



Marius Victorinus on the *Stigmata* of the Apostle Paul (Gal 6:17)

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Abstract: This discussion of the fourth-century commentary of Marius Victorinus on Paul's epistle to the Galatians serves as a critical witness to late ancient understanding of Paul's self-identification with the *stigmata* of Christ (of Gal 6:17), as the marks of his humiliating death on the cross. Echoing Paul on "being crucified with Christ", Victorinus exhorted Christians to follow that example in suffering for their faith, warning them that suffering is inevitable. The present textual study uses linguistic, grammatical, rhetorical, and socio-historical analysis, particularly on the key terms, *stigmata* and *mysterium*. It concludes that Victorinus associated these terms to give meaning to trauma and suffering for Christians. The term *mysterium* in Victorinus' work is closely associated with central aspects of Christ's life and work, especially his crucifixion and death. While rejecting the "history of religions" school of thought on Christian liturgy borrowing from mystery religions, this study concludes that Victorinus' use of the term *mysterium* reflects a move in fourth century Christianity to adapt language of the mysteries for the sacraments; more particularly, baptism is understood as a symbolic re-enactment of Christ's crucifixion, death and resurrection. Such an approach enhances the meaning of suffering in terms of service to Christ, for in baptism Christians share not only in Christ's death, as suffering "with Christ", but also in his resurrection, as victory over sin, suffering and death.

Keywords: suffering; marks; rhetoric; impersonation; crucifixion; humiliation; mystery; baptism; sacrament

1. Introduction: Victorinus on Christian suffering

Our age is no stranger to trauma, the often invisible wounding of the human psyche, unable to integrate the effects of violent conflict, abuse, or some other shocking experience. As such, trauma is not confined to our time. War, slavery and persecution were common enough in the ancient world. Early Christian communities were not spared. Aside from state-sponsored persecution, slavery was well-known among early Chris-

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tian converts. This is evident also from imagery used by the apostle Paul to express his grief at the waywardness of Galatian Christians. Deeply disappointed, he speaks of these new converts adding to the wounds acquired throughout his evangelistic work, as *stigmata* (Gal. 6:17). The text presents an intriguing use of a term for the branding of runaway slaves with the mark of their owner. Whether or not Paul himself ever experienced slavery, we know that the practice was not foreign to him. Even so, he accepted these wounds as a mark of his service to Christ, and no more than what a slave owed to his master.

How did later generations read Paul's interpretation of such wounds? Could they incorporate his approach for a new era with rather different relations between Christians, Jews and adherents of traditional pagan religion? When Marius Victorinus (ca. 285-ca.-365 CE) became a Christian in the mid 350s, persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire was only a dim memory; he enjoyed the religious peace initiated by Constantine. Yet a central question raised through his commentary on Galatians 6:17 is the meaning of suffering; were Christians still as fervent in religious commitment as in the years of persecution? Were they still willing to suffer for their faith? During Victorinus' years, we know of many Christians who would affirm true devotion by turning to ascetic practice and monastic communities. This was not his approach. So how did he interpret Paul's final words to the Galatians, on bearing the *stigmata* of Christ?

Victorinus' commentary on Gal 6:17 focuses on the *stigmata* as concrete evidence of trauma, specifically, the wounds borne by Paul in service to Christ; these mark his suffering together with Christ. Victorinus uses the reality of Paul's burdens to impress the inevitability of suffering on Christians of his community in Rome. The purpose of our discussion is to clarify how Victorinus arrives at that application of the text. It is not a call to a new kind of martyrdom, or to monastic asceticism; nor does he seek to convince by moral persuasion. Rather, by impersonating the words of the text, Victorinus presents himself as a living example, applying Paul's suffering, and by extension, Christ's own suffering, to himself. He gives meaning to the *stigmata* (representing that suffering) by associating them not only with Christ's passion and crucifixion, but also with the sacraments as a re-enactment of his passion. The key to this association is the term "mystery". With Paul, Victorinus speaks of serving Christ in the mystery, and suffering the mystery; union with Christ means union in his suffering. For Victorinus, that relationship will also define how Christians address trauma.

The present article focuses on Victorinus' discussion of Gal 6:17 in his commentary on Galatians², the very first commentary on that epistle to be published in Latin³. Due largely to a scarcity of secondary literature, our treatment will focus on the text itself⁴. Victorinus' commentary on Galatians has not received adequate attention in biblical or patristic scholarship⁵. This can be explained, in turn, by the problematic condition of the text most readily available until just a few decades ago, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (PL)⁶. Since the 1970s, scholars have benefited from the critical edition of A. Locher (1972), and of F. Gori (1981, 1986)⁷; these provide the more reliable basis for modern translations: Gori's Italian (1981), and the English translation of Stephen Cooper (2005). The present discussion of Victorinus' commentary on Gal 6:17 is much indebted to Cooper's substantive treatment, giving a full translation (albeit without facing Latin text), and extensive supportive discussion on issues of historical context, the order and exegetical style of the commentaries, and their influence.

2. Victorinus' commentary on Galatians 6:17

Writing some decades before Jerome (ca. 346-420) prepared his Vulgate Latin Bible, Victorinus based his commentary on the *Vetus Latina*

² Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas*; on commentaries of Victorinus which did not survive, see S.A. Cooper, *Marius Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Oxford 2005, p. 3.

³ On Origen's (Greek) commentaries as precedence for Victorinus, see Cooper, *On Galatians*, p. 8; also G. Raspanti, *Mario Vittorino esegeta di S. Paolo*, Palermo 1996. See further, W. Erdt, *Marius Victorinus Afer, der erste lateinische Pauluskommentator: Studien zu seinen Pauluskommentaren im Zusammenhang der Wiederentdeckung des Paulus in der abendländischen Theologie des 4. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main 1980.

⁴ For the text of the Galatians commentary used in this discussion, see *Marii Victorini opera pars II: opera exegetica*, ed. F. Gori, CSEL 83/2, Vienna 1986; accessed online, *Library of Latin Texts*, Ser. A, Turnhout 2009+: <http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/Search.aspx> (accessed: 1.05.2024). Unless otherwise noted, given translations are my own.

⁵ See E.A. Plumer, *Augustine's Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes*, Oxford 2003, p. 3-4.

⁶ See *Victorini in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas libri duo*, PL 8, 1145-1197.

⁷ See *Marii Victorini Afri commentarii in epistulas Pauli ad Galatas, ad Philippenses, ad Ephesios*, ed. A. Locher, Leipzig 1972; and *Mario Vittorino, Commentari alle Epistole di Paolo agli Efesini, ai Galati, ai Filippesi*, ed. F. Gori, Corona Patrum, Turin 1981. Cooper's translation is based on Gori's 1986 CSEL edition (see above, nn. 2 and 4).

translation, the version familiar to his readers⁸. He cites Gal 6:17 as two sentences, “From now on, let no one cause me trouble”, and, “For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus (NIV)”⁹. While the second sentence is more relevant for our discussion, use of “for” (*enim*, 6:17b) means that we cannot neglect the introductory words, following on Paul’s blessing on those who live by the rule of Christ (vs. 16). This sets the stage for his comments on the “marks” of Jesus. The initial, “From now on (*De cetero*)” of vs. 17 (Victorinus’ *ultra*), shows Paul summing up his appeal. These final words reveal a deep concern about the Galatians’ “judaizing” to substitute a false gospel requiring circumcision, especially to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ (τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκωνται, Gal 6:12).

2.1. Victorinus’ comment on Gal 6:17a

Victorinus begins by citing the text (*Vetus Latina*), *De cetero nemo mihi molestias praestet*:

This means that, in addition [to what I’ve said], let no one through their own sins cause me to be troubled and sorrowful, to add to my burdens. With this we repeat what was already said at the beginning [of this commentary]¹⁰, explaining how painful he [Paul] found the burden of their sinning, and how it grieved him. This is why, in the very last part of the letter, he warns

⁸ For the *Vetus Latina* text, see Cooper, *On Galatians*, Appendix 3, p. 366. In translating the Vulgate, Jerome also used the *Vetus Latina*; on his corrections, see Andrew Cain, trans. and intro. *St. Jerome, Commentary on Galatians*, Fathers of the Church, a New Translation 121, Washington 2010, p. 39-40.

⁹ See Gal 6:17, *Vetus Latina*: “De cetero nemo mihi molestias praestet. Ego enim stigmata domini nostri Iesu Christi in corpore meo porto”. Also using the *Vetus Latina*, Jerome’s translation differs slightly: “De caetero nemo mihi molestus sit. Ego enim stigmata domini nostri Iesu Christi in corpore meo porto” (Hieronymus, *Commentarius in epistolam Pauli Apostoli ad Galatas* III 6, 17a, 1; and 6, 17b, 1); see Cain, *St. Jerome, Commentary*, p. 39-40. The Greek text (UBS) divides the sentence with a semicolon: Τοῦ λοιποῦ κόπους μοι μηδεὶς παρεχέτω· ἐγὼ γὰρ τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματί μου βαστάζω. Citations from the Greek NT use the *Society of Biblical Literature* edition (SBLGNT), in: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/sblg/> (accessed: 1.05.2024).

¹⁰ See Cooper (*On Galatians*, p. 345 and n. 220) on this reference back to the preface, “His rebus motus Paulus scribit hanc epistolam (Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas I praef. 7*)”.

them [Galatians] that they should not return to other sins, lest they add to his burdens¹¹.

The commentary emphasizes two terms: *molestias* (lit. burdens, as *Vetus Latina* translation of κόπους) as troubles, and *peccata* as sins, errors, or mistakes. Victorinus specifies the distress of *molestias* caused by “errors” or “sins”, repeating the term three times: *peccatis suis*, *peccasse*, *peccata*¹², to emphasize the Galatians’ seriously straying from his instruction¹³. Modern commentaries recognize in Paul’s *molestias* a reference to the catalogue of troubles of 2Cor 11:24-28 (as well as 2Cor 6:4-5, and 12:7-10)¹⁴, where Paul also expresses deep concern for the congregations he had established (μέριμνα πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, 2Cor 11:28). This is probably reflected also in Victorinus’ development of *molestias*, with *anxius* and *tristis*, for an emotional or psychological state of trauma, although that interpretation hardly exhausts the more graphic NT Greek term given: κόπους¹⁵.

The sequel clarifies Paul’s careful use of words, turning from expression of anger or disappointment about “judaizing”, to appeal to *stigmata* marking his service to Christ, thereby possibly recalling also the original reason for visiting them at a time of his own weakness (Gal 4:12-14)¹⁶, although even then he sought to make Christ known and to present him crucified (Gal 3:1). Paul would not boast about his accomplishments but his

¹¹ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 1-5, “[...] id est ultra nemo peccatis suis faciat me anxium, tristem, molestias sustinere. Ita enim in principio diximus quod peccasse aegre tulerit et doluerit. Monet igitur in postrema epistola ut hi non ad peccata aliqua convertantur, ne molestias praestent”. Text and punctuation are based on Gori, *Marii Victorini opera pars II: opera exegetica* (CSEL).

¹² Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 2, 3 and 4.

¹³ For Victorinus’ focus on the Galatians’ *peccata* (sins), see his note on Gal 2:2, “Unde peccant hodie Galatae sequendo Iudaismum et disciplinam vel circumcisionis vel sabbati vel rerum ceterarum”; and on Gal 2:17: “ad peccata redeamus, id est judaizemus” (Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 2, 2, 24-26, and I 2, 17, 8-9).

¹⁴ The connection is explicit for Jerome; see Cain, *St. Jerome, Commentary*, p. 267.

¹⁵ On Jerome’s complaint about the *Vetus Latina* translation of Gal 6:17a, see Cain, *St. Jerome, Commentary*, p. 266-267. The term κόπος may mean abstract “suffering” or (emotional/spiritual) “trouble”; but its root in κόπτειν points to “physical” beating/striking. With μόχθος (toil, hardship) in 2Cor 11:27, κόπω καὶ μόχθω, the physical (external) meaning is reinforced.

¹⁶ See also 2Cor 11-12, for Paul acknowledging weakness as demonstration of God’s power.

weaknesses (ἀσθένεια; 2Cor 12:5 and 9; Gal 4:13; Rom 5:3-6) through which he could demonstrate the power of God, which is also displayed through the cross of Christ (2Cor 13:4).

2.2. Victorinus' comment on Gal 6:17b

The association made by Paul between his own weakness, witnessed by scars, its visible mark, and the heart of his message to the Galatians, to present Christ crucified (Gal 3:1 and 13), is not lost on Victorinus, as we discover from his comment on the *Vetus Latina* translation of Gal 6:17b, *Ego enim stigmata domini nostri Iesu Christi in corpore meo porto*:

This means that in my body I bear every kind of suffering, not only those he (Jesus Christ) endured on the cross, when his body was pierced by nails or his side was wounded by the spear; I also bear other *stigmata* (marks) of our Lord Jesus Christ, he [Paul] says. And this means that I too suffered; and when I serve Christ in the mystery¹⁷, I suffer the mystery of Christ. This implies first, that you too ought to endure all your many adversities, because [like Paul] that person will be [united] with Christ who suffers with Christ, and will begin to suffer not only that which Christ suffered, but also that which he himself, through his own action, suffers because of adversaries who oppose. On this basis he [Paul] indicates both what he himself would suffer, as much as he would obtain from Christ, and what we too should [expect to] suffer, if we wish to be [united] with Christ¹⁸.

Victorinus' discussion of the verse does not miss the prominence of the term *στίγματα*, as Paul himself clearly associates it with his own

¹⁷ The CSEL reading, "in mysterio cum servo Christo", differs from the *Patrologia Latina*: "in mysterio conservio Christo". See further, my comments below on mystery, #4.1.

¹⁸ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 6-15: "[...] id est omnem passionem, et illa quae in cruce toleravit, clavis figentibus corpus vel vulnere lanceae per latus et cetera, inquit, stigmata Iesu Christi domini nostri in corpore meo porto, id est et ego passus sum et, in mysterio cum servo Christo, mysterium Christi patior. Unde et vos adversa multa omnia tolerare debetis, quoniam cum Christo erit qui cum Christo patitur et ea quae Christus passus est et ipse actu suo adversantibus adversariis coeperit pati. Ex quo ostendit et quid ipse patiat, quantum mereatur a Christo et quid etiam nos pati debeamus si volumus esse cum Christo". On the passage see also Cooper, *On Galatians*, p. 345.

suffering; indeed, the structure of the statement indicates the term as an expansion of *molestias* (κόπους), for troubles endured in service to Christ. As he associates the marks of Christ with suffering, Victorinus' comments reflect the underlying movement of thought from Paul's own troubles, implied in *molestias*, to associate these with scars (as *stigmata*) accumulated through years of ministry (2Cor 11:21b-30), and further, to identify those scars with the marks of Christ's own suffering.

With Paul, Victorinus recognizes suffering on various levels, beginning with suffering through physical/external persecution, as when Paul was beaten or stoned by Jews and Romans, and as Christ experienced the *passio* on the cross. Such suffering results in bodily harm and visible scars. A second aspect is equally difficult but, like trauma, leaves less visible evidence. Indeed, Victorinus notes the opposition experienced by Paul, through his dedication to Christ, as he offended others by the gospel of the cross (as σκάνδαλον, Gal 5:11). Victorinus recognizes the serious trouble this meant for Paul in terms of varying forms of suffering, as he also differentiates *stigmata* resulting from Christ's suffering on the cross ("omnem passionem [...] in cruce") from other forms (*cetera*) of his *passio*. While he does not specify the meaning of *cetera* here, we may assume allusion to the opposition Jesus experienced from leaders of Judaism (Pharisees, Sadducees, etc.) during his ministry in Palestine, climaxing with the betrayal by Judas. Similarly, alongside strong opposition from diaspora Jews who rejected the gospel message, Paul suffered from burdensome worries (μέριμνα, 2Cor 11:28) for wayward or gullible believers in the congregations close to his heart.

Throughout this comment, therefore, but particularly in the application (the last two sentences), we note how Victorinus connects the *stigmata* with the theme of *suffering*; he repeats forms of the verb for suffering no less than five times: *patitur*, *passus est*, *pati*, *patiatur*, *pati*. It was an application none of his audience could miss. Just as Paul identified his own burdens with the "marks" of Christ's suffering (*passio*), Victorinus recognizes the meaning of these *stigmata* for the life of Christian service in his own time, pointing to the suffering that is to be expected by those who would serve Christ. With Paul's life as an example, Christians could expect faithful service to Christ to arouse opposition; and such opposition meant serious trouble, whether physical wounding, or emotional wounds of mockery and rejection. Nonetheless if, like Paul, their service was that of a slave (*servus*, δοῦλος) to his master, the expectation was full obedience to the master's call.

3. Stigmata

How then does Victorinus explain Paul's reference to *stigmata*?¹⁹ Introduced as a concrete example of his burdens, these include scars from (physical) persecution (*molestias*, as of 2Cor 11), with perhaps a further allusion to the weakness (ἀσθένειαν) of his arrival among the Galatians, the sickness which had not interfered with them welcoming him (Gal 4:12-13). Was Victorinus aware of Paul's dramatic use of a rhetorical strategy in thus presenting his "burdens"? It is well known that, rhetorically, the appeal to one's own wounds, with a display of battle scars, can make a powerful impact at the close of a forensic argument. From that perspective, Paul's appeal to (outward) marks of his troubles as *stigmata* takes the rhetoric of these concluding words to another level; Paul wants his listeners to take him seriously. Yet, for all Victorinus' expertise in rhetoric, we find no explicit reference to the rhetorical aspect of an appeal to *stigmata* in commenting on this final section of the epistle.

Rather, Victorinus emphasizes the connection of *stigmata* with *passio*, Christ's crucifixion. But he does not explain the term *stigmata* as such, a *hapax legomenon* in the Pauline epistles. Was he getting to the end of the commentary, thinking that the word warranted no further attention? But no doubt, Victorinus recognized its negative connotation, particularly in association with slavery²⁰, and the ever-present potential for abuse and violent treatment; did the widespread practice of slavery mean that such aspects of servitude could be taken as self-explanatory?²¹ Modern readers need more explanation. *Stigmata* should not be understood as a tattoo, now typically acquired as a decoration. For Victorinus' world, *stigmata* represented disgrace and humiliation. Indeed, for the Greco-Roman empire, death on a cross was the ultimate form of degrading punishment.

¹⁹ On early patristic discussion of the *stigmata*, see C. Muessig, *Signs of Salvation: The Evolution of Stigmatic Spirituality Before Francis of Assisi*, ChH 82/1 (2013) p. 40-68. See also H. Dieter Betz, *Stigma*, in: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, v. 7, Grand Rapids 1964, p. 657-664; and Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Philadelphia 1979, p. 324.

²⁰ On *stigmata* and "branding" of runaway slaves, see also S. Muir, *Two-way trauma in Paul's letter to the Galatians*, in the present collection on "trauma".

²¹ On conditions of slavery in antiquity, see K. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Cambridge 1994.

In drawing an immediate connection between the *stigmata Domini nostri Iesu Christi* and suffering on the cross (*passionem*)²², Victorinus remarks on physical evidence of the nails in Jesus' hands, and the spear piercing his side ("clavis figentibus, corpus vel vulnere lanceae per latus")²³. But those marks, as *stigmata*, also represent less visible wounds from Christ's willing obedience as it led him to that humiliating death. That aspect of Christ's suffering is featured in Victorinus' commentary on Phil 2:6-10, especially vs. 7-8: "He emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant [...] and humbled himself, becoming obedient even to the point of death"²⁴.

In the last two sentences of his comment, Victorinus addresses his audience directly, applying the meaning of these *stigmata* for Christians of his own time ("Unde et vos")²⁵. He interprets Paul's experience as suffering "in fellowship with Christ" ("cum Christo"), thereby recognizing an echo of earlier statements (Gal 6:14, and 2:20), where Paul affirmed his being crucified with Christ.

Did Victorinus actually expect Paul to have the scars of crucifixion in his hands? Medieval development of the theme of *stigmata* as physical marks of identification with Christ is well known, particularly from St. Francis of Assisi²⁶. Ascetic heroes gloried in evidence of the marks of Christ, especially on their hands. Victorinus' commentary does not support such literal interpretation of bearing the "marks" of Christ, but

²² Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 6.

²³ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 8. For Thomas' request to see these identifying marks, "ἐν ταῖς χερσίν [...] τὸν τύπον τῶν ἤλων [...] εἰς τὴν πλευράν", see Jn 20:25 and 27.

²⁴ See Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Philippenses*, PL 1207A, "[...] semetipsum exinanivit, et servi sumpsit formam in similitudine hominum factus, et habitu inventus tanquam homo. Humiliavit se ipsum, subditus factus usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis". For frequent citation of this text in Victorinus' *Adversus Arium*, see the index of *Marius Victorinus: Traités théologiques sur la Trinité*, v. 1-2, ed. P. Henry, tr. P. Hadot, SCH 68-69, Paris 1960, p. 1109.

²⁵ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 10.

²⁶ See Muessig, *Signs of Salvation*, p. 40-41. On Jerome's commentary of Gal 6:17b, Cain notes Paul mentioning "these marks in order to contrast them with the 'mark' of circumcision about which his Judaizing opponents boasted" (*St. Jerome, Commentary*, p. 267, and n. 40). Cain recognizes speculation on Paul's "tattoo" by F. Fenner, *Die Krankheit im Neuen Testament: Eine religionsgeschichtliche und medizingeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Leipzig 1930, p. 40; and D. Kremendahl, *Die Botschaft der Form: Zum Verhältnis von antiker Epistolographie und Rhetorik im Galaterbrief*, Göttingen 2000, p. 79-80.

it cannot be ruled out altogether for early Christianity. Writing of second-century persecution of Christians in Lyons, Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260 - 339) presents the cruel treatment of Blandina, suspended in mid-air, ready to be fed to wild beasts; but her companions saw her body hanging in the form of a cross and, recognizing her suffering as an imitation of Christ's own crucifixion, were comforted and encouraged²⁷. They recognized her condition as a "co-crucifixion" of the type mentioned in Gal 2:20 and 6:14, and Rom 6:3-6. Thus we find clear resonance with Victorinus' application of Paul's words in Gal 6:17b for suffering "cum Christo", in union with Christ.

The physical (external) persecution detailed by Eusebius no longer occurred in Victorinus' time. Nevertheless, he applies Gal 6:17 to point fellow Christians to the inevitability of suffering and persecution for the faith. And he is clearly speaking from experience. Not that it would have matched the dramatic persecution recounted by Paul (2Cor 11). Even so, Victorinus would have suffered from painful rejection and (social) humiliation when he converted to Christianity in later years²⁸; colleagues of his own senatorial ranking, proud traditional Roman citizens, may well have mocked him with the arrogant critique given by Porphyry in anti-Christian treatises (ca. 290 CE). Victorinus may also reflect troubles of the church in Rome when Liberius, its bishop (352-366 CE), was deposed and exiled by Emperor Constantius for resisting imperial pressure to sign the creed of Sirmium (351)²⁹. And finally, Victorinus' life was clearly impacted when Emperor Julian excluded Christians from teaching in state-sponsored education (360-363)³⁰. It

²⁷ See Eusebius Caesariensis, *HE* V 1, 41: "[...] Blandina for her part, was hung on a wooden stake and offered as food for the beasts that were set upon her. As she hung there, she was seen to have the form of a cross, and her strenuous prayer provided the competitors with great encouragement, for in her contest, they saw with their external eyes, through the sister, the one who was crucified on their behalf, so that the sight could persuade those who trust in Him that all who suffer for the glory of Christ will always have communion with the living God", tr. J.M. Schott, *Eusebius of Caesarea: The History of the Church, a New Translation*, Oakland 2019, p. 232. Schott comments here that Blandina is identified with Christ, and "becomes an instructive icon".

²⁸ On his conversion, see Augustinus, *Confessiones* VIII 2, 3-6.

²⁹ See T.D. Barnes, *The Capitulation of Liberius and Hilary of Poitiers*, "Phoenix" 46/3 (1992) p. 264.

³⁰ J. Lössl, *Epistolarity, Commentary, and Profession of Faith: Reading Marius Victorinus's Fictional Exchange with Candidus in the Context of His Conversion*, in: *The Philosophy, Theology, and Rhetoric of Marius Victorinus*, ed. S.A. Cooper – V. Nemeč, Atlanta 2022, p. 246-248.

is widely assumed that Victorinus gave up his teaching career under those conditions, using his last years to write the NT commentaries.

In that regard, Victorinus' approach differs from Jerome. Victorinus refers to Christians suffering particularly in terms of (socio-political) opposition ("adversantibus adversariis")³¹. With pointed reference to the "hardship catalogue" (2Cor 11:23-27), Jerome's commentary on Galatians (of 378/9) interprets Paul's suffering as the marks of Christ that are borne also by those who torment their own body: "[...] the one who is severely flogged, frequently jailed, beaten with rods three times [...] carries on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. It is possible too that he who beats his body and makes it his slave [...] carries the marks of the Lord Jesus on his body"³². Written just a few decades earlier, Victorinus' commentaries reflect none of Jerome's understanding of "bearing the marks" in terms of ascetic practice.

3.1. Rhetorical impersonation

We have already noted³³ the curious absence of any comment from Victorinus on the rhetoric of Paul's appeal to the *stigmata*. Surely, he recognized the significance of such a final statement, strategically located as a climax for the exhortation?³⁴ Yet Victorinus rarely remarks on rhetorical aspects in the commentaries. Unlike those of Jerome after him³⁵, his commentaries were not written for a scholarly community.

³¹ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 12.

³² Hieronymus, *Commentarius in epistolam Pauli Apostoli ad Galatas* III 6, 17b, 7: "qui macerat corpus suum et subicit seruituti [...] portat stigmata Domini Iesu in corpore suo", tr. Cain, *St. Jerome, Commentary*, p. 267.

³³ See above on *stigmata*, #3. On structure and rhetorical aspects of the commentary, see Cooper, *On Galatians*, p. 96-103; also, Raspanti, *Mario Vittorino esegeta di S. Paolo*, p. 113-130; and A. Locher, *Formen der Textbehandlung im Kommentar des Marius Victorinus zum Galaterbrief*, in: *Silvae*, ed. M. von Albrecht – E. Heck, Tübingen 1970, p. 137-143.

³⁴ For recognition of Gal 6:17 as climax of the hortatory section, see Betz, *Galatians*, p. 313; also A.V. Prokhorov, *Taking the Jews out of the Equation: Galatians 6:12-17 as a Summons to Cease Evading Persecution*, "Journal for the Study of the New Testament" 36/2 (2013) p. 174-175.

³⁵ See Cain, *St. Jerome, Commentary*, p. 19-40 and 46; also his, *Jerome's Commentaries on the Pauline Epistles and the Architecture of Exegetical Authority*, Oxford 2021, p. 162-163. See further G. Raspanti, *L'esegesi della lettera ai Galati nel IV secolo*

Yet Victorinus' expertise in rhetoric is not absent. His straightforward verse-by-verse exposition provides a literal reading, with a relatively brief but clear paraphrase of the text³⁶, a reasonable interpretation, and application of the message given; this approach reflects a style typical of rhetorical schools of the time, identified by Cooper as *commentatio simplex*³⁷. Clear exposition of the message regarded the writer's own words as authoritative, and explained them on their own terms³⁸. Victorinus' aim was simply to provide his audience with a useful aid in understanding the epistle.

Victorinus' sensitivity to rhetorical aspects characterizes a less obvious feature of the commentary. After the initial explanation of Paul's words about Christ's *passio* and the *stigmata*, we note a dramatic transition in Victorinus' commentary. He repeats the words of Paul, "stigmata Iesu Christi domini nostri in corpore meo porto", following that immediately by adopting the first-person narration of Paul: this means that *I too* have suffered ("id est et ego passus sum")³⁹, thereby appropriating that suffering for himself. Grammatically, the "first person" is already indicated by the verbs *porto* and *passus sum*; double use of *ego* in this context is very emphatic. The words echo Paul's own use (Gal 2:20, and 6:14) of confessional language, as of candidates for baptism. And Victorinus specifically draws our attention to such a first-person statement, so that the emphatic *ego* serves his impersonation of the apostle, thereby providing his own alternative and powerful rhetorical strategy. If specific reflection on rhetorical aspects of the epistle is subdued, Victorinus' dramatic reading of the text reveals him as still the teacher of rhetoric, providing a living re-presentation of Paul's own rhetoric, as it were, to convey the appeal being made here, and thereby also making it his own. This certainly enhances Victorinus' impact in conveying the message of Gal 6:17, trumpeting it effectively by giving himself, in the first person, as a living example.

d.C. Dal commentario dottrinale di Mario Vittorino ed Ambrosiaster a quello filologico di Girolamo, "Ho Theològos" 25 (2007) p. 109-128.

³⁶ For succinct comparison of Jerome and Victorinus, see Cain, *Jerome's Commentaries*, p. 63-72.

³⁷ See S. Cooper, *Narratio and Exhortatio in Galatians according to Marius Victorinus Rhetor*, ZNW 91 (2000) p. 112-113.

³⁸ See Cooper, *On Galatians*, p. 107-108.

³⁹ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 9. On Victorinus' rhetorical use of "appropriation", see Cooper, *On Galatians*, p. 102-104.

Victorinus continues addressing his audience with a first person appeal in the “application” of the final two sentences, where he transitions grammatically from “id est”, and “inquit”⁴⁰, to “ex quo ostendit (and on this basis, he [Paul] makes the point)”⁴¹. From use of the third person, “patiatur”, and “quantum mereatur” (for what Paul would suffer)⁴², Victorinus now uses the first-person plural, “nos”. This allows Victorinus to associate himself directly with his readers/hearers, without the distance that a teacher might keep in advising his students. Here we find a more subtle kind of “impersonation”, for Victorinus includes himself in the application for his listeners, to remind them how much, even now – i.e. with the cessation of imperial-backed persecution – “we” are bound to suffer (“debeamus”), if we wish (“volumus”) to be “cum Christo”⁴³. He descends from his pulpit (βῆμα), so to speak, and comes down to the level of his audience, warning them that, if Paul’s experience is any indication, service to Christ will evoke opposition (“adversantibus adversariis”); if *we* really want to experience our lives in fellowship with Christ, *we* have to be prepared to suffer. No doubt, his hearers absorbed the message of suffering more readily when the speaker included himself in its application.

4. *Mysterium* (μυστήριον) and the “Christ event”

How then are we to understand the most difficult term of Victorinus’ commentary, *mysterium*? Its significance is signaled by double use here, as well as close association with the key verbs, *servio* and *patior*, for serving (as a slave) and suffering: “in mysterio cum servio Christo,

⁴⁰ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 7 and 9.

⁴¹ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 14.

⁴² Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 14. This may be an allusion to Ananias’ message, Acts 9:16: ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν. Muessig translates *quantum mereatur a Christo*, “whatever Paul suffers, the more he merits Christ” (*Signs of Salvation*, p. 42-43), but from his reading of Paul’s message, Cooper translates *mereatur* as “obtaining” or “gaining”, rather than “meriting” or “deserving” (*On Galatians*, p. 163).

⁴³ Again, Muessig’s translation (*Signs of Salvation*, p. 42-43) for “what we ought to suffer (quid etiam nos pati debeamus)”, while grammatically and lexically possible, is inappropriate unless it points to what Christians *can expect to suffer*. Suffering by its nature is not active but, as the Greek equivalent for *passio* (πάθημα) shows, happens to the person. This explains the translation of *debeamus*: “and also that which *we should expect* (or, *we are inevitably bound*) to suffer”.

mysterium Christi patior (when I serve Christ in the mystery, I suffer the mystery of Christ)”⁴⁴. Our discussion of this term presents the final key in explaining Victorinus’ message of Christian suffering, with a potential answer to its challenging effect in the experience of trauma.

4.1. Textual problems with Migne’s “in mysterio conservio”

We begin by noting Locher’s and Gori’s (CSEL) reading of the text, which accepts the verb *servio* in a subordinate clause introduced by the conjunction *cum*⁴⁵. This corrects Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*, “in mysterio conservio Christo”, a reading which assumes *conservio* and *patior* functioning as parallel verbs. The verb *conservio* has been recognized as a neologism⁴⁶, emphasizing Paul’s *fellowship*, or *union with Christ*, for identifying with Christ in his suffering – such as we noted from Eusebius’ account of Blandina, indicating her bodily position as encouragement for others suffering in “communion with the living God”⁴⁷. It is also an important theme for Victorinus, noted from triple use of the phrase “cum Christo” in the applicatory admonition (noted above). The prefix *con-* with the verb *servio* puts emphasis on him (Paul) serving (as slave) *together with Christ*⁴⁸. Well acquainted with the Greek NT, Victorinus would be familiar with precedents for Pauline use of the prefix *συν-* with verbs to express working and suffering together with Christ⁴⁹. And use of the Latin prefix *con-* anticipates Victorinus’ triple use of the preposition *cum* in the last sentences.

⁴⁴ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 9-10.

⁴⁵ Locher punctuates this: “id est et ego passus sum et in mysterio cum servio Christo, mysterium Christi patior”; while Gori/CSEL has, “id est et ego passus sum et, in mysterio cum servio Christo, mysterium Christi patior”.

⁴⁶ The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (v. 4, p. 419) attests the verb only for this passage in Victorinus: “in mysterio conservio Christo”. No other known occurrence, not even in Victorinus’ work, has survived; on this issue we also cite a personal email of Cooper, 5 April, 2022.

⁴⁷ Eusebius, *HE* V 1, 41.

⁴⁸ The verb *servio* is not problematic. Paul refers to himself as *δοῦλος* of the Lord (Rom 1:1, and 6:18; 1Cor 7:22); Victorinus frequently cites Phil 2:6-10, on Christ taking the form of a slave (*μορφὴν δούλου*); see above, n. 24.

⁴⁹ For the prefix *συν-* to affirm identification with Christ in his suffering, being crucified with Christ, see Rom 6:6, *συνεσταυρώθη*, and Gal 2:19, *συσταυρῶμαι*; also Rom 8:17, *συνπάσχειν*, and further below, last par. of #5, “mysterium”.

Serious obstacles for the PL reading, however, led Locher and Gori to recognize *cum* as conjunction. The medieval manuscript would have shown an abbreviated “c” with a long mark over it⁵⁰, representing *con-* or *cum*; but a reading with the conjunction *cum*, rather than the prefix *con-*, made better sense: “*when* I serve Christ in the mystery, I suffer the mystery of Christ”. Nor does this reading minimize the theme of Paul’s suffering “together with Christ”. In the application, Victorinus reinforces that sense by emphasizing the readiness of the Christian to suffer “*cum* Christo”, *together with* Christ. From an initial focus on Christ’s suffering, Victorinus transitions to Paul’s suffering together with Christ, and finally, to reminding his fourth-century audience that, as followers of Christ, they are bound to face suffering; this is undoubtedly the central application of our union with Christ.

4.2. Understanding of “mystery” in antiquity

The question yet to be addressed is the meaning or “justification” of that suffering, particularly as Victorinus speaks of “suffering the mystery” as we “serve Christ in the mystery”. In the present treatment, focused on *stigmata* for representing “trauma”, we cannot do justice to the significance of *mysterium* in Victorinus’ work. But a brief exploration of its meaning in association with concepts like “suffering” in the commentaries is useful. For traditional Greco-Roman and NT use of the term⁵¹, we trace its roots to mystery religions (ca. 700 BCE-400 CE), with the Greek Eleusinian mysteries as outstanding example⁵². For these we note

⁵⁰ I am indebted to Stephen Cooper (in a personal email of 6 March, 2023) for elaboration on the manuscript reading *conservio*, for which Gori, with Locher, adopts *cum servio*. According to Cooper there were: “two independent mss: ‘S’ (the copy Sirmond made from a very ancient codex) and ‘O’ (and there are two other mss that are copies of ‘O’). So it seems that there is no discrepancy between ‘S’ and ‘O’ on this passage (or else it would have been noted in the apparatus)”. See also Édouard des Places (reviewing Locher’s edition), *Marius Victorinus commentateur de saint Paul; Les citations bibliques dans le De incarnatione de saint Athanase*, “Biblica” 55/1 (1974) p. 83-85.

⁵¹ For discussion of “mystery” in biblical dictionaries, see S.S. Smalley, *Mystery*, in: *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.C.D. Douglas, Grand Rapids 1967, p. 856-857; or G.W. Barker, *Mystery*, in: *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, v. 3, ed. G.W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids 1986, p. 451-455.

⁵² See T.M. Finn, *Sacraments*, in: *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. E. Ferguson *et al.*, Routledge 1998, p. 1011-1015, defining mysteries as an “ancient cultic rite in

the root verb *μύειν*, literally, “to shut (mouth or eyes)”, with the extended meaning “to initiate”⁵³.

NT use of the term “mystery” also represents something “secret”, but Paul explains that the mystery (of God’s eternal [if hidden] plan for Israel) is not to be kept secret, for it is revealed in Christ, for our salvation. And he was given this message: that the Gentiles are co-heirs with Jews of OT messianic promises (Eph 3:3-4 and 9; Col 1:24-27; Rom 16:25-26). This meaning for “mystery” is clearly developed in Ephesians, and assumed in Galatians, where Paul implies the concept for the message revealed by God himself (Gal 1:15-16, and 2:1-2). And, as noted (above), the key to that gospel message was “Christ crucified”; through his death, Christ reconciled all humanity, including Gentiles (2Cor 5:18).

4.3. “Mysterium” as the “Christ event” in Victorinus’ commentaries

In his discussion of the commentaries, Cooper chose a broad concept, the “Christ event”, as the central meaning of the term *mysterium*⁵⁴. This designation is supported from even a cursory survey of the term *mysterium* in Victorinus’ Galatians commentary, revealing a close connection with aspects of Christ’s life and death. Commenting on Gal 6:14-15, Victorinus speaks of Christ triumphing over the power of this world when, “*in the mystery*, he hung his flesh on the cross (*mysterio illo, dum carnem suspendit cruci*)”⁵⁵. The reference is expanded at Gal 1:11 to refer to Christ’s incarnation as God taking on flesh “in the mystery (*Deus mysterio carnem sumens*)”⁵⁶; it is expanded for the resurrection, as the “mystery of the Son raised from the dead (*mysteri-*

which key events in a god’s life were ritually enacted, in order to convey to both devotees and candidates for entry into the cult a share in the god’s life and accomplishments, that is, salvation (*sôtêria*)”.

⁵³ On devotees mandated not to share their experience publicly, see M.W. Meyer, *Mystery Religions*, in: *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, v. 4, ed. D.N. Freedman, New York 1992, p. 941-942.

⁵⁴ See Cooper, *On Galatians*, p. 252 and n. 14; also Cooper, *Metaphysics and Morals in Marius Victorinus’ Commentary on the Letter to the Ephesians: A Contribution to the History of Neoplatonism and Christianity*, New York 1995, p. 75-80.

⁵⁵ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 14, 12.

⁵⁶ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 1, 11, 9.

um resuscitati filii a mortuis)”⁵⁷. Paul also speaks of the resurrection as a “mystery” in 1Cor 15:51.

If the mystery represents central events and accomplishments of the life and ministry of Christ, it is focused on his death by crucifixion. In Ephesians the term points to the “mystery of God’s plan”, making salvation available to all humankind; it is implemented by Paul’s mission to the Gentiles (Eph 3:2-11). Victorinus recognizes that the mystery involved Christ in humiliation and crucifixion: “dum carnem suspendit cruci”⁵⁸. But there is also an element of paradoxicality⁵⁹, for he knows that the event which appeared as the worst humiliation, also represented Christ’s triumph over the power of this world: “mysterio illo, dum carnem suspendit cruci, et in ea potentiam huius mundi triumphavit”⁶⁰. While most saw the cross as a stumbling block (σκάνδαλον, 1Cor 1:23), Paul’s message turned that observation on its head: through the crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled the promise of the Messiah to save all people.

From Victorinus’ brief remarks on Gal 6:17 in the commentary, as well as his theological treatises, we recognize his understanding of the “Christ event” for such paradoxicality. It is particularly clear from Victorinus adopting as his own (as noted above, #3.1. Rhetorical impersonation, for Gal 6:17) the confessional statement of Gal 2:19 “I have been crucified (or co-crucified: συσταυρωμαι) with Christ”. For those who follow Christ, the implication, at every turn, is one of preparedness for humiliation and suffering, a crucifixion of the flesh and its desires⁶¹. Victorinus appropriates Paul’s words as his own, assuming them as his own confession of faith. For him this is clearly a message central to the epistle to the Galatians, and rooted in his understanding of Gal 6:12, that Christians not be reluctant to adopt the marks of Christ, even as “persecution for the cross of Christ”.

⁵⁷ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 1, 1-2, 48.

⁵⁸ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 14, 11-12.

⁵⁹ See also, S. Muir, *Two-way trauma* (in this collection).

⁶⁰ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 14, 12-14.

⁶¹ See further Gal 5:24, and 6:14 on boasting “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world”, and above. See also Cooper, *On Galatians*, p. 283-284, on Gal 2:20, “Confixi ergo cum Christo sumus cruci”.

4.4. *Mysterium* and the sacraments

But our exploration of the meaning of “mystery” as the “Christ event” has not accounted for some rather different and intriguing verbs and participles to express Christ “performing (*functus*)” the mystery, or the mystery being “enacted (*actum, gestum*)”. Commenting on Gal 1:3-5, Victorinus speaks of Christ enacting the mystery by giving himself for our sins, “Christus, mysterio functus”⁶². He speaks similarly of the mystery “enacted” by Christ: “omne mysterium, quod a Domino nostro Iesu Christo actum est”⁶³; and of it being done or carried out (“actum est” or “gestum est”), as we note from the discussion of Gal 1:11, “omne enim mysterium ideo actum est”⁶⁴, or on Gal 3:7, “mysterium circa Abraham idcirco gestum”⁶⁵. Here Victorinus continues by specifying the result of the mystery enacted: that human beings are justified on the basis of their faith in Christ (“ut ex fide justificarentur homines, ex fide scilicet in Christum”) ⁶⁶. For the mystery, “enacted” for our resurrection and liberation, requires only faith in the mystery of Christ and in Christ himself (“in nostram resurrectionem actum et liberationem, si fidem in mysterium Christi et in Christum habeamus”) ⁶⁷; and further, he affirms that these believers will be the children of Abraham: “si fidem habemus in Christum eiusque omne mysterium, erimus filii Abrahae”⁶⁸. Similarly, we find references to the effectivity or power (*virtus*) of the mystery, as capable of bringing all things to perfection (“virtus autem mysterii quamquam et occulta et sancta”) ⁶⁹; on Gal 5:5, Victorinus speaks similarly of the effective power of the mystery (“omnis enim virtus mysterii hoc operata est”) ⁷⁰.

Equally significant is the stated purpose of the enacted mystery: that we should not think in a “fleshly” way (“ut non eo modo sentiamus [...]”) ⁷¹

⁶² Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 1, 3-5.17.

⁶³ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 3, 7, 4-5.

⁶⁴ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 1, 11, 17.

⁶⁵ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 3, 7, 13.

⁶⁶ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 3, 7, 13.

⁶⁷ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 3, 7, 6-7.

⁶⁸ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 3, 7, 11-12.

See also Victorinus’ comment on Gal 6:15, referring to “what the mystery has achieved (“quid egerit mysterium”, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 15, 3)”. ⁷¹

⁶⁹ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 4, 4, 70.

⁷⁰ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 5, 5, 3-4.

omnia carnaliter accipiendo”)⁷¹. The application is expanded as Victorinus comments on Paul’s confessional language of co-crucifixion at Gal 2:19-20, repeating Paul’s use of the first person, singular, and plural (as on Gal 6:17), that “Christ has done this *by his mystery*, and he did it *for me*. We have therefore been nailed with Christ to the cross («hoc enim Christus mysterio suo, et mihi egit. Confixi ergo cum Christo sumus cruci»)⁷². As on Gal 1:11, Victorinus elaborates that the former self (“homo vetus”)⁷³ is fixed upon the cross, to die there. Through co-crucifixion, all carnal desires too are crucified, put to death⁷⁴.

Such language has confessional meaning, and represents more than just rhetorical impersonation. We are reminded of Victorinus’ commentary on Ephesians, noting the process of sanctification for beginning with the “mystery” of baptism (“sanctificatos ex fide Christi et mysterio baptismi”)⁷⁵. Even more clearly Victorinus associates the mystery with baptism in his *Adversus Arium* 1A 17, 24-30, on Rom 8:9-11, speaking of “the power of the mystery in baptism and its power of receiving the Holy Spirit” (“Totius mysterii virtus in baptismo est, eius potentia in accipiendo spiritu, utique spiritu sancto”)⁷⁶.

⁷¹ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 1, 11, 17-19.

⁷² Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 2, 19, 24-25.

⁷³ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* I 2, 19, 23.

⁷⁴ On the close connection of the “mystery” with crucifixion (of the flesh), see also Victorinus’ commentary on Eph 2:16: “Hoc actum est mysterium crucis, ut in poenam tollerentur omnia, quae inimica sunt animis et spiritui nostro; id est desideria mundana, carnis cupiditates, ipsaque caro quodam modo corrupta atque vitiosa” (*Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Ephesios* I 2, 16, 11-14). See further, Cooper, *Metaphysics and Morals*, p. 70.

⁷⁵ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Ephesios* I 1, 15, 8-9. For indirect references in the commentary on Galatians to association of the mystery with baptism, see his comment on Gal 4:19, where Paul refers to the Galatians as his children (“filii mei”, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 4, 18-19, 8); Victorinus speaks of the one leading the candidate for baptism as their “father” (“pater dicitur”) by virtue of the baptismal rite (“per baptismum”, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 4, 18-19, 7-11). See Cooper, *On Galatians*, p. 319 and n. 105-106; for Victorinus’ reference to “a father in the mysteries” (for the priest performing baptism), see the commentary on Eph 3:15: “Item et in mysteriis pater. Et Paulus quodammodo pater, si quidem dicit: filii mei estis” (*Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Ephesios* I 3, 15, 7-8).

⁷⁶ For the context, see Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* 1A 17, 15-30: “Quoniam Spiritus Dei Spiritus Christi, et idem Spiritus sanctus: Vos vero non estis in carne, sed in spiritu: si tamen Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis [...]. Hoc si ita est, dictum est: vos in spiritu estis, utique quem sanctus Spiritus dedit vobis. Qui iste est Spiritus, adiunxit: Si tamen

These references to *enacting the mystery*, or *becoming a new person in (or through) the mystery*, imply sacramental use of the term “mystery”. Nor can we ignore use of the term *mysterium* in early Latin Bible translations for the “sacrament” of baptism and the eucharist⁷⁷. Of course, we hesitate to reopen the discussion of late nineteenth-century “history of religions (*religionsgeschichtliche*)” scholarship⁷⁸ on appropriation of mystery religions for Christian liturgy⁷⁹. Yet Victorinus’ appropriation of Paul’s confessional language (Gal 2:20 and 6:14) clearly supports a sacramental context. We also know that, by the mid- to late-fourth century, the term *mystery* was associated with catechetical preparation for baptism.

The approach of the “history of religions” school was challenged definitively by Arthur Darby Nock (1902-1963) with his *Conversion* (1933), comparing the mystery religions with Christian practice to undermine assumptions of borrowing⁸⁰. More recently (1972), Edward Yarnold’s

Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis. Quis est iste? Si quis autem spiritum Christi non habet. Idem ergo Dei spiritus et Christi spiritus”. For occurrence of “mystery” in the theological treatises, see the index of Henry and Hadot, *Marius Victorinus: Traités théologiques*, p. 1120.

⁷⁷ On *sacramentum* for an oath of allegiance or a shared sacred commitment, see Finn, *Sacraments*, p. 1011-1012. Finn notes the Latin *sacramentum* for μυστήριον in the Septuagint (Dan 2:28-29, and 47; also 4:9; the Wisdom of Solomon 2:22; 6:22; 8:4 and 13). For Pauline use of μυστήριον (Eph 1:9; and 3:3, 4, 9, etc.), he suggests a Hellenistic Jewish background.

⁷⁸ On nineteenth-century critical historical analysis in German scholarship (as in D. Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu* [1835-1836]; Wilhelm Bousset [1864-1920], *Kyrios Christos*; or Richard August Reitzenstein [1861-1931]), exploring pagan mysteries for roots of a Christian theology of salvation, see *Hellenization Revisited: The Hellenistic Context of Judaism, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. W.E. Helleman, New York 1994, p. 438; also W.E. Helleman – M.A.B. Gaiya, *Early Christianity: A Textbook for African Students*, Carlisle – Cumbria 2019, p. 403, 407, 409; and E. Yarnold, *Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries in the Fourth Century*, “The Heythrop Journal” 13/3 (1972) p. 251.

⁷⁹ On second-century Christian leaders using language of the mysteries, see Finn, *Sacraments*, p. 1011-1012, recognizing Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata* and *Protrepticus* on Christians “initiated into the mysteries”; also Origen’s homilies, on baptism as “mystery of the third day”, and participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, while his interpretation of Rom 6:1-11 anticipated fourth-century sacraments as sacred “imitation” of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. See also below on Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catecheses ad Illuminandos*.

⁸⁰ See A.D. Nock, *Hellenistic Mysteries and Christian Sacraments*, “Mnemosyne” Fourth Series 5/3 (1952) p. 177-213, for archaeological research supporting his rejection of the *religionsgeschichtliche* approach. He concludes, “Any idea that what we call the

“Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries in the Fourth Century” affirmed this approach⁸¹; but Yarnold also recognized the significance of fourth-century decline in pagan mysteries for the adoption of “mystery” terminology in Christian practice⁸². Significant church building projects after Emperor Constantine’s conversion included structures with a *martyrium* (shrine), to celebrate the martyr to whom they were dedicated. For that context Yarnold noted significant borrowing from language of the mysteries for appropriate liturgical rites⁸³.

The NT itself had incorporated terminology associated with the mysteries, like the language of illumination (φωτίζειν), for baptism (Heb 6:4)⁸⁴. Second-century Clement of Alexandria also used the language of the mysteries for the sacrament of baptism as an initiation (μύειν) involving enlightenment (φωτίζειν) and perfection (τελειώσις) toward immortal life⁸⁵; this is recognized by Yarnold as part of Clement’s apologetic strategy, assimilating language of (gnostic) adversaries to refute them⁸⁶. For fourth-century liturgical adaptation of “mystery” terminology, Yarnold argues its use for dramatic effect. And this was possible because pagan mysteries no longer posed a real threat to the Christian faith⁸⁷.

In his *De mysteriis*, Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 310-ca. 367) applies the term to typological interpretation of OT passages, pointing to Christ and

Christian sacraments were in their origin indebted to pagan mysteries [...] shatters on the rock of linguistic evidence” (p. 200).

⁸¹ See Yarnold, *Baptism*, p. 247-267 (esp. 247).

⁸² On this decline, Yarnold (*Baptism*, p. 256-257) cites use of divination, magic, and trickery, to impress initiates.

⁸³ On martyrs as Christian heroes, see Yarnold, *Baptism*, p. 264-268.

⁸⁴ See Heb 6:1, 2 and 4, “Let us proceed to perfection; [...] as for the teaching of baptisms [...] it is impossible for those who once were enlightened [to renew repentance] (ἐπὶ τὴν τελειότητα φερώμεθα [...] βαπτισμῶν διδασχὴν [...] Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας)”. See also Yarnold, *Baptism*, p. 252-253; and E. Ferguson, *Baptism*, in: *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. E. Ferguson et al., Routledge 1998, p. 160-164.

⁸⁵ On Clement of Alexandria assimilating language of “enlightenment” (φωτίζειν) in the *Protrepticus* and *Paedagogus*, and Justin Martyr referring to baptism as “illumination”, see Yarnold, *Baptism*, p. 252-253; also Finn, *Sacraments*, p. 1011-1012, cited above, n. 79.

⁸⁶ Yarnold, *Baptism*, p. 251-253.

⁸⁷ On aspects of Christian liturgical practice that recall the mysteries: secrecy, mystical discourse, drama or contemplation (ἐποπτεία), see Yarnold, *Baptism*, p. 258-259, 261, and 263. On secrecy concerning the sacraments for baptismal candidates, see also T.L. Regule, *The Mystagogical Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem: Forming the Identity of a Christian*, “Liturgy” 35/2 (2020) p. 42-47.

the church⁸⁸. Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339-397), in his *De mysteriis*⁸⁹, written just a few decades later, used the term much as Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 313-386) used it in his catechetical lectures (*Catecheses ad Illuminandos*)⁹⁰. John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) also spoke of such lectures as “mystagogical” instruction, and the sacraments as “mysteries”⁹¹. Appealing to passages like Rom 6:3-4, or Col 2:11-14, Cyril of Jerusalem referred to baptism as the key to salvation, re-enacting the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, as a symbolic sharing in his suffering⁹². In Greek, Cyril’s language for the mystery parallels that of Victorinus in Latin.

At this point we turn to implications for Victorinus’ double use of the term *mysterium* in the critical and puzzling statement, “When I serve Christ in the mystery, I suffer the mystery of Christ”⁹³. Are we also to

⁸⁸ On Hilarius Pictaviensis, *De mysteriis*, see A. Fogleman, *Peccatrix Ecclesia: Hilary of Poitiers’s De Mysteriis as Biblical Ecclesiology*, J ECS 28/1 (2020) p. 53, and 58-59. For Jerome’s comment on Gal 6:2, referring to “twofold understanding” passing “from observance of the Law to spiritual mysteries”, see Cain, *St. Jerome, Commentary*, p. 250.

⁸⁹ On Ambrosius, *De mysteriis*, see Yarnold, *Baptism*, p. 258, 260, 262-263.

⁹⁰ On Cyrillus Hierosolymitanus, *Catecheses ad Illuminandos*, see Yarnold, *Baptism*, p. 259, 263. Some scholars question traditional assignment of post-baptismal *Catecheses mystagogica* to Cyril of Jerusalem, but Yarnold is positive (*Baptism*, p. 263), as is Regule (*The Mystagogical Catecheses of Cyril*), while she allows for this being the work of a close colleague or successor. See also J. Day, *Cyril of Jerusalem on the Holy Spirit*, in: *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church. Proceedings of the 7th International Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2008*, ed. D.V. Twomey – J.E. Rutherford, Dublin – Portland 2010, p. 73-85.

⁹¹ See Iohannes Chrysostomus, *In Iohannem homiliae* 85, 3 (on Jn 19:31): “With this too an ineffable mystery was accomplished [...] the initiated know it, being by water indeed regenerate, and nourished by the Blood and the Flesh. Hence the Mysteries take their beginning”, tr. C. Marriott, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF)*, Ser. 1, Vol. 14, ed. P. Schaff, Buffalo 1889; rev. ed. K. Knight, in: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/240185.htm> (accessed: 1.05.2024). See also, P. Argarate, *John Chrysostom’s Catechesis on Baptism in the Context of late Fourth Century Mystagogies*, “Icoana Credintei, International Journal of Interdisciplinary Scientific Research” 3/5 (2017) p. 19-25.

⁹² See Cyrillus Hierosolymitanus, *Catecheses ad Illuminandos* 20, 5: “We did not really die, we were not really buried, we were not really crucified and raised again; but our imitation was in a figure, and our salvation in reality. Christ was actually crucified, and actually buried, and truly rose again; and all these things He has freely bestowed upon us, that we, sharing His sufferings by imitation, might gain salvation in reality [...] by the fellowship of His suffering He freely bestows salvation”, tr. E.H. Gifford, *NPNF* 2.07, p. 283; in: <https://hismercy.ca/content/ebooks/St.Cyril%20of%20Jerusalem-Catechetical%20Lectures.pdf> (accessed: 1.05.2024).

⁹³ Marius Victorinus, *Commentarium in epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* II 6, 17, 9-10.

understand these terms to represent the sacraments, baptism and the eucharist? Although Victorinus does not name the sacraments as such, the degree of secrecy concerning the sacraments, particularly for baptismal candidates, and even more for the unbaptized⁹⁴, would explain the subtlety of his reference to sacraments in a commentary published for a wider audience. Indeed, such a reference serves to highlight the confessional nature of Victorinus' impersonation of Paul's words, "Ego enim stigmata Iesu Christi domini nostri in corpore meo porto"; and, "[...] id est et ego passus sum", echoing the confessional language of Gal 2:20, and 6:14 (noted above #3.1. Rhetorical impersonation). Even more, in these sentences we find a close association of the mystery with both serving and suffering, two key themes for Victorinus' application of the passage.

In this connection we note the important presentation of baptism, also given by Cyril of Jerusalem, as re-enacting the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Significantly, such re-enactment went beyond symbolizing death and burial, implying for both Paul and Victorinus a crucifying of the "old" life, with its worldly desires and inclinations. Sacramental re-enactment also meant resurrection "with Christ" to new life. From this perspective, we find both a broader and deeper significance for Victorinus' emphasis on the message of service in suffering. On the one hand, the sacrament placed the opposition and suffering experienced by Christians in a historically wide perspective, calling for comparison with the suffering of Christ himself, and placing the baptismal candidate also in the context of Christians who suffered persecution from the beginning of the church. And the sacrament lends depth to the experience of suffering because it represents suffering "in union with Christ"; in the context of the church and its sacraments, suffering occurs in fellowship or communion with other believers. In baptism, candidates pass through the water individually, but in suffering the Christian is not alone. Moreover, suffering with Christ is not only a story of sorrow and gloom; nor is it an end in itself. It brings the Christian to further sharing in Christ's victory over death, and resurrection to new life. Victorinus has warned his audience that a life of service for the Christian, following in Paul's and in Christ's own footsteps, cannot avoid suffering. Understood in the light of the baptismal sacrament, however, that suffering takes on a new and liberating meaning. In that context, historically and theologically, suffering loses its sting.

⁹⁴ On such secrecy, see above n. 87.

Such a reading of Victorinus' commentary of Gal 6:17 can also take us to his answer for trauma, the deep-seated effect of wounds which the human spirit cannot integrate. For Victorinus' Christian audience, suffering is inevitable, but it is not experienced by oneself, alone. There is always the cloud of witnesses, including many who have suffered as much, or worse. And it is not an end in itself; healing is possible by an identification with Christ, whose wounds prove to be the source of new, immortal life.

5. Conclusion

From this discussion of a short passage in the commentary on Galatians, we realize that Victorinus' work deserves more scholarly attention and wider appreciation. His comments on Gal 6:17 are carefully crafted, and go to the heart of Paul's final statement, recognizing the significance of the *stigmata* as evidence of suffering, with wounds physical and spiritual, that point to real trauma; the sins of the Galatians, departing from the salvation offered freely "in Christ", threaten to take Paul beyond his limit of tolerance. Strong words of appeal to the humiliation of *stigmata* in Gal 6:17 indicate as much. As Victorinus recognized, these are also *stigmata* in service to Christ, and represent Christ's ultimate humiliation, suffering and death on the cross. Thus Victorinus applies the verse, warning his audience that following Christ means suffering. With Paul, they can expect ongoing opposition and adversity.

Our analysis sought to demonstrate the effective power of Victorinus' exposition. His dramatic first-person retelling of the passage brings the confessional aspect of Paul's words to life. Nor does Victorinus simply "preach" to the audience, using moral persuasion to call them to obedience. He effectively closes the distance between himself and his listeners by including himself among those who need to hear the message (*debeamus, volumus*), balancing *vos* with *nos*. And he does not simply "predict" a life of suffering. Were that the full story, his audience could legitimately speak of cold comfort. Suffering must be more than an end in itself. Paul's life of suffering, as Victorinus recognized, was a life of service in fellowship with Christ. The *stigmata* borne by Paul are important marks by which he *identifies* with the suffering of Christ and can *be identified* as a Christ-follower, even if that makes suffering inevitable.

The redeeming factor comes from Victorinus' association of suffering with the "mystery", and more specifically, the affirmation of "serving in the mystery". With this term we recognize an element of paradox, for Victorinus knows from the Pauline letters that Christ's humiliating death was also the means of his triumph over the powers of this world, including the power of death; his death opened the way for resurrection to new life. Union with Christ means union in his death, but also in his resurrection to new life. As such the mystery is fully represented in the sacrament of baptism; for Paul explains that believers are "marked by the cross", as it were, as they crucify the "old self", to be buried in death, but also raised to new life, eternal life. In that connection we find a clue to Victorinus' answer for the incurable wounds of trauma. For Victorinus, suffering is redeemed in the experience of fellowship with Christ, especially when understood through the lens of the "mystery" of baptism, as a transition to healing and new life.

Does Victorinus have a message for our own time, with its incredible experience of suffering and trauma, with wars in so many parts of the globe, especially in the Middle East and parts of Africa? His approach in the few sentences we have studied make it clear that we can expect his empathy. But it is also clear that he would call us to a healthy respect for the inevitability of suffering. Unlike Jerome and many Christians of his time, Victorinus resisted the call to a new kind of martyrdom, or a life of ascetic practice. His realistic message places suffering in the larger perspective in which it can be redeemed.

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