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Introduction to the Problem, Terminology and Conceptual Framework

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Νυων ξαιρς εἶν τοί πᾶη ῥμασιν υἰπερ υἰμςν καιανταναπληρς τα υἰστερη ῥματα τςν ῥλιψεςν τουω Ξριστουω εἶν τηω σαρκι μου υἰπερ τουω σςματοῦ αυθτουω. (Col 1:24)

The preceding verse from Colossians has for years given interpreters pause. One could ask, for example, what the author construes as the “shortcomings” or “deficiencies”¹ in Christ’s afflictions “on behalf of his body.” The present monograph addresses a different question, namely *the appraisal of the value of Jesus’ followers’ suffering* and in particular how the New Testament (NT) authors utilize the clout gained from their valuations of Christians’ suffering to corroborate apostolic authority or believers’ standing in Christ. In Colossians we meet a ‘Paul’ whose sufferings are highlighted as “counting” for something of such worth that it merits comparison with Christ’s afflictions. Col 1:24 is just one of many NT passages that this monograph will examine with an eye to the role that appraised or valued suffering plays in the NT authors’ aims of asserting power, influence, or standing and on this basis persuading others to believe, or do, things. I argue that exhortations and assertions of standing, authority and power based on claims of persecution played a significant and heretofore under-appreciated role in much of the NT literature.

A. Introduction: Presuppositions, Methodology and Definitions of “Persecution” and Other Key Terms

1. Historical Reconstruction and Other Methodological Approaches to Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom in Early Christian Literature

Scholars in Early Christian Studies concerned with persecution have first and foremost examined legitimate questions of historical reconstruction, seeking *inter alia* to ascertain how many people suffered, how they suffered (including financially, by imprisonment or in martyrdom), and for what reasons. Numerous fine articles and essays,² as well as books,³ have focused on such “facts” of Christian persecution in the

¹ Gk.: υἰστερη ῥματα. NRSV: “what is lacking.” Unless otherwise stated, English translations of Scripture are from, or reflect only minor variations from, the NRSV. I note and, where appropriate, discuss any exegetically significant differences from the NRSV.

² T. D. Barnes, “Pre-Decian *Acta Martyrum*,” *JTS* n.s. 19 (1968): 509–531; Jan den Boeft and Jan Bremmer, “Notiunculae martyrologicae,” *VC* 35 (1981): 43–56; *VC* 36 (1982): 383–402; *VC* 39 (1985): 110–113; *VC* 45 (1991): 105–122; Hans von Campenhausen, “Bearbeitungen und Interpolationen des Polycarpmartyriums,” in: idem, *Aus der Frühzeit des Christentums* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1963), 253–301; Richard B. Cook, “Paul and the Victims of His Persecution: The Opponents in Galatia,” *BTB* 32 (2002): 182–191; Boudewijn Dehardschutter, “The *Martyrium Polycarpi*: A Century of Research,” *ANRW* 2.27.1 (Berlin: de Gruyter 1993), 485–522; Robert Doran, “The Martyr: A Synoptic of the Mother and Her Seven Sons,” in: *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms*, Septuagint and Cognate Studies 12 (ed. J. J. Collins and G. W. E. Nickelsburg; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 183–221; David Frankfurter, “The Cult of the Martyrs in Egypt before Constantine,” *VC* 48 (1994): 25–47; Karl Holl, “Die Vorstellung vom Märtyrer und die Märtyrer-Akte in ihrer geschichtlichen

first through the fifth centuries. These studies, focused almost exclusively on historical reconstruction of deeds of persecution, offer indispensable resources for the present investigation.

In recent decades, however, several innovative studies have highlighted how early Christian discussions of suffering and persecution naturally stemmed from particular agendas in their ancient contexts and warrant critical examination for purposes other than, or in addition to, historical reconstruction. Within NT studies, the seminal works by Adela Yarbro Collins and John H. Elliott emphasizing the psychological aspects of claimed or anticipated persecution in Revelation and First Peter opened new avenues for

Entwicklung,” in: idem, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Vol. 2: *Die Osten*; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck] 1928), 68–102; L. Ann Jervis, “Suffering for the Reign of God: The Persecution of Disciples in Q,” *NovT* 44 (2002): 313–332; Frederick C. Klawiter, “The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity: A Case Study of Montanism,” *CH* 49 (1980): 251–261; reprinted in: *Women in Early Christianity*, Studies in Early Christianity 14 (ed. David M. Scholer; New York: Garland, 1993), 105–116; Ekkehard Mühlberg, “The Martyr’s Death and Its Literary Presentation,” *Studia patristica* 29 (1997): 85–93; Harold Remus, “Persecution,” art. in: *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches* (ed. Anthony J. Blasi et al.; New York: AltaMira, 2002), 431–452; Anna Maria Schwemer, “Prophet, Zeuge und Märtyrer: Zur Entstehung des Märtyrerbegriffs im frühesten Christentum,” *ZTK* 96 (1999): 320–350; Grant R. Shafer, “Hell, Martyrdom, and the War: Violence in Early Christianity,” in: *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Vol. 3: *Models and Cases of Violence in Religion*; ed. J. Harold Ellens; London: Praeger, 2004), 193–246; Nicholas H. Taylor, “Who Persecuted the Thessalonian Christians?” *Hervormde Theologische Studies* 58 (2002): 784–801; Klaus Thraede, “Noch einmal: Plinius d. J. und die Christen,” *ZNW* 95 (2004): 102–128; Guy Wagner, “Le motif juridique des persécutions des premiers chrétiens par les autorités romaines,” *Études théologiques et religieuses* 75 (2000): 1–8.

³ Anna Sapir Abulafia, ed., *Religious Violence between Christians and Jews* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Paul Allard, *La persécution de Dioclétien et le triomphe de l’église* (Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1890); Theofried Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie 45 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980); Gary A. Bisbee, *Pre-Decian Acts of Martyrs and Commentarii*, HDR 22 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004); Christel Butterweck, “Martyriumssucht” in der alten Kirche? Studien zur Darstellung und Deutung frühchristlicher Martyrien, BHT 87 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995); Hans von Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964 [1936]); Leon H. Canfield, *The Early Persecutions of the Christians*, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law 136 (New York: Columbia University, 1913); Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels: Bollandistes, 1966); Henri Grégoire, *Les persécutions dans l’Empire romain* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1964 [1951]); Élie Griffé, *Les persécutions contre les chrétiens aux Ier et IIe siècles* (Paris: Letouzey at Ané, 1967); Patrick J. Healy, *The Valerian Persecution: A Study of the Relations between Church and State in the Third Century A.D.* (New York: B. Franklin, 1972 [1905]); Polydore Hochart, *Études au sujet de la persécution des chrétiens sous Néron* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1885); Edward H. Koster, “The Persecutions of the Christians in the Early Roman Empire,” (Diss., University of Chicago, 1923); Richard Laqueur, *Eusebius als Historiker seiner Zeit*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 11 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1929); Pierre Maraval, *Les persécutions des chrétiens durant les quatre premiers siècles*, Bibliothèque d’histoire du christianisme 30 (Paris: Desclée/Mame, 1992); Arthur James Mason, *The Historic Martyrs of the Primitive Church* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1905); idem, *The Persecution of Diocletian: A Historical Essay* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1876); Andrea L. Molinari, *The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles (NHC 6.1): Allegory, Ascent, and Ministry in the Wake of the Decian Persecution*, SBLDS 174 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); Jacques Moreau, *La persécution du christianisme dans l’Empire romain*, Mythes et religions 32 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1956); Jacques Ryckmans, *La persécution des chrétiens himyarites au sixième siècle* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1956); Joyce Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Herbert B. Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church* (New York: Abingdon, 1960 [1923; 1906] = Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

considering an author's attempts to influence the addressees' self-understanding and actions because of a particular conception of unjust suffering.⁴ Collins and Elliott also note that claims to suffering may be real, anticipated, exaggerated or even stem from envisioning an alternate universe that is to inform the addressees' perception of their present context.

Likewise, in the area of Late Ancient Christian Studies three innovative works merit special mention. Judith Perkins argues that in the early imperial period a new concept of "the suffering self" arose, offering to at least certain Christian authors, including those of the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* and the *Acts of Peter*, opportunities to develop religious identity because of suffering.⁵ Developing even further the concept of identity derived from suffering, Elizabeth A. Castelli argues that the early martyrdom literature played a role in the formation of Christian self-understanding and culture.⁶ Among other things, Castelli also argues that Christians both criticized Roman spectacles and offered an equivalent alternative through making a spectacle of martyrdom.

Another important—and likewise controversial—work is *Dying for God*, by Daniel Boyarin.⁷ An expert in Judaism in late antiquity, Boyarin argues that similarities in Jewish and Christian conceptions of martyrdom call into question the thesis that Judaism and Christianity were two entirely separate religions.⁸ His fourth chapter, "Whose Martyrdom Is This, Anyway?" explores in postmodern terms the rhetoric of ancient Jewish and Christian discourse(s) on martyrdom.⁹ Moreover, in an appendix to the aforementioned chapter Boyarin offers an insightful critique of W. H. C. Frend's classic study, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*.¹⁰ Yet Brian E. Daley largely

⁴ See Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) and the discussions of First Peter and Revelation in chapters 3 and 5, respectively. Cf. Charles H. Talbert, *Learning through Suffering: The Educational Value of Suffering in the New Testament and in Its Milieu* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991). Although I admire the questions Elliott poses concerning First Peter and its community, in chapter 3 I criticize several of his conclusions.

⁵ Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in Early Christianity* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995); cf. eadem, "The 'Self' as Sufferer," *HTR* 85 (1992): 245–272.

⁶ Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University, 2004), 4, states that her purpose is to study "such practices of collective memory in relation to early Christian martyrdom. My thesis is that the memory work done by the early Christians on the historical experience of persecution and martyrdom was a form of culture making, whereby Christian identity was indelibly marked by the collective memory of the religious suffering of others."

⁷ *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1999); cf. idem, "Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism," *J ECS* 6 (1998): 577–627.

⁸ *Dying for God*, esp. 1–21.

⁹ *Dying for God*, 93–126.

¹⁰ Boyarin, "On the Methodology and Theology of W. H. C. Frend's *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*," in: idem, *Dying for God*, 127–130, on Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965). In this appendix Boyarin also criticizes Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge

dismisses Boyarin's approach and conclusions in chapters 2–4, objecting in particular to “the imposition of contemporary literary theory” on the primary sources.¹¹ By contrast, Arthur J. Droge hails the innovation of Boyarin's work as setting the tone for future scholarship.¹²

One need not agree with all—or several—of the aforementioned scholars' conclusions to learn from their approaches to persecution, suffering and martyrdom in early Christian literature. What I view as particularly important are Boyarin's and others' laudable attempts to move beyond previous scholarship's nearly singular focus on the historical reconstruction of persecutory actions, analyzing instead an emerging “discourse” of unjust suffering and martyrdom in Christian (and some Jewish) authors in late antiquity. That is to say, the concept of martyrdom and unjust suffering offers a lens through which scholars can study Christian responses to and constructions of persecution, as well as the religious *identity derived from claims to unjust suffering*. Boyarin, for example, does not study martyrdom *per se* but instead asks what light Jewish and Christian reflections on martyrdom can shed on these ancient religious movements, their self-definition and relations to one another. This important shift exemplified by Collins, Elliott, Perkins, Castelli and Boyarin informs the agenda of my study.

Therefore, in addition to the important questions of historical reconstruction, we can learn much by posing additional questions to early Christian literature concerning suffering and persecution. I would submit that the methodological divide, if one still exists, should not concern historical versus interpretive approaches. Rather, we must recognize that *any* concept of “persecution” is itself a construct. Accordingly, examining the various the early Christian authors' constructs of persecution represents an essential and fruitful line of inquiry to which additional critical attention is warranted. Building on the aforementioned studies, as well as others, the present monograph represents a new contribution to the field of Early Christian Studies. No one to date has studied the use of

University, 1995). Two other thoughtful critiques of how scholars of early Christianity should critically assess claims to persecution and martyrdom are essays by Arthur J. Droge and Robert M. Grant and concern the indispensable, but immensely problematic, early-fourth century Ecclesiastical History by Eusebius of Caesarea. See Droge, “The Apologetic Dimensions of the Ecclesiastical History,” in: Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism, *Studia Post-Biblica* 42 (ed. Harold W. Attridge and Gohei Hata; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 492–509; Grant, “Eusebius and Imperial Propaganda,” in: Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism, 658–683.

¹¹ Daley, review essay of *Dying for God*: “Postmodernizing the Martyrs,” *First Things* 115 (August/September, 2001): 65–68 at 68. Cf. Robin Darling Young, review of *Dying for God* in: *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 393–395 at 393 (“the book accomplishes little more than an ebullient display of contrasts”).

¹² Droge, review of *Dying for God* in: *History of Religions* 42 (2002): 175–180, also urges that Boyarin and other scholars compare not only Jewish and Christian conceptions of martyrdom, but also ‘pagan’ ones. See further: Jan Willem van Henten, “The Martyrs as Heroes of the Christian People: Some Remarks on the Continuity between Jewish and Christian Martyrology, with Pagan Analogies,” in: M. Lamberigts and P. van Deun, eds., *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective: Memorial Louis Reekmans*, BETL 107 (Leuven: Leuven University, 1995), 303–322; J. W. van Henten and F. Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity* (The Context of Early Christianity; London: Routledge, 2002); J. W. van Henten et al., eds., *Die Entstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie*, *Studia post-Biblica* 38 (Leiden: Brill, 1989); J. W. van Henten, “Zum Einfluß jüdischer Martyrien auf die Literatur des frühen Christentums (2: Die Apostolischen Väter),” *ANRW* 2.27.1 (Berlin: de Gruyter 1993), 700–723.

“persecution” to legitimize ecclesiastical authority, the standing of believers,¹³ or both in the literature that eventually came to comprise the New Testament.

From the preceding paragraphs it would perhaps follow as a corollary that in our present age of ever evolving and emerging methods of inquiry, an academic monograph could do any number of trendy and potentially interesting things with such a multivalent topic as “persecution.” The present study’s approach to the NT literature is both informed by theoretical conceptions of “power” and rooted in historical-critical exegesis. For each NT writing examined, the discussion includes two parts. One defines briefly the socio-historical context that a NT author addresses, touching as necessary upon points of author, date, community, opponents and occasion. The remainder of each analysis examines in light of this context how depictions of unjust suffering and persecution serve to further an author’s goals of persuasion (that is, influencing people’s beliefs and actions) and corroborating or asserting a particular standing, power, authority or legitimacy on the basis of persecution. These interests are reflected in the book’s title, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, for assertions of authority and standing (possibly excluding others) are naturally claims to power. In order to more clearly articulate the aims of this study, the following subsections offer a statement of methodology and definition of terms.

2. Presuppositions and Methodology

This subsection addresses several prolegomena to the present study. First and foremost, I assume the introductory observation that the NT writings are occasional, having arisen out of particular contexts. I further argue that these contexts are oftentimes in no small part defined by inner-Christian disputes over power, legitimacy and self-definition. As a corollary, it follows that the NT literature attests to these very struggles within emerging Christianity to assert authority and influence others.

Some readers may perhaps be surprised by the presupposition that certain NT authors sensed the need to bolster their own authority. For an example of this, however, one need look no further than 2 Corinthians 10–13, where the apostle Paul defends his authority at great length against Christian opponents (the so-called “super-apostles,” 2 Cor 11:5; 12:11), who denied that Paul was a legitimate apostle. One of Paul’s central arguments in defense of his apostolic status in 2 Cor 11:23c–33 concerns the valuation of his many sufferings for Christ, including “dangers” (κινδύνοι) he encountered from bandits, Jews, Gentiles and false brothers (11:26). According to Paul, his suffering corroborates his status as an apostle of Christ. Paul’s Christian opponents undoubtedly would have appraised differently the worth of Paul’s sufferings in this context of disputed authority.¹⁴ The distinctive focus and, I hope, lasting contribution of this monograph is to highlight the extent to which appeals to persecution and suffering in the NT participate in such struggles to assert authority and influence others.

¹³ See further below under definitions of key terms. In this book I do not use “status” derived from suffering in the sense of an elite spirituality or standing before God. Rather, I use “status” in the basic sense of confirming of one’s stature or standing as a believer because of fidelity in suffering.

¹⁴ Accordingly the notion that the authors of ‘Scripture’ could simply presume such authority for the audiences they addressed is both a distortion and an anachronism. See further the discussion of 2 Cor 11:23c–33 in chapter 2.

The present study of how claims of persecution function in disputes builds on several additional presuppositions addressed in this and the following two paragraphs. First, with claims of suffering people can, and oftentimes do, disagree about “what happened.” Such disagreements can concern the authenticity or extent of the suffering or, if it is granted that some suffering did occur, whether it was indeed unwarranted and merits the designation of unjust suffering or persecution. This distinction is not a modern one, given that both Paul and the author of First Peter exhort that Christians not suffer as criminals.¹⁵ Instead, these authors urge submission to the Roman governing authorities, lest lawbreaking Christians incur the Romans’ divinely authorized judgment. These two NT authors assume that a civilly disobedient Christian would be justly punished and could not afterward claim to have been persecuted.

Furthermore, in a context of disputed authority or legitimacy, a claim of persecution can serve as a type of *cultural capital*,¹⁶ or a *commodity of power*, that one can leverage in an effort to assert legitimacy and influence others. My study casts light on numerous arguments in the NT to the effect of either “I suffered; therefore, I possess a certain stature,” or “I suffered; therefore, you must now believe or do what I say.” To these two basic arguments linking persecution with standing or persuasion, any number of variations is possible. Concerning the former, for example, the premises “I suffered and you did not” and “You persecuted me” can support the exclusive claim that “therefore, I possess a certain standing, power, authority or legitimacy which you do not have.” Furthermore, a person can attempt to associate him or herself with *others* who have been persecuted, in order to gain influence or stature. As will be seen in the chapters on First Peter, Hebrews, Revelation and Mark, moreover, a *community’s* faithfulness in suffering (or lack thereof) can likewise be appraised as an indication of their standing (or lack thereof) as sincere believers.

The utter simplicity of such arguments commends an additional observation: in a context of disputed authority, *the appraisal of a persecution’s value is hardly, if ever, self-evident*. On the contrary, such assertions of valuation as cultural capital are built upon numerous presuppositions and *subject to redefinition or even rejoinder*. Therefore, even if people happen to agree generally about “what happened” (for example, the persecution or its extent), there are many different ways that a person could appeal to a persecution as a basis for persuasion or authority.

In summary, the present study will examine the following three points in the NT literature:

- (1) the conflicts that an author addresses;
- (2) the conscription of persecution to bolster the standing and influence of the author, the audience, or both;

¹⁵ Rom 13:1–7 and 1 Pet 2:13–17. See further the discussion of these passages in chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁶ This monograph uses the term “*cultural capital*” intentionally, distinguishing it from “*social capital*,” which designates power derived from the *people* one knows. Cite Pierre Bourdieu here.

(3) ways that others could, or did,¹⁷ dispute such claims concerning persecution and its ascribed value, thereby limiting or refuting the assertion of power or standing on this basis.

Each of these three points merits specific attention within a NT writing. Additionally, I find it particularly fruitful to discuss them in relation to one another.

3. Definitions of Persecution, Appraisal and Other Key Terms

A brief clarification of terms, such as persecution, standing and valuation is also in order. This monograph oftentimes uses interchangeably *persecution* and *unjust suffering* to designate any undeserved penalty or punishment, whether real, imagined, anticipated or exaggerated. It likewise uses the related, albeit distinguishable, terms *status*, *standing*, *power*, *authority*, *stature* and *legitimacy* in similar contexts to indicate the benefit that an author wishes to derive for himself or to confer upon those who suffer persecution. Concerning the term *status*, I do not find any NT author arguing that by suffering one gains a higher, or even an elite, level of spirituality or favor before God. What I mean by *status* is assurance of one's identity and salvation "in Christ."¹⁸ That is, fidelity in suffering is a component of fidelity to Christ and therefore confirms authentic Christian existence or a person's standing in Christ. A possible corollary for some NT authors is that those who fail to suffer faithfully lack this assurance.

Furthermore, I refer to the *valuation*, or *appraisal*, of unjust suffering as the premising of arguments¹⁹ upon persecution, in order to corroborate or assert standing, power, authority or legitimacy. By this I mean the positing of value to something that ordinarily cannot be quantified—in this case, a particular trauma or persecution—thereby translating it into a type of *cultural capital*. Having argued for the existence and value of such a cultural capital, an author can then "spend" the acquired capital on the desired standing, power, authority, legitimacy, or response from the congregation. In numerous NT passages examined in this study, the asserted worth of one or more Christians' suffering is what rhetorically "purchases" the right to corroborate or assert the authority to influence others. For example, the following chapter examines how in 2 Cor 11:23c–33 Paul's suffering and difficulties as Christ's servant constitute a cultural capital that Paul leverages to counter his Christian opponents' denial of his apostolic status and authority and to corroborate that same status. Furthermore, in chapter 5 we shall encounter this in the prophet John's highlighting his having suffered exile to Patmos for Jesus (Rev 1:9) as corroboration of his status to address issues of suffering in several of the seven churches, as well as to critique rival Christian prophets (Rev 2:1–3:22).

As mentioned above, such valuation can also legitimize a group of believers over and against others. In such cases, an author conveys to the addressees that they can, or already do, possess standing as Christ's followers because of their faithfulness in suffering.

¹⁷ Inasmuch as the various opponents of the NT authors rarely, if ever, speak for themselves in the surviving sources, such inferences must be made with due caution.

¹⁸ An additional potential for misunderstanding is that the German equivalent for the English term "status" (cf. Lat. *status*) as defined above would be "Stand" (meaning "standing") and not the *faux ami* "Status," which in German carries hierarchical connotations not presumed in the present study.

¹⁹ That is, arguments like those discussed in the previous subsection.

One sees this in particular in First Peter and, as a future promise contingent upon faithfulness in Hebrews, the gospel of Mark and especially the Revelation of John, discussed in chapters 3–6.

The preceding definition of valuation offers the opportunity to comment on the book's subtitle, *The Appraisal of Suffering to Corroborate Apostolic Authority and Believers' Standing in the New Testament*. In emerging Christianity, the “rules of the game” concerning who possessed authority (and on what basis) and whose suffering counted (and for what!) would not be resolved for generations—indeed, centuries—if ever. The earliest church, of course, possessed neither a fixed, authoritative canon of Christian Scripture nor an established episcopate that could enforce such definitions. Especially when early church leaders disagreed and competed with one another for influence, they would at times seek additional means of bolstering their authority or legitimacy. Appeals to suffering constitute one such means. I have previously examined other such appeals that were popular in early Christianity, including miracle working and, at least as early as the second century, ascetic practices.²⁰ This is not to allege that the primary objective of suffering, miracle working or asceticism was to gain power or influence but simply to observe the additional utility of such activities whenever disputes about authority should arise.

Highlighting the various early Christian contexts in which competing definitions of standing and authority sometimes clashed, the economic overtones of this book's subtitle are intentional. I am convinced that it is possible to use economic language of appraisal and valuation as a heuristic device to elucidate a neglected aspect of numerous NT texts without ignoring the richness and complexity of the NT literature. I hope, moreover, that this approach will not result in my (inaccurately) being pigeonholed as a neo-Marxist. Some scholars may find the use of any economic language in reference to the NT objectionable on *a priori* or perhaps even confessional grounds. In response I would begin with the uncontroversial observation that any number of early Christian authors attached great “value” to Jesus' suffering and death.²¹ In my view, the reflection of several NT authors that *the suffering of Jesus' followers likewise has some value* arises as a natural and unsurprising corollary to treasuring Jesus' passion.²² A prime example of such reflection appears in the passage with which this chapter began (Col 1:24), where ‘Paul’ compares the value of ‘his’ “sufferings” (παρῶν) with that of Christ's “afflictions” (ἰσχυροῦς) “for the sake of” (ὑπὲρ) the church.²³ At the very least, I hope that these

²⁰ See Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark*, WUNT 2.112 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 245–339; idem, “The Apostle Paul and Justin Martyr on the Miraculous: A Comparison of Appeals to Authority,” *GRBS* 42 (2001): 163–184; idem, *The Diet of John the Baptist: “Locusts and Wild Honey” in Synoptic and Patristic Interpretation*, WUNT 176 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), esp. 132–193; idem, “Early Christian Ascetic Practices and Biblical Interpretation: The Witnesses of Galen and Tatian,” in: *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune*, NovTSup 122 (ed. John Fotopoulos; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 439–444.

²¹ For example, Mark 10:45||Matt 20:28; Rom 3:25; 1 Tim 2:6; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.

²² One task of NT Christology is to define as precisely as possible the ways that NT authors appraised the value of Jesus' suffering and its benefits for humanity. The corollary point concerning the value of suffering by Jesus' followers has received significantly less attention from NT scholars.

²³ Col 1:24: I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν), and in my flesh I am completing what is incomplete in Christ's afflictions (ἀναναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῆς

introductory remarks demonstrate the plausibility that certain NT authors attached value not only to Jesus' suffering but also, at times, to that of Jesus' followers. What these NT authors do with that ascribed value is the subject of this monograph.

In light of these considerations, I submit that the utilization of economic language offers a valuable aid to understanding the appraisals of suffering's value that the NT authors either argue or presuppose in both hortatory and polemical contexts. That is to say, my study poses a theoretically informed question about the worth of suffering that is to be answered by historical-critical exegesis of the relevant NT passages. What we need to understand is *how, why, and to what ends these authors attached value to Christians' sufferings*. Accordingly, this book will illuminate how attaching value to Christians' suffering plays a role in the purposes, or occasions, of numerous NT writings.

C. The Scope of this Book and Its Relevance to Other Areas of Religious and Theological Studies

1. The Scope of the Present Study

The next six chapters of the book examine, in the following order, the undisputed and deutero-Pauline letters (chapter 2), First Peter (chapter 3), Hebrews (chapter 4), the Revelation of John (chapter 5), and the gospel of Mark (chapter 6). These writings receive attention first, because in them I find that the valuation of suffering as a basis for persuasion, authority and standing figure most prominently. We begin with Paul's letters to demonstrate this theme already in the earliest surviving Christian literature. First Peter receives attention after the Pauline letters because of its modification of Pauline materials (especially Rom 13:1–7 in 1 Pet 2:11–17) and novel thesis that believers suffering has value for the furtherance of the Christian mission prior to the day of judgment. Discussing Hebrews, Revelation and Mark sequentially (chapters 4–6) has the benefit of bringing together three very different NT writings that share in common offering to their addressees a confirmation of standing as legitimate disciples if they will suffer faithfully. Afterward, the study turns in chapter 7 to other NT gospel materials—the secondary Markan endings and the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, where this theme plays a lesser role. Chapter 8 examines the Acts of the Apostles and is largely concerned with two themes: the rehabilitation of Paul the persecuted former persecutor and the devaluation of the Jews' standing because they persecute the early church. An Epilogue concerning persecution in ancient and modern contexts concludes this volume.

The broad scope of these inquiries precludes my pursuing in this volume several other promising avenues for research, including examining the remaining NT writings and additional early Christian literature (for example, the fascinating but chronologically later acts of the Christian martyrs),²⁴ or studying comparatively ancient Jewish, early

~λιψεσεν τοῦτο ἕρις τοῦ) for the sake of his body, that is, the church. See the discussion of this passage in chapter 2.

²⁴ Together chapters 2–8 concern twenty-one of the NT's twenty-seven writings. One could naturally investigate whether this theme surfaces in James, Jude, Second Peter and the Johannine epistles as well. Moreover, at an earlier point I considered discussing the letters of Ignatius of Antioch in this monograph. However, recent questions about these letters, especially concerning their date, by Reinhard M. Hübner, "Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der sieben Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochien," *ZAC* 1 (1997) 44–72; idem, *Der Paradox: Eine antignostischer Monarchianismus im zweiten Jahrhundert*, VCSup 50 (Leiden: Brill, 1999) have influenced my decision to examine them at a later point in a separate article.

Christian and Greco-Roman perspectives on suffering and persecution. I have no plan to pursue such inquiries and would welcome seeing others make contributions in these areas.

2. Texts and Contexts

The writing of a monograph necessarily entails a particular focus, which comes with certain limitations, which I wish to acknowledge in this and the following paragraphs. The method of inquiry, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, entails identifying a NT writing's context and then discussing the author's valuation of suffering as a basis for persuasion and corroborating authority and standing relative to that context. The potential difficulty of this approach, namely its circularity, is essentially no different than that faced by all historical-critical exegesis and minimized to the extent possible in more sophisticated studies: a context extracted from a writing serves as a guide for interpreting that writing. In this case, the context informs the examination of how the NT authors aim to persuade and assert power on the basis of unjust suffering.

Concerning the contexts that this study will posit for the NT writings, I am acutely aware that excellent scholars can, and oftentimes do, hold differing opinions about a writing's author, audience, sources and date, among other matters. Moreover, new insights and observations perennially appear in the scholarly literature. As a consequence, some, if not many, readers of this book will no doubt have come to different conclusions concerning one or more of the NT writings this study examines. When this is the case, I would invite the reader to consider how my analysis of persecution in the service of persuasion and corroborating standing could shed light on a differently construed context. In a monograph like this is it simply not possible—and, I think, also not desirable—to explore this theme from the standpoint of multiple possible contexts that scholars posit for a particular NT writing. I submit that there is much in each chapter that remains of interest to those who construe the context of a particular writing differently.

One dilemma I have faced at several junctures while researching this book is the desire to do “more” with a particular writing or passage. By its very nature, a monograph exploring a particular theme cannot offer a comprehensive analysis of each passage. Nor can it interact with all of the fine secondary literature on a given text or problem. To do either of these things would run the risk of losing the focus on the book's theme. I recognize that this entails myriad judgments for which I bear responsibility. If this monograph will have called attention to an under-appreciated aspect of the NT writings and the ways that this literature functions in contexts of disputed authority and the fostering of Christian identity as derived from suffering, it will have borne fruit that can be integrated into more detailed exegetical studies, commentaries and introductory works.

3. This Study's Potential Interest to Scholars in Early Christian Studies, as well as Other Areas of Religious and Theological Studies

As a New Testament scholar, I hope that this book will interest not only its primary audience of exegetes but also historical and constructive theologians and ethicists, who much better than I can examine how the valuation of suffering and its use in the assertion of authority and power has unfolded in subsequent Christian tradition. Furthermore, as a person of faith deeply committed to the critical study of the NT, I

hope that this monograph will also be an asset to experts in comparative theology, inter-religious dialogue and non-Christian world religions.²⁵

With appreciation for such broader concerns, the book concludes with an Epilogue on the ethics of persuading and asserting because of persecution an individual's or a group's authority and legitimacy in ancient and modern contexts. Regardless of their religious tradition, most people would agree that reflection on suffering that brings healing and affirms human dignity is virtuous and life-giving. Much—and oftentimes heated—debate lies in attempts to differentiate this from the exploitation of suffering for abuse that psychotherapists diagnose as victimization; from the vacuous usurpation of power at others' expense; or from merely wallowing in the wounds of the past without any redemptive purpose. The conversion of unjust suffering into cultural capital has the potential to spawn any of these unwelcome results, as well as others.²⁶ This is because with the status derived from enduring persecution or oppression, the one who experienced injustice can lay claim to a power that, depending on the context, can be used as a weapon in the oppression others. In other words, whether in an ancient or a modern context, reflecting on one's suffering is never "value neutral." Even those who have truly suffered bear a responsibility not to follow their oppressors in oppressing others.

I have written this book not only out of the conviction that there is much to gain from reading the NT with a greater awareness of suffering as a commodity of power but also because as moral human beings we must be(come) more circumspect in the ways that we attach value to our and others' suffering. This study naturally cannot resolve such complex questions and problems but will hopefully orient our moral compass toward greater reflection upon, and sensitivity to, them.

²⁵ In our modern context one thinks, for example, of the Israelis and Palestinians, each emphasizing their own narrative(s) of unjust suffering coming at the expense of the other group's legitimacy and hindering the prospects of dialog.

²⁶ In a contemporary North American context, among others, the seductive pseudo-status of victimization, offering the ominous opportunity to reap what some psychologists designate as "secondary benefits" from an earlier injury or trauma is especially to be avoided by those committed to applying consistently principles of religious and theological ethics.