Slave, Slavery

In the hierarchical societies of the early Roman Empire, the legal ownership of human beings who could be used as property (chattel slavery) had long been widespread and regarded as appropriate and moral. Polybius, the Greek historian of Rome's rise to power, noted that both slaves and cattle were essential to life (Polybius *Hist.* 4.38.4). As many as one-third of the population of the empire were enslaved, and an additional large percentage had been slaves earlier in their lives. Those laboring in rural slavery provided their owners' primary income, from which the owners drew to maintain a large number of domestic slaves who not only provided a wide range of personal services but also displayed their owners' economic status. The Christian movement developed in such a social and cultural context, with the result that many important passages in early Christian documents cannot be understood apart from keen awareness of those features that make Greco-Roman slavery unique.

1. Modern Readers and Ancient Slavery: Avoiding Anachronism
2. "Slaves of God" in the Biblical Tradition: Serving with Honor
3. Terminology of Slavery or Enslavement in Early Christian Texts: Clarifying the Contexts

1. Modern Readers and Ancient Slavery: Avoiding Anachronism.

Throughout history a large number of societies have chosen not to kill their vanquished enemies but to force them to serve as slaves, subjecting them to a "social death," separated from blood kin, from homeland and from legal protections enjoyed by free persons (see Patterson). The Greeks and Romans, however, independently transformed such enslavement into something original, "namely, an institutionalized system of large-scale employment of slave labor in both the countryside and the cities" (Finley, 67). Scholars have identified these societies as two of only five in world history rooted in "slave economics," that is, as having developed an economy and high culture made possible by extensive use of involuntary labor (see Ste. Croix). The other three were created later in Brazil, the Caribbean and the southern United States of America. It is natural then to think that knowledge of New World slavery can provide the modern interpreter with insight into the social, economic and legal context of the early Christians. Yet such information has frequently created serious misunderstandings.

Modern readers must overcome their temptation to read into any ancient Jewish, Greek or Roman text their knowledge of modern slavery. The meanings of any familiar-sounding terms can be determined only by a close investigation of the particular social systems and cultural values the early Christian writers took for granted (see Malina). Among the distinctive and often surprising features of slavery as practiced around the Mediterranean in the early centuries of our era are these:

1. An enslaved person generally could not be identified by appearance or clothing; racial or ethnic origins were not reliable indicators of social or legal status.
2. The cultural and religious traditions of slaves were usually those of their owners and other free persons.
3. Education of slaves was encouraged, enhancing their value; some slaves were better educated than their owners. Rome's cultural leadership in the empire largely depended on educated, foreign-born slaves who had been taken there.
4. Partially as a result, many slaves functioned in highly responsible and sensitive positions such as workshop and household managers, accountants, tutors, personal secretaries, sea captains and physicians (see Martin, 1–49). An important minority of slaves had considerable influence and social power, even over freeborn persons of lesser status than the slaves' owners.
5. By no means were the enslaved regularly to be found at the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid. Rather those free and impoverished persons who had to seek work each day without any certainty of employment occupied the lowest level. Some of them sold themselves into slavery in order to obtain job security, food, clothing and shelter.
6. Slaves could own property, including their own slaves. They could accumulate funds that they might use to purchase their own freedom.
7. Because slaves were owned by persons across the range of economic levels, they developed no consciousness of being a social class or of suffering a common plight (see Garnsey and Saller, 109–25). Thus no laws were needed to hinder public assembly of slaves.
8. In contrast to New World slavery, ancient owners did not regard their adult slaves paternalistically; they clearly distinguished the roles of parents and of owners and felt no need to justify the institution of slavery.
9. Persons not infrequently sold themselves to pay debts, to escape poverty, to climb socially or to obtain special governmental positions (see Dio Chrysostom 15.23).
10. A large number of domestic and urban slaves, perhaps the majority, could anticipate being set free (manumitted) by age thirty, becoming a freedman or a freedwoman (see Acts 6:9, "the synagogue of the freedmen"). At any moment innumerable ex-slaves throughout the empire were proof that slavery need not be a permanent condition (see Bradley 1987, 81–112). And even ancient Greek commentators expressed astonishment that slaves freed by Roman citizens usually became Roman citizens themselves at their manumission. Notable in Acts 23–25 is the Roman governor Marcus Antonius Felix, who had been a slave until Antonia, the emperor Claudius's mother, manumitted him.

Slavery then was a fundamental aspect of daily life in the early Roman Empire, and virtually no one questioned its morality. Roman jurists and philosophers, some of whom noted that holding human beings as slaves was *contra naturam,* seemed never to have doubted the practical necessity or moral appropriateness of this practice. Not even the Stoic-Cynic philosopher Epictetus, who was raised and educated in slavery, regarded release from legal slavery as a desirable goal in itself. For him, as for the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, a person's achieving *inner* freedom from domination by social conventions, life's circumstances and one's passions was far more important than any change in one's social-legal status.

2. "Slaves of God" in the Biblical Tradition: Serving with Honor.

Neither Greeks nor Romans used the phrase "slave of God" in self-description, for the lack of freedom implied by such a metaphor would have been intolerable. Thus kneeling played no role in the ceremonies of Greek and Roman worship; such "slavish" behavior would have met with contempt and would have been a cause for shame (see Bartchy 1985, 121–25).

In sharp contrast, in the Hebrew tradition the Israelites are frequently identified as "slaves of Yahweh," emphasizing their exclusive loyalty to their new Lord following his liberation of them from Egyptian chattel slavery at the exodus (Lev 25:55; see Ex 20:2). This is especially interesting, since in Palestine a peasant economy prevailed, with legal slavery (usually for debt) playing only a minor role. In the Hebrew Bible the phrase in the singular "slave of Yahweh" identifies persons who came to enjoy an especially honored relationship to Israel's God, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and Job. Paul of Tarsus boldly claims this designation of honor for himself and Timothy (Phil 1:1), as do James (Jas 1:1), Jude and the author of 2 Peter ("slave of Jesus Christ," Jude 1; 2 Pet 1:1). Once Paul even refers to freeborn, Greco-Roman Christians in general as "slaves of the Lord" (1 Cor 7:22). Early Christian writers freely extended this phrase to identify all Christians.

3. Terminology of Slavery or Enslavement in Early Christian Texts: Clarifying the Contexts.

3.1. Acts, Revelation and the Slaves of God. Early in Acts Peter quotes the prophecy from Joel according to which God's Spirit will be poured out "even upon my slaves, both men and women," echoing Mary's response to the angel Gabriel in the words: "Here I am, the slave of the Lord" (Lk 1:38, 48). Luke uses the phrase again in the prayer in Acts 4:29: "grant to your slaves to speak your word with all boldness." And in Acts 16:17 even a pagan diviner, herself a slave, identifies Paul, Silas and Timothy as "slaves of the Most High God." Paul's bold exorcism of her profitable "spirit of divination" infringed on the property rights of her owners, whose charges against Paul and Silas led to their flogging and imprisonment.

In the Revelation of Jesus to John (*see* Revelation, Book of), the author immediately identifies both himself and his intended readers as slaves of Jesus Christ. While occasionally referring to "slave and free" in inclusive series (Rev 6:15; 13:16; 19:18), John uses slave terminology primarily to emphasize the exclusive loyalty of Moses, the ancient prophets and his readers to God (e.g., Rev 10:7; 11:18; 19:5; 22:6). Note also that in four of his letters Ignatius refers to himself as a "fellow slave" *(syndoulos),* especially of the "deacons" *(diakonoi),* perhaps because he has identified them as representatives of Christ (Ign. Magn. 6.1).

3.2. 1 Peter, the Treatment of Slaves and Christ's Suffering Example. After exhorting all Christians to "live as free people, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as slaves *(douloi)* of God" (1 Pet 2:16), the author of 1 Peter turns to the vulnerable plight of those Christians in domestic slavery *(oiketai)* who were owned by pagans who perhaps treat them cruelly (1 Pet 2:18–23). The author urges them nevertheless to accept their owners' authority (1 Pet 2:17).

How an enslaved person, especially a household slave, was treated day to day depended almost entirely on the character and disposition of the owner. Greco-Roman laws and customs gave slave owners much leeway to act cruelly or compassionately in response to slaves, who were conventionally expected to act with fawning deception. Slaves were vulnerable to corporal punishment, including whippings that reinforced both the owners' domination and the slaves' lack of honor and dignity. As Christians, such slaves are addressed here as moral agents who like Christ himself may also suffer even though they are innocent of any wrongdoing (1 Pet 2:19–21; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 12–19; 5:10). Yet to endure abuse for doing what is right is honorable, not shameful. They, as Christians, are exhorted to refuse to return evil for evil, following Christ and sharing in his suffering (see Elliott, 142–43, 205–8).

3.3. 1 Clement and Self-Sale into Slavery. Two former imperial slaves, Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Bito, were the delegates of Christians in Rome to carry the letter now known as *1 Clement* to the house churches in Corinth at the end of the first century. This letter had been written in hope of inspiring the troublemakers among the Christians in Corinth to repent. The author points to the exemplary behavior of "many of our own number who have had themselves imprisoned in order to ransom others. Many have sold themselves into slavery *(douleia)* and given the price to feed others" (1 Clem. 55.2). These heroic examples of self-sacrifice, subverting the system for the sake of the common good (contrast Seneca *Ep. Mor.* 47.7), may already have been well known to the Corinthians. C. Osiek observes that "the fact that the letter is written from the Roman church to the Corinthian church further indicates that the examples cannot be localized; they belong to a common tradition of early Christian hagiography" (Osiek 1981, 370). The "ransoming of others" through imprisonment probably refers to a Christian's self-substitution for a person imprisoned for debt.

3.4. Ignatius to Polycarp and the Manumission of Enslaved Christians. Ignatius of Antioch is the first Christian writer after Paul (1 Cor 7:21) to comment on the manumission of Christian slaves. From his letter to Polycarp, bishop of the Christians in Smyrna, it is clear that some slaves, presumably already members of some of the house churches, had come to expect that the price of their manumissions would be paid from the churches' common funds (Ign. *Pol.* 4.3). Ignatius took up this issue in a household code dealing with care for widows and the behavior of slaves, wives, husbands and those practicing voluntary celibacy (see also Ign. Smyrn. 6.2).

First Ignatius exhorts Polycarp to lead in caring for every member of the house churches and especially by not acting arrogantly to enslaved Christians. In turn he urges these slaves not to permit the new honor in which they are held to lead to insolence. Rather they should honor God by giving "more devoted service, so that

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e.g. *exempli gratia,* for example

Ign. Magn. Ignatius *Letter to the Magnesians*

1 Clem. *1 Clement*

Ign. Ignatius *Letter to the Smyrneans*

they may obtain from God a better freedom." Then Ignatius warns them against making themselves "slaves of selfish passion" by seeking to obtain funds from the common chest (to be used for the widows?) to purchase their manumission. Perhaps experiences in Antioch led Ignatius to oppose the assumption that becoming a Christian gave a slave a *right* to manumission paid from the common treasury. He may also have been wary of provoking public slander of the Christian community as a cause of social instability. J. A. Harrell argues that "Ignatius showed concern only for the abuses of corporate manumission, not private manumission," concluding correctly that neither Ignatius nor Paul expressed any opposition to the liberation of Christians in slavery (Harrell, 194).

3.5. The Didache and God's Impartial Judgment of Slaves and Owners. Only one passage in the *Didache* mentions slaves or slavery. In a long chain of admonitions to practice extraordinary forms of generosity, the author cautions slave owners: "Do not be harsh in giving orders to your male and female slaves" (*Did.* 4.10), for those in slavery "hope in the same God as you," and cruel treatment could lead them to "cease to honor the God over you both." Enslaved Christians then are exhorted to "obey [their] owners with reverence and respect, as if they represented God" (*Did.* 4.11). This God, however, gives no advantage to owner over slave: "when he comes to call us, he will not respect our station but will call those whom the Spirit has made ready."

These admonitions extend the tradition of the NT household codes (see Col 3:22–23; Eph 6:5–8) which sought to transform negative attitudes engendered by the Roman patriarchal system. Owners are urged to exchange casual cruelty for fairness and compassion and slaves to abandon servile deception in favor of honesty and hard work. Both owners and slaves should imitate God's impartiality, thus profoundly altering interpersonal relationships. Many aspects of the slaves' social death were effectively overcome in the Christian house church "families." But the slave system as such was not called in question. With improved relations between slaves and their owners, ironically the system worked better than ever before.

3.6. The Shepherd of Hermas and the Obligations of Formerly Enslaved Christians. The author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* employs terms of slavery or enslavement far more than does any early Christian author, referring to Christians in general as "slaves of God" at least thirty-five times. He claims to have been an ex-slave himself (Herm. Vis. 1.1), and he directed his writing about the uses of wealth and the dangers of social climbing "to a large and influential group of freedmen and women in the Christian community" (Osiek 1993, 134). Here, for the first time in Christian writing, prosperous Christians are exhorted "not to oppress poor debtors" (Herm. Man. 8.10); such oppression frequently led to imprisonment or enslavement for debt, which some of these Christian freedmen and freedwomen may have suffered themselves.

NT New Testament
Herm. Vis. *Shepherd of Hermas, Vision(s)*
Herm. Man. *Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate(s)*

These former slaves had become the majority of small business people, tradesmen and craftsmen in Rome. *Hermas* challenged them to repent and use their wealth on behalf of the needy among the Christians, including "purchasing afflicted souls" (Herm. Sim. 1.8; see Herm. Man. 8.10), a phrase that may include the act of buying Christian slaves from pagan owners (Gülzow, 89, opposed by Osiek 1981, 372). In any case, later writings indicate that Christians became known for their efforts to rescue prisoners, captives and slaves (e.g., the *Apostolic Constitutions* 4.9.2; see Harrell, 178–82).

As the Christians moved into the second century, they continued to share with their pagan contemporaries the view that slavery was an integral part of civilization. But by referring to themselves as "slaves of God," in an extension of an honorable OT tradition, they risked deeply offending Greco-Roman sensibilities. In the awareness that "people are slaves to whatever masters them" (2 Pet 2:9), both slaves and their owners were exhorted as Christians to root their treatment of each other in their voluntary and exclusive enslavement to the holy master of them all.

See also Freedom, Liberty; Household Codes; Households, Family; Roman Empire, Christians and the; Social Setting of Early Non-Pauline Christianity.

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Herm. Sim. *Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude(s)*
OT Old Testament
ABD Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. D. N. Freedman
HUT Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
ed. edition; editor(s), edited by

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S. S. Bartchy

Social Setting of Early Non-Pauline Christianity

"Social setting" is an umbrella term for an aspect of the study of the historical context of (in this case) early Christianity. By studying its social setting we gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the first Christians and the world in which they lived. This helps us to recognize that early Christian belief and practice did not take shape in a vacuum but rather in the daily struggle of individuals and groups to bear witness to the lordship of Christ in a Mediterranean culture that acknowledged "many gods and many lords" (1 Cor 8:5).

1. Directions
2. Method
3. Later New Testament
4. Postapostolic Period

1. Directions.

In an influential article J. Z. Smith sets out four directions that the study of the social setting of early Christianity can take.

A first direction is the description of the social facts to which the Christian texts refer often only in passing because those facts were well known to their first-century readers. Important sources of information that supplement the literary evidence are such nonliterary evidence as provided by archaeology, epigraphy and papyrology (cf. Horsley). Even basic facts such as the size of houses and therefore the likely number of people who would be able to gather for worship in a house church give significant insight into the ethos of early church life.

Then there is the creation of a genuine social history that integrates what is known about the social facts into an account of early Christianity as a religious, cultural and social movement within the geographic, social, economic and political framework of the Roman Empire. Exemplary here is the work of R. MacMullen (1981, 1984) and, from an earlier generation, A. D. Nock.

The third direction addresses questions of social organization "in terms of both the social forces which led to the rise of Christianity and the social institutions of early Christianity" (Smith, 20). Examples of social forces behind the rise of Christianity include the kind of political, economic, ecological and cultural factors identified by G. Theissen in his studies of both the rural, Palestinian "Jesus movement" (1978) and the urban, Pauline house churches (1982). An early and influential study of the social institutions of the city-state *(politeia),* the household *(oikonomia)* and voluntary associations *(koinōnia)* presupposed in the NT and beyond is that of E. A. Judge.

A final direction of inquiry is one that draws its main inspiration from the sociology of knowledge and interprets early Christianity "as a social world, [that is,] as the creation of a world of meaning which provided a plausibility structure for those who chose to inhabit it" (Smith, 21). Attention focuses on describing the ethos of the Christian groups over against that of Qumran, the synagogue, the Cynics or the mystery cults (*see* Religions, Greco-Roman), what it felt like to convert and how the meaning of belonging was expressed through the particular language, rituals and symbols that the Christians developed (cf. Meeks 1983, 140–92).

2. Method.

In addition to understanding the various directions that the study of the social setting of early Christianity can take, it is important to be aware of ongoing debates over method. Two of these are particularly prominent in current discussion.

2.1. Social History or Social Science? One debate is whether study of the social setting of early Christianity is an exercise in social history using the standard tools and techniques of the contemporary historian or whether it is also an exercise requiring the models and methods of the social sciences. For those who favor the social-history approach, social-scientific method is rejected on various grounds: its models are anachronistic; the sources are not such as to make controlled social-scientific analysis possible; it fails to allow for incommensurability between the past and the present; its genealogy lies in a hermeneutic of suspicion that is hostile to theology and the supernatural; and it tends to reduce the meaning of particular historical realities to the level of their social function in relation to general underlying needs and forces.

For those who favor the social-scientific approach, the social-history approach is held to be seriously lacking. First, "the historian's conceptualization tends to be implicit, arbitrary and unsystematic, whereas the social scientist's is explicit and systematic" (G. Barraclough, in Malina 1986, 174); second, there is the historian's tendency "to evade so far as possible the theoretical issues, and also to deal for preference less with the underlying structure than with events and personalities" (G. Barraclough, in Malina 1986, 174). At first glance this looks like a difference between a theory-laden (social-scientific) approach and a theory-free (social-history) approach. In fact it is a difference between approaches that make explicit their theoretical foundation and those that leave them implicit. At issue are serious questions, perhaps not sufficiently acknowledged, that have to do with theology and the politics and ethics of interpretation (cf. Malina 1986; Holmberg, 145–57; Elliott 1993, 87–100). In this article the insights of both the social-history and social-scientific approaches will be deployed depending on what is appropriate to the subject matter under discussion.

2.2. Social Setting and Canonical Scripture. The other important debate over method is how investigation of the social setting of early Christianity is to be related to reading the NT and other early Christian texts as Scripture and tradition of and for the church. For some scholars, study of social setting is part of that larger enterprise called historical criticism that drives a wedge between Scripture and the church (see Braaten and Jenson). It does so by treating the text as a source for historical reconstruction rather than spiritual illumination and by putting to the text (now referred to as the "documents") questions that are honed not by the

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cf. compare

Christian tradition and the life of faith but by the Enlightenment tradition of the academy. For others, study of the social setting, both of the world behind the text and of the world within the text, is not inimical to the scriptural approach. On the contrary, it is a way of attending with greater seriousness to the remarkable realities to which these historical texts bear witness (see Barton). It is a way of putting body and soul together again in biblical interpretation that Meeks (1986) calls a "hermeneutics of social embodiment" and of becoming better informed about what kinds of questions a text like this deserves.

Historically and hermeneutically speaking, the former position with its emphasis on church and tradition is more Catholic, while the latter position with its emphasis on the text in its original context is more Protestant. The former position is a helpful reminder that the work of students of the social setting of early Christianity is to some extent parasitic upon the church for the authority attaching to what they do. The latter position is a reminder that the authority of the early Christian writings as Scripture and tradition depends in part on ongoing, skilled attention to what these writings make known. Both positions have something important to offer the task of interpretation (cf. Levenson, 106–26).

3. Later New Testament.

It is not possible here to give a comprehensive account of what is involved in investigation of the social setting of the later NT and beyond. We will proceed instead by selected case studies related to particular texts. The aim in each case will be to show the implications for interpretation of an understanding of issues of social setting.

3.1. Acts: Meals and Table Fellowship. The attention given to meals, table fellowship and table talk in Luke's two volumes is remarkable and all-pervasive (Moxnes). Clearly there is for Luke more to meals than the satisfying of physical hunger, although that is important in itself. What this extra dimension is becomes clearer in the light of the social and religious history of Israel and the Jews, for whom food and meal practices were governed by the levitical purity rules (*see* Food, Food Laws) and marked them out as God's elect (Lev 11; Deut 14; cf. Dan 1:3–17; 2 Macc 7). But it also becomes clearer in the light of the broader, cross-cultural insights of social anthropology, according to which meals meet social needs as well as physical ones and have as much to do with the social body or the body politic as with the physical body (cf. Neyrey). This is because meals involve the consumption of food in a social context and are part of an elaborate system of communication within a particular culture. Food dealings generally are a barometer of social relations and a powerful mechanism for both creating sociability and, alternatively, for destroying it.

If we ask how meals communicate meanings, how they provide food for thought, as we might say, anthropologists like M. Douglas (1975) draw attention to the way whole societies or groups within a single society both constitute themselves and distinguish themselves from others by their meal practices. Significant factors tend to be the type of food consumed or abstained from (clean or unclean, cooked or raw, meat or vegetable); the time and frequency of eating and abstaining (or fasting); the time of and time taken for meal preparation (e.g., whether it is permitted on the sabbath or not); the quantity and quality of food consumed (e.g., the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption, in which what is vital is that the consumption is conspicuous); who is allowed or invited to eat with whom and who is excluded from table fellowship; the symbolic geography of the meal (including who sits where, the position of men in relation to women, whether the meal is in public or in private); the clothes worn by participants (formal or informal, colored or not); and the sounds (if any) that are appropriate to accompany the meal (silence, table talk, prayers, readings and hymns).

Seen in the light both of the history of Israel and Judaism and of the insights of social anthropology, meals and table fellowship in Luke-Acts take on a profound level of significance (cf. Esler, 71–109). First, by virtue of the inclusion of Gentiles at table, they represent a challenge to the boundaries and self-understanding both of the Jewish ethnos and of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and elsewhere. The story of Peter and the Roman centurion Cornelius is an obvious case in point (Acts 10–11). Second and related, meals and table fellowship constitute the starting mechanism of a new group, an eschatological society based upon radically novel criteria of acceptability (cf. Lk 14:1–24) and therefore open to Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor. This helps to explain the repeated attention drawn to the first Christians' meal practice and the honor it attracted from outsiders: "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:46; cf. Acts 2:42; 4:32–35).

Third and conversely, it is not surprising that an important manifestation of problems in the Jerusalem church was the breakdown in table fellowship represented by the neglect of provision for the widows of the Hellenists (Acts 6:1–6). If meals are a potential source of unity and honor, they are also a potential source of conflict and shame. Fourth, the offering of food serves as part of a larger pattern of social exchange based on reciprocity. This helps to explain the references in Acts to the hospitality offered to apostles like Paul: after his own conversion, Paul receives food in the house of Judas in Damascus (Acts 9:19); the convert Lydia receives Paul and his companions into her house to stay (Acts 16:15); the Philippian jailer expresses his gratitude to Paul by feeding him in his own house (Acts 16:34); and in Troas, Paul's teaching all night long is punctuated by his receiving sustenance in the communal breaking of bread (Acts 20:11). Such hospitality makes it possible for beneficiaries of the apostle's ministry to reciprocate and thereby play a part in the apostolic mission and the life of the church.

Finally, table fellowship in Acts has a mimetic quality. The breaking of the bread that takes place when the Christians gather together (cf. Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11) is a solemn, but also joyful, reminder of the breaking of the bread by Jesus both at the Last Supper before the crucifixion (Lk 22:19) and at the house in Emmaus after the resurrection (Lk 24:30, 35). Thus the meal is a symbolic act that communicates to participants the very heart of what unites them. Its repetition also is significant in social-scientific terms. In the day-to-day life of the church, it binds the believers not

only to one another but also to the crucified and risen Lord who is the true host, now ascended into heaven (cf. Lk 22:30).

3.2. The Pastoral Epistles: Gendered Church Order. As children of the Enlightenment who espouse democratic individualism and the equality of the sexes, many readers of the Bible in Western cultures find puzzling and offensive instructions on church life that presuppose neither democracy nor egalitarianism. A case in point is the gendered church order in the Pastoral Epistles: “I desire that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling; also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel. . . . Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent” (1 Tim 2:8–15). This instance is certainly not unique in the NT and beyond (cf. 1 Cor 11:2–16; 14:33–36), even if it is by no means the only side of the story (cf. Gal 3:27–28; Rom 16:1–16), as social historians and feminist theologians, among others, have pointed out (Meeks 1974; Fiorenza). Responsible interpretation of texts like these requires the exercise of Christian theological judgment within the life of the church. Understanding these texts in their original social setting is an important contribution to the wise exercise of such judgment. Here we can draw attention to just a few of the pertinent areas of consideration.

First, the genderization of church order in the Pastorals should not come as a surprise. Christians were the heirs of traditions and practices in Israel and Judaism that took for granted a system of holiness symbolically elaborated along lines of purity that at certain points distinguished between men and women. In this complex symbolic system, the rationale for which remains largely unexplained and implicit, men and women were organized in ways that enabled them to symbolize the holy in complementary ways (Archer). This meant, for example, that in a system in which bodily wholeness symbolized the oneness of God and the holiness and set-apartness of the people of God, things that crossed or confused the boundaries of the physical body became potent symbols of the impurity or chaos that constantly threatened the holiness of the social body (Douglas 1966, 1973; Countryman).

Thus bodily emissions, especially menstrual blood in the case of women and seminal emissions in the case of men, were regarded as sources of contagious impurity that temporarily disqualified the impure person from participation in celebrations of God’s holiness in the cult (cf. Lev 12; 15). Greater seriousness was attached to the impurity of women through menstruation, not (it may be argued) because of the lower status of women but because of the symbolic weight accorded to blood as the symbol of life, which is sacred (Lev 17:11, 14). Nevertheless the regularity of ritual impurity through menstruation (and, related to this, childbirth) did mean that men alone were able to function as priests of the cult. Even here, a single tribe, the Levites, was set apart for the purpose. This cult and this symbol system are part of Christianity’s cultural inheritance and help to explain the gendered ordering of the church in the Pastorals and elsewhere.

A second, related social factor that throws light on church order in the Pastorals is that, in the Mediterranean world generally, social space was divided up and marked out in a number of ways, one of the most important of which was the differentiation of the public domain from the private along lines provided by the binary opposition of male and female. It is as if the physical bodies of men and women served as a kind of map not only of the moral ordering of the social body but of its spatial ordering as well. The male represents public space and what is associated with it: leadership in politics, philosophy, rhetoric, litigation, business, warfare and the arena. The female represents the more circumscribed, private space of the household. This is where women have authority that they are to exercise on behalf of the male household head in ways intended to protect his honor. This gendered ordering of social space is maintained by deep-rooted custom and convention and by the powerful social values of honor and shame. Eloquent expression of this gendered order comes from the Hellenized Jew Philo of Alexandria:

Marketplaces and council halls and law courts and gatherings and meetings where a large number of people are assembled and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action—all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life that never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the maidens as their boundary and the outer door by those who have reached full womanhood. Organized communities are of two sorts, the greater, which we call cities, and the smaller, which we call households. Both of these have their governors; the government of the greater is assigned to men under the name of statesmanship *(politeia),* that of the less, known as household management *(oikonomia),* to women (Philo *Spec. Leg.* 3.169-70).

In this light, the fact that the early Christians met together in houses (i.e., that a public or semipublic assembly took place regularly in a private place) makes it likely that conventional lines separating public and private spheres and related male and female authority became blurred. This blurring must have been accentuated also by claims by women as well as men to a new, charismatic authority that transcended legal and traditional household patterns; not to mention doctrines of an apocalyptic or a gnostic kind that encouraged celibacy and the reevaluation of the accepted social order (1 Tim 4:1–4; cf. *Acts of Paul and Thecla;* Kraemer). Thus it is not surprising that the Pastorals give such single-minded attention to the respective roles and authority of men and women and seek to put in place a gendered church order more in keeping with scriptural norms and wider cultural patterns (possibly including contemporary synagogue practice). This may reasonably be seen as an attempt both to protect the church against disintegration from powerful centrifugal forces and to maintain a credible witness to gospel truth in the society at large.

Interpreters may be right to see here the beginnings of the institutionalization and patriarchalization of the church and a decline from the discipleship of equals in the time of Jesus and his first followers (cf. Fiorenza, 288–94). But this may not be the fairest way to characterize either the Jesus movement (with its core of twelve

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i.e. *id est,* that is

male apostles) or what the Pastorals have in mind. For in their own social context, the issues dealt with are not primarily the politics of gender relations. They are to do much more with the disciplined ordering of the household of God in the face of serious threats to its common life and public reputation.

3.3. 1 Peter: Household Order and Christian Benefactors. The central section of 1 Peter contains remarkable and extensive instruction on the Christian's social obligations (1 Pet 2:11–3:17), making it one of the most significant non-Pauline texts to address the perennial theological question of the relationship between Christianity and culture. Particularly important are the metaphors aliens (paroikoi) and exiles *(parepidēmoi),* which are used to express the Christians' self-understanding (1 Pet 2:11; cf. 1 Pet 1:1, 17). Once we grasp what this designation implies, we have a key to interpreting the instructions about the Christian's social obligations. Are the instructions, in particular the so-called household code (1 Pet 2:13–3:7), intended to separate the church from the surrounding culture? Or do they represent a compromise with society at large? Or should they be seen somewhat differently?

The first position is that taken by J. H. Elliott in one of the first works of sociological exegesis of the NT (1981). He argues that *paroikos* is as much a social as a religious category and that the addressees of the epistle were marginalized "resident aliens" *(paroikoi)* of Asia Minor who were attracted to Christianity because it offered, both socially and religiously, a home for the homeless. However, because their conversion increased the antagonism of the native residents toward them, they developed the ethos and identity of what we would call a conversionist sect in tension with the surrounding society. The strategy of the letter is to confirm the believers in their social and religious separation from outsiders and to emphasize their incorporation into an alternative society, the household of God (1 Pet 4:17; cf. 1 Pet 2:5). The role of the household code and the wider instruction on social obligation is to accentuate the distance between believers and the world around them by increasing their self-understanding as the new eschatological people of God.

Not everyone has been persuaded by Elliott's proposal (cf. Winter, 11–23; Volf). While acknowledging the important point that "aliens and exiles" may have social as well as religious connotations, it appears rather one-sided to represent conversion and subsequent Christian instruction as the product of underlying social forces of marginalization when it appears more likely that the marginalization of the Christians is the result of their conversion and distinctive lifestyle. At the least the relation between social and religious factors is likely to be a complex one with lines of influence running in both directions. It may also be the case that Elliott's position is so predisposed toward accentuating the separatist, sectarian character of early Christianity that the relation between church and culture is polarized in a way that does not do justice to the more complex picture of the relation that 1 Peter implies. The act of distinguishing categories like "social" and "religious" (or "church" and "culture") that derive from our modern, secular way of seeing things may be a fundamental mistake. It predisposes us to define things from the beginning in terms of either the one or the other and to look for one-way causal relations that may be either simplistic or prone to ideological hostage-taking.

Different from Elliott's interpretation is that of D. Balch. On the basis of a comparison of the household code in 1 Peter with codes from the wider Hellenistic Jewish environment, Balch argues that the high degree of correspondence between the respective codes shows that, far from trying to distance themselves from society at large, the Christians in Asia Minor were being encouraged toward accommodation and greater integration. The motivation suggested is essentially apologetic. By accommodating to generally accepted social norms in relation to *politeia* and *oikonomia,* the Christians would counter the slander of outsiders who viewed them as a threat to civic order and household stability. In consequence the risk of discrimination or persecution would be reduced.

Balch's comparative historical work is important for helping modern readers of the letter understand why the instructions on social ethics tie together political obligation and household relations; why the household itself is given so much attention; and why the household code follows the pattern it does (with its overwhelming stress on the subordination of slave to master and wife to husband). This makes sense in a historical and cultural context that viewed the stable household as the fundamental building block of society and that ordered itself according to class and gender in strictly hierarchical, patriarchal terms.

What is problematic, however, is the assumption that because the Christian household code is close to the Hellenistic Jewish code, the Christians must be losing their radical nerve and accommodating to the world around them. This implies that the Christians began as a minority group of outsiders and gradually accommodated to the majority by becoming insiders. But this kind of polarization obscures (in a way similar to Elliott's model of a conversionist sect) as much as it reveals. For, rather than involving a transfer from one society to another, it is far more likely that the effect of conversion was to bestow on converts membership of two societies simultaneously: earthly households and the household of God.

If so, 1 Peter may represent an attempt neither to bolster sectarian separation (Elliott) nor to encourage cultural accommodation (Balch) but to do something more subtle because the situation of the addressees is more complex (Volf). This something has to do with encouraging the Christians to realize more fully and in practice their own vocation as people who by God's mercy "have been born anew to a living hope . . . [to be] a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pet 1:3; 2:9). Sometimes this call to holiness is likely to involve rejection of the surrounding culture; at other times, acceptance and, even more, acts of public benefaction for the welfare of the city (Winter, 11–40). But the motivation for rejecting or accepting or serving as a public benefactor need not be those forces (sociological, political or others) that come solely from outside. To see things in this way reduces the profound theology and ethics of the letter to social pragmatics. It also distracts attention from the main point: the eschatological reality of God's holy people to which 1 Peter is both witness and summons (cf. 1 Pet 1:13–17).

4. Postapostolic Period.

Study of the social setting of early Christianity is not limited to the texts of the NT. Its range is much broader than that. This is partly because the interests of the social historian tend not to be confined to the boundaries set by the canon of Scripture; partly because study of what came later helps us to see the period of origins in a clearer perspective; and partly also because of the availability of a variety of source materials that cry out for investigation.

4.1. The* Didache: *Morality and Greco-Roman Voluntary Associations. One of the perennial questions of interest in the study of early Christianity is the question of conversion: what was involved in conversion, what motivated people to convert and what did people think they were converting to (cf. Nock)? The *Didache* is particularly interesting in this regard. It is a late first- or early second-century manual of Christian instruction intended for the preparation of catechumens for baptism. Beginning with an extensive statement of moral rules (the so-called Two Ways; see also Barn. 18–20), it then proceeds to instruction on baptism, fasting and prayer, Eucharist, church order (apostles and prophets, bishops and deacons), Sunday worship, and warnings about the end time.

If we focus attention on the teaching about the Two Ways, which takes up the first half of the work as a whole, what is striking is the emphasis on moral rigor in conformity to traditions that, as the informed reader recognizes, are overwhelmingly biblical and evangelical. Addressed "to the pagans" *(tois ethnēsin)* as teaching of "the Lord" mediated through the apostles, this instruction marks out the "way of life" consonant with Christian profession (*Did.* 1–4) and the "way of death" to be shunned (*Did.* 5–6). But it is noteworthy how lacking this material is in Christian narrative setting and Christian doctrinal warrant. As W. A. Meeks (1987, 151) puts it: "At the lowest level, there is much here which a simple believer could take as simply rules for keeping in tune with the divine order of things, practices that the Greeks would call *eusebeia* and the Romans *religio,* but that a satirist might call 'superstition.' "

This observation is a useful reminder that the moral rigor that attracted pagans to Christianity and Judaism was not without parallel in Greco-Roman society beyond the church and synagogue. It needs to be recognized more widely that many pagans converted to Christianity because they found in the Christian groups moral standards that they recognized already as profoundly important for human welfare; and many others scorned Christianity because they regarded the behavior of the Christians as reprehensible (e.g., Pliny *Ep.* 10.96: "I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths."), a point about which a number of Christian writers from Paul on were particularly sensitive (cf. Wilken, 15–30).

A fine illustration of the high moral standards able to be found in Greco-Roman voluntary associations, for example, comes in the form of an inscription from a private cult group dedicated to a pantheon of gods in Philadelphia, Asia Minor, dated to the late second or early first centuries .B.C.. (text and translation in Barton

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Barn. *Epistle of Barnabas*

and Horsley). This inscription sets out in considerable detail a moral code that those who enter cult meetings are to swear to uphold:

When coming into this *oikos* let men and women, free people and slaves, swear by all the gods neither to know nor to make use wittingly of any deceit against a man or woman, neither poison harmful to men nor harmful spells. They are not themselves to make use of a love potion, abortifacient, contraceptive or any other thing fatal to children. . . . Apart from his own wife, a man is not to have sexual relations with another married woman, whether free or slave, nor with a boy, nor with a virgin girl; nor shall he recommend it to another. . . . A free woman is to be chaste and shall not know the bed of, nor have sexual intercourse with, another man except her own husband. . . . At the monthly and annual sacrifices may those men and women who have confidence in themselves touch this inscription on which the ordinances of the god have been written, in order that those who obey these ordinances and those who do not may be manifest.

Analogies with the early Christian groups are numerous and indicate the extent to which these groups must have appeared to outsiders as another form of club or voluntary society. The analogies include the open access given to "men and women, free people and slaves"; the regular meeting together for a religious purpose; the location of meetings in a privately owned house or shrine *(oikos);* the placing of moral responsibility on both men and women; a stringent sexual code; the respecting of marital and household ties; the protection of children (including the unborn); and the threat of divine sanction against oath-breakers. In relation to the Two Ways code in the *Didache,* especially noteworthy are the linguistic parallels to at least four of the forbidden practices: deceit *(dolos),* poison *(pharmakon),* destruction by abortion *(phthoros)* and murder *(phonos)* (cf. *Did.* 2.2). Comparable in meaning if not linguistically are the prohibitions against the enchanter, astrologer and magician, the prohibition on infanticide and the command to "make no evil plan against your neighbor" (*Did.* 2.6).

These analogies are not fortuitous. They reflect the early Christians' indebtedness to the social patterns and moral consciousness of their times, Greco-Roman as well as biblical and Jewish. Thus we may assume that attraction to Christianity on the basis of its moral appeal had its parallels and precedents in attraction to cult groups like the one at Philadelphia. Such parallels and precedents allowed later apologists like Tertullian (c. 160–220) to use the language both of the voluntary religious association and of the philosophical school as a vehicle for persuading opponents that their fears about the Christian gatherings were groundless:

We are an association *(corpus)* bound together by our religious profession, by the unity of our way of life *(disciplina)* and the bond of our common hope. . . . We meet together as an assembly and as a society. . . . We pray for the emperors. . . . We gather together to read our sacred writing. . . . After the gathering is over the

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c. circa, about (with dates); column

Christians go out as though they had come from a "school of virtue" (Tertullian *Apol.* 39, in Wilken, 46).

In the light of such evidence, it is a mistake to attempt to explain conversion and baptism as simply a progression from darkness to light, depravity to moral rigor, impiety to piety—however effective such an explanation might be from a rhetorical point of view. The reality of the social and religious setting was much more complex than this kind of polarization allows. The Philadelphian inscription is an important reminder that it was not only Jews and Christians who took morality and religion seriously.

4.2. Ignatius of Antioch and Judaism. If the previous example drew attention to aspects of the Greco-Roman social setting of early Christianity, this final case study looks at the continuing importance of Judaism for Christian practice and self-understanding into the second century. Good illustrations of this come in the letters written by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, during his journey under arrest from Antioch to Rome, where he was martyred sometime toward the end of the reign of the emperor Trajan (98–117). However, relations between Christians and Jews are not Ignatius's principal concern. These become an issue primarily because they bear on something even more fundamental: the unity of the churches. As W. R. Schoedel puts it: "Ignatius' letters reflect the conviction that the success of his martyrdom depends on the establishment and maintenance of peace and concord in the churches. Thus he calls for obedience to bishops and avoidance of false teachers, and his views on these matters are uncompromising" (Schoedel, 12).

Of the seven letters, those to the Philadelphians and Magnesians are particularly relevant (Stanton, 176–81; translation in Schoedel). In the former Ignatius unambiguously identifies as one threat to unity those who are encouraging the Christians to follow Jewish practices: "But if anyone expounds Judaism to you do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from a man uncircumcised; both of them, if they do not speak of Jesus Christ, are to me tombstones and graves of the dead" (Ign. Phld. 6.1). This is striking evidence of the parting of the ways between church and synagogue in the early second century (*see* Christianity and Judaism), for Ignatius can speak of *Ioudaismos* and *Christianismos* as two separate religions (cf. Ign. Magn. 10.1-3, where the proper noun *Christianity* occurs for the first time in Christian literature).

Nevertheless, the possibilities of mutual influence and interaction remain strong, so much so that Christians are "not to listen" to people advocating the adoption of Jewish ways. Particularly repugnant for Ignatius is the phenomenon of Gentiles (the "uncircumcised") advocating Judaism, for it is acceptable to move from Judaism to Christianity, but quite unacceptable to move from Gentile Christianity to Judaism. The fact that Ignatius speaks so strongly on this to a church that he knows personally shows how real he felt the threat to be. This suggests in turn that Jewish laws and customs had an ongoing appeal to Christians of the second century and that this appeal was by no means limited to former members of the synagogue.

Ign. Phld. Ignatius *Letter to the Philadelphians*

But it was not only the laws and customs of Judaism that exerted an influence: the Scriptures of the Jews were influential (and a source of division) also. Some of Ignatius's opponents appear reluctant to accept the teaching of Christ if it cannot be shown to be scriptural (Ign. Phld. 8.2). Ignatius's response is revealing, since it almost admits the point before appealing to a higher authority, reinterpreting "the charters" (i.e., the Scriptures) as Jesus Christ himself and his "cross and death and resurrection and faith through him."

Ignatius then brings his argument to a climax with a comparison between the old and new dispensations in order to convince potential dissenters of the superiority of the latter and of the divine and human unity to which it gives access: "The priests are also good; yet better the high priest entrusted with the holy of holies, who alone is entrusted with the secrets of God, since he is the door of the Father through which enter Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets and the apostles and the church—all these—into the unity of God" (Ign. Phld. 9.1-2). It is worth noting also that Ignatius passes in silence over Moses and the law in favor of the Hebrew ancestors and prophets. This is typical of his reinterpretation of the Jewish Scriptures and is a tendency found also in other contemporary Christian texts and writers, notably the *Epistle of Barnabas* and Justin Martyr (Stanton, 181–88). For the prophets in particular can be made to speak of Christ more easily than can the law, and in any case it is the law whose significance Ignatius wanted to play down because of its appeal to his Judaizing opponents.

The other letter of Ignatius that shows the prominence of Judaism in the social world of Christians in Asia Minor is the letter to the Magnesians, especially *Magnesians* 8–10. Once again the dominant concern is the unity of the church in the true faith under the authority of the bishop, presbyters and deacons (Ign. Magn. 6–7). In single-minded pursuit of this unity, Ignatius's tendency is to polarize reality in terms of what brings life and what leads to death (e.g., Ign. Magn. 5; cf. Malina 1978, 82–95). Compromise is not an option. In particular compromise with Judaism and Judaizers is ruled out emphatically: "Set aside then the evil leaven, old and sour, and turn to the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted with him to keep anyone among you from being spoiled, since you will be convicted by your odor. It is ridiculous to profess Jesus Christ and to Judaize; for Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, into which every tongue that has believed in God has been gathered together" (Ign. Magn. 10.2-3).

It is remarkable how far this uncompromising, polarized stance is from the position of Paul, who, in writing to the Corinthian church a generation or two earlier, can testify to having become "to the Jews as a Jew . . . to those under the law as one under the law" (1 Cor 9:20). For Ignatius the lines of continuity between Christianity and Judaism are weaker than they were for Paul; and the lines of discontinuity are greater. Whereas Paul distinguishes between grace and the law, Ignatius distinguishes between grace and Judaism: "For if we continue to live until now according to Judaism *(kata Ioudaismon),* we confess that we have not received grace" (Ign. Magn. 8.1). In consequence the prophets are christianized in a radical way (Ign. Magn. 8.2; 9.2), and the way of life associated with sabbath observance is

replaced by the way associated with the Lord's Day (Ign. Magn. 9.1). It is plain, therefore, that for Ignatius Christianity is the negation of Judaism, and any reversion to it is anathema. This is the way he responds to the threat to church unity posed by Gentile Judaizers: not by what we would call interfaith dialogue but by strengthening the boundaries and sharpening the lines of demarcation. For Ignatius too much was at stake to allow compromise: the truth of the gospel of Christ crucified and risen, the unity of the churches under their respective bishops and the witness of his own approaching martyrdom.

See also Architecture, Early Church; Centers of Christianity; Christianity and Judaism: Partings of the Ways; Church Order, Government; CIVIL Authority; Emperor, Emperor Cult; Food, Food Laws, Table Fellowship; Household Codes; Households, Family; Persecution; Roman Empire, Christians and the; Sexuality, Sexual Ethics; Slave, Slavery; Woman and Man.

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