

Early Christian Prayer and Identity Formation

Edited by
REIDAR HVALVIK and
KARL OLAV SANDNES

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Preface

This book resulted from a research project in the Department of New Testament Studies at the Norwegian School of Theology (MF), Oslo. Some international and mostly national colleagues participated in the two workshops held in Oslo autumn 2011 and 2012, where submitted papers were presented and discussed. The topic, “Early Christian Prayer and Identity Formation,” covers a vast field of material and texts, and within the limits of this volume only some of them have been covered. Some more contributions were planned, but for various reasons did not materialize. The project was financed by our school, for which we are grateful.

We appreciate very much the interest shown to our project already from its initial phase by Professor Jörg Frey, editor of *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* and Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

A special thank is directed to Glenn Wehus who has checked all Greek quotations in the manuscripts, and to Ole Jakob Filtvedt for substantial assistance in compiling the indices.

As we were bringing our project to a close, one of the participants, our colleague and friend through many years, Professor Dr. theol. Hans Kvalbein, passed away. We are glad to publish in this volume what is his last academic contribution. The book is dedicated in gratitude to the memory of him, mentor and friend through years.

Oslo, June, 2014

Reidar Hvalvik and Karl Olav Sandnes

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations, of the names of biblical books and other ancient sources as well as modern periodicals, reference works and serials, follow the rules recommended by the Society of Biblical Literature, as found in Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999).

In addition, the following abbreviations, not found in the *SBL Handbook* (1999 printing) have been used:

BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
ESV	English Standard Version
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NABRE	New American Bible Revised Edition
NET	New English Translation
NETS	A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title
VCSup	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae

Early Christian Prayer and Identity Formation: Introducing the Project

by

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In what is possibly the oldest extant Christian writing, Paul urges his converts to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17 NRSV). The admonition to pray continually is worth observing, since what is done unceasingly becomes naturally conducive in forming people’s identity. However, we do not know to what extent this admonition materialized. Nonetheless, prayer permeates early Christian texts, in practices as well as in instructions and admonitions. Thus the prayer-theme takes us to the practices of the early Christ-believers, or alternatively, to texts on their practice. This study proceeds from the conviction that Christian identity finds one of its most distinct expressions in Christian prayer, and also, conversely, that this identity was shaped and gradually formed by prayers. The old dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi*, about faith made visible in prayer, is a helpful reminder here because it assumes coherence between doctrine and the practice of prayer. It is therefore natural that Christian prayer has received much attention, as seen in recent research.¹

¹ To mention some: Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002); Hermut Löhr, *Studien zum frühchristlichen und frühjüdischen Gebet: Untersuchungen zu 1 Clem 59 bis 61 in seinem literarischen, historischen und theologischen Kontext* (WUNT 160; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer, *Kommunikation mit Gott und Christus: Sprache und Theologie des Gebetes im Neuen Testament* (WUNT 197; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Niclas Förster, *Das gemeinschaftliche Gebet in der Sicht des Lukas* (Biblical Tools and Studies 4; Leuven: Peeters, 2007); Jerome H. Neyrey, *Give God the Glory: Ancient Prayer and Worship in Cultural Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007); Hans Klein, Vasile Mihoc and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, eds., *Das Gebet im Neuen Testament: Vierte Europäische orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sâmbâta de Sus 4–8. August 2007* (WUNT 249; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); Geir Otto Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke–Acts: The Theme of Prayer within the Context of the Legitimizing and Edifying Objective of the Lukan Narrative* (LNTS 433; London: T&T Clark, 2011).

Concurrently with the flourishing of research on the prayer topic, studies in the formation of Christian identity have become increasingly essential to understand early Christianity in general. The question of identity is, in fact, interwoven into the fabric of many disputes among New Testament scholars, albeit the debates are not always framed that way. However, the relevance of the renewed interest in prayer to the debate on early Christian identity has not received its due attention; in short, prayer and identity formation have never been considered in tandem. The aim of the present study is to fill this gap.

In *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (2008), the topic of prayer is not explicitly raised; the term is even missing in the index. It is mentioned in the end though, more or less in passing:

Their faith in Jesus and his unique relation to God, their consequential initiation into a new Messianic congregation through baptism, and the consequences this had had for their common life of prayer (they prayed to Jesus as “our Lord,” *Marana!*) and not least for their communion with non-Jews – all this had started a loosening of their moorings from the earlier unquestioned belonging inside the Jewish people, Israel *kata sarka*. To begin with, it was imperceptible, in the long run inevitable.²

Bengt Holmberg’s observation, conducted somewhat randomly, becomes the focus of the present study. Similarly, James D. G. Dunn in *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* (2010), says that calling upon God through Jesus Christ was “a distinguishing characteristic of the earliest believers.”³

Back in 2003, however, an anthology appeared with an interest very closely related to ours: *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum*, edited by Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer. The present project parts ways with that important study in mainly two issues. In the first place, their study addresses identity and prayer more or less exclusively vis-à-vis the Jewish background of the emerging Christian movement. They rightly state that “Gebetstexte gehören zu den zentralen und deutlichsten Zeugnissen dieser vielsichtigen und komplexen Differenzierungsgeschichte.”⁴ Our study pursues

² Bengt Holmberg, “Early Christian Identity – Some Conclusions,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. Bengt Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 173–78, 176.

³ James D. G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 16. Likewise Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer, “Prayer as Demarcation: The Function of Prayer in the Gospel of John,” in *Das Gebet im Neuen Testament* (ed. Hans Klein, Vasile Mihoc and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr; WUNT 249; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 233–47. Ostmeyer says that prayer in the Fourth Gospel is caught up in deviating terminology aimed at establishing a group distancing itself from others.

⁴ Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer, “Identität zwischen Tradition und Neuschöpfung: Liturgisches Beten in Judentum und Christentum als Quelle eines unabschließbaren Prozesses religiöser Selbstbestimmung,” in *Identität durch Gebet: Zur*

the question of identity not exclusively against a Jewish background, although this remains a significant part of the present study. Some contributions emphasize the relevance of the Greco-Roman world as well.

In the second place, their investigation focuses on “standardisierte Gebete” of liturgical worship, while our study looks beyond “institutional prayers,” by including questions regarding the prayers’ contents, as well as how, where and to whom prayers were addressed. The present study is by no means comprehensive, but approaches – through some specific examples – Christian prayer from the angle of identity as it appears in recent studies on corporative identity, and does so in a way not pursued in the above-mentioned study.

This project was partly anticipated by the dissertation of our colleague Geir Otto Holmås, now published as *Prayer and Vindication in Luke–Acts: The Theme of Prayer within the Context of the Legitimizing and Edifying Objective of the Lukan Narrative* (2011). In his work, Holmås assesses the *function* of prayer in Luke–Acts. He argues that prayer in this double volume primarily provides the audience with identity and legitimation. The present study can be seen as a kind of follow up of the insights from this work.

Prayer

What do we mean by “prayer”? In his article “Gebet I” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Carl Heinz Ratschow introduces the article by saying: “Das Gebet ist allen Religionen als Ausdruck menschlicher Zuwendung zur Gotttheit eigen.”⁵ According to John Chrysostom, prayer is act of conversing with God (*Hom. Gen. 30.5*), thus assuming a profound relationship. According to H. S. Versnel, prayer in Antiquity generally followed a tripartite pattern: Usually it the prayer is was introduced with an invocation. The suppliant would explain why he or she was calling upon the gods. This often included references to familiarity and trust in the deity, which also might include laudatory aspects as well as gratitude. Upon this would follow an actual wish.⁶ Early Christian texts give a wide range of terms to describe prayer, such as προσεύχομαι/ προσευχή, εὔχομαι/εὐχή, δέομαι, αἰτέω, ἐπικαλέω, ἔρωτάω. In addition to this, there are a number of terms denoting worship

gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum (ed. Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer; Studien zu Judentum und Christentum; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 13–19, 14.

⁵ *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (ed. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller; 36 vols.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977–2007), 12:31–34, 31.

⁶ H. S. Versnel, “Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer,” in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (ed. H. S. Versnel; Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 2; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 1–64, 2.

more generally, but which may also include prayer, such as προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, ὁμολογέω, εὐχαριστέω/εὐχαριστία, ψάλλω, λειτουργέω/ λειτουργία, αἰνέω. Some of these terms overlap, sometimes even considerably, with prayer. In short, it is hardly possible to distinguish semantically between them. An example is 1 Timothy 2:1 where δέησις, προσευχή, ἔντευξις, and εὐχαριστία are mentioned side by side; they are held together in the one following preposition (ὑπέρ), uniting them all. To limit this study to texts featuring specific terms, would be tantamount to the exclusion of that which might have a bearing upon our topic.

Accordingly, prayer is not restricted to texts where terms for prayer appear. To proceed from a linguistic-labelling basis will therefore not suffice. In his above-mentioned book, Geir Otto Holmås has discussed the semantic fields involved. He points out that it is necessary not to restrict prayer simply to requests for presumed needs, but by the same token, one must also avoid including any kind of speech addressed to God. There is a risk both in limiting the material too much, and also in extending it too widely. It would also imply a dramatic narrowing of the perspective if we went about this according to a formal definition, such as texts with a direct address to God and/or Christ uttered in the optative or imperative. A working definition, broad enough to include the complexity found in the material itself, is called for. In short, the purpose is to find how and where “prayer” is situated within the wider framework of worship and piety. Academically precise and clear-cut definitions do not always find complete corroboration in the material to be investigated. This seems to be the case with regard to prayer, since it is a phenomenon with many complexities, and hence hard to define. The present volume provides a definition that, due to the nature of the material, tends to be relatively open. The working definition for the contributions will be as follows: *Prayer is a verbal and nonverbal communication with God, proceeding from a relationship of trust. This act of communication usually has a purpose, either in seeking divine assistance, guidance, or some kind of intervention. Since this act of communication is integrated in a relationship, prayer includes gratitude, adoration and praises as well.*

Identity

The second key word in this study is “identity.” Identity is, indeed, a complex phenomenon, involving individual as well as collective social aspects. It is a process of shaping, characterized by variety and fragility. Therefore, it is not one continuous uniform process we are delving into. Multiple and nested identities make identity formation a continual shifting process. Finally, Christian identity emerges as a result of many aspects – one of which is

prayer – and therefore it is hardly possible to present it as following one single straightforward line of development. The prayer life of nascent Christianity is a phenomenon at the crossroads between idiosyncrasy and common ground with other people, between verbal and non-verbal aspects, between texts and rituals, between rhetoric and reality, between construction and fact, between texts shaping Christian belief and actual social practices, between what is found in the sources and what is observable in real life, between male and female, between slaves and people of status and means.

The contributors to this volume share the opinion that the role of prayer in the formation of Christian identity is to be sought precisely at these junctions, but they may else hold different views on many aspects involved in this study. To understand the process of identity formation, it is essential not to perceive it solely as a process of “othering” – i.e., what separates the believers from out-groups – but also to include common ground with Jews as well as pagans, be it idiosyncratic or not. Not every aspect of early Christian prayer was distinct; it may still have been characteristic. To take one example, the bodily gestures, i.e., the non-verbal aspects, accompanying prayer did not necessarily separate the Christians from other practitioners of prayer in Antiquity, be they Jewish or pagan. However, the interpretation of bodily gestures gradually resonated with Christian faith and identity. It is implied that these gestures developed hardly at all from a given identity, but that they were later interpreted accordingly. In order to catch how the identity formation proceeded, the present volume, with regard to Christian texts, addresses sources from the New Testament until Augustine.

In Jesus’ prayer instruction, as rendered in Matthew 6, it is obvious that the prayer of his disciples is seen against the background of who they are, and who they are not. Jesus presents his instruction vis-à-vis Gentiles and certain hypocritical forms of Jewish piety, thus forming an ideal prayer yet within a context of Jewish piety. Luke’s Gospel, chap. 11 gives a somewhat different picture, but the nexus between who the disciples are and how they pray is affirmed. The so-called Lord’s Prayer is Jesus’ response to his disciples urging him to teach them how to pray, “like John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). Prayer is shaped by discipleship, and, by the same token, discipleship forms prayer. Whose disciples they are, be they John’s or Jesus’, is determined by their prayers. In these passages, the Lord’s Prayer becomes important primarily because *he* taught it, not because it alters traditional Jewish prayers.

Jesus of the Fourth Gospel addresses prayer in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42) as being in continuity as well as in discontinuity with Jewish traditions. The Jews are included here in the in-group (“we”) contrasted with “you” (the Samaritans), but the place of worship is altered from Jerusalem and Gerizim to anywhere, and to worship in Spirit

and truth. The Fourth Gospel implies that Jesus, through his ministry, brings Jewish prayer to a fulfilment.

This is not a monograph covering all necessary sources in order to provide a coherent picture. The aim is more modest; it provides examples of importance in order to understand this process. A simple and direct continuity and coherence between prayer practices, witnessed in later sources, and the New Testament texts and time cannot be taken for granted. Nonetheless, as we enter the hotly debated question of how early in time it makes sense to speak of a specific Christian identity, questions of chronology cannot be evaded, simply because in this question chronology matters. According to Anders Runesson, “(t)he English terms ‘Christianity’ and ‘Christians,’ despite their Greek origin and the use of *Christianos* three times in the New Testament, can be applied only anachronistically to a first-century context.”⁷ The view that real Christian identity is a later phenomenon (from the Constantinian era) can only be tested either by asking what identity really is, or by making reference to texts representing practices and attitudes that claim to be older. From this it follows that when relevant, attempts will be made to move backwards from later Christian sources.

In his important book *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (1999),⁸ Gerd Theissen presents a compelling theory of how Christian belief first manifested itself. He speaks of a system of signs holding religion together. He speaks of “myths,” foundational beliefs and narratives, rituals, behaviour patterns and a net of social relations. As for rituals, he says that they “replace the traditional sacrifices”; examples of such rituals are the Eucharist, baptism, the laying on of hands, foot washing, and the holy kiss. Surprisingly, he does not mention prayer; neither does this word occur in his general index of subjects. As our project will demonstrate, there is sufficient ground to say that in many early Christian texts prayer was likewise seen as a spiritual sacrifice, and thus of much relevance to Theissen’s helpful theory. Prayer practices are to be seen as identity forming behaviour: “Es gilt im Allgemeinen als unbestritten, dass es einen eigen Zusammenhang gibt zwischen Riten und der Identität von Gruppen, Gemeinschaften.”⁹ Rites mirrors identity, be it an

⁷ Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. Bengt Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59–92, 71.

⁸ Gerd Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1999). American edition: *The Religion of the Earliest Churches: Creating a Symbolic World* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1999).

⁹ Gerard Rouwhorst, “Identität durch Gebet: Gebetstexte als Zeugen eines jahrhundertelangen Ringens um Kontinuität und Differenz zwischen Judentum und Christentum,” in *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 37–55, 37.

already existing identity or the shaping of such. Construing Christian identity from prayer involves practices, values, and ideas not primarily associated with individuals. In the word of Gerard Rouwhorst, what prayer has in common with rituals is that both convey “mehr über die Identität einer Gruppe als die Schriften bestimmter Einzelner Denker oder Theologen.”¹⁰

The Contributions of the Present Study

The questions and topics which set the agenda for the studies presented here are as follows:

- In which ways was identity in nascent Christianity shaped by prayer?
- How did the believers pray? This applies both to the prayers’ content and to practices.
- In what way does prayer, and practices associated with prayer, provide insight into an ongoing process of identity formation?
- Since it does not make sense to decide whether prayer or identity comes first, their mutual relationship will be focused on.
- Did prayer among the Christ-believers make any difference with regard to gender and status? This brings into play a contingent perspective on the process of identity formation.

These questions have been addressed in the following contributions, presented here in abstracts.

The investigation starts with MIKAEL TELLBE approaching the question of how to define identity. The social identity of an in-group is generated through common symbols, narratives, acts or rituals, all creating a social dimension. Such identity is shaped through negotiation, dialogue and conflicts with others, or within the group itself. The identity of early Christians is constructed through texts that provide glimpses of complex experiences. In his second contribution, Tellbe addresses the Epistle to the Ephesians, which contains several sections on prayer. This paper is structured according to his contribution regarding identity, and thus serves to exemplify the theories. The author of Ephesians is engaged in the formation and reinforcement of the social identity of a Christ-believing community. The language of worship and prayer serves this process. By praying his own theology, the author sets his teaching within a three-part relationship of author, addressees and God.

LARRY HURTADO investigates the place of Jesus in earliest Christian prayer, finding it to be multi-faceted, significant, and without precedent or analogy in Second Temple Jewish tradition. Jesus functions as heavenly

¹⁰ Rouwhorst, “Identität durch Gebet,” 38.

intercessor and advocate, teacher and role model of prayer, recipient of prayer-appeals and cultic invocation, and as the one through whom valid prayer is made to God. Indeed, Jesus' unique status as God's Son serves as the basis for, and the frame within which early believers addressed God as "Father," giving their prayer a distinctive character. Moreover, the place of Jesus in early Christian prayer was an important factor in the early emergence of a distinctive Christian identity.

Prayer in practice involves nonverbal aspects as well. These are addressed by REIDAR HVALVIK. Prayer implies posture, gesture, space, direction and time. All aspects are conducive to expressing or forming the identity of an in-group. Certainly, some of the gestures are universal, akin to the phenomenon of prayer generally, but some have become characteristics of early Christian prayer. They may not be unique, but they still appear as typical for Christians, particularly so in the ways that they are interpreted. Praying towards the east serves as an example here, both of common ground and of Christian idiosyncrasy. Hvalvik also presents the common motif of the orans or orante, a (female) figure of a person at prayer, found in early Christian pictorial art.

GEIR OTTO HOLMÅS investigates Matthew and Luke, examining the role of prayer in an on-going process of "othering." Focus is given to the Lord's Prayer and Jesus' assertion that the temple had failed its function as a "house of prayer." Matthew instructively introduces the Lord's Prayer as a means of drawing boundaries, setting appropriate worship over against others ("the hypocrites"). Holmås argues that according to Matthew, the community was taking the place of the temple, which had ceased to be a prayer house under its failed leadership. The Lord's Prayer bears clear marks of a Jewish self-definition. It is with reference to shared traditions and values that the community was exhorted to surpass the righteousness of the hypocrites. Thus boundaries and closeness belong together. In Luke, prayer occupies a special role in defining identity. Here the Lord's Prayer is set over against the Baptist movement. Luke's rendering of Jesus' action in the temple portends Jerusalem's fate due to the city's blindness and unbelief. Nevertheless, Luke emphasizes the continuity with the piety of faithful Israel. The visitation of Jesus as the Messiah was decisive for drawing boundaries. Authentic worship takes place among Jews and Gentiles centered around Jesus, thus fulfilling Israel's hope.

ANNA REBECCA SOLEVÅG investigates how prayer and identity, with particular emphasis on gender and status, is situated in Acts and the Pastoral Epistles. She finds that prayer is a unifying identity marker, but also that different subgroups within the community come into special and variegated forms when prayer is the issue. Studies in early Christian identity must take intersectionality into account, and not speak unqualified or make generalizations about Christians. It mattered if you were a free male, a slave

or an independent woman. The issue of prayer makes this pertinent. From this, it follows that Christian identity was constructed differently within the in-group.

According to OLE JAKOB FILTVEDT, in Hebrews Christ is the ideal representative of the people of God; this is expressed particularly through texts discussing prayer, such as 5:7–10. It is important to grasp how Jesus' role as the brother of the addressees functions within this literature. Jesus demonstrated his character when he trusted his life to God during his sufferings. The argument of Hebrews moves from Christology to exhortation, thus making the identity of Christ and his prayers crucial for how members of God's people were to think about their identity. Similarities as well as differences appear in this analogous relationship. The identity of the Jesus-believers emerges from a tension between present suffering and future perfection, and is cultivated through prayer, for Christ and his followers alike.

CRAIG R. KOESTER's contribution on the Book of Revelation raises the question of how the visionary world in this literature relates to the social world of the early Christians. The heavenly worship depicted does not provide a model for prayer in the communities addressed. However, the Book of Revelation addresses a social context in which identity was a matter of dispute. Within that context, the heavenly worship provides a focus for prayer even among the communities. The heavenly worship transforms elements from Jewish temple worship and Greco-Roman practices in a way that centers prayer on what is distinctive of Christian worship: Jesus the Lamb, and God, whose authority is exercised through the Lamb. Prayer is offered to Jesus as well as to God. This provides a common center for worship, distinguishing its members from others. The identity formation proceeds both from a past defined by Jesus' saving work, and from a promised future; hence it is ongoing, anticipating the coming of the Lord Jesus (Rev 22:20).

The role of the Lord's Prayer comes into play in several papers; it clearly served as a distinctive mark of discipleship from early on. KARL OLAV SANDNES approaches the role of this prayer in shaping a distinct identity, from the angle of the two oldest treatises on this prayer, namely Tertullian and Cyprian, concentrating on the implications of calling God "our God." As the "first prayer" assigned to baptizands, *Pater Noster* brings out the privileged position of those baptized, and serves to reinforce unity and identity among them. These observations taken from the two Latin treatises are not without antecedents in some New Testament passages, albeit not as clear or vocal.

HANS KVALBEIN addresses the Lord's Prayer and the Eucharist prayers in *Didache*, arguing that the latter is in fact patterned on the Lord's Prayer, thus indicating the importance of this prayer. *Didache* witnesses a community that has distanced itself from both Jews and pagans. Although Jewish heritage looms large, a separate community is portrayed nonetheless. This duality

comes through in the Lord's Prayer, where the address "Our Father" and the prayer that God's kingdom may come hardly have Jewish equivalents. *Didache* 8–10 give relevant information on ritual practices, which is essential for understanding the religious identity of this community. Jesus figures prominently in the prayers found here.

REIDAR AASGAARD points out that even at the time of Augustine, matters of identity were important. Augustine's works show a strong awareness in shaping Christians both individually and collectively for the church. Emphasis is given to *Confessions*, which was intended as a means of forming a Christian identity. Prayer includes all dimensions of human life, and thus forms the person in all aspects of his/her life. *Confessions* not only shows an idiosyncratic thinker and unique personality; Augustine emerges also as a child of his time and church. Augustine searches for the self, and finds it in dialogue with God and fellow human beings. Hence, although the formation of Christian identity is very much a formation of his heart, it takes place within the church, as a joint venture with others. The question of identity is an ongoing forward-looking process, which Augustine now experiences only in preliminary and/or limited stages.

ANASTASIA MARAVELA presents Christian Greek papyri from Egypt (3rd – 5th C.E.). In a unique way they are direct witnesses of prayer, ideology and practices, yet they have not received their due attention. Although people addressed God in prayer, for their needs and to offer thanks to him, rather than to give an account of identity, it is nonetheless possible to tease out intimations of identity from these fragmentary texts. The pervasiveness of Jesus and God is the primary identity-creating force. Christian identity in these prayers is crafted through interaction with Old Testament texts or narratives, or with key narrative elements from the Jesus history (*historiola*). These elements serve to explain that it is worthwhile to approach God or Jesus in petitionary prayers. This practice equals Greek pagan prayers, which often included a narrative part evoking actions of the deity being approached or to pieces taken from mythology. At times, the prayers integrate alien elements.

Taking his point of departure from the Valentinian *Apolytrosis*, NICLAS FÖRSTER delves into certain formulae of prayer, conveying a Gnostic identity. *Apolytrosis* was a death ritual, mentioned in Nag Hammadi texts such as the Gospel of Philip, but known primarily from Irenaeus' and Hippolytus' accounts of the Marcosians. From these two authors, we learn how firmly established this ceremony was in the life of these groups. The prayer formula, known as *apolytrosis*, encapsulated Gnostic ideas and prepared the dead – on the journey towards salvation in Plerōma – for the judgment, for which the Demiurge was responsible. The formula worked as kind of a secret code or password. In the third century C.E., the formula was fundamental to Gnostic bishops, who had passed on this formula to believers about to die. Knowledge

of this prayer confirmed and preserved the idea of an elite united with their bishop, and became a particular mark of identity for the Marcosians.

GLENN WEHUS delves into the philosophical writings of Epictetus, for whom his own Stoic identity and view of prayer are intimately connected. Epictetus teaches his students to place their desires and passions only in things that are “up to them,” and to consider everything “not up to them” with indifference. This distinction is fundamental to his Stoic identity. Through reason and intellect God has enabled human beings to cope with this difference, and to accommodate to it. Legitimate prayers aim to internalize this distinction. Some prayers are illegitimate in building Stoic identity: petitions and lamentations that are superfluous and reveal their lack of Stoic identity. The Stoic remains in constant communication with God when facing the real life, which is threatening to a Stoic life. Prayer *is* therefore present in Epictetus identity formation *per se*.

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Identity and Prayer

by

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What are we looking for when we set out to examine the interrelationship between identity and prayer? In what way could prayers – personal and collective – express, form and reaffirm identities? The purpose of this introductory chapter is, first, to elaborate on the definition of “identity” and the process of social identity formation. A couple of theories concerning social identity will be presented that I find to be potentially helpful in the task of examining issues relating to early Christian identity formation. These theories will then, secondly, be related to the main task of this research project, namely to investigate how prayers may express and articulate identities and how prayers are used to form and reaffirm identities.

From the outset, I want to make clear that I am not a sociologist but a biblical scholar. As such, I try to read the New Testament texts from new perspectives such as social identity theories and others. Being aware of my limitations in the field of social theories and how to use these theories most effectively, I do however see many possibilities and promising paths to follow as we examine the ancient texts with the help of modern social theories and perspectives. Admittedly, an intrinsic commensurability between ancient and modern societies cannot be demonstrated. Therefore, we have to do this with care, always being aware of the so-called “sociological fallacy,” i.e., using modern social theories as though they can be safely transposed across the centuries without further verification.¹

1. Definitions

Commenting on the concept of “identity,” David Horrell points out that this term “has become something of a buzzword in recent social science and in

¹ See Edwin A. Judge, “The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History,” *JRH* 11 (1980): 201–17, 210.

studies of early Christianity.”² In the field of biblical studies, it has become very popular in the last twenty years or so to focus on identity issues and on the process of the formation of early Christian identity, in particular in relation to the process of the so-called “parting of the ways.” However, the term “identity” is not so easily defined, belonging as it originally does to theories about the character of the human individual.

Today most scholars agree that we may speak of at least two types of identity. First, there is the more individualistic-focused use of the term (personal identity) and, secondly, there is the collective use of the term (social identity). The personal identity includes the unique personal characteristics of the single individual, while the social identity refers to the memberships the individual claims in various groups or the identity of the collective group. In both uses, identity is seen as a social construct by the subjects under investigation and as something flexible, not as something fixed and static.

1.1. Personal identity

Individual identity may be described as the individual self, defining the self in terms of idiosyncratic personal relationships and traits. The self is here defined as all the statements a person makes that include the word “I.” This identity consists of multiple identities or roles; an individual does not just have one identity but several identities, not all of them being important and salient in all situations: a) persons may have multiple role identities within a single group, b) persons may have similar role identities in more than one group, and c) persons may have different role identities within interacting groups.³ Thus, I have several identities, for example, I am a man, a Swede, a husband, a father, a Christian, a scholar, a pastor, a birdwatcher, etc. Social scientists call this a “hierarchy of nested identities”. In the case of the individual, these different identities hang together by the fact of belonging to the same specific human being.⁴

Accordingly, personal identity is the meaning that an individual holds for himself about what it means to be who he or she is. This approach focuses on the individual self, on identities housed in the individual, but also how these

² David G. Horrell, “‘Becoming Christian’: Solidifying Christian Identity and Content,” in *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Sciences Approaches* (ed. Anthony J. Blasi, Jean Duhaime and Paul-André Durcotte; Oxford: Altamina Press, 2002), 309–35, 311.

³ Peter J. Burke, “Relationships among Multiple Identities,” in *Advances in Identity Theory and Research* (ed. Peter J. Burke; New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2003), 195–216, 200–201.

⁴ Bengt Holmberg, “Understanding the First Hundred Years of Christian Identity,” in *Exploring Christian Identity* (ed. Bengt Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 1–32, 28.

manifest themselves in social relations or social structures. In social psychology theories concerning identity stress is often put on the interplay of self and social structures. Two of the most influential sociologists of the twentieth century, Peter Bergman and Thomas Luckmann, say in a classic statement: “Identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society.”⁵ Their point is that identity, a key element of subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society. In social psychology, therefore, it can be said that the core of an identity is “the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role and incorporating into the self the meanings and expectations associated with the role and its performance.”⁶

1.2. Social Identity

The term “identity” is basically a social concept; identities, whether modern or ancient ones, are shaped and formed in relation to other individuals or groups. The British sociologist Richard Jenkins even argues that “all human identities are by definition *social* identities.”⁷ As a social construct, “identity” is not static or single; it normally consists of a complex compound of multiple social, ethnic, political and religious factors, and is formed, modified and reshaped in the continuous dialectic process between social relations and social structures, between the individual and society.⁸

As such, “social identity” can be defined in two ways. First, it can be defined as the identity of a social group (“group identity”). This view of identity corresponds mainly to questions such as: Who are we? What distinguish us from other groups in this society? Where do we draw lines between our group and others? This concerns mainly group-members’ common sense of belonging together in a particular, ethnic, cultural, religious and social minority group.⁹ An in-group is thus generally defined as a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category (cognitive dimension), share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves (affective dimension), and achieve

⁵ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 174.

⁶ Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, “A Sociological Approach to Self and Identity,” in *Handbook of Self and Identity* (ed. Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke; New York: Guilford, 2003), 128–52, 134.

⁷ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2004), 4 (italics his). Jenkins (*ibid.*, 5) defines “identity” as “our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others (which include us)”.

⁸ Cf. the phenomenological discussion of identity in Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 173–80.

⁹ Cf. Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of Early Christians: Associations, Judeans and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 6.

some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership in it (evaluative dimension).

Secondly, social science has mainly focused on defining self in terms of group membership, i.e., the individual's self-concepts as it pertains to positions or roles within social groupings. Social identity theorists who follow the lead of the social psychologist Henri Tajfel tend to use the term "social identity" to refer to an individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership.¹⁰ This aspect of identity answers questions such as: Who am I? How am I in this particular situation? How does this relate to who I am in other social groups? How does this self-understanding affect my belonging in this particular group? "Social identity" is thus the outcome of a process, whereby an individual's patterns of thoughts, feelings and actions have been attributed to significant group members and the individual has incorporated these as a mental image. Hence, social identity results in an individual's perception of belonging to a social in-group (e.g., the house of Israel, a kin group, a Jesus group, an "ethnic" group). In becoming part of a group, "individuals do not lose all sense of self, rather, they shift from the personal to the social level of identification. . . . The criterion for action shifts from the personal to the social categorical level."¹¹ Consequently, social identity can be contrasted with the abstracted identity of a group or movement as a whole (e.g., "Israel is the people of God").

As the individual thinks of himself/herself and others as belonging to the group, he or she stereotypes both himself/herself and other in-group members. The interest of the group becomes the interest of the individual, and the norms of the group become the norms of the individual. Identification of oneself as belonging to a group means that the self is experienced as similar to the in-group prototype and interdependent on other group members, but it does not generally mean a loss of the self as a distinctive agent, nor that the individual stops engaging in introspection, not even in collectivistic cultures.¹²

¹⁰ See Henri Tajfel, "Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison," in *Differentiation Between Social Groups* (ed. Henri Tajfel; London: Academic Press, 1978), 61–76; idem., *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); idem., *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); John C. Turner, "Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group," in *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (ed. Henri Tajfel; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 15–40.

¹¹ Stephen Reicher, Russel Spears, and Tom Potsmes, "Model a Social Identity of Deindividuation Phenomena," *European Review of Social Psychology* 6 (1995): 161–98, 177.

¹² See Rikard Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer: A Cognitive Perspective on Identity and Behavior Norms in Ephesians* (Linköping Studies in Arts and Science 493/Linköping Studies in Identity and Pluralism 10; Linköping University, 2009), 61.

Both insiders and outsiders think and reflect about identity, and therefore social identity is constantly “negotiated.” It is not a static character, nor the essence, or the “soul” of a group, but an ongoing, relational process of self-understanding and self-categorization, often with a strongly ideological perspective.¹³ The process of self-definition and social identity formation implies differentiation from one or more “others” by the drawing up of boundary lines, so-called “othering.” The “other,” or the enemy, becomes an intrinsic part of a group’s self-definition; the authors understand themselves and their readers in terms of the “other,” by insisting on what one is not. Difference and similarity reflect each other across a shared boundary; as expressed by Jenkins, “at the boundary we discover what we are in what we are not.”¹⁴ Hence, the definition of deviants, antitypes and “outsiders” becomes significant as a way of defining the prototypical member, the normative “insider,” and the social identity of the group. This process may be referred to as a form of categorization, a process that is based on stereotyping, whether positively (of group members) or negatively (of non-members).

In contrast to the more individualistic tendencies of modern, Western societies and personality development in those cultures, Bruce Malina and others have drawn attention to the primarily collective character of ancient Greco-Roman societies and the dyadic or group-oriented nature of ancient personalities.¹⁵ In collective cultures such as the ancient Mediterranean, the private self so dear to contemporary individualism was considered of little or no interest. In collectivistic cultures, people are socialized into the value that it is not my unique features that are valuable and stable but the features of the social context to which I belong. Malina introduces the concept of “dyadic personality,” even arguing that the collectively oriented persons of the Mediterranean world did not find introspection meaningful and interesting, since their identity was confirmed in interaction with others.¹⁶

2. Identity and Prayer

In studying identity formation in antiquity from the perspective of prayer, in particularly in the Hebrew and early Christian texts, I find it is most helpful to elaborate on social identity theories. This is primarily because that these texts were written in the Mediterranean collective culture with the purpose of

¹³ Cf. Holmberg, “Understanding,” 29.

¹⁴ Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 79.

¹⁵ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 58–80.

¹⁶ Malina, *New Testament World*, 66–68. This conclusion has however been questioned by several scholars, see Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 59–60.

forming the identity of the Jewish and Christian communities. Even the personal and individual prayers of, for example, the Psalms were meant to be read and prayed in a community setting in order to form the identity of the people of God. In the following discussion, I will therefore briefly present some relevant social identity theories that could be helpful as we elaborate on the role of prayer in the process of identity formation.

2.1. *Rituals, Identity and Prayer*

The social identity of an in-group is ordinarily based on common behavior norms and values.¹⁷ We do things together in order to express our collective identity. In this way, symbols and symbolic acts generate a sense of shared belonging.¹⁸ An aspect of this is ritual, what Catherine Bell calls “the social dimensions of religion.”¹⁹

Rituals are typical examples of identity forming behavior and actions.²⁰ According to Richard Jenkins, “The enhancement of experience which ritual offers cognitively and particularly emotionally, plays an important role in the internalization of identification.”²¹ For example, in order to express their belief (identity) early Christ-believing Jews and Gentiles began to replace traditional ritual actions (e.g., bloody animal sacrifices) by new (bloodless) rites, by the Eucharist, baptism, the laying on of hands, foot-washing and by the holy kiss.²² There is a thus close relation between belief and ritual. Ritual is generally thought to express beliefs in symbolic ways for the purposes of their continual reaffirmation and inculcation.²³ In this way, ritual is symbolic action, representing what the society holds to be of primary importance, or indeed the very structure of the society. Rituals could be seasonal rites commemorating historical events (Easter, Pentecost, etc.), rites of passage (e.g., baptism), rites of communion (the Lord’s Supper), or rites of devotions (e.g., prayers and supplications). In this way, rituals communicate the fundamental

¹⁷ See Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 63–88.

¹⁸ Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 111–12.

¹⁹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22.

²⁰ See Gerhard Rouwhorst, “Identität durch Gebet: Gebetstexte als Zeugen eines jahrhundertelangen Ringens zum Kontinuität und Differenz zwischen Judentum und Christentum,” in *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer; Studien zu Judentum und Christentum; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 37–55, 38.

²¹ Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 150–51.

²² Gerd Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 123–24.

²³ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 182.

beliefs and values of a society or a group. Rituals are “per-formative” in the meaning that they create as well as reflect social reality.²⁴

Performative theory is the scientific attempt to conceptualize ritual as a process by which acts and utterances are formalized into performatives, that is, kinds of concrete practice set apart from quotidian life and endowed with creative or generative qualities.²⁵ While performatives were previously made a subject of discussion under the aspects of stereotyping, rigidity and violence, it is today common to concentrate on productive moments of rituals that contribute to making and forming the identity of communities and individuals. Particularly evident in the work of Roy Rappaport, one of the most important contributions of the theory of ritual performance, is the observation of how identity and ritual correlate.²⁶ According to Rappaport, the conjunction of cognitive structure and concrete practice takes place in ritualized performance. Identity in this sense, then, is a composite reciprocity of cognition and practice, ideal form and concrete content, conjoined in the ritualized performances that constitute and circumscribe the shared life-world of a community. Thus, rituals are embodied expressions of identity; identity is constituted by the ritual participants becoming aware of their place in the relational field of ritual action. According to Köpping, Leistle and Rudolph, “ritual as performance functions as an extraordinary powerful means to confirm, alter or even subvert individual and collective processes of identity-formation.”²⁷

Thus, early Christian texts may be examined in light of this performative composite of structure and practice in order to advance our understanding of the performative process behind the formation and maintenance of early Christian identity. For example, performative features in the baptism rite transform reality by actualizing a cognized environment distinct to early Christian communities, thereby providing us a glimpse into the illocutionary process by which a Christian identity was produced.²⁸ Furthermore, also rituals of prayer expressed this identity; for example, as the early Christ-believers prayed in the name of Jesus they expressed their particular self-understanding as believers in relation to Jesus Christ.

²⁴ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 142.

²⁵ For a basic introduction to performative theory, see Klaus-Peter Köpping, Bernhard Leistle, and Michael Rudolph, *Ritual and Identity: Performative Practices as Effective Transformations of Social Reality* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006).

²⁶ See Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁷ Köpping, Leistle and Rudolph, *Ritual and Identity*, 28.

²⁸ See Stephen Richard Turley, “Ritual and Identity: A Case Study in Early Christian Baptism” (<http://ocabs.org/journal/index.php/jocabs/article/viewFile/54/25>), 2. Cf. Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 142.

Some prayers in the New Testament can be understood as more formal prayers, for example, the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6:9–13. This prayer was picked up early as a ritual prayer in the early Christian movement; for example, in *Did.* 8.3, it is explicitly stated: "Pray like this three times a day." In 1 Tim 2:1–8, prayer is set in a ritualistic, more formalized setting: "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer" (v 8). Raised hands marked the shared social identity of the believing in-group. Moreover, in James 5:14 explicit ritualistic guidelines are given about how to pray for a sick person: a) call the elders of the church, b) pray over him, and c) anoint him with oil. In *Did.* 8.1, prayer is closely connected to the ritual of fasting, articulating the identity of the true Christ-believer.

2.2. Ethnicity, Identity and Prayer

In the process of forming and defining social groups, the notion of "identity" is closely related to the complex idea of "ethnicity."²⁹ As has been pointed out, the knowledge of one's membership of a social group, together with the value and significance that is attached to this membership, constitutes the "social identity" of its subject. In this sense the ethnic group is a social, rather than a biological, category; it is defined by socially and discursively constructed criteria rather than by physical indices.³⁰ Accordingly, Jonathan Hall defines an ethnic group "as a social collectivity whose members are united by their subscription to a putative belief in shared descent and to an association with a primordial homeland."³¹ The ethnic identity of a group becomes particularly salient when confronted with other groups; in fact, it can be said that an ethnic group is made by its boundaries. Any ethnic group that gives itself a name is implicitly or explicitly naming itself in relation to, and/or in opposition to, some other name or group. It claims that its members are not the members of some other group, and it asserts that its members constitute an "us" versus the members of other groups, who constitute "them."³² Thus, ethnic identity can only be constituted by opposition to other ethnic identities. However, it is not the boundary itself that makes the ethnic

²⁹ For a general discussion of the definition and relation between the concepts of "identity" and "ethnicity," see Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 13–17. In the following discussion, ethnicity will refer to the combination of the experience of kinship (shared genealogy) and custom (common behavior). Cf. John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 402–3.

³⁰ See Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32–33.

³¹ Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 36.

³² Cf. Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Group and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), 14.

group; it is the ethnic group that makes the boundary, thereby articulating the share of its members in a sense of common origin, a distinctive history and destiny, and in a collective uniqueness and solidarity.

Ancient Mediterranean culture was clearly ethnocentric; people were corporately defined in relation to other groups of people, particularly in relation to other ethnic groups. For example, Jewish notions of ethnicity were shaped, articulated and reinforced particularly during centuries of exile, oppression and dispersion. “Jew” is predominantly the terminology used by the outsiders, and when it appears as a self-designation, it does so in contexts that speak of dealings with outsiders.³³ By their minds and manners the Jews erected a boundary between themselves and the rest of humanity, the non-Jews (i.e., “the Gentiles”). At the core of Jewish Diaspora, identity was found in the notion of shared ethnicity or in the ethnic bond, expressed in the combination of ancestry *and* custom. The Jews in the Diaspora claimed their right to be different, to be free “to live according to their ancestral customs” (2 Macc 11:25). In particular, Jewish identity was expressed through certain rituals as, for example, annual Jewish observances, festivals and feasts, particularly the main festivals of the Jewish calendar, Sabbath gatherings and the annual collection for the Jerusalem temple. Moreover, Jewish identity in the Diaspora was expressed in their links with Jerusalem, “the homeland” and with other Diaspora communities, in the reading and exposition of the Law and Jewish scriptures, in the rejection of alien, pluralist and iconic cults, in Jewish dietary regulations and separatism at meals, in male circumcision, in the upbringing and the education of Jewish children, etc.³⁴

The formation of early Christian identity was a process in constant dialogue and negotiation with Jewish identity. An important aspect of this identity formation can be found in the prayers of second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. The analysis presented in the monograph *Identität durch Gebet* (2003) addresses identity and prayer more or less exclusively vis-a-vis the Jewish background of the emerging Christian movement. The editors rightly say,

Im Blick auf den Differenzierungsprozess zwischen jüdischer und christlicher Identität kommt ein wichtiger Aspekt hinzu, insofern es sich nicht um die Herausbildung eines völlig neuen religiösen Selbstverständnisses handelt, sondern um eine auf gemein-

³³ It was probably the Seleucids who first categorized the Jews as an ἔθνος. See Elias J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 23–29. Significantly, we find the first appearance of the term ἰουδαϊσμός, “Judaism,” in the Maccabean literature, where it describes the most articulated encounters between Jews and Hellenistic culture (2 Macc 2:21; 8:1; 14:38). For example, in 2 Maccabees 6:6 the climax of oppression is reached when “it was not possible to observe the Sabbath or to keep the ancestral festivals, or even to admit to being a Jew (Ἰουδαῖον ὁμολογεῖν εἶναι).”

³⁴ See Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 424–42.

samen Fundamenten wachsende Differenz zwischen jüdischem und christlichem Gottesglauben. . . . Gebetstexte gehören zu den zentralen und deutlichsten Zeugnisse dieser vielsichtigen und komplexen Differenzierungsgeschichte.³⁵

Accordingly, this analysis focuses on issues of continuity and discontinuity between Jewish and early Christian prayers and liturgy: How did Jews and Christians pray? Where is the continuity/discontinuity? How do the prayers of these groups define themselves in relation to God?

The reason why some prayers were collected and kept in the history of the Jewish community and of the Christ-believing community is that prayers expressed who the believers understood them to be. According to Jacob Neusner, rabbinic literature “was created not only to chronicle the past but to promote and justify the world-view of those responsible for its redaction.”³⁶ Prayer may thus express a sense of belonging to the people of God. This is, for example, a common feature of the prayers of Psalms: prayers shaped the national identity of Israel as the people of God (e.g., Pss 46 and 104–107). This is also an important aspect of early Christian prayers. For example, early Christians used the Jewish *berakoth*-prayers as a model for their eulogies and prayers (cf. Luke 1:68; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). Fundamental in these prayers are the self-understanding of the church as the true people of God. Many prayers in the New Testament letters are structured around the theme of belonging, demarcating who belong to the in-group and who belong to the out-group respectively. This may be particularly demonstrated by the way the understanding of the ethnicity of the Christ-believing community is reshaped, for example, in the prayers of the letter to the Ephesians. In these prayers, the out-group of gentile believers are made into an in-group of the people of God, thus increasing the distinctiveness and the self-esteem of the in-group.³⁷

³⁵ Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer, “Identität zwischen Tradition und Neuschöpfung: Liturgisches Beten in Judentum und Christentum als Quelle eines unabschließbaren Prozesses religiöser Selbstbestimmung,” in *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer; Studien zu Judentum und Christentum; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 13–19, 13–14.

³⁶ Quote in Paul F. Bradshaw, “Parallels Between Early Jewish and Christian Prayers,” in *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer; Studien zu Judentum und Christentum; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 21–36, 23.

³⁷ See Mikael Tellbe, “Prayer and Social Identity Formation in the Letter to the Ephesians,” in this volume.

2.3. Narrative, Identity and Prayer

There is a close connection between ritual and myth. Rituals are based on myths, expressing the heart acts of the story.³⁸ In this way, narratives are not just a literary genre but also a way to think and comprehend life: “A narrative is basically a cognitive construct connecting events into temporal and causal chains.”³⁹ The social identity theorist Daniel Bar-Tal recognizes that social identity is not solely based on the mere fact of categorization but on “group beliefs” held by the members.⁴⁰ Every group nourishes a narrative about who they are, why the group exists and has value. In particular, a common history and narrative could provide a rationale and character to group existence.⁴¹ Narratives tell the group who they are and inspire and motivate behavior. In discussing issues of identity and ethnicity, it is not the boundary itself that makes the ethnic group but the ethnic group itself makes the boundary. Thereby the narratives articulate that its members share a sense of common origin, a distinctive history, destiny and identity.

Common meta-narratives and stories have deeper structures, which give a social group meaning and self-understanding. The story of Jesus is a typical example of such a story or narrative. The narrative of God’s saving acts in history and in Jesus Christ was the basic structure of the common group beliefs, which held various clusters of early Christ-believers together, shaping their common social identity.⁴² The individual believer’s conversion and continuing experience could, according to G. W. Stroup, be accommodated as “the lengthy, difficult process of reinterpreting his or her personal history in the light of the narratives and symbols that give the Christian community its identity.”⁴³ The story of Jesus in history, retold orally and re-enacted and modeled by believers, corporately and individually, shaped the boundary lines of belonging as well as of exclusion, a narrative that would have united some, while others would have been disqualified and excluded.

As it concerns identity and prayer, the old dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi*, reminds us that faith is made visible in prayer. A prayer tells a story – about the one a person prays to (the object) but also about the person who prays (the

³⁸ See Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 3–22.

³⁹ Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 13.

⁴⁰ Daniel Bar-Tal, “Group Beliefs as an Expression of Social Identity,” in *Social Identity: International Perspectives* (ed. Stephn Worchel et al.; London: Sage, 1998), 93–113, 94. See also Daniel Bar-Tal, *Group Beliefs: A Conception for Analyzing Group Structure, Processes, and Behavior* (New York: Springer, 1990).

⁴¹ So Bar-Tal, “Group Beliefs,” 112.

⁴² Hence, Lieu (*Christian Identity*, 310–16) proposes that the narrative was the medium through which the first Christ-believers formed their identity.

⁴³ George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 241.

subject). This is a common feature in the Psalms, where the one praying often tells a story about himself (e.g., Pss 13 and 77), and then he relate this story to the meta-story of creation (e.g., Ps 8), Exodus (e.g., Pss 77, 105 and 107), or to the general story of the faithfulness and goodness of God (e.g., Pss 13 and 103). Also the prayers of the New Testament are frequently based on a narrative, serving to form and reaffirm the identity of the one praying or/and of the ones being prayed for. When the author of the letter to the Ephesians prays, he gives the addressees a story to identify with, telling the grand story of God's salvation through his son Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit (so e.g., Eph 1:17; 3:16–17). He continually shapes his prayers around God, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, distinguishing his prayers from the typical Jewish way of praying. The purpose of this story is to strengthen the in-group and to shape cohesion, solidarity and unity of the in-group of Christ-believers.⁴⁴

2.4. Conflict, Identity and Prayer

The sociologist Lewis Coser has provided a classic analysis of the function of social conflicts (1956).⁴⁵ Even though Coser's conclusions have been modified by more recent studies (particularly the functionalistic assumptions which underpin his observations), his main theories on group conflicts are still helpful in considering the impact of conflict in, for example, the process of social identity formation of the early Christian movement. Coser defines social conflict as a "struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals."⁴⁶ A basic thesis for Coser is that "a certain degree of conflict is an essential element in group formation and the persistence of group life," proposing that in-group and out-group conflicts in a social setting have at least four potential characteristics:⁴⁷

First, conflict may serve as a boundary-maintaining and group-binding function. This means that conflict with other groups contributes to the establishment and reaffirmation of the identity of groups and to the maintenance of their boundaries against the surrounding world. Secondly, the closer the relationship, the more intense a conflict seems to be. In conflicts with close groups (e.g., with heretics), it is likely that one side hates the other more intensely the more the opposing group is felt to be a threat to the unity and identity of the in-group. Thirdly, conflicts may serve to define and strengthen group structures and may result in in-group solidarity, enhanced

⁴⁴ This is further developed in Mikael Tellbe, "Prayer and Social Identity Formation in the Letter to the Ephesians," in this volume.

⁴⁵ Lewis A. Coser, *Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956).

⁴⁶ Coser, *Functions of Social Conflict*, 8.

⁴⁷ Coser, *Functions of Social Conflict*, 31.

awareness of in-group identity and a tightening of the group boundaries. Groups engaged in continued struggle with the outside world tend to be intolerant within; they are unlikely to tolerate more than limited departures from the group unity. Fourthly, ideology (the collective aims) that transcends personal interests will make struggles between competing groups more intense. If the antagonists have in common the search for truth and the protection of ideals of the group that they represent, the conflict is likely to be more radical and merciless than conflicts fought for personal reasons.⁴⁸

As pointed out above, it is well known in social psychology that in-group and out-group conflicts can serve to shape and enforce the identity of the group, to clarify boundary markers, and to strengthen the difference between “us” and “them,” between “insiders” and “outsiders.” In particular, the drawing up and articulation of boundaries play an important role in the creation and perpetuation of conflict. The greater the similarity between the group members with regard to values and aspirations, the more acute the social competition within the intergroup becomes.⁴⁹ In intragroup conflicts, people normally dislike in-group members who diverge from in-group norms even more than they dislike out-group members.⁵⁰ Frequently, conflicts with an in-group may heighten in-group bias and results in a stereotypical perception and portrayal of the outsiders by the insiders.⁵¹

Relating Coser’s main theories to the theme of prayer, prayers are commonly related to conflicts. Prayers could arise out of personal or collective conflicts, as may be seen frequently in the book of Psalms where many Psalms are caused by the evil activities of Israel’s enemies (e.g., 9:3–6, 13, 15; 18:1, 3–4, 14, 17–18, 34, 40–41, 48; 89:10, 22, 24, 42, 51). These prayers reveal the self-understanding and identity of the believer, often depicted as a trusting, faithful and god-fearing believer. On the other side, the outsiders are portrayed as deviating enemies who revolt against the will of God. In conflicts the meta-narrative, i.e., the ideology/theology, of the believing in-group is spelled out. As Coser argues, it is often groups standing in close relation to each other that fight most intensely to claim the right to define the true identity (e.g., faithful Israelite against an unfaithful Israelite in the Psalms).

The urgent prayer of the early church in Acts 4:23–31 is a good example of how a collective prayer in a conflict setting articulates the self-understanding

⁴⁸ Coser, *Functions of Social Conflict*, 33–38, 67–72, 87–110, 111–19.

⁴⁹ Richard D. Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder, *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict and Conflict Reduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25.

⁵⁰ See José M. Marques et al., “Social Categorization, Social Identification, and Rejection of Deviant Group Members,” in *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes* (ed. Michael A. Hogg and R. Scott Tindale; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 400–424, 402.

⁵¹ So Louise H. Kidder and Mary Stewart, *The Psychology of Intergroup Relations: Conflict and Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 26–35.

of the praying group. The identity of the Christ-believers is expressed in their strong belief in God as the creator and the God of mighty signs and wonders. The usage of Hebrew texts, Exod 20:11 and Ps 146:6, express the “Jewishness” of the prayer, implying that they believe in the Creator who made a covenant with his people. The Christ-believing community understands itself as standing in an old tradition of the people of God (notice the Christological reading of the royal Psalm 2). As the Sanhedrin and the people of Jerusalem resist the apostles, they act as enemies of God who “conspire against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed” (Acts 4:27). The believers understand themselves as “your servants” (v. 29), who act in the name of “your holy servant Jesus” (v. 30). There is thus a close link between Jesus Christ and the apostles; to resist the community of believers is to resist Jesus Christ. The identity of the in-group is closely connected to their identity as followers and representatives of Christ. In the end, divine signs from heaven confirmed their identity as true believers among the people of Israel (v. 31).

2.5. *Prototypicality, Identity and Prayer*

Closely related to theories on social conflicts is the sociology of deviance, a particular branch of sociological inquiry into crime and rule breaking. An important aspect in an interactionist perspective of deviance is the categorization or labeling of someone/something as deviant by the ascription of names, titles, abuses, invectives, etc. Labeling theory focuses on the interaction between deviants and those who label them as deviants. The purpose of labeling is to cut off the rule-breaker from the rest of the social group by invoking socially shared assumptions that someone thus labeled is essentially and qualitatively different from other members of this group, i.e., an outsider.⁵² The result of this process of deviance is a total change of the identity of the rule-breaker into that of a deviant. As a result, the deviant “acquires a master status derived from the particular area of deviance engaged in.”⁵³ The crucial value for the process of name-calling and boundary-making is that it points to the important function of shaping and enforcing boundaries, of isolating the deviants and of maintaining unity and reinforcing norms and normative value systems within a social group, i.e., the formation of a shared social identity.⁵⁴

The deviance process can be described as the process through which a group arrives at common understandings or revives a waning solidarity.

⁵² Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, “Conflict in Luke-Acts: Labelling and Deviance Theory,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 97–122, 106–7.

⁵³ Lloyd K. Pietersen, “Despicable Deviants: Labelling Theory and the Polemic of the Pastorals,” *Sociology of Religion* 58 (1997): 343–52, 347.

⁵⁴ Cf. Marques et al., “Social Categorization,” 400–424.

Derogation of those who deviate from the in-group is a prescriptive process, which depends on norms that describe whether the in-group characteristics are “good” or “bad” in light of the perceivers’ motivations. In analyzing social group processes, in which people evaluative and upgrade likable in-group members and downgrade unlikable in-group members (“the black sheep effect”), J. M. Marques et al. conclude that deviants are particularly severely derogated when they deviate from the norms that define positive in-group distinctiveness.⁵⁵

Closely related to theories about deviance are social theories about the prototypical in-group member. Stressing the interaction between personal and social identity, the social identity theorist John Turner argues that a person’s self-conception tends to vary in particular group situations, notably by a movement along a continuum from pronounced personal identity at one end of the spectrum to a pronounced social identity at the other. The central idea is that of self-categorization, which refers to the operation of the categorization process as the cognitive basis for group behavior. Self-categorization means that people define themselves in terms of their membership to particular shared social categories.⁵⁶ According to Turner, “There is a depersonalization of the self – a ‘cognitive re-definition of the self’ – from unique attributes and individual differences to shared category memberships and associated stereotypes.”⁵⁷ For example, when a member participates in a group activity, he tends to depersonalize himself and to think of himself in terms of the other members of the group, or at least in contrast to other groups. Self-categorization as a group member leads people to develop a shared group-level fate and regulates whether or not people conform, and expect others to conform, to the group norms.

In any such categorization process, people tend to exaggerate the differences between the categories (accentuation of intergroup difference) and simultaneously to minimize the differences within the categories (assimilation or intragroup similarity).⁵⁸ According to Turner, members of a social group

⁵⁵ Marques et al., “Social Categorization,” 408–9.

⁵⁶ John C. Turner, with Michael A. Hogg et al., *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 42–43, 49. Cf. Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2003), 25.

⁵⁷ John C. Turner, “Some Current Issues in Research on Social Identity and Self-Categorization Theories,” in *Social Identity: Context, Commitment, Content* (ed. Naomi Ellemers, Russell Spears and Bertjan Doosje; Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 6–34, 11; cf. Turner et al., *Rediscovering*, 50–51.

⁵⁸ See Horrell, “Becoming Christian,” 312. Cf. Tajfel, *Human Groups*; Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel; Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47.

belong together in the sense that they stereotype themselves in order to enhance the sense of identity shared with in-group members and to accentuate their similarities within the group and the features that bind them together (*intra*class similarities), while heightening the sense of contrast between themselves and accentuating differences to out-groups (*inter*class differences).⁵⁹ This points to the conclusion that derogation of the in-group deviants increases the subjective validity of the social identity of the in-group.

As an image of depersonalization, i.e., when a person stops being preoccupied by personal agendas and becomes concerned with the interests of the group, Turner draws attention to the development of the idea of prototypicality, i.e., to the prototypical group member.⁶⁰ Social identity theory and self-categorization theory see the self, the group and the prototypical group member as cognitive categories. This means that they are representations in the mind. Contexts create categories and categories generate the prototypical group member. Inside the group, members who act and believe like the prototypical group member will be more appreciated, gain a higher status and have more influence on the other members. Members who deviate from the ideals of the group will be less liked and some sort of reprimand (accusations, shame, expulsion, etc.) will be affected if the deviation is large enough. In cases where the members identify enough with the group and the group values, these reprimands makes the member more motivated to change in order to re-establish his honor within the group. In other words, the in-group members who conform to the in-group prototype validate people's social identity, and thus attract positive reactions.

For example, the main rhetorical device in 1–2 Timothy is the repeated use of a group of “false” teachers as antitypes in contrast to the ideal or prototypical believer.⁶¹ The author uses these teachers both as a warning about what the addressees need to avoid, and as a counterpart to what they ought to attain. In defining the “false” Christ-believer, the true Christ-believer is positively characterized as the godly, well-content and persevering in-group member. The prototypical believer is thus shaped in contradiction to the negative moral standards of the “false” teachers. The leaders, including Paul and Timothy, become the representatives of these group values, in order to strengthen the members' sense of belonging to the group and to confirm their true group identity. The purpose of such a polemic and labeling is to denounce an accepted group of leaders and to transfer them into a non-accepted out-group. In this way boundary markers and norms are shaped and

⁵⁹ So Turner et al., *Rediscovering*, 49.

⁶⁰ Turner et al., *Rediscovering*, 46–47, 79–80.

⁶¹ I have developed this further in Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective* (WUNT 242; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 154–79.

articulated, and they define both the insiders and the outsiders respectively. This is a typical example of a process of categorization, by which the differences between the in-group and the out-group are exaggerated (accentuation), and the differences within the in-group are reduced and captured in the image of the prototypical member of the household (assimilation). In order to strengthen the self-understanding of the in-group members as the true possessor of the Jesus-tradition, and as those who stand in a unique relation to God and to each other, the author labels the in-group-members as “the faithful,” “the chosen” and “brothers and sister.” The key notion of the community of believers becomes the “family/household of God” (οἶκος θεοῦ).

As pointed out above, the Psalms frequently reflect times of conflict and distress. Often these conflicts are not outspoken or open conflicts but yet conflicts between the ways of the unbeliever in contrast to the ways of the believer. Here, the believer or the faithful becomes the prototypical in-group member, who models the ideal believer of the community. In the same way, the unbelievers or the unfaithful becomes the antitype of the true believer. For example, in Psalm 1 the “blessed man” is contrasted with the “wicked man.” In this Psalm, everything is connected to their relation to the Torah respectively, articulated in the contrast between “a tree planted by streams of water” and “chaff that the winds blows away” (vv. 3–4). Analogous contrasts between the prototypical believer and the antitypical, deviating unbeliever (“the wicked”) may also be found in, for example, Pss 9:5, 16–17; 11:2, 5–6; 37:1–2, 9–10, 12–40.

In the New Testament prayers, the prototypical believer is often spelled out in contrast to the unrighteous or false believer (e.g., Matt 6:5–8; Luke 18:9–14), or the deviant believer (e.g., Col 1:9–12; 2:4–5). In the letter to the Ephesians, the prayers function either as an affirmation of the identity of the believers (Eph 1:3–14), as a reminder of what is lacking in the identity of the believers (Eph 3:14–21), or as both a confirmation and a correction of the identity of the believers (Eph 1:15–23).⁶²

2.6. Gender, Identity and Prayer

In addition to the social theories mentioned above, there are several other significant perspectives that may deserve attention as we elaborate on identity and prayer. One such perspective is gender, identity and prayer. While sex is a biological classification of humans into women and men, gender is a cultured knowledge that differentiates them. Gender identity and gender role, the outward manifestations of personality that reflect the gender identity, are

⁶² See Mikael Tellbe, “Prayer and Social Identity Formation in the Letter to the Ephesians,” in this volume.

ordinarily defined as personal conceptions of oneself as male or female. However, gender identity is also a social construct in the sense that the assignments of roles and divisions of competence between sexes are embedded in the social and cultural framework of society.⁶³ Gender ordinarily results from a combination of genetic and social influences, inherent and extrinsic or environmental factors. Gender can thus partly be explained by reference to social processes, cooperating with other structures, such as social location and ethnicity, class and race.⁶⁴ Therefore, in the task of combat feminist hierarchy, hegemony, and exclusivity, many scholars today prefer to use the theoretical tool of “intersectionality,” being defined by Jennifer Nash as “the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors as race, gender, class, and sexuality.”⁶⁵ An intersectional perspective focuses on the intersecting and complex power structures that these different continuums represent.

This theoretical perspective is particularly helpful in analyzing identity and prayer in the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of the ancient Mediterranean society where gender role and social location were closely interrelated. While masculinity had a high cultural value, femininity had generally a low value in a society where women belonged to the lower social strata.⁶⁶ “Characteristic”-terms such as strong, brave, rational and controlled were connected with men, whereas the opposite terms, weak, fearful, emotional and uncontrolled, were connected with women.⁶⁷ In addition, gender-specific behavior was generally embedded in the fundamental values of the Mediterranean societies and was connected to the concepts of honor and shame.

In the Hebrew and Christian tradition, there are several portraits of women in prayer, regularly praying from a marginalized perspective, for example, Hanna’s prayer in 1 Sam 1–2, or Elizabeth’s prayer in Luke 1. In addition to their low status as poor women, Hanna and Elizabeth were also barren, accentuating their marginalized position in the Jewish society. Another

⁶³ So Ekkehard W. Stegemann, and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1999), 361.

⁶⁴ See Mats Alvesson and Yvonne Due Billin, “Beyond Body-Counting: A Discussion of the Social Construction of Gender at Work,” in *Gender, Identity and the Culture of Organizations* (ed. Iris Aaltio and Albert J. Mills; London: Routledge, 2002), 72–91, 73–75.

⁶⁵ Jennifer C. Nash, “Re-thinking Intersectionality,” *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 1–15, 2. See also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Introduction: Exploring the Intersections of Race, Gender, Status, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies,” in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (ed. Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2009), 1–23.

⁶⁶ See Anna Rebecca Solevåg, “Prayer in Acts and the Pastoral Epistles: Intersections of Gender and Class,” in this volume.

⁶⁷ Stegemann and Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement*, 361–62.

example is the Syrian-Phoenician woman, a poor, non-Jewish woman. Both gender, ethnicity and social location shaped her prayer: “She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter . . . even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs” (Mark 7:26, 28). In 1 Cor 11:2–16, women were both praying and prophesying, involving certain claims of authority. Paul’s immediate response is to remind them of their public identity (11:7–10), and thus they should show submission to their men. In 1 Cor 14:33–36 and 1 Tim 2:11–15 the women are not allowed to claim certain positions of authority as they pray, prophecy and teach. While women are asked to show submission at prayer, men are exhorted to pray, “lifting up holy hands” (1 Tim 2:9). All this shows the intimate relation between gender roles and certain expressions of identity.

Other perspectives to be included in analyzing the theme of prayer and identity are certain behavior and customs. We often show what we believe, or do not believe, in certain acts and postures. Thus, in a given social context identity can be expressed by certain nonverbal acts of prayer, such as bodily postures (e.g., standing, kneeling, raising hands), schedules (e.g., the Jewish prayer three times a day), location (e.g., temple, synagogue, the “inner room”), or the direction of the one praying (e.g., towards the east). Even the day of worship and prayer could be an important identity marker, for example, the meaning the early church gave to Sunday as the day of worship. All this tells something about the one praying, and could be seen as outward expressions of certain identity markers.⁶⁸

3. Text and Identity

Finally, a word about the texts in focus of this study. As we begin to explore the interrelationship between prayer and identity in the ancient texts, we are mainly interested in how texts construct the identity of their readers. In fact, we primarily have access to the world of the text and not to the world behind the text. With the word of Judith Lieu, “we can catch partial, but only partial, glimpses of a wider range of social experience than that (which is) directly represented by the texts.”⁶⁹ While acknowledging that texts address contexts, they primarily function to shape and construct the context that they address. Lieu continues: “Indeed, even when we attend to the voice of the text, often that of a particular author, we may not always be confident with how far it is articulating an existing consensus, or how far it is engaged in construction, and only fully successful in that enterprise once it is internalized and

⁶⁸ See Reidar Hvalvik, “Praying with Outstretched Hands: Nonverbal Aspects of Early Christian Prayer and the Question of Identity,” in this volume.

⁶⁹ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 9 (cf. p. 300).

authorized within the community.”⁷⁰ Thus, texts construct a sense of “who we are” – the “textualisation of identity” – even when the texts seem to be engaged in doing something quite different.⁷¹ Lieu draws the conclusion that texts rather *construct* than reflect realities – especially when a text is ascribed an authoritative or “sacred” status. For example, the early Christian communities were formed through its texts; specific formative texts lay at the heart of the formation of the identity of these communities.

This does not mean that we should avoid the demanding task of historical reconstructions. Texts may also reflect the existing realities (both relating to the author and to the community of the addressees). However, as we engage in reconstructing the setting of the text, we need to be sensitive to the constructing and cognitive function of the text, always being aware that the author’s attempt to construct the socio-historical reality of his readers may not in fact have succeeded.

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⁷⁰ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 9.

⁷¹ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 30–31.

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The Place of Jesus in Earliest Christian Prayer and its Import for Early Christian Identity

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The place of Jesus in earliest Christian prayer-practice is multi-faceted, profound, and without true precedent or analogy in the religious setting in which it emerged (Second Temple Jewish tradition). Indeed, the integral place of Jesus in the praying of earliest Christians gives it the character of a novel development of profound significance. Moreover, we see this multi-faceted place of Jesus in early Christian prayer already presupposed in our earliest texts, the letters of Paul. So this development was quite early and rapid, which makes it all the more interesting and intriguing. Also, as we will see in the following discussion, this distinctive “shape” of Christian prayer (typically offered “through” Jesus and/or in Jesus’ name) was an important feature contributing to the distinctive religious identity of early Christianity.

In what follows, I review the several ways in which Jesus features in early Christian beliefs about, and practice of, prayer. We begin by noting the emphasis on the resurrected/exalted Jesus as heavenly intercessor and advocate of believers, which is presented in the NT as giving a special basis and confidence on which believers can offer their prayers. We then turn to references to the earthly Jesus as teacher and role-model of Christian praying/prayer, which served further to give a distinctive shaping to believers’ praying (or at least to their view of their praying). Next, we examine instances where the exalted Jesus is himself sometimes the recipient of prayers, which certainly constitutes a distinctive feature of early Christianity, especially given the Jewish “monotheistic” matrix within which it first developed. Finally, we consider how Jesus functioned as a distinctive basis for prayer to God by believers, this often expressed by references to prayer as offered “through” Jesus or in Jesus’ name. Thus, both individually and, even more so, collectively, these ways in which Jesus functioned in earliest Christian prayer gave it a distinctiveness, this contributing substantially to the emerging distinctive identity of the religious movement that became “Christianity.”

Jesus as Intercessor/Advocate

It is well known that one of the emphases of the epistle to the Hebrews is Jesus' status as heavenly and true high priest (e.g., 2:14–18; 4:14–5:10; 7:15–8:7; 9:11–22; 10:11–14), and I return to this matter later in this discussion. But, though elaborated distinctively in Hebrews, the idea that the exalted Jesus acts as heavenly intercessor for believers is reflected as early as the famous passage in Paul's epistle to the Romans (ὃς καὶ ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, 8:34).¹ Here, Jesus' death, resurrection and high position "at the right hand of God" collectively underscore the efficacy of his intercession, which means that any condemnation of believers from any other quarter is futile. This suggests that Jesus' intercession relates particularly to the establishing of believers as acceptable before God. That Paul here refers to Jesus' intercessory role so briefly and in such compressed phrasing suggests that he was not introducing the idea, but instead presumed an acquaintance with it among his intended readers. Moreover, that this epistle was sent to a church that Paul had not founded suggests that belief in Jesus' heavenly intercession circulated across various early Christian circles.² The term used here, ἐντυγχάνω, could designate petitioning/appealing to rulers and in religious discourse prayers on behalf of others.³

We have another indication of this in the reference to Jesus as believers' "advocate" with/before God in 1 John 2:1 (παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον). Here, the author uses a term found in the NT elsewhere exclusively in the Gospel of John (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:1), where it functions as a kind of title for the Holy Spirit, "the Advocate."⁴ In 1 John 2:1, however, the term is not really a christological title, but instead portrays Jesus' function as advocate before God on behalf of believers. In the immediate context (v. 2), Jesus is also referred to as the "expiation/atonement" (ἰλασμός) for the sins of believers and the whole world, this latter

¹ See, e.g., Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 541–43.

² Horst Balz, "ἐντυγχάνω," *EDNT* 1:461–62 refers to "pre-Pauline tradition" in the reference to Jesus as interceding in Rom 8:34 (citing others who take the same view). It might be more accurate simply to say that the idea was not restricted to Pauline circles. Given the early date of Paul's "conversion," there was precious little time for "pre-Pauline tradition" to develop!

³ See examples cited in MM 219.

⁴ The four uses in the Gospel of John all have the definite article, ὁ παράκλητος, which makes it a title. Among key studies, Otto Betz, *Der Paraklet: Fürsprecher im häretischen Spätjudentum, im Johannes-Evangelium und in neu gefundenen gnostischen Schriften* (AGJU 2; Leiden: Brill, 1963); Raymond E. Brown, "The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 13 (1966–1967): 113–32; George Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John* (SNTSMS 12; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

word applied to him also in 4:10, reinforcing the focus on Jesus' advocacy/intercession as concerned with the sins of believers.⁵

In John 14:16, Jesus promises to ask (ἐρωτάω) "the Father" to give the disciples "another advocate" (the Spirit), and in 17:1–26 we have the famous "high priestly prayer" of Jesus for his followers (ἐρωτάω used several times in vv. 9, 15, 20). This uniquely Johannine composition has the earthly Jesus dramatically prefigured in the intercessory role in heaven reflected in the other texts.

Returning to Paul's reference in Romans 8 to Jesus interceding, it is interesting that earlier in the same chapter he also refers to the Spirit as interceding for believers (8:26, ὑπερευτυχάνει), leading one to wonder how he saw the relationship of the intercessory roles of Jesus and the Spirit. But this may simply reflect Paul's close linkage of the Spirit and the risen Jesus.⁶ In any case, the genuine intercession of both seems to figure in Paul's beliefs.⁷

But there is a difference in the specific nature of the intercessions of each. Paul refers to the Spirit's intercession as somehow assisting believers in their own efforts to pray, apparently compensating for the limited ability of believers to "know how to pray as we ought" (Rom 8:26). By contrast, as noted earlier, Jesus' intercession in Romans 8:34 seems concerned with justifying or defending believers before God against possible accusation. It is not entirely clear whether this is an action which Paul understands as happening in the present or set in the eschatological judgement. The latter option finds some plausibility in the Synoptic references to Jesus either acknowledging or denying people before God, actions which appear to be set in a scene of future reckoning (Mark 8:38/Matt 10:34). On the other hand, the present tense of the verbs in Romans 8:34 may suggest that Paul refers here to Jesus as currently interceding for believers.

To judge from a text such as Hebrews 4:14–16 and 7:25 (which explicitly cite Jesus as priestly intercessor), Jesus' priestly role served as a basis for confidence in prayer. In 4:14–16, the author encourages readers to "approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need" (v. 16), and in 7:25 Jesus' exaltation to a permanent priestly role means that he is "able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." The verb translated "approach" (προσέρχομαι) in these texts seems

⁵ Note also Paul's reference to Jesus with a related word, ἰλαστήριον, and the reference to "the mercy seat" (τὸ ἰλαστήριον) in Hebrews 9:5. See, e.g., Jürgen Roloff, "ἰλαστήριον," *EDNT* 2:185–86.

⁶ E.g., in Rom 8:9 the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ seem to be the same entity, in 8:15–16 the "spirit of sonship" is God's Spirit that bestows a filial status likened to Jesus', and in Gal 4:4–6 "the Spirit of his Son" is obviously God's Spirit.

⁷ Cf. Paul's reference to Elijah interceding with God "against Israel" (ἐντυγχάνει τῷ θεῷ κατὰ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, Rom 11:2).

definitely to carry a cultic/liturgical sense, i.e., approaching God in prayer/worship, as also in Hebrews 10:22.⁸ So earliest Christians saw Jesus' heavenly intercession as involving his petitions on the behalf of believers and also as authenticating and in some sense validating uniquely their own prayer-petitions, giving believers a distinguishing basis for confidence in prayer, indeed, giving early Christian prayer-practice a distinctive and identifying character.⁹

Jesus as Prayer Teacher and Role Model

In early Christian tradition, Jesus also functioned as an example of prayer and as the key teacher of prayer.¹⁰ All four Gospels have references to Jesus praying as well as encouraging and instructing in prayer, although there are interesting variations among them in emphases and even vocabulary.

The Gospel of Matthew includes distinctive material in which Jesus teaches his disciples not to pray for public display as do the "hypocrites" or with long prayers as do Gentiles, but instead to address God in private and with a direct simplicity (Matt 6:5–8, a similar criticism against scribes in Mark 12:40). The Matthean version of the Lord's Prayer immediately follows, which obviously functions here as the model for the kind of direct, simple and confident prayer advocated (6:9–13).¹¹

In contrast, note the setting of the Lord's Prayer in The Gospel of Luke (11:1), which portrays Jesus at prayer himself, and then asked by his disciples to teach them to pray. In Luke's account, thus, Jesus not only teaches a prayer but is pictured as himself modelling prayerfulness for the disciples and readers. Moreover, in this passage the disciples' comparison to John the Baptizer instructing his disciples about prayer tends to underscore the distinguishing and identifying function of the Lord's Prayer as given distinctively to Jesus' followers. As Dunn observed, "Luke presents the prayer precisely as a badge which was designed to mark out the disciples of Jesus from those of John the Baptist."¹²

Dunn also judged the Lord's Prayer "the single most important part of Jesus' teaching on prayer and the most characteristic prayer of Christians

⁸ I thank Ole Jakob Filtvedt for pointing to these texts in the discussion of an earlier draft of this paper and in an email subsequently.

⁹ Cf. ancient Jewish traditions of Moses as intercessor, both during his lifetime and after his death (e.g., *Jub.* 1:19; 4Q378 frags. 3, 26; *As. Mos.* 11:17–19; 12:6–8; and frequently in rabbinic literature, e.g., *Rab. Num.*, Hukat 19.33).

¹⁰ Among other discussions of this, James D. G. Dunn, "Prayer," *DJG* 617–25.

¹¹ Because the prayer is portrayed as given for Jesus' followers to use, it could more accurately be called "the Disciples' Prayer."

¹² Dunn, "Prayer," 620.

from then on . . .”¹³ Certainly, to judge from its subsequent place in Christian tradition, the Lord’s Prayer has been the single most influential expression of Jesus as teacher of prayer. That variant forms of the prayer appear already in Matthew and Luke shows that the tradition of Jesus teaching such a prayer circulated and was affirmed in various early Christian circles, the variations in the prayer reflecting its adaptation for actual usage. This function of the Lord’s Prayer as identifying Christians is further confirmed in its appearance in the *Didache* 8:2–3 (in a form almost identical to that in Matthew), where it is specifically indicated as the distinguishing form of Christian prayer, which “the Lord commanded” (ἐκέλευσεν ὁ κύριος).¹⁴

In some other Synoptic passages, Jesus urges faith in settings that suggest a connection to prayer. These include the account of Jesus healing the epileptic child (Mark 9:22–23, 29; cf. Matt 17:19–20; Luke 17:6), and the discussion following the withering of the fig tree (Mark 11:20–25; Matt 21:20–22). There is also a parable unique to the Gospel of Luke, which the author presents as intended to promote persistence in prayer (18:1–8). A similar encouragement to confidence and persistence in prayer appears in Luke 11:5–13, which includes the parable of the “Friend at Midnight” (vv. 5–8) unique to Luke, the remainder of this passage, Jesus’ exhortations to confident prayer, paralleled in Matthew 7:7–11.

But in comparison with these Gospels passages where Jesus teaches about or urges prayer, there are considerably more where Jesus is pictured as himself praying, a few of these already noted. Both Mark and Matthew have Jesus sending off his disciples in a boat and then going off alone to pray (Mark 6:46; Matt 14:23). In Mark 1:35 also, Jesus is pictured as arising early and going off for private prayer. Moreover, all three Synoptics have references to Jesus praying in Gethsemane before his arrest (Mark 14:32, 35, 39; Matt 26:36, 39, 42, 44; Luke 22:41, 44, 45), and the interweaving of exhortations to his disciples to pray in the same accounts (Mark 14:38; Matt 26:41; Luke 22:41, 46) rather clearly presents Jesus’ prayers as in some sense the positive model over against the sleepy disciples.

The usage of “*Abba*” in the Markan Gethsemane prayer (14:36) is interesting and has drawn a number of proposals as to why it is there.¹⁵ This Aramaic word appears elsewhere in the NT only in Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15, both of these latter texts referring to the early Christian (corporate?) prayer-

¹³ Dunn, “Prayer,” 619.

¹⁴ The body of scholarly literature on the Lord’s Prayer is considerable. E.g., some 280 items on it listed in *The Lord’s Prayer and Other Prayer Texts from the Greco-Roman Era* (ed. James H. Charlesworth, with Mark Harding and Mark Kiley; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994), 186–201, and the flow certainly has continued undiminished beyond that list.

¹⁵ See, e.g., the options reviewed by Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 678–79.

practice of addressing God as “Father.”¹⁶ Paul’s use of the Aramaic term in these texts seems to reflect an effort to link verbally the prayer-practices of his Greek-speaking congregations and Aramaic-speaking (Jewish) believers (in Roman Judea), as is also likely reflected in his use of “*Maranatha*” in 1 Corinthians 16:22. It has often been judged that this liturgical use of “*Abba*” in Aramaic-speaking circles is, in turn, best explained by positing Jesus’ distinctive use of this term in prayer, which then became a distinguishing mark of prayer among his followers.¹⁷

For the present discussion, however, the more relevant question is what particular point there was in the inclusion of “*Abba*” in the Markan narrative of Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer, a question underscored by the absence of the term from the parallel narratives in the other Gospels. Clearly, in each of the Gospels there was a choice of how to represent Jesus at prayer. If, as seems likely, Mark’s Greek-speaking readers were expected to recognize the term from its use in liturgical practice, then for them one effect of the appearance of “*Abba*” in the Gethsemane narrative would have been to align their use with Jesus’ prayer here. Indeed, they were likely intended to see Jesus’ use of this form of prayer-address as the basis for their own. Moreover, given Paul’s references to the use of “*Abba, Father*” by believers as indicative of their intimate filial relationship with God, perhaps Mark intended to emphasize Jesus’ intimate filial status as the context in which to read the poignant scene of Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer.

In comparison with the other Gospels, however, the Gospel of Luke has a particular emphasis on Jesus praying, a crucial component in the wider

¹⁶ See now Martin Hengel, “*Abba, Maranatha, Hosanna und die Anfänge der Christologie*,” in *Studien zur Christologie, Kleine Schriften IV* (WUNT 201; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 496–534, esp. 496–512. The first-person-plural form of the verb in Rom 8:15 (κράζομεν) may suggest a corporate action, as also perhaps the plural “our hearts” in Gal 4:6. A number of exegetes have suggested that Paul alluded to the corporate use of the Lord’s Prayer, as noted by Jewett, *Romans*, 499. The most extended discussion of the various questions about “*Abba*” is by Witold Marchel, *Abba, Père! La prière du Christ et des chrétiens: Étude exégétique sur les origines et la signification de l’invocation à la divinité comme père, avant et dans le Nouveau Testament* (Analecta Biblica 19; Rome: Pontifical Institute Press, 1963). He discusses the liturgical practice referred to by Paul, 188–91.

¹⁷ E.g., H. W. Kuhn, “αββα,” *EDNT* 1:1–2; Otfried Hofius, “Father,” *NIDNTT* 1:614–15 (614–21). There is no example of Second Temple era Jewish prayer in which God is addressed as “*Abba*.” Marchel (*Abba, Père!*, 181–86) reviewed proposals for the origin of the early Christian practice of invoking God as “*Abba*,” arguing that Jesus taught his followers to use the term. But on some matters Marchel’s tendency for maximalist theological claims (which sometimes involve reading NT texts through the lens of later theological formulations) intrudes into what should be a more controlled historical study.

treatment of prayer in Luke–Acts.¹⁸ In addition to texts already noted, the Lukan account of Jesus’ baptism distinctively has him praying (3:21). Likewise, the Lukan version of the scene where Jesus asks his disciples what people make of him opens distinctively with Jesus “praying alone” (9:18), and similarly Luke uniquely has Jesus at prayer in the transfiguration episode (9:28–29). As well, Luke 5:16 portrays Jesus as repeatedly withdrawing from the crowds for prayer, and in 6:12 before choosing the Twelve he spends the night in prayer, both of these statements unique to Luke.¹⁹

Moreover, the Gospel of Luke conveys several prayers ascribed to Jesus (more than in the other Gospels), all these likely intended to have inspirational and didactic force. In Luke 10:21–23, we have the “Q” text (parallel in Matt 11:25–27) where Jesus thanks God for the revelations to “infants,” those whom the Son of Man has chosen for revelation of “the Father” and “the Son.” Uniquely in Luke 22:32, Jesus assures Simon Peter that he has prayed (ἐδέξηθην) for Simon that his faith should not fail. In the Lukan Gethsemane scene, we have a version of Jesus’ prayer corresponding to the Synoptic parallels (Mark 14:36; Matt 26:39), “Father, if you will it, let this cup pass from me.”²⁰ But, in the crucifixion scene, whereas the other Synoptics simply have Jesus utter a loud cry (which they do not specify), in the Lukan parallel (23:46) Jesus addresses God in a final prayer, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,” with wording drawn from Psalm 31:5. In comparison with the attribution of words from Psalm 22:1 in Mark (15:34) and Matthew (27:46), Luke here likewise has Jesus die with the words of a Psalm upon his lips, but it is a more positive-sounding final prayer and likely intended to model a pious death.²¹

¹⁸ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke, I–IX* (Anchor Bible; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 244–47, for discussion of the Luke–Acts emphasis on prayer. Craig A. Evans, *Luke* (NIBCNT; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990), 91, notes the distinctive number of references to Jesus praying in Luke. See also David Crump, *Jesus as Intercessor: Prayer and Christology in Luke–Acts* (WUNT 2/49; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992).

¹⁹ In Luke 5:16, the imperfect, ἦν ὑποχωρῶν . . . καὶ προσευχόμενος, and the plural ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις combine to suggest a repeated practice.

²⁰ I omit here discussion of Luke 22:43–44, the well-known “bloody sweat” variant reading. Despite the recent defence of these verses as authentic to the Gospel of Luke, I suspect that they are a subsequent (albeit ancient) interpolation. Cf. Claire Clivaz, *L’ange et la sueur de sang (Lc 22,43–44): ou comment on pourrait bien encore écrire l’histoire* (Biblical tools and studies 7; Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

²¹ As frequently noted, the account of Stephen’s death in Acts 7:59–60 likely has intentional echoes of the Lukan account of Jesus’ death. Note particularly Stephen’s prayer, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (v. 59), and the description of his final appeal as made with “a loud voice” (φωνῆ μεγάλῃ, v. 60). These strengthen the suggestion that the author intended Jesus’ dying prayer as inspirational for believers.

In the Gospel of John also Jesus both prays and teaches his disciples to pray. But the author prefers a different vocabulary, curiously never using *προσευχή* or *προσεύχομαι*.²² The Johannine account of Jesus feeding the five thousand (6:5–13) refers to Jesus as giving thanks before distributing the bread (*εὐχαριστήσας*, v. 11), this note echoed in the subsequent scene where the crowd follow Jesus (*εὐχαριστήσαντος τοῦ κυρίου*, v. 23). By contrast, the Synoptic accounts of this feeding have Jesus “bless” (God), using a Jewish term for prayer at a meal (*εὐλόγησεν*, Mark 6:41; Matt 14:19; Luke 9:16). In their distinctive accounts of the feeding of the four thousand, however, Mark and Matthew use *εὐχαριστέω* (Mark 8:6; Matt 15:36). It is also interesting that in the Lukan last supper account, Jesus “gave thanks” over the bread and cup (*εὐχαριστήσας*, 22:17, 19), whereas in the Synoptic parallels Jesus pronounced a blessing over the bread (*εὐλόγησας*, Mark 14:22; Matt 26:26) and “gave thanks” over the cup (*εὐχαριστήσας*, Mark 14:23; Matt 26:27). In both of these Lukan meal scenes the author seems consistently to have preferred the verb that struck a closer association with the Christian sacred meal, thereby presenting Jesus’ actions as prefiguring the latter. The Johannine preference for *εὐχαριστέω* in the feeding account (and the somewhat less consistent use of the term in Matthew and Mark) also likely had the same purpose.

In Johannine passages where Jesus encourages his disciples to pray, however, the author prefers *αἰτέω*. These include the distinctively Johannine statements in which Jesus invites his disciples to ask/pray “in my name,” in a few cases to Jesus (14:13–14), but in others to “the Father” (15:16; 16:23–24, 26). In addition, Jesus assures his disciples in 15:7, “if you remain in me (*μείνητε ἐν ἐμοί*) and my words remain in you, whatever you ask (*αἰτήσασθε*) will be done for you.” These references to prayer set in a relationship to Jesus and in Jesus’ name clearly make him integral to prayer, and ascribe to him a particular efficacy that can be invoked by believers in their prayers. To judge from other NT texts in which direct invocation of Jesus’ name is attested (e.g., Acts 2:38; 3:6; 4:10; 10:48; 16:18; 1 Cor 5:4; 6:11), these Johannine statements likely reflect the specific practice of overtly invoking Jesus’ mediatorial efficacy in early Christian prayers, a matter to which I return later in this discussion. This also certainly constitutes a distinctive prayer-practice that marks off Christian believers.²³

²² Similar to their LXX usage, in the NT *προσευχή* and *προσεύχομαι* are used exclusively with reference to “prayer/pray,” *προσευχή* sometimes designating a place of prayer (Acts 16:13, 16). For further discussion of the terms in the NT and ample bibliography, see Horst Balz, “*προσευχή, προσεύχομαι*,” *EDNT* 3:164–69. This contrasts with the usage of other terms such as *αἰτέω* and *ἐρωτάω*, which can refer to requests made to other humans.

²³ As Hamman observed, this is not the same as the ancient Jewish notion of “the merits of the fathers” behind the prayers of devout Jews. Instead, “Elle s’appuie sur la

Other passages in the Gospel of John portray Jesus himself praying, but in these statements the author prefers the verb ἔρωτάω (14:16; 16:26; 17:9, 15, 20).²⁴ In a couple of cases, however, the author simply has Jesus speak (εἶπεν) to the “Father” (11:41–42; 17:1). Additionally, in both of these latter instances there is the visual detail of Jesus lifting his eyes toward the heavens, an action similarly ascribed to him in his prayer in the feeding account in Matthew 14:19/Mark 6:41/Luke 9:16 (cf. also 7:34), all these instances perhaps intended to make somewhat more vivid the representation of Jesus praying.²⁵

In what is sometimes called the “high priestly prayer” in John 17, we have the most extended passage purporting to convey a prayer of Jesus. As commonly judged by scholars, I take it as essentially the author’s composition, and so more indicative of his religious convictions than directly expressive of Jesus’ own piety. So, the length and placement of this prayer indicates how important the idea of Jesus praying and the content of the prayer were for the author. In this text, Jesus intercedes on behalf of his followers, and they explicitly include Jesus’ both original disciples and “all those who will believe” subsequently through their testimony (v. 20). This passage dramatically reflects the conviction we have already noted that the exalted Jesus intercedes for believers in heaven, Jesus portrayed here as anticipating his glorification (17:1–5) and also this intercessory role.

Moreover, the specific petitions in this prayer were certainly intended as meaningful for readers, and may have served to project the sort of intercessions that the glorified Jesus makes for believers. The repeated

médiation du Christ et sur son rôle d’intercesseur qu’il assume à partir du moment où il est glorifié” (Adalbert Hamman, *La prière I. Le Nouveau Testament* [Tournai: Desclée and Co., 1959], 407). On the use of Jesus’ name, see Wilhelm Heitmüller, “*Im Namen Jesu*”: Eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament, speziell zur altchristlichen Taufe (FRLANT 1/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903); Lars Hartman, “*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*”: Baptism in the Early Church (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997); Adelheid Ruck-Schröder, *Der Name Gottes und der Name Jesu: Eine neutestamentliche Studie* (WMANT 80; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999); William Q. Parkinson, “In the Name of Jesus’: The Ritual Use and Christological Significance of the Name of Jesus in Early Christianity” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2003). On the emphasis on Jesus’ name in the Gospel of John, see Franz Georg Untergassmair, *Im Namen Jesu – Der Namensbegriff im Johannesevangelium: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den johanneischen Namensausagen* (FB 13; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1974).

²⁴ Neither ἔρωτάω (63x) nor the compound form ἐπερωτάω (56x) designates address/prayer to God elsewhere in the NT, except for the uses of ἔρωτάω in 1 John 5:16 and ἐπερωτάω in Rom 10:20 (in a quotation from LXX Isa 65:1).

²⁵ In 11:41, ἦεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, and in 17:1, ἐπάρας τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς αὐτοῦ. The Synoptic texts use the verb ἀναβλέπω, meaning here “to look upward,” which is much more frequently used in the NT to mean recovery of sight (e.g., Matt 11:5; 20:34; Mark 10:51–52; Luke 7:22; 18:41–43; John 9:11–18; Acts 9:12, 17–18). A similar prayer gesture is mentioned in Jewish texts, e.g., 1 Esd 4:58; 4 Macc 6:26.

concern that believers be protected and kept firm in their faith (vv. 11–18) would have been encouraging, perhaps particularly in the early settings of opposition to Christians. The petitions for unity among Jesus’ followers (vv. 20–23) and for their perception of Jesus’ “glory” and unique relationship with God (vv. 24–26) were also likely intended as inspiring and instructive for the readers.

We get another reference to Jesus in prayer in Hebrews 5:7–10. Here, Jesus is portrayed as having “offered up prayers (δεήσεις) and supplications (ἰκετηρίας), with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission (ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας).” As Attridge concluded, the author here likely pictures Jesus in terms of “the traditional image of a righteous person at prayer,” and alludes to Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation as the positive answer to his prayers.²⁶ In v. 8, Jesus is said to have “learned obedience through what he suffered,” meaning that in his sufferings Jesus came to learn experientially what human obedience to God entailed. Thereby “perfected” (τελειωθείς) for his role as high priest for believers, Jesus is now “the source (αἴτιος) of [their] eternal salvation” (v. 9). Though the emphasis in the passage is on Jesus as truly partaking of the human condition, and so the more able to be a perfect high priest for believers, the reference in v. 7 to his “prayers and supplications” surely also presented him as an inspiring model for believers who likewise cry out to God in their own sufferings.²⁷

This presentation of Jesus as an inspiring role-model of piety is reflected again in Hebrews 12:1–3, where he is designated “the pioneer and perfecter (ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτήν) of our faith.” Though prayer is not specifically mentioned here, Jesus is clearly the path-finder and paradigm for believers in all aspects of their own spiritual lives. As Attridge noted, the “faith” that is inaugurated and perfected by Jesus here is not belief in doctrines but instead “the fidelity and trust that he himself exhibited . . . and that his followers are called upon to share.”²⁸

²⁶ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1989), 151, 150.

²⁷ Cf. the opposing view of Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer, *Kommunikation mit Gott und Christus: Sprache und Theologie des Gebetes im Neuen Testament* (WUNT 197; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 163, “Das Beten Jesu fungiert nicht als Vorbild für die Gläubigen.”

²⁸ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 356.

Jesus as Recipient of Prayers

As we should expect of authors influenced by the Jewish religious matrix of the earliest Christian circles, in the NT prayer is typically described as offered to God (“the Father”); but in some noteworthy cases Jesus is the recipient or co-recipient of prayers. Indeed, some texts refer to believers quite simply as those who invoke (“call upon”) Jesus, which reflects a programmatic place of this devotional action (a matter to which we return later). The early date of the evidence for invocation and prayer-appeals to Jesus makes the phenomena all the more remarkable. There are earlier studies that are still valuable, along with the more recent scholarly interest shown in these matters.²⁹ Available space here requires some conciseness and a focus on most relevant issues.

If we consider the evidence in terms of the dating of the texts in which it appears, we may begin with 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13, which records one of a number of what we may call “wish-prayers” (referred to by Fee as “benedictory” prayers) nearly all of which use optative verb forms.³⁰ In this particular text, initially God and Jesus are invoked together (v. 11, NB: in the optative-singular verb, *κατευθύναι*) to enable Paul to re-visit the Thessalonians. The inclusion of Jesus here is in itself remarkable enough. But then, in his next statement Paul appeals to “the Lord” solely (who must be Jesus here) to make the Thessalonians abound in love for all and to establish their hearts blameless in holiness “before God our Father at the appearance of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (vv. 12–13). Alleging “a tendency on the part of some to play down the role of Christ in prayer,” Fee pointed to this text and related passages as indicating that Paul addressed prayer to God and to Jesus

²⁹ Specifically on prayers to, and invocation of, Jesus in early Christianity, the following key works: Aleksy Klawek, *Das Gebet zu Jesus. Seine Berechtigung und Übung nach den Schriften des Neuen Testaments: Eine biblisch-theologische Studie* (NTAbh 6/5; Münster: Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1921); Franz Joseph Dölger, *Sol Salutis: Gebet und Gesang im christlichen Altertum* (3rd ed; Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1972; orig. ed., 1920); Joseph Jungmann, *Die Stellung Christi im liturgischen Gebet* (1st ed.; Münster: Aschendorff, 1925; 2nd rev. ed., 1962); Johannes Horst, *Proskynein: Zur Anbetung im Urchristentum nach ihrer religionsgeschichtlichen Eigenart* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1932), esp. 185–94; Hamman, *La Prière*, esp. 264–90; and now Ostmeyer, *Kommunikation*.

³⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 494. Ostmeyer (*Kommunikation*, 138–39) calls them “*Gebetsoptative*” and “*Segensoptative*.” In addition to 1 Thess 3:11–13, other Pauline examples include 1 Thess 5:23–24; Rom 15:5–6, 13; 2 Thess 2:16–17; 3:5, 16. Note also the verbless example in Rom 15:33. Cf. also 1 Tim 1:16, 18; 2:25; 4:16; Heb 13:20–21; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; Jude 2. Burton listed thirty-five instances of “the Optative of Wishing” in the NT: Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1955), 79, judging that it “most frequently expresses a prayer.”

“sometimes to both together and sometimes to either alone.”³¹ As observed by Zerwick, in this text “undoubtedly Jesus is presented as in intimate association with God the Father, in unity of action, and as one to whom prayer may be addressed.”³²

That the passage really does reflect an idiom indicative of prayer is corroborated by other passages where Paul employs the same or a very similar construction in what are likewise fairly obviously prayer statements. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24, he invokes “the God of peace” to sanctify the believers wholly for the future appearance of Jesus, and in Romans 15:5–6 he implores “the God of patience and encouragement” to promote harmony among readers so that they may “with one voice (στόματι) glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Moreover, in 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 we have another text where God and Jesus are jointly invoked, only in this case in the reverse order, to comfort/encourage (παρακαλέσαι) believers and to confirm them “in every good work and word.” In 3:5 and 3:16, the optative-verb appeals are to “the Lord” (ὁ κύριος) alone, who in both cases is almost certainly Jesus. Whatever the authorship of this epistle, it certainly further indicates that Jesus frequently featured as recipient and co-recipient of prayer-appeals in early Christian circles.³³ The author clearly expected readers to recognize and affirm the sort of wish-prayers noted.

We turn next to the curious passage (2 Cor 12:6–10) where Paul refers to his repeated appeals to “the Lord” (τῷ κυρίῳ) (τῷ κυρίῳ παρεκάλεσα, v. 8, again, rather clearly the risen Jesus) for relief from an affliction from Satan. Granted, Paul elsewhere uses παρακαλέω most frequently in appeals to his readers or others, and not in his references to prayers.³⁴ But his appeals to the risen Lord here are remarkable. On the one hand, Ostmeyer is correct to emphasize that Paul distinguished God and Jesus, that Paul typically describes his thanks and prayers as addressed to God (e.g., Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4), and that for Paul it was through Jesus’ redemptive work that “the possibility for thanks and

³¹ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 494.

³² Max Zerwick and Mary Grovenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (5th rev. ed.; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 617.

³³ For defences of Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, see, e.g., Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (BNTC; London: A&C Black, 1972), esp. 37–59; Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1986). Donfried suggested that Paul’s co-workers (e.g., Timothy) may have been involved in composing 2 Thessalonians; see Karl Paul Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonica and Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), “2 Thessalonians and the Church of Thessalonica,” 49–67.

³⁴ As noted by Ostmeyer, *Kommunikation*, 84–85.

appeals to God was opened.”³⁵ Nevertheless, as Dunn acknowledged in his recent discussion of early Christian worship, from this passage “it is clear enough that Paul understood the exalted Christ as one who could be appealed to for help, a request or petition that can readily be understood as prayer.”³⁶

In the Acts account of Stephen’s martyrdom we have yet another indication that early Christians made direct prayer-appeals to the exalted Jesus. At the end of his speech Stephen is depicted as declaring that he sees the heavens opened and Jesus standing at God’s right hand (7:55–56), which triggers the violence of those he addresses. Then, as he expires, Stephen invokes the Lord Jesus (ἐπικαλούμενον), with the requests, “receive my spirit” (v. 59) and not to hold Stephen’s death against those who stoned him (v. 60). In the narrative, Stephen is presented as exemplary, and so his prayer-appeal to Jesus depicted here must also be taken as reflective of devotional practices familiar to and approved by the intended readers.

The verb-form used in Stephen’s appeal, the middle-voice of ἐπικαλέω, connotes (as typically in Koine Greek) invoking some higher power, most often a deity.³⁷ In the Greek OT this verb-form is used many times in scenes of cultic worship and in more general references to prayer and invocation of YHWH (e.g., LXX Gen 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25; Pss 17:4, 7; 19:10; 74:2).³⁸ In Romans 10:9–13 Paul incorporates a quotation of one of these OT texts, Joel 2:32 (MT 3:5), “Everyone who calls upon (ἐπικαλέσονται) the name of the Lord will be saved,” in a striking adaptation of the Joel statement to designate acclaiming/invoking Jesus by name as ὁ κύριος.³⁹ To be sure, the action of “calling upon the name” of Jesus had a clear and specific confessional content, affirming Jesus as rightful Lord, but it was also a liturgical/devotional action in which believers invoked the Lord Jesus.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ostmeier, *Kommunikation*, 115 (my translation). Elsewhere, however, Ostmeier grants that in Paul’s thought God and Jesus are uniquely on one level and Christians on another level (369), making direct prayer to the risen Jesus appropriate (noting Acts 7:55–56 and possibly also the *maranatha* in 1 Cor 16:22 as instances).

³⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (London: SPCK; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 35.

³⁷ See, e.g., MM 239 for examples of “pagan” usage in prayers and magical invocations. The term is also used in Acts to designate Paul’s appeal to Caesar, invoking a higher power in his hearings before the Roman governor (Acts 25:11–12, 21, 25; 26:32; 28:19).

³⁸ There are ca. 30 instances in the Psalms alone. For discussion, see Karl Ludwig Schmidt, “ἐπικαλέω,” *TDNT* 3:496–500.

³⁹ Of course, a more extended quotation of this same OT text appears in the Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:17–21. In light of the climactic statement in Acts 2:36 “God has made him [Jesus] both Lord and Messiah,” I take it that v. 21 refers to “calling upon the Lord” Jesus, as is the case in Romans 10:13.

⁴⁰ Curiously, some exegetes take Paul as referring solely to a confessional act in Rom 10:13, and even deny any connotation of prayer: e.g., Jewett, *Romans*, 633 (n. 114),

Paul's combination of ὁμολογέω (vv. 9–10) and ἐπικαλέω (vv. 12–13) in this passage is likely influenced by the combination of similar terms in LXX Psalms 74:2 (ἐξομολογησόμεθα καὶ ἐπικαλεσόμεθα τὸ ὄνομα σου), and so vv. 9–10 should be taken as designating “the cry of adoration,” κύριος Ἰησοῦς.⁴¹

Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 12:3 about the Spirit prompting this same acclamation is set within a larger context dealing with worship (1 Cor 12–14), and so also likely refers to a liturgical action. Likewise, Philippians 2:9–11, the climactic lines of what is widely thought to derive from an early Christian ode sung in worship, portrays a future universal acclamation (ἐξομολογήσεται), κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, which was ritually anticipated in early Christian gatherings.

Indeed, in 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul refers to believers simply as “all those in every place who call upon (ἐπικαλουμένοις) the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In Acts as well, believers are identified as “those who call upon” Jesus' name (9:14, 21). As Dunn has stated, calling upon Jesus was “the defining feature of these early Christians,” marking and distinguishing them “from others who ‘called upon (the name of) some other deity or heavenly being.’”⁴² For individual believers, the practice likely commenced in their baptism (e.g., Acts 22:16), but it also seems to have been a regular feature of corporate worship. The description of this liturgical appeal to Jesus in phrasing taken from the worship of *YHWH* in the OT distinguished believers particularly from the prayer-practice of other Jews, for whom to “call upon the name of the Lord” would have meant worshipping solely the one God of biblical tradition.⁴³

We have further confirmation that the invocation of Jesus was rather widely characteristic of various early Christian circles, including early Aramaic-speaking groups, in Paul's incorporation of the *maranatha* expression in 1 Corinthians 16:22.⁴⁴ It is now increasingly accepted that the

citing approvingly Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 660. Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols. ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975–1979), 2:532, who notes that “Paul can think of prayer to the exalted Christ without the least repugnance” here gives “decisive” indication of the high significance Paul meant in applying the title κύριος to Jesus.

⁴¹ Otfried Hofius, “ὁμολογέω,” *EDNT* 2:516 (514–17). Cf. Josephus' account of the torture of Sicarii in Alexandria to force them (unsuccessfully) to confess Caesar as lord (Καίσαρα δεσπότην ὁμολογήσωσιν), *War* 7.418.

⁴² Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus*, 16.

⁴³ “Wenn die Anrufung Jesu das Gebet eröffnet, so ist das gerade ein bezeichnender Akt der Christen, durch den sie sich von den Juden, die auch ihr Gebet an den einen Gott richten, unterscheiden” (Horst, *Proskynein*, 194).

⁴⁴ In my discussion I draw upon key recent studies, esp. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “New Testament *Kyrios* and *Maranatha* and Their Aramaic Background,” in *To Advance the Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 218–35; *idem*, “The Semitic Background of the New Testament *Kyrios*-Title,” in *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays*

expression derives from the devotional language of the earliest circles in Roman Judea, and that it represents an Aramaic imperative-form meaning “O/our Lord, come!”⁴⁵ This means that a strong eschatological tone adheres to the expression. The Lord appealed to is clearly Jesus.⁴⁶ As to whether the appeal originally was for Jesus to be present “in the Spirit” at the sacred meal or for Jesus’ *parousia*, Hengel is probably right to urge that we should not exclude either sense, although the eschatological expectation of Jesus’ *parousia* likely governed the sense, at least initially.⁴⁷ The earliest Christian circles saw their worship gatherings as anticipations and expressions of eschatological realities and hopes. In any case, given that *maranatha* derives from the devotional language and practice of Aramaic-speaking believers, we are dealing with “the earliest prayer to Jesus that we know.”⁴⁸ The liturgical setting of the *maranatha* expression is further reflected in its retention in the eucharistic context in *Didache* 10:6.

It is widely thought that the prayer-appeal in Revelation 22:20, “Come, Lord Jesus!” is a Greek rendering of *maranatha*. The author of Revelation was a Jewish Christian, and had a very negative attitude toward what he regarded as unwarranted liturgical innovations, as reflected in his condemnations of the “Nicolaitans” (2:14–15) and the prophetess he calls “Jezebel” (2:20–25). It seems likely, therefore, that he conveys the traditional *maranatha* expression in Greek in 22:20. But, whatever its connection to *maranatha*, “Come, Lord Jesus!” in 22:20 is self-evidently a direct prayer-appeal to Jesus, and it is most likely reflective of a devotional practice that

(Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 115–42; and now Hengel, “Abba, Maranatha, Hosanna,” esp. 512–22.

⁴⁵ Fitzmyer (“Kyrios and Maranatha,” 228) proposed that *maranatha* derived from an elision of *mārānā’ āthā’*.

⁴⁶ Wilhelm Bousset’s short-lived proposal that the *mareh* addressed was God (*Jesus der Herr: Nachträge und Auseinandersetzungen zu Kyrios Christos* [FRLANT 25; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1916], 22) did not convince others, and he soon abandoned it, reverting to his earlier proposal that Jesus was the referent but that the expression arose in some place such as Antioch, Damascus or Tarsus, and did not go back to the “Palestinian primitive community”: *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (FRLANT NF4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 103 (n. 3). These proposals only reflect how desperately Bousset sought to avoid the conclusion that a cultic veneration/invocation of Jesus went back to the earliest Judean Christian circles. See my discussion in *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press; London: SCM, 1988; 2nd ed. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 4, 131–32 (n. 11).

⁴⁷ Hengel, “Abba, Maranatha, Hosanna,” 514.

⁴⁸ Hengel, “Abba, Maranatha, Hosanna,” 521: “das früheste Gebet zu Jesus . . . das wir kennen.”

originated far earlier than the late first-century date of the composition of Revelation.

In viewing this invocation of Jesus in historical perspective it is important to keep a clear focus. Although comparisons have been proposed with Jewish and pagan invocation of various deities and angels, these are actually dubious.⁴⁹ First, the evidence cited for Jewish invocation of angels (e.g., in *Hekhalot* texts or the Paris Magical Papyrus) is from several centuries later than the NT texts, and so hardly comprises a context for them. In fact, there is no direct evidence of Jewish invocation of angels in material contemporary with or prior to the NT.⁵⁰ Religious beliefs and practices change and develop in living religious traditions, so we need to use evidence with appropriate attention to chronology. Jews may have invoked angels in the first century C.E., but that remains to be shown.

Second, the phenomena are not the same. The magical and Jewish mystical texts cited reflect the invocation of numerous divine or angelic beings, and typically for “coercive” purposes, i.e., to force the being to do the will of the one invoking it. As Stuckenbruck put it, “In any case, given the coercive nature of the materials, ‘veneration’ is hardly an appropriate term to describe a posture towards any of the deities invoked.”⁵¹ By contrast, the NT texts evidence an invocation of Jesus *solely*, as God’s unique Son and agent and the appointed Lord of believers, and the intense devotion to him is evident.⁵²

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the function of the invocation of Jesus has no parallel. It appears that the corporate acclamation and invocation of Jesus as Lord functioned to constitute the Christian worship gathering, and served to mark and identify believers as Christians. That is, it had a powerful semiotic function for which we simply have no analogy in the mystical and magical texts, whether Jewish or pagan.

⁴⁹ E.g., Alan F. Segal, “Paul’s ‘*Soma Pneumatikon*’ and the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism* (ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila and Gladys S. Lewis; JSJSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 274 (258–76).

⁵⁰ “. . . no ‘magical’ Jewish source from the 1st century C.E. or earlier preserves any prayer or address made to an angel”: Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology* (WUNT 2/70; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995), 192. More fully, see Phillip Alexander, “Incantations and Books of Magic,” in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, Volume III, Part I*, (ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Martin Goodman; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 342–79; and now Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. 51–62, 70–142.

⁵¹ Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, 200.

⁵² The humorous story in Acts 19:11–20 may be relevant. On the one hand, it portrays the Jewish exorcists as quite ready to attempt to invoke Jesus as a powerful name/figure with which to conjure. On the other hand, the text distinguishes their misguided and unsuccessful effort from Paul’s miraculous ministry (v. 11), the latter presented as based in Paul’s devoted relationship with Jesus as his Lord.

Jesus as Basis of Christian Prayer

As noted already, in the NT prayers are most often portrayed as addressed to God.⁵³ Moreover, the prayer-appeals to and acclamations of Jesus that we have considered are not presented in the NT texts as an alternative to prayer to God, certainly not any competition or threat to the latter. Instead, Jesus is co-recipient or direct recipient of prayers, invocations and liturgical acclamations as the unique Son and Lord affirmed by God (“the Father”) who shares in the name and glory of God (e.g., Phil 2:9–11; Acts 2:32; Rom 1:3–4; 2 Cor 3:12–4:6; Rev 5:9–13). That is, Jesus is appealed to, invoked and acclaimed in obedience to the one God who has exalted Jesus and now demands that he be revered (Phil 2:9–11; John 5:22–23), and so as responses to God’s glorification of Jesus. In short, the inclusion of Jesus in devotional practice is done in the context of this understanding of Jesus’ relationship to God and God’s purposes.

But if Jesus is revered with reference to God, it is also true, and highly significant, that prayers to, and the worship of, God in the NT are typically offered with reference to Jesus. NT discourse about “God” includes programmatic references to Jesus (and also to the Spirit), and even more so the devotional practices of prayer and worship have a “dyadic shape,” worship of the one God very much re-configured (in comparison with the Jewish religious matrix) with reference to Jesus⁵⁴

This is directly reflected in the various NT statements about prayers and thanks to God as offered “through” Jesus and/or in his name. In several instances, Paul refers to his prayer and/or thanksgiving to God as “through” (διὰ) Jesus: e.g., Romans 1:8, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ”⁵⁵ and Romans 7:25, “Thanks (χαρίς) be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” We have a similar practice reflected in Colossians 3:17, which exhorts doing everything “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and giving thanks to God “through him.” Ephesians 5:20 urges thanksgiving to God “always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In John 14–16 Jesus is pictured as repeatedly encouraging his followers to make their requests to God (“the Father”) “in my name” (14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–24). Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 1:20 that “through him [Jesus] we say ‘Amen’ to

⁵³ See, e.g., my discussion of the NT “devotional pattern” in Larry W. Hurtado, *God in New Testament Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2010), 59–64.

⁵⁴ Hurtado, *God in New Testament Theology*, 65–71, where I discuss how discourse about, and devotion to, “God” is profoundly affected by the place of Jesus in earliest Christian beliefs and devotional practice.

⁵⁵ The absence of διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in a few witnesses is readily explainable as homoioteleuton.

God for his glory” may also reflect this central place of Jesus in Christian prayer.

It is likely that these statements reflect actual prayer-practices. It seems to me fully plausible that these practices involved actually naming Jesus as the one through whom and/or in whose name prayer was offered. Jesus’ name clearly functioned as a vehicle of divine power and blessing, as reflected in the regular invocation of his name in early Christian baptism, exorcisms and other deeds of power.⁵⁶ I know of no similar practice in contemporary Jewish circles involving such a focus on one particular, distinguishable figure in prayers and thanksgivings to God.

We also have statements about Jesus being integral to glorifying God. In 1 Peter 4:11 believers are exhorted to exercise their various gifts “so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” Romans 16:27 directs eternal glory “to the only wise God through Jesus Christ,” and in Jude 25 there is a still more elaborate statement of praise “to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ Indeed, in Revelation 5:13 we have an explicit statement of praise directed jointly “to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb.”⁵⁸

I take these references also as indicative of the prayer-practices of the early Christian circles reflected in these NT writings. Paul’s statement in Romans 5:1–2 likely represents the self-understanding of many early believers (perhaps especially Gentiles): “Through our Lord Jesus Christ,” believers had been granted God’s “favor” (χάρτιν), in virtue of which they now stood in a new relationship with God and even in confident hope of sharing in the glory of God. Therefore, they could “boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:11). As noted earlier, Hebrews 4:16 posits Jesus’ redemptive efficacy as the basis for believers to “approach the throne of grace with boldness,” confident of “mercy and grace to help in the time of need,” and 13:15 directs, “through him [Jesus], then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God.”

Indeed, the early Christian appeal to God as “Father” seems to have been heavily shaped by and based in the conviction that Jesus is God’s unique Son, and in Jesus’ relationship to God as his Father.⁵⁹ This is illustrated, for example, in Paul’s statements about believers addressing God as “Abba, Father” under the impulse of the Spirit of God who is also “the Spirit of

⁵⁶ Again, see esp. Heitmüller, “*Im Namen Jesu*”; Parkinson, “In the Name of Jesus”; Hartman, “*Into the Name of Jesus*”.

⁵⁷ Whether Rom 16:25–27 comes from Paul or is a later addition, in either case the text serves as evidence of early Christian devotional discourse and practice.

⁵⁸ I find unconvincing Ostmeier’s effort to distinguish sharply the kinds of reverence given to God and to the Lamb in Rev 5:9–13 (*Kommunikation*, 351–52).

⁵⁹ See my discussion of God as “the Father” in *God in New Testament Theology*, 38–41.

Christ” (Rom 8:9) and “the Spirit of his [God’s] Son” (Gal 4:6). As reflected in other NT texts, for believers God is Father particularly because he is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3), a striking re-designation of God when compared with Jewish traditional references to “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Conclusion

I trust that the preceding discussion has been sufficient to show that Jesus held a major and multi-faceted place in the prayer-practice of earliest Christians, as heavenly intercessor for praying believers, as teacher and model of their praying, as the co-recipient and recipient of prayers (most often invoked to constitute the worship gathering), and as the basis of Christian prayer. Though sharing numerous characteristics with Jewish prayer-practice of the time, from the earliest observable moments Christian prayer took on the distinctive features that we have noted here. Earliest Christian prayer was certainly distinctive in referring to Jesus at all. But more profoundly still, the programmatic and singular place of Jesus was without parallel or precedent in the religious environment of the time. This means that the place of Jesus in early Christian prayer contributed strongly to the emergence of a distinctive religious identity that was particularly marked by Jesus.

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Praying with Outstretched Hands: Nonverbal Aspects of Early Christian Prayer and the Question of Identity

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“Do not pray with merely external gestures (τοῖς ἐκτὸς σχήμασι προσεύχου), but with great fear turn your mind to the awareness of spiritual prayer.”¹ These words come from a late fourth century Christian monk and ascetic. In particular, the first half of the statement may sound a little bit surprising, but it reminds us of an important fact: Prayer is not only a matter of words, it also implies some “outward forms” such as posture, gestures,² and vocalization. Posture also involves space and direction, and direction is often related to time. These nonverbal aspects of prayer are the topic of this essay, namely space, time, orientation, postures and gestures.

In a broad survey of gestures connected with prayer, Thomas Ohm has shown that most of the gestures in question are old and universal.³ They were (and are) used by people in different cultures and religions. With such universality in mind, special attention should be given to the postures and gestures which seem to *characterize* early Christian prayer. They may not be unique but they should be *typical* for Christians in the first centuries and thus something that served to identify them. Besides, in a search for early Christian identity it is not enough to list the typical nonverbal aspects of early Christian prayer. It is also crucial to reveal how gestures and postures were *interpreted*, and to clarify why special significance was given to specific places and times. We will start our investigation with attention to the wider context of prayer,

¹ Evagrius Ponticus (ca. 390–395), *De oratione (On Prayer)*, 28 (PG 79: 1173). English translation from A. M. Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus (The Early Church Fathers)*; New York: Routledge, 2006), 189. In *Patrologia graeca* the work is wrongly attributed to Nilus of Sinai.

² In the Latin translation in Migne PG the crucial words in the quotation are rendered as *externis gestibus*.

³ Thomas Ohm, *Die Gebetsgebärden der Völker und das Christentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1948).

i.e., the place, direction, and time for prayer. Then we will go on with a discussion of specific postures and gestures. It will soon become evident, however, that the different aspects are interrelated, and thus there may be some overlap between the different sections of this essay.

Nonverbal aspects are seldom treated in any length in ancient sources. Much of the relevant material is found in random comments or descriptions concerning prayer practice. For that reason we have to consult a rather broad range of texts, from various places and times. In doing so, we do not presuppose that customs were universal, but as this essay will show, in many cases the nonverbal aspects of prayer, including their interpretation, seem to have been rather common. Being aware of using diverse sources (with regard to both chronology and geography), we will try to describe some typical nonverbal aspects attested in early Christian literature until around 400 C.E.

Among the various texts and authors to be consulted, special attention is given to Tertullian (active around 200), Cyprian (ca. 200–258), and Origen (ca. 185–ca. 251), simply because they all wrote extensively about prayer. In addition, important nonverbal aspects of prayer are treated in later catechetical works from Cyril of Jerusalem (delivered around 350) and Ambrose (bishop of Milan 374–397), and in the *Apostolic Tradition*, a text that has developed over time, and in its final form can be dated to the fourth century.

When searching for nonverbal aspects of prayer in early Christian literature, we have to take into consideration that the practice referred to in the sources does not necessarily reflect actual usage. The genre of several of the texts to be studied is in itself an indication of the fact that a text may *prescribe* practice rather than describing it. With regard to identity, this is in accordance with recent research that has rightly stressed the creative role of texts in early Christian identity construction.⁴

1. “Go into Your Inner Room” – The Significance of Place

One of the earliest Christian texts giving instructions for prayer, is Jesus’ teaching on prayer according to the Matthean Sermon on the Mount. The text certainly has a focus on words (cf. Matt 6:7–15), but the whole section is introduced by instructions about some nonverbal elements of prayer (Matt 6:5–6):

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner

⁴ Cf. Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), esp. chapter 2.

room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.⁵

The larger section to which this text belongs (6:1–18) is about not practicing piety “before others in order to be seen by them” (6:1), something which implies another practice than that of the “hypocrites.” The word hypocrites (which refers to persons who perform in front of others, pretending to be something they really are not) is often used in Matthew about the Pharisees (cf. Matt 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29), and this is probably the meaning also in 6:2 and 5. These people are used as a foil for the disciples of Jesus: The latter shall not act like the former. What characterizes the hypocrites is that they want to be seen when they pray. Consequently, they pray in public – on the street corners and in the synagogues. Unlike them, the disciples of Jesus are taught to pray in secret, in the inner room (ταμείον) of their houses. This means that the setting for the disciples’ prayer should be distinctively different from that of the hypocrites. In a way the very setting of prayer should contribute to the formation of the disciples as disciples of Jesus.

In Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ teaching the place for prayer is the inner room of the house. The word ταμείον may be used for a storage room (Luke 12:24), but more generally it is a rather private area in the house. The reference to this “inner room” is, however, certainly nothing but a way to concretize the exhortation to pray “in secret” (ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ).⁶ This is literally followed in the description of Peter praying in the Pseudo Clementine *Recognitiones*: He “retired to a certain secret place (*ad locum quondam secretiorem*) for prayer” (*Rec.* 8.1). Cyprian, in his exposition of the Lord’s Prayer, refers to Jesus’ teaching in Matt 6:6, saying:

Finally, in His teaching the Lord bade us to pray in secret, in hidden and remote places, in our very bed-chambers (*denique magisterio suo Dominus secreta orare nos praecepit, in abditis et secretis locis, in cubiculis ipsis*), because it is more befitting our faith to realize that God is everywhere present, that He hears and sees all, and by the plenitude of His majesty penetrates also hidden and secret places, as it is written: ‘I am a God at hand and not a God afar off. If a man hide himself in hidden places, shall I not see him? Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ [Jer 23:23]. (*Dom. or.* 4.43–51)⁷

⁵ If nothing else is indicated, the Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

⁶ Cf. Christ praying in the wilderness (cf. Luke 5:16; Mark 1:35) or on the mountain (Luke 6:12).

⁷ This and other translations from Cyprian’s *De dominica oratione* are taken from *Saint Cyprian, Treatises* (trans. and ed. Roy J. Deferrari; FC 36; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958). Latin text (ed. by Claudio Moreschini) in *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera, Pars II* (ed. Manlio Simonetti and Claudio Moreschini; CCSL 3A; Turnholt: Brepols, 1976), 87–113. The last numbers in the references indicate the line numbers in this edition.

Cyprian takes the words about praying in secret literally, though his main point is what the text says about God and his omnipresence. In this way Cyprian touches a point that now and then is commented upon in early Christian literature: that God is not limited to a specific place and can be worshipped everywhere (cf. already John 4). In the minds of Greeks and Romans, the gods were to be found in temples and consequently had to be worshipped there. At the beginning of the third century, we thus find the following accusation against the Christians: “Why do they have no altars, no temples, no publicly-known images?” (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 10.2).⁸ This was remarkable for people worshipping a god. An explanation for the phenomenon is found in the *Martyrdom of Justin and companions*. The prefect interrogates Justin about where the Christians come together, and Justin answers:

Wherever it is each one’s preference or opportunity. In any case, do you suppose we all meet in the same place? Not so; for the Christians’ God is not circumscribed by place (διότι ὁ θεὸς τῶν Χριστιανῶν τόπῳ οὐ περιγράφεται); invisible, he fills the heavens and the earth, and he is worshipped and glorified (προσκυνεῖται καὶ δοξάζεται) by believers everywhere. (Rec. B, 3)⁹

During the first two centuries or so the Jesus believers came together in “house churches,” i.e., in ordinary homes. They did not have anything comparable to the temples or synagogues of the Jews. In other words, they were not connected with a specific place. That made them rather unique in the religious landscape, and – as the quotation from *Octavius* makes clear – this was noted by outsiders. For that reason it seems justified to say that the *lack* of a specific place for worship and prayer in fact served to identify the Christians. For several generations place was *not* significant for early Christian prayer. Nevertheless it contributed to the identity of the Jesus believers – reflecting their faith in a God who was not restricted to a specific place. This, of course, changed dramatically after the edict of Milan in 313, and Constantine’s subsequent building of great basilicas. But already in the second half of the third century specific buildings for worship were erected. This is attested both by archeological evidence and in the later books of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*. In connection with the report about the persecutions under Emperor Diocletian, Eusebius mentions that the churches were destroyed. He writes: “we saw with our very eyes the houses of prayer (προσευκτηρίων τοὺς οἴκους) cast down to their foundations” (8.2.1). The term for the church building (προσευκτήριος, used as a substantive), is rare

⁸ Translation from *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix* (trans. G. W. Clarke; ACW 39; New York, N.Y.: Newman Press, 1974), 66.

⁹ Text quoted from Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 48–49.

but used by Eusebius several times¹⁰ and emphasizes the building as a place for prayer (προσευχή). Before that time the only regulations in early Christian texts concerning the place of prayer is related to the home.

Let us return to the words in Matt 6:5–6. They are seldom referred to or commented upon in early Christian literature. There are, however, a few important exceptions (in addition to the text from Cyprian quoted above) which illustrate quite different attitudes to the word of Jesus. The first to be mentioned is another North African writer, prior to Cyprian, namely Tertullian. In his book on prayer, he writes about place and time for prayer:

With regard to the times of prayer nothing at all has been ordained, save of course that we must pray at all times and “in all places” (*omni in tempore et loco orare*) [Eph 6:18; 1 Tim 2:8]. But why “in all places” (*omni loco*), when we are forbidden to do so in public? [Matt 6:5] “In all places,” he means, that convenience or even necessity has offered. Nor indeed do we regard the apostles as having disobeyed this command, when they prayed and sang to God in prison in the hearing of the prisoners [Acts 16:25], or Paul, who on board ship “in the presence of all celebrated the Eucharist” [Acts 27:35]. (*Or.* 24)¹¹

For Tertullian the word in Matt 6 represents a problem, but this is solved by referring to apostolic practice which illustrates that the word cannot be taken too literally. Also Clement of Alexandria refers to the word of Jesus, but his point is that the true Christian (the “gnostic”) is one who always prays:

In every place (ἐν παντί . . . τόπω), therefore, but not ostensibly and visibly to the multitude, he will pray. But while engaged in walking, in conversation, while in silence, while engaged in reading and in works according to reason, he in every mood prays. If he but form the thought in the secret chamber of his soul (ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ταμίῳ τῆς ψυχῆς), and call on the Father “with unspoken groanings” [Rom 8:26], He is near, and is at his side, while yet speaking. (*Strom.* 7.49.7)¹²

A more literal reference to the inner or secret chambers is found in Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini*, in a passage where Eusebius writes about the personal piety of the emperor:

He himself, like someone participating in sacred mysteries, would shut himself at fixed times each day in secret places within his royal palace chambers (εἴσω τοῦ

¹⁰ Cf. *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.4; 7.30.19; 7.32.32; 8.1.5; 10.4.14; *Laud. Const.* 11.

¹¹ Latin text of *De oratione* (based on G. F. Diercks’ edition) in *Tertulliani Opera I* (ed. Eligius Dekkers et al.; CCSL 1; Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 255–74, 272; translation from *Tertullian’s Treatises: Concerning Prayer. Concerning Baptism* (trans. Alexander Souter; London: SPCK, 1919). The references in square brackets (except the first and the third) are found in the margin in Souter’s edition. Souter rightly treats *omni loco* (ἐν παντί τόπω) as a reference to 1 Tim 2:8, but misses the reference to Eph 6:18 by the words *omni tempore* (ἐν παντί καιρῷ).

¹² Text in Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata Buch VII und VIII* (ed. Otto Stählin; vol. 3 of Clemens Alexandrinus; GCS 17; Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1909), 37; translation from *ANF* 2:537.

αὐτοῦ βασιλικῶς ταμείοις), and would converse with his God alone, and kneeling in suppliant petition would plead for the objects of his prayers. (*Vit. Const.* 4.22.1)¹³

A place for prayer in one's own home is also referred to in the story about Daniel in the lions' den, a text well known in the early church, often depicted in early Christian art and often commented upon by early Christian authors writing on prayer. In the introduction to this story, it is told that the king enforced an interdict, saying that no one was allowed to pray to anyone, divine or human, for thirty days, except to the king. The punishment for transgressing the interdict was to be thrown into a den of lions. The story continues – according to the Old Greek version of the text:

But although Daniel was aware of the interdict, which they established against him, he opened windows in his upper room (ἐν τῷ ὑπερῶν αὐτοῦ) opposite Jerusalem and would fall on his face thrice a day, just as he had been doing previously and kept entreating. And they watched Daniel and caught him praying three times a day each day. (Dan 6:10–11 NETS)¹⁴

This text is interesting with regard to nonverbal aspects of both Jewish and Christian prayer because it may be a useful starting point for revealing both similarities and dissimilarities. The first point to be mentioned is the fact that the pious Daniel prayed in his own home. The text does not, however, say that he prayed in the inner room of the house, but rather in the upper room (ἐν τῷ ὑπερῶν αὐτοῦ). The noun ὑπερῶν probably refers to the tower-like room built on the flat roof of an oriental house.¹⁵ It can be described as follows: “The upper story . . . is an additional, ordinarily third, story raised above the flat roof of the house at one corner, or upon a tower-like annex to the building. It generally contains but a single apartment, of larger or smaller dimensions, through which latticed windows on all sides give free circulation of air, making it the most comfortable part of the house.”¹⁶

In Theodotion's version the wording is different: ἐν τοῖς ὑπερῶοις αὐτοῦ (“in its upper rooms”), but the meaning seems to be the same. There is,

¹³ Text in Eusebius, *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin* (ed. Friedhelm Winkelmann; Vol. 1 of Eusebius Werke; GCS 7/1; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975), 125; translation from Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* (trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 160.

¹⁴ This and other translations from LXX are taken from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title* (ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), abbreviated as NETS.

¹⁵ BDAG s. v. ὑπερῶν.

¹⁶ George Foot Moore (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* [ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901], 96) commenting on Judg 3:20 (where LXX has ὑπερῶν).

however, a somewhat greater difference in the reference to the windows.¹⁷ According to the Old Greek version, Daniel “opened windows” (θυρίδας ἤνοιξεν), while Theodotion has: “the windows were open” (αἱ θυρίδες ἀνεωγμέναι). The use of an indicative aorist instead of a perfect passive participle, stresses the active action of Daniel in the Old Greek. This is clearly presupposed in Josephus’ retelling of the story: “While all the rest of the people took care not to transgress these orders and remained quiet, Daniel took no thought of them whatever but, as his custom was, stood up and prayed to God in the sight of all” (*A.J.* 10.255 [Thackeray, LCL]). Josephus’ point is that Daniel wanted to be seen because his prayer was *an act of confession*. In his commentary on Daniel, Hippolytus makes a similar point: He could have prayed in secret but decided not to do so.¹⁸

In the New Testament, the “upper room” is twice referred to as a meeting place for the early believers in Jesus. After the ascension, the disciples “went to the room upstairs where they were staying” (Acts 1:13). After naming those present, Luke continues: “All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer” (1:14). Also in this text the upper room functions as a place of prayer, more precisely communal prayer. In Acts 20:8, the upper room is the place where the believers came together in Troas; there Paul was speaking to them and there they broke bread.¹⁹ In these texts, the upper room has become a gathering place for the local group of Jesus believers (a “house church”).

With regard to place, it seems to be of little importance for Christians in the first two or three centuries. The disinterest in place is directly connected with their belief, as Cyprian says: “it is more befitting our faith to realize that God is everywhere present (*ut sciamus Deum ubique esse praesentem*).” Even if Yahweh was not thought physically to live in the Temple in Jerusalem, it nevertheless became the “house of God” for Jews in antiquity. In the preaching of Jesus, however – especially in its Johannine version – the centrality of the Temple was diminished. With regard to the importance of place, Jesus’ words in John 4:21 may have been decisive: “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.”

¹⁷ Note also Tob 3:11 where Sarah is said to pray “with hands outstretched toward the window.”

¹⁸ *Comm. Dan.* 3.22. Text in Hippolyt, *Kommentar zu Daniel* (ed. Georg Nathanael Bonwetsch; 2nd rev. ed. by Marcel Richard; Vol. 1. of Hippolyt Werke; GCS [NF] 7: Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), 176–77.

¹⁹ According to Str-B 2:594 the upper room was used “to serve the learned as place of assembly, study and prayer.”

2. Praying Towards the East – The Significance of Direction

The aforementioned text from Daniel also mentions another nonverbal aspect of prayer: direction. Daniel had the windows in his upper room “open toward Jerusalem” (θυρίδας ἤνοιξεν . . . κατέναντι Ἱερουσαλημ). This custom is also presupposed in the prayer of Solomon during the dedication of the Temple, referring to people who “pray toward this place” (προσεύχονται εἰς τὸν τόπον τοῦτον) (1 Kgs/3Kgdms 8:35). In 1 Esdras, in a story located in exile, Zerubbabel “lifted up his face to heaven toward Ierousalem and blessed the king of heaven” (4:58 NETS). This came to be the practice prescribed in rabbinic Judaism (cf. *t.Ber.* 3.5; *m.Ber.* 4.5), and thus a distinctive mark of Jewish piety and identity.²⁰

This practice was not followed in the early church, with the exception of the Ebionites who are said to “worship Jerusalem as the house of God (*Hierosolymam adorent, quasi domus sit Dei*)” (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.26.2).²¹ A similar statement is connected with Elxai/Elchasai: “For he forbids prayer facing east (κωλύει γὰρ εἰς ἀνατολὰς εὔξασθαι). He claims that one should not face this direction, but should face Jerusalem from all quarters” (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 19.3.5).²² Using the last quotation as evidence for a Christian position is, however, rather doubtful.²³ Based on all the ancient sources about the Elkesaites, they are best characterized as a syncretistic, Gnosis-like movement, with a strong “Judaizing” tendency.²⁴ The statement from Elxai/Elchasai seems rather to reflect some kind of opposition to a specific Christian custom, attested at least from the second half of the second century: praying towards the east.²⁵ Possibly, the earliest evidence for this

²⁰ See further Uri Ehrlich, *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer: A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy* (trans. Dena Ordan; TSAJ 105; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 64–98.

²¹ Translation from *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies: Book 1* (trans. Dominic J. Unger; rev. John J. Dillon; ACW 55; New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1992); Greek text in Irenaeus, *Libros quinque adversus Haereses* (2 vols.; ed. W. Wigan Harvey; Cambridge: Typis Academicis, 1857), 1:213. Cf. *Barn.* 16.1 who claims that the Jews “set their hope on the building, as though it were God’s house.”

²² Translation from *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* (trans. Frank Williams; 2 vols.; NHS 35–36; Leiden: Brill, 1987–1994); Greek text in Klijn, A. F. J., and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (NovTSup 36; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 158.

²³ Contra Martin Wallraff, “Die Ursprünge der christlichen Gebetsostung,” *ZKG* 111 (2000): 169–84, esp. 180.

²⁴ See the discussion in Gunnar af Hällström and Oskar Skarsaune, “Cerinthus, Elxai, and Other Alleged Jewish Christian Teachers or Groups,” in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 488–502; 496–502.

²⁵ For a broad discussion of the sources, see Franz Joseph Dölger, *Sol Salutis: Gebet und Gesang im christlichen Altertum. Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Ostung in Gebet*

convention is found in the *Acts of Paul*, where Paul is depicted praying just before he is beheaded: “Then Paul stood with his face to the east and lifting up his hands to heaven (Τότε σταθείς ὁ Παῦλος κατέναντι πρὸς ἀνατολὰς καὶ ἐπάρας τὰς χεῖρας εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν), prayed at length” (*Mart. Paul 5*).²⁶

Another early witness for this custom comes from North Africa, from Tertullian. In *Ad Nationes*, written around 197, he comments on various misunderstandings of the Christian religion and writes: “Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the god of the Christians, because it is a well-known fact that we pray towards the east, (*ad orientis partem facere nos precationem*) or because we make Sunday a day of festivity” (*Nat. 1.13.1*).²⁷ The same point is repeated in a work which is in fact a reworking of *Ad Nationes*, namely *Apologeticum*:

Others have an idea which certainly is more in accord with human nature and more likely; namely that the sun is our god. If such is the case, we will be in a class with the Persians, although it is not the sun painted on a canvas that we adore, since we have it everywhere at present in its own orb. To put it briefly, this suspicion started when it became known that we pray facing the East (*ad orientis regionem precari*). (*Apol. 16.9–10*)²⁸

It is most interesting that outsiders thought that the Christians worshipped the sun. This is clearly denied by Tertullian, but it certainly reflects a problem: the behavior of Christians in connection with prayer was not very different from other people’s behavior. Their way of prayer was not unique; it was shared with people of other religious convictions. For that reason one may be tempted to think that this practice was not suited for identity formation. But, as mentioned above, very much depended on the interpretation of the posture by early Christians themselves. Why did they pray facing east?

Some scholars have argued that this practice was also a Jewish custom. The argument is based on a few texts, e.g. Wis 16:28 and in particular a passage by Josephus describing the Essenes as praying to the sun (*B.J. 2.128*;

und Liturgie (2. rev. ed.; Münster: Aschendorff, 1925), esp. 136ff. See also the very useful overview in Uwe Michael Lang, *Turning towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), esp. 35–56.

²⁶ Richard A. Lipsius and Max Bonnet, eds., *Acta apostolorum apocrypha* (2 vols.; Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1891–1903), 2:115. English translation from *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. Edgar Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; Eng. translation ed. by R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991), 2:262.

²⁷ Latin text (ed. by J. G. Ph. Borleffs) in *Tertulliani Opera I.* (ed. Eligius Dekkers et al.; CCSL 1; Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 9–75, 32; translation (by Peter Holmes) from *ANF 3:123*.

²⁸ Latin text (ed. Eligius Dekkers) in *Tertulliani Opera I.* (ed. Eligius Dekkers et al.; CCSL 1; Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 77–171, 116; translation from *Tertullian Apologetic Works and Minucius Felix Octavius* (trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly and Edwin A. Quain; FC 10; New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1950), 51.

cf. 2.148).²⁹ It is, however, most unlikely that this reflects actual practice among the Essenes; it seems rather to reflect Josephus' tendency to describe Jewish "sects" in accordance with well-known groups and beliefs in the Greco-Roman world, where sun-worship was popular.³⁰ Besides, if the Essenes are identical with the sectarians from Qumran (as most scholars believe), it is clear that they prohibited sun-worship (11Q19 55.15–21 referring to Deut 17:2–5; cf. Ezek 8:16–19). A more likely background to Josephus' statement is that it refers to the custom to pray at daybreak, widely attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls.³¹ Nevertheless, it is quite possible that the Essenes actually prayed towards the east – in opposition to the contemporary Jewish religious establishment, to which they were most critical. Even if this was the case, praying towards the east was hardly a wide-spread Jewish practice.³² And even if the Essenes prayed towards the east, it does not explain why early Jesus believers did the same.³³

Actually it is quite possible to argue that the practice is part of a gentile heritage, as Franz Dölger claims.³⁴ Evidence for this practice can be found in, for example, Vitruvius' prescription that a temple and the statue placed in the cella should face west. He gives the following reason:

. . . so that those who approach with offerings and sacrifices will look toward the image within the temple beneath the eastern part of the heavens (*spectent ad partem caeli orientis*); and thus when they are raising their prayers, they will view both the temple and the rising heaven, while the images themselves will seem to be rising as

²⁹ This is certainly the meaning of the text, though it is often disputed; cf. Todd S. Beall, *Josephus' Description of the Essenes Illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls* (SNTSMS 58; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 52–54.

³⁰ Cf. Steve Mason, *Judean War 2: Translation and Commentary* (vol. 1B of *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary*; ed. Steve Mason; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 105–6.

³¹ See in particular *4Q503* containing several prayers beginning with the phrase, "And when the sun rises . . ."; cf. James R. Davila, *Liturgical Works* (Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 208–38. For a broader discussion, see Jeremy Penner, *Patterns of Daily Prayer in Second Temple Period Judaism* (STDJ 104; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 101–36.

³² Contra Wallraff, "Die Ursprünge der christlichen Gebetsostung," 176. Note also the prohibition against praying towards the east in the Palestinian Talmud: "Said R. Jacob bar Aha, 'It was taught there: One does not stop someone from facing in any direction [to recite the Prayer,] except east'" (*y. Ber.* 4.5, 8b). Quotation from Ehrlich, *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 75.

³³ Contra Jean Daniélou (*The Theology of Jewish Christianity* [trans. John A. Baker; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964], 340) who claims that it is "probable that the Christians preserved the Essene practice."

³⁴ Dölger, *Sol Salutis*, 198. This can explain why Aseneth prayed towards the east (*Jos. Asen.* 11.15, 19). There is no compelling reason to believe that it reflects Jewish prayer practice.

well, to view the supplicant and sacrificers because it seems necessary that all altars of the gods face east. (*De architectura libri decem* 4.5.1)³⁵

It is interesting to note that Vitruvius writes about (the statutes of) the gods as “rising” (from the east). This has an equivalent in the Old Testament where Ezekiel writes that the “glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east” (Ezek 43:2). Thus, there seems to be a rather common idea in antiquity that east was connected with the divine. For that reason, Origen can say that “by nature the east is preferred over the other directions,” as the direction for prayer (*Or.* 32; cf. *Clem. Alex., Strom.* 7.43.6–7). Is this the background for the early Christian practice – or should we look for a more specific Christian reason? I will argue that the latter is most likely.

Let us start in Jerusalem at the time of Bishop Cyril (d. 386). In his *Mystagogical Lectures*, the bishop reminds the newly baptized of the rituals they had experienced, first in the antechamber of the baptistery. There they were asked to face the west and renounce Satan, “as though he were there in person” (1.2). Cyril further explains:

Allow me to explain the reason for facing west, for you should know it. Because the west is the region of visible darkness, Satan, who is himself darkness, has his empire in darkness – that is the significance of your looking towards the west while you renounce the gloomy Prince of night. (*Myst. Lect.* 1.4)³⁶

As a result of the renouncing of Satan, Cyril states that “God’s paradise opens before you, that Eden, planted in the east,” and continues: “Symbolic of this is your facing about from the west to the east, the place of light (τούτου σύμβολον τὸ στραφῆναι σε ἀπὸ δυσμῶν πρὸς ἀνατολάς, τοῦ φωτὸς τὸ χωρίον)” (1.9).³⁷

In this ritual, directions are most important – as they are in similar rituals in the West. In Bishop Ambrose’ *De Mysteriis*, we find a similar speech to the newly baptized about what took place in the baptistery:

Having entered, then, in order to look upon your adversary, who you deemed should be renounced to his face, you turned to the east (*ad orientem converteris*). For the one who renounces the devil turns to Christ (*qui enim renuntiat diabolo, ad Christum convertitur*), and he looks upon him directly. (*Myst.* 2.7)³⁸

³⁵ Translation from Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture* (trans. Ingrid D. Rowland; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁶ Translations from Cyril’s *Mystagogical Lectures* are taken from *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, vol. 2* (trans. Leo P. MacCauley and Anthony A. Stephenson; FC 64; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 153, 155, 159.

³⁷ Greek text in Cyrill von Jerusalem, *Mystagogische Katechesen* (trans. Georg Rōwekamp; Fontes Christiani 7; Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 106.

³⁸ Translation from Boniface Ramsey, *Ambrose* (The Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 1997), 147. Latin text in Ambrosius, *De sacramentis. De mysteriis* (trans. Josef Schmitz; Fontes Christiani 3; Freiburg: Herder, 1990), 208–10.

According to Ambrose, turning to the east means turning to Christ. It is reasonable to think that Christians who were incorporated into the community of believers according to such a liturgy, were reminded of their conversion (“turning to Christ”) and baptism when they faced east during prayer. With this background, the direction of prayer could thus be a factor in their identity formation.

When Ambrose identified east with Christ he followed a well-established convention. The earliest explicit example of the identification is found by Justin Martyr. Writing about Christ, he states: “For His word of truth and wisdom is more blazing and bright than the might of the sun, and it penetrates the very depths of the heart and mind. Thus Scripture says: ‘His name shall arise above the sun.’ And Zacharias affirms: ‘The east (ἀνατολή) is His name’ [Zech. 6:12]” (Dial 121.1–2).³⁹ The fact that the Septuagint here translates the Hebrew word “shoot” or “branch” (נֶחֱמֶצֶת) with the word ἀνατολή gives Christian readers a good reason for connecting Jesus the Messiah with the east and the sun.⁴⁰

The same point is also found by Melito of Sardis. He calls Christ, “King of heaven and creation’s Captain, Sun of uprising (ἥλιος ἀνατολῆς) who appeared both to the dead in Hades and to mortals in the world, he also alone rose as Sun out of heaven” (*Fragm.* 8b, 4).⁴¹

The biblical basis for calling Christ the sun was found in Mal 4:2 (3:20): “But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness (ἥλιος δικαιοσύνης) shall rise, with healing in its wings.” This is explicitly said by Origen in his commentary on Numbers – as rendered in Rufinus’ Latin translation: “‘Sol iustitiae’ Christus est” (*Comm. Num.* 23.5.2).⁴² In the apocryphal *Acts of Philip* (from the second half of the fourth century) the phrase is put in Christ’s own mouth. In a commission narrative Jesus says to Philip:

³⁹ The first quotation is from Ps 71(72):17; the second from Zech 6:12 LXX. Greek text in Edgar J. Goodspeed, ed., *Die ältesten Apologeten: Texte mit kurzen Einleitungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914; reprinted 1984). Translation from *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr* (trans. Thomas B. Falls; FC 6; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), 335. Justin refers to Zech. 6:12 also in *Dial.* 106.4 and 126.1.

⁴⁰ On Zech 6:12 as a possible Messianic text, see Aquila H. I. Lee, *From Messiah to Preexistent Son: Jesus’ Self-Consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms* (WUNT 2/192; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 105–7.

⁴¹ Translation from Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha, and fragments* (ed. Stuart G. Hall; Oxford Early Christian Texts; Oxford, 1979), 73

⁴² Text in Origenes, *Homilien zum Hexateuch in Rufins Übersetzung* (ed. W. A. Baehrens; vol. 7/1 of Origenes Werke; Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1921), 217; cf. also *Hom. Exod.* 7.8. Also Ps.-Cyprian, *De Pascha Computus* 19 calls Christ the sun of righteousness on the basis of Mal 3:20 LXX; cf. Cyprianus, *Opera omnia* (ed. Wilhelm A. Hartel; CSEL 3/3: Appendix; Vienna: Gerold, 1871), 248–69; 266.

Why do you hesitate, Philip? Did you not hear my teaching: “Behold, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves”? Do not fear, therefore, their savageness. I will be always with you, helping and assisting. Behold, I send you out as rays, I, the sun of righteousness. I am with you everywhere. (*Acts of Philip* 8.5 [Ms V])⁴³

Even if this Christological interpretation is not always explicit, it seems to be presupposed, e.g. when Origen writes about the direction of prayer:

Now concerning the direction in which one ought to look when he prays, a few things must be said. Since there are four directions, north, south, west, and east, who would not immediately acknowledge that it is perfectly clear we should make our prayers facing east, since this is a symbolic expression of the soul’s looking for the rising of the true Light (τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ φωτὸς ἀνατολῆ). But suppose someone wishes instead to offer intercessions in whatever direction the doors of the house face according to the opening of the house, saying that having a view into heaven is more inviting than looking at a wall; and suppose it should happen that the opening of the house is not toward the east. In this case let the person be told that the buildings of men arbitrarily face in certain directions or have openings in certain directions, but by nature the east is preferred over the other directions, and what is by nature must be ranked ahead of what is arbitrary. Moreover, why should the person who wishes to pray on a plain pray for this reason toward the east rather than toward the west? If in that case the east must reasonably be preferred, why should this not be done everywhere? So much for that (*Or.* 32).⁴⁴

In fact, Origen seems to take the eastward position in prayer for granted; in other words, it is established Christian practice. In another context Origen says that there are various ecclesiastical observances “which everyone is obliged to do, and yet not everyone understands the reason for them.” He then continues: “For the fact that we kneel to pray (*genua flectimus orantes*), for instance, and that of all the quarters of the heavens, the east is the only direction we turn to when we pour out prayer (*ex omnibus coeli plagis ad solam orientis partem conversi orationem fundimus*), the reasons for this, I think, are not easily discovered by anyone.” But Origen explains that the customs are followed because “we have received them as handed down and commended by the great high priest and his sons,” that is, from Christ and his apostles (*Hom. Num.* 5.1.4).⁴⁵

⁴³ Translation from István Czachesz, *Commission Narratives: A Comparative Study of the Canonical and Apocryphal Acts* (Studies in Early Christian Apocrypha 8; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 145.

⁴⁴ All translations of Origen, *De oratione* are from Rowan A. Greer, ed., *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works* (The Classics of Western Spirituality; London: SPCK, 1979); Greek text in Origenes, *Buch V–VIII Gegen Celsus. Die Schrift von Gebet* (ed. Paul Koetschau; Vol. 2 of Origenes Werke; GCS 3; Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1899), 297–403; 400.

⁴⁵ Text in Origenes, *Homilien zum Hexateuch in Rufins Übersetzung* (ed. W. A. Baehrens; vol. 7/1 of Origenes Werke; Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1921), 26; English translation from Origen, *Homilies on Numbers* (trans. Thomas P. Scheck; ed.

The apostolic basis for the custom is also claimed in the *Syrian Teaching of the Apostles*.⁴⁶ In this writing, probably from the first half of the fourth century,⁴⁷ we find many regulations purported to come from the apostles. The first is as follows:

The apostles therefore appointed that to the east you should pray, because ‘as the lightning which lightens from the East and is seen even to the West, so shall the coming of the Son of man be’ [Matt 24:27]. By this may we know and understand that he will appear suddenly from the east.⁴⁸

In this text the practice of praying towards the east is claimed to be based on an explicit apostolic ruling. It is, however, difficult to prove that the convention goes back to apostolic times.⁴⁹ On the other hand, in some New Testament texts there is a definite focus on the east, a focus that made praying towards the east quite understandable. Let us examine the evidence.

As mentioned above, Justin Martyr takes ἀνατολή in Zech 6:12 as a reference to Christ. The text in question is one out of three Old Testament texts where the Septuagint renders the word Πῦξ (“branch”), a metaphor for a Davidic heir, as “East”/“dawn”/“sunrise” (ἀνατολή). The other two are Jer 23:5 (ἀναστήσω τῷ Δαυιδ ἀνατολήν δικαίαν) and Zech 3:8 (δοῦλόν μου Ἀνατολήν). There are good reasons to assume that these texts are the basis for Luke 1:78, stating that “the dawn from on high (ἀνατολή ἐξ ὕψους) will break upon us.” This means that the text has a messianic sense, fitting the concluding verses of the Benedictus (Luke 1:68–79).⁵⁰ If this is the case, Christ is understood as “East”/“dawn”/“sunrise” already in New Testament times. And what would be more natural than to pray towards the east – in remembrance of the name of the Savior?⁵¹

Christopher A. Hall; *Ancient Christian Texts*; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), 17–18.

⁴⁶ First published in William Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864). In the English translation Cureton names the document, “The Doctrine of the Apostles” (p. 24).

⁴⁷ See most recently Witold Witakowski, “The Origin of the ‘Teaching of the Apostles’,” in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984* (ed. H. J. W. Drijvers et al.; OCA 229; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 161–71. Burkitt (see next note) tends to date it earlier.

⁴⁸ Translation (slightly modified) from F. C. Burkitt, Review of F. J. Dölger, *Sol Salutis*, *JTS* 22 (1921): 283–6. The text is also found in *ANF* 8:668.

⁴⁹ Wallraff (“Die Ursprünge der christlichen Gebetsostung,” 172) claims that there are no sources earlier than ca. 190. The great geographical spread of this practice, however, makes it likely that the custom is earlier (ibid.).

⁵⁰ See the judicious discussion in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (AB 28; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 387.

⁵¹ For prayers directed to Jesus, see Larry Hurtado’s contribution in this volume, especially pp. 45–50.

Another text which may substantiate a Christological interpretation of ἀνατολή is 2 Pet 1:19, a text that urges the readers to pay attention to the prophetic word “until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (ἕως οὗ ἡμέρα διαυγάσῃ καὶ φωσφόρος ἀνατείλῃ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν).” The “day” is a metaphor for the eschatological age, and the “rising star” is almost certainly an allusion to Num 25:17 (“a star shall rise out of Jacob”), a text that was interpreted messianically in ancient Judaism.⁵² With regard to 2 Pet 1:19 it is therefore justified to say that “the rising of the morning star is a symbol for the Parousia of Christ which inaugurates the eschatological age.”⁵³

There is also a possibility that the prominence of the Mount of Olives in the gospel tradition is of some importance for our question.⁵⁴ In Luke’s report of the ascension of Christ, the event is located at the Mount of Olives.⁵⁵ There Christ was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of the sight of his disciples. Then two men in white robes appeared to them, saying, “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven (ἐλεύσεται ὃν τρόπον ἐθεάσασθε αὐτὸν πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν)” (Acts 1:11). The reference to “the same way” could imply that his Parousia would take place at the Mount of Olives, an interpretation which is supported by what seems to be an intended allusion to Zech 14:5 in 1 Thess 3:13.⁵⁶ There Paul writes about “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints (μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ),” using a phrase connected with the coming of the Lord in Zech 14:5 (καὶ πάντες οἱ ἅγιοι μετ’ αὐτοῦ).⁵⁷ Thus Paul assigns to Jesus the role Zechariah attributed to Yahweh,⁵⁸ connecting the

⁵² See especially *T.Jud.* 24:1, where Num 24:17 is connected with Mal 4:2: “And after this there shall arise for you a Star from Jacob in peace (καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἀνατελεῖ ὑμῖν ἄστρον ἐξ Ἰακώβ ἐν εἰρήνῃ): And a man shall arise from my posterity like the Sun of righteousness (ὁ ἥλιος τῆς δικαιοσύνης).” Cf. also *T.Levi* 18:3.

⁵³ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (WBC 59; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 226. Bauckham further notes: “The phrase ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν (‘in your hearts’) no longer appears surprising, once it is realized that only one specific aspect of the Parousia is being discussed, namely the Parousia as the full revelation of God to Christian believers” (ibid., with reference to Tord Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter* [ConBNT 9; Uppsala: Liber/Gleerup, 1977], 85).

⁵⁴ On this, see Georg Kretschmar, “Festkalender und Memorialstätten Jerusalems in altkirchlicher Zeit,” *ZDPV* 87 (1971): 167–205, esp. 192–8.

⁵⁵ Cf. the reference to Bethany, a village at the Mount of Olives, in Luke 24:50 and to the disciples’ return ἀπὸ ὄρους τοῦ καλουμένου Ἐλαιῶνος in Acts 1:12.

⁵⁶ Cf. Gordon Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 134–6.

⁵⁷ “The holy ones” are most probably angels, a factor that makes it very likely that also Matt 25:31 – about the coming of the Son of Man with all his angels (πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι μετ’ αὐτοῦ) – is an allusion to Zech 14:5; cf. also *Did.* 16:7, which is very close to Zech 14:5 (LXX).

⁵⁸ Cf. David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology* (WUNT 2/47; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992), 151–2.

Parousia of Christ and the coming of the Lord on the Mount of Olives, a mountain “which lies before Jerusalem on the east (κατέναντι Ιερουσαλημ ἐξ ἀνατολῶν)” (Zech 14:4). This connection is further sustained by the fact that Jesus, according to the Synoptic tradition, went into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives (Mark 11:1 parr) and held his eschatological speech at the same mountain (Matt 24:3; Mark 13:3).⁵⁹

In my opinion the aforementioned texts, connecting Christ in various ways to the sunrise and the east, were the building blocks for a Christological based argument for the practice to pray towards the east. And taken into consideration the strong expectation of an imminent Parousia, in what direction should the believers turn when they prayed, “Our Lord, come!” (μαράνα θά, 1 Cor 16:22; *Did.* 10:6), or, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ, Rev 22:20) – if not to the east? Admittedly the argument is not made explicit in the New Testament, but in all likelihood the connection between Christ and the east was so strong that it almost *required* that his followers faced east when they prayed.

The focus on dawn mentioned in several of the texts above is naturally linked to another nonverbal aspect of prayer, namely time. In his famous letter to Trajan, the Roman governor in Bithynia, Pliny (the younger), reports that the Christians “were accustomed to assemble at dawn (*ante lucem*) on a fixed day, to sing a hymn antiphonally to Christ as God” (*Ep.* 10.96).⁶⁰ A fixed time was not only customary for the meetings of the Christian community, it also applied to personal prayer.

3. “Three Times a Day” – The Significance of Time

Regular daily prayers, normally at dawn and dusk, seem to have been normal practice among both Jews and Greeks⁶¹ in antiquity. When the author of *Didache* exhorts his readers to pray (the Lord’s Prayer) “three times a day” (8.3), he is in line with a widespread Jewish practice (cf. Dan 6:12 LXX; cf. also Ps 54:18 LXX), a practice that probably was linked to the hours for the *Tamid* offering;⁶² at least both Judith and Daniel are said to pray at the time of

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that Luke stresses that Jesus spent the nights on the Mount of Olives (Luke 21:37) during his last week in Jerusalem.

⁶⁰ Quoted from P. G. Walsh, *Pliny the Younger, Complete Letters* (Oxford World’s Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 278–9. The working day began at dawn.

⁶¹ Cf. Plato’s statement about “talking to the gods in prayer and supplication, at the rising and setting of sun and moon” (*Leg.* 887e). For a discussion of this and other texts, see Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 156–64.

⁶² On this and other reasons for daily prayers, see Penner, *Patterns of Daily Prayer*.

the evening sacrifice (Jdt 9:1⁶³; Dan 9:20–21). This daily burnt offering, however, was presented only twice: at sunrise and at sunset (cf. Exod 29:38–42; Num 28:3–8; 2 Chron 31:3). Later it became usual to offer the evening sacrifice in the afternoon, at about three o'clock.⁶⁴ This is attested by Josephus who records that during the Roman siege of Jerusalem the priests were not hindered from their duties, “but did still twice a day, in the morning and about the ninth hour, offer their sacrifices on the altar” (*A.J.* 14.65 [Thackeray, LCL]; cf. *m. Pesah.* 5:1). If prayer was linked to the daily offerings, this development may explain why the ninth hour became a fixed hour of prayer (cf. Acts 3:1: ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς) – in addition to morning and evening.

The first Christian author to elaborate on the time for prayer is Tertullian in his *De oratione*. Observing that the apostles seem to have prayed at fixed hours, i.e., the third (cf. Acts 2:15),⁶⁵ the sixth (cf. Acts 10:9), and the ninth (cf. Acts 3:1),⁶⁶ he recommends to pray like them: “Concerning time, however, the keeping also of certain hours will not be useless from an external point of view – I mean of these common hours that mark the intervals of the day, the third, sixth and ninth, which in Scripture are to be found the most usual” (*Or.* 25.1).⁶⁷ Tertullian is aware that “these facts are stated simply without any command about the practice,” yet they will help to remember prayer during everyday life. Then he goes on to give a theological (trinitarian) reason for prayer three times a day:

We read also of Daniel’s practice, which followed, you may be sure, the teaching of Israel: we ought, like him, to pray not less than thrice a day, being debtors to the three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; of course, quite apart from the regular prayers which without any reminder are due at the beginning of day and night. (*Or.* 25.5)

In a later writing on fasting, from his Montanist period, Tertullian writes about fasting periods and hours of prayer. Again, he refers to the texts in Acts

⁶³ Judith’s prayer took place at the time “when the evening incense was being offered in the house of God in Jerusalem.” In the Bible the incense offering is not mentioned as part of the daily offerings but this is specified in the Mishna tractate *Tamid*; cf. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (3 vols.; rev. ed. by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Martin Goodman; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–1987) 2:304–7.

⁶⁴ Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, 2:301.

⁶⁵ The text was probably read in light of Acts 1:14 and 2:1.

⁶⁶ Dennis Hamm (“Praying ‘Regularly’ [not ‘Constantly’]: A Note on the Cultic Background of *dia pantos* at Luke 24:53, Acts 10:2 and Hebrews 9:6, 13:15,” *ExpTim* 116 [2004]: 50–52) has argued well for an interpretation of Luke 24:51 which implies that the apostles did not pray “continually” in the temple, but “regularly” – an interpretation that fits Tertullian’s argument.

⁶⁷ All translations from Tertullian’s *De oratione* are taken from *Tertullian’s Treatises: Concerning Prayer. Concerning Baptism* (trans. Alexander Souter; London: SPCK, 1919).

about the apostles praying and to the example of Daniel, and writes about “the apostolic (hours) – the third, the sixth, the ninth” (*Jejun.* 10.4). With special focus on the ninth hour, he thinks that Peter (Acts 3:1) was led by ancient usage and he asks if there is a more worthy reason for observing that hour for fasting and prayer. There is, and this reason may be attributed even to Peter: “For (the practice) comes from the death of the Lord; which death albeit it behoves to be commemorated always, without difference of hours; yet are we at that time more impressively commended to its commemoration” (*Jejun.* 10.6).⁶⁸

The “Christianizing” of the prayer hours, which began by Tertullian, is continued by Cyprian. He refers to many of the same biblical texts as Tertullian does, but he goes further in giving them a specific Christian interpretation. Referring to the book of Daniel, he claims that the three young men observed the third, sixth, and ninth hours, as it was a symbol of the Trinity (*sacramento scilicet trinitatis*). Then he continues, saying that the old practice of prayer pointed forward to important events:

For upon the disciples at the third hour did the Holy Spirit descend, which fulfilled the grace of the Lord’s promise. Likewise Peter at the sixth hour going upward upon the house-top was instructed alike by a sign and the voice of God admonishing him, to admit all to the grace of salvation, although before He was hesitant about baptizing the Gentiles. The Lord also, having been crucified from the sixth to the ninth, washed away our sins by His blood, and, that he might be able to redeem and quicken us, He then completed the victory by His passion. (*Dom. or.* 34.644–651 [Deferrari, FC])

Then he goes on giving new meaning to the morning and evening prayer:

For we must also pray in the morning, that the resurrection of the Lord may be celebrated by morning prayer (*ut resurrectio Domini matutina oratione celebretur*). . . . Likewise at the setting of the sun and at the end of the day necessarily there must again be prayer. For since Christ is the true Sun and the true Day (*Christus sol uerus est et dies uerus*), as the sun and the day of the world recede, when we pray and petition that the light come upon us again, we pray for the coming of Christ to provide us with the grace of eternal light (*Christi precamur aduentum lucis aeternae gratiam praebiturum*). (*Dom. or.* 35.654–655, 660–664 [Deferrari, FC])

Calling Christ the “Sun” is based on the widespread reading of Mal 4:2 (see above), while the designation “Day” is based on a literal reading of Psalm 117:22–24 (LXX), taking both the stone/cornerstone and “the day that the LORD has made” as references to Christ.

In this way morning prayer brings Christ’s resurrection to mind, while evening prayer is connected with the hope of the second coming of Christ. However, calling Christ *sol uerus et dies uerus* has another consequence:

⁶⁸ Translation (by S. Thelwall) from *ANF* 4:109.

But if in holy Scripture Christ is the true Sun and the true Day, no hour is excepted for Christians (*christianis*), in which God should be adored frequently and always (*frequenter ac semper*), so that we who are in Christ, that is, in the true Sun and in the true Day, should be insistent throughout the whole day (*per totum diem*) in our petitions and should pray; and when, by the law of the world, the revolving night, recurring in its alternate changes, succeeds, there can be no harm from the nocturnal shades for those who pray, because to the sons of light even in the night there is day. (*Dom. or.* 35.671–678 [Deferrari, FC])⁶⁹

It is noteworthy that every possible hour for prayer, both the fixed hours and the unceasing prayer, according to Cyprian have a Christological motivation. Even if the times for prayer coincide with the customs of people outside the Christian community, e.g. the Jews, the aforementioned texts contribute to giving the praying Christ believer an awareness of a specific belonging, and thus an identity as a Christian.

That this is an important reason for the “Christianizing” of prayer hours is seen in another text, namely the *Apostolic Tradition* (*Traditio apostolica*). This liturgical manual, a piece of “living literature,” has a most complicated history of origin, and in its final form it dates from the mid-fourth century.⁷⁰ Its nucleus, however, probably originated in the early third century, possibly in Italy/Rome (though not written by Hippolytus).⁷¹ Earlier it was believed that the *Apostolic Tradition* was a description of the Roman liturgy in the early third century; today scholars seem to think that the text equally assisted to *construct* a social reality.⁷² This means that the section on prayer was an instrument to construct a prayer practice, based on a specific theological interpretation. The actual section, chapter 41, is appropriately labeled “On the time when it is proper to pray.” There we find the following regulations for prayer:

And if indeed you are in the house, pray at the third hour and praise God. But if you are elsewhere and the occasion comes about, pray in your heart to God. ⁶For at that hour Christ was displayed nailed to the tree. . . . ⁷Pray likewise at the time of the sixth hour. For as Christ was fixed on the wood of the cross that day was divided, and a great darkness descended. . . . ⁸And they should pray at the ninth hour also a great prayer and give great praise, following the manner in which the soul of the righteous praises the Lord, the God of truth, who remembered his saints and sent them his Son, that is his Word, to enlighten them. ⁹For at that hour Christ, pierced in the side, poured forth water and blood and lit up the rest of that day and brought it so to the evening.

⁶⁹ Also Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 7.40.3–4) refers to specific hours for prayer, though he stresses that the true Christian prays “throughout his whole life” (*ANF* 2:534).

⁷⁰ See Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2002), 13–15.

⁷¹ A variant of the traditional ascription to Hippolytus is still defended by Stewart-Sykes. See *Hippolytus: The Apostolic Tradition* (trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes; Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 22–32.

⁷² *Hippolytus: The Apostolic Tradition*, 50.

Hence, in beginning to sleep, he made it the beginning of another day which fulfilled the image of resurrection. (*Trad. ap.* 41.5–9 [Stewart-Sykes])⁷³

The *Apostolic Tradition* continues giving rules for the prayer at bedtime, at midnight, and at cock-crow. Concerning prayer at midnight, it is referred to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matt 25:1–13:

“Behold, a shout went up around the middle of the night, of people saying: ‘Look, the bridegroom is coming: get up to meet him.’” And he goes on saying: “Therefore be watchful, for you do not know at what hour he comes.”¹⁷ And likewise pray, getting up around cock-crow. For at the hour when the cock crew the sons of Israel denied Christ, whom we have known by faith, looking each day in hope for the appearing of eternal light at the resurrection of the dead.¹⁸ Therefore if you faithful act thus and keep them in your memory and teach them in turn and encourage the catechumens, you shall not undergo temptation, nor will you perish, for you shall have Christ always in mind. (*Trad. ap.* 41.16–18 [Stewart-Sykes])

According to these rules, the various hours for prayer serve to remind the faithful always to have Christ in their minds. In this way *time* becomes significant, not only to avoid temptations, but also to create an identity as a believer in Christ.

The basic times for prayer seem to be an inheritance of wide-spread Jewish practice. It is, however, remarkable that all the above mentioned texts argue for specific Christological motivations for the different prayer hours. This illustrates the importance of the Jesus story for determining early Christian prayer practice. In other words, it shows that the Jesus tradition was a key to justify practice and consequently a key to identity formation.

4. “Whenever You Stand Praying...” – The Significance of Postures and Gestures

4.1. *Standing and Kneeling*

Among Jews in the Second Temple period the normal posture during prayer was standing, as Jesus portrays the Pharisee and the publican in the temple (Luke 18:11, 13); cf. the saying in Mark 11:25: “Whenever you stand praying (καὶ ὅταν στήκετε προσευχόμενοι)”⁷⁴ This was also taken as a given in later rabbinic writings.⁷⁵ When standing in prayer, one also lifted the eyes towards heaven. That this was normal is clear from what is said about the

⁷³ This and the following translation are from *Hippolytus: The Apostolic Tradition* (trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes), 164–66. Section 41.5–8 is translated from Sahidic, 41.9–18 from Latin.

⁷⁴ Cf. 1 Sam 1:26; Ps 133 (134):1; Josephus, *A.J.* 10.255; 12.98; *m. Taan.* 2.2; *m. Ber.* 5.1. See further Str-B 1:399–400.

⁷⁵ Cf. Ehrlich, *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 9.

publican: “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven.”⁷⁶

This posture is so often taken for granted that it is not mentioned, and even less commented upon. An exception is Cyprian, who in an apologetic work comments about worshipping idols:

Why do you humble and bend yourself to false gods? Why do you bow your captive body before foolish images and creations of earth? God made you erect, and, although the other animals are prone and are depressed with posture bent toward earth, you have an exalted stature and a countenance raised upward toward heaven and the Lord (*tibi sublimis status et ad caelum adque ad dominum susum uultus erectus est*). Look there, direct your eyes there, seek God on high. That you may be able to be free of things here below, hold up and raise your heart to the heavenly things on high. . . . Establish your soul with the state of your face and body. (*Ad Demetrianum* 16.306–317)⁷⁷

Even if standing is the normal posture, at times kneeling was the preferred position. In the aforementioned text about Daniel, it is in fact said that kneeling down was his habitual way of prayer: He “entered into his house, and the windows in its upper rooms were open for him opposite Ierousalem, and he was getting down on his knees (ἦν κάμπτων ἐπὶ τὰ γόνατα αὐτοῦ) three times a day and was praying and making confession to his God, just as he was doing previously” (Dan 6:11; Theodotion NETS).

What is meant by “getting down on his knees”? This is not quite clear. If we go to the Old Greek version of Daniel, we note that the wording is in fact markedly different: ἔπιπτεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ. The idiom used here (πίπτειν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ) means “to fall on his face,”⁷⁸ as a sign of devotion or humility before high-ranking persons or divine beings, especially when one approaches with a petition.⁷⁹ In such a context πίπτειν is closely connected with προσκυνεῖν (cf. e.g. Matt 2:11; 4:9; 18:26; Rev 5:14; 19:4 where both verbs are used). Physically this idiom seems to imply prostrating oneself, with the face to the earth – as Christ is depicted in Mark 14:35.

It is interesting that the Lukan version of the last mentioned text (Luke 22:41) says that Christ “knelt down” (θεῖς τὰ γόνατα), while Matthew (26:39) is closer to Mark, saying that Christ “fell on his face” (ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον

⁷⁶ The idiom “lifting the eyes towards heaven” (with the verb ἀναβλέπειν) occurs in connection with Jesus praying, e.g. in Matt 14:19 parr.; Mark 7:34; cf. Joh 17:1. The same idiom is found in *Mart. Pol.* 9.2; 14.1.

⁷⁷ Latin text (ed. by Manlio Simonetti) in *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera, Pars II* (ed. Manlio Simonetti and Claudio Moreschini; CCSL 3A; Turnholt: Brepols, 1976), 33–51. Translation from Saint Cyprian, *Treatises* (trans. and ed. Roy J. Deferrari; FC 36; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 181–2.

⁷⁸ Other examples of the idiom include Gen 17:3, 17; Jos 5:14; Sir 50:17; Matt 17:6; 26:39; Luke 5:12; 17:16; 1 Cor 14:25; Rev 7:11; 11:16; Josephus, *A.J.* 3.310; 7.95; 11.231.

⁷⁹ BDAG s.v. πίπτω.

αὐτοῦ). This means that the two versions of Dan 6:11 and the synoptic versions of Christ praying in Gethsemane seems to imply that the phrase, “to fall on his face,” can be more or less synonymous with the phrase, “bend one’s knees” (either with the verb κάμπτειν or τιθέναι). But this is clearly not the case in all instances. In some texts, τιθέναι τὰ γόνατα means to bow down on one’s knees while keeping the upper part of the body in a vertical position. This is certainly presupposed when King Solomon is described praying in front of the Temple, standing on a bronze platform: “he stood on it and fell to his knees (ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὰ γόνατα) before all the assembly of Israel – and he spread out his hands heavenward” (2 Chron 6:13 NETS). Similar expressions are used in the Septuagint in 3 Macc 2:1 (with the verb κάμπτειν), 1 Kgs 8:54 (ὀκλάζειν) and Ezra 9:5 (κλίνειν)/1 Esdras 8:70 (κάμπτειν); in all cases, there is a reference to hands lifted towards heaven.

The implication of these findings is that the phrase, “fall on one’s knees,” is ambiguous. It may imply prostration but not necessarily. In the New Testament, the idiom is not very common; it is used mainly by Luke (Acts 9:40; 20:36; 21:5) but no details are given about the actual position of the body.

What does kneeling as a prayer posture signify? Based on texts like Ezra 9:5 (introducing a penitential prayer) and 3 Macc 2:1 (introducing a prayer with penitential elements in a most critical situation; cf. vv. 17–18), it seems likely to think that genuflection is a sign of repentance, being linked with a consciousness of sin and guilt. Such an interpretation also fits the occurrences of the expression in *The Shepherd of Hermas*: In two of the three cases kneeling down is connected with confession of sin (Herm. Vis. 1.1.3 [1.3]: “I knelt down and began to pray to the Lord and to confess my sins”;⁸⁰ also in Vis. 3.1.5 [9.5], but not in Vis. 2.1.2 [5.2]).

This same is true of the two examples of a figurative use of the phrase. In the *Prayer of Manasseh*, an individual penitential prayer ascribed to a king who was notorious for his sin and idolatry,⁸¹ we find the expression, “I bend the knee of my heart” (κλίνω γόνυ καρδίας) (v. 11). A very similar expression is found in *1 Clement* where the author exhorts his addressees to repentance, “bending the knees of your heart” (57.2). All these examples seem to support an interpretation which argues that kneeling is a sign of repentance and confession of sin.

Such an interpretation does not, however, suit the use of the phrase in Eph 3:14: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father. . .” The introducing

⁸⁰ This and other translations from the Apostolic Fathers are quoted from Bart D. Ehrman, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (2 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁸¹ See further Reidar Hvalvik, “Prayer of Manasseh,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 821–2.

words (τούτου χάριν) refer back to the preceding section where Paul writes about his calling and the commission given to him who is “the very least of all the saints” (v. 8). The (figurative) genuflection referred to in v. 14 is thus best understood as a general sign of humility. This is also the case in Phil 2:10 where Paul says that in “the name of Jesus every knee should bend” in a state of awe and positive confession.

Among later early Christian writers there are, however, several texts that support the idea of repentance and confession in connection with the bended knees. Most explicit is Origen who talks about genuflection as a necessity in such a case:

And kneeling is necessary (ἡ γονυκλισία δὲ ὅτι ἀναγκαία ἐστίν) when someone is going to speak against his own sins before God, since he is making supplication for their healing and their forgiveness. We must understand that it symbolizes (ὅτι σύμβολον τυγχάνει) someone who has fallen down and become obedient (Or. 31.3 [Greer])⁸²

Tertullian links kneeling and fasting (*Scap.* 4.6), obviously as signs of repentance and supplication. The same is true of Ambrose’s comment on the anatomy of the knee: “The knee is made flexible, by which the offence of the Lord is mitigated, wrath appeased, grace called forth” (*Hex.* 6.9.74).⁸³ And later Theodoret of Cyrus comments on the posture of Daniel (according to the wording in Theodotion), saying, “His posture (τὸ σχῆμα) also shows his contrite heart (διανοίᾳς συντριβήν): he continued to offer his confession to God on bended knee” (*Comm. Dan.* 6).⁸⁴ In such a context kneeling is not only permitted, but the only acceptable posture of prayer.

Kneeling was, however, also a matter of some dispute.⁸⁵ Tertullian writes:

As regards kneeling also, prayer finds a variety of practice in the action of a certain very few who refrain from kneeling on the Saturday. At the very moment when this difference of opinion is pleading its cause in the churches, the Lord will give His grace that they may either yield or, without proving a stumbling-block to others, follow their

⁸² GCS 3 (ed. Paul Koetschau), Origenes 2:396. Also in *Ps.-Clem., Rec.* 3.50 kneeling is connected with repentance.

⁸³ Translation from A. E. Crawley, “Kneeling” in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (ed. James Hastings; 12 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner’s sons, 1908–1921), 7:745–7, 747. Latin text CSEL 32/1 (ed. C. Schenkl; 1897), 260: *flexibile genu, quo prae ceteris domini mitigatione offense, ira mulcet, gratia prouocatur.*

⁸⁴ Greek text and English translation in Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on Daniel* (trans. Robert C. Hill; Writings from the Greco-Roman World 7; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 164–5.

⁸⁵ It should be noted that kneeling and prostration were considered “un-Greek and un-Roman.” Thus Larry J. Alderink and Luther H. Martin, “Prayer in Greco-Roman Religions,” in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology* (ed. Mark Christopher Kiley; London: Routledge, 1997), 123–27, 125. Kneeling was, however, not totally unknown among the Greeks; see Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*, 190–94.

own opinion. But we, according to the tradition we have received, on the day of the Lord's resurrection, and on it alone, ought to refrain carefully not only from this, but from every attitude and duty that cause perplexity, putting off even our daily business, 'lest we give any place to the devil.' The same thing, too, at Whitsuntide, which is distinguished by the same solemnity of its rejoicing. But who would hesitate daily to prostrate himself before God even at the very first prayer with which we enter on the day? Further, at the fastings and stations no prayer must be engaged in without the bended knee and the other signs of humility. For we are not only praying, but also begging for mercy and confessing our misdeeds to God our Lord. (*Or.* 23 [Souter])

This passage makes it clear that kneeling was a most common posture when praying. What was unusual was to refrain from this practice on Saturday. The reason behind this exception is not explained; could it be some influence from Jewish Christians, out of reverence for the Sabbath? We do not know. Tertullian does, however, stress that there is one exception – on the Lord's Day. This is also confirmed in another writing from the same author: "We consider fasting, or kneeling during service, on Sundays to be unlawful, and we enjoy the same privilege from Easter until Pentecost" (*Cor.* 3.4).⁸⁶ The evidence from Tertullian seems to imply that kneeling was customary in North Africa around 200. And this practice is confirmed by Eusebius a little bit more than a century later. In his church history he refers to a legion of soldiers who "knelt on the ground according to our custom of prayer" (κατὰ τὸ οἰκεῖον ἡμῖν τῶν εὐχῶν ἔθος) (*Hist. eccl.* 5.5.1).⁸⁷

At this time kneeling seems in fact to have been so widespread that some even knelt at Sundays. For that reason kneeling became a topic at the ecumenical council in Nicaea in 325. In its last canon, we see the strong wish to establish an ecumenical or universal practice:

Forasmuch as there are certain persons who kneel on the Lord's Day (τινές εἰσιν ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ γόνυ κλίνοντες) and in the days of Pentecost,⁸⁸ therefore, to the intent that all things may be uniformly observed everywhere (in every parish), it seems good to the holy Synod that prayer be made to God standing. (*Canon* 20)⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Latin text in *Q. Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, De Corona* (ed. Jacques Fontaine; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966): "Die dominico ieiunium nefas ducimus, uel de geniculis adorare. Eadem immunitate a die Paschae in Pentecosten usque gaudemus." English translation from Tertullian, *Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works* (trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain; FC 40; Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press), 237.

⁸⁷ This and other translations from Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica* are quoted from *The Ecclesiastical History* (trans. Kirsopp Lake and J. E. L. Oulton; 2 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926–1932).

⁸⁸ What is meant is probably the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost; cf. the quotation from Tertullian, *Cor.* 3.4 above.

⁸⁹ Text in William Bright, *The Canons of the First Four General Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), XV. English translation (by Henry R. Percival) from *NPNF* 2/14:42.

The issue was hardly solved by that decision. Kneeling continued to be a question in the early church.⁹⁰ A witness of this is a question in Pseudo-Justin, *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*, probably written late in the fourth or early in the fifth century, maybe in Syria.⁹¹ The question is: “Since kneeling is the more fitting posture for sinners, why do men stand in prayer on the Lord’s days and from Easter to Pentecost?” (*Quest.* 115).⁹² Does this question indicate that the anthropological teaching of the church made kneeling a more common posture for prayer than it was in ancient Judaism? If this is the case, kneeling can be seen as an expression of early Christian identity, or at least one of the identities of a believer: a sinner before God.

The answer given to the aforementioned question is as follows, referring to a lost work of Irenaeus:

This [custom], of not bending the knee upon Sunday, is a symbol of the resurrection, (σύμβολόν ἐστι τῆς ἀναστάσεως) through which we have been set free, by the grace of Christ, from sins, and from death, which has been put to death under Him. Now this custom took its rise from apostolic times, as the blessed Irenæus, the martyr and bishop of Lyons, declares in his treatise *On Easter*, in which he makes mention of Pentecost also; upon which [feast] we do not bend the knee, because it is of equal significance with the Lord’s day, for the reason already alleged concerning it.⁹³

This answer too, gives an indication of a Christian identity, now closely related to the resurrection of Christ. This event made a difference, both with regard to time for worship and for posture of praying. Even if standing while praying was an old custom, it was given a new Christological interpretation.

In Basil the Great’s treatise *On the Holy Spirit (De Spiritu Sancto)* (written 375 C.E.) an eschatological interpretation is added to the Christological one:

We all stand for prayer on Sunday, but not everyone knows why. We stand for prayer on the day of the Resurrection to remind ourselves of the graces we have been given: not only because we have been raised with Christ and are obliged to seek the things that are above, but also because Sunday seems to be an image of the age to come. . . . It is therefore necessary for the Church to teach her newborn children to stand for prayer on this day, so that they will always be reminded of eternal life, and not neglect preparations for their journey. The entire season of Pentecost is likewise a reminder of the resurrection we expect in the age to come. . . . During this time the ordinances of the Church instruct us to pray standing, and by this reminder our minds are made to

⁹⁰ Note that rabbinic Judaism was critical to the practice of kneeling during prayer; cf. Ehrlich, *Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 35, 195.

⁹¹ See further *RAC* 19:868–69. On the character of this writing, see also Yannis Papadoyannakis, “Defining Orthodoxy in Pseudo-Justin’s ‘Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos’,” in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (ed. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin; TSAJ 119; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 115–27; esp. 116–19.

⁹² Quotation from Bright, *The Canons of the First Four General Councils*, 84.

⁹³ Translation (from Pseudo-Justin, *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*) in *ANF* 1:569. Greek text in Irenaeus, *Libros quinque adversus Haereses* (ed. W. Wigan Harvey; 2 vols.; Cambridge: Typis Academicis, 1857) 2:478 (fragm. VII).

focus on the future instead of the present. Also, every time we bend our knees for prayer and then rise again, we show by this action that through sin we fell down to earth, but our Creator, the Lover of Mankind, has called us back to heaven. (*De Spiritu Sancto* 66)⁹⁴

The use of both standing and kneeling as a posture for prayer – as presupposed by Basil the Great – may be illustrated by what Eusebius tells us about Constantine. As mentioned above, he is recorded to pray in his private chambers kneeling. Also before his baptism, he is depicted in the same posture: “he knelt on the floor and made himself a suppliant to God, making confession . . .” (*Vit. Const.* 4.61.3). Before God he knelt, but before the eyes of the public he prayed standing. This is clear from what Eusebius writes about the public image of Constantine: “In the imperial quarters of various cities, in the images erected above the entrances, he was portrayed standing up, looking up to heaven, his hands extended in a posture of prayer” (*Vit. Const.* 4.15.2 [Cameron and Hall]).⁹⁵

This leads us to another important posture – the *orante* position.

4.2 “Lifting up holy hands” – The *Orante*

A very common motif in early Christian art is a (female) figure with outstretched, raised arms, known as the *orans* or *orante* (of Latin *orare*, “pray”), meaning a person in prayer. This was the main custom of praying in antiquity, both among Jews and Gentiles, and it was also adopted by the early Christians.

In the Old Testament King Solomon is depicted with his hands outstretched toward heaven, both standing and kneeling (1 Kgs 8:22, 54; 2 Chron 6:13), and in Lamentations 3:41 we read: “Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven” (cf. 2:19). This way of praying is also referred to several times in 2 Maccabees (3:20; 14:34; 15:12), and according to the *Sibylline Oracles* the Jews prayed in this manner: “at dawn they lift up holy arms toward heaven” (3.591–593).⁹⁶

Raising one’s hands to heaven seems to be regarded as a universal prayer gesture by the Greeks. In the Pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De mundo*, the author states that God has gone up into “a pure region, to which we rightly give the name of heaven.” This is sustained by the way human beings pray:

⁹⁴ Translation from St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* (trans. David Anderson; Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 100–101. Greek text in Basile de Césarée, *Sur le Saint-Esprit* (ed. Benoît Pruche; 2nd ed.; SC 17; Paris: Cerf, 1968).

⁹⁵ The historicity of the statements about Constantine is not important since Eusebius certainly refers to well-known customs.

⁹⁶ Translation from *OTP* 1:375. Other evidence for this custom includes e.g. Exod 9:29, 33; Ps 141:2; Isa 1:15; 4 Macc 4:11; Josephus, *A.J.* 3.26; 4.40; 11.143; *Jos. Asen.* 11.15, 19.

“This, too, is borne out by the general habit of mankind, which assigns the regions above to God; for we all stretch up our hands to heaven when we offer prayers” (*De mundo* 400a 15–17).⁹⁷ The same practice is well attested in Roman literature, here exemplified by Vergil’s depiction of the pious Aeneas: “. . . and I stretch my upturned hand out to the sky with a word of prayer” (*Aeneid* 3.176–177).⁹⁸ In Roman tradition this posture is in fact that of *pietas*, as personified and represented in Roman art. Several emperors had the figure of *pietas* depicted on the reverse of their coins because they wanted to be associated with this virtue, cf. e.g. the silver denarius from Hadrian’s reign (120 C.E.) below.⁹⁹



The Pauline exhortation concerning prayer in 1 Tim 2:8 is thus referring to a well-known gesture: “I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument.” A quite similar exhortation is found in *1 Clement*: “Let us, therefore, approach him in holiness of soul, lifting up to him pure and undefiled hands . . .” (29:1; cf. 2:3).

This posture soon became the most popular for Christian prayer. Origen explicitly says that this was the preferred position for prayer:

This is how he should come to prayer, stretching out his soul, as it were, instead of his hands, straining his mind toward God instead of his eyes, raising his governing reason from the ground and standing it before the Lord of all instead of standing. . . . And although there are a great many different positions for the body, he should not doubt that the position with the hands outstretched and the eyes lifted up is to be preferred

⁹⁷ Translation from E. S. Forster, *De mundo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914).

⁹⁸ Other examples include Livy, *History of Rome* 4.21.5; Sallust, *The War with Catiline* 31.3.

⁹⁹ Courtesy of the Forum Ancient Coins (forumancientcoins.com). Cf. David R. Sear, *Roman Coins and Their Values, Vol. 2* (London: Spink, 2002), 3524.

before all others, because it bears in prayer the image of characteristics befitting the soul and applies it to the body. (*Or.* 31.2 [Greer])¹⁰⁰

According to Origen the orante position was preferable because it best reflected the right attitude of the soul. Several early Christian writers saw, however, a much more specific significance of this posture: it reminded them of the cross. One of the first to draw attention to this fact is the anonymous author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*. In his searching for events which foreshadowed the passion of Christ, he mentions the story from Exod 17 where Moses prayed while Joshua fought against Amalek. Joshua prevailed as long as Moses held up his hands; when he became weary, Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on each side. Barnabas comments: “the Spirit says to the heart of Moses that he should make a symbol of the cross (τύπον σταυροῦ)” (12.2). In this story there was scriptural support for combining prayer with outstretched hands with the sign of the cross. Also Tertullian comments on this text (Exod 17): Due to the critical situation kneeling or prostration would be a more fitting posture of prayer. Thus the only reason for Moses’ outstretched hands was that it should point to the cross “through which Jesus was to win the victory” (*Adv. Jud.* 10.10).

This same way of thinking is also seen behind some of the hymns found in the *Odes of Solomon*: “I extended my hands and hallowed my Lord; for the expansion of my hands is his sign. And my extension is the upright cross. Hallelujah” (27; cf. also 42.1).¹⁰¹

According to Tertullian the outstretched hands not only reminded the praying person of the cross and suffering of Christ; the very posture was a way of confessing the faith in Christ. In a text focusing on the right attitude of prayer, Tertullian comments on the washing of hands before prayer. This he rejects since it reminds him of Pilate washing his hands when delivering up the Lord. Besides, he says, “our hands are clean enough, for we have washed them (with the rest of our bodies), once for all in Christ” (*Or.* 13.2). Tertullian goes on, saying that the hands of Israel are unclean (because they have killed the prophets) and that they do not dare even to raise them to the Lord. “We, however, do not merely raise them, but also spread them out, and we make our confession to Christ, while we represent the Lord’s passion and likewise pray (*dominica passione modula(ta), tum et orantes confitemur Christo*)” (*Or.* 14 [Souter]).¹⁰²

The connection between the cross and the orante posture is widely attested, both in the East and the West. So is also the significance of the posture as a way of confessing Christ. In a sermon on the cross and resurrection of Christ, from Maximus of Turin in Northern Italy (d. ca. 420), we read:

¹⁰⁰ GCS 3 (ed. Paul Koetschau) Origenes 2:395–6.

¹⁰¹ Translation from OTP 2:759.

¹⁰² Latin text from CCSL 1 (Diercks).

Even a person's bearing, when he raises his hands, describes a cross; therefore we are ordered to pray with uplifted hands so that by the very stance of our body we might confess the Lord's suffering. Then our prayer is heard more quickly, when Christ, whom the mind speaks, is also imitated by the body. (*Sermon 38.3*)¹⁰³

When early believers in Jesus prayed with outstretched hands towards heaven, they followed a widespread practice. Already early in the second century, however, we find evidence for a specific Christological interpretation of the gesture. This means that a very common practice acquired a most specific meaning which was shared only by fellow believers. Thus this gesture as practiced and understood by early Jesus believers undoubtedly served as a factor in the formation of Christian identity.

5. Conclusion

In early Christian texts from the New Testament until around the year 400 there are several remarkable traits with regard to the nonverbal elements of prayer. First, until the time of Constantine there was remarkably little focus on the place of prayer. The strong belief that God is present everywhere made it possible to pray everywhere.

Second, there is the strong emphasis on praying towards the east. This practice was not without parallels in antiquity, but it was given a specific Christological interpretation, which in all likelihood made the prayer direction very important for Christian self-understanding and identity.

Third, even if Paul exhorts his addressees to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17), fixed times for prayer soon became normal. This was an inheritance from Second Temple Judaism, but from early on, the various hours for prayer were given a Christological motivation, a motivation which could be meaningful only for those who knew the gospel tradition. It thus served well in the formation of a specific group identity.

Fourth, even if kneeling was known as a posture for praying in the Old Testament and ancient Judaism, it seems to become more important in Christian circles than it ever had among Jews. It is possible that a stronger focus on sin and confession of sin (cf. e.g. *Barn.* 19.2) stimulated this way of praying. According to Eusebius, kneeling was the normal posture for praying, and in his portrait of James, the brother of the Lord, he says that he was found "kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel's because of his constant worship of God, kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people" (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.6 [LCL, Lake and Oulton]).

¹⁰³ Translation from *The Sermons of St. Maximus of Turin* (ed. Boniface Ramsey; ACW 50; New York: Newman, 1989), 93.

Fifth, while praying with lifted hands was the most common posture for praying in antiquity, it soon acquired a unique importance for Christians. The reason was that it was seen as a way of expressing faith in Christ and his suffering on the cross. In this way it certainly expressed a Christian identity, even if outsiders were unaware of the significance, as they also were when Christians prayed towards the east.

The importance of both kneeling and standing with outstretched hands may be illustrated by Tertullian's comments on the catechumens and their prayer: "Those who are at the point of entering upon baptism ought to pray, with frequent prayers, fastings, *bendings of the knee*, and all-night vigils, along with the confession of all their former sins." A little bit later he continues:

Therefore, you blessed ones, for whom the grace of God is waiting, when you come up from that most sacred washing of the new birth, and when for the first time *you spread out your hands* with your brethren in your mother's house, ask of your Father, ask of your Lord, that special grants of grace and apportionments of spiritual gifts be yours. Ask, he says, and ye shall receive. So now, you have sought, and have found: you have knocked, and it has been opened to you. This only I pray, that as you ask you also have in mind Tertullian, a sinner. (*Bapt. 20*)¹⁰⁴



Orante from the Callistus catacomb, Rome.
Photo: Joseph Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms, Tafelband* (Freiburg: Herder, 1903), fig. 88.

¹⁰⁴ Text and translation in *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (ed. and trans. Ernest Evans; London: SPCK, 1964); italics added.

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Prayer, ‘Othering’ and the Construction of Early Christian Identity in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke

by

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1. Introduction: The Gospels as Identity-Forming Narratives and the Prayer Theme

In the gospel of Luke the prayer theme is inherently conducive to the author’s effort of endowing the Jesus movement with legitimacy, edifying readers who belong to this movement through the paradigmatic patterns and principles offered by the past. Throughout Luke-Acts strategically placed prayer notices and prayers are integral to Luke’s project of authenticating the new Messianic movement as being accredited by Israel’s God.

This is a central thesis of my dissertation, published in 2011 under the title *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts*.¹ Here I offered a comprehensive examination of prayer as a literary theme in the Lukan double work interpreted as ancient *historia* and directed, as such, to specific pragmatic and rhetorical ends. Luke’s distinct emphasis on prayer was explained in relation to the broader purpose of his historical narrative of providing self-definition, telling Christian readers who they are, where they come from and what values and habits they should hold.

Recent gospel scholarship pursuing a combined focus on narrative dynamics and social processes has increasingly come to acknowledge that the canonical gospels construct through their poetics a sense of identity for their intended audiences. In terms of their performative function, these narratives were originally framed to shape and maintain the self-understanding, beliefs and practices of historical communities belonging to the nascent movement to become Christianity, in part by negotiating and defining these communities’

¹ Geir Otto Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts: The Theme of Prayer within the Context of the Legitimizing and Edifying Objective of the Lukan Narrative* (LNTS 433; London: T&T Clark, 2011).

boundaries and relationships with other contemporary groups.² Among the gospels, Luke provides a particularly profound case of how the portrayal of human-divine relations in prayer serves as a powerful affirmation of the identity-claims made by the story at large.

This article examines further the role of prayer in the efforts of gospel narratives to textualize identity by focusing specifically on the aspect of “othering.” Placing Matthew comparatively alongside Luke, close attention will be devoted to how the two gospels identify prayer as a defining activity of Jesus’ followers while simultaneously marking rivalling patterns of piety as “other.” An elementary sociological insight says that the self requires the other to define itself. Hence, discourse about prayer that distinguishes between insiders and outsiders, “our” practice and “theirs,” would arguably be particularly revealing of the gospels’ identity-claims. Two companion passages in Matthew and Luke will receive in-depth treatment for what they can tell us about the different endeavours of the two gospels to shape identity through texts: (1) Jesus teaching his followers a model prayer (“The Lord’s Prayer”) in a literary context dichotomizing them from contemporary groups (Matt 6:5–9a//Luke 11:1–2a); (2) Jesus’ assertion that the Jerusalem temple has failed in its function as “a house of prayer” (Matt 21:13//Luke 19:46), which in both gospels, it is argued, is surrounded with narrative clues pointing to Jesus’ community being the true locus of powerful prayer.

The topic of early Christian identity formation is inseparable from the historical development of the nascent Jesus movement within the matrix of Judaism and the so-called “parting of the ways.” The gospels of Matthew and Luke present themselves as particularly relevant for the present research project not only by containing a significant amount of material on prayer, but also by their sustained yet different efforts in tying the Jesus movement to the

² My dissertation can be seen as exemplifying a prominent strand in Lukan studies evolving from the seminal studies of Philip F. Esler and Gregory E. Sterling, emphasizing the role of Luke-Acts as a work of Christian self-definition and social identity forming; see Philip F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (SNTSMS 57; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic Historiography* (NovTSup 64; Leiden: Brill, 1992). For an interpretation of Matthew’s Gospel from the perspective of it being “an identity-forming, lifestyle-shaping narrative,” see e.g. Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (JSNTSup 204; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). In a recent survey of approaches employed in scholarly examinations of identity formation among the early Christians, Coleman A. Baker sees an interdisciplinary focus on “social processes and the role of texts in the identity-forming process” (which he labels “socio-narrative criticism”) as a particularly promising way forward in studying early Christian identity; see Coleman A. Baker, “Early Christian Identity Formation: From Ethnicity and Theology to Socio-Narrative Criticism,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 9 (2011): 228–37.

heritage of Israel.³ In her incisive study on identity construction in ancient Christianity, Judith M. Lieu claims that identity involves “(a)wareness of sameness and of difference, of a shared past and agreed values, of continuities and boundaries, whether physical or behavioural.”⁴ The main thrust of my examination will be to explore how perceiving rivalling patterns of prayer outside the Jesus community as other contributes to the textual shaping and maintenance of a distinctive identity in the gospels of Matthew and Luke by negotiating between the values and traditions that the Jesus movement shares with contemporary Judaism and conflictual identity-claims.

The examination will be structured as follows. Dealing with each gospel in turn, I shall first give a broad overview of the gospel’s particular portrayal and outlook of prayer and then explore in detail how The Lord’s Prayer⁵ and the Temple Action Episode⁶ are embedded in narrative contexts that dichotomize, explicitly or implicitly, prescribed patterns of prayer in the Jesus group from those outside its boundaries. In a concluding section I will draw together the major findings by venturing into the vexed question of what the textualization of prayer and identity in the two gospels may tell us about social experiences behind their discourse.

2. The Gospel of Matthew

2.1. Prayer in the First Gospel: An Overview⁷

Given Matthew’s strong interest in Jesus’ role as teacher, it is not surprising to note that material on prayer in the first gospel is mostly found in discourses and sayings of Jesus (5:44; 6:5–15; 7:7–11; 9:38; 18:18–20; 21:13, 21–22; 23:5, (14); 24:20; 26:39–46). Narrative references to prayer are rather few and far between, and there is no developed emphasis on Jesus as a paradigm of

³ Compared to the other Synoptics, Mark’s material on prayer is rather patchy and a concern with Jesus’ relationship to Israel less prevalent. While inclusion of Mark would have led to a more complete coverage of the synoptic gospels, a concentration on Matthew and Luke has the advantage of making the study more focused.

⁴ Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17 (cf. p. 12).

⁵ I use this designation, drawn from ecclesial tradition, for purely practical reasons.

⁶ This is my preferred terminology, as I consider the traditional designation “The Temple Cleansing Episode” to actually be a misnomer.

⁷ Curiously enough, before the appearance of Mathias Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels: A Theological Exegesis of the Ideal Prayer* (BIS 114; Leiden: Brill, 2012), there has been no detailed scholarly investigation of Matthew’s prayer material. Nygaard’s study, which treats all four canonical gospels, provides a theological exegesis focusing specifically on how the gospel texts work to construct ideals in prayer and how prayer-texts contribute to New Testament anthropology.

prayer (differently Luke⁸; on Jesus as pray-er in Matthew, see 11:25–27; 14:23; 19:13; 26:39–46; 27:46).⁹

Elaborate cases of prayer instruction in Matthew (6:5–15; 7:7–11; 18:18–20; 21:21–22) bear clear fingerprints of a communal self-awareness. Set in speech contexts that delineate the guiding practices, attitudes and values to be embraced by Jesus' community, this hortatory material is also strongly ethos conscious. As is widely recognized by scholars, Matthew's story seeks to shape community life by mediating the Jewish heritage to his readers through the lens of Jesus' life and teaching, while opposing the dominant form of contemporary Judaism. In accordance with this, prayer is prescribed in a way that both hovers close to the world of Judaism and brings out the particularity and exemplarity of the devotional practices of Jesus' followers.¹⁰

In the Matthean prayer instructions two emphases stand out in particular: (1) The privilege and authority of the praying followers of Jesus who have faith in God the Father and entrust themselves to his providential care; their prayers will assuredly receive a favorable hearing (6:6b, 8; 7:7–11; 18:19–20; 21:21–22). Equipped with a special prayer (6:9–13) and accorded the presence of the resurrected Jesus (18:18–20; cf. 28:20), Jesus' worshipping community is distinguished among others.¹¹ (2) As children of God the prayerful community should reflect God's character in a spirit of love, compassion and reconciliation. Drawing, in part, on the OT prophetic tradition, the fundamental significance of integrating worship with justice, mercy and reconciliation is underscored (prayer: Matt 5:44; 6:14–15; sacrifice: 5:23–26; cf. 9:13, 12:7). This aspect of Matthew's portrait of prayer is actually quite pronounced if one takes the prayer admonitions in Matt 7:7–11 and 18:18–20 to be directly related to the issue of fraternal correction and forgiveness in the community found in the immediate context (7:1–5 and 18:15–17, 21–35 respectively). In more general terms, one can speak of a distinct emphasis in Matthew's material about prayer on right intentions, humility and childhood.¹²

⁸ So also Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels*, 66: "Jesus is not a direct paradigm for the ideal pray-er, as he arguably is in Luke."

⁹ I have left out examples of Jesus saying the traditional blessing at meal-time.

¹⁰ Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels*, 26, notes that the focus on teaching makes prayer ideals more explicit in Matthew. Moreover, since "compared to Mark and Luke, the whole is more in view at all stages of the narrative . . . the implied reader is constructed closer to the surface level of the narrative" (26–27).

¹¹ Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels*, 68: "In Matthew, prayer itself presupposes a relation to God which those who are not followers of Jesus do not have."

¹² Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels*, 71.

2.2. *Matthew's introduction to the Lord's Prayer:
Othering "hypocrites" and Gentiles (Matt 6:5–8)*

The Lord's Prayer forms the core of the most fundamental and extensive piece of prayer education in Matthew, constituting the central part of The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:5–15; chs. 5–7).¹³ The introduction to the prayer (6:5–8) provides one of the most instructive examples in the whole gospel of the evangelist drawing boundaries between his community and those beyond it. The "we" of those who pray the Πάτερ ἡμῶν is clearly defined as the commended practice of Jesus' followers and is set over against that of two distinct outsider groups, the hypocrites (6:5–6) and the Gentiles (6:7–8).

In a section dealing with appropriate worship (Matt 6:1–18), prayer belongs with almsgiving and fasting in a triad of key religious exercises of Jewish piety (cf. Tob 12:8) understood as expressions of δικαιοσύνη, acts of righteousness (Matt 6:1).¹⁴ With stylized repetition the Matthean Jesus prompts his followers to perform their piety avoiding the ostentatiousness of the "hypocrites" (6:2–4, 5–6, 16–18).¹⁵ Οἱ ὑποκριταί – literally denoting "play-actors," here used metaphorically about falsely putting on a performance to impress onlookers – are in Matthew's Gospel an invective for the scribes and Pharisees (see 15:17–18; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). They are the people of the synagogue (cf. 6:5: "they love to pray . . . in the synagogues"), the antagonists of the Jesus group. The Matthean caricature of the ostentatiousness of the scribes and Pharisees in prayer is repeated in Matt 23:5 (and in the textually dubious 23:14).

Prayer (along with almsgiving and fasting) as an act of Jewish orthopraxy is assumed as self-evident for Jesus' community and the "hypocrites" alike. Moreover, as is routinely documented in the scholarly literature, the form and content of the prayer taught by Jesus is close to the prayer habits of the contemporary synagogue (early versions of the Amidah and the Kaddish). Still, the distinctiveness of the disciples' dispositions and performance is expounded with unmistakable polemical edge. Contrasting the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus' disciples should perform their piety "in secret" (6:2–4, 5–6, 16–18). As Louise J. Lawrence has rightly pointed out, the real contrast here

¹³ For The Lord's Prayer as the "conceptual and generative centre of The Sermon on the Mount," see Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels*, 29–30.

¹⁴ H. D. Betz' characterization of Matt 6:1–18 as "a Jewish-Christian cultic *Didache*" is often cited; cf. "A Jewish-Christian Cultic *Didache* in Matt. 6:1–18: Reflections and Questions on the Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount* (ed. Hans D. Betz; trans. L. L. Welborn; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1984), 55–69.

¹⁵ For the repetitive pattern and structural arrangement of 6:2–18, see e.g. Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision Making in Matt 5–7* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 102–3.

is not between public and private performance of piety *per se*, but between a concern for enhancing one's social privilege through placing high importance on public ritual acts versus seeking reputation before God.¹⁶ Authentic prayer requires parity between thoughts and actions. Indeed, this teaching connects to "a broad theme in the instruction of Matthew that reflects the halakhic emphasis on the centrality of action and intention."¹⁷ In the wider context of The Sermon on the Mount, what Jesus prescribes regarding piety exemplifies the "exceeding righteousness" which should mark his community vis-à-vis the scribes and Pharisees (cf. 5:20).¹⁸ As trusting children of the heavenly Father who perform their acts of piety before him alone, Jesus' followers are privileged objects of divine mercy and reward. By their faulty righteousness, the "hypocrites" have cut themselves off from God's reward.

Compared to the description of the "hypocrites" with its blend of familiarity and biting critique, the othering of οἱ ἔθνηκοί has a different ring:¹⁹ for Matthew, "the Gentile" (or "the heathen") is "the real outsider who stands beyond the boundary."²⁰ In 6:7–8, the Gentiles are presented in stereotypical and derogatory terms as people whose prayer is distorted by a misleading theology, as they seek to attain the attention of the divine by "heaping up empty phrases" and "using many words." As such they become the foil for Jesus' model prayer as the embodiment of genuine worship: As the foreknowing and caring Father, God should be addressed by his children in trust and simplicity.

Matthew's essentially Jewish worldview is clearly seen in this. The outsider status of Gentiles is also evidenced in Matt 5:47 and 18:17, where they are grouped with the tax collectors (cf. also 6:32). In the guidelines for community discipline in 18:15–20, the Gentiles and tax collectors are clearly distinct groups in contrast to the disciples. As is well known, there is an ambivalence towards the Gentiles (and more specifically towards the Gentile mission) in Matthew's story; besides sharp anti-Gentile statements there is also a characteristic pro-Gentile trajectory. How to reconcile these opposing tendencies is one of the most difficult interpretive cruxes of the first gospel. As for Matt 6:7–8, I believe some importance should be attached to Matthew's choice of the term οἱ ἔθνηκοί over τὰ ἔθνη (so also in 5:47 and 18:17; but not in 6:32). We might very well understand these verses as primarily referring to pagan practices current in Matthew's Greco-Roman

¹⁶ Louise Joy Lawrence, *An Ethnography of the Gospel of Matthew* (WUNT 2/165; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 152–55.

¹⁷ Lawrence, *An Ethnography*, 155.

¹⁸ So also Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 58.

¹⁹ In contrast to the sections on almsgiving and fasting – which are distinctively Jewish practices – the section on prayer also highlights the piety of the Gentiles.

²⁰ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 132.

environment.²¹ In point of fact, the boundary line between the Jesus movement and the Gentiles and tax collectors in the first gospel is not as hard and fast as an isolated reading of Matt 5:47; 6:7–8, 32; 18:17 might suggest. Indeed, in Matthew Jesus recruits followers among tax collectors (9:9–13; 11:19), he benefits Gentiles during his public ministry (8:5–13; 12:18, 21; 15:21–28) and he commands a post-Easter mission among τὰ ἔθνη (28:16–20; cf. 24:14). J. Lieu proposes that Matthew's use of ἔθνικός is a not entirely successful attempt to resolve the tension between the anti-Gentile and pro-Gentile strands in his gospel, "hinting at the need for redefinition now that there are also Gentiles, ἔθνη, within."²² This does not seem implausible as Matthew apparently is writing to a still largely Jewish community that has begun to expand beyond its ethnic boundaries in fulfillment of the universal vision of the resurrected Jesus at the end of the gospel (Matt 28:16–20).²³

The Sermon on the Mount has fittingly been called "the charter for the Matthean community,"²⁴ "the foundation document of a new religious community which sees itself as children of a heavenly father who will forgive and reward the 'righteous' (5:6, 10, 20, 45; 6:1, 33), those who are faithful to him and his Son's commands."²⁵ The setting of Matthew's Lord's Prayer presents Jesus' model prayer as relative to the particular ethos of his community, characterized by true intentions and trust in God the Father. The othering of "hypocrites" and Gentiles/heathens serves to legitimate the community's commitments, beliefs and rituals²⁶ over against dominant structures and values in the community's socio-religious environment.

²¹ On this, see e.g. Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels*, 33–34, who find here echoes of OT ridicule of other religions as well as a reference to "the repetitive and verbose practices of mystery cults where divine names are uttered to implore and even control gods."

²² Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 132, cf. p. 288.

²³ Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 11–12, strains the evidence when asserting that the first "evangelist considered his readers to be a 'new people' – in effect a 'third race' (*tertium genus*) over against both Jews and Gentiles." Neither am I convinced by the insistence of David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 215–56, that the Gentile mission in the view of Matthew is restrictedly a form of Jewish proselytism. This interpretation hangs on the assumption of an anti-Pauline tendency in this Gospel and an exaggerated stress on its Law-abiding features at the expense of the re-interpretation of the Law in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom.

²⁴ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 227.

²⁵ John Riches, "Matthew's World," in John Riches, William R. Telford and Christopher M. Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 74–108, 94.

²⁶ Cf. the comment of Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 141: "Minority or sectarian groups often have their own rituals and activities which bind together the community while simultaneously marking them as something distinct from outsider groups."

2.3. *The Matthean Jesus' Dismissal of the Temple as a "House of Prayer" (Matt 21:12–17) and Its Interconnection with Matthew's Portrait of the Praying Community*

All three Synoptics record Jesus' prophetic critique of the temple for failing to fulfill its designated role to be "a house of prayer" (cf. Isa 56:7) as part of the Temple Action Episode (Matt 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48). Intended for true worship, the temple has fallen into decay and become a "den of robbers" (cf. Jer 7:11).²⁷

The interpretation of Jesus' temple action is disputed, both from a historical and redactional point of view. Does it imply a rejection of the cult or rather a critique of the abuse of the temple under its current administration? Does Jesus' action prefigure the temple's destruction or does it symbolize his effort to take possession of the temple or to restore the temple to its intended purposes? This is not the place to discuss the *pro et contras* of various lines of scholarly interpretation.²⁸ Rather, we shall look for possible demarcations and negotiations between the failed "house of prayer" and Jesus' followers as a praying community in Matthew's narration.²⁹ This will be done in conversation with Daniel M. Gurtner, who has recently has given a reassessment of the first evangelist's theology of the temple and its cult with a view to its implications for the issue of the parting of the ways.³⁰

Gurtner believes that the driving thesis of Matt 21:12–17 is that Jesus will "restore the Temple to its intended function by making it a 'house of prayer,'" i.e. by healing the outcasts so that they now can enter and offer sacrifices.³¹ This is one important building block for his overall thesis that Matthew's portrayal of the temple is "remarkably consistent and positive,"³² and that "Matthew's temple is surely an *intra muros* issue."³³ But does Matthew's redaction and narrative configuration of the Temple Action Episode really

²⁷ Both Matthew and Luke omit the delimiting adverbial "for all people" found in Isaiah and Mark. What to make of this omission is disputed.

²⁸ For this, see especially Jostein Ådna, *Jesu Stellung zum Tempel: Die Tempelaktion und das Tempelwort als Ausdruck seiner messianischen Sendung* (WUNT 2/119; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

²⁹ To be sure, in its original setting of Isa 56 the designation "house of prayer" is a metonym for the temple as a place for worship of Israel's God centered around its *sacrificial* functions. Matthew appears to assume the validity of the temple's sacrificial cult (5:23–24; 17:24–27; 23:18–19), but in Matt 21 the cultic aspects is apparently deemphasized in favor of the spiritual-ethical (cf. 9:13; 12:7).

³⁰ Daniel M. Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology of the Temple and the 'Parting of the Ways'" in *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 128–53.

³¹ Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology," 140.

³² Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology," 130.

³³ Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology," 153.

imply a *restoration* of the temple taking place? I am inclined to agree with Gurtner when he describes Matthew's overall perspective towards the temple as "carefully walking a razor's edge between legitimacy on the one hand and judgment on the other" and that the temple's end therefore "is a consequence of failed leadership and appropriation of it."³⁴ Matthew indeed assumes the validity of the temple and its cult as long as it is true to its divinely ordained intentions. But in Matthew 21 one can discern a relocation of the temple's symbolic role as a locus for Jewish worship and interaction with God to the prayerful community centered on Jesus. In the words of Rudolf Schnackenburg: "Alongside the criticism of the old temple worship, Jesus' promising messianic activity enters the picture, an activity through which a new salvation community, practicing authentic divine worship, is being formed."³⁵ Writing from a post-70 position, Matthew 21 belongs to Matthew's attempt to delegitimize the central Jewish leadership by interpreting their mismanagement of the temple manifesting itself in corrupted worship as a cause of its destruction. Gurtner seriously underplays the significance of the Matthean emphasis on Jesus now being the ultimate location of God's presence and tends to slight virtually any evidence of a possible transfer of temple symbolism to Jesus and his community in the first gospel (cf. 21:42; 26:61; cf. 16:18).

Matthew's distinctive outlook is seen from the major addition he has made to the episode taken over from Mark: Jesus' act of disruption in the temple precincts is extended with a note on his healing the lame and blind and the children's praise drawing an angry response from the chief priests and scribes (21:14–16). The exchange between Jesus and the religious leaders exemplifies Matthew's tendency to heighten the conflict between Jesus and the authorities in Jerusalem (cf. the three polemical parables in Matt 21:28–22:14). Apparently, the healings of the blind and lame in the temple signify the restoration to fullness of the very ones who are prohibited from entering the holy place (according to 2 Sam 5:8; Lev 21:18–19). Following the lead of Birger Gerhardsson, Gurtner understands 21:14 to indicate that the outcasts are restored to participation in the temple cult by removing the disqualifying disability.³⁶ However, it is doubtful that this terse note can bear the burden of such a heavy theological point. We should note that Matthew in 21:14–16 is taking pains to correlate Jesus' healings to the hostile reaction from the chief priests and the scribes; indeed, Jesus' healings and the children's acclaim go

³⁴ Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology," 153.

³⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 202. One may have reservations to the antithesis between "old" and "new." The temple worship is obsolete, not in a supersessionist sense, only in the sense that at the time of Matthew's writing the temple lies in ruins.

³⁶ Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology," 139–40.

together in provoking this reaction. The scene hence portrays a controversy over Jesus' authority. The point is Christological, actually enveloping Jesus' prophetic critique in paradox: The very temple which has just been charged for no longer functioning as a house of prayer, now suddenly becomes the place where *God is being praised by infants who acknowledge Jesus as the Son of David*, continuing the crowd's cry at the triumphal entry (21:9). In the wider story of Matthew, the revelation of the Son is a privilege afforded to infants (Matt 11:25–27, cf. also "little ones" as a Matthean epithet for disciples, Matt 10:42; 18:6, 10, 14). In recognizing Jesus as he acts authoritatively and powerfully in the temple, the children testify that here is the "one greater than the temple" (Matt 12:6) through whom God's presence is now manifested (cf. Matthew's "God with us" Christology, 1:23; 18:20; 28:20).

Jesus' confrontations in the temple in Matthew are followed by the cursing of the fig tree (21:18–22), altering Mark's sequence which sandwiches the fig tree episode between Jesus' entry into the temple and the "cleansing" of the holy place (Mark 11:12–14; cf. 11:11, 15–19). Matthew's rearrangement hardly indicates a wish to downplay the connection between the two incidents, as some commentators suggest. Gurtner sees here an attempt by the first evangelist to dissociate the cursing of the fig tree with the temple, turning it into an ordinary miracle account by removing its symbolic traits. His interpretation rests on a very narrow redaction-critical basis and is hardly convincing.³⁷ Likening a disobedient people to a barren fig tree for whom judgment awaits (Jer 8:13; Hos 9:10, 16) is a well-known OT *topos*, as is withered figs symbolizing judgment (Isa 34:4, Jer 29:17). Indeed, the symbolic interpretation of Matt 21:18–19 is very plausible as failure to produce fruit is thematic in Matthean polemic against opponents (Matt 3:7–10; 7:15–20; 12:33–36), a theme that actually reaches its climax in the parable of the vineyard following at the end of chapter 21 (21:33–46; vv. 41, 43).

I suggest that the withered fig tree duplicates the violent action in the temple as a second enacted parable symbolizing the temple's coming destruction. But what are we to make of the attached saying in vv. 21–22 about faith and prayer? Commentators puzzle over these verses and their relation to the preceding context. Daniel Harrington finds the lesson on power and prayer "artificial and tacked on."³⁸ Margaret Davies understands vv. 21–22 as a promise that the disciples too would perform prophetic actions like the

³⁷ Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology," 140, who is strongly influenced by William R. Telford's redactional study *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redactional-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and Its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition* (JSNTSup 1; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980).

³⁸ Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 298.

one performed by Jesus, if they had faith and did not doubt.³⁹ What is then overlooked is that these verses are, in fact, tying up important motival threads running through Matthew's story: Jesus' struggle to instill in those of little faith a firm confidence (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8), which also includes the image of moving mountains and its message about the unlimited power and possibilities of Jesus' community of faith (17:20), and the assurance that the heavenly Father will hear the prayers of the community of Jesus (Matt 6:7–8; 7:7–11; 18:19–20). Contrasting the failed "house of prayer" (21:13–14, 18–20), Jesus' final words about effective prayer and faith expected from his disciples play a significant role in Matthew's effort to define the ethos and dispositions of his community over against its opponents. Jesus' community should be characterized by faith and prayer, guided by Jesus himself who is manifesting his power in an enacted parable against the temple authorities. Thus, the community is taking the place of the temple, which has ceased to be a prayer house under its failed leadership and is doomed accordingly.⁴⁰ The failure of the temple establishment to produce fruit brings about a transferral of divine blessings to the community that practices authentic worship, shaped around Jesus Messiah.⁴¹ This interpretation is entirely in line with the central thrust the parable of the vineyard (21:33–43): The vineyard (symbolizing the house of Israel, Isa 5:7) will be given to tenants who will give the master "the produce at the harvest time" (21:41), indeed to a people (ἔθνος) that "produces the fruits of the kingdom" (21:43).⁴²

³⁹ Margaret Davies, *Matthew* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 147. Matt 21:21–22 may seem to undermine the parabolic nature of the fig tree episode by emphasizing that the disciples will perform greater actions. Yet the point implied here is that Jesus' power is also the power of the community of faith, those among whom the resurrected Jesus is present (Matt 18:20). Similarly Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 422: "Jesus' cursing of the fig tree makes Jesus a model of this powerful faith, and discipleship an imitation of him."

⁴⁰ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 421, also finds a contrast here between the temple and its religious leaders whose judgment Jesus' symbolic action prefigures and "the community of the disciples as an alternative community of prayer, faith, and life-giving power" presented in vv. 21–22. Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels*, 67, prefers "continuity language": "Somehow the community . . . are thought to continue the 'true intentions' of the Temple (being 'a house of prayer')," cf. his exegesis on pp. 53–55, which is rather close to mine.

⁴¹ Some commentators think that in context the mountain to be thrown into the sea is a reference to the temple mount. Should we understand 21:21 as another allusion to the destruction of the temple, now suggesting that it is the effective result of the community's faith?

⁴² The building and stone metaphors in Matt 21:42–44 arguably express the idea of Jesus and his followers being a house contrasting the condemned temple. That Matthew regards the community as a new temple is an interpretive option to be considered much more seriously than does Gurtner (cf. Matt 16:18; 26:61; 27:40). He dismisses rather lightly the arguments defending this view offered by W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison,

3. The Gospel of Luke

3.1. *Prayer in the Third Gospel: An Overview*

Luke genuinely deserves the epithet often attributed to him, “the evangelist of prayer.” Through a combination of received tradition and thorough redactional reworking, the author of the third gospel has synthesized his material on prayer into a well-developed theme that is integral to the narrative logic of his “orderly account” (cf. Luke 1:3).⁴³ Luke’s gospel is punctuated at key points by (mostly very brief) references to prayer, a feature that persists also throughout its sequel, the Book of Acts. Earnest and tenacious prayer is portrayed as an essential characteristic of the godly in Israel at the outset of Luke’s story (Luke 1–2; 1:10, 13; 2:25, 37) and as a vital aspect of Jesus’ life and teaching as the story proceeds (Luke 3–24; for Jesus as pray-er, see 3:21–22; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28–29; 10:21–22; 11:1–2; 22:32, 42–44; 23:(34), 46; for Jesus enjoining prayer, see 6:28; 10:2; 11:1–13; 18:1–8; 21:36; 22:40; cf. 5:33–35; 18:9–14; 19:46; 20:47). Prayer constitutes a key aspect of the disciples’ apprenticeship under the tutelage of Jesus, who himself is presented as the model pray-er *par excellence*. In Acts, the mission of the early Jesus movement is regularly interspersed with moments of prayer.⁴⁴

Luke’s characteristic interest in prayer has not so much to do with a concern with correct performance of worship as with an effort to inculcate in readers, through the paradigms and principles offered by history, the importance of persistent prayer and the assurance that God is faithful in responding to such prayer. Luke-Acts portrays how the nascent movement around Jesus has progressed up until the time and situation of the readers in accordance with a historical plan during which Israel’s God has continuously answered the diligent prayers of the faithful ones, thus giving them his imprimatur. Moreover, the prayer theme is developed in close connection with Luke’s apologetic effort to establish the historical continuity of the Jesus movement, at the time of his writing increasingly non-Jewish in composition, with Israel. As the opening of Luke’s “orderly account,” the infancy narrative (Luke 1–2)

A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–1997) 3:603, 627–28; see Gurtner, “Matthew’s Theology,” 136.

⁴³ As demonstrated in Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication*. What is presented here is a summary of the main findings and conclusions of that work. My focus is practically limited to general prayer and petition; on the whole, hymns, praise and thanksgiving serve a different literary function in the double work. For a review of the rich scholarly literature on Lukan prayer, see Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication*, 2 (n. 3), 4–16.

⁴⁴ Acts 1:14, 24–25; 2:42; 3:1; 4:23–31; 6:4, 6; 7:59–60; 8:15, 22, 24; 9:11, 40; 10:2–4, 9, 30–31; 11:5; 12:5, 12; 13:2–3; 14:23; 16:13, 16, 25; 20:32, 36; 21:5; 22:17; 26:6–7, 29; 27:23; 28:8.

provides the indispensable starting point by tracing the Jesus movement's story of origins from its chrysalis in venerable Judaism and aligning it with the traditions of Israel's heritage. In turn, the developing portraiture of Jesus and his followers as a community of dedicated pray-ers who continually receive God's blessings provides narrative reinforcement of the strong accent in Jesus' prayer instructions on the certainty of the praying disciples' favorable hearing by God (Luke 11:5–13; 18:1–8).

3.2. Luke's Introduction to "The Lord's Prayer" (Luke 11:1–2): *Otherring the Baptist Movement*

The Lukan version of The Lord's Prayer forms the core of the first of two major units of instruction on prayer in the third gospel (Luke 11:1–13; cf. 18:1–8). In Luke's narrative Jesus' steadfast application to prayer, preferably in lonely places, has by now been established as a fixed pattern (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12–13; 9:18, 28–29; 10:21–22). A new development comes in when one of Jesus' disciples, who have thus far played the role of privileged yet passive observers at Jesus' sessions of secluded prayer (cf. 9:18, 28–29), asks him: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples" (11:1).

The passing reference to the Baptist and his followers is usually taken to reflect Luke's struggle to negotiate the relationship between Jesus' disciples and a concurrent Jewish religious movement. But what more can be said? Is Luke trying to set up some sort of *continuity* between the prayer practice taught by Jesus and the rituals performed by the affiliated Baptist movement?⁴⁵ Does the reference, on the contrary, have a polemical, boundary-drawing function highlighting the *distinction* between the two groups?⁴⁶ Or should we take it as a subtle pointer to Jesus' model prayer being an identity badge for his own community?⁴⁷

Looking for clues in Luke's progressing narrative, we should note first of all the pains taken to present Jesus' instruction on prayer as an outgrowth of his own practice of prayer. In offering a model prayer (11:2b–4), Jesus instructs his disciples to address God as *Father* (11:2b), and the parabolic teaching that follows ends with the assurance that God the Father far surpasses human fathers in his willingness to give to his children who ask (Luke 11:11–13; cf. 11:5–13). Having twice been addressed from heaven as "Son" during prayer (Luke 3:21–22; 9:28–36), at 10:21–22 Jesus utters a thanksgiving prayer to God his Father in which he claims his unique capacity

⁴⁵ So Niclas Förster, *Das gemeinschaftliche Gebet in der Sicht des Lukas* (Biblical Tools and Studies 4; Leuven: Peters, 2007), 220, 222; cf. the whole chapter 214–41.

⁴⁶ So Peter Böhleemann, *Jesus und der Täufer: Schlüssel zur Theologie und Ethik des Lukas* (SNTSMS 99; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), e.g., 90–91.

⁴⁷ So Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 440.

of revealing Him to those whom he chooses. The implication seems to be, first, that when the disciples are invited to address God as Father, this is an extension of Jesus' own special relationship with God in prayer, and second, that the event recounted in Luke 11:1–13 is to be seen as a display of Jesus' revelatory mandate; Jesus is fulfilling the program stated in 10:22, of disclosing the Father to those whom he has chosen.

This feature alone suggests that even when some kind of analogy with John's praxis is implied, the main thrust of Luke 11:1–2 is to highlight *the distinctiveness* of the prayer which Jesus summons his followers to bring before God. This interpretation is further substantiated by the literary role played by John and his disciples elsewhere in Luke's narrative. In 5:33 Jesus' followers are set over against the disciples of John (and of the Pharisees) for their non-observance of fasting and attendant prayer (the element of prayer being Lukan *Sondergut*).⁴⁸ Throughout Luke-Acts, the Baptist is consistently presented as Jesus' forerunner, being a model of Israelite expectation and preparedness for the advent of God's decisive act of salvation.⁴⁹ The recurrent juxtaposition of John and Jesus in Luke's narration serves to present them in terms of continuity as well as contrast (Luke 1–2; 3:1–22; 7:18–35; Acts 1:5, 21). Both John and Jesus serve as major protagonists in God's redemptive plan, yet John belongs to the time of preparation to be distinguished from the proclamation of the kingdom and the time of Spirit baptism associated with

⁴⁸ Among the gospels, Luke alone explicitly associates the Baptist with habits of prayer (5:33; 11:1; cf. also the prayer of Zechariah, John's father, mentioned at 1:13). Böhlemann, *Jesus und der Täufer*, 89–91, goes to great lengths to associate Jesus' prayer practice with the Baptist, but the connections are, for the most part, rather strained. A question that deserves some attention is whether Jesus' prayer after his baptism reflects a conventional ritual attached to John's baptismal activity. Förster has made an elaborate case for this (*Das gemeinschaftliche Gebet*, 214–41). He claims (p. 241): "Der Evangelist ging . . . in Lk 3,21 soweit anzunehmen, dass Jesus vor seinem öffentlichen Auftreten bei seiner Taufe ein Gebet der Täufer mitbetete und sich damit im Rahmen der besonderen Spiritualität der Johannesgruppe bewegte." Förster's argument verges on the speculative as he brings to bear on the terse Lukan prayer note vast comparative perspectives that cannot but be deemed remote both from a historical and literary perspective. There is, furthermore, a strange ambiguity in Förster's reasoning as he, on the one hand, insists on John being the inspiration for Jesus' prayer and, on the other, stresses the separation of John and Jesus in Luke's redaction of 3:19–22 even to the point of leaning towards Jesus performing self-baptism. As I have argued in *Prayer and Vindication*, Luke has structured the presentation of the praying Jesus with particular care so as to present Jesus as the sole pray-er during his public ministry; prayer also spans Jesus' whole life from beginning to end. The coming of the Spirit during prayer in Luke 3:21 clearly prefigures Jesus' role as the one baptizing in Holy Spirit (3:16; 11:13; Acts 2:1–4).

⁴⁹ On this, see especially John A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 60–84.

Jesus Messiah (Luke 3:16; 7:28; 16:16; Acts 1:5; cf. Acts 19:1–7).⁵⁰ Jesus' revelation of the Father to his disciples prepares them for the "promise of the Father" (Luke 11:2, 13; cf. 24:49). The enhanced focus on the Baptist and his task as forerunner in the double work amplifies Luke's effort to anchor Jesus' mission in faithful Israelite expectation, in keeping with his claim that Jesus is the fulfillment of "Israel's hope" (cf. Luke 2:25, 38; 24:21; Acts 1:6; 24:15; 26:6–7; 28:20).

A closer look at Luke 5:33 sheds light on the prayer praxis of John hinted at in Luke 11:1. Within the unfolding narrative, the words on the lips of Jesus' interlocutors in 5:33 ("The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink") evoke distinct echoes of the idealized portrayal of the prophetess Anna in the infancy narrative, who worshipped God with "fasting and prayer day and night" (2:37). We are led to think that the religious devotion of the disciples of John and the Pharisees embodies anticipation of redemption, just as Anna's piety was motivated by her hope for eschatological salvation. However, as Jesus' answer makes clear, his disciples' current dining is not a sign of religious laxity. Himself being the bridegroom, his presence turns the present into a period of glad festivities during which fasting would be out of question. In fact, the devotion of the disciples of John and that of the Pharisees are only seemingly congenial with that of Anna. At Jesus' appearance in the temple, Anna's fasting and prayer was turned into thanksgiving (2:38). The "new wine" associated with the time of fulfillment arriving with Jesus demands "fresh wineskins" (cf. 5:36–39). In looking forward to a time when Jesus' disciples indeed will fast, forestalling the Post-Easter community, the religious patterns of the Jesus movement are defined simultaneously in distinction from other Jewish renewal movements of the day yet still in continuity with the best of Israelite piety.

If Luke 5:33–39 implies that the "prayer and fasting" of John's disciples reflects a religious practice prompted by eschatological anticipation pertaining to the old economy, Jesus' prayer instructions in 11:1–13 now equip his disciples for end-time existence shaped by the nearness of the kingdom. As the baptizer with the Spirit, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit as the gift to be given to those who pray (11:13), which in Luke's story is fulfilled in the story of Acts (Acts 2:1–4; cf. 1:14; 4:24–31; 8:14–25; 10:1–46).

⁵⁰ In Conzelmann's famous schematism, John belongs to the period of Israel as the last prophet. Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (SNTSMS 7; London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 53, denies this identification as "simply incorrect." The Baptist is unique in his role as forerunner, and has an integral role in the story of salvation as the prophesied preparer of Messiah's way. He is included by Luke in the period of fulfillment, yet his ministry is still distinguished from Jesus' ministry of Kingdom proclamation (differently Matthew) and Spirit-baptism.

3.3. *The Lukan Jesus' Dismissal of the Temple as a "House of Prayer" (Luke 19:45–46) and Its Interconnection with Luke's Portrait of the Praying Community*

Luke's account of Jesus' action in the Jerusalem temple is considerably more condensed than those of Matthew and Mark. The third evangelist focuses entirely on Jesus' prophetic statement uttered as the merchants are being expelled from the holy place (19:45–46), thus foregrounding the temple's decay and its failure to fulfill its role as a "house of prayer." Virtually all references to the cultic apparatus have been left out from the Lukan version. Between the entry into the holy city (19:28–40) and the temple action (19:45–46), Luke has inserted Jesus' lament for Jerusalem and the foreboding of its destruction (19:41–44), a fact that significantly determines the mood of Jesus' violent action. We are clued to understand the event as a symbolic prophetic enactment of the impending judgment that results from Jerusalem's non-recognition of the divine visitation in Jesus Messiah. This visitation is suggestively exercised in the teaching ministry of Jesus at the temple according to Luke 19:47–21:38, which describes Jesus' final confrontation of Israel with the message of salvation before his passion.⁵¹

Jesus' encounter with Jerusalem in Luke 19 and his charge against the temple for improper worship stand in marked contrast with the depiction of prayerfully expectant Jerusalemites receiving the infant Jesus in the temple at the narrative's opening (Luke 1–2). An inverted scenario is now playing out compared with the idealized picture of pious Israelites praying diligently in the temple, for whom the disposition of prayer implied true expectation and recognition of the advent of God's salvation (2:29–32, 36–38; cf. 1:9, 13). Luke's redaction links Jerusalem's failure to acknowledge the divine visitation in Jesus' mission directly to the temple's slipping from its intended purpose of being a "house of prayer" (19:41–46). As Robert Tannehill has demonstrated, Jesus' lament in Luke 19:41–44 seems to be couched so as to present, in a tragic turn of events, Jerusalem's current blindness in a way that turns the idyllic portraiture of the birth narrative on its head.⁵² The elegy that Jerusalem does not understand "the things that make for peace (τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην)" (19:42) is an inversion of the prophetic recognition of Zechariah the priest that "the dawn from on high will break upon us (ἐπισκέψεται ἡμᾶς ἀνατολή ἕξ ὕψους) . . . to guide our feet into the way of peace (τοῦ κατευθῆναι τοὺς πόδας ἡμῶν εἰς ὁδὸν εἰρήνης)" (1:78–79). Simeon commits himself "in peace" to God because "his eyes have seen" salvation in the

⁵¹ J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1988), 56–62, rightly underscores Luke's deliberate redaction of Luke 19:47–21:38 in presenting Jesus' activity of teaching as his decisive encounter with the people of Israel in the temple.

⁵² Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (ANTC; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1996), 284–85.

newborn Jesus (2:29–30); by contrast, Jerusalem now confronted with its Messiah, is being met with the charge that “the things that make for peace” are “hidden from your eyes” (19:42). Moreover, Jesus’ anticipation of a time when “your enemies will set up ramparts around you” (19:43) ironically contrasts with the prospect of redemption “from the hands of our enemies” expressed in 1:74, 82.

In Luke’s rendering of Jesus’ action in the Jerusalem temple, the episode portends Jerusalem’s fate as a consequence of the city’s blindness and unbelief (cf. also Luke 13:34–35). It is a distinctive Lukan feature to emphasize that the fulfillment of Israel’s hope of redemption is being proclaimed in the setting of the regular worship of the Jewish people (e.g. Luke 1:8–10, 13; 2:36–38; Acts 3:1; 26:6–8); yet as Luke’s story moves along it becomes increasingly clear that many in Israel fail to acknowledge this fulfillment. Luke 19:46 highlights the religious failure of unfaithful Israel from the perspective of the focal point of the temple. Hardly more than Matthew does the author of Luke-Acts dismiss the temple in principle or as such; his affirmation of the temple as a locus for God’s offer of the redemption promised to his people is clear not only from Luke 1–2, but also from the fact that Jesus in Luke 19–21 and later his apostles in Acts use it as a place for teaching and proclamation (e.g. Acts 3:1–26; 5:20–21). As for the temple as a place of prayer and worship, Luke’s presentation is more ambiguous. From one perspective, it is obviously correct to state with J. Bradley Chance that “it is clear from the Book of Acts that even decades after the rejection of Jesus the temple was still a valid place of worship.”⁵³ But as I have argued extensively elsewhere, the portrait in Acts is rather subtle on this point.⁵⁴ Members of the believing community are from time to time shown to be blamelessly observing the customs of Israel in worshipping God in the temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 21:26; 22:17). Yet this goes hand in hand with a gradually increasing opposition from non-believing Jews in the temple as the story of Acts proceeds (chs. 3–7, 21–22). In Luke’s view, to reject the visitation of Jesus Messiah in the temple means rejecting the very hope that is the *raison d’être* of the worship of the temple (Acts 26:6–7). For him, true worship is ultimately not linked to a particular place (cf. Acts 7:48; 17:24), but to those who recognize in Jesus the fulfillment of God’s salvific promises. Accordingly, the true heirs of the persistent prayer in anticipation of God’s salvation taking place in the temple in Luke 1–2 are the faithful followers of Jesus (Luke 18:1–8; 24:53; Acts 1:14; 10:2, 14; cf. 26:6–7).

⁵³ Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple and the New Age*, 57.

⁵⁴ Geir Otto Holmås, “‘My House Shall Be a House of Prayer’: Regarding the Temple as a Place of Prayer in Acts within the Context of Luke’s Apologetic Objective,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 393–416.

4. The Contrastive Features in Matthew's and Luke's Constructions of Prayer and the Social Realities behind Their Works

The gospels shape identity as texts, as literary representations. As J. Lieu reminds us, finding the path between text and social realities in exploring early Christian identity formation is a precarious undertaking. Literary texts tend to be more exclusive than social experience. Whether and how their prescriptive message will actually affect the behavior of audiences cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, the relationship between texts and communities is often, in reality, two-directional, as texts “both shape and are shaped by communities’ dynamic self-understanding.”⁵⁵ Although the gospels’ textual constructions of identity surely point to social realities, we should avoid moving too rashly from literary representation into the self-understanding of real-world communities.

With this caveat in mind, we must, by way of conclusion, venture to give some suggestions regarding how the gospels’ identity constructions as seen from their treatment of prayer relate to presumed social realities. Most pertinent to our present purposes, the question of the gospels’ social setting has undergone significant re-evaluation in recent years, not least spurred by the general attempt to reclaim New Testament traditions and authors for Judaism and the re-appraisal of the relationship existing between “Judaism” and “Christianity” in the first and second centuries.

There is today far-reaching acceptance for the view that Matthew and his audience belong to a Jewish community which has experienced some sort of separation from the synagogue, living in the competitive atmosphere of post-70 Judaism where conflicts raged between so-called formative Judaism and other movements sharing the same traditions and historical matrix. Opposed to the prevailing body of contemporary Judaism, Matthew’s community is a “deviant” group whose alternative identity and way of life centered on the teaching of Jesus Messiah the evangelist seeks to define, confirm and legitimate in his writing.⁵⁶ However, it remains a matter of some dispute whether the Matthean community sees itself as a religious grouping distinct from the Jewish people or still within the fold of Judaism. Following the lead of J. Andrew Overman,⁵⁷ Anthony J. Saldarini,⁵⁸ David C. Sim and Daniel

⁵⁵ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 27; see further 27–61, 300–302.

⁵⁶ The older view, popular during the 1960ies and 1970ies, that Matthew is written for a predominantly Gentile community for which conflict with Judaism is a thing of the past, has hardly any advocates today.

⁵⁷ J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990).

⁵⁸ Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (CSHJ; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Harrington, a growing number of scholars now see the tension over Jewish issues reflected in Matthew as evidence for his writing *intra muros*,⁵⁹ a view characterized by Paul Foster as a “new” or “emerging” consensus.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, a vocal group of interpreters continue to argue (now by necessity with more sophistication) what was long the critical mainstream, viz. that the audience of the first gospel sees itself as a distinct entity over against Judaism, the Jesus movement and the synagogue having recently parted company (the Jesus movement existing *extra muros*).⁶¹ In a mediating position, other scholars maintain that Matthew has taken important steps in the direction of an alternative community with a new identity, but declare that the phenomenon of “the parting” and Matthew’s precise relation to an assumed cut-off point are too historically elusive to be clearly defined.⁶²

It would be presumptuous to believe that the present investigation, being very restricted in scope, would in any way settle the matter. Yet my exegetical deliberations lead me to take side with those who assume the latter, mediating position. As we have seen, the introduction to The Lord’s Prayer bears clear marks of a Jewish self-definition. It is on the basis of shared traditions and values that the community is exhorted to surpass the “hypocrites” in righteousness. The boundaries drawn against the people of the synagogue in terms of piety are really a function of their closeness and common matrix. The “Gentiles,” on the other hand, are the real foreigners who entertain wholly different values and mind sets. It is clearly anachronistic to interpret the antagonism with the synagogue reflected in the first gospel as a sign of Matthew’s community seeing itself as representing a new religion separate from Judaism. Yet the radical re-interpretation of the Law and other Jewish identity markers in light of the authority of Jesus Messiah – along with the adoption of distinctive practices like The Lord’s Prayer – expose a community that is intensely negotiating its identity between past and present. Further, as we have seen, the ambivalent attitude towards the Gentiles could be taken to

⁵⁹ Making his audience “Christian Jews” rather than “Jewish Christians,” the terminological change being more than pedantry.

⁶⁰ Paul Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel* (WUNT 2/177; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 78 and 253.

⁶¹ Graham Stanton *inter alia* in *A Gospel for a New People*; Douglas R. A. Hare, “How Jewish Is the Gospel of Matthew?” *CBQ* 62 (2000): 264–77; Foster, *Community, Law and Mission*; Roland Deines, *Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias: Mt 5,13–20 als Schlüsseltext der matthäischen Theologie* (WUNT 177; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

⁶² Cf. Riches, “Matthew’s World,” 87–88, who claims that “by the time of the composition of Matthew’s Gospel the writing was, in a manner of speaking, on the wall.” Further, Donald Senior, *Matthew* (ANTC; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1998), 23–24; Ulrich Luz, “Matthew the Evangelist: A Jewish Christian at the Crossroads,” in *idem.*, *Studies in Matthew* (trans. Rosemary Selle; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 3–17.

indicate that a redefinition of boundaries is beginning to emerge as Matthew writes. As for the Temple Action Episode, I have argued that Jesus' dismissal of failed worship under the administration of the Jewish leaders is joined with a transferral of the prerogatives of the temple institution to the people centered around Jesus Messiah. Transferral of temple imagery to a minority group within Second Temple Judaism is well attested in the Qumran literature,⁶³ so this need not indicate that Matthew's community is *extra muros*. Nor does the reference to the new *ἔθνος* in Matt 21:43 by itself point to the formation of a religious group that is outside the structures of ethnic Judaism (contra G. Stanton and his *tertium genus*). It might be more correct to say that Matthew is pressing towards a redefinition of boundaries that sets the stage for a new identity unbound by ethnic borders.

In postwar research it was almost unanimously held that the author of Luke (and Acts) was a Gentile addressing a Gentile audience. Today this consensus is definitely broken. The issue is closely tied to that of Luke's attitude towards Jews and Judaism, a topic designated by C. M. Tuckett as "one of the most controversial in contemporary Lukan studies."⁶⁴ Luke has been considered everything from intensely anti-Jewish to thoroughly sympathetic to and conversant with Judaism.⁶⁵ The recent effort to reclaim Luke's Jewishness, first instigated by J. Jervell in the 1970's, has lead several exegetes to seriously entertain the possibility that Luke's implied readers belong to either of two categories: "God-fearers"⁶⁶ or "Hellenized Jews."⁶⁷ Some scholars have gone very far in interpreting Luke's writings consistently within the orbit of Jewish discourse.⁶⁸ In the case of the third evangelist, it might be accurate to distinguish the social location of the author from that of his readers. In my opinion, much can be said for the view that the Lukan author himself is an

⁶³ This is well documented in Bertil Gärtner's classical study, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament: A Comparative Study in the Temple Symbolism of the Qumran Texts and the New Testament* (SNTSMS 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

⁶⁴ Christopher M. Tuckett, "Jews, Gentiles and Judaism" in John Riches, William R. Telford and Christopher M. Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 286–303, 286.

⁶⁵ On this, see especially Joseph B. Tyson, *Luke, Judaism and the Scholars: Critical Approaches to Luke-Acts* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

⁶⁶ E.g. Joseph B. Tyson, *Images of Judaism in Luke-Acts* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 181–83.

⁶⁷ E.g. Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007).

⁶⁸ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2008). I find their claim that "Greeks" and "Gentiles" in Acts refer to Jews heavily assimilated to the Hellenistic culture to be untenable.

educated, Hellenized Jew.⁶⁹ Yet it remains probable that Luke, writing some time during the last quarter of the first century, is addressing a community in which non-Jews constitute a prominent, if not the predominant element. From the general drift of the Lukan plot it is hard to escape the conclusion that the emergence of Jesus' community out of its original home in Palestinian Judaism and into a Gentile environment must have been a matter of great relevance to Luke's implied audience. Moreover, as many interpreters have argued, Luke's double-edged presentation of Judaism is best understood as inherent to his historiographical aim of legitimating the new community of Jesus that *is becoming increasingly Gentile in makeup* by stressing its antiquity and continuity with the best of vintage Judaism.

The way Luke negotiates the differences between the prayer practice of Jesus' community and that of Jews outside it is integral to his effort to show that Jesus and his followers have the claim upon Israel's heritage. Jesus gives his followers a distinctive prayer which equips them for the time of the Kingdom and the Spirit, yet they still stand in unbroken continuity with the piety of faithful Israelites (including John the Baptist) driven by the expectation of God to bring his salvific promises to fruition. For Luke, God's decisive visitation in Jesus Messiah is the ultimate fulfillment of the hope that propels the continual, prayerful worship in the Jerusalem temple. To the extent that members of Israel fail to recognize this, they are cut off from the people and the temple is breaking down as a true "house of prayer." Now authentic worship motivated by hope is taking place in the mixed community of Jews and Gentiles centered around Jesus. It by no means follows that Luke understands his community to be representing something different than Judaism. On the contrary, all the way through Luke and Acts, the hope entertained by the praying community remains *Israel's* hope.

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⁶⁹ See the arguments presented for this in David E. Garland, *Luke* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 3; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 23–24; Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 9–10.

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Prayer and Social Identity Formation in the Letter to the Ephesians

by

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Prayers play a significant role in the argument and structure of the Pauline letters.¹ There is no systematic treatment of the theme of prayer in these letters, but most of them either begin or end with a eulogy, doxology, prayer, thanksgiving or a prayer-wish.² In some of the letters, there are sections in the midst of the argument that smoothly turn from exposition into prayer or doxology and then back to exposition, at times making it hard to distinguish between prayer and exposition. Prayers, praises, prayer wish, prayer reports, expositions and exhortations are repeatedly intermingled.

Interestingly, though, there are rather few introductions to Pauline theology that pay attention to the crucial role of prayer in the Pauline letters or have a section on “Paul and prayer,” or something similar. Almost all the standard Pauline theologies have in common that they neglect to say anything about the role of prayer in the makeup and arrangement of the Pauline theology. If they do, they normally say something general and sweeping about the role of

¹ Since, in my point of view, it is almost impossible to determine whether the letters of the *corpus Paulinum* were written, partly or completely, by Paul himself or by an amanuensis, a co-worker or a later “Pauline school,” I use the term “Pauline” for all thirteen letters of this *corpus*. Hence, in this chapter I focus on how the putative “Pauline” persona works in the letter to the Ephesians.

² The most important prayers and thanksgivings in the Pauline letters are Rom 1:8–10; 10:1; 15:5–6, 13, 30–33; 1 Cor 1:4–9; 16:23; 2 Cor 2:14–16; 13:7–9; Eph 1:15–23; 3:14–21; Phil 1:3–11; 4:23; Col 1:3–14; 4:2–4; 1 Thess 1:2–3; 2:13–16; 3:11–13; 5:23–24; 2 Thess 1:3, 11–12; 2:16–17; 3:16; 2 Tim 1:3, 16–18; 4:22; Phlm 4–6, 25. Besides these, there are a couple of eulogies and doxologies, most notably Rom 11:33–36; 16:25–27; 2 Cor 1:3–7; Eph 1:3–14; 3:20–21. For a comprehensive list, see Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of St. Paul* (SNTSMS 24; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 297–302.

prayer in the Pauline letters.³ Of course, there may be several reasons for this lacuna; for example, the difficulty to distinguish between prayer and exposition in the Pauline argument or the assessment that these prayers are not proper prayers (a direct address to God). The neglect may also relate to the prevailing dichotomy between faith and science that has been so dominant in academic theology the last two centuries. Since prayer, in some way or the other, involves spirituality and the praxis of faith, this aspect of the Pauline life and theology has, whether deliberately or not, been a matter of disregard.

The central role of prayer in the Pauline theology is well illustrated by the letter to the Ephesians, containing several sections of prayer, possibly even some liturgical material.⁴ Some scholars even argue that the first half of the

³ Although some modern theologies do may mention prayer in Paul, these sections are ordinarily brief, see, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 46–49 (“God in experience”); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Leicester: Apollos, 2001), 294–300 (“Prayer and Perseverance”). The theme of prayer and thanksgiving in the Pauline literature are highlighted by several monographs, e.g., D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992); Roland Gebaurer, *Das Gebet bei Paulus: Forschungsgeschichte und exegetische Studien* (Giessen/Basel: Brunnen, 1989); Günter Harder, *Paulus und das Gebet* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1936); Peter T. O’Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (NovTSup 49; Leiden: Brill, 1977); Jean Paillard, *In Praise of the Inexpressible: Paul’s Experience of the Divine Mystery* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2003); Paul Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (BZNW 20; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939).

⁴ There are several terms of prayer in Ephesians: “blessed” (εὐλογητός, 1:3), “praise” (ἔπαινος, 1:6, 12, 14), “thanksgiving” (εὐχαριστία, 5:4), “prayer” (προσευχή, 1:16; 6:18), “request” (δεήσις, 6:18, 18), “to give thanks” (εὐχαριστέω, 1:16; 5:20), and “to pray” (προσεύχομαι, 6:18). According to Chrys C. Caragounis (*The Ephesian Mysterion: Meaning and Content* [CBNTS 8; Lund: Gleerup, 1977], 36–37), more than 71% of Eph 1–3 is made up of eulogy, prayer and doxology. It must be said, though, that this figure is somewhat speculative, due to the uncertainty on what could be counted as belonging to the prayers or not. Concerning the prayers of Ephesians, Andrew T. Lincoln, (*Ephesians* [Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1990], 47, 197) insightfully prefers to call them “prayer-reports,” since they are not an exact citation of prayer. However, the sense of these prayers are the same as real prayers, namely to change the situation of the people for whom they are made (cf. Christos Karakolis, “Paul Praying in the Post-Pauline Era: A Structural and Theological Study of Paul’s Prayer in Eph 3,14–19,” in *Das Gebet im Neuen Testament: Vierte Europäische orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sâmbâta de Sus 4.–8. August 2007* [ed. Hans Klein, Vasile Mihoc, and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr; WUNT 249; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009], 133–163, 161). Regarding the possible use of liturgical material in Ephesians, Ernest Best has drawn attention to this, e.g., in 1:3–14 and 1:20–23. See Best, “The Use of Credal and Liturgical Material in Ephesians,” in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin* (ed. Michael J. Wilkins and Terrence Paige; JSOTSup 87; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 53–69.

letter (chaps. 1–3) can be taken as an extended thanksgiving.⁵ This section is bracketed by a rather elaborated introductory eulogy (1:3–14) and a concluding doxology (3:20–21). In between, there are at least two comprehensive thanksgivings and prayers in 1:15–23 and 3:14–19. Typical for the combined eulogy, thanksgiving and prayer of 1:3–23 is that whereas it is obvious where the eulogy and the prayer start, the ending is not clear-cut.⁶ The author moves easily from adoration (εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς, 1:3) to exposition, from exposition to thanksgiving (εὐχαριστῶν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, 1:15–16) to prayer (δῶμι ὑμῖν, 1:17), including some possible hymnic or credal elements (1:20–23), and then from prayer back to exposition.⁷ Before the author turns to the paraenetical section of chapters 4–6, he ends with a prayer (3:14–19) followed by a doxology (3:20–21). Interestingly, the author seems to intend to begin to pray already in 3:1 (“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles. . .”), but the sentence is incomplete (anacoluthon) and instead the argument moves into exposition (3:2–13). The prayer is taken up again in 3:14 (“For this reason I kneel before the father”). Thus, although I doubt that the first half of Ephesians (chaps. 1–3) as a whole should be taken as an extended thanksgiving and prayer, the theme of prayer permeates the whole section, being introduced with an eulogy in 1:3–14 (a single complex sentence), followed with thanksgiving and prayer in 1:15–23 (a single complex sentence),⁸ and then completed with a prayer (3:14–19, a single complex sentence), and a doxology (3:20–21). Hence, we get the following chiasmic outline of eulogy, prayer, doxology and exposition in the first three chapters of the letter:

⁵ E.g., Jack T. Sanders, “The Transition from Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 348–62, 355–62; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxviii, 50.

⁶ Sanders (“Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving,” 356) even argues that the prayer of 1:15–23 continues “at least as far as 2:10.”

⁷ Several scholars take Eph 1:20–23 as an incorporated hymn, see, e.g., Jack T. Sanders, “Hymnic Elements in Ephesians 1–3,” *ZNW* 56 (1965): 214–32; Gottfried Schille, *Frühchristliche Hymnen* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1965), 103 n. 4. Lincoln (*Ephesians*, 50–51) sees 1:20–23 as a possible fragment of a hymn. The section of Eph 1:15–23 has thus interesting parallels with Col 1:3–20 with the subsequent order of thanksgiving, prayer and hymn.

⁸ The conjunction διὰ τοῦτο of 1:15 probably points back to the eulogy and the whole paragraph of 1:3–14, indicating that the prayer of 1:15–23 is a petition that the ideal of 1:3–14 may be realized in the recipients. Cf. Peter T. O’Brien, “Ephesians I: An Unusual Introduction to a New Testament Letter,” *NTS* 25 (1979): 504–16, 513.

- a) 1:3–14: Eulogy (εὐλογητὸς . . .) → Exposition
 b) 1:15–23: Prayer/Thanksgiving (διὰ τοῦτο . . .) → Exposition
 c) 2:1–22: Exposition
 b₁) 3:1: Prayer (τούτου χάριν . . .) → Exposition
 b₁) 3:14–19: Prayer (τούτου χάριν . . .) → Exposition
 a₁) 3:20–21: Doxology (τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ . . . ἡ δόξα)

Besides these doxologies, prayers and thanksgivings in chapters 1–3, there are a couple of admonitions to prayer in chapters 4–6, most notably 5:18–20 and 6:18–20. In these two sections, thanksgiving and prayer are the result of the work of the Spirit in the believers (see below). In 6:18–20, prayer is depicted as a weapon in the spiritual warfare that the believer is involved in (see below). In this section the author also asks the recipients to engage in prayer for himself and his mission. Finally, the letter ends with wish-prayer for the recipients' well-being in peace, love and grace (6:23–24). In this way, prayer frames the whole letter, as it moves from eulogy to prayer wish.

Thus, eulogy, thanksgiving, supplication and doxology play a crucial part in the way the theology of the letter to the Ephesians is spelled out, probably more clearly in this letter than in any of the other Pauline letters. Concluding that the eulogy and prayer sections of Eph 1–3 contain more theologically important words and even more theologically important peculiar words in relation to their comparison referent than do the paraenetic sections, Chrys Caragounis states that the eulogy-prayer sections “ought to be considered as forming the core of the theological content of the Epistle.”⁹ Hence, the essential part of the theology of Ephesians is, from the beginning to the end, steeped and shaped in the mood of prayer. This raises crucial questions not only about why the author so consistently “prays his theology” but also what this way of conveying his theology means for our understanding of the process of identity formation.

Prayer and Identity in the Letter to the Ephesians

First of all, the prayers of the letter tell us something about the identity of the author. Prayer rituals and formulas are embodied expressions of identity, where the author expresses his understanding of God and himself. The author forms the opening eulogy as a Jewish *berakah* with a characteristic Hebrew sentence structure of the Qumran texts.¹⁰ Several scholars have pointed out

⁹ Caragounis, *Ephesian Mysterion*, 38.

¹⁰ See Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen*

that the whole section of Eph 1:3–23 not only reflects the piety of the Hebrew scriptures; in fact, the structure of the passage indicates that its author was conditioned by patterns established by the Jewish *Shemoneh Esreh* (“Eighteen Benedictions”), the basic statutory prayer of Judaism in the first century C.E.¹¹ Although we cannot conclude from this alone that the author is of Jewish origin, we can at least say that he is clearly influenced by Jewish thinking and writings.

Secondly, the author is also a Jewish Christ-believer, praying to God, the Father, through/in Jesus Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ). We will come back to this way of praying below, but the author’s understanding of faith is clearly shaped by his relationship with the risen Christ and his understanding of belonging to the people of God as it is defined through/in Jesus Christ. Thirdly, although we are not dealing with liturgical texts primarily, as a Jewish Christ-believer the author’s mind is steeped in the prayer liturgies of the old Jewish traditions and the emerging Christian traditions. As such, the prayers of the author also have a didactic function: his prayers express knowledge of God and knowledge of God is expressed in prayer. In the mind of the author, there is apparently no tension between theological exposition and devotional prayer. His theology is expressed in praise and prayer, and his praise and prayer lead him to expose and expand his theology; prayer and reflection belong together. One may ask what this may say about the author. Quite clearly, in his perspective, the task of theologizing is not limited to theoretical knowledge about God; it is also a matter of experiential knowledge. In the perspective of the author, knowledge of God is not only a matter of intellectual cognition; it is a relational experience: “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better (ἐν ἐπιγνώσει αὐτοῦ)” (1:17b).¹² The recipients’ knowledge of God should lead them to experience God.

Apparently, thanksgiving, prayer and doxology were effective modes for the author’s theologizing. In expressing such a great deal of his theology in

(SUNT 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 72–75; K. G. Kuhn, “The Epistle to the Ephesians in the Light of the Qumran Texts,” in *Paul and Qumran: Studies in New Testament Exegesis* (ed. J. Murphy-O’Connor; Chicago: Priory Press, 1968), 115–31, 116–20. Kuhn (p. 116) points out: “Semitic syntactical occurrences appear four times more frequently in the Epistle to the Ephesians than in all the remaining letters of the corpus Paulinum.”

¹¹ E.g., Caragounis, *Ephesian Mysterion*, 39–40; Richard N. Longenecker, “Prayer in the Pauline Letters,” in *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (ed. R. N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 201–223, 214.

¹² With genitive the expression ἐπιγνώσις τοῦ θεοῦ carries the meaning of intimate knowledge of God; cf. Prov 2:5; Hos 4:1; Col. 1:9–10; 2 Pet 1:2–3. See BGAD, 291, and Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 258–59.

the form of prayer and worship, he seems to intend to bring his readers into his own relation to “the God and Father of *our* Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3, italics mine). As pointed out by Gordon Wiles in his analysis of the role of intercessory prayers in the Paul’s letters, “In his prayers he [Paul] was always conscious of living ‘before God’, . . . he understood himself in a special way as priestly intercessor.”¹³ Also the author of Ephesians functions in some sort of priestly function as he takes his readers before the “the God and Father.” In doing this, he seems to want to include his readers in his own relation to God. In turn, this is part of his strategy to win the addressees’ loyalty and form their self-understanding as true Christ-believers.

Most importantly, the author is engaged in the formation and reinforcement of the social identity of the Christ-believing community that he is addressing. The author addresses a seemingly insignificant and marginalized group of Gentile Christ-believers (2:11–13; 3:1; 4:17) who are in need of a strong affirmation and in-group identity. Accordingly, the letter of Ephesians as a whole continually serves to affirm them in their new faith. In his well-argued thesis about social identity formation in Ephesians, Rickard Roitto states: “The purpose of the letter as a whole is to inspire the recipients to behave according to their identity in Christ, with a particular interest in ethnic relations.”¹⁴ The author wants to reaffirm the readers’ new self-understanding and social identity. Elaborating on this idea in First Corinthians, Richard Hays calls this process “the conversion of imagination,” i.e., an imaginative paradigm shift where the readers understand their identity anew in perspective of the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ In a similar way, the author of the letter to the Ephesians wants his readers to understand what it means to believe in Christ and to live their lives in accordance with this new identity in Christ.

In this process of shaping the self-understanding of the readers, the language of worship serves a significant didactic and paraenetic role.¹⁶ According to Andrew Lincoln, the language of worship enables the author “to reinforce the perspectives and values he and his readers already share and in

¹³ Wiles, *Paul’s Intercessory Prayers*, 294.

¹⁴ Rickard Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer: A Cognitive Perspective on Identity and Behavior Norms in Ephesians* (Linköping Studies in Arts and Science 493/Linköping Studies in Identity and Pluralism 10; Linköping University, 2009), 148.

¹⁵ Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 5–6.

¹⁶ Peter T. O’Brien points out the didactic function and the paraenetical purpose of the introductory thanksgivings in the Pauline letters; see his *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (NovTSup 49; Leiden: Brill, 1977), 262–63. Cf. also Caragounis (*Ephesian Mysterion*, 55), concluding that “the function of both Eulogy and prayer is ultimately instructive.”

the process touch and build upon their religious experience and emotions.”¹⁷ Furthermore, in doing so, the author “attempts both to reinforce the common values which establish his readers’ identity as Gentile Christians who belong to the Church and to persuade them to change their behavior to that which is more appropriate to such an identity.”¹⁸

Thus, we conclude that the prayers of the letter to the Ephesians play a significant role in forming and informing about the recipients’ understanding of themselves. This, I would argue, is strategically done in at least three ways. First, the prayers demarcate who belongs to the in-group and who belongs to the out-group respectively. This is particularly demonstrated in the way the author reshapes the understanding of the ethnicity of the Christ-believing community; the out-group of Gentile believers are made into an in-group of the people of God. Secondly, the prayers present the ideal or the prototypical believer, affirming the identity of the true Christ-believer and, accordingly, disaffirming the identity of the false or deviating Christ-believer. Thirdly, the prayers give a common narrative and theological self-understanding that serves to shape the cohesion of the in-group of believers, to include and unite those who confess the same belief, and, in turn, exclude others. In the following, I will elaborate further on these three aspects of identity formation in the letter.

1. Ethnicity, Prayer and Identity

As I pointed out in the introductory chapter of this volume, the knowledge of one’s membership of a social group, together with the value and significance that is attached to this membership, constitutes the “social identity” of its subject. In this sense the ethnic group is a social, rather than a biological, category. In a way, ethnic identity is mainly constituted by opposition to other ethnic identities. However, it is not the boundary itself that makes the ethnic group; it is the ethnic group that makes the boundary, thereby articulating the share of its members in a sense of common origin, a distinctive history and destiny, and in a collective uniqueness and solidarity. It thus claims that its members are not the members of some other group and it asserts that its members constitute an “us” versus the members of other groups, who constitute “them.”

The formation of early Christian identity was a prolonged process of defining ethnicity in constant dialogue with Jewish identity specifically but also with Gentile/pagan identity generally. The author of the letter to the Ephesians takes part in this ongoing process and gives his specific contri-

¹⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln and A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Epistles* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 143.

¹⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxviii–lxxix; cf. lxxxvi.

bution. He constantly moves in the area of defining the recipients' understanding of ethnicity. The letter has traditionally been addressed to early Christ-believers in Ephesus: τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ] (1:1). It is, however, not probable that the location given in brackets belongs to the original text.¹⁹ Nonetheless, even though the letter to the Ephesians most likely originally functioned as a circular letter written for a wider audience in western Asia Minor, its present address – attested in a wide variety of manuscripts – indicates that from the beginning of the late second century and on this letter became connected with the early Christ-believing community in Ephesus (probably preserved and collected there).²⁰ In fact, the connection between this letter and the city of Ephesus could be made as early as the beginning of the second century C.E.²¹ Drawing from the letter to the Ephesians, Acts and the Pastoral letters, Werner Thiessen argues that the development of the Christian movement in Ephesus was particularly characterized by the transition from a Jewish movement to a more Gentile one, echoing the “Hauptproblem der Geschichte des frühen Christentums” during the first century, i.e., the long process of the separation of the early Christian movement from Judaism and the synagogue communities.²² According to Thiessen, the address of Paul's letter to the Ephesians (ΠΡΟΣ ἘΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ) stems from an Hellenistic Jewish Christian group who wanted to articulate the Pauline theology of the reality of unity between Jewish and Gentile Christ-believers in one community (Eph 2:11–22).²³ Even if I doubt that this letter should be particularly connected to the city of Ephesus during the second half of the first century and that we can use the letter to the Ephesians in the task of reconstructing the social reality of the Christ-believing community in this specific city, this letter demonstrates that at the time of writing issues concerning the definition and self-understanding of a

¹⁹ The locality of the addressees (ἐν Ἐφέσῳ) is absent in the oldest manuscripts (P⁴⁶, 298 κ* B* al), including some of the third and fourth century church fathers (e.g., Origen and Basil). The general character of the letter also supports the circular letter thesis, particularly the lack of personal greetings.

²⁰ This is also confirmed by the second century tradition in Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 3.3.4): “Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.” Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.23.4.

²¹ The connection to Ephesus was already made by bishop Ignatius c. 110 C.E., see Ign. *Eph* inscr. (alluding to Eph 1:3–5, 7, 10, 11, 19, 23). Cf. Rainer Schwandt, *Das Weltbild des Epheserbriefes: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie* (WUNT 148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 58–59.

²² Werner Thiessen, *Christen in Ephesus: Die historische und theologische Situation in vorpaulinischer und paulinischer Zeit und zur Zeit der Apostelgeschichte und der Pastoralbriefe* (Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 12; Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1995), 347.

²³ Thiessen, *Christen in Ephesus*, 348–50.

Gentile Christ-believing movement versus Jewish identity were certainly matters of concern in western Minor Asia.²⁴

The letter to the Ephesians is structured on the theme of belonging, either belonging to the in-group or belonging to the out-group. The recipients belong to the in-group and the non-believing Gentiles belong to the out-group. In the letter opening and in the introductory *berakah*, the author makes clear that the readers belong to the in-group of the people of God: they are “God’s holy people” (1:1), “chosen,” “predestined” and “adopted” (1:4–5, 11). In the *berakah*, this belonging is marked by the author as he shifts from first person plural (“we”) to second person plural (“you also”), and then back to first plural (“our”) (1:12–14); “also you (καὶ ὑμεῖς) were included in Christ” (1:13), i.e., belong to the in-group of believers. This also serves as a reminder that the author belonged to this group before his recipients, thus placing them in a subordinate client-relationship to himself, the patron. In the following prayer, the author shifts from second plural (“you”) to an inclusive first plural (“us”) (1:18–19). The readers are depicted as God’s inheritance as they constitute the people of God (1:18). In the concluding prayer and doxology, he changes from second plural (“you”) to first plural (“us”) (3:19–20). Apparently, the author wants to include the recipients in the in-group of “we”/ “us.”

In the argument as a whole, this inclusion of the recipients is made clear in two ways. First, the distinction between “you” and “we” marks a clear line between “then” and “now,” between the recipients’ former lives and their lives in the present (2:1–3; 4:17–24). There is a clear contrast in the letter between the recipients “past” (πότε) (2:2, 3, 11, 13; 5:8), and their present status. Formerly, as unbelieving Gentiles, they belonged to the out-group but now they belong to the in-group. Once, they were “foreigners and strangers” (2:19) but now they belong to ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ, the true people of God (3:10). This way of presenting their lives in temporal terms also creates definite boundary markers, serving to reaffirm their new, true identity in the present in contrast to their old identity.

Secondly, non-believing, pagan Gentiles are clearly depicted as members of the deviating out-group. In the distinction between “you” and “we” the author makes clear that the recipients once belonged to the out-group but now they belong to the in-group, i.e., being among those that belong to the covenant of Israel, “the commonwealth of Israel” (ἡ πολιτεία τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, 2:12). Once, the recipients also were “Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ . . . separate from

²⁴ I have demonstrated elsewhere that issues relating to the process of the “parting of the ways” were under debate in all the texts that relate to the city of Ephesus in the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century C.E. See Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective* (WUNT 242; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 57–136.

Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.” This non-status is now changed in Christ: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (2:11–13).

It is not quite clear how the author defines the relation between Israel and the church in these verses.²⁵ Several suggestions have been made. Lincoln argues that there is not a question of merging two groups; the recipients are not being incorporated into Israel, nor even are they described as joining a renewed Israel of Jewish Christians. Instead, he suggests, they “are being made members of a new community which transcends the categories of Jew and Gentile, an entity which is a new creation.”²⁶ In contrast, Markus Barth suggests that the author does not speak of “a third group who might have formed an intermediate class” but of an incorporation of the Gentiles into Israel, where all ethnic Jews are still part of this Israel.²⁷ However, since the author is silent concerning the status of non-believing Jews, it is not easy to determine the author’s definitions.²⁸ Roitto points out that the author seems to think of himself as both a Jew and a Christ-believer and sees no contradiction between these two social identities. He demonstrates that self-categorization theory states that identities can be cognitively ordered into categories in a person’s brain, where some identities are sub-categories to other identities.²⁹ Hence, Roitto suggests a third reading, namely that the definitions were still a matter of negotiation where the being “in Christ” is seen as a sub-category to

²⁵ As N. A. Dahl points out, “the author of Ephesians. . . failed to show any concern for the relationship of his audience to contemporary Jews in or outside the church.” See Dahl, “Gentiles, Christians, and Israelites in the Epistle to the Ephesians,” *HTR* 79 (1986): 31–39, 37.

²⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xciii; Lincoln and Wedderburn, *Theology*, 107, 133–34. This also the conclusion of, e.g., Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 395–96; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 191.

²⁷ Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (2 vols.; Anchor Bible 34A–B; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 1:269. For a similar view, see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 106–107, 111, 126.

²⁸ Interestingly, the author does not use the term “Jew” (Ἰουδαῖος) but the term “Israel” (Ἰσραήλ, 2:12), a term that more stresses covenant-belonging. Peter J. Tomson argues that the term Ἰσραήλ serves to transfer to the believing Gentiles a sense of belonging in the people of Israel. See Peter J. Tomson, “The Names Israel and Jew in Ancient Judaism and the New Testament,” *Bijdr* 47 (1986): 120–40 and 266–89, 285–88. According to Roitto (*Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 192), the author’s silence concerning non-believing Jews serves to decrease the cognitive distance to the covenant of Israel.

²⁹ Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 183.

being a member of Israel: “Being in Christ is neither just inclusion in Israel, nor a replacement or a parallel to ethnic Israel, but a sub-category.”³⁰

In conclusion, whatever our final explanation of this matter will be, it seems obvious that matters concerning the Law and Law-observance were not a major issue in perspective of the author. If there had been Law-observant Jews in the community, the role of the Law in relation to Gentile believers would most likely have been a matter of dispute, at least to some extent. Interestingly, the author redefines the significance of Israel’s identity marker number one, the circumcision (2:11). In the long run, this would also imply a redefinition of true membership in Israel, not only creating a sub-group within Israel but a new group outside Israel.³¹ This suggests to me that the author is in a process of redefining the meaning of the very term “Israel.”³²

Also the section of 3:2–13, a section framed by the author’s intention to pray in 3:1 and 3:14, is spelled out from a perspective of belonging to the in-group or the out-group. As in the two previous chapters, the readers are included in the in-group by the use of “you” and “we.” The “mystery of the gospel” is that the Gentiles are “heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (3:6). Outsiders are thus made into insiders. As a result, the author admonishes his readers: “In him and through faith in him *we* may approach God with freedom and confidence” (3:12, italics mine). The author completes his argument by approaching God in prayer together with his readers: “For this reason I kneel before the Father. . . I pray that. . . he may strengthen you” (3:14, 16).

The sharp contrast between the in-group of Gentile and Jewish Christ-believers together in Christ and the out-group of deviating non-believing Gentiles (and Jews?) thus functions in several ways. Roitto suggests at least three; first, this contrast increases the distinctiveness and the self-esteem of the group; secondly, it inspires the recipients not to feel committed to non-believing Gentiles but rather to the identity in Christ, and, thirdly, it forms the ideals and norms of the in-group prototype.³³ To this we now turn.

2. Prototypicality, Prayer and Identity

As pointed out in the introductory chapter social identity is closely related to the idea of self-category and prototypicality.³⁴ For example, when a member participates in a group activity, this person tends to depersonalize himself/herself and think of himself/herself in terms of the other members of the group, or at least in contrast to other groups. Self-categorization as a group

³⁰ Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 183; for this view, see pp. 181–93.

³¹ Cf. Rom 2:27–29; Phil 3:2–3; Col 2:10–12.

³² Cf. the redefinition of this term in Gal 6:16 (“the Israel of God”).

³³ Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 177.

³⁴ See Tellbe, “Identity and Prayer” in this volume, especially pp. 26–29.

member leads people to develop a shared group-level fate and regulate whether or not people conform, and expect others to conform, to the group norms. According to the social identity theorist John Turner, members of a social group belong together in the sense that they stereotype themselves in order to enhance the sense of identity shared with in-group members and to accentuate their similarities within the group and the features that bind them together (intra-class similarities), while heightening the sense of contrast between themselves and accentuating differences to out-groups (interclass differences).³⁵ Contexts create categories and categories generate the prototypical group member. Inside the group, members who act and believe like the prototypical group member will be more appreciated, gain a higher status and have more influence on the other members. Members who deviate from the ideals of the group will be less liked and some sort of reprimand (accusations, shame, expulsion, etc.) will be affected if the deviation is large enough.

We can see this process of self-categorization going on in the letter to the Ephesians. The author wants to bring the in-group together by stereotyping others and by reminding them of the single category (beliefs, traditions and norms) that they have in common. In doing so, he forms the idea of the ideal or prototypical group member, seeking to encourage the members of the in-group to identify with this prototype, thus increasing the cohesion within the group. This process of shaping of the prototypical group-member is clearly spelled out in the prayers of the letter. In what way?

First, the shaping of the notion of the prototypical believer begins already in the introductory eulogy as the author develops the identity that the group members should esteemed and value. The eulogy serves to reaffirm the self-understanding of the recipients as chosen and predestined by God for holiness, redeemed and forgiven through the blood of Christ, and filled and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:3–14). According to Roitto, the themes mentioned in this eulogy make “the in-group identity salient and hopefully increases the recipients’ sense that their identity is important and valuable.”³⁶ As such, several of the themes in this eulogy set the agenda for the rest of the letter in order to be developed further on.³⁷

Secondly, in the concluding prayer of chapters 1–3, the author points out what is lacking in prototypicality (3:14–19).³⁸ By letting the recipients know

³⁵ John C. Turner, with Michael A. Hogg et al., *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 49.

³⁶ Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 150.

³⁷ Cf. O’Brien, “Ephesians 1,” 509–12.

³⁸ Cf. Karakolis (“Paul Praying,” 152) commenting on Eph 3:14–19: “It is clear that the Gentile recipients of the epistle have not yet adequately progressed with regard to their spiritual power and steadfastness. Their lacking is the reason of the requesting prayer of Paul.”

what the author prays for them, he also signals what is lacking, insufficient or flawed in their appreciation of their faith. The addressees, in Lincoln's terms, "need an improvement in the quality of their lives before God."³⁹ This prayer thus serves to remind them about their shortcomings so that they will long to become more prototypical. Here, the author acts as the prototypical believer and the recipients as the less prototypical believers; he wants his readers ("you") to grow in power, knowledge and love. If they do so, they will become mature believers, "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (3:19). As such, they will act as prototypical Christ-believers for the whole group.

Thirdly, in terms of identity formation, the extended thanksgiving and prayer in 1:15–23 has two aims, combining the function of the eulogy in 1:3–14 and of the prayer in 3:14–19. In the thanksgiving, the author affirms the recipients' "faith in the Lord Jesus" and their "love for all God's people" (1:15). The tenor is affirmative; the author wants to "include them, bond with them and make them appreciate their identity."⁴⁰ In the subsequent prayer, the author points out that the recipients are lacking spiritual vision, thus accentuating what they need to attain in their lives; they deviate from the ideal believers and they need improvement. Hence, he prays that the recipients may be given "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (1:17). In order that they "may know the hope. . . the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power" (1:18–19), they are in need of enlightened hearts. Thus, the thanksgiving and prayer of 1:15–23 both confirms the prototypical believers and points out what is lacking in their prototypicality.

Fourthly, in the paraenetical section of the letter, chapters 4–6, the author moves from modeling prayer himself to admonishing his readers to pray. The social identity of an in-group is ordinarily based on common behavior norms and values. Behavior and customs express collective identity and a sense of shared belonging. Shared rituals, for example, common prayers, are typical examples of such identity forming behavior and actions. In the letter to the Ephesians, particularly in the paraenetical section, the author prepares a cognitive and experiential basis for group behavior based on the idea of self-categorization and prototypicality. Here the author delineates in detail the prototypical behaviors of the Christ-believers.

³⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxviii; cf. 201, 219. Roitto (*Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 151) rightly points out, "There is an important difference between praying and letting people know that you are praying. In the latter case you want them to *know* that you are trying to help them with something that is flawed in their lives. The form of prayer gives a sense that the author is benevolent and wishes to help them."

⁴⁰ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxviii, 151.

Prayer is one aspect of this prototypicality. For example, one characteristic sign of the prototypical Christ-believer is thanksgiving: “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:20). Thanksgiving is presented as a result of the indwelling of the Spirit (5:18).⁴¹ This is set in contrast to the deviant outsiders (the antitypes), who are characterized by “obscenity,” “foolish talk,” “coarse joking,” and are lacking in “thanksgiving” (εὐχαριστία; 5:4). The antitype to the ideal believer is here typically used in order to strengthen the solidarity and self-understanding of the in-group (cf. 4:17–24; 5:1–7). In effect, boundaries are drawn that give concrete markers that distinguish the insider from the outsider.

In 6:18–20, the recipients are encouraged to pray and supplicate. Again, the admonition is set in the context of the in-working power of the Spirit: “pray (προσευχόμενοι) in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers (προσευχῆς) and requests (δεήσεως)” (6:18a). The prototypical believer is depicted as a person of prayer, praying “on all occasions” and “always keeping on praying for all the Lord’s people” (6:18b). In the first part of the letter, the author models how to pray for his readers; he ends the letter with presenting himself as a prayer request: “Pray also for me” (6:19). As such, he still continues to model the ideal believer, in particular as he asks the readers to pray that he may declare the gospel “fearlessly, as I should,” i.e., as a true representative of Christ and the believing community. Thus, in presenting himself as the ideal believer, the author urges his readers to stick to this ideal, becoming and being prototypical believers themselves.

3. Narrative, Prayer and Identity

The social identity theorist Daniel Bar-Tal recognizes that social identity is not solely based on the mere fact of categorization but on “group beliefs” held by the members.⁴² A common history and narrative provides a rationale and character to group existence; why the group exists and why the group is valuable. Narratives also inspire and motivate in-group norms that in turn form, value and laud certain group behaviors. A particular good example of such common narrative or “myth” is the story of Israel; for example, the Jewish belief in the one God, the creator, and Israel as the chosen people of God. This story also became the story of the early Gentile Christ-believers, a common faith-narrative that emerged as they began to speak of the story of

⁴¹ The main imperative “be filled” (πληροῦσθε, v. 18) is followed by five participles, “speaking” (λαλοῦντες), “singing” (ᾄδοντες), “playing music” (ψάλλοντες), “giving thanks” (εὐχαριστοῦντες) and “submitting” (ὑποτασσόμενοι) (vv. 19–21) indicating that these five activities are the outcome of the work of the Spirit in the believers.

⁴² Daniel Bar-Tal, *Group Beliefs: A Conception for Analyzing Group Structure, Processes, and Behavior* (Springer Series in Social Psychology; New York: Springer, 1990), 94.

God's people in history as their story, and to see themselves as partakers of this story, i.e., as incorporated into a common narrative through the work of Jesus Christ. It is the story of Israel as recounted in the Jewish scriptures that is the basic narrative that frames the story of Jesus. By quoting from the sacred Scriptures, the story of Jesus is set within the greater narrative framework of the story of Israel: God's acts in Jesus Christ stand in continuity with God's preceding saving acts in history. When this story of Jesus was told with all its facets it created a sense of commonality and shared identity. The story of Jesus in history, retold orally and re-enacted and modeled by believers, corporately and individually, shaped the boundary lines of belonging – as well as of exclusion. This narrative would, in turn, have united some; others would have been disqualified and excluded.⁴³

The author of Ephesians gives his addressees a story to identify with. The purpose of this story is to strengthen the in-group and to shape cohesion, solidarity and unity within this group. In particular, this holds true for the author's prayers as they articulate certain convictions and beliefs that he presupposes he would have in common with his readers. There are a number of significant features of this common narrative.

First, the prayers of the letter to the Ephesians express a distinct triadic shape of belief.⁴⁴ The introductory eulogy is typical for the prayers of the letter. The object of praise and glory is "the God and Father" (1:3). Three times in the eulogy the author turns to God in praise, "to the praise of his glory" (εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ; 1:6, 12, 14). This address of praise and prayer is typical Jewish in character, where God, the Father, is the original

⁴³ I have demonstrated elsewhere that Christ-believers in the geographical area of Ephesus nurtured a common story of Jesus and the ethical response expected that had a notable coherence and consistency in its basic structure. The story contains at least ten theological and six ethical items. The theological items are: (1) In continuity with the Scriptures, (2) God, the Father, (3) is revealed in Jesus Christ, (4) the man Jesus (5) and the exalted Christ, (6) the mediator or means of salvation, and (7) in order to bring about God's salvation (8) on behalf of all men, (9) this was confirmed by the prophetic Spirit and (10) will be brought to completion at the future return of Jesus Christ. The ethical items, elicited in response to God's saving acts in Jesus Christ are: (1) man is called to make a committed and proper response (by receiving, by repentance, by believing) and by forming a community of responding/believing members. This response should be manifested (2) in Christ-like attitudes and virtues (love, godliness, humility), (3) in high moral standards, (4) by the renunciation of the things of this world (worldly values/material possessions), (5) by non-participation in pagan cultic life (idolatry), and (6) by a willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ. For further details, see Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus*, 237–307.

⁴⁴ Although the term "Trinitarian" is commonly used by scholars in describing the theology of Ephesians (e.g., Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 106–8), I deliberately avoid this anachronistic term. In lack of better terminology, I prefer to speak of a triadic pattern of theology in Ephesians.

cause and fundamental rationale of the recipients' identity.⁴⁵ The address is also elaborated in the prayer of 3:14, "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name." God, the Father, the object of praise in all the prayers, also becomes the subject, being the initiator and administrator of all the blessings that the recipients take part of (1:3–6; cf. 1:17–20a; 3:14, 19–21).

The address of the prayers is further defined as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3) and "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:17; cf. "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," 1:2; 6:23). This typically binitarian liturgical form has a specifically Christian character, in particular as the God of Israel, to whom the praise is addressed, is known as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴⁶ Furthermore, the introductory eulogy gets a specific Christian flavor by the repetitive use of expressions like "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ) and "in him" (ἐν αὐτῷ) (1:3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13²). Jesus Christ, the Son, is presented as the agent of God's plan of salvation (1:7–12, 20b–23; 3:17–19).

There is also a distinctive emphasis and role of the Holy Spirit in the prayers of the letter. In the third section of the eulogy (1:13–14), the Spirit is depicted as "a seal" and "a deposit," stressing the present role of the Spirit as guaranteeing the eschatological redemption and inheritance of the believers. In the prayer of 1:17b–18, the Spirit is called "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation," who gives knowledge of God and his work in Jesus Christ (1:17b–19). In the prayer of 3:14–19, the Spirit is the power that enables the indwelling of Christ in the believers (3:16–17).

Thus, there is a distinct way in the letter of praying to God, the Father, through/in Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit. Overall, the letter to the Ephesians is well known for its triadic patterns.⁴⁷ This is particularly spelled out in the extended prayers. For example, in 3:16–17, the prayer is directed to the Father in order that he may grant the Spirit of power so that Christ may dwell in the believers.⁴⁸ In a similar vein, the author prays, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (1:17). We cannot from these verses alone delineate the author's specific ontological understanding – the stress is certainly functional – of the relation between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. So much can be said, though, that this triadic way of praying differs

⁴⁵ For the Jewish character of this blessing, see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 162–63; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 10–12; Longenecker, "Prayer in the Pauline Letters," 207–14.

⁴⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 11.

⁴⁷ See 1:4–14, 17; 2:18, 22; 3:4–5, 14–17; 4:4–6; 5:18–20. This is particularly articulated by Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 106–10.

⁴⁸ I prefer to read the infinitive κατοικῆσαι as a progressive result of the previous infinitive, κραταιωθῆναι, v. 17. Cf. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 480–81.

clearly from the typical Jewish way of praying and marks a distinct Jewish-Christian identity of the author. His way of talking about the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit is central to his narrative understanding of belief.

Secondly, the prayers of the letter to the Ephesians present the recipients as partakers in the story of God in Christ. Concerning the overall narrative of Ephesians, Roitto states, "In Ephesians, the narrative rationale of the group is that God has chosen them and paved way for their identity through the Christ-event."⁴⁹ In the prayers, this is particularly demonstrated in the way the author draws his readers into the narrative of God's grand plan of salvation in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit. In the eulogy, the readers are depicted as "chosen," "predestined," "adopted" by God, the Father, "redeemed" and "forgiven" in Jesus Christ, and "marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (1:3–14). In a similar way, the prayer of 1:15–23, aims to set the readers in the story of God in Christ through the Spirit; it is asked that they be given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in order that they may see the work of God in Christ, the hope, riches and power "for us who believe." This prayer continually focuses on the readers' partaking in the work of God, particularly captured in the role of the church in God's grand story (1:22–23). The author prays that his readers should see the lordship of Christ and adjust their lives in accordance to this (1:9–10, 17–23; 4:17). The same goes for the prayer of 3:14–19; the readers are asked to get a grasp of "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" and "the fullness of God." In the following doxology, 3:20–21, the author makes clear that this has been revealed by God not only in Jesus Christ but also in the church, i.e., in the community of Christ-believers. Thus, the readers are partakers in the grand story of God; this is how they should understand their new identity in Jesus Christ.

This triadic way of presenting the theological narrative of Ephesians is also set in a temporal pattern of past, present and future. According to Charles Taylor, "in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going."⁵⁰ This time-based aspect of identity formation is particularly salient in the introductory eulogy. The author begins to establish the readers' self-understanding in the past work of God, the Father, who has blessed, chosen and predestined the believers (1:3–6), who has redeemed and forgiven them through the Son (1:7–8), and who has granted them the Spirit (1:13–14). In the present they live in a unique relationship to God as adopted sons and with the Spirit as a seal and deposit, while they are awaiting the final redemption and all-embracing lordship of Jesus Christ (1:9–10, 14). Also the prayers of 1:15–23 and 3:14–19 can be read in similar temporal categories. Here, the eschatological perspective

⁴⁹ Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 167.

⁵⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 47.

serves to explain how the believing community, which is already the fullness of Christ (1:23) still needs to be filled and attain the fullness of God/Christ (3:19; cf. 4:11–16).

Thirdly, the prayers of Ephesians anticipate the behavioral response to the story of God in Christ. Almost all of the major behavioral motives of the prayers of 1:3–3:21 are further developed in the paraenetical section of 4:1–6:20; for example, the theme of love, unity, holiness, fullness and forgiveness. Thus, the prayers prescribe the positive values and norms of the in-group and, in turn, reinforce the expected behavioral response that is expected to belong to the core social identity of the group. The author presents himself as exemplary in relation to God, a *typos* that his readers also should imitate (*imitatio*) in their new way of living. For example, the author prays that his readers may gain knowledge of God's dealings in Christ (1:17–18). This specific Christian knowledge is, however, not a goal in itself; greater is "the love of Christ. . . that surpasses knowledge" (3:18–19). To know the love of Christ involves being known by God and being filled by his love in Christ. This central theme of love is especially picked up in the paraenetical part of the letter where the believers are urged to "walk in the way of love" (5:1) and "speak the truth in love" (4:15; cf. 4:2; 5:25, 28, 33).⁵¹ Thus, love becomes the primary ethical "identity descriptor" of the group of Christ-believers.⁵²

Another important behavioral theme in the letter is the theme of holiness. The recipients are addressed as "holy" throughout the letter (1:1, 18; 3:18; 5:26). In the prayers, this is particularly highlighted in the eulogy: the readers are chosen by God in Christ in order "to be holy and blameless in his sight" (1:4). From this self-understanding of being God's holy people they should commit themselves to holiness; "to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:24).

Concluding Remarks

In praying with and for the believers, the author of Ephesians draws his readers into an understanding of themselves that bonds them not only with the author but also with "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In praying for and with his readers, the author brings them before God; in Jesus Christ Jews and Gentiles together have "access to the Father by one Spirit" (2:18). In

⁵¹ Hoehner (*Ephesians*, 106) sees this theme of love as the ultimate purpose of the whole letter: "It seems reasonable to conclude that the purpose of Ephesians is to promote a love for one another that has the love of God and Christ as its basis."

⁵² Cf. Samuel Byrskog, "Ephesians 4:1–6: Paraenesis and Identity Formation," in *Ethik als Angewandte Ekklesiologie: Der Brief an die Epheser* (ed. Michael Wolter; Rome: 'Benedictina' Publishing, 2005), 109–38, 138.

fact, being united in Christ they have their social identity as a dwelling place of God: “In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (2:21–22).⁵³ Depicting the believers in such specific terminology serves as a strong affirmation of the idea that offering prayers and praise to God belongs to the core identity of the prototypical community of Christ-believers.

Thus, the language of prayer has both a vertical and horizontal function. As I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter, prayer is used as an effective tool in the task of affirming and forming the social identity of the believing community in the letter to the Ephesians. The prayers of the letter reveal that the author believes that a strong in-group identity can be achieved through a revitalization of their relationship to and knowledge of God. Being used in this way, the language of prayer could even be a more dynamic vehicle in the process of forming and reinforcing identity than argumentative or paraenetical texts. This has to do with the power of rituals in identity formation. As pointed out by the sociologist Richard Jenkins, “The enhancement of experience which ritual offers cognitively and particularly emotionally, plays an important role in the internalization of identification.”⁵⁴ Prayer as a religious ritual serves not only to convey a rational understanding of God but also, somehow, to internalize this understanding, intending to create a cognitive and affective experience of God. In praying his theology, the author of Ephesians sets his teaching not only in a two-part relation of author–addressees but in a three-part relation of author–addressees–God, the Father. In this way, the addressees are challenged to read and apprehend their identity in a spirit of reverence and awe.

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⁵³ The image of a holy building is also highlighted in Eph 3:17. See Karakolis, “Paul Praying,” 153, 156.

⁵⁴ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2004), 150–51.

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Prayer in Acts and the Pastoral Epistles: Intersections of Gender and Class

by

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Negotiating Identity through Texts

Literary production played an important role in early Christian identity formation. Judith Lieu, among others, has pointed to the creative role of texts in early Christian identity construction, how texts construct identity through their poetics. According to Lieu, “textuality is not simply the articulation of identity but also the field of its contestation.”¹ Early Christian texts were sites for negotiating identity, and textual production can be seen as a contest for power in which texts are used rhetorically as a form of persuasion.²

When we speak of early Christian identity, we are concerned with social, or corporate identity rather than individual or personal identity, which is a modern development.³ How did early Christians distinguish between inside and outside? What kind of rhetoric was used to draw the boundaries between “us” and “them,” the inside-group and the “other”? A number of social factors played a role in early Christian identity-making. Lieu has pointed out that Greco-Roman identity “as encoded in texts” was not only gendered but also a matter of class.⁴

The intersection of gender and class is my particular interest in this paper, and I will use *intersectionality* as an interpretive tool. The central notion of intersectionality is that mutually reinforcing vectors of power and oppression,

¹ Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36.

² Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, 49.

³ Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, 178–79.

⁴ Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, 184–85. See also Mikael Tellbe’s chapter on “Identity and Prayer” in this volume.

such as race, gender, class, and sexuality⁵ must be taken into account in order to understand the complexity of hierarchical relations.⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the role of the *kyrios/paterfamilias* – the male householder – is important for understanding the intersecting power structures of antiquity. The *kyrios* of the household held authority over wife, slaves and children, therefore, gender, social status and age/generation were important identity markers in Greco-Roman society. Fiorenza has coined the terms *kyriarchy/kyriarchal/kyriocentric*, which I find helpful for an intersectional approach to early Christian texts.

The texts I have chosen for this intersectional analysis of identity construction are the Acts of the Apostles and the Pastoral Epistles. Prayer is an important topic in both the narrative of Acts and the exhortatory instructions of the Pastorals.⁷ Thus, the prayer discourse in these texts may serve as fruitful sites to explore early Christian identity construction. In this essay I am particularly concerned with gender and class, but will also point to some interesting intersections with the categories of age/generation and race/ethnicity.⁸ I am interested in the selected sources' representation of men as well as women, and slaves as well as free, and the intersections of these categories. We have, then, an oversimplified, but perhaps still useful grid of four different identity categories that will guide the analysis: free men, free women, male slaves, female slaves. I will look for the representations of each of these categories in the prayer discourse of Acts and the Pastorals.

⁵ Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 1–15, 2.

⁶ Paulina de los Reyes and Diana Mulinari, *Intersektionalitet: Kritiska reflektioner över (o)jämlighetens landskap* (Stockholm: Liber, 2005), 24–25.

⁷ The Pastoral Epistles is a contested category, but there are likenesses in literary style, ideology and theology that make it reasonable to regard them as a unit of post-Pauline letters from a common environment. See e.g. Frances M. Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3–4; Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ed. Helmut Koester; trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro; Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1972).

⁸ The role of race/ethnicity in early Christian identity formation has been the theme of several recent studies. See Aaron J. Kuecker, *The Spirit and the "Other"* (London: T&T Clark, 2011); Laura Salah Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2009); Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?* (London: T&T Clark, 2002).

Kyriarchal Structures and Prayer

How is prayer presented and in what way is prayer a site for negotiating identity in Acts and the Pastorals? The importance of prayer in Luke's two-volume narrative has been pointed out by Geir Otto Holmås, among others. He argues that "one finds a multiplicity of references to prayer which are integral to the course and progress of Luke's narrative."⁹ Prayer is also an important topic in the Pastoral Epistles (see e.g. 1 Tim 2; 5:5; 2 Tim 1:3; 2:22).¹⁰ Both in Acts and in the Pastorals the kyriarchal structures of ancient society come to the fore in settings of prayer. Peter's speech after the disciples receive the Holy Spirit is interesting for our purposes. The quotation from the prophet Joel concerns the visions, dreams and prophecies of the last days (Acts 2:14–21). In the quotation, different groups of people are singled out, following the gender, age and social status dividing lines of the kyriarchal household. It is not a complete list, or even a clear list, (are slaves included in "sons and daughters"? Are women included in "young and old"? but it follows a kyriarchal logic of differentiation. The quotation is similar to Gal 3:28 in that its aim is to be inclusive *across* kyriarchal dividing lines. The point is that despite these differences of identity there will be a common experience of the outpouring of the Spirit. Luke is quoting the prophet Joel, but makes some changes from the LXX version. The prediction that slaves shall prophesy is not in the LXX version of Joel 3:1–2, thus Luke adds the spiritual gift of prophecy to the experience slaves will have in the last days. However, as Richard Pervo points out, these promises about the prophesying activity of women and slaves find limited fulfillment in the subsequent narrative: "Dreams and visions are restricted to important male characters (Peter, Ananias, Cornelius, and Paul) and any prophesying by daughters takes place offstage."¹¹

As we are particularly interested in the impact of *prayer* for identity formation, the ending of the Joel quotation is also significant: "Then everyone who calls on (ἐπικαλέσεται) the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). The verb ἐπικαλέω occurs several times in Acts to denote prayer (7:59; 9:14, 21; 15:17; 22:16).¹² In the Joel quotation, different groups of people will do different kinds of prophetic acts, but *all* is allowed to call upon the Lord,

⁹ Geir Otto Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts: The Theme of Prayer within the Context of the Legitimizing and Edifying Objective of the Lukan Narrative* (LNTS 433; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 262. See also Holmås' contribution to this volume.

¹⁰ Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters*, 34.

¹¹ Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2009), 79.

¹² For Luke's use of the verb ἐπικαλέω, see Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts*, 25–26.

just as everyone will receive the Spirit. The role of supplicant, it appears, includes both genders, all generations and is regardless of social status.

There is a close relation between prayer and prophecy in Acts. Prophetic acts, such as visions and dreams, sometimes accompany prayer: Ananias is urged by the Lord in a vision to seek out Saul, who himself is praying and has seen a vision (9:10–12); Peter is on the roof praying, when he has his visionary insight so decisive for the whole narrative structure of Acts (10:9–11, 30–31). Both prophecy and prayer are portrayed as positive, desirable modes of speech, typical of the believing community in general and their leaders in particular (a point I will come back to). Thus, as desirable modes of speech, both prophecy and prayer are textual sites for negotiating identity and power.

Prophecy is not an important category of speech in the Pastoral Epistles. The verb does not occur and “prophet” is only used in a derogatory sense (Tit 1:12). Prayer, however, is an important characteristic of the believer. Regulations about prayer is the first and most important exhortation to occur in 1 Timothy (πρῶτον πάντων, 1 Tim 2:1), and it covers a whole chapter. The exhortation in 1 Tim 2:1–15 distinguishes between men and women in a setting of prayer. Men should lift their hands, but not be angry or quarrelsome; women should be more concerned about inner virtues than outward clothing, and they should be quiet. The attention to proper prayer conduct seems to fade away as the attention shifts to women. Whereas men are explicitly urged to pray (προσεύχεσθαι τοὺς ἄνδρας, 1 Tim 2:8), women are exhorted to “adorn themselves” with virtue (γυναικας ἐν καταστολῇ κοσμίῳ μετὰ αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης κοσμεῖν ἑαυτάς, 1 Tim 2:9).¹³

In 1 Tim 2 there is no mention of slaves or children, but I will still argue that we here glimpse a kyriarchal patterning of prayer. The terms used are ἀνὴρ and γυνή, which signal free, adult men and women. In comparison, Paul uses the terms male and female in Gal 3:28 (οὐκ ἔστι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ). A slave was either male or female, but the categories of man (ἀνὴρ/*vir*) and woman (γυνή/*mulier*) were connected to honor, and thus incompatible with the status of a slave.¹⁴ Likewise, male slaves were not ‘men,’ in part because they did not possess the masculine quality of having an impenetrable body – neither sexually nor in relation to violence.¹⁵ In this passage, then, the focus is on the comportment of free, adult men and women when they pray.

¹³ Anna Rebecca Solevåg, *Birthing Salvation: Gender and Class in Early Christian Childbearing Discourse* (BINS 121; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 114–15.

¹⁴ Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1988), 43.

¹⁵ Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 24; Jonathan Walters, “Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman thought,” in *Roman Sexualities* (ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 31.

Are the passages quoted above (Acts 2:14–21 and 1 Tim 2:1–15) exemplary of the gender and class taxonomies of prayer in these text groups? Is the prophecy from Acts 2 seen at work in the rest of Acts? Are there visions, dreams, and prophesying by male and female, old and young, slave and free? Are all believers portrayed as supplicants? And concerning the Pastorals: Is the focus on free men and women consistent? Or are there points of contention? I start with Acts, then move on to the Pastorals and finally I discuss some likenesses and differences in how these texts negotiate the power of prayer.

Acts – Civic Identity in the Making

The Christian community is presented as a praying community throughout Acts. Genuine prayerfulness characterizes the Jerusalem community as depicted in the first part of Acts (see e.g. 1:14; 2:42; 4:24), and prayer likewise surrounds Paul’s mission travels in the second part (see e.g. 16:13–16; 21:5).¹⁶ If we look for the four identity categories singled out for analysis, the free men that are singled out in the narrative are the apostles and other community leaders. These leaders are important in the discursive construction of prayer in Acts. To conduct prayer is a leadership task, a distinguishing mark of the apostles.¹⁷ At the selection of the seven for *diakonia* in Acts 6:1–7, the apostles preserve for themselves the task of prayer and the service of the word (τῆ προσευχῆ καὶ τῆ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου, 6:4). The appointment of the seven is sealed when the apostles lay their hands on them and pray (6:6). The male leader figures Peter, John, Stephen, Paul are all depicted as men of prayer (see e.g. 1:14; 7:59; 8:15; 16:25) and their prayers have healing powers (3:1–9; 9:39–42; 28:8). At decisive turn of events they (kneel or lay on hands and) pray with the community (see e.g. 1:23–24; 8:14–17; 13:1–3; 19:6; 20:36). Paul and Barnabas habitually designated elders through prayer and fasting (προσευξάμενοι μετὰ νηστειῶν, 14:23) before they travelled to a new city. There are several episodes in Acts where male leaders pray for new leaders with the laying on of hands (6:6; 8:15–17; 9:12; 13:3). According to Holmås, “the laying on of hands is for Luke a gesture of blessing that implies transmission of power or authority.”¹⁸ Simon the magician recognizes that the act of praying and laying on of hands carries authority and power and asks for it too: “Give me also this power” (8:19).

Peter’s encounter with Cornelius is a story framed by prayer. Cornelius is described as a man of constant prayer, a god-fearer and alms-giver (10:2).

¹⁶ Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts*, 166–67, 219.

¹⁷ Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts*, 185.

¹⁸ Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts*, 43.

Echoing Acts 2:17 (“your young men shall see visions”), Cornelius sees an angel in a vision who affirms that his prayers have been heard (10:4). Peter, too, receives a vision as he is at prayer up on the roof. These prayers and their divine confirmation through the visions bolster Peter’s argument for the inclusion of the uncircumcised at the meeting in Jerusalem.

Luke’s presentation of male leadership reflects *Greco-Roman protocols of masculinity*. Studies of ancient masculinity have shown that men were valued according to certain protocols.¹⁹ Mastery was the basic criterion of masculinity, and could be displayed either through self-control or by exercising power over “non-men” (women, slaves, children, barbarians).²⁰ In Acts, the depiction of male leaders at prayer becomes a site for displaying the leaders’ masculinity. Their prayers seem to be the source of their power and their sound leadership. The apostles are depicted as being more powerful than their opponents in speech (cf. the eloquent speeches cited at length in proximity to prayer e.g. by Stephen, 7:1–60; and by Paul, 20:17–38) as well as deed (cf. the healing miracles accompanying prayer e.g. in 8:14–22; 28:8–10). They are “men fit to appear before emperors and assemblies,” as Mary Rose D’Angelo points out.²¹ In the speeches, the standard Greek civic address, ἄνδρες, is used (cf. 2:14; 13:16; 17:22), thus conveying the public character of the Christian mission,²² but also revealing that the *agora* and the

¹⁹ Maud Gleason, “The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century C.E.,” in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 391.

²⁰ See John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For studies with particular emphasis on early Christianity/Judaism, see Fredrik Ivarsson, “A Man has to Do What a Man has to Do: Protocols of Masculine Sexual Behavior in 1 Corinthians 6–7,” in *Identity Formation in the New Testament* (ed. Bengt Holmberg and Mikael Winninge; WUNT 227; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 183–98; Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, “Taking it Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees,” *JBL* 117 (1998): 249–73.

²¹ Mary Rose D’Angelo, “‘Knowing How to Preside over His Own Household’: Imperial Masculinity and Christian Asceticism in the Pastorals, Hermas and Luke-Acts,” in *New Testament Masculinities* (ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson; SemeiaSt 45; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 265–95, 284.

²² Mary Rose D’Angelo, “The ANHP Question in Luke-Acts: Imperial Masculinity and the Deployment of Women in the Early Second Century,” in *A Feminist Companion to Luke* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings 3. New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 56.

forum were conceived of as male space.²³ This civic dimension to the presentation of the apostles has also been observed by Todd Penner, who argues that the Lucan speeches are means to create identity in the reading/hearing community, “a new Christian identity, embodied in an emerging *politeia* under Christ.”²⁴ The free men, then, that come to the fore in settings of prayer in Acts are the male leader figures. Their close connection to God through prayer is the source of their power, and they are portrayed as public figures inhabiting all the qualities expected of a virtuous man.

We also encounter several women at prayer in Acts. Mary, mother of John Mark, hosts a prayer meeting in her house (12:5–12) and Lydia is sought out by Paul at a creek-side prayer place where she is gathered together with some other women (16:13–15). Both Mary and Lydia are presented as patrons and as women in charge of entire households.²⁵ Mary has at least one slave, Rhoda, the door keeper (12:13). Lydia, who runs a purple cloth business, presumably also has slaves. Another female disciple (μαθήτρια, 9:36) who seems to be an independent householder and patron of the community is Tabitha (Dorcas). She takes care of the poor (9:36) and sows garments for widows (9:39). She is not depicted at prayer, but her house is a house of prayer: Peter prays for her and raises her from the dead (9:37–42).

Osiek and MacDonald point out that the role of teaching and preaching was distinct from the role of host and, seemingly, guarded with more anxiety and concern.²⁶ Priscilla, however, seems to be a teacher of “the way” as well as a patron and a co-traveler with Paul, all in partnership with her husband Aquila (Acts 18:2–3; 18:24–26; cf. Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Tim 4:19). But her teaching does not seem to be public. Whereas Apollo speaks boldly in the synagogue, Priscilla and Aquila take him home or aside (προσλαμβάνω) to instruct (ἐκτίθημι) him (Acts 18:26). In contrast to the male leader figures discussed above, we never hear these women’s voices as they pray. Moreover, women are not depicted as leaders in the public sphere, the home is their arena, whether they pray, teach or perform acts of charity.²⁷ It is perhaps a

²³ Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006), 3–4.

²⁴ Todd C. Penner, “Civilizing Discourse: Acts, Declamation and the Rhetoric of the Polis,” in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (ed. Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele; SBLSymS 20; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 65–104, 101–2.

²⁵ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, 214; Richard S. Ascough, *Lydia: Paul’s Cosmopolitan Hostess* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), 52–56.

²⁶ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, 161–62.

²⁷ Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (trans. Brian McNeil; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 131.

telling detail that the prayer place for Lydia's group of women is outside the gates of the *polis* (16:13), thus explicitly beyond the civic space of *forum* and *agora*.

Tabitha is connected to a group of widows, a category of free women that has a special connection to prayer in Luke-Acts. In the gospel, the prophet Anna is portrayed as a widow who lived in the temple and, "worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day" (Luke 2:37). When Jesus teaches a parable about the need to always pray (18:1), it is a widow that is cast as the relentless petitioner. According to Turid Karlsen Seim, widows are, in Luke's representation, models of piety.²⁸ In the two instances where widows are mentioned in Acts, the connection to prayer is weaker than in the gospel. We learn that they were considered a distinct group within the community that needed special attention and care through food distribution (6:1) and help with clothing (9:36; 39).²⁹ We do not, however, learn if these widows had any duties and whether prayer was among them.

With regard to the Joel prophecy in Acts 2, one might ask then, whether the prophetic utterances of women, supposedly a significant marker of the end times, have been completely neglected in Luke's narrative. The reference to Philip's daughters as prophesying virgins (παρθένοι προφητεύουσαι, 21:9) is, perhaps, an attempt to remedy this neglect. What the four unnamed daughters have to say is not recorded, as they are eclipsed by a male prophet, Agabus (21:10–14).³⁰ Thus, "even when Luke acknowledges the presence of women prophets within the early Christian communities, he 'silences' them."³¹ Luke does, however, include the voices of two prophetic women at the beginning of his gospel. Elisabeth's exclamation and Mary's prophetic prayer are acts of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41) and their utterances may, then, represent the prophesying daughters of the end times.³² Elisabeth is called a daughter (ἐκ τῶν θυγατέρων Ἀαρών, 1:5) and so is Anna (θυγάτηρ Φανουίλ, 2:36), the widow who resides in the temple and prays night and day (2:37). She is the only woman Luke calls prophet (προφήτις), but in contrast to Simeon's, her prophecy is not recorded. Mary's self-designation as a "handmaid of the

²⁸ Seim, *The Double Message*, 233–36.

²⁹ See F. Scott Spencer, "Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1–7," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 715–33.

³⁰ Only men are designated prophets in Acts. Agabus, who is mentioned in 11:27 as well, seems to belong to a group of prophets in the Jerusalem community. Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen are called prophets and teachers of the church in Antioch (13:1), Judas and Silas are also called prophets (15:32). All other references to προφήτης are to (male) OT prophets, see e.g. 2:16; 3:21; 7:42.

³¹ Clarice J. Martin, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; New York: SCM Press, 1994), 786–87.

³² F. Scott Spencer, "Out of Mind, Out of Voice: Slave-girls and Prophesying Daughters in Luke-Acts," *Biblical Interpretation* 7 (1999): 133–55, 135.

Lord”³³ (ἡ δούλη κυρίου, 1:38, cf. 1:48) is also interesting, considering the reference to the prophesying activities of female slaves (τὰς δούλας, Acts 2:18).

I now turn to the representation of slaves at prayer in Acts. I have already mentioned the metaphorical “slave of the Lord,” Mary in Luke 1. The designation of believers as slaves and God (and Jesus) as lord (δεσπότης or κύριος) is so common in early Christianity that one sometimes forget the social reality behind the metaphor.³⁴ The only Christian slave mentioned in Acts is Rhoda,³⁵ and she is present at a prayer meeting (12:5). The references to the conversion of entire households (10:48; 16:15; 16:33) is a hint that slaves were baptized (without consent?)³⁶, although they very seldom come into Luke’s scope of vision – Luke writes from the viewpoint of the householder.³⁷ Rhoda, however, is granted a leading role, at least for a moment, as a messenger of the apostle. It has been pointed out that the way Rhoda is described, as running to her master with unbelievable news, draws on a type scene from the Roman play genre called New Comedy.³⁸ The *servus currens* was a comic character in the play, and the type ridiculed the slave as someone foolish and unreliable, always telling spectacular stories in hope of a reward.³⁹ Some interpreters, including J. Albert Harrill, therefore argue that Rhoda is portrayed as a comic figure and that the episode ridicules slaves.⁴⁰ However, early Christian literature also employed the type/anti-type of the “faithful slave” and the “domestic enemy.”⁴¹ Although the Rhoda episode clearly plays

³³ KJV.

³⁴ For an overview of the metaphor see I. A. H. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of the Early Church* (JSNTSup 156; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1998). For Pauline usage, see Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); John Byron, *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (WUNT 2/162; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

³⁵ Possibly there is also a male slave, the young man, Eutychus who falls out the window while Paul preaches to the community in Troas (Acts 20:7–13) He is called both παῖς and νεανίας. Whereas παῖς is ambiguous and can mean either slave or young boy, νεανίας has a narrower meaning of “youth, young man” (BDAG). It is thus most likely that Eutychus is a teenager of free status. See Cornelia B. Horn and J. W. Martens, “*Let the little children come to me*: Childhood and Children in Early Christianity (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 101, 267.

³⁶ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 47–49.

³⁷ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 48.

³⁸ Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1987), 63.

³⁹ J. Albert Harrill, “The Dramatic Function of the Running Slave Rhoda (Acts 12.13–16): A Piece of Greco-Roman Comedy,” *NTS* 46 (2000): 150–57, 151–52.

⁴⁰ Harrill, “The Dramatic Function of the Running Slave Rhoda,” 157.

⁴¹ James Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006), 145–46.

on the comic “running slave,” I argue that Luke uses this literary figure with a twist. The reader knows that Rhoda is a good slave who is speaking the truth. Peter *is* standing in the street, just as she claims, even though she is brushed off as mad (μαίνη, 12:15) by her fellow believers. Thus, the joke is not on Rhoda, but on the community at prayer in Mary’s house: they are so busy praying that they fail to recognize that the answer to their prayers is standing at the door.⁴² The running slave turns out to be a messenger of truth, a “handmaid of the Lord” who despite being ridiculed stands her ground. This scene has affinities to the scene in Luke where the women who found the empty tomb are not believed (Luke 24:8–11).⁴³ This likeness to the resurrection story weakens the argument for Rhoda as the laughing stock.⁴⁴ In my opinion, both scenes reflect cultural expectations that women and slaves were regarded as less trustworthy witnesses, but in both cases the messengers defy these expectations. A female slave was perhaps the least trustworthy of all. Both stories, however, shame the community for lack of faith, not the messenger who speaks the truth. It does not necessarily follow that Luke has a socially subversive message for women or slaves (or, indeed female slaves like Rhoda), but the story indicates something about Luke’s representation of the identity of slaves in the community of believers. They are faithful, submissive and invisible most of the time, but none the less part of God’s mission and part of the praying community.⁴⁵

We do not encounter any individual male slaves in Acts, but another female slave is presented as one who interrupts prayer, the python-possessed slave in Philippi (Acts 16:16–20) This story dovetails the story about Paul’s encounter with Lydia, and many see them as twin stories.⁴⁶ The meeting of believers at prayer is disturbed, day after day, by a demon-possessed slave woman (παιδίσκη) calling out words of truth. In some ways she is similar to Rhoda in that she speaks up, and also that she speaks the truth. In other ways, she is her anti-type, a bad slave in contrast to Rhoda, the good slave. She

⁴² Kathy Chambers, “‘Knock, Knock-Who’s There?’ Acts 12.6–17 as a Comedy of Errors,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings 9; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 89–97, 92.

⁴³ Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 157.

⁴⁴ Chambers, “‘Knock, Knock-Who’s There?’ Acts 12.6–17 as a Comedy of Errors,” 92.

⁴⁵ D’Angelo, “Knowing How to Preside over His Own Household,” 293.

⁴⁶ Robert M. Price, *The Widow Traditions in Luke-Acts: A Feminist-Critical Scrutiny* (SBLDS 155; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 228–29; Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd C. Penner, “Gendering Violence: Patterns of Power and Constructs of Masculinity in the Acts of the Apostles,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings 9; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 193–209, 205.

operates in a public, and thus male-oriented space, and her speech is characterized as disturbing and out of place; she screams and she annoys Paul (16:17–18). The python-possessed slave calls Paul and Silas “slaves of the most high God (δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ ὑψίστου),” thus likening them to her own state of slavery. Like the slave woman, the apostles, too are “slaves” who cannot but speak the truth about what they have seen and heard (4:20). However, the slave woman is quite different from Paul and Silas in social status and power. She is triply controlled: as a female in a patriarchal society; as a slave under her masters’ power; and as possessed under dominion of the demon. Moreover, the source for the slave’s prophecy is not the Holy Spirit – she is an oracle of Apollo.⁴⁷ As such, she represents the alien gods worshiped in Macedonia, *and* she represents her (male) owners. The expulsion of the demon differs from other healing stories, where the positive change for the person healed is highlighted (see e.g. Luke 8:32–39; Acts 3:6–11; 14:8–10). In this story, there is no interest in the woman after she is silenced. In contrast to Lydia and the prison guard in the two preceding stories, this female slave does not become a convert. The attention shifts abruptly to her owners. It is their power contention with Paul and Silas that are in focus. By casting out the demon, Paul and his god are affirmed as superior to the slave owners and their god.⁴⁸ Ironically, the words of truth that the slave woman utters are the only prophetic words by a female slave (or a “daughter,” for that matter) quoted in Acts. Does she realize the Joel prophecy without Luke realizing it?

To sum up, the rhetorical construction of gender in Luke-Acts seems to be geared towards an imperial, or colonizing, masculine identity and a domestication of female identity.⁴⁹

The Pastoral Epistles – A Household Identity under Pressure

Prayer is not as recurrent a theme in the Pastoral Epistles as it is in Acts, but it is still important. As noted above, an exhortation about prayer is given a prominent place at the beginning of 1 Timothy. According to Frances Young, this placement grounds prayer as “the principal activity of the assembled household of God.”⁵⁰ Prayer and thanksgiving is upheld as the proper attitude

⁴⁷ Spencer, “Out of Mind, Out of Voice: Slave-girls and Prophesying Daughters in Luke-Acts,” 148–49.

⁴⁸ Stichele and Penner, “Gendering Violence: Patterns of Power and Constructs of Masculinity in the Acts of the Apostles,” 206.

⁴⁹ Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd C. Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking beyond Thecla* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009), 214; D’Angelo, “The ANHP Question in Luke-Acts: Imperial Masculinity and the Deployment of Women in the Early Second Century,” 46, 67.

⁵⁰ Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters*, 34.

of believers towards God's creation in a critique of false ascetic teachers in 1 Tim 4:1–5. Moreover, it is argued that marriage and all kinds of food should be received as God's gracious gifts with thanksgiving (μετὰ εὐχαριστίας, twice, 4:3 and 4:4) – it is sanctified by God's word and prayer (διὰ λόγου θεοῦ καὶ ἐντεύξεως, 4:5).

A further reference to prayer can be found in the widows' passage in 1 Tim 5:3–16. The author gives a description of “the real widow” who “has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day” (5:5). Paul, too, comes out as one who prays day and night. At the beginning of 2 Timothy, the pseudepigraphical Paul reassures Timothy that he is remembered in prayer: “I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day (ἐν ταῖς δεήσεσίν μου νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας)” (1:3).

The emphasis on prayer at the beginning of 1 Timothy makes it clear that prayer and the right organization of it is an integral part of “the sound teaching” so important in these letters.⁵¹ The urgent message of all three letters is that the recipients, Timothy and Titus, must teach the right doctrine and stand up against the “false teachers,” those who teach a different doctrine (ἐτεροδιδασκαλεῖν, 1 Tim 1:3). The conflict with the heretical opponents, the quintessential “others” of the Pastorals, is important for the construction of the community's identity.⁵² Boundaries are drawn between inside and outside in the negative descriptions of the opponents and in the positive description of those who believe in the “sound doctrine.” Earnest prayer is one of the signifying traits of the true believer: “Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord (τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων τὸν κύριον) from a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22).

In this intersectional analysis of identity construction, I singled out four categories for scrutiny, free men, free women, male slaves and female slaves. How are free men portrayed in the Pastorals? There is a similar expectation about displaying proper manliness through prayer in the Pastorals, as we found in Acts. The exhortation to men to pray and to women to be silent (1 Tim 2:8–10) shows that men are expected to lead the assembly in prayer. The dual concerns for dominance and self-restraint are often singled out as the two overarching aspects of the protocols of masculinity. These concerns are also evident in the Pastorals.⁵³ Glancy has noted that in the Pastoral Epistles

⁵¹ Different forms of “sound teaching” (ἡ ὑγιαίνουσα διδασκαλία) or “sound words” (ὑγιαίνοντες λόγοι) appear throughout the Pastoral Epistles, see e.g. 1 Tim 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Tit 1:9; 2:1. Cf. Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters*, 74–75; Solevåg, *Birthing Salvation*, 94–95.

⁵² Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, 138–39.

⁵³ On the constructions of masculinity in the Pastorals, see D'Angelo, “Knowing How to Preside over His Own Household”; Jennifer A. Glancy, “Protocols of Masculinity in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *New Testament Masculinities* (ed. Stephen D.

“cultivation of a self-controlled masculine self is coupled with the cultivation of a harmonious household.”⁵⁴ It is free men in charge of households that are eligible for leadership positions in the Pastorals. To exercise control over his subjects: wife, children and slaves, is the most important criterion for the selection of overseers, deacons and elders (1 Tim 3:4–5, 12; Tit 1:6). The community of believers is conceived, in the Pastorals, as a household – the household of God (οἶκος θεοῦ). The overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) is called God’s steward or household manager (θεοῦ οἰκονόμον, Tit 1:7) and the gospel is called οἰκονομία θεοῦ (1 Tim 1:4), God’s household plan.⁵⁵ In accord with this family focus in community organization, doctrinal deviation is connected with a disdain for family life and proper household conduct: heretics forbid people to marry (1 Tim 4:3); young widows leave their houses in search of gossip and heretical teachings (1 Tim 5:13–15); false teachers seek out silly women who let them into their homes (2 Tim 3:6); and false teaching causes the ruin of whole families (Tit 1:11).

Prayer seems to be important for the legitimacy and authority of leaders also in the Pastorals. As noted, Paul is presented as one who prays day and night. In 1 Tim 4:14, Timothy is reminded of the χάρισμα he received when he was appointed by elders: “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands (ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν) by the council of elders.”⁵⁶ Note that the expression ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν is the same as we find in Acts 8:18. In 2 Tim 1:6 Timothy seems to have received his χάρισμα when Paul laid his hands on him, not a group of presbyters. Nevertheless, the point is the same, leaders are appointed by the previous generation of leaders through prayer and laying on of hands, and herein lies their legitimacy and power. We do not find this expression in Titus, but Titus is instructed to appoint elders in every town according to Paul’s instructions, presumably, then, by prayer and the laying on of hands (1:5). The reminder about Timothy’s appointment comes right after an assurance that Timothy should not be disrespected due to his young age (1 Tim 4:12). The kyriarchal structure of the household (of God) is not only concerned with social status and gender, but also age. Thus, a young leader is given the authority from his elders.

That men should lift their hands “without anger or argument” (1 Tim 2:8) when they pray is also quite interesting. It reflects the Greco-Roman protocols of masculinity’s emphasis on self-control – the mastery of body and passions.

Moore and Janice Capel Anderson; SemeiaSt; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 235–64.

⁵⁴ Glancy, “Protocols of Masculinity in the Pastoral Epistles,” 236.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the term οἰκονομία θεοῦ, see Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters*, 54–55.

⁵⁶ 1 Tim 6:12 perhaps also refers to some kind of ritual of appointment.

The quiet, controlled and manly attitude of upright men at prayer (2 Tim 2:22) stands in contrast to the way the opponents are labeled. Marianne Bjelland Kartzow argues that the opponents are described as lacking in masculinity, and it is particularly their speech which is characterized as unmanly, e.g. in labels such as “old wives’ tales” (1 Tim 4:7) and the ability to lead astray “silly women” who are supposedly overpowered by sin and desire (2 Tim 3:3). The opponents are said to quarrel and they are associated with gossip, modes of speech which were considered effeminate in antiquity.⁵⁷

Do women have a role to play in relation to prayer in the Pastorals? As we have already seen, instructions are given for free women at prayer in 1 Tim 2. The focus is, however on how they should dress and behave, and further, gives a sharp exhortation that they are not allowed to teach or assume authority over men. The question is then, whether this is an exhortation concerning the worship service or whether it is a general prohibition. Some scholars argue for a limitation due to the term *γυνή*, and argue that it only concerns the relationship between husband and wife.⁵⁸ Others see a limitation in setting, claiming that it only pertains to the worship service.⁵⁹ These two limitations can also be combined, so that the issue becomes married women’s behavior in the public worship service.⁶⁰ I argue that neither limitation applies. Both *oikos* and *ekklesia* are governed by the same rules of behavior in the Pastorals. The “household of God”-structure blurs the boundaries between household and community and basically expects the same type of behavior in both settings.⁶¹ Thus, women must be silent and yield authority to their respective husbands or heads of households, as well as to male leaders in the *ekklesia*; at home, as well as during the worship service.

First Timothy 5 is concerned with widows. One of their important roles in the community is prayer: “The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day” (v. 5). We also

⁵⁷ Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles* (BZBW 164; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 192–201.

⁵⁸ Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; The Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 200.

⁵⁹ Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 223; Ulrike Wagener, *Die Ordnung des “Haus des Gottes.” Der Ort von Frauen in der Ekklesiologie und Ethik des Pastoralbriefe* (WUNT 2/65; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994), 69; Jouette M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (ANTC; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1996).

⁶⁰ Quinn and Wacker call 1 Tim 2:12 “the apostolic veto on a wife’s teaching in the liturgical assembly” (Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 225). See also Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 191, 201, 12–13.

⁶¹ Solevåg, *Birthing Salvation*, 119–23.

learn that some believing women may support (or house?) widows and thus relieve the community of an economic burden (v. 16). The author sets up several criteria for enrollment into the group of widows. Among these, age is an important factor: “Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old” (v. 9). Younger women, even if they are widowed, should marry and bear children: “So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us” (v. 14.). Again, we find a concern for the age/generation differential of the kyriarchal structuring of the *ekklesia*. Older women as well as older men are giving special responsibilities in the Pastorals. Older men seem to be given the highest authority – they shall teach and pray, and through the laying on hands they transmit the teaching and authority of the community to the next generation.

However, older women – not only widows – also seem to have some responsibilities toward the teaching of a younger generation of women, according to Tit 2:3–5. The duty of older women to instruct a younger generation of women does not contradict the exhortation to silence in 1 Tim 2:11–12 because it follows kyriarchal lines. Women may teach a younger generation of women (and also their own children, whether male or female and their own slaves, whether male or female), as long as they do not teach men.⁶² None of the highly charged verbs and nouns connected with male teaching (διδάσκω, διδάσκαλος, διδασκαλία, etc.) are used. Rather, the term used for women’s instruction, καλοδιδάσκαλος⁶³ is a *hapax legomenon* and thus may have been coined by the author.⁶⁴ It has been claimed that this teaching is only on behavior, not on issues of Christian faith.⁶⁵ However, 2 Tim 1:5 gives credit to Timothy’s mother and grandmother who have been forbears of Timothy’s faith, and widows are, in 1 Tim 5:3 giving a special task of prayer for the community. It seems likely that instructions in faith (and thus also on the importance of prayer) would be part of older women’s instructions.⁶⁶

Slaves are targeted in two “household codes” in 1 Tim 6:1–2 and Tit 2:9–10. Interestingly, slaves are not distinguished according to gender – we neither hear of male nor female slaves, they are exhorted in the inclusive

⁶² Anna Rebecca Solevåg, “Salvation, Gender and the Figure of Eve in The Pastoral Epistles,” *Lectio Difficilior*, no. 2 (2012): 1–27, 14.

⁶³ LSJ: “teacher of virtue”; BDAG: “teaching what is good.”

⁶⁴ Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 194.

⁶⁵ Linda M. Maloney, “The Pastoral Epistles,” in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1994), 374; Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 194.

⁶⁶ Anna Rebecca Solevåg and Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, “Hvem bryr seg om Pastoralbrevene? Nyere trender i Pastoralbrevsforskningen,” *Norsk teologisk tidsskrift* 111 (2010): 256–69, 262.

plural, δοῦλοι. The first code is particularly concerned that slaves of believing masters must still show them due respect, “so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed.” The second similarly calls for submission and, interestingly, comments on slaves’ speech: “they are not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament (κοσμῶσιν) to the doctrine of God our Savior” (Tit 2:9b–10). In both passages, the submission and good behavior of slaves are important for the life of the believing community.

Theft and disrespectful speech were stereotypical accusations about slaves that the author draws on here. Just as upper-class women were stereotyped in Greco-Roman literature as being attracted to a luxurious lifestyle and accused of being sexually deviant,⁶⁷ slaves were also cast in stereotypical categories as morally inferior beings, prone to steal, lie, and behave promiscuously.⁶⁸ In the exhortations to slaves in the Pastorals, the underlying assumption is that slaves are naturally disposed to be disrespectful, to talk back, steal and betray their masters.⁶⁹ As in the case of women, good deeds are encouraged and speech is discouraged also for slaves. Like women, slaves should also “adorn” themselves (κοσμέω) with good deeds. There seems to be a preoccupation with limiting the speech of these groups or labeling their speech as inappropriate. Slaves are silenced, as the speech they seem to be capable of is blaspheming (βλασφημέω) and talking back (ἀντιλέγω). The teaching of the true words of God (ἡ διδασκαλία) seems not to be entrusted to slaves, but, by behaving impeccably and keeping their mouths shut, they can prevent it from being slandered. Like women’s speech, slaves’ speech is feared, and thus restrained. Slaves may, however, if they behave well, have hopes of becoming “an ornament to the doctrine.” As a *mute* ornament, the slave is probably expected to stay in the background when this community gathers in prayer. Only through slaves’ silence – not their vocal prayers – can the believing community thrive.

In the Pastorals, Paul is called slave of God (δοῦλος θεοῦ, Tit 1:1) and the ideal community leader in 2 Tim 2:24 is designated “the slave of the lord” (δοῦλος κυρίου). In line with this “slave of god” imagery, God is referred to as a δεσπότης in the Pastoral Epistles:

In a large house (οἰκίᾳ) there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. All who cleanse themselves of the

⁶⁷ Solevåg, *Birthing Salvation*, 59–62, 118–19.

⁶⁸ K. R. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 123.

⁶⁹ As also noted by Glancy and Verner; see Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 148; and David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (SBLDS 71; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 141.

things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house (τῷ δεσπότῃ), ready for every good work. (2 Tim 2:20–21)

This image of vessels, drawing on the overarching “household of God”-model, likens all members of the believing community to objects useful for the owner – God. But in antiquity it was particularly slaves that were thought of as both human and chattel; as a “speaking instrument” or an “animate piece of property.”⁷⁰ The suggestion that anyone who cleanses himself can be special blurs the fact that the Pastorals strictly regulate the roles in the *ekklesia* according to class, age and gender. What kind of “vessels” believers can become does not only depend on whether they cleanse themselves, but where in the kyriarchally stratified οἶκος θεοῦ they are placed.

Negotiating the Power of Prayer

This investigation shows that prayer is an important part of Christian identity formation in both sources. The texts construct the believing community as a praying community, and thus prayer is a unifying identity marker. But the texts also single out some groups for special attention. In the beginning of the article I outlined a taxonomy for an intersectional analysis of early Christian identity negotiation that followed the kyriarchal lines of the ancient household. Through the analysis of the texts we now see that the subgroups that come to the fore can be fruitfully understood within a kyriarchal framework, but that they are narrower. Not all free men are given space in the text or constructed as powerful prayers, the focus is on one group – the leaders. Similarly with free women, there are particular subgroups that come into focus, whether wives, widows or householders.

The leaders of the community are presented as upright men who act and speak in conformity with the Greco-Roman protocols of masculinity in both sources. In both Acts and the Pastorals prayer is an important component in the transmission of power from one generation of male leaders to the next. Interestingly, we find the term ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν in both Acts and 1 Timothy, and the ritual it refers to seems to be fairly similar. There is, however, a significant difference in the construction of “manly” prayer in Acts versus the Pastorals. In Acts the representation of male leaders construct *civic* Christian identity. The leaders do not shy away but stand their ground in the public spaces, and their speech overpowers that of their contestants. The way the male leaders are presented in prayer conforms to the overall presentation of “manliness” in Acts. Masculinity is displayed through con-

⁷⁰ The quotations are from Varro (*Rust.* 1.17.1) and Aristotle (*Pol.* 1253b) respectively. See William Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6.

frontation and competition.⁷¹ In the Pastoral Epistles, true manliness is shown first and foremost through being a good householder who has control over his subjects and whose behavior and teaching stands in contrast to the false teachers'.⁷² Relations with the outside world should not be characterized by contest and competition but with deference and respect. Believers should pray for kings and rulers (1 Tim 2:2) and subject themselves to them (Tit 3:1–3).

The independent female householders we meet in Acts, whose houses are houses of prayer and who serve as patronesses for the apostles, are constructed quite differently from the married women in the Pastorals. In the Pastorals women's submission is at the forefront, whether the concern is the prayer meeting or women's behavior in the household. Uncontrolled women is something that should be avoided (1 Tim 5:13) and it is connected with the opponents. The heretics make their way into other households and teach "silly women" (2 Tim 3:6) and they advise against marriage (1 Tim 4:3). The women in Acts seem to operate more independently, although Luke makes sure that their space is the private space of the household, not the public space of the cities,⁷³ and as already noted, we very seldom hear these women's voices.

In the New Testament, only 1 Timothy can compete with Luke-Acts when it comes to the attention given to widows.⁷⁴ The widows are similarly constructed as needy or poor, a group that the community should care for. But they are also connected to prayer in both sources. The widow who prays "day and night" is the picture that emerges (Luke 2:37; 1 Tim 5:5). There is, however, a limit to the similarities in these constructions of believing widows. Seim argues that the focus on widows in Luke-Acts is part of an ascetic ideal that has theological significance. Ascetic women within the community represent a proleptic realization of the coming resurrection, when they will "neither marry nor [be] given in marriage" (Luke 20:35).⁷⁵ In the Pastorals, on the other hand, asceticism is criticized as part of the opponents teaching and marriage is lauded as something good, sanctified through prayer (1 Tim 4:3–5). Women's roles as wives and childbearers are so important that it is incorporated into the soteriological claim that women will be "saved through childbearing" (1 Tim 2:15).⁷⁶

⁷¹ Stichele and Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking beyond Thecla*, 115.

⁷² Solevåg, *Birthing Salvation*, 108–12.

⁷³ Stichele and Penner, "Gendering Violence: Patterns of Power and Constructs of Masculinity in the Acts of the Apostles," 205.

⁷⁴ Seim, *The Double Message*, 237.

⁷⁵ Turid Karlsen Seim, "Ascetic Autonomy? New Perspectives on Single Women in the Early Church," *Studia Theologica* 43 (1989): 125–30, 133.

⁷⁶ Solevåg, *Birthing Salvation*, 129–35.

Even though slaves are not depicted as subjects who pray, neither in Acts nor in the Pastorals, the institution of slavery is used metaphorically to signify the community at prayer. All believers are slaves of God and may approach him in silent supplication. The limited interest in slaves' identity shows that both Acts and the Pastorals are written from the perspective of householder and slave-owner, whose kyriarchal interest is slaves' meek and quiet behavior.⁷⁷

The "other" which this new Christian identity is constructed against is, however, quite different in the two sources. The "other" in Acts are the Jews and Roman authorities who do not believe the Christian gospel and who persecute the Christians.⁷⁸ These out-groups are defeated by the apostles' superior ability to speak and to perform healings and other miracles (e.g. prison escapes). The "other" in the Pastorals is the opponents, those who "teach otherwise." These have originally been part of the in-group, but in the eyes of the writer have strayed from the truth which the community represents. The types of speech characteristic of women and slaves noted above, characterizes the opponents and their speech as well. As Kartzow has argued, the opponents are feminized by labeling their speech as gossip. In addition, the opponents share characteristics with slaves. Like slaves, the opponents are liars, blasphemers (1 Tim 4:7; Tit 1:12; Tit 1:9; 1 Tim 6:4) and lovers of money (φιλαργυρία, 1 Tim 6:9–10). Like the speech of women and slaves, these rebels' talk must also be stopped (Tit 1:10–11). The observed similarities among slaves', women's and opponents' speech may serve as a warning against reconstructing a group of opponents whose characteristics can be gleaned from the nature of the author's invective. As Lone Fatum has noted, the Pastor's parenetic strategy is "to define and defend his own by naming and blaming the others for being just that, the others, i.e. the personified Other."⁷⁹ Such characteristics are part of the letter's rhetorical strategy which efficiently places opponents on the fringes of society as well as the household – as foreigners (Jews or Cretans),⁸⁰ women and slaves.

⁷⁷ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 47–48, 145–47.

⁷⁸ Stichele and Penner, "Gendering Violence: Patterns of Power and Constructs of Masculinity in the Acts of the Apostles," 195–96.

⁷⁹ Lone Fatum, "Christ Domesticated: The Household Theology of the Pastorals as Political Strategy," in *The Formation of the Early Church* (ed. Jostein Ådna; WUNT 183; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 185.

⁸⁰ It should be noted that the Pastorals also characterize the opponents in racial categories, as lying Cretans and as "Judaizers," particularly in Titus (see e.g. 1 Tim 1:4; 2 Tim 4:4; Tit 1:10–16; 3:9). See John W. Marshall, "'I Left You in Crete': Narrative Deception and Social Hierarchy in the Letter to Titus," *JBL* 127 (2008): 781–803. Thus, the Pastorals engage in what Buell has called "ethnic reasoning" (Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*, 2).

As noted, particular groups – male leaders, female patrons, widows and married women – come to the forefront in the prayer discourse of Acts and the Pastorals. That these groups are given attention indicates their importance for early Christian identity but perhaps also signals that there was conflict and negotiation particularly in relation to these groups.

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With Our Eyes Fixed on Jesus: The Prayers of Jesus and His Followers in Hebrews

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1. Introduction

1.1. Jesus and His Followers – Prayer and Identity

In this paper I want to explore how identifying as a follower of Jesus shapes the notion of prayer found in the letter to the Hebrews,¹ and how, in turn, the notion of prayer found in Hebrews shapes the notion of what it means to identify as a follower of Jesus. I will approach this topic through two basic angles, both of which focus on the significance of Jesus. First, I will look specifically at Jesus' role as example and model, and ask if the prayers of Jesus are presented as paradigmatic for how his followers should pray. Secondly, I will enquire more generally about how belief in Jesus, and the functions he is imagined to have filled or to fill, influence the conception of what it means to approach God in prayer.

The kind of identity which concerns us is in this paper thus identity as follower of Jesus. In Hebrews, this identity entails belonging to a larger community. The entire text is written to a group in the plural, and none of the individual addressees are identified. To be a follower of Jesus is therefore also to belong to a larger community.² This means that the kind of identity which concerns us is not the “personal identity” of individuals, pertaining to their

¹ Henceforth I will refer to the letter to the Hebrews as “Hebrews.”

² It is not necessary for our purposes to determine here precisely what kind of community Hebrews addresses. The majority of commentators hold that Hebrews is written to one *distinct* community. A notable exception is Pamela Eisenbaum (“Locating Hebrews within the Literary Landscape of Christian Origins,” in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights* [ed. Gabriella Gelardini; BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005], 213–237), who holds that the text is written for several communities. However, in either case, the communal aspect of identity as follower of Jesus would remain strong.

personal experiences, roles, functions, and so forth, but rather the “social identity” shared by all followers of Jesus, by virtue of their belonging to the same larger community.³

Furthermore, it is important to underline that I will be dealing with the identity of the followers of Jesus in terms of how this identity is recommended to and projected on the “addressees” of Hebrews. This means that I will mainly be dealing with the “addressees” in terms of their implicit or explicit presence on a textual level in Hebrews,⁴ and not the historical addressees of Hebrews and their identity or habits of prayer.⁵ This also means that the “shaping of identity” that concerns me is that which takes place on a textual level.⁶ In short, I will be exploring what it means to pray *qua* follower of Jesus, according to Hebrews.

1.2. Identity and Proto-typicality – Jesus as Leader and Model

One of the ways in which I intend to pursue this question is to examine Jesus’ function as example, asking if the prayers of Jesus are presented as paradigmatic for how his followers ought to pray. Before turning to the text in Hebrews which portrays Jesus as praying, I think it is helpful to say a few words generally about Jesus’ role as leader and model in Hebrews, as well as to provide a theoretical perspective on this motif. Doing this, we will also implicitly give some substance to the notion of what it means to be a *follower* of Jesus.

At several instances in Hebrews, Jesus is presented as a model and leader who should be followed and emulated.⁷ This idea is expressed in 12:1–3, where the author exhorts his addressees as follows: “let us . . . persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of

³ On the distinction between “personal identity” and “social identity,” cf. the introductory chapter (“Identity and Prayer”) by Mikael Tellbe in this volume.

⁴ For a helpful entry on the question of the implied reader/addressee, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Reader in New Testament Interpretation,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 301–28.

⁵ When I find reason to venture beyond the text of Hebrews, I shall make this clear. If not, I am operating on a textual level.

⁶ On the notion that texts shape identity, cf. chapter two in Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), entitled “Text and Identity.”

⁷ More generally on the “discipleship motif” in Hebrews and the call to emulate Jesus, see William L. Lane, “Standing before the Moral Claims of God: Discipleship in Hebrews,” in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 203–24.

the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”⁸ The term here translated as “leader,” namely ἀρχηγός, has a rich variety of nuances and connotations.⁹ The suggested translations include: captain, author, pioneer, leader and champion.¹⁰ It seems to me that the contexts where the term occurs in Hebrews (2:10; 12:2) suggest that the term ἀρχηγός – whether or not it *also* implies notions of Jesus as author or heroic champion – primarily points to the function of Jesus as leader. I have therefore opted for this translation. In 2:10 Jesus’ leadership is made explicit in the sense that God *leads* many children to glory, salvation and perfection through their ἀρχηγός, by liberating them from the realm of death.¹¹ In 12:2 the notion of leadership seems implied in the motif of an ἀγών (12:1). Jesus’ ἀγών, which took him from the cross to the right of God’s throne, is invoked for the purpose of encouraging the addressees to persevere in the race set before them. Jesus is thus pictured as the leader, the one who knows how the race goes and how one finishes it, and the addressees are cast as his followers.

In order to explore how Jesus’ role as leader and model relates to the question of identity, the concept of *proto-typicality* proves useful.¹² It has been pointed out in theories concerning social identity development that groups often develop their identity by creating a prototypical group member. That is: someone who embodies the normative and stereotyped vision of what a group member should look like. This prototype then becomes a standard against which to detect unwanted deviance, and with reference to which one could encourage typical in-group behavior, norms and values. By identifying with the prototype, other members of the group downplay the significance of their own personal identities and enhance the salience of their group membership. The concept of a prototype thus offers us a useful framework for

⁸ Translations are from New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE) unless otherwise indicated.

⁹ Cf. discussion and references to ancient literature in Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1989), 87–88; and William L. Lane, *Hebrews* (2 vols.; WBC 47A–B; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1991), 1:56–57. For a study dedicated to this topic alone, see Paul-Gerhard Müller, *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΡΧΗΓΟΣ: Der religionsgeschichtliche und theologische Hintergrund einer neutestamentlichen Christusprädikation* (Europäische Hochschulschriften 23/28; Frankfurt: Lang, 1973).

¹⁰ KJV: captain; NAS and NIV: author; RSV: pioneer; NABRE: leader; Lane (*Hebrews*, 1:56–57): champion.

¹¹ On the possible “mythic” background of this motif, see Harold W. Attridge, “Liberating Death’s Captives: Reconsideration of an Early Christian Myth,” in *Gnosticism & the Early Christian world* (ed. James E. Goehring and James M. Robinson; Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1990), 103–15.

¹² Cf. the discussion of this concept in the introductory chapter (“Identity and Prayer”) by Mikael Tellbe in this volume.

exploring how the picture painted of Jesus in Hebrews, and in particular his prayers, might contribute in shaping the notion of what it means to identify as a follower of Jesus.

2. Jesus Portrayed as a Praying Man: Hebrews 5:7–10

2.1. *Preceding Context*

We now turn to the portrayal of Jesus praying. This portrayal is found in 5:7–10 and is the climax to an entire section (4:14–5:10) focused on the high priesthood of Jesus.¹³ The section begins with injunctions given to the addressees based on the fact that they have a great high priest (4:14–16). Then follows a discussion about how high priests are chosen and what their duties are (5:1–4). The author underlines how the high priest stands in a special relationship with God and how he has been appointed by God to the task of high priesthood. At the same time, however, the high priest also stands in close relationship to the people. He shares in their situation, he is capable of showing sympathy towards those who err in ignorance, and he bears forth sacrifices both on his own behalf and on behalf of the people. This twofold relationship, with God and the people, seems to be the point of departure for the discussion about the high priesthood of Jesus (5:5–10). On the one hand, it is emphasized that Jesus was uniquely appointed by God as both son and high priest (5:5–6). On the other hand, and at the same time, this does not prevent him from sharing in the situation of the people for whom he serves as high priest (5:7–10). This tension between the identity of Jesus as the son of God and his identification with the people of God seems to provide the context for the portrayal of Jesus praying.¹⁴

2.2. *The Suffering High Priest – Praying with Loud “Cries and Tears”*

The praying activity of Jesus is described in terms of him bringing forth (προσενέγκας) prayers (δεήσεις) and supplications (ίκετηρίας). The term προσφέρω clearly seems to tie in with the idea of Jesus praying as a high priest, thus fulfilling his duties (cf. προσφέρη in 5:1, and προσφέρειν in

¹³ The delimitation of this section is widely recognized by commentators (cf. Attridge, deSilva, Johnson and Koester *ad loc*). A notable exception is Lane who divides 4:14 from 4:15, and sees 4:15–5:10 as one section (*Hebrews*, 1:110–14).

¹⁴ Hebrews seems to imply and presuppose that the audience belongs to “the people (of God)” (2:17; 4:9; 8:10; 13:12). My PhD-dissertation, “The Identity of Israel and the Paradox of Hebrews” (publicly defended at MF Norwegian School of Theology, June 2014) is dedicated to the question of what it means for the followers of Jesus to identify as members of the people of God, according to Hebrews.

5:3).¹⁵ The other terms used to describe Jesus praying are conventional, consistent with the author's point, namely that Jesus prayed to God just like other humans pray. The logic seems to be that Jesus expressed his solidarity with the people when he prayed, in a way that was analogous to how high priests in general, when they bring forth sacrifices on their own behalf, express that they share in the conditions of the people. The prayers of Jesus thus bear witness to the fact that he shares in the conditions of the people. The very fact *that* Jesus prayed to God concerning his own situation, and the fact that he had something to bear forth on his own behalf, provides a point of identification between Jesus and those for whom he ministers. As was emphatically highlighted also in 2:14–18, Jesus' sharing in human "flesh and blood" is part of what qualified him for the task of being high priest. This is therefore probably how we should understand the phrase which emphasizes that Jesus prayed during the "days of his flesh" (5:7). It was as a human among humans, as a man of flesh and blood, that Jesus prayed. It would be possible for any human being, and thus also for the addressees, to identify with the praying man portrayed in 5:7–10.

The human condition within which Jesus prayed is vividly expressed when it is said that Jesus prayed "with loud cries and tears." The emphatic focus on Jesus' agony in prayer is fascinating in and of itself when compared with Greco-Roman protocols of masculinity,¹⁶ or with the Stoic ideal of rising above material passions.¹⁷ The praying Jesus hardly conforms to such ideals. However, the motif of Jesus' agony in prayer also has a quite specific rhetorical location in Hebrews, as part of the presentation of Jesus' exposure to suffering and temptations. It is vital for Hebrews to underline that Jesus not only died but also suffered (cf. 2:10; 13:12). Jesus' agony, expressed in his prayers, makes it conceivable that Jesus sympathizes with the weakness and temptations experienced by his followers. Jesus' prayers thus give expression to the theme which was underlined in different ways throughout 2:10–18, namely the solidarity between Jesus and his followers.

This observation is worth unpacking because it is precisely within 2:10–18 that Jesus' role as leader is presented for the first time. In 2:10 we read: "For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering." The phrase which translates "leader to salvation" is τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας. The genitive construction is ambiguous and could

¹⁵ Correctly noted by Luke T. Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 145–46.

¹⁶ Cf. Anna Rebecca Solevåg's paper in this volume.

¹⁷ This Stoic ideal gave rise to a conception of prayer where your prayers should *not* be focused on the material conditions wherein you are found. Cf. Glenn Wehus' paper in this volume.

give rise to several possible translations.¹⁸ But in light of the general focus on movement in the passage, and the image of God leading many children to glory, I find it plausible that Jesus is presented as the “leader to salvation.” This salvation refers to something which will be inherited in the future (1:14), but which has nevertheless been made available through the ministry of Jesus (2:3). Moreover, salvation is interpreted by two other terms found in 2:10, namely “glory” and “perfection.” Jesus is the leader to salvation, in as much as he leads many children to glory.

However, Hebrews paradoxically holds that Jesus could only lead the way to glory, by being made subject to suffering and death. He had to be made perfect through suffering (διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι, 2:10). Obtaining a position of glory is thus equivalent to being perfected,¹⁹ and the perfection of Jesus took place through a process of suffering.²⁰ This, in turn, throws light on our understanding of what it could mean to follow Jesus towards salvation and glory. Jesus’ journey towards perfection took the shape of a two-stage process consisting of temporal abasement followed by exaltation. The way to perfection is thus one of suffering, temporal denigration and even death. At least it was so for Jesus, and there is reason to suppose that something analogous holds true for his followers too. The logic of the passage seems to suggest that to be led to glory by Jesus is to walk on the same kind of path that he walked. And the point in underlining so emphatically that Jesus suffered before reaching glory seems to be to motivate perseverance and endurance. Because the followers of Jesus “see” him crowned with glory and honor, even though they know that he suffered and died before reaching his goal, they will be able to interpret their temporal suffering as one step towards the glory for which they are destined.²¹ Because Jesus was crowned with glory after having suffered, they are allowed to hope for a similar vindication. Jesus’ suffering also provides a starting point for the author’s elaboration on the relationship between Jesus and his followers, and the identity of the followers. It is instructive to notice that the author persistently uses kinship language to designate them; they are sons (υἱούς, 2:10), siblings (ἀδελφοῖς,

¹⁸ Lane translates “the champion who secured their salvation” (*Hebrews*, 1:56–57). Craig R. Koester translates “pioneer of their salvation” (*Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 36; New York, N. Y.: Doubleday, 2001], 225–26).

¹⁹ Thus Franz Laub, *Bekennnis und Auslegung: Die paränetische Funktion der Christologie im Hebräerbrief* (Biblische Untersuchungen 15; Regensburg: Pustet, 1980), 71.

²⁰ Thus, whatever else the disputed concept of “perfection” in Hebrews might entail, I hold that it *includes* the notion of obtaining to the status destined for humans, inheriting salvation and being led to glory. For a similar view, see David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 194–97.

²¹ More generally, on the “pilgrimage motif” in Hebrews, see William G. Johnson, “The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews,” *JBL* 97 (1978): 239–51.

2:12)²² and children (παιδιά, 2:13). They are explicitly called the siblings of Jesus and must therefore implicitly be understood to be the children of God.²³ An important aspect of the kinship language is that it indicates association and solidarity.²⁴ Thus, Jesus entered the conditions of humans and shared in their flesh and blood (2:14) in order to become similar to his siblings in all things. This is also seen as a precondition for him being a merciful high priest, able to help them when they are tested (2:17–18). The high priesthood of Jesus is thus introduced for the first time in the homily in a context which highlights the solidarity of Jesus and his ability to help.

When Jesus is presented as a high priest praying in agony in 5:7–10, it seems that this recapitulates the portrayal of him and his siblings in 2:10–18. The fact that Jesus' priesthood is grounded in his ability to show solidarity invites the addressees to identify with the praying man portrayed in 5:7–10. The addressees know that Jesus fully identifies with their situation because he fully shared in it. By implication, therefore, they are also allowed to identify with the life, suffering, death and exaltation of Jesus.²⁵

2.3. Jesus Praying in the Context of His Passion

It is significant that Jesus is said to have directed his prayers to the one capable of saving from death. This is more than just a circumlocution aimed at designating God.²⁶ It also indicates that the prayers of Jesus are situated as part of his passion.²⁷ Granted this context, it is all the more puzzling that Jesus is said to have been heard²⁸ because of his reverence.²⁹ This seems, on the

²² I do not think that females are excluded from this designation, and thus prefer a gender-inclusive translation.

²³ On the relationship between God and his children, see Harold W. Attridge, "God in Hebrews: Urging Children to Heavenly Glory," in *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Paul J. Achtemeier on the Occasion of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (ed. A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 197–209.

²⁴ Patrick Gray, "Brotherly Love and the High Priest Christology in Hebrews," *JBL* 122 (2003): 335–51.

²⁵ On the dynamic of mutual identification between Jesus and his followers, see the helpful comments by Koester, *Hebrews*, 293.

²⁶ Contra Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:120.

²⁷ The question of whether Hebrews was familiar with something like the Gethsemane or Golgotha traditions found in the Synoptics lies outside the scope of this investigation.

²⁸ The term "heard" indicates more than just reception; it also implies "positive hearing" (cf. Matt 6:7).

²⁹ With most commentators, I take ἀπό in 5:7 to mean "because of" not "from," and I take εὐλάβεια to mean "reverence" and not just "fear" (cf. the use of the term in Heb 11:7; 12:28). Thus, Jesus was not heard in the sense that he was relieved from his fear of death. So correctly Harold W. Attridge, "Heard Because of his Reverence (Heb 5:7)," *JBL* 98 (1979): 90–93.

face of it, to suggest that Jesus was saved from dying, but Hebrews surely affirms that Jesus did suffer death (2:9–10; 9:27–28). The idea must therefore be that Jesus' prayers were heard in the sense that he was rescued from the realm of death, even though he died. He was "brought up from the dead" by God (13:20), and exalted after his suffering. I think this is also the way in which the remark in 5:9, that Jesus was perfected, should be understood. It should be taken to mean that Jesus' suffering was crowned with exaltation. The process of perfection and glorification through suffering, which 2:9–10 speaks of, is given narrative expression in 5:7–9.

2.4. *The Obedience of the Son of God*

Jesus' prayers are explicitly related to his identity as son of God. In 5:8 we read: "son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered." As several commentators note, 5:8 stands at the very heart of 5:7–10, both syntactically and thematically.³⁰ Designating Jesus as "son" reminds us of the presentation given of Jesus in Hebrews 1. Notice for instance how Psalm 2:7 is quoted both in 1:5 and 5:5. In 1:5, the quotation is used to highlight the exalted position of Jesus, and in 5:8, the author seems concerned to emphasize that Jesus' identity as the exalted son of God is inseparable from his identity as a man praying in agony. Even though he was the son of God already in the days of his flesh, he still had to learn obedience through suffering. To Jesus' identity as son belongs suffering and obedience. It is thus implied that Jesus willingly accepted to suffer (cf. 12:2–3).

There appears, therefore, to be three perspectives which Hebrews holds in unresolved tension in our passage: (i) the idea that Jesus showed anguish in the face of his passion, (ii) the idea that he hoped to be delivered from death, (iii) and the idea that he obediently learned to accept his vocation. There is thus a certain level of ambiguity as regards whether Jesus died willingly.³¹ I propose that a helpful way of holding these perspectives together would be to recognize that we are dealing with a portrayal of Jesus *praying*. It was precisely in a context of prayer that it was possible for Jesus to express his fear and anguish, his trust in God's deliverance, and his obedience towards God's will, at one and the same time. Because he knew, in the hour of his passion, that God was capable of anything, even deliverance from death, he could submit to the vocation given to him, even though terrified at the moment.

³⁰ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 152.

³¹ A possible way of coming to terms with this tension is to suppose that there are two stages in Jesus' prayer, i.e. that Jesus first prayed for deliverance and then submitted to God's will. Thus David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the "Epistle to the Hebrews"* (SNTSMS 47; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 91–92.

2.5. Jesus: The Source of Eternal Salvation for Those Who Obey Him

Having been perfected and having been heard by the one capable of saving, Jesus is said to have become “the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him” (5:9). This recapitulates the motif of Jesus as the leader to salvation, in that the phrase ἄριστος σωτηρίας αἰωνίου recalls the title attributed to Jesus in 2:10, ἀρχηγὸς τῆς σωτηρίας.³² There is an intricate logic, thus, according to which Jesus could only become the source of salvation by himself being saved from the realm of death.³³ Jesus confers to his followers what has been given him by God. The implication is clearly that those who are called to obey Jesus are still situated within a context of suffering. They have not yet reached the glory towards which they are heading. The followers of Jesus are called to be obedient, in a context very similar to the one wherein Jesus himself learned obedience. They are thus called to emulate their leader, for the purpose of receiving what was given to him.

What, then, would it mean to emulate the obedience of Jesus? For Jesus obedience seemed to mean something like accepting the fact that God’s plan for him was that he be perfected through suffering and death. Jesus therefore needed to trust that God was capable of accomplishing this, and to submit to the divine plan for salvation. The other main example of obedience in Hebrews, in addition to Jesus, is Abraham. For him, obedience meant trusting that God would bring him to the land promised to him, even though he did not know where he was going (11:8). Thus, both for Abraham and Jesus, obedience is related to accepting God’s way of accomplishing what he has promised. The main example of disobedience, on the other hand, is provided by the people in the wilderness who put God to the test while standing on the threshold to Canaan (cf. τοῖς ἀπειθήσασιν, 3:18). It was precisely their lack of faith and obedience which prevented them from entering into the rest promised to them, thus fulfilling the path on which they were set. It seems reasonable to assume that obedience means something similar for those for whom Jesus has become a source of salvation. We are not primarily talking about obedience in the context of specifically given commandments, which must be kept, but of obedience in the sense of submitting to a divine plan for salvation, which at times seems to have failed. Both Abraham and Jesus are pictured as examples of obedience, and Jesus’ followers are exhorted to display the same virtue.

³² Attridge, *Hebrews*, 153–54.

³³ In *this* respect, Ernst Käsemann is correct to speak of Jesus as the “redeemed Redeemer.” See *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews* (trans. Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1984), 144.

Jesus learned obedience as son of God, and his siblings and followers will learn obedience as children of God. It seems, then, that the implicit exhortation in the passage is this: “even though you are children of God, just as Jesus was, you will also have to learn obedience through suffering.” Precisely because the addressees are identified as the siblings of Jesus, they ought to know that the road to salvation passes through temporal abasement. They will therefore have to reckon with the fact that they do not yet see reality conforming to that which God has promised (2:8), and they will have to accept being made subject to all kinds of hardship and ridicule in the present (10:33–34). They will also have to learn to interpret suffering as loving discipline, which ultimately confirms their identity as children of God (12:4–11). Only in this way will they learn what obedience means, as they follow their leader and attempt to finish the race set before them. Prayer is, by implication, presented as a site for learning what obedience means, and for exploring what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

It is important to note, however, that Jesus is not only the perfect example of obedience; he is also the one his followers must now obey in order to obtain salvation. He is more than just an example from the past upon which one should look. As we shall now see, he also has a continuing role to play in the prayers of his followers.

3. The Followers of Jesus at Prayer, and Their Compassionate High Priest

We have now looked at the portrayal of Jesus praying in Hebrews, and made several observations. We have seen how Jesus’ prayers and their context of suffering express his solidarity with his followers, thus recapitulating the discourse found in 2:10–18. This solidarity motif also constitutes an implicit invitation for the addressees to identify with Jesus and the presentation given of him. Quite concretely, this would entail a call to emulate the obedience of Jesus and to accept suffering as part of God’s plans for those who are on their way to salvation. I also indicated that prayer, by implication, is presented as a site for exploring what it means and looks like to follow Jesus. It is now time to turn to what Hebrews has to say about the prayers of the followers of Jesus. However, before we do this, some disclaimers are called for. To begin with, it is evident that 5:7–10 is a passage which describes and discusses the prayers of Jesus, without providing us with the actual way in which Jesus prayed. Furthermore, we have no passage in Hebrews which explicitly states how the author would have wanted the addressees to articulate their prayers, let alone solid evidence to suggest how they actually did pray, if they did. What we do have, however, are texts which somehow exhort the addressees to pray, and

which in the process say something about the identity of those who pray. One such text is found in 4:14–16, and our main attention in the following is devoted to it.

3.1. *Jesus' Entrance into Heaven and the Call to Approach the Throne of Grace*

The basis for the exhortations given in 4:14–16 is the fact that the addressees are said to “have” Jesus as their high priest. Jesus, moreover, is said to have passed through the heavens (διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, 4:14). On this basis, the addressees are asked to approach the throne of grace (4:16). The logic seems to be that Jesus’ διέρχομαι is the precondition for the προσέρχομαι of the addressees. The fact that Jesus has already gone through the heavens is that which makes it possible for his followers to approach God’s presence and the throne of grace. Jesus’ function as leader is thereby evoked.

This would mean that Jesus’ journey through the heavens, mentioned in 4:14, develops on the motif of him as the first one to reach the glory and perfection towards which all his followers are headed too (cf. 2:10). An important element is also added to this motif, namely its cultic dimension. Jesus’ journey towards glory is interpreted as a high priestly entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. This entrance is alluded to in 4:14 but is made more explicit later: “This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil, where Jesus has entered (εἰσῆλθεν) on our behalf as forerunner, becoming high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (6:19–20). Here it is explicitly emphasized that Jesus’ high priestly entrance took place on behalf of his followers. The title given to Jesus, πρόδρομος, clearly implies that others will follow in his footsteps.³⁴ Although this is not entirely clear from 6:19–20 alone, the realm “behind the veil” wherein Jesus entered must be understood to be the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary. This is evident in 9:11–12, where it is stated that Jesus has entered (εἰσῆλθεν) a tent not made with hands and not part of this creation. This would suggest that the ambiguous phrase found in 4:14 should be taken as implying that Jesus passed through the heavens *in order to* enter the heavenly sanctuary to appear before God on our behalf (cf. 9:24).³⁵

This would imply that the throne of grace (4:16), which the addressees are called to approach, should be pictured as belonging to the sacred geography of

³⁴ Jesus is thus pictured as “das Anfangsglied in einer Reihe” and it follows “daß auch die an ihn Gläubigen in das Allerheiligste gelangen werden.” Thus Otfried Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 6:19f und 10:19f* (WUNT 14; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1972), 86.

³⁵ On the cosmology implied in the statements about Jesus’ high priestly entrance into heaven, see Hofius, *Vorhang*.

the heavenly sanctuary.³⁶ This assumption is strengthened as we observe that the verb which translates approach, προσέρχομαι, has a cultic flavor in Hebrews. It is used to describe how one enters the temple in order to bring forth sacrifices (10:1) within the regime of the old covenant. And in 10:19–22, a passage which clearly echoes 4:14–16, the term is used to denote entrance into the heavenly sanctuary: “Therefore, brothers, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary . . . let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.” The motif of being sprinkled clean and washed before entering the sanctuary underscores the cultic element in the exhortation.³⁷ The approach called for in 4:16 should probably be understood along similar lines, that is, as an approach into the sacred heavenly realm already entered by Jesus.

3.2. *Jesus – The One Who Mediates Access to God*

Before we return to interpret the call to approach God in 4:16, I would like briefly to explore a related topic found in Hebrews, namely the idea that one approaches God *through* Jesus. It is not only that Jesus grants access to God by virtue of his role as leader and forerunner. Having “arrived” at his exalted position in heaven, Jesus also intercedes for his followers. Thus in 7:25 it is said of Jesus that he “is always able to save those who approach God through him (δι’ αὐτοῦ), since he lives forever to make intercession (ἐντυγχάνειν) for them.” Jesus’ intercession might imply Jesus praying on behalf of his followers to God, or perhaps speaking their case.³⁸ The idea that you need an intercessor before God appears to reflect the notion that God’s presence, although attractive, is a scary place. Jesus seems to function as a “buffer” between God and those who approach him.³⁹ It is possible that Jesus’ role as intercessor is implied in all the cases where Hebrews speaks of approaching God *through* Jesus. To approach God through Jesus would then mean to appeal to the intercession of Jesus, as one approaches God. However, it is also conceivable that Jesus’ role as intercessor is only one aspect of his mediating function. One could imagine, for instance, that approaching God through Jesus could be done by way of appeal to Jesus’ self-sacrifice, as the means

³⁶ Thus Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:115.

³⁷ The reference to bodies washed with pure water could plausibly be taken as a reference to baptism in the name of Jesus. See Samuel Byrskog, “Baptism in Hebrews,” in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism in Early Judaism, Graeco-Roman Religion, and Early Christianity* (3 vols.; ed. David Hellholm et al.; BZNW 176; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 1:585–602.

³⁸ Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:190. A similar idea is probably described in 9:24, where it is said that Jesus entered heaven “now to appear in the presence of God for us (ὕπὲρ ἡμῶν).”

³⁹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 371.

through which God's presence has been made accessible (cf. 10:19–21), without directly appealing to his intercession. In either case, the focus is clearly theocentric. Jesus is mediator and intercessor, but God is the one who is approached.⁴⁰ Jesus is nevertheless central to the notion of approaching God, being the one through whom one approaches, the one who intercedes on behalf of his followers, and ultimately also as the one able to save those who approach God through him.

What, then, does one do if one approaches God through Jesus? In 13:15 we read that the addressees are exhorted continually to “offer God a sacrifice of praise” through Jesus (Δι’ αὐτοῦ, 13:15), interpreted as fruit of lips which confess the name of God.⁴¹ Doing good and sharing are also interpreted as sacrifices which are *well pleasing* to God. This sets up an implied contrast to the animal sacrificial practice, which is said to be neither wanted nor liked by God (10:5–10). The kind of worship resulting from the high priesthood of Jesus, and mediated through him, is thus contrasted to the kind of worship conducted within the regime of the old covenant by the Levitical priests. The metaphorical use of sacrificial language to denote worship, praise and thanksgiving mediated through Jesus is therefore bound up with a larger cultic discourse in Hebrews which highlights the superiority, distinctiveness and newness of Jesus' priesthood over against the “old regime” (i.e. earthly sanctuary, animal sacrifices, Levitical priests, old covenant).

Although metaphorical use of sacrificial terms to denote worship, thanksgiving and praise is a commonplace in Scripture,⁴² the rhetorical discourse within which such language is employed in Hebrews seems to lend it particularly strong force. Thanksgiving, charity and praise, understood in sacrificial terms, are not only presented as supplements to animal sacrifices or as interim alternatives to such practice. Rather, in Hebrews the idea seems to be that there is a fundamental contrast between the old regime of worship and the regime brought through Jesus. Although it would be a mistake to understand the critique of the old regime as intentionally anti-Jewish, and even if it is very difficult to know how the cultic discourse in Hebrews functioned vis-à-vis the Jerusalem temple,⁴³ it is still reasonable to assume that the cultic discourse in Hebrews, and the notion of worship bound up with it, could have

⁴⁰ More generally on Jesus as mediator and intercessor in New Testament prayer, see Larry Hurtado's paper in this volume.

⁴¹ Most commentators would argue that it is God's name which 13:15 asks its addressees to praise. A notable exception is Scott Mackie (“Confession of the Son of God in Hebrews,” *NTS* 53 [2007]:114–29), who claims that it is the name of Jesus which is confessed.

⁴² Cf. Pss 40:7; 51:17–19; 141:2; Hos 6:6; 14:3.

⁴³ The question of whether Hebrews dates before or after the fall of the temple, and what consequences this should have for our understanding of the cultic discourse in the homily, are hotly debated and unsettled issues in the present scholarly landscape.

functioned to foster a distinct sense of identity for those who identified as Jesus' followers, if they internalized the theology found in Hebrews. Together with identity as follower of Jesus, Hebrews attaches a strong sense that one possesses a new, distinct and superior way of approaching God, mediated exclusively through the priesthood of Jesus, and explicitly contrasted to an old regime (cf. 7:18–19; 8:6–7, 13; 9:8–14; 10:1–10).

3.3. *Confess and Seek Help*

We have now seen that worship, thanksgiving and praise seem to be part of what one does when approaching God through Jesus. However, 4:14–16 indicates that other aspects might also be important. There are two things which the addressees are asked to do in 4:14–16: hold fast to the confession (4:14) and approach the throne of grace for the purpose of receiving help (4:16). These exhortations are clearly intertwined. It is worth noting that the exhortations are given in the plural and that they thus seem to be directed at an entire confessing community, called to approach God together. We should probably imagine the exhortations found in 4:14–16 to be carried out primarily in the context of the ἐπισυναγωγή (cf. 10:25), as part of the common gatherings of those addressed, rather than by individuals on their own. Most scholars would agree that the confession referred to in 4:14 should be understood as consisting of statements about Christ.⁴⁴ Thus Jesus is called the “apostle and high priest of our confession” in 3:1. It is possible that we should imagine the confession primarily as summing up the main tenets of the Christology held by the community, thus serving a doctrinal function. Another attractive possibility is that the confession is assumed to function as part of the addressed community's worship.⁴⁵ In this view, holding on to the confession is not simply a matter of submitting to specific doctrinal beliefs, although it naturally includes this as well, it is also a matter of acclaiming Christ in the context of worship.⁴⁶ In either case, the confession seems to belong quite closely together with thanksgiving and praise.

In addition to the call to hold on to the confession, the addressees are exhorted in 4:16 to confidently “approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.” Our analysis above has suggested that the idea of approaching God is related to confession and worship in Hebrews, and is predicated on the idea that Jesus functions both as mediator and intercessor. However, in 4:16 the accent seems to fall neither on

⁴⁴ Mackie, “Confession of the Son of God,” 114–29.

⁴⁵ Larry Hurtado has demonstrated how cultic invocation of the name of Jesus was an important aspect of worship within the early Jesus movement. Cf. his contribution in this volume.

⁴⁶ This solution is argued by Henrich Zimmermann in *Das Bekenntnis der Hoffnung: Tradition und Redaktion im Hebräerbrief* (BBB 47; Köln: Hanstein, 1977), 44–51.

confession nor on worship, but on prayer and supplications in times of testing and need. It is significant to note that the exhortation to approach the throne of grace is predicated on the *compassion* of Jesus (4:15): “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin.” This recalls the statement made about Jesus in 2:17–18, where it was said of Jesus that he is able to help those who are tested because he himself was tested. However, 4:15 also anticipates the portrayal of Jesus praying in 5:7–10, where the testing of Jesus is given narrative expression related to prayer. The focus on the compassion of Jesus suggests that those who approach the throne of grace somehow communicate their situation to Jesus, and it is implied that this situation involves testing, need of help and mercy, as well as exposure to weakness. Because Jesus is a compassionate high priest, they can approach the throne of grace with confidence, knowing that Jesus will be able to sympathize with them. All this strongly suggests that help and mercy are given to those who approach God to *pray* for it in times of testing and weakness.

It is not entirely clear, however, if it is God or Jesus who is the implied recipient of prayer in 4:14–16. The theocentric focus in 7:25 and 13:15 seems to indicate that God is the one ultimately addressed in prayer. Even if we grant that God is the most natural recipient of prayer, two factors seem to indicate that Hebrews puts forward a notion of prayer where prayers could be addressed also to Jesus. First, the emphatic focus on Jesus’ ability to show compassion clearly seems to suggest that Hebrews does not simply refer to the abstract idea that prayers are accepted by God for the sake of Christ. One must imagine some kind of notion of prayer where it matters not only that Jesus healed the relationship between God and humans through his sacrificial death, but also that he presently intercedes in heaven. It is hard to imagine how such a notion of prayer would not include some sort of direct communication between Jesus and those who pray. Secondly, the help (βοήθειαν) and mercy (ἔλεος) one could hope to receive when approaching the throne of grace (4:16) are things which Jesus himself is said to be able to give. It is underscored that Jesus is capable of providing help (βοηθῆσαι, 2:18) and that Jesus is merciful (ἐλεήμων, 2:17). In 7:25 Jesus is even said to be able to save those who approach God through him. Jesus is pictured as the agent of the mercy and help, and ultimately also the salvation, for which his followers pray.

In other words, Hebrews seems to imply that prayers are somehow communicated to Jesus, and that Jesus himself is pictured as the one able to answer those prayers. It is certainly possible to imagine God nevertheless as at the center of the entire process. For instance, one could assume that Jesus bears forth the needs and problems of his followers before God in prayer, and

that God is the one who answers those prayers by using Jesus as his agent of mercy and help. Even if these assumptions are granted, and even if this would mean that prayers are ultimately directed to God through Jesus, rather than to Jesus himself, there is still no doubt that Hebrews pictures Jesus as having a very central and important role when his followers pray. This role is not limited to his redemptive self-sacrifice. He is the one who enables approach to God, the one who intercedes on behalf of God's people, the one who shows compassion in their time of testing – and ultimately also the agent of the help for which they pray. Jesus has become the source of eternal salvation for those who obey him (5:9).

3.4. The Author's Closing Prayer in 13:20–21

Although we do not have any instructions given to the addressees about how they should articulate their prayers, we do have a prayer written by the author himself. Towards the end of Hebrews we find the following prayer (13:20–21): “May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus our Lord, furnish you with all that is good, that you may do his will. May he carry out in you what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever (and ever). Amen.” Several features of this prayer are worth noting. To begin with, it is directed to God himself and not to Jesus. The prayer thus conforms to the theocentric focus in Hebrews, emphasized above.

Nevertheless, Jesus does play a significant role in the prayer. God is addressed and designated in terms of his relationship with Jesus. He is the God of peace who brought Jesus up from the dead. It is worth noting that the image of God bringing (ἀναγαγών) Jesus up from the dead is reminiscent of the idea expressed in 2:10, of God leading (ἀγαγόντα) many children to glory. Why is God designated in this way in the context of prayer? The answer would seem to be: because God's saving of Jesus, who was heard in the hour of his passion, has become *paradigmatic* for how God deals with the followers of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus has become the ultimate example of God answering prayer, and therefore God is addressed in prayer as the one who raised Jesus from the dead. The implication is clearly that if the great shepherd of the sheep has been led out of the realm of death, his flock will follow. Jesus' role as leader is thereby recalled.⁴⁷

God's action in bringing Jesus up from the dead is related to the blood of the eternal covenant. The blood of the covenant must be understood to be the blood shed by Jesus himself, through which the new covenant was inaugurated (9:18). The expression ἐν αἵματι διαθήκης should thus be taken to

⁴⁷ The designation of Jesus as the shepherd of the sheep could be influenced by Isa 63:11–14, depicting Moses as the shepherd of God's people, the one through whom God led and leads Israel.

mean: “by virtue of the (new) covenant blood.”⁴⁸ There is thus a sense in which the redemptive work of Jesus is seen as the foundation for the prayer as such. Jesus’ redemptive suffering is invoked as the basis for hoping for God’s deliverance. The prayer thereby implicitly appeals to the covenant faithfulness of God, and to the promises attached to the covenant mediated by Jesus (8:6). If the blood shed by Jesus is the reason why *he* was saved out of the realm of death, it seems to follow that those who approach God with their hearts sprinkled clean through the covenant blood of Jesus (cf. 10:22) are encouraged to hope that God will save them too, for the sake of Jesus.⁴⁹

What the author actually prays for in 13:21, namely that God may furnish the addressees with all that is good, in order that they may do his will, is presented as something God will accomplish through Jesus (διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 13:21). It is not only that God is approached in prayer and worship through Jesus, Jesus is also the one through whom God relates to those who approach him in prayer. God is depicted as the subject of the action, but Jesus is the medium. There is no easy way to distinguish sharply, therefore, between what God does in the lives of those who approach him in prayer, and the actions of Jesus. This ambiguity surfaces also in the ending doxology. This doxology could certainly be taken as referring to God, on the grounds that he is the one addressed in the opening of the prayer in 13:20.⁵⁰ However, the syntax would actually suggest that Jesus Christ is the one to whom glory forever belongs, because his name is placed directly in front of the doxology.⁵¹

4. Prayer and Identity in Hebrews – Some Conclusions

4.1. Jesus and His Followers at Prayer – Similarities and Differences

Although Hebrews seems to indicate that none of the addressees had experienced martyrdom (12:4), it appears that both Jesus and his followers are pictured as praying in times of testing, needing help. It also seems that such times of testing are situated as part of the same basic narrative: the story about how God leads his children to the glory for which they were destined, despite their experience of hardship. Jesus approached God needing salvation (5:7),

⁴⁸ Thus correctly Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:559; cf. the similar expression found in Zech 9:11.

⁴⁹ Although it is not explicitly stated that the hearts of the worshipers mention in 10:22 have been sprinkled clean through *blood*, this is surely implied. And the blood in question must clearly be the blood of Jesus himself. Thus Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (6th ed.; KEK XIII; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 346. Cf. also 1 Pet 1:2.

⁵⁰ Thus Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:565.

⁵¹ Thus Attridge, *Hebrews*, 407–8.

and so do his followers (7:25).⁵² Precisely this common ground and shared condition allows the addressees to identify with the portrayal of Jesus praying.

However, there are also important differences, pertaining to the fact that Jesus figures as part of the context in which his followers pray. Whereas nothing is said about Jesus having a high priest mediating on his behalf before God, he has become this high priest for his followers. Those who follow Jesus therefore know that they have someone interceding on their behalf before God. They can approach God through Jesus, on the grounds that Jesus has made God's presence accessible in a new way. His redemptive action and his role as leader are invoked in prayer (13:20–21), and Jesus himself is pictured as the agent of mercy (2:17), help (2:18) and salvation (7:25) for which his followers pray. It is also worth noting that even if it is said that Jesus has been tested in all things, it is emphasized that he was without sin (4:15). We should probably therefore not imagine Jesus praying for mercy or forgiveness, although it seems to be implied that his followers do.

4.2. *To Pray qua Follower of Jesus*

How, then, does the portrayal of the prayers of Jesus shape the prayers and identity of his followers? What does it mean to pray *qua* follower of Jesus? In answering this question, I think it is helpful to recall, once again, the picture painted of Jesus as leader in 2:10–18. There Jesus is pictured as leading his siblings to glory, on a journey which is structured in terms of temporal hardship, suffering and denigration, followed by exaltation, perfection and salvation. This basic structure is embedded in the life, death and exaltation of Jesus and it also seems to surface in the portrayal of Jesus praying in 5:7–10. Jesus is praying within a context of suffering, in the days of his flesh, as part of the process which would lead him to salvation, perfection and glory. He prayed to the God capable of saving from death, and was heard. I would argue that the same basic structure also provides an implied narrative context for his followers as they pray.⁵³ When Jesus' followers pray, they are situated in the context of a larger narrative which revolves around the question of how God will lead his children to glory.⁵⁴ They pray, knowing that the situation within

⁵² Christopher A. Richardson ("The Passion: Reconsidering Hebrews 5:7–8," in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts* [ed. Richard Bauckham; London: T&T Clark, 2008], 51–67, 66) strongly emphasizes that the relationship between the author's exhortation to approach God with confidence is predicated on the example of Jesus, and the confidence he demonstrated in the hour of his passion.

⁵³ A good case can be made to suggest that this "narrative," and the picture of Jesus as leader, is informed by the exodus story in Scripture. Thus Matthew Thiessen, "Hebrews and the End of the Exodus," *NovT* 49 (2007): 353–69.

⁵⁴ In *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1999), Gerd Theissen highlights how religious rituals, such as prayer, always relate to a religious myth. The intersection between "ritual" and "myth" seems to be a

which they are found, and which has occasioned their prayer, is a step towards the final goal.

What it means to approach God in prayer within such a context is exemplified by Jesus himself. He reckoned with God's ability to deliver, but he also submitted to God's way of bringing about perfection, trusting that he would keep his promises. Jesus thus learned obedience and his followers are called to emulate him. The tension between trust, obedience and suffering, surfacing in Jesus' prayers, shapes the notion of what it means, also for the addressees, to have their prayers "heard." There is no reason to rule out the idea that God answers prayers by providing help "here and now." On the contrary, this seems to be presupposed in the phrase "timely help" (εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν, 4:16). However, there is always also the possibility that God intends to discipline his children through suffering (12:4–11), thus preparing them to obtain life (12:9). God's children must therefore always be prepared to identify as the outcasts of this world (cf. 11:13–16, 38; 13:14), as those who apparently have *not* had their prayers heard. This does not challenge their identity, however, as siblings of Jesus on their way to glory, but confirms it.

The fact that Jesus suffered and prayed during the days of his flesh is not only important because it provides his followers with an example; it also qualifies Jesus for his present position as high priest in heaven. This priestly office includes mediation and intercession, and the followers of Jesus are thus called to approach God in prayer, thanksgiving and worship *through* Jesus. Jesus is even pictured as the agent of the help, mercy and salvation for which his followers pray. In all this, it is vital for Hebrews to emphasize that Jesus has already been tested in all things and that the followers of Jesus therefore have a high priest who is able to show solidarity and compassion. This allows for a strong sense of mutual solidarity and identification. Because Jesus identified with his siblings in all things, they are invited to identify with their high priest.

If we venture to move beyond the textual world of Hebrews, it seems that the way the concept of prayer is shaped in Hebrews could have invited the historical addressees to adopt a concrete practice characteristic of the followers of Jesus, namely articulating prayer and worship in a way that referred to Jesus. We could picture this as taking the shape of confessional acclamation and worship, prayers that recall the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus, appeals to the intercession of Jesus and perhaps even prayers addressed to Jesus himself. If such practice was adopted by the historical addressees, there is every reason to believe that it would have strengthened and shaped their identity as followers of Jesus. Articulating prayers which presuppose specific Christological convictions would constitute

fruitful avenue for further elaborating the narrative context of prayer in Hebrews, and how it relates to identity.

a recurring reminder that the one praying was one of Jesus' followers. Further, in as much as it would have been a practice not shared by those outside the early Jesus movement, such prayers would have been a unique characteristic of this movement, and therefore indicative of the identity of its members.

Hebrews has done much to underscore the distinctiveness of approaching God through Jesus, because the kind of approach enabled through the high priesthood of Jesus is pictured as something quite unprecedented and qualitatively *new*. In particular, Hebrews highlights that the approach to God made available through the death of Jesus is superior to what was available under the terms of the old covenant. The addressees are thus encouraged to view their prayer and worship as something new and unique, something exclusive and superior, as compared to all other forms of worship and prayer. If they internalized this point of view, it is reasonable to imagine that this would have strengthened their identity as followers of Jesus and encouraged them to continue to identify in this way.

4.3. With Our Eyes Fixed on Jesus – Identity and the Dynamics of Recognition

The title of this paper alludes to 12:1–2: “let us . . . persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.”⁵⁵ We have primarily focused on the role occupied by Jesus as leader. There is another aspect of this passage which is worth noting, however, and that is the focus on “seeing.” The injunction to fix one’s eye on Jesus poses the question: what does Jesus look like? What does one see if one looks at Jesus? This question seems relevant to the process of identity development. In the introductory chapter (“Identity and Prayer”) in this volume, Mikael Tellbe describes social identity development in terms of incorporating a “mental image” of what membership in a given group consists in.⁵⁶ If Jesus is the leader and model, the “mental image” created of him must be relevant to the identity development of his followers. If they fix their eyes on Jesus while praying, what would they see?

It seems to me that Hebrews has provided its addressees with two basic “images” of Jesus, on both of which they must keep their eyes fixed. We have the image of Jesus crowned with glory and honor, and the author even claims that this is how we now “see him” (2:9). But there is also the image of Jesus praying in agony, so vividly described that it would have been possible to visualize it. Both images display the same man, and the addressees have been

⁵⁵ Cf. also Heb 3:1.

⁵⁶ Cf. above, p. 16.

provided the resources for recognizing Jesus in both images.⁵⁷ Both of these images would be relevant, moreover, in a context of prayer. When the addressees pray, they do so in a way similar to how Jesus prayed in the days of his flesh. However, as they approach God in worship and prayer, they will also see the exalted Jesus, crowned with glory and honor, interceding on their behalf. In as much as they recognize the true identity of Jesus in both images and incorporate both as “mental images” of their leader, they will also *recognize* their own identity in the process, as the siblings and followers of Jesus.

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⁵⁷ On the dogmatic implications of the Christology in question, see Bruce L. McCormack “‘With Loud Cries and Tears’: The Humanity of the Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (ed. Richard Bauckham et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 37–68.

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Heavenly Prayer and Christian Identity in the Book of Revelation

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The question of prayer and identity formation in Revelation takes us to a basic interpretive issue: How does the visionary world depicted in the text relate to the social world of early Christians? Revelation pictures the prayers of the saints being offered in worship, but it is heavenly worship led by mysterious six-winged creatures, who are covered with eyes all around and inside (Rev 4:8; 5:8). They are joined by twenty-four elders in white robes, who cast down their gold wreaths before God's throne (4:10; 5:8). Prayers rise with incense offered by an angel (8:3–4), and martyrs cry out from beneath the heavenly altar (6:10). These scenes occur in the hidden world above, rather than the visible world below. In the final chapter it is the risen and unseen Jesus, who announces that he is coming, so that the Spirit and bride call out "Come," inviting others to join in praying "Come," until the final voice responds, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (22:17, 20).¹

The visionary world is not a direct reflection of the early Christian social world, but its images shape Christian identity by giving readers a sense of the community of prayer to which they belong. The need to strengthen identity is reflected in Revelation's opening chapters, which picture some readers experiencing conflict with local synagogues, raising issues about who can rightly claim a Jewish identity (2:9; 3:9). Conflict also involves civic or provincial officials, who have the authority to imprison or kill some readers, indicating problems about the place of Jesus' followers in imperial society (2:10, 13). Finally, there were internal disagreements over the extent to which people could accommodate Greco-Roman religious practices, such as eating

¹ Richard Bauckham, "Prayer in the Book of Revelation," in *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 252–71.

what had been offered to the gods, while maintaining their identity as followers of Jesus (2:14, 20).²

Identity is formed through networks of relationships, as people consider what they share with others and what distinguishes them from others. The process is dynamic rather than static. As social contexts change, identities are redefined through a process of reaffirming certain bonds while altering the way others are understood.³ Although prayer is our focus, we must consider how prayer relates to the core narrative and beliefs of the community, to its sense of the past, present, and future, and to the role of ethnicity. In terms of content, the prayers define a way of understanding one's place in relation to God, the community, and the world. The gestures and ritual settings associated with prayer both express and shape the way people see themselves in the presence of God and others. Visions that include prayer help to define the literary flow of Revelation, and as they do so they shape the self-understanding of those who read it.

Prayer to Jesus in Heavenly Worship (Revelation 4–5)

Revelation was designed to be read aloud in worship (1:3), and it pictures the prayers of the community on earth being offered by their counterparts in heaven (5:8). The writer presupposes that the earthly community consists of those who follow Jesus and identify with Israel's tradition, and yet come from various ethnic backgrounds. He will depict a worship scene that draws on Jewish, Greek, and Roman traditions, yet transforms them as the group addresses their prayers to Christ. In the process, the actions traditionally associated with prayer will be used in the heavenly world above, but they apparently do not provide a model for prayer in the Christian community below. The vision shapes identity by giving the community a focus for its prayer, rather than showing the manner in which prayer is to be made on earth.

Revelation 4–5 describes a celestial hall where worship is offered to God and the Lamb. Studies of such worship scenes usually focus on the hymns, which are a major feature. The hymns use traditional themes, which have been reworked for the present literary context. The lyrics do not directly replicate the hymns used in early Christian worship but shape the readers'

² On the social setting see Craig R. Koester, *Revelation* (Anchor Yale Bible 38A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 85–103.

³ Mikael Tellbe, "Identity and Prayer" in this volume; cf. Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2003), 19–33; Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2009), 1–21.

perspectives by showing that praise is rightly given to God and the risen Jesus.⁴ Here we will note aspects of the hymns, while devoting more attention to the role of prayer.

The description of heavenly worship discloses aspects of the community with which readers are to identify. The heavenly company includes four living creatures, whose faces are those of a lion, ox, human being, and eagle. Although the faces are modeled after the beings attending God in Ezek 1:10, Revelation recontextualizes the imagery, so that the creatures serve as heavenly representatives of the created order. Creation motifs are prominent in Rev 4–5 as God is praised for creating all things (4:11), and acclamation surges outward until praises are offered by angels and every creature in heaven and earth, under the earth and in the sea (5:11–13).⁵ Readers who identify with the four living beings and the rest of the created order recognize that they too are creatures, who depend on God for their existence and are to worship God as their Creator.

The words of the four creatures develop themes from Israel's worship. They are six-winged beings, who call God "holy, holy, holy," like the seraphim attending God's throne in Isa 6:3 (Rev 4:8). They invoke the familiar title, "the one who is" (ὁ ὢν, Exod 3:14 LXX), while expanding it to include God's past existence and future coming (*Sib. Or.* 3:16). Although non-Jewish sources sometimes refer to God's past, present, and future existence, the prominence of biblical imagery in this scene shows heavenly worship being directed to the God of Israel.⁶ Those who identify with these celestial beings identify with Israel's tradition.

The four celestial creatures are joined by twenty-four elders, who are heavenly representatives of the community that worships God on earth. In some respects they are like angels, who were sometimes pictured around

⁴ Hymnic passages include Rev 4:8–11; 5:9–14; 7:9–12; 11:15–18; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–8. Sometimes 12:10–12 is included, though the context is not worship. See Klaus-Peter Jörens, *Das hymnische Evangelium: Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung* (SNT 5; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971); Russell Morton, "Glory to God and the Lamb: John's Use of Jewish and Hellenistic/Roman Themes in Formatting His Theology in Revelation 4–5," *JSNT* 83 (2001): 89–109; G. Schimanowski, "Connecting Heaven to Earth: The Function of the Hymns in Revelation 4–5," in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (ed. Ra'anan S. Boustán and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67–84; Matthew E. Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity: Didactic Hymnody among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians* (WUNT 2/302; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 335–49.

⁵ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 33–34, 47–53.

⁶ Similar language was used for Isis (Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 9 [354C]), Zeus (Pausanias, *Descr.* 10.12.10), and other deities. See David Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; WBC 52; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1997–1998), 1:31.

God's throne, but angels were generally not called "elders" (πρεσβύτεροι). That term was more commonly used for leaders of Jewish and early Christian communities, whose counsel was respected.⁷ The term enhances the representative role of the figures in Revelation, encouraging readers to see them as examples of proper worship. The elders praise God by declaring, "You are worthy (ἄξιός εἶ), our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power," because God created all things (4:11).

The living creatures and elders shape a sense of worship in continuity with the tradition of Israel, but at the moment prayer is offered, a distinctly Christian element is introduced, which further defines the worshipers' identity. The living creatures and elders hold bowls of incense, which symbolize the prayers of the saints, and those prayers rise before Jesus, the slaughtered and living Lamb (5:6–8). Traditionally, prayers and incense were offered to God, and yet here they are offered to Christ. Where the Psalms praise God with "a new song," the heavenly beings in Revelation sing "a new song" to Jesus the Lamb (5:9–10; cf. Pss 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). Where the heavenly company told God "You are worthy," they now say to the Lamb: "You are worthy" (ἄξιός εἶ, Rev 4:11; 5:9).

The image of the Lamb encompasses the central narrative of the Christian community, which concerns the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Belief that Jesus' blood was shed to redeem people from sin and that Jesus had risen as the firstborn from the dead was shared by the author and readers (1:5–6). Portraying Jesus as a sacrificial Lamb draws from various biblical images, such as the Passover sacrifice and idea that God's servant suffered as an innocent lamb.⁸ After introducing Jesus as Lamb in 5:6, the writer makes "Lamb" the primary way of referring to Jesus for the rest of the book. Worshipers either identify with Lamb (ἀρνίον) who sacrifices himself for others (7:14; 12:11; 14:1–4) or with the beast (θηρίον) that symbolizes imperial power and violently oppresses people (13:1–18). By making the

⁷ R. Alistair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994). Interpreters sometimes emphasize the differences between the heavenly elders, who wear gold wreaths and sit on thrones, and the elders in the synagogue and church who did not appear that way (Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* [Grand Rapids, Mich. and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004], 491). David Aune rightly notes that the elders or πρεσβύτεροι are like an embassy or πρεσβεία bringing gold wreaths to a ruler (*Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity* [WUNT 199; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 107). While recognizing the distinctive elements in Revelation, calling this heavenly group πρεσβύτεροι enhances their role as representatives of the earthly community.

⁸ On Jesus as Lamb or Passover sacrifice see 1 Cor 5:7; John 1:29. On the suffering servant as a lamb see Isa 53:7; Acts 8:32; 1 Clem. 16:7; Barn. 5:2; Justin, *Dial.* 111.3. See Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force* (WUNT 2/167; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

Lamb the focus for prayer, the heavenly creatures and elders remind readers of the central story that gives their community its identity.

By offering prayer and praise to the crucified and living Jesus, the heavenly company does not make him into a second god, alongside the Creator. Revelation's perspective is monotheistic. The writer pictures only one throne and one kingdom, which belong to God and the Lamb. They reign as one and are worshiped as one (11:15; 22:3).⁹ The hymns that ascribe glory and honor to the Creator and the Lamb individually soon culminate in praising both in the same song (4:11; 5:11, 13). Since Jesus is the one through whom God's power is exercised, those who worship Jesus are understood to worship God.¹⁰ Here God is the Creator, who has a rightful claim to be worshiped by the whole earth because he brought all things into being (4:11). The song of the heavenly worshipers extends the theme of God's rightful dominion over the world by saying that those redeemed by the Lamb include those from the world's many tribes and languages and peoples and nations, who have a place in God's kingdom where they serve as God's priests (5:9–10).

The language shows that the community that prays to Jesus has its place within Israel's tradition. According to Exod 19:6, the people of Israel were for God "a kingdom of priests."¹¹ In Revelation, those redeemed by the death of Jesus become "a kingdom," because they are brought into a faith community that recognizes the lordship of God, exercised through his Messiah. As "priests" they rightly worship God. Although members of this community come from many nations, where other gods were worshiped, recognizing what

⁹ Revelation speaks of the kingdom of the Lord and his Messiah, but uses the singular "he shall reign" (11:15) and speaks of the throne of God and the Lamb, while saying that the redeemed worship "him" (22:3). Some argue that the text originally referred only to God and regard the references to the Messiah and Lamb as awkward attempts to Christianize the passage (Aune, *Revelation*, 1:cxxxi). But in the final form of the text the peculiar language emphasizes the unity of God and the Lamb, which is also reflected in calling both the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13). Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer takes God alone to be the object of worship in 5:14, even though praise was given jointly to God and the Lamb in the previous verse. He does not develop the role of the risen Jesus as the recipient of prayer in Revelation (*Kommunikation mit Gott und Christus: Sprache und Theologie des Gebetes im Neuen Testament* [WUNT 197; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 349–63, esp. 353).

¹⁰ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 118–49; Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 2003), 590–95.

¹¹ The Hebrew of Exod 19:6 reads "a kingdom of priests" and the LXX reads "a priestly kingdom." Revelation 1:6 reads "a kingdom, priests," while 5:10 includes a conjunction, "a kingdom and priests," which suggests that each aspect warrants due consideration. Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 181–83.

Jesus has done gives a distinctive center to their worship. It incorporates them into a people that worships Israel's God, who has acted through Jesus on their behalf. They are "holy ones" or "saints" (ἅγιοι, 5:8), because they belong to the God who is holy (ἅγιος, 4:8) and are set apart for God's service.

The heavenly worshipers form a sense of identity for the Christian community on earth by setting the proper *focus* for prayer. What is surprising is that they do not seem to model the proper *form* for prayer. Their gestures reflect the practices used in Greco-Roman contexts and Jewish temple traditions, but not those of first-century synagogues or Christian assemblies.

First, the elders wear gold wreaths, which they throw down before God's throne when declaring God worthy of power (4:10). The gesture recalls the Greco-Roman practice of giving gold wreaths to a ruler to acknowledge his authority. Cities might send delegations to honor someone with gold wreaths in order to ensure good relationships or to ask for help (Josephus. *A. J.* 14.304; *B. J.* 4.620). But the gesture could suggest an elevated notion of a ruler's authority, since gold wreaths were placed on statues of Greek and Roman deities (Ep Jer 9; Dio Chrysostom, *Dei cogn.* 60; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 10.437b). When embassies gave Alexander the Great their gold wreaths, it was "as if they had come on a sacred embassy to honor some god" (Arrian, *Anab.* 7.23).¹² By using the gesture, the elders show that it is right to honor God's sovereignty, while the wider literary context critiques those who give divine honors to imperial rulers and their supporters, who are depicted as a seven-headed beast and a false prophet (Rev 13:1–18; 16:13; 19:20). Yet there is nothing to suggest that giving gold wreaths to God was a gesture that was performed in Christian worship.

Second, the creatures and elders hold kitharas as they offer prayer and song to the Lamb (Rev 5:8). The scene is reminiscent of Jewish tradition, where these stringed instruments were used in the Jerusalem temple, sometimes to accompany "a new song" of praise to God (2 Chron 9:11; Pss 33:2–3; 98:1, 5; 108:2; 1 Macc 4:54). The importance of the kithara in Jewish worship is suggested by its use on coins minted during the Bar Kochba revolt (fig. 1).¹³ But kitharas were not uniquely Jewish. The Greeks and Romans used them for entertainment at banquets and to accompany songs praising their gods and heroes. The kithara was associated with Apollo, who was honored by musical contests during festivals. Such competitions also were held at festivals of the

¹² Gregory Stevenson, "Conceptual Background to Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John," *JBL* 114 (1995): 257–72; J. R. Harrison, "Fading Crown: Divine Honour and the Early Christians," *JTS* 54 (2003): 493–529; Aune, *Apocalypticism*, 107.

¹³ Leo Mildenberg, *The Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War* (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1984), 46–48. Image courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group (cngcoins.com).

imperial cult.¹⁴ A vase painting from Delphi shows Apollo holding both a bowl and a kithara, as do the creatures in Revelation (fig. 2).



Fig. 1: Kithara on Jewish coin
Bar Kochba period (132–135 C.E.)



Fig. 2: Apollo holding kithara and bowl

By way of contrast, kitharas and other instruments apparently were not used in first-century synagogues or Christian assemblies.¹⁵ Early references simply note that Christians sang together, evidently without accompaniment.¹⁶ Writers refer to instruments like the kithara only as illustrations of articulate or inarticulate speech (1 Cor 14:7) or as a symbol of harmony within the church (Ign. *Eph.* 4:1; *Philad.* 1:2). Later writers say that Christians used only the voice and not instruments like the kithara (Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.4.41). Some rejected the use of instruments because they were linked to bawdy social life and pagan festivals. Since kitharas were mentioned in Scripture, those writers gave them purely spiritual significance.¹⁷ It seems

¹⁴ On the use of kitharas to praise Greek and Roman deities see Dio Chrysostom, *I Regn.* 2.28; Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.10.10; Lucian, *Salt.* 16. On musical competitions in the imperial cult see Friesen, *Imperial*, 52, 75, 126. On the imagery in Revelation see Gregory Stevenson, *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation* (BZNW 107; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2001), 234.

¹⁵ Biblical texts might have been intoned in synagogues, but whether hymns were sung is not clear. Instruments were not used, however. See James McKinnon, “The Exclusion of Musical Instruments from the Ancient Synagogue,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 106 (1979–80): 77–87.

¹⁶ See Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Jas 5:13; Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96.7.

¹⁷ See James McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3–4, 32–35, 43.

unlikely that kitharas were actually used for accompanying songs or prayers in the congregations addressed by Revelation.

Third, the heavenly worshipers hold gold bowls full of incense, “which are the prayers of the saints” (5:8). The bowls (φιάλαι) were wide shallow pans. Some of the bowls used in the Jerusalem temple were made of gold and could hold wine and flour as well as incense (Josephus, *A. J.* 3.143; cf. Num 7:14, 86; 2 Chron 4:8). Incense was burned each morning and evening on an altar in the Jerusalem temple (Exod 30:7–8; 2 Chron 13:11). Prayer was not mandated as a part of the rite, but the time of the incense offering was considered appropriate for prayer (Jdt 9:1; Luke 1:10). The rising smoke could signify the worshiper calling upon God (Ps 141:2).¹⁸ The use of incense may have been limited to the temple. In ancient synagogues it was apparently not customary to burn incense during prayer.¹⁹ In Greco-Roman worship, the shallow libation bowls envisioned by Revelation were often used for wine that was poured out as prayers were made to the gods (fig. 2).²⁰ To show devotion to traditional deities or the emperor, incense could be placed on a special holder or burnt on a small altar (fig. 4).²¹

First-century Christians probably did not use incense during prayer. Early references to the fragrances Christians offer to God are metaphors for acts of love (Eph 5:2; Phil 4:18; cf. 2 Cor 2:14–16). The Christian refusal to use incense was notable enough that the second-century apologists had to explain it. Justin Martyr argued that God desired prayer rather than incense (*1 Apol.* 13), while Athenagoras said that God did not need incense because he was the perfect fragrance (*Leg.* 13).²² Tertullian told Christians not even to trade in incense because it was associated with idolatry (*Idol.* 11). Revelation does not

¹⁸ Incense was offered in connection with other sacrifices and shielded the priest from the divine presence as he entered the holy of holies (Lev 16:12–13), but it was also linked to prayer (Wis 18:21). See Kjeld Nielsen, “Incense,” *ABD* 3 (1992), 404–9, esp. 407; Franz Tóth, “Das Gebet der Heiligen: Gebet, Räucherwerk und Räucher kult in der Johannesapokalypse vor der Hintergrund biblischer und frühjüdischer Traditionen,” in *Das Gebet im Neuen Testament: Vierte Europäische orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sâmbâta de Sus 4.–8. August 2007* (ed. Hans Klein, Vasile Mihoc, and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr; WUNT 249; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 249–311.

¹⁹ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 16.

²⁰ Homer, *Il.* 9.162–81; 24.281–98; Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.193–200; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 70–73.

²¹ Image courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group (cngcoins.com). See S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 156, 209, 211, 228; Friesen, *Imperial*, 108, 112, 115. Note Pliny’s demand that followers of Jesus offer incense before the image of the emperor (*Ep* 10.96.5).

²² In *Barn.* 2:5 the author insists that sacrifices of all sorts have been abolished, quoting Isa 1:13, which calls incense an abomination.

polemicize against incense but treats it as a metaphor for prayer, perhaps recalling Ps 141:2, “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you.” Later writers could appeal to Revelation’s metaphorical usage when arguing that God desires prayer rather than incense.²³

Fourth, the heavenly company falls down before the Lamb when offering the prayers of the saints (5:8). In the social and political sphere, people would prostrate themselves before a person of higher rank in order to show subordination or devotion or to make an appeal for help (Luke 5:12; 8:41; 17:16). Forms of prostration could be used when showing reverence or making a request of the emperor.²⁴ In Revelation the verb “fall” (πίπτω) suggests falling face down, as the creatures and elders do in worship (Rev 4:10, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). When John falls down in awe before an angel, he is directed not to do so because it connoted the worship that is due to God alone (19:10; 22:8). By falling down before the Lamb, the heavenly company shows that Jesus – unlike the angels – can be rightly be worshiped and offered prayers.

The posture of the heavenly company has at most an indirect connection with the usual forms of communal prayer in the readers’ social context. In Jewish circles, prayer was often made while standing, and the eyes and hands could be lifted toward heaven.²⁵ People might also kneel down for prayer, and while doing so they could still lift up their hands.²⁶ Individuals might fall face down when offering especially urgent petitions to God, but that was not usual during communal prayer.²⁷ Among Greeks and Romans, it was common to stand with hands raised toward heaven. Kneeling might be used for urgent prayers, but on the whole, kneeling and prostration were considered un-Greek and un-Roman.²⁸ When Revelation pictures the heavenly worshipers falling down before the Lamb, it puts them in a posture of reverence that goes beyond the usual patterns of communal prayer. By using the same posture when relating to God and the Lamb, the heavenly beings identify true worship with a community that offers prayers to Jesus.

²³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.17.5–6. He notes the symbolic quality of incense in Rev 5:8, as does Origen (*Hom. Ezek.* 7.4.1–4; *Cels.* 8.17). See Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 17–38.

²⁴ Aune, *Apocalypticism*, 108.

²⁵ On standing see Luke 18:11, 13; Josephus, *A. J.* 10.255; *m. Ber.* 5:1; *m. Ta’an.* 2:2.

²⁶ On kneeling see Dan 6:11; Luke 22:41; Acts 9:40; Eph 3:14. On extending the hands see 1 Kgs 8:54; 2 Chron 6:13; Ezra 9:5; 3 Macc 2:1. See Reidar Hvalvik, “Praying with Outstretched Hands: Nonverbal Aspects of Early Christian Prayer and the Question of Identity” in this volume.

²⁷ On praying with one’s face to the ground see Josh 7:6; Mark 14:35; Matt 26:39; 1 Cor 14:25; *b. B. Meši’a* 59b.

²⁸ Larry J. Alderink and Luther H. Martin, “Prayer in Greco-Roman Religions,” in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology* (ed. Mark Christopher Kiley; London: Routledge, 1997), 123–27, esp. 125. F. T. van Straten, “Did the Greeks Kneel before their Gods?” *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving* 49 (1974): 159–89.

Prayer to God in Heavenly Worship (Revelation 7–8)

The dynamics of identity formation continue as the prayers of the saints are offered again in heavenly worship several chapters later (8:3–4). This context provides a glimpse of the future when the earthly community will join the heavenly creatures and elders in giving praise to God. As before the people redeemed by the Lamb come from every tribe and nation, but in this scene they are beyond earthly suffering and take their place before God's throne. They wear white robes, hold palm branches, and thank God and the Lamb for salvation. At the end of the scene the multitude falls silent, so that an angel can offer prayer at the altar, but time seems fluid, since those prayers come from the saints who still struggle on earth (7:9–8:4).

Different dimensions of this scene give readers a sense of the community to which they belong. The context identifies the worshipers in a twofold way: as heirs of the promises made to Israel and as a group of people from many ethnic backgrounds. Initially, John hears that the redeemed consist of 144,000, sealed from the twelve tribes of Israel (7:4–8). But when he turns to see the group, it proves to be a countless multitude of people from every tribe and nation, who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (7:9–17). Although interpreters disagree about the relationship of the two parts of the vision, the most plausible view is the two scenes describe the same group.²⁹ Just as John hears about the Lion of Judah and then sees the slaughtered Lamb, he hears about the number of the redeemed from the twelve tribes and then sees a numberless group from every tribe (5:5–6; 7:4–8, 9–17). If Christ is both Lion and Lamb, the redeemed are both heirs of Israel's heritage and those redeemed from many nations.

The description of this group fits the multiple dimensions of its identity. They wear white robes, hold palm branches, and thank God and the Lamb for salvation (7:9–10). To some extent the scene develops Jewish tradition. During the festival of Booths, worshipers were to celebrate by waving branches of palm, willow, and other leafy trees (Lev 23:40; Josephus, *A. J.* 13.372). Before the fall of the temple, worshipers waved their branches and called out "Save us, O Lord," and here they declare that God has brought salvation.³⁰ The Maccabees celebrated their victories over the Seleucids by

²⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 76–77. Other interpretations are that the 144,000 are Jewish Christians within the church, a special group of martyrs, or the church militant in contrast to the great multitude that is the church triumphant. See the discussion in Koester, *Revelation*, 423–30.

³⁰ Ps 118:25; *m. Sukkah* 4:1–5; Håkan Ulfgard, *Feast and Future: Revelation 7:9–17 and the Feast of Tabernacles* (ConBNT 22; Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989), 89–91; Jonathan A. Draper, "The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7:1–17," *JSNT* 19 (1983): 133–47.

waving palm branches, which symbolized triumph throughout the ancient world.³¹ But Zechariah 14 envisioned a time when the Gentiles would join in celebrating the feast of Booths as God's kingdom was established over all the earth. The vision suggests that such hopes are realized through the Lamb.

The vision also transforms Greco-Roman practice. At festivals honoring various deities, worshipers would wear white and carry palm branches and other items.³² Such gatherings were joyous occasions. In a similar way, throngs of people in white robes might greet a ruler with praises (Josephus, *A. J.* 11.327, 331), as was done for Augustus and later emperors (Suetonius, *Aug.* 98.2; Herodian, *Hist.* 8.7.2). People might hold palm branches as they came to seek help from a deity (Achilles Tatius, *Leuc. Clit.* 4.13.1–4) or to celebrate a victory. It was common to show appreciation by declaring a benefactor to be one's savior, and the term was used for the emperor.³³



Fig. 3: Hadrian welcomed with palms.
Judea as a woman offering at an altar



Fig. 4: Personified Piety
offering incense at an altar

Motifs like those in Revelation appear on a coin from the early second century (fig. 3).³⁴ It shows Judea, personified as a woman, welcoming the emperor Hadrian. She is attended by boys carrying palm branches, like the crowd in Rev 7:9, and she stands by an altar as the angel does in 8:3–4. Revelation

³¹ On the palms as victory symbols see 2 Macc 10:7; 1 Macc 13:51; Philo, *Deus* 137; Caesar, *Bell. civ.* 3.105; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 17.244.

³² Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.10–11; cf. Plutarch, *Moralia* 771D; Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, eds., *Roman Civilization: Selected Readings* (3rd ed.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 2:188.

³³ On imperial usage see Josephus, *B. J.* 7.71; Craig R. Koester, “‘The Savior of the World’ (John 4:42),” *JBL* 109 (1990): 665–80.

³⁴ Courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group (engcoins.com).

draws on the traditional symbols of victory while redefining the meaning. The book centers the notion of conquering (νικάω) on the death of the Lamb, whose blood brings the salvation that the worshipers celebrate with their palms and acclamations. The idea of triumph persists, but the means of triumph is redefined in terms of Christ's sacrifice. The beast depicts the violent victory associated with Roman conquest (11:7; 13:7). By way of contrast, the redemptive death of Jesus the Lamb is the true victory that gives the group its identity (5:5–6; 12:11; 15:2).

Against this backdrop of festive worship there is silence in heaven, which establishes the context in which an angel offers the prayers of the saints at the altar (Rev 8:1). Jewish sources sometimes told of angels interceding for the righteous (*I En.* 9:3; *T. Levi* 3:5), but in Revelation the angel brings the saints' own prayers before God (Tob 12:12). There are various precedents for the silence. Some sources tell of angelic worshipers falling silent in God's presence.³⁵ Others said that earthly sacrifices were to be offered in silence, which suggests that there should be silence when prayers are made in heaven.³⁶

But it was also the case that Greco-Roman worshipers were to be silent as a sign of reverence when prayers were offered.³⁷ When Vespasian and Titus were in Rome to celebrate their victory over Judea, a "countless multitude" stood everywhere in the city. As the victors took their seats, the troops raised their voices in acclamation, until the emperor gave the signal for silence, so that "amidst profound and universal stillness" he stood up to offer prayers (Josephus, *B. J.* 7.122–128). In a similar way Revelation 7 shows a countless multitude giving acclamations to the seated sovereign, and the praises end in silence for prayer.

The angel that offers the prayers of the saints assumes a traditional posture by standing at the altar, as priests did in Jewish temple practice. The angel holds a censer, which was a device for holding coals and burning incense. Synagogue art includes short-handled incense shovels among the symbols of

³⁵ 4Q405 20–22 13; Dale C. Allison, "The Silence of the Angels: Reflections on the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice," *RevQ* 13 (1988): 189–97.

³⁶ *Let. Aris.* 95–96; *T. Adam* 1:12. See Peter Wick, "There Was Silence in Heaven (Revelation 8:1): An Annotation to Israel Knohl's 'Between Voice and Silence,'" *JBL* 117 (1998): 512–14. On other interpretations see Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downer's Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 2005), 211–13; cf. Konstantinos T. Zabras, "Silence and Proper Intention in Late Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Prayer: The Case for *m. Berakhot* 5,1," in *Das Gebet im Neuen Testament: Vierte Europäische orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sâmbâta de Sus 4.–8. August 2007* (ed. Hans Klein, Vasile Mihoc, and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr; WUNT 249; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 3–24.

³⁷ Homer, *Il.* 9.171; Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 6.32.1; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 28.3.11.

Jewish temple worship.³⁸ The incense altar was located in the forecourt of the temple at the entrance to the holy of holies. At the time of the incense offering, prayers could be made (Exod 30:7–8; Josephus, *B. J.* 5.216; Jdt 9:1; Luke 1:10). Censers used by the Greeks and Romans often looked like a chalice, consisting of a bowl on a stem with a base. They were carried in religious processions and were placed before images of the gods and the deified emperors.³⁹ Incense was also burned on altars. A coin from the early second century shows Piety, who personified duty to the gods, holding a box of incense in her left hand and dropping incense onto a flaming altar with her right hand (fig. 4). The motif was broadly familiar in antiquity.

As before, the vision shapes Christian identity by identifying the focus for prayer. The white robes, palm branches, and offering of incense at the altar draw symbolic associations from both Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions, but the defining element is that prayers are made to the God who brought salvation to people of many tribes and nations through the death of Jesus the Lamb. Community is formed as people adopt that same focus for their prayers. There is nothing to suggest that Christians typically wore white robes or held palm branches for worship or prayer,⁴⁰ and their gatherings did not involve altars in the usual sense. In another vision Revelation uses altar and temple imagery symbolically to identify the Christian community as the place where true worship takes place on earth (11:1–2).⁴¹ What gives the community its identity is directing its worship and prayer to the God who brings salvation through the blood of the Lamb.

³⁸ Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (13 vols.; New York: Pantheon, 1953–1968), 4:195–97.

³⁹ Pausanias, *Descr.* 7.21.12. On imperial usage see Price, *Rituals*, 109–10, Friesen, *Imperial*, 108, 112, 115.

⁴⁰ Some suggest that washing and white robes recall the rite of Christian baptism (Acts 22:16; Gal; 3:27). See Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 292–93; Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation* (CC; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 99. What makes a primary link to baptism unlikely is that the aorist tense may be used for washing here, but elsewhere washing one's soiled garment seems to be a repeated or continual action, which has more to do with repentance than with the baptismal rite (Rev 3:4–5, 18–19; 22:14). In 6:11 white robes are given to those who already have died for the faith, making it unlikely that it signifies baptism. Later, the bright garment of the Lamb's bride consists of her good deeds (19:8).

⁴¹ The use of temple imagery to depict the early Christian community was common (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:5; Ign. *Eph.* 9:1; *Magn.* 7:2). On the imagery in Revelation and its implications for identity see Stevenson, *Power*, 223–77.

Prayer and Christian Identity in the World (Revelation 6–19)

A major aspect of identity formation concerns the praying community's relationship to the wider social world. This issue is taken up through the prayer of the slain witnesses, whose souls are kept under the heavenly altar. The witnesses ask, "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you wait before you pass judgment (κρίνεις) and bring justice (ἐκδικεῖς) for our blood, which was shed by the inhabitants of the earth?" (6:10). Their petition plays an important literary role by raising issues of divine justice, which are developed in chapters that follow and culminate with the fall of Babylon, the city that shed the blood of the saints (17:6; 18:24). The author connects that event to the prayer of the witnesses by saying that God "judged (ἔκρινεν) the great whore, who ruined the earth with her immorality, and he brought justice (ἐκδίκησεν) for the blood of his servants, which was shed by her own hand" (19:2). Identity is formed not only by the prayer but by the entire process through which God responds.

The slain witnesses under the altar – like the heavenly creatures and elders – are a group with which the earthly community is to identify. Revelation has called Jesus "the faithful witness," who testified to the reign of God and was killed for it (1:5; 3:14). Those who follow his example include Antipas, the "faithful witness," and those under the altar who remained true to the word of God and faithfully bore witness, and were killed as a result (2:13; 6:9). Revelation does not equate "witness" (μαρτυρέω, μαρτυρία, μάρτυς) with dying, but recognizes that bearing witness to God, Jesus, and the world's sin can provoke the kind of opposition that will culminate in death. Because of their exemplary faithfulness, Revelation could assume that the community of readers would want to identify with them.⁴²

Their petition begins, "How long?" and the words take up a familiar theme of biblical prayer: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" (Ps 13:1–2; cf. 6:3; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5–10). By employing this language, Revelation locates the plea of the slain witnesses – and those who identify with them – within the tradition of Israel's prayer.⁴³

⁴² Jan Willem van Henten, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Revelation," in *Die Johannesapokalypse: Kontexte – Konzepte – Rezeption* (ed. Jörg Frey, James A. Kelhoffer, and Franz Tóth; WUNT 287; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 587–618; Bauckham, *Theology*, 84–94.

⁴³ Other apocalyptic writings also ask "how long" injustice will persist and when God's purposes will be accomplished (Dan 8:13; 12:6; 4 Ezra 4:33; 6:59; 2 Bar. 21:19; 81:3; Bauckham, "Prayer," 261).

The words of the petition define a set of relationships. First is the witnesses' relationship to God. They address God as their "Master" (δεσπότης), a term sometimes used for God.⁴⁴ They recognize that God has authority over them and that they are in a position of obedience – which was shown by their willingness to die for the sake of God's word. As Master, God has power they do not have, so they need God to act on their behalf. The way God responds will reveal what kind of master he is, and whether he cares for his servants. The witnesses add that God is "holy," including themselves among the others who worship God by calling him "holy" (4:8). They also call God "true," which means they continue to trust his word. Undergirding the petition is the conviction that God is just, so that he cannot abandon those who suffer unjustly.

Second is the witnesses' relationship to the world. Their plea contrasts them with the perpetrators of injustice. In Psalm 13, quoted above, the speaker referred to "my enemy," but the slain witnesses speak more broadly, identifying those who shed their blood as "the inhabitants of the earth" (6:10). They divide the world into two categories: the faithful who suffer and those who make them suffer, a category that seems to include everyone else. The expression "the inhabitants of the earth" (οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) was often used in apocalyptic sources for those who are sinful and subject to divine judgment.⁴⁵ Similarly, Revelation depicts the inhabitants of the earth as those who are influenced by evil, engage in false worship, and oppose God and his people.⁴⁶ The witnesses' prayer fosters a dualistic sense of identity in which the world consists of two groups: victims and perpetrators, us and them.

The prayer organizes relationships around the question of divine justice. The faithful have lost their lives unjustly, while the perpetrators have not been brought to account. So the witnesses ask how long God will refrain from taking action. The assumption is that if God is just and if he is true to his own character, then he must deal with the injustice. Although expressed as a question, the implied request is that God should take immediate action by passing judgment (κρίνεις) and seeing that justice is done (ἐκδικεῖς, 6:10). English translations often take the petition to mean that God is to "avenge" their deaths (ESV, NET, NIV, NRSV). In a strict sense, vengeance would mean slaughtering "the inhabitants of the earth" and repaying bloodshed with bloodshed, taking "life for life" (Exod 21:23). There are biblical passages that expect those who shed innocent blood to pay with own blood (Gen 9:5–6;

⁴⁴ BDAG δεσπότης 1b.

⁴⁵ *1 En.* 65:6, 10; 67:8; *2 Bar.* 54:1; 70:2; *4 Ezra* 3:34–35; 6:18. There are exceptions to this negative viewpoint, where those who live on earth are recipients of God's mercy (*1 En.* 60:5; *4 Ezra* 6:26).

⁴⁶ *Rev* 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8. See Bauckham, *Climax*, 239–41.

Num 35:33), and other sources ask that God make murderers die for shedding innocent blood.⁴⁷

Interpreters in the ancient church were not convinced that the witnesses' petition was simply vindictive. Tertullian construed the plea for justice as a way of saying "your kingdom come" (*Or.* 5). Writing in a context of persecution and schism, Cyprian appealed to this passage in order to show that Christians were not to seek revenge against their persecutors but were to wait for God's justice (*Pat.* 21). Augustine noted that the witnesses' cry for justice seemed to fall short of Jesus' command to love one's enemies, yet he concluded that their petition was not vindictive but a way of affirming that God is just (*Enarrat. Ps.* 79.14). The comments of the ancient interpreters reflect concerns about the way the prayer in Revelation 6 might set a positive or negative example for the church of their own time, but they also invite consideration of the way the prayer functions in its literary context and relates to the social setting of the earliest readers.

Revelation shapes the way readers are to construe the witnesses' prayer by disclosing God's response. Through visions that convey a divine perspective, the book will redefine the dualistic identity reflected in the petition. Those who affirm the plea for justice are to see themselves not only as victims but as witnesses to the world in which injustice has occurred. While assuring the readers that justice will be done, the visions work against the idea that justice can be reduced to retribution. The prayer will be answered in due time, but at present those who identify with the slain witnesses are to continue their work of bearing witness by confronting the world's false belief and calling its inhabitants back to the God who created all things.

The redefinition of relationships begins in the immediate literary context. The scenes that follow the witnesses' prayer disclose that God's justice has been delayed to allow time for people to repent.⁴⁸ The writer creates a sense that judgment is imminent, only to interrupt the action in order that people might be protected. There are ominous signs of doom as the sun grows dark and the moons turns to blood. The sky vanishes and the earth shakes, until people cry out in terror, asking "Who is able to stand" in the face of divine wrath? (6:17). But when it appears that the end has come, the angels interrupt by holding back the forces of destruction in order that people might be sealed (7:1–3). The outcome of this action is that John sees the answer to the terrified

⁴⁷ See Psalm 79, which asks "How long" in a context where the enemies have "poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, so that the Psalmist tells God, "Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you" and "Let the avenging blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes" (79:3, 5, 6, 10; Bauckham, "Prayer," 261). Also see the texts collected by Aune, *Revelation*, 2:407–10.

⁴⁸ On the pattern of interrupted judgment see Bauckham, *Theology*, 80–84; Peter S. Perry, *The Rhetoric of Digressions: Revelation 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13 and Ancient Communication* (WUNT 2/268; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 209–41.

question of the world: He sees a countless multitude from every nation, “standing” with palm branches before God and the Lamb (7:9). The impression is that judgment has been delayed in order that many might be saved.

When the prayers of the saints are offered up again by the angel at the heavenly altar, the same pattern persists. It initially seems that the prayers for help are about to be answered with divine wrath. After the angel has offered up the prayers at the altar – the scene discussed above – he takes coals from the altar and hurls them down to the earth, signaling the devastating trumpet plagues (8:3–5). But the plague scenes show that if God simply responds to prayer with retribution, or if he equates justice with wrath, then nothing changes. The patterns of injustice persist. Fire could fall from the sky and the sea could turn into blood, demonic creatures could torment the ungodly, and a third of humanity could be slaughtered – but people would not repent. Nothing would change. People would continue practicing idolatry and murder, which is not what God wants (9:20–21). So at that point the movement toward final judgment is interrupted once more, and John is commissioned to prophesy again (10:1–11).

The vision that follows defines the identity of the Christian community in terms of witness during this delay before the end. The two figures John describes are “witnesses” (μάρτυρες), who symbolize the Christian community as a whole (11:3–14).⁴⁹ They wear sackcloth when confronting the world with the need for repentance (11:3). Symbolizing the community in this role modifies the dualistic contrast between victims and perpetrators, which was reflected in the petition of the witnesses under the altar (6:9–11). The praying community that seeks justice *against* the inhabitants of the earth is also called to bear witness *to* the peoples of the earth. Their identity as witnesses involves ongoing engagement with the unbelieving world, because God’s justice makes room for repentance.⁵⁰

God’s response continues through visions that assure readers that injustice will not continue indefinitely. A plague from heaven turns water into blood, so that those who shed the blood of the saints and prophets are given blood to drink (16:4–6). There is a degree of symmetry in justice, since those who shed blood must drink blood, and yet the plague stops short of absolute retribution, since it leaves people alive so that they can repent, even if they refuse to do so (16:9, 11). A voice from the altar, which is presumably the voice of the praying witnesses, agrees that at this point God’s actions are true and just (16:7). Prayers are finally answered when Babylon, the city that is drunk with

⁴⁹ Some interpreters have identified the two prophets as individuals, like Moses and Elijah or Enoch, but most now recognize that they are collective symbols for the people of God. See the surveys of research in Koester, *Revelation*, 439–40, 496–98.

⁵⁰ Bauckham, *Climax*, 273–83 and “Prayer,” 263–66.

the blood of the saints and witnesses, is finally destroyed by its own ally the beast (17:6, 16). God's justice is done when the city that perpetrated violence becomes the victim of its own violent tendencies.

Initially, the witnesses' prayer defined a world consisting of two groups: the witnesses and the inhabitants of the earth, the victims and the perpetrators, us and them. The divine response calls for a more complex perspective. Readers who identify with the prayer for justice are also to identify with the vocation of those who pray it: they are witnesses to the world. God is just and will bring an end to injustice, but he has delayed final judgment in order that his people might live out their identity as witnesses, who call the world to repent. The goal of God's justice is not to slaughter "the inhabitants of the earth" but to rid the earth of the powers that ruin it (11:18). Judgment comes upon Babylon not only for the blood of the witnesses but for "all who have been slaughtered on the earth" (18:24). God's response to the cry "How long?" ultimately involves justice for all the victims of Babylon's oppression. Readers are to see their identity as witnesses in that light.⁵¹

Praying "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20)

Revelation concludes with the Christian community's most distinctive prayer, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (22:20). This petition fosters bonds within the community, while distinguishing it from other groups. Others in the ancient world prayed to God or the gods, but only the followers of Jesus, who believed he was alive, could address a petition to him, asking him to come. Earlier in the book, the heavenly creatures and elders brought the prayers of the earthly community to Jesus the Lamb (5:8), but in the closing section an unnamed voice calls upon Jesus to come, encouraging readers to give their assent to that prayer.⁵²

The petition was probably familiar to the readers. The writer places it in the epistolary closing of his book, followed by the parting wish that "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all" (22:21). Paul did the same in the conclusion of 1 Corinthians, where he included the Aramaic form *maranatha*, "Our Lord, come," along with the final word of grace (1 Cor 16:22–23).⁵³

⁵¹ Bauckham, "Prayer," 263.

⁵² Ostmeier would not consider "Come, Lord Jesus" to be a prayer (*Kommunikation*, 68), but since it involves direct address to the risen Christ, it is treated as a prayer in this context.

⁵³ On letter closings shaping the perspective of the readers see Anders Eriksson, *Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians* (ConBNT 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998), 280–95. On this petition as evidence of early Christian prayer to Jesus see Larry Hurtado, "The Place of Jesus in Earliest Christian Prayer" in this volume.

Using a familiar petition was a way for both writers to affirm that they and their readers belonged to the same community. Concluding with a prayer that all could say together also encouraged readers to receive the writer's message favorably, since they shared a common faith.

The literary context of this closing petition probably reflects the social setting of early Christian gatherings in which prophets spoke. There are no depictions of heavenly worshipers here. Instead, there is a blending of divine and human voices. John can refer to himself in the first person as "I, John" the one recounting the visions (22:8). The risen Jesus also speaks in the first person as "I, Jesus" (22:16), and he repeatedly announces, "See, I am coming soon" (22:7, 12, 20). The blending of the divine and human voices would probably have been familiar in worship gatherings where prophetic words were shared.⁵⁴

The responses made to Jesus' announcement characterize the praying community to which the readers belong. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" (22:17a). The Spirit is God's Spirit, which speaks through early Christian prophets (22:6). At points the Spirit conveys words *from* the risen Christ to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, etc.), but here the Spirit speaks *to* Christ, calling on him to "Come," a prayer the church is invited to share. The bride is New Jerusalem, whose voice speaks from the future (21:2, 9–10). The readers belong to the community of those betrothed to the Lamb through faith (19:7–9), and as the voice of the bride calls from the future, it renews the readers' desire to meet Christ the bridegroom at his coming. Those who now identify with the bride are to commit themselves to her way of life, which consists of fidelity to Christ and deeds of justice (τὰ δικαιώματα, 19:8). By implication that identity means repudiating the ways of the whore, which are opposed to God and expressed in injustice (τὰ ἀδικήματα, 18:5). An unnamed voice

⁵⁴ M. Eugene Boring, "The Voice of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John," *NovT* 34 (1992): 334–59; Giancarlo Biguzzi, "The Chaos of Rev 22,6–21 and Prophecy in Asia," *Bib* 83 (2002): 193–210. Some suggest that "Come, Lord Jesus" presupposes a Eucharistic context, like *maranatha* in *Did.* 10:6. Some see a similar connection in 1 Corinthians, where the meal anticipates Christ's future coming (1 Cor 11:25; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* [4 vols.; EKK 7; Zürich: Benzinger and Neyukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991–2001], 4:472–73). Others think the concluding *maranatha* simply presses for clarity of commitment (Eriksson, *Traditions*, 114–19; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans and Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000], 1348–52). Some discern a Eucharistic context in Revelation. See Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (NTL; Westminster John Knox, 2009) 416; Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1997) 494–97. Yet the formula was not limited to Eucharistic contexts (Martin Hengel, "Abba, Maranatha, Hosanna und die Anfänge der Christologie," in *Studien zur Christologie* vol. 4 [ed. Claus-Jürgen Thornton; WUNT 201; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 496–534, esp. 513–14). The absence of clear allusions to the Lord's Supper in Revelation means that a Eucharistic setting cannot be assumed.

invites the readers themselves to join in the prayer, saying, “And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’” (22:17b). The invitation prepares them to echo the final petition “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (22:20).

Addressing the final prayer to Jesus reinforces the sense that the worshiping community rightly prays to Jesus as to God. The literary context gives the risen Jesus the titles of God, calling him the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (22:13; cf. 1:8; 21:6). Where it was traditionally said that God would repay people according to their works (Isa 40:10; Pss 28:4; 62:12; Prov 24:12; Rom 2:6; 2 Tim 4:14), here the risen Jesus is expected to do so (Rev 22:12). Addressing Jesus in prayer both reflects and reinforces the idea that he functions as God for the community. It is one thing to speak *about* Jesus by using divine titles, but people take another step when they speak *to* Jesus as to God. As people do so together, such a prayer fosters a sense of intimate connection to Jesus and to the others who can speak to him in this way.

The prayer is also set within a series of sharp contrasts that replicate the contrast between the bride and the whore, which is a major literary feature of Revelation.⁵⁵ There are those who persist in doing what is unjust and unclean—traits of Babylon the whore (22:11; cf. 17:4; 18:5)—and there are those who do what is just and holy—like New Jerusalem the bride (22:11; cf. 19:7–8; 21:10). There are those who now wash their robes and have the right to enter New Jerusalem, where they will eat from the tree of life; and there are those outside, who are dogs, sorcerers, immoral persons, murderers, idolaters, and practitioners of falsehood (22:14–15). There are the blessed, who keep the words of the prophecy, and there are those who falsify its message, so that they are threatened with plagues and the loss of their share in the tree of life (22:7, 18–19).

Forming an identity means that people affirm who they are and who they are not. Praying “Come, Lord Jesus” in the context of these contrasts strengthens a sense of identification with those who expect Jesus’ coming to be beneficial and can anticipate a place in New Jerusalem, and it sets them apart from those allied with Babylon, who will face judgment when Christ appears. To pray in this way bolsters a sense of commitment to a way of life that is acceptable to the risen Jesus, while strengthening the person’s resolve to reject the types of behavior that Christ will condemn. The context reinforces the connection between prayer and the ethical dimensions that relate to it.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1999); Bauckham, *Theology*, 131–32.

⁵⁶ On the ethical aspect see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1991), 117–39; David A. deSilva, *Seeing*

This section of Revelation could give the impression that the world really can be neatly divided into “us and them.” One could simply equate the righteous with those who call on Jesus in prayer and the wicked with the rest of society. But two qualifications must be made: First, the passage envisions a social setting that is dynamic rather than static. The community prays in a context where both evil and righteousness are at work, pulling people in different directions. Because of the contending forces, the bond with Jesus must be continually reaffirmed through witness, worship, and prayer, even as resistance against evil must be reinforced.

Second, Revelation recognizes that all people, including those within the Christian community, are subject to the scrutiny of the risen Christ. There are passages that envision the whole world being judged at Christ’s coming (14:14–20; 19:11–21), but there are also passages in which those *inside* the community are warned that Christ will “come” to take action against them (2:5, 16; 3:3). The writer speaks of “those who wash their robes” in the present tense (οἱ πλύνοντες, 22:14), so that the identity of the community that prays to Jesus is not characterized by perpetual sinlessness but by its ongoing willingness to repent.

Conclusion

Readers addressed by Revelation faced external and internal conflicts that involved questions about what it meant to be identified as followers of Jesus. Scenes involving prayer foster a sense of cohesion by depicting a community consisting of those who have been delivered by the Lamb to serve God. The image of the slaughtered and living Lamb encompasses the group’s central narrative of redemption, and because of what Jesus the Lamb has done, his followers can direct their prayers to him. Doing so gives them a unique center for their common life, while distinguishing them from other groups, who would not address prayer to Jesus the Lamb.

The writer assumes that his community includes people from various ethnic backgrounds, whose central bond comes from a shared faith. He helps to integrate people into the group by drawing on gestures of prayer and worship that had precedents in Jewish temple tradition and Greco-Roman practice. There are objects like shallow bowls, incense, kitharas, palm branches, and an altar. Songs are sung and then there is reverent silence for prayer. Yet as the author draws on these images, he refocuses them on God and the Lamb, who give this multiethnic community its identity. The older

patterns are transformed in order to center the readers' practice of prayer on Jesus the Lamb and the God whose authority is exercised through him.

Prayer scenes include critical elements that differentiate the community from those who had a different focus for their devotion. When the heavenly elders throw their wreaths before God's throne, the implication is that God can rightly be honored in that way, because he created all things and has a rightful claim to dominion, but honoring Greco-Roman deities and rulers in that way would be an affront to God and incompatible with one's identity as a person belonging to God.

Yet the writer also assumes that there is a dynamic quality to setting the community apart from others. The prayer of the witnesses under the altar expresses a dualistic worldview in which there are two groups: the victims who call for justice and the perpetrators who are to be judged. But God's response to the prayer nuances this worldview by reminding readers that those who pray are witnesses (μάρτυροι). An integral part of their identity is bearing witness to the reign of God and the Lamb, and to the world's sin and need for repentance, even as they look for God's just purposes to be accomplished. Moreover, the final petition, "Come, Lord Jesus," appears in a context that links the community's identity and boundaries to certain patterns of life. Readers cannot only pray that God's justice will be done but are to identify themselves with the patterns of justice and purity that characterize New Jerusalem, and to repudiate the patterns of injustice and defilement that characterize Babylon. Revelation recognizes that the process is ongoing, and that the followers of the Lamb also need to repent or "wash their robes" as they live out their identities as followers of the Lamb. As they add "Amen" to the Spirit and the bride, who call on Christ to come, they make that prayer their own, and thereby recommit themselves to lives that are in keeping with the redemptive work of the one to whom their prayer is addressed.

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“The First Prayer”: *Pater Noster* in the Early Church

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Matthew and Luke include notices in their Gospels of Jesus instructing his disciples on how to pray.¹ Both versions of the Lord’s Prayer speak of it as a model for prayers, and as a characteristic for Jesus’ disciples. It appears as a “gruppenspezifisches Gebet,”² marking the disciples off from other groups. Three ante-Nicene treatises on the Lord’s Prayer are preserved, those of Tertullian, Cyprian and Origen; the first two are in Latin and the latter in Greek. The catechetical distinctiveness of the Latin treatises is obvious. Origen’s treatise is a scholarly work and an extensive commentary on prayer in general, and the Lord’s Prayer in particular. In depth, complexity and technical discussion on terminology, Origen stands out from the other two.³ This paper investigates the way the two Latin treatises introduce and perceive of the Lord’s Prayer, although the primary purpose is not the many exegetical *crucis* involved, but how this Prayer was looked upon in principle. What role was assigned to the Lord’s Prayer? Did it receive the paradigmatic role assumed in both New Testament versions? These questions imply that the focus will be on the implications of addressing God “Our Father.” The setting of the present project on the development of Christian identity implies that chronology matters. Hence, this article also traces the roots of our findings in sources antedating the two Latin treatises.

¹ See Geir Otto Holmås’ contribution in the present volume.

² Karl-Heinrich. Ostmeier, “Das Vaterunser: Gründe für seine Durchsetzung als ‘Urgebet’ der Christenheit,” *NTS* 50 (2004): 324–26.

³ This is emphasised by Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Tertullian, Cyprian and Origen on the Lord’s Prayer. Translated and Introduced with Brief Annotations* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 101–7.

1. Preliminary Observations

According to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a compilation of liturgical traditions from around 375 C.E., the newly baptised (ὁ βαπτιζόμενος) has altered his/her previous status and lifestyle to embrace a new (*Const. ap.* 3.18.1).⁴ The baptised is called κληρονόμος Πατρός and συγκληρονόμος τοῦ Υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, echoing Rom 8:17 of being “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”⁵ Baptism establishes a relationship between the Father, Son and children. Accordingly, the baptised is also called θεοφιλής, “beloved of God,” which brings to mind the heavenly voice at Jesus’ baptism: ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός;⁶ in fact, Christ is called this in *Const. ap.* 3.17.4. The immediate context includes the newly baptised, who is called υἱός τοῦ θεοῦ. The heavenly voice is thus connecting Jesus’ baptism and that of ὁ βαπτιζόμενος. As God’s son, the newly baptised prays like a son to his father (προσευχόμενος ὡς υἱός πατρί), and the Lord’s Prayer is then cited in full (*Const. ap.* 3.18.2). As a communal prayer it is offered by the fellowship of believers, distinguished from the same Prayer that is also to be prayed thrice a day in private (*Const. ap.* 7.24.1–2). The Lord’s Prayer is therefore “the first prayer” of the baptised, but also indeed the daily prayer for all believers.

According to *Const. ap.* 7.45.1–2, baptism is followed (μετὰ τοῦτο) by the baptised praying while standing upright and eastward. Standing while praying is the position of resurrection, and facing towards the rising sun is thus an embodiment of this faith.⁷ The Lord’s Prayer is not quoted here, but baptism confers the right to address God as Father. Clearly, the Lord’s Prayer is meant since it says that the baptised joins the prayer “taught us by the Lord” (7.45.1).

The pattern emerging is as follows: The Lord’s Prayer is the first prayer of the baptised, uttered more or less immediately after the bath, and understood in an analogy with children addressing their father. Accordingly, the Lord’s

⁴ Greek text in *Les Constitutions Apostolique tome i-iii* (edited, translated, introduced with notes by Marcel Metzger; SC 320, 329, 336; Paris: Cerf, 1985–1987).

⁵ NRSV.

⁶ Hans Kvalbein, “The Baptism of Jesus as a Model for Christian Baptism: Can the Idea be Traced Back to the New Testament Times?” *StTh* 50 (1996): 67–83 has argued that becoming God’s “beloved son” in baptism is due to the fact that the origin of baptism was Jesus’ baptism in Jordan with the heavenly voice accompanying this event; similarly Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press 2007), 16–17, 57–59.

⁷ This is worked out in detail by Franz J. Dölger, *Sol Salutis: Gebet und Gesang in christlichen Altertum mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Ostung in Gebet und Liturgie* (Münster: Aschendorff 1972); see also Reidar Hvalvik, “Praying with Outstretched Hands” in the present volume.

Prayer is an in-house prayer. The baptised imitate Christ’s relationship to his Father, expressed in the heavenly voice at his baptism. Hence, the Lord’s Prayer carries the notion of the new identity conferred in baptism, made visible in the bodily position and its direction during prayer. What is well established in the *Apostolic Constitutions* is in the making in earlier sources. In spite of pluriformity, the Lord’s Prayer appears quite early as an in-house prayer, a privilege derived from “childhood” and “Fatherhood,” which is significant enough to be noted in a discussion on the emerging Christian identity.

2. Tertullian, *De Oratione*

In this first Latin treatise, *On Prayer* (c. 200 C.E.), Tertullian works out both structure and content in the Lord’s Prayer, which is the foundation of all Christian prayers. Our concern in this paper lies precisely with this aspect of his *De oratione*. Tertullian also addresses practical issues on how to pray, such as washing hands, bodily gestures while praying, when to pray and the veiling of women at prayer. Tertullian’s comments on washing the hands are instructive as to the question of identity. While the Jews wash their hands on a continuous basis, though remaining unclean (Isa 1:15–16), and therefore unable to raise them to the Lord; “we,” says Tertullian “not only raise them, but even spread them, thus imitating Christ crucified” (*Orat.* 14).⁸ Thus, prayer is accompanied by a bodily performance manifesting the imitation of Christ (*Dominica passione modula*). Tertullian’s perception of the Lord’s Prayer is to be sought primarily in the introduction and epilogue of this writing, as well as in the meaning attributed to the fact that Christians are addressing God as *Pater*.

2.1. Prologue: *A New Prayer* (*Orat.* 1)

De oratione states the core of Tertullian’s argument in the opening section: “Our Lord marked out for his new disciples of the new covenant a new form of prayer” (*Dominus noster, novis discipulis novi testamenti novam orationis formam determinavit*),⁹ which is a paraphrase of Jesus’ words on “new wine” (Mark 2:21–22 parr.). The adjective *novus* abounds, mentioned seven times altogether in 1.1. With arguments bringing to mind Melito of Sardis’ *Paschal Homily*,¹⁰ Tertullian says that the past (*retro*) is either altered (*demutatum est*),

⁸ The translations of the treatises on prayer by Tertullian, Cyprian and Origen are taken from Stewart-Sykes.

⁹ Latin text in Dietrich Schleyer, ed., Tertullian, *De Baptismo. De Oratione* (Fontes Christiani 76; Turnout: Brepols, 2006).

¹⁰ See *Pasch.* 34–45 in particular.

such as circumcision, added (*suppletum*), such as with the rest of the law (*reliqua lex*), fulfilled (*impletum*), such as with the prophecies, or brought to perfection (*perfectum*), such as with faith itself. The contrasting *carnalia vs. spiritalia* and *retro vs. nova* capture the implications of the Gospel brought vis-à-vis the past. From this it follows (*igitur*) that Christ introduced a new prayer, consisting of Spirit, Word and Wisdom (*Orat.* 1.1–2); in brief, a prayer consistent with the present age of salvation, an epitome of the Gospel. This prayer, which is taught by the Lord Himself (1.4), encapsulated the content of the Gospel (*breviarium totius Evangelii comprehendatur*) (1.6). The Lord's Prayer is embedded in a contrast pattern significant to the question of identity, namely past *vs.* the present brought about by Christ. A marked contrast to the Jews will eventually develop from this reasoning.

This perspective on the Lord's Prayer finds affirmation in John the Baptist (*Orat.* 1.3), who also taught his disciples how to pray (Luke 11:1). John paved the way for Christ, and his prayer likewise pointed to the true and abiding prayer, which is the reason why the prayers he taught his disciples have not been preserved. While John is *de terra* (John 3:31–32), Jesus is *de caelis*. This contrast between below and above, or earthly and heavenly, also applies to their respective prayers. The heavenly nature of the Lord's Prayer follows from the fact that it summarizes the entire Gospel, being short on words, though rich in thought and substance (*Orat.* 1.6). The heavenly wisdom now abides even *sub tectis* in private houses (Matt 6:5–6), (*Orat.* 1.4). Therefore, the communal prayer is also a private prayer.

2.2. Epilogue (*Orat.* 28–29)

De oratione closes with the same “salvation-historical” perspective. In accordance with Jesus' dictum in John 4:23, it says: “We are true worshippers.” This is seen against the background of the Old Testament criticism of sacrifices which God has not demanded (Isa 1:11–12). What God demands, is taught by *evangelium*; i.e. the Prayer summing up the content of the Gospel. Clearly, the Lord's Prayer is of significance to Tertullian since it is Jesus' own instruction, and is a spiritual sacrifice, the prayer of the true prayers (*nos sumus veri adoratores*) (*Orat.* 28.1–3). Hence, it is also more powerful than prayers offered in Old Testament times (*Orat.* 29.1). Even at that time (*vetus*), prayer liberated from fire, dangerous animals and hunger, but the Christian prayer is more powerful (*quanto amplius operator oration christiana*). The Old Testament examples mentioned bring to mind Daniel as a primary figure of prayer in the Old Testament.¹¹ Even the rescue of Israel from the plagues in Egypt (Exod 7:1–11:10), the crossing of the sea (Exod 14) and the stopping of the rain (Deut 11:13–17) all came about thanks to prayer. Tertullian now

¹¹ Pointed out by Schleyer, ed., Tertullian, *De Baptismo. De Oratione*, 275.

argues *a minore ad maius*: How much more is accomplished through Christian prayer! (29.2). The dawning of a new situation is marked by *nunc*, “now,” and the true prayer of justice (*vero oratio iustitiae*)¹² turns away all of God’s anger. Tertullian then lists all the benefits prayer confers upon the believers (29.1–2), as prayer is a defence wall for the faith (*murus est fidei*); it provides the necessary armament and defence against the Enemy (29.3). Tertullian therefore urges his readers to be armed with the weapon of constant prayer (*orantes*), which is “the standard of our Emperor” (*signum nostri imperatoris*) (*Orat.* 29.3). Like soldiers, those baptised carry the sign of their *imperator*.¹³ The merging of military and baptismal theology is also worth noticing. *Signum* corresponds to seal (σφραγίς) as a description of the baptismal act. When Tertullian mentions prayer and the seal in tandem here, it implies that the Lord’s Prayer marked them off from outsiders; it was a sign of reserved property. Hence, this Prayer “abbreviated” what baptism conferred upon the believer, thereby encapsulating the new status conferred in baptism.

In his closing of this writing, Tertullian says that the entirety of creation prays. Domestic as well as wild animals pray, and so do birds. The voice of all creatures prefigures the real and proper prayer. He argues that animals, and in particular flying birds, form a cross with their wings, thus bringing to mind the spreading of hands while praying (see above). Christians therefore are not alone in praying. Tertullian includes this in the many things prefiguring the Lord’s Prayer, the true fulfilment of all prayers, be it in the Old Testament or in nature. Tertullian, who elsewhere urges contrasts between faith and the world, finds the cross witnessed to in various cruciformed appearances in nature.

A rhetorical question then closes his text. Why is it necessary to continue pointing out *officium orationis*, when even the animals do so? The answer is: *Etiam ipse Dominus oravit* (“The Lord Himself prayed”), to which Tertullian adds a final doxology in the Lord’s Prayer (“To him be honour and power in all eternity”). The epilogue thus ends with Jesus’ own practice as a model for Christian prayers. Implied is that when praying, the Lord addressed His Father in a way similar to how believers address their heavenly Father.

¹² Here, *iustitia* takes on the meaning of a new covenant; thus Schleyer, ed., Tertullian, *De Baptismo. De Oratione*, 275; similarly Michael J. Brown, *The Lord’s Prayer through North African Eyes: A Window into Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 236.

¹³ See Karl Olav Sandnes, “Seal and Baptism in Early Christianity,” in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (3 vols.; ed. David Hellholm et al.; BZNW 176; Berlin: de Gruyter 2011), 2:1444–46; Schleyer, ed., Tertullian, *De Baptismo. De Oratione*, 278–79.

2.3. Addressing God as “Father”: Command and Privilege

We turn to Tertullian’s exegesis of the address *Pater qui in caelis es* (*Orat.* 2.1–3.1). Addressing God in that way is a reward of faith (*meritum fidei*). Calling God *Pater* is faith in action, says Tertullian, and substantiates this with reference to John 1:12. This privilege brings out what it means to be sons or children of God (*filius Dei*). Praying fulfils the precept (*praecepit*) of the Lord, to call no earthly “father” (Matt 23:9). The right to address God in this way has been commanded by the Lord Himself: “Therefore, when we pray in this way, we are being obedient to that direction” (*Itaque sic adorantes etiam praeceptum obimus*) (2.2). Those knowing (*agnoscerunt*) God as Father are called *felices*, and they are contrasted with those mentioned in Isa 1:2: “I have begotten sons and they have not acknowledged me” (*filius genui et illi me non agnoverunt*) (2.3). The contrast intended here between *agnoscerunt* and *non agnoverunt* Tertullian applies to both Christians and Jews.

Calling God “Father” means to call upon both His *pietas* and *potestas*; i.e. His love¹⁴ and power. A Christological perspective is introduced in *Orat.* 2.5–6. With reference to John 10:30 (“I and the Father are one”), he says that this includes calling upon his *Filius*. This is somewhat surprising since a more natural logic is that the Christians (*filius*) address God as *Pater*, like Christ (*Filius*) also did. At this point, Tertullian’s ideas become somewhat blurred because his theology here is informed by two ideas, the idea of a natural family with father, children and mother, and Jesus as a model for Christian prayer. Working with these two ideas simultaneously makes Tertullian vacillate here. In accordance with the first idea, he says that *mater ecclesia* is included, but he does not want to say that the church is called upon in the same way as the Father and Son. This brings him to speak of honouring God together with his people in *Orat.* 3.7 (*Deum cum suis honoramus*); the believer is calling God *Pater* together with Christ and the church. While Christ, according to *Orat.* 2.5, was called upon, he is now himself honouring his heavenly Father. On the one hand, he argues from the analogy of families. In short, Jesus’ instruction on prayer demonstrates what children expect from their father (*ostendit quid a patre filii expectent*) (*Orat.* 6.3), which is a lesson drawn from Jesus’ instruction on prayer closely associated with the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 7:9; Luke 11:11). There, Jesus proceeds from what children naturally expect from their parents. On the other hand, there is also an argument taken from the baptism of Jesus; like *filius*, so also with *filli*. These

¹⁴ As for *pietas*, *Oxford Latin Dictionary (OLD)* describes this as “an attitude of dutiful respect towards those to whom one is bound by ties of religion, consanguinity, etc.” It is often used to describe parents’ devotedness to their offspring; see *OLD* s.v. 3.a. As demonstrated by Brown, *Lord’s Prayer*, 17, 56, 234, Tertullian depicts the relationship between God as Father and His devotees in an analogy with traditional Roman mores.

two ideas work well independently, but they somehow blur the picture when brought together.

Knowing God’s true name as *Pater* marks something new, says Tertullian in *Orat.* 3.1. Even when he asked God about His name, Moses learnt another name (*aliud nomen*). God was not yet known by his true name. This was revealed to *us* in the Son (*nobis revelatum est in Filio*), a claim supported with Johannine references, of which John 17:6 is most important: “I have made your name known . . .” This summarizes the entire ministry of Jesus, his teaching about God as the true Father, hence forming the background for Tertullian’s idea that the Lord’s Prayer represents an epitome of the Gospel. This is in accordance with Tertullian’s logic throughout this literature, namely the family-framing of his thoughts on the Lord’s Prayer.¹⁵ Seen against a biblical background, there is very much in knowing the true name: “I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isa 43:1, cf. 49:1; 62:2). Knowing the name marks a close relationship, and marks Israel off from the nations. The name serves a similar purpose in the Book of Revelation, in which names mark the contrast between the believers and the followers of the Beast and Babylon. It is equivalent to the seal that marks ownership and protection.¹⁶

The relationship between baptism and prayer comes into play in *Orat.* 13.1–3, as Tertullian has observed that some Christians take ritual baths before addressing God in prayer, a practice amounting to pagan superstition. Christians must not act as did Pilate; he washed his hands before handing Christ over; “we” on the contrary are praying to him, says Tertullian. Christians are washed once (*semel*), and there is no need for further rituals to access God. Baptism gives the full right to address God, thus prayer becomes an identity marker. Furthermore, worth noticing is that *De oratione* is addressed primarily to catechumens preparing themselves for the bath, which gives them this right.¹⁷ In this way, *De oratione* paves the way for some considerations on *De baptismo*. Our findings find substantiation in the first and elaboration in the latter. The closing of *De baptismo* now comes into focus because it addresses what occurred immediately after the baptismal bath.

¹⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to John* (BNTC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005), 432–34 suggests that the Lord’s Prayer is among the building-blocks in the Johannine style encapsulated in John 17.

¹⁶ Rev 2:17; 3:12; 13:17; 14:1; 17:5; 19:12,16; 22:14; see also Sandnes, “Seal,” 1441.

¹⁷ *Benedicti* (*Orat.* 1.4) refers to catechumens; see Schleyer, ed., Tertullian, *De Baptismo. De Oratione*, 11.

3. Tertullian: The Closing of *De Baptismo* (21.5)

This writing, composed between 200 and 206 C.E., is probably a collection of sermons given to baptismal candidates preparing for the bath.¹⁸ Tertullian addresses his catechumens¹⁹ as *benedicti* for whom the “grace of God” has been awaiting. Tertullian conceives of baptism in terms of God’s grace awaiting the catechumens rather than the other way around, thereby emphasizing the theocentric perspective.²⁰ Tertullian tells his catechumens that when they ascend from the most holy bath of new birth (*de illo sanctissimo lavacro novi natalis*)²¹ they will for the first time spread their hands in the house of their mother (= the church), and they will do this together with their brethren (*primas manus apud matrem cum fratribus aperitis*). Baptism is an act of initiation, of being enrolled into a new fellowship, which becomes visible in the role and function attributed to prayer. Certainly, this is not the first time the catechumens address God in prayer since prayers are important in the preparation for the baptismal act throughout this literature: “Those who are at the point of entering upon baptism, ought to pray, with frequent prayers, fastings, bendings of the knee, and all-night vigils” (*Bapt.* 20.1).²² This is motivated with a reference to the Lord saying: “Stay awake and pray” (Matt 26:41), as the catechumens imitate Jesus who prayed and fasted (*Bapt.* 20.3–4). It might be objected to here (*dicet aliquis*), says Tertullian, that then one should fast *after* baptism since this would be in accordance with Jesus in the desert (Matt 4 par.). To Tertullian, this is not possible because baptism is an occasion of joy and happiness (Mark 2:18 par.). From this it follows that *Bapt.* 21.5 is about the altered status conferred upon those baptised, which becomes apparent in prayer.

What can be gleaned from this text about the role of prayer in the baptismal act? In the first place, prayer takes place within Christian fellowship. The catechumens have entered the fellowship of those who pray, simply

¹⁸ Øyvind Norderval, “Simplicity and Power: Tertullian’s *De Baptismo*” in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and early Christianity* (3 vols.; ed. David Hellholm et al.; BZNW 176; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 2:947–72.

¹⁹ With Schleyer (Tertullian, *De Baptismo. De Oratione*, 11–12, 215) I take *benedicti* to refer to catechumens. Chap. 1.1 speaks of someone instructing (*instruens*) and some who are taught or formed (*formantur*). Chap. 20.1 speaks of those who are about to receive baptism (*ingressuros baptismum*). Tertullian himself was probably their instructor in the faith. As they are now approaching the end of these classes, he addresses them directly.

²⁰ Schleyer, ed., Tertullian, *De Baptismo. De Oratione*, 91–92.

²¹ Tit 3:5 clearly forms the biblical background here.

²² The translation is a slightly altered version of Tertullian’s *Homily on Baptism* (ed. E. Evans), available at www.tertullian.org.

put: *cum fratribus*. Praying is not a private matter; the Lord’s Prayer is a communal prayer.²³ The idea of the fellowship as lending power to their prayers may be inspired by Matt 18:19–20 about common prayer.²⁴ With regard to identity, this is a crucial observation, as baptism implies joining the family of those addressing God as Father.

Secondly, Tertullian urges his catechumens to ask for special grants of grace and distributions of gifts in their first prayer, echoing 1 Cor 14:4–12. The prayers of the newly baptised access the gifts of God in a special way. Thirdly, the post-baptismal prayer has God’s promises: *Petite et accipietis*, says Tertullian, quoting from Matt 7:7 and Luke 11:9 on Jesus’ instruction on prayer. In quoting from the immediate context of these passages, Tertullian alters the promise indicated in the future sense of the Greek biblical text into past tense: “You have asked, and have received; you have knocked, and it has been opened to you.” Altering the tense in this way implies that Tertullian distinguishes between two kinds of prayers. The pre-baptismal prayers prepare for the reception of God’s gifts and protect from temptations.²⁵ Fundamentally, this prayer has been accepted in baptism itself; they have now entered the open door, thus adding dimensions and power to their prayers. The acceptance of their preparatory prayer affirms that their prayer as baptised will also be accepted. Fourthly, this affirmation is now what Tertullian trusts when at the very end of his address to his catechumens he asks them to also make remembrance of him when they pray in church for the first time (*primas*): “This only I ask, that as you pray, you also (*etiam*) have in mind Tertullian, a sinner.”²⁶ The prayers of his former catechumens have gained a power unprecedented before the baptismal act. As a result, it is difficult to know whether this applies to the content of the prayer or its moment; most likely, it is the moment. Nonetheless, this particular prayer has a power to move God to respond in ways according to the prayer. Consequently, the power assigned to this prayer approaches magic. *Etiam* suggests that Tertullian includes himself among the prayer concerns brought to the mind of his baptismal candidates, as his point concerning baptism and the Lord’s Prayer may well be summarized in the words of Paul the Apostle:

²³ Willy Rordorf, “The Lord’s Prayer in the Light of its Liturgical use in the Early Church,” *Studia Liturgica* 14 (1980–1981): 1–19 points out that the plural (“our Father”) indicates that this prayer of the Church has its essential *Sitz im Leben* in the worship of baptised Christians in a local congregation (pp. 1–2). This is not to deny that this prayer was also used privately.

²⁴ Rordorf, “The Lord’s Prayer,” 5.

²⁵ This is in accordance with *Praescr.* 10.1–5, where this biblical passage is being addressed. The seeking and finding has their goal in faith: “You have succeeded in finding when you have believed.”

²⁶ Origen has a similar ending of his treatise, thus making this appear somewhat stereotypical.

“through whom (i.e. Jesus Christ) we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand” (Rom 5:2). Baptism gives an unprecedented access to God through prayer, which becomes the sign of the new status of those baptised.

Lastly, the post-baptismal prayer implied here is the Lord’s Prayer, albeit not exclusively.²⁷ Tertullian says that their first prayer is directed to *pater* and *dominus*, with the dominical sayings alluded to here being closely associated with the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, particularly in the Lukan version. A further argument is the fact that Tertullian mentions that the post-baptismal prayer takes place in *mater ecclesia*, together with *fratres*. The Lord’s Prayer includes analogical thinking that proceeds from family relationships.

Although not spelled out in *De baptismo*, it is worth considering that Tertullian considers the baptism of Jesus in Jordan as a paradigm for Christian baptism.²⁸ This is proverbially put in 1.3: “But we, being little fishes, as Jesus Christ is our great Fish, begin our life in the water, and only while we abide in the water are we safe and sound,” which includes a paradigmatic relationship between the two. Accordingly, the baptisands are likewise to become God’s beloved children in their baptism. Tertullian comes very close to stating this in chapter 7, saying that Jesus received his name *Christos* (= the Anointed) in his baptism being anointed at Jordan.²⁹ “So also in our case” (*Sic et in nobis*), says Tertullian (7.2), thus attesting to the connection between the two baptisms. The heavenly voice, the name of Christ and anointment cumulatively suggest that Jesus’ baptism is the paradigm for Christian baptism, but also that the latter is a pattern for how Jesus’ baptism is described, as mutuality is significant here. It is therefore likely that the motivation for bringing together baptism and the Lord’s Prayer is implicit in Tertullian’s *De baptismo*: Like *filius*, so also *fili*.

This argument is also found in his *Adversus Praxean*, in which Tertullian attacks the idea that Father and Son are two separate gods. He argues that the Father is in heaven and the Son on earth, according not to their being

²⁷ Schleyer, ed., Tertullian, *De Baptismo. De Oratione*, 13. Tertullian’s description of this powerful prayer brings to mind the many papyri where the Lord’s Prayer is included in amulets for magical purposes; see Leiv Amundsen, “Christian Papyri from the Oslo Collection,” *SO* 24 (1945): 141–47. Amundsen makes particular mention of P. Oslo inv. 1644 (4th century C.E.), where the Lord’s Prayer appears together with four lines from Ps 91:1–4 (LXX 90), the mostly popular magical text in Jewish sources. The way the Lord’s Prayer and Ps 91 together form a tandem, which is indicative of the protective role of the Lord’s Prayer here. Furthermore, Ps 91 has all the marks of a prayer, thus showing that both magic and prayer are sometimes kindred, and also that the Book of Psalms was used as a Christian prayer book.

²⁸ Schleyer, ed., Tertullian, *De Baptismo. De Oratione*, 70–72; “Nach *De baptismo* wird Christus in seiner Taufe aber auch zum Urbild des Täuflings.”

²⁹ This interpretation finds support in Acts 4:27 cited by Tertullian, and in Acts 10:38 as well, which he does not quote.

separated, but to a divine plan of salvation (*Prax.* 23.3–4). Tertullian substantiates his view with the Johannine emphasis that the Son has come in his Father’s name, and also with the heavenly voice given at his baptism and on the mountain (Matt 17:5): *Hic est filius meus dilectus*. Hence, when he prays the Son also turns to His heavenly Father with his concerns. Tertullian says He taught us to do likewise, saying “*Pater noster qui es in caelis*” (*Prax.* 23.4). The Lord’s Prayer is the imitation of *filius* by *filiis*; the sons or children imitate the Son. The way the Lord’s Prayer and baptism belong together strengthens the impression that prayer marks Christian identity, as the right to pray to the heavenly Father is embedded in the very ritual that marks the transition to become *filiis*.

4. Cyprian, *De Dominica Oratione*

Cyprian wrote his Treatise IV on the Lord’s Prayer at the beginning of the Decian persecution (ca. 252 C.E.). The first eleven chapters are devoted to prayer in general and addressing God as Father in particular. From chapter 12 on, Cyprian treats the petitions one-by-one.

4.1 *True Worshipers Are Heard*

It is God’s purpose, the opening paragraph says, to make His will known. So He has done through His servants, the prophets of old. The fulfilment of what they spoke, however, is now given in the Son’s own voice (*propria voce*), and is heard by all who have been enlightened (*luminati*). Among his salutary words are found the prayer in which he instructed “us” on prayer (*Dom. or.* 2.13–15).³⁰ The Son learnt this prayer when with his Father (*apud patrem*),³¹ and he then taught it to “us.” Addressing God in words taught by Himself, so to say, enhances the possibility that the prayer will be heard; it simply renders the Lord’s Prayer more effective (*quanto efficacius*) (*Dom. or.* 3.37). This prayer is the fulfilment of John 4:23 about the time when true worshippers (*veri adoratores*) will address the Father in Spirit and truth.

Chapters 4–6, in which Cyprian speaks more generally on prayer, address the circumstances of prayer taking place standing in God’s sight.³² With reference to Matt 6:6, Cyprian says that one should pray “in secret, in hidden

³⁰ Latin text: *De Dominica Oratione*, in *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera, Pars II* (ed. Claudio Moreschini; CCSL 3A; Turnholt: Brepols, 1976), 87–113. The last numbers in the references indicate the line numbers in this edition.

³¹ It is not clear here what time Cyprian has in mind. The nature of the petitions makes a reference to their preexistence unlikely. I hold the baptismal moment, at which the sonship of Jesus was declared, to have guided Cyprian to this idea.

³² *Stare* includes the bodily position while praying; thus also in *Dom. or.* 31.562.

and private places, in our inner rooms” (*Dom. or.* 4.44–45).³³ God is close at hand, and He hears not only the voice, but even the heart. This finds affirmation in several biblical texts, of which 1 Sam 1:13 on Hanna’s prayer is given prominence. She spoke in her heart; her lips moved; no voice was heard, but nonetheless God responded. The right attitude of true worshippers is also given to Cyprian by the publican in Luke 18:10–14.

4.2. A Communal and Uniting Prayer

When Cyprian turns directly to the Lord’s Prayer (chap. 8), he emphasises that prayer manifests peace and unity among the believers. Hence, it is to be made neither *singillatim* nor *privatim*, whether alone or in private (*Dom. or.* 8.101–102). Of course, this is a derivation from the plural *noster*, which introduces the Lord’s Prayer. From this focus on unity, it follows that prayer is not to be concerned with oneself only (*Dom. or.* 8.102):

Our prayer is common and collective; and when we pray we pray not for one but for all people (*non pro uno sed pro populo toto*), because we are all one people together. The God of peace and the master of concord, who taught that we should be united (*qui docet unitatem*), wanted one to pray in this manner for all, as he himself bore all in one (*Dom. or.* 8.106–111).³⁴

According to Cyprian, the Lord’s Prayer is a symbol and manifestation of the unity of the believers. The citation just given is to Cyprian a *lex orationis*, observed for the first time in the three young men shut up in the fiery furnace (Dan 3). They prayed together, being of one heart and spirit (*consonantes in prece et spiritus consensione concordēs*) (*Dom. or.* 8.112–113). From one mouth (*ex uno ore*) (117), although three in number, Cyprian sees a foreshadowing of the prayer later taught by Christ, and which manifested itself in the believers praying with one accord (*unanimēs*) (Acts 1:14) (123–124). It is worth noticing how Cyprian emphasises the obligation to use this prayer, since it was taught by the Lord Himself.

4.3 The Prayer of Those Reborn in Baptism

In *Dom. or.* 9, Cyprian considers the Lord’s Prayer a summary of the teaching given by Jesus; it brings out the heart of his entire ministry. The petitions, and not least, the very address “Father,” represents a compendium of heavenly

³³ Carolyn Osiek, “When You Pray, Go into Your ταμεῖον (Matthew 6:6),” *CBQ* 71 (2009): 723–40 argues that the focus here is not on privacy but intimacy. The Greek ταμεῖον or Latin *cubiculum* was an established topos for the place of intimacy with friends.

³⁴ In *Dom. or.* 29.539, Cyprian mentions Jesus’ own example, withdrawing to pray alone in a solitary place (Luke 5:16), which demonstrates that it is not his point to question the private prayer as such.

doctrine (*caelestis doctrinae compendium*) (9.132). He picks up on this later, saying that God thus abbreviated the saving ministry of Christ, giving *grande compendium*: in a short form, he quickly (*velociter*) taught what simple faith is really about (*Dom. or.* 28.519–524).

Cyprian’s key perspective on the Lord’s Prayer is that this prayer is given to children: “. . . pray you, ‘Our Father who are in heaven.’ Anybody who is renewed, reborn and restored to God by grace, first of all says ‘Father,’ because he is now become a son” (*Sic, ait, adorate: pater noster, qui est in caelis. Homo nouus, renatus et Deo suo per eius gratiam restitutus pater primo in loco dicit, quia filius esse iam coepit*). This prayer is an immediate result of being reborn. The connection between this prayer and becoming a child is pointed out, thus picking up on Tertullian’s family framework for understanding Christian prayer. The baptismal reference of this language is obvious and it abounds in this treatise.³⁵ Cyprian then cites from John 1:11–12, and summarizes his point in the following way:

Whoever therefore believes in his name is made a child of God (*Dei filius*), and hence should begin to give thanks and show himself a child of God as he names his Father God in heaven. He bears witness also, among the first words of his words at his rebirth, that he renounces his earthly and fleshly father and acknowledges that he has begun to have the Father in heaven as his only father (*Dom. or.* 9.138–143)

Here, Cyprian combines baptism and John 1:12 (*Dei filii*), hence it appears to me that Cyprian also includes in this the baptism of Jesus himself, in which he was declared *Dei filius*. In *Dom. or.* 11.178–180, Cyprian makes much of the analogy between *Filius* and *filii*.³⁶ Baptism established a Father – child relationship. Calling God by the name *Pater*, an abbreviation for the Lord’s Prayer, is the first word (*prima statim natiuitatis suae verba*³⁷) uttered by the newly born *filius*. *Statim* implies that this happens instantly, as is characteristic of new-born children. Elsewhere, Cyprian draws on the idea that the Lord’s Prayer has implications for the question of infant baptism. In his *Ep.* 58 (64), he asks what hindrances there are for infants to be baptised. Among

³⁵ For baptism as regeneration and the baptised as a new being in Cyprian’s writings, see Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church. History: Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 2009), 357–59. *Dom. or.* 12.198 addresses those who pray the Lord’s Prayer as “we who were sanctified in baptism,” upon which 1 Cor 6:9 about being washed (*abluti*) is cited; cf. *Dom. or.* 36.693–694. Addressing the Christians as *luminati* (“enlightened”) and talking about *fecit vivere* (“he made us alive”) (*Dom. or.* 1.11 and 2.16) strengthens the baptismal reference for Cyprian’s treatise on the Lord’s Prayer.

³⁶ In *Dom. or.* 11.183, he calls the Christians *fratres dilectissimi* (“beloved brothers”), thereby indicating a further link to the heavenly voice at Jesus’ baptism, where he was declared the “beloved Son.” The terminological distinction between *παῖς* and *τέκνον* in the Greek text does not affect Cyprian here since Latin has *filius* anyway.

³⁷ This plural is due to the fact that *Pater* represents the Lord’s Prayer in its entirety.

his arguments, Cyprian also includes the fact that God's mercy mediated in baptism does not prefer age, "since God shows Himself as Father to all with well-weighed equality for the attainment of heavenly grace" (3).³⁸ This means that the Lord's Prayer becomes a symbol for the nature of Christian faith, extending beyond a reference to the prayer as such.

Cyprian reasons from family relationships, which is clearly indicated in his quoting from Deut 33:9, Matt 23:9 and Matt 8:22. These texts share the idea that physical family and fatherhood are replaced by the divine. Against this background, it makes sense for Cyprian to say that the Lord's Prayer – abbreviated as uttering "*Pater*" – is the first to be uttered by a son or daughter. With the help of these texts, Cyprian uses *Pater Noster* to emphasise the heavenly Father in contrast to fathers who are both earthly (*terrenus*) and physical (*carnalis*). There is no Father (*pater solus*) other than God, an idea taken from Matt 23:9. With reference to Matt 8:22 on letting the dead bury their own dead, Cyprian makes a contrast between fathers doomed to pass away and the living Father of the believers (*Dom. or.* 9.150).

4.5. *Noster* vs. *Vester*

Cyprian emphasises (chap. 10) that this new relationship is marked by God being "our" Father. God is the Father of all who have been reborn and thus become children of God (*filius Dei*) (*Dom. or.* 10.151–155), as a new status comes into being through baptism. While chapter 9 contrasted *Pater* with earthly fathers, chapter 10 introduces another contrast. From the potential implicit in the idea that God is *noster*, it is not surprising that a contrast to the Jews now emerges. Cyprian says that this very word *noster* implies an accusation against them. Sharply contrasted with the Father-theology derived from baptism, Cyprian now cites John 8:44 about the father of the Jews being the Devil (*Dom. or.* 10.160–162). To this he adds Isa 1:2b–4, in which God holds against Israel that they have abandoned Him. In spite of His having begotten and brought them up, they despised Him. The language of giving birth (*generavi*) and child-rearing (*exaltavi*) is worth noticing here. This perspective is kept throughout the treatise, and brings to mind the baptismal background as well. When Christians say *Pater Noster*, this is according to Cyprian "because he (God) has begun to be ours, and has ceased to be the Father of the Jews, who abandoned him" (*quia noster esse iam coepit et Iudaeorum qui eum dereliquerunt esse desiuit*) (*Dom. or.* 10.169–171).

Both prophetic criticism against Israel in the Old Testament and polemics found in John's Gospel now become building blocks in claiming God to be solely "ours." The Old Testament prophets are turned against their own people, and Cyprian joins this choir by drawing on a contrast that comes

³⁸ Translation from *ANF* 5:354.

naturally from the idea of fatherhood (cf. Gal 4:1–7), namely the contrast between sons or family and servants or slaves. He cites John 8:35: “The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.” Chapter 11 summarizes Cyprian’s main point on the Lord’s Prayer. As Christ, *Filius Dei*, called God “Father,” so can “we,” *fili Dei*, likewise call Him *Pater*. This is the privilege of Christian believers alone. Christ, *Filius*, authorized (*ipse. . . permisset*) the believers to address God in that way. Hence, the Christians are like temples, dwelling places of God. Here, Cyprian brings together the Lord’s Prayer and Paul’s ecclesiological temple notion (1 Cor 6). At the end of the day, the Lord’s Prayer is to Cyprian an ecclesiological text, i.e. a text on Christian identity.

5. Tracing the Roots of the Lord’s Prayer as a “First Prayer”

It is not my intention to now argue that Christians generally included the Lord’s Prayer in their baptismal liturgies. These liturgies were not consistent, and also varied geographically.³⁹ But the findings suffice to make the point that the connection between baptism and the Lord’s Prayer is attested to so widely that it is relevant for the question of Christian identity.

5.1. Back to the End of the First Century

In the *Apostolic Tradition*, formerly ascribed to Roman Hippolytus, a baptismal liturgy is described in detail. Having accomplished the bath and the accompanying rites, it says about the baptisands: “And afterward let them then pray together with all the people, not praying with the faithful until they have carried out all these things” (*Trad. ap.* 21.25).⁴⁰ Baptism gives admission to a new status manifested in prayer, as the baptisands have joined the fellowship of those whose privilege it is to pray. No indication of the nature of this prayer is given; obviously, the fellowship of those enjoying this privilege is more important here than what was actually prayed, with recent research justifying that this Church Order does not represent the practices of any particular church at one given point; instead, it is composite in nature. Hence, the age of this piece of information is unreliable; it may date from the mid-4th

³⁹ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47–53; Johnson, *Christian Initiation*, 37–39.

⁴⁰ Quoted from Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2002), 120; Latin text in *Traditio Apostolica* (translated and introduced by Wilhelm Geerlings; Fontes Christiani 1; Freiburg: Herder, 1991).

century, although the core material on baptism may well go back to the mid-2nd century.⁴¹

In his *First Apology* chapters 61–66, written ca. 150 C.E., Justin Martyr presents key elements in a baptismal ritual. The scheme goes very much like this: 1) preparation with prayers and fasting; 2) the bath; 3) communal prayer; 4) the Eucharist. Justin strongly emphasises that baptism is a bath of illumination: Καλεῖται δὲ τοῦτο τὸ λυτρὸν φωτισμός (*I Apol.* 61.12),⁴² making children of free choice and knowledge enlightened within (*I Apol.* 61.10). Moreover, knowledge conveyed in this bath includes knowing God as Father (*I Apol.* 63.1–4), for which Matt 11:27 about knowing the Father twice serves as an argument (see also 63.13). Obviously, enlightenment was tantamount to know the true name of God, namely Father and His Son. This takes us to another observation, which can be introduced in citing from *I Apol.* 65.1–3:

After thus baptizing the one who has believed and given his assent, we escort him to the place where are assembled those who we call brethren, to offer sincere prayers in common for ourselves, for the baptized person, and for all other persons wherever they may be, in order that, since we have found the truth, we may be deemed fit through our actions to be esteemed as good citizens and observers of the law, and thus attain eternal salvation. At the conclusion of the prayers we greet one another with a kiss.⁴³

Clearly, a communal prayer associated with baptism marked the incorporation into the larger fellowship of believers. The prayer takes place after the bath (μετὰ τὸ οὕτως λῦσαι); the baptisand is brought to the place where the brethren are, and they take part in the communal prayer before the Eucharist is celebrated. The prayer is therefore a sign that they have now been instructed in the truth. Justin never spells out the precise content of this prayer, although it does not take much imagination, if chapters 63 and 65 are held together, to assume that this includes the Lord's Prayer. According to *I. Apol.* 61.10, the name of God the Father is called upon during the bath.

The first extant text to address baptismal liturgy is *Did.* 7–8, from the end of the first century C.E. In the instructions given there, the Lord's Prayer is included: "Do not pray as the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in his Gospel, pray thus . . ."; then follows the Lord's Prayer (8.2–3). Hence, they are instructed to pray three times a day. The text speaks out of a concern to define Christians' relationship to Jewish customs and traditions.⁴⁴ A key role

⁴¹ Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 13–15.

⁴² For further references see Colin Buchanan, *Justin Martyr on Baptism and Eucharist* (Joint Liturgical Studies 64; Alcuin Club; Norwich: SCM-Canterbury Press, 2007), 17, 35, 37, 41.

⁴³ Quoted from *Saint Justin Martyr* (trans. Thomas B. Falls; FC 6; New York: Christian Heritage, 1948); Greek text in *Iustini Martyris Apologiae Pro Christianis* (ed. Miroslav Marcovich; PTS 38; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1994).

⁴⁴ See Hans Kvalbein's contribution in the present volume.

is then assigned to the Lord’s Prayer, which takes the place of *Tefillah*.⁴⁵ *Didache* 7.2–3 may be taken as an isolated unit instructing those baptised on how to pray. However, it is worth considering that chapters 7–9 constitute one continuous liturgical section on baptism and the Eucharist. Beneath the substructure of how to practice these things, a liturgical subtext can be observed. It is not by accident that the prayer instruction with the Lord’s Prayer follows upon the instruction on the baptismal act, and is followed again by Eucharist instruction. A continuous reading presupposing a liturgical scheme is suggested by *Did.* 9:5: “But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptised in the Lord’s Name.” This implies that a continuous procedure forms the basis for understanding the role of the Lord’s Prayer. Aaron Milavec depicts a liturgical order in seven steps, of which the last four are of direct relevance here: 4) each candidate is immersed, dried off, and re-clothed in a dry tunic; 5) New members are warmly embraced and kissed (same sex only) by their new family; 6) The Lord’s Prayer is prayed together for the first time; 7) All retire to a home for a fast-breaking feast (the Eucharist).⁴⁶ *Didache* draws attention to a post-baptismal setting for the Lord’s Prayer, an observation which is indeed telling for the understanding of this prayer in the Early Church. It is the privilege of the Christ believers to address God in terms found in this particular prayer.

5.2. *Even in the New Testament?*

Hans Kvalbein has argued that the baptism of Jesus was fundamental for understanding Christian baptism in the early Church, and even in the New Testament.⁴⁷ He proceeds from texts in which the baptisand is called “the beloved son,” an echo of the heavenly voice at Jordan. Taking this as a point of departure, it seems justified to say that the fundamental building block that makes the Lord’s Prayer a post-baptismal prayer is in place.

This is where Gal 4:6 and Rom 8:15 enter the picture. What can be gleaned from these texts? They both contrast the sonship or childhood of the believers with their previous enslavement. According to Galatians, becoming children of God took place in baptism (3:27–29). In Rom 8:17 the repeated *σὺν Χριστῷ* sums up their new status, as the believers have become children and heirs, like Christ before them. They suffer with Christ, and they will be glorified together with him. Beneath this argument lies the pattern from Rom 6 in which baptism is seen as an imitation of Christ, which is repeatedly stated in *σὺν Χριστῷ*. Baptismal context and imitation of Christ are assumed in both

⁴⁵ This is pointed out by Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1998), 134, 138.

⁴⁶ Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 64, 105.

⁴⁷ Kvalbein, “The Baptism of Jesus.”

texts. Furthermore, the new status of being “sons” finds its true expression in κρᾶζον/κράζομεν ἀββα ὁ πατήρ, echoing the Lukan version of the Lord’s Prayer in particular (cf. Mark 14:36). In Gal 4, this comes from the Spirit of the Son in the believer, while in Romans it is an utterance of the Spirit.

Is this a reference to prayer, and eventually an abbreviation for the Lord’s Prayer? The verb used may have wide connotations, with reference to “cry out” or to “call out” probably including some excitement as well.⁴⁸ Walter Grundmann has made a good case that κράζω in these texts must be understood against its usage in the LXX in which it frequently refers to prayers: φωνῆ μου πρὸς κύριον ἐκέκραξα (Ps 3:5 LXX). This usage lives on in the traditions about the sick and needy addressing Jesus, “crying” for his help.⁴⁹ I hold this to be an observation more significant than discussing whether this implies ecstatic acclamations or not.⁵⁰ Granted the relevance of this interpretation, Paul considers prayer to God the Father in these two passages as marking the identity of Christ believers. Worth noticing is the immediate connection to baptismal motives in both texts. Hans Dieter Betz says that the doubling of the invocation (Abba Father) in both Aramaic and Greek is due to the bilingual character of the early Church: “There is no need to assume that Paul had in mind the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ here.”⁵¹ If the bilingual nature of his churches was a particular concern for Paul, one would also expect this to show up elsewhere in his letters. Since this is not the case, another explanation appears more likely. The presence of this Aramaic word within a Greek text is odd, and is most easily explained as a reference to the Lord’s Prayer.⁵² I therefore hold it likely that the Lord’s Prayer is included here, given in the two words Abba Father. Franz Joseph Dölger’s words from 1930 are still worth quoting:

. . . so ist tatsächlich mit der Möglichkeit zu rechnen, dass nicht nur für die Zeit Tertullians das Vaterunser als Gebet nach der Taufe anzunehmen ist, sondern dass das

⁴⁸ BDAG s.v.

⁴⁹ Further references in Walter Grundmann, “κράζω,” *TDNT* 3:898–903.

⁵⁰ Pace Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 499.

⁵¹ Hans D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1979), 211; similarly F. E. Vokes, “The Lord’s Prayer in the First Three Centuries,” *Studia Patristica* 10 (1979): 253–60, 255.

⁵² This was argued by Alfred Seeberg, *Der Katechismus der Urchristenheit* (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1903), 243. His view was adopted by many scholars; cf. Rordorf, “The Lord’s Prayer,” 4; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson 1993), 221–22; Jewett, *Romans*, 499. This brings to mind examples from Mark’s Gospel, in which Aramaic words have been preserved, as indicative of key notes in the tradition (Mark 5:41; 7:34, 14:36). The latter text renders the words of Jesus at the moment of his most crucial prayer at Gethsemane.

‘Gebet des Herrn’ sogar in paulinischer Zeit nach dem Geistesempfang von dem Täufling mit der Gemeinde gebetet wurde.⁵³

In other words, it is a possibility that the Lord’s Prayer is alluded to in these Pauline passages. However, it moves beyond the evidence, and at points even contrary to the evidence, to assume that Paul would subscribe to the exegesis given by Tertullian and Cyprian on the implications of calling God Father. Nonetheless, Paul’s frequent epithet “God our Father” (1 Thess 1:3; Gal 1:4; 2 Cor 6:18) goes a long way toward closing the gap between Paul and our Patristic writers on the Lord’s Prayer. The argument in Gal 3–4 and Rom 4:4 makes Abraham a crucial figure. Faith and Spirit define the true descendants of Abraham as crying “Abba Father.” Ephesians 2:18, be it Pauline or Pauline tradition, echoes Rom 5:1 about Christ’s ministry giving access to the Father. However, his commitment to his fellow Jews, primarily expressed in Rom 9:4–5, distances him from the supercessionist position inherent in both Tertullian’s and Cyprian’s reasoning. It made a difference that the church by their time was already predominantly Gentile.

6. Drawing the Findings Together

6.1. *A Privilege*

Karl-Heinrich Ostmeier asks why the Lord’s Prayer, so genuinely Jewish in content, came to be reckoned as the Christian prayer par excellence.⁵⁴ According to Ostmeier, the position of the Lord’s Prayer depends not on its content, but on how it came to be seen on the basis of its function, as well as the authenticity implied in claiming that it was spoken by κύριος Ἰησοῦς.⁵⁵ This prayer takes the form of a creed, “Ausweisgebet.”⁵⁶ My presentation has amply demonstrated that this occurred in the early 3rd century. Ostmeier considers the Lord’s Prayer as “the first prayer”⁵⁷ in the sense of its being “Prototyp des christlichen Gebetes.” Judged from how Tertullian and Cyprian conceived of the Lord’s Prayer, and its invocation in particular, it is clear that baptism gives admission to the fellowship of those calling God by the name of

⁵³ Franz J. Dölger, “Das erste Gebet der Täuflinge in der Gemeinschaft der Brüder: Ein Beitrag zu Tertullian *De baptismo* 20,” in idem., *Antike und Christentum: Kultur und religionsgeschichtlichen Studium* 2 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1974), 152–53.

⁵⁴ Ostmeier, “Das Vaterunser,” 320: “Wie könnte ein inhaltlich jüdisches Gebet ohne exklusiv christliche Anteile zum Zentralgebet der Christen werden?”

⁵⁵ Ostmeier, “Das Vaterunser,” 327: “Da die Typik nicht im Inhalt des Vaterunser begründet war, musste die *Einsetzung* durch Jesus als dem κύριος hervorgehoben werden.”

⁵⁶ Ostmeier, “Das Vaterunser,” 330, 332.

⁵⁷ Ostmeier, “Das Vaterunser,” 322; first suggested by Dölger, “Das erste Gebet.”

Father. The Lord's Prayer is therefore marking them off from other people, as they address God as children do with their parents.⁵⁸ The Lord's Prayer is the exclusive right of those reborn in baptism. As a result, it is not only the paradigmatic prayer, but also chronologically the first genuine prayer for the baptised Christian. For the question of identity formation, it is indeed important that the Lord's Prayer is integrated into the ritual of baptism, as rituals are means of both expressing and strengthening the identity of a group. They encapsulate the fundamental beliefs of a group, and put them into practice in acts performed by the members together, which in itself fostered a sense of togetherness.⁵⁹ This insight finds anthropological as well as religio-historical support, as amply demonstrated in the recent works on baptism edited by David Hellholm et al.⁶⁰

The *schibboleth* is the fatherhood of God and the childhood of the believers that came about through baptism, an act whereby Jesus was imitated: like *Filius*, so also *fili*. The Lord's Prayer, baptism, Christ imitation, family framework and the "othering" of the Jews as well as Gentiles – all these cumulatively contributed to shaping a Christian identity, or vice-versa, that an emerging Christian identity struggling to form itself found these, when taken together, helpful means for articulating a separate identity. It is highly important that both Tertullian and Cyprian considered the Lord's Prayer as abbreviating the privilege of Christians to pray in general to have access to

⁵⁸ In his treatise *On Prayer*, Origen says that nowhere in the Old Testament is God called "Father" in a prayer, albeit that God is certainly spoken of as "Father," and that believers are called "sons of God" (Deut 32:6, 18, 20; Isa 1:2; Mal 1:6). This distinction matters to Origen: "Even if God is termed 'father,' and those begotten by the word through their faith in him are called 'sons,' nonetheless a firm and abiding sonship is not to be discerned among the ancient people" (22.2). This is stated by Paul in Gal 4:1–2. The fullness of time (Gal 3–4) is about adoption as sons, to which Origen adds as proof Rom 8:15: "you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry Abba Father." To this is added John 1:12 on being God's children and 1 John 3:9 on being born by God. Here, Gal 4:16 and Rom 8:15 are clear references to *Pater Noster*. Origen's comment is a reminder that the emphasis given to the Father in the Lord's Prayer is a mark of idiosyncrasy. It epitomizes a new relationship to God. Be this, from a historical and comparative perspective, correct or not, it is indeed relevant as to how this prayer was viewed among most Christians.

⁵⁹ Emphasised also by Gerard Rouwhorst, "Identität durch Gebet: Gebetstexte als Zeugen eines jahrhunderte-langen Ringens um Kontinuität und Differenz zwischen Judentum und Christentum" in *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 37–38.

⁶⁰ *Ablution, Initiation and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (3 vols.; BZNW 176; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011).

God the Father.⁶¹ This brings to mind the privilege of childhood (ὑιοθεσία), encapsulating in Paul’s letters the privilege conferred upon believers through Christ. Paul’s idea is not at all remote from these two later authors on this particular point.

Is it likely that the Lord’s Prayer was not uttered at all before baptism, as these sources imply? This questioning brings to mind the distinction between text and reality. Certainly, the reality behind the theology voiced by both Tertullian and Cyprian was more complex. How could the newly baptised join a prayer they had never been taught before? The decisive moment for both Tertullian and Cyprian was to pray the Lord’s Prayer together with fellow Christians in a setting thus defined. For this experience to work according to its intention, the catechumens must have been familiar with this prayer beforehand; otherwise, this occasion would rather confirm them as outsiders than represent their acceptance into the fellowship of those addressing God as Father. Moreover, if the Lord’s Prayer represented a summary of Christian prayer, as stated by both authors, there obviously must have been some continuity between prayers taught during the preparation for baptism and the Lord’s Prayer itself.

6.2. *Building Blocks, not “Building”*

The treatises of both Tertullian and Cyprian were composed at a time when North African Christians faced troubles and even persecutions. Naturally, this enhanced a process towards the construction of a separate identity, which must be taken into account when attempts at antedating our findings are being made. Nevertheless, it seems justified to say that in viewing the Lord’s Prayer as the first prayer, they did not alienate themselves from what can also be gleaned in earlier texts. This essay attempts to trace this to before the 2nd and 3rd centuries, and eventually to push the evidence back into the New Testament itself. Although this can hardly be fully substantiated, important building blocks are nonetheless present. However, the fact that building blocks, which in the *Apostolic Constitutions* were foundational, and even so in Tertullian and Cyprian, are found quite early, some even during the time of the New Testament, does not necessarily mean that the ritual and theology behind them are in place as well. There is a danger of putting together building blocks anachronistically. Building blocks need to be put together to form a building, and the pattern for doing that can too easily be inferred from later sources. It takes more to demonstrate patterns than to prove the existence of building blocks. It seems to me that the fundamental building blocks reach back into New Testament times, but that the pattern taken from emerging

⁶¹ Brown, *Lord’s Prayer*, 11–12 opposes this interpretation, urging that “Father” must be taken in a universal sense. He does so with reference to his own theological convictions, not to Tertullian’s and Cyprian’s.

Christian identity formation is not yet in place. It is necessary to distinguish between building blocks and building. For the question of Christian identity, however, the presence of the most important building blocks is significant, because they give witness to a fragile, pluriform, and place-dependent process towards that identity.

6.3. *The Polemic Power Inherent in Noster*

As early as in the New Testament, the Lord's Prayer was an identity marker of Jesus' disciples, vis-à-vis hypocrites' show-off prayers and the Gentiles' prayers in many words (Matt 6 and Luke 11). In the Patristic material, this becomes a contrast primarily to the Jews; they become the hypocrites who do not know the Father. Old Testament texts were used to point this out, most strongly in Cyprian saying that God has ceased to be the Father of the Jews. This is not a slip of the tongue, but comes as result of his supercessionist thinking, which is implied in what it meant that God is "ours." Criticism against hypocrites – in the Gospels still insiders – is in Tertullian and Cyprian especially targeting Jews as a group.⁶² There is a marked difference between their time and the time of Matthean and Lukan Jesus. It seems, however, that introducing "our" into a prayer of disciples involved in group polemics carried a potential to foster a process whereby identity becomes separated from others, which was not at all initiated by Tertullian and Cyprian. Investigating prayer and the Lord's Prayer in particular makes visible contours of the development towards a distinctively Christian identity much earlier than that.

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The Lord's Prayer and the Eucharist Prayers in the *Didache*

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Together with the gospels of Matthew and Luke the early church manual of the *Didache* gives the oldest evidence for the text of the *Pater Noster*, the Lord's Prayer. The gospels give the text as part of their story about the life and message of Jesus, a story ending with his death and resurrection around the year 30 C.E. The *Didache* presents the text in a quite different setting: as part of various instructions for an early Christian community. Here the Lord's Prayer is presented after instructions about the initiation rite of baptism (ch. 7) and is closely linked to the fasting practice connected to baptism (ch. 8). It is followed by instructions about thanksgivings for the holy vine and the bread (ch. 9), and about praise to God and prayer for the church after the meal (ch.10). We have thus a relatively broad picture of common prayers connected with basic events in the life of the church, baptism and the common meal.

In this article I will discuss the Lord's Prayer in its context of the Eucharist prayers in the *Didache*. I approach these prayers with the question of whether we can find in them some indications of the kind of identity prescribed in the text for those who prayed like this. The prayers in their context may give both direct and indirect hints about how prayer practices shaped the identity of the addressees.

Before we turn to the prayer texts themselves, we have to look at their context in the *Didache* as a whole. What kind of problems does it address, and when and where is it written?

Introduction to the *Didache*

The date and provenance of the *Didache* has been a matter of discussion since the first edition of its text by Bryennios in 1883.¹ The dating has varied between the mid first to the mid second century C.E. or even later. The problem is complicated by the character of the text as a compilation of different sources or its use of different traditions. Kurt Niederwimmer summarized his investigations by suggesting a date for the sources towards the end of the first century C.E. and for the final redaction by the Didachist between 110 and 120 C.E.² This may be seen as a good consensus of scholarship until 1990.³ More recent investigations, however, have suggested an earlier dating. Thomas O’Loughlin speaks of a broad consensus today for a first-century date. He refers to scholars maintaining that it is more likely that Matthew has used the *Didache* or its traditions as sources than the opposite, and he himself does indicate a date as early as 50 C.E. “In all probability a version of the *Didache* was committed to memory by groups of followers of Jesus by the middle of the first century.”⁴ For John Dominic Crossan an early

¹ See Jonathan A. Draper, “The *Didache* in Modern Research: An Overview,” in *The Didache in Modern Research* (ed. Jonathan A. Draper; AGJU 37; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1–42.

² Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache: A Commentary* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1998), 53. His conclusions are evidently more tentative than conclusive: “In sum, the date of the *Didache* is a matter of judgment. An origin around 110 or 120 C.E. remains hypothetical, but there are as yet no compelling reasons to dismiss this hypothesis.” In a footnote he gives a survey of scholarly contributions, some of them favoring either an early or late dating.

³ Clayton N. Jefford, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (VCSup 11; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 1–17 gives an impressive survey of research before Niederwimmer’s commentary. He describes (p. 8) the dating of the text to 80–130 by Theodor Zahn (1884) as still being “the standard for current investigations of the text within the scholarly community.”

⁴ Thomas O’Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians* (London: SPCK, 2010) approaches the text as “a window on the first and second generation of Christians, who were close to the patterns of Jewish faith, seeking to understand the new way of Jesus” (p. 27). See also his summary of his book: “This book has been an exploration of one short text from the first generations of Christians” (p. 160, my italics). Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope & Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50–70 C.E.* (New York: Newman Press, 2003) has made the early dating part of the title of his voluminous (more than 900 pages!) book. The early dating is also defended by Draper, “The *Didache* in Modern Research”; Michelle Slee, *The Church in Antioch in the First Century CE: Communion and Conflict* (JSNTSup 244; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003); Alan J. Ph. Garrow, *The Gospel of Matthew’s Dependence on the Didache* (JSNTSup 254; London: T&T Clark, 2004); Jonathan Schwiebert, *Knowledge and the Coming Kingdom: The Didache’s Meal Ritual and its Place in Early Christianity* (LNTS

dating of *Did.* 9–10 has a key position in his reconstruction of the development of the Eucharistic practise in the early church (see below). It reflects a type of common meals among Jesus' adherents practised before the meal traditions presupposed in 1 Cor 11.

When we ask for the place of its composition it is hard to give a decisive answer. A few scholars prefer to set the provenance in Egypt, but a majority seek for an origin in Syria-Palestine. The capital of the province of Syria, Antioch, is for many a plausible suggestion, because it had a large Jewish population and evidently played an important role in the church from early apostolic times. A provenance from Antioch combined with a very early dating of the *Didache* is proposed by Michelle Slee, who makes the text a part of the conflict between Paul and Peter in Antioch described in Gal 2:11–14. She finds support for this thesis in *Did.* 6:2–3, where the Gentile convert is warned against eating food offered to idols (contra Paul), but is not obliged to bear the full yoke of the Jewish Torah-observance (contra Peter and James).⁵

This uncertainty about date and provenance of the sources as well as of the final redaction of the document is relevant for an investigation of the identity of the community as it appears in *Didache*. The arguments for the time and place are closely connected to the understanding of the development of the relationship of the first Jesus believers to their own Jewish origin and to the increasing number of Gentile converts who already by the end of the first century in all probability made up the majority within the Christian church in many major cities.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to argue broadly for some specific date and provenance of the text. I have to keep to the prayers in the *Didache* in their correspondence to their literary context and to relevant Jewish and Christian texts and to the question of how they conceive of the identity of the addressees. But my general impression of the discussion makes me inclined to prefer the traditional dating of the document to ca. 100 C.E. Christopher Tuckett has carefully analysed the text of the *Didache* in comparison with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and concludes that a dependence of the *Didache* on the finished gospels is highly probable.⁶ Gerd Theissen

373; London: T&T Clark, 2008), and Owen F. Cummings, "The *Didache* and the Eucharist," *Immanuel* 118 (2012): 120–31.

⁵ Slee, *The Church in Antioch*, 83–91. She similarly interprets the warning against hypocrites in *Did.* 8 as referring not to Jews in general, but to Pharisaic Jewish Christians who wanted the Gentile converts to become Jews (including circumcision of the males) before they could enter the common meals in the (Jewish-)Christian community.

⁶ Christopher M. Tuckett, "Synoptic Tradition in the *Didache*," in *The Didache in Modern Research* (ed. Jonathan A. Draper; AGJU 37; Leiden: Brill 1996), 92–128, discusses the parallels between the *Didache* and the synoptic gospels and concludes (p. 128) that "these parallels can best be explained if the *Didache* presupposes the finished gospels of Matthew and Luke."

presupposes that the *Didache* knew the Gospel of Matthew and maintains that the two documents give evidence for a church at the end of the first century practising two types of common meals, a sacred meal as described in the *Didache* and a sacramental meal as presupposed in the gospel.⁷ These two meal types, however, are not seen as alternative celebrations in conflict with each other but as different ways of eating a holy meal together. Howard Marshall⁸ argues extensively against J. D. Crossan's thesis⁹ that the *Didache* describes a meal practised very early, in a period before the Eucharist traditions as described in 1 Cor 10–11 and in Mark 14 and parallels. Crossan maintains that the lack of references to the death and resurrection of Jesus and to the institutional words of the Eucharist in the *Didache* indicates that the institution of the Eucharist cannot go back to Jesus. Marshall warns against such a conclusion on the basis of an argument *e silentio* in a short document whose sources, provenance and interpretation are so disputed. Even if many questions are left open, Marshall's analysis is an adequate warning against playing the Eucharist meal of *Did.* 9–10 out against the Pauline tradition in 1 Cor 10–11 and the institution narratives in the synoptic gospels.

The early dating of the *Didache* seems to presuppose a polarization between its description of the Eucharist and the presentation of the Lord's Supper in Paul and the gospels. With the scholars mentioned above I am sceptical of this way of playing the Eucharist in the *Didache* out against the canonical evidence. The traditional dating around 100 C.E. may still be seen as a valid alternative "consensus" to the early dating.¹⁰ The question of dating is

⁷ Gerd Theißen, "Sakralmahl und sakramentales Geschehen: Abstufungen in der Ritualdynamik des Abendmahls," in *Herrenmahl und Gruppenidentität* (ed. Martin Ebner; QD 221; Freiburg: Herder, 2007), 166–86; 178: "Didache und MtEv belegen die Koexistenz zweier Mahltypen in ein und derselben Gemeinde, die Didache bezeugt ein normalreligiöses Sakralmahl, das MtEv ein extremreligiöses Sakramentalmahl." Theissen indicates that the sacred meal may have been celebrated every week, on "the day of the Lord" (*Did.* 14:1), but the sacramental meal only at Passover, or by other special occasions.

⁸ I. Howard Marshall, "The Last Supper," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb; WUNT 247; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2009), 481–588.

⁹ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 360–67.

¹⁰ Jens Schröter, *Das Abendmahl: Frühchristliche Deutungen und Impulse für die Gegenwart* (SBS 210; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2006), 62, 65. The later dating is also defended by Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2002), 48: "An ever-growing consensus emerging in recent scholarship is that the text was composed by the turn of the first century CE." Bart D. Ehrman, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: I Clement, II Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache* (LCL 24; Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 411: "As to the date of the Didachist himself, opinions

of course relevant for the understanding of the circumstances in which the Didache was written. An early dating would point to a historical context where a majority of the believers in Jesus were of Jewish origin. At the turn of the century, however, the Jewish Christians would be only small minorities in most churches outside of Palestine. The dating of the document and its sources is highly relevant to the question we have to discuss in this paper: Does the *Didache* present a Jewish sect within the broader Jewish community, or has its addressees gained their own identity, separated from the assemblies of the Jewish synagogues?¹¹

The *Didache* – A Survey of Content and Structure

The *Didache* has a clear structure, indicated by headlines or redactional comments at the intersections of its four parts:

(1) The *Didache* presents itself rather abruptly as a *teaching on the two ways*: the way of life and the way of death (1:1). The following instructions are exclusively ethical, with no doctrinal content. There seems to be a broad consensus that the two-ways document (*Did.* 1–6) is a Christian adaption of a Jewish tradition, clearly influenced by the Jesus tradition.¹² The Christian adaptations of the Jewish tradition indicate an intention to teach Gentiles a new way of conduct different from their former life and in accordance with the message of Jesus.¹³

again vary, but most would put the time of his composition sometime around the year 100, possibly a decade or so later.”

¹¹ The problem is well formulated in Huub van de Sandt, “The Didache Redefining its Jewish Identity in View of Gentiles Joining the Community,” in *Empsychoi Logoi: Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst* (ed. Alberdina Houtman, Albert de Jong and Magda Misset-van de Weg; AGJU 73; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 247–65, 247: “Is it possible to frame the Didache community within the social history of the Jews? Or was it a sect ‘outside Judaism’, showing a qualitative otherness vis-à-vis Judaism? Does the Didache text represent the organization, interests, strategies and ideology of a fundamentally Jewish faction, or does it reflect the orientation of a group establishing and maintaining an identity separate from Judaism?”

¹² See e.g. Willy Rordorf, “An Aspect of the Judeo-Christian Ethic: the Two Ways,” in *The Didache in Modern Research* (ed. Jonathan A. Draper; AGJU 37; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 148–64; Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 59–63. Sandt and Flusser, *Didache*, 55–80 and 140–90 give an extensive discussion of the two ways teaching, showing its profound Jewish character.

¹³ Sandt, “The Didache Redefining,” 253: “By supplementing the basic tradition, the independent Jewish document of Two Ways became a text of instruction intended for Gentiles who wanted to associate themselves with the Judeo-Christian community of the *Didache*.”

The teaching on the Two Ways is explicitly presented as instructions for the catechumens in the sentence leading to the second part of the *Didache*, the agenda: ταῦτα πάντα προειπόντες βαπτίσατε . . . (“Having said all these things in advance, baptize . . .,” 7:1).

(2) The *Agenda for gatherings in the church* (*Did.* 7–10), starts with instructions for the celebration of baptism (ch. 7), continues with teaching on fasting and prayer (including the Lord’s Prayer, ch. 8), and then deals with the procedures for the common meal, the Eucharist, with an extensive presentation of the Eucharistic prayers (chs. 9–10). These chapters are the main focus of our considerations below.

(3) The third part of the *Didache* is about different aspects of the *Order of the ecclesia* (chs. 11–15): First there are rules for how to receive travelling teachers, apostles and prophets (ch. 11), travelling Christians (ch. 12), prophets and teachers who want to stay (ch. 13). Then there are instructions for Sunday worship and bishops and deacons (chs. 14–15).

The introduction to this third part is highly relevant for the question of prayer and identity: “And so, welcome anyone who comes and teaches you everything mentioned above” (*Did.* 11:1). The expression ταῦτα πάντα τὰ προειρημένα points back to the preceding ten chapters and makes the teaching of *Did.* 1–10 a criterion for the evaluation of visiting apostles and prophets and everyone who comes in the name of the Lord (chs. 11–13), and also for the election of bishops and deacons, who should be “true and approved,” ἀληθεῖς καὶ δεδοκιμασμένους (15:1). The preceding sentence in 10:7 relates to the previously prescribed prayers which are indirectly regarded as obligatory with only one exception: “But permit the prophets to give thanks as often as they wish [or: as much as they wish, ὅσα θέλουσιν].” The normative function of the prayers is emphasized in the closing sentence of the third section when the prayers are mentioned first: “But say your prayers, give charity, and engage in all your activities as you have learned in the gospel of our Lord” (15:4). The prayers of *Did.* 8–10 evidently had a role as identity markers serving to distinguish between true and false prophets and true and false teaching.¹⁴

¹⁴ Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, “Taufe und Taufucharistie: Die postbaptismale Mahl-gemeinschaft in Quellen des 2. und 3. Jahrhunderts,” in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (3 vols.; ed. David Hellholm et al.; BZNW 176; Berlin: de Gruyter 2011), 2:1483–1530. Weidemann concludes his analysis of the *Didache* with an emphasis of the prominent role of the meal prayers for the identity of the community of the document: “Dass der Didachist in Kap. 9–10 nun aber Eucharistiegebete im Wortlaut mitteilt, dürfte seinen Grund darin haben, dass in diesen Gebeten – wie auch in der sonstigen Praxis der Initiation von Heiden in die Ekklēsia – das Selbstverständnis der *Didache*-Gemeinde auf besonders charakteristische und für ihn gültige Weise formuliert ist” (1498; italics original).

(4) At the end of the book we find a short section with *Final apocalyptic warnings*: Be watchful in the last days of tribulation! (*Did.* 16). This section has similarities with the eschatological teaching of Jesus in the synoptic gospels. It ends with a vision of the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven. The last words of the book are probably lacking in our manuscripts.¹⁵

The *Didache* is often presented as the oldest known example of a church order.¹⁶ This description may be anachronistic and create false expectations. The first and most extensive part of it, the Two Ways teaching, has no indication of use in a liturgical setting or links to church gatherings. According to 7:1 it can best be characterized as a pre-baptismal catechesis. The agenda of chapters 7–10 lets basic questions remain open. The instruction for baptism is only concerned with the quality and quantity of the water and presupposes a triune baptismal formula. However, there is nothing about procedure, place, prayers and a possible presence of church leaders at the baptism. The instruction on fasting on specific days and the recital of the Lord's Prayer three times a day is not related to church gatherings, but rather gives advice for personal piety. This is of course a personal piety confirming their belonging to the fellowship of those joining in the same prayer, addressing their common "Father in heaven." In the instructions on how to receive apostles, prophets and travelling Christians, there are clear suggestions for how to judge their behaviour in general, but their role when the church comes together for service is only presupposed, not described. The concluding eschatological warnings are not what you expect to find in a church order. As a church order the *Didache* is a very fragmentary compilation of different materials leaving many questions open. This fact complicates the interpretation of the Eucharist prayers because there is no closer description of the meal procedures they belong to.¹⁷ There are different interpretations of where in the text the Eucharistic sacrament proper is celebrated.¹⁸ We cannot enter this discussion here, but treat the chapters 9 and 10 as a unit referring to a

¹⁵ Willy Rordorf and André Tuilier, *La doctrine des douze apôtres: (Didachè) introduction, texte, traduction, notes* (SC 248; Paris: Cerf, 1978), 199.

¹⁶ Schröter, *Das Abendmahl*, 61–62 discusses the purpose of the ancient church orders, with reference to contributions by B. Steimer and G. Schöllgen.

¹⁷ See the careful considerations about the fragmentary character of the *Didache* in Georg Schöllgen, "Die *Didache* als Kirchenordnung: Zur Frage des Abfassungszweckes und seinen Konsequenzen für die Interpretation," *JAC* 29 (1986): 5–26.

¹⁸ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, "The Birkath Ha-Mazon and the Body of the Lord: A Case-Study of *Didache* 9–10," *Questions Liturgiques* 85 (2004): 197–205 gives a broad discussion of the relation of the cup and the κλάσμα in *Did.* 9 and the thanksgiving for the full meal in *Did.* 10 to the sacramental Eucharist proper. From a comparison with Jewish meal prayers and the later development of Christian liturgy he concludes (with Niederwimmer and Rordorf) that 10:5 is the invitation to the Eucharist as sacrament. The prayers in *Did.* 10 therefore have a double function as pointing backwards to the meal they have shared and forwards to the Eucharistic sacrament they are going to celebrate.

celebration called Eucharist composed both of a real meal (10:1) and of a sacramental bread and cup (spiritual food and drink, 10:5) which in the later development came to be isolated from the common meal.

If we take its title seriously the book may better be called a manual of Church instruction.¹⁹ The longer title *The Lord's Teaching to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles* seems to be an echo of the Great Commission in Matt 28.²⁰ This longer title may have been secondary compared to the short title *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, but may have been an adequate interpretation of its biblical allusion. The Risen Lord gathers the twelve apostles (in Matt 28:16 more exactly: eleven) and instructs them to go to all nations in contrast to the limited sending to Israel in Matt 10:5–6. Their mission is to make disciples, by baptizing them and by teaching. Their teaching is in the Great Commission defined ethically, not doctrinally: the new disciples should *obey* everything Jesus has *commanded*. In the Gospel of Matthew this would point to the Sermon on the Mount as basic teaching on discipleship. In the *Didache* it corresponds to the Two Ways tract including the *sectio evangelica*. The title would in this way very well cover the teaching in chapters 1–8 on the new behaviour, baptism and prayer as the basis for discipleship. This teaching leads up to the presentation of the Eucharist in chapters 9–10 where only baptized persons had access. The Eucharist seems to be the end point and the peak of an initiation procedure as described in *Did.* 1–10.

The Two Ways tract and the following agenda for gatherings of the *ecclesia* correspond to the description of the initiation procedure for entrance to the church in Justin's first apology: teaching on the new way of life, with fasting and prayer (*I Apol.* 61:1–2), then baptism (61:3–12) and participation in the common meal (65–66).²¹

We will concentrate our investigation on the prayers and their immediate context in the agenda for the church in chapters 7–10.

¹⁹ Kirsopp Lake, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers with an English translation* (2 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1912; reprinted 1959), 1:307. The following considerations in this paragraph were inspired by a conversation with my colleague Oskar Skarsaune.

²⁰ The echo is observed by Rordorf and Tuilier (*La doctrine*, 16), but not considered as relevant for the interpretation of the *Didache*, which according to these authors was written independently of the Gospel of Matthew.

²¹ Cf. Weidemann, "Taufe und Taufeucharistie," 1485–92. Weidemann makes a distinction between the Eucharist as part of the procedure of baptism and initiation ("die Taufeucharistie," *Did.* 9–10 and Justin, *I Apol.* 61–66), on one hand, and the weekly Eucharist celebration on the day of the Lord ("Sonntagseucharistie," *Did.* 14 and Justin, *I Apol.* 67) on the other. But there is no reason to see any great difference in the order of the Eucharist in these contexts. We suppose that the prayers in *Did.* 9–10 also represent the prayers of the weekly gatherings of the church.

Baptism as Christian Initiation

The teaching of the Two Ways addressed to the candidates for baptism points to a strong concern for seeing baptism as a starting point for a new lifestyle and a new morality with roots in Jewish tradition. But the new start is linked to a baptism into (εἰς) the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, with the same baptismal formula as in Matt 28:19. This baptismal formula presupposes a baptismal instruction with a doctrinal content in addition to the moral teaching of the Two Ways. A new morality is important for those who want to join the church in baptism, but it cannot stand alone as instruction for the candidates to baptism. A teaching about Father, Son and Holy Spirit is implied in the use of this formula even if it is not expressed in the text.²²

In the prescriptions about baptism the use of water is indispensable, but there is a distinction between three types of water, probably mentioned in order to mark out a priority. The discussion of different types of water is clearly reminiscent of Jewish considerations about purification water, e.g. as reflected in the Mishnah tract *Miqwa'oth* (immersion pools) with its classification of different kinds of water. But the discussion in the *Didache* is remarkable in its lack of any consideration about the purity of the baptismal water. The power of baptism is not dependent on the quality or the quantity of water, but on its performance in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jewish discussions about purification water are a faint background to the text,²³ but the Christian baptism is quite different from a purification act that is repeated. It is a singular rite marking the transition to a new life on "the Way of life" and to a new identity marked by the names of the triune God.

The instructions about fasting before the act of baptism (7:4) lead over to the next section on fasting and prayer. Here we find an explicit confrontation between the addressees and a competing group, described as οἱ ὑποκριταί, the hypocrites. The same word is used in Matt 6:2–5 and 16 to describe the opponents to the disciples of Jesus in their practice of giving alms, praying and fasting. Hypocrisy is a repeated accusation against the Pharisees and the scribes in Matt 23:13–32. Some scholars maintain that the hypocrites in *Did.*

²² The Two Ways tract opens with the commandment to "love God who has created you" combined with the command to love your neighbor (1:1), a short form of the double commandment as given in Mark 12: 29–31 with parallels. The reference to the "Lord" in 4:1 is probably to Jesus as the Lord, but in 4:12–13, echoing Deut 4:2, to the Lord God; see Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 105, 112. There is only one reference to the Spirit in the Two Ways: "For he [God] does not come to call those of high status, but those whom the Spirit has prepared" (*Did.* 4:10). So the Father, the Son and the Spirit may be tacitly present in the Two Ways, but there is nothing in this basic baptismal instruction that really explains or develops the baptismal formula.

²³ Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 128: "The Jewish tradition is still influential, but in principle it has already been ruptured."

8 refer to the Pharisees as a faction within Judaism²⁴ or to judaizing Christians influenced by the Pharisees.²⁵ This delimitation to a special group of Jews has not gained broad support. It is more probable that the hypocrites are referring to Jews in general outside the community known and presupposed by the author of the *Didache*.²⁶ Their fasting twice a week corresponds to the description of the Pharisee in Luke 18:12. In the *Didache*, however, the difference in the praxis of fasting is not seen in manners or behaviour, as in Matt 6, but in the choice of days for fasting. The hypocrites fast on Monday and Thursday, the Christians, however, should fast on Wednesday and Friday. The naming of the days is given according to Jewish custom: Monday is the second day after Sabbath, Tuesday the third day etc.

Huib van de Sandt gives a thorough discussion of the identity of the “hypocrites” in *Did.* 8, concluding that they refer to Jews in general.²⁷ He gives an important argument for this from the instruction to fast one or two days before baptism (*Did.* 7:4). When this baptism and the following Eucharist is celebrated on “the day of the Lord” (*Did.* 14:1) they would fast on the Sabbath. But fasting on a Sabbath was not allowed by the Jews because it was a feast day (Neh 8:10; Tob 2:1; *Jub.* 50:10, 12). Such an invalidation of a Jewish identity marker “suggests a Gentile Christian influence and a polemic use of the term ‘hypocrites’ against Jews in general.”²⁸

The instruction about fasting presupposes that there is close contact with the life of the synagogue and that Jewish customs might have been attractive to some of the addressees. On the other hand, however, the *Didache* has a strong concern for building a separate identity among the Christians as distinct from the other group by avoiding fasting on the same days as them.²⁹

²⁴ Jonathan A. Draper, “Christian Self-Definition against the ‘Hypocrites’ in *Didache* VIII,” in *The Didache in Modern Research* (ed. Jonathan A. Draper; AGJU 37; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 223–43; Marcello Del Verme, *Didache and Judaism: Jewish Roots of an Ancient Christian-Jewish Work* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 185.

²⁵ According to Rordorf and Tuilier (*La doctrine*, 37) the “hypocrites” here refer to Jewish Christians, “certains chrétiens judaïsants.” The suggestion of Slee (*The Church in Antioch*) that they are Jewish Christians of Pharisaic observance, representing or being close to the “men from James” in Gal 2:11–14 is hardly convincing.

²⁶ Cf. the discussion in Sandt, “The *Didache* Redefining,” 259–64. See also the literature in Draper, “Christian Self-Definition,” 233, note 55.

²⁷ Sandt, “The *Didache* Redefining,” 259–64.

²⁸ Sandt, “The *Didache* Redefining,” 264.

²⁹ Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 132: “The sharp polemic against the οἱ ὑποκριταί, and the necessity of distinguishing oneself from the fasting customs of the pious Jews by the choice of other fast days, presumes (on the one hand) an ongoing, close contact between the communities reflected here and their Jewish environment. On the other hand, the text requires us to suppose that these communities are in the process of separating themselves from the religious communion of Israel, or else they have already done so.”

And there seems to be no problem if the preparation for baptism implies fasting on the Sabbath.

The Lord's Prayer as Identity Marker (*Did.* 8)

Not only their fasting, but also their prayer should be different from οὐποκριταί. The identity of the Christians is linked to a common prayer, the *Pater Noster*, which is introduced as the prayer "the Lord has commanded in his Gospel." There is no explicit description of how this prayer is different from the prayers of the "hypocrites," neither in form nor in content. Its authority and its function as identity marker seems not to be so much dependent on its content as on its origin from Jesus as the Lord and on its character as part of the good news, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, as a description of the message of Jesus.³⁰

The designation κύριος in the *Didache* in most cases refers to Jesus.³¹ His position as "Lord" does not contradict his position as servant (παῖς) in the Eucharistic prayers 9:2–3 and 10:2–3. As obedient servant he was raised to glory by God (Acts 3:13–15), and Jesus was confessed as the Lord from the earliest days of the church (1 Cor 8:6; 12:3).³²

In the *Didache* there are four occurrences of the word εὐαγγέλιον (8:2; 11:3; 15:3–4). It is not used in the general meaning of a message of salvation, but is a reference to the authority behind the ordinances of the tract. In 8:1–2 the readers are instructed to pray "as the Lord commanded in his gospel." Similarly we read in 15:4: "But your prayers and alms and all your acts perform as you find in the Gospel of our Lord." The combination of fasting and prayer in 8:1–3 and of alms and prayer in 15:4 may be a strong indication that the author is familiar with the teaching on alms, prayer and fasting in

³⁰ Karl-Heinrich Ostmeier, "Das Vaterunser: Gründe für seine Durchsetzung als 'Urgebet' der Christenheit," *NTS* 50 (2004): 320–36, points to the authority of Jesus as the main reason for *Pater Noster's* role as identity marker for the early Christians. We shall discuss aspects of the content of the *Pater Noster* as identity markers below when we come to the Eucharist prayers in the *Didache*.

³¹ Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 134, n.5. Possible exceptions are 4:12–13 (cf. n. 23 above), the prayer in *Did.* 10:5 (where the address to the Lord is related to "your church" and "your kingdom"), and the quotation from Mal 1 in *Did.* 14:3. Milavec (*The Didache*, 663–66) maintains that the "Lord" in *Did.* 8:2 and elsewhere in the *Didache* refers to God the Father. "The Lord's Prayer, consequently, is the prayer of the Lord God delivered through his servant Jesus." This is highly improbable: the authority of the εὐαγγέλιον comes from the Lord Jesus.

³² Cf. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

Matt 6:1–18, and that the reference to the Gospel of the Lord points to an oral tradition similar to this or to the written Gospel of Matthew.³³

To pray according to the Gospel of the Lord is an indispensable duty for the addressees of the *Didache*. In the gospels the Lord's Prayer is presented as a prayer for the disciples of Jesus who continued to attend the synagogues and to practise the Jewish way of prayer. In the *Didache* the Lord's Prayer seems to be an alternative to the prayers of the "hypocrites" and to exclude a common prayer with the Jews. The contrasting prayer may be the main prayer of the synagogue, the *Amidah* or the *Eighteen Benedictions*, often simply called the *Tefillah*, "the prayer."³⁴ According to Jewish sources, the form and content of the *Amidah* was decided at the Synod of Jamnia, reconstituting Jewish religious life after the fall of the temple.³⁵ A reconstruction of the development and the exact wording of this prayer in the first century C.E. is hardly possible, but it was evidently already at the end of the first century longer than the short *Pater Noster*.³⁶

On the other hand, the Didachist summons the readers to pray the Lord's Prayer three times a day, which again shows affinity to Jewish prayer praxis. "Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice," is the word of the supplicant in Ps 55:17, and Daniel is not frightened by the prospect of being thrown into the lion's den: "Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before" (Dan 6:10).³⁷ The *Tefillah* was read in the morning and in the evening in connection with the recital of the *Shema*, and in addition also in the afternoon

³³ Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 135: "The prayer to be spoken thus appears as a direct order from the κύριος, a mandate that the Lord commanded "in his gospel." By εὐαγγέλιον, the Didachist means either the living voice of the gospel or a written gospel. It is difficult to decide." A dependence of Matthew on the *Didache* (as indicated by authors mentioned in n.5 above), is less probable.

³⁴ Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 134; Draper, *Modern Research*, 236–37; Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 295.

³⁵ Ismar Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), 28; W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963, repr. 1966), 309–15. The historicity of the Jamnia synod is, however, highly disputed; see Jack P. Lewis, "Jamnia (Jabneh), Council of" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:634–37.

³⁶ Asher Finkel, "Prayer in Jewish Life of the First Century as Background to Early Christianity," in *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 43–65, esp. 62–63; Elbogen, *Gottesdienst*, 27–41.

³⁷ The expression τρίς τῆς ἡμέρας is repeated three times in Dan 6:9–12 LXX. To this text see also Reidar Hvalvik's contribution in this volume.

at the time of the burnt-offering in the temple.³⁸ According to Acts 3:1, Peter and John went to the temple at the time of prayer in the ninth hour, at three in the afternoon. Cornelius at Caesarea observed the same time for prayer (Acts 10:3, 30), and one day later Peter prayed in the sixth hour on his way to Caesarea (Acts 10:9). To pray three times a day is therefore no new obligation in *Did.* 8:3, but a confirmation of the order of prayer the disciples of Jesus inherited from common Jewish practice. Jesus and his adherents had been educated in the synagogues as the houses of worship for the Jews.³⁹ In the beginning they did not distance themselves from the temple as the “house of prayer” (Mark 11:17 parr.).⁴⁰ But they had received a new prayer from their Lord and Master, that became their distinctive mark.

Another indication of the affinity of the *Didache* to Jewish prayer praxis is the addition of a eulogy or doxology at the end of the Lord's Prayer: “because yours is the power and the glory forever.” This is the oldest attestation to such a clause at the end of the prayer. A fuller ending with the word “kingdom” before “power and glory” was introduced into late manuscripts of Matt 6:13 and is now part of the liturgical form of the *Pater Noster* in the churches. The critical apparatus of Nestle-Aland points to 1 Chr 29:11–13 as a possible source of this doxology, even if the kingdom, the power and the glory here are mentioned in a different order and together with many other words for God's greatness and honour. The difference in wording is for Niederwimmer an argument against seeing 1 Chr 29:11–13 as a source for the doxology.⁴¹ Even if it is hard to find an exact corresponding wording of the eulogy in the Old Testament or Jewish sources, there can be no doubt that the habit of closing a prayer with praise to God is inspired by Jewish prayers. Each of the prayers of the *Eighteen Benedictions* is closed by the formula *barukh atta adonay*, “praised be you, Lord.” The same formula closes the three first benedictions of the *Birkath Ha-Mazon*, the Jewish praise for the food.⁴² The recital of the *Shema* is introduced by two praises, the *yozer or* and the *ahavah rabbah*, and is followed by a third, the *emeth weyazziv*. These three praises are closed by the *barukh*-formula, respectively “Praised be you, O Lord, Creator of the

³⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *ABBA: Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1966), 70–72.

³⁹ According to Elbogen (*Gottesdienst*, 36–37) the first (Jewish) Christians were in the beginning eager participants in the synagogue services: “Die Judenchristen gehörten zu ihren eifrigsten Besucher, sie fungierten auch als Vorbeter” (37).

⁴⁰ See Geir Otto Holmås' contribution in this volume.

⁴¹ Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 137.

⁴² Kurt Hruby, “La ‘Birkat Ha-Mazon’,” in *Mélanges liturgiques offerts au R.P. dom Bernard Bott O.S.B. de l'Abbaye du Mont César a l'occasion du cinquantième anniversaire de son ordination sacerdotale (4 juin 1972)* (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1972), 208–15. The fourth benediction has this formula in expanded form at the beginning.

luminaries,” “Praised be you, O Lord, who has chosen your people Israel in love,” and “Praised be you, O Lord, who has redeemed Israel.”⁴³ The content as well as the form of these formulas no doubt strengthened the identity of the Jews as Israel, God’s chosen people. This raises the question whether the addition of a *berakhah* to the Lord’s Prayer in the *Didache* was meant to emphasize an identity as part of Israel or to establish an identity related to, but nonetheless distinguished from the Jews.

The Eucharistic Prayer over Cup and Bread (*Did.* 9)

The doxology at the end of the Lord’s Prayer in *Did.* 8:2 is closely related to the three doxologies in the Eucharistic prayer for the cup and the bread in *Did.* 9 and to the corresponding three doxologies in the prayer after the meal in *Did.* 10. In the Eucharistic prayers the two first doxologies have a shorter form with only δόξα (“glory”) as the attribute to God. But the third doxology in both prayers has the fuller form of “power and glory,” like the ending of the Lord’s Prayer in the *Didache*. Only in 9:4 the word order is different: “glory” comes before “power.” The insertion of “through Jesus Christ” here is marking out the doxology as Christian, different from the Jewish doxologies.⁴⁴ The doxologies of the Eucharistic prayers evidently render the responses of the assembled church to the prayers, and also indicate the three-part structure of each of the two prayers as a whole.⁴⁵

The first prayer over the cup addresses God with the same words as the Lord’s Prayer: Πάτερ ἡμῶν, “our Father,” (9:2) and this address is used again in the thanksgiving for the broken bread (9:3). This address is not used in any form of the Jewish meal prayer, the *Birkath Ha-Mazon*.⁴⁶ It creates the impression of God as the heavenly father present in a household gathered

⁴³ S. Singer, *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire* (23rd ed.; London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1954), 37–39, 39–40, 42–44.

⁴⁴ On Jesus as mediator of the prayers of the church, see Larry Hurtado’s contribution in this volume.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the structure of the prayers, see Dieter-Alex Koch, “Eucharistic Meal and Eucharistic Prayers in *Didache* 9 and 10,” *Studia Theologica* 64 (2010): 200–218.

⁴⁶ See Hruby “La ‘Birkat Ha-Mazon’” for a full survey of the different versions of the Jewish meal prayers. From *m. Ber* 6:1 the praise for the cup may be reconstructed as “Blessed art thou, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine” (Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 145).

around his table. The address invites the praying group to see themselves as blessed children of God their father.⁴⁷

The reason for the thanksgiving is the knowledge they have received through Jesus about “the holy vine of David your servant.” The metaphor of Israel as a holy vine planted by God is well known from the Old Testament. It is the centre of the vineyard where God has invested so much effort to receive good fruit (Isa 5:2). Both there and in other prophetic texts the metaphor is connected with words of judgement, where God reacts to the lack of obedience and gratitude from his chosen people (Hos 10:1; Jer 2:21; Ezek 19:10–14). We do not find the expression “vine of David” in the Old Testament, but the application of the image of the vine in Ezek 17 seems to draw direct lines from the people as vine to the last Davidic kings of Judah before the exile in Babylon. In *Did.* 9:2 “David your servant” is a model of “Jesus your servant,” proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David and fulfilment of the promises to Israel.

Remarkable in the context of *Did.* 9–10 is the similar use of this metaphoric language in Ps 80, where Israel is the vine brought by God from Egypt and planted in the rich soil of the promised land, where it “sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River” (v. 11). But now it is broken down and burnt, and the prayer of the people sounds three times like a refrain: “Restore us, o God; let your face shine, that we may be saved” (Ps 80:4, 7, 19). The word for “restore us,” *hashivenu*, is a form of *shuv* that may also be translated “let us return, come back” and points to the (eschatological) gathering of the dispersed people in the land of Israel.⁴⁸ This wide-spread motif in the Old Testament and in ancient Jewish sources is of course the background of the prayers for the gathering of the church into the kingdom of God in *Did.* 9:4 and 10:4.⁴⁹

The parallel expressions “David your servant” and “Jesus your servant” indicate a similar parallelism between “the holy vine” and the praying group as the “we” who have received knowledge through Jesus. In this way the prayer furthers an identification of the praying group with Israel as the holy

⁴⁷ “This predication [“our Father”] certainly expresses the self-concept of the group, who understand themselves as the table company of children who receive the goods of time and eternity from the hand of the heavenly Father” (Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 145).

⁴⁸ The LXX has here the verb ἐπιστρέφω in the causative sense, that God may let them return. The same verb is used in LXX Jer 39:37 in parallelism to συνέγω: “I gather them . . . I will bring them back.” The Hebrew *shuv* as well as the Greek ἐπιστρέφω may also have the meaning of “returning to God” and be used synonymously to μετανοέω, “repent,” *Did.* 10:6.

⁴⁹ Luigi Clerici, *Einsammlung der Zerstreuten: Liturgiegeschichtliche Untersuchung zur vor- und Nachgeschichte der Fürbitte für die Kirche in Didache 9,4 und 10,5* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966).

vine, made possible by Jesus as the new David, God's servant and the messianic king of the church.⁵⁰ This use of "we" that is in line with the address to God as "our" Father, would enhance a strong feeling of identity as the chosen people of God in continuity with the promises of the Scriptures. There are no hints of polemic against others in these expressions, but they would have been offensive to Jews who did not share the belief in Jesus as the son of David. For Gentiles with limited knowledge of the Old Testament they would hardly have been understandable at all and create an impression of a very exclusive group. Language and motifs in the prayer would strengthen a distinct Christian identity with a thoroughly Jewish background.

The thanksgiving for the broken bread (κλάσμα) is similar to the thanksgiving for the cup in that neither the wine nor the bread is seen as nourishment for the body. They have a symbolic meaning as part of a holy meal, and the gift of the κλάσμα is "life and knowledge." The life here clearly refers to eternal life and corresponds to the immortality as the gift mentioned together with knowledge (and faith) in 10:2. The κλάσμα seems thus to be related to the idea of Jesus as "the bread of life" who gives the eternal life that neither the manna in the desert nor the bread of ordinary meals can give (Joh 6:35, 50–51). The knowledge (γνώσις) is described by the repeated formula ἡς ἐγνώρισας ἡμῖν διὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ παιδός σου "that you have made known to us through Jesus your servant" (*Did.* 9:2, 3; 10:2). It refers to the knowledge or revelation that was given by Jesus. The praying community as the "we" in this formula speaks on behalf of a privileged group that have received this life-giving knowledge from God. This knowledge marks their identity as God's people by God's generous grace through Jesus, and distinguishes them from other human beings.

In a second part of the thanksgiving for the κλάσμα it is compared to grains of wheat that were spread over the mountains, but are gathered and made into bread. This is applied to the church in a prayer that the church of God may be gathered from the ends of the earth into the kingdom of God. Here we find a reference to a broadly attested motif in the Old Testament: The scattered Israel shall be gathered into the promised land in the days of salvation.⁵¹ The identity of Israel as God's people is strongly connected to the gift of the land, as expressed in the liturgy of the first fruits in Deut 26:1–11. In the *Birkath Ha-Mazon*, the praise for the meal, the pious Jews remind themselves of the

⁵⁰ Niederwimmer (*The Didache*, 146) has a different interpretation of the "holy vine of David" as a metaphor for salvation itself. This might be supported from the parallel expressions "life and knowledge" in *Did.* 9:3 and "knowledge, faith and immortality" in 10:2, but has no support in the Old Testament or in the intertestamental use of this imagery. An interpretation of the vine as the people in line with the tradition is preferable.

⁵¹ See the broad presentation of this motif in Clerici, *Einsammlung*, and the source references in Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 151.

connection of the daily bread with the gift of the land in accordance with Deut 8:10: "You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given to you." After the deportation of the Jews to exile in Babylon, interpreted as God's reaction to the sins of the people, the promise of a return to the land and a restoration of the people are basic elements in Jewish eschatology.⁵² In the *Amidah* the Jews pray for the return of the exiles to the land and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.⁵³ In the *Birkath Ha-Mazon* the second blessing is praise to God for "the land and the food" and the third for the "rebuilding of Jerusalem."⁵⁴ In the time of the *Didache* the hope of a gathering of Israel in the promised land was a central element in the identity of the Jews, expressed in their prayers as a hope for the future based on the memory of the inheritance of the land under Joshua in the past.

This gives important information for the change of this motif in *Did.* 9:4 and 10:5. The gathering of the ἐκκλησία has replaced the gathering of the exiled Jews and the kingdom of God has become the place of salvation instead of the land of Israel and the rebuilt Jerusalem. The Jewish hope has gone through a radical Christian re-interpretation. The prayers indicate a moving away from Jewish identity towards sharing a hope designed by the message of the kingdom in the (synoptic) gospels, inclusive also of Gentiles.⁵⁵

At the end of this prayer the Didachist has given a comment restricting the participation in the Eucharist: "Let no one eat or drink of your thanksgiving except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord." This instruction may imply that non-baptized persons were allowed to be present at the celebration of the Eucharist. But the author is concerned to maintain a

⁵² This pattern of Sin-Exile-Restoration is described in Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: a Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century BC* (London: SCM Press, 1968).

⁵³ The 10th *berakhah* (return of exiles; Singer, *Daily Prayer Book*, 48) is based on Isa 56:8 and is attested in Hebrew Sir 51:12 f. The 14th *berakhah* (rebuilding of Jerusalem; *ibid.*, 49) probably gained its form after the Jewish wars 70 and 135 C.E., but its content is attested already in Hebrew Sir 51:12 g.

⁵⁴ Hruby, "La 'Birkat Ha-Mazon,'" 211–16. On the reorganization of the *Birkath Ha-Mazon* in *Did.* 9–10 see also Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 313–18. Their conclusion is as follows: "Both *Did.* 9:4 and 10:5 represent a striking discontinuity in the people-of-God concept, since the gathering of the church into God's kingdom no longer has any connection to the gathering of Israel" (328).

⁵⁵ Sandt ("The Didache Redefining," 253–60) makes a careful analysis of the prayer in *Did.* 10:5 compared with the *Birkath Ha-Mazon*. He suggests that the prayer in the *Didache* was a reworking of a Greek version of the *Birkath Ha-Mazon* from circles in Hellenistic Judaism. His conclusion (258) supports my own: "In sum, the transfer of the gathering of Israel to the Christian church in *Did.* 10:5 (and 9:4), without any reference to the symbolic centre of Jewish ethnicity, is a conspicuous characteristic of a Gentile-oriented refashioning. . . . The Didache liturgy thus shows indications of a community which has lost this sense of group identity within a Jewish matrix."

strict distinction between insiders and outsiders at the holy meal itself. The cup and the bread are only for the insiders, for baptized Christians. This restriction is given authority from the Lord himself, whose word is quoted: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs!” This means that not only the baptism, but also the participation in the Eucharist is a distinguishing identity marker for the praying group. The expression in the quotation has its background in the distinction between clean and unclean in the Old Testament and in Jewish practice. The comparison of the outsiders with dogs declares them unclean and therefore excluded from the holy sphere. Its original function may have been to exclude non-Jews or uncircumcised persons from the temple in Jerusalem. In the *Didache* the slogan works likewise, but places the distinction differently. Non-baptized persons are excluded from the Eucharist, be they Jews or Gentiles.⁵⁶ Baptism is the decisive initiation to a holy people sharing a holy meal. These two exclusive rituals point to an identity clearly distinguished from that characteristic of Jewish assemblies and of course even more from their Gentile neighbours.

This does not mean that baptism conveys a status that cannot be changed or lost. In *Did.* 14 we read that the participants in the Eucharist should confess their transgressions (cf. 4:14) so that the holy meal, here called their sacrifice⁵⁷ according to Mal 1:11, should not be impure. Quarrel between the table fellows brings an intolerable profanation of the offering. The Eucharist requires reconciliation between its participants (cf. *Did.* 3:2; Matt 5:23–24). It is more than an ordinary table fellowship. Purified in baptism they share a meal of holy gifts.

The Prayer after the Meal (*Did.* 10)

A closer look at the three-part structure of the prayer after the meal shows a striking affinity to the Lord’s Prayer. The address to God as *πάτερ ἅγιε*, “Holy Father” (10:2) may at first glance seem to indicate a distance to the Lord’s Prayer compared to the repeated address to God as “Our Father” in 9:2–3. But the address to God as Father does link all of these prayers together

⁵⁶ Huub van de Sandt, “‘Do not Give what is Holy to the Dogs’ (Did 9:5D and Matt 7:6A): The Eucharistic Food of the *Didache* in its Jewish Purity Setting,” *VC* 56 (2002): 223–46 gives informative background material for this quotation in Jewish sources, where the *holy* probably refers to sacrifices in the temple and the *dogs* may refer to the Gentiles. But the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is no topic in the *Didache*. The application of the “Holy to the Dogs” in *Did.* 9:5 is not only to the “Gentile outsider” (ibid. 246), but generally to unbaptized persons, including Jews. In this article Sandt seems to apply the restriction of *Did.* 9:5 only to Gentiles, not to unbaptized Jews.

⁵⁷ According to Niederwimmer (*The Didache*, 197) the “sacrifice” does not refer to the Eucharistic elements, but to “the Eucharistic prayer offered by the congregation.”

with the *Pater Noster*, and the address to the Father as “Holy” may be influenced by the first thanksgiving for the Holy Name, “which you made tabernacle (κατεσκήνωσας) in our hearts” (10:2). The expression reminds one of the tabernacle as a model of the temple in Jerusalem, the house for the name of the Lord (1 Kgs 8:17–19). But the underlying image now is the church as the temple of God, filled with his gracious presence (1 Cor 3:16–17, cf. 14:25: “God is really among you”). The “Holy Father” is present among the believers through the presence of his “Holy Name” in their hearts. He has given them “knowledge, faith and immortality” as present gifts with a promise for a future beyond death. The first prayer of the Lord’s Prayer may primarily have been more theocentric and eschatological, echoing the promise of God to sanctify his Name in Ezek 36:23. But it is not difficult to see a correspondence between the thanksgiving for the Holy Name in the heart of the believers and the prayer in the *Pater Noster* that God may sanctify his Name.⁵⁸ The gift of the Holy Name in the hearts, given to them through baptism into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, seems to be an identity marker of the ideal participants in the worship of the *Didache*. The prayer to the “holy Father” in *Did.* 10:2 is a reminder of the Name of God in the hearts of the believers and probably also an echo of the first prayer in the *Pater Noster* that God’s Name be sanctified.

Common to the address to God as “holy Father” in 10:2, as “our Father” in 9:2 and 3 and as “our Father in heaven” in the Lord’s Prayer in 8:2 is the brevity and simplicity of the approach to God. “Father” stands alone as the respectful and familiar title and the only noun describing God, three times with the qualifier “our” and one time each with “in heaven” and “holy.” There has been a long discussion after Joachim Jeremias’ reconstruction of this address to Aramaic *Abba* and his interpretation of this as an unambiguous mark of the *ipsissima vox Jesu*: This is the way Jesus himself has spoken of God.⁵⁹ Jeremias may have exaggerated the understanding of the word as exclusively connected to intimate family language.⁶⁰ His main thesis has so

⁵⁸ A corresponding individualizing of the *Pater Noster* may be seen in the (late!) textual variant in Luke 11:2, where “your Kingdom come” is replaced by “your Holy Spirit come to us and cleanse us” as the prayer following “your Name be sanctified.”

⁵⁹ Jeremias, *ABBA*, 59; and Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press 1967), 57. To address God as “my Father” is something new. “So we have here a quite unmistakable characteristic of the *ipsissima vox Jesu*.”

⁶⁰ James Barr, “Abba isn’t Daddy!” *JTS* 39 (1988): 28–47; James H. Charlesworth, “A Caveat on Textual Transmission and the Meaning of Abba: A Study of the Lord’s Prayer” in *The Lord’s Prayer and other Prayer Texts from the Greco-Roman Era* (ed. James H. Charlesworth with Mark Harding and Mark Kiley; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994), 1–14.

far been modified, however, but not really refuted: This way of addressing God briefly and simply as Father has no clear analogies in Jewish prayers.⁶¹

On the other hand, God is not addressed as “king” in prayers in the New Testament or in the apostolic fathers. The only exception is *1 Clem.* 61:2, “Heavenly Master, king of eternity,” where it marks out God as heavenly and eternal king in contrast to “those who rule and lead us here on earth” (60:4) for whose wisdom and welfare the community are praying. The most frequent address to God in this prayer is δεσπότης, Lord or Master (*1 Clem.* 59:4; 60:3; 61:1, 2). But *1 Clement* knows that the address to God as Father is a decisive expression of a Christian conversion (*1 Clem.* 8:3), see below.

It is important to note that Jeremias’ thesis is about *addressing* God as Father. Jeremias was fully aware of the image of God as Father in *descriptions* of Israel’s relationship to God. He explicitly refers to many such texts in the Old Testament and Early Judaism.⁶² Theissen and Merz do not hit the mark when they argue against Jeremias from *Jos. Azen.* 12:14–15 and *Sir* 51:10: In these texts “father” is not used in address to God, but in descriptions of him.⁶³ The address to God is the traditional “Lord,” in *Jos. Azen.* 12:14: “Have mercy upon me, Lord, and guard me, a virgin (who is) abandoned and an orphan, because you, Lord, are a sweet and good and gentle father.” Similarly in *Sir* 51:10: “I cried out, ‘Lord, you are my Father; do not forsake me in the days of trouble’.” Charlesworth also argues against Jeremias by quoting texts where God is described, but not addressed as Father.⁶⁴ In some few cases God is addressed as Father in the form “our Father” or “our Father in heaven,” but always in combination with other words expressing respectful distance, like King, Lord, Master.⁶⁵ According to Jeremias there are only two texts from the time of the Second Temple addressing God as Father in this way. The prayer *Ahavah rabbah*, introducing the recital of the *Shema*, had probably been part of the temple worship and has a passage like this: “Our Father, our King, for the sake of our fathers, . . . have mercy upon us and

⁶¹ Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57 (= *ABBA*, 59): “We can say quite definitely that there is no analogy at all in the whole literature of Jewish prayer for God being addressed as Abba.”

⁶² Jeremias, *ABBA*, 15–33; *The Prayers of Jesus*, 11–29.

⁶³ Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *Der Historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 458.

⁶⁴ Charlesworth, “A Caveat on Textual Transmission,” 5–11: *T. Levi* 18:2–6; *T. Jud.* 24:1–2; *m. Yoma* 8:9. In *m. Sotah* 9:15 the formula “On whom can we depend – only on our Father in heaven” is repeated three times in a description of the great apostasy at the end-time.

⁶⁵ *Sir* 23:1: “O Lord, Father and Master of my life, do not abandon me to their designs”; 23:4: “O Lord, Father and God of my life, do not give me haughty eyes.”

teach us."⁶⁶ R. Aqiva (*b. Ta'an* 25b) probably quotes from an old litany with a repeated address to God as "our Father, our king" which later has been extended in the Jewish liturgy.⁶⁷ Charlesworth has not considered Jeremias' arguments against dating the address to God as Father in the 4th and 6th prayer of the *Amidah* to pre-mishnaic times.⁶⁸

Jeremias' concern was to elucidate the prayer language of the historical Jesus, and both Charlesworth and Fitzmyer confirm that in the address to God as "my Father" or *abba* we hear the *ipsissima vox Jesu*.⁶⁹ Two comments may be necessary to qualify this conclusion. 1) We cannot exclude that Jesus' use of "my Father" or *abba* had antecedents in contemporary Judaism even if we do not find evidence confirming this. Our source material is simply too limited to confirm definitely the uniqueness of Jesus' language here. 2) If his address to God as "my Father" or *abba* was an innovation in relation to contemporary Judaism, this does not make his person or message less Jewish. Jesus was a Jew, and the Lord's Prayer as rendered in the gospels is a "thoroughly Jewish prayer, for almost every word of it could be uttered by a devout Jew."⁷⁰ This concern has rightly been underscored by Charlesworth in his discussion with Jeremias.

For our purpose the question of a possible provenance from the historical Jesus may be open. It is more important that we in the Lord's Prayer as well as in the Eucharist prayers of *Did.* 8–10 faces a community of Jesus believers around 100 C.E. In Gal 4:6 and Rom 8:15 Paul clearly presumes that the appeal to God as *Abba*, "Father," was an identity marker for the members of the community, made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul would hardly have written in this way if the address to God as Father had been common in the prayers of his Jewish contemporaries.⁷¹ The prayer to God as

⁶⁶ Jeremias, *ABBA*, 28–29; *The Prayers of Jesus*, 24–25; cf. Singer, *Daily Prayer Book*, 39.

⁶⁷ Jeremias, *ABBA*, 28–29; *The Prayers of Jesus*, 24–25; for the expansions, see Singer, *Daily Prayer Book*, 55–57.

⁶⁸ Charlesworth, "A Caveat on Textual Transmission," 7, compare Jeremias, *ABBA*, 29–30; *The Prayers of Jesus*, 26.

⁶⁹ See note 61 above and compare Charlesworth, "A Caveat on Textual Transmission," 10; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (X–XXIV): Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Anchor Bible 28A; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 898.

⁷⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 900.

⁷¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 711–18 gives a brief and instructive discussion of "Jesus' *Abba* Prayer" with references to Jeremias and more recent literature. His conclusion is that "the *Abba* prayer was so cherished among the first believers *precisely because it was Jesus' own prayer form*." From Gal 4 and Rom 8 he also concludes that "the *Abba* prayer was a *mark of Christian worship*, and therefore, presumably, *distinctive of Christians*" (italics original). This implies also that the first disciples "cannot have been aware of *abba* as a regular address in the prayers of fellow Jews" (716). A similar

Abba and the possession of the Spirit are for him the basis of a new community. Through Christ both Jews and Gentiles “have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18). In *1 Clem.* 8:3 the simple address to God as Father is the decisive step in the *μετάνοια*, the conversion to God: “If you turn to me with all your heart and say ‘Father,’ I will listen to you as a holy people.”⁷² The appeal to God as “our Father” and “holy Father” in *Did.* 9–10 evidently belongs to this specific Christian prayer language, presumably inspired by the *Pater Noster* and possibly by Jesus’ own prayer practice. This way of addressing God in the *Didache* is likely to have shaped and promoted the self-consciousness in the praying group: they are the privileged adopted sons and daughters of God with an open access to their Heavenly Father. The common address to God as Father in communities consisting not only of Jewish, but also of Gentile Christians, may have been an offence for many Jews in their identity as the chosen people of God, and as such an identity marker of a community including both Jews and Gentiles.

In the thanksgiving prayers found at 9:2–3 and 10:2–3, the mediator of the gifts from God is Jesus “your Servant.”⁷³ These four designations of Jesus as *παῖς* are framed by a reference to the holy vine of David “your servant” *παῖς* (9:2) (cf. David as *παῖς* of God in Luke 1:69; Acts 4:25) and by the closing exclamation “Hosanna to the God of David” (10:6). This makes it possible and probable to see a messianic reference in the designation of Jesus as *παῖς*, proclaiming him to be the son of David in a similar way as Jesus was

conclusion is supported by Martin Hengel, “Abba, Maranatha, Hosanna und die Anfänge der Christologie,” in *Studien zur Christologie: Kleine Schriften IV* (WUNT 201; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 496–534. He discusses the aramaic words *abba* and *maranatha* in the prayers of the Pauline churches and he deplores that scholars fail to recognize “dass diese *etwas ganz Ungewöhnliches und spezifisch Urchristliches* sind und nach unserem Wissen keine Vorbilder in der synagogalen Liturgie der griechischen Diasporasynagoge besitzen” (499; italics original).

⁷² The quotation in *1 Clem* 8:3 differs from our texts to Ezekiel, but is also found in Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.91.2 and in the Nag Hammadi tract *Exegesis of the Soul* (NHC II, 6 135.30–136.4). These authors may possibly have used a lost Ezekiel-Apocryphon, cf. Horacio E. Lona, *Der erste Clemensbrief* (Ergänzungsreihe zum KEK, Bd. 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 188. For our purpose it is not decisive whether the quotation ultimately comes from a Jewish or a Christian source. We only know it from two Christian writers and a gnostic text where the exclamation of God as Father is an expression of a true conversion and thereby confirms this address to God as an identity marker of a child of God.

⁷³ The work of Christ, or more precisely the work of God “through Jesus your servant,” is here regularly described with the verb *γνωρίζω*: Jesus the servant has “made known” the holy vine (9:2), life and knowledge (9:3), and knowledge, faith and immortality (10:2). In the corresponding formula in 10:3 this verb is replaced by the verb *χαρίζω*: “You have by grace given us spiritual food and drink and eternal life” – evidently as an allusion to the name of the meal as an *εὐχαριστία* (9:1, 5) and the repeated references to thanksgiving (9:2, 3; 10:1–2, 3, 4, 7).

welcomed into Jerusalem as the son of David with the *ὠσαννά* from Ps 118:25–26 in Matt 21:9.⁷⁴ There is no need to see *παῖς* as an “inferior” Christological title contradicting the description of Jesus as Lord, e.g. in the warning “Let nobody eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized into the Name of the Lord!” (9:5).⁷⁵ The title *παῖς* does not necessarily associate Jesus with the suffering servant of Isa 53, but points to his obedience to God and thereby to his decisive role in God’s salvific action. This use is evident in Acts 3:13 and 26, where God’s glorification and resurrection of Jesus as the servant is contrasted to the betrayal and denial of him by the leading Jews in Jerusalem. The prominent role of Jesus in the prayers distinguishes them from both Jewish and Gentile contemporary prayers.

The second prayer in *Did.* 10:3 is addressed to God as the almighty Lord, *δέσποτα παντοκράτωρ*, thanking him for having created all things “for the sake of your name.”⁷⁶ His generosity as creator is specified as his giving food and drink to people for enjoyment so they may give him thanks. The word for “thanksgiving,” *εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι*, “we thank you,” may point to the name of the meal as Eucharist, *εὐχαριστία* (9:1, 5), consisting of food and drink, bread and wine. The first part of the prayer has a broad reference to everyday food and drink as God’s gracious gifts to all created human beings. But in the second part, this horizon is narrowed to the celebrating community: “But to us you have graciously given⁷⁷ spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your Servant. Above all we thank you because you are powerful (*δυνατός*).⁷⁸ To you be glory forever.”

The prayer seems to have its background in the fourth prayer for the daily bread in the Lord’s Prayer. As an interpretation of the fourth prayer its double application is striking: as Creator God gives food and drink to everybody, furthermore he feeds his church for eternal life through Jesus Christ by the

⁷⁴ Hengel, “Abba,” 515–17 shows the close connection between the *ὠσαννά* and the *μαρνανθά*. They are exclamations welcoming Jesus as the present Lord at the Eucharist and looking forward to his coming at the Parousia.

⁷⁵ Rordorf and Tuilier (*La Doctrine*, 43–44) shows how the Christological designations give the Eucharistic prayers a Christian content compared to their background in Jewish thanksgivings. Only in the prayers proper do we find the archaic, Jewish-Christian designation of Jesus as *παῖς*. In the triadic baptismal formulas of 7:1 and 3 (and indirectly in 16:4) he is designated as Son of God. The most common Christological title in the *Didache* is *κύριος*, Lord: 4:1; 6:2; 9:5; 10:5; 11:4, 8; 12:1; 14:1; 15:1, 4; 16:1, 7, 8.

⁷⁶ *παντοκράτωρ* is normally used in combination with *κύριος* and/or *θεός*. It is a characteristic designation for God in the LXX and in Revelation referring to his power as Creator of heaven and earth.

⁷⁷ The verb *ἐχαρίσατο* gives a new word play on the Eucharist *εὐχαριστία* and the preceding verb *εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι* in v. 2: “we thank you,” and the same verb in v. 3 “so that they may give thanks to you.”

⁷⁸ Cf. *δύναμις* in the doxologies in 8:2; 9:4 and 10:5.

spiritual food and drink in the Eucharist. The emphatic place of the ἡμῶν in the beginning of the sentence marks a contrast between the believers and other human beings in the preceding sentence. The gift of the Eucharist is a privilege for the believers. The distinction between “them” and “us” implied in this prayer is a strong identity marker of those participating in the prayer versus other human beings. But its explicit reference to God’s care for everybody indicates that the praying community does not encourage enmity or contempt towards the “outsiders.” As in Matt 5:43–48 and Luke 6:27–36, God’s unlimited love inspires the disciples to love people outside the praying fellowship. This positive attitude to the outsiders is confirmed by the teaching of the Two Ways: “Do not hate anyone (οὐ μισήσεις πάντα ἄνθρωπον) – but reprove some, pray for others, and love still others more than yourself” (*Did.* 2:7).

We find the closest verbal parallel to the Lord’s Prayer in the third and last prayer in *Did.* 10:5: “Remember, Lord, your church and deliver it from all evil” (τοῦ ῥύσασθαι αὐτήν ἀπὸ παντὸς πονηροῦ). The similarity to the last prayer of the *Pater Noster* can hardly be overlooked: “deliver us from evil” (ῥύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ). The wording in *Did.* 10:5 excludes the interpretation of the evil (τοῦ πονηροῦ) as the Evil one, the Devil, which has been considered as a possibility in the *Pater Noster*. “From all evil” (ἀπὸ παντὸς πονηροῦ) also makes a specific reference to the great tribulation at the end time a less probable interpretation. This may be included, especially when we look at the eschatological outlook of the prayer as a whole (10:6), but the last prayer of *Did.* 10 seems to have a broader scope including the everyday temptations and all the evils threatening the church on its way to the kingdom of God. The broader understanding of the prayer is confirmed by the teaching of the Two Ways: “My child, flee from all evil (φεῦγε ἀπὸ παντὸς πονηροῦ) and everything like it” (*Did.* 3:1). The presentation of the way of death is concluded by use of the same verb: ῥυθειήτε, τέκνα, ἀπὸ τούτων ἀπάντων “Be delivered, children, from all such people” or: “from all such things,” referring to the preceding list of vices leading to death (*Did.* 5:2). As the oldest interpretation of the *Pater Noster* outside the canonical gospels the *Didache* here gives an important contribution to the understanding of its 6th prayer.

The content of the prayer is not only negatively to save the church from all evil, but also positively that the church should be “made perfect in your love” and be “made holy.” The aim is that God may gather it from the four winds to the kingdom that God has prepared for it (ἡτοιμάσας, cf. Matt 25:34). We have seen that the idea of gathering the church has its background in the Old Testament and in the Jewish expectation that the people in exile shall return from the diaspora to Zion and the holy land. But in the *Didache* the kingdom of God has now replaced the holy land as place of salvation. The church is now the dispersed Israel that should be gathered into the kingdom, and Jesus

the Servant is now the mediator of salvation to those who are baptized into his name, to those who pray his prayer and who take part in his holy meal, the Eucharist.

The image of the kingdom of God as the final destination for the church on "the Way of life" (10:5 cf. 9:4), may be a reminiscence of the second prayer of the Lord's Prayer: ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου, "your kingdom come," especially when we read *Didache's* prayer in light of the following eschatological prayer μαρναναθά, "Come our Lord!" (10:6). The reference to the "four winds" in the prayer evokes the picture of the Son of Man in Matt 24:31: "He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."⁷⁹ The expression is traditional, but may probably imply that the praying church in the *Didache* knows about the existence of many other churches scattered around in the Roman Empire and is conscious of its own identity as part of a worldwide church. They share a hope to be united with the fullness of churches in the coming kingdom of God.

When the kingdom of God is seen as the final eschatological destination for the praying community as part of God's worldwide church there can be no doubt that the βασιλεία is conceived in spatial terms, as the realm of God's salvation. I have elsewhere argued that this is the basic meaning of this concept already in the message of Jesus according to the synoptic gospels.⁸⁰ It is not a *nomen actionis* referring to God's kingship or his rule or reign, which for a long time has been a sort of *opinio communis* among New Testament scholars. The concrete, spatial understanding of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in the teaching of Jesus has consequently not been supported by the dictionaries.⁸¹ But it has got support from a growing number of interpreters.⁸² Recently Dale C. Allison Jr. has given an extensive and convincing excursus with a broad use of ancient sources and in dialogue with modern scholarship showing that the concrete, spatial interpretation is the most probable and in many cases the only possible understanding in the gospels and in early Christian literature.⁸³

⁷⁹ Cf. Luke 13:29: "People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the banquet in the kingdom of God." The four winds, *Did.* 10:5 (Zech 2:10, NRSV 2:6), and the four corners of the earth, *Did.* 9:4 (Isa 11:12), are expressions for the dispersion and the gathering of Israel. Cf. Clerici, *Einsammlung*.

⁸⁰ Hans Kvalbein, "The Kingdom of God in the Ethics of Jesus," *Communio Viatorum* 40 (1998): 197–227; and "Jesus as Preacher of the Kingdom of God," in *The Identity of Jesus: Nordic Voices* (ed. Samuel Byrskog, Tom Holmén and Matti Kankaanniemi; WUNT 2/373; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 87–98.

⁸¹ BDAG, s. v.; J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida: *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York: UBS, 1988), 1:479–80.

⁸² Cf. Kvalbein, "The Kingdom of God," 205–206, note 30.

⁸³ Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010), 164–204, Excursus I: "The Kingdom of God and

The first and the second prayers of the *Pater Noster* have often been compared with the Jewish *Kaddish* prayer:

Magnified and sanctified be his great name in the world which he has created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom (*weyamlikh malkuteh*) during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time. And say ye, Amen.⁸⁴

The juxtaposition of God's name and God's *malkuth*/βασιλεία makes this prayer a close parallel to the two first prayers of the *Pater Noster*. They are both examples of Jewish prayer traditions that have been living for centuries up to this day. Independent of the uncertain dating and exact wording of the *Kaddish* prayer⁸⁵ it may count as evidence for the Jewish character of the Lord's Prayer. They have a common concern for God's holy name. But there is an interesting difference in the wording of the *malkuth*/βασιλεία prayer. The Lord's Prayer speaks of the βασιλεία as *coming*; the *Kaddish* speaks of the *malkuth* as *ruling*, *yamlikh*. From our interpretation of the βασιλεία in Jesus' teaching this means that the *Pater Noster* has a prayer that God will bring and establish the time and place of salvation. The verbs for "coming" in the Jewish tradition are not connected to the concept of *malkuth* as a word for ruling, but to the expectation of the coming world, *olam habbah*.⁸⁶ The *olam* in this expression refers both to the time and the place of salvation, seen as an eschatological reality that will replace this world. In this way the *olam*, not the *malkuth*, corresponds to the βασιλεία in the message of Jesus. The *Kaddish*, on the other hand, expresses the hope that God will rule as king in a new way in the time of fulfilment, but does not indicate a new world as a place where human beings may enter or be excluded. The language of the kingdom in the synoptic gospels and in the *Didache*'s prayers has a spatial connotation which in Jewish terminology is not connected to the *malkuth d'adonay*, but to the *olam habbah*. The second prayer of the *Pater Noster* may have had a strange sound in the ears of contemporary Jews (and of course even more in the ears of contemporary Gentiles), but is closely related to the very centre of the message of Jesus according to the synoptic gospels. The prayers that the church be gathered in the kingdom of God in the *Didache* and the prayer that the kingdom may come in the *Pater Noster* are deeply rooted in Jewish expectations based on the Old Testament, but they are at the same time

the World to Come." See the broad references to recent literature on this topic in this excursus.

⁸⁴ Singer, *Daily Prayer Book*, 75.

⁸⁵ To these questions see the extensive study of the *Kaddish* in Andreas Lehnardt, *Qaddish: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Rezeption eines rabbinischen Gebetes* (TSAJ 87; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002). Written forms of the *Kaddish* are not available until post-Talmudic times.

⁸⁶ See the broad documentation for this language in Allison, *Constructing*, 190–99.

identity markers of a new community of Jews and Gentiles, a “third people” as indicated already in 1 Cor 10:32: “Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.”

The closing words in 10:6 further the self-consciousness in the praying church. As the “holy ones,” οἱ ἅγιοι, they expect to stand under the grace of God even if the world passes away. The “holy ones” is a common name for the Jesus believers in the Early Church.⁸⁷ Paul regularly addresses his churches as the “holy ones” in his letters. This designation for the community is not so prominent in the *Didache*, but the Two Ways urges the candidates for baptism: “You shall every day seek the presence of the holy ones so you can find rest in their words” (4:2). The restriction of the meal for the “holy ones” in 10:6 may be read as a parallel to the restriction in 9:5: the ritual meal is only for “those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord.”⁸⁸ The character of the Eucharist as a holy meal for the holy ones is in *Did.* 14:3 expressed by other words: it is a “pure” sacrifice which should not be “defiled” by quarrels between its participants.

We may conclude that there is a strong similarity between the prayer in *Did.* 10 and the *Pater Noster*. The Lord's Prayer seems to give a pattern for the Eucharist prayer, visible in its appeal to God as Father, in its concern for his Holy Name, in the thanksgiving for food (bread and wine), in its prayer to be delivered from all evil, and in its expectation of the coming kingdom.⁸⁹ The influence from the Lord's Prayer is broader than the possible similarities with the *Birkath Ha-Mazon*, and pertains both to verbal parallels and to prayer

⁸⁷ Reidar Hvalvik, “‘The Churches of the Saints’: Paul's Concern for Unity in His References to the Christian Communities,” *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 78 (2007): 227–47 has shown that the “church” (ἐκκλησία) and the “holy ones” are already in Paul's letters group designations and identity markers for the early believers in Jesus and contribute to their “ecumenical” consciousness.

⁸⁸ Koch (“Eucharistic Meal,” 212) sees the function of the restriction to the holy ones not only as an emphasis of the holiness of the Eucharist, but at the same time as an invitation to church members to add their own thanksgiving prayers at the end of the celebration. This function does not, however, come to expression in the text.

⁸⁹ Under the heading “A paradigm for the Church's liturgy,” N. T. Wright summarizes the paradigmatic content of the *Pater Noster* for the Church's liturgy as follows: “Invocation of God as Father, worship and prayer that sanctifies God's name, prayer for Jesus' kingdom work to find its complete fulfilment on earth as in heaven – all of these might come first.” So N. T. Wright, “The Lord's Prayer as a Paradigm of Christian Prayer,” in *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 132–54, here 149. Wright has no reference to the *Didache*, but his thesis corresponds to the similarities I have found between the *Pater Noster* and the Eucharistic prayers in *Did.* 9–10. My analysis confirms that the *Pater Noster* may have been a paradigm for these prayers.

motifs.⁹⁰ The *Birkath Ha-Mazon*, however, has been the model for giving praise to God in connection with a common meal.

Conclusion: The Prayers and the Identity of the Community Witnessed to in the *Didache*

Before we summarize, we may present some basic general observations pertaining to the addressees and how their identity is portrayed. We notice that the document does not give any broad description or characterization of the “others.” We find no words for “Jews” and “Judaism” or their “synagogues.” Habits and institutions that function as identity markers for the Jews, like circumcision, Sabbath and ritual purity of food, are nowhere mentioned. This is striking when we compare with the letters of Paul and with texts from the apostolic fathers in the 2nd century C.E., where these words and topics occur in polemic discourses.⁹¹ The “Gentiles” are mentioned as addressees in the longer heading to the document, but in the tract itself τὰ ἔθνη are only mentioned in two quotations. If you only love those who love you, “do not even the *Gentiles* do the same” in *Did.* 1:3 is quoted from Matt 5:47, and shows that the tract promotes a love surpassing common behaviour among Gentiles. “My name is wonderful among the *Gentiles*” in *Did.* 14:3 is part of a citation from Mal 1:11 and 14 and suggests that Gentiles now are included in the community. The relationship between Jews and Gentiles and the relation of the praying community to them is of no central concern in the *Didache*. The community is pictured as establishing a clear distance to both groups. This is confirmed by the description of the Jews as “hypocrites” in *Did.* 8:1–2 and of all outsiders, be they Jews or Gentiles, as “dogs” in *Did.* 9:5. In both cases the derogative descriptions are based on gospel tradition (Matt 6:2, 5, 16 and 7:6) and are used, but not developed polemically, by the Didachist.

The preferred self-designations of the community are the “holy ones,” ἅγιοι (4:2; 10:6; 16:7), and the “church,” ἐκκλησία (4:14; 9:4; 10:5; 11:11). The two designations are combined in the prayer in 10:5 that the church as “made holy” should be gathered into the kingdom of God. Together with the images of the community as the “holy vine of David” (9:2) and as “sheep”

⁹⁰ The influence from the *Birkath Ha-Mazon* has been developed by Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*; Sandt, “The Didache Redefining,” and Stewart-Sykes “The Birkath Ha-Mazon.” But I have found no exposition of the influence from the *Pater Noster* on the Eucharist prayers in scholarly contributions to the *Didache*.

⁹¹ Examples are easily found in concordances to the New Testament and in Henricus Kraft, *Clavis patrum apostolicorum* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964).

turned into wolves by false prophets (16:3), these self-designations are derived from the Old Testament and represent traditional characterizations of Israel as the holy people of God. Only once do we find a self-designation without this background: "Christian," χριστιανός, in *Did.*12:4. This was according to Acts 11:27a new name given to the disciples of Jesus in Antioch. In the apostolic fathers this name and its derivation χριστιανισμός, indicate that they were a new community of Jesus believers with their own identity distinguished from Jews and Gentiles.

In the *Didache* the prayers in chapters 8–10 give important evidence for the development of their identity as a religious community. The prayers give criteria for the assessment of the teaching of visiting apostles and prophets and for the election of local leaders. The prayers are mentioned first in the summarizing admonition in 15:4, and together with charities and other activities they derive their authority from "the gospel of the Lord." The prayers are normative and only the prophets are allowed to deviate from or to supplement the prescribed prayers in *Did.* 8–10.

The general picture of the identity of the group at prayer in the *Didache* owes much to Jewish inheritance, but appears simultaneously as a new and different community, separate from the religious life and the customs of the Jews.

1. The *Two Ways teaching* as preparation for baptism may originate from Jewish sources, but with insertions from Jesus' teaching in the gospels. It points to a new way of life, a morality different from the way of Gentiles, but with no indications of Jewish identity markers like Sabbath and circumcision.

2. *Baptism* as initiation rite to the fellowship of believers presupposes the use of water, and the discussion of different types of water has clear affinities to Jewish descriptions of water for their ritual purification. But Jewish purification baths are repeated, whereas baptism is a one-time initiation. The *Didache* is not concerned about the quantity or the purity of the water; decisive is that the water rite is performed into the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By this formula the baptism is a distinguishing identity marker, separating the community of baptized persons from both Jews and Gentiles.

3. Prayer and *fasting* belong together, and the habit of regular fasting twice a week is inherited from Second Temple Judaism. But at the same time it shapes a separate identity by avoiding fasting on the same days as the Jews. The negative characterization of the Jews as *hypocrites* is inherited from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:1–18), but not developed polemically.

4. The identity of the community witnessed to in the *Didache* is linked to the *Pater Noster*, the prayer "the Lord has commanded in his gospel," which is different from the prayers of the hypocrites. *The Lord's Prayer* should be prayed three times a day in accordance with Jewish prayer praxis, probably simultaneous with the Jewish main prayer, the *Eighteen Benedictions*. In the

Didache it is also closed by a doxology analogous to the praise, the *berakhhah*, which regularly marks the end of a Jewish prayer. There are Jewish parallels to each of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer. But at two points the *Pater Noster* probably had a strange sound in the ears of contemporary Jews. The brief and simple address to God as "Our Father" has no equivalents in Jewish prayer literature. And the prayer that God's kingdom may come has no exact verbal parallels in Jewish prayers. Its content, however, corresponds to the Jewish hope of a coming world, the *olam habbah*. In the gospels the Lord's Prayer is presented to the disciples of Jesus who continued to attend the synagogues as Jewish prayer houses. In the *Didache*, however, it is presented as an alternative prayer to the prayers of the *hypocrites*, and as such an identity marker for the new community. They are closely related to the Jews and nourished by their traditions, but still clearly separated from them.

5. The Eucharistic prayers in *Did.* 9 and especially in chapter 10 have their background in *Jewish meal prayers*, where a meal should be concluded by the *Birkath Ha-Mazon*, the praise for the food. In this prayer the food as gift from God is closely linked to the gift of the land and the election of Israel as God's chosen people. These motifs are absent from *Did.* 9–10, or more correctly: they have been transformed and applied to the new community. The chosen people are the church, the ἐκκλησία, and the promised land has been replaced by the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, the "kingdom of God." The concern for a gathering of the exiled Jews in the land of Israel is replaced by a gathering of the worldwide church into the kingdom of God. The prayers envision a community which has transformed the hopes of contemporary Judaism and developed a hope based on Jesus' message of the kingdom.

6. *Jesus* has a prominent place in the prayers. By God's gracious revelation through Jesus his Servant the praying community have received the decisive knowledge leading to eternal life. Jesus is God's servant and the messianic king, corresponding to Israel's king David (9:2, cf. 10:6). Three times we find praise for the knowledge God "has made known through Jesus your servant" (9:2, 3; 10:2) and through the servant Jesus God has given "spiritual food and drink and eternal life" (10:3). In the third doxology in *Did.* 9 glory and power to God is given "through Jesus Christ." In this way the Eucharist prayers are qualified as *Christian* prayers. The exclamation *maranatha* (10:6) looks forward to a future role of Jesus, as confirmed by the eschatological outlook in 16:7–8. The role of Jesus Christ in the prayers is unique in comparison with Jewish and Gentile prayers.

7. The prayer after the meal in *Did.* 10 is not only influenced by the Jewish *Birkath Ha-Mazon*, but even more by *the Lord's Prayer*. This comes to expression in the address to God as Father, in praise for his Holy Name, in thanks for his giving food and drink to everybody and even more for the spiritual food and drink he gives in the Eucharist. In the prayer to deliver the

church from all evil we even find verbal parallels to the last prayer in the *Pater Noster*, and the prayer that the church should be gathered in the kingdom may be an application of “your kingdom come.” As an adaptation and a development of the *Pater Noster*, the Eucharist prayer in *Did.* 10 has made explicit its character as a Christian prayer enhancing the Christian identity of the praying and celebrating community. This corresponds to the introduction of the *Pater Noster* in *Did.* 8 as an alternative to the prayers of the “hypocrites.”

8. Participation in the Eucharist is *only for baptized persons*. “Let no one eat or drink of your thanksgiving except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord” (*Did.* 9:5). The Holy should not be given to the dogs. The consumption of the spiritual food and drink is restricted to “us” in contrast to all men as created and nourished by God (10:3). Baptism is initiation into a table fellowship of participants considering themselves the holy people of God, distinguished from both Jews and Gentiles. In this way both baptism and Eucharist are identity markers of the community presented in the *Didache*.

The prayers in the *Didache* are deeply rooted in Jewish piety. At the same time they envision a community being the new people of God on the way to the kingdom prepared for them. They have been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus to be his holy people of Jews and Gentiles. By God’s gracious revelation through Jesus his Servant they have received the decisive knowledge leading to eternal life. When they share their common meal they give thanks and praise to God who has opened this way of life for them.

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“What point is there for me in other people hearing my confessions?” Prayer and Christian Identity
in Augustine’s *Confessions*

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By the time of Augustine (A.D. 354–430), Christianity had reached a new stage in its historical development. From being a minority – sometimes a persecuted minority – in the third century, the church had experienced a remarkable growth in the fourth century. During the reign of Constantine the Great (306–337), Christianity became a *religio licita*, a tolerated religion, and indeed the politically favoured religion, a position that was consolidated when Theodosius the Great in 380 made it the only legitimate religion of the Roman Empire. Modern demographic calculations indicate that the percentage of Christians in the population grew from ca. 10% in A.D. 300 to ca. 50% a century later – it had by then become a mass movement.¹ In the fourth century, numerous churches were built, a variety of liturgies were developed, a great number of biblical and other Christian writings were spread, and training programs – called the catechumenate – were established for the many who wanted to join the church. Thus, when Augustine was baptized in the spring of 387, after a brief period as catechumen, he became member of a faith community which had gone through a long process of maturing. The church which he was to serve as a priest and bishop for nearly four decades, had become an institution which could offer its adherents guidance on how to view the world, what to believe, how to live, and also instruments to handle all this, including holy places, rituals and writings.² It had learned by experience, developed theological and philosophical traditions of its own, and

¹ Keith Hopkins, “Christian Number and Its Implications,” *J ECS* 6 (1998): 185–226, esp. 222–25.

² See Reidar Aasgaard, “Ambrose and Augustine: Two Bishops on Baptism and Christian Identity,” in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (3 vols.; ed. D. Hellholm et al.; BZNW 176; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 2:1253–82, esp. 1255–58, 1277–78.

gradually become a vital social and ideological factor in the Greco-Roman world. In fact, because the church could offer its members a comprehensive view of life and living, it had by Augustine's time turned into a central provider of identity to individuals and to society.

In spite of this, it is clear that Christianity was still in a state of transition. The rapid growth of the church and its new and close relations to the authorities represented big challenges, as did changes in society in general: the Roman Empire – particularly the Western part – was in a social and political decline and its borders were constantly threatened by migration, particularly by Germanic tribes from the north. The church too experienced serious strife and backlashes, such as the Arian/Catholic conflict and the attempt of Julian the Apostate (emperor 361–363) to re-establish the traditional Greco-Roman cults. Thus, the church and its members still had a considerable way to go with regard to matters of identity: a Christian view of life was far from having the self-evident character that it would acquire later, particularly in the High Middle Ages.

Formation of Christian Identity and Prayer in Augustine

In Augustine's works, we can sense a strong need for the shaping of a Christian identity for himself and for the church of his time.³ The endeavour to forge such an identity emerges as a central concern in his writings, whether exegetical, philosophical, theological, apologetic or educational. But it comes in paradigmatic ways to the fore in writings such as *Soliloquies*, *Confessions*, and *City of God*. These works appear to reflect an on-going development in Augustine himself. In *Soliloquies*, written shortly after his conversion (386–387), he is in dialogue with his own reason (*ratio*), and his main aim is to get to know himself and God.⁴ Interestingly, this is formulated as a prayer: "God, who is always the same, may I know myself, may I know you. That is my

³ What "identity" and "Christian identity" mean are matters of much debate. I cannot go into a discussion of this here, but refer to other contributions in the present volume. For a central contribution on the matter of identity, and with a chapter on Augustine, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For a discussion of issues with regard to the formation of Christian identity in Augustine, particularly from the perspective of spirituality, see Thomas F. Martin, *Our Restless Heart: The Augustinian Tradition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003). Éric Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 CE* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012) has a chapter on Augustine (ch. 3). Rebillard argues that Christians of this period were characterised by fluid identities, and could shift loyalties depending on circumstances and demands (see esp. 91, 92–97).

⁴ Or some kind of personification of reason, see *Solil.* 1.1.1.

prayer" (*Solil.* 2.1.1).⁵ In *Confessions* (ca. 397), which we shall return to soon, he describes his own life as a process of personal formation led by God. And in *City of God*, one of his last and greatest works (413–427), he presents us with a "collective autobiography" of the people of God, the church, the people of God on pilgrimage in the world from the beginning to the end of time. In all three works, then, the formation of Christian identity is at the heart of the matter: In *Soliloquies* in a solitary, groping discussion with himself, in *Confessions* in social and ideological interaction with other humans and with God, and in *City of God* in his reflections on the character and life of the church as a community of believers spanning time and eternity, heaven and earth.

Unlike some other early Christian authors, such as Origen, Augustine did not write a systematic treatise on prayer. He very often touches on the topic, however. His longest treatment is in *Letter 130* (after 411), in response to Proba, a woman who had asked him for guidance on the matter. He often deals with prayer in other works too, particularly in his *Explanations of the Psalms*, and in letters, sermons and theological treatises. Usually, however, this is done briefly and in passing, and only occasionally in more detail. In addition, he wrote exegetical works on biblical prayers. Among the most important are his commentary *On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount* (393–394) and *Sermons 56–59* (ca. 410–416), which explain the Lord's Prayer to catechumens – the Lord's Prayer and interpretations of it was a central part of this kind of teaching.⁶

Augustine's understanding of prayer is closely related to his understanding of the human being and the relationship of humans to God.⁷ For Augustine, humans are by nature loving beings, but beings who have been separated from what they love. However, with all their will – Augustine is in this respect very much a voluntarist – humans aim at being reunited with the object of their love. The goal of their longing is ultimately God. But the will of humans is divided, so that they often confuse lower, temporary goods with God, the highest, eternal good. Thus, the aim of this longing can only be reached in that God, himself the essence and source of love, in his grace gives his love freely

⁵ Augustine, *Soliloquies: Augustine's Interior Dialogue* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 1999), 55.

⁶ Other texts of special interest are *On Holy Virginity* (401), *Sermon 213* (before 410), and *Enchiridion* (421–422).

⁷ For presentations of prayer in Augustine, see Rebecca H. Weaver, "Prayer," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 670–75, with references; Roy Hammerling, "St. Augustine of Hippo: Prayer as Sacrament," in *A History of Prayer: The First to the Fifteenth Century* (ed. idem; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 183–97; Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, *The Longing of the Heart: Augustine's Doctrine on Prayer* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009). Van Bavel deals with matters related to Christian identity, but not in a systematic way.

to humans – this is fulfilled by Christ. Prayer is for Augustine a central instrument in this yearning for God. Through prayer, which includes both lament and praise, humans are trained and disciplined on their way to “seeing God.”

According to Augustine, Scripture and Christian teaching play an important part in the process of praying. As humans in their interior, in their “heart,” yearn for God, God on his part communicates with them in the words of the Bible and in the preaching and the liturgy (*Conf.* 9.4.8–11).⁸ Through God’s work, these internal and external elements interact so that the inner human is shaped in accordance with his will. In this process, which Augustine sees as a constantly on-going conversation, a Christian becomes in step not only with God, but also with oneself and with the church as a believing community (6.5.7–8).⁹

For Augustine, however, prayer is not only a matter of the inner human and of hearing the word. In his teaching, particularly to catechumens, he also focuses on other aspects, for example on occasions for and forms of prayer. He recommends appointed times for praying and suggests that prayer be accompanied by certain actions, such as turning toward the east, bending the knees, and stretching out the hands. But he emphasises that such practices and postures are not required – they are pedagogical and psychological means to intensify one’s praying. Nor does the length of prayers make a difference: Augustine tends to recommend brief prayers – for him the apostle Paul’s exhortation to “pray unceasingly” (1 Thess 5:17) means being continually open to one’s own longings and to God, the goal of one’s longing.¹⁰

From this it becomes evident that Augustine sees strong interrelations between the issues of prayer and of Christian identity. In prayer, all the dimensions of Christian living – thoughts, feelings, senses, social relations – are taken into account in the formation of identity. For Augustine, prayer is a social activity in which the believer communicates with God, but also with one’s own inner self and with the community of believers. These are features that are prominent in *Confessions* as well, and we shall now take a closer look at this work. My aim is to show how such features are reflected in the work, but – more importantly – to show what is characteristic of it as regards the relationship between prayer and identity formation.

⁸ If nothing else is indicated, the numbers given in the following refer to *Confessions*.

⁹ Van Bavel, *Longing of the Heart*, 59–68; also Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 39–41.

¹⁰ Weaver, “Prayer,” 673, with references.

Identity Formation and Prayer in *Confessions*

As a work from antiquity, *Confessions* is special in at least two ways – and both are highly relevant here. First, it is the oldest known instance of a book-length *self-portrayal*.¹¹ Thus, it can be regarded as the starting point of a new literary genre: the autobiography.¹² Books 1–9 are a chronological survey of his life from his birth to his thirty-third year, up to 387, the year of his baptism and the death of his mother Monica. In each book, he focuses on certain main phases and events, such as his childhood and adolescence, the Manichean period, his friendship relations, and his conversion. The long Book 10 is an in-depth analysis of his own mind, his inner world, in the act of writing, and the final Books 11–13 consist of reflections on time and eternity and on the creation story of Genesis 1.

It is striking that Augustine is silent about the years between his mother's death and the time of writing (ca. 397). This leaves us with a time gap of more than ten years, a period which brought big changes to his life. He had, for example, returned to North Africa, been ordained a priest, and promoted to bishop. Clearly, this signals that Augustine's interest in the work lies in his process towards joining the church and in his conversion to an ascetically oriented Christian life. As for his motivation for writing *Confessions*, he says in retrospect in *Revisions* (A.D. 426–427):¹³

¹¹ There have also been long-lasting and extensive debates about the degree of historicity and/or trustworthiness of Augustine's self-portrayal in *Confessions*. For a brief survey of these, see Paula Fredriksen, "The *Confessions* as Autobiography," in *A Companion to Augustine* (ed. Mark Vessey; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 87–98, esp. 88–91; also Maria Boulding, "Introduction," in *Augustine, The Confessions* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 1997), 30–32. As will be clear, I put a relatively high trust in Augustine's narrative, at least in his *intention* to describe his life and inner world as adequately as possible.

¹² There are diverging opinions as to whether *Confessions* can be classified as an autobiography, since it deviates from what some consider typical of the genre. For a discussion of this issue, see Paula Fredriksen, "Die *Confessiones* (Bekenntnisse)," in *Augustin Handbuch* (ed. Volker H. Drecoll; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 294–309, esp. 297–300. In my opinion, these views measure *Confessions* against too narrow criteria for what can be called an autobiography, standards which even do not suit modern variants of the genre; for an example of this see Garry Willis, *Saint Augustine's Childhood. Confessiones Book One* (London: Continuum, 2001), 6–9. In my view, which I cannot elaborate here, *Confessions* should be characterised (primarily) as an autobiography, very similar to what today is characterised as an "intellectual autobiography."

¹³ For the following translations of *Confessions* (and the *Revisions* text), see Augustine, *The Confessions* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 1997). As Latin text, I use James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions. Volume I: Introduction and Text* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) and for general reference his commentary volumes II–III.

The thirteen books of my *Confessions* concern both my bad and my good actions, for which they praise our just and good God. In so doing they arouse the human mind and affections toward him. As far as I am concerned, they had this effect upon me in my writing of them, and still do when I read them now. What others think about them is for them to say; but I know that they have given pleasure in the past, and still do give pleasure, to many of my brethren. (2.6.1)

Here Augustine states explicitly that the work was intended for its audience as an instrument in the formation of Christian identity: his confessions “arouse the human mind (*intellectum*) and affections (*affectum*) toward him (God),” i.e. they appeal to both intellect and emotions, and serve as a guide to God. Both here and in *Confessions* itself, Augustine also sets up himself as an example for others. He even remarks that the work, in his view, has had such an educative effect: “I know that they have given pleasure in the past, and still do give pleasure, to many of my brethren.” Interestingly, he also focuses on his own response – at the time of writing and at the time of *Revisions*, nearly thirty years later – stating that the story functions in the same way for him: as an instrument in his own process of formation as a Christian. Thus, the Augustine of *Confessions* was and remained a “prototype” even for the old Augustine.¹⁴

Second, *Confessions* has the form of a prayer. As he describes his earlier life, sketches his present inner landscape and ponders the mysteries of time and creation, Augustine throughout the work addresses God as his conversation partner.¹⁵ In this respect too, *Confessions* is the first of its kind, and almost singular – it scarcely has any literary successors. With this form, Augustine manages to relate central aspects of his life to God: his experiences and actions, his inner self, and his intellectual faculties and activities – the whole person is involved in the conversation. The change from *Soliloquies* is marked: there the dialogue is with himself, and he addresses God directly only on three occasions (*Solil.* 1.1.2–6; 2.1.1; 2.6.9).¹⁶ As for the term *confessiones*, which is Augustine’s own designation of the work, he consciously

¹⁴ More indirectly, the impact of *Confessions* can also be seen in Possidius, Augustine’s colleague and early biographer. In his *Life of Augustine* (ca. 432–435) he refrains from describing this part of Augustine’s life. For this, he simply redirects his readers to *Confessions*; see Possidius, “The Life of Saint Augustine,” in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints’ Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head; University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 31–73, esp. 33–34.

¹⁵ What has not – to my knowledge – been noted by scholars is that Augustine on a few occasions, consciously and/or unconsciously, breaks with the prayer form. The shifts from addressing God to addressing an audience or even himself – and back again – are sometimes almost unnoticeable, but sometimes also more distinct (1.16.25–26; 3.2.3; 3.7.12–8.15; 4.11.16–12.19; 6.11.18–19; 7.4.6).

¹⁶ The first is a very long prayer, the two other very short. *City of God* has no prayers on the part of Augustine.

makes the most of its many nuances. It does not only mean “confessing” one’s sins: it also includes “acknowledging” one’s weaknesses, “presenting” one’s own life, “professing” one’s beliefs, and “giving testimony” to God and his greatness.¹⁷ Thus, for Augustine making his *confessiones* implies directing himself to God in a variety of ways, spanning the whole range from lament to praise of God.

In a unique way, then, the two matters of main interest for us – identity formation and prayer – come together in *Confessions*, and this makes it highly relevant to scrutinise the work more closely here. In the presentation so far, I have indicated how these factors intersect in Augustine in general. In what follows, I shall go into some specific aspects of the relationship between prayer and identity formation in *Confessions*. In particular, I shall focus on the main characters of the work, viz., God, Augustine, model persons, and the readers. The aim will be to examine in what ways the issue of identity finds expression in the interaction between these different agents. Because of the abundance of material, it will only be possible to touch on a few passages. On the basis of these analyses, I will then discuss the place of prayer in the process of identity formation in *Confessions*.

Conversing with God: the Creator and Saviour

In the opening paragraphs of *Confessions*, Augustine immediately sets the tone for his narrative, introduces some main partners of the conversation, and establishes the relationship between them. He does this through words from the Psalms: “Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise; your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning” (1.1.1).¹⁸ Thus, unlike most other comparable works from antiquity, *Confessions* has no formal opening or dedication, but addresses the conversation partner immediately, without further justification or explanation. This is not done thoughtlessly, however, but serves to emphasize the character of the conversation partner: he is the all-powerful and all-knowing creator of the world, and does not need to be prepared for what Augustine has to tell.

At the same time, Augustine briefly introduces the other main conversation partner, who is here not himself, but the human being in general, though – as is implicitly clear – exemplified through himself: “so we humans (*homo*), who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you – we (*homo*) who carry our

¹⁷ See Boulding, “Introduction,” 24–26. Augustine also uses a variety of other terms from the word field of “prayer,” see e.g. Weaver, “Prayer,” 671; also Willis, *St. Augustine's Childhood*, 13–15.

¹⁸ Pss 48:1; 96:4; 144:3; 147:5. Here and in what follows, I use the numbering of Psalms according to most modern bibles (NRSV), not the Septuagint or the Vulgate.

mortality about with us, carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud.” With this, all human beings are placed in the same position towards God: through our mortality and sin we share a basic “identity” – but, as we shall see, through our longing also the same potential.

Augustine then reflects on how God can be approached: how is it possible to speak to him, and in particular, how can he be praised, if one does not know him or believe in him? To answer this, Augustine directs attention to Scripture and to those who preach what Scripture says: “But scripture tells us that those who seek the Lord will praise him, for as they seek they find him, and on finding him they will praise him” (1.1.1; Ps 22:26; Rom 10:14). Thus, Scripture – the Bible – is from the very start introduced as a main means for entering into dialogue with God. But establishing such a dialogue is God’s gift: only he gives the faith which he has “breathed into” the human being, through the incarnation of the Word, “the humanity of your Son.”

After having touched on the paradox of how God, the creator of all, can be called upon (*invoked*, *invocare*) by a human being who would not exist if God was not already “in him” (1.2.2), Augustine goes on to describe his conversation partner in more detail, “what God is to him” (cf. 1.5.5), giving what we may call a personality profile, an “identity” to the person he is communicating with. He starts by pondering the nature of God and his relationship to the world as a whole: God is in everything but also transcends everything, and he is omnipresent but nevertheless whole and undivided (1.3.3). Augustine elaborates this by attributing to God a number of character traits, partly from the philosophical domain, partly from the human sphere (especially anthropomorphisms) and partly from business life, and with many biblical echoes – these are means of describing God that permeate the rest of *Confessions* as well:¹⁹

You are most high, excellent, most powerful, omnipotent, supremely merciful and supremely just, most hidden yet intimately present, infinitely beautiful and infinitely strong, steadfast yet elusive, unchanging yourself though you control the change in all things, . . . You love without frenzy, you are jealous yet secure, you regret without sadness, you grow angry yet remain tranquil, you alter your work but never your plan; . . . You allow us to pay you more than you demand, and so you become our debtor, yet which of us possesses anything that does not already belong to you? You owe us nothing, yet you pay your debts; you write off our debts to you, yet you lose nothing thereby. (1.4.4)

What is typical of this description is the double character, the duality, ascribed to God: he is high and strong, but at the same time near and sympathetic. This duality is so marked that it borders on the paradoxical. Typical and also full of tension is the mixture of philosophical epithets (powerful, just, secure) and terms signifying human emotions (jealous, regret, angry). On a couple of

¹⁹ See e.g. *Conf.* 6.3.4; 7.14.20; 10.6.8–7.11.

occasions, Augustine even speaks of God laughing at him and all his questions (1.6.7; 1.6.9).

It is worth noting that Augustine in the central opening paragraphs of *Confessions* (1.1.1–5.6) says very little about Christ. He is only mentioned once, as the Son (1.1.1). Bible references are mostly from the Old Testament/the Hebrew Bible, and it is primarily character traits of God in the Old Testament that are evoked. This is also a characteristic of many of the other descriptions of God in *Confessions*. For example, there are probably only two passages in the entire work in which Augustine addresses Christ directly; one is, however, at a central point, in the opening prayer of Book 9: “But where had my power of free decision been throughout those long, weary years, and from what depth, what hidden profundity, was it called forth in a moment, enabling me to bow my neck to your benign yoke and my shoulders to your light burden, O Christ Jesus, my helper and redeemer?” (9.1.1; also 1.11.17).

The rarity of prayer to Christ does, of course, not mean that he is of little importance in *Confessions*. On the contrary, Christ plays a central role throughout the work (e.g. 5.14.25; 6.4.5; 10.43.68–70). This is often seen in Augustine's critique of various kinds of thinking, whether philosophical or other, as in his encounter with Cicero's *Hortensius*: “Only one consideration checked me in my ardent enthusiasm: that the name of Christ did not occur there. Through your mercy, Lord, my tender little heart had drunk in that name, the name of my Savior and your Son, with my mother's milk, and in my deepest heart I still held on to it” (3.4.8). In prayers, God is also sometimes portrayed through traits borrowed from the New Testament and its descriptions of Jesus: this is visible in the passage above, which with its paradoxes presupposes the concept of incarnation. And in central passages such as the ending of Book 10, Jesus is described at length as mediator and saviour (10.43.68–69; also 4.12.19). Nonetheless, ideas about praying to Jesus (e.g. Rev 22:20), Jesus as a model for prayer (e.g. Luke 11:1–4; Heb 7:25), or Jesus as interceding in prayer (e.g. John 17) seem of little importance in the work.²⁰ Thus, prayer in *Confessions* primarily emerges as prayer to God as creator or as “head” of the Trinity.

In spite of his many descriptions of God, Augustine at the same time states that he is totally beyond human comprehension. Both our words and thoughts fall short of conceiving him: “What are you, then, my God? What are you, I ask, but the Lord God? For who else is lord except the Lord, or who is god if not our God? . . . After saying all that, what have we said, my God, my life, my holy sweetness? What does anyone who speaks of you really say?” (1.4.4). This same motif is repeated throughout *Confessions*: “How deep is

²⁰ A study of prayer in other works of Augustine or in Augustine in general may give a different result, see e.g. Van Bavel, *Longing of the Heart*, 135–50.

that mystery hidden in the secret recesses of your being, O Lord, my God! And how far from it have the consequences of my sins hurled me! Heal my eyes, that I may rejoice with you in your light" (11.31.41).

Conversing with Himself: Augustine and his Heart

The attempt at describing God and how conversing with him can be possible is the main motif of *Confessions* 1.1.1–5.6. But Augustine, as I have already noted, also starts sketching a portrait of himself as the other main conversation partner – who he is in relation to God – an undertaking that he pursues through the rest of the work.²¹ In the opening passage, he repeats almost verbatim and elaborates his description of humankind, but now more explicitly includes himself: “Yet these humans, due part of your creation . . . , still do long to praise you. You stir us (*nos*) so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you” (1.1.1). Here, Augustine presents the human being as related to God in two ways, and Augustine will himself in *Confessions* turn out to be a model in both these respects. On the one hand, the human being is incomparably small to God: it is an insignificant part of creation, a “due part” (*aliqua portio*), burdened by mortality and sin. On the other hand, the human being is attached to the creator through a longing to communicate with him, “to praise” him, a longing which is engraved in everyone by God himself, “because you have made us and drawn us to yourself.” Ultimately, this is a longing for an eternal peace in him.²²

The introductory description reaches a climax in 1.5.5–6. Here, Augustine sees God as his “only good.” In strongly emotional language, he several times appeals to the mercy of God. Twice he asks him to show what God is to him: “What are you to me? . . . O Lord my God, tell me what you are to me.” The answers that he asks for, and repeats twice, are: “Say to my soul, *I am your salvation*” (cf. Ps 35:3). Between these two questions he turns the question, and in a way that demonstrates his total dependence on the merciful, loving God: “What indeed am I to you, that you should command me to love you, and grow angry with me if I do not?” This contrast between Augustine as infinitely small and dependent and God as incomprehensibly big and self-sufficient runs like a scarlet thread through the whole of the work, a contrast which makes Augustine again and again emphasize humility, *humilitas*, as the greatest virtue, in contradistinction to pride, *superbia* (e.g. 10.36.58–59).

²¹ See e.g. already in *Conf.* 1.6.7, in his self-characterisation as “but dust and ashes” (Gen 18:27; Job 42:6).

²² The motif of peace is also central in the final paragraphs of *Confessions* (13.35.50–38.53), and thus serves to frame the whole narrative.

Another scarlet thread in *Confessions* is the emotionally charged language. Both in the opening passage and elsewhere, descriptions of his own, and other people's, feelings abound (e.g. 8.12.28; 9.6.14; 10.33.50) – Augustine sees emotions as a natural and integral element in a Christian identity.²³ The way he describes his reactions at his baptism is characteristic:

During the days that followed I could not get enough of the wonderful sweetness that filled me as I meditated upon your deep design for the salvation of the human race. How copiously I wept at your hymns and canticles, how intensely was I moved by the lovely harmonies of your singing Church! Those voices flooded my ears, and the truth was distilled into my heart until it overflowed in loving devotion; my tears ran down, and I was the better for them. (9.6.14)

Especially relevant to the issue of identity are the instances in *Confessions* where Augustine explicitly and consciously touches on his own position vis-à-vis God. This can take the shape of *meta*-reflections on what he as a human is to God, such as in the passage above on “what . . . I (am) to you” (1.5.5). In several texts he oscillates between addressing God and himself (e.g. 3.2.3). Interestingly, he also enters into dialogue with himself, and with a much more psychological approach than in *Soliloquies*, sometimes almost in self-therapeutic fashion:

For my own part I was reflecting with anxiety and some perplexity how much time had elapsed since my nineteenth year, when I had first been fired with passion for the pursuit of wisdom, resolving that once I had found it I would leave behind all empty hopes and vain desires and the follies that deluded me. Yet here I was in my thirtieth year sticking fast in the same muddy bog through my craving to enjoy the good things of the present moment, which eluded and dissipated me. “Tomorrow,” I had been saying to myself, “tomorrow I will find it; it will appear plainly and I will grasp it.” (6.11.18)

Similarly, Augustine looks critically back on his earlier ways of thinking (3.5.9; 9.4.7) and living (8.7.16–18; 10.30.41–42), criticizes his inclinations to slackness as well as to ascetical rigor (10.33.49–50), acknowledges his weaknesses (10.38.63–40.66), and reproaches himself for not seeking God's help (4.7.12; 5.6.11).

In many cases, this self-reflection takes the shape of a rhetorical address to himself, in particular to his “soul” (*anima*): “Be not vain, my soul . . . Why follow your flesh, perverted soul? Rather let it follow you, once you are converted” (4.11.16–17). In other cases, Augustine in his self-reflection speaks of his “inner self” (*interior homo*; 10.6.9). Both the soul and the inner self are central anthropological concepts in *Confessions*, being the higher (simplicistically speaking: closer to God) and better (*melior*) part of what – together with the body and the exterior (self) – constitutes a human being. In

²³ See also Catherine Conybeare, “Reading the Confessions,” in *A Companion to Augustine* (ed. Mark Vessey; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 99–110, esp. 102–3.

this work, these concepts serve as central instruments for Augustine in his dealings with himself.

Far more important in *Confessions*, however, is his concept of the “heart” (*cor*). *Cor* serves as the ultimate expression of the core of a human being – as Augustine states, it is only in “my heart . . . that I am whoever I am” (10.4.4). It is also the element which – at least potentially – links a human being with God, and with other human beings as well.²⁴ Already at the outset of the work, he introduces it: “our heart is unquiet until it rests in you” (1.1.1). In Augustine’s description, the heart is turned into a living being: it can be burdened down (4.7.12) and stray from its maker (4.12.18). Nevertheless, its maker is present to it: “He is most intimately present to the human heart” (*intimus cordi est*). Even a heart that is closed, is open to God, for “a closed heart does not shut you out” (5.1.1; also 5.6.11) – nothing can be hidden from him. The heart is referred to throughout the work, but most frequently in Book 9, in the accounts of Augustine’s baptism and his mother Monica’s life and death.²⁵ The heart also has senses of its own kind: ears to hear the Word (4.11.16), a mouth thirsting for celestial water (9.10.23), and even the ability of touch: in the Ostia experience, Augustine and his mother Monica “touched the edge” of God’s Wisdom “by the utmost leap” of their heart (*modice toto ictu cordis*; 9.10.24).

In spite of this, Augustine can speak of his own person as a mystery.²⁶ In the past, in his adolescence, he strayed from God, becoming to himself “a land of famine” (2.10.18). At the death of a friend, grief darkens his heart, and he becomes “a great enigma” to himself (4.4.9). Of his years in Carthage (until A.D. 383), he says to God that “you are . . . in the hearts of all those who confess to you, . . . but I had roamed away from myself and could not find even myself, let alone you” (5.2.2). And much later, long after his conversion, when analysing his mind and memory, he exclaims: “Lo, you were within, but I outside (*intus eras et ego foris*), seeking there for you . . . You were with me, but I was not with you (*mecum eras, et tecum non eram*)” (10.27.38; also 7.7.11). Even then he still finds himself alienated from himself, “outside,” not fully present in himself and in God: this will have to wait until later: “When I at last cling to you . . . my life will be alive indeed, because filled with you. But now it is very different . . . I am not full of you, and so I am a burden to myself” (10.28.39).

²⁴ Kazuhiko Demura, “*Cor nostrum* in the *Confessions* of St Augustine,” in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church* (ed. Pauline Allen, Wendy Mayer and Lawrence Cross; Brisbane: Australian Catholic University, 1999), 187–96, esp. 188–92; also Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 42.

²⁵ *Cor* is used 185 times in *Confessions*. It occurs more than 30 times in Book 9, i.e. more than twice the average.

²⁶ See also Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 41–43, 151–54.

Speaking about Others: Christians as Models of Praying

An important feature in Augustine's construction of Christian identity in *Confessions* is his descriptions of other persons. In the narrative, these serve to portray both figures to be shunned and models to be emulated. Among the former, who are less relevant here, are for example Manicheans, Arians, astrologers and Neo-Platonists (3.6.10–7.13; 5.3.3–7.13; 7.6.8–10; 7.9.13–16; 7.19.25; 9.7.15). Augustine warns repeatedly against these, but also states that “the discrediting of heretics serves to throw into high relief the mind of your Church and the content of sound doctrine” (7.19.25). As for the latter, Augustine presents several persons, some of them at length. Within the narrative, and clearly also for Augustine himself, these function as model Christian figures. Some of them are described as people at prayer. From his childhood he mentions experiences of people praying to God, and who – whether intentionally or not – taught him to pray: “We did, however, . . . meet some people who prayed to you, Lord, and we learned from them, imagining you as best we could in the guise of some great personage who, while not evident to our senses, was yet able to hear and help us. So it came about that even then in boyhood I began to pray to you, my aid and refuge” (1.9.14).

In Books 2–7, people at prayer or the act of praying are scarcely mentioned; thus, prayer or intercession appears to play a limited role, at least on the surface. As for himself, Augustine confesses that after his boyhood prayers, he had not yet “begun to pour forth my groans to you in prayer, begging you to help me; rather was my mind intent on searching and restlessly eager for argument” (6.3.3). The only exception, but the more important, is his mother Monica. In the narrative, she stands out as a model person at prayer – although Augustine is not uncritical in his view of her. At three central points in Books 2–7 he elaborates the role of his mother, and in all these cases, prayer plays a crucial part.

The first passage serves as the end climax of Book 3: here, Augustine first relates Monica's dream about standing on a wooden ruler – later interpreted by Augustine as the rule of faith (8.12.30) – together with him, and then of the bishop faced with Monica nagging him for help with her lost son. In the latter case, the bishop advised her: “Leave him alone . . . Simply pray for him to the Lord. He will find out for himself through his reading how wrong these beliefs are, and how profoundly irreverent” (3.12.21). In the former case, the dream strengthens Monica's hope, so that she became “no less assiduous in her weeping and entreaty, never at any time ceasing her plangent prayer to you about me. Her pleas found their way into your presence, but you left me still wrapped around by the fog, and enveloped in it” (3.11.20).

The second passage is when Augustine, unhappy with his job as a teacher in Carthage and with his mother's influence, fled to Italy:

That same night I left by stealth; she (Monica) did not, but remained behind praying and weeping. And what was she begging of you, my God, with such abundant tears? Surely, that you would not allow me to sail away. But in your deep wisdom you acted in her truest interests: you listened to the real nub of her longing and took no heed of what she was asking at this particular moment, for you meant to make me into what she was asking for all the time. (5.8.15)

In the third passage, the opening narrative of Book 6 about Monica's subsequent travel to Italy and their reunion in Milan, Augustine emphasises her perseverance in prayer: "to you, the fount of all mercy, she redoubled her prayers and tears, imploring you to make haste to my help and enlighten my darkness" (6.1.1).

Thus, in this part of *Confessions*, the portrayal of Monica serves to underscore the importance of intercession for others: through her patient prayers for her son, God has – without their knowing – been leading Augustine step by step closer to his Christian breakthrough. With this breakthrough, described in Books 8–9, the place of prayer changes drastically. Now we again encounter other people praying, such as Ponticianus, a court official whom Augustine came to know, and who "was himself a baptized Christian and made a practice of prostrating himself in the church before you, our God, in frequent and prolonged prayers" (8.6.14; also 8.6.15). And in the drama of his conversion, Augustine himself, for the first time since Book 1, turns to God in prayer: "I flung myself down somehow under a fig-tree and gave free rein to the tears that burst from my eyes like rivers, as an acceptable sacrifice to you. Many things I had to say to you, and the gist of them, though not the precise words, was: 'O Lord, how long? How long? Will you be angry for ever? Do not remember our age-old sins'" (8.12.28, cf. Ps 78:5, 8). And when Monica immediately after this, in the final passage of Book 8, gets to know of his conversion, Augustine refers back to her dream about the wooden ruler (3.11.20) and writes that she "blessed you, who have the power to do more than we ask or understand, for she saw that you had granted her much more in my regard than she had been wont to beg of you in her wretched, tearful groaning" (8.12.30).

In Book 9, in the time after his conversion, prayer also has a central but somewhat different role. First, Augustine here makes active use of the early Christian "prayer book," the Psalms: a long passage in the description of his study stay at Cassiciacum is an exegesis of Psalm 4 (9.4.8–11). Church hymns – particularly those of Ambrose – also become part of his prayer resources (9.7.15), and he quotes a stanza from Ambrose's *Deus, Creator omnium* (9.12.32). And at the very end of Book 9, which rounds off the mainly narrative part of *Confessions*, Augustine, after having described the deaths of Monica and his father Patricius, asks his readers – as his mother's final wish – to remember them "at your (God's) altar," so that "the last request she made

of me be granted to her more abundantly by the prayers of many, evoked by my confessions, than by my prayers alone" (9.13.37).

In this book, then, the forms of prayer described are far more clearly shaped by ecclesiastical traditions than in the previous books. Here, Augustine at central points highlights institutional forms such as biblical prayers, hymns, and intercession in the church. And whereas praying has had a more individual and less collective character earlier in *Confessions*, Augustine here at the end of Books 1–9 depicts prayer as a joint task for the community of believers in "our mother the Catholic Church," they who are his "fellow-citizens in the eternal Jerusalem" (9.13.37).

Conversing with Others: Augustine and his Readers

In spite of its prayer form, *Confessions* does not only have God as its addressee. The work is obviously also directed at human beings: Augustine's praying does not take place in privacy but in public, in the presence of an (implied) audience, and probably even of persons who themselves had been involved in the story he is telling. Clearly, therefore, his *confessiones* is a conversation not only with God, but also with humans. This, of course, is a fact that Augustine is very much aware of – it can be observed both indirectly in how he formulates himself, and explicitly in his reflections on why and for whom he is writing.

An example of how Augustine by an *indirect* route approaches his audience is 4.10.15–12.19, a passage already briefly touched on above. In this text, Augustine makes three moves, which both rhetorically and theologically are very telling. First, he addresses God who has created all through his Word, and without which – or rather, whom – nothing can exist nor persist (4.10.15). As a consequence of this, Augustine turns to his own soul and exhorts it not to be vain and to "take care that the ear of your heart be not deafened by the din of your vanity," to listen to the "Word who calls you back," and not follow the flesh (4.11.16–17). In this way, he uses speech (cf. the "Word"), a central element of a conversation, to link God and himself (his "soul") together. Then, in a third move, Augustine admonishes his soul to forward this message, the Word, also to others. This is formulated as a long speech by the soul (4.12.18–19), in which it first calls its audience to return to God and his love: "Let us love him . . . You know where he is, because you know where truth tastes sweet. He is most intimately present to the human heart, but the heart has strayed from him. Return to your heart, then, you wrongdoers, and hold fast to him who made you" (4.12.18).

Next, the soul enters into a sermon-like exposition of the acts of the Word, which clearly takes its point of departure in the rule of faith: "He who is our

very life came down and took our death upon himself . . . Impatient of delay he ran, shouting by his words, his deeds, his death and his life, his descent to hell and his ascension to heaven, shouting his demand that we return to him” (4.12.19). Augustine then briefly addresses his soul again that it should “carry them off with you to God, because if you burn with the fire of charity as you speak, you will be saying these things to them by his Spirit,” before finally returning to default mode: prayer to God.

With the chiasmic, or Chinese boxes, structure of this passage, Augustine manages to appeal directly, and effectively, to his audience without conflicting rhetorically with the prayer form of *Confessions*.²⁷ And by employing the Word as leitmotif, he is also able to link together the three parties involved: God, the soul (i.e. himself, and implicitly every Christian), and other human beings. In this passage and, as we shall see, in *Confessions* as a whole, this manoeuvre is in fact theologically crucial. It testifies to what is probably the main concern for Augustine in the work: to live according to the Great Commandment (Matt 22:34–40) – in his own interpretation of it: through the love of God and of neighbour to bring one’s neighbour back into the love of God. As Augustine formulates it when he exhorts the soul: “If kinship with other souls appeals to you, let them be loved in God, because they too are changeable and gain stability only when fixed in him; otherwise they would go their way and be lost. Let them be loved in him, and carry off to God as many of them as possible with you” (4.12.18).²⁸

That the Great Commandment is at the core of *Confessions* is substantiated in Augustine’s explicit mentions of his readers. His first direct reference to them is in the account of his father’s ambitions for his son’s education. This he uses to warn his audience against seeking worldly honour:

But to whom am I telling this story? Not to you, my God; rather in your presence I am relating these events to my own kin, the human race (*generi humano*), however few of them may chance upon these writings of mine. And why? So that whoever reads them may reflect with me on the depths from which we must cry to you. What finds a reader hearing with you than a heart that confesses to you, a life lived from faith? (2.3.5)

A little later in the same book he returns to this topic, and points to the common lot and the common possibility of healing that human beings share: “If there is anyone whom you have called, who by responding to your summons has avoided those sins which he finds me remembering and confessing in my own life as he reads this, let him not mock me; for I have been healed by the same doctor who has granted him the grace not to fall ill, or at least to fall ill less seriously” (2.7.15).

²⁷ See 1.16.25–26; 6.11.18–19 for similar but less complex examples of this apostrophe-like technique.

²⁸ See 3.8.15; 10.37.61 for other examples of references to the Great Commandment.

The most central passage of his meta-reflections on the purpose of *Confessions*, however, is to be found at the beginning of Book 10. Here, he turns to his situation at the time of writing (ca. 397), and the text serves to introduce the final section of the work (Books 10–13). He begins by stating his reason for making his confessions, which is to get to know God, and to be shaped by him: “Let me know you, O you who know me; then shall I know even as I am known. You are the strength of my soul; make your way in and shape it to yourself.” And because God is Truth, Augustine has to be truthful to him and to his own readers: “Truth it is that I want to do, in my heart by confession in your presence, and with my pen before many witnesses” (10.1.1.). Since nothing can be kept hidden from God, even the things that Augustine would be unwilling to confess, he has no other choice than to surrender himself, both what is bad and what is good, to God and his love: “To you, then, Lord, I lie exposed, exactly as I am. I have spoken of what I hope to gain by confessing to you. My confession to you is made not with words of tongue and voice, but with the words of my soul and the clamor of my thought, to which your ear is attuned” (10.2.2).

Augustine then addresses the question why he is making his confessions in the presence of others: “What point is there for me in other people hearing my confessions? Are they likely to heal my infirmities?” He first upbraids the propensity to voyeurism in those who want to hear about his life: “A curious lot they are, eager to pry into the lives of others, but tardy when it comes to correcting their own. Why should they seek to hear from me what I am, when they are reluctant to hear from you what they are?” Nonetheless, he is willing to entrust his life to others, and his fellow believers in particular: “Yet charity believes without stint, at least among those who are bonded together by charity, and so I also confess to you, Lord, in such a way that people to whom I can offer no proof may discern whether I confess truthfully. I cannot prove it, but all whose ears are open to me by love will believe me” (10.3.3).

He then returns to the question about what he wants to achieve: he will confess to his fellow believers so that they by hearing about his former life and sins and about God’s forgiveness and healing (cf. Books 1–9) can be strengthened in their faith in God’s grace: “When the confession of my past evil deeds is read and listened to – those evil deeds which you have forgiven and covered over to make me glad in yourself, transforming my soul by faith and your sacrament – that recital arouses the hearer’s heart, forbidding it to slump into despair.” But what, then, about that part of his life which belongs to the present: “what profit is there . . . if through these writings I also confess to other people in your presence not what I have been, but what I still am?” There are many people who do not already know him, but nonetheless wish to get to know him, since they have read his works or heard about him. To these persons too, even though they cannot be sure that they really will come to

know him, he entrusts himself: “They want to hear and are ready to believe me: will they really recognize me? Yes, because the charity that makes them good assures them that I am not lying when I confess about myself; that very charity in them believes me” (10.3.4).

But is there any profit for them in hearing him confessing his present life? Yes, there is, both for them and for himself, because it causes them to thank God and to pray for him and one another. However, those who will profit from this are fellow Christians:

let it be a brotherly mind that does this, not the mind of a stranger, not the minds of alien foes who mouth falsehood and whose power wreaks wickedness; let it be a brotherly mind which when it approves of me will rejoice over me, and when it disapproves will be saddened on my account, because whether it approves or disapproves it still loves me (10.4.5).

Once again, Augustine highlights prayer in the form of intercession as central to the community of believers, as an expression of a joint Christian identity. And once again, we see him focusing on love, and on love undeserved. Clearly, he has here the Double Commandment in view, which he applies to his fellow Christians in particular (10.4.6).²⁹ Thus, Augustine regards the will to live according to this commandment as something that characterizes, or should characterize, them, viz., as part of their Christian identity.

Formation of Christian Identity in *Confessions*

The presentation of these select aspects of *Confessions* shows that it shares many of the same ideas about prayer that we find elsewhere in Augustine. Other aspects of the work that we have not addressed, such as methods of praying, also confirm this. What, however, makes *Confessions* stand out among Augustine’s writings is the attention it gives to the praying of an *individual*, and the function that prayer has in the work *as a whole*. In the following I shall focus on these features, and particularly on how the combination of the two contributes to the shaping of Christian identity.

The issue of identity formation is clearly at the centre of *Confessions*. As I have noted, the work is special in several respects. It is unique in genre and topic (an autobiography). It is also unique in the length and depth with which Augustine narrates his life story and reflects on his own development. Its only – yet distant – parallel in the latter respect is the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius (ca. 170–180). Thus, no other single work from antiquity brings us as close to an individual and his inner world as *Confessions*.³⁰

²⁹ He also alludes to 1 Corinthians 13 (“The Gift of Love”).

³⁰ At least as far as Augustine has presented it in the work (see note 11 above).

In the present volume, which deals with identity formation in early Christianity, this presents us with a challenge. Considering *Confessions*' uniqueness, what can it tell us about its time? Should we see it as a great but idiosyncratic work on the part of Augustine? Or does it in any way relate to the cultural and religious climate at the turn between the fourth and the fifth centuries? Is it exceptional, or can it be seen as typical? There is of course no simple answer to this. What is clear is that *Confessions* is unique as a literary work. But is the life and thinking that it mediates unique? This is probably less the case. Although Augustine was in many ways a singular personality, he in his writings also emerges as very much a child of his time. He was special in his intellectual capacity, in his vigorous impulse to think things through, and in his ability to mediate this to others, as attested in *Confessions*. But in other respects he can clearly be seen as reflecting the lives, development and challenges of numerous other individuals, at a time when many people from different social levels were joining the church.³¹ What moved the readers of *Confessions* at Augustine's time was not primarily the uniqueness of his personal process, but far more likely its representativeness: in this story, his contemporaries could recognise their own life stories, although prototypically and in a way that most of them were themselves unable to formulate. This is indicated in Augustine's own comments in *Revisions*, and in the instant popularity that *Confessions* enjoyed.³²

Consequently, *Confessions* should be read as giving expression to an ongoing process of identity construction among Christians in general by the end of the fourth century. Without underestimating Augustine, he may in retrospect have become more of a special case than he was perceived to be in his own time. But in addition – considering his reputation among his contemporaries – the Augustine of *Confessions* would not only serve as a reflection, but also as a *pattern* for Christian life, faith and thinking, both through his critical attitude to his own past, through the story about his conversion, and through the new life he was now leading.

As I have argued above, there are several factors in *Confessions* that contribute to the formation of Christian identity: the ways Augustine positions himself vis-à-vis his various conversation partners; his emphasis on Christian models; and through his boundary marking vis-à-vis opponents. But more important than these factors is Augustine's intense study of his own inner person: a central element throughout the work, both the narrative (1–9) and the analytical (10–13) parts, is his descriptions and assessments of his own motives, deliberations, memories and values. In this self-analysis, which

³¹ Augustine himself gives many examples of such persons, e.g. 8.1.1–5.10; 8.6.13–7.18.

³² Cf. e.g. the biographer Possidius' omission of this part of Augustine's life (see note 14 above).

Augustine would probably call the laying open of his heart – and modern readers perhaps the laying open of his identity – Augustine addresses the whole register of human existence: experiences, feelings and thinking, the relations to nature, history and time, and to himself, others and God. The only other work to resemble this, but in a much more rudimentary form, is again *Soliloquies*.³³

In this attention to the inner life of human beings, which has been described as Augustine's "radical reflexivity," many have seen him as anticipating later perceptions of and searches for the human self, such as in René Descartes (1596–1650), Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), or more recently within postmodernism, most strikingly in the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004).³⁴ And there are clearly similarities in their perceptions of the self, but also marked differences, as I shall indicate below.

Prayer in *Confessions*

Let us now turn to the matter of prayer. As I have noted above, prayer has in various ways a central role in *Confessions*; however, the clearly most striking feature is the fact that the work as a whole is formulated as a prayer. What relationship is there between the formation of Christian identity and the prayer form of *Confessions*? Would it make a difference if it was written as a straightforward autobiographical account, and not as a prayer? Yes, it clearly would, and in two respects, both of which are related to the matter of Christian identity. One has to do with theology in a narrow sense, the other with ecclesiology; but both have to do with relationships.

The first difference is that the prayer form of Augustine's self-presentation makes it part of a dialogue, a conversation between one person and another, between himself and God. For Augustine, this is a real conversation: he is speaking with a living Other. This is, for example, markedly different from the character prayer has in the Stoic Epictetus.³⁵ The change from Augustine's own *Soliloquies*, written ten years earlier, is also striking. In *Soliloquies*, the conversation is with his own reason, and the God addressed in its prayers resembles an abstract, philosophical concept. In *Confessions*, God emerges – as we have observed – as far more human, with feelings, empathy, and a will

³³ Augustine also enters into similar analyses of the "inner person," for example in *The Trinity* (399–422/426), but never in ways comparable to *Confessions*.

³⁴ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 130–33 for Augustine's "radical reflexivity." See also Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 143–54. For discussions of these matters, see John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

³⁵ See the contribution by Glenn Wehus in the present volume.

to change his mind; in brief, he is painted in the colours of the Old Testament Lord and the New Testament Christ. For this reason, talking with the God of *Confessions* is having a conversation with a Person: God is a who, not a what.³⁶ At the same time, however, he is not merely human: he is also all-knowing and all-just. Nothing can be hidden from him, and only honesty without pretence is possible. Thus, in his conversation with God Augustine has no other option, for good or for ill, than to be himself, at least as far as he is able to understand and describe himself.

Seen in this way, Christian identity in *Confessions* is fundamentally linked with God. It is an identity conditioned and shaped in exchange with him, not in isolation or in dialogue merely with oneself. At this point, Augustine's search for identity, for the self, differs from postmodernism, especially deconstructionism's perception of a person's self as in flux, without an actual core.³⁷

The other difference which the prayer form makes is that Augustine in *Confessions* shares his life not only with God, but also with his readers: he lays his heart open also to them. This may seem a trivial observation, but is not, as Augustine's reflections on this in Book 10.3.3–5.7 indicate. What he does thereby is to place himself in a very unpleasant position: he has to face both God and his readers simultaneously and to balance his account in both directions. If he should try to present himself too sympathetically vis-à-vis his readers, God will know that he is putting on a show. If he depicts himself too negatively, even with the wish to glorify God, God will reproach him for slighting God's own creation. In both cases, he will be insincere to his readers – and there are few things that Augustine is more on guard against in others and in himself than self-exaltation and its counterpart, self-denigration. Augustine has often been accused of painting his life in too dark colours and also of trying to score rhetorical points by this. But it is more probable that Augustine here is in fact presenting himself as he sees himself at the time of *Confessions*, and as he still can recognise himself thirty years later in his *Revisions*. This Augustine is of course not the “real” one, but Augustine as adequately presented as he himself could manage.

Prayer and Christian Identity in *Confessions*: Final Reflections

What could have been the effect of Augustine's unveiling of his heart to God and to others? There is no simple answer to this either. From Augustine's point of view, the combination of self-description and prayer could obviously

³⁶ So Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 151.

³⁷ Cf. Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 148–54; also Caputo and Scanlon, *Augustine and Postmodernism*.

be a rhetorically very forceful way to present a paradigm for Christian identity formation, at least to readers who were prepared to sympathise or identify with him. At the same time, his self-portrayal would expose him to a great risk of compromising and dishonouring himself vis-à-vis both supporters and critics. Considering that Augustine by 397 was still at an early stage of his ecclesiastical career and far less established than he became later, he would by this make himself very vulnerable, not only because of his former life (Books 1–9), but also as he sees himself in his present state (Books 10–11).

Interpreted in this way, Augustine in praying his life in *Confessions* makes himself dependent on both God and other human beings. Thus, he is not only the figure that many today consider him to be, a person who with his analyses of his inner world anticipates a postmodern interest in the individual self. There is of course much to this, but it is only partly true: Augustine is at the same time a collectivist through and through.³⁸ He sees himself as a human being and a Christian living his life in the world and in a community of believers. Although the formation of Christian identity for him is very much a formation of his heart, it takes place within the church, in a joint venture with others.

The Great Commandment, the love of God and neighbour, is at the centre of Augustine's thinking – he deals at length with this in *Christian Instruction* (Book 1.11.23–30.65), written at roughly the same time as *Confessions* (ca. 397). This is also reflected in *Confessions*, but in a radical, almost drastic, way: in this work, Augustine puts himself at the mercy of others. He does not only urge love of God and love of neighbour. By exposing himself in this way, he is also asking to be loved: Augustine is handing himself over to the love of others, both God and neighbour.

In Augustine's days, Christianity had already been around for nearly four centuries and had, as I have noted, become a movement addressing all aspects of human life. But the growth of the church and the changes taking place in the Roman Empire confronted Christians with new challenges. Christianity was not yet established in such a way that its supporters could relax their efforts: what it meant to be a Christian and a member of the church and of society had to be continually negotiated, and in a variety of ways. It was only later, with the Christianized culture of the Early and High Middle Ages, that there would be some – limited! – relaxation from such demands. In his *Confessions*, Augustine would in a singular way give expression to one aspect of the shaping of Christian identity in his time: the inner formation of a person through his or her relation to God and to other human beings. With the recognition that Augustine's self-description evoked in others, *Confessions* would contribute to the Christian formation of many of his contemporaries as well as to that of posterity.

³⁸ Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 47–50.

Up to this point, I have presented some features of a Christian identity as it emerges in *Confessions*. Now, at the end, it is also appropriate to complicate the matter somewhat. As it turns out, Augustine himself in fact takes considerable pains to undermine the idea of identity, and thereby also the idea of a specific Christian identity. In his analyses of his self and of God, the final outcome is a – disquieting – resignation. In his search for his heart, Augustine is faced with mysteries: God is in the last resort impossible to get at, to know. And worse still, at least as far as the issue of identity is concerned, is that Augustine does not even understand himself. In spite of, or because of, his analyses of his development and his own mind, he has not really come to know his heart. Paradoxically, for all his search for himself and for God, Augustine in *Confessions* ends up being an unknown speaking to an unknowable.

Consequently, Augustine's journey has much in common with a post-modern questioning and eventual deconstruction of the self – this is not to be dismissed too lightly. Still, there are crucial differences: the restlessness of Augustine's heart, his not-knowing, is of a limited character. He has a trust in his dialogue partner, that He is knowing, and knows Augustine better than he can know himself.³⁹ And he also has the hope that this is a preliminary state: there will be a day of eternal peace in which his prayers and those of others will be fulfilled, and then they will all be able to fully know – and enjoy – God, themselves and one another. As Augustine states it in the last words of *Confessions*: “What human can empower another human to understand these things? What angel can grant understanding to another angel? What angel to a human? Let us rather ask of you, seek in you, knock at your door. Only so will we receive, only so find, and only so will the door be opened to us. Amen” (13.38.53).

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³⁹ Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 153–4.

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Christians Praying in a Graeco-Egyptian Context: Intimations of Christian Identity in Greek Papyrus Prayers¹

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1. Introduction

Prayers recovered on papyri and related writing materials (parchment, ostraca, wooden tablets etc.) in Egypt represent direct witnesses of early Christian prayer ideology and practice. As such, they complement the testimony of the New Testament and of the early Christian authors and exegetes (Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others) dealing with this core aspect of early Christian religious life. However, this important corpus has not received the attention due nor has it been sufficiently mined to illuminate early Christian prayer mentality and its manifestations in prayer practice.² To my knowledge, it has never been investigated against the background of the formation of Christian identity in general nor within the more specifically Graeco-Egyptian setting that has yielded these texts.

This contribution seeks to tease out manifestations of identity in the corpus of early Christian papyrus prayers in Greek. Identity is here understood as the sense and expression of belonging to a religious community possessing traits which distinguish its members from those belonging to other religious groups – a sense of unity and segregation at the same time. Expressions of identity

¹ This article has benefited from the feedback of the editors. Special thanks to Ágnes Mihálykó (PhD fellow, University of Oslo) for most useful suggestions and to Dr. Nicholas E. Allott (University of Oslo) for revising the English.

² They find e.g. no place in the material presented in Mark Kiley et al., eds., *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) or in the recent overview article by Columba Stewart, “Prayer,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 744–63.

will be sought in the self-presentation of the praying voice as well as in the presentation of the relationship between the orant(s) and the divine addressee of the prayer. The presence and construction of alterity will also be explored.

2. Greek Christian Prayers from Late Roman and Early Byzantine Egypt

2.1 *The Corpus: Provenance, Date and Selection Criteria*

The papyrus texts identified as prayers of Christian affiliation form a disparate body of prayer texts, the majority in a fragmentary state of preservation. They include prayers of all kinds, from prayers for individual use (private prayers, often used as amulets) to prayers offered by or on behalf of the worshipping community (liturgical prayers), as well as prayers included in collections (*euchologia*) in the possession of churches, monasteries, officiating priests, or perhaps even of devout individuals.³ Viewed as a whole, they represent acts and tokens of Christian communication with God from various locations and contexts of worship in late Roman and early Byzantine Egypt (excepting the Delta from which virtually no papyri survive).⁴

The dates of the manuscripts, often assigned on palaeographical criteria only,⁵ range from the third to the seventh/eighth century (while some copies are as late as the ninth/tenth century). Palaeography warrants only the date of the copy at hand, while the composition of the text may antedate or coincide with the production of the manuscript. Consequently, even papyrus prayers dated in the sixth, seventh or eighth century may be of a considerably earlier

³ A list of Christian prayers on papyrus can be found in Joseph van Haelst, *Catalogue des Papyrus Littéraires Juifs et Chrétiens* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1976), 263–330. Later additions are reviewed in the bulletin “Christliche Texte,” which appears at regular intervals in the journal *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*. Selections of important texts in translation: Charles Wessely, *Les plus anciens monuments du Christianisme écrits sur papyrus* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1974), 424–50 and Adalbert Hamman, ed., *Early Christian Prayers* (Chicago and London: Henry Regnery Co & Longmans Green, 1961), 62–77.

⁴ Provenance may be ascertained only when the papyri have been recovered as a result of excavations, or when they may be connected to documentary evidence of known provenance.

⁵ The statement by Orsini and Clarysse regarding the dating of New Testament papyri holds equally true for Christian prayers coming from codices: “NT texts are even more problematic than other literary texts, since they are nearly always written in the form of a codex, so that the script is the same on the two sides and neither the back nor front can be used to provide a terminus ante or a terminus post” (Pasquale Orsini and Willy Clarysse, “Early New Testament Manuscripts and their Dates: A Critique of Theological Palaeography,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 88 [2012]: 443–74, 444).

age. In order, however, to avoid stepping on grounds beyond a papyrologist's expertise,⁶ the present discussion will limit itself by and large to prayers the manuscripts of which are datable up to and including the early fifth century,⁷ and thus to texts the antiquity of which is guaranteed by the date of the manuscript itself. The antiquity of the manuscripts entails that the historical value of these prayers far exceeds that of other sources transmitting prayers of early Egyptian Christianity, in particular the *euchologion* of Sarapion⁸ and the witnesses of the Egyptian church rite, most notably the Liturgy of St. Mark/St. Cyril,⁹ that present research with the challenge of distinguishing an original kernel from the later accretions.

It is finally worth noting that while excluding papyri preserving Biblical texts, mostly Psalms, used as prayers,¹⁰ the present discussion will include so-called "magical" Christian prayers from the period examined. The fact that these prayers originated in a realm outside religious life proper should be no compelling reason for excluding them from an investigation of Christian identity. They are after all the prayers of Christians in so far as they are addressed to the Christian God and appeal to Jesus (or to God through Jesus).¹¹ The specimens included in this discussion are prayers for protection or other benign ends. They lack both the element of coercion, thought to distinguish magical from religious expressions,¹² and peculiarities characteristic of magical texts as the *voces magicae* or the *materia magica*. There are no indications that the so-called Christian "magical" prayers formed part of a

⁶ Theological criteria would then form the basis of judgement.

⁷ It seems worth restating at this point that no Christian prayer on papyrus datable before the third century has emerged so far. All papyrus prayers dated to the third and fourth centuries have been investigated and the relevant ones have been brought to bear on the discussion. I have also included copies dated by editors "fourth/fifth," as this mode of dating implies that a date in the late fourth century is as plausible as a date in the early fifth century.

⁸ A collection of liturgical prayers ascribed to the fourth century bishop Sarapion of Thmuis. Text: Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1995).

⁹ Text: Geoffrey J. Cuming, *The Liturgy of St Mark: Edited From the Manuscripts With a Commentary* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1990).

¹⁰ The topic is complex and merits a separate study. The lack of historical context makes it a challenge to determine the use of papyri transmitting Psalms. On the use of the Psalms in prayer see Emmanuel von Severus, "Gebet I," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (ed. Theodor Klauser et al.; Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–) 8:1134–1258, 1171.

¹¹ The relevant specimens are PGM II Christliches P6a, P13 and P21.

¹² Fritz Graf, "Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 188–213, offers important reflections on the straddling of prayer between religion and magic and a brief presentation of the criticism levelled against the rigid ("Frazerian") dichotomy of the two fields.

magical ritual. Their use was mostly amuletic.¹³ More substantially, this is important comparative prayer material as it may shed light on elements of Christian identity that were of paramount importance at an individual and deeply personal level so that they were carried over to religious expressions situated outside or in the fringes of modes of religious life sanctioned by the Church.

2.2 The Formal Structure of Greek Christian Prayers

From the formal point of view Christian prayers in Greek show the traditional structure of Greek prayers¹⁴ which begin with an opening invocation (*invocatio*)¹⁵ often expanded through predication which articulates praise of the divine addressee. Praise leads to or is interwoven with a narrative (*pars epica*) of events from the action of the divinity prayed to. The petition (*preces*), the actual request addressed to God, follows. The prayer is then rounded off with further praise and a closing valediction to the divinity.

Invocation and petition are indispensable constituent elements of Christian prayers (see e.g. PGM II Christliches P6a¹⁶ (4th/5th cent.) ὁ θε(ε)ς τῶν παρακειμένων σταυρῶν| βοήθησον τὸν δο|ῦλόν σου Ἀπφουᾶν ἀμήν – “God of the crosses pressing upon us, help your servant Apphouas. Amen”).¹⁷ The optional parts, the compressed narrative (*historiola*) and the praise, often convey an implicit argument in support of the request. However, praise, a prominent component in Christian prayers, may also be offered solely for the

¹³ Theodore S. de Bruyn and Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets and Formularies from Egypt Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablets,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 48 (2011): 163–216.

¹⁴ See Carolus Ausfeld, “De Graecorum Praecationibus Quaestiones,” *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie* 28 (1903): 502–47 who introduced the terminology *invocatio*, *pars epica* and *preces*. This was updated in Henk S. Versnel, “Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer,” in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (ed. H. S. Versnel; Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 2; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 1–64 into the terms *invocation*, *argument* and *request* used currently. See also Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 132–55.

¹⁵ Its format in papyrus prayers is either a cletic case (vocative case or nominative in cletic function) or an appropriate form of a cletic verb (ἐπικαλοῦμαι/-ούμεθα).

¹⁶ In this article the papyrus edition number will be provided in addition to the van Haelst catalogue number (for texts published before 1976) and the *Leuven Database of Ancient Books* (LDAB) number. References to papyrological editions, corpora and series are abbreviated according to John F. Oates et al., eds., *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, last updated 1st June 2011. The punctuation is that of the ancient manuscripts. Editorial conventions follow the Leiden system, see Bernard A. van Groningen, “Projet d’unification des systèmes de signes critiques,” *Chronique d’Égypte* 7 (1932): 262–69.

¹⁷ P.Oxy. VII 1058. van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 307, no. 955; LDAB 5833. See also de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets,” 200–201, no. 109.

purpose of glorifying God, bearing little or no obvious connection to the request. The concluding doxology in particular (σοὶ δόξα καὶ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων – “for yours is the glory and the power for ever and ever” *vel sim.*) – in combination with the intercessory formula (διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – “by the agency of Jesus Christ” *vel sim.*) – becomes the veritable hallmark of Christian prayers, a distinctively Christian elaboration of the concluding praise module of prayers.¹⁸

3. Christian Identity in Papyrus Prayers

3.1 Explicit Expressions of Identity

Few explicit expressions of the Christian petitioners’ sense of belonging to a distinct religious community are traceable in papyrus prayers. The reason for this situation, which in and of itself should hardly be taken to reflect a correspondingly low degree of self-consciousness among the Christian believers, may be either the limited extent and fragmentary nature of the available material or that the focus in prayer is primarily communication with the divine, not overt expression of self-consciousness.

The most explicit testimonies of group identity are yielded by P.Berol. inv. 13415,¹⁹ a leaf from a papyrus codex (4th/5th cent.), which preserves two prayers drawn from a liturgical setting of some kind.²⁰ Of the first prayer, which has been interpreted either as a Friday prayer or as a pre-baptismal prayer,²¹ there have been preserved only the final doxology and the immediately preceding request:

¹⁸ On the forms and development of the Christian doxology see Alfred Stuiber, “Doxologie,” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (ed. Theodor Klauser et al.; Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–) 4:213–23. On papyrus doxologies and their background see Giuseppe Ghedini, “Frammenti liturgici in un papiro milanese,” *Aegyptus* 13 (1933): 672–73 (comm. on IV.4).

¹⁹ van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 291, no. 879; LDAB 5926. Editions: Carl Schmidt, “Zwei altchristliche Gebete,” in *Neutestamentliche Studien Georg Heinrici* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1914), 66–78; Theodor Schermann, *Frühchristliche Vorbereitungsgebete zur Taufe (Papyr. Berol. 13415)* (München: Beck, 1917).

²⁰ Both are articulated in a collective voice: διὰ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως τῶν ψυχῶν| ἡμῶν| Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (v.8–9), ἐπικαλούμεθά σε (v.12), παρκακαλοῦμέν σε (v.37–r.1), καταξιωθῶμεν (r.23) etc.

²¹ Friday prayer: Schmidt, “Zwei altchristliche Gebete,” 76–78; pre-baptismal prayer: Schermann, *Frühchristliche Vorbereitungsgebete*, 13–17.

P.Berol. inv. 13415 v.3–10²²

δὸς ἄγειν τὰς νηστεί-
 [ας ε]ῦ ἐν καθαρᾷ καρδίᾳ· καὶ σωθῆναι
 [ἀπὸ] πάσης μεθοδίας τοῦ διαβόλου
 [καὶ τ]ελειωθῆναι ἐν χριστιανισμῶ·
 [δὸς ὑπο]μαίειν (l. ὑπομένειν) σε ἄχρι ἐσχάτης ἀν[α-]
 [πνοῆς] διὰ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως τῶν ψυχῶν
 ἡμῶ[v] Ἰ(ησο)ῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ· δι' οὗ σοὶ δόξα καὶ τιμὴ κ[αί]
 κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας ἀμήν

(. . .) grant that we may carry out the fasting in a seemly manner, in pure heart; that we may be saved from all contrivances of the devil, and that we may be perfected in Christianity. Grant that we abide by you until our last breath through the agency of the archpriest of our souls, Jesus Christ, through whom is your glory and honour and might in all time. Amen.

The plea “to be perfected in Christianity” (τελειωθῆναι ἐν χριστιανισμῶ) underlines the petitioners’ adherence to a distinct system of interlocking belief and practices. Its key elements feature in the immediate context: faith in God and in the continuous agency of Christ, fasting, avoidance of temptation. The orants are anxious to secure Jesus’ pastoral agency in order to persevere in faith.

The second prayer (v.11–r.36), preserved in its entirety and more or less complete, is labelled “Sabbath prayer” (σαββατικὴ εὐχή). Its *Sitz im Leben* is uncertain: Theodor Schermann considers it pre-baptismal, while its first editor, Carl Schmidt, views its multiple references to teaching, study and illumination as compatible with a service in which the study of the Scriptures had a central place.²³ The orants invoke God (v.12) and praise him as the wise ruler, the overseer and creator of all, and as the one who wishes that all humans may be saved and may come to know the truth (v.12–20). God is then glorified – in the orants’ own voice “because you deemed us worthy of your divine call, teaching and recovery so that we may receive instruction in wisdom and comprehension” (v.24–6 ὅτι κατηξίωσας ἡμᾶς τῆς ἀγίας σου κλήσεως καὶ διδασκαλίας καὶ ἀνανήψεως μαθητευθῆναι ἐν σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει), and because of his salvific plan (v.29–37). The ensuing request forms the core of the prayer:

²² The punctuation of the texts cited is that of the ancient manuscripts.

²³ Schmidt, “Zwei altchristliche Gebete,” 75: “Es handelt sich also um einen liturgisches Gottesdienst, der ausschließlich der Lehre, der κατήγησις τοῦ λόγου, gewidmet ist, . . .”

P.Berol. inv. 13415 v.37–r.9

κ[αὶ πα-]||

[ρα]καλοῦμεν σε τὸν π(ατέρ)α τῶν οἰ-
 [κτ]ιμῶν· καὶ θε(ε)ὸν πάσης παρακλή-
 [σε]ως· ὅπως βεβαιώσης ἡμᾶς ἐ[ν]
 [ταύ]τη τῇ κλήσει ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ
 [θρ]ησκείᾳ καὶ ἀνανήψει μελε[τῶν-]
 [τας] τοὺς ἁγίους λόγους τοῦ θεοῦ[υ]
 [νό]μου· καὶ ἐπιθυμοῦν[τας νῦν]
 [σοι] ἐγγίξειν· καὶ φωτισθῆναι ἐν σοὶ
 [πάση]ς γνώσεως καὶ εὐσεβείας

We also beseech you, the compassionate father and God receptive to all petitions, to steady us in this call, in this worship/belief and recovery, in practicing the sacred words of the divine law, in being desirous of approaching you and being illuminated by your agency in all knowledge and piety.

The reiteration of the formulations of the praise (v.24–6) with θρησκεία (“worship”/“belief”)²⁴ having substituted διδασκαλία (“teaching”) is noteworthy. The interchangeability of the terms underlines the significance of instruction in shaping Christian beliefs. Instruction paves the way to and provides the foundation of Christian religious life perceived as service of and belief in God. A second set of requests (r.10-20) touch upon God’s willingness to forgive lapses and sins before the orants renew the plea for strength and illumination and launch into the final doxology:

P.Berol. inv. 13415 r.21–36

ὁ ε[ὐ]μενῆς] θε(ε)ὸς δυνάμωσον ἡμᾶς ἐ[ν τῇ σῆ]
 ἀντιλήμψει καὶ φώτισον ἐν τῇ [σῆ πα-]
 ρακλήσει· ὅπως καταξιωθῶμεν τῶν
 εὐαγγελιζομένων δογμάτων τῶν ἁγί-
 ων σου ἀποστόλων· καὶ τῆς μεγαλοφυ-
 οῦς διδασκαλίας τῶν εὐαγγελίων τοῦ
 σ(ωτήρο)ς ἡμῶν Ἰ(ησοῦ) Χ(ριστοῦ)· μὴ μόνον λόγῳ καὶ ἄ-
 [κο]ῆ· ἀλλὰ ἔργῳ καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ· τὰ ἀντάξια
 [ἀσ]κοῦντες εὐεργετήματα· τὰ ἄνω βλέ-
 [πειν]· τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖν· τὰ ἄνω σκοπεῖν·
 [οὐ] τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· ἵνα καὶ ἐν τούτ[ω τῶ]
 [καιρ]ῷ καὶ ἐν ποιήματί σου· δοξάσῃται τὸ πά(ν)-
 [τιμ]ον καὶ πανάγιον· καὶ παντοδύνα-
 [μ]όν σου κράτος ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ Ἰ(ησοῦ) τῷ ἡγαπημέ-

²⁴ On the meanings of the word see Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 654 s.v. θρησκεία.

[νφ] σου· σὸν ἀγίω πν(εύματ)ι καὶ ν[ῦν καὶ ε]ἰς τοῦς
[αἰ]ῶνας ἀμήν:

Kindly God, reinforce us through your support; illuminate us, we implore you, so that we may be deemed worthy of the doctrines of your holy apostles, proclaimed as good news, and of the magnificent teaching of the gospels of our saviour, Jesus Christ; not only to speak of them and hear them spoken of but to actively and with vigour practise acts of kindness of equal worth; to look upwards; to seek and look out for what is high up, not what is on earth; so that in this occasion and through your creature may your highly honoured, most holy and mighty power be glorified by the agency of your beloved Jesus Christ, with the aid of the holy Ghost, now and for ever. Amen.

This prayer portrays Christian identity as dependent on the strengthening and illuminating agency of God but also as an active pursuit of self-development for the faithful. The motivating and cohesive factors for the orants (be it aspiring or fully introduced Christians) are described in terms of “call”, “worship/service of God” and “recovery” (from primordial sin or from ignorance). The study of God’s law, of the teachings of the Apostles and of the Gospels serve as the foundation of the petitioners’ practical ethics (v.28–9 ἀλλὰ ἔργω καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ ... [ἀσ]κοῦντες εὐεργετήματα), while their common goal is described in terms of spiritual ascent combined with avoidance of mundane pursuits (v.29–31 τὰ ἄνω βλέπειν . . . [οὐ] τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). Doctrine, teaching and practices make up Christian faith, and the orant prays that he/she may have his/her life shaped by them.

At the level of expression, adverbials consisting of the preposition ἐν governing an abstract noun (in dative) and complementing verbs which signify confirmation, affirmation, illumination *vel sim.* delimit the grounds on which Christian collective identity in prayer rests. Another example of this is offered in the part of P.Würzb. 3, a liturgical papyrus from Hermopolis preserving two intercessory prayers (late 3rd cent.),²⁵ in which the officiating voice asks of God:

P.Würzb. 3r.14–17

κατάρτισον δὲ σεαυτῶ καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐ[ν] ἄ-
[γνί]α (l. ἀγνεία) καὶ παρθενία τοῦ λαοῦ σου θεῆ διαμενουσ[ῶ]γ²⁶

²⁵ van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 324–25, no. 1036; LDAB 5475. Editions: Ulrich Wilcken, *Mitteilungen aus der Würzburger Papyrussammlung* (Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Kl. 1933. 6; Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1934), 31–6; Jürgen Hammerstaedt, *Griechische Anaphorenfragmente aus Ägypten und Nubien* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999), 142–50, no. 11.

²⁶ Hammerstaedt (largely following Wilcken) reads in ll. 14–15 τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν <ἐν> ἄ-[[γν]ι<α> καὶ παρθενία τοῦ λαοῦ σου θ(ε)ῆ, ἰδίᾳ μενούσ[α]ς producing a different interpretation (transl. Hammerstaedt: “Richte für dich her auch die Seelen derjenigen aus deinem Volk, die <in> Reinheit und Jungfräulichkeit sind, Gott, welche – scil. die Seelen –

[δικ]γὺς (l. δεικνὺς) πιστὰς ἐγκρατεῖς ἀμετακινήτο[υ]ς
[βεβ]αί-α-ς ἐν ταύτη[[v]] τῇ πίστει ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἀγ[άπῃ]

Make full ready for yourself, God, also the souls of those of your people (fem.) who persevere in purity and virginity, proving them faithful, self-controlled, unmoved, steady in this faith, in this love(?) (. . .)

The specific group prayed for here are, I suggest, female Christians who have opted for a life in virginity.²⁷ What God is asked for, to help them persevere “in faith” and “in love,” both brings them together as a group and distinguishes them from their fellow-Christians. Πίστις signifies both the Christian faith and their pledge to remain faithful “virgins of God,” while ἀγάπη refers both to love as the fundamental principle of Christian ethics and to the pure, non-carnal love which distinguishes and identifies this particular group of devotees within the wider Christian community.

Quite the opposite to the specimens discussed so far, P.Oxy. III 407 (3rd/4th cent.)²⁸ survives complete and was most probably intended for individual use, either as an amulet or in service.²⁹ The nearly square sheet preserves seven lines of text on one side and the word “prayer” (προσευχῆ) on the back.³⁰

für sich bleiben, in dem du sie erweistest (?) als gläubich usw.”). I see neither a *nomen sacrum* stroke over the invocation, which is written out in full, nor an *iota* before δια-. The formulation ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐν παρθενίᾳ καὶ ἀγνεῖᾳ in the intercession *Apost. Const.* 8, 12, 44 (202) offers a concise parallel, while the request τοὺς ἐν παρθενίᾳ διατήρησον in *Apost. Const.* 8, 15, 5 while constituting no parallel as regards the construction or the meaning offers a verbal compound of διά expressing the perseverance anticipated of those who pledge abstinence.

²⁷ The view that this passage refers to female dedicatees to God has been advanced also by the liturgist Klaus Gamber (see Klaus Gamber, “Liturgiegeschichtliche Bemerkungen zum Würzburger Papyrus Nr. 20,” in *Miscellanea papirologica Ramon Puig en el seu vuitantè aniversari* [ed. Sebastià Janeras; Barcelona: Fundació Salvador Vives Casajuana, 1987], 129–32). His hypothesis is, however, not borne out by the text which he adopted, as pointed out by Pieter J. Sijpesteijn and Kurt Treu, “Zum liturgischen Fragment P. Würzb. 3,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 72 (1988): 67–68.

²⁸ P.Lond.Lit. 230 (descr.). van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 307, no. 952; LDAB 5531. Second edition: Francesco Pedretti, “Papiri cristiani liturgici: I,” *Aegyptus* 36 (1956): 247–53. See also Alfred Rahlfs, *Verzeichnis der griechischen Handschriften des Alten Testaments*, Bd. I, 1: *Die Überlieferung bis zum VIII. Jahrhundert* (Bearb. Detlef Fraenkel, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 291; de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets,” 212–13, no. 173.

²⁹ Milne (in P.Lit.Lond. p. 195) and others consider the papyrus as an amulet, Pedretti (“Papiri cristiani liturgici,” 251) stresses the liturgical use of its formulary, while Don Barker, “The Reuse of Christian Texts: *P. Macquarie* inv. 360 + *P. Mil. Vogl.* inv. 1224 (P⁹¹) and *P. Oxy.* X 1229 (P²³),” in *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 5; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 138–40 considers it as a favourite penitential prayer.

³⁰ The back also contains the remains of an account, probably in a different hand.

Traces indicate that the sheet had once been folded. The label would then indicate for the user the type of the hidden interior text which reads:

P.Oxy. III 407

ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντ[ο]κράτωρ ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν
καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς
βοήθησόν μοι ἐλέησόν με [[εξ]]ἑξάλιψόν (l. ἐξάλειψόν) μου τὰς
ἀμαρτίας σῶσον με ἐν τῷ νῦν καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι
αἰῶνι διὰ τοῦ κυρίου κα[ι] σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ 5
Χριστοῦ (l. Χριστοῦ) δι' οὗ [σοι] ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας
τῶν αἰώνων[ν] ἀμήν

God almighty, creator of the heaven, the earth, the sea and everything in them, help me, have mercy on me, expunge my sins, save me now and in the time to come by the agency of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, through whom also is (your?) glory and might in all eternity. Amen.

Assistance, mercy, obliteration of sins and salvation are the requests (ll. 3–5) in the core of this structurally typical petitionary prayer. They are framed between the invocation (nominative for vocative), expanded through predication (ll. 1–2), and the concluding doxology (ll. 5–7). In accord with the gravity and long-term character of the requests, God is called upon in his almightiness as manifested in the creation of the universe. In describing the creation, the praying voice echoes Ps 145:6 (also, with some variation, Neh 9:6, Acts 14:15 and Rev 14:7).³¹ This aptly demonstrates the degree to which early Christian identity in prayer has the Scriptures, in particular the Psalms, as steady reference text and building block.³²

3.2 Doxology, Jesus and identity

A striking feature of this important papyrus prayer is the strongly individualised expression of the requests, highlighted by means of syntactic parallelism (juxtaposition of verbs in imperative followed by personal pronoun clitic), *polyptōton* and rhyming.³³ On the other hand, these very same features impart a ritual quality to the passage. The individualised tone is ultimately counter-balanced by dint of the formulation “through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ” in the doxology (ll. 4–5) which both projects the individuality of the orant onto a wider, more inclusive whole (“us”) and makes the success of prayer dependent on and guaranteed by Jesus’ mediation. Thus, Jesus in his

³¹ Pedretti, “Papiri cristiani liturgici,” 250–51.

³² Cf. Larry Hurtado, “The Place of Jesus in Earliest Christian Prayer and Its Import for Early Christian Identity,” in this volume, p. 41.

³³ ll. 3–4 βοήθησόν μοι ἐλέησόν με ἐξάλιψόν μου τὰς ἀμαρτίας σῶσον με.

role as intercessor³⁴ emerges as the uniting factor for each and every Christian praying. From this point of view, at least as interesting as the question of the use of P.Oxy. III 407 may be the observation that even when addressing and communicating with God in an individual voice the Christian orant never loses sight of his/her being a member of a community presided over by Jesus whose role as an intercessor between humans and God guarantees the fulfillment of prayers.

The formula introducing Jesus' intercessory role in combination with the concluding doxology develops into a hallmark of early Christian prayers, occurring with variations in the vast majority of early papyrus prayers.³⁵ It conveys a crucial, identifying feature of early Christian prayer as it proceeds from the human to the divine sphere, i.e. its double channeling.³⁶ Whereas Jewish and Greek pagan petitioners address the divine recipient of their prayers exclusively and directly, Christian orants communicate their requests to God both directly and indirectly, consistently entrusting the fulfillment of their prayers in Jesus' intercessory role. The qualification of Jesus in this context as "our Lord" or "our Lord and Saviour" (P.Oxy. III 407.5–6, O.Petr.Mus. 19r.5–6 etc.) foregrounds the orants' keen consciousness of Jesus' continuing salvific role.³⁷

Interesting perspectives on sources and negotiations of identity in prayer as well as on the role of Jesus are offered by the versions of the prayer which accompanied the ritual of "placing the hand upon ailing persons" (χειροθεσία ἐπὶ ἀσθενούντων). This prayer has been preserved in two fourth century manuscripts, the wooden tablet P.Kellis I 88³⁸ and in papyrus codex P.Monts.Roca inv. 155b.19–156a.5³⁹ (commonly known as "the miscel-

³⁴ On Jesus' intercessory role more generally see Hurtado's contribution in this volume, pp. 36–38.

³⁵ In papyri from the period up to the fifth century see BKT VI 1.37–41, PGM II Christliches P21.4–5, P.Mil. s.n. fr. IV.3–5 (see Ghedini, "Frammenti liturgici," 669), P.Monts.Roca inv. 154b.21–23, 155a.24–27, 155b.15–18 and 156a.3–5, P.Berol. inv. 13415r.8–10 and v.32–6, P.Strassb. inv. 254v.24–6 and O.Petr.Mus. 19v.11–15.

³⁶ Hurtado (in this volume, p. 51) uses the term *dyadic shape*.

³⁷ The vivid metaphors "the chief-priest of our souls" in P.Berol. inv. 13415r.8–9 and "the chief-physician of our souls" (BKT VI 1.38–39) are noteworthy exceptions. The former may be explicable in the light of the pre-baptismal setting of the prayer, while the latter may be extra-mural as this papyrus may contain Christian adaptations of originally non-Christian (Hermetic?) prayers, see below.

³⁸ From Kellis, a settlement in Dakhleh Oasis, LDAB 5659. Second edition: Cornelia E. Römer, Robert W. Daniel and Klaas A. Worp, "Das Gebet zur Handauflegung bei Kranken in P.Bar. 155, 19–156, 5 und P.Kellis I 88," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 119 (1997): 128–31.

³⁹ van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 288, no. 864; LDAB 552. Edition: Ramon Roca-Puig, *Anàfora de Barcelona i altres pregàries (Missa del segle IV)* (Barcelona: Roca Puig, 1994), 95–101.

laneous Barcelona codex”). While differing as regards the opening invocation and the conclusion of the prayer, the two witnesses are fully aligned with regard to the prayer’s main part⁴⁰ with a sole exception: the Kellis prayer has “banish every ailment from him” (l. 11 χώρισον ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ πᾶσαν νόσον) as opposed to “banish every ailment from them” (χώρισον ἀπ’ αὐτῶν πᾶσαν νόσον) in P.Monts.Roca inv. 155b.23–24. This may indicate that the Kellis tablet preserves a version of the prayer adapted for individual use.⁴¹

In the version of the Barcelona codex the unadorned invocation of God⁴² is followed by the request:

P.Monts.Roca inv. 155b.19–24 (= P.Kellis I 88.4–10)

σύ Κύριε ἐπίθες τὴν
 χεῖρά σου τὴν κραταιὰν καὶ τὸν βραχίονά σου
 τὸν ὑψηλὸν τὸν πλήρη ἰάσεως καὶ δυνάμεως τὸν
 πλήρη ὀλοκληρίας καὶ ζωῆς χώρισον ἀπ’ αὐτῶν
 πᾶσαν νόσον πᾶσαν μαλακίαν πᾶν πνεῦμα
 ἄσθενείας

Place upon (them/him [sc. the ailing]), Lord, your mighty hand and your arm raised high, wielding full healing and strength, sanity and life. Remove from them/him all ailments, all sickness, all spirit of infirmity (. . .)

The petition construes full identity between the hand of God and that of the officiating priest who, as the heading (χειροθεσία) indicates, would have recited or chanted the prayer while resting his hand on the ailing person. God’s “mighty hand and raised arm,” a gesture of power straight out of the heart of Judaism (similar words are put in Moses’ mouth as he prays to Yahweh in Deut 3:24), is in its Christian adaptation translated into the humble gesture of the servant of God attempting to enlist assistance against human infirmity. This, originally Jewish, gesture is moreover construed with, and thus governed by, the verb used in the New Testament to describe Jesus’ and the apostles’ healing acts (ἐπίθεις).⁴³ Reinterpretations of this sort seem to be part and parcel of a constant process of identity negotiations between Christianity and Judaism.

⁴⁰ The corresponding prayer in Sarapion’s prayer-book, no. XXX, presents significant divergences of wording.

⁴¹ Römer, Daniel and Worp (“Das Gebet zur Handauflegung,” 128) consider it part of a liturgical book.

⁴² In P.Kellis I 88 this invocation is preceded by another, ll. 2–4 δέσποτα σ.....| θ(εὸς) αἰώνιος traces| κ(υρί)ου. σὺ, κ(ύρι)ε (“Master, (saviour?)| eternal God [text damaged] of the Lord. You, Lord, etc.”)

⁴³ The New Testament parallels are listed in Römer, Daniel and Worp, “Das Gebet zur Handauflegung,” 128, n.6.

Also identical in the two witnesses is the sequel to the request, articulating a *da-ut-dare-possim* mentality⁴⁴ seldom found in Christian prayers:

P.Monts.Roca inv. 155b.24–156a.2 (= P.Kellis I 88.15–23)

ὅπως τοῦ ἐλέους σου τυχόντες δυνηθῶ-
σιν πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτῶν σοὶ λα-
τρεῦειν σοὶ εὐχαριστεῖν ὅτι σὺ εἶ ἡμῶν σωτὴρ
καὶ καταφυγὴ καὶ βοηθὸς πάσης ἀντιλήμψεως
ἡμῶν

(. . .) so that having obtained your mercy they may be able throughout their life to worship you and thank you since you are our saviour and shelter, and assistant in every undertaking (. . .)

The doxology concluding the Kellis prayer, P.Kellis I 88.23–25 ὅτι δεδόξα[σται] καὶ ὑψῶται τὸ πανάγι<ον> [ῶ]νομά σου – “for your most holy name has been glorified and elevated,” is shorter and simpler compared to the doxology in the corresponding Barcelona codex prayer:

P.Monts.Roca inv. 156a.2–5

ὅτι δεδόξασθαί (l. δεδόξασται) σου τὸ πανέντιμον ὄνομα
διὰ τοῦ αγιασματος (l. ἡγιασμένου) σου παιδὸς Ἰ(ησοῦ) Χ(ριστοῦ) τοῦ Κυρίου ἡ-
μῶν δι’ οὗ σοὶ δόξα κράτος τιμὴ μεγαλωσύνη καὶ νῦν
καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων ἀμήν

(. . .) for your most honoured name has been glorified through your hallowed son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whom is your glory, might, honour and magnificence now and in eternal time. Amen.

The absence of Jesus in his intercessory role is the most striking feature of the Kellis version of this prayer. The possibilities that the reference to Jesus as intercessor was suppressed because of lack of space or that it was there on a separate board or on the now almost entirely effaced back cannot be definitively excluded. However, the Manichean leanings of the Kellis community⁴⁵ make it highly likely that Jesus is not mentioned because among the members of this community he did not enjoy the identity-creating role which he had for Christians, i.e. that he was not conceived of as “our Lord” and indispensable reference-point for the fulfillment of prayers. On the other hand, even in this, possibly Manichean, prayer one may observe the interweaving of the individual (l. 11) and the collective (ll. 16–17, 20, 23),

⁴⁴ Pulleyn, *Prayer*, xv and 27–28.

⁴⁵ Römer, Daniel and Worp, “Das Gebet zur Handauflegung,” 129 note that the prayer has no traits that could support or be incompatible with use by Manicheans.

characteristic of the Christian prayer P.Oxy. III 407. What is more, even if the Kellis tablet preserves a version adapted for individual use, the response envisaged to God's granting of the request and healing the person prayed for is still communal and collective. The whole community of worshipers will be gratified and will thank and glorify the Lord for it.

3.3 *The Lord's Prayer and the Quest for Identity*

Jesus taught his followers to pray to God as "our Father" (Matt 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4), thus laying down a normative prayer example. However, the Lord's Prayer, considered with good reason as a core component of Christian identity,⁴⁶ is represented in the papyrological record with only a handful of independent witnesses⁴⁷ datable up to and including the fifth century.

The earliest specimen is P.Ant. II 54 (3rd/4th cent.),⁴⁸ a bifolium from an improvised miniature codex. The first three pages of this manuscript preserve part of the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:10–12, beginning with the second pronoun of v. 10 and breaking off abruptly in mid-word at v. 13). This papyrus may represent an aborted attempt at preparing an amulet. Alternatively, it may be an unfinished writing exercise scribbled in a notebook, since the scribe makes some effort to write in sloping majuscule. Similarly, the occurrence of Matt 6:9 (missing οὐρανοῖς) in the margin of page 52 of the accounts notebook P.Erl.Diosp. 1 (from Diospolis Parva; dated sometime after A.D. 313/314) gives the impression of a scribbling of a familiar phrase (for writing practice or as a *passatempo*).⁴⁹ P.Oxy. LX 4010.11–19 (4th cent.)⁵⁰ is by far the most substantial early papyrus witness of the Lord's Prayer in a nicely produced copy. The Lord's Prayer, which occupies the lower part of a single papyrus sheet, does not stand independently but is introduced by another prayer which concludes with the orants asking the Almighty "to be deemed worthy of

⁴⁶ See Karl Olav Sandnes, "'The First Prayer': Pater Noster in the Early Church," in this volume (209–232), and Hurtado, in this volume, pp. 38–39.

⁴⁷ By "independent witnesses" I mean papyri which contain the Lord's Prayer not as part of a New Testament copy. To the seventeen specimens from Egypt listed in the LDAB from the period third/fourth to eighth century add the marginal annotation in p. 52 of P.Erl.Diosp. 1 (4th cent.). Only four papyri are datable in the time up to and including the fifth century. The papyrological record of the Lord's Prayer has been reviewed in G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity 3: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1978* (Sidney: Macquarie, 1983), 103–5, and in Thomas J. Kraus, "Manuscripts with the *Lord's Prayer* – They are More than Simply Witnesses to that Text Itself," in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 2; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 227–66.

⁴⁸ van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 129, no. 347; LDAB 5425. See also Kraus, "Manuscripts," 233–5, no. 1; de Bruyn and Dijkstra, "Greek Amulets," 208–9, no. 156.

⁴⁹ See Kraus, "Manuscripts," 235–36, no. 2.

⁵⁰ LDAB 5717. See also Kraus, "Manuscripts," 238–40.

(uttering?)” the Lord’s Prayer (l. 11 καταξίωσον ἡμᾶς ..[6–9⁵¹ π(ά)τερ ἡμῶν] etc.), subsequently cited in the Matthaean version.⁵² The *Sitz im Leben* of this papyrus is in all probability the liturgy.⁵³ Of the later specimens, P.Oslo inv. 1644 (4th/5th cent.),⁵⁴ containing the Lord’s Prayer and Ps 90.1–4, is thought to have served as an amulet. The same applies to the use of P.Köln IV 171 (5th cent.),⁵⁵ a copy penned in a particularly clumsy hand, which preserves the concluding part of the Lord’s Prayer, followed by the acclamations ἀμήν and ἅγιος, repeated thrice. Finally, P.Col. XI 293 (5th cent.),⁵⁶ is a cut-off from a vellum codex of the Gospel of Matthew, to serve as an amulet or in an act of deliberate damage.⁵⁷

This meagre papyrological harvest nevertheless betokens the typical settings and double, collective and private, use of the Lord’s Prayer in Egypt. It unavoidably also raises the question why this very authoritative prayer has left so faint an imprint on the Graeco-Egyptian written record. One way of approaching this puzzle may be to bring the low prominence of the Lord’s Prayer to chime with the observation that God is not predominantly addressed as “father” in papyrus prayers. Culling some representative invocations, one notices that the dominant address-modalities in papyrus prayers include “God almighty” (θεὸς παντοκράτωρ, in P.Oxy. III 407.1, BKT VI 1.61, O.Petr.Mus. 19r.10), “Sire” (δέσποτα, in P.Monts.Roca inv. 155a.18) and “Sire God almighty” (δέσποτα θεὸς παντοκράτωρ, in P.Monts.Roca inv. 154b.5–6, 155b.1), “Lord/Master” (κύριε, see P.Monts.Roca inv. 155b.19) or

⁵¹ The editor wonders whether the missing text should be restored as λέγειν (“to utter”) followed by punctuation gap and offers parallels from the Liturgy of St. Mark.

⁵² But γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου (“let thy will be done”) is omitted and Matt 6:13 is repeated.

⁵³ The first prayer is uttered in a collective voice. As to the part of the liturgy to which it could belong, compare the beginning of the precommunion rite in the liturgy of St. Mark (Cuming, *The Liturgy of St. Mark*, 50–52). On the Lord’s Prayer in the liturgy see F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western Being the Texts, Original or Translated of the Principal Liturgies of the Church Edited with Introduction and Appendices*. Vol. 1: *Eastern Liturgies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), 581, s.v. “Lord’s Prayer.” On its place in the Liturgy of St. Mark see Cuming, *The Liturgy of St. Mark*, 137–38.

⁵⁴ van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 128, no. 345; LDAB 2994. Edition: Leiv Amundsen, “Christian Papyri from the Oslo Collection,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 24 (1945): 141–7. It was later discovered that it belongs together with P.Schøyen I 16 preserving its lower part with Ps 90:4–13. See also Rahlfs and Fraenkel, *Verzeichnis*, 270; Kraus, “Manuscripts,” 236–37; de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets,” 190–91, no. 50.

⁵⁵ LDAB 5971; Kraus, “Manuscripts,” 241, no. 8; de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets,” 190–1, no. 44.

⁵⁶ LDAB 2953; Kraus, “Manuscripts,” 240–41, no. 7; de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets,” 198–9, no. 105.

⁵⁷ The former is the hypothesis of the editor, Timothy Teeter, while the latter view is held by Paul Mirecki, “[Review of] Teeter, Timothy M., *Columbia Papyri XI*,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 38 (2001): 135–36.

simply “God” (θεός, see P.Würzb. 3r.15). The view of God as a father to whom the faithful turns as a child turns for help to one’s parents – a metaphor conveying respectful intimacy⁵⁸ – has subsided in favour of invocations which indicate relations of greater distance, dependence and subjection between the orants and the prayer’s primary addressee. In the same spirit the orants present themselves to God as “your servants” (P.Berol. inv. 13415v.2–3 [τ]οὺς μικροὺς τῶν δούλων σου μετὰ [τ]ῶν μεγάλων – “[preceding verb lost] your young servants along with the older ones . . .”)⁵⁹ or “your people” (P.Strassb. inv. 254v.8–10 διὰ τοὺς πτωχοὺς τοῦ λα[ο]ῦ σ[τ]οι[ν] δι’ ἡμᾶς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους| τὸ ὄνομά σου – “for the poor among your people, for us all who invoke your name . . .”). One may wonder whether this is in keeping with the prevailing socio-economic realities of the times,⁶⁰ but it is hard to tell given that this is biblical language. Internally the overall picture appears complex: while the *Didache* (8:3) recommends the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer thrice daily and Church fathers treat it as the prayer *par excellence*, it “is not as well attested as a liturgical text in regular and continuous employment in the early Church as would have been expected.”⁶¹

It is therefore important to bear in mind the limits and limitations of the papyrological testimony which pertains only to the Egyptian *chōra* and reflects the use of the Lord’s Prayer in everyday devotion. Humble as they may be, P.Erl.Diosp. 1 and even P.Ant. II 54 reveal that even common believers were familiar with the Lord’s Prayer which they jotted down, presumably recalling it from memory, for practice or in moments of distraction, perhaps even of personal distress. Knowing a prayer by heart presumably means that the orant does not need a copy of it and that it would have been recited more often than it would have been written down. Thus, rather than testifying to low impact and low identity factor, the absence of the Lord’s Prayer from the written record may indicate just the opposite, i.e. a significant and powerful prayer which Egyptian Christians knew by heart as it

⁵⁸ For an outline of the hermeneutics of the invocation of God in the Lord’s Prayer see Karlheinz Müller, “Das Vater-Unser als jüdisches Gebet,” in *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. A. Gerhards, A. Doeker and P. Ebenbauer; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 162–67.

⁵⁹ This mode of self-presentation of the orant is also found in magical texts. See Ágnes Mihálykó, “Christliche magische Kleintexte” (Master thesis; Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University, 2013), 37.

⁶⁰ Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 214–29.

⁶¹ Paul F. Bradshaw, “Parallels between Early Jewish and Christian Prayers: Some Methodological Issues,” in *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. A. Gerhards, A. Doeker and P. Ebenbauer; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 31.

belonged to the core of their religious identity. The exceptional power ascribed to the Lord's Prayer is also revealed by the fact that this prayer was along with Psalm 90 the most frequent Scriptural excerpt featuring in amulets. Given that superstition resorts to the most efficient means available to achieve the result desired, the frequent use of the Lord's Prayer in amulets suggests that its power and efficacy were highly valued by Christians who sought to secure God's assistance and protection.

3.4 *The Scriptural Pool of Identity*

Greek prayers, cultic or literary, often included a narrative part (the *pars epica*) evoking an episode from the action of the divinity prayed to.⁶² It outlined a background against which his/her help was presently adduced, having an argumentative function. A magisterial example is ll. 5–24 of Sappho's F 1,⁶³ a poem articulated as a prayer to Aphrodite. This extensive centrepiece evokes how the goddess once manifested herself in response to a plea from the narrating-praying voice, willing to fulfil her petition ("but come if ever in the past you/ heard my voice from afar and hearkened/ and left your father's hall and came . . ."). The narrative, which ultimately unveils the identity of the narrating-praying with the poetic persona and the resonance of the poetic prayer at hand with a multitude of similar past prayers ("Who is it this time I must cozen to love you, Sappho?"), presents a precedent that justifies the narrative-praying voice's plea ("yes, come once more, from sore obsession free me"). Whether extensive or compressed, the narratives in Greek prayers were drawn from (and in their turn created) the great pool of Greek identity, mythology.

The narrative sequences included in Christian prayers, known as *historiolas*, were likewise drawn from Christianity's own textual pool of identity, the Scriptures. By far the most prominent Old Testament narrative featuring in early Christian prayers is the creation of the universe (Gen 1:1–2:3) foregrounding God as an almighty demiurge, and thus as an appropriate recipient of the prayer. In addition to P.Oxy. III 407.1–2, the so-called Strassbourg anaphora, P.Strassb. inv. 254 (4th/5th cent.),⁶⁴ offers an example of this:

⁶² On terminology see footnote 14 above.

⁶³ The translation is by Martin L. West, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 36.

⁶⁴ van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 317, no. 998; LDAB 5836. Editions: M. Andrieu and P. Collomp, "Fragments sur papyrus de l'anaphore de saint Marc," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 8 (1928): 489–515; Anton Hänggi and Irmgard Pahl, *Præx eucharistica: Textus e variis liturgiis antiquioribus selecti* (Freiburg: Éditions Universitaires, 1968), 116–19; Hammerstaedt, *Griechischen Anaphorenfragmente*, 22–41. Hammerstaedt (*Griechischen Anaphorenfragmente*, 22) places the composition of the text between the

P.Strassb. inv. 254r.2–7

σοι ἄ[νθομολογεῖσθαι νύκτωρ τε]
καὶ μ[ε]θ' ἡμέραν· σοὶ [τῶ ποιήσαντι τὸν οὐ-]
ραν[ὸν κ]αὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν [οὐρ]αγ[γ]ῶ γῆν καὶ θα-]
λά[σσης] καὶ [π]οταμοὺς κ[αὶ π]άνα τὰ ἐ[ν αὐ-]
τοῖς σοὶ τῶ ποιή[σ]α[ντι] τὸν ἄνθρωπον [κατ']
ἰδ[ίαν εἰκόν]α καὶ [καθ' ὁ]μοίωσιν

(It is worthy)⁶⁵ to acknowledge you night and day; you who created heaven and everything in it, the earth, the seas, the rivers and everything in them; you, who made man in your own likeness (. . .)

Narrative elements which recall the foundational narratives of Christianity laid out in the New Testament and related texts prevail. The episodes conjured up depend on the type and setting of the prayer. In concordance with the nature of the ritual which it accompanied, the “thanksgiving/eucharistic prayer for bread and wine” (εὐχαριστία περὶ ἄρτου καὶ ποτηρίου) in the miscellaneous Barcelona codex⁶⁶ narrates Jesus’ prototype act of consecrating bread and wine as his body and blood respectively, and offering them to his disciples. An analogy is then construed between Jesus’ act and its ritual reenactment – presented as a recurrent act of commemoration (ἀνάμνησις)⁶⁷ – in the frame of the eucharist.

P.Monts.Roca inv. 155a.7–18

καθὼς καὶ αὐτὼς (l. αὐτὸς) ἦν ἵκα
ἔμελλεν παραδιδόναι <εαυτὸν> λαβῶν ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαρι-
στήσας καὶ ἐκάλεσεν καὶ ἔδωκεν τοῖς μαθηταῖς
αὐτοῦ λέγων λάβετε φάγετε τοῦτό μου ἔστι τὸ σῶμα 10
καὶ ὁμοίως μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι λαβῶν ποτή-
ριον εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων λάβετε
πίετε τὸ αἷμα τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυόμενων (l. ἐκχυόμενον) εἰς
ἄφησιν (l. ἄφεισιν) ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ ἡμεῖς τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦμεν

outbreak of the conflict with the Arians (second quarter of the fourth century) and A.D. 380.

⁶⁵ The dative is probably governed by an impersonal expression such as ἄξιόν ἐστι (“it is worthy”) *vel sim.* See the parallels cited in Hammerstaedt, *Griechischen Anaphorenfragmente*, 28n. 89. Compare also BKT VI 1.85–86 and 91–92, P.Oxy. III 407.1–2 etc.

⁶⁶ P.Monts.Roca inv. 154b–155a. Van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 287–8, no. 863; LDAB 552. Editions: Roca-Puig, *Anàfora de Barcelona*, 10–85; Michael Zheltov, “The Anaphora and the Thanksgiving Prayer from the Barcelona Papyrus: An Underestimated Testimony to the Anaphoral History in the Fourth Century,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008): 467–504.

⁶⁷ The New Testament intertext is Luke 22:19.

εἰς τὴν σὴν ἀνάμνησιν ὁσάκις ἐὰν συνερχόμενοι 15
 ποιῶμεν⁶⁸ τὴν ἀνάμνησιν τοῦ ἁγίου μυστη-
 ρίου διδασκάλου⁶⁹ καὶ βασιλέως καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν
 Ἰ(ησο)ῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ

As he [*sc.* Jesus], when he was about to turn himself in, took bread, thanked, called his disciples and offered (it) to them saying “Receive and eat; this is my body” and similarly, after they had eaten, he took a chalice, thanked and offered (it) to them saying “Receive, drink the blood which is being shed for the remission of the sins of the many,” we also do the same in reminiscence of you, every time we gather to reenact the holy mystery of our teacher, king and saviour, Jesus Christ (. . .)

The analogy, explicitly articulated in l. 14 (καὶ ἡμεῖς τὸ αὐτὸ ποιούμεν), fleshes out the idea that Christian identity is forged and affirmed through ritual reenactment of a core New Testament rite. While ritual reenactment of a foundational narrative is in and of itself not peculiar to Christianity, the occurrence of prayer at both levels (Jesus offers a thanksgiving prayer before offering the first communion to his disciples ≈ its reenactment in liturgy) demonstrates the centrality of prayer in the constitution of Christian identity. In the immediately preceding statement God is petitioned to send the holy Spirit to sanctify and transform the bread and the wine into the body and blood of Christ, elaborated upon as “of the new covenant/alliance” (τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης, P.Monts.Roca inv. 155a.7). The qualification, occurring in the Old Testament (Jer 38 [31]:31)⁷⁰ but invested with new meaning in its association with the central narrative and rite of the Christian faith, captures the kernel of Christian identity and signals its points of contact with and, more importantly, differentiation from Judaism and its sacred texts.

Another noteworthy concatenation of narrative elements drawn from the foundational narratives of Christianity features in PGM II Christliches P13 (4th/5th cent.).⁷¹ The papyrus – in all probability an amulet which accompanied

⁶⁸ The papyrus reads οσοκιναενουερχοντες| ποιουντες. I prefer Roca-Puig’s restoration over Zheltov’s ungrammatical ὡς ἐκεῖνοι ἄν συνέρχοντες,| ποιουντες σου τὴν ἀνάμνησιν, see Zheltov, “The Anaphora,” 479–80. The intertext is 1 Cor 11:25.

⁶⁹ This qualification of Jesus is unique in Eucharistic prayers. Could it be *ad hoc*, conditioned by the educational use of the miscellaneous Barcelona codex? See on this Sofia Torallas Tovar and Klaas A. Worp, *To the Origins of Greek Stenography (P. Monts. Roca I)* (Montserrat: Abadia de Montserrat and CSIC, 2006), 23–24.

⁷⁰ See Roca-Puig, *Anàfora de Barcelona*, 56 (comm. on l. 7) and Zheltov, “The Anaphora,” 490n. 82.

⁷¹ P.Cairo inv. 10263. van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 294, no. 895; LDAB 5787. First edition: Felix Jacoby, *Ein neues Evangelienfragment* (Strasbourg: K. J. Trübner, 1900), 31–49. See also Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 35–6, no. 10; de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets,” 188–89, no. 30, and the discussions by Theodore S. de Bruyn, “Ancient Applied Christology: Appeals to Christ in Greek Amulets in Late Antiquity,” in *From Logos to Christos: Essays on Christology in Honour of Joanne*

its owner even to the grave – preserves a petitionary prayer addressed to Jesus. Offered in the name of “all who invoke your [*sc.* Jesus’] holy name” (l. 14 ὅσοι ἐπικαλούμεθα τὸ ἅγιόν σου ὄνομα)⁷² and articulated in a markedly liturgical language,⁷³ it requests protection from dark and evil forces, fevers, harm by humans (magic?) and by the devil (ll. 15–17). The amuletic function of the artefact apart, there is little in the content of the prayer that relates directly to magic; there is, indeed, very little in it that may be viewed as non-Christian, in the broad sense of the term.⁷⁴ The *historiola*, directly predicated on the invocation (ll. 1–2), is articulated as a string of participles sweeping over important stations in Jesus’ life, more specifically his conception, birth, upbringing, death, resurrection, manifestation to the Apostles and ascent to heaven:

PGM II Christliches P13.2–5

ὁ ἐλθὼν διὰ τοῦ Γαβριήλ ἐν τῇ γαστρὶ τῆς Μαρίας[ς] τῆς παρθένου[ς] ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐν Βηθλ<ε>ὲμ καὶ τραφεὶς ἐ<ν> Ναζαρέτ ὁ σταυρωθεὶς[ς] [...]ἔπιτο[.....]ου⁷⁵ διὸ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐ<ρ>ράγη δι’ αὐτὸν ὁ ἀναστὰς ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐν τῷ τάφῳ τῇ τρίτῃ τοῦ θα[ν]άτου ἐφάνη ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ καὶ ἀνελθ[ὼν] ἐπὶ τὸ ὕψος τῶν οὐρανῶν

(. . .) who was conceived in the womb of Mary, the virgin, through the agency of Gabriel, who was born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, who was crucified [text uncertain], therefore the veil of the Temple was ripped because of him, who was resurrected from the dead in the grave, who on the third day following his death showed himself in Galilee and ascended to heaven (. . .)

The narrative sequence has both a laudatory and an argumentative function.⁷⁶ The latter is clearly the primary one, as the *historiola* culminates in Jesus’

McWilliam (ed. E. M. Leonard and K. Merriman; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 6–7 and Mihálykó, “Christliche magische Kleintexte,” 56–64.

⁷² Compare P.Strassb. inv. 254v.9–10 cited in p. 306 above.

⁷³ Jacoby, *Ein neues Evangelienfragment*, 36; de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets,” 180; Mihálykó, “Christliche magische Kleintexte,” 64.

⁷⁴ On Charōn see below pp. 315–16. On possible Gnostic elements see Jacoby, *Ein neues Evangelienfragment*, 36–47 (esp. 47) and Mihálykó, “Christliche magische Kleintexte,” 60–61 and 64–65.

⁷⁵ The expected supplement, [ἐπ]εὶ (l. ἐπὶ) Π[ο]ντίου Πιλάτου (“when Pontius Pilatus was governor”) has been rejected by Reitzenstein who inspected the papyrus (Jacoby, *Ein neues Evangelienfragment*, 39). Eitrem proposed ἐπὶ τῷ κρανίου τόπῳ (“in the Place of the Skull”).

⁷⁶ On credal sequences in amuletic prayers in general compare the thesis of de Bruyn, “Ancient Applied Christology,” 6: “these credal statements render present the power of Christ to save and protect the wearer of the amulet.”

resurrection and ascent to heaven, presented as defeat of death (ll. 9–12)⁷⁷ and release of God’s “creature,” a formulation that alludes to the narrative of the creation in *Genesis*. This role of Jesus serves in turn to explain and justify why humans turn to him in petitionary prayer:

PGM II Christliches P13.13–14

καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐχάρη ὅτι ἀπέστη ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ὁ ἐχθρὸς καὶ δέδωκας ἐλευθερίαν τῷ κτίσματι αἰτουμένῳ| δεσπότην Ἰ[η]σοῦς ἡ φωνὴ ἡ [π]αραφήσασα τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ὅσοι ἐπικαλούμεθα τὸ ἅγιόν σου ὄνομα

(. . .) and the earth [sc. people] rejoiced because the enemy turned away from them and you granted freedom to the creature who petitions the master: “Jesus, the voice that discharges from sin (us) who invoke your holy name (. . .).”⁷⁸

The *historiola* of PGM II Christliches P13 has been formulated as a creed, although it lacks the introductory credal verb.⁷⁹ It is in particular modelled on the Christological section of early credal statements.⁸⁰ However, while some parts of Jesus’ life covered (birth, crucifixion, resurrection etc.) also feature in early Christian creeds, idiosyncratic details absent from the known creeds (including the Nicene) prevail.⁸¹ Against the background of the Christological controversies, the resolution of which made an indelible mark on the formation of Christian identity in the fourth and fifth centuries,⁸² the credal-

⁷⁷ The emphasis on this theme, which emerges already in the part bridging the invocation and the *historiola* (l. 2 ὁ ἐλθὼν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ κατακλάσας τὸν ὄνυχά τοῦ Χάρωντος – “the one who came to the world and broke the claw of Charōn”) perhaps explains why the amulet had been deposited with a corpse, although the requests concern living beings.

⁷⁸ My translation differs from the ones offered in Jacoby, *Ein neues Evangelienfragment*, 35 (“. . . und du Freiheit gabst dem Geschaffenen, das verlagte nach dem Herrn Jesus, die Stimme die freisprechen wird von den Sünden. . .”) and Preisendanz in *Papyri Graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (ed. Karl Preisendanz and Albert Heinrichs; 2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1974) II, 221 (“. . . du Freiheit gabst der Schöpfung, die verlagte nach dem Herrn, Jesus, die Stimme die von den Sünden freispricht uns alle. . .”). Because of its tense I take the verb as having active sense, construed with an accusative expressing the person “prayed to,” see *LSJ* 1940, 44 s.v. αἰτέω II.

⁷⁹ Jacoby, *Ein neues Evangelienfragment*, 47: “eine Art Symbol.”

⁸⁰ Mihálykó, “Christliche magische Kleintexte,” 60. On the Christological proclamations in the early creeds see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (3rd ed.; London: Continuum, 1972), 94–95.

⁸¹ On the origins of the elements in the *historiola* see Mihálykó, “Christliche magische Kleintexte,” 60–61.

⁸² Lewis Ayres, “Articulating Identity,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (ed. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 414–63.

like *historiola* of PGM II Christliches P13.1–5 *prima facie* articulates a self-positioning and identifying statement⁸³ of the user of this prayer-bearing amulet. It is, however, an open question whether this statement of personal dogmatic identity should be taken entirely at face value given that the language and style of the text strongly suggest that its author was in possession of intra- and extramural learning, and that he was moreover anxious to demonstrate it⁸⁴ – something which implies a potential tension (or perhaps a certain balancing act) between the truth value of the credal statement and the tendency of the author/user to show off learning.

4. Alterity in Papyrus Prayers

Perspectives on identity may also be gained from references or allusions, usually of polemical character, to rival groups, mentalities or practices.⁸⁵ Differentiation – delimiting and defending an exclusive territory of “correct” faith – does not appear to have been uppermost in the minds of early Egyptian Christians when praying. As, however, the definition and appropriation of “orthodoxy” was in the heart of the formation of Christian identity at the time,⁸⁶ hints of other religious groups, beliefs and practices – and hence indirectly, to modalities of self-conception and self-differentiation – surface even in prayers.

A possible *locus* of perspectives on otherness is open reference to enemies and threatening forces. An example is found in the liturgical prayer for the patriarch [sc. of Alexandria], versions of which are transmitted by a fifth century ostrakon, O.Petr. Mus. 19r.9–v.16,⁸⁷ perhaps from Upper Egypt, as

⁸³ On the relationship between credal declarations and identity see Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (London: Epworth, 1980), 189–94.

⁸⁴ Mihálykó, “Christliche magische Kleintexte,” 64.

⁸⁵ On self-conception through the deflective mirror of the other, see Michael Tellbe, “Identity and Prayer” in this volume (13–34), and Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 15–17 and 269–97.

⁸⁶ Ayres, “Articulating Identity,” 414–63.

⁸⁷ Formerly O. Tait-Petrie 415. van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 282, no. 833; LDAB 5978. Second edition: Joseph van Haelst, “Une ancienne prière d’intercession de la liturgie de Saint Marc (O.Tait-Petrie 415),” *Ancient Society* 1 (1970): 95–114. Re-edited by Cornelia E. Römer, “Ostraka mit christlichen Texten aus der Sammlung Flinders Petrie,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 145 (2003) 201, no. 27 and as O.Petr.Mus. 19. The hand places the copy of this prayer in the later fifth century. The text itself, however, may have been composed anytime between AD 364–66 and 476. The absence of monophysitic traits in particular indicates that the text antedates the patriarchate of Cyril (412–444), see van Haelst, “Une ancienne prière,” 99, 111 and 113.

well as by the medieval witnesses of the Liturgy of St. Mark.⁸⁸ The petition to God to defeat the enemies of the spiritual leader of the praying community and the stipulation that these may be visible or invisible occur across the tradition (O.Petr.Mus. 19v. 9–11 πάντα δ' ἔχθρ|ὸν αὐτοῦ ὀρατῶν (l. ὀρατὸν) ἢ ἀόρατον σύντριψον ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδ[ας] αὐτοῦ – “shatter under his feet all his enemies, visible and invisible . . .”⁸⁹ vs. Lit. St. Mark 8.15–6 Cuming πάντα δὲ ἔχθρὸν ὀρατὸν τε καὶ ἀόρατον [τῆς ἁγίας σου ἐκκλησίας add. Vat.Gr. 1970] καθυπὸταξον ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ἐν τάχει – “swiftly subdue all enemies [of your holy Church], visible and invisible, under his feet”). The enemies in question – one may think of heterodox Christians, pagans, Jews or demonic forces – form the “army” of otherness, against which the spiritual leader of Egyptian Christianity wages war. The repetition of αὐτοῦ in the Petrie ostrakon may put the emphasis slightly more on the person of the patriarch prayed for (opening up for the possibility that the enemies may also include his rivals?), while the addition of τῆς ἁγίας σου ἐκκλησίας in Vat.Gr. 1970 results in the emphasis being firmly on religious and doctrinal rivals.

Equally intriguing is the omission from the Petrie ostrakon prayer of the qualifier ὀρθοδόξοις, attending the datives ἐπισκόποις πρεσβυτέροις etc. in the manuscript transmission of the liturgy of St. Mark (Lit. St. Mark 8.^{9–11} Cuming):

O.Petr.Mus. 19v.1–8

ἐκτελοῦντα αὐτὸν τὴν
 ὑπὸ σοῦ ἐμπεπιστευ-
 μένην ἱερωσύνην κατὰ τὸ
 ἅγιον θέλημά σου σὺν πᾶσιν
 ἐπισκόποις πρεσβυτέροις διακόνο-
 ις σὺν παντὶ τῷ πληρώματι τῆς
 ἁγίας καὶ ἀποστολικῆς σου ἐκκλησί-
 ας

(. . .) fulfilling the pontificate entrusted to him in accordance with your holy will, along with all the bishops, priests, deacons, and the entire membership of your holy and apostolic church (. . .)

This suggests either that the distinction orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy was not (or not yet) part and parcel of Christian identity as conceived of by the user of this ostrakon or that he/she chose to leave it out as irrelevant or unimportant for his/her conception of Christianity. The above interpretation may also apply to the qualification of the church simply as “holy and apostolic” to the exclusion (or because of lack of knowledge?) of the additional (and from the

⁸⁸ Cuming, *The Liturgy of St. Mark*, 8–9, 14–15 and 32–33, 92 and 133–35.

⁸⁹ For versions of the prayer see van Haelst, “Une ancienne prière,” 106–8.

point of view of identity, exclusive) markers μόνη (“the only”) and καθολική (“universal”), occurring in the Liturgy of St. Mark (Lit. St. Mark as in Vat.gr. 2281 = 8.¹³⁻¹⁴ Cuming τῆς ἁγίας καὶ μόνης καθολικῆς καὶ ἀποστολικῆς ἐκκλησίας; Vat.gr. 1970 om. καὶ ἀποστολικῆς) and other early liturgical prayers.⁹⁰

On another front the description of the eucharist in liturgical prayers as “spiritual sacrifice” (alternatively, “a sacrifice in words/speech”) (λογικὴ θυσία), “pure sacrifice” (θυσία καθαρὰ) and “bloodless worship” (ἀναίμακτος λατρεία) construes and emphasises religious otherness by boldly appropriating and re-qualifying the ritual vocabulary of religious rivals.⁹¹ The earliest example of these expressions in Christian prayers occurs in the so-called Strasbourg anaphora.⁹²

P.Strassb. inv. 254r.10–19

εὐχαρισ-

τοῦντες προσφέρομεν τὴν θυσίαν τὴν λογι-
κὴν τὴν ἀγαίμ[ακτ]ον λατρε[ί]αν ταύτην
ἣν προσφέρει σοι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἀπ’ ἀνατολῶ(ν)
ἡλίου καὶ μέχρι δυσμῶν [ἀπ]ὸ ἄρκ[τ]ου καὶ μέ-
χρι μεσημβρίας· ὅτ[ι] μ[ε]γ[α]λὸν τὸ ὄνομα σου ἐν πᾶ-
[σι] τοῖς [ἔ]θνεσιν καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ ἴσθμῳ θυμιάμα
προσφέρεται [τῷ] ἁγίῳ σου [ὀ]νόματι καὶ θυσία
καθαρὰ ἐφ’ ἣ θυσί[α] καὶ προσφορᾶ δεόμεθα
καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν σε

⁹⁰ See van Haelst, “Une ancienne prière,” 113 (comm. on l. 23).

⁹¹ On the complex trajectory of the Christian appropriation of sacrificial language see the work of Frances M. Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideals in Greek Christian Writers from the New Testament to John Chrysostom* (Patristic Monograph series 5; Cambridge, Mass.: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979); Everett Ferguson, “Spiritual Sacrifice in Early Christianity and its Environment,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung II Principat*, Band 23.2 *Religion. Vorkonstantinisches Christentum: Verhältnis zu römischem Staat und heidnischer Religion* (Forts.) (ed. W. Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 1151–89 and more recently Majastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures c. 360–430* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 119–26 and Daniel C. Ullucci, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65–117.

⁹² See above footnote 64. On ll. 10–12 as expressions of differentiation from Judaism see also H. A. J. Wegman, “Une anaphore incomplète? Les fragments sur papyrus Strasbourg Gr. 254,” in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (ed. R. van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 444–46.

(. . .) by way of thanks we offer this spiritual sacrifice, this bloodless act of worship, which all nations from east to west and from north to south perform for you. For your name is mighty among all peoples, and incense is offered everywhere in your holy name as well as a pure sacrifice, upon which we beg and ask of you (. . .)

The use of the technical terms “sacrifice” (θυσία), “offering” (προσφορά) and “worship” (λατρεία) in this eucharistic prayer retraces the common grounds between on the one hand Christian and on the other hand pagan Greek and Jewish worship (as described in the LXX), while the adjectival modifiers λογική, καθάρα and ἀναίμακτος identify Christian ritual acts as exclusively spiritual forms of worship.⁹³ What is more, the emphatic presentation of the universal dissemination of the pure worship of the Christian God (r.13–18)⁹⁴ conveys allusive claims of segregation from, if not of triumph over, Judaism when read against its intertext, Yahweh’s refusal to accept the defiled offerings of the priests in Mal 1:10–12 (καὶ θυσίαν οὐ προσδέξομαι ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν ὑμῶν. διότι ἀπ’ ἀνατολῶν ἡλίου ἕως δυσμῶν τὸ ὄνομά μου δεδόξασται ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καὶ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ θυμίαμα προσάγεται τῷ ὀνόματί μου καὶ θυσία καθάρα, διότι μέγα τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ – “and I shall not accept sacrifice from your hand; for from East to West my name has been glorified among peoples, and everywhere incense is offered in my name and a pure sacrifice; for my name is great among peoples, says the Lord Almighty”). The Christian spiritual acts of worship belong among the pure offerings cherished by God, not the contaminated offerings of the Jews.

5. An Unmixed Identity?

Besides its other distinctive features⁹⁵ the prayer PGM II Christliches P13 stands out on account of the presence in it of Charōn, the Netherworld

⁹³ That the ground realities were far more complex becomes manifest when we come across the term λογική θυσία also in the prayer collection BKT VI 1.50: δέξαι λ[ογικὰς] θυσίας ἀγ[νὰς] ἀπὸ ψυχῆς καὶ καρδίας (“accept the spiritual pure sacrifices from the soul and the heart”). The body of this prayer coincides with the conclusion of the Hermetic *Poimandres*, but in the Berlin papyrus collection the Hermetic text has been given a Christian frame, see more in footnote 103. On Greek testimonies of the idea of spiritual sacrifice see Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas*, 15–34 and Ferguson, “Spiritual Sacrifice,” 1152–60.

⁹⁴ Note the repetition of forms of πᾶς, l. 13 πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, l. 15–16 ἐν πᾶ[σι] τοῖς [ἔ]θνεσιν, ἐν πα[ντὶ τ]όπῳ.

⁹⁵ See above pp. 311–12. This text has been described very aptly as “un valido esempio di contaminazione rituale e concettuale a partire da elementi peculiari di tradizioni religiose diverse tra loro” (Anna Scibilia, “Un invocazione greca proveniente dall’ Egitto cristiano. Il Papiro Kairo 10263 ed un procedimento di cristianizzazione,” in

ferryman of the Greek pagan tradition, now well in the process of merging with the figure of Death.⁹⁶ Jesus, the divine addressee of the prayer, is said “to have totally shattered the claw of Charōn” through his coming to the world (l. 2: ὁ ἐλθὼν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ κατακλάσας τὸν ὄνυχά τοῦ Χάρωντος), to “have made Charōn barren” (l. 11: ὁ ποιήσας τὸν Χάρωντα ἄσπορον) and to “have bound the seditious enemy hands and feet” (l. 12: ὁ καταδήσα[ς τ]ὸν ἐχθρὸν ἀ[πο]στάτην).⁹⁷ In the last passage this import from the Greek pagan tradition holds a position equivalent to that of the rebellious, fallen angel of the Jewish and Christian apocryphal tradition, Satan. The occurrence of Charōn – a religiously and culturally alien figure incorporated into the Christian tradition⁹⁸ – in the prayer of an intellectually powerful and idiosyncratic individual may well represent yet another token and demonstration of erudition.⁹⁹ All the same, it indicates that Christian identity, far from being pure, incorporated extramural elements, even if this happened at an individual level and in settings that were not average, perhaps predominantly in intellectual circles.

Yet it would appear that Christian prayer discourse espouses and promotes, even if in implicit terms, the ideal of uncontaminated Christian identity. This ideal is promoted in the doxology rounding off the anaphora in the Barcelona codex:

P.Monts.Roca inv. 155a.23–27

ἵνα ἔτι καὶ ἐν τούτῳ
δοξάζωμεν τὸ πανέντιμον καὶ πανάγιον ὄνο-
μά σου διὰ τοῦ ἀγιασμένου (l. ἡγιασμένου) σου παιδὸς Ἰ(ησοῦ) Χρ(ιστοῦ) τοῦ
Κ(υρίου) ἡμῶν δι’ οὗ σοι δόξα κράτος εἰς τοὺς ἀκηράτους
αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων ἀμήν

(. . .) so that even in this we may glorify your most honoured and hallowed name through the agency of your beloved son Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whom is your glory and might in the unmixed/uncontaminated centuries of the centuries. Amen.

Cristo e Asclepio. Culti terapeutici e taumaturgici nel mondo mediterraneo antico fra cristiani e pagani. Atti del convegno internazionale, Accademia di studi mediterranei, Agrigento 20-21 novembre 2006 (ed. Enrico dal Covolo and Giulia Sfameni Gasparro; Roma: Libreria Ateneo Silesiano, 2008), 179.

⁹⁶ On Charōn in Greek literature and art see Otto Waser, *Charon, Charun, Charos* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898), 12–29, esp. 23–24, and 89–90, and Franz de Ruyt, *Charun: Démon étrusque de la mort* (Rome: Institut Historique Belge, 1934), 230–33 and 242–43.

⁹⁷ The second participle is not only syntactically parallel to the first but also echoes it phonologically and morphologically (κατα-κλά-σας . . . κατα-δή-σας).

⁹⁸ On the survival of Charōn as Charos/Charontas in the Byzantine and modern Greek tradition see Waser, *Charon*, 85–104.

⁹⁹ Mihálykó, “Christliche magische Kleintexte,” 64.

The formula εἰς τοὺς ἀκηράτους αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων (“in the unmixed/uncontaminated centuries of the centuries”) exhibits intriguing variation in the doxologies of two other papyrus prayers. P. Würzb. 3v.10–11 reads ὧ ἡ δόξα καὶ τ[ὸ κ]ράτος εἰς τοὺς ἀγηρ-άτ>ους¹⁰⁰ αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων[ν] (“to him belongs the glory and the might in the unaging centuries of the centuries”), while the prayer transmitted in BKT VI 1.¹⁰¹ 30–40 concludes in 39–40: [εἴη σοι] ἐπ’ αὐτῷ δόξα κράτ[ο]ς πᾶ[σ]α μεγαλοσύνη μεγαλ[ο]πρέπεια εἰς τοὺς σύμπαντας ἀγηράτους ἀτε|λευτήτους αἰῶ[ν]ας [τ]ῶν αἰώνων (“may your glory, might, greatness and majesty be based on him [sc. Jesus] in the unaging and interminate centuries of the centuries”). Although the expression “unaging centuries” is not unknown in Christian circles (it is e.g. used in Macarius’ Magnes *Apocriticus*), the concept of “the unaging αἰὼν” is ascribed by Christian heresiography to the Gnostic Valentinus and his circle.¹⁰² BKT VI 1 contains a collection of prayers, some of which are Christian, while one (BKT VI 1.42–59) overlaps to a considerable degree with the closing hymn of the Hermetic work *Poimandres*.¹⁰³ Despite their important differences, Gnostic and Hermetic ideas circulated back and forth and merged, while osmosis with Christian ideas and materials is also well-documented.¹⁰⁴ This may suggest a chain of connection, more specifically that the expression “in the unaging centuries” (εἰς τοὺς ἀγηράτους αἰῶνας) may have originated in Hermetic circles, while the adaptation εἰς τοὺς ἀκηράτους αἰῶνας (as a variant, not as phonological variation) may have entered Christian prayer discourse via Gnosticism and may have been subsequently favoured as it was felt to be well attuned with a developing “orthodox” identity aspiring to an uncontaminated, exclusive Christian identity. To this it may with good reason be objected that, as the interchange of γ and κ is a common phonological trait

¹⁰⁰ I retain Wilcken’s emendation, rejected by Hammerstaedt who derives the form from ἀγήραος. But (i) ἀγήραος is exclusively poetic and (ii) omission of letters is a distinctive feature of the papyrus.

¹⁰¹ P. Berol. inv. 9794 (3rd cent., unknown provenance). van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 263, no. 722; LDAB 5201.

¹⁰² Epiphanius, *Pan.* 31.5.3 (= GCS 25, 390).

¹⁰³ Jesus features in three of the five prayers included in the extant portion of BKT VI 1, more specifically in prayers i.12–26, i.27–ii.41 and ii.60ff. On the identity of prayer BKT VI 1.42–59 with the concluding hymn of *Poimandres* (minus the introductory lines and the doxology, ll. 58–9), see Richard Reitzenstein and Paul Wendland, “Zwei angeblich christliche liturgische Gebete,” *Nachrichten von der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (philol.-hist. Klasse; Berlin: Weidmann, 1910), 324–34. The texts are edited side by side in Maria Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1985), 204–9, no. 81.

¹⁰⁴ Roelof van den Broek, “Gnosticism and Hermetism in Antiquity: Two Roads to Salvation,” in *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* (ed. Roelof van den Broek; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 3–21.

in the papyri,¹⁰⁵ the form ἀκηράτους in P.Monts.Roca inv. 155a.26 may be a simple phonological confusion.¹⁰⁶ Yet nowhere else does the scribe of this papyrus confuse the two consonants, not even in passages replete with errors where confusion of κ and γ could easily have taken place.¹⁰⁷ The use of the adjective ἀκήρατος in Christian liturgies¹⁰⁸ (as opposed to the total absence of ἀγήρατος) may also indirectly corroborate the hypothesis that ἀγήρατος; ἀκήρατος in BKT VI 1.39–40, P.Würzb. 3v.10–11 and P.Monts.Roca inv. 155b.26–27 may be significant variants testifying to an ongoing process of identity formation where elements of alien origins within the body of Christian prayer and prayer ideology were boldly reclaimed and transformed, and thus neutralised and naturalised within the frame of a distinctive and increasingly “purified” Christian identity.

6. Conclusions

Greek Christian papyrus prayers are potentially important witnesses of Christian identity formation in the expansive and soul-searching period from the third to the late fourth/early fifth century. The fragmentary state of much of the material, the many open questions regarding historical contexts and, above all, the fact that Christians pray to God first and foremost to petition or thank him, not to give an account of identity, means that what has eventually been teased out may be no more than intimations of identity, mere glimpses into the collective self-conception and consciousness of the Egyptian Christian orants.

The requests contained in the prayers of P.Berol. inv. 13415 lay out the identifying features of Christian life: as a call from God it is dependent on his continuing strengthening agency; equally, it is a form of *vita activa* on the part of the believer uniting instruction and study, faith and practice. These

¹⁰⁵ On their interchange intervocalically see Francis T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Vol. 1: *Phonology* (Milan: Cisalpino, 1975), 79–80, c1 and c2.

¹⁰⁶ ἀγηράτους is the natural supplement of ἀτελευτήτους in BKT VI 1.40 so that interchange γ < κ is implausible. Interchange cannot be ascertained in P.Würzb. 3v.11, when the text is emended to ἀγηρ-άτ>ους (while the form ἀγήρους would only be compatible with “unaging”).

¹⁰⁷ E.g. P.Monts.Roca inv. 157a.8–10: ἐπὶ γηρε (l. γῆρας) τεκνω (l. τέκνον) σοι (l. σύ) μοι δωκες (l. ἔδωκας)· γερναν (l. γέρας) παλαιά{ν} σου Σαρρα οικιχα{το} (l. ἐκίχατο) δῶρον (“you gave me a child in my old age; Sarah received a gift of honour from you in her old age”).

¹⁰⁸ E.g. in the expression πρόσδεξαι τὸν ἀκήρατον ὕμνον (“accept the uncontaminated song of praise”) in the Vat.Gr. 1970 version of the part of the Liturgy of St. Mark preceding the communion, see Cuming, *The Liturgy of St. Mark*, 54.

prayers yield a contemporary perspective of major importance into what held Christians together as a group. Expressions of identity in these and other early prayers are encapsulated in adverbials consisting of the preposition ἐν governing abstract noun (in dative).

Jesus – “the archpriest of our souls” according to P.Berol. inv. 13415 and “our Lord (and Saviour)” according to other papyrus prayers – is along with God the pervasive presence and identity-creating force in papyrus prayers, as he is in various other contexts. His role is that of an intercessor, a mediator and guarantor of the eternal glory of God and of the prayers addressed to him. His prominence is in stark contrast with the modest representation in the papyrological record of the very prayer which he taught his followers, the Lord’s Prayer. However, in this case absence may equal *e silentio* presence in the active lives of the Christian believers as the Lord’s Prayer appears to have been a very familiar prayer, usually recited by heart and written down only in amulets (the very nature of which required a written text) as one of the most powerful protective prayers.

Papyrus prayers offer yet another perspective into how Christian identity had been crafted in vivid interaction with the Scriptural narrative pool. Prayers ground the request on or convey the praise of God by means of compressed narrative sequences drawn from the NT. When moreover the prayer accompanies liturgical re-enactment, e.g. in the Eucharist, prayer emerges as an identifying force permeating Christian history. Equally, narrative elements or sequences from the Old Testament are evoked and furnished with novel dimensions as part and parcel of a constant negotiation of identity with Christianity’s “sibling” and rival, Judaism.

Perspectives on alterity may be gained either from open references to enemies and threatening forces against whom the Christian orants ask for God’s protection, or indirectly when the technical-cultic vocabulary of religious rivals is reclaimed through linguistic and contextual shifts. While Christian identity in papyrus prayers appears cohesive in important respects, religiously alien elements (Charōn in PGM II Christliches P13, a Hermetic prayer furnished with Christian frame in BKT VI 1) are carried over and are thus integrated into Christian prayer discourse. However, the prevalent ideology and aim in Christian prayer discourse still seems to be purity and exclusion of otherness.

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Prayer in the Valentinian *Apolytrosis*: A Case Study on Gnostic Identity

by

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Introduction

Thanks to the important discoveries of the last century and to many new publications on Gnosticism there is growing wave of scholarly study of Gnostic religion and its various manifestations.¹ The Gnostics were active as religious movements in the mid-second century A.D. and beyond. The basic language of their teachings and literature was Greek, a language they shared with non-Gnostic Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism of the same period. It is also clear that the area of Gnosticism is far from homogeneous and includes Christian and non-Christian Gnostic groups and their works. Gnostic prayer can be observed in almost all different groups and branches of Gnosticism. Before the Nag Hammadi Library² (and various other documents, e.g. Codex Tchacos that originally contained among other texts the *Gospel of Judas*³) had been found and published, much of the Gnostic prayer-material such as the Naassene Hymn⁴ was also only accessible because the Church Fathers quoted

¹ For an overview cf. George Winsor MacRae, "Prayer and Knowledge of Self in Gnosticism," in *Studies in the New Testament and Gnosticism* by George W. MacRae (Selected & edited by Daniel J. Harrington and Stanley B. Marrow; Good News Studies 26; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), 218–36. On the question of terminology cf. Hans Friedrich Weiß, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis: Eine rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studie* (WUNT 225; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 34–59.

² David Brakke, "Nag Hammadi," *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd ed.) 9:6395.

³ On the Codex Tchacos that was discovered by some peasants during a clandestine search in Middle Egypt, probably around 1978, cf. Rodolphe Kasser and Gregor Wurst, eds., *The Gospel of Judas together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos* (Critical Edition; Introductions, Translations, and Commentary by R. Kasser et al.; Washington: National Geographic, 2007), 2–6.

⁴ Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6.10.2.

it from the Gnostic sources available to them.⁵ Among this anti-heretical literature the earliest surviving work on the Gnostics is by Irenaeus, writing in Lugdunum (modern Lyons in France) in about A.D. 180. Apparently Irenaeus had firsthand knowledge of the Valentinians Ptolemy and Marcus, who to him presented the most immediate danger of his time. He had probably interviewed some of these Valentinians and also had access to original Valentinian documents. Another important patristic author was Hippolytus of Rome who left us the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* also known as *Philosophumena*, written in Greek probably sometimes after A.D. 222. A new theme was introduced by Clement of Alexandria in his principal work, the *Stromateis*, opposing false Gnosis with the true Gnosis of the Christian knowledge. Finally Epiphanius, from A.D. 366 bishop of Constantia, the ancient Salamis on Cyprus, has to be mentioned. He composed his “medicine chest” or *Panarion* as antidote against the poison of heresy. Hippolytus, Epiphanius and other later heresiologists had no independent knowledge of many Gnostic groups.⁶ For their reports they depended in many cases on Irenaeus and on each other. Thus, one has to be cautious about the information presented in their anti-Gnostic writings. Nevertheless, the evidence of the Church Fathers remains indispensable, as they often provide us the only information about certain Gnostic groups, their doctrine and rites. They also help us to define different branches of Gnosticism in terms of characteristic traits and distinctive teachings. Therefore the traditional categories of the heresiologists and their summaries of Gnostic doctrine can help us to understand the confusing picture of the original sources, e.g. the amazing variety of myths offered in the individual tractates of the Nag Hammadi library. This is also the case in respect to the Gnostic prayer and its relation to the group-identity among the Gnostic sects and their respective community life.

According to the Church Fathers prayer was an important topic in Gnostic teachings and also part of their special Gnostic rituals and service. In all Gnostic movements, unless exceptionally expressly rejected, ritual and prayer played an important role. No Gnostic group could be successful without conforming to this elementary spiritual need of its adherents. However, according to Clement of Alexandria there was one notable exception: One Gnostic group, the adherents of Prodicus, did not pray at all.⁷ Clement does not explain to us the reason for this rejection of prayer. However, a reason can be inferred from his comments on the doctrine of Prodicus in another context: Prodicus regarded a class of human beings as saved by nature and taught that those saved came from above. Death had its origin in the works of the creator

⁵ Frederik Wisse, “The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists,” *VC* 25 (1971): 205–223, 205.

⁶ Wisse, “The Nag Hammadi Library,” 207.

⁷ *Strom.* 7.41.

of the world, suggesting that potentially, those saved had no need for prayer at all.⁸ In this respect Prodicus and his followers were the exception that proved the rule. Other Gnostic writings present us with a comprehensive picture of a variety of prayer texts, as well as mentioning actual rites such as baptism or unction. Gnostic teachers also discussed the possible meaning and theological legitimacy of prayer in the doctrinal passages of their writings. Particularly, the Coptic texts of the Nag Hammadi library, often previously known to us only by title and thought to be irretrievably lost, contain many prayer texts that were often inserted into the text of the treatises.⁹ Some of the prayers are also given as collections of more or less long formulae for rituals and ceremonies.

For the purpose of this paper our investigation will be confined to Valentinian Gnosticism. This Gnostic movement was named by heresiologists after its founder Valentinus. Sometime around A.D. 140, during the papacy of Hyginus, Valentinus migrated to Rome, where he played an important role in the local Christian community and its ecclesiastical development. Only a few fragments of his writings are preserved by the quotations of later heresiologists. These fragments are often ambiguous in their possible interpretations. However even the bitterest enemies of Valentinus conceded that he had an outstanding personality, eloquence and literary talent.

For more information then about Valentinus himself we can look to his disciples who had founded schools of their own. This was because Valentinus had a very large following compared to other Gnostic teachers and his adherents became one of the most significant factions regarded as heretical in nascent Christianity. Their activity began while Valentinus was alive and still active under pope Anicetus (A.D. 154–165?). Over the years, the school of Valentinus split into schools and groups with several outstanding theologians and biblical commentators as their leaders. The Valentinian system of teachings is known by the large reports of Irenaeus and Hippolytus and by original sources, mainly the texts from Nag Hammadi. In this paper I can only mention some basic features: In the beginning the Valentinians proclaim a God beyond the Old Testament God, calling him the “Father.” This ultimately

⁸ *Strom.* 4.30; on Prodicus, cf. Eric Segelberg, “Prayer among the Gnostics? The Evidence of some Nag Hammadi Documents,” in *Gnostica-Mandaica-Liturgica* (ed. Jan Bergman, Jan Hjärpe and Per Ström; Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis; Historia Religionum 11; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 55–69, 55.

⁹ Cf. Jean-Marie Sevrin, “La prière Gnostique,” in *L’expérience de la prière dans les grandes religions: Actes de colloque de Louvain-la-neuve et Liège (22–23 Novembre 1978)* (ed. Henri Limet and Julien Ries; Homo religiosus 5; Louvain-la-neuve: Centre d’histoire des religions, 1980), 367–374 and Segelberg, “Prayer among the Gnostics?” 55–69. A collection of material in translation is given by Gerd Lüdemann and Martina Janssen, *Suppressed Prayers: Gnostic Spirituality in Early Christianity* (London: SCM, 1998).

transcendent deity is also called Προπάτωρ, this means “pre-Father,” for, unlike ordinary fathers, he has no father. He is “ineffable”¹⁰ and reposes in silence. This “silence” (Σιγή) is regarded as his female partner who is also named Χάρις and Ἐννοια. Valentinian theories then explain how the first transcendental unity could generate plurality. This happened by projecting a succession of pairs of eternal beings or aeons. Together they form the Pleroma, the spiritual world. The aeons are a diametrical union of the masculine and the feminine principles. In the end the entire Pleroma consists of 30 aeons. Their ultimate offspring is another divine being, the God of the Old Testament, also called the Demiurge, who comes into being because of the fall of “Wisdom” or Sophia, one of the aeons, and created the visible world. Sophia is introduced in the Valentinian teachings as one of the aeons issuing from the Father. She “experienced a passion, apart from the conjunction with her partner”¹¹ that caused her to burst forth. In this way, Sophia generates imperfection that need to be removed from the perfect realm of the Pleroma. What happens now to the lost aeon? From this point on two stories are intertwined.¹² One story tells of the emergence of the Demiurge who creates a defective world outside the divine realm. Then this world must be redeemed. The other is the story of Sophia and her repentance, conversion, and restitution to her former position. She puts aside her guilty intention and is restored to her former position supported by the other aeons. The redemption of the earthly realm outside the divine sphere is effected by the aeon Christ, who unites himself with the man Jesus at Jesus’ baptism and brings men the Gnosis, i.e. the saving “knowledge.”

Geographically, Valentinian Christianity spread to almost all parts of the Roman Empire from southern France to Egypt, North Africa, and eventually Mesopotamia. In the second and third centuries the followers of Valentinus became distant of the nascent early Catholic Church. However at the beginning the Valentinians were regarded as members of the local Christian congregation.

Valentinian Prayer and Cultic Practice

Compared to Valentinus himself we have an astonishing range and variety of literary remains connected with his disciples that inform us, among other

¹⁰ Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.11.1.

¹¹ *Haer.* 1.2.2: ἔπαθε πάθος ἄνευ τῆς ἐπιπλοκῆς τοῦ συζύγου. Greek text is found in Irenaeus, *Contre les Hérésies: Livre I* (ed. Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau; 2 vols.; SC 263–264; Paris: Cerf, 1979), 2:38.

¹² Cf. Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 95–118.

themes, about their rituals and prayers. There were rituals and also special prayers used by Valentinians for their initiation. Examples of prayer and descriptions of related rites can be found in patristic sources. We know, for example, about a rite for the dying described by Irenaeus as well as by other sources. The Nag Hammadi library provides us with further information: A treatise found in Nag Hammadi, the *Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI, 2), expounds the Valentinian concept of creation and explains the process of redemption in terms of Valentinian theology. At the end of the *Valentinian Exposition* brief statements on rituals are appended to the tractate. They include prayers related to rites of baptism and Eucharist (with names given to them by modern editors): *On anointing* (NHC XI, 2 40:1–29); *On baptism A* (40:31–41:38); *On baptism B* (42:1–43:19); *On the Eucharist A* (43:20–38); *On the Eucharist B* (44:1–37). Unfortunately, large parts of the relevant pages in the manuscript found in Nag Hammadi have been destroyed. The diplés serving as division marks between the individual pieces can nevertheless be recognised.¹³ The first text is a prayer probably connected with pre-baptismal anointing and had an exorcistic character. Then follow two prayer-texts on baptism and two others related to the Eucharist. Thus, this treatise sheds light on the sacraments of the Valentinians and their formulae of prayer.

Another document from Nag Hammadi is the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II, 3). In this collection – probably an anthology of excerpts from Gnostic theological works – we find the remnants of Valentinian sacramental theology. In the *Gospel of Philip* the meaning and value of certain rituals within the context of Valentinianism are also mentioned, e.g. in the summarizing statement: “The lord did everything in a mystery, a baptism and a chrism and a Eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber.”¹⁴ This sentence probably lists the separate sacraments of the Valentinians without describing the ritual in detail.

In this paper I will deal especially with the ritual called *Apolytrosis* or “redemption” that is also included in the list quoted from the *Gospel of Philip*. This Valentinian ritual and its related formula of prayer marked one of the

¹³ Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the “Valentinians”* (NHMS 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 355.

¹⁴ NHC II, 3 67.27–30: ΟΥΧΡ̅̅̅̅ ΠΕ ΔΠΧΟΕΙ[C P̅] ΖΩΒ ΝΙΜ Ζ̅̅̅̅ ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΟΥΒΔ[Π] ΤΙCΜΔ Μ̅̅̅̅ ΟΥΧΡΙCΜΔ Μ̅̅̅̅ ΟΥΕΥΧΔΡ[Ι CΤ] ΙΔ Μ̅̅̅̅ ΟΥCΩΤΕ Μ̅̅̅̅ ΟΥΝΥΜΦΩΝ. Text from Hans-Martin Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II,3): Neu herausgegeben, übersetzt und erklärt* (TU 143; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 44; my translation. On this passage cf. also David H. Tripp, “The ‘Sacramental System’ of the Gospel of Philip,” in *Studia Patristica* 17/1 (ed. E. A. Livingstone; Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), 251–260, 257 and April D. DeConick, “The True Mysteries: Sacramentalism in the Gospel of Philip,” *VC* 55 (2001): 225–261, 230.

difference between the Gnostics and the Church at large.¹⁵ It is mentioned in Gnostic sources as well as in the patristic literature. The *Apolytrosis* that can be translated with “redemption” was probably a death rite and its formula was transmitted to Gnostics in preparation for their heavenly journey after death and the possible dangers they could encounter in the hereafter. In it, the dying is provided with a formula of prayer that will protect them when the Creator-God judges them in the hereafter. I will confine myself to this particular ritual and its formula as it provides a very good illustration of the interdependence between the special Valentinian formulas of prayer with their related ritual practice that were restricted to this Gnostic group and the emerging Gnostic-Christian identity. This can also illustrate how certain Valentinian prayers with accompanying rituals were very much interrelated with the identity of being a separate Gnostic group. In discussing this issue I will mainly concentrate on the patristic evidence, above all on Irenaeus’ report about Marcus and his adherents.

Irenaeus and Hippolytus on the Marcosians

Marcus and his followers are known to us from Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 1.13–16.2¹⁶ and the Marcosian ritual of redemption is described in *Haer.* 1.13.6. Some additional pieces of information are provided by Hippolytus who in his *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 4.41.2–42.1 generally depends on Irenaeus’ account. These passages, contained in the anti-heretical works of Irenaeus and Hippolytus will be the centre of our investigation. All other material presented by Irenaeus in *Adversus haereses* 1.17–21.5 was collected from different Valentinian sources at his disposal. This material covers not only exegetical teachings of the Valentinians but also traditions of the typical Valentinian initiations, rites and prayer-formulas in *Adversus haereses* 1.21. Irenaeus does not give us the name of the Valentinian teachers or groups to which one must attribute the different teachings and formulas reported by him. This was done on purpose: Irenaeus wanted to draw a sharp contrast between the variant and inconsistent Valentinian teachings and the in

¹⁵ In Greek and Roman contexts, the word *apolytrosis* was a technical term for buying back a slave. Early Christians also employed the word metaphorically in Luke 21:28 and Rom 3:24; cf. on this Nicola Denzey Lewis, “Apolytrosis as Ritual and Sacrament: Determining a Ritual Context for Death in Second-Century Marcosian Valentinianism,” *J ECS* 17 (2009): 525–561, 558.

¹⁶ Niclas Förster, *Marcus Magus: Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe, Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar* (WUNT 114; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 7–53; Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 498.

doctrinal uniformity of his own Catholic Church throughout the world.¹⁷ Therefore he underlines the confusion among the different Valentinian groups: “For there are as many different redemptions as there are mystagogues of this doctrine.”¹⁸ He then draws a picture of many different rituals and gives their respective formulas as quoted by him. Although Irenaeus claims an inner connection between the different Valentinian groups the effect of his description and quotations presents the sects as being widely divergent, especially in their rituals. He also gives the impression that the Valentinian rituals were subjected to rapid change. As an example, he reports that some Valentinians associate redemption with baptism, others with sacramental unions in marriages, and yet others with chrism or with anointing rituals preceding death (*Haer.* 1.21.2–5). Some of them were even teaching that the “knowledge” itself was redemption because only the spiritual element in the human is redeemed (*Haer.* 1.21.4). However, it seems clear that the variant forms of the ritual presented by Irenaeus fall into two main categories. He informs us about a ritual of initiation and also about a death ritual.¹⁹ Irenaeus’ presentation of the latter gives the impression that certain Valentinians practised the death ritual in addition to their other initiatory rites. The result is that according to Irenaeus contradictory Valentinian teachings and rituals were created by a growing number of competing “mystagogues” and Gnostic teachers, a claim enhanced by his – probably deliberate – failure to introduce them to his readers by name. This picture drawn by Irenaeus has led to much confusion among scholars. Some of them misunderstood the entire material in *Adversus haereses* 1.17–21.5 as belonging to the followers of Marcus.²⁰ But the differences underlined by Irenaeus are obviously related to several Valentinian groups and not only to the Marcosians. It is also not clear why Irenaeus quoted the Marcosian formula of redemption in *Haer.* 1.13.6 – and this means clearly separated from the other quotations of similar prayer-texts in *Haer.* 1.21 – if it had not exclusively belonged to this Gnostic group.

¹⁷ Wisse, “The Nag Hammadi Library,” 212; cf. also Hans-Georg Gaffron, “Studien zum koptischen Philippusevangelium unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Sakramente.” Ph.D. diss., Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 1969, 186.

¹⁸ *Haer.* 1.21.1: ὅσοι γάρ εἰσι ταύτης τῆς γνώμης μυσταγωγοί, τοσαῦτα καὶ ἀπολυτρόσεις (Rousseau and Doutreleau, SC 264: 295).

¹⁹ Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 364; cf. also Kurt Rudolph, *Die Gnosis: Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion* (3rd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 251–253.

²⁰ Cf. Wilhelm Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (FRLANT 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907), 64–65; Wisse, “The Nag Hammadi Library,” 212 and Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 113. That the passages on the Marcosians in *Adversus haereses* are confined to *Haer.* 1.13–16.2 was discussed extensively by me in *Marcus Magus*, 9–13; cf. also François M.-M. Sagnard, *La Gnose Valentinienne et le témoignage de Saint Irénée* (Études de philosophie médiévale 36; Paris: J. Vrin, 1947), 358.

Furthermore, Hippolytus informs us that the confusion in Irenaeus' report had already been rejected by the Marcosians themselves:

For the blessed presbyter Irenaeus also undertook a refutation in an outspoken way, and presented these kinds of washings and redemptions, describing their practices in a somewhat rough and summary fashion. When some of them happened to see what he had written, they denied having been taught such things – they are instructed always to make denials.²¹

The plural “washings and redemptions” probably alludes to the differences among the Valentinians presupposed to by Irenaeus in *Haer.* 1.21. This critic of Irenaeus' account is exceptional among the patristic sources about Gnosticism and important for our understanding of the special rites and prayers of this group of Valentinian Gnostics. Hippolytus then alleges that a Marcosian bishop performed the ritual of redemption in his own time, which is a considerable change in the ritual.

We will begin our investigation by discussing Irenaeus' report on the Marcosian rituals and prayers in *Adversus haereses* 1.13. This passage in Irenaeus' work is extremely valuable, because it contains not only information about the cult and its formulas of prayer but also about the community-life of this Valentinian group. Irenaeus' description of the ritual of *Apolytrosis*, or redemption, and his citing of the related prayer is imbedded in his report on the missionary work, life, and cultic practice of the Marcosians, providing us with a contextual background. This allows us to look at the form and sequence of the rites in the Gnostic service, whereas in other Valentinian groups we possess only cultic formulas that are isolated from their religious and liturgical context. For this reason Irenaeus' report must be considered a rather unique and important source compared to other isolated prayer-texts, e.g. those formulas on anointing, baptism, and Eucharist supplemented at the end of the *Valentinian Exposition* from Nag Hammadi. Further, Irenaeus' account about the rites and cultic formulas of the Marcosians is valuable because it can help us to prove the influence of the different older traditions of Marcus' pagan religious and cultic environment. In spite of the polemical attacks on Marcus and his adherents Irenaeus is also trustworthy because he based his report on his own experience. He had personal contact with Marcosians doing missionary work among Christians in the river valley of the Rhone,²² i.e. in the immediate vicinity of Lyon, the seat of his bishopric.²³ In

²¹ *Haer.* 4.42.1: Καὶ γὰρ καὶ ὁ μακάριος πρεσβύτερος Εἰρηναῖος, παρρησιαιτέρον τῷ ἐλέγχῳ <αὐτῶν> προσενεχθεῖς, τὰ τοιαῦτα λούσματα καὶ ἀπολυτρώσεις ἐξέθετο, ἀδρομερέστερον εἰπὼν ἢ πράσσουσιν. οἷς< > ἐντυχόντες τινὲς αὐτῶν ἤρνηται οὕτως παρελιφέναι, ἀεὶ ἀρνεῖσθαι μανθάνοντες. Greek text in Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (ed. Miroslav Marcovich; PTS 25; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986), 259. The translation is taken from Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 368.

²² *Haer.* 1.13.7; cf. on this Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 159–60.

addition to the Rhone valley, there were also Marcosians in Asia Minor, where Marcus himself operated and attracted followers. Irenaeus knew about Marcus' activities in Asia Minor because of the close communication that existed between this part of the Roman Empire and southern Gaul in antiquity, for example when Irenaeus accuses Marcus of seducing the wife of a deacon in Asia Minor (*Haer.* 1.13.5). According to Irenaeus the Marcosians were, at least at the beginning of their history, a small faction within a Christian community. His work also shows that the difference between Marcosians and other Christians was not at all clear. The Gnostics went to the Christian service and for some time they were not perceived negatively. In addition to Christian ritual they practised their own separate cult, partly in the course of a common meal. This cult was reserved for members and prospective members of their group.²⁴ According to Irenaeus some Christians attended their meeting and realized only well into the ceremony that they were not in a normal Christian service. In a later period the Marcosians also spread to Rome and separated from the Church at large. In the third century they formed a distinctive group with its own bishop. In this time Hippolytus apparently had personal encounters with them, probably in Rome.²⁵ From these, he informs us about the later development of the Marcosians, also mentioning their rejection of Irenaeus' report on them as cited above.²⁶ Probably for this reason Hippolytus based his own presentation of Marcosian community life and teachings on Irenaeus' work leaving all polemical accusation aside, especially when he came to the Gnostic rites of the Marcosians.

Apolytrosis – the Marcosian Death Ritual

A special deathbed rite, the *Apolytrosis*, is mentioned by Irenaeus as well as by Hippolytus. It served as a means of achieving the expected redemption in the hereafter. It was also supposed to manifest its worth after the death of each Gnostic, in the face of the dangers of the world beyond, during the ascent to the Pleroma. The formula of this ceremony was, as we can infer mainly from Irenaeus, a kind of invocation and was supposed to ensure the salvation of the Gnostic when, in the moment immediately following his death, he was judged by the Demiurge. This is presupposed by the formula of prayer connected with this rite that served as a kind of password for escaping this judgement

²³ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 389–90.

²⁴ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 128–29, 400.

²⁵ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 27, 390.

²⁶ *Haer.* 4.42.1. The Marcosian response to Irenaeus' report is a unique exception; cf. Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 27–29, 412.

after death – knowing of this prayer would, it was believed, make the person “unassailable and invisible” to the judge. With the help of this saving knowledge, the pneumatic class of human beings could liberate itself from the chains of the mundane sphere and also from the sphere of influence of the Demiurge.²⁷ This illustrates the close links between Valentinian teachings and the death ritual of this group. The salvation of pneumatic human beings occurs for Valentinians, as it does for Marcus, with the appearance of Jesus.²⁸ A celestial “Christ” formed from all 30 aeons of the Pleroma is united with the earthly “Jesus” in the shape of the dove that came down onto Jesus, when he was baptized in the Jordan.²⁹ Therefore, Marcus considered Jesus to be a divine messenger who brought the information about his own heavenly origin, in other words, about the “indescribable” first God, whom Marcus also called “father”. Furthermore, the preaching of Jesus radically brought an end to the ignorance of all listeners who had not been conscious of their real origin. Marcus defined this meaning for pneumatic human beings as follows: “. . . then, when they recognized him, they were freed from (their) ignorance, went up from death to life³⁰. . . . The father of all things wanted to abolish ignorance and to destroy death. The knowledge of him became the abolition of ignorance.”³¹ Thus, abolishing ignorance by knowing Jesus and the father of all things offered protection from the final death. But this knowledge must also convey that the spiritual element exists in the world and how it can be saved. The Gnostics instructed by Marcus’ teachings were aware of their heavenly origin and prepared for the union with the angel waiting for them in the heavenly sphere. The *Apolytrosis* also served the same purpose on the level of ritual practice.³²

The Marcosian Formula of *Apolytrosis* – Its Content

Underlying this ceremony is a typically Valentinian concept: The Gnostic must pass through the heavenly spheres after his or her death. In the deathbed ritual the dying one is provided with answers in form of prayer that can protect him or her on the great journey in the hereafter. Redemption has to be understood as the return of every Pneumatic to his or her origin in the

²⁷ Bousset, *Hauptprobleme*, 315.

²⁸ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 338–40.

²⁹ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 255–56.

³⁰ *Haer.* 1.15.2: τότε γρόντες αὐτὸ ἐπάσαντο τῆς ἀγνοίας, ἐκ θανάτου δὲ εἰς ζωὴν ἀνήλθον (Rousseau and Doutreleau, SC 264:240–41).

³¹ *Haer.* 1.15.2: Τεθειληκέναι γὰρ τὸν Πατέρα τῶν ὄλων λῦσαι τὴν ἀγνοίαν καὶ καθελεῖν τὸν θάνατον. Ἀγνοίας δὲ λύσις ἢ ἐπίγνωσις αὐτοῦ ἐγίνετο (Rousseau and Doutreleau, SC 264:241); cf. on this passage Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 337.

³² Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 144.

Pleroma. The pre-condition for this is the union of the Pneumatics with their personal angels waiting for them in the Pleroma. The spiritual matrimony with the angel anticipates the perfect in this life by using certain initiatory rites that are not discussed in this paper. However, the definitive spiritual union will take place after death in the Bridal Chamber of the Pleroma. Then “the wedding feast, common to all who have been saved, will take place.”³³ Among the Marcosians the following formula of *Apolytrosis* quoted by Irenaeus in *Adversus haereses* 1.13.6 served as a means to protect the knowing Gnostics on their way into the Pleroma:

O you, who sit beside God, and the mystical Sige before the aeons, you through whom the greatneses, who continually behold the face of the Father, having you as their guide and leader, draw upwards their forms – which appeared to her to the over-audacious-one and because of the goodness of the Propater she brought forth us as their images, having a dreamlike notion of the things on high – behold, the judge is near, and the herald orders me to make my defence. But do you, as understanding the affairs of us both, render an account to the judge for us both as if it is one.³⁴

In the formula, a female divine being is invoked but not named. This heavenly being, which can be identified as the aeon Sophia, is described as sitting beside “silence” (Σιγή) and the God, the Father of All (Πατήρ), who is also called θεός. By naming the Sophia the “one who sits besides” (πάρεδρε) another divine being the text underlines her exceptional position in the divine realm next to the highest aeons of the Valentinian Pleroma. In this position Sophia is near the “silence” which existed before all other aeons of the Pleroma, and by which allows these aeons to see the face of the Father.³⁵ Thus Sophia is placed in a rather powerful position in the pleromatic world of the Valentinians. The Marcosian prayer of *Apolytrosis* is directed to this influential figure. As a companion of God and the “silence” it could act as a kind of advocate for the deceased using her own special connections to protect the supplicant. This introductory passage was probably later expanded by an explanatory gloss that underlies the role of Sophia’s dreams in creation.³⁶ This clause later added to the text refers to the aeon as “the over-

³³ Exc. 63.2: Εἶτα, τὸ δεῖπνον τῶν γάμων κοινὸν πάντων τῶν σωζομένων. Greek text from Clement of Alexandria, *Extraits de Théodote* (Texte grec, introduction, traduction et notes par F. M.-M. Sagnard; SC 23; Paris: Cerf, 1948), 186.

³⁴ *Haer.* 1.13.6: Ὁ πάρεδρε θεοῦ καὶ μυστικῆς πρὸ Αἰώνων Σιγῆς, <δι> ἦς τὰ Μεγέθη διὰ παντὸς βλέποντα τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ Πατρός, ὀδηγῶ σοι καὶ προσαγωγῆι χρώμενα, ἀνασπῶσιν ἄνω τὰς αὐτῶν μορφάς, ἃς ἡ μεγαλότολμος ἐκείνη φαντασιασθεῖσα διὰ τὸ ἀγαθὸν τοῦ Προπάτορος προεβάλετο ἡμᾶς τὰς εἰκόνας <αὐτῶν>, τότε ἐνθύμιον τῶν ἄνω ὡς ἐνύπνιον ἔχουσα, ἰδοὺ ὁ κριτῆς ἐγγὺς καὶ ὁ κῆρυξ με κελεύει ἀπολογεῖσθαι. Σὺ δὲ, ὡς ἐπισταμένη τὰ ἀμφοτέρων, τὸν ὑπὲρ ἀμφοτέρων ἡμῶν λόγον ὡς ἓνα ὄντα τῷ κριτῇ παράστησον (Rousseau and Doutreleau, SC 264:203–204). My translation.

³⁵ This alludes to Matt 18:10.

³⁶ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 147–50.

audacious-one.” This probably alludes to Sophia’s transgression caused by her passion. Sophia in this gloss is also given the task of generating certain parts the cosmos, especially human beings. In this process the upper heavenly world contains the types or models from which the lower cosmos is formed. Thus she brought forth “us,” one would assume, the spiritual human beings, in a representation of the aeons in the Pleroma.

However, in spite of this later expansion, the text seems clear: The recapitulation of the special Valentinian teachings about Sophia was a key part of the prayer and could be regarded as saving knowledge for the Gnostics.³⁷ Sophia will enter the Pleroma to celebrate her eternal nuptials with the Saviour followed by the pneumatic beings who are finely reunited with their angels as their male counterparts. Therefore, she is also called “guide and leader” who draws upwards the “forms” (μορφαί), i.e. the pneumatic human beings once created by modelling them in imitation of the aeons of the Pleroma. On their way they have to pass the judgement of death. This judgement is imagined in the form of proceedings in an earthly court of justice, with a herald calling the deceased for interrogation. The formula of *Apolytrosis* becomes the means of asserting the Marcosians freedom from the Demiurge because they are obliged to recite it when the herald calls them.³⁸ Then in response to the invocation, Sophia will intervene on behalf of those who are already united with their angels and presents them to the judge “as one.”³⁹ Thus, the angel with whom the Marcosians were united in their lifetime in the course of an initiatory rite ensured the help of the aeon Sophia who assisted them in the dangers of the beyond. By unifying with their angels, the deceased were also transferred to a higher rank in heavenly realm that brought them nearer to Sophia, making them superior to the Creator-God, i.e. the Demiurge, who judged them. Sophia acted on their behalf in the role of an advocate, giving account to the judge. Thereafter, Sophia protected their ascents, the celestial journey awaiting the Marcosians immediately after death, against all further interference from the Demiurge. The goal of the spirituals is to be united for all times with their models in the Pleroma. Magical means will also serve this purpose: According to Irenaeus, Sophia uses the Homeric hat of Hades to make the wearer invisible.⁴⁰ With help of this magical hat she was able to guide the deceased to their Bridal Chamber in the Pleroma.

³⁷ Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 114.

³⁸ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 151–52.

³⁹ Sagnard, *La Gnose*, 419.

⁴⁰ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 152; cf. also Bousset, *Hauptprobleme*, 295 and Hans-Martin Schenke, “Der Widerstreit gnostischer und kirchlicher Christologie im Spiegel des Kolosserbriefes,” in *Der Same Seths: Hans-Martin Schenkes Kleine Schriften zu Gnosis, Koptologie und Neuem Testament* (ed. Gesine Schenke Robinson, Gesa Schenke and Uwe-Karsten Plisch; NHMS 78; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 91–103, 97.

According to Irenaeus, the *Apolytrosis* made the Marcosians self-confident and even proud.⁴¹ They regarded themselves as being freed from the fear of eternal punishment that could endanger their salvation. In this the formula of *Apolytrosis* played a decisive role providing a prayer for the Marcosian to be used by them after their death. The text of the formula must be understood as a special prayer of petition. Its basically pagan outlook is also obvious. Compared to prayer in biblical tradition, there is a clear lack of consciousness of human sinfulness before God and the plea for forgiveness. Jesus is never mentioned and the prayer is directed at Sophia as part of the Valentinian Pleroma. The form of the prayer is also comparable to pagan texts – as seen in the prayer of *Apolytrosis*, which begins with an invocation expanded by a so-called “cultic relative clause.” This is a characteristic and widely attested formal element in pagan prayer where comparably extended invocations should address the right deity in the polytheistic pantheon.⁴² One can also compare the formula of *Apolytrosis* with Orphic gold leafs (*lamella*) that were found in graves in northern Greece, southern Italy, Rome, and Crete, ranging from the 4th century B.C. to the late Roman time. These golden sheets bore texts of Orphic origin, related to Orphic mystery groups instructing the elect what they have to do and how to answer questions in the netherworld. Some of them describe an underworld tribunal under Persephone where the deceased has to make the correct response.⁴³ The texts also instruct the deceased in what they have to say to the otherworldly gatekeepers when interrogated by them. In this paper the possible links between the Valentinian *Apolytrosis* and Orphism cannot be discussed in detail. However, the Church Fathers have already hinted to the similarities between this Valentinian rite, its formula and certain mystery cults, for example, in their reference to those Valentinians who introduced it as “mystagogues.”⁴⁴

Secrecy, Bishops and Marcosian Ritual

What is exceptional among the Gnostics is that Hippolytus informs us – as already mentioned – of the later development of the Marcosians. Apparently some Marcosians had argued with Hippolytus, probably in Rome, protesting against Irenaeus’ description of their *Apolytrosis*.⁴⁵ From Hippolytus’ report

⁴¹ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 142–144.

⁴² On cultic relative clauses in pagan epiclesis cf. Georg Appel, *De Romanorum precatationibus* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 7,2; Gießen: Töpelmann, 1909), 114–16 and Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 146.

⁴³ Cf. Fritz Graf, “Orphism,” in *OCD* 1079; Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 115.

⁴⁴ *Haer.* 1.21.1.

⁴⁵ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 27, 390.

we also understand how the Marcosian rite of *Apolytrosis* developed in the 3rd century:

And subsequent to the baptism, to these they promise another which they call Redemption. And by this they wickedly subvert those that remain with them in expectation of redemption, as if persons, after they had once been baptized, could again obtain remission. Now, it is by means of such knavish tricks as this that they seem to retain their hearers. And when they consider that these have been tested, and are able to keep what was committed to them, they then admit them to baptism. However, they are not satisfied with this alone, but promise something different for the purpose of confirming them in hope, in order that they may be inseparable. They utter something in an inexpressible voice, after having laid hands on him who is receiving the redemption. And they allege that they could not easily repeat it unless one was highly tested, or when the bishop bends down to the ear of the dying and says it. And this is a knavish trick (undertaken) for the purpose of securing the constant attendance of the disciples upon the bishop, because they strive to learn what that might be which is spoken at the last, by (knowing) of which the learner will be one of the perfects.⁴⁶

In this passage Hippolytus described the Marcosians as an independent Gnostic group separated from the Church and headed by its own Gnostic bishop.⁴⁷ This shows that the Marcosian community moved toward a structure, which paralleled the Church in order to compete successfully with it. However, this is not a sign of “growing hierarchisation in the organisational structure”⁴⁸ but was probably a successful strategy that strengthened the group against outsiders. Therefore the Marcosians gradually developed “into a more organized church movement.”⁴⁹ In this transformation the special prayers and rites transmitted by the bishop played a crucial role. According to Hippolytus, these special Gnostic rites effectively stabilized the Marcosian

⁴⁶ Hippolytus, *Haer.* 4.41.2–42.1: Οἷς μετὰ τὸ <πρῶτον> βάπτισμα καὶ ἕτερον ἐπαγγέλλονται, ὃ καλοῦσιν ἀπολύτρωσιν, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἀναστρέφοντες κακῶς τοὺς αὐτοῖς παραμένοντας ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως, <ὡς> δυναμένους μετὰ τὸ ἅπαξ βαπτισθῆ<ναι ἀμαρτάνων>τας πάλιν τυχεῖν ἀφέσεως. <οἱ> καὶ διὰ τοῦ τοιοῦτου πανουργήματος συνέχειν δοκο(ῦ)σι τοὺς ἀκροατάς. Οὓς ἐπὶ <οὖν> νομίωσι δεδοκιμάσθαι καὶ δύνασθαι φυλάσσειν αὐτοῖς τὰ πιστά, τότε ἐπὶ <τὸ πρῶτον> λουτρὸν ἄγουσιν, μηδὲ τούτῳ μόνῳ ἀρκούμενοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἕτερον [τι] ἐπαγγελ-<λ>όμενοι, πρὸς τὸ συγκρατεῖν αὐτοὺς τῇ ἐλπίδι, ὅπως ἀχώτιστοι ὦσι. Λέγουσι γοῦν τι φωνῇ ἄρρητῳ ἐπιτιθέντες χεῖρα τῷ τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν λαβόντι, ὃ φάσκουσιν ἐξεπιεῖν εὐκόλως μὴ δύνασθαι εἰ μὴ τις εἴη ὑπερδόκιμος, ἢ ὅτε τελευτῶν<τι> πρὸς τὸ οὓς ἐλθὼν λέγει ὁ ἐπίσκοπος. Καὶ τοῦτο δέ <ἐστι> πανούργημα πρὸς τὸ ἀεὶ παραμένειν τοὺς μαθητάς τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ, γλιχομένους μαθεῖν τὸ τί ποτε εἴη (ἐ)κ(εῖν)ο, τὸ ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων λεγόμενον, δι’ οὗ <τῶν> τελείων ἔσται ὁ μανθάνων (Marcovich, PTS 25: 258–259). My translation (partly based on the translation of John H. MacMahon, *The Refutation of all Heresies in ANF* 5:92–93).

⁴⁷ Valentinian bishops are also mentioned in other patristic sources; cf. Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 157–58.

⁴⁸ Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 500.

⁴⁹ Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 243.

group. These rites were arranged as a system of initiatory grades and could be compared with symbolic steps involving not only initiation but also aspects of a *disciplina arcani*. In this respect the cultic area of the Marcosian life underwent a profound change and their rites became almost secret mysteries to which not everyone, even not every Gnostic, had immediate access. Thus, the Gnostic bishop stands now in the centre of Hippolytus' description of the death rite. Only the bishop could perform this ceremony and recite the relevant formula, as he alone knew its exact wording and did not reveal it to outsiders.⁵⁰ Hippolytus' inability to quote this formula suggests no Marcosian bishop had betrayed it to him. He could also not repeat Irenaeus' formula of *Apolytrois*. One can assume that this was because of the Marcosians' critique on Irenaeus' report. However, Hippolytus makes it clear: He mentions baptism as a form of first step after joining the Marcosians.⁵¹ The rite required that the candidate had been instructed and tested before being baptised. This probably presupposes that the Marcosians did missionary work among pagans and baptised them before they were allowed to enter the group.⁵² The last step of the symbolic ladder was reached shortly before the death of each Gnostic with the *Apolytrois*. Their formula was only revealed to the dying Marcosians by their bishop watching over them at the moment of death. Then the bishop put his hands on their head and whispered the formula of *Apolytrois* into their ears.⁵³ According to Hippolytus these last rites kept the Gnostic group "inseparably" (ἀχώριστοι)⁵⁴ together and its members eagerly desired "to learn what that might be which is spoken at the last."⁵⁵

Identity and *Apolytrois*

With help of the special rites and teachings I have just described Marcus' circle could establish and stabilize itself within a Christian community. At least at the beginning before the office of bishop as mentioned by Hippolytus had developed, Marcus and his adherents considered themselves to be Christians and led, so to speak, a double life, with their Gnostic knowledge making them, at least in their own eyes, a kind of Christian elite.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ *Haer.* 4.41.4.

⁵¹ *Haer.* 4.41.2–3.

⁵² Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 155.

⁵³ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 156–57.

⁵⁴ *Haer.* 4.41.4 (Marcovich, PTS 25: 258).

⁵⁵ *Haer.* 4.41.4: γλιχομένους μαθεῖν τὸ τί ποτε εἶη (ἐ)κ(εῖν)ο, τὸ ἐπ' ἐσχάτων λεγόμενον (Marcovich, PTS 25: 259).

⁵⁶ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 130–31, 141–43, 413. Hippolytus underlines that after receiving the *Apolytrois* the "knowing" Marcosians belonged to the "perfect," *Haer.* 4.41.4: δι' οὗ <τῶν> τελείων ἔσται ὁ μανθάνων (Marcovich, PTS 25: 259).

But what caused them to develop their own identity as a group separated from the Church? Irenaeus describes the fierce controversy shaping the period of separation between the Marcosians and the Church in general. The controversy started when Christians were invited to the cultic meals of the Marcosians but refused to accept their special rites. After distancing themselves from the Gnostics they alerted the local bishop.⁵⁷ Following this, both sides struggled to win over those Christians who had already joined the Marcosian group.

In Hippolytus' time the Marcosians were no longer considered as members of the Church and had to worship as a completely separate group. However, they imitated the hierarchy of the Church by establishing their own Marcosian bishops. This mimicry was combined with bold elitism, which could also help to draw the boundaries against all outsiders and keep the group together.

However, what might these observations tell us about the relation of the prayer of *Apolytrosis* and Gnostic identity? The first point that I would like to stress is the Gnostics' marked sense of forming a Christian elite. Irenaeus repeatedly mentions their distinctive self-confidence. It was founded in, and reinforced by, their special rituals. Among those, the death ritual of *Apolytrosis* held an important position. The Marcosians as well as other Valentinians understood themselves as the knowing ones who could liberate their own deceased from any mundane restrictions and open their way to eternal redemption. This saving knowledge was basically identical with their Gnostic teachings. In the formula of *Apolytrosis* central parts of these teachings were transformed into a prayer text. Thus it recapitulates key issues of the Marcosian myth of Sophia.⁵⁸ On top of this, the formula itself pronounced by a dead person in the hereafter had saving power – it invoked the helpful intervention of Sophia. Therefore the Gnosis, i.e. saving knowledge – at least in regard to the *Apolytrosis* of the Marcosians – and the content of prayer were very much the same. This distanced the Marcosians from all other “normal” Christians who had not access to the secret information ritually expressed in the rite and its related formula of prayer.

Finally, the special last rites, the *Apolytrosis*, were perhaps a further reason for the growing number of Gnostics. The belief that certain invocations could protect against all the dangers of the beyond was evidently so attractive that all the attempts made by the majority Church failed to persuade Marcosians to return to their old Christian community. The larger Church got into great difficulties because it stood by its belief in God as judge rather than the Demiurge, and in the Last Judgement as taking place at the end of the world and not in an immediate judgement after death. Besides, the Church struggled to compete with this Gnostic ceremony, as Hippolytus implies, and many

⁵⁷ Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 128–29.

⁵⁸ Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 114.

Marcosians remained with their bishop who could promise them redemption immediately after death using the formula of *Apolytrosis*. Pagan prayers and mystery-cults probably influenced the content of this formula. Thus one can interpret it in accordance with Adolf von Harnack's famous *dictum* as the result of "the acute secularisation or Hellenizing of Christianity."⁵⁹ Nevertheless, this Hellenizing helped to build an own Gnostic identity and became one of the features that allowed the Gnostics to become an independent community competing successfully with the larger Christian Church.

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⁵⁹ Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (3 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1909; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 1:250.

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“Bring Now, O Zeus, What Difficulty Thou Wilt.”
Prayer and Identity Formation in the
Stoic Philosopher Epictetus

by

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In several of the ancient philosophical traditions, especially in the more popularly oriented (Roman/imperial) Stoicism and Cynicism, identity formation was at the centre of their educational goals. Among these ancient philosophers few have put more effort into trying to understand human identity than the Stoic Epictetus (ca. A.D. 55–135). Or rather, few ancient philosophers have put more effort into trying to bring about in themselves and others a practical ethical identity with which they will be able to fight the battles of life. In addition, few of these philosophers speak so much about god and pray to him with such intimacy as does Epictetus,¹ and it is the aim of this article to investigate the role of prayer in the process of identity formation in this Stoic philosopher.

Questions about identity and identity formation are especially interesting when applied to a person like Epictetus who himself experienced a dramatic shift in his course of life. Having been born a slave in Asia Minor, he was taken to Rome where he served as a household slave for one of Nero’s freedmen, Epaphroditus. While still a slave, he began to study Stoic philosophy under Musonius Rufus. He eventually gained his freedom and started teaching in Rome, until the Emperor Domitian in A.D. 90 evicted all philosophers from

¹ Prayer in a philosophical context had a long tradition in antiquity. It is found already among the Pre-Socratics, for example in Xenophanes, and Socrates, Epictetus’ main philosophical ideal, is frequently portrayed as praying (see for example Plato, *Phaed.* 117B–C; *Phaedr.* 279B–C); Aristotle wrote a now lost work (except for one sentence) on prayer; and both among the earlier and later Stoics we encounter prayer (for example Cleanthes, 3rd century B.C., and Seneca, the somewhat elder contemporary of Epictetus). For a broader treatment see Emmanuel von Severus, “Gebet I,” *RAC* 8:1145–52 and Heinrich Schmidt, “Veteres philosophi quomodo iudicaverint de precibus,” *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* (ed. Albrecht Dieterich and Richard Wünsch; Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1907–1908), 4:1–74.

Italy. Epictetus then went to Nicopolis in Western Greece where he established his own school of Stoic philosophy, and he served as the head of this school for the rest of his life.

Epictetus seems to have delivered both formal lectures commenting on and interpreting the books of earlier Stoics and more informal talks or lessons where the emphasis was upon the practical implications of Stoic philosophy for one's ordinary day to day life.² Epictetus himself wrote nothing for publication. His informal and practical teaching, though, was written down by one of his students, Arrian,³ who originally wrote eight books (the so-called *Diatribai* or *Discourses*) of which four have survived. In addition, he made a short compendium (still extant) of the core tenets of his master's teaching (the so-called *Encheiridion* or *Manual*).⁴

Methodological reflections

Prayer involves two parties, a human being and god, that is, the one who prays and the one to whom one prays. In addition there is a third element, the prayer itself, both its material content and its form (what and how one prays). This latter element again reflects the other two, one's anthropology and theology, since what and how one prays will say something about one's own person and one's understanding of god. Our analysis of Stoic identity formation as it is expressed in the prayers of Epictetus will therefore operate within this hermeneutical triangular framework of the anthropology, theology and material substance and form of the prayers. Moreover, since Stoicism lays the emphasis on the intellectual-cognitive aspect of a human being, identity in our

² Traditionally, Stoic philosophy was structured around the three topics physics, logic, and ethics (which in turn had their subtopics, for example theology being a part of physics). Even though there are signs in Epictetus' works that all these subjects have been taught in his school, Epictetus places the emphasis decisively on ethics, subordinating all other aspects of the Stoic world view to the importance of shaping a robust ethical character.

³ This Arrian went on to become a high Roman official and a productive writer especially of historical works. He wrote for example a still extant biography of Alexander the Great.

⁴ The standard edition of the *Discourses* is Heinrich Schenkl, *Epicteti Dissertationes ab Arriano Digestae* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1916), while the *Encheiridion* has recently appeared in a new edition by Gerard Boter, *The Encheiridion of Epictetus and Its Three Christian Adaptations: Transmission and Critical Editions* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). The *Discourses* and especially the *Encheiridion* are available in numerous translations. The two most widely used among scholars are Robin Hard's translation in the Everyman series, London, 1995, and W. A. Oldfather's translation in Loeb Classical Library (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925–1928). The translations in this article are from Oldfather.

context is to be interpreted as self-understanding and self-reflection, that is, what one *thinks* of oneself.

As examples of prayers from Epictetus I have chosen to include two types of texts. One is what may be called prayer proper, that is, humans speaking to god, the line of communication going only one way. The other consists of texts where humans and god speak to each other in a two-way communication. Such dialogues are perhaps not prayers according to a strict definition, but the two types have at least one fundamental point in common, namely being a direct and immediate communication between humans and god. In my view, also the second type is sufficiently prayer-like to be included in an analysis of prayer and identity formation in Epictetus.⁵

In order to gain a better understanding of Epictetus' anthropology and theology, I will first give a brief outline of these subjects in Stoicism generally. Thereafter I will present the core tenets of Epictetus' moral philosophy. In the main section of the article I will analyse some of the prayers found in Epictetus, an analysis which will result in a more thematic discussion of some central questions relating to the subject of prayer and identity formation in this Stoic philosopher. At the end I will give some comments on the relationship between Epictetus' prayers and Christian prayers, trying especially to trace a possible Epictetan, or more general Stoic, influence on two philosophically oriented Christian theologians of the early church, Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

1. Theology and Anthropology in Traditional Stoicism

For the Stoics, reality in its entirety consists ultimately of two basic principles, the active and the passive principle. The active principle (τὸ ποιοῦν) shapes and forms reality, while the passive principle (τὸ πάσχον) experiences this shaping and forming. The important point for us in our context is that for the Stoics god (θεός) is another word for this active principle. This means that in order for anything at all to be created or formed, be it on the widest cosmological scale or in the details of earthly and human life, such as a person's identity and character, god will always be involved.

In addition, god as the rational principle of the universe is also the ultimate cause behind every development and change in both time and space. Each event is caught up in an interlocking chain of predetermined events which is

⁵ To bring god into the prayer by putting words in his mouth and letting him speak directly, thereby creating a fictive dialogue, may be seen as a *topos* belonging to the so-called diatribe style which was popular among many ancient philosophers and preachers, cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (FRLANT 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910; repr. 1984), 55.

called fate (εἰμαρμένη).⁶ This fate, however, should not be understood as a mere mechanical series of causes and effects. Fate is rooted in god, and god is benevolent and providential. Fate and providence, therefore, are two sides of the same coin. As Calcidius (ca. 4th century A.D.) says, reporting the viewpoint of Chrysippus, the third head of the Stoic school (3rd century B.C.) and founder of what emerged as orthodox Stoicism: “providence will be god’s will, and furthermore his will is the series of causes. In virtue of being his will it is providence. In virtue of also being the series of causes it gets the additional name ‘fate.’”⁷

When it comes to the subject of anthropology, the Stoic view is based upon the unification of the active and passive principle, but mediated through a series of transformations. I will not go into the details of this transformation process.⁸ Suffice it to say that the active principle is labelled πνεῦμα when it concerns concrete physical objects in general, and for human beings in particular this πνεῦμα, the formative aspect of a person, is specified as λογική ψυχή (logical/rational soul). Through his soul, then, a person is akin to god. This soul is further divided into eight parts, the most important of which is the ability for governing, called ἡγεμονικόν. This ἡγεμονικόν is identical with λόγος, reason, and everything which happens in a person passes through this ἡγεμονικόν as a kind of centre of operation. Stoic psychology thereby ends up being both monistic and rationalistic: There is nothing irrational in a human soul, and every thought, word and action which people do or say are expressions of rationality.

2. The Moral Philosophy of Epictetus

Epictetus seems to have shared the general Stoic theology and anthropology outlined above. But rather than expounding the technical aspects of these or other Stoic teachings, he focuses in the surviving works almost entirely on the impact which this philosophy has for the individual human being in his struggle to fight the battle of life.⁹ For Epictetus, as for Stoics generally, the

⁶ See for example Cicero, *On divination* 1.125–6 (=2.921 in H. F. A. von Arnim’s collection of Stoic fragments, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, [SVF], Leipzig: Teubner, 1903), cited in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1:337 (text 55L), and Gellius 7.2.3 (=SVF 2.1000) in Long and Sedley, 1:336 (text 55K).

⁷ Calcidius 204 (SVF 2.933) in Long and Sedley, 1:331 (text 54U).

⁸ On the details of this transformation process see the commentary in Long and Sedley, 1:286–289 and the argument by Chrysippus preserved in Stobaeus 1.129.2–130.13 (=SVF 2.413, part) and cited in Long and Sedley, 1:280 (text 47A).

⁹ For example in frag. 1 (preserved in Stobaeus, translated by W. A. Oldfather in LCL) Epictetus states clearly his view of what really matters for a Stoic philosopher:

aim is to live in accordance with nature (φύσις), which means living in accordance with reason (λόγος). This will in turn lead to a life without fear or anxiety (ἀταραξία) or disturbing passions (ἀπάθεια). In order to accomplish this, Epictetus advises his students to divide their entire experiential existence into two categories, ‘that which is up to us’ (τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν), and ‘that which is not up to us’ (τὸ οὐκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν). That which is up to us is, in short, our inner life, our thoughts, evaluations, considerations and opinions. That which is not up to us is everything external, for example our health, wealth, family, reputation, and social standing. And the important thing is to learn to place one’s desire and passion only in the things that are up to us, and, correspondingly, to consider everything which is not up to us as totally indifferent (ἀδιάφορον) to the subject of tranquillity and happiness. All impressions (called φαντασίαι) should be scrutinized by reason, and this rational faculty which is able to evaluate the worth of these impressions is called προαίρεσις, the ability to prefer what is important instead of what is indifferent.¹⁰

This is the message which Epictetus never tires of trying to communicate to his students. Time and time again he takes this philosophical theory and tries to apply it to concrete challenges which face him and his students every day, for example love of money, sexual temptations, longing to become famous or to have good health. In Epictetus’ view god created mankind with a

“What do I care . . . whether all existing things are composed of atoms, or of indivisibles, or of fire and earth? Is it not enough to learn the true nature of the good and evil, and the limits of the desires and aversions, and also of the choices and refusals, and, by employing these as rules, to order the affairs of our life, and dismiss the things that are beyond us?”

¹⁰ *Prohairesis* is the most important ethical-anthropological concept in the philosophy of Epictetus. This term has been translated in many different ways, for example ‘moral character,’ ‘will,’ ‘volition’ (for a comprehensive list of suggested translations see Keith Seddon, *Epictetus’ Handbook and the Tablet of Cebe: Guides to Stoic Living* [London: Routledge, 2005], 209). The noun προαίρεσις is derived from the verb προαίρεσθαι, and among the numerous treatments of the meaning of this term in Epictetus, I believe that Elizabeth Asmis is correct in understanding the prefix προ- as a comparative-qualitative rather than a temporal modifier (see Elizabeth Asmis, “Choice in Epictetus,” in *Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy presented to Hans Dieter Betz on his 70th Birthday* [ed. Adela Yarbro Collins and Margaret M. Mitchell; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001], 385–412, 387–91). The core meaning of προαίρεσις in Epictetus then is ‘preference,’ the rational human faculty of preferring one value *before*, that is *above* (προ) another. In these preferences or choices a person’s whole ethical character and identity, his entire system of values, is involved, and the term προαίρεσις therefore functions as a laden and evocative expression of a person as a qualitative, self-determined and free human being. See also the interesting analysis in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and the Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 112–18. Cf. Adolf Bonhöffer, *Epictet und die Stoa: Untersuchungen zur stoischen Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1890), 119.

rational and dignified nature,¹¹ and life is a continuous battle for regaining and maintaining this nature despite adversity and hardships. This is the all-encompassing task god has given to every human being. Seen in this perspective, everything Epictetus says has to do with identity formation, with creating a human soul and a human character that is able to withstand existential challenges and still keep its natural and god-given self-respect and peace of mind.

3. Communication from Humans to God: Prayers Proper

As stated initially, Epictetus frequently prays to god, and in light of the close connection between Epictetus' understanding of human identity and his view of god, this is not surprising. However, on the basis of the general Stoic world view described above, with its inviolable and rigid causality, prayers to god would seem to be superfluous and in vain. What happens will happen no matter what an individual human being might wish for. This is an issue to which we will return later on. For now let us concentrate on the prayers themselves, and firstly what we termed as prayers proper: communication from humans to god. These prayers can be broadly divided into two categories: prayers which Epictetus sees as legitimate, and prayers which he sees as illegitimate when uttered by a person seeking to establish a Stoic identity.¹²

3.1. Legitimate prayers

An example of a legitimate and commendable prayer is found in *Disc.* 2.16.42–43. Chapter 2.16 concerns the lack of consistency between philosophical theory and practical life in persons attempting to lead a Stoic life. Even though one has spent much time trying to learn the right ethical-philosophical precepts – that good and bad are located solely within one's own judgment while the indifferent is to be found outside, in externals – the precepts are far from being internalized. In the beginning of the chapter

¹¹ See for example *Disc.* 2.8.23 where Epictetus (through god as his mouth-piece) terms human beings as 'reverent' (αἰδέιμωνα), 'faithful,' (πιστόν) and 'high-minded' (ύψηλόν) by nature. See also Rachana Kamtekar, "ΑΙΔΩΣ in Epictetus," *Classical Philology* 93 (1998): 136–60, 144.

¹² The subject of what should be considered legitimate prayers in a philosophical context is a major theme also in the fifth oration of the Platonist philosopher Maximus of Tyre (a younger contemporary of Epictetus, 2nd century A.D.; translation in M. B. Trapp, *Maximus of Tyre: The Philosophical Orations* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1997], 40–50); it is also treated in the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Alcibiades II* (translation in Loeb Classical Library, *Plato*, vol. 12).

Epictetus illustrates this lack of consistency by a rhetorical question, clearly intending a negative answer, contrasting life inside and outside of his philosophical school: “Does any of us remember these principles outside the classroom?” (2.16.2). His criticism, therefore, is meant as self-criticism, directed at himself and his students.¹³ This, then, is the context of the following prayer in 2.16.42–43 (here I include also v. 41):

Man, do something desperate, as the expression goes, now if never before, to achieve peace (εὐροίας), freedom (ἐλευθερίας), and high-mindedness (μεγαλοψυχίας). Lift up your neck at last like a man escaped from bondage,⁴² be bold to look towards God and say, “Use me henceforward for whatever Thou wilt; I am of one mind with Thee, I am Thine; I crave exemption from nothing that seems good in Thy sight; where Thou wilt, lead me; in what raiment Thou wilt, clothe me. Wouldst Thou have me to hold office, to be poor or be rich? I will defend all these Thy acts before men;⁴³ I will show what the true nature of each thing is.” (*Disc.* 2.16.41–43)

For Epictetus, true Stoic identity applies to someone who actually lives by Stoic moral philosophy and doesn’t just expound it during lessons in school.¹⁴ Moreover, such an identity is inextricably connected to god. But the role of god, as presented in this prayer, in bringing about such an identity is not to intervene in a person’s life and improve his thoughts and actions. Instead, the role of god consists in facilitating the outward conditions of existence for the individual, be it his geographical location, means of clothing, public responsibility and recognition, or economic status. The responsibility for the success of the formation into a true Stoic is left to the individual himself. This individual “I” is prominently present in the prayer, expressing its willingness to shoulder everything life, and thereby god, may bring. And the ties between a human being and god are made very close, even verbally. For example, the sentence “I will defend all these Thy acts before men” reads literally with the Greek word order “I (ἐγώ) you (σοι) for all these acts before men will defend,” placing the individual person and god next to each other in a symbiotic relationship.

Turning to the question of what type of prayer this represents, we may perhaps best describe it as a confession, not, though, a confession of sin or guilt. The shortcomings and failures of the earlier life of the one who prays are present in the prayer only indirectly, hidden in the two phrases (in the introduction to the prayer) “man, do something desperate (ἀπονοήθητι) . . . now if never before (ἤδη) to achieve peace of mind” and in the phrase (in the

¹³ Epictetus’ mentioning of the school at 2.16.20 and 2.16.34 also underscores the conclusion that his criticism is a criticism of himself and of his students.

¹⁴ This distinction between what we may call a true and false Stoic is vividly portrayed by Epictetus in *Ench.* 46 using an illustration from every day bucolic life: Sheep digest their food and show the results of their eating by producing wool, not by vomiting the fodder and bringing it back to the herdsman.

prayer itself) “use me henceforward (λοιπόν) for whatever Thou wilt.” Rather, it is a confession of human allegiance to and trust in god. At the same time, it shows a person’s humility and submissiveness towards the deity. The subject even utters an explicit identity statement, saying “I am Thine,”¹⁵ thereby confessing his adherence to god and defining himself theocentrically.

The prayer does not go into details about how the change of identity will be brought about, but the change is portrayed as fairly radical and abrupt. Epictetus seems to have in mind a kind of *metanoia*-decision, a decision to break with one’s prior life and alter one’s ways dramatically, cf. the chronological divisions expressed by the two phrases mentioned above: “man, do something desperate. . . now if never before,” and “use me henceforward. . . .”

The prayer is presented as Epictetus’ proposal in a dialogue with one of his students as to how a would-be Stoic should pray, and it is phrased in the first person singular. The proposed prayer is, however, obviously intended to be heard and practiced by more than this individual. As stated above, the mentioning of the school not only in 2.16.2, but also in 2.16.20 and 2.16.34, Epictetus shows that the context of the prayer is the school in general. The prayer functions as a means of creating both an individual and a collective identity, and it serves as an ideal prototypical prayer which implicitly distinguishes the ethos of the Stoic in-group from the mistaken prayers and ethical-religious mentalities of the “others,” the out-groups,¹⁶ especially the non-philosophers who in their prayers negotiate with the deity in order to achieve desired benefits (the so-called *do ut des*-prayers, a person giving something to the deity in order to get something back).

Another example of a legitimate prayer is found in 1.6.37. The topic of the chapter is god’s providential structuring and governing of the universe and of human beings in particular. Each person is created with a repertoire of faculties designed to make him able to tackle all the different ethical and existential challenges that may come. Equipped with this knowledge, Epictetus counsels his listeners in the following manner:

Come then, do you also, now that you are aware of these things, contemplate the faculties (δυνάμεις) which you have, and, after contemplating say: “Bring now, O Zeus (ὦ Ζεῦ), what difficulty (περίστασιν) Thou wilt; for I have an equipment given to me by Thee, and resources wherewith to distinguish myself by making use of the things that come to pass. (*Disc.* 1.6.37)

¹⁵ The reading σός εἶμι (“I am Thine”) is a conjecture by C. Salmasius (in an edition from 1620). The manuscript tradition reads ἴσος instead of σός (“I am the same [as Thou]”), but the two expressions come close in meaning.

¹⁶ By “in-group” and “out-group” I mean the people, ideals or principles with which one wants to be associated (in-group) or dissociated (out-group). See also the introductory article (“Identity and Prayer”) by Mikael Tellbe in this volume.

This prayer closely resembles the one above. In both, human beings are confessing their willingness to accept life as it is and to make the best of it. But whereas the prayer in 2.16 was phrased openly concerning what god may give a person, making it up to god whether he will send easy or difficult circumstances (“whatever Thou wilt”; “where Thou wilt”; “in what raiment Thou wilt”), the human subject is in 1.6 explicitly praying for hardships: “Bring now, O Zeus, what difficulty Thou wilt.” Here we find the notion of petitionary prayer turned upside-down. Instead of asking god to relieve him of his difficulties and hardships, the speaker challenges god to bestow whatever burden he wants. To each difficulty and adversity god has given mankind a corresponding faculty. Therefore Epictetus is not afraid of their consequences. As he says in 1.24.1–2, using a metaphor from athletics:

It is difficulties (περιστάσεις) that show what men are. Consequently, when a difficulty befalls, remember that God, like a physical trainer (ἀλείπτης), has matched you with a rugged young man. What for? some one says, So that you may become an Olympic victor; but that cannot be done without sweat.

And in 1.6, just before our pericope, Epictetus relates the story of Heracles (according to one tradition the mythical founder of the Olympic games) who used his labours as an opportunity to reveal his nature (1.6.36). To Epictetus, then, one’s hardships and setbacks are to be seen as “blessings in disguise”.¹⁷ They are the material by which a person can show and build his identity. Life as a whole amounts to an all-inclusive training session which constantly challenges the participants and their choice of character.

By advising his listeners to offer prayers such as this, Epictetus presents them with a means of assuming a leading role in their own lives. Instead of picturing themselves as being passively subjected to external circumstances, they are recommended to view themselves as the agents of their own happiness. In *Ench.* 11 Epictetus gives his students the following advice: “Never say about anything, ‘I have lost it,’ but only ‘I have given it back.’ Is your child dead? It has been given back. Is your wife dead? She has been given back.” Through such inner dialogues and prayers a person will be able to convince himself that he is always in control and never a victim of the vicissitudes of life

As in the first prayer, we find in 1.6.37 a characteristic amalgamation of a bold and strident anthropology, willingly taking on any battle that may come, and at the same time a deep seated and unshakable confidence in the benevolence and providence of god. Stoic identity, then, is brought about by two cooperative factors: god’s natural endowment of every human being with the necessary means of handling life, and an individual’s own concrete and actual use of those resources.

¹⁷ Robert Dobbin, *Epictetus: Discourses Book 1* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 112.

The two prayers in 2.16 and 1.6 are both prospective in that they are aimed at people who have their lives ahead of them and are looking forward to what the future might bring. Epictetus' teaching, though, also provides us with prayers which are retrospective, looking back on a person's life. One such prayer we find in 3.5.7–10. Interestingly, this prayer is presented as Epictetus' own words, not just a prayer recommended to others. The prayer is set in a context where Epictetus is counselling one of his anxious students who want to leave school and go home because he has become ill. To such a wish Epictetus has no sympathy and ironically says to him: "What, were you free from illness at home?" (3.5.2). As Epictetus sees it, learning how to overcome burdens such as illness under all circumstances is precisely the reason why someone joins a Stoic school of philosophy in the first place. Wanting to leave when illness occurs is for Epictetus to turn the whole matter upside-down. Illness is a means of achieving the goal which you came to school to attain. Since the student is so concerned about illness, Epictetus uses this subject as an opportunity to challenge him about his system of values. The teacher asks his student what he would like to be doing when illness and death comes upon him. But instead of waiting for the boy's reply, Epictetus gives his own personal answer. He imaginatively relocates himself to his own deathbed and tells the student what he hopes he will be able to say to god when life is ebbing:

As for me, I would fain that death overtook me occupied with nothing but my own moral purpose (προαίρεσις), trying to make it tranquil (ἀπαθής), unhampered (ἀκώλυτος), unconstrained (ἀνανάγκαστος), free (ἐλεύθερος).⁸ This is what I wish to be engaged in when death finds me, so that I may be able to say to God, [i] "Have I in any respect misused the resources which Thou gavest me, or used my senses to no purpose, or my preconceptions? Have I ever found any fault with Thee? Have I blamed Thy governance (διοίκησιν) at all?"⁹ [ii] I fell sick, when it was Thy will; so did other men, but I willingly. I became poor, it being Thy will, but with joy. I have held no office, because Thou didst not will it, and I never set my heart upon office. [iii] Hast Thou ever seen me for that reason greatly dejected? Have I not ever come before Thee with a radiant countenance, ready for any injunctions or orders Thou mightest give? [iv]¹⁰ And now it is Thy will that I leave this festival; I go, I am full of gratitude (χάριν) to Thee that Thou hast deemed me worthy to take part in this festival with Thee, and to see Thy works, and to understand Thy governance." (*Disc.* 3.5.7–10)

Stating initially, as a kind of preamble before the actual prayer, that the single most important thing to do in one's life and also when faced with imminent death is to work on one's own ethical-psychological identity, one's προαίρεσις, Epictetus then offers his prayer to god. Structurally the prayer itself consists of four parts (marked i–iv in the citation above). First there is a series of rhetorical questions addressed to god. Then there is a narrative part where Epictetus speaks about incidents from his life. From this he moves on to a second series of rhetorical questions again addressed to god, before

ending the prayer with another narrative part, this time a narrative that turns into a confession of gratitude.

Both series of rhetorical questions (i and iii) concern the way Epictetus has lived his life in relation to god. The anthropological image drawn for us in these questions is the image of a self-confident human being. Even though Epictetus' utterances of his willingness to live his life according to god's precepts are phrased as questions, they come with an implied answer, namely to confirm Epictetus' untainted moral character and theocentrically oriented devotion. As such they leave god rhetorically speaking with no other possibility than to concede to Epictetus' version of the matter. God can find no fault with Epictetus, and Epictetus knows it.

In the first narrative part (ii) placed between the two series of questions, Epictetus speaks about his handling of adversities in his life: "I fell sick, when it was Thy will; so did other men, but I willingly." Epictetus may here be speaking generally or even hypothetically about illness in his life, but the words may also be read as a factual description of Epictetus' historical life. Of Epictetus' personal health, we know that he had a problem with his leg. He calls himself "lame" (χωλός, *Disc.* 1.8.14; 1.16.20). We do not know precisely what he means by this. Probably it does not refer to a complete paralysis leaving him totally unable to walk, but his mobility will surely have been affected putting restrictions on him in his daily life. Nor do we know what caused this impairment. The tenth century lexicon *Suda* mentions rheumatism. Other sources claim that it was a result of physical punishment inflicted upon him by his master Epaphroditus while he served as his slave in Rome (cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.53). Whether it is this trouble with his leg or any other specific illness Epictetus has in mind in this prayer, we cannot tell. Nevertheless, he interprets his illness as an expression of the will of god. What sets Epictetus apart from others, though, is not that he is the only one to be struck by god in this manner. What distinguishes him above others and shows his true Stoic identity is his choice of judgment and reaction: "I [became ill] willingly (ἐκών)." His existential and ethical choices are identical with the will of god.¹⁸

¹⁸ The notion that god provides the framework for a person's life is expressed clearly by Epictetus in *Ench.* 17 using an illustration from the theater where the playwright decides the roles of the actors. One's real worth and identity, though, is not defined by the role as such, but by the way one plays it. For a good discussion on the relationship in Epictetus between the superficial and genuine aspect of one's roles and identity, see V. Henry T. Nguyen, *Christian Identity in Corinth: A Comparative Study of 2 Corinthians, Epictetus and Valerius Maximus* (WUNT 243; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 92–114. On the meaning of "person" (πρόσωπον) in Epictetus, see Michael Frede, "A Notion of a Person in Epictetus" in *The Philosophy of Epictetus* (ed. Theodore Scaltsas and Andrew S. Mason; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 153–68.

After using the two series of questions and the first narrative part to look back on his life, in the last narrative section (iv) Epictetus speaks about his final living moments. Comparing life to the joyous spectacle of a festival (πανήγυρις), he again interprets his ensuing death as something god has ordered. As is well known, the Stoics regarded suicide as legitimate when the circumstances made it impossible to continue living a rational-ethical life of self-respect.¹⁹ Whether Epictetus in this prayer has in mind suicide or a natural cause of death is neither possible nor necessary to decide. He subordinates his own will to god's and simply concludes 'I go' (ἄπειμι); the abruptness and naked simplicity of his decision making it even more startling and effective.

The final sentence of the prayer is particularly interesting because here Epictetus expresses his gratitude to god for having been given the gift of life and a correct understanding of his governance. According to H. S. Versnel, prayers of gratitude to the gods are rather uncommon in antiquity, and when they do occur, they often include an expression of hope for future benefits from the gods.²⁰ Epictetus, on the contrary, thanks god and asks for nothing, thereby again signalling a different ethos than the one implied by the contractual-negotiating relationship between humans and god so often present in ancient prayers.

Even though the picture we are given of Epictetus in this prayer is of a person having almost a hybris-like degree of human self-reliance, this impression is modified somewhat by two factors. First, his (hopefully) successful Stoic way of life is wholly preconditioned by "the resources which Thou gavest me" (3.5.8). Secondly, it should be remembered that the prayer is presented as what Epictetus wants (θέλω) to be able (δύναμαι) to say to god when he is about to die, not what he now, in the middle of his life, prospectively knows with surety that he is going to say when the time of death comes. It is an ideal wish.

By placing himself at the end of his life, looking back on how he has handled his struggles, Epictetus implicitly says that the Stoic identity formation process is precisely that – a process. Becoming a Stoic is not some-

¹⁹ Among the Stoics, especially Seneca frequently speaks of suicide as a way out of impossible circumstances. Comparing Epictetus and Seneca on suicide, A. A. Long states that "Epictetus shows none of Seneca's fascination with suicide, nor does he treat it, like Seneca, as the supreme test of a Stoic's freedom" (A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 204).

²⁰ H. S. Versnel, "Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer," in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (ed. H. S. Versnel; Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 2; Leiden: Brill, 1981), XII, 4 and 42–64.

It should be noted, however, that gratitude was often expressed in other ways, for example by votive offerings, see Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 39–55.

thing you can achieve once and for all. Day by day each new situation demands an ethical evaluative judgment. It challenges who you want to be, it challenges your choice of character, your choice of identity. Each *prohairesis* decision moves you either in the right or the wrong direction. And by revealing to his students the teacher's own final prayer, and by fixing their gaze upon his ideal life, Epictetus wants to inspire them to make the right choices here and now. Epictetus assumes the role of a prototypical master guiding his disciples into an *imitatio Epicteti*.

By these three examples we have seen that different kinds of prayers are employed by Epictetus in mentoring his students in establishing a firm Stoic identity. Prayers expressing human self-assertion and prayers of gratitude and humility are seen and used as legitimate prayers. They contribute positively to a Stoic identity formation process.

3.2. *Illegitimate prayers*

As mentioned above, not every kind of prayer is sanctioned by Epictetus. Some kinds of prayers are rejected as illegitimate for someone seeking to build a Stoic identity. I will here give three short examples of such prayers. In 2.8.15 Epictetus contrasts the internal life of the school with the outer and wider world of society at large. Each time he sends a young student out into the world he is fearful whether the student will manage to behave like a Stoic in all the different real-life situations he will encounter (2.8.15). Such lack of consistency between inside-school and outside-school behaviour should really be out of the question, and in the section just prior, Epictetus tells us why:

You are a being of primary importance; you are a fragment (*ἀπόσπασμα*) of God; you have within you a part of Him. Why, then, are you ignorant of your own kinship? Why do you not know the source from which you have sprung? Will you not bear in mind, whenever you eat, who you are that eat, and whom you are nourishing? Whenever you indulge in intercourse with women, who you are that do this? Whenever you mix in society, whenever you take physical exercise, whenever you converse, do you not know that you are nourishing God, exercising God? You are bearing God about with you, you poor wretch, and know it not! (*Disc.* 2.8.11–12)

Being a Stoic should mean that one knows that one is a fragment of god. And having such knowledge should in turn make it impossible, ideally at least, to behave indecently. Even more, it should make it impossible for a Stoic student to utter to god a prayer like this: “O God, would that I had Thee here (*αὐτοῦ σὲ ἦθελον ἔχειν*)” (2.8.16). Praying to god petitioning his presence reveals a severe deficiency in one's knowledge and digestion of Stoic philosophy and thereby in one's Stoic identity. God, by virtue of his omnipresence, is already there, inside every human being.

A second example of an illegitimate prayer for Stoics we find in 2.16, a chapter to which we have already been introduced. As we remember, the

subject of this chapter is that even though one has a correct theoretical understanding of the true essence of good and evil, namely that it is located solely within one's own moral judgement, and not in the outside experiential world, we tend to get disturbed and upset by events around us. And so we end up praying to god in the following manner: "O Lord God, how may I escape anxiety? (κύριε ὁ θεός, πῶς μὴ ἀγωνιῶ)" (2.16.13). Epictetus, then, going further satirically comparing a person's anxiety with having a problem with a running nose, dismisses such prayers emphatically "Fool, have you not hands? Did not God make them for you? Sit down now and pray forsooth that the mucus in your nose may not run! Nay, rather wipe your nose and do not blame (μὴ ἐγκάλει) God!" (2.16.13). As in the former example, petitions to god seeking his assistance find no sympathy with Epictetus.

The last example of illegitimate prayers we find in chapter 1.29. The subject of the dialogue is human beings pictured as chosen by god to bear testimony to the deity's benevolent management of the world. Having been given such a task, Epictetus finds it unacceptable that a person should deliver a testimony like the following: "I am in sore straits, O Lord, and in misfortune, no one regards me, no one gives me anything, all blame me and speak ill of me" (1.29.48).²¹ While the two former examples were prayers of petition, this one has the character of a lamentation, a prayer of complaint. What unites them is that to Epictetus they are all unnecessary and superfluous, resulting from a lack of ethical and ontological competence. Neither petition nor lamentation were necessary if a person truly understood what faculties he has been given by god to conquer in life. Articulation of human weakness and despair has no place in Stoic prayers.

4. Communication between Humans and God: Dialogue-Prayers

The second type of prayer to be treated is the dialogue between humans and god, and our first example is from *Disc.* 1.1.10–13. In the prior section (1.1.7–9) Epictetus discusses the reason why he as a human being is not able to use his body with the same kind of freedom and independence as he uses his soul. In Epictetus' view, this difference between external bodily limitation and internal psychological freedom should not be explained by positing that the gods were *unwilling* (οὐκ ἤθελον), but rather that they were *unable* (οὐκ ἠδύναντο) to make the body free of external compulsion. In order to substantiate this explanation, Epictetus lets god/Jupiter present his own divine answer to the question:

²¹ The Greek runs: ἐν δεινοῖς εἰμι, κύριε, καὶ δυστυχῶ, οὐδεὶς μου ἐπιστρέφεται, οὐδεὶς μοι δίδωσιν οὐδέν, πάντες ψέγουσιν, κακολογοῦσιν.

But what says Zeus? “Epictetus, had it been possible I should have made both this paltry body and this small estate of thine free and unhampered.¹¹ But as it is—let it not escape thee—this body is not thine own, but only clay cunningly compounded.¹² Yet since I could not give thee this, we have given thee a certain portion of ourself, this faculty of choice and refusal, of desire and aversion, or, in a word, the faculty which makes use of external impressions (τὴν δύναμιν ταύτην τὴν ὀρηκτικὴν τε καὶ ἀφορμητικὴν καὶ ὀρεκτικὴν τε καὶ ἐκκλιτικὴν . . . τὴν χρηστικὴν ταῖς φαντασιαῖς); if thou care for this and place all that thou hast therein, thou shalt never be thwarted, never hampered, shalt not groan, shalt not blame, shalt not flatter any man.¹³ What then? Are these things small in thy sight?” “Far be it from me!” “Art thou, then, content with them?” “I pray the Gods I may be (εὐχομαι . . . τοῖς θεοῖς).” (*Disc.* 1.1.10–13)

Since the difference between the ways the soul and the body operate is a core issue in Epictetus’ understanding of human identity, this question is of the utmost concern for him. He is in need of an answer that is both authoritative and existentially satisfying. And by letting Zeus begin his explanation with an address to Epictetus by name, he establishes a personal and intimate relationship between the two.²² The answer from Zeus is portrayed not just as a theoretical and impersonal lecture aimed at a general audience. It is rather a special message crafted for this particular individual, Epictetus, and delivered by one subject to another. God is presented as taking an active part in the human identity formation process. By spending his time answering a person’s questions about his human identity, god shows that he acknowledges his struggling mankind, that is, those few who have taken it upon themselves to relentlessly ask and probe the really important and decisive questions in life. Such people will always find a listening god.

The second example of a dialogue prayer is found in *Disc.* 1.30.2–5. Here Epictetus discusses the common human tendency of seeking to please (ἀρέσκω) the powerful and wealthy rather than attending to one’s own ethical character. Epictetus’ solution to the problem is to theologize each such encounter between ordinary people and the powerful by bringing in god as a third party (under the somewhat anonymizing title ‘another’ [ἄλλος]).²³ This

²² Indeed, the use of personal names also goes the other way with Epictetus addressing god by the name of Zeus, cf. *Disc.* 1.6.37 above. The use of this traditional name of the supreme deity in the Greek pantheon for the Stoic god should not be interpreted as implying a transference of the more popular Greek religious views of god into Stoic philosophy. There was common practice among Stoics of using the names of the Greek gods in a metaphorical way. See for example Diogenes Laertius 7.147: “they [the Stoics] call him Zeus (Δία) as the cause (δι’ ὄν) of all things; Zeus (Ζῆνα) in so far as he is responsible for, or pervades, life (ζῆν); Athena (Ἀθηνᾶν) because his commanding-faculty stretches into the aether (αἰθέρα); Hera (Ἥραν) because it stretches into the air (ἄερα),” cited in Long and Sedley, 1:323 (text 54A).

²³ Other instances where Epictetus calls god ἄλλος are for example 1.25.13 and 1.30.1.

invisible, but nevertheless present divine third party is pictured as the one who ought to define a person's system of values, the system which is the core of one's identity and which shapes one's thoughts and actions.

Epictetus then heightens the fervour of the discussion by not only speaking *of* god, but actually bringing god on stage as an active contributor in an intriguing dialogue with an (imagined) past student of Epictetus' school (here I include also v.1):

When you come into the presence of some prominent man, remember that Another [=god] looks from above on what is taking place, and that you must please Him rather than this man. ² He, then, who is above asks of you, "In your school what did you call exile and imprisonment and bonds and death and disrepute?" ³ "I called them 'things indifferent' (ἀδιάφορα)." "What, then, do you call them now? Have they changed at all?" "No." "Have you, then, changed?" "No." "Tell me, then, what things are 'indifferent'." "Those that are independent of the moral purpose (ἀπροαίρετα)." "Tell me also what follows." "Things independent of the moral purpose are nothing to me." "Tell me also what you thought were 'the good things'." ⁴ "A proper moral purpose (προαίρεσις) and a proper use of external impressions (χρήσις φαντασιῶν)." ⁵ "And what was the 'end'?" "To follow Thee (τὸ σοὶ ἀκολουθεῖν)." "Do you say all that even now?" "I say the same things even now." (*Disc.* 1.30.1–5)

Although god's interlocutor is a *former* student (his time in school being referred to in past tense), his conversation with god nevertheless assumes the form of a questioning, a kind of oral exam. God is pictured as an impatient and intensely focused professor hurling his searching questions at the shaky student. The poor fellow is knocked off his feet and driven into delivering exactly the answers which the teacher wants to hear. And the questions are all about identity, one's ethical system of values, one's character.

God, the professor, knows that it is easy to acquire a theoretical Stoic orthodoxy while in school (in-group). One's identity, though, is challenged severely when one encounters the value system of the world outside school (out-group). Human identity in Stoic terms implies delivering the same answers (that is, having and practising the same ethical judgments) in every given situation no matter the external context. Identity in Stoicism is an altogether internal issue. It is something up to the human subject himself to decide.

In this prayer god's role as divine pedagogue who watches over the identity formation process of his human devotees, appears as a continuation of Epictetus' own school project. As long as the students are in Epictetus' school, they are his responsibility, and he knows he has to challenge them in order to get substantial results. When they leave school, god takes over the relay. Remembering the impatient and confronting tone of Epictetus in conversation with the sick student mentioned above, we notice a similarity between this Stoic teacher and god. Both share the same intense concern for

their students' ethical identity and they even employ the same pedagogical methods in trying to keep them on the right path.

5. What Does Epictetus Mean by the Term God?

We will shortly try to sum up more systematically the most important aspects of the relationship between prayer and identity formation in Epictetus. Before doing so, however, we first have to address an important and basic question which I have deliberately left hanging, namely: What is the precise nature and identity of god in Epictetus? As mentioned earlier, god in Stoicism is another word for the universal reason. Because this reason pervades all of reality, god is in orthodox Stoicism understood mainly as pantheistic or panentheistic, that is immanently present in everything which exists. But since the Stoic god is also providential, he is in Stoic tradition also, but not so commonly, described in personal and theistic language, as a separate ontological entity, different and distinguishable from the rest of reality. There is common agreement that in Epictetus the theistic descriptions dominate,²⁴ and some scholars have seen in Epictetus' theology a break with the earlier Stoic orthodox tradition.²⁵ Keimpe Algra, on the other hand, thinks that even though theistic language takes precedent in Epictetus, this is only on the level of words, of rhetoric. In his view "the surface structure of theistic language represents an orthodox core,"²⁶ and he refers to Epictetus' position as "quasi-theism."²⁷

Space does not allow us to enter into a discussion of this interesting topic as such. To make it short, in my view Algra is basically right. To Epictetus god is rationality, the principle of order, harmony and meaning in the world. And this understanding of god has important consequences for our theme, the role of prayer in human identity formation. Since god ultimately is no external entity who has a separate existence outside of and apart from the world, and since he is no personal god, he is not capable of receiving prayers, and

²⁴ Keimpe Algra, "Epictetus and Stoic Theology," in *The Philosophy of Epictetus* (ed. Theodore Scaltsas and Andrew S. Mason; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 32–33; Long, *Epictetus*, 148.

²⁵ This tendency has been most manifest in French scholarship; for bibliographical details see Algra, "Epictetus," 33–34. See also Long, *Epictetus*, 147.

²⁶ Algra, "Epictetus," 42.

²⁷ Algra, "Epictetus," 51. We should also be cautious not to import a modern conception in our description of ancient Stoicism and thereby picture a necessary opposition between pantheism and theism. As Algra points out ("Epictetus," 36–40), these two perspectives could be combined in Stoic philosophy, and god's role as both the structural principle in everything and the directional goal of everything may be seen to imply both these aspects.

neither, on the basis of such prayers, can he interfere in the lives of human beings or any other creatures.²⁸

6. Prayer as Self-formation

How then should we interpret the prayers we have just examined where Epictetus addresses god and communicates with him? And what is the relationship between prayer and identity formation in Epictetus? In my view, which is also shared by Algra, the prayers in Epictetus should rather be interpreted as pedagogical instruments aimed at having an effect on the human being who is praying. They are examples of what Paul Rabbow, speaking of Stoic inner pedagogical self-hortatory dialogues, has called “das psychagogische Selbstgespräch.”²⁹ This reading of Epictetus’ prayers is supported, as Algra shows, by the communicative context of several of his prayers. For example, a prayer-hymn by Cleanthes (the second head of the Stoic school, 3rd century B.C.) which Epictetus cites in *Ench.* 53 (“Lead thou me on, O Zeus and Destiny, to that goal long ago to me assigned”),³⁰ is introduced with the admonition “Upon every occasion we ought to have the following thoughts at our command.”³¹ The prayer is used as a means of self-admonition, and by addressing god, the ultimate principle of existence (macro level), the individual human being situates himself and his challenges (micro level) within a universal framework, thereby lending importance to his own identity formation process and creating an existential context in which this process can take place. The rhetorical, and presumably also psychological, effect of addressing god in this way is to portray a human being as intimately and directly connected to god in every little adversity in life. A person is not

²⁸ Without questioning the validity of Algra’s view substantially, one could, though, perhaps view the matter also from the *effective* and *formative* side of language and ask what effect a predominantly theistic way of speaking of god would have especially on the listeners of Epictetus and perhaps also on Epictetus himself.

²⁹ Paul Rabbow, *Seelenführung: Metodik der Exerzitien der Antike* (München: Kösel, 1954), 189–214; for examples of such inner dialogues in Epictetus see *Disc.* 4.1.110; 4.9.16. The role of inner dialogues and exercises in the process of identity formation is also treated by M. Foucault in his description of ancient “technologies of the self,” see Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton; London: Tavistock, 1988), 16–49, especially 28–39.

³⁰ Epictetus cites this hymn, in full or partially, also in *Disc.* 2.23.42; 3.22.95; 4.1.131; 4.4.34.

³¹ Algra, “Epictetus,” 49. For another example see *Disc.* 3.24.95–103. See also Keimpe Algra, “Stoic Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (ed. Brad Inwood; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 174–77.

alone when making his or her decisive choices. One is surrounded by and immersed in benevolent providence and cosmic reason.

In Epictetus then, we should speak not only of prayer *and* identity formation, but also of prayer *as* identity formation. In the actual uttering of the prayers humans counsel themselves, directing their thoughts to worthy objects and shaping their character into always preferring the true values. To Epictetus prayer is *paideia*. Indeed, it is a kind of *autopaideia*, self-formation, and that in a double sense, both formation *of* the self (object) and *by* the self (subject).

The notion of prayer as self-formation also brings out clearly what Epictetus sees as the essential aspect of a human being, namely the mental and intellectual side in contrast with the body. Identity formation means to shape one's thoughts and judgments, not one's thighs or biceps. In Epictetus the body is explicitly denied any role in defining what a human being is, as for example in *Disc.* 3.13.17 where Epictetus gives the following corrective to a person who is afraid that someone might murder him: "Fool, not murder *you* (σέ), but your trivial body (τὸ σωματίον)." As we have seen, it is by means of one's rationality that a human being is akin to god (an ἀπόσπασμα of god, *Disc.* 2.8.11). The body is only clay (πηλός, *Disc.* 1.1.11). Prayers, then, and identity formation concern only what a person should do with one's inner life, not what one should do with one's external, material conditions.

By applying the categories "in-group" and "out-group" (defined earlier as the people, ideals or principles with which one wants to be associated or dissociated) we may sum up and describe Epictetus' identity formation programme in the following way, by gradually narrowing the scope:

1) Within the world at large:

The students in the Stoic school of philosophy (in-group) – the rest of mankind (people in general) (out-group)

2) Within the Stoic school:

The true Stoic student, the one who really practices Stoic philosophy and who perseveres despite hardships (in-group) – the student who gives up and leaves, or who is satisfied with merely attaining a theoretical understanding of Stoicism (out-group)

3) Within the true Stoic student:

The soul or reason, one's value system, one's judgments or "preferences" (προαίρεσις) (in-group) – the body, one's physicality, one's passions (out-group)

7. Stoic and Christian Prayer

Within a volume focusing mainly on early *Christian* prayer some closing remarks on the relationship between Epictetus' Stoic prayers and Christian prayers seem in order. I will restrict myself first to prayers from the New Testament, and secondly to two representatives of a more philosophically oriented Christian theology, Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

While there are points of contact between Epictetan and New Testament prayers, there are also obvious differences. Some of the most striking are the confessions of human strength and the accompanying self-reliant tone found in Epictetus' prayers, a feature quite different from the New Testament ideal of humility and self-abasement in relation to God.³² For example the repentant publican in the parable of Jesus (Luke 18:9–14) is portrayed as a prototypical believer admitting his weaknesses and failures in contrast to the self-confident Pharisee. Moreover, in line with the individual and self-reflexive nature of the prayers in Epictetus there are no examples of what we may call communal or joint prayers. Epictetus and his students do not seem to have come together in order to pray to god. Neither are there any examples of intercessions, prayers for others.³³

As we saw earlier, Epictetus dismisses petitions to god, and especially petitions for material aid. Epictetus, then, presumably would never pray as the early Christians did: "Give us this day our daily bread," bodily existence being merely a trifle, an ἀδιάφορον. Nevertheless, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, petitions are not altogether absent in Epictetus. For example, in *Disc.* 3.24.95–102 Epictetus remarks that it is god who apportions the roles of every human being, an apportioning which results in people living their lives under vastly different circumstances. For instance, it is god who decides whether one should live "in Rome, Athens, Thebes or Gyara" (*Disc.* 3.24.100) – the last location being a feared island in the Aegean where people were sent in exile. Epictetus then lets the "good and excellent man" (ὁ καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός), the ideal to which he himself aspires, express his readiness to accept all these different conditions, but with one small additional prayer to god: "Only remember me there (μόνον ἐκεῖ μου μὲμνησο)" (*Disc.* 3.24.100).³⁴

³² For an interesting example of later Christian critique of Epictetus' boldness, see the comments on the French seventeenth century philosopher Blaise Pascal in Long, *Epictetus*, 263–4, and Algra, "Epictetus," 51–52.

³³ This is not to say that identity formation is perceived only as a solitary task carried out by the individual in his confinement. For example in *Disc.* 3.24.103 Epictetus exhorts his students to assist each other in their struggles for acquiring a firm Stoic identity, thereby revealing a social and reciprocal dimension in the identity formation process.

³⁴ Other examples may be found in *Disc.* 2.18.29, 4.1.151, and *Ench.* 53 (mentioned above).

At face value this prayer seems to contradict and move beyond what we have found in Epictetus so far, in that it appears to direct petitions to an external god. In line with our previous argumentation, though, I prefer to also read this prayer as ultimately operating within the confines of traditional Stoic theology. This prayer, therefore, should be interpreted as a metaphorical way of positioning himself within the general rational administration of the world and reminding himself that this overall ontological structure is important not only for the world at large, but for him concretely and individually. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Epictetus, at least rhetorically, in this prayer puts a severe strain on the traditional Stoic view of god and his relationship to human beings and the world, stretching it to its limits.

This prayer of Epictetus also has a kind of parallel in the New Testament in the prayer of the crucified criminal who in his dying moments asks Jesus: “Remember me (μνήσθητί μου) when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). There is no reason to think that Epictetus was acquainted with the New Testament even though he was aware of the existence of the Christians,³⁵ and a direct literary dependency between the two prayers therefore seems improbable. But a prayer such as this by Epictetus, with its emotional and existential tone and parallel wording with the New Testament, will probably have been one of the factors that contributed to giving Epictetus a high standing among Christians (see below). What the Christians did not find in Epictetus, though, was a God promising: “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Epictetus did not envisage an eschatological salvation. For him the meaning and beauty of life, and the goal of his identity formation programme, consisted in embracing wholeheartedly the place and role assigned to him by god in the ever recurrent historical cycle.

In the decades after his death Epictetus continued to be read, exerting his influence on new generations of Stoics, for example the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180). But the thoughts of Epictetus also had their impact beyond the confines of Stoicism. In the emergent Christian church, especially in the east,³⁶ Epictetus was known and used, and it is the aim of this final section to investigate briefly in what way Epictetus, and Stoicism in general, may have influenced the views on prayer and identity formation of the two Alexandrian theologians Clement and Origen. Both Church fathers are representatives of that branch or tradition in the early church which saw the Biblical-Christian message as the true philosophy, and which wanted to

³⁵ Epictetus mentions Christians two times calling them ‘Jews’ (*Disc.* 2.9.19–21) or ‘Galilaeans’ (4.7.6), but he does not seem to have had any substantial knowledge about their teachings (see Oldfather’s introduction in *Epictetus* [LCL], vol. 1, xxvi–xxvii, who in turn builds on the classic study by Adolf Bonhöffer, *Epiktet und das neue Testament* [Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1911]).

³⁶ Michel Spanneut, “Epiktet,” *RAC* 5:599–681; here 640.

create a synthesis between Biblical teachings and Greek pagan philosophy.³⁷ They were both also well acquainted with the ancient Greek philosophical traditions, and they both served as teachers (Origen succeeding his teacher Clement) in the so-called catechetical school in Alexandria, an institution of advanced, higher learning. Of the Greek philosophical schools of thought it is first and foremost (Middle) Platonism which they try to integrate with their Christian theology, but Stoic views are also prominent, especially in Clement.³⁸ In his article on Epictetus in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* Michel Spanneut shows several similarities and points of contact between Clement and Epictetus both in thought and wording, and concludes that “Aus all dem wird deutlich, dass Clemens in vielen Punkten mit Epiktet verwandt und mehr oder weniger von ihm abhängig ist.”³⁹

Origen too was well aware of Epictetus, and in contrast to Clement he even mentions Epictetus by name, rating him in some aspects higher than his true philosophical hero Plato since the latter “is found only in the hands of those who profess to be literary men; while Epictetus is admired by persons of ordinary capacity, who have a desire to be benefited, and who perceive the improvement which may be derived from his writings” (*Contra Celsum* 6.2).⁴⁰ Even so, Spanneut finds fewer similarities between Origen and Epictetus than in the case of Clement, and he concludes that “Man kann also nicht sagen, dass Epiktet einen wirklichen Einfluss auf Origenes ausgeübt hat.”⁴¹ While this statement is probably correct if one places the emphasis on the adjective “wirklichen” meaning a comprehensive and thorough influence, a more general influence exerted by Epictetus and Stoicism seems obvious.

Clement’s and Origen’s views on prayer are primarily to be found in *Stromata* book 7 and *De oratione* respectively.⁴² Our analysis will focus on

³⁷ See Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets, and Early Christianity* (LNTS 400; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 124–59.

³⁸ Middle Platonism (first century B.C. until about A.D. 200) was in itself an amalgamation of Platonic, Pythagorean, Aristotelic, and Stoic features (see David Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* [Leiden: Brill, 1986], 486–8). On Middle Platonism as an important background for Clement’s theology, see Henny Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁹ Spanneut, “Epiktet,” 640. – To the possible objection that these similarities may be explained by a common background in Greek philosophy, Spanneut claims that “Zweifelloos erklärt ihre gemeinsame Herkunft aus dem Griechentum der ersten Jahrhunderte nC. gewisse Übereinstimmungen . . . Jedoch reicht die gemeinsame Herkunft allein nicht aus, um die Häufung verwandter Thesen und Ausdrücke zu erklären” (“Epiktet,” 640).

⁴⁰ Origen speaks of Epictetus also in *Contra Celsum* 3.54 and 7.53–54.

⁴¹ Spanneut, “Epiktet,” 641.

⁴² The translation of *Stromata* used in this article is from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2: *Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* (ed.

these texts and try to shed light on some of the same aspects as in our investigation of Epictetus' prayers, that is, the understanding of God (the one to whom one prays), a human being (the one who prays), and what one should pray for. With the Bible as their primary authoritative text, the two Alexandrians understand God both as an external divine being with a separate existence apart from the created material world of human beings, and as one who guides history through his benevolent providence. The portraying of God as provident will find support in both Platonism and Stoicism. The view of God as an external being, on the other hand, is generally more in line and easier to square with a Platonic world view, with its dualistic conception of a pure realm of ideas over against their imperfect worldly realisations, than it is with elder Stoicism which leaned more towards an immanent and pantheistic understanding. But as we have seen, in the Stoicism of Epictetus the language of an external god takes precedent. No matter how the lines of influence may have gone, this view of God leads Clement and Origen to see prayer as a legitimate and commendable human activity, directed at a real God who longs to have a relationship with his creatures.

When it comes to the understanding of human beings, the intellectual and cognitive anthropology which is so pervasive in both Platonism and Stoicism (and which we have seen clearly in Epictetus) makes a strong impact in Clement and Origen. In both, the rational-spiritual aspect of a person (soul and spirit) is given preference over one's bodily constitution. In Clement, the true Christian is even labelled a "Gnostic" (the one who knows/has knowledge; for example *Strom.* 7.1.1.⁴³ This anthropology, in turn, functions as the basis for Clement's preferred definition of prayer as a "converse with God" (ὁμιλία πρὸς τὸν θεόν) (*Strom.* 7.39.6), and it also supplies the premises for what kind of prayers one should utter. According to Clement one's earthly existence should be seen as "the chain of the flesh" (τοῦ δεσμοῦ . . . τοῦ σαρκικοῦ) (*Strom.* 7.40.1), and the true Christian is one who "in accordance with reason . . . asks for none of those things in life required for necessary use (εἰς τὴν ἀναγκαίαν χρῆσιν)" (*Strom.* 7.46.1). Instead he prays for "the things which are really good, the things which concern the soul", and then he adds in Stoic sounding language, "And so he desires not anything that

Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; rev. by A. C. Coxe; repr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994); the translation of *De oratione* is by A. Stewart-Sykes in *Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen: On the Lord's Prayer* (New York: St Vladimir's, 2004), 111–214. For an instructive discussion of Clement's notion of prayer in book 7 of the *Stromata*, see Henny Hägg, "Seeking the Face of God: Prayer and Knowledge in Clement of Alexandria," in *The Seventh Book of the Stromateis* (ed. Matyáš Havrda, Vit Hušek, and Jana Plátová; VCSup 117; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 131–42.

⁴³ Interestingly for our purposes Spanneut claims that Clement's image of this Gnostic, the true Christian, is drawn by using both Christian and Stoic features (*RAC* "Epiktet," 637).

is absent, being content with what is present. . . . having become sufficient (αὐτάρκης) in himself, he stands in no want of other things” (*Strom.* 7.44.3–5). A further and related reason for not praying for or being anxious about material, mundane matters, is the belief that – and again we are reminded of what we encountered in Epictetus – “the affairs of the universe are managed in the best way” (ἄριστα διοικεῖσθαι) (*Strom.* 7.45.4). Therefore a Christian “is well pleased (εὐαρεστεῖται) with all that happens” (*ibid.*). Consequently, the task of the Gnostic is to cooperate with God in prayer, asking “that he may never fall from virtue; giving his most strenuous co-operation (συνεργῶν) in order that he may become infallible” (*Strom.* 7.46.5). This cooperation consists in fighting the battles of life in much the same way as we saw in Epictetus. A person has to decide to dedicate one’s life to godly, spiritual matters,

obtaining command (ἐγκρατής γενόμενος) of all the influences which war against the mind (ἀντιστρατευομένων τῷ νῷ); . . . applying himself (προσεδρεύων) without intermission to speculation (θεωρίᾳ); . . . exercising himself (ἐγγυμνασάμενος) in the training of abstinence from pleasures, and of right conduct in what he does (7.44.7; *ANF* 2:535).

Even though life is a struggle, an often repeated theme in Clement’s prayers is gratitude and praise (for example *Strom.* 7.36.4; 7.41.6; 7.49.4). As in Epictetus, a person’s relationship with God is primarily to be expressed by humble and joyous thanksgiving.

Origen’s views on what a person should pray for are in many respects similar to those of his former teacher, but his Platonic leanings are more manifest. Origen, too, admonishes his readers to refrain from praying for “earthly things” (ἐπιγίαιον, *Or.* 8.1), and “anyone . . . who asks after mundane (ἐπίγεια) and minor matters from God is disregarding the one who commands us to request what is heavenly (ἐπουράνια) and great from the God who does not know how to bestow anything mundane (ἐπίγειον) or minor” (*Or.* 16.2). On the other hand, with the Bible as the authoritative word of God, Origen has to come to grips with the numerous accounts mentioned there of people who prayed for earthly, material matters, and to whom God granted what they asked. Origen gives a long list (in *Or.* 13.2) of such Scriptural precedents, for example Hannah who prayed for a son. Since these people are portrayed as ideals to emulate, or, using identity theory language, as prototypical identity characters, their stories cannot simply be ignored. Origen’s hermeneutical solution is to apply his Platonic world-view, whereby the earthly, material benefits which the Biblical heroes received are given a two-layered interpretation, one material and one spiritual. According to Origen, “we should give preference to whatever . . . is presented by analogy (ἀπὸ τῆς ἀναγωγῆς), over the obvious blessings that, according to the surface meaning (κατὰ τὴν λέξιν), were supplied to those who prayed” (*Or.* 13.4). Using also

the figures of the sun and shadow from Plato's *Republic*,⁴⁴ Origen says that "just as the person who seeks the sun's rays (τὰς ἡλιακὰς ἀκτῖνας) is neither pleased or pained by the presence or absence of the shadows of objects (ἡ τῶν σωματῶν σκιά), in that he has what he most requires, since he has the light shining upon him, so . . . we shall not quibble over such a trifling matter as a shadow" (*Or.* 17.1).⁴⁵

Like Clement and Epictetus, Origen wants to teach his readers not to put their hopes and desires in attaining what they pray for. A far greater good is the attitude which accepts all that God designs in his providence without complaining and which interprets it as opportunities for training furnished by a coach: "For whoever is best pleased with whatever should occur is made free from every bond, and does not put a hand against God who ordains whatever he wishes for our training (γυμνάσιον) and does not murmur secretly in his thoughts" (*Or.* 10.1).⁴⁶ In addition, in Origen a certain human contribution is also necessary in order to gain results from prayer: "none might obtain particular things except by praying in this way: with a particular disposition, believing in a certain way, having lived in a certain way prior to prayer" (*Or.* 8.1). And with Paul Origen describes the ultimate goal of prayer as not pertaining to matters in the outer world, but as involving the construction of a new identity of the individual, "looking upon the glory of the Lord with face unveiled, and so being transformed into his image" (*Or.* 9.2; cf. 2 Cor 3:18).

Prayer, then, for both Clement and Origen is understood as a comprehensive phenomenon in a Christian's life. It amounts to an all-inclusive mode of living, more than a narrow and isolated human activity. Turning to God in constant dialogue functions for these two Alexandrians as the most important tool in the formation of a Christian identity. In this spiritual practice the core element of a person's character is involved, and one's own primordial and God-given identity as one belonging to the realm of spiritual truth and wisdom is rekindled and given pointed direction by the grace, love, and rational beauty of the God to whom one turns. Unlike Epictetus they believe that God both has the ability and the will to grant what one wishes – given that one asks for the truly good things, truth, knowledge, and love. But like Epictetus they emphasize that even if no obvious answers are given to one's prayers, one should see the relationship with God in prayer as a benefit in itself and use prayer as a means to shape one's character in order to be

⁴⁴ *Republic* 6.508c–509d; 7.514a–517a.

⁴⁵ This higher, spiritual benefit and meaning is by Origen also called "mystical matters" (τὰ μυστικά) and "types/typologies" (τύποι) (*Or.* 13.4).

⁴⁶ God portrayed by metaphors derived from athletics is found also in Epictetus, see for example *Disc.* 1.24.1–2 mentioned above, and in Clement (see *Strom.* 7.20.3–4; *ANF* 2:528).

harmonized with the will and identity of the one who administers everything with wisdom and goodness. While Epictetus probably has exerted a greater and more direct influence upon Clement than Origen, they were both acquainted with this Greek Stoic and cherished him as a kindred spirit among the pagans.

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Prayer and Identity Formation: Attempts at a Synthesis

by

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In a study that involves many contributors addressing texts of different genres, provenance and time, and also within a limited scope of material, it is evident that conclusions have to be modest, and aimed primarily at initiating further thoughts on the question of prayer and identity. Nonetheless, the material investigated is sufficient to form a basis on which to make some important observations pertaining to an often-overlooked aspect in discussions on the origins of Christian identity. This is the question that all contributions have struggled to answer, each providing bits and pieces for a much larger puzzle. Working on this topic has confirmed the relevance of bringing together the process of identity formation and practices of prayer. Although prayer is only one among many elements that shaped nascent Christian identity, it has become clear that prayer is a catalyst for questions pertaining to identity. We agree with Michael J. Brown, who says that one of the best ways to manifest the distinctiveness of Christians vis-à-vis their environment is through cultic practices, which also involve prayers.¹

In his famous religious studies, Ninian Smart has pointed out seven dimensions that together may form a religious identity: doctrinal, narrative, ethical, ritual, experiential, material and institutional/social;² this is not at all unlike Gerd Theissen's theory on how Christian belief manifested itself in its early stages.³ As early Christian prayers emerge in this investigation, several of these dimensions come into play.

¹ Michael J. Brown, *The Lord's Prayer through North African Eyes: A Window into Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 1.

² Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transfigurations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 10–21.

³ Gerd Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (transl. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1999); see also the introduction of the present volume.

A Dynamic Process

Christian identity, as it appears in the material investigated in the present volume, finds itself on the verge between textual phenomenon and social realities.⁴ We have proceeded from texts, but with the firm conviction that texts also construct identity. Therefore attempts have been made to hypothesize about the social and historical realities behind the texts, or to look into the impact that the texts had on those who were exposed to them. Texts create representations of social reality, but are not to be identified with that reality. We have pointed to some observations which indicate that textual identity in real life was a matter of negotiations and complexities. The texts we deal with are mostly prescriptive, in that they recommend certain notions of Christian identity, challenge the addressees to put those notions of identity into practice, and invite the addressees to embrace certain ways of thinking and acting. The fact that prescriptive texts emphasize the distinctiveness of Christian identity confirms that it is necessary to make a methodological distinction between texts and social reality. In their aim of forming identity, they are simply more exclusive than is social experience. On the ground, things become more complex. It is apparent that it took a long time for a Christian identity to become dominant vis-à-vis other aspects that influence identity. The fragility and complexity of identities certainly accompanied a process towards a more coherent identity. The fact that identities blend, are fluid and to some extent, elusive, implies that we are dealing with a complex and dynamic phenomenon, which is difficult to describe in a precise manner.

We do not know if, or to what degree, an author succeeded in the attempts to shape the identity of an audience. Even if the author did, we cannot universalize this success, because it applies primarily to the given audience. Succeeding/ success is not an easy concept either, because if and when it comes to happen, the process of transference from text to reality takes place in multi-faceted ways, and does not necessarily move coherently and in a straightforward manner always. It is not evident where to identify success on such a complex road. Christian identity manifested itself in different ways, according to gender, sexuality, class and status, as Anna Rebecca Solevåg has pointed out in her contribution. The way prayer informed Christian identity cannot exclude power structures and gender roles in society.

We must distinguish between the Christ-believers' view of praying and how they actually prayed. With regard to the process of identity formation, this distinction matters. We have investigated prescriptive texts on prayer, actual prayers, and prayers that may also serve in magical amulets (papyri).

⁴ Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Identity emerges in different ways and with varying distinctiveness in this material.

From this, it follows that early Christian identity was not fixed; on the contrary, it was flexible and constantly evolving. However, investigating prayers is a useful perspective to enlighten this process, since it may point us beyond the texts we study, in the direction of early Christian practice. The dynamic perspective includes aspects of real life, albeit fragile and preliminary.

In his introductory contribution (“Identity and Prayer”), Mikael Tellbe points to how essential conflicts with other groups were to form and reaffirm a fellowship as an in-group, where boundaries were tightened. We have seen throughout our study that prayers are caught up in a process of “othering,” which is fundamental to theories on how identity is established. As demonstrated by Niclas Förster, conflicts appeared also within an in-group, and eventually led to separations, as it did with the Marcosians. The separation was caused by a struggle over rituals, including prayers.

Praying Fixed Prayers Together: Prayer and Rituals

Generally speaking, what people do together fosters a sense of cohesiveness within a group of people. Ritual theories confirm this, arguing that they are embodied expressions of identity. According to Stefan C. Reif, “Prayer for the followers of Jesus was . . . still more individual than communal and improvised rather than authoritatively structured.”⁵ This is an important point to notice. Most prayers probably were rites of individual devotion, not ritual prayers as such. However, this should not distract us from observing that early Christian prayer is rightly understood within a ritual perspective. The prayer instructions in 1 Timothy 2 speak of prayer “in every place” (1 Tim 2:8), thereby attesting the idea that Christians should act in a common way, although this does not refer to a ritual as such. For obvious reasons, we cannot generalize from this idea, but the text illustrates a point, namely that doing the same thing repeatedly, in fact brings a ritual perspective into play.

In the present study, Larry Hurtado’s contribution is important here in demonstrating that the Christocentric nature of prayer is confirmed in various trajectories of the early Jesus movement. Furthermore, early comments on the Lord’s Prayer aimed at identifying topics that disciples were invited to address to God. This also created a sense of devotion that moved beyond the individual and improvised.

⁵ Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 124.

Naturally, special importance is assigned to The Lord's Prayer. Its role as a demarcation prayer⁶ becomes visible when considering that it had become the prerogative of the baptised to join in this prayer. When this practice was introduced we do not know. However, the idea is traceable to *Didache*, and even in Paul's letters we can identify the foundations of the idea that this was a prayer exclusively for the baptised, albeit not placed together to form the theology that developed later. The nexus between The Lord's Prayer and baptism was witnessed in different sources (Karl Olav Sandnes). *Didache* also shows that the Lord's Supper was a context for the Lord's Prayer, thus further demonstrating its ritual function (Hans Kvalbein). This nexus, between this prayer taught by Jesus and the ritual of entrance into a fellowship sharing the table, attests that by this time, the Lord's Prayer encapsulated a Christian identity.

From early on, this particular prayer was an in-group prayer, although not in the way it eventually became in the second and third century. From being a prayer that drew boundaries within a shared Jewish setting (Geir Otto Holmås), it moved towards a means of expressing exclusiveness vis-à-vis Jews: "Our Father" implied such a claim. Christ-believers addressed God as Father, as Jesus did. Thus this prayer owed its authority both to the example of Jesus – who himself prayed in accordance with the Lord's Prayer in Gethsemane, as clearly implied in Mark 14:36 parr. – and also to the fact that Jesus taught the disciples this prayer. Content-wise, however, this fixed prayer is less distinct, although both the idea of God as Father and of the Kingdom of God might convey more idiosyncratic elements.⁷

Prayer as Performed Theology

The fact that Christ-believers prayed did not set them apart from either Jews or pagans, since prayer universally is one aspect of religious practice. This common ground applies mostly to how they prayed and, to some extent, to content. Bodily gestures, times of praying, et cetera, were of course open to

⁶ Karl Heinrich Ostmeier, "Das Vaterunser: Gründe für seine Durchsetzung als 'Urgebet' der Christenheit," *NTS* 50 (2004): 320–36.

⁷ Hans Kvalbein's contribution in the present volume disagrees with the notion put forward already by Johann Jakob Wettstein: "*tota haec oratio* (i.e. the Lord's Prayer) *ex formulis Hebraeorum concinnata*," namely that the whole prayer is putting together Hebrew sentences; see Karlheinz Müller, "Das Vater-Unser als jüdisches Gebet," in *Identität durch Gebet: Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker and Peter Ebenbauer; Studien zu Judentum und Christentum; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 159–204, 159. The way "Father" was addressed in patristic exegesis is supportive of Kvalbein's view, at least with regard to how this was perceived by some Christians.

different interpretations. The neglect of assigned space for praying became, to some extent, a distinguishable trait (see below). Gradually, commonplaces and shared practices with regard to prayer came to be interpreted in ways that resonated with the faith. However, the practices were not necessarily created by faith; in this way they were not distinctive on their own, but rather they were caught up in a process gradually accommodating them to Christian belief and identity, and thus they became increasingly distinctive.

The practice of prayer was common in the ancient world, and its distinctiveness can be attributed to the religious world views within which it operated. Epictetus' distinction between legitimate and illegitimate prayers is nothing but an extension of his philosophical views (Glenn Wehus). The Greek philosophical orientation in Clement's theology on prayer in *Stromata* 7 has a direct bearing upon his critical attitude to petitionary prayers: "In accordance with reason, then, he (*i.e.* the Gnostic = the true Christian) asks for none of those things in life required for necessary use; being persuaded that God who knows all things, supplies the good with whatever is for their benefit, even though they do not ask" (*Strom.* 7.7). Thus prayer practices are in many ways an index of fundamental convictions held by individuals and groups of people. However, there is mutuality here too: theology informs practices, but gradually the shared practices will also resonate with their corresponding theology.

Mikael Tellbe has demonstrated that this is precisely what happens in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The author "prays his theology." When considering the question of identity formation, this observation is significant, since this coherence between doctrine and prayer content is certainly conducive to the question of identity. The prayers of the author embody his or her theology. Niclas Förster makes the same observation with regard to the *Apolytrosis* of the Marcosians. This was a prayer in which central parts of the Marcosians' teaching appeared; in short, doctrine was transformed into prayer. Gnostic saving knowledge made up the content of this prayer.

Christocentric in Orientation and Focus

In making prayers an important aspect of their religious lives, Christ-believers did not separate themselves from other religious people of their time. Are there any defining traits of the prayers of Christ-believers, then? If any such traits can be identified, we must assume that they likely fuelled the process of identity formation. The distinctive character of Christian prayer is connected intimately to the role attributed to Christ. As Larry Hurtado puts it in this volume, "the integral place of Jesus in the praying of earliest Christians gives

it the character of a novel development of profound significance.”⁸ Christ was seen as a heavenly intercessor for praying believers, a teacher (The Lord’s Prayer) and model for praying (Gethsemane), as well as the co-recipient of their prayers. The role of Jesus in his followers’ prayers was certainly distinctive and is the single most important factor in marking the idiosyncrasy of Christian prayers. Christ fostered bonds within the group while simultaneously distinguishing it from other groups.

Both Larry Hurtado and Craig R. Koester demonstrate that the role given to Jesus in prayers was the most distinct characteristic conducive to shaping Christian identity. Equally important is that this distinctiveness is found in various early Christian circles, and should thus be considered a typical trait. Supportive evidence is also found in Ole Jakob Filtvedt’s essay on how prayers in Hebrews are shaped by Christology. Like Jesus, the believers pray in the midst of suffering while awaiting future perfection. It is also interesting to note that even the prayers found in Egyptian papyri confirm the unique role assigned to Jesus in the prayers of the believers (Anastasia Maravela).

The role of Christ in the prayers also brings into play the importance attributed to myths or common narratives in theories on how an in-group identity is established.⁹ Jesus’ name is an abbreviation for the story of his life; Jesus is both the crucified and the living. In the Book of Revelation, worship, praise and prayers are addressed to the “slaughtered Lamb,” a label encapsulating the story of Christ. The redemptive death of Jesus gives the group its identity, and also forms the focus of the celestial worship and prayers in Revelation (Craig R. Koester). The heavenly worship scenes do not necessarily mirror early Christian services, but they do shape the focus and orientation of those engaged in prayers within the communities, and are essential to the people’s sense of belonging to a fellowship. The Book of Revelation depicts more clearly than any other New Testament writing that Jesus is addressed as “God” in prayer; as God is the recipient of prayers, so too is Jesus.

Koester demonstrates, however, that those in the Book of Revelation who pray in the name of Christ also identify with Israel’s tradition and the prayers of that tradition. The prominence of biblical imageries in the heavenly worship anchors the prayer of the saints within older traditions of prayer, but these are transformed to make the Lamb the dominant focus of devotion and prayer. The envisaged praying community thus consists of people from many nations.

⁸ Page 35 above.

⁹ See Tellbe, “Identity and Prayer” in the present volume; cf. also Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* and Smart, *The World’s Religions*.

Time and Space of Prayer

As demonstrated by Reidar Hvalvik in the present volume, the sources give more attention to fixed hours than to the question of space. An ongoing negotiation with especial regard to time is visible in the fact that even a late text such as *Apostolic Constitutions* (7.24.1–2) follows Jewish prayer customs to pray three times a day. Indirectly, 1 Thess 5:17 addresses this by saying “pray always,” which by necessity implies the dissolution of both time and space. This attitude is motivated by God’s omnipresence, a conviction that was noted even by outsiders: the Christians had no altars, no temples, no recognized images (Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 10.2). This observation gave rise to charges of secrecy (*obscuritas*) and withdrawal from the public.

The visit of Constantine’s mother to the Holy Land in 327 C.E. implies a new situation with regard to place and prayer. In his *Vita Constantini*, Eusebius says that Helena’s visit was motivated by Ps. 132/131:7: “Let us adore in the place where his feet have stood” (42.1).¹⁰ Egeria visited the Holy Land (381–383 C.E.), searching the sites of the Lord *gratia orationis*, “for the sake of prayer” (13.1). In fact, *gratia orationis* later became a technical term for “pilgrimage”; i.e., travelling with the purpose of praying on a sacred spot, in particular spots where the Lord had once walked. Egeria met with many others there who came for the same purpose: *gratia orationis*.

The liturgy of Jerusalem at that time consisted of hymns, readings and prayers precisely at the places where the Lord had once walked: *id est in eo loco* (31.1). Of special interest is 35.4–36.1, where it says that the prayers are adapted according to day and place: *semper et diei et loco aptas*. Egeria mentions in particular the place where the Lord had once prayed (*eodem loco, ubi oravit Dominus*), i.e., Gethsemane, as a proper place for offering prayers.¹¹ In his *Ep.* 58 to Paulinus, Jerome calls upon God’s omnipresence to question the role of the spots where the Lord had once walked in Jerusalem: “nothing is lacking to your faith although you have not seen Jerusalem” (58:4).¹² A crucial text for Jerome’s critique of a place-oriented theology on prayer is Jesus’ dictum about Jerusalem and Garizim in John 4 (*Ep.* 58:3).

Although the Constantinian age brought a new practice, this was not entirely a novelty. Eusebius tells in his *Church History* (6.11) that a certain Alexander from Cappadocia visited Jerusalem around 220 C.E. He went there to pray and investigate the sacred places (εὐχῆς καὶ τῶν τόπων ἱστορίας

¹⁰ Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine* (trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

¹¹ See Egeria: *Itinerarium: Reisebericht mit Auszügen aus Petrus Diakonus De Locis sanctis Die Heiligen Stätten* (trans. Georg Rówekamp and Dietmar Thönnies; Fontes Christiani 20, Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 107–15.

¹² Translation from *NPNF* 6:120.

ἔνεκεν). Nonetheless, it seems that the question of place came to play a much more significant role in the Constantinian age. This implies that we have a pre-Constantine characteristic, which seems from early on to have marked the Christians off from their society, to the extent that it gave rise to accusations of avoiding public appearance, namely the irrelevance of place.

The Orant Comes into Focus

As pointed out in the introduction, the prayer of the early Church came into being as a blending of various perspectives, or within junctions of different traditions, one of which is either the Jewish or Greek background. Jewish traditions represent an obvious foil against which to investigate Christian identity formation. In this study included the Greek philosophical background, since this is often overlooked in studies on prayer. Although the Jewish background is evident in many papers, the article on Epictetus in particular demonstrates a somewhat different perspective. Glenn Wehus' work on this Stoic philosopher pointed to how he paved the way for an attitude that in fact rendered prayer superfluous. Petitions in particular were oriented toward the egoistical, serving the end of the prayer's need.¹³ Prayer became more of a pedagogical tool for developing the self of the orant; subsequently, the prayers uttered were often fictitious in nature. When this philosophical orientation was taken up by Clement in *Stromata 7* and in Origen's *On Prayer*, and came to fruition in Augustine's *Confessions*, the prayer served primarily to interiorize Christian identity (Reidar Aasgaard).

The philosophical orientation brings petitionary prayers into question, in a way that an Old Testament background does not account for. The very fact that the prayer for daily food, materialistic as that prayer is in nature, is so often disputed in the early Church is likely a sign of this. Even Tertullian, who admits that it is a prayer for earthly necessities (*terrenae necessitae*) (*Orat.* 6.1–6), makes the following comment: “Nonetheless, we should understand ‘Give us this day our daily bread’ better in a spiritual sense (*spiritualiter potius intellegamus*).”¹⁴ Clement's ideal prayer is passionless and aimed at developing the perfection of self. Thus, prayer receives a therapeutic effect upon the orant herself. Prayer is a “communication with God” (ὁμιλία

¹³ Epictetus is, of course, standing on the shoulders of predecessors; see P. A. Meijer, “Philosophers, Intellectuals and Religion in Hellas,” in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (ed. H. S. Versnel; Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 2; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 216–63, 232–45.

¹⁴ Brown, *Lord's Prayer*, 153–59 argues that Clement never cites from the Lord's Prayer in his treatise on prayer since he considers it a petitionary prayer, although this prayer appears elsewhere in his writings.

πρὸς τὸν θεόν ἢ εὐχή) (*Strom.* 7.7.39), and not an attempt to persuade or move God; there is no real reciprocity here.¹⁵ Therefore, prayer is not a means of addressing one's desires to God. Versnel's expression "Gebetsegoismus" applies here.¹⁶

Tertullian certainly differs from Clement with regard to philosophical orientation. Yet this legacy is also very much present in his treatise *On Prayer*. He finds biblical texts that enable him to cope with this. Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is fundamentally a petitionary prayer – which is also the reason why many early Christian interpreters find this prayer rather problematic¹⁷ – but nonetheless aimed at bringing Jesus into accordance with God's will (*voluntas Dei*) (*Orat.* 4.5). The primary emphasis is adherence to the divine will. Tertullian thus refutes any egoism in prayer: "we are asking that his will be done in all people (*in omnibus*)" (*Orat.* 4.1), thus turning the orant into an intercessor.¹⁸ We observe how the philosophical orientation instigates the Christian discussion on prayer and, at points, renders a somewhat altered picture from that found in, for instance, the psalms of the Old Testament. The emphasis on the development of the orant himself has a repercussion for the question of identity formation, since prayer is employed here not only to make up for needs, but also to shape the personalities of those engaged in such activity.

When Did the Identity Process Take Its Beginning?

The present investigation provides no answer to how far back the process of identity formation may be traced; neither is this possible if a fixed time is envisaged. Identity formation was a non-unified process, and did not proceed continuously from a single point of departure. The 'answer' to the question of this paragraph refers to a process, complex in nature, diversified according to provenance, gender and status, and with regard to time. Multiple dimensions are involved in this process. A helpful example may be the prayer for vindication (Rev 6:9–11), which pronounces a clear-cut distinction between "us and them," between the saints and the world, but this sharp distinction finds some important nuances in the divine response given in Revelation 9–19; the community is not only set against the world, but is also urged to be a witness of repentance until Christ returns (Craig R. Koester).

¹⁵ See Brown, *Lord's Prayer*, 143–52.

¹⁶ H. S. Versnel, "Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer," in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (ed. H. S. Versnel; *Studies in Greek and Roman Religion* 2; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 1–64, 17–21.

¹⁷ See e.g. Jung-Sik Cha, "Confronting Death: The Story of Gethsemane in Mark 14:32–42 and its Historical Legacy" (PhD diss., Chicago University, 1996).

¹⁸ Thus also Brown, *Lord's Prayer*, 236.

Nonetheless, the present volume was triggered by the current debate on the so-called “parting of the ways” and in particular by those pushing the emergence of Christian identity very late, even to the Constantinian era or more specifically, to the time of Emperor Theodosius I. Our task has been to challenge this, not by a univocal response, but rather by calling upon a neglected factor in this debate. Contributors of the present volume may hold different opinions on how this should be addressed, but all share the conviction that prayers should be seriously considered in the current debates on the emergence of Christian identity. Some observations favour the view that the dynamics of this process took their beginning early.

The Christocentric orientation of early Christian prayer is substantiated in various New Testament writings. A Messianic orientation is, by itself, hardly a demarcation factor in a Jewish setting. In accordance with Luke 11, this may simply mark a group-specified way of praying within Jewish parameters. However, the Christocentric emphasis is so thorough, and the role attributed to Jesus in prayer throughout the New Testament surpasses the concept of giving to him the role of an instructor in how to preach (Hurtado). The Christocentric orientation appears to be a first step, if one such can be identified, from which a later development took its beginning.

Alongside the Christocentrism of the New Testament goes the marginalized position of Christ-believers. A fragile reality is often helped or alleviated with common practices. As pointed out in Mikael Tellbe’s paper on “Identity and Prayer,” conflict is often an essential factor in forming the identity of a group. Conflicts serve to strengthen the relationship within the group, and thus maintain its boundaries, either vis-à-vis other groups within a wider fellowship, or towards outsiders. In any case, conflicts serve to define boundaries.

From about 100 C.E. the Lord’s Prayer has been considered an epitome of the Gospel, and functions within the setting of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We have seen that the role of rituals for identity formation was crucial. A ritual setting for the Lord’s Prayer is not at all obvious in the New Testament, but is clearly visible from the second century onward (*Didache*) (Kvalbein). The basic building blocks that later came to make up the prayer theology found in Patristic texts, where this common prayer was intertwined in rituals, are already present in Paul’s letters. However, as pointed out in this volume, it requires more than building blocks to make the building. The studies presented in this volume suggest that, viewed from the role of prayer, Christian identity, albeit fragile and complex, was taking shape already in the first century. This focus on prayer suggests an early beginning of a formation process for Christian identity. However, many contributions in this book have argued that Christian identity is also open-ended. It seems to move between the past, present and the future. Christ’s saving work in the past is decisive for

believers in the present, while they continue to await the full consummation of who they are. From this perspective, Christian identity is dynamic and continually shifting.

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