

Living Martyrs in Late Antiquity and Beyond

Surviving Martyrdom

Diane Shane Fruchtman

First published 2023

ISBN: 978-1-032-26106-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-26325-0 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-28772-8 (ebk)

Introduction

Introduction: Rethinking Martyrdom

(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

DOI: 10.4324/b22865-1

The funder for this chapter is Rutgers University



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

INTRODUCTION

RETHINKING MARTYRDOM

LIVING MARTYRS

On January 14, 402, with clouds of war gathering in the north and threatening to darken all of Italy, Meropius Pontius Paulinus addressed the crowds assembled at Nola for the feast day of its patron saint, Felix. His message is a soothing one: even in the scourge of Gothic incursions can God's hand be seen, spurring on the hordes to punish the unfaithful. Escaping such wrath is simply a matter of doing what all those assembled at Nola have already done: placing trust in Felix, the martyr and servant of God. To reassure his audience that reliance on Felix's intercessory power is warranted, Paulinus describes, in verse, what he identifies as daily occurrences at the martyr's tomb:

For every day, with dense crowds on all sides, we are witness
either to now-healthy men discharging vows of gratitude
or to the sick begging for and experiencing various remedies;
We see also many, carried from some foreign shore,
prostrate before the sacred hall of the holy martyr
as they render their thanks, recalling dangers endured,
testifying that, though their ship was crushed by strong gales,
with God's mercy they were rescued,
that they emerged from the depth of the sea with the very hand of
Felix guiding them,
that safety, once despaired of, had seized them, now at peace,
and that both water and flames yielded to the merits of Felix.¹

Here was full proof of Felix's intercessory power, testimony to add to the exorcisms Paulinus recounts and the miracle—which Paulinus uses to conclude the poem—of Felix protecting his sanctuary from the wind-driven fingers of a threatening fire.² Just as Felix had warded off flames from his shrine, so too would he ward off harm from those whose faith had led them there.

Such demonstrations of intercessory power—instances of healing, exorcism, and intervention—are typical feats for martyrs in the late antique Latin West. Typical, too, are the throng of feast-day celebrants and their

2 *Rethinking Martyrdom*

varied pilgrimages to the martyr's tomb. But Felix, the center of all this celebration and veneration, is not a typical martyr. In fact, by the standards of many—both Christians throughout history as well as modern scholars writing outside confessional consideration—he is not even a martyr. Felix fails as a martyr because he did not die.

By which, of course, I mean that he did not die in persecution at the hands of those who opposed the Christian faith. Rather, he died peacefully as an old man, well after the threat of persecution had passed, having earned the status of martyr—according to Paulinus—long before his death. Paulinus writes that, having scorned savage punishments, Felix was deemed worthy of avoiding them, and he ascended to heaven a martyr without blood.³ He later explains:

Martyrdom without slaughter is pleasing, if ready for suffering,
both mind and faith burn for God. The will for suffering
suffices, and giving testimony of devotion is the height of service.⁴

According to Paulinus, Felix earned the title of martyr and, perhaps more importantly, the powers that come with it by his *willingness* to suffer, and not by his actual death. This notion that martyrdom is and can be independent of death and bloodshed is not something that Paulinus manufactures solely for Felix's benefit: he considers both Felix's bishop Maximus and his own contemporary Victricius of Rouen to be martyrs, despite both of them surviving their ordeals.⁵ Martyrs, for Paulinus, did not need to die to earn the title.

Why did Paulinus insist on Felix's martyr status rather than identifying him primarily as a confessor or even an ascetic?⁶ How could he plausibly detach martyrdom from death and greet Victricius as a martyr, *fait accompli*? Can we accept his understanding of Felix as a true martyr? And how would it change our understanding of martyrdom if we did? In this book, I argue not only that scholars *can* include martyrs who do not die in our definition of martyrdom, but also that we *must* do so if we are to glean from our sources a full, accurate, and fruitful understanding of what martyrdom is and has meant to Christians throughout Christian history.

In the chapters that follow, I investigate Paulinus's treatment of Felix alongside other instances of living martyrs in the fourth- and fifth-century West in an attempt to further our understanding of the phenomenon of martyrdom and of martyr-centered spirituality in Late Antiquity; this rethinking of how we understand martyrdom in Late Antiquity then provides a template for how we must rethink martyrdom and martyrdom discourse in other settings. With this study, I aim to expand our contemporary definition of martyrdom, to highlight the inadequacy of how we are using the term by showing the historical diversity of its use, and to suggest one axis on which it must be rethought—namely, the criterion of death.

LIVING MARTYRS IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Paulinus was not the only late antique Christian author to dissociate martyrdom from death. The poet Prudentius rejoices in *Peristephanon* 4 that the city of Caesar Augusta has the unprecedented honor of being home to a martyr, the maiden Encratis, who survived her own martyrdom.⁷ Elsewhere, in *Peristephanon* 10, he implicitly characterizes a nameless woman as a martyr after she bravely endures the torture and death of her infant son.⁸ And Augustine of Hippo, skeptical of human claims to righteousness and wary of the Donatists' self-promotion as "the church of the martyrs," used his sermons to clarify for his parishioners that suffering and dying were not sufficient to merit a crown—as he time and again argues that *non poena sed causa martyrem facit* (it is not the punishment but the cause that makes a martyr), he effectively distances martyrdom from any punishment at all.⁹ He reminds his listeners that "martyr" originally meant "witness" and outlines ways of becoming a martyr that do not involve a bloody death, including spreading the word of God, fighting temptation, and suffering on a sickbed without the aid of amulets. Augustine writes that because the criterion for martyrdom is adherence to a divine *causa*, God has many hidden martyrs.¹⁰ Furthermore, Paulinus, Prudentius, and Augustine are all building on a tradition in which death is not the sole signifier of martyrdom. The Alexandrians Clement and Origen as well as the Africans Tertullian, Cyprian, and Commodian all privileged the *intent* of the would-be sufferer, rather than the actual suffering, in determining whether or not a Christian was truly a martyr.¹¹

Despite the advocacy of so many prominent figures, when Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* entertained the question of whether death was essential to martyrdom, he answered, unequivocally, that it was:

As long as bodily life remains for a man, however, he has not yet shown in action that he despises all temporal things: For men are accustomed to scorn both their families and all their good possessions, and even to suffer bodily wounds, so that they might save their lives. . . . Therefore, for the perfect idea of martyrdom, it is necessary that one endure death for Christ's sake.¹²

Modern scholars seem to agree. With general approbation bordering on consensus, modern treatments of martyrdom all include the death of the martyr. Recent attempts to redefine the term focus on establishing its discursive character, on recognizing its reliance on a narrative community and "reputational entrepreneurs" to establish the existence of a martyr, on including those who died a little too eagerly to suit certain church fathers, and on complicating the notion that there was but one ideology of martyrdom.¹³ All presume the requirement of death. Candida Moss, for instance, in her investigation of christomimesis in martyrdom, interrogates features

4 *Rethinking Martyrdom*

of martyrdom that are usually taken for granted and asks the pivotal question: “Why do martyrs die?”¹⁴ But this salutary reframing nonetheless presumes that they *do*. Even those who seek to reclaim and re-emphasize the term’s root meaning of “witness” nonetheless include the co-requisite of death: Michael Budde in *Witness of the Body* defines martyrdom as “witness written on or by the bodies of persons killed for their faith.”¹⁵ As far as most scholars are concerned, J. D. Crossan’s statement holds: “Every martyr needs a murderer.”¹⁶

This consensus largely ignores the rather long list of Christians described and venerated as martyrs who did not suffer death as part of their witness. In addition to Encratis and Felix, Thecla and Marcellus were venerated as martyrs despite surviving their ordeals.¹⁷ Commodian, writing in North Africa in the third century, described martyrdom as a daily battle and, in fact, mocked those who sought to achieve martyrdom via the “shortcut” of a bloody death.¹⁸ Margery Kempe in the late fourteenth century and Thomas Hoccleve in the fifteenth both claimed to be martyrs and to have suffered martyrdom through mundane trials and social marginality—torments more vicious than execution for their very replicability: what martyr could be beheaded three times a day for seven years?¹⁹ Living “in torment and martyrdom,” as Hoccleve claims to do, takes far more endurance.²⁰ Paschasius Radbertus in the ninth century claimed that the Virgin Mary ought properly to be called “martyr” as well as “Virgin,”²¹ and Gregory of Nazianzus treats living martyrdom as a real possibility when he asks Eusebius of Samosata for his intercession via prayers, arguing that since Eusebius was accustomed to “bravely struggling in the gospel’s faith like this; enduring terrible persecutions; preparing great license for himself to speak frankly with God, Dispenser of Justice, through the endurance of tribulations,” he not only had divine power at his fingertips but also could share that power with others, “as if from one of the holy martyrs.”²² In addition, many influential late ancient figures other than Prudentius, Paulinus, and Augustine understood martyrdom as separable from death. John Chrysostom, Caesarius of Arles, and Gregory the Great all dissociated martyrdom from the death of the martyr.²³ This is by no means an exhaustive catalog, but it does suggest that current understandings of martyrdom do not do justice to the ways in which martyrdom has historically been understood.

These instances of martyrdom without death have not gone unnoticed by modern scholars. Most pass over the fact with only brief notice.²⁴ Others remark on the “stretching” of the definition to include people who should not properly be considered martyrs.²⁵ Several scholars, like Miri Rubin and Danna Piroyansky, have encountered living martyrs during broad examinations of the experience of martyrdom in Christian history and include martyrs who do not die in their investigations of the many divergent ways that Christians have identified and identified with martyrs.²⁶ But while they offer excellent pictures of the reach of martyrological thinking within the late medieval period, neither uses her portrait as a starting point for

rethinking the concept of martyrdom itself or the treatment of martyrdom more broadly. The same is true of scholarship on the “spiritual” or “white” martyrdom of monks and virgins. On the whole, while scholars acknowledge the traditions locating martyrdom in the will or in metaphorical death, they compare monks to martyrs and even call them the “new martyrs” without using the comparison to reflect back on what the meaning of “martyr” really is and what the scholarly definition of it should be. The “red” martyr, or martyr by death, becomes the paradigm on which the “new martyrs” are modeled, while the monk’s martyrdom is seldom used to illuminate or expand our understanding of the meaning of martyrdom.²⁷ Edward Malone provides a telling example: while he often asserts that the martyrdom of intent or metaphorical death was, for ancient authors like Clement, “in a real sense martyrdom,”²⁸ he nonetheless repeatedly distinguishes between “spiritual martyrdom” and “real martyrdom.”²⁹ More recently, Carole Straw, in summarizing Augustine’s views on martyrdom for the encyclopedic *Augustine through the Ages*, distinguishes between “literal” martyrdom and “spiritual” martyrdom, even though Augustine makes no such distinction and, in fact, goes out of his way to say that the “literal” meaning of martyrdom would be “witness”—something Straw herself notes!³⁰

Across the board, then, the concept of the living martyr is seldom directly addressed, and it is never theorized in such a way as to reflect back on martyrdom more generally. More importantly, knowledge of the existence of “living martyrs” and the awareness that Christians have not always considered death necessary to martyrdom have not prompted a move to redefine the term “martyr.” Nor has there been any sustained discussion of what expanding our definition to the living might mean or what impact it might have on our understanding of Christian spirituality in different historical contexts. This persistent scholarly oversight is made possible by the vastness of the topic of martyrdom, the explosion of scholarly interest in it, and its many compelling aspects that demand focused attention. But it is exacerbated by the (quite reasonable) impulse to elide living martyrs with their dead counterparts, to say that their categorization as martyrs is a result of overextended similes, rhetorical posturing, or propagandistic scheming on the part of the authors arguing for their status as martyrs.

This is the situation I seek to remedy with this book. I argue, based on readings of the martyrological work of Paulinus, Prudentius, and Augustine, that an awareness of the living martyrs’ roles in late antique spirituality can aid in our knowledge of that spirituality and in our knowledge of the value of martyrdom in Late Antiquity more generally; this mode of analysis, rather than any single definition, can then be applied to any situation where martyrdom or martyrdom discourse appears to be in use. My aim is to demonstrate that re-focusing our gaze on what our authors claim martyrdom is and does will enable an enhanced understanding of the role of martyrdom in Christian history and in wider discourse.

6 Rethinking Martyrdom

Such an intervention is long overdue. The prevalent tendency of modern scholars is to overlook and dismiss mentions of living martyrs. This was Thomas Aquinas's response as well. Confronted with the examples of "Jerome" and Gregory the Great bestowing martyr status on the unexecuted and the example of Marcellus being venerated as a martyr, Aquinas writes: "The authorities cited here, and others of the same kind, speak of martyrdom figuratively" (*per quamdam similitudinem*).³¹ With this dismissal, Aquinas gives the concept only slightly shorter shrift than modern scholars are accustomed to do.

Such dismissal does not do justice to Paulinus, who argues compellingly that Felix is, in fact, a martyr of no less (and possibly greater) standing than those who shed blood; it does not do justice to Prudentius's expression of privilege at having access to a martyr who did not die; it does not do justice to Augustine's vehemently asserted ideology of living martyrdom. It glosses over the understandings of martyrdom that Commodian, John Chrysostom, Caesarius of Arles, Gregory the Great, and so many others expressed and propagated. To the extent that we might still want to say that these authors were dissembling or promoting "dubious" martyrs for their own profit, we must acknowledge that, in reality, *all* martyrs must be argued for³² and that these martyrs are therefore no different from others in that respect. These authors may have sensed that they needed to "sell" their constructions of martyrdom to their contemporaries, but that does not mean that they did not themselves believe in their constructions. In fact, the urgency of their advocacy indicates the opposite, that they believed enough in their constructions of martyrdom that they felt it was worth advocating for them.

If we are to understand what martyrdom meant to Christians in a given time and place, we need to take their professed understandings seriously, to seek out the full picture of what martyrdom meant to them—how it affected and was shaped by their worldviews, how it fit into their theological and ecclesiological ideologies—and, finally, to ascertain what impact their understanding of martyrdom had on the spirituality of the audiences before whom they were advocating their martyrs. Focusing on death as the sole criterion for martyrdom limits what we see and are aware of, both in terms of the authors' aims and in terms of the practitioner's experience; it excludes from our observation and analysis a real form of martyrial consciousness and closes off from our understanding a significant element of late antique spirituality. Just as travelers might make pilgrimages to far-flung ascetics in order to participate in the biblical past,³³ so too would pilgrims attend the feast day of St. Felix with spiritual expectations. How did the fact of Felix's peaceful death affect that experience? How did Felix's post-martyrdom life make him a better martyr, more able to connect with Nolan Christians and more representative of true Christian witness in the minds of those who visited his shrine? Failing to treat living martyrs as real martyrs discounts and distorts the real experience of Christian practitioners and believers.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In an effort to access a fuller range of martyrial thought in Late Antiquity, and in order to give voice to the real or hoped-for experiences of Christian practitioners and believers in the late antique Latin West, I have focused this book on the martyrological works of Prudentius (c. 348–413), Paulinus (353–431), and Augustine (354–430). In each case, I use close and historically contextualized readings of their texts to establish the author’s understanding of martyrdom and how living martyrs—martyrs who do not die in persecution but achieve martyrdom through other means—play into that understanding. I explore the arguments they make for their martyrs and how those arguments are presented. Ultimately, I establish that all three authors not only argued for martyrdom without death but also sought to inculcate in their audiences a martyrial consciousness—a worldview that allowed them to think of themselves as martyrs and to become martyrs themselves.

In Chapter 1, “Destabilizing Death: Prudentius’s *Peristephanon*,” I explore the martyrological poetry of Prudentius, looking at his treatments of the martyrs Quirinus, Vincent, Encratis, Gaius, and Crementius to identify the myriad ways in which the poet advocates dissociating martyrdom from death. Prudentius uses his mastery of classical literary and rhetorical techniques to work upon and within his readers to make his case both persuasive and seemingly intuitive. Chapter 2, “Modeling the Living Martyr: Witness in and through Poetry,” argues that with death thus destabilized, the notion of witness emerges to take its place as the signal characteristic of martyrdom, and not just for the martyrs already discussed: Prudentius ultimately seeks to teach his readers how to become martyrs themselves through their own mediated witness.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I turn to Paulinus of Nola. Chapter 3, “Paulinus of Nola and the Living Martyr,” charts Paulinus’s martyrological program as he seeks through his poetry and letters to defend the martyr status of his patron saint Felix, despite Felix’s failure to die in persecution. Paulinus adduces other living martyrs as well and, in the process of defending them all, configures martyrdom as primarily an embodied reorientation to God. This new worldview coheres with other elements of Paulinus’s spirituality, such as his attitudes toward friendship and poverty, so that understanding his martyrological spirituality helps make his whole Christian outlook more intelligible. In Chapter 4, “Making Martyrs in the Nolan Countryside,” I argue that, like Prudentius, Paulinus sought to extend the possibility of martyrdom to his contemporaries. Rather than advocating a shift in worldview alone, as Prudentius had done, Paulinus seeks to cultivate an ethic of imitation to complement that worldview. This imitation, like Prudentius’s worldview, is based on an understanding of the centrality of witness, which Paulinus nonetheless characterizes as ambiguous—the potential illegibility of witness necessitates an authorized and authoritative interpreter.

Chapter 5, “*Non Poena Sed Causa*,” turns to Augustine’s *Sermones ad populum* to highlight the ubiquity and utility of the figure of the living martyr in the late antique West, tying the poetic and rhetorical activism pursued by Paulinus and Prudentius to Augustine’s explicit pastoral activism. This chapter demonstrates the centrality of living martyrdom to Augustine’s martyrial thinking as expressed in his sermons. Chapter 6, “Augustine and the Life of Martyrdom,” describes the life of martyrdom that Augustine advocated his listeners adopt and investigates the rhetorical techniques Augustine employed to make the life of martyrdom a reality for his contemporaries.

In the Conclusion of the book, I argue for the importance of a reconsideration of martyrdom beyond the late ancient context. After synthesizing the findings of my chapters to highlight the ways this research necessitates a total rethinking of martyrdom, I then address the broader question of how we might attempt to define martyrdom—that is, how scholars of history and religion might change our “search terms” so as to better identify and understand martyrdom discourse in any historical or contemporary context. I conclude with a discussion of the dire need for such analyses, both in the realm of historiography and in the realm of contemporary political discourse.

This book offers one further key tool to readers interested in martyrdom beyond the late ancient context: my account of witness. In order to examine the range of what Prudentius, Paulinus, and Augustine considered to be martyrdom, I had to reckon (as each of them did) with the concept of the Greek term’s literal meaning. Based on the uses of witness that I observed in these authors’ works, I here develop a more precise and functional taxonomy of witness that amplifies the three primary ways that witness operates: as observation, as testimony, and as enactment. I hope that this account will be helpful, even if only heuristically, well beyond the confines of this project. This tripartite witness is elaborated in Chapter 2 (pages 51–52) and then applied throughout the other chapters.

READING AND RECEIVING THE CREATION OF MARTYRIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

I have pursued my readings of Prudentius, Paulinus, and Augustine with an eye toward uncovering worldviews—both those assumed by the authors and those advocated by them. A worldview is, essentially, a sort of feedback loop that allows humans to negotiate self and world. It is at once the starting point, the end-point, and the processing capability of identity. The worldview is the lens through which we understand ourselves and the world around us. It is the filtering process by which we add our perceptions (interpreted by means of our starting-point worldview) to the reservoir of what we think we know. It is also the end-point, our new starting point, in which our newly added knowledge is taken for granted and becomes the assumed and

the “natural,” the new starting point from which we now evaluate all future stimuli.³⁴ The worldview limits what we can incorporate into “the known,” and it limits the resonances any experience can stimulate. Its all-encompassing nature is well-described by Eugene F. Miller:

All human expressions point beyond themselves to the characteristic world view (*Weltanschauung*) of the epoch or culture to which they belong. This underlying impulse or spirit makes the culture a whole and determines the shape of all thought and evaluation within it.³⁵

The worldview is constantly being reinforced and remade. It can also, to an extent determined in part by the worldview itself, be harnessed and re-trained.³⁶ The goal of creating, re-training, or reinforcing a worldview is to form a coherent community of believers whose shared outlook and expectations would allow their communal identity to remain vigorous and distinctive, regardless of context.

In order to access the late antique martyrial *épistémè*³⁷—the imaginative reality of living martyrdom—I have taken cues from a number of scholars who subject their texts to rhetorical, ideological, and literary analysis in order to obtain a sense of what effects the texts were aspiring to. I follow Averil Cameron’s model of taking linguistic and rhetorical choices seriously in order to glean a sense of how authors used discourse to implant “‘habits of the heart’ more powerful than institutions and more lasting than social welfare.”³⁸ Just as she notes, for instance, the use of biography rather than historiography as the primary vehicle for Christian identity narratives and the theologically productive use of paradox within those biographies, I focus on the choice to use martyr discourse to convey Christian worldviews and look for the rhetorical tools authors employ to make their narratives “better.”³⁹ My close readings are modeled on those of Patricia Cox Miller, who, in her investigation of how late ancient authors appealed to their readers’ sensory imaginations, demonstrates exemplary attention to detail and rhetorical technique.⁴⁰ I have been particularly inspired by her application of Bill Brown’s “Thing Theory” to ancient texts, looking for moments of fissure, incongruity, or excess that might signal “a change in habitual perception” or a demand for further attention.⁴¹ My reading practices are also informed by Natalie Zemon Davis’s approach, demonstrated in *Fiction in the Archives*, of acknowledging the fact of fiction—the fictive or formative elements that comprise the crafting of any narrative.⁴² Davis establishes the bounds within which sixteenth-century pardon tales sought to achieve persuasion and the tropes that petitioners used and finessed to their purposes; I likewise sought context-appropriate guidelines for my analyses by assessing comparable documents and contemporary theories of reader engagement.

I have tried, in other words, as much as possible, to analyze the texts from within their own *épistémès*. I do not want to suggest that such

things as *épistémès* or authorial intent or even intended meaning are easily or unproblematically retrievable. Nor do I allow a lack of contextual precedent to circumscribe my readings. Rather, I have sought to use an awareness of the cultural possibilities of representation to enhance my ability to see innovative or understated techniques that themselves, in turn, expand our knowledge of the boundaries and character of the *épistémè*.

Examining and expanding our knowledge of *épistémès* in this way is an important historiographical tool. It is notoriously difficult to establish what the reception of these and other ideas may have been on a large and representative scale, so the historian's assessment must in part rely on reconstructions of what was plausible and imaginatively possible in any given historical context. In much the same way that we tentatively assume laws are written with contemporary intent and that an imperial edict banning a practice generally means that the practice was either being engaged in or was feared to be, we can assume that arguments about living martyrdom and martyrdom without death would only have been made to audiences that were assumed to have been at least potentially receptive to them. Prudentius, Paulinus, and Augustine would not have argued that martyrdom does not require death if: (a) most of their contemporaries did not assume that martyrdom *did* require death and (b) they did not think their contemporaries could be corrected on this point and could be persuaded to adopt an idea of martyrdom without death. Establishing that the life of martyrdom existed within this late ancient milieu, even as an imagined possibility for these elite authors, can thus offer us insight into their audiences' spiritual realities, worldviews, and imaginative experiences because we can get a sense of what their spiritual aspirations could plausibly have been assumed to be. In other words, if these authors thought that the life of martyrdom would be appealing and compelling to their audiences, we can tentatively assume that it would have been among the many options imaginatively or aspirationally available to those audiences, and that living martyrdom was incorporated into their spiritual horizons; this means that living martyrdom was, indeed, to *some* degree, part of their lived, experiential realities as they navigated those horizons.⁴³

That said, I do examine possible receptions of these ideas whenever they are available. Acknowledging the value of epistemic analysis for historiography does not mean ignoring other evidence. Looking at manuscript histories and subsequent uses of these authors' works, we can indeed find some indications of how these ideas about living martyrdom were received by contemporaries and by the next generation(s) of readers and culture-makers. But the record is, frankly, ambiguous. Some subsequent evidence shows the idea of living martyrdom to have been well-received or at least accepted without comment, while other evidence seems to indicate a rejection of or a failure to understand the arguments being made for living martyrdom. For example, Gregory of Tours in 587 included Felix as a martyr

in his compilation of martyr stories (*Liber in Gloria Martyrum*) rather than including him among the confessors (where he puts Paulinus). This would seem to indicate that Gregory agreed that one did not have to die to be a martyr. But despite including at the end of his account that Felix died a peaceful death, he prefaces his entry on Felix with the statement that “the story of Felix’s passion is not available,”⁴⁴ which indicates the possibility that he thought Felix must have encountered some violent but unrecorded trial in order to be classed as a martyr. On what grounds did Gregory think that Felix’s martyrdom was incomplete? And what prompted Gregory to maintain a distinction between martyrs and confessors (so much so as to give them each their own compendium!) and yet to place Felix among the former? The evidence for the reception of the idea of living martyrdom is ambiguous; the evidence of the *épistémè* must therefore bear a larger share of the historian’s attention.

But if we are to talk of *épistémès*, we must be a little more attentive to who the audiences were whose worldviews Prudentius, Paulinus, and Augustine thought they could influence. These, after all, were men who numbered among the elite in status and education (as well as in wealth, though Augustine’s access came largely vicariously), and they certainly had their own agendas and their own prejudices about which of their listeners and readers “counted.” In each case, however, there is some evidence that, while the idiom and form of their works were geared toward a largely elite audience, these authors intended their messages about living martyrdom to be disseminated widely, beyond the elite, and to be applicable to a wide range of Christians. I will discuss this evidence at some length in the chapters to follow.

RETHINKING MARTYRDOM

One of the more common objections to the idea of “living martyrs” is that a term for such would-be martyrs already exists: “confessor.” Martyrs die for their causes, while confessors suffer persecution and are willing to die, but ultimately live to tell the tale.⁴⁵ However, this designation is as fraught, as habitually over-simplified, and as improperly retrojected into historical sources as is the idea that martyrdom requires death. The idea that “martyr” and “confessor” represented two separate categories of sanctity is not uniformly represented or even prevalent in our late ancient evidence; any official distinction between those who are perfected in martyrdom and those who have to settle for sainthood as confessors is a later development, seemingly gaining dominance in the late fifth century but perhaps not firmly established in cultic practice until the ninth.⁴⁶ But as we know from the fact that so many Christians labeled as “martyrs” people who did not die in persecution even when an alternate title was clearly available to them, this bifurcation between martyrs and confessors has never reflected the totality of Christian practice and belief.

A brief glance at the late ancient context reveals the complexity of the situation on the ground. Where the term “confessor” was available and in use,⁴⁷ there was often no clear distinction between the categories of confessor and martyr: Cyprian of Carthage, who is credited with originating the terminology of “confessor,” often himself used the terms interchangeably;⁴⁸ Prudentius (as I discuss in Chapter 1) does not distinguish between “confessor” and “martyr” but instead uses the former as a descriptor of the latter; meanwhile, Paulinus (as I discuss in Chapter 4) understands the martyr and the confessor to have two separate crowns but considers them to be simultaneously attainable. These were not mutually exclusive terms.⁴⁹

Some texts do indeed distinguish between those who die in persecution and those who have not (yet) done so. The *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne* is the earliest and most famous example of this, as the Christians being persecuted are described as rejecting the title of “martyr”; it was their joy to yield the title of martyr to Christ and to those who had witnessed to Christ by their deaths:

. . . They would not proclaim themselves to be martyrs, and they would not allow us to greet them by that name, but if one of us by chance in a letter or in speech called them martyrs, they would rebuke them harshly. For they joyfully yielded the name of martyr to Christ, the faithful and true witness, first-born of the dead and originator of life in God, and being mindful of those martyrs who had already gone, they said: “Those already are martyrs, whom Christ has deemed worthy to take up in confession (ἐν τῇ ὁμολογίᾳ), sealing their witness (τὴν μαρτυρίαν) through death. But we are common and lowly confessors (ὁμολογοί),” and with tears they cried out to their brethren, asking that prayers be offered that they might be perfected.⁵⁰

But even here, there is tension within the text: the narrator has already been calling these Christians “martyrs” throughout the description of their ordeals and insisting that they had, indeed, “witnessed”: the narrator describes them as “having won such glory—and having witnessed (μαρτυρήσαντες) not just once but twice or many times, having been brought back again from the beasts wearing burns and bruises and wounds.”⁵¹ Indeed, the martyrs’ reluctance to claim the title of “martyr” seems to be one of the grounds by which they are deemed worthy of being called martyrs:

And in truth they demonstrated in deed the power of testimony (τῆς μαρτυρίας), acting with great boldness toward the Gentiles, and they made their nobility apparent through humility, their fearlessness, and their heroism. But they, filled with fear of God, declined the name of “witnesses” (τῶν μαρτύρων) from their brethren.⁵²

Of course, one could understand the narrator's persistent use of "martyr" to be a product of his knowledge that these particular Christians do, in fact, perish during their ordeals. But even if that were the case, even if there were no ambiguity whatsoever in how the text distinguishes martyrs and confessors, we would be no closer to establishing that such a distinction had wide endorsement beyond this text. We must always be wary of reading later developments into earlier texts; we must always be wary of falsely assuming homogeneity among extant sources as well as among the historical circumstances they represent; and we must always be wary of assuming that an "official" ecclesiastical position reflects the reality of religion lived on the ground.

To illustrate how easily such importations and impositions can occur (and how difficult it can be to circumvent habitual thinking about martyrdom), we need only look at James Kelhoffer's examination of the role of confessors at the Council of Nicaea in 325.⁵³ Kelhoffer challenges the conventional wisdom—endorsed by T. D. Barnes, Ramsay MacMullen, Averil Cameron, Stuart Hall, and others—that confessors had special influence and authority at the council. Such claims appear to be based on the evidence of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, writing roughly 100 years after the council, and other fifth-century commentators. But no sources contemporary to the council mention confessors being present at the council, let alone having special authority. While this is an argument from silence, it is fairly persuasive because one of our sources for the council is Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote extensively on martyrs elsewhere and who is responsible for preserving the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, discussed above. Kelhoffer is careful to say that he cannot disprove assertions about the presence and authority of confessors at Nicaea; rather, he demonstrates that there is no evidence for such claims. The fact that such rigorous scholars as Barnes, Cameron, Hall, and MacMullen have endorsed an idea unsubstantiated by contemporary evidence is telling—it shows how difficult it is to avoid interpolating our own received understandings into our readings of ancient or otherwise "othered" sources. That bishops who had survived persecution constituted a special class of council attendees is a truism in part because scholars are familiar with Cyprian's treatment of confessors and the veneration of martyrs and martyrdom by fourth-century Christians. It makes sense, but it is, nonetheless, merely an unsupported assumption. Kelhoffer's argument shows the importance of attending to our sources, of following their leads. And yet, *he too* is vulnerable to the same errors: throughout his article, he refers to those who had survived persecution as "confessors," even though the only source that accords them a title (rather than a description) refers to these bishops as "martyrs." This is precisely why this present book is a necessary project: our habits of thought about martyrdom require further, and pointed, disruption.

How, then, should we discuss martyrdom in the absence of a singular definition? How do we disrupt our own definitional tendencies? Quite

simply, the place to begin is to attend to our sources. In this book, I follow the lead of the authors whose work I am analyzing, focusing on how they use the term, and how they understand the concept. This is not to say that precise terminology is always required for a concept to be under discussion—an assumption that Bryan Van Norden labels the “lexical fallacy”⁵⁴—nor should we assume that similarity in terminology indicates similarity in concepts. But Prudentius, Paulinus, and Augustine all use the terminology of martyrdom and, what is more, seem to be understanding martyrdom in mutually intelligible ways. In the Conclusion I will discuss how we can investigate martyrdom and martyrdom discourse when we do not have a corresponding term, but the first challenge this book must surmount is to show that the word, when used, does not always mean what we think it means.

As historians, our focus should be on how terms and concepts are used, rather than on any “ideal” definition. If we define “martyrdom” without a full awareness of its significance to those attempting to use it, what they thought it meant, and where they thought its power lay, we are closing ourselves off not only from seeing its full polyvalent power but also from recognizing representations of martyrdom. Paul Middleton provides an excellent example of such definitional deficiency within the history of scholarship on martyrdom. He argues that by following Clement of Alexandria’s lead and dismissing the martyr status of those who actively sought out arrest and martyrdom—the so-called “radical martyrs”—modern scholars had formed an incomplete picture of what martyrdom meant to the earliest Christians, a picture that did not do enough justice to the notion of martyrs as combatants in a cosmic conflict whose deaths were seen as actively contributing to their causes.⁵⁵

In a similar fashion, we cannot understand the full range and utility of martyrdom discourse if we do not take into account the full range of those who, at various points in Christian history, could be depicted as martyrs and what the criteria for martyrdom were for those who advocated for them. Because the term “martyr” is “not an ontological category but a post-event interpretive one,”⁵⁶ these living martyrs are, in fact, simply martyrs—no less validly martyred than the archetypal early Christian lion fodder. The broad presence of these martyrs throughout Christian history makes any definition of martyrdom that hinges on death inadequate, and so whatever definition of martyrdom we adopt must recognize that death was not essential to the representation, power, and significance of the martyr. We need to know how and why these living martyrs fit into the larger understanding of what a martyr is and what a martyr can mean.

Furthermore, any definition of martyrdom must be broad enough to include multiple and (potentially conflicting) ideologies while still presenting a category distinctive enough to allow comparison and discussion. Martyrdom is not a single phenomenon, with a single or simple ideal form

or function or subject to a universal understanding. As Candida Moss argues, martyr *acta*, even within the relatively narrow time period of the pre-Constantinian church, reflected different understandings of what martyrdom was and what it meant. Comparing these early martyr *acta*, she shows that, despite formal similarities, their theological and soteriological underpinnings differed widely. The martyr's death signified vastly different things from text to text. She concludes: "Just as we speak of ancient Christianities, we should speak of ancient ideologies of martyrdom."⁵⁷ The differences in martyr ideologies require that we interpret each martyr text individually for what it can tell us of its own understanding of martyrdom. This is not to say we cannot challenge the text's self-understanding, but we do need to seek out its gaps, what it assumes, what it argues, what positions it is arguing against, what pressures it seems to be reflecting, and what pressures it is trying to exert upon its readers. We need to compare texts to see in what ways they are communicating with one another, but the comparison should highlight, rather than elide, differences in how texts understand and represent martyrs. In short, as we define what martyrdom is, we need to allow for broad boundaries but also internal variety. Only then can we begin to overcome the lexical fallacy and identify martyrdom in locations where the term is not explicitly used; only then can we get an accurate picture of what martyrdom has meant to Christians throughout history and the many ways it has been diffused through discourse.

SURVIVING MARTYRDOM

This book thus offers a threefold corrective to current scholarship on martyrdom: a historical corrective, a historiographical corrective, and a political corrective. Each of these correctives is reflected in the subtitle of the book, *Surviving Martyrdom*.

The historical corrective consists in showing that martyrdom is something that a Christian, by many Christian accounts, could survive. These "living martyrs" did, in fact, exist as real objects of spiritual devotion and emulation at various points in Christian history. Through historically contextualized readings of their work, I show that Prudentius, Paulinus of Nola, and Augustine of Hippo all attempted to create new paradigms of martyrdom that did not require the martyr's death. By focusing on these living martyrs, we are able to see more clearly the aspirations and agendas of those who promoted them as martyrs and how their martyr-ological discourse illuminates the variety of ways that martyrdom is and can be mobilized to construct new, community-creating worldviews.

The historiographical corrective demands that we, as scholars, change our "search terms" as we sift through historical material to find martyrs and martyrial discourse—to change how we define and locate martyrdom—so that we can recognize the full array of what Christians have designated as

martyrdom and glean the fullest possible picture of how martyrial discourse is deployed. Focusing on death as the sole criterion for martyrdom limits what we see and are aware of; it precludes us from observing and analyzing a real, historical form of martyrial consciousness, closing off from our understanding a significant element of Christian spirituality. In other words, we need to recognize the ways that martyrdom, as a phenomenon or cluster of phenomena, survives beyond the limitations of parochial definitions.

The political corrective is also crucial: we need to recognize the full range of martyrdom discourse, which expands in scope and deepens in intensity when we recognize the possibility of *living* with a martyrial consciousness rather than dying to merit the title. Once death is removed as a criterion, martyrdom proliferates. It is this recognition that underpins my final understanding of the subtitle of the book. Martyrdom is not only something that martyrs could survive; it is also a discourse that survives, resilient and persistent, across a variety of historical and cultural contexts and on into the present.

Notes

1. Paulinus, *Natalicium* 8.384–394 (CCSL 21, 379): *Omni namque die testes sumus undique crebris / Coetibus aut sanos gratantia reddere vota / Aut aegros varias petere ac sentire medelas; / Cernimus et multos peregrino a litore vectos / Ante sacram sancti prostratos martyris aulam, / dum referunt grates, tolerata referre pericla, / testantes validis collisa naue procellis / se raptos miserante deo, Felicis et ipsa / educente manu maris emersisse profundo / et desperatam placidos cepisse salutem, / Felicis meritis et aquas et cedere flammis.* All translations in this book are my own unless otherwise stated.
2. For the exorcisms, see *Natalicium* 8.307–353.
3. *Natalicium* 1.5; 1.9.
4. *Natalicium* 3.10–12 (CCSL 21, 298): *martyrium sine caede placet si prompta ferendi / mensque fidesque Deo caleat; passura voluntas / sufficit, et summa est meriti, testatio voti.*
5. Paulinus, *Epistula* 18.9.
6. Despite Felix’s post-martyrdom poverty and humble behavior, Paulinus never tries to link him to the “spiritual martyrdom” of monasticism, a fact that suggests that the concept was perhaps not as well-defined (or as “uniform and definite”) as Edward E. Malone argues it was by this time. The differences between Paulinus’s treatment of Felix and Sulpicius Severus’s treatment of Martin, where he wants to call him a martyr but explicitly refrains from doing so (*Epistula* 2.9–12), demonstrate this fairly clearly. See Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 44.
7. Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 4.109–144.
8. *Peristephanon* 10.828–830.
9. Augustine, *Sermo* 53A, 13; 94A, 1; 274; 275, 1; 285, 2; 306, 2; 306A; 325, 2; 327, 1; 328, 4; 331, 2; 335, 2; 335C, 5ff., 335G, 2; 359B, 16–20.
10. For “martyr” meaning “witness,” see Augustine, *Sermo* 299F, 1; 335A, 1; and 319, 3. For suffering on a sickbed, see Augustine, *Sermo* 286; 335D, 3; and 335D, 5. For spreading the word of God, see Augustine, *Sermo* 260E, 2. For fighting temptation, see Augustine, *Sermo* 328, 8 and 303, 2. For hidden martyrs, see Augustine, *Sermo* 306E, 6. For discussion and further examples, see Chapter 5.

11. Malone, *Monk and Martyr*, 8–43. Malone traces the development of non-fatal aspects of martyrdom into monasticism, and the monk’s emergence as the new martyr via a spiritual martyrdom. But not all post-persecution martyrial fervor was channeled into monasticism, as we shall see in Prudentius, Paulinus, and Augustine, and I am more interested in instances where the martyrs were not also identified as monks.
12. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae.124, 4, 52: *Quamdiu autem homini remanet vita corporalis, nondum opere se ostendit temporalia cuncta despiciere: consueverunt enim homines et consanguineos et omnia bona possessa contemnere, et etiam dolores corporis pati, ut vitam conservent . . . Et ideo ad perfectam rationem martyrii requiritur quod aliquis mortem sustineat propter Christum.*
13. On establishing its discursive character, see Mikael C. Haxby “The First Apocalypse of James: Martyrdom and Sexual Difference” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013), 11–15. On narrative community, see Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 34: “Martyrdom is not simply an action. Martyrdom requires audience (whether real or fictive), retelling, interpretation, and world- and meaning-making activity. Suffering violence in and of itself is not enough. In order for martyrdom to emerge, both the violence and its suffering must be infused with particular meanings. . . . Martyrdom always implies a broader narrative that invokes notions of justice and the right ordering of the cosmos.” On “reputational entrepreneurs,” see Michaela DeSoucey et al., “Memory and Sacrifice: An Embodied Theory of Martyrdom,” *Cultural Sociology* 2, no. 1 (2008): 99–121. For “radical” martyrs, see Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006). On complicating the notion that there was but one ideology of martyrdom, see Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), viii.
14. Moss, *Other Christs*, 75.
15. Michael L. Budde and Karen Scott, eds., *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), viii.
16. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 285.
17. For Thecla’s reputation and veneration as martyr despite surviving her ordeals, see Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 134–171. For Marcellus, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae.124, 4.3.
18. See Commodian, *Instructionum libri ii* 2.17 (“To the one wishing for martyrdom”) and 2.18 (“The Daily War”), as well as Diane Fruchtman, “Scaffolding Reality: Acrostics and Identity in Commodian’s *Instructiones*,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 12, no. 1 (2019): 34–38.
19. On Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve, see Danna Pirovansky, “‘Thus May a Man Be a Martyr’: The Notion, Language, and Experiences of Martyrdom in Late Medieval England,” in *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England, c. 1400–1700*, eds. Thomas S. Freeman and Thomas F. Mayer (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 70–87, here 72–73, 84.
20. Pirovansky, “Thus May a Man Be a Martyr,” 84–85. *Hoccleve’s Works: The Minor Poems*, eds. Frederick J. Furnivall and I. Gollanez, Early English Text Society, e.s. 61, 73 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970; revised reprint in one volume), 97, lines 62–63. Modernization by Pirovansky.

21. Paschasius Radbertus, *De assumptione sanctae Mariae uirginis*.
22. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistula* 64, to Eusebius of Samosata, 5. Translation by Bradley K. Storin (*Gregory of Nazianzus's Letter Collection: The Complete Translation* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019], 167) to whom I am grateful for the reference.
23. For John Chrysostom's repeated insistence in his homilies that Christians can be martyrs without persecution by such means as avoiding "pagan" practices, see Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 80. See also Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 175. Gaddis also here discusses Caesarius of Arles, who, in his *Sermo* 52, argues that "whoever gives testimony to Christ for the sake of justice will be, without a doubt, a martyr; and whoever resists the defenders of dissipation and persecutors of chastity out of love for God, will receive the crown of martyrdom." Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 52.1 (CCSL 103): *quicumque testimonium pro iustitia dederit christo, sine dubio martyr erit; et quicumque defensoribus luxuriae et persecutoribus castitatis pro dei amore restiterit, martyrii coronam accipiet*. For Gregory the Great, see *Homiliae in euangelia*, 2.
24. For instance, in treatments of Paulinus, Catherine Conybeare identifies Felix as "an obscure saint and dubious martyr" (*Paulinus Noster: Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000], 52), while Dennis Trout refers to him alternately as "confessor," "saint," and "martyr," following Paulinus's usage and abstaining from any judgments about the authenticity of his martyrdom (*Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, Poems* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999]).
25. Michael Gaddis, for instance, notes that, for Caesarius of Arles, Maximus of Turin, and John Chrysostom, the meaning of martyrdom "stretches all the way from suffering violence to inflicting it. Far from its original sense of resistance to persecuting authorities, martyrial rhetoric here is used to justify the disciplinary, corrective violence carried out by Christian authorities willing to 'persecute' for the sake of spreading the gospel" (Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*, 175). Because Gaddis is less concerned with the changing understanding of martyrdom than with its mobilization for the sake of legitimating violence in specific historical contexts, he neither attempts a redefinition nor expands his inquiry to the meaning of martyrdom as a whole. Lucy Grig, meanwhile, although she does an excellent job of demonstrating Paulinus's attempt to number Felix among the martyrs (since "martyr status was still the summit of saintly perfection") declines to discuss how including living martyrs in the catalog of martyrdom might affect the character or extent of that summit (Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* [London: Duckworth, 2004], 106). On this same assumption—that martyrs should, in fact, die, Elizabeth Castelli refers to Thecla as "a martyr who, paradoxically, did not die a martyr's death" (*Martyrdom and Memory*, 135). It is noteworthy that the same fifth-century text that first memorializes Thecla in narrative as a "martyr" not only maintains her peaceful death after having already achieved martyrdom but also amplifies it, suggesting that Thecla simply does not die. Ever. Dethroning the assumption that martyrs must die would affect Castelli's argument. The story that Castelli recreates is of an ascetic, sexually abstinent, itinerant preacher morphed by the processes of memory-making into an archetypical virgin martyr.

- The very title of “martyr” seems to be evidence for Castelli of a destructive reading of Thecla’s text: by calling her a martyr, the fifth-century author, on Castelli’s reading, is beginning the process of elision and erasure. But, if the fifth-century author’s understanding of martyrdom did not depend on death but, rather, for instance, on witness, the use of the term “martyr” would serve as a confirmation and expansion of Thecla’s apostolic witness, rather than a diminution of it.
26. Miri Rubin, “Choosing Death? Experiences of Martyrdom in Late Medieval Europe,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and the 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 153–184; Pirovansky, “Thus May a Man Be a Martyr.” Pirovansky, covering a somewhat smaller terrain than Rubin, is able to conclude, based on the pervasiveness of martyr language, that “the interpretation of the world through a martyrological prism” was available to all and was used to make sense of suffering encountered in everyday life (87).
 27. An exception to this would be David Brakke’s treatment of Antony as new martyr, which has the effect of highlighting the element of spiritual combat against demons present in martyrdom accounts. But even Brakke is not interested in redefining martyrdom; he does not force us to rethink the phenomenon as a whole (nor is that his object). See Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Examinations of the ascetic’s role as new martyr can certainly shed light on the utility of martyrdom: on the desire of its continuance; on the weight it carried in the Christian mind; on the roles that it served that needed to be filled by some other athlete of God. But, again, martyrdom is not the emphasis; its definition is not expanded to include the phenomena helping to illuminate it.
 28. Malone, *Monk and Martyr*, 14.
 29. See, for example, Malone, *Monk and Martyr*, 18, 19, 37, 41, 46.
 30. Carole Straw, “Martyrdom,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 538–541.
 31. *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae. 124,4 (Blackfriars edition, vol. 42): *Ergo dicendum quod illae auctoritates, et si quae similes inveniuntur loquuntur de martyrio per quamdam similitudinem*. Aquinas has attributed to Jerome a letter we now know to have been by Paschasius Radbertus (*De assumptione sanctae Mariae uirginis*).
 32. Thanks to Mikael Haxby for this succinct phrasing.
 33. Georgia Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 33.
 34. In this sense, the worldview plays a similar role to narrative, in the sense elaborated by Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 23–25, 27–37. Myths, which Lincoln redefines as narratives with authority, are the basis by which we classify our experience, and that in turn governs how we classify ourselves. Thomas Sizgorich uses such a concept of narrative to illuminate communal boundaries in Late Antiquity in his *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
 35. Eugene F. Miller, “Positivism, Historicism, and Political Inquiry,” *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 3 (September 1972): 796–817, quoted at 801.

36. For a wonderful example of worldview creation in progress, see the work of Nancy Pearcey, particularly *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004). Pearcey is an Evangelical Christian and Intelligent Design proponent who advocates Christian worldview construction: “[This book] will walk you through practical, workable steps for crafting a Christian worldview in your own life and work. And it will teach you how to apply a worldview grid to cut through the bewildering maze of ideas and ideologies we encounter in a postmodern world” (17). She describes how the Christian must revise every aspect of life, thought, perception, and valuation to cohere with a biblical perspective centered on the suffering and redemption of Christ: “The spiritual reality of *rejected, slain, raised* lies at the heart of everything in the Christian life, including the work of developing a Christian mind” (378).
37. That is, “the epistemological field . . . in which knowledge . . . grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility” (Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1971], xxii).
38. Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 28.
39. Cameron writes: “The better these stories were constructed, the better they functioned as structure-maintaining narratives and the more their audiences were disposed to accept them as true” (*Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 93). Much of my concern here lies with what constituted a “better” narrative—what did authors think they could do to make the narrative more compelling? What made the martyr-narrative “better” for them?
40. Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 7.
41. Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001): 1–21; Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 2.
42. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 3.
43. This is rather akin to what Lisa Kaaren Bailey describes in *Religious Worlds of the Laity in Late Antique Gaul* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 9: “The author was required to imagine the audience, and to write with their reception in mind. The audience therefore played a role in shaping the text, along with the author.”
44. 103.1 (SS rer. Merov 557): *quia historia passionis non est in promptu*.
45. Everett Ferguson, “Confessor,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, Second Edition*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Routledge, 1999), 274.
46. Samuel Collins argues for the development of a distinct cult for confessors in Milan at the end of the fifth century, but, notably, his conclusions do not necessarily apply beyond Milan, and it is unclear whether the bishops presented alongside martyrs were understood to be members of a distinct category of saint (“From Martyrs’ Cults to Confessors’ Cults in Late Antique Milan: The Mosaics of San Vittore in Ciel d’Oro,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 5, no. 2 [2012]: 225–249). We get a clear sense of distinction with Gregory of Tours, who composed two separate treatises (*Liber in Gloria Martyrum* [GM] and *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*) and understood the differentiating criteria to be death: he includes Paulinus’s Felix among the martyrs because he assumes that the story of his passion has been lost (GM 103, see note 44).

- We can posit an official distinction sometime prior to the eleventh century, as a group of Christians prosecuted for heresy in 1025 in Arras were in part targeted because they refused veneration to confessors while accepting the legitimacy of martyr-veneration. See Donald S. Prudlo, *Certain Sainthood: Canonization and the Origins of Papal Infallibility in the Medieval Church* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 48.
47. In Greek, we find locutions such as ὁμολογοί (Eus. Caes. *HE* 5.2.3) and παθόντων εἴνεκα τοῦ ὀνόματος (Hermas, *Vision* 3.1.15), while in Latin we find *confessor* and other variations derived from *confiteor*.
 48. Ferguson, “Confessor,” 247. See also the discussion in Grig, *Making Martyrs*, Chapter 2 (in particular page 22) and 105–106.
 49. Grig’s “Brief History of Martyrdom” in *Making Martyrs* highlights the mutability of the meanings for “confessor” and “martyr” in antiquity, but these insights have not prevented a continued default assumption by most scholarship that there is and was a distinction between “confessors” and “martyrs.” For example, David Eastman depicts the majoritarian view among scholars of the early Church when he writes that “As cults grew in popularity and exposure in [the fourth century], Christians also began to venerate confessors (those who had professed their faith but had not died as martyrs) and others who had been considered particularly holy while alive. The distinction between these different types of holy people became blurred, and Christians commonly referred to all of them as *saints*” (*Paul the Martyr: The Cult of the Apostle in the Latin West* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011], 2–3). This idea that the terminology had at some point been clear but then became fuzzier as Christians adapted to life after Constantine is extremely common but in direct opposition to the historical uses of the terms. This is why we still see scholarship invested in this distinction, such as András Handl’s “Bishop Callistus I. of Rome: a Martyr or a Confessor?” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 18.3 (2014): 390–419. Though Handl briefly acknowledges the unsettled nature of the terminology in the fourth and fifth centuries, he nonetheless maintains the paradigm.
 50. Eus. Caes. *HE* 5.2.2–3: οὐτ’ αὐτοὶ μάρτυρας ἑαυτοὺς ἀνεκήρυττον οὔτε μὴν ἡμῖν ἐπέτρεπον τοῦτῳ τῷ ὀνόματι προσαγορευεῖν αὐτούς, ἀλλ’ εἴ ποτέ τις ἡμῶν δι’ ἐπιστολῆς ἢ δι’ ἀλόγου μάρτυρας αὐτοὺς προσεῖπεν, ἐπέπλησσαν πικρῶς. ἡδέως γὰρ παρεχώρουν τὴν τῆς μαρτυρίας προσηγορίαν τῷ Χριστῷ, τῷ πιστῷ καὶ ἀληθινῷ μάρτυρι καὶ πρωτοτόκῳ τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ἀρχηγῷ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἐπεμιμνήσκοντοτῶν ἐξεληλυθῶτων ἤδη μαρτύρων καὶ ἔλεγον ἑκείνοι ἤδη μάρτυρες, οὓς ἐν τῇ ὁμολογίᾳ Χριστὸς ἠξίωσεν ἀναληφθῆναι, ἐπισφραγισάμενος αὐτῶν διὰ τῆς ἐξόδου τὴν μαρτυρίαν, ἡμεῖς δὲ ὁμολογοί μέτριοι καὶ ταπεινοί, καὶ μετὰ δακρύων παρεκάλουν τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς δεόμενοι ἵνα ἐκτενεῖς εὐχαὶ γίνωνται πρὸς τὸ τελειωθῆναι αὐτούς.
 51. Eus. Caes. *HE* 5.2.2: ὥστε ἐν τοιαύτῃ δόξῃ ὑπάρχοντες καὶ οὐχ ἄπαξ οὐδὲ δις ἀλλὰ πολλάκις μαρτυρήσαντες καὶ ἐκ θηρίων αὐθις ἀναληφθέντες καὶ τὰ καυτήρια καὶ τοὺς μώλωπας καὶ τὰ τραύματα ἔχοντες περικεκίμενα.
 52. Eus. Caes. *HE* 5.2.4: καὶ τὴν μὲν δύναμιν τῆς μαρτυρίας ἔργῳ ἐπεδείκνυτο, πολλὴν παρησίαν ἄγοντες πρὸς τὰ ἔθνη, καὶ τὴν εὐγένειαν διὰ τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ ἀφοβίας καὶ ἀτρομίας φανερὰν ἐποιοῦν, τὴν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς τῶν μαρτύρων προσηγορίαν παρητοῦντο, ἐμπεπλησμένοι φόβου θεοῦ.
 53. James Kelhoffer, “The Search for Confessors at the Council of Nicaea,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19, no. 4 (2011): 589–599.
 54. Bryan Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 22–23.

55. This oversight regarding a major feature of how early Christians understood martyrdom prevented scholars interested in martyrdom's origins from seeing a major potential source of martyr ideology: the paradigm of Jewish Holy War, as represented in the books of the Maccabees, where human deaths offer effective aid to the divine cause. See Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 128–134.
56. Elizabeth A. Castelli, "The Ambivalent Legacy of Violence and Victimhood: Using Early Christian Martyrs to Think With," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 6, no. 1 (2006): 1–24, here 1.
57. Moss, *Other Christs*, viii.