

The Function of Ethos in Colossians

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Though we often try to deny it, from ancient Athens to present-day Hollywood ethos has been an important element in persuasion. Indeed, as James May asserts, “Oratory, by its very nature, involves character. Verbal persuasion of any sort always implies the presentation of a persona by the speaker that can effect its audience for good or for ill.”¹ Indeed, Aristotle says it is the most effective form of proof (*Rhet.* 1.4). While New Testament documents are written rather than spoken, we may remember that they were heard rather than read by most of the recipients. In some ways, this factor increases the need to give attention to ethos. Since the author is not there to present the desired image, he must attend to such matters yet more carefully in the material he presents. Yet biblical scholars have been loath to acknowledge the place of non-rational means of persuasion in biblical writings. In large part, this is a result of our nervousness (inherited from the Enlightenment and Empiricism) about the legitimacy of non-rational argumentation. Participants in this series of conferences have stretched beyond the narrow confines of *logos* on many occasions, trying to perceive the ways biblical writers seek to persuade their readers. Such work has revealed significant elements of the ways these writing “work,” how they are constructed so that they employ a wide range of persuasive tactics known to rhetoricians (and others) of the

first century. Since ethos is one of those important persuasive tactics, it is important to understand how it is used in our texts.

Ethos in Greco-Roman writers

Lysias is often credited with being the one who developed ways to present character in speeches (i.e., *ethnopoia*) as he wrote speeches for others to deliver.² But he was not the only one to note the weight audiences grant to character. Isocrates says that a person's life carries more weight than his/her words (*Antidosis* 339). Recognizing the importance of ethos, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (2.3) argues that in forensic cases the accuser must show the accused to be of the sort of character who would commit the crime while the defendant must show him/herself to be of upright character, thus making it unlikely that he/she could have committed the crime. A glance at extant forensic speeches shows, as Pearson observes, that ethos is a central element in that species.³ Aristotle observes that ethos is even more essential in deliberative speeches than in forensic speeches (*Rhet.* 2.1.4). When we also recognize the significance attached to ethos in epideictic rhetoric,⁴ it becomes clear that ethos is an integral part of all types of speeches. The various speeches of Demosthenes demonstrate how pervasive this strategy of persuasion is; they dwell extensively on his character and he says explicitly that his character should guide his hearers' interpretations his actions. Furthermore, the more debatable the topic, the more important ethos becomes because when the evidence does not clearly point to one conclusion, the hearers must rely on the evaluations of the speaker and so the audience needs to trust the speaker.⁵

Modern interpreters often contrast two ways of thinking about ethos: ethos as the person's actual manner of life and ethos as an image constructed within the speech. Cicero and Quintilian are commonly cited as the writers who claim that one must truly be a good

person to be a good orator. Cicero does assert that a speaker needs genuine weight of character to call the people to action (*De or* 2.333). In Cicero's discussion of Antonius's speech for Norbanus, Antonius is seen to gain credibility by showing himself to be good, virtuous, honorable, and loyal,⁶ all characteristics honored by the audience. Comments in Cicero's early speeches recognize the ways he lacks this known character and he uses the unfairness of the power of the opponent's character as a way to gain a hearing. But when he has reputation and position, he uses these as means to persuade. By the time he composes the *Philippics*, those speeches rely on ethos along with pathos as their predominant sources of persuasion.⁷

Cicero is not alone in this. The *Rhet. Ad Her.* asserts that the advocate must show the defendant to be an upright person to be successful. And Cicero's admirer Quintilian defines the orator as "a good man skilled in speaking," with the "good man" element being the more important (12.1, 12.1.11). For Quintilian the orator is to be a kind of Roman wise man (12.2.7). These later Roman writers sound much like Isocrates who we have seen comment on the power of a person's life.

Such understandings of ethos are commonly contrasted with Aristotle who asserts that the orator must only appear to possess the qualities of virtue, goodwill, and good sense (*Rhet* 2.1). Schutrumpf gives expression to a commonly held view when he comments that giving the impression of having these three qualities is more important in Aristotle than actually having them.⁸ Perhaps, however, the contrast between Aristotle and Cicero has been overdrawn. Aristotle clearly emphasizes the constructed nature of a speaker's ethos in *Rhet* 2.1 but, as Fortenbaugh points out, does not use the word ἠθὸς in that context.⁹ In 2.1 Aristotle enumerates those things which make a politician credible because he is dealing with

deliberative speeches. In 1.2 and 15 Aristotle treats ethos in connection with forensic speeches and there speaks as though moral character does make a difference and refers to ethos as “an established moral disposition.”¹⁰ On the other side, Cicero envisions Antonius creating an image of himself for the hearers.

So perhaps the distinction between those who stress that a person must possess certain characteristics and those who stress the need to seem to have them is not as great as it may sometimes appear.¹¹ The proper image of the speaker (or client) must be constructed in the speech, whether one possesses the necessary character or not. When rhetoricians advise speakers to mention birth, hardships, commonalities between themselves and the audience, and other things which will produce goodwill in the hearers, this is constructing a *persona* to make the case more convincing. That Aristotle acknowledges that this is what one is doing, does not mean he sees no connection between genuine character and persuasion. The connection between persuasion and character manifests itself in the attention he gives to knowing the character of the audience (1.13.16) and the nature of various sorts of people (2.12).¹² Hughes notes that both Aristotle and Cicero took creative license in composing narratives to show that a person possessed certain qualities.¹³ Perhaps both would acknowledge that “(t)he speaker’s life, insofar as it is public, forms a long prelude to his speech.”¹⁴ Still, Aristotle would perhaps give more emphasis to the necessity of the speaker fashioning the perceptions of that public life in the speech.

The constructed nature of ethos can be seen beyond speech making and the handbooks on rhetoric. As Cox has shown, ancient biographies sought to illustrate a type of character rather than give a factual account of an individual’s life.¹⁵ These accounts of lives intend to shape the readers, calling them to avoid or adopt a particular manner of life. To

accomplish this the writer shapes the narrative to construct the proper image or ethos of the subject. There is an element of fiction in such biography and in every presentation of ethos, though that does not make the account wholly fictional.¹⁶ Since this presentation of a life intends to be persuasive, the writer emphasizes the subject's commonalities with the readers and her/his possession of virtues the readers prize. Aristotle recognizes the importance of knowing what the audience values or what they will find persuasive and thus recommends a study of the audience. Similarly, Cicero assumes that the values of Roman culture are what the orator needs to display.¹⁷

Ethos plays a role in actual speeches and various other writings that is even larger than the considerable one we would expect from the handbooks. In his extant letters, Isocrates continually refers to his advanced age and the difficulties that brings as he writes his letters. This is clearly a means he uses to exhort those to whom he writes to follow his recommendations. Isocrates's speech *Against Lochites* shows the extent to which he was willing to rely on ethos. In this work Isocrates says that Lochites was too young to participate in the overthrow of democracy by the Thirty, but had he been old enough he would have been among the conspirators because that is the sort of person he is. Since Lochites is of that sort of character, the assembly should side with Isocrates who had opposed the Thirty with the audience and thus they should punish Lochites. The *De Corona* of Demosthenes also shows the extent to which ethos could dominate a speech; nearly the entire speech is about ethos. A final sample is the collection of works known as the Major Declamations of Quintilian. While these are probably school exercises rather than speeches which were actually delivered, they give us a glimpse of the kinds of persuasion being taught and used. These defense speeches are almost entirely devoted to ethos. If someone is

accused of murder, the facts of the case seem almost irrelevant; they are certainly secondary to the evidence drawn from the character of the accused and the accuser. When all the evidence points to the blind son, the argument is that he could not have committed the murder of his father because of his virtuous character. On the other hand, his accuser is just the sort of person who would commit such a heinous crime and try to blame it on others, after all, that is what stepmothers are like! Whatever the crime, the defense is the virtuous character of the defendant and this argument is bolstered by charges about the dubious character of the accuser or the injured. These declamations support the view that ethos is not simply the backdrop of an argument but at times *is* the argument.¹⁸

Before turning to Colossians it may be useful to note that three different uses of the word ethos appear in the above discussion. Grimaldi sees two uses of ethos in Aristotle, one that applies to the speaker and one that applies to the audience.¹⁹ We have seen above how Aristotle thinks it is important to know the character of the audience so that one can gain their goodwill. May finds a third use of ethos in Aristotle, that of drawing an image. In isolating this third use of ethos May distinguishes between the moral character of the speaker and the image the speaker draws of himself.²⁰ I hope we have shown that there is some usefulness in making this distinction, even while recognizing that Cicero is less forthcoming about the distinction than Aristotle. It may be particularly helpful to keep this distinction in mind when studying Colossians, a letter whose author either has not met the recipients or has adopted a pseudonym (or perhaps both).

Ethos in Colossians

Colossians was written to keep its recipients from accepting the teaching being advocated by a group of visionaries who see and participate in angelic worship in their

visions. These visionaries call others to adopt mildly ascetic practices, apparently associated with Jewish feast days, which lead to ecstatic visions. These teachers have begun to assert that only those with such experiences are truly Christian and so those without them are still in sin and still outside the realm of salvation. It is this latter element that causes the writer of Colossians to reject the visionaries' teaching so vehemently. These visionaries think their teaching is compatible with that of Paul who, after all, had his own visionary experiences. The recipients of the letter have, for the most part, not yet accepted this teaching but are considering it. Thus, Colossians seeks to dissuade them from accepting it and to convince them to remain in the teaching they had received previously.²¹

Given this context, perhaps the first use of ethos to notice is the image of the recipients that the writer constructs. From the greeting through chapter three the Colossians are described as faithful and holy. These descriptors are first found in the greeting (1:2). Then, the aspect of their lives the writer mentions first in the thanksgiving is their piety, followed immediately by their love for all the saints, the holy ones (1:4).²² When the writer applies the poetic material of 1:15-20 to the Colossian situation, he further develops his description of their holiness, claiming that the work of Christ has made them holy and spotless and without blemish. They are also to understand themselves to be among those "saints" who have received knowledge of the mystery of God. Then when encouraging them to live out Christian attitudes in 3:12 the writer identifies them as God's chosen who are holy and beloved. This emphasis on the holiness they possess probably serves to help them reject the visionaries' teaching, but it also bestows upon them a position of high status. Some rhetoricians mention complementing one's audience as a way to gain their goodwill.²³ Perhaps this is part of the reason the writer characterizes the Colossians in this way.²⁴ The

tactic of praising them emerges explicitly in 2:5, where the writer says he rejoices because of their orderliness and their steadfastness in the faith.

This awarding of high status is further bolstered not only by placing them among those to whom God has revealed a mystery hidden for ages, but also by making them an element in the mystery; this mystery is “Christ in you” (1:27). Thus they hold a significant place in God’s plan for the whole world. They are also assured that they have been made full in Christ who embodies the fullness of deity and is the ruler of all powers (2:9-10). Since they are united with this most powerful force in the cosmos, they clearly possess status. Finally, the author assures them that they will receive glory at the parousia (3:4). Thus, the writer has constructed a powerful and complementary ethos for the readers.

One other element of their ethos is of interest: quite often the author mentions the change the Gospel has wrought in their lives. In 1:12 they are told that they have been made sufficient to share in the heavenly inheritance. By itself, this assertion does not necessarily signal a radical change in them. However, the next verse indicates that receiving that sufficiency also meant that they were rescued from one realm and transferred into a new realm, the kingdom of Christ. The drastic change envisioned is seen clearly in 1:21-22, where the writer says that in their former lives they were enemies of God because of the orientation of their lives, lives characterized as evil, but now they are reconciled and possess a manner of life that is holy. The radical nature of this change comes to the fore again in 2:11-13. Here they have been given a new life by participating in the burial and resurrection of Christ. They were dead but have now been raised.

The idea that a person’s character undergoes a radical change runs counter to Roman ideas about character. As May and Baumlin note, Romans often saw character as

unchanging even across generations.²⁵ While Baumlin contrasts such a view of character with Aristotle's construction of a self in a speech, the tension between a constant nature and a changing one is present any time an author exhorts people to live in a particular way, especially if that call includes any implication that the person is not already conforming to the prescribed manner of life. Even if the moralist sees human nature as good and in need only of returning to a life according to nature, a change is urged so that one's true character is lived out. The moralists often indicate that such change is a very difficult task. But even in the context of the moralists, the language of Colossians (and other Christian writings) is quite radical. The change envisioned in Colossians assumes a different understanding of the nature of the self. This alternative understanding of character enables both the complementary descriptions of the Colossians found throughout the letter and the exhortations to proper living.

The visionaries rejected in Colossians comprise a second group whose constructed ethos forms part of the argument. They are presented as deceivers (2:4, 6) who are proud and are associated with lowly things (the flesh) rather than with Christ (2:16-19). Furthermore the judgments they formulate against the Colossians are mentioned to indicate that these teachers do not act in the best interest of the readers. The remarks about the uselessness of the things they advocate appear to be the sort of comment the *Rhet ad Alex.* has in mind when it recommends that one ridicule what the opponent is proud of (1441b). So Colossians provides the necessary derogatory characterization of the opponents as the contrasting image to its presentation of Paul's ethos.

Colossians devotes more attention to the ethos of Paul than it does to that of either the visionaries or Colossians themselves. The first word in Colossians about Paul is that he

is “an apostle through the will of God” (1:1). This assertion immediately sets him in a place of authority. The scope of the authority with which Paul is invested comes to expression in 1:23 where he is identified as a minister of the Gospel that is preached throughout the whole world. These broad statements narrow to include the Colossians specifically in 1:25. This verse identifies Paul as a minister who has been given the task of fulfilling the word of God among the recipients. Thus, Paul possesses authority over them. Assertions of such authority could arouse resentment. Perhaps Paul attributes his position to the “will of God” in 1:1 and says that it has been given him by God to avert such resentment. Such a move coheres with the advice Plutarch gives about avoiding resentment when praising oneself. He recommends attributing one’s success to the gods as a way to make self-praise less offensive.²⁶ Ascribing Paul’s office to God’s will, then, both gives it God’s approval and lessens the offense of asserting authority among those who have had no direct contact with Paul. Perhaps submitting to the will of God also shows him to be a person of good sense, one of those characteristics required for a speaker to be persuasive.

A second element of Paul’s ethos that Colossians develops at some length is his relationship with those known by the implied readers. Isocrates asserts that people honor those who are on intimate terms with superior people (*To Philip* 1.9). The *Rhet. Ad Alex.* also notes that having certain people as friends and maintaining those relationships can help make the audience well-disposed (1445b-1446a). In a similar vein, Aristotle notes that those who are friends of the same people are friends (*Rhet* 2.4.4). Thus, by claiming a relationship with those who are friends of the Colossians, Paul gives grounds for the recipients to consider him their friend and so to be well disposed toward him. The writer of Colossians identifies Paul’s gospel with the message that Epaphras had initially brought to Colossae. As

the person who brought the gospel to Colossae, Epaphras is trusted and held in honor by the implied readers. Calling him “a faithful servant of Christ for you” and noting that he praises the recipients (1:7) reinforces this status. When Epaphras is mentioned again in 4:12 he is a slave of Christ who prays for them and suffers for them.²⁷ So he is completely trustworthy. In 1:7 the writer presents Paul and Epaphras as close associates, identifying Epaphras as Paul’s “beloved fellow slave.” In the context of this letter, Paul is the one whose ethos benefits from this association. Paul can be trusted because the implied readers already trust Epaphras.

The benefit of association seems to run in the other direction when the letter identifies Tychicus as someone Paul is sending to them (4:8). That is, the writer enhances Tychicus’s status by having Paul call him “the beloved brother, faithful servant, and fellow slave in the Lord.” Thus, the one Paul is sending to them is a member of the Pauline mission and so shares in Paul’s work for the recipients.²⁸ But then, both Paul and Tychicus benefit from their association with Onesimus who is identified as one of the recipients’ own, a person who is faithful and beloved by them (4:9). Perhaps both Epaphras and Onesimus had developed a good reputation for their work in the region the letter addresses. At least it seems likely that they were known, though perhaps only by reputation, to the actual as well as the implied recipients of the letter. Clearly the mutual associations of Epaphras, Onesimus, and Paul were beneficial in building a persuasive ethos for the Paul of Colossians.

Colossians also uses explicit expressions of concern for the recipients to construct a winsome ethos for Paul. In addition to the common Pauline statements about praying for the recipients that appear in the opening thanksgiving (1:3, 9),²⁹ the writer mentions other ways in which Paul wants to benefit them. Here we return to 1:25-28. We have already noted that

Paul says his work of ministry is for the Colossians. Expounding upon the content of the gospel, he identifies it as the mystery which had been hidden until revealed to the saints, among whom the readers are to count themselves. Paul has been appointed to the task of proclaiming this mystery, a mystery that includes exhortation and teaching that have as their goal the maturity of every hearer. Of course, the hearers closest at hand are the letter's recipients. Thus the task assigned Paul by God is to bring benefit to the readers (among others). Paul also endears himself to them with the not uncommon expression of his being absent in body but present in spirit (2:5). These statements clearly demonstrate Paul's goodwill toward the Colossians.

One final element in the development of Paul's ethos calls for comment. Several times throughout Colossians the writer mentions Paul's sufferings and his hard work for the readers. Such references are striking because he has never met them. Yet he says that he suffers for them in particular even as he suffers for the whole church (1:24). Then in 2:1 he emphasizes how much he struggles for them, those in their region, and all Christians he has not met. His sufferings include being deserted by nearly all of his fellow Jews (4:11). More emphatically, these sufferings include being imprisoned as he writes, a matter he mentions twice near the very end of the letter (4:3, 18). The second mention of this state of affairs is the call to remember his chains, which is followed only by the closing benediction.³⁰ Thus, this placement gives Paul's imprisonment a significant role in the letter's persuasive strategy.

Of course, demonstrating that you have the good of the audience at heart is one of the central tasks of constructing a persuasive ethos. Mention of suffering for the audience's good is one of the recommended strategies for accomplishing this. *Rhet. ad Her.* (1.8) recommends that the speaker recount the vicissitudes of life, while Quintilian (12.2.29-30) notes that

speaking of one's contempt of suffering creates the proper ethos. We may also recall that Cicero (*De or.* 2.335) says that one who speaks for moral worth should recall achievements by one's ancestors that involved danger and brought advantage to the audience. Thus presenting Paul's suffering as *for them*³¹ demonstrates Paul's concern for whole church, especially Gentile Christians and even more particularly the letter's recipients (1:24, 26-27).³²

Such suffering and hardship is also part of the image of a philosopher that one finds in the moralists and philosophers, where catalogs of hardships function as evidence of the philosopher's genuineness.³³ These vicissitudes are commonly given as examples of what the readers should be willing to endure for the sake of virtue.³⁴ For example, Hermogenes (418.3-419.15) suggests that the speaker give his own character as an example for others to imitate. In 1 Thess 1:6; 2:1-12; and 2:13-16 (if genuine) Paul gives his endurance in sufferings (as well as those of Jesus and the Hebrew prophets) as a model for the readers to imitate. Similar accountings of Paul's sufferings are found throughout the Pauline corpus. Such autobiographical remarks from Paul usually support the main point of the letter by giving an illustration.³⁵ MacDonald concludes that the stories of Paul's life told in the early church retained the basic insight articulated by Paul, that suffering is a consequence of following Jesus.³⁶ Thus, one might expect that one of the functions of the extensive treatment of Paul's ethos in Col 1:24-2:5 would be to construct a model for the Colossians to imitate. But there is little or no direct connection between the image of Paul drawn in these verses, or any of Colossians, and the letter's exhortations about conduct and belief. Colossians certainly gives no evidence that the recipients were enduring persecution or were suffering in other ways. The surprising absence of a direct connection between the image of Paul

constructed in the letter and its exhortations leads us to inquire about the function of Colossians' emphasis on Paul's image and particularly the focus on his suffering (especially given that there is no hint that the recipients are suffering). Such questions are rendered all the more acute by the arresting assertion in 1:24 that Paul's suffering fills up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

Pobee argues that Paul understands his sufferings in an eschatological context in which there is a measure of sins that must be committed before the parousia. The sooner these sins are committed and the more of their consequences Paul suffers, the sooner the parousia may come. Thus, Paul's sufferings are for the cause of Christ.³⁷ Remaining within a forensic understanding of vicarious suffering, Pobee's interpretation of this suffering coheres with the strategy of showing that one possesses goodwill toward the readers—not only the implied original readers, but all Gentile Christians, really all who await the parousia. Such an understanding of Paul's sufferings is similar to that which Margaret Mitchell perceives in John Chrysostom. According to Mitchell, Chrysostom believes that “all that Paul suffered he suffered for the sake of the salvation of the world.”³⁸

David Seeley's study of the noble death in Greco-Roman literature, however, gives us a different way to think about the function of such descriptions of suffering and what it means to speak of vicarious suffering.³⁹ Seeley acknowledges that in works such as 4 Maccabees, the sufferings of martyrs are sometimes seen as expiatory, as acts which serve to purify the sins of others.⁴⁰ But he sees another and more common understanding of vicarious suffering at work in a broad number of writings, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Often, the deaths of martyrs are vicarious through being examples for others to follow. They are given as examples of acts of obedience. This does not necessarily mean that others are called to a

martyr's death however. Instead, the example serves to call others to a broader obedience to God or to the requirements of the philosophical life.⁴¹

In 4 Maccabees 7-9 Eliazar's death is explicitly designated as an example that the seven brothers should follow. He is "our aged instructor" on how to suffer rather than violate the Law (9:6). Similarly, as the first brother dies he calls out, "Imitate me, brothers" (9:23). The basic point, however, is not that all should die for their faith, but that reason is stronger than emotion and thus reason enables one to remain faithful and obedient.⁴² This meaning of the martyrs' deaths is a constant refrain of the book. The behavior of the mother also serves a mimetic function because she knows that obedience to God is more important than the life of her children. Thus, the writer says she also demonstrates that reason is stronger than emotion.⁴³ As 4 Maccabees ends, its concluding and primary exhortation is not to seek a martyr's death, but rather to "obey this law and exercise piety in every way," knowing that reason is stronger than emotion (18:1-2). Therefore, the point of recounting these stories is to urge that broader obedience to the Law.

Seneca views the suffering and death of those who die a noble death in ways that are similar to what we have seen in 4 Maccabees. In Epistle 24,⁴⁴ Seneca tries to comfort Lucilius, who is being sued, by telling him that the outcome has no ultimate significance because even death itself is not to be feared. Seneca makes his point first and often by noting examples of those who bore noble deaths or suffered in other ways and did not yield their view of life.⁴⁵ Seneca tells of these sufferers to encourage Lucilius to live the proper manner of life, to encourage him to maintain the outlook of a philosopher. In another context Seneca makes this point by saying explicitly that good people suffer hardships and pains so "that they may teach others to endure them; they were born to be a pattern" (*Prov* 6.3). The

pattern they provide is intended to be useful not only for those who face extreme circumstances, but more generally to arm the minds of all to withstand with fortitude whatever befalls and to scorn pain, poverty, death, and fortune (6.4-9). Perhaps the most significant comment from *Ep.* 24 is Seneca's remark that Lucilius may not want to hear this advice because it is so common in the schools. Putting words in Lucilius' mouth Seneca has him opine, "those stories have been droned to death in all the schools" (24.6). So this use of recounting the suffering and death of the virtuous was a widely known and used device.

Since this is such a ubiquitous topos, we may assume that the author of Colossians and its readers know it. This gives us a different way to approach Col 1:24-25. Interpreters have often focused their attention on finding a way to be certain that the author casts no doubt on the full sufficiency of the death of Christ. If the only view of the vicarious suffering of Christ (or Paul) available sees it as expiation for the sin of others, these interpreters have a difficult case to make. However, if we understand the vicarious nature of the suffering spoken of here within the framework of the calls to imitation found in so much ancient literature, not only are the theological difficulties less daunting, but the passage makes excellent sense in the argument of the letter.

Just as Seneca says that providence gives hardships to the virtuous so they may teach others, so Paul is given this ministry (which includes hardships) by God, a ministry which benefits the church, indeed, it "fulfills the word of God" among them. While Colossians does not specify how Paul's suffering benefits the church, the best explanation in the larger context is that his suffering is a summons to a "mimetic re-actualization."⁴⁶ This meaning of Paul's suffering is intimated in v. 28 where, after describing the wondrous nature of the Gospel, Paul says he proclaims it by admonishing and teaching everyone so that they may

become mature in Christ. The focus then returns immediately to Paul's hardships; he works hard in Christ (v. 29). Thus it seems probable that at least one of the means of proclamation referred to in v. 28 is the suffering of Paul. It is vicarious suffering in the sense that the suffering of sages is vicarious for Seneca (and other philosophers); it enables others to endure troubles or be obedient to the proper manner of life when they see the example of the noble sufferer. Similarly, Paul's example of suffering is part of that proclamation that leads others to maturity.

The reference to Paul's suffering and the implicit call to imitation does not require us to assume that the recipients were enduring persecution or need encouragement to do so. Clearly the recounting of the deaths of martyrs in 4 Maccabees and various philosophers was not intended only or primarily as encouragement for those who face a martyr's death. Instead, these deaths are the extreme examples of obedience. Others are enabled to obey God or the way of philosophy by "witnessing" the obedience of these martyrs. As we saw, 4 Maccabees gives them as examples of reason being stronger than emotion and as exhortation to obey the Law and adhere to pious practices. Since there is no evidence that the recipients of Colossians are enduring persecution, Paul's sufferings are not direct encouragement for those suffering at the hands of persecutors. However, by constructing this image of Paul as the one who suffers for them by the will of God, they are given an example to imitate in the broader sense. Their mimesis is their obedience to the Gospel Paul proclaims and to the commands he gives.

The language Colossians uses when it turns to ethical exhortation supports this understanding of Paul's suffering. In 2:20 they are reminded that they have been "put to death with Christ" and so must not take up certain practices; in 3:1 they are raised with Christ

and so must seek the proper things and this means they will remember that they have died in Christ. Then in 3:5 they are exhorted to “put to death the things of the earth.” While this death and resurrection language is certainly to be associated with baptism, it also harks back to the language of suffering used in connection with Christ and Paul. Paul’s faithful endurance in suffering is not to be imitated only when they are suffering, rather they are to draw a broader lesson: they are to imitate the pattern of life commitments that Paul’s sufferings illustrate. They must reject the commands of the other teaching because they have died to such things (2:20-23) and must strive to put to death those parts of themselves inclined to vice (3:5-7), just as Paul struggles in suffering. Thus his suffering is vicarious in the sense that he serves as an example of obedience to the Gospel for them to imitate.

Finding that Paul’s suffering in Colossians possesses a mimetic vicariousness, especially in 1:24-2:5, does not indicate that this is the only type of vicarious suffering the letter speaks of. 4 Maccabees demonstrates the way two understandings of vicarious suffering can stand together in a single text. Eleazar’s death is presented as a death that should inspire obedience, but in 6:28-29 Eleazar prays that his death may serve as the punishment for the whole people, that his blood effect their purification, and his life be accepted in exchange for theirs. The immediately following sentences assert that his resistance of torture demonstrates the power of reason, the acknowledgement of which and exhortation toward whose adoption as one’s way of life the whole book points. Thus, 4 Maccabees does not seem to see a contradiction in having both an expiatory and a mimetic understanding of the suffering of the same person. Similarly, in Colossians Christ’s death may be understood as vicarious by being expiatory in the sense of purifying before and

reconciling to God in 1:20 and then in 1:24 as vicarious in the sense of having a mimetic force.

If our understanding of the mimetic function of Paul's suffering in Colossians is valid, then we have found two important functions of this emphasis in the construction of his ethos. First, we saw that it builds goodwill with the recipients, even if they are not the purported recipients because this suffering is said to be for all Gentile Christians, especially those Paul has not met. So Paul has their best interest at heart as he opposes the visionaries' teaching and exhorts the readers to the proper manner of life. Second, Paul's sufferings serve a mimetic function; they are an example to be followed, not directly by enduring persecution but by faithful obedience to the commands given in the letter and more generally in the gospel preached by Paul.

Conclusion

Ethos, then, pervades Colossians and is a significant part of its persuasive strategy. The writer gives careful attention to constructing a complementary image of the recipients. He grants them a favorable character by describing them as holy and faithful people who possess knowledge of the mysteries of the divine and indeed play a role in the unfolding of that plan of God. Such a description is sure to curry the goodwill of the audience. At the same time, the visionaries advocating the teaching Colossians rejects are cast in a rather different light. They are deceitful and proud; they lead others to lowly ways of life and boast in useless things. Clearly they are not teachers with whom the holy, faithful, and transformed readers will want to associate.

The ethos of Paul receives the most attention in Colossians. He is ascribed the position of apostle and so possesses the authority of one to whom they should listen.

Paul's status is enhanced by his associations with people of repute: Epaphras, Onesimus, and perhaps Tychicus. The most outstanding feature of Paul's ethos is his suffering. From near the beginning of the letter to its closing lines, Paul is presented as one who suffers for the Colossians, for Gentile Christians, and for the whole church. This emphasis does far more than make him a sympathetic figure, though it does that. His suffering for the recipients also creates goodwill because it demonstrates that he has worked for their good in the past and so can be trusted to act in their best interest in the present. Those Paul benefits include the genuine recipients of Colossians (whoever they were) because it is suffering for "all those who have not seen my face" (2:1). A second important function Paul's sufferings have is that they provide of an example for the readers to imitate by being obedient to the Gospel, particularly as that Gospel is explicated in this letter and its exhortations.

Direct appeal to ethos does not dominate Colossians, but the constructed eth_ of the recipients, the rejected teachers, and Paul are important elements of its argument. As we have seen, the ethos of Paul, and especially his suffering, plays a significant role in this letter's attempt to persuade its recipients to reject the teaching offered by the visionaries and to remain committed to the teaching they had received earlier.

¹ James M. May, *The Trials of Character; The Eloquence of Ciceronian Ethos* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1988), 162.

² So James S. Baumlin, "Introduction," in *Ethos; New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, eds. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas: SMU Press, 1994), xii.

³ Lionel Pearson, *The Art of Demosthenes* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981), 78.

⁴ See Sullivan, 113-33. Aristotle (*Rhet* 3.17.12) envisions the possibility that an epideictic speech may lack enthymemes and be composed entirely of arguments from ethos.

⁵ See David S. Cunningham, *Faithful Persuasion; In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1991), 102.

⁶ See Lucia Calboli Montefusco, "Aristotle and Cicero on the *official oratoris*," in *Peripatetic Rhetoric after Aristotle*, eds. W.W. Fortenbaugh and David C. Mirhady, Rutgers University Studies in the Classical Humanities, 6 (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 77.

⁷ So May, *The Trials of Character*, 149.

⁸ Eckart Schütrumpf, "Non-Logical means of Persuasion in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Cicero's *De oratore*," in in Quintillian," in *Peripatetic Rhetoric after Aristotle*, eds. W.W. Fortenbaugh and David C. Mirhady, Rutgers University Studies in the Classical Humanities, 6 (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 97.

⁹ William W. Fortenbaugh, "Aristotle's Accounts of Persuasion through Character," in *Theory, Text, Context: Issues in Greek Rhetoric and Oratory*, ed. Christopher L. Johnstone (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1996), 151.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 151-53.

¹¹ Richard Leo Enos and Karen Rossi Schnackenberg, "Cicero Latinizes Hellenic *Ethos*," in *Ethos; New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, eds. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas: SMU

Press, 1994), 206 make a similar point when they comment that for Cicero ethos was not created only in the speech.

¹² Perhaps this lessens the tension Baumlin (“Introduction,” xxvi) sees between Plato’s true self coming to expression and Aristotle’s verbal construction of character. The metaphysical theory of Plato surely did not preclude the possibility that a person would create false appearances which would deceive many.

¹³ Joseph J. Hughes, “‘Dramatic’ *Ethos* in Cicero’s Later Rhetorical Works,” in *Ethos; New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, eds. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas: SMU Press, 1994), 222.

¹⁴ Perelman, Chaïm and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 320.

¹⁵ Patricia Cox, *Biography in late antiquity: a quest for the holy man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). See pp. 8-9 for the discussion of the difference ancient writers saw between a chronological account and a treatment of character.

¹⁶ See Tita French Baumlin, “‘A good (wo)man skilled in speaking’: *Ethos*, Self-Fashioning, and Gender in Renaissance England,” in *Ethos; New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, eds. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas: SMU Press, 1994), 231.

¹⁷ James L. Kinneavy and Susan C. Warshauer, “From Aristotle to Madison Avenue: *Ethos* and the Ethics of Argument,” in *Ethos; New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, eds. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, SMU Studies in

Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas: SMU Press, 1994), 175 asserts that the effectiveness of ethical appeal depends on how it corresponds to the receiving society's values.

¹⁸ Marchall W. Alcorn, Jr., "Self-Structure as a Rhetorical Device: Modern *Ethos* and the Divisiveness of the Self," in *Ethos; New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, eds. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas: SMU Press, 1994), 4.

¹⁹ William M. A. Grimaldi, *Aristotle: A Commentary* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1980), 186-88.

²⁰ May, *The Trials of Character*, 2.

²¹ For arguments supporting this understanding of the problem Colossians address see J.L. Sumney, *Servants of Satan, False Brothers, and Other Opponents of Paul*, 188-213.

²² Thomas Olbricht, "The Stoicheia and the Rhetoric of Colossians," in *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology; essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht, JSNTS 131 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1996), 313 also sees the attributing of status for the readers as part of the function of assigning these characteristics to them.

²³ E.g. *Rhet ad Alex* 1436b.

²⁴ Even if the original readers are not the readers constructed by the text, i.e. the implied readers, the actual readers are to identify with those characterized in the text.

²⁵ May, *The Trials of Character*, 6; Baumlin, "Introduction," xix. Cicero's advise (*De or* 2.335) to mention one's ancestors' achievements provides some support for this view. See also the letter of Aristippus to Philip among the Cynic Epistles. Aristippus

writes that telling of one's heroic ancestors is a way of gaining the goodwill of an audience (28).

²⁶ Plutarch, *On Praising Oneself*. 542.

²⁷ The characteristics listed are just the sort Quintilian (12.2.29-30) thinks one should have to be a moral example.

²⁸ Troy W. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit; Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique*, JSNTS 118 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 180 comments that the co-workers of Paul, through their association with his mission, "all share Paul's divine commission and empowerment."

²⁹ Olbricht ("The Stoicheia and the Rhetoric of Colossians," 313-15) sees attaining goodwill through praising the readers as the primary function of 1:3-8.

³⁰ It is interesting to note that Paul's imprisonment is also mentioned in Philippians in the opening (1:7) and perhaps at the very end if the mention of the emperor's household (4:22) functions to remind the readers of his circumstances.

³¹ Olbricht ("The Stoicheia and the Rhetoric of Colossians," 318) also notes that these comments on Paul's suffering in 1:24-2:5 function to gain the readers' goodwill.

³² L. Gregory Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians*, JSNTS 78 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 192-93 notes that in Philippians Paul uses his suffering as a means of *captatio benevolentiae*.

³³ See John Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an earthen vessel: an Examination of the catalogues of hardships in the Corinthian correspondence*, SBLDS 99 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988).

³⁴ See George Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography. Toward a New Understanding*, SBLDS 73 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 28-36, 61.

³⁵ Lyons, 227.

³⁶ Dennis MacDonald, "Apocryphal and Canonical Narratives about Paul," *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, ed. William S. Babcock (Dallas: S.M.U. Press, 1990), 69. MacDonald (p. 70) goes on to say that the point of these stories is to call others to imitate Paul as Paul imitates Christ.

³⁷ John S. Pabee, *Persecution and martyrdom in the theology of Paul*, JSNTS 6 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 102-106. To maintain this understanding Pabee interprets τῷ Κριστῷ as an objective genitive.

³⁸ Margaret Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet; John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*, HUT 40 (Tübingen: Mohr, Siebeck, 2000), 307-308.

³⁹ David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation*, JSNTSup 28 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 97-98. See e.g., 4 Macc 17:22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 92-94, 113-116.

⁴² See e.g. 6:31; 7:16; 8:1; 13:1-5; 14:2-6; esp. 7:5-6.

⁴³ 4 Macc 15:1-10; 16:1-2.

⁴⁴ Cited by Seeley, *The Noble Death*, 114-18.

⁴⁵ He gives as examples Metellus, Rutilius, Socrates, Mucius, and Cato in 3-8. Others are noted throughout the letter.

⁴⁶ Seeley (*The Noble Death*, 114) uses this expression to describe Seneca's use of the death of Socrates in *Ep* 24.

