

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. Preamble

There is a wide discrepancy between the handling of two central themes, mission and the Supper Narratives of the New Testament, in contemporary scholarship.

The jury appears to be out on the place of mission in New Testament studies. Both Martin Hengel and William J. Larkin Jr. note the seminal importance of Ferdinand Hahn's *Mission In the New Testament*. However, whilst Hengel remarks upon the appearance of a number of subsequent monographs (1983, 48), Larkin notes a comparatively smaller output of work in English (Larkin & Williams 1999, 1-2). He further highlights the tendency within evangelical circles for mission in the New Testament to be addressed primarily by missiologists rather than New Testament scholars. David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* stands out as a major contribution to the analysis of mission in the New Testament and beyond. A recent major contribution has appeared recently in the form of Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*.

The same cannot be said of the Supper Narratives: fresh articles and monographs dealing with these texts, central to so much Christian experience and practice over the centuries, constantly appear, often driven by new trends in criticism. It is tempting to paraphrase Qoheleth: "of making many books there is no end" (*Eccles.* 12:12 [NRSV]). It is thus worth introducing this thesis with an apologia for the production of yet another reflection on these texts, and reasons for adopting a particular critical approach.

1.2. A Less-Trod Path: The Text itself as Evidence for Missionary Theology

Many studies of mission in the New Testament focus on the events portrayed especially within the narrative accounts of the work of the Early Church. Thus, the documents are used as sources to reconstruct a history of the early church, a meta-narrative which lies behind the text. Nuggets of information about the early church's missionary activity are quarried out of these sources.

This study takes a slightly different approach. It is not new, nor is it unique, but it appears to be the less-trod path. On this path, the texts themselves are used as examples of the missionary methods of the earliest Christian generations¹. Texts are not merely witnesses to, but examples of, the missionary activity of the church. Thus the way in which the texts are constructed and how they present a message become the centre of attention. They are not accidental witnesses, sucked dry of possible meaning or value and then discarded. They are intrinsically valuable *in themselves*. This means that the focus of attention is on the texts themselves, not on the meta-narrative they present².

The texts of the New Testament become examples of mission activity for analysis. This is the main point of this thesis.

The Supper Narratives (Mk 14:12-26, Matt 26:17-30, Luke 22:7-23 and 1 Cor 11:17-34) will be the focus for a search for the theological method known in missiological circles as inculturation³.

The focal point of the search is specific texts and their construction rather than sources, editorial activity or even the events described. A full analysis of the vocabulary and ideas used within the Supper Narratives will be needed.

Such an approach stresses the **missionary dimension** of the New Testament rather than its **missionary intention** (Ott 2000a 82-3; Ott 2000b, 90), that is, its missionary nature rather than specific mission tasks. It highlights the essential missionary nature of the Scriptures as part of the activity of the early church:

...the history and theology of earliest Christianity are 'mission history' and 'mission theology'. A church and theology which forgets or denies the missionary sending of believers as messengers of salvation in a world threatened by disaster surrenders its very foundation and in so doing surrenders itself.

(Hengel 1983, 64)

The study at hand thus gains certain urgency. It ceases to be only an historical study, but one which has implications for the current missionary task of the church. For it asks us to re-examine our faith and practice in light of the early church, to ask whether their

methods might not work or be translated into our situation and even, perhaps, help us to recover some of the zeal and passion of those first missionary generations.

It is also wise to say what this less-trod approach will not attempt do. It will not be a work of traditional source criticism, trying to identify the earliest tradition about the last meal Jesus held with his disciples. Studies of this type have reached no firm agreement about the Last Supper itself, an earliest tradition for it, or the words spoken by Jesus himself at that meal. Attempts to discover the pre-history of our Gospel texts will always be thwarted by three features: the lack of agreement in identifying conclusively the development of existing written traditions, our ignorance of the lost strata of written materials, and the irrecoverable oral stages of transmission (cf Ch. 6, pp.262-3, ¶ 6.2.4.4.). However, the current path is not merely a response to the lack of agreement reached by previous studies. It is based on other positive methodological considerations outlined below. These begin with an examination of the Supper Narratives themselves.

1.2.1. Unity and Diversity: The Supper Narratives and the Synoptic Question

The four texts at the centre of this thesis appear linked to each other. They appear to describe a common shared event, the last meal which Jesus shared with his disciples, and there are similarities and difference in their detail and vocabulary. In this they are not unique: parallel passages occur throughout the Gospels⁴.

Fundamental differences in the various accounts of the Last Supper⁵ show that we cannot assume there is an infallible record of that event. Differences even include the order of actions (bread, cup) and the words spoken by Jesus. Rather, we are dealing with four accounts of an event that may, or may not, be recoverable in either part or entirety. The Gospel accounts appear to show different traditions (even within a single Gospel), which have been handled in different ways by the evangelists. Scholarly consensus suggests three trajectories within the New Testament.

The first is found in Mk and Matt and the second in Luke and Paul. The third, the Johannine, is the most puzzling, for it includes no account of the meal itself. The meal exists by implication only, and any theology focussed on the basis stuff of meals, of eating, drinking or the elements of food and drink is recorded elsewhere, noticeably in

John 6. It appears each writer's own *Sitz im Leben* and theological perspective may further have influenced the way in which received traditions have been handled.

Care must also be taken with the dates of the different traditions. Whilst 1 Cor would appear to be the earliest document, it may not hold the earliest account of the Supper Narratives. Many would hold that Mk is an earlier form. This serves as a reminder that the dates of documents themselves are not conclusive evidence for priority. A later document may record an earlier tradition. Each of the works with which we deal may contain elements which can be dated earlier or later in the transmission of the traditions (Conzelmann 1975, 200; Davies and Allison 1997, 466-7; Nolland 1993, 1045-7; Schrage 1991, 9-12). This becomes especially complicated given our ignorance about the period and processes in between the Last Supper and the accounts of it that we possess. Even by the most conservative estimates there is a gap of 26 or so years between the Last Supper and the writing of 1 Cor, and almost 40 between it and Mk. A reluctance to limit putative sources only to documents in our possession and allowances for the role of oral tradition in the process of transmission introduce further complications and a lack of certainty.

This study will focus primarily on the Synoptic traditions and 1 Cor which have clear affinities and overlap both theologically and semantically. Reference will be made to the Johannine, and indeed, non-canonical traditions such as the *Did.* as necessary. They cannot be ignored, for that would ignore the further links between all the traditions and spoil the intention of studying the Supper Narratives in their context rather than in a vacuum. It is noticeable that our focus is on written documents. The limitations which this makes should not be denied. Texts should not be used as if they provide a complete witness to the events of a bygone age, or a means by which an event or ritual may be accurately reconstructed. They are, at best, partial witnesses to such phenomena.

1.2.2. Reconstructing Ritual: The Problem With Texts (1): A Sense of Proportion

This study will not attempt to reconstruct the original Last Supper, nor the rituals of the early church. There are methodological concerns behind this.

The first of these is related to the evidence for such investigative work. Both the Last Supper and the eucharistic practice (if we can use this as a convenient but anachronistic

shorthand) of the early Church were ritual actions. This much is clear even from the lowest common denominator approach. The only evidence that we have examined for the reconstruction of such rites is written documents. Scholars run the risk of over-emphasising the role of such texts at the expense of irretrievable evidence. Northern academic scholarship can do this even when physical evidence of other kinds is extant. Let us consider for a moment the case of the synagogue at Dura - Europos, and its third century CE frescos. The art historian, Annabel Wharton, takes issue with the way in which texts are used to interpret these paintings, summarising her arguments with two important remarks:

The inevitable result of promoting the text is the effacement of the image. In other words, by identifying the text - not the image - as the locus of meaning, signification is literally moved outside the visual representation.

(1994, 9)

and,

This priority of the text is again reasserted; meaning is restricted to the written word. This preoccupation with identifying *the* explanatory text seems to be a peculiarly scholarly form of controlling meaning.

(14)

If such approaches can adversely affect analysis of extant physical remains, how much more can the analysis of invisible ritual practice be affected (cf. Hicks 1959, 7)? Wharton's remarks appear pertinent to the examination of early eucharistic practice. There is a danger that the texts become the ultimate authority, and the role of the rituals and environments which produced or influenced them diminished (Chilton 2002, 184-5). The evidence from Corinth itself warns against this: Paul is arguing for the centrality of a "text" Last Supper in forming contemporary practice. Automatically this raises the question of how much the congregation had shaped its practice in accordance with such traditions: a little, or a lot? Why did Paul need to supply this kind of teaching? Matters are further complicated by the intrusion of canonicity into the debate⁶.

Thus, in the remarks that follow, the textual accounts will be the focus of attention as witnesses to the theological method and interpretation of an event perceived as important by particular writers, rather than attempting reconstructions of either the Last Supper or the rites of the early Church.

1.2.3. Reconstructing Ritual: The Problem With Texts (2): Unity & Diversity

A second question comes out of the ways in which liturgical scholars have used texts like these. Their primary aim has been the reconstruction of the rituals of the Early Church. The texts have been primary witnesses, but meaning has been located in some kind of meta-narrative. Dix did this when he argued for a unitary model of the eucharist constructed from textual references (1946, 208-14; 225-37). He is open to the charge of marginalizing texts and traditions which appear to be at odds with his construction (McGowan 1999, 21-2). Lietzmann's strategy was similar yet different: he identified two different trajectories, based on the then-current distinction of Petrine and Pauline Christianities⁷.

More recent approaches in New Testament studies stressing themes of unity and diversity provide a different pattern in which a number of traditions and trajectories may be recorded (e.g., Dunn 1982). Such an approach, which respects a variety of different traditions, seems especially appropriate given the number of meal traditions, and the diversity of the Supper Narratives themselves.

It also necessitates a departure from the approach of Smith (2003). Whilst acknowledging the importance of his work in identifying the different meal traditions, the way in which all the meal types are subsumed under a generic type, "the banquet tradition", "at one remove" from the actual meals themselves, may highlight their unity at the expense of their diversity. A "meta-event" is constructed which straddles the different meal phenomena under consideration. A corresponding loss of fine or individual detail also arises.

The stress on the origins of the meals within either a specific meal type or a generalised term does not do justice to the significance of each account in its own context. Neither does a reference to the traditions or intentions of the writer which underlie a Supper Narrative⁸. The analysis of possible sources and intentions is of value only to the extent that they give insights about the understanding of each text in its own context. The sources and traditions must not determine the meaning to the detriment of text and context.

1.3. New Testament Scholarship: Methodological Issues

The study of biblical texts has been transformed from the nineteenth century onwards by the phenomenon of Higher Criticism. Space does not permit a description of the variety of different trends which this movement has embraced. For the moment it is enough to note a divergence in this study from two specific aspects of such scholarship.

The first of these is concerned with the History of Religion School and related movements, which raises a number of ideological considerations, the second centres on Form Criticism, particularly its attitude to culture. A more positive view is taken of Redaction criticism, but particular concerns about the relationships between the Supper Narratives need to be spelled out.

1.3.1. The “History Of Religion” Approach: Culture and Ideology

Inasmuch as this study depends on examining the New Testament in its context, there is much common ground between the material it will discuss and the researches of the History of Religion School. Both involve contextual analysis. The difference comes in the conclusions reached. For the History of Religion approach tended to make connections between the New Testament and other theological materials, to claim certain influences (usually negative) and then criticise pericopes so “influenced” as corrupt and unreliable witnesses⁹. I have argued elsewhere that such an approach does not respect the complexity of the issues: materials, symbols and claims can be used to subvert the faith tradition that produced them. Nor is it the case that such material must automatically contaminate the Christian document(s) and theology in which they are found (Fitzgerald 2001, 244; King 2001). Thus whilst drawing on the rich scholarship which formed the History of Religion school, their (often ideological) conclusions, which appear founded on controversial views of the relationship between religious traditions, will not necessarily be accepted¹⁰.

Two short examples quoted by Martin Hengel, at the beginning of his study, *The Son of God*, show how New Testament critics have taken part in such enterprises. Hengel argues that the movement from Jesus to the Christological hymn of Phil 2, “the apotheosis of the crucified Jesus” (1986, 2), marked an unparalleled doctrinal

development. In the preparation of his study, he notes that different scholars attribute this development to different cultural factors. For Harnack,

under the influence of Messianic dogmas, and led by the impression which Christ made, Paul became the author of the speculative idea that not only was God in Christ, but that Christ was possessed of a peculiar nature of a heavenly kind ...

(Harnack 1901,199; cf. Hengel 1986, 3)

For Harnack, the influence came from Judaism, “Messianic dogmas”. Jewish scholars thought otherwise:

Christ has become a supernatural being and approximates to Gnostic heavenly beings...This heavenly Christ seems to have wholly absorbed the earthly Jesus into himself...The myth clearly represented here points to pagan religious spheres.

(Schoeps 1974, 153; cf. Hengel 1986, 5)

Both adopt a negative role about the influence of a particular culture (its theology or mythology) on the doctrine. We should note that this may not be a blanket condemnation of the role of all cultures, but only perhaps of a particular culture in a particular doctrinal development. The critical tones may, indeed, say more about the commentator than the value of the culture *per se*. Negative opinions can also inform the attitude taken to particular texts as well as to cultures, and thus may distort arguments based on them¹¹. Both writers also reveal ideological assumptions which may distort the reading of texts. The first of these refer to how Jewish and Graeco-Roman cultures are viewed, the second to the values which the critic then bases on those assumptions.

1.3.2. Ideological Assumptions (1): The Context of the New Testament

For the immediate purposes of our study we can note that there is interplay of culture and the “Jesus” event in the descriptions of Paul’s theological method given by both Harnack and Schoeps. Yet we cannot restrict our investigations to an interplay between one event and one culture. The environment which produced the New Testament was one in which a wide variety of different cultures exerted different degrees of influence. It might be tempting to think that early church doctrine sprang fully formed from a Jewish background, and that inculturation as a theological method only appears when that core of belief interacts with Graeco-Roman culture¹².

The history of the eastern Mediterranean warns against such a division. Archaeological finds in Palestine point to firm contacts between the Greek and Semitic worlds from the 6th century BCE, and to continuous trading links from that period on¹³. Burkert details the interplay between Greek and Semitic religious traditions from 800 BCE onwards (especially on Cyprus), noting the difficulty of disentangling the lines of historical influence (2000, 51-53)¹⁴. The Hellenistic period, especially from the period of Alexander the Great in the latter fourth century BCE, saw Greek hegemony over the eastern Mediterranean. Links between Palestine and the Diaspora would have further aided the use of Greek. By the third century BCE, letters like those of Tobias to Apollonius indicate the use of Greek within some strata of Palestinian society (Hengel 1991a, 59). This was followed by numerous cultural activities by the mid second century (1 Macc 1:11-15): architecture, sports, trade and, above all, language and literature. By the first century CE the picture was further complicated by the inclusion of Roman cultural elements: "There is as much Romanitas in Gerasa as there is Hellenism" (Alexander 2001, 71).

Despite this history, many classical and biblical scholars have attempted, in a variety of ways, to set up a dualism between Hellenism and Judaism ripe for criticism:

...a picture emerges of two essentially monadic cultures that were destined to collide like billiard balls, and from whose collision, in Hegelian fashion, European civilisation was to emerge....In fact, it is now clear from archaeology that all the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East were in constant contact and interchange at both the material and intellectual levels from earliest antiquity.

(Alexander 2001, 69)

Barr's conclusions are similar to those of Alexander. Working from a linguistic rather than an archaeological basis, he shows that the contrast commonly made between Hebrew and Hellenistic thought does not hold up under scrutiny (Barr 1961, 8-20). This does not mean that no comment can be made on the contact between the cultures: only dualism is being rejected. Such encounters can manifest themselves in three ways:

First is cultural-religious capitulation...

Second, one might make a stand, refuse to compromise, and try to fight off the alien culture...

Third, one may recognize that the heathen must be onto something or they would not be so successful, so one selectively adopts and adapts aspects of the enemy to use against him.

(Price 2002, 324-5)

All three responses allow for cultural assimilation, no matter what their stated intent. The Maccabean revolt appears to exemplify the second approach. It is still possible to say that the Maccabean revolt was about power, political liberty and religious freedom. Yet, it was also about cultural assimilation. It raised the question of how Greek a true Jew could be. It begged a situation in which a foreign culture was a threat to Jewish identity. However, it also showed that even isolationist groups, consciously or unconsciously, were touched or influenced by foreign cultural values at even basic levels¹⁵.

It is highly likely that traces of Graeco-Roman as well as Jewish cultural influence may be found in the earliest strata of Christian meal traditions given that Greek meal traditions appear to have infiltrated Jewish practice. Steyn (1957, 13-44) shows that the shape of the Passover meal may have been influenced by the Greek symposium meal (see also Neyrey 1996, 4). Meal traditions from both cultural groupings are best outlined before the analysis of the traditions themselves to avoid any lacunae¹⁶.

The first stage in examining such claims must be a clear description of contemporary practices themselves. The search for causal cultural influences is secondary, and more open to error¹⁷. Similarities may be noted, but this should not demand an automatic causal connection. Where possible such identifications will be made cautiously. Burkert notes that it is often difficult to disentangle lines of historical influence in ancient religion (2000, 51). The variety of rituals from different cultures found in the eastern Mediterranean of the New Testament period suggest similar caution should be taken in analysing early Christian meal traditions.

Detailed analysis of the context of the New Testament can only confirm this, and force us to examine the relationship between different cultures. For, if we look at the environment of the early Christian writers we find that it would be difficult to describe it as purely Jewish, Greek, or Roman. Scholars may argue, but it is not so much about whether this interplay happened, as the extent to which it occurred¹⁸. Moreover, the question of the kind of influence (positive, negative or neutral) cannot be restricted to

one or the other. All are possible, and all must be considered before a conclusion is drawn.

Part of any detailed analysis must involve a careful use of evidence on the basis of date and location. We must not compress religious phenomena for different periods and locations together haphazardly (Price 1980, 29). Failure to consider both the location and date of a particular text may lead to false inferences being derived. The American social commentator, Camille Paglia, who poured scorn on Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, has savagely critiqued scholarship which does not maintain such close scrutiny:

It is clear he has never pondered the most basic questions of historicizing about Athens, which requires minute attention to enormously rapid cultural changes occurring over a century. Compare, for example, the anxiety-provoking transformations in Renaissance Italy from 1500 to 1525, in Shakespeare's England from 1590 to 1610, and in America from 1915 to 1925 or from 1960 to 1967. Halperin jumps around amateurishly from the fifth century (whose many phases he does not see) to the middle or late fourth century, back to the fifth, then to the early sixth, then to the late fourth or early third, and back to the late sixth, all of which is funnelled, like gravel pouring off a truck, into conclusions about "classical" Athenian attitudes.

(1992, 189; cf. Parker 1983, 15-6)¹⁹

Such comments are equally, if not more, applicable to New Testament scholars when considering cross-references between Greek literature and the New Testament. Care must be taken not to conflate different regions and eras thus distorting the relationship between the writings and the cultural epochs that produced them and building up a false picture of the New Testament and its relationship to context²⁰.

1.3.3. Ideological Assumptions (2): Interpreting Contexts

Such cultural and temporal diversity raises questions about value judgements made about elements which compose a theology. This manifests itself particularly in analyses which explicitly or implicitly touch upon issues of "orthodoxy". Particular elements of belief are considered to be orthodox or unorthodox, positive or negative, in their contribution to theological formulations. We can see hints of this, for example, in the values which some commentators place on Mystery influence on the Supper Narratives.

Such influences may be considered a corrupting, neutral or beneficial influence. Yet such values are often based on two types of criteria that are out of place.

The first are anachronisms, usually based on Christian dogma of a different period. This is problematic because the value of a text or tradition is judged according to a set of beliefs from a different era (Beck 2000, 174). Ultimately, it is these beliefs that form the “control” by which “orthodoxy” is evaluated and the texts or concepts themselves lose value except to the extent to which they conform to the control. The handling of eucharistic texts from the New Testament in the doctrinal controversies of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation provide a myriad of examples. This is not ultimately to set the boundaries of contemporary or later orthodoxy, or to deny the possibility of any orthodoxy. It merely questions the validity of such orthodoxy in assessing the value of a text from a different period in its own right. The question becomes more important when it is seen how attitudes to concepts like “sacramentalism” may be anachronistically imported and thus warp the reading of the text in its own context.

This concern extends even to the use of terms such as “New Testament” and “Old Testament”. Within the wide spectrum of “New Testament studies” there remains a lively debate over the relationship between the canonical and non-canonical texts in the study of Christian origins. There are roughly three approaches, (1) that the non-canonical sources do not assist in this task, (2) that non-canonical texts may supplement canonical writings, and (3) that both sets of writing are of equal value (Theissen & Merz 1998, 18). As the first of these two options both appear to work with criteria of orthodoxy or value judgements which are set by later orthodoxies, this study will adopt the third option. Nevertheless, there is a convenient shorthand in using terms such as “Old Testament”, “New Testament”, “Apocrypha” and “Pseudepigrapha”. When used, these are intended as purely descriptive terms (albeit formulated at later dates) for these collections of writings. They should not be read as implying that the first two are more “orthodox”, “better”, or provide a benchmark or control by which the other collections are evaluated.

The second sees “orthodoxy” based on some criterion within Judaism. This will be seen most clearly in the discussion about “drinking blood” (Ch. 7, pp.316-38, ¶ 7.3). Yet our

research must prompt us to consider whether such orthodoxy is not itself a further example of anachronism or an over-simplification of Judaism (cf. Neusner & Chilton 1995, 12-17; 20-2; 48-3). We will see that different Jewish sects disagreed with each other over key as well as peripheral issues: the validity of the Temple priesthood, the nature of purity (Ravid 2002, 69-80) and Messianic expectations, to name but three topics, all reveal major differences of opinion which must raise doubts about a Jewish “orthodoxy” in the Second Temple Period.

“Orthodoxy” is little used in the description of Graeco-Roman religion, perhaps because of its polytheistic and syncretistic nature, perhaps because few scholars have such a strong personal attachment to its creeds. Here the analysis faces a related, but different, problem. Treatments of the Mystery Religions give examples of two distorting phenomena. The first is that a particular cult may contain a number of variations and defy a standard description. A Mystery cult may be presented as a clearly identifiable phenomenon in different times and places. This was not necessarily the case. The cult of Dionysus was so varied in its different forms at different times that its manifestations might defy even a common identity (Beck 2000, 172). The second is related to this observation. If common identity cannot be established in practice related to one deity, it will not be possible for any particular cult to be taken as typical of the Mysteries as a whole. Thus approaches like those of J.Z. Smith which would make the Attis cult paradigmatic of Mystery Religions as a whole must be treated with caution (Beck 2000, 173-4).

If such methods are put to one side, a different method for assessing the relative values and meanings of particular texts is needed.

1.3.4. Studying without “Orthodoxy”: Family Resemblances & Re-accentuation

The use of any “orthodoxy” as a control runs the danger of importing anachronisms and irrelevant value judgments into the analysis of any text. This phenomenon can be seen in cultural anthropology (Ch.2, pp.33-5, ¶2.2.2-3). However, modern cultural anthropology has indicated that there are ways in which evaluations can be made which avoid both problems, particularly by the use of phenomenological rather than ideological approaches.

1.3.4.1. "Orthodoxy"

In modern philosophical terms, a system which is not dependent on "orthodoxy" of some kind appears to shun metaphysical ideals. This is seen in the development of the analysis of culture. Systems which use a criterion of orthodoxy may be likened to scholarship like that of Frazer which evaluated culture on the basis of a set of metaphysical values. Such theories were criticised by Wittgenstein for their idealism (Kerr 1986, 159)²¹.

1.3.4.2. "Family Resemblances"

In their place, Wittgenstein posited a non-idealistic system in which "family resemblances" are used to assess data. These "family resemblances" are also helpful for the task ahead. They are useful tools for assessing class membership, similarity and difference. They provide a tool for assessing whether particular phenomena can be classed together. However, whilst Wittgenstein's theory has been viewed by some as unsatisfactory, a less problematic sociological interpretation is possible (Hunter 1985, 53-60). In this,

It is philosophically preferable to regard the family resemblance ideal ...as claiming that, having determined in other ways which objects belong to a given class, we will not necessarily find that they share one or more features, but will generally find that there is the kind of network of resemblances that there is often among the members of a family: A and B have similar eyes, B and C similar chins, A and C similar mannerisms, while perhaps D resembles B only in some way in which B resembles no other family members, and therefore there is no resemblance between A and D.

(59)

Thus, members of the same class need not share one resemblance, but rather share *significant resemblances* among them. A shared resemblance, it must also be noted, does not necessarily mean that two objects belong to the same class (54). Caution is needed before phenomena are grouped together or even claimed to depend on each other: such claims may not be sustainable merely on the grounds of resemblance²².

Further, John Barton's work has further shown the value of "family resemblance" in analysing Biblical texts. These family resemblances do not just cover the likenesses between the different texts of the Old Testament, but extend to the shared assumptions which underpin them. Thus, even texts which appear to be in disagreement may actually

share family likenesses to the extent that they work from common assumptions. An investigation of this type may also involve searching for beliefs which explain the resemblances (Barton 1983, 94-6). For our purposes, the use of family resemblances will involve examination not just of details within the Supper Narratives, but also of the ideas that lie behind them.

1.3.4.3. “Mapping” Family Resemblances

In subsequent chapters, a methodology close to Hunter’s ideal is to be followed. A number of phenomena from different cultures and context will be examined under three headings: meals, sacrifice and eschatology. Particular phenomena will be seen to belong, or not, to these categories. We might say that the phenomena will be “mapped” against them in the following way:



Figure 1

“Family resemblances” would appear a useful way to assess whether particular phenomena or beliefs may appear in one or more of the categories.

1.3.4.4. “Mapping” and Generalisations

This does however raise a major problem: how much can one generalise about any group of related phenomena? At what point does generalisation obscure distinctiveness?

As Bryan Wilson pointed out an ideal type is not some box into which the phenomenon must be neatly dropped. If it were, then one might be justified in either whittling away the rough edges of each religion or of making the box big and shapeless enough for all to fit. But an ideal type is a yardstick abstracted from the admittedly diverse phenomena which represents a general family resemblance without demanding or implying any absolute or comprehensive conformity. Indeed the very lack of conformity to the type by a particular

Mystery religion would serve as a promising point of departure for understanding its special uniqueness.

In the same way, Smith seems unwilling to admit the viability of an ideal type of the dying-and-rising god mytheme. If the various myths of Osiris, Attis Adonis et al. do not all conform to type exactly, then they are not sufficiently alike to fit into the same box, so let's throw out the box. Without everything in common, he sees nothing in common.

(Price:1996, np)

The death of Christ highlights the issues of ideal types and non-conformity. The divinity of Christ and his death on the Cross would have been a culturally difficult combination for a Greek audience: a combination of, to normal thought, mutually exclusive ideas (Burkert 2000, 201) ²³. Over-simple explanations of the “death of the god” can hide qualitative differences (Ch. 5, pp.241-2, fn.16). Equally, concentration on differences may obscure similarities or family resemblances. The demand for exact correspondences will inevitably end up in the denial of similarities between types, simply because they do not correspond exactly. However, generalities or family resemblances do show that there may be similarities between various types, and that these might manifest themselves to some extent in similarities in their component parts. Attention should be directed not just to larger constructs, but also to their constituent elements.

1.3.4.5. Family Resemblances and Genealogy

To deny all but exact parallels sets aside common elements or features which may be expressed in different ways. Ignoring details leaves open accusations of vagueness and lack of precision. It would appear that the use of analogies and “family resemblances” may be helpful, combined with a willingness to accept such conclusions as provisional. Yet even here, caution must be re-iterated, as “analogy is not genealogy” (Cahill 2002, np)²⁴.

Manifestations of Judaism and Christianity can be seen to exhibit resemblances without being directly linked:

Thus Christianity as we know it and Judaism as we know it never in fact separated from one another in the manner of say Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity in the eleventh century. Rather each is a finally dominant form at the end of its own branch of the tree of religious evolution. I am denying what evolutionists deny when they correct the popular misconception that humans descended from apes: no, the two are related, but not directly. They merely share remote evolutionary ancestors.

(Price 2002, 330)

Whilst there may be similarities or analogies between different phenomena, dependence, or “genealogy” is much more difficult to prove. Yet similar phenomena may be mapped, even if they appear as parts of complete systems which are different. For common elements may, in fact, appear in different systems providing different functions. Anthropologists have identified two techniques in which common constituent elements are used thus: “re-accentuation” and “*bricolage*”.

1.3.4.6. Mapping without Genealogy: “Re-accentuation”

Newsom’s work on identity at Qumran provides an introit to “re-accentuation” through her description of how the sectarians re-worked traditional elements into a new worldview:

In developing its repertoire of terms and images of self-representation the Qumran community drew on highly traditional languages of the self, grounded in the familiar idioms of prayer and worship, wisdom instruction, cultic language, and much more.

(Newsom 2001, 6)

She further articulates this using Bakhtin’s concept of “re-accentuation”, originally formulated in literary theory in which speakers may invest words with fresh accents for their own purposes (Bialostosky 1989, 220-1; Booker & Juraga 1995, 14-5). Within Bakhtin’s theory of language, none of the elements which constitute an act of communication (object, speaker, listener, utterance, intertext and language) are static, but always open to change (Halasek 1999, 24). Newsom has appropriated this theory to describe the use of theological vocabulary in the following way:

Ordinary words, words traditionally important for self-representation, such as ‘righteousness’ or ‘spirit’, may be given a slightly different nuance by being associated with a different range of terms or employed in unusual constructions...

The presence of traditional elements is extremely important. They allow a person entry into the discourse because of their familiarity and the value attached to them. In the re-accentuation of terms, however, and in the new utterance that is created out of those traditional elements, it is possible to create the sense that one is only now understanding the true meaning of words that had long been familiar and important. The subject who is called into being is also experienced as at once familiar and new, a self that is recognizable but truly known for the first time.

(2001, 6-7)

A dynamic or developmental understanding of concepts and practices such as this may be as helpful as the more static genealogical pattern in making connections between the different phenomena which will be examined in the Supper narratives.

These remarks equally provide a useful warning against too easily assuming a direct relationship between religious phenomena in a complex melange of faiths, cults, sects, and schools of the ancient Mediterranean. The use of a term or symbol need not demand a wholesale acceptance of its previous meaning or significance.

1.3.4.7. Mapping without “Genealogy”: *Bricolage*

Marilyn Legge has described a further technique which utilises traditional materials and concepts to reach new conclusions as *bricolage*:

The art of using what is at hand, odd materials for purposes other than intended, to create something useful and distinct to meet a yearning or need. This is an accessible practice often found where people aim to survive against the odds.

(1997, 6)

Originally developed as an anthropological term, *bricolage* appears in the writings of Levi-Strauss (1996, 16-22). For Levi-Strauss, the *bricoleur*'s work is always constrained by the meaning of the elements used; yet every selection of elements in a structure will demand its complete re-organisation. The *bricoleur*'s work is situational and focussed on social function (Sussman 1989, 134). *Bricolage* works with signs, imagination and intuition rather than abstract scientific concepts (Mohanram 1999, 8) and is contrasted with the ratiocination of the “engineer” or “scientist”, who works primarily with concepts or abstracts²⁵.

Bricoleurs use concepts and practices from different cultures to construct their beliefs and lifestyle (Draper 2003, 107). Their adaptation of traditional or received elements may lead to new constructs in which the constituent elements are re-arranged in novel ways. In many ways this process is similar to re-accentuation, but it highlights the fact that developments may appear to represent a break from, rather than a continuation of, the received tradition.

Both re-accentuation and *bricolage* explain how traditional elements may gain fresh interpretation or significance, and how elements may be used in ways which appear

radically different. They thus allow a pattern of resemblances to be seen, even between constructs which appear different or exclusive.

1.3.5. *Form Criticism & The Criterion of Dissimilarity*

The second criticism concerns one of the “tools” (Hooker 1972, 570-81; Mascall 1984, 87-97; Allison 1998, 4-5; 8-9; 20) of Form Criticism. This is the “criterion of dissimilarity”. The criterion of dissimilarity is one of the tools developed by form critics in their examination of the New Testament. It has endured, but is not without its critics (Theissen & Merz 1998, 115-118). Put crudely, it is the idea that any suggestion of commonality between a saying of Jesus and contemporary Judaism or the *Sitz im Leben* of the early church renders that saying inauthentic. It also appears to be over-optimistic:

We just do not know enough about first century Judaism or early Christianity to make the criterion very reliable. Why pretend to prove a negative? I remember W.D. Davies once advising me never to use the word *unique* in connection with Jesus. His reason was very simple: How can we claim anything to be without parallel when so little is known about antiquity?

(Allison 1998, 5)

Mascall notes that the criterion also reveals a monumental degree of skepticism, demanding that no statement made by Jesus can be considered authentic unless it was inconsistent with both Judaism and the teaching of the early church (Mascall 1984, 88). This effectively rips him out of his cultural context: Jesus becomes a Jew who cannot speak in the terms of his own culture, nor have guessed what might befall the first Christian generation. Such an approach appears wrong-headed. What is more likely than that Jesus the Jew would have echoed Jewish ideas and idioms in his thoughts and actions (cf. Ch.1, p. 30, fn.26)?

To take Jesus out of his culture is damaging in two ways. First, it asks how anyone (i.e., any listener) who was so culturally conditioned could have understood him. This is the practical question of communication.

The second refers to Christology. What does it say about the humanity of Jesus if he is deprived of the cultural dimension which is such an essential part of being human? The

criterion demands the removal of cultural accretions and a completely different role for culture in the theological process.

The method which we will outline reaches exactly the opposite conclusion. Sayings or actions are shaped by their context and the culture which produces them. Pushed to a conclusion, the results of our approach would be more likely to indicate that the lack of any cultural overlap between a saying or action of Jesus would be a stronger sign of inauthenticity than any signs of Judaism, Hellenism or the Early Church. Given the inextricable bond between Gospel and culture posited by such thinking, the validity of the criterion of dissimilarity must be brought into question. If this is right, there can be no place for a tool which will take Jesus out of his world. Whilst it might be argued that the tool is still useful for deciding whether a saying was really coined by the early church, again caution must be introduced. Partly, because the scholar must decide whether Jesus could anticipate what would happen, but more because there are shared cultural concerns, and the sharing of a culture is not in itself grounds for rejection.

A respect for the role of culture in shaping human identity raises queries about the value of the criterion of dissimilarity, and logically leads those who adopt it to question their use of the tool. By implication it also is suspicious of any description of Jesus which would seek to extract him from the context of first century Palestine, or de-historicise and universalise him. Rather, Christ in his context must speak to Christians in theirs.

1.3.6. Redaction Criticism and The Relationship between the Texts.

The search for inculturation in the Supper Narratives is aligned strongly with Redaction Criticism. Here, the role of the redactor(s) or editor(s) of the final text is put under scrutiny. In many respects, this was a reaction to Form Criticism which had tended to view the writers of the text under consideration as compilers or editors, and consequently had diminished their creative contribution to the final form of the texts (Collins 1983, 197-9). Thus, examination of a text focuses on how Mark, Matthew, Luke and Paul have constructed their individual Supper Narratives. Yet this does not happen in isolation from the previous methodologies. Redaction criticism draws on insights from source and form criticism (Hayes and Holladay 1983, 94). Yet this brings its own particular problems.

Part of the task of redaction criticism is to consider how particular writers might use pericopes in different ways to make different points. The first problem that this raises is whether an original common source can be identified. Simple answers may not necessarily be correct. There is no guarantee that the earliest text may contain the earliest tradition. It is always possible that a later work may preserve an earlier tradition. For example, in relation to the Supper Narratives, 1 Cor might be the earliest text, but there is a strong possibility that Mark has preserved earlier traditions (cf. Ch. 1, p.4. , ¶ 1.2.1.).

A second problem concerns the length of a passage or pericope: it should not be assumed that the shortest account is the earliest. It would be easy to jump to the conclusion that the Ransom logion has been incorporated by Luke into a longer reworking of Jesus' words at the Last Supper, since it is found there in none of Mark, Matt or 1 Cor. However, a strong case can be made for Luke's preservation of an early piece of tradition in its original location (cf. Ch. 7, p. 346, ¶ 7.5.2.)

A third concern is whether lines of transmission can be traced: that say that X has used or altered Y" may be deeply problematic and beg a number of issues. That the Synoptic Problem is still open to vigorous debate shows the enduring nature of the problem and that no conclusive solution has yet been found (see Ch.1, p. 27, fn. 4). The problem is too complex to solve here, but does prompt the following practical assumptions. This thesis will work on the basis of Markan Priority over Matt and Luke. To that extent, it will be possible to use terminology such as "Matt has edited Mk...". However, greater skepticism will be reserved for the relationship between Matt and Luke. Similarly, references to *Quelle* (Q) will be treated with caution. As such, wherever possible terminology which assumes a particular relationship will be avoided, and language which explains their differences without assuming a causal or temporal relationship will be adopted.

1.3.7. Methodological Issues: A Summary

The method adopted in the following research is based on the following considerations:

- Cultures of the NT period are not discrete, neither are they uniform.
- Research is not driven by ideology or anachronistic “orthodoxies”, including scholarly consensus.
- Scholarly tools which would take the texts out of context are avoided (e.g., criterion of dissimilarity)²⁶.
- Tools such as “family resemblances”, “re-accentuation” and *bricolage* provide means to “map” the relationship between different types and their components.
- The “mapping” of such phenomena is by analogy rather than genealogy.

1.4. The Shape of This Thesis

With these methodological concerns noted, let us return to our main focus. This study proposes to examine whether the missionary theological method of inculturation can be discerned in the Supper Narratives found in the Synoptic Gospels and 1 Cor. This involves analysing these pericopae for traces of such a practice. The strategy to be adopted involves a number of distinct phases: definitions, context and close exegesis.

1.4.1. Chapter 2: What is “Inculturation”?

This chapter provides a definition of inculturation, the stated object of the research. This involves giving definitions of concepts which underpin it. “Culture” and its role in theology are important because they inform the understanding of “inculturation”. This chapter also includes an historical dimension which shows the presence of this particular theological method in the history of the church, even if the term itself is coined comparatively recently.

1.4.2. Analysing the Context of the Supper Narratives

The next phase concerns the context from which accounts of the Last Supper in the Synoptic Gospels (Mk 14:12-26, Matt 26:17-30 and Luke 22:7-23) and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34) arose. This context is examined thematically.

In his *The Problem of the Lord's Supper*, Schweitzer challenged the commonly held assumption of his time that the meaning of the Lord's Supper and Last Supper could be found either in the words of institution (presentation) or in the act of sharing (partaking) (1982, 61). His view was based on a common sense understanding of the scene which came to him whilst watching the Passion Play at Oberammergau. It was not logical that the disciples would eat and drink, whilst waiting for Jesus to interpret what they were doing.

How absurd for twelve men to sit with bits of bread in their hand or a cup poised,
waiting for Jesus to say the interpretative words!

(1982, 20)

In reaction to this, he placed the locus of understanding and interpretation firmly in the eschatological words of Jesus and their significance²⁷. His criticism of presentation and partaking is based on the assumption that the words of institution *follow* the acts of distribution. If this is the case, it surely applies equally to his own eschatological interpretation, for the eschatological saying (Mk 14:25) also follows the action.

Schweitzer considered the Supper Narratives using four themes: the meal as Passover, the meal as “presentation” (where interest lies chiefly in the significance of Jesus’ words), the meal as “partaking” (where the act of eating is crucial), and the meal as eschatological event. Schweitzer’s stress on the eschatological dimension also demanded that it stood in splendid isolation and could not be mixed with either ideas of either presentation or partaking. Didn’t this actually create a false problem? If presentation, partaking and eschatology can be shown to share common features and aims, there is no reason for them to be presented as mutually exclusive. It will not be necessary to choose between them, but rather to trace shifts in emphasis. It may even be the case that one, or more, may be subsumed into another.

This thesis works, with some modifications, through the four. The categories of “meal” (Ch. 3), “sacrifice” (Ch. 4) and “eschatology” (Ch. 5) are all described. For convenience, the categories are examined under three headings: Graeco-Roman, Judaic and Early Christian. These divisions, in light of previous remarks, do not suggest that these categories or headings are discrete. Rather, Magesa’s sentiments are shared:

For the sake of clarity, I have grouped these works according to themes. These are arbitrary; many of the ideas intertwine and inter-relate.

(2004, 171)

1.4.2.1. Chapter 3: Meal Traditions in the New Testament Period

The analysis of meal traditions in Ch. 3 covers a number of areas. It considers meals at home, in public meetings and in specifically religious contexts. The emphasis of this chapter is primarily to describe the shapes of the meals, the actions and roles undertaken by those who participated. In its scope, it corresponds roughly to Schweitzer's concern with the Passover, that is, with the identification of meal types²⁸.

1.4.2.2. Chapter 4: Body, Blood, Sacrifice and Communion²⁹

Ch. 4 picks up a point which arises in Ch. 3. Some meal types have a religious significance. Such meals often follow a sacrificial act. Thus, it becomes necessary to examine themes connected with sacrifice. A number of phenomena need to be further described as the theme of sacrifice is opened up. The first is the symbolism of particular elements, such as "blood", the second, of particular aims such as "communion", the third, of concepts such as "sacrament". If Schweitzer's schema is followed, these issues refer to what he calls "partaking" and "presentation".

1.4.2.3. Chapter 5: Eschatology in the New Testament Period

The significance of sacrificial activity itself opens up a further area for discussion. Many rites have a goal of giving benefits. These benefits may include ideas such as life after death, or particular rewards. In some cases, aims such as "communion" have an eschatological dimension, as they involve the inclusion of meal participants in concepts such as the "Kingdom of God". This covers material similar to Schweitzer's "eschatology". His study marked a turning point in studies of these narratives. Since his examination of the texts, which has to be culled from his three books, *The Problem of the Lord's Supper*, *The Mystery of the Kingdom*, and *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, any study of the Supper traditions has had to include comment on their eschatological dimension (Reumann in Schweitzer 1982, 36).

1.4.3. Recapitulation

Ch.s 3-5 are followed by a short recapitulation which summarises how the three different categories (meal, sacrifice, eschatology) relate to each other, and suggests

how data retrieved from the Supper Narratives might be mapped. It provides a “hinge” before the focus shifts towards the Supper Narratives themselves.

1.4.4. Detailed Analysis of the Supper Narratives

In Ch.s 6-8 the Supper Narratives are examined in detail: a close exegesis of the texts. The thematic approach is maintained, based on the wordings of the texts. Thus “parallel” verses are studied in tandem. Again, distinctions are made which seem arbitrary but also appear to provide a way of managing a complex set of data. The distinctions break this exegetical section into three chapters.

1.4.4.1. Chapter 6: Actions, Gestures and the Supper Narratives

Ch. 6 focusses on the actions recorded in the Supper Narratives. These actions provide the basic “stuff” of the Supper, gestures related to bread and a cup. Resemblances to the meal traditions of the age, primarily related to Ch. 3, are noted. Yet it becomes obvious that the actions themselves are not a finished product. They are, in turn, given specific interpretations.

1.4.4.2. Chapter 7: Sayings and the Supper Narratives

The words connected to the elements and the meal in general are researched in Ch. 7. They give a much more precise focus to the ways in which the different New Testament writers interpreted the elements and gestures of the meal. These interpretations were not always comfortable. The use of blood, in particular, raises a number of problems about cultural location and dislocation.

It must be admitted that the division of actions and words does violence to the narratives, for these elements are meant to go together. However, this appears to be the best way to manage the material and minimise the repetition which would occur if the different texts were to be considered one by one. The conclusions reached at the end of this thesis will draw together the material that is divided at this point.

1.4.4.3. Chapter 8: The Pauline “Lord’s Supper”

Ch. 8 deals specifically with the Pauline interpretation of the meal in 1 Cor 11. Paul’s account is different from the Gospels. A historical narrative is being set in a specific pastoral context, and is presented as part of the solution to a particular problem. This

material, which then includes Paul's rationale for the eucharist, is a qualitatively different type of speech or interpretation and merits examination on its own.

1.4.5. Chapter 9: Summary of Findings

Ch. 9 provides a conclusion in which the different themes are drawn together, and the Narratives are mapped against the meal, sacrificial and eschatological phenomena which have been adopted and adapted by the Synoptic writers and Paul. From these studies, we then attempt to draw conclusions about whether the Synoptic writers and Paul used inculturation, and examine whether these contain any lessons for contemporary Christians.

Such lessons may impinge both on eucharistic practice and the use of inculturation in modern situations. It is not that the methods of the New Testament writers must be mimicked or repeated. Their world is not our world. However, their attempts to earth the central act of Christian worship enjoined on his disciples by Christ in their own contexts may provide precedents and pointers for those who seek to connect this act of worship with the cultural and religious needs of people in different times and places today. Not only that, the fact that such approaches are used by the New Testament writers may give a "Scriptural" authority for theological enterprises which might be considered modern, dangerous or even un-Christian.

Notes

1 Flemming (2002) and King (2001) are examples of this approach.

2 G. Nicolson has made a similar point. In his *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema*, he provides helpful insights based on a survey of recent studies of the Fourth Gospel. In noting attempts by scholars to locate the meaning of the Gospel in either source materials or redactional activity, he stresses that the text should be the correct point of departure for such a search (Nicolson 1983, 13-18; for a similar approach, see also Schottroff 2000, 57; Smith 1987, 617). See also Chilton 1992, 113-4.

3 Inculturation will be defined fully in Ch. 2. Inculturation, or related terms such as contextual theology are not, however, taken as equivalents of missiology (Kim 2004, 39).

4 The Synoptic Problem (summary in Carlson 1996-2003) suggests an inter-relationship between Mk, Matt and Luke. The majority of scholars would place Mk as the first Gospel (Marcan Priority), though arguments are still made for Matthean Priority, e.g., the reworking of the Griesbach hypothesis (Farmer 1982, 93-132). Occasionally, the priority of *John* has been asserted (Berger 1997; Matson 2004, 88-98; Robinson 1985; Wallace 1990, 179, fn.10). Whilst this last suggestion has not achieved mainstream acceptance, earlier work in Robinson 1976 has performed a service in showing how arbitrary much thinking about the dates of New Testament documents is (Mascall 1984, 111-7).

Whilst Marcan Priority is the first part of the 2-Source hypothesis, the role of Q (*Quelle*- Saying Source) has been brought into question (Farrer 1955; Goulder 1996; Hobbs 1980 and Linnemann 1996). It is debated whether Q is a unitary source, or a number of sayings-sources. Questions must be asked about the nature of Q, and whether these are rightly described as written sources. Increasing prominence is given to the role of orality in the formation of the Gospels. Further, the Supper Narratives have not been considered as part of Q, which, as its name suggests, focusses primarily on the sayings of Jesus.

Thus far, the priority of Mk is asserted, the usefulness of Q queried (cf. Goodacre 1998 and 2000). This then leads to the relationship of Matt and Luke. Traditionally it has been assumed that Matt predated Luke and, thus, was a source for the latter. However a number of arguments point rather to the reverse, that Luke might be a source for Matt (Hengel 2000, 186-207). Neither proposition can be ruled out on the grounds of age, especially since recent scholarship has brought forward the dating of the Gospels from the later dates advocated earlier in the twentieth century.

Whichever the view taken of the Synoptic problem, and the interrelationship between Mk, Matt and Luke, we observe a shared tradition which includes all the Synoptic Gospels. The precise relationship held will influence the lines of dependency which the critic observes.

5 We note that "Last Supper" is not itself used within the New Testament to describe the meal which Jesus ate with his disciples (Fitzmyer 1985, 1378).

6 In the flux period before these texts themselves were even established, never mind what is now defined as the "canon of Scripture", the centrality of what has since become canonical should not be assumed. Further, the role of written texts as a medium is different from oral "texts" or traditions. We know of the existence, even if not the exact content, of such traditions within the early church, not least because of the oral phase in the transmission of what came to be the gospels, and because of research into oral transmission. We should also know better than to assume that a culture in a different time and place will use texts in ways which we assume: orality, literacy and availability of texts alter the conceptual landscape. Scholars constantly need to guard against building a conceptual methodology in their own image. It is as besetting a sin as the tendency in New Testament scholarship to describe Jesus in our own image(s) warned of by Tyrrell and the scholarly prophets of past generations (e.g., Albert Schweitzer).

7 Such a dualism may reflect the methodology of the time which stemmed from the work of F.C. Baur (Dix 1946, 236; McGowan 1999, 26). For a critique of Lietzmann's theory in 20th century scholarship, see Thiselton 2000, 851-2.

8 Thus McGowan (1999, 30) is critical of O'Neill (1995a) for his stress on the meaning of the eucharist on a construction of the historical event, rather than the recorded traditions, and of Jeremias and Mack for placing meaning on a tradition or its author.

9 Note the summary of Muthuraj:

The significant contribution made by the History of Religions School was that it brought to light the role played by oriental religion and piety in the formation of NT religion. However, many scholars regard Oriental religions as detrimental to Christianity and describe them in pejorative sense as being syncretistic, polytheistic and idol worshipping. Some even understand and interpret New Testament Christianity as a triumph achieved over the eastern/oriental religions.

(2001, np)

For general criticism of the History of Religion school, in particular those theorists who posited that early Christian dogma exhibited signs of a strong dependence on the Mystery Religions, see Closson (2001). More detailed criticisms of such views in respect of the eucharist are found in Ch. 3, p128, fn. 50.

Similarities between Christian and pagan myths were also understood to undermine the truth of Christianity (implicitly because it was no longer considered unique). The failure of scientific research, viewed as more accurate or reliable than religion, to explain universal truths of human nature further compounded the scholars' conclusions (Girard 1996, 27).

10 Meeks (2001) provides an overview of the History of Religion School, as well as earlier and later studies of the "Hellenism vs. Judaism" debate. Martin (2001a, 58-61) suggests that contextual studies are ultimately more reliable than those driven, consciously or unconsciously, by ideology.

11 An example of this can be seen in the critical reaction to the late John O'Neill's argument about Jesus' silence concerning his Messiahship (O'Neill 2000, 89). This, O'Neill claimed, is based on an ancient Jewish law, that the true Messiah could not declare himself as such.

O'Neill's critics demanded proof of the existence of this law. O'Neill cited the text of John 19:7 as proof of such legislation. Robinson 1985, 263, whilst supporting the basic contention, notes that neither Philo nor Josephus show any awareness of such a charge. Evidence from the Mishnah on Leviticus may reflect a later legal interpretation of blasphemy.

Noting the overlap of the concepts "Messiah" and "king of the Jews" (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων), John 19:21 is further proof. For there, the high priests request that the wording of the charge against Jesus be changed to, "He said, 'I am the King of the Jews'" (μὴ γράφε· ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν· βασιλεὺς εἰμι τῶν Ἰουδαίων) [Italics mine]. John 5:18; 10:33-36; Matt 27:41-3 and Luke 23:2 are all brought as supporting evidence for the role of "speaking" as the basis for charges (cf. O'Neill 1995b, 49-50).

O'Neill's critics still insisted that further evidence be produced from other sources to substantiate his claim. Given that the historical reliability of John is still open to debate, and that this is one of those incidental details which has no apparent reason for inclusion unless it reflects some situation in real life, this would appear to be a piece of evidence in favour of O'Neill's hypothesis. It would seem that critics require further evidence, preferably from some non-canonical, contemporary source (cf. Theissen & Merz 1998, 11). This speaks volumes about the prejudice with which they approach an incidental detail in John. The value placed on the canonical texts, or evidence deduced from them, is different to those of O'Neill and Schweitzer (below), who both assume a higher degree of historical reliability. It also begs the question why such a detail should be found elsewhere. Why should it be more acceptable from that particular document rather than canonical writings? Care needs to be taken that canonical documents are not treated with a *greater* degree of skepticism than their contemporaries. That would be a mark of bias rather than true skepticism. Schweitzer's views are similar to O'Neill's. It is the words of Jesus which provoked outrage:

But to claim to be the Messiah, that was blasphemy!

(1985, 135-6)

The thinking behind this remark is, however, completely different. His argument did not depend on any particular legal text, but on his understanding of Jesus' trial. Jesus' own public ministry, according to Schweitzer, had revealed him as the Forerunner, not the Messiah. Evidence brought by Judas to the authorities betrayed Jesus' confidence by revealing the secret of the Transfiguration and the conversation to the Twelve at Caesarea Philippi (134-6, cf. Schweitzer 1981, 394).

12 The term "Graeco-Roman" is preferred to "Hellenistic" as it reflects more accurately the mixture of the Mediterranean cultures in the 1st century CE. If "Hellenism" is used, the Roman element may be obscured. Further, it avoids much of the ideological baggage which has accrued to the use of "Hellenism" particularly in relationship to Judaism. This includes dualistic understandings of the two cultures which arose with the Tübingen school of the mid 19th century. See Engberg-Pedersen 2001, particularly Engberg-Pedersen's own introduction and the programme articles by Meeks, Martin and Alexander (all 2001). All three detail how scholarship since the Tübingen school has provided definitions of Judaism and Hellenism which have been formed or influenced by their own contemporary situations and ideology. The theories that arise have seen the two terms used to justify a number of propositions:

"Hellenism" has represented universalism, Christianity, rationality, freedom, abstraction, timelessness, barrenness, individualism, nationalism, antinationalism, culture, Protestantism, sophistry, human wisdom, philosophy, theology, dogmatism, asceticism, dynamism, and so on. "Judaism", for its part, has been used to represent particularism, communalism, sterility, historicity, nonhistoricity, Roman Catholicism, Lutheran dogmatism, poststructuralism, effeminacy, feminism, revelation, nationalism, antinationalism, legalism, freedom, naturalism, simplicity, religion, prophecy, asceticism, nonasceticism, dynamism and so on and on.

(Martin 2001, 58-9)

The appearance of several ideologies in both lists surely suggests the sterility of such approaches. Further, many theories have posited a questionable, if not unnecessary, dualism between Judaism and Hellenism on these grounds.

13 Fuller accounts of this process may be found in Hengel 1991a, esp. 57-80; Hengel 1980; Lieberman 1942; Lieberman 1962; Safrai 1971; Schurer 1979, 74-79; Tcherikover 1970, 344-351.

Hengel 1991, 252 picks up the fact that the boundaries between Judaism, Palestine and the Diaspora were porous.

14 A further, detailed instance is seen in the inter-relationship suggested by Barker between Judaism of the 6th Century BCE and Pythagoreanism (Barker 2003, 262-92). Acceptance of her claim that key ideas in Pythagoreanism originate in Palestine depend, in part, on agreeing with her thesis that a prophetic writing such as Ezekiel provides reliable evidence of an "older Testament" which predates the Deuteronomic writings.

15 Thus we can note the use of Greek and Greek names amongst the Maccabean party (1 Macc 8, 12; 1-33, 14:16-24, 15:15). In the post-Maccabean period different groups appear to have been influenced by Hellenism (Baumgarten 1998a, 8-9). This includes those groups who would have argued that they had maintained some kind of cultural purity. Hengel outlines Hellenistic influence of both the *Hasidim* and early Essenism (1991a, 175-254). Their use of mythology and symbolism appear to include Egyptian and Iranian influences as well (184-6). Hengel further suggests that the Hasmonean state was built on Hellenistic political principles (1980, 81). The Qumran sectarians appear to have been influenced by Hellenism in their compilation of lists (Evans 2000, 62-66). Albright argued that Pharisaic exegetic and dialectical methods were essentially Hellenistic (1940, 273-4). Eliav notes that similar care needs to be taken in the discussion of everyday activities, presenting a nuanced analysis of the role of bathhouses, which suggests cultural elements do not clash violently but are absorbed through revision and adaptation (2000).

16 Similar debates are held over literary terms and forms as well as the relationship between rabbinic and Hellenistic legalism. An examination of the literary form, the *chreia* (χρεῖα), exemplifies this (King 1993, 81-85). The Greek *chreia* refers to a particular kind of saying, albeit with a confused history within Greek and Roman literature. However, the term is also used in other contexts of aphorisms which occur in Jewish literature. The key articles for the debate about dependence or common terminology are Fischel (1968 and 1973; arguing that two rabbinic anecdotes are based on Hellenistic *chreia*) and Green (1978; that Fischel's methodology has obscured rabbinic features of these anecdotes). Bloch (1978, 56-7) notes the influence of Greek literature on rabbinic writing. A further example arises in "farewell speeches", which exhibit common general characteristics, but peculiar emphases in their Greek (e.g., Plato, *Phaedo* 115-8. Jowett's 1871 translation is available on-line at <http://plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/phaedo.htm>) and Jewish (e.g., 1 Kings 2: 1-10, 1 Macc 2:49-70) expressions (Kurz 1985, 253-61). The appearance of similar literary forms in different contexts may, but need not, imply cultural dependency. It may only show the use of a common terminology, or environment. Hengel's observations about the interaction between Jewish apocalyptic traditions and Hellenism apply to other areas of religious discourse:

The examples and parallels mentioned do not on each occasion demonstrate a direct influence on early Jewish apocalyptic by its Hellenistic oriental environment - this is certainly present, but the investigation would have to go into much more detail to demonstrate it in particulars- but only show the relevant spiritual milieu which is typical of the Hellenistic period from the beginning of the second century onwards.

(1991a, 216-7)

The paintings at Dura-Europos (circa 240 CE) in which Jewish, Mithraic and Christian worship are all depicted primarily in the guise of "initiate mythologies" (Elsner 2001, 278; 280) raise the same issues. Such arguments provide salutary reminders against jumping to quick conclusions and assuming too readily some kind of dependence on one particular cultural thread. Great caution must be exercised before even a specific example of dependence can be proved in this way.

The arguments for the formal incorporation of Hellenistic legal methods are found in Daube (1949). It should be noticed that Daube describes the rabbis as masters, not slaves, of such Hellenistic influences (240). Later in his argument he notes a common foundation between different philosophical schools:

We have before us a science the beginnings of which may be traced back to Plato, Aristotle and their contemporaries. It recurs in Cicero, Hillel and Philo - with enormous differences in detail yet *au fond* the same. Cicero did not sit at the feet of Hillel, nor Hillel at the feet of Cicero: and there was no need for Philo to go to Palestinian sources for this kind of teaching. As we saw there are indeed signs that Hillel's ideas were partly imported from Egypt. The true explanation lies in the Hellenistic background. Philosophical instruction was very similar in outline whether given at Rome, Jerusalem or Alexandria.

(257)

Lieberman (1962, 78) also argues in favour of Hellenistic influence. The case for the use of Hellenistic terminology alone is presented by Towner who concludes:

Because neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament provides significant evidence which might throw light upon the genesis and development of the rabbinic method of hermeneutics, scholars have turned to the Hellenistic world in search of external parallels. The resulting discussion has already been noted: in brief, it is inconclusive. Some individual *middot* can certainly be compared with the methods of juridical interpretation among the Alexandrian grammarians. Some terminology may have been borrowed. However, the evidence is much too diffuse to suggest that the Tannaim simply learned their methods of interpretation from the Greek grammarians.

(1982, 135)

Roman legal theory and practice may also have been influential, cf. Alexander 2001, 71.

17 The search for cultural sources for motifs may, in the long run, be as unhelpful as the linguistic discipline of etymology. The pitfalls of etymology are outlined in Barr 1961, 108-160; Silva 1983, 38-51.

18 There remain wide differences of opinion about the degree of interaction between Judaism and Hellenism. Further, different locations, social classes and degrees of education all appear to contribute to different degrees of formal and informal exposure to Hellenism with Palestine and the Diaspora.

Feldman provides an overview of the current debate, using Hengel's *Judaism and Hellenism* as his starting point (2002). His more cautious conclusions about the penetration of Greek language and culture and Palestinian society centre on two recurring criticisms: the degree to which extant written evidence is Palestinian in origin and the degree to which it might reflect minority groups rather than the "Palestinian masses".

Similarly, Feldman (2001b), in response to a thesis proposed by Gruen, argues that evidence suggests assimilation of Hellenistic practice only by a minority (60-1), and that views which did not see the two cultures as incompatible or competing reflect the attitudes of a small elite of Jewish leaders and the dominant powers of the period: Seleucids, Ptolemies and Romans (79).

19 Fitzmyer notes that care must be taken in differentiating the different periods of religious activity in Corinth (1993, 275-6). Texts referring to the Hellenistic period may not reflect practices in what was essentially a new Roman foundation. See also Fotopoulos (2003, 173-4).

See Metzger for similar considerations regarding Mystery religions (1968, 6-7).

20 This phenomenon is also documented in the use of Jewish materials. Scholars are increasingly expected to differentiate the strata of the Talmud before drawing conclusions about the relationship between first century Judaism and Christianity (King 1993, 80, see further Porton 1981, 81-9). O'Toole raises similar objections to Jeremias' handling of rabbinic regulations about meals (1992, 235-7).

It also applies to the use of Graeco-Roman materials. The influence of Mithraism, for example, on emerging Christianity will be

considerably different if its period of formation is dated to the second half of the first century CE rather than the first century BCE. When this kind of more nuanced approach is adopted, accepted commonplaces about the ancient world fail to survive scrutiny. This will be seen particularly in the reflections which follow about Mystery Religions in Ch.s 3, 4 and 8.

21 See also Thiselton (1993, 78-9). Price notes the difficulty of analysing what ancient understandings of the Roman imperial cult really were (1980, 43).

22 Such a discussion may seem rather abstract. Yet such thinking is not divorced from the definition of "theological method" given in Chapter 2. Thiselton suggests that Gadamer's understanding of tradition and Wittgenstein's "family resemblances" have much in common:

The historical-temporal continuity of tradition constitutes for Gadamer a connecting stratum in which historically finite actualizations occur; these are not merely equal autonomous "moments" like the claims of sub-groups within a pluralistic culture. Similarly, Wittgenstein's "language-games" *inter-penetrate, overlap, and exhibit family resemblances*: just as the faith of pilgrims who visit the tombs of Cuthbert and Bede over the centuries overlap in criss-crossing testimonies to truth and in family resemblances along side their historical peculiarities.

(1992, 400)

23 A similar mix of mutually exclusive concepts is found in Paul's 'spiritual body' (1 Cor 15:44, cf. Perkins 1985, 305). Further, Käsemann argues that Paul uses terminology from Gnosis, but freely adapts ideas and motifs (1964a, 114-119). The mixing of such apparently contradictory terms provide a warning that commentators should not blithely assume that the Early Church unthinkingly adopted a Greek terminology, and all the ideas which lay behind it, and thus distorted the Christian message. Much hinges on the descriptive language used. Technical terms such as "resurrection" need to be handled with great care (see Chapter 5, pp. 213-4, ¶ 5.3.3.2.-3.).

24 Beck also notes the distinction of analogy and genealogy based on Smith's work (2000, 173). His own preference, which is alluded to in this chapter, is analogical rather than genealogical.

25 Brandon argues that whilst *bricolage* may imply a certain naivety, there is nonetheless a value to the process as opposed to expertise or academic excellence (2002).

26 That said, complete originality is not being claimed for these criticisms. Both the History of Religions School and the "criterion of dissimilarity" have been criticised elsewhere from within the New Testament guild, and recent scholarship has tended to recover Jesus' Judaism.

The same premises did not govern the "new" quest for the historical Jesus. It marked a recovery of interest in historical details: it began with Käsemann, and was highly critical of ahistorical approaches (e.g., Bultmann), and worked with a modified set of criteria (Theissen & Merz 1998, 6-7). Further, the "third" quest, exemplified by Evans, examines extensively the Jewish milieu of Jesus (10-11).

27 As a criticism, this appears to work on the assumption that the meal is devoid of meaning. The actions are presented as a *tabula rasa* on which a meaning needs to be stamped. This seems an unrealistic understanding of meals (see Ch. 3, pp. 72-3, ¶ 3.1.1.; Hicks 1959, 8). What the words do, be they the words of institution or eschatological statements, is to refine the interpretation of a common action which already has a measure of meaning. The question that then needs to be addressed is the locus of that meaning. If an eschatological pre-understanding could be assumed, why not one centred on presentation or partaking?

Schweitzer located the meaning in eschatology. He would prefer that the true meaning of the meal be seen in purely eschatological terms. Yet, the narratives as they stand contain, apparently, both eschatological and, according to Schweitzer, non-eschatological elements. Yet, it is not necessary that elements be one or the other. Schweitzer makes the two mutually exclusive. Yet these need not be the only alternatives (Mbiti 1971, 33, n.4), nor do they need to be exclusive. It may be the case that one category of sayings might rather be subsumed into the other. Thus, what appears to be non-eschatological, because it is not explicitly eschatological, may actually be eschatological. To put it bluntly, "partaking" language might not seem at first glance to be eschatological, but might have an eschatological significance because of its religious context (i.e., the ideas which coalesce around the practice of eating together).

Schweitzer also thought it impossible that any theory based on either presentation or partaking could provide a satisfactory explanation of the Last Supper, notwithstanding the discovery of new historical data (Schweitzer 1982, 106). However, as his own later writings show, other options are possible. In a discussion of the meaning of the death of Christ:

...Paul illustrates the meaning of the death of Christ by means of a conception which was familiar to the religious thinking of Judaism, in the light of which primitive Christianity also was accustomed to see it, in consequence of the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. The most important thing for him is - and that is why Paul recurs to the idea of sacrifice- that in this way it is possible for him to give an intelligible form to the conception of righteousness which results from the action of faith. For the idea of sacrifice involves the idea of the Sacrificial Community.

(Schweitzer 1998, 218)

This passage suggests a connection in primitive Christianity between the ideas of sacrifice and the Last Supper. Primitive Christianity appeared to look for meaning in the ideas surrounding sacrifice rather than eschatology. The connection of the Last Supper to the Passover is only part of a broader movement. Such a connection may be problematic for Schweitzer. Can he explain how primitive Christianity, and St Paul in particular, so much more attuned to an eschatological worldview, missed, or came to neglect, what he (Schweitzer) saw as self-evident, namely, that the Last Supper be interpreted primarily as an eschatological event?

28 It must be admitted that he assumes rather than argues his case against the meal as Passover (Schweitzer 1982, 59-61). The points at issue will be dealt with here in more detail in Chapter 6.

29 There are a number of different ways in which scholars of anthropology, religion and the Bible have handled the theme of sacrifice, starting from Robertson Smith (Mack 1987, 1-6; Malina 1996, 39). Much of this theory casts negative light on ritual. Frankfurter is critical of assumptions that ritual and sacrificial practice need be accompanied by an inversion of religious and moral order (2001, 363-73).

A major contribution to the discussion of sacrifice has come in recent years from Rene Girard. His thesis is that sacrifice, in its many manifestations, springs from a pattern of "mimetic violence" (for criticism, see Chilton 1992, 163-172). Whilst Girard's thesis has become popular and influential, especially in Christian circles, it is not without its critics. There are three objections to the theory.

- It is based on literary sources rather than actual rituals. Cf. Burkert (1983, 35, fn2) on the absence of eating from Girard's sacrificial theory.
- It begs the question that the myth informs the ritual.
- It marginalizes the "mythic realisations" by which societies explained their rituals, making them subordinate to Girard's pattern (Burkert 1983, 141; Mack 1987, 11). This need not be the case: purity as the avoidance of sex and death might shape Jewish practice rather than violence (Klawans 2001, 145)

Burkert locates mythic explanations within the context of hunting. His research is based on ethology [the study of human behaviour and social organisation based on scientific data] (Mack 1987, 30-1). He argues that myth is secondary to ritual. Thus his analysis looks at rituals, which are reconstructed as far as possible from both archaeological and literary data. A recurring theme in Burkert's work is the role of sacrifice (giving order to the phenomena of life and death) in shaping identities and relationships within societies and communities (Lambert 1993, 305-6). Tradition is of great importance in considering the role of ritual. Critics of Burkert are concerned that he cannot adequately justify the psychological motivation for ritual behaviour and introduces religious language (Mack 1987, 31-2). Lambert points out that Burkert's system oversimplifies the motivation for sacrificing, and disregards a concept as central to sacrificial thinking as "thanksgiving" (1993, 310).

Both Burkert and Girard are open to the criticism that they have resurrected earlier theories of primal violence (Frankfurter 2001, 377). Girard's work, in particular, would make earlier rituals little more than a *praeparatio evangelium* (375), and seems to be built on shakier foundations than Burkert's ethological approach (376).

A third theory comes from the essays of Jonathan Z. Smith who argues that the search for an origin or meaning is irrelevant. The distinction of sacred and secular arises from divisions and location. Smith shows how myths reflect social issues and are adapted to deal with new situations (Mack 1987, 40-42). Thus issues of the sacred and secular are shaped by context rather than origin (Girard) or tradition (Burkert). Religion is a way to deal with the contemporary realities of life. Critics of Smith's theory focus on why ritual should be used as a means to rationalise experience (Mack 1987, 50-1).