein Kenner der paulinischen Begriffswelt liest ohne Anstoss über 1,24 weg.’ Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, *Kritik der Epheser- und Kolosserbriefe auf Grund einer Analyse ihrer Verwandtschaftsverhältnisse* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1872), p. 21.

17 ‘Diese Wendung erscheint im ersten Hinblick als entschiedene Negation der paulinischen Soteriologie. Ist doch *Christus* um unseretwillen gestorben, ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, Röm 5,8! ... Er tut es für den Leib Christi ... , also für die Kirche – trotz I Kor 1,13! Daß in der Auslegungsgeschichte von Kol 1,24 immer wieder eine solche Diktion als blasphemischer Verstoß gegen die paulinische Soteriologie verstanden wurde, kann also nicht verwundern.’ Hans Hübner, *An Philemon, an die Kolosser, an die Epheser* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 12; Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), p. 67. Hübner subsequently clarifies that this is in fact a caricature of typical reactions to the verse, and far from being his personal view.

An essential element in indulgences is the application to one person of the satisfaction performed by others. This transfer is based on three things: the Communion of Saints, the principle of vicarious satisfaction, and the Treasury of the Church.

The paragraph on vicarious satisfaction continues:

Merit is personal, and therefore cannot be transferred; but satisfaction can be applied to others, as St. Paul writes to the Colossians (1:24).<sup>18</sup>

The danger in Col. 1:24 therefore, as far as Protestants are concerned, is that history has proven that a focus on the theme of vicarious suffering can be developed into a doctrine which states not just that one person's afflictions may benefit another or the church in general, but that the benefits of that person's standing with God and eternal destiny even may be transferred, dispensed by a corrupt priesthood or even put up for sale, in complete contrast to the doctrine of justification by faith. Indeed, the theology of this 'treasury of merits' was canonized in the Bull *Unigenitus Dei Filius* of Pope Clement VI,<sup>19</sup> dated 27 Jan. 1343, which declared:

For it was not with corruptible gold and silver that he redeemed us, but with the precious blood of his own pure and unblemished lamb, who, sacrificed innocent on the altar of the cross, poured out not a mere drop of blood – though because of his union with the Word this would have been enough for the redemption of all humankind – but copiously, like a flood ... Thus in order that the mercy of such an outpouring be neither useless, vain nor superfluous, he has acquired such a great treasure for the Church militant, desiring as a good Father to lay up treasure for his children, so that thus men might have an inexhaustible treasure, whereby those in need may share the friendship of God. This treasure he neither wrapped in a cloth nor hid in a field, but committed to blessed Peter, the key-holder of heaven, and his successors, his vicars on earth, to be dispensed to the faithful for proper and reasonable causes either for full or for partial remission of the temporal punishment for sin.<sup>20</sup>

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18 *Catholic Encyclopedia* <<http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=6095>> [accessed 27/1/2009].

19 The theology of indulgences and the 'treasury of merits', was first developed by Hugh Saint-Cher (ca. 1200-1263) and developed during the 13<sup>th</sup> century by St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas and others to support a practice dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

20 'Non enim corruptibilibus auro et argento, sed suis ipsius agni incontaminati et immaculati pretioso sanguine nos redemit, quem in ara crucis innocens immolatus non guttam sanguinis modicam, quae tamen propter unionem ad verbum pro redemptione totius humani generis suffecisset, sed copiose velut quoddam profluvium ... effudisse ... quantum ergo exinde, ut nec supervacua, inanis aut superflua tantae effusionis miseratio redderetur, thesaurum militanti Ecclesiae acquisivit, volens suis thesaurizare filiis



This bull, in turn, was the main text cited by the papal legate Cardinal Cajetan in his momentous dispute with Luther over authority in the Church at the Diet of Augsburg in 1518.<sup>21</sup> Col. 1:24 therefore represents for Protestants both a historic crux of the Reformation and a continuing association with the Roman Catholic doctrine of indulgences.<sup>22</sup>

#### **1.1.4 The apparent meaning of Colossians 1:24**

Despite evangelical reservations, at first glance there would seem to be in this verse a clear understanding in the mind of the writer of Colossians (one, furthermore, that he seems to assume his readers share or are at least willing to accept) that his suffering has vicarious effect on behalf of both the audience and the wider church. At its most simplistic, this has been expressed in quasi-mathematical terms as a predetermined quantity of affliction destined to be undergone by believers. The first to express it so baldly was the Lutheran pietist J.A. Bengel in 1742:

The measure of sufferings was fixed, which the whole church must endure. The more of them therefore that Paul endured (drained out), the less is left for himself and others; the communion of saints produces this effect.<sup>23</sup>

Whilst few before or since have seen it as simply as this, Bengel illustrates the question

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pius Pater, ut sic sit infinitus thesaurus hominibus, quo qui usi sunt, Dei amicitiae participes sunt effecti. quem quidem thesaurum non in sudario repositum, non in agro absconditum, sed per beatum Petrum, coeli clavigerum, eiusque successores, suos in terris vicarios, commisit fidelibus salubriter dispensandum et propriis et rationalibus causis nunc pro totali, nunc pro partiali remissione poenae temporalis pro peccatis.'

21 Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: a Life of Martin Luther* (New York: New American Library, 1950), pp. 72-73.

22 Canon 992 of the Roman Catholic Church reads: 'An indulgence is the remission in the sight of God of the temporal punishment due for sins, the guilt of which has already been forgiven. A member of Christ's faithful who is properly disposed and who fulfils certain specific conditions, may gain an indulgence by the help of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, authoritatively dispenses and applies the treasury of the merits of Christ and the Saints.'

<<<http://www.ourcatholicfaith.org/canonlaw/CANON840-1165.html>>> [accessed 2/3/2011].

23 J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (trans. James Bryce; 4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 7<sup>th</sup> edn, 1873-77), v. 4, p. 165.

which this research seeks to answer: is there here a latent doctrine (unexpounded, admittedly) - or, more likely perhaps, a common understanding - of vicarious suffering within the Body of Christ? If so, what are the roots of such a belief, whether Jewish or Hellenistic; and are there echoes of it in the early church?

I take it to be self-evident that the writer was not being deliberately mysterious in this passage, but fully expected his contemporary readers to understand his point. Whilst the Pauline letters mention frequently God's 'mysteries',<sup>24</sup> it is nearly always (particularly in Colossians and Ephesians) in the context of the historical mystery *now being revealed* in Christ or through Paul's ministry. Indeed, later in the very same sentence which begins with 1:24, the writer speaks of 'the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints' (1:26). In this context of celebrating the ministry of revelation and disclosure which God has given him, the almost casual way in which this 'filling up of Christ's afflictions' is mentioned in passing argues strongly for a shared understanding between writer and readers.

#### **1.1.5 The pastoral importance of a correct theology of suffering**

The motivation for this research has a pastoral as well as a theological basis, however. Alongside a desire to shed new light on Col. 1:24, and hence on early Christian belief, is a suspicion that, in neglecting to explore its meaning, the modern church too often finds itself with an inadequate understanding of, and approach to, the whole area of suffering. There are several different reasons for this: most fundamental perhaps is a genuine unease about the relationship between God and suffering. Here John Stott, in an oft-quoted

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<sup>24</sup> Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:16.

statement, echoes the view of many evangelical Christians:

The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been [*sic*] in every generation. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair. Sensitive spirits ask if it can possibly be reconciled with God's justice and love.<sup>25</sup>

Whether his assertion that this situation 'has been in every generation' will stand up to scrutiny is doubtful though: this research will show that its universality, if not its existence, is a comparatively modern phenomenon. Put from a more subjective point of view, Jervis expresses the same dilemma thus:

The presence of suffering is often understood as the absence of God; our response, whether intellectual or visceral, to suffering's cruel bite is to feel that God has abandoned us ... The disconnect between our faith in a caring and sovereign God and our own experience of life's hardships inevitably poses a problem for us.<sup>26</sup>

C.S. Lewis too expresses the sense of injustice often provoked by the apparently random occurrence of suffering: 'We are perplexed to see misfortune falling upon decent, inoffensive, worthy people – or capable, hard-working mothers – or diligent, thrifty, little trades-people.'<sup>27</sup> If however, as this research intends, it can be demonstrated from Col. 1:24 that there is in fact a far bigger picture – that the Christian's afflictions are indeed 'for the sake of his body, which is the church' – then to some degree the apparent abandonment by God can be understood at least to have a beneficial effect.

Second, a natural aversion to and even denial of the whole subject of suffering has infiltrated the 'comfortable' Western churches. David Prior writes:

Suffering is natural and normal to the Christian experience. There is a growing tendency to deny that. If you really allow God to work in you, it is often affirmed, you will be strong and successful, healthy and victorious. Conversely, if you suffer, show weakness or vulnerability,

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25 John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), p. 311.

26 L. Ann Jervis, *At the Heart of the Gospel: Suffering in the Earliest Christian Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 1.

27 C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 84.

you are not being a proper Christian.<sup>28</sup>

He summarises the four causes of this twentieth-century trend within the evangelical churches as humanism, elitism, chauvinism and escapism, and he appears to be substantially correct in his criticism of what is sometimes known as ‘muscular Christianity’ – a tendency to concentrate on and celebrate as role-models those (particularly men) who are deemed successful by society, such as sportsmen, businessmen and actors. Such a trend, epitomising the first three of the symptoms listed, naturally deters any positive attitude to the phenomenon of suffering. Likewise, Prior’s description of an escape from reality through ‘praising in all circumstances’,<sup>29</sup> or other spiritual exercises such as lengthy fasting, whilst appearing godly, may at times be little more than a Christian form of ‘denial’, rings true: Prior traces its roots to the influence of Eastern religions.<sup>30</sup>

The third main reason for the difficulty is a dilemma particularly in those churches where the rediscovery and celebration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and particularly of healing, have brought an ambiguity to the subject of Christian suffering for which these churches’ theology is often inadequately prepared. The argument specifically in relation to sickness (which in the absence of systematic persecution in the West today is the most prevalent experience of suffering) runs something like this:

We believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit (particularly those enumerated in 1 Cor. 12) are still available for and manifest in the church, and have rejected the so-called cessationist view that such gifts were only temporary (whether for the apostolic era, until the Church

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28 David Prior, *The Suffering and the Glory* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), p. 13.

29 Though he does not mention it, Prior probably has in mind the controversial and hugely popular book by Merlin R. Carothers, *Prison to Praise* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1970) and its sequels. The author advocates praise as a tool to change unpleasant circumstances.

30 Prior, *Suffering*, p. 15.

was established, or any other time-limit).<sup>31</sup>

It follows that miraculous divine healing, along with the other gifts, can and does occur in the church – and experience confirms this.

Common experience also shows, however, that amidst the healings (whether immediate or gradual, minor or spectacular), a very substantial proportion of those seeking healing and receiving prayer generally remains unhealed.

At this point, two options are open: either to pursue a reason for the unanswered prayer, or to retreat to the ‘safe uncertainty’ of the sovereignty of God (‘ours not to reason why’). But for those unable to resist the temptation to ask, ‘Why me?’ or ‘Why am I not healed?’, various Bible verses may be produced to suggest a plausible reason, and in this arena the teachings of the ‘Word of Faith’ ministries may appear to offer a simple solution. It is therefore worth briefly exploring these ideas at this stage.

### **1.1.6 The influence and implications of Word of Faith teaching**

Word of Faith teaching (or simply ‘faith teaching’), although with roots back into the nineteenth century in the USA, has seen a remarkable growth in the past 40 years.

Although most of its best-known proponents past and present are American,<sup>32</sup> its influence elsewhere has spread widely through literature, Christian television and the internet; and

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31 For examples of this teaching: Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Scribner, 1918); Thomas R. Edgar, ‘The cessation of the sign gifts’ <[http://www.the-highway.com/cessation\\_Edgar.html](http://www.the-highway.com/cessation_Edgar.html)> [accessed 16/6/2010]; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993).

32 These include: E.W. Kenyon (1867-1948), Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society <<http://www.kenyons.org>>; Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003), RHEMA <<http://www.rhema.org>>; Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Copeland Ministries <<http://www.kcm.org>>; Joyce Meyer, Joyce Meyer Ministries <<http://www.joycemeyer.org>>; Creflo Dollar, Creflo Dollar Ministries <<http://www.creflodollarministries.org>>; Benny Hinn, Benny Hinn Ministries <<http://www.bennyhinn.org>>; Jerry Savelle, Jerry Savelle Ministries International, <<http://www.jsmi.org>>; Oral Roberts, Oral Roberts Ministries <<http://www.orm.cc>>; Frederick K.C. Price, Ever Increasing Faith Ministries <<http://www.crenshawchristiancenter.org>> [all accessed 28/1/2009].

because one of its two chief distinctives, divine healing, presupposes a Pentecostal / charismatic theology, faith teaching's influence has spread much further than the bounds of its own churches. Briefly, on the subject of healing, the teaching is attractively simple:

1. Healing for all believers is part of the atonement of Christ: Isa. 53:5 'By his wounds we are healed', (often with emphasis on the present tense).
2. Jesus taught his followers to ask in faith and receive: Mark 11:24: 'Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.'
3. Therefore all that remains is for the believer to speak out the words of faith in order to appropriate the healing already provided for. Reference is often made when the healing is not evident to the preceding caution in Mark 11:22-23: 'Have faith in God ... if anyone says ... and does not doubt, in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.'<sup>33</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin writes, for example,

God wants us to be healed, and he has made provision for us to receive and possess healing ... the gifts of healing ... operate as the Spirit wills. Yet we are instructed not to wait for Him, since He has already done something about our healing at the cross. Healing belongs to us. It isn't simply a matter of prayer ... Healing is a gift, like salvation, already paid for at Calvary. All we need to do is accept it. All we need to do is possess the promise that is ours.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, Gloria Copeland (wife of Kenneth) teaches:

Take it! That's exactly what you have to do if you want to obtain healing. In fact, in every area of life obtaining the victory boils down to one thing, *Just take God at His Word*. What He says - what He has written in his Word - is the absolute truth and it *really* will work if we only *take hold of it* ... God has given each of us the choice. He said it this way: 'I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, *therefore choose life*, that both thou and thy seed may live' (Deuteronomy 30:19). We must choose to *take* what God has offered. And we must do that - 'by force'. Matthew 11:12 says ... God's Word has the power within it to bring itself to pass.<sup>35</sup>

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33 Hence the designation 'Word of Faith': speaking out one's faith in prayer.

34 Kenneth E. Hagin, *Possessing the Promise of Healing*

<[http://www.rhema.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=225:possessing-the-promise-of-healing&catid=51:healing&Itemid:238](http://www.rhema.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=225:possessing-the-promise-of-healing&catid=51:healing&Itemid:238) [accessed 17/3/2009].

35 Gloria Copeland, *Take your Healing - by Faith!*

<[http://www.kcm.org/index.php?p=real\\_help\\_content&id=1115](http://www.kcm.org/index.php?p=real_help_content&id=1115)> [accessed 29/1/2009].

The difficulty arises for those who suffer, because of the inevitable corollary of such teaching: if God's plan is for healing, prosperity, etc., and it is there for the asking, yet the individual still suffers – whose fault can the sickness be but the sufferer's? The result for the unhealed sufferer can often be a sense of failure, of 'lack of faith'. The conscientious will also be able to recall additional Bible verses from the Gospels which would appear to support the accusation, e.g. Matt. 13:58, 'And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith'; Matt. 17:20, 'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.' In such circumstances it happens all too often that those who are already suffering and vulnerable become crushed by the additional weight of condemnation and/or rejection (real or imagined), and what purported to be a ministry of healing and release can end up having entirely negative results for the sufferer.

The consequences therefore both for sufferers in the church and for those exercising pastoral ministry to the sick are huge and vital. Where does physical suffering fit into God's scheme of things? According to Copeland, it belongs exclusively on the cross.

Under the heading 'What about suffering with Christ?', his website states:

Here's some good news: when the Word says we are to be partakers of Christ's suffering, it means we are enter into the *victory* Jesus bore for us on the cross. The only suffering we encounter in sharing his victory is spiritual. That's what the Word is talking about when it says we are to be partakers of Christ's suffering. In other words, the only suffering for a believer is the spiritual discomfort brought by resisting the pressures of the flesh, not a physical or mental suffering. Jesus has already borne for us all suffering in the natural and mental realms.<sup>36</sup>

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36 *What about Suffering with Christ?*

<[http://www.kcm.org/index.php?p=real\\_help\\_content&id=1371](http://www.kcm.org/index.php?p=real_help_content&id=1371)>[accessed 18/3/2009]. Though not all of the major Word of Faith ministries are as extreme as this. Joyce Meyer ministries has a web-page entitled 'Eight Specific Reasons why Christians Suffer'

<<http://www.joycemeyer.org/OurMinistries/EverydayAnswers/Articles/art37.htm>> [accessed 18/3/2009]. The 8 reasons are: a lack of Word knowledge; disobedience; to purify and test your faith; a need for brokenness; to build compassion; to encourage others; because of the Word; because of living in the

Therefore against a background of belief in miraculous healing through faith, the unhealed may find themselves once more the unwelcome focus of something like the disciples' earnest question, when facing a victim of a congenital disability: 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' (John 9:2). Their assumption of blame springs perhaps from the doctrine of retribution worked out within Judaism during the intertestamental period. The OT law does not equate or parallel sickness directly with sin, although healing and protection are promised for obedience to the commandments (Ex. 15:26; Deut. 7:15) and disease threatened for covenant breaking (Deut. 28:27, 58-61). This is reflected later in Job's perplexity at his suffering despite his assurance of righteousness, as well as in the Pss., e.g. Ps. 41:4: 'I said, "O Lord, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you."'; Ps. 38:3: 'Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin.'<sup>37</sup> But the far later Testament of Gad (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) is more explicit: 'God brought on me a disease of the liver ... For by whatever human capacity anyone transgresses, by that he is also chastised.'<sup>38</sup> Likewise Testament of Zebulun portrays sickness as divine punishment: '... keep the Lord's commands ... for these reasons the Lord blessed me, and when all my brothers were ill, I alone passed without sickness.';<sup>39</sup> Testament of Simeon: 'For seven days my right hand became partly withered ... because of Joseph, so I repented and wept.'<sup>40</sup> Then, as now, it is a natural instinct to find a cause for the mystery of sufferings which frequently otherwise appear totally arbitrary in their occurrence. The development of this train of thought will be followed further in Chapter 6; for now, suffice to say that the difference between these

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world.

37 Similarly, Ps. 6:1-3; 32:3-5.

38 TGad 5:10-11.

39 TZeb. 5:1-2.

40 TSim. 2:12-13.



apocryphal texts and the approach all too often found in Word of Faith teaching is that the former are soul-searching and self-critical, whereas the latter tends, arguably, to be somewhat simplistic and accusatory. Although in the Gospels 'Jesus bursts through the mechanical dogma of retribution',<sup>41</sup> divine discipline remains one of several possible explanations for sickness: 1 Cor. 11:32; Jas 5:15: 'The prayer of faith will save the sick person ... And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.'

Parallel procedures apply in the other main area of faith teaching's specialisation: prosperity.

Creflo Dollar writes:

Poverty is not the will of God for any believer. However, there are Christians who have taken a 'vow of poverty' because they believe that poverty is a part of being holy and righteous. This is far from the truth. Poverty has nothing to do with godliness, or God-likeness. To be poor, or impoverished, means 'to be without; in lack; deprived.' You and I don't serve a God of lack and insufficiency. He is the God of the exceeding and the abundant. In fact, he wants to lavish you with his goodness (Eph. 3:20). I like what Dr. Leroy Thompson says: 'You can't think any bigger than God can deliver'. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible proves that poverty goes against everything that God desires for Believers.<sup>42</sup>

Dollar's School of Prosperity describes itself as

a course designed to teach you how to fulfill your God-given destiny – to be a blessing to others and by being His distribution center. Whether you are financially comfortable or head over heels in debt, you need this course! You will learn: Why God wants you rich; how to use biblical principles to make natural principles work on your behalf; the keys to debt reduction; how to increase for kingdom advancement; the automatic systems for financial freedom.<sup>43</sup>

Should there be a paradigm-shift such that suffering of whatever kind be understood as potentially an essential and scriptural contribution to the life of the Body of Christ - a

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41 A. Oepke, νόσος, *TDNT* 4, p. 1095.

42 Creflo A. Dollar, *Your Inheritance of Wealth and Riches*

<<http://www.creflodollarministries.org/Public/Bible/Article.aspx?id=303>> [accessed 17/3/2009].

43 <<http://www.worldchangers.org/soponline/soplanding.html?site=CDM>> [accessed 17/3/2009].

ministry even - then it may be that suffering will become no longer an object just of sympathy, but rather one of honour or, as Bonhoeffer described it, ‘the badge of true discipleship’.<sup>44</sup> Any insights, then, into the real meaning of Col. 1:24 will bring practical relevance and implications to the everyday life of the church, and particularly its pastors and its sufferers. With this in mind, the research will look not just at the evidence for a belief in vicarious suffering in the early church, but also during two key periods of church history: first the Reformation, with its rediscovery of the principle of *sola scriptura* with regard to doctrine and authority, and second the modern Western evangelical churches.

## **1.2 Methodology and structure**

First of all, in order for the context and objectives of this research to be clear, it will be necessary to define and delimit the term ‘suffering’ as experienced in the church. This can be done in advance of a detailed linguistic study of the two word-groups θλίβω and πάσχω represented in Col. 1:24, by a simple comparison of the Pauline lists of the apostle’s own sufferings to the empirical experience of Christians then and now. The statement of Col. 1:24 will be placed in the context both of the letter itself and of Paul’s further teaching on suffering. I will then proceed to an in-depth linguistic analysis of Col.1:24, with detailed word-studies of the key terms, their ambiguities and nuances, producing a working translation.

The history of interpretation of Col.1:24 was covered exhaustively by Kremer in 1955.<sup>45</sup> A summary of his chief relevant findings will place particular emphasis on two broad periods, the Church Fathers and the Protestant Reformation (these being each in their own way foundational for later evangelical doctrine, and will be supplemented in two further

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<sup>44</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 91.

<sup>45</sup> Jacob Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt* (Bonner biblische Beiträge, 12; Bonn: Hanstein, 1956).

areas: first, an up-to-date survey of developments in the past 60 years with a summary of current scholarship; and second, an investigation into the broader area of modern Western evangelical attitudes to suffering.

At that stage it will be appropriate to take stock and answer two questions:

First, is there evidence that, whatever the conclusions regarding the ‘meaning’ of the verse, they will be of general application to all believers of every era; that we are not dealing here purely with a one-off description of Paul’s apostolic ministry? Should it be the latter, the research would still be valid academically, yet of no value or application pastorally in the modern church.

Second, which of the viewpoints encountered in both the historical and modern scholarship and belief can be safely discounted; which can be accepted and incorporated into the conclusions of this research; and in particular, which aspects appear to have been neglected or insufficiently considered? The last will naturally form the basis for most of the second half of the thesis.

The key issues thus identified will be investigated particularly within the framework of Paul’s dual background as an educated Hellenistic Jew. The main aim will therefore be, with regard to a potential belief in vicarious suffering, to identify the possible influences upon his beliefs and teaching from his religious and social backgrounds. This will involve assessment not just of relevant OT influences but also of contemporary Jewish views, as reflected in the apocryphal, pseudepigraphical, rabbinic and other early writings on the one hand; and on the other, an investigation into the secular Greek and Roman attitudes to suffering. In addition, there will be a comprehensive search in the Church Fathers for

echoes and developments of a belief in vicarious suffering, and its possible relationship to the growth of the cult of martyrs. Finally, the findings will be assessed in the context of Paul's teaching on the church as the Body of Christ and particularly in the light of the nature of relationships between church members which that teaching describes and encourages.

The conclusion will seek a re-statement of the message of Col. 1:24 for the modern church, and in particular a positive understanding of individual Christian suffering.

### **1.3 Definitions**

For the concept of vicarious suffering to be coherent (whether or not it is found reflected in Col. 1:24) there needs to be a clear definition of *suffering* as experienced by the members of the church. Fortunately, Paul in several places gives examples of his own experiences of θλίψεις in the service of Christ and his church,<sup>46</sup> and it seems from these that the category is a very broad one. This is useful in a modern Western church application, where the issue is rarely predominantly one of direct persecution, discrimination or deprivation. Here on the contrary it is more often a case of the basic call to discipleship and holiness, with the obedience of faith involving self-denial and sacrifice, along with the common trials of life such as need and illness, and how nevertheless 'in all things God works for the good of those who love him' (Rom. 8:28).

The most comprehensive list of Paul's own θλίψεις is 2 Cor. 11:23-29:

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<sup>46</sup> The most prominent examples are Rom. 8:35-39; 1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:23-28; 12:10; Phil. 4:11-12. This genre of '*peristasis* catalogue' is researched in depth by John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: an Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, 99; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). See also below, 1.5.2.

Are they servants of Christ? ... I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day on the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (NIV)

Here, significantly without differentiation, are grouped: direct persecutions, both judicial and personal; physical exhaustion and deprivation of several kinds; betrayal and relational problems; various physical perils, many resulting from the itinerant ministry; and, as a climax, pastoral pressures. Whilst there are many other mentions of Paul's 'troubles' and 'afflictions',<sup>47</sup> including illness (not mentioned above),<sup>48</sup> this list by itself serves the purpose of illustrating not just the diversity of Paul's suffering, but also the fact that he viewed it all as part of the package of being a 'servant of Christ' (v.23). The variety found in Paul's hardship lists coincides remarkably with a modern definition of 'suffer' as 'to have something painful, distressing or injurious inflicted upon one: [such as] pain, death, punishment, judgment, hardship, disaster, grief, sorrow, care ... wrong, injury, loss, shame, disgrace'.<sup>49</sup> Such a broad definition has the additional benefit of being unrestricted by time and place or cultural considerations, being in some way and to one degree or another the common experience of all Christians. Edith Schaeffer wrote:

Affliction is a universal problem ... all people of every tribe, nation and language group have experienced and are experiencing and will experience some form of suffering, troubles, disappointments, or tragedy, and will continue to do so in their daily lives ... an affliction can be

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47 E.g., Rom. 8:18, 31-39; 15:30; 1 Cor. 2:3; 4:9-13; 15:30-32; 2 Cor. 1:3-11; 2:1-4, 12-16; 4:7-18; 6: 4-10; 7:4-5; 12:7-10; Gal. 4:19-20; 6:17; Phil. 1:30; 2:17; 1 Thes. 2:2, 9.

48 Gal. 4:13-15.

49 *OED*, 1979.

physical, psychological, material, emotional, intellectual, or cultural ...  
An affliction can be that which turns our whole lives upside down ... or it  
can be seemingly so small and insignificant that we might feel that no one  
else would define it as 'trouble' at all.<sup>50</sup>

Kraemer makes the additional important point that, notwithstanding its universality,  
suffering is essentially subjective and experiential:

What is crucial is the evidence that someone is uncomfortable with the  
situation at hand; what defines the category of suffering is not the nature  
of the event but the quality of the experience. If someone feels anguish or  
psychic disruption as a consequence of what has befallen her or him, then  
we have suffering.<sup>51</sup>

Jervis helpfully points out that specifically for the Christian believer, there may be two  
separate categories of suffering:

Paul views believers' suffering as both 'in Christ' and 'with Christ'.  
Believers inevitably experience the difficulties of human life, which they  
share with every person, but may do so 'in Christ'. Enduring difficulties  
(of whatever sort) while being a believer is what I term suffering '*in*  
*Christ*'. As well, believers experience suffering as a *result* of  
incorporation into Christ. This involves sharing Christ's sufferings and  
suffering for Christ's sake. These sufferings '*with Christ*' are in addition  
to the difficulties believers undergo along with all humanity.<sup>52</sup>

There appears therefore every benefit in recognising the breadth of the experience of  
suffering, both Paul's own and humankind's, as well as the essential subjectivity of it, and  
so making the definition as broad as possible.

As regards *vicarious*, the following dictionary definition will be applied: 'of punishment,  
etc.: endured or suffered by one person in place of another'.<sup>53</sup> Thus for sufferings to be  
vicarious, there must be a definite benefit or exemption from suffering for some other(s).

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50 Edith Schaeffer, *Affliction* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), pp. 9-10.

51 David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 9.

52 L. Ann Jervis, *At the Heart of the Gospel: Suffering in the Earliest Christian Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 42.

53 *OED*, 1979.

Reference will be made to the beliefs and teachings specifically of *evangelical* Christians and churches. By this I mean those who believe in ‘the divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God—fully trustworthy for faith and conduct.’<sup>54</sup>

Finally, this thesis will refer at several points to the *meaning* of Col. 1:24. This signifies a two-fold process: primarily, the understandings and reactions evoked in the first recipients of the letter, inevitably informed, conditioned and circumscribed by both their cultural background(s) and usage of the terminology employed; secondarily, in accordance with the usual evangelical principles of biblical application, the implications of such understandings for the present-day believer as far as they are relevant or applicable to modern Christian life.

#### **1.4 The authorship of Colossians**

Any study of this letter will have to confront at some level the question of its disputed authorship. Although the issue should have comparatively little effect on this study (it being on the existence or otherwise of an early Christian belief in vicarious suffering, regardless of who it was in Col. 1:24 who may have expressed or exposed it), for the sake of convenience and ease of expression, it will be advantageous to state a position on the authorship from the outset.

The question of who wrote Colossians remains unresolved to this day, and yet it was

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<sup>54</sup> Article 3 of the Evangelical Alliance *Basis of Faith*. <http://www.eauk.org/connect/about-us/basis-of-faith.cfm> [accessed 23/12/2013].

undisputed until 1838, when the work of Mayerhoff was published posthumously.<sup>55</sup>

Mayerhoff concentrated principally on a thorough study of the lexical, grammatical and theological similarities between Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles on the one hand, and their distinctiveness from the rest of the Pauline corpus on the other, whereas subsequent major studies have focussed predominantly on the relationship between Colossians and Ephesians.<sup>56</sup> Any detailed study of the history of the authorship debate is beyond the scope of this research;<sup>57</sup> however, it is fair to say that the argument continues to this day, evidenced not only by widespread disagreement amongst commentators and NT scholars, but also by no less than four recent monographs on the subject.<sup>58</sup> Although these latter all regard Colossians as pseudonymous, the wider sphere of scholarship is much more evenly divided, as can be seen from the chart in Appendix 2, which displays in greatly simplified terms both the breadth and the balance of opinion over the past 60 years. The only thing clear here is the complete lack of consensus. Marginally, there are slightly more commentators who favour Paul as author, though this may perhaps be due to disproportionate representation by conservative evangelical scholars. The only obvious trend seems to be that English-language commentators are in a clear majority favouring authenticity, whereas continental authors generally tend to view Col. as pseudepigraphical.

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55 Ernst Theodor Mayerhoff, *Der Brief an die Colosser: mit vornehmlicher Berücksichtigung der drei Pastoralbriefe kritisch geprüft* (Berlin: Schultze, 1838).

56 E.g. in particular Holtzmann, *Kritik* (essentially in agreement with Mayerhoff in denying Paul to be author); Ernst Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Skrifter utgivna av kungl. humanistiska vetenskapssamfundet in Lund, 39; Lund: Gleerup, 1946 (staunchly defending Pauline authorship)).

57 A very thorough recent survey of the authorship debate is in Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (trans. Astrid B. Beck; Anchor Bible, 34B; New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 114-126. Particularly helpful summaries of the issues involved and the flow of opinion can be found in Johannes Lähnemann, *Der Kolosserbrief: Komposition, Situation und Argumentation* (Studien zum Neuen Testament, 3; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971), pp. 12-22; Angela Standhartinger, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte und Intention des Kolosserbriefs* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 94; Leiden: Brill, 1999); pp. 1-3.

58 Lähnemann, *Kolosserbrief*; Standhartinger, *Studien*; Mark Kiley, *Colossians as Pseudepigraphy* (The Biblical Seminar, 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986); Outi Leppä, *The Making of Colossians: a Study on the Formation and Purpose of a Deutero-Pauline Letter* (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society, 86; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2003).



For the purpose of this research though, the identity of the author is of little relevance. Whether written directly by Paul or by another who was to all appearances very well versed in his teaching, the text under scrutiny is in either case a reflection of beliefs and doctrine held by churches in the Pauline circle in the first century, and it is as such that I hope to discover its meaning and background. Because it makes little difference in this respect, and furthermore because I personally am far from convinced by the arguments put forward *against* the authenticity of Col.,<sup>59</sup> I shall for simplicity's sake name the author consistently as Paul rather than hedge my bets by referring to him as 'the author', though the use of that name should be taken as under appropriate qualification.

### **1.5 The context of Colossians 1:24**

In order to do justice to the study of this one verse and anchor its position in a wider

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<sup>59</sup> I am by no means averse to the possibility of NT documents being pseudepigraphical, and happily concede the likelihood of it for other letters. In the case of Colossians, however, I find several stumbling blocks preventing me being persuaded by the arguments adduced by the opponents of authenticity. First, as long as there are no clear theological *contradictions*, arguments based on lexical and grammatical statistics and stylistic variations are at best contentious and often ambiguous. It seems surprisingly often to be forgotten that the documents in question were written as ephemeral letters as opposed to treatises for posterity (though Romans might overlap into the latter category). As such, they are specifically addressed to churches in hugely different geographical, cultural and linguistic communities (the native language in Colossae, for example, was not Greek but Phrygian) and largely in response to specific and individual issues in the churches well-known to both writer and recipient, but lost to us later readers. Add to that the time span of at least 15 years between the earliest and latest epistles, and such variations seem inevitable rather than grounds for suspect authenticity. When the writer is a preacher with a thirty year itinerant ministry who moreover boasts of divine revelations, a high level of theological development is to be expected over that period; Paul furthermore coined the now proverbial phrase 'all things to all people' (1 Cor. 9:22), so an exceptional degree of variety ought to be expected in his style and content. That Colossians is no doubt one of the latest Pauline letters appears to be freely conceded by those who defend its authenticity.

Second, Colossians simply does not look much like a pseudepigraphical letter – and to this can be attributed the relative recency of the discussion. There is a huge amount of detail, including several known named individuals, in the address and the final greetings, all of which is consistent with the letter's authenticity as well as with the information in Philemon. To explain this away as a deliberate camouflage is to contradict the valid argument that pseudepigraphical writing was an accepted and understood practice at the time. Moreover, such attempts, where they exist, tend to be simple and clumsy, whereas the detail in Colossians is not only precise, but entirely consistent with what we know both of Paul's ministry and the circumstances of the letter.

context, it will be helpful to provide brief résumés firstly of the content and structure of the Colossian letter as a whole, and then of Paul's teaching on Christian suffering.

### **1.5.1 Colossians 1:24 in the context of the epistle**

Whilst the word 'now' is not primarily resumptive in meaning (below, 2.4), this verse does nevertheless open a new section in the epistle, which had begun with versions of the conventional greetings (1:1-2) and the familiar thanksgiving found in every Pauline epistle except Galatians (1:3-14). Next there followed the so-called 'Hymn to Christ' (1:15-23), following which Paul moves on to a description of the purpose of his mission as minister of the gospel (1:24-2:5). The verse in question therefore occurs at the start of this section, which goes on to describe and celebrate the revelation of God's mystery in Christ (1:25-27); the commitment and passion of Paul and his companions to the ministry (1:28-29); and finally and more personally, his longing for the Colossian church's growth and development in these matters (2:1-5).

Subsequently, there follow warnings against human philosophies and Jewish legalism (2:6-23), a short spiritual exhortation (3:1-4), a substantial list of ethical instructions (3:5-17), and a *Haustafel* or list of household rules (3:18-4:1), before the letter concludes with a further three short exhortations (4:2-6) and the conventional final greetings (4:7-18).

### **1.5.2 Colossians 1:24 in the context of Paul's teaching on suffering**

Paul mentions the broad topic of Christian suffering in all of his undisputed epistles, and he is also quoted on the subject in Acts. Often the subject is addressed head-on, but frequent comments are also made in passing, as is consistent with an experience that was commonly accepted as an inevitable part of everyday life. For the believer in particular, Paul is

forthright about the inevitability and necessity of suffering:<sup>60</sup> to the Thessalonians he writes,

We sent Timothy ... so that no-one would be unsettled by these trials [θλίψεσιν]. For you well know that we were destined for this. Indeed, when we were with you we predicted to you that we were going to be persecuted [θλίβεσθαι] [1 Thes. 3:2-4].

In Acts 14:22, the encouragement Paul and Barnabas give to the new disciples is that ‘it is through many hardships that we must enter the kingdom of God’. For Paul personally these afflictions were in addition the fulfilment of a specific calling, for shortly after Paul’s conversion God declared, ‘I will show him how much he must suffer on account of my name [Acts 9:16]’.<sup>61</sup> There seems, however, to be no reason given to believe either that such an individual calling is due to Paul’s status as an apostle, or that other believers too might not have a similar calling. Indeed, Paul tells the Philippians, ‘It has been granted to you [ἐχαρίσθη – given by grace] on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake [Phil. 1:29]’.

Suffering is not without purpose, though: ‘we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope [Rom. 5:3-4]’. The appropriate response is patient endurance (Rom. 12:12; 2 Cor. 1:6; 2 Thes. 1:4), but not just passively - the believers are to ‘stand firm’ (1 Cor. 15:58; Phil. 1:27) and ‘contend for the faith’ (Phil. 1:27), whilst Paul describes himself as ‘pressing on’ and ‘straining towards what is ahead’ (Phil. 3:12-14). The Christians must recognise that they are engaged in a spiritual fight: ‘we do not wage war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly [2 Cor. 10:3-4]’; rather they are weapons of righteousness (Rom. 6:13; 2 Cor. 6:7) and of light (Rom. 13:12) in the ‘struggle [ἀγῶν, Phil. 1:30; 1 Thes. 2:2; Rom. 15:30]’. Strict ‘training’ is therefore recommended to avoid

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<sup>60</sup> This is consistent with Jesus’ predictions in, e.g., Matt. 10:22, 38; Luke 9:23; 14:27; John 15:20; 16:33.

<sup>61</sup> Subsequent prophetic revelation of suffering in store for Paul is mentioned in Acts 20:23; 21:11.

failure (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Suffering not only has a purpose, but also a whole series of what might be termed compensations, of which one of the most prominent is joy. Sometimes a simple reason is given (for example, ‘we rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance [Rom. 5:3]’),<sup>62</sup> but on other occasions a real experience of paradox is brought into view:<sup>63</sup> that of suffering accompanied by joy: ‘even if I am poured out as a drink-offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and join you in rejoicing [Phil. 2:17]’; ‘I overflow with joy in all our afflictions’ [2 Cor. 7:4]. In similar vein, Paul says of the Macedonian believers that ‘in the most testing affliction, their abundant joy and deep poverty overflowed in rich generosity [2 Cor. 8:2]’.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to joy, there can be deep fellowship in suffering (Rom. 15:30; 1 Cor. 12:26; Phil. 1:28-30; 1 Thes. 2:14), and the experience of God’s comfort: ‘just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows [2 Cor. 1:5]’.<sup>65</sup> Human suffering provides an opportunity for the grace of God, who told Paul, ‘“my grace is sufficient for you, because power is perfected in weakness” [2 Cor. 12:9]’. It also affords God an opportunity to display his power: ‘We have this treasure in earthenware pots, in order that the exceeding power may be God’s, not our own [2 Cor.

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62 Similarly, Paul describes being encouraged despite his sufferings in 2 Cor. 7:4; 1 Thes. 3:7.

63 The same paradox is widespread among the NT writers, and further exemplified in Matt. 5:11-12; Acts 5:41; 2 Cor. 6:10; 12:10; 1 Thes. 1:6; Jas 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:6; 4:13.

64 In the context of Col. 1:24, Lohmeyer comments, ‘As though it were obvious that suffering is the pure fountain out of which joy wells up [Wie selbstverständlich sind Leiden der lautere Brunnen, aus dem die Freude quillt].’ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 11<sup>th</sup> edn, 1954), p. 76.

65 These twin themes are treated at length by Barnabas Mary Ahern, ‘The Fellowship of his Sufferings (Phil. 3, 10): a Study of St. Paul’s Doctrine on Christian Suffering’, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22 (1960), pp. 1-32.

4:7]’.<sup>66</sup> Whatever the opposition, be it ‘affliction or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword’, there is nothing that ‘will be able to separate us from the love of God [Rom. 8:35, 39]’.

Finally, there is the eternal prospect which puts all else into perspective: ‘I reckon that the sufferings of the present are not worthy of comparison to the glory which is to be revealed in us [Rom. 8:18]’; ‘for our light and momentary afflictions are producing an immeasurable and eternal weight of glory for us [2 Cor. 4:17]’.

Against this background, Col. 1:24 echoes several familiar themes: Paul’s sufferings for the church as part of his ministry (Phil. 1:12-13; 2 Cor. 4:1-6:10; 11:23-29; 1Thes. 2:2); the overflow of Christ’s afflictions (2 Cor. 1:5); joy in suffering (Rom. 5:3; Phil. 2:7; 2 Cor. 8:2) - in addition to the identification of the church as Christ’s body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

The aspects which appear to go beyond what appears elsewhere in Paul’s writings are the stated ‘lack’ in Christ’s afflictions and, by implication, the existence of a requisite measure thereof; and the hint of vicarious substitution in Paul’s sufferings.

Having defined the terms of the research, its wider biblical context, and its relevance to contemporary church life, the study now moves on to a close examination of the text and its possible meanings.

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<sup>66</sup> God’s strategic use of Paul’s suffering is the subject of Scott Hafemann, ‘The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul’. In Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, eds., *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 127; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), pp. 165-184.

## **CHAPTER 2 – THE TEXT OF COLOSSIANS 1:24, ITS**

### **VOCABULARY AND STRUCTURE**

This chapter will investigate the various linguistic issues involved in establishing the meaning of the text. This will, on the one hand, prepare the ground for a working translation of the verse, and, on the other, provide an introduction to a large part of the theological background and context, both Jewish and Hellenistic, to be discussed later in chapters 5-7.

#### **2.1 The text**

Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν  
θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία.

Nestlé-Aland 28<sup>th</sup> edn lists a variant reading found in a small number of MSS, which supply the possessive pronoun μου to the παθήματα, giving the reading Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθημασίν μου, etc.; the UBS 4<sup>th</sup> edn on the other hand does not consider this variant worth listing in the textual apparatus as an alternative. The reason for this is plain: although there are quite a number of MSS supporting this variant (01<sup>2</sup> 075 81 323 326 629 1241s 1505 2464 t vg<sup>mss</sup> sy<sup>h</sup> Chr), they are nearly all either marginal notes or dated relatively late.<sup>1</sup> This comparatively minor variant has, however, historically had a disproportionate influence on translators and interpreters because it found its way into the *textus receptus* of

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1 01<sup>2</sup>: 7<sup>th</sup> century correction in Sinaiticus; 075: 10<sup>th</sup> century Athens; 81: 11<sup>th</sup> century BL; 323: 12<sup>th</sup> century Geneva; 326: 10<sup>th</sup> century Oxford; 629: 14<sup>th</sup> century Vatican; 1241s: 12<sup>th</sup> century Sinai; 1503: 12<sup>th</sup> century Athos; 2464: 19<sup>th</sup> century Patmos; t: 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century Liber Comicus; vg<sup>mss</sup>: some variant Vulgate MSS; sy<sup>h</sup>: Syriac Harclensis version (7<sup>th</sup> century); Chr: John Chrysostom.

the Greek NT as first published by Erasmus in his *Novum instrumentum* of 1516,<sup>2</sup> and thence into the English translations from Tyndale (1526) onwards. The same applies to the pioneering translations of Luther into German (1522)<sup>3</sup> and Lefèvre d’Etaples into French (1523).<sup>4</sup> This variant ἐν τοῖς παθημασίν μου owes its origin most likely to analogy with ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου in the second half of the verse.

A further minor variant supplies the relative pronoun ὃς to link the verse back to v. 23: ὃς νῦν χαίρω, etc., giving a reading: ‘... of which I, Paul, have become a servant, who now rejoices ...’<sup>5</sup> Although this addition was translated into the Vulgate and thence found its way into the Catholic translations,<sup>6</sup> it has little manuscript support, and can easily be explained by dittography: διάκονος ὃς;.

## **2.2 The vocabulary**

There are several words in the text which allow more than one interpretation; some come with important and specific linguistic, theological or historic connotations. The following merit particular attention at this stage: πάθημα, θλίψις, ὑστέρημα, ἀντανάπληρῶ, σάρξ, σῶμα [Χριστοῦ], ἐκκλησία. The remaining vocabulary will be dealt with more briefly later (2.4).

### **2.2.1 πάθημα**

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2 Desiderius Erasmus, *Novum nstrumentum* (Basel: Froben, 1516).

3 Martin Luther, *Das neue testament deutsch* (Wittenberg: Lotther, 1522).

4 Jacques Lefèvre, *Le nouveau testament* (Paris: Simon de Collines, 1523).

5 ‘Qui nunc gaudeo in passionibus ...’, John Wordsworth and Henry White, eds., *Nouuum Testamentum latine* (London: BFBS, 1973), p. 479.

6 Though also, strangely, the AV – see below (2.5).

Almost invariably found in the plural in the NT,<sup>7</sup> πάθημα is a verbal noun of πάσχω, the older noun from the same root being πάθος. This word cluster shares three unusual features which render its meaning less than straightforward: an irregularity in the verb forms; an obscure and disputed etymology; and perhaps most significantly, a history of semantic shifts. πάσχω has the following principal parts: future πείσομαι, aorist active ἔπαθον, perfect πέπονθα. This last, nasal, form, which is also present in the noun πένθος, ‘sorrow, mourning’, would indicate a derivation cognate with English ‘bind’ from an Indo-European root *\*bhendh*. Pedersen suggests an original sense of ‘to be bound, hampered’.<sup>8</sup> This semantic concept of distress through restraint is the same as that in English ‘anguish’ < Latin *angustus* ‘narrow’ (see also on θλίψις, 2.2.2). An alternative derivation suggested by Partridge goes back to the root *\*pa-*, with variants *\*pē-* and *\*po-* reflected in Greek πῆμα ‘suffering’ and πόνος ‘pain’ respectively.<sup>9</sup> This alternative has the merit of considering πάσχω as cognate with the otherwise coincidentally similar Latin *pati* ‘suffer’ > English ‘passion, patient, etc.’.

Whatever its etymology, the consistent emphasis with πάσχω and its related terms is on an ‘experience of external origin’. There is a sense of passivity to the extent that πάθος is contrasted with terms of action, such as ἔργον, πράξις and ποίημα.<sup>10</sup> The earliest use in Homer shows that its original sense was ‘to suffer evil’, e.g. *Iliad* 20.297-298: ‘But wherefore should he, a guiltless man, suffer [πάσχει] woes vainly by reason of sorrow that

7 Of 16 NT occurrences, Heb. 2:9 is the only exception.

8 H. Pedersen, ‘Zwei Fälle eines irrtümlich als Labiovelar aufgefassten π’, *Revue des études indoeuropéennes*, 1 (1938), p. 193.

9 Eric Partridge, *Origins: a Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, 1966).

10 See below, n. 20.



are not his own?';<sup>11</sup> *Odyssey* 3.128: '... that for her sake they had endured [ἔπασχον] at the hands of Ares.'<sup>12</sup> Later, with appropriate additions, it could be used for experiencing anything that might come.<sup>13</sup> Thus Sophocles, *Ajax* 520-521: 'A man should keep it in his memory if perhaps he has enjoyed [πάθοι] some pleasure';<sup>14</sup> *Oedipus* 1489-1490: 'In return for his benefits [ἄνθ' ὃν ἔπασχον εὔ], I would duly give him the requital promised when I received them.'<sup>15</sup> Both εὔ πάσχειν, as in the last example, and κακῶς πάσχειν are common usages, e.g. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.146: 'for he was well aware that if the Persians were harmed [παθόντες κακῶς] they would be bitterly wroth with the Samians'.<sup>16</sup> By the time of Plato (c. 427-347 BC), the semantic drift away from specific suffering had continued to the extent that sometimes πάσχω could mean simply 'be affected', e.g. Plato, *Gorgias* 485B: 'and for my part, I have much the same feeling [ὁμοιότατων πάσχω] towards students of philosophy as towards those who lisp or play tricks';<sup>17</sup> or with an even more neutral sense, 'to happen', e.g. *Symposium* 174E: 'where he found himself [πάθειν] in a rather ridiculous position';<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Thucydides 1.80: 'No one of them, therefore, is eager for war through lack of experience, as would be the case [πάθοιεν] with most men'.<sup>19</sup> Plato furthermore emphasises the passivity of παθήματα by making it opposite to ποιήματα

11 ἀλλὰ τί ἤ νῦν οὗτος ἀναίτιος ἄλγεα πάσχει, μὰν ἔνεκ' ἄλλοτρίων ἀχέων. Homer, *Iliad*, with an English translation by A.T. Murray (Loeb Classical Library; 2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 392-393.

12 ...οὓς ἔθεν εἶνεκ' ἔπασχον ὑπ' Ἄρηος παλαμάων. Homer, *Odyssey*, with an English translation by A.T. Murray (Loeb Classical Library; 2 vols.; London: Heinemann, 1919), vol. 1, pp. 126-127.

13 Wilhelm Michaelis, πάσχω, *TDNT* 5, p. 904.

14 ἄνδρ' ἰοι χρεὼν μνήμην προσεῖναι, τερπνὸν εἰ τί που πάθοι. Sophocles, *Ajax* (ed. and trans. A.F. Garvie; Aris & Phillips Classical Texts; Oxford: Oxbow, 1998), pp. 60-61.

15 ἄνθ' ὃν ἔπασχον εὔ, τελεσηόρον χάριν δοῦναι σφιν, ἥνπερ τυγχάνων ὑπεσχόμην. Sophocles, *Plays: Oedipus Colonens* (ed. and trans. R.C. Jebb; London: Bristol Classical Press, 2004), pp. 228-229.

16 εὔ ἐξεπιστάμενος ὡς παθόντες οἱ Πέρσαι κακῶς προσεμπικανέεσθαι ἐμελλον τοῖσι Σαμίοισι. Herodotus (trans. A.D. Godley; Loeb Classical Library; 4 vols.; London: Heinemann, 1921), vol. 2, pp. 180-181.

17 καὶ ἐγὼ γε ὁμοιότατων πάσχω πρὸς τοὺς φιλοσοφοῦντας ὥσπερ πρὸς τοὺς ψελλιζομένους καὶ παίζοντας. W.R.M. Lamb, ed., *Plato*, with an English translation (Loeb Classical Library; 5 vols.; London: Heinemann, 1946), vol. 5, pp. 390-391.

18 καὶ τι ἔφη αὐτόθι γελοῖον πάθειν. Lamb, *Plato*, vol. 5, pp. 88-89.

19 ὥστε μήτε ἀπειρία ἐπιθυμῆσαι τινα τοῦ ἔργου, ὅπερ ἂν οἱ πολλοὶ πάθοιεν. *Thucydides*, with an English translation by Charles Forster Smith (4 vols.; Loeb Classical Library; London: Heinemann, 1953-56), vol. 1, pp. 134-135.

‘works’: *Republic* 4.437B: ‘ “Will you not then,” said I, “set down as opposed to one another assent and dissent, and the endeavour after a thing to the rejection of it, and embracing and repelling – do not all things like these belong to the class of opposite actions [ποιήματα] or passions [παθήματα]?” ’<sup>20</sup> In parallel to the ambivalent meaning of the verb, παθήματα (usually in the plural) not infrequently means simply ‘incidents, happenings’, e.g. Plato, *Republic* 3.393B: ‘And in this manner he has carried on nearly all the rest of his narration about affairs in Ilion, all that happened [παθήματα] in Ithaca, and the entire Odyssey’;<sup>21</sup> *Laws* 3.681D: ‘... in which are blended all kinds and varieties [παθήματα] of constitutions, and of States as well.’<sup>22</sup>

In translating παθήματα, then, one should be conscious of this historical drift away from describing purely bad experiences and wary of automatically rendering it ‘suffering’ unless the context merits it. The emphasis should perhaps be more on the event or experience itself, rather than focussing on its quality.

The OT is unhelpful in establishing a background understanding: πάσχω, as we have seen, has inherently passive connotations, and therefore does not lend itself to translating Hebrew, which does not have a straightforward passive voice in the Indo-European sense, and thus the word cluster is rare in LXX: πάσχω occurring only 21 times, while πάθημα itself is entirely absent. In both Philo and Josephus, however, the word-group is common,

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20 Ἄρ’ οὖν, ἣν δ’ ἐγώ, τὸ ἐπινεύειν τῷ ἀνανεύειν καὶ τὸ ἐφίεσθαί τινος λαβεῖν τῷ ἀπαρνεῖσθαι καὶ τὸ προσάγεσθαι τῷ ἀπωθεῖσθαι, πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν ἐναντίων ἂν ἀλλήλοις θείης εἴτε ποιημάτων εἴτε παθημάτων. Plato, *The Republic*, with an English translation by Paul Shorey (Loeb Classical Library, 237; 2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1937), vol. 1, pp. 437-438. A very similar example is found in his *Laws* 10.894C.

21 καὶ τὴν ἄλλην δὴ πᾶσαν σχεδὸν τι οὕτω πεποιήται διήγησιν περὶ τε τῶν ἐν Ἰλίου καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἰθάκῃ καὶ ὅλη Ὀδυσσεΐα παθημάτων. Plato, *Republic*, vol.1, pp. 392-393.

22 ἐν ᾧ δὴ πάντα εἶδη καὶ παθήματα πολιτειῶν καὶ ἅμα πόλεων ξυμπίπτει γίνεσθαι. Plato, *Laws* (trans. R.G. Bury; Loeb Classical Library; 2 vols.; London: Heinemann, 1952), vol. 1, pp. 182-183.

with the full range of meanings.<sup>23</sup>

In the NT, the word-group occurs 62 times, not including the many compound forms. All three occurrences of πάθος<sup>24</sup> and two of those of πάθημα<sup>25</sup> are translatable as '[evil] lust'. One half of the remainder refer to the sufferings of Christ, both in his own predictions and in retrospect in Acts and the epistles.<sup>26</sup> Apart from a handful of references to specific individual suffering, the rest are to do with the experience of Christ's followers.<sup>27</sup> Of particular relevance are those which deal in various ways with the sharing or fellowship of that experience, e.g. 2 Cor. 1:7 '... we know that just as you share in our sufferings [κοινωνοί ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων], so also you share in our comfort.' Here again, it may be argued that although in many ways the παθήματα described were doubtless predominantly unpleasant, the main focus is on the experience itself and the sharing of it: both the fellowship between believers and the implicit evidence of being a genuine follower of Christ.

How is πάθημα to be translated in Col. 1:24? Given on the one hand the breadth of meaning and essential vagueness of πάσχω and its derivative nouns; and yet on the other the constant underlying pejorative inclination, is it to be 'suffering', or a rather blander 'experience' or even 'undertaking'? Second, is the impersonal nature of the παθήματα to be reflected, or a presumption made that Paul refers to his own experience? These questions will be easier to answer after consideration of θλῖψις and ἀνταναπληρῶ, below

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23 For examples, see Michaelis, πάσχω, *TDNT* 5, pp. 909-910.

24 Rom. 1:26; Col. 3:5; 1 Thes. 4:5.

25 Rom. 7:5; Gal. 5:24.

26 E.g. Matt. 16:21; 17:12; Mark 8:31; 9:12; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 22:15; 24:26, 46; Acts 1:3; 3:18; 17:3; Heb. 5:8; 13:12; 1 Pet. 2:21, 23.

27 E.g. Acts 9:16; Rom. 8:18; 1 Cor. 12:26; 2 Cor. 1:6, 7; Gal. 3:4; Phil. 1:29; 1 Thes. 2:14; 2 Thes. 1:5; 1 Pet. 2:20; 3:14, 17; 5:10; Rev. 2:10.

(2.3.2).

### 2.2.2 θλίψις

The root meaning of the verb θλίβω and its noun θλίψις are ‘to press, squeeze’ (as in ἵνα μὴ θλίβωσιν αὐτόν, ‘to prevent them crowding him’, Mark 3:9); and ‘pressure’ respectively (though the noun does not occur in its literal sense in the NT). Early on, however, the figurative sense developed: ‘to oppress, afflict’; and ‘pressure, affliction, suffering’: these may be either internal or external in origin, and with only two exceptions this is the sense used in the NT.<sup>28</sup> In the LXX also the figurative sense is widespread, being used to translate a wide range of Hebrew terms. Its greatest significance for understanding the NT usage is its close association with the OT ἐκκλησία, the chosen people of Israel.

This term which is so common and which has so many senses in the LXX acquires its theological significance from the fact that it predominantly denotes the oppression and affliction of the people of Israel or the righteous who represent Israel. To be sure, we never find the general statement that θλίψις necessarily belongs to the history of Israel as the people chosen and guided by God. Yet Israel does in fact constantly experience θλίψις in its history, and it is aware that this θλίψις is significant in the history of salvation.<sup>29</sup>

In the LXX, θλίβω and θλίψις occur commonly (some 200 times), and are used to translate several Hebrew words, of which terms from the following four roots are by far the most common:

שָׂרַר (*šārar*). Etymologically, the meaning of this root is apparently ‘to tie, bind’.<sup>30</sup>

There are two different qal forms, of which the second, intransitive form, occurring 33 times in the OT, means ‘to be restricted’ (an etymology thus closely parallel to that of θλίβω as well as to one of those postulated for πάσχω). The hiphil of this form (11

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28 Mark 3:9 (above) and Matt. 7:14: τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς ἢ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζῶην.

29 Heinrich Schlier, θλίβω, *TDNT* 3, p. 142.

30 H.-J. Fabry, שָׂרַר I, *TDOT* 12, p. 455.

occurrences) has the transitive meaning ‘to harass’, and is mostly translated by θλίβω, e.g. 1 Kgs 8:37: ‘when an enemy besieges [θλίψει] them in any of their cities’; Neh. 9:27: ‘So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them’ [καὶ ἔδωκας αὐτοὺς ἐν χειρὶ θλιβόντων αὐτοῦς, καὶ ἔθλιψαν αὐτούς].<sup>31</sup> Besides this, there are two related nouns: צָר (šar) and צָרָה (šarā), both meaning ‘anguish, distress’. The former is translated in various ways, including ἀνάγκη and ἐχθρός, but four times as θλίψις, e.g. Job 15:24: ‘distress [ἀνάγκη] and anguish [צָר / θλίψις] fill him with terror.’<sup>32</sup> By far the most common term from this root, and also the most frequent rendering as θλίψις in the LXX, is צָרָה, which carries a broad and general sense of ‘distress, trouble, unsatisfactory situation’. In this case the LXX translators were more consistent: 62 out of 70 occurrences are rendered θλίψις; the rest either κακός or ἀνάγκη. Found mostly in passages of speech (Psalms, Job, the Prophets), צָרָה covers a wide range of both national and individual misery, present and eschatological. Poetic parallels include ‘disaster’ (Jer. 15:11); ‘rebuke and disgrace’ (Isa. 37:3); ‘anguish’ (Ps. 31:7); ‘sword of judgment or plague or famine’ (2 Chron. 20:9); ‘darkness and fearful gloom’ (Isa. 8:22); ‘hot anger, wrath and indignation’ (Ps. 78:49); ‘complaint’ (Ps. 142:2); ‘the cords of death, the anguish of the grave and sorrow’ (Ps. 116:3) and many more.<sup>33</sup> Here, the whole range of human distress, tribulation and misery finds itself distilled and translated into the term θλίψις.

צָר (šar). The relationship of this term, ‘enemy’, to צָרָה and its derivatives discussed above, is unclear: Fabry describes the problems as ‘virtually impenetrable’.<sup>34</sup> This collision of the homonymous roots has, moreover, influenced the LXX translators: although they most commonly translate צָר with ἐχθρός ‘enemy’, they also render it 18

31 Other examples include Deut. 28:52; Judg. 10:9; 2 Chron. 6:28; 28:22; 33:12.

32 Also in Pss. 4:1; 31:7.

33 Fabry, צָר I, *TDOT* 12, p. 457.

34 Fabry, צָר I, *TDOT* 12, p. 455.

times as θλίβων (and twice as ἐκθλίβων), e.g. Ps. 3:1: ‘O Lord, how many are my foes’ [κυριε τί ἐπληθύνθησαν οἱ θλίβοντές με]; Lam. 1:5: ‘Her foes have become her masters’ [Ἐγένοντο οἱ θλίβοντες αὐτήν εἰς κεφαλὴν].<sup>35</sup> In several instances it occurs in combination with ἐχθρός, which has been used to render the parallel עָוֵב (‘ōyēḇ). The synonymous עָוֵר (śōrēr) is similarly translated most often with ἐχθρός, but four times with θλίβων, e.g. Ps. 23:5: ‘You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies’ [Ἡτοίμασας ἐνώπιόν μου τράπεζαν μου, ἐξεναντίας τῶν θλιβόντων με].<sup>36</sup> In such texts the use of θλίβω and its cognates conveys vividly the sense of ‘being pressed in’ or ‘oppression’.

רָחַץ (*lāḥaš*)(verb) / רָחַץ (*laḥaš*)(noun). Unlike with the other Hebrew terms, in this case the LXX is consistent in translating with θλίβω, θλίψις or a compound thereof. Yet again, the literal meaning is ‘to press’, and though rarely used in this way in the OT,<sup>37</sup> it is well illustrated in the story of Balaam and his donkey: ‘When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed [προσέθλιψεν ἑαυτήν] close to the wall, crushing [καὶ ἀπέθλιψε] Balaam’s foot against it’ (Num. 22:25). The figurative sense, however, is far more common: ‘to oppress, repress’ and ‘oppression, repression’ respectively. Most often this is of one people (usually Israel) by another, e.g. Ex. 3:9: ‘I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them’; 1 Sam. 10:18: ‘I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.’<sup>38</sup> Two other, less common, usages are found: first, the oppression of the resident alien (גֵּר / *gēr*) in Ex. 22:21: ‘Do not ill-treat an alien or oppress him’ and 23:9; second, in personal lament, e.g. Ps. 43:2: ‘Why must I go about mourning,

35 Further such translations of עָוֵב by θλίβων include Pss. 12:4; 26:2, 12; 119:157; Lam. 1:7, 17; 2:17; Mic. 5:8.

36 The other occurrences of this translation are Pss. 42:10; 69:19; 143:12.

37 Other examples are Judg. 1:34 and 2 Kgs 6:32.

38 Similarly Deut. 26:7; Judg. 2:18; 4:3; 6:9; 10:12; 2 Kgs 13:4, 22; Pss. 44:24; 106:42; Jer. 30:20; Amos 6:14.

oppressed by the enemy?’<sup>39</sup> In these instances, the sense of ‘harassment’ springs to mind; however, the predominant connotation of this particular word-group is clearly corporate: the affliction of God’s people Israel.

נָאָה (*yānā*). This occurs 14 times in the hiphil, meaning ‘to oppress’. Mostly the LXX translates by κακόω ‘to treat badly, to hurt’, but five times by θλίβω. The first four constitute warnings against oppressing resident aliens (Lev. 19:33) or freed slaves (Deut. 23:16) or exploiting a neighbour by abusing the Jubilee Year regulations (Lev. 25:14, 17); the fifth, Isa. 49:26, has God promise: ‘I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh’. A common thread here appears to be the exploitation of the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

In addition to the derivatives of these four main roots, θλίβω is also used on occasion to translate four other Hebrew terms in the LXX, and θλίψις eleven different nouns.<sup>40</sup> Taken all together, the huge array of negative human experiences covered in the LXX by θλίβω, θλίψις and their compounds, makes this one of the most historically loaded of NT terms, and consequently it corresponds closely in content to what is commonly meant by the blanket term ‘suffering’ in English today.

In the NT, θλίψις, and never πάθημα, is the word always used for Christ’s own predictions of his followers’ destiny: ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλίψιν ἔχετε, ‘In this world you will have trouble’ (John 16:33); τότε παραδώσουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς θλίψιν, ‘Then you will be handed over to be persecuted’ (Matt. 24:9). The Pauline usage, however, is more divided. In describing his

<sup>39</sup> Likewise Pss. 42:10; 56:2.

<sup>40</sup> Θλίβω: צִק (hiphil), ‘to constrict or harass’; נָשָׁא, ‘to press down’; נָאָה, ‘to be hostile to’; נָשָׁא, ‘to destroy’. Θλίψις: מַצָּר, ‘oppression’; מַצָּר, ‘tribulation’; אִסָּד, ‘disaster’; מַצָּר, ‘misery’; מַצָּר, ‘heavy burden’; מַצָּר, ‘oppression’; רָעָה, ‘evil’; מִשְׁרָה, ‘carefulness’; נָשָׁא, ‘violence’; מַצָּר, ‘mourning’; מַצָּר, ‘destruction’. Schlier, *θλίβω*, *TDNT* 3, pp. 140-141.

own sufferings, he uses *πάσχω* / *παθήματα* just six times apart from Col. 1:24 (four of which, in 2 Cor. 1:5-7, are essentially the sufferings of Christ overflowing to his followers: the others are 2 Tim. 1:12; 3:11), but *θλίβω* / *θλίψις* 17 times. The question arises whether, despite their very different histories and connotations as well as the stylistic preferences of the writers, the two terms are to all intents synonymous in the NT in general, and in this verse in particular, and will be considered below (2.3.3).

### **2.2.3 ὑστέρημα**

Both *ὑστέρημα* and *ὑστέρησις* (only in Mark 12:44, Phil. 4:11) are nouns formed from the adjective *ὑστερος*, and neither is found in Greek literature before the Christian era, though both occur in the LXX (though *ὑστέρησις* only in the Apocrypha). The root meaning of *ὑστερος* is ‘what is behind or after’, either spatially or chronologically; *ὑστέρημα*, however, has usually the sense of ‘deficiency, lack’, and the LXX occurrences confirm this.<sup>41</sup> For example, Qoh. 1:15, ‘what is lacking [*ὑστέρημα*] cannot be counted’; Ps. 34:9, ‘those who fear him lack nothing’ (*οὐκ ἔστιν ὑστέρημα τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν*). In the NT, the term is used to describe the poverty of the widow in the treasury (Luke 21:4), and the need of the churches in Judea for whom Paul organises relief (1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 8:14; 9:12); apart from these financial cases, it is used also to describe what was lacking in the service the Philippians desired to render to Paul (Phil. 2:29), and in the faith of the Thessalonians (1 Thes. 3:10). In such cases it appears to be a matter of non-culpable deficiency rather than defect: in these examples, the widow is commended for her sacrificial generosity; the famine afflicting the Judean churches among others was

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<sup>41</sup> Judg. 18:10; 19:19, 20; Ps. 34:9; Qoh. 1:15; 2 Esdr. 6:9.



prophesied (Acts 11:29); the Philippians are commended for their thwarted attempts to give; and the Thessalonians praised as role-models (1 Thes. 1:7).

#### **2.2.4 ἀνταναπληρόω**

The chief point of interest in this word is the prefix ἀντ(ι)-. Both πληρόω, ‘to fill’ and ἀναπληρῶ ‘to fill up’ are commonplace. As it stands though, ἀνταναπληρόω is a *hapax legomenon*, and Kremer and Lightfoot can find only nine occurrences of it in six separate texts in Greek literature.<sup>42</sup> The decision in translation is what, if any, significance to give to the first prefix, and the majority of translators have effectively ignored it as a stylistic flourish, and translated as ἀναπληρόω. The prefix ἀντί, when used on its own as a preposition, normally means ‘opposite, over against’. This usage, however, is not found in the NT, where it generally has the sense ‘in place of’: Ἀρχέλαος βασιλεύει ... ἀντὶ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ (Matt. 2:22). A further development is the sense ‘to the account of, in payment for’: Ἡσαῦ, ὃς ἀντὶ βρώσεως μιᾶς ἀπέδεδετο τὰ πρωτοτόκια ἑαυτοῦ (Heb. 12:16).<sup>43</sup> Both these senses of ἀντί are of particular relevance in determining the possibility of a vicarious statement in Col. 1:24. Moreover, these substitutionary forms of ἀντί balance with that of ὑπέρ,<sup>44</sup> ‘for the sake of, on behalf of, in place of’, found twice in Col. 1:24, once each side of ἀνταναπληρόω.

Also worth noting are the three senses (leaving aside the literal and the temporal) listed by Delling for the simple un-prefixed πληρόω:<sup>45</sup> ‘to fulfill a demand or a claim’; ‘to fill up completely a specific measure’; ‘to complete or fulfill prophetic sayings which were spoken with divine authority’. All of these nuances are relevant in considering the

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<sup>42</sup> See below.

<sup>43</sup> Other examples of this usage include Matt. 5:38 (twice); 17:27; 20:28; Luke 11:11; Rom. 12:17; 1 Thes. 5:15.

<sup>44</sup> See below, 2.4.

<sup>45</sup> Delling, *πλήρης*, *TDNT* 6, pp. 290-297.

possibility of a belief in a fixed measure of tribulation or sufferings allotted to the church.

The single compound ἀναπληρώ in classical Greek has several meanings dependent on context, but with added emphasis on ‘completeness’.<sup>46</sup> In the NT there are only six occurrences,<sup>47</sup> and of particular significance are the two where it is used in combination with ὑστέρημα: χαίρω δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ παρουσίᾳ Στεφανᾶ καὶ Φορτουνάτου καὶ Ἀχαικοῦ, ὅτι τὸ ὑμέτερον ὑστέρημα οὗτοι ἀνεπλήρωσαν, ‘I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have *supplied what was lacking* from you’ (1 Cor. 16:17); ὅτι διὰ τὸ ἔργον Χριστοῦ μέχρι θανάτου ἡγγισεν παραβολευσάμενος τῇ ψυχῇ, ἵνα ἀναπληρώσῃ τὸ ὑμῶν ὑστέρημα πρὸς με λειτουργίας, ‘because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, *to supply your lack* of service toward me’ (Phil. 2:30) (AV). Additionally, the only two occurrences (2 Cor. 9:12; 11:9) of another double compound, προσαναπληρώ, are both juxtaposed with ὑστέρημα.

Ἀντί is prefixed freely to nouns, adjectives and particularly verbs, modifying the meaning along the line of one of the senses of the simple preposition mentioned above. In the NT, verbs compounded with ἀντί are not uncommon: there are 19 different verbs found, totalling 64 occurrences, though only two (ἀνθίστημι, ‘to resist’, with 13 occurrences, and ἀντιλέγω, ‘to speak against’, with 12) are at all frequent.<sup>48</sup> Of these 19, nine are modified by the sense ‘against’ from the prefix, chiefly giving the meaning ‘to resist, oppose’ (e.g. , ἀντίκειμαι, ἀντιπίπτω), whereas a further eight are given the sense of reciprocation sometimes inherent in the prefix (above). These are ἀνταποδίδωμι, ‘to repay’, ἀντιβάλλω,

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<sup>46</sup> Delling, πλήρης, *TDNT* 6, pp. 305-306.

<sup>47</sup> Apart from the two quoted, Matt. 13:14; 1 Cor. 14:16; Gal. 6:2; 1 Thes. 2:16.

<sup>48</sup> Luke is particularly fond of such compounds: of the 19, 16 are found in Luke/Acts, of which seven there and nowhere else.

‘to discuss’, ἀντικαλέω, ‘to invite back’, ἀντιλαμβάνομαι, ‘to give / receive help’, ἀντιλοιδορέω, ‘to return an insult’, ἀντιμετρέομαι, ‘to measure back’, ἀνταποκρίνομαι, ‘to respond’, ἀνθομολογέομαι, ‘to give [back] thanks or praise’. The sense of reciprocation or of doing something in turn is therefore prominent among ἀντί-verb compounds in the NT.

This survey of NT usage already argues against the very many interpreters who either ignore the ἀντί- altogether,<sup>49</sup> or interpret it as an intensive prefix,<sup>50</sup> for which there is no warrant. A glance, moreover, in even a small dictionary of classical Greek,<sup>51</sup> confirms not just that the prefixation of ἀντί- to a verb significantly changes the meaning, but also how frequently it bears the sense ‘in turn’<sup>52</sup> (e.g. the following sequence: ἀντι-κακουργέω injure in turn, ἀντι-καλέω invite in turn, ἀντικατ-αλλάσσομαι exchange for, ἀντί-κειμαι be opposed, ἀντι-κελεύω command in turn, ἀντι-κλαίω weep in turn). Pobee is one of very few to note this possible meaning of ἀντί-: ‘Thus Paul’s sufferings fill up in turn what is lacking in the θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ’.<sup>53</sup> A comparison, moreover, with the nine extra-biblical occurrences of ἀνταναπληρώω clearly shows that in every case, the substitutionary or reciprocal sense is evident:

Demosthenes, *Speeches* 14:17: ‘Each of these [navy-]boards I would subdivide into five groups of twelve men, always attaching to the wealthiest men those who are poorest, to

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49 Moule, for example, says, ‘probably ... the ἀντί is only a redundant repetition of the ὑπέρ which precedes it’. *Colossians*, p. 78. Others who regard the prefix as meaningless are Rosenmüller, Olshausen, Schenkel, Braune, Oltramare and Percy.

50 For example, Lücke, Huther, Meyer, Haupt, von Soden, Abbott, Prat, Barth & Blanke, Schmid and Kittel. See further Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt*, p. 157.

51 James Morwood and John Taylor (eds.), *The Pocket Oxford Classical Greek Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp. 32-36.

52 Moir also notes this meaning of the prefix, yet applies it to mean ‘I fill up one after another in quick succession the afflictions of Christ’ – an intriguing translation, but one which adds little to understanding the overall meaning of the verse. W.R.G. Moir, ‘Colossians i. 24’, *Expository Times* 42 (1930/31), pp. 479-480.

53 John S. Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), p. 104.

keep the balance [ἀνταναπληροῦντας].<sup>54</sup>

Dio Cassius, *Roman history* 44:48: ‘You did not quarrel at all about titles, but applied them all to him [i.e. Caesar], feeling that they were inadequate to his merits, and desiring that whatever each of them, in the light of customary usage, lacked of being a complete expression of honour, might be supplied [ἀνταναπληρωθῇ] by what the rest contributed.’<sup>55</sup>

Apollonius Dyscolus, *Syntax* uses the term four times:<sup>56</sup>

1:19: ‘The verbs had evolved in three persons, and therefore the pronoun was devised alongside, developed in persons, replacing [ἀνταναπληροῦσα] both the case of the noun and the number of the verb.’<sup>57</sup>

2:44: ‘The pronouns therefore arose to replace [ἀνταναπληροῦσαι] what it was impossible for the nouns [to express].’<sup>58</sup>

3:111: ‘That both might have supplied [ἀνταναπληρωθῇ] what is missing.’<sup>59</sup>

4:64: ‘As they have not properly provided any proof ... the missing proof for it must now be supplied [ἀνταναπληρῶσαι].’<sup>60</sup>

Ptolemy, *Μαθηματικὴ σύνταξις* 6:9: ‘Since one calculation gave the recurrence erroneously as too short, but the other again coincidentally longer, it was evened, and Hipparchus simply calculated that the excess caused by the false calculation could be evened out [ἀνταναπληρουμένην] by one third of a phase to produce a correct phase of the

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54 Τούτων δὲ τῶν συμμοριῶν ἐκάστην διελεῖν κελεύω πέντε μέρη κατὰ δώδεκα ἄνδρας, ἀνταναπληροῦντας πρὸς τὸν εὐπορώτατον αἰ τοὺς ἀπορωτάτους. Demosthenes, *Oratio de classibus* 14:17.

55 Ἴν’ ὅσον καθ’ ἕκαστον αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ νομιζομένου πρὸς τὸ τελειότατον καὶ τῆς τιμῆς καὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας ἐνέδει, τοῦτο ἐκ τῆς παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων συντελείας ἀνταναπληρωθῇ. Dio Cassius, *Historiarum Romanorum quae supersunt* 44:48 in Dio Cassius, *Roman History: with an English translation by Earnest Cary* (9 vols.; Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), vol. 4, pp. 394-395.

56 <<http://schmidhauser.us/apollonius/works/Synt.txt>> [accessed 5/8/2013].

57 ἦν δὲ τὰ ῥήματα ἐν τρισὶν προσώποις καταγινόμενα, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο προσεπενοεῖτο ἡ ἀντωνυμία ἐν προσώποις ὠρισμένοις καταγινόμενη, ἀνταναπληροῦσα καὶ τὴν θέσιν τοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ τὴν τάξιν τοῦ ῥήματος.

58 καὶ ἐνθεν παρεισέδουν αἱ ἀντωνυμίαι τὸ ἀδύνατον τοῦ ὀνόματος ἀνταναπληρῶσαι.

59 Ἴν’ ἑκατέρα ἀνταναπληρωθῇ τοῦ λείποντος.

60 Οὐδεμίαν ἀκριβῆ ἀπόδειξιν ποιησάμενοι ... χρῆ οὖν ἀνταναπληρῶσαι τὴν τοῦ τοιοῦτου ἀπόδειξιν.

moon.’<sup>61</sup>

Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7:12: ‘This Gnostic, to speak compendiously, makes up for [ἀνταναπληροῖ] the absence of the apostles, by the rectitude of his life, the accuracy of his knowledge [etc.]’.<sup>62</sup>

Kremer concludes:

That the prefix ἀντί in the compound ἀνταναπληρῶ is endowed with a decisive meaning in the non-Biblical texts, is beyond question. Just try deleting ἀντί in the quoted texts; the sense of the whole is completely altered. Ἀνταναπληροῦν in the places quoted never means simply “fill up” or “complete”.<sup>63</sup>

More than a century earlier, Estienne’s dictionary had unequivocally defined

ἀνταναπληρῶ as *vicissim impleo* ‘I fill up in turn’.<sup>64</sup>

In conclusion, the translation of ἀνταναπληρῶ, far from glossing over the significance of the prefix, ought to draw attention to the reciprocation between the two halves of the verse: ‘I, for my part, make up for’.<sup>65</sup> The usage of πληρόω and its derivatives specifically in eschatological contexts will be explored further below (7.3.1-2).

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61 ἐπεὶ δὲ ἡ μὲν ἐλλείπειν ἐποίει τὴν ἀποκατάστασιν, ἡ δὲ πλεονάζειν κατὰ τινὰ συντυχίαν, ἣν ἴσως καὶ ὁ Ἰππαρχος ἀνταναπληρουμένην πῶς κατανοήκει μόνῳ τῷ τῆς ὑπεροχῆς τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν τρίτῳ μέρει μιᾶς μοίρας.

62 ὁ γνωστικὸς οὗτος συνελθόντι εἶπεν τὴν ἀποστολικὴν ἀπουσίαν ἀνταναπληροῖ βιοῦς ὀρθῶς, γινώσκων ἀκριβῶς ... (English translation in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (10 vols.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 4<sup>th</sup> printing, 2004), vol. 2, p. 545).

63 Daß dem Präfix ἀντί in der Zusammensetzung ἀνταναπληρῶ an den genannten außerbiblischen Stellen eine entscheidende Bedeutung zukommt, steht ganz außer Frage. Man versuche nur einmal, in den angeführten Texten jeweils ἀντί zu streichen; der Sinn des ganzen würde dadurch ... völlig verändert. Ἀνταναπληροῦν bedeutet an den zitierten Texten nie ein einfaches „Auffüllen” oder „Vollmachen”. Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt*, p. 160.

64 Henri Estienne, *Θησαυρὸς τῆς ἐλληνικῆς γλώσσης* (9 vols.; Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1954 [reprint of 3<sup>rd</sup> edn; Paris: Firmin Didot, 1829]. This is also significantly the translation chosen by J.A. Bengel, *Gnomon*, vol. 4, p. 164 (see above, 1.1.4).

65 Kremer argues further that the phrase ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου may be just an expansion of ἐν ἐμοί, re-emphasising the change of person from that in the first half of the verse indicated by ἀντί.

### 2.2.5 σάρξ

The translation of this term, usually translated ‘flesh’, is far from simple because of the variety of ways in which the Pauline epistles and the wider NT employ it, each with its different contrasts and associations. Nevertheless there is great consistency in the English versions in simply rendering it ‘flesh’: not until the JB of 1967 was any alternative offered - in this case ‘body’. The same solution was chosen by New JB (1985), CEV (1995), NLT and NIRV (both 1996) and NCV (2005). The most evident potential problem in every case is that they have used the same translation for σῶμα, which, even if unlikely to confuse, makes for a poor reading stylistically. GNB translates ‘physical sufferings’, which avoids this problem.

This raises the question, however, whether Paul is in fact thinking solely of physical, bodily afflictions, or whether this is an unnecessarily narrow interpretation of σάρξ in this case, and various scholars have attempted to encapsulate the essence of the word without restricting it to the physical or visible. For example, Gnllka comments: ‘The concept of flesh here denotes the person from the aspect of being “in the world” with a capacity for suffering.’<sup>66</sup> Likewise, Moule says: ‘Broadly speaking (and with notable exceptions), the tendency ... is to use σάρξ for the realm in which suffering and dying takes place.’<sup>67</sup> With specific reference to this verse, Schweizer writes: ‘The reference is to the physical existence of the apostle as this is exposed to affliction’.<sup>68</sup> All three seem to be attempting to express in different terms that Paul’s primary focus is on the essential vulnerability or

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66 ‘Der Begriff Fleisch bezeichnet hier die Person unter dem Aspekt der Welthaftigkeit und Leidenschaftlichkeit’. Joachim Gnllka, *Der Kolosserbrief* (Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 10/1; Freiburg: Herder, 1980), p. 98.

67 Moule, *Colossians*, p. 80. An extensive treatment of Paul’s usage of σάρξ is provided by Ernst Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi: eine Untersuchung zur paulinischen Begrifflichkeit* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, 9; Tübingen: Mohr, 1938), pp. 100-118; Lorenzo Scornaienchi, *Sarx und Soma bei Paulus: der Mensch zwischen Destruktivität und Konstruktivität* (Novum Testamentum et orbis antiquis: Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments, 67; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), pp. 287-292.

68 Eduard Schweizer, σάρξ, *TDNT* 7, p. 136.

passibility of his human nature rather than his physicality.

Besides these considerations, if one retreats to the safe familiarity of ‘flesh’, with all its ambiguities, there is a danger of importing negative connotations from elsewhere in the Pauline epistles. The answer to the first question is straightforward: it has already been seen how Paul’s descriptions of θλίψεις contain emotional, psychological and spiritual distress as well as physical sufferings, such as ‘the pressure of my concern for all the churches’ (2 Cor. 11:28), ‘despair’ (2 Cor. 1:8), ‘anguish of heart’ (2 Cor. 2:4), etc.

Furthermore, in the LXX antecedents of the term a similar breadth of affliction was noted. Best therefore to avoid restricting the meaning to just physical suffering - yet whether the term ‘flesh’ achieves this or not depends entirely on the readership: although having the dubious advantage of being the closest literal translation, it presents a dilemma, for either one assumes no biblical knowledge in the reader, in which case ‘flesh’ has to mean the physical body and we have failed in our objective; or else one relies on an association with other NT occurrences, and here one usage in particular predominates – that of σάρξ versus πνεῦμα – and brings with it equally unwelcome baggage.<sup>69</sup> This particular usage finds its clearest exposition in Rom. 7-8, where we learn, for example, ‘that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh’ (7:18, RSV), and ‘those who are in the flesh cannot please God’ (8:8, RSV),<sup>70</sup> - and brings pejorative connotations which are completely alien to the spirit of Col. 1:24. This usage of σάρξ is mainly due to the pervasive influence of Epicurus, for whom the σάρξ is the seat of desire, ἡδονή, and who was popularly held to have taught licentiousness and unbridled lust – a reputation exploited by his Platonist opponents.

Schweizer remarks that ‘Hellenistic Judaism drank all this in eagerly’.<sup>71</sup>

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69 Scornaienchi, *Sarx*, pp. 292-297 discusses the negative connotations of σάρξ.

70 Further Pauline examples of this particular usage of σάρξ are: Rom. 7:5; 8:4, 5 (twice), 6, 7, 9, 12 (twice), 13; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 7:1; Gal. 3:3; 4:29; 5:16, 17 (twice), 19; 6:8 (twice); Col. 2:5; 1Tim. 3:16.

71 Schweizer, σάρξ, *TDNT* 7, pp. 104-105.

‘Flesh’, then, is really not much help in translating σάρξ in Col. 1:24. Much closer in sense is the similar usage found in Phil. 1:22-24, where Paul weighs the merits of life versus death: ‘If I am to go on living in the body [εἰ δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί], this will mean fruitful labour for me ... but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body [ἐν τῇ σαρκί]’ - in other words, ‘alive’.<sup>72</sup> Schweizer lists a range of seven different usages by Paul for σάρξ,<sup>73</sup> of which one of the commonest is the description of the earthly sphere as opposed to the heavenly. A clear example is Rom. 1:3-4, which describes God’s Son, ‘who as to his human nature [κατὰ σάρκα] was a descendant of David, and through the Spirit of holiness [κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης] was declared with power to be the Son of God’. A similar usage is found in Heb. 5:7, where the phrase ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς ἀρκὸς αὐτοῦ is translated by NIV ‘during the days of Jesus’ life on earth’ (RSV: ‘in the days of his flesh’). In a similar context of describing the ministry of suffering, in 2 Cor. 4:11, Paul writes: ‘For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body [ἐν τῇ θνητῇ σαρκὶ ἡμῶν]’. Bruce’s own preferred translation, ‘in my own person’,<sup>74</sup> would also accord with this usage. Likewise, Pokorný equates the phrase with ‘by means of his mortal existence’.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the solution, then, is to avoid both the unhelpful connotations of ‘flesh’ and the unnecessary restrictiveness of ‘body’ by translating ‘in my life’ or ‘while I live’.

### **2.2.6 σῶμα [Χριστοῦ]**

The phrase ‘Body [of Christ]’ is one of the most frequent Pauline designations of the

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72 Similar usage is found in Gal. 2:20; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 5:7; 1 Pet. 4:2. Dibelius, however, maintains that ‘σάρξ hier = σῶμα’, and that the reason for the choice of term is to avoid confusion with Christ’s σῶμα in the second half of the verse. *An die Kolosser*, p. 23.

73 Schweizer, σάρξ, *TDNT* 7, pp. 125-135.

74 Bruce, *Colossians*, p. 81.

75 Pokorný, *Colossians*, p. 100; see also below (5.2).



church, most thoroughly described in 1 Cor. 12:12-31. The context there is Paul's argument that the diversity of spiritual gifts enhances the essential unity of the church in much the same way as the organs of the human body contribute in different ways to its health and well-being. Paul uses this as an exhortation to unity, and concludes his analogy: 'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it' (v. 27). Despite the pictorial language and numerous parallels drawn from it, the force of his argument lies not in the church being *like* a body, but that it *is* a body. As such, it is not only composed of many very diverse elements, but can only function by the cooperation and reciprocation of these parts. Furthermore, because of these there is a strong emphasis firstly on 'belonging' and consequently on real empathy and shared identity (see below, 7.5.3). The detailed exposition in this one passage should not obscure how widespread the usage is in the Pauline epistles. Apart from the 18 occurrences of σῶμα in 1 Cor. 12, the imagery occurs also in Romans, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, as well as elsewhere in 1 Corinthians.<sup>76</sup> In Colossians, the first reference (1:18) is to Christ's status, authority and role as head of the body; in 2:9, the emphasis is on the need of the members to be connected to and dependent on that head; and in 3:15, on the natural harmony that should exist in a healthy body. The overall image therefore is no two-dimensional picture illustrating merely the body as the sum of its parts, but one of a living, interactive, relational being, wholly dependent on its head for direction and purpose. The later background and usage of the word σῶμα, particularly in the extra-biblical literature, will be discussed later (7.5.2).

The term σῶμα is of obscure origin,<sup>77</sup> and in its earliest attestation in Homer it means a

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<sup>76</sup> Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 10:16(?), 17; Eph. 1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16 (twice); 5:23, 30; Col. 1:18, 24, 2:17, 19.

<sup>77</sup> The most widely accepted etymology derives it from an Indo-European root \*teuə, *to swell*, giving a

corpse, either human or animal.<sup>78</sup> E.g. *Iliad* 3:23: ‘even as a lion is glad when he lighteth on a great carcass’;<sup>79</sup> *Odyssey* 12:67-68: ‘But the planks of the ships and the bodies of men are whirled confusedly by the waves of the sea and the blasts of baneful fire.’<sup>80</sup> Not until Hesiod (ca. 7<sup>th</sup> century BC) does it also apply to a living body: e.g. *Works and days* 539-540: ‘so that your hairs do not tremble nor stand up straight shivering along your body’,<sup>81</sup> although the association with death is still common, as in *The Shield* 426: ‘like a lion that has come upon an animal’ [and then kills it].<sup>82</sup>

Subsequently, a wide variety of usage developed,<sup>83</sup> corresponding to a large degree with the breadth of meaning of modern English ‘body’. Its developments in Stoic philosophy will be considered in more detail below (7.5.2) when discussing the Hellenistic background to the Pauline teaching. At this stage, concerned primarily with linguistic rather than philosophical considerations, suffice to say that in describing the Christian community as a body, Paul is using terminology familiar to his audience. The early Stoics (late 4<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) debated the nature of the σῶμα in various categories. Alongside living creatures (σώματα ἡνωμένα καὶ συμφυᾶ) and composite structures (σώματα ἐκ συναπτομένων), e.g. a house or a ship, is a third type: σῶμα ἐκ διεστώτων, in which a

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meaning *stocky thing, trunk*. The same root is behind English *thumb, thigh*. Calvert Watkins, ed., *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 2011), pp. 94-95.

78 Käsemann, *Leib*, pp. 24-25. Eduard Schweizer, σῶμα, *TDNT* 7, pp. 1025-26; Scornaienchi, *Sarx*, pp. 68-72.

79 ὥς τε λέων ἐχάρη μεγάλην ἐπὶ σώματι κύρσας. Homer, *Iliad*, vol.1, pp. 118-119.

80 ἀλλὰ θ’ ὁμοῦ πίνακίς τε νεῶν καὶ σώματα φωτῶν κύμαθ’ ἄλδς φορέουσι πυρός τ’ ὀλοοῖτο θύελλαι. Homer, *Odyssey*, vol. 1, pp. 436-437.

81 ἵνα τοι τρίχες ἀτρεμέωσιν μηδ’ ὀρθαὶ θρίσσωσιν ἀειρόμεναι κατὰ σῶμα. Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia* (ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most; Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 130-131.

82 λέων ὥς σώματι κύρσας. Hesiod, *The Shield [etc.]* (ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most; Loeb Classical Library, 503; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 34-35.

83 A detailed analysis of the extra-biblical usage of σῶμα is found in Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology: with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 29; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 9-15.

σῶμα is made up of different individuals, for example the people or the senate. Particularly relevant, the ἐκκλησία can be considered as σῶμα: Chrysippus (c. 280-207 BC), the third head of the Stoa, quoted by Plutarch, wrote: ‘Often a single body [σῶμα] consists of many separate bodies like an assembly [ἐκκλησία] and an army and a chorus from which, however, life and thought and instruction comes to each individual.’<sup>84</sup> Such usage seems to be a very accurate precedent for Paul’s use of the word in describing the church.

### 2.2.7 ἐκκλησία

This term has a rich history both in secular Greek and in the LXX.<sup>85</sup> From the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC in Athens and the other city-states, the herald would summon (ἐκ-καλέω)<sup>86</sup> the citizens to the assembly (ἐκκλησία). An early example from Thucydides: ‘The Athenians called an assembly [ἐκκλησία], and gave their citizens an opportunity to express themselves.’

(*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1:139).<sup>87</sup> Similarly, Xenophon: ‘Then they called an Assembly [ἐκκλησία], at which the Senate brought in its proposal’ (*Hellenica* 1:7:9).<sup>88</sup>

They are hence the ἐκκληῖται, those ‘called out’, but also called *together* to form a union: as such they are distinct from the δῆμος, the sum total of the populace. This simple and visual image commended the word both to the translators of the LXX (3<sup>rd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> century BC) and to the early Christians.

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84 οὐ γὰρ ἐνταῦθα μὲν ἐν συνίσταται σῶμα πολλάκις ἐκ διεστώτων σωμάτων, οἷον ἐκκλησία καὶ στρατεύμα καὶ χορός, ὧν ἐκάστῳ καὶ ζῆν καὶ φρονεῖν καὶ μανθάνειν συμβέβηκεν. Chrysipp. Fr. 367 in Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum*, 29 in H. von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* (4 vols.; Stuttgart, Teubner, 1964), vol. 2, p. 124 (Schweizer’s translation).

85 Karl Ludwig Schmidt, καλέω, *TDNT* 3, pp. 501-531; Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), pp. 34-37.

86 Thus the etymology: the actual term normally used was ἐκκλησίαν ποιεῖν or συλλέγειν.

87 ποιήσαντες ἐκκλησίαν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι γνώμας σπῖσιβ αὐτοῖς προντίθεσαν. Thucydides, vol. 1, pp. 238-239.

88 ἐντεῦθεν ἐκκλησίαν ἐποίουν, εἰς ἣν ἡ βουλή εἰσήνεγκε τὴν αὐτῆς γνώμην. Xenophon, *Hellenica*, with an English translation by Carleton L. Brownson (Loeb Classical Library; London: Heinemann, 1947), pp. 70-71.

In the LXX, ἐκκλησία (about 100 occurrences) almost always translates לְהָאָהֳלָה (*qāhāl*), defined as ‘an assembled group of people’,<sup>89</sup> and the few exceptions all come from the same stem. Being a secular term, unless the context makes it obvious, it often needs an addition to indicate that ἐκκλησία refers to the congregation of God, e.g. ἐκκλησία κυρίου,<sup>90</sup> ἐκκλησία Ἰσραήλ.<sup>91</sup> The sense, however, invariably mirrors the secular Greek usage in that it refers to a deliberate gathering for a definite purpose. This might be for various reasons, such as the receiving of the Law at Horeb (Deut. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16); worship (Deut. 31:30; Pss. 22:22; 26:12); warfare (Judg. 20:2; 21:5, 8; 1 Sam. 17:47); the return of the ark of the covenant (1 Chron. 13:2, 4); (re-)dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8:14, 22, 55, 65; 2 Chron. 6:3, 12, 13); coronation (1 Chron. 29: 1, 10, 20); the exiles assembled to return home (Ezra 2:64), etc.

Given the remarkably congruent meaning and background to the respective Greek and Hebrew terms (albeit the former is strictly secular whereas the latter is predominantly religious), it is not surprising that an unusual degree of consistency in translation is found. There is, however, one exception: in Genesis to Numbers, לְהָאָהֳלָה is consistently translated συναγωγή (and also usually in Jeremiah and Ezekiel). The choice of whether to use συναγωγή or ἐκκλησία in translation appears to be primarily a matter of personal preference for the individual translators: whilst there is little perceivable difference in meaning, there is nevertheless near-complete consistency within individual biblical books. Whilst in many respects the meaning and usage of the two Greek words are similar or identical, συναγωγή is itself used in the LXX 225 times, but in the great majority of cases

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89 H.-J. Fabry, לְהָאָהֳלָה, *TDOT* 12, p. 551.

90 Deut. 23:1, 2, 3 (twice), 8; 1 Chron. 28:8.

91 Deut. 31:30; 1 Kgs 8:14, 22, 55; 1 Chron. 13:2; 2 Chron. 6:3 (twice), 12, 13; 10:3.

to translate Hebrew  $\pi\tau\gamma$  (*‘ēdāh*),<sup>92</sup> defined as ‘the national, legal and cultic community of Israel gathered around the [tent of meeting]’.<sup>93</sup> However, when the earliest Christians chose their self-designation, the imagery of being called out by God seems to have appealed to them: 1 Pet. 2:9 may play on this: ‘But you are a chosen people ... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness [τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος] into his wonderful light.’ Paul too is keen to remind his readers that they are those called by God, e.g. Rom. 1:6: καὶ ὑμεῖς κλητοὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; 1 Cor. 1:2. By the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD the term συναγωγή had become much more of a restricted and religious term than in the LXX, whereas ἐκκλησία was no longer widely used by Jews;<sup>94</sup> besides, many of the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians had consciously left the synagogue (or been expelled) and joined themselves to Gentile Christians - a process foretold in John 16:2: ‘they will put you out of the synagogue’, and mirrored in Paul’s experiences in Acts 13:42-52; 18:5-8; 19:8-10 – and therefore a different name was essential.

### **2.3 The balance of Colossians 1:24**

We are now in a position to consider the balance between the two halves of the verse, and in particular to address the following questions in the light of the significance given to ἀνταναπληρώω:

1. Is καί here a simple conjunction, or does it have an adverbial role such as ‘whereas’, ‘whilst’?
2. Is there any solid basis to the frequent assumption that the writer refers in the first clause, as well as the second, to his own personal experience, not that of another?
3. Is there a linguistic and / or theological significance in the writer’s choice of παθήματα

<sup>92</sup> E.g. Ex. 12:3; 16:1; Lev. 4:13; 16:5; Num. 1:2; Josh. 22:20.

<sup>93</sup> Wolfgang Schrage, συναγωγή, *TDNT* 7, p. 802.

<sup>94</sup> Schmidt, καλέω, p. 516.

and θλίψις for the two separate clauses, or is it simply a stylistic choice to use synonyms rather than repetition?

### **2.3.1 The role of καί**

The conjunction καί is capable of a considerably greater range of nuance and expression, depending on the context, than the simple connective ‘and’;<sup>95</sup> moreover, the adverbial use is common, e.g. Gal. 2:16, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ‘so we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus’; Col. 3:4, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ, ‘then you also will appear with him in glory.’ In view of the distinctive contribution of the prefixed ἀντί in ἀνταναπληρῶ noted above (2.2.4) and the semantic similarity between the preceding παθήμασιν and the following θλίψεων, this καὶ serves as the fulcrum on which the two halves of the statement are balanced. This would give a translation of this phrase along the lines: ‘whereas I too for my part fill up ...’ or ‘whilst I also play my part in filling up ...’.

### **2.3.2 The subject of the παθήματα**

The usual assumption in translating Col. 1:24 is that the impersonal παθήματα in which Paul rejoices are his own. From Tyndale (1526, ‘Now joy I in my sufferings which I suffer for you’, with reduplicated emphasis on Paul as the subject) onwards, the English versions have, until recently, consistently presumed to supply the author as the subject. Bruce expresses what most other commentators appear to assume when he notes that ‘the implied pronoun μου (“my”)’ occurs in some manuscripts.<sup>96</sup> Lohse describes the second half of the

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<sup>95</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Biblical Languages: Greek, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1994), pp. 211-212.

<sup>96</sup> Bruce, *Colossians*, p. 80.

verse as a ‘clarifying clause’ which more closely explains the first,<sup>97</sup> thereby equating the παθήματα with the θλίψεις, as well as the sufferer of each. Michaelis likewise states ‘There is no doubt but that the παθήματα of Col. 1:24 are the sufferings of the apostle’,<sup>98</sup> yet gives no reason at all for what he subsequently terms a ‘presupposition’. Had the writer intended this meaning, he could more simply and less ambiguously have written χαίρω πάσχων. Not until the NIV (1973) was a more circumspect (not to mention more accurate) rendering produced among the major English translations: ‘now I rejoice in what was suffered for you’; recently MacDonald has pointed out that the phrase might be rendered ‘the sufferings’ rather than ‘my sufferings’.<sup>99</sup> A similar trend, though, to personalise the παθήματα is also manifest among major translations into other languages, e.g. Luther (1522): ‘Nu frewe ich mich in *meynen* leyden, die *ich leyde* fur euch’; Segond (1880): ‘Je me réjouis maintenant dans *mes* souffrances pour vous’ [italics mine].

There are two objections to this persistent assumption: one linguistic, the other historical. First, if there is a reciprocal dynamic to ἀνταναπληρώω, then it follows that Col.1:24 speaks not solely of Paul and his activities, but, by contrast, of some other person in the first clause. This might be Christ, whose θλίψεις (and their deficiency) are the focus of the second clause; or it might be one or more others. Lightfoot, having reviewed the extra-biblical occurrences of ἀνταναπληρῶ (as above, 2.2.4), emphasises the linguistic need for two parties:

The meaning of ἀντὶ in this compound will be plain from the passages quoted. It signifies that the supply comes *from an opposite quarter* to the deficiency. This idea is more or less definitely expressed in the

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97 Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (trans. William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 69.

98 Michaelis, πάσχω, *TDNT* 5, p. 933.

99 Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Sacra pagina series, 17; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 78.

context of all the passages ... The force of ἀνταναπληροῦν in St Paul is often explained as denoting simply that the supply *corresponds in extent* to the deficiency. This interpretation practically deprives ἀντί of any meaning, for ἀναπληροῦν alone would denote as much. If indeed the supply had been the subject of the verb, and the sentence had run τὰ παθήματά μου ἀνταναπληροῖ τὰ ὑστερήματα κ.τ.λ., this idea might perhaps be reached without sacrificing the sense of ἀντί; but in such a passage as this, where one personal agent is mentioned in connexion with the supply and another in connexion with the deficiency, the one being the subject and the other being involved in the object of the verb, the ἀντί can only describe the antithesis of these personal agents. So interpreted, it is eminently expressive here.<sup>100</sup>

Abbott disagrees with Lightfoot,<sup>101</sup> being followed in turn by Bruce,<sup>102</sup> by reiterating the view that the prefixed ἀντί simply conveys a correspondence between the amount of the lack and its subsequent supply. Pointing out that the two NT occurrences of ὑστέρημα in conjunction with simple ἀναπληρῶ (1 Cor. 16:17; Phil. 2:30) both also deal with ‘supply from another quarter to the deficiency’, he maintains that this therefore cannot be the added meaning of ἀντί. Abbott can easily show that the idea of correspondence is indeed present in the classical texts, but this is not the issue in dispute so much as *what is added* by ἀντί. His own conclusion that ‘ἀνταναπληρῶ is more unassuming than ἀναπληρῶ’ seems limp. In resolution of this dispute, it is helpful to take a step back from arguments about Greek vocabulary and recognize that in fact, when addressing the idea of ‘lack and subsequent supply’, both the above concepts of ‘correspondence’ and ‘supply from another quarter’ are already logically inherent. Thus, any so-called ‘supply’ that *fails* to correspond to the lack can hardly be worthy of the description; likewise, if one potential source proves a failure or inadequate, resulting in a ‘lack’, it is more than likely that provision, if it comes at all, will have to be from another direction. So although both the above views are

100 J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London: MacMillan, new edn, 1879), p. 163.

101 K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), pp. 229-230.

102 Bruce, *Colossians*, pp. 81-82.



essentially correct, the two decisive merits of Lightfoot's view over Abbott's are from elsewhere: first, the very common meaning of prefixed ἀντί explored above (2.2.4) as 'to do something in turn' (a usage completely ignored by Abbott); and second, the persistent failure to find any alternative meaning for it that is either persuasive or has any genuine substance. Furthermore, if Lightfoot is correct, then very clearly, in conjunction with the preceding καί, the prefixed ἀντί forms a neat fulcrum on which the two halves of the verse are balanced: 'I rejoice in what was suffered ... // whilst I in turn fill up ... the afflictions...'. If this is the case, it may also explain the inclusion of the phrase ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, which otherwise appears to add little to the statement, to emphasise how Paul is now playing his part, like his forerunners.

If this point is granted, the consequent question arises: who is this 'other agent' who has experienced the παθήματα? Is it, as Lightfoot goes on to say, Christ himself, who graciously 'left something for Paul the unworthy servant to suffer'?<sup>103</sup> There is much to support this view in the light of Paul's own commission related in Acts 9:16: '“I will show him how much he must suffer for my name”'; his frequent teaching on not just the inevitability but also the privilege of suffering for the gospel (see further in chapter 3), in particular 2 Cor. 1:5, which describes how 'the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives': but this is not the only possibility. In the context of the verse, with its second clause describing Paul's own contribution to the θλίψεις, we can discount the theoretical possibility of the παθήματα being good or neutral experiences; however, the frequent Pauline references to the apostolic labours and endurance on behalf of the churches allows the very real possibility that the reference here is – in part at least - to those who first brought the gospel to Colossae and planted and ministered in the church there. For

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103 Lightfoot, *Colossians*, p. 163.

example, 1 Thes. 2:2: ‘We had previously suffered and been insulted at Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition’; 2 Cor. 1:8, ‘We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships [θλίψεις] we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.’ As regards the church in Colossae, it is clear that the church there was planted not by Paul himself, but by one of his circle: ‘You learned it [the gospel] from Epaphras, our dear fellow-servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf’ (Col. 1:8). The same Epaphras is mentioned again at the end of the letter: ‘Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you ... I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis’ (Col. 4:12-13). It is possible that Paul, rejoicing over the παθήματα of another for the Colossians, refers not simply to the sufferings of Christ, but also (or instead) to the labours of those like Epaphras who evangelised them. Whoever the reference is to can probably not be determined, and is of only secondary relevance: the importance for the interpretation of Col. 1:24 is that Paul is comparing and contrasting his own efforts with those who have gone before, whether Christ in salvation or Epaphras and his colleagues in evangelism or both. It appears to be common ground amongst commentators, regardless of their views on the authorship of the letter, that Colossae and the other churches of the Lycus valley were founded by disciples of Paul, but not by the apostle personally; the way this slightly awkward, impersonal phrase is used could be seen to acknowledge that fact, whilst in the second half of the verse, Paul hastens to announce his subsequent personal contribution through ‘filling up what is lacking’. This is very different from regarding the latter as a ‘clarifying clause’,

explaining or paraphrasing the παθήματα ὑπέρ ὑμῶν, as Lohse explains it.<sup>104</sup>

Amongst the modern commentators, both Gnilka and Hübner translate παθήματα accurately as impersonal and hence ambiguous; though having done so, both proceed to interpret the sufferings as the author's own. Thus Gnilka translates: 'Now I rejoice in the sufferings (which accrue) to your benefit', yet in analysing the structure of the verse, paraphrases 'I rejoice in my sufferings for you';<sup>105</sup> Hübner translates: 'So now I rejoice in the sufferings for you' but comments: '“Paul” rejoices in the sufferings which he bears for the benefit of the Colossians.'<sup>106</sup>

### **2.3.3 Παθήματα and θλίψεις: synonymous or contrasting?**

It has been seen that in the broadest sense these two terms both normally fall into the semantic category of negative experience, and can both be translated in most circumstances as 'sufferings', as indeed one or two translations have done (see below, 2.5). There are three reasons for avoiding this, however. The first is a matter of style – it is bad practice in translation to conflate two separate terms into one, on the simple basis that if the author of the original had wanted identical terms, he or she would have made that choice (this regardless of whether a specific distinction is intended). Second, with even the most mundane vocabulary, each word will have its individual associations and nuances, and whilst these can rarely be replicated to perfection in translation, a far better attempt can be made than simply to equate the terms. In this particular case, I would suggest that the

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104 Lohse, *Colossians*, p. 69.

105 'Jetzt freue ich mich in den Leiden, (die) euch zugute (kommen)' / 'Ich freue mich in meinen Leiden für euch'. Joachim Gnilka, *Der Kolosserbrief* (Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 10/1; Freiburg: Herder, 1980), p. 93.

106 'So freue ich mich nun in den Leiden für euch' / '„Paulus“ freut sich über den Leiden, die er den Kolossern zugute erträgt'. Hans Hübner, *An Philemon, an die Kolosser, an die Epheser* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 12; Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), pp. 66-67.

terms involved are very different in tone: *παθήματα* essentially vague with a tendency to neutral passivity; *θλίψεις* multifaceted but sharp and specific. Third, and most importantly by far, in this particular sentence consisting of two balanced clauses dealing with two different persons linked with a contrastive conjunction, it is especially important that the nouns likewise express this contrast. In conjunction with these last two points is the distinction noted above, that NT usage does not describe Christ's own earthly sufferings as *θλίψις*, but always *πάθημα*; whereas both terms are used of his followers.<sup>107</sup> Smith, however, turns this argument around, deciding that 'the two terms seem to be more or less synonymous' on the basis that the *παθήματα* are Paul's own, whereas here, uniquely, *θλίψεις* are used to describe Christ's afflictions - a reversal of the usual practice.<sup>108</sup> His view seems unconvincing, as it argues directly against the stream of normal usage.

## **2.4 Minor linguistic points**

Finally, there remain some lesser points to be considered before translation is attempted.

*νῦν* does not share the range of meaning of English 'now', despite Dunn's statement that 'it could be simply resumptive, as it often is in common speech today',<sup>109</sup> and his reference to Moule in support of his opinion, which seems flawed, since Moule appears in fact to

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107 Christ's sufferings are described using *πάσχω* in Matt. 16:21; 17:12; Mark 8:31; 9:12; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 22:15; 24:26, 46; Acts 1:3; 3:18; 17:3; Heb. 2:18; 5:8; 9:26; 13:12; 1 Pet. 2:21, 23; 3:18; 4:1; and using *παθήματα* in 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:10; Heb. 2:9, 10; 1 Pet. 1:11; 4:13; 5:1. The sufferings of his followers are described by *πάσχω* in Acts 9:16; 28:5; 1 Cor. 12:26; 2 Cor. 1:6; Gal. 3:4; Phil. 1:29; 1 Thes. 2:14; 2 Thes. 1:5; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Pet. 2:19, 20; 3:14, 17; 4:15, 19; 5:10; Rev. 2:10; by *παθήματα* in Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 1:6, 7; 2 Tim. 3:11; 1 Pet. 5:9; by *θλίβω* in 2 Cor. 1:6; 4:8; 7:5; 1 Thes. 3:4; 2 Thes. 1:6, 7; 1 Tim. 5:10; and by *θλίψις* in Matt. 13:21; 24:9, 21, 29; Mark 4:7; 13:19, 24; John 16:33; Acts 11:19; 14:22; 20:23; Rom. 5:3 (twice); 8:35; 12:12; 1 Cor. 7:28; 2 Cor. 1:4 (twice), 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13; Eph. 3:13; Phil. 1:17; 4:14; 1 Thes. 1:6; 3:3, 7; 2 Thes. 1:4, 6; Heb. 10:33; Rev. 1:9; 2:9, 10, 22; 7:14.

108 Barry D. Smith, *Paul's Seven Explanations of the Suffering of the Righteous* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 47; New York: Lang, 2002), p. 198, n. 76.

109 Dunn, *Colossians*, p. 113.

take a very different view, and doubts that the Greek can carry such a weak sense.<sup>110</sup> Moo also maintains that *vũv* sometimes functions more as a transitional conjunction, yet the two parallels he notes (1 Cor. 5:11; 12:20) both fail to support the case.<sup>111</sup> Houlden is more forthright in declaring that *vũv* is always temporal,<sup>112</sup> and Stählin,<sup>113</sup> while noting that there can be a weakened sense which has lost temporal significance, goes on to show that this occurs only in certain Lucan expressions and in the phrase *vũv* (or *vũvi*) *δέ*, ‘in actual fact’ (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:18; John 18:36). *vũv* thus has the sense of German *jetzt* rather than *nun*. Nowhere else in the Pauline epistles does *vũv* have an apparently resumptive sense – nor indeed even occur initially in a sentence as in this case. Better, then, to adopt Dunn’s first suggestion and follow Lightfoot in reading ‘now as I review my part in all this’;<sup>114</sup> or alternatively Caird’s interpretation, ‘the now of his imprisonment’,<sup>115</sup> or Lohse’s: ‘“now”, when there is discussion of the universal saving act of reconciliation’.<sup>116</sup> Stylistically, though, the usual word order ‘now I rejoice’ is preferable to the NKJV ‘I now rejoice’, which although stressing the ‘now’, correspondingly weakens the primary emphasis on the rejoicing and its causes.

*χαίρω ἐν*. This verb, ‘to rejoice’, is very flexible, the object being expressed in a variety of formulae in the NT: with *ἐπί*, e.g. *ἐφ’ ὑμῖν οὖν χαίρω*, ‘I am full of joy over you’ (Rom. 16:19); with *ὅτι*, e.g. *χαίρω ὅτι ἐν παντί θαρρῶ ἐν ὑμῖν*, ‘I am glad [that] I can have complete confidence in you’ (2 Cor. 7:16); with *ἐν*, e.g. *ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω*, ‘because of this I

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- 110 C.F.D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 75.  
 Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 149. In 1 Cor. 5:11, the *vũv* very clearly contrasts with v. 9 ‘I have written ...’ v. 11 ‘but now I am writing ...’; in 12:20, it follows the emphatic assertion in v. 18, ‘God has arranged the parts in the body ...’ v. 20 ‘so now ...’.
- 112 Houlden, *Paul’s Letters from Prison*, p. 180.
- 113 G. Stählin, *vũv*, *TDNT* 4, pp. 1108-1109.
- 114 J.B. Lightfoot, *Colossians*, p. 162.
- 115 G.B. Caird, *Paul’s letters from Prison* (The New Clarendon Bible; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 184.
- 116 Lohse, *Colossians*, p. 68.

rejoice’ (Phil. 1:18); with *διά*, e.g. χαρᾷ χαίρει διὰ τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ νυμφίου, ‘[the friend] is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice’ (John 3:29); with genitive absolute, e.g. ἐχάρην γὰρ λίαν ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν, ‘it gave me great joy to have some brothers come’ (3 John 3); with dative, e.g. τῇ ἐλπίδι χαίροντες, ‘be joyful in hope’ (Rom. 12:12). There is no particular significance in the choice of the construction χαίρω ἐν in Col. 1:24: it is common enough,<sup>117</sup> and can safely be rendered ‘rejoice in (or over)’.

ὑπέρ. Aside from its original spatial meaning of ‘over, above’, ὑπέρ followed by the genitive has two further principal meanings:<sup>118</sup> ‘on behalf of’ and ‘in the place of’ – or, as Porter terms them, the beneficial and substitutionary senses.<sup>119</sup> The first of these is common and quite straightforward, particularly in the context of sacrifice or dedication, e.g. Mark 9:40: ὃς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν καθ’ ἡμῶν, ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἔστιν, ‘who is not against us is for us’; Rom. 5:7: μόλις γὰρ ὑπὲρ δικαίου τις ἀποθανεῖται, ‘rarely will anyone die for a righteous man’. The substitutionary sense is a further development of the meaning of ὑπέρ, yet overlapping with the beneficial sense in many passages, e.g. Rom. 5:8: Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν, ‘Christ died for *and/or* in the place of us’; 1 Tim. 2:6: ὁ δοὺς ἑαυτὸν ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων, ‘who gave himself as a ransom for all people’. In the context of the vicarious passion and death of Christ, there is little problem in translation: his death was indisputably both for the benefit of *and* in the place of the sinner. In other contexts, the decision becomes theologically more loaded, e.g. 1 Cor. 15:29, which describes οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν, ‘those who are baptised for [or should it be “in the place

117 Luke 10:20; Phil. 1:18; 3:1; 4:4, 10; Col. 1:24.

118 Two other, less common meanings also occur: ‘with reference to’, e.g. John 1:30; Rom. 9:27; 2 Thes. 2:1; and ‘on account of’, e.g. Acts 9:16; 1 Cor. 10:30; 2 Cor. 12:8.

119 Porter, *Idioms*, pp. 176-177. Gnllka, however, enumerates three meanings: ‘for the sake of’; ‘in place of’; ‘for the good of someone’ (‘1. um ... willen, 2. an Stelle von, 3. zum Besten von jemandem’), though the first and last conflated would seem to equate to Porter’s ‘beneficial’ sense. *Kolosssebrief*, p. 95.

of''] the dead'. Such a decision is crucial in the case of Col. 1:24 (which moreover uses the word twice), and is at the heart of this research into the possibility of a vicarious statement here. For the present, a cautious line will be taken in translation, while bearing in mind for a later chapter the conclusion of Porter: 'The use of ὑπὲρ in a substitutionary sense is not unknown in classical Greek and is in fact fairly widespread in the Hellenistic papyri ... There is no reason apart from theological bias to exclude this usage in the NT.'<sup>120</sup> This bold assertion will be tested later, when the whole theme of substitution and its social background and linguistic description are investigated.

## **2.5 The history of translation of Colossians 1:24 into English**

The first phase of the history of the printed English Bible begins with William Tyndale's first NT of 1526 and ends with the King James version of 1611 - heavily influenced, like all its predecessors, on Tyndale's pioneering work. In Tyndale's second translation of 1534, Col. 1:24 reads: 'Now joy I in my sufferings which I suffer for you, and fulfill that which is behind of the passions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the congregation.' Tyndale famously declined to use 'church' for ἐκκλησία because of its inseparable association to his mind with the corruption and disrepute of the contemporary Church of Rome:

Wherefore inasmuch as the clergy ... had appropriated unto themselves the term that of right is come to all the whole congregation of them that believe in Christ and with their false and subtle wiles had beguiled and mocked the people and brought them into the ignorance of the word, making them understand by this word church nothing but the shaven-flock of them that shorn the whole world: therefore in the translation of the New Testament where I found this word ecclesia, I interpreted it by this word congregation ... And when Mr More says that this word church is known well enough, I report me unto the consciences of all the land, whether he says truth or otherwise. Or whether the lay people understand by church the whole multitude of all that profess Christ, or the juggling

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120 Porter, *Idioms*, pp. 176-177.

sprites only.<sup>121</sup>

Matthew Coverdale followed Tyndale in his own translation of 1535 and in the Great Bible of 1540, likewise overseen by him. The Bishops' Bible (1568) replaced Tyndale's 'congregation' with the more conventional 'church' for ἐκκλησία, as did the Geneva Bible (from 1557). The 1587 edition moreover replaces the verb 'joy' with 'rejoice'; 'passions' with 'afflictions'; and simplifies 'that which is behind' to 'the rest', while removing the pleonastic 'which I suffer'. The resultant rendering is: 'Now rejoice I in my sufferings for you, and fulfill the rest of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his bodies sake, which is the church.'

The Rheims NT of 1582 followed the minor variant text beginning with the relative pronoun ὅς, giving the reading 'who now rejoice in my sufferings', a rendering followed also by the Geneva Bible edition of 1599 and the AV of 1611. Another Rheims innovation followed by subsequent versions was to replace 'fulfill' with 'fill up'. Less helpfully, it renders both παθήματα and θλίψεις as 'sufferings'. The AV text, which for centuries had almost exclusive influence, reads: 'Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.'

The RV of 1881 and the ASV of 1901 were the first versions to give weight to the prefix ἀντ(ι)- in ἀνταναπληροῶ, translating it 'fill up on my part', though this reverted to simply 'fill up' in the RSV (1952). The only other of the major modern translations to do likewise

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121 William Tyndale, *An Answer unto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue* (ed. Anne M. O'Donnell and Jared Wicks; *The Independent Works of William Tyndale*, 3; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 13.



is the NASB, a 1960 version based on the ASV, which renders it ‘I do my share ... in filling up’. Many of the large number of translations published in the last fifty years are loose or even paraphrases, but amongst the narrower versions there is considerable consistency: apart from the aforementioned NASB / ASV rendering, the only notable variant – all the more remarkable for its uniqueness – is the 1973 NIV’s translation of *παθήματα* literally as ‘what was suffered’, as opposed to personalising it as ‘my sufferings, etc.’ The two recent versions both based on NIV have taken different directions: whilst TNIV (2001) reverts to ‘what I am suffering for you’, NIRV (1996) retains ‘what was suffered for you’ and also translates like ASV / NASB ‘I fill up my share in Christ’s suffering’.

## **2.6 Criteria for a translation of Colossians 1:24**

In many years of translating from a range of languages, the best definition of the translator’s art that I have come across is found – perhaps surprisingly – in the preface to the NEB New Testament: ‘We have conceived our task to be that of understanding the original as precisely as we could (using all available aids), and then saying again in our own native idiom what we believed the author to be saying in his.’<sup>122</sup> This concise and excellent principle frees the translator from slavery to any over-literal or word-for-word rendering as well as the temptation to adhere unnecessarily to tradition or precedent, and especially encourages the abandonment of any archaic usage. In the case of the present text, the greatest danger in translation is to attempt to eradicate the ambiguities inherent in the original: these should be retained and reflected as far as linguistically possible, and the task of interpretation left to the exegesis.

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122     *The New English Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), NT, p. vii.

On the other hand, in order to ‘say again in our own native idiom’ what the author was saying, some account must inevitably be taken of the modern understanding of a word, together with the baggage it has accumulated, and in Col. 1:24 this applies particularly to both ἐκκλησία and σάρξ. In the first case, there seems little merit in translating with Tyndale and other early English translators (and Luther) as ‘congregation’, although there is a temptation to use the more secular (and perfectly accurate) term: the reasons for his aversion to ‘church’ are no longer relevant – if anything, the modern translator would be more concerned with the popular misunderstanding of church as a meeting-place. Although Dibelius still translates it with *Gemeinde* ‘fellowship, community’, this fails to fit happily the concept, already expressed in v. 18, of the universal church as opposed to the local church.

This leaves me with five essential factors to bear in mind in producing my translation:

1. Παθήματα should retain a measure of ambiguity and anonymity.
2. Full weight must be given to the specific meaning of the prefix ἀντί in the compound ἀνταναπληρῶ.
3. Παθήματα and θλίψεις should be distinguished in translation as in the original.
4. Καί should balance the first two clauses of the verse in a way that compares and contrasts the anonymous παθήματα of the first with the very personal role of the writer in the second.
5. Particular care must be taken with the rendering of σάρξ, to avoid unhelpful associations.

With this in mind, I offer the following working translation at this stage of my

investigation:

### **2.7 A working translation**

‘Now I rejoice in what was suffered for your sakes - whilst I for my part fill up, while I live, what is left over of Christ’s afflictions for the benefit of his body, which is the church.’

### **2.8 Conclusion**

Having established a translation which fulfills the criteria that were found to be most important, these findings will be borne in mind while in the next two chapters the history of the interpretation of Col. 1:24 is investigated, and put to work again when subsequently the most important theological and historical issues are considered in depth in Chapters 6 onwards.

## **CHAPTER 3 - THE HISTORY OF THE INTERPRETATION OF COLOSSIANS 1:24.**

### **PART 1: FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE REFORMATION**

The history of the interpretation of Col. 1:24 was investigated in detail by Jacob Kremer in his 1956 work *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt*,<sup>1</sup> which remains the most significant monograph dedicated specifically to the verse.<sup>2</sup> In Chapters 3 and 4, Kremer's findings will be summarised briefly, but more particularly there will be a re-examination of the texts of the Church Fathers, many of which have never before been translated into English, with particular regard to any suggestions of vicarious or substitutionary suffering. Similar emphasis will also be given to the views of the Protestant Reformers; and finally the history of interpretation will be brought up to date to cover the past fifty years and investigate and assess current trends.

#### **3.1 Colossians 1:24 in the Church Fathers**

This survey will restrict itself to texts which make specific reference or at least clear allusion to Col. 1:24: the subject of martyrdom, as well as other references to vicarious suffering, will be dealt with later in chapter 6.

##### **3.1.1 The Early Greek Fathers**

The earliest clear reference to Col. 1:24 is by **Origen** (d. 254), in his *Exhortation to martyrdom*:

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- 1 Kremer's doctoral thesis at the Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1954, published Bonn: Hanstein, 1956. In 2001 he published his revised conclusions, 'Was an den Bedrängnissen des Christus mangelt: Versuch einer bibeltheologischen Neuinterpretation von Kol 1,24', *Biblica* 82 (2001), pp. 130-146 (below, 4.1).
  - 2 Only three books on Col. 1:24 have been published to date: Kremer, *Leiden*; G. de Ru, *Heeft het lijden van Christus aanvulling nodig?: onderzoek naar de interpretatie van Colossenzen 1:24* (Amsterdam: Bolland, 1981); Axel Sandin, *Hvad fattas i Kristi lidanden? : några tankar öfver Kol. 1:24* (Piteå: Hällgren, 1900).

You, sacred Ambrose, have been honoured and welcomed by several cities, yet now appear as in pomp, bearing the cross of Jesus and following him as he leads you before magistrates and kings, so that accompanying you he may grant to you both a mouth and wisdom; and to you too, his fellow contestant Protocetus, and to all you our<sup>3</sup> fellow-witnesses [συμμαρτυροῦσιν] who ‘fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ’.<sup>4</sup>

Although this first reference offers no interpretation as such, two points are significant: first, it disagrees with those later interpreters who maintain that Paul is referring to a ministry specific to his own apostolic office:<sup>5</sup> it seems evident here that Origen sees Col. 1:24 as exemplary for all witnesses to Christ – and Christ is very much ‘with them’ in that experience of suffering witness. Second, Origen swaps παθήματα for θλίψεις, and omits the prefix ἀντί- from the verb: apparently the distinctions are of no great significance to him.

Origen mentions Col. 1:24 once more, as a quotation in his commentary on Romans (extant only in Latin translation),<sup>6</sup> where it is adduced in comment on Rom. 8:17, alongside Gal. 2:20; 2 Tim. 2:11-12; Phil. 2:8-9 to illustrate that as co-heirs with Christ, the Christian must suffer with him. The Latin translation of the text again gives no indication of any significance to ἀντί- nor of any distinction between παθήματα and θλίψεις.<sup>7</sup>

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- 3 Migne reads ὑμῖν for ἡμῖν, translating as *vester* ‘your’ fellow witnesses. Conversely, O’Meara (Origen, *Prayer. Exhortation to Martyrdom* (Ancient Christian Writers, 19; London: Longmans, Green, 1954), p. 179) translates ‘their fellow witnesses’. These alterations, however, seriously undermine the solidarity with the present sufferers – ‘martyrs’ in the modern sense - which Origen is seeking to express. Far from a case of ‘us and them’, here Ambrose and his companions are portrayed as witnesses both together with and on behalf of the whole church.
- 4 Καὶ μάλιστα εἰ δοξασθεῖς καὶ ἀποδεχθεῖς ὑπὸ πλείστων ὅσων πόλεων, νῦν ὥσπερ εἰ πομπεύεις, αἶρων τὸν σταυρὸν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἱερὲς Ἀμβρόσιε, καὶ ἀκολουθῶν αὐτῷ, προάγοντι ἐπὶ ἡγεμόνας καὶ βασιλεῖς, ἵνα, αὐτός σοι συμπορευθεῖς, αὐτός σοι δῶ καὶ στόμα καὶ σοφίαν, καὶ σοὶ τῷ συναγωνιστῇ αὐτοῦ, Πρωτόκτητε, καὶ συμμαρτυροῦσιν ἡμῖν, <τοῖς ἀναπληροῦσι τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν παθημάτων τοῦ Χριστοῦ>. Origen, *Εἰς μαρτύριον προτεπτικός* 36. *PG*, vol. 11, cols. 609-610.
- 5 Among the Fathers: Hegemonius, Chrysostom, Theodore, Pelagius.
- 6 Origen, *Opera omnia* (ed. C.H.E. Lommatsch; 25 vols.; Berlin: Haude et Spener, 1831-48), vol. 7, p. 92.
- 7 ‘quod deerat passionum Christi, repleo in corpore meo’.

The next Greek Father to refer to Col. 1:24 is **Athanasius** (d. 373), who alludes to it in discussing 1 Pet. 2:1 ('Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ') as an exhortation to imitate Christ in his suffering:

Just as Paul too says that he fills up [ἀναπληροῦν] what is left over of the afflictions of Christ in his own body.<sup>8</sup>

That this reference is in indirect speech in contrast to the original accounts for the use of ἰδίᾳ in place of μου; here again the prefix ἀντί- to ἀναπληροῦν is omitted – in this case however it is redundant anyway, because in quoting only the second half of the verse Athanasius removes the contrast between the preceding παθήματα and the θλίψεις of the apostle, rendering the 'I for my part' unnecessary.

The next surviving reference occurs in a polemic tract, extant only in Latin translation, ascribed to **Hegemonius** and entitled alternatively *Acta Archelai* or *The disputation with Manes* (ca. 350). Here the author is concerned to rebut the claims of the heretic Manes to apostolic authority, and does so by emphasizing the uniqueness of Paul and alleging the finality of his ministry.

'For those which were lacking of the tribulations of Christ, I fill up in my flesh.' And again in another place he declares that because he is a minister of Christ above the rest, so after him there is absolutely no other to be looked for; indeed he commands that not even an angel from heaven is to be thus received. And how then are we to believe Manes, coming from Persia and professing to be the Paraclete?<sup>9</sup>

Here, Hegemonius uses the text to demonstrate the unique contribution of Paul: he had

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8 Καθὼς καὶ ὁ Παῦλος εἶπε τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀναπληροῦν ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ σαρκί. *Sermo maior de fide* 31. *PG*, vol. 26, col. 1285.

9 'Quae enim deerant tribulationum Christi in carne meo adimpleo. Et in alio rursum loco profitetur, quia super ceteros Christi minister sit, tamquam si postea omnino non sit alius expectandus; iubet enim neque angelum de caelo suscipi. Et quomodo de Persida venientem Manem et dicentem se esse paracletum nos esse credamus.' *Acta Archelai* 35 (ed. Charles Henry Beeson; *Die griechischen christlichen Schriften der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906), p. 57.

previously mistranslated Eph. 3:8 as ‘but to me *alone* this grace was given’,<sup>10</sup> and 1 Cor. 15:9 as ‘I am the last [as opposed to the least] of all the apostles’!<sup>11</sup> Sadly, both scriptural and historical accuracy have been sacrificed by Hegemonius in pursuit of refuting Manes; this is all the more regrettable, since his interpretation of what Paul means by ‘fill up the afflictions of Christ’ is the earliest of all surviving attempts to actually clarify this phrase, yet it is distorted by his polemic aims.

### **3.1.2 John Chrysostom**

Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) has more to say about Col. 1:24 than any of the Greek Fathers, and his interpretation, which occurs in the fourth of his *Homilies on Colossians* is the earliest extant thorough exegesis of the text. For Chrysostom, this verse is above all a declaration of the extent of Christ’s love for his church on the one hand, and of Paul’s for both Christ and the church on the other. This comes about by the combination of two factors: first, the apostle’s humility and willingness not to consider his suffering as his own, but rather as Christ’s; and second, the great love of Christ, expressed in his willingness to continue his own sufferings even beyond death. Chrysostom first describes the apostle’s attitude:

It seems he is making boastful claims, but it is not out of arrogance – far from it – but rather out of a great tender love for Christ: for he does not want the suffering to be regarded as his own, but Christ’s. He says this from a desire to make them Christ’s friends. And what I suffer, I suffer for his sake, he says: therefore express your gratitude not to me but to him: for he it is who suffers these things. In the same way that, if one person is sent to another, yet asks a third party, ‘Please go to him on my behalf’, that party is entitled to claim, ‘I am doing it for him’; thus Paul is not ashamed to call these sufferings Christ’s.<sup>12</sup>

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10 ‘Mihi autem soli data est gratia haec.’ *Acta Archelai* 34, p.55. Compare Vulgate: ‘Mihi omnium sanctorum minimo data est gratia haec.’

11 ‘Ego enim sum novissimus omnium apostolorum.’ *Acta Archelai* 34, p. 56. Vulgate reads: ‘Ego enim sum minimus Apostolorum.’

12 Δοκεῖ μὲν μέγα εἶναι ὅπερ ἐφθέγγετο, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπονοίας, μὴ γένοιτο, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλῆς φιλοστοργίας τῆς περὶ τὸν Χριστόν· οὐ γὰρ βούλεται αὐτοῦ εἶναι, ἀλλ’ ἐκείνου τὰ πάθη. Οὕτω δὲ εἶπε,

The selfless love of the apostle evidenced by this verse occurs several times elsewhere in Chrysostom's homilies.<sup>13</sup> This altruism however is more than matched by the willingness of Christ to continue suffering for his beloved church. Beyond demonstrating the extent of his love, however, there is no investigation yet into the purpose of such suffering.

For he [Christ] did not just die for us, but even after dying he is willing to be afflicted for our sakes. Paul struggles forcefully to demonstrate Christ exposing himself to danger on behalf of the church through his own body, and he yearns to tell them, 'It is not our doing, that you are brought to God, but his, even if it is we who do these things; for it is not our own task we have assumed, but his. It is just as if a troop had a commander shielding them while standing in battle, but then leaving and his lieutenant taking over his wounds until the battle is done'.<sup>14</sup>

Having established that Paul's afflictions are substitutionary for Christ's and yet, paradoxically, Christ suffers through him, Chrysostom next reveals the motive – and it is to do not with salvation but with evangelism and reconciliation:

Listen to how he does this too for his sake. He says it is 'for his body', meaning, 'I am not pleasing you, but Christ: the things he should suffer, I suffer in his place'. See the case he is building: he demonstrates how deeply he is in love. So he wrote in 2 Corinthians: 'to us was given the ministry of reconciliation' [5:18]; and again: 'we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as if God were appealing through us' [5:20]. He is saying the same again here: 'It is for him I suffer, all the more to woo them to him'.<sup>15</sup>

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τούτους οικειῶσαι αὐτῷ βουλόμενος. Καὶ ἃ ἐγὼ πάσχω, δι' ἐκεῖνον πάσχω, φησὶν· ὥστε μὴ ἐμοὶ χάριν ὁμολογεῖτε, ἀλλ' ἐκείνῳ· αὐτὸς γὰρ πάσχει ταῦτα. Ὡςπερ ἂν εἴ τις πεμφθεὶς πρὸς τινα, ἕτερον ἀξιῶσει λέγων· Παρακαλῶ σε, ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ ἀπελθε πρὸς τόνδε· εἴτα ἐκεῖνος λέγοι, ὅτι Διὰ τόνδε ταῦτα ποιῶ. Ὡστε οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται καὶ ταῦτα αὐτοῦ παθήματα λέγειν. *PG*, vol. 62. Interestingly, Kremer translates this last phrase, 'Paul therefore need not be ashamed to term his sufferings the afflictions of Christ [Paulus braucht sich deshalb (also) nicht zu scheuen, seine Leiden Christi Bedrängnisse zu nennen]' (*Was mangelt*, p. 10); whereas Broadus conversely translates, 'So that He [i.e. Christ] is not ashamed to call these sufferings also his own'. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2303.htm>> [accessed 13/4/2010]. Chrysostom would no doubt be pleased to see that the identification between Christ and his apostle is so strong as to cause such an ambiguity! I believe though that the preceding sentences lead more naturally to assuming Paul to be the subject here.

13 For example, 28<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Acts* 13: 4-5; 13<sup>th</sup> *Homily on 2 Corinthians* 6:11-12.

14 Οὐ γὰρ μόνον ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν ἑτοιμός ἐστι θλιβῆναι δι' ἡμᾶς. Ἐφίλονεῖκε καὶ ἐβιάσατο δεῖξαι αὐτὸν καὶ νῦν κινδυνεύοντα ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος, καὶ πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ἀποτείνεται, ὅτι Οὐ δι' ἡμῶν προσάγεσθε, ἀλλὰ δι' αὐτοῦ, κἂν ἡμεῖς ταῦτα ποιῶμεν· οὐ γὰρ οἰκεῖον ἔργον ἀνεδεξάμεθα, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐκεῖνου. Καὶ ταῦτόν ἐστιν, ὥςπερ ἂν εἴ τις τάξιν λαχοῦσα στρατηγὸν τὸν ὑπερασπίζοντα αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ στήκοι, εἴτα ἀπελθόντος ἐκεῖνου, ὁ ὑποστράτηγος τὰ ἐκεῖνου τραύματα ἀναδέξοιτο μέχρι τοῦ λυθῆναι τὸν πόλεμον.

15 Εἴτα ὅτι καὶ δι' αὐτὸν ταῦτα ποιεῖ, ἄκουσον. Ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, φησί· τοῦτο θέλων εἰπεῖν, ὅτι



Already there is a sense that, beyond the demonstration of his great love and the reconciliation of humankind, there is unfinished business which Paul is engaged in.

Chrysostom now makes this explicit in his closing remarks:

What he means is: even if he who owes you something has gone away, I shall repay the debt. So he also uses the expression ὑστέρημα to show that he has not yet finished his suffering. For your sakes, he says, even after death he suffers, as long as there is anything left over to suffer. He expresses this differently in Romans: ‘who also intercedes on our behalf’ [8:34]: it is clear that Christ is not satisfied with death alone, but subsequently does much else. So then, he is not saying these things to exalt himself, but to show that Christ is still wanting even now to care for them.<sup>16</sup>

Here then, according to Chrysostom, we have primarily a description of the relationships between the three parties: Christ, Paul and the church; and of the degree of care and passion that motivates them. The apostle’s ministry is unique and personal (there is no call here to imitation); it is also undoubtedly substitutionary, but only in relation to Christ’s ‘debt’ and not to the church’s suffering. The lingering question is why Christ’s death and earthly suffering should be ‘lacking’: there is of course no suggestion of deficiency in its atoning effect, yet neither is there any answer why this ‘debt’ is left unpaid for Paul to pick up.

However, this is by no means Chrysostom’s last word on Col. 1:24. In his first *Homily on 2 Corinthians*, he mentions it in relation to the thematically linked 2 Cor. 1:5 (‘For just as the

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Οὐχ ὑμῖν χαρίζομαι, ἀλλὰ τῷ Χριστῷ· ἃ γὰρ ἐκεῖνον ἔδει παθεῖν, ἐγὼ πάσχω ἀντ’ αὐτοῦ· ὅρα πόσα κατασκευάζει. Δείκνυσι πολὺ τὸ φίλτρον· ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ πρὸς Κορινθίους Ἐπιστολῇ γράφων ἔλεγεν, Ἐν ἡμῖν ἔθετο τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς· καὶ πάλιν, Ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ πρεσβεύομεν, ὥς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι’ ἡμῶν· τοῦτο καὶ ἐνταῦθα φησιν, Ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχω, ἵνα μᾶλλον αὐτοὺς ἐπισπάσῃται.

16 Τουτέστιν, Εἰ καὶ ὁ ὀφείλων ὑμῖν ἀπῆλθεν, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ ἀποδίδωμι. Διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ Ὑστερήματα εἶπεν ἵνα δείξῃ ὅτι οὐδὲ τὸ πᾶν ἡγεῖται οὐδέπω πεπονθέναί. Ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, φησὶ, καὶ μετὰ θάνατον πάσχει, εἴ γε ἔτι ἐλλείμματα ἔμεινε. Τοῦτο ἐν τῇ πρὸς Ῥωμαίους ἐτέρως ποιεῖ λέγων· Ὡς καὶ ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν· δεικνὺς ὅτι οὐκ ἠρκέσθη τῷ θανάτῳ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα μυρία ποιεῖ. Οὐ τοίνυν ἑαυτὸν ἐπαίρων ταῦτα λέγει, ἀλλὰ τὸν Χριστὸν δεῖξαι βουλόμενος ἔτι καὶ νῦν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν φροντίζοντα.

sufferings of Christ overflow onto us ...'), pointing out that the sufferings do not just 'come to' the apostles but 'overflow' to them:

For we did not just suffer as Christ suffered, he says, but more abundantly too. Consider: Christ was rejected, persecuted, flogged and died; but we more so, he says – which alone would be enough comfort. Let no-one accuse him of brazen claims, though: for elsewhere he says, 'Now I rejoice in my sufferings and for my part fill up what remains of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh.'<sup>17</sup> Yet neither of these expressions indicates arrogance or madness. For just as they performed greater signs (whoever believes in me, Jesus said, will do greater things than these [John 14:12]) - even if they all came about through his working in them – so they also suffered more than him; and all this again is only through him who comforts them and equips them to bear the horrors that befall them.<sup>18</sup>

Here the surprising claim is that the apostles suffered more than Christ. Although this matches in boldness the claims made for Paul in the 4<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Colossians*, the context here in 2 Cor. 1, where Paul is describing the experiences which he shares with his fellow apostles, dictates that the role of Paul is not unique in the way in which his 'filling up of the afflictions of Christ' was described there.

The third major mention of Col. 1:24 by Chrysostom is found in his twelfth *Homily on Philippians*, in comment on Phil. 3:10:

'Being conformed', he says, 'to his death', i.e., sharing in it: just as he suffered at the hands of men, so do I: that is why he says 'conformed' – and again elsewhere: 'I in turn fill up what remains of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh.' In other words, these persecutions and sufferings mold that image of death. He did not seek his own good, but that of the many. Therefore the persecutions and the afflictions and the troubles should not only not disturb you, but rather make you happy, because by

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17 Chrysostom has the variant reading with μου inserted. His interpretation requires a slightly different translation from the preferred one.

18 Οὐ γὰρ ὅσα ἔπαθε, φησὶν, ἐπάθομεν πάθη, ἀλλὰ καὶ περισσά. Σκόπει δέ· Ἠλάθη, ἐδιώχθη ὁ Χριστὸς, ἐμαστιγώθη, ἀπέθανεν. Ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς πλέον τούτων, φησὶν· ὅπερ καὶ μόνον ἰκανὸν εἰς παραμυθίαν ἀρκέσει. Ἀλλὰ μηδεὶς τόλμαν καταγινωσκέτω τοῦ λόγου· καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἀλλαξοῦ φησι· Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασί μου, καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου. Ἀλλ' οὐδέτερον τόλμης οὐδὲ ἀπονοίας τινός. Καθάπερ γὰρ μείζονα αὐτοῦ εἰργάσαντο σημεῖα (Ὁ γὰρ πιστεύων, φησὶν, εἰς ἐμὲ, μείζονα τούτων ποιήσει), τὸ δὲ πᾶν αὐτοῦ γίνεται τοῦ ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν αὐτοῖς· οὕτω καὶ πλεόνα αὐτοῦ ἔπαθον· τὸ δὲ πᾶν αὐτοῦ ἐστὶ τοῦ παρακαλοῦντος αὐτοῦς, καὶ παρασκευάζοντος φέρειν τὰ συμπίπτοντα δεινά. *Homily 1 on 2 Corinthians 3*, PG, vol. 61, col. 387.

these we are ‘conformed to his death’.<sup>19</sup>  
Here again a different emphasis predominates: that of suffering as discipleship and training in Christ-likeness; later to become a major theme in the Protestant Reformers’ interpretation of the verse.

In summary: in each case Chrysostom appears to regard the sufferings described as the specific personal ministry of Paul (or in the case of 2 Cor. 1:5, of Paul and his fellow apostles), though the motivation throughout is love for Christ and care for the church – and as such is naturally an example to other believers. No significance is given to the prefix ἀντί in ἀνταναπληρῶ, nor is any distinction drawn between παθήματα and θλίψεις: the whole notion of Christ continuing to suffer beyond death through his apostle discourages this. Whilst Paul’s afflictions are in some way substitutionary for Christ, there is no hint that they are so for the church as a whole or for individual fellow-believers: the benefit to the church is perceived as the demonstration of the extent of the love of Christ, with its power to draw believers and unbelievers alike closer to him in love, being in turn mirrored in the apostle’s love for both Christ and his body, the church. Paradoxically though, these sufferings are still ‘Christ’s’ rather than Paul’s, because the apostle chooses in love to credit them to his Saviour. The concept of ‘lack’ as applied to the ministry of Christ appears unproblematic to Chrysostom and is not addressed: at most, there is the description of how the ‘greater sufferings’ of the apostles mirror the ‘greater works’ (John 14:12) which Jesus promised they would perform, and there is no concept here of any

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19 Συμμορφούμενος, φησὶ, τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ· τουτέστι κοινωνῶν. Καθάπερ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ‘ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔπαθεν, οὕτω καὶ ἐγώ· διὰ τοῦτο εἶπε, Συμμορφούμενος· Καὶ ἀλλαχοῦ πάλιν· Ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου. Τουτέστιν, οἱ διωγμοὶ καὶ τὰ παθήματα ταῦτα, τὴν εἰκόνα δημιουργοῦσιν ἐκείνην τοῦ θανάτου. Οὐ γὰρ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἐξήτει, ἀλλὰ τὸ τῶν πολλῶν. Ὡστε καὶ οἱ διωγμοὶ καὶ αἱ θλίψεις καὶ αἱ στενοχωρίαι οὐ μόνον ὑμᾶς οὐκ ὀφείλουσι θορυβεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ εὐφραίνειν, ὅτι διὰ τούτων συμμορφούμεθα τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ. 12<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Philippians*. PG, vol. 62, col. 266.

predetermined quota of eschatological suffering. Chrysostom idiosyncratically interprets σῶμα αὐτοῦ not as an image of the church (despite the identification in the text, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία, which is never addressed), but in the first instance literally as the physical body of the earthly Christ in which he suffered and now continues to suffer.<sup>20</sup>

### **3.1.3 Severian of Gabala**

Chrysostom's contemporary Severian, Bishop of Gabala (now Jabla) (d. after 408), left a commentary on the Pauline epistles, of which fragments survive in later catenas.<sup>21</sup> On Col.

1:24 he writes:

If, he says, there is anything remaining to be suffered, then I fill up the leftovers of the afflictions for Christ's sake, and rejoice in suffering on your behalf. Why for your sakes? Because he suffered in order to proclaim [the good news] to you. If Christ is the head of the body, the church, then the afflictions that arise for the church through those who rebel against the word of truth are quite naturally termed 'afflictions of Christ', and whoever wrestles with a heart of praise in these afflictions could say, not without good cause, I take my turn in filling up what remains of the afflictions of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Here, as in Chrysostom's 4<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Colossians*, the benefit to the body of Christ is simply construed as the evangelism that follows the struggles of the apostle. Christ himself, however, suffers in a rather more detached way than Chrysostom conceived: here it is by association with his disciples, as head of the church. There is absent any sense of his suffering personally in a real way. By contrast, the application is wider than Chrysostom would have it, since for Severian any suffering believer experiences the same

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20 In the 4<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Colossians* (above), he draws a distinction between the two terms, in describing 'Christ exposing himself to danger on behalf of the church through his own body'.

21 A form of Bible commentary consisting entirely of excerpts from earlier commentators, common from the 6<sup>th</sup> century until the late Middle Ages.

22 Εἴ τι, φησὶν, ὑστερήμα πρὸς τὸ παθεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀναπληρῶ τὰ ὑπολειπόμενα τῶν θλίψεων διὰ τὸν Χριστόν, χαίρω πάσχων ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν. διὰ τί δὲ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν; ὅτι διὰ τὸ κηρύττειν αὐτοῖς ἔπασχεν. καὶ γὰρ εἰ ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος, τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αἱ διὰ τῶν ἐπανισταμένων τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπεγυριόμεναι θλίψεις τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, Χριστοῦ θλίψεις καὶ μάλα εἰκότως ὀνομάζονται, ὁ ταῖς θλίψεσι ταύταις ἐνευδοκιμῶν καὶ ἐναθλῶν οὐκ ἔξω σκοποῦ φήσειεν ἀνταναπληροῦν τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Karl Staab, ed., *Pauluskommentare aus der griechischen Kirche* (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, 15; Münster: Aschendorff, 1933), p. 321.

process as Paul. Severian does not address the concept of ‘lack’ in Christ’s afflictions: all those that remain are simply due to the battle for the gospel, rather than any determined measure.

### **3.1.4 Theodore of Mopsuestia**

Another contemporary and friend of Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350-428), left a commentary which survives complete in Latin translation as well as in fragments of the Greek original. On Col. 1:23 he comments: ‘This was his task: to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, those outside of the requirements of the Law.’<sup>23</sup> It is in this context that Paul expresses his joy in suffering:

‘So’, he says, ‘I take pleasure even in suffering for you; and since Christ had previously suffered for your wellbeing, to proclaim you his Body by his resurrection, I fill up what is left of his afflictions for you.’ What was left over? Your learning what things have been put right for you and receiving the proclamation about them. But this was never going to be without labour and afflictions. These are why I suffer, going about proclaiming all that has been accomplished, so that you might believe and with willing hearts come to be appropriated by him; for of these things I was made a minister.<sup>24</sup>

Theodore, like Severian, follows Chrysostom in seeing this verse as descriptive of the apostolic ministry: in this case with emphasis on the mission of Paul (and presumably his co-workers?) as apostle to the Gentiles. In contrast, however, there is a clear line drawn between Christ’s earthly afflictions and Paul’s filling up what was lacking: there is no talk here of Christ continuing to suffer, and the apostle is portrayed more as succeeding to the ministry rather than substituting for the lack. Like Severian, Theodore sees the afflictions

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23 Τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν ἔργον αὐτοῦ, τὸ κηρύττειν εἰς τὰ ἔθνη τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἔξω τῆς τῶν νομικῶν παρατηρήσεως. *In epistolas B. Pauli commentarii* (ed. H.B. Swete; Cambridge: University Press, 1880), vol. 1, p. 279.

24 Ὡστε (φησὶν) ἡδομαι καὶ πάσχων ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· καὶ ἐπειδὴ προλαβὼν ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμετέρας εὐεργεσίας ἔπαθεν ὁ Χριστός, ὥστε σῶμα ἑαυτοῦ ὑμᾶς ἀποφῆναι διὰ τῆς ἀναστάσεως, τὰ πρόσλειποντα ταῖς θλίψεσιν αὐτοῦ ταῖς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἀναπληρῶ. τί δὲ ἦν τὸ πρόσλειπον; τὸ μαθόντας ὑμᾶς τίνα ἐστὶν τὰ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κατορθωθέντα παρ’ αὐτοῦ, δέξασθαι τὴν περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπαγγελίαν· τοῦτο δὲ ἄνευ πόνων καὶ θλίψεων γενέσθαι οὐδαμῶς οἷόν τε ἦν· ὑπὲρ δὴ τούτων πάσχω, περιῶν καὶ κηρύττων ἅπασιν τὰ κατορθωθέντα, ὥστε ὑμᾶς πιστεύσαντας τῇ διαθέσει τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν πρὶς αὐτὸν οἰκείωσιν δέξασθαι· τούτων γὰρ ἐγὼ κατέστην διάκονος. *Commentarii*, vol. 1, pp. 279-280.

in terms of the struggle to preach the Gospel against opposition, and the benefit for the church as the very success of that mission. Unlike his two friends, he addresses the ‘lack’ in Christ’s afflictions directly and very simply: logically, the preaching of the Gospel has to follow after the completion of Christ’s earthly ministry – naturally the risen Christ cannot accomplish this, and has commissioned Paul to do so to the Gentiles (just as Peter and others have been commissioned with the ministry to the Jews [Gal. 2:9]).

### **3.1.5 Theodoret of Cyrus**

A generation later than Chrysostom, Severian and Theodore, yet from the same School of Antioch, Theodoret (ca. 393-ca. 457) also produced a commentary on Colossians. On 1:24b he wrote:<sup>25</sup>

The Lord Jesus undertook death for the sake of the church, and the shame of the cross, and the blows to the temples, and the scourging on his back, and everything else he endured; and the godly apostle similarly bore the various sufferings for her sake. For he knew about the life to be produced by it. He describes himself ‘filling up in turn what was lacking in the afflictions of Christ’, as filling up what was left over, and taking on the accompanying sufferings. What was left over was the proclamation to the Gentiles, and the display of salvation’s big-spending producer.<sup>26</sup>

Here Paul’s sufferings ‘for the church’ are paralleled very directly with Christ’s death, etc. ‘for the church’ – undeterred by the distinction that the latter was to provide salvation, whereas the former simply to bring the gospel to the Gentiles; both were consecutive acts in the plan to bring salvation. Like Theodore, Theodoret regards the proclamation as the ‘lack’ in the work of Christ; yet in fact the lack he describes is not in the afflictions of

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25 Theodoret’s only comment on v. 24a is to query how Paul could say he had suffered for the Colossians if he had never visited them himself: therefore he must have done so.

26 Καὶ ὁ Δεσπότης Χριστὸς τὸν ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας κατεδέξατο θάνατον, καὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ τὴν ἀτιμίαν, καὶ τὰς ἐπὶ κόρρης πληγὰς, καὶ τὰς κατὰ τοῦ νότου μάστιγας, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὅσα ὑπέμεινε· καὶ ὁ θεῖος Ἀπόστολος ὡσαύτως ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ὑπέστη τὰ ποικίλα παθήματα, καὶ μεθ’ ἡδονῆς ὑπέστη. Χαίρω γάρ, φησὶν, ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν. Ὅδει γὰρ τὴν πραγματευομένην ἐντεῦθεν ζωὴν. Ἀνταναπληροῦν δὲ ἔφη τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὡς τὸ λειπόμενον πληρῶν, καὶ τῶν ὑπὲρ τοῦτου παθημάτων ἀνεχόμενος. Ἐλείπετο δὲ τὸ κηρύξαι τοῖς ἔθνεσι, καὶ δεῖξαι τῆς σωτηρίας τὸν μεγαλόδωρον χορηγόν. *PG*, vol. 82, col. 604. Theodoret here employs the imagery of a lavish choral production.

Christ (which Theodore portrays as continued in the apostle) but rather in the work of salvation.<sup>27</sup>

### **3.1.6 Later Greek Fathers**

Of the later Greek Fathers, the most interesting is **Photius** of Constantinople (ca. 820-891), in that he deals with the question ‘what was Christ’s lack which Paul filled up?’ by outlining the two theories current at the time, before positing his own, third, interpretation. The first is similar to that expounded by Chrysostom in his first *Homily on 2 Corinthians* (3.1.2 above):<sup>28</sup> just as Christ predicted his followers would do greater works than him and gave them power to do so, Paul has followed up Christ’s work ‘in the flesh’ by completing the things he could have done himself, such as proclaiming the gospel, but left for the apostles. Photius concedes that others object to this understanding on the basis that to speak of Christ’s sufferings being lacking is inconceivable and unacceptable. The second current interpretation of ὑστερήματα relies on a distinct usage derived from ὕστατα,<sup>29</sup> where ὕστατα is the third of the comparative concepts ‘greater’, ‘medium’ and ‘last and least significant’. Appeal is made to Paul’s great humility (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:9; 2 Cor. 12:11; Phil. 3:9), and consequently in this interpretation what he says is that his own sufferings are so insignificant compared with Christ’s, they are unworthy to be compared to his. Here we have, ironically, two opposite extremes: in the first, the suffering exceeds Christ’s; in the second it does not bear comparison to Christ’s. The fatal flaw in the second statement is that this use of ὑστέρημα has no support from either OT or NT usage, where it clearly denotes ‘lack’. Although Photius gives no clue to the authorship of either of these

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27 In recent times Theodoret’s interpretation has found fresh support from B.N. Wambacq, ‘“Adimpleo ea quae desunt passionum Christi in carne mea...”’, *Verbum domini* 27 (1949), pp. 17-22.

28 Photius, *Ad Amphilochium quaestio 121. PG*, vol. 101, col. 705.

29 *PG*, vol. 101, col. 708.

two interpretations, his summary of the contemporary views on Col. 1:24 is important. His own alternative interpretation runs as follows:

It is not as if Christ did not bear what he ought to suffer – no way: he left out nothing at all in that respect; on the contrary, his grace to us was over-abundant. So which lacks is Paul filling up? They are those which the Saviour, had he been still living at the time when Paul was preaching, would have suffered as he taught and, by his presence, as he cared for the creation: those are what Paul now suffers, thereby ‘filling up in turn what was left over of the afflictions of Christ’. This corresponds more closely to the word. For he does not say simply ἀναπληρῶ, but ἀνταναπληρῶ, ie. in place of [ἀντὶ] the Lord and Teacher I, the servant and disciple, succeed to his ministry, and fill up in turn what is lacking of his afflictions. The things he would have borne, had he not given me this ministry, I of course – having taken it on – fill up in my body [σώματί μου] what was lacking in his afflictions.<sup>30</sup>

Photius is the first to emphasise expressly the significance of the prefix ἀντί-, and in his interpretation the main sense is of ‘in place of [Christ]’, though the sense ‘in turn’ is latent also. He also notably replaces σάρξ with σῶμα in speaking of Paul’s body: evidently the pejorative overtones of σάρξ (see above, 2.2.5) are of little significance to him. He follows Chrysostom and the School of Antioch in maintaining that Christ deliberately left something of his suffering for his apostle to succeed to, but does not go so far as Chrysostom in suggesting that Christ really suffers in Paul’s afflictions. His theory that the afflictions are Christ’s in the sense that they would have been his, had he not left off his ministry in favour of the apostles, is novel but less than convincing. Any sense of the benefit to the church is here very far in the background.

Photius, however, later followed this interpretation with a more developed one, which

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30 Οὐχ ὅσα Χριστὸς ὀφείλων παθεῖν οὐχ ὑπήνεγκεν, οὐμενοῦν· οὐδὲ γὰρ τι ὅλως ὑστερήσεν· ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπερεπλέονασεν ἡ χάρις αὐτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς. Ποῖα οὖν ὑστερήματα ἀνταναπληροῖ; Ὅσα, εἴτ’ ἔτι τῷ ἀνθρώπου βίῃ ἐπεδήμει ὁ Σωτὴρ καθ’ ὃν καιρὸν ὁ Παῦλος ἐκήρυσεν, ἔπαθεν ἂν διδάσκων, καὶ διὰ τῆς παρουσίας ἔτι τοῦ πλάσματος προνοούμενος, ἐκεῖνα νῦν πάσχων ὁ Παῦλος ἀνταναπληροῖ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τοῦτο γὰρ μᾶλλον ἐγγύτερον καὶ τῇ τοῦ ῥήματος ἐμφάσει. Οὐ γὰρ ἀπλῶς φησιν Ἀναπληρῶ, ἀλλ’ Ἀνταναπληρῶ, τουτέστιν, Ἀντὶ Δεσπότου καὶ διδασκάλου ὁ δοῦλος ἐγὼ καὶ μαθητὴς τὴν ἐκείνου διακονίαν ὑπελθὼν, καὶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων αὐτοῦ ἀνταναπληρῶ. Ἄ γὰρ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ὑπέστη, μὴ παραθέμενός μοι τὴν διακονίαν, ἐπεὶ παρέλαβον ταύτην, εἰκότως καὶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματί μου ἀνταναπληρῶ. *PG*, vol. 101, col. 709.



survives in the fragments of his commentary on Colossians found in the catenas:

Christ was beaten and mocked and scourged and crucified for us, not simply to fulfill all [suffering], but also for the sake of understanding and all secret reasoning to go beyond fulfilling it. So we have all become indebted through these countless world-saving sufferings, to ourselves endure and enter into sufferings and afflictions for the sake of Christ and his body, that we may in turn fill up what Christ suffered for us. However, to fill them up, i.e., to suffer equally and similarly and leave nothing, is impossible. Rather, whatever we might suffer is a lack [ύστέρημα] in regard to the afflictions of Christ. For how could the Lord's suffering for the servant be filled up by the servant for the Lord? For it is neither equal nor similar: it falls a long way short. Neither surely in the same way could that of the sinless one for the sinner and evildoer, by those in sin on behalf of the benefactor and sinless one? And much besides. Therefore, whatever anyone might suffer, in wanting to take a turn in filling up, simply demonstrates in the filling a lack [ύστέρημα] in regard [ie. in comparison] to the afflictions of Christ. That is why blessed Paul, who ran more than any for Christ's sake, suffering daily innumerable terrors, knew this and expressed it thus to teach us.<sup>31</sup>

The most striking contrast in this second interpretation is the switch of focus from the apostolic ministry of Paul to what 'we in turn may fill up' and 'whatever we might suffer', and in doing so Photius renders the text of much greater relevance to the consideration of Christian suffering in general. However it is difficult not to feel that, in trying too hard to deny any 'lack' in Christ's ministry, he devises an interpretation of ύστέρημα which is contrived (though perhaps somewhat influenced by the previously rejected derivation from ύστατα with its emphasis on insignificance), and unfortunately results in casting the Christian life in the guise of an attempt to repay the Saviour for salvation: a contradiction of the 'over-abundant grace' which Photius had previously remarked on in his earlier work.

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31 'Ο Χριστός ραπισθεῖς καὶ ἐμπαιχθεῖς καὶ μαστιγθεῖς καὶ σταυρωθεῖς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, οὐχ ἀπλῶς ἐπλήρωσε πάντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ νοῦν, καὶ ἀφράστῳ λόγῳ ἐξεπλήρωσεν. χρεῶσται οὖν πάντες καθεστήκαμεν ἀντὶ τῶν μυρίων ἐκεῖνων καὶ σωσικόνων παθῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑπομένειν καὶ ἀντείστασθαι παθήματα καὶ θλίψεις ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ καὶ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ἀνταναπληρώσωμεν ἃ ἔπαθεν ὁ Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνταναπληρῶσαι αὐτά, τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἴσως καὶ ὁμοίως παθεῖν καὶ μηδὲν ἐλλείπειν, ἀδύνατον. ἀλλ' ὅσα ἂν πάθωμεν, ὑστέρημά ἐστι πρὸς τὰς θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ. πῶς γὰρ ἂν καὶ ἀνταναπληρωθεῖ τὸ δεσπότην ὑπὲρ δούλου παθεῖν διὰ τοῦ δούλου ὑπὲρ δεσπότη; οὐ γὰρ ἴσον τοῦτο οὐδὲ ὁμοιον, πολλοῦ γε καὶ δεῖ. ἢ τὸ ἀναμάρτητον ὑπὲρ ἀμαρτωλῶν καὶ προσκεκρουκότων διὰ τοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἀμαρτίαις ὑπὲρ εὐεργέτου καὶ ἀναμάρτητου; καὶ μυρία. διὸ ὅσα ἂν τις πάσχει ἀνταναπληρῶσαι θέλων, ὑστέρημα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀνταναπληροῖ. διὸ καὶ ὁ μακάριος Παῦλος ὁ πάντων πλεον ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ δραμῶν, ὁ καθ' ἐκάστην ἡμέραν μυρία πάσχων δεινά, τοῦτο εἰδὼς καὶ διδάσκων ἔλεγεν. Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, pp. 631-632.

His earlier insistence on the significance of ἀντί- is now abandoned: here it means rather ‘in comparison to’. Again, the phrase ‘for the sake of his body’ is left unconsidered, except inasmuch as the imitation of Christ’s own afflictions for the church will bring corresponding benefits to it.

Neither of the final two Greek Fathers to comment on Col. 1:24 made original contributions: **Theophylact** (11<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>32</sup> reiterates the interpretation of Chrysostom, whereas **Euthymius Zigabenus** (12<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>33</sup> does likewise and also summarises the first of the interpretations of Photius.

### **3.2.1 Early Latin Fathers**

As was the case with the Greek Fathers, Col. 1:24 is not dealt with specifically in any of the earliest records, despite a considerable body of literature on the subject of martyrdom (see below, 6.6). **Tertullian** (ca.160-ca.220) quotes the verse,<sup>34</sup> but only in order to demonstrate that the church is the Body of Christ; he makes no other comment.

**Hilary** of Poitiers (d. 367) mentions the verse in the context of his comments on Ps. 69:20 (‘I looked for a sympathiser, but there was none; for comforters, but found none’):<sup>35</sup>

He [Christ] seeks not the comfort of a commiserator or consoler, but faith, so that he who comes from the Law and understands the prophecy of all these sufferings, may stand with him just as if in fulfillment of that same Law: as Paul later, ‘filling up the sufferings of Jesus Christ and buried with him in baptism’, knows Christ to be the end of the Law.<sup>36</sup>

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32 *PG*, vol. 124, col. 1229.

33 *Commentarius in XIV epistolas S. Pauli et VII catholicas* (ed. N. Calogeras; Athens, 1887), p. 123.

34 *Adversus Marcionem* 5.19, *PL*, vol. 2, col. 520.

35 Originally Ps. 68:18 in Hilary.

36 ‘Commaerentis et consolantis non solacium, sed fidem quaerit, ut si quis veniens ex lege et harum omnium passionum intelligens prophetiam secum tamquam in consummatione ipsius legis assisteret: ut postea Paulus ‘adimplens passiones Jesu Christi et consepultus in baptismo’ Christum finem esse scit legis’. *CSEL*, vol. 62, p. 328. Kremer also finds an allusion in Hilary’s *De trinitate* 5.32, but it seems very slight, with reference merely to ‘the fulness of the Lord’s suffering [ad plenitudinem dominicae passionis]’. *Was mangelt*, p. 35.

The concept of ‘lack’ is not addressed here, nor is the theme of suffering for the sake of the church; the focus being rather the importance of faith and the consequent inclusion ‘in Christ’, who is himself the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets.

**Ambrose**, Archbishop of Milan (d. 397) frequently echoes the phrase ‘for his body, which is the church’,<sup>37</sup> and there are two references to Col. 1:24 in his expositions of the Psalms. In the *Explanatio psalmi 118*,<sup>38</sup> it is quoted as evidence of Paul’s longing to share in Christ’s suffering; in the *Explanatio psalmi 37* [on Ps. 38:6] (‘I am afflicted with misery and bowed down to the end; all day I go about in mourning’), Ambrose argues that just as Christ suffered gladly to bring us gladness, so we too should be pleased to suffer for him, offering him not just our faith but a continuation of his ministry of suffering. He concludes:

So the aim is ‘that I may fill up’, he says, ‘what is lacking of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh for his body, which is the church, of which I have been made a minister’. We can see what there is for us to take on – we who have taken on the priestly ministry: that not only for ourselves, but also for the Lord’s church, we ought bravely to bear physical suffering.<sup>39</sup>

Here Ambrose mentions both the ‘lack’ and the benefit of the sufferings, yet tantalisingly declines to deal with them further. From his translation of Col. 1:24, it may well be that he understands the lack to be not in the sufferings of the earthly Christ, but in the ongoing afflictions of the apostle. The benefit to the church is unspecified.

The next surviving commentary is that now ascribed to **Ambrosiaster** (late 4<sup>th</sup> century).

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<sup>37</sup> CSEL, vol. 62, pp. 185, 275, 336, 449; vol. 64, p. 275.

<sup>38</sup> CSEL, vol. 62, p. 184.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Hic ergo finis, ut adimpleam, inquit, quae desunt tribulationum Christi in carne mea pro corpore eius, quae est ecclesia, cuius sum factus minister. uidemus quid nobis suscipiendum sit, qui ministerium sacerdotale suscipimus, ut non solum pro nobis, sed etiam pro ecclesia domini sustinere fortiter passiones corporis debeamus.’ *Explanatio psalmi 37* 32, CSEL, vol. 64, pp. 160-161.

On Col. 1:24 he writes:

He confesses to exulting in the tribulations which he was suffering, because he sees benefit for himself in the faith of the believers. For tribulation is not in vain when it gains for life the one for whom it suffers. These sufferings, he says, concern Christ, whose teaching they certainly persecute; [this he says] in order to burden the unbelievers with the horror<sup>40</sup> of their impiety and to preach to the faithful the love of God, whose Son still suffers injury for us.<sup>41</sup>

The general understanding here is very close to that of Chrysostom, in that the cause for rejoicing is the salvation which follows the (inevitably persecuted) preaching of the Gospel. By the same token it is ‘for the church’ because it builds it up. The sufferings here though are Christ’s not so much because they are a continuation of his ministry as because they constitute a rejection of him and his teachings. The issue of ‘lack’ in Christ’s sufferings is not addressed, partly at least because Ambrosiaster’s translation speaks specifically of the ‘remains’ of Christ’s afflictions (*‘reliquias pressurarum Christi’*) in contrast to the Vulgate which clearly describes ‘what is lacking’ (*‘ea quae desunt passionum Christi’*). Ambrosiaster enlarges on these present themes elsewhere in his commentaries: as regards the benefits of Paul’s suffering, on 2 Tim. 2:10 he notes, ‘in order that his preaching should bring salvation to those people predestined for life, he was subjected to adversities, knowing he would achieve the desired end, their salvation.’<sup>42</sup> On 2 Cor. 4:10, 12 he is unequivocal in his assertion that Christ continues to suffer in the persecutions of his disciples, which are stirred by the preaching of the gospel:

There is no doubt that Christ is put to death in the martyrs, and that in those who suffer for the faith – whether destruction or imprisonment or floggings – it is Christ who suffers ... for their salvation they were

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40 Reading ‘crudelitate’ for ‘credulitate’.

41 ‘In tribulationibus, quas patiebatur, exsultare se fatetur; quia profectum suum videt in fide credentium. Non est enim inanis tribulatio, quando eum pro quo patitur, acquirit ad vitam. Quas passiones Christo dicit inferri, cujus utique doctrinam persequuntur; ut et perfidos gravet impietatis suae credulitate, et fidelibus Dei praedicet charitatem, cujus Filius nunc usque injurias patitur pro nobis.’ *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Colosenses*. PL, vol. 17, col. 449.

42 ‘Ut praedicatione sua salvaret homines praedestinos ad vitam, exitiis erat subjectus, sciens profectum se habiturum quaesitae salutis illorum.’ *Commentarius in Epistolam II. ad Timotheum*. PL, vol. 17, col. 517.

subjected to death; for in preaching to people they stir up hostility to themselves, whether from Jews or from Gentiles, even to death.<sup>43</sup>

Here for the first time a strong emphasis on the identification of Christ with his followers through his indwelling appears – a theme which, together with that of the believers’ corresponding incorporation in Christ, was to influence many later interpretations.

The ‘heretic’ **Pelagius** (late 4<sup>th</sup> century), in his commentary on Colossians, introduces the interpretation (which recurs several times later) that the ‘lack in the afflictions of Christ’ is to be understood only in conjunction with the following phrase ‘in my flesh’. That is to say, it is the ‘afflictions of Christ in Paul’s flesh’ which are not yet complete, but which he through his ministry, perhaps culminating in martyrdom, will fill up. He finds support in this interpretation by adducing Heb. 12:3-4:

Far from ever being frightened by the present persecutions, what I suffer appears to me to be too slight until the greatest “suffering of Christ” is fulfilled in me; as he says to the Hebrews: ‘May your courage not flag; for you lack this: you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.’<sup>44</sup>

Pelagius’ contribution was amplified by Augustine’s later acceptance (below, 3.2.2) of his interpretation. His view that the completion of the afflictions equates to martyrdom has recently been echoed by Perriman (below, 4.2.4) and Maisch (4.2.5).

**Tyconius** (late 4<sup>th</sup> century) quotes Col. 1:24 in passing in his *Liber regularum*, by noting that in 1 Cor. 12:12 Paul equates ‘Christ’ and the ‘Body of Christ’. He then backs this up

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43 ‘Dubium non est, quia in martyribus Christus occiditur, et in iis qui pro fide patiuntur aut exitus, aut vincula, aut verbera Christi passiones sunt ... pro salute eorum morte subiciebantur; gentibus enim praedicantes, inimicitias sibi excitabant tam a Judaeis quam a gentilibus, usque ad mortem.’ *Commentarius in Epistolam II. ad Corinthios*. PL, vol. 17, cols. 307-308.

44 ‘Usque adeo praesentibus non terreor persecutionibus, ut mihi parum uideatur esse quod patior, quo usque Christi in me passio maxima impleatur; sicut ad Hebraeos dicit: “ut non fatigetur animus uester; deficientes nondum usque ad sanguinem restitistis.”’ *Expositio in Colosenses*. In *Pelagius’s Exposition of Thirteen Epistles of St Paul* (Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature, 9; Cambridge: University Press, 1931), p. 456.

with an abbreviated misquotation, reinforced with a denial that anything could be deficient in the afflictions of the incarnate Jesus Christ:

Again: 'I rejoice in sufferings for you and fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, that is of the church' for there was nothing lacking in Christ's [own] sufferings, since 'it is enough for a disciple that he be like his master'.<sup>45</sup>

Here again, as in Chrysostom's interpretation in the 4<sup>th</sup> *Homily on Colossians*,<sup>46</sup> the 'lack' must be in the ongoing ministry of the church rather than in the historical ministry of Christ.

### **3.2.2 Augustine of Hippo**

Of all the Latin Fathers, Augustine (354-430) has by far the most to say that is relevant to Col. 1:24: indeed his contribution is perhaps matched only by that of Chrysostom (3.1.2). His interpretation is essentially a development of that of Tyconius, from whose *Liber regularum* he quotes widely, and is closely bound up with his own Body of Christ theology. The catchphrase 'Christus unus, caput et corpus' ('One Christ, head and body') and variants thereof, recurs frequently in his writings,<sup>47</sup> and is reflected in his various references to this verse: three times in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*; in *Tractate 108* [on John 17:14-19]; in *De trinitate*; and in *Sermo 341*.

Augustine's most thorough treatment occurs tangentially in his exposition of Psalm 62:3,<sup>48</sup> where he finds reference to the afflictions of Christ in the descriptions of oppression, particularly the phrase *interficate omnes* [v. 3b: 'you all attack him']. He then expands:

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45 'Iterum: Gaudeo in passionibus pro uobis et repleo quae desunt pressurarum Christi, id est Ecclesiae. nihil enim defuit Christi passionibus, quoniam sufficit discipulo ut sit sicut magister.' F.C. Burkitt, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius* (Texts and Studies, 3/1; Cambridge: University Press, 1894), p. 4.

46 Above, 3.1.2.

47 E.g. *De doctrina christiana* 3.31; *De fide et symbolo* 17; *Homily on the Gospels* 94:5 [on John 16:8].

48 Ps. 61:4 in the original text.

But we ought to recognise [here] our own person, the person of our church, the person of the body of Christ. For Jesus Christ is one man with his head and body: the Saviour of the body and the members of the body, two in one flesh and in one voice and in one suffering; and when iniquity shall have passed away, in one rest.<sup>49</sup>

Having made the identification of Christ and his church as two in one, body and head, he then proceeds to explain the following paradox:

Therefore the sufferings of Christ are not Christ's alone; yet again, there are no sufferings of Christ that are not Christ's own. For if by 'Christ' you understand 'Christ, head and body', then the sufferings of Christ are only Christ's: if though by 'Christ' you understand only the head, then the sufferings of Christ are not only Christ's own. For if the sufferings of Christ are Christ's alone – that is, only of the head – why does a certain member of his, the apostle Paul, say, 'that I may supply what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh'? If therefore you are one of the members of Christ – whether you hear this or do not hear it now (yet you can hear if you are one of the members of Christ) – whatever you might suffer from those who are not among the members of Christ: that was something that had been lacking in the sufferings of Christ. That is why it is 'added': because it was 'lacking'; you fill up a measure, you don't make it overflow: you will suffer as much as your sufferings are to contribute to the total suffering of Christ, who has suffered in our head and suffers [now] in his members, that is in us ourselves. To this nation-like commonwealth we all pay – each his own portion – what we owe, and contribute the 'tax' of sufferings according to the powers we possess. The final count of all sufferings will not happen until the end of the world.<sup>50</sup>

Three things are immediately striking from this first passage. First, the emphasis on each individual paying his or her own portion: the phrase 'as much as your sufferings are to contribute to the total' implies a predetermined quota, whereas in the next sentence the

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49 'Sed debemus intelligere personam nostram, personam Ecclesiae nostrae, personam corporis Christi. Unus enim homo cum capite et corpore suo Jesus Christus salvator corporis et membra corporis, duo in carne una et in voce una et in passione una; et cum transierit iniquitas, in requie una.' *PL*, vol. 36, col. 730.

50 'Passiones itaque Christi non in solo Christo; imo passiones Christi nonnisi in Christo. Si enim Christum intelligas, caput et corpus, passiones Christi nonnisi in Christo: si autem Christum intelligas solum caput, passiones Christi non in solo Christo. Si enim passiones Christi in solo Christo, imo in solo capite, unde dicit quoddam membrum eius Paulus apostolus, 'ut suppleam quae desunt pressurarum Christi in carne mea'? Si ergo in membris Christi es, quicumque homo, quisquis haec audis, quisquis haec nunc non audis (sed tamen audis, si in membris Christi es); quidquid pateris ab eis qui non sunt in membris Christi, deerat passionibus Christi. Ideo additur, quia deerat; mensuram imples, non superfundis: tantum pateris, quantum ex passionibus tuis inferendum erat universae passioni Christi, qui passus est in capite nostro et patitur in membris suis, id est in nobis ipsis. Ad communem hanc quasi rempublicam quisque pro modulo nostro exsolvimus quod debemus, et pro possessione virium nostrarum quasi canonem passionum inferimus. Pariatoria plenaria omnium passionum non erit, nisi cum saeculum finitum fuerit.' *PL*, vol. 36, cols. 730-731.

amount is ‘according to the powers we possess.’ Either way, the message here is strictly about individual quotas, leaving no room seemingly for any concept of vicarious suffering: although a total quota is mentioned, there is no discussion of any possibility of transference from one individual or group to another. Consistent with this is the second feature: that neither here nor in any of his other treatments of Col. 1:24 does Augustine either quote or address the phrase ‘for the sake of his body, that is the church’ – and this despite his highly developed theology of the Body of Christ. It is difficult to know therefore what Augustine made of this phrase here, and similarly tempting to wonder if for some reason he consistently ignored it to *avoid* any suggestion of vicarious suffering. The third feature of note again is consistent with his emphasis on individuality, and agrees with the interpretation of Pelagius inasmuch as the phrase ‘what is lacking’ is taken to refer to the whole phrase ‘the afflictions of Christ in my flesh’. Taken all together these features convey that Augustine understands the ‘filling up’ to be a personal task for each believer with reference neither to the (already perfectly adequate) sufferings of Christ (the incarnate head), nor to the sum total of the afflictions of the church (the members of the Body).

The same teaching about incorporation into Christ is found in Augustine’s *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, where in *Tractate 108* he comments on John 17:19a (‘For them I sanctify myself’), that Christ inevitably does so because the believers in question are part of him, and are therefore sanctified ‘in him’. After reiterating that ‘the head and body are one Christ’ and quoting Gal. 3:16, he refers to Col. 1:24:

That is why the very same apostle says elsewhere, ‘Now I rejoice in the sufferings for your sake, and fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh.’ He did not say ‘my afflictions’, but ‘Christ’s’, because he was a member of Christ; and in the persecutions which Christ was meant to suffer in his whole body, even he was filling up his own



portion of his afflictions.<sup>51</sup>

Here again the emphasis is upon a personal quota of affliction and the only lack is until such a quota is met in the individual, thus precluding any vicarious suffering.

Augustine tackles head-on the thorny issue of lack in Christ's afflictions in his comments on Ps. 87:1-2 (though the connection with the context of the Psalm is very obscure):<sup>52</sup>

Wherever the head leads, the body follows. Look what the apostle said because Christ was suffering in him: 'that I may fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh.' 'That I may fill up': what? 'The things that are lacking'. What is lacking? 'The afflictions of Christ'. And where are they lacking? 'In my flesh'. Was there ever anything lacking in the afflictions of that person who was made the Word of God, born of the Virgin Mary? For he did suffer whatever he was meant to suffer - and voluntarily, not by the obligation of sin; and patently it *was* everything: for, placed on the cross, at the end he accepted the vinegar and said, 'It is complete.' ... What does 'it is complete' mean? 'Now nothing is missing from the full measure of my sufferings; everything that was prophesied of me is complete': ... so all the sufferings were fulfilled – but [only] in the head: there were still missing the sufferings of Christ in the body. You though are the body of Christ and its members. Because Paul belonged to these members, he said: 'that I may fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh.' Therefore we go where Christ has preceded us. Wherever Christ leads as head, he follows as body. And so here Christ is still at work.<sup>53</sup>

With such a strong yet lucid emphasis on the 'lack' referring to what is yet to be suffered by the individual believer, Augustine is able to satisfy the need for a robust defense of the salvific sufficiency of Christ's own afflictions as head; yet still the question why the

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51 'Inde est, quod alio loco idem ipse apostolus ait: "Nunc gaudeo in passionibus pro vobis, et adimpleo ea quae desunt pressurarum Christi, in carne mea." Non dixit, pressurarum mearum, sed "Christi": quia membrum erat Christi; et in persecutionibus suis, quales Christum in suo toto corpore pati oportebat, etiam ipse pressuras eius pro sua portione adimplebat.' *PL*, vol. 35, col. 1916.

52 Originally Ps. 86:1-2.

53 'Praecessit enim in capite, sequitur se in corpore. Videte quid dixit apostolus quia in ipso Christus patiebatur: "Ut adimpleam quae desunt pressurarum Christi in carne mea". "Ut adimpleam": Quid? "Quae desunt". Cui desunt? "Pressurarum Christi". Et ubi desunt? "In carne mea". Numquid aliquid pressurarum deerat in illo homine, quod factum est verbum Dei, nato de Maria virgine? Passus enim est quidquid pati deberet, ex sua voluntate, non ex peccati necessitate; et videtur quia omnia: in cruce enim positus accepit acetum ultimum et ait "Perfectum est"; ... Quid est "Perfectum est"? Jam de mensura passionum nihil mihi deest; omnia quae de me praedicta sunt, completa sunt: ... ergo impletae erant omnes passionibus, sed in capite: restabant adhuc passionibus Christi in corpore. Vos autem estis corpus Christi et membra. In his ergo membris cum esset apostolus, dixit: "Ut adimpleam quae desunt pressurarum Christi in carne mea." Ergo illuc imus quo Christus praecessit: praecedit enim Christus in capite, sequitur in corpore. Et adhuc Christus hic laborat.' *PL*, vol. 37, cols. 1104-1105.

apostle's afflictions are 'for the sake of the body' remains unanswered. The theme of identification between Christ the head and Christ the body in affliction occurs again in Augustine's comments on Ps. 143:1:<sup>54</sup>

‘That I may fill up’, he says, ‘what is lacking in the afflictions’: not in mine, but in Christ’s; not in ‘Christ’s flesh’, but in ‘my flesh’. Christ, he says, still suffers affliction - not in his flesh, in which he ascended into heaven, but in my flesh: ‘It’s no longer I who lives, but rather Christ who lives in me [Gal. 2:20]’. Unless then Christ were also suffering affliction himself in his members, that is in his believers, then

Saul on earth would not be persecuting Christ seated in heaven [Acts 9:4].<sup>55</sup>

The allusion here to Acts 9:4 (‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’) is one which Augustine uses frequently to confirm Christ’s identification with his body on earth.<sup>56</sup> An identical argument to that above is found in his *Sermo 341*,<sup>57</sup> and a passing reference in *De trinitate* 4:3:6,<sup>58</sup> which adds nothing of relevance to this study.

In summary, Augustine’s position appears to be as follows: there is nothing whatsoever deficient in the sufferings and afflictions of Christ the Saviour and head of the body. Nevertheless, such is the strength of his identification with his continuing body on earth, the church, and particularly in its afflictions, that it is accurate to call the believers’ afflictions Christ’s own. Moreover, each member of the body is called to fill up a predetermined amount of affliction and thereby contribute filling up the grand total of the *universa passio* of Christ.

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54 Originally Ps. 142:1.

55 ‘“Ut suppleam, inquit, quae desunt pressurarum”, non mearum, sed “Christi”; “in carne” non iam Christi, sed “mea”. Patitur, inquit, adhuc Christus pressuram; non in carne sua, in qua ascendit in coelum, sed in carne mea: “vivo enim non iam ego, vivit vero in me Christus.” Nisi enim Christus et in membris suis, hoc est fidelibus suis, pressuram ipse pateretur, Saulus in terra Christum in coelo sedentem non persequeretur.’ *PL* vol. 37, col. 1846.

56 E.g. *De consensu evangelistarum* 4:5:6; *De civitate Dei* 16:9; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 37:6; 44:20; 87:15.

57 *PL*, vol. 39, col. 1500.

58 *PL*, vol. 42, col. 891.

### **3.2.3 Gregory the Great**

The contribution of Gregory (d. 604) is found not in any direct treatment of Col. 1:24, but rather in the context of his commentary on Job, where it is mentioned several times. For example, after rearticulating Augustine's teaching on the unity of the head and body of Christ in suffering, he continues:

Therefore the sufferings of the head must be expressed even now, in order to show how much he endures even in his body. For if our torments did not affect our head, he would never have cried out from heaven on behalf of his afflicted members to his persecutor, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' If our torments were not also his own suffering, there is no way the converted and afflicted Paul would have said: 'I make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ in my flesh.'<sup>59</sup>

Here, as in Augustine, Christ's sufferings, though completed in his flesh, continue in his body, the church. In his comments on Job 39:11 ('Will you rely on him [the wild ox]<sup>60</sup> for his great strength? Will you leave your labours to him?'), Gregory sees an allegory of God's dealings with Paul:

[God] also left for him the labours that he had borne in his flesh, for after being converted, he bore them to the extent of imitating his own passion. Therefore it is said by this same 'rhinoceros': 'I fill up what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh'.<sup>61</sup>

Here the emphasis is on Christ's leaving unfinished work for Paul to do – a theme reminiscent of Athanasius (above, 3.1.1).

### **3.3 A summary of the interpretations of Colossians 1:24 by the Church Fathers**

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59 'ita et nunc passiones exprimi eiusdem capitis debent, ut ostendatur quam multa etiam in corpore suo sustinet. Si enim caput nostrum tormenta nostra non tangerent, nequaquam pro afflictis membris persecutori suo etiam de coelo clamaret: Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris? Si cruciatus nostri eius poena non essent conversus afflictusque Paulus minime diceret: "Suppleo ea, quae desunt passionum Christi in carne mea".' *PL*, vol. 75, col. 612.

60 'Rhinceros' in the Vulgate used by Gregory.

61 'Cui labores etiam quas ipse in carne pertulerat dereliquit, quia conversum illum usque ad imitationem propriae passionis traxit. Unde et per eundem rhinocerotem dicitur: Suppleo ea quae desunt passionum Christi in carne mea.' *PL*, vol. 76, col. 592.

The treatment of Col. 1:24 by the Fathers, as outlined above, is very brief, with the exception of Chrysostom and Augustine, and consequently sketchy. The lack of comment from the earliest times is disappointing, particularly as there is consequently little contribution from those actually undergoing major persecution: their views would have been especially valuable. As it is, the surviving literature is mostly from periods when the church was broadly-speaking at peace and ‘established’: many of the comments show great reflection but less urgency: as in our day in the West, suffering is not perceived to be the most pressing consideration. The many views expressed by the Fathers defy codification, but it will nevertheless be helpful to enumerate their elements thematically and moreover note what is missing from their comments, before moving on chronologically.

**Table 1 – Summary of the Church Fathers’ comments on Col. 1:24**

<b>The message of the passage</b> is applicable to:	all believers	Origen, Severian, Photius, Augustine
	the apostle only	Hegemonius (extreme view), Chrysostom
<b>The prefix ἀντί-</b>	omitted	Ambrose
	ignored	Origen, Chrysostom
	means ‘in comparison to’	Photius
With the Latin Fathers this question does not arise, the word ἀνταναπληρῶ being translated variously <i>adimpleo</i> (Hilary, Ambrose), <i>repleo</i> (Tyconius), or <i>suppleo</i> (Augustine, Gregory) before through the influence of the Vulgate (ca. 400) <i>adimpleo</i> became uniform.		
<b>θλίψεις / παθήματα</b>	not differentiated in any of the surviving texts, and are explicitly equated by Origen.	
<b>Paul’s ‘filling up afflictions’</b>	imitation	Ambrose, Tyconius
	a demonstration of faith	Hilary

is primarily	a demonstration of humility	Chrysostom, Photius' 2 <sup>nd</sup> rejected opinion
	in parallel to 'greater works'	Chrysostom
	a demonstration of Christ's great love	Chrysostom
	the ministry of evangelism	Chrysostom, Severian, Theodore, Theodoret, Photius
	a part of discipleship and conformity	Chrysostom
	an expression of fellowship with Christ	Ambrose
<b>The afflictions themselves</b>	come from opposition to the gospel by unbelievers	Severian, Ambrosiaster, Augustine
<b>The 'lack'</b>	refers to the continued ministry	Theodore, Theodoret, Tyconius
	is in comparison to Christ's	Photius
	is ignored	Severian
	is a demonstration of Christ's love and care	Chrysostom
	is not in the afflictions of the incarnate Christ, but in those of Paul or the individual believer	Ambrose (possibly), Pelagius
		Augustine
<b>The afflictions are referred to as 'Christ's' because</b>	he is the head of the body which is afflicted	Severian, Augustine, Gregory

	Christ and the Body of Christ can be equated	Tyconius
	he indwells those who are afflicted	Ambrosiaster
	they are the continuation of his ministry	Chrysostom, Theodore, Theodoret, Photius, Gregory
<b>The benefits for the church</b> receive scant attention, but for Ambrosiaster equate to the hearing of the Gospel message and consequent salvation.		
There is a pre-ordained <b>measure of afflictions</b>		Augustine

What is perhaps more remarkable - from our present-day perspective at least - than the various comments and views expressed by the Church Fathers are the features that are absent in their writings. First, there is no consideration expressed of the OT background to what Paul is attempting to convey, either conceptually or linguistically, but rather his words are generally considered in isolation, the only occasional comparisons being with other Pauline references to suffering. Neither is there any attempt to place the verse's meaning in the context of contemporary Jewish and Christian expectations (apocalyptic or otherwise) regarding an imminent *parousia*. Moreover, in considering the nature of the writer's afflictions, there is little reference to earlier attitudes to suffering and martyrdom. In short, the whole treatment of Col. 1:24 by the Church Fathers involves decontextualising it at nearly every level. In conclusion it must also be conceded that thus far in the literature on Col. 1:24 there has been no mention or consideration of any vicarious aspect to the afflictions described.

### **3.4 The interpretation of Colossians 1:24 during the Middle Ages**

There is very little originality in the few surviving mediaeval interpretations of this verse:

as Kremer notes,<sup>62</sup> they almost invariably follow the lines of argument of Augustine and/or Pelagius (above, 3.2.2; 3.2.1). By far the most significant development of the period is the application of Col.1:24 to the recently-formulated doctrine of the ‘treasury of the church’,<sup>63</sup> to support the development of the doctrine of indulgences (above, 1.1.3), and the first to do so explicitly was **Thomas Aquinas** (d. 1274) in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*. This is of major importance for two reasons: first, because of the subsequent growth in indulgences and their direct role as a major catalyst for the Continental Reformation; second, and more specifically relevant for this research, because in the process Aquinas highlights for the first time the issue of vicarious substitution. Whereas for the Church Fathers the phrase ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία received scant attention, and when it was interpreted at all the explanation was expressed rationally in terms of the evangelistic labour expended in bringing the gospel; here quite abruptly it comes to prominence, endowed with real theological significance and a suggestion of vicarious suffering. Aquinas wrote:

Now it was said above that one man can provide satisfaction for another. Moreover, the Saints, in whom is found a superabundance of works of satisfaction, did not perform this kind of work specifically for the one who requires remission - otherwise they would obtain remission without any indulgence - but communally for the whole church, just as the apostle says he ‘fills up what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ in his body for the church’ to which he writes Col. 1. And so the aforesaid merits are the common property of the whole church.<sup>64</sup>

By insisting on the communal nature of the ‘treasury of merits’, Aquinas preserves the prerogative of the Church to distribute its benefits through the sale of indulgences. In his

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<sup>62</sup> Kremer, *Leiden*, pp. 56-61.

<sup>63</sup> Usually attributed to Hugh Saint-Cher (ca.1200-1263), *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Colosenses*.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Dictum est autem supra, quod unus pro alio satisfacere potest. Sancti autem, in quibus superabundantia operum satisfactionis invenitur, non determinate pro isto qui remissione indiget huiusmodi opera fecerunt, alias absque omni indulgentia consequerentur remissionem; sed communiter pro tota Ecclesia sicut Apostolus ait se “implere ea quae desunt passionum Christi in corpore suo pro Ecclesia” ad quam scribit Col. 1. Et sic praedicta merita sunt communia toti Ecclesiae.’ *Scriptum super Sententiis*, lib. 4, dist. 20, quaest. 1. <<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/snp4020.html>>[accessed 14/4/2010].

later *Lectures on Colossians*, he addresses directly three of the major difficulties raised by Col. 1:24: the sufficiency of Christ's suffering; the nature of the Body of Christ; and the 'quota' of afflictions to be filled up. On the first of these, Aquinas is unequivocal in defending the sufficiency of Christ's suffering for salvation:

Superficially these words could be misunderstood to mean that Christ's suffering was insufficient for redemption, but that the sufferings of the Saints were added for completion. But this is heretical, because the blood of Christ is sufficient for redemption, even for multiple worlds (1 John 2:2).<sup>65</sup>

The lack is therefore nothing to do with the work of salvation, but explained in terms of the body of Christ (very similar to Augustine's understanding) with additionally a strong doctrine of predestination:

But what we must understand is that Christ and the church are a single mystical person, whose head is Christ and whose body is all the righteous: so whoever is righteous is like a member of this head (1 Cor. 12:27), and the members belong to one another. For God by predestination ordained how many merits there were to be throughout the whole church, whether in the head or in the members, just as he also predestined the number of the elect. And prominent among these merits are the sufferings of the saints. Now Christ, ie. the head, has infinite merits, yet each saint still contributes merits according to his portion.'<sup>66</sup>

Thus, by emphasising the contrast between Christ's infinite merits and the relatively modest ongoing work-in-progress of the saints' contributions, Aquinas manages both to preserve the sufficiency of Christ's sufferings and yet to make room for an interpretation of Paul's 'filling up what is lacking': it refers to the apostle's own personal quota.

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65 'Haec verba, secundum superficium, malum possent habere intellectum, scilicet quod Christi passio non esset sufficiens ad redemptionem, sed additae sunt ad complendum passionem sanctorum. Sed hoc est haereticum, quia sanguis Christi est sufficiens ad redemptionem, etiam multorum mundorum. I io. II, 2.' Thomas Aquinas, *Super epistolas S. Pauli lectura* (2 vols.; Turin: Marietti, 8<sup>th</sup> edn, 1953), pp. 137-138.

66 'Sed intelligendum est, quod Christus est una persona mystica, cuius caput est Christus, corpus omnes iusti: quilibet autem iustus est quasi membrum huius capitis, I Cor. XII, 27: et membra de membro. Deus autem ordinavit in sua praedestinatione quantum meritorum debet esse per totam ecclesiam, tam in capite quam in membris, sicut et praedestinavit numerum electorum. Et inter haec merita praecipue sunt passionem sanctorum. Sed Christi, scilicet capitis, merita sunt infinita, quilibet vero sanctus exhibet aliqua merita secundum mensuram suam.'



In Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*, Col. 1:24 is dealt with in the section on 'The efficacy of Christ's passion'. The objection is raised: 'Besides Christ's passion, that of the saints was conducive to our salvation [Col. 1:24].' To this the response given is:

The sufferings of the saints are not beneficial to the Church by way of redemption, but by way of exhortation and example. As Paul writes,

‘if we are afflicted, it is for your instruction and salvation [2 Cor. 1:6].’<sup>67</sup>

Here again, Aquinas shows himself to be thoroughly orthodox in his treatment of the merits of the saints; nevertheless, by the time of the Reformation, the growing tide of indulgences and the temptation to sell them for the church's profit proved stronger than sound doctrine.

### **3.5 Colossians 1:24 and the Reformation**

The interpretations of this verse by the Protestant Reformers are of special interest for two reasons: first, because they were in the front line of resistance to the Church of Rome with its indulgences and (in their view) distorted teaching on 'merits' – doctrines which, as described above, were founded in part on this very verse; and second, because the principle of *sola scriptura*, which asserts that the Bible is the only infallible and inerrant authority for the Christian faith, and which characterised the Reformers' teaching, is also a fundamental part of the modern evangelical tradition. That said, the literature consists of only a handful of commentaries plus a few gleanings from other works and marginal notes in editions of the NT.

#### **3.5.1 Philipp Melanchthon**

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 3a:48:5. (61 vols.; London: Blackfriars, 1964-81), vol. 54, pp. 86-89.

Amongst the German Reformers, only Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), Luther's Wittenberg friend and colleague, produced a commentary (two in fact) on Colossians. In the first he addresses Col. 1:24 twice: not only in the body of the commentary, but also at some length in the introductory *Argumentum*. Here he introduces a military analogy, quite similar to that of Chrysostom's *Fourth Homily* (3.1.2), in order to emphasise that Paul is speaking not of any lack of 'merit' in Christ, but of his unfinished campaign:

The merit of Christ the commander is complete and sufficient for all his subjects. We on the other hand are soldiers in the same military service, which is not yet ended. So to the afflictions of the commander are immediately added the afflictions of the soldiers who succeed him, which are lacking from the commander just until the end of the military service in the gathering of the universal church – even if the merit of the commander and the battles of the soldiers are different. With these words Paul's statement is most simply expressed: 'I fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, etc.; not what pertains to merit, since the fullness belongs to Christ alone, but to the fellowship of military service, in which it behoves the soldiers to suffer just like the commander whom they follow immediately after.'<sup>68</sup>

He concludes by noting that the 'Papists' distort this quote to apply it to the merits of the saints for the remission of sins, and quoting Rom. 5:15 and 1 John 2:2 in support of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. In the body of the commentary, Melanchthon takes a more pastoral approach, emphasising the encouragement to be found in the example of the apostle, solidarity in the church which has the cross and suffering at its centre, and in the words of Christ regarding the inevitability of suffering for his followers. After warning that this has nothing to do with 'merits', he deals with the phrase 'for his body' and writes,

'that is, in order that my ministry may serve the church in teaching', not because the apostle's afflictions are a merit of reconciliation.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> 'Ducis Christi meritum integrum est et sufficiens pro omnibus subditis. Nos autem sumus milites in eodem ministerio, cuius nondum finis est. Ita subinde ad afflictiones ducis succedentium militum afflictiones, quae tantisper desunt duci, donec finis est ministerii in collectione universae Ecclesiae, etiamsi differunt meritum ducis et praelia militum. His verbis simplicissime enarretur Pauli dictum: Impleo quod deest afflictionibus Christi, etc., non quod ad meritum, quod plenissimum est solius Christi, sed quod ad militiae societatem attinet, in quo subinde milites succedentes oportet similia pati afflictionum ducis.' *Enarratio epistolae Pauli ad Colosenses*. In *Opera quae supersunt omnia* (Corpus reformatorum, 1-28; Halle: Schnetschke, 1834-60; 28 vols.), vol. 15, col. 1225.

<sup>69</sup> 'videlicet, ut ministerium meum serviat Ecclesiae in docendo, non quod afflictiones Apostolorum sint

He then returns to the theme of the nature of the afflictions of Christ and the church respectively: there is a similarity, because we must be conformed to the image of Christ, but a great difference resulting from their respective missions.

And because of the reasons for which the Son was sent, to be a sacrificial victim, we are to understand that the mission of the Son is to be distinguished from the rest of the church which is subjected to the cross for different reasons. Christ's suffering alone is λύτρον [atonement]; whereas the church's are either τιμωρίαι [chastisements] or δοκιμασίαι [testings] or μαρτύρια [witness].<sup>70</sup>

Melanchthon thus becomes one of the few commentators to acknowledge expressly a multiplicity of possible reasons for Christian suffering.

Melanchthon also published a much briefer collection of notes on Colossians. Here he says,

The afflictions of the saints are Christ's afflictions, therefore there is something lacking in the afflictions of Christ just for as long as there remain those who are afflicted. But it does not follow from this that the afflictions of the saints justify them. For Paul does not say that, but says we are justified through faith in Christ.<sup>71</sup>

### **3.5.2 Martin Luther**

Luther (1483-1546) himself wrote no commentary on Colossians, but alludes to the verse several times in his writings and his posthumously collected *Table Talk*. The earliest mention of Col. 1:24 occurs in his first series of lectures on the Psalms (1513-16) where, on the title of Ps. 88 he uses it to illustrate the purpose of antiphonal singing:<sup>72</sup>

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meritum reconciliationis.' *Opera*, vol. 15, col. 1247.

70 'Et propter quas causas filius missus sit, ut fieret victima, sciendum est, et distinguenda missio filii a reliqua Ecclesia, quae propter alias causas cruci subiecta est. Solius Christi passio est λύτρον, afflictiones vero Ecclesiae sunt aut τιμωρίαι, aut δοκιμασίαι, aut μαρτύρια.'

71 'Afflictiones sanctorum sunt Christi afflictiones, ergo tantisper deest aliquid afflictionibus Christi, donec supersunt, qui affligantur. Sed inde non sequitur, quod afflictiones sanctorum iustificent eos. Neque enim hoc Paulus dicit, sed dicit iustificari nos ex fide in Christum.' *Scholia in Epistolam Pauli ad Colosenses*. In *Melanchthons Werke* (7 vols. in 9; Gütersloh: Mohn, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1969-83), vol. 4, p. 228.

72 Ps. 87 in Luther's Bible.

For what is the purpose of one responding to another, if not to help bring the same song or the same work to a perfect ending? Thus also the apostle says 'I complete the sufferings of Christ which are lacking in my flesh.' This is suffering together for the purpose of reigning together; enduring together for the purpose of reigning together.<sup>73</sup>

This seems a strange application of the verse, and within these two sentences little can be gleaned of Luther's understanding of it beyond the believer's call to the fellowship of suffering. That theme is prominent again in his sermons on the letters of Peter (1523), where he quotes Col. 1:24 in his exposition of 1 Pet. 1:11b ('The Spirit of Christ in them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow'):

One can take that as meaning mutual suffering: that Christ suffers and we suffer. St Paul calls the sufferings of all Christians the sufferings of Christ. For just as faith, the name, the word and work of Christ are mine because I believe in him, so too his suffering is mine, because I suffer for his sake. Thus Christ's sufferings are now fulfilled daily by Christians until the end of the world.<sup>74</sup>

Prominent here is a strong sense of identity between Christ and his followers, the call to discipleship involving acceptance not just of the blessings of faith but also the cost; and the continuity between his work and that of the Christian. An additional layer is added by the believer's willingness to suffer 'for his sake'. Luther goes on to describe the comfort which this sharing in suffering brings, and the glory which it heralds for the disciple as it did for Christ.

The next mention of Col. 1:24, in Luther's *Lectures on the Minor Prophets* (1524) is fleeting, but adds the view that each believer has an individual quota of sufferings - or 'cross' - to bear. On Zech. 13:9 ('One third I will lead into the fire'), he comments:

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73 'Quid enim est alterum alteri respondere, nisi eundem cantum vel idem opus ad finem perfectum adiuvare implere? Ita et Christi passiones ait apostolus impleam, quae desunt in carne mea. Hoc est compati ad conregnandum, contolerare ad conregnandum.' *Dictata super Psalterium*. In *Werke*, vol. 4, p. 35.

74 'Das mag verstehen von beyderley leyden, das Christus und wyr leyden. S. Paulus heysst auch aller Christen leyden das leyden Christi. Denn wie der glaub, der nam. Das wortt und werck Christi meyn ist, darumb das ich an yhn gewerbe, also ist seyn leyden auch meyn, drummb das ich auch umb seynen willen leyde. Also wirtt das leyden Christ teglich nun den Christen erfüllet, biss ans end der welt.' *Epistel S. Petri gepredigt und ausgelegt*. In *Werke*, vol. 12, p. 279.

Besides this, we are compelled to bear our private individual sufferings, just as each one has a divinely imposed cross [to bear], so that we complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, as it says in Colossians.<sup>75</sup>

Luther's theme is similar in his next mention of the verse, in a sermon preached at Coburg on Easter Day, 16th April 1530. In teaching on following Christ, he stresses the importance and inevitability of following his example of suffering:

And though our suffering and cross should not be promoted as if we were saved through it or earn the smallest merit, yet we should still suffer after Christ, so that we be conformed to him ... therefore each one must bear a piece of the holy cross: it cannot be otherwise. So St Paul says too: 'I fill up in my flesh what is lacking from the sufferings of Christ.' As if to say, 'the whole of his Christendom is not yet fully ready; we too must follow after, so nothing of Christ's suffering may be missing or lost, but rather all come together in a single heap.'<sup>76</sup>

He then goes on to emphasise that the suffering must be genuine and not a token; from elsewhere and not self-inflicted; nor must it become a merit in itself or a cause for pride.

The most notable addition in this text is the concept of an ordained measure of suffering which the church is to complete – one which, as an Augustinian, Luther would have found in the teachings of his founder.<sup>77</sup> It is interesting that in this sermon, Luther balances his view on the uniqueness of each believer's suffering or cross with the vivid illustration that ultimately each contribution is added to the 'one heap'.

Finally, in his 1535 commentary on Galatians, at 6:14a ('May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ') Luther defines the 'cross of Christ' as Christian suffering,

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75 'Praeter hoc etiam privatas et proprias passiones cogimur ferre, singuli prout divinitus crux imponitur, ut compleamus ea, quae desunt passionibus Christi sicut est in Coloss.' *Praelectiones in prophetas minores*. In *Werke*, vol. 13, p. 668.

76 'Und wiewol unser leiden und Creutz nicht also sol auffgeworffen werden, das wir dadurch selig werden oder das geringst damit verdienen wolten, sollen wir dennoch Christo nachleiden, das wir ihm gleichformig werden ... Darumb mus ein iglicher ein stücke vom heiligen Creutz tragen, und kan auch nicht anders sein. S.Paulus sagt auch also: 'Ich erfülle an meinem fleische das jehne, das noch am leiden Christi mangelt', Als solt er sagen: Sein gantze Christenheit ist noch nicht vol bereitet, wir müssen auch hinnach, das nichts an dem leiden Christi feile noch abgehe, sondern das es alles auff einen hauffen kome.' Luther, *Werke*, vol. 32, p. 29.

77 See above (3.2.2), Augustine's interpretation of Ps. 62:3.

citing Col. 1:24, along with 2 Cor. 1:5 and Acts 9:4, as evidence that ‘it means all the afflictions of all the faithful, whose sufferings are Christ’s sufferings’.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to his published works, Luther is recorded as discussing Col. 1:24 at three points in his *Table Talk*.<sup>79</sup> His comments, however, add nothing of substance to what we learn of his understanding from the published references: the first quotes the verse in an explanation of the origins of the Roman Catholic doctrine of merits; the other two, quoting Augustine and using his image of the body and members of Christ, explain the difference between the sacrificial suffering of Christ himself, and the inevitable sufferings sustained by all who are his members and to whom his own passion serves as an example.

In summary of these miscellaneous comments on Col. 1:24, we can say that Luther’s main themes are the identity of Christ with his followers, particularly in suffering (their ‘cross’ to bear), which is the path to sharing his glory. Although each individual must carry his own portion (and there is a strong hint that Luther, following Augustine, interpreted ‘what is lacking in the afflictions...’ as connected with ‘in my flesh’), nevertheless this is an essential contribution to the common ‘heap’ which must be completed by the church before the work is complete. Luther does not comment on any possibility of vicarious suffering in this verse, nor deal with the phrase ‘for the sake of his body’, beyond the idea that each must play his or her part.

### **3.5.3 Andreas Osiander**

The Nuremberg reformer Andreas Osiander (1498-1552) mentioned Col. 1:24 several times when quoting ‘the church, which is the Body of Christ’, but on three occasions gave

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78 ‘Significat omnes afflictiones omnium piorum, quorum passiones sunt Christi passiones.’ *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas commentarius*. In *Werke*, vol. 40, p. 171.

79 Luther, *Werke. Tischreden*, vol. 4, p. 493, no. 4779; vol. 5, p. 216, no. 5526; p. 327, no. 5711.

it more extensive treatment. The first of these was in his 1524 work *Grund und Ursach*, where a discussion of Melchizedek and his offering leads to a description of the comparable priestly role of Christ,<sup>80</sup> and as members of his body, believers must suffer as he did (1 Pet. 4:1). Osiander then quotes Col.1:24, adding:

He means: Christ sacrificed himself through death once for our sins and has found us eternal salvation: there is no lack in that. We however have not yet received the kingdom, but must suffer and die first, as Christ died. And until that happens there is still a lack in the spiritual body of Christ, which is the fellowship of the faithful. It lacks, however, nothing except in suffering and death, for after death the kingdom of heaven is certain for all members of Christ. Therefore he says 'I make up the lack in the afflictions of Christ in my body' which is a member of his, and do this not just for my own sake, for a blessing, but much more for the whole spiritual Body of Christ, 'which is the fellowship'. For through my suffering the word of God, through which they are blessed, is demonstrated and strengthened in the Christian community.<sup>81</sup>

This very succinct explanation shares with Luther's the emphasis on the sufficiency of Christ's sufferings, yet the inevitability of the believer's. He appears to link the lack of afflictions with 'in my body', though there is nothing here about a personal tally: the aim here is not so much to fill up a quota as to achieve blessing, both personally and for the rest of the church. The way the latter is achieved is conceived differently from elsewhere: for Osiander the suffering of the believer is testimony to the truth of the Bible, which in turn encourages and builds up the church.

In his *Brandenburg-Nürnbergische Kirchenordnung* of 1533, Osiander takes a simpler

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80 Gen. 14:18-20; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6-10; 6:20-7:22.

81 'als wolt er sagen: Christus hat sich ainmal für unser sünd in todt geopfert und hat uns ain ewige erlösung gefunden, daran ist kain mangel. Wir aber haben das reich noch nicht eingenommen, sonder müssen vor auch leyden und sterben, wie Christus gestorben ist. Und weil das nicht geschicht, so ist noch ain mangel an dem gaistlichen leib Christi, welches seine glaubige gemayn ist. Im mangelt aber nichts dann leydens und sterbens, dann das hymmelreych ist nach dem tod allen gelidern Christi gewiß. Darumb spricht er: "Ich erstatte den mangel der trübsalen Christi an meinem leib", welcher sein glid ist, und thu das nicht allayn von meinenwegen, daß ich selig werd, sonder vilmer für den gantzen gaistlichen leib Christi, "welches die gemayn ist". Dann durch mein leyden wirt das wort Gottes, dardurch sy selig werden, in der christlichen gemayn bezeüget und befestiget.' Andreas Osiander, *Gesamtausgabe* (10 vols.; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1975-98), vol. 1, p. 221.

approach. His argument runs that since Christ was pleasing to his Father and entered his glory through suffering, suffering must be the most pleasing thing to God. The believer should therefore seek to please him in the same way, particularly as ‘no servant is greater than his master’ (Matt. 10:24). One should suffer patiently simply to be like Christ. He then teaches on the Body of Christ, head and members, and quotes Col. 1:24 and Acts 9:4 in support of the identity of the believer’s suffering with Christ’s, concluding that ‘suffering is a furtherance of and entry into glory’ (quoting 2 Tim. 2:11-12; Rom. 8:23).<sup>82</sup> Almost verbatim the argument is repeated in Osiander’s *Kirchenordnung Pfalz-Neuburg* of 1543.<sup>83</sup>

### **3.5.4 Martin Bucer**

Bucer (1491-1551) alludes several times to Col. 1:24, yet quotes it directly only once, in his *Einfaltiges Bedencken* of 1543. There he writes:

Our suffering is incorporated into the suffering of Christ, and we are planted through baptism into his death (Rom. 6:5). So we can be certain that our suffering is as pleasing to God as Christ’s. For he is our head, and we are his members, therefore the suffering has to be shared. That’s why he also says to Paul, when he is persecuting the Christians, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And if the head has suffered, the members must also suffer. That is why Paul says to the Colossians, ‘I rejoice in my suffering, which I am suffering for you, and supply in my flesh what is still lacking from the afflictions in Christ’. Therefore suffering is a fostering of and an entrance into glory, as Paul says (2 Tim. 2:11-12, Rom. 8:18).<sup>84</sup>

Here Bucer combines a clear reiteration of Augustine’s ‘Christ, head and body’ teaching

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82 ‘Darzu ist das leyden ein fürderung und eingang zu der herrligkeyt’. *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5, p. 105.

83 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 7, pp. 621-622.

84 ‘Es ist auch vnser leyden in das leiden Christi eingeleibet, vnnd wir seind durch den tauff in seyn todt gepflantzet, Roman. vj.[5], Auff das wir ja gewiß mogen seyn, das vnser leyden Gott auch wolgefalle wie das leyden Christi. Dan er ist vnser haupt, vnnd wir sind seyne glider, darumb, so muß das leiden gemein sein; daher sagt er auch zu Paulo, da er die Christen verfolgt, “Saul, Saul, Warumb verfolgest du mich?” Vnnd hat das haupt gelitten, so müssen die glider auch leyden. Darumb spricht Paulus zun Colossern j.[24]: “Jch freuwe mich in meinem leyden, das ich für euch leyde, vnd erstatte an meynem fleysch, was noch mangelt an trubsalen in Christo”. Darumb ist das leyden ein fürderung vnd eingang zu der herligkeyt, wie Paulus sagt, ij. Timoth. ij. [11-12] ... Rom. viij. [18].’ Martin Bucer, *Deutsche Schriften* (in progress; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1960-), vol. 11/1, p. 256.



(including the latter's oft-quoted Acts 9:4) with the familiar Reformation theme of suffering as a preparation for glory. At the same time his starting-point anticipates the more recent focus on the theme of incorporation into Christ' (below, 4.2.2).

### **3.5.5 Other German- and English-speaking Reformers**

**Martin Chemnitz** (1522-86), in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, devotes considerable space to the interpretation of Col. 1:24 in his '*Third topic – concerning indulgences*'. After outlining the official Roman Catholic doctrine, he affirms the sufficiency of faith in Christ for salvation:

But they object: Nevertheless the text says that Paul fulfills what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. I answer: Not even the ancient translation says that anything is lacking to the suffering (or passion) of Christ, but 'the things which are lacking of the sufferings (plural) of Christ.'

He then explains, like others before him using Acts 9:4 and 1 Cor. 12:12, how the sufferings of the members of Christ are identified with those of the Head.

The afflictions of the saints are called "Christ's afflictions" to sweeten the cross for the godly.

The reasons for these afflictions are enumerated as conformity to his image (Rom. 8:29); following Christ (1 Pet. 2:21); in order to also share his comfort (2 Cor. 1:5); and for joy when his glory is revealed (1 Pet. 4:13).

Therefore Paul says nothing other than this, that he, as not the least important member of the body of Christ, fulfills his measure of the afflictions which yet remain or are left over to be borne by Christ's body.'<sup>85</sup>

This interpretation is significant, written as it was by a second-generation reformer in 1565-73 with the benefit of several decades of theological reflection: yet remarkably it adds very little to the various comments of Luther, Melancthon and Osiander. Again the

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<sup>85</sup> *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, 3<sup>rd</sup> topic, ch. 3, 4<sup>th</sup> argument. In Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent* (transl. Fred Kramer; 4 vols.; St Louis: Concordia, 1979-86), vol. 3, pp. 173-175.

idea of a quota of affliction for the individual believer is prominent – less clear is the concept of any sum total for the church. This accords with Chemnitz’s interpretations of the benefits of affliction listed above, which are more individual than corporate: what the church derives is more nebulous: comfort (2 Cor. 1:6-7), encouragement (Phil. 1:12-14) and the proof of the truth of the Gospel (as Osiander above).

**Heinrich Bullinger** (1504-75), Zwingli’s successor at Zürich, deals with Col. 1:24 in a sermon on faith and works: his view is that ‘you may better translate the Greek τὰ ὑστερήματα that rather which is behind, than that which is lacking to the afflictions of Christ’,<sup>86</sup> and he quotes 1 Pet. 2:21 (‘Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example’). His view therefore is that the apostle’s ‘filling up’ is purely in imitation of Christ.<sup>87</sup>

The same simple theme of imitation is found in the marginal comments in the NT of

**William Tyndale** (1494-1536):

Passions or sufferings of Christ: is the passions which we must suffer for his sake. For we have professed and are appointed to suffer with Christ. John 20, as my father sent me, so send I you.<sup>88</sup>

### **3.5.6 Flacius Illyricus**

One of the most concise and yet typical Reformation contributions comes from the Albanian-born Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520-1575), whose commentary was published in parallel to an edition of the NT in Basel in 1570. Flacius writes:

Next he mentions the ‘remains of the afflictions of Christ’; we are to

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<sup>86</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *Decade 3, sermon 9*. In *The Decades* (5 vols.; Cambridge : University Press, 1849-52), vol. 3, pp. 333-334.

<sup>87</sup> However, since his main concern in this sermon is to refute any suggestion that faith alone might be insufficient for salvation, rather than to interpret this verse, it may be unfair to judge his teaching by this isolated reference.

<sup>88</sup> William Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament* (ed. David Daniell; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 296.

understand as it were a certain measure of afflictions prescribed by God, which he intends to be fulfilled by Christ in his own as well as in his mystical body, before they are fully glorified, just as in the Apocalypse the martyrs petitioning for vindication are told in reply that they are to wait until their brothers have suffered. The Antichrist and his like have from this badly – or rather blasphemously – invented the treasury of the saints and also their works of satisfaction or merits of supererogation: but they are utter blasphemies against the blood of the perfect lamb, which alone cleanses us from every sin, and which with a single oblation restores us as perfect, and obtains complete redemption ...

Notwithstanding, it does however speak of the sufferings of Christ, for he himself suffers in his body: as he says to Saul (Acts 8 [sic]), ‘Why do you persecute me?’ And he is with us in tribulation. However, the apostle himself here expressly declares he is speaking of the afflictions which are lacking in the mystic body of Christ or the church: that she be conformed to her head, rather than any that might be lacking in that one most perfect propitiatory sacrifice, but which are brought to perfection in the true and natural body of Christ.<sup>89</sup>

If one had to select a single text to illustrate the Reformation view of Col. 1:24, one could hardly improve on Flacius’ contribution. In this short passage he robustly maintains the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice, while taking a swipe at the blasphemies of the Papacy, and acknowledges the unity between Christ and his body in a way reminiscent of Augustine. What is unusually original at this period is his bold statement that there is a predetermined measure of affliction. His development of this, however, reveals that, like most of his fellow Reformers, he conceives the purpose of this not so much in terms of fulfilling an eschatological measure as in achieving conformity with Christ through suffering.

### **3.5.7 Calvin and Béza**

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89 ‘Quod porrò dicit reliquias afflictionum Christi intellige certam quasi mensuram afflictionum esse à Deo prefinitam, quam à Christo in suo proprio & etiam mystico corpore expleri porteat, antequam plenè glorificentur, sicut in Apocalypsi martyribus petentibus [sic] vindictam, respondetur, ut expectent, donec etiam confratres eorum patiantur. Antichristus cum suis hinc malè, aut potius blasphemè thesaurum sanctorum & etiam suorum satisfactiones aut merita supererogationis commentus est: sed sunt prorsus blasphemi in sanguinem agni immaculati, qui solus purgat nos ab omnibus peccatis, quique nos unica oblatione perfectes reddidit, & invenit redemptionem plenum ... Dicuntur autem nihilominus Christi passiones, quia ipse patitur in corpore suo: sicut ad Saulum dicit, Act. 8, Cur me persequeris? & nobiscum est in tribulatione. Expressè autem hîc ipsemet Apostolus testatur, se loqui de afflictionibus quae desunt in mystico corpore Christi seu Ecclesiae: quo illa suo capiti conformetur, non quae desint in illo unico perfectissimoque propitiatorio sacrificio, in vero naturalique corpore Christi peracto.’ *Novum Testamentum Iesu Christi filii Dei: glossa compendiarie M. Matthiae Flacii Illyrici Albonensis* (Basel: Perna et Dietrich, 1570), pp. 990-991.

Turning to the French-speaking Reformers, Jean Calvin (1509-64) devotes the larger part of his comments on Col. 1:24 to a refutation of the Catholic treasury of merits; on the phrase ‘fill up what is lacking’ he emphasises the great unity between Christ and his members, quoting 1 Cor. 12:12:

Therefore, in the same way that Christ suffered once in his own person, so he suffers daily in his members, and in this way are filled up the sufferings which the Father has appointed for his body by his decree.<sup>90</sup>

As cause for rejoicing he mentions being conformed to Christ which results from the afflictions, and the fellowship enjoyed with him in the process. Moreover, he quotes the promises of 2 Cor. 4:10, ‘we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body’, and 2 Tim. 2:11-12, ‘If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him’. As regards the afflictions being ‘for the sake of the church’, he simply describes them as ‘useful to all the faithful, and they promote the welfare of the whole church, by illustrating the teaching of the gospel.’<sup>91</sup> There is nothing here that is distinctive or original: Calvin is more concerned with fending off the Catholic interpretation than in seeking new insights.

Calvin’s successor at Geneva, Théodore Béza (1519-1605) puts the same views very succinctly in his marginal commentary in the *Geneva Study Bible*:<sup>92</sup>

The afflictions of the Church are said to be Christ’s by reason of that fellowship and knitting together that the body and the head have with one another. And this is not because there is any more need to have the church redeemed, but because Christ shows his power in the daily weakness of his own, and that for the comfort of the whole body.<sup>93</sup>

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90 ‘Quemadmodum ergo semel passus est in se Christus, ita quotidie patitur in membris suis: atque hoc modo implentur passiones, quas Pater illius corpori suo decreto destinavit.’ Jean Calvin, *In omnes Pauli apostoli epistolas ... commentarii* (Geneva: Curteus, 1565), p. 687.

91 ‘vtiles ... piis omnibus, & totius Ecclesiae salutem promoueat, Euangelii doctrinam illustrando’.

92 Notes abridged by L’Oiseleur from Béza’s marginal commentary on his own Greek / Latin edn of 1565.

93 Théodore Béza, *The New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ* (London: Christopher Barker, 1599), fol. 89.

### **3.5.8 Summary of the interpretations of the Reformers**

Two chief characteristics are distinctive of the Reformers' comments on Col. 1:24: first, they sought, by affirming the importance of justification by faith, to address the pressing need to refute the Roman Catholic use of the verse in support of their own doctrine of the 'treasury of merits'; second, by far the greater part of their positive comment is pastoral rather than theological: consequently there is little original interpretation. The recurrent themes are: the fellowship of suffering, both with Christ and with one another, and the inevitability of it; the imitation of and conformity to Christ through suffering; the comfort to be found through these first two and besides through the anticipation of glory; and finally the proof of the Gospel truth made clear through the believers' suffering, with the consequent strengthening of the church.

In addition, both Luther and Calvin believe in a predetermined quota of affliction appointed for the church's members, though the emphasis is always on the individual in fulfilling his or her own contribution, which precludes any suggestion of vicarious substitution. What is most striking in comparison both with the teachings of the Church Fathers and with many modern scholars is that among the Reformers there is not a whisper of a suggestion that Paul's experience is unique by virtue of his apostolic office and role; rather the believer is encouraged in every way to regard the apostle's experience as an example for all to follow. In common with the Fathers, however, there is no attempt to understand Col. 1:24 either in its original cultural context or against the OT background.

## **CHAPTER 4 - THE HISTORY OF THE INTERPRETATION OF COLOSSIANS 1:24.**

### **PART 2: SINCE THE REFORMATION, AND CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP**

#### **4.1 Protestant interpretation of Colossians 1:24 since the Reformation**

This brief sketch will highlight only the main threads and innovations of the period following the Reformation up until the 1950s, in particular those which have proved to have lasting influence upon current interpretation.

**Jean Leclerc** (1657-1736), who wrote no commentary of his own, but added his own notes to his translation of Hammond's *A paraphrase and annotations upon all the books on the New Testament*,<sup>1</sup> was the first to highlight the meaning of the prefix ἀντί- in ἀνταναπληρώω as meaning 'in turn [*vicissim*]' – just as in the preferred translation above (2.2.4; 2.7). Leclerc's application of this, though, is that Paul is now 'in turn' suffering the same kind of persecution that he himself formerly meted out to other believers (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). His further interpretation that the 'afflictions of Christ' meant 'sufferings for Christ's sake' reflects a view common among the 18<sup>th</sup>-century scholars,<sup>2</sup> yet one which has found little favour since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

**J.A. Bengel**, (1687-1752) who, as noted above (1.1.4), appears to have been the first to write in terms of a fixed sum of affliction for the church which Paul was vicariously bearing, also shared Leclerc's translation of ἀνταναπληρώω, as well as – unusually -

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1 J. Leclerc, *Commentarius paraphrasticus et annotationes H. Hammondi* (Amsterdam: Galletus, 1698).

2 Others who followed this interpretation were Beausobre, Streso, Elsner and Wolf.

translating καί not simply as a connective ‘and’, but with a contrastive ‘but’, giving extra emphasis to the change of subject from the sufferings in the first phrase of the verse: ‘Now I rejoice in the sufferings for your sake, but I in turn fill up the afflictions ...’ In the later editions of the *Gnomon*, Bengel’s son Ernst adds the further comment,

The measure of suffering predestined for Paul was filled up when the Gentiles reached full fellowship of the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

Here the twin eschatological quotas of suffering and mission from Col. 1:24-25, much later to be highlighted by Cahill, Pokorný, Stettler and Maisch (4.2.4), are expressly combined for the first time.

In 1856, **John Eadie**’s commentary includes the first mention of the so-called ‘messianic woes’ mentioned in the Rabbinic literature (and reflected probably in Mark 13; Matt. 24; Luke 21), a term used to describe the eschatological sufferings expected to herald the coming of the Messiah. Eadie wrote:

The Rabbins [*sic*], in their special dialect, attached a similar meaning to the phrase חבלי משיח – sufferings of Messiah.<sup>4</sup>

Although Eadie makes no use of this belief in his own interpretation, it perhaps marks the beginning of modern attempts to take account of the background of 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish expectations in attempting to understand the verse, and the ‘messianic woes’ in particular have played an increasingly prominent part in the research on Col. 1:24 since the 1950s (below, 4.2.6).

Brief mention must be made here of a line of interpretation which, though no longer

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3 ‘Mensura passionum Paulo destinata dum adimpleta fuit, gentes ad plenam evangelii communionem pertigerunt’. Bengel, *Gnomon* (Tübingen: Fues, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1855), p. 785.

4 John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* (London: Griffin, 1856), p. 90.

enjoying support, for a short while became very popular in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly though not exclusively among German scholars: the *Christusmystik* (usually known in English as ‘mystical union’) interpretation. First propounded by **Deissmann**, this view shares some terminology and the basic concept (namely, incorporation ‘in Christ’) with the still current Body of Christ interpretation, yet applies it very differently.

Deissmann argues from an unorthodox view of Paul’s use of the genitive case, which he claims to find exemplified in later Greek and Latin texts. Taking the expression ‘*Glauben Christi Jesu* [the faith of Christ Jesus]’, he argues that this is neither a subjective genitive (‘the faith exercised by Christ’) nor an objective genitive (‘faith exercised with Christ as its object’), but rather what he terms a ‘genitive of communion’ or ‘mystical genitive’ – that is, ‘the faith of a person who is “in

Christ” ’.<sup>5</sup> He then extends the approach to other occurrences of the phrase ‘of Jesus Christ’ such as, in our case, ‘the afflictions of Christ’. He can then declare,

Because he (Paul) suffers in Christ, for him the sufferings are ‘Christ-sufferings’ or ‘Christ-afflictions’. It is not the old Paul who suffers, but the new Paul, who is a member of the Body of Christ, and who therefore shares the experience of whatever the Body experiences, past and present.<sup>6</sup>

Gal. 2:20 exemplifies this belief: ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me’. This principle necessarily applies not just to Paul but to every other member of the Body of Christ. Each has a share therefore in the total amount of - among other things - Christ-afflictions.

The suffering, crucifixion, dying, burial and the reawakening of Christ are the events of salvation which he, Paul, and also all the other

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5 This subject is still the topic of lively debate. For a thorough summary of the recent developments and contributions, see Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: the Narrative Structure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2002, pp. xxi-lii.

6 ‘Weil er (Paulus) in Christus leidet, sind ihm die Leiden ‚Christusleiden‘ oder ‚Christustrübsale‘. Nicht der alte Paulus leidet, sondern der neue Paulus, der ein Glied am Leibe Christi ist, und der darum alles mystisch miterlebt, was der Leib erlebt hat und erlebt.’ Adolf Deissmann, *Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1911), p. 127.



Christians, experience together in an ethical-mystical way, not just in baptism, but in ongoing fellowship of suffering, cross, blood and life with the Master.<sup>7</sup>

After Deissmann, the *Christusmystik* theory was embraced and developed by several other German scholars, most prominently **Schmitz** and **Schneider**.<sup>8</sup> The whole argument depends on understanding the ‘afflictions of Christ’ to mean two separate experiences: on the one hand the sufferings of the incarnate Christ, in which orthodoxy dictates there can be nothing lacking; and on the other, the afflictions of Paul and / or the church, which are a lifelong experience of the former through mystical union, and therefore incomplete in this life. Before long, however, the whole mystic approach came in for some devastating criticisms from Lohmeyer and Percy,<sup>9</sup> all the more fatal for their simplicity, from which it has never recovered. Percy concentrates his response mainly on linguistic issues, and singles out Schmitz and the ‘mystical genitive’ for criticism:

The meaning of an interpretation such as that of O. Schmitz deviates completely from the literal sense of the expression, quite apart from its nebulous thought content.<sup>10</sup>

He goes on to criticise the translation of ὑστερήματα as ‘remains’ (essential for the mystic union interpretation to make sense) as opposed to ‘lack’, and attributes this entirely to the ambiguity in the German phrase *was fehlt* rather than any legitimate meaning of the Greek. Lohmeyer on the other hand merely points out a glaring logical inconsistency in the mystic union theory, and it is to do with the whole topic of a ‘lack’ in the afflictions of Christ

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7 ‘Das Leiden, Gekreuzigtsein, Sterben, Begrabenwerden und die Auferweckung Christi [sind] Heilsvorgänge, die er, Paulus, und auch die anderen Christen ethisch-mystisch miterleben, in der Taufe nicht bloß, sondern in der fortdauernden Leidens-, Kreuzes-, Bluts- und Lebensgemeinschaft mit dem Meister.’ Deissmann, *Paulus*, p. 159.

8 Foremost amongst these are Otto Schmitz, *Die Christus-Gemeinschaft des Paulus im Lichte seines Genitivgebrauchs* (Neutestamentliche Forschungen, 1/2; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1924); Johannes Schneider, *Die Passionsmystik des Paulus: ihr Wesen, ihr Hintergrund und ihre Nachwirkungen* (Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 15; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929). Others who adopted this approach include A. Schweitzer, H. Windisch, A. Oepke and M. Dibelius.

9 Lohmeyer, *Kolosser*, pp. 77-78; Percy, *Probleme*, pp. 128-130.

10 ‘Einer Interpretation wie der von O. Schmitz geht der Sinn für den sprachlichen Wert des Ausdrucks völlig ab, von ihrem nebligen Gedankengehalt abgesehen.’ Percy, *Probleme*, pp. 128-129.

which, he maintains, remains unexplained by this interpretation. Either one experiences the completed ‘package deal’ of Christ’s sufferings, or else the ‘lack’ can only describe the delay in downloading or working through the experience, which has nothing to do with filling it up:

For in the ‘mystical communion of suffering’,<sup>11</sup> either the complete suffering of Christ is present, and ‘lack’ is never for a moment detectable; or else the individual’s suffering of faith stays distinct from that exemplary suffering of Christ, remaining of its own self lacking – until eventually death or the *parousia* retrospectively smoothes over all these worldly shortcomings. Neither in that case can it ever be described as a ‘filling up’.<sup>12</sup>

**Lightfoot**’s commentary has had lasting influence chiefly because of the phrase he coined to describe the distinction between the sufferings of Christ himself and those of his followers. Lightfoot was one of many Protestant scholars in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to conclude that the most natural explanation of the phrase θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ is as a reference to the sufferings of the historical Christ.<sup>13</sup> This starting-point however ran the danger of implying that those sufferings were insufficient for salvation, and so Lightfoot was at pains to make clear the difference between two aspects of Christ’s suffering:

The sufferings of Christ may be considered from two different points of view. They are either *satisfactoriae* or *aedificatoriae*. They have their sacrificial efficacy, and they have their ministerial utility. (1) From the former point of view the Passion of Christ was the one full perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. In this sense there could be no ὑστέρημα of Christ’s sufferings; for, Christ’s sufferings being different *in kind* from those of his servants, the two are incommensurable. (2) From the latter point of view it is a simple matter of fact that the afflictions of every saint and martyr do supplement the afflictions of Christ ... They continue the work which

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11 The term *Nachleiden*, which Lohmeyer has coined, is difficult to translate succinctly. Literally ‘after-suffering’, it describes the present experience of a past event. ‘Empathy’ would convey all but the temporal aspect of the word.

12 ‘Denn in dem „mystischen Nachleiden” ist entweder das ganze Leiden Christi gegenwärtig und „Mangel” in keinem Augenblicke spürbar, oder es bleibt das eigene Leiden des Glaubens von jenem vorbildlichen Leiden Christi geschieden, bleibt aus sich heraus mangelhaft, so lange bis der Tod oder die Parusie alle diese irdischen Mängel nachsichtig ausgleicht. Dann kann auch niemals von einem „Erfüllen” gesprochen werden.’ Lohmeyer, *Briefe*, p. 77.

13 The other major proponents of this understanding are Lohmeyer, Percy and Rendtorff.

Christ began ... These ὑπερήματα will never be fully supplemented, until the struggle of the Church with sin and unbelief is brought to a close.<sup>14</sup>

In many respects this represents little more than an expression in theological terms of what Chrysostom described in more homiletic fashion, with his vivid analogy of the lieutenant taking over the work of his captain until the battle is finished. It also harmonises well with Augustine's 'Christ, head and body' doctrine and the emphasis of the Reformers on the twofold edification of suffering: in conforming the individual to Christ, and in strengthening the church through the proof of the Gospel's truth. This general line of interpretation was particularly popular from the late 19<sup>th</sup> into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including amongst its proponents scholars such as **Lohmeyer**, **Percy** and **Masson**,<sup>15</sup> whilst **Bultmann** and **Käsemann** combine aspects of it with the 'mystic union' approach.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, **Axel Sandin**, a Swedish Lutheran pastor, deserves mention as the first to devote a monograph to Col. 1:24. After a brief outline of the history of interpretation, his main concern is to deny any insufficiency in the atoning work of Christ, and in order to explain this, he helpfully divides the sufferings of Christ into three categories: atoning suffering (*försoningslidande*), incarnational suffering (*helgelselidande*)<sup>17</sup> and Christ's historical suffering (*verldshistoriska lidande*).<sup>18</sup> The first two of these are unique to the person of

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14 Lightfoot, *Colossians*, p. 164.

15 Lohmeyer, *Briefe*; Percy, *Probleme*, pp. 128-133; Charles Masson, *L'épître de Saint Paul aux colossiens* (Commentaire du Nouveau Testament; Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950), p. 299.

16 Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1948-53), pp. 298-299; Ernst Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, 60; Tübingen: Mohr, 1933), pp. 146-147. This interpretation is referred to amongst more recent scholars by Moule, *Colossians*, p. 75; Herbert M. Carson, *The Epistle of Paul to Colossians and to Philemon: an Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1960), pp. 49-52; Gnllka, *Kolossierbrief*, p. 97; Schweizer, *Colossians*, p. 102, n. 14.

17 By this Sandin means the sacrifice inherent in Christ setting aside certain aspects and privileges of his divinity in becoming incarnate, and in his experiencing the frailties of fallen humanity.

18 Sandin, *Kristi lidanden*, pp. 14-16.

Christ, and can have nothing lacking; the third, however, is common to Christ and his disciples, the former setting the example for the latter in walking the path of suffering which is discipleship.

## **4.2 Current understandings of Colossians 1:24**

This section will examine the contributions of the past fifty years, since the publication of Kremer's comprehensive history of interpretation. It is fitting to begin with Kremer's own thorough exegesis,<sup>19</sup> before going on to survey the work done on Col. 1:24 since then.

### **4.2.1 Jacob Kremer**

As mentioned above (2.2.4), Kremer follows Lightfoot in attaching a distinct meaning to ἀντί- in ἀνταναπληρῶ, rendering a sense of 'one person making up the lack left by another'. He rejects those interpretations which restrict any application to the ministry of the apostle as contradictory to the Pauline teaching on the necessity of Christian suffering.<sup>20</sup> In this connection he furthermore disagrees with those who would support such a view by connecting the phrase ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου with τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ instead of with ἀνταναπληρῶ to convey the sense that what is being filled up is purely Paul's own unique quota of afflictions.

Kremer suggests that Paul's own experiences of affliction are probably to be identified with his imprisonment, but goes to great lengths to discover why they are described here as

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<sup>19</sup> Kremer, *Leiden*, pp. 154-201.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. 1 Thes. 3:3; 2 Thes. 1:4; Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 1:30. Modern commentators who maintain this view are nearly all continental: the list includes Lohse, de Ru, Stettler, Maisch, Ernst, Pokorný, Gniska, Wilson and Aletti.

*Christ's* afflictions. After dismissing in turn the interpretations based on τοῦ Χριστοῦ as a genitive of possession ('sufferings for Christ's sake'), or as a genitive of quality ('Christ-like sufferings'), or dependent upon understanding the text to refer to mystical union with Christ, he turns to two remaining major possibilities: that Paul refers to the afflictions of the historical incarnate Christ; or that he is speaking in terms of 'Body of Christ' theology. He is unable to accept that either of these options exclusively can be logically correct, and thus arrives at length at his own interpretation, which is fundamentally the same as Chrysostom's, and runs as follows: the lack of Christ's afflictions comes about because by his death Christ was no longer able to suffer all that he planned to endure for the salvation of humankind, and therefore delegated to his apostles the remainder of what he was committed to. Paul therefore sees himself as filling up 'what is lacking in Christ's afflictions'. The term 'Christ's afflictions' thus involves a combination of Kremer's previous two rejected possibilities: the afflictions are *both* those of the historical Christ *and* of his successor apostle. Such an interpretation requires an acceptance that the Gospel proclamation is an integral part of the whole work of salvation, just as much as the atoning sacrifice of Christ which forms its message, but satisfies Kremer's earlier stipulations on the meanings of ἀνταναπληρῶ and ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου respectively. He is uncertain about the phrase ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, beyond clarifying that Paul's afflictions were not incurred on his own account but the church's, and suggests that the writer thought no more specifically about it: he rejects as unfounded the suggestion of any quota of afflictions (whether the 'messianic woes' or not) which Paul might vicariously be reducing to the benefit of the church.

For all the thoroughness of Kremer's work on the history of interpretation as well as his

detailed linguistic study, it is hard to avoid the impression that his personal interpretation of the passage is arrived at less than satisfactorily by a process of elimination - that is, by describing the various available interpretations one at a time and finding fault with each in turn until left with an irreducible residue that he can agree with: consequently he fails to convey total conviction. In conceding that Chrysostom's interpretation has found meagre support over the centuries - which fact he attributes to its appearance in a collection of homilies rather than a more widely circulated theological work - Kremer perhaps puts his finger inadvertently on its greatest weakness: while Chrysostom's interpretations contain many valuable devotional lessons for the faithful, illustrated by vivid analogies, they lack theological depth and rigour, leaving many questions unanswered, as described above (3.1.2).

This is, however, far from the end of the story as far as Kremer is concerned, because almost half a century after his dissertation he published a further paper on Col. 1:24,<sup>21</sup> in which he concedes that despite the warm reception of his book, 'my own exegesis however provoked question-marks from several authors.'<sup>22</sup> Kremer then offers a radical reinterpretation of the text, which shows several new influences. Foremost among these is his reassessment of the letter's authorship: since now 'very many exegetes' now regard Colossians as pseudepigraphical, Paul now becomes 'Paul', an unknown author posing as the apostle in the context of Col. 1:23 – 2:5, 'a fictional self-presentation'. This stance in turn frees the interpreter to consider the eschatological framework of contemporary expectations, whereas previously he considers these would have been inconsistent with authentic Pauline eschatology. Kremer notes now the LXX background of θλῆπις and its

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21 Jacob Kremer, 'Was an den Bedrängnissen des Christus mangelt: Versuch einer bibeltheologischen Neuinterpretation von Kol 1.24', *Biblica* 82 (2001), pp. 130-146.

22 'meine eigene Exegese [wurde] von mehreren Autoren mit Fragezeichen versehen'.

association with the afflictions of the people of Israel (see above, 2.2.2); however, he maintains that here in Col. 1:24 it is anachronistic to see a reference to the so-called ‘messianic woes’, expected by the Jews as a prelude to the coming of the Messiah, as he says the literary references to the woes postdate this text. He prefers to see instead a simple identification by ‘Paul’ with the afflictions commonly experienced by God’s chosen. Kremer further modifies his previous Chrysostom-based interpretation, so that it is not simply a case of Christ’s suffering on the cross finding its consummation in the preaching of Paul’s apostolic mission (with accompanying afflictions) to complete the work of salvation. He points out that the ‘lack’ is not in the afflictions of ‘Jesus’, i.e., the incarnate historical Christ, but of ‘the Christ’ – with emphasis on the definite article – which he believes specifically indicates the risen, glorified Lord, as described in the preceding hymn of Col. 1:15-20. It is therefore specifically this ‘risen, glorified Christ’, whose afflictions are still lacking, and which it is the personal destiny of the apostle Paul to fill up, the author here employing the popular contemporary eschatological expectations of a ‘measure’ of afflictions.

Kremer’s reinterpretation brings welcome consideration both of the eschatological aspect of the verse and of the OT background of θλῖψις. It is spoiled, however, by the strange and unsubstantiated assertion that the passage predates reference to the messianic woes: such beliefs are generally considered to be contemporary with the rise in interest in apocalyptic literature in the early Maccabean period (from 167 BC),<sup>23</sup> with strong OT roots. Rowland, for example, writes:

The doctrine of the so-called messianic woes, which has its origins in the prophetic predictions of disaster for Israel and Judah (e.g. Isa. 13:19;

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<sup>23</sup> E.g. James M. Elfrid, *These Things are Written: an Introduction to the Religious Ideas of the Bible* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), pp. 85-87.

34:4; Jer. 14:12; 21:7; Ezek. 13:11) emerges in passages like Dan. 12:1 and Syriac Baruch 25ff.<sup>24</sup>

The elimination of the messianic woes from the reckoning leaves only a rather vague reference to contemporary eschatological expectations, and still no substantial answer to the question of why the afflictions of ‘Paul’ are ‘for the sake of his body, which is the church’. Again, Kremer’s point that ‘the Christ’ means the risen glorified Lord is an interesting one,<sup>25</sup> yet weakened in two ways: first, the risen glorified Lord’s afflictions are to be filled up uniquely by the apostle (in complete contradiction of his earlier stance – which was adopted for good reason - against such interpretations); second, if that is the case and the apostle has now filled up these afflictions, it begs some obvious logical questions: where does that leave the church now? Is the mission to the Gentiles complete without anybody noticing? What of the other apostles - by even the most conservative count there were eleven others – and their roles? If, as Kremer and others maintain,<sup>26</sup> Paul’s ministry is unique, then logically there would seem to be no universal lessons to be learnt from it, including the question of a principle of vicarious suffering. For this reason, the issue of the nature of Paul’s apostolic ministry will be addressed in the next chapter (5.2)

#### **4.2.2 C.F.D. Moule and subsequent interpretations based on his exegesis**

Moule’s commentary has had lasting influence on subsequent interpretations of Col. 1:24,

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24 Christopher Rowland, ‘Apocalyptic literature’ in D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson, eds., *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 170.

25 O’Brien (below, 4.2.3) and Stettler (4.2.4) also voice this theory.

26 Historically, the uniqueness of Paul’s apostolic ministry forms an important element in the interpretations of Hegemonius (3.1.1) and Chrysostom (3.1.2) among the Church Fathers, yet seems totally absent from the thinking of the Reformers. For a list of modern proponents, see above, n. 21.



particularly amongst British scholars.<sup>27</sup> First, he considers the possibility that the lack which Paul fills up refers to the ‘availability of the benefits of Christ’s afflictions’ (i.e., the apostle’s sufferings incurred in the ministry of evangelism), as maintained by the School of Antioch, Photius and Tyconius, yet sets this aside because ‘the words here hardly admit of such an interpretation’. This leaves, Moule maintains, two main possible lines of interpretation. The first, based on the ‘Body of Christ’ doctrine, means that through incorporation into the Body each Christian necessarily shares Christ’s sufferings through union with him, and that no Christian while still in this life has therefore completed his or her personal tally. The second line of interpretation is based on the ‘messianic woes’ and a belief in a ‘quota of sufferings which the “corporate Christ”, the Messianic community, the Church, is destined to undergo before the purposes of God are complete.’ Moule’s own preference is to combine these two lines of thought, with the latter dominant, rendering as the primary meaning of τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ‘what is yet to come of the afflictions of the (corporate) Christ.’

It seems a pity that Moule does not investigate these two important strands in greater depth: this study will seek to do so in chapter 7. Such an interpretation, nevertheless, leaves wide open the possibility of Paul considering his afflictions to be vicarious. Moule indeed quotes Bengel’s blunt mathematical assessment (see above, 1.1.4) to this effect, though without committing himself to agreement.

**Carson**,<sup>28</sup> whilst preferring, somewhat confusingly, the phrase ‘mystical union’, adopts the ‘Body of Christ’ approach as outlined by Moule, without exploring it any further than that

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<sup>27</sup> Moule, *Colossians*, pp. 74-80.

<sup>28</sup> Carson, *Colossians*, pp. 49-52.

‘Christ suffers in his mystical body’, and that this suffering is an integral part of building up the church and perfecting the elect. **Clark** too substantially adopts,<sup>29</sup> with one or two minor reservations, Moule’s view on the predestined amount of suffering to be endured, yet makes no comment either on the notion of the messianic woes themselves, nor on whether these may be vicariously borne, beyond saying that through them one may hasten the *parousia*. **Harris** is concerned mainly to deal with linguistic issues in his commentary.<sup>30</sup> However, without committing himself, he isolates two major lines of interpretation, which are the same two identified by Moule: those based respectively on Body of Christ teaching and on the apocalyptic ‘messianic woes’.<sup>31</sup> **Whiteley** also is content to follow Moule’s two main trains of thought on Col. 1:24,<sup>32</sup> though unlike Moule without expressing which is dominant: what he terms the ‘blood of the martyrs theology’ (Moule’s ‘quota of suffering’) and the ongoing suffering to be borne by virtue of ‘participation in Christ’. These four scholars, whilst lending support to Moule’s line of interpretation and making slight adjustments in emphasis, cannot be said to add much of substance to it.

**Yates**, who initiated a brief flurry of correspondence in the *Evangelical Quarterly* with his article,<sup>33</sup> also endorses Moule’s two-fold explanation, but unlike Moule he prefers to emphasise the first alternative, that of suffering through incorporation into Christ.

**Trudinger**, in his response, agrees with Yates but adds his clarification on the meaning of

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29 Gordon H. Clark, *Colossians* (Trinity Paper, 25; Jefferson, Md: Trinity Foundation, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1989), pp. 58-61.

30 Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 64-67.

31 Harris explicitly aligns this interpretation with those of Lohse and O’Brien as well as of Moule.

32 D.E.H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), pp. 148-149.

33 Roy Yates, ‘A Note on Colossians 1:24’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 42 (1970), pp. 89-92; L. Paul Trudinger, ‘A Further Brief Note on Colossians 1:24’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (1973), pp. 36-38; Richard J. Bauckham, ‘Colossians 1:24 Again: the Apocalyptic Motif’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 47 (1975), pp. 168-170.

‘filling up the afflictions of Christ’, which he considers to be Paul’s way of saying that he personally still falls short of the full measure of conformity to Christ’s sufferings (as expressed for example in Phil. 3:10). **Bauckham** in turn replies that this explanation confuses the personal application of the meaning of suffering in Phil. 3:10, ‘I want to know Christ ... and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings’, with the expressly corporate application ‘for the sake of his body’ in Col. 1:24. The solution, Bauckham maintains, is to see the verse against the background of the messianic woes, as in Moule’s first strand of thought, which he feels has been given insufficient weight. This, as Bauckham rightly intends, restores some sense of vicarious purpose to Paul’s afflictions which is otherwise missing from Trudinger’s interpretation. The discussion thereby in a sense comes full circle, but in the process does helpfully bring out the distinction between the theme of personally being conformed to Christ through suffering (as in Phil. 3:10), a major emphasis particularly of the Reformers (above, 3.5.7), and the question of vicarious benefits for the church, hinted at in Col. 1:24.

**Flemington**,<sup>34</sup> while endorsing Moule’s two-fold interpretation, argues that most interpretations effectively insert a full-stop after the phrase ‘I make up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ’, and appeals for its removal, thereby arriving at a meaning which reinforces the first of Moule’s lines of interpretation, that which deals with the consequences of being ‘in Christ’. To Flemington’s way of thinking, Paul is thus expressing the ultimate ‘in Christ’ experience: conformity in every way to Christ, ultimately in suffering like him. In this interpretation, the sense is closely akin to that of 2 Cor. 4:10, ‘we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus’.

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<sup>34</sup> W.F. Flemington, ‘On the Interpretation of Colossians 1:24’ in Willaim Horbury and Brian McNeil, eds., *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G.M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 84-90.

#### **4.2.3 Other interpretations based on the notion of an eschatological quota of suffering<sup>35</sup>**

**Houlden** sees the main sense of Col. 1:24 as an expression of ‘the authentic pattern of Christian life’,<sup>36</sup> life-through-death and glory-in-weakness, but with strong background themes as well: he mentions the ‘messianic woes’ and a belief in a quota of sufferings, and more specifically addresses directly the subject of belief in the atoning value of sufferings, with reference to Isa. 53:12; 2 Macc. 7:37-38. This in turn allows for a notion of vicarious suffering in the church. Houlden acknowledges the awkwardness of communicating that there may be inherent atoning value in human suffering without compromising the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ’s atoning death, but sums up the result succinctly:

Christ’s death is unique in that he is identified with the pre-existent wisdom of God: in and through him the whole divine life and work are expressed. Nevertheless something of the belief in the value of *any* good man’s sufferings for God remains, and in this verse Paul endeavours, in a way not entirely free from ambiguity, to express it in association with the overriding belief in the universal effectiveness of Christ’s work, and in the light of the believer’s life ‘in Christ’.

Houlden brings up here the wider context of attitudes in the ancient world to the atoning efficacy of the suffering of the righteous. This whole theme, and the contemporary beliefs, not only of the Jews but also of Greek and Roman society, will be considered in chapter 6,

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35 Although pre-dating the timespan of this section, Dibelius’ commentary also falls into this category, as perhaps the earliest enthusiastic espousal of the twin themes of the Messianic woes and a quota of suffering, and has had major influence particularly on the German-speaking scholars. Martin Dibelius, *An die Kolosser, Epheser, an Philemon* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 12; Tübingen: Mohr, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1953), pp. 22-23.

36 Houlden, *Paul’s Letters*, pp. 175-178.

along with its influence on the development of the martyr cult.

**Lohse** is in no doubt at all that the background to this verse is the concept of the woes of the Messiah,<sup>37</sup> inherited from Judaism by the Christian community, and their common experience. Lohse also emphasises, however, that the apostle's sufferings are far more significant than those of others, and unique in performing a vicarious service for the church by bearing more of the definite measure of tribulations determined for the righteous, and thus in turn foreshortening the eschatological afflictions. Again, it is difficult to see why the apostle's role should be unique, whether among the other apostles or among the body of believers. Lohse goes as far as to say (in commenting on v. 25) 'Paul is, as *the* Apostle to the nations, the one and only Apostle.'<sup>38</sup>

**De Ru**'s monograph on Col. 1:24, having reviewed various interpretations and investigated some of the contemporary Jewish apocalyptic expectations, draws very similar conclusions to those of Lohse. He believes the phrase 'afflictions of Christ' to be clearly apocalyptic in tone, particularly as it is set amidst other such terminology (e.g. 1:26, 'the mystery once hidden but now made plain'; 1:27, 'the riches of the glory of this secret'; 2:3, 'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'). The measure of these afflictions is vicariously filled up by Paul for the church and thus speeds the *parousia*. Like Lohse though, de Ru insists that this ministry is unique to the apostle - and of course unless such a stipulation can be answered there is no place either for imitation or for a belief in general vicarious suffering:

Paul wants to make his community aware that his sufferings, to which in fact the sufferings of other Christians cannot be compared, contribute

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<sup>37</sup> Lohse, *Colossians*, pp. 68-72.

<sup>38</sup> Lohse, *Colossians*, p. 72.

towards bringing to complete fulfillment God's plan, which he has already begun to put into operation. The suffering of the apostle - which is substitutionary not for Christ but for the fellowship, for the elect – is part of the unique status of his office. The New Testament witnesses, the tools of God's Self-Revelation, have a different function and significance to their successors in later centuries ... They are ministers of the Word of God in a unique sense.<sup>39</sup>

Such an exalted view of the apostolic office not only shapes Lohse's and de Ru's interpretations of this passage, but inevitably has implications for the investigation of a belief in vicarious suffering: if Paul was unique in his sufferings, then regardless of whatever they might have achieved in his own ministry, there is no universal principle to be learned from them. This theme will be examined below (5.2).

**Martin** also regards this verse as Paul describing his endurance of the messianic afflictions and thus hastening the day of victory.<sup>40</sup> Paul sees himself as a martyr figure called upon to perform a vicarious ministry. The whole theme of martyrdom, both in Judaism and the early church, is closely linked to the concept of vicarious suffering, and will be dealt with in depth below (6.3-6),

**Caird** is very clear that Paul's ministry to the church does include vicarious suffering:<sup>41</sup> 'Paul is glad that he has been able to do enough of the heavy lifting to spare his churches some of their load.'<sup>42</sup> Although he makes no mention of eschatological expectations, this

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39 'Paulus wil zijn Gemeente kenbaar maken, dat zijn lijden, waarmee in feite het lijden van andere christenen niet vergeleken kan worden, er toe bijdraagt, dat Gods plan, dat Hij reeds begonnen is te verwerkelijken, tot volledige vervulling komt. Het lijden van het apostel – dat plaatsvervangend is, niet voor Christus, maar voor de Gemeente, voor de uitverkorenen – behoort tot de unieke waarde van zijn ambt. De getuigen in het Nieuwe Testament, de werktuigen van Gods Zelfopenbaring, hebben een andere functie en betekenis dan hun navolgers in later eeuwen ... Zij zijn in unieke zin Verbi Divini ministri.' de Ru, *Lijden*, p. 95.

40 Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians: the Church's Lord and the Christian's Liberty* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1972), pp. 61-64; *Colossians and Philemon* (New Century Bible; London: Oliphants, 1974), pp. 69-70. This is the theme also of the short note by G.H.P. Thompson, 'Ephesians iii.13 and 2 Timothy ii.10 in the Light of Colossians i.24', *Expository Times* 71 (1959-60), pp. 187-189.

41 G.B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon in the RSV* (The New Clarendon Bible; Oxford: OUP, 1976), pp. 183-185.

42 Caird, *Paul's Letters*, p. 184.

interpretation is reached on the basis that, as Augustine taught, Christ lives on in his body, the church, and thus its own sufferings are Christ's. Such afflictions will never cease (therefore there will be something lacking) until the final victory, and it is fitting, as Paul wrote in Gal. 6:2, for the strong to help the weak. Caird floats the idea of a fixed quota of suffering without committing himself; nor, sadly, does he indicate whether he considers this aspect of the apostle's ministry to be unique; however, he concludes with a neat paraphrase which clearly suggests vicarious suffering:

I am glad to suffer on your account. I make my contribution to the mounting tally of what Christ must still endure by drawing to my own person what would otherwise have fallen to his body, the church.<sup>43</sup>

**O'Brien** too prefers to see the verse in the light of the 'woes of the Messiah' (he suggests that the use of the definite article in τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ indicates a familiar concept),<sup>44</sup> and points particularly to the OT background of θλίψις (see above, 2.2.2) and the other references in the immediate context which have an apocalyptic flavour, e.g. the references to 'mystery' in 1:26, 27; 2:2, and to the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge in 2:3. He agrees with Lohse that the use of the definite article in τὰ ὑστερήματα again indicates a recognised idea: that just as there is a divinely pre-determined measure of time (as in Mark 13:20, 32; Acts 1:7) and a limit to tribulations (Matt. 24:21-22), so too there is a quota of the messianic woes which is not yet filled up.

O'Brien goes further in seeing here a vicarious benefit to the Body of Christ:

By filling up what was lacking of a predetermined measure of afflictions which the righteous must endure, Paul also reduces the measure of the tribulations other believers, especially these Gentile Christians at Colossae, are to experience. The more of these sufferings he personally absorbed, as he went about preaching the gospel, the less would remain for his fellow Christians to endure.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Caird, *Paul's Letters*, p. 184.

<sup>44</sup> O'Brien, *Colossians*, pp. 73-81.

<sup>45</sup> O'Brien, *Colossians*, p. 80. Though not quoting Bengel's well-known comment on Col. 1:24 (above, 1.1.4), O'Brien interestingly here repeats him almost verbatim.

O'Brien here gives what is perhaps the most unequivocal support so far to the notion of vicarious suffering within the Body of Christ. What he does not indicate is whether he views Paul's ministry as unique in this respect, or whether there is here a general principle, relevant as much today as it was for the apostle. He merely comments later that 'what was true of Paul's struggle for the sake of the gospel generally had reference to the Colossians and other Lycus Valley Christians as well.'<sup>46</sup> **Wall** follows O'Brien's interpretation,<sup>47</sup> while adding that this talk of filling up [ἀνταναπληρῶ] a quota of suffering is found in the wider context of the mission to the Gentiles ('to present in its fullness [πληρῶσαι] the word of God to you', v. 25).

The main point highlighted by **Simpson** and **Bruce** in their commentaries is the background theme of the 'Suffering Servant' of Deutero-Isaiah (see below, 6.1).<sup>48</sup> It is in this tradition, Bruce maintains, that Paul sees his role as Christ's apostle of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, with the attendant afflictions prophesied of the Servant. This theme will be investigated in depth later; Bruce also sees here though a second possible backdrop, the messianic birth pangs, and a hint that Paul may be willing vicariously to take on more than his share of these afflictions to spare others:

Jesus, the Messiah, had suffered on the cross; now his people, the members of his body, had their quota of affliction to bear, and Paul was eager to absorb as much as possible of this in his own 'flesh'.<sup>49</sup>

The similarity between this interpretation, with its refreshing realism, and quotations from Caird and O'Brien above, is striking, as is the echo of Bengel's bluntly mathematical

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<sup>46</sup> O'Brien, *Colossians*, p. 100.

<sup>47</sup> Wall, *Colossians*, pp. 84-89.

<sup>48</sup> E.K. Simpson and F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians* (The new London commentary on the New Testament; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1957), pp. 214-217; Bruce, *Colossians*, pp. 80-84; Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Carlisle: Paternoster, rev. edn, 1980), p. 139.

<sup>49</sup> Bruce, *Colossians*, p. 83.



approach to Col. 1:24 (1.1.4; 4.1)

**Dunn** sees Col. 1:24 as an extension of Paul's eschatological schema,<sup>50</sup> of which he enumerates three main elements: Christ's sufferings and death as the eschatological tribulation before the coming of the new age; participation in the death of Christ as the means of transition from the old age to the new; and the Christian life as a continual process of dying with Christ leading to a share in his resurrection. Thus he combines elements of the themes of the messianic woes, incorporation into the Body of Christ, and the imitation of Christ in discipleship. Dunn's opinion on the lack in Christ's afflictions is that Paul's view of the cosmic scope of Christ's work of reconciliation made him aware that it was far from complete, and with it the sufferings of Christ:

The death of Christ has activated the first trigger; but those sufferings are not yet complete, otherwise the second and final trigger would have been activated too.<sup>51</sup>

Dunn's interpretation here is very close to Chrysostom's (3.1.2), yet avoids the rather simplistic tendency of the latter by pasting it onto the vast canvas of Paul's eschatology rather than leaving it on a primarily devotional level.

The remaining interpretations in this category seem to add little that is original, but nevertheless clearly indicate the substantial broad support that has grown in recent years for the eschatological approach. **Thompson** agrees that the afflictions are part of the 'messianic birth-pangs',<sup>52</sup> and that they are Christ's by virtue of the apostle's incorporation into the body of Christ. **Wilson** too prefers an interpretation in terms of union with Christ

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50 Dunn, *Theology*, p. 486; *Colossians*, pp. 113-117.

51 Dunn, *Colossians*, p. 116.

52 Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 44-45.a

and the messianic woes,<sup>53</sup> but adds his commendation of Aletti's insistence on retaining the Greek word order so that any measure of afflictions is a purely personal one, thus ruling out any possibility of vicarious sufferings. On the other hand, **Witherington** likewise sees Paul 'suffering in himself the messianic woes',<sup>54</sup> yet for him it is 'so that the Colossians have to suffer less, since there is a definite amount to be suffered, and so that obstacles to the end and to the return of Christ may be removed.' **Moo** similarly regards the messianic woes as the key to interpreting the filling up of Christ's afflictions in Col. 1:24;<sup>55</sup> but for him though the benefit for the church is simply the proclamation of the gospel through the fulfillment of Paul's ministry. Finally, both **Lindemann** and **MacDonald** (tentatively)<sup>56</sup> see in this verse a suggestion of vicarious suffering against the background of the messianic woes, but without expanding the discussion further.

#### **4.2.4 Interpretations based on the context of Paul's theology of mission**

In this section are collected a wide variety of interpretations which nevertheless have in common an attempt to understand Col. 1:24 within the context of Paul's attitude to and teaching on his own mission.

**Gnilka** addresses directly the issue of whether the twin apocalyptic concepts of the messianic woes and the fixed measure of sufferings are present in Col. 1:24.<sup>57</sup> As he presents it, this depends on one's interpretation of the phrase ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα.

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53 R.McL. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), pp. 168-172.

54 Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: a Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 142-145.

55 Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 147-153.

56 Andreas Lindemann, *Der Kolosserbrief* (Zürcher Bibelkommentare: NT, 10; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1983), pp. 33-34. MacDonald, *Colossians*, pp. 78-80.

57 Gnilka, *Kolosserbrief*, pp. 94-98.

Either this is forward-looking and refers to such a predetermined measure of affliction; or it is backward-looking, to ‘what is still lacking’ in the afflictions of the incarnate Christ, to be completed through the proclamation of the gospel message (as in the interpretations of Chrysostom, Lightfoot and Kremer). The decisive factor for Gnllka is his assertion that the phrase ἀναπληροῦν τὸ ὑστέρημα is a recognised expression (as in 1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 9:12; 11:9; Phil. 2:30) meaning simply ‘supply or fill up a lack’ rather than ‘fill up a predetermined measure’. There are two weaknesses in this argument, though. First, the two alternative meanings Gnllka gives are not mutually exclusive: the ‘predetermined measure’ of the messianic woes, if the concept is present in this verse, is portrayed very much as lacking and therefore needing to be filled up by the apostle: the second meaning is a specific application of the first. Second, the point is only correct with reference to the limited NT usage as an integrated phrase, overlooking the ability of the verb ἀναπληροῦν on its own to express filling up a measure; examples of such usage are 1 Thes. 2:16: ‘thus always filling up the measure of their sins’ [εἰς τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἀμαρτίας πάντοτε]; Gen. 15:16: ‘for the sins of the Amorites have not yet reached their full measure’ [οὐπω γὰρ ἀναπεπλήρονται αἱ ἀμαρτίαι τῶν Ἀμορραίων ἕως τοῦ νῦν]; Ex. 23:26: ‘I will definitely grant you a full number of days’ [τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν ἡμερῶν σου ἀναπληρῶν ἀναπληρώσω].<sup>58</sup> Gnllka prefers however an interpretation based on a very exalted view of Paul’s status as ‘apostle to the Gentiles’, and thus a representative of Christ to a unique degree, whose proclamation with its attendant suffering comprises the filling-up of the afflictions of the earthly Christ.<sup>59</sup> Any consideration of a general principle of vicarious suffering is excluded by the uniqueness of Paul’s role and the denial that ἀνταναπληρῶ can refer to filling up a measure. What remains is substantially a re-

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58 Further examples of such usage include Gen. 29:28; Ex. 7:25; Lev. 12:6; Esth. 1:5; 2:12, 15.

59 This theory, shared with Lohse and de Ru (above, 4.2.3), is addressed below (5.2).

statement of the teaching of Chrysostom (3.1.2) which, as noted above, is devotionally of great value, yet seemingly leaves too many theological questions unanswered to be fully satisfying.

**Wolter** agrees with Gniska in most points,<sup>60</sup> giving little weight to the eschatological interpretation, and agreeing that ἀναπληροῦν τὸ ὑστέρημα is a recognised expression. Both he and **Lona**,<sup>61</sup> who also rejects the apocalyptic interpretation, believe the main purpose of the passage to be a posthumous endorsement of Paul's ministry by emphasising his apostolic credentials of suffering for the church (see also Maisch's interpretation below).

**Schweizer**,<sup>62</sup> having given an excellent outline summary of the various current views on Col. 1:24, believes that whilst there is 'a variety of different notions' involved in the verse, including the necessity of suffering for believers, the main thrust is simply that Paul rejoices in the difficulties inherent in the proclamation of the gospel because these give credibility to the message. Schweizer's interpretation therefore is remarkably similar to that of several of the continental Reformers, e.g. Melancthon, Bucer, Chemnitz and Béza.

**Barth and Blanke** quote Schweizer's interpretation approvingly.<sup>63</sup> After an extensive discussion of the various main arguments, they are clear that 'the double *hyper* (for) in this reading does not mean a substitution.' That is ruled out because the 'lack' in the afflictions is simply the lack in Paul's personal experience of them, not the church's nor those of

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60 Michael Wolter, *Der Brief an die Kolosser. Der Brief an Philemon* (Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament, 12; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1993), pp. 97-102.

61 Horacio E. Lona, *Die Eschatologie im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief* (Forschung zur Bibel, 48; Würzburg: Echter, 1994), pp. 100-106.

62 Schweizer, *Colossians*, pp. 98-106.

63 Barth & Blanke, *Colossians*, pp. 251-257, 289-295.

Christ himself. Through Paul's afflictions (and particularly, according to these commentators, through his imprisonment) endured with joy, the strength of God is revealed, and thus the gospel Paul preaches is verified.

**Pokorný** finds the key to Col. 1:24 in the immediate context.<sup>64</sup> He parallels *filling up* 'what is lacking of Christ's afflictions' with the mission in v. 25 to make *fully* known the word of God. Ultimately the goal is to 'present everyone mature in Christ' (v. 28). Here lies the tension, 'what is lacking': salvation is complete, yet the mission of the apostle (and of the whole church) to lead people to the 'knowledge of God's mystery of Christ' (2:2) is not yet. Pokorný's interpretation is thus essentially that of Chrysostom and the School of Antioch, and like them he holds a high view of the uniqueness of Paul's apostolic ministry. His afflictions are 'for the church' in that they form part of his apostolic ministry which lays its foundation, so there is therefore room here neither for imitation nor for vicarious suffering. Very similar arguments to this are also presented by **Hugedé** and **Talbert**.<sup>65</sup> **Hübner** insists that Col. 1:24 can only be understood against the background of Paul's theology of mission and more specifically of the apostolic office;<sup>66</sup> in particular the teaching of 2 Cor. 4:10, 'always carrying around the dying of Jesus in our bodies, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our bodies.' What is lacking then is purely the historic event of the gospel proclamation being fulfilled. According to Hübner this interpretation removes any need to investigate the apocalyptic background or go into the normal linguistic studies of the text. **Pfammatter**'s interpretation of the 'filling up of the

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64 Pokorný, *Colossians*, pp. 95-101.

65 Norbert Hugedé, *Commentaire de l'Épître aux Colossiens* (Geneva: Labor et fides, 1968), pp. 84-86.

Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), pp. 198-205.

66 Hübner, *Kolossier*, pp. 66-69.

afflictions' is very similar to those of Pokorný and Hübner,<sup>67</sup> as is his view of the apostolic ministry, though retaining the notion of some degree of vicariousness in them. This approach, by focussing mainly upon the historical progress of the gospel as opposed to the theological issues, seems to be of little help in this research.

**Perriman** protests at 'the displacement of the words "in my flesh" '<sup>68</sup> maintaining that it is Paul's experience of the afflictions which is incomplete. Linking this passage with Phil. 3:10-11, 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead', Perriman sees here an intensely personal expression of yearning for the process of conformity to Christ to be complete. This would necessarily be consummated in death, and Perriman detects here an anxiety that this might be precluded by the *parousia* during Paul's lifetime. Perriman is one of few scholars to have argued in detail against the increasingly popular eschatological interpretation. His own interpretation however, has two major drawbacks. First, Paul's suggested anxiety regarding the timing of the *parousia* and its personal consequences is at odds with his ambivalence towards living or dying expressed in some detail in Phil. 1:20-26; second, and more generally, if Col. 1:24 expresses something that is intensely personal concerning Paul's own development, it cannot easily be said to be 'for the sake of his body, which is the church'. As with all lines of interpretation which regard the main issue to be Paul's personal discipleship, the only way to justify this latter phrase is to take the view that, rather than the afflictions being *directly* 'for the church', they simply occur in the context of a ministry which is 'for the

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67 Josef Pfammatter, *Epheserbrief, Kolosserbrief* (Die neue Echter Bibel: Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 10; Würzburg: Echter, 1987), pp. 67-68.

68 Andrew Perriman, 'The Pattern of Christ's Sufferings: Colossians 1:24 and Philippians 3:10-11', *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1 (1991), pp. 62-79.

church'. Such a perspective certainly rules out any vicarious value to the afflictions but at the same time makes the boast of it being for the sake of the church a little hollow.

Furthermore, this line of interpretation fails to take account of the first half of the verse where, according to nearly all translations and the great majority of interpreters, Paul speaks of rejoicing in suffering 'for you', the Colossian believers.

**Cahill** draws attention to the parallel between the words ἀνταναπληρώω 'I in turn fill up' in 1:24 and πληρῶσαι 'to fulfill [the word of God]' in the following verse.<sup>69</sup> He points out the irony that despite the growing popularity of interpretations involving the eschatological quota of suffering, exegetes continue to miss the close connection in this passage with the one other such NT eschatological quota: that of the gospel being preached to the whole earth before the *parousia* (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10; Acts 1:6-8; Rom. 11:25).<sup>70</sup> Thus understood, the main point in 1:24 is not about suffering *per se* but more to do with Paul's fulfillment of two great intertwined aspects of his apostolic calling: the ministry of proclamation and the inevitable suffering involved therein.

**Stettler** too interprets Col. 1:24 in the light of its parallel in 1:25 and indeed in the wider context of Paul's theology of mission,<sup>71</sup> and particularly of his self-understanding as *the* apostle to the Gentiles. Both the mission in 1:25 and the sufferings in 1:24 are undertaken by Paul to hasten the *parousia*: it is in this sense that they are 'for the church'. Stettler gives three reasons why 'it is not possible to totally dispense with the idea of "some

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69 Michael Cahill, 'The Neglected Parallelism in Colossians 1, 24-25', *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 68 (1992), pp. 142-147.

70 Cahill was presumably unaware of Pokorný's commentary, published shortly before his article, which does make precisely this point. It is subsequently taken up by Stettler and Maisch (below).

71 Hanna Stettler, 'An Interpretation of Colossians 1:24 in the Framework of Paul's Mission Theology' in Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, eds., *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 127; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), pp. 185-208.

preordained required quota” of sufferings in Col. 1:24’:<sup>72</sup> the implication of the word ‘lack [ὕστερῃμα]’; the use of the definite article in the phrase τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ, suggesting a well-known concept; and the known existence of such a concept in Jewish eschatology. According to Stettler’s interpretation, however, there can be no sense in which Paul’s afflictions, although ‘for the church’, can be considered vicarious: she regards them as efficacious for the church precisely because they are an integral part of Paul fulfilling his unique calling as the apostle to the Gentiles.

Perhaps also in this category one should tentatively place **Ernst**, who, despite a good summary of some of the current interpretations, is reluctant to commit himself, beyond commenting that the author appears to regard the apostolic role as including a substitutionary element in terms of communicating the reconciliation of the Gospel (2 Cor. 5:18-20), and surmising that the right direction is perhaps to be found in the ‘corporate thought-pattern of Judaism, which has found valid expression in the song of the substitutionary suffering of the Servant of the Lord (Isa. 52:13-53:12)’.<sup>73</sup>

#### **4.2.5 Other interpretations**

**Vine** sees the afflictions in Col. 1:24 as simply the inevitable and supplementary sufferings of Christ’s followers experienced in the fulfillment of their ministry.<sup>74</sup>

The interpretation of this verse by **le Grelle** is founded completely on his own

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<sup>72</sup> Stettler, ‘Colossians 1:24’, p. 206.

<sup>73</sup> ‘das korporative Denken des Judentums, das sich im Lied vom stellvertretenden Leiden des Gottesknechtes einen gültigen Ausdruck geschaffen hat (Jes 52,13-53,12)’. Josef Ernst, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, an Philemon, an die Kolosser, an die Epheser* (Regensburger Neues Testament, 6; Regensburg: Pustet, 1974), pp. 182-187.

<sup>74</sup> Vine, *Philippians and Colossians*, pp. 144-146.



translation,<sup>75</sup> which he admits is markedly different to the traditional. He renders Col. 1:24: ‘je compense, en plénitude, la pauvreté des angoisses du Christ (subies) en ma chair pour son corps [I compensate, through my fullness, for the poverty of Christ’s anguish (endured) in my flesh for his body]’ – in other words the verse is entirely about the paradoxical joy in suffering Paul experiences as he serves the body of Christ. Le Grelle’s theory is rooted in a perceived contrasting parallel between 1:24 (τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χηριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου) and 1:27 (τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν). Although the structure of the respective phrases seems undeniably similar, le Grelle would go further in seeing here a theme familiar elsewhere in Paul’s theology: the twin paradoxes of riches in poverty (e.g. 2 Cor. 4:7 ‘we have this treasure in jars of clay’; 6:10 ‘poor, yet making many rich’) and weakness in strength (e.g. 2 Cor. 13:4 ‘[Christ] was crucified in weakness, yet lives by God’s power’). In itself, this theory seems reasonable, yet it relies heavily on two debatable linguistic assertions. The first and more distinctive is that ὑστερήματα always means ‘poverty’, whether physical, emotional or spiritual; whilst this is certainly the meaning in some contexts, for example the story of the impoverished widow (Luke 21:4) or Paul’s collection for the poor believers in Palestine (2 Cor. 8:14; 9:12), it is conjectural in others, such as 1 Thes. 3:10, which appears to refer to encouragement and spiritual refreshment, or Phil. 2:30, where the topic is help and care. Outside the NT also,<sup>76</sup> the range of meanings stretches a definition of ‘poverty’ much too far: 1 Clem. 2:6 reads: ‘you mourned for a neighbour’s transgressions [παραπτώμασι], and regarded his shortcomings [ὑστερήματα] as your own.’<sup>77</sup> Herm. v:3:2:2 parallels ὑστερήματα with ἁμαρτήματα ‘sins’ which need purging. The second assertion, that the

<sup>75</sup> G. le Grelle, ‘La plénitude de la parole dans la pauvreté de la chair d’après Col., I, 24’, *Nouvelle revue théologique* 81 (1959), pp. 232-250.

<sup>76</sup> Ulrich Wilckens, ὕστερος, *TDNT*, 8, pp. 600-601.

<sup>77</sup> Ἐπὶ τοῖς παραπτώμασι τῶν πλησίων ἐπενθεῖτε· τὰ ὑστερήματα αὐτῶν ἴδια ἐκρίνετε.

reference is to be phrased ‘the afflictions of Christ in my flesh’, while much more popular (being supported in recent times by Flemington, Aletti, Wilson and Perriman) is conjectural and equally unsafe.

**Kamlah** finds three strands woven together in Paul’s thoughts in Col. 1:24:<sup>78</sup> a simple willingness to suffer in bringing salvation through his ministry; the apocalyptic concept of a measure of suffering for the righteous before the end; and the traditional Christian experience of joy in suffering.

**Aletti**’s starting point in his interpretation is that the majority of translations are at fault in changing the word order of the Greek text.<sup>79</sup> He maintains that any suggestions of lack in the work of Christ (which are quite out of keeping with the rest of the letter) are avoided in his translation, ‘ce qui manque aux tribulations du Christ en ma chair [what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions in my flesh]’. These afflictions are nothing more than the attendant suffering involved in preaching the Gospel. Aletti’s view in this respect is very close to those of Pokorný, Hübner and Pfammatter (above, 4.2.4).

**Smith** is the only recent scholar to interpret Col. 1:24 in the sense of ‘mystical union’ (though he prefers the phrase ‘spiritual union’) between Christ and his apostle.<sup>80</sup> By this interpretation, Paul’s afflictions are Christ’s by virtue of the spiritual union, and need ‘filling up’ because ‘the term “the afflictions of Christ” denotes both Christ’s own suffering and the suffering of all those in spiritual union with him, and, in particular, those

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78 E. Kamlah, ‘Wie beurteilt Paulus sein Leiden?’, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 54 (1963), p. 229, n. 55.

79 Jean-Noël Aletti, *Saint Paul, Épître aux Colossiens* (Études bibliques, nouvelle série, 20; Paris: Gabalda, 1993), pp. 129-137.

80 Smith, *Paul’s Seven Explanations*, pp. 181-183.

called to be apostles.’ That said, there remains a predetermined limit, and when this is achieved, then comes the End. Smith gives no explanation why the role of the apostles should be different in this respect, except to say that apostolic suffering is vicarious for those churches under Paul’s authority. In support of this he quotes 2 Cor. 4:10, ‘We always carry around in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body’, and 1:6, ‘If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation’: in other words Paul’s afflictions are a means to an end – they display the life of Christ, and they bear fruit in other people’s lives. This seems indisputable, yet it is not what is generally understood by the phrase ‘vicarious suffering’. To be the latter, there would need to be demonstrated more than just a benefit to others; it would need to spare them from the need to suffer themselves. In any case, Smith’s adoption of the ‘mystic union’ interpretation of ‘the afflictions of Christ’ makes any sense of vicariousness redundant: if Paul’s suffering and every other person’s are deemed to be in reality Christ’s sufferings experienced through the mystic union of the individual with Christ, then there can logically be no sense of individual apportionment nor subsequently of vicariously taking another’s suffering.

**Maisch**,<sup>81</sup> who believes Colossians to have been written pseudonymously after Paul’s death, regards 1:24 as a posthumous explanation of the purpose of his death. Paul’s afflictions are an integral part of the ministry which he goes on to describe in v. 25, the ‘filling up what is lacking’ being the culmination of these in his death:

Death, the final suffering of the apostle, is here interpreted as a necessary service ‘for you’ and the church.<sup>82</sup>

This bold interpretation rests on two important assumptions, of which the first, the

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81 Ingrid Maisch, *Der Brief an die Gemeinde in Kolossä* (Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 12; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), pp. 134-138.

82 ‘Der Tod, das letzte Leiden des Apostels, wird hier als notwendiger Dienst „für euch” und die Kirche gedeutet.’ Maisch, *Kolossä*, p. 138.

authorship and circumstances of the letter, has been dealt with above (1.4); Maisch's theory though leaves no room for Paul himself to be the author. The second, theological assumption, is that Paul regarded his death not just as a fitting seal and climax to his ministry, but also in some way as a martyr's death of vicarious benefit for the church. Maisch sees the twin references to 'filling up' and 'fullness' respectively in vv. 24-25 as evidence that Paul aimed to pursue both his proclamation and his suffering to their logical extremes. It is hard to understand on the one hand why early Christians should go to such lengths to shore up the reputation of a deceased apostle, including resorting to the alleged deception of 'the fiction of a captivity (4:3, 10)', and on the other who the audience could be who needed to be thus persuaded. The other evidence of Paul's attitude to his own suffering and eventual martyr's death (e.g. Phil. 1:20-25; 3:10-11; 2 Cor. 1:3-9; 4:7-18; 11:23-33) would seem impressive enough without such an alleged fictionalised reconstruction.

**Sumney** examines Col. 1:24 against the background of contemporary Greco-Roman rhetorical devices.<sup>83</sup> The quantity of references to suffering in Colossians leads him to the conclusion that the emphasis serves an exhortational function along the lines of secular philosophers, rhetoricians and moralists, with the focus on setting an example for the believers to follow. This he terms 'mimetic vicariousness' because the 'understanding of the function of the unjust deaths and of hardships of the noble or virtuous is that they are vicarious by setting examples for others to follow.'<sup>84</sup> The possible influence of contemporary secular views on innocent suffering will be examined below (6.5); the issue of vicariousness here is simpler to address, for Sumney is straining the definition of the

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83 Jerry L. Sumney, '“I Fill up what is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ”: Paul's Vicarious Suffering in Colossians', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006), pp. 664-680; *Colossians: a Commentary* (New Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), pp. 97-102.

84 Sumney, 'Afflictions', p. 669.

word ‘vicarious’ too far in this application. Indeed, our definition of the word (above, 1.3) states that the experience is ‘endured or suffered by one person in place of another’. Of course, such suffering may *additionally* be exemplary, as if Paul were saying, ‘I am suffering this so you don’t have to, but expect you to go and do likewise on behalf of others’ – which may well be the case. But one cannot have the latter *without* the former and call it ‘vicarious’, because no substitution or replacement has occurred in the first place.

#### **4.2.6 Summary of current interpretation of Colossians 1:24**

Scholarship on Colossians over the past fifty years, as in comparable periods before, has shown some distinctive trends and tendencies in its treatment of Col. 1:24. Whilst there are few ideas, old or new, which have gained universal assent, there have certainly been both an abandonment of certain previous theories and at the same time a degree of clustering or polarisation towards a smaller number of ‘live’ ones. One trend which is particularly welcome is the growing number of scholars who believe the meaning of this verse will be found through a combination of two or more ideas or strands of thought, rather than in a single unified theory. It is in this direction that the latter part of this research will head, as the most promising of these are examined in later chapters, but for now the shape and trends of recent research may be summarised as follows:

Certain theories once popular now appear to have little or no current support. These include the *Christusmystik* theory, virtually abandoned following the refutations of Lohmeyer and Percy; and those theories based upon understanding ‘Christ’s afflictions’ to mean either ‘Christ-like afflictions’ or ‘afflictions for Christ’s sake’ – such views fail to get

below the surface of the theological problems of the verse. The same applies to some extent to those which follow *exclusively* the line of thought introduced by Chrysostom, which sees the ‘filling up the afflictions’ as simply finishing the job that Christ’s passion began.

On the other hand, some elements of the explanations provided by the Church Fathers are still to be found incorporated into the theories of many modern scholars. For example, Augustine’s ‘Christ one, head and body’ theology, together with his favourite references in Acts 9:4, 1 Cor. 12:12, etc., is still very much alive in the modern re-examination of ‘Body of Christ’ theology. Likewise, Chrysostom’s various teachings on Paul finishing off the work of the earthly Christ are still reflected in the many interpretations which use the evangelistic ministry of the apostle as the context for understanding the verse.

Broadly speaking, three approaches in particular have risen to predominate the modern understanding of Col. 1:24:

There has been a very great increase in the weight given to understanding the verse in the context of contemporary Jewish expectation and eschatology. Specifically, the concept of the ‘messianic woes’ has won acceptance from a considerable number whilst attracting strong criticism from others. The catalysts for this new interest have been two very different occurrences: first, the publication in 1926 of Strack and Billerbeck’s huge commentary on New Testament passages,<sup>85</sup> which has opened up for scholars a whole new rabbinic perspective; and then from 1947 the discovery and subsequent publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls from near Qumran, again offering some very different angles on Judaism

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<sup>85</sup> Herrmann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (6 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1922-28).

around the New Testament period.

There has been a renewed interest, particularly amongst English-speaking scholars, in the theology of the Body of Christ. This appears to be due largely to the publication of the important works by Best and Robinson,<sup>86</sup> as well as Moule's influential commentary.

Serious attention has been given, only relatively recently, to the context of Col. 1:24 within the apostolic ministry of Paul. Particularly relevant are the immediately surrounding verses in Col. 1-2 and their parallels both in eschatological terminology and in the 'filling up' of the ministry.

Cutting across the various approaches taken by different scholars are two important variants, each with special relevance to this present research. Both of these threads have come noticeably closer to the forefront in recent discussion:

the first is the question of whether the afflictions of Paul are to be understood as unique by virtue of his apostolic status and ministry, or are exemplary for all believers;

the other is whether those afflictions are borne vicariously for the benefit of the church or not.

Finally, the question of authorship has resulted in an increasing number of commentaries which have abandoned Pauline authorship entirely and take pseudonymity as the starting point for their interpretation. This does not necessarily in all cases mean that their interpretations are not relevant to this research: where the author is portrayed simply writing 'as Paul', the validity of the interpretation is scarcely affected; but where there is deemed to be substantial reconstruction, fictionalisation or even subversion by the author,

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<sup>86</sup> Ernest Best, *One Body in Christ: a Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955); John A.T. Robinson, *The Body: a Study in Pauline Theology* (Studies in Biblical Theology, 5; London: SCM Press, 1952).

the resulting interpretation is inevitably skewed by such premises and hard to incorporate into the research.

There is of course, as described above (1.4), nothing new in the authorship of the letter being disputed. The tendency however until the latter part of the twentieth century, very broadly speaking, appears to have been for authorship issues to be aired in the introduction of the commentary, and even where doubts were raised, for them to be left there and have relatively little impact on interpretation. More recently, however, the four monographs on the pseudonymity of Col.,<sup>87</sup> as well as one or two commentaries,<sup>88</sup> have taken completely new approaches to interpretation starting from as opposed to merely accommodating pseudonymity.

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<sup>87</sup> Lähnemann, *Kolossierbrief*; Kiley, *Colossians*; Standhartinger, *Studien*; Leppä, *Making of Colossians*.

<sup>88</sup> E.g. Maisch, *Kolossä*; Kremer's about-turn change of interpretation between his 1956 monograph and his 2001 journal article clearly mirrors this wider movement.



## **CHAPTER 5 - INTERIM CONSIDERATIONS**

The previous three chapters of this thesis have looked in detail at the text of Col. 1:24 and established a working translation, covered in some detail the history of interpretation, and finally assessed the various views expressed in recent commentaries and research. The second half of this research will now evaluate further these findings, and investigate in detail those aspects of the interpretation of Col. 1:24 which have perhaps previously received insufficient attention from commentators. In addition, the background literature will receive close attention to discover if there are echoes in it of belief in the vicarious effects of suffering: this will include the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period onwards into the early Christian era, the writings of the Church Fathers, and also the literature of the Hellenistic culture within which Paul was working and writing.

In the meantime, and before moving on to all of that, the thesis pauses to look at three areas which need to be considered at this stage. First of all, it will be useful to summarise where this research has arrived so far, and what it is now looking for. Then the question of the uniqueness of Paul's ministry, which has been raised by a number of commentators, needs to be addressed; and finally before proceeding, it will be useful to look at the present-day shape of teaching and belief on suffering in the Western evangelical churches and how it compares with the historical attitudes reflected so far in the commentaries on Col. 1:24.

### **5.1 Summary of the findings so far, and a preliminary hypothesis on the meaning of Col. 1:24**

The translation produced in Chapter 2 is the starting-point for these comments:

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for your sakes - whilst I for my part fill up, while I live, what is left over of Christ's afflictions for the benefit of his body, which is the church.

Here we have a statement which is in two halves – the conjunction καὶ clearly separates the two clauses - yet, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, the second is far from being a mere paraphrase or elucidation of the first; nor is it simply a case of two statements on a common theme loosely joined together with an ‘and’ in the middle. Indeed there *is* that common theme - of suffering (παθήματα / θλίψεις) on behalf of (ὕπέρ) the church - but it is the subject of two strongly *contrasting* statements, balanced by the fulcrum of a contrastive ‘whilst’ or ‘whereas’:

<u>‘what was suffered’</u> <b>past</b> tense implicit <b>anonymous</b> <b>παθήματα</b> looking <b>back</b> to historic events	<u>‘I for my part fill up the afflictions’</u> <b>present</b> (continuous implicit) emphatically <b>personal</b> ‘I for my part’ <b>θλίψεις</b> looking <b>forward</b> to implied ‘filling up’
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The questions raised by the second section of the verse which remain to be answered – and to which, I submit, the historical and recent interpretations surveyed in Chapters 3-4 have not produced wholly satisfactory answers – include the following:

What is it that is lacking in the ‘afflictions of Christ’, in what way is it lacking, and how is it to be ‘filled up’?

Is there a definite quota of such afflictions? If so, is that corporate or personal or both?

In this context, then, what precisely is meant by the ‘afflictions of Christ’?

In what way can Paul’s ‘filling up’ be ‘for the sake of the church’? Is it possibly through vicarious substitution?

Is Paul writing of his personal apostolic ministry in this, or are the principles involved of wider validity?

I get the distinct impression at this stage (in common, it appears from the survey of recent scholarship in 4.2, with a growing proportion of modern interpreters) that there is little likelihood of the meaning of Col. 1:24 being discovered through a single key insight; it seems much more probable that the theological and doctrinal minefield which Paul scattered apparently so casually in passing through this verse onwards to his climax in 1:25, is to be cleared up – if at all – only by looking in it for the confluence of several separate streams of thought of diverse origins. Of course, most of these have already been highlighted by scholars past and present. The following appear to me as being of particular interest, meriting further investigation:

The twin eschatological concepts of the ‘**Messianic woes**’ and of the possibility of a **quota or measure** awaiting fulfilment before the *parousia*. The relevance of the former is frequently referred to in recent commentaries both by its proponents – particularly Moule and his successors – and its opponents, yet seemingly never investigated or assessed in any depth. The latter is also suggested by many as one apparent implication of the text,<sup>1</sup> yet only rarely with reference to the wider context of eschatological expectations, whether Pauline or otherwise. This study will attempt to consider both these theories in greater

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Moule, Clark, Yates, Houlden, Lohse, Martin, Caird, O’Brien, Simpson and Bruce, Witherington, Stettler (4.2.2-4).

depth and assess their background influence on the expression ‘fill up the afflictions of Christ’.

The whole broad theme of **substitution** appears to bear far more relevance to Col. 1:24 than it is credited with. Not only is it of course crucial to any possible suggestion of vicariousness in the verse; it is at the very least highlighted by the two occurrences of ὑπέρ (‘for the sake of, to the benefit of, on behalf of’) and the prefix ἀντί- in ἀνταναπλήρω (‘[I] for my part, [I] in turn’). Whatever else Col. 1:24 may mean, any degree of vicariousness must logically depend entirely on an underlying theme of substitution, and so Chapter 6 will look at the prevalence of this topic in the whole background of Paul’s thinking and environment.

Finally, there is, I believe, much to be gained by viewing this verse through the lens of the experience and understanding of the church specifically as the **‘Body of Christ’**; further than this, the designation of the church as such at the end of the verse is no mere appendage – far less a simple repetition of the formula in 1:18a - but rather an important key to unlocking the meaning of the whole.

Before these subjects are investigated, though, I would like at this stage to sketch a preliminary outline of what I believe Paul *may* be saying in Col. 1:24, and which I feel increasingly certain will be confirmed by looking in more depth at the above-mentioned topics.

### **5.1.1 The real message of Col. 1:24: an interim hypothesis**

His vision still inspired by the glorious description of his Lord in the Hymn to Christ (vv. 15-20) and his own enumeration of the eternal and life-changing benefits of the gospel (vv. 21-23), Paul now hastens to summarise as succinctly as possible his own role and ministry in relation to his addressees at Colossae. Before unpacking the implications of this ministry (1:25-2:5), he provides in 1:24 a brief snapshot of the essence of it:

Acknowledging that he is a successor both on the one hand to the completed saving work of Christ (vv. 13-23), and on the other to the pioneering evangelism of Epaphras (1:7) and perhaps others, and all that they respectively went through,

Paul's own contribution now is to continue paying the price, through his own ministry (elaborated later, 1:25-2:6), to further and to nurture and protect what has been started, with all the attendant opposition, persecution, toil and pressure - in short 'afflictions' - which that work entails.

There is more purpose to this ministry, however, than simply the benefits for the recipients and the fruit consequent upon its success: the very price that Paul pays in terms of his afflictions will additionally benefit the church, the Body of Christ, in his shouldering the lion's share of what it corporately is called to undergo.

This vicarious element to his afflictions is effective for three reasons: because there has been a limit set in the economy of God's plan quantitatively in terms of suffering, just as there has been also chronologically for the *eschaton*; because of the well-established and widespread biblical principle of substitution, as well as the atoning value of the suffering of the righteous; and because of the nature of the Body of Christ, with its mutuality and its corporate personality.

Within this sketched outline, many of the historic interpretations surveyed in the last two

chapters are perfectly compatible. For example, Chrysostom's teaching on the essential continuity between the ministry of the incarnate Christ and that of his Body, the church, in preaching and evangelism is important and in no way conflicts with any of the above-mentioned topics which are about to be investigated; as suggested before (3.1.2), the problem is that neither does it satisfactorily address several of the specific theological issues raised by the verse. Likewise, Augustine's teaching on the Body of Christ is of vital importance to this topic, yet in itself it fails to answer completely the questions regarding the eschatological issues or the possibility of vicarious suffering. What is needed is an explanation that combines the best of the wisdom of the historic interpretations with new insights to be gained by in-depth study of the three areas mentioned above, in order to provide a meaning that is both satisfying theologically and practical pastorally.

## **5.2 Paul's apostolic ministry: in what ways is it unique?**

At this stage, the subject of the possible uniqueness of Paul's status and ministry needs to be clarified before the lessons to be learnt from it can be accepted as being of universal application. As we have seen, some of the scholars whose work has been examined emphasise to a greater or lesser degree the unique status of the apostolic ministry in general with its attendant sufferings, or more particularly the individual ministry of Paul himself as 'apostle to the Gentiles', or even of Paul's view of the efficacy of his own sufferings. This assertion needs closer examination at this stage because, taken in its more extreme form, this perspective precludes any wider application of the truth of Col. 1:24 to today's church: so, even if it could be proved that Paul's own afflictions had vicarious benefit for the Body of Christ, that fact alone would not establish a general principle with potential application to all believers.

Of the modern scholars enumerated above in Chapter 4, the following express to some degree the view that Paul's unique apostolic ministry was the basis for his statement on his afflictions in Col. 1:24: Lohmeyer, Lohse, Gnllka, de Ru, Pokorný and Stettler.<sup>2</sup>

Lohmeyer expresses himself unequivocally, in a manner which incidentally highlights the relevance of this issue for the present research:

It is Paul who now fulfills, in his martyrdom, the measure of the sufferings of Christ. This word 'fulfill' is not limited by being defined in any way; so it bears the sense that, along with this suffering by the apostle, simultaneously the whole measure is completed of that suffering which, according to 'God's counsel', has to be fulfilled before Christ's *parousia*. And therefore the word cannot refer to a suffering which every believer should endure; the fact of this martyrdom is the primary application: it completes the eternal structure which God has already begun to erect. So then, Paul is the continuer of the work which found its beginning in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Although he does not mention it, Lohmeyer is here using imagery identical to

Chrysostom's Paul as lieutenant left holding the fort after Christ's departure, in his *Fourth*

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2 It is immediately obvious that all of these scholars are continental, a curious occurrence for which there appears no obvious explanation. In none of their commentaries is there any hint of influence by, nor any reference to, any of the others. A shared sympathy with the views of Chrysostom and the School of Antioch may be the simple reason. The theological basis of Paul's suffering is additionally investigated at length by Erhardt Güttgemanns, *Der leidende Apostel und sein Herr: Studien zur paulinischen Christologie* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 90; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966). A large part of his concern is to refute the various 'mystical' interpretations popular at that time, and to deny any approach which regards Paul as 'suffering by analogy to Christ'. He takes as his own starting-point the view that Paul's suffering is inseparable from his apostolic ministry, and hence distinct from the suffering of the fellowship: 'Here we must establish that the apostle's sufferings are never divorced from his missionary calling, and that they are therefore an expression of his apostolic sending. Accordingly the apostolic ministry is the ministry of suffering [Hier muß konstatiert werden, daß die Leiden des Apostels niemals von seiner missionarischen Berufsaufgabe abgelöst werden, daß sie also Ausdruck seiner apostolischen Sendung sind. Danach wäre das Apostelamt das Amt des Leidens]' (p. 28). Güttgemanns defines Paul's sufferings as 'epiphany' (pp. 29-30), by which he means that they result from the revelation of Christ in and through the apostle in the course of his apostolic ministry. His argument that this fundamentally distinguishes the apostolic ministry from that of other believers is however open to the same objections adduced below.

3 'Paulus ist es, der jetzt das Maß der Leiden Christi in seinem Martyrium erfüllt. Dieses Wort „erfüllen“ ist durch keine Bestimmung eingeschränkt; es gilt also in dem Sinne, daß mit diesem Leiden des Apostels auch das Maß der Leiden voll geworden ist, das nach „Gottes Ratschluß“ bis zur Parusie Christi erfüllt sein muß. So kann das Wort auch nicht von einem Leiden sprechen, das jeder Gläubige zu erdulden bestimmt wäre; die Tatsache dieses Martyriums hat prinzipielle Gültigkeit. Sie vollendet den ewigen Bau, den Gott zu errichten schon begonnen hat. So ist denn Paulus der Fortsetzer des Werkes, das in Christus seinen Anfang genommen hat.' Lohmeyer, *Kolosser*, p. 79.

*Homily on Colossians* (above, 3.1.2), and he also share the latter's apparent view that Paul's sufferings are unique to the apostle (or at least, as in the *First Homily on 2 Corinthians*, to the apostolic circle). Consequently, Lohmeyer follows the same direction as Chrysostom in emphasizing that Paul was uniquely completing what Christ had apparently left unfinished, rather than either filling up his own quota of affliction or, far less, as Lohmeyer emphasizes, establishing a general principle for believers to imitate.

Lohmeyer appears to make here a series of very bold assumptions for which however he gives no reasoned argument. He insists, here as elsewhere, on designating these sufferings as 'martyrdom' - a very far cry from the normal broad description of 'affliction' which was found above (2.2.2) - and part at least of his assertion that Paul's sufferings are not typical rests insecurely on this base. Then he asserts that the verb ἀνταναπληρώω is not defined, which is demonstrably not the case: it is defined by 'in my flesh' (even to the extent that many interpreters, taking their cue from Pelagius,<sup>4</sup> have taken the phrase as a self-contained unit and read it as Paul fulfilling his personal quota of affliction); it is defined as 'for the sake of the body', implying that the focus of it is not so much on finishing Christ's work as on building the church; and additionally it is defined by its preposition ἀντί, which refers back *contrastively* to 'what was suffered' previously: the sense being not of completing what was left (for some always unspecified reason) unfinished by those who went before, but of filling up the afflictions inherent in the ongoing work built upon their foundation. Lastly, Lohmeyer states that the fulfillment of Paul's suffering coincides with the completion of the suffering decreed before the *parousia*. This would seem to imply that consequent upon Paul's 'martyrdom' one of two things should have taken place: either the

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4 See above (3.2.1).



*parousia* itself, or alternatively a cessation of suffering by the body of Christ – if one is to take into account seriously the phrase ‘for the sake of the body’. That neither of these has in fact yet occurred is a matter of history. Neither is the ‘eternal structure’ which Lohmeyer refers to yet complete (assuming he refers to the church), and therefore in several respects Lohmeyer’s approach remains a puzzle.

Lohse takes a different approach, though one which is equally forthright:

The sufferings of the apostle which are mentioned in Col are far more significant than the ‘sufferings’ (παθήματα) which all Christians share ... The sufferings of the apostle belong to the unique dignity of his office. For this reason the emphatically contrasting ‘I’ distinguishes Paul from all other members of the community ... Of course, the concern is only with Paul’s office, and no indication exists of a mention of the rest of the apostles, neither Peter nor the Twelve. Paul is, as *the* Apostle to the nations, the one and only Apostle.<sup>5</sup>

Lohse is completely right in pointing out the emphasis on the ‘I’ of the verb, yet does not explain why it contrasts with ‘all the other members of the community’ – the very same community for the sake of which he declares he fills up the afflictions. In fact, the contrast is with those who have gone before him and, if anything, he is saying ‘now it is *my* turn to fill up the afflictions’. Lohse’s stance on the uniqueness of Paul displayed here is influenced by a variety of factors: of prime significance is his view that Col. is definitely pseudepigraphical. He discusses the image of the apostolic office which developed amongst the second-generation Christians as marked by suffering and specifically by martyrdom, much as the Jewish model for the OT prophets developed along similar lines. Against this background therefore, the author is regarded as putting into the mouth of Paul a focus on his sufferings which reinforces this image and thus his status in the eyes of the readers. Lohse seems then to combine this aspect of the apostolic role with the intensely

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<sup>5</sup> Lohse, *Colossians*, pp. 70-72.

personal assertions made about Paul's ministry in 1:24-25 to produce his thesis that the afflictions of Paul are unique. Furthermore, Paul's frequent testimony regarding his own commissioning is assessed in terms that support this: Lohse notes the frequent use of the term χάρις to express this,<sup>6</sup> as well as other expressions of trust and privilege.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst accepting Lohse's point about the historical development of Paul's status and image, it is tempting to suspect that his insistence on the uniqueness of the apostle is tailored to fit in both with that and with his theories on the pseudepigraphical authorship of the letter, rather than by sound reasoning. There is inherently no reason why the examples Lohse gives to demonstrate the strength of Paul's sense of calling to his ministry should be exceptional. Naturally, Paul's calling and ministry were unique, yet the same could be - and often is - said of every believer: if χάρις is one of the most characteristically Christian concepts, it is also one of the most universal, as Paul emphasises in Rom. 12:6, 'We each have different gifts [χαρίσματα] according to the grace given us'; Phil. 1:7, 'All of you share in grace with me'.

There is nothing here to place Paul in a unique category. Nor is there any just cause for his dismissal of Peter and the other apostles: granted, Paul is speaking in the first person singular in this passage, but that is a far cry from claiming exclusive privilege or status.

Gnilka shares Lohse's views both on the authorship of the letter and on the status and reputation of Paul in the early church – the latter, if anything, to an even higher degree:

The concept of a fulfilment of Christ's afflictions presupposes the effectual redemption, yet is in the final analysis only comprehensible with reference to two perspectives. On the one hand the apostle represented his

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<sup>6</sup> Gal. 2:9; 1 Cor. 3:10; 15:10; Rom. 1:5; 12:3,6; 15:15.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. 9:17, 'I have been entrusted with an office'; 1 Cor. 4:1, 'This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.'

Lord in a unique manner; and on the other this idea, which is already present in the earlier Pauline letters, becomes greatly accentuated in the deuteropauline prison letters: that of Paul as the apostle to Gentiles and the nations ... The figure of Paul won uncontested respect and almost soteriological significance. ... The place of the ascended Christ, now immune from suffering, is taken by the suffering apostle.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst reiterating that 'all interpreters take as a starting point that Christ alone achieved complete redemption from God',<sup>9</sup> Gnilka nevertheless seems to go as close to that line as possible without crossing it. Again, the influence of Chrysostom and his theme of 'unfinished business' is detectable. Gnilka's contention that 'the apostle represented his Lord in a unique manner' is, unfortunately, not backed up with any reason and appears itself to be dependent on the subsequent development of the figure of Paul into legendary status rather than vice versa.

De Ru's stance is very similar to Lohse's regarding the apostolic status; however he is a little less exclusive in that he widens the circle to include others (perhaps not only apostles?): having ascribed Paul's afflictions to 'the unique status of his office', he then speaks of the special role of 'the apostle Paul and the first witnesses of God's salvation through Christ', a rather broader category.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless he still maintains the special status of that first generation.

The advantage of Pokorný's comments on this topic are that he does at least, in marked

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8 'Die Vorstellung einer Ergänzung der Drangsale Christi setzt die redemptio objectiva voraus, ist aber letztlich nur unter Berücksichtigung zweier Gesichtspunkte verständlich. Einmal vertritt der Apostel seinen Herrn in einzigartiger Weise, das andere Mal wird dieser Gedanke, der bereits die älteren Paulusbriefe bestimmt, in den deuteropaulinischen Gefangenschaftsbriefen hinsichtlich der Tätigkeit des Paulus als Heiden- und Völkerapostel noch gesteigert ... Die Gestalt des Paulus hat unbestrittenes Ansehen und nahezu heilsrelevante Bedeutung gewonnen ... An die Stelle des nicht mehr leidensfähigen erhöhten Christus ist der leidende Apostel getreten.' Gnilka, *Kolosserbrief*, p. 98.

9 'Alle Interpreten davon ausgehen, daß Christus allein die vollgültige Erlösung mit Gott (redemptio objectiva) bewirkte'. Gnilka, *Kolosserbrief*, p. 96.

10 De Ru, *Lijden van Christus*, p. 95.

contrast to the others mentioned above, supply specific reasons for his views:

Though the church as a whole is called to be a witness of the faith (3:12-17), the apostle, as an original witness, fulfills a specific mission. By means of his mortal existence (“in his flesh”) he demonstrates the crucified Christ (e.g., Gal. 6:17; Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:10f.). Furthermore he underscores and verifies his proclamation by his joy in suffering. By referring to his suffering, Paul defended himself against the accusations of his opponents in 2 Cor. 10-13; here the authentication of his witness is also important. A message proclaimed in this manner cannot be fraudulent. According to 2:29, Christ himself works through the apostle (cf. Phil. 4:13). The apostle is distinguished from other Christians by means of the specific mandate of the original witness (1:1, 23; Eph. 3:5, cf. Gal. 1:12). According to Eph. 2:20 he is part of the foundation of the church; he fulfils his apostolic mandate for others (1:25; 2:1).<sup>11</sup>

The evidence listed here is a mixture of points which are widely accepted and others which perhaps have less relevance. The significance of being an original witness is one which is echoed in Acts 1:21-22: when discussing the replacement of Judas Iscariot as an apostle, Peter says ‘ “It is necessary to choose one of the men who have accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us ... One of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection” ’. The two issues of having a special mandate and of being foundational in the planting of the church are also widely accepted as characteristic of the apostolic ministry. What is less obvious, however, is to what extent these, as well as the other criteria listed by Pokorný, are exclusive to the Twelve – or whether this apostolic ministry is a rather wider set, with successors in later generations. These criteria will now be examined briefly in turn.

We have already seen above (1.5.2) that joy is one of the most frequently mentioned by-products of suffering, and in particular Rom. 5:3 (‘We also rejoice in our sufferings’) and 1 Thes. 1:6 (‘In great affliction you welcomed the message with the joy of the Holy Spirit’) attest to its universality. Common Christian experience confirms this too, and also the

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<sup>11</sup> Pokorný, *Colossians*, p. 100.

authentication it adds to the testimony – in fact, as noted above in chapter 3, the theme of suffering as ‘witness’ was one of the most frequent purposes of suffering mentioned by the Church Fathers, and equally prominent in the Reformers’ teaching on the subject.

Similarly, it is difficult to maintain that some of the other criteria which Pokorný mentions – those of demonstrating the crucified Christ in the flesh, of having a specific mandate for ministry, and of fulfilling that ministry mandate for others – are peculiar to the apostolic ministry: it can equally be demonstrated that Paul regarded his experience in these respects as exemplary for his churches.

Stettler also takes such a view of Paul’s uniqueness, yet primarily for linguistic reasons:

That Paul is seen as a “unique sufferer” in this text is also indicated by the verb ἀναναπληροῦν, which does not leave room for any notion of imperfection – as if Paul carried out only part of the task. Even in the present tense it cannot be interpreted as an “inchoate act”.<sup>12</sup>

This, however, results from her interpretation of the prefix ἀντί denoting in this case the idea of ‘representation’ rather than meaning ‘in turn’ – as chosen for the preferred translation (2.7). Such an interpretation renders the prefix tautological, as that concept is already expressed by the phrase ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. Besides this, Stettler interprets Col. 1:24 firmly within the context of Paul’s mission, and she regards the apostle’s view of this as a ‘global strategy’, with a huge but finite goal of preaching the gospel to the western limits of the known world.

The strategy he pursued in his missionary endeavours shows that he saw himself in a global task ... He thinks of himself as *the* apostle to the Gentiles per se. So far has he reached out with his mission that, in the East, “there is no more place for him to work” and he is “now” planning to “go to Spain” (Rom. 15:23f.), which, according to the map of his day, was the end of the inhabited world, and would therefore have meant the

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<sup>12</sup> Stettler, ‘Colossians 1:24’, p. 190.

fulfilment of his global task of the Gentile mission.<sup>13</sup>

There is no doubt Paul had a specific calling, huge vision and a strategy; what is hard to believe is that as an educated person he could be naïve enough to think there was no mission field beyond the outskirts of the Empire, or alternatively that the inhabitants of Africa, India, China or Northern Europe were not Gentiles who needed to hear the gospel, and that he therefore had any right to consider himself ‘*the* apostle to the Gentiles per se’.

Leaving aside now the specific objections to individual reasons that scholars have given for ascribing either to Paul individually or to the apostolic ministry as a whole a status, role or experience which is unique, we shall examine a number of fundamental and broad factors which appear to have been ignored in the process.

1. *The definition of the term ἀπόστολος*. The first serious weakness in claiming exclusivity in any respect for Paul as ‘apostle’ is the lack of uniformity in the NT use of the term, compounded by the absence of extra-biblical use which might define it more clearly. The background of the word ἀπόστολος is very different from its later religious usage: indeed, far from being a personal description, the earliest use is both inanimate and collective – initially describing a naval task force – and is only later extended to include animate objects such as the army itself or its commander.<sup>14</sup> There is little or no parallel to the NT usage in secular Greek usage, nor is there any precedent in LXX. The only common factor is the concept of *being sent* inherent in the verb ἀποστέλλω.

Within the NT there is clearly divergent usage, even by individual authors – a trend which

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<sup>13</sup> Stettler, ‘Colossians 1:24’, pp. 193-194.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, ἀπόστολος, *TDNT* 1, pp. 407-408.

definitely suggests a certain flexibility of application. In the Gospels, for example, the limited occurrences are the parallel Synoptic accounts of the calling of the Twelve (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13) and only a handful of other verses where obviously the same clearly-defined group is referred to.<sup>15</sup> In Acts, this trend initially continues, with the account of Judas' replacement among the Twelve (1:26), and many references to the Jerusalem leadership of the early church.<sup>16</sup> However, before long a different use occurs, which appears much more flexible in its application: here the referent may or may not be one of the original Twelve. Having been sent out on their missionary journey by the Church in Antioch, both Paul and Barnabas are referred to as 'apostles' (14:4, 14). The implication is that we have here in Acts two parallel uses of ἀπόστολος: on the one hand 'the Twelve', Christ's Apostles; and on the other hand a wider and less defined group continuing the apostolic role of mission and church planting.<sup>17</sup>

Paul's own usage mirrors that of Acts: in parallel to his reference to 'the Twelve' and 'the apostles' in 1 Cor. 15:5, 7; Gal. 1:17, 19, and his own regular self-designation as apostle in the greetings of most of his letters,<sup>18</sup> he elsewhere uses the term with considerable flexibility. In 1 Thes. 2:7, 'We could have been a burden as apostles of Christ', the reference is to the joint authors identified in 1:1 as Paul, Silas and Timothy. In Rom. 16:7 Paul greets Andronicus and Junias who are 'outstanding among the apostles'. In 1 Cor. 4:9, referring to the Corinthians' improper partisanship which has resulted in competitive fan-

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15 Mark 6:30; Luke 9:10; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10.

16 Acts 1:2; 2:37, 42, 43; 4:2, 33, 35, 36, 37; 5:2, 18, 21, 26, 27, 29, 40, 41; 6:6; 8:1, 14; 9:27; 11:1. Later, in the narrative surrounding the Jerusalem Conference, a new set phrase, 'the apostles and elders' makes an appearance, describing the evolved Jerusalem church leadership (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4).

17 Paul himself in a sense straddles both these categories: on the one hand, as an 'original witness', albeit by revelation rather than in the natural, he can claim equality with the Twelve (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8-10); on the other, he also fits comfortably alongside Barnabas and Silas in the second group, those commissioned and sent out by the churches.

18 Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1;

clubs for himself and Apollos respectively, Paul comments, ‘It seems to me that God has put *us apostles* last as condemned men’, after clarifying in 4:6 that ‘I have applied these things to myself and Apollos’.<sup>19</sup> An even more general use by Paul is found in 2 Cor. 8:23, where the ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν are the commissioned representatives of the churches who were to accompany him to Rome with the collection for the poor, and in Phil. 2:25, where Epaphroditus is described as the ἀπόστολος of the Philippians, charged with conveying to Paul the evidence of their concern for him. In these verses, the usage is almost entirely stripped of any sense of status or office, reverting to the simple literal sense of ‘one who is sent’.

In considering the designation ‘apostle to the Gentiles’, which forms such an emphatic part of the arguments of Lohse, Gnllka and de Ru, it would be easy to lose sight of the fact that this phrase only occurs once in the NT – in Rom. 11:13: ‘I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am myself an apostle of Gentiles, I glorify my ministry’. In translating this text (ἐφ’ ὅσον μὲν οὖν εἰμι ἐγὼ ἐθνῶν ἀπόστολος), the emphasis ought to be placed on the personal pronoun ‘I’, reflecting the emphatic ἐγὼ, otherwise unnecessary, in the original. Some of the English translations, however, have in effect transposed the emphasis by inserting the definite article before ἀπόστολος, implying possibly that Paul was claiming exclusive rights to the title. Lohse takes this even a step further by italicizing ‘*the* Apostle to the Gentiles’. This seems quite unwarranted: in the context, all Paul is saying is, ‘I can speak authoritatively on this subject: after all I’m a Gentile-apostle’.<sup>20</sup> The only other passage which might give support to a theory of exclusivity is Gal. 2:8, ‘For he who was

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19 The description of ‘false apostles’ in 2 Cor. 11:13, although inherently negative, also suggests a greater flexibility in the use of the term.

20 Modern English translations are divided on whether to place the definite or the indefinite article before ‘apostle to the Gentiles’ in this verse, but the great majority choose the latter: ‘the apostle to the Gentiles’ is found in NIV, TNIV, NLT; ‘an apostle to the Gentiles’ in ASV, ESV, GNT, NASB, NCV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NEB (‘a missionary’).



working in Peter as an apostle of the circumcision was also working in me for the Gentiles’ (this is often expanded in the English versions to read ‘as an apostle to the Gentiles’).

There is no question here of any exclusivity to the term ‘apostle to the Gentiles’, since not only is the term *apostle* absent from the original, but the next verse, 2:9 describes James, Peter and John giving the right hand of fellowship to both Paul and Barnabas: ‘that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision’. There appears therefore to be no basis in the NT for ascribing unique attributes to Paul’s ministry beyond what is individual to each believer’s specific calling.

One further, and very simple, objection to claims for unique status on behalf of Paul as apostle to the Gentiles are that they can only come from a very European viewpoint.

Whatever the limitations or otherwise of Paul’s own geographical knowledge, and especially if, as Scott suggests,<sup>21</sup> ‘it seems likely that Rom. 15:19 portrays Paul’s mission to the nations from the perspective of Jerusalem as the center of a circle (κύκλος) encompassing the whole inhabited world’, it must have been pretty obvious that his own mission was taking him almost exclusively to one point of the compass – westwards. No doubt historically the Coptic Church or the Church of South India, for example, would have a very different perspective on this subject.<sup>22</sup>

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21 J.M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations: the Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul’s Mission to the Nations, with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 84; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), p. 139.

22 A recent (March 2012) visit to Ethiopia served to strengthen this suspicion. The ancient tradition in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church of teaching being primarily pictorial as opposed to literary is still very much alive, and has resulted on the one hand in the preservation and modern reproduction of beautifully decorated churches covered in paintings from the Bible and the legends of the saints for didactic purposes, and on the other hand in a very different emphasis particularly in the selection of teaching materials from the NT. Whereas OT and gospel narratives are abundantly portrayed, there is little from the Acts of the Apostles beyond the Ascension and Pentecost, and the didactic importance attributed in the western churches to the Epistles, particularly of Paul, is supplanted by the legends of the saints, the reason being quite simply that the former are impossible to depict. Of these legends, two in particular predominate: the traditions, biblical and otherwise, of Mary (in particular the ‘flight to Egypt’, as it has local interest) and those of St George: whilst it is freely acknowledged that the latter may be non-

2. *Paul's humility.* Any attempt to elevate Paul to unique status must come to terms with his character and demeanour as reflected in his letters. For example, in 1 Cor. 15:9 he states, 'I am the least of the apostles, who is not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God', which is difficult to reconcile with claims for his special status among the apostles.<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor. 3:5 shows similar disregard on his own part for status: 'What is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed; and to each [the role] as the Lord has granted'. 2 Cor. 11-12 demonstrates that, far from enjoying uniquely elevated status, Paul struggled against 'false apostles' (11:13) and others who did indeed proclaim their own superiority: 'I lack nothing that belongs to the "super-apostles", even if I am nothing' (12:11). While on the one hand constantly striving for the truth of the gospel, Paul elsewhere on the other hand shows a complete lack of competitiveness: in Phil. 1, having described how some have taken advantage of his incarceration to preach out of rivalry, he concludes, 'But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether in falsehood or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice' (1:18). Whatever the arguments might be for a posthumous elevation of Paul and his image reflected in a pseudepigraphical Colossians, these passages and others in the undisputed Pauline epistles prove that such an image is greatly distorted from the apostle's authentic character and attitudes.

3. *Paul's inclusivity and calls for imitation.* Finally, regarding the issue of Paul's 'filling up what remains of the afflictions of Christ' being a contribution unique to Paul and never

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historical, the lessons of the legends are, nonetheless, memorable and deemed to be of great devotional and moral value. Paul, while appropriately acknowledged as an apostle and NT author, is accorded less status than, for example, the four gospel writers.

<sup>23</sup> This point is emphasised by Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, p. 292-294.

to be repeated, any such view must additionally take in to account Paul's recurrent practice of encouraging his audience to imitate and learn from his behaviour. For example, 1 Cor. 4:15-16 reads, 'In Christ Jesus I fathered you through the gospel. So I beg you, become imitators of me'; in similar pastoral vein Paul writes approvingly to the Thessalonians (1 Thes. 1:5-6), 'You know how we were with you for your sakes. And you too became imitators of us and of the Lord'. The Philippians are exhorted, 'With others, become imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who live out the model we gave you' (Phil. 3:17); 'Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put into practice' (Phil. 4:9). These bold and uninhibited calls to thorough imitation make it clear that Paul regarded himself in his apostolic ministry to be a role-model just as much as a preacher,<sup>24</sup> and to make Col. 1:24 an exception to this very broad rule is unconvincing as well as unnecessary.

Taken all together, the biblical evidence weighs heavily against any exclusivist view of Paul's role in 'filling up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ'. With the notable exception of the School of Antioch, such a theme is absent from the teaching of the Fathers on this verse (3.1-3), while on the other hand the theme of imitation is positively emphasized by the Reformers (3.5).

### **5.3 Current evangelical belief and teaching on suffering**

In order for the findings of this research to have practical relevance to the present-day churches, and not just simply to provide new insight into the meaning of a single Bible verse, it will be helpful to assess what the current beliefs in such churches are, how they

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<sup>24</sup> Further examples are 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Thes. 3:7, 9.

compare to the views, beliefs and priorities of Christians in the earlier stages of church history reviewed in Chapters 3 and 4, and in what respects they might possibly be lacking. If the findings of this research can address any such lack, it will prove to be of genuine pastoral, rather than purely academic, value.

This section therefore aims to provide an overview of the contemporary teaching on suffering in the Western evangelical churches. For this purpose, a representative selection of some thirty titles written during the past fifty years has been reviewed. They fall generally into two categories: the first includes most of the best-known recent books on the topic by popular evangelical authors and leaders;<sup>25</sup> the second, smaller, group comprises works by otherwise unknown authors who write from personal experience of loss and suffering,<sup>26</sup> yet they are published by mainstream evangelical publishers for a wide general audience.<sup>27</sup> A minority of the popular authors (for example, C.S. Lewis) would perhaps not have been comfortable with the label ‘evangelical’,<sup>28</sup> yet nevertheless are still widely read

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25 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (trans. R.H. Fuller; London: SCM Press, 1959); Herbert M. Carson, *Facing Suffering: a Christian Response* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1978); Steve Chalke and Paul Hansford, *The Truth about Suffering: Why Does it Happen? What can we Do about it?* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1996); Roger Forster, *Suffering and the Love of God: the Book of Job* (London: PUSH, 2006); Nicky Gumbel, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1999); Martin Israel, *The Pain that Heals: the Place of Suffering in the Growth of the Person* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981); C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Fontana, 1957); James Martin, *Suffering Man, Loving God* (London: Collins, 1990); John Piper, *Don't Waste your Life* (Londonderry: Christ is All, 2003); David Prior, *The Suffering and the Glory: Balanced Christian Discipleship* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985); Edith Schaeffer, *Affliction* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984); M. Basilea Schlink, *The Hidden Treasure in Suffering* (Radlett: Kanaan, 1992); John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1984); Paul Tournier, *Creative Suffering* (transl. Edwin Hudson; London: SCM Press, 1982); Maurice Wood, *Your Suffering* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958); Philip Yancey, *Where is God when it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

26 Though some, most notably Joni Eareckson Tada, Elisabeth Elliot and David Watson, would fit comfortably in both categories.

27 Barbara Baisley, *No Easy Answers: an Exploration of Suffering* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2000); Margaret Clarkson, *Destined for Glory: the Meaning of Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes, *When God Weeps: Why our Suffering Matters to the Almighty* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); Elisabeth Elliot, *A Path through Suffering* (Eastbourne: Crossway, 1991); Frances Hogan, *Suffering: the Unwanted Blessing* (Christian essentials; London: Flame, 1990); Noreen Riols, *When Suffering Comes* (Milton Keynes: Word, 1990).

28 Lewis preferred to describe himself simply as ‘a layman of the Church of England’. *Pain*, p. viii.

by and influential upon evangelical Christians, and claimed by them as their own.

The books in question show a wide range of approaches to the subject, whilst dealing with quite a limited number of broad questions, which can be summarised in the following categories:

Why does suffering exist, or where did it originate?

Why does an omnipotent, loving God permit suffering; or, more broadly, where is God's involvement or lack of it?

Is there any purpose or benefit in suffering, and if so, what? Furthermore, if the answer to that is yes, how does the sufferer discern the purpose or derive the benefit?

What is the role or ministry of the church, or, more loosely, of individual Christians in helping and otherwise interacting with those who are suffering?

This section will look briefly at the different approaches to each of these basic issues one by one, and seek to define the common ground in evangelical belief and practice in respect of suffering. This will in turn be compared with the attitudes and approach reflected in the historical treatments of Col. 1:24 studied in Chapters 4 and 5. Finally, this section will highlight any potential deficiencies in the modern church's approach to suffering which the results of this research might supplement. Limitations of space dictate that this survey will necessarily be restricted to broad trends and consensus rather than going into great detail.

### **5.3.1 The existence and origin of suffering**

This aspect of evangelical teaching shows a remarkable consistency amongst the different writers: regardless of their background they share much common ground, and the Bible texts adduced to support their beliefs are few in number and, once again, from a common

stock. Naturally the issue receives less, if any, attention in popular works whose main focus is to comfort and support those undergoing suffering or to equip others in the ministry of encouragement and care for sufferers, whereas it is fundamental to those with a more doctrinal or theological approach to the subject. For these purposes, the nature of suffering may be categorised into four separate immediate causes, each of which nevertheless traces its origins by a different route to a single primordial catastrophic event, commonly termed the 'Fall of Man', together with its antecedents in the spiritual realm.

#### **5.3.1.1. The spiritual battle**

The first such category may broadly be termed persecution, oppression and opposition. In one sense, this is the most easily explained manifestation of suffering, being a simple matter of observable cause and effect: some individuals or organisations or governments dislike Christians or what they stand for - whether or not they can articulate reasons for this attitude - and consequently oppose them by various means, whether organised or sporadic, hidden or overt. Whatever the manifestation of such opposition – from state-sponsored persecution right down to individual acts of mockery or unfair treatment – the root cause is the same: every Christian is involved in a spiritual battle which nevertheless also has very practical and emotional outworking.<sup>29</sup> Paul himself alludes several times to this warfare element of Christian discipleship.<sup>30</sup> Yancey writes, 'A far greater war [than World War II] is being fought on this planet, which will determine the destiny of all creation. And that war will involve certain casualties.'<sup>31</sup> He then goes on to describe the mitigation of this suffering in terms of the rewards both promised and earned.

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<sup>29</sup> Clarkson, *Destined*, pp. 35-55 contains one of the clearest and most thorough expositions of this teaching.

<sup>30</sup> Rom. 7:23; 13:12; 15:30; 1 Cor. 9:26; 2 Cor. 6:7; 10:3-5; Phil. 1:27-30.

<sup>31</sup> Yancey, *Where is God?*, p. 232.

The origins of this warfare, in turn, are traced back to the OT.<sup>32</sup> The main story of the Fall is related in Gen. 3; yet that myth in turn presupposes the enmity already displayed there between God and the snake (subsequently identified with the later Jewish concept of the Satan or adversary). Two enigmatic texts from the prophets are commonly interpreted as alluding to a prehistoric rebellion by a contingent of angels under the leadership of Satan or Lucifer, which challenges God's authority and results both in those angels' downthrow and in their subsequent enmity to God. In Isa. 14:4-20, a lament against the King of Babylon is addressed in terms that in fact appear to cast him as the personification of a rebellious angelic being: 'How you are fallen from heaven, O morning star' (14:12); his sin is a pride which rises to challenging God's unique authority: 'You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven ... I will make myself like the Most High" ' (14:13-14). Similar terms are employed in Ezek. 28:2-19, where the personification this time is the King of Tyre: 'In the pride of your heart you say, "I am a god" ' (28:2). Here though there is also a glimpse of an honourable angelic origin: ' "You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden ... You were anointed as a guardian cherub ... You were on the holy mount of God" ' (28:12-14).<sup>33</sup> It is against this background that the story of Adam and Eve and their Fall, with its many and various repercussions, takes place. As far as the spiritual warfare is concerned, the antagonism between the Satan and humankind is explicitly stated by God: ' "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and hers" ' (Gen. 3:15).

The standard evangelical teaching follows what it would claim to be the Bible's lead in

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32 Schaeffer, *Affliction*, pp. 18-21; Carson, *Suffering*, pp. 16-18.

33 Admittedly, this teaching appears rarely in print or in teaching these days, and belongs to the common stock of Christian belief evolved over the centuries. Its transmission probably owes more to Milton's *Paradise lost* than to the efforts of writers or preachers! An exception is Clarkson, *Destined*, pp. 13-14.

going to great lengths to avoid any hint of a straightforward dualism that might compromise the sovereignty of God,<sup>34</sup> and in particular the story of Job is very often used as a paradigm of human suffering – in the present context the first two chapters particularly are quoted to illustrate the dynamics in the spiritual realm which lie behind Job’s many afflictions.<sup>35</sup> Special attention is often drawn to the portrayal of the Satan as dependent upon God’s specific permission before he may afflict Job (Job 1:12; 2:6); to Job’s eventual vindication (42:7-9); and to his ultimate restoration, which involves his total redemption from his afflictions (with interest) and the implicit nullification of the Satan’s various attacks (42:10-17). Apart from the widespread appeals to the lessons to be learnt from the book of Job, the most frequently used paradigm of the experience of Christian suffering is Paul himself.<sup>36</sup> In his case the allusions to the spiritual battle are even more pronounced. Not only are there the lists of afflictions, such as 2 Cor.6:4-10; 11:23-29 (see above, 1.3), but the references to the path of discipleship as a fight or struggle are frequent (e.g. Rom. 15:30; 1 Cor. 9:26; 2 Cor. 10:4; Phil. 1:30). These allusions plus the vivid narrative in Acts of the opposition and persecution often encountered on Paul’s missionary journeys furnish plentiful material for teaching and example.<sup>37</sup>

In all of this spiritual opposition to humankind, and to Christians in particular, the devil

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34 E.g. Prior, *Suffering*, p. 161: ‘At its most naïve and most dangerous, such over-emphasis on the devil betrays a fundamental dualism in people’s thinking: the world is seen almost literally as two spheres – the one in which God rules and everything is light and truth, the other in which the devil holds sway and causes nothing but darkness, evil and misery ... The most serious parody sees Jesus and Satan, not just in opposition, but as two rival – and equivalent – contenders for the allegiance of human beings.’

35 Gumbel, *Suffering*, pp. 11, 20; Chalke, *Suffering*, pp. 28-30; Kendall, *Thorn*, p. 23; Prior, *Suffering*, pp. 24-26; Schaeffer, *Affliction*, pp. 50-63; Forster, *Suffering*, *passim*; Baisley, *No Easy Answers*, pp. 38-39; Tada and Estes, *When God Weeps*, pp. 77-80; Watson, *Fear no Evil*, pp. 112-113, 118-123; Clarkson, *Destined*, pp. 56-58; Carson, *Suffering*, pp. 21-28.

36 E.g. Kendall, *Thorn*, pp. 5-26; Prior, *Suffering*, *passim*; Schaeffer, *Affliction*, pp. 30-49; Tada and Estes, *When God Weeps*, pp. 24-27; Carson, *Suffering*, pp. 61-67.

37 Acts 13:45-46, 50-51; 14:2-6, 19; 16:19-24; 17:5-9, 13; 18:12-13; 19:23-34; 21:27-36; 22:22-29; 23:12-15.



and his forces are considered to enlist any means at their disposal: direct oppression of different kinds; human agency; and the potentially destructive power of the created world.

### **5.3.1.2 Human sin and wrongdoing**

Evangelical writers have little difficulty in demonstrating that a large proportion of human suffering and misery is inflicted by individuals, society and its governments upon their fellow human beings.<sup>38</sup> Whether it be on the international scale of full-blooded warfare, in the sphere of social exclusion and injustice, or simply in individual acts of selfishness and cruelty, the existence of human wickedness is obvious and its manifestations infinite. The distinctively biblical rationale for this is once again traced back to the Fall, and the subsequent corruption of humankind.<sup>39</sup> Lewis points out:

When souls become wicked they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this, perhaps, accounts for four-fifths of the sufferings of men. It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs; it is by human avarice or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature, that we have poverty and overwork.<sup>40</sup>

Approaches vary as to whether Adam is viewed as a historic ancestor, whose original act of disobedience and sin is inherited by all his descendants, or whether the creation story is primarily myth, Adam standing for Everyman in his tendency towards independence, self-determination, disobedience and selfishness. Here there is no clear consensus discernible, nor do many writers even state their opinion, so one cannot even speak in terms of ‘schools of thought’.<sup>41</sup> The result however is the same in either case: there are these traits of Adam

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38 E.g. Lewis, *Pain*, pp. 43-56; Gumbel, *Suffering*, pp. 10-14; Chalke, *Suffering*, pp. 41-46; Carson, *Suffering*, pp. 15-18.

39 Lewis, *Pain*, pp. 57-76; Carson, *Suffering*, pp. 15-20.

40 Lewis, *Pain*, p. 77.

41 In fairness it should be admitted that huge numbers of biblical fundamentalists, particularly in North America, would hold to a literal interpretation of the Adam story. Such views, however, are not found clearly expressed amongst the writers surveyed here.

in everyone, and consequently one need look no further for the ultimate roots of human evil.

### **5.3.1.3 Sickness and pain**

The subject of disease and physical pain is one of the most frequently discussed in the works under review. The topic raises thorny issues now as it did in biblical times: the crux is usually the apparently indiscriminate nature of its selected victims.<sup>42</sup> Whereas the cause and effect of human evil can usually be traced, in most cases this is not evident where disease is involved, as the abandonment of the earlier simplistic doctrine of retribution testifies:<sup>43</sup> the rise of the OT Wisdom literature is one direct result of the loss of the traditional certainties regarding sin and punishment, as the question of the suffering of the righteous comes to demand urgent new answers. Job in particular is frequently cited in this context, the core messages being these: the existence and nature of the spiritual battle in which Job, precisely because of and not despite his righteousness, is caught up; the ultimate redemption of nearly every aspect of the disaster (namely, Job's health, family, possessions, wealth and honour) when God eventually intervenes; and the importance of reserving to God's sovereignty a substantial degree of mystery in such matters. Indeed, as is often pointed out,<sup>44</sup> this is the substance of God's 'reply' to Job in chapters 38-41: neither an explanation nor a refutation, but rather a demonstration of the many limitations of human understanding compared to God's wisdom.

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42 Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 87-112; Clarkson, *Destined*, pp. 18-26. See also the quotations above in 1.1.5.

43 See above (1.1.6).

44 Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 102-105; Chalke, *Suffering*, pp. 55-56; Clarkson, *Destined*, p. 58; Carson, *Suffering*, p. 28.

As regards the very existence of sickness and disease, reference is made once again to the Genesis narrative of the Fall. Here there is found not only a general removal to some degree of God's intimate presence and protection from Adam, now expelled from Eden, but in addition both pain and hardship as well as ultimate physical death are shown to be direct consequences of God's judgement on sin (Gen. 3:16-24).

#### **5.3.1.4 Natural disaster**

Evangelical teaching and belief concerning natural disaster likewise trace its origins to the Fall. Not only does the soil no longer cooperate with Adam but produces thorns and thistles because it has been cursed (Gen. 3:17-19); Paul writes that 'the whole creation has been groaning as if with labour pains' (Rom. 8:22).<sup>45</sup>

As with sickness, care must be taken when assessing individual events, to avoid attempting to strip away all the mystery. Yancey and Watson both point out that Jesus,<sup>46</sup> even when referring (Luke 13:1-5) to two contemporary disasters (one of persecution, the other a practical accident) in order to dismiss any suggestion of specific retributive purpose, nevertheless omitted to reveal or even hint whether there might be any purpose on God's part, or whether they were purely random happenings.

#### **5.3.2 Why does a loving God allow suffering?**

From the common Christian assertions that God is both omnipotent and loving, the logical inference is that he must either permit or even positively wish suffering on individuals –

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<sup>45</sup> Wood, *Your Suffering*, p. 9; Clarkson, *Destined*, pp. 27-29.

<sup>46</sup> Yancey, *Where is God?*, p. 83; Watson, *Fear no Evil*, p. 130. Also: Carson, *Suffering*, p. 19.

and in Job is found dramatised one particular interpretation of such divine permission. Indeed, this same story raises the possibility that Job's suffering may not merely be a case of permission but of purpose or election even. God himself is seen provocatively to draw the Satan's attention: 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no-one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil' (Job 1:8). The vital question raised by this paradox is 'Why does God allow suffering?' The pressing and everyday relevance of the search for answers to this question is reflected in the popular Christian literature,<sup>47</sup> and the answers offered are varied.

First is the logical and scientific rationale, which applies on different levels the argument, 'If God has created things in such a way, then it must necessarily follow as a consequence that ...' With reference to physical pain, it can be demonstrated that originally the unpleasantness of the sensation fulfils the vital biological function of preventing self-harm in the animal kingdom.<sup>48</sup> Yancey gives several illustrations of how essential such sensation is, including a vivid description of the damage endured by victims of leprosy whose condition entails loss of feeling in their extremities, resulting in a horrific series of inadvertently self-inflicted injuries.<sup>49</sup> The same principle applies to fear, the anticipation of

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47 A quick search reveals at least 12 popular titles with this very title or similar, all published in the past 20 years: John Ankerberg and Dalton Burroughs, *Why Does God Allow Suffering and Evil?* (Chattanooga: AMG, 2008); Brad Burke, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2006); Martin R. de Haan II, *Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?* (Grand Rapids: RBC Ministries, 1990); Gumbel, *Suffering*; David Hewetson, *Why Does a Good God Allow Suffering?* (Oxford: Lion, 1990); Perry Jones, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* (Charleston: Createspace, 2008); Greg Laurie, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* (Houston: Harvest Ministries, 2005); Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* (Leicester: Crossway, 1994); Massimo Lorenzini, *Why Does God Allow Death and Suffering?* (Charleston: Createspace, 2011); Alistair McGrath, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000); Ralph O. Muncaster, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* (Irvine, Ca: Harvest House, 2001); Robert Powell, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* (Fremont, Ca: Asian Humanities Press, 1989). <<http://www.abebooks.com>> [accessed 15/1/2011].

48 Hogan, *Suffering*, pp. 16-17; Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 25-51.

49 Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 37-46.

danger or hurt, with its stimulus to flight and the search for safety.<sup>50</sup> That both these essentially beneficial phenomena can be manipulated for evil ends by hostile agents, human or even spiritual, is a necessary corollary of the way the former operate, as well as of the divine gift of free will.<sup>51</sup> This free will, which is axiomatic in Christian teaching, can also account for those experiences of suffering which are at root self-inflicted, whether deliberately, through ignorance, recklessness or perversity.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, in the case of natural disaster and apparently random so-called ‘acts of God’, attention is drawn to the way God has created the universe, including a life-sustaining set of physical laws which bring a stability and predictability that are both beneficial and benevolent. Inevitably such laws also entail cause and effect, which in certain circumstances can be destructive and cause human suffering.<sup>53</sup> These events occur in three different ways: first, as in the case of sickness above, circumstances may be manipulated by hostile spiritual forces to cause suffering;<sup>54</sup> second, the gift of free will with which humanity is endowed may be used for selfish and evil ends, once again at the expense of others’ suffering; and finally, the created universe itself is regarded as having suffered corruption as a consequence of the Fall. Paul writes that at the last ‘the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay’ (Rom. 8:21), a state that is one basis of the Messianic hope of the ‘restoration of all things’ (Matt. 17:11; Acts 1:6; 3:21) and the eschatological ‘new heaven and new earth’ (Isa. 65:17; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

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50 Yancey also points out that heightened sensitivity to pain is often the corollary of a proportional sensitivity to and enjoyment of pleasure; and also the reward of achievement following intense and often painful effort, as experienced, for example, by artists and sportsmen. *Where is God?*, pp. 47-56.

51 Martin, *Suffering man*, pp. 21-25, 29-31; Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 64-65; Gumbel, *Suffering*, pp. 9-10; Forster, *Suffering*, pp. 12-16.

52 Exemplified in Prov. 26:27, ‘If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him’; Gal. 6:7, ‘A man reaps what he sows’.

53 Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 63-65.

54 Luke 13:10, ‘A woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years’; Luke 6:18, ‘Those troubled by evil spirits were healed’.

Lewis discusses at length the inevitability of suffering once the gift of free will is granted to a corrupted humanity,<sup>55</sup> and yet at the same time its absolute consistency with divine omnipotence, summarising:

We can, perhaps, conceive of a world in which God corrected the results of this abuse of free-will by His creatures at every moment: so that a wooden beam became soft as grass when it was used as a weapon, and the air refused to obey me if I attempted to set up in it the sound waves that carry lies or insults. But such a world would be one in which wrong actions were impossible, and in which, therefore, freedom of the will would become void ... Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-will involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself.<sup>56</sup>

However, it is not just a matter of the immutable laws of nature producing cause and effect, with the possibility of abuse: more than this, evangelical teaching describes an originally perfect creation marked by stability and harmony; yet when sin entered this paradise, the Fall was not simply ethical or spiritual, but had cosmic repercussions - in society, in the human body, and in the physical world itself.<sup>57</sup> Not surprisingly then, this loss of harmony is marked by a measure of hostility and insecurity in every sphere: spiritual, social, animal, health and physical. When it comes to seeking reasons for suffering, Yancey concludes that:

Maybe God *isn't trying to tell us anything specific* each time we hurt. Pain and suffering are part and parcel of our planet, and Christians are not exempt. Half the time we know why we get sick: too little exercise, a poor diet, contact with a germ. Do we really expect God to go around protecting us whenever we encounter something dangerous?<sup>58</sup>

He points out the paradox that, whereas the persistent question posed by sufferers is 'why?', the answers God desires to give are to the question 'to what end?' - which leads to

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<sup>55</sup> Lewis, *Pain*, pp. 14-24.

<sup>56</sup> Lewis, *Pain*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>57</sup> Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 66-68.

<sup>58</sup> Yancey, *Where is God?*, p. 84.

the closely related subject of God's purpose in suffering.

### **5.3.3 The purposes of suffering**

At the same time as endeavouring to explain the origin and sources of evil and suffering, evangelical teaching generally maintains that the harsh realities of suffering may be at least partially mitigated, particularly for believers, by an understanding and embracing of God's purpose in permitting it: the fact that he can use it, despite the inevitable pain, to a variety of good ends. The following are the most commonly mentioned of such potential purposes, and it will be evident that many of the categories overlap into one another.

#### *The testing of faith*

In comparison to earlier phases of church history, when the 'testing of faith' was regarded as one of the most common and significant interpretations of the suffering of the righteous, this concept receives only minor attention in modern evangelical literature.<sup>59</sup> When it does feature, it seems to be portrayed as something of a fringe benefit rather than as having a meaningful purpose.

#### *Christian growth and discipleship*

First, God may use pain to draw attention to himself and thereby make himself known to a person for the latter's ultimate good. C.S. Lewis, in an oft-quoted analogy,<sup>60</sup> described pain as God's megaphone: 'God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but

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<sup>59</sup> Watson, *Fear no Evil*, pp. 118-123; Clarkson, *Destined*, pp. 81-83.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. Yancey, *Where is God?*, p. 68; Gumbel, *Suffering*, p. 15.

shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.’<sup>61</sup> The removal of health, emotional well-being, or the distraction of material comfort often, as in the story of Job, causes people to turn to God.<sup>62</sup>

Second, God may allow suffering of some kind in order to produce character or prevent pride,<sup>63</sup> and to reinforce dependence upon him.<sup>64</sup> On the positive side, suffering produces maturity of character.<sup>65</sup> It may even be a measure of the depth of his love and the importance of his plans for humankind that he allows suffering to refine and purify. Lewis writes: ‘It is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.’<sup>66</sup> Affliction and poverty may often be used to produce, in a way that cannot be achieved by teaching alone, some of the most essential traits of Christian character: humility, patience, cooperation, generosity, unworldliness.

### *Discipline*

Whilst taking care to avoid a simplistic doctrine of sin / retribution, as commonly found in the OT,<sup>67</sup> evangelical writers concede that there may be occasions when suffering may be at least partially punitive;<sup>68</sup> far greater emphasis though is placed on suffering as

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61 Lewis, *Pain*, p. 81.

62 Tada and Estes, *When God Weeps*, pp. 20-22; Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 68-74.

63 2 Cor. 12:7, ‘To keep me from becoming conceited ... there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.’

64 2 Cor. 12:8-10.

65 Gumbel, *Suffering*, p. 15; Wood, *Your Suffering*, p. 21; Schaeffer, *Affliction*, pp. 128-148; Hogan, *Suffering*, pp. 34-40; Tada and Estes, *When God Weeps*, pp. 126-144; Clarkson, *Destined*, pp. 60-61, 84-85.

66 Lewis, *Pain*, p. 31.

67 E.g. Gen. 6:5-7; 19:13; 38:7; Ex. 12:12; Lev. 10:1-2; Deut. 24:16; 1 Kings 16:12-13, 18-19.

68 Gumbel, *Suffering*, pp. 10-11; Chalke, *Suffering*, pp. 28-30; Kendall, *Thorn*, pp. 10-16; Martin, *Suffering Man*, pp. 35-46; Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 79-82; Watson, *Fear no Evil*, pp. 111-117; Clarkson, *Destined*, pp. 74-80, 94-96.



discipline. Perhaps the commonest analogy is that of the parent-child relationship, where the loving parent recognises that a certain degree of correction and training is essential for the healthy development of the child's character; even if a measure of it seems disagreeable, the results show that it has been an expression of love rather than unkindness.<sup>69</sup> Lewis observes that:

Love, in its own nature, demands the perfecting of the beloved; that the mere 'kindness' which tolerates anything except suffering in its object is, in that respect, the opposite pole from Love. When we fall in love with a woman, do we cease to care whether she is clean or dirty, fair or foul? ... Love is more sensitive than hatred itself to every blemish in the beloved.<sup>70</sup>

Other biblical imagery is also frequently used,<sup>71</sup> such as refinement, e.g. 1 Pet. 1:6-7:

'In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in various trials, in order that the testing of your faith - more precious than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be found genuine, leading to praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed'; and pruning, John 15:2: 'Every branch in me which bears no fruit he cuts off, while every one that bears fruit he prunes so it bears more fruit.'

### *The imitation of Christ*

It is often said that the experience of suffering helps the believer to appreciate more deeply the sufferings of Christ, and at the same time his solidarity with the sufferer.<sup>72</sup> Partly because of the potential for suffering to refine character and to focus the individual upon eternal and spiritual values rather than the temporal and material, Christ-likeness may be achieved through suffering to a degree that is unlikely by other means. In addition, such

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<sup>69</sup> Heb. 12:5-11 illustrates this point at some length.

<sup>70</sup> Lewis, *Pain*, p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> Gumbel, *Suffering*, pp. 15-16; Chalke, *Suffering*, p. 67; Schaeffer, *Affliction*, pp. 149-168.

<sup>72</sup> Prior, *Suffering*, pp. 16-24; Wood, *Your suffering*, pp. 22-26; Hogan, *Suffering*, pp. 50-55; Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 222-228; Forster, *Suffering*, pp. 99-126; Tada and Estes, *When God Weeps*, pp. 129-135.

spirituality heightens the sense of closeness to and fellowship with Christ.<sup>73</sup> To Bonhoeffer, this identification with Christ and his sufferings is the essence of discipleship: 'The disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross'.<sup>74</sup> He goes on to explain that, like Christ, the believer overcomes suffering, paradoxically, by willing endurance and by forgiving those who inflict it. Clarkson refers to Col. 1:24 in this context, commenting,

We are totally dependent on Christ's work for our salvation. But in several places the Scriptures teach that our sufferings, like His, may have significance for the church, His body. As with so many things concerning our salvation, this is a mystery. But it is a mystery in which all Christians have some part, and in which some of us may have a special part.<sup>75</sup>

Clarkson sees this principle as a demonstration of the grace of God, that human suffering, the result of sin, could be used for his good purposes, and she understands by 'filling up' the sufferings of Christ, that the work of Christ is in one sense only 'completed' when his followers emulate in their victory over suffering his own victory on the cross over sin.

### *Suffering as a prerequisite of glory*

An essential part of the call to Christian discipleship is the call to suffer for and with Christ, be it in self-denial and labour or in persecution and hardship.<sup>76</sup> Jesus reiterated this several times: 'Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:28); 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it' (Luke 9:23-24); 'In this world you will have trouble' (John 16:33);

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<sup>73</sup> Phil. 3:10-11.

<sup>74</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, p. 77.

<sup>75</sup> Clarkson, *Destined*, p. 88.

<sup>76</sup> E.g. Tada and Estes, *When God Weeps*, pp. 55-65; Clarkson, *Destined*, pp. 62-73.

‘You do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you’ (John 15:19). These Gospel warnings are reflected in the Epistles: Paul wrote, ‘I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection of the dead (Phil. 3:10-11); likewise Peter: ‘To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps’ (1 Pet. 2:21). Quite apart from the potential value in suffering producing Christlike character and the fellowship of Christ’s suffering, the view is sometimes expressed that there is something essentially transforming and redemptive about suffering.<sup>77</sup> This is one of the main themes of Prior’s *The suffering and the glory*, which he pointedly subtitled ‘*balanced Christian discipleship*’. ‘The glory ... does not come in spite of the suffering; the glory comes in and through the suffering. Without the suffering there would be no glory; no cross, no crown.’ Commenting on 2 Cor. 4:8-12, he states, ‘Paul is saying that if there is going to be spiritual life anywhere for anyone, someone somewhere has got to suffer.’<sup>78</sup> In this statement and elsewhere in Prior’s book are strong elements both of the vicarious effects of suffering and of the need to ‘pay the price’, which we shall return to later (6.3-6).

Yancey brings the entire spectrum of Christian affliction into this same bracket, writing:

When a pastor in South Africa goes to prison for his peaceful protest, when a social worker moves into an urban ghetto, when a couple refuses to give up on a difficult marriage, when a parent waits with undying hope and forgiveness for the return of an estranged child, when a young professional resists mounting temptations toward wealth and success – in all these sufferings, large and small, there is the assurance of a deeper level of meaning, of a sharing in Christ’s own redemptive victory.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 230-234; Prior, *Suffering*, pp. 16-20; Hogan, *Suffering*, pp. 45-48.

<sup>78</sup> Prior, *Suffering*, p. 19.

<sup>79</sup> Yancey, *Where is God?*, p. 232.

Martin Luther King is quoted as saying, ‘Unearned suffering is redemptive’,<sup>80</sup> yet modern evangelical writers are usually reluctant to be specific on the redemptive value of believers’ suffering, lest they appear to compromise the sufficiency of Christ’s work on the cross by inadvertently encouraging attempts to earn or deserve salvation. Although this aversion is understandable as a perhaps over-zealous attempt to preserve the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide*, ‘salvation by faith alone’, it sadly appears to have stifled to some degree the investigation and acceptance of an understanding that has historically been regarded as of great value to suffering Christians. That simply fulfilling Christ’s command for every disciple to ‘pick up your cross daily’, with all the resultant afflictions, in no way equates to attempting to achieve ‘salvation by works’, thereby usurping or compromising the role of Christ’s saving death on the cross, should be self-evident, but nevertheless the over-cautiousness frequently prevails in evangelical circles.

#### *Suffering as witness to the truth of the Gospel*

This aspect, so prominent in earlier times of persecution, finds much rarer explicit mention in the modern literature. Schaeffer,<sup>81</sup> however, gives considerable emphasis to it. In her vivid analogy, drawing on the imagery of the ‘cloud of witnesses’ in Heb. 11:1, heaven contains a museum in which every victory over affliction through faith by every individual believer is a unique exhibit, yet each testifies to the sufficiency of the primal victory of Christ on the cross over the devil. In this perspective are included elements of the imitation of Christ, the refining power of suffering, and the testing of faith. Carson is one of surprisingly few to articulate in print a point that is nevertheless commonly heard and embraced in evangelical circles: that there is a powerful testimony to be heard from the

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80 Chalke, *Suffering*, p. 25, quoting Martin Luther King, Speech in Washington, DC, 28 August 1963.

81 Schaeffer, *Affliction*, pp. 67-89.

behaviour of believers who suffer:

The Christian's reaction to suffering can be a powerful reinforcement to the gospel ... A natural human response is to ask of any political or religious message, 'Does it work?' ... How compelling, therefore is the testimony of a very ordinary Christian who in the midst of great suffering has not lapsed into self-pity or bitterness, but has demonstrated a deep peace of soul, and indeed a remarkable joy in the face of trial! Here is a living vindication of the gospel.<sup>82</sup>

The fact that this theme is not discussed at greater length in the literature may be due in part to a continuing unease with the concept of suffering as positive: that God can use suffering for good purpose is a consolation and encouragement; that he might go further still and ordain it for the sake of the gospel is at first glance unnerving – nobody relishes such a calling.

*Suffering as a means to bring about God's purposes to bless*<sup>83</sup>

This powerful paradox, pre-eminently exemplified in Christ's passion and resurrection, is illustrated in many Bible stories, e.g. Joseph's slavery in Egypt (Gen. 37-50),<sup>84</sup> Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 6); Jacob wrestling with God and his subsequent mending of his ways (Gen. 32:22-33:17). In each of these Biblical examples there is a strong flavour of vicarious suffering: refining the character of the individual is important, yet it takes second place to the benefit brought about for the many. Hogan comments, 'It is a well-known axiom that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, and Church history bears abundant witness to the fact that persecution does not diminish her in any way but instead occasions fresh growth in the Spirit.'<sup>85</sup>

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82 Carson, *Suffering*, p. 56.

83 Gumbel, *Suffering*, pp. 18-19; Chalke, *Suffering*, pp. 23-27; Hogan, *Suffering*, pp. 29-30.

84 Kendall, *Thorn*, pp. 54-62.

85 Hogan, *Suffering*, pp. 50-51.

### *The context of suffering*

Although not strictly presented as a ‘purpose’ in the same way as the previous categories, mention is often made of one overarching ‘mitigation’ for the experience of suffering: the reward and inheritance in store.<sup>86</sup>

Now if we are [God’s] children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Rom. 8:17-18)

Care is taken to avoid any suggestion that salvation is anything other than by faith, yet at the same time great encouragement and comfort in adversity is offered by the future prospect of heaven.

### **5.3.4 The role of the church**

Of particular interest for this current research, because of the Col. 1:24 statement, ‘I fill up ... the afflictions of Christ ... for the sake of his body, which is the church’, are the modern evangelical views on the role or involvement of the church in - and its relationship to - the suffering of its members. In the great majority of the literature, this role is restricted simply to the ministries of pastoral care, prayer, and healing exercised by its members, whilst comparatively little attention is given to the spiritual nature and function of the church as the Body of Christ and thus as an entity that is more than the sum of its members.

Of regular concern is how unprepared many modern Christians often are in knowing how to respond to sufferers and help them, and stories abound of the hurt and emotional damage done by ostensibly caring people insufficiently equipped with an understanding of

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<sup>86</sup> Gumbel, *Suffering*, pp. 19-22; Schaeffer, *Affliction*, pp. 23-26, 73-74; Hogan, *Suffering*, pp. 55-56; Tada and Estes, *When God Weeps*, pp. 198-213.

suffering.<sup>87</sup> Excruciating though some of these anecdotes are (and of course they are more than matched by many examples of outstanding love, care and dedication),<sup>88</sup> it is apparent how very high a proportion of the focus is upon the ministry of individual Christians, and conversely, how little is written – and thus presumably experienced - of the role and ministry of the church corporate.

Amongst more recent authors, Yancey provides an exception to this trend, with a whole chapter on the church's role, entitled *The Rest of the Body*.<sup>89</sup> Here he portrays the church not just as a collection of believers but as the body which groans and hurts as its members suffer, yet also fulfils the ministry of Christ in bearing the burdens of the afflicted and setting them free:

The image of the body accurately portrays how God is working in the world. Sometimes he does enter in, occasionally by performing miracles, and often by giving supernatural strength to those in need. But mainly he relies on us, his agents, to do his work in the world. We are asked to *live out* the life of Christ in the world, not just to refer back to it or describe it. We announce his message, work for justice, pray for mercy ... and suffer with the sufferers.<sup>90</sup>

Here is a real portrayal of the Body of Christ not just as metaphor but as a dynamic reality, backed up by many testimonies to the mutuality of fellowship therein, and its power not just for sharing burdens but for healing when the suffering of its members is embraced. There is also a restoration of balance here – the church is not just the agent of Christ in ministering out to those who suffer, but also the expression of his life, the whole body sharing and absorbing the pains and afflictions (as well as the joys) of its individual parts. Prior points out, 'If we choose to make ourselves available to one another in the body of

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87 Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 15-19; Schaeffer, *Affliction*, pp. 31-32; Clarkson, *Destined*, p. 35.

88 E.g. Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 40-44, 213-217.

89 Yancey, *Where is God?*, pp. 235-243.

90 Yancey, *Where is God?*, p. 242.

Christ, it will mean daily dying and suffering – dying to ourselves and carrying the sufferings of others in our feelings and personality.’<sup>91</sup> He then goes on to apply that principle particularly to the ministry of intercession. For him the church is crucial to the whole experience of suffering: ‘The express purpose of God, therefore, in our sufferings, is our personal wholeness and the wholeness of his body, the Church. The two are inextricably linked.’ Chalke goes further, in extending the ministry of suffering to the world as well:

When God said he loved the world, it cost Jesus his life. When we say we love the world, we should expect it to cost us the same. This means that the church exists to continue God’s way of ending suffering. It also means that Christians shouldn’t expect their days of suffering to end the moment they become Christians. Because in the end, the way in which Jesus alleviated people’s suffering was by taking it on himself.<sup>92</sup>

Here Chalke links the church’s ministry with its imitation of Christ as well as with the concept of redemptive suffering. Seen this way, the afflictions are not just the consequence of opposition or persecution, nor simply the price that must be paid, but a by-product of a chosen way of life which is about serving others first.

Of all the authors studied in this chapter, Bonhoeffer demonstrates perhaps the highest and most developed view of the Body of Christ and the ‘fellowship of suffering’. Significantly, in this context he quotes Col. 1:24, and interprets it unequivocally in terms of vicarious suffering:

[Christ] has, in his grace, left a residue (‘υπερήματα) of suffering for his Church to fulfil in the interval before his Second Coming. This suffering is allowed to benefit the Body of Christ, the Church. Whether we have any right to assume that this suffering has power to atone for sin, we have no means of knowing. But we do at least know that the man who suffers in the power of the body of Christ suffers in a representative capacity ‘for’ the Church, the Body of Christ, being privileged to endure himself what others are spared ... Such vicarious activity and passivity on the

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<sup>91</sup> Prior, *Suffering*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>92</sup> Chalke, *Suffering*, p. 65.



part of the members of the Body is the very life of Christ, who wills to be formed in his members (Gal. 4:19).<sup>93</sup>

Here Bonhoeffer's most radical contribution is quite simply to interpret and re-position the sufferings of the individual believer very firmly back in the context in and for which they were originally intended to be lived out and understood: the fellowship and community of the church. As he concludes, 'There is nothing new in all this. We are simply following in the steps of the first disciples of Christ.'<sup>94</sup> No doubt the difference in emphasis from most recent writers – and its continuity with the early church - is due in large part to the origin of his writings in the crucible of persecution.

### **5.3.5 Summary and conclusions**

The authors studied in this sample of modern writing on suffering are generally very consistent in doctrine, particularly regarding the biblical teaching that underpins it. The major differences, understandably, are in emphasis, which depends in turn principally on the nature of their writing and consequently the audience for which it was intended: whether personal experience and testimony, devotional, theodicy, exegetical, or commonly some combination of these.

#### **5.3.5.1 The origins of suffering**

Concerning the origins of evil and suffering, the modern evangelical teaching is fully in keeping with the traditional doctrines, tracing the various manifestations of evil via different routes back to the common source, the Fall. The question why God allows

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<sup>93</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, p. 220.

<sup>94</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, p. 220.

suffering, though an age-old one, has perhaps never been more persistently asked than nowadays, and the volume of literature addressing this aspect has mushroomed correspondingly. Comparison with the writings of the Church Fathers reveals a totally different viewpoint on the whole issue of suffering: whereas the modern question ‘why?’ often conceals a more specific sense of either ‘why me of all people?’ or ‘why does a loving God *allow* suffering?’, the early church demonstrates much more frequently the attitude ‘why, for what good purpose?’ with a strong aroma of faith, hope and anticipation rather than regret. Even allowing for the passage of time reducing the surviving literature to a comparatively few works by eminent teachers which have proved their worth in edifying generations of believers, nevertheless the contrast is remarkable. There is a very strong, yet often unspoken, acceptance that suffering is a universal Christian calling, and therefore the issue of God’s permission is almost foreign and irrelevant to their outlook, with the strongest possible emphasis instead on its fruit and the rewards. Similarly, the Reformers too embrace the call to suffering positively: the recurrent identification of it as ‘the cross’ by Melancthon, Luther and other Reformers alludes strongly to the roots of the call to discipleship and its implicit sufferings in the Gospels (Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Luke 14:27).<sup>95</sup>

#### **5.3.5.2 A comparison of teaching on God’s purposes in allowing suffering**

Closely linked to the question of God’s permission is that of God’s purposes in suffering. As suggested above, the distinction may sometimes be reduced to little more than a matter of perspective. Here the modern evangelical emphases are in many respects at variance with the historical responses outlined above in chapter 3. In the case of the Church Fathers,

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<sup>95</sup> See, for example, the texts quoted above at 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 3.5.5.

taking their comments on Col.1:24 as illustrative of their general approach to suffering, by some distance the most prominent purpose mentioned is that of *witness*. This takes two forms: witness to the truth of the gospel through the willing suffering of the believers, their demeanour, their joy, etc. - a witness which both persuades the unbeliever and encourages the believer (Origen);<sup>96</sup> and the afflictions which are implicit in the ministry of evangelism (Chrysostom, Severian, Theodore, Theodoret). So in a sense there are both direct and indirect senses in which suffering may constitute a part of the Christian witness. Other purposes identified are the imitation of Christ (Athanasius, Ambrose) - and, further than this, identification with him (Ambrosiaster, Augustine) or the need to suffer with him (Origen) or be conformed to him; and discipleship and training (Chrysostom). All these latter purposes are Christ-centred, illustrating the enormous weight placed by the Fathers upon personal holiness and godliness.

For a summary of the Reformers' understanding, insofar as it relates to Col. 1:24, a good place to start must be Melancthon's explicit statement: 'the church's [sufferings] are either τιμωρίαι [chastisements] or δοκιμασίαι [testings] or μαρτύρια [witness]'.<sup>97</sup> The third of these is readily recognisable from the Church Fathers - Osiander provides a typical example:

[I suffer] not just for my own sake, for a blessing, but much more for the whole spiritual Body of Christ, "which is the fellowship". For through my suffering the word of God, through which they are blessed, is demonstrated and strengthened in the Christian community'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Smith describes this effect succinctly: 'Suffering is a manifestation of human frailty and limitation. So when a *suffering* apostle successfully evangelizes a city, performing signs and wonders as a confirmation of the message, it is palpable to all – including the apostle – that it is "the power of Christ" (ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ) (2 Cor. 12:9) or "the all-surpassing power of God" (ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ... τοῦ θεοῦ) (2 Cor. 4:7) which works through him and consequently, that his role in the endeavor is merely instrumental. This is the only conclusion that could be drawn, since all would accept the premise that suffering ensues from powerlessness, and such powerlessness is incommensurate with the results achieved by the apostle. *Explanations*, p. 158.

<sup>97</sup> See above, 3.5.1, and note 73.

<sup>98</sup> Osiander, *Grund und Ursach*. See above (3.5.3, n. 84).

The ‘chastisements’ would presumably equate to discipline and training, rather than primarily punishment; the element here that is not found as such in the Church Fathers’ comments is ‘testings’. Perhaps surprisingly, nothing further specifically on affliction as ‘testing’ occurs in the Reformers’ comments of Col. 1:24: though, as with the Church Fathers, plenty is to be found on the themes of conformity to Christ (Luther, Chemnitz, Flacius, Calvin), and also on the necessity of suffering as a prerequisite for entering into glory and the rewards of Christ (Luther, Osiander, Bucer). It is probably the case that the ‘testings’ of affliction were regarded not primarily as an end in themselves but as a means of purification and refinement of Christlike character.

Against this historical background sketch, modern evangelical teaching and belief shows several distinctly different characteristics. At its broadest, and allowing the same caveat (that it may be slightly unfair to compare a cross-section of modern popular evangelical literature with the select classics of previous eras), the overall impression is of suffering as a slight embarrassment about which believers need to be apologetic - in both senses of the word: God needs to be repeatedly justified for allowing things to be so complicated and unpleasant; and the proclamation of the gospel is often defensive and regretful on the whole area of believers’ suffering. It is against this trend that many of the works reviewed endeavour to restore a more biblical balance.

More specifically, the following comments may be made: God’s prerogative to test the faith of believers is conceded, but beyond reference to the example of Abraham sacrificing Isaac (Gen. 22:1), little is made of the topic of testing in the context of suffering. Likewise,

the paucity of teaching on suffering as witness is in stark contrast to other periods in church history. In contrast, the greatest concentration is upon the whole cluster of themes to do with Christian growth and maturity. Here, noticeably, the motifs of discipline, the development of character, and the imitation of Christ tend to blend together more indistinctly than in earlier times – the earlier certainties of the benefit of discipline, and the yearning to be like Christ, including an expectation of having to share in his suffering, appear to have given way to a more general and vague sense of ‘if you do have to suffer, God can use it to do you good’. In parallel to this, the comprehensive longing for Christ-likeness as an end in itself, which marks the writings of the Fathers and the Reformers, has to some extent given way to a concentration on the potential benefits in the life and character of the individual. The most likely explanation for this seems to be cultural: in a modern welfare state, not only have the huge advances in medicine managed to protect the majority from the degree of first-hand experience of suffering which was the common lot in previous generations, but also the combination of insurance available against every calamity and a comprehensive social welfare have contrived to make suffering an aberration from the norm, whereas until comparatively it was the everyday experience of the masses – as it still is in the developing world. The tension between this modern ethos and the gospel call to ‘pick up your cross daily’ is one which the church struggles to resolve, and it is indeed the attempt to restore balance here which is behind much of the literature reviewed in this chapter.

It is not unfair to say that the two related themes of suffering as a prerequisite for glory, and as a means to bring about God’s blessing, are recognised as biblical and valid in modern teaching, yet are addressed only very rarely in comparison with earlier periods. As

with the whole topic of persecution, the general impression given is one that says ‘we know it does happen, but let’s not look at it too closely’.

Barry Smith, in a recent study entitled *Paul’s seven explanations of the sufferings of the righteous*,<sup>99</sup> has sought to categorise Paul’s various comments, explanations and apparent assumptions regarding suffering found in the undisputed letters. These categories he lists as:

1. Suffering resulting from persecution.
2. Suffering as remedial. That is, suffering as discipline.
3. Suffering as salvation-historically necessary. In other words, God may call some to suffer as an intrinsic part of their calling to bring salvation to others.
4. Suffering as probationary. The testing of faith.
5. Suffering as the effect of the sin of the First Man.
6. Suffering as pedagogical. By this Smith means suffering as a witness to the truth of the gospel.
7. Suffering as participation in the suffering of Christ.

For the first five of these, Smith traces the OT roots and also the parallels in the ‘Second-Temple literature’. The last two he finds to be unique to Paul. For the purposes of comparison, I have attempted to tabulate his ‘seven explanations’ against the findings of the past three chapters to show the frequency of occurrence of each explanation in the two historical periods highlighted in chapters 3-4 and amongst contemporary evangelicals as

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<sup>99</sup> Published New York: Lang, 2002.

shown above. At the risk of reducing complex matters to a mere caricature, the table will necessarily be very brief for reasons of space and clarity.

**Table 2 – The emphasis given to the principal explanations for believers’ suffering in different eras of church history**

<b>Category in Smith, Paul’s 7 explanations</b>	<b>Church Fathers</b>	<b>Reformers</b>	<b>Current evangelicals</b>
1. Result of persecution	Frequent	Frequent	Agreed in principle but rarely encountered in practice
2. Remedial / discipline	Frequent	Frequent	Extremely common as ‘character-forming’; less as chastisement
3. Salvation-historically necessary	Key point for Chrysostom and his successors	Not found	Sometimes in the form ‘there’s a price to be paid’
4. Probationary / testing	Particularly common at times of persecution	Frequent	Rare
5. Effect of Fall	Generally accepted as a fundamental doctrine		
6. Pedagogical / witness	Frequent	Particularly prominent	Common as a by-product rather than a purpose
7. Participation in Christ’s suffering	Strong emphasis in early Fathers. Key point for Augustine and successors	Strong echoes of Augustine’s emphasis	Quite common as a comfort; rare as a doctrine

If one were to summarise as briefly as possible the modern evangelical approach in comparison to the historical evidence, the word ‘selective’ springs to mind. Probably this paucity of real substance in modern teaching is accounted for by the general discomfort

with the whole concept of ‘suffering as positive’ identified above.

#### **5.3.5.3 The role of the church in the context of believers’ suffering**

It is perhaps not surprising that the scarcity of recent evangelical teaching on the role of the church in the context of suffering is in stark contrast to the impression given by the earlier writers and commentators surveyed in Chapter 3, since much of their doctrine was being shaped at crucial times of persecution and opposition. Their understanding of the nature and role of the church was therefore molded at least in part by the fellowship of suffering and the vital need for mutual support. The very earliest reference to Col. 1:24, by Origen in his *Exhortation to martyrdom* (3.1.1) refers to Ambrose, Philoctetus, and ‘all you our fellow-witnesses, who “fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ” ’, and the passage exudes solidarity and corporate identification with, as well as pride in, the martyrs. This attitude will be found repeated many times in the accounts of the early martyrs, to be examined later (6.6). The later influential teaching of Augustine (3.2.2), with his recurrent ‘One Christ, head and body’ theme, although from an era when the church was less threatened, nevertheless reemphasized that affliction is ‘for the sake of (and experienced as part of) the Body of Christ’. This emphasis is found again at the forefront repeatedly in the teaching of the Reformers: for example, Melanchthon refers in the context of Col. 1:24 to ‘the fellowship of military service’,<sup>100</sup> and his references to the afflictions are consistently described as being ‘of the saints’ or ‘of the church’, rather than individual. Luther’s view is similarly of a corporate effort: even the sufferings of the individual ‘all come together in a single heap’.<sup>101</sup> This emphasis is consistently found amongst the Reformers quoted above

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100 Melanchthon, *Enarratio epistolae Pauli ad Colosenses*. See above (3.5.1, n. 71).

101 Luther, *Sermon at Coburg, 3 April 1530*. See above (3.5.2, n. 79).



in 3.5.1-7.

By comparison, the modern evangelical teaching appears, with one or two notable exceptions, to be very thin in its understanding of the vital importance and relevance of the wider Body of Christ in the context of individual suffering, and the principle focus is nearly always on the individual's response, and his or her wellbeing and ability to cope. The church generally is there in the background as a source of fellowship, encouragement and support for the individual, but it is not often brought into the equation in discussion of the meaning and purpose of suffering, still less – with the exception of the aforementioned roles – is it seen as part of the answer.

## **CHAPTER 6 - THE BIBLICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS TO VICARIOUS SUBSTITUTION**

This chapter will look very broadly at the theme of substitution which lies behind the meaning of Col. 1:24 which I have suggested above (5.1.1). Not only will it examine the specific notion of vicarious suffering and substitution, but it will look particularly at the far more widespread motif of substitution as it occurs in the OT, the Apocrypha and later Jewish literature, and also in what appear to have been the popular beliefs of the Greco-Roman culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. In short, it will aim to demonstrate that Paul lived in an environment and culture where from two separate directions - both from his religious Jewish upbringing and education, and from the secular world in which he moved as he preached the Gospel to his contemporaries – he would have been strongly influenced – saturated even - by the concept of substitutionary actions of one kind or another, whether cultic, social, political, or even literary. The aim of this chapter is not to investigate any particular aspect of this huge subject in any great depth, but rather to illustrate the breadth of its occurrence. Far from attempting to construct any kind of synthesis from the various different strands, the object of this overview is, on the contrary, to demonstrate the diversity and ubiquity of these themes in the background to Paul's thinking. It must also be strongly emphasised that some of the examples carry far less weight (particularly theologically) than others: again, the primary aim is not to compare the evidence but to discover how far the concept permeated society's thinking on a range of very different levels.

### **6.1 Substitution in the OT**

The motif recurs in numerous different guises and defies codification, so a pragmatic

approach has been adopted, glancing first at the best known and most obvious text, followed by facets of substitution in the cult, then other OT customs and historical events which touch upon the theme. A prime example, which several scholars consider treats the subject of vicarious suffering in a way unique in the OT,<sup>1</sup> is found in the ‘suffering servant’ passages of Deutero-Isaiah. Isa. 53:4-8 contains statements which appear to go further than any other OT passage in stating a principle of vicarious substitution. They occur in the context of the final of the four so-called ‘Servant Songs’<sup>2</sup> (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Here the ‘Servant of the Lord’, whatever his identity either historically or prophetically, is portrayed as suffering capital punishment. The passage in question dramatically describes the dawning realisation that the Servant’s punishment was not due to purely personal misdemeanours, but was firstly (vv. 4-5), suffered representatively for the nation, and then (v. 6) vicariously on their behalf. The text reads:<sup>3</sup>

Surely he bore our sickness!  
 And our pains – he carried them!  
 But as for us, we thought him struck down,  
 beaten by God and afflicted.  
 He was being wounded because of our rebellions.  
 He was being bruised because of our wrongs.  
 The punishment for our wholeness was on him  
 and with his stripes comes healing for us.  
 All of us like sheep stray away.  
 Each of us – we turn to our own way.  
 But Yahweh laid on him  
 the iniquity of us all.

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- 1 For example, Eduard Lohse, *Märtyrer und Gottesknecht: Untersuchungen zur urchristlichen Verkündigung vom Sühnetod Jesu Christi* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 67; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955), p. 97; David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 24; Angel M. Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus* (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, 3; Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1979), pp. 280, 300; Hermann Spieckermann, ‘The Conception and Prehistory of the Idea of Vicarious Suffering in the Old Testament’. In Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (trans. Daniel P. Bailey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 1.
- 2 First identified by Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).
- 3 Using the literal translation by John D. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (Word Biblical Commentary, 25; Waco: Word, 1987), p. 224.

For the first few stanzas of this poem, it seems that the astonishment is one almost of relief on the part of the writer as the awareness dawns that he and his fellows are equally guilty with the Servant – ‘a belated expression of solidarity’.<sup>4</sup> This, however, is quickly replaced by an awed and humbled realisation that as a result of the Servant’s suffering, the rest of the community escapes punishment and finds wholeness – in other words, this suffering was vicarious. Kraemer summarises the significance of the passage succinctly:

Those who view him [the Suffering Servant] imagine, after the traditional explanation, that *he* is being punished by God, that is, for his own sins (v. 4). But they are blind; he bears the sins of others. Such vicarious retribution has important benefits: by virtue of his afflictions others may be healed. On account of his sufferings the sins of others will be atoned. He is the sacrifice through whose offering the Lord’s purpose will be able to prosper.<sup>5</sup>

Traditionally, the Suffering Servant has been regarded in Christian circles as a type of the Christ, and this passage in particular as one of the earliest and most detailed of the biblical messianic prophecies, quoted many times in the NT and even more frequently alluded to.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this research, however, it is immaterial who the ‘Servant songs’ refer to: what matters is that the phenomenon of vicarious suffering has come to light and is attested in the OT,<sup>7</sup> validating it as a viable and coherent theological principle, and allowing the possibility of its reoccurrence in other contexts. Not that it was a complete innovation, but more that ‘an understanding of substitutionary atonement is born. It had long existed in the sacrificial cult (Lev. 16), but in this verse it finds classical expression in a new sense.’<sup>8</sup> In this comment Watts is correct that substitution had long existed in the

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4 Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, p. 231.

5 Kraemer, *Responses*, p. 24.

6 Matt. 8:17; Mark 15:27; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Rom. 10:16; 15:21; Acts 8:32-33; 1 Pet. 2:22.

7 Rodriguez discusses in detail the scholarly objections to such an interpretation of the fourth Servant Song as substitutionary, which he convincingly refutes by detailed examination of the distinctively cultic vocabulary used throughout, and which he regards as providing its true interpretation as a cultic substitutionary expiation. *Substitution*, pp. 278-300.

8 Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, p. 231. Spieckermann, ‘Conception’, traces the background to the vicarious suffering found in this passage, and relates it not only to the Levitical cult but also to passages of intercession in

cult: we shall now explore to what extent it was present in the theology of the OT sacrificial system.

### **6.1.1 Substitution in the sacrificial system**

Taking as a starting-point Watts' citation above of Lev. 16 as evidence of substitutionary atonement in the Jewish cult, we find there, in amongst a considerable miscellany of laws and prohibitions, an entire chapter devoted to the detailed description of the required ritual for the most sacred event in the Hebrew calendar, the annual Day of Atonement.<sup>9</sup> In detail and length these instructions are unequalled in the OT ritual law, indicating the Day's vital importance at the heart of the cult. The ritual of this festival incorporates the normal procedures of the usual sin offering and burnt offering as well as the features unique to the Day of Atonement, but it is the latter which will be examined since they give probably the clearest indication of vicarious substitution in the Law.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest, ceremonially washed and attired, enters the sanctuary area with five sacrificial animals: a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, both of his own providing and on his own behalf; plus two goats and a ram from the Israelite community, the former as a sin offering and the latter for a burnt offering. Through the rituals, atonement is achieved not just for the priesthood and the people, but also 'for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar' (v. 33). It is the procedure concerning the two goats (vv. 7-10, 15-22) which is of particular interest to this study, and

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Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

9 John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (Word Biblical Commentary, 4; Dallas: Word, 1992), p. 243; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: its Life and Institutions* (transl. John McHugh; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1973), pp. 507-510; Sanders, *Judaism*, pp. 100-102, 141-143; a vivid description of the Day of Atonement in the days of the high priest Simon ben Onias is recounted by Ecclus 50:1-21; much fuller details are provided in mYoma.

in the ritual they are dealt with between the sacrifice of the high priest's bull for his own sin offering (vv. 6, 11-14) and the two rams as burnt offerings for himself and the community respectively (vv. 24-25). Lots are cast by the high priest for the two goats, and one is designated as sin offering and dealt with accordingly; the other is designated 'to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat' (v. 10).<sup>10</sup> During this procedure,

He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins – and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert.

In this Day of Atonement rite,<sup>11</sup> the laying on of hands explicitly effects transference of sins to an animal substitute. In that sense it is completely different from the normal 'laying on of hands' by the offerer, which takes place in other regular sacrifices (see below), yet which goes unremarked upon here in the sin offering (v. 6) and the burnt offering (v. 24) which respectively precede and follow the scapegoat ritual.

Not only is the principle of substitution clearly spelled out in the Day of Atonement ritual, but it is also central to the regular Levitical sacrificial system, especially in respect to the

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10 'For a scapegoat' is a conventional paraphrase; the actual reading is 'for Azazel' (לְעִזָּאֵל), the meaning of which is obscure and disputed. Some scholars consider Azazel to be the name of a desert demon (otherwise unknown), in which case there is a balance in the procedure: one goat for YHWH and one for Azazel. In any case, the designation 'scapegoat' suffices to describe the goat's function. Hartley, *Leviticus*, pp. 238-239; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 508-509; Rodriguez, *Substitution*, pp. 118-119.

11 A superficially similar ritual is found in the regulations of the cleansing of skin diseases (traditionally 'leprosy') in Lev. 14:1-32. In this procedure the person seeking cleansing brings two live clean birds, together with some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop. The first bird is killed over fresh water, following which the priest dips the remaining bird, together with the objects, into the blood of the first. The person is then sprinkled seven times, following which the bird is released into the open fields (there is also an extensive follow-up procedure for the cleansed person to follow (vv. 8-31), but this is not relevant to this point). Although this is a purificatory rather than an expiatory rite, the parallel with the scapegoat ritual includes the involvement of two creatures, one killed and the other released (here perhaps symbolising release from the disease and its social repercussions). Despite the similarities, indicated by both Hartley (*Leviticus*, pp. 219, 238) and de Vaux (*Ancient Israel*, p. 508), the cleansing ritual cannot be said to involve the bird in any way as a substitute, not least because the issues of sin and its removal are dealt with by the subsequent guilt offering (vv. 12-18) and sin offering (vv. 19-20). The common theme is more the 'act of riddance' (Hartley) involved.

various blood sacrifices. Even in the case of the fellowship offering (שלמים), which is a freewill offering unrelated specifically to atonement for sin, the offerer is instructed to ‘lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting’ (Lev. 3:2). The laying on of hands is generally interpreted as an act of identification between the offerer and his offering – as is perhaps also the stipulation (3:3) that he slaughter it himself - and recurs frequently in the Levitical regulations for the various blood sacrifices:<sup>12</sup> the burnt offering (עלה) (1:4); the fellowship offering (3:2, 8, 13); and the sin offering (חטאת) (4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33). The idea of substitution is more specific in the regulations regarding the burnt offering, which prescribe, ‘He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted *on his behalf* to make atonement for him’ (1:4). Although the precise means by which the atonement is effected is left unclear (perhaps deliberately, lest a mechanical rite impinge on the sovereignty and grace of God),<sup>13</sup> Lev. 17:11 is explicit that it is the blood of the sacrifice that is crucial: ‘For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.’<sup>14</sup> Rodriguez deals at length with the question as to whether Lev. 17:11 refers only to the שלמים or to blood offerings in general, and following persuasive argument concludes that it is in fact a general principle for all blood sacrifice:

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12 Lohse, χεῖρ, *TDNT* 9, pp. 428-429; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 448-449; Hartley, *Leviticus*, pp. 19-21; N. Kiuchi, *Leviticus* (Apollos Old Testament commentary, 3; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), p. 56; Rodriguez, *Substitution*, pp. 193-232 deals exhaustively with the OT references to the ritual and the different theories of its significance; Hartley also provides a good summary of alternative interpretations. The ‘identification’ interpretation may be supported by Lev. 24:14, which instructs witnesses of blasphemy to lay hands on the condemned person before stoning, to confirm, as it were, that it was upon their witness that judgment has been given.

13 Lohse comments, ‘In late Judaism and in the OT alike, scarcely a thought was given as to why and in what manner the sacrificial cult could effect atonement. It was simply enough for the Jew that God had ordained the offering of the sacrifices and thereby granted the possibility of atonement [Darum hat man sich im Spätjudentum ebenso wie im Alten Testament kaum Gedanken darüber gemacht, warum und auf welche Weise der Opferkultus Sühne bewirken könne. Genügte es doch für den Juden, daß Gott die Darbringung der Opfer geboten und damit diese Sühnmöglichkeit gegeben hatte].’ *Märtyrer*, p. 21.

14 Rodriguez, *Substitution*, pp. 233-260.

This verse informs us that Yahweh has assigned to the blood of every sacrifice an expiatory value. Blood is there clearly identified with the life of the victim. Since life belongs to Yahweh it is to be returned to Him. It is in the process of returning it to Him that expiation is achieved. Yahweh in His great love for His people is willing to accept it in place of the forfeited life of the sinner. The blood which is bearing the sin of the individual is accepted in exchange for him. Expiation is achieved through sacrificial substitution.<sup>15</sup>

This declaration raises the status of the blood sacrifice far above that of an offering (however costly) made in contrition or as penance or even as thanksgiving; at some level evidently, the animal's life (נפש) is being poured out on behalf of the offerer's life (נפש).

Rodriguez has undertaken a detailed study of the substitution motif in the OT cult, and compared it with the surviving literary evidence of the phenomenon in neighbouring ancient Near Eastern cultures.<sup>16</sup> In regard to the latter, having surveyed texts from Sumer, Assyria, Babylon, Ugarit and the Hittites, he concludes that 'the practice of substitution was well known throughout the ancient Near East.'<sup>17</sup> The rituals varied considerably in detail, but were all intended to avert the threat – whether real or portended – of sickness or death. Two characteristics familiar from the OT are common practice in all the rituals: the identification of the individual with his or her substitute, often through laying on hands or other physical contact, accompanied by a declaration; and the transfer of the evil to the substitute, often by death or destruction. In different traditions and for varying purposes the substitutes could be human, animal, or inanimate in the form of figurines or effigies.

Although the OT avoids all suggestion of magic, which is common in the neighbouring

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15 Rodriguez, *Substitution*, p. 259.

16 An earlier discussion of this subject, but including a treatment on the wider conceptual issues of substitution, is S.H. Hooke, 'The theory and practice of substitution', *Vetus testamentum* 2(1952), pp. 2-17. A similar approach, but chiefly drawing parallels to the 'Suffering Servant' passages, is Josef Scharbert, 'Stellvertretendes Sühneleiden in den Ebed-Jahwe-Liedern und in altorientalischen Ritualtexten', *Biblische Zeitschrift* 2(1958), pp. 190-213.

17 Rodriguez, *Substitution*, p. 73.



cultures, the practices otherwise bear many similarities to some OT rituals.

### **6.1.2 Penal and non-penal substitution in the OT outside of the cult**

Further examples of substitution, both in penal and a wide variety of other contexts, can be found in the OT outside the cult, and they fall into two broad categories: animal substitution (narrated as predating the Law and its sacrifices); and human substitution.

#### **6.1.2.1 Animal substitution**

Two prominent instances in the early history of the nation, where the sacrifice of an animal as substitute preserves human life, are the accounts of the offering of Isaac by his father Abraham (Gen. 22) and the institution of the Passover (Ex. 12). In the first of these accounts, Abraham, in unquestioning obedience to God's instruction (22:2), travels to Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac and is about to wield the knife when interrupted by an angel (v. 11). Thereupon

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD will Provide. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided' (vv. 12-13).

That this story relates an example of vicarious substitution seems clear not just from the original narrative,<sup>18</sup> but also from its adoption by the NT writers as an image of the sacrifice of Christ, Abraham and Isaac being treated as types of God the Father and Jesus respectively. Echoes of Gen. 22:12, 16 can perhaps be heard in, for example, Rom. 8:31-32, 'If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us'; and in John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son'. Wenham

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<sup>18</sup> Rodriguez, *Substitution*, pp. 261-271; Philo, *Abraham* 177: 'And so Isaac is saved, God supplying a gift instead of him.' Translation from Philo, *The Works of Philo* (trans. C.D. Yonge; Peabody: Hendrickson, new edn, 1993), p. 426.

sees further allusions to the story in John 1:29, Matt. 3:17 and 1 Pet. 1:19-20 (as well as the specific reference to it in Jas 2:21-23; Heb. 11:17-19), and comments, 'This typology is very widespread in the NT and therefore must be extremely early and probably reflects Jesus' own self-interpretation of his mission.'<sup>19</sup> More than that, such NT interpretation of OT texts as illustrative, whether typologically or prophetically, of the vicarious substitution by Jesus on the cross, strengthens the case for substitution as a common OT motif. In this respect the validity of the individual interpretations themselves is less relevant than their frequency, for this was precisely the milieu in which Paul too was immersed as he was writing of his own vicarious afflictions in Col. 1:24. In its original context, the sacrifice of Isaac can perhaps be interpreted as a substitutionary sacrifice commanded by God following the shortcomings and weakness displayed by Abraham in the preceding narratives of ch. 20-21 (his deception of Abimelech and his taking Hagar as surrogate mother for Ishmael), which might call into question the strength of his faith. Rodriguez concludes that 'Gen. 22:1-19 suggests that sacrificial substitution was known and practised outside the Levitical cultus.'<sup>20</sup> As was the case with the fourth Servant Song, there is every indication here that distinctively cultic language has been imported to the text to provide it with its own interpretation as a substitutionary act, for example the terms עֹלָה 'burnt offering', שֶׁה 'lamb', מִזְבֵּחַ 'altar', שַׁחַת 'to slaughter', אֵיל 'ram'.<sup>21</sup>

The Passover, together with the subsequent exodus from captivity in Egypt (Ex. 12-14), marks the birth of the nation of Israel,<sup>22</sup> and this momentous event, commemorated as an

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19 Gordon Wenham, *Genesis* (2 vols.; Word Biblical Commentary, 1-2; Dallas: Word, 1994), vol. 2, p. 117.

20 Rodriguez, *Substitution*, p. 269.

21 Rodriguez, *Substitution*, pp. 263-264.

22 De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 493; John I. Durham, *Exodus* (Word Biblical Commentary, 3; Waco: Word, 1987), p. 153.

annual festival in perpetuity (12:14) again involves a substitute - in this case a lamb.<sup>23</sup> The original instructions specify that each household is to slaughter a lamb (though they may share with neighbours if they are few) and smear some of the blood on the sides and tops of the door-frames of their houses (vv. 3-7). God tells Moses and Aaron that, following the subsequent meal,

‘On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn – both men and animals – and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.’ (vv. 12-13)

In this instance there is no indication that the lamb is in any sense an expiatory or atoning sacrifice;<sup>24</sup> the emphasis is rather on an act of faith and obedience leading to a blood-ritual which provides protection from death. Nevertheless, as the account reads, the shedding of blood effectively to save human life indicates that in some sense at least the lamb can be seen as a substitute: its life for the household’s in the overarching context of God’s plan for deliverance. Rodriguez, after reviewing the various scholarly opinions expressed on the nature of the Passover, concludes, ‘The Passover was a particular and unique kind of sacrifice ... Its function was to preserve the firstborn of the Hebrews. That preservation is possible because the Lord was willing to accept the Passover victim as a substitute for the firstborn.’<sup>25</sup> The substitutionary view is given added confirmation by Paul’s own identification of it as a type of Christ: ‘For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed’ (1 Cor. 5:7). Furthermore, two customs found a permanent and significant place in the Israelite cult as direct consequences of the Passover events:

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23 Rodriguez, *Substitution*, pp. 271-276.

24 De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 488. Durham, *Exodus*, pp. 153-155. Both authors on the contrary indicate the signs of a pre-Israelite nomadic background to the original sacrificial ritual, more to do with protection and fertility. Rodriguez, *Substitution*, p. 275 opines, ‘The ideas of propitiation and expiation seem not to be present in the narrative’.

25 Rodriguez, *Substitution*, p. 275.

*The separation of the Levites.* Num. 3:12-13 (the substance of which is repeated in slightly expanded form at Num. 8:14-18) defines the status of the Levites as set apart permanently for cultic service; and the reason given is once more to do with substitution:<sup>26</sup>

‘I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are mine, for all the firstborn are mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for myself every firstborn in Israel, whether man or animal.’

This regulation is a development of the principle outlined in Ex. 13, whereby all the firstborn in Israel, whether man or animal, are deemed to ‘belong to’ God in perpetuity (v. 2), as a memorial that God had preserved the lives of the firstborn in houses where the door-frame had been daubed with the blood of the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:21-29). Num. 3:12-13 portrays the service of the Levites as the effective application of this principle, the one tribe set apart substituting for the consecration of the firstborn of the whole nation.

*The redemption of the firstborn.* In the same vein, instruction is given in Ex. 13:12-13 for the redemption of firstborn sons and donkeys (these probably for economic reasons) by means of animal substitution:<sup>27</sup>

You are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

There follows in vv. 14-15 a reiteration in catechetical form of the historical background to this occasion for substitution.

#### **6.1.2.2 Human substitution**

26 Philip J. Budd, *Numbers* (Word Biblical Commentary, 5; Waco: Word, 1984), pp. 31-32, 34, 38; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 42, 360. De Vaux points out however that the OT text as it stands does contain conflicting accounts of the choosing and function of the Levites (Num. 3:6; Ex. 32:25-29; Deut. 10:6-9).

27 Durham, *Exodus*, p. 179; Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 151. The importance of this instruction may be gauged by its repetition several times in the Law (Ex. 22:29; 34:19-20; Num. 3:13; 18:15. Its fulfilment in regard to Jesus is recorded at Luke 2:23, quoting Ex. 13:2, 12. Num. 18:19 sets the redemption price for the firstborn son at five shekels (confirmed by Josephus, *Antiq.* 4:71).

Notwithstanding his comments on the general prevalence of the substitution motif for the Jews (see below, 7.1.4), Lohse notes,

The OT speaks remarkably little about the possibility of one *person* substituting for another. This reticence will have been based on the fact that sympathetic magic was forbidden in Israel. This prohibition excluded any possibility of substitutionary practices being interpreted as having magical effect.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, as Lohse points out, even in the absence of any theological explanation, the OT contains several pericopes which deal with the issue of human substitution:

*David and Bathsheba.* 2 Sam. 11 recounts the story of David's adultery with Bathsheba and his subsequent plot to have her husband Uriah killed. In 12:1-14, the prophet Nathan is sent to deliver to the king God's judgement, which was twofold: that his own wives would have public adulterous relationships (vv. 11-12); and that the child of his own adultery would die in his place:

David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan replied, 'The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die' (vv. 13-14).

It would be going too far to assert that here is an example of substitutionary atonement: as the narrative reads, the implication is that forgiveness is already granted in response to repentance, and that the death of the child is more a reassertion of God's righteousness; nevertheless, the theme of substitution in a penal context is also clearly present.

Anderson's view is that 'the sin is "transferred" to the child who dies instead of David.

However, this must be understood in the light of the existing concept of the unitary nature

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28 'Das Alte Testament spricht auffallend wenig davon, daß ein Mensch stellvertretend für den anderen eintreten kann. Diese Zurückhaltung wird darin begründet sein, daß der Analogiezauber in Israel verboten war. Durch dieses Verbot wurde ausgeschlossen, daß stellvertretendes Handeln als magische Wirkung verstanden werden können.' Lohse, *Märtyrer*, pp. 94-95. My italics to bring out the force of the German emphasis.

of the family or its corporate responsibility'.<sup>29</sup> However, such a 'transference of sin', as Anderson expresses it, outside the cultic context seems a rather strange concept: it would appear to be simpler just to regard the child's death as vicarious, in the simple sense that his death, though innocent, takes the place of what David deserved as a murderer, regardless of the theological detail.

*Moses' intercession.* A suggestion of voluntary vicarious substitution is found in Ex. 32:32, where Moses intercedes for the people of Israel after they have stirred God's wrath by making an idol in the form of a golden calf. Moses then goes further and pleads, 'Please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written'. This appears to imply considerably more than just an expression of solidarity, as the proposal entails a transfer of punishment. Although God declines Moses' offer of substitution, he does not rebuke it as improper: indeed he immediately reaffirms Moses' leadership, the inference being that Moses has thereby shown himself worthy of the task. Similar desires are later expressed by David over his son Absalom (2 Sam. 18:33) and Paul himself over his Jewish kinsfolk (Rom. 9:3).

*The law of the talion.* This custom, codified in Ex. 21:23, which is a legal principle designed to ensure equity in reparation,<sup>30</sup> is based upon a straightforward principle of substitution: 'If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, [etc.]'. Applied to a homicide, this reflects the rationale of the ancient tribal custom of blood-vengeance, whereby the blood of a kinsman must be avenged by that of his killer

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29 A.A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (Word Biblical Commentary, 11; Dallas: Word, 1989), p. 163.

30 Durham, *Exodus*, p. 324; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 10-12; Lohse, *Märtyrer*, p. 96.

or at any rate of one of the latter's kinsmen (גִּידָאֵל).<sup>31</sup> The importance of this blood-vengeance is underlined by the provision of regulations for dealing with an unsolved murder (Deut. 21:1-9): despite the absence of a suspect, the bloodshed of the innocent still requires atonement, so must be achieved by the blood of a substitute heifer. Through this substitution, the judicial requirement of blood reparation is achieved.

*Levirate marriage.* Another ancient social institution which became enshrined in the Law was the custom of levirate marriage, described in Deut. 25:5-6:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law [Latin: *levir*] to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

There follows a procedure whereby the brother-in-law can decline to cooperate (Deut. 25:7-10, reflected in Ruth 4:3-8) This custom, to which there are parallels among other Ancient Near Eastern societies,<sup>32</sup> is the framework both of the early story of Tamar (Gen. 38:6-19) and of the conundrum concerning seven brothers with the same wife, presented to Jesus by the Sadducees (Matt. 22:23-33); and, combined with the equally ancient custom of the *go'el* or kinsman redeemer,<sup>33</sup> in the tale of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4:1-12).<sup>34</sup> This custom is of interest in the present discussion, since it has nothing to do with the cult, nor is there any element of suffering involved: it is purely a well-established social convention in which substitution, in an area which is both intimate yet life-changing for the parties involved, is taken for granted.

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31 This custom is reflected in Gen. 4:23-24 (Lamek); 2 Sam. 3:27, 30 (Joab kills Abner to avenge his brother Asahel's death). In Israel, however, the custom was restrained to some extent by the establishment of cities of refuge (Num. 35:9-34; Deut. 19:1-13), allowing a measure of judicial intervention.

32 De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 36-37; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy* (2 vols.; Word Biblical Commentary, 6; Nashville: Nelson, 2002), vol. 2, pp. 603-609.

33 Codified in Lev. 25:25; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 21-22.

34 The same custom seems to be behind the story of the marriage of Tobias to Sarah in Tob. 6:12; 7:10-14.

### **6.1.3 Substitution as a motif in Israel's history, folklore and literature**

Admittedly of far less theological importance than those incidents described above which deal with either cultic or judicial matters, yet nevertheless of huge significance in understanding the thinking and culture in which both Paul and his Jewish audience were immersed, is the prominence of the motif of substitution in one form or another in Israel's literature, history and folklore. Lohse comments on the 'high value that Judaism attributed to substitution', and 'the broad domain of the related representations in Judaism'.<sup>35</sup> The reason for including these tales here is not because of any weighty theological significance comparable to the texts already examined: on the contrary, the point is to demonstrate the occurrence of the motif of replacement or substitution throughout the thought-world of Israel, from the cultic texts down to the popular and recreational.

*Replacement of the firstborn brother.* The substitution of the eldest brother, and his consequent loss of inheritance and status, by a younger is another frequent motif in the OT,<sup>36</sup> though the story behind it differs in every case. Examples include: Abel finds favour with God rather than Cain (Gen. 4:2-5); Isaac inherits, rather than Ishmael (Gen. 21:9-10); Jacob buys Esau's birthright (Gen. 25:29-34); Joseph favoured over Reuben; later Benjamin (Gen. 37:3; 42:4); Perez, second twin, manages to be born first rather than Zerah (Gen. 38:27-30); Ephraim receives blessing of firstborn in place of Manasseh (Gen. 48:17-19); David chosen as king despite being youngest, over Eliab and his brothers (1 Sam. 16:6-13). God gives the kingdom to Solomon instead of to his older brothers (1 Kgs 2:15).

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<sup>35</sup> 'Die hohe Bewertung, die das Judentum der Stellvertretung gab ... Das weite Gebiet der damit verbundenen Vorstellungen im Judentum'. Lohse, *Märtyrer*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>36</sup> De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 42.



The frequency of this motif's recurrence underlines the fascination it appears to have held for Ancient Israel. In most cases the story is related with some sense of wonder, as being contrary to custom and expectation; nevertheless such deviations from the cultural norm have, in most cases, huge consequences, including great blessing for the recipients of such unexpected preference. Furthermore, there is emphasis placed on the sovereignty and grace of God in choosing the substitute (Mal. 1:2-3; cf. Rom. 9:13).

*Deceptive substitution.*<sup>37</sup> Besides the many different examples of substitution serving either a cultic purpose or the salvific plans of God for his people, the OT patriarchal narratives also contain a considerable number of instances where the substitution can perhaps best be described as devious or manipulative (although in most cases God's plan remains demonstrably unthwarted). Examples of this recurrent motif are:<sup>38</sup> Abram's pretence on two occasions that his wife Sara was in fact his sister (Gen. 12:11-20; 20), a deception later repeated by his son Isaac in relation to Rebekah (Gen. 26: 7-11); his substitution of the maidservant Hagar for Sara in order to produce an heir (Gen. 16), and a similar story where childless Rachel offers Jacob her maid Bilhah (Gen. 30:1-8); Jacob's substitution of himself for his brother Esau to deceive his blind father and steal the blessing due to the firstborn (Gen. 27:1-40) and a similar story of Jacob later substituting Joseph's younger son Ephraim for the firstborn Manasseh (48:8-22); Laban's giving his elder

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37 This unusual motif is investigated in detail by Michael James Williams, *Deception in Genesis: an Investigation into the Morality of a Unique Biblical Phenomenon* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 32; New York: Lang, 2001).

38 Here are listed only those incidents involving human substitution, as relevant to this research. Other deception pericopes include: the Fall, including the serpent's deception and Adam and Eve's shifting blame (Gen. 3:1-13); Laban's attempt to deceive Jacob of his wages by switching the goats in his flock, and Jacob's retaliation (30:31-43); Rachel's theft of her father's household gods (31:19, 30-35); the slaughter of the recently circumcised Shechemites by Simeon and Levi in retaliation for the rape of their sister Dinah (34); the deception of Jacob by his sons to hide their sale of Joseph into slavery (37:29-35); Tamar's deception of her father-in-law Judah to become pregnant by him (38:11-26); the incrimination of Joseph by Potiphar's wife (39:1-20); two stories of Joseph deceiving his brothers ostensibly to test their motives (42:7-28; 44:1-34).

daughter Leah in marriage to Jacob in lieu of the younger sister Rachel whom he desired (Gen. 29:14-30), and his subsequent switching of his flocks to avoid giving Jacob his agreed wages (30:25-43).

The down-to-earth, arbitrary and, in many instances, scurrilous nature of these incidents only serves to emphasise how prevalent the theme of replacement or substitution appears to be in ancient Israel's society and consciousness, and thereby in their literary legacy.

#### **6.1.4 Summary**

The many and varied OT sources discussed in this section illustrate just how much the theme of substitution permeated not just the religious life of Israel but also her social institutions and culture. From the sacrifices at the heart of the cult and the foundational moments of the nation (e.g. Abraham's faith, Passover) to events involving the major figures in the history of the nation (Moses, David, etc.); from the hugely significant Suffering Servant prophecy to practices woven into the fabric of society like the redemption of the first born and levirate marriage; even in the rather mystifying patriarchal stories of deceit: everywhere there can be found the same motif of substitution. The next sections will show that this trend in Israel is by no means limited to biblical sources, but at this stage we will focus more particularly on the subject of suffering and the role of substitution in that context.

#### **6.2 Jewish interpretations of the meaning and purpose of suffering**

Only a brief historical sketch of this extensive subject is possible in the confines of space available, but that should suffice to provide some background for the purposes of this

research.<sup>39</sup> The earliest Jewish view on suffering, as it has come down to us in the OT, relegates the mystery of the existence of evil and suffering to the inscrutable sovereignty of God, a view stated in Amos 3:6, ‘When disaster comes to a city, has the Lord not caused it?’; Isa. 45:7, ‘I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things’. Held in balance with a deep conviction that God is holy and just, no problem presents itself, and a phlegmatic resignation is possible. For example, 2 Sam. 15:25-26:

Then the king said to Zadok, ‘Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favour in the Lord’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling-place again. But if he says, “I am not pleased with you”, then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him’.<sup>40</sup>

From about the time of the earliest canonical prophets however, a more systematic doctrine of rewards and punishments begins to evolve. This classic Jewish approach to the cause of suffering is straightforward and simple: God rewards with blessing those who keep covenant and obey his Law; conversely he punishes those who break covenant and are disobedient. This system operates at every level of society, from the individual through family and tribe to the nation, the latter reinforced with a strong ethos of corporate identity and hence responsibility. This principle is summarised succinctly in relation to the national welfare in Deut. 11:26-28:<sup>41</sup>

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God, and turn from the way that I command you today.

In the historical books of both the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler this principle is

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39 For more extensive treatments of the historical development, see Wolfgang Wichmann, *Die Leidenstheologie; eine Form der Leidensdeutung im Spätjudentum* (Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, 53; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930), pp. 1-15; Kraemer, *Responses*, pp. 17-35.

40 See also 1 Sam. 26:19.

41 This same principle is expounded at length in Lev. 26; Deut. 28. In Josh. 8:34, Joshua recites ‘all the law – the blessings and the curses’, a statement that reflects the same simplistic approach.

invoked repeatedly in their assessments of the welfare of the nation as a reflection of its obedience or otherwise, frequently as personified by the king. Hence the recurrent formulae serve as an interpretative context for the enumerated successes or disasters of their respective reigns which follow. In both histories the standard formula, with variants reads, ‘He did what was right / evil in the eyes of the Lord (as his father David had done / unlike his father David).’<sup>42</sup> Reduced to the level of an individual’s covenant relationship with God, this same approach results in the doctrine of retributive justice described above (1.1.6), where ultimately prosperity, health, long life and wellbeing – or, conversely, poverty, sickness and premature death – become the evidence of righteousness and sin respectively. On both the individual and corporate levels, the equation is simple: suffering = punishment. Not only do the laws themselves (e.g. Lev. 26:14-38; Deut. 28:15-68), and the comments of the redactors of the historical books, support this doctrine, but so too, influentially, do the early OT narratives: sin and suffering as punishment begin in Eden (Gen. 3:16-19) and the principle continues through the whole Torah.<sup>43</sup> Eventually, this tidy definition of the single cause and meaning of suffering as rooted directly in God’s judgement on sin, failed to stand up to scrutiny: the evidence of real life just did not support the simplistic formula that the righteous prosper and the sinners suffer, and so the issue of the suffering of the righteous became an endless debate. Von Rad describes the doctrine of retribution as ‘theories alien to life ... a doctrinaire system which could only end in theological catastrophe’;<sup>44</sup> and so it did. Qoheleth outlines the problem with great

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42 This formula occurs at 1 Kgs 14:22; 15:11, 26, 34; 16:25, 30; 22:43, 52; 2 Kgs 3:2; 8:18; 12:2; 13:2, 11; 14:3, 24; 15:3, 9, 18, 24, 28, 34; 16:2; 17:2; 18:3; 21:2, 6, 20; 22:2; 23:32; 24:9, 19; 2 Chron. 14:2; 20:32; 21:6; 22:4; 24:2; 25:2; 26:4; 27:2; 28:1; 29:2; 33:2, 6, 22; 34:2; 36:5, 9, 12. Significantly, at 1 Kgs 14:22, in place of the king’s (Rehoboam’s) name, the formula reads, ‘Judah did evil ...’, illustrating the strong national corporate personality (and hence responsibility) under the king as head.

43 Gen. 4:10-13; 6:5-7; 18:20-21; Ex. 32:5-10; Num. 11:1-3; 12:1-10; 14:26-35; 21:4-6; 25:3-4; Deut. 32:48-52.

44 Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (trans. James D. Martin; Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1972), p. 195.

clarity and bluntness:

And here is another frustration: the fact that the sentence imposed for evil deeds is not executed swiftly, which is why men are emboldened to do evil – the fact that a sinner may do evil a hundred times and his [punishment] still be delayed. For although I am aware that ‘it will be well with those who revere God since they revere him, and it will not be well with the scoundrel, and he will not live long, because he does not revere God’ – here is a frustration that occurs in the world: sometimes an upright man is requited according to the conduct of the scoundrel; and sometimes the scoundrel is requited according to the conduct of the upright. (Qoh. 8:10-14)<sup>45</sup>

Echoes of the resultant tension are heard in many parts of the OT, as some bemoaned the unfairness of their lot, whilst others began a prolonged search for alternative meanings to the dilemma of the suffering of the righteous.<sup>46</sup>

The following are the principle alternatives to the predominant retributive interpretation of suffering adduced in the OT and later Jewish writings:<sup>47</sup>

*Suffering as discipline.*<sup>48</sup> Sanders helpfully defines such discipline:

Not all of man’s sufferings are interpreted as divine discipline in the OT: God might destroy His people completely or He might punish them for sins committed. It is only when the punishment is interpreted as an opportunity to repent, and is seen as evidence of God’s goodness and love

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45 The author’s own translation, in Kraemer, *Responses*, pp. 33-34. This observation is echoed much later by Philo: ‘Blessings in complete abundance are heaped upon the most wicked and worthless of mankind, such as, for instance, wealth, a high reputation, honour in the eyes of the multitude, authority ... But all the lovers and practisers of wisdom and prudence, and every kind of virtue, everyone of them, I may almost say, are poor, unknown, inglorious, and in a mean condition.’ *De Providentia* 2:1. In *Works*, p. 748.

46 The history of the suffering of the righteous *as a recurrent motif* is traced and analysed in depth by Lothar Ruppert, *Der leidende Gerechte: eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Alten Testament und zwischentestamentlichen Judentum* (Forschung zur Bibel; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1972), but without exploring the ethical, theological and philosophical implications. It concludes with an interesting summary of the historical stages involved, pp. 182-189.

47 Wichmann, *Leidenstheologie*, pp. 5-15; H. Wheeler Robinson, *Suffering Human and Divine* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), pp. 33-48; Sanders, *Suffering*, p. 1; von Rad, *Wisdom*, pp. 195-206; Kraemer, *Responses*, pp. 22-35; Smith, *Paul’s Seven Explanations*, pp. 10-34, 59-78, 119-128, 135-139, 142-145. Naturally, as in any attempt to categorise beliefs and viewpoints that are hugely divergent both in perspective and time of writing, the number and nomenclature of the categories discerned varies considerably between these authors – in number between three and eight. For the same reason, as well as because in some passages there may be more than one facet discernible, there is often considerable overlap between categories.

48 Or, *remedial* (Smith), *educational* (‘Erziehungsleiden’, Wichmann); Kraemer categorises this approach under the heading ‘Suffering and love’.

that it is called divine discipline.<sup>49</sup>

Compared with the classic retributive interpretation, by adding the twin elements of love as context and motivation (hence Kraemer's categorisation (n. 49 below)) and repentance as purpose, the belief in suffering as discipline appears much more positive to sufferer and observer alike. Here, the framework is formed by God's covenant relationship to his people. For example:

Hazael king of Aram oppressed Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz. But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To this day he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence. (1 Kgs 13:22-23)

This is what the Lord says: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and I will have compassion on them. (Jer. 33:25-26)<sup>50</sup>

Such discipline may be either national (predominantly in the prophetic books)<sup>51</sup> or individual (chiefly in Job, Pss., Prov.), as for example:

I will be his [David's] father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him. (2 Sam. 7:24-25)<sup>52</sup>

In such passages the seemingly impersonal and at times bewildering process of retributive suffering is seen to have given way to a no less painful but infinitely more personal, purposeful – and thus more bearable – expression of parental love:

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49 Sanders, *Suffering*, p. 117.

50 Similar covenant motivation is expressed in Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 4:27-31; 9:26-27; Ps. 106:40-46; Jer. 46:28; Mic. 7:20.

51 Further examples include Deut. 8:5; Isa. 9:12; 42:25; 57:17; Jer. 2:19, 30; 3:3; 5:30; 11:6-8; 15:7; 30:11; Ezek. 6:7; 16:27-28; 23:48; Hos. 2:8-17; 3:4-5; 5:2; 5:15-6:3; 10:10; Amos 4:6-11; Zeph. 3:2; Hag. 2:17; Zech. 1:6.

52 Other mentions of divine discipline of the individual are 2 Chron. 33:10-13; Job 5:17; 11:13-15; 22:4, 21-30; 33:19; 36:7-12; Pss. 6:1-2; 22:1-21; 38:1-4; 39:7-11; 51:8-9; 73:14; 94:12; 119:25-26, 71-72; Prov. 3:11-12; 15:10.

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke,  
because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights  
in. (Prov. 3:10-11)

The benefits of such discipline are not always limited to the sufferers: in some cases the lesson is to be learnt by observing the exemplary suffering of others.<sup>53</sup> Nor is the evidence of this understanding by any means restricted to the OT: later Jewish literature has many examples.<sup>54</sup> Judith expresses the same view succinctly in addressing her fellow-countrymen under siege by Nebuchadnezzar's troops:

We have every reason to give thanks to the Lord our God: he is putting us to the test as he did our ancestors ... He is not subjecting us to the fiery ordeal by which he tested their loyalty, nor taking vengeance on us: it is for discipline that the Lord scourges his worshippers. (Judith 8:25, 27)

On the individual level, Wis. Sol. 12:2 states,

Thou dost correct offenders little by little, admonishing them and reminding them of their sins, in order that they may leave their evil ways and put their trust, O Lord, in thee.

Many further examples of the interpretation of suffering as loving discipline can be found in the apocryphal literature and at Qumran, and this aspect is particularly emphasised in the early rabbinic literature.<sup>55</sup> In some respects one extension further in the same direction, away from retribution and towards a beneficial purpose in suffering, is the development of belief in the atoning value of suffering, considered below.

*Suffering as testing.*<sup>56</sup> The rationale behind this interpretation, which is explicit in some of the oldest texts as well as upon later reflection,<sup>57</sup> is that God may at times test the faith and

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53 For example, Ex. 14:30-31; Deut. 11:2-7; 13:11; Ps. 64:8-10; Prov. 24:30-34; Isa. 53:5; Jer. 3:6-10; Ezek. 5:15.

54 For example, 2 Macc. 5:17; 3 Macc. 2:12-13; Pss. Sol. 2, 7, 8, 17; Ecclus 1:12-13; 18:13-14; 22:27-23:3; Wis. Sol. 3:4-6; 2 Bar. 13:10; 78:6; 4Q215; 1QH 13:15-18; 17:33-34.

55 Smith, *Paul's Seven Explanations*, pp. 61-78; Lohse, *Märtyrer*, pp. 29-32.

56 Or, *probationary* (Robinson, Sanders, Smith).

57 That is to say, the understanding of suffering as testing in certain specific OT passages existed contemporaneously with the classic retributive interpretation, rather than principally evolving (like the

righteousness of either the nation or an individual by seeing how they respond under some trial, affliction or command to obedience. In this context in particular, little distinction in practice appears to have been made between suffering more narrowly defined and general hardship or adversity. For the purposes of God's testing, they are all grist to the mill (and in that respect the diversity of affliction is parallel to that found later in Paul's own affliction lists (see above, 1.3). An example of national testing is Judg. 2:21-22:

I will no longer drive out before them [Israel] any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord.<sup>58</sup>

It is on the individual level, however, that this principle is mentioned more frequently, both in the OT and in later literature. The classic and most-quoted example is the case of Abraham, as God requires him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:1-19): the scene is set in v.1: 'Some time later God tested Abraham.' Testing of the individual is most frequently mentioned in the later books of the OT,<sup>59</sup> and the theme recurs often in the later Jewish texts. Speaking of the 'souls of the just', Wisdom 3:4-6 states,

Though in the sight of men they may be punished, they have a sure hope of immortality; and after a little chastisement they will receive great blessings, because God has tested them and found them worthy to be his. Like gold in a crucible he put them to the proof, and found them acceptable.<sup>60</sup>

There is often in such passages an express or implied overlap with the views that suffering may have atoning value, and that it will be rewarded or compensated in the next life (below).

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divine discipline interpretation) as an alternative to it.

58 Further examples of the principle of such national testing (though some do not specifically involve suffering so much as a call to obedience) are: Ex. 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2, 16; 13:3; Judg. 3:1, 4; Ps. 81:7.

59 For example, 1 Chron. 29:17; Job 7:18; 23:10; Pss. 7:9; 11:4; Prov. 17:3; Jer. 11:20; 12:3; 17:10; 20:12.

60 The same theme is found also in Ecclus 2:1-5; 4:17; 33:1; 44:20; Tob. 2:13-14; Jub. 17:17-18 (referring to Gen. 22); Ps. Sol. 16:14-15; TJos. 2:7-8; 4 Ezra 16:73.



*Suffering as revelational.*<sup>61</sup> According to this view, God may require the righteous to suffer as a means to further his saving purposes, a theme that later came to be associated particularly with the calling of the prophets, as their ministry provokes hostility and persecution. This is seen most clearly in the life of Jeremiah, who expresses dramatically the tension between the privilege and the burden of the calling:

The word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long.  
But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his  
word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of  
holding it in; indeed, I cannot. (Jer. 20:8-9)

Jeremiah further mentions death-threats (11:18-23); family betrayal (12:6); despair and disillusionment (15:18; 20:7).<sup>62</sup> Other prophets facing the hostility of the nation and its leaders are Elijah (1 Kgs 19:1-4), Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:27) and Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20-21), whilst Hosea (instructed to marry an adulteress, Hos. 1-3) and Ezekiel (losing his wife and forbidden to mourn, Ezek. 24:15-27) suffer deprivation through God's use of them as prophetic paradigms. The theme recurs later in the tales of suffering in 2 and 4 Macc. (below, 6.3).

The tradition of the suffering prophet is reflected in the 1st-century (?) *Lives of the prophets* which, though generally regarded as of little theological or historical weight,<sup>63</sup> does reflect the tendency to see martyrdom as part of the prophet's calling – of the 23 prophets' lives described, five are related as ending in martyrdom,<sup>64</sup> despite the silence of the canonical sources on the matter. A similar trend is probably behind the catalogue of the afflictions and exploits of the prophets in Heb. 11:32-38. There is a strong vicarious

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<sup>61</sup> Thus Robinson, Sanders; Smith terms this category *salvation-historically necessary*.

<sup>62</sup> 'It is deeply significant that some of the contemporaries of Jesus should have seen in him the return of Jeremiah [Matt. 16:14].' Robinson, *Suffering*, p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, pp. 382-383.

<sup>64</sup> In the case of Isaiah, his fate of being sawn in two in the *Lives* (and presumably alluded to in Heb. 11:37) agrees with the account in the *Martyrdom of Isaiah* (?1<sup>st</sup> century AD).

element to this prophetic suffering, as the hostility of the godless is borne in God's name on behalf of the nation.

*Suffering as atonement.*<sup>65</sup> Since this is of the greatest interest for this research, it will be treated separately below (6.2.1)

*Suffering as eschatological.* Beginning with what are perhaps among some of the later OT texts (Dan. 7-12; Mal.), this approach, closely linked to the nation's eschatological hopes (see below, 7.1) views the increase in the sufferings of the righteous – and the nation in particular – as a sign of the impending Day of the Lord.

These first five explanations, each of which is the fruit of theological reflection and debate, are supplemented with others which could be described as avoiding the attempt at explanation altogether (for which reason they will be treated very briefly), and which frequently overlap in the texts.<sup>66</sup>

*Suffering as transient.* This view is exemplified in Habakkuk when, following the prophet's complaints (1:2-2:1), God's reply speaks of 'an appointed time' to be awaited, and the statement that meanwhile 'the righteous will live by his faith' (2:3-4). It is particularly frequent in the Psalms,<sup>67</sup> where the key words 'hope' and 'wait' sum up the desired response.

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<sup>65</sup> Or, *sacrificial* (Robinson). Kraemer includes this in his category 'Suffering and love'; Smith places it under 'salvation-historically necessary'.

<sup>66</sup> In addition to those enumerated here, Kraemer identifies two further explanations which do not occur in the OT but arose in the Hellenistic period: first, the concept of fate (τύχη), exemplified in Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6:250, 267-268, 310-311; second, a kind of naturalistic explanation, seen on the one hand in the appeal to reason which sees suffering not as a problem but as a virtue – for example in 4 Macc. (see below, 6.3), or on the other hand in the kind of explanation of 'natural causes', as given by Philo, *De providentia* 2:53-58.

<sup>67</sup> For example, Pss. 27:13-14; 33:20-22; 130:5-8. Also, Zeph. 3:8-20.

*Suffering as mysterious.* This approach is characteristic of the wisdom literature,<sup>68</sup> and seeks refuge in the inscrutable sovereignty and wisdom of God: ‘Who can say to him, “What are you doing?”’ (Job 9:12; Wis. Sol. 12:12).

*Suffering as meaningless.*<sup>69</sup> The most extensive OT exploration of this view is generally considered to be reflected in Qoheleth,<sup>70</sup> (particularly if one accepts the broad consensus opinion that the epilogue (12:9-14) is a later addition).<sup>71</sup> Qoheleth concludes, having sought for meaning in life,

All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not ... This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: the same destiny overtakes all. (9:2-3)

Ps. 49 expresses many of the same sentiments and views, yet with less frustration, whilst similar sentiments are expressed by Job’s complaint in Job 24, and implied in chs. 29-31.

### **6.2.1 Suffering as atonement**

The normal procedure through the OT cultus for atoning for sins was to offer the appropriate blood sacrifice as prescribed in Lev. 1, 4:1-6:8. However, as the survival of the Jewish faith through the OT Exile and later the destruction of the Temple in 70AD demonstrated, there were already alternative or supplementary means of atonement and forgiveness of sin available.<sup>72</sup> Some hints of the validity of such non-cultic atonement appear in the OT: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than

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68 Von Rad, *Wisdom*, pp. 195-206.

69 Or, *suffering in vain* (Kraemer).

70 Kraemer, *Responses*, pp. 33-34.

71 Roland Murphy, *Ecclesiastes* (Word Biblical Commentary, 23A; Dallas: Word, 1992), p. 124.

72 Sanders, *Judaism*, pp. 251-257; Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. John Baker; 2 vols.; London: SCM Press, 1961-67), vol. 2, pp. 443-483.

burnt offerings' (Hos. 6:6); 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise' (Ps. 51:17). The rabbinic view is most clearly stated in the teaching on the four degrees of atonement by R. Ishmael (died ca. 130AD), which is repeated many times in the literature. In it, he identifies four degrees of seriousness for sins, each of which requires atonement according to an escalating scale: repentance, Day of Atonement, chastisements, and finally death.<sup>73</sup> R. Ishmael's influential approach<sup>74</sup> introduces three of the most important non-cultic means of atonement, and predominant amongst these is *repentance*.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, for later Jewish writers both this and confession increasingly became considered an indispensable component of offering any sacrifice, though they went to great lengths to avoid carefully any suggestion that the temple cult was deficient, as Sanders outlines in detail.<sup>76</sup> Philo, for example, writes at some length on the inner conviction and self-reproach that is an indispensable part of the sacrificial act:<sup>77</sup>

'God looks not upon the victims as forming the real sacrifice, but on the mind and

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73 'One scriptural passage says: 'Return, O backsliding children' (Jer. 3.14), from which we learn that repentance effects atonement. And another scriptural passage says: 'for on this day shall atonement be made for you (Lev. 16.30), from which we learn that the Day of Atonement effects atonement. Still another scriptural passage says: 'Surely this iniquity shall not be expiated by you until ye die' (Isa. 22.14), from which we learn that death effects atonement. And still another scriptural passage says: 'Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with strokes, (Ps. 89.33), from which we learn that chastisements effect atonement. How are all these four passages to be maintained? If one has transgressed a positive commandment and repents of it, he is forgiven on the spot ... If one has violated a negative commandment and repents of it, repentance alone has not the power of atonement. It merely leaves the matter pending and the Day of Atonement effects atonement ... If one wilfully commits transgressions punishable by extinction or death at the hands of the court and repents, repentance cannot leave the matter pending nor can the Day of Atonement effect atonement. But both repentance and the Day of Atonement together atone for one half. And chastisements atone for half ... However, if one has profaned the name of God and repents, his repentance cannot make the case pending, neither can the Day of Atonement effect atonement, nor can sufferings cleanse him of his guilt. But repentance and the Day of Atonement both can merely make the matter pend. And the day of death with the suffering preceding it cleanses him.' Mekh. Ex. 20:7.

74 Lohse, *Märtyrer*, p. 34 lists all the other references.

75 E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: a Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 159-180; *Judaism*, pp. 252-253; Lohse, *Märtyrer*, pp. 25-29.

76 This is already evident in the cultic instructions for the confession of sins over the sacrificial animal in Lev. 5:5 (sin offering); 16:27 (Day of Atonement); as well as in civil cases (Num. 5:7).

77 Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1:67, 187, 203, 227, 235-237; *Moses* 2:147.

willingness of him who offers them’;<sup>78</sup> and furthermore, that both sacrifice and prayer are essential for every person in order to ensure propitiation and avoid chastisement.<sup>79</sup>

More serious sins might be atoned for through *sufferings*.<sup>80</sup> This is very closely linked to and part of the understanding of suffering as discipline (above, 7.3). Smith declares, ‘It is unanimously agreed by the early rabbis that, “Chastisements are precious”.’<sup>81</sup> In the first place suffering can be positive if it encourages repentance by evoking the correct response: R. Aqiba (late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD), reportedly pointed this out to the sick R. Eliezer,<sup>82</sup> with reference to the example of King Manasseh, who repented of his apostasy and was consequently restored (2 Chron. 33: 10-13). Such an explanation of cause and effect is readily observable; the suffering of the righteous, however, is precious because it can atone for sins. In *Sipre* Deut. 32,<sup>83</sup> R. Aqiba states,

A person should be happier with suffering than with good, for even if a person experiences good all of his days, he is not forgiven for his sins.

And what causes his sins to be forgiven? Say: suffering.

There follow several concurring comments from other early rabbis (including reference to the benefits of discipline mentioned in Prov. 3:11-12; Deut. 8:5), of which perhaps the most outspoken is that of R. Nehemiah, a pupil of Aqiba:

Precious are sufferings, for just as sacrifices pardon, so too do sufferings pardon ... and not only so, but sufferings pardon more than sacrifices. For what reason? Because sacrifices are with property, but sufferings are with body. (Mekh. Ex. 20:23)

Here one can see how the classical doctrine of retribution has in effect been turned upside down, so that sufferings become a sign not of God’s judgement but of his favour. Not only

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<sup>78</sup> Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1:290. In *Works*, pp. 561-562.

<sup>79</sup> Philo, *Moses*, 2:147.

<sup>80</sup> Wichmann, *Leidenstheologie*; Lohse, *Märtyrer*, pp. 29-32; Kraemer, *Responses*, pp. 23-24, 81-85.

<sup>81</sup> Smith, *Paul’s Seven Explanations*, p. 74.

<sup>82</sup> *Sipre* Deut. 32; *Mekilta Bahodesh* 10:60-86.

<sup>83</sup> Also in *Mekh. Ex.* 20:23.

that, but they may even be vicarious. Lohse summarises the early rabbinic view:

The prophets suffered vicariously; primarily Moses, Ezekiel and Jonah, but also Daniel and Job were named as those who suffered for Israel. The martyrs suffer vicariously. And the pains that R. Judah and R. Eleazar ben Simon had to bear had the effect that during that time nobody died prematurely, no stillbirths occurred, and the rain never failed. For upon these two learned men had come all the sufferings of Israel, so that they bore the punishment vicariously for Israel.<sup>84</sup>

If this perspective on the suffering of the righteous developed so early in the rabbinic period, it maybe sheds an interesting light on Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), and in particular Father Abraham's reply to the rich man: 'Remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony' (v. 25). There is a hint here that Jesus may be endorsing the view that the afflictions of the righteous have atoning value, though of course that is not the main point of the parable.

Both in R. Ishmael's popular schema (above, n. 73) and throughout the Jewish literature of the time, the most potent means of atonement is by death.<sup>85</sup> This huge topic, which includes consideration of the atoning value of martyrdom, voluntary death, and capital punishment as special cases, is far beyond the scope of this research.

Those listed above are the principal but not the only means of atonement found in the literature of late Judaism. According to Lohse,

From the perspective of the Rabbis, atonement can be obtained through works of love, charity and almsgiving, through reparation, study of

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84 'Stellvertretend haben die Propheten gelitten; vornehmlich Mose, Hezekiel und Jona, aber auch Daniel und Hiob werden als solche genannt, die für Israel litten. Stellvertretend leiden die Märtyrer. Und die Schmerzen, die Rabbi Jehuda und R. El'azar b. Simon zu ertragen hatten, bewirkten, daß in dieser Zeit niemand vorzeitig starb, keine Fehlgeburten eintraten und es niemals an Regen mangelte. Denn auf diesen beiden Gelehrten waren alle Leiden Israels gekommen, so daß sie stellvertretend für Israel die Strafe trugen.' Lohse, *Märtyrer*, pp. 31-32.

85 Lohse, *Märtyrer*, pp. 33-110; Sanders, *Paul*, pp. 158-159, 172-174.

Torah, fasting, and prayer. Whoever honours his father can thereby atone for his sins.<sup>86</sup>

### **6.2.2 Future justice**

There remains one vital factor which informs and permeates many of the later developments in Jewish thinking on suffering: the growing beliefs in resurrection, an afterlife, and the consequent possibility of deferred justice. It is impossible here to trace in detail the complex threads of such doctrines,<sup>87</sup> but the key points may be summarised as follows:

There had already existed in OT times some elements of belief in deferred justice. For example, the ‘Day of the Lord’ (above, 6.1.1) included in many cases a degree of judgement (Isa. 2:12-17; Mal. 4:1) and reward (Isa. 2:2-4; Mal. 3:16-17). Similarly, the belief in suffering as transient expressed by Habakkuk (above, 6.2) presupposes a later settlement of affairs.

The second half of the book of Daniel, arguably among the latest compositions of the OT (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), contains several apocalyptic visions, and in the last is the first recorded explicit promise of resurrection for the righteous. Dan. 12:2-3 states:

Many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.<sup>88</sup>

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86 ‘Sühne kann nach Ansicht der Rabbinen erworben werden durch Liebeswerke, Wohltätigkeit und Almosen, durch Wiedergutmachung, Studium der Tora, Fasten und Gebet. Wer den Vater ehrt, kann dadurch seine Sünden sühnen.’ Lohse, *Märtyrer*, pp. 25. Lohse supplies extensive references to this list.

87 Summaries can be found in Kraemer, *Responses*, pp. 25-27, 39-44; Eichrodt, *Theology*, vol. 2, pp. 509-527; E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), pp. 298-303; Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, pp. 554-555.

88 Kraemer points out that although in some respects this statement is couched in fairly vague terms (‘many’, ‘some’, and leaves open the question whether the promise is for individuals) so that it might not be relied on confidently by an individual threatened with suffering, that is far from the case by the time of

During the intertestamental period, the belief in justice after death gathered wider popularity, to the degree that Kraemer can summarise, ‘Typifying documents of this period is the opinion that the scales of divine justice will be properly reconciled only in some future world.’<sup>89</sup> The development of increasingly widespread belief in a ‘world to come’ throws open a much wider context for the operation of God’s justice and thereby a whole new perspective on the suffering of the righteous.

The variety of opinion on the suffering of the righteous, the frequent interpretation of it in terms of atonement, and most significantly the possibility of such atonement being not just of individual benefit but applicable also to the community, pave the way for developing a belief in vicarious suffering – and perhaps the most important impetus to this was given by the stories surrounding the victims of the Maccabean Wars.

### **6.3 Vicarious suffering in the Maccabean martyrs story, and its legacy**

Probably no single event during the intertestamental period made a greater impact upon the Jewish people and their thinking than the Maccabean Revolt (167-160BC), and it is during this era that many of their views on the meaning and purpose of the suffering of the righteous appear to have been re-formulated. The heroic leadership of the Maccabees, the ultimate deliverance by God from the Seleucid enemy, and the persecution and sufferings involved, all made an indelible mark on the nation’s consciousness and beliefs. There exist four Books of the Maccabees, of which the first is a history of the causes and the course of the war. 3 Maccabees is a tale of miraculous deliverance of the Jews in Egypt some fifty years before the Maccabean events but otherwise unconnected and of little influence; it is

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<sup>2</sup> Macc., only two generations later (below, 7.3). Kraemer, *Responses*, pp. 27, 229.

<sup>89</sup> Kraemer, *Responses*, p. 39.



in the Hellenistic 2 Maccabees (late 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 1<sup>st</sup> century BC) and 4 Maccabees ( usually dated to shortly before 70AD) that are found in some detail the tales of torture and martyrdom which were to have huge influence on both Jewish and later Christian attitudes to martyrdom,<sup>90</sup> and two tales are particularly vivid and illustrative.<sup>91</sup>

The first such episode (2 Macc. 6:18-31) recounts the story of Eleazar, a devout and righteous man of a great age, who first is forced to eat pork but spits it out rather than eat anything unclean; then, being urged to merely pretend to eat it and thus escape the punishment of death, refuses lest he set a bad example for the young, and besides, ‘I might for the present avoid man’s punishment, but, alive or dead, I shall never escape from the hand of the Almighty’. The second episode, following immediately after (2 Macc. 7), recounts in gruesome detail the inquisition by Antiochus IV of a godly mother and her seven devout sons, each of whom in turn is tortured but embraces death for the sake of the Law (7:2, 11, 30) , and confessing faith in resurrection (7:9, 11, 14, 23, 29, 36).

Aside from the heroic stand taken by the faithful in these two stories, two statements in particular stand out, as the author seeks to guide the reader’s understanding of them. First, he writes, before recounting the narrative, ‘Now I beg my readers not to be disheartened by these calamities, but to reflect that such penalties were inflicted for the discipline of our race and not for its destruction’ (6:12); and at the end, the climactic speech of the seventh and youngest son concludes, ‘With me and my brothers may the Almighty’s anger, which

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90 Seeley, however, dates it earlier: 20-54AD. David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Greco-Roman Martyrology and Paul’s Concept of Salvation* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 28; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), p. 13.

91 These passages, and their influence on Jewish and Christian beliefs, are examined in great detail in Jan Willem van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: a Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 57; Leiden Brill, 1997).

has justly fallen on all our race, be ended' (7:38). If the first statement exemplifies the not uncommon contemporary belief in suffering as divine discipline, the second appears not only to portray the atoning effect of the suffering of the righteous or 'noble death', but contains also more than a hint that this may be vicarious on behalf of the body of believers – in this case the Jewish nation.

By the time that these same two stories are re-told in 4 Maccabees, where they are the focus of the entire work, they have grown in the telling, not just in the florid detail of the narrative, but also in the theological interpretations provided.<sup>92</sup> Eleazar's story and the commentary thereon fill chapters 5-7, and the final words of Eleazar, as he dies 'for the sake of the Law' are a prayer: 'Be merciful to your people and let our punishment be a satisfaction on their behalf. Make my blood their purification and take my life as a ransom for theirs' (6:28-29). Anderson comments on this verse that it is 'the most explicit statement in 4 Mac of the concept of the martyr's death as a vicarious atonement for the people, a concept absent from 2 Mac',<sup>93</sup> (though it is by no means the only such expression).<sup>94</sup> The story of the mother and her seven sons has likewise been expanded to eleven chapters, and in the final commentary the writer includes this assessment of the martyrdoms: 'The tyrant was punished and our land purified, since they became, as it were, a ransom for the sin of our nation. Through the blood of these righteous ones and through the propitiation of their death the divine providence rescued Israel' (17:21-22).

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92 The author's stated aim in 4 Maccabees is to prove that 'devout reason is absolute master of the passions' (1:1, 7, 13) and after first asserting (ch. 2) that the Law is compatible with reason, he then employs the two tales in question as his evidence.

93 H. Anderson in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, p. 552.

94 Other expressions in the same vein are found at 1:11, '[they overcame] the tyrant by their fortitude so that through them our own land was purified'; 9:24, 'Fight the sacred and noble fight for true religion and through it may the just providence that protected our fathers become merciful to our people'; 12:18, 'When he was on the point of death, he declared ... I call upon the God of my fathers to be merciful to our people'; 18:4, 'It was because of them [the martyrs] that our nation enjoyed peace'.

In this later version, therefore, of both of these tales, there appears to be a clear expression of belief not only in the atoning value of the death of the righteous, but also in the vicarious benefit of it to the whole body of believers, in this present case the Jewish nation. The significance of this is great, for two reasons: first, because the Maccabean books as a group are often regarded as a precursor or template for the later development of the Christian martyrologies (see below, 6.6); and second - particularly relevant if this link is admitted – there is here a belief in vicarious affliction very closely contemporaneous with Paul's statement in Col. 1:24.

The continuing influence of the Maccabean martyrdoms is not quite as simple to assess as might appear at first glance. On the one hand, there seems clear evidence that in literary terms, the later genre of Christian martyrdom tales finds its earliest roots in 2 and 4 Macc.<sup>95</sup> On the other, the interest of this present research lies more in whether the Maccabean martyrdoms helped to change the thinking of later generations, Jewish and Christian alike, on the atoning value of the suffering of the righteous.

#### **6.4 Further examples of vicarious suffering in Jewish literature**

Although the passages described above from 4 Maccabees are probably the best known, they are by no means the only mentions of belief in vicarious suffering in Jewish literature in the centuries immediately before and after Christ. TBenj, 3:8, for example, the prophecy

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95 Marie-Françoise Baslez, 'The origin of the martyrdom images: from the Book of Maccabees to the first Christians'. In Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér, eds., *The Books of the Maccabees: History, Theology, Ideology: Papers of the Second International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Pépa, Hungary, 9-11 June, 2005* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 118; Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 113-130; Raphaëlle Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées: de l'histoire juive au culte chrétien: les homélies de Grégoire de Nazianze et de Jean Chrysostome* (Supplements to Vigiliae christianae, 80; Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 5-6. See also below (6.6) and the bibliography there.

over Benjamin ascribed to Jacob reads,

In you will be fulfilled the heavenly prophecy which says that the spotless one will be defiled by lawless men and the sinless one will die for the sake of impious men.

This version of the text is dated to the mid-late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC,<sup>96</sup> thus predating the Christian interpolations which are evident in the longer version, and demonstrates additionally a Jewish interpretation of the ‘Suffering Servant’ prophecies as vicarious suffering that predates the NT by several generations.

In the *Life of Adam and Eve* (1<sup>st</sup> century AD?),<sup>97</sup> there is an undeveloped allusion to vicarious suffering in both versions of the text. The Latin *Vita* text (35:2-3) reads,<sup>98</sup>

Eve herself began to weep, saying, ‘O Lord my God, transfer his pain to me, since it is I who sinned’, and Eve said to Adam, ‘My Lord, give me a portion of your pain, for this guilt has come from you to me’

The suggestion here is not so much of atoning substitution as of the simple transference of affliction to one person for the benefit of another.

It appears that the Qumran community too was familiar with the concept of atonement through vicarious suffering, as the motif occurs several times in the *Community Rule* (1QS, usually dated ca. 100-75BC):<sup>99</sup>

[The Council of the Community] shall preserve the faith in the Land

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96 The version quoted is the Armenian version. The longer  $\beta$  text, with Christian interpolations, reads, ‘Through you will be fulfilled the heavenly prophecy concerning the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the world, because the unspotted one will be betrayed by lawless men, and the sinless one will die for impious men by the blood of the covenant for the salvation of the Gentiles and for Israel and the destruction of Beliar and his servants.’ It seems a little odd that early Christians should have sought to adapt this prophecy regarding Benjamin, as it must have been known to them that Christ was from the tribe of Judah.

97 Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, p. 252.

98 The Greek *Apocalypse* text reads, ‘And Eve also wept and said, “My lord Adam, rise, give me half of your illness and let me bear it, because this has happened to you through me; because of me you suffer troubles and pains” (ApMos 9:2).

99 Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 61; *The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls*  
<<http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/community>> [accessed 17/7/2012]

with steadfastness and meekness and shall atone for sin by the practice of justice and by suffering the sorrows of affliction ... They shall be witnesses to the truth at the Judgement, and shall be the elect of Goodwill who shall atone for the Land and pay to the wicked their reward ... And they shall be an agreeable offering, atoning for the Land and determining the judgement of wickedness, and there shall be no more iniquity. (1QS 8:3-4, 6, 10)

[The members of the Community] shall atone for guilty rebellion and for sins of unfaithfulness that they may obtain lovingkindness for the Land without the flesh of holocausts and the fat of sacrifice. (1QS 9:4)

They shall atone for all those in Aaron who have freely pledged themselves to holiness, and for those in Israel who have freely pledged themselves to the House of Truth. (1QS 5:6).

Although only the first of these references to the atoning work of the Community specifically mentions affliction or suffering, the common context of all three passages makes it clear that it is through the self-denial and discipline of holiness and obedience to the Law and the teachings of the Community that the vicarious atonement is to be effected.<sup>100</sup>

Although such references are thinly scattered in the literature of the period, they appear consistent enough to suggest that the notion of vicarious suffering was far from a novelty in Jewish circles around the time of Paul. Anderson comments:

The idea that the suffering and death of the righteous atoned vicariously for the sins of others is sufficiently well attested ... to suggest that it was in the air in the intertestamental period ... We can recognize that the readers of 4 Maccabees would certainly not have regarded the notion of vicarious redemption as a novel doctrine introduced by the author.<sup>101</sup>

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100 Not only do many of the Qumran documents portray a life of ascetic practice, hard labour and self-deprivation; if, as is usually maintained, the Qumran sect community belonged to or were associated with the Essene sect, then the detailed description of their beliefs and lifestyle by Josephus also indicates that they would be no strangers to affliction. *Jos. War* 2.8.2-13. On the identity of the Qumran sect with the Essenes, Vermes writes, 'I assume, in the company of the majority of scholars, that the ancient Jewish sect of the Essenes and the Qumran Community were probably one and the same.' Vermes, *Dead Sea scrolls*, p. xv. Also, Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, pp. 522-524.

101 H. Anderson. In Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, p. 539.

Boustán<sup>102</sup> has demonstrated how during the intertestamental period the notion of vicarious suffering became far more widespread in Jewish circles. In this respect the Jewish beliefs were remarkably parallel to those current in both Greek and Roman society at the time, and although naturally the roots of such beliefs in the pagan culture are very different, they can be traced back even further in time.

In conclusion, it seems fair to assume that Paul, as a highly educated Jew, would not only have a share in the heritage of the Scriptures and their interpretation, but also an awareness of the popular contemporary views on vicarious suffering reflected in the extra-biblical literature reviewed here, and is likely to have been influenced by these as he wrote of ‘filling up the afflictions of Christ ... for the sake of his Body’.

### **6.5 The ‘noble death’ in Greek and Roman society and literature**

The influences on Paul, as an educated Hellenistic Jew, were wider than just those from his Jewish ethnic and religious heritage. So far this overview has considered only the Jewish scriptures and traditions with regard to the suffering of the righteous; there was also, however, a long and commonly held tradition in Greco-Roman culture that viewed suffering (and death in particular) unmerited and bravely borne as of great honour and merit, and Paul was most probably well aware of these traditions too. Only a brief summary of the chief aspects of these beliefs is possible here.<sup>103</sup>

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102 Ra’anan S. Boustán, *From Martyr to Mystic; Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 112; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 149-165.

103 Fuller treatments can be found in Seeley, *Noble Death*, pp. 113-141; Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), pp. 17-45; Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (The Context of Early Christianity; London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 9-41; Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions* (Anchor Yale Reference

Seeley lists the five characteristic components of the ‘noble death’ motif as obedience; the overcoming of physical vulnerability; a military setting (though this may be spiritualised, or else metaphorical, as applied to some of the philosophers); vicariousness, or the quality of being beneficial to others; and sacrificial metaphors.<sup>104</sup> It is immediately evident that the martyrs’ deaths in 4 Macc. fit these criteria, as would later many of the classic Christian martyrologies (below, 6.6). Although at first glance they may appear to have little in common, the two main categories of noble death esteemed by the Greeks and Romans, the military and the philosophical, share the essential characteristic that members of each profession are willing to die for their beliefs, demonstrating that honour is dearer to them than life itself. In the case of soldiers this of course reflects a universal and timeless tradition, which in the case of the Greeks is reflected in the literature from as early as Homer. The most striking difference in the Greek tradition is the emphasis on choice: voluntary death or even suicide may be considered more desirable - because deemed noble - than life at any cost. For example, the great hero Achilles declares:

Destiny has left me two courses open to me on my journey to the grave.  
If I stay here and play my part in the siege of Troy, there is no home-  
coming for me, though I shall win undying fame. But if I go home to my  
own country, my good name will be lost, though I shall have long life,  
and shall be spared an early death.<sup>105</sup>

Likewise, Sophocles’ Ajax describes the issues of life and death in brutally frank terms:

It is shameful for a man to desire long life when it grants him no relief  
from troubles. What joy has he when day after day pushes you forward a  
little, back a little towards final death. I wouldn’t think much of a mortal

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Library; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 23-39.

104 Seeley, *Noble Death*, p. 13.

105 Homer, *Iliad*, 9.410-416. Further examples of voluntary death occur in *Odyssey* 11.271-280; 11.543-567; 15.353-359.

who warms himself with vain hopes. Either to live nobly or to die nobly is what a noble man must do.<sup>106</sup>

These two heroes not only express succinctly the thinking behind the noble death, but became role models, along with other heroes of myth and legend, for later imitators, both Greek and Roman.<sup>107</sup>

From the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, a tradition developed in Athens of composing funeral orations in honour of those who had fallen in battle for the homeland.<sup>108</sup> Few have survived in the literature, but the flavour of the theme of noble death may be gleaned from Pericles' oration (430BC), where he describes the dead of the Peloponnesian War:

And when the moment came, they were minded to resist and suffer, rather than to fly and save their lives; they ran away from the word of dishonour, but on the battle-field their feet stood fast, and in an instant, at the height of their fortune, they passed away from the scene, not of their fear, but of their glory.<sup>109</sup>

Demosthenes in his oration similarly concentrates more on the soldiers' motivations than on the details of their achievements: 'They did not take notice of their desire to live, natural to all people, and chose to die nobly rather than live on and see Greece in misfortune.'<sup>110</sup> Although such eulogy of the fallen in battle is common in most cultures, the Greek funeral orations emphasise not just the sacrifice but particularly the choice of death rather than life, and the nobility of spirit behind that.

Amongst the Greek dramatists, Euripides the tragedian in particular incorporates the theme

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106 Sophocles, *Ajax*, 473-480.

107 Seeley, *Noble Death*, p. 20.

108 Van Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom*, pp. 16-19, 33-36. The ceremony is described in Thucydides 2.34.

109 Recorded in Thucydides 2.35-45.

110 Demosthenes, *Oration* 60.1 following the Battle of Chaeronea, 338BC.



of noble death into several plays.<sup>111</sup> In *Alcestis*, the theme is even one of vicarious substitutionary death, where Queen Alcestis dies in place of her husband Admetus, the deal being outlined by Apollo in the opening speech, introducing ‘The son of Pheres, whom I snatched from death by tricking the Fates: and the Goddesses promised me, “Admetus shall escape instant Hades if he exchanges with another corpse.”’<sup>112</sup>

The Romans had a completely different but ancient tradition of noble death in the context of military duty, termed a *devotio*.<sup>113</sup> Livy describes how in such an event the commander before battle would, as a means to secure victory, dedicate himself (or a substitute) to the gods of the underworld in a solemn ceremony,<sup>114</sup> reciting a formula dictated by the *pontifex*, and then seek death as a substitute for the army. The *devotio* of P. Decius Mus is described as follows:

‘Why’, he asked, ‘do I seek any longer to postpone the doom of our house? It is the privilege of our family that we should be sacrificed to avert the nation’s perils. Now will I offer up the legions of the enemy, to be slain with myself as victims to Earth and the Manes.’ ... He was then devoted ... and having added to the usual prayers that he was driving before him fear and panic, blood and carnage, and the wrath of gods celestial and gods infernal, and should blight with a curse the standards, weapons and armour of the enemy ... he spurred his charger against the enemy lines, where he saw that they were thickest, and hurling himself against the weapons of the enemy met his death. From that moment the battle seemed scarce to depend on human efforts.<sup>115</sup>

These few but varied examples of the military noble death illustrate not so much the existence among the Greeks and Romans of miscellaneous customs as a pervading ethos and appreciation of life held cheap in the face of the choice between survival with

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111 The theme of noble death appears also in *Phoenissae*, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, *Hecuba*, *Helen* and *Orestes*.

112 Euripides, *Alcestis* 11-14.

113 Seeley, *Noble Death*, pp. 19-21, 36-38.

114 Livy 8.9.4-9; 10.28.3-10.29.7.

115 Livy 10.28.13, 15-10.29.1. Translation from *Livy: with an English translation by B.O. Foster* (13 vols.; Loeb Classical Library; London: Heinemann, 1917-1951), vol. 4, pp. 467-469.

dishonour or noble death with glory in the interest of the nation.<sup>116</sup> In the popular thinking of NT times, however, the main focus of the concept of noble death was no longer its military origins: these had been largely superseded by the influence of the philosophers – in particular the Stoics.

For both Greeks and Romans the death of Socrates (399BC) exercised a unique influence and became not just the focus of admiration but also in many cases a model for imitation.<sup>117</sup> Socrates had been accused and convicted on two charges of impiety and corrupting the minds of the young, to both of which he pleaded not guilty. Having been condemned to death, he chose to die voluntarily by his own hand, and his trial, his conversations before and afterwards, and ultimately his death were commemorated at length by his disciple Plato,<sup>118</sup> whose purpose is not merely to exonerate his teacher, but to demonstrate through Socrates' own words and actions his nobility of life and death. In his case the 'noble death' is illustrated by, among other things, his fearlessness of death; his willingness to submit to authority and face the trumped-up charges, despite the opportunity to flee; his remaining true to himself; and finally in exercising the freedom to take his own life rather than have it taken from him. His typical attitude is expressed in the *Apology*:

You are wrong, sir, if you think a man of the slightest worth ought to calculate the risks of living and dying, rather than look at this alone, when he acts, whether he does right or wrong, and the works of a good man or a bad one.<sup>119</sup>

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- 116 Although this section focuses on the Greek and Roman attitude to noble death, there are also notable and very similar military examples of this same principle amongst the Jews. For example: Eleazar Avaran (1 Macc. 6:43-46); Razis (2 Macc. 14:37-46); the Masada rebels (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7:389-406).
  - 117 Droge and Tabor, *Noble Death*, pp. 20-22; van Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom*, pp. 12-14, 28-30; Seeley, *Noble Death*, pp. 114-141.
  - 118 Plato, *Euthyphro* (a dialogue set as Socrates is on his way to court); *Apology* (Socrates' defence); *Crito* and *Phaedo* (discussions set in Socrates' prison cell). Plato, *The last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, The Apology, Crito, Phaedo* (trans. Hugh Tredennick; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
  - 119 Plato, *Apol.* 28B.

Writing centuries later, Seneca sums up Socrates' noble death:

Socrates in prison held discussions, and refused to leave when some offered him the opportunity to escape; he stayed in order to set humankind free from two of its most oppressive matters, death and prison.<sup>120</sup>

Seneca, in the same *Letter to Lucilius* (no. 24, conventionally entitled *On Despising Death*), tells the stories of five others who also died the noble death,<sup>121</sup> making the point in each case that the death was beneficial to posterity. At one point he writes, 'These tales', you say, 'have been recited repeatedly in all the schools. Soon, when you have got to the subject of "Despising death", you will tell me about Cato.'<sup>122</sup> Whereupon he does just that, relating how Cato 'read Plato's book [on the death of Socrates] on that last night, with a sword placed at the head of the bed.' This passage confirms that the stories of noble death were familiar to every schoolchild since they were judged to be beneficial and educational – and that some, like Cato, regarded the deaths of Socrates and other predecessors as worthy of imitation. Seneca returns to the subject of Cato's suicide in *Epistle 67*, describing it as 'the most beautiful and magnificent virtue'.<sup>123</sup>

Epictetus similarly emphasises the enduring benefit of Socrates' example:

If alive we were useful, should we not be much more useful to humankind by dying when we ought and as we ought? And now Socrates is dead, the memory of him is no less useful to humankind, but even more so, than what he said and did while still alive.<sup>124</sup>

Epictetus goes on to describe such deaths as 'examples' worthy of study and imitation,<sup>125</sup> a

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120 Seneca, *Ep.* 24:4.

121 Rutilius, Metellus, Mucius, Cato and Scipio. Some of these and others are held up as 'examples' again in *Ep.* 98:12-14.

122 Seneca, *Ep.* 24:6.

123 Seneca, *Ep.* 67:12. Seneca deals further with the glory and nobility of such deaths in *De Providentia* 3.

124 Epictetus 4:1.168-169.

125 Epictetus 4:1.170-172.

theme which is repeated frequently in the writings of the philosophers.<sup>126</sup>

Seeley pinpoints the issue which this short summary has sought to illustrate:

Paul knew Hebrew, but he wrote in Greek. He was a student at Jerusalem, but he was born in the Hellenistic city of Tarsus. It is not difficult to surmise that he went to school and studied Greek at some point in his life. In school, he may well have encountered the Noble Death. Another possibility is that this concept was so tightly woven into the fabric of Hellenistic culture that Paul assimilated it without even trying.<sup>127</sup>

Despite the probability that Paul was well aware of these secular beliefs and values, there are definitely limitations as to how far the actual content of the ‘noble death’ tradition can be paralleled to Paul’s teaching on suffering. Although the philosophers’ example of holding lightly onto life and having no fear of death is not dissimilar, as is their expressed motivation for the common good, the way in which such principles are worked out is very different. Although Seeley is at pains to identify the ‘vicariousness’ inherent in each of the examples he investigates, his success in most instances appears to rely on a very broad and rather unconventional definition of the word *vicarious*, to the extent that it appears to mean little more than *beneficial, altruistic, philanthropic* or even simply *worthy of imitation*. Oepke, in reference to the suffering of the Greek heroes, concludes: ‘The tragedy of the sick hero also has saving significance. The vicariousness, however, is not that of historical expiation, and the approach is individualistic.’<sup>128</sup> Paul’s view, on the contrary, as I believe it is reflected in Col. 1:24, is that his suffering is not merely exemplary, but vicarious in the conventional meaning of substituting for that of others, and essentially in a corporate context: the Body of Christ. Here in the selection of Greek and Roman texts reviewed above is a flavour of the Greco-Roman attitude to noble death and suffering, which

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126 Droge and Taylor, *Noble Death*, pp. 20-45; van Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom*, pp. 11-14, 25-27; Seeley, *Noble Death*, pp. 113-141.

127 Seeley, *Noble Death*, p. 16.

128 A. Oepke, νόσος, *TDNT* 4, p. 1096.

indicates that Paul's bold statement in Col. 1:24, far from being alien, would have struck a familiar note with his readers, even those without a Jewish cultural and religious background.

## **6.6 Martyrdom and suffering in the Early Church**

The main development of the Christian martyr cult which took root from the mid-second century postdates the period of Paul's writing by some three generations, so this section will limit itself to those trends which can plausibly be demonstrated to reflect earlier beliefs and tendencies.<sup>129</sup> This is not difficult if one accepts the pioneering and influential findings of Frend,<sup>130</sup> that there is a basic continuity from the earliest Jewish roots of martyrdom in the 2nd-century BC to the beliefs of the early church.<sup>131</sup>

### **6.6.1 Jewish 'martyrs' as background**<sup>132</sup>

The Jewish martyrdom prototypes are generally considered to be the Maccabean martyrs (above) on the one hand, and on the other the protagonists of two episodes from the book

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129 Full accounts and analyses of the development of the Christian martyr cult can be found in W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: a Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965); G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995); Candida R. Moss, *The other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Theofried Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums* (Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie, 45; Münster: Aschendorff, 1980); van Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom*, pp. 42-131.

130 Frend, *Martyrdom*, pp. 17-22, 198. This is in contrast to the theory that martyrdom is essentially a Christian development, first formulated by Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936).

131 Bowersock, however, dissents from this majority view, regarding martyrdom as a peculiarly Christian development which influenced the transmission of the Maccabean martyr tales rather than vice versa, denying the Greek antecedents as dissimilar, and disallowing the Danielic martyr stories as having a 'happy ending'. *Martyrdom*, pp. 4-13. Seeley for his part views the Maccabean tales as *mimetic* rather than *vicarious* (as this research defines it). Seeley, *Noble Death*, pp. 91, 99.

132 The development of Jewish martyrology and the history of scholarly discussion on the subject are discussed in detail by Boudewijn Dehandschutter, *Polycarpiana: Studies on Martyrdom and Persecution in Early Christianity* (Bibliotheca ephemeridum Iovaniensium, 205; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), pp. 199-214.

of Daniel, written some forty years before 2 Macc.: ch. 3 (the fiery furnace) and ch. 6 (Daniel in the lion's den).<sup>133</sup> There are close formal similarities in the Maccabean and Daniel stories, if one accepts that in the latter the 'martyrs' do suffer execution, being saved only by miraculous intervention. It has been seen (above, 6.3) that the Maccabean accounts show clear indications of an understanding of vicarious suffering:<sup>134</sup> such an interpretation is absent in the Aramaic original of Daniel; however in the *Prayer of Azariah* (LXX Dan. 3:24-45), Azariah prays, in the context of lamenting Israel's loss of its temple and cult,

May we be accepted with our broken heart and humbled spirit, as though we came with burnt offerings of rams and bullocks and with thousands of fat lambs. Let our sacrifice be as such before you this day, and let yourself be atoned before you. (3:39-40)

Although the final phrase is disputed, there seems no doubt both that Azariah conceives their death to be on behalf of the nation, and that some measure of atonement is involved. The specific interest of this current research is in answering the question: to what extent do the earliest accounts portray the Christian martyrs as suffering *for* the church? To put it another way: do they conform to the pattern of the Maccabean and Danielic martyrs, and is there therefore the possibility of their martyrdom being understood to incorporate at least an element of vicarious suffering? If that were the case, then Paul's statement in Col. 1:24 would fit comfortably in such a continuum as an expression of the same vicarious theme.

### **6.6.2 Early Christian martyrs**

Whilst it appears to be generally accepted that the word *martyrus* as a technical term for

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133 Frend, *Martyrdom*, pp. 20-22, 47-49; van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, pp. 7-14; van Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom*, pp. 42-49; Lohse, *Märtyrer*, pp. 66-78; Pobee, *Persecution*, p. 49; Moss, *Martyrdom*, pp. 37-44. Frend goes so far as to label 2 Macc. as the first Acts of the Martyrs (p. 45).

134 See also above (7.5) the note on the Jewish 'noble death' accounts in Macc. and Josephus.

one who dies for their faith (as opposed to the common meaning of ‘witness’) is attested first in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 1, 2, 14 (155-160 AD),<sup>135</sup> the phenomenon itself, as well as records of it, goes back to the earliest days of the church. In the earliest accounts, there are few instances where a belief in vicarious suffering as such is mentioned. On the other hand, the writings of the early Church Fathers, and in particular the category of *Martyrdoms, Passions and Acts*,<sup>136</sup> are frequently suffused with such a powerful sense of fellowship or *koinonia* that the individual martyr is portrayed as suffering not only on his or her account but also very much for and as part of the local church: there is a strong flavour of teamwork, both in the narrative descriptions and in the hortatory literature.

Among the letters of Ignatius (107AD) there are indeed hints of vicarious suffering: ‘I know well what I am, and what you are to whom I write: I am the condemned; you are the pardoned. I am in peril; you are in security’ (*Eph.* 12); ‘I am offering my life on your behalf, and also for those whom you sent for the honour of God here to Smyrna’ (*Eph.* 21); ‘My life is a humble offering for you’ (*Smyr.* 10); ‘I am offering myself, and these chains you cherished so affectionately, as a humble sacrifice on your behalf’ (*Polycarp* 2). Bowersock points out that the term used in these passages for ‘offering, sacrifice’ (ἀντίψυχον) is extremely rare, occurring only twice in literature before the 4<sup>th</sup> century apart from in Ignatius and 4 Macc., and moreover, is essentially substitutionary in meaning – ‘a life for a life’.<sup>137</sup> Moss writes of Ignatius,

His descriptions reveal martyrdom to be a communal event firmly grounded in eucharistic practices ... As a eucharistic sacrifice Ignatius’s

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- 135 E.g., Bowersock, *Martyrdom*, p. 13; van Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom*, pp. 2-3.  
 136 Moss provides an extensive bibliography of such writings, *Other Christs*, pp. 177-201.  
 137 Bowersock, *Martyrdom*, pp. 79-80. He nevertheless denies any influence upon Ignatius by the Maccabean traditions, positing instead a common influence in Asia Minor (pp. 77-81). Frend makes the same point regarding the terminology, preferring to translate the term as ‘ransom’ or simply ‘substitution’, *Martyrdom*, p. 199.

death is set within the framework of community regulation, and, like the Eucharist, it serves as a means to maintain and reinforce church unity ... Ignatius's death, like other forms of eucharistic offering, has a cathartic, healing effect on the church.<sup>138</sup>

The letters supplement the brief comments above with many references to the churches' partnership in his martyrdom, such as the honour granted him by their visits as he passed through,<sup>139</sup> the delegations sent to accompany him on his journey,<sup>140</sup> and an intense sense of common purpose going far beyond ordinary church fellowship. Bommes writes,

Here the church's intense participation in the fate of the martyr finds expression and at the same time its deepest basis: it is because Ignatius goes to his death because of the 'common name' and the 'common hope'.<sup>141</sup>

As Bommes points out, this is by no means a one-sided participation: the commitment and identification is all the stronger as Ignatius, notwithstanding his single-minded pursuit of martyrdom, nevertheless simultaneously writes with equal intensity to encourage and advise the churches in their own witness.

In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, generally acknowledged as the earliest of the martyr accounts,<sup>142</sup> this sense of joint ownership of the martyr's honour is again evident, the setting of the story with the martyr being physically taken from the company of his fellow-Christians (5-8) being reflected in the closing comment that the Lord 'singles out his

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138 Moss, *Martyrdom*, pp. 55-56.

139 *Eph.* 1; *Tral.* 1; *Rom.* 1, 9.

140 *Mag.* 15; *Tral.* 12; *Phil.* 11; *Smyr.* 12.

141 'Hier ist eine intensive Anteilnahme der Kirche am Geschick des Märtyrers ausgesprochen und zugleich ihr tiefster Grund genannt: Er besteht darin, daß Ignatius auf den Tod zugeht wegen des >>gemeinsamen Namens<< und der >>gemeinsamen Hoffnung<<'. Karin Bommes, *Weizen Gottes: Untersuchungen zur Theologie des Martyriums bei Ignatius von Antioch* (Theophaneia, 27; Köln: Hanstein, 1976), p. 187.

142 Maxwell Staniforth, ed., *Early Christian Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 153; van Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom*, p. 94; Bowersock, *Martyrdom*, p. 13. Moss summarises: 'Treated by scholars as the first martyrdom account and as a document that inaugurated a new genre, a new linguistic category, and a new ideology, it has become the funnel through which pre-Christian noble death is channelled into Christian martyrdom.' *Martyrdom*, p. 58.



chosen saints from among the number of his bondsmen' (20). This same identification of the church members with those of their number who suffered martyrdom is evident in the other early martyr tales. In the *Martyrdom of Lyon and Vienne*,<sup>143</sup> whilst the focus is on the details of the arrest, trial, confession and deaths of the various named individuals, the context is the proud proclamation of 'the severity of *our* trials', 'the grace of God at *our* head', 'the judgement so unreasonably given against *us*', 'Attalus, one of *our* constant witnesses', etc. - in summary, the portrayal of the martyrs is of select and privileged representatives of a church which owns, honours and even to some degree envies their sacrifice.

Although written even later, the writings of both Origen and Tertullian, although extreme in their advocacy of voluntary martyrdom, share this same 'owning' of the martyrs, with more than a hint of envy discernible. As seen already (3.1.1), Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* (235AD) exudes fellowship with the martyrs, whilst Tertullian's distinctly pastoral letter *To the Martyrs* (ca. 197) is set in the context of the church's care for and fellowship with its prospective martyrs.<sup>144</sup> Moss comments furthermore, 'In the *acta* the martyrs and, occasionally, all members of the Christian community, are presented as "children of God". Language of family ... permeate[s] these texts.'<sup>145</sup> Whilst several generations in time and great divergences of perspective separate the writings reviewed in this section, there is nevertheless a common and consistent theme: that whereas the individual suffers, he or she does so as a member of the church, not just in fellowship with it and under its care, but also for its honour and its benefit. More than that: there does appear to be a continuity of thought, motivation and practice (as well as of the literary

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143 Transmitted in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5:1. The events recorded took place in 177AD.

144 Tertullian, *Ad martyras* 1:1; 2:7.

145 Moss, *Other Christs*, p. 156.

descriptions) right from the earliest Danielic ‘martyrdoms’, through the NT period and beyond.

It is of course a big leap to assume from these few surviving records that the portrayals of the martyrs in such literature accurately reflects their own theology, beliefs and attitudes rather than those of the hagiographer who naturally has an agenda to teach and inspire the faithful. Whilst the events may be faithfully portrayed, the context and interpretation must be those of the later author. Van Henten and Avemarie point out that ‘the martyrs are model figures for the groups who transmit and read the writings devoted to them. Martyr figures play an important role in the process of the formation of self-identity.’<sup>146</sup>

Nevertheless, by the same token, what has been transmitted to posterity is a vivid and extreme portrayal and proof of the fundamental ‘Body of Christ’ principle, that ‘if one member suffers, every part suffers with it; if one member is honoured, every part rejoices with it’ (1 Cor. 12:26).

## **6.7 Summary**

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the seed-bed of contemporary belief - be it religious, philosophical or secular - at the time of Paul’s letter to the Colossians was extremely fertile regarding the related concepts of substitution, the atoning value of the afflictions of the righteous, and vicarious suffering. Admittedly, no one text or group of references can easily be adduced to prove that Col. 1:24 relates a principle of vicarious suffering; rather, the sheer cumulative weight of references to these popular beliefs in such a variety of contexts, both Jewish and Gentile, religious and secular, surely adds credence

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146 Van Henten and Avemarie, *Martyrdom*, p. 7.

to the likelihood of it, and demonstrates that such an interpretation would in no way seem alien or even novel to the readers in Colossae.

## **CHAPTER 7 - THE MESSIANIC WOES, ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS, AND THE KOINONIA OF THE BODY OF CHRIST**

Having looked at substitution, the first of the three topics identified in Chapter 5 as meriting further investigation, this chapter will deal with the remaining two areas, researching first the concept of the ‘woes of the Messiah’, which are often alluded to but rarely if ever investigated by modern commentators,<sup>1</sup> and then the nature of eschatological expectation in the first century, with particular reference to the concepts of ‘measure’ and ‘fulfilment’. The second part will look briefly at the Pauline teaching on the church as the Body of Christ, and more specifically at the internal relationships it describes, and the concept of *koinonia*.

### **7.1 The ‘woes of the Messiah’ and their background**

A large proportion of recent commentators and scholars, particularly in the English-speaking world, refer to the apocalyptic and rabbinic teaching on the Messianic woes in connexion with Col. 1:24.<sup>2</sup> None of these however, beyond the occasional citation, goes into any further detail on the subject.<sup>3</sup> The OT roots of this teaching are twofold: first, the

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1 See the commentators discussed above at 4.2.2 and 4.2.3.

2 Bauckham, ‘Colossians 1:24 again’, p. 169; Bruce, *Colossians*, p. 83; De Ru, *Lijden*, p. 92; Dibelius, *Kolosser*, p. 23; Dunn, *Colossians*, p. 115; Ernst, *Kolosser*, p. 185; Flemington, ‘Colossians 1:24’, pp. 84-85; Gnlika, *Kolosserbrief*, p. 97; Harris, *Colossians*, p. 66; Houlden, *Paul’s Letters*, pp. 177-178; Kittel, ‘Kol. I,24’, p. 188; Kremer, ‘Bedrängnissen’, pp. 137-138; Lohse, *Colossians*, p. 70; MacDonald, *Colossians*, p. 79; Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 70; Moo, *Colossians*, pp. 151-152; Moule, *Colossians*, p. 76; O’Brien, *Colossians*, pp. 78-79; Perriman, ‘Pattern’, pp. 63-64; Talbert, *Colossians*, p. 201; Thompson, *Colossians*, p. 45; Wall, *Colossians*, pp. 87-88; Wilson, *Colossians*, p. 171; Witherington, *Colossians*, p. 144; Yates, ‘Note’, p. 91.

3 This appears to reflect a more general neglect of this subject. Dubis opens his book with the statement, ‘Biblical scholars have heretofore neglected serious study of the Jewish eschatological concept of the “messianic woes.” To be sure, scholars make frequent reference to this concept, but without any sustained analysis of the subject.’ Mark Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter: Suffering and Eschatology in 1 Peter*

broader and, in terms of theological development, earlier, theme of the ‘Day of the Lord’; and second, the mysterious and elusive figure of the Messiah, later to become the focus of popular anticipation and expectation.

### **7.1.1 The Day of the Lord**

Perhaps the earliest surviving reference to the ‘Day of the Lord’ (יום יהוה) is in Amos 5:18 (first half of 8<sup>th</sup> century BC):<sup>4</sup> ‘Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.’ From this earliest recorded mention three things are immediately clear: that the concept of the ‘Day of the Lord’ was by no means a new one, but already established as a commonly held hope; that this hope was originally for some form of divine intervention, perhaps military, on Israel’s behalf;<sup>5</sup> but also that it was likely to be disappointed, not so much in its occurrence as in its outcome.<sup>6</sup> Amos was followed chronologically by Isaiah, for whom, just a generation or two later, it was already sufficient to make reference to it simply by saying (2:11) ‘in that day’ (ביום ההוא).<sup>7</sup> For Zephaniah (late 7<sup>th</sup> century; 1:7-2:3), Joel (? early 6<sup>th</sup> century; 1:15; 2:1-2, 11, 31; 3:14)<sup>8</sup> and Obadiah (vv. 8-18) the ‘Day of the Lord’ is among the main topics of their prophetic books. The theme is repeated in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah,

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4:12-19 (Studies in Biblical Literature, 33; New York: Lang, 2002), p. 5.

4 Ralph L. Smith, *Micah – Malachi* (Word Biblical Commentary, 32; Waco: Word, 1984), p. 131.

5 Stuart comments: ‘The Day of Yahweh is best understood as having its origins in Israelite Holy War ... and particularly in the cultural expectation that a true sovereign could complete a war of conquest in a single day, whether he chose to intervene in an existing battle or to attack a foe *de novo*.’ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah* (Word Biblical Commentary, 31; Nashville: Nelson, 1987), p. 231. The alternative theories are briefly summarised in Smith, *Micah – Malachi*, p. 123.

6 ‘That Amos would announce woe (הוי) to such people must have been quite surprising inasmuch as Israelites felt themselves Yahweh’s people if anyone was, and those likely to merit his rescue if anyone would.’ Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah*, p. 353.

7 Further references in Isaiah include: 2:12, 17, 20; 3:7, 18; 4:1-2; 5:30; 7:18; 13:6, 9; 17:4, 7; 22:5, 8, 12; 24:21; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1; 34:8.

8 ‘This concept is so prominent in Joel that it may be likened to an engine driving the prophecy.’ Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah*, p. 230.

Zechariah and Malachi.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding the diversity of the prophetic references and the considerable differences in the times of writing, there is remarkable consistency in the basic message. Isaiah foretells that God will indeed come one day to intervene and to bring judgement on his enemies; nevertheless his people must repent of their own sin which itself will bring judgement on them. This sin includes pride (Isa. 2:11-12, 17), idolatry (2:20), ostentation (3:18) and revelry (22:12-13), whilst the punishments include humiliation (2:11-12, 17), poverty (3:7, 18; 4:1-2), invasion (5:30; 22:5-8), destruction (13:6), desolation of the land (13:9), and death for sinners (13:9). However, in contrast to the predominantly condemnatory tone of Amos, there are, both in Isaiah and elsewhere, some passages speaking of redemption, where the opportunity for repentance and restoration is promised (17:7-8; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1-3; 61:2), as is elsewhere the longed-for vengeance upon Israel's enemies (24: 21-23; 34:8-10). Zephaniah later also condemns idolatry (Zeph. 1:4-9) and prophesies destruction (1:10-18) in similar terms. Previously Joel had foretold both invasion (Joel 2:1-11) and famine and plague (1:15-20), though he also spoke of repentance and restoration (2:31-32; 3:14-18). Centuries after Joel, the same themes appear in the prophecies of Ezekiel: invasion (Ezek. 7:24); famine and plague (7:15); as well as vengeance on the nation's enemies (30:2-19). Jeremiah prophesies the twin themes of restoration (Jer. 30:8-9)<sup>10</sup> and vengeance (46:10),<sup>11</sup> as does Malachi, the last of the Minor Prophets (Mal. 4:2, 6; 4:3). In summary, the resulting message is consistently this: there will be a day when God will come to judge, but it will not be a straightforward case of his siding with Israel and Judah against their political enemies: there is also a strong moral

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9 Jer. 30:8; 46:10; Ezek. 7:7, 10; 30:3; Isa. 61:2; Zech. 14:1-20; Mal. 4:1-5.

10 Mentioned also in Obad. 17.

11 Also in Zech. 14:30-20.

element to his judgement, and the distinct possibility that through their sin even his own people find themselves counted God's enemies and liable to punishment.

### **7.1.2 The Messiah**

Any detailed study of the development of the concept of 'Messiah' (מָשִׁיחַ, *anointed one*) and the growth of associated expectations amongst the Jews is far beyond the scope of the present research. Sanders comments that it is in fact quite difficult to assess how widespread or how uniform such expectations and beliefs were among 1st-century Jews.<sup>12</sup>

To keep to the basics, the following facts can be enumerated with some confidence:

The essence of the expectation was 'the hope that a time of salvation will come with the accession of a king of David's line – a time that is often regarded also as a last time.'<sup>13</sup>

Certain OT passages, relatively few in number, are at the root of this belief. Most prominent of these among the prophets are Isa. 9:6-7:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders ... Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever.

and, much later, Jer. 23:5-6:

'The days are coming', declares the Lord, 'when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.'

Similar themes are found in Ezek. 34:23-24; 37: 22-25; Hag. 2:21-23 (applied in the first instance to Zerubbabel). Additionally, such expectations appear to be presupposed by the

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<sup>12</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, pp. 295-296.

<sup>13</sup> Franz Hesse, in Walter Grundmann et al., *χρῖω κτλ.*, *TDNT* 9, p. 505. Hesse concurs with Sanders in prefacing this definition with the remark, 'We are in a very debatable area when we discuss the development in Israel of Messianic ideas'. He concludes, 'It is very difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct a history of the Messianic movement in Israel and post-exilic Judaism from these scanty passages' (p. 509).

grandiose prophetic oracles found in the Royal Psalms, addressed to the reigning king. For example, Ps. 2:6-9:

‘I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.’ I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron sceptre.’

Similar passages in the Psalms are Pss. 21:9-13; 89:19-37; 110:1-6; 132:11-12.

Around the time of Christ, Messianic expectations, however varied they may have been, appear, from a reading of the NT as well as the early rabbinic evidence, to have been high. A degree of eager anticipation is reflected in John 1:41; 4:25; 7:26; Luke 3:15. Passages such as Matt. 2:4; 16:16; 26:63; Luke 2:11; 2:26; 20:41; John 7:41-42; 12:34 presuppose an understanding and acceptance of the relevant prophecies. Furthermore, a substantial element of the *kerygma* of the early church seems to have been specifically to prove that Jesus is the Christ in a manner that suggests that it was primarily the identity of the Messiah, and not his coming, that was uncertain (John 20:31; Acts 5:42; 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28). The Qumran scrolls, in particular the Community Rule (1QS) and the Damascus Document (CD), both dated to about 100BC,<sup>14</sup> fully reflect the contemporary expectancy,<sup>15</sup> although there the reference is nearly always to two Messianic figures rather than a single Messiah;<sup>16</sup> the senior and usually first-mentioned is a high-priest of the house of Levi, mostly called the ‘Messiah of Aaron’; and the other a king of the house of Judah generally called the ‘Messiah of Judah’. Though it is unclear whether the Qumran sect ever consciously merged the characteristics of the two Messiahs into a single individual, the

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<sup>14</sup> Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 62, 81.

<sup>15</sup> Grundmann, Walter et al., *χρίω κτλ*, *TDNT* 9, pp. 517-520; John Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: a Reappraisal* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1964), pp. 167-172.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., 1QS 9:11; CD 12:23-13:1; 14:19.



eschatological expectations associated with them appear to be consistent with the beliefs reflected in the biblical and the apocryphal literature.

In the gospel accounts Jesus is at times apparently portrayed as accepting the identity of the Messiah or Christ (Matt. 16:20; 23:10; 26:63-64; Mark 9:41; Luke 24:25; John 10:24; 17:3), even if he declined some of the popular associations, such as, for example, a political role (Matt. 20:28; Luke 22:27; John 18:36).

### **7.1.3 The OT background to the ‘woes’**

The term ‘Messianic woes’ - or alternatively ‘woes of the Messiah’ - translates the Hebrew phrase חבלו של משיח.<sup>17</sup> The root חבל in the OT relates to various aspects of the childbirth process,<sup>18</sup> with the emphasis variously on the anticipation, the pains, and the notion of ‘bringing forth’,<sup>19</sup> and is normally translated in LXX as ὠδίνω ‘to be in labour’ / ὠδίν ‘birth pangs’. In most occurrences, the context emphasises not just the pain but also the suddenness – the unpredictable timing - of the event.

The metaphor of labour pains to describe the anguish and horror of impending judgement, and in particular of the Day of the Lord, is frequently employed by the OT prophets. For example, Isa. 13:6, 8: ‘Wail, for the day of the Lord is near ... [8] Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labour’; Jer. 30:6-7: ‘Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labour, every face turned deathly pale? How awful that day will

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17 Aramaic חבליה דמשיח.

18 E.g., Songs 8:5; Ps. 7:14; Job 39:3; Isa. 13:8; 26:17; 66:7; Jer. 13:21; 22:23; 49:24; Hos. 13:13.

19 Georg Bertram, ὠδίν, *TDNT* 9, p. 670.

be!’<sup>20</sup> Yet the same dramatic imagery can be used to convey the opposite extreme: not fear or pain, but rather the joy and miracle of a new beginning that follows the labour pains:

Before she goes into labour, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son. Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labour than she gives birth to her children. Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?’ says the Lord ... Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. For you will nurse and be satisfied (Isa. 66:7-11).<sup>21</sup>

This double-sided imagery of labour-pains and childbirth conveys in turn a twofold message: one of judgement certainly, but not simply of judgement and subsequent punishment as an end in itself, but as a salvific event – the doorway to a new and better beginning.

It should therefore come as no surprise, given the levels of popular expectations and the persistence of these themes over such a long period of Jewish history, that Jesus himself employs some familiar OT terminology in describing the end of the Age (Mark 13:6): birth-pains (ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων, Mark 13:8; Matt. 24:8); ‘that day / those days’ (Mark 13:17, 20, 24, 32; Matt. 24:19, 22, 29, 36; Luke 21:23, 34) in addition to many other allusions to OT prophecy regarding judgement.

#### **7.1.4 The woes of the Messiah in rabbinic Judaism**

A full discussion of this important and extensive topic is not possible here, so a limited selection has been made in order to give a flavour of the main themes. The rabbinic texts

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20 Further examples are: Isa. 21:3; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 48:41; 49:22; 50:43; Mic. 4:9-10. In particular the references in Jer. convey a sense of total vulnerability.

21 Similar imagery is employed at Isa. 54:1-8.

that mention the ‘woes of the Messiah’ as such are – considering the frequent attention drawn to them by recent commentators on Colossians – quite few in number.<sup>22</sup> The following are the most important:<sup>23</sup>

a. Mekh. Ex. 16:25, 29:

R. Eliezer says: If you will be worthy and keep the Sabbath you will be saved from three tribulations, i.e., from the day of Gog and Magog, and from the pangs of Messiah, and from the great judgment day. [16:29 repeats 16:25 almost verbatim].

b. bSanh. 98b:

Abaye enquired of Rabbah: ‘What is your reason [for not wishing to see the Messiah]? Shall we say, because of the birth pangs of the Messiah? But it has been taught, R. Eleazar’s disciples asked him: ‘What must a man do to be spared the pangs of the Messiah?’ [He answered,] ‘Let him engage in study and benevolence; and you Master do both.’

Here the familiar OT imagery of birth pangs is continued, and the importance of these two texts lies both in the very early date of the sayings and in the authority of the teacher.

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (often called simply Eliezer ‘the Great’) was teaching around the end of the 1st century, a member of the Sanhedrin and famed as a scholar. He is consequently one of the most frequently quoted authorities in the Talmud. The very early date for these sayings (ca. 90), with the implicit assumption that both the theme and the phrase ‘woes of the Messiah’ are already familiar, allows the possibility of an allusion to the same topic in Colossians, written barely a generation earlier. Three later but equally prominent references to the woes follow:

c. bSabb. 118a:

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22 This tally increases however if one includes other terms which, from their context and details, are evidently describing the same concept. Such terms in the Rabbinic and apocalyptic literature include ‘the footprints of the Messiah’ (mSota 9:15); ‘the time of the crucible’ (4QFlor 1-3 i:19-ii:12); ‘the great tribulation’ (Rev. 2:22; 7:14); ‘the time of distress’ (Dan. 12:1).

23 Herrmann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (4 vols.; München: Beck, 1922-28), vol. 1, p. 950.

R. Simeon b. Pazzi said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi in Bar Ḳappara's name: He who observes [the practice of] three meals on the Sabbath is saved from three evils: the pangs of Messiah, the retribution of Gehinnom, and the wars of Gog and Magog. 'The pangs of Messiah': 'day' is written here; whilst there it is written, 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible *day* of the Lord comes.' 'The retribution of Gehinnom': 'day' is written here; whilst there it is written, 'That day is a *day* of wrath.' 'The wars of God and Magog': 'day' is written here; whilst there it is written, 'in that *day* when Gog shall come.'

In this passage notably the connection is specifically made back to the 'Day of the Lord' (Mal. 4:5).

d. bPes. 118a:

Now since there is the great *Hallel*, why do we recite this one?<sup>24</sup> Because it includes [a mention of] the following five things: The exodus from Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea, the giving of the Torah, the resurrection of the dead, and the pangs of the Messiah. The exodus from Egypt, as it is written, 'When Israel came forth out of Egypt' [Ps. 114:1]; the dividing of the Red Sea: 'The sea saw it and fled' [Ps. 114:3]; the giving of the Torah, 'The mountains skipped like rams' [Ps. 114:4]; resurrection of the dead, 'I shall walk before the Lord in the land of the living' [Ps. 116:9]; the pangs of the Messiah: 'Not unto us, Lord, not unto us' [Ps. 115:1].<sup>25</sup>

e. bKeth. 111a:

'Ho, Zion, escape, thou that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon' [Zech. 2:7]. Abaye said: We have been taught that Babylonia will not experience the pangs of the Messiah.

The first of these three later recorded sayings is traced back to Bar Ḳappara, who taught around 220, and the last to Abaye, who died in 338. The second is anonymous and therefore undatable.

Caution is urged in attempting to interpret NT texts and concepts by backdating from the

<sup>24</sup> The 'great *Hallel*' is Ps. 136. 'This one' refers to the standard *hallel*, Pss. 113-118.

<sup>25</sup> The psalm is here interpreted as a prayer for deliverance from the distress of the pangs. The text continues: 'R. Johanan said: "not unto us, o Lord, not unto us" refers to the servitude to the [foreign] powers. Others state, R. Johanan said: "Not unto us, o Lord, not unto us" refers to the war of Gog and Magog.'

later rabbinic literature.<sup>26</sup> What is clear though even from these scant but prominent sayings is that the ‘woes of the Messiah’ was a familiar concept and a subject for debate already in NT times and for several centuries afterwards.

As regards the precise nature of the ‘woes’, there are countless descriptions in the rabbinic and apocalyptic literature. A typical example is found in bSanh. 97a:

Thus hath R. Johanan said: in the generation when the son of David [i.e., Messiah] will come, scholars will be few in number, and as for the rest, their eyes will fail through sorrow and grief. Multitudes of trouble and evil decrees will be promulgated anew, each new evil coming with haste before the other has ended. Our Rabbis taught: in the seven-year cycle at the end of which the son of David will come – in the first year, this verse will be fulfilled: And I will cause it to rain upon one city and cause it not to rain upon another city; in the second, the arrows of hunger will be sent forth; in the third, a great famine, in the course of which men, women and children, pious men and saints will die, and the Torah will be forgotten by its students; in the fourth, partial plenty; in the fifth, great plenty, when men will eat, drink and rejoice, and the Torah will return to its disciples; in the sixth, [heavenly] sounds; in the seventh, wars; and at the conclusion of the septennate the son of David will come ... R. Nehorai said: in the generation when Messiah comes, young men will insult the old, and old men will stand before the young; daughters will rise up against their mothers, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law ... R. Nehemiah said: in the generation of Messiah’s coming impudence will increase, esteem be perverted ... and the Kingdom will be converted to heresy with none to rebuke them.

This extended catalogue of woes, though considerably longer than most, is very typical in enumerating what might to us appear at first glance a rather eclectic list of events, but one which demonstrates the range and type of occurrences which the pious Jew would consider disasters of the highest order. So alongside the universal natural catastrophes of famine and drought and the perennial threat of war are found the breakdown of social order and family life, the loss of the role of Torah and consequent heresy, and there is perhaps even a hint that the promised plenty, with its eating and drinking, is not entirely a good thing. Whilst it

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<sup>26</sup> Dubis, *Messianic Woes*, p. 6.

is possible to discern a dramatic escalation in the severity of the sufferings threatened, alongside a gradual increase in apocalyptic elements, the essence of the woes shows a general consistency with the OT prophetic teaching on the ‘Day of the Lord’ (above, 7.1.1).

In terms of date of publication (as opposed to oral origin), the earliest rabbinic reference to the woes is in the Mishnaic tract Sota:<sup>27</sup>

With the footprints of the Messiah: presumption increases, and dearth increases. The vine gives its fruit and wine at great cost. And the government turns to heresy. And there is no reproof. The gathering place will be for prostitution. And Galilee will be laid waste. And the Golan will be made desolate. And the men of the frontier will go about from town to town, and none will take pity on them. And the wisdom of scribes will putrefy. And those who fear sin will be rejected. And the truth will be locked away. Children will shame elders, and elders will stand up before children ... The face of a generation in the face of a dog. A son is not ashamed before his father. Upon whom shall we depend? Upon our Father in heaven. (m. Sota 9:15)

Despite the absence of the terms ‘woes’ or ‘birthpangs’, the details in this passage use the same vocabulary to describe the same familiar phenomena. Such descriptions in the rabbinic writings bear remarkable consistency in content and approach to the centuries-old OT prophecies of the Day of the Lord and its antecedents previously described;<sup>28</sup> equally, they bear striking similarity to many of the much more nearly contemporary sayings of Jesus relating to the End, which are stated in terms full of OT allusion: he describes the beginning of the birth-pains in Mark 13:8 as follows: ‘Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.’<sup>29</sup> There will be earthquakes in various places,<sup>30</sup> and

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27 The Mishnah is traditionally dated to ca. 200; the Babylonian Talmud 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century.

28 There are many others, including for example: bSanh. 96a; 98a; 98b; 99a; bKeth. 112b; Midr. Ps. 92:10; bChul. 63a. Most of these, as well as those quoted above in full, are quoted or reflected also in later rabbinic writings. Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar*, pp. 981-986 gives an extensive listing.

29 Isa. 19:2.

30 Isa. 2:19, 21; 13:13; 24:18-20; 29:6; Ezek. 38:19; Joel 3:16. More broadly, the earthquake is a common

famines.’<sup>31</sup> On family breakdown he says:<sup>32</sup> ‘Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death’ (Mark 13:12); and regarding the spiritual health of the people: ‘And then many will be caused to stumble and will betray and hate one another.’<sup>33</sup> Because of the increase in wickedness, the love of many will vanish’ (Matt. 24:10, 12). Jesus’ ready usage of themes and terminology familiar from both OT and the later writings of the Rabbis is entirely consistent with his own rabbinic background.

### **7.1.5 The ‘woes’ in the apocalyptic writings**

The apocalyptic literature of the period up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD is essentially eschatological in content, employing many of the same themes and motifs as the rabbinic writings. Here, consequently, the woes are mentioned far more frequently: Charles goes as far as to state that ‘The woes before the Messianic Age are a feature of all Apocalypse.’<sup>34</sup> Three typical examples show very similar themes to both the biblical and the rabbinic texts:<sup>35</sup>

1 Enoch 99:4-5, 7; 100:1-2 (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC - 1<sup>st</sup> century AD):

In those days the nations shall be confounded, and the families of the nations shall rise in the day of the destruction of the sinners. In those days they (the women) shall become pregnant, they (the sinners) shall come out and abort their infants and cast them out from their midst and they

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sign of the coming of God, whether in wrath and judgment (Ps. 18:7; Nah. 1:5; Jer. 10:10); or in blessing (Hag. 2:6, 21); or simply as a demonstration of his majesty (Judg. 5:4-5; Job 9:5-6; Ps. 77:18; Hab. 3:60).

31 Isa. 3:7; Joel 1:16-20.

32 Isa. 3:4-5; Mic. 7:6.

33 Amos 8:11.

34 R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), vol. 1, p. 48.

35 These particular examples are selected partly for their comparative succinctness: most of the similar passages are considerably more prolix. Further detailed descriptions of the ‘woes’ in the apocalyptic literature include: Jub. 23:22-25; 4 Ezra 4:51-5:13; 6:18-24; 8:63-9:6; Apoc. Bar. 48:30-37; 70:2-10; Sib. Or. 3:796-805; 1 Enoch 80:2-8.

shall (also) abandon their (other) children, casting their infants out while they are still suckling ... And those who carve images of gold and of silver and of wood and of clay, and those who worship evil spirits and demons, and all kinds of idols not according to knowledge, they shall get no manner of help in them. They shall become wicked on account of the folly of their hearts ... In those days the father will be beaten together with his sons, in one place; and brothers shall fall together with their friends, in death, until a stream shall flow with their blood. For a man shall not be able to withhold his hands from his sons nor from (his) sons' sons in order to kill them. From dawn until the sun sets, they shall slay each other.

The importance of this apocalyptic passage lies in its very early date, possibly even pre-NT. Whilst many of the OT elements (women in labour, idolatry, family breakdown and bloodshed) are present, one finds also the development of a demonic theme, as well as a more detailed and even systematic depiction of the events. Similarly in the following two examples:

Apoc. Bar. 27:1-13 (early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD):

That time will be divided into twelve parts, and each part has been preserved for that for which it was appointed. In the first part: the beginning of commotions. In the second part: the slaughtering of the great. In the third part: the fall of many into death. In the fourth part: the drawing of the sword. In the fifth part: famine and the withholding of rain. In the sixth part: earthquakes and terrors. In the eighth part:<sup>36</sup> a multitude of ghosts and the appearances of demons. In the ninth part: the fall of fire. In the tenth part: rape and much violence. In the eleventh part: injustice and unchastity. In the twelfth part: disorder and a mixture of all that has been before.

Sib. Or. 2:154-159 (?70-150 AD):

But whenever this sign appears throughout the world, children born with grey temples from birth, afflictions of men, famines, pestilence, and wars, change of times, lamentations, many tears; alas, how many people's children in the countries will feed on their parents, with piteous lamentations.

Characteristic of the graphic depictions of the 'woes' found in the apocalyptic literature is an escalation (although there hardly seems scope for it) in the gruesomeness of the horrors to unfold. A particular emphasis which unites many of the individual terrors is the

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<sup>36</sup> The seventh part is lacking: perhaps because association of the sacred number with chaos and destruction was felt to be inappropriate?



unnaturalness of it all: beside the recurrent prophetic staples of famine, warfare and earthquake are parricide, abortion and abandonment of children, and even cannibalism. Not just the nation, but society itself, the family and natural processes such as childbirth, have joined the creation in reverting to chaos and godlessness. Nothing could constitute a more horrific judgement in the eyes of the righteous than such a total abandonment by God.

The relevance of these selected examples of references to the ‘woes of the Messiah’ from such a wide variety of sources is that they appear to indicate a widespread and deeply ingrained sphere of belief in Judaism up to and around the time when Paul was writing. It seems therefore reasonable to suppose that as a highly educated Pharisee he would have been familiar with such teaching and potentially influenced by it. Whether or not this is the case in Col. 1:24 will be discussed in the next section.

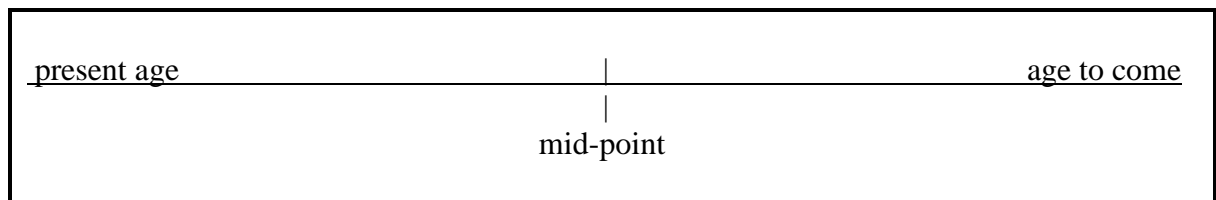
## **7.2 The effects of the coming of Christ upon NT eschatology**

Clearly there is a remarkable continuity, and much consistency, in the themes of the ‘Day of the Lord’ and the preceding ‘woes of the Messiah’ right from the early prophets through the NT period to the later writings of both the rabbinic and the apocalyptic authors.

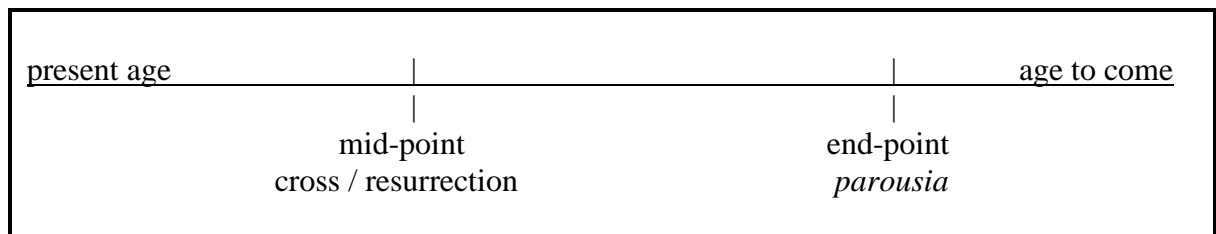
However, for Jesus’ first disciples and the early Jewish Christians in general a reorientation of eschatological beliefs was required in the light of their conviction that the Messiah had now in fact already come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The OT expectation that the Day of the Lord would bring about the ‘End of the Age’ and simultaneously usher in the blessed ‘Age to come’ needed considerable adjustment. Jesus himself is recorded as initiating the idea that although Messiah had come, and with him in one respect the judgement (John 9:39; 12:31), nevertheless the End was still some way in the future: ‘And

this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come' (Matt. 24:14); 'See, I am with you every day until the end of the age' (Matt. 28:20). The old eschatology, with its simple sequence of the two ages separated by the Day of the Lord, has therefore had to be adjusted to incorporate the in-between time following the coming of Messiah. Dunn helpfully illustrates the change schematically,<sup>37</sup> with a series of time-lines running left to right:

Older (Jewish) eschatological schema:



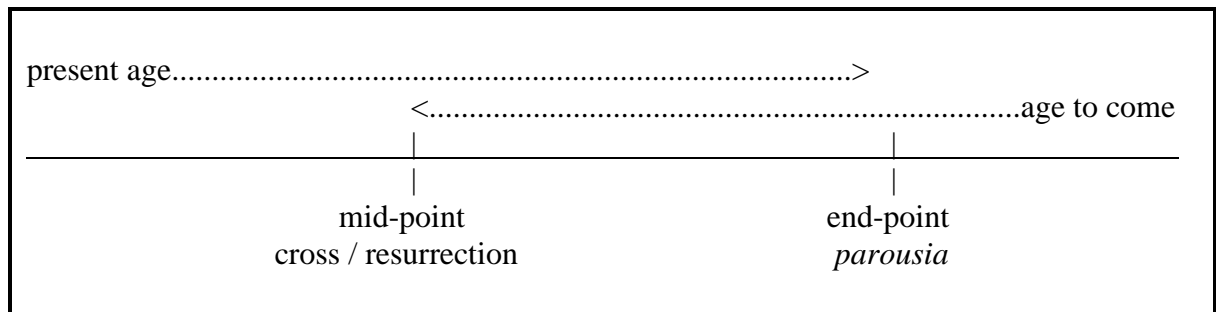
Revised (Christian) eschatological schema, where the simple division into two ages is now divided by a period of expectation between the two crucial events of Christ's cross and his return:



Paul reflects in his letters the newly introduced eschatological tension which this brings to his own theology and that of the NT as a whole. Rather than bringing about the culmination of one age and the start of another, the coming of the Messiah, together with his death and resurrection, has ushered in a time with a sense of 'already, but not yet' in

<sup>37</sup> Dunn, *Theology*, pp. 464-465.

which it can truly be said that God's kingdom has come in Christ,<sup>38</sup> yet its fulfilment still lies in the future.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, Paul, the church and the believers are living in the overlap between the two ages. The schema can therefore be elaborated like this, in order to highlight this 'overlap':



This begs the question as to where the ancient Jewish expectations rooted in the OT, such as the birthpangs of the new age, the Day of the Lord, and the end of the age, now fit into the Christian schema. Regarding the latter two of these, the answer is quite straightforward: they are both still firmly in the future. Paul can still write of the coming 'day of the Lord' (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thes. 5:2), but more frequently he rephrases it more specifically as 'the day of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 1:8), 'the day of the Lord Jesus' (2 Cor. 1:14), 'the day of Christ Jesus' (Phil. 1:6) or 'the day of Christ' (Phil. 1:10; 2:16). On the other hand, he can also still echo the OT in referring to it simply as 'the Day' (1 Cor. 3:13). It will still be 'the day of God's wrath' (Rom. 2:5) and 'the day when God will judge people's secrets' (Rom. 2:16) but the former significantly only in the context of addressing the unrepentant (2:4). The terminology of the end of the age is infrequently employed by Paul, but when it is it clearly mirrors the usage of both the older eschatology and the wider NT: 'he will keep you firm without reproach until the end [ἕως τέλους]' (1

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Matt. 12:28; 18:4; 19:14; Luke 10:9, 11; 12:32; 17:21.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; 1 Thes. 2:12.

Cor. 1:8); ‘then the end [τὸ τέλος] [will come]’ (1 Cor. 15:24);<sup>40</sup> he uses the term παρουσία for the ‘coming’ of the Lord only at 1 Thes. 4:15; 5:23 (and at 2 Thes. 2:1, 8, 9 if Paul’s authorship is conceded).<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the most notable passage occurs in Rom. 8:22, where, in the context of celebrating the Christian hope, Paul himself for once employs the childbirth metaphor: ‘For we know that the whole creation groans and is in labour together [συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει] up till now.’

To attempt to answer now the question raised by all the commentators mentioned above (n. 2): is Paul alluding to these ‘woes of the Messiah’ in Col. 1:24, when he writes of the ‘afflictions of Christ’? It would be an attractively simple equation and a reasonably legitimate translation from the Hebrew or Aramaic to the Greek; unfortunately it would almost certainly be far too simplistic to regard the two terms as straightforwardly synonymous, and on several counts it seems improbable. Stuhlmann summarises the situation well:

The Christian community is convinced that these sufferings are necessary: εἰς τοῦτο (τὰς θλίψεις) κείμεθα (1 Thes. 3:3-4). Their necessity however is not just (as in the Jewish tradition) viewed prospectively, but now also – and decisively so – retrospectively. The suffering of *Christ* conditions the suffering of *Christians*. It is precisely this link that is captured in the term θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ. It is the essential modification regarding the tradition.<sup>42</sup>

So although on the one hand several commentators have noted that the phrase ‘the afflictions of Christ’ is expressed as if reference is being made to an already-known

40 Further NT use of τέλος includes Matt. 10:22; 24:6, 13, 14; Mark 13:7, 13; Luke 21:9; Heb. 3:14; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 2:26; 22:3. When referring to the ‘end of the Age’, the word συντέλεια is sometimes employed: Matt. 13: 39, 40, 49; 24:3; Heb. 9:26.

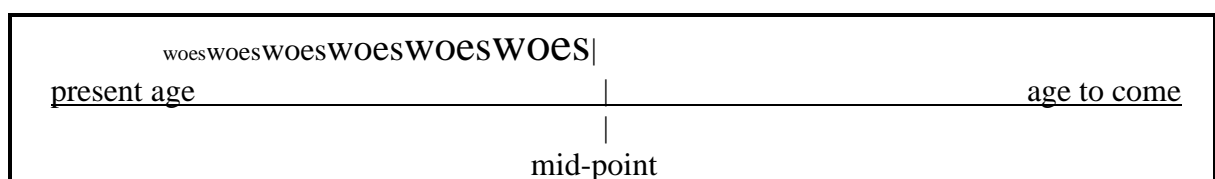
41 Wider usage of the word is found in Matt., 24:3, 27, 37, 39 (the synoptic parallels employ a verbal paraphrase); Jas 5:7, 8; 2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28.

42 ‘Die christliche Gemeinde ist überzeugt, daß diese Leiden notwendig sind: εἰς τοῦτο (τὰς θλίψεις) κείμεθα (1Thess 3,3f). Ihre Notwendigkeit aber ist nicht nur (wie in jüdischer Tradition) aus der Prospektive gesehen, sondern nun auch – und zwar entscheidend – aus der Retrospektive. Das Leiden des Christus bedingt das Leiden der Christen. Genau dieser Konnex ist in dem Terminus θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ festgehalten. Er ist die wesentliche Modifikation gegenüber der Tradition.’ Rainer Stuhlmann, *Das eschatologische Maß im Neuen Testament* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 132; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), p. 101.

concept – that is, it appears to be a catch-phrase;<sup>43</sup> on the other hand, whatever the merits of that argument in itself might be, it correspondingly weakens the case for Paul employing the phrase to denote the ‘woes’, for as we have seen, it was a well-established custom to refer to the ‘woes’ in Greek as ὄδιν, and never as θλίψεις. Besides, nowhere apart from at Rom. 8:22 (above) does Paul specifically refer to the birth-pangs, whereas it has already been noted how frequently he writes of the θλίψεις experienced by believers, employing the term which was well-established in the LXX in referring to the hardships endured by God’s chosen people (above, 2.2.2). Most importantly, although this research has already argued (above, Chapter 6) that there existed in Paul’s cultural background a widespread belief in the atoning power of sufferings and consequently the logical possibility of afflictions being vicarious, yet no such understanding is known to have been attached to the popular beliefs pertaining to the woes of the Messiah.

Perhaps then the main difference between the ‘afflictions of Christ’ referred to in Col. 1:24 and the traditional ‘woes of the Messiah’ is largely in terms of focus, and what we maybe have here is Paul recasting the traditional understanding of the woes into a different mould in parallel to the way in which we have seen that the early Christian eschatology had to be adapted as a result of the coming of Christ, his death and resurrection. To adapt Dunn’s schema above, incorporating the traditional expectation of the woes escalating up to the abrupt end of the age:

Older eschatological schema, showing a climax of ever-intensifying woes:



<sup>43</sup> E.g. Wall, *Colossians*, p. 88; Wolter, *Kolossier*, p.101.



Here, in contrast to the Jewish expectation of the build-up of woes before the end of the present age, there is, during the period of eschatological tension, a continuous (if not steady) ‘filling-up’ until the measure is reached at the time of the parousia. Consistent with this is Paul’s statement that ‘the sufferings of Christ overflow into us’ (2 Cor. 1:5), as here in the opening statement of that epistle he draws attention to the continuity of life and ministry from Christ via the apostle to the readers.

There are further significant differences between the ‘afflictions of Christ’ and the ‘woes of the Messiah’ as each respectively is portrayed. As evidenced by the passages quoted, the woes are generally conceived to be corporate and national in scale – there is some minor suggestion that they might be avoided by an individual, but in most cases only by geographical removal (as Jesus too implied, Matt. 24:15-20). Otherwise the woes appear to be a shared experience for the entire nation, sinners and righteous alike. The afflictions of Christ however, are very different from this: first, they are an integral part of the Christian life (Luke 9:23-25; 14:26-33; John 15:18-22; Acts 14:22; 1 Thes. 3:3); second, they are only rarely punitive.

### **7.3 The concept of ‘fulfilment’ related to the *eschaton***

When Paul describes in Col. 1:24 his ‘filling up’ the afflictions of Christ, he is introducing a concept replete with eschatological associations and allusion in both the OT and NT, for an essential and recurrent theme in the eschatological terminology is that of ‘fulfilment’. One of the inherent components of the whole topic is the tension caused by the hopes, anticipation and expectation of the *future* event on the one hand when compared to the often contradictory and disappointing *present* on the other. Such tension is rendered all the

more acute when the expectation is fuelled by prophecy – or even, as in the case of the Messianic woes, of a people’s popular beliefs.

‘Fulfilment’ is the key that releases such tensions and, whilst the applications are quite varied, the biblical vocabulary, both in LXX and the NT, is very simple, consisting almost exclusively of the simple verb πληρόω ‘to fill’ and its derivatives.<sup>44</sup>

### **7.3.1 Fulfilment in the OT**

Beginning with the LXX, we find both πληρόω and its more archaic cognates πίμπλημι and ἐμπίπλημι used to translate a variety of Hebrew roots, by far the most common of which are מלע ‘to fill’ and שבע ‘to satisfy’. Besides the obvious literal applications, there is a range of figurative senses in which the terms apply, and of particular relevance as eschatological terminology are the three which describe respectively time running out; God’s promises being fulfilled; and, most significant for understanding Col. 1:24, the filling up of a predetermined measure.

1. *Temporal fulfilment.* Ἐμπίπλημι is found just once with this sense (Isa. 65:20, ‘an old man who does not complete his time [ὅς οὐκ ἐμπλήσει τὸν χρόνον αὐτοῦ]’), but πληρόω some fifteen times, e.g. Jer. 29:10, ‘when seventy years are completed [πληροῦσθαι] for Babylon’; Gen. 29:21, ‘Give me my wife, for my time is completed [πεπλήρωνται γὰρ αἱ ἡμέραι].’<sup>45</sup> As well as these instances of the simple verb form, the compound ἀναπληρόω (as in Col. 1:24) is also used seven times in a temporal context.<sup>46</sup>

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44 See above (2.2.4) for a discussion of the specific compound form ἀναπληρόω found in Col. 1:24.

45 Further examples are Gen. 25:24; Lev. 8:33; 25:29-30; 1 Sam. 18:27; Jer. 25:12; 41:14; Num. 6:5, 13; Tob. 8:20; 14:5; Ecclus 26:2; Wis. 4:13.

46 Gen. 29:28; Ex. 7:25; 23:26; Est. 1:52; 2:12, 15; Isa. 60:20.



2. *The fulfilment of promises or prophecy.* Of the variant forms, only πληρόω is used (six times) in this sense in LXX. For example, 1 Kings 8:15, ‘Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who with his own hand has fulfilled [ἐπλήρωσε] what he promised.’<sup>47</sup>

3. *The filling up of a predetermined measure.* Although there are only two clear examples of this particular usage, its importance should not be underestimated, since both linguistically and theologically it serves as a precedent for understanding similar NT expressions, particularly as it occurs in an eschatological context. Dan. 8:23 reads, καὶ ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῆς βασιλείας αὐτῶν, πληρουμένων τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν, ‘towards the end of their reign, when their sins have been filled up’. Very similar in tone, and employing the compound ἀναπληρόω, is Gen. 15:16, ὅπω γὰρ ἀναπεπλήρωνται αἱ ἁμαρτίαι τῶν Ἀμορραίων, ‘for the sins of the Amorites have not yet filled up [their quota]’.<sup>48</sup>

### **7.3.2 Fulfilment in the NT**

The pattern of usage in all of the three categories above is resumed and continued in the NT:

1. *Temporal fulfilment.* Whilst there are a number of passages where πληρόω is used in an implicitly temporal sense, these generally convey more of a sense of ‘complete’, ‘finish’ a task, e.g. Luke 7:1, Ἐπειδὴ ἐπλήρωσεν πάντα τὰ ῥήματα αὐτοῦ, ‘when he had finished

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47 Similar expressions are used at 1 Kgs 2:27; 8:24; 2 Chron. 6:4, 15; 36:21-22.

48 A similar expression is found in 2 Macc. 6:14, where the author comments, ‘The Lord did not see fit to deal with us as he does with other nations: with them he patiently holds his hand until they have reached the full extent of their sins [πρὸς ἐκπλήρωσιν ἁμαρτιῶν], but upon us he inflicted retribution before our sins reached their height [ἵνα μὴ πρὸς τέλος ἀφικομένων ἡμῶν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν].’ A list of references for similar expressions of ‘filling up the sins’ is to be found in Pobee, *Persecution*, p. 125, n. 66.

saying all this'; Acts 14:26, τὸ ἔργον ὃ ἐπλήρωσαν, 'the work they had completed'.

However, in Luke *πμπλήμι* is used several times in a manner closer to OT usage in order to denote the ending of a time period, e.g. Luke 1:57, ἐπλήσθη ὁ χρόνος τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν; 2:6, ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν, both of which can be translated 'when the time had come for her to give birth.'<sup>49</sup>

2. *The fulfilment of promises or prophecy.* In this sense there are numerous occurrences of *πληρόω*, beside one instance of *πμπλήμι* (Luke 21:22). Particularly common (as well as typical) is Matthew's formula (with variants) ἵνα πληρωσθῇ 'to fulfill ...' (Matt. 1:22; 2:15; 13:35, etc.). Similar constructions occur throughout the gospels and Acts,<sup>50</sup> but elsewhere only at Jas 2:23. Additionally, compound forms are employed in the same vein at Matt. 13:14 (ἀναπληρόω) and Acts 13:33 (ἐκπληρόω), possibly with intensive effect.

3. *The filling up of a predetermined measure.* In a usage very similar to Dan. 8:23, Matt. 23:32 reads καὶ ὑμεῖς πληρῶσατε τὸ μέτρον τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν, 'Go on, fill up the measure [of the sin] of your forefathers', graphically leaving no doubt that, figuratively at least, there exists a μέτρον or limit set by God. On an even more eschatological note, Rev. 6:11 gives as a response to the souls of the dead, that they are to wait until '[the number of] their fellow-servants and brothers who were to be killed as they were was completed' (ἕως πληρωθῶσιν καὶ οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτενέσθαι ὡς καὶ αὐτοί). This passage is important not just for the lexical example it affords of the use of the verb, but because of the evident purpose of its mention of 'filling up': it is in response to the plea of the martyrs for vindication, and is plainly to encourage the reader

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<sup>49</sup> Further similar occurrences are Luke 1:23; 2:21, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Further examples of this formula are: Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 26:54, 56; 27:9; Mark 14:49; Luke 4:21; 24:44; John 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24, 36; Acts 1:16; 3:18; 13:27; Jas 2:23.

(perhaps in similar distress) that there is a limit set for the afflictions of the saints.

Particularly rich in eschatological overtones are three sayings of Jesus which overlap this category and the first in mentioning a predetermined measure of *time*. Luke 21:24, ‘and Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled [ἄχρι οὗ πληρωθῶσιν καιροὶ ἐθνῶν]’, is strongly reminiscent of the division of time frequently found in the apocalyptic and rabbinic literature.<sup>51</sup> Less apocalyptic, yet still far more than rhetorical, are his utterances announcing the beginning of his public ministry, ‘The time is fulfilled [Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς] and the kingdom has drawn near’ (Mark 1:15), and John 7:8, ‘I myself am not going up to this feast, because my own time is not yet fulfilled [ὅτι ὁ ἐμὸς καιρὸς οὐπω πεπλήρωται]’. From three different sources, these sayings from Jesus himself add great weight to a belief in the concept of filling up a predetermined measure.

Stuhlmann detects a logical development in the biblical ‘fulfilment’ theme, beginning from the simplest, the ‘measure of time’ (*mensura temporum*). From there it is a short step to those instances where the passage of time is not in itself the determining factor, yet is implicit in the necessary accumulation of the requisite tally of the commodity which is to be filled. This category he terms *mensura in temporibus inlatorum* (‘the measure of inferred time’), and it is here that he includes two themes: first, the measure of sin, as in Gen. 15:16 (the sin of the Amorites), Matt. 23:32 (the sins of the forefathers), and 1 Thes. 2:16 (the sin of the Jews); and second, the measure of suffering, and here he places Col.

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<sup>51</sup> The rabbis were adept at dividing world history, both past and future, into periods of time. E.g., 4 Ezra 14:11-12; Apoc. Bar. 53-72 (12 periods); 1 Enoch 93:1-10; 91:12-17; Or. Sib. 4:47 (10 periods); bSanh. 97b (7 days), etc.

1:24.<sup>52</sup> In his view then, the ‘filling up the afflictions of Christ’ describes a process of accumulation, over time, towards a set (albeit unknown) quota.

Stuhlmann sees the fulfilment theme develop one step further than this in the NT, however, in a direction whose roots he traces to the early apocalyptic literature (e.g. 1 Enoch 47; 8:4-11:2), and this category he terms *numerus clausus* (limited quota).<sup>53</sup> This trend is found reflected twice: in the apocalyptic Rev. 6:9-11, where the souls of the Christian martyrs are told to be patient and wait ‘until [the number] is fulfilled [πληρωθῶσιν] of their fellow-servants and brothers who are to be killed as they had been’; but also in the Pauline mainstream at Rom. 11:25-26: ‘a partial hardening of Israel has taken place, until the full quota [πλήρωμα] of the Gentiles has come in, and thus all Israel shall be saved’.

Stuhlmann’s research has highlighted not just the diversity of the theme of ‘fulfilment of a measure’ in both the OT and the NT, but also provides a rationale for its development that is simple and convincing. Most significant for this present research, although he himself places Col.1:24 itself in the second category rather than with the *numerus clausus*,<sup>54</sup> the occurrence of an example of the latter in Rom. 11:26, at the heart of Paul’s eschatological teaching, gives weight to the argument, as Stuhlmann himself believes, that Col. 1:24 not only describes a fixed quota of affliction, but a belief in the vicarious nature of Paul’s own sufferings: ‘He is pointing out that the fellowship is spared every ‘affliction of Christ’ that

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52 Stuhlmann also discusses as a sideline the possible inclusion here of other passages, 2 Cor. 1:6; 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:10, but does not consider that they definitely concern the theme of ‘fulfilment’. Stuhlmann, *Maß*, pp. 102-103.

53 *Numerus clausus* is a procedure that has been in place for many years in the higher education systems of Germany and other North European nations, whereby the fixed quota of places for a given course (in particular in vocational subjects), is limited to the extent of overriding all other entitlements of the applicants, with the object of protecting the status and standard of the trades and professions.

54 It seems unclear why Stuhlmann has made this decision – it may simply be that *numerus clausus* correctly applies to individuals as opposed to impersonal commodities such as sin or affliction.

he takes on. On this basis the apostolic suffering directly credits the fellowship's account.'<sup>55</sup> Here the themes of 'fulfilment', vicarious suffering, and the fellowship of the church are entwined in a statement that seems both clear and logically coherent.

This brief study on the motif of 'fulfilment', like the preceding research on the 'woes of the Messiah', is important because it illuminates a significant part of the background to and influences upon Paul's thought and writing with regard to understanding Col. 1:24.

#### **7.4 Summary of the Messianic woes**

The 'woes of the Messiah' can be regarded as an important and recurrent element in the Jewish eschatological expectations of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and to that extent the many commentators listed above in footnote 2 are correct in detecting their influence in Col. 1:24. Nevertheless, the motif of fulfilment is alien to the Messianic woes themselves, as is any suggestion of vicarious suffering, the woes traditionally being conceived as corporate and national. Both the fulfilment motif and that of vicarious suffering fit far more comfortably with the recurrent and fully Christianised Pauline development of the traditional belief in the Messianic woes into a teaching on the necessity of believers' suffering as a participation in the 'afflictions of Christ'. Here in Paul's theology the emphasis is rather more on the inheritance of a legacy from the past (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:10) than of labour pains inevitably preceding a better future – although neither aspect can be entirely absent, as Jesus' own use of the traditional imagery reminds us.

The possibility of a set quota or limit of some kind to these afflictions is perfectly

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<sup>55</sup> 'Er zeigt auf, daß jedes Christusleid, das er übernimmt, der Gemeinde erspart bleibt. Das apostolische Leiden kommt auf dieser Basis der Gemeinde direkt zugut'. Stuhlmann, *Maß*, p. 101.

consistent with the biblical developments of the theme of ‘fulfilment’, and is in particular fully supported by Paul’s own references to such concepts in Rom. 11:26 and 1 Thes. 2:16. The framework is therefore well set, having investigated in chapter 6 the whole concept of substitution, vicarious and otherwise, to proceed to a brief study of the Body of Christ, as the vehicle or context for it to be effective.

## **7.5 The Body of Christ**

Having surveyed the history of interpretation of Col. 1:24, and in this chapter and the previous one investigated the possible influence of contemporary eschatological beliefs, including the ‘woes of the Messiah’, and the apparently pervasive motif of substitution, it remains to examine the nature of the *context* within which affliction and suffering might achieve vicarious effect. In other words, if one accepts in principle the possibility of vicarious benefits to suffering, what is the framework within which they might find expression and function? It has already been suggested (5.1) that maybe the text itself deliberately provides the key to this by explicitly (and otherwise somewhat superfluously), repeating the identification of the church as the Body of Christ.<sup>56</sup>

### **7.5.1 The Body of Christ in the Pauline epistles**

Paul employs several images and analogies to explain and illustrate his teaching on the church, besides its primary designation as ἐκκλησία: family, temple, nation, bride,

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<sup>56</sup> An identification already made as recently as Col. 1:18. Walter comments: ‘This is rather a circuitous formula; something like ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐκκλησίας would have been simpler. Why does the author quote the body metaphor again here? [Das ist eine etwas umständliche Formulierung; einfacher wäre etwa gewesen ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Warum zitiert der Verfasser hier wieder die Leib-Metaphorik?] Matthias Walter, *Gemeinde als Leib Christi: Untersuchungen zum Corpus Paulinum und zu den <<Apostolischen Vätern>>* (Novum Testamentum et orbis antiquis, 49; Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 2001), p. 179. Walter’s own answer to the question (p. 181), putting the emphasis on *of Christ*, is that it is a deliberate reminder of why there is affliction: because they belong to and follow Christ. This seems less than fully satisfactory.

building, etc.;<sup>57</sup> but of all these the most frequent by some distance is the picture of the church as the Body of Christ,<sup>58</sup> which is named as such some 17 times in the whole Pauline corpus.<sup>59</sup>

The aim of this brief section is not to investigate the possible backgrounds to the concept of the church as *σῶμα*,<sup>60</sup> nor its relationship to the incarnate Christ,<sup>61</sup> which have been treated in depth elsewhere; nor the sacramental aspects of the Body as it relates to teaching on Eucharist and baptism;<sup>62</sup> the *specific* relevance of this concept to Col. 1:24, and thus the

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57 The church in the wider Pauline corpus is variously described as God's people, 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 6:16; 9:12; Eph. 3:8; 4:12; 5:3; God's household, Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; the family (of believers), Gal. 6:10; Eph. 3:14; a building, 1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:21; a dwelling in which God lives, Eph. 2:22; a temple, 1 Cor. 3:16 (twice), 17 (twice), 2 Cor. 6:16 (twice); Eph. 2:21; a field, 1 Cor. 3:9; a letter from Christ, 2 Cor. 3:2, 3; the circumcision, Phil. 3:3; the pillar and foundation of truth, 1 Tim. 3:15; and in terms of the bride of Christ, 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33. Cumulatively, the members are called, among other things, the saints, the sons of light, the brothers / sisters, the believers, those who are called, and neighbours.

58 Dunn, *Theology*, p. 548. The literature on the Body of Christ in the Pauline epistles is quite extensive, including the following: Peter Müller, *Der Soma-Begriff bei Paulus: Studien zum paulinischen Menschenbild und seine Bedeutung für unsere Zeit* (Schriften zur Religionserkenntnis; Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1988), pp. 26-54; Gosnell L.O.R. Yorke, *The Church as the Body of Christ in the Pauline Corpus: a Re-examination* (London: University Press of America, 1991; Heon-Woon Park, *Die Kirche als „Leib Christi“ bei Paulus* (Giessen: Brunnen, 1992); John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: a Study in Pauline Theology* (Studies in Biblical Theology, 5; London: SCM Press, 1952); Sang-Won Soon, *Corporate Elements in Pauline Anthropology: a Study of Selected Terms, Idioms, and Concepts in the Light of Paul's Usage and Background* (Analecta biblica, 148; Rome: Pontificio istituto biblico, 2001), pp. 83-120; Käsemann, *Leib*; Walter, *Gemeinde*; Dunn, *Theology*, pp. 548-552; 'The "Body of Christ" in Paul', in Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige, eds., *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honour of Ralph P. Martin* (JSNT Supplement Series, 87; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), pp. 146-162; Ernest Best, *One body in Christ: a Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955); Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 137; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Gundry, *Sōma*, pp. 223-244; Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: the Early House Churches in their Historical Setting* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), pp. 62-70; Andrew Perriman, "'His Body, which is the Church...': Coming to Terms with Metaphor", *Evangelical Quarterly* 62 (1990), pp. 123-142; L. Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul* (trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker; New York: Herder & Herder, 1959), pp. 262-286.

59 The precise number depends on one or two ambiguous verses where it is not clear whether the church or the metaphorical / sacramental body of Jesus is referred to – or indeed the ambiguity may be deliberate. The occurrences are: Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:29; 12:13, 27; Eph. 1:23; 4:4, 12, 16 (twice); 5:23, 30; Col. 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15. Yorke helpfully analyses the 88 Pauline occurrences of *σῶμα* and its cognates (apart from five which refer to heavenly bodies or the body of a seed) into three categories: anthropological, Christological and ecclesiological. 61 are anthropological, leaving 27, including those listed above, to be divided between the latter two categories.

60 Yorke, *Church*, pp. 1-7, 34-43; Park, *Kirche*, pp. 27-117; Käsemann, *Leib*, pp. 1-94; Robinson, *Body*, pp. 55-58; Walter, *Gemeinde*, pp. 8-37, 158-164; Scornaienchi, *Sarx*, pp. 15-52; Lee, *Paul*, pp. 8-45.

61 Yorke, *Church*, pp. 7-10, 34-41; Käsemann, *Leib*, pp. 156-159; Robinson, *Body*, pp. 34-48.

62 Müller, *Soma-Begriff*, pp. 32-33; Park, *Kirche*, pp. 275-308; Käsemann, *Leib*, pp. 151-155, 174-183;

focus of this section, is the nature of the inner dynamic, the mutuality and reciprocity within the Body, which might facilitate the vicarious effect of the afflictions mentioned in that verse. Best points out:

The metaphor looks inward and not outward; it is used, not to express a truth about the place of the Church in the world, but about the relationships of members of the church to Christ and to one another; it is concerned not with the external life of the Church but with its internal life.<sup>63</sup>

This section is therefore not being over-selective in the treatment of the subject, but on the contrary focussing on the real essence of the imagery in every occurrence of it: as Gundry also succinctly observes:

Where Paul uses the phrase ‘the Body of Christ’, he discusses the *inner* structure and workings of the body in the interrelationship of its various organs and limbs. Paul nowhere relates the Body of Christ to outward activities in relationship to others. Thus the cohesiveness and harmonious function of a single physical body, considered by itself, provides Paul with a model for the Church in the interrelationships of its own members.<sup>64</sup>

For this more restricted investigation of these ‘interrelationships’ a smaller selection of the Pauline *σῶμα* texts is relevant. Suffice to say, on the subject of the background to the imagery, that perhaps the very multiplicity and diversity of the possible roots which have been enumerated and investigated paradoxically illustrates a simple but vital point that should not be lost sight of:<sup>65</sup> the human body must be by its very nature one of the most universally accessible and understandable images – not only visible and tangible to, but even subjectively experienceable by, everybody. Walter, for instance, is able to assemble an impressive array of examples of the use of the body as metaphor from Greek and

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Scornaienchi, *Sarx*, pp. 172-176; Cerfaux, *Church*, pp. 262-282.

63 Best, *One Body*, p. 113.

64 Gundry, *Sōma*, p. 226.

65 Dunn comments, ‘We have to ask, “Why this term?” and “Where did Paul get it from?” Several answers have been offered over the years, most of them too little to the point.’ *Theology*, p. 549.



Roman philosophers and Jewish Hellenistic sources.<sup>66</sup> It seems therefore that the variety of possible backgrounds to the analogy of church as a human body is unsurprising, and perhaps far less significant than the common down-to-earth reality of Everyman's experience which it mirrors.

### **7.5.2 σῶμα as corporate body in Greek and Latin literature**

When discussing the linguistic aspects of Col. 1:24, it was seen (2.2.6) that usage of the word σῶμα broadly mirrors that of English *body*, in that it developed from an original purely physical meaning to allow various metaphorical or analogical applications, including, most significantly for Paul's imagery, that of a group composed of several individuals. The concept of σῶμα as a unit made up of diverse parts was developed in various directions by the Stoics; although their ideas and the cosmological and anthropological reflections based thereon<sup>67</sup> do not directly concern this research, the socio-political aspect is very relevant, for through it the image of 'body and members' became familiar and widespread in the Greco-Roman world. Käsemann describes 'the picture of the body and its members, which permeated the entire Stoic literature';<sup>68</sup> Dunn comments, 'The image of the city or state as a body was already familiar in political philosophy'.<sup>69</sup> The best known literary example of this is the fable of Agrippa Menenius, related by Livy. It deserves quotation in full, as the parallels with Paul's imagery in 1 Cor. 12 are striking:

In the days when man's members did not all agree among themselves, as is now the case, but had each its own ideas and a voice of its own, the other parts thought it unfair that they should have the worry and the trouble and the labour of providing everything for the belly, while the belly remained quietly in their midst with nothing to do but to enjoy the

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<sup>66</sup> Walter, *Gemeinde*, pp. 70-98. The primary features of the quotations are also helpfully tabulated at pp. 313-317.

<sup>67</sup> Käsemann, *Leib*, pp. 40-50; Schweizer, σῶμα, pp. 1032-1041; and particularly Lee, *Paul*, pp. 46-102.

<sup>68</sup> 'Das Bild vom Leibe und seine Gliedern, das sich durch die ganze stoische Literatur verbreitet hat'. Käsemann, *Leib*, p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> Dunn, *Theology*, p. 550.

good things which they bestowed upon it. They therefore conspired together that the hands should carry no food to the mouth, nor the mouth accept anything that was given it, nor the teeth grind up what they received. While they sought in this angry spirit to starve the belly into submission, the members themselves and the whole body were reduced to the utmost weakness. Hence it became clear that even the belly had no idle task to perform, and was no more nourished than it nourished the rest, by giving out to all parts of the body that by which we live and thrive, when it has been equally divided amongst the veins and is enriched with digested food – that is, the blood.<sup>70</sup>

In this vivid tale are found not just a similar imagery, but specific close parallels to several of Paul's statements in 1 Cor. 12: 'The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you" (v. 21); 'those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable' (22); 'there should be no division in the body, but its parts should have equal concern for each other' (25); 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it' (26). Similar sentiments are found in Seneca:

Everything which you see, which comprises both god and man, is one – we are members of a great body. Nature produced us in relationship, since she created us from the same source and to the same end. She produced in us mutual love, and made us sociable.<sup>71</sup>

Even if Paul was the first to apply the analogy of the human body specifically to the church,<sup>72</sup> the antecedents and the basic concept appear to have been widespread. Dunn, after reviewing the various suggested sources of the imagery, concludes, 'Paul reaches for the body imagery as a means to assert unity (oneness) in and through diversity because that was already the function of the imagery in common usage.'<sup>73</sup> Walter writes,

Σῶμα, as the parallel pagan texts demonstrate, could, in philosophical and historiographic contexts, express an idealistic belonging together of separate individuals. That is what I consider Paul is playing on here [in Rom. 12:4-6]. Taking that further, I don't consider it beyond the bounds of possibility that Paul may even have come across the administrative

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70 Livy, *Histories* 2:32. Translation from *Livy*, with an English translation by B.O. Foster (14 vols.; Loeb Classical Library; London: Heinemann, 1919-51), vol. 1, p. 325. Livy relates how this tale dissipated the anger of the plebs against the patricians in 494BC. Similar imagery, though less developed, is found in Epictetus 2:10:4-5.

71 Seneca, *Ep.* 95:52.

72 Walter, *Gemeinde*, pp. 105, 143-44 argues that Paul was the first to apply this designation to the church, and that his use of it in 1 Cor. implies that the readers were already familiar with it through his previous teaching.

73 Dunn, 'Body', p. 155.

usage of σῶμα.<sup>74</sup>

Whatever the contexts in which Paul might previously have come across σῶμα imagery,<sup>75</sup> he evidently considered it to be the best adapted to the truths of interdependence, belonging and mutual service which he was constantly trying to convey to his churches.

### **7.5.3 The dynamics of relationships within the Pauline Body of Christ**

Regardless of the background to the body imagery and its antecedent philosophical applications, the real test of the analogy has to be whether its implications work out in practice – that is, in those inner ‘interrelationships of its own members’ which Gundry (above, 7.5.1) identified as the invariable focus of the Pauline usage. The key texts which bear upon the internal dynamics of the Body are primarily the extended analogy to the human body in 1 Cor. 12: 12-27; the similar but far shorter description in Rom. 12:4-5; and additionally Col. 2:19; 3:15; Eph. 4:12, 16.<sup>76</sup> It will be simplest to examine the relevant parts of 1 Cor. 12 first, as being the most detailed, supplemented and compared as necessary with the other texts.

First it should be noted that this full description of the Body, set in the middle of extensive teaching on various aspects of church life and practice (1 Cor. 5-8, 10-14), arises from Paul’s need to remind and re-emphasise to his readers that the spiritual gifts of which they

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74 ‘Σῶμα, das hatte die Darstellung des paganen Vergleichmaterials gezeigt, konnte in philosophischen und historiographischen Zusammenhängen eine ideelle Zusammengehörigkeit verschiedener Personen ausdrücken. Darauf spielt Paulus hier meines Erachtens an. Ich halte es darüber hinaus nicht für ausgeschlossen, daß Paulus auch auf den administrativen Gebrauch von σῶμα rekuriert haben könnte.’ Walter, *Gemeinde*, p. 158.

75 Further on this subject, see two short articles: T. W. Manson, ‘A Parallel to a N.T. Use of σῶμα’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1936), p. 385; Wilfred L. Knox, ‘Parallels to the N.T. Use of σῶμα’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1938), pp. 243-246.

76 Although Eph. is generally considered to be post-Pauline, these Body of Christ references appear entirely consistent in doctrine with those found in Col. and the undisputed letters.

exhibited such proficiency (1:7) are given in fact ‘for the common good’ (12:7). As Dunn comments, ‘Even the listing of the charisms in 1 Cor. 12.8-10 underlined the character of the charismatic community as one of mutual interdependence.’<sup>77</sup> The whole context therefore is one of common life, mutuality and sharing, a theme which is then developed using the human body as analogy.

Paul proceeds to illustrate two complementary facts: that on the one hand the body is a unit despite the great diversity of its parts (vv. 14-18); yet on the other, this very diversity becomes instrumental in the health, strength and balance of the unit through the mutual dependence of each part (vv. 19-24): ‘The diversity of members and of charisms [is] integral to and constitutive of the oneness of the body’ (Dunn).<sup>78</sup> Paul illustrates each of these propositions – ‘The body is not a single part, but many’; ‘If they were all one part, where would the body be?’ - with what Walter terms a ‘fable-style dialogue’.<sup>79</sup> Each of the two ‘declarations of independence’ by parts of the body is answered in turn by a theological statement: ‘In fact God has arranged the parts of the body ...’; ‘But God has combined [the parts of] the body ...’. The conclusion, or indeed the climax, of the argument is that in this divinely structured church body not only do the members ‘have equal concern for each other’ (v. 25) – which might be considered a natural sympathy arising from common purpose and sense of identity – but ultimately even, ‘if one member suffers, every member suffers with it’ (v. 26), which implies something rather less conscious and more organic, comparable to the human body’s natural coordinated response to pain or infection. If, as Barrett rightly points out,<sup>80</sup> the ‘physiological metaphor’

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<sup>77</sup> Dunn, *Theology*, p. 557.

<sup>78</sup> Dunn, ‘Body’, p. 149.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Fabelartiger „Dialog”’. Walter, *Gemeinde*, p. 130.

<sup>80</sup> C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Black’s New Testament

inevitably breaks down at this point, since one cannot simply say conversely of the human body, ‘if one part rejoices, every part rejoices with it’, then this would seem paradoxically to emphasise that we are dealing here not with theory or doctrine so much as with the experienced reality of church life. The word translated ‘suffers with’, *συμπάσχει*, has an interesting background, very significant to its use with body imagery. It was coined, along with various other compounds prefixed *συν-*,<sup>81</sup> by the early Stoic Chrysippus, quoted above (2.2.6) as one of the first to use the term *σῶμα* in a manner akin to Paul’s, in order to explain his cosmological theories, and it was originally used to express ‘the all-embracing, total effect of cosmic phenomena’.<sup>82</sup> Paul’s usage of a term with such a pedigree could not fail to emphasise the reality of the shared life within the Body of Christ, for Paul has in effect borrowed terminology originally adopted by the Stoics to express the ultimate union of all things, and employed it to express the intensity of belonging inherent in the microcosm of the church.

Not only is the distribution of the charismatic gifts ‘for the common good’ of the Body (12:7); their motivation must correspondingly be sacrificial love as opposed to self-aggrandisement (ch. 13).<sup>83</sup> The briefer but similar use of the body analogy in Rom. 12:4-8,<sup>84</sup> whilst employing the same term *χαρίσματα* for the ‘gifts’ as in 1 Cor. 12, noticeably concentrates, with the exception of prophesying, on practical ministries – serving,

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Commentaries; London: A & C Black, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1971), pp. 291-292.

81 Scornaienchi, *Sarx*, pp. 191-192.

82 Michael Lapidge, ‘Stoic cosmology and Roman literature’, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II* 36.3 (1989), p. 1384.

83 This theme is reflected frequently in 1 Cor.: for example, in Paul’s instructions on food sacrificed to idols (8:7-13); eating meat (10:23-33); the Lord’s Supper (1:17-33); and the use of gifts of prophecy and tongues (14:1-17).

84 Both Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Black’s New Testament Commentaries; London: A. & C. Black, 1962), p. 236 and Walter, *Gemeinde*, pp. 149-151 point out that in Rom. 12 Paul, whilst employing the same imagery as in 1 Cor. 12, actually uses the phrase ‘one body *in* Christ’. Walter sees in this a reflection of the breadth of Paul’s consideration and usage of the analogy.

teaching, encouragement, charitable giving, leadership and showing mercy – rather than the so-called ‘charismatic gifts’ described in 1 Cor. 12:8-10. Here in Rom. 12 there can be little doubt that the work of each of the body’s members is to help build up the rest of the body, and once again the mention of gifts is prefaced by a warning, ‘Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think of your self soberly.’ This same concept is expanded and spelled out clearly in Eph. 4:11-13, where the purpose of the ministries (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) is ‘for equipping the saints for works of service, to build the Body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith’. Again, as in Rom. 12, this teaching is prefaced by instructions on appropriate attitudes and behaviour towards fellow-members: humility, gentleness, patience and love (v. 2) with the whole context (vv. 1-16) being a call to unity. 4:16 summarises the ideal: ‘from [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, by the proper working of each part, causes the body to grow and build itself up in love.’ This last phrase is very similar to Col. 2:19: ‘The whole body, through its ligaments and sinews supporting it and holding it together, grows God’s growth.’ Yorke comments, ‘For Paul, the human body acts as an important role model for the church because it suggests interconnectedness, interdependence, life and growth ([Col.] 2:19).’<sup>85</sup> Yet again, the context is a call to genuine rather than false humility (vv. 18, 23) and this is followed, as in 1 Cor. 12-13, by a lengthy appeal to selfless and loving behaviour within the church (vv. 5-17). The end result is distilled in Col. 3:15: ‘Let the peace of God arbitrate in your hearts: to this you were called in one body.’ Walter sums up, ‘Unity and peace are the hallmarks of the fellowship as Body.’<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Yorke, *Church*, p. 92.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Einheit und Frieden kennzeichnen die Gemeinde als Leib.’ Walter, *Gemeinde*, p. 195.

The flavour of unity and belonging in the Pauline descriptions of the Body of Christ is very strong and the corporate identity intense, and one term more than any other encapsulates this ethos: κοινωνία, which, together with other derivatives of the same root and those of the synonymous μετοχή,<sup>87</sup> expresses the togetherness, belonging and commonality of the church.<sup>88</sup> However, in NT usage, whereas μετοχή is used to describe ‘shared possession’, the particular slant of κοινωνία is a fellowship that is consequent upon firstly a shared fellowship with Christ, and as such has also a nuance of active participation, not just a passive sharing.<sup>89</sup> Thornton writes,

The koinonia is not the Church as a visible society nor any particular external manifestation of the Church’s unity. It is rather an interior spiritual reality, an activity of sharing or communion, constituting the inner bond of that brotherly concord which, in turn, is realized and expressed in the life of the community.<sup>90</sup>

Hauck expresses it this way:

Paul uses κοινωνία for the religious fellowship (participation) of the believer in Christ and Christian blessings, and for the mutual fellowship of believers ... Fellowship with Christ necessarily leads to fellowship with Christians, to the mutual fellowship of members of the community.<sup>91</sup>

The structures of the works of both Thornton and Hainz furthermore reflect this dual slant of κοινωνία being both active yet essentially derivative, Thornton’s being in two parts, ‘The common life, human and divine’ and ‘The divine-human life and the Body of Christ’,<sup>92</sup> whilst Hainz’s first chapter, ‘Fellowship with Christ’, takes as its starting point 1 Cor. 1:9, ‘God, who called you into fellowship [κοινωνίαν] with his Son Jesus Christ, is

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87 The degree to which the two terms are synonymous is discussed and confirmed in L.S. Thornton, *The Common Life in the Body of Christ* (Westminster: Dacre, 1941), pp. 448-452.

88 A complete list of NT references is given in Thornton, *Common Life*, pp. 451-452.

89 The etymology of the respective terms is illustrative: whereas the verb μετέχω is a simple compound of μετά – ἔχω, ‘have with’, i.e., ‘share’, the ultimate root of κοινωνός and derivatives is Indo-European \*kom, ‘[together] with’.

90 Thornton, *Common Life*, pp. 450-451.

91 Friedrich Hauck, κοινωνός, κτλ., *TDNT* 3, p. 804.

92 Thornton, *Common Life*, pp. ix-xi.

faithful', before proceeding later to its outworking in terms of the Body of Christ.<sup>93</sup> He concisely defines the Pauline usage of the terminology as follows: 'κοινωνία = fellowship with somebody through mutual participation in something [Phil. 1:5; 3:10; 2 Cor. 1:7]; κοινωνός, κοινωνοί = people who stand in a relationship of fellowship with one another because they have a common share in something [1 Cor. 10:18, 20; 2 Cor. 2:23; Phmn 6, 17]; κοινωνεῖν = have or engage in fellowship through the reciprocal sharing of give and take. Rom. 12:13; 15:17; Phil. 4:17]'.<sup>94</sup>

This model of the Body of Christ with its inner dynamic of reciprocal sharing, its unity and its common care for its members, finds expression in two similar cameo descriptions in Acts:

All the believers were together and had everything in common, and sold property and possessions and distributed them to anyone as they had need.

[Acts 2:44-45]

The heart and mind of the body of believers was one, and nobody said that one of his possessions was his own, but to them everything was shared.

[Acts 4:32]

Regardless of whether or not the early church's experience of shared ownership was a success or should set an example for later imitation, one thing seems clear: it arose as a natural outworking of the primary phenomenon of κοινωνία, the fact that 'all the believers were together' and 'the heart and mind of the believers was one', not as a separate part of an ideological agenda. Such a degree of togetherness and unity may seem elusive and even idealistic, yet it corresponds precisely to the same values Paul refers to in his appeals to the

93 'Die Gemeinschaft mit Christus'. Josef Hainz, *Koinonia: >>Kirche<< als Gemeinschaft bei Paulus* (Biblische Untersuchungen, 16; Regensburg: Pustet, 1982), p. 15.

94 'κοινωνία = Gemeinschaft mit jemandem durch gemeinsame Teilhabe an etwas; κοινωνός, κοινωνοί = Personen, die in einem Gemeinverhältnis zueinander stehen, weil sie gemeinsam Anteil haben an etwas; κοινωνεῖν = Gemeinschaft haben oder halten durch wechselseitiges Anteil-geben oder Anteil-halten.' Hainz, *Koinonia*, pp. 5-6.



Body of Christ (above). Banks evaluates Paul's approach thus:

There can be no doubt that his communities failed to express fully the ideals of common life he held out before them, and that Paul was fully aware of this fact. But it would be a mistake to represent his subtle and distinctive approach to community as therefore idealistic and impracticable ... No one is more realistic than Paul in dealing with the frailties and failures of human relationships and yet he continually sets before his communities a vision of what their common life should, and one day will, be.<sup>95</sup>

Such a combination of strong and clear vision tempered with pastoral pragmatism is indeed the aim of many a biblical preacher and teacher to this day: the incentive is strong to replicate in church that degree of selfless service and willingness to share which will ultimately encompass all of life, not just possessions, to the degree where ultimately even suffering may have vicarious benefit to others.

#### **7.5.4 The Body as a vehicle for vicarious suffering**

If Paul did indeed have an understanding of vicarious suffering within the church, his own teaching on the Body of Christ, as outlined here, seems to be the perfect vehicle for the outworking of it. With its intense sense of belonging, the reciprocity of its submissive, serving relationships, and the mutual interdependence of its members, sharing fellowship in a common cause, but also more importantly in a mutual relationship with Christ, everything is in place for the afflictions of one member to have vicarious effect to the benefit of the others.

These same principles might therefore be seen as applying to any church which is modelled along New Testament lines, not so much in the way things are done, but more particularly with regard to the reality and depth and expression of the *κοινωνία* relationships between the members, fuelled by an experience of the Holy Spirit's presence

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<sup>95</sup> Banks, *Community*, p. 188.

and his fruit and gifts in their lives. In this respect many of the charismatic and Pentecostal churches are ideally placed, as they often have a stated aim to seek the restoration not just of the charismatic gifts but also the quality of relationships in church evidenced by the NT.<sup>96</sup> If Paul is expressing in Col. 1:24 a principle of vicarious suffering within the church, then the mutually devoted, tight-knit community evident from his portrayals of the Body of Christ might be the ideal forum for it to take place.

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96 This is a common theme particularly of the prolific literature produced by the leaders of the British 'charismatic movement', especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Influential examples include: Michael Harper, *Glory in the Church: a Guidebook to Christian Renewal* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974); Arthur Wallis, *The Radical Christian: a Call to Live without Compromise* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1981); Terry Virgo, *Restoration in the Church* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1985).

## **CHAPTER 8 – SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **8.1 Summary**

Through the course of this thesis, we have seen then that the structure and meaning of Col. 1:24 strongly reflects the verse's context, the wider passage 1:22-27 marking a transition from earlier mention of what is past and established (the status of Christ, his work of redemption, the evangelisation of the Colossians and the consequent changes in them, as well as Paul's commitment to pray for them) to Paul's current understanding of his mission in 1:28-2:3. Col. 1:24 represents this change of focus in miniature: in this transitional verse, bracketed as it is between the statement repeated verbatim in vv. 23 and 25, ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ [Παῦλος] διάκονος, Paul does not pause to explain theological detail, but contents himself with the briefest synopsis of the role he, perhaps belatedly, has now come to play. The verse thus mirrors its context with two contrastive statements, the first reflecting the past, the second the present and future. The rarity of the compound verb ἀνταναπληρόω should not obscure how commonly its prefix ἀντί- may be freely used to endue a verb with an added sense of 'in turn' or 'for [my] part'. In the preferred translation of 1:24, this produces the contrastive 'I rejoice ... whilst I for my part fill up'.

The historical interpretations of Col. 1:24 (ch. 3-4.1), innumerable and diverse as they are, nevertheless are clearly conditioned - at least in part and quite understandably when dealing with the topic of suffering and affliction - by the contemporary position of the church in society, and in particular whether the environment is of persecution or of peace and favour. Thus the comments of the Church Fathers (3.1-3), the overwhelming majority of which date from after the major periods of persecution, predominantly treat the issues of

affliction and persecution as historical events in Paul's life to be understood and interpreted, rather than extrapolating general principles from them with which to teach their contemporaries. The views of the Protestant Reformers (3.5), on the other hand, show less interest in Paul's experience but conversely are keen to apply the lessons to their own, and additionally emphasise those aspects which distinguish their teaching from that of their Roman Catholic contemporaries. The survey of modern Western evangelical views (5.3) broadly reflects a relatively affluent society where suffering (and particularly persecution) is largely regarded as an aberration as opposed to the expected norm.

One feature of the history of interpretation that may be significant is the absence of comments on Col. 1:24 in the surviving writings of the earliest Fathers; and when they do begin to address the verse, many of the Fathers pass over the issues which have greatly exercised later interpreters and commentators: is there a 'measure' of the afflictions of Christ? How can it be filled up? And does Paul regard his suffering as vicarious? An argument from silence is always built on soft ground, but the suspicion is hard to avoid that just possibly the earliest Christians had cultural understandings (doctrines would be too strong a term) which subsequently were lost to the later church, and which helped them to take in their stride some implications of this verse which are problematic to later readers. Or to put it another way: perhaps Paul's readers would have read into what Paul was saying assumptions and would have made connections which no longer occur to the modern reader. Potential partial answers to this have been identified as the 'woes of the Messiah', beliefs about substitution, and the specifically Pauline teaching on the church as the Body of Christ.

To some of the Fathers, though, we are indebted for major contributions to the understanding of Col. 1:24, including a near-universal rejection of any suggestion of inadequacy in Christ's redemptive work. Chrysostom (3.1.2) clearly emphasised the continuity between the work of Christ and that of Paul his apostle; both he and his fellow-members of the School of Antioch (3.1.2-5) stress the consequent inevitability of suffering in Christian service, particularly in evangelism; Photius (3.1.6) was the first of the Greek Fathers unequivocally to express the view that the lessons of Col. 1:24 are of wider application than just Paul himself, an understanding that had however been commonplace among the Latin Fathers. To these latter, and particularly to Augustine (3.2.2), we owe an increased emphasis on the close identification of Christ with his Body, the church, and in Augustine we find the first suggestions of belief in a predetermined quota of affliction for each disciple.

The mediaeval period (3.4) saw the first (re-?)introduction of an understanding of vicarious suffering in Col. 1:24 in the works of Aquinas. The Protestant Reformers (3.5) however make no mention of this, needing to combat the Roman extrapolations of such teaching in the form of the 'treasury of the church' and the sale of indulgences, and prefer to concentrate on each disciple's call to pick up their cross and suffer in following Christ. The theme of fulfilling a quota of suffering becomes commonplace, but is generally referred to the individual's calling, Luther however significantly adding the notion of contribution to a 'common heap'.

The succeeding centuries (4.1) witnessed the rediscovery, in the context of interpretation of Col. 1:24, of the 'woes of the Messiah' (Eadie) and the notion of a predetermined quota of

suffering for the church as a whole (Bengel) and thereby the theoretical possibility of one person's suffering vicariously relieving another. The scholarly views of the past half-century (4.2) show little consensus; insofar as they can be categorised at all, the majority cluster, with significant individual variant emphases, around one or other of the two most popular thrusts. The first such cluster of opinion is oriented around the contemporary eschatological expectations of the *parousia*, with or without influence from the Jewish beliefs in the 'woes of the Messiah', and with differing views on the existence or otherwise of a quota (either individual or corporate) of affliction appointed to be fulfilled. The second major cluster of opinion follows very much in the tradition of Chrysostom and the School of Antioch on the one hand, and Augustine on the other, in focussing on the continuity between the ministry of the incarnate Christ and that of his Body the Church (or in some notable cases just that of his apostle(s)). The survey of modern popular literature (5.3) shows that the emphasis within the Western evangelical community tends, generalising broadly, to be on the individual rather than the church; on avoidance or alleviation of suffering rather than embracing it; and on the pastoral, practical and emotional needs of the sufferer rather than on seeking God's purpose in it.

I discussed finally three intriguing topics which have been raised in recent scholarly interpretations and yet were deemed to deserve further study and a higher profile. The 'woes of the Messiah' (7.1) are found to be considerably more pervasive in the Jewish literature and beliefs of Paul's time than is perhaps generally conceded, and there is plentiful evidence in both OT and NT of the motif of 'fulfilment' (7.3). On balance, however, although there is enough support for a Pauline concept of believers' afflictions fulfilling a fixed quota, as far as the Messianic woes are concerned, their whole focus is

different (partly because of the Christian realignment of Jewish eschatological expectation (7.2)) from Paul's understanding of his own afflictions, and it is therefore difficult to bring the two into alignment. Looming far larger in the background - social, religious, and literary – on both the secular and the Jewish sides of Paul's background, is the theme of substitution (ch. 6), to the extent that one can picture him introducing the subject in Col. 1:24 without feeling the need to unpack or explain it in detail to his church audience. This is all the more unnecessary if that church has already been exposed to and embraced the Pauline teaching on the nature of the church as the Body of Christ (7.5), is consequently familiar with the realities of κοινωνία, and knows by personal experience the spiritual reality that 'if one member suffers, every member suffers with it' (1 Cor. 12:26).

## **8.2 Conclusions**

Paul wrote the statements of Col. 1:24 in the context of explaining where he envisaged his role fitting in to the larger picture: the gospel of salvation achieved by Christ, preached by Epaphras, and embraced by the Colossian believers. The pursuit of his calling entailed a great deal of suffering and affliction of many different kinds. From one perspective, many of these were as a logical consequence of the rigours and dangers of his itinerant ministry and the opposition it provoked. From another, Paul is clear that he was called specifically to suffer, both for Christ and for his church; from yet another angle, Paul is a disciple like any other Christian, carrying his cross daily as he suffers both '*in* Christ' and '*for* Christ'. He seems unconcerned to try to isolate these strands: at least as far as the Colossians are concerned, he suffers 'for the sake of his body, which is the church'. In making this assertion, Paul writes as one highly educated in the teachings of his Jewish upbringing, but additionally immersed in and conversant with its popular expectations of birthpangs

preceding the coming (now to the converted Paul, the *return*) of the Messiah, together with an understanding of the not uncommon theme of a predetermined quota of such suffering. Likewise, the idea of one person substituting for another, in particular in suffering vicariously, was a common theme in both his religious and secular social background. This background, combined with half a lifetime of both experiencing and teaching on the mutual nature of the Body of Christ, his favourite model for the church, with its profound koinonia, its reciprocal give and take, and its unity which goes even beyond empathy, not surprisingly led Paul, by a short step and with little need for further explanation, to express himself in terms of suffering vicariously for the church. Whether he would have gone so far as to indulge in suggesting, as have an increasing number of commentators since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a mathematically corresponding reduction in suffering by others as a result of his own afflictions, is unclear; probably he would have been more content to restrict himself to considering that his afflictions were contributing an extra helping, as Luther put it, ‘to the common heap’.<sup>1</sup>

### **8.3 Implications and opportunities for today’s church**

Churches that teach and experience the use of the charismatic gifts find themselves sometimes in something of a quandary when faced with the presence of real suffering amongst their own members. On the one hand, the church’s ‘brochure’ (whether in the form of the vision statement, the preaching from the pulpit, or the emphasis of relevant Bible texts) proclaims the availability of healing through the operation of the spiritual gifts today in the church. There may well also be additional teaching on prosperity and on ‘overcoming’ through Christ. On the other hand, while everyone rejoices with those who

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<sup>1</sup> Luther, *Sermon at Coburg, 3 April 1530*. See above (3.5.2, n. 79).



do receive healing or whose other needs are met, there can be a resultant tension for those still suffering. ‘Why me?’ is a question all too often waiting for an answer. Conversely there is a danger of reverting to a judgemental doctrine of retribution in the minds of others: ‘There must be something wrong.’ The sufferer may also feel guilty for failing to live up to the church’s teaching and expectations, so that, however much love and pastoral care is expressed, there remains a burden of guilt and confusion adding to the weight of suffering.

If, however, the church can regain the balance between the proclamation and operation of the spiritual gifts on the one hand, and a proper understanding of the implications of Christ’s call to his disciple to ‘pick up his cross daily and follow me’ (Luke 9:23) on the other, and see personal suffering restored to this broader context, much of the tension could be resolved. Then if to this were added an understanding that possibly these afflictions, like Paul’s, are ‘for the sake of the church’, the result should be a wholly different perspective. The suffering might come to be regarded no longer just as a matter for compassion and concern, but also for honour and respect, enabling it to be embraced rather than rejected by sufferer and church alike.

#### **8.4 Further research**

The constraints of space have limited this thesis to a study primarily of what Paul meant in Col. 1:24, and several areas need to be researched further. The linguistic study in Chapter 2 produced a radically fresh translation of the verse, with new emphases compared to previous published versions. This deserves further study in several areas: first, linguistically; second, on how it fits into study on the wider topics both of Paul’s own

understanding of his ministry and of his teaching on suffering; and third, on how it could influence future translation of the text.

The survey of historical and modern interpretations of Col. 1:24, with the overview of current evangelical views on suffering, has highlighted huge variations in believers' attitudes towards suffering in different eras and cultures, and various causes have been briefly surmised for this. A detailed study on how such differentiation in approaches to suffering arose and the factors that conditioned them would be of theological interest as well as relevant to future church teaching, training and pastoral care.

On the subject specifically of vicarious suffering, two further large areas of research invite further investigation: first, is there empirical evidence in church history down the ages of the principle of vicarious suffering actually at work as suggested above? Tertullian is often (mis)quoted as writing that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church',<sup>2</sup> and anecdotal evidence is plentiful,<sup>3</sup> but a detailed study and analysis of the principle would be fascinating and add great weight to the findings of this research. Second, this thesis has touched only briefly on the subject of suffering in the modern church. A survey of attitudes in the churches towards the suffering of their members and their consequent approach to serving their needs would be very valuable: in what respects are these conditioned by the teaching of the church leaders, and what are the experiences of the sufferers, the other church members, and the leaders respectively? Further to this, how

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2 What Tertullian actually wrote, *Apologeticum* 50:13, was 'The more often we are mown down by you, the more we flourish numerically; the blood of Christians is seed [Plures efficitur, quotiens metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum]'.<sup>2</sup>

3 Some historical illustrations of this principle are related by Ajith Fernando, *The Call to Joy and Pain: Embracing Suffering in your Ministry* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), pp. 75-79, in a chapter entitled 'Suffering and church growth'. See also the chapter by John Piper on 'Why God appoints suffering for his servants' in John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), pp. 91-109.

might the conclusions on vicarious suffering arrived at in this thesis help challenge and improve the whole experience of pastoral care for each of these groups? With regard to this last matter, the publication of an edited version of the main points of this thesis for a popular Christian readership should be pursued.

## **APPENDIX 1 – LINES OF THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF COL. 1:24**

(translated from Maisch, *Kolossä*, pp. 135-136)

- Christ's sufferings are present but *lacking* (subjective genitive). The verse concerns the suffering of the earthly Jesus, which is connected to the proclamation of the kingdom of God.
- The sufferings were *only partially fulfilled* by the earthly Jesus (partitive genitive) and need to be completed by Paul. It concerns the sufferings connected with the mission to the Gentiles. E.g. Theodoret of Cyrus.
- Christ has fulfilled his suffering. But since he wanted to continue to suffer *after his death* and this was not possible in his transfigured body, Paul assumes this task as *substitute*. E.g. Chrysostom.
- It concerns sufferings which *Christ sends* (genitive of authorship) and which are to be endured by Paul or the church respectively; or sufferings which Paul suffers *for Christ's sake* (causal genitive).
- What is meant is not Christ's sufferings, but Paul's sufferings which he has to bear for Christ's sake and whose *full measure is not yet achieved*. E.g. Pelagius.
- a) It concerns the sufferings of the *one complete Christ* (= head and body), which are still lacking because thus far only the sufferings of the head are complete. E.g. Augustine; b) *a measure* has been set for the suffering of the *complete Christ*, which has to be fulfilled by the suffering of the church. E.g. Augustine.
- It concerns the apostle's sufferings; their value to the church lies in their *atoning power*.
- It concerns the sufferings of the (*mystical*) *Body of Christ*, i.e., the church, which are not yet fulfilled and which are undergone vicariously by Paul for the church or for the benefit of the church. Here the unity of the 'complete Christ' (see no. 6) is surrendered in favour of the 'body'. E.g. Calvin, supplementing Augustine.
- The atoning sufferings are complete; yet the *sufferings, works of penance or merits of the Saints* may possess some value. E.g. Thomas Aquinas.
- The concept of the substitutionary suffering of the Saints for the church led in the late Middle Ages to the teaching of the so-called 'treasury of the church'. The sufferings still missing are those which Paul was to contribute to the treasury of the church and whose measure is not yet fulfilled. E.g. Dionysius von Rijckel.
- This problem has come to a head since the Middle Ages, when the sufferings were considered *exclusively as atoning sufferings*. The view that these sufferings might need supplementing is rejected by all theologians.
- The *atoning suffering* of Christ *is not yet completely achieved* (subjective genitive). A small group of authors speaks of the 'insufficiency of Christ's achievement'. The remnant is provided by Paul in the fellowship of suffering with Christ and thus he brings the work of redemption to completion.
- The suggestion of a measure which is to be fulfilled (see nos. 5, 6b, 10) is modified by the motif of the *eschatological quota* familiar through apocalyptic literature and Qumran. a) The eschatological quota of suffering, begun with Jesus' suffering and to be provided by the community until the *parousia*, means that any suffering taken on by the apostle spares the community. b) The quota of suffering is closely connected with

- the *parousia*, for it has to be fulfilled before the *parousia* and can hasten its coming.
- Paul completes what is still missing from the suffering of the earthly Jesus and which also the heavenly Christ is not able to achieve. The expression ‘fill up what is still lacking’ thus means not a quota to be filled (see no. 13), but the *completion of what is missing* with the express exception of the atoning suffering.

**APPENDIX 2 - THE AUTHORSHIP OF COLOSSIANS ACCORDING  
TO COMMENTATORS OF THE LAST 60 YEARS**

<b>DEFINITELY BY PAUL</b>	<b>Position taken</b>	<b>Commentators</b>	<b>Other recent writers</b>
<b>PROBABLY BY PAUL</b>	Authorship not questioned	Hugedé, Vine, Kremer (1956) <sup>i</sup>	
	Discussed and affirmed	Martin, Simpson, Bruce, Caird, Clark, Houlden, Lohmeyer, Moule, O'Brien, Witherington	
	By Paul or colleague during Paul's lifetime	Barth/Blanke  Thompson	
	By Paul with collaboration	Lindemann, Wall, Schweizer	
<b>UNCERTAIN</b>	Undecided or non-committal	Aletti, Ernst	Wedderburn
	By another on Paul's instructions	Dunn	
<b>PROBABLY NOT BY PAUL</b>	Not by Paul, but very early after his death	Pokorný, Pfammatter Wolter, Hoppe, Sumney	
	Post-Pauline by disciple		
<b>DEFINITELY NOT BY PAUL</b>	Definitely pseudonymous	Gnilka, MacDonald, Maisch, Wilson, Lohse, Kremer(2001)	Standhartinger, Lähnemann, Leppä

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