THE FUNCTION OF CHRISTIAN LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION; FROM PAUL TO JULIAN

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ABSTRACT

THE FUNCTION OF CHRISTIAN LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION; FROM PAUL TO JULIAN
(Under the Direction of Bart D. Ehrman)

This paper explores the function of Christian letters of recommendation, from the time of Paul (c. 50 CE) to the time of Emperor Julian (c. 350 CE). The first chapter provides background information concerning the function of letters of recommendation generally in antiquity. It is argued that the primary functions of such letters in Greco-Roman society was to provide hospitality for the traveler, and to testify to their trustworthiness. Where pagans used such letters for business or filial purposes, the early Christian church used them to build religious networks across the wide span of the Mediterranean world and the Levant. The second chapter of the thesis takes up the subject of hospitality practices in the Christian mission, and the third explores the use of letters of recommendation in the writings of the apostle Paul. Letters of recommendation were extremely important for the growth, spread and development of the Christian church.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

After Constantine's conversion to Christianity, paganism made a brief resurgence in the mid-fourth century under the leadership of Emperor Julian. Though Julian reviled Christianity's claims to a unique and exclusive relationship with the Creator, there were many things in the religion that he admired: kindness to strangers for example, or the care Christians took for their dead, or their chastity, charity, and sobriety.[1] It has been said that Julian attempted to create a "pagan church,"[2] and the phrase is perfectly apt: he took the form and structure of Christianity and attempted to fill it with traditional pagan content.

Of the elements in Christianity which Julian sought to appropriate for paganism, the fifth-century historian Sozomen tells us that "the point of ecclesiastical discipline which he chiefly admired, and desired to establish among pagans, was the custom among bishops to give letters of recommendation to those who traveled to foreign lands, wherein they commended them to the hospitality and kindness of other bishops, in all places, and under all contingencies."[3] There are a handful of such letters among the published papyri. One, *POxy*

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[1]See especially his "Letter to Arsacius", *Ep.* 22.429.C-D, 430a-d, 431A-D, 432A; (LCL, transl. Wilmer C. Wright, 3 Vols., London: William Heinemann, 1923).

[2]Downey, Glanville, "Julian and the Unity of Faith and Culture," 342.

[3]*Ecclesiastical History* 5.16. Kurt Treu comments and adds corroborating evidence: "Werden hier diese Briefe als 'bischofliche' bezeichnet, so ist in der Epitome des Theodoros Anagnostes allgemein von 'Einfuhrungsbriefen' die Rede: Julian will τὰς Χριστιανῶν εὐποιίασ μιμεῖσθαι καθυπεκρίνατο διὸ ξενῶσι

3857, is from the time of Julian, and is a helpful example of the sorts of documents Julian wanted the pagan priests to begin writing. The text, though missing a line at the top, is otherwise complete. It reads:

τοῖς κατὰ τόπον ἀγαπητοῖς	to my beloved
ἀδελφοῖς καὶ συνλειτουργοῖς	brothers and fellow ministers
την θυγατέρα ἡμων Γερ–	Our daughter Ger-
μανίαν, ἐπικουρίας	mania needs
δεομένην, π[αραγι]	help,
νομένην πρὸς	coming to
ὑμᾶς προσδέξασθε	you. Receive
ἐν ἐιρήνε, δι ἧς	in peace. Through her
ὑμᾶς καὶ τοὺς σὺν	you and those with
υμιν ἐγω τε καὶ οἱ σὺν	you I greet,
ἐμοι προσαγορεύ–	and those
ομεν. Ε(μμανουή)λ.	with me. Immanuel. Amen.
ἐρρῶσθαι ὑμας	Farewell
ἐν κ(υρί)ω εὔχομαι,	I pray in the Lord
ἀγαπητοὶ ἀδελφοί	beloved brothers[4]

It may seem somewhat counterintuitive that such diminutive and commonplace

καί πτωχείοισ χορηγεῖσθαι προσέταττε καὶ τὰσ συστατικὰσ ἐπιστολὰσ ἐσπούαζε γράφεσθαι καὶ τὰσ λοιπὰσ εὐσεβείασ ἤθελε γίνεσθαι," ("Empfehlungs-Schemabriefe," 636).

[4]*Oxyr.* 3857. M. Sirivianou, who edited and translated the text, dates it paleographically to the fourth century. Given the amount of interest in Egypt generated by Athanasius' publication of *The Life of Antony*, it is more

documents would be central to Julian's programme for the revival of paganism throughout the Roman Empire. Yet evidently they were, and the purpose of this paper is to explore why.

One of the intriguing things about this papyrus letter is its size. It measures 3' x 5.57' – roughly the size of a flash card. It was folded five times along its length, which means that when Germania carried it, it was an extraordinarily small document measuring about 3' x 1.' Within that small space, the majority of the text is devoted to greetings, with only a minimal reference to Germania herself: "Receive our daughter Germania, who needs help." In the first chapter of the paper, I show how pagan letters of recommendation typically spend much more time in the middle section, describing the background and virtues of the one commended. This Christian document lacks detailed information about the bearer, and is in some ways more like a ticket than a proper letter.

In order to show how these documents functioned within the Christian ecclesiastical context, I have divided this paper into three sections. In the first, I will survey the existing scholarship on Christian letters of recommendation. This scholarship has been predominantly occupied with questions about the form and structure of the letters, and how they are related to ancient manuals on epistolography. In general, scholars have emphasized the form of these letters to the exclusion of their function. In the second section of the paper I will attempt to show that these letters functioned to procure hospitality for the bearer. Since primary evidence is scarce, my method is to examine hospitality practices when such letters are *not* utilized. My central point in this section is that, although in the sources hospitality is often mentioned as a Christian virtue, strangers often needed to be tested, and were not simply welcomed on principle. Christian letters of recommendation validated the bearer, so

likely than not that this particular letter was written on behalf of one of the numerous pilgrims who flocked to Egypt in the latter half of the fourth century.

that the host community did not have to. Finally, in the third part of the paper, I will examine 2 Corinthians, which shows how letters of recommendation were being employed in the early Christian mission. I will argue in this section that the letters were utilized by Paul's primary opponents – the Jerusalem Christians – and that they functioned to authenticate their gospel over and against Paul's. For the Corinthian community, these letters and their bearers cast doubt on the sufficiency of Paul's ministry, thereby illustrating the fact that letters of recommendation functioned in the growing Christian church to delineate an orthodox "us" from a heterodox "them". The paper as a whole, then, is an attempt to understand better how these letter functioned by viewing them from three angles: the Christian letter of recommendation in comparison to similar Greco-Roman letters, the function of procuring hospitality, and the function of establishing alliances which devolve upon points of doctrine.

The documentary letters of recommendation which are identifiably Christian (currently ten have been published)[5] are all from about the fourth century. However, the practice of commending individuals in writing is evident in earlier times also. Romans chapter 16 is thought by some to originally have been be an independent letter of recommendation for Phoebe,[6] III John is sometimes referred to as a letter of recommendation,[7] and Acts 18:27 relates how the community at Ephesus wrote a letter of recommendation for Apollos when he

[5]P. Alex. 29; P.S.I. 1041; P. Princ. 101; P. Oxy. 1162; P.S.I. 208; P. Oxy 2603; SB 7269; P. Oxy 2785; N.S. 27-30; P. Oxy 3875.

[6]The idea was originally put forward by T.W. Manson in an issue of the bulletin for the Rylands Library (XXI, 1948, 224 – 240). For discussion, see Edgar Goodspeed, "Phoebe's Letter of Introduction", *HTR* 44 no. 1 (1951): 55 – 57, Karl Donfried, "A Short Note on Romans 16", *JBL* 89 no. 4 (1960): 441 – 449, and B.N. Kaye, "'To the Romans and Others' Revisited", *Novum Testamentum,* 18 (fasc. 1) 1976: 37 – 77.

[7]For example in Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John, passim,* and Bruce Malina, "The Received View", *passim.* For a more balanced consideration of how the commendation for Demetrius functions in the context of the letter as a whole (and in the broader context of Greco-Roman epistolography), see Robert Funk, "The Form and Structure of II and III John", *JBL* 86 No. 4 (1967): 424 – 430.

traveled to Achaia. It is clear that the use of these letters had its roots in the earliest Christian mission.

This practice is also evident in the post-biblical period. Statements commending certain individuals are scattered throughout Ignatius' epistles (though it is never clear who carried the letters), and the epistle of Polycarp to the Philadelphians commends Crescens ("whom I recently commended to you and now commend again," vs. 14). We can begin to sense these sorts of recommendations taking on a more specifically ecclesiastical function with Clement of Alexandria, who when he went to Antioch carried with him a letter of recommendation written by bishop Alexander of Jerusalem.[8] So also Origen, when he traveled through Palestine on his way to Greece to deal with some doctrinal problems there, carried with him letters of recommendation written by his bishop.[9]

The *Apostolic Constitutions* shows that by the fourth century the writing of these letters had become so commonplace that they were not, in and of themselves, enough to guarantee the legitimacy of the bearer:

> Of Commendatory Letters in Favour of Strangers, Lay Persons, Clergymen, and Bishops; And that Those Who Come into the Church Assemblies are to Be Received Without Regard to Their Quality. If any brother, man or woman, come in from another parish, bringing recommendatory letters, let the deacon be the judge of that affair, inquiring whether they be of the faithful, and of the Church? Whether they be not defiled by heresy? and besides, whether the party be a married woman or a widow? And when he is satisfied in these questions, that they are really of the faithful, and of the same sentiments in the things of the Lord, let him conduct every one to the place proper for him.[10]

This text illustrates issues central to the function of Christian letters of recommendation: they procured hospitality and proposed to guarantee an individual's orthodoxy. It also illustrates that, by the fourth century, writing these letters was such a common practice, and

[8]Eusebius, *EH,* 6.11; transl G.A. Williamson in *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Chirst to Constantine,* Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Dorset Press, 1965, p. 251.

[9]*Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. IV, "Introductory Note to the Works of Origen"; Eusebius, *EH,* 6.23.

heresy such a complicated matter, that deacons had to adjudicate whether or not the letter of recommendation should be accepted or not. Regardless of such problems, however, Emperor Julian clearly appreciated the value of these letters for creating and reinforcing social and ideological networks over a wide area.

[10] *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. VII, "Apostolic Constitutions", §58

CHAPTER 2

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION IN GRECO-ROMAN SOCIETY

Overview of Letter-Writing in the Ancient Near East

There is as yet no study which gives a detailed comparison of Greek and Latin letters with their predecessors in the Ancient Near East. From a survey of the earliest written records, we can see that letters were employed from time immemorial to establish, maintain or break relationships between people (or kingdoms) separated by large distances. To illustrate the general point, there is a confluence of themes in the earliest references to letters in the ancient Near East. The first letter mentioned in the Greek tradition is the one carried by Bellerophon, written by his father-in-law Proteus.[11] Bellerophon presumed the document he carried was a letter of introduction, but unbeknownst to him the text actually ordered the recipient to have him put to death. In a similar manner the first letter mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (2 Samuel 11) occurs when King David orders the bearer of the letter, Uriah, to be put on a hopeless military expedition that will result in his death. So also the Mesopotamian tradition (from the second millenium BC and preserving legendary material about Sargon of Akkad (2334 – 2279 BCE)) describes the invention of letters as follows:

[11]*Iliad,* 6.153-211. For a persuasive attempt to identify a Semitic origin to this Homeric episode, see Jeffrey A. White, "Bellerophon in the 'Land of Nod'", *AJP* 103 No. 2 (1982): 119 – 127. See also G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary,* vol. 2: 112f.

> At that time writing on tablets indeed existed but enclosing them in clay (envelopes) [ie, sending them as letters] had not yet been invented. King Ur-Zababa, creature of the gods, wrote a tablet for Sargon that would cause his own [Sargon's] death. He dispatched it to (king) Lugalzagesi in Uruk.[12]

From the very earliest times, then, it is clear that letters were used to navigate social relationships. In antiquity, they were viewed with a great deal of suspicion – they had great power to unite, but also great power to divide.[13] While this paper is primarily concerned with how letters can *establish* relationships, there is plenty of material available for how letters can equally destroy them.

In the Assyrian archives, there are passages of recommendation (for example, commending an individual for the post of court astrologer) analogous to the later Greek and Latin letters,[14] but the most interesting early example of a letter of recommendation comes from the Egyptian Amarna Archive (*EA* 23).[15] This letter was written in the 14th century BCE in Babylonian cuneiform, and is a letter of introduction for the goddess Sauska (in this case embodied in a statue). The letter was written by Tusratta king of Assyria to his son-in-law Nimmureya king of Egypt. Sauska had revealed to Tusratta that she wished "to go Egypt, the country that I love, and then return," so he wrote a letter of recommendation to

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[12]Cooper, J.S and W. Heimpel, "The Sumerian Sargon Legend." *JAOS* 103 (1983): 77; *cf* also Piotr Michalowski, *Letters from Early Mesopotamia,* 3.

[13]Various scholars have attempted to articulate this seemingly inherent destructive power of the written word. Michalowski writes "The idea that a letter could kill its bearer is indicative of the ideological danger of written communication: letters can be falsified, altered, or simply lost" (*Letters from Early Mesopotamia,* 3). William Harris concurs: "When letters are mentioned by fifth-century writers, they often have a surprisingly sinister import, like Proteus' letter in the Iliad: they are authoritative and deceptive at the same time…it is remarkable how much the letters of Thucidydes – political of course – are instruments of death, betrayal, and deceit" (*Ancient Literacy,* 88). The topic of this paper is letters of recommendation, which function to establish relationships, but it is clear from even a cursory view of the evidence that Christians often used letters to break relationships: to slander a "heretic" or condemn an enemy. I had initially intended to survey this negative use of letters in early Christianity, but found the topic too large to treat in such a small paper.

[14]See Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars,* that contains a letter (*ABL* 956) which reads "The body-guard Marduk-sarru-usur is a trustworthy and reliable man" (200).

[15]Moran, William L., *Amarna Letters,* 61f.

accompany her statue on the journey. The letter reads, "Just as earlier [Sauska] dwelt there and they honored her, may my brother now honor her 10 times more than before. May my brother honor her, (then) at (his) pleasure let her go so that she may come back."

I have briefly cited these few texts in order to underscore the point that the use of letters in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (the periods of central concern for this paper) was not novel. What made the Hellenistic period different from previous periods was the spread of alphabetic literacy and the ideals and institutions of paideia in the context of a Greek diaspora. In other words, letters of recommendation did not appear for the first time in the Hellenistic period, but they *were* used for the first time to commend common individuals rather than kings, generals and goddesses.

The Hellenistic Period and Letter-Writing Manuals

Before the Hellenistic period, letter writing was largely practiced by the political and military elite.[16] By the fifth century it was employed in the context of trading and commerce by private individuals,[17] but it was not until the Hellenistic period that letter-writing became a common and widely practiced activity. Various factors influenced the development of letter writing, two of the most important of which were the Hellenistic Greek diaspora and institutionalization of paideia.[18]

One concrete piece of evidence for a Hellenistic beginning to formal instruction in letter writing is the manual (wrongly) attributed in the MS tradition to Demetrius of

[16]See esp. Luther M. Stirewalt, *Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography,* 6-15.

[17]This is evidenced by the earliest letter we have, the lead Berezan letter. For a discussion, see Michael Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters,* p.51, 195ff.

Phaleron. In 1909, Brinkmann attempted to give a date for this manual. His method was to compare the language of the manual with the published papyri, and he concluded that it was originally written between 200 BCE and 50 CE.[19] Clinton Keyes, who had more papyri available for analysis, accepted some of Brinkmann's findings but also pointed to terms and phrases which are typical of the first through third centuries CE.[20] Keyes concluded that although the manual may have originated towards the earlier limit set by Brinkmann, the presence of phrases clearly post-Ptolomaic show that it continued to be developed well into the Roman period.

In his attempt to test the date assigned by Brinkmann to the Pseudo-Demetrius text, Keyes chose the letter of recommendation as a control. The reason is that the letter of recommendation "is perhaps the most distinctive in purpose and character of them all…it was less likely than the other kinds to contain extraneous matter, and, even where it does, the separation of the words of introduction from the other elements is easily made."[21] Keyes observed that several of the other types of letters identified in the manuals "tend to shade into one another."[22] Keyes' opinion that the letter of recommendation was a distinct sort of letter with a unique and relatively stable form and function was also the opinion of some in

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[18] See Harris, William, *Ancient Literacy,* 127f; White, John L. *Light from Ancient Letters* 189-193; and Stirewalt, *Studies,* 6-15.

[19]Brinkmann, L., "Die älteste Briefstellar," 317.

[20]Keyes, Clinton W., "The Greek Letter of Introduction," 31f.

[21]*Ibid*. Trapp agrees: "The letter of recommendation, the letter of condolence or consolation, and (perhaps) the invitation [are more thoroughly stylized]," *Letters,* 5.

[22]So for example, the "Friendly Type" and the "Praising Type", "The Greek Letter of Introduction", 32

antiquity – Cicero uses the term *litterae commendaticiae* and explicitly distinguishes them from other types of letters.[23]

Pseudo-Demetrius' manual is called Τύποι Ἐπιστολικοί, and it offers examples for twenty-one types of letters. The letter of recommendation is listed second, after the "friendly type", which suggests that these two were the most common or distinctive types of letters known to the author. The description of and model for a letter of recommendation are as follows:

> The commendatory type, which we write on behalf of one person to another, mixing in praise, at the same time also speaking of those who had previously been unacquainted as though they were (now) acquainted. In the following manner:
> So-and-so, who is conveying this letter to you, has been tested by us and is loved on account of his trustworthiness. You will do well if you deem him worthy of hospitality both for my sake and for his, and indeed for your own. For you will not be sorry if you entrust to him words or deeds of a confidential nature. Indeed, you, too, will praise him to others when you see how useful he can be in everything.[24]

We can see from this text that the letter of recommendation was carried by the one recommended, it offered a brief identification and background, and certified that the individual had been "tested by us." This "testing" will be a key point in the next chapter of this paper, dealing with issues pertaining to hospitality.

As mentioned, the Τύποι Ἐπιστολικοί lists twenty-one types of letters, though the author speculates that "perhaps time might produce more than these", and the thought proved prescient. The other extant manual from antiquity, the Ἐπιστολιμαῖοι Χαρακτῆρες, offers forty-one types. It is from the 4th to 6th centuries AD and was variously attributed to either Libanius or Proclus in its manuscript tradition. It is worth pointing out that by the time this

[23] Cicero *Ad Fam.* 5.5 § 1. Hannah Cotton writes, "The economic and social forces which these letters utilize, the atmosphere and the milieu in which they seem to thrive, and the political framework in which they operate had existed in Rome, even if in a less developed form, long before the first century B.C. The practice of writing recommendations must have already taken deep roots in Cicero's Rome", "Greek and Latin Epistolary Formulae," 424.
[24] Translated in Abraham Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists,* 33.

later manual was written, instruction in letter-writing had not only been incorporated into the schools, but it was considered by some to be a formal component of rhetoric.[25] Libanius-Proclus' entry for a letter of commendation is as follows:

> The commending style is that in which we commend someone to someone. It is also called the introductory style.
> Receive this highly honored and much-sought after man, and do not hesitate to treat him hospitably, thus doing what behooves you and what pleases me.[26]

The texts from Pseudo-Demetrius and Libanius-Proclus are our only two extant ancient manuals on epistolography. Much of the scholarship on these manuals has been occupied with discerning the degree to which they match up against the surviving papyri, and the letter of recommendation has been used as the primary control because its form and structure were more stable than other types. Keyes concluded that the extant papyri do not show any dependence on the manuals of Pseudo-Demetrius or Pseudo-Libanius. Particularly compelling is his observation that παρακομίζοντα (the verb used in the Τυποί) is not found in any of the papyri he surveyed, and κομίζων (from Pseudo-Libainius) was very rare.[27] The papyri instead use phrases such as ὁ φερῶν or ὁ ἀποδιδούς. Keyes concluded that "while the letters of introduction do not slavishly adhere to any single formula, there is abundant evidence that traditional formula, different from those found in the Τύποι, did exist, and were generally used…these formulae were probably contained in handbooks of letter writing which are now lost."[28]

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[25]See Julius Victor, "The Art of Rhetoric," 27 (fourth century A.D.), in Malherbe, *Theorists,* 63.

[26] Malherbe, *Theorists,* 69, 75.

[27] Kim, Chan-Hae, *Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation,* 47, objects to Keyes' analysis here (by offering three exceptions and one tendentious restoration of a lacuna), but the objections are irrelevant to Keyes' basic point: the papyri do not show dependence on the manuals.

[28]Keyes, "The Greek Letter of Introduction," 42.

This raises the question, however: if there is no evidence that the papyrus letters of recommendation are related to manuals which we *do* have, why does Keyes think they are related to other manuals which we *do not* have? Keyes is not alone in his tendency to see an archetypal manual behind every linguistic and grammatical coincidence in the papyri. Chan-Hae Kim, surveying five Christian letters of recommendation, writes that they "are so nearly identical that we wonder if the [Christian] writers of these letters had a manual of their own."[29]

The suggestion that a handbook lay behind every linguistic and grammatical coincidence in the papyri is predicated on one of two assumptions: 1) either the writer had a perfect memory of the manual from which he learned; or 2) he or she had a manual in front of them and copied directly. Given the fact that the papyrus letters we have do not show much adherence to the two most famous manuals, it is better to conclude that letter-writers in general simply put their thoughts onto papyrus, as opposed to consciously imitating an ideal type embodied in a manual.[30]

It seems to me that the reason Keyes, Kim and others posit archetypal manuals is that it gives them a conceptual framework within which to interpret their findings. Without positing such a manual, it becomes difficult to explain linguistic and grammatical similarities in the papyri – instead of a concrete manual one must resort to a more general linguistic theory – how many ways *are* there to say "carrying"? It seems to me that the most likely *Sitz im Leben* for the manuals was practice exercises in the schoolroom (and not reference-books

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[29]Kim, *Form and Structure,* 99.

[30]*Cf* White, *Light from Ancient Letters,* "One thing is certain. There was never a full integration of the practice and the theory. Ordinary letter writing, occasioned by practical necessities, influenced the theory but did not dominate it," 190.

used at the point of writing). The Bologna Papyrus (3rd – 4th c. AD) appears to be a student's attempts to copy letter-types from a manual,[31] and this dovetails with the suggestion above that letter-writing was by the fourth century taught as a school-room exercise.[32] This is to be distinguished from the supposition that letter-writers had a manual in front of them as they wrote, into which they simply inserted the particular information specific to their circumstance. Evidence on the topic is scarce, but if it is granted that the manuals were for schoolwork (and not referenced at the point of writing), then this would account for the similarities in general structure – since the type was learned during school – as well as the differences in language and phraseology, which would arise according to the exigencies of the specific situations and according to the proclivities of the various writers. Kim and Keyes tend to suppose that there is a manual behind every coincidence in the papyri, but if these were as widely copied and referenced as such a supposition would require, one would expect to find fragments of them amongst the papyri, and this is not the case.[33]

The Form and Structure of the Letter of Recommendation

In the only monograph written on the subject, Chan-Hae Kim attempted to delineate the general traditional structure of the Greco-Roman letter of recommendation. His ultimate concern was with the New Testament, which according to him had not "benefited …by the study of the papyri in the field of epistolography."[34] Kim attempted to rectify the situation

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[31]An edition of this papyrus is given in Malherbe, *Theorists*, 4f.

[32]See above, n. 25.

[33]The single exception would be the Bologna Papyrus, cited above n. 31.

[34]Kim, *Form and Structure,* 1.

by selecting "one type of papyrus letter, the letter of recommendation, in an effort to establish its' type [his emphasis] by examining the structure of the letter and its constituent forms."[35] He surveyed the published papyri and found 83 letters of recommendation, seven of which he identified as Christian.[36]

Kim argued that that letters of recommendation include 1) an opening section, subdivided into a "salutation formula" and a "formula valetudinis"; 2) a background section, subdivided into an "identification formula" and the "background proper"; 3) a request period, subdivided into a "request clause", a "circumstantial clause", and a "purpose or causal clause"; 4) an appreciation section; and 5) a closing section, subdivided into a closing "formula valetudinis" and a "closing salutation." Stanley Stowers has helpfully modified the language of the scheme; for example replacing Kim's "formula valetudinis" with a more general "Wish for well-being," and his "Identification formula" with "Identification of the one recommended."[37] By softening Kim's overly-rigid reliance on putative formulae, Stowers renders the primary evidence more amenable to the broader structure Kim has identified.

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[35]*Ibid*, 2. Kim's reasoning in his thesis is circular, and this underscores problems inherent in classifying ancient letters according to genre. Keyes wrote that the different types of letters given in the manuals "tend to shade into one another" ("The Greek Letter of Introduction," 32). Trapp and Stowers agree that the classification of letters is more properly a heuristic (rather than scientific) exercise.

[36]Hannah Cotton added 19 letters to Kim's total (*Documentary Letters of Recommendation in Latin from the Roman Empire,* 53f), Kurt Treu included two that Kim missed ("Empfehlungs-Schemabriefe", 632f), and the letter for Germania cited above was published in 1993, yielding a total of 105 currently published documentary letters of recommendation (though a few of the letters Kim included are problematic; for example Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians).

[37]Stowers, Stanly, *Letter-Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity,* 153. I consider this "helpful" because, as I have argued above, the idea that the papyri show "formulae" does not match up with the evidence from the extant manuals, and is therefore in my view are overly-schematic.

A papyrus letter which nicely exemplifies the typical letter of recommendation identified by Kim is *PMerton* 62, dated to 6 CE (Kim's number for each section is in the left-hand column).[38]

1	Ἀπολλώνιος Σαραπίωνι τῶι	Apollonius to Sarapion
	[σ]τρατη[γῶι] καὶ γυμνασιάρχωι	the strategus and gymnasiarch
	πλεῖστα χ[αίρ]ειν και λιὰ παντὸς	many greetings and good
2	ὑ[γ]ιαίνειν. Ἰ[σί]δωροσ [ὁ] φέρων σοι	health always. Isodorus, the one who is
	τὴν ἐπισθολὴν ἔστιν μου ἐκ τῆσ	delivering this letter, is from my
3	οἰκίασ. ἐρωτηθεὶσ ἔηε αὐτὸν	household. I ask you to consider
	συνεσταμένον, καὶ ὑπὲρ ὧν ἐάν	him introduced to you, and if he comes
	σοι προσέλθῃ, εἰς τὴς ἐμὴν καταλο–	to you for anything do it for him
4	γὴς πόησον αὐτῶι. τοῦτο δὲ ποήσας	for my sake. If you do this,
	ἔσῃ μοι κεχαρ[ισ]μένος. καὶ σὺ δέ	I will be indebted to you. And whatever
	περὶ ὧν ἐὰς αἶρῃ σήμανον, καὶ	you wish to ask I I
	ἀνόκνωσ ποήσωι πρὸσ αὐτῶν ὅμοια.	will do without delay.
5	ἐπιμέλου σεαυτοῦ ἵν᾽ ὑγι(αίνῃσ). ἔρρωσο.	Take care of yourself that you may be healthy. Farewell.

In this letter, the basic structure is fairly clear. If we compare it to the model letter from Pseudo-Demetrius cited above, we can see that both mention the one who carries the letter, and both attest to his reliability ("is loved on account of his trustworthiness" in the manual – "is from my household" in *PMerton* 62). The manual expresses the writer's wishes with a future indicative ("οὐ μεταμελήσῃ"), while *PMerton* 62 uses an aorist imperative ("ἐάν σοι προσέλθῃ…πόησον"), but the sense is the same: in each case it is a polite request. In the more general terms suggested by Stowers, there is in both letters a greeting with a wish for well-being, an identification of the one recommended with some background information, a polite request, an appreciation, and some closing remarks. Most of these elements can be found in most of the published papyrus letters of recommendation, and constitute its basic type.

[38]Kim, *Form and Structure,* 188.

A study similar to Kim's is Kurt Treu's "Christliche-Empfehlungs-Schemabriefe," published in 1973.[39] Treu places seven Christian letters of recommendation next to each other, line by line, in an attempt to demonstrate "ein Schema zugrundeliegt."[40] I will reproduce the first lines of Treu's table, from the "Greetings" section, in order to illustrate his method (there is not enough space to reproduce the table entirely):

	Χαῖρε ἐν Κυρίω, ἀγαπητέ ἀδελφὲ Πέτρε, Σώτας σε προσαγορεύω.
	" " " " " Παύλε, Σώτας " "
	" " " " " Μάξιμε, [...]ασ " "
	" " " " πάπα Σώτα, πρεσβ. Ἡρακλέουσ πολλά σε προσαγορεύομεν
	Θεωνᾶς Μηνσουρίῳ ἀγαπητῷ αδελφῳ ἐν Κυρίῳ χαίρειν
	Τύραννοσ τοῖσ κατὰ τόπον ἀγαπητοῖσ ἀδελφοῖσ " " "
	Λέων πρεσβύτεροσ " " " συλλειτουργοῖσ, πρεσβυτέροισ καί δια– κόνοις ἀγαπητοῖσ ἀδελφοῖσ ἐν Κυρίῳ Θεῷ χαίρειν.

(A=PSI 208; B=PSI 1041; C=*PAlex* 317; D=*POxy* 2785; E=NS 11; F=Naldini 94; G=*POxy* 1162)

At first glance, Treu's table looks impressive – there does seem to be an underlying structure. But three of the first four examples are from the same person, Bishop Sotas, who clearly has a habitual way of expressing greetings in his letters. The fourth is from a presbyter in Sotas' region, and the similarities between his letter and Sotas' letters may be attributed to local epistolographic convention. Treu's table does indicate that there is a general structure to the Christian papyri, but on the other hand it is fairly clear from the same table that there is also a good deal of variety in their language and phraseology.

In the same way that it is problematic to assume a manual behind every papyrus letter, it is overly-schematic to insist on a structure which underlies all letters of a given type. Kim

[39]Treu's article appeared two years after Kim's dissertation was published. He does not mention Kim, but the table he uses to illustrate Christian letters of recommendation is very similar in structure (and in content) to the tables Kim constructs.

himself concedes this point, acknowledging that not all of the papyri he selected for inclusion in his study "are letters of recommendation per se."[41] The types really do tend to "shade into each other."[42] The structure also breaks down in what Kim has called the "Identification Formula." He identifies four constituent elements, and then writes that "not all letters of recommendation have the prototypical identification formula. Some of them display all four items but in a slightly different order and form, and some have only a few of these items – occasionally with different phrasing and arrangement – combined either with the background proper or with the request period."[43] Finally, Kim observes that "in the Roman and Byzantine periods, the rigid structure of the letter is gradually lost, and it becomes difficult to make a clear distinction, even between the background and the request period."[44] This observation significantly damages his claims about the form and structure of the letters, because about half of the letters he collected are from the Roman and Byzantine period.

Kim's over-emphasis on the structure of the Greco-Roman letter of recommendation ultimately undercuts his broader attempt to illuminate the New Testament, for the simple reason that the papyrus letters of recommendation are in form and structure nothing like any New Testament epistle. No papyrus letter, for example, contains in its general form or structure an "'eschatological climax'…a paraenetic section, benedictions, greetings, and

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[40]"Christliche Empfehlungs-Schemabriefe," 632.

[41]Kim, *Form and Structure,* 5 (his emphasis).

[42]Keyes, cited above, n. 22.

[43]Kim, *Form and Structure,* 51.

[44]*Ibid,* 37.

some miscellaneous requests,"[45] all of which Kim identifies in I Thessalonians, an epistle he hopes to illuminate through his discussion of the papyri.

The Function of the Letter of Recommendation

In order to compare the relative functions of the Christian and pagan documentary letters of recommendation, I will juxtapose two and highlight similarities and differences. The work Kim has done on clarifying the general structure makes it easier to notice where they differ from each other. The questions I am concerned with here are how and why they differ.

Before comparing two letters to see what functions are implicit in the text, however, I will cite one narrative that gives an explicit description of how a letter of recommendation functioned in a pagan context (unfortunately, I have not been able to find a comparable narrative depiction from within the Christian tradition). The passage is from chapter two of *The Golden Ass*, where Apuleius arrives at the house of Milo, his host-to-be. He bangs on the gate and a slave girl answers:

> "Was it you who made that dreadful noise?"
> "It was I who knocked."
> "Well, where's your gold or silver? You must be the only man in Hypata who doesn't know our terms: no cash advanced, except on a pledge of equal weight in precious metal."
> "Not at all the way to speak to visitors," I said severely. "Is your master at home?"
> "Of course he is. But what's your business?"
> "I have come with a letter of introduction to him from Demeas the Corinthian."
> "Wait here while I give him your message." She barred the gate again and went back into the house. Presently she reappeared: "My master says, will you please come in?"[46]

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[45] *Ibid,* 121.

[46] *The Golden Ass of Apuleius,* transl. Robert Graves, New York: The Pocket Library, 1954, p. 19.

I would point out that the initial response from the girl is suspicion, which the letter functions to remove. The subsequent narrative reveals how Milo welcomes Apuleus into his house, provides him with hospitality (food and a room), and plies him with questions about their mutual friend Demeas. The letter of introduction has enabled these two – who previously did not know each other – to develop an immediate relationship. All this will be important in the next chapter on hospitality.

Kim did some comparison of the pagan and Christian letters, though his results are largely grammatical and lexical, and therefore unhelpful for showing how these letters functioned. One important difference he found, though, was that in contrast to the pagan letters, the Christian letters had "neither background nor the most commonly used identification formula; and there is no clearly noticeable request period, either."[47] This point may be expanded, and to do so I have juxtaposed a pagan letter of recommendation with a Christian letter (I have inserted spaces between the sections in order to make them structurally parallel):

***POxy* 1162 (Christian)**	***POxy* 292 (Pagan)**
Leon the presbyter, to the presbyters	Theon to his esteemed Tyrannus
and deacons who share the local service,	Many greetings.
beloved brothers in the lord God	
fullness of joy.	
Our brother Ammonius who is coming to you	Heraclides, the bearer of this letter, is
Receive in peace	my brother. I therefore entreat you with
	all my power to be introduced to him.
	I have also written to your brother
	Hermias asking him to communicate with
	you about him. You will confer upon me
	a very great favor if Heraclides gains your
	notice.

[47]Kim, *Form and Function,* 117.

Through whom we and those with us greet	Before all else you have you have my
you and those who are with you kindly in the	good wishes for unbroken health and
Lord. I pray for your health in the Lord	prosperity. Good bye.
God. Emmanuel is my witness. Amen.	

There are numerous elements in these two letters that are indicative of the difference in function between private pagan letters and Christian ones, even in the opening and closing sections (where Kim saw no substantial differences). I will discuss 1) the greeting; 2) the phrase "τοῖσ κατὰ τόπον"; 3) the background/request sections; and 4) the closing.

1) In the greeting, the Christian letter is addressed to multiple unnamed people. This is entirely different from the pagan letters of recommendation collected by Kim, which invariably mention by name at least one of the individuals to whom they are addressed. By contrast, Leon identifies himself as a presbyter, and addresses the letter generally to presbyters, deacons and beloved brothers. His general greeting indicates that he does not know the individuals to whom he is commending Ammonius. This corroborates Sozomen's comment above, that the letters "commended [the bearers] to the hospitality and kindness of other bishops, in all places, and under all contingencies." These Christian letters can function in an ecclesiastical context across a wide geographical area, while the pagan letters invariably function in a one-to-one direct relationship in a specific area.

2) The phrase τοῖσ κατὰ τόπον has been the subject of some scholarly discussion. The editors of *POxy* 1162 translate it with συνλιτοῦργοι[ς] as "to those [presbyters and deacons] who share the local service."[48] But since τοῖσ κατὰ τόπον (without συνλιτοῦργοι[ς]) is an independent phrase which recurs in other Christian letters – as Treu's table shows (above, p.18) – this is not the best translation. Sirivianou points out that the phrase was already used

[48] See Treu's table above, line G, for the full Greek text.

in a “similar context” in I Maccabees 12:4: “καὶ ἔδωκαν ἐπιστολὰσ αὐτοῖσ πρὸς αὐτουσ κατὰ τόπον, ὅπως προπέμπωσιν αὐτοὺσ εἰς γῆν Ἰούδα μετ’ εἰρηνης.” The meaning here of κατὰ τόπον is clearly “in each place.” The context in Maccabees alluded to by Sirivianou is as follows: Jonathan had sent envoys to Rome seeking to reconfirm their alliance – the Romans accepted the envoys favorably, and wrote letters guaranteeing the envoys safe passage through various places on their way back to Judea. The Roman letters were efficacious because they had behind them the authority of the Roman Empire and army.

I agree with Sirivanou that the context of the Maccabees passage is similar to that of the Christian letter of recommendation. In I Maccabees, the envoys are commended in each place on their return home, and the authority behind the commendation is the Roman Empire. In the Christian letter of recommendation cited above, Ammonius is being commended to churches in each place, and the authority behind the commendation is the ecclesiastical office represented by the presbyter Leon. The difference of course is that the authority in the former example is military and political, while that in the latter is ecclesiastical, but they are similar insofar as it is a general commendation – applicable in numerous places – and that the authority behind the letter is acknowledged by all parties. Typical pagan letters of recommendation are by contrast meant to be read by one person in one place. This point is underscored by the fact that in the letter cited above, Theon wrote independent letters to both Tyrannus and his brother Hermias.

The phrase τοῖσ κατὰ τόπον signifies that these were open letters, efficacious wherever the person commended chose to go. This further explains the fact mentioned above that there are no specific addressees in the greeting. The only analogous materials that I have found in non-Christian sources are when a political ruler writes a general commendation for the purposes of safe passage.[49] In the pagan documentary papyri collected by Kim, there are no instances of a general commendation.

3) The third point of comparison between the pagan and Christian letter of recommendation cited above is the background/request section. They are similar in that the Christian letter mentions “our brother Ammonius,” and the pagan letter likewise mentions that Hericlides is “my brother.” On the general use of filial language, Sirivanou writes that

> It was the general custom for pagans as well as Christians to apply to other persons with whom they had business or social relationships the language of family relationships. Officials call each other “brother”. In private life “brother” and “sister” were used to persons of about the same age, “father” and “mother” to older friends, “son” and “daughter” to younger ones. This affectionate use may differ from the spiritual one, by which persons of all ages may be “sons” or “daughters” of the priest or teacher (just as all people are the sons and daughters of God: 2 Cor. 6.18)[50]

This is corroborated by Kim’s survey of the papyri, where he found that the majority of letters identify the person commended with filial language. Next most common, Kim observes, are identifications with references to friendship or affection, and least common were identifications in terms of occupation or qualifications.[51] Clearly, terminology of familial relationships was most important when recommending one person to another.

The key point of difference here is that in the Christian letter, there were evidently no prior existing social relationships. The lack of named addressees in the greeting section and

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[49]In addition to the letter mentioned in 1 Maccabees, there is Artaxerxes’ letter in Ezra 7:11-26, which orders “all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you” (v.21); *cf* also a letter from the Sargonic period, “Thus says Mesag: In the name of the king (I declare that) no one is to detain Ur-lumma. He has given up all claims (in the matter)” (Michalowski, *Letters,* 43).

[50]*POxy* 292, ed. Sirivanou, 116. See also the essay by Stephen C. Barton, “The Relativisation of Family Ties in the Jewish and Greco-Roman Traditions,” in *Constructing Early Christian Families,* Halvor Moxnes, ed., 81 – 100. Barton argues that “subordinating mundane ties of all kinds was a rhetorical theme and a mode of action deeply rooted in the traditions of Jewish monotheism…nor was it without analogy in the Graeco-Roman traditions,” 81.

[51]Kim, *Form and Structure,* 96.

the phrase κατὰ τόπον indicate that these Christian ecclesiastical letters were open letters, and that it was not necessary for either the writer or the bearer to have a prior relationship with the recipients. Ammonious is introduced and identified with only the phrase τὸν ἀδελφὼν ἡμῶν Ἀμμώνι. Kim suggests that the precedent position taken here by "'our brother'…is important because it indicates a stronger emphasis on the credentials than on the position of the person(s) recommended…the fact that they are 'our brothers,' namely, fellow Christians, is much more important than who they are in other respects."[52] I think that Kim is correct, and this helps to explain why the background/identification section in this letter is much shorter than in the pagan letter: the only thing that matters within the ecclesiastical context is that the commended is "our brother." This point will be further explored in the final chapter of the paper, on issues pertaining to how these letters functioned in the context of competing orthodoxies.

Another element in the background/request section worth pointing out is that the Christian letter uses a simple aorist imperative (συνδέχασθαι αὐτὸν), while the pagan letter has relatively lengthy requests: "I entreat you with all my power," and "You will confer upon me a very great favor." Kim asserts that the use of the aorist imperative is a characteristic deviation of the Christian letters from their pagan counterparts,[53] but we have seen above that non-Christian letters could at times employ aorist imperatives (*PMerton* 62 has "ποήσον"). Although Kim is mistaken in his specific point, it is nevertheless true that many of the pagan letters he gathered have the polite request phrase καλῶσ ποιήσεισ, which is found in none of

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[52]*Ibid.* 109f.

[53]*Ibid,* 113.

the identifiably Christian letters.[54] In general, the *tone* of the pagan letters in the middle section is of a politely requested favor, and the tone of the Christian letters in the same section is more akin to formal directive. This suggests that the favorable reception of the one recommended in the Christian letter was not so much requested as it was assumed, and this again accords with Sozomen's statement that these letters were "a matter of ecclesiastical discipline." Furthermore, some of the Christian papyri direct the recipients to receive the one commended "κατὰ τὸ ἔθοσ" (PSI 208, SB 7269) or "ὣσ καθήκει" (PSI 1041), which corroborates the point. The pagan letters, on the other hand, often must devote space in the background/request section to giving specific reasons for *why* the person should be received favorably (this can be seen clearly in the Christian letter's empty lines in the background/request section, above page 23).

4) The final element for comparison in the two letters is the closing. Both letters wish health upon the addressee. In the pagan letter, however, the closing shows one person addressing one person. In the Christian letter, a whole group addresses a whole group. This phenomenon is admittedly not unique to Christian letters – in the papyri there are numerous examples of writers mentioning multiple individuals in their own community and inquiring about or blessing multiple people in the recipient's community. While closing letters in such a manner is not a distinctively Christian practice, it does underscore the general sense Christians had of being within a worldwide religious community, especially because the sender and addressee need not have had a prior relationship.

[54] *Ibid.*

Summary

Scholarship on Christian letters of recommendation has tended to emphasize the form and structure of the letters, and their relationship to the letter-writing manuals. Kim's monograph illustrated the basic structural components of the letter of recommendation, though he is often overly rigid in his descriptions of the structure. His book belongs to the trajectory initiated by Deissmann, which uses the papyri to help us understand the language, grammar and structure of New Testament documents.[55] Kim shed some light on certain linguistic and grammatical phenomena, but he had trouble in drawing meaningful conclusions because the extant papyri are in their form and structure very different from New Testament epistles. The New Testament texts have passages of commendation which are tacked onto documents which contain other sorts of material.

The pagan letters are short and formulaic, like the later Christian papyri. They both function to procure hospitality for the bearer, but where the pagan letters are concerned in the main with business or family concerns, the Christian letters such as the one carried by Germania are concerned primarily with the bearer's orthodoxy. These later Christian letters – which by the time of Julian had evidently become a constituent part of how Christian communities "talked" to one another – are yet again different from passages of commendation in the New Testament. The New Testament examples (plus two similar second century texts) are as follows:

- Rom. 16:1-2: "Phoebe [is] a deacon of the church at Cenchrae…she has been a benefactor of many and myself as well"

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[55]Diessman, Adolf, *Light from the Ancient East,* esp. 1-30; for a good discussion of Diessman's research as it pertains to Greco-Roman letter writing, see Stowers, *Letter Writing,* 17-21.

- II Cor. 8: "[Titus] not only accepted our appeal, but since he is more eager than ever, he is going to you of his own accord…with him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for proclaiming the good news…etc…and with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested, etc."
- Ephesians 6:21: "Tychicus will tell you everything. He is a dear brother and faithful minister in the Lord."
- Colossians 4:7-9: "Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord…he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you."
- Philemon: "I am sending [Onesimus], that is, my own heart, back to you" (v.12)…"welcome him as you would welcome me" (v.17).
- I Peter 5:12: "Through Sylvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter."[56]
- III John 12: "Everyone has testified favorably about Demetrius, and so has the truth itself. We also testify for him, and you know that our testimony is true."
- Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians, 14: "Crescens…conduct while with us has been blameless, and I believe that it will be likewise with you."
- Alexander's letter to the Antiochenes: "I am sending you these lines, my dear Brothers, by Clement the blessed presbyter, whom you have already heard of and will now get to know…this virtuous and estimable man has both strengthened and enlarged the church of the Lord" (Eusebius, *EH* 6.12).

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[56]There is some debate as to whether "through Sylvanus" means that Sylvanus was the scribe, or the one carrying the letter. For a discussion, see Achtmeier, Paul, *1 Peter,* 200f. Elliot, John H. *1 Peter,* 318f.

The presence of commendations in the epistles above of disputed authorship (Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Peter) suggests that, even in the New Testament period, including such passages at the close of a spurious letter created verisimilitude. If true, this means that even in the New Testament period, such passages of commendation were not only common, but commonplace.

In the next part of the paper, I will explore how these letters and passages of commendation functioned to procure hospitality, and in the last part I will examine in more detail how they functioned to delineate an orthodox “us” from a heterodox “them”.

CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

Both manuals cited above explicitly mention hospitality in their model letters of recommendation, and procuring hospitality for the bearer may be considered the constituent function of the genre for both pagans and Christians. The scene from the *Golden Ass* shows what must have been a common occurrence in the delivery of these letters: a traveler arrives, announces that they have a letter of recommendation, and is welcomed inside and provided with food and lodging. Since the locus of Christian worship until the time of Constantine was the house-church, the scene from Apuleus also gives a credible scenario for how Christian letters of recommendation were announced and delivered. In both Apuleus' text and in Philemon (v.22), there is mention of a guest room, which is where travelers would have usually stayed. Within the Christian community, it is plausible that the one who received the letter would have directed the traveler to the house of another Christian, possibly a widow with an open room, or else a family trusted by the local leader.

In order to understand just how important these little "tickets" were, it is illustrative to view them against the backdrop of hospitality practices and conventions where there were no letters of recommendation. In general terms, when one had no such letter, their legitimacy was open to question, and they had to justify themselves through work [57] or through personal

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[57]The emphasis on manual labor as a test of an itinerant's reliability is attested in the Didache, ch. 11, and also in a number of later texts pertaining to wandering monks. "A wandering monk was suspected to be a monk

charisma. In the next chapter I will argue that 2 Cor. 2:14 – 7:4 constitutes Paul's charismatic attempt to legitimate his ministry vis-à-vis his opponents, who had letters of recommendation where Paul had none. The point here is that a letter of recommendation such as the diminutive flash-card carried by Germania essentially transformed ancient conventions of hospitality. This is perhaps why Robert Kaster alluded to letters of recommendation as "a central document of the age,"[58] and why Julian considered them of primary importance for the revival of paganism.

Scholarship on Christian hospitality practices is scarce. Bolchazy argued for a evolutionary development of hospitality, beginning with ancient Roman and Hebrew conventions and culminating in the unconditional acceptance of the stranger in Stoicism and Christianity.[59] His work, however, is generally dependent on comments made in the context of paranesis, which he takes to be indicative of actual social practice. The most thoroughgoing attempt to understand conventions of early Christian hospitality as well as their Jewish antecedents and their Greco-Roman context is John Koenig's excellent book *New Testament Hospitality,* which highlights the role played by hospitality in the New Testament period. Unfortunately, his book does not deal with post-Biblical material, and is therefore not relevant to the present topic of how letters of recommendation functioned as a constituent part of the mission in subsequent centuries.

Possibly the major reason Christian hospitality has not received sustained attention in the scholarship is trend to see a certain stasis in the mission, after the initial period of radical

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who did not engage in the practice most commonly recommended to ensure both individual and communal tranquility: manual labor," Caner, Daniel, *Wandering, Begging Monks,* 23.
[58]Kaster, Robert, *Guardians of Language,* 45.

itinerancy. The most influential author in this regard is Gerd Theissen, who in *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* emphasized the symbiosis between established local communities and itinerant apostles in the first century of the Christian movement in Palestine, but he concluded that this symbiosis petered out with the development of orthodox ecclesiastical structures.[60] In this section I will deal with numerous texts which show a continuation of itinerant prophesying and preaching well into the third and fourth centuries and beyond.

Theissen emphasized the importance of the relationship between traveler and host in the Christian mission. From the point of view of the established communities, the travelers themselves were decidedly liminal characters. On the one hand, they could potentially bring fresh gospel traditions of the sort that Papias valued;[61] on the other hand, they could take advantage of the communities and leech them of wine, women and money, as evidenced by the Didache's "χριστέμποροσ" (12.5) and by the career of Peregrinus.[62] In the realm of paranesis, the settled communities saw it as their duty in the dissemination of the gospel to welcome Christian itinerants with hospitality. Practically, though, strangers needed to be tested in order to prove their legitimacy.

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[59]See, for example, his introductory chapter in Bolchazy, Lasislaus, *Hospitality in Early Rome,* 1-14. Also relevant to the New Testament period is the work of Hans-Joseph Klauck, *Hausgemeinde und Hauskirche im frühen Christentum*, Stuttgart:Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981.

[60]See especially the section on the functional effect of the Jesus movement on Hellenistic society, pp 114-119.

[61]"Books to read are not as useful to me as the living voice sounding out clearly up to the present day" (Papias *Fr.* 7, Holmes, Michael W., ed., *Apostolic Fathers,* 319).

[62]Lucian, "The Passing of Peregrinus," 16: "He left home, then, for the second time, to roam about, possessing an ample source of funds in the Christians, through whose ministrations he lived in unalloyed prosperity. For a time he fattened himself thus; but then…he had transgressed in some way even against them—he was seen, I think, eating some of the food that is forbidden them", Lucian, *LCL* Vol. 5, transl. M.A. Harmon, New York: G.P. Putnam, 1919.

In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss house-churches and the role of women in providing hospitality. Next I will argue that paraenetic comments enjoining hospitality are not necessarily borne out by the evidence. Since scholarship on post-Biblical Christian hospitality is scarce, in this section of the paper I will have to rely heavily on primary sources. And finally, I will survey texts which show Christian itinerants who did not have letters of recommendation: how did they procure food and lodging, and what was their procedure for legitimating themselves? In this connection, it is worth remembering Paul's litany of reasons why he should be considered a legitimate apostle: "As servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God, [etc]" (2 Cor. 6:4f). Such extended appeals – to personal charisma and to personal experience – are rendered unnecessary when one has a letter of recommendation.

The House Church

It is important to emphasize at the outset the fact that early Christian "hospitality" was not a disembodied virtue – it was enacted far into the post-Biblical period specifically at the site of the Christian house church, and was influenced by the social and cultural customs which prescribed proper and improper behavior within the Greco-Roman household.[63] Typically, these homes were of moderate size. Carolyn Osiek has recently given a good

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[63]On house churches generally, Floyd Filson's essay ("The Significance of Early House Churches" *JBL* 58 (1939) 105 – 112) is seminal; for a major review of the primary evidence, the scholarship, and a re-appraisal of the role of house-churches in the early mission, see Robert Gehring's recent *House Church and Mission,* Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.

overview of a common Greco-Roman home. She has pointed out that one goes outside the archaeological evidence in *assuming* that all house-churches were always small,[64] but the average home would not be able to host Eucharist and worship services for more than 30 or 40 people.[65] Floyd Filson has emphasized the importance of understanding early Christianity as a movement essentially comprised of house-churches, and he also argues that multiple house churches could easily give rise to factionalism of the sort evidenced by Gaius and Diotrephes in III John[66] (this will be relevant in the next chapter, concerning Corinthian factionalism evidently grouped around house-churches).

Within these small or moderate-sized homes, hospitality will have been expressed primarily by providing food for the guest(s). Providing food is the expression of hospitality *par excellence,* and is common to hospitality practices in all ancient cultures.[67] The particular Christian practice of giving the Eucharist is, when stripped of later theological accretions, essentially an expression of hospitality: it underscores the importance of the guest-host relationship in the Christian mission, and reaffirms the sense of membership in a worldwide household of believers.[68] Christian hospitality was enacted at a house church, and relevant texts often associate women with this practice.

[64]Carolyn Osiek, *Families in the New Testament World*, 203; *cf* Gehring's appendix "Floor Plans and Reconstructions", in *House Church and Mission,* 313 – 320.

[65]Osiek, Carolyn, *Families in the New Testament World,* 5 – 35.

[66]Floyd Filson, "Early House Churches," 105 – 112.

[67]For the Greco-Roman evidence, see especially A. Denaux' "The Theme of Divine Visits and Human (In)hospitality in Luke-Acts," 255-280; and Bolchazy, *Hospitality*. For the Hebrew Bible and antecedent Bedouin practices, see T.R. Hobbs, "Hospitality In the First Testament and the Teleological Fallacy," *JSOT* 95 (2001) 3-30 and Scott Morchauser's intriguing study "'Hospitality', Hostiles and Hostages: On the Legal Background to Genesis 19:1-9," *JSOT* 27 (2003) 461-485.

[68]"'Serving at table' (Acts 6:2; cf. Acts 16:34, also Luke 10:40; 12:37; 17:8) does not mean administration of funds but table service at a meal…table minsitry, therefore, was most likely the eucharistic ministry, which

The Role of Women in the Practice of Hospitality

In the typical Greco-Roman household, the woman is the source of domestic organization and authority.[69] Generally speaking, men occupied the public sphere and women occupied the private sphere, but Schussler-Fiorenza has pointed out insightfully that "the public sphere of the Christian community was *in* the house and not outside the household."[70] The woman's role is central in issues pertaining to the serving of meals (and therefore the Eucharist) and to hospitality in general; and in fact, in a great number of relevant Christian texts, women are closely associated with hospitality and mission.[71]

Widows are sometimes specified in texts pertaining to the local communities' role of welcoming itinerants and sending them off, possibly because widows were more likely than others to have rooms available in their houses.[72] The Latin form of the Gospel of Thomas describes how Joseph, Mary and Jesus, on their sojourn to Egypt to escape Herod's slaughter

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included the preparation of a meal, purchase and distribution of food, actual serving during the meal, and probably cleaning up afterwards," Schussler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 165.

[69]See Schussler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* 170ff and Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Macdonald, *A Woman's Place,* 1 – 17; *cf* Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Church,* 5 – 23, Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ,* 135, and Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 23-25.

[70]Schussler-Fiorenza, Elizabeth, *In Memory of Her,* 176.

[71]See the discussion by Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Macdonald with specific reference to the funerary frescos from Marcellino and Petro, *A Woman's Place,* 164 – 193. The authors conclude that with Christianity "No longer is the cultural perception of female respectability tied to a legal relationship with the *paterfamilias;* instead, it is visually indexed by the woman's role in relation to her household, as someone who has reared children and provided hospitality for family, close relatives and friends", 192. *Cf* Gehring, *House Church and Mission,* 210 – 225, and the essay by Francine Cardman, "Woman, Ministry, and Church Order in Early Christianity", in Ross Shephard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Woman & Christian Origins,* 300 – 329.

[72]For a collection of primary evidence, see Patricia Cox Miller, *Women in Early Christianity,* 49 – 61. Osiek and Macdonald write that receiving traveling visitors "was a ministry entrusted particularly to those widows who would have the capacity to receive guests", *A Woman's Place,* 12. For a detailed study of widows in early Christianity, see Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Woman's Ministry in the Early Church,* especially her chapter on the apostolic period, 56 – 75. *Cf* Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows,* 123 – 140.

of the innocents, “received hospitality in the house of a certain widow, and they remained in the same place one year”.[73] Origen also lodged in a widow’s household for an extended period of time.[74]

In the late first and early second century, there seems to have been an attempt in orthodox circles to gain control over the widows’ role of providing hospitality for strangers and guests.[75] I Timothy 5:9 says, “Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once, she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints’ feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.” Of interest here is the church’s will to power over such women: they must fulfill certain criteria which enable them to be “put on the list,” where the “list” evidently contains the names of those who are allowed to receive money from the coffers of the local congregation.[76] The criteria that she be “not less than sixty years old” helps to ensure that no sex is happening between the widows and the “saints”; the stipulation that she be “married only once” similarly attests to the weakness of her libido; and the other criteria help to ensure that she is a mother, with genuine concern for those around her, who has welcomed guests and visitors and treated them graciously. In his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, Raymond Collins comments that “The hospitality expected of a woman who one day would be enrolled as a real widow was probably the sort of hospitality that was offered to fellow Christians, perhaps especially to traveling Christians

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[73] *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol 8,* §1.

[74] Eusebius, *EH* 6.2.

[75] Schussler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 286-290.

[76] See esp. Raymond Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus,* 138f.; *cf* Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows,* 123 – 140.

and evangelists."[77] This is the sort of widow this author prefers, which must of course be understood against the backdrop of other widows who may have liked to "entertain" their guests more liberally, or else who would receive hospitably the heretics with whom the Pastorals are so concerned.

The location of Christian hospitality, then, was at the home of a believer, and was concerned first and foremost with providing a meal to the traveler, and then lodging for a period of time. Women, and often widows, are associated with the local community's hospitable reception and treatment of travelers and guests.

Paranesis, Social Reality, and "Testing the Stranger"

Reading the paraenetic and apologetic material on hospitality, one gets the impression that Christians welcomed each other on principle. Donald Wayne Riddle has written that "It is significant that the passages in which the references to hospitality occur (in the New Testament) are all of the paraenetic category. That is, they relate to a generalized pattern of behavior which was expected to apply universally."[78] While this is true, John Koenig has shown that certain assumptions about hospitality practices are deeply embedded in New Testament narratives, particularly in Luke-Acts. Especially intriguing is Koenig's analysis of material unique to Luke which indicates that "Luke wants his readers to think of Jesus as a *wandering prophet Messiah* [his emphasis],"[79] which of course highlights the virtue of

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[77] Raymond Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus,* 140.

[78] Riddle, Donald Wayne, "Early Christian Hospitality," 143.

[79] Koenig, John, *New Testament Hospitality,* 93.

hospitality on the part of those who received Jesus (and by extension, those who received favorably the early missionaries).

The actual practice of hospitality in the mission field is, as Riddle emphasized, accompanied by many paraenetic comments. In Romans 12:13, Paul exhorts the Romans to "extend hospitality to strangers." I Peter 4:8 enjoins the community to "be hospitable to one another without complaining." The author of I Clement, recalling the glorious past of the Corinthian church, writes "Who did not proclaim the magnificent character of your hospitality?" (10.7). The author of Hebrews, following a tradition grounded in the Genesis stories of Lot and Abraham, writes, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (13:1f).[80] And Aristides, in his apology for Christianity, sees this sort of idealized Christian hospitality as a selling point for the movement: "if they [Christians] see a stranger, they take him under their roof, and rejoice over him as over a very brother, for they call themselves brethren not after the flesh, but after the spirit."[81] The virtuousness of hospitality is everywhere assumed in Christian texts, though the assumption is of course not unique to Christianity.

While hospitality was considered a virtue in the wider Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures, Christians tended to see their own conventions as unique and superior to others. In an intriguing exchange, Lactantius engages Cicero over the latter's rumination that

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[80]Koenig writes, "Much of the lore about hospitality in ancient Judaism centered around the figure of Abraham, for it was he and Sarah who had welcomed the three heavenly visitors at their tent by the oaks of Mamre," *Ibid,* 15.

[81]*Cf* Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67, "And those who prosper, and who so wish, contribute what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the Ruler, who takes care of the orphans and widows, and those who, on account of sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers who are sojourners among us." *Cf* also the Shepherd of Hermas Man 8 (10), though Hermas interestingly waffles on the point: "Next hear the things that follow these: serving widows, looking after orphans and those in need, delivering God's servants from distress, being hospitable (for the practice of hospitality results in doing good, I presume)."

"It is right that Theophrastus commends hospitality…it is very attractive, in my own view too, for the homes of distinguished men to be open to distinguished guests." Lactantius counters that "a just and wise man's house ought to be open not to the distinguished but to the poor and desperate. Distinguished and powerful people cannot be in need of anything, since their wealth protects them as well as distinguishing them."[82]

Lactatius presumably would have had a similar objection to Rabbi Jose b. Johannen of Jerusalem, who thought that "sitting in the meeting house of the am ha'aretz puts a man out of the world."[83] Although Cicero emphasizes illustrious guests and Jose emphasizes bucolic hosts, in each case there is a cultured differentiation of one class of person over another, and this is precisely what is at issue for Lactantius.

It matters, however, that Lactantius is writing apologetically. There are other texts which show that the Christian practice of hospitality could be and at times was in fact closer to the type put forward by Cicero or Rabbi Jose. The 3rd century Apocalypse of Paul (probably from Egypt)[84] offers a series of speculations on who would be admitted to the heavenly "City of Christ" and who would be denied entrance. One category of people who would be excluded were those who, even though they fasted zealously,

> had a proud heart above other men, glorifying and praising themselves and doing nothing for their neighbors. For they gave some friendly greeting, but to others they did not even say hail! and indeed they shewed hospitality to those only whom they wished, and if they did anything whatever for their neighbor they were immoderately puffed up.[85]

[82]*Divine Institutes,* 6.12.6.

[83]*Mishnah Aboth* 1.5.

[84]See the discussion in Elliott, *Apocrypha,* 616f.; the Latin MSS of the Apocalypse of Paul has been recently edited by Hilhorst in Theodore Silvestein and Anthony Hilhorst, eds., *Apocalypse of Paul,*Geneve: P. Cramer, 1997*;* but see the critical objections by J. Tromp in his review of the work, *VC* 52 (1998) 213 – 217.

[85]Transl. Elliot, *Apocryphal New Testament,* 630.

Because the people implicated here are not caricatures of evil, hypocritical Christians, it is difficult to escape the impression that our author has specific individuals in mind. He approves of their fasts, which implies that they are more or less well-known figures in the community. They also had households which were in the practice of welcoming guests, which implies a certain amount of social status. The primary objection that these men and women did not accept individuals with whom our author feels religious camaraderie shows that, just as there was no monolithic form of Christianity, so also there was no unqualified attitude of hospitality towards other Christians.[86]

In Clement of Alexandria, the idealization of Christian hospitality again seems to break down under the weight of actual social situations. In the *Stromateis* II.9, Clement writes that hospitality is essentially "occupied in what is useful for strangers." He cannot let "strangers" go unqualified, however, and offers an extended syllogism for what constituted a "stranger": "guests are strangers; and friends are guests; and brethren are friends." In his train of thought, Clement has begun with a universalized definition of hospitality, but has ended with "brethren" as the legitimate recipients of this hospitality. The transition from "stranger" to "brethren", which Clement here attempts to make with extended syllogistic reasoning, is of course effected practically by a simple letter of recommendation. In the letter cited in the previous chapter, Ammonius – although a stranger to the host community – is introduced and received on ecclesiastical authority as an approved "brother."

[86]A complementary situation is suggested in the *Shepherd of Hermas,* Parable 8 (10), where the most innocuous category of evil-doers "believed, but practiced the works of lawlessness. Still, they never fell away from God, but bore the name gladly, and gladly welcomed God's servants into their houses" (For commentary, see Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas,* ed. Helmut Koester, 58f.) Where the Vision of Paul approves of the practices of the householders and objects to their inhospitality, Hermas disapproves of their practices but approves of their hospitality.

Clement's conceptualization of "stranger" is often theologically loaded,[87] but in a passage of exegesis on II John it is evident that he was aware of the practical need to be wary of certain Christian strangers. Commenting on II John v.10 ("Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching"), Clement writes that the Presbyter

> wisely forbids us to salute such and to receive them to our hospitality. For this is not harsh in the case of a man of this sort. But he admonishes them neither to confer nor dispute with such as are not able to handle divine things with intelligence, lest through them they be seduced from the doctrine of truth, influenced by plausible reasons. Now, I think that we are not even to pray with such, because in the prayer which is made at home, after rising from prayer, the salutation of joy is also the token of peace.

In this passage, Clement's initial comments arise as a fairly straightforward exegesis of II John. The last sentence indicates, however, that he may have specific situations in mind which pertain to the exercise of Christian hospitality. The "prayer which is made at home" is not in Clement's text, and therefore most likely arises from his experience. This means that this text should be read not only as general exegesis, but also as a reflection of actual situations known to Clement, where Christians were denied hospitality because of their doctrinal errors (or, as Clement has it, lack of intelligence concerning "divine things").

As mentioned above, scholars have sometimes made the mistake of taking paraenetic injunctions or apologetic generalizations as universal social practice. But welcoming any and all Christian strangers simply on principle is simply unwise. Origen reminds us that anyone who is "interested in historical learning, and who give themselves wholly to it, to the neglect of other branches of knowledge more necessary to the conduct of life, can quote numerous instances showing that they who shared in the hospitality of others entered into conspiracies against them."[88]

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[87] See, for example, *Exhortation to the Heathen,* Chapter 9; *Paidagogos* 3.2; *Stromateis* Book 7.
[88]Origin, *Contra Celsum*, II.21.

Although much importance must be accorded to the genre in which generalized Christian statements about hospitality occur, it is nevertheless true that open hospitality was considered by Christians themselves to be a virtue, in some sense unique to their movement. Many of the same texts which enjoin reception of itinerant Christian strangers also emphasize care for orphans and widows, each of which was clearly a constituent part of Christian organization and self-identity. Orphans found food, shelter and presumably some level of instruction in Christian households, and while it may be paranesis to say "care for the orphan" and apologetic to say "we care for the orphan," the fact is that that is precisely what a number of Christians did.

Regarding the hospitable reception of strangers, many Christians were doubtless eager to put such paranesis into practice. The inevitable problems arose when itinerant Christians came who had an understanding of Christ different from the host community, or when itinerants would intentionally parasite on the virtue of hospitality to serve their own materialistic ends.[89] Such situations occur with some frequency if one reads between the lines of our texts, and it is evident that Christians needed a way of authenticating itinerants.[90] A letter of recommendation is the most convenient way of doing this, but before the spread of literacy in the Hellenistic period, there was a long tradition of hospitality conventions

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[89]E.g., *The Passing of Peregrinus,* (cited above, n. 62).

[90]Derrida, coming from a completely different point of departure, arrives at the same conclusion, "The law says to me that you should open your house, your borders, your country, to any other, to anyone. We have the universality of the law, which is its ideal concept, and we have the singularity of the other. Since we cannot practically, pragmatically, or realistically open the door to anyone, since we cannot dream of such hospitality, which could be perverse if we were simply to open the door, we have to make decisions as to how to respect the unconditional law of hospitality, and at the same time we have to restrict, we have to have a policy of hospitality, public or private. In that case we have to define a policy of absolutely unconditional openness to whoever is coming and, because this is absolutely impossible, we have to produce laws and rules in order to select, in the best possible way, the ones we welcome," Derrida, Jacques, "The Politics of Exodus", 84f.

oriented towards authenticating a stranger. Christianity inherited these traditions, but the problem for them was somewhat compounded by the fact that the "distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders,' between natives and foreigners which was made in a city by virtue of blood-line and ethnic group, was irrelevant for those who conceived their existence according to the Christian message."[91] In the previous chapter, we saw how the letter of recommendation for Heraclides emphasized exactly these blood-lines, while the Christian letter to which it was compared conceived of Ammonius as a brother not biologically, but ἐν τῳ Κυρίῳ.

Cultural anthropologists have paid a good deal of attention to the rites and rituals whereby a stranger is translated into a guest,[92] and although their work is seldom considered by historians who interpret the past primarily through the lens of ancient texts, it is nevertheless truth that the sorts of "tests" studied by anthropologists are functionally analogous to the tests employed by the early Christians.[93] Availing himself of such anthropological categories, Bruce Malina argues that hospitality practices must be understood within the framework of ancient conventions of honor and shame. Within this conceptual framework, Malina writes, "Since the stranger is potentially anything, he must be tested as to whether he can subscribe to the rules of the new culture. Officials (Josh 2.2) or concerned citizenry (Gen 19:5) might conduct such tests…letters of recommendation can excuse from a test, although sometimes not (e.g. II and III John, Rom 16:3-16; 1 Thess 5:12-13)…the test, when given, attempts to assign an acceptable but temporary social situation to

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[91]Ubieta, Carmen Bernabe, "Neither *Xenoi* nor *pariokoi,*" 271f.

[92]See, for example, George Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers, *The Clash of Cultures and the Contact of Races,* 85-104.

the stranger."[94] There are some problems with Malina's attempt to translate anthropological categories into New Testament social history. First, the phrase "rules of the new culture" excludes scenarios where a stranger is "tested" within the same or very similar cultures, as would be the case for the earliest Palestinian missionaries. Second, the sense that such a test establishes "temporary" relationships seems arbitrary, especially in light of evidence from the Didache where specific tests are recommended for those who wish to settle permanently in the community (12:3f). And finally, his overarching thesis that the rejection of an itinerant *must* be understood with reference to ancient assumptions about shame and honor is hardly the only viable set of interpretative categories which can yield meaningful results.

The basic premise of Malina's discussion is clear, however, and corroborated by the evidence: strangers were not welcomed on principle in antiquity; they had to be tested in order to prove their worth. How were the guest/host relationships established, and what were some of the tests used by Christians to certify that the recipient of hospitality deserved it? To approach an answer to these questions, I will treat two bodies of evidence: first, situations where the itinerant knew no-one in the city or town they to which they were traveling; and second, situations where both the guest and the host knew a third party who helped facilitate the meeting.

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[93]The most important piece of New Testament scholarship which does take into account such anthropological categories is Bruce Malina's "The Received View and What it Cannot Do", *Semeia* 35 (1986) 171 – 194.

[94]"The Received View," 183. Malina mentions testing by "officials", which is corroborated in the case of the *Apostolic Constitutions* (cited above) where letters of recommendation were evaluated by the deacons to see whether the bearer was tainted by heresy.

When Itinerants Knew No-One

It is possible that Christian traveling in the east may have known of a network of house-churches and/or inns along the major travel routes which were available for their use. Such a scenario is suggested by the *Acts of Archelaus,* which provides some clues as to how these may have functioned. The story centers on an extravagantly wealthy Christian, Marcellus, who appears to have owned or else had a close association with the system of hospices and inns in the region.[95] A Manichean envoy named Turbo attempted to use this network while travelling to Carchar with a letter from Mani to Marcellus. When he arrived at the inns, so the author tells us, the managers asked him "where he came from, who he was [and who] had sent him."[96] This is clearly a test – with an acceptable answer Turbo will guarantee himself food and lodging. Turbo gave his hosts an answer he hoped would suffice: "I am from Mesopotamia, but I came here from Persia, and was sent by Manichaeus, the teacher of the Christians." Archelaus tells us that the managers of these hostels were "not willing to welcome a name they did not know, and would evict Turbo even from their own inns, not granting him so much as the opportunity to drink water."[97] In the third and fourth century east,[98] then there appears to have been a network of inns funded by or associated with

[95]In his edition of the Acts, Samuel Lieu comments that "Since Manichaeism had considerable following among merchants…inns and hostels were likely to be convenient centres of proselytizing by the sect" (*Actae Archelae,* 40n.12). Such would be the case for non-Manichaean proselytizing as well; that this author conceives of an association of these inns with more orthodox sensibilities is made clear when he writes that "had he not finally declared that he was carrying a letter for Marcellus, then Turbo on his travels may have met a fateful end", *Actae Archelae* IV; this translation and those following are from Samiel Lieu, *Actae Archelae,* IV, transl. Mark Vermes, 38f.

[96]*Ibid,* 40.

[97]*Ibid.*

[98]The time frame concerns the date of the text itself and not the events it purports to describe. For the literary devices and orthodox bias in this account (of which Turbo's expulsion from inns which recognized Marcellus must be considered an example), see Lieu in *Acta Archelae,* 1 – 34.

wealthy Christians, which would have facilitated Christian travel. The guests were tested by asking them under which name they came.

Far more common, however, are scenes where an itinerant enters a city and goes to a public place: a well, the city-gates, a marketplace, or a temple. These scenes are in evidence often in the Apocryphal Acts. V.H. Kooy writes that "A traveler entering a city would come to the open place, and there, unless a breach of etiquette occurred, someone would invite him to his home and grant him the customary graces."[99] Such public civic spaces functioned as a meeting-place in both the earlier periods and in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, though from the Hellenistic period onward the number and variety of both public spaces and itinerants had increased greatly.[100] In these public places, itinerant Christians in search of hospitality would have to compete with other itinerants (Cynics, Cybele priests, rhetors, teachers, philosophers, and sundry merchants, magicians and healers), or else go to an inn.

The *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*[101] depicts two scenes which are relevant to the topic of establishing relationships in a strange city. In the first scene, Peter and his companions disembark from their ship and go ashore with their baggage. While looking for an inn, they meet a stranger (who turns out to be Christ/Lithargoel), who invites them to come to his paradisiacal city. He tells them that "No man is able to go on that road, except

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[99]Kooy, V.H., "Hospitality," 654. Kooy is writing in specific reference to Bedouin and Hebrew Bible conventions of hospitality, but the evidence from the Greco-Roman period (some of which is discussed below) shows that Kooy's comments apply to later periods and cultures also: the conventions did not change substantially. See also note 67 above.

[100]See Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks,* 1-40.

[101]On this text, see R. McL. Wilson and Douglas M. Parrott, *The Coptic Gnostic Library,* Vol. 3, 197 – 202.

one who has forsaken everything that he has and has fasted daily from stage to stage."[102] The text, though much later than the primitive Palestinian itinerancy emphasized by Theissen, reflects the continuation of the ascetic ideal of itinerancy and renunciation alongside the development of orthodox ecclesiastical structures. In this author's experience, such traveling Christians sometimes lodged at a local inn, like many other travelers in antiquity. On the other hand, the author does not appear to approve of this practice, and Christ/Lithargaoel's instructions on the ascetic discipline necessary to arrive at the paradisiacal city is counterposed to the image of Peter and the companions lugging their baggage onto the docks and hunting for an inn.

In the second relevant scene, Peter and his companions have made the journey with Christ/Lithargoel. Arriving at the heavenly city, they "rested in front of the gate, and…conversed with one another. It was not a conversation about this world, but a lively unbroken discussion about the faith."[103] Corroborating Kooy's comments cited above, the apostles here sit at the city gates, conversing about the faith. Since they have no place to stay, the narrative seems to reflect a presumption that, while at the city-gates, sooner or later someone from the city will become engaged in the discussion, and offer to provide the apostles with food and lodging. The author's phrase "lively unbroken discussion about the faith" is intriguing, however, because this is only ostensibly the means by which the author envisions truly effective missionary activity. The core assumptions of the narrative depend on healing and magic. This is evidenced generally in the text's preoccupation with magic and fetishes, and specifically in a conversation between the apostle John and

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[102]Transl. Douglas M. Parrott and R. McL. Wilson, in James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library,* 267.
[103]*Ibid*

Christ/Lithargoel, where John repeats the traditional Christian folk saying, “the physicians of this world heal the body, but the physicians of souls heal the heart.” Christ/Lithargoel praises John for this saying, but then follows it with a fascinating non-sequiter: “Heal therefore the bodies first.” This then illuminates what must have been an actual practice for many itinerant Christians of the day: they would go into public, civic space such as the city gates, and offer their services as miracle workers and healers. When they found a client, they would ply their trade, and then, having thus procured hospitality, engage (or not) in more general evangelism. The mode of legitimation envisioned by this author involves the personal charisma, magical capabilities and healing powers.

The Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Andrew[104] depicts a scene where the travelers happen upon a country farmer from whom they proactively request hospitality. Peter and his companions enter a region where they know no one. Andrew asks Peter, “Father Peter, are we again to undergo toils in this city, as in the country of the man-eaters?” Peter says to him: “I do not know. But, behold, there is an old man before us sowing in his field: if we go up to him, let us say to him, ‘Give us bread’; and if he give us bread, we may know that we are not to suffer in this city; but if he say to us, ‘We have no bread’, then we shall know that suffering again awaits us.” Peter and the disciples approach the man and greet him, who responds by saying “Hail, merchants!”[105] When Peter asks the man for bread, he is given a

[104]*ANF* Vol. XIII. For a survey of the MSS and history of this text, see J.K. Elliott, *New Testament Apocrypha,* 240-243.

[105]That the farmer has assumed them to be merchants is unusual. “Merchants” are seldom mentioned as a category of itinerants comparable to Cynics or Christians in the secondary scholarship. Hobbs, surveying the Hebrew Bible period, writes, “Some transients, such as armies and traders, took precautions by traveling in large numbers. These travelers, however, are always regarded as willful wanderers intent on destruction and/or exploitation” (Hobbs, T.R., “Hospitality in the First Testament,” 18). The farmer’s greeting “hail” indicates that such merchants may not have “always” been regarded as destructive in the Hellenistic and later periods; furthermore, the itinerant merchants presumably sold goods to some people some of the time, even in the period Hobbs surveys. Hobbs unfortunately does not cite the primary texts from which he draws his conclusions.

test: the man instructs the apostles to watch over his oxen while he goes into town to fetch the loaves. The disciples agree, and after the man is gone, Peter says to the others, "It is not right for us to rest and be idle, above all, when the old man is working for us, having left his own work." Peter and the others then plow the field and sow wheat, thus earning the bread brought back to them by the farmer. The fact that they worked the land is a critical point for the storyteller because, in the context of ancient itinerancy, idleness in a hospitable situation is a self-evident indication of ulterior motives. The farmer returns with the loaves, from which point the apostles have a foothold in the town: the subsequent narrative relates how they then go about "pardoning the sins of those who believe in them, and healing every disease, and every sickness." Though he doesn't mention this text in particular, Daniel Caner has recently shown that the concatenation of themes in this text: begging, healing and magic, are typical in texts pertaining to ancient itinerancy, as is the emphasis on manual labor as a test of an itinerant's reliability.[106]

The texts discussed so far have shown various scenarios for traveling Christians, and the point of view has been predominantly that of the itinerants themselves. From the complementary point of view of the settled communities, the most relevant text is the Didache, which reflects knowledge of individuals who would enter the village, call on the local Christian community, and identify themselves as Christian holy men. Some of these charismatics would prophesize, and in a pretended trance would demand money or provisions before moving on to the next village. The Didachist calls these individuals

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[106]Caner, Daniel, *Wandering, Begging Monks, passim.*

"χριστέμποροσ," literally "Christ-sellers."[107] It is an important term for a number of reasons: first, it excludes pagan or Jewish itinerant charismatics. The Didachist knows that these individuals claimed to be Christians, and they were in a parasite-host relationship with specifically Christian communities. This dovetails with Lucian's description of Peregrinus, and both together confirm that the paraenetic ideals of Christian hospitality opened up the possibility for certain itinerants to manipulate this for their own ends.[108] It follows from this that there were *bona fide* charlatans in the Christian mission field.

In Chapter 11 of the Didache, there are certain tests prescribed in order to distinguish charlatans from genuine evangelists, though the Didachist accords all itinerants *prima facie* acceptance: "Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord" (11.4),[109] and furthermore insists that they must not be tested while speaking in the spirit. The rest of the time, however, they must give teachings which mirror those outlined by the Didache. They must not stay more than one day, or two at most; they cannot take more food than necessary to arrive at the next night's lodging; they must not ask for money; they must not order food while prophesying; and they must practice what they preach. "Afterward, when you have tested him, you will find out about him, for you have insight into right and wrong" (12:1). To these sorts of tests, which must have been fairly common for most Christian host communities, the Shepherd of Hermas adds a particularly insightful one: "true prophets speak on their own initiative, false prophets speak only when asked, and their

[107] *Cf* Caner's discussion on "John Chrysostom and the Christmongers of Constantinople," in *Wandering, Begging Monks,* 169-177.

[108] Since charges of charlatanism were stock polemic amongst the competing Christianities, it is often difficult to say with any certainty which individuals really did have materialistic motives, and which ones merely had a version of the gospel different from that of the accuser.

[109] See Kurt Niederwimmer's discussion, *Didache,* 178-187.

answer is governed by the form of the question."[110] Of course, such questions and tests are rendered obsolete by the presence of a letter of recommendation from a recognized official.

Finally, Cyprian offers a test which he seems to have considered conclusive. In Epistle 51, he is concerned with those who are fleeing persecution, and praising those Christians who offered hospitality to the fugitives who "were departing to banishment and flight."[111] Yet hospitality for fugitive Christians inevitably created situations where the refugee held gospel which deviated from that of his host. In a related letter (Epistle 70), Cyprian insists that if someone "comes from the heretics…he must be baptized, in order that he may become a sheep." Baptism, then, was a way for Christians in Cyprian's day in North Africa to legitimate an individual in a complex world of competing Christianities. Here again, anyone bearing a letter of recommendation from a bishop known to Cyprian would presumably be exempt from this re-baptism.

When an Itinerant Knows (or Knows of) People in the Town

One way of navigating the social space between stranger and guest occurs when someone's reputation has preceded them, so that when they enter a town or city their hosts are ready and waiting. The Acts of Paul and Thecla relates how Onesiphorus, hearing that Paul was to visit Iconium,

> went out to meet him with his children Simmias and Zeno and his wife Lectra, in order that he might entertain him. Titus had informed him what Paul looked like, for he [Onesiphorus] had not seen him in the flesh, but only in the spirit. And he went along the royal road to Lystra and kept looking at the

[110] *Shepherd of Hermas,* Mandate 11.

[111] *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5

> passers-by according to the description of Titus. And he saw Paul coming, a man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, of noble mien, with eyebrows meeting, rather hook-nosed, full of grace. [2,3][112]

Titus has told Onesiphorus about Paul and provided a detailed physical description so that when Paul came to Iconium, he would find a welcome reception in Onesiphorus' house. I assume that such exchanges happened frequently in the ancient world, and that a rather detailed description of the commended individual's physical body (one would have to give more detail than just baldness or a unibrow) would be necessary to establish the connection.[113] Since the reputation of the commended has preceeded him or her, they are not wholly a stranger to the host: the "test" is merely a test of physical recognition, passed immediately when Paul, "seeing Onesiphorus, smiled."

Even this most basic of tests, physical recognition, could however be manipulated. In *BJ* 2.7, Josephus relates an anecdote about pseudo-Alexander which is predicated on the coincidental physical resemblance between Herod's son and the pretender. Even a striking physical resemblance was not, of course, enough to pull off the fraud: Josephus tells us that pseudo-Alexander was accompanied and instructed by an individual who knew much about Herod's reign. The physical resemblance, coupled with knowledge of the kingdom, was enough to deceive the Jewish communities of Crete, Melos and Rome, but not enough to deceive Augustus' servant Celadus, who had spent a great deal of time with the real Alexander. When pseudo-Alexander is questioned by Celadus, he fails the tests and the fraud is exposed. Since such conspicuous physical resemblance is rare, these sorts of situations cannot have happened with any frequency in antiquity. On the other hand, the

[112] "The Acts of Paul and Thecla," from *The Apocryphal New Testament,* transl. J.K. Elliott.

[113] *Cf* Tcherikover, *Corpus Papyrorum,* 126: "Telesarchos son of Aleximachos,…of the Epigone, c. 53 years of age, of pale complexion, curly-haired, bald forehead, one scar on the nose and several below the chin." Detailed descriptions of an individual's physical body are not uncommon in the documentary papyri pertaining

story underscores the point that strangers are essentially liminal, and before they are tested (and sometimes even afterwards) it is very difficult to know with complete certainty that they are who they say they are.

In the Acts of Paul and Thecla, the third party (Titus) instructs the *host* (Onesiphorus) to watch for the coming guest (Paul). In 4.1 of the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* we find a third party (Peter) instructing the *guest* (Clement) to travel to Tyre and visit a certain hostess (Justa), who is evidently a widow.[114] The text is silent on the point, but there seem to me only two viable options for how Clement proceeded: Peter could have given him the location of her house, or else Clement could have gone to the city-gates or another public place and asked where Justa lived. The former seems more likely, especially in places and times where Christianity was persecuted, and also in light of analogous evidence from *Recognitions* I.4, where Barnabas gives Clement "the particulars that identify our dwelling [in Judea], so that you may find it easily when you please to come." When the guest knows a host in the city they are entering, they need only go to their house, or else enquire from the townspeople where the person lived.

Clement says that Justa "received us most joyfully." It seems that her relationship with Peter has ensured that Peter's associates would also be welcomed in her house. In such situations the hostess would have to satisfy for herself the authenticity of the traveler. I have not found any texts which describe the sort of "tests" which would have been most common in these sorts of situations. She could have asked Clement to describe Peter's physical body, though such a question may have been considered rude or improper, and ineffectual as a test

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to slaves. Scars are emphasized repeatedly, as are height (e.g., "tall," or "of medium height"), approximate weight, eye-color, etc.

[114] *Ante Nicene Fathers,* Vol. 8; for the background of the Homilies, see J. Irmscher's essay "The Pseudo-Clementines", in Hennecke-Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha,* 532ff.

anyway. She may have asked Clement about Peter's travels, his personality, his gospel message, his plans, or a host of other topics which would help her form a judgement as to whether Clement was a genuine associate of Peter. Though such subtle tests are not in the sources, I assume that they were the most common way a householder had for authenticating someone who came in the name of a common acquaintance.

Summary

In this part of the paper, I have tried to present information which bears on the Christian practice of hospitality. There is a tendency to take at face value Christian comments on hospitality (e.g., Bolchazy) made in the context of paranesis, and so it is in my view important to think concretely about the topic: hospitality was enacted at house-churches, and is often associated with women and especially widows. Though Christians considered hospitality a general virtue in the paranetic texts, the social reality was that strangers often needed to be tested in order to gauge their trustworthiness. Letters of recommendation stand in place of these tests, and changed the way relationships were established in antiquity. In a survey of apocryphal texts, it is evident that itinerant or traveling Christians had a set of conventions when traveling to a place where they knew no-one, and a particular set of means by which they could establish relationships with those already in the city (in this they shared in the more general Greco-Roman and Jewish practices). When they were traveling to a place where they know (or know of) someone, a different set of dynamics apply, most especially simple physical recognition.

In the text cited above (p. 46), Malina claimed that letters of recommendation "sometimes" excuse the itinerant from tests, "but not always." He cites four New Testament texts in support of his claim: II and III John, Romans and I Thessalonians. I Thessalonians 5:12-13 ("We appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work; be at peace amongst yourselves") is irrelevant to the topic of letters of recommendation, and Romans 16 likewise does nothing to support Malina's claim that such letters do "not always" excuse the bearer from tests.

There is evidence that letters of recommendation were being rejected in III John (verses 9 and 10), and also in the passage from the Apostolic Constitutions cited above (n. 10). The rejection of the letters results from theological squabbles between house-churches on the one hand, and bishoprics on the other, where the opponents clearly knew each others' reputations. In their general deployment, however, letters of recommendation do obviate the need for tests. As such, they are extremely helpful in understanding the establishment and maintenance of relationships amongst like-minded Christians, across great geographical distances. These letters, while explicitly validating the bearer of the letter, also implicitly validate the authority of both the sender and the recipient. Practically, they function to guarantee hospitality, but beneath their practical function is a web of relationships between people who may not share the same ethnicity, hometown, gender, age, or any of the other traditional markers of identity; and yet who share what is to them the only true marker of identity, their sense of being brothers and sisters "ἐν τῷ κυρίω". For a movement which had nominally divested itself of traditional identity markers, these letters were extremely important for creating and sustaining social networks over a wide area.

CHAPTER 4

II CORINTHIANS 3:1-3

In this part of the paper I want to explore in greater detail the claim that letters of recommendation function to delineate a doctrinally-legitimate “us” from an illegitimate “them”. To do so, I chose the earliest explicit Christian reference to a letter of recommendation, which occurs at 2 Corinthians 3:1-3. As it turns out, this passage is a central element in the centuries-long debate over Jewish-Christian opposition to the ministry of Paul, and so is perfect for illustrating my point that these letters functioned within the context of competing *kerygmata*. I will argue that the letters at 3:1 were written by the church in Jerusalem, who sent out delegates to cleanse Paul’s pollution of the mission field. The plan for this chapter is as follows; first, I will give some basic background information about Corinth. Then I will discuss some general issues regarding the interpretation of Paul’s letters, and specify my own method. Before treating in detail 3:1-3, I will survey Paul’s broad concerns in this letter (actually, for reasons I will specify, I am looking only at 2 Cor. 2:14-7:4). Finally, I will situate my discussion in the context of the larger debate about Paul’s opponents in the mission field. My conclusion, as alluded to above, is that Christianity is in important ways indebted to Judaism for its use of letters of recommendation, and that these letters functioned to create, delineate and maintain group boundaries over a wide geographical area.

Corinth was a Roman colony located strategically on the isthmus between the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf. Cenchrae was its sister city to the south, and Paul founded communities in both cities. The town plan of Corinth measured about a mile and a half east to west, and about two thirds of a mile north to south.[115] Most of the inhabitants were artisans or slaves drawn from the eastern Mediterranean.[116] There was a great deal of merchant traffic through Corinth, and a proliferation of exotic religious cults (Cybele from Phrygia, Dionysius from Thrace and a Jewish synagogue, for example).[117] Auspicious for this part of the paper is the fact that Bellerophon, who carried the first letter of recommendation known to western literature (*Iliad* 6.145f) was one of the important civic deities presiding over Corinth.[118]

We know by name 14-17 of the Corinthian Christians at the time of Paul's letters (three references are ambiguous). There were certainly at least four home owners (Priscilla/Aquila, Stephanas, Crispus and Gaius)[119] – to which one may confidently add Erastus – for a total of five known homes where Christians may have met for worship.[120] Even the furthest apart of these homes will have been in walking distance from one another, though Phoebe's church in Cenchrae must have been relatively isolated from the goings-on in Corinth proper. Inferring

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[115]"The Corinth Project" developed at the University of Pennsylvania has an interactive map of ancient Corinth which presents its layout, temples, markets, etc: http://corinth.sas.upenn.edu/corinth.html

[116]Furnish, Victor, *Second Corinthians,* 13.

[117]Barrett, C.K., "Christianity at Corinth", 270

[118]Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth,* 6.

[119]Theissen, Gerd, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity,* 94

[120]Scholars have recently proposed alternative theories for where Christians may have met. Jewett proposes insulae (R. Jewett, "Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church"); Justin Meggitt proposes workshops (*Paul, Poverty, and Survival,* 62-67). Neither theory has attracted more than minimal attention, and most scholars continue to work on the hypothesis that Christians met at the homes of the (relatively) wealthy members of the congregation.

that the Christians we know by name probably included their families and some friends, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor estimates the Christian population in Corinth at the time of Paul's writings at 40 to 50 people "as a base figure."[121] He also surveys the largest homes of the period, and concludes that such a number probably could not be serviced by one house only. This conclusion is corroborated by 1 Cor. 16:19 and Rom. 16:5, both of which suggest there were multiple Christian house churches in other large cities. It is therefore highly likely that there were multiple house churches in Corinth. O'Connor,[122] Filson,[123] Witherington[124] and others have I think correctly emphasized the point that physical separation tends to foster the creation of personal loyalties and competition, and thus ideological factionalism.

The Hermeneutics of Paul's Letters

Paul's letters are most properly studied by historians as occasional letters. They are written by Paul in response to specific occasions, and are therefore best understood within the context of those situations. The situations themselves are reconstructed with reference to the content of the letter itself, similar material in other letters written by Paul, and in consideration of Greco-Roman and Jewish politics, religion, philosophy, socio-economic realities, etc. There has been a good deal of discussion surrounding the methodological circularity of reconstructing the situation from the letter, and then interpreting the letter with

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[121]"House Churches and the Eucharist" in Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth,* 133.

[122]*Ibid.*

[123]Filson, Floyd V., "The Importance of Early House Churches," 105 – 112

[124]Witherington, Ben, *Conflict and Community,* 30.

appeal to the reconstructed situation. On the other hand, it is evident that these letters did not originate in a social and historical vacuum. While it is impossible to arrive at certainty regarding any proposed reconstruction of the situation to which Paul responds, it is nevertheless true that some proposals are more probable and persuasive than others:[125] this is the reason why some scholars are widely read while others are not. Below I will argue that Paul's opponents most probably constitute the primary occasion for this letter.

The simplest historical hermeneutic takes Paul's words at face value, supposing that they square perfectly with the situation they describe. Such an approach, when applied to Paul's opponents, naturally tends to make them into caricatures.[126] While many nominally concur that Paul's rhetoric against his opponents should not govern how we re-present them "historically", this in fact happens all the time. Schussler-Fiorenza's observation is well-founded: "A cursory look at the scholarship on 1 Corinthians indicates that Paul is a skilled rhetorician, who, throughout the centuries, has reached his goal of persuading his audience that he is right and the others are wrong."[127] It helps Paul's cause, of course, that we have today almost no texts that speak out against him, either because they were never written down in the first place or else because the Great Church ignored, suppressed or destroyed

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[125]For an excellent essay on historical method, emphasizing the need to frame arguments and conclusions in terms of *probability,* see especially Morton Smith, "Historical Method in the Study of Religion." *History and Theory,* Vol. 8, Beiheft 8: On Method in the History of Religions.

[126]For example, Jan Lambrecht writes, "It is important to remember that Paul's behavior is regulated not by subjective preferences but by the objective reality of God" (Lambrecht, Jan, *Second Corinthians,* 40). Such starting points naturally end with conclusions such as Schlatter's, who writes that whenever one of Paul's opponents preached, their preaching (as opposed to Paul's) "no longer puts the listener in front of God but binds him instead to whoever the teacher is, and whatever he wants" (Schlatter, Adolf von, *Die Theologie der Apostel*, 499). Schlatter, of course, cannot know this.

[127]Schussler-Fiorenza, Elizabeth, "Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians", 389. Feminist scholars in general have trained their exegetical eyes to discern the voices of voiceless women and to restore to them a measure of the importance they surely had within the primitive Christian mission. We certainly ought to extend the same courtesy to Paul's opponents.

them. Given this situation, it is only fair to treat the texts we *do* have cautiously, making a sharp distinction between Paul's rhetorical characterizations of his opponents and our "historical" comments about them. Both Paul himself *and* his opponents ought to be granted a basic, *prima facie* dignity and integrity of thought and behavior. As Schussler-Fiorenza saw, this is clearly lacking in the scholarship. I will return to this point below, because it matters for understanding the origin of the Christian practice of writing letters of recommendation.

There is another component to a thoroughgoing hermeneutic of Paul's letters that has not been elevated to the level of method, but which in my view is important enough to do so. This involves the fact that in almost all of his letters, Paul is responding to reports of the situation *as mediated by his informants*. If Titus were the delegate who traveled to Paul with the information to which Paul responds in 2 Corinthians, then the content of his letter is as much dependent on Titus' perspective as it is on Paul's. If Titus carried a letter, then the complexities increase: we then have the perspective of the letter-writer, the augmentation of that perspective by the bearer(s), and Paul's own perspective – each of which is in one way or another bundled into the canonical text we now read. John C. Hurd, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, was the first (to my knowledge) to pursue systematically and persistently a reconstruction of the communiqué delivered to Paul as a central component for understanding Paul's response.[128] Other scholars have explored this aspect of how Paul's letters came to be written in the way that they are,[129] and it is important for the present

[128]Hurd, John C., *The Origin of First Corinthians, passim.* See also his retrospective comments in *The Earlier Letters of Paul,* 171f.

[129]In addition to Hurd, Schussler-Fiorenza ("Rhetorical Situation", esp. 387-389) and Michael Goulder (*Paul and the Competing Mission, passim*) are especially sensitive to the issue, as are Dahl ("Paul and the Church at Corinth" in Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth,* 85-96) and Theissen ("Social Stratification in the

purposes to remember that Paul does not have "objective" information about the occasion to which he responds, and that his information is mediated through a third party who certainly had their own biases and their own perspective.

In this paper, I have not attempted to reconstruct the situation at Corinth so much as to reconstruct the content of the communiqué delivered to Paul. One reason why this is important is that it opens up a view onto the likelihood that the delegation sent to him was sent by one faction in the city only[130] – whose presentation of the problems there would not necessarily have been shared by the others – and so to generalize about "the situation in Corinth" would close off, for example, the perspective of the homeowner at whose house Paul's opponents stayed. So I have tried throughout this chapter to trim away parts of 2 Corinthians which would involve complicated arguments to justify as components in a communiqué delivered to Paul, and to pursue instead a basic set of information which at a minimal level may *explain* the content and rhetoric of Paul's response. I will argue below that the information to which Paul responds consisted of four reasonably secure elements: 1) Individuals arrived in Corinth carrying letters of recommendation who 2) said that Paul's ministry was not sufficiently established, that 3) he did not accept hospitality as befits those sufficiently commissioned to spread the gospel, and 4) that Paul's gospel was obscure. This minimal account of the information delivered to Paul *explains* the content of his reply, and more to the point it explains how letters of recommendation were functioning in the early Christian mission field.

Corinthian Community", *ibid* 97-106). By way of contrast, the commentaries bury it under the weight of data they present.

[130]That there were already factions in Corinth is well-known from I Cor. 1:12f.

2 Corinthians 2:14 – 7:4

Because there are serious questions as to the literary unity of 2 Corinthians, I have confined my exegesis to the section within which Paul makes his reference to the letters of recommendation borne by his opponents, 2:14 – 7:4 (minus a clear interpolation at 6:14 – 7:2).[131] Most scholars consider this a unified block of text,[132] and so Paul here is responding to a single report about the situation in Corinth.

In the commentaries, 2:14 – 7:4 is variously described as "Paul's Apostolic Service" (Martin), "Paul's Apostleship" (Lambrecht), "The Apostolic Office" (Bultmann), "Comments on the Apostolic Service" (Furnish), etc. Matera described this section as "the most profound discussion of apostolic ministry found in the New Testament."[133] In order to illustrate Paul's most basic concern here, I have approached it by way of a word study. There are three words which Paul uses with an inordinate frequency. They are not only more common here than elsewhere in Paul's writings, they also appear in close relationship with one another and form a kind of leitmotif that runs through the text: Paul is arguing that his ministry (διακονία) is sufficiently (ἱκανός) established/commended (συνίστημι). Apart from capturing Paul's defensive tone in this text, "The Sufficient Establishment of Paul's Ministry" would not be substantially different from the rubrics offered by the commentaries.

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[131]For a thorough and clear discussion of Pauline interpolations, see William O. Walker, *Interpolations in the Pauline Letters.*

[132]The notable exception to the general consensus is Hans Windisch, who thought that 3:7ff could be extracted from its current place within the letter and treated as an independently composed "midrash" inserted by Paul at this point (Windisch, Hans, *Korintherbrief,* 112-120). See especially the thorough appraisal of Windisch's theory (and its reception) in Scott Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel,* 255-265.

[133]Matera, Frank J., *II Corinthians,* 52.

If 2:14 does not belong together with the passage preceding it, then we enter Paul's thought at 2:14 *en medias res*: the beginning of the letter is lost. Paul is describing his successes in the mission field away from Corinth. There is an abrupt shift at 3:1, where he suddenly asks, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?" The shift here has not been so abrupt as to warrant a partition theory about originally discrete documents, and the reason is that ἱκανότης holds 2:14 – 17 together with the following passage, 3:1-6. In 2:16 he asks "Who is sufficient?", and at 3:5 he writes that "ἡ ἱκανότησ ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅσ και ἱκάνωσεν ἡμᾶσ".[134] Georgi saw that Paul's concept of ἱκανότης functioned here as an "inclusion", and it is important for the present paper to notice that what *gets included* between 2:16 and 3:5 are the letters of recommendation of Paul's opponents (3:1-3).[135] Before he mentions these letters and after, he is thinking of the issue of sufficiency, which implies that he associated the letters with this issue. Martin's reading of the passage is clear: "Paul is on the defensive, and concerned to demonstrate (as far as that is possible) the validity of his apostolic ministry in a context where it is under suspicion."[136]

In the passage cited above (3:5), Paul continues, "ὅσ και ικάνωσεν ἡμᾶσ διακόνουσ καινῆσ διαθήκης". The term διακονία and its cognates occur 36 times in Paul's letters, 20 of which are in 2 Corinthians. In 3:6-11, Paul emphatically contrasts his ministry with the

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[134]"The noun ἱκανοτης appears nowhere else in the Greek Bible or early Christian literature" (Furnish, Victor, *II Corinthians,* 184).

[135]Goulder offers a penetrating observation: "The word (ἱκανότης) is used both before and after the reference to the letters in 3.1-3 and should be connected with them. Both adjective and verb are used in the papyri as legal terms meaning 'authorized, to authorize': 'I am writing this to you so that you may be authorized'…etc…so the letters of II.3.1-3 were not merely commendatory letters as Paul depreciates them; they were authorizing letters, making their bearers plenipotentiaries. They gave them authority to act as might be necessary…to give considered opinions – in other words, to make rulings for the church" (Goulder, Michael, *Paul and the Competing Mission at Corinth,* 33f). Goulder's point is both novel and substantial.

[136]Martin, Ralph P., *2 Corinthians,* 55.

ministry of death (v.7) and condemnation (v.9). It is by God's grace that Paul has his ministry (4:1), which is of reconciliation (5:18), puts no obstacle in anyone's way, and so is faultless (6:3). It is clear that the concept of true ministry is a kind of ground bass throughout this text. Paul returns to it again and again, using it to launch forth his defense (or, with an opposing image, retreating consistently to his trenchant assertion that his ministry really *is* sufficiently established). Furnish I think correctly argues that the concept of true ministry seems to have been an important topic not only for Paul in the text we read, but also for his *opponents* in Corinth: "It is likely that they attached some kind of special meaning to it which had the effect of casting doubt on the validity of Paul's ministry."[137] This seems right, but Furnish may have introduced something of a red herring here when he writes about "special meaning". What is evidently at issue is simply legitimate ministry: Paul's opponents said that his ministry was insufficiently established, and he countered that their ministry was the ministry of death. There is no need to suppose that there are "special meanings" hidden in any of this.

As noted above, Paul relates his concept of "ministry" closely with "sufficiency" in 3:5-6. He also relates "ministry" closely with "commendation" 6:3-4: "No fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way". These two concepts are similarly juxtaposed in 4:1-2: "It is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open

[137]Furnish, Victor, *2 Corinthians,* 197. *Cf* Martin's observation that "The issue of ἱκανότης ('competence, capability, adequacy,' but much more a matter of true authority and evidence for it), [was] a term obviously ventilated at Corinth" (*2 Corinthians,* 49); *Cf* also Georgi, *Gegner,* 224; Barrett, *2 Corinthians,* 102-103; Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents,* 132.

statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God."

Like διακονία, συνίστημι and its cognates occur with disproportionate frequency in 2 Corinthians (9 times in this letter, 4 elsewhere). Within 2:14-7:4, Paul's use of συνίστημι is noticeably convoluted. He openly commends himself to the consciences of everyone (4:2), but he is not commending himself to the Corinthians again (3:1, 5:11), but he and his associates have commended themselves "in every way" (6:4; he here gives a long list of specific "ways" – beatings, sleepless nights, truthful speech and the like – which would go unmentioned if he were not *actually* trying to commend himself to the Corinthians again). Although Paul's thoughts on commendation are convoluted in this passage, it is suggestive that his general deployment of the concept is in a number of places closely associated with metaphors for the interior person, like "heart" and "conscience." At 3:1 he does not need a letter of recommendation because the Corinthians are written on his "heart"; at 4:2 he commends himself openly to the "consciences" of everyone; and at 5:11 he writes that he is not commending himself, but hopes nonetheless that he is well known to the "consciences" of the Corinthian congregation. His repeated appeal to interiorized modes of legitimation suggests that his opponents had exterior modes of legitimation.[138] At 4:16 he writes that the inner nature (the "hearts" and "consciences" to which he appeals) is "being renewed day by day"; in contrast to the "outer nature" which is "wasting away".[139] Paul's repeated

[138]Taking Paul's comments and supposing that the opponents said or did the opposite is often called the "mirroring technique" in the scholarship, and critics rightly point out that over-use of this technique would lead to arguing that, since Paul said in 4:5 that he had "treasure in clay jars", the opponents said they had trash in clay jars, or treasure in crystal vases, or some such (see Jerry Sumney, *Paul's Opponents, passim*, for a good discussion and critique of the mirror technique). This of course does not mean that Paul never responded to his opponents in his letters – only that the passages in question need to be carefully evaluated.

[139]4:16; the "outer nature" has tonal affinities with Paul's image of the persecuted body (4:8-12), the "ministry of death" (3:7), Moses' veil (3:7-18), and the opponents' letters "written with ink…on tablets of stone" (3:3).

interiorization of the concept of true commendation makes the most sense when viewed as a polemical response to exterior objects – the *written* commendations carried by his opponents.

The heightened frequency of διακονία, συνίστημι and ἱκανότης, along with the contexts in which they occur and their close interrelations with one another, indicate that Paul is most probably responding to the charge that his ministry is not sufficiently established. This charge could be easily conveyed to Paul, and it furthermore *explains* most of the content in II Corinthians 2:14-7:4, why in these passages Paul both recommends himself (he really is an authentic apostle, as the hearts and consciences of the Corinthians can surely attest) and does not recommend himself (only inferior apostles – "those who boast in outward appearances", i.e. his opponents – need or have external means of validating their ministries).

The other elements in 2 Cor. 2:14-7:4 which appear to be involved in the information communicated to Paul are the charge that he did not receive hospitality like a genuine apostle, and the charge that his gospel was obscure. I consider these elements probable aspects of the communiqué because Paul uses them both to attack his enemies (his opponents "peddle" gods word; it is the Mosaic Law that is "veiled") *and* defend himself (4:2: he does not "adulterate" God's word and 7:2: he has "taken advantage" of no one; and 4:4; "Even if our gospel is 'veiled', it is veiled to those who are perishing").

To sum up so far; keeping in mind that there were probably multiple house-churches and the attendant factionalism in Corinth and Cenchrae, I have attempted to reconstruct the communication to which Paul responds in 2 Cor. 2:14-7:4. By paying close attention to the words he uses and the ways he constructs polemic around certain topics, it seems evident that people came to Corinth with letters of recommendation who charged Paul with obscurantism and accused him of not behaving like a genuine apostle in his refusal to accept hospitality, and furthermore they made the more substantial charge that his ministry was not sufficiently established. This latter line of attack Paul takes very seriously – it undergirds both the frame and the content of his response. If we ask what, for the opponents, a sufficient establishment of a ministry *would* entail, the most probable answer would be the network of more institutionalized social relations embodied in the opponents' letters of recommendation. These outward forms of legitimation help explain the interiorized language which Paul uses in his appeals, since he had no comparable letters. One final point: the term "letters of recommendation" (συστατικῶν ἐπιστολῶν) itself is in part derived from συνίστημι, and so the heightened (and as we have seen, convoluted) use of the latter term by Paul almost certainly has as its cause the letters borne by the opponents. In the next part of the chapter I will consider how scholars have dealt with 3:1-3 itself.

2 Corinthians 3:1-3

> Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

This passage has an odd history in the exegesis of modern scholarship. On the one hand, many commentators simply ignore it or treat it with the utmost indifference, while on the other hand it was a critical point in the debate between Käsemann and Bultmann concerning the identity of Paul's Corinthian opponents, and whether or not they had come from Jerusalem. It therefore has the paradoxical distinction of being both significant and ignored. My argument is that it is the most important passage in the whole of 2:14-7:2: it is the central axis around which the rest of the text revolves.

There are some arguments about how this passage relates to the passage preceding it (2:14-17), and to the passage(s) after it (3:4f and especially 3:7ff). As noted above, the connection with the passage preceding it is somewhat abrupt, but it connects well enough on the main points. It is the passage following, though (Paul's extraordinary interpretation of the Mosaic law)[140] that has generated by far the most interest. Scholars who have attempted to connect the two passages have come up against a rather large stumbling block. On the one hand, it seems quite obvious that Paul refers to the letters of recommendation, which in turn leads to his redefinition of what a letter of recommendation really is ("written on the heart"), followed by a denigration of the actual written letters by equating them with Moses' tablets of stone and the law that brings death. Murphy-O'Connor's simple explanation is the clearest: "Paul associated the bearers of the letters of recommendation with the Mosaic law."[141] But on second look, this only works by conceding to those letters of recommendation (and their authors/bearers) a rather disproportionate amount power and importance. Paul is either killing flies with a shotgun or else there is a significant opponent in his sights. As Fitzmyer writes, "The puzzling element in this passage is how Paul can begin with such a trivial matter as a letter of recommendation and pass from it to the involved discussion about the veil on Moses' face, and from that to the sublime theology of

[140]Oostendorp's reading of the passage on the Mosaic Law [in 3:7ff] is unequivocal: "Paul has just forcefully argued that the insufficiency of Moses' ministry and glory is found in its very essence, namely, that it brings only condemnation and death", *Another Jesus,* 39.

[141]Murphy-O'Connor, *2 Corinthians,* 32; *Cf* Raisanen, *Paul and the Law,* 244.

the glory or splendor of the creator-God reflected on the face of Christ."[142] Fitzmyer leaves the puzzle unsolved, as does Furnish, who though he concedes that 3:1-3 is "by no means beside the point" says little to help clarify what the point might be.[143] There are many who ignore this passage altogether, or else treat it with minimal consideration.

Like Fitzmyer, Harvey also sensed a puzzle in this passage and to his credit attempted an explanation: "Was Paul stung by his opponents into arguing about 'letters of commendation,' and did this lead his mind onto ideas about 'writing in the heart,' Moses and 'glory'? Or were these the things he really wanted to talk about in the first place, in which case the 'letters of commendation' may simply have been a rhetorical motif, a convenient way of introducing a new topic?"[144] My argument here is that the former scenario is exactly correct, but Harvey himself inclines to the latter scenario. He proposes, in other words, that the letters of recommendation mentioned in 3:1 never actually existed, that nobody came to Corinth bearing them, and that Paul imagined them simply as a launching pad for his subsequent discussion of Moses and the veil. The struggle exhibited by Harvey to make sense of these letters illustrates the profound aversion felt by some in reducing (as they would see it) Paul's religious thought to a particular set of social and historical circumstances. Harvey's solution to the puzzle he senses is to jettison the social and

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[142]Fitzmyer, Joseph, *According to Paul,* 68.

[143]Furnish devotes one small paragraph (*2 Corinthians,* 193) in discussing who the bearers of the letter might be, and concludes after citing only Barrett and Plummer that the individuals probably came from "other Hellenistic congregations." *Cf* Mark Goodwin, *Apostle* (who cites favorably Furnish's minimal evaluation); *cf* also Sumney *Identifying Paul's Opponents* (128) who agrees with Furnish and concludes that the opponents have the letters "which they use as evidence of apostolic status". The only thing Witherington says about these verses is that such letters were common, and the bearers cannot have been "Peter, James, or Apollos, all of whom were already known to the Corinthians, as I Corinthians shows" (Witherington, Ben, *Conflict and Community,* 377). Martin, in discussing 3:4, writes that it "harks back to 3:1-3 (Plummer, Hughes) – or better – to 2:17 (Strachan, Godet, Windisch, Provence, 62)" (Martin, Ralph P., *2 Corinthians,* 52), but the fact that it "harks back" to something is all Martin offers.

[144]Harvey, A.E., *Renewal Through Suffering,* 68.

historical circumstances altogether, viewing the letters instead as a "rhetorical motif" concocted in order to enter into a sublime train of theological thought.

I would contend against Harvey that letters of recommendation should be sufficiently *improbable* in the context of the early Christian mission to justify treating them here as simply and *only* a rhetorical motif. But we know that such letters were then circulating. Apollos had one written on his behalf by Priscilla and Aquila when he first arrived in Corinth (Acts 18:27), and Paul often commended individuals in his letters (Romans 16:1-2; I Cor. 16, II Cor. 8:16-19, etc.) Furthermore, Paul carried at least two such letters himself, one as "Saul" the delegate of the high priest (Acts 9:1-2, 22:5) and one to Antioch (according to Luke) as an apostle approved by the original group of Christians in Jerusalem. This latter text constitutes important evidence that the Jerusalem church was writing letters of recommendation for individuals sent to churches outside Palestine, and that the letters and the individuals they commended were principally concerned with matters pertaining to doctrine. I will return to it later in the paper, but it is important here simply to underscore the fact that *contra* Harvey there is nothing inherently unlikely in the possibility that people came to Corinth bearing letters of recommendation, and that therefore a more tangible connection should be sought between the letters mentioned in 3:1f with the Paul's subsequent denigration of the Mosaic covenant. The most obvious hypothesis connecting the two passages is that Paul's opponents were observant of the Mosaic covenant, and that the letters of recommendation they carried were considered authoritative by enough Christians in Corinth to elicit Paul's response, in both the substance and tone in which he gives it.

Georgi saw that a historical explanation (rather than literary one) of 3:1-3 was necessary to understand the text; in fact, he makes it a central point in his critique of

Lütgert's influential response to Baur (these arguments will be given in more detail below).[145] Following his teacher Bultmann, Georgi argues against the proposition that the letters were from individuals in Jerusalem who had widely recognized apostolic authority. He frames the argument this way:

> The assumption that the opponents of Paul in Corinth had understood their letters of recommendation as an authorization by Jerusalem is disproved by the fact that they asked for letters of recommendations from the Corinthians, too. They were interested in letters of recommendations from the congregations in general.[146]

There are three distinct problems with the way Georgi has formulated the issue. First, what we have from those he argues against (Baur and Käsemann) is not an "assumption", it is an internally coherent argument which explains other related problems. Second, the question is not whether the opponents "understood their letters as an authorization by Jerusalem"[147] – the question is whether they were in fact such. We are clearly dealing in the realm of fiction if we imagine the opponents carrying papers which *they* believe to be apostolic authorization from Jerusalem, but which are in fact are, say, inventories from a Samaritan pig-herder. Finally, strictly speaking, nothing would be "disproved" if these individuals had asked for letters of recommendation from the Corinthians (they simply would then have had letters from Jerusalem *and* Corinth and wherever else they went). More important than these objections, however, is that such interpretations as Georgi's is dependent on taking Paul's words here at face value. Since it is problematic to take a

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[145]Georgi, Dieter, *Gegner,* 5; *Cf* Lütgert, W., *Freiheitspredikt und Schwarmgeister in Korinth: Ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik der Christuspartei,* Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1908.

[146]*Gegner,* 244.

[147]*Cf* Sumney's comment cited above (n. 143) that the opponents "used [the letters] as evidence of apostolic status".

polemical text at face value, I would argue that the phrase at issue (ἢ ἐξ ὑμῶν) should be *evaluated* before it is simply *repeated*.

For an evaluation of this phrase, the only real exchange in the scholarship is a brief one between Bultmann and Käsemann. Käsemann had argued in some detail that the newcomers in Corinth most probably carried letters from the *Urgemeinde*. He acknowledges that the letters can be seen as trivial documents from one Hellenistic community to another, but argues that such "Unverbindliche Schreiben würden Paulus kaum Anlass geben, sein Amt in solcher Breite und Nachdrücklichkeit zu entfalten, wie es c. 3f geschieht."[148] Bultmann countered that the phrase "συστατικαι επιστολαι προσ υμασ η εξ υμων" indicated *contra* Kasemann that "die von der korintischen Gemeinde ausgestellten Empfehlungsschreiben den an sie gerichteten im Gewicht gleichstehen, und diese werden also ebenfalls Schreiben aus hellenistischen Gemeinden (wenn nicht nur aus einer) sein."[149] Käsemann did not reply, and Bultmann reiterated his stance in his commentary *Der Zweiter Brief an der Korinther*: "Woher diese die Empfehlungsbriefe haben, ist nicht erkennen. Auf Jerusalem weist nichts…η εξ υμων: diese Leute lassen sich also von Korinth aus weiterempfehlen."[150] He footnotes this latter statement to a question: "Täten das Jerusalemer Gesandte?"

"Auf Jerusalem weist nichts...Täten das Jerusalmer Gesandte?" This to me sounds like whistling in the dark, but in any event the Bultmann/Käsemann debate was the last substantial exchange on the topic, and their argument fairly represents how the scholarly discussion now stands. Many scholars take Bultmann's line, a few take Käsemann's, a few

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[148]Kasemann, Ernst, "Die Legitimitat des Apostels", 45.

[149]Bultmann, Rudolf, *Exegetische Probleme,* 22.

[150]Bultmann, Rudolf, *Die Zweiter Brief an der Korinther,* 74.

mesh the two into a statement reminiscent of the Byzantine NT MS tradition,[151] and nothing is resolved. It should be repeated that my concern here is to connect the letters of recommendation with the passage that follows immediately upon them, Paul's subsequent characterization of the Mosaic law as "the ministry of death" (3:7). There are a few points I would like to make regarding the exchange between Bultmann and Käsemann. 1) It will be noticed that Bultmann did not respond to Käsemann's point that the more-or-less routine letters of recommendation between Hellenistic communities would hardly have prompted Paul to respond in such "Breite und Nachdrücklichkeit"; 2) Bultmann's assertion that the origin of these individuals is "nicht erkennen" means that there is no logical reason to exclude Jerusalem as a possibility; 3) In order to read ἢ ἐξ ὑμῶν as Bultmann does – that is, as a simple factual declaration that these individuals asked for letters as they traveled on their way – one must concede that they have already gone to other communities; but this scenario is subverted by Bultmann himself to the extent that he connects them with the opponents (present in Corinth) in chapters 10-13. He cannot have it both ways.[152]

I am convinced that Käsemann is correct, and would explain Bultmann's single text-based objection (his exegesis of ἢ ἐξ ὑμῶν) as follows. If Paul had responded to the communiqué with only the question "Do *I* need letters of recommendation *to you*?", this would imply an earthly source of authority behind him, and Paul would of course

[151] E.g. Kreitzer, the term 'letters of recommendation' "appears to mean not only letters of recommendation to the Corinthian church (from Jerusalem?) but letters of recommendation from them to others (especially if 'from you' (εξ ηυμοων) at the end of 3.1 is given its full weight" (Kreitzer, Larry, *2 Corinthians,* 42). Similarly Margaret Thrall, *2 Corinthians,* 78.

[152] This of course applies to all who follow Bultmann; e.g. Furnish, who accepts a Hellenistic origin of the opponents based on Bultmann's reading of ἢ ἐξ ὑμῶν, yet writes that "The reference [in 3:1] is clearly pejorative, the *some* referring to those whom Paul opposes, as in 10:2," (Furnish, Victor, *2 Corinthians,* 180).

acknowledge no human agency behind his apostolic authority.[153] He adds a rhetorical "or from you" which subtly shifts the *source* of legitimacy away from the signatories on the letter and *onto the Corinthians themselves.* In other words, he introduces the idea that the Corinthian community is equal in authority to those who signed the opponents' letters, and moves the whole issue of apostolic legitimacy away from the realm of institutionalized social networks embodied in the letters and into the realm of his own personal relationships and charismatic authority. Moreover, if we ask how Bultmann's reading of ἢ ἐξ ὑμῶν would operate in a communication sent to Paul, perhaps it would be along the lines of the following: "Some people came in with letters, accepted hospitality, questioned the sufficiency of your ministry and accused you of obscurantism, then asked for letters and left." I would argue that in such a case Paul would be far more inclined to *attack* them as false apostles than to extensively *defend* his own legitimacy: if they were really just letter-mongers (as Bultmann, Georgi and all who follow them believe), this would most probably have become the grounds for invective, not defense. Käsemann's basic objection emerges again: such a hypothesis cannot satisfactorily explain the breadth and seriousness of Paul's reply.

As the debate now stands, Käsemann's argument should I think be judged the most probable. It is certainly *possible* that the individuals came from elsewhere, but it is most *probable* that they came from Jerusalem. This probability is enhanced when we remember that the Apostolic Decree was sent out by central authorities in Jerusalem, commending Judas and Silas to deliver the letter concerning the matter of gentiles and the Law (Acts

[153] Paul's emphatic statement that he did *not* go to Jerusalem to consult with the "pillars" after his vision (Gal. 1:15-18) illustrates the point; conversely, Luke's statement that he did go illustrates the tendency both in the book of Acts and in much of the scholarship to see Paul of one mind with Peter, James, etc.

15:23-29).[154] There are two specific issues concerning the Decree as given by Luke which are worth mentioning here. First, Fitzmyer and others think that the letter, which Luke evidently got from a source in Antioch, was originally addressed "'To you [Christians in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia] and Barnabas and Paul'...That would mean that Barnabas and Paul were thought to be still in Antioch and were intended as co-*recipients* of the letter about dietary matters."[155] (Again, the present purpose is to connect the letters of recommendation at 3:1 with the following denigration of the Mosaic law.) Second, some scholars have expressed reservations about the likelihood of Paul delivering such a document, given explicit statements in his own letters which seem to indicate he preached the opposite of what the Apostolic Decree mandated,[156] for example in his interpretation that a veil lies over

[154]There has been some discussion as to whether Luke fabricated the text of the letter whole-cloth, or whether he took it over (perhaps with modification) from a source. Haenchen (*Acts,* 460), Conzelmann (*Acts,* 120), Pervo (*Profit with Delight,* 77) and others think that Luke fabricated the document. There are three substantial arguments against this position: 1) As Knox argues, linguistic particularities such as the phrase "οι πρεσβυτεροι αδελφοι" "suggest that we are dealing with an original document copied by Luke more or less verbatim…since there is no reason why Luke should use the curious phrase as against πρεσβυτεροι in 14:23; 15:4, 6, etc., unless he found it in the original" (Knox, John, *Acts*, 50); 2) Conzelmann, though he thinks the letter as we now have it in Acts is a Lukan creation, admits that there is substantial evidence that some such document was circulated in the early church (he cites "Rev. 2:14, 20; Justin *Dial.* 34.8; Mincius Felix 30.6; *The Martyrs of Lyons* in Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.26; Tertullian *Apol.* 9.13; *Ps-Clem Hom* 7.4.2; 7.8.1, 8, 19", *Acts,*119); and finally; 3) Wedderburn argues that the addresses to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia is "striking when Luke has (a) nowhere described the evangelization of Cilicia and Syria apart from Antioch…and (b) has in chaps 13-14 described the spread of the Christian Church to the area of Asia Minor evangelized by Barnabas and Paul in those chapters: Cyprus, and particularly Pisidia and Lyacaonia" ("The Apostolic Decree", 374f). The point of view taken by the present paper is that a document similar to the one in canonical Acts 15:23-29 circulated in the early church, which Luke used as a source and modified.

[155]Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 562, my emphasis.

[156]Jervell describes the decree as follows: "the Decree is necessary because the law demands it; the Decree expresses what Moses demands from Gentiles in order that they may live among Israelites (Acts 15:15-17). The background is what Leviticus 17-18 demands from 'strangers' in Israel. The Decree is known from the synagogues as Moses is read there Sabbath by Sabbath, as happens all over the world. The Decree gives a common norm for Jews and Gentiles, grounding the unity of the church in the law. The main point in the Decree is that keeping the law, in this case the four commandments, is a confession of the one and only God of Israel. Therefore the commandments of purity are especially important, as the principles of the Decree show. As the Decree is part of the Torah, the law remains valid for both Jewish and Gentile Christians," *Theology,* 59f. *Cf* F.F. Bruce's comment on the Council of Jerusalem: "In this new order the Mosaic Law retained its place as the supreme revelation of God's will, even if the Gentile converts were not obliged to submit to it in its fullness", (Bruce, F.F., *New Testament History,* 314).

Moses "whenever Moses is read". The Apostolic Decree is a notoriously complicated text, and there is not enough space here to consider its problems in detail. What I would point out is only that the Apostolic Decree is most *like* the sort of document which would most satisfactorily *explain* Paul's thought in 2 Cor. 2:14-7:4. It recommends the bearers to the communities to which they travel, and elicits a response from Paul which is centered on the validity of the Mosaic law.

To sum up so far. It was reported to Paul that individuals came to Corinth with letters of recommendation and specific arguments ready to level against him, calling into question the sufficiency of his ministry. Scholars have not been able to explain the breadth and seriousness of Paul's response, especially when they treat these letters as non-existent (Harvey), or else as unimportant documents (Furnish, Bultmann, Fitzmeyer, etc) perhaps written by other Hellenistic communities on behalf of letter-mongers. If we take seriously the need to explain Paul's extended defense of his ministry and his polemical attacks against the Mosaic Law, it is clear that his opponents are most probably Jewish Christians, and in fact most scholars already agree that this is the case.[157] If we ask further what the document they carried would be most *like* – as far as we can judge from the tone and content of Paul's response – the most suggestive document is I think the Apostolic Decree, which commends individuals (Judas and Silas) and is primarily concerned with issues pertaining to the Mosaic

[157]According to Gunther's tally, only Lütgert, Schlatter, Bousset, Reitzenstein, Schniewind and Lake consider these individuals non-Jewish gnostics of one stripe or another (Gunther, John J., *St. Paul's Opponents,* 1) – everyone else thinks they were Jews or Jewish Christians. Gunther's own conclusion is that "there is sufficient theological coherence of their teachings to affirm the existence of a definite religious perspective" (*Ibid* 312; Gunther here refers to Paul's Jewish-Christian opponents generally, not only in the Corinthian correpsondence). There is however nothing "definite" about Gunther's own description of this group: "Believers whose background was a mystic-apocalyptic, ascetic, non-conformist, syncretistic Judaism more akin to Essenism than to any other well-known 'school' or holiness sect" (*ibid.* 315). In this paper, I would argue that Gunther is correct that they shared a definite religious perspective, but would not characterize them the way that he does: I think they were simply the Jerusalemite *Urgemeinde.*

Law. Such a document would easily explain Paul's extended defense of his ministry, and his passionate appeals to the "hearts" and "consciences" of the Corinthian community.

The Identity of Paul's Opponents

The identity of Paul's opponents has been hotly disputed ever since F.C. Baur opened the question in 1831 with his essay "Die Christuspartei". Baur began with the factions mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:12, and argued that the four parties mentioned there actually reduce to two when examined closely: the party of Paul and the party of Cephas [=Peter]. Though Baur's central exegetical work in this essay was on the Corinthian correspondence, he used parallel texts from other Pauline letters in order to conclude that Paul faced really only one unified opposition in the mission field, and these associated themselves with Peter. "Associated themselves" is phrased passively because Baur was quite explicit that Peter did not send these individuals himself: "Under the authority of [Peter's] name a Jewish Christian element had, without doubt, been introduced into a Church consisting almost entirely of Gentile Christians. In this sense only can the Apostle mean to affix the name of Cephas or Peter to one of these parties."[158] Baur writes "in this sense only", but surely he is overstating his point here. Given what we know about Luke's mishandling and manipulation of information concerning Paul in the book of Acts[159] – and Baur himself was deeply suspicious

[158]Cited in Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth,* 53; 150 years later Barrett basically repeats Baur's line, that these people came to Corinth and "made free with [Peter's] name", (Barrett, C.K., "Christianity at Corinth", 271). The reason Baur and Barrett insist on this arbitrary distinction is transparent – at least to me.

[159]E.g., "In Acts 15 the private conference of Gal. 2:1-10 is turned into a massive assembly in which both Peter and James give unqualified support to the Pauline mission on Pauline terms", (Goulder, *Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth,* 5). *Cf* Lenz, "The evidence suggests that Luke was highlighting, if not creating, Paul's high social status and moral virtue. By the end of Acts, the Paul who is described is, quite frankly, too good to be true" (Lentz, John Clayton, *Luke's Portrait of Paul,* 171).

of Acts' historical value – we ought to give fair hearing to the possibility that neither Peter nor James really approved of the reports they received concerning Paul's mission, and that they sent out men to correct his errors. Granted that this possibility runs contrary to the orthodox Church's later view that Peter, James and Paul shared one mind and one mission, but if we are trying to make the most sense of the actual evidence, it is a hypothesis which warrants more consideration than it has gotten in the almost 200 years since Baur.

Because the literature on this topic is voluminous and space is limited, I have confined myself in this penultimate section of the paper to four points, each of which is expressed in order to cast doubt on Baur's detractors and to bolster my own argument that the first-mentioned Christian letter of recommendation was written by the Jerusalem church, and functioned to provide doctrinal legitimation in the context of the early Christian mission.

1. John J. Gunther, in his book *St. Paul's Opponents and their Background,* surveyed the relevant scholarship and listed no less than 13 distinct scholarly proposals for the identity of Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians, each of which arose in one way or another in response to Baur.[160] Scott Hafemann observes the proliferation of theories on Paul's opponents, laments the complexities involved in trying to find out who the opponents *really* were, and finally advocates replacing a discussion of Paul's opponents with "a return to the text."[161] When

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[160]Gunther, *St. Paul's Opponents,* 1.

[161]"Paul's Argument from the Old Testament and Christology in 2 Cor. 1-9", in R. Bieringer, *Corinthian Correspondence,* 281; by "a return to the text" he means doing close exegesis on the individual letters before building anything up into a general statement applicable to other Pauline texts. This sort of appeal is not uncommon (Jerry Sumney and others make it also), and is problematic to the extent that it insinuates that scholars who make general statements *have not* read the individual texts closely. Furthermore, Hafemann mischaracterizes in important ways the attempt to find out who Paul's opponents were: "The attempts to understand 2 Cor. 1-9 in the light of an *a priori* decision concerning the nature of Paul's opposition have…collapsed" (281). There is not and cannot be anything *a priori* when one cites texts to build up an

one proceeds in this manner, Hafemann argues, "It becomes evident that Paul primarily [in 2 Cor] refers to three complementary sources of authority for his arguments: the Scriptures, Christology, and his own experience as an apostle."[162] But if the reconstruction given above about the communiqué delivered to Paul is even partially correct, then those three sources of authority to which Paul appeals in 2 Cor. are not used *for* his arguments, they *are* his arguments. With Hafemann we reach a critical juncture in approaches to Paul: if we are pooh-poohed away from taking seriously the possibility that Paul's opponents constitute the *occasion* for at least some of the letters, then we can no longer treat them as *occasional letters,* and are not doing historical exegesis.

Hafemann's appeal to the complexity of the issue and the wide array of scholarly disagreement should not impinge upon the basic methodological approach whereby Paul's letters are treated as occasional: if the opponents appear to constitute the primary occasion to which he is responding, then so be it. But there is another consideration: the wide range of proposals for the identity of Paul's opponents mentioned by Gunther is not without a very suggestive common denominator: in the overwhelming majority of reconstructions offered by scholars in response to Baur, Paul's opponents are portrayed in the scholarship as illegitimate apostles.[163] There is only one very recent reconstruction I have read (Michael Goulder's) which grants to these individuals basic legitimacy as apostles. *All* the others – Baur, Käsemann and Barrett included – do not. Schussler-Fiorenza's observation cited above

argument. Such appeals as made by Hafemann read to me as a retreat from the *implications* of general statements (as does Bultmann's "*nicht erkennen*" discussed above). Similar examples could be easily multiplied, most of which have Baur's thesis in the background (so explicitly in both Hafemann and Bultmann).

[162]*Ibid,* 282.

[163]Proposals include Gnostics, Pneumatic-Libertine Gnostics, Alexandrian syncretistic, antinomian Gnostics, Judaizers, wandering Jewish preachers taking over Gnostic pneumatic opposition of 1 Cor, etc. (Gunther, *St. Paul's Opponents.,* 1f.)

about the effectiveness of Paul's rhetoric is here on full display. In the almost two centuries since Baur's work, every effort has been made to vilify Paul's opponents – to rob Peter in order to pay Paul – and this seems to have been done in what amounts to a culturally subconscious and *systematic* manner. Hafemann sees a vast number of theories about Paul's opponents, but I see only one: *they were illegitimate.*

2. The term "gnosticism" has come under a good deal of fire lately.[164] The same should be done in a systematic manner for the term "Judaizing" as it is used in New Testament scholarship. Given E.P. Sanders' observations above about the basic continuity between Jesus' mission, message, and the Jewish covenantal law ("the disciples did not gain the impression that the Mosaic dispensation was valueless and had already passed away"),[165] the term "Judaizing" can be meaningful in the New Testament period primarily as a foil for Paul, because *most everyone else was a "Judaizer*."

In his chapter on "Jewish Christianity" in *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament,* James Dunn proposes to draw a circle, the center of which is the core Christian message and the circumference of which demarcates acceptable Christianity from unacceptable Christianity.[166] The proposal marks the book's implicit theological underpinnings, because from a disinterested historical point of view no phenomena are "unacceptable". In most

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[164]See especially Michael Williams' *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category,* Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1996.

[165]*Jesus and Judaism,* 268. Or again, "Here the great *fact* is that Jesus' followers did not know that he had directly opposed the law, and in particular they did not know him to have opposed the laws governing *Sabbath, food and purity.* Sabbath and food, which are prominent in the Gospels, are two of the three issues which figure in Paul's letters" (*Jesus and Judaism,* 325, Sanders' emphasis). *Cf Ibid* 245-269 and 335.

[166]A central question for Dunn is "Where did acceptable diversity fall over into unacceptable diversity?", Dunn, James D.G., *Unity and Diversity,* 335.

places, Dunn's theology is muted and barely noticeable: he works competently with the tools of historical criticism and in general he builds persuasive arguments with the texts he uses. But here, in the chapter on Jewish Christians, his arguments become strained. For example, he states that the agreement in theology between Jesus' original followers and the second-century Ebionites is "striking", but he differentiates the two as follows: "the faith and practice of the primitive Jerusalem community was not something thought out, clearly crystallized in debate; it was simply the first stage in the development from a form of Jewish messianism to Christianity proper."[167] There is a subtle misdirection at work here – he has introduced a new interpretative category ("development") – and it becomes quite clear that Dunn's teleological view of what constitutes "Christianity proper" actually *governs* his interpretation of the evidence. Another example of the same thing is his statement that "Ebionism was rejected because in a developing situation where Christianity had to develop and change, it did not."[168] Yes, but rejected *by whom?* Certainly not by the Ebionites themselves, and why should their opinion on the topic not receive a fair hearing? Yet again, "heretical Jewish Christianity was a form of stunted, underdeveloped Christianity, rigid and unfitted to be the mouthpiece of the gospel in a new age."[169] Yes, but it was viewed as "stunted and underdeveloped" *by whom*? Their own point of view? A "historical" point of view? It seems that Dunn must have a false gospel in order to conceptualize a true one.

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[167]Dunn, James D.G., *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 244

[168]*Ibid.*

[169]*Ibid,* 245. Moreover, in labeling Jewish Christianity "heretical" Dunn goes against his own better judgement – "it would seem wiser to avoid the use of the terms 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' at least as the basic categories of discussion: the concepts beg too many questions, are too emotive, provide categories that are far too rigid, and tend to close off avenues of investigation rather than to open them up" (*Ibid* 5f). Is it merely ironic that Dunn uses the word "rigid" to describe *both* the terms "heresy/orthodoxy" *and* the *character* of Jewish Christianity?

Finally, he states that "Matthew's emphasis on love…as the means of interpreting the law does mark off his attitude as more distinctively Christian than Jewish."[170] This latter statement may perhaps be forgiven since Dunn cannot at that time have read Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism,* which demolished the unreflective assumptions upon which such claims depended.

The result of all this is that Dunn is able to present a spectrum of Jewish Christianity.[171] On the "acceptable" side are Matthew, John, the Letter to the Hebrews, Lukan Psalms, and the Epistle of James (the latter is perilously close to being "unacceptable"). On the "unacceptable" side are Paul's opponents and the Ebionites. But the categories he works with to achieve this spectrum are grounded in a notion of "development" which fits all-too-well with cozy religious sensibilities. "Judaizers" (for Dunn as for many others) are those who attempt to draw "true Christians" over to the "stulted and underdeveloped" Jewish side of the spectrum. This presentation of the evidence is in my view non-historical and arbitrarily determined by theological precommitments. When Dunn writes that Paul's opponents were "Christian Jews rather than Jewish Christians,"[172] what can that possibly *mean*?

If we blow away the chaff from his chapter, however, we are left with a number of statements which should lead us to the view that Judaizers – from the opponents of Paul down through the Ebionites – represented a closer connection to Jesus and his own disciples than did Paul. A few examples,

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[170]*Ibid,* 262.

[171]*Ibid,* 265.

[172]*Ibid,* 256.

- "The earliest community in no sense felt themselves to be a new religion, distinct from Judaism" (239).
- "Heretical Jewish Christianity [=Ebionite Christianity] would appear to be not so very different from the faith of the first Jewish believers" (242)
- "A force *within* the Jerusalem community…saw it as their task to undo the evil which they thought Paul was doing with his law-free gospel" (253).
- "It is quite likely that Paul was defeated at Antioch, that the church as a whole at Antioch sided with Peter rather than with Paul" (254)
- "The sharpness of the antagonism between Paul and Jerusalem can hardly be overstated" (255)

In my view, such observations as these warrant a very close re-examination of what scholars actually mean by the term "Judaizers" when they use it in the New Testament period. Insofar as it implies a spectrum of "valid" and "invalid" Christianity – the former of which means Paul and the latter of which means "not Paul" – it should be dropped. The relevance for the present thesis is that Paul's opponents in Corinth, who carried letters of recommendation, are reasonably considered as legitimate (non-heretical) Christians, and that this evidence indicates that such letters were being used at a very early point to delineate an orthodox "us" from a heterodox "them". Stated another way, letters of recommendation were not being used by illegitimate apostles or charlatans in order to fool the Christian communities who provided hospitality for them. They were functioning to create a social web of doctrinally like-minded people.

3. From the Pseudo-Clementine literature, we know that there was a tradition within Jewish Christianity that denigrated the legitimacy of Paul's mission, since Paul had only seen Jesus in a vision and never been personally instructed by him. In this tradition, Paul has in a fundamental way undermined Jesus' own ministry, and he is given the name "Simon Magus" – the archetypal heretic. Walter Bauer wrenches this tradition out of its textual date (second-century or later) with his observation that "Paul was the only heresiarch known to the apostolic age – the only one who was so considered in that period at least from one particular perspective."[173]

In his book *Identifying Paul's Opponents,* Jerry Sumney discusses F.C. Baur's thesis and supposes that "the real starting point of Baur's reconstruction is the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, an extra-canonical, second-century source."[174] Of mild interest is why Sumney thinks it matters that this text is "extra-canonical", of greater interest is his conclusion that since "the canons of critical historical research prohibit the use of later texts, we are left with only contemporary sources; sound historical method will admit no others."[175] Surely Sumney has articulated a good working principle, but every "canon of critical historical research" ought to be weighed against specific cases, and broken if need be. In this particular case, the Pseudo-Clementine material levels against Paul the basic accusation that he, unlike Peter, had never known Jesus. By way of extrapolation, Paul never heard Jesus teach, did not know what he looked like or what his voice sounded like, never heard a parable, never saw a healing, did not know how people responded to him, never heard his opinion on any matter

[173]Bauer, Walter, *Orthodoxy and Heresy,* 236.

[174]Sumney, Jerry, *Identifying Paul's Opponents,* 16.

[175]*Ibid,* 80.

brought before him, did not know who Mary Magdalene was, etc. The Pseudo-Clementine author grants that Paul had a vision, but emphasizes the fact that visions are not always completely trustworthy. Many people in antiquity had them.[176] The argument is that it is essential to learn about the Messiah from those who actually *knew* the Messiah.

Is the basic argument of the Pseudo-Clementine passages really "anachronistic" (as Sumney argues) in the context of first-century debates between Paul and his opponents in the mission field? We have only the most frail of corroborating evidence from Paul himself, such as the claim that it is "no longer necessary to know Christ *according to the flesh*,"[177] or that he preaches "Christ, *and him crucified*" (either of which fit into the frame of the debate suggested by the later Clementine literature, but both of which are hotly contested phrases). There is not space enough here to deal with these Pauline statements in detail, so I would instead reverse the question and ask *if* Paul had Jewish Christian opponents who were associates of the "pillars" (we know that he did in the "men from James", Gal. 2:12), and *if* Paul's opponents came up with arguments against him (again, this is known[178]), then is it really conceivable that it never occurred to any of them to point out that Paul never knew Jesus like other Christians did – Christians who were *yet living*?

If Paul's cavalier attitude towards the Law (real or perceived) prompted reaction from Jesus' Palestinian followers, then surely the fact that Paul never knew Jesus like some of them did constituted one of their primary arguments against him. Using later texts to shed

[176]See especially Robin Lane Fox's long chapter "Seeing the Gods" in *Pagans and Christians,* 102-167.

[177]Goulder's observation is worth repeating: "Many scholars have correctly seen the force of individual phrases and sentences, but I have not found any, even Barrett, who has fully grasped the force of the apparently wandering text [2 Cor. 5]. Baur saw correctly that those who 'knew Christ according to the flesh' were the Petrines" (37). *Cf* F.C. Baur "Die Christuspartei," 89-90 and *Paul,* 271-273.

[178]"His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is of no account" (II Cor. 10:10)

light on the situation of centuries earlier is surely dangerous ground, as Sumney emphasizes. But in this particular case we are immensely fortunate to have a text which helps illuminate in a perfectly reasonable way some of the *content* of what Paul's opponents may have said about him, and thereby restore to them a basic integrity which is elsewhere lost in meaningless terms like "dogs", "ravenous wolves", "peddlers of God's word", and "Servants of Satan".

4. Michael Goulder has written a book recently (2001) that aims at restoring Baur's thesis. It is too early to gauge the impact this book will have on subsequent scholarship, but it is important for my purposes to emphasize that such a book *can* be written, and that such an argument as Baur's can be resurrected, basically affirmed, and *enhanced* with the tools of critical scholarship which have developed since the early 19th century. "We may conclude, then," Goulder writes, "that there is no obvious cogent objection to Baur's theory."[179]

Goulder begins by deconstructing the objections raised against Baur, and especially the ultimately specious charge that his work is framed by Hegelianism.[180] He then tackles Lütgert's response to Baur, which "underlies all modern discussions"[181] of the topic. The central and most widely convincing element in Lutgert's critique was the point that the

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[179]Goulder, Michael, *Christianity at Corinth,* 19.

[180]This charge against Baur was common in the 19th century, and carried into the 20th century by Kummel (*History,* 132) and Neill and Wright, (*Interpretation,* 23f). Goulder correctly objects that "an author's attachment to a philosophical or religious position is irrelevant. All scholars are subtly influenced in judgement by their presuppositions from life more generally, but we deal with the issues raised on the basis of the arguments advanced, not by attacking those presuppositions" (*Ibid* 12). *Cf* also P. Adinall, "Why Read the Bible?" *ExpTim* 105 (1994): 136-140 and R.C. Morgan, "Ferdinand Christian Baur," *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West,* I:261-289.

opponents in Galatians seem substantially different from those in Corinth, especially with regard to circumcision. This meant for Lutgert that one cannot speak properly of anything like a faction (Petrine or otherwise) consciously opposed to Paul, nor of any organized "counter-mission", and that therefore that Baur's thesis must die the death of a thousand qualifications.

Although there are some logical and historical problems with the argument that because Paul does not mention the topic in the Corinthian correspondence, it was therefore not an issue important to his opponents there, it is nevertheless true that circumcision does not appear to be the *primary* issue, as it appears to be in Galatians. Does this imply that the opponents were then unrelated? For perspective on this question it is helpful to remember that the topic of proselyte circumcision was not clear-cut for contemporary non-Christian Jews, either. *TB Yebamot* 36a indicates that it was a matter of dispute between Hillel and Shammai (Hillel taught that baptism was sufficient),[182] and there were conflicting messages given to the King of Adiabene on the topic (Joseph *Antiq* 20.34ff). So at least in regard to the topic of proselyte circumcision, the Jewish Christian opponents of Paul cannot be considered any more or less "unified" than their contemporaries within more normative Judaism. But that is not principally what Baur meant by a unified front against Paul, anyway. Baur's thesis is that important Jewish Christian apostles were aware of Paul's mission and were aware of his teachings on the law – and they responded. That the forms and content of their responses were not always uniform is not surprising – they were not

[181]Goulder, *Christianity at Corinth,* 16.
[182]For a conflation of these problems, see Mishnah *Yev.* 46b, where the issue is what to do with one who has been circumsized, but who has not yet "performed the ablution."

clones after all. But as Sanders points out in similar contexts,[183] what is more important is the fact that focusing on differences can obscure the very basic and pervasive beliefs which go unexpressed *because they are assumed*. In this case, what Paul's opponents hold in common is not only the belief that the Mosaic law is *not* "veiled" – as Paul writes – but on the contrary it is a glorious and wise and sacred thing given by YHVH to his people. This is a belief held as far as we can tell by Jesus and those whom he personally instructed, and the disciples of those whom he personally instructed.

The four points expressed above illustrate how scholars have responded to Baur. Hafemann's proposal to bracket the question of Paul's opponents altogether amounts to a compromise of basic exegetical method. In the two centuries after Baur, many alternatives to his thesis have been proposed, almost all of which portray Paul's opponents as illegitimate. This is noticeable in even the best scholars, as for example in Dunn's use of value-laden categories to demonstrate that the opponents were unacceptable. On the other hand, if early Christian "Judaizers" are understood to mean those who hold a positive valuation of the Mosaic Law, then it is clear that Paul's opponents are closer in theology to Jesus' earliest followers than is Paul, and furthermore that they initiated a tradition of suspicion of Paul which lasted for centuries. "Judaizers" should not under any circumstances imply illegitimacy, especially in the New Testament period.

It has been important to discuss in some depth the Baur thesis because it matters for understanding the earliest uses of letters of recommendation in Christianity. If, as Bultmann and his followers have argued, the bearers were heretics moving around the early mission

[183]Sanders, E.P., *Judaism: Practice and Belief, passim.*

field abusing Christian hospitality and using letters of recommendation to move from community to community, then we would have to conclude that such letters *functioned* in earliest Christianity to provide legitimation for itinerant and illegitimate parasites – Peregrinus, for example. But I have argued to the contrary, that the letters were used by the Jerusalem church as a form of institutional control over communities in the Diaspora, and that they functioned to prescribe policy on disputed matters. In this particular case, as Paul's response in 3:7f shows, the policy at issue clearly had something to do with the Mosaic Law. These letters, then, functioned to delineate a legitimate "us" (in this case, the *Urgemeinde* of Jerusalem Jewish Christians) from an illegitimate "them" (in this case, Paul and his associates in the mission field). That the commendations were efficacious is evident in the breadth and seriousness with which Paul responds. These individuals received hospitality in Corinth, were evidently persuasive to one or more house-church groups in the city, and almost certainly taught about the essential goodness, beauty and glory of the promise that God made to the Israelite people through Moses.

Summary

2 Cor. 3:1-3 is the earliest reference in the Christian literature to a letter of recommendation. If we treat the text within which 2 Cor 3:1-3 occurs, it is probable that Paul is responding to information that individuals came to Corinth bearing letters, that they opposed Paul and his mission, and they made the charge that his ministry was insufficiently established. That these individuals were Jewish Christians is evident, and conceded by most commentators.

The idea that they had come to Corinth from Jerusalem was put forward a long time ago by Baur, and his thesis has been ferociously attacked ever since. Only very recently, with Michael Goulder, have supporters arose to defend Baur's thesis, more or less on its original terms. I agree with Baur and Goulder that the evidence suggests that Paul's opponents most likely came to Corinth from Jerusalem. Bultmann's reading of ἢ ἐξ ὑμῶν is accepted by most, and is most probably wrong. Käsemann's point about the seriousness with which Paul responds to his letter-bearing opponents has not yet been sufficiently countered.

The foregoing discussion has been intricately involved with the highly charged question of the identity of Paul's opponents, and whether or not they were "heretics" who carried invalid letters of recommendation. My intention has been to remove the force of the label "heretic", and to replace it with the evident fact that Paul had legitimate Christian opponents who were constructing a network of alliances, in part through the tool of commendatory letters. This function of the letter of recommendation, to link groups of like-minded believers, is evident wherever and whenever Christians wrote them (as it is for example in the documentary papyrus letters cited in chapter one). That they were being used in the earliest available canonical texts suggests rather forcefully that these were a *consituent* part of the growth and spread of Christianity, and 2 Corinthians illustrates that, when deployed in the context of competing Christianities, they can be a powerful tool for delineating one group from another within the broader movement.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Emperor Julian realized the Christian letters of recommendation served a very important function for the religion. As of yet, scholars have not paid much attention to the issues surrounding why this is so. In the first part of this paper, I began by looking at how scholars, and particularly Chan Hae-Kim, have viewed these documents. Kim's work is widely cited, and is in fact (along with Keyes) the primary point of reference scholars have when looking into Christian letters of recommendation. Kim was preoccupied with issues of form and structure, while Keyes was concerned with how the papyrus letters matched up linguistically and grammatically with the two epistolographic manuals which survive from antiquity. Keyes' work helped correct a previous error in dating the manual of Pseudo-Demetrius, while Kim's work, in the tradition inaugurated by Diessmann, attempted to shed light on the New Testament. Kim's approach does not really work, because in regard to their form and structure the New Testament texts are nothing at all like the papyrus letters. Pagan letters and fourth century Christian ones are more properly letters of recommendation, while the New Testament texts have passages of commendation tacked onto letters primarily concerned with other matters. All three types do however *function* in a similar manner, at least insofar as they procure hospitality for the bearer and legitimate him or her. A difference is that the pagan letters are mostly concerned with business and family relationships, while the Christian letters offer legitimation in context of issues pertaining to doctrine.

The fact that in the late Hellenistic period people could move around the Mediterranean with little flash cards that could guarantee them a favorable reception simply revolutionized ancient practices of hospitality. In the second part of the paper, I tried to underscore the fact that, without such documents, legitimation was effected through the agency of work, charisma, magic, eloquence, etc. Prior to the Hellenistic period (and in many cases during and after it) hosts had to use an entirely different set of criteria in order to decide who they should welcome as friend and guest, and who they should reject. With the increasing ways the written word was put to use, though, social networks in the Hellenistic and Roman periods could spring up over a vast geographical area, because one needed only to be able to read a small text in order to decide whether or not to give hospitality to the traveler. As the examples from the Didache and Peregrinus show, in a world without recourse to written legitimation one had to be suspicious of anyone traveling through the host community. This changed with the ability to "recognize" someone through a piece of writing they carried, and is one reason why I think Julian saw how important these little documents were for the success of Christianity.

Without written commendations, a host community had to have a basic posture of suspicion towards itinerants because they may have been outright charlatans, or else they may have had a false, "heterodox" gospel. We can see how important this dynamic was in the earliest reference to letters of recommendation in the New Testament, at 2 Cor. 3:1-3. The same dynamic is also in evidence some 50 years later in III John, which was written commending the right-standing of an individual in the context of competing house churches.[184] In the case of II Corinthians, I have argued that it was the Jerusalem church that sent out delegates to clean up after Paul. Paul, then, was the first Christian we know of to find himself on the outside of a network of relations established through the writing and sending of such letters. That he carried out his defense of his ministry with reference to his own charisma (accompanied by appeals to the "hearts" and "consciences" of the Corinthians) is not an accident: as I argued throughout the chapter on hospitality, charisma is the primary *alternative* to written legitimation (as are work, miracles, visions, magic, etc). Letters of recommendation functioned to garner hospitality for doctrinally like-minded believers in the wide Christian mission.

The final point I would make before closing this paper is that scholars of early Christianity have paid very little attention to the impact of literacy itself on the growth and spread of Christianity. To put it another way, few have as yet realized just how profound the *technology* of the written word really is, and how the written word in Hellenistic and then Roman societies aggregated to itself an increasing number of functions. One often hears about how much importance Christians (and Jews also) gave to their sacred writings, but few have explored the possibility that writing itself may have been a necessary cause for both religions' ability to spread out over a wide geographical area. An example may help illustrate the point. An excellent and recent book on the topic of Christian attitudes towards literature and writing is Harry Gamble's *Books and Readers in the Early Church.* Gamble is not interested in a diachronic understanding of the spread of the written word through history, so from my point of view his discussion begins in *en medias res,* with "Christian epistolography through the first five centuries [attesting] to the usefulness of this genre to the

[184]See especially the work of Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John, passim.*

ancient church, for it was well suited to communication between widespread congregations and a valuable instrument for teaching."[185] While there is nothing wrong with Gamble's point *per se,* I would emphasize that letter-writing was not merely *suited* to widespread communication; it was in fact that thing that made such communication possible. The importance of this cannot be overstated: private letters between households in wide-ranging cities are hardly in evidence even in 200 BCE, but by the Christian period it was technologically possible to develop such dispersed social networks. Letters of recommendation were one very important way this new technology impacted ancient culture as a whole – it enabled the establishment, development and maintenance of a widely dispersed network of people. For the Christians, it meant they could recognized and welcome each other with phrases like ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ, written on papyrus.

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[185] Gamble, Harry, *Books and Readers in the Early Church,* 37.

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