Misel Gara

AGAPE: SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN LOVE-FEAST

MA Thesis in Late Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Studies

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by

Misel Gara

(Hungary)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Late Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Misel Gara**, candidate for the MA degree in Late Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Studies, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

The present thesis examines the social aspects of the early Christian love-feast. Following the social-historical contextualization and critical analysis of surviving written sources about the love-feast from the first three centuries CE, the thesis attempts to refute the widespread misconception in contemporary scholarship that a main cause of Christianity's success was the love-feast's charitable nature towards non-Christians. After presenting the love-feast's relation to the Eucharist, and through the examination of basic early Eucharistic theology, the thesis argues that the meal's primary function was to establish the "Holy Communion" by the spiritual bond of *agape,* the metonymically identified divine love. Upon the examination of the social-religious functions of the pagan sacrificial meal, the thesis argues that, in the pagan paradigm, *koinonia* or communion is not merely a key concept spiritually, but most importantly a necessary precondition for citizenship in the Hellenistic legal tradition. By drawing a parallel between the Hellenistic concept of citizenship and the Christian concept of "heavenly citizenship," the thesis argues that in the Christian understanding, the concept of *politeia* in itself already bore the meaning of the principle of social care, within the community. Therefore, the love-feast was not simply the platform of Christian social care, but the rite was meant to draw the cultic boundaries of the community, which provided the social basis for political unity and solidarity among Christians.

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Introduction

Distance was one of the biggest enemies of the *Imperium Romanum*. Indeed, in the light of ancient infrastructure, it seems unfathomable how it could still last for centuries. Although a well-developed inland road network was built under the Roman rule, the Roman administration relied on marine transport so much that Rodney Stark, social-historian, labeled it as "waterfront empire."[1] To some extent, it was the Mediterranean Sea that made it possible to control such enormous lands, but it also predestined its growth. To solve the delimitations of central administration due to the slow flow of information and circumstantial communication, the *Imperium* endeavoured to involve the local elites and governments in the maintenance of order and to assign them the execution of fundamental functions of the state, as much as possible. Thus, according to Peter Brown's theory, the statehood of the *Imperium* in the modern-sense is rather questionable, and the Roman Empire is better described as a "minimal-" or "nightwatchman-state."[2] However, one indubitable achievement of Rome was the *pax Romana*, the general climate of legal stability and security that Rome provided for the urban population in the provinces. But this did not mean the forcing of Roman law onto all subjects. On the contrary, as Wayne Meeks phrased it: "Local government was reinforced. Increasing recourse to the courts tolerated local law, while the possibility of appeal to the provincial governor or to the emperor himself led to greater consistency in the exercise of justice."[3] Hence the *Imperium* did not interfere with the local laws of its city-states and "member-states." Instead, it allowed them to have their own internal autonomy, legislation, and jurisdiction and

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[1] Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 74.

[2] Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3-31.

[3] Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 12

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left them untouched as long as they did not harm the *pax Romana* and, borrowing the "tributary empire theory" of Peter F. Bang, as long as they regularly paid the imperial taxes.[4] Thus, by nature, the *Imperium* did not take responsibility for the social security of most of its inhabitants.

The presupposition of the present thesis is that Christianity reacted to this problem with a consistent socio-political program and institutionalized social care. Tertullian provides a tangible definition for this, anachronistically speaking, early Christian proto-social insurance system:

> That kind of treasury we have is not filled with any dishonourable sum, as the price of a purchased religion (*non de honoraria summa quasi redemptae religionis congregatur*); everyone puts a little to the public stock, commonly once a month (*modicam unusquisque stipem menstrua die*), or when he pleases, and only upon condition that he is both willing and able; for there is no compulsion upon any. All here is a free-will offering, and all these collections are deposited in a common bank for charitable uses (*haec quasi deposita pietatis sunt*).[5]

As Eric Dodds summarized it: "The Church provided the essentials of social security: it cared for widows and orphans, the old, the unemployed, and the disabled; it provided a burial fund for the poor and a nursing service in time of plague."[6] There is a trend in contemporary historiography, which presents the social aspects of early Christianity within the context of Rome's "religious economy."[7] According to this theory, in late antiquity, different religions and cults were intensely competing for adherents, and provided certain services and counter-services in exchange, in order to motivate conversion. The present thesis intends to develop this idea by suggesting that the early Church, in fact, did not only compete with other cults' social services and pagan euergetism, but through formulating canon law, whereby the Christian concept of citizenship challenged the Roman legal system itself, both ideologically

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[4] Peter F. Bang, "Tributary Empires: Towards a Global and Comparative History," in *Tributary Empires in Global History*, ed. P. F. Bang, and C. A. Bayly (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1-21.

[5] Tert. *Apol*. 39.5-7

[6] Eric R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 137.

[7] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997), 193.

and in terms of social security. Moreover, as will be shown, Christianity considered itself a parallel society.

This research focuses on the timeframe of the first three centuries CE, before the "Constantinian shift." Using Constantine as a watershed is not self-explanatory, but necessary from the perspective of the theory of "open platform," borrowed from economic science, and closely connected to the "religious economy" approach.[8] Accordingly, the economic value of membership goes up with the increment of members, within a given group. Therefore, following the exponential growth in the third century, after Christianity became *religio licita*, the high number of Christians, by itself, could already motivate mass conversion, as a self-inductive process, which could affect and distort our understanding of the role of love-feasts. Therefore, one crucial premise of the present study is the asssumption that conversion could also have material reasons from the micro-economical perspective of a hypothetic household. However, the thesis does not intend to suggest an over-simplified mono-causality, nor exclude the possibility of conversion for other, non-material ones. Conversion in late antiquity, just like today, could have various causes and diverse personal motivations, but recognizing them is inevitable for modelling global social-historical tendencies.

Contemporary research of early Christian social history often settles with the moral aspects of Christian charity and the notion of "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Undeniably, alongside its paradigmatic outcome, the new Christian view about love had non-negligible material consequences. As Henry Chadwick put it, "The practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success."[9] In accordance with this view, the Christianity's charitable attitude primarily targeted poverty at the love-feasts. Moreover, *agape,* through its later Latin equivalent *caritas*, is often translated simply as

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[8] Robert Wright, *The Evolution of God* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 274.
[9] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 56.

"charity," and thereupon *agape*, the meal is automatically interpreted as the platform for charity, a "charity-meal." As Adolf von Harnack phrased it:

> Every divine service was looked upon as a spiritual offering (of thanks) accompanied with fasting and deeds of compassionate love. The Lord's Supper (Eucharist) was held to be an offering gift in the strictest sense of the word, and everything which was associated with it, such as assistance of the poor, became imbued with the idea of sacrifice.[10]

According to Harnack, gifts (προσφορὰ, δῶρα) were brought to the Lord's Supper, which was used partly in the common meal, and partly in support of the poor, pagan and Christian alike.[11]

To challenge this widespread stereotype, the present thesis explores three arguments. First and foremost, the thesis intends to dismiss the misconception that the "Christian success" under discussion was the result of its social policy towards non-Christians. This is an essentially erroneous concept, which is partially due to the general practice of projecting the source material of the fourth and fifth centuries onto the first three hundred years, where the exponential growth in the spread of Christianity took place, such as the letters of Emperor Julian.[12] Ignoring the significance of the so-called "Constantinian shift" distorts the image of the nature of Christian charity. Just as the legal status and general position of the Church had transformed within the *Imperium*, the Eusebian political program of salvation history radically changed the self-identification of the Christian community, the general goal of the Christian mission and its subjects. As will be demonstrated below, during the first three centuries CE the Christian charity was, above all, meant only for Christians, while participation at the love-feast for non-Christians was emphatically prohibited.

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[10] Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, transl. Edwin K. Mitchell (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1898), 55.

[11] According to Harnack, nowadays this momentum is preserved in the Eastern Orthodox liturgy of the *prosphoron*.

[12] "For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans [meaning Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see our people lack aid from us."

Julian, *Epistle 84a* in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*. ed. by W. C. F. Wright (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1923), 69.

Secondly, scholarship often does not differentiate between the institution of early Christian alms-giving and the charitable nature of the love-feasts. This is especially problematic because, while alms-giving required anonymity, the participants brought "gifts" to the meal publicly. "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in heaven."[13] For the Christian charity, anonymity was a precondition for selflessness.

Thirdly, a central issue in the research of the love-feast and its charitable nature is that scholarship tends to ignore the following verse from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, despite its well-articulated regulation:

> Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore, when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον). For in eating, each one takes his own supper (ἴδιον δεῖπνον) ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?[14]

Gerd Theissen's reading, solving this contradiction by applying Paul's commandment only to the wealthy, seems arbitrary.[15] Especially so, because the regulation is repeated in the following verse: "Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment."[16] It is not acceptable to arrive hungry at the community's communal meal for any Christian, regardless of their social status. This Pauline message directly questions the interpretation of the love-feast as a main social event for feeding the poor.

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[13] Mt 6.1-2, The thesis uses the New King James Version of the Bible.
[14] 1 Cor 11.17-22
[15] Gerd Theissen, *The First Followers of Jesus: A Sociological Analysis of the Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1978), 31.
[16] 1 Cor 11.33-34

Moreover, as it will be elaborated in the first chapter, the social basis of Christianity during the first three centuries was the urban middle class of the larger cities of the Mediterranean. This fact is especially contradictive considering the Christian doctrine of idealized poverty. One main research question and goal of the present thesis is to solve this paradox. As we shall see, the first Christians did not simply convert, to use a banal phrase, for "free food." The case of the love-feast, and their social aspect is more complex. Following the social-religious examination of the notion of the Christian Holy Communion in the second chapter, the third chapter correlates it with the Christian concept of "heavenly citizenship." The analysis of the development of early Eucharistic theology and Christianity's self-identification as *politeia* points to the particularity of early Christianity's social aspect. Thus, as a provisional hypothesis, the study proposes the interpretation of the communion as a form of a "social contract" of the Christian congregation, with the repeated affirmation of the covenant at the Eucharist. This would mean the interpretation of the institution of the love-feast not merely as the "tool," but rather the "pledge" for Christian social care.

Chapter 1 - Agape

This chapter attempts to present two, at first glance disparate, aspects of the love-feast. First it contextualizes early sources about the love-feast, by presenting early Christianity's social historical background in its first three hundred years. Following a historiographical overview of the social history of early Christianity and outlining the main the chapter presents the seemingly paradox situation, that while early Christianity primarily attracted the "urban middle class" the doctrinal idealization of the "holy poor" is prominent in the early textual sources. The second half of the chapter is dedicated to list and present the occurrences of the love-feast in their social-historical context following source-criticism, with an overview of the secondary literature. Historiography will be shown to raise two main methodological problems. First, how to distinguish (or not distinguish) between the Eucharist and love-feast? Second, how does divine love in the abstract sense relate to the love-feast?

1.1. The Social Basis of Early Christianity

Who were the first Christians? The thesis of class conflict, as a central tenet of Marxist historiography, had long determined the general view in the sociology of religion of early Christianity. By the beginning of the twentieth century, a widely accepted consensus was formed concerning the social basis of Christianity, considered as the religion of the poor, underprivileged and oppressed lower-class, including the proletariat and slaves. As Friedrich Engels writes: „Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of

peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome."[17] Moreover, Ernst Troeltsch developed this thesis

to the generalization that every new religious movement emerges from the lower classes.[18] The

romanticized image of Early Christianity as a proletarian movement was understandably fitting

for Marxist historians, while in popular culture books like Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis*

represents this myth creation the best.

The myth of poverty, as Christianity's social basis, is not pulled out of the air by Marxist

historians and their followers. The praises of the idealized "holy poor" proliferate in the

Gospels. "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."[19] Moreover, in the Gospels,

earthly possession is pitted against the "treasure in heaven:" "But woe to you who are rich, for

you have received your consolation."[20] Apparently, one cannot have both:

> So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell
> all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven;
> and come, follow Me. But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he
> was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said,
> "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is
> easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter
> the kingdom of God."[21]

The explanation is clear: one "cannot serve God and mammon" at the same time.[22] Hence, the

origin of this widespread misconception is not merely a creation of the nineteenth-century

historiography, affected by egalitarian political philosophy. Moreover, there is already a great

ambivalence in the early Christian writings, whose audience, as we shall see, often served "God

and mammon" simultaneously.

The first scholarly confutation of the view that early Christianity was a typically lower-

class religion comes from Edwin Judge.

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[17] Friedriech Engels, "Zur Geschichte des Urchristentums" [On the History of Early Christianity] first published in: *Die Neue Zeit*, 1895 vol. 8

[18] Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches. American ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911), 38.

[19] Lk 6.20 respectively Mt 5.3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

[20] Lk 6.24 See also the parables of the Unjust Steward, the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Parable of the Rich: Lk 16.1-13, Lk 16.19-31, Lk 12.13-21

[21] Mt 19.21-26 respectively Mk 10.23-27 and Lk 18:18-30

[22] Lk 16.13

> Far from being a socially depressed group, […] the Christians were dominated by a socially pretentious section of the population of big cities. Beyond that they seem to have drawn on a broad constituency, probably representing the household dependents of leading members… But the dependent members of city households were by no means the most debased section of society. If lacking freedom, they still enjoyed security, and moderate prosperity. The peasantry and persons in slavery on the land were the most underprivileged classes. Christianity left them largely untouched.[23]

Judge's theory was largely based on his philological analysis of the Pauline corpus. The reinterpretation of 1Cor 1.26 played a central role in his argument: where Paul says that among his Christian brothers there are "not many noble (οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς)," Judge emphasizes that it alludes to "but there are some." Judge demonstrates that most of the persons in the *Acts of the Apostles* are from the middle-class. An important supporting argument of this thesis was the general syntactic and sociolinguistic examination of the Pauline corpus, which suggests that Paul's intertextual references required a high level of erudition, both Jewish and Greek, which indirectly represents the social status of his audience.[24]

But what does "urban middle-class" mean in the context of late antiquity? Is our image of the late antique urban population and urbanism appropriate? The coast of the Mediterranean is considered to be a highly urbanized region during the time of the Principate. According to a widely accepted estimate, the most urbanized province, *Asia Minor*, where Christianity also appears to have been more successful, had a ratio of 1:8 of the urban—non-urban population, while the average of the whole *Imperium* was 1:10.[25] On the other hand, the definition of "city" is problematic in the context of late antiquity. These numbers are based on the arbitrary population threshold of 5,000 to classify settlements to urban and rural. However, the legal status of a *polis* does not necessarily coincide with the urban way of living. A high number of cities with *polis* status were actually small settlements, counting only a few thousand

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[23] Edwin A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century* (London: Tyndale Press, 1960), 60.

[24] Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (London: Baton Rouge, 1977) 29-59.

[25] Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor,* vol. 2, The Rise of the Church (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 244.

inhabitants, working in agriculture in the direct proximity of the "city" while the inhabitants'

political status and also their cultic self-identification was "citizen." According to the common

estimate of the employment rate in the *Imperium*, 80-90 percent of the Mediterranean

population was engaged in the agricultural sector.[26] Therefore, in the social history of late

antiquity, the concept of "city" is of limited usefulness, and the distinction between "urban"

and "rural" can be misleading since it arbitrarily projects a binary scale onto more complex

social-economic relations. With a Gordian solution, Rodney Stark's social-historical analysis

sets a limit of 30,000 inhabitants, and argues that Christianity affected these "larger cities"

more than "smaller cities." Based on archaeological evidence, he demonstrates that three-

fourths of the larger cities already had a Christian congregation by 100 CE, and in comparison,

only one-third of smaller cities did so. Furthermore, while all of the larger cities betray some

presence of a Christian community by 180 CE, a third of the smaller cities still did not.[27]

Secondly, the application of the term "middle-class" in the context of late antiquity is

also problematic. Steven Friesen, for instance, imagines Roman society as relentlessly

polarized and argues that the "Roman middle-class" is a mere construct.[28] Peter Brown

vehemently attacks this view:

> Our image of Roman society as a whole has unduly stressed the chasm between
> rich and poor, and hence between upper- and lower-class culture. As a result of
> such a polarized view, we have tended to pay less attention to intermediate layers
> of society, and to the wide variety of social niches in which cultural activity took
> place. We suffer from what Walter Scheidel has acutely called "binary tunnel
> vision."[29] We see only a world rigidly divided between the leisured upper classes
> and the poor. As a result, we miss the sheer zest with which wide sections of
> Roman society, well below the level of the elites, threw themselves into the
> business of making sense of the world in religious terms.[30]

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[26] Paul Erdkamp, "Urbanism." in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 245.

[27] Stark, *Cities of God,* 82.

[28] Steven Friesen "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2004): 323–61.

See also: Justin J. Megitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1998).

[29] Walter Scheidel "Stratification, Deprivation and Quality of Life," in *Poverty in the Roman World*, ed. M. Atkins and R. Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 55.

[30] Peter Brown, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 31.

Brown, to avoid the anachronistic use of "middle-class," introduced the term "*mediocritas*" to describe Christianity's social basis.[31] He takes the expression from a fourth-century source, from Pacianus, the bishop of Barcelona who wrote about the modest, yet fair standard of living of the local Christians:

> It is good that we are middling persons (*mediocres*). It is not for us to live in houses sheathed with marble, to be weighed down with gold, in flowing silks and bright scarlet. But all the same we have our little places in gardens and by the sea-side. We have good quality wine, neat little banquets and all that goes with a sprightly old age.[32]

Although this source falls outside the examined period, the self-definition of the Christian congregation that it describes, that is neither rich nor poor, can be projected onto earlier times.

Wayne Meeks phrases his stance very carefully when he discusses the social basis of the Pauline community, primarily of Corinth. In his opinion, although the exact composition of the community and their social stratification is still very ambiguous, let alone our blurred knowledge about the social-historical background of late antiquity, he nevertheless allows himself to draw a generalized picture of the "typical" Christian.

> We cannot draw up a statistical profile of the constituency of the Pauline communities nor fully describe the social level of a single Pauline Christian. We have found a number of converging clues, however, that permit an impressionistic sketch of these groups. It is a picture in which people of several social levels are brought together. […] The extreme top and bottom of the Greco-Roman social scale are missing from the picture. The "typical" Christian, however, the one who most often signals his presence in the letters by one or another small clue, is a free artisan or small trader. Some even in those occupational categories had houses, slaves, the ability to travel, and other signs of wealth. Some of the wealthy provided housing, meeting places, and other services for individual Christians and for whole groups. In effect, they filled the roles of patrons.[33]

According to this newly formulated, general view "the main strength of Christianity lay in the lower and middle classes of the towns, the manual workers and clerks, the shop keepers and

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[31] Brown, *Through an Eye of a Needle,* 31.
[32] Pacianus of Barcelona, *Sermo de Paenitentibus* 10.3, SC 410 in: *Pacien de Barcélone: Écrits*, ed. Carmelo Granado (Paris: Le Cerf, 1995), 138.
[33] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 72-3.

merchants."[34] However, the image of the hard-working, middle-class man is far from positive in late antiquity. Those artisans who laboured manually were pejoratively labelled as βάναυσοι, an invective synonym of "vulgar" where our word "banal" comes from.[35] It is telling that Aristotle excludes these manual workers from the government, when he describes the ideal state: "For the artisan class has no share in the state" (τὸ γὰρ βάναυσον οὐ μετέχει τῆς πόλεως).[36]

From the end of the second century and during the third century, a period of exponential growth for Christianity, radical changes took place in the Roman social structures, throughout the *Imperium*.[37] The unified legislation connected to urban *humiles* and *collegia*, which were basically co-operative societies and labour organizations, shows that the urban *plebs* melted into a homogeneous social class with the *metaxy* group, the working class, the freed slaves, and extreme poverty. It is an increasingly accepted approach in the scholarship of early Christian social history to juxtapose the institution of the early Church with these *collegiati*, which continued to thrive during the third century.[38] The same process can be observed in the countryside in the case of the forming *colonus*-system. During the political crisis of the third century, small landowners went bankrupt and sold their lands to bigger landowners, resulting in *latifundia* concentrations, while they themselves began to lease their own land for cultivation. Some scholars, following the fundamental work of Michael Rostovtzeff consider this new type of tenant farming an early form of feudalism.[39] However, contemporary scholarship, refuting this theory, on the basis of archaeological evidence, successfully

[34] Arnold H. M. Jones, "The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity," in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Aranldo Momigliano (Oxford: University Press, 1963), 21.
[35] Aristotle, *Pol*. 7. 1337 b7
[36] Aristotle, *Pol.* 7. 1339 a 20
[37] Géza, Alföldy, *Római társadalomtörténet* [Roman social history] (Budapest: Osiris, 1975), 152-74.
[38] Jean-Michel Carrié, "Les associations professionnelles à l'époque tardive: Entre munus et convivialité," *Humana Sapit: Études d'Antiquité Tardive Offertes à Lellia Cracco Ruggini* 3 (2002): 309-32.
[39] Michael I. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 475–77.

deconstructed the "black legend of the *latifundium*" and the image of the *colonus*-system as the archetype of serfdom.[40] In any case, Christianity barely reached these new social groups and structures and the reformulating urban and rural lower classes until the fourth and fifth centuries.

Although the issue of citizenship is rarely touched in scholarship due to the lack of sources, for the discussion of Christianity's social basis, it is worth overviewing some meaningful statistics. In classical Athens, which is considered to be one of the most "democratic" *polis* in the Mediterranean regarding citizenship, the ratio of citizens is ranging from 8 to 10 percent of the total population of the city, while the non-citizen, but free population ranges from an estimated 40 to 60 percent.[41] Citizenship of course does not necessarily correlate with wealth or occupation, and it is impossible to make precise estimates about the overlap of citizens and Christians in late antiquity. However, Meeks draws the following image of the civic conditions of the Corinthian community:

> These non-citizen residents, or *metics* (μέτοικοι), often retained some sense of ethnic identity by establishing local cults of their native gods or by forming a voluntary association, which also had at least the trappings of religion. […] Two or even three organized bodies of residents might exist side by side, or Greek and Roman citizens might be wholly integrated. Among the resident aliens, alongside the Roman citizens and the citizens of the city, one group occupied a special position. The Jews were normally organized as a distinctive community, governed by its own laws and institutions, and often contended, sometimes successfully, for equality with the full citizens. […] The different groups in the city and, within each group, persons of differing status were variously affected by the hegemony of Rome, and they reacted with various emotions and strategies to the effective presence of that power in their towns.[42]

Their legal status of non-citizens was far from being "autonomous." On the contrary, Christian and Jewish communities had to observe their own traditional laws simultaneously, aside from the local civic laws and the prevailing Roman law, which may have resulted in great legal

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[40] Jean-Michel Carrié, "Le colonat du Bas-Empire: Un mythe historiographique?" *Opus* 1 (1982): 351-70.

[41] Danielle L. Kellogg, "Population and Social Structure," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Athens*. ed. Jenifer Neils and Dylan Rogers (Cambridge: University Press, 2021), 160-1.

[42] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 13-14.

uncertainty. In the *Imperium* there was no central regulation of the status of non-citizen residents of the cities. "No consistent pattern can be discerned in the relations between Roman settlers and native populations, they were strictly ad hoc, and they might be radically affected by reasons of discipline or expediency."[43]Although the following chapters will explore the social-religious aspect of citizenship, for the moment the working hypothesis is that most Christians had neither Roman nor other citizenship.

1.2. Love-Feast in the Sources

In general, the literary source basis, where the early Eucharistic meal is explicitly mentioned, and called *agape,* is quite narrow in the first three centuries CE. To some extent, this scarcity of sources forces the research to turn towards hypothetical reconstructions. On the other hand, it enables the writing of comprehensive studies of such a broad subject. However, this should not entitle scholarship for grandiose speculation. Within the framework of the present chapter, some of the most important problems and debates are being presented in the research of the love-feast.

Concerning the first mention of the love-feast it is the Epistle of Jude that refers to the Eucharistic meal as *agape* for the first time in the New Testament. However, there are two textual variants, leading to different interpretations. The variants of the word *agapais*/*apatais* (ἐν ταῖς ἀγάπαις / ἀπάταις) stand either for "love-feasts" or "deceivings/dissipation." The Greek critical edition by Nestle-Aland prefers to read it as "love-feast," against the Vulgate's *maculae*, for instance. This is the reading already present in the New King James' English

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[43] Barbara M. Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 71.

translation: "These are spots in your love-feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves." Although the similarities between Jude 12 and 2Pt 2.13 are striking, in the case of the latter, many Greek editions as well as the New King James still favours the other reading: "Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings (ἀπάταις) while they feast with you." Most scholars conclude that the author of the Second Epistle of Peter, in fact, borrowed material from the Epistle of Jude.[44] Based on the observation that the word used for feasting (συνευωχούμενοι) only appears in these two texts in the New Testament, it is obvious that 2Pt's allusion is also connected to the feasting context, that is the early Eucharistic meal, either under the name *agape* or not. Reta Halteman Finger convincingly argues that 2Pt, in fact, uses a deliberate pun on Jude.[45] However, it is strange why the copyists, who were surely aware of this similarity, still kept the two different variants.

Chronologically, the next source which explicitly identifies the Eucharistic meal with the love-feast is from Ignatius of Antioch (d. 108 CE) writing to the Christians of Smyrna:[46] "You should regard that Eucharist as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes. (Ἐκείνη βεβαία εὐχαριστία ἡγείσθω, ἡ ὑπὸ ἐπίσκοπον οὖσα ἢ ᾧ ἂν αὐτὸς ἐπιτρέψῃ) […] Without the bishop's supervision, no baptisms or love-feasts are permitted (οὐκ ἐξὸν ἐστιν χωρὶς ἐπισκόπου οὔτε βαπτίζειν οὔτε ἀγάπην ποιεῖν)."[47] The separate use of "Eucharist" and "love-feast" in the same context long perturbed scholars. In the case of Ignatius, the fact that "Eucharist" and "love-feast" appear in consecutive verses led some scholars to conclude that the different designations describe two separate meals and not two aspects of the same meal. Based on the ground-breaking work of Hans Lietzmann, who first introduced this two-part approach, until the mid-twentieth century, there was a relative

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[44] Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 164.

[45] Reta Halteman-Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 62.

[46] For the chronology see: J. M. Vacant, E. Mangenot, and É. Amann, eds. *Le Dictionnaire de théologie catholque* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1950)

[47] Ignatius of Antioch, *AdSmyrn* 8.1-2

scholarly consensus that sources witness for two completely separate meals, both physically and liturgically.[48] Lietzmann based his theory on the fact that a morning and an evening meal appear simultaneously in some second-third century sources, to which he connected completely separate liturgies and functions. Another key source, cited by Lietzmann was the famous 96th Letter of Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, where a morning worship with hymn-chanting and a separate evening supper is being mentioned, uniquely from a non-Christian narrative.[49] It was Massey Shepherd who challenged this theory first:

> It should not be supposed that Ignatius refers to two distinct types of assembly in the terms 'Eucharist' and '*agape*.' They are one and the same thing. Both terms are used to describe the entire service of worship, though strictly speaking, they refer to only one specific characteristic of a Christian assembly.[50]

According to Shepherd, in the context of Ignatius, the Eucharist stood only for the consumption of the liturgical bread and wine, which served as the culmination of the broader meal of the love-feast.

This raises the methodological problem of whether or how to distinguish between "the breaking of the bread," "Lord's Supper," "love-feast," and "Eucharist." Due to the manifold nature of early Christianity, there was a wide divergence in local liturgies and terminology. As Dennis Smith summarized:

> Church historians today have come to recognize the need to rethink the origins of the Eucharist. Previously it had been widely assumed in scholarship that a straight line could be drawn from the earliest Christian meals, perhaps even the last meal of Jesus, to the fourth-century Eucharist. This assumption must now be rethought. We can no longer draw such a line. The earliest evidence testifies to significant local variations in early Christian communal meal practices. In addition, the change from communal meal to the fourth-century form of the Eucharist is too severe.[51]

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[48] Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and the Lord's Supper: A Study in the History of Liturgy* [first published: 1926] transl. Dorothea H. G. Reeve (Leiden: Brill, 1979)

[49] Plin. *Sec. Ep.* 96.10

[50] Massey Shepherd, "Smyrna in the Ignatian Letters," *The Journal of Religion* 20 (1940): 149.

[51] Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 286.

To see this diversity let us compare two examples. In North Africa, where the development of the rite can be considered well-documented, the Eucharist seems to be celebrated together with the love-feasts, up until the mid-third century.[52] The supper, which most probably took place on Saturday evening (the beginning of Sunday in the Jewish paradigm), by the end of Tertullian's life (d. 240 CE) became separated from the Eucharist, which became a morning celebration on Sunday morning. Under Cyprian, the two separate meals existed parallel. However, Cyprian harshly preached against the newly appeared rite which tried to merge the two, bringing the *agape* onto Sunday, because he wanted to keep the two meals apart. [53] By contrast, according to L. Michael White, biblical scholar and archaeologist, in Syria and Mesopotamia provinces, there were already two separate rites by the beginning of the third century: a morning worship and an evening communal meal, both taking place on Sunday. Based on archaeological evidence from Dura Europos, namely the demolition of a division wall between a dining room and a separate altar room, and the renovation of the house church into a functional hall of assembly, White argues that the Eucharist "took over" the *agape* around 242 CE.[54]

While in some places, the love-feast seems to have kept its primary position, elsewhere the Eucharist ceased to be a part of a broader meal, and turned into a "token meal." As Jeff Bach puts it, although "there is a plurality of themes, two primary traditions do emerge in the liturgy: communal fellowship meal or communion (κοινωνία) and remembrance (ἀνάμνησις)."[55]

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[52] Andrew B. McGowan, "Rethinking Agape and Eucharist in Early North African Christianity," *Studia Liturgica* 34 (2004): 165–76.

[53] P. F. Bradshaw and M. E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2012), 56-60.

[54] L. Michael White, "Regulating Fellowship in the Communal Meal: Early Jewish and Christian Evidence" in *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World*, ed. I. Nielsen, and H. S. Nielsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998), 177- 205.

[55] Jeff Bach, "Agape in the Brethren Tradition" in *The Lord's Supper: Believers Church Perspectives*, ed. D. R. Stoffer (Independence: Herald Press, 1997), 162.

The first exhaustive refutation of Lietzmann's two-part theory was made by Michael Townsend, who argued that the *agape* and Eucharist are different, yet cohesive aspects of the same rite from the beginning of the rite's development.[56] Likewise, Grayson Snyder confirmed that the celebration of the Eucharist in the early church consisted of both the liturgy of communion/love-feast and remembrance.[57] Paul Bradshaw highlights that "contemporary currents in the New Testament scholarship stresses the essential pluriform nature of primitive Christianity, and so render improbable the traditional idea that a single, uniform archetype ultimately underlines the later diversity in Christian worship practices."[58] Notwithstanding that the Eucharist evolved differently and had local variants, it is not justifiable to conclude that it did not have one archetype at the beginning. And most importantly, despite the diversity, the different liturgies preserved a uniform religious function: above all, the communal consumption of the Eucharistic bread and wine. This notion appears most traceably in the Apostolic Tradition, traditionally associated with Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235 CE):

> When the evening has arrived, with the bishop present the deacon shall bring in a lamp. The bishop, standing in the midst of all the faithful present, shall give thanks. But he shall first greet all by saying, "The Lord be with you." And all the people shall respond, "And with your spirit." Then the bishop shall say, "Let us give thanks to the Lord." And the people shall respond, "It is proper and just. Greatness and exaltation and glory are due to him." But he shall not say, "Lift up your hearts," because that is said for the oblation. And he shall pray thus, saying, "We give thanks to you, O God, through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, because you have enlightened us by revealing the incorruptible light. Therefore, having finished the length of a day, and arriving at the beginning of the night, and having been satisfied with the light of the day, which you created for our satisfaction, and since we now do not lack a light for the evening through your grace, we sanctify you and glorify you, through your only Son our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom to you with him be glory and might and honor with the Holy Spirit, now and always, and throughout the ages of the ages. Amen. Then all shall say, "Amen." After the meal they shall get up and pray, and the children shall sing songs, along with the virgins. Afterwards, the deacon holding the

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[56] Michael J. Townsend, "Exit the Agape?" *The Expository Times* 90, no. 12 (1979): 356–61.

[57] Graydon F. Snyder, *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1992), 239-40.

[58] Peter F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 52-3.

mixed cup of the oblation shall say a psalm from among those in which is written Alleluia.[59]

Here, the thanksgiving oblation takes place in the evening, possibly Saturday, followed by the meal:

> When they dine, the faithful present shall take from the hand of the bishop a small piece of bread before taking their own bread, because it is blessed. Yet it is not the Eucharist, like the body of the Lord. Before they all drink, they shall take their cups and give thanks for them. Thus they will eat and drink in purity.[60]

In the Apostolic Tradition, Eucharistic liturgy directly consecrates the whole meal. Moreover, since fasting was required before the Eucharist, it must have preceded the evening meal. Although the Eucharistic meal is not being called *agape* in the Apostolic Tradition, in other writings of Hippolytus there are further written pieces of evidence which show that the Eucharist was an integral part of the love-feast. Although Hippolytus' Canons were discovered in Arabic (most likely translated from Coptic), the term *mahabba'* (محبة) is usually the mirror translation of the Greek *agape*. Thus it is likely that originally he was writing about love-feast: "That deacons may pronounce the benediction and thanksgiving at the love-feasts when a bishop is not present."[61] Again, the Eucharistic liturgy is the necessary preamble of the love-feast.

Clement of Alexandria (d. 215 CE) also provides information about the *agape* and gives further insights into the Eucharistic nature of the love-feast. "But love[-feast] (ἀγάπη) is in truth celestial food, the banquet of reason."[62] Moreover, it is surprisingly not the Eucharist, but the *agape* that perpetuates the sacrament: "On this love[-feast] alone depend the law and the Word; and if "thou shalt love the Lord thy God and thy neighbour," this is the celestial festival in the heavens."[63] Based on the feasting context, interpreting *agape* as love-feast seems

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[59] Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 25.1-9
[60] Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 26.1-2
[61] Hippolytus, *Canones* 32.35
[62] Clem. *Paid*. 2.1.6
[63] Clem. *Paid*. 2.1.9

plausible. On the other hand, something extraordinary appears in Clement, which could be called the divinization of the rite. Clement, so to speak, expand the sacrament of the divine love to the whole love-feast. For him, the *agape* is not a mere evocation, but the "actual" incarnation of the Love of God, on which the world order is built on. On the other hand, in Clement's writings, the critique of certain illegitimate love-feasts of Gnostic heretics appears emphatically:

> [The Gnostics] dare to apply the name *agape*, to pitiful suppers, redolent of savour and sauces. Dishonouring the good and saving work of the Word, the consecrated *agape*, with pots and pouring of sauce; and by drink and delicacies and smoke desecrating that name, they are deceived in their idea, having expected that the promise of God might be bought with suppers. Gatherings for the sake of mirth, and such entertainments as are called by ourselves, we name rightly suppers, dinners, and banquets, after the example of the Lord. But such entertainments the Lord has not called *agapæ*. […] Love, then, is not a supper. But let the entertainment depend on love.[64]

According to Clement, the non-orthodox who celebrate this "sham love-feast" clearly cannot partake from Christ's true flesh and blood. Notably, Clement is far from willing to abolish the institution of the love-feast, instead, he wants to "reconquer" the sacrament from those who misuse it. "For the supper is made for love, but the supper is not love; only a proof of mutual and reciprocal kindly feeling."[65]

The next mention of the *agape* comes from Tertullian, a contemporary of Clement, who wrote his apologetic text in Latin for the defence of the Christian faith, during the persecutions under Emperor Septimius Severus, in Carthage 197 CE:

> But my business at present is to justify the Christian supper; and the nature of this supper you may understand by its name; for it is the Greek word for love (*id vocatur quod dilectio penes Graecos).* We Christians think we can never be too expensive, because we think all is gain that is laid out in doing good; when therefore we are at the charge of an entertainment, it is to refresh the bowels of the needy, but not as you gorge those parasites among you who glory in selling their liberty for stuffing their guts, and can find in their hearts to cram their bellies in spite of all the affronts you can lay upon them; but because we know God takes a peculiar delight in seeing us do it."[66]

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[64] Clem. *Paid.* 2.1.3-4
[65] Clem. *Paid*. 2.1.8
[66] Tert. *Apol.* 39.16

Tertullian stresses that although the love-feast "is to the bowels of the needy," it is not designated to feed the "hungry non-believers," but only the Christian needy. Tertullian strengthens this in a later paragraph:

> Certainly, say you, the rates for the temple now come to nothing, and who can brag of any collections for the gods? And really we cannot help it; for in good truth we are not able to relieve such a parcel of beggars, both of gods and men; we think it very well if we can give to those that ask; and I will pass my word that if Jupiter will but hold out his hand, he shall fare as well as any other beggar.[67]

Tertullian quite harshly draws an analogy between the obligatory tax to pagan temples and beggars, emphasizing that Christians should only help those who ask. It is also remarkable how Tertullian identifies the feast with the term "love" in his argument and explains its origins with Greek etymology. The use of the word *agape* is not at all conventional. Catherine Osborne categorizes various meanings of *agape* in the New Testament.[68] She differentiates between four meanings and argues that *agape* can either stand for an emotion, a type of behaviour, a bond or for the Love of God "with capital L." To clarify this ambiguity, she examines the development of term from the Platonic tradition until the Christian change of paradigm. In her philological analysis she highlights:

> It seems, at first, slightly surprising that the New Testament writings should employ this noun with any frequency. Abstract nouns are not used in Greek so much as they are in English, and many ideas that we should express with a noun would normally come out better in Greek if we used a verb or a participle instead.[69]

Between the lines, a certain notion formulates in the language of early Eucharistic theology. Indeed, as Joseph Wawrykow stresses, it was more customary among the early writers to refer

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[67] Tert. *Apol.* 42.8

[68] Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 46-8.

[69] Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, 25.

to the Eucharist as the sacrament of love and charity.[70] What this sub-chapter intends to emphasize is the phenomenon that in early sources, the divine love is often metonymically identified with the feast, confirming that the same love coming from God through the Eucharist, spreads further with the charity among Christian adherents. The Love of God, the love-feast as an event, and the charitable attitude of the community are only different aspects of the same thing in Early Christian thinking. The First Epistle of John draws an equation mark between God and love: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love (ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν)."[71]

To differentiate between *agape*, in the sense of divine love and *agape*, the love-feast is often not self-explanatory, based on their context. For instance, it is remarkable how Ignatius of Antioch alternately refers to both love-feast and abstract sense love of God in the context of the Eucharist.

> My love has been crucified (Ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως ἐσταύρωται) and there is no fire in me desiring to be fed; but there is within me a water that liveth and speaketh, saying to me inwardly, Come to the Father. I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, the flesh of Jesus Christ, of the seed of David; and I desire the drink, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love (θέλω τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ, ὅ ἐστιν ἀγάπη ἄφθαρτος).[72]

The fact that Ignatius identifies the drinking of Christ's blood with the epithet "incorruptible love" (ἀγάπη ἄφθαρτος) cannot be neglected. It is also noteworthy that the metonymy of Christ "*eros*" uniquely appears in this text and never in the New Testament, which use of language, according to Anders Nygren, is an early attempt by Ignatius to assimilate the Platonic *eros* and the Christian *agape*.[73] Similarly, in his Epistle to the Smyrnaeans Ignatius writes that the true

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[70] Joseph Wawrykow, "The Heritage of the Late Empire: Influential Theology," in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Boston, 2012), 63.

[71] 1Jn 4.7-8

[72] Ignatius of Antioch, *AdRom* 7.1-3

[73] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, transl. Philip S. Watson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 391.

faith "both in the flesh and in the spirit, are established in love through the blood of Christ (ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ αἵματι Χριστοῦ)."[74] He clearly alludes to the Eucharist and this leaves room to interpret "love" both as abstract sense "divine love" or "love-feast." Could not the communal meal itself establish the spiritual bond "through the blood of Christ"? The translation "both in the flesh and spirit, are established at love-feasts, through the blood of Christ" would also be reasonable, or even more.

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[74] Ignatius of Antioch, *AdSmyrn* 1.1

Chapter 2 - Koinonia

This chapter intends to present the communal nature of the love-feast through an analysis of the notion of communion or *koinonia*. As it has been shown in the previous chapter, Eucharist and *agape,* despite their differing local variants, are inseparable and, indeed, two different aspects of the same rite. This chapter first presents the possible prefigurations of the Eucharistic meal in the Old Testament. After outlining some possible archetypes, the chapter endeavours to demonstrate that associating the love-feast solely with the *Last Supper* is inappropriate, and proposes that the episodes of the *Feeding of the five (or four) thousand*, and the post-resurrection *Lakeside meal* had crucial theological importance in the liturgy of the love-feast. Following the social-religious examination of the origin and inner mechanism of pagan communion and the overview of the early development of Eucharistic theology, the chapter attempts to demonstrate the innovation and significance of the Christian Holy Communion. Through the critical reading of early sources about the Eucharistic meal, the chapter aims to present the central role of the concept of communion in the liturgy.

2.1. Prefigurations of the Eucharistic meal

From a Christian perspective, there are three prefigurations of the Eucharistic meal in the Torah. The first is when Melchizedek, the king-priest of Jerusalem sacrifices bread and wine to God.[75] The scene, traditionally, provides the legitimacy for the establishment of the priesthood and the tithe. The second is the institution of the Passover Lamb during the Plagues of Egypt, preceding the Exodus, whereby it is commanded that "according to each man's need

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[75] Gen 14.18-20

you shall make your count for the lamb."[76] Israel, as a whole, must have taken part in this animal sacrifice.[77] But after the Exodus from Egypt, the Passover "shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations" only through the symbol of unleavened bread, while the exclusive right to perform an animal sacrifice got back to the priesthood of the Temple.[78] Accordingly, in Judaism it was possible to have a sacrificial meal strictly under the special circumstances of the Exodus from the captivity in Egypt, otherwise, it was the monopoly of the successors of Melchizedek, the descendants of Levi.[79]

The third prefiguration of the Eucharist is extraordinary in this respect and plays a crucial role in the present inquiry. In this scene, the Israelites were wandering in the Desert, and on the fifteenth day of the second month, after they had left Egypt, they began to starve and grumbled against Moses. "Then the Lord said to Moses: I will rain down bread from heaven (ἄρτους ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) for you."[80] Although it is a bit arbitrary to use "heaven" here since the Greek word can simply mean "sky" in the context of the formulating Septuagint, it is quite equivocally written, that it was God personally who intervened and acted. Against further doubt about God's presence (*shekinah*), the text later clarifies that "there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud" (ἡ δόξα κυρίου ὤφθη ἐν νεφέλῃ).[81] God can be seen as the manifested Glory (δόξα or *Kavod*), as a fiery cloud speaking in His voice, while Moses, the medium, the only one who can hear Him, does not get any special role or divine attributes like auralization during the miracle.

It is unclear what exactly the *manna*, the heavenly food falling from the sky that the Jews ate for forty years was, despite the endeavor of the Mishnah trying to explain and

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[76] Ex. 12.4
[77] Ex. 16.6
[78] Ex. 16.14
[79] Although there were Jewish sects who did not accept this monopoly, such as the Essenes, the Samaritans or the Jews of Leontopolis.
[80] Ex. 16.4.
[81] Ex. 16.10

rationalize its origin, placing its creation onto the twilight of the first Shabbat, as some kind of a semi-divine, but still worldly material.[82] However, the Torah undeniably states that this particular edible substance was raining down from the sky (or heaven), though it is uncertain whether it refers to that specific fiery cloud which was God's manifestation or not. The phenomenon is found in a more tangible formulation in the Book of Psalms: "Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens (καὶ θύρας οὐρανοῦ ἀνέῳξεν); he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. Human beings ate the bread of angels (ἄρτον ἀγγέλων); he sent them all the food they could eat."[83] What makes this story confusing is that whatever *manna* was, it was unmistakably not created on Earth as a simple miracle, nor transformed from another earthly material, but it was descending straight through the doors of heaven. So to speak, *manna* functioned as the executive power of God.

This Mosaic scene is undoubtedly the basis and prefiguration of the story appearing in all of the Gospels when Jesus feeds the five thousand (and the four thousand in Mark and Matthew).[84] The directness of the reference is visible even for the authors.[85] However, strangely it is only the Gospel of John that connects the Eucharist to the *Feeding of the five thousand,* supposedly due to its narrative structure, while all the Synoptic Gospels connect Eucharist to the Last Supper.[86] The part when Jesus specifically drew the Jews' attention to the fact, that it was not Moses who gave them the heavenly bread, but God Himself may imply that the tradition still identified it as a miracle coming from Moses.[87] Either way, Jesus says that this food was only His prefiguration. The real heavenly food is Him and His body and blood, which He gives for the salvation of the world. Jesus could not say more explicitly: "I am the

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[82] Pirkei Avot 5:6
[83] Ps. 77.23-26
[84] Mk 6.30-44, 8.1-10; Mt 14.13-21, 15.29-39; Lk 9.12-17; Jn 6.1-15
[85] Jn 6.32, 49; 1Cor10.3-5
[86] Mt 26.26-29; Mk 14.22-25; Lk 22.19-20; Jm 6.22-58
[87] Jn 6.32

living bread which came down out of heaven" (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς).[88]

Notwithstanding these traditional interpretations, there is another important scene in the Gospel of John, which is often neglected in the scholarship, in spite of its direct reference to the divine love *agape* and its correlation with the meal *agape*.[89] R. Lee Cole is convinced that the post-resurrection lakeside meal in the Gospel of John gave the name to the love-feast. He writes:

> That this lakeside meal gave the name to the *agape* there cannot be much doubt. We shall see that in the catacomb pictures the words "*eirene*" and "*agape*" are at times connected with the common meal, but the preponderances is given to the word "*agape*"; we shall see, too, that in many of the pictures the number of figures is not twelve, as at the Last Supper, nor ten, nor eleven, as at the post-resurrection suppers, but seven, in evident remembrance of the "come and dine" incident recorded by St. John in his last chapter. It is a little extraordinary how the writers on the agape have overlooked this pertinent incident and have sought elsewhere for the source of the name "agape."[90]

Based on early frescos found in Christian catacombs, it is unequivocal that the love-feast was not only associated with the Last Supper, and the *Feeding of the five thousand*, but the post-resurrection lakeside meal as well. Therefore, the Eucharistic meal cannot be interpreted as solely the "remembrance" (ἀνάμνησις) rite of the *Last Supper* as a distinct tradition from the communal fellowship meal or communion (κοινωνία). These archetypes listed above are only comprehensible together and all of them are deeply embedded in the liturgy of Christian communion.

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[88] Jn 6.51
[89] Jn 21.1-19
[90] R. Lee Cole, *Love-Feasts: A History of the Christian Agape* (London: C. H. Kelley, 1916), 62-63.

2.2. The Origins of Communion

As Patrick Gray remarks, "one finds that the Fathers wrote very little indeed that is overtly about the Eucharist, and that there exists correspondingly little secondary scholarship on the subject."[91] He explains this reticence of the Eucharist with its initiative nature to an exclusive mystery. Due to the scarcity of sources it seems impossible to exhaustively unravel complex theological layers beneath them. Nevertheless, the Eucharist is unequivocally central, if not the most central, element of the entire Christian faith. The supposition that Eucharistic theology would not be there from the very beginning can be excluded. It is more likely a mere blind spot hindering the detection of its presence. With the understanding of the ritual's pagan and Jewish origins and the analysis of some sporadic theological texts, it is possible to reconstruct some central elements and emerging themes of early Eucharistic theology.

The first problem comes with the separation of the above-mentioned initiative nature of the Eucharist from its other functions. Why would it be necessary to repeat an initiation ritual every Sunday? Indeed, we do not find any directives in the Gospels regarding the repetition of the Eucharist, except maybe Luke's slightly ambiguous indication: "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."[92] In the Gospels, there is no other sign of the institutionalization of the Eucharist. Even in John's description and well-detailed theological explanation of the Eucharist, it looks rather a one-time ritual, than something repetitive.

Despite the Jewish context, it is striking how the Christian rite of the "breaking of the bread" immediately gets separated from the traditional *challah* eating at Shabbat meals. The

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[91] Patrick T. R. Gray, "From Eucharist to Christology: The Life-giving Body of Christ in Cyril of Alexandria, Eutyches and Julian of Halicarnassus," in *The Eucharist in Theology and Philosophy,* Ancient and Medieval Philosophy 35 ed. István Perczel, Réka Forrai, and György Geréby (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 24.

[92] Lk 22.19

over-emphasis of placing the rite onto Sunday (which in the Jewish paradigm starts at Saturday sunset, when the *kallah,* the "Shabbat-bride" departs) is already found in the New Testament, in the Troas episode, for instance, when Paul too broke bread with the local community.[93] From the beginning it is a completely different rite from the dough offering of Second Temple Judaism and its symbolic imitation in the Jewish households: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship (κοινωνία), to the breaking of bread (τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου) and to prayer."[94] Joel Koenig stresses that the "breaking of the bread was not a standard Jewish designation for a full meal, but only for the ritual act that initiated it. What seems to have happened is that the early believers took up this typical description of a meal's commencement and applied it to their entire liturgy of eating and drinking."[95] According to the much-debated work of Géza Vermes, the new Christian liturgy of the "breaking of the bread," originates in the Essene sect, merging the symbolism of the initiation rite of baptism and a rite of the communal meal which came to be associated with the Last Supper under Pauline influence.[96] Undoubtedly, it is first Paul, who directly connected the repetition of the Eucharist to the Last Supper by saying: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."[97]

Eucharist obtains a new aspect aside from its initiative role: communion. However, the Christian "Holy Communion" merges different religious aspects of the ritual common meals of both paganism and Judaism. In the theological analysis of the Eucharist, it is expediential to treat the two separately. In the Jewish paradigm, to become ritually one in substance with the Divine is blasphemous. In Jewish thinking, the performance of any kind of sacrifice and the

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[93] Acts 20.7; 20.11
[94] Acts 2.42
[95] Joel Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Norcross, GA: Trinity Press, 2000), 91.
[96] Géza, Vermes, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 75.
For the Essene origins of the Eucharist see Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977)
[97] 1Cor 11:26

sacrificial meal is literally thanksgiving to God (*todah*) for his providence over the Chosen People.

Hence, to fully understand the significance of the innovation of the Christian paradigm, it is worth turning toward paganism first. Until Robertson Smith' work, the general view was that the pagan animal sacrifice is necessarily a renunciation, partially due to the action expressed in the etymology of the word, meaning some kind of a voluntary tax to the deity.[98] "And sacrificing is making gifts to the gods and praying is asking from them?" asks Socrates the rhetorical question whereto the obvious answer would be "yes." The notion of *do ut des* namely that "something is given so that something may be received in return" had explicitly symbolized some kind of a sacral exchange as the inner mechanism of the sacrifice in classical paganism.

Émile Durkheim was the first to demonstrate that the sacrificial meal is most importantly sacral incorporation of the table-community and also the deity by the food, where "the meal is taken in common to create a bond of artificial kinship among the participants.*"99* Max Weber shared the opinion that the sacrifice *"*is intended for a "communion" between the participants and the god as brotherhood of table-community."[100] While examining pagan animal sacrifices, it is of key importance to distinguish the Greek term for "sacrifice by burnt offering" (ὁλοκαυτεῖν) from the verb that stands for "sharing sacrificial communion" (θύεσθαι). The former was quite rare on its own, instead of burnt or chtonic offerings it usually went side by side with the latter type, that is communion. At the pagan ritual the deity got its share as well since certain parts of the sacrifice are reserved only for the godhead, as in the Hesiodic example:

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[98] Robertson Smith, Lecture 6 and 11 in: *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: Fundamental Institutions* 2nd ed. [first published in 1889] (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1969)

[99] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, [first published in 1912] transl. by K. E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 341.

[100] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* [first published in 1922] transl. by Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 12.

For when the gods and mortal men had a dispute at Mecone, even then Prometheus was forward to cut up a great ox and set portions before them, trying to deceive the mind of Zeus. Before the rest he set flesh and inner parts thick with fat upon the hide, covering them with an ox paunch; but for Zeus, he put the white bones dressed up with cunning art and covered with shining fat. Then the father of men and of gods said to him: "Son of Iapetus, most glorious of all lords, good sir, how unfairly you have divided the portions!" So said Zeus whose wisdom is everlasting, rebuking him. But wily Prometheus answered him, smiling softly and not forgetting his cunning trick: "Zeus, most glorious and greatest of the eternal gods, take whichever of these portions your heart within you bids." So he said, thinking trickery. But Zeus, whose wisdom is everlasting, saw and failed not to perceive the trick, and in his heart he thought mischief against mortal men which also was to be fulfilled. With both hands he took up the white fat and was angry at heart, and wrath came to his spirit when he saw the white ox-bones craftily tricked out: and because of this the tribes of men upon earth burn white bones to the deathless gods upon fragrant altars.[101]

Interestingly, the Greco-Roman, pagan communion is nothing else than the ritual repetition of this "trickery act" of Prometheus, while paradoxically being aware that the deity invited to the meal sees through the "trick."

2.3. The Christian Holy Communion

The most prominent and radical change in the Christian liturgy is that, unlike its predecessors, the animal sacrifice and the act of giving a portion, a burnt offering, to the deity is completely missing from the rite, since in the Christian paradigm, Christ has already made the ultimate blood sacrifice, symbolizing the Lamb of God.[102] "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (καὶ γὰρ τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός).[103] What remains from the ancient ritual is communion.

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[101] Theog540-555 see also the standard Homeric exemple: Od 14.419-36
[102] Jn 1.29; Is 53.4-7
[103] 1Cor 5.7

It is quite instructive to examine Christians' narrative of the inner logic of sacrifice. Remarkably, there is an abundance of Christian apologetic texts concerning the pagan sacrifices. In the Letter to Diognetus (mid-second century CE), the author calls the burnt offering of the pagan sacrifice non-sense, since it questions God's omnipotence:

> For while the Gentiles, by offering such things to those that are destitute of sense and hearing, furnish an example of madness; they, on the other hand by thinking to offer these things to God as if He needed them, might justly reckon it rather an act of folly than of divine worship. For He that made heaven and earth, and all that is therein, and gives to us all the things of which we stand in need, certainly requires none of those things which He Himself bestows on such as think of furnishing them to Him. But those who imagine that, by means of blood, and the smoke of sacrifices and burnt-offerings, they offer sacrifices [acceptable] to Him, and that by such honours they show Him respect, — these, by supposing that they can give anything to Him who needs nothing, appear to me in no respect to differ from those who studiously confer the same honour on things destitute of sense, and which therefore are unable to enjoy such honours.[104]

This early Christian critique largely defined the erroneous usage of the *do ut des* principle in early sociology of religion, mentioned above. By contrast, to reason why the Christian sacrifice is appropriate, Irenaeus (d. 202 CE) writes as follows:[105] "Sacrifices, therefore, do not sanctify a man, for God stands in no need of sacrifice; but it is the conscience of the offerer that sanctifies the sacrifice when it is pure, and thus moves God to accept [the offering] as from a friend." Solving the paradox of giving something created to the Creator, Irenaeus simply turns it into a matter of conscience.

2.3.1. Unity

The problem of dissension is already visible in the Pauline community. "Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

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[104] Letter to Diognetus 3.3-5
[105] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.3

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"[106]

Some scholars suggest that in the first few centuries, it might be more adequate to speak about Christianities, than "Christianity."[107] The fear from factions within the Church largely affects early Eucharistic theology. As cited above, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul complains about the division between the members of the congregation and about those who do not partake fully in the Eucharist: "So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers (ἴδιον δεῖπνον)."[108] The One Holy Communion is designated to draw the boundaries of the Christian community. In the Christian paradigm, the incorporation by the Eucharistic bread establishes the foundation of the Christian community. "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation (κοινωνία) in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation (κοινωνία) in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf."[109] Moreover, in early Christianity the Church is metonymically identified with Christ's body, the Eucharist, one and undividable. Ignatius of Antioch is also concerned with the fragmentation of the Holy Communion into multiple separate communions, while he prescribes the presence of a bishop as a precondition of the Holy Communion. "Take ye heed, then, to have but one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to [show forth] the unity of His blood; one altar; as there is one bishop."[110] Tertullian in a less abstract way, explains the importance of the unity in the Eucharist with the unified practice of religion and the unity of the congregation:[111]

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[106] 1Cor 1.12-3
[107] D. Jeffrey Bingham, "Development and Diversity in Early Christianity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 1 (2006): 45-66.
[108] 1Cor 11.20-21
[109] 1Cor10.17
[110] Ignatius of Antioch, *AdPhil* 4.1-2
[111] Tert. *Apol.* 39.1-2

> We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, *(Corpus sumus de conscientia religionis et disciplinae unitate et spei foedere)* and by the bond of a common hope. We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications.

For strengthening the unity, the question of the supervision of the Eucharist by the Church also becomes prominent in early sources, as it is Ignatius' main concern: "Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it."[112] Similarly, Irenaeus writes: "The Church alone offers this pure oblation to the Creator, offering to Him, with giving of thanks, [the things taken] from His creation."[113]

2.3.2. Participation

It is also due to the aforementioned communal aspect of the Eucharist that, from the very beginning, the main concern of the sources is the question of the participation of the "non-faithful" on the suppers. The shifting interest of the Eucharist is visibly mirrored in the liturgy. As Lizette Larson-Miller identifies this process, while examining the evolution of the orders of masses *(ordinarium missae)*:

> A church with many "semi-catechized" Christians means that the liturgy will need to work harder to edify and instruct, including both encouragement to participation (particularly in communion) at the same time as "fencing off" communion by stressing the awesome nature of the sacrament and the ethical demands of participation."[114]

In fact, nearly all existing sources in the first two centuries focus on the question of participation in communion. The liturgy was divided between the liturgy of the baptized and

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[112] Ignatius of Antioch, *AdRom* 7.3
[113] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.3
[114] Lizette Larson-Miller, "The Liturgical Inheritance of the Late Empire in the Middle Ages" in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* ed. Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Boston, 2012), 15.

the liturgy of the Word for the catechumens, who could not participate at the Eucharist until their religious education was not accomplished.

Apparently, there is an "unworthy manner" in participating. Early sources concentrate on the ethical aspect of the rite, with educative intention. Jude, in his Epistle, puts forth a real diatribe against those "ungodly people" who eat with the (presumably godly) congregation.[115] It is also quite telling how Justin Martyr (d. 165 CE) writes about this issue: "And this food is called among us Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined."[116] Participation and being part of communion are only for the baptized. Probably this paragraph from the Didache, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (usually dated to the mid-second-century) is the one, which best shows the exclusive nature of the Eucharist: "But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs.""[117] The rigor is understandable since eternal life is at stake. As St. Cyprian writes:

> When therefore, He says, that whoever shall eat of His bread shall live forever; as it is manifest that those who partake of His body and receive the Eucharist by the right of communion are living, so, on the other hand, we must fear and pray lest anyone who, being withheld from communion, is separate from Christ's body should remain at a distance from salvation. [118]

Likewise, those baptized who do not participate regularly in the Eucharist, are not "registered" for eternal life.

> Let no man deceive himself: if anyone be not within the altar, he is deprived of the bread of God. [...] He, therefore, that separates himself from such, and does not meet in the society where sacrifices are offered, and with the Church of the first-born whose names are written (γέγραπται) in heaven, is a wolf in sheep's clothing. [119]

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[115] Jd 1.12
[116] Justin Martyr, *First Apology,* 66.1
[117] Did 9.5
[118] Cyprian: *Treatise* 4.
[119] Ignatius of Antioch, AdEph 5.2-3

The importance of the expression "names written in heaven" will be elaborated later.

For now, what is key that the "bread of God" is the precondition for entering heaven.

2.3.3. The Sacrament of the Meal

In the Christian paradigm, communion does not manifest through a profane or worldly substance, such as communion by the meat of an animal for pagans. The spiritual bond between the participants who incorporate in the Eucharist is transcendent. As Everett Harrison put it: "This fellowship will be consummated in heaven's glory."[120] In the complex trinitological aspects of the Eucharist, for orthodox Christians the communion is established with God the Father (1 John 1.3, 6), with the Son (1 Cor 1.9), and is also realized with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13.14, Phil 2.1). It is telling how Paul finishes his Second Letter to the Corinthians with the following formula: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit (ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου) be with you all."[121]

There is a problematic duality in the relation of the divine and mundane nature of the Eucharist, which is already present as a main focus in the early exegetic literature of the antitypes in the Tanakh and the earliest Eucharistic theology. The divinization of the Eucharist raises the question: whether the Eucharistic bread is a symbolic representation or the actual flesh of Christ. If the Eucharistic bread is a divine substance, how can human beings incorporate it? Evidently, Eucharistic theology has always been directly related to Christology. However, Joseph Wawrykow doubts that the Christological debates about the relation of the divine and human natures of Christ and the Eucharist, from the fifth century CE onwards, could be applied and projected onto earlier developments of Eucharistic theology. He points out quite

[120] Everett F. Harrison, *Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960), 219.
[121] 2Cor 13.14

sharply that "an older scholarly convention, of pitting "realists" against "symbolists", as if it were not possible to affirm Christ's presence while insisting on the sign-character of this sacrament, seems increasingly untenable."[122] According to Wawrykow, the focus on the nature(s) of the Eucharist only shifted from other earlier aspects, such as charity and communion at the end of the fourth century CE.

It might be Justin Martyr who represents best the early Christian understanding of the synthesis of divine and profane natures of the Eucharistic bread and wine:

> For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word (δι' εὐχῆς λόγου τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ εὐχαριστηθεῖσαν τροφήν), and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation (μεταβολὴν) are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.[123]

It is important, that for Justin it is not the Word of God that is responsible for this "divine change," but it is the repeated word of Christ by prayer that blesses the Eucharist.

Likewise, Irenaeus resolves this contradiction, anachronistically speaking, with the syncretism of "dyophysite" and "miaphysite" views. For him when the "manufactured bread receives the Word of God" by "exhibiting to us His true flesh in the Eucharist, He conferred upon our flesh the capacity of salvation."[124] The originally worldly bread obtains divine nature by the Word, pronounced by the legitimate representative of Christ: the bishop. Irenaeus elaborates:

> But our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist, in turn, establishes our opinion. For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.[125]

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[122] Wawrykow, *The Heritage of the Late Empire*, 63.
[123] Justin Martyr, *First Apology,* 66.2
[124] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haererses* 5.2.3
[125] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.5

For Irenaeus, it is not at all problematic to juxtapose the divine and mundane natures of the Eucharistic bread. It is also peculiar how the issue occurs for Tertullian in his polemics against Marcionism:

> Then, having taken the bread and given it to His disciples, He made it His own body, by saying, "This is my body," that is, the figure of my body (*figura corporis*). A figure, however, there could not have been, unless there were first a veritable body. An empty thing, or phantom, is incapable of a figure. If, however - as Marcion might say - He pretended the bread was His body, because He lacked the truth of bodily substance, it follows that He must have given bread for us. It would contribute very well to the support of Marcion's theory of a phantom body, that bread should have been crucified! But why call His body bread, and not rather - some other edible thing, say - a melon, which Marcion must have had in lieu of a heart![126]

In Tertullian's cynical remark lays the core of the "symbolist" view which later provided the basis for the Christological debates of the fifth century. Cyprian explicitly reflect on this formulating opposition within the Church:

> As the prayer goes forward, we ask and say, "Give us this day our daily bread." And this may be understood both spiritually and literally, because either way of understanding it is rich in divine usefulness to our salvation. For Christ is the bread of life; and this bread does not belong to all men, but it is ours. And according as we say, "Our Father," because He is the Father of those who understand and believe; so also we call it "our bread," because Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body.[127]

It is clear that neither Cyprian is concerned with the contradiction of the two natures. Whether "real" or "symbolic," the act of consummation of the Eucharist is subordinated to one function: creating communion among Christians.

From the beginning, Eucharist was the most central ritual in the practice of the Christian faith. Aside from being a form of initiation its most prominent aspect was creating communion in the congregation by the communal incorporation of Eucharistic bread and wine. The communal aspect explains the special emphasis on the question of participation and the integrity of rite in the early sources. As it has been shown, the Eucharist amalgamated elements

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[126] Tert. *AdMarc* 4.40
[127] Cyprian: *Treatise* 4.

of the pagan sacrificial meals and the Jewish Shabbat meals, while it dramatically changed the inner logic of the communion. In the Christian paradigm the blood sacrifice is already redeemed by the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, hence the Holy Communion is being established by His flesh and blood, the divinized Eucharist. Notwithstanding later controversies about the relation of the divine and human nature of the Eucharist, up until the fifth century, "realism" and "symbolism" existed abreast and flourished in early Eucharistic theology.

Chapter 3 - Politeia

The present chapter intends to link the Christian Holy Communion with the symbolism of the "heavenly citizenship." By presenting the pagan understanding of the relation of communion and citizenship, the chapter draws a parallel between the Christian concept of *politeia* and the Hellenistic legal tradition, which was largely based on the institutionalized rite of pagan animal sacrifice and the establishment of communion within the given civic cult community. Following the presentation of the metaphor of the Heavenly Jerusalem as an archetype for Christianity in Second Temple Judaism, the chapter argues that the Eucharistic liturgy followed a pattern to a certain level, which was borrowed from the Hellenistic paradigm. Moreover, presenting the problematics of Christians' participation at pagan communal meals, the chapter also suggests that the first Christians must have coincided with the non-citizen residents of the cities of the *Imperium Romanum*, in the first three centuries. Finally, the chapter proposes that early forms of social care in the late antique pagan society were always associated with citizenship as a precondition, thus the Christian *politeia* alluded to this notion as well.

3.1. Pagan Communion and Citizenship

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus of Nazareth calls his followers those who "are not of the world" (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ ἐστέ) and whom "the world hates" (μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος).[128] The Epistle to the Hebrews refers to those who are waiting for the city to come, whose maker is God (ἧς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ θεός) as "strangers and pilgrims" (ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι)

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[128] Jn 15.19

on Earth. [129] Similarly, Peter addresses his First Epistle to a the so-called "chosen pilgrims of the Dispersion" (ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς) in the cities of Asia Minor and certain "sojourners" (πάροικοι) who reside with the Gentiles, apparently represented as a contraposition by the author.[130] The original meanings of these group designations (ξένοι, πάροικοι, παρεπίδημοι) are easily lost in translation. In the Hellenistic world all of them referred to specific social groups, connected by one important aspect: members of these groups did not possess citizenship in the city where they resided. While some consider this motif of alienage figurative and spiritual, others read it literally; the two theories do not necessarily contradict each other.[131] The motif of alienage on Earth is obviously a direct reference to the notion that appears in the Tanakh, where the land of Israel is God's private property who graciously lends it to His people: wanderers and sojourners.[132] On the other hand, these designations of the above mentioned groups were undeniably concrete legal categories in Roman and Hellenistic *polis* laws, and they also happen to coincide with the social basis of early Christianity as we know it, including the Jews of the Diaspora, elaborated above.

But what is the religious significance of citizenship in Late Antiquity? Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges rightly points out that in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, being a citizen always implied active participation in the common cult of the *polis* and therefore to be a member of the given cult community.[133] This primarily meant publicly performed sacrifice and communal meal (κοινωνία) with the cult community. Everett Ferguson stresses the exclusive nature of these communal meals and emphasizes that "in most civic cults a woman was not

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[129] Heb 11.10 and Heb 11.13
[130] 1Pt 1.1; 2.11 and 1Pt 1.17; 2.11 respectively
[131] Figurative: Charles H. Talbert, "Once Again: The Plan of 1 Peter," in *Perspectives on First Peter*, ed. C. H. Talbert (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 141-151.
    Literal: John H. Elliot, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, its Situation and Strategy* (PA: Fortress, 1981), 39
[132] Lev 25.23
[133] N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, *La cité antique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 43-46.

admitted, nor was a non-citizen or slave."[134] In Aristotle's *Politics* the civic ritual common

meal is directly connected to citizenship as a precondition:

> As to common meals, all agree that this is an institution advantageous for well-organized states (ταῖς εὖ κατεσκευασμέναις πόλεσιν) to possess; our own reasons for sharing this view we will state later. But the common meals must be shared by all the citizens (δεῖ δὲ τούτων κοινωνεῖν πάντας τοὺς πολίτας).[135]

Far from being a mere privilege of the exclusive circle of citizens, the Athenian regulation of

communion put an extra financial burden on the participants. In the known sources of animal

sacrifice, and the following ritual common meal, there is no evidence for any kind of

progressive taxation in classical paganism. The fee is understood strictly proportionally:

"…each citizen pays a fixed poll-tax, failing which he is prevented by law from taking part in

the government" (εἰ δὲ μή, μετέχειν νόμος κωλύει τῆς πολιτείας).[136] Even Aristotle remarks

that in comparison with the imaginary, utopian system of Crete, the Athenian reality is too

cruel with poor citizens. Those who are unable to pay, thus unable to participate in the

communion, get excluded from the civic cult. "For it is not easy for the very poor to participate,

yet their ancestral regulation of the citizenship (τῆς πολιτείας οὗτός ἐστιν αὐτοῖς ὁ πάτριος) is

that it is not to belong to one who is unable to pay this tax."[137]

Just as obtaining any other citizenship, following a complex and multiple-stage routine,

the *rite de passage* to become a Roman citizen always consisted of publicly performed sacrifice

and later required participation in the annual ceremonies. As for double or multiple citizens,

while participation in the various sacrificial meals of the Mediterranean, syncretistic paganism

could coexist perfectly, it was problematic for the Jewish and Christian communities.

Accordingly, in the Pauline tradition, the participation in sacrificial meals was strictly

forbidden for Christians:[138]

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[134] Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), 174.
[135] Aristotle, *Pol.* 7.1330a4-7
[136] Aristotle, *Pol.* 2.1272a14-5
[137] Aristotle, *Pol.* 2.1271a35-7
[138] 1Cor 10.19-22

> Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered (θύουσιν) to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons (κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων). You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

The key term "to eat meat sacrificed to idols" (ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον ἐσθίουσιν) betrays the language of Judaism's critique of paganism.[139] However, the main issue was not the unholiness of the meat, since in the Jewish-Christian paradigm it was also God's creation, which they could buy at the market and eat at home privately without any problem.[140] The reason lay in the public appearance or "another man's conscience," as Paul phrases.[141]

Nothing signifies better the key importance of the sacrifice and its nature as the precondition for citizenship, than the Giessen Papyrus 40, a fragment from Caracalla's decree, the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, issued in 212 CE.[142] Although the emblematic decree was the subject of a great deal of secondary literature, its impact on Christian communities has not been discussed in detail.[143] A closer look at the text and the philological analysis of the phrasing might help understand the religious significance of the sacrifice in the acquisition of Roman citizenship. From his own perspective, Caracalla not only bestowed Roman citizenship to nearly all free inhabitants of the *Oikumenē* (δίδωμι τοῖς συνάπα[σιν κατὰ τ]ὴν οἰκουμένην π[ολιτ]είαν Ῥωμαίων), but by doing so he literally thanked to the Capitoline gods (εὐχαριστήσαιμι) by expanding their worship to all of his subjects, obliging as many people as possible to share and contribute to their sacrifice (θεῶν συνει[σ]ενέγ[κοι]μι). Here, being a Roman citizen is the synonym of sacrificing to the Roman gods. Although it is not explicitly declared that the decree was specifically against Christians (and Jews), it certainly provided a

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[139] 1Cor 8.7
[140] 1Cor 10.28
[141] 1Cor 10.29
[142] P. Giss. 1.40
[143] Paul Keresztes, "The Constitutio Antoniniana and the Persecutions under Caracalla," *The American Journal of Philology* 91, no. 4 (1970): 446-59.

strong basis for later persecutions. Tertullian wrote his apologetic pamphlet to Scapula, the proconsul of Carthage, possibly because the *Constitutio Antoniniana* was already inured in the province of Africa.[144] "We therefore sacrifice for the emperor's safety, but to our God and his, and after the manner God has enjoined, in simple prayer*"* (*Itaque et sacrificamus pro salute imperatoris, sed Deo nostro et ipsius, sed quomodo praecepit Deus, pura prece*).[145] The acceptance or refusal of this apologetic argument probably depended on the local authority's interpretation of the decree of Caracalla.

The expanding of the Roman cult community by citizenship can also be observed through the *libelli* from Fayyum, from the time of the Decian persecutions (249-51 CE):

> I (or we) have always and (all [my] life) without interruption sacrificed and poured libations and manifested piety toward the gods (in accordance with the divine decree), and now (again) in your presence in accordance with the edict's decree, I (or we) have made sacrifice and poured a libation (or poured a libation and sacrificed) and partaken of the sacred victims (in company with my wife and children) (acting through me). (Wherefore I present this petition and) I (or we) request you to certify this (for me, or for us) below…[146]

Roman citizens, presumably only those who held public offices and were, therefore members of the same cult community, had to perform uniformly a sacrifice and eat from the sacrificial meat with their children, in the presence of seven or at least four witnesses. The function of this sacrifice was to create a communion with the gods of the Capitoline Triad and the emperor, proving their loyalty to the Roman law, and the Roman world order. First and foremost, in these *libelli* it was the Christians who were put on trial.

Indeed, in the pagan paradigm, the very order of the world depended on the relationship between gods and men, which was primarily strengthened by the sacrificial meal. According to Plato's Gorgias "…gods and men are held together by communion and friendship, by orderliness, temperance, and justice; and that is the reason, […] why they call the whole of this

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[144] Timothy D. Barnes, "Proconsuls of Asia under Caracalla," *Phoenix* 40 (1986), 202-5.

[145] Tert. *Ad Scap* 2.8 (transl. by S. Thelwall)

[146] John R Knipfing, "The Libelli of the Decian Persecution," *The Harvard Theological Review* 16, no. 4 (1923): 345-90.

world by the name of order, not of disorder or dissoluteness."[147] For an external comparison, perhaps the feudal oath and fealty had a similarly emphatic role in maintaining the "world order." When Plato makes communion a precondition of orderliness and justice, he may in fact allude to concrete legal practices of Athenian law.

3.2. The Holy Communion and the Heavenly Citizenship

Does the theological significance of the concept of city and citizenship for early Christians really originate in paganism? Interestingly, the metaphor is partially inherited from the Tanakh. In Messianic Judaism the prophecies often preach about the "City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel" or the city whose name will be: "The Lord is there," and which will serve as the capital of the Messianic Kingdom, with the reunited twelve tribes.[148] Naturally the concept of being a Jew as a form of citizenship is a later phenomenon, dating to the Hasmonean period when early Second Temple Judaism was facing Hellenistic "globalization" and Jewish self-identification had to fit somehow Greek legal practice. [149] Although the Jewish self-identification with the city of Jerusalem or Mount Sion is presumably due to the emphatic importance of the Temple, rather than the influence of Hellenistic concepts of citizenship and *polis*-culture, the notion is still conspicuous. The institution of the (Second) Temple had the sacred monopoly of sacrifice among Jews (and Jewish cities), and therefore was the only way to establish communion between God and the Chosen People. Communion in the Jewish paradigm, of course, differs from paganism in many ways but through the image of the city one can trace down how the original tribal structures and the concept of the "One People" met

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[147] Plato, *Gorg*. 508a
[148] Is 60.14 and Ez 48.35 "JHWH-Sammah"
[149] Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 125-29.

Hellenistic social structures of the *polis*.[150] The metonymically impersonated city of Jerusalem, representing the whole Jewish community, the One People, now becoming citizens of the One City, made a contract, "*an everlasting covenant*" with God.[151] More precisely, the picture painted by Ezekiel presents a marriage contract, whereby Jerusalem is the "unfaithful, wanton" and sometimes even called "harlot wife" to whom God grants atonement over and over in spite of "her" serial "adulteries."[152] This covenant (or marriage contract) was traditionally repeated and confirmed annually during the celebration of the Passover or Pesach, which is sometimes also referred as Thanksgiving (or Eucharist) to God for the successful escape from Egypt, the Exodus.[153]

But what does "city" and "citizenship" signify for the followers of Jesus? In the Synoptic Gospels, not mentioning references to specific cities, the only abstract image of a city occurs in Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid."[154] The exact explanation of the metaphor identifying Christians with a city, however, is not elaborated by the Synoptic Evangelists. In the scene of the Temptation of Jesus, also in Matthew's Gospel, "the devil took Him up into the holy city" (εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν), and "set Him on the pinnacle of the Temple" (ἐπὶ τὸ πτερύγιον τοῦ ἱεροῦ).[155] This is the only instance in the Synoptic Gospels, where "the holy city" may be interpreted as the New Messianic Jerusalem. But neither of these stories uses *polis* or *politeia* in the Hellenistic sense as a metaphor. For Jesus' mostly rural, Galilean followers and disciples, Hellenistic *polis*-culture was probably alien and distant, and the metaphor of the city stood for the Temple instead.

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[150] Katell Berthelot, "Judaism as 'Citizenship' and the Question of the Impact of Rome" in *In the Crucible of Empire: The Impact of Roman Citizenship upon Greeks, Jews and Christians*, ed. K. Berthelot, and J. J. Price (Leuven: Peeter, 2019), 107-29.

[151] Ez 16.60

[152] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 144-52.

[153] Jn 6.11

[154] Mt 5.14

[155] Mt 4.5

Apostle Paul, "a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city," also well-known for his Roman citizenship, was the one who first introduced the metaphor of citizenship in the Hellenistic sense and employed it consistently in his rhetoric.[156] His allegoric use of the heavenly city and its inhabitants no longer depicts the holy city simply as the Temple, as inherited from Messianic Judaism. Instead, it alludes to the Hellenistic concept of *politeia*, a certain system of rights, a form of government, cultic commonwealth and, last but not least, a way of living, resulting in the Christian *politeia*. Paul generously granted this heavenly kind of citizenship to his followers. "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*" (*Ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι, ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολῖται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ).*[157] And yet Paul keeps the image of the non-physical Temple. The adherents themselves will provide the building stones for the dwelling place of the Lord, in which the Apostles and the prophets will be the foundation and Christ will be the cornerstone.[158] The synthesis of the Hellenistic concept of the city and the Jewish concept of the Temple might be the most visible in the Letter to the Hebrews:

> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (πόλει θεοῦ ζῶντος, Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἐπουρανίῳ), to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven (ἐκκλησίᾳ πρωτοτόκων ἀπογεγραμμένων ἐν οὐρανοῖς), to God the Judge of all (κριτῇ θεῷ πάντων), to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.[159]

Although Paul links the image to Mount Zion, he precisely describes a Hellenistic government of a *polis*, with court of justice, the assembly of the angels, and the most fundamental organization: the general assembly of citizens, the ecclesia, where only those belong who were "registered." Starting with Paul, citizenship itself becomes spiritually meaningful and

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[156] Act 21.39 and Act 22.28 respectively
[157] Eph 2.19
[158] Eph. 2.20-21
[159] Heb 12.22-24

independent as a concept. Those who previously had not held (worldly) citizenship and therefore belonged to no civic cult community, now became members of Paul's abstract cult community: "For our citizenship is in heaven" (ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει).[160]

In the New Testament, the symbolism of the city is the most prominent in the Book of Revelation. In the last chapters, following the pattern borrowed from Messianic Judaism, the image of "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth" is juxtaposed with "the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."[161] The heavenly "*gerousia*" with the "twenty four, crowned old men, sitting on thrones" (ἐπὶ τοὺς θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρας πρεσβυτέρους καθημένους) can be understood as a civic institution, probably symbolizing the twelve Jewish and twelve Gentile Apostles.[162] Although the significance of the Temple is still more relevant for the author, than the Hellenistic city image, it is of key importance that in the Book of Revelation the Temple cannot be seen anywhere in the city "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its Temple."[163] The inhabitants of New Jerusalem will implicitly become the building stones of this non-physical, heavenly Temple:

> He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the Temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem (τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλήμ), which comes down out of heaven (ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) from My God. And I will write on him My new name.[164]

The inner logic and narrative of heavenly citizenship appears almost in the purest form in the *Epistle to Diognetus*, usually dated to the mid-second century:

> For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked

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[160] Phil 3.20
[161] Rev 17.5 and Rev 21.2
[162] Rev 4.4
[163] Rev 21.22
[164] Rev 3.12

out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines (δόγματος ἀνθρωπίνου). But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners (πάροικοι). As citizens (πολῖται), they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners (ξένοι). Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. […] They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven (ἐν οὐρανῷ πολιτεύονται). They obey the prescribed laws (τοῖς ὡρισμένοις νόμοις), and at the same time surpass the laws (νικῶσι τοὺς νόμους) by their lives.[165]

This source, written in order to explain the basics of Christianity to a pagan, describes particularly clearly what citizenships meant in the Hellenistic world. Here the counterpoles of the Christian *politeia* are the earthly laws, the *nomoi* that regulate the life of both Christians and non-Christians in the earthly cities of the world. What is translated here "surpass the laws" (νικῶσι τοὺς νόμους) does not only mean that Christians simply "live on a higher level" than the earthly laws. Christians not only obey and fulfill the pagan "minimums" but they do even more. They overfulfil the *nomoi* by living the Christian conduct, the *politeia*. By contrast, also in the mid-second-century *Shepherd of Hermas*, these two systems of laws are incompatible, as can be seen:

> You know that you who are the servants of God dwell in a strange land; for your city is far away from this one. […] I do not wish thee to dwell in my city; but depart from this city, because thou obeyest not my laws. […] What, then, dost thou intend to do, having a law in thine own city, on account of thy lands, and the rest of thy possessions? Thou shalt altogether deny thy law, and walk according to the law of this city. See lest it be to thy hurt to deny thy law; for if thou shalt desire to return to thy city, thou wilt not be received, because thou hast denied the law of thy city, but wilt be excluded from it. Have a care, therefore: as one living in a foreign land, make no further preparations for thyself than such merely as may be sufficient; and be ready, when the master of this city shall come to cast thee out for disobeying his law, to leave his city, and to depart to thine own, and to obey thine own law without being exposed to annoyance, but in great joy.[166]

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[165] Epistle to Diognetus 5.1-9
[166] Sepherd of Hermas 50 Parable 1.1-6

The spiritual bond of the heavenly citizenship is so strong that it is pitted against the mundane citizenships on the Earth. Obedience to the earthly civic laws contradicts the observance of the heavenly civic laws. The two are not simply on different levels of the hierarchic ladder of citizenships with the right to appeal to the "heavenly court." Basically, the author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* is threatening with exclusion from heaven if the "citizen" does not deny the earthly civic laws. But why could these citizenships not coexist just like double and multiple citizenships coexisted in the pagan Mediterranean between different authorities? This chapter argues that the original problem goes back to the confliction of pagan communion and Eucharistic "Holy" Communion.

The primary aim of this chapter is to link the Christian concept of *politeia,* the heavenly citizenship to the sociological-religious aspect of the love-feast, the shared Eucharistic meal of the Christian communities: the Holy Communion. In order to prove this, the supporting arguments and evidence are as follows:

First, the use of the compositional phraseme and collocation of "blood of the covenant" for the Eucharist. The term appears twice in the Synoptic Gospels, in Matthew and in Mark and in both cases during the scene of the Last Supper. [167] John Reumann argues that during the first and second centuries CE the word διαθήκη, generally translated as "covenant" or in earlier tradition "testament," in fact often describes ordinary contracts and treaties in Greek legal language including civic legal practices.[168] When Jesus says "For this is My blood of the [new] covenant" (τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης) he enters into alliance (or signs a spiritual contract) with his disciples through Eucharistic communion.[169] On the other hand the phraseme is clearly borrowed from the Exodus when after receiving the Commandments "Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant (τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης)

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[167] Mk 14.24; Mt 26.28

[168] John Reumann, "Oikonomia=Covenant: Terms for Heilsgeschichte in Early Christian Usage,*" Novum Testamentum* 3, no. 4 (1959): 282-92.

[169] Mt 26,28; Mk 14,24; Lk 22,20

which the Lord has made with you according to all these words."[170] This direct continuity is also strengthened by the author.[171] Although often neglected, it is of key importance that in the Mosaic scene the "sprinkling of the blood of the covenant" follows a sacrifice that Moses and the Jews performed on an improvised altar, as a so called "peace offering" to God (ἔθυσαν θυσίαν σωτηρίου τῷ Θεῷ).[172] According to Lawrence Schiffmann, sacrifice of the type of peace offering (*zevah hashelamim* in Hebrew, for some reason translated as εἰρηνικός only outside the Torah) always signifies sacrificial meal and communion.[173] This can be interpreted, in fact, as the communion that creates the spiritual bond of the Mosaic covenant and indicates that the Christian "new" covenant also comes to realization by communion.

Second, the allegoric use of acquiring citizenship during descriptions of being received into the Church by baptism and the Eucharist. According to Albert Harrill, in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians the expression used for the baptism ritual "putting on Christ" (Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε) most likely corresponds to the Roman ritual of putting on a toga to become full right Roman citizen.[174] Moreover, Claudia Rapp argues that the Church Fathers often borrowed the notion of the *polis* and *politeia* to illustrate the process of becoming Christian.[175] Based on the catechetical homilies of John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE), baptism can be understood "as if entering a city gate," which means that by acquiring membership in the Church community they were gaining citizenship rights to the heavenly city. John Chrysostom writes: "We have been inscribed in a different *politeia*, the Jerusalem above."[176] John Chrysostom and other theologians use the verb πολιτογράφεσθαι consequently, which stands for the inscription of

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[170] Ex. 24.8

[171] Heb 10.29

[172] Ex 24.5

[173] Lawrence H. Schiffmann, "Shelamim Sacrifices in the Temple Scroll," *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* / ארץ-ישראל: מחקרים בידיעת הארץ ועתיקותיה כ (1989): 176-83.

[174] Gal. 3.27; J. Albert Harrill, "Coming of Age and Putting on Christ: The Toga Virilis Ceremony, its Paraenesis, and Paul's Interpretation of Baptism in Galatians," *Novum Testamentum* 44, no. 3 (2002): 252-77.

[175] Claudia Rapp, "City and Citizenship as Christian Concepts of Community in Late Antiquity," in *The City in the Classical and Post-Classical World: Changing Contexts of Power and Identity*, ed. C. Rapp, and H. Drake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2014), 153-66.

[176] John Chrysostom, *Catechesis* 4.29, 1.4-5.

one's name onto the list of citizens in Hellenistic *polis* law. Rapp also draws the attention to the term *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) often losing its rich resonance in translation as "church" which in the context of the *polis* stands for the civic institution of the citizens' assembly. She stresses how the Apostolic Constitutions in the end of the fourth century addressed the congregation as "*the holy ekklēsia of God which is listed by name* (ἀπογεγραμμένη)" most likely on the membership list inscribed onto the wall of the "heavenly building."[177] Rapp remarks: "That theologians employ the language of the law is striking. It suggests that these authors - far from rejecting the world in which they lived - had been groomed for a life of public leadership and were well versed in the relevant terminology, as was their potential audience."[178]

Although the final supporting argument is indirect and follows an inverse logic, it is still central and cannot be neglected in the broader perspective. As was demonstrated in the first part of this chapter, the connection of communion and citizenship is inseparable, being integral parts of the pagan paradigm and civic legal practice in Roman and Hellenistic *polis* laws. As it was shown, the *polis* and *politeia* metaphors, borrowed by Christian theologians, originally root to Hellenistic concepts. The relation of the spiritual bond, namely that between communion and citizenship, was so self-evident and went concomitant for the inhabitants of the Hellenistic world, that it would be illogical to assume that the Early Christian theologians used only one half of a complex and complemental notion.

Either way, it is clearly seen in these writings that through Eucharistic theology, the early Christians intended to establish a new political unity by adopting the Hellenistic concept of *politeia*. While the image of the heavenly *politeia* modelled the ideal way of living, by the fourth century Eusebius of Caesarea's and other Church Fathers' vision was to accomplish the Christian *politeia* on Earth, through the political program of salvation history. Therefore, in

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[177] Apostolic Constitutions 2.26.1.
[178] Rapp, "City and Citizenship as Christian Concepts," 162.

order to find a sufficient explanation for the social role of *agape,* it seems plausible to conjecture that the early Christian social care implied strong political theological aspects.

On the other hand, the principles of social care were not completely alien to pagan society. As Christoph Markschies summarised it:

> [The] picture that used to be a popular one, namely, that pagan antiquity knew no almsgiving, is a caricature. On the contrary, in the time of the empire many cultural and social institutions functioned on the basis of developed and often strict system of sponsorship. But only in the Christian community was this system turned into a continuing institution and organized strictly.[179]

Markshies alludes to the practice of euergetism, which was widespread in the Hellenistic world and a pillar of late antique civic society. Euergetism, unlike the strictly regulated liturgy-system in the Classical era, was an unbidden and voluntary contribution. It is important to emphasize, that euergetism was not a form of redistribution or progressive taxation.[180] This form of public benefaction was purely a question of prestige and informal pressure. Moreover, euergetism targeted only the fellow citizens of the benefactor and was not designed to help the needy non-citizen residents. As Peter Brown phrased it precisely: "Poverty, in itself, gave no entitlement. Those who received benefits from the wealthy received them not because they were poor, but because they were citizens."[181] From the Athenian financial support of the war-widows and orphans through the Roman *alimentatio* to the *annona,* every known example of social care in the pagan society targeted only those who had citizenship. Therefore, it is clearly traceable how Christian theology's logic associated social care with citizenship. By adopting the pagan pattern, the Christian concept of *politeia* in itself bore the meaning of social care, for which, as a legal precondition, communion established the affiliation.

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[179] Christoph Markschies, *Between Two Worlds: Structures of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 115.

[180] Paul Veyne*, Le pain et le cique: Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976), 88.

[181] Peter Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul: Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 81.

But Christian charity was something more than a question of prestige, as it bonded together not only the community but also the Divine. Gary Anderson wrote: "Charity was an act that established a contact point between the believer and God."[182] The basis for this notion can best be seen when Luke quotes Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor."[183] Charity is a mission from God. Moreover, as it was attempted to be presented above, it is the same divine love that streams from God through Christ, that the community invokes or imitates at the love-feast and that manifests in charity and social care. It might be the following section from the Letter to Diognetus that shows this way of modeling in its most complete entirety:

> On the contrary, he who takes upon himself the burden of his neighbour; he who, in whatsoever respect he may be superior, is ready to benefit another who is deficient; he who, whatsoever things he has received from God, by distributing these to the needy, becomes a god to those who receive [his benefits]: he is an imitator of God (οὗτος μιμητής ἐστι θεοῦ).[184]

By imitating the ideal heavenly society through the Holy Communion, Christians were invoking the heavenly *politeia* on Earth. Peter Brown's idea describes the same principle when he writes specifically about the Christian almsgiving: "The primal joining of heaven and earth was mirrored in society itself. The starkly antithetical poles of rich and poor were brought together, through almsgiving. Through these two primal joinings, the greatest gulf of all - that between God and humankind - was healed."[185]

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[182] Gary Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 7-8.
[183] Is 61.1 quoted in Lk 4.18
[184] Letter to Diognetus 10.6
[185] Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 6.

Conclusion

The present thesis offered a possible explanation for the contradiction concerning the charitable nature of the early Christian love-feast. Despite *agape*'s articulated association and metonymical identification with divine love and charity, the study tackled the issue of the prohibition of arriving hungry at the meal, and the regulation that only baptized Christian members could participate. Moreover, while in the doctrines the idealization of poverty is prominent, it is consensual that in the first three centuries Christians were predominantly coming from the urban middle class. That implies that the first Christians probably did not rely on permanent material support, and in particular food. The examination of early sources clarified that *agape* was inseparable from the Eucharist since they are integral aspects of the same liturgy. After presenting the historiography of the issue, the thesis argued that despite their different local variants, even when they were celebrated on different days, *agape* and the Eucharist were two cohesive parts of one rite, with the primary social religious function to establish communion between the adherents. Following the examination of the pagan origins of the ritual, the thesis presented how Christianity transformed the inner mechanism of communion, by abandoning the pagan blood sacrifice and Second Temple Judaism's halachic sacrificial laws, and by the divinization of the profane "carrier materials," bread and wine. The thesis intended to point out how early sources about the Eucharist put a great emphasis on the question of participation and unity. While scholarship often settles with the explanation coming from the initiative nature of the First Communion as a onetime *rite de passage* to the "Christian mystery," the thesis argued that the primary function of the rite was to establish communion among the adherents, which was repeated on a weekly basis. The thesis argued that the metonymically identified divine love created the spiritual bond of the "Holy Communion" within the Christian congregation.

By linking *agape*, *koinonia,* and *politeia,* the analysis aimed to draw an analogy between the pagan understanding of the notion of social care and the Christian concept of the "heavenly citizenship." The social-religious analysis of the functions of the pagan sacrificial meal revealed that in the pagan paradigm communion took on more than just spiritual aspects. Most importantly, it served as a precondition for citizenship in the Hellenistic legal tradition. By outlining a parallel between the Hellenistic concept of citizenship and the Christian concept of "heavenly citizenship," the thesis argued that in the Christian paradigm, the concept of *politeia* in itself already bore the meaning of the principles of social care. Thus, the present study was devoted to demonstrate that the love-feast was not merely a tool of Christian social care, but the rite was meant to draw the cultic boundaries of the community, which laid down the foundations of the political unity and solidarity among Christians. Therefore, while the thesis attempted to refute that the love-feast's primary social function was to feed the poor, it offered a possible solution to why it was still associated with charity. Namely, the thesis suggests that the Eucharistic meal could serve as some kind of a symbolic pledge for Christian social care, but strictly within the community. This hypothesis may also support the social approach widely used in contemporary scholarship which explains the "Christian success" by its role as a proto-social insurance system in late antique society. Accordingly, the Christian "covenant," strengthened at the Eucharistic meal, assured the adherents that in the case of need, the community will help them or their family. This potential micro-economic strategy would also explain the personal motivation behind the striking wealth that the Church acquired with astonishing speed.

A secondary, but important result of the thesis was the identification of the first Christians with the non-citizen residents of the larger cities of the Mediterranean. To date, scholarship has surprisingly neglected the issue of citizenship. Applying interdisciplinary methodology, namely using sociology of religion in the reconstruction of late antique social

history could further narrow the research of Christianity's social basis in the first three centuries, where sufficient data is unfortunately missing. The social-economic status of non-citizen, yet free groups (such as the groups of ξένοι, πάροικοι, παρεπίδημοι, or μέτοικοι) perfectly fits the picture about early Christians' social basis, including the Jews of the Diaspora, detailed above.

Regarding future research based on the present work, potential new foci may include the examination of different strategies to avoid participating in pagan communions by those Christians and Jews, presumably in the minority, who still wanted to have citizenship rights. For instance, in the light of these results, it would be worth to reconsidering the general view of the *fiscus Iudaicus*, imposed by Vespasian after the destruction of the Second Temple, usually interpreted only as a great extra tax-burden on the Jewish communities. On the other hand, the tax exempted the Jews from sacrificing to the emperor and the Capitoline gods. Could it be analysed as a "legal loophole" in the Roman citizenship tradition and a way of paying the obligatory tribute to the "Capitoline gods" through representatives, while avoiding participation at pagan communions? Christians considering themselves "the citizens of Jerusalem" centuries after the Second Temple's destruction is also a remarkable strategy. How could this self-identity function under Greco-Roman citizenship laws? How this "fictional" communion, from a pagan perspective, was compatible with pagan communions and civic laws in practice?

Another possible direction of future research may be the analysis of the normative history of Christianity concerning its self-identification as *politeia*. The *Shepherd of Hermas* quoted above, represents a very radical, dualistic view, while the *Epistle to Diognetus*, dated approximately to the same time, betrays a completely different political thought, a moderate coexistence and balance of the earthly laws and the Christian conduct. Do they represent two phases of a single development of the concept of *politeia* or are they two simultaneous schools

of thought? How and when did this change in the Christian paradigm take place or how did the two merge? How could the "aliens on Earth" become integral parts of late antique civic society? By the third century CE, a certain "optimism" appeared among premillennialist Christian authors concerning the "world to come." Was the Christian *politeia* only a matter of eschatology? To what extent did Christian social care and solidarity imitate, anticipate or invoke divine love and the City of God on earth? The principle of social care is central in our modern understanding of statehood. But how did the imperial ideology of the Roman "minimal state" treat this question on the level of representation? And how did this representation change with the Christianization of the Empire?

While the present thesis focused on the analysis of the love-feast's social aspects, it also intended to provide a basis for answering some of these questions in future research.

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