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THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE *MARTYRDOM OF POLYCARP*: MARTYRDOM AS BOTH IMITATION OF CHRIST AND ELECTION BY CHRIST

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ABSTRACT. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* narrates a martyrdom 'according to the Gospel'. Numerous facets of the text echo the passion materials of the Gospels, and Polycarp is directly said to imitate Christ. Various scholars have discussed the *imitatio Christi* theme within the work. Such an approach focuses upon Christ as an exemplar of suffering to be imitated, through specific events of similar suffering. But the Christology of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is far richer than this focus alone. Jesus Christ is also the Son, Savior, eternal high priest, teacher, elector, king, and alternative κύριος to Caesar. As the sovereign κύριος, he actively coordinates events and chooses martyrs from among his servants.

KEY WORDS: Polycarp, Christology, martyrdom, imitation, *imitatio Christi*, election

Introduction

Traditionally, when scholars have interpreted the Christological themes embedded within the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (*Mart. Pol.*), they have emphasized Jesus Christ as a martyrological example to be imitated. This *imitatio Christi* or mimetic approach is commonly rooted in an understanding of the phrase 'a martyrdom according to the Gospel' (*Mart. Pol.* 1.1; 4.1; 19.1; 22.1). Many scholars have underscored that 'a martyrdom according to the Gospel' imitates Jesus' passion by repeating or recapitulating specific details.[1]

The Christology of *Mart. Pol.* was not discussed in A. R. Stark's *The Christology in the Apostolic Fathers* (1912). C. R. Moss's scholarly writings, which do discuss the Christology of *Mart. Pol.*, emphasize the themes of *imitatio Christi* and *alter Christus* (2010a: 552-553; 2010b: 4-6; 2012: 63-64). Her work *The Other Christs* expertly dissects the notion of Christly imitation in *Mart. Pol.*, examining the details and function of this mimesis (see Moss, 2010b: 3). One is also reminded of M. Franzmann's essay (2009) on *imitatio Christi* in *Mart. Pol.* But the Christology of the narrative is

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1 See Lightfoot (1889: 365); Campenhausen (1964: 82-85); Guillaumin (1975); Saxer (1986: 27-33); Lieu (1996: 59-63); Camelot (1998: 200-201); and Wilhite (2014).

fuller and richer than *imitatio Christi* alone. In this article, I wish to extend the study of the Christology found in *Mart. Pol.* as it now stands (including the colophons) beyond the theme of *imitatio Christi*.[2]

Some scholars have compiled lists of numerous, specific gospel parallels within *Mart. Pol.*[3] Jesus predicted his execution (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 5.2). Jesus entered into town on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 8.1). Jesus waited to be betrayed (Luke 22:20-23, 39-54), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 1.2). Jesus prayed with a few close companions (John 17:1-26), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 5.1), and both prayed broadly for all believers. Jesus hosted a final meal (Matthew 26:17-29), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 7.2). Jesus prayed again before his arrest (Matthew 26:36-46), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 7.2-3). Jesus wished for God's will to be done (Mark 14:36), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 7.1). Jesus heard a voice from heaven (John 12:27-28), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 9.1). Jesus was betrayed by a close acquaintance at night (Matthew 26:47-49), as was Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 6.1-2). Jesus was pursued as if a criminal (Matthew 26:55; Mark 14:48; Luke 22:52), as was Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 7.1). Jesus neither turned himself in nor resisted arrest (Matthew 26:47-54), nor did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 1.2; 7.2). Jesus was arrested outside the city proper (John 18:1), as was Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 5.1). Jesus interacted with a 'Herod' (Luke 23:6-12), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 8.2-3). Jesus was questioned by a proconsul (John 18:28-19:11), as was Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 9.2-11.2); and in both cases the Roman authority seemed reluctant to mete out execution and provided opportunity for dismissal. Jesus remained silent early in his trial (Matthew 26:63; Mark 14:61), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 8.2). Jesus prayed at his place of execution (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:34, 46), as did Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 14.1-15.1). Jesus was pierced (John 19:34), as was Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 16.1). Jewish leaders agitated opposition to both Jesus (John 19:12-16) and Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 12.2-13.1). Both traditions highlight Friday, the day of preparation (Luke 23:54; John 19:31; *Mart. Pol.* 7.1). And those who betrayed Polycarp received 'the punishment of Judas himself' (*Mart. Pol.* 6.2; see Lawson, 1961: 169).

Imitatio Christi

'In its basic meaning', explains Moss (2010b: 23), '*imitatio Christi* refers to actions or words that imitate those of Christ… The idea can be expressed both linguistically using the mimesis word group and conceptually in passages that propose

2 Of course, the theme of 'imitation' involves more than mere 'copying', as it assumes a motivating admiration for the *exemplum* (Moss, 2010b: 7). On the colophons, see Hoover (2013).

3 For a similar parallel listing, see Hartog (2013: 205). For other listings, see Lightfoot (1889: 610-612); Müller (1908: 6-12); Barnard (1978: 226-228); Bastiaensen (1987: 601-605); Camelot (1998: 200-202); Hook and Reno (2000: 133-136); Dehandschutter (2007: 95). See also Dehandschutter (1979: 241-254).

mimicry of Jesus' behavior but do not explicitly use this terminology'. Martyrdom was 'the ultimate act of *imitatio Christi*' (York, 2011: 37). 'For a person to sacrifice his or her life for the faith is to practice the *imitatio Christi* in a special sense' (Loades, 1993: xv; cf. Castelli, 2004: 54). Such 'imitation', therefore, was a common theme of martyr literature (Pellegrino, 1958; Buschmann, 1998: 83-84; Hurtado, 2003: 619-625; Moss, 2010b: 46-48), and appears in the context of a call to 'endurance' in Pol. *Phil*. 8 (cf. Ign. *Pol*. 3; Ign. *Smyrn*. 4.2; Lawson, 1961: 163). Prior to *Mart. Pol.*, Ignatius of Antioch expressed his desire to imitate the sufferings of Jesus (Ign. *Rom*. 6.3; cf. Tinsley, 1957; Swartley, 1973; McNamara, 1978; Kathanar, 1996; Moss, 2010b: 41-43; Petersen, 2013; Preiss, 1938; Reis, 2005).

In her impressive *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom*, Moss (2010b: 46) explains: 'For ancient audiences of the *acta*, the observation that martyrs imitate Christ is obvious. The preponderance of allusions, quotations, and statements explicating martyrdom's value as an *imitatio Christi* render this statement banal; it is everywhere implied and frequently stated'. Imitation in a martyr text (a martyr act) 'means both the way that the genre of the martyr act—problematic as it is—imitates and interprets the gospel account, and also the way that the martyr is portrayed as or presumed to imitate Christ' (Moss, 2010b: 6). Martyrs could be construed as the ultimate disciples of Jesus, following him to the point of death, and therefore being worthy of imitation in their own right (*Life of Anthony* 89). As such, 'The presentation of the martyr as imitator of Christ was a delicate theological balancing act' (Moss, 2010b: 4). The theological implications could be viewed by some as 'inherently troubling' (Moss, 2010b: 22; cf. Griffin, 2013). Martyrs imitated Christ but they were not to replace him (cf. *Mart*. *Pol*. 17.2-3).

Moss adds that 'among scholars, the idea [*imitatio Christi*] is most closely associated with the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, a text that has become a staple among students of early Christian martyrdom. Polycarp's *imitatio* is explicitly stated from the outset, where his conduct is compared to that of Jesus. Polycarp is part of a mimetic chain, one that connects the audience of the martyrdom to Christ himself' (Moss, 2010b: 46). Polycarp is 'the perfect imitator of Christ', and the 'allusions to the passion narrative reach an entirely new level' (Moss, 2010b: 56, 106). Moss (2010b: 57) reiterates, 'the author deftly but overtly weaves references to the Gospels throughout the account, beginning with an outright declaration of Polycarp's imitation and proceeds to mirror the passion narratives from the Garden of Gethsemane to the moment of death'. For Moss (2010a: 552-553, 557), these constructed parallels add to the dubious nature of the historicity of the account.

No doubt, a theme of *imitatio Christi* courses its way throughout *Mart*. *Pol*. (Moss, 2010b: 46-47). However, the use of exact Gospel literary texts is debated, with Holmes (2005: 417) finding no single, *provable* instance. Yet the notion of mimesis in the work is not merely theatrical imitation, so there may be a danger in trying to find as many exact parallels as possible (Waldner, 2004: 59). Some of the

collected parallels seem rather weak or superficial (Dehandschutter, 2007: 96).[4] Others seem awkward or even unduly forced (Hartog, 2013: 206).[5] One also recognizes that Polycarp's execution diverged from Jesus' in various ways. As van Henten (1993: 715) notes, the parallels 'are never completely identical, so that the suitable distance between Polycarp and Jesus Christ is maintained'.[6] For example, while Jesus was nailed to the cross (as emphasized in Ign. *Smyrn*. 1.2; *Acts of Carpus* 37-41), Polycarp was tied to the cross instead, upon his insistence (*Mart*. *Pol*. 13.3-14.1).[7] Moss (2010b: 58-59) argues that the Jesus-Polycarp parallelism does not exactly 'break down' at this 'crucial moment', but rather the Polycarpian narrative is influenced by the *akedah* of Isaac.

An intentional paralleling of Polycarp's passion with that of Jesus' (as reflected in multiple similarities throughout the narrative) seems absolutely undeniable. Otherwise, it remains 'difficult to explain why so many scholars have so regularly "found" them' (Hartog, 2013: 208). Moss (2013: 120) maintains that 'the parallels between the death of Jesus and the death of Polycarp are apparent to even the most cursory of readers'. And Wilhite (2014: 13) declares, 'the amount of material that parallels the Gospels is too extensive to attribute to coincidence or accidental mirroring' (cf. Moss, 2012: 63). As Jefford (2012: 97) concludes, 'From beginning to end, the bishop's arrest, trial, and execution are painted against the canvas of similar events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth as they are recorded in the New Testament Gospels'.

Nevertheless, the 'gospel parallels' do not exhaust the meaning of 'a martyrdom according to the gospel', as evidenced by the role of secondary imitation in *Mart*. *Pol*. (Hartog, 2010: 291). Polycarp was 'an eminent martyr whose martyrdom all desire to imitate because it transpired according to the Gospel of Christ' (*Mart*. *Pol*. 19.1). The author(s) desired that 'we also might become imitators of him' (1.2; cf. 18.3; 22.1), thus transforming Polycarp from an imitator of Jesus to a pattern to be imitated (Franzmann, 2009: 378). But if Polycarp's 'martyrdom according to the gospel' consisted primarily in exact details like riding into town on a donkey, being crucified on the 'day of preparation', etc., these events were beyond the recipients' control (and thus their ability to 'imitate' them). Therefore, the details of recapitulation cannot exhaust the meaning of 'a martyrdom accord-

4 For example, the paralleling of the statement of the author of *Mart*. *Pol*. and the centurion's statement at Jesus' cross in Luke 23:47 (see Wilhite, 2014: 19). I am grateful to S. Wilhite for allowing me access to his paper.

5 For example, the comparison of Polycarp's leg injury in disembarking from the carriage with the mistreatment of Jesus prior to his execution (see Wilhite, 2014: 18). The emphasis in *Mart*. *Pol*. 8.3 is how nobility just walks it off.

6 English translation from Buschmann (2010: 145).

7 See Dehandschutter (2007: 96) and Weinrich (1981: 178, n. 9). Cf., however, Moss (2010a: 555); Moss (2010b: 58-59); Moss (2013: 131-132). On Polycarp's martyrdom as a sacrifice, see (Moss, 2010b: 84). Moss (2010b: 58-59) describes Polycarp as trumping or excelling Christ in some facets. See also Moss (2013: 129, 133).

ing to the gospel' (Hartog, 2013: 208-209). Moreover, the Christology of *Mart. Pol.* is far richer than the mere recapitulation of details found in the Gospel passion narratives.

Moss (2010b: 4) states, 'In some narratives, such as the famous *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the martyr is explicitly identified both as an imitator of Jesus and as a model for other Christians… At the same time, the author is keen to differentiate between Polycarp and Christ… To simply state that the martyrs imitate Christ does not exhaust what the imitation of Christ can tell us about either martyrdom or the history of ideas… By presenting martyrs as Christly imitators, the authors of the early martyrdom accounts provide scholars with a window into early Christian understandings of scripture, Christology, and soteriology'. The imitation theme does reflect Christology, as the martyrs are depicted as 'partners with Christ' (*Mart. Pol.* 6.2) who 'share in the cup of Christ' (14.2; cf. Johnson, 2013).[8] But the Christology of *Mart. Pol.* also reflects a multi-faceted jewel rather than a focused prism alone.

Christological Titles

An examination of the fuller, richer Christology of *Mart. Pol.* could begin with an overview of the Christological titles found within the work. They include the following:

7x: The Lord [by itself] (1.1; 1.2; 2.2; 2.3; 17.3; 18.3; 20.1)
6x: Christ, your Christ, the Messiah [by itself] (2.2; 6.2; 9.3; 14.2; 17.2; 19.1)
5x: the Son, his Son, your beloved Son, your beloved and blessed Son [including instances of combination with other titles] (14.1; 14.3; 17.1; 20.2; Moscow Epilogue 3)
4x: Jesus Christ, the only begotten Jesus Christ (14.1; 14.3, 20.2; 21)
4x: Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ (inscr.; 19.2; 22.3, Moscow Epilogue 3)
2x: King, my king (9.3; 17.3)
1x: High priest (14.3)
1x: The crucified one (17.2)
1x: Teacher (17.3)
1x: Savior (19.2)
1x: Helmsman (19.2)
1x: Shepherd (19.2)
1x: The Master, within the compound word φιλοδέσποτον (2.2)

In the letter opening (and in 19.2), the Lord Jesus Christ is coupled with God the Father (cf. 22.3). The 'Lord' replaces 'God' in an allusion to 1 Corinthians 2:9 in

8 On 'the cup of Christ', see Matthew 20:22; 26:39; Mark 10:38; 14:36; Luke 22:42.

Mart. Pol. 2.3 (see Hartog, 2015). This establishes the Lord as a revealing agent and parallels the use of 'Lord' in 2.2 (in a clearly Christological manner). The use of 'Christ' (Messiah) takes on a polemical tone in the context of Jewish opponents (17.2-18.1). As 'Son of God' [υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ], Christ is worthy of worship in 17.2-3.

In Polycarp's prayer, Jesus Christ is not called the υἱὸς but the παῖς. As I have argued elsewhere, the use of παῖς for the Son (or Servant) tends to be an early tradition that is overtaken by the use of υἱὸς (Hartog, 2014: 41-44). The context in *Mart. Pol.* 14 emphasizes that 'knowledge' of the Father is received through the παῖς, Jesus Christ. This discussion of knowledge of the Father through the παῖς is similar to *Didache* 9.2, which declares, 'We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of David, your child [τοῦ παιδός σου], which you made known to us through Jesus your child [τοῦ παιδός σου]. To you be the glory forever'. *Didache* 9.3 reiterates, 'We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge that you made known to us through Jesus your child [τοῦ παιδός σου]. To you be the glory forever'.

Christ as King

Perhaps the most fascinating facet of these Christological titles is the double use of 'King' (9.3 and 17.3). In 17.3, the title appears within a context of imitation: 'But we love the martyrs as disciples and imitators of the Lord, worthily because of their unsurpassed good will toward their own King and Teacher'. This text hints that Jesus is more than an example to be followed. He is also a king [βασιλέια] to be served, as well as a teacher [διδάσκαλος] who instructs. As king, the Lord decides the future of his followers. The very next sentence adds a wish to become martyrological partners and fellow disciples (17.3): 'May we also become both [their] partners and fellow disciples!'

The title of 'king' is also found in the famous affirmation in 9.3: 'For eighty-six years I have been serving him, and he has done me no wrong. Indeed how can I blaspheme my king [βασιλέια] who saved me?' This text directly connects the kingship of Christ with serving him [δουλεύων]—for eighty six years. The notion of serving Jesus reappears in 20.1: 'Therefore, having learned these things, send the letter to the brothers further on in order that they too may glorify the Lord, who makes his choice from his own servants [δούλων].' The following verse speaks of Christ's 'eternal kingdom' [τὴν αἰώνιον βασιλείαν].

As one can see next, the following colophons speak of Jesus' reigning throughout the ages [βασιλεύοντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας] in his eternal dominion [θρόνος αἰώνιος] (21), and of his heavenly kingdom [τὴν οὐράνιον βασιλείαν] (22.1; 22.3; Moscow Epilogue 3). The text of 22.1 moves from the salvation of the elect ones to the personal desire to be found in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Lord's sovereignty is thus reflected in both election and kingdom entrance.

In an article recently appearing in *Vigiliae Christianae*, Hoover (2013: 15) comments upon the association in the colophons between the elect / chosen ones and the kingdom: 'Notice how both prayer and colophon are couched in a general

context of association with the "chosen ones" / "martyrs" in the "heavenly kingdom" / "resurrection of eternal life", unlike the "glorification" theme that characterizes the *Life* [*Vita Polycarpi*]; furthermore, the prayer's double reference to the Son ("your beloved Son, through whom be glory to you, *with him* and the Holy Spirit") retains close, if inexact, literary parallels with the Moscow colophon's doxology.'

Christ as Savior and Priest

Mart. Pol. 9.3 not only labels Christ as 'King', but also refers to his salvific work: 'my king who saved me [τὸν σώσαντά με]'. The work as a whole includes some other soteriological fascinations. *Mart. Pol.* 1.2 declares, 'For it is [characteristic] of true and firm love to desire not only oneself to be saved [σώζεσθαι] but also all the brothers'. *Mart. Pol.* 17.2 refers to Christ 'who suffered for the salvation [σωτηρίας] of the whole world of the saved [τῶν σωζομένων], the blameless on behalf of sinners'. This description refers to vicarious suffering, and the context in chapter 17 is anti-Jewish polemic. 'All this was done at the instigation and insistence of the Jews… They did not know that we will never be able either to abandon the Christ who suffered for the salvation of the whole world of those who are saved, the blameless on behalf of sinners, or to worship anyone else' (Holmes, 2007: 325). The Christ [Χριστός] could properly be translated as 'the Messiah' here. Within the context, the point seems to be that the Messiah did not die for Jews alone, but for the salvation of the whole world of the saved.

Chapter 19.2 describes the Lord Jesus Christ as 'the savior [τὸν σωτῆρα] of our souls and pilot of our bodies and shepherd of the universal church throughout the world.' The text includes an early reference to ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία [the 'catholic church' or 'universal church']; and it emphasizes a future for both soul and body. One is reminded of the portrayal of Polycarp's prayer from the stake in 14.2: 'I bless you because you have considered me worthy of this day and hour, to receive a portion in [the] number of the martyrs in the cup of your Christ, unto [the] resurrection of eternal life—both of soul and of body—in the immortality of the Holy Spirit' (Hartog, 2014).

In this context, one could also speak of the priestly work of Christ in 14.3: 'For this reason, and for all things, I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you through the eternal and heavenly high priest [τοῦ αἰωνίου καί ἐπουρανίου ἀρχιερέως], Jesus Christ, your beloved Son …' The theology of Jesus as 'the eternal high priest' and 'Son of God' parallels the Christology of the books of Hebrews (4.14; 6.20; 7.3; 10:29) and *1 Clement* (36.1; 61.3; 64; cf. Ign. *Phld.* 9.1).[9] Interestingly, 'the eternal high priest' is also found in Pol. *Phil.* 12.2, in the extant Latin (*sempiternus pontifex*). Thus the Messianic offices of king and priest are both associated with Jesus in

9 For the possible influence of Hebrews, see Oxford Society (1905: 99-100), Bauer (1995: 71), and Hernando (1990: 194, n. 241).

Mart. Pol., while the office of prophet is never thus attached. Polycarp, on the other hand *is* said to speak prophetically (5.2; 12.3) and to be an 'apostolic and prophetic teacher' (16.2). Thus the title of διδάσκαλος is used of both Jesus (17.3) and Polycarp (16.2).

Christ as Sovereign Elector

In the *Mart. Pol.*, Jesus Christ chooses his servants and brings them into his kingdom (20.1-20.2): 'Therefore, having learned these things, send the letter to the brothers further on in order that they too may glorify the Lord, who makes his choice (τὸν ἐκλογὰς ποιοῦντα) from his own servants. Now to him who is able to bring us all through his grace and bounty into his eternal kingdom through his Son, the only begotten Jesus Christ…' Divine choice is assumed in the references to 'the elect' in 16.1, 'his elect' (22.3; Moscow Epilogue 3), and 'the holy elect' (22.1). While 'the elect' in the colophons could be taken in a soteriological manner, as in the distinction between 'the unbelievers and the elect' in 16.1, the sense is narrower in 20.1: the Lord chooses from among his own those special servants who are to be martyrs. This martyrological sense of election lies behind the language of Polycarp 'fulfilling his own lot' (6.2) and being counted worthy of the day and hour, 'to receive a portion in [the] number of the martyrs' (14.2). The concept of being chosen to suffering was not uncommon in early Christian martyr texts (Brown, 1981: 72; cf. Philippians 1:29), as faithful victims were 'part of an elect family of martyrs' (Moss, 2010b: 163). It is important to stress the Christological source of election in *Mart. Pol.*, as Jesus Christ the Lord chooses martyrs from among his own servants (20.1; cf. Moscow Epilogue 3).

Of course, election is affiliated with God's will, an important facet in *Mart. Pol.* Paralleling Jesus' Gethsemenaean prayer, Polycarp declares, 'The will of God be done' (7.1). In the context of chapter 7, Polycarp could have escaped to another farm, 'but he did not wish [to], saying, "The will of God be done".' This verse echoes chapter 2.1: 'Blessed and noble, therefore, [are] all the martyrdoms that have happened according to the will of God. For it is necessary for us, being very devout, to ascribe to God the authority over all things.'

Christology and 'According to the Gospel'

A 'martyrdom according to the gospel [κατὰ εὐαγγέλιον]' parallels a martyrdom 'according to the will of God' in 2.1. (cf. 19.1-20.2; Dehandschutter, 2007: 98). Holmes (2005: 420-421; 2007: 300), following Weinrich (1981: 167-168) and Buschmann (1998: 83), has argued that chapter two serves as a three-fold thematic focusing of the *Mart. Pol.* Such a martyrdom is one that '(a) is a matter of divine calling rather than human accomplishment or initiative', '(b) demonstrates a concern for the salvation or well-being of others' (1.2), and '(c) displays endurance in the midst of suffering' (2.1-2.2; 19.1-19.2). The main theme of *Mart. Pol.* (a 'martyrdom according to the gospel') thus stands as 'the fruit of an act of interpretation' (Holmes, 2005: 421-422). All three of these traits can be viewed through a

Christological prism. Jesus Christ sovereignly chooses his martyrs, Jesus Christ also was concerned with the salvation of others, and Jesus Christ also displayed endurance in suffering.

All of these same themes appear in Paul's Philippians 1:20-2:17 (Hartog, 2010; cf. McClain, 2014: 341-342).[10] If this is the case, *Mart. Pol.* may not only be constructing a 'martyrdom according to the Gospel' with Jesus' passion narratives in mind, it may also have 'conduct worthy of the Gospel' (Philippians 1:27) in mind. Such 'conduct worthy of the Gospel' is associated with the desire for Christ to be exalted in one's body 'whether by life or by death' (Philippians 1:20; cf. Fowl, 2011), and it entails the command to 'look out not only for personal interests, but also for the interests of others' (Philippians 2:4). This latter verse from Paul's Philippians is echoed in *Mart. Pol.* 1.2: 'not only looking out for that which concerns ourselves but also that which concerns our neighbors' (see Hartog, 2010: 393). Such a reception places a new interpretive grid upon *Mart. Pol.* 4: 'Therefore, on account of this, brothers, we do not praise those who hand themselves over, because the gospel does not so teach.' Thus a 'martyrdom according to the Gospel', and by extension a martyrdom according to God's will, is contrasted with the problematic actions of Quintus in *Mart. Pol.* 4 (Hartog, 2013: 275).

One might add a fourth trait of a 'martyrdom according to the gospel': it is characterized by 'nobility' (Hartog, 2010: 392; Hartog, 2013: 207-208).[11] Like the other three traits described above, this characteristic appears in the thematic passage of *Mart. Pol.* 1-2 [where the γενναῖος word group appears four times].[12] The γενναῖος word group re-appears twice more in chapter 3, with references to 'noble' Germanicus and 'the whole crowd' marveling at the 'nobility of the God-loving and God-fearing race of the Christians'. Of course, as Droge and Tabor (1992) as well as van Henten and Avemarie (2002) and others have demonstrated, this characteristic of nobility is commonly found among the Jewish, pagan, and early Christian martyr texts of the broader era. And the portrayal of Polycarp within *Mart. Pol.* manifests some affinities with the image of Socrates (Geffcken, 1910: 500-501; Benz, 1950-1951; Butterweck, 1995: 8-22; York, 2011: 34-39; Moss, 2013: 134; Cobb, 2014).[13] Nevertheless, the thrust of *Mart. Pol.* 1-2 is Christologi-

10 Wilhite (2014: 14, 16) acknowledges this parallel, while also comparing 1 Corinthians 10:23-11.1.

11 Wilhite (2014: 12) accepts and adapts this fourth characteristic. Of course, many martyr texts stressed the 'nobility' (or courage) of the victim, so the trait is not at all unique to *Mart. Pol.* (cf. *Mart. Lyons* 1.17-19). Buschmann (1995: 112-115, 127) emphasizes the 'calm patience', 'calm serenity', and 'quiet serenity' of Polycarp in contrast to his 'enthusiastic' opponents. Buschmann (1994: 64) further contrasts the restlessness of Ignatius with the serenity of Polycarp. See also McCready (2005: 148, 150).

12 That is, four times in Dehandschutter's critical edition (2007), which supports one instance (γενναιότατοι) not found in the editions of Ehrman (2003) and Holmes (2007).

13 Because of the timing of publication overlaps, I was unable to interact directly with the full article of Cobb (2014) [only an abstract]. For a wider context of the Socratic tradition, see

cal in focus. The martyrs were noble because 'the Lord was beside them, conversing with them' (2.2), and 'they despised the earthly torments' because they gave attention to 'the grace of Christ' (2.3).

The joint concept of 'a martyrdom according to the Gospel' and a martyrdom 'according to God's will' is thus embedded within a wider framework of divine sovereignty that weaves its way throughout the *Mart. Pol.* In a sense, God is the stage director of the drama, divinely superintending all events. This divine sovereignty leads to a sense of necessity within the narrative. It was 'impossible' for Polycarp to remain hidden, because he had to 'fulfil his own lot, becoming a partner of Christ' (6.2). It was 'necessary' that Polycarp's vision of the burning pillow be fulfilled in his own burning at the stake (12.3; cf. Kozlowski, 2009). He resolutely declared, 'It is necessary for me to be burned alive' (12.3). The Christian witnesses were 'preserved in order to announce to the rest the things that happened' (15.1). *Mart. Pol.* 2:1 summarizes this mindset: 'For it is necessary for us, being very devout, to ascribe to God the authority over all things'.

Interestingly, in light of our Christological interest, this divine sovereignty is focused upon the 'Lord' (κύριος) in chapter 1. 'For nearly all the preceding things happened in order that the Lord might show to us again the martyrdom in accordance with the gospel' (1.1). While κύριος could be a term for God in a general manner, the context narrows the meaning in a Christological fashion. The preceding verse refers to 'God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ' (inscription). And the following verse states that Polycarp waited to be betrayed 'as also the Lord did, in order that we also might become imitators of him, not only looking out for that which concerns ourselves but also that which concerns our neighbors' (1.2). Only the Son was betrayed, and the allusion to Philippians 2.4 heightens the Christological focus of κύριος.

In fact, apart from the prayerful ascription in *Mart. Pol.* 14.1, κύριος can be interpreted consistently as a Christological title throughout the work (similar to the general usage within the Pauline literature). With the final occurrence found in chapter 18, in the context of the internment of Polycarp's remains, the narrator declares, 'Gathering there together with gladness and joy, so far as possible, the Lord will permit to celebrate the birthday of [Polycarp's] martyrdom, both for the commemoration of those previous contestants and for the training and preparation of ones to come'. From beginning to end, the Lord is sovereign in the affairs of the chosen martyrs and their fellow disciples.

Garrison, Mejer, and Döring (1978). The portrayal of Polycarp also resembles that of Stephen in Acts 6:15 (*Mart. Pol.* 12). Like Stephen, Polycarp stoked the reactive anger of his opponents, was strengthened directly by Christ, and had a wondrous countenance in facing death (Franzmann, 2009: 371). According to Franzmann (2009: 374), 'Polycarp imitates even more strongly the death of Stephen than the death of Jesus'. The preponderance of parallels, however, fit Christ more than Stephen. See also Buschmann (1994: 237-239). For a comparison between Polycarp and Indian gymnosophists, see Kozlowski (2011).

Conclusion

With this final text, we have come full circle. Yes, there is a definite theme of *imitatio Christi* within *Mart. Pol.* Polycarp imitated his Lord, and the others in turn were to imitate Polycarp. There indeed would be 'the training and preparation' of future martyrs (18.3). But Jesus Christ is not merely the object whom the believer intentionally follows, but also the subject who directs all human affairs (18.3), including martyrdom (14.2). 'Consequently, the transformation that changes both Polycarp and his witness is also a transformation wrought by Christ in which the whole church participates and is changed' (McClain, 2014: 345). In this Christological paradigm, Jesus Christ the Lord does not play merely a passive role of historical exemplar, but he plays an active and contemporary role, choosing elect martyrs from among his servants (20.1), enabling Polycarp to endure (13.3), standing by the martyrs and speaking to them (2.2), and directing all human affairs as the King.

Within the context of *Mart. Pol.*, Christological kingship plays a political, anti-imperial role. Herod the irenarch and his father Nicetes insisted, 'For what harm is it to say "Caesar is Lord" and to offer incense?' (8.2). The proconsul persisted, 'Swear, and I will release you. Revile Christ!' (9.3). It is interesting that Polycarp responds, 'For eighty-six years I have been serving him, and he has done me no wrong. Indeed how can I blaspheme my king who saved me?' Polycarp cannot serve Caesar in the way requested, because he serves another king. The alternative politic becomes explicit in chapter 21: '[Polycarp] was arrested by Herod in [the] high priesthood of Philip [the] Trallian, Statius Quadratus being proconsul, but while Jesus Christ reigns throughout the ages…' Jesus Christ is depicted both as an alternative high priest to Philip the Trallian and as an alternative King to the Roman rulers.

Jesus is certainly an example of suffering to be imitated in *Mart. Pol.* But the Christology of *Mart. Pol.* is far richer than an *imitatio Christi* focus alone, whether the general imitation of Christ as a model figure or the recapitulation of specific details from his passion narratives. As the sovereign king, Jesus Christ is more than a model object for imitation. He is an active agent in the unfolding narrative itself, directing the drama even as he wills and chooses. Within *Mart. Pol.*, Jesus Christ is more than a historical exemplar to be followed in suffering, but a living and active priest, shepherd, and king. *Mart. Pol.* reflects a fuller and richer Christology than *imitatio Christi* or *alter Christus* alone. Jesus Christ is the Son, Savior, eternal high priest, teacher, elector, king, and alternative κύριος to Caesar.[14]

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