

Jesus' Suffering and Ethics: Patristic Exegesis Reconsidered

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In patristic literature Jesus' death is not only understood as the basis of our salvation but also seen as an example for our moral life. With regard to some biblical passages this statement seems to be self-explanatory, yet it has certain implications to be discussed.

1. The New Testament's terms denoting this circumstance are conjunctions like *ὡς*, *κάθως* and *γάρ*. Jesus is rarely named as a paradigm;¹ more often the relevant texts speak about *mimesis*. However, in ancient Christian exegesis on Passion texts we find not only the idea, but very often also the terminology of example and imitation.

2. The death of prominent persons was a subject of its own interest in ancient times. Timon's *Σίλλοι*, to be found in Diogenes Laertios' *Lives and doctrines of famous philosophers*, are sometimes ridiculed, but there are traditions of a noble death² that have been a challenge for Christian proclamation. In the Greek world, the fates of Codros³, Menoiceus⁴, Leaina⁵, Anaxarchos⁶, Zeno of Elea⁷, and especially the death of Socrates have

¹ For *μίμησις* cf. 1 Cor 11:1, for *τύπος* cf. 1 Cor 10:6.11; for *ὑπόγραμμα* cf. 1 Pt 2:21, for *ὑπόδειγμα* cf. Joh 13:15; Jas 5:10. The term *παράδειγμα* does not occur in the New Testament but it is a biblical term, cf. Ex 25:40 LXX.

² For an exhaustive collection of these traditions see A. Lumpe, "Exemplum", *RAC* VI (1966), 1229–1257; the Christian reception is listed pp. 1247–1252.

³ Cf. Cicero, *Tusc.* 1,116; Velleius Paterculus, *Historiae Romanae* 1,2,1; cf. further Lactance, *div. inst.* III,12,22 = CSEL 19, 210; Jerome, *in Eph.* 1,7 = PL 26, 450 D – 451 A.

⁴ Cf. Cicero, *Tusc.* I,116; Papinius Statius, *Thebaïs* X,762–77; cf. further Lactance, *div. inst.* III,12,22 = CSEL 19, 210.

⁵ Cf. Pausanias, *Description of Greece* I,23; Plinius, *n.h.* VII,87; Tertullian, *apol.* 50,8 = CCL 1, 170.

⁶ Cicero, *Tusc.* II,52; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* III,3 ext. 4; Diogenes Laertios, *Vitae* IX,58–9; cf. further Origen, *Cels.* VII,53 = SC 150, 138.

⁷ Cf. Plutarchus, *de Stoicis repugnandis* 37, 1051 D; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 9,26–28; cf. also Tertullian, *de anima* 58,5 = CCL 2, 868; Clement of Alexandria, *str.* IV,56,1 = GCS 15, 274.

to be mentioned, in Roman tradition the examples of Dido⁸, Mucius Scaevola⁹, Lucretia¹⁰, Curtius¹¹, Decius¹², Hasdrubal's wife¹³, Regulus¹⁴, Cato the Younger¹⁵, and Otho¹⁶. So we have to develop a theory of the history of Christian reception and non-reception of these traditions.¹⁷

3. In the second century, ancient critics of Christianity did not only repeat the gossip-like reproaches of thylestic meals and sexual misbehaviour¹⁸ but also began to read Christian scriptures and to prove the absurdity of Christian faith. Therefore, we have to ask whether an influence of pagan criticism on Patristic exegesis can be ascertained or not.

4. The appreciation of non-Christian examples by Christian authors is part of the general and well disputed theme "Christians and pagan wisdom". Some authors hardly quoted pagan examples and were content with mere biblical examples. Other authors defended their use of pagan exam-

⁸ Cf. also Tertullian, *ad martyres* 4,5 = CCL 1, 6; id., *ad nationes* 1,18,3 = CCL 1, 137.

⁹ Cf. Livy, II,12,1–13,5 and especially Livy II,12,9: *et facere et pati fortia Romanum est*; Seneca, *ep.* 98,12; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* III,3,1; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* LIII,8,3; cf. also Tertullian, *de anima* 58,5 = CCL 2, 868; Augustine, *de civitate Dei* V,18 = CSEL 40/1, 247–8.

¹⁰ Cf. Cicero, *fin.* II,66; Quintilian, *inst.* V,11,10; cf. further Tertullian, *ad martyres* 4,4 = CCL 1,6.

¹¹ Cf. Livy, VII,6,3–5; Quintilian, *inst.* XII,2,30; Dio Cassius, *Roman history* LIII,8,3; cf. even Tertullian, *de testimonio animae* 4,9 = CCL 1, 180; Augustine, *de civitate Dei* 5,18 = CSEL 40/1, 248. There is a monument at the *Forum Romanum*.

¹² Cf. Livy, X,28,13–18; Quintilian, *inst.* XII,2,30; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* LIII,8,3. Cf. further Lactance, *div. inst.* III,12,22 = CSEL 19, 210.

¹³ Polybius, *Roman History* 38,20,7; Strabo, *Geographica* XVII,3,14; cf. further Tertullian, *ad nationes* I,18,3 = CCL 1, 137; id., *apol.* 50,5 = CCL 1,170.

¹⁴ Cf. Seneca, *ep.* 98,12; Seneca, *de providentia* 3,7–10; Quintilian, *inst.* XII,2,30; cf. further Tertullian, *de testimonio animae* 4,9 = CCL 1, 180; Augustine, *de civitate Dei* I,15 = CSEL 40/1, 27–30.

¹⁵ Cf. Seneca, *de providentia* 2,10; id., *de constantia sapientis* 2,3; Plutarch, *Vita Catonis minoris* 69,2–3: Cato's death is a death for freedom. Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana* 2,49, gave only little comment.

¹⁶ Cf. Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, LXIII,13,3.

¹⁷ Cf. K. Döring, *Exemplum Socratis*, in *Studien zur Sokratesnachwirkung in der kynisch-stoischen Popularphilosophie der frühen Kaiserzeit und im frühen Christentum* (Hermes.E 42; Wiesbaden 1979). This is a useful, but, concerning Christianity, not an exhaustive book. For example, references to Origen's *Contra Celsum* are missing.

¹⁸ These rebukes are only quoted by Christian authors, cf. Tertullian, *apol.* 7–9 = CCL 1, 98–105; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9,2–6 = CSEL 2, 13f.; Athenagoras, *suppl.* 31–36 = PTS 31, 99–112; analogies from pagan authors like Tacitus or Celsus are missing. According to Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9,6 = CSEL 2, 13f., Fronto mentioned these issues in the assembly of the Roman senate.

ples by pointing out to how the Bible itself¹⁹ and the Church fathers refer to pagan examples or used allegorical exegesis of the 'sack of Egypt' in Exod 12:35–36.²⁰

The Example of Jesus

According to the New Testament the death of Jesus is not only the basis of our salvation but it has also ethical implications; self-denigration (Mark 10:45; Phil 2:6–8) and self-negation, i.e. the struggle against desires (Matt 16:24; Gal 5:24), willingness to subordination (1 Pt 2:21–23) and to suffering²¹ are the main issues raised in patristic exegesis.²²

The terminology of example and imitation mentioned above was part of a coherent and common ancient concept to clarify a doctrine or to admonish people without specific philosophical education to behave differently. Ancient Christians shared this concept and introduced this terminology in the exegesis of New Testament references which contain the idea but not the terms. This terminology is not only applied to comment on passages like Matt 16:24 parr.²³; 20:28²⁴; 26:42²⁵; 26:50²⁶; 27:40–43²⁷; Luke

¹⁹ Origen, *hom. in Luc.* 31,3 = FC 4/2, 314–316; Jerome, *ep.* 70,2,1 = CSEL 54, 701–2. Decisive are 1 Cor 15:33; Tit 1:12; Acts 17:28. Cf. further the references to Moses and Daniel in Basil of Caesarea, *ad adolescentes* 2 = PG 31, 568 C.

²⁰ Origen, *ep. ad Gregory the Thaumaturgos* 2 = SC 148, 188; Gregory of Nyssa, *vit. Mos.* II = GNO 7,1, 67–69; Augustine, *doctr. Christ.* II,144 = CSEL 80, 75.

²¹ Hebr 13:12f; 1 Pet 4:12; Ignatius, *Rom.* 6,3.

²² The phenomenon that a distinct event can be interpreted in multiple ways is analogous in pagan and Christian tradition: The death of Cato is commented on as death for *dignitas* (Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* III,2,14) and freedom (Seneca, *de constantia sapientis* 2,3), as an example of the fortitude in suffering (Seneca, *ep. moral.* 98,12), and as an example of the Stoic doctrine that death is no evil (Cicero, *Tusc.* 1,74).

²³ Hilary of Poitiers, *in Mt* = SC 258, 58; Beda Venerabilis, *Mc.* = CCL 120, 538; Leo I., *tract.* 70,4 = CCL 138 A, 429: *Dicente Domino: Qui non accipit crucem suam et sequitur me, non est me dignus, et dicente Apostolo: Si conpatimur, et conregnabimus, quis uere Christum passum, mortuum et resuscitatum colit, nisi qui cum ipso et patitur et moritur et resurgit?*

²⁴ Origen, *comm. in Mt* 16,8 = GCS 40, 497 admonishing the leaders of the church; Hilary of Poitiers, *Mt* 20,12 = SC 258, 116; Jerome, *in Matth.* 3,20,25 = SC 259, 96, quoted by Beda Venerabilis, *Mc* = CCL 120, 566: *Denique sui proponit exemplum.*

²⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *in Mt* = PG 72, 456 A: The fact of the repetition of Jesus' plea proves that we are allowed to implore God repeatedly as well.

²⁶ Jesus accepts Judas' kiss – he teaches to love the enemies; cf. Hilary of Poitiers, *in Mt* 32,1 = SC 258, 240; Beda Venerabilis, *Mc.* = CCL 120, 618; id., *Lc.* = CCL 120, 387, pointing out to Ps 119:7.

²⁷ John Chrysostom, *hom. in Mt* 87,2 = PG 58, 771f.

23:34²⁸; Gal 1:4²⁹; 3:13³⁰; Phil 2:5³¹, but even to comment on ὑπαγε ὀπίσω μου in Matt 16:23³², or Jesus' cry at the Cross (Ps 21:2 LXX = Matt 27:46).³³ According to Leo the Great Jesus' suffering as a whole is both sacrament of justification and example of demanded devotion³⁴, and the cross as punishment for low people is supposed to serve all people an opportunity for imitation.³⁵

The criterion of ancient Christian exegesis was the usefulness for the Christian believers, and this concept of usefulness was biblically grounded in 2 Tim 3:16, but closely related to philosophical ideas of the Hellenistic world.³⁶

The Death of Socrates in Ancient Literature

As far as the death of Socrates is concerned, it is not necessary to dispute whether Socrates himself understood his own death in a paradigmatic way or not. The fact is that his death has been understood as a moral example since the time of his pupils Xenophon and Plato. According to Xenophon, Socrates knew very well that his willingness to die would bear witness to the fact that he “wrought no man at any time, nor corrupted any man, but strove ever to make my companions better”.³⁷ The Platonic Socrates addresses his accusers: “Do not ... demand of me that I act before you in a

²⁸ Beda Venerabilis, *Lc.* = CCL 120, 403.

²⁹ Origen, *Cels.* II,11 = SC 132, 314.

³⁰ NHC 1,2, p. 13,20–25; Tertullian, *patient.* 8,3 = CC.L 1,308.

³¹ Origen, *comm. in Mt* 16,8 = GCS 40, 497; Marius Victorinus, *in Phil* 2,5 = CSEL 83/2, 187; Pelagius, *in Phil* 2,5; Theodoret of Cyrus, *in Phil* = PG 82, 569 B.

³² Hilary of Poitiers, *in Mt* = SC 258, 58. The reason for this positive interpretation of these words is the following context Matt 16:24, but also the positively nuanced ὀπίσω μου in Matt 4:19.

³³ Beda Venerabilis, *Mt* = PL 92, 125 A; Hrabanus Maurus, *in Mt* = PL 107, 1142 CD: *Et ostendit quam patientes et sperantes debeant esse inter flagella, qui peccatores sunt, quomo ipse ad immortalitatem non nisi per mortem transivit.*

³⁴ Leo I., *tract.* 67,5 = CCL 138 A, 411: *Ab omnipotenti enim medico duplex miseris remedium praeeparatum est, cuius aliud est in sacrament, aliud in exemplo, ut per unum conferantur divina per aliud exigantur humana. Quia sicut Deus iustificationis est auctor, ita homo deuotionis est debitor.*

³⁵ Lactantius, *epit.* 46,3 = SC 335, 182: *Suscepit ergo id genus mortis quod solet humilibus inrogari, ut omnibus facultas daretur imitandi.* But Lactantius does not specify the issues of the imitation demanded from us.

³⁶ Cf. M. Sheridan, “The Concept of the ‘Useful’ as an Exegetical Tool in Patristic Exegesis”, *StPatr* 39 (2006), 253–257, here 253.

³⁷ Xenophon, *Mem.* 4,8,10.

way which I consider neither honourable nor right nor pious.”³⁸ Further: “if you kill me ..., you will not injure me so much as yourselves. For neither Anytos nor Meletos could injure me; that would be impossible for I believe it is not God’s will that a better man can be injured by a worse”.³⁹ And he comments on Crito’s announcement of the nearness of his death with these words: “good luck be with us! If this is the will of the gods, so be it.”⁴⁰

The death of some important people is told according to the outline of Socrates’ death. It is disputed whether even they themselves understood their imminent death in this way.⁴¹ The death of Socrates was a subject of reflections for example in times of danger for philosophers, especially in the first century C.E.: Philosophers had to endure banishment and death during the times of Nero, Vespasian and Domitian.⁴²

Seneca quoted the example of Socrates as an example of an overwhelming multitude of troubles,⁴³ with regard not only to the death but to the whole life of the Athenian philosopher.⁴⁴ Thinking of Socrates’ example as a positive one implies that he felt the impulse to become an example himself.⁴⁵

According to Epictetus the Athenian philosopher this is the most important example of philosophic living in general. Two statements formulated in allusion to Socratic maxims are given in Epictetus’ *Enchiridion* as advice, which we should, upon every occasion, have in mind: “they (scil. Anytos and Meletos) can kill me yet they cannot injure me” and “if this is the will of the gods, so be it”.⁴⁶ Yet for Epictetus these sayings are not only general rules but also examples of the main doctrines of his own philosophy: The *dictum* on Anytos and Meletos demonstrated in Epictetus’ view that for Socrates the essence of the good did not consist in the very life.⁴⁷ Epictetus concludes: “I have learned to see that everything that happens, when outside the realm of my moral purpose (*ἀπροαίρετον*), is nothing to me.”⁴⁸ Socrates’ word spoken to Crito teaches us to learn the meaning of

³⁸ Plato, *Apology* 35c; cf. Plato, *Crito* 54bc.

³⁹ Plato, *Apology* 30cd.

⁴⁰ Plato, *Crito* 43d.

⁴¹ Cicero, *Tusc.* 1,74 and Plutarchus, *Cato minor* 69,3, concerning Cato the Younger.

⁴² Cf. Tacitus, *ann.* 15,62, concerning Seneca; *ibid.* 16,32–34, concerning Thrasea

Paetus.

⁴³ Seneca, *ep. moral.* 98,12.

⁴⁴ Seneca, *ep. moral.* 104,28.

⁴⁵ Seneca, *ep. moral.* 98,13.

⁴⁶ Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 53,3f.

⁴⁷ Epictetus, *Diss.* 1,29,18.

⁴⁸ οὐδέν ἐστιν πρὸς ἐμέ. (1,19,24).

death, exile, prison, hemlock, and not to lament.⁴⁹ Not death itself is evil but our fear of death.⁵⁰ To be educated consists precisely in learning to desire everything exactly as it happens to be.⁵¹

Ancient Critics on the Story of Jesus' Passion

Jesus' cross caused mockery and despise from the very beginning of Christianity, and the oldest testimony of critique against Christianity did not speak of it very favourably.⁵² The first specified critique is formulated within the "Word of truth" by the philosopher Celsus who did not simply repeat the well-known accusations against the Christians but had read the Gospels and therefore was more informed than his predecessors in anti-Christian criticism.

For Celsus Jesus' claim to be God was not only disapproved because of the fact of his suffering.⁵³ On the one hand, it was a well-known general problem in Greek philosophy to combine the notion of the good and unchangeable god with the idea of suffering; on the other hand, Celsus reads some details of the Gospels' Passion story as evidence against the Christian truth. If Jesus had really been God he would not have had to suffer corporal pains and would not have lamented in Gethsemane;⁵⁴ and if he really had been God he would have disappeared from the cross.⁵⁵ Even human beings like Heracles, Asclepios, Orpheus or the philosophers Anaxarchos and Epictetus mastering their imminent death in an honourable way were superior to Jesus: For him, it would have been better not to remain silent but to persuade his accusers by speaking freely and thus proving his innocence.⁵⁶ The stories told by the Gospels are not reports on real events but inventions by the disciples in order to cover up their master's misfor-

⁴⁹ Epictetus, *Diss.* I,4,24.

⁵⁰ Epictetus, *Diss.* II,1,14.

⁵¹ Epictetus, *Diss.* I,12,15: τὸ παιδεύεσθαι τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἕκαστα οὕτω θέλειν ὡς γίνεται.

⁵² Tacitus, *ann.* XV,44.

⁵³ Celsus, according to Origen, *Cels.* II,9.31 = SC 132, 300–302. 362. Julian the Apostate is said to have repeated this argument: *Ostendemus ... illum nouum eius* (scil. *Diodori Deum Galilaeum, quem aeternum fabulose praedicat, indigna morte et sepultura denudatum confictae a Diodoro deitatis* (Julian the Apostate, cited in Facundus of Hermiane, *Pro defensione trium capitulorum* 4,2,62 = CCL 90 A).

⁵⁴ Celsus, according to Origen, *Cels.* II,24 = SC 132, 348.

⁵⁵ Celsus, according to Origen, *Cels.* II,68 = SC 132, 444.

⁵⁶ Celsus, according to Origen, *Cels.* VII,53 = SC 150, 138.

tune.⁵⁷ Celsus certainly knew about Christians interpreting Jesus' punishment as teaching contempt for death,⁵⁸ but he did not consider this fact to be proof of a moral value of Christianity.

Porphyry repeats some of Celsus' critical remarks and lists explicitly the contradictions between Jesus' behaviour and some of his statements,⁵⁹ but he also focuses indirectly on the comparison of Jesus with Socrates when asking: "Why did Christ not say anything worthy of one who was worthy and divine, when brought to the high priest or to the governor? He could have educated his judge and onlookers and made them better men. Yet, he tolerated being beaten with a reed, spit at, and crowned with thorns – unlike Apollonius, who, after speaking frankly to the emperor Domitian, disappeared from the court. ... even if Christ had to suffer according to God's orders, and was compelled to endure penalties, at least he should have tolerated his suffering with frankness, and spoken words of power and wisdom to his judge Pilate."⁶⁰ We remember: To make other people better men was the mission vindicated by Socrates.⁶¹

I would like to conclude this section with the following remarks: To combine the notion of the good and unchangeable God with the idea of suffering was a problem for ancient Greek philosophy in many ways, and, for early Christians, it was an issue not only on account of their own system and therefore often being disputed between Arians and Non-Arians⁶², but also a problem pointed out to by ancient critics of Christianity.

Christian Reception of Non-Christian Noble Death

Examples of pagan self-offering are well-known to some Christian authors; the first occurrence to be mentioned here is 1 Clem 55:1.⁶³ To educated

⁵⁷ Celsus, according to Origen, *Cels.* II,15f = SC 132, 324–326; similarly Porphyry, Frgm. 15 Harnack (p. 50f) = Frgm. 169, R. Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians. Ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Texts and Contexts* (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 1; Leiden 2005), 194.

⁵⁸ Celsus, according to Origen, *Cels.* II,73 = SC 132, 458.

⁵⁹ Porphyry names the contradiction between Jesus' behaviour in Gethsemane and his saying "Do not fear because of those who can kill the body" (Porphyry, Frgm. 62 Harnack [p. 84] = Frgm. 174 Berchman [p. 197]).

⁶⁰ Porphyry, Frgm. 63 Harnack (p. 84f) = Frgm. 174 Berchman (p. 197).

⁶¹ Xenophon, *Mem.* 4,8,10.

⁶² Cf. Athanasius, *c. Ar.* III,26 = PG 26, 377 A – 380 B; Hilary of Poitiers, *in Mt* 31,2 = SC 238, 226.

⁶³ For the first half of 1 Clem 55,1 cf. the traditions retold in Cicero, *Tusc.* I,116; for the second half of 1 Clem 55,1 cf. the saying of Scipio Africanus quoted in Seneca, *ep.* 86,2: *causa tibi libertatis fui, ero et argumentum; exeo, si plus quam tibi expedit crevi.*

Christians, the details of Socrates' trial were well-known: in the ancient schools of rhetoric Socrates' trial was a regularly used paradigm,⁶⁴ and possibly Lucian even testifies Socrates' popularity with Christians even in the lower classes of Greco-Roman society.⁶⁵ The Christian reception of Socrates,⁶⁶ insofar it was a positive one, is a topic in Christian apology and hardly ever a topic of ethical admonition. Some Christians like Justin the martyr establish a community of fate between the Christian martyrs and Socrates: Both sides intended to enlighten their contemporaries on how to think of heavenly things appropriately;⁶⁷ both sides had to suffer punishment in the form of injury following a charge of atheism;⁶⁸ both sides are rehabilitated by the punishment of their accusers.⁶⁹ Justin frankly alludes to Socrates with the words "you can kill us but you cannot hurt us".⁷⁰ Clement of Alexandria quotes Plato's description of the just man tormented by his enemies⁷¹ and draws a parallel to Wis 2:12f.⁷² and 1 Cor 4:9,11⁷³.

Tertullian, Minucius Felix and Arnobius use the traditions of noble death in the Greco-Roman world with regard to *apologetic* interests. Tertullian attacks the Greco-Roman contempt for the Christian willingness to martyrdom: *uestris ista* (pagan examples of a noble death) *ad gloriam, nostris ad duritiam deputatis*⁷⁴. In a milder tone Minucius Felix compares the Christian martyrs with Greco-Roman suffering heroes, and he concludes: If these heroes are honoured in Greco-Roman culture, Christians'

⁶⁴ E. Benz, "Christus und Sokrates in der Alten Kirche (Ein Beitrag zum altkirchlichen Verständnis des Märtyrers und des Martyriums)", *ZNW* 43 (1950/51), 195–224, here 219.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, passim; E. Fascher, Sokrates und Christus, *ZNW* 45 (1954), 1–41 = *id.*, *Sokrates und Christus* (Leipzig 1959), 36–94.425–432.

⁶⁷ Justin, *1 apol.* 5,2–4 = PTS 38, 38f.; *M.Apoll.* 38 (Musurillo 100); cf. Tertullian, *apology* 14,7 = CCL 1,113.

⁶⁸ Justin, *2 apol.* 10,5 = PTS 38, 151; *M.Apoll.* 40f. (Musurillo 100); *M.Pion.* 17 (Musurillo 158); Athenagoras, *Suppl.* 31,1 = PTS 31, 99f. Justin, *2 apol.* 7(8),1 = PTS 38, 149, also underline the analogy between the fate of Jesus and the fate of Heraclitus and Musonius Rufus.

⁶⁹ Tertullian, *apology* 14,8 = CCL 1,113. Mara bar Sarapion (see J.B. Aufhauser, *Antike Jesuszeugnisse* [2nd ed.; Bonn 1925], 5–11) compares Socrates, Pythagoras, and the "wise king" of the Jews, Jesus.

⁷⁰ Justin, *1 apol.* 2,4 = PTS 38,33.

⁷¹ Plato, *rep.* II, 361 E: "... the just man will have to endure the lash, the rack, chains, the branding-iron in his eyes, and finally, after every extremity of suffering, he will be crucified, and so will learn his lesson that not to be but to seem just is what we ought to desire."

⁷² Clement of Alexandria, *str.* V,108,2f. = GCS 15, 398.

⁷³ Clement of Alexandria, *str.* IV,52,1f. = GCS 15, 272.

⁷⁴ Tertullian, *ad nationes* I,18,5 = CCL 1,137.

willingness to martyrdom is a proof of the truth of Christianity.⁷⁵ According to Arnobius, the noble death of Greco-Roman heroes justifies Christians worshipping Christ crucified.⁷⁶

Not apology but exhortation determines the conclusion *a minori ad maius*: If even non-Christians are able to become heroes for the sake of earthly glory, how much should Christians be willing to suffer martyrdom.⁷⁷ Socrates sometimes serves as a paradigm of μακροθυμία and ὑπομονή.⁷⁸ Ps-Caesarius of Nazianzus calls Socrates, Antisthenes and Epicetetus the examples of μακροθυμία; in comparison to these examples τῆς ἕξω παιδείας the Christians should not lag behind.⁷⁹

However, other Christians reclaimed superiority with regard to Christian martyrs⁸⁰ or misused the Socratic confession “I go to die, and you to live; but which of us goes to the better lot, is known to none but God”⁸¹ in order to refute the dogmatic philosophy of his successors⁸² or had a negative notion of Greco-Roman martyrs in general.⁸³

Within Christian *exegetical* writings, I have not found any references to Socrates. Even the nowadays discussed parallels between Acts 5:29 and Plato's apology⁸⁴ are rarely noted.⁸⁵ In the Acts of Apollonius, Socrates' death is commented by quoting Is 3:10, but this combination does not occur in the known commentaries on Isaiah⁸⁶ – we have to consider the brevity of the distinctive explanations even in the voluminous works. But also in Christian writings on martyrdom the suffering of Socrates is not mentioned at all. One reason could be the occurrence of martyrdoms in biblical

⁷⁵ Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 37,3–5 = CSEL 2, 52.

⁷⁶ Arnobius, *ad nationes* 1,40 = CSEL 4, 26f.

⁷⁷ Cf. Tertullian, *apol.* 50,5–9 = CCL 1, 170; *id.*, *mart.* 4,4–7 = CCL 1,6f.

⁷⁸ *Acta Phileae* 4,1–2.

⁷⁹ Ps-Caesarius of Nazianzus, *dial.* 4, *interr.* 192 = PG 38, 1172.

⁸⁰ Cf. Lactantius, *div. inst.* V,13,12–14 = SC 204, 196; cf. also Augustine, *de civitate Dei* I,24 = CSEL 40/1, 42–3.

⁸¹ Plato, *Apology* 42 a.

⁸² Ps-Justin, *Cohortatio ad Graecos* 36,2 = PTS 32, 73, alluding to Plato, *apology* 42a.

⁸³ Cf. Tertullian, *de anima* 1,1–6 = CCL 2, 781f; Gregory of Nazianzus, *or.* 4,70 = SC 309, 178–182; John Chrysostom, *hom. in Mt* 33,4 = PG 57, 392f.

⁸⁴ Plato, *Apology* 29d.

⁸⁵ Acts 5:29 is quoted as a word stimulating the willingness to suffer martyrdom, cf. Origen, *comm. in Rom* 9,27 = FC 2/5, 94; Dionysius of Alexandria, in Eusebius of Caesarea, *h.e.* 7,11,4–5 = GCS 9/2, 654; Athanasius of Alexandria, *c. Ar.* III,57 = PG 26, PG 441C – 444 A. Yet nowhere any parallel is drawn between Christian martyrdom and the fate of Socrates. In some commentaries to Acts 5,29 this parallel is missing also, cf. Beda Venerabilis, *retr.* = CCL 121, 128.

⁸⁶ I have controlled Euseb of Caesarea, *Is.* 29 = GCS 57, 23; Jerome, *in Is.* 16 = CC.SL 73 A, 683; Theodoret of Cyrus, *Is.* = SC 315, 214–216; Cyril of Alexandria, *Is.* 1,2 = PG 70, 108 C – 109 A; Procopius of Gaza, *Is.* = PG 87/2, 1904 D – 1905 B.

writings: The martyrdom of Eleazar (2 Macc 6) and the martyrdom of the seven sons and her mother mentioned in 2 Macc 7 are sometimes quoted,⁸⁷ and homilies on biblical martyrs like Abel or the Maccabees⁸⁸ or on Christian martyrs made it unnecessary to memorize the pagan Socrates.

Christian Apologetic Literature and Anti-Christian Polemic

According to Celsus, Jesus could have dodged his way of suffering if he had truly been God. Origen answers: neither did Socrates; he preferred to die according to his philosophy instead of living against his own teaching. Leonidas, at the Thermopyles, showed a similar attitude, Jesus and the Christians as well, though they knew that they had to die if they confessed the Christian faith.⁸⁹ But Origen's refutation is more far-reaching: The full purpose of Jesus' crucifixion is not intelligible by the very wording but by a symbolic meaning: We should follow our Lord in self-denigration and take up his cross and so would be crucified for the world and renounce any sin.⁹⁰ Explicitly, Origen explains Jesus' silence during the mockery in the praetorium (Matt 27:27–31) to be proof of steadfastness and self-control superior to any speech of the Greek philosophers.⁹¹

Jesus' announcements of his imminent suffering are in Christian literature clearly understood as sayings of Jesus himself; Celsus' theory of the invention of these sayings by the disciples is, at least, mentioned in Augustine's *De consensu evangelistarum*.⁹²

Anti-Christian Polemics and Christian Exegesis

Some exegetes formulate general remarks concerning the passion of Jesus with possible allusions to the problems raised by anti-Christian critics. John Chrysostom and Augustine, at least, shortly refute the wrong opinion that Jesus' passion could be unworthy for him.⁹³ Explicit references to anti-Christian polemics occur only rarely in Christian exegetical writings.

⁸⁷ Origen, *mart.* 22–27 = GCS 1, 19–24; Cyprian, *ep.* 58,6,1 = CCL 3C, 327f.

⁸⁸ Eusebius Gallicanus, *hom.* 32 = CCL 101, 363–371.

⁸⁹ Origen, *Cels.* II,17 = SC 132, 330–332.

⁹⁰ Origen, *Cels.* II,69 = SC 132, 446–448.

⁹¹ Origen, *Cels.* VII,55 = SC 150, 142.

⁹² Augustine, *cons. ev.* 1,16/24 = CSEL 43, 22.

⁹³ John Chrysostom, *hom. in Mt* 54,4 = PG 58, 537; Augustine, *Io. ev. tr.* 60,2 = CCL 36, 478.

Some examples of ancient exegesis of the Passion stories, however, show that there is at least some indirect influence.

Jesus' announcements of his imminent suffering are generally understood as sayings of Jesus himself; Joh 10:18 excluded for ancient Christian authors the possibility that Jesus should not have known of his suffering.⁹⁴ In the commentaries on Matt 24:9 there is no hint at actual experiences. The mockery of the crucified Jesus is nowhere commented by the argument that Jesus' silence and his remaining on the cross would imply a teaching for believers to be patient under such sufferings.

Yet, there are some issues where the coincidence of anti-Christian critique and problems of Christian theology leads to exegetical efforts worthy to be noted here: Jesus' prayer at the Mount of Olives, his silence during the trial and the mockery, and his quotation of Ps 21:2 LXX on the cross.

The story of Jesus' struggle at the Mount of Olives contains two critical points for the Greco-Roman point of view as well as for Christian faith: Jesus' sorrow (Matt 26:37) and Jesus' plea (Matt 26:39,42).

Different positions are held up by Christians with regard to human affections. In a situation generally demanding apologetic efforts, Origen has to write with regard to two ideals of his pagan counterparts concerning Platonic theology and Stoic ethics: 1. God cannot suffer; 2. the wise man is free from affections. According to Origen's exegesis of Matt 26:37 mastered by these ideals, Jesus is only insofar affected by affections as he can demonstrate the truth of his saying "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matt 26:41b).⁹⁵ Directly confronted with Celsus' polemics Origen justifies the pains of Jesus in another way: How should Jesus Christ be a paradigm for his followers in their dangerous situation, if he did not really have to undergo the pains?⁹⁶ Without explicit reference to an apologetic situation Hilary of Poitiers and Jerome offer a moral justification for Jesus: His sorrow does not result from his dread of death but from his compassion for the apostles who will fail (Matt 26:31) and – so only Jerome – to the Jewish nation that will be punished if Jesus is killed.⁹⁷ Augustine's exegesis is not apologetics but polemics: The Stoic struggle against affections is wrong, and his critique of this Stoic issue also concerns Christian ethics: The Christian should have affections: the affection of fear regarding men

⁹⁴ Referring to this problem Joh 10,18 is cited by Leo I., *tract.* e 68,2 = CCL 138 A, 415; Petrus Chrysologus, *serm.* 72 bis 1 = CCL 24 A.

⁹⁵ Origen, *comm. in Mt ser.* 90 = GCS 38, 205; similarly Tertullian, *or.* 4,5 = CCL 1, 260 interprets Jesus' plea Matt 26:39,42.

⁹⁶ Origen, *Cels.* II,25 = SC 132, 354.

⁹⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, *in Mt* 31,4 = SC 258, 230; Jerome, *in Mt* 26,37 = SC 259, 252.

who may be lost to Christ, the affection of joy if men are gained for Christ.⁹⁸

Jesus' plea is interpreted as a plea not refusing the suffering in any way – with regard to the biblical announcements and to Jesus' consecration of his body and blood (Matt 26:28) it was impossible for ancient Christian authors that Jesus should have wished to evade the imminent passion. Hilary interpreted Jesus' prayer as a plea in favour of his followers to overcome the weakness of their flesh and their fear of death; Jesus' prayer is a help for us in the situation of martyrdom.⁹⁹ According to Origen and Jerome Jesus' prayer was a plea in favour of the Jewish nation: if the Jews killed him they would have no possibility of exculpation; Jesus wished to hinder God's punishment of them.¹⁰⁰ Other interpretations underline the spiritual implications: this prayer implies the admonition to follow God even against our own nature;¹⁰¹ Jesus takes up our weakness in order to teach us to put the divine will before the human will;¹⁰² Jesus' plea in Gethsemane can encourage us to repeated prayer¹⁰³ and shows what could be prayed for by somebody in fear: Because "we do not know how to pray as we ought to" (Rom 8:26), God mercifully denies the harmful things asked for.¹⁰⁴ Yet we find also other interpretations: Jesus has overcome the weakness of the flesh; therefore the apostles were willing to suffer martyrdom¹⁰⁵ in order to demonstrate the distinction between the one emotion excusing the weakness and the other emotion that he had chosen from the will of the Father for the reconciliation of the world.¹⁰⁶

The silence of Jesus according to Matt 27:12 is interpreted as a consequence of his willingness to suffer: Jesus did not want to respond in order to prevent the possibility that he could be freed so that the usefulness of

⁹⁸ Augustine, *Io. ev. tr.* 60,3 = CCL 36, 479, mentioning fear, sadness, desire, joy. Augustine did not mention here (!) that according to the doctrine of some Stoics there are also allowed affections.

⁹⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, *in Mt* 31,10 = SC 258, 236 – 238.

¹⁰⁰ Origen, *Cels.* II,25 = SC 132, 354; Jerome, *in Mt* = SC 259, 254; Beda Venerabilis, *Lc.* = CCL 120, 385f.

¹⁰¹ John Chrysostom, *hom. in Mt* 83,1 = PG 58, 746.

¹⁰² Augustine, *Io. ev. tr.* 52,3 = CCL 36, 447; Leo I., *tract.* 54,4 = CCL 138 A, 320; Maximus Confessor, *opusc.* 7 = PG 91, 80 D (concerning this issue within the frame of Christological debate cf. P.M. Blowers, "The Passion of Jesus Christ in Maximus the Confessor: A Reconsideration", *StPatr* 37 [2001], 361–377, 368f.).

¹⁰³ Cyril of Alexandria, *in Mt* = PG 72, 456 AB.

¹⁰⁴ Leo I., *tract.* 56,2 = CCL 138 A, 330. Similarly Cyril of Alexandria, *in Lc* = PG 72, 921 B.

¹⁰⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, *c. Ar.* 3,57 = PG 26, PG 441C – 444 A.

¹⁰⁶ Leo I., *tract.* 67,7 = CCL 138 A, 413.

the cross would be missing.¹⁰⁷ However, there is also a possible allusion to the anti-Christian critiques: According to John Chrysostom, any answer of Jesus would have been useless; there was no possibility of making the accusers better men.¹⁰⁸ The polemical comments on the mockery Matt 27:40–43 at least implicitly contribute to this reproach: Even if Jesus had descended from the Cross, the mockers had not become faithful to him.¹⁰⁹

The cry at the cross is a cry of mercy *propter nos*¹¹⁰ and *pro nobis*¹¹¹. Jesus transfers our desolation in order to finish the curse upon us;¹¹² within himself Jesus depicts our existence¹¹³; Jesus uses words to be used by the human sinners.¹¹⁴

The continuation of Ps 21:2a LXX raises christological problems. Jerome comments on the distinctive Greek versions of this phrase. Symmachus and Aquila and the fifth and sixth edition render *gemitus mei*, i.e. the sigh of Jesus concerning Israel and its refutation to accept the salvation brought by him; the LXX-rendering *verba delictorum meorum* is not spoken in regard to himself but to the nation whose sins he had took up by his own body (cf. 1 Pt 2:24).¹¹⁵ According to Augustine the phrase *longe a salute mea, uerba delictorum meorum* cannot be spoken by Christ with regard to himself because of the absence of sin (*qui peccatum non fecit, nec inuentus est dolus in ore eius*, 1 Pt 2:22) but is a plea for us: *Quomodo ergo dicit delictorum mea, nisi quia pro delictis nostris ipse precatur, et delicta nostra sua delicta fecit, ut iustitiam suam nostram iustitiam faceret*.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁷ Jerome, in *Mt* = SC 259, 278, quoted also by Beda Venerabilis, *Mc.* = CCL 120, 626: *Iesus autem nihil respondere uoluit, ne crimen diluens dimitteretur a praeside et cruces utilitas differretur.*

¹⁰⁸ John Chrysostom, *hom. in Mt* 86,1 = PG 58, 764.

¹⁰⁹ Leo I., *tract.* 68,2 = CCL 138 A, 417.

¹¹⁰ Maximus of Turin II., *hom.* 45 = PL 57, 330 A: *Haec autem dicit, ut manifestaret propter nos se esse derelictum, quorum peccata portabat, ac videntes disceremus et nos pro ipso sancto et iusto mori, cum pro peccatoribus et ille moreretur.*

¹¹¹ Leo, *serm.* 67,7 = CCL 138 A, 412f: *Vox ista ... doctrina est, non querela. Nam cum in Christo Dei et hominis una persona sit, nec ab eo potuerit relinquī a quo non poterat separari, pro nobis trepidis et infirmis interrogat cur caro pati metuens exaudita non fuerit.*

¹¹² (Ps?-)Athanasius of Alexandria, *exp. Ps.* = PG 27, 132 B: τὰ ἡμῶν εἰς ἑαυτὸν μετατιθεῖς ἵνα παύσῃ τὴν ἁρᾶν.

¹¹³ Gregor of Nazianzus, *or.* 30,5 = FC 22, 232: ἐν ἑαυτῷ ... τυποῖ τὸ ἡμέτερον.

¹¹⁴ Cyril of Alexandria (Reuss, *Matthäuskommentare*, Frgm. 312); Beda Venerabilis, *Matt.* = PL 92, 125 A; Hrabanus Maurus, in *Mt* = PL 107, 1142 CD: *Ostenditque quantum flere debeant qui peccant, quando sic flevit qui nunquam peccavit.*

¹¹⁵ Jerome, in *psalm* 21,2 = FC 79, 120–122.

¹¹⁶ Augustine, *en. Ps.* 21, *serm.* 2,3 = CCL 38, 123.

Conclusion

The exegetical writings in the strict sense do not contain many clear allusions to pagan anti-Christian critics. Authors like Jerome feel free to allude to pagan critics¹¹⁷ or not.¹¹⁸ Regarding Leo I., the Venerable Bede and Raban Maur this can be explained by the fact of Christian dominion. John Chrysostom, however, perhaps a student of Libanius, knew the anti-Christian tendencies in the fourth century very well; Jerome read Porphyry's attack while Augustine and Cyril of Alexandria were great apologists in any way. Why is a treatment of anti-Christian critics widely missing in their exegetical writings?

One point has to do with genre. The *Sitz im Leben* of the homily, addressing believers, seemed for most of these authors¹¹⁹ not to be the proper occasion to include examples of pagan critique. Some fourth-century authors were even conscious of a revitalising well-educated paganism, combining philosophical thoughts with traditional theology. They felt being counterparts of that movement but were not sure whether believers were able to differentiate.

Finally, the Christian cosmos itself contained possibilities to formulate moral implications of the death of men. Willingness to martyrdom and implications of individual ethics were common biblical issues satisfying ordinary claims – so: why should the memory of Socrates be kept alive?

¹¹⁷ Cf. Jerome, *in Gal* = CCL 77 A, 168.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Jerome, *in Mt* = SC 259, 296.

¹¹⁹ There are exceptions: Maximus of Turin, *hom.* 37,1f = CCL 23, 145 compares the myth of Odysseus' saving himself in the scene *Od.* 12, 39–54 with Christ who really saves the whole world.