

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI  
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TO GRIEVE OR NOT TO GRIEVE:  
GRIEF IN THE CONSOLATION LETTERS OF JEROME AND  
AUGUSTINE

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<p><b>Abstract:</b></p> <p>This thesis is born out of an observation in some recent scholarly research that tends to polarize early church fathers, particularly Jerome and Augustine in their attitude towards the expression of grief by bereaved Christians. Augustine is said to allow a moderation of grief while Jerome condemns it outright. Adopting a literary analytical method, this thesis sets out to find the disposition of saints Jerome and Augustine towards the expression of grief in their consolation letters.</p> <p>The study finds out that there are more similarities in Jerome's and Augustine's approaches to grief than differences. Neither of these men maintained a singular stand on the expression of grief but adjusted their position depending on various circumstances. Their ideal recommendation was that Christians ought not to weep at all for deceased Christians but instead to rejoice and congratulate them for having left a world of sin to be with Christ. But when circumstances made the emotion of grief too powerful to bear, the church fathers excused grief and instead called for moderation. Having been bereaved themselves, at one point or the other, the church fathers were not unaware of the power of this emotion. When grief was excused, they explained that the grief was not for the departed person but for the virtues lost due to the death and for the living because they are allowed to continue in the world of turmoil and away from paradise. Grief also became legitimate if the deceased person died in sin because then, he would descend to hell.</p> <p>In their consolation letters the church fathers adapted traditional lines of arguments that were current in the Greco-Roman consolations to correspond with the teachings of the Bible in order to offer consolation to bereaved Christians. This hybrid produced a kind of consolation that some scholars have referred to as 'theological consolation'. Unlike the philosophical consolation of the pagans, Christian consolation was hinged on the assurance of resurrection at the second coming of Christ. But as the second coming of Christ became less and less imminent than it was first thought the church fathers began to offer consolation based on an assurance that the deceased believer is already in heaven.</p> <p>The thesis begins with a survey of the ancient practice of consolation, a practice that was first documented and transmitted by the Greeks but adopted and preserved by Romans and then Greek and Latin church fathers. There was also an attempt to define consolation as a literary genre, an effort that many scholars find problematic due to the vastness of literature with consolatory content and the variety in degree of consolation in each. The solution to this problem was to view consolation as a theme present in various genres rather than a genre of its own. On this basis, my sources were delimited to include only patristic epistolary consolation.</p>		
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## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of study

Bereavement, “[T]he situation of a person who has recently experienced the loss of someone significant through that person’s death”<sup>1</sup>, is probably the most traumatic experience any human being can have. Depending on the age of the deceased at the time of death and the virtues and benefits lost as a result of the death, bereavement can be a tragedy of extraordinary impact. The circumstances that resulted in the death and how significant the deceased has been to the bereaved can also compound the hurt that results from bereavement. Saint Ambrose relates how family ties and loss of benevolence increases sorrow: “In the case of brothers the habits of intercourse and joint occupations inflame the bitterness of grief.”<sup>2</sup>

One would think of grief as an inevitable outcome of bereavement, and as such should neither be condemned nor questioned. But the feeling, or more precisely, the expression of grief among early Christians was somewhat conflict-ridden as it was thought to be antithetical to the doctrine of resurrection. The death of close relatives was one of the greatest challenges that early Christians had to deal with as the second coming of Christ became less imminent than it was first perceived. While their assurance of the resurrection of loved ones cannot be said to have been compromised, the reality of bereavement nevertheless, weighed heavily on them. How were these Christians to deal with distress that resulted from the death of close relatives in light of their belief in post-

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<sup>1</sup> Stroebe, M. and Schut, H. 1998, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ambrose, *Satirii* 1:68.

mortem life? The New Testament is unequivocal about the fate of those who die in Christ. At the second coming of Christ they will rise to everlasting life (John 5: 28, 29; 11:24, 25). In the light of such assurances, grieving for the dead appears completely out of place for Christians. On the other hand, giving the seeming inevitability and overwhelming power of the emotion of grief at the death of someone significant, holding back grief appears both difficult and inhumane.

Early Christian leaders attempted to help their followers overcome the distress of bereavement by offering doctrinal clarification regarding the fate of the dead and reaffirming the certainty of resurrection to a blissful life in paradise. In his Epistle to the Thessalonians, apparently in response to some fears expressed by them regarding the fate of their loved ones who had died while waiting for the Parousia, Paul assured them that those who are alive at the second coming of Christ do not have any advantage over those who die before the great event. He then cautioned the Thessalonian Christians against ignorance on this matter, in order not to grieve “like those who do not have hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). Whether Paul was trying to discourage any form of bereavement grief, which would be seen as contrary to the Christian hope in a future resurrection or he was simply against excessive grief, which was a common cultural practice in the Ancient Near East<sup>3</sup> is not immediately clear from the text. In other words, Paul’s caution might be interpreted as against grief altogether or only too much of it.

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<sup>3</sup> Pham 1999, 63.



Subsequently, church fathers of the early Christian era adopted and adapted the classical tradition of consolation by means of the prose letter and speech to console bereaved Christians. But their attitude towards the expression of grief was neither rigid nor consistent. From the theological standpoint, they took up a firm stance against grief, but in the pastoral role of offering practical consolation, they not only adopted a more tolerant approach but at times were themselves overcome by grief. Their consolations offer us an opportunity to study, as far as can be plausibly reconstructed from extant texts, the tension that existed between the emotion of grief and hope of resurrection among early Christians. In this thesis, I will explore the church Fathers' disposition towards the expression of grief in their consolation letters. My central objective is to find out what rational conclusions may be drawn from the consolation letters of some early church fathers, especially Jerome and Augustine, regarding whether or not to grieve at the death of a relative or friend in the light of the gospel. I will make clear that while the church fathers exhorted the Christians to absolute victory over grief, they nevertheless recognised the shock that results from bereavement and were willing to deal more gently with their flocks in those intense moments. I will also analyse what techniques were employed by the church fathers in their consolations as well as whether and to what extent they are indebted to their pagan forebears. My investigation will utilise a comparative approach. First, I will compare the early Christian consolation against the wider Greco-Roman consolation and then those of two major church fathers—Jerome and Augustine. These church fathers have been chosen

as the case studies for this investigation because they have been presented in scholarship as representing opposing views regarding the expression of grief for the dead. Hans Boersma, in his article “Numbed with Grief”, suggests that Jerome and Augustine exhibited completely divergent attitudes towards grief based on their interpretation of Paul’s injunction in 1 Thessalonians 4.13.<sup>4</sup> According to him, Augustine who understood Paul in the “restrictive” sense believed that there was nothing wrong with a moderate expression of grief while Jerome, understanding Paul in the “non-restrictive” sense thought grief is a sign of hopelessness and should be completely suppressed by Christians. I will make clear that neither of these church fathers was consistently for or against grief but adjusted their positions based on the prevailing circumstance. Jerome and Augustine differ considerably in their adoption and adaptation of pagan consolation techniques and the acknowledgment of such reliance. While Jerome boasts of his use of pagan wisdom in his consolations, Augustine hardly leaves any trace of such reliance. These church fathers have also received a fairly disproportionate attention in modern scholarship. Jerome’s consolation has received much attention, probably due to his avowed admiration and use of the classical tradition. His consolation is viewed as ‘literary’ while Augustine’s has been in the most part ignored or understudied, partly due to the notion that traditional consolatory *topoi* are absent or not recognizable in his consolation. Modern scholarship of the late antique Latin Christian consolation tends to focus on the ‘literariness’ and so have given more attention to the likes of Jerome and

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<sup>4</sup> Boersma, 2014. See page 55 for further discussion on his article.

ignored such as Augustine. Contemporaries from the Latin west, they both exerted a tremendous influence on the construction of the Latin Christian *Consolatio Mortis*. They are both eminent and highly venerated in both Eastern and Western churches. Both men experienced the death of close acquaintances and at one time or the other dealt personally with the grief crises.

## 1.2. Structure of study

Chapter one of this study provides a general introductory outline of my thesis, including the background, aim, structure, relevance of the thesis and the research method employed. In chapter two, I will delve into the nature of ancient bereavement, grief and the various theories of grief therapy. Here, I will also do a survey of the letter of consolation and its adaptation by early Christian leaders. In chapter three, I will study the psycho-somatic interaction between the early Christian understanding of the fate of the dead and the embodied emotion of grief at the death of a loved one. Here also, I will study the literary strategies employed by the authors of early Christian consolation treatises, sermons and letters to deal with bereavement in the light of the Christian hope and the basis of early Christian consolation. I will then compare these with their pagan forebears. In chapter four, I will study the general disposition of the early church fathers towards grief then compare Jerome's and Augustine's attitudes towards grief as expressed in their consolation letters. This will then be followed by my findings, summaries and conclusions.

### 1.3. Sources

The theme of consolation cuts across many literary types including poems, sermons, epistles, treatises, letters, hymns, philosophical dialogues and epigraphs. Among early Christians, consolatory sermons, treatises and letter were prevalent, although the distinction between a letter and a treatise was not so clear.<sup>5</sup> This study will make reference to consolation in various literary genres as deemed necessary, however, its primary focus will be the consolation letter because it was the most common medium the church fathers used to address the problem of grief. Since Favez's pioneering study,<sup>6</sup> ten letters of Jerome (*Ep.* 23, 39, 60, 66, 75, 77, 79, 108, 118 and 127)<sup>7</sup> and three of Augustine's (*Ep.* 92, 259 and 263) have generally been accepted as falling within the ambits of consolation. These will form the basis of this study. They will be studied against the backdrop of the wider Greco-Roman tradition of consolation.

### 1.4. Previous Research

Patristic studies through the centuries have focused more on theological themes and paid little attention to the presence of other forms and contents. Only quite recently has there been a surge of interest in patristic epistolary consolation. The earliest modern research on classical consolation was carried out by Carolus Buresch<sup>8</sup>, and his work, though now considered by some scholars as outdated, remains fundamental in the study of ancient consolation.<sup>9</sup> Buresch's primary concern was the

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<sup>5</sup> Demetrius, in his *On Style*, distinguished a letter from a treatise on three counts: length, diction and content. For him, a letter that is too long and too grandiloquent is not a letter but a treatise with the superscription "Dear X", cf. Mitchell, 1968.

<sup>6</sup> Favez 1937.

<sup>7</sup> Scourfield 2013, 10; **Chapa 1991, xx?**; Holloway 2001, 60 n. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Buresch 1886.

<sup>9</sup> Scourfield 2013, 21.

pagan consolation. Only a passing reference is made to patristic consolation, probably due to the view at that time that faith-based consolation did not belong to the literary tradition. Charles Favez<sup>10</sup> was the first to devote an extensive study to Christian consolation, but his study was limited to only the Latin writers.<sup>11</sup> Other major works on patristic consolation are Beyenka (1950) on Augustine, Kassel (1958) on the philosophical influences on patristic consolation, Hultin (1965) on medieval consolations, Gregg (1975) on the Cappadocian Fathers, McLure (1991) on the Renaissance and Scourfield (1993) on Jerome. More recently, Baltussen (2013) offers a critical evaluation of the so called ‘genre’ of consolation. For consolation in the New Testament, see Holloway (2001), Chapa (1990) and Malherbe (1993). I have drawn substantial information from these and other scholars. I have not come across any major scholarly work that treats patristic attitudes to the emotion of grief and the practice of mourning for the dead in the light of the New Testament, which is why I hope my interest in this theme will be at least a starting point for subsequent research.

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<sup>10</sup> Favez 1937.

<sup>11</sup> Beyenka 1950, ix.

## 2.0. BEREAVEMENT, GRIEF AND ANCIENT CONSOLATION

### 2.1. The Origin and Development of Ancient Consolation

Human beings have been plagued by the distress of grief much earlier than extant sources can corroborate. But the earliest known recognition of this emotion as a human problem and the attempt to systematically address it seems to have had its origin in fifth century Greek rhetoric.<sup>12</sup> It was here that the idea of cure of the soul by rational argument was born. The task of consolation developed slowly and over time became a widespread practice. When people were grieved because some misfortune had befallen them, friends and relatives were often expected to visit and offer words of comfort. But as Mary Beyenka suggests, sometimes the unpractised words from these ordinary people were inadequate to offer the much needed relief, therefore they turned to philosophers at the time of grief.<sup>13</sup> These philosophers, or more precisely rhetoricians, who professed to heal moral pains<sup>14</sup> then began to develop well-structured speeches which, “like moral medicines, fitted the particular ills of their fellow men.”<sup>15</sup> As the need for these well-structured consolation expanded, soon there also arose the need to include its study in the curriculum of the existing rhetorical schools.<sup>16</sup> According to them, “we must employ the resources of eloquence and deliver as from a pulpit

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<sup>12</sup> Chong-Gossard 2013, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Beyenka 1950, 1; Stowers 1986, 142-3.

<sup>14</sup> Beyenka 1950, (cf. Dion C. *Discourse* 27).

<sup>15</sup> Beyenka 1950, (cf. Cicero, *Tusc.* 3:8)

<sup>16</sup> Chapa 1990, 222.

the message to mankind, either to begin to wish for death, or at any rate cease to fear it.”<sup>17</sup>

Some incidences, such as the death of a prominent leader, the loss of many soldiers in a battle, or an earthquake affected so many people and thus required a more communal consolation. The task of consolation seems, therefore, to have gradually expanded from addressing individual needs to include communal needs. This was usually done through public speeches.<sup>18</sup> Physical presence was a necessary part of the business of consolation, but if this could not be achieved—and in some cases even when visitation was made—a letter of consolation was expected. Although evidence abounds of much earlier texts on death and grief that might have touched on consolation, Crantor of Soli (c. 335?—c. 275 B.C.) is widely acknowledged as the one who created a distinct pattern for the Hellenistic tradition of consolation. His treatise *On Grief* (Περὶ Πένθους) was written to console his friend Hippocles at the loss of his children and became a model for Greek and Latin consolation traditions. Crantor was a member of Plato’s Academy and a student of Xenocrates. The original text of *On Grief* is lost but much of it is preserved in the third book of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*. Later on consolation was studied as a distinct subject in various schools of rhetoric.

*Lupē* is the most common word used by the ancient Greeks to denote grief. Its primary usage denotes the unpleasant feeling that results from

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<sup>17</sup> Cicero *Tusc.*, 1.117.

<sup>18</sup> Pericles presented a consolatory speech to the Athenians to console them at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War (431—404 B.C.), in which several soldiers died (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 2.34—46), cited in Baltussen 2013, p. xiv.

intense physical or mental distress or the expression of this feeling.<sup>19</sup> *Lup-* is the root of a family of words that carries a wide range of meanings. It encompasses all the ill-feelings that stand in opposition to *hēdonē* (delight, pleasure), including sadness, anger, anguish, sorrow and depression which may be expressed through crying, weeping, groaning or simply wearing a sad look. Ancient grief was a part of a wider discussion on the passions. Ancient theories of grief recognised four basic elements, though some of the elements could be (and were) further divided.<sup>20</sup> First, there is the stimulus or the cause of the grief. Ancients understood that grief did not come from the blues, it was always a response to something perceived to be evil. Secondly, there is the psychological element which involved one's perception, beliefs and mental assessment of the circumstance. The likelihood or intensity of grief largely depended on the psychological element. One's psychological interpretation of a certain event determined if and to what degree grief was experienced. Depending on one's perception of the incident that had occurred, the resultant grief could range from mild to acute. The most severe form of grief in ancient times was caused by the death of a dearly beloved person or the anticipation of one's own death. Thirdly there is the emotional element or the actual feeling of anger, sadness and depression. Ancient theorists also mention a physiological element to grief such as numbness. Jerome relates how Marcella turned deadly pale on hearing the news of Lea's death<sup>21</sup> and Gregory of Nyssa

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<sup>19</sup> Liddell and Scott 1953.

<sup>20</sup> Knuuttila 2004, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Jerome *Ep.* 23.1.



recounts how he was numbed with grief at the death of his sister Macrina.<sup>22</sup> Fourthly, there is the behavioural element or the expression of the grief in terms of despondency, weeping, withdrawal or frowning. Many ancient consolers used λύπη indiscriminately, at various times referring to any of the elements above.

Although some ancient consolations were eclectic in nature, that is, they combined arguments from various schools, in general the way and manner in which an ancient consoler carried out consolation depended on his philosophical school and perception of the nature of grief. The various techniques that were utilized reflect the existing ideologies on the nature of grief, moreover, the philosophical persuasion of the person being consoled influenced the way his grief was combated. For instance, if a Stoic was being consoled by a Stoic, a different approach would be used than when an Epicurean is involved. Here, I will survey the various philosophical understandings of grief and how these understandings shaped their approach to consolation.

## 2.2. Ancient Philosophers on Grief and Consolation

### 2.2.1. Plato and Aristotle

Ancient understandings of grief and consolation are deeply rooted in philosophical theories of emotion that were developed by Plato and later modified and expanded by Aristotle. Their theories of the *pathos* constitute the basis for later inquiries and philosophical discussions of the

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<sup>22</sup> Greg. Nyss. *Maer.* 27.4.

human emotions in general and of grief in particular.<sup>23</sup> Plato thought that the soul comprised of three distinct parts—the reasoning, the spirited and the appetitive parts. He placed the emotions in the spirited part, which, though not rational, could be habituated to serve reason (*Resp.* 4.441a-442c). Although his notion of *pathos* was more general, covering every accidental and contingent changes that happen to somebody in contrast to intentional actions,<sup>24</sup> *pathos* eventually became the standardized word used in reference to emotions.<sup>25</sup> His discussions of emotions, within the broader *pathos*, focussed on pleasure and distress, which he characterized as processes of disintegration and restoration of the harmonious state of a living organism (*Philebus* 32a–b). Plato argued that pleasure and distress are bodily processes that one becomes aware of through sensory perception. He noted that bodily processes may be perceived or not and that the perceived may be perceived neutrally, as pleasant or as unpleasant. Although Plato did not treat grief or any other individual emotion extensively, his discussion of the relationship between perception, body movement and behaviour became the springboard for further observation. Crantor, who is considered the father of consolation was a member of the *Academy*.

Building on Plato’s theory, Aristotle proffered a more monistic view of the soul and sought to explain the interconnectedness of the body and soul, and of perception, imagination, feeling, and thinking. Aristotle was

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<sup>23</sup> Knuuttila and Sihvola 1998, 1.

<sup>24</sup> “That which happens to a person or thing”, Liddell and Scott 1940. For a discussion of this term, see Annas 1992, 103 -105 and Nussbaum 1994, 319.

<sup>25</sup> Price 2009, 121.

the first to present distinctive analysis of individual emotions. In *Rhetoric* 2,1-10, after defining emotion as “all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgements, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure,” he goes on to enumerate and expatiate on twelve emotions: anger (*orgē*), feeling mildly (*praotēs*), friendly love (*philia*), hatred (*misos*), fear (*phobos*), confidence (*tharsos*), shame (*aiskhunē*), feeling kindly (*kharis*), pity (*eleos*), indignation (*nemesis*), envy (*phthonos*), and emulation (*zēlos*). Aristotle further distinguished four basic components of an emotion: cognition, psychic affect, bodily affect, and behavioural suggestion.<sup>26</sup> For Aristotle, grief is an unpleasant awareness of something inconvenient taking place in oneself and lies in perception. In other words, to have emotions such as fear and grief, one must first have beliefs of a certain kind, beliefs that certain things are bad. Aristotle believed that unpleasant experiences are stored in the memory, remembrance or anticipation of which can cause grief without any bodily effect.<sup>27</sup> (*Philebus* 1370a28–9). In EN 3.9, 1117b10–13, Aristotle states that people will be more pained at the prospect of their death the more they have complete virtue and the happier they are because death is a greater loss to good people than to those for whom life is less worth living. Grief therefore, for him, is more grievous if the loss involved is perceived to be much. The Peripatetic School, founded by Aristotle, seems to have conceded that complete extirpation of the *pathos* is impossible, thus the formulation of the doctrine of moderation of grief (*metriopatheia*).

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<sup>26</sup> Knuuttila 2004, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *Phlb* 1370a 28-9.

*Metriopatheia* appears to have been more feasible in dealing with bereavement grief than the stoic *apatheia*.

### 2.2.2. Stoics

Of all the philosophical schools of the Hellenistic and Classical era, the Stoics had the most complex and elaborate account of the *pathos*. Basically however, they believed there are four generic emotions under which every other one can be subcategorised: desire (*epithumia*), fear (*phobos*), pleasure (*hêdonê*), and pain (*lupê*).<sup>28</sup> Their theory of emotion is hinged on two distinguishable value-judgements, the first is about the nature of an event—whether it is good or evil and the second is about the appropriate reaction to the event. Desire, for them, is the opinion that something in the future is a good and as such, one should reach out for it; fear is the opinion that something in the future is evil and as such, one should avoid it; pleasure is the opinion that something is presently good and as such, one should be elated about it; and grief is the opinion that something is presently evil and as such, one should be downcast about it. The Stoics maintained that human emotions are intrinsically flawed, a malfunction of human reason, from which the philosopher should be free. *Apátheia*, freedom from *pathê* was, as such, a central doctrine of the Stoics. Their approach to the alleviation of grief was two-pronged, addressing either of the two value-judgements—they would either attempt to convince the grieving person that the supposed evil is not what it appears to be or else that the reaction to it is not the appropriate one (Cicero, *Tusc.* 3,76).

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<sup>28</sup>Brennan 1998, 29.

Cleanthes (331-232? BC), a key Stoic and successor of Zeno as leader of the Stoic *Scholarch*, believed that correcting people's perception of good and evil produced a more effective cure for grief. In utilizing this approach, the philosopher would try to persuade the bereaved person, for instance, that death is not a bad thing at all. He would then invoke various arguments to substantiate his claim. This method was advocated by Cleanthes and was preferred when the person being consoled was a Stoic. Chrysippus (279-206 BC), Cleanthes' successor as leader of the Stoic school, thought, on the other hand, that although a change of perception produced good results, it was far more feasible to convince people, especially non-stoics, that even if the supposed evil (such as death, poverty, exile, etc.) were actually so, they should be born with courage and equanimity. This argument was probably influenced by cultural ethics. For instance, they would appeal to conventional ideas that grieving is a mark of weakness and enduring grief a mark of strength and dignity.<sup>29</sup> Chrysippus is also credited with a polemical statement that unexpectedness can aggravate grief, but that it doesn't cause it;<sup>30</sup> in saying this, he was taking issues with the Cyrenaics who held that unexpectedness was the main cause of grief.

### 2.2.3. Cyrenaics

No ancient source offers a comprehensive account of the Cyrenaic theory of the nature of grief but according to Cicero, they believed that grief was not caused by evil per se, but by that which was unexpected and

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<sup>29</sup> Gill 1996, 123.

<sup>30</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.52, 76; 4, 59-62.

unprepared for. They held that everything that is considered evil is rendered even more grievous if it was sudden, unexpected and unanticipated. First, because the scope of an evil event is usually not clear at the instance thus giving room for exaggeration; secondly, for the loss that might have been prevented, had the evil been anticipated. They believe that *praemeditatio*—a constant realization that all humans are susceptible to evil—significantly reduces grief in the event of a misfortune. According to them, no one can permanently escape evil. Their approach to grief therefore, was to live with the awareness of mortal vulnerability and the expectation that one may be overtaken by evil at any time. Their view of grief is encapsulated in the ancient poem:

I begat them and begetting knew  
That them for death I reared.  
Also when to Troy I sent them  
Greece to fight for and defend,  
Well I knew to deadly warfare  
Not for feasting sent I them.<sup>31</sup>

Also, a story is told of Anaxagoras who heard about his son's death and calmly said "I knew that I had begotten a mortal".<sup>32</sup> Foresight and anticipation, for them, eliminates shock. Their main line of argument in consolation is that misfortune is neither a surprise nor unique to the sufferer. A typical exhortation for a Cyrenaic will be that what has happened has befallen others before and was borne with equanimity and that nothing unexpected has happened. Examples will then be sited of those who have had similar ordeals and survived.

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<sup>31</sup> Ennius *Telamo* App. II. (cf. Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.13).

<sup>32</sup> Cicero *Tusc.* 3.28 (for references to this dicta by ancient writers, see Scourfield 1993, 113).

Critics of this theory argued that this constant living in the anticipation of some evil is in itself a constant cause for distress. Moreover, some evil occurrences seem to defy all predictability and foreknowledge. Also, events that are viewed as evil cause grief even if they were foreseen and anticipated (Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.28, 31, 52, 59, 76). Cicero thinks that this theory does not relieve grief per se, but only helps the sufferer to bear his loss, like others, without complains.

#### 2.2.4. Epicureans

Epicurus believed that grief emanated from false beliefs concerning pleasures, personal survival, the soul, and the gods. For him, these beliefs result in groundless desires and an irrational longing for immortality and a fear of the gods and of death,<sup>33</sup> therefore, an effective cure for grief begins with the cure of the erroneous belief upon which it is based. This, for him was the essence of philosophy. For him:

"Empty is that philosopher's argument by which no human suffering is therapeutically treated. For just as there is no use in a medical art that does not cast out the sicknesses of bodies, so too there is no use in philosophy, if it does not throw out suffering from the soul."<sup>34</sup>

Epicurus believed that all men must naturally feel distress if they anticipate something bad or think themselves surrounded by evil.<sup>35</sup> Whether the evil is real or perceived, the effect is the same. He objected to the Cyrenaic view that an anticipated or foreseen evil is less grievous than one that is sudden and unexpected. For Epicurus, the opposite is in fact the case; one who constantly anticipates evil is constantly grieved

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<sup>33</sup> KD 11–12, 20, cf. Knuutila 2004, 82.

<sup>34</sup> Usener 1887, 221, cf. Nussbaum 1994, 102.

<sup>35</sup> Cicero *Tusc.* 3.15

even if the evil never happens. He had two approaches to the alleviation of grief, first was to remove the mind from reflecting on evil (*avocatio*) and second, to redirect it to focus on pleasure (*revocatio*). Epicurus believed that if one could completely ignore every present evil, disregard every potentially grievous incident and instead bask in the pleasure of past, present and anticipated good, grief would be significantly reduced if not completely eliminated.

Towards the end of his life, on his death bed and amidst an excruciating pain from strangury and dysentery, Epicurus puts his doctrine of grief therapy in practice by meditation on happy times in the past and by writing letters. In his letter to Idomeneus, he writes:

“On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could augment them; but over against them all I set gladness of mind at the remembrance of our past conversations.”<sup>36</sup>

Cicero criticised this theory on the basis that heedlessness is not within the control of one who has been stung by death.<sup>37</sup> In other words, ignoring misfortune is virtually impossible for one who has just experienced one. Yet concerning the loss of his daughter, for which he was deeply grieved, he wrote: “For my part, endurance of this and all other evils that can befall a human being, makes me feel profoundly grateful to philosophy which not only distracts my thoughts from anxiety, but also arms me against all the slings and arrows of fortune” (Fam. 12.23.4). In saying this, Cicero acknowledged the therapeutic benefit of distracting the mind from evil

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<sup>36</sup> *Diog. Laert.* 10:22.

<sup>37</sup> *Tusc.* 3.1.35



and engaging it in something that brings joy, in this case philosophy. He was echoing Epicurean strategy for grief therapy. Christian consolers employed this strategy by redirecting the minds of the bereaved from the pain of loss to the virtues attained by the deceased and the bliss of the heavenly kingdom.

### 2.3.0. What exactly is Ancient Consolation?

One will be seriously mistaking to think of the ancient practice of consolation in the modern sense. Ancient and modern consolations are as different as the time and cultural gap that separates them. Modern consolation is hardly anything more than an expression of sympathy towards a grieving person. Ancient consolation, on the other hand was a systematic, intellectual and often highly philosophical engagement of a grieving person in rational dialogue to help them put their misfortune in its proper perspective and so take charge of themselves over the emotion of grief. The word ‘consolation’ derives from the Latin *consolatio*, and is first used by Cicero to describe the key objectives of the philosophical tradition of consolation.<sup>38</sup> According to Cicero, ancient consolation has to do with all the practices whose primary aim was “to remove distress altogether, or to cause it to subside, or to diminish it as much as possible, or to restrain it so that it cannot spread any further, or to divert it elsewhere”<sup>39</sup>. There is no way to ascertain all the mediums that were employed to achieve this aim. In a broad sense, consolation can include all the activities that were carried out by individuals to combat their own

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<sup>38</sup> Scourfield 2013, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.* 3:76 (trans. Magaret Graver).

grief—such as sleep, meditation, writing a eulogy for the deceased, etcetera—or those intended to combat other people’s grief, such as visitation, words of comfort, presentation of gifts, sermons, letters, philosophical essays and so forth. The late fourth century church father, Gregory Nazianzus, writing to console a friend of his, states that even mere “sympathy is an effective consolation”<sup>40</sup> and Augustine finds relief from grief after taking a bath and having a long sleep.<sup>41</sup>

### 2.3.1. Range of subjects

Although bereavement seems to have been the predominant reason why people were consoled in ancient times, consolation was offered to people who were distressed for a variety of undesired events and circumstances. Judging from Ps-Demetrius’<sup>42</sup> description of a consolatory letter, every circumstance that caused grief was viewed as a misfortune and therefore necessitated a consolation. Some of the other incidents about which people were consoled in antiquity includes exile, shipwreck, poverty, old age, the destruction of one’s country, slavery, illness, blindness, persecution, legal difficulty, political or financial setback, the escape of a slave, forced separation and fraud.<sup>43</sup> The content of the consolation was usually defined by the particular misfortune that had happened.

According to Cicero,

[T]here are separate forms of discourse respectively for exile, the destruction of one’s country, slavery, illness, blindness, and any other mishap that might properly be called a calamity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Greg. Naz. *E.p* 165.3.

<sup>41</sup> Augustine *Confessions*, 9.32.

<sup>42</sup> See p. 29 bellow.

<sup>43</sup> For more detail on the range of subjects about which people were consoled, see Holloway 2001, 60.

<sup>44</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.34.81. Cited in Holloway 2001, 55.

Some ancient consolatory writings did not address a specific incident or subject but provided rational argument to combat grief in general. Primarily, people wrote to survivors of a deceased person or to those who had recently experienced something perceived as a misfortune. But consolation was also offered to someone who was distressed due to the imminence of an undesired incidence, especially an approaching death.<sup>45</sup> Occasionally, consolation was also offered to self for a misfortune that has already taken place or is looming.<sup>46</sup> There are also instances where people wrote to console others on account of their own misfortune.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.3.2. The Structure of Ancient Consolation

Although ancient consolation cut across many different genres, the structure of consolation did not change drastically. Whatever the genre, it was quite typical to preface a consolation with a statement of sympathy, personal lament or an acknowledgement of what has happened. Here the consoler will express his pain at the incidence or state how he became aware of the sad event. The beginning section of a typical consolation will thus include a sentence such as: “I felt for you in your sorrow and trouble, when I heard of the untimely passing from life of your son, who was very dear to us all.”<sup>48</sup> This will then be followed by various commonplaces drawn from nature, theology, philosophy or any other source; and then exhortations. But this sympathy-commonplaces-exhortation was neither strictly followed nor always in that order. The

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<sup>45</sup> In the Pseudo Platonic *Axiochus*, Socrates consoles Cleinias’ father, who was very old and trembled at the prospect of death (*Ax.* 365b 5-6) cited in Holloway 2001, 61.

<sup>46</sup> Cicero’s *Consolatio* was composed to console himself after the loss of his daughter.

<sup>47</sup> In *Phaedo*, Socrates consoles his survivors on account of his own imminent death.

See below, p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> Ps.-Plut. *Ad Apoll.* 1.1.

suggestion by some scholars that a rigid pattern was followed by authors of ancient consolation is implausible. Many consolers simply composed their consolation as best suited the situation and often interspersed the various segments. If the consoler thought that the grief was excessive or unwarranted, then a rebuke was included. Ancient consolation consisted primarily of philosophical argument against grief with *exempla* from antiquity<sup>49</sup> and illustrations from nature.<sup>50</sup> Eulogy dominated the early Christian consolation.

### 2.3.3. Topoi

*Topoi*, commonplaces or tropes are the traditional arguments used by consolers to help the grieving person overcome grief. Although various philosophical schools had their characteristic approach to consolation based on their doctrine of the nature of the soul, the true meaning on virtue and the value of emotions, they often combined *topoi* from other philosophical schools. Cicero is a classic example of this. He combined ideas from various sources to soothe his grief. Cicero believed there were two general strategies of consolation argument, first to attack to the object of distress and second, to attack the feeling of distress.<sup>51</sup> Most ancient consolations followed either or both of these trajectories. They were either aimed at a change of one's perception of an event or one's behaviour towards it. A consoler would therefore start by trying to convince a grieving person that what is thought to be evil is not evil then

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<sup>49</sup> Sen., *Ad Marc.* 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Sen., *Ad Marc.* 7.1

<sup>51</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.* 2.33.

move to the argument that even if the event is evil it should be borne with maturity.

Some of the main philosophical arguments that were put forward to rouse the grieving person to a responsible behaviour are that a) all are born mortal, every human is subject to suffering, therefore suffering and death should be no surprise; b) death is an escape from the evils of this life; c) time heals all grief; d) suffering and death are neither good nor evil but neutral; e) life is a loan; f) the dead feel no pains; g) even cities and nations perish; and h) the universe itself will perish.<sup>52</sup> Menander Rhetor, a third century rhetorician, compiled two treatises on epideictic oration and suggested the various subjects that should be addressed in each. Menander suggests that in the *paramuthaticus logos* “one should say that the deceased has enjoyed enough of life, that he has escaped its pains, that he is now living with the gods, and a speaker can even find fault with those who lament the deceased.”<sup>53</sup> These were then followed by an exhortation to the grieving person to face the situation in a more responsible way, for example, to moderate one’s grief and not be overcome by it, to be grateful for once having the desired instead of lamenting or complaining for losing it. Societal values and expectations shaped the way grief was expressed and afforded consolers additional weapon to combat the emotion. The Stoic doctrine that all passions are evil and that the sage cannot experience it has helped to portray the

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<sup>52</sup> See Hultin 1965, 137.

<sup>53</sup> Kennedy 1984, 76.

emotion of grief as disgraceful, childish and womanish.<sup>54</sup> As such, a public figure ought not to weep or be seen weeping.

#### 2.3.4. Consolation as a Literary Genre

From the flourishing and widespread tradition of ancient consolation has survived a maze of literature from which the ancient tradition might be reconstructed to the extent the texts allow. When ancient consolation is being discussed as a literary form, the Latin form *consolatio* is usually preferred. According to Wilhelm Kierdorf, a leading scholar in Classical Philology:

What is specifically meant by *consolatio* as a literary genre...are writings of a philosophic bent, whose authors either try to dissuade individuals from grieving in the face of misfortune, or proffer general counsel on overcoming adversity.<sup>55</sup>

Presupposing an existing well-defined ‘genre’, this definition views consolation writings based on their orientation and objective: their orientation being ‘philosophical’ and their motive being to alleviate grief. The writings didn’t have to take any particular format as long as their intention was to alleviate grief and they were of a ‘philosophical bent’. This definition, while taking cognisance of a very important aspect of consolation, namely its ultimate goal, and while recognising philosophy as the context from where consolation developed, says nothing about the ideological and structural content of the text and leaves out non-

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<sup>54</sup> In many early Christian texts, feminineness is not only linked with weakness but also with irrationality, sensuality, passivity, cowardice and instability, cf. Marjanen 2009, 246.

<sup>55</sup>Kierdorf 2005.

philosophical works that were also deemed consolatory—such as poems and prose letters.

Rudolf Kassel, one of the earliest modern scholars on consolation, offered another definition that highlights a bifurcated nature of consolatory writings. According to him:

Consolatory writings in the narrower sense are writings composed in specific cases of bereavement with the aim of freeing the afflicted person from his pain or at least lessening his grief; in the broader sense they include writings which, without any immediate cause, are meant to provide the reader with appropriate intellectual support against adversities of many different kinds.<sup>56</sup>

This definition does not only recognise the context of the writings but differentiates the general essays on death and grief from the more personal writings that are crafted in response to a specific tragedy. This recognition of the immediate context of the writing will prove very important when discussing the various types of consolatory writings in antiquity. Pseudo-Demetrius, in describing types of letters in his *Epistolary Types*, states that “the consolatory types [of letters] are those written to people who are grieving because something unpleasant has happened (to them)”<sup>57</sup>. In this description, the immediate context plays an important role in defining the consolatory nature of a text. It is written in response to a specific incidence of misfortune.

Until quite recently, scholars have thought of ancient consolation as a clearly defined body of related literature that may be grouped together as a

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<sup>56</sup> Kassel 1958, 3. Quoted in Scourfield 2013, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Pseudo Demetrius, *Τύποι Ἐπιστολικοί*. From Malherbe 1988, 35.

genre. But the homogeneity and boundary limit of this so-called genre is now being called to question.<sup>58</sup> One of the leading scholars in this critical scrutiny is J. H. D. Scourfield. Scourfield has problematized the basis of the long-held notion of a ‘genre’ called *Ancient Consolation* by raising conceptual questions regarding the nature, purpose and structure of ancient consolation and highlighting the variety of texts with consolatory elements. His argument is that varying degrees of consolatory remarks are found in such a broad spectrum of ancient literature that there is hardly any legitimate parameter on which they may be classified together. According to him, these texts are not related enough to be classified under one literary umbrella. Instead he has suggested that we view ancient consolation as a theme that cuts across various genres, including essays, letters, poetry,<sup>59</sup> epigraphy, dialogues, speeches and sermons and not a fixed genre of its own.<sup>60</sup>

One of the biggest challenges in the classification of ancient consolatory literature is that their consolatory content varies in degrees. While some were written solely for the purpose of consolation, others were written for other purposes and consolation is only given in the passing. On the other hand, some ancient works were entitled *consolatio* but only so much and the entire work is dedicated to something else. For discussion on how the question of genre played out in the early Christian consolation letters, see page 43 below.

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<sup>58</sup> Scourfield 2013, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Holloway 2001, 57

<sup>60</sup> Scourfield 2013.



Since early Christian consolation letters are the primary source of this study, an overview of this genre of ancient literature is crucial. Here, I will do a brief survey of the broader ancient epistolography then proceed to the consolatory types, highlighting the conventional practice and the Christian usage.

#### 2.4.0. The Consolation Letter

The *epistula consolatoria* was part of a wider epistolographic tradition of the Greek and Roman antiquity, much of which has survived whole or in fragments and have been the subject of scholarly investigation. Letter writing was the primary means of communication between two or more persons that were physically separated and thus became a very common and widespread practice in ancient times. This is attested to by the sheer number of letters that have survived from the Greco-Roman and early Christian antiquity. The corpus is quite extensive. The most of it coming from the time of Cicero to the mid fifth century. Letter writing was utilized for a multiplicity of purposes other than mere communication and was used in many areas of life, including royal administration, business transactions, philosophical instructions and religious admonition political. Many of the surviving letters are attributed to popular figures in antiquity while others are pseudonymously attributed to them. The origin of letter writing predates any extant textual evidence but the earliest surviving letter is one written by an otherwise unknown Achillodoros to his son Protagoras and a certain Anaxagoras reporting

the seizure of his [Anaxagoras'] goods.<sup>61</sup> The letter, written on a piece of lead and dated between 550 and 500 BC, was discovered in Berezan in 1970. The practice of letter writing in antiquity was enriched in the rhetorical schools where it became a distinct subject in the curriculum of rhetorical training. Although there are a number of ancient theories regarding the nature and character of a letter, none is systematic or comprehensive. There are, however, two ancient manuals of epistolography that enumerate the various 'types' of letters known then and the different 'forms' of writing that were employed. The first one is *Epistolary Types* (τύπος ἐπιστολικοί), pseudonymously attributed to Demetrius of Phalerum (ps. Dem.) and dated to between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D.<sup>62</sup> The other one is *Epistolary Forms* (Ἐπιστολιμαῖοι Χαρακτῆρες), also a pseudograph attributed to Libanius (ps. Lib.) and dated to about the fifth century A.D.<sup>63</sup> Pseudo-Demetrius distinguishes twenty-one types of letters with samples while pseudo-Libanius distinguished forty-one, also with samples. Both of them include the consolatory letter. These handbooks only reflect on the proper style in which a letter ought to be written in accordance with the existing convention and seem to have been composed as manuals for elementary instruction in letter writing rather than a comprehensive theory on epistolography.

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<sup>61</sup> Ceccarelli 2013, 38.

<sup>62</sup> Malherbe 1988, 2. Ceccarelli 2013, 3. Stowers 1986, 52-53 The exact dating of this text is still disputed.

<sup>63</sup> Scourfield 2013, 12; Chapa 1990, 223-224.

Malherbe's recent work *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*<sup>64</sup> is currently the most extensive survey of ancient epistolography in English. This work puts together the otherwise scattered ancient epistolary theories, thereby providing the most complete basis for a proper definition of the ancient letter. Putting these pieces together we get the idea that an ancient letter is, in fact, a speech in the written medium,<sup>65</sup> in which one speaks to an absent friend as though he were present.<sup>66</sup> It is one half of a dialogue<sup>67</sup> or a surrogate for an actual dialogue<sup>68</sup> and reflects the personality of its writer.<sup>69</sup> It represents a real communication and not a technical treatise.<sup>70</sup> In other words, a letter is a "written message of modest length, made to be conveyed between two physically separate parties, and framed by conventional formulae of salutation and farewell"<sup>71</sup> There are some ancient writings whose authors clearly intended as letters but do not bear all the characteristics of a letter. That these famous theorists thought that an ideal letter should follow these precepts does not rule out the fact that those who composed letter-like texts in antiquity actually intended to write letters and thus should be viewed as such.

One of the most recent studies on ancient epistolography is Paola Ceccarelli's *Ancient Greek Letter Writing*.<sup>72</sup> In this work, Ceccarelli carries out an extensive linguistic and historical survey of the

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<sup>64</sup> Malherbe 1988.

<sup>65</sup> Cic. *Ad Att* 8, 14, 1; 9, 10, 1; 12, 53; Sen. *Ep.* 75, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Cic. *Ad Fam* 2, 4, 1; Sen. *Ep.* 75, 1; Ps. *Lib.* 2, 58.

<sup>67</sup> Dem. 223.

<sup>68</sup> Cic. *Ad Fam.* 12, 30, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Cic. *Ad Fam.* 16, 16, 2; Sen. *Ep.* 40, 1; Dem. 227.

<sup>70</sup> Dem. 230-31.

<sup>71</sup> Trapp 2006, 335.

<sup>72</sup> Oxford 2013.

terminologies commonly used in connection with ancient letters, γράμματα (letter) and ἐπιστολή (epistle). Her conclusion is that beginning from the fourth Century B.C. onwards, “a letter is a piece of writing introduced by a prescript containing a greeting formula (the most common being ὁ δεῖνος τῷ δεῖνι χαίρειν), followed by a message in the first person, and ending with a concluding wish, such as erroso/errosthe (‘Farewell’) or similar.”<sup>73</sup> Although some scholars have attempted to distinguish between a letter and an epistle,<sup>74</sup> the distinction is far from clear-cut, therefore, in this study, I will treat them under the same umbrella.

Letter writing was utilized by early Christians to transmit different kinds of messages between parties that were physically apart. Although they generally followed the conventional Greco-Roman and Hebrew epistolary patterns, there were modifications that produced a uniquely Christian hybrid. Most early Christian texts, including the New Testament, are composed in the epistolary format. Twenty-one of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament use this format.<sup>75</sup> The church fathers carried on the tradition of letter writing and a significant number of their correspondences were preserved. There are more than nine thousand extant letters written by Christians up to the fifth century.<sup>76</sup> Early Christian letters were used for a variety of religious purposes

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<sup>73</sup> Ceccarelli 2013, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Ceccarelli 2013, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Stowers 1986, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Stowers 1986, 15.

including exhortation, spiritual instruction, theological exposition and consolation, just to mention a few.

Going by Pseudo-Demetrius' definition, consolatory letters are "those written to people who are grieving because something unpleasant has happened to them."<sup>77</sup> Writing a letter to console someone who had experienced some misfortune was a common practice in the period concerned in this study. These letters were written by educated and (usually) highly placed friends and relatives of the grieving person, but some were also self-addressed.<sup>78</sup> Although many of these letters were very personal, a wider readership was anticipated in some of them. The earliest and most influential consolation letter from antiquity is Crantor of Soli's *On Grief*, written to console Hippocles on the death of his children.<sup>79</sup> This letter provided the ideological and structural pattern that was to be followed by many subsequent writers. As a result, the letter attained a quintessential status and exerted a remarkable influence on both Greek and Latin pagan and Christian writers. In his consolatory letter to Tubero, Panaetius recommended that *On Grief* be learnt by heart and Diogenes Laertius described it as 'especially marvellous'.<sup>80</sup> Cicero described it as a 'golden booklet' and drew significantly from it in his *Consolatio*. Jerome claims to have studied it as one of his credentials as a consoler and that much of Cicero's consolation writings were patterned

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<sup>77</sup> Pseudo Demetrius, *Τύποι Ἐπιστολικοί*. From Malherbe 1988, 35.

<sup>78</sup> According to Cicero (*Tusc.* 1.83), he wrote *Consolatio* to console himself.

<sup>79</sup> Plutarch, *Cons. Ad Apoll.* 6:104.

<sup>80</sup> *Diog. Laert.* 4.27

after it.<sup>81</sup> Although the most part of this work is lost, fragments of it have survived.<sup>82</sup>

The corpus of consolatory letters from the classical antiquity is quite extensive. From Cicero to the mid fifth century A.D., at least seventy letters of consolation have survived from the Roman tradition.<sup>83</sup> There have also been discoveries of papyri from ancient Rome containing letters of consolation from the Roman province of Egypt. Examples of the consolatory letter may be found in the letter collections of Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Pliny the Younger, Apollonios of Tyana, Fronto, Emperor Julian and Libanius.<sup>84</sup> Cicero's *Consolatio* is by far the most influential consolation letter from the Roman antiquity. Cicero wrote this letter to himself in 45 B.C. to combat his own grief after the death of his daughter Tullia. From Cicero's own comments about *Consolatio* in the third book of *Tusculan Disputations*,<sup>85</sup> we can gather that the letter was philosophically eclectic, combining ideas from Stoic, Epicurean, Cyrenaic, Peripatetic and Academic sources.<sup>86</sup> It is also widely acclaimed as most pivotal in the transmission of the Greek consolation tradition to Latin writers of the Late Republic. Like *On Grief*, this letter is also lost, but much of it is preserved in books 1 and 3 of the *Tusculan*

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<sup>81</sup> *Ep.* 60.5

<sup>82</sup> Mette, 1984.

<sup>83</sup> Scourfield 2013, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Cic., *Ad fam.* 4.5; 5.16; 5.18; *Ad Att.* 12.10; 15.1; *Ad Brut.* 1.9; Sen., *Ep.* 63; 93; 99; *Plin.*, *Ep.* 1.12; 3.21; 9.9; Fronto, *De nepote amisso*, 1; 2, and *Ad Verum Imp.* 2.9; 10; Apoll. Tyan., *Ep.* 55, 58; Jul., *Ep.* 69; 201; Liban., *Ep.* 344; 1473; cf. S. Stowers 1986, 152.

<sup>85</sup> 3.31.76.

<sup>86</sup> Holloway 2001, 58.

*Disputations*<sup>87</sup> and in Lactantius' (c. 250—c. 325 A.D.) *Divinarum Institutionum*.<sup>88</sup> Other consolation letters from the late Republic are Seneca, *Ep.* 63, 99; Xenophon, *Ep.* 3; Apollonios of Tyana, *Ep.* 55 and 58; Libanius *Ep.* 341, 390, 405, 414, 430, 473, 698, 702, 1325, 1473, 1483, 1508; Julian, *Ep.* 201; Many epigraphs were also consolatory.

### 3.0. EARLY CHRISTIAN CONSOLATION

#### 3.1. The Culture of Grief in the Ancient Near-East

What was the attitude of Christians towards grief when they were bereaved? What was the attitude of the bishops towards grief and how much of these is reflected in their consolation letters? These are some of the questions I will address in this chapter. Mourning for the dead was a fundamental part of funeral rituals in the ancient near east.<sup>89</sup> Burial rites included loud laments, tearing of clothes, tearing of hair, cutting of self with sharp objects, putting on of sackcloth, sitting or lying on dirt, strewing dirt on one's head and various kinds of fasting and sacrifices. Mourning the dead was also cultural in Biblical Israel. The standard mourning period appears to have been seven days (1 Sam. 31.13), but Aaron and Moses were mourned for thirty days each (Num. 20.29; Deut. 34.8). After learning of Joseph's death, "Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist and mourned for his son many days" (Gen. 37.34). At the death of Jacob, his children mourned him for seven days with a 'great and solemn lamentation' (Gen. 50.10). In the Old Testament, there

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<sup>87</sup> In *Tusc.* Cicero constantly refers to the *Consolatio* and draws heavily from it (1.26.65, 31.76, 34.83; 3.28.70, 31.76; 4.22.63).

<sup>88</sup> Lactantius, 3.14-17. For other consolation letters from the late Republic, see Holloway 2001, note 23.

<sup>89</sup> Pham 1999, 16.

are specific rituals associated with mourning the dead. At the death of Abner, David commands his men to tear their clothes, gird themselves with sackcloth and mourn for him (2 Sam. 3.31). On hearing of the death of Absalom, David tore his clothes and lay on the ground (2 Sam. 13.31). Shaving of the hair and making one's self bald was a mourning ritual also. Job tore his clothe and shaved his hair to mourn the death of his children (Job 1.20) and prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, God commands her to make herself bald to mourn her children who will be carried away captive (Mic. 1.16). Other activities connected with weeping for the dead in ancient Israel are fasting, self-gashing, pulling the hair, beating the breast, striking the thigh, walking about with head bowed and walking barefoot.<sup>90</sup>

Mourning for the dead was born out of a deep sense of loss at the death of someone significant. Death abruptly ends a bond of love that has been built over a lifetime, emotional destabilization is just one of the many ills that results from bereavement. Some of those who died were the suppliers of various needs including protection, food, shelter, spiritual mentorship, companionship and so forth, and their death meant the loss of all these. Grief, then appears to be a natural outcome of bereavement. This norm is at the root of the practice of consolation—it is because grief seemed natural when a misfortune occurred that those involved needed to be consoled.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 27.



Weeping for the dead performed consolatory function. It afforded the bereaved an opportunity to express how dear the deceased was to them and how much he will be missed as a result of his death. Accordingly, the intensity and scale of weeping indicated how important the person was and how much the living have been deprived. Much weeping for an individual was a sign that the person was very important to the people while little or no weeping meant that the person was of little or no value to the family or community. It was probably for this reason that, in some cases, eulogy was called for and professional mourners invited. Thus, when in 396 A.D., Jerome wrote a letter (*Ep.* 60) to console his old friend Heliodorus, over the death of his nephew Nepotian, he urged him to find comfort in the fact that “all Italy mourned for Nepotian.”<sup>91</sup> In the Old Testament, one of God’s punishments against the wicked was that they will not be mourned (*Jer.* 25.33).

Closely connected with this is that weeping appears to have been a socio-cultural demand. People were simply expected not just to be grieved when their friends or relatives died but to express this grief by weeping. Those who did not express any grief at the death of their relative or friend might be viewed as cold-hearted, emotionless, happy with the death or even responsible for it. In the Ancient Near East, mourning rituals for the dead was intended to help the dead find rest and immortality.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 60.14. At the time, Heliodorus was the Bishop of Altinum and Nepotian a presbyter under him.

<sup>92</sup> Pham 1999, 24.

### 3.2. A new reality for Christians

In the Christian era however, the resurrection of Christ signalled a new reality. Adam, by disobedience, had brought death. Jesus however broke the power of death, making it possible for those who believe in Him to rise again. The resurrection of Jesus did not only serve as a type for the resurrection of the saints (1Cor. 6:14; 15:20), it also became the springboard for its proclamation. Because Jesus had been raised by God with a physical and glorious body, those who die in Him will be raised in a similar fashion. Death has therefore been ‘swallowed up in victory’ (1 Cor. 15:51). Whoever believes in Christ from hence will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in Him will never die (Jn. 11:25, 26). In light of this assurance, the Christian was called to a new reaction to death and bereavement. Christians ought no longer to fear death or mourn those who die in Christ. But this new understanding of death did not immediately stamp out the natural inclination to grieve at the death of a loved one. How were Christians to react when they lost a dear one to death? Paul was certain that, owing to the Christian assurance of resurrection, their attitude towards bereavement should be completely different from that of the pagans who had no such hope (1 Thess. 3:13-14).

### 3.3. Consolation in the New Testament

The New Testament is replete with consolatory themes similar to those of the classical tradition and although there is no universal agreement, there is a growing consensus among scholars that Paul and the authors of the Gospels were influenced by the rhetorical tradition of the Greek and Roman world. In John 13—17, Jesus offers a series of speeches to His

disciples intended to prepare them for His own departure from the earthly life. According to George Kennedy, a Harvard University professor of Classics, these speeches are best described as consolation.<sup>93</sup> Jesus offered specific consolations regarding His death and subsequent departure from this world. Having predicted His imminent death, He consoled His disciples by assuring them that He will rise again and that His resurrection will turn their grief to joy.<sup>94</sup> Regarding His ascension, Jesus promised to come back to take them to a place He was going to prepare for them and to send them another comforter, the Holy Spirit, in the meantime.<sup>95</sup> He then exhorts them not to give in to despondency. Some church fathers as early as the Fourth Century already noticed classical parallels in Jesus' Farewell Discourse here.<sup>96</sup>

Paul Holloway has postulated that the primary motivation for the epistle to the Philippians was to console them for their despondency over Paul's arrest, therefore the book may fittingly be classified as a consolation.<sup>97</sup> If this claim is accepted, *Philippians* will be the first Christian consolation letter. The epistle however, does not adopt any of the traditional lines of arguments followed by classical consolers and contains only two *topoi*.<sup>98</sup> Holloway further identifies Cyrenaic consolation argument that "unexpectedness makes grief more grievous" in 1 Pet. 4.12; 1 Thess. 3.1-10 and Phil. 1.28-30 where the Christians are frequently warned that

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<sup>93</sup> Kennedy 1984, 76.

<sup>94</sup> John 16.21-23.

<sup>95</sup> John 14:1-3; 15:26. The idea of a surrogate as consoler is present in classical consolation and elsewhere in the NT

<sup>96</sup> Parsenios 2005, 23.

<sup>97</sup> Holloway 2001, 55.

<sup>98</sup> Holloway 2001, 74.

tribulation is an integral part of their sojourn in this world and thus should not come to them as a surprise. Holloway argues for consolation as one of the primary motivations of 1 Peter.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Abraham Malherbe has argued that 1 Thess. 4.13-18 is consolatory, pointing out a number of parallels with classical consolation in the pericope; the metaphor of death as sleep, the call for cessation or moderation of grief, the call to reason (e.g. not to be ignorant), and that the dead will soon be joined by the living all have precedents in classical consolation letters.<sup>100</sup>

#### 4.0. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PATRISTIC CONSOLATION

##### 4.1. Its Origins

Patristic consolation was a continuation of apostolic traditions. While the second coming of Christ was being anticipated, many Christians continued to lose loved ones to death and needed assurance on the fate of these loved ones. At the time, the church was also undergoing various persecutions.<sup>101</sup> The apostles, having all died, left the bishops in the position to encourage the young church based on the doctrinal foundation they had received. Apparently in response to various questions and circumstances, the Apostolic Fathers began to preach sermons and write treatises and epistles touching on suffering, death, grief and the eternal reward for the faithful. While the earliest writings cannot be classified as consolation, they nevertheless reinforced the Christian faith and hope in a better life in the face of recurrent death.

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<sup>99</sup> Holloway 2002, 433.

<sup>100</sup> Malherbe 1983, 225. Malherbe's position has been challenged by Chapa (1990) who argued for a Semitic, rather than classical background to 1 Thess. 4. 13-18.

<sup>101</sup> Beginning from Trajan and reaching its climax under Diocletian. See Cairns 1981, 91-94.

In his *Epistle to the Corinthians*,<sup>102</sup> Saint Clement of Rome (d. 99) sought to assure the church of the second coming of Christ and the resurrection. The *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* (8.2)<sup>103</sup> and *Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans* (5-7)<sup>104</sup> both speak of the courage to face death and how, by death, the Christian attains true life. In his fourth vision, the *Shepherd of Hermas*,<sup>105</sup> is told of the tribulation that will face the church and the need to cast away every sadness. Athenagoras of Athens (c. 133-190), in his treatise *On the Resurrection of the Dead*,<sup>106</sup> Tertullian (c.155-c.240), in his *On the Soul* and *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*,<sup>107</sup> and Origen (184-253), in his *De principiis* all seek to console the church by reaffirming the certainty and nearness of Christ's second coming and the resurrection. Saint Cyprian (c. 200-258) is the first to compose a consolation which seems to consciously utilize the commonplaces found in the pagan *consolationes*. His treatise *De mortalitate*<sup>108</sup> was probably developed from a sermon delivered to his diocese on account of their alarm regarding the indiscriminateness of death due to a plague (*Mort.* 1.1). Cyprian insists that death is not to be feared but welcomed (2.2), it is not unexpected since it was predicted by Jesus (2.3-4), it is a release from the cares of this life (15.1, 23.3), and by death, we pass to immortality (22.1). Other surviving consolations from the late fourth to

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<sup>102</sup> *Fathers of the Church, Vol. 1*, pp. 29-31.

<sup>103</sup> *Fathers of the Church, Vol. 1*, 140.

<sup>104</sup> *Fathers of the Church, Vol. 1*, 110-111.

<sup>105</sup> *Fathers of the Church, Vol. 1*, 256-8

<sup>106</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 2*.

<sup>107</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 3*.

<sup>108</sup> *Fathers of the Church Vol. 1*

early fifth centuries are Gregory of Nyssa's funeral sermons on *Meletius*, *Pulcharia* and *Flacilla* and his treatises on the *Life of Macrina* and *On Infants' Early Deaths*; Saint Ambrose's funeral sermons on the death of *Satyrus* and the Emperors Valentinian II and Theodosius, letters 15 and 39 and his treatise *De bono mortis*;<sup>109</sup> Gregory Nazianzen's oration 7 and 18; and Paulinus of Nola's *Carm.* 31.<sup>110</sup> Extant from Jerome's collections are ten letters of consolation<sup>111</sup> and from Augustine's, two sermons<sup>112</sup> and three letters.<sup>113</sup>

The earliest known patristic epistolary consolation is Saint Basil's *Ep.* 5 written to Nectarius and dated to 358.<sup>114</sup> This was the first of a tradition that was to continue into the middle ages. Basil wrote at least eleven other letters of consolation.<sup>115</sup> These letters were addressed to congregations as well as bereaved individuals mainly of the clergy and nobility. Early Christian consolation letters drew directly from the funeral sermons and were necessitated by the inability of the church fathers to physically offer their comfort to the bereaved.

Religion played a role in the Christian consolation that is not found in the classical tradition. First, there is the belief in a single, all-powerful and loving God who is the creator and sustainer of everything and is in control

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<sup>109</sup> Scourfield 1993, 25.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Chapa, 223; Scourfield 1993, 24-25.

<sup>111</sup> *Ep.* 23, 29, 60, 66, 75, 77, 79, 108, 118 and 127.

<sup>112</sup> *Serm.* 172, 173.

<sup>113</sup> 92, 259 and 263.

<sup>114</sup> *Fathers of the Church*, Series 2, Volume 8.

<sup>115</sup> *Ep.* 6, 28, 29, 139, 140, 238, 247, 256, 257, 301, 302.

of history. His will is absolute and obedience to Him brings the utmost blessings. The authority of God's word in the lives of Christians means they are willing to submit to His will even if it involves some suffering. Faith in the word of God was the most important ingredient in the Christian consolation and (whether self-deceptive or not) supplied something that was lacking in the pagan consolation.

Secondly, the bishop occupied a position that the pagan consolers did not have. Their authority to console did not only stem from the personal relationship they had with those in need of consolation but also from their role as representatives of God. This, no doubt, gave them an added authority.<sup>116</sup> Also, the scriptures provided a single and inexhaustible source of ideas and models for consolation. Almost any of the commonplaces from the classical tradition had a scriptural equivalence. Christian consolers therefore mostly relied on the Old Testament for commonplaces and role models. Although the structure of their consolation bore some semblance with those of the pagans, they were always couched in scriptural language. It is probably for this reason that some modern scholars have referred to patristic consolation as "theological consolation"<sup>117</sup> The indebtedness (or otherwise) of the patristic consolation literature to the classical literary tradition will be discussed in 4.2 below.

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<sup>116</sup> Aug. *Ep.* 263.1.

<sup>117</sup> Kern 2005, 1011.

Theologically speaking, the church fathers were unequivocal about Jesus' victory over death and the certainty of resurrection for believers who died in Christ. They were therefore strongly opposed to weeping for Christians who died. But however firm the church fathers were against grieving for the dead, in their pastoral role of practical consolation they seem to have adopted a more lenient approach depending on each specific situation. Gender, social status, spiritual standing, among other things, seems to have influenced their approach to grief. Depending on these variables, the church fathers' approach to bereavement was anything from a total proscription of weeping to a call to grieve exceedingly.

#### 4.2. Early Christian Consolation and the question of Genre

As with the classical consolation, the question of classification is ever more crystalized in the writings of early Christians.<sup>118</sup> The discovery of more and more consolatory elements in early Christian documents that have previously not been viewed as consolation has recently revived the question of classification. On what basis may we view an early Christian document as consolation? Should it be on the basis of textual attestation, where the author of the document calls it consolation either in the title or in the text? Should it be on the basis of the purpose, where the document is written in response to (or in anticipation of) a potentially grief-causing event with the intent of helping the persons concerned to face the event with maturity? Or should it be on the basis of the presence of traditional consolation arguments found in the philosophical tradition? If we rely on

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<sup>118</sup> I have discussed the problem of classifying pagan consolatory literature in 2.3.4 above and the presence of consolatory themes in the N.T. in 3.3. My aim here is to raise the question of classification again, but only with regard to early Christian literature.



the presence of consolatory remarks, we have to ask how much of consolation makes a document *consolation literature*. As noted above, the motif of consolation is found not only in early Christian sermons, prose letters and treatises but also in some of the Gospel books of the New Testament. But while some of these documents were written for the purpose of consolation, the motif is remote and secondary in others.

Another question that comes to mind regarding classification is that the source of consolation for Christians was completely different from that of the pagans. While pagan consolation comprised mainly of philosophical arguments. Consolation, for the Christian was the assurance of eternal life. According to John Chrysostom, Paul's second epistle to Timothy was written because Paul was "desirous to console his disciple..." and "the whole epistle is full of consolation".<sup>119</sup> Yet instead of the traditional consolatory arguments used by the pagans, we see only assurances of eternal life. For example, in 4:8 Paul says "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (NKJV).

The difficulty in defining consolation literature is most evident in the letters of Jerome and Augustine. Since Favez first categorized ten of Jerome's letters as *consolation*, scholars have generally acquiesced.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Chrys. *Hom.* 9, 2 Tim. 3:6-7.

<sup>120</sup> See *n.* 7 above.

Nevertheless, not all of them conform to the precepts of a letter<sup>121</sup> or focus on consolation. According to Mitchell, *Epp.* 79 and 118 take the tone of sermons while 66 and 77 are more like eulogies.<sup>122</sup> Jerome himself calls *Ep.* 108 a “eulogy”<sup>123</sup> and *Ep.* 60 “the epitaph of Nepotian”.<sup>124</sup> He seems to have simply taken advantage of the circumstance of bereavement and the tradition of writing to achieve other aims. The purpose and character of his letters are most illustrative of the difficulties inherent in the definition of a consolation literature. Jerome wrote *Ep.* 66 to console Pammachius two years after the death of his wife Paul. Yet after a brief highlight of the life and virtues of Paulina and offering a few consolatory remarks, Jerome spends the greater part of the letter commending Pammachius for giving up his senatorial status to become a monk. Similarly, his *Ep.* 108 to Eustochium, which Jerome calls a “treatise”<sup>125</sup> and a “monument” to Paula, is essentially a biographical sketch of the life of Paula. Favez seems to have grouped these letters simply on the grounds that they were written to someone who was grieving as a result of a recent bereavement and contain some lines of consolation.

The problem of grouping is also very evident in the writings of Saint Augustine. Although consolatory remarks are scattered in varying degrees throughout his oeuvre,<sup>126</sup> only a few of his writings have been traditionally categorized as consolation literature, including only three

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<sup>121</sup> See 2.4.0 above.

<sup>122</sup> Mitchell 1968, 300.

<sup>123</sup> *Ep.* 108.21.

<sup>124</sup> *Ep.* 77.1.

<sup>125</sup> *Ep.* 108.33

<sup>126</sup> Especially in the *Confessions* and *City of God*.

letters.<sup>127</sup> Of the three Augustinian letters that were written for the purpose of consolation, only *Ep.* 263 is wholly so. Augustine claims that the purpose of his letter to Italica (*Ep.* 92) shortly after the death of her husband is to offer consolation, nevertheless, the greater part of the letter is dedicated to a current theological debate.<sup>128</sup> Likewise, his letter to Cornelius after the death of his wife is nothing but rebuke and a call to chastity.<sup>129</sup>

#### 4.3. Early Christian Consolation and the question of sources and Traditions

To what extent did the church fathers borrow from classical authors of consolatory literature or adhere to their traditional line of argument in the composition of their own consolation? This is the question I will address in what follows. Beginning from the seventeenth century, some scholars began to apply a philological approach to the study of the New Testament. Their studies found several parallels between early Christian literature and Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions.<sup>130</sup> Since then, scholars have continued to search for and discover more parallels between early Christian authors of consolation and their pagan forebears and contemporaries. Consequently, more recent scholars have produced several limited or specialised studies in this direction, including scholars of ancient consolation, who began to search for traces of the pagan consolation in the New Testament.<sup>131</sup> Modern scholarship continues to

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<sup>127</sup> See 1.3 above.

<sup>128</sup> The main subject of the letter seems to be a theological argument against the corporeal vision of God.

<sup>129</sup> *Aug. Ep.* 259.

<sup>130</sup> Malherbe 2003, 15.

<sup>131</sup> See for instance, Holloway 2001, Chapa 1990, Parsenius 2005, Malherbe 1983.

unveil more and more indebtedness to the Greco-Roman consolatory tradition in early Christian epistles. Yet, the true extent of indebtedness and the possibility of a converse indebtedness remains to be studied. Greco-Roman literary tradition represents only one of the sources from which early Christians tapped for the construction of their own consolation. Although often ignored by scholars, the Old Testament appears to be the primary source of the consolatory themes and models in early Christian consolation. As noted by Juan Chapa, although early Christian consolation was delivered within the framework of Hellenistic rhetoric, and within it, Hellenistic epistolography, its background was Jewish.<sup>132</sup>

That the early church fathers borrowed from conventional traditions in the construction of their own consolation is beyond dispute. Eclecticism, however, did not originate with the Christian writers, nor was it unique to them. Every generation of scholars built on achievements made by previous generations and interaction among various literary traditions was quite normal. The Latin *consolatio* was developed from and built on Hellenistic models and traditions. With regard to early Christian consolation, one must avoid the temptation to stress their Greco-Roman affinity over the Semitic or to rule out some originality. Because the early church fathers received Rhetorical training as part of their preparation for ministry, and whereas their consolation was addressed mainly to noble and highly educated people, it was only natural for them to pattern their

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<sup>132</sup> Chapa 1990, 228.

consolation to the highest standard current at the time. But the degree of their utilization of the classical stock varied significantly.

From Wilhelm Kierdorf's recent encyclopaedia entry 'Consolation as a Literary Genre' in *Brill's New Pauly*, one can deduce at least three degrees of reliance on the pagan consolatory tradition in the consolatory writings of the early church fathers. There are some church fathers whose adaptation of the old consolatory motifs is clear and recognisable, there are some in whose consolatory writings these motifs can only be recognised with difficulty and still there those in whose writings one can find no identifiable link.<sup>133</sup> Thus church fathers varied—from admiration to selective utilization—in their attitude toward pagan literature. Both Jerome and Augustine boast of imitating the pagan philosophers in their writing. In the consolation to Heliodorus,<sup>134</sup> Jerome claims to have read the consolatory works of Crantor, Cicero, Plato, Diogenes, Clitomachus, Carneades and Posidonius.<sup>135</sup> Although he demonstrates a great deal of familiarity with these texts, some scholars believe his claim is implausible and that his access to the earliest texts was second-hand, mainly through Cicero.<sup>136</sup> In another context, Augustine claims to imitate the ancient philosophers. According to him, "Instead of confuting them, which is beyond my power, I have rather imitated them to the best of my ability."<sup>137</sup> Yet in practical application, the traditional lines of argument

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<sup>133</sup> Kierdorf 2003, 706.

<sup>134</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 60.

<sup>135</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 60.5.

<sup>136</sup> Scourfield 1993, 115.

<sup>137</sup> Aug. *Ep.* 1.1.

seems to be more evident in Jerome than Augustine. While particular ancient consolatory traditions may be easily identified in the consolation of Jerome, only with difficulty, if at all, can one find such links in the consolation writings Augustine. As a result, the Bishop of Hippo does not feature in the earliest known study of Early Christian consolations by Charles Favez<sup>138</sup> and continues to be side-lined in the study of early Christian consolation on the grounds that traditional consolation motifs are either not present or not recognisable in his corpus.<sup>139</sup> While Jerome cites several *exempla* from the pagan consolation tradition,<sup>140</sup> none of such *exempla* are found in the consolation letters of Augustine.

Although some church fathers admired the pagan literary wisdom and sometimes viewed conformity to them as credential on their own part, still they viewed their beliefs as hopeless and inadequate to offer true consolation. Responding to a criticism regarding his admiration and usage of quotations from “profane” pagan writings, Jerome exercises no restraint in the defence of his fondness with these writings and invokes the examples of revered authors of sacred history to support this adaptation. But for Jerome, this was only an adaptation for a better use; like David, it was “to wrench the sword of the enemy out of his hand and with his own blade to cut off the head of the arrogant Goliath”.<sup>141</sup> Early Christian consolation appears then to have been a fusion of the old with the new, an adoption and adaptation of the old to form something new for

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<sup>138</sup> Favez 1937.

<sup>139</sup> Kierdorf 2005, 704-6; cf Lössl 2013, 153.

<sup>140</sup> Jer. Ep. 60.5.3.

<sup>141</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 70.2.

religious purposes. As Lössl has pointed out, there was continuity and transformation in the early Christian consolation.<sup>142</sup> Following are some key areas the church fathers are indebted to the Greco-Roman literary tradition in their consolation and some areas of originality.

Christian consolers adopted a number of commonplaces from the classical tradition, but these were usually adapted to fit into various Christian doctrines and with scriptural backings. Some of the *topoi* from the common stock that are found in the early Christian consolation are (1) Death is a sleep, (2) Life is a loan, (3) Death is a journey, (4) Distress will dissipate over time, (5) Grief is futile and a sign of weakness, (6) Evil is not unexpected, (7) The dead are taken to safety, they have escaped sorrow, (8) Grief is contrary to reason, (9) There are others to console, (10) Death is not evil, (11) The deceased are now with the gods (God), (12) Even cities perish, (13) The deceased lived a long life, (14) The dead feel no pain, (15) Life is temporary—the living will eventually die. In exhorting the bereaved to a more appropriate behaviour, they were asked not to grieve for the loss of the desired but to be thankful for once having it. These *topoi* took up an entirely new meaning in the context of the Christian doctrines.

Based on scripture, Christian consolers developed several commonplaces that, although similar in some ways to those of the pagans, were unique. For instance, a) death is the will of God, b) tribulation was

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<sup>142</sup> Lössl 2013, 166.

predicted/prophesied, c) death is a process of purification, d) grief is a sign of unbelief, e) grief portrays a bad image of Christianity to unbelievers, f) Grief is against God's command, g) the dead will rise again, h) the dead are already with Christ, and i) misfortune is a test of faith. Thus commonplaces such as "He was taken away, lest the wicked should alter his understanding,"<sup>143</sup> "for your salvation I die daily,"<sup>144</sup> "all flesh is grass,"<sup>145</sup> which are direct quotes from the Scriptures also have parallels in the Greco-Roman consolation. But the adaptation and transformation of pagan ideas to meet Christian ends and the use of additional sources from the Old Testament did not radically transform the prose consolation. All of the ideas, arguments and examples—be they of classical, Jewish or Christian origin—served basically the same function—to help the grieving overcome their grief.

The church fathers also adopted and adapted the traditional lines of arguments and used similar rhetorical methods to meet the need of their audience.<sup>146</sup> One key rhetorical technique adopted by the church fathers is the *exempla*—citation of revered people from the past who have experienced similar misfortune and bore their grief with dignity. They elevate such characters as heroes and models to be emulated and call on their addressee to strive to be like them in the present situation. Examples of those who, in their opinion, mismanaged grief may also be called forth

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<sup>143</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 75.2, cf. Wisdom 4.11.

<sup>144</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 60.14; 127.6 cf. 1 Cor. 15.31.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, *Ep.* 79.6, cf. Isa. 40.6.

<sup>146</sup>Baltussen 2013, xvi.



to expose the consequence thereof. Jerome cites Abraham,<sup>147</sup> Naomi and Job<sup>148</sup> as examples of patience under trial and models in dealing with grief. This rhetorical technique is very common in Seneca. In his *Consolation to Marcia*, he presents Livia and Octavia respectively as *exempla* of grief management and mismanagement.<sup>149</sup>

Consoler-consolee relationship played an important role in the efficacy of a given consolatory piece. The grieving person's sense of respect and loyalty to the consoler may create a pliant disposition and so facilitate submission to the exhortation being given. But oftentimes a consoler did not have this kind of relationship. Seneca devised a rhetorical technique to address this problem. He invoked the voices of persons who possessed greater authority on his addressee than himself and, setting himself aside temporarily, spoke in the voices of these figures, thereby transforming the speaker and addressee relationship.<sup>150</sup> This technique was adopted by Jerome in his letters to Paula. He fictionalized the voice of Jesus to rebuke Paula:

“Are you angry, Paula, that your daughter has become my daughter? Are you vexed at my decree, and do you, with rebellious tears, grudge me the possession of Blaesilla? You ought to know what my purpose is both for you and for yours. You deny yourself food, not to fast but to gratify your grief; and such abstinence is displeasing to me. Such fasts are my enemies. I receive no soul which forsakes the body against my will... “In the midst of your tears the call will come, and you too must die; yet you flee from me as from a cruel judge, and fancy that you can avoid failing into my

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<sup>147</sup> Jerome, 39.6.

<sup>148</sup> Jerome, 39.5.

<sup>149</sup> Sen. *Ad Marc.* 2-3.

<sup>150</sup> See Wilson 2013, 94.

hands. Jonah, that headstrong prophet, once fled from me, yet in the depths of the sea he was still mine. If you really believed your daughter to be alive, you would not grieve that she had passed to a better world. This is the commandment that I have given you through my Apostle, that you sorrow not for them that sleep, even as the Gentiles, which have no hope. Blush, for you are put to shame by the example of a heathen. The devil's handmaid is better than mine. For, while she imagines that her unbelieving husband has been translated to heaven, you either do not or will not believe that your daughter is at rest with me.”<sup>151</sup>

Likewise, Jerome creates the voice of Blaesilla herself to reprimand

Paula:

“If ever you loved me, mother, if I was nourished at your breast, if I was taught by your precepts, do not grudge me my exaltation, do not so act that we shall be separated forever. Do you pity me because I have left the world behind me? It is I who should, and do, pity you who, still immured in its prison, daily fight with anger, with covetousness, with lust, with this or that temptation leading the soul to ruin. If you wish to be indeed my mother, you must please Christ. She is not my mother who displeases my Lord.”<sup>152</sup>

He also conjures the voice of on looking pagans to smear Paula for her excessive wailing.<sup>153</sup> With this imaginative persona, Jerome could adopt a more authoritative or even aggressive voice to achieve his aim.

The structure, function and style of epistolary consolation in the classical tradition, as with those written by Christians, is not uniform. Individual consolers adopted unique styles and approaches according to their

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<sup>151</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 39.3.

<sup>152</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 39.7.

<sup>153</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 39.6.

rhetorical proficiency and the present situation. While the basic structure of sympathy—*topoi*—exhortation is common, it is not overarching. Although sympathy, various pagan *topoi* and exhortation are common in patristic epistolary consolation, the church fathers did not necessarily follow this structure. Jerome admits that he composed his consolation according to each situation,<sup>154</sup> even at the expense of rhetorical order.<sup>155</sup> Eulogy seems to feature quite significantly in the Christian consolation, as against those of classical authors. Against the backdrop of the doctrine regarding heaven and hell, eulogy played a consolatory function. Eulogising the dead was to reassure the bereaved that the dead would not be condemned to hell but admitted into paradise and in fact, in some cases, were already there. Eulogy was also meant to highlight the virtues lost in the dead and so draw tears from the mourners' eyes.<sup>156</sup> Eulogy as consolation, therefore, seems to be uniquely Christian.

Life after death is the principal basis for early Christian consolation, but the consolatory use of arguments for the immortality of the soul dates back to pre-Christian times. According to Cicero, Pherecydes of Syros, a sixth century B.C. philosopher, was the first to argue for the immortality of the soul, and Pythagoras and Plato believed this doctrine.<sup>157</sup> The subject seems to have subsequently dominated philosophical debates for some time. However, Socrates is the one who is famous for both deriving and offering consolation from belief in the continuous existence of the

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<sup>154</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 77.1

<sup>155</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 118.1.

<sup>156</sup> Plato *Phaedo*, 67B (cf. Jer. *Ep.* 60.1).

<sup>157</sup> Cicero *Tusc.* 1.38.

soul after death.<sup>158</sup> On the day of his execution, Socrates explains to his followers that upon death, the soul is set free from corporeal encumbrances and joins the immortal gods. In this realm, there are better rulers, better friends and an unhindered communion with the gods and pursuit of philosophy.<sup>159</sup> Post-mortem existence of the soul therefore features as the philosopher's consolation in *Phaedo*. In the third book of the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero utilises this same argument and Seneca allude to it in consoling Marcia.<sup>160</sup> Menander Rhetor, who composed two treatises on epideictic orations suggests that in the consolatory speech, one should mention that the dead is perhaps in Elysium or with the gods.<sup>161</sup> But the nature of the Christian afterlife is quite concrete as opposed to the incorporeal soul of the philosophical tradition. Christian consolers paint a real picture of bodily saints being welcome into heavenly choirs and walking with Jesus.<sup>162</sup> Earlier Christian consolations held that afterlife will be accessed via a bodily resurrection at the second coming of Christ.<sup>163</sup> But as the second coming of Christ appeared less imminent than it was first thought, the doctrine of *resurrection* at Parousia no longer carried the consolatory force it once did and was therefore transformed into a more immediate *translation* after death. Therefore according to Jerome, Lea is already in Abraham's bosom<sup>164</sup> and Nepotian with Christ in heaven.<sup>165</sup> This transformation served

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<sup>158</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 60.4.

<sup>159</sup> Plato *Phaedo*, 69D.

<sup>160</sup> *Ad Marc* 7.2.

<sup>161</sup> Menander Rhetor, 2.9.414.

<sup>162</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 60.7.

<sup>163</sup> See Paul, *1 Thess.* 4.13-18.

<sup>164</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 23.3

<sup>165</sup> Jer *Ep.* 60.7

consolatory purposes. With regard to the death of his teenage friend, Augustine submits in his *Confessions* that ‘he was snatched away from these delusions of mine, so that he could be saved and so abide with you [God], for my consolation’<sup>166</sup>. Thus the idea of immediate translation seemed more grief-relieving than a later resurrection. A physical and blissful afterlife—be it by means of resurrection or (more frequently) translation—formed the basis of early Christian consolation. Ideas and arguments for the immortality of the soul from classical literature were only adapted—to the degree they were accommodated by Christian theology—to support this belief. Although neither Jerome nor Augustine gives a comprehensive account of the nature of this blissful life, one thing very clear is that it is real and better than the present one.

When considering the Greco-Roman literary tradition as the backdrop of the early Christian consolation, it is essential to bear in mind that the entire enterprise of *consolatio* is built on the fundamental belief in the therapeutic power of the *logos*, which is Hellenistic. This idea was developed through the classical era and expanded into various genres and forms—spoken, written and sung. Subsequently, it spread beyond its rhetorical and philosophical setting where the church fathers saw in it a ready tool to deal with problem of grief, from which Christian were not immune. Like their pagan counterparts, Christian consolers saw

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<sup>166</sup> Augustin *Confessions*, 4.4.

themselves as healers of grief and frequently utilise imageries from the medical world.<sup>167</sup>

One fundamental difference is evident between the Christian and non-Christian consolation. The non-Christian consolation sought to help the bereaved soothe their grief because of the disruptive nature of the emotion. Their consolation was more or less to encourage the bereaved to continue to live a normal life despite what had happened. Except for the stoics, classical consolation saw nothing intrinsically wrong with the emotion of grief. Many pagan consolers believed that comfort is derived from giving expression to grief.<sup>168</sup> The Christians on the other hand viewed grieving for the dead in a theological sense. For them, the hope of resurrection, having been made even more certain by the resurrection of Jesus (and other saints) invalidates grief. The question of grief therefore touched on the validity of some fundamental Christian doctrines, including those of faith, hope, and resurrection.

#### 4.4. Jerome and Augustine on Grief

Scholarship on the attitude of church fathers towards grieving for the dead in their consolation letters have been somewhat simplistic and incomprehensive. First, there has been an attitude of selectivity in the choice of texts studied on the subject. Text that seem to support a particular disposition have been studied to the negligence of other important texts. This lack of comprehensiveness has failed to reveal how

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<sup>167</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 60.15.

<sup>168</sup> Hultin 1965, 137.

flexible each church father was regarding the expression of grief. There is therefore the notion that the bishops were practically polarised on how to handle grief with some bishops consistently prohibiting it while others consistently allowing at least a moderation of it. Secondly, studying these texts without a thorough consideration of their contexts conceals how much the church fathers were sensitive to the spiritual and socio-cultural circumstances surrounding each individual, thus giving the impression that church fathers were rigid regarding grief. A closer look will however reveal that the church fathers' attitude to grief was not so rigid, neither were they consistently prohibiting or allowing grief, instead they adjusted their stands based on individual circumstances.

One scholar who tends to polarize Jerome and Augustine based on isolated texts is Hans Boersma. In his article, *Numbed with Grief*,<sup>169</sup> Boersma gives the impression that on one hand is a group of church fathers, including Augustine and John Calvin, who interpret Paul in a restrictive sense, taking the "as" in 1 Thess. 4.13 to mean the degree of mourning while on the other hand is another group, including Jerome and Chrysostom, who interpret Paul in a non-restrictive sense; for them, the "as" refers to the gentiles, meaning that Christians should not grieve at all because such emotions belong only to the hopeless. For Boersma, therefore, one group totally condemns grief while the other allows a moderation of it. Quotes from these church fathers are (in my opinion) taken out of context in support of the claim. I will argue, however, that

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<sup>169</sup> Boersma 2014.

the church fathers neither rigidly and consistently opposed grief nor rigidly and consistently allowed it but adjusted their positions depending on the prevailing circumstance surrounding each case.

#### 4.4.1. Do not grieve, instead rejoice

Church fathers generally began on the note that Christians ought not to weep when fellow Christians died. Jerome, Augustine, Basil and Ambrose all shared this sentiment. In his consolation to Paula in A.D. 389, Jerome insisted that “we who have put on Christ and according to the apostle are a royal and priestly race, ought not to grieve for the dead.”<sup>170</sup> In writing to console Nectarius, Basil asserted that “we who trust in Christ should not grieve over them who are fallen asleep.”<sup>171</sup> In the year 394, Ambrose wrote to console Faustinus at the death of his sister and bade him not to mourn or lament for her because she lives a better life beyond. “Why,” asks Ambrose, “should we lament the dead when the reconciliation of the world with God the father has already been made through the Lord Jesus” (Ep. 37:8). In the year 408, Italice, a noble lady lost her husband and solicited a letter from Augustine in the hope that her grief will be alleviated. In Augustine’s letter to her he pointed out that “you ought not to consider yourself desolate while you have Christ dwelling in your heart by faith; nor ought you to sorrow as those heathens who have no hope.”<sup>172</sup> Church fathers up to the early fifth century, not the least of which are Jerome and Augustine, are generally unanimous that, for the Christian, the ideal reaction to bereavement was not to grieve.

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<sup>170</sup> Ep. 39.4.

<sup>171</sup> Ep. 5.2

<sup>172</sup> Ep. 92.2.



They invoked various Christian doctrines and commonplaces to convince the grieving person that there is actually no need to grieve. Below, I will outline some of the arguments the church fathers put up to urge their followers not to grieve, first, theological, then the commonplaces.

The doctrine of life after death was the cornerstone of Christian consolation. This doctrine was formulated by the earliest Christians based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus had not only taught that whoever believed in Him would live forever even if they died but had also raised up the dead to demonstrate His authority over death. According to Tertullian, this was intended to “put in secure keeping men's belief in a future resurrection.”<sup>173</sup> However, it was the resurrection of Jesus Himself that reinforced the belief in a future resurrection of all saints. In the Johannine Apocalypse of Revelation (1.8), Jesus declared that by His own death and resurrection, He now possessed the keys to death and hades and that whoever died believing in Him will receive a crown of life (2.10). Although arguments continued to rage on among various Christian groups regarding the exact nature of the soul after death and of the resurrection itself, they nevertheless appear to be certain about one thing—that believers in Jesus will live even if they die. Paul was the first Christian writer to explicitly use the doctrine of life after death for consolatory purposes. Assuring the Thessalonians of the certainty of the resurrection, he stated that “Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him...

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<sup>173</sup> Tert. 3.8.

therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Subsequently, beginning with Clement of Rome, various church fathers continued to offer consolation to bereaved Christians based on the hope of resurrection. The church fathers used a variety of metaphors<sup>174</sup>—the cycle of the seasons, the flowering of trees and shrubs, the coming of dawn after darkness, the fertility of seeds and the return of the phoenix after five hundred years—to reinforce belief in God’s ability to restore the dead back to life.

Church fathers often used the metaphor of sleep to elucidate the temporary nature of death.<sup>175</sup> The imagery of death as sleep is rampant in both Old and New Testaments and also present in Greek as well as Egyptian Epitaphs. The church fathers utilised this ancient metaphor to show that the soul is conscious during the interregnum of death and that the body will rise again, therefore grief is unnecessary. The reference to death as a journey, which is present in the pagan consolation, is also used by the Christian consolers. They frequently refer to the dead as having “departed” or “gone ahead of us.”

Church fathers also insisted that Christians should not grieve for the dead because God has so commanded. Two scriptural texts feature prominently to back this up; the first is Jesus’ statement to the crowd of mourners at Jairus’ home: “Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping”

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<sup>174</sup> Bynum 1995, 23.

<sup>175</sup> Jerome, *Eps.* 66.4,15; 75.1; 118.2; 127.14; Aug. *Ep.* 263.4.

(Luke 8.52) and the other is Paul’s counsel to the Thessalonian Christians against ignorance, lest they “sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4.13). The reception of this Pauline text has been a bit ambiguous among church fathers. Sometimes they use it as ground for moderate grief and at other times for absolute refrainment from grief. According to Augustine, “when the Apostle Paul said [‘do not sorrow as the pagans’], he did not prohibit sorrow altogether, but only such sorrow as the heathen manifest who have no hope” (Aug. *Ep.* 263). Cyprian’s view is that, by this text, Paul reproaches, rebukes and blames all who grieve for their dead and views them as hopeless.<sup>176</sup>

Being misunderstood by the on-looking pagans around was another reason the church fathers insisted that no matter how painful their bereavement was, Christians ought to endure and not mourn. The church fathers were worried that mourning over the dead would contradict the doctrine of resurrection and send a wrong signal to the pagans. Since the departed Christians were alive with Christ, it was completely illogical to weep for them. As for the bishop, he was an example to all—‘The eyes of all are turned upon [him]’, therefore he could not weep for whatever reason.<sup>177</sup>

Christian consolers did not only urge bereaved Christians not to grieve but in fact, that they should rejoice over the death of a fellow Christians and sing for joy at their departure. They continued to explain that death

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<sup>176</sup> Cypr. *De Mort.* 2.2-4.

<sup>177</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 60.14.

is a good thing for believers because, they have gone to be with Christ, they have left the world of sorrow and temptations, they are now with the saints, they are now welcomed by the choir of angels. In his consolation to Paula, Jerome maintains that Blaesila should be congratulated rather than mourned because through her death, she has passed from darkness to light.<sup>178</sup> He also insists that since Christ has been victorious over death, the death of Christian should be accompanied, not with sorrow, but with joy.<sup>179</sup> In Ep. 60.15, he states that Nepotian should be congratulated for having escaped death.<sup>180</sup> Of this practice among early Christians, it is reported that:

“if any righteous person of their number passes away from the world they rejoice and give thanks to God, and they follow his body, as if he were moving from one place to another: and when a child is born to any one of them, they praise God, and if again it chance to die in its infancy, they praise God mightily, as for one who has passed through the world without sins. (*Acts of John* 15.35)

#### 4.4.2. Grieve moderately or even exceedingly

Although the church fathers recognised the ideal not to grieve, and constantly exhorted Christians not to grieve for the dead but rather to rejoice, they were not insensitive to the overwhelming power of the emotion of grief nor were they unaware of the socio-cultural tension contending with their faith. Church fathers acknowledged the natural disposition to grieve when bereaved, an emotion that is intrinsically human. In consoling Marcella over the death of her friend Lea, Jerome

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<sup>178</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 39.3.

<sup>179</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 39.4.

<sup>180</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 60.15.

acknowledges the sheer difficulty of putting grief to check when someone dear dies. According to Jerome, “there are few if any who will not burst into tears when the vessel breaks.”<sup>181</sup> Even if reared on the milk of Hyrcanian tigresses they must still shed tears (Ep 66.1). According to Augustine, when the virtues of the deceased are pondered upon “and are regretfully desired with all the vehemence of long-cherished affection, the heart is pierced, and like blood from the pierced heart, tears flow apace.” At these moments of intense emotion, the fathers excused grief and instead appealed for moderation, using various tropes to point out the unreasonableness and futility of prolonged or excessive grief. According to Augustine, “There is nothing in the sorrow of mortals over their dearly beloved dead which merits displeasure; but the sorrow of believers ought not to be prolonged.”<sup>182</sup> In consoling Paula, Jerome excused her grief because she is a mother, but insists that her grief be put under check<sup>183</sup> and demanded of Heliodorus to set a limit on his sorrow.<sup>184</sup>

The church fathers themselves were not immune to grief. Being the custodians of the Christian doctrines and visible role models for the church, they endeavoured to maintain a stoical disposition against grief at all times. But occasionally, they also acknowledged that they were neither stone-hearted nor made of iron. In his consolation to Nectarius, Basil wondered if there was anyone “so stony-hearted or so entirely devoid of human sympathy as to hear unfeelingly of such a sorrowful

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<sup>181</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 23.1.

<sup>182</sup> Aug. *Ep.* 263.2

<sup>183</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 39.5.

<sup>184</sup> Jer. *Ep.* 60.7.

event or to give his soul to only moderate grief.”<sup>185</sup> Jerome, in a letter to Heliodoros and in a different context altogether, acknowledges his humanity and susceptibility to the plight of all men: “My breast is not of iron nor my heart of stone. I was not born of flint or suckled by a tigress.”<sup>186</sup> In his consolation to Heliodorus, he confesses that sorrow is able to overcome momentarily even the knowledge of resurrection.<sup>187</sup> But according to Jerome, his susceptibility to grief should not be the basis of discountenance because even Jesus wept for Lazarus even if He knew He was going to raise him up, for He loved him.<sup>188</sup> While consoling Paula over the death of Blaesilla, Jerome confessed that he was overcome by grief<sup>189</sup> and after the death of Paula, relates how he was so overwhelmed by grief that he could not do any literary work.<sup>190</sup> Likewise, Ambrose admits in his letter to Anysius<sup>191</sup> that he was grieved at the death of Acholius. Writing to console the church of Neocaesarea over the death of their bishop in 368, Basil stated that his soul was prostrated with grief.<sup>192</sup> In his Confessions, Augustine relates how he was weighed down by an “unspeakable sorrow” and grievously pained at the death of his mother.<sup>193</sup> In the public, he managed to suppress the surging tears but later on, in private, he wept freely for his departed mother.<sup>194</sup> Although church fathers were highly knowledgeable and confident regarding the fate of

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<sup>185</sup> *Ep.* 5.1.

<sup>186</sup> *Ep.* 14.3 Trans. Fremantle, W. H. *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, 1968.

<sup>187</sup> *Ep.* 60

<sup>188</sup> *Ep.* 39.2.

<sup>189</sup> *Ep.* 39.1.

<sup>190</sup> *Ep.* 99.2; see also *Ep.* 108.28.

<sup>191</sup> *Ep.* 12.1.

<sup>192</sup> *Ep.* 28.1.

<sup>193</sup> *Aug. Conf.* 9.29-30.

<sup>194</sup> *Aug. Conf.* 9.33.

the dead, they were aware that sometimes, even the strongest of these could not keep grief in check. Mourning by a consoler might have been a mere show of sympathy or solidarity, which was a rhetorical method. According to Basil, “now I have mourned, as none could help mourning, over the event, and, in the midst of my lamentations, have sent you this letter.”<sup>195</sup>

The church fathers excused grief on at least three counts. First, they maintained that Christians could grieve for the dead if the object of the grief was not the deceased person but the leadership and virtues lost as a result of the person’s death. In his letter to console Paula over the death of Blaesilla, Jerome wishes that his eyes were a fountain of tears so that he could weep for the “holiness, mercy, innocence, chastity, and all the virtues” that are now lost now that Blaesilla is dead. In writing to console the church in Neocaesarea for the death of their bishop, Basil weeps because the bishop was “a prop of his country; an ornament of the churches; a pillar and support of the truth; a stay of the faith of Christ; a protector of his friends; a stout foe of his opponents; a guardian of the principles of his fathers; an enemy of innovation.”<sup>196</sup> Lamenting for the congregation, he wrote “your boys have lost a father, your elders a brother, your nobles one first among them, your people a champion, [and] your poor a supporter.”<sup>197</sup> “A mouth is sealed gushing with righteous eloquence and words of grace to the edification of the brotherhood. Gone

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<sup>195</sup> Basil *Ep.* 29.1.

<sup>196</sup> Basil *Ep.* 28.1.

<sup>197</sup> *Ep.* 28.2.

are the counsels of a mind which truly moved in God.”<sup>198</sup> For the loss of all these virtues, Basil said “our souls are prostrated with grief.” Here, he did not only excuse the expression of grief but called for it. For him, this was a misfortune of no small dimension and even “a lifetime will not suffice us fittingly to weep” for it, and “although all the world should mourn with us, not even then can the expression of grief equal our suffering. Nay, more, should all the waters of the rivers become tears, they would not suffice to fill up the measure of our grief.”<sup>199</sup> Augustine confessed that he wept uncontrollably for himself and his departed mother after thinking of her devout conversation, holy tenderness and attentiveness towards him, which were suddenly taken away.<sup>200</sup>

Secondly, the church fathers believed grief was justified if it was for self rather than the deceased. For them, Christians could weep for themselves that they continue to live in the presence of sin and have to battle with temptation and endure various sufferings. According to Cyprian, living in the world was a continuous struggle with various sins: “with avarice, with immodesty, with anger, with ambition, with carnal vices, with enticements of the world and with lust. If lust is overcome, ambition takes its place. If ambition is despised, anger exasperates, pride puffs up, wine-bibbing entices, envy breaks concord, jealousy cuts friendship; you are constrained to curse, which the divine law forbids; you are compelled to

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<sup>198</sup> *Ep.* 29.1

<sup>199</sup> *Ep.* 29.1.

<sup>200</sup> *Aug. Conf.* 9.33.



swear, which is not lawful.”<sup>201</sup> The death of a Christian therefore offered the living an opportunity to weep for a continuous life on earth.

A third reason why grief was not only excused but solicited was at the death of a sinner. The church fathers called for Christians to weep for those who died in sin because they were to be tormented in hell. According to Jerome, we should mourn for the wicked since they are taken by Gehena.<sup>202</sup>

## 5.0. CONCLUSION

This thesis was born out of an observation in some modern research on patristic consolation which appeared to polarize Jerome and Augustine on their attitudes towards grief in the light of the New Testament. Jerome is said to be completely against grieving for the dead while Augustine finds nothing wrong with a moderate grief. In this thesis, I have argued that the church fathers were not polarized in their view of bereavement grief, neither were they rigid in their approach towards grief, instead they adjusted their stance in accordance with each situation. They seem to have viewed bereavement grief as an emotion that is contrary to the Christian faith and ought to be overcome by Christians. They also seem to have both recognised the sheer difficulty in putting grief to check even with the weapons of faith or reason. They both exhorted their flocks to the ideal not to weep when a Christian died, but instead to rejoice. But however much they preached against grieving for a deceased Christian,

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<sup>201</sup> Cypr. *De Mort.* 1.4.

<sup>202</sup> Jer. Ep. 39.3.

they were not unwilling to excuse grief and instead call for moderation in those very sore moments. Jerome and Augustine, who had themselves at one point or the other borne the sting of bereavement, did not purport to be immune to the powerful emotion but also expressed their own grief when stung by bereavement. They were not ashamed to give expression to grief when it was unbearable, after all Jesus and Lazarus' sisters wept even if they were fully aware that Lazarus would be raised from the dead. The church fathers excused grief when it was for the loss of virtue or leadership as a result of the death of a Christian or for self for being allowed to live longer in the presence of sin and away from Christ. They called for followers to grieve exceedingly if a believer died in sin, because that person has lost the eternal reward of the saints and will be tormented in Gehenna for ever.

In the course of this thesis, I addressed the question of consolation as a literary genre and that of the background and source of early Christian consolation. I argued that although the early Christian consolation developed from the Greco-Roman literary tradition, the sacred scripture, both Old and New Testaments were the primary source from where the church fathers drew ideas and exempla for consolation and that the basis of their consolation was a blissful and physical afterlife.

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