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Christianity Seminar: Estimating Authority and Ritual Practice

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Preface

This issue of *Forum* features two sets of papers presented at Westar events in 2017—the first two at the Spring meeting in Santa Rosa and the second pair at the Fall meeting in Boston. All four of the papers challenge long-established views about Christian origins, whether about assumptions regarding the esteem granted to the founders of Christianity or about the development of the Eucharist meal.

The Spring papers were presented in a special session on apostolic authority in which I made my Westar debut with "Cursing and the Apostle: The Fight for Authority in Early Christianity." The paper grew out of my work on the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, a text that features tales of a young Jesus blinding, maiming, and killing his fellow villagers in Nazareth. To understand why Jesus would be portrayed this way, we have to consider attitudes toward cursing in the ancient world. The paper begins with a survey of sources for both cursing and curse stories—from narrative literature, to inscriptions, medical texts, treaties, and magical implements—in canonical and noncanonical sources, as well as in texts and artifacts from contemporary cultures. Biblical curses and curse stories appear in many forms—such as the exploits of prophets like Moses and Elisha, as well as in oracles and psalms. These have not escaped scholars' attention, but there seems to be a resistance to recognizing the same phenomena in Christian material, even though the canonical Jesus does curse (only a fig tree, but he also pronounces woes on his enemies), as do his apostles (in several episodes in Acts, and perhaps also in references to the power given to them by Jesus to perform "signs and wonders"). After the survey of sources, the paper turns specifically to the exploits of the apostles in the canonical and noncanonical acts and to Paul's letters. In the various acts, the apostles use curses in competition with other religious figures to demonstrate their power and the might of God. Beneficent miracles are performed also, but curses seem to be equally effective for gaining converts. In Paul's letters, the apostle curses his opponents, including those who proclaim a gospel contrary to his own (Gal 1:8–9) and those who have "no love for the Lord" (1 Cor 16:22). Anyone in antiquity could utter curses, and it was widely believed that they could be effective, but certain figures, such as holy men and rabbis, were considered particularly adept. The apostolic curse stories depict the apostles cursing, and then the readers witness the result of the curse, demonstrating that the apostle, and by extension other

Christian leaders and saints, wield the power and authority of God. Let no one stand in their way.

In the same session, Jason BeDuhn, author of *The First New Testament: Marcion's Scriptural Canon* (Polebridge 2013) delivered his paper, "The Contested Authority of Paul in the Second Century." Scholars have often assumed that Paul was esteemed for his theological—as well as ethical—views from the start, just as he is today. But BeDuhn argues that Paul was relatively unknown until the middle of the second century. Few texts mention or allude to Paul's letters before that time, and even those that do need to be evaluated carefully—apparent quotations may be simply stock phrases or shared metaphors, and some of the Pauline material may have been added to the texts later in their manuscript transmission. The change in opinions on Paul may have come as a result of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, which led to gentile Christians distancing themselves from their Jewish-Christian forebears and contemporaries. At the same time, and perhaps for the same reasons, Marcion severed Christianity's ties to Judaism by dispensing of Jewish scriptures and assembling his Christian-only canon: the Gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's letters. Orthodox Christians may have seen similar value in using Paul to emphasize their ties to the gentile mission, and perhaps even adopted Marcion's collection of letters as their own, while also creating several additional anti-Marcionite texts—Acts, 2 Peter, James, and the Pastoral Epistles—to rescue Paul for orthodoxy. Even so, orthodox writers tend to minimize the content of Paul's letters, perhaps as a reaction to Marcion's interpretations, and focus more on Paul as the founder of particular communities or portray him as subsumed under the authority of the Twelve. BeDuhn's characterization of some NT texts as anti-Marcionite may be hard for some to accept, but overall his paper is a valuable corrective to the assumption that Paul was always valued as a theologian and thereby provides an argument for moving away from using them as a guide for modern Christian thought and practice.

New ways of examining the origins and development of the Eucharist meal inform the second pair of papers. In "Changing Courses: Eucharistic Origins," Andrew McGowan argues against the notion that the Eucharist meal essentially arrived as something entirely new and fully-formed in the lifetime of Jesus or Paul. Instead, McGowan considers the original meal as a somewhat normal practice for its time, but now obscured by the sacramentalism of the Last Supper accounts. Early Christian meal events were simply shared community meals, though they could have early taken on some ritualistic aspects—they need not be one or the other. McGowan cautions, however, that even the presence of bread and wine at the meals would reflect everyday practice in the ancient world. Other food may also have been consumed in the early banquets, but it is possible too that restricting the menu to bread and wine would help to avoid the problem of consuming meat dedicated to idols (1 Cor 8:4–13). At some point the community meals transitioned into the Eucharist-only sacrament; McGowan places this development in the third century, with the addition

of a morning Eucharist ceremony and the gradual abandonment of the evening banquet, perhaps as a result of the difficulties of feeding an ever-growing community. McGowan's paper demonstrates the value of scholarship on ancient meals and, as with BeDuhn's examination of Paul, the dangers of assuming Christian practices remained static from their inception.

In the final paper, "The Ritual of the Hellenistic Meal: Early Christian Everyday Practice as an Exegetical Challenge," Soham Al-Suadi develops Hal Taussig's work on the Eucharist meal as a typical Hellenistic meal, which was a site of "social, political, and religious experimentation." Like McGowan, Al-Suadi sees the origins of the Eucharist meal in the everyday practices of the ancient world. But it is important to understand that even an ordinary communal meal could be the place of transformation. So Al-Suadi examines the earliest account of the Christian banquet from Rom 14:1–12 and looks at what it reveals about Christian identity formation. In essence, Paul was faced with a tension between Jews and gentiles at the table and sought a remedy to the tension between them to "minimize the disruptive state of experimentation." The decisions about identity made at the meal—on how the menu settles differences between Jews and gentiles—then continue after the meal, influencing daily life. Al-Suadi moves from comparisons to Hellenistic meals to the creation of a new hermeneutical method that combines socio-historical criticism with ritual theory and applies it to portions of Paul's letters related to the Eucharistic meal. She focuses on several aspects: the terms of identification used for the participants, how the order within the meal ritual influences the interconnectedness of those involved, and what the order of reclining during the meal reveals about group and individual identity. As a result, the exegete becomes acutely aware of how participation in the Eucharist at once provides an opportunity to break or transcend social divisions, reflects the tensions that exist in the larger community, and seeks to resolve their differences in pursuit of forming a new group identity. Most interesting about Al-Suadi's discussion is her argument that the birth of Christianity was not a singular, remarkable event; rather, it arose from the everyday experience of communal meals, occurring wherever Christianity had taken root.

—Tony Burke

Cursing and the Apostle

The Fight for Authority in Early Christianity

Tony Burke

Claims about and against apostolic authority loom large in our sources for early Christianity. Paul's letters, for example, demonstrate his own anxiety over rival teachers challenging his apostolic credentials and his mission to gentiles. And his community in Corinth was fractured over allegiances to particular leaders, with some declaring "I belong to Paul" or "I belong to Cephas," or others (1 Cor 1:11–13). These same divisions continued into the next several centuries with various communities aligning themselves with particular apostles, writing texts in their chosen hero's name, sometimes even casting the apostles of rival communities in a negative light.[1] The empty tomb and resurrection stories of the gospels similarly champion certain apostles as the first to witness evidence of the resurrection; and such witness seems to be an essential part of the credentials for leadership in the first century. Another method for demonstrating apostolic authority is the telling of stories in which the apostle demonstrates miraculous abilities similar to those performed by Jesus—such as healings, exorcisms, and wonders that defy nature. But perhaps the most effective way for the apostle to display his authority is through the performance of punitive miracles, or curses. Beneficent miracles invite awe and wonder, but imprecatory miracles inspire dread and fear. There is no better way to show that the power of a mighty deity flows through the miracle worker's veins, that his warnings must be heeded, and that any who dare to cross him will perish.

Curse stories, indeed cursing in general, are relatively unexplored in the study of early Christianity, a neglect due likely to the belief among Christians that acts of vengeance characterize the God of the OT, not the NT. But a careful look at the sources yields numerous references in Christian literature to cursing—sometimes by God, sometimes by demons, sometimes even by Jesus. Curses by apostles are plentiful, both within the confines of the NT—in the gospels, the book of Acts, and in Paul's letters—and outside the canon, in the exploits of individual apostles reported in the various apocryphal acts. The writers of these texts had no qualms about calling upon God and Jesus to harm

1. On this phenomenon, see Smith, *Petrine Controversies*.

rather than to heal. Readers of the texts have not always valued such portrayals of Christian leaders—some commentators pass over them without comment, some try to justify the apostles' actions through victim blaming, some try to diminish the horror of the texts by dismissing them as symbolic or as appropriate only to their ancient contexts. But cursing is as much a part of Christian thought and praxis as blessing and, though the apostolic curse stories and invocations may not be as well known as the sacrifices the apostles made for the faith, they are no less a part of the Christian literary tapestry.

Curses in Biblical Antiquity

The neglect of curses and curse stories in the study of early Christianity is due, at least in part, to shortcomings in the terminology used to describe phenomena relating to cursing in our sources. Some basic definitions may help clarify matters.

Douglas Stuart, writing for the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, defines the verb "to curse" as "to predict, wish, pray for, or cause trouble or disaster on a person or thing"; and the noun "curse" he defines as "the expression of such a prediction, wish, prayer, or causation; or the result thereof; or, rarely, the object (person or thing) thereof."[2] By extension, a curse story—also known as a curse miracle, punitive miracle, or imprecation—is a narrative in which the protagonist issues a curse upon another. The one who invokes the curse could be a deity, such as God, who curses Adam and Eve in Genesis, or a representative of a deity, such as the prophet Elisha or the apostles, or a semi-divine being, such as the wonderworker Apollonios or Jesus. Like healing or exorcism stories, curse stories follow a stereotypical pattern: the introduction of the antagonist(s) and protagonist(s), the offense, the punishing curse, the result, and the response.[3] The line between a curse and a curse story is rather blurry; curse stories can include cursing formulae (when the protagonist curses his opponents), and they indicate to potential cursers that curses can indeed be successful. Note also that curses invoke the names of deities who have proven to be powerful, perhaps even because of the fame accrued from curse stories.

2. Stuart, "Curse," 1218; see similarly Scheper, "Cursing," 2097. Scheper's comprehensive overview includes a helpful annotated bibliography of earlier works.

3. Curse stories seem ripe for exploration from form critics, but they are absent from the classic studies of comparative sources for the NT (such as Bultmann's *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*). One exception is the list of "rule miracles of punishment" by Thiessen (*Miracles Stories*, 106–12), though, e.g. from Christian literature he lists only the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) and, tentatively, the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12–14; 20:24; and Matt 21:18–19). Thiessen lists also several inscriptions from Epidaurus and stories from the Talmud, but nothing from the Hebrew Bible nor intertestamental and Hellenistic Jewish literature.

Often, but not always, curse stories are discussed in the context of miracles in the ancient world. Kenneth L. Woodward, following J. P. Meier, defines a miracle as "an unusual or extraordinary event that is in principle perceived by others, that finds no reasonable explanation in ordinary human abilities or in other known forces that operate in the world of time and space, and that is the result of a special act of God or the gods or of human beings transformed by efforts of their own through asceticism or meditation."[4] Such a definition is wide enough in scope to include curses, or punitive miracles; but most scholars prefer to draw a distinction between miracles, which in their view are always positive, and curses, which they prefer to associate with magic, not miracle. In the *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes declares that a miracle "must aim to 'beget or confirm beleefe' or, more specifically, serve 'for the procuring of credit to God's messengers, ministers and prophets.'"[5] Biblical scholars and theologians often use this function of miracle to distinguish the extra-ordinary actions of Jesus from those of his contemporaries.[6] Of course, punitive miracles too can beget or confirm belief, but there is an apparent unwillingness among scholars of Christianity and Christians in general, to think Jesus would utter curses; the Jesus they know used his power to heal, not to hurt. Surprisingly, the same scholars (and others) have no hesitation in calling the plagues of Exodus, or the Great Flood "miracles," though they are more appropriately considered curses;[7] it is okay, it seems, for the God of the Hebrew Bible (OT) to perform such acts, but not Jesus nor the Father whose love he proclaims.

Sources for curses and curse stories are plentiful and varied.[8] The majority of the sources are literary, including narrative literature (biblical texts, classical works, etc. that convey curse stories and/or feature characters who utter curses); prophetic, polemical, and epistolary literature; inscriptions (tombs, shrines,

4. Woodward, *Book of Miracles*, 28; adapted from Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 512.

5. Quoted by Blenkinsopp in "Miracles: Elisha and Hanina ben Dosa," 57.

6. See, e.g., Meier, who states "Jesus' miracles do not directly punish or hurt anyone. This contrasts with the Greek magical papyri, which include spells for causing sickness or insomnia," etc. (*Marginal Jew*, 548–49).

7. The problem of the distinction between miracle and curse stories is exemplified in collections of source material, such as Wendy Cotter's *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, which includes the curse on the fig tree as the only Jesus imprecation, neglects Elisha's slaughter of the boys of Bethel, and mentions no Greco-Roman curse stories at all; and Woodward's *Book of Miracles* again neglects the boys of Bethel and Greco-Roman analogues, and does not mention Jesus' fig tree story at all. Howard Clark Kee's *Miracle in the Early Christian World* is more expansive, with attention paid to curse stories in noncanonical Christian sources, but Kee offhandedly dismisses canonical imprecations as created simply to demonstrate the superiority of Christian miracle over non-Christian "magic."

8. A comprehensive and authoritative survey of sources specific to the ancient Mediterranean world is provided in Speyer, "Fluch."

property markers);[9] medical texts;[10] treaties;[11] and book curses (e.g. Deut 4:2; 12:32; 1 Enoch 104.10; *Letter of Aristeas* 311; Rev 22:18–19; Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8; common also in manuscripts and used generally to ensure the book is transmitted faithfully).[12] Cursing is also associated with "magical" implements (amulets, papyri, bowels, tablets, *defixiones*).[13] This latter category is not solely literary, as these implements both invoke and protect people from curses; in doing so they may contain symbols as protection alongside of or instead of writing. So common were these materials in antiquity that Pliny the Elder, for example, wrote "there is no one who is not afraid of curses and binding spells" (*Natural History* 28.4.19), and they were used also by Jews and Christians, sometimes even evoking Jesus as an instrument of the curse.[14] Another category that surpasses simply literary evidence is the evil eye.[15] This phenomenon entails the belief that someone's glance can effect damage to life and property. Everyone is susceptible to the evil eye, especially prominent people, because they are often the cause of others' envy. It is not a tangible curse—that is, its implementation does not require writing or devices—but writers do mention it (for biblical examples, which tend to be obscured in translation, see e.g. Deut 28:53–57; Prov 23:1–8; Wis 4:12; Sir 37:10–11; Matt 6:22–23//Luke 11:34–36) and there is physical evidence for talismans and other implements used to guard against it.

Much of previous biblical scholarship on curses has focused on the Hebrew Bible, with an eye to contemporary ancient Near Eastern sources.[16] Scholars have examined Iron Age era inscriptions (including Akkadian, Ugaritic, Aramaic, Phoenician, Punic, and Edomite),[17] curse stories in Mesopotamian

9. On Greek epitaphs from Asia Minor, see Strubbe, "Cursed Be He" (with some description of Christian use of similar curse formulae, p. 37). Note also the "Judas curse" that appears on Christian epitaphs to ward off those who would do it harm (e.g. "if anyone should dare to open [this tomb] also to [the] sun, he will share the lot of Judas [Iscariot], all things will become darkness to him and God will destroy him on that day"); see van der Horst, "Note on the Judas Curse." Gevirtz ("West-Semitic Curses") sees a connection between west-Semitic curse epitaph formulae (e.g. "the man who should damage this stele, may the gods . . .") and casuistic law.

10. On illness as a curse of the gods, see Horstmanshoff and Stol, *Magic and Rationality*.

11. E.g., Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*; Magnetti, "Function of the Oath"; and Johnston, "Nahum's Rhetorical Allusions."

12. For a study of such curses see Drogin, ***Anathema!***

13. Widely considered authoritative is Gager, *Curse Tablets*. Sometimes the boundaries between these categories are porous; see, e.g., the detailed instructions God gives to Ezekiel to create a cursing spell in Ezek 5:1–4, the bitter waters "spell" prescribed in Num 5:11–31, and the powerful reading of the scroll in Jeremiah 36. See further Fox, "Old Testament Parallels."

14. Some examples are collected in Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*.

15. See Lykiardopoulos, "Evil Eye," and the exhaustive four-volume study by Elliott, *Beware the Evil Eye*.

16. Hebrew terms related to cursing (*'alah*, *'arr*, *qillel*, and *qbb*) appear 338 times in the Hebrew Bible. See further Brichto, *Problem of "Curse,"* and Blank, "Curse," esp. 73–83. Note also that *berek* ("bless") is sometimes used euphemistically to mean *qillel* (e.g. 1 Kgs 21:13; Job 2:9). For selections of texts see Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*.

17. See Crawford, *Blessing and Curse*.

literature (including the flood stories and Enkidu's curse on Shamash from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* 7.3), the curse against soldiers who break the Hittite Soldiers Oath,[18] Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions with curses against trespassers, curses on Akkadian boundary stones for those who fail to honor contracts of sale, treaties, Egyptian tomb curses,[19] and curses in covenant texts (including the *Code of Hammurabi*),[20] all with the hope of illuminating biblical texts and early Jewish practices. Covenant curses have been afforded much attention due to their use in the Mosaic covenant (see Lev 26:14–45; Deuteronomy 27–28; note also God's promise in the Abrahamic covenant: "I will bless those who bless, and the one who curses you I will curse," Gen 12:3). Of interest also is the commandment against "the wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God" (Exod 20:7), which may refer to cursing by God's name or cursing God in general (see the capital punishment for doing so in Lev 24:10–16; 1 Kgs 21:13; cf. 1 Sam 3:13, where God punishes the blasphemer directly).[21] Jewish Scripture is replete also with cursing stories. In some, God is the one who perpetrates the curse, as in the punishments on Adam and Eve (Gen 3:14–19, and which results also in the cursing of the earth itself), the plagues of Exodus (Exodus 7–11), the whitening of Miriam's skin (Numbers 12), and the plague inflicted on Israel as punishment for the census of David (2 Sam 24; 1 Chronicles 21). In other tales, the one who curses is human—as in Shimei's curse on David (2 Samuel 16) or Noah's curse on Canaan (Gen 9:18–27)—or is a particularly righteous human, as seen in the imprecatory miracles performed by Elijah and Elisha (2 Kgs 2:1–17; 5:19b–27; 6:1–23), including Elisha's famous encounter with the "bad boys of Bethel" (2 Kgs 2:23–25),[22] and several other cursing tales featuring unnamed prophets (1 Kgs 13:1–10, 11–32; 20:35–43).

Sources for curses are more plentiful than they may seem at first glance. Curse stories are obvious, as are curse formulae, but some statements, particularly in biblical texts, have the force of a curse but do not use obvious curse terminology. The first of these is woe oracles, which combine the woe interjection with a prediction of disaster (e.g. Amos 5:18; 6:1; Isa 5:8–24; Jer 23:13; Ezek 34:2; Zech 11:17; these are plentiful also in intertestamental literature, e.g. *2 Esdr* 2:8; *SibOrac* 3:295–334, 492–511; 5:1–26; 11:183–85).[23] Since the person declaring

18. See Scheper, "Cursing," 2099 citing Falco, "Malediction."

19. Scheper, "Cursing," 2101–2.

20. See Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 178–80; also McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*.

21. For more on cursing God (blasphemy), see Blank, "Curse," 83–87. Note too that the command from Job's wife that he "curse God and die" (Job 2:9) implies that a curse on God will backfire on the one who utters it.

22. For an interesting study of how this problematic story has been interpreted over time, see Zielkowski, *Evil Children*.

23. See Horine, "Study of the Literary Genre"; Clements, "Woe (OT)"; and Collins, "Woe (NT)." On cursing in Jewish apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, see Van Den Doel, "Blessing and Cursing," chap. 2.

the woe is a prophet speaking with the voice of God, it would appear that these should be regarded less as predictions and more as promises of divine punishment. To be sure, not all woes are curses; woes in a form such as "Woe to the man who . . ." may be more an educational device expressing disapproval with certain types of conduct than a curse. So, care must be taken to not rush too quickly to declare a woe a curse, but equally one must not too readily rule it out, particularly due to religious sensitivities—for example, eliminating from study the woes pronounced by Jesus simply because one believes Jesus would not utter curses. Similar caution should be used when examining imprecatory psalms, which call for God to enact revenge on the singers' enemies (e.g. "May his days be few; may another seize his position. May his children be orphans, and his wife a widow, etc.," Ps 109:6–19; see also Pss 35:26; 58:6–10; 69:22–28; 83:13–17; 137:8–9).[24] Are the writers simply expressing their hope in God's intervention, or do they believe their words have the power to bend God to their will? Finally, oaths too are related to curses as they imply a conditional self-curse as punishment in the event that the oath-taker does not follow through on what is sworn.[25] The agent of this punishment is frequently identified as God (e.g. Saul's oath that "God do so to me and more also," 1 Sam 14:44), but the punishment typically is not specified (for exceptions, see Pss 7:4 and 137:5, and Job 31) perhaps out of concern that the punishment be put into operation too soon.

Jewish writers of Jesus' time retold the biblical curse stories in their "rewritten Bible" texts and also created new cursing stories. Pseudo-Philo reports how God burned alive 1000 Ba'al worshippers (*Biblical Antiquities* 28) and Artapanus tells how Moses killed a king by whispering the name of God into his ear (27.21–26). Josephus relates a number of punishment miracle stories, including when God brought a deadly storm as vengeance for the murder of the holy man Onias (*Jewish Antiquities* 14.19–25), the disease inflicted by God on Herod the Great as punishment for his sins (*Jewish Antiquities* 17.168), and a story of Honi the circle drawer who, though he refused, was expected by the men of Hyrcanus to place a curse on Aristobulus (*Jewish Antiquities* 14.22–24).[26] Covenant curses return in the *Community Rule* from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which draws upon covenantal formulae from Numbers and Deuteronomy but redirects their curses to those

24. See Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, chap. 3; Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1.48–52; Luc, "Interpreting the Curses"; and Blank, "Curse," 80–81, who sees imprecatory prayers developing out of curses. In Luc's enumeration there are 28 imprecatory psalms in total and another 27 feature "judgment predictions" that are similar in function. Three of the former (35, 69, and 109) are invoked by NT writers, so Christians are more connected to these curse texts than it may seem. On the implications of this, see Day, "Imprecatory Psalms."

25. Scheper, "Cursing," 2102.

26. On Josephus' reporting of biblical and post-biblical miracles, of which "punishment miracles form the largest class" (pp. 40–41), see Eve, *Jewish Context of Jesus' Miracles*, 24–52.

outside of the community (e.g. 1QS ii.5–9).[27] Rabbinic texts feature prohibitions against cursing (Ketubbot 72a; Shevu'ot 35a), but allowance is made for cursing the wicked (Menahot 64b).[28] Most often in the Talmud it is God who is the principal actor in curse stories, inflicting death on a wide range of people, such as a judge who breaks the rules of procedure (*Mekilta* Mishpatim 20), a pupil who dares to decide a halakah in the presence of his teacher (Eruvin 63a), a Roman who pushes a rabbi out of the way in a lavatory (Berakhot 62b), a rabbi who contradicts an older rabbi (Sifre Numbers 28, 26), another who relaxes the rule of the seventh year without authority (y. Shevu'ot 38d), and the daughter of the emperor Hadrian became a leper after quoting a biblical text in a mocking challenge to God (Hullin 60a).[29] Some rabbis appear to have had special powers of their own—Rabbi Eliezer's ability to call upon God is feared by other rabbis because it was said that "every place upon which Rabbi Eliezer set his eyes was burned up . . ."; his wife was also afraid—that if she allowed him a moment to pray, he would call upon God to destroy her brother, and this happened (b. Bava Metzi'a 59B).

Greek epics and plays feature a number of curse stories, though these are rarely mentioned in overviews of parallels with Christian texts because scholars focus more on Greek miracle tales in order to compare them with examples of Jesus' beneficent wonderworking. Yet, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain their share of stories of the gods cursing humans (e.g. Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men into pigs; *Odyssey* 10.320), and both texts feature the Erinyes, female personifications of vengeance who punish whoever has sworn a false oath (see *Iliad.* 9.453–57; 3.278; 19.260; *Odyssey* 17.465). In Greek drama there is the curse of King Oedipus against his disloyal sons (Sophocles, *Oedipus coloneus* 1299, 1434), and (unwittingly) against himself as the man responsible for the murder of the previous king (Sophocles, *Oedipus tyrannus* 269–72), the curse on Jason by Medea (Euripides, *Medea* 160 seq.; for other curses by Medea, see *Argonautica* 4.1635–90 and Seneca, *Medea* 6–23), and Deianira's murder of Hercules using a cursed garment (Sophocles, *Trachiniae*; Seneca, *Hercules Otaeus*). Even Greco-Roman holy men—figures depicted in ways similar to Jesus in the gospels—curse, as is evident from the story of Apollonios of Tyana meeting an Empusa (a vampire or ghoul with a donkey's hooves). Apollonios curses the creature and tells his companions to do the same (Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 2.4). Also of interest is a series of punishment miracles found in inscriptions from an Asclepian shrine in Epidaurus intended to illustrate the rules

27. Additional sources within the Dead Sea Scrolls, including the two curse fragments (4Q286–87, 4Q280–82), are discussed in Nitzan, "Blessing and Cursing."

28. For a brief survey of sources, see Scheper, "Cursing," 2104 and *inter alia* Lauterbauch, "Belief."

29. These examples are presented in Thiessen, *Miracles Stories*, 110.

of the shrine—for example, one Aeschines looked into the sanctuary without permission and lost his sight, and because Amphimnestus failed to carry out his vow to give a tenth of his catch of fish to Asclepius, he was attacked by fish.[30]

The motive behind the preceding parallelomaniacal taxonomy is to demonstrate the pervasiveness of cursing in the world in which Christianity was born. It should come as no surprise then, that cursing appears in Christian literature, though scholarship has been slow to pay it much attention.[31] The most well-known example is Jesus' curse on the fig tree (Mark 11:12–14; 20–21, and Matt 21:18–19).[32] In Mark's version of the tale, Jesus curses the tree, disrupts the temple with his famous "temple tantrum," and then returns to see the tree withered. The framing structure suggests that there is a connection between the curse and what happens in the temple—indeed, the fig tree is a common symbol for Israel (see e.g. Isa 34:1–4). The fig tree thus has parabolic value: the judgment and withering of the fig tree symbolize the fate of Israel as a nation for having failed to produce fruits of righteousness.[33] But is it more than symbolic? By his withering of the fig tree is Jesus not thereby also "withering" Israel itself? It may be significant also that in Matthew the story continues with a teaching by Jesus on power (20:22–24); he tells his followers that if they have faith, they too can "move mountains" with their words. Is Jesus instructing his followers on how to curse? The rending of the temple veil (Mark 15:38 par) is another curse miracle of retribution. This curse is aimed at an inanimate object, but it has symbolic value similar to the curse on the fig tree. Jesus also pronounces plenty of woes, which, again, could have the force of a curse. There is the woe on the betrayer of the Son of Man (Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22), against Pharisees (Luke 11//Matt 23; note specifically Matt 23:59, where Jesus seems to curse Jerusalem),[34] against stumbling blocks (Luke 17:1//Matt 18:7), and on unrepentant cities (Luke 10:13–15//Matt 11:20–24).[35] Elsewhere Jesus is hesitant

30. These and additional examples are presented in Thiessen, *Miracles Stories*, 109–10.

31. The NT words are *anathematizo* and *kataraomai*, which occur 23 times in the corpus; see Behm, "ἀνάθεμα, ἀνάθημα, κατάθεμα"; Büchsel, "ἀρά"; Aust and Müller, "Curse." Woe (οὐ αί) occurs 47 times.

32. Literature on the fig tree episode is plentiful. As a start, see the detailed discussion in Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 884–96; Van Den Doel, "Blessing and Cursing," 247–51; Hatch, "Cursing of the Fig Tree,"; Robin, "Cursing of the Fig Tree"; Hull, "Cursing of the Fig Tree"; Oakman, "Cursing Fig Trees"; Cotter, "For It Was Not the Season for Figs"; and Telford, *Barren Temple*.

33. Hull, "Cursing of the Fig Tree," 1429.

34. For contemporary discussion and application, see Carter, "Matthew 23:37–39." Carter tries to soften the curse by saying only the political elite and not the entire city are the target.

35. See Comber, "Composition." Comber takes seriously that Jesus is indeed cursing the cities. The woe "is not merely an expression of opinion but contains in itself the power to effect what is said. Thus, Jesus here seals the fate of the Galilean cities by pronouncing eschatological judgment upon them" (499). Eusebius, for one, seemed to think Jesus' judgment was instantaneous, rather than eschatological; he mentions Chorazin, a "village in Galilee against which Christ uttered a woe after he had preached to it; now it is a desert, two miles from Capernaum" (*Onomasticon* 303, 174).

about such actions; in Luke, Jesus rebukes John and James when, after encountering rejection from Samaritan villages, they ask Jesus "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (9:52–56; recalling 2 Kgs 1:9–12).[36] He also instructs his followers to refrain from oaths (Matt 23:16–22; cf. Jas 3:9).

The gospels also contain apocalyptic woes: Jesus' "woe to those who are pregnant and nursing in those days" (Mark 13:17 par.) seems more of a warning than a curse, but Matthew's pericope on the Last Judgment has a returned Son of Man declare that the self-righteous are "accursed" and are told to "depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (25:41; cf. 2 Pet 2:14 on false teachers as "accursed children"). Additional apocalyptic woes on "the inhabitants of the earth" (Rev 8:13) are described in grisly detail in Revelation 9–12. Luke's Sermon on the Plain contains a number of woes not found in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (should a statement like "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep" be considered a curse? Or an illustration of proper conduct?);[37] and Jesus describes what will happen to Jerusalem ("they will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you") because the city "did not recognize the time of your visitation from God" (19:41–44). Luke also has Jesus tell his disciples to "Bless those who curse you" (Luke 6:28), testifying, at least, to the prevalence of the practice of cursing.

Though canonical curse stories featuring Jesus are rare, they are nevertheless present in the NT. Luke-Acts is particularly heavy with curse stories. The two-part epic includes God's curse on Zechariah (1:20), who is struck mute for questioning God's announcement of the birth of John, and God's fatal punishment of Judas (Acts 1:15–20), Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11; influenced perhaps by the story of Achan who misappropriated what had been dedicated to God and was killed along with his family; see Josh 7:1–26), and Herod Agrippa (12:20–23; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.8.2, where Agrippa's death is also seen as divine retribution),[38] as well as the blinding of Paul (9:3–9). A different type of curse occurs in Matt 27:24–26, where the Jews attending Jesus' trial curse themselves,

36. See further Allison, "Rejecting Violent Judgment." Allison sees in Luke 9:52–56, *Acts of Philip* 15:21, Ps.-Clement, *Homilies* 16:20, and *Testament of Abraham* 4–14 evidence of a critique of prophetic punishment stories. Thus, Jesus here is forbidding such vengeance in all cases, not merely this one; however, Allison does not provide an explanation for why Luke is not hesitant to tell curses stories in Acts.

37. Betz (*Sermon on the Mount*, 586), for his part, sees these woes not as curses but as "mere threats" to those who do not follow Jesus' instructions. Note too the woe on slanderers in Jude 11, which promises them the same death as those who perished in Korah's rebellion.

38. Allen (*Death of Herod*) compares the story of the death of Agrippa with similar Death of Tyrant-Type scenes in Jewish and Greco-Roman literature and notes Luke's penchant for curse stories, stating "Luke's use of retribution has generally been neglected by scholarship. Perhaps this neglect is due to modern sensitivities which find a theology of retribution unappealing. Nevertheless, it was a theme of some importance in the ancient world" (p. 202).

shouting, "His blood be on us and all our children!" The most dramatic curse of all may be that of Peter, who, when asked if he knew Jesus, "began to curse, and he swore an oath" (Mark 14:71//Matt 26:74); the oath alone implies that Peter is cursing, but are we meant to understand that the explicit curse here is a curse against Jesus, as later generations were expected to do when accused of being Christians? And could the readers of the gospels have seen a causal connection between Peter's curse of Jesus and Jesus' subsequent death?[39]

Curse stories appear also in apocryphal texts. Often scholars mention them in an effort to show how beneficent the canonical miracles are in comparison, but curses do not appear dramatically more often in apocryphal texts than in the NT. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* is center-stage in such discussions. Here we find a five-year-old Jesus withering a child's hand (3.2), striking another child dead for bumping into his arm (4.1), blinding those who spoke against him for committing these deeds (5.1), murdering a harsh teacher (14.2), and cursing a snake (16.2).[40] In the *Protevangelium of James* the midwife Salome has her hand withered for performing a physical exam on Mary after doubting her perpetual virginity (20.1). Earlier in the same text, the priest Zechariah tells Joseph not to refuse the care of Mary because God might curse him like he did Dathan, Abiron, and Kore (*InJas* 9.2; referencing Num 16:1–35). Additional childhood cursing tales appear in the *Arabic Infancy Gospel* and its Syriac source, the *History of the Virgin*: Jesus turns children into goats (39), a man is cast down a well by God (27), another man is transformed by a curse spell into a mule (20), and a second snake is killed by a curse from Jesus (41). In the *Dormition of Mary*, the apostle John curses unbelievers with the words "let those who crucified you and did not believe in you be troubled" (8),[41] Jews who try to burn Mary's house are burnt by a fire sent by an angel (35), and an angel severs the hands of a man trying to interfere with Mary's body (46). Additional curses can be found in late antique and medieval texts such as the *Encomium to Mary* (14.30–34), the *Life of John the Baptist* attributed to Serapion (7.10), and the *Letter from Heaven* (19, 28–29, 32, and 47).[42] Woes also are common; particularly notable are the woes appearing in a wide assortment of early texts (see *POxy 840*; *Thom.* 103; *ApJas* 3, 7, 8; *Book of Thomas the Contender* 143–44; *Epistle of the Apostles* 38). And not to be neglected are injunctions against cursing; for example, the *Pistis Sophia* features a command by Jesus to renounce cursing, among other iniquities (3.102), and while the *Didache* invokes Luke 6:28 ("bless those who curse you") and prohibits magic and sorcery and "speaking evil" (2.2–3; also 3.4, 5.1; see also *Barn*. 20.1),

39. See Dewey, "Peter's Curse."

40. On the curses of the young Jesus as a reflection of the author's views of Jesus' adult activities, see Burke, *De infantia Iesu*, 276–81; and Eastman, "Cursing."

41. The *Dormition* comes in many versions; the one used here is the standard Greek text attributed to St. John the Theologian (trans. in Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 701–8.

42. For these lesser known texts, see the individual contributions in Burke and Landau, *New Testament Apocrypha*.

it also pronounces woes on "those who receive" (1.5) and states that the way of death is "evil and completely cursed" (5.1).

The world of early Christianity is steeped in cursing. Writers of texts were influenced by curse stories from Jewish Scripture and other literature that came before them and thus felt no hesitation in crafting curse stories of their own esteemed figures. They participated in and protected themselves against the effects of the evil eye and nefarious magical spells and worried that God, or angels, or demons would afflict them with death or infirmity as punishment for some discretion. The effects of cursing were an ever-present threat. Anyone, it seems, was capable of cursing, though some figures were believed to be particularly adept at it. Balaam's curses were considered particularly effective (Num 22:6), and Job mentions "cursers of the day," who seem to have a reputation for effective cursing.[43] Curses by people of higher status, such as parents, priests, and kings are said to be powerful,[44] but simply being righteous can be enough, since a righteous person can not only "decree a thing and it shall be accomplished" (Job 22:23) but can even command God to nullify his own decrees. In general, however, the power seems to be inherent in the words of the curse itself, so much that great care needed to be taken in what one said. Consider the worldview of the Talmud: here we see a world inhabited by angelic powers who may be in such a rush to fulfill their roles in managing and supervising affairs in the earthly realm that they sometimes mistake a human voice for a divine one or carry out an order incorrectly or against the wrong person.[45]

Why is cursing so common? For many people cursing provided opportunities to exercise power in situations in which they were powerless. Curses were invoked in treaties to guarantee compliance, they were used on boundary markers to prevent trespassing, on graves to avoid damage or desecration, on manuscripts to prevent sloppy copying or interpolation, and on people due to such motives as jealousy, anger, and to gain advantage. Curse stories also involve power, typically to prove that the person who is cursing has influence or authority, or to show the deity invoked in the curse is powerful. They demonstrate too that a curse can be effective, for only here do we see a protagonist invoke a curse and then witness its outcome. Some curse stories feature reversals, illustrating also that a curse can be revoked. It is often asked if the ancients took cursing seriously—did they think curses actually worked? Or were they merely a way to alleviate anxieties? Certainly alleviation of anxieties was part of the reason to curse, to make those who invoked curses feel like they could have

43. Blank, "Curse," esp. 95 n. 63. Note, however, that Prov 36:2 implies an unwarranted curse is ineffective, and Sir 21:27 states, "when an ungodly man curses his adversary, he curses himself."

44. This is the case at least for tomb curses, though this likely reflects the wider context of cursing. See Strubbe, "Cursed Be He," 41 (citing Speyer, "Fluch," 1165–67).

45. See Lauterbauch, "Belief."

control over the uncontrollable; but scholarship on the power of the word and legal injunctions suggests that curses were believed to be effective. Scholars, then, should take the phenomenon of cursing just as seriously as those who invoked them.

Cursing and the Apostle

It is against this background that curses associated with apostles, passed over in the preceding enumeration of sources, will be examined now in some detail. The material spans canonical gospels, epistles, and acts, and noncanonical acts of the apostles. It shows that the apostle, like other powerful figures, could demonstrate his authority through cursing and that writers were determined to show that the apostle's curses were effective.

Apostles as Performers of "Signs and Wonders"

That the apostles and disciples of Jesus had powers similar to those displayed by Jesus is affirmed throughout first-century Christian literature. The earliest references can be found in Mark, where Jesus sends out the Twelve to the villages to teach and gives them "authority over unclean spirits" (6:7) and the power to cast out demons and cure the sick (6:13). They seem also to be able to curse villages who refuse them by shaking the dust off their feet (6:11), an action that has an almost ritual (i.e. magical) quality to it. The cursing dimension to this activity is made more apparent in a parallel to the mission instructions from Q (QS 10:2–11; with partial parallel in *Thom.* 14), which may predate Mark's account. Here Jesus says, "I tell you on that day it will become more tolerable for Sodom than for that town" (Luke 10:12; cf. Matt 10:15). Q follows up the commission of the apostles with the woes on Chorazin and Bethsaida, further demonstrating the connection between shaking off the dust and cursing. Note too that Luke includes Mark's sending out of the Twelve and pairs Q's mission instructions with the sending out of the 70, thus widening the number of Jesus' followers who are capable of performing miracles.[46] The powers granted to the apostles continue after Jesus' death. Luke makes this apparent in the sequel to his gospel by having the Holy Spirit, which operated through Jesus, be active also in the Jerusalem church following Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). Though Jesus is no longer present, the apostles continue to cast out demons in his name (Acts 3:6) and perform other miraculous deeds.

Mark tells us more about the apostles' miracle working efforts in a healing story in which the apostles try but fail to cast out a demon from a boy (9:28–29; cf. Matt 17:19), and also reveals that others beyond his immediate followers

46. Note too the longer ending of Mark, which declares that "those who believe" will be able to cast out demons, speak in tongues, pick up snakes, drink poisons, and heal the sick (16:17–18).

are using, successfully, the name of Jesus to cast out demons (9:38–39; cf. Luke 9:49–50). Similarly, Matthew alone has Jesus warn of false prophets who will be barred from the kingdom of heaven and will approach him on Judgment Day asking, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?" (Matt 7:21–23). Evidently, not everyone is able to successfully access this power; Acts 19:13–14 mentions the seven sons of the high priest Sceva who try and fail to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. Paul's letters reveal that he too had the power to perform "signs and wonders" (Rom 15:18–19; 2 Cor 12:12) and had demonstrated the "power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left" (2 Cor 6:7; see also 1 Cor 2:4–5). Others Paul knew also worked miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:10; Gal 3:5; note also Heb 2:3–4).

What is clear from these examples is that wonderworking was not restricted to Jesus alone. His followers were given the same abilities, at least to heal and cast out demons, and though it is unspoken in the texts, perhaps the ability also to curse if the occasion required it. But perhaps it is not so unspoken after all, if Paul's claims of performing "signs and wonders" and other displays of the "power of God" are considered to include punitive miracles as well as blessings. Certainly that is possible, especially given the other references to cursing in Paul's letters and the curse stories told of the apostles in canonical and noncanonical acts.

Cursing in the Letters of Paul

Paul is very concerned with issues of authority. His letters continually argue for his authority over his converts and against those who would try to usurp his position. It is difficult for him to assert authority when absent from these communities. But curses help. In Galatians he complains about people coming into his community proclaiming another gospel. He says about them: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!" (1:8–9). Later he declares that "whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty" (Gal 5:10). Something similar occurs in 1 Corinthians, where Paul ends his letter with "Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord" (16:22). It is easy to dismiss these statements as rhetorical flourishes but, given the prevalence of cursing in the ancient world and belief in the power inherent in the curses themselves, they should be taken seriously as occasions where Paul is calling upon divine agents to curse his opponents and expecting some result to occur. Of course, Paul is often inconsistent in his letters—on almost any topic—so it should come as no surprise that he tells his Roman readers to "bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (Rom 12:14).

Galatians features also a discussion of the law as a curse. Quoting Deut 27:36, Paul states, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things in the book of the law" (Gal 3:10). In Paul's view everyone is cursed because no

one can possibly obey the entire law. But Christ nullified this curse by becoming a curse himself, as, again appealing to Deuteronomy, Paul declares that "cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Gal 3:13; Deut 21:23).[47] It is possible that Paul is responding here to an association made between Deut 21:23 and Jesus already made by Jewish opponents of the Christian community. He mentions elsewhere that some people are cursing Jesus. To the Corinthians he says, "I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, 'Let Jesus be cursed!'" (1 Cor 12:3).[48] Later writers allude to such practices. According to Origen, Ophite Gnostics did not admit anyone into their congregation "unless he first pronounces curses against Jesus" (*Contra Celsum* 6.28).[49] And Justin Martyr describes Jews ridiculing Jesus after their prayers (*Dialogue with Trypho* 137.2) and cursing Christians in their synagogues (16.4; 96.2). Further evidence may be found in the *Birkat ha-Minim*, a Jewish curse against heretics that may have been intended to include Christians (or at least Jewish-Christians).[50] The curse is part of daily prayers (Amidah) and may have originated in the first century. It may have worked as a way to root out heretics, as no heretic would invoke a curse upon themselves. The same method was used in trials of Christians before Roman authorities. In his description of such trials, Pliny says they were required to deny they were Christians, pray to the Roman gods, offer incense and wine to images of Trajan and the gods, and curse Christ—which no Christian, Pliny writes, "it is said, can be forced to do" (*Epistulae* 10.96). Some scholars see also a noteworthy parallel between the demand that Christians on trial "curse Christ" and the story of Peter's denial in the canonical gospels: when accused three times of being a Christian, Peter denies he knows Jesus, and in the third denial, it is said that he "began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know this man you are talking about'" (Mark 14:71). Who is Peter cursing here? Could this episode be a reflection of what happened when Christians of Pliny's time were brought to trial?[51] In Paul's case, certainly he is not saying people *in* the Corinthian community are cursing Christ, but it does seem to have

47. Commentary on this section of Galatians is rich, due in part to its difficulties; as Norman Young writes, "The meaning of almost every phrase in Gal 3, 10–14 is disputed" ("Who's Cursed—and Why?" 79). For two recent treatments, see Wisdom, *Blessing for the Nations*; and Streett, "Cursed by God?"

48. Scholarship on this passage is robust, with Unnik, "Jesus: Anathema or Kyrios," being the most detailed.

49. Discussion in Pearson, "Did the Gnostics Curse Jesus?"; and Rasimus, "Anathema Iesous."

50. The tradition appears first in *b.* Berakhot 28b–29a; see Langer, *Cursing the Christians*, 18–26 for a comprehensive discussion of sources and history of interpretation, as well as Horbury, *Jews and Christians*, 67–110, which focuses particularly on its connection with Justin.

51. For a survey of scholars' views on Peter's curse, see Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 605, and Dewey, "Peter's Curse," 101. Particularly recommended is the detailed study by Merkel ("Peter's Curse").

happened in early Christian communities and was demanded of those brought before councils to denounce Christianity.

Another possible example of cursing in Paul's letters is found in Paul's instruction to expel a member of the Corinthian community who is living with his father's wife (1 Cor 5:1–8).[52] He says the man should be "removed" from the community (5:2) and instructs the group to "hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (5:5). Paul's instructions are not clear. What does it mean to be handed over to Satan? Why would this lead to physical harm ("destruction of the flesh")? Perhaps some meaning could be taken from Romans, in which Paul says, "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh" (9:3; see also Paul's woe on himself in 1 Cor 9:16: "woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel"). So is removal from the community, being "cut off from Christ," in itself a curse—a curse that involves some form of physical, rather than merely spiritual, harm?

Paul's letters demonstrate how ubiquitous cursing was in the world of early Christianity. He confronts notions of the law as a curse, of Jesus being the victim or the target of a curse, and even pronounces curses himself—against those who would interfere in his mission, against himself if he is found to have failed in it, and perhaps against problematic members of his communities. He does also forbid cursing in Rom 12:14, and certainly this is a far better biblical injunction to follow, but his statements in support of cursing (such as 1 Cor 16:22, "Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord") are no less scriptural.

Cursing in the Book of Acts

Acts is a treasure trove of curse stories. Several of these—those performed by God against Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Herod Agrippa, and Paul—are mentioned above; what remains to be examined are curses performed by apostles. It is in this context that the story of Ananias and Sapphira warrants a second look, because Peter plays a fairly active role in this curse. As the story goes, the community in Jerusalem shares its resources so that "no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common" (4:32). Members of the group sold their land and houses and gave the proceeds to the apostles who "distributed to each as any had need" (4:35). Two members of the community, however, had not given all they owned.

> But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and

52. South ("Critique of the 'Curse/Death' Interpretation") remarks that Paul's instructions are often interpreted as Paul "enjoining the pronouncement of a curse upon the offender in question with the expectation that he will die as a result" (p. 540). After examining possible Greek and Jewish parallels, South concludes that Paul is simply commanding the Corinthians to expel the offender.

> brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!" Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price." And she said, "Yes, that was the price." Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things. (5:1–11)

It is not clear who exactly is the instrument of doom in the tale: is it God, or is it Peter? Certainly Peter has some culpability in the couple's deaths. He has the ability to know that Ananias is lying, and Ananias dies after Peter's declaration of the falsehood. The same formula is followed for Sapphira, though by now Peter certainly knows what fate will befall her if she lies. The story is a frightening warning to those who dare to cheat or lie to the community. Readers of the text, or hearers of the tale, would feel some hesitation in doing the same. They may also have felt that the successors of Peter would have the same ability to curse those who disobey the church's commands and justifiably worry if they are called before their superiors.

The second apostolic curse story in Acts is Paul's encounter with Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas (13:6–11). Paul and Barnabas have traveled to Cyprus and there they meet the proconsul of Paphas, who is accompanied by "a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus" (13:6). When Elymas tries to prevent Paul and Barnabas from speaking to the proconsul about Jesus, Paul curses him: "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now listen—the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun" (13:10–11). And, as one might expect, Elymas is blinded. It is not revealed to the reader how long the blindness lasts—it might last for his entire life. As for the proconsul, "when [he] saw what happened, he believed" (13:12). Miracles are often depicted in the canonical gospels and Acts as effective ways to attract people to the faith and encourage belief; they are an entryway, an attention-getter for the teacher, who then follows up the miracles with teachings. But this story demonstrates that a curse can be just as effective, particularly when encountering rival wonderworkers. It is a classic case of my god is bigger and better than your god.

Cursing in Apocryphal Acts

The same conflict between apostles and rival wonderworkers is observable in the curse stories of the apocryphal acts. The apocryphal acts are similar to the canonical Acts—they feature stories of apostles travelling to various locations, performing miracles, converting people to the faith, and encountering persecution and martyrdom—but focus on individual apostles, each of whom is appointed a corner of the world to evangelize. Various sources mention this apportioning of duties; the earliest is Origen, whose account also includes some information that may be derived from the apocryphal acts:

> The holy apostles and disciples of our Savior were scattered over the whole world. Thomas, tradition tells us, was chosen for Parthia, Andrew for Scythia, John for Asia, where he remained till his death at Ephesus. Peter seems to have preached in Pontus, Galatia and Bithynia, Cappadocia and Asia, to the Jews of the Dispersion. Finally he came to Rome where he was crucified, head downwards at his own request. What need be said of Paul, who from Jerusalem as far as Illyricum preached in all its fullness the gospel of Christ, and later was martyred in Rome under Nero? (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.1, appealing to Origen, *Commentary on Genesis* 3; cf. *AcThom.* 1; *Acts of Philip* 8.1).

Every apostle, as well as several secondary figures such as Cornelius the Centurion and Mark the Evangelist, has his own apocryphal acts, but five of these stand out in scholarship as the earliest: Andrew, Peter, Paul, John, and Thomas, all composed in either the late second or early third century.[53] Christian institutions and theologians have not looked favorably upon these texts. Uneasy about the somewhat unorthodox preaching and ascetic practices of the apostles presented in the apocryphal acts, orthodox revisers removed the martyrdom accounts and discarded everything else. Due to the efforts of Christian apocrypha scholars, portions of the discarded material have been recovered, but even today only the *Acts of Thomas* is available in its entirety. The material that is available for study features a number of curse stories, but the texts may once have featured more.

Several of these curse stories focus on encounters between the apostle and minor characters who offend the apostle or interfere in his mission. Both Paul and Thomas encounter unworthy people who attempt to take part in the Eucharist. In one story, "a certain youth who had wrought an abominable deed" (he killed a woman who spurned his advances) cannot put the Eucharist in his mouth because his hands had withered up (*AcThom* 51). The apostle says that the Eucharist had detected his lie, though presumably the punishment came directly from God. In the other story, the apostle is more active in the curse

53. For ease of comparison, the translations of the five "great" apocryphal acts are taken from Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*. The *Acts of Philip* is taken from Bovon and Matthews, *Acts of Philip*.

(*AcPet* 2). A woman named Rufina approaches Paul to receive the Eucharist, but he stops her and says,

> Rufina, you do not approach the altar of God as a believer, since you rise from the side not of a husband but of an adulterer, and yet you endeavour to receive God's eucharist. Behold, Satan will trample down your heart and expose you before the eyes of all who believe in the Lord, so that they may see and believe, and know that they have believed in the living God, the searcher of hearts. But if you repent of your deed, he is faithful to forgive your sins and can free you from this sin. But if you do not repent while you are still in the body, the devouring fire and the outer darkness will receive you forever.

Rufina falls down, paralyzed on the left side of her body. The onlookers worry now that God will not forgive their own former sins, a concern that reflects the overarching theme of the text: that apostates during times of persecution should be welcomed back to the community if they repent. Rufina, for her part, is not repentant of her sin and is punished as a result. Another tale of Paul features the common punishment of blindness. A man in Myra named Hermocrates is cured of dropsy by Paul. This angers his son Hermippus, because he wanted his father to die so that he could inherit his property. Hermippus comes at Paul with a sword, but after Paul prays to God to "look down upon their counsel and let me not be brought to nought by them," Hermippus is struck blind (*AcPaul* 4). Attacking an apostle brings misery also when a cupbearer at a wedding strikes Thomas. The apostle says to him, "My God will forgive you for this wrong in the world to come, but in this world he will show his wonders, and I shall soon see that hand that struck me dragged along by dogs" (*AcThom* 6). And indeed, the cupbearer is later killed by a lion and a black dog takes his hand and brings it back to the wedding (*AcThom* 8). Andrew also meets resistance and is twice saved from death by curses from God. In the first story, a noble youth named Exoos comes to Andrew without his parents' consent. The parents lead a mob to the house where Andrew is staying, but before any harm can come to him, God blinds the mob. "All were converted," the text reports, "except the youth's parents, who cursed him and went home again, leaving all their money to public uses. Fifty days after they suddenly died, and the citizens, who loved the youth, returned the property to him" (*Acts of Andrew* 12). In the second story, a proconsul sends Andrew into a pit of wild animals, but God intervenes and a fierce bull spares Andrew, killing instead its two handlers; then a fierce leopard enters the pit but it "left every one alone but seized and strangled the proconsul's son" (*Acts of Andrew* 18). The final example of cursing opponents is the infamous tale of the attempted necrophilia of Callimachus from the *Acts of John* (70–86). Callimachus and Fortunatus enter the tomb of Drusiana but before they can defile her body, a snake comes out of nowhere and kills Fortunatus. Then an angel appears. He covers Drusiana and says to Callimachus, "die, that you may live" (76). Then Callimachus is bitten by the snake. John comes to the tomb, dismisses the snake and raises Callimachus to life so that he can

reveal what happened. Now repentant of his attempted crime, Callimachus is accepted into the apostle's group. Drusiana is then restored to life and in turn she raises Fortunatus, who flees from the tomb. Later John receives a revelation that Fortunatus will die of blood-poisoning from the bite, and he dispatches one of his followers to determine if he is indeed dead. When they discover it is true, John says, "You have your child, devil!" (86), and they all rejoice.

Another apostolic curse story deserves separate mention, because one of the victims in the account is not a sinner, but someone who was cursed in order to prevent sin. The story is the sole episode in the *Act of Peter* from Berlin Coptic Papyrus 8502.[54] A crowd comes to Peter in search of healing. One person in the group asks him about his daughter: "why haven't you helped your virgin daughter, who has grown up to be beautiful and has believed in the name of God? For look, she is completely paralyzed on one side and lies there in the corner, helpless. We see people you have healed, but your own daughter you have neglected" (128,15–129,8). Peter responds that it is indeed within God's power to heal her, and Peter does so, "so that your soul may be convinced and those here may increase their faith" (129,17–19). The crowd rejoices, and Peter declares, "Look, your hearts are convinced that God is not powerless regarding what we ask of him" (130,12–16). Then Peter says to his daughter, "Now go back to your place, lie down, and become an invalid again, for this is better for both of us" (131,2–5). The crowd begs him to heal her again, but Peter refuses, saying the Lord told him on the day she was born, "this girl will harm many souls if her body stays healthy" (132,1–4). He then relates a story of a man named Ptolemy who was tempted by the girl when she was only ten years old. The text is damaged at this point, but it seems that Ptolemy attempted to "defile" her and was prevented when God paralyzed the girl and blinded her attacker. Ptolemy repented and his sight was restored, though he died shortly after. Ptolemy's story is not unlike those of Hermippus, Callimachus and Fortunatus, and the parents of Exoos, all of whom were cursed for their attacks on believers. But the curse on Peter's daughter is different, because she never sinned. She was paralyzed largely to avert another man's sin and remains that way to prevent others from doing the same. The story is a shocking example of victim blaming of a girl who was never even given a name.

A second set of curse stories in the apocryphal acts was written to demonstrate to the reader that the Christian God is mightier than other gods. These tales involve the destruction of pagan temples, and sometimes the temple officials along with them. In a lengthy account from the *Acts of John* 37–47, John enters the temple of Artemis in Ephesus dressed in black. The worshippers, all dressed in white, are insulted and try to kill him. John evades the crowds and issues a challenge: "Behold, here I stand. You all assert that Artemis is power-

54. Translation by Marvin Meyer in Meyer et al., *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 749–54.

ful. Pray to her, that I alone die! Or if you cannot accomplish this, I alone will call upon my own God to kill you all because of your unbelief" (39). Those who had witnessed his previous miracles realize their danger and plead for their lives. The apostle prays for God's mercy on them. In response, half of the temple falls down, the idols and altar are smashed, and the priest is crushed by the roof. Again the people cry out for mercy and then destroy the rest of the temple themselves and declare, "We know that the God of John is the only one, and henceforth we worship him, since we have obtained mercy from him" (44). Later, one of the priest's family takes his body and lays it at the gate of the house where John is staying. Impressed by the man's faith, John tells him to raise the priest to life using the words, "The servant of God, John, says to you, Arise!" The priest is restored to life and follows John. A similar story is told of Paul (*AcPaul* 5), who is imprisoned along with two companions in the temple of Apollo in Sidon. He prays for liberation and half of the temple falls. There is no mention of loss of life, but the text is too fragmentary at this point to know for sure. In its present form, the episode is more of a "liberation miracle" in the same vein as Acts 12:1–19.[55] Destruction of temples occurs also in later apocryphal acts, though no one is hurt in the accounts. In the *Acts of Cornelius* the converted centurion visits Skepsis and prays for the temple of Zeus to fall, temporarily trapping the governor's wife and son (2.10–3.4),[56] and in the *Acts of Titus* a temple under construction falls after Titus walks by and "utters a deep groan" (9.1–2).[57] The outcome of both miracles, as usual, is the conversion of onlookers.

The final category of curses in the apocryphal acts are those invoked against religious rivals. The high priest of Artemis killed in the *Acts of John* could be placed also in this category, but far more illustrative of the competition for followers is the fall of Simon Magus in the *Acts of Peter*. The two figures are established as rivals in the canonical acts, though their encounter ends rather peacefully with Simon repenting of his attempt to buy the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:9–24), and thus prevents Peter's curse ("May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gifts with money," 8:20) from coming to fruition. The pair compete more aggressively in Peter's solo adventures, not only in the *Acts of Peter* but also the *Pseudo-Clementine Romance* and several derivative texts. But it is the martyrdom portion of the *Acts of Peter* that features the final contest between the two wonderworkers (chap. 32). In a final attempt to demonstrate his greater power, Simon climbs up on a high place in the city of Rome and leaps off, appearing to onlookers as if he is flying. Worried that many would turn from God and worship Simon, Peter prays to

55. On which see Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany*, and Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 409–15.
56. Translation by Tony Burke, in Burke and Landau, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 337–61.
57. Translation by Richard I. Pervo in Burke and Landau, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 406–15.

Jesus for assistance, saying, "Make haste, O Lord, show your mercy and let him fall down and become crippled but not die; let him be disabled and break his leg in three places." As expected, Simon does fall and is crippled. To add insult to injury, the crowds stone him and "from that time" they believed in Peter. Simon is carried off by his remaining supporters to Africa where he is operated on and dies shortly thereafter. Simon's end is relatively tame compared to those who oppose Philip in the fourth-century *Acts of Philip*. In one story (chap. 2), Philip is opposed by a Jewish delegation to Athens led by the high priest Ananias, who is possessed by the demon Mansemat. Ananias comes to the apostle with 500 men and accuses him of sorcery. After Philip gives a spirited defense of his mission, Ananias runs at the apostle to whip him, but his hand withers and his eyes are blinded. Then the 500 are blinded also (2.12). The 500 repent and eventually regain their sight, but Ananias remains stubborn and refuses to believe, even after Jesus himself descends from heaven in glory and lightning. The apostle restores the high priest's sight but utters a spell in Hebrew and the earth swallows him up, first to his knees, then his waist, then his neck. Finally, with Ananias still unrepentant, Philip becomes angry and says, "A curse on you! Depart now entirely into the abyss in front of all these people" (2.23). And Ananias descends alive into Hades. Philip's anger eventually becomes his undoing. In the final act of the text, Philip is crucified upside down. He is told by Christ that he must not do anything to prevent his martyrdom, but Philip is incensed by the treatment of his companion John and declares, "I will no longer hold myself back, but I will bring my full indignation upon them and destroy them all" (15.25). Again he cries out to God in Hebrew and the proconsul, the temple and its priests, and 7000 men are swallowed up by the abyss. Fortunately for the townspeople, Jesus appears again and punishes Philip for disobeying his rule to "not return evil for evil" by preventing his entry into paradise for forty days (15.29–31). Philip struggles to understand the reason for this punishment—he asks, "Why are you angry with me, Lord, that I called down curses on my enemies? Indeed, why do you not strike them down since they still live in the abyss?" (15.30)—but relents and accepts his fate. Jesus saves the townspeople from the abyss by transforming his cross into a ladder (15.32). What is most surprising in this final story is that Philip can curse without the consent of God; the power is entirely the apostle's.

The apocryphal acts, as with other noncanonical texts, tend to be disparaged for their abundant use of wonders and prodigies, the principal aim of which is to entertain their readers while at the same time demonstrating that the apostles' miracles are mightier than the magic of their rivals and that their God is the one true god. The apocryphal acts look garish, some scholars say, in comparison to the more sober canonical acts.[58] Yet, when it comes to curse stories (the most

58. Such a distinction is made, e.g., by Achtemeier, "Jesus and the Disciples as Miracle Workers," esp. 164.

offensive element of the apocryphal acts for many readers), the canonical Acts has the apocryphal acts beat: there are far more punitive miracles per page in Acts than in the longer individual acts. And the curses largely function the same way: to demonstrate the might of the apostles over their opponents and thereby elicit belief from onlookers. There is little distinction between Philip's blinding of the high priest Ananias and his men from Paul's blinding of Elymas, nor God's murder of Judas, Agrippa, and Ananias and Sapphira, on the one hand, and the killing and maiming of Fortunatus, the parents of Exoos, and the priest of Artemis, on the other.

Conclusions

According to the canonical gospels, Jesus granted his followers—not only the Twelve, but, according to Luke, 70 additional disciples and, according to Paul, even more—powers to heal and, so it seems, powers to hurt. Signs and wonders and deeds of power are performed in these texts to demonstrate the truth of the gospel and the authority of the apostle as the gospel's spokesperson. The canonical book of Acts indicates these wonders included curses, and Paul's own propensity for cursing further demonstrates that imprecations were part of the apostle's toolkit for asserting his authority when challenged by antagonists inside and outside of his communities. The connection between cursing miracles and authority is further illustrated in second- and third-century gospels and acts, either through stories of the young Jesus cursing his neighbors so that they will marvel and declare him to be "either a god or an angel" (*InThom* 7.4), or through tales of the apostles defeating rival wonderworkers, toppling temples, or maiming those who do not treat him with due respect. The function of the apostolic stories, as with beneficent miracle tales, is to evoke faith and to show that the God that the apostles proclaim is powerful—mightier than other gods and the wonderworkers and priests who claim to worship them. Though Christian readers are more comfortable with Jesus and his apostles performing miracles of blessing, it is clear that the authors of early Christian literature are just as likely to portray them cursing as blessing. What is surprising is not that these early Christian figures curse, but, given the widespread use of cursing in antiquity, that they do not curse more.

Just as many today shy away from the apostolic cursing stories, some late antique and medieval Christian readers also had difficulty with the tales. One of the more interesting avenues of investigation of curse stories is how they are received by writers over the centuries. Eric Zielkowski has done such a study for the story of Elisha and the Bad Boys of Bethel, and Roger Hull has touched on this methodology in his article on the curse of the fig tree. A place to start for looking at how the curse stories in Acts have been received is in Theodoret of Cyrrhus's history of the monks of Syria (*Philotheos historia*). Theodoret was a Syrian writer of the fourth/fifth century who reports the activities of more than

a dozen holy men, such as Simeon Stylites, living in solitude in the hills around Antioch. Included in these reports are several punitive miracles performed by James of Nisibis, Julian, Peter the Galatian, Maësymas, and Acepsimas. Theodoret feels some discomfort with these curse stories, or at least expects his audience would, so much that he justifies their actions by comparing them to similar acts by the apostles, Jesus, and also Elisha. For example, James encounters some girls washing at a spring. They do not "feel awe at his novel appearance," so he dries up the spring and turns their hair gray. The townspeople beg him to reverse the punishment, but the girls do not come to him, so he lets the penalty stand. Theodoret compares the actions of James with Elisha, and praises James for his restraint: "I myself am filled with admiration for his gentleness . . . he did not, like the great Elisha, hand over those girls to carnivorous bears, but applying a harmless correction that involved only a slight disfigurement he gave them a lesson in both piety and good behavior" (1.5, trans. Rice). Similarly, when James makes a stone explode to shock a judge who gave an unjust verdict, Theodoret praises him for not killing the judge and equates his leniency with Jesus' curse on an inanimate fig tree (1.6). And when some men trick James into making supplication to God for a man feigning death, James kills the man and later restores him to life. Again, Theodoret compares James's miracle to scripture, this time to Peter's curse on Ananias and Sapphira: "While the divine Apostle did not release the dead from their misfortune—for terror was needed in the first stage of proclaiming salvation—James, who was full of the grace of an apostle, both applied chastisement as the occasion demanded it and then swiftly revoked it, since he knew this was what would benefit the wrongdoers" (1.9). Theodoret demonstrates that it was still commonplace in late antiquity to ascribe the power of cursing to Christian holy men, and to tell such stories to demonstrate the holy man's power and authority. But he also demonstrates that there is some discomfort about depicting the holy men this way, and that he can justify their actions by showing that they were more lenient and merciful than even Elisha and Peter. Theodoret's discomfort aside, the cursing holy man was still an attractive, awe-inspiring figure in his day, and his ability to punish his enemies was no less effective for proving his might than it was in earlier centuries.

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The Contested Authority of Paul in the Second Century

Jason BeDuhn

At the dawn of the third century, Tertullian of Carthage is prepared to do battle for his community's proprietary rights to Paul against the rival claims to the Apostle put forward by the followers of Marcion. There appears to be no question for Tertullian that Paul is an authority of impeccable orthodoxy and that Paul's letters count as "scripture," even if they are not yet collected into a single volume with a standardized sequence—as they already were for Marcionites three generations earlier.[1] But if the Marcionite valorization of Paul in the second century is a clear landmark, much less clear is how the Apostle fared with other second-century Christians. Indeed, roughly contemporaneous with Tertullian is the "Basic Writing" underlying the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions*, in which Paul is utterly rejected and demonized under the transparent mask of "Simon Magus."[2] Thus Tertullian and "Clement" represent two opposing outcomes of second-century assessments of Paul, and the task before us is to fill in the picture of how Paul's authority fared in that poorly illuminated century.

To be sure, Tertullian does not mark a sudden embrace of Paul among non-Marcionite Christians. Paul is invoked as an authority a generation earlier by Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria; and their contemporary Melito of Sardis, while not mentioning Paul by name, appears to be significantly indebted to Paul's thought and uses a number of what have been considered Pauline catchphrases. More on that characterization below. But in the generations before these figures of the closing decades of the second century, Paul holds a much more ambiguous, or even ambivalent, status. One does not get the impression of an "ancient" and well-established authority stretching back to Paul's own

1. "The first witness to a full-blown edition of Paul's letters is Marcion, about 140 C.E." Gamble, "New Testament Canon," 283.

2. I adopt here the position of Côté, *Le Theme de l'Opposition*, 219–35, that the Ps.-Clementine literature accumulates polemic against multiple targets, and consequently the figure of Simon is a composite arch-heretic covering Paul, Marcion, Gnostics, and a number of other positions. It therefore preserves traces of each of these distinct polemical strands. Opinion varies widely on where certain parts of the anti-Paul polemic fall in the strata of the texts, but certainly it formed a significant part of the "Basic Writing" and the latter's sources. On the second- century date of its core "Basic Writing," see Jones, *Pseudoclementina*; Cirillo, "L'antipaolinismo"; Drijvers, "Adam and the True Prophet."

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time, but rather of a recent introduction that various Christian leaders, many of them anonymous, feel compelled to stage-manage and resolve. A flurry of literary activity dated approximately to mid-century bears witness to a significant adjustment of Christian traditions of authority to make room for Paul.

In the past it has been widely accepted that Paul is everywhere in the second century, as a source and authority, even in authors who never once mention him. Pick up any edition or translation of the Apostolic Fathers or other second-century authors and look in the notes or the scripture index at the back, and you will see scores of supposed allusions to Paul. The problem with these catalogues of supposed allusions to Paul is that they rarely involve any substantive or distinctive ideas of Paul, but rather merely metaphors he employs, or images he draws upon, or rhetorical turns of phrase he uses. In other words, there are little more than standard tropes of second-century religious discourse (in many cases, not even distinctly Christian discourse) that supposedly link these writers to Paul's pervasive authority.

The identification of these shared features of discourse as "Pauline" would seem to depend on an unstated and unexamined premise, namely, that Paul introduced all these metaphors and images and rhetorical tropes, that he shared nothing with contemporaneous Christian discourse around him, and so only by dependence on him alone can later authors employ them.[3] Any similarities between Paul and another early Christian writer are invariably taken to be the result of the influence of the former on the latter, rather than their common participation in a tradition of discourse. This predisposition is compounded by a neglect of the larger discursive practices of the period and a narrow focus on comparison of any early Christian writer back to the NT alone, rather than a larger rhetorical environment. This approach to intertextuality is part of a larger problem in how we have tended to think about early Christianity, due to our sources being texts. Without thinking too much about it, we imagine early Christian discourse being transmitted by texts, so much so that we are constantly excusing the failure of writers to exactly duplicate the words of their supposed textual source; they are "quoting from memory" we say, and that is why they fail to meet our standard of literary dependence. Certainly, there are clear cases of quoting from memory; but a great deal of what we have handled this way cannot be justified. Instead of direct literary dependence mediated by "memory," many of the "echoes" of one author in another should be attributed to their common participation in a tradition of oral discourse and their independent use of a repertoire of catch-phrases and images and concepts that filled

3. See de Boer, "Which Paul?" who notes "Paul's frequent use of already existing liturgical, hymnic, confessional, and parenetic traditions, derived from Jewish Christianity and from a gentile Christianity that had begun and would develop independently of his missionary efforts, and Paul's evident indebtedness to various conceptions and traditions from both the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds" (pp. 53–54).

the oral life of early Christians. In this light, we need to reassess the significance of supposed allusions to Paul and start to be much more skeptical of them. We need to expose the hidden theological assumption in our field that Paul is a special kind of authority with pervasive influence on early Christian authors if we are going to objectively determine whether such authority and influence actually existed in the second century.

The most secure place to look for evidence of Paul's authority in the second century is where that authority is expressly invoked. Marcion, for example, expressly invoked the authority of Paul, and a second-century Valentinian tradition suggests that Valentinus did too.[4] Of other second-century Christian leaders (prior to 180 CE), Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Tatian each refer to Paul, and it is important to look closely at the context and manner in which they do so. Paul appears, too, in a variety of anonymous or pseudonymous writings of the period, and we need to consider what the authors of these texts thought of him. On the other hand, some of the major Christian voices of the second century make no mention of Paul. It could be argued that such silence is not particularly significant in compositions such as the Didache, Barnabas, or Hermas, as well as the Apologists, due to the type of literature they are, or for that matter the epistles of John, 1 Peter, even arguably Hebrews. But it is more difficult to pass over the silence of Justin Martyr and Theophilus of Antioch, which suggests either ignorance, or indifference, or taciturn hostility. With the Pseudo-Clementine hostility to Paul looming in the next century, silence on Paul in the second century should not be assumed to be benign, if we have any reason to think an author should have been aware of him. It is best to start, therefore, with those who do mention Paul explicitly, and see where they lead us.

Paul Cited as an Authority in Non-anonymous Christian Writings Prior to Irenaeus

First Clement

The often repeated dating of this letter to the late first century is no longer tenable, and it should be dated rather to the mid-second century.[5] *Clement*

4. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.17, reports the tradition that Valentinus claimed succession to Paul's teachings via an intermediary named Theudas.

5. The letter is addressed from the Christian community of Rome to that of Corinth. Hegesippus seems to know of it in the 170s (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.16; 4.22); and at approximately the same time Dionysius of Corinth, is the first person to ascribe the letter in question to "Clement," without specifying when he lived or wrote. For a thorough dismissal of the traditional arguments for dating Clement and the letter at the end of the first century, see Welborn, "Date of First Clement." Clement is referred to as a contemporary by Hermas who, according to the Muratorian Canon, was the brother of the Roman leader Pius, and therefore writing around the 150s. At least two generations separate the author of the letter

sees Peter and Paul together as famous martyrs in the background of his own Roman church (5.4–7). But Paul gets singled out (47.1–4) as an authority to the Corinthian Christians to whom Clement is writing, as the founder of their community. Since Clement seeks leverage with the Corinthians, it is in his interest to explicitly cite and endorse statements of Paul that serve his purpose. Robert Grant's characterization of *Clement's* use of Paul is apt: "Clement of Rome . . . had referred to 1 Corinthians and used Romans, but he was using them as authorities for Corinthian Christians who knew and admired Paul."[6] The fact that he has a copy of 1 Corinthians in Rome is often cited as evidence that Paul's letters were in wide circulation or even already in a collection, with corresponding implications for Paul's authority. But, since *Clement's* testimony makes it clear that he has been approached by a group of Corinthian leaders seeking his intervention, it seems quite likely that they put Paul's letter into his hands as a useful reference point for him to use in his correspondence, as a founding charter document of the community. *Clement* alludes to no other letter of Paul's beside Romans and 1 Corinthians, and his presentation of Christian ideas and ideals owes little or nothing to Paul.

Ignatius

Unfortunately, uncertainty over the date of Ignatius and the integrity or even authenticity of his letters makes use of them problematic; yet the evidence they provide is generally in accord with other sources in this category. T. D. Barnes has made compelling arguments for dating Ignatius' letters and death circa 140 CE.[7] The literature on the many problems that beset the textual tradition of his letters is too extensive to cite usefully here. In the nineteenth century, William Cureton discovered a short recension preserved in Syriac manuscripts for the letters to Polycarp, the Ephesians, and the Romans, and demonstrated that no quotation from Ignatius made before the mid-fourth century comes from any passages outside of this short recension.[8] He put forth a scenario by which longer versions of the letters were crafted in the fourth century in response to the issues of that time. Nonetheless, the modern consensus favors the so-called "Middle-length Recension," and that is the one that will be used here as the starting point of analysis.

As with *Clement*, Ignatius acknowledges Paul without making substantial use of him. He refers to Paul explicitly only twice. Like *Clement*, he knows of

from the apostolic foundations of the Roman Christian community (1 Clem. 44.2–3), and the bearers of the letter are "old" men who grew up as Christians (63.3). The letter's stress (1 Clement 33) on God as "creator" (*demiourgos*) and "ruler of the universe" (*despotēs tōn hapantōn*) may place it in an anti-Marcionite context.

6. Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 59.

7. Barnes, "Date of Ignatius."

8. Cureton, *Antient* [sic] *Syriac Version*.

Paul in tandem with Peter as a pair of martyrs associated with the Christian community at Rome (*Rom*. 4.3). He refers to Paul alone when writing to the Ephesian Christian community, which he knows was founded by Paul. He calls them "fellow initiates of Paul, (a man) sanctified, approved, worthy of blessing, in whose steps may it be mine to be found when I reach God, who in every letter remembers you in Christ Jesus" (*Eph*. 12.2). For Ignatius, therefore, Paul appears to be primarily a famous name to drop of a community founder of the revered past.

Further influence of Paul on Ignatius' thought and rhetoric is debatable, but certainly not pervasive.[9] Much of what has passed for dependence on Paul appears more likely to be drawn from a common stock of images and rhetorical tropes, either specific to early Christianity (for example, "inherit the kingdom of God,"[10] "not to please men, but to please God,"[11] "not through human beings, but through God"[12]) or more widely used by writers of the era (e.g. "fighting wild beasts,"[13] "one x, one y, one z,"[14] "things visible and invisible,"[15] "every tongue testify"[16]). Ignatius may well provide evidence that other phrasing, previously known mostly from Paul, had wider use and was not original with Paul (e.g. the cross as a "scandal,"[17] "the last of them, a miscarriage,"[18] becoming a "new human being"[19] or "newness of life,"[20] even "Jews and Gentiles in one body"[21]). William Schoedel, responding to the past tendency to attribute any common phrasing to a literary dependence of Ignatius on Paul, remarks that, "we are more inclined today to reckon with the possibility of the use of traditional materials."[22]

Confidence that Ignatius knew Paul as a letter writer, and even of multiple letters, rests on a single passage in his letter to the Ephesians ("who in every letter remembers you in Christ Jesus," *Eph*. 12.2). This passage is missing, however, from the short Syriac recension discovered by Cureton, defended by him as the original text of Ignatius' letters. It may therefore be significant that,

9. See Lindemann, "Paul's Influence."
10. 1 Cor 6:9; cf. Ignatius, *Eph*. 16.1; *Phld*. 3.3.
11. Gal 1:10; cf. Ignatius, *Rom*. 2.1.
12. Gal 1:1; cf. Ignatius, *Phld*. 1.1.
13. 1 Cor 15:32; cf. Ignatius, *Rom*. 5.1. Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 178 identifies this as a common heroic trope.
14. Eph 4:5–6; cf. Ignatius, *Magn*. 7.1-2. Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 116–17 demonstrates that this was a rhetorical commonplace of the era.
15. Col 1:16; cf. Ignatius, *Trall*. 5.2; *Rom*. 5.3; *Smyrn*. 6.1.
16. Phil 2:11; cf. Ignatius, *Magn*. 10.3.
17. 1 Cor 1:19–23; cf. Ignatius, *Eph*. 18.1.
18. 1 Cor 15:8–9; cf. Ignatius, *Rom*. 9.2.
19. Eph 2:15 and 4:24; cf. Ignatius, *Eph*. 21.
20. Rom 6:4; cf. Ignatius, *Eph*. 19.3.
21. Eph 2:16; cf. Ignatius, *Smyrn*. 1.2.
22. Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 9–10.

where the "Middle-length recension" can be checked against this short Syriac recension (i.e. for Ignatius' letters to Polycarp, the Ephesians, and the Romans), the examples of language "echoing" Paul discussed in the previous paragraph are nearly always missing.[23] It is hard to imagine a scenario in which such Pauline phrases would be carefully expurgated from Ignatius' letters by a later hand; more likely they are interpolations from a later time when Paul's rhetoric pervaded Christian discourse. But even if one defends the originality of these passages in the letters of Ignatius, they scarcely amount to more than a common tradition of early Christian expression. Paul does not represent for Ignatius a special authority. He brings him up when writing to the one community, of the six he addresses, that Paul himself founded.

Polycarp

Polycarp's letter includes references to Ignatius as a contemporary that have caused many issues with dating the two men and their writings; but this can now be resolved by placing them both near mid-century. Writing to the Christians of Philippi, Polycarp, like Ignatius and Clement, has good reason to cite the authority of Paul to a community that the latter founded.[24] Boudewijn Dehandschutter sees it this way:

> Paul is an authority explicitly mentioned. Yet is it right to conclude that he is the *only authority and the other apostles are of lesser importance*? It seems to us that Paul is rather an authority with the *Philippians*: Polycarp, knowing that Paul is "their" apostle (see ch. 3), refers continually, be it implicitly, to the Pauline letter to the Philippians. It may be noticed that the name of Paul figures explicitly in the context of his relations to the Philippians. His role as explicitated [sic] authority seems well nigh limited to this.[25]

A clear pattern emerges among the three principal identifiable authors who cite Paul's authority prior to 180 CE. These authors cite Paul when writing to communities he founded. This would seem a properly political deference to the founding figure of the local association. But how do we know that Paul was an authority for Ignatius or Clement or Polycarp in other circumstances? The

23. For example, *Eph*. 16.1 (// 1 Cor 6:9 "inherit the kingdom of God"); *Rom*. 9.2 (// 1 Cor 15:8–9 "last of them, a miscarriage"); *Eph*. 18.2, 20.2, *Rom*. 7.3 (// Rom 1:3 "from the seed of David"); *Eph*. 19.3 (// Rom 6:4 "newness of life"); *Eph*. 20.1 (// Eph 2:15, 4:24 "new human being"); *Rom*. 2.1 (// Gal 1:10 "not to please people but to please God").

24. He appears to know multiple letters by Paul (*Phil*. 3.1–2), and at least alludes to specific content from some of these letters. At 11.2–3, 1 Cor 6:2 is explicitly cited as words of Paul; but the explicit citation may have been introduced by the Latin translator, since this part of the letter does not survive in Greek, and there are no other examples where Pauline language or imagery is treated as an explicit quotation (Lindemann, "Paul in the Apostolic Fathers," 42).

25. Dehandschutter, "Polycarp's Epistle," 281. Accordingly, although Polycarp shows knowledge of 1 Peter, "Polycarp does not mention Peter explicitly, because the apostle has no particular authority with the Philippians" (p. 283).

assumption that he was has gone unexamined, abetted by the lack of further evidence. But that lack of further evidence might not be accidental.

Since Irenaeus refers to a number of epistles of Polycarp,[26] the preservation of only this one letter draws to our attention the retrospective selection for preservation of early Christian literature, and its consequent shaping of our perception of the course of early Christianity. This becomes quite clear with the work of Eusebius in the early fourth century, self-consciously constructing a pedigree for his form of Christianity by selecting an approved canon of ante-Nicene "fathers," while rejecting other early Christian authors as not belonging to the "orthodox" trajectory he is manufacturing. This one letter of Polycarp, by almost universal opinion an undistinguished piece of writing, may have been preserved and valued precisely because of its apparent affirmation (and domestication) of Paul. Polycarp's other letters possibly contained no further reference to Paul, or even contained elements out of alignment with later "orthodoxy," and could serve no useful purpose for those in later eras who were choosing what to copy and what to neglect from earlier Christian literature. By looking only where later orthodox collectors allow light to shine on early Christian literature, we are misled in our reconstructions of the period, over-generalizing from a few isolated scraps that were found to be useful by later church leaders. When we consider how much of early Christian literature is lost, we must recognize how skewed our picture is by a preservation process that might have been inclined to save anything with positive reference to or use of Paul.

But even where later orthodox collectors allow light to shine by what they chose to copy and preserve, there is clear evidence of Paul's quite limited authority: in the lackluster use these authors make of him. Andreas Lindemann, for example, finds *Clement's* and Polycarp's use of Paul superficial and rarely engages with any of Paul's deep thoughts.

> [I]t is clear that they show no signs of interest in extended use of Paul—his letters or his theology—"in his own right"; nor do they have any interest in what we would call "critical discussion" of Pauline theology . . . Pauline texts and Pauline ideas were simply employed as needed (so to speak) or where the writer thought it important to call on an apostolic authority in support of his own argumentation.[27]

Lindemann's observation is representative of widespread disappointment among modern researchers in the use of Paul in early Christianity. Starting with the Reformation, but carrying on into the very latest "New Paul" of modern interpretation, we fail to see what we consider most significant in Paul's thought being understood and highlighted in those early Christian authors who cite

26. In his letter to Florinus, quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.4–8.

27. Lindemann, "Paul in the Apostolic Fathers," 44–45. Cf. Lindemann, "Paul's Influence," 24 on *Clement* and Ignatius.

him. Certainly, each of these second-century writers discussed so far knows Paul and is willing to cite him as an authority. But they are far from "Paulinists" in their thinking, and treat him primarily as a founding figure, not a theologian of any weight. They handle his letters as charter documents for specific communities, mined at most for practical and paraenetic material, not for core doctrines of the church, and certainly not as "scripture." Tatian's use of Paul can be characterized in similar terms. He attempts to claim Paul's endorsement of celibacy in *On Perfection according to the Savior*.[28] Apparently, he was hard-pressed to find an early Christian authority who took this position. Otherwise, he has no use for the Apostle.

Paul Ignored as an Authority in Non-anonymous Christian Writings Prior to Irenaeus

Tatian's awareness of Paul only serves to highlight the silence of his teacher, Justin Martyr. Since Justin explicitly mentions Marcion multiple times, and Marcion's reliance on Paul would be unavoidable, Justin's silence on Paul is telling. C. H. Cosgrove argues that the absence of Paul from Justin's writings is a consciously anti-Marcionite attitude on his part.[29] But this can scarcely be a benign silence as regards Paul. If Paul was any sort of authority for Justin, he surely would have drawn upon him in his lengthy *Dialogue with Trypho*, particularly since Paul makes messianic interpretations of the Jewish scriptures that would serve nicely Justin's line of argument in the dialogue. Of course, what we are missing from Justin's oeuvre is precisely his anti-Marcion *Syntagma*, referred to by Irenaeus. This is the one work where Justin could not have remained silent on Marcion's use of Paul and would have attempted to reclaim him as Tertullian later would, if he was so inclined. So once again we face the implications of the selective preservation of early Christian writings and must wonder why the *Syntagma* was allowed to die a quiet death.

The case of Justin's lost work is scarcely unique; we are missing the bulk of second- and early-third century anti-Marcionite compositions. Theophilus of Antioch also composed such a work, we are told, and so did Rhodon, Dionysius of Corinth, Philip of Gortyna, and Modestus. It is remarkable that so many of these anti-Marcionite tracts are no longer extant, and one must wonder at the reason for that. Did they perhaps go too far in some of their remarks and attack not only Marcion but his chief authority figure, Paul? If that was the case, then the early Christian tracts against Marcion may have been considered largely worthless to later generations, because they reflected views at odds with later orthodoxy, including perhaps overt criticism of Paul.[30]

28. Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 127–28.
29. Cosgrove, "Justin Martyr."
30. Grant, *Jesus after the Gospels*, 51.

Theophilus, like Justin, is silent on Paul in his lengthy extant writing and shows no significant engagement with Paul's thought. Some very close parallels to Paul's language in Romans 13 and 1 Timothy 2 appear in Book 3 of Theophilus' surviving treatise. However, not only do these passages represent fairly generic paraenesis that Paul and Theodosius could have drawn independently from their culture, but also they both appear in Book 3, which was unknown to Irenaeus and Eusebius, written in a different style than the other two books, and make reference to historical events after the time of Theophilus, if Eusebius' dates for him are accurate.[31] Even if these hurdles can be overcome, and the passages accepted as quotes of Paul made by Theophilus, it is astonishing what minor, and one might even say trivial, elements of Paul are made use of by this author.

One author who perhaps slipped through later censorship of overtly anti-Pauline texts was Hegesippus. While not mentioning Paul by name, he appears to directly reject one of Paul's statements. He objects to a statement matching 1 Cor 2:9 as "twisted" and contrary to a logion of Jesus.[32] His case provides an open window into an otherwise shuttered second-century environment, in which Paul is ignored out of ignorance or rejection, that forms the background to other kinds of coded anti-Paulinism in the third century.

Paul as an Authority and a Problem in Pseudonymous and Anonymous Christian Writings Prior to Irenaeus

Turning to other second-century literature that both survives and in some way refers to Paul, we can divide this material preliminarily into texts that view Paul as a problem and those that seem to champion him. Upon closer inspection, this distinction is purely one of rhetorical strategy, and in fact all of these writings confront a Paul that is a problem either for them or for those to whom they are writing.

The author of 2 Peter famously grabs the bull by the horns and refers to the great difficulty of understanding Paul, a polite way of saying that one should not try too hard to do so, and focuses instead on his more banal, edifying remarks. In this stance, the author stands quite closely to Ignatius, Clement, and Polycarp. Although the author of James does not mention Paul by name, a convincing case can be made that he takes direct aim at Paul by alluding to and refuting specific passages in Paul's letters: Jas 2:24 responds to and reverses Rom 3:28 and Gal 2:15–16; Jas 2:18–19 takes a broader swipe at "faith"/"belief" as a sufficient basis for righteousness; and Jas 2:20–23 can be construed as playing a different Abraham story off against the one Paul employs in Gal 3:6–8, Rom

31. See Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 143–44, 163–64.
32. See Luedemann, *Opposition to Paul*, 155–68.

4:3. It must be noted that neither 2 Peter nor James can be definitively dated to the time before Marcion, and a number of modern researchers have argued that they at least belong to the second century, perhaps even to the time when Marcion was forcing a response to the authority of Paul.

Texts that seem to champion Paul include the Pastoral Epistles[33] and the Acts of the Apostles within the NT, and 3 Corinthians and the Epistle of the Apostles outside of it. All of these works make Paul stand out from the disciples of Jesus as a special case and, it would seem, the ultimate hero towards which the trajectory of the early church heads. Yet all, at the same time, strip Paul of his major distinctive ideas and conform him to a generic moralizing second-century kerygma. In fact, they go out of their way to emphasize that Paul is neither original nor independent from the twelve disciples (his dependence on them is particularly stressed in 3 Corinthians, Acts, and the Epistle of the Apostles). These works, like *1 Clement* and Polycarp, celebrate Paul primarily as the founder of Christian communities and a martyr.

The canonical Acts of the Apostles and the non-canonical Epistle of the Apostles appear to have quite similar agendas, both engaged in domesticating Paul and subordinating him to the twelve disciples of Jesus. The Epistle does this with a heavier hand than Acts. Paul's origins as an enemy of the Christians is discussed at much greater length, and his dependence on the instruction of the disciples emphasized much more (31–33). In fact, his independent inspiration by Jesus is all but erased. The Acts of the Apostles is a more subtle work, but yields the same Paul, with his visionary relationship with Jesus effectively reduced to a single call and, in direct contradiction to Paul's own testimony in Galatians, this is followed by instruction at the feet of the Jerusalem disciples. The long-lived debate over whether the author of Acts knew the letters of Paul comes down to just two possible outcomes: either the author worked in an environment in which Paul's ideological conflicts and distinctive ideas had been totally suppressed, or the author himself was engaged in suppressing them. A growing number of scholars would now date Acts in the second century, bringing it closer to the likely time of the composition of the Epistle of the Apostles.[34]

Re-dating Acts into the period when Marcion was active has suggested to several researchers that it has an anti-Marcionite agenda behind it. By subordinating Paul to the Twelve, Acts separates Paul from his Marcionite interpreters and deprives the latter of the unique authority they ascribed to him. This would be simply an alternative tactic to that of the Ps.-Clementine "Basic Writing," which deals with Marcion by disposing of Paul altogether. The difference between these two strategies, however, is crucial and suggests that Acts

33. On the Pastorals as anti-Marcionite in inspiration, see Rist, "Pseudepigraphic Refutations."

34. E.g., Pervo, *Dating Acts*; Townsend, "Date of Luke-Acts"; Mount, *Pauline Christianity*; Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*; Matthews, *Acts of the Apostles*.

is not aimed primarily at depriving the Marcionites of their Apostle. Notice that Paul is not simply subordinated to Peter in Acts, which would sufficiently reclaim him from the Marcionites. More than that, Paul takes over the book and becomes its hero, displacing Peter in the narrative. The author appears to be a true champion of Paul, after all, and thinking primarily of redeeming him for fellow Christians who have rejected him, in other words, those who would be sympathetic to the negative portrait painted of him in the Ps.-Clementine "Basic Writing." The Epistle of the Apostles can be read in the same way: the subordination to the Twelve brings Paul into the fold, and yet he is dwelt on at length as a prophesied super-apostle, the culmination of apostleship. In both these works, then, Paul, is being championed to readers not just as one apostle among many, but a legitimate apostle who emerges from the many to be the most important. Yet what is the point of winning people over to the importance of Paul if to do so one strips Paul of those ideas that at least modern commentators consider to be most significant? Answering this question requires us to shift our thinking from what we take to be most important about Paul to what made him important in the second century, and perhaps even reclaimed him from obscurity.

The Rediscovery and Reclamation of Paul in the Second Century

Those who champion Paul in the second century (with the exception of Marcion) reduce him to a legendary founder of gentile Christian communities a century earlier. That is what is most important about him. His epistles merely chronicle his foundational work for most of these second-century fans of Paul; only Marcion shows much interest in them beyond that. This legendary Paul is the subject of the Acts of Paul, and features in a few other places in the apocryphal acts literature. While this tradition built up over time, including later engagement with canonical literature, Dennis MacDonald has effectively argued for the vitality of the oral traditions behind the Acts of Paul in the first half of the second century. MacDonald contends that the Pastoral Epistles respond to, and seek to reclaim Paul from, these oral traditions, seeking to "bend Pauline tradition toward social conservatism."[35] The character of the legends is more socially radical, but not particularly more Pauline, as MacDonald concludes elsewhere: "One of the striking features of this library of Pauline fabulosity is . . . that Paul's own epistles and perspectives are virtually absent. The issue is not merely a disregard of the epistles; the Pauline *praxeis* communicate a theology largely alien to Paul."[36] So even though the Pastorals and the Acts of Paul oppose one another on key issues of practice, they equally depart from the Paul found in

35. MacDonald, *Legend and the Apostle*, 66.
36. MacDonald, "Apocryphal and Canonical Narratives," 57.

the epistles, deploying in its place an abstracted figure of a legendary founder who apparently could be all things to all men.

While this abstracted memory of Paul had earlier development, the key to its simultaneous deployment in a dozen writers in the mid-second century may be the circumstances of the Bar Kokhba war and its aftermath. This war marked a devastating setback for Jewish-Christianity, the Christianity represented by the Twelve. Not only was the Jewish-Christian homeland devastated by the war, but the very Jewishness of these Christians subjected them to heightened prejudice and persecution outside of that homeland. Gentile Christianity in these circumstances was forced to distance itself from the Jewish people, and did so in two alternative ways. Marcion took up the cause of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and cut all ties to antecedent Jewish religious traditions. Many other Christians, however, including the dominant group in Rome, chose a different path. They appropriated Jewish tradition and arrogated it to themselves as *Verus Israel*, spiritual Israelites replacing ethnic Israelites (whether this was abetted by a sizable Jewish constituency that successfully made the shift to a "gentile Christian" identity remains an open question).[37] The Justin Martyrs and Melitos of the period developed the argument that the Jews were not entitled to their tradition, and it was predestined for the gentiles. This theme of God's rejection of the Jews (Acts 13:46–47), of course, would be utterly abhorrent to the author of Romans, but becomes the master plot of Acts, as it recounts—in the person of Paul no less—the transfer of the Christian mission from Jews who reject it to gentiles who accept it.

This new synthetic Paul retains his status as the founding "Apostle to the Gentiles," a status impossible to gainsay with his gentile communities in the eastern Mediterranean forming a substantial base of the Christian movement, and looking more and more to be its future. Paul took on an essential role in the new supersessionist narrative of Christianity, by which it was foreordained to become a gentile community, for example in the Epistle of the Apostles. The Jewish-Christian Twelve are relegated to the role of a revered set of spiritual ancestors from the exotic source culture, who proleptically sanction its appropriation by gentile believers. At the same time, Paul is made palatable to those deeply rooted in the former Jewish-Christian camp by subordinating him, even in the initiative of a gentile Christianity, to Peter. This new synthesis of traditions became represented in the dual martyrology of Peter and Paul, which had a prominence in circulating imagery of the pair well beyond anything that the Acts narrative created. Their joint portrait was copied almost as an emblem

37. "The existence of Gentile Christian anti-Pauline communities . . . can be explained only in terms of their internal development. They probably gave up their Jewish manner of life as the result of theological and political influences and as a result became Gentile Christian churches. Thus their anti-Paulinism derives from their Jewish-Christian past" (Luedemann, *Opposition to Paul*, 197–98).

of the new Roman orthodoxy, and their connected mention in the works cited above belongs to this same promotional enterprise.

But then why did proto-orthodoxy retain his epistles at all, full as they are with content that was at best beside the point, and at worst quite disturbing to the image of Paul being carefully crafted by second-century non-Marcionite Christians? The lens of motivated interpretation is a strong one, and second-century non-Marcionite Christians read with selective attention to Paul's content, just as assuredly as Marcionite Christians did. Tertullian gives us a rich set of examples of this phenomenon. He and his associates simply read Paul for certain things in which they were interested and glossed over the rest, just as modern biblical scholars yawn past large portions of the epistles and focus on what they regard as theologically significant content. The strength of this ability to read what one wants or expects to read can be illustrated by the phenomenon of the Marcionite Prologues to the epistles, which orthodox medieval scribes blithely copied into biblical manuscripts, completely oblivious to their "heretical" content.[38] The fact is that Tertullian's Christianity can be refuted from his own Pauline scriptures just as easily as he was able to refute Marcion's Christianity from their Pauline scriptures. What the two sides had in common was the status of the epistles as foundational charter documents of gentile Christianity, which in the absence of any other comparable texts from the first Christian generation were forced to suffice for non-Marcionite Christians not particularly interested in much of their content. Other early Christian texts could be touched up with references to a gentile mission or read in that light even if they did not envision it. But only Paul's letters made reference to specific gentile communities that, even if marginal in their own time, were now embraced as the antecedents of the emerging dominance of that form of Christianity.

These conditions likewise would have forestalled more direct and explicit anti-Paulinism in our surviving second-century authors, for whom the role he had played as the founding figure of key communities would be undeniable. As we have seen, these authors—such as Ignatius, Clement, and Polycarp—seek correspondence and affiliation with these Pauline communities as part of the formation of a more interconnected church, and perhaps in an effort to keep them from falling under the influence of Marcion (or some other faction). They could not possibly succeed in that endeavor by disparaging their founder, especially since Marcion spoke so highly of him. They had to invoke Paul, but a different Paul, one aligned with their form of Christianity. If more overt, explicit anti-Paulinism existed at the time, for example among those who would later express their views in the Ps.-Clementine "Basic Writing," it has been largely erased from history from a combination of the devastation of three successive

38. Already Marius Victorinus in the fourth century made use of them without detecting a "heretical" provenance for them.

anti-Jewish wars (including the destruction of many Jewish Diaspora communities in the violent outbreak under Trajan), along with the subsequent selection and deselection of texts to preserve by the surviving and triumphant factions of the Christian movement. We should see the flurry of activity around Ignatius, Polycarp, Clement, Hegesippus, Justin, Theophilus, Melito, and Irenaeus (as well as the organizational work done by others mentioned by these authors, but who themselves did not produce texts) as a process of regrouping the movement as an independent gentile Christianity in the aftermath of the break with Judaism. They constructed the fiction of apostolic succession to cover their free hand in reimagining and redefining Christianity in much the same way and at the same time that non-Christian Judaism was similarly regrouping in the aftermath of the preceding century of trauma. They were free to reclaim Paul in the absence of stronger voices of opposition to him stemming from Jewish-Christian circles and were able to remake him in the image of their brand of Christianity in defiance of the Marcionite claim upon him.

These second-century Christian writings show great variety among themselves in their theology and principal concerns; even those that stand apart from Marcion do not represent anything like a united common front or faction. The simultaneous concern with Paul among many of them, therefore, may suggest that Paul was relatively unknown beforehand, and suddenly demanded attention. The illusion of a continual engagement with Paul has been created by artificially distributing these texts over a hundred-year spread of time. But not a single one of these texts can be dated with any certainty prior to Marcion. Whether it was specifically the phenomenon of Marcion that demanded a response, or the historical circumstances that these writers shared with Marcion, the result was a flurry of activity at mid-century to address, champion, domesticate, or reject Paul.

We should not necessarily assume, therefore, that the lukewarm reactions to Paul we see in second-century texts are variously diluted forms of an earlier hostility to him, as formerly anti-Pauline communities were forced to embrace him for his role in anticipating the shift to a primarily gentile Christianity; in many cases they may reflect responses to becoming aware of Paul for the first time, being already well-ensconced in a non-Pauline (rather than anti-Pauline) heritage. Other Jewish-Christians had brought gentiles into the movement, but in a manner that did not entail Paul's approach of creating purely gentile Christian communities from scratch. The community Paul addresses in Romans is clearly of this type. The degrees of ignorance or indifference or hostility we see in the second-century material could be explained against the background of a prior insignificance of Paul for many Christian communities not founded by him. Hence, figures like Justin or Theophilus could genuinely have never heard of the man, while individuals like Clement or Polycarp were canny enough to scope out the sources of authority recognized by those whom they wished to address in those specific communities that Paul had founded. Even

the authors of Acts and the Epistle of the Apostles may have been unearthing an obscure figure to most Christians, as a timely symbol for a demographic shift in the community that they considered inevitable. It is even possible to imagine these authors and Marcion emerging from the same laboratory of historical crisis, each latching onto the figure of Paul to fill a crucial role in getting the Christian movement through it, but finding different things in the figure that they respectively considered the solution. It is not improbable that Paul would have anathematized both sides.

Paul's Epistles as Authoritative Texts prior to Irenaeus

Marcion is the earliest dateable Christian known to have treated Paul's epistles as an authority, to have them in a definitive collection, with a specific order, and indeed to use them as "scripture": his *Apostolikon*. Even considering the traditionally accepted dates of the Apostolic Fathers (rather than the later dating suggested above), Marcion is the earliest witness to the very existence of 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon, as well as to their Pauline authorship.[39] Many modern scholars would contend that Marcion made some mistakes of attribution in this set, and that Paul is not actually the author of all of them. Moreover, Marcion is the only Christian writer prior to Irenaeus to make extensive, rather than superficial, use of Paul. The question naturally follows whether Marcion alone was the primary rediscoverer of Paul's epistles, or whether he depended in turn on a prior tradition of treating the epistles as authoritative.

The discovery of non-Marcionite collections of the epistles with the "Marcionite" order of the letters can be interpreted in two ways: either (1) it demonstrates that Marcion did not originate this order, but accepted an existing Pauline collection carrying authority, or (2) non-Marcionite Christians inherited the Pauline collection of epistles from Marcion, rearranging, redacting, and supplementing them. With regard at least to the first several letters, we find the same order in a list of NT books preserved in a ninth-century manuscript from the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, the so-called *Catalogus Sinaiticus* (also referred to as the *Kanon Sinaiticus*),[40] as well as in the original sequence

39. The traditional date for Ignatius would give him priority for attesting, at least implicitly, the existence of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which Marcion knew as the letter to the Laodiceans.

40. Lewis, *Studia Sinaitica*, 13–14. This ninth-century manuscript contains a stichometry of the Bible and lists Paul's letters in the following order: Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, Hebrews, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, [1 Timothy], 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon. The order through Romans matches that of the *Apostolikon*.

of a commentary on Paul's letters written in the fourth century by Ephrem Syrus.[41] A third example comes from a set of prologues to Paul's letters found in catholic Latin manuscripts, whose wording reveals an original order identical to Marcion's *Apostolikon*; for that reason, some researchers have proposed that they actually derive from the *Apostolikon* itself, and are referred to as the "Marcionite Prologues."[42]

Prompted by this evidence of a wider circulation of a Galatians-first Pauline corpus, researchers have called into question the idea that Marcion had ideological motives for the sequence of the *Apostolikon* and considered it to be possibly an attempt to put the letters in a chronological sequence,[43] which Marcion adopted from this earlier Pauline collection. Yet, since these non-Marcionite sources are later than Marcion by between two hundred and a thousand years, we need to reassess our assumptions. The readiness of scholars to propose that these (later) sources represent a (lost) tradition that predates Marcion suggests an unspoken and perhaps unconscious assumption that "orthodoxy" must be prior to "heresy" and cannot depend on the latter. This assumption should have been thrown out long ago. Why could not these "orthodox" Pauline collections depend on Marcion for their order? Indeed, the strong probability that the "Marcionite Prologues" are Marcionite, and yet were carried over with Paul's letters into "orthodox" circles, lends credence to an original dependence on the Marcionite movement for the ten-letter set of epistles—while a smaller set may have already been in wider circulation, and a larger set was a product of "orthodoxing" adaptation of the Marcionite set.

It is much the same for the presence of "Marcionite" readings in manuscripts of Paul's epistles. While some, including Harnack and Blackman, argued for the influence of Marcion's text on the "orthodox" manuscript tradition, today this

41. Ephrem Syrus, *Commentarii in Epistolas d. Pauli* (Venice: Sanctus Lazarus, 1893). The original order was detected by Harris, *Four Lectures*, 21–22, and accepted by Zahn, "Das Neue Testament Theodors," 798–99. Harris noted a reference at the beginning of the commentary on Romans to previous discussions of Galatians and Corinthians (in that order), and at the beginning of that on Hebrews (since Ephrem's commentary includes Hebrews and the Pastorals, as well as 3 Corinthians, but not Philemon) to prior discussion of Galatians, Corinthians, Romans, et cetera (*quum nec in epistolis scriptis ad Galatos, ad Corinthios, et ad proximos quos viderat, id fecerit, neque in epistolis ad Romanos datis, et ad caeteros quos non viderat, tale quoddam egerit*). The possibility that Ephrem's commentary was actually written on the *Apostolikon* was disproven by Frede, *Altlateinische Paulus-Handschriften*, 167–68, who found none of the identifying omissions of the *Apostolikon* in Ephrem's commentary, even though the latter does contain several unique readings in common with the text of the *Apostolikon*.

42. The Marcionite provenance of the prologues was arrived at independently by De Bruyne, "Prologues," and Peter Corssen, "Überlieferungsgeschichte." Harnack defended their Marcionite origin in "Der marcionitische Ursprung." For the best survey of the textual basis for these prologues, see Dahl, "Origin," and the discussion in Frede, *Altlateinische Paulus-Handschriften*, 165–78. Those arguing that the prologues are not Marcionite include Dahl; Frede; Mindle, "Herkunft"; Lagrange, "Les Prologues."

43. See Frede *Altlateinische Paulus-Handschriften*, 165–66, 295–97; Frede, "Ordnung der Paulusbriefe."

is generally considered far-fetched. Instead, this evidence is taken to prove that Marcion's text preserved various alternative readings from the prior "orthodox" text. Once again, the unstated assumption is the old Tertullian paradigm by which "heresy" always depends on and diverges from a prior "orthodoxy" and that "orthodoxy" can never derive and diverge from a prior "heresy." But now that we know better than to use these categories, why are we still reading evidence according to them?

Take, for example, the landmark study of Harry Gamble. "The early history of the Pauline letters is a continuing enigma in New Testament scholarship," he acknowledges. "Despite a great expenditure of effort over the past century, we are able today to claim very few assured conclusions and cannot describe with any confidence the process by which the individual letters of the Apostle were gathered into a collection and came to form a substantial part of the New Testament canon."[44] Nevertheless, he asserts, a few key pieces of evidence appear to support the conclusion that "Marcion's Pauline corpus is derivative in both content and structure from another early edition of the letters,"[45] because "the large majority of peculiar readings attested for Marcion can otherwise be closely paralleled in the larger textual tradition of Paul's letters, especially the so-called Western text and some parts of the Syrian tradition. This means that Marcion is not to be credited with extensive tendentious emendations and that his text of the epistles belonged to a common pre-Marcionite form of the Pauline text that was already current around the beginning of the second century."[46] This whole line of argument depends for its cogency on the assumption that "orthodox" texts can never derive their readings from a "Marcionite" source, but always the reverse. Yet Gamble himself acknowledges that non-Marcionite Christians were simply not treating texts with the kind of authority Marcion ascribed to them at the time;[47] so the ideological context did not exist for an authoritative set of epistles prior to Marcion—at least not authoritative in the way we have been conditioned to think of "canon" or "scripture."

The other way to read the evidence, then, is that Marcion collected Paul's epistles into a set and particular order and that order was retained in some non-Marcionite Christian circles when they adopted the collection for their own use,

44. Gamble, *Textual History*, 11.

45. Gamble "New Testament Canon," 283.

46. Gamble "New Testament Canon," 284. John Clabeaux, *Lost Edition*, 147, notes a correspondence between the textual traditions that show the closest connection to the variant readings in Marcion's text (the "I-type" Old Latin witnesses, and the witnesses to the older Syriac versions) and the places where the "Marcionite" order of the letters is attested (in the Latin Prologues and in the commentary of Ephrem Syrus). He follows Frede, *Altlateinische Paulus-Handschriften*, 167 and 178, in suggesting that the Old Latin version was based on a Greek text from Antioch in Syria, thus drawing together the two regions where we find the closest connection to Marcion's text (at least in the minor textual variants) (pp. 147–48).

47. Gamble, *New Testament Canon*, 60.

in the process of reclaiming Paul as their own authority for the "gentile turn" in the wider Christian movement in the second century.[48] Irenaeus and Tertullian, two and three generations later than Marcion respectively, have no particular order for the epistles. They do not attest the existence of a definitive set and sequence of the epistles among non-Marcionite Christians. We begin to have manuscript evidence of such single volume editions of the epistles in the period roughly contemporaneous to Tertullian, but the sequence varies throughout the third century. So there is nothing in this material to connect later sources that use the "Marcionite" order with some supposed earlier standard collection independent of Marcion. Rather they would appear to relic traces of the order when the set was first adopted from the Marcionites, replaced in other settings over time with a new "catholic" order.

As we have seen, when second-century Christians other than Marcion cite Paul as an authority, and quote from his epistles, they are neither very interested in, nor strongly influenced by, specific things Paul has to say outside of very generic material. They use the epistles when relevant for the particular community they are addressing, or occasionally on other minor matters, but never as the foundation of their own theology. For other writers of the time, Paul represented a problem, a figure of the past to be safeguarded through domestication, and only championed in this safe, altered form. We may owe to Marcion, therefore, the prominence of Paul in the Christian tradition—responded to, dealt with, but accompanied by the epistles that the Marcionites had brought to unprecedented prominence—and in the latter form only later coming to the foreground of Christian thought in the time of Augustine.[49] Marcion's contemporaries had at best subsumed him within the broader apostolic mass, remembering him as an early community founder and martyr. His epistles were treated as . . . epistles—edifying correspondence documenting his organizational work and relations with his communities. For those communities, no doubt the epistles were treasured as charter documents, kept in the community *capsa*, and taken out for consultation to settle issues of community governance and practice. That is where "letters of a just man named Paul" were kept by the Christian community at Scillium in North Africa in 180 CE—not a community founded by Paul, but now in the Pauline orbit as part of the ecumenical dissemination of Paul or, for all we know, as a community of Marcionite Christians.

48. Couchoud, "La Première Édition," went so far as to argue that Marcion himself had put together the first collection of Paul's letters.

49. In the opinion of Knox, *Marcion*, 159, "One of the most convincing reasons for finding in Marcion the original occasion of the New Testament lies in the predominating position of Paul in the New Testament canon, a position apparently out of proportion to his influence on the church of the early second century." Gamble, *New Testament Canon*, 43–44, likewise considers the status of Paul in the canon surprising against an early Christian background where Paul is almost entirely absent.

To make use of Paul and reclaim him from the Marcionites, non-Marcionite Christians scarcely could dismiss his epistles once they became aware of them and confirmed that certain communities revered them as their charters. But they could make this epistolary Paul more palatable and usable by adding previously "private" letters not known to Paul's churches—the Pastoral Epistles, which conveniently aligned Paul more closely with their own brand of Christianity, and even took swipes at various deviants who coincidentally taught things akin to Marcionites and Gnostics. The Pastorals, unknown to Marcion, are first clearly referenced by Irenaeus. Several researchers have suggested that they were either composed or at least added to the smaller corpus of Paul for the express purpose of countering Marcion and "domesticating" Paul from radical interpretation.[50]

The emerging authority of Paul led, therefore, to the creation of different sets of his epistles, with varying content in individual epistles as well. The absence of chapters 15 and 16 from Romans and the designation "Laodiceans" used instead of "Ephesians," found in Marcion's *Apostolikon*, are features also to be seen in some witnesses to non-Marcionite collections.[51] In some early manuscripts the specific addressees of the epistles are omitted (e.g. in a number of manuscripts of Ephesians at 1:2, of Romans at 1:1, 1:7, and 1:15, and of 1 Corinthians at 1:2).[52] Perhaps these three letters circulated as a smaller, independent set, and that is why they were subjected to this "ecumenical" editing.[53] The seven communities represented by the set of ten epistles found in the *Apostolikon* may have had a symbolic connotation, implying "universality."[54] Rather than demonstrating anything about the state of the epistles before Marcion, however, these variations in content and collection could demonstrate contemporaneous activity in the time of Marcion and serve to identify changes and additions made by "orthodox" editors to conform the epistles to their ideas, once they had acquired them from Marcion's collection.[55]

Conclusions

The convenient short-hand of the expressions "Marcionite" versus "non-Marcionite" should not be construed to suggest the existence of just two camps in second-century Christianity when it came to Paul's authority. Instead, the term

50. E.g., Carroll, "Expansion."

51. Dahl, "Origin," esp. 252–54, 263; Clabeaux, *Lost Edition*.

52. On this phenomenon, see Dahl, "Particularity." This apparently was true of the version of Romans known to Origen; see Bauernfeind, *Römerbrieftext*.

53. See Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection*.

54. Gamble, "New Testament Cannon," 283.

55. Some evidence points to an effort to harmonize the authentic epistles with the Pastorals through strategic glosses added to the former. See, e.g., MacDonald, *Legend and the Apostle*, 85–89.

"non-Marcionite" refers to all the other varieties of Christians. With the exception of Torah-observant Jewish Christians, and perhaps a zealous "Judaizing" group among gentile Christians, along with those who simply had not heard of him yet, nearly every other stripe of second-century Christian had some use for Paul once he was brought to their attention. Marcion's championing of Paul did not drive others away from the Apostle, for the simple reason that those others needed Paul. They needed him as the "Apostle to the Gentiles," who had created a nascent form of the Christian mission that took on much greater significance as Jewish Christians went through violent set-back after set-back. They needed him because he was the founder of key communities with which they wished to be in communion. They needed him as an "ancient" authority dating back to the first generation, precious few of whom put pen to papyrus. They needed him because his heroic reputation as a martyr and the stuff of legends already had a life of its own, separate from Paul the epistle writer and theologian. And so Paul was destined to become "all things to all men," used in various ways as needed, read in light of other ways of being Christian than his own.

As for the epistolary Paul, the one who is now taken to be the "real" Paul, he has no greater claim to be the "real" Paul—at least not the complete Paul—than those other "Pauls" taken up partially, in fragments, as useful, by other second-century Christians and their successors. The epistolary Paul is an accidental Paul, a Paul of specific circumstances and moments in a career that certainly had much more to it, some of which may actually be preserved in the Pauline penumbra of Acts both canonical and non-canonical. And the epistolary Paul is almost certainly not nearly as original as he now appears, an isolated surviving voice from an early phase of Christian discourse that existed all around him and carried forward into later writers who had never heard of Paul, but sound so much like him because they employ that same discourse. Accidents and circumstances shaped Paul's life, shaped his epistolary legacy; and accidents and circumstances revived that legacy in the second century, reinvesting it with a broader authority than it ever had in his lifetime, with two millennia of profound consequence for Christian history.

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Changing Courses

Eucharistic Origins[1]

Andrew McGowan

Setting Places

To narrate the origin and development of Christian meal practice is to narrate Christian origins on a plate.[2] The texts, methods, and issues are a part of those involved in any account of early Christian belief and practice; to focus on meals and their accouterments is not to consider a side issue, but to take a particular view or angle on how the Christian movement begins and develops. Central to such a narrative is the question of how eucharistic meals changed from being substantial community suppers to liturgical rituals involving token foodstuffs. This question in particular functions as a sort of window onto broader issues of methods and assumptions in the study of early Christianity; real or supposed disjunctures identified in meal practice are closely related to paradigms of real or supposed change in the message and organization of the Christian movement.

The possibility of giving meals their due as a subject for critical study has become clearer in the last half-century, through wider developments in the study of food itself as a social and historical phenomenon, such as in the work of Mary Douglas,[3] and through specific studies of meals in early Christianity and its Greco-Roman context. The work of Dennis Smith and Matthias Klinghardt exemplifies and leads these latter developments, but has not exhausted them; rather, a different set of possibilities for consideration of meals has now become possible.[4] Together these constitute something of a paradigm shift regarding meals in early Christianity, one that is still in progress. Questions about the development of early Christian practice beyond the first century or so, and the passage from the earliest traditions to the liturgical life of the fourth century,

1. In memory of Dennis Smith, scholar and symposiast.

2. I have retained the term "Christian" here despite its drawbacks; I suggest that to withhold it from an earlier period, but allow it for all later ones, is to invite an essentialism of sorts, since there are arguably various Christianities involving an essential instability across time, not just a disjuncture between the earliest and all.

3. Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," 61–81; Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*.

4. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*; Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*.

remain particularly fruitful and somewhat neglected areas of exploration. In what follows I offer some observations about this passage or trajectory, *ab ovo usque ad mala*, or *a convivio usque ad sacramentum*.

For Starters

The recent acknowledgement of the ubiquity and centrality of an ancient Mediterranean meal tradition—the "symposium," in broad terms—implies that much previous scholarship had been asking some wrong questions when wrangling over eucharistic origins. A ritual meal was not a peculiar form of religious or communal practice, but far the most obvious way for the earliest Christ-followers to gather. This means that, in one sense, the Eucharist did not need to be "instituted" by Jesus or anyone else; rather the Christian movement had to adapt existing traditions and practices in a way that would have been expected of any group bound by common interest. Arguments about whether a distinctive Christian meal practice went back, as traditionally held, to a Last Supper of Jesus, or even before that to the meals of the historical Jesus, or instead to Paul and to the communities associated with him, are therefore somewhat beside the point, or at least in need of re-framing.

By implication, this same realization also undercuts arguments about genetic links between Christian meals and particular Jewish meal forms, real or imagined.[5] Jewish practice hardly becomes less relevant because of such an interpretive move, but instead should be viewed as part of a Greco-Roman world of commensal signification, with distinctive elements.[6]

In any case, the pursuit of eucharistic origins in the strict sense becomes not the quest for an unmoved mover, whether person or event, that brought into being an idiosyncratic ritual, but the subtler pursuit, description, and analysis of the ways in which meals were performed in ancient Christian contexts. This evidence constitutes part of a wider tradition of meals that precedes any creative act on the part of Jesus, Paul, or others. The Christian contribution is demiurgic, rather than the creation of a ritual *ex nihilo*.

The relevance of the historical Jesus to eucharistic tradition is particularly interesting, but also likely to be misconstrued. While some Jesus scholarship of the last century saw meal practice as a key aspect of Jesus' historic activity, such claims are open to challenge in more than one sense. Norman Perrin's view, which still exerts subtle influence in many more recent studies, was that Jesus' commensality was scandalous relative to that of his contemporaries and that this was both the real origin of a Christian meal practice and the basis of his rejection and death—a key instance of the questionable "criterion of dissimilar-

5. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 63–65.
6. Susan Marks and Hal Taussig, eds., *Meals in Early Judaism*.

ity" used by him and others to identify some traditions as historically authentic.[7] Perrin thus concluded that "the most reasonable explanation of the fact of early Christian communal meals is that they are a continuation of a regular practice of the ministry of Jesus."[8] While it is fair to assume Jesus and his followers celebrated meals, the idea of an "explanation" for early Christian meals is misconceived, and this version of it problematic. One problem is of course the picture of Jesus relative to Judaism that it implies. Even more relevant here, however, may be the acknowledgement of an existing meal tradition, both as a likely historical setting of Jesus' activity and for the practice of the subsequent communities where Jesus traditions were formed and circulated. The implications of the shift in perspective are somewhat anticlimactic. The fact that Jesus is depicted eating, and teaching at and about meals, is not actually remarkable at all, but completely to be expected. The particular ways he is depicted as eater and teacher about meals do have significance in the tradition, as certainly in the canonical text of, for example, Luke; but the fact of his eating, or teaching about eating, is not message so much as medium. Smith and Hal Taussig offer the pithy observation that "as much as one can reasonably affirm about the historical Jesus on [the] question" of eating is that he "probably attended banquets."[9]

While there can perhaps be further and different attempts to reconstruct the meal practice of the historical Jesus and its significance, this point is inescapable. The quest for the historical Eucharist must center on the evidence for early communities of Jesus' followers, not on wishful thinking about Jesus. What lies before or beneath the evidence for the earliest Christian meals has as much or more to do with the variety of contextual evidence, textual and material alike, for the ways inhabitants of the ancient Mediterranean ate in general and what these meals signified, than with the somewhat elusive specifics of Jesus' own meals.

Between Courses

If the basic fact of a transition from meal to liturgy across the first few centuries of the Common Era seems clear enough, the timing, means, and significance of this shift is less so. Most accounts or theories of early eucharistic practice involve some suggestion of a break, a disjuncture between the meal and the Eucharist. Sometimes such a claimed break aligns with proposals about broader changes in the lives of these communities, often modeled as decline or fall from a pristine ideal to a less palatable and institutionalized reality, not just at table but otherwise. In some cases, the notional break between one idealized practice and a later less authentic one can actually be where "Eucharist" is assumed to

7. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus,* 102–5.
8. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, 104–5.
9. Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables,* 47.

originate, or at least to emerge as a visible or distinctive event separate from a more mundane common meal.

One such suggested break has already been noted in the form of Perrin's proposal that Jesus' meal practice involved a profound contrast with the culture of his Jewish contemporaries. Although this view does not require a specific ritual shift, it then allows or assumes the immediate and early construct of "Eucharist," taken to be a particular formal setting, that can serve as *Sitz im Leben* for prophetic utterance and other sources of the Jesus tradition.[10] This is more or less the earliest possible placement for such an emergence or rupture.

Other scholars have sometimes offered views that posit such breaks and inventions just a little later, but in doing so often give little recognition to the ritual character of ancient meal tradition generally, and thus characterize the changes across early eucharistic practice as a fall from, for example, openness (assumed to involve informality) to ritual (assumed to accompany exclusivity). John Dominic Crossan gives a section of his major book on the historical Jesus the pessimistic title "From Kingdom to Liturgy."[11] He sees commensality as basic to "a shared egalitarianism of spiritual and material resources" that amounts to "the heart of the original Jesus movement,"[12] but then identifies "liturgy"—for him, the Last Supper tradition—as a stage in a process of turning the abundant meal of Jesus into the solemn commemoration of his death. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has also drawn an explicit and unhappy contrast between inclusive meal and exclusive ritual: "The central symbolic actualization of the *basileia* vision of Jesus," she says, "is not the cultic meal but the festive table of a royal banquet or wedding feast."[13]

These two instances refer to the undeniable fact of the transition from a substantial meal to the token Eucharist of later centuries, but make some unwarranted assumptions. The first is that exclusivity is assumed to be a late (or at least later) development, rather than an initial characteristic of Christian meals. This is a complex question, but suffice to say that the evidence for exclusivity in meal practice is as old as, and more explicit than, any evidence for lack of concern about boundaries in the early communities (see *Did.* 9, 14; cf. 1 Corinthians 10–11; contrast 1 Corinthians 14; Acts 27:35–36). We might actually expect, from the outset, the same diversity of practice among the Christians as is found in other meal settings. This boundary setting was not a product of ecclesiastical bureaucracy, but a social norm for dining clubs. In at least some cases, the exclusivity of the meal, like that of (other) *collegia* who celebrated meals, would have been a feature as soon as the event was identifiable as belonging to a particular group.

10. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, 22, 27, etc.
11. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 293–98.
12. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 341.
13. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 119.

A second problematic assumption is that ancient feasting was not already a highly ritualized activity, whether or not large amounts of food were consumed. In fact this is not the case at all, as Smith's and Klinghart's work makes plain. The opposition between conviviality and formality is a modern Western fantasy. More specifically, these writers also seem to assume, as do many others, that the emergence of the Last Supper narratives as significant for eucharistic practice are a sign of some shift to a different set of meal characteristics, both theological and practical. We will return to this, but it is worth saying that nothing in the first-century literature, and little in that of the second, supports this assumption; the eucharistic meals of this period seem to have been both festive and ritualized, exclusive and substantial. The weight of significance that the Last Supper narratives seem to carry with them in the tradition, even for modern and critical readers, may have submerged other possibilities for interpretation.

A related version of a proposed break between meals is one placed between Jesus and Paul, more or less, wherein the Last Supper again functions as signifier of something like a purely sacramental and tokenized meal. Alfred Loisy was among those to make such a suggestion, observing (and perhaps lamenting) the transition "from a simple act of thanks over bread and wine . . . to the practice and idea of an entirely religious meal, the somewhat contrived symbol of a unique sacrifice, . . . a sacramental communion with the dying savior."[14] The tradition of the "Lord's Supper" is in this view "conceived of to authorize the mystical supper and substitute it, a liturgical function, for the common meal which was the primitive supper . . ."[15] Something similar appears in Hans Lietzmann's work, wherein the Pauline creation (*sic*) of the Last Supper narrative provides an understanding of the meal focused on the atoning death of Jesus, which does not supplant the earlier model but rather results in parallel strands and forms of meal, joyous and solemn, for some time thereafter.[16] Here the break is partly one of sequence, but the earlier form also persists, one paradigm initially accompanying rather than supplanting the other.

The ingenuity of these schemes, and Lietzmann's in particular, need not be denied. Nor can we fail to ignore either the distinctive settings of the different communities or the various contributions (or discontinuities) that might be attributed to Paul, over and against other strands or trajectories in earlier Christian thought and practice. However, these, like the others, turn out to be answers to questions that themselves need revising. Such models actually exaggerate the extent to which practices and ideas that can be attributed to Paul or the communities associated with him require some external conception, such as those of mystery religions or notions of martyr cult, which then have to be imposed onto a simpler Arcadian (or at least Galilean) original. The problem here

14. Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 301.
15. Loisy, *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 305 n. 4.
16. Lietzmann, *Messe und Herrenmahl,* 255 n. 2.

lies again in the failure to acknowledge that there was already a wider meal tradition encompassing all the Greco-Roman *comparanda* including the meals of Jewish groups; the limits now apparent in the older *religionsgeschichtlich* accounts using mystery cults for influences or parallels must also be noted.[17]

Each of the positions criticized above attempts to deal with what is unquestionably a significant set of problems concerning apparent shifts or varieties of practice in early Christian meals. These approaches, however, all use what is largely diachronic analysis to deal with evidence that demands more synchronic attention. Some of the issues noted need not or cannot be understood primarily or solely as one feature or pattern succeeding another as break or fall, but exist concurrently: ritualization, exclusivity, satiety, and mysticism may have co-existed in Christian meals, if not always in the same forms.

The wider reality of the ancient Mediterranean meal tradition, within which the diversity of specifics can be encompassed, puts all these texts and practices in a different light. Grand theories that depend on dualities, whether parallel and cultural ones, such as Jewish versus Greco-Roman, or serial and historical ones, such as notions of fall from Jesus to Paul, or from movement to Church, etc., must all be treated with skepticism. The real diversity of early Christian practice seems less amenable to such dualities than to close readings of texts and modest linkages between practices, whether verbal, ritual, or material, that commend themselves as mutually enlightening. This does not mean avoidance of what must be acknowledged as the breathtaking changes in meals across this period, but the changes cannot be assumed simply to reflect shifts in the focus of theological discourse already present in the diversity of the NT writings.

To elaborate slightly, the process of close reading may be compared to Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description,"[18] where culture itself is compared to text; interpretation of meal practice therefore becomes more than simply the depiction of some idea in ritual terms, a "sign" in the trivial sense, but ritual and culture themselves become the system of meaning within which ritual diversity—including discursive action associated with ritual—must be considered. This entails holding back from immediate correlation of meal actions to concurrent theologies and personalities, or reduction of one to the other, but giving more careful attention to the variety of elements—foods, diners, roles, locations, times—which constitute meals themselves, and relating them to one another as well as to the wider issues.

The proposal of those smaller relationships is a form of what Claude Levi-Strauss and others have called *bricolage* or tinkering,[19] the modest juxtaposition

17. See the essays in Carpenter and Faraone, *Masks of Dionysus*. Notions such as theophagy seem often to have been read back into accounts of mystery cults from crypto-Christian assumptions.

18. Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," 3–30.

19. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 16–21.

of items which help interpret one another, rather than their assimilation to a grand theory. The meal then becomes not so much the expression of theological paradigm as itself the field of meaning, the arena or world within which meaning can be created and interpreted for the ancient eating subject and the modern interpreter. Such a shift with its focus on synchronic issues may amount to a step back from the problem that has been noted more than once above, the need for a necessarily diachronic account of the shift from banquet to Eucharist, but this reticence is only temporary, a pause in the process of digestion before resuming the task of analysis.

Main Meals

One impediment to more adequate imagining of Christian meals seems to be the incomplete consideration of ancient diet as either a cultural or economic phenomenon. Food itself is, to state the obvious, necessary to a meal, but the foods of Mediterranean antiquity remain undervalued objects of reflection by scholars of ancient Christianity, whether for their significance as symbolic media and for communication of values, or on the other hand simply as comestibles, commodities, or otherwise as economic realities.

The Eucharist was a meal. This deceptively simple insight lies at the heart of the "sympotic" paradigm shift already discussed, but much of the scholarly work done recently relates to the meal as ritual, and to cultural and religious identity issues, broadly speaking.[20] Even where power is acknowledged as a major issue, this has tended to focus on its construction through discursive and other performances, rather than on how it reflects access to food. Hunger, however, is not merely a symbolic reflection of power or the lack of it but is part of its embodied reality. The mere fact of the Christian meal as an event that led to physical satisfaction (see *Did*. 10.1), in a setting where hunger was often close at hand, has not been fully acknowledged in all accounts of eucharistic origins and development. This may also be a reason that exclusivity played a part in some, if not all, eucharistic gatherings from the earliest times; the value of the food involved was a significant issue, and proselytizing and baptism were means of controlling the flow of hungry seekers.

Bread and wine are uniquely prominent in the evidence for eucharistic meals. While traditional or pre-critical views saw this merely as a continuation of the elements established at the Last Supper and hence of the Seder, others have struggled to provide convincing explanations for what have still seemed curious choices of food and drink. The answer was perhaps too obvious; these are simply the staple food and drink of that world. All that is necessary to "explain" them, genetically speaking, was that they were the foods at the center of

20. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*.

any meal. This means that rather than having any obvious inherent meaning arising from their oddity, they begin as more or less as symbolically neutral, as the building blocks of diet or meal, rather than carrying necessary or specific connotations. Of course, this could also allow them to play a variety of roles in the drama of meal ritual, but such roles would have to be identified from specific evidence rather than assumed from wider associations.

As a meal, it must be admitted, the eucharistic diet of bread and wine seems anticlimactic or underdone. Some tension could be acknowledged between the overarching claim of eucharistic practice as part of the ancient sympotic tradition and typical Christian meal elements that seem so prosaic. Yet aesthetic objection should not overwhelm the insights offered by starting with the reality of hunger, rather than with the jaded palate.[21] Many people in the ancient Mediterranean will have eaten and drunk precisely thus, of bread and wine, from day to day; what may seem more remarkable about the Christian meal is its juxtaposition of the ritual accoutrements of banqueting with the material elements of quotidian or simple diet.

This may provide part of the logic underlying the better-known juxtaposition of bread and wine with Jesus' body and blood; there is a less confronting but still curious relationship between signifier and signified in both senses. In that symbolism of the Last Supper tradition lies an implied mimicry or even parody of the meat-laden meals associated with sacrificial cultus of the types Paul discusses when attempting to set dietary boundaries with his Corinthian addressees (1 Corinthians 8, 10). Bread is cheaper than meat, and more commonly available—both characteristics that make it amenable to the weekly pattern of Christian meals that seems to have been typical from an early point—as well as avoiding the religious difficulties with meat that more scrupulous Christians seem to have felt at banquets, or even in markets. The eucharistic meal may also have functioned in ways that paralleled or competed with public grain doles such as the Roman *Annona*—an issue with untapped potential for considering the political dimensions of the Christian construction of a reality where God alone is true ruler—as well as responding to the food shortages that gave rise to such state-led or euergetic measures.[22]

Even if bread and wine were eaten in the quantities sufficient to qualify as a meal in the usual sense, there were probably other dishes filling out the expected ancient triad of *potos*, *sitos* and *opson* in many cases. [23] Yet this mitigates only partly the curious focus on bread, in particular; even where other elements

21. See further Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*.

22. Briefly acknowledged in Heid, "The Romanness of Roman Christianity," 407 and rarely elsewhere.

23. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*; McGowan, "Feast as Fast: Asceticism and Early Eucharistic Practice," 809–23.

are present, and whether or not wine is emphasized, bread remains a central focus of ritual activity.

Separating Meal and Eucharist

The earliest Christian gatherings involved a substantial meal; the eucharistic rites held a few centuries later did not. We have already noted some attempts at narrating this change as a break of sorts, enacted early in the history of the Eucharist; I here recapitulate some suggestions already made for an alternative account, less dependent on supposed early breaks than on a later shift in function which, while dramatic, is somewhat less bound up in other theories of institutionalization or decline.

Although Paul, castigating the wealthier or greedier Corinthians for their impatience and lack of consideration, suggests they can eat before coming to the common meal, there is no reason to think that he intended a separation of token food rite from community banquet, let alone that his early readers took him to suggest that, or acted on it. Rather, the evidence for early Christian meals clearly supports the continuation of evening banquets with both religious significance and dietary substance, for decades or centuries thereafter.

The *Didache* presents its community meal as providing "satisfaction," as noted already (10.1). Pliny's account suggests both a morning gathering and an evening meal with typical foods (*Ep.* 10.96). Ignatius of Antioch, perhaps closer to the middle than the beginning of the second century,[24] uses *eucharistia* and *agape* in an overlapping if not quite interchangeable way; Ignatius' *agape* seems always to be the meal event (*Smyrn.* 8 etc.), and *eucharistia* means the specific actions and the sacred foods of the meal (*Eph.* 1.13, *Smyrn.* 6.7), but by extension the meal also—these are not, in any case, separate events.

Some take Justin Martyr's accounts from the 160s to suggest the separation of banquet from sacrament, but this is an argument from silence at best; in fact, his descriptions of the Eucharist make much better sense if the meal elements are understood still to be substantial as well as sacred, since they are reported to be carried away by deacons to feed the housebound, who are presumably also poor (*1 Apol.* 65–67). Likewise, Justin makes no reference to any second event that could be a Eucharist separate from a meal.

The earliest references to two separate events with something like the expected features of substantial evening meal on the one hand, and separate token reception of sacred foods on the other, appear in the works of Tertullian.[25] In his treatise *On the Soldier's Crown* he refers to the practice of receiving eucharistic

24. Barnes, "The Date of Ignatius," 119–30.

25. McGowan, "Rethinking Agape and Eucharist in Early North African Christianity," 165–76.

food from the hands of clergy, considering it to be a sort of extra or supplementary performance contrasting with those more clearly and securely enjoined by scripture.

> We take also, in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all alike. (*De Corona Militis* 3.3)[26]

This morning reception of the Eucharist is not, however, evidence for what was normative for eucharistic celebration and reception in the Carthaginian Church. The reference to Jesus' supposed command that the sacrament actually be eaten *in tempore victus*—at regular meal times, that is, in the evening—is a clue.

What Tertullian takes to be the dominically-instituted example of an evening meal is in fact still the norm for his community. A banquet was clearly still the central liturgical event of the Carthaginian Christian community around 200.[27] This, and not the morning event, can be referred to as a "Lord's supper" (*De Spect.* 13) or "God's banquet" (*Ad Uxor.* 2.8.8). The proper name of this Carthaginian Christian meal was however "*Agape*" (*Apol*. 39.16; *De Ieiunio* 17.2–3; cf. *Passio Perpetuae* 17), as it had been for Ignatius. The contemporary *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* confirms that the substantial *Agape* was still the central ritual act of the community; the martyrs celebrated it as a last meal together: "Moreover, on the day before . . . they dined to the extent they could in that last meal, which they call 'free', not on a 'free banquet', but on an *Agape*" (*Mart. Perp.* 17.1).

The fullest description of this African *Agape* is provided in Tertullian's *Apology* (c.197):

> Our dinner shows its purpose by its name: it is called what among the Greeks means affection (*dilectio*) . . . We do not recline until we have first tasted of prayer to God. So much is eaten as satisfies hunger; as much drunk as is fitting for the pure. Appetite is satisfied to the extent appropriate for those who are mindful that they have to worship God even at night; speech, as for those who know the Master is listening. After washing of hands, and lights, each is invited into the middle to sing to God as able, from knowledge of sacred writings or from their own mind; thus it can be tested how much has been drunk. Prayer again closes the feast. (*Apol.* 39.16–18)

This is obviously still a banquet, but also highly ritualized; nor is there reason to imagine its ritualization was a recent development, rather than a version of the typical *symposium*. So this was certainly the *Agape*; but it was also, still, the Eucharist. It is this event Tertullian presents as the central community gathering, and as the ritual that must be defended from accusations of cannibalism.

26. *Eucharistiae sacramentum, et in tempore uictus et omnibus mandatum a Domino, etiam antelucanis coetibus nec de aliorum manu quam praesidentium sumimus.*

27. Thus also Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 515.

The morning event that exists by this point is thus not "the Eucharist," but a different setting or situation at which the Eucharist—that is, the meal elements, understood to have undergone transformation or consecration—is received. The morning event must have been quite established to be reported the way it is by Tertullian, but since the evening meal also continued, the emergence of the morning gathering as a venue for eucharistic reception does not constitute a definitive transformation of the Eucharist from a meal. We must assume that the *Agape* still involved the eucharistic ritual; it may be that the morning reception was at this point effectively the consumption of sacred leftovers.

The morning gathering may originally have been the kind of prayer meeting to which Pliny refers, and/or part of a pattern of daily prayer marking particular hours, attested clearly enough elsewhere. Recently Clemens Leonhard has also suggested it may be a form of the *salutatio* of the bishop as patron, which clients were expected to perform in the mornings.[28] A tendency to reserve and consume the sacred meal elements to break one's fast in the morning, even privately, appears around this time also (see *Ad Uxor*. 2.5.3).

The prevalence of the morning reception of the Eucharist separate from the meal, and more specifically its prevalence instead of the meal, is thus a third-century issue, not a first-century one. Further change was of course still to come. Fifty years after Tertullian, his Carthaginian compatriot Cyprian can still refer both to evening and morning gatherings, although the latter has now certainly become the normal place to receive the eucharistic food and drink.

> But when we dine, we cannot call the people together to our banquet, to celebrate the truth of the sacrament with all the brethren present. And it was not early but after dinner that the Lord offered a mixed cup. Should we then celebrate the Lord's sacrifice after supper, that so we offer a mixed cup with all present there? It was proper for Christ to offer at the evening of the day, so he might show in that sacrificial hour the sunset and the evening of the world; as it is written in Exodus, "And all the people of the congregation of the children of Israel shall kill it in at evening." And again in the Psalms, "Let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice." We, however, celebrate the resurrection of the Lord in the morning. (*Ep.* 63.16.1–2)[29]

Not every aspect of this shift is clear, but the fact of it is. Such a third-century shift, however, offers no obvious alignment with grand theories of wider change in earliest Christianity, such as those already mentioned, or with the popular tendency to blame anything bad on Constantine, who had not yet been

28. Leonhard, "Morning Salutationes and the Decline of Sympotic Eucharists in the Third Century," 420–42.

29. I follow Graeme Clarke's interpretation of dominicum used here in the absolute as inferring something like "Lord's sacrifice." The phrasing here quasi-private to exclude "Lord's Supper." See Clarke, ed., *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, 3.300 n. 42.

born; all the more reason, then, that some other explanatory factors have to be considered.

First, growth in the number of participants is hinted at in Cyprian's letter. Banquets now cannot function as a means to gather the entire Christian community, presumably because the group is now larger. The change in the time of the Eucharist may therefore be a result of other and relatively banal changes in the Christian movement as a social formation. The analogues with dining clubs or *collegia* have arguably now broken down; the Church seems more and more a new kind of entity, whose character escapes the boundaries of acknowledged models and is in effect seeking new ones.

Second, and back to the food, we have seen implied a development or focusing of belief in the spiritual or sacramental benefits of the eucharistic bread and wine. We need not swallow the assumption that the foods had never been seen as sacred at earlier points—certainly the fact that the meal was sacred did not preclude it being substantial or vice versa.[30] Yet there is no question of a shift in focus and in function across the evidence, and through the period in question. At the end of this process, the meal elements have a value independent both of the meal setting and of their food value.

While some of this development of sacramental theology may seem to be inherent in theological reflection on the meal and the foods as signs of Jesus' presence, and on the tradition of his identification of meal elements as his body and blood, there were other experiences of token eating and drinking around this time that could have catalyzed the more constrained or atomized forms of eucharistic participation. Christians subject to examination and trial were often expected to perform ritual acts, including eating, with foodstuffs consecrated to Roman deities or the imperial cult.[31]

In any case, the veneration of the consecrated elements independently of the *Agape* means they are available for different uses and events; and this new sort of objective sacrality seems to have commended itself to incorporation into morning rituals, private and quasi-public.

The Close of the Banquet

The appearance of the morning Eucharist, a later development than has typically been assumed, might be thought to herald the disappearance of the evening banquets, which had been central to the life of early Christian communities. This is probably not the case. The Eucharist did not "evolve" from one form to the other; rather the eucharistic elements made a sort of jump from one setting to another, but both settings already existed, and both continued, at least to

30. Riggs, "The Sacred Food of Didache 9–10 and Second-Century Ecclesiologies," 256–83.

31. Rives, "The Decree of Decius and the Religion of Empire," 135–54.

some extent. The pre-existence of the morning gatherings has been mentioned; the afterlife of the banquet deserves a little more attention.

In the curious third-century collection known as the *Apostolic Tradition*, we encounter what might be the first account of a Christian banquet in which the eucharistic elements seem no longer to have a place, but have left vestiges. Bread and cups are blessed at this "Lord's supper," but care is taken to distinguish them from those of the Eucharist. The event is quasi-private, and the role of the patron or host is important.[32] This meal seems to be the former eucharistic meal from which the Eucharist proper has now departed.

Papyrological evidence, not least, gives plentiful indications that similar meals—for which, as often before, the term *agape* is used—were important for some centuries thereafter.[33] Other later Christian communal meals, such as those in monastic settings, should also be understood as true survivals or successors to the ancient banquets of the Christian communities. The relative lack of scholarly interest in these, with notable exceptions,[34] reflects the continued difficulty in re-attuning the imagination to the fact that the study of eucharistic origins is not, or not just, the study of the roots of Christian liturgy, but the study of ancient meals.

32. Bobertz, "The Role of Patron in the Cena Dominica of Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition," 170–84.
33. Alcock, "The Agape," 208–9.
34. Larsen, "Early Monastic Meals," 307–28.

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The Ritual of the Hellenistic Meal

Early Christian Everyday Practice as an Exegetical Challenge

Soham Al-Suadi

Introduction

The question of the interdependence of text and context is not only of interest for theological but also for socio-historical and cultural studies of the NT. Especially with regard to the beginning(s) of Christianity, scholars are interested in describing the way in which cultural practices and religious customs influenced the constitutional writing of NT texts. Contrary to the thesis that the "Birth of Christianity" was a single event of extraordinary significance for the ancient world and for future generations and was related to the figures of Jesus or Paul as trailblazers, the interdependence of text and context implies that the "birth" of Christianity was a highly differentiated social, political, and religious process. The process can be studied through the critical analysis of biblical texts. Recent socio-historical scholarship has shown that the beginnings of Christianity can be located in the overall social practice of the Hellenistic meal, which was not an identity marker for Christianity, but a performance of social, political, and religious experimentation.[1] Taussig understands the Hellenistic meal as a semi-private social act, which allowed the participants to experiment with social variables so that they could put new social alternatives into practice:

> The semiprivate character of these meals proved to be a particularly evocative dimension of their societal and political influence in a world militarily occupied by an imperial power. To a certain extent, these meals were private in that a private individual almost always hosted them and the invitations were directed to either private individuals or members of an association. On the other hand, people from the public sphere permeated the meals with relative ease, and there was often a certain element of display inherent in the meals themselves. (*In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 35)

1. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 16. Relevant discussions have taken place at the seminar "Meals in the Greco-Roman World" of the Society of Biblical Literature. This article is based on paper presentations by the author at recent SBL meetings. The papers of the Greco-Roman Meals Seminar were recently published in Taussig and Smith; Taussig and Marks; and McGowan (2015).

Consequently, Taussig identifies not one single beginning of Christianity but many, in different socio-political settings and involving participants with a variety of cultural backgrounds. Considering that the beginnings of Christianity can be found within this social practice, it will be argued that Christian origins should be placed in the ordinary dining practice of the early Christian communities and that an exegetical approach that integrates this ritual practice should be developed.

In the first section of the article, identity formations in Rom 14:1–15:7 will be explored. The debate about the weak and the strong is read within the context of the Hellenistic meal practice in order to analyze the relationships of the meal community. Next, the relevance of the meal for the discussion of the origins of Christianity is assessed. Especially in respect of Pauline studies it is instructive to shift the frame from an evaluation of an individual exertion of influence to a social practice of participation. In this regard, the ritual is not understood as the exception to the ordinary but as the daily experience of a transcended reality. After the characterisation of the Hellenistic meal in Pauline communities, everydayness and ritual will be discussed. "Everyday life," therefore, becomes a category for NT studies because the meal transcended day-to-day life experience while simultaneously becoming part of it. Going back to Romans 14, it will be shown that this chapter is a composition of everyday features that are located in the symbolism of the Hellenistic meal.

In the second section of the article, a more systematic study of the correlations between text and context will be presented. "Ritual-exegesis" is the preferred method with which Paul's understanding of meals with heterotopic value is interpreted. Four steps will lead to an interdisciplinary exegesis that helps to understand the development of texts and the beginnings of Christianity within the Hellenistic meal practice.[2]

Identity Formations in Romans 14

In Rom 14:1–12 Paul gives exemplary guidelines for the weak and the strong, starting with the thematic admonition to welcome the weak without ulterior motives. Paul thus describes the principle of welcome to the table in the context of the communal practice of eating.[3] In 14:2 it is said that one person believes

2. The paper is based on the outcomes of my dissertation (Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*). It advances the discourse in the field of identity formations in daily life and expands the meaning of "ritual exegesis." For more detail on ritual theories, in-depth exegetical remarks, a complete discussion of identity formations in early Christianity, postmodern theories, and other aspects of this paper, view the corresponding chapters in the monograph.

3. Jewett, *Romans*, 833.

he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.[4] Therefore, the strong are advised to avoid disrespect and the weak are advised to avoid judgment. The theological justification is divine welcome (14:3), which is exemplified by the absence of judgment of another's household. It is clear that 14:3 prefers a religious attribution of the weak and the strong over a socio-historical perspective that highlights the meal and its challenges within a common and ordinary setting. Despite the effort to characterize Paul's description of internal divisions as a hypothetical construct (Karris[5]) or understand the weak and the strong in the light of Greco-Roman philosophical categories (Stowers[6]), the majority of scholars have located the conflict in Roman Christian and/or Jewish categories: scholars typically defined the weak and the strong as Jewish and gentile Christians respectively, who are divided over certain practices rooted in the Mosaic Law.[7] Rauer, however, located the discussion against the Greco-Roman background and identified the weak as gentile Christians who abstained from meat because of their conversion from Hellenistic mystery cults. The possible range of interpretations for Romans 14–15 expanded after Rauer's thesis. Dodd noticed vegetarianism for Jews and gentiles and placed emphasis on Christians who rejected meat because of their life in the sphere of the "Reign of God." Huby, on the other hand, stated that Paul is too vague to identify clearly whether he is addressing Jewish or Greco-Roman concerns, and therefore assumed that Paul is addressing the whole community, not two distinct groups. Contemporary scholars, such as Minear, professionalized the attempt to identify mixed groups. For Minear the weak and the strong are ethnically mixed groups, but the weak deemed Jewish practices as necessary for salvation whereas the strong are those who practice freedom from the Law. Barclay attests an identity crisis with regard to the weak who must figure out their place in the Christian community. All in all, scholars argue that Paul addresses a real situation in Rome.

4. The term λάχανον is only used in Matt 13:32; Mark 4:32; Luke 11:42; Rom 14:2; 1 Kgs 20:2 (1 Kgs 21:2 LXX); Gen 9:3; Ps 36:2 (Ps 37:2 LXX). It stands for herbs grown on land cultivated by digging; garden-herbs, as opposed to wild plants; any potherb, or vegetables (Thayer and Strong, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3001).

5. Toney summarizes the argumentation of Karris, who based his observation on a literary comparison between 1 Corinthians 8–10 and Romans 14–15: ". . . fourth, while Paul uses 'if' clauses in 1 Corinthians 8–10 to make his argument concrete, in Romans 14–15 Paul only uses one 'if' clause (Rom 14:15), which indicates that Paul is not addressing a concrete situation; fifth, in Romans 14–15 Paul omits references to concrete situations unlike 1 Corinthians 8–10's reference to meat sacrificed to idols because Romans 14–15 is meant to be a generalization; eating only vegetables encompasses all food abstinence and observance of days is a general reference to fast days; sixth, verbal parallels indicate that Romans 14–15 is repeating, rephrasing, and echoing 1 Corinthians 8–10. . . ." Karris, "The Strong and the Weak in Romans 14–15," 22–23.

6. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*.

7. Gäckle gives a detailed history of the discourse on the weak and the strong. See Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen in Korinth und in Rom*.

The discussion about the theological implications of the weak and the strong can obviously not be solved by identifying groups behind the terms ἀσθενέω (weak) and δυνατός (strong). It is necessary to analyze the situation Paul is describing more precisely and, possibly, employ alternative approaches. If Romans 14 depicts a real situation in Rome, what did this situation look like?

Locating the situation within the Hellenistic meal practice is a noteworthy approach because, obviously, "Paul's letter shows concern about how what people were eating and not eating affected their sense of community at the meals. . . . The food issues are immediately related to the quality and character of relationships in the meal community."[8] Taussig identifies the weak and the strong as Jews and gentiles who debated about Jewish dietary laws, and further elaborates on the meal practice and related identity formations:

> It is clear that Paul was addressing an ongoing meal practice that had heightened tensions because of the difference in the diets of the Jews and gentiles in the group(s). One must surmise that at these meals, most (if not all) Jews ate only vegetables. One must also surmise that many (if not all) gentiles continued to eat meat. From other literature, it is clear that some Hellenistic Jews felt comfortable with gentiles eating meat while limiting their own diet to vegetables. It seems possible that some Jews may have on occasion eaten meat with the gentiles as an expression of community solidarity and then afterward had regrets. It also seems possible that some gentiles may have abstained from eating meat in deference to Jewish worries. And, it is likely (since Paul had heard about it) that some Jewish members had expressed their discomfort. (Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 73)

For Taussig, "Paul's desire for resolution in a common diet for this community meal is understandable, [but] it ignored the deep work ritual negotiation does for complex social situations."[9] Taussig's analysis is interesting for the interpretation of Rom 14:1–15:7 because he emphasizes that the letter is addressing the whole group that is participating in the Hellenistic meal. He, therefore, locates the identity formations within the ritual that is part of the daily life of the community. Remarkably, Taussig does not question that we are witnessing here the beginnings of Christianity, but he questions whether Paul is aware of ritual processes that lead to a Christian identity. One has to ask, therefore, how the connection between the ritual and the origins of Christianity can be understood, and how the differences between groups and their interests fit into the thesis that the Hellenistic meal shaped the beginnings of Christianity.

Meals and the Beginnings of Christianity

In my socio-historical studies I examine the features of daily life in the NT to illustrate how the Christ-believers could simultaneously affirm and transform

8. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 41f.
9. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 74.

shared values.[10] This interpretation questions the view that the early Christian meal practice and Paul's writings are correlated with Paul, who, as the founder of Christianity, reminded the communities to come together for the Eucharist, which the historical Jesus as the *kyrios* had revealed and instituted and which he ate with his disciples during the night he was handed over to the Romans. In this line of interpretation, many interpreters consider that eating bread and drinking wine became a sacrament, because it was linked to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like baptism, only fellow Christians understood this sacrament and became transformed by it. Consequently, for this interpretation, Paul encouraged the "Christians" with his letters to abandon their Jewish traditions because they were no longer participating in the Passover but in their own meal: the Lord's Supper. Very quickly, theologians began to picture Jesus and Christianity participating in the Last Supper as the Eucharist on one side, contrary to the Jews and Judaism celebrating Passover on the other.

The problem with this interpretation is that it promotes an understanding of Christian origins that begins with the historical Jesus and ends with the Eucharist, all taking place within the first century.[11] It pictures a pure cult, which is represented in the bread and wine as the body and blood of Jesus, and it focuses upon the presence of the divine, which separates the common ("profane") from the Christian ("sacred"). This supports the problematic understanding that Jesus and/or Paul founded Christianity. It is also troublesome in that it fails to take the problems of anti-Semitism and Christian universalism into account.

In the study of the Hellenistic meal, the beginnings of Christianity are analyzed according to sociological features that take the individual importance of the historical Jesus or Paul into consideration, but understand them as much as participants of the social practice as their followers. In order to define the sociological relevance of the meal, Klinghardt (1996) and D. E. Smith (2003) look at the structure of practice to show that the ritual, as described by Paul, matches

10. The first influential monograph is from E. W. Stegemann and W. Stegemann, *Urchristliche Sozialgeschichte*, 1997. With regard to Luke 24:36–52, W. Stegemann supports the view of the communal meal: "Vermutlich ist die Emmausgeschichte transparent für die Situation der lukanischen Christenheit. Sie macht anschaulich, wo die Christusglaubenden in der nachösterlichen Situation dem Auferstandenen begegnen: im Schriftverständnis und im gemeinsamen Mahl" (*Jesus und seine Zeit*, 57).

11. One might think that the older paradigm relies on inacurate data. McGowan observes: "The inadequacy of the older paradigm is not so much a consequence of new discovery or of new theoretical underpinnings for historical inquiry, although these are important to the establishment of a new alternative view; rather the traditional narrative fails in quite classical historical terms. That is to say, given the body of evidence relatively well-known to historians concerning the communal eating practices of early Christians, it fails to account for enough of the evidence in sufficiently simple terms. Not all Christians ate their sacral meals for those reasons, in those ways, with those words and names." McGowan, "Rethinking Eucharistic Origins," 174.

this overall social practice. With them, Taussig identifies a clear typology of five points that characterize the Hellenistic meal:

1. the reclining of (more or less) all participants
2. the order of a supper (*deipnon*) of eating, followed by an extended time (*symposion*) of drinking, conversation, and/or performance
3. marking the transition from *deipnon* to *symposion* with a ceremonial libation
4. leadership by a "president" (*symposiarch*) of the meal
5. a variety of marginal personages[12]

The typology indicates that the meal was as much part of religious practice as part of the activity of daily life. This means that there was no difference between private and religious meals. Understanding the meal as part of the cultural code of antiquity leads to the conclusion, with Klinghardt and D. E. Smith, that there were no differences between Jewish and Hellenistic-pagan meals.[13] Earlier it was argued that the meal allowed the participants to experiment with social variables so that they could put new social alternatives into practice. The discussion of social alternatives raises questions regarding the social value of these alternatives. In Klinghardt's view, these values are *koinonia* (community), *isonomia* and *philia* (equality and friendship), and *charis* (grace/generosity/beauty), which are expressed as utopian political values.[14] Taussig elaborates, that "the social value of *koinonia* (community) was reinforced through the appropriate arrangements of food, reclining order, shared leadership, and finances of the meal itself."[15] The order of reclining reflects the values of equality/*isonomia* and friendship/*philia* in as much as *philia* became a commonly asserted value of those who reclined together at meals.[16] The utopian character is established, as "the richness and extensiveness of the food available represented a society that had all it needed."[17]

The larger sociological framework and the ordinary as a place for social, political, and religious transformation are essential when examining the beginnings of Christianity. Taussig defines the Hellenistic meal as a ritual that focuses on the identity *to be* and not on the identity *that was.* Unity is presented as strength derived from fluid experimental identities and does not focus on the stability of Jewish or Greek identities and practices outside of and inside of

12. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 26.
13. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 11.
14. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 26–29; Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 153–73.
15. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 27.
16. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 27.
17. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 28.

the ritual. Taussig places emphasis on the everydayness of the ritual that is able to induce the development of a new social and religious identity. This connects the ritual with everyday life of antiquity and at the same time with concepts of identity formation in ritual theory. Taussig strengthens the connection between everydayness and ritual, and between ritual and identity.

The question is: How can we describe the everydayness of antiquity and place the beginnings of Christianity into the ordinary? The following discussion will focus on contextual identity formations and the need to specify the methodological concepts of everydayness in regard to ritual and identity formations. After these observations, the interpretation of Romans 14 will be expounded to discover the hermeneutical differences from other interpretations.

Everydayness and ritual

Everydayness and ritual are not automatically regarded as a self-evident duo because rituals are associated with festivity and the exceptional; they are considered as the exception to the dull day-to-day life. Following Schütz, whose work bridged sociological and phenomenological traditions to form a social phenomenology, I understand the environment of everydayness as representing the "paramount reality" in which everyday commodities are accepted without a word of protest (Schütz and Luckmann). Therefore, everyday life is the place where rituals are displayed and understood. It is crucial to understand the sociological context, because everydayness is inter-subjectively constructed. Central to everydayness and other areas of a person's reality is not the ontological structure of its objects but the meaning that is created out of human experience.[18] So far, the sociological and methodological connection between everydayness and ritual is comprehensible.

The consideration of social dominations leads to the assumption that everyday practices reproduce power relations and may also resist and transform them. In the NT we can observe power relations connected with the construction of individual or sociological meaning. For the study of the Hellenistic meal it is essential to work with theoretical concepts that take the individual experience and community participation into account.

Berger and Negro understand everyday life "as an interpretive framework defined in dialectical opposition to the notion of special events and used by scholars and non-scholars to make sense of practice."[19] Based on social practices, they suggest that three types of factors determine if an event is interpreted as part of everyday life: 1) contextual factors, 2) ideological factors, and 3) factors of economics and practice.[20]

18. Steuten, *Das Ritual in der Lebenswelt des Alltags*, 62.
19. Berger and Negro, *Identity and Everyday Life*, 4.
20. Berger and Negro, *Identity and Everyday Life*, 11.

1. contextual factors are deeply informed by what are called "ideologies of everyday life": the political, religious, or aesthetic significance that everyday life is given in the worldview of an individual or society
2. ideological factors determine the ideological weights of social practices and can vary significantly
3. the economic and practical features of a practice itself also have a large impact on its interpretation as everyday or exceptional[21]

Uncertainty remains if the complex interplay of factors and the interpreter's own meaning-making process, which decide whether or not any social practice is read within everydayness or special events, lead to identity formations.

However, Berger and Negro propose factors that decide about the everydayness other than ritual practices. The identification of contextual factors, ideological factors, and factors of economics and practice can help to locate the letters of Paul in the ordinary and regard the ritual as an aspect of daily life accordingly.

"Everyday life" as a category for New Testament studies

Considering the tendency in contemporary cultural studies to use the term "everyday life" to invoke a casual, programmatic, or polemical manner to critique the approaches and perspectives of others, it is not surprising that scholars are cautious to use the term in relation to Christian origins. Looking at the practice of the Hellenistic meal, it is helpful to follow Taussig's basic assumption that the Hellenistic meal happened in the tension between "not ordinary" and "frequent." Klinghardt discusses the tension as follows:

> The values—good order, quietness, peace—attributed to the symposium clearly relate to its utopian character. Indeed, there are many hints that the symposium provided an experience that transcended the limitations of everyday life and became important for exactly this utopian quality. . . . On the one hand, the boundless abundance of foodstuffs connected to the meal is characteristic: The communal, festive meal is the place to overcome the meagreness of daily life. (Klinghardt, "A Typology of the Communal Meal," 17–18)

In that sense the Hellenistic meals were a regular part of the daily rhythm of life, although it was not usual for a particular person to participate in such a meal every day.[22] Following Klinghardt we can observe that the meal transcended everyday life experience at the same time as it became part of it:

> More or less, all meals in the early Christian world enabled people living in similar social situations to have similar religious experiences: the awareness of being part of a community that confers personal acceptance and a particular place within the group; the tangible feeling of grace, abundance, and justice; and

21. Berger and Negro, *Identity and Everyday Life*, 11–12.
22. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 23.

> anticipation of the utopian counter-experience that transcends the experience of everyday life. (Klinghardt, "A Typology of the Communal Meal," 18)

The tension is tangible in the social order of reclining. The norm of reclining stood in tension with one's experience in ordinary life, where very few people experienced much leisure, many lived in the middle of distress, and social pressure was high.[23] This tension is also tangible in the context of the meal. Here it was not unusual for prayers to a god to be followed by conversation about ordinary daily routines and other "secular" activities.[24] Taussig's notion of experimentation derives from the fact that during the meal, especially during the symposium, the participants had a larger tolerance of some disturbance. The ritualized experience of such social disorder helped to perfect it for the commonplace life experiences of the diners.[25] Taussig also states that even the social symbolism of meals, the prevalence of meals, and the important functions meals played in ordinary people's imagination of society made some meals an occasion for serious social experimentation.[26] The ritual acts not as a troubleshooter but as a troublemaker in a very positive sense. Daily, the tension between "not ordinary" and "frequent" allowed the practice of the Hellenistic meal to become part of daily life for many people who were used to social experimentation due to their fluctuant social status. Taussig points to common aspects, like the order of reclining or the role of secular activities, to illustrate the tension. The Hellenistic meal is a preferred place to study social performances of everyday life, because it functions as a ritual and can be described with a standardized form.

Romans 14 between ritual and identity

So far, we looked at the ordinary, regular dining structures in Greco-Roman culture in order to focus on the social practice of the Hellenistic meal. The discussion about everydayness and ritual, as well as identity, supported an understanding of cultural codes that allows for social, political, and religious transformations. It became clear that central to everydayness is the meaning that is created out of experience and that types of factors determine if an event is interpreted as part of everyday life. We worked on factors of everydayness more precisely, which opens the examination of the features of daily life in Romans 14 to illustrate how the Christ-believers were able to simultaneously affirm and transform shared values.

Although the participants had a larger tolerance of some disturbance, Paul warns the community in v. 1 of quarrelling over opinions. The verb

23. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 69.
24. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 32.
25. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 84.
26. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 156.

προσλαμβάνω (to receive) in v. 1 and v. 3 and 15:7 (the only references in Paul), relates to an extended welcome in(to) one's home or circle of acquaintances.[27] Therefore, it implies the context of everyday life, and functions as a symbolism of meals. It is also connected with theological associations, speaking of God who has welcomed them. Verse 4 gives a practical allegory by mentioning the house slaves, who should not be judged—answered by a reference to the Lord who is able to make them stand. At this point, clearly the household is understood as a medium in which the inner structures represent the structures outside. The house and everything that takes place in it are standing for receiving God. Without interrupting the given balance of power, Paul uses the image of the house as a place of individual and social meaning and illustrates with his diatribe that the negotiating of individual, social, and religious positions is in the same manner possible.[28]

The discussion about the days and the eating in vv. 5–6 integrate the argument in everyday contexts of mixed communities. At this time, the reader knows about the characteristics of the strong and the weak, and neither the strong nor the weak are reaffirmed. The strong individual believes he can eat anything (Rom 14:2), is welcomed by God even in the event of arrogance (v. 3), considers all days to be equivalent (v. 5) and is eating in gratitude towards God (v. 6). The weak individual on the other side is eating cabbage (v. 2), distinguishes the days in respect to the Lord (v. 5), and says thanks to God (v. 6). Paul leaves the behaviour of the readers to themselves and does not deny their ability in any way. The participants of the meal could differentiate their behaviour within the community and decide. Like their freedom to choose the food that they want to eat, they could decide on the observance of the Sabbath. They were also able to direct the other servant—this being the only exemplary argument Paul is giving.[29]

27. Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 234–35. "To receive" stands in the Pauline verses for the access to one's heart or the ability to take one into friendship and contact: Rom 14:1, Τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει προσλαμβάνεσθε, μὴ εἰς διακρίσεις διαλογισμῶν ("Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for purpose of quarreling over opinions"); 14:3, ὁ ἐσθίων τὸν μὴ ἐσθίοντα μὴ ἐξουθενείτω, ὁ δὲ μὴ ἐσθίων τὸν ἐσθίοντα μὴ κρινέτω, ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτὸν προσελάβετο ("Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat, for God has welcomed them"); Rom 15:7, Διὸ προσλαμβάνεσθε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς προσελάβετο ὑμᾶς εἰς δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ ("Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the Glory of God"). Thayer and Strong, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4355d.

28. Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 261. The diatribe is characterized in that (1) the author suddenly turns to another imaginary interlocutor, (2) an answer is immediately given that equals the position of the interlocutor, and (3) this dialogue contains rhetorical questions. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul´s Letter to the Romans*, 79–118.

29. Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 261–62.

Followed by Paul's parallel of life and death in vv. 7–9, he is strengthening the identity formation of the group towards the Lord. The judgment theme in vv. 10–13 illustrated by Septuagint-quotes marks the consequences for the group when they continue to argue about contextual factors of their everyday life.[30] Paul condemns with the focus on the autocracy of God not only the people who believe to judge one another in God's place, but he also condemns the belief in their high-handedness. Although he appreciates the strength among the people, because it allowed to live a righteous life without irritation, he criticizes the self-possessed life on a daily basis.[31]

Verse 17 opens up the debate about eating and drinking by talking about the Kingdom of God, which is not about food and drink, as a contrast to the everydayness of the community. The discussion of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (Kingdom of God) should not be underestimated in the Pauline literature. Stegemann (2009) writes:

> Die paulinischen Texte sind im aktuellen Zusammenhang insofern interessant, als sie einerseits die Königsherrschaft Gottes als zukünftig erwarten (vgl. nur 1Kor 15,50 und Gal 5,21), andererseits, weil sie nicht mit dem irdischen Jesus, d.h. seiner Verkündigung und seinem Wirken im Land Israel, in Verbindung gebracht werden. Allerdings ist auffallend, dass auch in den Paulusbriefen die Königsherrschaft Gottes umfassende soziale bzw. gesellschaftliche Ziele formuliert: Gerechtigkeit (dikaiosyne), Frieden (eirene) und Freude (chara). Diese Ziele hebt Paulus von materiellen Bedürfnissen—Essen und Trinken—ab (Röm 14,17). Der nähere Kontext dieser Aussage, in dem es um die Frage der Einhaltung bzw. Nichteinhaltung von Speisevorschriften geht, deutet aber darauf hin, dass Paulus nicht damit rechnet, dass in der Königsherrschaft Gottes Essen und Trinken aufgehört haben. Vielmehr: Sie sind kein Thema mehr für kulturelle Reglements bzw. Unterschiede.[32]

The Kingdom of God is described as a realm that is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Paul places the emphasis clearly on the religious identification as opposed to the material, social, or political aspects of the meal.[33] Righteousness, peace, and joy seem to be missing in the social practice of having the *deipnon* (supper) and the *symposion* (extended time of drinking, conversation, and/or performance). Mutual upbuilding is contrasted with the taking of food, which is in danger of making other people fall. The destruction of the work of God is equally in danger as is their own faith.

We can see clearly that Paul's interest to integrate the experience of day-to-day life with his theological connotations is very strong. Romans 14 is a

30. Rom 14:11 refers substantially to Isa 45:23.
31. Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 264.
32. Stegemann, *Jesus und seine Zeit*, 326–27.
33. Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 234–35.

composition of everyday features that are located into the symbolism of the Hellenistic meal. The welcoming of brothers and sisters refers to the reclining, eating, and drinking to *deipnon* and the focus of the honour of the Lord to the ceremonial libation and the divisions within the group to debates about leadership and control.

In addition to the identification of Hellenistic meal features, the characteristics of everydayness should not be underestimated. Contextual factors, ideological factors, and factors of economics and practice are incorporated into the argumentation.

It is important to realize that the meaning-making process and the determination whether the experience during the meal is part of the vital identity formations does not only depend upon the decision of being part of the ritual itself. The analysis of everydayness and identity showed that the interpretation of these processes relies on continued identifications outside of the meal practice. The analogies to the household, the quotations of the Septuagint and the illustration with complicated scenes from everyday life show that Paul tries to influence the decision-making over the ritual. Paul, therefore, works on the Jewish and gentile identities of everyday life and tries to minimize a disruptive state of experimentation at the same time.

It was shown that the "Birth of Christianity" is usually characterized as a singular event of extraordinary significance, and it is often related to the figures of Jesus or Paul as relevant initiators. Understanding that Paul is addressing the whole community in Romans 14 and that he depicts a real situation in Rome led to the observation that the "Birth of Christianity" is not a exclusive event but embedded into the common life. Part of the everyday life was the Hellenistic meal practice, which allowed experimentation with identity formations because of the tension between "not ordinary" and "frequent." Taussig shows that the "Birth of Christianity" can be located in the overall social practice of the Hellenistic meal, which was a performance for social, political, and religious experimentation. He understands the Hellenistic meal as a semi-private social act, which allowed the participants to experiment with social variables so that they could put new social alternatives into practice. Consequently, this interpretation is analyzing not one single beginning of Christianity, but many originating in everyday life. Considering Taussig's interpretation and his focus on the identity to be, it was necessary to analyze the surrounding everydayness of the "Birth of Christianity." Therefore, the meaning-making process was examined, which depends on continued identifications outside of the meal practice.

How can the observations about the relevance of the meal as a ritual practice influence exegetical approaches? In other words: the correlations found between text and context show that early Christianity is a diverse social movement, which is reflected within the meal practice. It is now our task to engage with the question of how to analyze the texts exegetically.

New Interpretations

Whereas former paradigms encouraged the understanding of texts as a provider for a plausible linear path from primitive practice to later normative patterns,[34] we gained a different understanding of the texts and the contexts. It was shown that the study of meals, as texts and as contexts, lead to an understanding of identity formations in the first century. In his book *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity*, Taussig is interested in Paul's understanding of the meal, and he argues that the beginnings of Christianity can be found within this social practice. Taussig relies on Klinghardt's and D. E. Smith's studies on the subject, who identified the meals described by Paul as Greco-Roman meals. Other scholars adopted socio-historical methods to study meals and combined it with archaeological or anthropological data. Ritual theory was recently used to situate the Lord's Supper within the Hellenistic meal. DeMaris sets an example for locating the NT within its ritual world by avoiding an interpretive framework that assumes the referential or symbolic nature of rites. He regards rites as generative and creative.

In this sense, it becomes very important to combine socio-historical criticism and ritual theories to study Paul's understanding of the Hellenistic meal. Central for the generative and creative development of a communal identity of Christ-believers is, from my point of view, the heterotopic idea that Paul is expressing in his letters.[35] In Paul's understanding of the Lord's Supper and his descriptions of its context, one can see that the Lord's Supper, where his utopia of a community being the body of Christ is realized, could take place in a multiplicity of contexts (heterotopia).

In describing the Hellenistic meal it was already indicated that the location of the meal is important. The location determines the design of the right proportions of the dining room or the optimum arrangement of seats. However, locations are not only material values but also symbols for social, political, or religious conditions. Communities are therefore inevitably connected to a place where values and standards of the participants are updated and implemented. Whether in a private house, in a club, or in a temple, the participants meet for a meal and thus realize their community.[36] In his letters Paul is realizing utopia and makes it heterotopic because the social, political, and religious matters are not of utopian imagination but of communal experience.

34. McGowan, "Rethinking Eucharistic Origins," 177.

35. The heterotopic character differs from an utopian value in the sense that the heterotopia can be realized, while the utopia remains unachieved. For a detailled discussion, see Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 98–100.

36. Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 97.

Ritual-Exegesis

To study the correlations between text and context, a method to highlight Paul's understanding of meals with heterotopic value is requested. Foucault[37] speaks of a place with heterotopic values when it is not unrealized but operates by its own rules. These other places are not static in their social significance. Characteristics are that the consideration of his places is quite distinct from the places they reflect.

He also notes that heterotopic places hold a specific function in society and are able to connect different "rooms" with each other. Here they combine social realities that seem incompatible outside the heterotopia. They thus break with the conventional time and the chronology of the social processes. In addition, the access to heterotopic places is not given to everyone. They are simultaneously isolated and penetrable, as participants are at the same time excluded of other processes. Here Foucault[38] refers explicitly to religious cleansing activities. As we have seen in Romans 14, it becomes necessary for Paul to talk about the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (Kingdom of God) to define a place where people experience a community where the established social values are transformed into the light of God. To integrate the sociological and philosophical theories into an exegetical practice, it is important to follow analytical steps that cover the different disciplines.

The combination of socio-historical methods, ritual theories, and NT exegesis leads toward the development of "ritual-exegesis." Ritual-exegesis argues in four steps:

1. it describes the NT *topoi*, which are relevant to the characteristics
2. it reflects on *ritual theories*, which clarify the characteristics theoretically
3. it gives a *socio-historical analysis* of the characteristics within the meal
4. it combines the NT relevance with the ritual theories and the socio-historical analysis to outline the *ritual-exegesis*

The characteristics of the meal are: the participants and their behaviour, the sequence of the meal and the language during and about the meal. Where does "terms of identification" fit. It is not properly a "characteristic."

Terms of Identification

After discussing Romans 14 in detail, we have seen that the commonly known categories of differentiation are not applicable in Paul's vision of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Nevertheless, he is working with terms of identification as groups and individuals within the meal. This means that first we have to look at the descriptions of groups and individuals in the NT. Second, we will work with J.

37. Foucault, "Andere Räume," 39.
38. Foucault, "Andere Räume," 40–44.

Z. Smith (1980, 1982, 1987, 1998) and Bell (1990, 1992, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2007) to describe how the order within a ritual influences the interconnection between the participants. Third, we will describe the order of reclining to show how much identification of the group and the individual took place through this act. In the outline of the ritual-exegesis, we will discuss these features in Galatians 2, Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8–10, and 1 Corinthians 11.

Ritual-exegesis does not only attempt to describe the Lord's Supper as a Hellenistic ritual but also to show how Paul puts the ritual into a grammar of written and social practice, as Judith Lieu puts it.

New Testament *topoi* relevant for the terms of identification

The NT *topoi* that are relevant for the terms of identification as groups and individuals are κοινωνία (community) and σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (body of Christ) for the identification as a group and ἀδελφός (brother/sister) and κοινωνός (partner) for the identification as individuals.[39] I do not understand κοινωνία as the community with each other but as the community with someone through the participation in something—in our case, the Hellenistic meal. The social practice of the Hellenistic meal leads to the understanding that κοινωνία (community) is the participation *at* a community and not the dynamic interaction *within* the community. Klinghardt explains, that

> even the size of the triclinia expresses the high appreciation for κοινωνία: The archaeological remains range from 7 to as many as 17 couches (in the hestiatorion of the Asklepieion in Troizen); 11 to 13 couches appear most often and represent a standard that was even used as a basic architectural measure. If larger groups needed more seating, they would not augment the number of couches within a triclinium but instead multiply the number of triclinia.[40]

The term σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (body of Christ) is used by Paul in Rom 7:4, 1 Cor 10:16, 12:27, and Eph 4:12. The term is connected with Christ's body on the cross in Romans, it is the central expression within the narrative of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10, and it is significantly related to the community in 1 Cor 12:27. Strecker concludes that σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, body of Christ, is set within a ritual background and relates to the community, which is the body of Christ through their ritual performance.[41]

The words ἀδελφός (brother/sister) and κοινωνός (partner) are used in the opposite direction. We can observe that ἀδελφός (brother/sister) is a term used to describe the relationship given by birth, status, or religion. Christ-believers call each other ἀδελφός (brother/sister) to name their interaction between each

39. Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 150–56.

40. Klinghardt, *A Typology of the Communal Meal*, 14.

41. See Strecker, *Die liminale Theologie des Paulus*, 336; Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 153.

other. At this point, it is important to distinguish between interaction and participation. Other than κοινωνία (community), which stood for participation, κοινωνοί is illustrating the individuals, who interact with each other while they are always in danger of hurting one another.

Ritual theories that clarify the terms of identification

Ritual theories, which help to clarify the terms of identification, are found in the studies of J. Z. Smith and Bell. Smith defines ritual as follows: "Ritual provides an occasion for reflection and rationalization on the fact that what ought to have been done was not done, what ought to have taken place did not occur."[42] It is essential for Smith's understanding of ritual that the ritual modifies daily behaviour.[43] The impact on daily life is given by the ability to identify problematic events or patterns in the lives of particular people. The ritual also allows perfecting or rationalizing such noticed phenomena (Taussig). In this way, ritual gives an assertion of difference within a social body. Interestingly, there is no neither-nor in this assertion. For the discussion of terms of identification, Smith's studies are a relevant source. The community is not seen as an extravagant gathering but as a group contextualized in daily life. This group is viewed with its difficulties without losing its integrity.

In the monograph *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Bell focuses on the communal body and shifts from the metaphorical use to a corporeal use by talking about the body's interaction with its environment. The body interacts with its environment and is moulded by it in turn. She writes that "by virtue of this circularity, space and time are redefined through the physical movements of bodies projecting organizing schemes on the space-time environment on the one hand while reabsorbing these schemes as the nature of reality on the other. In this process," she continues, "such schemes become socially instinctive automatisms of the body and implicit strategies for shifting the power relationship among symbols."[44]

Combining the results of Smith and Bell together makes me conclude that interaction between the participants and sharing the common idea are very much relying on the interaction of the bodies with their environment because bodies are projecting and reabsorbing terms of identification at the same time.[45]

Reclining and the terms of identification

Let us look at the order of reclining during the Hellenistic meal to verify how individual and communal terms of identification are projected and reabsorbed by the bodies of the participants. The reclining is the central element of

42. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 63.
43. Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 157.
44. Bell, "The Authority of Ritual Experts," 99.
45. For a detailed discussion, see Al-Suadi, *Essen als Christusgläubige*, 156–59.

the Hellenistic meal because "reclining for a meal was always fundamentally a mark of status. To designate other postures at the meal, such as sitting while others reclined, was an intentional indication of one's lower status."[46]

The order of reclining serves different purposes for the meal. First of all, reclining meant that the meal participants were able to rest, eat, and socialize at the same time. Secondly, reclining had a very relevant social function and secured the position of the community. In communities where *one is more equal than the other*, the decision of seats was a crucial question. Sitting at the right-hand side of the leader of the meal was the most wanted position; sitting at the left the least wanted. The order of reclining was even more crucial because it did not necessarily match the social status outside of the meal community. This makes the reclining a place where the body's interaction reflects and rationalizes on the fact of the ritual that what ought to have been done was not done, what ought to have taken place did not occur.[47]

Outline of the ritual-exegesis

Knowing that the order of reclining as much as the other elements of the ritual meal are related to social and religious tensions, encourages one to understand the negotiation over the community as the body of Christ as part of the ritual. I now would like to look at Paul's participation in the social and religious negotiations that can be studied through/by means of his letters.

In Gal 2:11–14 the reader is not informed much about the perfecting or rationalizing patterns but about the common reclining of Jews and gentiles during the meal. Together with Romans 14 one is aware of the disturbing consequences the denial of the right reclining order might have. Cephas separating from the table in Antioch and Paul's warnings against the brother are marking these consequences. The brother or sister in Romans 14 can be judged and despised (v. 10); a stumbling block or hindrance can be put in the way of another (v. 13); and, he or she can be injured by what one eats (v. 15). Knowing these warnings makes us conscious of the community, which can only understand itself as the body of Christ if this devastating interaction can be transformed to participation. First Corinthians 8 goes further by assessing the differences to one side and expecting the withdrawal of other temples for the sake of the weaker brother. Paul writes (1 Corinthians 8):

> [12] But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

We can see clearly that the sin against a member of the family is related to the sin against Christ.

46. Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet as a Social Institution," 25.
47. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 63.

In 1 Corinthians 10 the center of attention is given to vv. 16 and 17:

> [16] The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? [17] Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

The NRSVS translates κοινωνία as "a sharing" in 1 Cor 10:16. This translation does not make very clear that κοινωνία is not a strategy for achieving this community. But κοινωνία as we said earlier is a participation in a community, which is clarified by the difference between κοινωνία and κοινωνός. First Corinthians 10:18 and 20 exemplify that κοινωνοί themselves are not making a κοινωνία. The κοινωνία is the "other-place," the heterotopy, where the identity of the participants is the body of Christ.

First Corinthians 11 does not deny, like 1 Corinthians 8, that there is participation at the table of other gods and states that this is not the community that represents the body of Christ. Divisions frighten the community, which under these circumstances is not able to come together for the Lord's Supper. The terms of identification are made very clear in 1 Cor 11:33 and 34.

> when you come together to eat, wait for one another. [34] If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation.

From the perspective of ritual theories, it is especially relevant to note that Paul assesses problematic and disturbing patterns but that he does not consider them as part of the ritual. In contrast to Galatians 2, where he does not deny that the reclining of Jews and gentiles raises difficulties, and 1 Corinthians 8, where he even tries to influence the outcome of the meals through his own abstinence of meat, and 1 Corinthians 10, where the heterotopy of the body is dependent on the different body parts, 1 Corinthians 11 and Romans 14 do not show at all that negotiation is a substantial part of the ritual. First Corinthians 11 and Romans 14 only give evidence that there are limits of individual identifications when one wants to be part of the body of Christ; either the worship of other gods or the separation within the κοινωνία (community).

Conclusion

We started with the thesis that the texts themselves are products of a ritual practice, have a ritual implication and are therefore inevitably linked to the ritual as such. To study the correlations between text and context I considered early Christianity as a diverse social movement and located the beginnings of Christianity within the social meal practice.

The first section has shown that the "Birth of Christianity" should not be characterized as a singular event of extraordinary significance, but rather as a long-term development, which is embedded in the daily life. Part of the day-to-day experience was the practice of the Hellenistic meal practice, which allowed

experimentation with identity formations. The tension between "not ordinary" and "frequent" was valued as a force that stood for social, political, and religious variation. Hence, the communities could put new social alternatives into practice without disregarding their social status. Consequently, we worked with the picture of many origins of Christianity that originated in everyday life. The question, how one can analyze the relevance of the meal as a ritual practice for the development of NT texts led to the method "ritual exegesis." On the topic of processes of identification, it studies the correlations found between text and context and showed that early Christianity is a diverse social movement, which is reflected within the meal practice.

Central for the generative and creative development of a communal identity of Christ-believers is, from my point of view, the heterotopic idea of the body of Christ that Paul is expressing in his letters. In the ritual-exegesis I focused on the terms of identification of the meal. The NT *topoi*, which are relevant for the terms of identification as a group were κοινωνία (community) and σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (body of Christ). The κοινωνία was understood as the participation at a community and not as the dynamic interaction within the community, whereas σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ is set within a ritual background.

Ritual theories, which clarify the terms of identification theoretically, were those of J. Z. Smith and Bell. They helped to understand that interaction between the participants and participation in a common activity are very much relying on the interaction of the bodies with their environment because bodies are projecting and reabsorbing terms of identification at the same time.

The socio-historical analysis of the order of reclining within the meal showed that the reclining is a situation in which the body's interaction causes one to reflect and rationalize on the fact that what ought to have been done was not done, what ought to have taken place did not occur.

The outline of the ritual-exegesis of the texts showed that Paul is realizing his heterotopic idea of the community as the body of Christ in his texts very differently. In 1 Corinthians 11 and Romans 14 Paul is not at all in favour of diverse social engagements, whereas in Galatians 2 he does not deny difficulties and in 1 Corinthians 8 he even tries to gain influence on the meal behaviour as a role model. First Corinthians 10 takes it even further and relates the meal behaviour to the glory of God.

One can see that Paul is concentrating on utopia and makes it heterotopic because the social, political, and religious matters are not of utopian imagination but of diverse communal experience.

Locating the debate about the "weak" and the "strong" in Romans 14 within the context of the Hellenistic meal led us to the question of identification processes that were described, performed, and transcended during the meal. Knowing that the practice grew because of the semi-private character that was part of everyday life did not only place the meal in common backgrounds but also the development of NT texts. "Ritual exegesis" is a professional approach

for the analysis of interdependence between texts and context and allows, hopefully, further investigation of ritual practices in early Christianity.

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