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“All is Pure for the Pure”:
Redefining Purity and Defilement in Early Christianity,
From Paul to Origen

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Moshe Blidstein

University College

April 2014

Short Abstract

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Two broad motivations, at some tension with each other, were at the basis of Christian purity discourse. The first was a substantive motivation: the creation and maintenance of anthropologies and ritual theories coherent with the theological principles of the new religion, and the integration of purity traditions and concepts into these worldviews and theories. The second was a polemic motivation: construction of Christian identity by laying claim to true purity while marking the purity practices and beliefs of others (Jews, pagan or "heretics") as false. I trace the interplay of these factors through a close reading of second- and third-century Christian Greek authors discussing food abstentions, death defilement, sexuality and baptism, on the background of Greco-Roman and Jewish purity discourses.

This thesis demonstrates three central arguments. First, purity and defilement are central concepts for understanding Christian cultures of the second and third centuries. Second, Christianities developed their own conceptions and practices of purity and purification, distinct from those current in contemporary and earlier Jewish and pagan cultures, though decisively influenced by them. Third, concepts and practices of purity and defilement were shifting and contentious, an arena for boundary-marking between Christians and others and between different Christian groups.

Long Abstract

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This thesis examines the meanings of purification practices and purity concepts in early Christian culture, as they were articulated and formed by Greek Christian authors of the first three centuries, from Paul to Origen. As purity and defilement are especially suited for articulating difference, hierarchy and change, these concepts were essential for early Christians, shaping their understanding of human nature, sin, history, and ritual. They were central for answering many of the key questions for which Christians of the first centuries sought answers: What is the difference between Christians and non-Christians? How can a pagan or a Jew become a Christian? What happens when a person sins, and how can sin be allayed? In parallel, the major Christian practices embodying difference and change, baptism, abstinence from food or sexual activity, were all understood, emoted and shaped as instances of purification.

Despite the importance of purity and defilement for early Christian thought and practice, there is little scholarship to date which explores the development of these concepts. Purity is seldom studied for its own right, especially not in the period discussed, and little connection is made between purity as understood in different domains of Christian writing: in anti-Jewish polemics on the dietary laws, in discussions of Christian rituals, and in exhortations and arguments about sexuality. This scholarly silence is to a great extent a legacy of the church fathers themselves, who polemicized against Jewish purity rituals. This thesis attempts to fill the scholarly lacuna by examining the development of purity concepts in early Christian writings across a number of central topics: food customs and laws, purification from death defilement, sex defilement and the purification of baptism.

In their purity practices and discourse Christians had much in common with Greco-Roman religions and Judaism, but were nevertheless innovative on many fronts. Purity and defilement rules served all ancient religions to negotiate the difference between the divine and human realm, to construct borders between social groups, and to signify and embody changes people underwent in their lives. Christians, too, used purity and defilement to address these issues, but differently. The new anthropologies and theologies developed by Christians required an innovative approach to purity, one in which the management of purity and defilement was expressed through ritual and bodily practice but also related to the person's moral aspects: agency, interior faculties and relationship with supernatural entities. These dynamics of continuity and change in Christian purity discourse are exemplified in the title quote from the pseudo-Pauline Epistle to Titus (1:15): "To the pure all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure." Both the Christian preoccupation with purity as well as the radical innovativeness of Christian purity discourse are prominent in this quote, which declares all purity distinctions to be subsumed under the distinction of belief and unbelief.

Two broad motivations, at some tension with each other, were at the basis of Christian purity discourse. The first was a substantive motivation: the creation and maintenance of anthropologies and ritual theories coherent with the theological principles of the new religion, and the integration of purity traditions and concepts into these worldviews and theories. Christian writers sought to understand what sin does to a person and how it can be removed, and purity and defilement were central concepts in the formulation of the solution to these problems. The second was a polemic motivation: construction of Christian identity by laying claim to true purity while marking the purity practices and beliefs of others (Jews, pagan or "heretics") as false. The most common strategy for this was to designate the purity of others as relating to the level of the external body only, as opposed to their own purity which relates to the internal aspects of soul or heart.

Following an introduction, the thesis consists of five chapters: a chapter on purity and defilement in the Greco-Roman world and in Judaism, followed by four chapters on each of the main topics of early Christian purity discourse: food, death, sex and baptism.

In chapter 1, I describe in brief how purity and defilement were practiced and discussed in the Greco-Roman world and in Judaism. Several types of purity and defilement were in

operation in ancient religions. The first type was temporary and mundane, a defilement occurring when there was an obstruction to the normal order or when categories were mixed up. Typical examples are blood transgressing the boundaries of the body, or the dead intruding upon the living; defiled persons required relatively simple purifications in order to enter temples. A second type of defilement followed exceptional actions, typically deliberate, such as murder or adultery. Here purification required both punishment by the community and ritual actions, such as sacrifice. A third type, which became more and more significant in the first centuries CE, was the defilement of the individual by his evil actions and dispositions and its purification through asceticism, philosophy or repentance. This purification could be a life-long pursuit of an ideal of purity that could rarely be reached.

Purity received an unusually central role in Judaism. Purity from temporary defilements was highly valued among significant portions of the Jewish population in the first century BC and CE, and Jewish writers made much use of purity terms to describe moral virtues and sins. For the interests of this thesis, purity in late Second Temple Judaism is important for understanding the ground from which Christian conceptions grew or reacted against, while second and third century Judaism provides a comparison for contemporary Christianity. The following two chapters, on food and death, focus on areas in which Christianity's perception of purity was fundamentally at odds with the perception of Jewish and Greco-Roman religions, leading to a total lack of sympathy towards the purity rules of these religions.

Chapter 2 discusses the purity and defilement of food. Issues of food purity served as a focus for the construction of Christian identity in the first and second centuries, and it is from here that purity issues received their polemic character. While the earliest NT sources rejected only some secondary Jewish food purity laws, by the end of the first century the Levitical dietary laws themselves were under dispute, creating the basis for all subsequent opinion. Most second- and third-century Christian writers agreed that food, in principal, cannot become impure, and that the application of purity status to food characterises Jews or heretics.

The discussion is constructed around two types of evidence which contradicted this consensus, creating an opportunity for discussion. The first was Christian observance of food abstinences, especially from food offered to idols, and their description using terms of purity and defilement. The second was the dietary laws of Leviticus, in which scripture speaks of

certain foods as impure. Early Christian writers put forth a variety of readings - allegorical, historical, ascetic and demonological - to contend with the implications of the dietary laws for a theory of purity. These readings represent a reconstruction of the notion of defilement on the foundation of free will rather than nature. Although this may appear to be a radical move undermining the basis for a "real" distinction between various foods, I argue that it in fact retained a notion of impurity while using a new moral language which accorded with the theological and anthropological outlook of early Christians.

Chapter 3 turns to another area in which the idea of purity was nominally rejected: purification from death defilement. Here too, Christian writers spoke of death defilement in a polemic context, characterizing purification from death defilement as a Jewish preoccupation, which Christians should not practice. A close reading of the texts indicates that Christian purity discourse in this area is better understood as constructing Christian identity, rather than reflecting contemporary practice. And yet, as compared to the energy expended on contending with issues of food purity, death defilement was usually ignored by early Christian writers, indicating that death defilement was a less suitable object for anti-Jewish polemic. The reason for this, I argue, lies in the deep transformations which Christianity brought about in perceptions of the dead human body and in perceptions of sacred space. Due to these transformations, death defilement became a totally unviable option for Christian ritual.

The following two chapters focus on sex and baptism, areas in which the focus of Christian discourse was not on the rejection of Jewish purity practices but rather on the creation of new notions of bodily purity and defilement. The domain of sexuality, discussed in chapter 4, was frequently described using purity terms. This imagery drew from a number of traditions - Greco-Roman sexual ethics, imagery of sexual sin from the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple texts, and both Jewish and pagan purity laws, all seen through the lens of Paul's imagery of sexual sin.

Two broad currents characterised Christian sexual ethics in the second century: one upheld marriage and the family as the basis for a holy Christian society and church, while the second rejected all sexuality, including in marriage. Writers of both currents made heavy use of defilement imagery. For the first, sexual sin was a dangerous defilement, contaminating the Christian community and severing it from God; some writers also recognized intercourse or

menstruation as a temporary defilement, preventing religious activities (a remnant, or perhaps resurgence, or a truce-perception of purity). For the second, more radical current, sexuality itself was the defilement, and a Christian who wished to be a “temple of God” must not succumb to it; virginity or continence alone were pure. I focus on the way purity discourse served the rhetorical interests of each current. For the first, purity language was a way of emphasising the difference between Christians and pagans, but also a way of constructing an alternative sexual purity model to that of the radical anti-marriage sects. For the second, purity language worked to blur the borders between sexual sin and sexuality in general; typically, pure virginity was opposed to defiled adultery, excluding a middle option of pure marriage.

Defilement imagery concerning sexuality is especially prominent in the writings of Origen. Many of the ideas found in the earlier traditions and in the two second-century currents are synthesised here into a new (at times inconsistent) theory of sexual defilement. Although Origen did not prohibit marriage, he saw sexuality as defiled, the quintessential expression of human corporeality, closely connected with sin though not synonymous with it. I argue that Origen was the first Christian thinker who integrated the notion of temporary sexual defilement found in the Hebrew Bible with the second-century Christian notion of essential sexual defilement, creating a nuanced conception of defilement which was to have great influence in the future.

Chapter 5 discusses baptism, a ritualization of the Christian perception of purity. Most authors who wrote about baptism in the second and third century characterised it as an act of purification, an understanding which is supported by the imagery of the ritual itself and by the Jewish and pagan parallels. This understanding made baptism dangerously similar to Jewish ritual; the first section of the chapter therefore focuses on the efforts of Christian authors to differentiate between Christian baptism and Jewish rituals. Here we again witness the importance of identity construction for the shaping of purity discourse.

In the next section, I investigate what exactly baptism was thought to purify. Some authors speak of a purification from past sins, others from Sin as a cosmological or ontological entity; some of materiality itself, yet others of “the flesh,” the “fire of lust” or even impure spirits. This identification of baptism – a physical act of washing – with purification from what would seem to be non- or semi-physical entities makes it a major site for addressing the

relationship between external and internal purity, the role of conscious intention as opposed to ritual action, and the place of spiritual entities. Many Christian authors (Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria are cases in point) carefully skirt this danger zone by emphasizing the conscious moral *metanoia* undertaken by the baptisand and the spiritual enlightenment which accompany it, all the while taking care to point out that other groups – pagans, Jews, or various “heretics” – believe they can be purified by the physical act alone. Other writers, however, do attempt to work out the spiritual workings of a physical ritual, indicating that it is a reflection of the duality of the human person and of the cosmos as a whole. Such theorizing can be found already in Valentinian texts such as the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, and is developed in Origen’s symbolic ritual theory or in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*’s demonological theory.

As in sexual issues, here too Origen supplies the most systematic usage of purity discourse; baptism and sex are linked through his understanding of infant baptism as purification from an inherent defilement linked to the sexual origin of the human body. Some Jewish-Christian sources also saw a degree of overlap between baptismal purification and purification from sexual defilement. Thus in the third century we find a number of sources constructing new ritual purity systems, in which sexuality and baptism are the opposite poles. Here we may see how Christianity not only reacted to external purification perceptions, but created new systems reflecting the anthropology and cosmology of the new religion.

This study leads to a number of general conclusions. First, far from being irrelevant for this period, purity and defilement are central concepts for understanding Christian cultures of the first three centuries. Second, second- and third-century Christianities developed their own conceptions and practices of purity and purification, distinct from those current in contemporary and earlier Jewish and pagan cultures, as part of the institutionalization and ritualization of the religion. The innovative aspect of the Christian perception of purity was not only the rejection of the “old” ritual systems, but the creation of a new ritual purity system in the midst of what could be seen as a general theoretical rejection of ritual. Third, throughout this period, concepts and practices of purity and defilement were shifting and contentious, an arena for boundary-marking between Christians and others and between different Christian groups.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
Scholarly neglect	1
Purity practice and purity discourse	4
A working definition of early Christian religious purity discourse.....	7
Examining dichotomies	11
Geographic and temporal range; subjects discussed	13
The texts and their authors	15
Chapter outlines	24
I: PURITY AND DEFILEMENT IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD AND IN JUDAISM	29
1. The Greco-Roman world	29
Temporary defilements	30
Crimes, sexual immorality and an impure mind	33
Initiation and the mysteries, Orpheus and Pythagoras.....	35
Asceticism in the first centuries CE	38
Summary	42
2. Purity and defilement in Judaism	43
Purity and defilement in the Hebrew Bible.....	43
Purity and defilement in Late Second Temple Judaism.....	49
<i>Food impurity and outsiders</i>	49
<i>Sexual sins and genealogical purity</i>	53
<i>The dietary laws</i>	55
<i>Animal blood</i>	57
<i>The anthropology of defilement</i>	58

Purity and defilement in Rabbinic texts	63
Summary	68
II: PURITY OPPOSED: EARLY CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIETARY IMPURITY	71
Introduction	71
1. Purity of food in the New Testament	71
Gospels.....	72
Pauline Epistles	76
Pseudo- and Deutero-Pauline letters.....	81
Acts of the Apostles	83
Summary	86
2. Christian dietary observances in the second and third century.....	87
Food offered to idols.....	87
<i>Food offered to idols as an identity marker</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>The impurity mechanism of food offered to idols according to Clement and Origen.....</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Jewish-Christian sources.....</i>	<i>95</i>
Blood and strangled animals.....	98
Meat, wine and fasting.....	100
Summary	104
3. Attitudes towards the biblical dietary laws in second- and third-century texts	105
Arguments concerning the dietary laws in the second century.....	106
<i>The symbolic alternative.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Jewish as opposed to Christian identity</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Historical and ascetic arguments.....</i>	<i>110</i>
Origen	114
Conclusions.....	121

III: PURITY IGNORED: EARLY CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEATH DEFILEMENT	125
1. Early evidence	125
2. The <i>Didascalia Apostolorum</i>	128
3. Origen	134
4. Methodius of Olympus	136
5. Archaeological evidence and Christian praxis	138
Conclusions	139
IV: PURITY IN PRACTICE: SEXUAL CONTACT, SEXUAL SIN AND DEFILEMENT IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY	141
Introduction	141
1. Sexual purity and defilement in Paul's Epistles	143
2. Pure marriage, defiled πορνεία	150
Sexual purity as familial hierarchy: early second century "household codes"	150
Clement of Alexandria	155
The <i>Sentences of Sextus</i>	159
The Valentinians	159
Pure christians, defiled pagans: second century apologists	161
Summary	163
3. Pure hearts, pure bodies	165
The <i>Shepherd of Hermas</i>	165
Tatian and the "Encratites"	167
The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles	169
Pseudo-Clementine <i>Epistles to Virgins</i>	176
The <i>Gospel of Thomas</i> : singleness and purity	177
Summary	179
4. The protological dimension: from Marcion to the Sethians	180
Marcion, Cassian, Saturninos	180

Creation myths from Nag Hammadi.....	182
Summary	187
5. Jewish-Christian texts.....	187
Pseudo-Clementine <i>Homilies</i> and <i>Recognitions</i>	187
The <i>Didascalia Apostolorum</i>	191
<i>Protevangelium of James</i>	194
Summary	196
6. The Origenist synthesis	197
Origen	197
Dionysius of Alexandria.....	207
Conclusions.....	209
V: PURITY RITUALISED: BAPTISM AS PURIFICATION IN EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS	213
Introduction	213
1. Baptism and Purification in the New Testament.....	216
The Pauline Epistles	216
The Gospels and Acts.....	218
Hebrews and 1 Peter.....	219
Summary	221
2. Baptismal purity discourse in the second and early third century.....	222
Jewish purifications, Christian baptism.....	222
<i>The Didache</i>	222
<i>The Epistle of Barnabas</i>	226
<i>Justin Martyr</i>	226
<i>Clement of Alexandria</i>	227
<i>Summary</i>	228
Baptismal theory in the second and early third century	228

<i>Early second century texts</i>	228
<i>Justin Martyr</i>	230
<i>The Excerpta ex Theodoto</i>	232
<i>The Gospel of Philip</i>	237
<i>Clement of Alexandria</i>	239
<i>The Acts of Thomas</i>	242
<i>Summary</i>	243
3. Origen	246
4. Jewish-Christian writings: many baptisms	252
<i>Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and Recognitions</i>	252
<i>Didascalia Apostolorum</i>	257
<i>Elchasai and the Elchasites</i>	258
<i>Summary</i>	261
Conclusions	261
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS	265
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS OF ANCIENT SOURCES	273
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SECONDARY LITERATURE	284

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Introduction

This dissertation examines the meanings of purification practices and purity concepts in early Christian culture, as they were articulated and formed by Christian authors of the first three centuries, from Paul to Origen. As purity and defilement are especially suited for articulating difference, hierarchy and change, these concepts were essential for early Christians, shaping their understanding of human nature, sin, history, and ritual. They were central for answering many of the key questions for which Christians of the first centuries sought answers: What is the difference between Christians and non-Christians? How can a pagan or a Jew become a Christian? What happens when a person sins, and how can sin be allayed? In parallel, the major Christian practices embodying difference and change, baptism, abstinence from food or sexual activity, were all understood, emoted and shaped as instances of purification.

Christian purity practices and concepts had much in common with the practices and concepts of Greco-Roman religions and Judaism, but were nevertheless innovative on many fronts. Purity served all ancient religions to negotiate the difference between the divine and human realm, to construct borders between social groups, and to signify and embody changes people underwent in their lives. But while Christians, too, used purity and defilement to address these issues, there was also a real shift in what purity meant, which can be seen both in practice and in discourse. This interplay between continuity and change in Christian purity practices and discourse is the subject of this thesis. Both the Christian preoccupation with purity and the radical innovativeness of Christian purity discourse are exemplified in the title quote from the pseudo-Pauline Epistle to Titus (1:15): “To the pure all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure,” which declares all purity distinctions to be subsumed under the distinction of belief and unbelief.

Scholarly neglect

Despite the importance of purity and defilement for early Christian thought and practice, there is little scholarship to date which explores the development of these concepts. While purity and defilement in the Gospels and Paul were thoroughly investigated in the past decades, and there are a significant number of studies which discuss various purity aspects in the first three

Introduction

Christian centuries,¹ there is no scholarly work which investigates Christian purity and defilement in the second and third centuries across several domains. In works which are dedicated to baptism or to sexual abstinence, two fields in which purity language is prominent and which are relatively well-studied, purity is rarely singled out for study. Even in scholarly literature on the body in early Christianity, a field greatly developed in the past decades, purity and defilement do not receive sustained discussion, especially in the ante-Nicene period.² Thus, despite its centrality, purity is treated as an ad-hoc concept accompanying other concepts such as *askesis*, abstinence and sin, and not understood for its own right. Furthermore, little connection is made between purity as understood in different domains of Christian writing: in anti-Jewish polemics on the dietary laws, in discussions of Christian rituals, and in exhortations and arguments about sexuality.³ It appears that purity and defilement are simply not seen as relevant concepts for Christianity beyond the first century and before the Middle Ages, i.e., in late antiquity.

How did this situation come about? To a great extent, it is the legacy of the Church Fathers themselves. Explicit discussions of purity and defilement in the church fathers typically occur in a polemical context, and this had a decisive influence on their portrayal. The formation of Christianity in the first centuries was constructed upon a fierce polemic against other religions, their beliefs and their rituals. Christian purity discourse worked on two levels.

¹ On dietary laws and the relationship to Judaism: Tomson (1999), Tomson (2000), Freidenreich (2011), 85-128; on social construction and order: Maier (1993); Penn (2005); on death defilement: Uro (2013); on baptism: Filoramo (1999); Stroumsa (1999a); Bovon (2000); on sexuality: Crouzel (1963), 44-65; Brown (1988), 1-208; Fonrobert (2000), 160-209; Branham (2002); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 77-128; Vuong (2010); on alimentary asceticism: McGowan (1999a); on purity of heart: Raasch (1966, 1968).

² The fourth century, with its wealth of ascetic phenomenon and associated texts, is in a somewhat better situation: see Brakke (1995); Shaw (1998); Clark, E. (1999); Vecoli (2007); Leyerle (2009); Clark, G. (2011).

³ The separation of domains is exacerbated by the common translation of ἀγνεία when appearing in a sexual context as “chastity,” rather than “purity” or “holiness;” this translation, while not erroneous, conceals the broader connotations of the term.

First, it used purity concepts to articulate theological, anthropological and ritual worldviews. Second, it sought to demonstrate the superiority of its purity conceptions to those of other religions and groups. From an early stage, purity rituals of other religions and groups were singled out as prime examples for irrelevant and insignificant rituals, to which true worship and ritual should be opposed. The strategy was to differentiate Christian from non-Christian purity practices and concepts as much as possible by claiming that Christian purity concepts are essentially spiritual and moral, and concern purification from sin, while those of other religions are corporeal and external, and concern only purification from bodily defilement. An explicit discussion of the bodily aspects of Christian purity ritual would have been detrimental to these polemical interests.

Such polemical formulations, which understood purity rituals to be simply irrelevant for Christians, were largely followed by scholars of Christianity.⁴ Recent work has shown that the New Testament texts, rather than simply rejecting ritual impurity, reflect its complex negotiation, drawing upon earlier traditions of relating to moral and ritual impurity. However, this revisionist perspective rarely goes beyond the first century, and so second- and third-century texts are still seen on the background of a simplistic notion of supersessionism, understanding early Christians to be devoid of ideas and practices of ritual purity. This is unjustified: second and third century polemics on purity show that purity was open for negotiation at a later period as well. Early Christian writers had to persuade their readers that their purification practices were more efficacious and significant than those of others. The polemics thus served as an impetus for the articulation of theories of purity and purification, which explained how a person can be truly defiled and purified through Christian practice and

⁴ E.g., Hübner (1992): “The foregoing presents fairly a well-unified picture: cleanness is no longer understood as cultic/ritual in the NT, rather as ethical/soteriological, and soteriological/sacramental. Therefore, over against the OT and ancient thought... a radically new understanding of reality for the relation of God to humanity is gained. There emerges an opposing force in the NT that appears quite pragmatic and harmless, though in the Patristic period (see below) has a disastrous effect and renews reactionary thinking in the categories of uncleanness and cleanness once overcome by Jesus and NT reflection.”

Introduction

belief. These theories, and the tensions which they respond to, are one of the recurrent themes of this thesis.

The polemical discussions are commonly taken to be the early Christian message on purity, to the detriment of the implicit Christian discourse on the subject, which was no less significant. Terms and images of purity and defilement are ubiquitous in early Christian writings, but they are usually a backdrop to the issues being developed, the idiom of the discussion and not its object.⁵ Thus, precisely because purity pervaded the thought world of Christian writers, it was generally taken for a given. This implicit purity discourse constitutes a better vantage point for discerning the writers' *habitus*, their non-reflexive practices embodying their principles, than their explicit, polemical purity discourse.⁶

Purity practice and purity discourse

This study focuses on the *purity discourse* created in Christian communities rather than on the *purity practices* of these communities. All we know of purity in early Christianity is mediated through texts; and it is principally the texts (and the beliefs of authors as expressed in texts), rather than the practices themselves, which I intend to investigate. While some facts on the practices themselves can be ascertained through the texts – e.g., baptism was conducted in the first centuries and was preceded by certain prayers and rituals – their character as *purity practices* was a result of the interpretation of the people who practiced them, to which, again, we have access only through the textual lens of Christian writers. Inevitably, an ancient historian can only analyse text or artifact, and only at second instance the practice itself.⁷ This is especially relevant for the history of Christian ritual, which has a strong polemical aspect and in which writers were continuously in dialogue with other purity traditions.⁸ This focus on

⁵ For purity and defilement as an idiom, see Valeri (2000), 112-3.

⁶ For the primacy of *habitus* compared to conscious articulated discourse, see Bourdieu (1990), 52-97.

⁷ See Buc (2001), Watts (2007), 1-36.

⁸ For the importance of texts in the construction of early Christianity and the study of discourse as an essential approach to the history of early Christianity, see Cameron (1994), 15-24; Lieu (2004), 8-11, 28-

purity discourse will facilitate the understanding of what early Christians themselves understood purity and defilement to be, rather than how their practices can be understood through purity concepts imposed from the outside.

Rules of purity and defilement are found in all cultures, though there is immense variety in the objects or actions seen as defiling, as well as the means of purification. The most influential general theory concerning rules of purity and defilement is Mary Douglas' structural-symbolic theory, first put forward in her book *Purity and Danger*.⁹ For Douglas, defilement is found in the ambiguous areas in and near the margins of society's structures, and, in parallel, in and near the margins of structural forms, primarily the human body.¹⁰ In her theory, purity rules are explained through their social function, which is to maintain the structures of society, thought and body by marking their margins and ambiguities. In a further publication, *Natural Symbols*, Douglas attempted to align different types of social groups and societies with different types of rituals practiced in these societies.¹¹ For example, a highly hierarchical society with strong internal social control will practice rigorous purity rituals symbolizing the internal social hierarchy; moral purity is expressed by ritual purity. In contrast, a small, competitive group attempting to differentiate itself from society at large will practice different types of ritual, which construct the external boundaries of the body but pay less attention to the internal hierarchy; witchcraft is extensively feared, a reflection of the fear of the group from society at large.¹²

61. For defilement as a tool in Roman rhetoric, see Lennon (2013), 167-87.

⁹ Douglas (2002 [1966]). In later work published by Douglas in the 90's, she has changed her perspective on several crucial questions; however her earlier work is much more influential and is seen as her major contribution to the discussion.

¹⁰ Douglas (2002 [1966]), esp. 115-122.

¹¹ Douglas (2003 [1969]).

¹² The first example is of high grid and high group, the second of low grid and high group. My description is of course highly condensed and does not do justice to the complexity of the theory. For different versions of Douglas' theory and discussion, see Spickard (1989).

Introduction

For the purposes of my study, Douglas' theory is helpful, but only to a limited extent. Her insights on the symbolic links between individual and collective body, namely that the body of the person parallels the social body, and that concerns about defining the borders of the former reflect and embody concerns about the borders and identity of the latter, are fundamental to any study dealing with the body. Furthermore, the more precise correlations identified in *Natural Symbols* are informative as possible backgrounds for various types of purity rituals and beliefs. However, Douglas' functionalist theory has been criticised for its lack of appreciation of historical diversity and change and the primacy of place it gives to the social dimension.¹³ The correlation of purity theories to social realities requires a "thick description" of the social situation in the maelstrom of early Christian movements and groups, sadly unavailable to the modern historian. Furthermore, the details of her theory are frequently not valid in the historical situation of early Christianity. In a masterful article on the attitudes towards nocturnal emissions in the third- to fifth-century church, David Brakke had similar findings:

While Douglas' formulation above provides the right questions for our study, a direct correlation between greater need to define social boundaries and greater anxiety about the integrity of the individual body does not obtain. Particularly when the group against which a community wishes to define itself is perceived to have such strong purity concerns, the lack of such concerns can become a mode of tight self-definition.¹⁴

Therefore, rather than correlate early Christian evidence to a general social theory, I seek to

¹³ See Jenson (1992), 76-8; Beard (1995); Yoo (2005), 8-15; Bradley (2012); Frevel and Nihan (2012), 6-9; Valeri (2000), 70-83. For criticism of functionalism as a tool for analysis of ancient ritual and a plea for attention to the interpretations given by ancient authors themselves, see Johnston (2008), 469-72.

¹⁴ Brakke (1995), 421; Gager (1982) believes Douglas' theory on the social meaning of body-soul relationships is directly relevant to early Christian doctrines on resurrection, incarnation and asceticism, correlating between views and supposed social features of the groups which espoused them. Carter (2002) makes extensive use of Douglas' group and grid theories to explain Paul's attitude towards sin.

place the transformations occurring in purity conceptions and the conflicts about them in historical context and to understand their relationship to the textual and practical traditions of purity from which they sprung. The turn from the general to the particular is in accordance with the “recent scholarly trend [...] to focus on the internal mechanisms of purity systems within specific communities, and the impact of those systems on a community’s activities, beliefs and traditions.”¹⁵

An alternative methodological approach developed over the past decades is of defilement as arising not from an artificial or culture-driven structure, but rather from a natural reaction of disgust towards certain actions and substances, even if mediated by culture. This direction offers a compelling framework for explaining how morality is emotionally embodied through practices of purity and defilement.¹⁶

A working definition of early Christian religious purity discourse

Since this study focuses on purity discourse, it is essential to determine which texts are to be discussed under this title, that is, which texts may be considered relevant to the understanding of the development of purity discourse over the period. We shall delimit our subject in a number of ways. Beyond geographical and temporal boundaries to be detailed below, we shall use both lexical and substantive criteria. The discussion in the thesis will focus on texts which *both* a) include the relevant lexemes, and b) use them in certain ways, explained below.

In Greek, the language of the great majority of the texts examined, the two most common words for “pure” are καθαρός (and the associated καθαρμός, purification; καθάίρω, to purify) and άγνός (and the associated άγνεία, purity; άγνίζω, to purify). The semantic fields of these terms are different, though with significant overlap: καθαρός refers both to physical cleanliness and to metaphysical purity, whether religious or secular; άγνός usually refers to metaphysical purity of a religious character. άγνός may shade into “holy”, especially in Classical Greek; in

¹⁵ Bradley (2012), 17.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Kekes (1992); Haidt et al. (1997); Miller (1998). For an application in biblical studies, see Kazen (2008).

Introduction

Jewish and Christian Greek, however, there are few clear attestations for this meaning.¹⁷ Both καθαρός and ἄγνός may be used for purity relating to the sexual sphere, though the latter is more common. Indeed, ἀγνεία is commonly rendered as “chastity” both in classical and Christian texts, though in my opinion this is often an imprecise translation, obscuring the other purity connotations of the term.

Defilement, both physical and metaphysical, is connoted most often by μιάρός and the verb μιαίνω or μολυσμός and the verb μολύνω.¹⁸ It is very common, however, to find impurity connoted by negation - ἀκάθαρτος, ἄναγνος. An associated term with more emotional force is βδελυρός, “disgusting,” or “abominable.”

The connotations of these terms are all quite wide, frequently general and imprecise, and not necessarily religious; therefore, many instances of their usage are not relevant for our investigation. First, on the most mundane level, καθαρός could be applied to a person or an object when it was physically clean and washed, or physically unmixed or unstained with a foreign substance; μιάρός or ἀκάθαρτος when the opposite was the case. This usage of the terms, which has little to do with religious or cultural purity, is not under discussion here. A second usage of impurity language is that used to convey emotions of disgust and contamination. These emotions need not be religiously motivated or have any religious significance: disgust is a general human and even animal response, and may be expressed in a culture towards certain foods, animals or people without it being articulated through religious language, laws or rituals. This type of usage is not the focus of our discussion, which is

¹⁷ Liddell and Scott (1996); Arndt (2000); Lampe (1961), s.v. For discussion of the terms' respective fields in Greek literature, see Parker (1983), 1-17; Rudhardt (1992), 163-75; Varenhorst (2008), 81-6; Robertson (2012). In this study I shall almost always translate both as “purify,” “pure,” since there is no suitable English term which captures the distinction. Translating one as “cleanse” and the other as “purify” is quite arbitrary. ἄγος/ἐναγής, denoting pollution or guilt resulting from a crime in earlier Greek literature, is rare in early Christian texts; see Lampe (1961), s.v.

¹⁸ An additional term meaning “impure” or “defiling” is κοινός; its extension from its more usual meaning of “common” to the impurity sphere started in late second temple literature, and from there passed into the New Testament and later Christian usage. See below p. 72 n. 2.

interested in the religious role of purity and defilement. However, when disgust is articulated or validated religiously or is expressed through religious rituals or laws, it comes into our ambit.

A third type of usage of purity and defilement language is to describe the general moral status of people, which may or may not have religious consequences. In these cases, the author's intention was not to imply that the person is free or not of a specific defilement, but rather to add general rhetorical edge to their praise or condemnation of a person or action. This ad-hoc usage borrows the positive connotations of purity language (or vice-versa) but without implying a larger worldview connected to it, and is therefore less significant for our endeavor. To determine whether a certain case of purity language is specific or general, we must look at its context. For example, when "pure" appears without further elaboration as one adjective in a list of positive adjectives describing a person, it is reasonable to see it as more general and less significant. On the other hand, when a number of purity terms appear, and especially when the relations between these terms are specified (e.g., a specific defilement is opposed to purity, purification from defilement is called for, impurity is identified as opposed to holiness), this is a more significant text. In these cases, purity or defilement is not an unstructured general term, but a specific part of a conceptual structure.

Therefore, only certain instances in which terms of purity and defilement are used will be discussed here. First, the usage must have a religious dimension: a pure person is described or considered in the text as more suitable for approaching the sacred or the divine, while an impure one is less suitable. Second, purity and/or defilement are described as part of a conceptual structure, in relation to each other or in relation to other cultic terms (such as holiness or wholeness), and are not simply used ad-hoc.

A number of terms bear a close relation to purity, and thus merit discussion here. The first is ἅγιος and its derivatives, meaning "holy" or "sacred".¹⁹ This term is relatively rare in earlier Greek literature, but is used hundreds of times in the LXX to render the root שׁדק as well as

¹⁹ Other terms for holy or sacred are ὅσιος, ἱερός and σεμνός. These are less frequent in the New Testament and early Christian writers than ἅγιος. For discussions of the relationships between these terms, see Bromiley et al. (1964), s.v., Wartelle (1989).

Introduction

other terms relating to the divine and the sancta,²⁰ and then used copiously by Paul and most early Christian writers. There is an affinity between concepts of holiness and religious purity, as both are attributes of the divine and therefore necessary attributes of people who wish to approach the divine, or of places and objects linked to the divine. However, these terms are not synonymous. In general, while ἅγιος denotes what is positively set apart and consecrated to God, purity is essentially a negative concept, referring to a lack of defilement. Seen more dynamically, purification is the removal of defilement, while sanctification or consecration is a raising of status. The differentiation between the terms is seen especially concerning ritual purity (whether Israelite or Greek), in which purification is a temporary precondition for contact with the sacred, and not an end onto itself. When speaking of moral purity, however, the differentiation is not as clear, and in these cases the impurity caused by sin may be opposed to holiness rather than to purity, since there is no legitimate profane status. This indicates that the relationship between purity and holiness is contingent on the relative statuses of moral and ritual purity, a central question of early Christian purity discourse to be discussed in the thesis.

Another relevant group of words is that of corruption (φθορά) and incorruption or integrity (ἀφθαρσία).²¹ φθείρω can extend to mean to subject to decay or death, to destroy (physically or morally) and also to seduce. As such the meaning of these terms appears to be rather far from defilement, and is not used to connote defilement in Jewish Greek authors. However, second- and third-century Christian writers frequently used words of this group, sometimes together with terms of defilement, to describe their revulsion from sexual sin.²² Following post-first-century Greek usage as found in Plutarch and other writers, these words function as terms of moral disgust, and their appearance signals the emotional and rhetorical

²⁰ See Gehman (1954). ἅγιος very rarely (twice out of hundreds) translates terms of purity (טהר: Lev 10:14; בָּרַר: Jer 4:11) in the LXX.

²¹ For these terms, see Bromiley et al. (1964), s.v. φθείρω; Lampe (1961), s.v.

²² At times words of this group may take on meanings of defilement: see Lampe (1961), φθορά (2); Liu (2013), 122-3 concerning 1 Cor 3:16.

force of such sins.²³ As in the case of terms of defilement proper, this word group is at times used ad-hoc or more systematically as opposed to purity and/or holiness (in the case of φθορά) or as opposed to defilement (in the case of ἀφθαρσία). We shall discuss these terms only in the latter case, when φθορά appears to expand the borders of purity discourse.

Examining dichotomies

The central dichotomy of Christian purity discourse is that of sin vs. bodily defilement: this dichotomy is negotiated again and again throughout our corpus. At times, sin is strongly differentiated from bodily defilement, and interest in the latter is relegated to Jews or pagans; elsewhere, sin and bodily defilement appear to be conflated, with sin reified and made corporeal. Frequently, this dichotomy is described by scholars as reflecting an opposition of “moral purity” versus “ritual purity,” with the former relating to sin and the latter to bodily defilement with little moral significance. Thus Jonathan Klawans, in his seminal *Sin and Impurity in Ancient Judaism*, traces the development of various relationships – opposition, compartmentalization, merge – between systems of ritual purity and moral purity across the history of ancient Judaism, from the Hebrew bible to the Rabbis and the New Testament.²⁴ Clearly, in order to better understand the dynamics of Christian purity discourse, it is the shifts and continuities of this dichotomy which we should trace and analyse.

Conceptual dichotomies are artificial: they are cultural constructions created and maintained at certain historical junctures, serving certain interests. To understand how this dichotomy between sin and bodily defilement was constructed and what interests it served, the investigation must proceed on two levels. First, examine this dichotomy by unpacking “sin” and “defilement” into the various dimensions through which Christian purity discourse constructed them. Second, find an external vantage point outside of the dichotomy itself to serve as a theoretical framework for its examination.

For the first level, three dimensions of sin vs. bodily defilement appear most frequently in the texts:

²³ For the term in Plutarch, see Vamvouri Ruffy (2012).

²⁴ For alternative terminologies of Jewish purity, see below p. 44 n. 58.

Introduction

1. Inside vs. outside the body:²⁵ This dichotomy was used already in the Gospels to describe the relationship of sin and bodily defilement (Mark 7:15) and had a major role in subsequent Christian discussions. Sin/defilement can be seen as originating from the heart or mind, i.e., from the inside of the body, or as affecting only the outside of the body, not going beyond the skin.
2. Intentionality and agency: Sin/defilement may be a product of intentional action of a willful agent, or occur automatically and involuntarily.
3. Supernatural beings: Deities or demons may be involved to various degrees in defilement and purification, and this may determine the degree of moral value given to these processes.

In the thesis, descriptions of statuses of purity and impurity and actions of defilement and purification by early Christian writers will be examined through these dimensions. Together, these dimensions and the interactions between them can provide a precise picture of the relationship between sin and defilement.

For the second level, as an external vantage point, I will use a typology of “battle” and “truce.” These terms refer to the relationship between pure and impure as found in different religions and cultures, and will provide a general framework to understand the transformation of purity perceptions in early Christianity. Both “battle” and “truce” perceptions were found in Second Temple Judaism, Greco-Roman religions and in early Christianity. However, in Judaism and Greco-Roman religions truce perceptions were more dominant, while in early Christianity battle perceptions were dominant.

For truce perceptions, purity and impurity are statuses, rather than forces. Both purity and impurity are conceived as normal, a result and expression of human life and the order of the world. There is no attempt to totally eradicate impurity. Rather, purification consists in the separation of pure from impure and the careful management of the borders between things or people of different statuses, which are continuously breached and sealed again. An admixture is therefore seen as impure, as purity consists in separation. Purity is essentially a second-order

²⁵ Following Kazen (2002), 219-31.

mechanism: it safeguards and defines the borders of social groups, spaces and times, thus creating and constructing these entities and the order of the religious and social cosmos. This function is usually achieved through ritual. Purity and defilement have a moral dimension in the support they give to the primary structures of society.

In battle perceptions, purity and impurity are seen as two opposing, active forces: the former is good, the latter evil. Purity and impurity are aligned with the general struggle between good and evil. Therefore purity and impurity frequently merge with other common dichotomies: between holiness and unholiness, saint and demon, righteousness and sin, flesh and spirit, out-group and in-group. Since both purity and impurity are active forces, they may vanquish each other: a strong force of purity/holiness can drive out weak impurity and vice versa. The struggle between purity and impurity may be internalised – a person may contain both elements, and attempt to achieve purification by strengthening the pure aspects and weakening the impure. As primary mechanisms, purity and impurity have a moral aspect, but ritual is an important way of conducting and expressing the struggle between pure and impure.

Geographic and temporal range; subjects discussed

The thesis discusses Christian texts written in Greek and Syriac up to the time of Origen – the middle of the third century, including those extant only in Latin or Syriac translation. I also discuss briefly some of the Coptic texts found in Nag Hammadi, read in translation.²⁶ Geographically, I focus on the Eastern Roman Empire and Mesopotamia, i.e., the Greek- and Aramaic-speaking areas: specifically, Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor. The main fatalities of this linguistic and geographic concentration are the Latin North Africans Tertullian, Cyprian and Novatian as well as the (originally Greek) *Apostolic Tradition*, which may have been written in Rome.²⁷ All of these relate to issues of purity and defilement (especially concerning sex and

²⁶ Aspects of purity and defilement in fourth century Christianity have been more extensively studied than those of earlier periods, and will not be discussed here; see references above n. 2.

²⁷ Though many scholars believe it is an aggregation of sources from different areas and period between the second and fourth centuries; see Bradshaw et al. (2002), 1-19. *Apostolic Tradition* 15-21 has much interesting material on the baptismal process as purification, see Werblowsky (1957); Kelly (1985), 81-

Introduction

baptism), but their analysis and integration with the conclusions of this thesis will require a separate study. Other texts which I will not discuss although they may have been written in this period are the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Joseph and Asenath* and other apocryphal texts based on characters from the Old Testament. While some of these texts include references to purity and defilement, they are very difficult to date and to assign to a Jewish, Christian or Jewish-Christian context; datings usually range between the first centuries BC and the 3rd or 4th CE. These texts, too, await further study from the purity perspective.²⁸

I chose to concentrate on four subjects - food, death, sex and baptism. These subjects appear to me to include the most significant purity discourse in early Christian texts, both explicit and implicit. Furthermore, these subjects provide quite different vantage points on Christian purity discourse, allowing for comparison and analysis. Since these were the main areas of purity and defilement discourse also in the cultures from which Christianity grew, focusing on these subjects facilitates discussions of continuity versus innovation and counter-definition. Necessarily, this concentration means that some other issues receive less attention: Idolatry, discussed briefly in the context of food offered to idols; illness and healing in general and leprosy in particular;²⁹ and purification from sin in contexts other than baptism: penance,

93; Bradshaw et al. (2002), 82-135; Ekenberg (2010). And see also *Apostolic Tradition* 41.11 on sex and prayer. For Tertullian on purity and defilement, see especially *Idol.* 16-18; *Spect.* 8, 17; *Cor.* 12 (on idolatry); *Marc.* 2.18, 4.8-9 (on Jewish law); *Jejun.* 1-5, 14-15 (on food); *Bapt.* 4-5, 15, 18-20 (on baptism) with Yarnold (2001); *Ux.* 2.2; *Virg.* 7; *Pud.* 13-19 (on sex), with Conybeare (2007); Radler (2009); Cohen (2011). On moral and ritual transformations in Tertullian in general, see Stroumsa (1999b). For Cyprian, see *Ep.* 64 (58).5; 70 (69); 74 (73).5; *Laps.* 10, 15-17, 22-7 (on baptism, rebaptism and idolatry) with Burns (1993); *Eleem.* 2-3 (on inner and outer purification); *Hab. virg.* 2, 17-19 (on sex) with Dunn (2003); Hunter (2007), 120-22; Cohen (2011).

²⁸ See *T. Reub.* 5-6; *T. Levi* 9, 14-16; *T. Jud.* 23; *T. Asher* 1-4; *T. Jos.* 4, 6; *T. Ben.* 5-8, with Rosen-Zvi (2006) and Marcus (2010); *Jos. Asen.* 8; 12.5; 15 with Chesnutt (2005). A further text not discussed comprehensively in this thesis for reasons of uncertain dating is *P. Oxy 840*, which deals with baptism and purity in a polemical context; see Bovon (2000); Stewart-Sykes (2009).

²⁹ See Martin (1995) for Paul; Holman (1999) for Gregory of Nyssa, and Methodius of Olympus' *De Lepra*.

the purification/atonement afforded by Jesus in his death, purification in the eschaton and purification of sins through the eucharist. All of these subjects require separate studies which will integrate them into the framework developed in this thesis, and I hope to approach some of them in the future. Other areas are discussed throughout the thesis as cutting across the four subjects, but do not receive separate chapters: for example the defilement of “the other” (pagans, heretics or Jews)³⁰ and demonology.

The texts and their authors

The thesis' discussion is built around the various purity domains, and therefore synchronically rather than diachronically (though the chapters themselves proceed in proximate chronological order). This provides sustained examination of each of the domains, facilitating the identification of common themes as well as dynamics between different authors and texts. To provide a diachronic perspective to complement the synchronic one, I will provide here some context and background on the major authors of the second and third century discussed in the thesis.³¹ In these brief expositions, I will focus on the aspects most relevant for the purity discourse of these authors.

The *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Didache*, and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, all of unknown authorship, are important sources for the early second century Christianity. *Hermas*, written in Rome in the first half of the second century, describes a series of revelations to the prophet Hermas, frequently in the form of parables explained by an angel.³² A central preoccupation of the book is how a Christian can repent from sin. This question is dealt with on personal social levels: the effect of sin and repentance on the person and his or her relationship with God, and the role of different types of people in the Church. On both levels, language of purity and defilement is used frequently to describe sin, repentance and righteousness, informing the understanding of baptism and sexual sin as purity issues.

³⁰ See Frankfurter (2001); Lieu (2002); Penn (2003).

³¹ Authors and texts appearing less frequently will be discussed upon mention.

³² For overviews, see Ehrman (2003), II.162-72; Maier (1991), 55-86; Osiek (1999), 1-38.

Introduction

The *Didache*, probably redacted in the early second century from earlier materials, is composed of two parts: the first consists of ethical instructions, and the second discusses church rituals.³³ It is the second half that interests us here, for its discussions of baptism and eucharist provide a perspective on earliest Christian ritual, in which purity plays a central role. The context of the *Didache*'s production is unclear, especially since its various parts were probably written separately; nevertheless, the language and ideas propounded in the text, as well as polemic against Jewish fasting practices, suggest Christian communities in a close relationship with Christian or non-Christian Jews. This proximity is reflected in the conception of baptism and eucharist, discussed in terms close to that of the purification and sacrifice rituals of first-century Judaism.

The *Epistle of Barnabas*, written sometime in the first three decades of the second century, is the earliest polemical document arguing against Judaism.³⁴ Its core argument is that Christians, not Jews, understand the scriptures correctly, and that God's covenant with the Jews was broken forever with the sin of the Golden calf. The biblical laws concerning food, sacrifices, Sabbath, circumcision etc. were never intended to be performed in practice, but were rather to be understood symbolically as relating to moral issues or typologically as foreseeing the coming of Christ. As *Barnabas* is the first Christian document relating extensively to the biblical food laws, which Christians saw as a prime example of Jewish purity laws, it is a key text for the development of purity discourse in the context of anti-Jewish polemic.

The mid-second to the third century saw the flourishing of Christian literature in several genres: apologetic literature, narratives on apostles and martyrs, church orders, homilies and theological and exegetical treatises. Each of these provides a somewhat different type of purity discourse, according to their rhetorical interests.

In the second century, Christian writers were strongly invested in producing apologetic works, which justified Christian doctrines and practices in contrast to those of pagan and

³³ For overviews, see Ehrman (2003), I.405-15; Niederwimmer (1998); Draper (1996).

³⁴ Ehrman (2003), II.3-11; Paget (1994).

Jews.³⁵ Two apologetic authors are central for our purposes – Aristides and Justin Martyr. The *Apology* of Aristides, written in Greek in the early second century, may be reconstructed from a 6th cent. Greek version and in an earlier Syriac translation, as well as Armenian and Greek fragments.³⁶ Aristides divides humanity into pagans, Jews and Christians; the beliefs and cults of the former are refuted and ridiculed, while those of the Jews are relatively good, but still lacking. The Christians' excellent virtues and worship are then opposed to the others in a description which focuses more on their practice than their beliefs. Aristides uses purity language to describe the dietary and sexual customs of the Christians, as well as to explain repentance in baptism. The *Apology* thus affords an opportunity to examine how purity discourse is used to compare Christians to both pagans and Jews.

Justin Martyr's oeuvre is another such opportunity on a broader scale. Justin, born in Neapolis (Shechem) in Samaria around the turn of the first century, had a philosophical background, describing himself as a former Platonist who converted to Christianity. In the *Dialogue with Trypho*, written in the mid-second century, Justin argues with a (possibly fictional) Jew, seeking to prove the truth of Christianity and its superiority over Judaism. Justin's main argument is that the Jewish laws were relevant only temporarily, while Christianity is the true, eternal message of scripture. As in *Barnabas*, the food laws are rejected, though on quite different terms. On another front, Justin provides a description of baptism in which he explains why the Christian ritual is a superior purification to that of the Jews. Justin also wrote two *Apologies*, intended to justify Christianity for a pagan audience. Here we find the first lengthy description and explanation of baptism, in which Justin emphasises the repentance and illumination of the baptisand, as well as a description of the sexual purity of Christians.

The five early Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles – the *Acts of Paul, of Andrew, of John, of Peter and of Thomas* – are all narratives of the travels, miracles, speeches and martyrdoms of the Apostles. The Apocryphal Acts are dated to the second half of the second century (though parts of the *Acts of Paul* may have circulated earlier), and the *Acts of Thomas*, probably written in

³⁵ See Grant (1988).

³⁶ Grant (1988), 35-45; Pouderon (2003), 23-180.

Introduction

Syriac, to the early third century.³⁷ The Apocryphal Acts share many motifs with the ancient novel, though their sexual ethics and religious outlook appear intentionally opposed to this genre. Like the novel, the *Acts* too were contentious, seen by some of the Church's leaders as suspect in its theology and traditions and giving an overly central role to women.³⁸ Although the five *Acts* are independent texts composed by different authors, they share a number of central features. The apostle's main task in his travels is the conversion of the populace, and the narrative focuses upon the conversion of specific people, usually of the elite, both women and men. The apostle suffers persecution from the rulers and some of the populace, but succeeds in his mission through speeches, healings and other miracles. The Apocryphal Acts call for extreme sexual asceticism, and conversion and baptism typically include renunciation of sex, expressed in separating from a betrothed or husband and joining the apostle instead. These texts are the most explicit, detailed and direct witnesses for this sexual ethic in the second century, and are therefore central for tracing the development of ideas of sexual purity. This is especially true of the *Acts of Thomas*, the earliest significant witness for Syriac Christianity, which also provides evidence on the practice and theory of baptism in its milieu.

Two texts, the third-century source contained in the Ps.-Clementines and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, widen our view to Jewish-Christian communities, where Jewish traditions on purity had the most explicit and direct role. The Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* recount the miracles, conversions and speeches of the apostle Peter, as told by Clement, future bishop of Rome. Although these texts were composed at a late date – the *Homilies*, extant in the original Greek, in the fourth century, and the *Recognitions*, extant only in Latin and Syriac translations from the fifth, it is generally recognized that they are both based on a common, shorter text, written in Syria in the middle of the third century.³⁹ This common text contained,

³⁷ For the relative dating of these texts, See the articles by Pieter J. Lalleman, “The Relation between the *Acts of John* and the *Acts of Peter* and Willy Rordorf, “The Relation between the *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of Paul*: State of the Question”, both in Bremmer (1998); Davies (1980), 6-9; Bremmer (2001); for the dating of the *Acts of Paul* see now Barrier (2009), 23-4.

³⁸ See Cooper (1996); Bremmer (2001).

³⁹ For overviews, see Irmscher and Strecker (1992); Jones (2005). There have been many attempts to

embedded in a narrative proving that a person can overcome Fate (and astrology) through a decision to be baptised, evidence for beliefs and practices thought to originate from a Jewish-Christian milieu (affinities with an Ebionite or Elchasite community have been suggested). Many of these explicitly concern purification, and therefore are highly relevant for our endeavor. The Ps.-Clementines also discuss baptism, food laws, and sexual sin. “Jewish Christian” is a modern not an ancient term, and its definition has been much contested.⁴⁰ Here we use a practice-based definition: Jewish-Christian connotes a community which practiced rituals common in most Christian communities as well as rituals common in most Jewish communities (and generally not in Christian ones); this definition is therefore rather fluid, according to the extent of observances.⁴¹

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* is also an important source for unearthing Jewish-Christian practices and beliefs. The *Didascalia* is thought to have been written in Greek in the third century, though only fourth-century Latin and Syriac translations remain.⁴² The text, which focuses on defining correct practices and rituals in a community of Jewish-Christians, reflects a conflict between different groups over the degree to which Jewish Law should be observed.⁴³

reconstruct the various sources, a discussion which cannot be followed up here. In general, passages which appear in both the *Homilies* and the *Recognitions* are assumed to originate from the third century source; these, in turn, may have originated from earlier sources. For a history of the scholarship, see Jones (1993).

⁴⁰ See Taylor (1990); Paget (1999); Reed (2003); Marcus (2006).

⁴¹ This definition is naturally more useful for assessing texts speaking of practice (Ps.-Clementines, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, CMC, parts of Epiphanius’ descriptions in the *Panarion*), and less useful for those which speak only of beliefs.

⁴² For date, provenance and textual tradition see Stewart-Sykes (2009), 49-55, 89-91; Bradshaw (2002), 78-80; Vööbus (1979), I.23-68. Stewart-Sykes (2009), 49-55, argues that ch. 26 containing Jewish-Christian polemic should be dated later, to the early fourth century; but see the criticism of Marcus (2010), 600n.14.

⁴³ Conflicts and identity-formation between the various groups as reflected in the *Didascalia* are

Introduction

The author holds that only the Ten Commandments should be observed, while the rest of the Law was in force only temporarily. In addition to rejection of Shabbat and circumcision, the author argues at length against women who practice purification following menstruation, urges to ignore issues of death defilement and rejects what he sees as excessive dietary restrictions. This text thus provides evidence for conflicting third-century views on purity practices and beliefs, as well as their supporting reasoning.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen, the two great representatives of Alexandrian Christianity, are the most important writers for our endeavor. This is due not only to their extensive extant works, unparalleled in other Christian Greek authors of the period, but also to the unprecedented degree to which they attempt to integrate both the Old and New Testaments, including their purity concepts and language, into a comprehensive worldview which included ethics, anthropology, theology and cosmology. The Alexandrians are also unprecedented in the influence of philosophy (principally Stoic and Platonic, but also Aristotelian) on their thought and in their philosophical sophistication.

Clement of Alexandria probably wrote most of his books around the turn of the second century. We shall use the *Paedagogus*, setting out correct comportment and behavior of Christians in matters of food, sex, clothing and deportment, and drawing heavily upon the ethical doctrines of the Stoics and Middle Platonists; the *Stromateis*, a massive and complex work dealing with mostly with theology but also with many other subjects, such as the attitude towards marriage and sexuality; and the *Excerpts from Theodotos* and the *Prophetic Eclogues*, two short collections which appear strongly influenced by Valentinianism.⁴⁴

We shall briefly note some points on Clement's thought. In his works, Clement weaved together verses from the Gospels, Paul's Letters and the Septuagint, as well as citations from Greek literature and philosophical concepts. In the incorporation of the Septuagint into his writings, Clement frequently used symbolic and typological exegesis but also ascetic

discussed by Fonrobert (2001); Marcus (2010); Zellentin (2013).

⁴⁴ For textual issues, see Osborn (2005), 5-16; Heine (2008); Bucur (2009); for context and relationship with philosophy, see Chadwick (1966), 31-65; Lilla (1971); Edwards (2002), 18-25.

interpretations which broadened the meaning of specific laws to general statements.⁴⁵ Clement rarely inveighed against Jews or Jewish Law and exegesis, and his main opponents are the pagan cults and other groups of Christians which propogate false ethics or theology. His ethical system was based on a number of philosophical models: the Platonic model of the correct hierarchy and harmony between the superior and inferior parts of the soul, the Stoic extirpation of passions (*apatheia*), the Aristotelian “middle way” and the need to develop virtue through *ascesis*.⁴⁶ In the application of these philosophical systems, as well as in their combination with biblical ideas, he was strongly influenced by Philo, who practiced similar eclecticism. Issues of personal purification and defilement, whether as concerns practices of food, sex or baptism, were also mediated through these philosophical concepts.

Origen, born in 185, was by far the most prolific and influential Christian scholar of the third century writing in Greek. His immense corpus, only partially extant and mostly in Latin translation, includes several genres - anti-pagan apologetic in the *Contra Celsum*, a theological-philosophical treatise in *On First Principles*, and pastoral-spiritual guidance in *On Prayer* and *An Exhortation to Martyrdom* - but especially biblical exegesis in numerous homilies and commentaries on both the Old and New Testaments. The bible is dominant in Origen’s writing, to an extant not found earlier. Besides the unprecedented exegetical focus, all his writing is interwoven with biblical allusions and citations, and his language is strongly influenced by that of the bible. At the same time, Origen received an extensive philosophical education, and Plato (and to a lesser degree Aristotle and the Stoa) had a significant impact on his thought, though there is much controversy concerning the weights of these influences relative to the bible.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Origen’s thought is clearly indebted to the Alexandrians Philo (whom he mentions several times) and Clement (whom he does not); the influence of Valentinian writers on the one hand and the Rabbis on the other is more controversial.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ For Clement’s exegetical principles, see Dawson (1992); Osborn (2005), 56-80.

⁴⁶ On Clement’s ethics, see Lilla (1971), 60-117; Maier (1995).

⁴⁷ See Chadwick (1966), 66-94; Edwards (2002); Crouzel (1961).

⁴⁸ See Edwards (2002), 11-46; van den Hoek (2000); Strutwolf (1993); de Lange (1976); Markschies (2004).

Introduction

Origen's writings include major discussions of purity and defilement, ranging across all the areas discussed in this thesis – food, death, sex and baptism. In all of these areas he takes much from his predecessors, and nevertheless is almost always innovative; it is only with Origen that purity and defilement are reconsidered systematically and broadly as Christian concepts. Therefore I chose Origen as the chronological end-point of my thesis, and his writings are discussed last in most of the subject-chapters, as a culmination of trends found in the second-century authors. As a background to the question of the role and meaning of purity, we are interested in three major aspects of Origen's work: anthropology, biblical hermeneutic and the relationship with Judaism.

Origen held to a tripartite anthropology of spirit, soul and body.⁴⁹ The spirit is the divine element in the person, and is totally immaterial; it cannot be directly influenced by the person's actions, but can be obstructed or supported by them. The soul, which is the seat of personality and free will, includes higher aspects (the *nous*, *hegemonikon* or “the heart,” created according to the image of God) and lower aspects (the passions or the “fleshly soul”). If the former control the latter, the soul tends towards the spirit and away from the body, and vice versa; in this life, however, the soul is necessarily embodied. The moral status of the body is ambiguous.⁵⁰ In principal it is morally neutral, since good and evil come only from the decisions of the soul; however Origen frequently speaks with qualifications of the body as evil in some way, a notion to which defilement is strongly linked. Furthermore, the degree of materiality of the body is determined according to the spiritual level of the created being, so that angels, demons and humans have different kinds of bodies; so also the body of humans in different spiritual stages (e.g., in the resurrection, on heaven or on earth).

Since Origen was first and foremost an exegete, his biblical hermeneutics are the key to his thought. Frances Young states that with Origen, the bible first became a Classic, i.e., a text which serves as the foundation for *paideia*, the comprehensive education at the basis of elite

⁴⁹ For Origen's anthropology, see Crouzel (1955); Edwards (1992); Crouzel (1989), 87-98; Blosser (2012).

⁵⁰ See discussion in Blosser (2012), 38-59.

culture.⁵¹ This transformation, based on the conception of scripture as an embodiment of the *logos*, had a number of ramifications. It entails the multivalence of scripture, since different levels of understanding apply to people at different stages of their spiritual development; and it leads to acute attention to the bible in its entirety and to every detail of the scriptural text.⁵² For our purposes, this innovative hermeneutic meant that references to purification in the Old Testament received serious attention by Origen, and furthermore that they were understood by him on multiple levels: as relating to actual practice and as relating to psychological and spiritual advancement. As can be inferred from Origen's well-known parallelism of the senses of scripture to tripartite human anthropology, the "spiritual" or the "psychic" senses are not independent of each other or of the "literal" sense. The relationship between these levels of understanding was not uniform, shifting according to theological and polemical interests: at times Origen simply discards the "literal" sense of the verses, while elsewhere he retains this sense, integrating it with the psychological or spiritual sense.⁵³

Origen's relationship to Judaism is expressed primarily through his biblical hermeneutics.⁵⁴ Although some of his interpretations were borrowed from Jews and his philological project took the Hebrew text of the Old Testament as primary, his basic argument was that Jewish readers of the bible do not recognize Christian salvation, expressed in the higher/spiritual sense of scripture, because of their literalist exegesis. This argument is central for his common binary opposition of Jewish ritual purity to Christian moral or spiritual purity. At the same time, protecting Jewish laws from pagan attacks served his polemical interests in the *Contra Celsum*, and here we find many of the traditions most sympathetic to them. These exegetical dynamics made for a much more nuanced reception of biblical statements on purity issues than was found earlier.

⁵¹ Young (1997), 292-4.

⁵² See Torjesen (1986); Crouzel (1989), 61-84.

⁵³ For the relationship of the literal and higher senses see Dawson (2001), 65-82; for that of the psychic and spiritual, Dively Lauro (2005).

⁵⁴ See De Lange (1976); McGuckin (1992), and bibliographies there; Martens (2012), 133-60.

Chapter outlines

The thesis consists of five chapters: a chapter on purity and defilement in the Greco-Roman world and in Judaism, followed by four chapters on each of the main topics of early Christian purity discourse: food, death, sex and baptism.

In chapter 1, I describe in brief how purity and defilement were practiced and discussed in the Greco-Roman religions, the many diverse cults practiced throughout the Hellenistic and Roman Empires, and in Judaism, that practiced by Jews in the Hellenistic, Roman and Parthian empires. Several types of purity and defilement were in operation in ancient religions. The first type, corresponding to a “truce” impurity perception, was temporary and mundane, a defilement occurring when there was an obstruction to the normal order or when categories were mixed up. Typical examples are blood transgressing the boundaries of the body, or the dead intruding upon the living; defiled persons required relatively simple purifications in order to enter temples. A second type of defilement, corresponding to a “battle” impurity perception, followed exceptional actions, typically deliberate, such as murder or adultery. Here purification required both punishment by the community and ritual actions, such as sacrifice. A third type, an extension and interiorization of “battle” impurity, became more and more significant in the first centuries CE. This was the defilement of the individual by his or her evil actions and dispositions, conceptualized at times as a “defilement of the soul,” and its purification through asceticism, philosophy or repentance. This purification could be a life-long pursuit of an ideal of purity that could rarely be reached. These three purity types were generally distinct from each other, but there were also overlaps between them, and the vocabulary they used was virtually identical.

Though these three types of purity and defilement featured in both Greco-Roman and Jewish religions, purity received an unusually central role in Judaism. Purity from temporary defilements was highly valued among significant portions of the Jewish population in the first century BC and CE, and Jewish writers made much use of purity terms to describe moral virtues and sins. While purity in late Second Temple Judaism has received scholarly attention in the past decades, second and third century Judaism, in which purity rituals had to be interpreted anew for a religion without a sacred centre, have been much less investigated in this regard. For the purposes of this thesis, the former is important for understanding the ground from which

Christian conceptions grew or reacted against, while the latter provides a comparison for contemporary Christianity.

The following two chapters, on food and death, focus on areas in which Christian discourse associated bodily purity with Judaism and nominally rejected it. In these areas, Christianity's battle perception of purity was fundamentally at odds with the truce perception of Jewish and Greco-Roman religions, leading to a total lack of sympathy towards the purity rules of these religions.

Chapter 2 discusses the purity and defilement of food. Starting from the Gospels and the letters of Paul, food is the *locus classicus* for debates on the correct attitude towards purity laws. Issues of food purity served as a focus for the construction of Christian identity in the first and second centuries, and it is from here that purity issues received their polemic character. While the earliest NT sources reject only some secondary Jewish food purity laws, by the end of the century the Levitical dietary laws themselves were under dispute, creating the basis for all subsequent opinion. Most second- and third-century Christian writers agreed that food, in principal, cannot be impure, and that the application of purity status to food characterises Jews or heretics. Evidence from scripture or communal custom which indicated the contrary required explanation, and from these explanations we may see how writers translated the notion of impurity into concepts coherent with their world-view.

The discussion in this chapter is constructed around two types of such problematic evidence. The first was Christian observance of food abstinence, especially from food offered to idols, and their description using terms of purity and defilement by Paul. The second was the dietary laws of Leviticus, in which scripture speaks of certain foods as impure. Writers such as the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Origen put forth a variety of readings - allegorical, historical, ascetic and demonological - to contend with the implications of the dietary laws for a theory of purity. These readings represent an attempt to reconstruct the notion of defilement on the foundation of human free will. Although this may appear to be a radical move undermining the basis for a "real" distinction between various foods, I argue that it in fact retains a notion of impurity while using a new moral language which accords with the theological and anthropological outlook of early Christians.

Chapter 3 turns to another area in which the idea of purity was nominally rejected:

Introduction

purification from death defilement, commonly practiced throughout the ancient world. Here too, Christian writers spoke of death defilement in a polemic context, characterizing purification from death defilement as a Jewish preoccupation, which Christians should not practice. It is quite unclear, however, to what extent Christian death impurity practice was in fact different from that of pagans or Jews. A close reading of the texts in their historical contexts indicates that Christian purity discourse in this area is better understood as constructing Christian identity, rather than reflecting contemporary practice. And yet, as compared to the energy expended on contending with issues of food purity, death defilement received relatively few mentions in Christian writers of the first three centuries. This indicates that death defilement was not a suitable object for anti-Jewish polemic for many Christian writers. The reason for this, I argue, lies in the deep transformations which Christianity brought about in perceptions of the dead human body and in perceptions of sacred space. Due to these transformations, death defilement became a totally unviable option for Christian ritual, and polemic was not required.

The following two chapters focus on sex and baptism, areas in which the focus of Christian discourse was not on the rejection of Jewish purity practices but rather on the adoption or creation of new notions of bodily purity and defilement. The domain of sexuality and sexual sin, discussed in chapter 4, was frequently described using purity terms. This imagery drew from a number of traditions – Greco-Roman sexual ethics, imagery of sexual sin from the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple texts, and both Jewish and pagan purity laws, all seen through the lens of Paul’s imagery of sexuality and sexual sin. These traditions themselves reflected battle perceptions of purity, and therefore Christianity adapted, rather than rejected them.

Two broad currents characterised Christian sexual ethics in the second century: one upheld marriage and the family as the basis for a holy Christian society and church, while the second rejected all sexuality, including in marriage. Writers of both currents made heavy use of defilement imagery. For the first, sexual sin was a dangerous defilement, contaminating the Christian community and severing it from God; some writers also recognized intercourse or menstruation as a temporary defilement, preventing religious activities (a remnant, or perhaps resurgence, or a truce-perception of purity). For the second, more radical current, sexuality

itself was the defilement, and a Christian who wished to be a “temple of God” must not succumb to it; virginity or continence alone were pure. I focus on the way purity discourse served the rhetorical interests of each current. For the first, purity language was a way of emphasising the difference between Christians and pagans, but also a way of constructing an alternative sexual purity model to that of the radical anti-marriage sects. For the second, purity language worked to blur the borders between sexual sin and sexuality in general; typically, pure virginity was opposed to defiled adultery, excluding a middle option of pure marriage.

Defilement imagery concerning sexuality is especially prominent in the writings of Origen. Many of the ideas found in the earlier traditions and in the two second-century currents are synthesised here into a new (at times inconsistent) theory of sexual defilement. Although Origen did not prohibit marriage, he saw sexuality as defiled, the quintessential expression of human corporeality, closely connected with sin though not synonymous with it. I argue that Origen was the first Christian thinker who integrated the notion of temporary sexual defilement found in the Hebrew Bible with the second-century Christian notion of essential sexual defilement, creating a nuanced conception of defilement which was to have great influence in the future.

Chapter 5 discusses baptism, a ritualization of the Christian battle-perception of purity. Most authors who wrote about baptism in the second and third century characterised it as an act of purification, an understanding which is supported by the imagery of the ritual itself and by the Jewish and pagan parallels. This understanding made baptism dangerously similar to Jewish ritual; the first section of the chapter therefore focuses on the efforts of Christian authors to differentiate between Christian baptism and Jewish rituals. Here we again witness the importance of identity construction for the shaping of purity discourse.

In the next section, I investigate what exactly baptism was thought to purify. Some authors speak of a purification from past sins, others from Sin as a cosmological or ontological entity; some of materiality itself, yet others of “the flesh,” the “fire of lust” or even impure spirits. This identification of baptism – a physical act of washing – with purification from what would seem to be non- or semi-physical entities makes it a major site for addressing the relationship between external and internal purity, the role of conscious intention as opposed to ritual action, and the place of spiritual entities. Many Christian authors (Justin Martyr and

Introduction

Clement of Alexandria are cases in point) carefully skirt this danger zone by emphasizing the conscious moral *metanoia* undertaken by the baptisand and the spiritual enlightenment which accompany it, all the while taking care to point out that other groups – pagans, Jews, or various “heretics” – believe they can be purified by the physical act alone. Other writers, however, do attempt to work out the spiritual workings of a physical ritual, indicating that it is a reflection of the duality of the human person and of the cosmos as a whole. Such theorizing can be found already in Valentinian texts such as the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, and is developed in Origen’s symbolic ritual theory or in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*’s demonological theory.

As in sexual issues, here too Origen supplies the most systematic usage of purity discourse; baptism and sex are linked through his understanding of infant baptism as purification from an inherent defilement linked to the sexual origin of the human body. Some Jewish-Christian sources also saw a degree of overlap between baptismal purification and purification from sexual defilement. Thus in the third century we find a number of sources constructing new ritual purity systems, in which sexuality and baptism are the opposite poles. Here we may see how Christianity not only reacted to external purification perceptions, but created new systems reflecting the anthropology and cosmology of the new religion.

In the general conclusion, I discuss the consequences of the textual analyses for the overarching theme of the thesis – how purity and defilement are redefined in early Christianity to support the anthropology, demonology and theology of second- and third-century communities, and to construct the identity of these communities. I compare the different area of purity discourse, and attempt to trace the historical development of purity concepts and ideas through the first three centuries of Christianity.

Chapter I

Purity and defilement in the Greco-Roman world and in Judaism

1. *The Greco-Roman world*

Representations of practices and beliefs of purity and defilement were ubiquitous in ancient Greco-Roman literary texts and documents, appearing in a range of religious contexts.¹ In this short section, I cannot describe the purity rituals customary in Ancient Greece or in the Roman Empire. I will rather focus on the most important aspect of religious purity and defilement for our purposes, the relationship between the crime or sin and defilement, with attention to developments of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.²

The sources themselves – whether documentary or literary – rarely differentiate between moral and ritual aspects in purity, or distinguish between different types of defilement in general. Nevertheless, we may discern three types of purity and defilement. Temporary defilement accompanied such natural events as birth, death and sexual relations. Though the prescriptions vary between different documents and texts, such occurrences required waiting for several days and sometimes washing before entering temples. This defilement was contagious to a certain degree, in the case of death, for example, affecting also the family of the deceased or people entering the house. Purity and impurity are statuses, secondary mechanisms for safeguarding the order of society and the relationship between God and man. This type of defilement is a good example of a “truce” purity system: purity and impurity are statuses, secondary mechanisms for safeguarding the order of society and the relationship between God and man. Serious crimes against the gods or the community, especially murder and sacrilege, led to defilement of a different type. Here, the guilty person (and to a certain extent, his or her community as well) would be tainted by his crime, until it was expiated by his

¹ For Greek religion, Parker (1983) is essential and will be my main source of reference for the earlier period. For Roman religion, see below n. 13.

² This question is one of the central issues discussed by Parker (1983), see especially 96-103, 281-307, 323-7. Chaniotis (1997) is an important study on this issue.

punishment and/or absolved through specific rituals. This is essentially a battle system: impurity is a force of evil, which must be eradicated. A third type of purity sees the person as striving to gain salvation through constant and life-long purification of his soul and body, attained via ascetic practices or the attainment of special knowledge. Here, defilement is a general characteristic of embodied human life, and purity is only achieved by the select few, or for a short time. The three types of defilement and purity are amply attested already in 5th century BC Greece (though they were never clearly differentiated as such). Though the three types appear quite different from one another, they shared a common terminology, were all expressions of a break in the normal order of society, and were seen as antithetical to contact with the divine.³

While these different types are sufficiently distinct to be discussed separately, there were many overlaps and interactions between them. Thus, for example, the third salvatory type of purity frequently appealed to the rituals and images of the first and second. Furthermore, these three types do not cover all the cases of defilement in ancient societies. For example, certain annual festivals would be dedicated to the routine purification of the community, even if no unusual crime has taken place. The main function of these festivals would be not to attend to specific pollutions but rather to mark the changing of times, to start anew.⁴ Another noteworthy exception is the purity of sexual abstinence, according to which virgins are considered to be purer than other women; this does not fit in any of the types, and it will be discussed separately.

Temporary defilements

In Ancient Greece, birth and death were defiling; generally, the only consequence of this was

³ Parker (1983), 326; Rudhardt (1992), 46-52, 163-76; Bendlin (2007). Another usage of terms of purity, parallel to these three types and drawing on all of them is found in rhetoric, drama or literature: here, though terms of defilement and purity could be used precisely and technically, they may also (and perhaps more frequently) be used as terms of opprobrium or approval, testifying to the moral integrity or lack thereof of a certain person, for example; see Parker (1983), 4-6.

⁴ Parker (1983), 23-4.

the prohibition of contact with temples or priests, though Robert Parker believes it plausible that contact with a corpse was seen as dangerous to sensitive people, such as women of a childbearing age, and that more scrupulous (or superstitious) people would prefer simply to stay away from funerals or corpses.⁵ In both cases, defilement was contagious, affecting also those who came into contact with the parturient or the corpse. Menstruation and miscarriage or abortion are also noted in *leges sacrae* from the second century BC to the second century CE as preventing entrance to temples.⁶ Without going further into the functions and significance of these defilements, it is clear that although they are caused by non-morally valenced events and transmitted by physical contagion, they had moral results: the hierarchies of sacred space, time and persons were marked through them.⁷ They expressed a basic value of Greek religion: humans are essentially different from gods, and therefore blatant expressions of human mortality must be distanced from that which is sacred to the gods. As these defilements were contracted naturally and were not linked to guilt, they could also be removed through a physical act of washing and/or waiting for a certain amount of time, depending on the severity of defilement. Even people not known to be polluted would wash their hands before entering a temple, reflecting the higher purity required there.⁸

Sexual relations and the eating of certain foods (e.g., swine, goats, garlic, cheese and beans) required similar purification procedures according to many *leges sacrae*.⁹ The character of pollution in these cases is somewhat different than birth or death, as there is no contagion involved; furthermore, they are caused by voluntary actions. In these cases it is not only that the defiled would not enter a temple on certain occasions, but also that there would be a preparatory period before festivals or a temple visit in which abstinence from sex and certain

⁵ Parker (1983), 53-4.

⁶ See Parker (1983); Kloppenborg (2011), 271-3; Lupu (2004), 209-10. For the pollution of menstruation in Rome, see Lennon (2010).

⁷ See in general Cole (2004).

⁸ See Ginouvès (1962), 327-428.

⁹ Sexual abstinence: Parker (1983), 84-8; foods: Parker (1983), 357-65; Lupu (2004), 211; Kleijwegt (1994).

foods was customary. Although the pollution caused by sexual relations could be seen as similar to that of birth or death - symbols of human mortality to be set apart from divine immortality - there was more to it than that; to men, women were dangerous and access to them had to be carefully managed.¹⁰

While sexual abstinence for both men and women was a feature of many priesthoods, total abstinence or virginity for life were rare in Greek cults, though certain cases were reported by Pausanias in the second century.¹¹ It would appear that the Imperial period saw a shift in this regard, with the widespread “Oriental” cults demanding total or at least long periods of abstinence of their priests and priestesses.¹²

Purity and defilement in Rome is not well documented, and the details of many of the rituals involved are lost to history.¹³ Concerning menstruation, though several sources mention the dangerous qualities of menstrual blood to people or crops which come into contact with it, there is no text which speaks of it as preventing contact with the sacred.¹⁴ Concerning birth, the mother and child are generally described as vulnerable to pollution rather than polluting, as in Greek religion.¹⁵ There is more evidence for temporary pollution created by death and sex. The defilement of corpses, the deceased’s family and funerary professionals is well attested, and the rites following death as well as annual rituals of commemoration were constructed so as to manage and purify these defilements. Some Roman cults focusing on fertility (not only of

¹⁰ Parker (1983), 101; Carson (1999).

¹¹ Parker (1983), 92-4, arguing that when virgins were required, this was more a matter of age and status than of purity. Cf. Goff (2004), 146-52; Connelly (2007), 39-41.

¹² Alvar (2008), 143-204.

¹³ Purity in Roman religion is relatively under-studied; an overview is Lennon (2012), much expanded in Lennon (2013). I thank Jack Lennon for allowing me to read the manuscript before publication. See also Saladino (2004), 63-87; Linke (2012). As the focus of the dissertation is on the East, Rome will be mentioned only occasionally.

¹⁴ E.g., Columella, *Rust.* 11.38, 50; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 7.63-4, 28.70-82; see Lennon (2010).

¹⁵ Lennon (2013), 58-62.

Oriental extraction) expected temporary sexual abstinence before festivals, indicating the defiling nature even of legitimate sexual relations. Another dimension of the link between abstinence and purity were the vestal virgins; here, however, virginity was clearly exceptional and specific to these unique women who safeguard the purity of the city and were a “metonymy for the untouched city of Rome.”¹⁶

Crimes, sexual immorality and an impure mind

The pollution of murders, adulterers, perjurers and performers of sacrilege is attested in both documentary and literary texts from Greece and Rome, in myth, philosophy and forensic rhetoric. In these cases, crime and defilement came hand in hand: defilement was an expression of the gods’ anger and the community’s rejection of the criminal, and its purification through various elaborate rituals part of a process of reconciliation, acting in parallel to the legal process.¹⁷ Though attaining purification through ritual would presumably imply a degree of repentance, change of heart or of conscience was neither the aim nor the basis of the procedure. At least in the case of murder, intention was not essential, as accidental death also incurred defilement, though perhaps of lesser magnitude.¹⁸ The defilement of the murderer was frequently reified in the texts: physically, as the blood on the murderer’s hands; metaphysically, as the anger of the gods, as avenging demons, or as a curse cast by the victim’s family. The blood must be washed off, the anger be appeased, in order that the defilement be purified.

The impurity of sexual immoral acts was not as clear-cut. While in both Greece and Rome the prostitute, adulteress or incestuous person are described in the sources as polluted, dirty or even revolting and were certainly not allowed in the shrines,¹⁹ Parker argues for a distinction between them and the murderer: they were not contagious or dangerous, i.e., did not produce

¹⁶ Parker (2004).

¹⁷ Parker (1983), 104-30; Bendlin (2007), 185-7; Lennon (2012), 53-4.

¹⁸ Parker (1983), 117; Chaniotis (1997), 147.

¹⁹ For Rome, see Lennon (2013), 90-135.

an independent defiling force.²⁰ Furthermore, the severity of defilement in these cases was much more status-relative, as it is only created by sexual immorality on the part of honorable citizens. The best index for the difference between these various defilement is the purification method: birth and death were purified through a simple set of rituals, murder required severe punishment (such as exile) together with rituals, but for sexual immorality there was no specific purification available beyond cessation of the acts and punishment. Parker therefore designates this defilement “metaphorical”; however, although this defilement is not reified as a physical or demonic force, it was linked to the body of the sexually immoral person and seen as “unnatural,” at least in the more severe cases (e.g., incest).

The intense concern of Greek and Roman writers in the Early Empire with the supposed loosening of sexual morality is well documented. Σωφροσύνη, ἐγκράτεια (self-control or moderation, by this period frequently in the sexual sphere), *pudicitia*, *castitas* (chastity) and *incontinentia* (lack of self-control) became keywords in the discourse of philosophers and moralists, as well as the object of a legal reform led by Augustus.²¹ Political propaganda focused on chastity or lack thereof of the persona in question, and novels highlighted – and questioned – the chastity of its heroes and heroines.²² On the social level, the main thrust of this movement was to uphold monogamous marriage, in which the wife is subordinated to the husband, as the basis of an ordered and pious society and state. On the individual level, the Greco-Roman elite male was called upon by writers such as Plutarch, Seneca, Musonius Rufus and Epictetus to curtail his sexual appetites to a minimum, and his wife likewise; the sole aim of intercourse should be reproduction.²³ Some went so far as to suggest total renunciation of sex for the true

²⁰ Parker (1983), 96.

²¹ For σωφροσύνη see North (1966); for ἐγκράτεια, see Foucault (1988), 63-77; Bobonich and Destrée, (2007). For the Latin terms, see Langlands (2006), esp. 29-33. For the legal aspect and its political ramifications, see Edwards (1993), 34-62.

²² Propaganda: Edwards (1993); Langlands (2006), 281-318; Noreña (2007); Knust (2006), 15-50. Novels: Goldhill (1995).

²³ Veyne (1978), 35-63; Foucault (1988), 147-85; Gaca (2003), 59-117.

philosopher, though this was not the dominant view. These developments would naturally lead to a greater emphasis on the defilement of people seen as sexually immoral, especially adulterers.²⁴ It was accompanied by the fascination of many texts with the dissonance between women's moral and physical sexual purity – i.e., with stories about women whose chastity is forcibly violated but who remain morally pure.²⁵ These developments of the Hellenistic and Early Imperial period in which sexual purity is focused on the self may be contrasted to Classical Greece, where “it is less in order to be a certain kind of person that chastity is required than in order to enter certain places, touch certain objects, view certain sights.”²⁶

Another manifestation of this shift may be discerned in the spread of the requirement of a “pure mind” for entering temples.²⁷ Although the opposition of a “pure mind” to a “pure body” and the priority of the former over the latter were already found in the 5th century BC, in Plato and in texts concerning the mysteries, they rarely appeared in the sacred laws before the 2nd century BC. By the second century CE, these elements became a commonplace in temple inscriptions.²⁸

Initiation and the mysteries, Orpheus and Pythagoras

The most salient examples of moral purification expressed ritually in Greek religion were found in the mysteries, a diverse category of cults, ranging from the ancient Eleusinian, Bacchic and Cybeline mysteries to the later cults of Isis, Serapis and Mithras.²⁹ A central element in these

²⁴ See Lennon (2010); Langlands (2006), 45-77, 271-2.

²⁵ Langlands (2006), 78-116, 254-64, esp. 93-4, 114, 264.

²⁶ Parker (1983), 92.

²⁷ Chaniotis (1997).

²⁸ See further Dickie (2002), who emphasises the early date (5th cent.) of some of the texts demanding a clear conscience and good moral character for participating in sacred ritual; Bremmer (2002) argues that some of these texts should be dated later. See also Petrovic and Petrovic (2006), 111-39; Kloppenborg (2011), 273-6.

²⁹ For overviews of purity and the mysteries, see Parker (1983), 281-91; Chaniotis (1997), 149-50; Burkert

cults was initiation, entailing a decision to belong to the circle of worshippers of a certain god, put into practice through an elaborate and secret ritual. While initiation did not necessarily entail purification, moral or ritual, there is significant evidence that both the initiation itself and the rituals leading to it were frequently seen as a purification and transformation of the person. This purification would provide the initiate with the special protection of the god/dess, and especially with a better afterlife, far above that of the common crowd. The most striking proof of this conception is found in some of the gold tablets from graves of Bacchic initiates, who identified themselves as coming “pure from the pure.”³⁰ This purity, acquired through initiation, would allow them to attain a better place in the afterlife in “the seats of the pure.” Other sources show that initiation was seen as the start of a “pure life.”³¹ The initiates would want to distinguish themselves from other people, and for this end they would claim ritual and moral purity and membership in a “pure” group.³²

The interaction of the tablets and of Dionysiac cult in general with teachings identified with Orpheus, Pythagoras and Empedocles is well known, and was made already in antiquity.³³ The best-attested teachings of these semi-historical figures were body-soul dualism and metempsychosis, which were linked to the requirement to purify the soul of its defilements in order to better its future fate. These doctrines provided body-soul dualism with a ritual dimension, in which correct conduct would help decouple soul from body, or allow the soul to dominate the body, a direction developed most famously by Plato (on which below). Best known among these rituals was abstinence from meat and beans, but the Pythagorean *acusmata* also

(1987), 89-114. For Dionysius, see Graf and Johnston (2007), esp. 121-31. For the “oriental” cults, see Alvar (2008), esp. 143-204; the evidence on Isis is much more comprehensive than for the others, due mostly to Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* for which see Griffiths (1975), 286-308. For the relationship with Christianity, see Nock (1933); Alvar (2008), 383-421; Graf (2011); de Jáuregui (2010), 349-51.

³⁰ Graf and Johnston (2007), 122.

³¹ Euripides, *Cretans* fr. 472 (=Porph. *De Abst.* 4.56); *Bacchae*, 72-7.

³² See Edmonds (2009), 73-49.

³³ Herodotus 2.81.

include prohibitions on other foods, on breaking bread, dipping hands in holy water, travelling by the main roads, entering a temple shod, and myriad others.³⁴ Many of the regulations were found in other cults, but only temporarily, to designate the time of a festival or a visit to the temple. Pythagoreans thus adapted rules used in Greek society to create a group with permanent enhanced purity.³⁵

Similarly, most of the preparatory rituals for initiation in the mysteries, which are termed “purifications,” are not essentially different from those of other Greek cults; they are given unusual emphasis, however, as befits preparations for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. These include washing (once or several times), abstinence from sex and certain foods for several days, distancing from birth and death, etc. Also attested are some unusual preparations, such as smearing with mud or bran, flogging and ecstatic dancing. Such purification rituals were only one side of the story, as according to various witnesses, the Eleusinian and Dionysian initiate was required to be pure of hands, heart, mind and speech, and to have “lived a good and righteous life.”³⁶ Thus there is no doubt that in these cults both ritual and moral purity were seen as essential. Moral purity concerned the person’s actions, but also related specifically to various personality aspects perceived to be especially sensitive to the moral dimension (i.e., the heart or the mind).

The cults of Isis, Cybele (Magna Mater) and Mithras continued this double emphasis. In the Roman Empire these cults were modeled to some extent on the Eleusinian and Dionysiac mysteries, and indeed here too we find a demand for pure hands and mouth.³⁷ Furthermore, these cults were connected with sexual purity, in which ritual and moral purity were merged. Beyond the few days of sexual abstinence required before initiation and festivals, initiation was accompanied by a general demand for moral progress, though what exactly this may have meant in each case is not clear. The initiation of Apuleius’s Lucius, for one, clearly expressed a

³⁴ Burkert (1972), 166-92.

³⁵ As argued by Burkert (1972), 175-8, followed by Parker (1983), 292-8, 304.

³⁶ Origen, *Cels.* 3.59.

³⁷ Porphyry, *Antr. nymph.* 15, quoted in Alvar (2008), 195.

change of heart and a decision to renounce his enslavement to pleasure.³⁸ Isis was praised as a goddess of justice and of marital chastity, and it is reasonable that her devotees would be expected to practice these virtues.³⁹ On the moral aspects of the Cybele and Mithras cults much less is known, but these gods were apparently seen as supporting marital chastity.⁴⁰ Jaime Alvar concludes that these cults would have promoted the moral qualities which were “in keeping with the dominant official ethics of the wider society” at this period,⁴¹ i.e., marital chastity, obedience, self-discipline, and personal integrity. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the main meaning of the initiation ritual would be an expression of loyalty and obedience to the god; ethical changes the person may undergo are the results, not the causes, of this devotion.

Asceticism in the first centuries CE

Plato’s formulation of the theory that the body contaminates the soul was highly influential. In the *Phaedo* he explains that it is only in death, with the decoupling of soul from body, that true knowledge can be obtained; until then,

we shall be nearest to knowledge when we avoid, so far as possible, intercourse and communion with the body... keep[ing] ourselves pure from it until God himself sets us free. And in this way, freeing ourselves from the foolishness of the body and being pure (καθαροί), we shall, I think, be with the pure and shall know of ourselves all that is pure (τὸ εἰλικρινές)... for it cannot be that the impure attain the pure.⁴²

Souls which have been contaminated by the body will have difficulties even after death, remaining close to the tomb, ultimately inhabiting another body, without any opportunity for a connection with the divine. The purity of the soul is guarded also by practicing the virtues:

³⁸ *Metam.* 11.6.7; 11.15.1.

³⁹ Alvar (2008), 177-92.

⁴⁰ Idem, 165-77; 192-203.

⁴¹ Idem, 202.

⁴² Plato, *Phaed.* 67a-b; see Moulinier (1952), 323-410; Parker (1983), 281.

“self-restraint and justice and courage and wisdom itself are a kind of purification (69c).” In other dialogues, the relationship of the soul with the body is more complex. The soul is divided into three parts, and the issue is then not so much the purification of soul from body, but rather the purification of the lower part of the soul from the influence of the body, achieved through the dominance of the higher parts.⁴³

In discussing asceticism in the Roman period, we are moving from the world of popular religion to that of a philosophical movement, though a dominant and influential one. An amalgamation of Stoic ethics of moderation and self-control, Platonic thought on soul and body, and a Cynic impulse for counter-culture, created a preference for asceticism: a way of life leading to virtue and even self-divinization through the refinement of the body so that the soul be free of its obstructions, and of the soul so that it dominate the body.⁴⁴ This ascetic trend was expressed in a large number of texts, many of which speak of the transformation of the person in terms of purification,⁴⁵ but here I will focus on Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* and on the works of Porphyry as prime examples of the new emphasis on religious purity and purification in asceticism.⁴⁶

The *Life of Apollonius* portrays this first-century philosopher and miracle-worker as a

⁴³ Plato, *Resp.* book 4; *Phaedr.* 245-9. For an overview of Plato’s thought on the soul, see Miller (2006); for the significance of this for Platonic views on asceticism, Dillon (1995).

⁴⁴ This short description is a necessarily simplification of a complex, centuries-long movement, on which there is much scholarship. See, in general, Meredith (1976). On the first and second centuries: Francis (1995); Valantasis (1999); Valantasis (2001). For Cynic asceticism and its influence, see Goulet-Cazé (1986). On the third and early fourth centuries, see Shaw (1995); Dillon (1995).

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Chaeremon the Stoic, fr. 10 (=Porph., *Abst.* 4.6-8); Plutarch, *Rom.* 28.6-7; Epictetus *Diatr.* 3.21; Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 3.8; Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.2.3-5, 1.6.5, 3.6.5. These are generally based on Plato’s description of the virtues as purifying the soul. For Plotinus, See Trouillarde (1955), 166-210. Notable for the religious expression of Platonic theory are the Hermetic treatises; for self-purification in this literature see, e.g., *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.22-23; 13.7-15 with Fowden (1986), 142-54.

⁴⁶ For the reorientation of philosophy towards religion, see Maiullo (2010).

successor of Pythagoras. He refuses to eat meat “as impure (οὔτε καθαρὰς) and dulling the mind” (1.8), eating only fruit, and “would not stain the altars with blood,” but with incense alone (1.1), the best offering for divination (5.25). His clothing was of “unadulterated linen... the gift of unadulterated water and earth” (1.32). Such purity allows a person “to recognise his own soul,” and also gives him the gift of prophecy (8.7). Apollonius overcame sexual passion already in his adolescence, and never married (1.13); death and murder are so polluting to him that he cannot enter Judea (5.27) or talk with a murderer before his purification (6.5). In a speech in the temple of Asclepius, he explains that that the gods accept in their temples only those with a “clear conscience,” but are angry at those entering “besmirched and corrupt” (1.11). In his extensive travels he meets other ascetics which serve as examples for best conduct; the “naked ones” in India explain that one who foretells the future must be “of a healthy disposition, with no pollution besmirching (μήτε κηλιῖδα προσμεμάχθαι) his soul, and no scars of sin traced on his mind” (3.42); those who wish to study philosophy in that country are examined for purity of conduct on many levels, and their forebears are examined as well (2.30).

These brief allusions allow us to outline the purity doctrine reflected in this book: enhanced ritual purity, together with exceptional moral conduct, self-control and intellectual pursuits lead to exceptional feats, prophecy and semi-divinization. Both the ritual and the moral virtues required are not innovative, but they are taken to the extreme for the creation of the figure of the holy man.⁴⁷ This holiness is not opposed to that of traditional religion, but a focusing of its powers on the individual: according to one of his letters (66), Apollonius would live in a temple.⁴⁸

While Philostratus’ work is a presentation of the holy man to the public, Porphyry develops the philosophical underpinnings of this ascetic movement.⁴⁹ In the *Sentences*, closely

⁴⁷ See Fowden (1982).

⁴⁸ See Reimer (2002), 143-74.

⁴⁹ On Porphyry and purification, ritual and philosophical, see Meredith (1976); the articles reproduced in Clark (2011), part 3; Marx-Wolf (2010a); Bouffartige and Patillon (1977-95), esp. the notes to vol. 3. A useful general overview is Smith (2010), 325-57. For Neoplatonic attitudes towards purity and Judaism,

following upon the words of his teacher Plotinus, Porphyry explains that there are four classes of virtues which humans should strive for: political, purificatory (καθαρτικῶν), intellectual and “paradigmatic.”⁵⁰ The latter two, if at all attainable in this life, are only for the select few; the first consists of the virtues which allow people to live together. The second, purificatory virtues are those to which “we ought to direct our attention most of all.” (32.95). These virtues “consist in detaching oneself from the things of this realm... [in abstaining] from actions in concert with the body and from participating in the passions which affect it” (32.16-18). The aim of purification is advancement to the next set of virtues, and ultimately – assimilation to God (32.32). In practice, purification of the soul from the influence of the body is performed by the suppression of pleasure, pain, anger and fear; “desire for anything base must be eliminated altogether,” especially desire for sexual intercourse, food and drink (32.123-6). Purification can also be assisted by rituals such as vegetal offerings or prayer, which bring spiritual powers to bear upon the lower part of the soul, that which interacts with the body.⁵¹ The need to purify the soul from the body in order to draw close to god and the conceptualization of vice as defilement of the soul is reiterated several times in a letter to his wife, Marcella.⁵²

It is in the expansion of the purificatory role of the abstinence from food, and especially animal meat, that Porphyry deviated from the teachings of Plotinus. In his *On Abstinence*, Porphyry provides historical, philosophical and cross-cultural arguments for the defilement of eating meat. Originally, in the golden age of purity, humans would not eat other animals; this only occurred following an awful crime, or perhaps a period of starvation (1.5-13). Eating meat is akin to murder, and also to cannibalism, according to the doctrine of metempsychosis. But especially, meat pollutes the soul by tying it strongly to the body. Animal sacrifices are dangerous also because they draw evil demons who feed upon them (2.40-35). An explicit link is drawn between the temporary abstinence from impurity as a preparation for temple rituals and

see Scrofani (2008).

⁵⁰ *Sent.* 32, closely corresponding to *Enn.* 1.2. See Dillon (1983); Brisson (2004). Translations from Dillon and Brisson (2005), vol. 2.

⁵¹ *Fr.* 290F (Smith, p. 328).

⁵² *Marc.* 9-11, 13, 14, 26, 28, 33.

the permanent abstinence required for philosophers who wish to return their souls to their original state and assimilate to god (2.44-6); this is especially seen in examples from “barbaric” priests and sects, such as Egyptian priests or Jewish Essenes, who in their extensive purity regulations present the best example of how the gods should be approached (Book 4). It is in this context that Porphyry presents a general theory of purity: defilement is the mixing of opposites, purification is their separation. The soul is therefore contaminated when mixed with the body, humans are contaminated when eating animals, and sexual intercourse contaminates both partners (4.20).⁵³ This attempt at a general definition demonstrates the central place purity attained in the thought of the age; it is a principle which cuts across the domains of history, cosmology, anthropology, theology and religious practice. Despite this expansion, and especially the new focus on the persona and psychology of the philosopher or holy man in the subjugation of the passions, the practical methods used to achieve purity are very similar to those practiced for many centuries: abstinence from certain foods and drinks and abstinence from sexual activity.

Summary

This short survey presents a complex picture regarding moral and ritual purity in Greek and Roman thought and practice. Ritual purity had numerous moral dimensions, marking out the place of the gods, creating and maintaining social and cultural hierarchies and allowing for the reintegration of those who breached social order. However, such an integrated approach to purity was continuously challenged by body-soul or body-heart dualism found already in 6th century BC Greece, and which slowly infiltrated popular consciousness and religious practice. Such conceptions point to the possible lack of coherence between ritual and moral purity, and to the potential for moral abuse of ritual purity. They therefore emphasised the hierarchy between inner and outer, “soul” and “body,” so as to enable a reintegration of person and the viability and moral significance of ritual action. One result of this move is that purification is

⁵³ Obviously, there is an element of hierarchy here: it is only a mixing of higher and lower that is a contamination, and the mixing contaminates only the higher, not the lower. For this passage see especially Clark (2001), repr. in Clark (2011).

internalised to a dynamic occurring inside the person; purification becomes an end in itself, instead of a temporary means to approach the sacred.

2. *Purity and defilement in Judaism*

Due to the canonical status of the Hebrew Bible in late Second Temple era Judaism, practices of purity and defilement in this period have a clearer and more unified textual basis than in contemporary Greco-Roman cultures. Furthermore, purity was a focus of late Second Temple religion, and as such is extensively discussed in the sources. Although there was significant diversity in purity and defilement practices between various late Second Temple Jewish sects or developments over time, these were never divorced from the prescripts and language of the bible. Understanding the biblical view on purity and defilement is therefore essential for any treatment of purity in later periods.

Purity and defilement in the Hebrew Bible

Purity (טהרה, *t.h.r*) and defilement (of the root טמא, *t.m.*) are central terms for the biblical authors, especially in Leviticus and Numbers, most of which are usually identified with sources P and H.⁵⁴ These terms cover a wide and complex linguistic field, corresponding to what must have been an important aspect of Israelite religion.⁵⁵ Purity is intimately connected to holiness

⁵⁴ The following outline will not address distinctions between different biblical sources, as these are irrelevant for the late second temple, Rabbinic and early Christian discussions.

⁵⁵ Much scholarly effort has been directed at constructing a typology and system of this field; the most important in the past decades are Wright (1991); Milgrom (1991); Jenson (1992); Kugler (1997), Schwartz (2008); Olyan (2000); Klawans (2000). There have been many proposals for the function or meaning of the biblical purity system: a summary in Milgrom (1993), mentions “sin, esthetics, fear of demons, holiness of sanctuary, separation of Israel, health, enhancing priestly power” and “polarity between life and death” (the option supported by Milgrom himself). However, as Lemos (2013) argues, all attempts to force biblical purity notions into one, or even several systems, are ultimately unsuccessful and derive from an undue emphasis on the ideational/symbolic over the ritual actions themselves.

(ש.ת.ק, *q.d.š*), another central root (11:43-47).⁵⁶ Only pure people may approach the holy, while the impure are barred from it. God's holiness is extended to the temple, cult objects, sacrifices and priests, but also, if they follow the commandments, to Israel as a whole (19:2, 20:7, 26). Therefore the temple and the sacrifices are the focus for the purity system, and it is usually the temple from which defiled people must be distanced (whether in order to protect the holy from defilement or to protect the defiled people from the dangerous encounter with the holy when in an unfit state); however, certain defilements must be distanced from the people or the land of Israel as a whole, in order to allow for the continuing presence of God among them (eg., Num 5:2-4) This ambivalence is at the centre of much scholarly controversy between "minimalists" who believe the purity system was essentially connected to the temple only and "maximalists" who see it as pertaining to lay daily life outside the temple as well.⁵⁷

Sources of impurity in the bible can be divided into two main types, permitted and prohibited (or ritual and moral, as termed by Klawans).⁵⁸ Permitted defilements are associated with common bodily phenomena:

1. Sexual defilements: menstruation (15:19-24), semen (15:16-18), irregular genital emissions by men or women (15:2-15, 25-30), and birth (12:2-8);

⁵⁶ Biblical citations in this section are to the book of Leviticus unless otherwise noted. For the relationship between holiness and purity, see Milgrom (1991), 731-3; Jenson (1992), 40-55; Kugler (1997); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 32, 36-42.

⁵⁷ The controversy is generally focused on the second temple period; regarding the bible, representatives of the first camp are Neusner (1973); Maccoby (1999); of the second are Alon (1977), 190-234 and Milgrom (1991), 976-85.

⁵⁸ This is the terminology of Hayes (2007). For other terms, see Klawans (2000), 13-17; Haber (2008), 9-30, and see the criticism of the terms "ritual" and "moral" as anachronistic in Kazen (2002), 214-22. For handy descriptions of the permitted purity system, see Wright (1991); Hayes (2007), and the tables in Jenson (1992), 225-6. Impurity is also created as a by-product of certain sacrifices, which we do not discuss here, see Wright (1991), 154.

2. Death related defilements: the human corpse (Num 11:11-20) and certain animal carcasses (5:2-3, 11:24-47);
3. *ṣaraʿat* (צִרְעַת) – a certain skin disease (in humans, 13:1-14:32) or fungus (in clothes or buildings, 14:33-57).

The mechanisms of defilement and purification are complex, and we may observe here only the following. Permitted defilements are temporary, and are purified through various rituals, according to the severity of the defilement: e.g., washing once and waiting until evening (animal carcasses, semen), sprinkling on the third and seventh day with a special mixture of red-cow ashes and holy water (human corpse), shaving, washing, waiting eight days, and bringing a complex sacrifice (*ṣaraʿat*). The major impurities (corpse, *ṣaraʿat*, irregular genital emissions) are communicable, defiling also people or objects touching them or under the same roof with them, though the defilement is weakened as it is passed along, and can then be purified with a lesser ritual (e.g., 15:5-8, 21-23). Some impurities are described as polluting the altar/sanctuary from afar, even without entering it, and therefore require a sacrifice for purifying the altar, beyond the washing/ waiting purification of the defiled person (5:2-3, 13:1-31; 15:13-15, 29-30).⁵⁹ In its communicability, pollution acts as a quasi-physical substance, described by various scholars as a “ray” or “viscous gas.”⁶⁰

In general, contracting these defilements is not a sin; only entering sacred space while defiled, eating of the sacrifices (7.20-21; 22:1-7, Num 9:6-7), and in certain cases delaying purification (17:15-16, Num 19:13, 20, perhaps Lev 5:2-3) are considered sinful. To priests and the *nazir*, who must maintain a higher degree of holiness, corpse impurity and eating carrion is prohibited (21:1-5, 22:8, Num 6:6-7; cf. Ez 44:15-31, Jud 13:14).

Prohibited defilements (described using *ṭ.m.* but also as *toʿeva* (תועבה) “abomination” and similar terms) arise from major sins, namely certain idolatrous practices (sacrifice to the Molech (20:1-3) and necromancy (19:31)), murder (Num 35:33-34) sexual sins (principally incest,

⁵⁹ See Milgrom (1976); Sklar (2005).

⁶⁰ Maccoby (1999), 18-19.

adultery and homosexuality, 18), and purposefully polluting sacred objects (7:19-21, 22:3-7).⁶¹ Such sins defile the land of Israel, the persons involved and the sanctuary, and lead to the expulsion of Israel from the land (18:24-30, Ez 36:17, Jer 3:1). The defiling sins are identified with the practices of the former inhabitants of the Canaan. Prohibited defilement is not communicable by touch; the person involved and the land cannot be purified through rituals, but only expiated by punishment or atonement. The defilement of Israel by sins, especially idolatry and sexual sin, is frequently deplored by the prophets (Jer 2:7, 23, Hos 6:10, Ez 16:36-63, 36:16-25, Ps 106:34-41), who call for moral purification in the present and refer to Israel's purification by God in the eschaton. In a related usage, women who took part in prohibited sexual relations or were victims of rape are said to be defiled by the men (Gen 13:34; Num 5:11-31; Deut 24:4).

The dietary laws (Lev 11, Deut 14:3-20) are difficult to assign to either the permitted or the prohibited system.⁶² The pig, hare, rabbit and camel are prohibited for consumption and also termed "defiled," (11:4-8) though it is not clear what this defilement would entail, since no purification is provided. This would appear to be similar to the prohibited purity system, yet in this case it is not the prohibited action which is defiling, but the animal itself, and the defilement appears to pass by physical contact of consumption, as in the permitted system. The unit continues to different kinds of defilement, caused by the carcasses of other prohibited (11:24-8) and permitted (39-40) animals. These latter defilements can be purified by washing and waiting until the evening, as in the permitted system.

Clearly, the relationship between the purity systems is highly significant for the relationship between impurity and sin in the Hebrew bible. Klawans has argued that prohibited defilement is not simply a secondary usage or metaphor based upon the more "real" permitted defilement; both are equally termed defilement, both result from actual physical events and

⁶¹ See Klawans (2000), 26-31.

⁶² See Wright (1991), 165-9; Klawans (2000), 31-2; Houston (1993), 39-43, 51-3, who detail further ambiguities. Meshel (2008) argues that Lev 11:1-43 uses all six variables of consumption/contact, im/pure, permitted/prohibited with great precision to create a three-dimensional matrix of the animal kingdom.

have real consequences.⁶³ They are, therefore, two independent systems of purity, one concerning natural biological functions and the other concerning sin (though some overlaps are conceded).⁶⁴ These conclusions regarding the independence of the systems have, however, been recently criticised by many scholars, who argue that the borders of these systems are not well defined, and in fact there may be no “system” at all.⁶⁵ First, the dietary laws, which do not clearly belong to either system, demonstrate that elements from the two systems are at times conflated. Second, both systems are conceptualised in opposition to the holiness of the temple. Third, a menstruating woman is not only defiled but also prohibited sexual contact. Fourth, although *šara‘at* is not explicitly tied to sin in Leviticus, it does appear elsewhere as a punishment for sin (Num 12:10-12, 2 Kg 5:27, 15:5). Fifth, those defiled by *šara‘at*, irregular genital emissions and death were sent out of the camp so that it would not be defiled (Num 5:1-4); while such isolation does not necessarily entail any moral standpoint, it may easily lead to perceiving such people as somehow less worthy than their undefiled peers. In general, as Thomas Kazen has argued, permitted and prohibited impurities are better seen as part of symbolic spectrum, and not as discrete systems.⁶⁶ Both use metaphors of dirt and disgust to express various levels of negative attitudes towards certain situations and actions and to create social hierarchies, even if these situations and actions are natural, inevitable and sometimes even necessary. Both use the temple and the sancta as the main focus for holiness, to which impurity is opposed. The various parts of the spectrum echo each other, and by upholding the laws of permitted impurity, the laws of prohibited impurity are strengthened as well.⁶⁷

An important usage of purity terms is to signify forgiveness by God following penance or

⁶³ Klawans (2000), 32-36, contra, e.g., Neusner (1973), 108. Some prophetic usages of defilement (Is 1:15-17, 64:4-5, Ps 51) are seen even by Klawans as metaphorical, since they do not evoke a system of purity and defilement but are ad-hoc usages, an exception deemed arbitrary by Kazen (2008), 43-64, at 45.

⁶⁴ Klawans (2000), 36-8.

⁶⁵ See Kazen (2008); Miller (2010), n.48; Nihan (2012); Lemos (2013), 288.

⁶⁶ Kazen (2008).

⁶⁷ As described by Wright (1991), 170-81.

in the eschaton. Thus David implores God to “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and purify me from my sin... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps 51:4, 9, 12),⁶⁸ and Ezekiel promises that God “will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be pure from all your defilements. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you” (36:25-6).⁶⁹ Such verses were to be extremely influential for the future development in the understanding of penance and change of heart as purifications.

While *ṭ.h.r* and *ṭ.m.*⁷ are the main terms of the Hebrew Bible for purity and defilement, they are not the only ones. Following Jacob Milgrom, Jay Sklar has recently demonstrated that *.כ.פ.ר.* (*k.p.r.*), a root which designates the action of the blood of various sacrifices, does not mean only “atone” as it is usually rendered, but rather refers both to expiation of inadvertent sin (4:1-5:13) and purification of the temple or altar from defilement created by these sins.⁷⁰ Thus we have another area in which defilement accompanies sin, and this defilement is purified in a process similar to that of the major permitted impurities – a sacrifice. The juxtaposition of sin and defilement is especially clear in the Day of Atonement rituals, which both purify the sins of Israel, and atones the priests, the temple and Israel (16:30-34). Another term similar to defilement is *ל.ל.ל.* (*h.l.l.*), “desecration,” i.e., the degradation of something holy; a priest is said to

⁶⁸ MT: (4) הָרַב כְּכִסֵּי מַעֲוֵנֵי וּמִחֲטָאֵתַי טְהַרֵּנִי ... (9) תְּחַטְּאֵנִי בְּאֵזוֹב וְיִטְהַר תְּכַכְּסֵנִי וּמִשֶּׁלֶג אֶלְבִּינִי ... (12) לֵב טְהוֹר בְּרָא-לִי אֱלֹהִים; (4) ἐπὶ πλεῖον πλῦνόν με ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνομίας μου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμαρτίας μου καθάρισόν με... (9) ῥαντιεῖς με ὑσώπω, καὶ καθαρισθήσομαι· πλυνεῖς με, καὶ ὑπὲρ χιόνα λευκανθήσομαι... (12) καρδίαν καθαρὰν κτίσον ἐν ἐμοί, ὁ θεός, καὶ πνεῦμα εὐθὲς ἐγκαίνισον ἐν τοῖς ἐγκάτοις μου.

⁶⁹ MT: וְיִרְקַתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מִיַּם טְהוֹרִים וְטְהַרְתֶּם, מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל-גְּלוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם. וְנָתַתִּי לְכֶם לֵב טָהוֹר וְרוּחַ יְדִשׁוּ אֶתְּךָ. LXX: καὶ ῥανῶ ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ὕδωρ καθαρὸν, καὶ καθαρισθήσεσθε ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἀκαθαρσιῶν ὑμῶν καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν εἰδώλων ὑμῶν, καὶ καθαριῶ ὑμᾶς. καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν καρδίαν καινὴν καὶ πνεῦμα καινὸν δώσω ἐν ὑμῖν. See also Is 1:16, 4:3-4; Jer 4:14; Job 9:30; Ps 73:13. Lawrence (2006), 35-7.

⁷⁰ Milgrom (1976); Wright (1991), 159-60; Sklar (2005), 148-59; Ginsburskaya (2011). And see Schwartz (1995), for whom sin does not cause impurity but is rather objectified in a way analogous to impurity and is dealt with in similar sacrificial rituals.

be desecrated if he marries a widow or divorcee (21:7, 14-15), the temple is desecrated by the service of a physically blemished priest (21:23), and an Israelite father is warned not to desecrate his daughter by prostituting her (19:29).⁷¹ *Kila'im* (כלאים) designates the prohibited mixing of two breeds, vegetable or animal (19:19, Deut 22:9); this could also be seen as a type of impurity. While none of these are part of the permitted defilement system (they cannot be purified and are not communicable) they serve to blur the lines between permitted and prohibited defilement.

Purity and defilement in Late Second Temple Judaism

The purity systems of the Hebrew Bible retained their importance into the late Second Temple period, for all known segments of the Jewish population, in Judea and the diaspora.⁷² Purity is a central term in Second Temple texts, and here we can only discuss a number of topics which have greater relevance for understanding Christian purity discourse: the expansion of purity beyond the temple, the defilement of outsiders, sexual impurity, the dietary laws and how defilement and purity were understood anthropologically.

Food impurity and outsiders

The sources of permitted impurity and their methods of contagion and purification are discussed and developed extensively in the Dead Sea Scrolls, both in texts of sectarian nature and those considered to have reflected wider Jewish society.⁷³ There is much evidence for observation of the rules of permitted impurity also in the earliest strata of Tannaitic literature,⁷⁴ as well as in Josephus and Philo.⁷⁵ Archaeological excavations in areas of Jewish

⁷¹ In parallel, Koltun-Fromm (2010), 37-40 argues that *q.d.š* may be used not only as “to consecrate” but also “to purify.”

⁷² For purity in the Diaspora, see Sanders (1990), 255-308. For a general view on purity in the Second Temple period, see Birenboim (2006).

⁷³ Two recent surveys are Harrington (2004); Werrett (2007).

⁷⁴ Neusner (1974); Noam (2008); Furstenberg (2010).

⁷⁵ Neusner (1973), 38-50; Nakman (2004), 170-254; Leonhardt-Balzer (2001), 256-72.

settlement have uncovered large numbers of purity baths (*miqvaot*) from this period.⁷⁶ We cannot discuss here the details of changes occurring in the permitted impurity system in this period, or the differences between the various sects. One significant general trend, attested in both textual and archaeological evidence, is an expansion of the permitted purity system to contexts outside of the temple and its personnel.⁷⁷ This expansion took place through several developments: a multiplication of the number of holy places, objects and states considered susceptible to impurity, an intensification of the powers of contagion of impure foods and liquids, and the addition of some new sources of defilement. Combined, these developments meant that many more Jews who were not priests were concerned about impurity and performed purifications as part of their daily life, and that permitted defilement may have been seen as a problematic status to be in even when no contact with temple, sacrifices or tithes was envisioned.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the degree of maintenance of permitted purity in daily life could now be used as an index for piety, social prestige and group identity.

One significant expansion was the requirement among the Pharisees, according to the Mishnah, to maintain some degree of purity while eating regular food (*hullin*), though there is much controversy as to the extent of this observation and its significance.⁷⁹ Some scholars see *hullin*-purity as an attempt to extend the holiness of the temple and the sacrifices to the

⁷⁶ Wright (1997); Lawrence (2006), 155–84; Adler (2010).

⁷⁷ For the biblical background to this question see above n. 57. For the Second Temple period, see Sanders (1990), 131-254; Harrington (1995); Regev (2000); Poirier (2003); Kazen (2010), 1–12; Birenboim (2011).

⁷⁸ However, even following this expansion purification is rarely required simply for its own sake, i.e., not as a preparation for some other activity such as eating or liturgy; on this see Harrington (2001), 130-206 and Miller (2010), 30.

⁷⁹ See *t. Demai* 2.2. A new mechanism, “graded purification,” required defiled people to bathe for partial purification, even before they performed the full purification process. This allowed them to eat *hullin* at a certain low level of purity, even if not to enter the temple or eat sacrifices and tithes. See Alon (1977), 152-7; Regev (2000); Kazen (2010), 113-36.

communal meal, perhaps as an alternative to the temple, while for others it is a personal ascetic practice, acting alongside the temple: “purity for its own sake”.⁸⁰ The observation of *ḥullin* purity had much social significance, as it required the creation of groups of relatively pure Jews who would not eat their daily meals with those they deemed defiled, and more generally to the emergence of permitted purity as a group-relative or even individual status rather than an objective one, and to the perception of outsiders to the group as defiled. The Dead Sea Sect is the most obvious example of this development, but the Essenes and the Pharisees may have also fulfilled these conditions.⁸¹

The trajectory set by the innovation of *ḥullin* purity is joined by several sources which require washing for purity before prayer and torah-reading, thus extending the holiness of the temple to these individual and communal religious activities – and implicitly to the body of the religious practitioner – even before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.⁸² Some, however, argue that the requirement of purification before liturgical activity is not supported by a close reading of the Rabbinic sources⁸³ or by the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁸⁴ The evidence from Jewish-Hellenistic sources for purification as preparation for prayer or mystical ascent is clearly stronger.⁸⁵ In any case, the Palestinian sources are interested in extra-temple purity as a requirement for eating much more than for liturgical activity.

The dualist worldview of the Dead Sea Sect, setting the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, was well suited to the injection of a moral dimension into the permitted impurity

⁸⁰ For this controversy, see Alon (1977); Neusner (1973), 64-71; Sanders (1990); Harrington (1995); Poirier (2003); Birenboim (2011). Quote from Sanders (1990), 192.

⁸¹ See Baumgarten (1997), 91-100; Furstenberg (2010).

⁸² Regev (2000), 177-8, 186-92; Lawrence (2006), 56-64; Adler (2008); Haber (2008), 161-80.

⁸³ Noam (2007), 133n.20; Birenboim (2011), 64-8.

⁸⁴ Feder (2009).

⁸⁵ *Judith* 12.8; *Lett. Arist.* 304-6; *A.J.* 2.159 (on the Essenes), 12.106; *Sib. Or.* 3.591-3; *T. Levi* 2.3 (preparation of Levi before ascent to heaven); and the lifestyle of the Therapeutae as described by Philo, *Contemp.* 25-8.

system. The Sect saw itself as morally and ritually superior to non-members, who were inherently sinful and evil, as they did not accept the Sect's beliefs and rituals. Through their scrupulous purity observances, the Sect hoped that God would dwell in their community, providing it with a holiness similar to the temple and making themselves "a little more like priests."⁸⁶ Outsider status was expressed as impurity, at once "permitted" and "prohibited," here merged into one construct. It is therefore unsurprising that the initiation process into the Sect may have been seen as a process of purification, and that this purification featured some water ablution but was also conceived as an act of repentance and purification by the holy spirit.⁸⁷

The conflation of moral and ritual purity was present in other purity dimensions as well, though its extent is debated.⁸⁸ Klawans believes the two concepts were totally merged at Qumran, summarising: "... at Qumran, sin was considered to be ritually defiling, and sinners had to purify themselves... those who became ritually impure had not only to purify themselves, but to atone as well..."⁸⁹ Some scholars, however, argue that the language used is not intended as practical instruction, barring the repentance of a ritually defiled person, but is only figurative; that the texts seemingly prohibiting sinners from eating the pure food of the sect do so for reasons of punishment and not purity; and that it is not said that sin itself is an impurity, but just that it prevents purification from those who are ritually impure.⁹⁰ I would therefore prefer J. M. Baumgarten's more cautious statement that "the dividing line between uncleanness and sin in Qumran is not sharply drawn," based on his reading of a purification liturgy which "indicates a definite awareness of the spiritual overtones of lustration."⁹¹

⁸⁶ Himmelfarb (2006), 85. See also Newton (1985), 51; Shemesh (2000); Conway (2000); Regev (2003).

⁸⁷ 1QS 2.25-3.9. See Harrington (2008).

⁸⁸ See Flusser (1979), 212-7; Newton (1985), 40-9; Baumgarten (1992); Klawans (2000), 67-91; Himmelfarb (2001); Birenboim (2003); Harrington (2004), 27-30; Lawrence (2006), 81-154.

⁸⁹ Klawans (2000), 91.

⁹⁰ Harrington (2000); Himmelfarb (2001), 30-2; Birenboim (2003), n.29; Kister (2009), 525; Ginsburskaya (2010).

⁹¹ Baumgarten (1992), 209.

Sexual sins and genealogical purity

The prohibited impurity system also underwent changes. Of the grave sins of bloodshed, idolatry and sexual misbehaviour, the impurity of the latter was greatly emphasised in texts such as *Ezra*, *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and *4QMMT*.⁹²

Furthermore, to the biblical sexual sins of incest, adultery and homosexuality, sex with non-Israelites was added as a defiling sexual sin. The book of *Ezra* innovated the notion that the seed of Israel is holy, while children born of a gentile-Israelite union are of degraded status and not fully Israelite (“genealogical purity,” as formulated by Christine Hayes). This notion was developed into a central theme in *Jubilees*, for which sexual contact with a foreigner defiles the future children, the Israelite partner, the nation of Israel and the land, and is akin to idolatry. While Ezekiel forbids only priests from marrying foreigners, *Ezra*, *Jubilees* and *4QMMT* democratise this attribute of holiness to Israel as a whole, and furthermore do not recognise the possibility of foreigners converting to Israelite religion. This development reflects a usage of prohibited impurity to mark the borders of the Israelite nation, which these authors perceived to be endangered from the encroachment of external cultures.⁹³

This development, as well as the prohibition on non-Jewish access to the Temple and a general notion that Jews should not mix with gentiles, especially in meals, demonstrate that gentiles were now seen as categorically defiled, an idea which does not appear in the bible. It is clear that that this impurity was a consequence of the supposed sinfulness of gentiles and the danger that they would influence Jews; scholars are divided to what extent this sin impurity translated into contagious bodily impurity.⁹⁴ It would appear that there was no agreement on the matter in antiquity either, and that certain sects such as the Essenes or the writers of *Jubilees* took a more isolationist stance than other segments of Second Temple Judaism, and

⁹² See Werman (1997); Himmelfarb (1999); Himmelfarb (2006), 66-84; Klawans (2000), 43-63; Hayes (2002), 68-91; Rosen-Zvi (2006); Loader (2007); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 53-73.

⁹³ Birenboim (2006), ch. 2, discusses the reasons for this national separatism and its purity manifestations.

⁹⁴ Klawans (1995); Hayes (2002), 68-91; Harrington (2008).

perceived gentile impurity as more inherent and physical in nature.⁹⁵ Others, however, such as Josephus, Philo and the early Rabbis, recognised the possibility of conversion, locating the impurity solely in gentiles' sinful deeds. Food prepared by gentiles was also prohibited and described as defiled according to some texts: the heroes of the books of Daniel (1:5-16) and Tobit (1:10-13), from the 3rd-2nd centuries BC, abstain from such food; however, it is difficult to know if this was the result of an intrinsic defilement of such food or the concern that gentiles would not take care with its preparation according to the dietary laws.⁹⁶

If in Leviticus only a small number of grave sins are associated with impurity, in many Second Temple texts impurity is seen as a consequence of other sinful behaviours, such as deceit, bribery and evil thoughts. These usages are frequently linked to biblical mentions of purification from sin in general, such as Is 1:15-17, 64:4-5 and Ps 51.⁹⁷

While sexual sin becomes a central focus for defilement, sexual relations in marriage were legitimate and even positive for the vast majority of Second Temple texts, even if they incurred permitted defilement. Some texts expanded this defilement significantly, however; thus the *Temple Scroll* prohibits sexual intercourse in the "holy city" (probably Jerusalem), and *Jubilees* and other Dead Sea texts prohibited intercourse on the Sabbath.⁹⁸ Seminal emissions, including sexual relations, precluded a member of the Dead Sea sect from participating in some of the gatherings of the community. Philo and Pliny report that all the Essenes were celibate, while Josephus says some were; but there is no clear evidence for celibacy of the Dead Sea Sect from either the Scrolls or archaeology.⁹⁹ The sect may have been independent of the Essenes, or, alternatively, the Greek authors expanded the celibacy of a small number to the whole group in

⁹⁵ Werman (1997); Hayes (2002), 45-91.

⁹⁶ For the former option and additional sources, see Freidenreich (2011), 35-8.

⁹⁷ *Temple Scroll* 51.11-15; See Klawans (2000), 51. This generalizing movement is prominent in Philo, who is mainly interested in the influence of sins on the person and not so much in the details of the sins themselves.

⁹⁸ *Temple Scroll* 48.14-17; *Jub.* 50.8; *CD* 11.5; 4Q251; see Loader (2009), 363-7; Doering (2000).

⁹⁹ Regev (2008); Ilan (2010).

their depiction of an ideal group free of sexuality, derived from Greco-Roman models. For Philo, at least, this ideal may be seen also in the description of the Therapeutae as virgins, who remained “pure... out of the love of wisdom... do to which they are indifferent to the pleasures of the body.”¹⁰⁰

The dietary laws

As briefly discussed earlier (p. 46), the dietary laws are based on a notion of natural impurity of certain animals, leading to a prohibition of eating rather than to contagious defilement. In the late Second Temple period, the dietary laws are rarely discussed by Palestinian authors (for whom they were uncontroversial) but are the focus of two notable apologetic discussions in texts from Alexandria, the *Letter of Aristeas* (128-69) from the late third or second century BC and Philo’s *Special Laws* (4.100-131).¹⁰¹

The high priest Eleazar as cited in *Aristeas* identifies the dietary laws as especially intriguing to non-Jews. He then opens the discussion with what may be the earliest explicit theoretical challenge to the logic of the dietary laws: “why, since there is but one form of creation, some animals are regarded as impure for eating, and others even to the touch? (128-9)” In his explanation, Eleazar explains (143) that indeed “all things are alike in their natural constitution (φυσικὸν λόγον);” and yet, the biblical purity and dietary regulations are essential for maintaining the virtues of the Jewish nation, the “men of God.” Since the gentiles are typically (though not intrinsically) idolatrous and given over to “meats and drinks and clothing,” extensive purity laws are required to prevent their influence on the Jews. Through these laws, God “fenced us round with impregnable ramparts and walls of iron that we might not mingle at all with any of the other nations, remaining pure (ἄγνοι) in body and soul.” In particular, the impure animals are “symbols” (παράσημον, 147) or “signs” (σημεῖόν, 150) for the practice of virtue, since each symbolises a certain evil disposition or action of humans through

¹⁰⁰ Philo, *Cotemp.* 68; and see below n. 124.

¹⁰¹ *Aristeas*, ed. Hadas, 156-64; Philo, ed. Colson, VIII.68-90. For discussions of these texts, see Grant (1980); Berthelot (2001); Svebakken (2010); Rosenblum (2010), 36-45; Freidenreich (2011), 31-46. For the dating of *Aristeas*, see Rappaport (2012).

their own behaviour.

Dietary purity, for *Aristeas*, is not an ontological statement but an instrument working on several levels: it is not only a form of moral teaching to better a person's soul, but also a social tool. *Aristeas* does not explain how exactly the dietary and purity laws are supposed to prevent mingling with the nations, and in fact the letter itself positively describes Jews eating with gentiles; it is idolatry and other vices, and not contact with gentiles, that *Aristeas* opposes. Furthermore, contact with gentiles is inherent in the text: the allegorical explanations for the dietary laws have been identified as close to Pythagorean explanations of their own dietary laws, and in general it is claimed that *Aristeas*' arguments "come from within the realm of Greek philosophical polemic."¹⁰² Nevertheless, *Aristeas* identifies the dietary laws as separating Jews from gentiles, an idea already found in the biblical passages which link the separation of the Jews from the gentiles to their holiness.¹⁰³ This identification was to become a common one in the Greco-Roman world, at least according to later first-century sources.¹⁰⁴

In Philo's interpretation, which draws many elements from *Aristeas*,¹⁰⁵ the main objective of the dietary laws is to prevent desire (ἐπιθυμία), while the aspects of identity and preventing the evil influence of idolaters is absent.¹⁰⁶ The dietary laws provide training (*ascesis*) against

¹⁰² Berthelot (2001); Honigman (2003), 21.

¹⁰³ Deut 14:2, 21; Lev 20:24-26. Milgrom (1991), 718-36. And see similarly in the more strongly worded 4 Macc. 4.26, 5.16-29 with Lieu (2002), 305-7.

¹⁰⁴ For others with this opinion, see Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.137; Plutarch, *Quest. Conv.* 4.4-6.2. And see Schäfer (1998), 66-81; Rosenblum (2010), 95-110. Stern (1994), 56-9, 78-81, observes that as opposed to the bible and Jewish Hellenistic texts, dietary laws do not figure prominently as positive identity markers in Rabbinic texts, but only as negative markers (i.e., gentiles are castigated as eating defiled foods, and sometimes identified with these foods).

¹⁰⁵ Svebakken (2010).

¹⁰⁶ See Svebakken (2010) for a comprehensive discussion of Philo's interpretation as part of Middle Platonic discourse on desire and abstinence. 4 Macc. 1:33-4 also speaks of the abstinence required by the dietary laws as instance of the mastery of reason over the passions.

desire in three ways. First, the prohibited foods are “fleshy and fat, and calculated to excite treacherous pleasure” (4.100), and therefore the dietary laws promote frugality and abstinence (4.101). Second, many of the prohibited animals are cruel and carnivorous, and people eating them themselves become cruel by feelings of vengeance which are aroused by killing and eating man-eating animals (4.103-4). Third, the prohibited animals, as in *Aristeas*, symbolise various evil traits (and vice versa); abstinence from them teaches people to avoid these traits (4.105-118).

On the explicit level, purity and impurity do not figure strongly in these discussions: all the explanations - social, ascetic or symbolic - would not change significantly if we spoke of prohibition rather than impurity. While the equation of impurity with prohibition is inherent already in the bible, *Aristeas*' rejection of the ontological perspective on the impure animals further cements it. But despite the rationalisations, a certain notion of contamination is retained in these explanations, whether in the possibility of social influence or in the influence of luxurious foods. These ascetic and social explanations show that the symbolic dimension, in which the prohibition is supposed to influence moral reflexion, is not itself sufficient as an explanation for these writers.

Animal blood

Blood, animal and human, provided a central symbolic nexus in biblical and Second Temple cult and literature. Criminal murder was described as a spilling of blood, which required expiation and purification by spilling the blood of the murderer. Animal blood was the most potent purificant in temple cult, and its manipulation and sprinkling on the altar was a central part of most sacrifices.¹⁰⁷ In parallel, animal blood was prohibited for consumption; meat could only be eaten following slaughtering of the animal (as opposed to other modes of killing) and covering of the blood. The bible (Lev 7:26-7; 17:10-14; Deut 12:23-4) explains that blood is prohibited because it “is the soul” and is preserved for expiation through sacrifice. Despite its prohibition, and as opposed to the impure animals, terms of impurity are not used towards animal blood in

¹⁰⁷ See Ex 29:20-21; 30:10; Lev 5:9; 8:15; 14:49-52; 16:14-19; Gilders (2004).

the Hebrew bible.¹⁰⁸ However, a person who eats a carcass from which blood has not been drained is said to be impure, requiring relatively minor purification - washing and waiting till evening (Lev 17:15-16), an impurity which may be associated with the blood still present in the meat. This minor impurity may be opposed to the impurities associated with human blood - the major prohibited impurities of murder, idolatry and sexual sin¹⁰⁹ and the major permitted impurities of menstruation and other emissions (Lev 15).

The prohibition of consuming animal blood was taken to different directions in Late Second Temple literature. *Jubilees* strongly emphasises it (6.6-14, 7.25-33) coupling it with the shedding of human blood.¹¹⁰ *Jubilees* states that the earth must be purified of the blood shed upon it through the blood of the one who shed it (7.33), applying a verse speaking of murder (Num. 35:33) to the consumption of animal blood. Early Rabbinic sources, however, attempt to lighten the prohibition, allowing the usage of animal blood for agriculture, limiting the types of blood prohibited for consumption, and understanding the verse in Gen. 9:4 as prohibiting not consumption of blood but rather eating of an animal while still alive.

The anthropology of defilement

Accompanying the expansion of the relevance of impurity as both a ritual and moral concept, Second Temple texts also develop a more complex anthropology to articulate the significance of impurity and purification to the individual.

¹⁰⁸ As Biale (2007), 12, points out, “while animal and human blood, properly spilled, do not create ritual pollution - and, indeed, animal blood is the most powerful ritual detergent for decontaminating such pollution - blood improperly spilled is associated with the three cardinal, ‘moral’ sins that defile the land;” See also Wright (1992), 736: “blood... [is] not prohibited on the basis of impurity.” Douglas (1966), 61, 125 and Hanson (1993) wrongly say that blood was polluting according to the bible. For criticism on this point see Maghen (2004), 72-5.

¹⁰⁹ The association of murder with blood is obvious, see e.g. Gen 4:10-11; Num 35:33-4; *Jub.* 6.6-14, 7.25-31; *1 En.* 7. For idolatry and blood, see Lev 17:3-6, Ez 36:17-18, Ps 106:34-8; for sexual sin, *1 En.* 15.4.

¹¹⁰ For a similar juxtaposition, see Ez 33:25; a stronger link is found in *1 En.* 7; See Himmelfarb (2006), 61-6; Werman (1995); Gilders (2006).

One direction is the reification of sin-related impurity as a demon or spirit. While in the Hebrew Bible impurity is never linked to any personal force, several Second Temple texts do so. In *1 Enoch*, the heavenly Watchers “defile themselves” with mortal women, a union which produces monstrous giants (7.1, 9.7-8, 10.20-22, 15.3-7); the defilement is probably the result of the sexual contact being a mixture of heavenly and earthly beings, and perhaps also of the relationship with menstrual women.¹¹¹ In *Jubilees*, the progeny of the Watchers are evil spirits, who cause diseases and incite people to sin (specifically, idolatry, bloodshed and eating blood), and are called “impure demons” (10.1-14).¹¹² In these texts, the demons are independent beings, external to humans, and their impurity is a result of their evil deeds. In the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, which may, however, be of a later provenance, spirits of impurity and of fornication, the forces of Beliar, are given an inner, psychological role.¹¹³ A person with a divided heart or mind vacillates between loyalty to spirits of impurity/fornication and to God, while righteous people have a pure, undivided mind, rejecting the influence of impure spirits (*T. Levi* 9.9; *T. Benjamin* 8.2-3; *T. Reuben* 5-6). *T. Reuben* 2-3 presents a list of the spirits, good and evil, who battle in a person’s mind or soul, leading to righteousness or sin.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, which include many demonic beings, present the best case for links between demons and impurity.¹¹⁴ As a personification of the powers against which the Sons of Light are fighting, these demonic beings have a significant role in the Scrolls’ dualist worldview. Though individual demonic beings are named, they are also frequently described as a group as “evil spirits” or “wicked spirits.” At times, such spirits are said to enter people and to cause disease, which may be healed through exorcism;¹¹⁵ and apotropaic prayers are found to ward off the influence of the spirits, sometimes described as “impure” (*ruah ṭme’ah*, 11Q5 19.15-16, 4Q444 8). These spirits are not only external beings, but also invade the person’s body, heart or mind,

¹¹¹ See Wahlen (2004), 31; Loader (2007), 8-52.

¹¹² VanderKam (2003); Wahlen (2004), 34-7; Loader (2007), 126-45.

¹¹³ See Wahlen (2004), 50-2; Rosen-Zvi (2006), 83-90.

¹¹⁴ Milgrom (1995); Alexander (1998), 348-50; Kister (1999); Wahlen (2004), 37-50.

¹¹⁵ 1QapGen 20; 4Q560; 11QPs^a19, 24. see Eshel (2003).

influence their victim's decisions and lead him or her to sin, although a certain degree of free will is maintained.¹¹⁶ Thus the cosmic forces of evil, the inner battle of spirits and bodily harm through disease are integrated through the demonic-spiritual realm.¹¹⁷ Internal sin-impurity and its purification is at times explicitly incorporated into this spiritual worldview. For example, in the eschaton, according to the *Rule of the Community*, God will “purify [the believer] by the holy spirit from all wicked acts and sprinkle upon him the spirit of truth from all the abominations of falsehood, and from being polluted by a spirit of impurity.”¹¹⁸ There is, however, little evidence that permitted impurities were seen as a direct demonic influence.¹¹⁹

According to several of the Dead Sea Scrolls, sin impurity is by no means only a product of external influences; it arises from inherent sinfulness and guilt of humans, linked especially to the flesh.¹²⁰ Recently, several scholars have proposed that both bodily impurities and impurity caused by sin, expressed by such terms as *‘erva* (ערוה) and *nidda* (נדה), are seen by the Dead Sea Scrolls as aspects or results of the inherent lowliness of humans. They can therefore be purified

¹¹⁶ For the source of sin as external or internal and the consequences for theodicy, free will and determinism, see the wide-ranging study of Brand (2013).

¹¹⁷ Kister (1999); Levison (2006). Frey (1997) argues that while in earlier sapiential texts such as the *Treatise of the Two Spirits* the different dimensions of dualism (cosmic, ethical and psychological (e.g., the struggle of spirits in the heart)) are integrated, in later sectarian texts which align the ethical border along the borders of the sect, the importance of ethical dualism is reduced and social and cosmic dualism is emphasised.

¹¹⁸ IQS 4.21: “...ולטהרו ברוח קודש מכול עלילות רשעה, ויז עליו רוח אמת כמי נדה מכל תועבות שקר והתגולל ברוח נדה...”. See Flusser (1979), 217-24; Himmelfarb (2001), 29-34; Wahlen (2004), 45-7. The language of purification by spirits of holiness and truth is clearly derived from Ps. 51 and Ez. 36:25-27. The influence of these verses is seen also in 1QS 3.7-8; 1QH 8.30, 16.20; *Jub.* 1.23; *T. Benjamin* 8.3; *Aramaic Levi Document*, 3.13 (ed. M.E. Stone and E. Eshel (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 63). And see Levison (2002), 250-3.

¹¹⁹ Contra Milgrom (1995), 66; see Baumgarten (1990).

¹²⁰ CD 3.12-18; 1QS 11.9-21; 1QH 5.30-33, 9.21-24, 12.28-37; 4Q418 81.2-3; 4Q512 29-38. See Kister (2009), 515-22; Himmelfarb (2001), 35-6; Frey (2002).

by a holy spirit (whether in the eschaton or through the rituals of the sect) only by virtue of God's grace given to those who fulfil his commandments.¹²¹

For Philo of Alexandria, who followed a Platonic tripartite division of the soul together with a Stoic moral philosophy, the true objective of much of the Mosaic law is the purification of the rational part of the soul from desire, passions and influences of the body and the senses, found in the irrational soul.¹²² Such true purification allows the knowledge or sight of God.¹²³ While Philo describes the body as opposed to the soul in highly negative terms, he does not espouse severe asceticism but rather a moderation of the pleasures of the body.¹²⁴ When relating to purification before sacrifice (*Spec.* 1.257-60), Philo emphasises the importance of purification of both soul and body, and that the latter is secondary to the former. The purification of the body is attained through ablutions, and that of the soul through sacrifices. This would seem to correspond to the biblical distinction between permitted and prohibited purity, though here the focus is on the purification of the individual sinner, and not of the temple or the land.¹²⁵ At the same time, the body is itself the subject of the purification ritual, since according to Philo the mixture of water and ashes sprinkled in the ritual is supposed to remind the purified person of the humble origins of the body, and to lead to moral change.

In many instances, purification of the body is seen by Philo as an external symbol for the

¹²¹ Birenboim (2003). Holtz (2012), 519-36, uses the term "constitutional purity" to designate this inherent defilement.

¹²² E.g., *Cher.* 48-51; *Her.* 184-5; *Migr.* 67; *Leg.* 129-32; *Sobr.* 62-4; See Hay (1987); Winston (1984); Leonhardt-Balzer (2001), 256-72; Gaca (2003), 190-220; Brand (2013), 119-25. On the ascetic role of the dietary laws in purifying passions, see *Spec.* 4.100-131 with Svebakken (2009), 187-227.

¹²³ *QE* 2.51; *Abr.* 122.

¹²⁴ See Winston (1998); Gaca (2003), 190-220. The Therapeutae, however, are described as fasting for up to six days, *Contemp.* 34; and Moses despised "all connection with women" from the start of his prophecy, *Mos.* 2.68. For the various forms of asceticism in Philo, see See Fraade (1986), 264-5 and Satlow (2008).

¹²⁵ Klawans (2000), 64-5.

true meaning of the law – purification of the soul from the passions.¹²⁶ The connection is not only symbolic, however: Moses, for example, purified “not only his soul but also his body” by separating from his wife and fasting, in order to serve as a prophet and receive the Torah.¹²⁷ For Philo, the body-soul division thus serves as shorthand for the discernment of morally significant purifications from the less significant; they are carefully distinguished but continually linked.

A similar distinction and link is made by Josephus when describing the ablutions of John the Baptist: John taught that the baptized “must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed,” but rather that it serve as “a purification (ἐφ’ ἀγνεία) of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behaviour (ἅτε δὴ καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς δικαιοσύνη προεκεκαθαρμένης).”¹²⁸ Body and soul here serve to articulate the relationship between external action and sin; the two are ambiguously linked, but the link is not causal in either direction. The *Rule of the Community*, which as we discussed conflates purification from sin and from bodily impurity to some degree, also expresses this in anthropological terms: “it is through the submission of his soul (*nafsho*, נַפְשׁוֹ) to all the statutes of God that his flesh (*bešaro*, בֶּשָׂרוֹ) shall be purified, being sprinkled with waters for purification and made holy by waters for cleansing (1QS 3.9).”

Josephus emphasises that for John a righteous life was essential for baptism, since baptism could not be used to gain pardon for past sins. John – or Josephus’ report – may have been a critical response to ideas on immersion for purity advanced by contemporary groups or individuals. Josephus says that the Essenes bathe their bodies in cold water as a purification

¹²⁶ *Cher.* 17, 94-6; *Deus.* 7-9; *Plant.* 175-7; *Spec.* 3.208-9. And see Neusner (1973), 44-50; Kazen (2002), 219. Compare *Ps.-Phoc* 228; *Lett. Arist.* 139, 234; *Sir.* 34.25-6.

¹²⁷ *Mos.* 2.68; see Koltun-Fromm (2010), 177-9.

¹²⁸ Josephus, *A.J.* 18.117. For the relationship of this passage with Christian accounts, see below p. 218. On this well-known passage, see Flusser (1979), 84-9; Flusser (1988), 50-54; Collins (1989); Meier (1992); Taylor (1997), 88-100; Klawans (2000), 138-43; Lawrence (2006), 74-5. A minority opinion, represented by Nir (2012), doubts its authenticity.

before meals, and also when touched by a foreigner or someone of a lower rank inside the group, and that his teacher Bannus performed “frequent ablutions of cold water, by day and night, for purity (πρὸς ἀγνείαν).”¹²⁹ For these individuals, regular immersion was seen as part of a general project of supererogatory purification and asceticism, and not simply as a purification for the bodily impurities described in the Torah. While the Essenes or Bannus probably did not believe immersion to simply purify from sin, rival groups may have believed their practices implied this (or simply alleged that they did), and this may explain John’s insistence that baptism does not independently purify from sin. Alternatively, Josephus’ insistence on the lack of efficacy of a solely external ritual may be directed at Christians, who perceived baptism in general, and John’s baptism in particular, as a “pardon for sins” even as they called for repentance to accompany it (see below p. 218).¹³⁰

Purity and defilement in Rabbinic texts

The study of purity in Judaism in the second and third centuries, after the destruction of the temple, is to a great extent dependent on the study of the large corpus of Tannaitic texts discussing purity and on archaeology.¹³¹ Although the textual evidence is voluminous, it is almost all dedicated to technical discussions of the purity rules, and seldom discusses the Rabbis’ general approach to purity, or even discloses to what extent the theoretical discussions reflect contemporary practice. Extracting such information from the texts is further

¹²⁹ B.J. 2.129, 138, 150; Vita 11.

¹³⁰ For discussion of this latter option, see Meier (1992), p. 231 n. 21. For later hostile caricatures of Christian baptism as magically effecting a forgiveness of sins, see below p. 245 n.84.

¹³¹ The sixth part of the *Mishnah* and the accompanying *Tosefta*, as well as many passages throughout the Rabbinic corpus, are dedicated to purity issues. Studies of purity practices and conceptions in the second and third centuries include: Neusner (1973), 72-107; Neusner (1974); Oppenheimer (1977); Fraade (1986); Harrington (1993); Nielsen (1993); Klawans (2000), 92-133; Fonrobert (2000); Miller (2010); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 175-238. Archeological: Adler and Amit (2010). Purity is the focus of several recent dissertations in Rabbinic studies: Furstenberg (2010); Jacobowitz (2010); Balberg (2011). I thank Yair Furstenberg and Mira Balberg for giving me access to their dissertations.

complicated by questions of redaction and source criticism. The Rabbis' discussion is almost all limited to the "permitted impurities," which are basically those of the bible. However, the biblical rules undergo great elaboration and conceptualization, leading to the creation of a highly complex purity system, composed of various degrees of impurity and methods for their transmission. As in the bible, permitted impurities are rarely seen as sinful; however, the maintenance of purity for the eating of *ḥullin* appears in Rabbinic literature as a characteristic of select groups from among the Rabbis, *ḥaburot*, while disregard for purity rules in general is a characteristic of the *ʿamme ha'arets*. This would imply that for the Rabbis, as for the Dead Sea Sect, maintenance of purity was a social marker differentiating various Jewish groups, though this was doubtless not its only function.¹³²

From the detailed Rabbinic discussions of purity, it would appear that purity was regularly required for eating and preparing food even after the destruction of the temple, and not only for the eating of tithes but occasionally also for *ḥullin*. Indeed, stories and sayings preserved in the talmudim demonstrate that practices of eating in purity, as well as use of red heifer ashes, continued up to the early fourth century.¹³³ The crucial question, however, on which scholarship is as yet undecided, is whether this pertains only to the customs of small pietistic circle, or also a wider segment of the Palestinian population (not to speak of the diaspora). This question is linked to the larger debate on the degree of authority held by the Rabbis in second- and third-century Jewish society,¹³⁴ as well as to that of the social reality and status of the *ʿamme ha'arets* and the *ḥabura*, and their relationship to general Palestinian society. Yair Furstenberg has demonstrated that the while in the earliest traditions (first century) there is an attempt by the Rabbis to maintain purity status in their day-to-day life while integrated in general society, in the later traditions (early third century) purity is assigned to a circumscribed social circle,

¹³² See Furstenberg (2010), 209-62, who argues that according to *m. Hag* 2.7, the defilement of the *ʿamme ha'arets* was categorical, and was ultimately modeled upon that of gentiles. On the relationship of *ḥabura* and Dead Sea Sect, see Fraade (2009).

¹³³ Alon (1977); Oppenheimer (1977), 63-6; Nielsen (1993), 297-300; Adler (2010), 123-4, citing Shmuel Safrai, Yaacov Sussman and Louis Ginzberg; Furstenberg (2010), 1-5.

¹³⁴ see, e.g., Schwartz (2001), and the criticism of Miller (2007a).

and only to tithes and not to *hullin*.¹³⁵ Likewise, an analysis of traditions concerning the obligation of a man who had seminal emissions to wash before studying Torah, leads Yonatan Adler to the conclusion that it was still in force throughout the second century, but was no longer practiced by the middle of the third.¹³⁶ Synagogues frequently have water installations associated with them, indicating some instance of washing before prayer, though *mikvaot* near post-70 synagogues are rare.¹³⁷

Eating in purity according to Rabbinic *halakha*, however, is only one side of the matter. As Stuart Miller has argued, even if the majority did not adhere to the stipulations of the Mishna, this does not mean that they did not maintain purity rules at all. It is very reasonable to assume that Jewish women washed after menstruation and before sexual relations, even if many may not have kept the prescribed number of days according to the Rabbis or washed in a rabbinically valid *mikveh*.¹³⁸ In fact, there is some evidence that in the 2nd to 4th centuries, popular purity practices sometimes went beyond Rabbinic stipulations. A number of Christian accounts, mostly from the diaspora, testify that Jews used to wash after sexual relations, though these are frequently in a polemical context.¹³⁹ This is corroborated by the archaeological record, which shows continued use of *mikvaot* in the second and third centuries, and also from ambivalent Rabbinic references to such practices.¹⁴⁰ There is also some evidence that a degree of purification from death impurity by immersion was observed in this period, and not only by the Rabbis.¹⁴¹ Priests continued to be identified as such into the fourth century and beyond, and they may have had a significant role in synagogue worship; they would most probably have

¹³⁵ Furstenberg (2010), 261. See also Goodman (2000), 178-80.

¹³⁶ Adler (2008).

¹³⁷ Reich (1994); Adler (2008).

¹³⁸ For other methods of purification current in the middle ages with possible roots in an earlier period, such as sprinkling, see Cohen (1999).

¹³⁹ Nielsen (1993), 188-229.

¹⁴⁰ Adler and Amit (2010); Kiperwasser (2012).

¹⁴¹ Adler (2009).

continued to take care not to be defiled by the dead and to eat tithes in purity.¹⁴²

Thus purification from defilements was not only a memory from the temple: it continued to be a practical matter in the second and third centuries, both for the Rabbis and for other Palestinian Jews, while for the Roman diaspora we have little information. Observance of purity was in decline, however, and by the late third century related, for most Jews, principally to purification of women from menstruation defilement, and for priests – to refraining from defilement by corpses and cemeteries, and perhaps to purification in water before eating tithes. It is on the background of this environment that we can see the dual meaning of purity for the Rabbis: both as characterising the golden age of the temple, but also as very useful for delineating the holy spaces, people and times in their contemporary society.¹⁴³ The maintenance of purity rules in this period shows the relevance of loci of holiness other than the temple – whether in the temple-oriented dimension of priests and tithes, in the conception of the holy Jewish nation and their holy land, or in holiness achieved through extra-temple religious ritual such as prayer or Torah-study. This holiness may be associated with the individuals or the community who perform the rituals, as well as with the place they are performed – the synagogue.

The association of defilement with sin is rare in Tannaitic literature. Leprosy especially is associated with various sins, or seen as a punishment for them; however, it is more likely that these are connected to the disease, and not to the impurity which accompanies it.¹⁴⁴ Sin is occasionally described as impurity, and its rescinding or removal as purification, but these do

¹⁴² Ir-Shai (2004), 67-106; Levine (2005), 519-29. And see the criticism of Miller (2007b), for whom priests were not the main practitioners of purity in late ancient Palestine. For the decline of the observance of death impurity among priests in the Palestinian Talmud, see *y. Ber.* 3.1 with Ta-Shma (2002); and for the earlier leniency in this regard by the Tannaim, see Noam (2009).

¹⁴³ See Noam (2008). For the sacrality of the synagogue as both participating in that of the temple as well as a constant reminder of the lack of the temple, see Branham (1994).

¹⁴⁴ Klawans (2000), 98-104.

not go far beyond the biblical ideas of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:30), Ps 51 or Ez 36.¹⁴⁵ The Rabbis did assign ritual defilement to gentiles and to things associated with them, an idea which may or may not have been an innovation.¹⁴⁶ Although in principle gentiles are not included in the biblical system of defilement and purification – they are neither pure nor impure – the Rabbis considered them categorically defiled as a *zav*, one who has irregular genital emissions.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, idols, as well as idol-offerings, are said to be defiling, and so are all lands outside of the land of Israel, ostensibly due to the fear of unmarked bones.¹⁴⁸ These ideas, which function (and perhaps even intention) was probably to bolster the self-identity of Jews as a pure nation vs. the gentiles, demonstrate how impurity could still be used for the marking of status in a post-temple environment.

More innovative are requirements of purity not as a preparation for a religious ritual, but as practices for raising the spiritual level of the individual, i.e., as ascetic practices, whether sexual or alimentary.¹⁴⁹ Rabbinic writings are characterised by a tension between the affirmation of marriage, procreation and sexuality, and the conception that sexuality is at times detrimental to spiritual development. The dominant resolution of this tension is to support moderate and ordered sexuality as the ideal for the sage, but other opinions, which support the

¹⁴⁵ Lev 16:30 is central in *m. Yoma*'s description of the Day of Atonement ritual; see 3.8, 4.2, 6.2, and esp. 8.9; and see Klawans (2000), 116.

¹⁴⁶ Alon (1977), Birenboim (2006) and Noam (2010), 27-41, believe the rabbinic decrees are based on second-temple customs; Klawans (1995); Hayes (2002), 107-44 and Balberg (2011), 184-230, argue that they are an innovation.

¹⁴⁷ *t. Zabim* 2.1.

¹⁴⁸ *m. ʿAbod. Zar.* 3.6, *M. Šabb.* 9.1; *t. Zabim* 5.6-7; *t. Ohal.* 17.6-7, 18.1-2.

¹⁴⁹ The most pertinent tradition is Pinehas ben Yair's saying, "Scrupulousness leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to purity, purity leads to renunciation (*perišut*), renunciation leads to holiness, holiness leads to meekness, meekness leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to piety, piety leads to the holy spirit..." (*m. Soṭah* 9.15). See Fraade (1986), 269-77; Diamond (2003), and, mostly for a later period, Swartz (1994).

curtailment of sexuality for a time, are also voiced.¹⁵⁰ A similar tension is reflected in traditions on the nazirite, in which the Rabbis dispute whether abstinence produces holiness or rather requires expiation.¹⁵¹ Mira Balberg recently analysed the purity rules of the Mishnah as a discourse of subjectivity, reflecting the construction of the individual through constant self-examination, a conscious management of the self in an impure world.¹⁵² This discourse, she argues, is akin to the Greco-Roman concept of σωφροσύνη, denoting self-control, self-knowledge and moderation, which is central for the development of asceticism in the Roman Empire.¹⁵³

Summary

What is most striking about the role of purity in ancient Judaism is its diversity: purity language and conceptions were used to denote a wide, and not totally compatible, spectrum of meaning, from the moral to the ritual, and from the communal to the individual. This diversity – its relevance for many domains of religious life – is what allowed it to become such a potent symbol, through the transfer of values from one domain to the other. Accordingly, both battle and truce models of impurity came into play (see above p. 12). In some cases, purity vs. defilement was part of the general opposition between good and evil, expressed through various dimensions of theology, law and anthropology; here, there can be no neutral middle ground between pure and impure: the impure/evil/sinful must be eradicated. In other cases, the opposition of purity vs. defilement is much less charged – both are normal, an expression of human life.

In the first centuries CE, purity functioned as a tool for creating new sites for holiness, and especially for differentiating different groups in Jewish society and for articulating the difference between Jews and non-Jews. This was true also before the destruction of the temple; but this destruction meant that holiness would necessarily be situated in new ways.

¹⁵⁰ Boyarin (1993), 134-66; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 214-38.

¹⁵¹ Diamond (2003), 121-32.

¹⁵² Balberg (2011), 231-80.

¹⁵³ Balberg (2011), 265-8. Balberg does not use the term “asceticism” in her analysis.

Purity rituals frequently had moral implications – though the scope and significance of these implications changed widely between different groups and periods, and some purity rituals were more apt for expressing moral attitudes than others. Purity as a ritual reflection of moral conceptions was especially prominent when purity became aligned with group-borders and defilement signified the crossing of these borders. At these instances, sin could be reified as the outsider, and the defilement of sin as the contact with the other. Another channel for reification of sin as defilement passed through the demonic, cast in many texts as the source for evil, though the character of demonic defilement is never clearly defined, and rarely assimilated to the more mundane bodily defilement.

Purity practices in Palestinian Jewish society of the 1st century BC to the 1st century CE certainly went far beyond those found in what would be found in a contemporary Greek society. This can be seen especially in the extensive elaboration of purity laws found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Rabbinic texts: while the core principle of the defilement of death and sex are similar to those of the Greek sacred Laws, the intricate methods of contagion and purification and the various effects of defilement on food are not found elsewhere. Furthermore, some of the new sources of defilement identified during the Second Temple period and later – of gentiles and their food, of idolatry, and of territory outside Palestine – are certainly more a defensive measure against Greco-Roman culture than an adoption of it, and there are no significant parallels to such defilements in Greco-Roman cults.

And yet, the individualization and corresponding de-sacralisation of purity issues in Judaism of this period, expanding requirements of purity beyond the traditional sacred spaces and times and focusing on the human body itself, can be linked to contemporary Greco-Roman ideas. This is, unsurprisingly, more easily seen in Greek authors (i.e., Philo and Josephus), but is not confined to them. Philo's interpretation of purification as pertaining to the advancement of the person, the depiction of sexual sin as defilement, and the promotion of Jewish ascetics are clearly influenced by Platonic, Stoic and Pythagorean models, and are all quite in line with contemporary Greco-Roman literary custom. The Dead Sea Sect, with its displacement of sacrality from temple to the holy community and self and the corresponding expansion of purity concerns can also be seen along this trajectory, though here biblical language and concepts permeate the literature to a much greater extent. In the evocative literature of the

Chapter I: Greco-Roman and Jewish Context

sect, the body and wrongdoing are blended into an unfied image of defilement as part of a grand dualist scheme; even if coming from different sources, this is reminiscent of Platonic body-soul dualism. Finally, in the rabbinic period, operating in a post-temple era, most of the purity laws were transformed from practical reality to discourse alone, an object for study and discussion. Those which remained in practice were reoriented from the temple and its sacrifices to that of the individual and the community.

Chapter II

Purity opposed: early Christian attitudes towards dietary impurity

Introduction

Food was the main focus for explicit discussion of purity in the first three centuries. This focus reflects the central preoccupation of early Christian writers to construct Christian communities in relation and in opposition to Judaism. Dietary laws were an important aspect of Jewish representation and self-identification in the ancient world; in the Roman Empire, rigorous dietary laws similar to those of Leviticus were quite rare, and Christians of the first centuries had to decide to what extent they saw themselves as obligated to such laws. At the same time, early Christians practiced additional dietary laws, not all of them directly related to the Levitical ones.

A preliminary question requiring clarification is what purity and defilement mean in this context; not all food from which people willingly and categorically abstain must be considered impure. In the Hebrew bible, some foodstuffs are prohibited in certain cases but this does not make them impure: leavened bread on Passover, wine for officiating priests, and perhaps *chelev* and blood. Our discussion, as in the thesis in general, is dependent on the terms of purity and defilement used in the text, and prohibition or abstinence not accompanied by such terms cannot be instances of purity discourse.

1. Purity of food in the New Testament

The importance of food as a focus for purity issues in earliest Christianity is apparent from the large number of passages in the letters of Paul, the Gospels and Acts discussing dietary laws and food purity. These passages had a decisive impact on subsequent Christian discussions.¹ In the NT, food defilement is always discussed in a conflictual setting, in which a certain group takes defilement more seriously than others; the immediate objective of the author in these passages is to provide guidance concerning the identity of “true” defilement as opposed to “false”

¹ For a comprehensive bibliography on purity in the Gospels, see Meier (2009), 415-26.

defilement as understood by the rival groups. This guidance focuses on the relationship of defilement with sin and on the anthropology of defilement, i.e., which aspects of the person are involved in it. These characteristics of the NT discussion on food defilement were to become the standard talking points in the following centuries, not only concerning issues of food defilement, but in impurity discourse as a whole.

Gospels

By far the most influential text was Mark 7:1-23 and its parallel, Matthew 15:1-20. According to Mark's report, Jesus' disciples were criticised by the Pharisees for eating with hands that are unwashed and therefore defiled (κοινᾶις), against "the traditions of the elders".² Before eating, Mark explains in an aside, "the Pharisees and all the Jews" wash their hands, and they also wash any food from the market and their utensils. Jesus accuses them of hypocrisy for practicing such human traditions while abandoning the commandments of God.³ He then teaches a parable to the crowd: "there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out of the person are what defile the person (7:15)."⁴ To the disciples he explains,

"(18) 'Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, (19) since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?' Thus he declared all foods pure. (20) And he said, 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles. (21) For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions

² The term *koinon*, commonly used in the NT to denote defilement, is found with this meaning only in Jewish Greek; its first attestation is in *1 Maccabees* 1.47, referring to animals that Jews refuse to eat (together with swine). Wahlen (2005) argues that it denotes a status of doubtful purity; Furstenberg (2010), 226n.60, based on House (1983), believes that in the NT it denotes something which was defiled by something else, but is not naturally impure. See further Hauck (1964).

³ For an argument that in the Roman world the meaning of ritual rested on authority, see Scheid (2007); here Jesus is critiquing ritual by undermining its authority.

⁴ οὐδέν ἐστιν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν ὃ δύναται κοινῶσαι αὐτόν· ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενά ἐστιν τὰ κοινοῦντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery...”⁵

The Matthean version is shorter, and less radical: “it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles” (15:11); significantly, the statement in 19b, “thus he declared all foods pure,” indicating a wide-ranging dismantling of Jewish food purity, is missing in Matthew. Furthermore, Matthew closes the unit with the saying that sins defile a person, but “to eat with unwashed hands does not defile,” focusing the discussion solely on the question of hand washing. The majority view is that the Markan tradition is earlier than Matthew, and that Matthew reworked the Markan tradition to better speak to his Jewish audience.⁶

Despite the primacy of the Markan version, many scholars have denied the authenticity of 7:19b, even though most uphold that of 7:15, 18-20.⁷ Without this addition, Jesus’ sayings in verses 15 and 18-21 are not so radical: read in the context of the hand-washing disputation, they only relate to food defiled by impure hands (an innovation no earlier than the first century

⁵ οὐ νοεῖτε ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἔξωθεν εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς τὸν ἄνθρωπον οὐ δύναται αὐτὸν κοινῶσαι, ὅτι οὐκ εἰσπορεύεται αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἀλλ’ εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν, καὶ εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκπορεύεται; καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα. ἔλεγεν δὲ ὅτι Τὸ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκεῖνο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον· ἔσωθεν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς καρδίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοὶ ἐκπορεύονται, πορνεῖαι, κλοπαί, φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι...

⁶ See Booth (1986), 49-50; Lindars (1988); Davies and Allison (1988-97), II.516-17; Kazen (2010), 126-7; Meier (2009), 388-91. Dissenters are Sigal (1983), Dunn (1990), 43-4, who believes Matthew (and the close parallel, *Gos. Thom.* 14) relies here on an earlier oral tradition earlier or contemporary with that reflected by Mark, perhaps part of Q.

⁷ Räisänen (1982) and Meier (2009), 384-97 argue that Jesus’ parable as reported by Mark is not authentic. Most scholars, however, believe 15, and perhaps 18-21, are authentic; see Booth (1986), 46-53; Klawans (2000), 146-7; Collins (2007), 353. Chilton (2003) proposes a reconstruction of four stages of editing of the text, from Jesus’ original logion to the final Markan redaction, reflecting increasingly hostile attitudes towards traditional purity perceptions.

BC) and not to the biblical dietary laws.⁸ Even read as a separate unit, the things coming “from outside” would probably relate, in an early first century context, to food defiled by corpse defilement or genital emissions, and not to food categorically prohibited by the torah.⁹ Scholars have also pointed out that the opposition between the things “coming from outside” and “from inside” may not be absolute but relative, i.e. that the things coming from outside are not completely non-defiling, but only less significantly defiling than those from inside; this would be a commonplace in first-century Judaism, as we saw.¹⁰ Furthermore, while the explanation to the disciples identifies the things coming in as food and those going out as evil intentions, this is not explicit in the parable itself. Some have argued that the parable in fact opposes two kinds of *ritual* defilements: the biblical permitted impurities coming from within, specifically genital emissions; and food which has been defiled, which indeed does not defile the person eating it according to the bible.¹¹ This opposition is then used by Jesus to make the point that moral actions are more important than ritual, but without a rejection of any biblical defilement laws and certainly not of dietary laws.

Mark, however, was acting in the context of a partly gentile church, in which the status of the biblical dietary laws themselves was in dispute, and following the Pauline challenge of the relevance of the Mosaic Law for gentiles.¹² He therefore portrays Jesus as purifying “all foods,” which readers in the second and third centuries – the perspective we are focusing on – always understood to mean the biblically prohibited animals.¹³ At their final stage of redaction, the

⁸ See the readings of Booth (1986), 65-74; Kazen (2002), 63-7, 86-8, 229; Furstenberg (2008); Avemarie (2010) denies that the handwashing incident was the original context of the saying.

⁹ Kister (2001); Furstenberg (2008).

¹⁰ Above, p. 61ff. See Booth (1986), 69-71, Dunn (1990), 51; Klawans (2000), 147; Kazen (2002), 65-6, 88; Collins (2007), 354-5.

¹¹ Booth (1986), 206-13; Kister (2001), 150-3; Furstenberg (2008).

¹² See especially the parallel between Rom 14:14 and Mark 7:19. For possible Pauline influences on the final Markan narrative, see Wong (2001); Chilton (2003); Meier (2009), 394-7; Avemarie (2010), 273-4.

¹³ For possible alternative readings which do not see 7:19b as relating to the dietary laws, see Tomson

sayings in their context oppose the irrelevance of Jewish washing rituals and dietary laws to the significance of the impurity of evil actions. Thus the concept of impurity is not discarded; rather, Mark's Jesus strictly and explicitly separates the impurity of food from sin impurity in an unprecedented fashion, rejects one and upholds the other. By concluding the hand-washing narrative with the statement "thus he declared all foods pure," Mark merges hand-washing and biblical dietary laws into one undifferentiated principle of Jewish ritual purity, a construction which would be the basis for future discussions. Thus the dietary laws are characterised as non-essential and "external" as opposed to the significance and "internality" of moral precepts; the degree of significance is expressed as a degree of defilement.

Outside vs. inside the body is the reigning image through which Mark's Jesus expresses his views on purity.¹⁴ Even though food is eaten and internalised, it is still considered external since it is then evicted from the body, and especially does not enter the heart; only things coming from the heart – actions born from intentions (διαλογισμοί) – are really significant and therefore defiling. The list of evil things which come from within and defile is diverse. It includes the traditional biblical sources of sin defilement (fornication, murder, adultery, though not idolatry); other inter-personal sins (theft, deceit, envy, slander) some of which are known from the Dead Sea Scrolls as sources of sin impurity, personal qualities (avarice, pride, folly) and a general term, wickedness.¹⁵ The defilement accompanying them is less the result of the evil

(1999), 206; Kazen (2002), 220; Wahlen (2006), 73--9; Crossley (2009). In my opinion, the ungrammaticality of 7:19b is a good indication for a radical reading, which would not easily be integrated into the earlier argument. If indeed Mark is relating here to the dietary laws, this can be understood in two ways, both radical: or that Jesus declared that no foods have ever been impure (denying that the OT was ever to be practiced), or that they were impure in the past, but he is now purifying them (providing him with the power to purify what is naturally impure). See Marcus (2000), 457, who opts for the second option.

¹⁴ See also Matt. 23:25-26 paralleling Luke 11:37-41, with Uro (2000) and Kazen (2002), 222-31.

¹⁵ Klawans (2000), 146-50; Kazen (2002), 214-9 speaks of Jesus as developing and radicalizing the "moral trajectory" found in late Second Temple Judaism concerning purity.

action than of its source in the person's *διαλογισμοὶ*.¹⁶ In parallel, it is the person who is defiled, and not – as in the Hebrew Bible – the land or the temple. As in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature, the heart represents the true essence of the person, especially that of intentionality and moral responsibility.¹⁷ Thus Mark identifies and ties together two features which characterise moral purity: interiority and intention.

Pauline Epistles

Mark's strict opposition of inner and outer, rejecting a defilement associated with food, is generally in line with the major Pauline discussions of food purity, 1 Cor 9-11 and Rom 14-15. Mark's focus on the individual's thoughts as the basis for impurity is ultimately affirmed by the Pauline discussions, although the latter also emphasises the social meanings of eating, and recognizes the need to honour the impurity beliefs of other members of the community, even if they are not objectively grounded. For Paul and his community the contentious dietary issues are food offered to idols (1 Cor 8-10), Jews eating with gentiles (Gal. 2), and eating meat and drinking wine (Romans). The biblical dietary laws are not explicitly mentioned, though they may have been the background for the abstinence described in Romans. In Romans 14-15, purity language is emphatically used; in 1 Corinthians 9-11, there is only a single occurrence of a purity term regarding food.

The relativisation and individualisation of defilement can be seen clearly in Romans 14, where Paul speaks of the eating customs of different groups in the community: "Some believe in eating anything, while the delicate eat only vegetables (v. 2)" Later in the chapter, it is mentioned that some "eat meat and drink wine" while others do not (v. 21). Various proposals have been offered for understanding the abstinence of "the weak" in Rom 14. Vegetarianism, as we saw earlier (p. 41), was a central plank of the Neopythagorean purity doctrine and was a common doctrine in contemporary philosophical circles. In parallel, total abstinence from meat provided a simple way to adhere to the Jewish dietary laws in a gentile

¹⁶ Ottenheijm (2000), 146.

¹⁷ Raasch (1966), 11-21; Collins (2007), 356-7. And see Ps 24:3, 51:12; Jer 4:14, Prov 6:18 and Matt 5:8 on purity of heart, with Bauer and Felber (1988); Betz (1995), 134-7.

environment,¹⁸ and is portrayed in some Jewish texts as an act of piety and mourning for the destruction of the temple, or mourning for sin.¹⁹ Moreover, as meat and wine were associated with idolatry, abstinence expressed its total rejection.²⁰ There was thus ample background for vegetarianism to spread in early Christian communities. Paul's lack of specificity concerning the dietary issues at hand is itself telling; even if the abstention is based on Jewish dietary concerns, the question of the precise *halakhic* categories is less important than the meaning of pure/impure categorization for the community. For Paul and his readers, a person abstaining from certain foods will mark them as pure, and vice versa; impurity is synonymous with prohibition.

Each group, Paul says, should adhere to its beliefs; the strong (Paul among them) should not judge the delicate, even if the latter are in the wrong:

(14:13) Let us therefore no longer pass judgment (κρίνωμεν) on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another.

(14) I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is impure in itself; but it is impure for anyone who thinks it impure (οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι' ἑαυτοῦ· εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκείνῳ κοινόν) ... (20) ... Everything is indeed pure (πάντα μὲν καθαρὰ), but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat...

(23) But those who have doubts (διακρινόμενος) are condemned (κατακέκριται) if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

The reiteration that “nothing is impure of itself” and that “everything is pure” forcefully puts forward Paul's position on the impurity of food; with such statements, it is reasonable to

¹⁸ Probable examples are Dan 1, Jud. 12:1-4, Josephus *Vit.* 4.

¹⁹ For the temple - *M. Ta'anit* 4.6; *b. Baba Batra* 60b=t. *Sotah* 15.11-12; for sin - *T. Reu.* 1.10, *T. Jud.* 15.4. For a summary of evidence and scholarship, see Toney (2006), 56-61.

²⁰ The Jewish connection is strengthened by Paul's use of *koinon* for impurity, see above n. 2. See Dunn (1988), 818-19; Barclay (1996); and see McGowan (1999a), 33-88 for Jewish and Greco-Roman meat and wine abstentions in antiquity, 226-31 on Romans. Reasoner (1999), 137, identifies in the abstinence of the weak/delicate “a composite of Jewish and pagan values current in first-century Rome.”

conclude that Paul believed that the biblical dietary laws did not have a firm ontological basis, and furthermore that he thought that this stance is commensurate or even based on a tradition from Jesus.²¹ Nevertheless, Paul recognises the need for abstinence in certain cases, seemingly not only because of the care and respect that must be taken towards others who abstain in order to maintain a unified community and out of brotherly love, but also because eating impure food is truly sinful for those who “have doubts.” This points to a notion of subjective dietary impurity based on a person’s internal integrity and faith, though subjective, however, this perception of impurity must be respected by the community as a whole. Daniel Schwartz has recently argued that this relativist conception of impurity accords with Paul’s general stance on the Law, namely, that it is still in force for those who do not have the saving knowledge of the believers, and that such people sin if they do not abide by it.²²

In 1 Cor 8-10, Paul contends with a more specific question of eating food which was offered to idols.²³ He envisions a number of situations in which this might occur: in a temple (8:10),²⁴ by buying meat of doubtful origin (10:25), or by eating food of doubtful origin in a non-believers’ house (10:27). In the first case the food should not be eaten, while in the two other cases it may, as long as it is not known that it was indeed offered to idols; the attempt to understand this apparent discrepancy has been the basis of much scholarship. Paul explains the

²¹ Of course, if Mark 7:15 is seen as inauthentic then it could be based on Paul and not vice versa. See Wong (2001) and above n. 7.

²² Schwartz (2012); Furstenberg (2011) has a similar reading of 14:14, but sees the relativist conception as going back to Jesus, with Paul shifting to a more absolutist notion in 14:20. I thank Yair Furstenberg for allowing me to read the text of this unpublished paper.

²³ The scholarship on 1 Cor 8-10 is considerable; beside the commentaries there are a large number of monographs from the past three decades. I found most helpful the commentaries of Fee (1987), 357-491, Thiselton (2000) and Fitzmeyer (2008), 330-404 and the studies of Tomson (1990), 189-221, Borgen (1994), Cheung (1999) and Still (2002). For a recent survey of scholarship see Fotopoulos (2003), 1-37.

²⁴ The precise situation envisioned here is much debated: to what extent was eating in a temple linked to sacrifice to the gods? For a thorough investigation, see Fotopoulos (2003), 49-178.

prohibition in the first case as follows:

(8:7) ...Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their consciousness, being delicate, is defiled (ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενῆς οὖσα μολύνεται)... (10) For if others see you, who possess knowledge (γῶσιν), eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their consciousness is delicate (ἀσθενοῦς), be encouraged (οἰκοδομηθήσεται) to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols?²⁵

Many have read this as indicating that Paul does not believe that there is an essential problem with food offered to idols, and that its prohibition is only a matter of maintaining peace in the community.²⁶ However, Peter Tomson and Alex Cheung have argued according to Jewish parallels and in light of the forceful anti-idolatry language in 10:1-23 that Paul's basic stance is that idol food should never be eaten,²⁷ but that idolatrous intention is required in order to render the food prohibited; in doubtful cases in which idolatrous intention is not clear, there is no obligation to investigate further if such intention was indeed present. The default situation, until known otherwise, is that the food was not used for idolatry, since "the earth and its fullness are the Lord's" (10:26). According to such a reading, the consciousness of the weak is defiled (συνείδησις αὐτῶν ... μολύνεται) when they in fact eat such food, since they are not strong in their new belief, and therefore still eat with intention towards idolatry, unprotected by true knowledge.²⁸

A third option is to continue the line of Romans 14: Paul does not believe in essential,

²⁵ Translation NRSV, with amendments following Tomson (1990), 195-7.

²⁶ E.g., Barrett (1965),

²⁷ Alternatively, Still (2002) reads Paul as saying that *in principle* food offered to idols is allowed, but that it should never be eaten in a temple setting due to the dangers to other community members.

²⁸ See Tomson (1990), 215-6; Cheung (1999), 130-4. And see Martin (1995), 179-89, who emphasises the prophylactic function of *gnosis* against the pollution of demons. For Martin, pollution is the main concern of Paul with food offered to idols, even though 8:7 is the only instance of purity language in these chapters.

objective dietary impurity, but nevertheless thinks that such impurity exists subjectively for those who believe in it (or lack the knowledge that it does not exist), and that the opinions and situation of these people should be respected by the other members. Paul interiorises the defilement and relativises it: some people are defiled but not others, according to their prior beliefs and character. It is not simply the food itself which defiles, but its interaction with the suitable consciousness which accepts it as idolatrous. Though this explanation has the advantage of cohering with Romans, it is somewhat at odds with Paul's categorical and "objective" description of the consumers of food offered to idols as partners (κοινωνοὺς) with demons and partaking (μετέχειν) of their table, which prevents them from taking part in the Lord's table (10:21-3).²⁹

Impurity does not appear to have been at the core of the dispute in Corinth, and this is signaled by the single mention of "defilement" in these chapters, itself rather unclear. "Defilement of consciousness" (8:7) parallels "wounding of consciousness" (v. 12); when community members eat food offered to idols, the delicate are harmed by being led to idolatry.³⁰ Defilement here is not used in a precise fashion. Rather, it implies that the eater of such food, and more specifically the eater's higher faculties, both sin and are harmed by eating.

The Pauline discussions of food impurity, clearly mirroring actual contentions in the early Christian communities, pertain to idolatry and its influences and to abstention from meat and wine and other alimentary asceticisms, which may have been based on Jewish dietary laws. This reflects a shift in the focus of food symbolism from issues current in Palestinian late Second Temple period society of the washing of handwashing and contagious impurity to those of the diaspora communities, where questions of idolatry and alimentary asceticism were apparently paramount. It is probable that some members of these communities maintained the biblical dietary laws as well, though this is nowhere explicitly mentioned.

²⁹ For the meaning of this partnership, see Fitzmeyer (2008), 393-4; Hollander (2009). For the earlier history of the idea of the pagan gods as evil demons, see Martin (2010).

³⁰ Borgen (1994); Fitzmeyer (2008), 345. As Cheung (1999), 131 and Martin (1995), 181-2 point out, the parallels between v. 7, 10 and 12 show that the person's consciousness is not differentiated from the person; there is no essential difference between a delicate consciousness and a delicate person.

We have seen (above p. 53) that although the impurity of idolatry has a strong presence in Jewish literature since the bible, its relevance as a ritual concept pertaining to food is never clear, even in late Second Temple Judaism; the subjective dimension of idolatry may have made it difficult to render in rigid ritual rules. Paul is no different in this regard. He relates to food offered to idols in practice as defiling, but far from automatically: the defilement is subject to the character of the persons influenced by it, their faith or their consciousness. Impurity does not cease to exist – but ideally, since it arises from sin, in a strongly believing community it would not be able to gain a foothold in the minds of the believers.

Pseudo- and Deutero-Pauline letters

In Colossians, a letter usually attributed to a follower of Paul from the 70s or 80s, we find Paul opposing a party whom he portrays as characterised by Jewish customs, an ascetic attitude, worship of angels and the observance of traditions coming from humans, not from God (2:8-23). Such observances, he says, are irrelevant after Christ's triumph over the rulers of the world. Specifically, he says,

(2:16) Do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink (κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει ἢ ἐν πόσει) or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. (17) These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ... (20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations (δογματίζεσθε), (21) “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (Μὴ ἅψη μηδὲ γεύση μηδὲ θίγης)? (22) All these regulations refer to things that perish (φθορὰν) with use; they are simply human commands and teachings.

Of course, this description of the shadowy rivals does not necessarily mean that they actually practiced such regulations, or indeed that such a group even existed; rather, the writer uses the stereotyping of opponents to strengthen the identity of his group and to position the religious practice of his group as beyond such regulations. Though purity is not mentioned in this pericope, the “matters of food and drink” in conjunction with the sabbaths and festivals would suggest that some Jewish dietary laws are in mind; however, as in Romans 14, there are no

clearer indications of what these dietary regulations may have been.³¹ The party is characterised as ascetic and promoting “severe treatment of the body” (v.23); thus the alimentary abstentions may certainly have had an ascetic background. Verse 21, which again refers to unknown dietary abstentions does not make the picture much clearer, despite the added hint of “do not touch,” which brings to mind purity restrictions similar to those of the Hebrew Bible. The purity direction is made stronger in v.22, with an echo of Mark 7:19 and a reference to Mark 7:7-8 (purity is a human command). Here too, overregard for “external” purity of food is linked with lack of suitable authority. Although the details are opaque, the overall message is clear. Such regulations are only relevant for those who still live in this world, unaware of the change which Christ wrought; for believers in Christ, adherence to them is harmful.

1 Timothy, a pseudo-Pauline letter from the end of the first or the beginning of the second century, uses similar tropes when speaking against rival groups (1 Tim 4:1-5).³² Here, too, abstinence from food (as well as sex) characterises their unidentified opponents, who draw their authority from “deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.”³³

(3) They forbid marriage and demand abstinence (ἀπέχεσθαι) from foods,³⁴ which God created to be received with thanksgiving (εὐχαριστίας) by those who believe

³¹ See Dunn (1996), 171-5, 190-94; MacDonald (2008), 109, 116-26; Beetham (2008), 193-218.

³² Cf. Titus 1:10-16, which identifies his opponents as “especially those of the circumcision” (1:10) who “pay attention to Jewish myths,” (1:14). Titus was apparently charged by his opponents that they are purer due to their observance, to which he responds: “To the pure all things are pure (πάντα καθαρὰ τοῖς καθαροῖς), but to the defiled (μεμιαμμένοις) and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are defiled.” 1 Tim 4:1-5 supplies little information on the background of its rivals; for various options, see Marshal (1999), 531-5. And see below in the sexual context, p. 151.

³³ For the connection frequently made in early Christian literature between false teachings or prophecies and impurity, see Horbury (1998a), 118-26.

³⁴ ‘Timothy’ is elsewhere urged to “keep yourself pure” by not abstaining from wine, for health reasons (5:22-3).

and know the truth. (4) For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, when it is received with thanksgiving; (5) for it is sanctified (ἀγιάζεται) by God's word and by prayer.

We have already seen the argument from a homogeneously good creation in *Aristeas* (p. 56). Yet here we have another argument - the possibility of human ritual action in the material world, which demonstrates its essential goodness. Thanksgiving and sanctification through prayer and “God’s word”³⁵ are seen as a religious attitude to food which is incommensurate, and indeed an alternative, to the differentiation according to purity inherent in certain types of food, which does not depend on human attitudes towards it.³⁶

Acts of the Apostles

In a vision (Acts 10:9-16), Peter sees a sheet with “all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air” being lowered from heaven to earth, and is told “kill and eat.” When he objects that he “has never eaten anything defiled or impure (πᾶν κοινὸν καὶ ἀκάθαρτον),” he is told “What God has purified (ἑκαθάρισεν), you must not call defiled.” Later in the narrative, the vision is explained as allowing association with believing gentiles (v. 28). While this is the only unequivocal reference in the NT to the biblical dietary laws, the animals are only a metaphor for gentiles, who are the focus of the narrative: it is nowhere said that the animals themselves should in fact (and not in a dream) be eaten.³⁷ Nevertheless, the reference to purification by

³⁵ The meaning here of “God’s word” is unclear; for various options see Marhsal (1999), 546, who opts for Gen 1:31 stating that all creation is good, or to scripture used in blessings over food.

³⁶ And see 1 Cor 10:26-31, Rom 14:6; Tomson (1990), 254-8. In Rabbinic traditions, blessings are at times seen as an alternative to sacrificial cult (and hence to one type of religious use of food) but not to food purity or the dietary laws: see *t. Ber* 4:1 with Bokser (1981); Leonhard (2007).

³⁷ This continues on the Jewish-Hellenistic tradition reading the dietary laws as referring to the prohibition of association with sinful people, see above p. 49. Wahlen (2005) understands the commandment to “kill and eat” as referring not to the impure animals, but rather to animals which are of questionable purity (*koinos*) – and thus parallel the status of God-fearers, in the grey area between Jew and gentile. While the suggestion is intriguing, the evidence for *koinos* having this

God in the past would appear to refer to a known occasion which is not part of the vision, and this can be read as being based on Mark 7:19, where Jesus does precisely this.³⁸ The vision and its interpretation convey the idea that impurity is a homogenous and general concept, which can be applied to food and people in much the same way.³⁹ Furthermore, it demonstrates the strong connection for the first-century communities between food and community boundaries; food was the most direct way to express community unity.

The role of food as defining the identity of the new community comes to fore most clearly in the “Apostles’ Decree” cited in Acts 15:20, 29 and 21:25, in which the Jerusalem church agreed that ritual demands from gentiles should be limited to abstinence of “food offered to idols/the pollution of idols (εἰδωλοθύτων (15:29, 21:25)/ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων (15:20)), of sexual immorality (πορνείας), of the meat of strangled animals (πνικτοῦ) and of blood.”⁴⁰ The Decree’s

meaning is weak, see Oliver (2012), 423. And see above n. 2.

³⁸ Alternatively, Mark 7:19b may be an insertion based on Acts’ witness. If Acts is referring here to a general purification of all animals, i.e., an abrogation of the dietary laws, the parallel with the “purification” of the gentiles is not precise: only believing gentiles who have been actively purified by baptism and the holy spirit are seen as pure, see Acts 15:7-11, but compare 10:28, in which “no human” should be called impure.

³⁹ Contra Furstenberg (2010), 228, for whom the interpretation of the vision totally supplants its original focus on animals, and therefore concludes that “Peter believes that the descriptions used for the categorization of animals and foods cannot be used for distancing from people.”

⁴⁰ These verses raise many textual problems, and they appear as cited in most, but not all, of the manuscripts, with the Western tradition lacking πνικτοῦ. This omission leads to a less food-related reading, with “blood” more easily understood as bloodshed, and “the pollution of idols” as idol worship; it is reasonable to see this as an emendation to “de-ritualise” the decree (see the arguments in Oliver (2012), 449-51, contra, e.g., Wedderburn (1993)). Much was written on problems of provenance, authorship and editing of the decree, as well as concerning its role in disputations in the early church, e.g., its relationship with the dispute in Gal 2 between Paul and James. A comprehensive recent treatment is Wehnert (1997). Discussions of the textual problems are found in Simon (1969); Metzger (1975), 429-34; Strange (1992), 87-106; Wedderburn (1993); Wehnert (1997), 22-9.

demands are described as the most “essential” (ἐπάναγκες, 15:28) laws, clearly of Jewish provenance, which gentiles must perform; as such scholars see them as “halakha for gentiles”⁴¹ or as showing gentiles’ affiliation to the Jewish *ethnos* through Jewish identity markers.⁴²

The significance of impurity for the decree is conditioned on how ἀλισγημάτων is read; does it relate only to idols (making impurity simply a synonym for food offered to them), or to all four items, and thus the governing concept of the decree?⁴³ All four items are found as impure in Second Temple Jewish literature. Although the impurity of animal blood and of strangled animals is in a different class from the idols and *porneia*, there are precedents for linking them together.⁴⁴ A wider reading of ἀλισγημάτων is important for Jürgen Wehnert’s otherwise compelling thesis that the four items of the decree are all things which the bible sees as defiling to gentiles as well as Jews (Lev 17-18), and were therefore the most significant obstacles before fellowship of Jews and gentiles in the early church.⁴⁵ However, from the decree or itself or from its context there is no reason to think that table fellowship between gentiles and Jews is the issue here, or that a gentile eating one of the prohibited foods would be seen as

⁴¹ Wehnert (1997), 72-3; Bockmuehl (2000), 164-7.

⁴² Deines (2007), 375-8. For the background of the items of the decree in Lev 17-18 and in the commandments given to Noah as refracted in Second Temple literature, see Barrett (1998), 733-5; Taylor (2001); Bockmuehl (2000), 150-73; Oliver (2012), 451-75.

⁴³ Wehnert (1997), 69 and Deines (2007), 379-81 hold the latter position; Strange (1992) and Wedderburn (1993) the former. Alternatively, ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων may be the heading, which is then detailed: *porneia*, blood, strangled animals. And compare the decree as found in the Pseudo-Clementine literature, *Hom.* 7.4, 7.8, 8.23, where impurity is only linked to idols or demons and not to the other items; while in *Hom.* 8.19 partaking of the table of demons, shedding blood and eating strangled animals are all seen as part of idol-worship, with the list rounded off by “and anything else that is impure.” And see Klijn (1968).

⁴⁴ See above p. 57, nn. 109-110.

⁴⁵ Wehnert (1997), 245-61; and see the criticism of Bockmuehl (1999), 266-7. Certainly Wehnert’s reference to decree as comprising the Torah’s “zentrale reinheitsgesetzliche” (p. 72) is unwarranted.

defiling to Jews. The issue is rather, as Markus Bockmuehl explains, “what gentiles must do be saved.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, the fact that one of the reports (15:29) lacks ἀλίσγημάτων altogether would argue against the centrality of impurity here, especially if it the more original one. The ambiguity of the text on the matter remains. There is no doubt, in any case, that later readers could see this text as ascribing impurity to all the items.

The prohibition of the impurity of idols and food offered to them is more absolute here than in Paul, though not incompatible with Paul’s stance. While in Romans and 1 Corinthians intention is emphasised, here there are no qualifications. Furthermore, the prohibition on blood and strangled animals is clearly of a different nature than that of food offered to idols: blood remains blood, no matter what you think about it. The sin is thus in the eating itself, not in a prior action which then may affect the food. Even without explicit definition as impurity, the prohibition on blood and strangled animals – which remained in force for centuries – is significant as it is a dietary law plain and simple, very similar to, and indeed drawing upon Jewish dietary laws.

Summary

Our survey leads to the following general conclusions. Jesus himself may have spoken against the custom of hand washing and the perception that food is contaminated by permitted impurities, and used these issues as the backdrop for his opposition of inner and outer purity. In the second half of the century, this tradition was expanded to a purification of “all foods.” From the Pauline epistles and Acts, we can see that idolatry loomed large as the main source for food impurity, although the eating of non-slaughtered animals and blood on the one hand, as well as abstinence from meat and wine on the other were also contentious issues; for all of these, the relationship between gentiles and Jews and the identity of the early communities were the determining background.

Only in Paul do we find sustained discussions of food impurity. The main Pauline innovation is of an emphasis on the ontological purity of all foods, together with a subjectivization and relativization of impurity. Concerning food offered to idols, this means that

⁴⁶ Bockmuehl (2000), 164; Deines (2007), 355-6, contra Fitzmeyer (1998), 557; Oliver (2012), 447-51.

only those members of the community who have idolatrous intentions or fear the power of the idols are affected by the impurity of the food. Therefore, those who believe strongly have nothing to fear from impurity, though they should at times abstain in order not to harm others. Impurity is therefore real enough – but can be allayed by those who believe. Concerning other food abstentions, too, a certain subjective power of impurity is retained for those who believe in it, even though objectively such impurity does not exist. Acts, which simply speaks of the impurity of food offered to idols, and perhaps of the impurity of blood, appears to hold to a stricter, and less relative, conception of dietary impurity.

2. *Christian dietary observances in the second and third century*

Food continued to be a central issue for Christians of the second century, and the attitude towards dietary restrictions had an important role in the construction of Christian identity as separate from Judaism and paganism, as well as in the formation of the various Christian groups. The main issues were already found *in nuce* in the first century: the forbidden animals of the Jewish dietary laws, food offered to idols, blood and strangled animals, and meat and wine in general. While the Jewish dietary laws were almost completely rescinded, the other abstinences were widely practiced in the second- and third-century communities.

Food offered to idols

Food offered to idols as an identity marker

Food offered to idols is clearly prohibited in the *Didache* (6.3):⁴⁷

And concerning food, bear what you can; but especially abstain from food sacrificed to idols (εἰδωλοθύτου); for this is a ministry to dead gods (λατρεία... θεῶν νεκρῶν).⁴⁸

There are various opinions as to the original context of this sentence: some argue that it is part of the Jewish stratum of the *Didache* ('the Two Ways'), while others claim it is a Jewish-Christian

⁴⁷ Böckenhoff (1903) is still the most comprehensive study for the post-NT texts; for writers of the 2nd and 3rd century, see Cheung (1999), 210-77.

⁴⁸ Trans. Ehrman, 427.

“appendix” to the Jewish stratum, or from the pen of the final editor of the *Didache*.⁴⁹ In any case it appears that by the mid-second century this sentence, calling for specific abstinence from food offered to idols as a minimum requirement appeared as we have it now and was aimed at Christians in general. Most scholars see the call to “bear what you can” as concerning the Jewish dietary laws, perhaps functioning as a more stringent version of the Apostles’ Decree, but some read it as referring to general abstinence (for example from meat).⁵⁰ In any case, the concern about food offered to idols is seen in the context of food restrictions, not of idolatry.

The reason given for the prohibition is too laconic to allow any definitive interpretation. It would appear the act of eating of the offerings is itself considered to be a λατρεία – it is not that the food was defiled by the act of offering and should therefore not be eaten, but rather that eating it will be considered to be an act of worship, presumably even when performed outside temple precincts. No defilement is spoken of, though the phrase “dead gods” brings to mind the defilement of the dead, and certainly gives such sacrifices a highly negative connotation.⁵¹ The continuing prohibition of food offered to idols for Christians is found in many texts of the second to the fourth century, both Christian and non-Christian.⁵²

⁴⁹ Flusser (1987); Draper (2003); on the *Didache*, see above p. 16.

⁵⁰ See Flusser (1987); Tomson (1990), 180; Cheung (1999), 211-12; Draper (2003), esp. 112-14.

⁵¹ The phrase “dead gods” is probably based on LXX Ps 105:28 concerning Bal Peor, “ἔφαγον θυσίας νεκρῶν” (and see Rev 2:14, which mentions this incident). See also Wis 15:17 and Heb 9:14, in a sacrificial context: “For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls... sanctifies for the purification, how much more shall the blood of Christ... purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living god.” Since demons were frequently identified with the ghosts of the dead, “dead gods” could also be a synonym for demons. “Offering to the dead” is one of the standard descriptions in the Mishnah for idol offerings, see *m. Avot* 3:4; *m. Avoda Zara* 2:3; *t. Hulin* 2:13, 18, 22. R. Yehuda ben Bteira (1st cent.?) cites Ps 105:28 to prove the impurity of idolatry by a comparison to death defilement, *b. Hulin* 13a.

⁵² Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96; Celsus, *Alethes Logos* apud *Cels.* 8.28; *Sib. Or.*, 2.95-6; 6 *Ezra* 16.69-70.

A number of second-century texts testify to the importance of abstaining from food offered to idols as a Christian identity marker.⁵³ The early 2nd century *Apology of Aristides* declares (15), as part of a list of Christian virtues opposed to Jewish and especially pagan mores, that “of the food which is sacrificed to idols they do not eat, for they are pure (*καθαροὶ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν*).” Aristides is also the first to refer explicitly to the Jewish dietary laws as a question of “purity of foods,”⁵⁴ and abstinence from food sacrificed to idols is set up as the superior Christian food purity, aligned with their sexual purity.⁵⁵ Aristides’ argument is quite curious when considered in the context of an apology to a Roman Emperor, who could hardly be imagined to believe that eating food sacrificed to idols is defiling; clearly, this argument is targeted at a readership of Jews, Christians, or sympathisers of the Christian movement. Similarly, Justin compares Solomon’s idolatry to the dedication of the Christian “gentiles who know God”, who “would rather endure every torture and pain, even death itself, than worship idols, or eat meat sacrificed to idols.”⁵⁶ Thus Christian apologists used abstinence from food sacrificed to idols as a proof of their greater dedication to God than the Jews.

Opponent Christian groups were often accused of eating food offered to idols. This is already seen in Revelation 2:14, 20, where this accusation appears against two individuals, together with that of sexual immorality.⁵⁷ Following Justin’s boast of Christian dedication, Trypho counters that some of the believers in Christ do in fact eat food offered to idols; Justin replies that these are Christians only in name, but are actually heretics, “impious atheists and wicked sinners.”⁵⁸ In fact, this dietary rule is the only point of practice or theory imputed by Justin to the heretics he mentions. Irenaeus expands on this point, and claims that Basilides,

⁵³ For a good overview and analysis of this aspect, see Freidenreich (2011), 103-9.

⁵⁴ See below p. 109.

⁵⁵ Note that the object of the purity observed by the Jews is the food, while in the case of the Christians they themselves are pure.

⁵⁶ *Dial.* 34.7; trans. Slusser and Falls, 53.

⁵⁷ See Cheung (1999), 197-209.

⁵⁸ *Dial.* 35.5. See Cheung (1999), 237-41.

Saturninus and the Valentinians do not believe that actions in the material world have any influence on man's spiritual status, and therefore commit many sins; together with sexual sin, "food sacrificed to idols they eat without scruple, thinking they in no way defile themselves (μολύνεσθαι) by it."⁵⁹ Clearly, such food was considered in the second century to be a source of defilement, which only heinous "heretics" would dare to contract. Irenaeus' wording suggests that not only was eating such food seen as an act of idolatry, but also the food itself was considered to be defiling. There is no external collaboration for the claim that gnostic Christians had less regard for this prohibition; rather, accusations of disregard for the dietary prohibition, always together with accusations of sexual sin, are used by these writers for defining the boundaries of orthodoxy.⁶⁰

The impurity mechanism of food offered to idols according to Clement and Origen

The prohibition of food sacrificed to idols, and even more its definition as defiling, is difficult to square with the statement that "what enters into the mouth does not defile a man" and the rejection of the dietary laws. The first writer who refers to this issue is Clement of Alexandria.⁶¹ The second book of the *Paedagogus* describes at length the dangers of excessive eating and the importance of frugality. In this context, Clement explains the prohibition of food offered to idols, through extensive citation of Paul's writings:

⁵⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6.3; trans. Unger, 37. See also 1.24.5, 2.14.5. In a later usage of the pollution of sacrifices as marking a border between orthodox and heretic, Victorinus of Pettau (fl. late 3rd cent.) comments on a heresy believing "that what had been offered to idols might be exorcised and eaten, and that whoever should have committed fornication might receive peace on the eighth day" (*Commentary on Revelation* 2.6; trans. ANF VII.346).

⁶⁰ Cheung (1999) takes the accusations by John, Justin and Irenaeus at face value, without any supporting argumentation. For the dynamic of sexual slander against rival groups together with accusations of idolatry, see Knust (2006), 143-64.

⁶¹ On Clement, see above p. 20ff. For food in the *Paedagogus*, see Grimm (1996), 85-106; for the relationship of Clement's ethics to Stoic and Middle Platonic doctrines, see Maier (1995). For Clement's thought on the body in the *Paedagogus*, see Desjardins (2007).

I consider a defilement and an abomination (Μιαρὰ δοκεῖ μοι καὶ βδελυρὰ) foods that are spoken of as idol-offered...: from the blood of them fly “the shades from out of Erybus now dead.” “I would not have you become associates of demons,” the Apostle says. There are two sorts of food, one ministering to salvation, and the other proper to those who perish. We should abstain from this last sort, not out of fear (for there is no power in them), but we detest it for the sake of our consciences, which are pure (ἀγίαν), and to show our abomination (βδελυρίαν) of the demons to whom they have been dedicated. And another reason is the impressionability of those who interpret so many things in a way that harms themselves, “whose conscience, being weak, is defiled.” Now, “food does not commend us to God,” “nor does what goes into a man defile him, but what comes out of the mouth,”... The physical act of eating is indifferent (Ἀδιάφορος ἄρα ἢ φυσικὴ χρῆσις)... But it is not right for those judged worthy of partaking of divine and spiritual food to share “the table of demons.” “Have we not a right,” the Apostle asks, “to eat and drink and to take about with us a woman?” But it stands to reason that we forestall passion when we keep pleasures under control.⁶²

Jesus’ principle of impurity is translated here into Stoic terminology: foods are ἀδιάφορα, or lacking in moral value, either good or bad.⁶³ However, this lack of moral value is clearly incompatible with the perception of foods offered to idols as defiled. In his solution to this problem, Clement builds on the foundations laid by Paul, with significant expansions and adaptations. First, Clement makes much heavier use of purity language, explicitly saying that food sacrificed to idols is polluted. Second, the possibility of defilement of conscience as a result of sacrifice, which Paul saw as a danger only to the weaker members of the community, is expanded to all Christians. Third, Clement sees the demons as physically linked to the sacrifice: while Paul claimed that sacrifices are a “participation” with demons, here the demons hover around the sacrifice. This physicality is further augmented by the description of the victims’

⁶² *Paed.* 2.1.8, trans. adapted from Wood, 99-100. See also *Strom.* 4.15.97.

⁶³ See Donahue (1963), Clark (1977), 35-7; and compare Epictetus *Diss.* 2.5.1, who says that material things are ἀδιάφορα, but their “usage” (χρῆσις) is not.

blood and the citation of the divinatory scene from the *Odyssey*. Clement's demons are not the gods of the nations, as Paul uses the term, but rather ghosts of the dead, which can be raised through divination. All of these elements – blood, the dead, and divination – have a well-established history as polluting and dangerous beings or practices.

As Gregory Smith has demonstrated, demons in this period were generally conceived as having a body, even if of a special and airy kind.⁶⁴ They were made of *pneuma* and could therefore move about very easily and also influence the emotions and thoughts of people, which were also manifestations of physical movements inside the human body. Demons were therefore dangerous to humans both physically and spiritually. One expression of the demons' physicality is their food – smoke and blood from sacrifices. Not only Christians believed that smoke and blood are the food of demons: this is a commonplace in the second and third centuries, found in neoplatonic writers such as Porphyry and Iamblichus and in magic spells.⁶⁵ However, while supporters of sacrifice would have viewed such *daimones* as semi-divine beings which help to govern the world, most Christians theologians of this period identified demons as beings sent down to the material world following their sins shortly after the creation of the world. Since then, they spent their time scheming against God and leading humans to sin.⁶⁶

Clement's thought brings the demons centre stage and identifies them as the pollutants of the food. By this move, Clement can distance himself from the kind of impurity ascribed to the Jewish food laws. There, he claims, the food is impure naturally, in the state in which it was made by God. Here, the food is naturally indifferent, but it is the action of a moral agent, the demon, that makes it impure. Certainly, for Clement as well as for Origen after him, a demon cannot act on his own without the cooperation of the person, as that would undermine free will,⁶⁷ but in our case, it is the physical proximity of the person to the sacrifice that is seen as cooperation with the demon and choosing to be on his side. Clement emphasises the moral and

⁶⁴ Smith (2008).

⁶⁵ Marx-Wolf (2010a)

⁶⁶ Martin (2010).

⁶⁷ *Strom.* 2.20; Karavites (1999), 45-7.

rational freedom of the person: Christians are to abstain from food sacrifices to idols “not because of fear,” he says, “but to keep our consciences pure and to show our abomination of the demons.” This pollution is built upon a rational, clear-headed decision of a free agent, and not upon fear, an irrational response. Nevertheless, physical impurity is created not just from the free agent’s decision – if this was enough, the demon would be superfluous – but by the physical proximity of the demons to the sacrifice, which creates this defilement.

If the demons are the main agents of pollution, their action results in social division: “there are two sorts of food,” suitable for two groups of people: those who eat divine food and those who eat from the table of demons. The differentiation of social groups is central to the Jewish dietary laws, as *Aristeas* explained. Thus, Clement understands the function of the Christian dietary laws to be quite similar to that of the Jewish laws.⁶⁸

Lastly, this passage is part of a larger discussion of asceticism, specifically food asceticism, in Clement's *Paedagogus*. Clement closely follows here the formulation of the *Sentences of Sextus*, a second-century Christian compilation of gnomic sayings, concerning purity of food in general.⁶⁹ I intend to examine the relations between food asceticism and purity in the next section, so here I will just note that the ascetic contextualisation of the food sacrificed to idols solves some of the problems we are raising, by treating it as just another instance of the purification of the soul through renunciation of bodily pleasures. This contextualisation is not at all simple, however, because the problem with eating sacrifices is of a different order: it is their unique spiritual status which sets them aside from all other foods, including non-sacrificial meat.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Clement further underlines the similarities by noting (*Paed.* 2.1.17) that Jews were prohibited from eating the animals of Lev 11, but were not allowed even to touch animals that died, were strangled, or were offered to idols (The first two are in Lev 11:26; the ritual impurity of idols is not biblical, see above p. 67). Thus, according to Clement, the common Christian observances (except for blood) are actually those which were considered most important also by the Jews.

⁶⁹ 108b-110; for a comparison between Clement, Sextus and other texts, see Wilson (2012), 143-9.

⁷⁰ On Clement's attitude to food in the *Paedagogus*, see Grimm (1996), 89-106.

Following Clement, Origen elaborates on the subject in two long passages: in the *Contra Celsum* (8.28-30), and in his *Commentary on Matthew* (11.12). In both instances Origen begins with an exposition of the Jewish position on dietary laws, goes on to explain Jesus' views on inner and outer purity, and emphasises that true defilement can only be a result of evil thoughts or deeds and not of material food. He then proceeds to contend with the question of food offered to idols. Although he does not say so explicitly, the arrangement of ideas indicates that Origen is aware of the apparent contradiction between the emphasis on internal purity and the prohibition of certain foods. In the *Contra Celsum*, Origen does not add any new solution for this problem beyond what is found in Paul and in Clement, but expands their demonological focus: all three prohibitions of the Apostles' Decree are explained as linked to demons: blood draws demons, and strangled animals still have their blood in them; eating blood, "we might have such spirits feeding along with us," and then we are "joining the table of demons."

In the *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen emphasises the aspect of knowledge or doubt of eating sacrifices, which causes a person to "eat not in faith"; by this, he can then distance the defilement from the material food, through an interpretation of 1 Cor 8:7 that applies it to the imagination of the man eating it instead of to the food itself:

And the man who knowing that they have been sacrificed to demons nevertheless uses them, becomes a communicant with demons, while at the same time, his imagination (φαντασίας) is polluted (μεμολυσμένης) on account of the demons participating in the sacrifice. And the Apostle, however, knowing that it is not the nature (φύσιν) of foods which is the cause of injury to him who uses them or of advantage to him who refrains from their use, but opinions and the reason which is in them, says 'But food commends us not to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we eat not are we the worse'.⁷¹

It is not the sacrifice that pollutes but the demons, and the demons do not pollute the person as a whole, but rather his mind is that which pollutes the sacrifice, because the mind believes it is polluted. Origen returns to this rather subtle point in his *Commentary on Romans*:

And you should not be surprised that the reflection of the mind makes food defiled

⁷¹ *Comm. Matt.* 11.12, trans. ANF IX.441.

that, of its own nature, is neither common nor defiled, though simplicity of mind and the absence of scrupulosity of reflection... absolves truly defiled food (*cibum vere pollutum*) – for what is sacrificed to idols is truly defiled. And, again, even if the food is pure, nevertheless someone may come under suspicion, as would be the case when what has been sacrificed to idols is said to be defiled on account of a scrupulous conscience.⁷²

Here it appears that there are two levels of impurity: “true defilement” which is inherent in food sacrificed to idols, but which is annulled by “simplicity of mind,” that is, by not believing in its power; and the defilement on account of conscience, which is secondary – but still present and significant enough to prohibit the food from being eaten.

For Origen and Clement, the sacrifices are a material stepping-stone between the demon-world and the mind of man, both spiritual; the presence of sacrifices is required for the demons to pollute the mind, but they themselves are not polluted. The writers attempt to diminish the role of the material sacrifices by expanding the role of the two spiritual agents: the demons on the one side and the mind of man on the other, but they cannot escape the fact that the sacrifices are still somehow required for the pollution to be transferred.

Jewish-Christian sources

The Pseudo-Clementines’ Jewish-Christian milieu is reflected in a number of distinctive food observances which were certainly not the norm in non-Jewish Christianity of this period, such as the recurring commandment to refrain from eating together with the unbaptised.⁷³ This regulation is tied to the gentiles’ impure life (ἀκαθάρτως αὐτοὺς βιοῦν) (*Hom.* 13.4) or, more specifically, to the impure spirits possessing whoever worshipped an idol/demon in the past (*Rec.* 2.71).

The *Ps.-Clementines* condemn blood sacrifice as a demonic invention and practice, allowed

⁷² *Comm. Rom.* 9.42.5, trans. Scheck, II.250.

⁷³ *Rec.* 1.19.5=*Hom.* 1.22.5; *Rec.* 7.29.3-5=*Hom.* 13.4.3-5; *Rec.* 7.36.4=*Hom.* 13.11.4; *Rec.* 2.71; see Molland (1955), 21-4. In *Hom.* 13.4, it is explained that the unbaptised gentiles “live impurely,” and therefore “our religion compels us to make a distinction.” For the *Ps.-Clementines* in general, see p. 18.

to the Israelites only grudgingly and for a time.⁷⁴ Following *Jubilees* (above p. 58), blood especially is singled out as a highly polluting substance, consumed in demonic worship; its use in ritual purification is illogical, and should be replaced with purification by water. In accordance, the prohibition of eating blood, meat containing blood or food sacrificed to idols is reiterated several times, in various formulations.⁷⁵ The prohibited substances are said to be “polluting to both body and soul (*animam simul et corpus polluunt*)” (*Rec.* 4.36); in the *Homilies*, these prohibitions appear together with other regulations concerning washing after sexual contact and menstruation.⁷⁶

Thus the idea that blood is prohibited because of the demons’ association, which we saw in Origen, is also present in a document originating from quite a different milieu, which may be earlier than Origen.⁷⁷ The pollution of blood and of sacrifices and their relationship to the demons is developed further in a number of passages of the *Ps.-Clementines*. The demons are told that they do not have power over men, except if the men subjugate themselves to them by

worshipping you, and sacrificing and pouring libations, and partaking of your table... or shedding blood, or tasting dead flesh (σαρκῶν νεκρῶν γευόμενος), or filling themselves with that which is torn of beasts, or that which is cut, or that

⁷⁴ See *Hom.* 8.13-20, 9.14; *Rec.* 1.29, 36-7, 39, 48, 64, 2.71, 4.29, 5.32. See Jones (1995), 147-9 for a comparison with other Jewish-Christian traditions, to which add *Gospel of Judas* 38-9. For discussion, see Boustani and Reed (2008a), 336-52. The rejection of animal sacrifice is a common trope in late ancient Christianity and pagan philosophers, see Ullucci (2011) and above p. 41.

⁷⁵ For analyses of these prohibitions in the *Ps.-Clementines*, see Klijn (1968); Wehnert (1997), 145-86; for a short overview, Jones (2005), 321-2.

⁷⁶ In other passages (*Hom.* 8.23; 9.23), the prohibition on eating from the table of demons/idols is mentioned independently, without the prohibition on blood. Klijn (1968) discerns two layers in these texts, the earlier speaking of demons and blood, and the later, influenced by the Apostles’ Decree, including also carrion. Even if this reconstruction is true, the earlier text still includes the connection between impure demons and the pollution of blood.

⁷⁷ The parallelism was noted by Simon (1978), 92.

which is strangled, or anything else that is impure (ἄκαθάρτου).⁷⁸

Demons enter people by tricking them into sacrificing and then eating the sacrifice; they do this in order to gain a body, which allows them to take part in corporeal sins, among them gluttonous eating. The residing demons, which mix up with the human soul, cause diseases of various kinds. Fasting and asceticism are therefore very useful in getting rid of such demons, though baptism is the only final remedy.⁷⁹

The pollution of “both body and soul”, which is directly opposed to Origen’s insistence that the demons pollute only the imagination, accords with the importance for the *Ps.-Clementines* of purification rituals of washing after sex, which were explicitly said to purify the body. It is evident that the *Ps.-Clementines* are much more receptive to the idea that demons physically pollute the eater of blood or sacrifices than the Alexandrian writers. Although sin is created by the person’s free will, the resulting pollution is not rooted in human choice to detest the sacrifice but rather in direct action by the demons themselves.

There is no trace in the *Ps.-Clementines* for adherence to the Jewish dietary laws as regards impure animals, though there is also no proof that such laws were not adhered to. This goes against the common opinion that the *Ps.-Clementines* originated in an Ebionite milieu, since Origen says that the Ebionites, like the Jews, attack “us” for not adhering to the dietary laws.⁸⁰ However, if the *Ps.-Clementines* were written in a vegetarian milieu, adherence to most

⁷⁸ *Hom.* 8.19; trans. ANF VIII.274.

⁷⁹ This complex demonology appears both in *Hom.* 9.9-15 and in *Rec.* 4.16-19, and is therefore probably early. However, while in the *Homilies* the demons enter the body by themselves through the physical eating of the sacrificed food, in the *Recognitions* the process is controlled, to a degree, by individual choice: eating and drinking immoderately and with desire is an “invitation” to the the demons to enter the person. The *Rec.* refer more generally to immoderate consumption, and only occasionally (4.19) to sacrifice. See Snowden (1990), 81-8.

⁸⁰ The identification of the *Ps.-Clementines* with the Ebionites owes much to Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.15-16; for criticism of this identification, see Finley (2009), 283-93. In the *Didascalia Apostolorum* 23-4, an unidentified group is attacked for observing the Levitical dietary rules, specifically not eating pigs,

of the dietary laws would not have required special regulations.⁸¹

Blood and strangled animals

Abstinence from animal blood and non-slaughtered animals was widely practiced in Late Ancient Christianity. However, it was much less commented upon than the sacrifice prohibition.⁸² The reason for this may be that it is mentioned in the NT only in the Apostles' Decree, as opposed to the idol sacrifices which are at the centre of an extended Pauline discussion.⁸³ Mentions of abstinence from animal blood rarely relate to impurity, except when coupled together with the issue of idol sacrifices and/or murder of humans.⁸⁴ Since animal blood is not seen as a pollutant in the Hebrew Bible, but rather as a purificant in sacrifice (see above p. 57), there is little reason to expect this idea to be prominent in early Christian literature. In the Epistle to the Hebrews (9:22) blood is also discussed as a purificant rather than a pollutant: "under the law, almost everything is purified with blood".

Origen explains that the blood prohibition was expressly directed by Leviticus (17:1) at both Israelites and foreigners, and therefore it is universal and binding upon Christians.⁸⁵ We

together with other Jewish observances. For analysis of this text, see Zellentin (2013).

⁸¹ See Jones (2005), 322.

⁸² Most references to Christians not eating blood are made in passing, as if this observance was self-evident: *Letter from the Churches of Lyon and Vienne*, apud Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.1.25-26; Tertullian *Pud.* 12.4-5; *Mon.* 5.3; *Apol.* 9.13; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 30.6; Origen, *Hom. Num.* 16.9.1. For these and many later texts, see Böckenhoff (1907), 37-49; for references in Syriac martyrdom accounts, some of them early, see Becker (2003), n. 31. For an overview on blood in late ancient Christian and Jewish literature, see Boustan and Reed (2008b); for blood pollution in Roman religion, see Lennon (2014), 90-135.

⁸³ Bockmuehl (2000), 170, further argues that in antiquity animals were typically slaughtered, draining the meat of its blood, and that the consumption of blood would have required going out of your way.

⁸⁴ Tertullian *Apol.* 9.13 (cited below) is the only case known to me of consumption of blood described as polluting.

⁸⁵ Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 2.13.14 (trans. Scheck (2001), I.151); this is also implied, but not explicit, in Justin,

have already seen how Origen and the Ps.-Clementines apply the demonological explanation not only to idol sacrifices but to blood as well. In this they strengthen a link between consumption of blood and the defilement of idolatry already hinted to in some earlier texts (above p. 107). Tertullian claims that Acts' prohibition of blood actually relates to spilling human blood, that is, to murder; however, he still says that Christians abstain from blood "that they may not contract pollution (*contaminemur*)".⁸⁶

Though the possible impurity of spilling, emission or consumption of human blood is a rather different issue, its relevance is indicated by *Jubilees'* coupling of the consumption of animal blood and the spilling of human blood in murder, echoed in the Pseudo-Clementines (*Hom.* 8.15-17; *Rec.* 1.30). In the Hebrew bible and Second Temple literature the pollution of human blood was typically associated with the moral impurities of murder or idolatry or the ritual impurity of menstruation and other genital emissions, and was not a subject for dietary law. Murder, especially of the innocent, is the prime context for blood pollution, whether for Greeks, Romans, Jews or Christians.⁸⁷ However, the *consumption* of human blood is brought to the fore by Jesus' statement, cited with different emphases in the various Gospels and in Paul, that his blood and flesh are consumed in the Eucharist, an idea that seems quite foreign to Jewish sensibilities. In a biblical context, modeled on the symbolic actions and metaphorical statements of the prophets, it is reasonable to understand the statement as figurative or metaphorical.⁸⁸ The question of impurity of blood does not arise in the texts, however; even John 6:52-61, which appears to indicate that Jesus' statement was seen by some as offending ("σκανδαλίζει", 6:61), the issue of eating blood (not to speak of its impurity) is not specified as

Dial. 20.1; Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 15.3. In the *Dialogue with Heraclides* 11 (trans. Chadwick, 452), however, Origen refuses to accept that the soul is to be identified with actual blood, or to relate to the prohibition on blood as a practical one.

⁸⁶ Tertullian, *Apol.* 9.13; *Pud.* 12.4-5.

⁸⁷ Is 1:15; *Mart. Pion.* 13.2; Lennon (2013), 92-100; Parker (1983), 104-43; Stowers (1995).

⁸⁸ See Klawans (2006), 215-7; Chilton (1993).

the reason for this.⁸⁹ Despite the continuation of the prohibition on consuming blood in early Christianity, Jesus' blood was of course described by Christians as purifying, not defiling. Though accusations of cannibalism, including the drinking of blood, arose towards Christians in the second century, it has been pointed out that this was a common accusation against deviant groups, and many reasons beyond the body and blood imagery have been proposed for these accusations.⁹⁰

Meat, wine and fasting

While food offered to idols, and perhaps blood, were broadly considered a defilement in early Christian writings, abstinence from meat and wine, and fasting in general, were much more common and central.

Fasting had a number of functions in the early church.⁹¹ As in many biblical and second-temple period texts, it appears frequently together with prayer, as an act of contrition, humility and penance.⁹² As such, it magnifies the prayer's power, sometimes allowing the worshipper to have visions or prophecy, or to exorcise demons.⁹³ Fasting quickly became part of the permanent rituals of the church – already at the beginning of the second century, a fast preceded and prepared for baptism,⁹⁴ and was obligatory on certain days.⁹⁵ While these

⁸⁹ Klawans (2006), 215-7. For an opposite view see Cahill (2002), who, however, conflates various types of Jewish blood prohibitions and labels all blood as impure.

⁹⁰ McGowan (1994).

⁹¹ See Rufe (1994); Finn (2009), 58-71.

⁹² Hermas, *Sim.* 5.1-3; *Acts of Thomas* 20, 29, 139, 145; Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 10.2; *Hom. Jos.* 1.7; *Hom. Jer.* 20.7.5; *Hom. Num.* 25.4; *Fr. 1 Cor.* 24; Tertullian, *Paen.* 9; 11; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.16.2; 41.6.

⁹³ Prophecy: Arbesmann (1949); Trevett (1996), 105-9; Hermas, *Vis.* 2.2.1; 3.1.2.; 3.10.6; Tertullian, *on Fasting* 7-9, 12; *de anima* 48. Demons: Matt 17:21; Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 13.6-7; *Hom. Ex.* 2.3; *Hom. Jos.* 24.1; *Ps.-Clementine Ep.* I.12.5.

⁹⁴ *Did.* 2.7; Justin, *Apol.* 1.61; Tertullian *Bapt.* 20; Clement, *Ecl. Proph.* 84; *Ps.-Clement Hom.* 3.73; 11.35; 13.9; 11. *Rec.* 3.67; 6.15; 7.34-7.

functions and meanings of fasting may have been conceptualised as purification (raising the level of the person by removing inferior elements, permitting enhanced contact with the sacred), such a description is rarely found in texts from the first three centuries. One exception is in Clement's *Prophetic Eclogues* (14):

Fasting, according to the signification of the word, is abstinence from food. Now food makes us neither more righteous nor less. But mystically it shows that, as life is maintained in individuals by food, and want of food is the token of death; so also ought we to fast from worldly things... Especially does fasting empty the soul of matter, and make it, along with the body, pure and light (καθαράν καὶ κούφην) for the divine words. Worldly food is, then, the former life and sins; but the divine food is faith, hope, love, patience, knowledge, peace, temperance. For "blessed are they that hunger and thirst after" God's "righteousness, for they shall be filled." The soul, but not the body, it is which is susceptible of this craving.⁹⁶

Although Clement speaks of fasting as a symbol,⁹⁷ he apparently does not relinquish the simple meaning of the word when he says that it makes both the soul and the body "pure and light." Fasting (both actual and symbolic) purifies the soul by emptying it of matter, the external effects of which can be seen on the body.

Dietary self-control and moderation, expressed in eating only the minimum required for health, are a central aspect of Clement's advice in the *Paedagogus* for living a "Christian life." Overeating and extravagance in food are damaging to the health, and indulging in food for pleasure's sake is dangerous to the soul. There is little that is new in this type of discourse, which was already well developed by Hellenistic and Roman philosophers.⁹⁸ Clement rarely uses purity language when exhorting for alimentary moderation. This can be compared to the ready deployment of such language in the *Sentences of Sextus*, 108b-110: "Overindulgence in food creates impurity (ἀκρασία σιτίων ἀκάθαρτον ποιεῖ). The usage of living things is indifferent

⁹⁵ *Did.* 8; Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 10.2.

⁹⁶ Trans. ANF VIII.44.

⁹⁷ For this idea, see *Hermas*, *Sim.* 5.3.1-3, *Gospel of Thomas* 14, 27; Clement, *Strom.* 3.15.99.4.

⁹⁸ See Grimm (1996), 32-56.

(χρῆσις μὲν ἀδιάφορον), but abstinence (ἀποχή) is more rational. It is not food and drink going in through the mouth that defile (μιαίνει) a person, but things going forth from an evil character.”⁹⁹ Sentence 110 is a close rendition of Mark 7:15/Matt 15:11, but its message is integrated with the impurity of excessive eating as well a degree of vegetarianism to produce a somewhat contradictory message.

We have already seen Paul’s witness on avoidance of wine and meat and the eating of vegetables in the Roman community, as well as his use of purity language to describe these dietary customs. The sentences quoted above from *Sextus* typify one strand of early Christian thought on the matter: eating meat is not prohibited, but is also not recommended. In the *Stromateis* (7.6), Clement claims that meat burdens the soul and the rational faculties, but in the *Paedagogus* it is seen merely as another opportunity for immoderation, and not as a defiled or defiling substance. Origen, too (*Cels.* 8.28), points out that scripture does not prohibit meat as the Pythagoreans do, though he then cites Paul’s call for respect towards meat- and wine-abstinence, and explains that such abstinence promotes a “safer and purer life (ἀσφαλεστέρου βίου καὶ καθαρωτέρου)” – a rather different reason than that provided by Paul himself. Christians, says Origen, indeed abstain from blood or meat offered to idols, but not as a general abstinence from meat but in order to avoid demons; furthermore, all gluttonous eating is prohibited, not only eating of meat (*Cels.* 8.30). Origen may be reacting here not only to Celsus’ suggestion that Christians should adopt Pythagorean practice, but to a prevalent early Christian practice of abstinence from meat and wine.

Most of the evidence for this vegetarianism comes from reports on Christian groups primarily located in Syria and Asia Minor. According to their detractors, Marcion, Tatian, some of the followers of Saturninus, Ebionites, Elkasites, Encratites and the Baptist group which Mani grew up with, all abstained from meat.¹⁰⁰ In the second- and third-century *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, the apostles never eat meat, and frequently fast or limit themselves to bread, water

⁹⁹ Trans. Williams, 143.

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.24.2; Epiphanius *Pan.* 30.15.3-4, 30.22.3-5, 53.1.4; Tert. *Fasting* 15.1, *de cult. Fem.* 2.9; Hippolytus *Haer.* 8.13; CMC 91-4. See McGowan (1999a), 143-74; Stewart-Sykes (2002). Manichaeans, too, did not eat meat, but this was only part of a more complex dietary regime.

and salt. We rarely receive reports for the reasoning behind this abstention, however. Alistair McGowan argues that the main reason for the vegetarianism of these groups was the association of meat with pagan sacrifice; its rejection signaled total repudiation of pagan culture and a commitment to an alternative society. The best support for this argument comes from Ps.-Clementine literature, where the eating of meat and blood are strongly tied to the historical development of sacrifice,¹⁰¹ and from the *Acts of Andrew* (53), where demons are said to be revitalised by eating meat. As McGowan himself recognises, however, the sacrificial association is only one aspect of meat consumption; vegetarianism was also a conscious choice to reject luxury and to adopt a symbol of poverty, and, as suggested by the Alexandrian authors, an opportunity for self-discipline. Some of them may have abstained as a continuation of Jewish observance, though there is no proof for this. In any case, Christian authors, even those strongly opposed to eating meat, did not describe meat itself as polluting. Rather, vegetarianism and general dietary restrictions were seen as part of a purer life of *askesis*. The purity discourse is focused here not on the substances eaten but rather on the resulting lifestyle as a whole.

Wine abstinence was frequently linked with meat abstinence. Already in the Hebrew bible, avoiding wine is the hallmark of officiating priests and the *nazir* (Lev 10:9; Num 6:3); it was certainly not seen as polluting, however. For a moralist such as Clement, drunkenness was the diametrical opposite of the self-control (*Paed.* 2.25-7). Among early Christian groups, especially in Asia Minor and Syria, we find a widespread tradition of using water, not wine, for the eucharist, doubtless reflecting a more general abstinence from wine. This too is seen by A. McGowan primarily as an attempt by these groups to differentiate themselves from the “cuisine of sacrifice,” which included wine libations, but was doubtless also based on the other associations of wine with luxury and drunkenness, and with the self-identification of some Christians as “mourners” and perpetual penitents for their sins.¹⁰² Again, the question here is of an ascetic lifestyle seen in general as pure, and less the impurity of the substance itself.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Rec.* 4.13-36.

¹⁰² See Griffith (1995), 234-5.

¹⁰³ See Epiphanius *Pan.* 45.1.6-8 on Severus, a third-century figure, who compares wine to poison.

Summary

Idolatry, animal blood, meat and wine figure as possible sources for dietary impurity in second- and third-century Christian texts.

Idolatry is the major type of dietary impurity, figuring most often in the texts. Already in Paul, and much developed in Clement, Origen and the Pseudo-Clementines, is the idea that this impurity is mediated through demons. Demonology allows Christian thinkers to maintain the possibility of defilement of meat, dangerous and transferrable to humans through consumption, in spite of the general principle of the insignificance of food as an object of defilement and the Gospels' insistence that defilement ultimately comes from the heart. The impurity of food offered to idols had obvious social implications of differentiation between Christians and pagans, and this was certainly one of its main functions.

We may demonstrate the complexity of the moral status of defilement of food offered to demons by examining it in terms of the three dimensions outlined in the introduction – relationship to the body, agency, and supernatural beings. The defilement is created and transferred by the act of sacrifice, and therefore outside the body. At the same time, Clement and Origen emphasise the role of the *suneidesis* or the mind in creating defilement or at least in causing it to adhere to the worshipper. Other writers, however (the Ps.-Clementine literature, *Didache*, Justin, Aristides) do not mention any interior aspect. This is reflected also in the dimension of agency – Clement and Origen highlight the human intentionality needed for defilement to pass from the food to the person, and the demons too have a degree of agency so that defilement is not created automatically. Lastly, for Clement and Origen the involvement of supernatural entities mediating the effect of the physical object on the mind or *suneidesis* connect it to a larger context of good and evil. On all these dimensions, therefore, the Alexandrians make a clear effort to provide defilement with moral credentials. The writers of the Ps.-Clementine literature, on the other hand, do not shy away from direct defilement of the external body, caused without clear agency or intentionality. There is no polemic with Judaism over the nature of defilement in the background of these texts, and their anthropology is not as bifurcated between body and soul. Therefore, for these writers, demons serve less to bridge spirit and matter, and more to underline the intensity, danger and dynamism of idol food defilement, and to link it to a broader history of the battle of good with evil.

Beyond idolatry, animal blood was generally not eaten by Christians of the first centuries. Blood may have been seen as intrinsically polluted for consumption, and for Christians writers (following certain currents in Second Temple literature), it had connotations of idolatrous sacrifices and murder, both sins described as creating impurity in the Hebrew bible.

Some Christian groups abstained from meat and wine, while others practiced fasting. Though the precise background for the wine and meat abstinence is unclear, it was at times described using purity language. The purity discourse in this case is of a general ascetic regime leading to a pure life, rather than the pinpointing of specific substances as impure for consumption.

3. Attitudes towards the biblical dietary laws in second- and third century texts

The biblical dietary laws were widely perceived by Christian writers of the first centuries to be one of the most salient features of Jewish religion.¹⁰⁴ As we saw earlier (p. 55), both in the perception of Greco-Roman culture and in Jewish self-perception, the dietary laws were a defining feature of Judaism. The importance of these laws in polemics and discussions between Jews and non-Jews in antiquity is unsurprising in light of their probable practical role in hindering close Jewish interaction with non-Jewish society.

As we saw, the dietary laws were not clearly condemned in the Gospels or in the first century Pauline tradition. By the second century, however, some Christian texts presented a much more negative attitude, declaring that the dietary laws, together with the other two prominent Jewish identity markers of ancient discourse - Shabbat observance and circumcision - were not binding upon Christians. Furthermore, the dietary laws were rejected not only as relating to food, but as a central dimension of Jewish ritual purity laws. The amalgamation of the purity laws and the dietary laws as a homogenous construct of Jewish ritual purity, already well under way in Mark 7, led to the positioning of dietary laws as the main target for anti-Jewish rhetoric, with all the NT passages concerning food and purity now seen as directed at

¹⁰⁴ To the best of my knowledge, there is no comprehensive study dedicated to Christian perceptions of biblical dietary law after the second century CE. A general overview, although omitting many sources, is found in Stein (1957). Tomson (1999) is an excellent study, but it is mostly dedicated to NT texts.

the dietary laws. Since the dietary laws differentiated between Jews and non-Jews while purity laws typically created hierarchies between different Jewish groups, focusing on the dietary laws as emblematic of Jewish purity permitted Christian writers to identify Jewish purity laws in general as characteristic of Jews only, an important step towards their delegitimisation.

Patristic discussions of biblical dietary laws typically have two dimensions: rejection of the practice of the dietary laws and alternative interpretations for them. In the first, Christian writers polemicise against the implementation of the laws, making use of NT prooftexts perceived to oppose Jewish Law in general and the dietary laws in particular. Straightforward opposition to the laws is sometimes challenged by Christian abstinence from food offered to idols, which raise the question of why certain food observances stemming from the Hebrew Bible are legitimate, while others are not. The rejection of the laws as guide to practice raised the need for alternative interpretations, which uphold the text of the Old Testament but annul its binding force as a practical obligation. These interpretations vary, but can be classed into four general categories: allegorical, ascetic, historical and demonological. The interpretations are targeted at two audiences: those with doubts as to the validity of the Old Testament, who require an explanation of its continuing significance; and those influenced by Jewish practice, who therefore require an alternative, non-practical interpretation.

Arguments concerning the dietary laws in the second century

The symbolic alternative

The *Epistle of Barnabas* is the earliest Christian text which clearly rejects the dietary laws as practical precepts regarding food, accompanied by their alternative interpretation.¹⁰⁵ Moses, who spoke “in the Spirit,” was relating in these laws symbolically to different kinds of people who should be shunned; “but they [i.e., the non-Christian Jews] received his words according to the desires of their flesh (κατ’ ἐπιθυμίαν τῆς σαρκὸς) as if he were actually speaking about food (10.9).” As we saw, symbolic interpretations of the dietary laws were already put forward by *Aristeas* and Philo, and *Barnabas* may have adopted similar interpretations of other Jewish authors. Here, however, symbolism replaces practice rather than explains it. This rejection was

¹⁰⁵ See Grant (1980), 306-7; Paget (1994), 149-54; Hanson (1959), 97-8.

clearly the result of *Barnabas*' attempt to reinforce an identity totally opposed to torah-practicing Jews: language of We vs. Them abounds in the letter. As in *Aristeas*, identity is behind the dietary laws, but precisely in an opposite way: for *Aristeas*, maintaining these laws safeguarded Jewish identity, while for *Barnabas*, the understanding that they should be rejected is the hallmark of a Christian.¹⁰⁶

While the author of *Barnabas* does not provide any substantive argument against the dietary laws, their rejection in these terms is innovative. The idea of the Law being “fleshy” as opposed to the “spirit” of the believers would appear to be Pauline (Gal 5:16-18; Rom 7:5-6, 2:28-9; 2 Cor 3:12-17); but its application to the dietary laws, and their resulting rejection, is new. Also new, at least in a Christian context, is the explicit expression that a literal understanding or hermeneutic of the Hebrew Bible is “fleshly,” as opposed to a symbolic, “spiritual” hermeneutic.¹⁰⁷ *Barnabas* claims that the dietary laws were never supposed to be practiced, not even before the coming of Christ; their true “spiritual” interpretation was just not understood by the Jews’ because of their preoccupation with food.

Although impurity is not mentioned in *Barnabas*' discussion, the idea of contagion is retained and transferred to the social realm, in that the prohibited animals symbolise people to whom a believer must not “cling” (κολληθήσῃ) or “be like” (ὁμοιωθήσῃ; 10.3-8). Here *Barnabas* differs from *Aristeas*, for whom the symbolism is more direct, referring to the vices themselves. Another innovation of *Barnabas* is in the central place of sexual sins: these are symbolised by three different animals, while in *Aristeas* they are not mentioned at all.¹⁰⁸ Philo already interpreted the dietary laws as relating to desire (ἐπιθυμία) of all kinds, but did not single out

¹⁰⁶ See Freidenreich (2011), 102.

¹⁰⁷ Boyarin (1994) claims this for Paul himself; but Paul nowhere speaks of a literal interpretation as fleshly and a figurative one as spiritual. For criticism of Boyarin, see Barclay (1998), Dawson (2001), 1-46. For the relationship of *Barnabas* and Paul, see Horbury (1998a), 143 and Paget (1996).

¹⁰⁸ The change is clearest in the case of the weasel: both cite the biological “fact” that it conceives through the ears and bears young through the mouth, but *Aristeas* (165-6) interprets this as referring to evil speech, and *Barnabas* (10.8) to oral sex, which he describes as “lawless” and “impure.”

sex nor did he create a clear and detailed correspondence as here. As scholars have noted, the section concerning sexual sin (10.6-8) is awkwardly inserted, signaling that it is an addition to a borrowed text.¹⁰⁹ The centrality of sex as the main Christian body symbol, and therefore its centrality in Christian purity discourse and its use for explaining food issues, is already found here.

Barnabas' symbolic alternative was taken up as the dominant – though not the only – interpretation by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen.¹¹⁰ Irenaeus takes advantage of the division afforded by the two signs of purity for quadrupeds – chewing cud and parting hoofs – to express a four-fold division into Christian (pure on both counts), heretics and Jews (each have one sign but not the other, and so impure), and pagans (impure on both counts).¹¹¹ Again, the dietary laws are used to define the identity of Christians vs. others (especially heretics), though here on a more symbolical level. The parallelism to the dietary laws is hardly rigorous, however, since in the same passage he compares heretics also to cattle, swine, dogs, and all irrational animals. The symbolic impurity of the dietary laws is merged with the more general idea of animality as a negative trait, symbolising gluttony, lust and “filthiness.”

Clement of Alexandria is the first writer from whom we have a comprehensive discussion of the dietary laws relying on NT prooftexts. Symbolic interpretations are a major aspect of his understanding of these laws: *Barnabas* is cited twice as an example for a correct symbolic reading,¹¹² and he emphasises that the dietary laws concern association with different kind of people by “some sort of allegory” or “metaphor”: “the unclean (ἀκαθάρτοις) who, like swine,

¹⁰⁹ Paget (1994), 150; Rhodes (2004), 60n.83.

¹¹⁰ As well as Augustine, who contributed to it becoming the most dominant approach to the dietary laws in Latin world; However, Stein (1957), 153, who claims that “the fathers of the church after the third century merely reiterate the principal Christian objections against dietary laws... which in their view can only be considered as σύμβολα or τύποι or ἀνιγμιατικῶς,” ignored the other options discussed here.

¹¹¹ Irenaeus *Haer.* 5.8.3; ed. Rousseau, II.112-7.

¹¹² Clement, *Strom.* 2.15; 5.51-2.

revel in bodily pleasures and filthy habits of life” (swine), or those who “make their living by plundering others” (birds of prey).¹¹³ Elsewhere, he puts forward an interpretation very similar to that of Irenaeus.¹¹⁴

Jewish as opposed to Christian identity

In the 120's, the *Apology of Aristides* casts Jews as superior to pagans and yet inferior to Christians, through a description of Jewish law based on Col 2:16 and a parallel description of Christian morals, worship and laws.¹¹⁵ For Aristides, while the Jews believe they worship God they actually worship angels, “as when they celebrate sabbaths and the beginning of the months... and fasting and circumcision and the purity of foods (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐܢܐ), which, however, they do not observe perfectly (14.4)”¹¹⁶ Other than the explicit mention of purity regarding food, also of interest is the claim of the Jews’ imperfect observance, which shows that the author had some degree of respect towards these laws.¹¹⁷ Aristides then describes the superior Christian observances, which include a number of food related issues: abstaining from food offered to idols (see above), fasting for a number of days to give food to the poor, and always giving thanks for food and drink. Here too, as in Barnabas, there is little essential

¹¹³ *Paed.* 3.11.75-6, trans. Wood, 256-7.

¹¹⁴ *Strom.* 7.109.3.

¹¹⁵ For the dating, see Pouderon (2003), 32-7. Justin, *Dial.* 46, also appears to be based on Col 2:16 but surprisingly omits the reference to food and drink, see Hirshman (1996), 55-9.

¹¹⁶ This part is extant only in Syriac and is missing in the Greek version. Grant (1988), 38, 45, argues that the Syriac is from a revision postdating Hadrian’s death in 138; but see the criticism of Pouderon (2003), 35-6. Aristides totally avoids any mention of Jewish scriptures, while mentioning Christian scriptures multiple times. The positive practices of the Jews come to them simply “from their forefathers.”

¹¹⁷ Pouderon (2003), 382 understands this to mean that they perform the commandments only externally and not according to their spiritual meaning, similar to *Barnabas* above. This, however, is not the simple meaning of the text, which focuses on practical issues; furthermore, there would be no need for the “however” (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ).

argument against the dietary laws. Jews, while depicted relatively positively as regards their theology and charity, perform a type of ritual more suitable to angels than to God, though why this is so is not explained. From the comparison with the Christian observances we may surmise that Aristides believed they lacked a moral dimension. But mostly, Jews and Christians are simply two different kinds (γέννη) of people (2.2).¹¹⁸ Christians and Jews may share certain beliefs (the unity of God) or practices (charity) but they are divided by ritual.

The anti-Jewish rhetoric is much strengthened in a later adaptation of Col. 2:16 to Jews, by the *Epistle to Diognetus*, in the late second century (4:1-2):¹¹⁹

“I do not think you need to learn from me about their anxiety (ψοφοδεές) over food (βρώσεις), their superstition about the sabbath, their arrogance over circumcision and the pretense they make of fasting and of their celebration of the new moon - ridiculous matters and unworthy of argument. For how is it not completely unwarranted to accept some of the things created by God for human use as made well (καλώς), but to reject others as useless (ἄχρηστα) and superfluous (περισσά)?¹²⁰

The precepts of the law regarding food, Sabbath, circumcision and festivals are denigrated and ridiculed. We have already seen the argument from the homogeneity of creation in *Aristeas* and in 1 Timothy, though here it is more pointed and detailed. As opposed to *Barnabas*, the writer does not even see any need to explain the meaning of the Hebrew Bible. He is rather intent on distinguishing Jewish from Christian worship and custom: while the former have unique and strange customs which separate them from the rest of society, Christians follow local custom, and “their worship of God remains invisible (6.4).”

Historical and ascetic arguments

Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, in the mid-second century, brings new arguments to the table. For Justin, the main perspective on the Mosaic Law is historical: while the Law’s moral

¹¹⁸ For the significance of religious practice and other factors as determiner of γέννη, see Lieu (1996), Buell (2005); Aristides is discussed on pp. 35-6, 46.

¹¹⁹ For the dating see Grant (1988), 178-9.

¹²⁰ Trans. Ehrman II.137.

precepts were always valid, and indeed performed by the patriarchs, its ritual precepts were a temporary response to a specific historical situation, that of Israel following the Golden Calf incident. Thus these laws, including the dietary laws, ritual purity, circumcision and the like are no longer valid in Christ's new covenant.¹²¹ In the case of the dietary laws, this historical reconstruction is corroborated by God's permission to Noah to eat every kind of meat "as the green herbs,"¹²² showing the impurity of animals was indeed a temporary measure. Since the laws were a reaction to a specific sin, they are no longer relevant for those no longer under its power.

The dietary laws were, according to Justin, an educatory and preventive measure, protecting the Jews from the possible influence of eating and turning it into an act of religious significance. Eating at times causes sin, and so the Jews "were likewise ordered to abstain from eating certain kinds of food, so that while eating and drinking you would keep God before your eyes, for you have always been disposed to forget him."¹²³ The prohibited foods were not chosen at random, however, but were rather "of the impure, harmful and violent animals (ἀκαθάρτων καὶ ἀδίκων καὶ παρανόμων)." These animals, it appears, are not impure simply by power of divine decree, but are impure (here synonymous with harmful) from their nature; it is only the prohibition of such animals which is temporary and specific, while the impurity abides. The

¹²¹ Justin, *Dial.* 44-6; see Stylianopoulos (1975); de Jonge (1985); Rokeah (2002), 43-60. Justin's argument is found again in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26, though without specific emphasis of the dietary laws. The *Didascalia* differentiates between the "first legislation" (the Decalogue) and the "second legislation," (the rest of the Torah's laws); the latter were a punishment to the Jews following the sin of the golden calf.

¹²² *Dial.* 20.2, and see Rokeach (2002), 109-16. Justin claims here that the Jews interpret "as the green herbs" as meaning that as only some herbs are eaten, so also only some animals are allowed. Such an interpretation, while possible, is not found in Rabbinic sources, which generally hold the position that the dietary laws are intended only for Jews; its strangeness indicates that it is a straw argument for Justin to knock down. Rokeach (2002), 116, nevertheless concludes that "Justin's disputants were Hellenistic Jews whose apologetic exegesis about this issue he quoted - and challenged."

¹²³ *Dial.* 20.1; trans. Falls and Slusser, 33.

dietary laws are given an ascetic, rather than a symbolic rationale, though it is circumscribed to a specific time and people. Justin relies here on the Pauline notion of the relative force of impurity: although food is indeed impure in some cases, it is only the “weak” who are susceptible to it.¹²⁴

For Justin, the dietary laws were God’s instrument for educating the people when confronted with an extraordinary situation calling for extraordinary measures. Therefore they are not ontologically meaningful nor convey any moral meaning, even symbolically. On the other hand, he upholds the factual usefulness of these laws at a certain point in history, a position accepted by all Christian writers except for *Barnabas*, for whom the dietary laws never had a literal meaning.¹²⁵

The ascetic interpretation found in Philo and alluded to by Justin was adopted towards the end of the second century by Clement of Alexandria, who as we saw also made use of symbolic interpretations.¹²⁶ Biblical law is seen by Clement as an instrument for healing the soul, and the dietary laws are integrated into this theme.¹²⁷ They therefore received a stamp of approval unprecedented in earlier second-century explanations, and quite rare in later ones.

The discussion of the dietary laws in the *Paedagogus* (2.1.16-17) opens with a number of examples from the Gospels for dietary abstinence (John’s ascetic diet, Matthew’s vegetarianism and Peter’s avoidance of pigs), followed by the citation of three passages indicating the opposite: Peter’s vision (Acts 10); Jesus’ saying that nothing outside a person can defile (Mark

¹²⁴ Historical explanations are later most dominant in the Syriac and Syrian tradition; see Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 15; Theodore Bar Koni, *Book of the Scholia* 3.41; Isodad of Merv, *Commentary on Leviticus*, 11. This interpretation also appears in Procopius, *Comm. Lev.*, PG 87.728.

¹²⁵ As observed by Paget (1994), 152-4.

¹²⁶ The mix of symbolism and asceticism is also found in Philo, from whom Clement frequently draws, especially in biblical exegesis. See Runia (1993), 132-56; and concerning food and the dietary laws, Grimm (1996), 99-100, 235n.109: “The tenor of Clement’s discussion throughout his treatment of food echoes not Aristotle but Philo with his repeated warnings against the dire consequences of pleasure..”

¹²⁷ See *Strom.* 1.171; 6.133-48; *Paed.* 3.89.1, with Maier (1995), 725-8.

7:15); and God’s statement to Adam that “all these things shall be food for you.”¹²⁸ The latter passages show, Clement says, that “the usage [of foods] is indifferent (ἀδιάφορος ἢ χρήσις),” using Stoic terminology for things lacking moral valence, which are neither good nor bad.¹²⁹ What defiles is not food, but “wrong opinions concerning intemperance” (ἡ περὶ τῆς ἀκρασίας διάληψις κενή).

The effect of food on the person was anything but indifferent for Clement, however, as the book-length discussion in the *Paedagogus* of all matters pertaining to food demonstrates; even if food itself is indifferent, the passions it nurtures are not. Clement therefore turns to a well-known Aristotelian principle: in food matters, as in all else, we should avoid the extremes and practice the middle way, and this means to eat only what is necessary. The biblical dietary laws, however, went beyond the mean, to utmost frugality.¹³⁰ Only a small number of foods were permitted to the Jews, “for since it is impossible for those who use dainties to abstain from partaking of them, he appointed the opposite mode of life, till he should break down the propensity to indulgence arising from habit.”¹³¹ The dietary laws were a radical measure, but they were needed in order to break the opposite habit.¹³² Clement’s explanation here is very

¹²⁸ This verse refers only to vegetables, and not to meat. Clement, as a hesitant vegetarian, may have preferred it to Justin’s proof-text from Noah, which explicitly allows meat.

¹²⁹ The ἀδιάφορα are also known as “intermediates” (e.g., Cicero *Fin.* 3.58-9); this does not connote the golden mean but rather things which are neither good nor evil. For the distinction, see Plutarch, *On Moral Virtue* 444E. For the middle way in Clement and Middle Platonism, see Lilla (1971), 64-5; Clark (1977), 28-34.

¹³⁰ It is also possible to read Clement as saying that the frugality of the dietary laws is itself the golden mean, and accordingly to read the sentence on the breaking of habits as concerning only the laws forbidding touching dead animals or those offered to idols. In this case, the dietary laws would appear to exemplify the preferred way for all.

¹³¹ *Paed.* 2.1.17; trans. ANF II.242.

¹³² For the attainment of the virtuous middle by practicing the extreme, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.9 (1109B).

close to Justin's, though it is translated into philosophical terminology. As opposed to Justin, Clement does not restrict the validity of the laws, or explain if this education was only temporary, or perhaps is still necessary.

In a passage in the *Stromateis* (2.20.105), Clement explains that swine and fish without scales are fat and fattening, and therefore forbidden in order to “discipline us” (προπαιδεύει ἡμᾶς) and “check our desires” (στελλῶν ἡμῶν τὰς ἐπιθυμίας).¹³³ Here, Clement comes quite close to claiming that certain dietary laws are still valid for Christians, for ascetic reasons. Such interpretation invests the biblical dietary laws with inherent content, and integrates them into the ascetic worldview of late ancient Christianity.¹³⁴ The idea that abstinence from eating and/or differentiation between animals can be useful on a moral level is also at the basis of the historical solutions; however, Clement goes beyond them to confirm the general moral value of the dietary laws.

Origen

Origen used all of the strategies of his second-century predecessors to explain the dietary laws. To these he added innovative explanations, in which purity and impurity received a more significant role than in the past. As opposed to most of his predecessors, who discussed the dietary laws in the context of anti-Jewish polemics, Origen's discussions are strongly rooted in the biblical text he is commenting on, whether the NT or the Hebrew Bible, and his first

¹³³ In a discussion of vegetarianism (*Strom.* 7.33.1) Clement mentions that the Jews regard pigs as impure because of their destructive habits, but then cites others who regard them as best for eating precisely for this reason, or because they are otherwise useless, while yet others abstain from them due to their “propensity for sex.” (διὰ τὸ κατωφερὲς εἰς συνουσίαν)

¹³⁴ For exegetical strategies incorporating ritual biblical laws into the ascetic worldview, see Clark (1999), esp. 204-32. Tertullian's attitude is similar to Clement's; in his reply to Marcion, he writes that the laws are “a measure for encouraging continence,” subduing cravings for lust and luxury and facilitating fasting (*Marc.* 2.20.1; *Jejun.* 5), all positive, and not specifically Jewish, results. Tertullian does not emphasise the link of these objectives to any historical event, though he mentions the Israelites' craving after Egyptian cucumbers and melons.

priority is therefore explaining the text according to his unique hermeneutic. This has a number of consequences: first, purity language features heavily in Origen's discussions, as a reflection of its importance in the biblical texts. Second, we find quite different approaches to the dietary laws in different parts of Origen's massive corpus, according to specific exegetical requirements in dealing with each biblical text. Third, the significant discussions of food purity in the gospels and in Paul, hardly mentioned by second-century authors, receive detailed attention.

The focus on biblical exegesis does not detract, however, from the strong polemic dimension of Origen's writings on the dietary laws. As most of the biblical laws, the dietary laws required two different polemical approaches – on the one hand, justification in the face of pagan criticisms, and on the other hand, defence from Jewish or Jewish-Christian arguments that they should be practiced as written in the bible. Both of these contexts are explicitly found in Origen's writings: in the *Contra Celsum* he defends the logic of the dietary laws, criticised by Celsus, while his biblical exegesis opposes accusations by the “bodily Jews and the Ebionites who differ little from them” that the Christians transgress the laws and that Origen's allegorical interpretations “does violence to scripture.”¹³⁵

Origen's multi-leveled hermetic, including both symbolic and literal readings, can be seen clearly in the case of the dietary laws. Symbolic explanations of the dietary laws are propounded at length in the *Homilies on Leviticus* (7.6-7).¹³⁶ Origen starts by justifying his allegorical hermeneutic by linking Paul's allusion to “spiritual food” (1 Cor 10:1-4) to the understanding of food laws as the “shadow of future things” (Col 2:16), showing that the laws should be read according to the spirit not the letter. He then cites Peter's vision and its interpretation, which demonstrates that the dietary laws “should be interpreted as pertaining to humans.” These prooftexts indicate that the target of Origen's polemic was not Jews, but rather Christians who practiced the dietary laws, such as the Ebionites he explicitly mentions.

¹³⁵ *Comm. Matt.* 11.12; *Hom Lev.* 4.7.1.

¹³⁶ See also *Hom. Lev.* 3.3.4-5, where he allegorises the impurity of the touching of carcasses of pure and impure animals.

In his symbolic exegesis, interpretations of the impure animals as evil traits along the lines of *Barnabas* are marginalised in favour of a more general approach to food as a symbol for human interaction:

Every person has in himself some food which he gives to his neighbour ... For it cannot happen that, when we approach each other as human beings and join in conversation, we do not either take or give some food between us either by a response, or by a question, or by some gesture. Indeed, if the person from whom we take food is pure (*mundus*) and of a sound mind, we receive pure (*immundus*) food. But if he whom we touch (*contingimus*) is impure, we receive impure food.¹³⁷

The symbolic impurity of animals, therefore, does not express only prohibition, but also contagion. Words as well as other forms of communication are the bearers of this impurity, which comes out of a person's mouth. Origen, like Clement and *Sextus*, is using here the Matthean version of Jesus' saying on true impurity which "comes out of the mouth."¹³⁸

While in the *Homilies on Leviticus* the focus of Origen's attention was on symbolic interpretation, the *Commentary on Romans* and the *Commentary on Matthew* feature discussions on the principles of food purity, formulated by integrating Jesus' sayings (Matt 15/Mark 7) with the opinions of Paul (Rom 14, 1 Cor 10, Col 2 and 1 Tim 4), read as pertaining to food in general and the biblical dietary laws in particular.

All animals and material things were created by the good God; therefore, there cannot be a distinction in value between them as regards their essential nature, including of purity and impurity.¹³⁹ In other words, following Clement, food as of itself is indifferent.¹⁴⁰ However, food does not remain in its natural state, but is incorporated into the human world – and it is here

¹³⁷ *Hom. Lev.* 7.5.2; trans. Barkley, 145. Cf. *Sel. Lev.* on Lev 5:2, PG 12.400.

¹³⁸ See *Cels.* 8.28: "the things which come out of the mouth are evil thoughts which are spoken aloud, murders, adulteries, fornications..."; *Comm. Matt.* 11.12: "we are defiled when... we speak offhand and discuss matters we ought not."

¹³⁹ *Comm. Rom.* 9.42.3; 10.3.1.

¹⁴⁰ *Comm. Matt.* 11.12; *Comm. Rom.* 10.3.4.

that it can receive a value of pure or impure, through human attitudes towards it. Specifically, there are two ways in which food can become impure: when eating it may harm someone else (Rom 14:20), and when the person eating it believes it is impure (Rom 14:14). This shows that “impurity and defilement consist not in things or in essences, but in actions and thoughts.”¹⁴¹ Foods appearing to be impure are pure for those with pure mind and action, and vice versa. This “internal” understanding of purity is opposed to the Jewish “external” and “fleshly” understanding.¹⁴² Nevertheless, according to Origen’s reading of Romans, the relativisation and internalisation of impurity does not mean that it is irrelevant for the material world. Although impurity originates in the human mind and in the actions produced by it, it may be expressed in the status accorded to material things. Animals, however, which lack any internal source of impurity, cannot become impure as in the understanding imputed to the Jews by Origen. We may therefore qualify Peter Tomson’s statement that “it is not the contents of Jewish food and purity laws which makes the Church Fathers condemn them, but their being labeled as Jewish. For similar practices observed in their own gentile Christian communities are labeled positively.”¹⁴³ Although the practices are indeed similar, they pass through a prism of interpretation which provides them with very different meanings, as “true” or “false” impurity. The identification of the practices as Jewish or Christian occurred together with a process of providing them with opposite significance, thereby changing their content and accommodating them to their role in the perception of “Judaism” and “Christianity.”

For Origen, however, food is said to be impure not only according to the circumstances described in Romans, but also in an ascetic mode. Foods eaten “for the love of pleasure” are impure. What matters is therefore not the type of food eaten, but how food is used, in what amounts and for what objective, since even heretics, pagans and magicians abstain from meat and wine as part of their rituals, while the Pythagoreans do so because of their belief in

¹⁴¹ *Comm. Rom.* 10.3.2.

¹⁴² *Comm. Matt.* 11.12; *Comm. Rom.* 9.42.8.

¹⁴³ Tomson (1999), 201.

reincarnation.¹⁴⁴ This understanding of alimentary asceticism as a form of purity is relatively marginal in Origen's writings, and as opposed to Clement it is not used to explain the dietary laws.

Food impurity can also be used instrumentally. Deploying a more sympathetic historical argument than Justin's, Origen explains that the dietary laws served in the past for "distinguishing God's special people from nations that the ignorance of God and the worship of idols were making impure,"¹⁴⁵ a notion clearly adopted from the *Letter of Aristeas*. With Jesus' coming and the purification of the nations through faith, all foods were purified, in order to facilitate Christianity's expansion.¹⁴⁶

From the text analysed above, it would seem that food impurity for Origen has nothing to do with the animal itself. Yet precisely the opposite stance is taken elsewhere. Impurity of animals is first mentioned in the Pentateuch in Genesis, when Noah is told to bring seven of every pure animal but only two of the impure. This raises the question:

Since the law of pure and impure was not yet in existence, how did Noah know what was impure to say thus? You should understand this according to what is said "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law;" Noah knew this law by his nature (ἀπὸ τοῦ φύσει νόμου).¹⁴⁷

Noah's impure animals were especially disturbing, since they existed long before the Exodus, when the historical reasons given by Justin and Origen were not yet relevant. Origen's natural law solution does little to alleviate the situation. The idea that the patriarchs fulfilled parts of the law through innate understanding was well-known in second- and third-century writers (as well as Philo), but this typically refers to moral commandments still binding on Christians, and

¹⁴⁴ *Cels.* 5.49; *Comm. Matt.* 11.12; *Comm. Rom.* 9.42.4.

¹⁴⁵ *Comm. Rom.* 10.3.2; trans. adapted from Scheck, 258.

¹⁴⁶ *Comm. Rom.* 10.3.2; *Cels.* 8.28. Cf. *Cels.* 5.49

¹⁴⁷ Origen, *Sel. Gen.*, PG 12:105. For natural law in Origen, see Banner (1954); Roukema (2004); as relevant for animals as well, see *Cels.* 4.83.

not ritual ones they rejected.¹⁴⁸ Natural law does not cohere with the understanding of impurity as a product of the human mind, but rather raises the possibility of a natural and universal source of impurity, relevant not only for Jews but for gentiles as well. Origen does not provide any clue here as to what may have been the natural law criteria differentiating pure and impure animals, and whether it was identical to the laws of Leviticus.

Further information may be gleaned from a gloss on God's commandment to Noah, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything (Gen 9:3)." Justin used this verse to argue against the dietary laws; Origen, however, does the opposite, by clarifying that "every moving thing" does not include the snake family, "for it is considered of the wild animals (θηρίοις); but rather those which nature (πέφυκεν) is to be eaten, crickets and grasshoppers and the like."¹⁴⁹ In this case, Origen aligns the primeval commandment to Noah with the Levitical laws (which explicitly permit crickets and grasshoppers but prohibit snakes), and explains that a similar prohibition was in force for all wild animals. Wildness and carnivorousness as the traits of the impure birds are emphasised already by *Aristeas* (144), and in his *Commentary on Leviticus*, Origen says briefly that all wild animals are impure and represent cruel people.¹⁵⁰ Thus the dietary laws were, in fact, based on a

¹⁴⁸ See Justin, *Dial.* 44-46; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.16.3; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 2.2-10, with de Jonge (1985), 157-70; Rokeah (2002); Inowlocki (2010), 103-19. For law of nature in Philo, see Horsley (1978); Najman (1999), and in Second Temple Judaism generally, Bockmuehl (1995). For the law of nature as including animals as well as humans in Stoicism and Roman law, see Kroger (2004).

¹⁴⁹ *Fr. Gen.* fr. E17 (ed. Metzler, p. 214 = fr. 758 Petit (TEG 2, 159)). For the opposition between such pure insects and the impure snake, see Philo, *Leg.* 2.105.

¹⁵⁰ *Sel. Lev.* on Lev 11:2, PG 12.401A; Justin, too, said that God chose the violent animals to be impure (above p. 111), but this was only temporary, while here the impurity is primeval. A direct antecedent to this idea may be Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 2.16-17 who explains that although all animals were created equally good, the wild animals later became evil, "for when man transgressed, they also transgressed with him." The animals will return to their original purity in the eschaton; see Rogers (2000), 121-3. This point is picked up by Origen in *Hom. Ez.* 11.3.3, where he says that all wild animals will return in the future to their original tameness and purity. For an identical medieval Jewish view,

natural, objective criterion, that of wildness and cruelty to other animals. This criterion was known already to Noah, perhaps based on natural law which prohibits stealing and cruelty to others.¹⁵¹

This naturalistic conception is at the basis of yet another of Origen's dietary law theories, developed primarily in the *Contra Celsum* as part of a discussion of demons and divination. Origen claims that demons have a stronger hold on "the most rapacious wild beasts and other very wicked animals" than on tame animals, because "animals of this sort have something about them resembling evil, and although it is not evil yet it is like it;" wild animals are therefore more efficacious for divination. Moses learnt of this demonic preference (from his own reason or through God's assistance), and prohibited as impure those animals to which the demons have a predilection.¹⁵² The ambiguous evil or impurity of the wild animals themselves is only a secondary reason for their prohibition: the correlation of wildness with demonic possession is the real reason.¹⁵³ This correlation allows Origen to find a site for the animal's impure status which can be more easily managed than that of natural impurity arising from wildness. After all, wild animals remained wild even after Jesus, but the power of demons can be weakened, at least for Christians.¹⁵⁴

Origen thus provides a wide variety of avenues of interpretation: historical, symbolic,

see *Midrash Psalms* 146; and compare *Ber. Rab.* 20.5, which states that all animals will be "healed" in the future except for the snake.

¹⁵¹ See, e.g., Cicero, *Off.* 3.29-31; and compare *4 Macc.* 5.25-6, where Eliezer argues that the dietary laws were made by God to suit human nature, as opposed to Antiochus' claim that pork is a "gift of nature," which it is unjust to turn away (5.9).

¹⁵² *Cels.* 4.92-3; trans. Chadwick 257. This explanation also appears briefly in *Hom. Num.* 16.7.13.

¹⁵³ Demonic possession is also Origen's explanation for the NT's frequent use of *koinos* to denote impurity: "because [the person] is possessed not by one spirit but by many, on that account such a man is called common, as one who is a slave to many vices or demons" (*Comm. Rom.* 9.42.3).

¹⁵⁴ *Hom. Ez.* 11.3.4: The purification and taming of the wild animals "had been done in part even now, and will be completed in the second coming."

natural and demonic. The first two of these are common in earlier Christian exegesis, but the latter two are innovative; they are, moreover, somewhat dangerous to the Christian side of the anti-Law polemic, since they provide an opening for arguing that the dietary laws have not lost their relevance. And yet, the demonic and the symbolic explanations are closer than appears at first. Both are methods of “spiritualization” of the animal: symbolically, by equating impure animals and evil human beings, and psychologically by peering into the animal’s soul and discerning there a demonic spirit. Origen’s interpretation comes full circle when we are reminded of his imaginative use of bestial images to understand the inner workings of the human soul.¹⁵⁵ We can also find some context for it in the demonic identification of wild animals in works such as the *Life of Anthony*, where the saint fights the animal-demons sent to intimidate him: “in the *Life of Antony*... There is a clear connection between demons that appear as animals, animals that obey the command of the Devil and animals of flesh and blood, which are evil because of their inherent bestial nature.”¹⁵⁶

Conclusions

The general attitude of Christian writers of this period towards the Jewish dietary rules is negative. They were seen as distinctively Jewish and thus their rejection was part of Christian identity formation, especially since Jewish-Christian groups continued to practice these laws. Second century writers developed a wide range of strategies to incorporate the biblical dietary

¹⁵⁵ Cox (1982). See further on the blurring of boundaries between wild animals and demons in late ancient Judaism and Christianity, especially in Origen’s thought: Crouzel (1956), 197-206; Williams (2006); Gilhus (2006), 205-26. For Origen’s demonology in general, see Ferguson (1989); Crouzel (1994); Bright (1999); Marx-Wolf (2010b).

¹⁵⁶ Gilhus (2006), 223; cf. *Life of Anthony* 39.3; 51.5. See further Brakke (2006), 31-2, who claims that “Jews and Christians traditionally interpreted the unclean animals in the Septuagint as symbolizing demons,” however with no collaboration for this statement. Beasts and demons occupy the same space, e.g. Rev 18:2. See also *Apoc. Mos.* 16 (the devil occupying the serpent in paradise); *T. Naph.* 8; *Teachings of Silvanus* 105.26-106.14, a passage in which various wild animals symbolise the “powers of the adversary” in the soul and “everything which is dead;” Lucian, *Philopseudes* 31.

laws into their theological and ethical systems while minimising their practical significance, limiting it to specific circumstances, or using it as support for a general ascetic project. The main motivation of these writers was to argue for the irrelevance of the dietary laws and thus to differentiate Christian from Jewish food customs. Christian customs are constructed as representing internal purity, powered by human agency and linked to questions of good and evil, while Jewish law is constructed as representing external purity, lacking in agency and moral value.

At the same time, Christian interpretations sought to infuse spiritual elements into the laws in order to co-opt them for the Christian project and justify scripture, and this was done on a number of levels. The primary level was symbolic interpretation, which totally circumvented any material aspects through the creation of direct equivalence between impurity and morally valued acts or persons. However, non-symbolic interpretations also have an important role in this transformation: in historical interpretations, the laws were seen as one of the stages of a moral education; in ascetic interpretations, as instances of a general moral discourse; and in the demonological interpretation, as taking a position in the spiritual confrontation between evil demons and god-fearing men. The practical understanding of impurity is rejected, but it is allowed to take up a significant role when coupled with the accepted moral discourse.

For the symbolic interpretations, the *impurity* of animals does not have much significance: it simply accompanies their prohibition, and both are discussed as one. The concept of defilement contagion is retained to some degree in the symbolic interpretations which speak of people from whom one should distance himself, as from a source of impurity. It is only in the *Epistle to Diognetus* (echoing 1 Tim) in which we find a substantial argument against the concept of impurity in relation to the dietary laws. For Clement, who interpreted the impurity of animals ascetically, the question of purity would appear to be more relevant, since the prohibited animals physically influence the person eating them. Clement, however, was more inclined to use Aristotelian and Stoic terms than concepts of purity and pollution to describe his views on food.

Origen, for whom questions of Christian as opposed to Jewish interpretation were also paramount, developed a general theory of dietary impurity by applying the Pauline perspective

on biblical exegesis and on food impurity, originally pertaining to food offered to idols, to the biblical dietary laws. Through this application, the dietary laws were rejected as practical precepts, since they did not meet the criteria he developed from the Pauline discussions. Food, for him, exemplified a more general issue of the meaning of purity and impurity of the material world, its sources and meaning. At the same time, Origen also sought to explain the logic behind the dietary laws through second-century symbolic, historical and ascetic perspectives, and through his innovative demonological explanation.

The models of “battle” and “truce” (see above p. 12) provide an effective perspective for understanding the Christian transformation of food impurity. For Christian writers after the first century, conducting a dialogue of the deaf with non-Christian Jews, a truce model of food defilement was unacceptable and even incomprehensible. They simply could not conceive of terms of impurity as lacking clear moral significance, as not participating in the cosmic battle of good and evil. They therefore read the biblical food laws through a battle perspective, and in this light Jewish practice appeared to be inadequate and illogical. The problem for them was not the prohibition or impurity of foods per se; it was rather that the way Jews practiced their food impurity appeared arbitrary, out of sync with the cosmic patterns. Christian explanations of food impurity (demonological, allegorical, ascetic) are all attempts to force the biblical laws into a battle model, which would make them comprehensible again.

Chapter III

Purity ignored: early Christian attitudes towards death defilement

In most ancient religions, including Judaism, human corpses were perceived as creating defilement which required purification.¹ Corpses or people defiled by death were prohibited entry to sacred space, and sacred people (e.g. priests) were denied entry to spaces defiled by death. This defilement was contagious to some extent, and could pass to other people or objects through touch or familial ties. From the fourth century onwards, most Christians rejected this perception, and allowed – even approved of – the introduction of corpses into sacred space.

Scholarly examinations of Christian rejection of death defilement typically focus on the breaking down of traditional barriers between the living and the dead found in the cult of the saints, through which the relics of the saints become part of the religious and social landscape.² Indeed, many of the ancient sources discuss death defilement in the context of the cult of the saints. However, this approach is less pertinent to the third century, when the cult of the saints was much less developed than in the fourth and fifth centuries. Furthermore, this approach does not take sufficient notice of Christian views towards other dimensions of impurity in this period as a context for views on death defilement, or try to understand how death defilement concepts influenced other impurity dimensions.³

1. *Early evidence*

Some conception of death defilement is assumed in the Gospels. Continuing on the image of

¹ See above pp. 31, 32, 45.

² Brown (1981), 1-12; Paxton (1990), 19-26; Wortley (2006). An early version of this chapter appeared in Blidstein (2013).

³ Three recent monographs give attention to the significance of defilement: Samellas (2002), esp. 146-77; Volp (2002), esp. 247-63; McCane (2003), 109-26. None of them, however, discuss the question of death defilement in the context of Christian attitudes towards impurity in general, and only the latter attempts to provide a timeline of the development of attitudes towards death impurity.

cleaning the outside and inside of the cup, Jesus compares the Pharisees to “whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of impurity (πάσης ἀκαθαρσίας). So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt 23:27). As in the much more developed issues of food impurity, here too the opposition of inside vs. outside is emphasised, and here too true defilement is that which is on the inside; rituals concerning the outside only (whitewashing, which marks the impurity but also beautifies the tomb) are insufficient and irrelevant for this abiding internal defilement.⁴ As opposed to Mark 7, however, there is no focus here on the heart as opposed to the outside of the body, and thus no explicit moral/ritual divide. In fact, it would appear that Matthew’s Jesus is using the well-known and accepted defilement of the dead as a simile for the true defilement of the Pharisees. The version in Luke (11:44) is somewhat different, but with similar import: there, the Pharisees are compared to “unmarked tombstones, and people walk over them without realising it.” Here too there is an implicit acceptance of the requirement to mark graves, presumably for reasons of death defilement.

There are no sources from the second century which can give us a clear picture concerning Christian views towards death defilement, though there are a number of possible hints. One is a passage in Aristides’ *Apology* (4), which argues that the earth cannot be a god because “it is filled with the dead and becomes a repository for bodies: none of which things can that holy and venerable and blessed and incorruptible nature receive.” This text certainly does not prove that Christians purified themselves after contact with the dead, but it does attest to a thoroughly negative attitude towards corpses, and their incompatibility with the sacred. Another possible hint is a mention in the Ps.-Clementine *Recognitions* (1.71) of the

⁴ See McCane (2003), 70-3. For marking of tombs with lime, see *m. Ma’as. Š.* 5:1. Many have seen the Matthean rendering as problematic, since it does not seem to recognize the impurity-marking function of whitewashing, only the beautifying. The two functions, however, do not seem to me incompatible, if we see the impurity of tombs not as a totally negative aspect but as a separation from ordinary life, see below p. 133-134. For the meaning of whitewashing as marking or as beautifying, see Lau (2012), who brings evidence that the latter was also relevant in a contemporary Jewish context.

miraculous whitening of tombs of Christians every year, which some have seen as evidence that marking for death impurity continued in the writer's milieu.⁵ However, this may represent only the situation in the Jewish-Christian context of Ps.-Clementine literature; furthermore, the whitening is interpreted as demonstrating that the dead were remembered by God, with death impurity not mentioned. A custom of whitening graves could no doubt continue without death impurity beliefs. Another argument which has been advanced for the continuing importance of death impurity for Palestinian Christians is that Christian burials of the 2nd century are archaeologically indistinguishable from Jewish burials, indicating that "Christians interred their dead outside of the limits of human habitation... almost certainly for reasons of impurity".⁶ I find this argument inconclusive, as besides the cemetery's location there is nothing about the physical aspect of Jewish burials that shows that they were considered defiling. The continuing burial in the same place does not prove anything beyond adherence to old habits: why replace a perfectly good burial-area?

In short, there is no conclusive evidence as to what Christians of the second century thought or did about death defilement. Arguing from silence, we may surmise that Christians continued to do what their Jewish and Pagan neighbours did – i.e., distance the dead from what they considered to be sacred. There is no reason to think, however, that they continued to practice the details of Jewish *halakha* regarding the dead, as such observance would probably have appeared in our sources or been the object of polemics, as with other Jewish observances.

The earliest unequivocal source is from the end of the second century: Clement of Alexandria interprets death defilement symbolically, and denies its practical significance (but without polemical force):

Wherefore... those anointed to be high priests, and kings, and prophets, were reckoned more holy. Whence He commands them not to touch dead bodies or approach the dead; not that the body was polluted (μιαροῦ τοῦ σώματος), but that

⁵ McCane (2003), 114, who cites this text as 2nd century evidence, though the *Recognitions* is commonly agreed to have been edited in the 4th or 5th cent.; only texts appearing in both the *Rec.* and the *Hom.* go back to an earlier common text, and this pericope does not.

⁶ *Idem*, 112.

sin and disobedience were incarnate, embodied (σαρκικῆς τε οὔσης καὶ ἐνσωμάτου) and dead, and therefore abominable (βδελυκτῆς).⁷

Clement's interpretation of death as sin which should be abominated is to be the standard understanding among Christian writers. But as in the food laws, here too symbolic interpretation of impurity is only one of the answers to the incompatibility between the rejection of impurity and OT laws regarding it. This interpretation, furthermore, does not explain why impurity was rejected in the first place. Third century sources begin to answer this question.

2. *The Didascalia Apostolorum*

The earliest source with significant discussion of the question of death defilement is the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, in the context of a broad polemic against Jewish purity laws, including food prohibitions and impurity of menstruants. This source, which discusses the question directly and at some length, is frequently cited in modern scholarship as exemplifying the growing divide between Christian and Jewish attitudes towards death defilement and their practical significance, and therefore I will give it particular attention.

In chapter 26, *The Didascalia* claims that the requirement of purification after contact with the dead have been annulled by Jesus. Christians are not obligated to this law:

Indeed, in the second legislation, if one touch a dead man or a tomb, he must be bathed. You, however, according to the Gospel and according to the power of the holy spirit, shall be assembled even in the cemeteries (ܘܒܝܬ ܡܩܒܪܝܢ ܘܒܝܬ ܡܩܒܪܝܢ), and read the holy Scriptures, and without observance (ܘܒܝܬ ܡܩܒܪܝܢ) complete your services and your intercessions to God, and offer an acceptable Eucharist, the likeness of the body of the kingdom of Christ, in your congregations and in your cemeteries and on the departures of them that sleep among you (ܘܒܝܬ ܡܩܒܪܝܢ ܘܒܝܬ ܡܩܒܪܝܢ) – pure bread that is prepared in fire and sanctified through an invocation – and without doubting pray and offer for those who are asleep.⁸

⁷ *Strom.* 4.25.158; trans. ANF II.438.

⁸ Vööbus (1979), II.261; trans. IV.243-4. The Latin version (Funk (1905), I.376) does not contain

Although the eucharistic bread is pure and sanctified, it is still fitting that it be offered in the cemetery, together with prayers and readings from the scriptures. Thus the conception that death defilement is incompatible with the sacred is rejected. The phrase “according to the Gospel and according to the power of the holy spirit” should be read in light of the pneumatology developed earlier in the text: a believing, baptised woman is filled with the holy spirit even while menstruating, because otherwise she would be filled with an impure spirit, as a person cannot be void of any spirit whatsoever. Therefore, she should not abstain from contact with the “works of the holy spirit”, the eucharist, prayer or scriptures.⁹ The same holds in the cemetery: although it is infested with impure spirits, believers should not fear to hold services there, because they are filled with the Holy Spirit and cannot become impure. The *Didascalia* adds another reason for the rejection of impurity: the believing dead are not really dead, they are only asleep and waiting for the resurrection. This was also the case with Elisha, whose bones resurrected a dead man, proving that “even when he was asleep, his body was holy and filled with the holy spirit,” and therefore certainly did not defile.

In these two explanations, the *Didascalia* goes beyond postulating a rejection of the impurity laws by Jesus, and develops a theory of why the dead are not impure. Both of these explanations are relevant to believers only, not to all mankind: the Holy Spirit which is in them prevents them from becoming defiled when in the cemetery, and similarly prevents them from defiling after they die, since they are not really dead. It appears that for the author of the *Didascalia* death impurity still exists – perhaps in the death of non-Christians – but in the case of Christians, it is vanquished through the action of the Holy Spirit. The centrality of

significant differences.

⁹ Vööbus (1979), II.256; trans. IV.239. A parallel to this is found in a Tannaitic source attributed to R. Yehuda b. Bteira of Nisibis, which argues that Torah should be studied even by men with seminal emissions: “words of Torah do not become defiled, as is written, ‘my words are like fire, says the Lord,’ as fire does not become defiled, so words of Torah do not become defiled” (*b. Ber* 22a). In both sources, it is intimated that impurity only adheres to things of this world, and not to sacred things and words, which are beyond it. This idea is inimical to the truce worldview of defilement, in which it is precisely the sacred that should be distanced from impurity.

pneumatology for the rejection of death impurity mirrors the role of demonology in food impurity. As true defilement is mediated through demons – impure spirits – so defilement cannot adhere to a body when the holy spirit is present.

The *Didascalia*'s rejection of impurity would seem to be valid for all Christians, with hardly any mention of special treatment of martyrs' tombs: all that is said is that the offering of the Eucharist can be performed also in the cemetery, and should be offered there for the benefit of "those who sleep". These offerings are for all of the believers, and not specifically for the martyrs.¹⁰ A comparison with a later version of this text, included in the late 4th century *Apostolic Constitutions* demonstrates this point:

Didascalia Apostolorum 26

...be assembled even in the cemeteries, and read the holy Scriptures,

and without observance complete your services and your intercessions to God,

and offer an acceptable Eucharist...

...And he is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

...For this cause therefore do you approach without restraint to those who are at rest,

Apostolic Constitutions 6.30¹¹

...assemble in the cemeteries, reading the holy Scriptures,

and singing for the martyrs which are fallen asleep, and for all the saints from the beginning of the world, and for your brethren that are asleep in the Lord,

and offer the acceptable Eucharist...

... is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him.

Wherefore, of those that live with God, even their relics (τὰ λείψανα) are not without honour.

...Whence you also, O bishops, and the rest, who without such observances touch the

¹⁰ Elisha, brought as an example for a non-defiling holy man, is not set as an extraordinary person but rather as proof that the Holy Spirit continues to abide in the bodies of the "sleeping" believers.

¹¹ Trans. ANF VII.464.

and hold them not defiled.

departed, ought not to think yourselves defiled.

Nor abhor their relics (τὰ τούτων λείψανα),
but avoid such observances, for they are foolish.

The later redactor inserted mentions of martyrs and of relics as non-defiling, highly relevant to the debate on the cult of the saints at the end of the 4th century, into the earlier text, which had framed the rejection of impurity in a context of general contact with the dead, not with certain, specific dead. The *Didascalia* does envisage services in cemeteries as including Eucharist meals, but does not state that these are preferred sites for offering as they would later become.

The *Didascalia*'s somewhat ambiguous statements concerning the degree of contact with the dead reflect the early stages of a cult of the martyrs. The earliest attestation for the venerated status of a martyr's body is probably the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, now argued to date from the first half of the 3rd century.¹² After his death, the believers gather Polycarp's bones, "more valuable than expensive gems and more precious than gold, and put them in a suitable place. There, whenever we can gather together in joy and happiness, the Lord will allow us to commemorate the birthday of his martyrdom (18.2-3)."¹³ Thus at this date a martyr was commemorated by honouring his remains, their proper burial, and by the celebration of the date of the martyrdom at the tomb in an unspecified way; practices which were not very different from what was done for all honourable dead, though with greater intensity.¹⁴ In the

¹² Rordorf (1986); Moss (2010).

¹³ Trans. Ehrman I.393.

¹⁴ This can be compared with the situation in third-century Africa according to Saxer (1980): "la *cura mortuorum* ne diffère pas substantiellement dans le cas de morts ordinaires et dans celui des martyrs, envers ces derniers elle ne change que d'intensité... le culte des martyrs dans le cadre du sacrifice eucharistique est de la même nature que le culte des morts." Tomb-side Eucharist offering for the dead is found also in the *Life of Polycarp* 20, traditionally dated to the fourth century but now claimed to be a late third century text by Stewart-Sykes (2002).

early-third century *Acts of Thomas*, King Mizdaeus searches after a bone of Thomas for healing his son, though the dust of his tomb proves sufficiently efficacious after it is found that the body was stolen by his disciples.¹⁵ David Frankfurter has argued that in third-century Upper Egypt, saints' bodies were thought to convey healing powers similar to those of holy objects of traditional Egyptian religion.¹⁶ The practices in these sources are still far from amounting to a cult of the saints: the saints' bodies are seen as sources of power and healing and their tombs are commemorated, but they are not at the centre of a cult nor deemed to be the most suitable places for eucharist offering.

The *Didascalia's* claims that eucharist offerings should be made at tombs despite charges of impurity are seen by some as evidence that there was an active polemic on the subject, with some Christians strongly believing in death impurity, and also believing that impurity prevented the offering of eucharist among tombs.¹⁷ However, there are a number of reasons to think that the *Didascalia* does not in fact attest to such a polemic.

The arrangement of Chapter 26 of the *Didascalia* indicates that the Christian practices at the tomb were not so innovative, certainly less so than non-purification of menstruants. In the *Didascalia's* polemic against purity issues in Jewish law, rejection of concerns over menstruants' defilement takes prime place (over 6 pages in the Vööbus edition), with issues of death defilement, occupying less than a page, located in the middle of the discussion of menstruants. Significantly, the rejection of death defilement is not portrayed as opposed to actual Jewish practice but only to what was commanded in "the second legislation" (i.e., the Jewish laws), and its discussion is not framed as a dispute with a real protagonist. Menstruation issues, on the other hand, *are* framed as such a dispute, with the text appealing several times to the protagonist ("I say to you, O woman...), and with actual practice referred to several times. The *Didascalia's* integration of death defilement issues with menstruation issues is exemplified in the concluding sentence of the passage on death defilement:

¹⁵ *Acts of Thomas*, 170 (ed. Klijn (2003), 250).

¹⁶ Frankfurter (1994), 25-47.

¹⁷ Volp (2002), 250-2.

On this account then do you approach without restraint to those who rest (*ماتوا* (*للموت*) [i.e., the dead] and you shall not declare (them) impure (*مجانس*), so also you shall not separate those (women) who are in the habit.¹⁸

The text then returns to its polemic against menstruation defilement. Thus a central role of the argument against death defilement is to buttress the argument against menstruation defilement. I would argue that in the *Didascalia's* milieu, the rejection of death defilement was much less controversial than the rejection of menstruation defilement, and perhaps was not subject to real controversy at all.

Cultural context also makes this conclusion likely. Seen in a traditional funerary context, whether Jewish or pagan, the practices defended by the *Didascalia* are not so innovative. While Jewish prayers or torah-readings were certainly not held regularly in cemeteries, they were also not prohibited there, and burial services included prayers and verses from scripture. Among Jews, impurity did not prevent convening at tombs, especially of prophets or well-known rabbis, though without cult.¹⁹ Funerary and commemorative meals, which included offerings at the tomb, were common in all cultures of the region and were practiced also by Christians. They show much similarity with early eucharists at the tomb, especially as in this period many conceived of the eucharist as a special meal and not specifically as a sacrament.²⁰ Therefore, the *Didascalia's* claim that observance of religious rituals at tombs is not compatible with the “second legislation’s” requirement to be purified after contact with a tomb is false, and does

¹⁸ Vööbus (1979), II.262, trans. IV.244.

¹⁹ A number of Rabbinic sources witness to a custom of placing a Torah scroll on the bier as part of a rabbi’s funeral: Kadari (2010); Ta-Shma (2002). Other sources for Jewish assembly at tombs of saints, especially the tombs of the Maccabees, are collected by Horbury (1998b). See, however, the downplaying of evidence for such customs by Rutgers (1998), and the comments of Lane Fox (1987), 447-8. An analysis of the literary aspect of the question is found in Ziadé (2007), 66-106.

²⁰ MacMullen (2010); Rebillard (2009); Jensen (2008); Saxer (1980), 47-53; Delehayé (1933), 29-59. Most of the evidence cited by these authors is from the West, but there is also some evidence from the East which shows generally similar patterns. On the eucharist as a meal after the first century, see McGowan (1999a).

not accord with Jewish or pagan practice. Rather, belief in death defilement required that rituals at tombs be marked as marginal and secondary to the primary rituals performed in the social and geographical centre of the community, and that there be a clear separation, expressed through purification, between rituals at the tomb and rituals at the centre.²¹ While the ritual described in the *Didascalia* blurs the line between centre and margin, it does not erase it: the offerings at the tomb are “for those who are asleep,” not the central offering of the community.

If it is not a side to a polemic on practices of death defilement, why does the *Didascalia* say that eucharist offering in cemeteries are prohibited according to Jewish Law? I believe that the rejection of death defilement is one element of its attempt to create a united and integrated realm of Christian practice opposed to Jewish practice, and thereby – of Christian identity opposed to Jewish “second legislation” identity.²² Death defilement was chosen to play a role in this text because its editors thought that it is similar to other Jewish purity laws and could therefore be of use in their wholesale rejection, and not because of its practical significance in its community.

3. Origen

Compared to his copious remarks on food laws, Origen discusses death impurity only once, in his *Homilies on Leviticus*, in an attack on the practical Jewish understanding of death defilement laws:

Why should one, who, for example, touches a dead animal or the body of a dead man be held to be impure? What if it is the body of a prophet? What if it is the body of a patriarch or even the body of Abraham himself? What if he touches the bones of Elijah, which raise a dead person?... see how unsuitable the Jewish interpretation is.²³

²¹ Scheid (1984).

²² On the *Didascalia*'s creation of an alternative to Rabbinic Judaism, see Fonrobert (2001).

²³ *Hom. Lev. 3.3.1*, ed. Borret I.128; trans. Barkley, 55-6.

Rather, the biblical text should be read symbolically, as relating to sin, or a person who sins. Origen's rejection of impurity focuses on different issues from the *Didascalia*: he does not mention the resurrection, the Holy Spirit, or Jesus' annulment of the Law. The problem with impurity is its homogeneity, its equalising force: Origen cannot comprehend a situation in which all of the dead are equally defiled without regard to their actions while living. As he says in the *Contra Celsum*:

It is absurd (ἄτοπον) that some stones and buildings should be regarded as more pure or more impure (καθαρώτερα ἢ μιαρώτερα) than other stones and buildings because they have been built for the honour of God, or for the use of the most dishonourable and polluted bodies (ἀτιμοτάτων σωμάτων καὶ ἐναγῶν), if there is no difference between one body and another, the difference depending upon whether they are inhabited by rational or irrational beings, and by the better kind of rational beings or by the worst of men.²⁴

The status of a person's body – dead or alive – cannot be isolated from his spiritual status, since the body is a receptacle for the soul. Death impurity, however, implies that all human bodies are equally defiling. A broad, absolute distinction between dead and living persons does not permit a hierarchy of bodies spanning this divide. In Origen's eyes, such homogenization is so absurd that it immediately undermines the viability of ritual impurity. The imminent possibility of resurrection reflected in the power of Elijah's bones further demonstrates that the line separating dead from living is more ambiguous than it appears, and hence that religious hierarchies should span the divide between them. For Origen, bodies have a negative or positive value which can be expressed in purity or defilement; this source for this is not the body itself, but rather the soul it houses. This is the same principle found in food impurity: true impurity has an interior source, even as it influences exterior reality. Jewish interpretation of impurity is cast as disregarding the interior and arbitrarily defiling the exterior.

It is difficult to compare Origen's view with that of the *Didascalia*, as the former is writing biblical exegesis while the latter is a guide of practice. However, Origen's immediate turn to the

²⁴ *Cels.* 4.59, ed. Borret, II.416-7; trans. Chadwick, 232. On the value of the body for Origen in this context, see Volp (2009).

‘very special dead’, not mentioned at all by the *Didascalia*, indicates a radically different approach to the problem, which will dominate in the future.

4. *Methodius of Olympus*

Methodius (d. 311) is the only early Christian author who wrote a tract expressly dedicated to issues of biblical ritual purity, and we shall therefore discuss his work briefly even though he postdates Origen. The treatise discusses the biblical dietary and death impurity laws, arguing against Jewish interpretation and advancing an allegorical reading.²⁵ Methodius’ arguments on death impurity are quite different from Origen’s and are more similar to the *Didascalia*. First, he argues that if impurity indeed exists, and considering that red cow ashes are no longer available,²⁶ then touching the holy scriptures or celebrating Passover should be forbidden; the fact that the Jews still perform these rituals shows that they are hypocrites, not practicing what they preach. As Methodius understands Jewish death impurity, impurity should be incompatible with any degree of contact with holiness, including touching the holy scriptures and the non-sacrificial celebration of Passover. These practices are quite similar to the rituals explicitly permitted by the *Didascalia* in cemeteries - reading the scriptures and eucharist; it appears that there was a common understanding of what kind of rituals are not allowed if impurity is in force.

Furthermore, claims Methodius, the laws of death defilement are almost impossible to keep, as they require frequent purifications. The Law required ashes for purification in order that with the demise of the Temple and the loss of the ashes the Jews would be forced to resort to the true purification through Christ. What is more, the carrying of Joseph’s bones by Moses

²⁵ The text known as *de Cibis Judaicis* is extant only in a Slavonic translation, translated into German by Gottlieb N. Bonwetsch, “Über die Unterscheidung der Speisen und über die junge Kuh” in *Methodius* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1917) [=GCS 27].

²⁶ Methodius’ belief that red cow ash for purification no longer existed in his time (briefly alluded to by the *Didascalia* as well, Vööbus p. 236) runs counter to the opinion of several scholars who argue from Talmudic sources that it was used to the end of the fourth century, at least in Palestine. See above p. 64 n. 133.

in the desert demonstrates that these laws were not kept.²⁷ These problems in the practice of the law indicate that the biblical text should be read symbolically, as saying that the death of the soul – sin – defiles the person.²⁸

To these negative arguments Methodius adds positive arguments reflecting Christian views on the dead: the dead are actually purer than the living, because they cannot sin anymore; this is proved by the future resurrection, as God would not resurrect impure beings.²⁹ Methodius goes somewhat further than the *Didascalia* in the affirmation of death. It is not only a valid continuation of life, or a temporary ‘sleep’ before the resurrection, but an improved status purer than life.

²⁷ *de Cib.* 13 (ed. Bonwetsch, 446). A pre-third century Midrashic tradition also commented upon Joseph’s coffin being carried in the desert, but rather than explaining away the supposed impurity problem, it aggravated it (*Mekilta d’Rabbi Yišma‘el*, Masekta d’Vayehi Bešalah, Petihta, ed. Horovitz and Rabin, 79):

Joseph’s coffin [*aron*] went alongside the ark [*aron*] of He who lives forever. The nations would say: What is the nature of these two chests? They would reply: This one is the coffin of a corpse, and that one is the ark of He who lives forever. They would ask them: What is the importance of this dead person to go alongside the ark of He who lives forever? They replied: The one lying in this coffin fulfilled what is written on what lies in that ark (trans. in Kadari (2010)).

This midrash, which seems oblivious to the problem of defilement, may serve to exemplify the gap between what (some Rabbinic) Jews really thought about impurity (albeit in an aggadic context) and what Christians alleged that Jews thought about impurity. Another tradition (*Sifrei Behalotcha* 68) identifies the impure people of Num 9:6 as the bearers of Joseph’s coffin.

²⁸ *De Cib.* 10.

²⁹ According to 1 Cor 15:42, the corrupted or perishable body becomes incorrupt or imperishable when raised. This does not, however, determine the status of the body in the interim, while in the tomb. Methodius’ image for body in *De resurrectione* 1.41 is that of a temple within which grows the tree of sin; in death the tree is uprooted and the temple falls; when resurrected, the temple is reassembled according to the original plan (an expansion of Rom 6:7: “anyone who has died has been freed from sin”). Thus the body in the tomb is purer than the living body. See Bynum (1995), 68-71.

5. *Archaeological evidence and Christian praxis*

There is no material evidence that Christian burials were significantly different from non-Christian burials prior to the spread of the cult of the martyrs.³⁰ Christian burials were still situated outside of the towns, like their pagan or Jewish contemporaries, and there are no architectural signs for the eucharist being celebrated at the martyrs' tombs before the end of the fourth century.³¹ Christian funerals were doubtless different in their liturgy and perhaps in an optimistic attitude about the fate of the dead; but this does necessarily entail any practical attitude towards death defilement. Thus it is difficult to know if the theoretical discussions rejecting defilement, which we examined in the preceding pages, were accompanied by a decisive change in practice. Certainly the question did not preoccupy the minds of contemporary Christians to any great extent, judging by the small number of discussions. The paucity of evidence could be interpreted in two opposite ways – or that Christians did not purify themselves after contact with the dead, in accordance with the rejection of Jewish law and pagan religion, and therefore there was little comment upon it; or that they did purify themselves like their contemporaries, but that the issue was not considered important enough to justify polemic as long as the purification was not of a specifically Jewish or pagan character. Both answers could be true, in different places and situations. The work of Eric Rebillard, which has shown that funerals and cemeteries were under the tutelage of the family and not the church, may indicate that the latter option of continuing purification practice is likely as families may have been more traditional and less influenced by theoretical anti-Jewish arguments.³²

However, there is a third option: we – as the third-century Christians – may not have to choose between these two opposing interpretations. Even if Christians believed that death defiled, this belief may not have had much practical meaning, since they lacked temples

³⁰ “...there is no trace of a specifically Christian funerary architecture before the time of Constantine”: Ward-Perkins (1966), 23.

³¹ Snyder (2003), 172-3.

³² Rebillard (2009). I thank Prof. Rebillard for his suggestions concerning this chapter.

requiring purification before entry. A general feeling of repugnance of the dead, arising from basic human biological and psychological traits, probably exists in almost all societies; however, its articulation in ritual is not automatic, and it requires a well-structured spatial and social world.³³ Christians in the third century had sacred objects, but these were certainly not as articulated in space as the pagan temples.³⁴ As a result, beliefs of death impurity could rarely be expressed in the usual ritual way, i.e., the prohibition of entering sacred space while defiled. The situation is quite similar to that of the Jews, who also lacked a spatial sacred centre after the destruction of the temple, leading to a gradual decline of defilement rules. Christians perceived corpses in general (but not the martyrs) as repugnant, as we will see from a number of 4th century sources, but did not have a spatial ritual system to articulate this repugnance.³⁵ When such a spatial system did develop in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, it was already centred upon martyrs' tombs and therefore could hardly foster rituals of death impurity.

Conclusions

We shall conclude this chapter by comparing Christian attitudes towards death defilement to the attitudes towards food defilement. On both food and death, the basic attitude is that Jesus annulled the Jewish purity laws; references to ritual purity in the bible should be interpreted as relating to moral issues, thus dismantling the ritual aspect of defilement while maintaining the biblical text. Discussions of death defilement relate only to Jewish, and not to pagan beliefs in death defilement, demonstrating that the debate on death defilement was part of the broader polemic with Judaism on purification.

Nevertheless, there is a prominent difference between the issues. As opposed to food impurity, which was discussed intensively in earliest Christianity and continued to draw

³³ See Uro (2013).

³⁴ Sotinel (2005).

³⁵ This lack of ritual articulation may also have led to a weakening of the beliefs themselves: a person who rarely purifies himself after contact with the dead will probably start to downplay defilement, even if he has a general belief that it exists.

Chapter III: Death defilement

attention for centuries, no explicit mention of death impurity is made in the first two centuries, and later discussions are undeveloped. There are a number of reasons that food continued to be central in Christian discussions of purification while death defilement did not: First, as we mentioned earlier, purification from death would not have been important for Christians because they did not have temples to enter, and churches were not yet spatially well-defined. Second, food laws had a central role in the construction of Christian vs. Jewish identities following the interpretation of Jesus' sayings on purity as relating to food laws. Third, the existence of Christian dietary observances required a theoretical effort to elucidate the difference between Christian and Jewish approaches to food purity, which was not required in the case of death defilement. In the latter case, although unarticulated vestiges such as feelings of disgust remained, a coherent system expressed in ritual did not exist. While in food laws we find a complex negotiation of the idea of impurity through demons or the conscience, in the case of death impurity there is a complete rejection which hardly merits attention from the writers of the period.

As a consequence of the collapse of death defilement as a symbolic system, it could not be significantly used in inter-religious debate, because there was no common language with which to argue. As we saw from Origen, biblical death defilement could not be understood by Christian writers but as an abstract metaphor for sin or disgust, disconnected from any ritual reality. This led to such misconceptions as the idea that Jews try not bury their dead for fear of defilement. Food purity rules, in contrast, were interpreted in a variety of ways, reflecting some comprehension of how Jews understood food as a ritual symbol.

Chapter IV

Purity in practice: sexual contact, sexual sin and defilement in Early Christianity

Introduction

Regulating human sexuality, sometimes to the extent of a total denial of its legitimacy, was a central concern for Christians of the first three centuries. For early Christian writers, controlling the sexual urge was the best way to shape both the individual and society according to the new Christian message. Already in the second century we find many Christian voices advocating and implementing total sexual renunciation, an attitude which by the early fourth century was realised in the birth of monasticism in both Egypt and Syria. Other Christians of the same period upheld marriage, but strictly curtailed the function and the place of sexuality as part of family life, not to speak of sexual relations outside the bond of marriage or homosexual relations.

These attitudes were accompanied by a focus on sexuality as the main dimension for articulating and controlling the relationships between the various components of the person. This focus and its significance for the ordering of Christian society are best summarised by Peter Brown:

“First, a muted but tenacious tendency to treat sexuality as a privileged ideogram of all that was most irreducible in the human will. Second: a marked tendency... to herald sexual renunciation as a privileged emblem of human freedom. Third:... a widespread tendency to regard the body itself, by reason of its sexual components, as a highly charged locus of choice, of admiration in its virgin state and of avoidance in its sexually active state.”¹

In contemporary pagan and Jewish cultures, practices and theories of purity and defilement played an important role in the regulation of sexuality as an intermediate and ambiguous space

¹ Brown (1990), 481.

between the individual and society. It is therefore logical to turn to sexuality in order to understand Early Christian conceptions and practices of purity and defilement. Indeed, purity language is ubiquitous in the copious Early Christian discussions and polemics concerning sexuality. While relating to food and death the main interest of Christian writers was to characterise Christian practice as not pertaining to purity, or alternatively as purity practices relating only to the interior and not to the exterior of the body, in the sexual realm most writers did not hesitate to use purity language, and to implicate the whole body in this discourse. Nevertheless, scholarship on early Christian sexual discourse has rarely examined purity language systematically, identified to what extent such language reflects systemic understanding of sexual issues as purity issues, and assessed how this perspective may facilitate understanding of early Christian views of sexuality.²

In the following chapter, we shall therefore relate to the following issues. First, to what extent does early Christian use of purity language correspond to an ideational system in which sexuality is regulated through purity concepts, rather than being used on an ad-hoc basis? Second, how did ideas of sexual purity develop historically and what is their relationship to earlier and contemporary Jewish and pagan understandings of sexuality? What is the relationship between various currents of thought in Christianity of the period relating to these questions? Third, what is the role of sexual purity in articulating social, anthropological, theological and cosmological worldviews? Here we may ask how sexual purity concepts relate to the constructs of defilement vs. sin in light of the dimensions of interior/exterior, automatic/intentional and the role of supernatural forces in the creation of defilement and purification (see introduction, p. 11). A further question is the relation of sexual purity discourse to other purity domains discussed in the thesis.

After a section on sexual purity in the Pauline Epistles, the chapter will be divided into six sections on the second and third centuries. In the first, I will discuss texts which perceive

² An exception is the scholarship on Paul's writings, where many have acknowledged the key role of purity for understanding his ideas on sexuality, see references below nn. 6, 11, 12, 19, as well as Newton (1985), 102-9; Gordon (1997); Klawans (2000), 150-6; Vahrenhorst (2008); Ciampa and Rosner (2006)

sexual purity as pertaining to the domain of marriage and families, and therefore as creating a pure Christian society based on the married couple. The second section discusses sexual purity as a theme in Christian apologetic literature. The third section will include texts in which sexual purity is discussed mostly on the anthropological level, as an essential component in determining the correct relations between the different parts of the person. The fourth section will turn to texts which emphasise the protological dimension of sexuality, i.e., how it came into being and the significance this has for its status in the writers' world. The fifth section will discuss texts coming from Jewish-Christian milieu, which present a distinctive view on sexual purity and defilement. The sixth section will be devoted to discussions of sexual purity in Origen's works, in which all of these perspectives come into play.

1. Sexual purity and defilement in Paul's Epistles

Paul discussed sexual issues at length. His views on questions of illicit sex (πορνεία), marriage and celibacy were famously ambiguous, allowing widely differing interpretations by early Christians and by modern scholars. This ambiguity extends also to the role of purity and defilement in determining sexual issues. As this dimension of Paul's thought is extensively discussed in the scholarship, we will only outline the main points.

The basic Pauline stance, reiterated several times, is a total and stark condemnation of sexual sins, especially πορνεία. This condemnation appears most simply in "vice lists" of various sins, including (though not restricted to) sexual sins. From some of these lists, it is clear that impurity (ἀκαθαρσία; ἄγνεία is rarely used by Paul) designates a form of sexual sin; thus in Galatians (5:19): "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery...", and in 2 Corinthians (12:21): "I may have to mourn over many of those who previously sinned and have not repented of ἀκαθαρσία, πορνεία, and licentiousness..."³ The same sequence appears in epistles of disputed Pauline authorship, Colossians (3:5) and Ephesians (4:19, 5:3-5).

An exposition of the functioning of πορνεία's impurity is found in 1 Thess 4:3-6:

(3) For this is the will of God, your sanctification (ἀγιασμός): that you abstain from

³ ἀκαθαρσία is clearly sexual also in Rom 1:24.

Chapter IV: Sexuality and defilement

πορνείας (4) that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself (or: how to control your own body) in holiness (ἁγιασμῶ) and honour, (5) not with lustful passion like the heathen who do not know God... (7) for God has not called us to ἀκαθαρσία, but in holiness (ἁγιασμῶ).

Impurity of sexual sin is opposed to holiness (ἁγιασμός); such impurity characterises the out-group, idolatrous non-believers, while holiness should be practiced by the in-group, the followers of Jesus. Holiness is expressed in the person's acquisition or control (κτᾶσθαι) of his "vessel" (σκεῦος), the ambiguity of which may be intentional, evoking an image of strict control of the borders of the body and/or the family unit paralleling the control over the borders of the group.⁴ This conglomeration of ideas indicates that "holiness" here relates to a pure body, which is not defiled by illicit and uncontrolled sexual relations.⁵

The connection made in this passage between illicit sexual activity and the crossing of the group borders, akin to idolatry and expressing a lack of loyalty to God, is not a Pauline innovation and features widely in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX and in Second Temple texts (though earlier texts spoke of Israel as the in-group, while Paul was speaking to a new, gentile community).⁶ Nevertheless, in 1 Corinthians, Paul's most extensive discussion of sexuality, the focus on the body sets him apart from earlier writers.

In 1 Cor 5:11-13, relating to a case of incest in the Corinthian church, Paul demands of his readers "not to associate with πόρνοι... not even to eat with such a one," saying that the community must "purge (ἐξῆρατε) the evil person from among you," thereby affirming the need to maintain a community pure of sexual sin.⁷ This idea is provided with a theoretical basis

⁴ For an interpretation of this passage in purity terms, see Thomas (2010).

⁵ The same opposition of ἁγιασμός and ἀκαθαρσία appears in Rom 6:19, where sexuality is not explicitly mentioned; sexual sins and ἁγιασμός are contrasted in 1 Cor 6:19, where ἀκαθαρσία is not mentioned, but "washing" (ἀπελούσασθε) – probably referring to baptism – is.

⁶ Hayes (2002), 19-103; Gaca (2003), 119-89; Knust (2006), 59-64; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 53-73; Thomas (2010).

⁷ For an interpretation of this and subsequent passages as relating to maintaining firm social

in 1 Cor 6:15-19:

(15) Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a πόρνης? Never! (16) Do you not know that whoever is united to a πόρνης becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” (17) But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. (18) Shun πορνείαν. Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the πορνεύων sins against his own body. (19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?

Paul does not use terms of defilement in this passage. However, he identifies the believer’s body as a locus of holiness - a member of the body of Christ as well as a temple for the Holy Spirit⁸; illicit sexual acts are totally incompatible with this, as they create a physical alliance with the πόρνης, affecting the sinner’s body. Paul’s description of the merging of bodies created through sexual contact (citing Gen 2:24) emphasises the desecration of the holy body through physical contact with the πόρνης.⁹ The body is not a neutral agent, which must be pure to come into contact with a sacred place; rather, it itself is sacred, and therefore must be protected from defilement. This focus on the body as the site of sin and as bearing its consequences was conducive to the later developments of sexual sin as a defilement of the individual body, although due to the lack of defilement terms in this passage it is difficult to ascribe this idea already to Paul himself.

The discussion of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, which had a huge influence on subsequent Christian practice and thought, includes a number of possible pointers to Paul’s understanding

boundaries and preventing invasion of sexual sin into the pure community, see Martin (1995), 167-79. Martin demonstrates this concern of invasion throughout 1 Corinthians, and sees it as representing a conception of the healthy body as having strong borders, as opposed to a conception of health as a good balance between the body’s components. While Martin’s analysis is highly instructive, I hesitate to conflate disease and impurity to this extent: impurity appears to me to be an independent domain in Paul’s thought.

⁸ For the body as temple of God’s spirit, see also 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19, 2 Cor 6:16.

⁹ Fisk (1996), 540-58.

of the link between sexual practice and defilement. Here, however, the issue is not sexual sin but sexual relations within marriage.

As a response to the Corinthian position, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman,” Paul argues that marriage is permitted, and sexual relations are an obligation of marital partners; nevertheless, temporary separation from sexual relations is allowed “to devote yourself to prayer (σχολάσητε τῇ προσευχῇ)” (1 Cor 7:5). Some scholars have seen here a background of purity concerns, according to which sex is incommensurable with religious activities.¹⁰ The text itself, however, does not call for abstinence, use purity language, or indeed explain why prayer requires abstinence; it is probable that Paul means only that prayer requires leisure and an unoccupied mind.¹¹ Later in the chapter Paul states that virgins should not marry, but that neither should those already married be separated: here again he refrains from purity logic, which would probably require a more clear-cut position.

The single appearance of a defilement term in this chapter is when Paul denies its relevance. In the case of marriage with a non-believer, says Paul, the couple need not separate, “For the unbelieving husband is made holy (ἡγιάσται) through his believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise your children would be impure (ἀκάθαρτά), but as it is, they are holy (ἅγια)” (1 Cor 7:14). Defilement in this case results not from sexual sin, but from idolatry or disbelief of the partner; the connection between husband and wife transfers holiness from one to the other, overcoming the defilement which would have otherwise passed to the children. While the mechanism of sanctification or potential defilement is not specified, the reasoning of 1 Cor 6 discussed above implies that it is the result of the joining of bodies.¹²

Paul’s views on the dangers of sexual sin are linked to his anthropology. The basic division

¹⁰ Poirier and Frankovic (1996); Vahrenhorst (2008), 173-5; Loader (2012), 454-5.

¹¹ See Thiselton (2000), 508-9; Deming (2004), 120-3; Garland (2003), 261-2; Beattie (2005), 23. For late ancient exegesis of this verse, see Clark (1999), 277-82.

¹² For recent discussions of this passage from a purity perspective, see Gillihan (2002); Hayes (2002), 94-6; Hodge (2010); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 92-4; Cohen (2011). And compare 2 Cor 6:14-7:1.

of the person is between flesh and spirit.¹³ “Flesh” for Paul is frequently (though not always) a negative term denoting aspects of the person which are inclined or lead to sin. Although not only sexual sins are linked with the flesh, these must have held a prime place in this regard (see their placement in Gal. 5:19-21). “Flesh” and “spirit” are sometimes reified by Paul as cosmological forces residing not only inside but also outside the body.¹⁴ Paul does not use impurity language to describe the opposition between flesh and spirit.¹⁵ However, as Dale Martin suggests, his belief in a constant struggle between forces of evil and good and the identification of the forces as evil with a certain part of the person, would lead him to see sexual sin not only as dangerous but also as polluting, to the body of the believer and to the body of the community.¹⁶ Moreover, the essentially dualist opposition between flesh and spirit together with the ambiguity of the meaning of “flesh” would lend itself to readers of Paul who sought to implement a harsher position towards sexuality.

Though Paul does not clearly define the impurity of sexual sin, it does go beyond an ad-hoc usage, in which impurity simply means evil. Sexual impurity is opposed to holiness, rather than to purity; holiness becomes a broad term, including meanings traditionally associated with purity. This creates a simple dualist system, as the pure is now synonymous with the sacred and the common with the defiled. When speaking of sexual sin, there is no “middle ground” in which people can be pure but common, and neither are they allowed to be common and impure.¹⁷ A person has a stark and simple choice – either to be impure, sinful, and far from God, or to be holy, pure, and close to God. In this reduction of the system to only two options, some of the functions of purity and defilement are lost: the possibility for a dynamic of continual purification in response to occasional sin is barely recognised, and purity as an

¹³ The opposition is clearly put forward in Rom 8:1-13, Gal 5:16-25, 6:8. See Jewett (1971), 49-166; Boyarin (1994), 57-85; Martin (1995), 168-174.

¹⁴ Rom 7:5.

¹⁵ Though see Rom 6:19, Gal 6:8.

¹⁶ Martin (1995), 212-7.

¹⁷ See for this point Vahrehorst (2008), 129, 166-7; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 79-81.

internal social hierarchy is not possible either.

Despite the relative paucity of purity terms in Paul's writing on sexual sin, many scholars have concluded that sexual sin is seen by Paul through a purity prism based on a juxtaposition of the anthropological model presented in 1 Cor 6-7, the few appearances of purity terms and the Jewish contexts and parallels to Paul's images. They argue that sexual sin is perceived as defiling the holiness of the community and the individual, and that the terms of impurity used are not just rhetorical flourishes to drive home his condemnation of such practices.¹⁸ Furthermore, attempts have been made to categorize Paul's sexual impurity using the "ritual" and "moral" categories. Marcel Simon already suggested that Paul's understanding of *πορνεία* crossed the lines between ritual and moral purity.¹⁹ However, Simon did not clarify what he means by "ritual" and "moral," nor how Paul's view differs from the views of earlier Jewish writers. Jonathan Klawans states that Paul's understanding of sexual sin is completely in line with biblical and Second Temple conceptions of "moral impurity," and is not ritual at all; this is proved by the lack of any purification ritual (he does not consider baptism as such a ritual, since it is one-time only).²⁰ However, Christiane Hayes has pointed out that Paul's impurity is innovative, and is difficult to characterise through the categories of moral and ritual: it is caused by intentional sin and not some unintended contagion, but nevertheless functions through the physical, individual body, is transmitted from flesh to flesh, and is purified through a once-in-a-lifetime bodily ritual, baptism. She therefore coins the term "carnal impurity" to describe Paul's sexual sin impurity, which is not clearly "moral" or "ritual" and which focuses upon the body of the believer.²¹

¹⁸ For references, see above n. 6

¹⁹ Simon (1967).

²⁰ Klawans (2000), 153-4.

²¹ Hayes (2002), 96 and 254 n. 16, 17. Thomas (2010) suggests that this new type of impurity was influenced by the impurity model found in some contemporary Greek Sacred Laws, which specified requirements of purification following sexual sins such as adultery. The suggestion is attractive, but Paul's language of abomination and horror of such sins is much closer to Second Temple Period texts

Paul's writings on sexual purity and his ambiguous statements concerning marriage had a decisive influence on second-century discussions of marriage and sexual asceticism. Throughout the second century, we find two main trends in Christian practice and thought regarding sexuality. Representatives of both trends used purity language and concepts to speak about sexuality and the body, but in quite different ways.

Writers of the first trend integrated Stoic and Jewish sexual ethics into the Christian churches, upholding marriage as an essential social institution but severely regulating and limiting the place of sexuality in marriage. They emphasised social values of authority, hierarchy and control, together with personal values of self-control and honesty. These values and their implementation were in turn cast as differentiating between pure Christians and defiled pagans, as the latter were portrayed as addicted to promiscuity and disregard of the marriage bond. Inside this current, however, we can find some variety concerning the valuation of sexual activity in marriage.

The second trend rejected sexuality and marriage altogether, championing celibacy and virginity as an alternative to family life, ideas which were opposed to the dominant morality of the Greco-Roman world as well as to that found in most contemporary Jewish texts. Sexuality was seen as the embodiment of all that was evil on the personal, social and cosmic level, and abstinence from it as the best method to overcome such evil. In this case, it is virginity or the rejection of sexuality in general that is seen as "Christian" and opposed to pagan or even Jewish society and morals.²² There is, however, significant variety among writers of this trend in the degree of implementation of these ideals of virginity and/or celibacy.

than to the dry prescriptions of the *sacrae leges*.

²² I owe this general picture to Pagels (1983), 146-75. Gaca (2003) speaks of three main positions in early Christian communities – encratite, proto-orthodox, and more libertine positions (much less common than the first two). Gasparro (2006), 127-146, followed by Hunter (2007), uses a typology of "moderate" vs. "radical" encratic trends in the second and third century.

2. *Pure marriage, defiled πορνεία*

Sexual purity as familial hierarchy: early second century “household codes”

Household codes, which emphasised the importance of authority, hierarchy and harmony in the household, are a common feature in the Pseudo-Pauline and early second century Christian literature.²³ Scholarship has pointed to the affinity of these codes to Stoic, Peripatetic or Neo-Pythagorean codes.²⁴ Many of the Christian household codes include references to sexual issues, and they frequently utilise purity language, but generally and ambiguously.

Ephesians 5 opens on a cultic note, with an exhortation to imitate Christ who was a fragrant offering; speaking of πορνεία and ἀκαθαρσία is not proper among the saints (ἅγιοι). Correct hierarchical and loving relations between partners in marriage are paralleled to Christ’s love to, purification (καθαρσίας) and sanctification (αὐτὴν ἁγιάσῃ) of the church (5:26-7).²⁵ The implication is that an ideal wife would be pure, holy and without blemish, and that these attributes are linked to her submission to her husband. The parallel of church and wife indicates that wives’ fidelity to their husbands is essential for securing the community’s borders, and that the pure wives of the believers are opposed to the defiled women of the outside world. In other words, sexual impurity includes not only πορνεία but also rebellion against the husband’s authority.²⁶

1 Timothy and the Epistle to Titus attest to a conflict over the Pauline heritage between the author’s position, affirming marriage but hedging it with prescriptions, and a position prohibiting marriage, attacked in these epistles but never clearly identified with any specific

²³ Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:21-6:9; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Tim 2:8-3:12; 5:1-22; 1 Pet 2:18-3:7; Polycarp, *Phil.* 4-6; Ignatius, *Pol.* 4-6.

²⁴ See Verner (1983); Balch (1988).

²⁵ The parallel is far from simple, as the husband’s love for his wife does not clearly include purification and sanctification, upon which such emphasis is placed here; compare Ez 16:1-14.

²⁶ MacDonald (1988), 115-20.

group.²⁷ Correct understanding of purity is at the centre of these debates. The Epistle to Titus attacks its alleged opponents, especially among “the circumcision party,” saying “To the pure all things are pure (πάντα καθαρὰ τοῖς καθαροῖς) but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure (1:15);” this appears to be a counter-attack against the opponents’ claims that they are purer because of their adherence to purity rules, characterised as “Jewish myths.” The epistle then provides its alternative version of correct conduct: control over the emotions and strict maintenance of traditional social hierarchies, including marriage. 1 Tim 4:1-5 likewise attacks its opponents, characterised as excessively focused on impurity of material things, for forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from foods (see above p. 82). The principle which should govern both sex and eating, according to 1 Timothy, is of essential goodness of the material world as God’s creation, and even a potential for holiness through prayer. The parallel of marriage and food implies that as in the new covenant all foods are permitted and none is impure, so also marriage cannot be essentially defiled or defiling.

1 Timothy and Titus claim that the ascetic regimen of their opponents (real or imagined) entails a lack of self-control and leads to social strife and disobedience. Their alternative model, focused upon social control and hierarchy, claims for itself true fulfilment of the ideal of σωφροσύνη (moderation or self-control) and ἐγκράτεια (self-control or self-discipline).²⁸ Σωφροσύνη is one of the cardinal virtues among Hellenistic and early Roman philosophers and moralists, for whom it embodies an ideal of moderation, self-restraint and decorum in the conduct of the Greek or Roman higher classes; restrained sexuality is but one dimension of σωφροσύνη, though an important one, especially for women.²⁹ Thus Titus requires an elder to

²⁷ Pagels (1983); Collins (2011), 155-175, identifies this position as that of Marcion; MacDonald (1983) as that of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. However, Dibelius and Conzelmann (1972), 1-5 as well as Hunter (2007) caution that there is no way to identify the opponents beyond their general ascetic attributes.

²⁸ See Knust (2006), 94-7; Streete (1999), 299-316, describes this as a conflict over “true” asceticism, “integrative” as opposed to “combative.” The connection between σωφροσύνη and ἐγκράτεια is a commonplace, as in Plato, *Resp.* 430e; *4 Macc.* 1.31.

²⁹ North (1966); for the Pauline and deutero-Pauline use of the term see p.312-9, and Towner (2006), 206-9.

Chapter IV: Sexuality and defilement

be σώφρονα and ἐγκρατῆ (1:7-9); Young women should be σώφρονας and ἀγνάς, busy at home and subject to their husbands (2:4-5); young men are also σωφρονεῖν (2:6), while slaves should be subject to their masters (2:9). All should reject worldly passions, and live in self-control and uprightness (σωφρόνως καὶ δικαίως) (2:12). For 1 Timothy, women must be modest, σωφροσύνης (2:9) and submissive to their husbands. Overseers and deacons, among other virtues, should have a “pure conscience (καθαρᾶ συνειδήσει)” (3:9). Σωφροσύνη/ἐγκράτεια is associated here with terms such as καθαρότης, ἀγνεία and ἀγίοις, and thus to the Pauline construct of the pure Christian opposed to the impure idolater (an opposition referred to explicitly in Titus 3:3). This allows the author to support a morality upholding marriage and hierarchy, but at the same time to utilise the rhetorical power of purity discourse and not to abandon it to his more radical opponents.³⁰ As in Ephesians and as opposed to 1 Corinthians, the purity of the individual body is not emphasised, nor is the body seen as a possible agent for transmission of defilement. In these texts, sexual purity has little cultic or ritual overtones and does not imply a model of contagion; terms of purity can be readily translated as “chaste.”

1 Peter, Ignatius’s *Epistle to Polycarp*, Polycarp’s *Epistle to the Philippians* and 1 *Clement*, written within a few decades around the end of the first century, all include household codes that use purity language to refer to sexual issues.³¹ The *Epistle of Polycarp to Philipppans* features exhortations addressed to various groups in the church (ch. 4-5). Wives are enjoined to purity/chastity (ἀγνεία and ἐγκράτεια); widows, who are compared to altars and reminded that

³⁰ For a similar though later battle waged between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis and between Babylonian rabbis and Syriac Christians over the meaning of sexual purity as denoting pure marriage or celibacy, see Boyarin (1993), 138–42.

³¹ 1 Peter (3:1-4) exhorts his readers to an exemplary life which will bring glory to God’s name, to abstinence from sinful desires, and to total submission to authority. This theme is especially developed regarding women, whose “purity (ἀγνήν) and reverence” will win over their husbands to the faith, and who are told adorn their inner self rather than their outward appearance. The meaning of purity here is not clarified, but it appears to be connected to a submission to hierarchy and uniformity of inner and outer aspects.

sacrifices must be inspected to ensure they are free of blemishes (an allusion to purity),³² must be σωφρονοῦσας. The advice to young men and women concerning sexual matters is replete with purity language:

...so let the young men be blameless (ἄμεμπτοι) in all things, concerned above all else for their purity (ἀγνείας)... For it is good to be cut off from the passions of the world, since every passion wages war against the spirit... Therefore we must abstain from all these things, and be subject to the presbyters and deacons... And the virgins must walk in a blameless (ἀμώμω) and pure (ἀγνῆ) conscience.³³

As in the Pauline and the Pastoral Epistles, purity language is not directed against sexual activity as such, but against “lust” and illicit sexual activity. “Purity” or “purity of conscience” are catch-all terms for refraining from illicit sexual activity, in the case of unmarried women (“virgins”) presumably encompassing all sexual activity. The call to sexual purity is accompanied by a call to obedience, reiterated in the Epistle several times. Again, issues of authority, hierarchy and sexuality are brought together through the use of purity language, with the purity of the members of the community representing the purity of the community in face of the pagan world.³⁴

The household code appearing in Ignatius’ *Epistle to Polycarp*, though starting with a reference to Ephesians 5, uses ἀγνεία in a different way than we have seen until now:

... If anyone is able to honour the flesh of the Lord by maintaining a state of ἀγνεία, let him do so without boasting. If he boasts, he has been destroyed, and if it becomes

³² For this image, of which this is the earliest instance, see Osiek (1983), who finds its origin in the provision of gifts to widows from the community, compared to sacrifices.

³³ Polycarp, *Phil.* 5.3; trans. Ehrman, II.341.

³⁴ For the *Epistle of Polycarp* as strengthening group borders through purity language, especially as concerns avarice, see Maier (1993), 229-47. Contra Gibson (2003), 157 n. 30, there is no reason to see these mentions of ἀγνεία as evidence that “Polycarp endorsed observance of Jewish purity laws”; they fit within the early second century household code use of the term, which is clearly based on Pauline usage.

Chapter IV: Sexuality and defilement

known to anyone beyond the bishop, he is ruined (ἔφθαρται). But it is right for men and women who marry to make their union with the consent of the bishop, that their marriage may be for the Lord and not for passion.³⁵

Despite the support of marriage, it is not married women who are enjoined to purity or compared to the pure church; rather, ἀγνεία appears as a code-word for abstinence from sexual activity and presumably from marriage, conveying a special status that bishops must have perceived as a threat. Purity within the sexual realm is ascribed by Ignatius to the continent, and less so to harmonious and hierarchical couples; this use of ἀγνεία is reminiscent of the opponents of 1 Timothy and Titus. The integration of the continent into a household code (slaves and widows are mentioned earlier) may indicate that such people were already seen as an integral, if unusual, part of the Christian community.³⁶

In *1 Clement* we find two different uses of ἀγνεία. Clement writes to the Corinthians, “You directed women to accomplish all things with a blameless (ἀμώμω), respectful, and pure (ἀγνῆ) conscience, dutifully loving their husbands.”³⁷ Elsewhere, again in a context of communal hierarchy, women are ordered to “display a character of ἀγνεία, worthy of love; let them exhibit the innocent will of their meekness.”³⁸ Considering the meaning of ἀγνεία in the other household codes, restrained sexuality is probably implied here as well. However, *1 Clement* also uses ἀγνεία along the lines of Ignatius to mean total continence: “Let the one who is ἀγνός in the flesh not act arrogantly, knowing that another has provided him with his self-restraint

³⁵ Ignatius, *Pol.* 5.2; trans. Ehrman, II.315.

³⁶ Cf. Rev 14:4, where redemption is promised to the virgins (male!) who have not been defiled (ἐμολύνθησαν) with women; see Olson (1997) for a background of this verse in Enochic literature. It is possible that ἀγνεία is deliberately opposed to “ἔφθαρται” in the case of boasting, as the verb φθείρω may be used for the seduction of a virgin. Thus the opposite of purity is not quite pollution but rather corruption and destruction. The pair ἀγνεία-φθορά is significant in later second-century writings.

³⁷ *1 Clem.* 1.3; trans. Ehrman, 37.

³⁸ *1 Clem.* 21.7; trans. Ehrman, 77.

(ἐγκράτεια).”³⁹ Thus in the same text, sexual ἀγνεία has two different connotations.

Ignatius and 1 Clement support both kinds of ἀγνεία, as long as they do not undermine the authority figures of the church, and do not show a clear preference between them; presumably, proponents of both were significant members in their communities. A lexical analysis demonstrates the overlap as well as the divergence between the two currents: while ἀγνός and ἐγκρατής are terms that designate both the totally continent and the honourably married, only together with the former is “flesh” mentioned, while σωφροσύνη is used more together with the latter.

To summarise this section, these authors use sexual purity language in two different ways: the majority usage is to designate monogamous, honourable and hierarchical marriage, while the minority usage is to designate those who have no sexual relations at all. Though sexual relations proper are not described as defiling, this is implied in the latter usage. The body is rarely alluded to; the main metaphor in these texts for maintaining the borders of the community is the pure family rather than the pure individual. Thus for the dominant view reflected in these texts, purity language does not appear to reflect a clear purity system which includes some specific defilement, not for sexual sin and certainly not for sexuality itself. For the putative opponents of 1 Timothy and Titus as well as “the pure in flesh” of 1 Clement and Ignatius purity may, however, have had a more precise meaning. However, here too purity is identified more as a state of not participating in sexual activity, rather than the absence of a specific defilement.

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria wrote extensively on marriage and sexuality in the second book of his *Paedagogus* and in the third of his *Stromateis*.⁴⁰ Clement’s basic position, following the Late Stoa and Philo, is procreationist: sex is permitted and even required within marriage for the

³⁹ 1 Clem. 38.2; trans. Ehrman, 103.

⁴⁰ For Clement on sexuality, see Oulton and Chadwick (1954), 15-38; Broudéhoux (1970); Brown (1988), 122-39; Hunter (1992), 95-111; Maier (1995), 719-45; Behr (2000), 152-84; Gaca (2003), 247-72; Hägg (2006); Hunter (2007), 105-113.

production of children. Sexual relations for any other objective, even in marriage, are illegitimate and dangerous, lead to sin and prevent Christians from approaching God. Clement's writings focussed on two major issues: first, refuting more radical, "encratite" positions, which rejected marriage altogether, as well as "libertarian" positions which allowed sex outside marriage or for pleasure; second, setting rules for the correct comportment and behaviour of Christians in their married life, in which sex receives a limited and well-defined role. For Clement, the curtailment and eventual elimination of desire (ἐπιθυμία) in sexual relations is a decisive part of the refinement and care of the self which leads the Christian Gnostic to ἀπάθεια and salvation.⁴¹

Although this process of self-refinement could be seen as an extended act of purification, purity terms are infrequent in Clement's writings on sexuality. His focus is on terms borrowed from Stoic and Aristotelian moral philosophy (also central, as we saw, in the household codes), ἐγκράτεια and σωφροσύνη, which express the self-control and moderation required in all walks of life. The objective of ἐγκράτεια is not to arrest a specific impurity arising from an external sexual source, but rather to arrest desires and passions coming from within the person. Even when Clement does use purity as a close synonym of ἐγκράτεια, it is directed against desires and not against the physical sexual act. For example, "We must purify (καθαρευτέον) ourselves from indulgence and lust and take care for our soul... For when it is pure (καθαρός) and set free from all evil the mind is somehow capable of receiving the power of God and the divine image is set up in it."⁴² Clement's reluctance to tie impurity to physical aspects of sexuality is understandable in light of his anti-"encratite" position: his objective is to show that there is nothing inherently impure about sexuality or the body, the only problem is the passions and desires, their excessive expressions and dominance over the faculties of reason. Moreover, sex is nowhere said to be an obstacle for religious activity; tellingly, Clement says that sex should take place at night, and not "after they have come from church, or even from the market, when they should be praying or reading or performing the good works that are best done by day."⁴³ Church

⁴¹ See especially Hunter (1992) and Maier (1995).

⁴² *Strom.* 3.42. cf. 3.59, 3.106

⁴³ *Paed.* 2.96.

or prayer are not differentiated from the market and other daily actions. Sexuality is certainly circumscribed and regulated, but it is not an impurity system that regulates it.⁴⁴

It is rather to his opponents that Clement attributes conceptions of sexuality as impurity, accusing them that they take all birth and material bodies to be impure.⁴⁵ Clement does describe grave sexual sins as impure; thus the opinions and acts of the certain “libertines” are polluted,⁴⁶ and scripture “regards as defilement an association which is bound up with a strange body and not with that which is bestowed in marriage.”⁴⁷ However, these usages of impurity are not systematical enough to be more than rhetoric.

As part of his procreationist agenda, Clement interprets several sexual purity laws of the Hebrew Bible, or attributed to it: the prohibition of sex during women’s “purification” (καθάρσει; i.e., menstruation) and during pregnancy,⁴⁸ washing after sex,⁴⁹ abstinence from sex before divine revelation and (less directly) eating the hare and the hyena which later interpreters believed were sexually impure.⁵⁰ Sex during menstruation is prohibited, Clement explains, because it does not produce children. However, it is not only that the seed is wasted: “it is wrong to contaminate (μολύνειν) fertile seed, destined to become a human being, with excrement (ἀποκαθάρματι) of the body, or to allow it be diverted from the furrow of the womb and swept away in a fetid (ρύπαρῶ) flow of matter and excrement (ἀποκαθάρματι).⁵¹” The principle of ritual impurity is retained with much of its force – it is not allegorised – but its

⁴⁴ See, however, *Strom.* 6.100, where it is said that the wife of the Gnostic, after they had already had children, is for him “as a sister,” presumably meaning that the ideal couple should be continent after fulfilling their procreationist obligations.

⁴⁵ *Strom.* 3.25, 3.86, 3.100.

⁴⁶ *Strom.* 3.27-30, 3.109.

⁴⁷ *Strom.* 3.89; trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 82. cf. 2.145.

⁴⁸ *Strom.* 2.135; 3.72-73; *Paed.* 2.92.

⁴⁹ *Strom.* 3.82-3.

⁵⁰ *Paed.* 2.83, 2.88.

⁵¹ *Paed.* 2.92; trans. Wood 170.

circumstances change radically.⁵² The impurity of menstrual blood is not an obstacle to religious activities; rather, the seed is seen as quasi-holy, due to the commandment on procreation and its creative potential.⁵³ For Clement, menstruation is impure, not because of its connection to the sexual act, but rather because of its negation of the true objective of sex.⁵⁴ The prohibition on sex during pregnancy (deduced by Clement though not appearing in the bible) is also explained as a procreationist strategy; however, no impurity is mentioned. The call for three days of abstinence from sex before the Sinai revelation is interpreted as an “attempt to bring the Jews to continence (ἐγκράτειαν) by degrees.”⁵⁵ Clement thus does not turn to the obvious interpretation, that this sexual abstinence is a preparation for approaching the holy sphere, since this would support the perception of sex as impure; rather, it is part of a general educational message about the value of reducing sexual activity. Concerning washing after sex, Clement says that it is no longer required, “since by one baptism he has washed them clean for every such occasion,” but also because “human birth is not a defilement,” as “it is not frequent intercourse of the parents which produces birth, but the reception of the seed in the womb.”⁵⁶ In other words, what is defiled is not sex and birth, but rather frequent intercourse and desire –

⁵² Buell (1999), 46, comments that while much of the procreationist imagery and ideology of Clement comes from Philo and Plutarch, they do not mention the *impurity* of menstruation at all in this context.

⁵³ For the seed as bearing the *pneuma* of the future person and being accompanied by an angel into the womb, see *Ecl.* 50 and *Strom.* 6.134-6. For Clement’s biological and anthropological models of gestation, see Buell (1999), 21-31. Marriage itself is also called “a sacred image which must be kept pure from those things which defile it” (*Strom.* 2.145), and “even the seed of the sanctified is holy” (*Strom.* 3.46).

⁵⁴ Compare Porphyry, *Abst.* 4.20. Broudéhoux (1970), 134, writes “Nul doute que l’union conjugale pratiquée dans ce conditions ne constitue, aux yeux de Clément, un péché.” I see no basis in the text for such a statement.

⁵⁵ *Strom.* 3.73; trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 73.

⁵⁶ *Strom.* 3.82-3; trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 79. And see *Paed.* 3.46: women should bathe for “cleanliness (καθαριότητα) and health,” but men for health only.

and the latter, at least, has been “washed clean” by baptism. Lastly, the prohibition on eating the hare and the hyena (the latter is not biblical) is ascribed to their sexual habits, an interpretation already found in earlier authors; the prohibition is not in fact on eating, but is rather a “counsel to restrain violent sexual impulses, and intercourse in too frequent succession.”⁵⁷ Here certain sexual practices are associated with impurity, as these animals are said to be impure; but it is clear that “impure” means to Clement nothing more than “strongly condemned.”

Sentences of Sextus

The *Sentences of Sextus*, a second-century Christian compilation of gnomic sayings based on a previous pagan collection, includes a number of sentences on sexuality, in which purity language is used rather freely and unsystematically.⁵⁸ Like Clement, Sextus permits marriage, but believes that it should be a “struggle for self-control (ἐγκράτειαν)” (239). The importance of control over the body is reiterated several times (230-40, 274a). He who lacks control of his “stomach and lower organs” is unfaithful and defiles (μαίνει) God (428-9). Despite general support of marriage, its renunciation is permitted in order to “live as a companion of God” (230a). The body, “the garment of the soul given by God” must be kept spotless (ἄσπιλον) (449). Although purity language is thus used for describing sexual control, it is used much more frequently and forcefully to describe continence in eating (108-11, cited above p. 101); but the two are essentially two sides of the same coin: “as you control your stomach, so you will control your sexual desires” (240).

The Valentinians

The sexual ethics of the Valentinians are nowhere clearly described; our information derives from heresiologists’ descriptions and from obscure references in the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Excerpta ex Theodotos*. Beyond the ambiguity of the texts, which frequently do not make clear if they are speaking of marriage/sexual intercourse in practice or metaphorically, it is also

⁵⁷ *Paed.* 2.83, 88; See above p. 114.

⁵⁸ Chadwick (1959), 99-101, 172-3.

unclear if all the texts are speaking of the same group. These ambiguities can explain the wide variety of opinions in scholarship concerning the sexual ethics of the Valentinians.⁵⁹ Here, we shall focus the discussion on one saying from the *Gospel of Philip* (81-82):

No [one can] know when [the husband] and the wife have intercourse with one another, except the two of them. Indeed, marriage in the world is a mystery for those who have taken a wife. If there is a hidden quality to the marriage of defilement, how much more is the undefiled marriage a true mystery! It is not fleshly, but pure. It belongs not to desire, but to the will. It belongs not to the darkness or the night, but to the day and the light...

Two marriages are compared and juxtaposed: “marriage in the world”, “fleshly,” “of defilement,” which “belongs to desire” on the one hand, and “undefiled”, “pure” marriage, which “belongs to the will.” But what exactly are these marriages? The most obvious understanding of marriage of defilement is simply marriage with sexual intercourse, and that intercourse is designated as defiled due to its connection with the flesh and desire. But what would pure marriage be? Three options come to mind - it could be actual marriage, but without any intercourse; actual marriage with intercourse of some “pure” kind; or a metaphorical marriage which does not include any practical act whatsoever.

The third, metaphorical option is made less likely by the witness of Clement of Alexandria, who opens the *Stromateis*’ third book with the declaration that “the Valentinians, who hold that union of man and woman is derived from the divine emanation in heaven above, approve of marriage.” There is little reason to doubt his witness on this issue. To this we can add Irenaeus, who cites a Valentinian maxim which, like the *Gospel of Philip*, appears to differentiate between two kinds of marriage: “whoever is in the world and does not love some woman to the extent of being married to her, is not of the truth and will not attain to the truth. On the other hand, whoever is of the world and is married to a woman, will not attain the truth since he is married to the woman out of concupiscence.”⁶⁰ The maxim is interpreted by Irenaeus to mean that intercourse is obligatory and has salvific value for the elect, but is prohibited for those who

⁵⁹ A good overview of the scholarship is found in DeConick (2003), 307–42.

⁶⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6.4; trans. Unger, I.38.

are not. Both witnesses suggest that the Valentinians known to them supported some sort of marriage in practice, and furthermore believed that it has positive salvational or gnostic value. However, Irenaeus also says that some Valentinians claimed to live with women “in modesty as sisters,” a description of continent marriage.

The positive view of some kind of marriage is supported also by frequent reference in the *Gospel of Philip* to a ritual, place or spiritual stage known as “the bridal chamber,” apparently the culmination of the Valentinian spiritual development, in which believers, through their own union, imitate the union of heavenly powers and draw spiritual power from them. The “pure marriage” of saying 81-2 probably parallels the “bridal chamber.” Unfortunately, although described by sexual imagery, it is nowhere clear if the bridal chamber was indeed a practical ritual, and if it was – what it entailed. Some scholars believe that the term is totally metaphorical and referred to a high spiritual level or stage, while others think that it was connected to actual marriage of some kind, perhaps without any sexual relations⁶¹ or in which sexual relations were supposedly without lust, similar to Clement of Alexandria’s ideal marriage.⁶²

Pure Christians, defiled pagans: second century apologists

Most second-century apologists made some reference to the sexual purity of some Christians as proof for the superiority of Christianity over pagan culture and religion.⁶³

The *Apology of Aristides* claims that Christian wives are “pure as virgins (ⲛⲉⲗⲁⲃⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓ), and their daughters are modest; and their men keep themselves from every unlawful union and from all impurity (ⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓ).”⁶⁴ This is compared to the pagans, who practice homosexuality

⁶¹ Williams (1986), 196-227.

⁶² DeConick (2003).

⁶³ On the Apologists’ views of marriage and sexuality, see Hunter (2007), 97-99.

⁶⁴ Aristides, *Apology* 15.5; ed. Pouderon, 238-9; trans. Harris and Harris, 49. This section is extant in an early Greek fragment, *Pap. Lond. Litt.* 223 (2486), ed. Pouderon, 299; however the first sentence there is difficult to understand: “αἱ γυναῖκες ἀντῶν ἀγναὶ καὶ παρθένοι εἰσιν,” the simple translation of which

and incest but nevertheless accuse the Christians of these same “monstrous abominations (ἀσθηταῖς κακοῖς).”⁶⁵ In the second part of the sentence impurity functions as a synonym for illicit sexual relations. The first part regarding wives, however, is unclear: how can a married woman be pure as a virgin? Aristides probably did not intend to say that married Christian women are totally continent;⁶⁶ rather, the author is exaggerating his praise for the Christians. The *Apology*’s purity discourse reflects a fundamental ambiguity. On the one hand, the axis of purity and defilement is mapped onto the axis of degree of the *legality* of sexual activity, and therefore marriage is not considered to be defiled, since it is allowed; the men are pure because they abstain from “illegal” sexuality. At the same time, purity and defilement are also mapped onto the axis of the *degree* of sexual activity, without considering its legality; therefore, virginity is considered “pure.”

In his *First Apology* (15), Justin Martyr speaks of the unique temperance (σωφροσύνης) of the Christian teaching, which repudiates second marriages and conceives even unrealised desire for a married woman to be sinful. In this passage Justin does not use purity vocabulary,⁶⁷ and prefers to remain with σωφροσύνης, a virtue well-known in Roman discussions of sexuality. He does boast, however, that “there are many men and women of sixty and seventy who from childhood were disciples of Christ and remain uncorrupted (ἄφθοροι).” This term, common in medical texts, is rarely found in Christian or moral literature of Justin’s time, a choice which can be attributed to the intended audience of the text.⁶⁸ Thus though Justin is a witness to

would be “their wives are pure and virgins,” as in Milne (1923), 74, though Pouderon translates “leurs épouses et leurs vierges sont pures.” The abbreviated Greek version embedded in *Barlaam and Ioasaph* has only (254): “They refrain themselves from all unlawful intercourse and all impurity (ἀκαθαρσίας).”

⁶⁵ Ibid 17.

⁶⁶ Compare 1 Cor 7:29: “those who have wives be as though they had none.”

⁶⁷ For the relative paucity of purity terms in the apologists, see Wartelle (1989).

⁶⁸ Exceptions are LXX Esth 2:2; Titus 2:7; Aristides, *Apology* 15.1 (regarding the virgin Mary). The cognate ἀδιάφθορος is however very common in first and second century authors, including Philo.

practices of lifelong celibacy in the Christian communities of his time, he abstains from utilising purity language or similes.

The *Embassy of Athenagoras*, from the 170's, points out that Christians abstain even from lustful looks and therefore no doubt practice temperance (σωφρονεῖν) (32-3). They marry only once, for procreative purposes; many grow old without having ever married, as this brings them in closer communion with God. More ambiguously, Athenagoras says (32) that regarding those "whom we call brothers and sisters,"

we exercise the greatest care that their bodies should remain undefiled (ἀνύβριστα) and uncorrupted (ἀδιάφθορα); for the Word again says to us, If any one kiss a second time because it has given him pleasure...; therefore the kiss, or rather the salutation, should be given with the greatest care, since, if there be mixed with it the least defilement (παραθολωθείη) of thought, it excludes us from eternal life.

Again the Pauline and pseudo-Pauline ἀγνεία or καθαρός are not used, and terms more in vogue in non-Christian moral literature are preferred. Both the body and the mind may be defiled by a wrongly-intentioned kiss: in the realm of sexual defilement, intention does not remain in the mental sphere, but also creates bodily defilement.⁶⁹

Summary

The authors discussed up to now agree that marriage is allowed, and for some it is even required for procreation and for a functional, ordered society. Sexual purity is expressed in marriage in which correct dispositions and practices are maintained. Men must be faithful to their wives and wives must submit to their husbands, maintaining the strict boundaries of the conjugal couple and the hierarchy of the family unit. These boundaries extend beyond divorce and even beyond death, so that widows must remain unmarried. Desire is dangerous and sinful primarily because it leads to extra-marital sex, and secondarily because it leads to ill-timed, overly-frequent, or unneeded sex in marriage. The purity of person, household and community

⁶⁹ For kisses as defiling and defining community borders, see Penn (2005); this passage is discussed on p. 109. The emphasis on Christians' sexually innocent mind is found in Justin as well as in another late second-century apologist, Theophilus, *Autol.* 3.13, who calls this ἀγνεία and σεμνότητος.

are strongly linked to one another through the marital institution. The anthropological significance of sexual purity is developed by Clement, for whom sexual desire is not the result of external forces but of internal “passions,” which must be bridled.

However, in some of these texts we found also praise of celibacy, partial or total, and of long-term virginity. These conceptions do not negate marriage but rather function alongside it; both marriage-πορνεία and virginity-sex are set along the purity-impurity axis. Thus in *1 Clement*, Ignatius and the *Sentences of Sextus* both virginity and honourable marriage are mapped as pure (though sex as of itself is not said to be impure in any of these early texts), without clear distinction. Aristides’ *Apology* is an interesting example, as the two types of sexual behavior are juxtaposed despite their inherent incompatibility. A similar move can be seen in Justin, who speaks mostly against the defilement of πορνεία but also mentions the continence of many Christians. The merging of two disparate sexual systems through the use of the purity-impurity axis serves to enhance the value of virginity, as it is opposed not to a practice of ambivalent moral value (married sex) but rather to a practice on which there is a wide consensus of abhorrence (πορνεία). Typically, when all three axes (sexual legality, sexual activity and purity) are mentioned, the impurity pole is connected to the “sexual legality” axis (illegal sexual acts are defiled) while the purity pole is connected to the “sexual activity” axis (lack of sexual activity is pure).

In parallel to this tendency to merge sexual sin and sexual activity through purity discourse, we find in other texts the opposite tendency – to differentiate clearly and consciously between sexual sin and sexual activity along the purity axis. Already the Pastoral Epistles show that sexual purity, together with alimentary purity, was an issue of contention between Christian groups. The authors of the texts supporting marriage were clearly aware that their opponents’ call for total continence was framed through purity discourse, and attempted to define a different way of practicing sexual purity. Purity discourse itself was therefore not transparent but rather an arena for contention between these second-century groups.

3. *Pure hearts, pure bodies*

The Shepherd of Hermas

The *Shepherd* opens with a depiction of a sexual sin of the heart: Hermas sees his former owner naked, and has a passing thought of desire for her. He is then berated for this “wickedness and impurity (ἀκάθαρτα)” in visions, and told that such a sin is especially grave when it occurs in the heart of “Hermas the self-controlled (ἐγκρατής), who abstains from every evil desire and is full of all simplicity and great innocence.”⁷⁰ The main concern of the book is personal conversion, μετάνοια; the key to a virtuous life is found in maintaining a simple (ἀπλότης), single heart, as opposed to a double heart or soul (δίψυχος), in which hypocrisy and cunning reign.⁷¹ Accordingly, as opposed to the household codes, we gain a less social and more psychological angle on sexual purity in early second century Rome.

Ἐγκράτεια and the ceasing of ἐπιθυμία are one of the main objectives of the transformation Hermas is called to undergo.⁷² It is difficult to tell whether these terms refer to the sexual sphere or to a general moral stance concerning also desire for food, luxury and the like. Some passages, however, discuss sexual issues explicitly, with terms such as πορνεία, flesh and ἀγνεία, such as *Mandates* 4.1: “I command you to guard your ἀγνεία and not to let any thought to rise up in your heart about someone else’s wife, or about πορνεία, or any other similarly wicked things.”⁷³ After a discussion of divorce following adultery, he adds: “not only is it adultery to defile (μιάνη) one’s flesh, but whoever does things similar to what the gentiles (ἔθνεσιν) do commits adultery. (*Man.* 4.1.9)” The chapter concludes with a call to “preserve ἀγνείαν and reverence,” and a promise that if Hermas does so, the speaking angel would “dwell in your house.” Here ἀγνεία means to maintain a heart pure of sexual desire, as part of married life; adultery functions as a catch-all term for various illicit sexual activities, characterised as defilements of the flesh and associated with non-Christians. There appears to be little

⁷⁰ *Hermas*, *Vis.* 1.2.4; trans. Ehrman, 181.

⁷¹ For sexual issues in *Hermas*, see Brown (1988), 69-72; Trevett (2006), 125-33.

⁷² Lipsett (2011), 19-23.

⁷³ *Hermas*, *Man.* 4.1.1-3; trans. adapted from Ehrman, 245.

innovation in the ideas and terminology of *Mandate* 4.1, which are closely related to Pauline sexual purity tropes. However, the centrality of the heart as the location for the various passions and its characterization as pure or defiled, as well as the angel's promise of indwelling, are significant in light of the anthropology developed by *Hermas*.

In *Mandates* 5.1, the person, described as a "vessel" (σκεῦος) or a "place" (τόπος), is said to be inhabited by a holy and an evil spirit; the holy spirit will only remain inside the person if this "place" is pure (καθαρόν), that is, if it is not "obscured", "oppressed" or "choked" by the evil spirit. In this case, the holy spirit is contaminated and departs.⁷⁴ While this theory of sin certainly utilises purity concepts when conceiving the person as a potential locus of holiness, it is not sexual sin that initially contaminates the person. Rather, anger, ill-temper and double-mindedness are the direct causes for attracting the evil spirit; only after it resides in the person and the holy spirit is defiled and crowded out, is the person led to "great sin."⁷⁵ Sexual sin is therefore the result, and not the cause, of contamination by the evil spirits.

A more closely Pauline view, speaking of the flesh rather than evil spirits, may be expressed in *Similitudes* 5.7: "Guard this flesh of yours to keep it pure and undefiled (καθάρων καὶ ἀμίαντων), that the spirit dwelling in it may bear a good testimony to it, and your flesh may be made upright... If you defile your flesh, you will also defile the Holy Spirit as well; and if you defile your flesh, you will not live."⁷⁶ Though there is no indication what exactly such defilement or purity would mean in practice, the focus on flesh makes it is probable that

⁷⁴ See also *Man.* 10.2-3; for the sources, reception, and wider meanings of these ideas in the Shepherd of *Hermas*, see Fredrikson (2001); Bucur (2006) and above p. 76 n.17; compare also Valentinus' description of the heart in frg. 2 and commentary by Markschies (1992), 54-83.

⁷⁵ *Man.* 5.2.4. In its context, I believe "great sin" can be assumed to include primarily sexual sin; see *Man.* 4.1.1-2. For anger as the main sin caused by evil spirits leading to greater sins, see *T. Dan*; *Didascalia* 3; *m. Abot* 4.1; *t. B. Qam.* 9.31 with Rosen-Zvi (2011), 29-31.

⁷⁶ Trans. Ehrman, 337. A similar expression is found in *2 Clem.* 8.6-9.3: "Keep the flesh pure (ἀγνήν), and the seal of baptism undefiled (ἄσπιλον)... we must guard the flesh as a temple of God." See below p. 229.

πορνεία is the referrant. *Mandates* 4 shows that honourable marriage would not have been considered defiled; although a widow should not re-marry.⁷⁷

For *Hermas*, both the heart and the flesh function as loci for the indwelling of the holy spirit, and both must therefore be kept pure for it to remain.⁷⁸ Flesh is defiled only by sexually sinful actions, such as the prohibited marriages discussed in *Mandates* 4; such actions are clearly of social import for the community. The heart, however, as a more delicate organ, is defiled even by sinful emotions – sadness, anger and the like – which draw in the evil spirits, leading in turn to sexual sins of the heart and of the flesh. Such malmanagement of the heart leading to defilement would be dangerous especially for *Hermas* as a person in contact with the holy spirit, which indwelling allows for both effective prayer and true prophecy.⁷⁹

Tatian and the “Encratites”

Of Tatian’s views on sexuality we know only from the reports and rare citations of his attackers, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus; the *Oratio ad Graecos*, his only extant text, does not relate to these issues.⁸⁰ One problem with relying on such sources, beyond their obvious bias, is that they tend to lump their opponents together. Thus Irenaeus speaks together of the Encratites, Tatian, Marcion and Saturninus; while Clement of Alexandria directs his criticism against Marcion, Tatian and the Valentinians, frequently without differentiation.

The earliest source for Tatian’s view on sexuality is Irenaeus. He says that

⁷⁷ *Man.* 4.4. See the sisterly relations with women in *Vis.* 2.2 and *Sim.* 9.11; on hints to the value of celibacy in *Hermas*, see Deming (2004), 40-2; Trevett (2006), 125-33.

⁷⁸ *Sim.* 5.7.4.

⁷⁹ See Bucur (2006) and Reiling (1973), 97-121.

⁸⁰ For analyses of Tatian’s views on sexuality see Brown (1988), 83-96; Gasparro (1984), 23-78; Pagels (1983), 151-7; Gaca (2003), 221-245. I agree with Hunt (2003), 145-75 that there is much less evidence for Tatian’s negative views on sexuality than would appear from much of the scholarship, as only one fragment of Tatian on the matter exists. See further the persuasive deconstruction of Tatian’s ascetic image by Koltun-Fromm (2008).

Chapter IV: Sexuality and defilement

The so called Encratites (Ἐγκρατεῖς), who sprang from Saturninus and Marcion, preached celibacy (ἀγαμίαν) and so made void God's pristine creation, and indirectly reprove him who made male and female for generating the human race. They also introduced abstinence from what is called by them ensouled food (ἐμψύχων), being thus ungrateful to the God who made all things.... A certain Tatian was the first to introduce this blasphemy... Like Marcion and Saturninus, he declared that marriage was corruption and fornication (φθορὰν καὶ πορνείαν).⁸¹

Thus we know that Tatian, Marcion and probably also the "Encratites" equated marriage with πορνεία, collapsing the two axes we discussed earlier to one axis of virginity vs. πορνεία/corruption; but no further development of purity imagery is evident.⁸²

Clement of Alexandria, relating in general to those who reject marriage, says that they regard sexual relations to be impure (μιαρὰν).⁸³ Clement is also the source for Tatian's interpretation of Paul's position on sexual relations in marriage:

While agreement to be continent makes prayer possible, intercourse of corruption (φθορᾶς) destroys it. By the very disparaging way in which he allows it, he forbids it. For although he allowed them to come together again because of Satan and the temptation to incontinence, he indicated that the man who takes advantage of this permission will be serving two masters, God if there is "agreement," but, if there is no such agreement, incontinence, fornication and the devil.⁸⁴

In this fragment, Tatian radically totalises Paul's stance. There is no option for a temporary separation of holy and impure; prayer cannot be set aside as a special holy time, to leave the rest of a person's married life for secular pursuits. A Christian is intrinsically holy, a shrine in which God dwells,⁸⁵ from which the corruption of sexual relations should be totally divorced.

⁸¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.28.1; trans. Unger, I.93.

⁸² The same picture is presented by Hippolytus, *Haer.* 8.13, 10.19.

⁸³ *Strom.* 3.46.

⁸⁴ *Strom.* 3.81; trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 77.

⁸⁵ *Orat.* 13, 15-16; see Brown (1988), 91-2; Stroumsa and Fredricksen (1998), 205-6. It is true, as Koltun-

The innovation here is not only in the intensity of impurity ascribed to sexuality, but in the relevance of marital sexuality to the understanding of the person as a permanent temple which strives for contact with God's spirit, as opposed to a neutral agent who engages in holy activity from time to time.⁸⁶

The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles

The early Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles – the *Acts of Paul, of Andrew, of John, of Peter and of Thomas* – are commonly seen as the quintessential expression of extreme sexual asceticism.⁸⁷ Thus Davies, for example, says that the Apocryphal Acts are “products of communities of sexually continent Christians.”⁸⁸

Fromm (2008), 4-6 points out, that this anthropological conception is not linked in the *Oratio* with any ascetic practice, for which we must look to Clement's citation. The argument for such a link is based on the similar connection made in other texts (2 Clem. [above n. 76], *Acts of Thomas*, Aphrahat, *Shepherd of Hermas*) between indwelling of the holy spirit, the person as a temple, baptism and ascetic practice.

⁸⁶ Quispel (2008), 193, argues that for Tatian baptism removes the pollution of prior sexual relations, but that since baptism is unique, after baptism sexual relations are prohibited and non-purifiable. However the passage from which he adduces this (Clement, *Strom.* 3.82.6) nowhere betrays that he is disputing Tatian on the issue of baptism.

⁸⁷ See above p. 18. The Apocryphal Acts are not totally opposed to marriage, and various traditions and texts from which these Acts were composed may have had different opinions on the matter. Thus *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the first half of the *Acts of Thomas*, for example, are totally negative towards married sex, while other narratives and sermons focus on *porneia* and do not call for total *enkrateia*. For the *Acts of Paul* the question is summarized by Dunn (1996), 69-88, who concludes that “the *Acts of Paul* is not encratite” (88); his discussion, however, is marred by his apparent motivation to save the Apocryphal Acts for the “Great Church.” For additional bibliography, see Barrier (2009), 84 n.14. For the *Acts of Thomas*, see Tissot (1981), 109-19; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 101-2.

⁸⁸ Davies (1980), 13. Davies approaches sexuality in the Apocryphal Acts from the social perspective; the issue is analysed a folkloric perspective by MacDonald (1983), and more rigorously and from a

Chapter IV: Sexuality and defilement

The most revealing passage in the Acts relating to sexual continence is the well-known first speech of Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*; this speech is entitled “the word of God concerning abstinence (ἐγκρατείας) and the resurrection” and consists of thirteen macarisms:

1. Blessed are the pure (καθαροὶ) in heart, for they shall see God. 2. Blessed are they who have kept the flesh pure (ἀγνήν), for they shall become a temple of God. 3. Blessed are they that abstain (ἐγκρατεῖς), for to them will God speak. 4. Blessed are they who have renounced this world, for they shall be well pleasing unto God. 5. Blessed are they who have wives as if they had them not, for they shall be heirs to God...

13. Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well pleasing to God, and shall not lose the reward of their purity (ἀγνεύας), for the word of the Father shall be for them a work of salvation in the day of his Son, and they shall have rest forever and ever.⁸⁹

These thirteen macarisms create a clear unit.⁹⁰ The placing of issues of sexual purity at the beginning and at the end, as well as their numerical dominance, indicates their importance for the author. The first macarism, identical to that of Matt. 5:8, receives here a different meaning when it is appended to the others and serves as the basis for a series of sayings on sexual purity. Purity of heart is implicitly tied to purity of flesh (a link reminiscent of that made in the *Shepherd of Hermas* or even the *Epistle by Polycarp*, which speaks of the virgins’ “pure conscience”). These purities are linked to ἐγκράτεια and renunciation of the world, explained through the further link to “possessing wives as though they have them not,” a near quote of 1 Cor 7:29, thus anchoring the series in a Pauline source. The import of sexual purity is explained in the second clause of each sentence: it will enable the believer to have a close relationship with God, through seeing, speaking or inheriting him, or becoming a temple for him.⁹¹ The unit

feminist angle by Burrus (1987); from the perspective of its relation to humankind’s original purity and future resurrection by Van Eijk (1972) and Gasparro (1984), 87-100.

⁸⁹ *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 5; trans. adapted from Schneemelcher, 239-40.

⁹⁰ For a close reading, see Barrier (2009), 78-85.

⁹¹ The connection of renunciation and intimate knowledge of God is continued in the next group of

ends with an unusual blessing for the pure bodies of the virgins, who will be recompensed in the resurrection. The whole passage speaks of the close connection between sexual purity of the body and closeness to God, a closeness achieved through knowledge of God and some sort of revelation or prophecy in the present and the resurrection of the body in the (near) future.⁹²

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* almost universally uses positive purity language and does not speak of sexuality as defilement. One exception is the accusation of two of Paul's enemies that Paul defrauds women by saying: "You have no resurrection otherwise, except if you remain pure (ἀγνοὶ), and do not defile (μολύνετε) the flesh but keep it pure (ἀγνήν)" (12). Paul himself phrases this more generally in a speech before the proconsul (17): he was sent to "sever men from corruption (φθορᾶς) and uncleanness (ἀκαθαρσίας) and all pleasure and death, that they may sin no more."

A similar ethos to that of the macarisms is found in the concluding speech of the *Acts of John*.⁹³ John thanks God for preventing him from marrying in order to remain consecrated for a godly life, saying, "you kept me also till this present hour pure for yourself (καθαρὸν ἑαυτῷ) and untouched by union with a woman... [you] disclosed to me the repugnance of even looking closely at a woman..."⁹⁴ The defilement of even the slightest contact with a woman would make impossible John's godly status and mission, and especially his spiritual sight; only because God rid him of the "foul madness (ῥυπαρᾶς μανίας) that is in the flesh... the bitter death... the secret disease of my soul... him that raised tumult in me," could John have an intimate, total, "spotless

macarisms, 6-11.

⁹² These same elements - purity, abstinence, fear of sin, possession of the holy spirit and resurrection - are listed by Pinhas b. Yair, a second century Rabbi, in a short passage of spiritual guidance (*m. Sotah* 9:15); purity, knowledge of God and resurrection appear in 1QH 19:10-14. See Lawrence (2006), 127-9. DeConick (1996), 143 n. 52, believes that purification as a prerequisite for mystical ascent is the original meaning of Matt 5:8, deriving from Jewish mystical ideas expressed in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo and the *Hekhalot* literature.

⁹³ For sexual asceticism in the *Acts of John*, see Lalleman (1998a), 231-44.

⁹⁴ Acts of John 113.

(ἄσπιλόν),” “undoubting” relationship with God, in which he knew him “with purity (καθαράν).”⁹⁵

István Czachesz points to the focus in this text on the purification of the person in order to achieve mystical sight of God, and suggests that it was appended to other traditions about John in early third-century Alexandria;⁹⁶ this is unlikely, however, as we have seen that similar themes were already found in the *Acts of Paul of Thecla*. Special sexual behaviour is here demanded only of John as an apostle with a unique relationship with God, and not of all the baptised.⁹⁷ Whatever its influences, this passage clearly perceives any defiled sexual contact to be totally and permanently incompatible with a pure mystical experience of God; purification of this sexual defilement is achieved only through divine assistance.

In the *Acts of Peter*, partly extant in Coptic, “defilement,” “corruption” and “shame” describe illicit sexual relations, and not married sex.⁹⁸ At the same time, some women are persuaded by Peter’s “preaching of purity” to “remain in purity from intercourse” with their husbands, in order to “worship God in sobriety and purity.”⁹⁹ Here we see again the tendency to map virginity on the purity pole, while acts of πορνεία (and not sexual relations in general) are mapped on the defilement pole.

⁹⁵ Ibid. Stronger language is found in the fragment of the Acts of John in the *Pseudo-Titus Epistle* (ed. Schneemelcher, 1989), 65. Here John speaks of the virgin body as “clean” and “untouched”, while those who consent to conjugal union are “caught in corruption”, “soiled by Satan”: “[sexual union] is a device of the serpent... a gift of death, a work of destruction, a teaching of division... an unclean fruit of parturition, a shedding of blood, a passion in the mind, a falling from reason, a token of punishment, an instruction of pain, an operation of fire...” The authenticity of this fragment is disputed, however; see Gasparro (1984), 100-1; Lalleman (1998a), 236-8. To me it appears quite singular in its language and symbolism, and therefore suspect.

⁹⁶ Czachesz (2006).

⁹⁷ Lalleman (1998a), 235.

⁹⁸ Berlin Coptic Papyrus 8502 (trans. Schneemelcher (1989), 285).

⁹⁹ *Acts of Peter 33-4 (Martyrdom of Peter, 4-5; trans. Schneemelcher (1989), 311).*

The *Acts of Andrew* and the *Acts of Thomas*, usually dated later than the other Acts to the beginning of the third century, are more extreme in that they describe sexual relations directly as defiled, not only for the apostle but also for his audience. The narrative of the *Acts of Andrew*, interspersed with many speeches, is built around the apostle's persuasion of Maximilla to leave her husband. Andrew's speeches to Maximilla feature a number of descriptions of sexuality: "I know... that you are moved to resist the whole allurements of sexual intercourse, because you wish to be separated from a polluted and foul way of life (μυσαροῦ βίου καὶ ῥυπαροῦ)...";¹⁰⁰ "Keep yourself henceforth chaste and pure, holy, undefiled, sincere, free from adultery...". Andrew prays for Maximilla (16), "...may the soul in her remain pure (καθαρά), sanctified by your name; but especially protect her, Lord, from this foul defilement (τοῦ μιαιοῦ τούτου μιάσματος),"¹⁰¹ while Maximilla herself prays to be delivered from the "unclean union (μιαρᾶς μίξεως) with Aegeates" and to remain "pure and chaste (καθαράν καὶ σώφρονα), serving God alone" (14).¹⁰² The speeches take a strongly dualistic stance, opposing the heavenly world, the immaterial soul or intellect and the "true nature of man," on the one hand, with earthly existence, the materiality of the body, the devil and sexuality, on the other.

The *Acts of Thomas*, probably the latest among the Apocryphal Acts and originally written in Syriac, not in Greek, shares many of the characteristics of these texts. Restriction of sexuality, expressed as purity, is central to the text: as stated by A. F. J. Klijn, for the *Acts of Thomas* "the most important quality of man is his or her purity."¹⁰³ Here too sexual contact, even

¹⁰⁰ *Codex Vaticanus* 808.5; trans. Schneemelcher, 129.

¹⁰¹ Trans. Schneemelcher 139.

¹⁰² Aegeates himself, despite his demonization as a "snake" and "devil" who is addicted to sensual pleasure, is glad at first that his wife is σωφροσύνη and is loyal to him. Thus σωφροσύνη is a term which can be used by both sides of the conflict. Aegeates also seems to accept Maximilla's contention that "It is not right for a man's mouth to touch a woman's mouth after prayer;" apparently this is something that the Christian author thought that even an evil pagan would agree with.

¹⁰³ Klijn (2003), 11. See especially the lengthy extollations of purity in *Acts of Thomas* 85 and 94 (an expansion of the macarisms of the *Acts of Paul*).

Chapter IV: Sexuality and defilement

in marriage, is deemed impure: it is described as filthy (ῥυπαρᾶς), defiled (μιαρᾶ) and corrupted, “a deed of shame and confusion,” opposed to the “purity of the Messiah.”¹⁰⁴ Sexual renunciation is described as the removal of corruption and of disease from within the person,¹⁰⁵ or as the shedding of dirty clothes,¹⁰⁶ while σωφροσύνη/سَوْفْرُوسُؤْنَه or ἄγνεία/أَغْنِيَاء denote living with a wife in continence.¹⁰⁷ Through rejection of sexuality a person can become a pure temple,¹⁰⁸ fit to enter before the king.¹⁰⁹ Corruptible marriage to a physical, temporal husband produces only troublesome children and sins, while incorruptible marriage to the true, heavenly husband, Jesus, produces spiritual fruits and immortality.¹¹⁰ Arresting sexuality opens the way for soteriological self-knowledge, an understanding of humankind’s true state.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, many of Thomas’ sermons are set against πορνεία or adultery, not sexual relations in general.¹¹² This discrepancy leads Yves Tissot and Naomi Koltun-Fromm, against H.J.W. Drijvers, to argue for two essentially incompatible sources in the *Acts of Thomas*: an earlier and more traditional one in which marriage is allowed and πορνεία is the focus, and a later one for which all sexual contact is defiled.¹¹³ I do not find their argument persuasive: as we

¹⁰⁴ *Acts of Thomas* 12-14, 51-2, 54-5, 84, 88.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid* 124, 144.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid* 126.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid* 150; perhaps 51, according to Klijn (2003), 128. I am not persuaded by the interpretation of Koltun-Fromm (2010), 111-2, that ἄγνεία in this pericope indicates a marriage which includes sexual relations.

¹⁰⁸ *Acts of Thomas* 12, 87, 156.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* 126.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* 14, 124. For an overview of the *Acts of Thomas*’ attitude to sexuality, see Klijn (2003), 53-5; Drijvers (1992), 327-9, 335-7.

¹¹¹ *Acts of Thomas* 15.

¹¹² *Ibid* 28, 84.

¹¹³ Tissot (1988); Drijvers (1992); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 97-126.

saw, other Apocryphal Acts (and other writings of the second century) commonly speak of pure virginity as opposed to defiled πορνεία, and there is no reason that one author could not condemn both sexuality in general and πορνεία, or adultery, in particular. This is exactly the position which Thomas is said to have advocated: “Whosoever shall partake in the polluted union (κοινωνήση τῆ μιαρᾶ / ܩܘܢܘܢܗܝܬܐ ܕܩܘܢܘܢܐ), and especially in adultery, he shall not have life with the God whom I preach.”¹¹⁴ It is true that in *Thomas* the conflation of πορνεία and conjugal sex is even more extreme than in most of the Apocryphal Acts, since (together with the *Acts of Andrew*) it uses the negative defilement pole for both πορνεία and conjugal sex; and at times, it seems that both are equally rejected, though this is nowhere said explicitly.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, I do not find in the Apocryphal Acts in general or in the *Acts of Thomas* in particular any preoccupation with the origin of sexuality in the Fall, as Pagels, among others, believes.¹¹⁶ The purpose of the *Acts of Thomas* is to persuade its readers to live a life in which sexual relations play a lesser role: it is less interested in defining exactly to what extent each act is prohibited, or in explaining the origin for the defilement of sex (though at times it is insinuated that the demons have something to do with it, as with other sins); rather, it demonstrates its evil consequences and opposes it to a life of holiness and marriage with Jesus.

¹¹⁴ *Acts of Thomas* 51. I see no reason to interpret, with Koltun-Fromm (2010), 111-2, “the impure union” here as *porneia*, especially in light of the definite article.

¹¹⁵ Many interpreters explain that since the true bridegroom is Jesus, any other relationship is essentially adulterous. This is a logical conclusion, but does not appear in the text, which retains some ambivalence on the relationship between adultery and marital sex. See Davies (1980), 84; Pagels (1983), 174 n.8; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 121.

¹¹⁶ Pagels (1983), 158; Gasparro (1984), 87-101. The only relatively clear statement to this effect is found in the the *Acts of Andrew* (5-7), which see Maximilla’s conversion as a “repentance” from the “affliction” of Eve. *Acts of Thomas* 32 relates the actions of the serpent/Satan through history, starting with the Fall; Adam is said simply to have “transgressed God’s commandment.” Although the Devil “bound them [=the angels] in lust for women,” it is sins of anger and rebellion rather than sexual sins which feature in the devil’s machinations. I do not find with Klijn (2003), 54, the idea of a virgin Adam in paradise in *Acts of Thomas* 15.

Pseudo-Clementine *Epistles to Virgins*

The Pseudo-Clementine *Epistles to Virgins* provide a window into the lives of those who followed the precepts of the *Apocryphal Acts* to the full. Commonly sourced to third century Syria, the *Epistles* are an exhortation to virgins for proper and saintly behaviour.¹¹⁷ The *Epistles* reflect a context of rivalries and reciprocal criticism between different groups of itinerant male virgins.¹¹⁸

The sexual precepts of the first Epistle are quite general. Virgins of both genders must conquer the body, the flesh and Satan (I.5); they are the city and temple of God, there is nothing in them of the mind of the flesh. However, this is only if they imitate Christ and the apostles, all holy people “who cherished and loved purity (ܠܗܘܠܘܬܐ), and ran in the contest, and finished their course without blemish (ܐܨܦܝܠܘܨ ܐܬܝܠܥܣܘܢ/ ܦܪܘܢ ܠܕܝ ܘܠܒܘܬܐ) (I.6)” A virgin must be “holy in both body and spirit... waiting upon the Lord always in purity and holiness (ܠܗܘܠܘܬܐ ܠܗܘܠܘܬܐ) in the Spirit of God... living purely and without stain (καθαρῶς καὶ ἀμιάντως / ܠܗܘܠܘܬܐ ܠܕܝܐ ܕܘܠܘܬܐ) (I.7).” The place of virgins is better than that of “those who have passed a wedded life in purity (ܠܗܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܘܠܘܬܐ), and whose bed has not been defiled (ܘܠܘܬܐ ܠܗܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܘܠܘܬܐ). For God will give to virgins the kingdom of heaven, as to the holy angels (I.4)” Though virginity is clearly preferred, both marriage and virginity are marked with the term ܠܗܘܠܘܬܐ (purity/holiness). This would indicate an ethic similar to that of the closely contemporary *Acts of Thomas*, which sees both marriage and virginity as compatible with the holy Christian life.¹¹⁹

The second Epistle contains more practical detail relating to the proper behaviour of wandering male virgins, who acted as preachers and exorcists. This behaviour was to be of

¹¹⁷ The *Epistles* are fully extant only in Syriac translation, edited by Beelen (1865), but substantial Greek fragments have also been found, ed. Diekamp and Funk (1913). For the date, see Harnack (1891), 361-85; Brown (1988), 196n.32; Caner (2002), 66n.72.

¹¹⁸ *Epistles to Virgins* I.10-11.

¹¹⁹ See above p. 173.

“chastity and holiness” (ܠܚܘܨܬܐ ܘܚܘܨܬܐ),¹²⁰ expressed mostly in separation from women during their travels. Although their mission included preaching to women, they were never to sleep, eat or drink in the same place as a lone woman, especially unmarried; a woman should not wait upon them, wash their feet or anoint them (II.1-3). Therefore, the virgins should take great care in organising their sleeping and eating arrangements. The ideal segregation is expressed most poignantly in the instructions for the salutation following prayer with women: “the women and the maidens will wrap their hands in their garments; and we also, with circumspection and with all chastity, our eyes looking upwards, shall wrap our right hand in our garments; and then they will come and give us a salutation on our right hand (ܠܚܘܨܬܐ ܠܥܝܢܐ ܘܠܥܝܢܐ ܘܠܥܝܢܐ) wrapped in our garments” (II.2).¹²¹ Both touch and sight must be prevented. The separation between the sexes is extended to examples from the Old Testament: Moses, Aaron and Joshua all ministered before God without women present. When travelling in the desert, the Israelites made sure that the women walk in the rear, apart from the men, “that there might be no disorder on account of the women” (II.4).¹²²

The Gospel of Thomas: singleness and purity

The *Gospel of Thomas* is widely, though not universally, regarded as a text of encratite tendencies.¹²³ This understanding is supported by an interpretation of a number of logia speaking of the importance of being “alone” or “single,” and of the blessedness of the childlike state. The most explicit of these is logion 22:

... Jesus said to them: “When you make the two into one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below – that is, to make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not

¹²⁰ A recurring expression, *Epistles to Virgins* II.6, 8, 11, 15.

¹²¹ The salutation has been interpreted by some as a kiss (Penn (2005), 83); however it would seem as likely to be some kind of handshake.

¹²² To the best of my knowledge, this interpretation of the walking order of the Israelite tribes (Numbers 2) as segregating women and men is unique.

¹²³ See Uro (1998); Valantasis (1999).

be male and the female will not be female... then you will enter [the kingdom].”

Many scholars believe that for the *Gospel of Thomas*, this singleness recreated the singleness of the androgynous Adam before the separation into two sexes following the Fall, which was essentially a sexual sin; the attainment of such singleness requires a life of renunciation, including celibacy.¹²⁴ Other interpretations of *Thomas* are certainly possible, however; some scholars have pointed out that the *Gospel of Thomas* does not relate to sexual renunciation explicitly, only to “singleness” and unspecificity of gender, and therefore may not relate to sexuality but rather to the human condition of being separated from some true, primal selfhood.¹²⁵ Indeed, different interpretations of logion 22 or very similar sayings were already current in the second century; Clement of Alexandria cites Julius Cassian as using a similar saying from the *Gospel of the Egyptians* to support an ideology of total celibacy, *2 Clement* cites it to support a more mundane sexual ethic, that “brother seeing sister may have no thought concerning her as female,” while Clement of Alexandria himself interprets it symbolically as relating to the extinguishing of anger and desire in the rational person.¹²⁶ Furthermore, the practical import of Thomas’ ideology is not at all clear; following an analysis of the main points, Risto Uro concludes that “in spite of the clear ascetic inclination... one can recognise a certain ambiguity in Thomas’ relation to the issue of marriage versus celibacy... [which] perhaps reflects an ongoing discussion on the matter in Thomas’ community.”¹²⁷

Our question is different: do we find in the *Gospel of Thomas* ideas of sexual purity or defilement? It appears to me that we must differentiate between ideas of doubleness/singleness

¹²⁴ Klijn (1962); Guillaumont (1972); Murray (1974); Quispel (2008 [1981]); Gasparro (1984), 79-86; DeConick (1996), 3-1, 129-147. See the general discussion of themes of unification and singleness in Meeks (1973), esp. 194-6.

¹²⁵ See Davies (2005), 21-22; Buckley (1985), and discussion in Uro (1998), 140-62.

¹²⁶ *Strom.* 3.93; *2 Clem.* 12 with Le Boulluec (2007), 251-75. The image of the female becoming male and vice versa can even connote sexual relations, as in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, *Asclepius* 21.3, see Mahé (1975), 123-45.

¹²⁷ Uro (1998), 161.

of the person or of harmony between various parts of the person, and ideas of defilement/purity of the person. In the former, the focus is on the person's interior: the ideal, original state of the person is lack of differentiation, and corruption comes through differentiation into various aspects. This corruption is expressed in many texts through sexual differentiation of the primeval, singular Adam into male and female. On the ethical or psychological level, this differentiation is reflected in double-heartedness, lack of harmony between the "inner" and the "outer" person or lack of a decisive decision to be loyal to God alone. In conceptions of purity and defilement the focus is on the borders of the person, which are defiled when they are breached or in danger. In this case, sexual defilement is seen as invading the person from the outside; on the ethical level, the problem is with adherence to some external source of defilement, or lack of sufficient border maintenance.¹²⁸

Summary

The authors discussed in this section make frequent and extensive use of defilement imagery for sexuality; however, the degree of specificity of this language varies widely. In certain cases, it appears that purity language simply emphasises the main message of these texts: that sexual activity in general, and sexual sin in particular, are hazardous to the soul and the body, and totally inimical to a person's contact with God.

Other texts are more specific. The *Shepherd of Hermas* envisions the heart and the flesh as places for inhabitation by the Holy Spirit or contamination by the evil spirits, a dynamic in which sexual sin plays a central role; Tatian also speaks of the person as a temple for the holy spirit which any sexuality contaminates. Many of the texts link sexual purity with knowledge of God, and vice versa. For the opening speech of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, virgins, or even people "who have wives as though they have not," are pure in heart, in flesh and in body; essentially, it is the whole person who is seen as pure or defiled. The Pseudo-Clementine *Epistles to Virgins*,

¹²⁸ For a similar differentiation between conceptions of interior corruption and of exterior invasion, see Martin (1995); for Martin, however, the ideal person or society according to the first conception is one in which there is a proper hierarchic relationship between components, and not one in which there is monolithic simplicity or singleness.

while not providing a clear anthropology, are among the few texts which translate the general sexual ethic of purity into detailed precepts for male virgins to follow. Some of the texts bifurcate the person into body and soul and see the former as a source of contamination for the latter (e.g., *Acts of John, Epistles to Virgins*). For others, however, the body does not appear a source of contamination, but as an object of contamination by sexuality no less than the soul; it is therefore the person as a whole who is subject to sexual purity or defilement.

4. *The protological dimension: from Marcion to the Sethians*

Marcion, Cassian, Saturninos

According to several sources, the Marcionite church which flourished between the second and the fourth centuries in Syria and the East totally repudiated marriage, and withheld baptism and Eucharist from married people, requiring them to separate, abstain, or wait until widowed.¹²⁹ The authors from whom we derive our knowledge on Marcion – Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, and Hippolytus – all claim that this behaviour stemmed from his cosmological conception of an “evil” or “just” creator, responsible for the corporeal human condition and the social order of this world, as opposed to a good, highest god, who sent a non-fleshly Christ to release the world from the creator’s hold. Marriage and procreation are collaboration with the evil god, filling the world he made; continence, on the other hand, “distresses the Creator, by repudiation of the things made or ordained by him.”¹³⁰ As Andrew McGowan demonstrated, hatred for *matter* as of itself is rarely cited as a reason for Marcion’s sexual abstinence; rather, abstinence is an attempt to subvert the plans of the creator god.¹³¹ Nevertheless, there is evidence for aversion of the body as a part of creation which must be denied (as opposed to matter in general): according to Tertullian, Marcionites described it as “earthly”, “packed with

¹²⁹ Tertullian, *Marc.* 1.29; 4.11; 4.34. For additional sources see Harnack (1924), 148-51; 277*. On Marcion’s asceticism/encratism in general, see Brown (1988), 86-90.

¹³⁰ Hippolytus, *Haer.* 10.19; Clement, *Strom.* 3.12; 3.25.

¹³¹ McGowan (2001); though see Clement, *Strom.* 3.12.

dung”, “foul from the excrement of the earth”, “a sewer.”¹³² Marriage and sex are “corruption” or “impure,” or simply “evil.”¹³³ Nevertheless, the evilness of sex is more frequently linked to its procreative results, and not to the evilness or impurity of the flesh.

Julius Cassian’s views are known to us from the brief citations and lengthy paraphrases and polemics of Clement of Alexandria.¹³⁴ Cassian completely rejected marriage and sexuality, perceiving them as *πορνεία*.¹³⁵ He argued that the sexual organs have not been created by the God “to whom we seek to attain,” since that same God “pronounced eunuchs blessed.”¹³⁶ Sexual relations and birth are synonymous with corruption and are the result of the deceit of the serpent, who “took it from the irrational animals.”¹³⁷ Prior to the sin of Adam and Eve, bodies and therefore sexual differentiation and sexual acts did not exist: “The coats of skins’ in Cassian’s view are bodies.”¹³⁸ The soul “having become female by desire has come down here from above to birth and corruption,” a view that Clement characterises as Platonic.¹³⁹

The extant fragments and paraphrases of Cassian rarely contain explicit impurity terms, though “corruption” (*φθορά*) is quite frequently used to describe birth or the body;¹⁴⁰ in a rare counter-example, Clement ascribed to the anti-marriage party in general the view that

¹³² Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.10-11; 4.21; *Res.* 4; *Carn. Chr.* 4.

¹³³ Hippolytus, *Haer.* 10.19; Clement, *Strom.* 3.46; Tertullian, *Marc.* 1.29.

¹³⁴ Citations: *Strom.* 3.91-2; paraphrases: *Strom.* 3.93-105. For discussions of Cassian’s views, difficult to disentangle from those of Marcion and Tatian in Clement’s polemic, see Beatrice (1978), 222-42; Beatrice (1985); Pearson (1981), 101-20; Gasparro (1984), 32-55; Le Boulluec (2007); Hunter (2007), 106-111.

¹³⁵ *Strom.* 3.90.

¹³⁶ *Strom.* 3.91-2.

¹³⁷ *Strom.* 3.94; 3.104.

¹³⁸ *Strom.* 3.95.

¹³⁹ *Strom.* 3.93.

¹⁴⁰ Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.28.1; 10.19; Clement, *Strom.* 3.93-4; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 10.19.

“relations are impure (μιαρὰν).”¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, the anthropology and theology of Cassian would support a general view of the human body and sexuality as impure: these elements of the person are unessential, secondary and externally derived. The body defiles the soul, which is the true human essence. The only way to be purified is therefore to minimise the role of the body, through the minimisation of sexual activity.

Satorninos, according to Irenaeus, believed that man is a combined creation of the superior power (who gave it the spark of life) and of seven angels, one of whom is the God of the Jews (who together created the rest of the body and psyche).¹⁴² Furthermore, there are two human races, “one wicked and one good,” and only the latter, those who are saved by an “ungendered, incorporeal” Christ, have in them the spark of life, while the former are assisted by demons.¹⁴³ Irenaeus then adds that “to marry and beget children comes from Satan, and most of his followers abstain from animal food, misleading many by this false type of temperance.”¹⁴⁴ It is important to note that while sexual activity is from Satan and was presumably abstained from as well (though this is not explicit), no aspect of the human body or soul is said to be the creation of Satan.

Bentley Layton points to the extensive parallels between Irenaeus’ summary and early formulations of the Gnostic myth found in the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Reality of the Rulers*, to which we will now turn.¹⁴⁵

Creation myths from Nag Hammadi

The *Apocryphon of John*, in rewriting the story of Genesis, gives an important role to two sexual acts of the first humans.¹⁴⁶ In the first act, the demiurge Ialdabaoth (also known as Saklas or

¹⁴¹ *Strom.* 3.46; trans. Chadwick and Oulton, 61-2.

¹⁴² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.1.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1.24.2.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; trans. Unger, I.85.

¹⁴⁵ Layton (1987), 159-62.

¹⁴⁶ The text also describes the creation of the various divine entities as acts of sexual procreation.

Samael), after casting Adam down into the material world of deadly pleasures, “defiled” or “seduced” Eve; from this Cain and Abel, rulers of the material world, were born (24.15). The text then explains:

And to the present day sexual intercourse, which originated from the first ruler, has remained. And in the female who belonged to Adam it sowed a seed of desire¹⁴⁷; and by sexual intercourse it raised up birth in the image of the bodies. And it supplied them some of its counterfeit spirit (24.26-32).

Sexual intercourse and desire originated from Ialdabaoth-Saklas-Samael, and their function is to multiply bodies; the counterfeit spirit put in humans, closely connected with sexuality, is opposed to the holy spirit coming from above. Ialdabaoth’s leonine features and association with fire elsewhere in the text also serve to link it with sexual desire. Furthermore, the snake (identified as one of the rulers) is said to have taught Adam and/or Eve to “consume imperfection consisting of the sowing (or, less literally, “of procreation”) of desire for corruption” (22.12).

Immediately afterwards, however, Adam is said to “have known the image of his own prior acquaintance,”¹⁴⁸ from which Seth, the father of the “immovable race” was born, with the assistance of Sophia’s spirit. Was this a physical sexual act? If not – was Seth only a spiritual being?¹⁴⁹ Karen King believes that this was indeed another sexual act, but this time a positive one, intimating “that the perfectibility of humanity includes sexual relations.”¹⁵⁰ Ingvild Gilhus proposes that the birth of Seth was the result of a non-passionate sexual act, or one that was

Although these have bearing on the valuation of sexuality, it is difficult to transfer their meaning from the divine to the human realm, and therefore I focus on the Genesis stories involving humans. See Stroumsa (1984), 35-70; Gilhus (2005).

¹⁴⁷ Thus in the Nag Hammadi manuscripts II and IV; in BG and III, sexual desire is planted in Adam.

¹⁴⁸ 24.34; in manuscript III, “He knew his own lawlessness.”

¹⁴⁹ For this problem, see Stroumsa (1984), 38-40.

¹⁵⁰ King (2006), 106-7.

not inspired by the counterfeit spirit but by heavenly spiritual images.¹⁵¹

The text further speaks of a third sexual act, in which the rulers seduced women through the counterfeit spirit, “by which they would befoul the souls...and they married women and begot children out of the darkness, after the image of their spirit. And their hearts became closed and hardened with the hardness of the counterfeit spirit, down to the present time” (30.7-11). From this passage, it would appear that sexuality in the present world is always mixed up with “the spirit of darkness.”

In another retelling of Genesis, the *Reality of the Archons*, the rulers rape what they think is Eve, but actually succeed only to “defile foully” her animate body without the spiritual element (89.17-29); from this violent sexual act Cain is born (91.11). In this version, however, this act is not linked with human sexuality in this world. Eve and Adam go on to give birth to Abel and later bear Seth and Norea “through God” (91.30-35). Norea is “the virgin whom the powers did not defile,” despite their later attempts to do so. The *Reality of the Rulers* thus speaks of three human sexual actions –the rape of Eve by the evil rulers (obviously negative), that of Adam and fleshly Eve which produces Abel (not condemned), and that of Adam, spiritual Eve and God, which produces Seth and Norea (obviously positive).¹⁵²

In the version told in *On The Origin of the World*, the Archons attempt to rape Eve in express intention to defile her and prevent her ascension to the upper worlds,¹⁵³ but succeed only in raping her material shadow. The shadow as well as their own bodies are defiled (117.12-14). Though this action is not clearly tied to subsequent human sexuality, the Rulers are “very glad” to see Adam “and the female creature who was with him erring ignorantly like the beasts” (118.9), presumably in intercourse. In another complex myth included in this text, representing an earlier stage of creation, Eros is created from the blood of the Virgin and “all the gods and angels... become enamoured with him.” Eros is the origin, or at least the direct parallel, of intercourse upon earth: “Just as Eros appeared out of the midpoint between light and darkness,

¹⁵¹ Gilhus (2005).

¹⁵² See Layton (1976), 60-2; Barc (1980); Gilhus (1985), 60-66.

¹⁵³ See Stroumsa (1984), 42-4; Tardieu (1974), 129-31.

and in the midst of the angels and people the intercourse of Eros was consummated, so too the first sensual pleasure sprouted upon the earth. The woman followed the earth, and marriage followed the woman, and reproduction followed marriage, and death followed reproduction (109.16-25).”¹⁵⁴

These retellings of Genesis in Codex II of the Nag Hammadi library represent sexuality as a key factor in the creation of human society. The evil Rulers, characterised by symbols of materiality and sexual lust, repeatedly use sexuality in their attempts to contravene the plans of the good spiritual beings. In the *Apocryphon of John*, illegitimate sexuality is explicitly said to be the root cause of all sexuality; in the other versions this is not stated, but the fact that the first sexual act was not (as in the biblical story) a legitimate one between a man and his wife, but rather an illegitimate act of the forcible “defilement” of a virgin, points in this direction. This reflects a general perception of sexuality as being inherently defiled and defiling, and therefore most suitable to demonstrate the evil nature of the Rulers’ deeds.¹⁵⁵ As in the Apocryphal Acts, the rejection of sexuality is performed through the transfer of negative value from traditionally illegitimate sexuality to all sexuality. There may, however, be exceptional cases in which even human procreation somehow involves the higher spirits, though it is not clear if this would sanction actual sexual relations performed without lust or with a spiritual intention, or rather relegate any legitimate sexuality to an unattainable sphere. In any case, none of the texts demand sexual abstention in practice, as Saturninus and Marcion were reported to have done.

The *Testimony of Truth*, which attacks rival Christians, is much more practical, and includes the most explicit and most developed negative characterization of sexuality in the Nag

¹⁵⁴ Tardieu (1974), 165-74.

¹⁵⁵ See Williams (1996), 144. The attitude of these texts can be compared to Justin’s *Book of Baruch*, where a model of legitimate marriage and procreation is explicitly upheld, and only adultery or homosexuality are repudiated as the result of a primeval fall, see Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.26.9-10 with Williams (1986), 196-227.

Hammadi codices, along with significant purity language.¹⁵⁶ One who is under the “defilement of the Law” cannot know the truth, as one cannot serve two masters: the law is defiled because it supports sexual relations, and especially because it leads to procreation and thereby “assists the world.” Those who are under the law, “who defile and who are defiled,” are inflamed by passion, which is an instrument of the Archon of Darkness to fulfil the law through “those who are begotten in this place” (29.21-30.17). Those with true knowledge will receive eternal life, while the ignorant ones, “the defiled pleasures prevail over them” (39.1).

This sexual defilement is explicitly tied to the history of salvation. Those under the Law are controlled by “the errant desire of the angels and the demons and the stars” (29.16). The River Jordan symbolises sexual desire, and in coming down upon it the Son of Man, who is “alien to defilement,” brought the dominion of carnal procreation to an end (30.18-31.3). Jesus was born from a virgin womb (39.30), which remained virginal after his birth (45.18): “let us therefore strengthen [ourselves] as virgins” (40.6-7). The man who “knows the God of truth” is called to “forsake all the things of the world”, and “subdue desire in every way” (41.5-12), presumably relating in this context to sexual continence, among other ascetic customs. Although the fragmentary text does not explain in what way the “error of the angels” created sexuality and how this evil is transferred to the human race,¹⁵⁷ this is clearly connected to the partition of man into flesh, soul and spirit, and to the alliance between the flesh and concupiscence (30.32) and corruption (42.6).¹⁵⁸ The negative attitude towards the body is expressed also in the explicit opposition to the idea of a carnal resurrection.

¹⁵⁶ See Pearson (1981), 101-20, who identifies the author with Julius Cassian in the late second century. But see the criticism of Gasparro (1984), 154-6 and Mahé and Mahé (1996), 46-9, who find incongruencies between Cassians’ views and those of the *Testimony of Truth*. See also Mahé (1998), 21-36; Grypeou (2005), 251-6.

¹⁵⁷ Gasparro (1984), 155, believes that 45.23-48 implies that sexuality was created by the demiurge; although a comparison with other texts such as the *Apocryphon of John* makes this probable, the passage itself does not say so.

¹⁵⁸ For the anthropology of this text, see Mahé (1996), 36-45.

Summary

The Gnostic texts discussed in this section articulate a comprehensive purity and defilement system regarding sexuality, in which it is perceived as an external aspect of the person. The origin of human sexuality is found in a primeval, sinful moment, as part of the creation of the material world by evil forces. Some of the myths allow for a more complex understanding of human sexuality, with both evil and good models appearing in the primeval context. In two cases (Julius Cassian and the *Testimony of Truth*) various dimensions of sexuality's defilement are detailed: its demonic or evil origins, a condemnation of its actual practice, as well as a perception of the body and the genitals as a secondary creation. Of Marcion's writing we lack even fragments, but it is likely that his conception of sexuality included similar elements. These writers press their logic to the extreme: if sexuality as the most salient expression of corporeality is totally defiling, the only way for humans to be purified is by its total rejection.

5. Jewish-Christian texts

Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions*

The worldview of the third-century source common to the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* appears to be quite similar to that of the second century Household Codes. Marriage is strongly supported, while virginity is nowhere mentioned. Both in the narrative and in the exhortations embedded in it, σωφροσύνη is emphasised as the prime sexual value, opposed to sins such as adultery, πορνεία and incest, sometimes described by impurity terms.¹⁵⁹ Unusually, the support of marriage extends even to desire (ἐπιθυμία), which is necessary as it leads to reproduction;

¹⁵⁹ For the opposition σωφροσύνη/adultery, and the pollution (μιαν-) of the latter, see *Epistle of Clement to James*, 7-8; *Ps.-Clementine Hom.* 9.23, and esp. 13.13-20. *Hom.* 3.26 uses both σωφροσύνη and ἀγνεία. These are roughly paralleled by *Rec.* 7.15, 7.38, while *Rec.* 6.12 adds that one kind of chastity is “that sexual intercourse must not take place heedlessly and for the sake of mere pleasure, but for the sake of begetting children.” On the sexual ethics of the *Homilies* and their relationship to encratism and the ancient novel, see Cooper (2000), 243-64; Horn (2007).

desire is evil only in adultery.¹⁶⁰

Seemingly opposed to this marital ideology, we find in the Pseudo-Clementines also a condemnation of desire (*ἐπιθυμία/concupiscentia*) as characterising the “first birth” of “fire” which is purified and replaced in baptism by a second birth, “of water.”¹⁶¹ Sexual desire also caused the fall of the angels, following which “sunk in defilement (*μιασμῶ*) and altogether emptied of their first power, unable to turn back to the first purity (*ἀμίαντον*) of their proper nature, their members turned away from their fiery substance.”¹⁶² The imagery is reminiscent of Julius Cassian or some Gnostic sources which we discussed above. Though it does not necessarily entail condemnation of all sexuality, this imagery reflects a perception of sexual desire as evil and incompatible with Christian life.

The Pseudo-Clementines perceived menstruation as defiling, and required purification after intercourse. Although this position is not unique in the third century, the central place it receives here is unparalleled.¹⁶³ It is stated in brief in a version of the Apostles’ Decree: “And this is the service He has appointed... to wash after intercourse; that the women on their part should keep the law of purification,”¹⁶⁴ and much expanded in a sermon entitled “on purity”: both the law of God and human rationality command that “a man not approach his wife when she is in separation.”¹⁶⁵ Bodily purity is secondary to purity of heart, but both are essential for worship: interior purity leads to external purity, while negligence in respect to the body prevents enlightenment. The text appeals several times to the obviousness and naturalness of purification following intercourse and menstruation, and to the argument that even pagans see great importance in such purification.¹⁶⁶ Beyond the demonic explanation which appears only

¹⁶⁰ *Hom.* 19.18, 21; 20.4.

¹⁶¹ *Hom.* 11.26; *Rec.* 9.7. For *ἐπιθυμία* in the Pseudo-Clementines, see Cirillo (1988).

¹⁶² *Hom.* 8.13=*Rec.* 1.29.

¹⁶³ See Reed (2012); Wehnert (1997), 148-73.

¹⁶⁴ *Hom.* 7.8. The parallel version of the Apostles’ Decree in *Rec.* 4.36 does not include menstrual purity.

¹⁶⁵ *Hom.* 11.28=*Rec.* 6.10-11. See in chapter on baptism, p. 253.

¹⁶⁶ *Hom.* 11.30=*Rec.* 6.12. A point made also by Origen, below p. 205.

in the *Recognitions* (see below), and is probably a later rationalization not present in the earlier source, the requirement of purification is based a unified conception of body and soul, but also upon conservatism: it should be performed simply because that is what rational people do, whatever their religion. The author perceives his community as participating in religious practice common to all humanity, linking purity discourse to a discourse of naturalness.¹⁶⁷

Demons have a central role in sexual sin. The *Homilies* explain that since demons enter men's bodies in order to attain sexual and alimentary pleasures, they can be expelled by "abstinence, and fasting, and suffering of affliction." If the demon is stubborn recourse must be made to "prayers and petitions, refraining from every occasion of impurity (ἀκαθάρτου), that the hand of God may touch him for his cure, as being pure (ἀγνοῦ) and faithful."¹⁶⁸ 'Refraining from impurity' would probably entail temporary sexual renunciation, but perhaps other abstinences as well. Demons are also given a more precise role: the *Recognitions* explains that demons produce defects in children born from intercourse performed "while lust is wholly gratified and no care is taken in copulation... because they have not observed the law of intercourse." People should therefore "avoid causes of impurity, so that that which is produced may be pure (*inmunditiae causas declinet, ut possit mundum esse quod gignitur*)."¹⁶⁹ That the main "cause of impurity" was menstruation can be seen in the parallel passage in the *Homilies*, in which children's diseases are said to be the result of ill-timed intercourse: "Because men, following their own pleasure in all things, cohabit without observing the proper times; and thus the deposition of seed, taking place unseasonably, naturally produces a multitude of evils... for instance, by not knowing when one ought to cohabit with his wife, as if she be pure from her discharge (καθαρὰ ἐξ ἀφέδρου)."¹⁷⁰ These diseases, however, are a result of "sins of ignorance,"

¹⁶⁷ For purity as distinguishing humans from animals and therefore as a "natural" human characteristic, see Epictetus *Diatr.* 4.11. In *y. Ber.* 3.4 [26b], a woman who does not purify herself [from menstrual defilement?] is said to be "like a beast."

¹⁶⁸ *Hom.* 9.10. See Schoeps (1950).

¹⁶⁹ *Rec.* 9.9.

¹⁷⁰ *Hom.* 19.22; compare *T. Naph.* 8.7-10 with Marcus (2010), 618-23.

not of wickedness.¹⁷¹ Intercourse during menstruation is thus seen as a problem with both spiritual and medical aspects.

In an allegorical account in the *Homilies*, Eve is described as an evil prophetess representing the female principle, or flesh and blood as opposed to the spirit. This female principle is said to be “as a female being in her menses (ἐμμηνίους), who at the offering of sacrifices is stained with blood; and then she pollutes (μολύνει) those who touch her.”¹⁷² This myth could be seen as a development of the gnostic myths of the sexual defilement of Eve by the archons (see above p. 182), but here the defilement is not of sexual intercourse itself but of

¹⁷¹ See Kelley (2007); DeConinck (2003), 337. A Rabbinic parallel is *Leviticus Rabba* 15:5, which states that a child born of menstrual intercourse will become leprous. The same theory is cited by Diodorus of Tarsus (Deconinck (1912), fr. 73); Theodoret, *Qu. Lev.* 22; Jerome, *Comm. Ez.* 18.6. Roman medical texts do not mention such a result, and in general describe menstrual blood as harming crops rather than future children or sexual partners; see Richlin (2002), 225–56; Lennon (2010). Brundage (1990), 156, states that deformity of the child as a result of sexual relations during menstruation is unknown in classical authors, and so this may be one of its earliest mentions; and see Marienberg (2003), 113–20.

¹⁷² *Hom.* 3.24. Menstrual blood is compared here to sacrificial blood, part of the Ps.-Clementine polemic against sacrifice, see Reed (2012), 16–17. The account of the Ps.-Clementines includes significant parallels to that ascribed by Theodore bar Koni, *Book of the Scholia* 11 (ed. Hespel and Draguet, *Livre des scolies: recension de Séert* (Louvain: Peeters, 1981), 249–50) to the Quqites, a sect placed by Syriac heresiological sources in the second century, see Drijvers (1967). In Theodore’s account of Quqite cosmology, the Mother of Life, following her penetration by the “dead image,” “became impure and did not return to the dwelling of the gods, her companions. She remained for seven days in a condition of impurity.” This parallel supports Drijver’s claim that Theodore’s description is cited from an ancient source, as well as his linkage of this description to the tradition that the Quqites practiced Jewish or Samaritan death defilement customs, placing them in a Jewish-Christian context. For a close Zoroastrian parallel, see *Bundahishn* 3.5.15–16, discussed in Koren (2011), 89–91; and compare *Avot de Rabbi Nathan B*, ch. 9: “Adam was the blood of the Holy One, blessed be He; Eve came and spilt it. Consequently, the commandments of menstrual purity were given to her.”

the menstrual blood, as would be more appropriate for a community supporting marriage.¹⁷³

The *Didascalia Apostolorum*

Like the Pseudo-Clementines, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* supports marriage unequivocally; it attacks as heresy the claim that “not marrying is holiness (ܠܗܘܠܘܬܐ),”¹⁷⁴ and uses conventional purity rhetoric to describe adultery or other sexual sins threatening marriage.¹⁷⁵ The *Didascalia* also includes a number of innovative sexual prescriptions, such as exhortations on the importance of separate and modest bathing (ch. 3) and of segregation of women and men in the church (ch. 12).

As opposed to the Pseudo-Clementines, however, this position does not translate into an obligation for marital ritual purity regulations. Indeed, the *Didascalia* argues vigorously against keeping “the habits of nature and fluxes and intercourse,” observances it claims were held by some men and women “who have converted from the Peoples,” i.e., Jews. According to the hostile witness of the *Didascalia*’s redactor, these people held to a number of closely connected customs: first, abstinence from prayer, reading Scripture and participation in the Eucharist during the “seven days of menstruation,” second, bathing after the seven days of menstruation (for women), seminal emissions (for men), or intercourse (for both) before “they assemble” (in the Syriac, ܡܫܘܒܝܢ) or “pray” (in the Latin, *orent*); third, prohibition of intercourse during

¹⁷³ Compare also the purifying light/blood poured out by Pronoia in the first stages of the cosmogony in *On the Origin of the World* 108, above p. 184. There, the blood of Pronoia (also called “virgin”) purifies the waters, fertilises the earth and causes plants to grow, the opposite of the properties usually ascribed to menstrual blood by Roman writers, according to Richlin (2002). For general parallels between this text and the cosmogony of the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, see Tardieu (1974), 92n.44-45; 149-50.

¹⁷⁴ *Didascalia* 23, trans. Connolly, 202; marrying off their children is a duty of guardians and parents, *Didascalia* 22, trans. Connolly, 124. For the *Didascalia* in general, see above p. 42.

¹⁷⁵ *Didascalia* 1-3, trans. Connolly, 5, 9, 24. *Didascalia* 26, trans. Vööbus, 245: “if a man should corrupt and defile (ܢܫܘܒܝܢ ܡܫܘܒܝܢ) a strange woman... or be polluted (ܡܫܘܒܝܢ) with a harlot... and be bathed in all the rivers, he cannot be made clean (ܡܫܘܒܝܢ).”

menstruation. The *Didascalia*'s redactor clearly opposes abstinence from holy works and bathing during menstruation, though he may have concurred with the need for temporary abstinence from intercourse, according to the Latin translation though not the Syriac.¹⁷⁶ Even in the Syriac, the first two points are at the centre of the *Didascalia*'s polemic while the third is mentioned only in passing. This would indicate that the former were more contentious in the redactor's community, a reasonable situation as these customs are public and more easily identified as Jewish, compared to the latter which are private.

As Charlotte Fonrobert has shown, the *Didascalia*'s redactor imputes two main reasons for these purity observances: loyalty to the Levitical laws and belief that the Holy Spirit departs from them during menstruation, emissions or intercourse, and returns only with washing.¹⁷⁷ The redactor refutes both arguments: the purity laws of Leviticus are secondary, were received as a punishment for Israel's sins, and were since abrogated; the Holy Spirit enters a person in baptism, and does not leave as a result of bodily discharges, but only due to sins. A person whom the Holy Spirit departs is necessarily filled with an impure spirit, "and then there will be the entering in of the impure spirit and the going out of the Holy Spirit, and continuous battle."¹⁷⁸

That the laws of Leviticus played a role in the community is indicated by the detail of seven days of purification; however, neither washing after menstruation nor abstinence from prayer or Scriptures are called for in Leviticus. Fonrobert believes it likely that the observant women indeed believed that the Holy Spirit departs in the time of their menses,¹⁷⁹ though in my opinion this is improbable: this belief appears too well suited for the redactor's refuting

¹⁷⁶ Syriac: ed. Vööbus, II.244; Latin: ed. Connolly, 255. Connolly (*ibid*, n. 5), Cohen (1991), 290 and Stewart-Sykes (2009), 256n.141 believe the Syriac is primary and the Latin an emendation, but Vööbus (*ibid*, n. 229) and Zellentin (2013), n. 37-39, deem the Latin primary and the Syriac a later emendation.

¹⁷⁷ Fonrobert (2000), 172-85.

¹⁷⁸ *Didascalia* 26, ed. Vööbus, II.241.

¹⁷⁹ Fonrobert (2000), 175.

argument that only baptism and sin affect it.¹⁸⁰ It is more probable that the women would have based their custom on Leviticus, on an adaptation to new circumstances of the tradition of their (former?) Jewish community that menstruation is impure or on medical/demonic explanations as found in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. Even if the women may not have voiced this argument themselves, however, the idea that the Holy Spirit departs during menstruation must have been comprehensible in the context of the third-century Jewish-Christian community in which the text was produced.¹⁸¹ We thus find here two opposing conceptions of anthropology and impurity: For the *Didascalia*'s opponents, impurity is temporary, caused by the body's rhythms, and is unconditioned upon baptism; it can be removed by washing and its main effect is on the degree of permissible contact with the holy. For the *Didascalia*'s compiler, it is a permanent condition, linked to the baptismal, and therefore pneumatic, status of the person; the degree of permissible contact with the holy is simply a result of his identity as baptised or not. David Brakke reconstructs the social situation at the basis of this argument: Christian communities attempting to define themselves both against the pagan majority and against the Jewish communities and their laws.¹⁸² The focus on baptism as the ultimate and single purification, reflected in the body through the purity of single marriage and not through menstrual purity, served both identity interests at once.

Fonrobert reminds us that very similar issues are discussed in the contemporary *Tosefta*, though with greater precision: there it is said, "men and women with irregular genital emissions, women who menstruate and patrurients are permitted to read the Torah, Prophets and Writings and to study mishna, midrash, religious law and aggadah; but men who had

¹⁸⁰ Fonrobert (2000), 178 writes that the women thought that "as their bodies bleed periodically, the Holy Spirit leaves and reenters their wombs;" The *Didascalia*, however, does not mention the womb or any other organ as the habitation of spirits.

¹⁸¹ There is no suggestion that the women believe an impure spirit enters them during menstruation; it is only that the Holy Spirit departs, a less radical statement, *contra* Brakke (1995), 428.

¹⁸² See the insightful discussion in Brakke (1995), 428-30.

regular ejaculation are prohibited from all of these.”¹⁸³ The *Mishna* and *Tosefta* also discuss the permissibility of prayer for men with seminal emissions.¹⁸⁴ Thus adherence to the Levitical law by no means must lead to a prohibition of these activities when impure. However, the differences between the two texts are also noteworthy: for the *Didascalia*, abstinence from these activities forms the test case for obligation to Jewish purity laws; for the *Tosefta*, they are just marginal extensions of the main purity laws regarding menstruation and emissions. Second, the *Mishna* and *Tosefta* are mostly directed at men, while the *Didascalia* focuses on women.¹⁸⁵ Third, while the *Tosefta* only relates to reading and studying, the *Didascalia* speaks also of prayer and Eucharist, perhaps reflecting differences in the participation of women in these rituals in the communities of the *Tosefta* and the *Didascalia*. The *Tosefta*, of course, does not have a clear parallel to the Eucharist. As Shaye Cohen points out, the *Didascalia* appears to have a sacral conception of the religious rituals of the community which is generally lacking in the *Mishna*.¹⁸⁶

Protevangelium of James

This text, narrating the special birth and upbringing of Mary and the virgin birth of Jesus is dated by most scholars to the late second or early third century.¹⁸⁷ Its provenance is unknown, but the case for Syria has recently been defended.¹⁸⁸ Mary’s defining feature in the text is her purity, which is focused on her virginity but by no means restricted to it.¹⁸⁹ From her infancy,

¹⁸³ *t. Ber.* 2.12.

¹⁸⁴ *m. Ber.* 3.4-5; *t. Ber.* 2.12-13.

¹⁸⁵ Cohen (1991), 282-3, points out that according to these texts the only impurity which may cause a prohibition of such activities is that of semen. The Talmuds (*y. Ber.* 3.4, *b. Ber.* 22a) explain that the issue here is an attempt to reduce sexual activity; Kiperwasser (2012) understands this as the Talmud’s response to a popular practice of post-coital immersion for purity.

¹⁸⁶ Cohen (1991), 287-90.

¹⁸⁷ Cullman (1992).

¹⁸⁸ Vuong (2010), 251-313.

¹⁸⁹ See Foskett (2002), 141-64; Foskett (2005); Vuong (2010).

Mary is raised under strict purity conditions: Anna feeds her only after she has “purified herself from her impurity (τῆς ἀφέδρου αὐτῆς);” Mary is not allowed to walk outside, but is raised in a “sanctuary (ἀγίασμα)” in Anna’s bedchamber,¹⁹⁰ through which “nothing common (κοινὸν) or unclean (ἀκάθαρτον) was allowed to pass” (presumably referring to animals);¹⁹¹ and she was cared for only by “the undefiled (ἀμιάντους) daughters of the Hebrews.” All of these restrictions are expansions for known purity principles: defilement of birth, of certain animals, and menstrual or sexual defilement. Mary is distanced from all of these impurities as if she was herself a sacred place or object. She is then taken to live in the temple, where she “received food from the hand of an angel.” At the age of twelve the priests decide to put her under the care of Joseph, “lest perchance she defile the sanctuary of the Lord,”¹⁹² presumably by menstruation; she is now called “the virgin of the Lord.”¹⁹³

From this point, the story focuses on Mary’s virginity. She participates in spinning threads for the temple’s veil, together with other undefiled virgins.¹⁹⁴ When she is found to be pregnant, Joseph laments: “Who has done this evil in my house and defiled (ἐμίανεν) her? ... For as Adam was (absent) in the hour of his prayer and the serpent came and found Eve alone and deceived her and defiled (ἐμίανεν) her, so also has it happened to me.”¹⁹⁵ Mary protests that she is pure

¹⁹⁰ Compare the hyperbolic description in *Mishna* and *Tosefta Parah* 3.2 of the children who drew the water for the purifying red cow ash mixture: they were born and raised in special enclosures and not allowed to walk on the ground lest they happen upon death defilement.

¹⁹¹ Some read this simply as referring to abstaining from unclean food, see Acts 10:14, with Strycker (1961), 91n.3.

¹⁹² *Prot. Jas.* 8.2. Glancy (2010), 109-14, argues (unconvincingly in my opinion) that *Prot. Jas.* believes Mary was never polluted by menstruation.

¹⁹³ *Prot. Jas.* 9.1.

¹⁹⁴ *Prot. Jas.* 10.1-2. It is unclear if this means only that they were virgins or also pure from menstruation. Lieberman (1962), 168-9, believes the latter and therefore thinks they were younger than twelve; but see the refutation of Nir (2003), 100-117.

¹⁹⁵ *Prot. Jas.* 13.1; compare 2 Cor 11:3, 1 Tim 2:14, *Acts of Andrew* 7. For Adam’s absence, see *Greek Life of*

(καθάρᾶ), as does Joseph to the priests who accuse him of defiling (ἐμίανεν) her; they are both vindicated in a bitter water [*sotah*] test. Salome, who doubts that a virgin could give birth, examines Mary and her hand is burnt.¹⁹⁶

The developed purity imagery of the text has been seen by some as proof of a linkage with Jewish and/or Jewish-Christian communities.¹⁹⁷ Although this cannot be ruled out, there is nothing specific in these details which could not have been imagined by a third-century Christian who knew his bible as happening in first-century Jewish Jerusalem. Purity details play a significant role in the narrative: rather than compartmentalising the various dimensions of purity, the *Protevangelium* combines them in order to extol the one most central to it, of virginity. The unique and exceptional purity restrictions of Mary's childhood shape her body into a fitting receptacle for the Holy Spirit, and form the backdrop for her unique virginity. Nevertheless, the writer's interest in such "Jewish" dimensions of purity is unusual. Despite her august status, Mary is not exempt from menstrual defilement, at least according to neutrally-portrayed temple priests. This indicates, though does not prove, that the author thought menstruation to be defiling for contemporary women too. More generally, it shows that the author understood – as opposed to most Christian writers of this time – that for Jews, ritual impurity does not necessarily entail negative moral value.¹⁹⁸

Summary

The preoccupation with menstrual impurity found in the *Didascalia* and the *Ps.-Clementines*, both well known for their Jewish-Christian background, is not surprising. The *Didascalia* and the *Ps.-Clementines* demonstrate the variety of justifications that could arise for menstrual impurity in their milieus: demonology, medicine, "common" morality or Jewish law. Menstrual impurity is

Adam and Eve 7.2.

¹⁹⁶ *Prot. Jas.* 20.1; compare *Acts of Thomas* 51, Cyprian, *Laps.* 25-26, for similar powers of the Eucharist against sinners.

¹⁹⁷ See Mach (1985), 215-22; Horner (2004), 313-35; Vuong (2010); Glancy (2010), 110, sees the text on the background of general "Greco-Roman purity habitus."

¹⁹⁸ See Vuong (2010), 157-68.

important specifically in texts which see marriage as legitimate and even required; this is true also of Clement of Alexandria. Apparently, menstrual impurity is a more apt subject for discussion (even if contentious, as the *Didascalia* proves) when the focus is not on sexuality itself as an impurity, and when procreation is perceived as a virtue. This does not mean, however, that it was not practiced also in other milieus, as the next section will demonstrate.

6. *The Origenist synthesis*

Origen

Origen's position on marriage and sexuality has been characterised as "moderate encratism": one that does not totally condemn marriage, yet integrates key features of encratite ideology.¹⁹⁹ Although he owes much to second-century thought on sexuality, here too Origen is a great innovator. This is especially true regarding the purity aspects of sexuality.²⁰⁰

Origen's discussions of sexuality are extensive, and widely distributed among his voluminous writings. Two significant sites for the development of his thought are the *Homilies on Leviticus* 8, where he discusses the impurity of childbirth (Lev. 12), and fragments 25-40 of his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, in which he discusses Paul's sexual ethics.²⁰¹ Even a cursory reading of these texts highlights the high prevalence of purity terms. This can be explained on two levels. First, Origen's discussions of sexuality are, generally speaking, built upon the biblical texts; in his role as an exegete, he adopts and adapts the purity terms common in both the Hebrew Bible and in Paul's letters. Second, the purity language used by Origen reflects a certain understanding of sexuality as impurity.

As in many earlier authors, virginity on the one hand and πορνεία on the other are mapped unto a purity-impurity axis. Virginity is emphasised throughout Origen's writings: Both Jesus and Mary were virgins, "the first-fruit of the purity which consists in chastity

¹⁹⁹ Gasparro (2006); Hunter (2007), 115.

²⁰⁰ Crouzel (1963), esp. 39-65 (summarised in Crouzel (1989), 137-9) and Gasparro (1985), 167-83 (mostly corresponding to Gasparro (1984), 184-202), are essential here.

²⁰¹ ed. Jenkins (1908), 353-72, 500-14.

(καθαρότητος τῆς ἐν ἀγνείᾳ ἀπαρχῆν).²⁰² After the martyrs, virgins and the continent are considered the best “sacrifices,” since “it is the undefiled body that will chiefly seem to be a sacrifice that is living and holy and pleasing to God.”²⁰³ Sexual continence is instrumental for maintaining the Christian body as a temple of God.²⁰⁴ The opposite pole is also clearly delineated: sexual sin defiles the soul;²⁰⁵ “impurities (ἀκαθαρσίας)” are those acts which are “opposed to purity,” born of “impure desires (ἀκάθαρτα ἐπιθυμῖαι)”: fornication, adultery, pederasty, etc.²⁰⁶ Origen defines impurity as sexual sin, appealing to nature: “every sin of physical stimulation... not only concerning adulteries and corruptions of boys but also concerning all the others... has been given the general name ‘impurities (ἀκαθαρσία)... [but only] in the case of actions contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν), not in the case of marriage.”²⁰⁷

Beyond this traditional purity discourse Origen develops another dimension, the impurity of sexual relations in general. On the one hand, Origen emphasises the permissibility of marriage, attacking encratite positions as “Gnostic” and opposed to the tenet “everything God made is pure.”²⁰⁸ On the other hand, he reiterates several times that marriage is a second best option, a concession to be resorted to only when virginity is not possible: “God has allowed us to marry wives, because not everybody is capable of the superior condition which is to be entirely pure.”²⁰⁹ Throughout the discussion of marriage in his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, the term “purity” (καθαρ- or ἀγν- interchangeably) is reserved for virginity or for continent marriage; nevertheless, abstinence from sexual relations is sometimes described as “purer” or

²⁰² *Comm. Matt.* 10.17

²⁰³ *Comm. Rom.* 9.1.7. Cf. *Cels.* 7.47-8, *Hom. Num.* 11.3.5;

²⁰⁴ *Or.* 25.3; *Comm. Rom.* 1.18, 1.19.7; *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 16; *Cels.* 8.19; *Hom. Jos.* 5.6.

²⁰⁵ *Hom. Gen.* 1.14.

²⁰⁶ *Comm. Jo.* 20.22.

²⁰⁷ *Fr. Eph.* fr. 24, trans. Heine, 210; cf. *Fr. Eph.* fr. 37. Virginity is understood to equal incorruption also in *Hom. Gen.* 5.4, *Hom. Ex.* 13.6.

²⁰⁸ *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 34.

²⁰⁹ *Cels.* 8.55; *Comm. Rom.* 9.1.7; *Hom. Jer.* 20.4.1; *Comm. Matt.* 14.25.

“purest” (καθαρώτερον, καθαρότητά), instead of “pure,” implying a gradation of levels of purity rather than an absolute distinction.²¹⁰ The blurred lines between defilement of sexual sin and of intercourse in general is apparent in Origen’s comment that corruption (φθορά) is a term suited for describing sexual sin, since “uncorruption and corruption according to nature is abstaining from sexual intercourse – for a virgin is said to be corrupted, and also a young man is corrupted or uncorrupted.”²¹¹

Does this mean that sex in marriage is impure? Can there be sexual impurity without sin? Origen’s hesitation before arriving at such a conclusion is apparent from his apologetic language when discussing such issues, warnings that he is speaking of mysteries, and qualifying terminology.²¹² Nevertheless, this seems to be the conclusion at which he arrived. The impurity of non-sinful sex is discussed on two levels: its roots and background – the impurity of corporeality and the body; and its practical results – prohibition of praying or participating in the Eucharist after sex.

In several places in his works, Origen speaks of the body and of conception and birth, the processes that create it, as inherently defiled. However, there are a number of ambiguities and inconsistencies between these texts. Sometimes impurity is conflated with sin, and in other times it is opposed to it. Furthermore, in some texts, the ultimate source of defilement is sexuality and the sexual act, while in others it appears to be simply the fact of human

²¹⁰ *Fr. 1 Cor. fr. 28, 29, 33. Cf. Hom. Gen. 3.6.*

²¹¹ *Fr. 1 Cor. fr. 32.*

²¹² Apologetic: *Hom. Luc. 14.3*: “Perhaps I seem to speak rashly...”; *Hom. Lev. 8.3*: “I myself in such matters dare to say nothing. Yet, I think there are some hidden mysteries in these things...”; *Hom. Lev. 12.4.1*: “This passage of Scripture is most difficult to explain;” *Or. 31.4*: “lengthy consideration leads me to say...;” *Hom. Num. 6.3*: “Now I think, though I would not declare this absolutely...;” *Hom. Num. 23.3*: “I fear to say something... lest I seem to cause grief.” Qualifying: *Hom. Lev. 12.4.1*: “a certain contamination”; *Comm. Matt. 17.35*: “defilement of some sort” (μολυσμῶ πως); “certain impurity” (ἀκαθαρσία τινί).

embodiment.²¹³

In the *Homilies on Luke*, Origen explains that Jesus required purification after his birth even though there was no sin in his making, because “no man is clean of stain (*sorde*, ῥύπος); stain and sins do not mean the same thing... every soul that has been clothed with a human body has its own stain,” even Jesus who took on a body for our salvation.²¹⁴ Likewise, infants are baptised although they did not sin: “through the mystery of baptism, the stains of birth are put aside.”²¹⁵ These “stains” which baptism purifies are obviously universal, stem from the body, and are distinct from sin. In this text, sexuality is not mentioned at all as the source of pollution.²¹⁶ In the *Homilies on Leviticus 12*, however, Origen says sacrifice is required for infants as purification for parental defilement, either from the father’s seed or from the mother’s uterus; In this passage, Jesus is said to have remained pure, since his Father was divine and his mother uncontaminated.²¹⁷ Origen nowhere says in this passage that the act of conception is responsible for the defilement, though this could be inferred from his claim that Mary was uncontaminated. Rather, the *materials* of which the fetus is composed are defiled and defiling. In both of these texts Origen differentiates between corporeal impurity and sin, and does not identify corporeal impurity with the sexual act. The defilement of birth is portrayed as a natural consequence, nearly devoid of moral significance.

An opposite position is found in other passages. In *Homilies on Leviticus 8* Origen explains that a woman is defiled after giving birth, “as if she owes a propitiation and a purification for

²¹³ For this question see Crouzel (1963), 60-66; Gasparro (1984), 189.

²¹⁴ 14.3-4, trans. Lienhard, 57; the essential parts of this passage are also extant in the Greek fragments (M. Rauer, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol IX (GCS 49) [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1959], 85). For the defilement of Jesus’ body, see also *Cels.* 6.73; *Comm. Rom.* 3.8.4; *Hom. Lev.* 9.5.1.

²¹⁵ *Hom. Luc.* 14.5. And see n. 222 below.

²¹⁶ For Jesus’ body in these passages of the *Homilies on Luke*, see Jacobs (2013).

²¹⁷ *Hom Lev.* 12.4.1. The relationship between Mary’s virginity and corporeal defilement is discussed by Crouzel (1962), 32-44; Hunter (2007), 184-6.

sin, because she furnishes the service of bearing a man into this world;”²¹⁸ the baby itself is also defiled, for “every soul which is born in flesh is polluted by the filth of iniquity and sin.”²¹⁹ Indeed, infant baptism demonstrates that infants require “forgiveness and indulgence.”²²⁰ Similarly in the *Commentary on Romans* Origen claims that Leviticus requires purification offerings for new-born babies and that infants are baptised owing to “sin’s innate stain, which must be washed away through water and the spirit. Because of this as well, the body itself is called the body of sin... because the soul was fashioned into the body of sin.”²²¹ In these passages the defilement present at birth is almost assimilated with sin.²²² The two positions enunciated in these passages appear to be irreconcilable, and it would be safer to say that Origen did not arrive at a clear conclusion on the matter.²²³

²¹⁸ *Hom Lev.* 8.3.1, trans. Barkley, 155.

²¹⁹ *Hom Lev.* 8.3.5, trans. Barkley, 157. For a close reading of *Hom. Lev.* 8.1-4, see Fonrobert (2000), 198-203; Rouwhorst (2000).

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ 5.9.11, trans. Scheck, I.366. See also *Cels.* 7.50: “a sacrifice for sin is to be offered even for new-born babes because they are not pure from sin.”

²²² *Hom. Num.* 25.6 presents a different angle on the pollution inherent in bodily life: “no one who goes forth from this life can be clean,” because of the combat during life with evil and polluted forces; “Even if I am able to conquer the devil, even if I am able to reject the impure thoughts... I am necessarily polluted and defiled in the process.” This text is untypical for Origen’s thought: not only does pollution not equal sin, but it is actually the struggle against sin which pollutes. Cf. *Frg. Lam.* 23 (on *Lam.* 1:9), where Origen asks “if it is possible to be involved in some impurity without being responsible for it;” he appears to answer in the affirmative, though this is not totally clear.

²²³ Many scholars understood Origen’s position on sin at birth as deriving from his supposed theory of the fall of the soul into the body due to its sins. See Raasch (1968), 39; Rondet (1972), 70-84; Kelly (1977), 180-2; Beatrice (1978), 212-21; Gasparro (1984), 185; Hällström (2010), 1000-4. However it has been shown that there is no proof that Origen believed in such a theory, see Edwards (2002), 87-122 and Laporte (1995), 101-17. Furthermore, none of the passages under discussion make any mention of

Ritual defilement at birth, without moral significance, would have been a very tidy way of explaining infant baptism as well as Jesus' requirement of purification, avoiding theological complications. However, defilement of the child at birth, as opposed to defilement of the mother, is only hinted to in Luke 2:2, and not in any other sources, Christian or Jewish; Origen probably picked this detail out because of its theological usefulness.²²⁴ Considering the general lack of acceptance of unmediated ideas of ritual defilement by Christian writers in general and Origen in particular, it is not surprising that he could not retain the position of the *Homilies on Luke* without adding a moral dimension, as we find in his other writings.

In the *Homilies on Luke* (and to a lesser extent in the *Homilies on Leviticus*) the emphasis is on the defilement of birth and generation, and not on the sexual act, which is only mentioned instrumentally. The simple fact of being in the body is that which defiles: "as long as we are placed in the flesh, we cannot be pure liquid unless the eighth day should come."²²⁵ This is also apparent from the testimonia cited in these passages, all demonstrating that the day of birth is reason for lamentation, not celebration.²²⁶ In the *Commentary on Romans*, however, Origen clearly

it whatsoever, but only refer ambiguously to some "mystery."

²²⁴ Therefore, the claim of Ferguson (2006), 131 that Origen's innovation "is to extend the baptismal forgiveness of sins to ceremonial impurity, particularly that associated with childbirth," can only be partly upheld, since impurity of newborns is not mentioned in Leviticus or in subsequent Jewish or Christian exegesis. Baumgarten (1994), 3-10, followed by Harrington (2004), 62, find hints to impurity of newborns in Qumran texts (and Thiessen (2012) adds Jubilees), but these, in my opinion, are only conjectures. Laporte (1997), 439, writes that "for Philo, the chief reason for circumcision is the removal of impurity of birth," citing QG 3.48. However Philo only says there that one reason for circumcision (not the chief reason) is that entrance to the temple requires purity, and circumcision is similar to the Egyptians' shaving their hair before entering temples. The defilement according to Philo is clearly that of the foreskin, and not of birth, which is not mentioned. Moreover, Laporte (1995), 193 erroneously claims that for Leviticus, circumcision removes "Levitical impurity." For circumcision and impurity, see Cohen (2005), 18-21; Clark (2005).

²²⁵ *Hom. Lev. 8.4.1*, trans. Barkley (1990), 159.

²²⁶ *Hom. Lev. 8.3; Cels. 7.50*.

ties birth defilement to the sexual act accompanied by lust; accordingly, in this text impurity is most strongly characterised as sin and Jesus is said to be totally pure:

...all of us human beings who have been conceived from the seed of a man coming together with a woman, must of necessity employ that utterance in which David says, ‘in iniquities I have been conceived and in sins did my mother conceive me.’ He, however, who came to an immaculate body with no contact from a man... possessed in no respect whatsoever the contamination of sin, which is passed down to those who are conceived by the operation of lust.²²⁷

The emphasis on sexual lust as the source for this impurity is pronounced also in texts in which Origen comments on passages mentioning “loins (ὄσφύς).” Ezekiel’s heavenly man appeared as fire from his loins and downwards, but as electrum from his loins upwards: “everything which is in generation has need of purification from fire; everything which is in generation has need of punishment. But what is above the hips and has transcended generation, this is like the purest and most precious element in the world.”²²⁸ John the Baptist was celibate – as he had a “leather girdle round his loins” and “did not belong to the impure who, having been cast out of the camp because of the emission of semen, cannot dwell with the ark of the Lord.”²²⁹ Clearly, sexuality and corporeality are for Origen closely connected, even if in some texts one or the other side is emphasised.

Origen twice ties the status of sexuality to Adam and Eve’s sin. In one case, he argues that although humans naturally have sexual facilities, they were not created to be sexual beings but rather to be the temple of God.²³⁰ Proof for this is found in that Adam and Eve had sex only after

²²⁷ 6.12.4. trans. Scheck, II.49. Jesus lacking a body of sin because he was born without sexual intercourse appears in *Fr. Rom.* 45, showing that Rufinus’ translation is not responsible for this idea. Cf. *Cels.* 2.69.

²²⁸ *Hom. Jer.* 11.5. See also *Hom Ez.* 1.3.2; *Sel. Ezech.*, PG 13.768.

²²⁹ *Fr. Eph.* fr. 34, trans. Heine, 263; *Pasch.* 35. For a similar interpretation of the high priest’s girdle and breeches as pertaining to Jesus’ celibacy, see *Hom. Lev.* 9.2.4.

²³⁰ *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 29.

their sin and expulsion from Eden. Since this is a known encratite position,²³¹ he hastens to add that it does not preclude marriage but only indicates that marriage is inferior to “chastity and purity.” In the other, explaining the Pauline expression “body of sin,” he says that “our body is the body of sin, for it is not written that Adam knew his wife Eve and became father of Cain until after the sin.”²³² This position appears to entail that Adam and Eve were created as asexual beings and only later became sexual, though Origen nowhere says this explicitly.²³³ The primeval roots of the impurity of sexuality, although expressed in these two texts quite clearly, are far from central for Origen’s thought; it is rather sexuality as the origin for birth and corporeal existence that is emphasised.

If sexual impurity has its roots in ontology and cosmology, its fruits can be found in ritual. Several times throughout his works Origen reads Paul’s instructions of 1 Cor 7:5 as concerning the incompatibility of sexual intercourse and prayer, and develops a similar conception regarding the Eucharist based upon the Pauline injunctions in 1 Cor 11:28-34 and Old Testament precedents. In his commentary to 1 Cor 7:5, Origen writes unequivocally that prayer by a couple who have had intercourse is impure (μὴ καθαρᾶς), even if intercourse itself is permitted, since “it is impossible to pray as is ought and to provide for the duties of marriage.” For support, he argues that even “the Greeks purify themselves (ἀγνεύουσι) for the sake of their idols... Moses, too, purifies (ἀγνίζει) the people and says, ‘Do not go near a woman for three days,’ so that their purified state might enable them to become hearers of God.”²³⁴ Origen then

²³¹ See above p. 181.

²³² *Comm. Rom.* 5.9.11, trans. Scheck, I.366.

²³³ Gasparro (1984), 198-202, attempts to reconstruct an Origenist three-stage fall into the body and sexuality in the story of Genesis, on the basis of fourth- and fifth-century evidence and second-century precedents.

²³⁴ *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 29. Trans. Kovacs (2005), 108. In *Hom. Ex.* 11.7 Origen links Moses’ injunction not with temporary abstinence but with the ideal of “it is well for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Cor 7:1), which he attributes to Paul himself. For Origen’s exegesis of 1 Cor 7:5, see also *Comm. Matt.* 14.2; Crouzel (1963), 54-7; Clark (1999), 278-80; Hunter (2007), 125-7.

applies the same logic to the Eucharist, this time using the example of the sexual abstinence David required of his men before eating holy bread.²³⁵ In this fragment, Origen applies pagan and biblical evidence without any allegory or apologetic, understanding temporary sexual abstinence as a universal human preparation for sacred activities, whether prayer, fasting, revelation, eating holy bread or even pagan idols. This incompatibility between sex and holiness accords with Origen's opinion that the Holy Spirit cannot be present during sexual activity, even if performed for the sake of lawful procreation by a prophet.²³⁶ Therefore, "the offering of perpetual sacrifice [=prayer or perhaps Eucharist] belongs to that one alone who has pledged himself to perpetual and continual chastity (*qui indesinenti et perpetuae se devoverit castitati*)."²³⁷

In *On Prayer*, impurity is hesitantly extended even to the place where sexual activity occurs, which is seen as unsuitable for prayer.²³⁸ In another passage in the same text, however, the relationship between prayer and sex arising from 1 Cor 7:5 is seen quite differently, reminiscent of Clement of Alexandria: "[prayer] 'as we ought' is hindered unless in performance of the ineffable mysteries of marriage due regard is paid to gravity, infrequency and absence of passion."²³⁹ Here it is not sex itself that is the problem, but the lack of restraint accompanying it; accordingly impurity language is not used. However, this position would appear to be the less

²³⁵ David's pure reception of the Eucharist is mentioned also in *Hom. Ez.* 9.5.

²³⁶ *Hom. Num.* 6.3.7. Marriage, therefore, cannot be a "spiritual gift," since it includes intercourse (*Comm. Rom.*, fr. 3); and since those who have intercourse are in "a certain impurity" and cannot pray, marriage cannot feature in the future age (*Comm. Matt.* 17.35).

²³⁷ *Hom. Num.* 23.3.2. In both these texts, Origen starts by speaking of sin as proscribing connection with the Holy Spirit or prayer, and then suggests that the same is true regarding sexual impurity.

²³⁸ *Or.* 31.4.

²³⁹ *Or.* 2.2, trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 241. Another comment similar to Clement's restrictions on married sex is found in *Hom. Luc.* 6.1: "Even those who are joined in marriage do not consider every season free for intercourse... if the husband and wife are both aged, it is a disgraceful thing for them to yield to lust and turn to mating."

dominant one in Origen's writing.

The Eucharist is equated to the Passover sacrifice, which requires "girding of loins": "Scripture teaches us to bind up the bodily source of seed and to repress inclinations to sexual relations when we partake of the flesh of Christ... the married man who eats the Passover will also gird his loins."²⁴⁰ Sexual purity is required especially of church officials: "the priest who enters the sanctuary and offers the Eucharist after intercourse "despite his impurity (ἀκαθαρσίαν)... profanes (Βεβηλοῖ) the sanctuary and creates confusion (φουρμόν)."²⁴¹

Origen categorically prohibits intercourse during menstruation: "one who has intercourse with a woman in the time of her period is considered highly culpable."²⁴² As opposed to Clement, however, he does not appeal to procreationist ideology but to the prohibition of Ezekiel (18:6). It is instructive that in this issue as well as those of the sexual purity required for prayer and Eucharist, Origen rarely appeals directly to the biblical texts which concern impurity of sexual emissions (Lev 15), or sexual prohibitions (Lev 18), even when these texts would have supported his position. He prefers to turn to the actions of the patriarchs and prophets, to the words of the prophets and to such ambiguous expressions as "girding of loins," perhaps so as not to seem as if he is obligated to laws of Leviticus.

Origen is the only Christian writer from the first three centuries from which we have such a developed ontology of sexual defilement, and is also the author for whom the imagery of defilement most clearly goes beyond rhetoric, creating a nuanced and meaningful complex. For Origen, defilement, and in this case sexual defilement, is a term that connects several dimensions of thought and practice: cosmology, anthropology, ethics and ritual. This may also be the reason that his writings are not always totally in agreement: sexual defilement as a cosmological/anthropological term is not always compatible with its implications for ritual. This diversity in the meaning of defilement is also a result of the different sources Origen is

²⁴⁰ *Pasch.* 35.30-37.2, trans. Daly, 47.

²⁴¹ *Sel. Ezech.* 7.22, PG 13.793. For other purity requirements for the Eucharist according to Origen, see Buchinger (2007), 215, and texts cited there.

²⁴² *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 34; *Sel. Ezech.* 18.6, PG 13.816. For Clement, see above, p. 157.

using: although he clearly makes use of ideas found in anti-marriage authors discussed earlier, he integrates them into a setting in which marriage is allowed. This integration of radical and less radical strands of thought may explain why impurity attained such a central place in his sexual ethic. Purity and defilement are structures of thought which respond to the need to combine an anti-sexual attitude with a reality in which believers are married and will continue marrying for the foreseeable future. The defilement of sexuality can be contained as long as it does not invade into the sphere of the holy – that of prayer, the Eucharist, the church and its officials. This affirmation of the value of ritual purity and defilement must also reflect a growing institutionalization of Christianity, the erection of structures which are seen as containing inside them, whether physically or metaphorically, a sacredness which is not found outside. Rituals are required to maintain the borders of these institutions.

Dionysius of Alexandria

The changing attitudes towards sexual impurity are exemplified in the questions asked of Dionysius of Alexandria, bishop of the city, in the middle of the third century: can women enter the church and participate in the Eucharist while menstruating? And what about a married couple after sexual relations, and men after seminal emissions?²⁴³ This is the earliest Christian text foregrounding these questions, a sign of the institutionalization of worship in this period: the sacralisation of places dedicated to worship and the rise of the Eucharist as a sacred object.²⁴⁴ When a conception of sacredness residing in physical objects and spaces arose, it was soon expressed through attitudes towards sexuality, and ritual purity was invoked.

Regarding menstruation, Dionysius answers as follows:

Concerning women in their menstrual separation (ἐν ἀφῆδρω), whether it is right for them in such a condition to enter the house of God, I think it unnecessary even to inquire. For I think that they, being faithful and pious, would not dare in such a

²⁴³ Dionysius of Alexandria, *Letter to Basilides 2*, ed. Joannou, 12; trans. ANF VI.94-6. Discussions of this text are found in Cohen (1991), 273-99; Brakke (1995), 433-4; Fonrobert (2000), 196-7; Synek (2001).

²⁴⁴ For sacred space in early Christianity see Sotinel (2005); Kilde (2008), 13-38. For the sacralisation of the Eucharist see Caseau (2009), 371-420.

condition either to approach the holy table or to touch the body and blood of Christ. For even the woman who had the twelve-year discharge and was eager for a cure touched not him but only his fringe. It is unobjectionable to pray in any state... but he who is not completely pure (καθαρός) in both soul and body shall be prevented from approaching the holy and the holy of holies.

The impurity of menstruation, and the relevance of this impurity for approaching the Eucharist or the holy table, is self-evident; what is more, Dionysius believes that normative Christian women would also think it to be self-evident. Even if he is overstating his case, the belief in the impurity of menstruation must have been widespread. Body and soul are put on a similar level, and purity of both is required for approaching the holy.

Prayer, as opposed to the Eucharist, is “unobjectionable” even in a state of impurity. This exemption is difficult to reconcile with the Dionysius’ next answer (canon 3), which states that “persons who are self-sufficient and married ought to be judges of themselves” citing 1 Cor 7:5, a verse that clearly does perceive prayer as incompatible to some degree with sexual relations.²⁴⁵ Dionysius probably meant to say that since discretion is given to married couples in the question of prayer and sex, it should also be given them in the case of the Eucharist. The distinction between prayer and Eucharist indicates that Dionysius thought impurity to be more potent as regards physical sacred things than spiritual things, or, perhaps, that prayer was considered less sacred, and therefore less endangered by impurity.

Shaye Cohen remarks that Dionysius’ answer appears to hearken back to Leviticus 15; Charlotte Fonrobert, however, argues that Leviticus is not mentioned and that biblical laws are not closely followed.²⁴⁶ Since menstruation rarely appears as an impurity in Greco-Roman

²⁴⁵ Synek (2001) believes this answer referred to a question about the permissibility of sexual relations during menstruation in general; however, I see no specific reason to think that such a prohibition, which very rarely appears even in later Christian sources, would be meant here. The question of prayer after sexual relations is much better attested, and is of course the subject of the Pauline verse cited. Furthermore, the expression “judges of themselves” is probably a reference to 1 Cor 11:29-30, indicating that Dionysius’ answer refers to self-discernment regarding the Eucharist.

²⁴⁶ Cohen (1991), 288-9; Fonrobert (2000), 296n84.

culture,²⁴⁷ and almost all prior and contemporary occurrences of this usage of the term (ἀφένδρος) are based upon the Septuagint, I find Cohen's position more tenable.

The third question concerns seminal emissions; here too, Dionysius says that "they should be guided by their own conscience" and "decide for themselves, whether they have any doubt about this matter or not, as also in the case of foods, 'he that has any doubt is damned if he eat.'" The juxtaposition of the two Pauline passages (1 Cor 7:5 and Rom 14:23) yields a general rule of thumb regarding purity issues, according to which impurity only influences one who believes in it. This rule, however, appears to apply only to men; the defilement of menstruation was too strong for it to be attenuated by Pauline ambiguity. Alternatively, perhaps Dionysius thought that all women were "delicate" in the terms of Rom 14, and believed menstruation to be impure.

Conclusions

As we have seen throughout this chapter, impurity is one of the main terms associated with sexuality in Early Christianity. We may discern two types of sexual impurity, corresponding to the types of "battle" and "truce."

The "battle" type, which was more dominant in early Christian texts, springs from both Jewish and pagan traditions on the impurity of sexual sin. In the first centuries of Christianity there was a shift in the understanding of this impurity. First, it became strongly associated with the body of the performer of the sexual act, and not only with the action itself. Second, impurity was expanded to sexual contact as a whole, even inside 'legitimate' marriage: this was a major (though rarely explicit) move towards the de-legitimization of sexuality. For both sexual sin and sexuality in general, it is irrelevant to categorise Christian sexual impurity as "moral" or "ritual" according to the internal/external dimension: it is specifically a person's body (or a certain aspect of it, the flesh), which is involved in sexuality and from which this impurity springs, and yet, the heart and mind are clearly implicated in it as well. Therefore the move made by many Christian writers concerning food issues, an isolation of "true" impurity as originating in the interior faculties rather than the exterior of the person, is rarely attempted

²⁴⁷ See Lennon (2010).

here. Rather, sexual impurity is linked to body and soul at once; it is the purity of both which Christian authors claimed characterised Christians as opposed to pagans. While in food issues Jewish purity was the foil to Christian custom, here it is pagan impurity which is opposed to Christian purity, a theme upon which most of the second-century apologists elaborate. The intention behind the sexual act is a significant cause of defilement, but it is only part of the picture: a virgin is “pure” and a non-virgin “corrupted,” whatever the reason. Impurity as an alternative or complementary dimension to that of sin allows writers to go beyond characterising sex simply as permitted or prohibited.

In some texts, sexual impurity is said to arise from a specific, external source to the person, described in different ways: it enters a person through the agency of certain spirits and/or with the aid of his own volition (*Shepherd of Hermas*, *Ps.-Clementine Homilies*), or was created by an evil divinity (Marcion, Cassian, many Nag Hammadi texts). In other texts, this impurity is found within the person, who is described as bifurcated: it is synonymous with the evil body as opposed to the soul (*Acts of John* and *of Andrew* other Nag Hammadi texts), or the flesh as opposed to the spirit (Paul and many other authors). In the many occasions in which the demonic is implicated in sexual impurity, this is not so much (as in food) to explain the presence of impurity in the material world, but rather to emphasise the evil of sex or sexual sin, and to integrate this evil into cosmology and sacred history, according to a model already found in *Jubilees* and the Enoch literature. In any case, sexual impurity is a total and permanent obstacle before the close association with God that humans are called to achieve.

The “truce” type, practiced widely in Judaism and in Greco-Roman religions, was less dominant in early Christian texts, but nevertheless appears throughout our period in several authors. For these authors, sexual impurity is a result of living in a corporeal world in which procreation is essential, which should however be separated from sources of holiness. Clement of Alexandria and especially Jewish-Christian texts curtail sexual contact and prohibit sex with a menstruating woman. While it is reasonable to assume that in the *Ps.-Clementines* and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* this prohibition has a Jewish background, it would appear that a more general Greco-Roman attitude plays a role here as well. The idea that sexual impurity is legitimate yet incompatible with the sacred is found also in Origen and his student Dionysius; however, here it is already infused with the perception of sexuality as evil, adopted from the

battle model of the radical second-century authors. For Origen, sexuality is a necessary evil in the present world, and this contradiction can be put to rest, even if not solved, by calling it impure. Both Origen and the *Ps.-Clementines* believed sexual relations to be defiling and requiring purification, and both appealed to pagan parallels; but their reasoning is different. For Origen, sexual relations are defiling and incompatible with holiness because they are evil, representing all that is base, bodily and sinful; for the *Ps.-Clementines*, sexual relations are a normal part of life, and purification is part of a cultured human life.

Chapter V

Purity ritualised: baptism as purification in Early Christian texts

Introduction

In Christianity, baptism is a series of actions centring upon being washed in water in the name of Jesus, serving for initiation into the Christian community. Only through the transformation of baptism could a person join the community and take part in its most sacred rites, especially the eucharist. But what actually happened in baptism? How did washing in water and the acceptance of the Christian God change a non-Christian into a Christian?

Writers from Paul onwards sought to explain the symbolism of this ritual and to understand its significance for the person undergoing it. The change occurring in baptism was conceptualised by writers of the first centuries through many concepts and metaphors: regeneration or rebirth, sanctification, purification, forgiveness of sins, casting in fire and sealing. In this chapter I will focus on the pervasive conceptualization of baptism as a purification of the person, and on what this conceptualization entails for the Christian understandings of sin and defilement. While I do not claim that purification was always the most important interpretation of baptism, it was a highly prevalent image among writers of the first centuries, making baptism a prime site for examining purity discourse. It is surprising, therefore, that there are hardly any studies dedicated to the question of baptism as purification after the NT.¹

While in the NT the purificatory aspect of baptism is seldom mentioned, in the much more systematic and extensive writings of the following two centuries it has a central role. This can be seen both in the terms and figures writers use to describe baptismal change and in the ideas expressed through such language.

Baptism was pervasively described in the second and third centuries by terms and idioms

¹ The only study known to me dedicated specifically to this subject is Frăţilă (2001). Its focus, however, is on texts postdating the fourth century.

Chapter V: Baptism and purification

expressing purification or washing of dirt and defilement. “Washing” (λουτρὸν) is a common name for baptism among Christian writers, drawing on 1 Cor 6:11 and Acts 22:16; writers frequently suggest that baptism washes a person clean of sin.² Words of the roots καθάρ- and ἄγν- are frequently associated with baptism, at times accompanying the description of baptism as a washing.³ Writers also use more developed images for purification through baptism, such as the removal of blindness, whitening of clothes or person, and the shedding of dirty garments.⁴ Many illustrations of baptism make use of passages in the Hebrew Bible speaking of purification of lepers⁵ or of purification as part of the temple cult.⁶ Others cite prophetic passages speaking of purification from sin⁷ or expand on stories interpreted as images of purification, such as the crossing of the Red Sea or Noah’s ark.⁸

² Justin, *Dial.* 14; Clement, *Paed.* 1.6; Origen, *Hom. Ex.* 5.5, *Comm. Rom.*, 5.9.11; Tertullian, *Bapt.* 4; *Ps.-Clementine Rec.* 4.32, 6.8; Cyprian, *Ep.* 70 (69).1.3; 69 (70); 74 (73).5.4; *Hab. virg.* 23; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 7.5.5. See Ysebaert (1962), 64-78.

³ Justin, *Dial.* 14, 86; Irenaeus, *Epid.* 41; Clement, *Ecl.* 7; Origen, *Hom. Ex.* 11.7, *Comm. Jo.* 6.33 [17].166-167, *Hom. Lev.* 6.2. For other references see Lampe (1961), 21, 682, 685-6 (s.v. ἀγνίζω 1; ἀγνισμός 1; καθαιρῶ B3; καθάρσιος C; κάθαρσις A1).

⁴ Removing blindness: Clement, *Paed.* 1.6; whitening: Origen, *Hom. Jer.* 11.6.3; Removal of dirty clothes: Clement, *Paed.* 1.6.32; Origen, *Hom. Ex.* 11.7; *Ps.-Clementine Rec.* 1.69. The symbolism of nudity and clothing in baptism and their connection to purification have been studied extensively. See Daniélou (1956), 51-3; Smith (1966), 217-38; Filoramo (1999); Layton (1978), 155-69.

⁵ Leprosy: Irenaeus, frg. 34; Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 33.5. For leprosy in later patristic exegesis, see Swanson (2004), 234-70.

⁶ Clement, *Strom.* 3.12.82.6; Cyprian, *Ep.* 69.12.

⁷ Favorites are Is 1:16 (Justin, *1 Apol.* 61), Ezek 36:25 (Cyprian, *Ep.* 69, 70) and Ps 51:7 (Origen, *Catena Fragments of Commentary on John*, 36). Later writers string these and others in catenae, e.g., Didymus of Alexandria, *Trin. PG* 39:712-714; Theodoret, *Affect.* 7:30.

⁸ Noah’s ark: 1 Pet 3; Tertullian, *Bapt.* 8; Cyprian, *Ep.* 69.12. Red sea: Tertullian, *Bapt.* 9; Origen, *Hom. Ex.* 5.5; *Hom. Jos.* 5.9; *Hom. Cant.* 2.6. For both images, see Daniélou (1960).

The importance of the purificatory dimension of baptism in second and third century writings goes beyond the lexical level, and is supported also by the description of baptism's function and meaning. First, baptism's central component is dipping or sprinkling in water. Washing is perhaps the most pervasive image of purification, as it clearly enunciates the idea of the shedding of negative aspects in order to uncover the basic, unadulterated core of the object or person. Furthermore, as early Christians also knew, washing in water was the central purification ritual in Judaism and in Greco-Roman religions. The purificatory character of washing in water in Judaism was clearly in the background of John's baptism, described by the Gospels as a precursor for Jesus' baptism, and, presumably, for later Christian baptism. Second, baptism was thought to remove negative elements from the person: it absolved past sins, an action frequently (though not always) conceptualised as purification, and sources from the second century speak of baptism expelling impure demons, the fire of lust, corporeality or evil in general. Third, baptism was the prerequisite for participation in the eucharist offering, which was commonly seen as a sacrifice; a eucharist was typically offered immediately after baptism. Purification preceded sacrifice in most ancient religions (indeed this was the typical setting for purification), and therefore understanding baptism as a kind of purification would be highly suitable for the religious context of early Christianity. Other sources speak of baptism as a preparation of the person for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and also here purification is an apt image.

The first, introductory section of the chapter is an exposition of baptismal practice and symbolism as expressed in the NT documents. After this we shall investigate what baptismal purification meant for second- and third-century writers, and the purity discourse implicated in the theology, anthropology and phenomenology of baptism in these writings. The discussion will be divided into three main groups of writers: 1) a number of major second-century writers; 2) Origen; 3) Jewish-Christian writings. For all of these writers, baptismal purity discourse is essentially a question of how sin can be removed through ritual. This questions clusters around two issues: the relationship with Jewish purity conceptions and the relationship between inner and outer purification, i.e., the anthropological model behind the ritual.

1. *Baptism and Purification in the New Testament*

The Pauline Epistles

The Pauline epistles are the earliest texts in which immersion is linked with the name of Jesus and with entrance to the Christian communities. They are therefore the earliest witnesses to the transformation of what was primarily a ritual of purification (whether for sin or for bodily defilement) into a ritual of initiation as well. In the words of Wayne A. Meeks: “by making the cleansing rite alone bear the whole function of initiation... the Christian groups created something new. For them the bath becomes a permanent threshold between the “clean” group and the “dirty” world, between those who have been initiated and everyone who has not.”⁹

In this basic transformation, an action which was used in both Jewish and pagan ritual systems as a preparatory ritual **before** entrance into a holy space or group became in Paul the main ritual **of** entrance into the group: a ritual of sanctification as well as a ritual of purification. Furthermore, as Meeks notes, this sanctification is permanent, a total change of personal status which cannot be reversed. Baptismal purity is not a personal matter with short-term consequences, but a public, permanent transformation, aligning the baptisand with spiritual fault-lines of cosmic proportions. From being allied with the evil demons and idol-worshippers, under the power of Sin, he or she is now in the camp of the angels of god and of the saints; from the defilements of the day-to-day world to that of the primal purity of Adam in paradise and the purity of the soon-to-arrive eschaton.¹⁰

As a result, while in the Hebrew bible purity was distinct from sacrality, for Paul the pure is almost synonymous with the sacred and the profane or common with the defiled, creating a much simpler dualist system. Moreover, the place of sin in the community had changed. Rather than regularly encompassing both sinners and non-sinners, pure and impure, the community includes only the pure and the sacred. The only possible morally correct act of a person outside this community is to enter it, and thus to shed all his or her sins, these being a direct result and

⁹ Meeks (2003), 155. See further Stroumsa (1999a), 172-3; Betz (2004), 84-118; for a discussion of the relationship between purification and initiation, see Petersen (2010).

¹⁰ See Newton (1985), 79-97; Carter (2002), 63-77, 175-80; Filoramo (1999), 406.

reflection of the former life “outside.” Though defilement can at times enter the community this is the exception not the rule.

Paul did not speak of the ritual of baptism itself, and appeared to take it for granted. His discussions were dedicated mostly to developing the initiatory symbolism of baptism: baptism as conveyer of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13), as “baptism into Christ” (Gal. 3:27), as the formation of one body (1 Cor 12:13), and as burial with Christ and baptism into his death (Rom 6:3-4; Coloss. 2:12). Purification – whether of body or of sins – is never explicitly mentioned by Paul in connection to baptism, and terms of purity are not used to describe the ritual. While other writers of the first and second centuries emphasise that initiation into the pure and sacred group is possible only with or following purification from sins incurred in the past, this is not the focus of the Pauline discussions. Thus, in Rom 6:3-4, Paul speaks of death of the sinful body and freedom from sin in baptism, without mentioning purification. In 1 Cor. 6:9-11, it is said that members of the community used to be sinners in the past, but they were “washed (or: washed clean, ἀπελούσασθε), sanctified (ἡγιάσθητε)... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”¹¹ If indeed this is intended as a reference to baptism,¹² clear terms of purification appear to be neglected (though this depends on how ἀπελούσασθε is understood), and the focus is rather on sanctification.¹³

Some passages in the pseudo- and deutero-Pauline epistles contain additional hints to baptismal purification and to the connection between purification and sanctification. Eph. 5:25-7 (also discussed above p. 150), represents Jesus as making the church “holy (ἁγίαση)” and “purifying her with the washing of water by the word (καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι).” Here, too, the reference to baptism is unclear; even assuming that actual ritual

¹¹ For baptism/immersion in God for purification, compare *m. Yoma* 8.9.

¹² Ferguson (2009), 150, believes it is; Fee (1987), 246-8 is less certain.

¹³ But see Bultmann (1952), 135-7; Schnackenburg (1964), 3-9; Hartman (1997), 63-6. Newton (1985), 82, argues that Paul is here “clearly speaking... of a cleansing of past transgressions”, and Petersen (2010), 3, sees “washed clean” (as, e.g., in the New Jerusalem Bible) as a more apt translation: “the ritual is said to have cleansed the participants from the state of being that existed prior to the ritual”.

baptism is being referred to, it is not the focus of the verse, but is rather being used as a image for a purification of the church as a whole. Nevertheless, the author appears to assume that a ritual of purifying washing with water is well-known to the readers. Sanctification and purification from metaphorical blemishes are essentially combined: they appear to be two aspects of the same process or act, and both a result of baptism. Another passage mentioning washing, but not purification, is Titus 3:5-6: “he saved us... according to his mercy, through the washing of rebirth and renewal (λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως) by the Holy Spirit which he poured out upon us.”

The Gospels and Acts

The references in the Gospels to baptism are to John’s baptism, to the baptism of Jesus himself by John (Mark 1:9-11; Matt 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-33), or to Jesus’ commandment to the apostles to baptise others (Matt 28:18-20).

Josephus described John’s baptism as “a purification of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behaviour.”¹⁴ The Gospels’ description is rather different: it has significant eschatological overtones, and focuses on baptism as purification from sin, rather than of the body. John’s call was for “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν),” and the people “confessing (ἐξομολογούμενοι) their sins, were baptised by him in the Jordan River” (Mark 1:4-5, Matt 3:6, Luke 3:3). According to this description, immersion itself was not primarily for ascetic purity (in spite of John’s ascetic behaviour), neither for bodily purity of the kind described by the Torah, but rather for the forgiveness of sin. Furthermore, there is no hint as to the function of the physical washing in water, which is only highlighted in comparison to the more effective baptism “by fire and the Holy Spirit,” to be performed by Jesus.

Jesus’ baptism by John is not described as a baptism for purification, but rather as the site for the descending of the Holy Spirit upon him. However, since John’s baptisms were for the forgiveness of sins, it is implied that Jesus’ baptism by John, as well as Jesus’ future baptisms in

¹⁴ See above p. 63.

the Holy Spirit, are also linked to this function.¹⁵ The baptisms to be performed by Jesus will be acts of judgement and purgation (Matt 3:11). Jesus himself links the fire he came to cast upon the earth and the baptism he must undergo (Luke 12:49-50). Instead of the believers being purified from sins, in the eschaton the world itself will be purified by the destruction of the sinners.

In the book of Acts, baptism appears frequently as an act of conversion, with the focus on the baptisands receiving the Holy Spirit and of baptism as an action of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Forgiveness of sin and repentance both appear explicitly: “and Peter said to them: Repent (μετανοήσατε), and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38).” This passage does not, however, use terms of purification, or explain how baptism, repentance, or both bring about the forgiveness of sins.¹⁷ Peter’s exhortation echoes that of John, but adds to it the name of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere (22:16), baptism in Jesus’ name is said to wash away sins (ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας). Forgiveness of sins is more central in Acts than in Paul’s writings, but the gift of the Holy Spirit still receives more attention. Paul (in Acts and in the Epistles), did not mention the need for repentance as part of baptism, while for Peter it appears to be an essential prerequisite. On numerous occasions, belief in Jesus and repentance are demanded from the audience, usually before baptism.¹⁸

Hebrews and 1 Peter

Relative to the Pauline Epistles, the Gospels and Acts, Hebrews and 1 Peter put a much greater

¹⁵ For a discussion of the place of repentance in Jesus’ baptism, see Evans (2002), 61-5.

¹⁶ Ferguson (2009), 166-85.

¹⁷ The verb ἀφίημι with the noun ἁμαρτία are commonly used in the New Testament to denote forgiveness of sins, Mark 1:4, 2:5; Matt 26:28; Luke 1:77, 3:3, 11:4, 24:47, Acts 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18; Col 1:14; the terms appear in the LXX in this way too, though much less commonly. The image behind the usage is a financial one of the forgiveness of [the debt of] sins; as a creditor can forfeit his right to the debt, God can do the same. See Anderson (2009).

¹⁸ Acts 8.12; 10.43; 14.23; 16.31.

emphasis on baptismal purification. Chapters 8-10 of the Epistle to the Hebrews construct an elaborate typology based on the Jerusalem temple cult, portraying Jesus as the true and perfect atoning High Priest and sacrifice. The conclusions drawn from this typology include what may be a description of baptism: “since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς καὶ λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ)” (10:21-22).¹⁹ The believers are called to enter the temple of which Jesus is high priest, but to do that they must first purify themselves, through a “sprinkling” (probably an allusion to Jesus’ blood – see Heb 9:19-22; 12:24) of the heart as well as washing in water for the body.²⁰ These actions are probably a typology of the consecration of priests as described in Exod 29 and Lev 8, where they are sprinkled with blood and washed in water, thus representing baptism as a consecration of the believers. The passage in Hebrews does not clarify the relation between the washing of the body and the sprinkling of the heart: does the pure water also affect the heart? What exactly is washed from the body?

1 Peter, on the other hand, sharply differentiates inner and outer purification in baptism: “Baptism... saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the flesh (σαρκὸς ἀπόθεις ρύπου) but as an appeal (ἐπερώτημα) to God for a good conscience (συνειδήσεως), through the resurrection of

¹⁹ See Hartman (1997), 123-6; Leithart (2000); Ferguson (2009), 188; Byrskog (2011).

²⁰ The idea that sacrifices are responsible for inner purification while water purifies the body, and that both are required, is explicitly stated by Philo; see above p. 61. A comparison with Ez 36:25-6, which is clearly in the background here is enlightening: “I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be pure from all your defilements, and from all your idols I will purify you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you.” For Ezekiel the eschaton will be marked by purification from sin and inner renewal; though the renewal is directed at the interior heart, (metaphorical) water purification pertain to the person as a whole, not only the body. Cf. Jas 4:7-8: “Draw near to God... cleanse (καθαρίσατε) your hands, you sinners, and purify (ἀγνίστατε) your hearts, you double-minded (δίψυχοι);” here sin is situated in the hands as well as the heart and mind.

Jesus Christ.” (3:21).²¹ The real efficacy of baptism according to 1 Peter is moral (perhaps a request that past sins would be annulled, though the wording here is ambiguous); clearly, baptism was seen as similar enough to physical purification to require a distinction between them. Both in Hebrews and in 1 Peter, *συνείδησις* (in Hebrews together with the heart) is identified as the internal faculty which is purified, opposed more or less sharply to the external body washed in baptism. This reminds us of the Pauline usage of *συνείδησις* to denote the faculty which may be defiled by food offered to idols (1 Cor 8:7, above p. 78ff).

Summary

Most of the texts included in the NT rarely use explicit terms of purification when relating to baptism. Baptism was seen primarily as a ritual in which the person was transformed and became part of the Christian community. However, one of the conceptualizations for this transformation was the removal of sins and the taint of the participation in non-Christian communities and cults from the baptisand.

The role of the physical act of washing in water and its relationship with the purification from sin remains ambiguous, though some passages remind the reader of the non-importance of external relative to internal purification. If the demarcating line between bodily purity and purity from sin is blurred in the late Second Temple Period texts, in the NT texts on baptism it is non-existent: the ritual action of washing in water purifies sins, even though more volitional dimensions, such as repentance and invoking God’s name, are required as well.

²¹ RSV translation; many translate differently: “as a pledge of a good conscience towards God.” The latter translation is less conducive to an interpretation of baptism as purification. However the translation of *ἐπερώτημα* as “appeal” appears to be philologically simpler, and is appropriate in the context. Commentators who defend this translation and therefore connect the verse with purification from sin include Schreiner (2003), 196; Grudem (1988), 163; Senior and Harrington (2003), 105.

2. *Baptismal purity discourse in the second and early third century*

Jewish purifications, Christian baptism

The Didache

The *Didache* speaks of baptism as follows (7):²²

But with respect to baptism, baptise as follows. Having said all these things in advance, baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running water (ὕδατι ζῶντι). But if you do not have running water, baptise in some other water. And if you cannot baptise in cold water, use warm. But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But both the one baptising and the one being baptised should fast before the baptism, along with some others if they can. But command the one being baptised to fast one or two days in advance.

The *Didache* says little on theory and focuses on baptismal practice, which can be summed up in three points: 1. Baptism should be performed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; 2. It should be preceded by study of the “Two Ways” text which comes before this passage (*Did.* 1-6), as well as by a fast of the baptiser, the baptisand and the community; 3. The water used should follow precise (but flexible) provisions.

Point no. 2 demonstrates that suitable preparations were required. The objective of fasting is not clarified. It could be seen as an act of personal penance and purification, but the call for a fast of the community as well does not accord with this interpretation.²³ There are a number of alternatives: the fast marks the gravity with which the ritual should be approached; it reflects the first step of the incorporation of the baptisand into the community, all now participating in the same ritual, or perhaps it creates a break between the food eaten before and after the conversion.²⁴ The requirement to study the “Two Ways” document is more informative; baptism does not only require general faith in Christ, but also assent to a defined

²² For the *Didache*, see above p. 16.

²³ Contra Mitchell (1995), 251.

²⁴ Draper (2000), 135-6; Milavec (2003a), 253-8.

corpus of ideas. We learn that baptism was intimately connected to an understanding of the distinction of the “way of life” as opposed to the “way of death,” and to the conscious decision of the baptisand to recognise the validity of this knowledge and to choose the way of life.²⁵ Baptism is thus a ritual aspect of a strictly binary system which divides the world into good and evil.

Point no. 3 concerns the water itself. Living water is mentioned in the Torah and the Mishna as an element in certain purification rituals; the classification of various kinds of waters for purification – living water being the best, standing water less so and aspersion as the lowest grade – is found in the Mishna, and the *Didache* is clearly influenced by this tradition.²⁶ However, the role of living water here is to be connected also to its symbolism of regeneration and fertility, expressed for example in Zechariah 14, as well as true wisdom and the Holy Spirit, found in many closely contemporary texts.²⁷ Beyond their interest for the relationship with Jewish ritual, the water requirements demonstrate the significance of ritual detail for the *Didache*'s author. At the same time, they show that the community was willing to compromise, leading several scholars to see here greater leniency concerning ritual matters as compared to Rabbinic Judaism.²⁸ However, in Jewish sources, living water was not typically required for purification. The usual method of purification according to Rabbinic and Qumranic sources, as well as according to the archaeological record, was by immersion in a *mikveh*, which was usually filled with water from a natural source; at least according to the Mishna, the water in the

²⁵ See Mitchell (1995), 250. Rordorf (1996a) demonstrates that while the Two Ways document was originally an independent text, it was already joined by an early-second century editor to the ritual manual on baptism as a catechesis. Idem (1996b), traces the connections between the Two Ways motif and baptism in early Christian literature, concluding that Two Ways texts were commonly used as pre-baptismal catecheses.

²⁶ Lev 14:5-51; Num 19:17; *m. Miqw.* 1.

²⁷ John 4:10, 7:37; Rev 22:1; *Sib. Or.* 4.165; *Odes Sol.* 11.6; Ignatius, *Rom.* 7.3; Jones (2007); Draper (2000), 143-4; Daniélou (1958): 335-46; Fishbane (1992), 3-16.

²⁸ Mitchell (1995), 252; Niederwimmer (1998), 127-9; van de Sandt (2002), 240-1.

mikveh would not have been termed “living water” (though other Jewish groups unknown to us may have called it so).²⁹ The use of living water as a default option may therefore reflect a more stringent position than that known from other Jewish sources, even if the other possibilities allowed (warm water and aspersion) reflect a lenient position. Thus it cannot be said categorically that the *Didache* is more lenient than contemporary Rabbinic halakha; rather, it shows a strong preference for living water combined with a more flexible stance towards ritual details than the Mishna. Running water continued to be the preferred option for baptisteries in the first three centuries.³⁰ The importance of running water, although rooted in Jewish sources, characterises the baptismal ritual of various second- and third-century Christian groups more than the purification rituals of contemporary Jewish communities. The Christians of the *Didache* therefore may have required a higher standard of water than that commonly used by Jews for

²⁹ There appears to be a general misunderstanding of the meaning of “living water” in Rabbinic and Qumranic sources. The term is never used for the water with which a *mikveh* must be filled for purification of menstruants, for the purification of various levels of death defilement, or for proselyte immersion, contrary to the opinion of Lawrence (2006), 84-5, 165-7, Mitchell (1995), 252-3, Jensen (2011), 133 and others. The term is used only for spring water, and required only for three extraordinary cases: purification of the defilement of abnormal genital discharges (*zav*), as part of the leper’s purification ritual, and for the preparation of the solution used for purification from death defilement (only in the first case was *immersion* in living water required). Mikvaot indeed require water from a natural source, but this is not called “living water” in any of the sources, and it does not have to be running water; it may be pooled rainwater. See *Sifra* Metzora, Parshat Zabim 3-5; *m Miqw.* 1.8; *t. Zabim* 3.1-3; *t. Parah* 9; 11Q19 45.16. The situation is different in Greek Jewish sources: *Jos. Asen.* 14.15, which mentions Aseneth washing hands and face in “living water” in order that Joseph accept her as a wife, and Philo, *Mos.* 2.143, who relates that Moses consecrated the priests by washing them with “the purest and most living spring water.” The latter source, at least, is certainly a case of consecration and not only purification; furthermore, it also attests to the use of the term “living water” for spring water, and not for running water in general. Later usage may have also adopted this meaning, see *y. Ber.* 3.4 (27a).

³⁰ Jensen (2011), 132-4.

their rituals, perhaps reflecting their belief that they were achieving a higher degree of purification through baptism than that achieved by Jews through their rituals, as well as better expressing the symbolism of baptism as a new birth and as a reception of heavenly knowledge.³¹

The only theoretical development of the role of baptism in the *Didache* follows a description of the eucharist offering: “But let no one eat or drink of your eucharist, unless they have been baptised into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, ‘Give not that which is holy to the dogs.’” As Huub van de Sandt has demonstrated, the saying equates the eucharist to the Jerusalem temple sacrifices, which could only be eaten by pure Jews; the eating of temple sacrifices by dogs was considered a grave profanation in Qumran and in early Rabbinic sources, and here the dogs are a metaphor for the unbaptised. The *Didache*’s understanding here of what occurs in baptism again reflects a strictly binary worldview, in which ideas of change of status and purification merge. Baptism transforms the person from a defiled “dog” to someone pure and holy, fit for eating the holy sacrifice. Baptism is thus both conversion and purification.

While no direct answers are provided to the questions we are interested in – what is being purified in baptism, and how does this occur – it is clear from the preparations required that some moral transformation is expected. Furthermore, the *Didache* is a testimony to the way Jewish ritual terminology was used, probably in a Jewish-Christian milieu, to describe and define baptism. The choice of images (“living water”, “dogs”) expanded the symbolic valence of the new ritual beyond purification to evoke a binary worldview of good and evil, while retaining a strong link to the Jewish roots of purification rituals.

³¹ See sources in note 27 above, and *T. Levi* 8 [in lines extant in the Greek but not in the Aramaic fragments from Qumran, and therefore possibly a Christian interpolation]; *Barn.* 11; Justin, *Dial.* 14, 69, 114; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.17.2; Clement, *Strom.* 7.104.5; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 13; idem, *Fr. Luc.* 84; *Trad. ap.* 21; Oxy. P. 840, ll. 44-5. “Living water” or “running water” in connection to baptism is common in Jewish-Christian sources: *Ps.-Clementine Hom.* 11.26; *Epistle of Peter to James* 1; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 2.30.4, 30.17.4 (concerning the Ebionites) as well as in Gnostic sources: Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.27; *Ap. John* 5; *Gos. Phil.* 86; *Apoc. Adam* 84; *Acts Thom.* 52, and is central in Mandaic religion. See Daniélou (1958), 335–46.

Chapter V: Baptism and purification

Epistle of Barnabas

The difference between Jewish and Christian rituals, according to *Barnabas*, is that only the latter grant forgiveness of sins: “it is written about the water that Israel will not at all accept the baptism that brings forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν), but will create something in its place (οἰκοδομήσουσιν) for themselves (11.1).” The object of “create” is not clear; textually, it links to the “cisterns of death” opposed to the “waters of life,” both mentioned later in the passage. Barnabas may be opposing here between baptism as the true purifying ritual and the rituals of the Jerusalem temple; his impetus for this may be contemporary hopes among the Jewish community for the restoration of the temple.³² Jewish rituals are marked as a human creation as opposed to the divine source of baptism.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr is the first Christian writer who relates extensively to baptism, and we shall discuss him more fully below (p. 230); here we shall just comment on his comparison of Jewish ritual and Christian baptism in the *Dialogue with Trypho*. Developing the same proof-texts as *Barnabas*, Justin too opposes between the spiritual and moral purification afforded by baptism and the physical purification of Jewish rituals:

...We have believed through the baptism of repentance (μετανοίας) and knowledge (γνώσεως) of God, which was instituted for the sins of the people of God, as Isaiah testifies, and we know that that same baptism which he announced, and which alone can purify (καθαρίσαι) penitents, is the water of life. The wells which you have dug for yourselves are broken and useless. For, of what value is that baptism which cleanses only the flesh and body (τὴν σάρκα καὶ μόνον ὃ σῶμα φαιδρύνει)? Baptise your souls from anger, avarice, jealousy, and hatred; then the body will be pure (καθαρόν).³³

Justin’s first step is to call Jewish washing rituals “baptism,” allowing a comparison with

³² See citation of 16.7, below p. 230 with Ferguson (2002); Paget (1994), 154-7; Shukster and Richardson (1986), 25-6; for a differing opinion, see Schwartz (1992).

³³ *Dial.* 14; cf. *1 Apol.* 62.

Christian baptism. Jewish washings, performed in wells of standing water, purify only the body and are therefore of no value, while Christian baptism is a purification of the soul from various vices in the “water of life,” which then leads automatically to a purification of the body as well.³⁴ Ambiguity is retained on how the vices and sins are removed – does this happen through repentance or does immersion in the name of God remove them? And if through repentance, why is immersion needed at all? In light of the anti-ritual stance Justin is promoting against Jewish religion, downplaying the washing of the body in baptism is a convenient move.

Probably as a response to claims that the baptism is no different from pagan purification rituals, Justin explains in his *First Apology* that the demons (i.e., the pagan gods), hearing Isaiah’s prophecies on washing in water and repentance, caused their followers to sprinkle themselves with water before sacrifice and to immerse before entering temples.³⁵ This was of course, for Justin, an erroneous and even malicious understanding of the prophecies, which truly related to Christian baptism. Though Justin does not stress the point of physical vs. spiritual washing here, it is clearly implied.

Clement of Alexandria

Clement sees Jewish washings for purity after sexual relations as an image of baptism, and as superseded by baptism:

But the providence of God as revealed by the Lord does not order now, as it did in the past, that after sexual intercourse a man be baptised (βαπτίζεσθαι). For there is no need for the Lord to make believers do this after intercourse since we trust that by one baptism he has washed them clean (ἀπολούσας) for every such occasion, as also he has included (περιλαβών) in one baptism the many of Moses. In the past the law commanded baptism after the emission of the generative seed because it was foretelling our regeneration by speaking of fleshly birth, not because it held human

³⁴ See Hirshman (1996), 55-9; and see the similar fragment of Epicharmus (5th cent. BC, fr. 269): “if you have a pure mind, you’re pure in all your body.”

³⁵ Graf (2011), 102-5.

birth as an abomination (βδελυσσόμενος).³⁶

The permanent purification of baptism supersedes washings for purity after intercourse. Washings for purity were prescribed as a prophecy that regeneration would require washing, and not due to bodily defilement. Nevertheless, Clement does not say that they should not have been practiced in the past, and indeed baptism “washes clean... for every such encounter,” indicating that it has a role in purification of the defilement of intercourse, which otherwise must be dispensed with through “many washings.”³⁷ As opposed to Justin, Clement does not denigrate Jewish washing rituals, or describe them as solely physical. This relatively conciliatory attitude to Jewish washing rituals is reminiscent of Clement’s understanding of the Jewish dietary laws (above p. 113) as part of an ascetic project.

Summary

The link of baptism with Jewish purification rituals is made clear in the *Didache*, many of the ritual details of which are strongly paralleled by Jewish sources. For a number of central second-century writers, this similarity caused led to the need to differentiation between the two. Barnabas and Justin, engaged in polemic with Judaism, situate the difference in the distinction between physical and external on the one hand and spiritual and internal on the other, continuing the purity discourse seen in food issues. Clement approaches the issue in a more complex manner: purification rituals are rejected, but they are seen to prefigure baptism, and one of the functions of baptism is to make purification after sex superfluous. Clement emphasised that baptism is unique while the water purifications are multiple, demonstrating their relative weakness.

Baptismal theory in the second and early third century

Early second century texts

Though none of the three early second century texts discussed in this section provide a

³⁶ *Strom.* 3.12.82.6-83.1.

³⁷ For further discussion of Clement’s views on purification from sexual intercourse, see above p. 155-159.

comprehensive view of baptismal purification, or indeed of baptism theory in general, each uses purity language to describe baptismal forgiveness of sins. It is intimated that the removal of sins in baptism transforms the baptisand, especially his or her interior or moral faculties, and thus allows closer connection with the divine.

A central concern of the *Shepherd of Hermas* is an urgent and broad call to repentance for members of the community who sinned after their baptism. Though *Hermas* rarely related directly to baptism itself, it is a witness to the view that the purification afforded by baptism is the forgiveness of past sins.³⁸ The grave import of post-baptismal sin expressed in his discussion of repentance by the baptised clearly assumes that baptism remits sins totally and uniquely: “the one who has received forgiveness of sins ought never to sin again, but to live in purity (ἐν ἀγνείᾳ).”³⁹ Sins occurring after baptism were seen as a challenge to the purity of the baptisand and to the Christian community: “Guard this flesh of yours pure and undefiled (καθαρὰν καὶ ἀμίαντον)... If you defile your flesh, you also defile the Holy Spirit, and if you defile your flesh, you shall not live.”⁴⁰

The *Epistle of Barnabas* clearly enunciates the idea that baptism is a purification from sins, which occurs while in the water: “We go down into the water full of sins and defilement (γέμοντες ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ ῥύπου), but come up out of it bearing the fruit of reverential fear in our heart and having the hope in Jesus in our spirits” (11.11). Defilement, parallel and here synonymous to sin, is replaced by the results of the repentance. The latter are to be found in

³⁸ *Hermas* is the first to speak of a unique and one-time opportunity for forgiveness of sins after baptism through repentance, known later as *paenitentia secunda*. (See *Mand.* 4.3.3-6; Clement, *Strom.* 2.57-78). There were different opinions in the first two centuries concerning the status of post-baptismal sinners. The more rigorous view is reflected in Heb 10:26-7: “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” Others held that sincere repentance may with difficulty remove sin even after baptism. See Bryant (1998), 49-77; O’Brien (2003), 219-224; Horn (2006).

³⁹ *Hermas*, *Mand.* 4.3.2.

⁴⁰ *Hermas*, *Sim.* 5.7.1-2.

the heart and the spirit, and this was presumably also the site of sins and defilement before baptism. Nevertheless, the internal change occurs while washing in external water. Forgiveness of sins allows the baptisand to replace his former sinful self and become a temple of God: “Before we believed in God, the dwelling place of our heart was corrupt and feeble (φθαρτὸν καὶ ἄσθενές), since it really was a temple built by hand, full of idolatry and a house of demons, because we did everything that was opposed to God... we have become new... because we have received the forgiveness of sins and have hoped in the name” (16.7-9). Again, the heart is the site of transformation, here explicitly opposed to the hands; the defilement which filled the heart is synonymous to everything “opposed to God,” idolatry and demons, all of which are removed by baptism.⁴¹ According to *Barnabas*, baptism serves as an initiation into the community, but its main import is the transformation of the individual which takes place through this ritual.

The *Apology of Aristides* does not mention baptism by name, but refers to a repentance from sins committed by the token Christian “in the former time, when he was blaspheming and reviling the true knowledge of the Christians.”⁴² Through this repentance, which presumably happened at the time of conversion, he “purifies his heart (מַל רָצוֹן) and his sins are forgiven him.” Past ignorance is cited as the reason for forgiveness. As opposed to *Hermas*, the purification of the heart is attributed wholly to the person, with no role for an angel or God to assist the repentant sinner, and also no clear role for baptism. This description fits into the general thrust of the text, which as an *Apology* focuses on the high morality of Christians rather than on their rituals or on God’s special relation to them.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr is the first writer to relate extensively to baptism, describing it as a forgiveness of

⁴¹ Benoit (1953), 39; Kelly (1985), 52. This is the earliest text explicitly connecting baptism to the removal of demons from the heart; however, there is no comprehensive theory of demons in *Barnabas*, and they do not appear to be more than a synonym for sins.

⁴² Aristides, *Apology* 17; ed. Pouderon, 248.

sins, a rebirth, and an illumination, “a baptism of repentance and knowledge of God.”⁴³ We saw earlier that the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin described baptism as a form of purification in order to oppose it to Jewish purifications. However, purity language does not feature in his main description of baptism in the *First Apology*. In both texts, Justin clearly says that baptism is the forgiveness of past sins, and links baptism to Isaiah’s call to “wash yourselves, make yourselves clean.”⁴⁴ However, in the *First Apology* Justin’s main thrust is to highlight the moral content of baptism and the personal change accompanying it and wrought by it, rather than the effect of the ritual as of itself, probably a reflecting his rhetorical concerns in this text. Justin stresses the volitional character of baptism: it is undertaken by those who “are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true,” and is preceded by fasting and prayer for the forgiveness of past sins.⁴⁵ Pre-baptismal repentance is an absolute requirement for forgiveness of sins.⁴⁶ Baptism is synonymous with the attainment of knowledge and understanding, and allows the baptisand to enjoy free choice: As opposed to the “first birth,” a result of physical intercourse, was characterized by “ignorance and by necessity (ἀγνοοῦντες κατ’ ἀνάγκην)”, out of baptism are born “children of choice and of knowledge (προαιρέσεως καὶ ἐπιστήμης)”; baptism is called “illumination (φωτισμός), because they who learn these things are illuminated in their minds (διάνοιαν).”⁴⁷

Justin does not explain how baptism confers this knowledge and understanding: is it a mystical experience, in which knowledge is miraculously attained?⁴⁸ Or is actual study or

⁴³ *1 Apol.* 61; *Dial.* 14.

⁴⁴ *1 Apol.* 61-62; *Dial.* 12-14. Justin completes the quote with “put away the evil of your doings from your souls,” but the original text reads “from before my eyes.” This change demonstrates Justin’s focus on the purification of the person in baptism from past sins, as opposed to the cessation of sinning.

⁴⁵ *1 Apol.* 61.

⁴⁶ Benoit (1953), 158-163; Allert (2002), 244.

⁴⁷ *1 Apol.* 61.

⁴⁸ In *Hermas Mand.* 4.2. Hermas requests his angel to give him understanding (συνέτισόν με), since his heart was hardened by his sins; the angel replies that he “gives understanding to all those who

exhortation involved, presumably before the immersion ritual? In the briefly described preparatory stages, only self-persuasion, repentance, fasts and prayer are mentioned. Most scholars are sure that a period of catechesis existed, in light of other sources of the period which mention it.⁴⁹ Justin may have preferred to retain some ambiguity on this point, allowing the reader to ascribe the “illumination” to the immersion itself. Illumination refers less to substantive knowledge and more to salvational knowledge: free choice as a result of the comprehension of right and wrong, compared to the lack of choice before baptism resulting from ignorance. This kind of knowledge may not require lengthy study, but rather a resolution, which could more easily be seen as god-sent to some degree.⁵⁰

In this account of baptism which gives prime place to conscious choices and moral decisions, describing baptism as a “washing of the soul,” the fact that an actual washing in water took place is underplayed. To the extent that it does have a role, what appears to be important is the pronouncement of the name of God, and not the washing itself, which is not provided with any explanation.⁵¹ Perhaps this is the reason that purification, too, is not Justin preferred image.

Excerpta ex Theodoto

Sources on the Valentinians attest to the existence of a baptismal ritual similar to “orthodox” baptism: it included preparatory stages of fasting and prayer, stripping and clothing, an immersion in water with invocation of the name(s) of God, and completion of the rite by

repent,” but that “repentance is itself a form of understanding.” The next chapter (4.3) discusses repentance in baptism and after baptism.

⁴⁹ Rordorf (1996), 158; Allert (2002), 242-3; Ferguson (2009), 241.

⁵⁰ Korteweg (2011), 158, explains this enlightenment as a release from the demons which dominate the world by deceit through the attainment of knowledge, and the choice to repudiate them. However, Justin never explicitly links baptism to his demonology.

⁵¹ Justin does say that the name of God is pronounced “in water,” but does not explain further. The baptismal water may be a substitute for the “moist seed” of intercourse mentioned in 1 *Apol.* 61, i.e., a symbol of rebirth; cf. Clement *Strom.* 3.12.83.1 cited above p. 228.

participation in the Eucharist. In addition we find in some sources anointing with oil, probably after immersion, and in others exorcism and consecration of the water.⁵²

Baptism is central in a number of texts from the second century attributed to followers of Valentinus or influenced by Valentinian ideas, and also appears in patristic accounts of the Valentinians.⁵³ These sources are the earliest which explicitly confront theoretical issues of how baptism transforms the person as a composite of body and soul. The *Excerpts from Theodotus*, compiled by Clement of Alexandria, are a selection from the writings of an Alexandrian follower of Valentinus from the mid-second century, though some of the text may be from Clement himself.⁵⁴ The text as we have it includes a number of innovative points on the theory of baptism: the agonistic nature of baptism; the preparations required and their demonological explanation; and the anthropological model of the ritual.

First, the idea that baptism saves and protects from evil powers is reiterated several times.⁵⁵ As Jesus “received power to walk upon scorpions and snakes” or upon “the evil powers” through his baptism, his believers also receive these powers (76); the impure spirits (ἀκαθάρτων πνευμάτων), which had until now “obsessed” (ἐνήργουν) the baptisand, now tremble before him (77). Baptism liberates from Fate (εἰμαρμένη) (78), the heavenly powers controlling the world (69); it also liberates from “fire,” (76) probably the fire of hell or cosmic fire responsible for purging the world from evil, which appears to enter the person at times as well.⁵⁶ In baptism the soul is saved “from the world and from the mouth of lions” (84), as well as

⁵² Sagnard (1948), 234-5; Desjardins (1990), 129; Turner (2000), 88-9; Thomassen (2010), 897. These anointings and exorcisms may be linked to those of the *Apostolic Tradition* (see above p. 13 n.27), though the direction of influence between the two is unclear, see Leeper (1990), 6-24.

⁵³ See Thomassen (2006), 333-405; Thomassen (2010), 895-912; Turner (2000); Pagels (1972); Pagels (1997).

⁵⁴ For the relationship of this important and relatively neglected work to Clement’s *Prophetic Eclogues* and to his other works, see Bucur (2009).

⁵⁵ Discussed by Kelly (1985), 57-71.

⁵⁶ The fire of hell is mentioned in 37-8; fire is described in 81 as a cosmic force responsible for

from death and from “the triad of corruption (τῆς ἐν πθορᾷ τριάδος)” (80). For the *Excerpta*, baptism is primarily part of the battle of the Spirit against evil and its various manifestations, while forgiveness of sins is not mentioned. Baptism itself is not described as purification.

Second, the baptisand’s role is to take part in this battle by chasing away any malignant forces which may follow him into the baptismal water, through exorcisms, prayers and fasting, “raising of hands and kneelings.” To the extent that some of these forces are conceived to be inside his body, it is these preparatory actions which are characterised as purifications: “only he who is pure (καθαρός) may go down to the water” (83). This is the earliest source which provides a precise demonological reason for pre-baptismal preparations: immersion is a sacred ritual requiring prior purification. While the preparatory stage removes personal evil spirits through prayer and exorcism, baptism itself works against larger, cosmological forces: fate, “fire”, “evil principalities.” Only when the baptisand is free of lower-level evil influences, can he or she proceed to the main ritual, which subdues the major ones and protects from them. The water used for baptism is also exorcised and consecrated, thus preparing it for the ritual and removing evil spirits from it.

Third, the *Excerpta* is preoccupied with explaining the relationship between the corporeal and incorporeal elements of the ritual and with its effects on the soul and on the body. As opposed to Justin, who circumvented these questions in order to better attack Jewish ritual, this writer sees more of an obligation to try and explain how a corporeal baptismal ritual works, considering that matter is basically evil and baptism is supposed to liberate from its power.⁵⁷

destroying demons and evil forces as well as for destroying “all bodies”, while in the *Ecl. Prop.* 8 and 25 Clement speaks of fire as a force discerning the evil from the good and “cleansing away evil.” See Sagnard (1948), 199; Thomassen (2006), 138. Thus it is not clear why baptism would extinguish this purifying force. Cirillo (1988), 90, explains that it relates to the fire of lust, as in *Ps.-Clementine Hom.* 11.26, *Rec.* 6.9, and then is more similar to the “passions” from which Christ rescued his believers through his Passion (*Exc.* 76). See discussion in Nardi (1984); van Unnik (1970).

⁵⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.21.4, reports that some Valentinians indeed did not perform any physical baptismal ritual, claiming that “the unspeakable and invisible power ought not to be performed by visible and corruptible creatures, nor should that of those [beings] who are inconceivable, and incorporeal, and

The *Excerpta* explicitly underplays the corporeal effect of the ritual: “the power of the transformation (μεταβολῆς) of him who is baptised does not concern the body but the soul” (77). The elements used in ritual do not change their external nature either, only their internal power is transformed: “In their external appearance (τὸ φαινόμενον) they are just as they have been... in the same way water, both that which has been exorcised and that which has become [fitting for] baptism, not only separates what is inferior (χωρίζει τὸ χεῖρον), but also acquires consecration (ἀγιασμὸν προσλαμβάνει)” (82). The preparation of the water through the power of God’s name thus has two functions: a lower-level, external function of separation from evil (i.e., purification, presumably from the evil or impure spirits), and a higher-level, internal one of consecration.

If the corporeal elements do not change, why is a physical rite needed - and how can it be efficacious? The *Excerpta* attempts to answer this conundrum by arguing that baptism works on both a corporeal and incorporeal level, against two components of “fire”:

As far as fire is concerned, there is one part which is corporeal and attacks all bodies, and another which is pure and incorporeal (καθαρὸν καὶ ἀσώματον), and attacks what is incorporeal, such as demons, angels of wickedness and the adversary himself. Thus, the celestial fire has a double nature, being partly intelligible (νοητόν), partly sensible (αἰσθητόν). And baptism is double in a similar way (ἀναλόγως), being partly sensible through the water, which extinguishes the sensible fire, and partly intelligible through the spirit (πνεύματος), which protects from the intelligible fire.⁵⁸

beyond the reach of sense, [be performed] by such as are the objects of sense, and possessed of a body,” and that only gnosis is required for salvation.

⁵⁸ Exc. 81. Translation in Thomassen (2006), 142-3; see also Procter (1995), 45-51. The sentence concerning the corporeal spirit and its relationship with the sensible fire is cryptic; perhaps the corporeal spirit both nurtures and contains the fire, maintaining it at a suitable level. For sensible and intelligible fire, see Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6.4.

The *Pistis Sophia* (115-6), commonly dated to the second half of the third century, develops the role of fire in baptism, building on Luke 12:49-52. According to this text, sins, fixed within the soul by the evil

While the identity of “sensible” and “intelligible” fire is not spelled out, it is clear that their duality, corresponding to the duality of the person, is responsible for the dual nature of baptism.⁵⁹ The thrust of the passage is to legitimise the role of ritual through the understanding that the corporeal and the incorporeal are ultimately linked, and that rituals are required as a response to the corporeality and complexity of the person and of the cosmos. Although “the problem of the physicality of ritual is not ultimately solved,” as Thomassen concludes,⁶⁰ the problem was evidently not as important for the writer and his community as the advantages and power conferred by the ritual, and the opportunities it provided for transforming the soul and liberating it from the body.⁶¹

The *Excerpta* gives a clearly defined place to purification in baptism by relegating it to the preparatory and exorcistic stages of the ritual. The articulation of the ritual into different stages allows for a differentiation of purification from sanctification, and so for a stage in which

“spirit counterpart,” are consumed in baptism by a “wise fire,” so called because it distinguishes good from evil. Entering the body, the fire “pursues all the persecutors” responsible for punishing the sinner, and then separates the person to his good and evil components. The fire remains inside the person to maintain this division, “so that it makes them pure, and purifies them so that they are not defiled with matter.” Baptism is thus an instrument for purification in two ways: by purging a person of his past sins which have become “fixed” inside him or her and by separating out the inherent good components of the person from the bad. Matter and evil remain in the person, but they are distinguished from the soul, presumably preventing future sins and helping the person to attain gnosis. See van Unnik (1970).

⁵⁹ The dualism expressed here concerning demons must be attenuated according to an earlier passage of the *Excerpta* (14), which states that “The demons are said to be incorporeal, not because they have no bodies... but because, in comparison with the spiritual bodies which are saved, they are a shade. And the angels are bodies; at any rate they are seen. Even the soul is a body...” However, it is difficult to know which passages are a citation of Theodotos and which are Clement’s own.

⁶⁰ *Idem*, 143.

⁶¹ For ritual and corporeality in dualist systems, see Buckley (2007/8); Buckley (1980); BeDuhn (2000), 88-125, 209-33.

a person may be pure but not yet sanctified. We may find here the reintegration of a discrete notion of purification into Christian ritual theory and practice, a notion based on demonology. We saw in earlier chapters the value of demonology for Alexandrian writers for constructing impurity ideas, and this text may be a witness for an earlier, similar move, though in a different sphere.

Gospel of Philip

The *Gospel of Philip* is an anthology of aphorisms, extant in Coptic, and found among the Nag Hammadi codices. It is dated to the early third century, perhaps of Syrian provenance, and is considered a Valentinian text.⁶² *Philip* relates to water baptism as one of a number of sacraments essential for bringing salvation and illumination; immersion, together with anointing with oil, together provide rebirth, immortality and perfection.⁶³

In one passage, the *Gospel of Philip* relates to baptism as purification: “Through water and fire the whole place is purified (ΕΥΤΟΥΒΟ) – the visible through the visible, the hidden through the hidden. There are some things which are hidden through what is visible. There is water in water; there is fire in a chrism (57.22-28).” This passage corresponds to the *Excerpta*’s explanation of the dual nature of baptism, adding a reference to the link between ritual practice and spiritual reality: “there are some things which are hidden through what is visible.”⁶⁴ The water is not just physical, visible water, but also hides inside it hidden, spiritual water which cleanses that which is hidden in the person. However, the *Gospel of Philip* uses a term of purification where the *Excerpta* did not.

The *Gospel of Philip* includes two passages which may express a completely different understanding of baptismal purification from either forgiveness of sins or the removal of demons and fire. In these passages, baptism is described as dyeing:

⁶² Schencke (1992), 179-87.

⁶³ On baptism in the *Gospel of Philip*, see Thomassen (2006), 341-50; van Os (2007); DeConick (2001); Uro (2007), 115-37.

⁶⁴ The hidden (spiritual reality) and the visible (physical, external symbol) is a motif in the *Gospel of Philip*: see 19, 33, 58, 121-5.

(61.12-20) God is a dyer. As the good dyes, which are called 'genuine,' dye (only) with the (materials) which were dyed in them, so it is with those whom God has dyed: since his dyes are immortal, they (also) become immortal through his colours. But God baptises [or: dips, dyes, **ῬΑΠΤΙΖΕ**] those whom he baptises in water.

(63.25-30) The Lord went into the dye-works of Levi. He took seventy-two (cloths of different) colours and threw them into the vat. He took them out (again) all white. And he said: "Even so is the Son of Man come as a dyer."

Dyed cloth undergoes an internal transformation through assimilation with the dye – and yet it remains the same cloth; in the same way, the physical water of baptism is the medium for the immortality of god to transform the baptisand.⁶⁵ According to the second passage, baptism homogenises and assimilates, transforming multiplicity into uniformity. Purification indeed has two aspects: on the one hand, differentiation of good and bad and removal of defilements, and on the other hand the creation of a homogenised unity. Thus in this image, a person who was once "mixed," composed of different elements, becomes pure: "all white."⁶⁶ A similar idea is expressed in the *Gospel of Truth*:

As in the case of the ignorance of a person, when he comes to have knowledge, his ignorance vanishes of itself, as the darkness vanishes when the light appears, so also the deficiency vanishes in the perfection... It is within Unity that each one will attain himself; within knowledge, he will purify himself from multiplicity into Unity, consuming matter within himself like fire, and darkness by light, death by life.⁶⁷

This idea of purity may be compared to the singleness of heart which is characterised as pure

⁶⁵ For discussion of these passages, see Charron and Painchaud (2001).

⁶⁶ For the ideal of white as opposed to colored clothes see Clement, *Paed.* 3.53-4; for baptism turning all colors into one see *Hermas, Sim.* 9.5.5, 9.13.5, 9.17.3-4. For "all white" as pure, see also Lev 13:13, Ps 51:9, Is 1:18. This idea may also be connected to the effect of fire in baptism (above nn. 56, 58), since fire turns combustible materials into white ashes. White clothes are associated with death, for "he who is dead has become something simple, unmixed and pure": Plutarch, *RQ* 26. Dyeing can also express defilement, see Seneca *Ep.* 59; Porphyry, *Abst.* 4.20.4-6.

⁶⁷ *Gos. Truth* 24-5.

and opposed to a “double heart,” according to many first and early second century sources.⁶⁸

Clement of Alexandria

Clement’s writings on baptism were heavily influenced by Valentinian theology, as can be seen from a comparison of the passages on baptism in his *Paedagogus*, *Stromateis* and *Eclogae propheticae* with the ideas we have just encountered.⁶⁹ In his writings, Clement emphasises the personal aspects of baptism, understanding it not so much as a ritual of incorporation into the Christian community and more as a moment of many-faceted decisive individual change:

This ceremony is often called ‘free gift (χάρισμα),’ ‘enlightenment (φώτισμα),’ ‘perfection (τέλειον),’ and ‘bath (λουτρόν)’ – ‘bath,’ because through it we are washed clean (ἀπορρυπτόμεθα) of our sins; ‘free gift,’ because by it the punishments due to our sins are remitted (ἀνεῖται); ‘illumination,’ since by it we behold the wonderful holy light of salvation, that is, it enables us to see God clearly; finally, we call it ‘perfection’ as needing nothing further, for what more does he need who possesses the knowledge of God?⁷⁰

In this passage, the purificatory aspect of baptism - forgiveness of sins and their punishments – appears side by side with illumination and knowledge, and no interaction between them is

⁶⁸ Jas 4:7-9; *Psalms of Thomas* 16; *Hermas*, Vis. 2.4, 3.2, Mand. 2, 9; 1 *Clem.* 60.2; 2 *Clem.* 11. Philo, QG 2.49 speaks of spiritual purification as including two stages – separation of evil thoughts and reintegration of the soul and the body. On unity, singleness and purity see further Klijn (1962), 271-8; Murray (1974), 58-79; Lockett (2008), 21-5, 102-4, 141-4; and see above p. 178.

⁶⁹ For Clement’s views on baptism, see Hägg (2010); for purification in Clement in general, see Raasch (1968). Choufrine (2002), 17-80 conducts a thorough comparison of Clement’s baptismal theology with Valentinian sources on illumination and liberation from evil, and demonstrates their close correspondence. Choufrine (2002), 46-50, claims that according to Clement baptism purifies from the passions, basing his claim on an ambiguous reference in *Paed.* 1.6.29. However, even if his interpretation is correct, it is a single oblique occurrence in a very long and developed passage on baptism, which lays much more emphasis on ignorance and sin than on the passions.

⁷⁰ *Paed.* 1.6.26.

indicated.⁷¹ Other passages develop this connection, suggesting that they are in fact two sides of one coin: cleansing sin is likened to the removal of a mist or obstruction from the eyes, which immediately enables vision, or true knowledge.⁷² Sin or ignorance and the illumination of baptism cannot co-exist, as darkness is incompatible with light: “the very act of expelling the inferior reveals the better.”⁷³ Idolatry results from ignorance, and both are dispelled through the gaining of knowledge or illumination, represented by Clement as washing in the water of truth.⁷⁴ The illumination of baptism is not a result of the period of instruction preceding it, but rather occurs immediately, at the time of the ritual itself:

All our sins, in fact, are washed away (ἀπολούμεθα); instantaneously we are no longer bad. This is one gift of illumination, that we no longer are in the same state as before we were washed... knowledge is engendered together with illumination, bathing the mind in light... Catechesis is provided to engender faith, but faith comes at baptism by the teaching of the Holy Spirit (ἅμα βαπτίσματι ἀγίῳ παιδεύεται πνεύματι).⁷⁵

Baptismal repentance is a return to an original, more spiritual state, a process in which the material part of the soul is left behind and the soul is thereby purified:

It will not be improper to adopt the words of those who teach that the remembrance of higher things is a filtration [or: dematerialization, purification: διυλισμὸν] of the spirit, and hold that the process of filtration by spiritual apprehension (νοοῦσιν) is a withdrawal from inferior things by recalling higher things... we also, repenting of our sins, renouncing our iniquities (ἐλαττώμασιν), filtrated by baptism

⁷¹ See also 1.6.32: “new-born children of God, purified (κεκαθαρμένον) of *porneia* and vice.”

⁷² *Paed.* 1.6.27, *Pr. ecl.* 35.1. The image is developed also by the contemporary Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 1.2. See Choufrine (2002), 41-5 for an investigation of this idea in Clement and its comparison with Valentinian sources.

⁷³ *Paed.* 1.6.29.

⁷⁴ *Protr.* 10.99.

⁷⁵ *Paed.* 1.6.30.

(διυλιζόμενοι βαπτίσματι), speed back to the eternal light, children to the Father.⁷⁶

The purification of sin and ignorance by baptism is thus conceived by Clement as a change in the composition of the soul itself. The same idea is developed in *Prophetic Eclogues* 25 through an interpretation of Matt 3:11-12. In baptism, the Holy Spirit is said to enter the person's soul and to discern (διακρίνεται) the material from the spiritual part, as wheat is discerned from chaff, since the spirit a "power of separating material forces." "Wise fire" then destroys the material part and conserves the spiritual, as fire is "strong and capable of cleansing (καθαρτικόν) evil."⁷⁷ However, in Eclogue 7, Clement uses a cognate of διυλισμὸν to designate the purification in baptism not of the material part of the soul, but rather of the impure spirits mixed up in it:

Thus it is not the body only, but the soul, that we purify (καθαίρομεθα). It is accordingly a sign of the sanctifying of our invisible part (σημεῖον γοῦν τοῦ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα ἡμῶν ἀγιάζεσθαι), and of the straining off (διυλίζεσθαι) from the new and spiritual creation of the impure spirits (πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα) that have got mixed up (συμπεπλεγμένα) with the soul.⁷⁸

In Clement of Alexandria we find for the first time significant and clear usage of purity terms in relation to baptism, which is not part of anti-Jewish polemic as in Justin, but a reflection of his anthropology and ritual theory. Before baptism the soul is seen as mixed, its superior elements inseparable from certain inferior elements, whether these be evil spirits or matter; in baptism the spirit is refined and purified of these elements. The purification of baptism is performed

⁷⁶ *Paed.* 1.6.32. Cf. *Pr. Ecl.* 5: "Illumination is an escape from matter (ἕλη), leading us out of disorder (ἀταξία)," with Nardi (1984), 54-64.

⁷⁷ These ideas are very similar to those we saw earlier in Valentinian sources, see van Unnik (1970) and above n. 56. For an interpretation of this passage, see Itter (2009), 129.

⁷⁸ This passage indicates that the unclean spirits become part of the soul (see also *Ecl.* 12) According to *Strom.* 2.20.116, however, Clement denies that the soul harbours independent spirits, as this impinges on free will, which is essential for baptismal forgiveness of sins following repentance (*Strom.* 2.3). The discrepancy between these sources can be minimized through Eclogue 46, which explains that what is usually called "unclean spirits" are actually passions, or "qualities of wickedness." See Choufrine (2002), 52, n.128; Leeper (1990), 16-7; Kelly (1985), 52-6; Nardi (1984), 74-9.

through gnosis, an illumination of knowledge from the Holy Spirit discerning between good and evil elements in the soul of the baptisand. Clement himself says that some of these ideas were adopted from others (*Paed.* 1.6.32), and the similarity with the *Gospel of Philip* is manifest.

The Acts of Thomas

As in most of the apocryphal acts, many of the stories in the *Acts of Thomas* climax with the baptism of the hero or heroine, embodying their final rejection of the pagan world and its sexual life. However, the *Acts of Thomas* is unique in the extensive prayers and speeches surrounding baptism, which provide significant detail on the practice and theory of the ritual.

The *Acts of Thomas* features invocations to the holy spirit to act upon the baptismal elements (oil and water) and on the baptisand. In a pre-baptismal prayer (ch. 25), Thomas asks that God purify Gundaphar and his brother from their uncleanness (ܩܘܕܫܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ; in the Greek, “purifying them [καθαρίσας αὐτούς] with your washing”) and “guard them from the wolves.” In the baptism itself (ch. 27), as the last in a series of invocations following anointing of the head before baptismal immersion, Thomas calls on the holy spirit to “come and purify (καθάρισον, ܩܕܫܐ) their kidneys and hearts.”⁷⁹ Here, the purification is directed at the inner faculties of the person. In the baptism of Mygdonia (ch. 121), Thomas addresses the oil to be used for the anointing and prays: “heal her old wounds, and wash away (ܩܕܫܐ) from her her sores,” clearly metaphors for forgiveness of sins. The baptism of Vizan and his companions (ch. 156-7) is replete with purity language: Thomas prays that Jesus heal and strengthen them, “sanctify them in the impure place (ܩܕܫܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ) and purify them of corruption ܩܕܫܐ (ܩܕܫܐ) in the place of the enemy... and make them holy shrines and temples” (156; quite abbreviated in the Greek). The baptisands are conceived here as temples for the holy spirit, embattled islands of purity and holiness in the midst of a defiled world.⁸⁰ Here,

⁷⁹ God “examines,” “searches” or “sees” the kidneys and hearts in Jer 11:20, 17:10, 20:12, Ps 7:10, Rev 2:23. The closest parallel to a purification of these organs is Ps 26:2: “refine (צרפה) my kidneys and heart.”

⁸⁰ Compare *Hermas*, *Man.* 5.1 (above p. 166) and *Gos. Phil.* 25 (above p. 237) where “the place” is said to be purified; though in all three cases it is the baptisand alone who is purified, *Thomas* chose to oppose

sanctification and purification appear quite synonymous. Later, Thomas exclaims that the oil repels “the enemies” when the anointed “have been purified (ܐܘܢܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ) of their former works” (in the Syriac only), praying for forgiveness of sins, destruction of the enemy, and the healing of souls and bodies (157). Thus purification and healing of the baptisand, as well as an anti-demonic force, were among the functions of the pre-immersion anointing, an integral part of the baptismal sequence in Syrian Christianity; and the whole rite was seen as a purification as well.⁸¹

Considering the strong anti-sexual connotations of purity terms in the *Acts of Thomas* (see above p. 173), we may conjecture that here too it is principally sexual sins which are purified. This may be seen in a general exhortation (ch. 58), where Thomas says that for those who believe in him (and, it is implied, repent of their sins), Jesus “will blot out (ܐܘܢܘܢܐ / ἀφίησιν) your former actions, and will cleanse (ܐܘܢܘܢܐ / καθάρσει) you from all your earthly thoughts (Greek: bodily lusts) that abide on the earth, and will heal (ܐܘܢܘܢܐ / ἰάσεται) you from your sins, which, unless you repent of them to God, will accompany you and go with you.” Baptismal purification as envisioned in this text consists mostly in interior cleansing – of sins, lusts, thoughts – but is at times also directed at the healing of the body. This healing may refer to an asexualisation of the body, or, more directly, to actual healing.

Summary

Forgiveness of sins was a major function of baptism according to all major second century writers.⁸² The ambiguity of Acts 2:38 concerning the exact relation between repentance,

the pure baptisand to the world, while the other texts chose to speak of the total purification of the person.

⁸¹ Winkler (1995) explains the purificatory character of anointing as a late (4th cent.), Greek-influenced development, with its original meaning being an actualization of Jesus baptism in the Jordan. This is difficult to square with the prominence of the purificatory dimension in the third-century *Acts of Thomas*.

⁸² Benoit (1953), 223: “la rémission des péchés est une des constants de la doctrine baptismale. Elle apparaît chez presque tous les Pères en liason étroite avec le baptême;” Ferguson (2009), 10.

baptism, and forgiveness of sins characterises many of the writers of the second and third centuries as well. Writers of the second century began to develop theories of baptism and sin, which explained or at least related to the relationship between interior disposition in the form of repentance and external action in ritual, between the actions of the human practitioner and divine action. These theories frequently used images and concepts of purification to explain how sin and other entities are removed by baptism.

The conception that baptism purifies the person from the sins that he or she performed in the past is found in several second-century writers. While the writers distinguish between body and soul, underlying their thought is the conception that the whole person is located in (or perhaps, at) his or her body, and thus participates in the physical trait of spaciality.⁸³ The person as a whole is the site of former sins, which can therefore be removed from him or her through action upon the body. Sins, accordingly, are not an abstract idea, and neither are they past actions completed without leaving a mark or debts accrued in some heavenly account. Rather, they are stored in the person or change him or her in a way which can be reversed through baptism. Most of the writers emphasise that an important stage of this purification is a conscious repentance from these sins, but it is clear that in order to remove them completely an act must be performed which brings external powers, spiritual and physical, to bear upon the person and upon his or her sins.

Justin Martyr in his externally-oriented *Apology*, on the one hand, and the more esoteric and internally-oriented Valentinian writings reflect two possible reasons for developing a baptismal theory in the second century. In the Valentinian *Excerpta*, we witness the need to integrate ritual in general and baptism in particular into the anthropological and cosmological worldview of second-century Christian thinkers, and to explain the relative role of body and spirit in the ritual. In Justin's *Apology*, we witness the need to explain the efficacy and meaning of the the ritual to external listeners.⁸⁴ Justin and the *Excerpta* also represent two different ways

⁸³ See Martin (1995). For the Stoic background of this anthropology see Long (1982); for its articulation and significance in Paul, see Engberg-Pedersen (2010).

⁸⁴ A century later, Pophyry accused the Christians of purifying sin mechanically and unmorally through baptism (*Christ. fr.* 88, ed. Harnack; the attribution of these fragments is however very much

of dealing with the body's role in baptism: Justin ignores it, focusing on the changes which the soul undergoes, while the *Excerpta* attempts to incorporate it, though underlining its relative marginality.

Even for those authors who do not ignore the body's role in the ritual the focus of baptismal purification is undoubtedly on the interior, expressed as the soul or the heart. Thus the *Excerpta* elaborates on the various evil parts of the soul and on the consecration afforded to each through baptism. Though it posits both corporeal and incorporeal effects of baptism, this contradicts its statement that the ritual purifies from corporeality itself. This ambiguity can be attributed to the perennial dilemma of the Christian tradition: on the one hand, the influence of traditions of body-soul dualism, which taught that true purification is spiritualization – a purification from, and not of, the body; and on the other hand, the unity of soul and body, which meant that purification of the body can be performed through purification of the soul.⁸⁵ To this we might add the traditional association of bodily purification with Jewish Law.

The *Excerpta* focuses on baptism as leading to a fundamental change in the make up of the person, rather than a change in actions and dispositions. Even if baptism is performed on a personal level, its significance is much wider, part of a battle against the forces of evil which work under various guises, both inside and outside the person. These theories allowed greater anthropological precision and integration with the dualist worldview than a simple theory of purification from sin that did not pinpoint the location of evil within the soul. This anthropological theory of baptismal purification is integrated by Clement of Alexandria with other traditions: he speaks of purification from sin, the filtration of the soul from its material parts and illumination by divine knowledge as different aspects of the same process. The emphasis on the purification from matter is clearly a Platonist element, combined with the tradition of purification from sin and with demonological ideas.

contested, see Barnes (1973)). Such accusations may have already been found in the second century: Celsus in his *Alethes Logos* (apud Origen, *Cels.* 3.59) opposes the Christian call to sinners to be baptised to that of the mysteries, which called only upon the pure. For similar later criticism, see Julian, *Contra Galileos*, 245C-D; *Casars* 336A-B.

⁸⁵ For this fundamental ambiguity, see Stroumsa (1990).

A link between baptismal purification and knowledge or understanding is found in almost all of the second-century authors, attesting to the centrality of this conception. The evil forces or components which were removed from the person prevented knowledge of God and/or his commandments: purification is possible only with concurrent enlightenment, which comes from above. This divine enlightenment is connected, however, both to preliminary acceptance of the Christian message by the believer (i.e., an understanding of the truth) and to the possibility of future knowledge of God. Though the connection between knowledge and purification is understandable in a Platonic framework, it also has biblical roots: Ps 51, one of the main sources for baptismal (and penitential) purificatory imagery, underlines this link as well (v. 5, 8, 15).

Demonology features in second century writings, but it is strongly developed at this stage only in Clement's *Excerpta* and *Prophetic Eclogues*. As in food impurity, here too demonology assists in understanding the link between ritual bodily action and spiritual result.

3. Origen

Origen speaks of baptism on four levels – of water, of spirit and of fire, as well as of Old Testament types of Christian baptism. In all of these levels, baptism is frequently described as purification.⁸⁶ Like his predecessors, Origen holds baptism to be a unique opportunity for forgiveness of sins,⁸⁷ which are described as being washed away and purified: “you descend into the water and come out unimpaired, the filth of sins having been washed away.”⁸⁸ Frequently

⁸⁶ On baptism in Origen, see Ferguson (2006); Blanc (1972), 113-124; Daniélou (1955), 52-61; Crouzel (1989), 223-6; Hanson (1959), 311-33; Saxer (1988), 145-94; Hällström (2010), 989-1010.

⁸⁷ *Mart.* 30; cf. *Hom. Jud.* 7.2. Baptism as forgiveness or purification of sins is mentioned in *Comm. Rom.* 5.9; *Hom. Gen.* 13.4; *Hom. Ex.* 2.4; *Hom. Jos.* 15.7 and other passages discussed below. Trigg (1982) speaks of “the relative insignificance of the forgiveness of sins in his understanding of baptism.” It is difficult to see what supports such a statement.

⁸⁸ *Hom. Ex.* 5.5, where baptism purifies from “the Egyptians” who attempt to follow the baptisand, symbolizing “the rulers of this world” or “spiritual evils.” This is the only explicit case in Origen's works, to the best of my knowledge, in which baptism works against demonic forces (cf. more

baptism is just described as purification, without specifying that sin is that which is removed, though this can be understood from the context.⁸⁹

Origen oscillates between washing and purification as images of baptism itself and of the repentance or good works preparing for baptism. Thus, commenting on the washing of garments before the Sinai revelation, he says:

No one, therefore, can hear the word of God unless he has first been sanctified, that is, unless he is holy in body and spirit (*sanctus corpore et spiritu*), unless he has washed (*laverit*) his garments. For a little later he shall go in to the wedding dinner, he shall eat from the flesh of the lamb, he shall drink from the cup of salvation. Let no one go in to this dinner with dirty (*sordidis*) garments... for your garments were washed (*lota*) once when you came to the grace of baptism; you were purified (*purificatus*) in body; you were cleansed from all filth of flesh and spirit (*mundatus es ab omni inquinamento carnis ac spiritus*). What, then, God has cleansed (*mundavit*), you shall not make unclean (*immunda*).⁹⁰

The purification of body, flesh and spirit (undifferentiated in this passage), symbolised by the washing of garments, all occur in baptism. This purification is clearly a preparation for what follows – eucharist and the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Origen says that the “mystery of baptism” cleanses from “the filth of leprosy,”⁹¹ or more directly, that “the bath through water is a symbol of the purification (καθαροῦ) of the soul.”⁹²

Elsewhere, however, it is pre-baptismal repentance which is symbolised through washing and purification: “...it is the Law of God which washes you (*te lavat*). This cleanses your filthiness

implicitly in *Hom. Ex.* 8.4). Thus while demons are quite central to Origen’s general moral system (see Ferguson (1989), 54-66), they are marginal to his baptismal thought.

⁸⁹ *Hom. Ex.* 11.7; *Hom. Lev.* 9.4.4; *Hom. Luc.* 33.5; *Comm. Jo.* 6.48.

⁹⁰ *Hom. Ex.* 11.7. Note Origen’s use here of the verse relating to the purification of foods/gentiles (Acts 11) in a baptismal context.

⁹¹ *Hom. Luc.* 33.5.

⁹² *Comm. Jo.* 6.33.166-167.

(*sordes tuas diluit*). This... removes the stains (*maculas*) of your sins... you, who desire to receive holy baptism and to obtain the grace of the Spirit, first you ought to be cleansed (*purgati*) by the Law....”⁹³ Here, baptism is not a preparation for a further spiritual stage, but rather a level which a person can hope to attain following sufficient purification through moral work. Similarly, in the *Contra Celsum*, in a passage comparing Christian catechumens to initiates of the Mysteries, Origen says that catechumens are “purified (*κεκαθάρθαι*) by the logos,” and only then “are called to the mysteries,”⁹⁴ as these are “delivered only to the holy and pure (*ἀγίοις καὶ καθαροῖς*)... God’s initiates who have been purified in soul (*κεκαθαρμένοις τὴν ψυχήν*)”⁹⁵ In other passages, Origen even says that baptism without cessation of sin and repentance does not effect forgiveness of sins.⁹⁶ These two options, of baptism being the objective of prior purification or being a purification in itself, are not contradictory: pre-baptismal moral instruction and repentance as well as baptism itself, and even life after baptism, can all be seen as part of an extended process of purification.⁹⁷

But how does baptism itself remit sins and purify a person who is sufficiently prepared for it? And how is the person transformed in this process? In his *Commentary on John*, Origen was led to this question by the necessity of explaining the difference between the baptism of John and that instituted by Jesus:

I [John], baptise you in water unto repentance, purifying you (*καθαίρων*), as it were... and exhorting you to repentance. For I have come to prepare for the Lord...

⁹³ *Hom. Lev.* 6.2.

⁹⁴ *Cels.* 3.59. cf. 3.51.

⁹⁵ *Cels.* 3.60.

⁹⁶ *Hom. Luc.* 21.4, 22.5-6; *Comm. Jo.* 6.33.165. In *Hom. Ezek.* 6.5, *Hom. Num.* 3.1 and *Comm. Rom.* 5.8.3, Origen clarifies that not all who are externally baptised receive salvation or the Holy Spirit; it is only those who committed a moral choice.

⁹⁷ See Raasch (1968), 40-2; der Maur and Waldram (1981), 43-51, who understand the stages of catechumenate and baptism as part of one long “sacramental process,” through which the Word of God purifies the person. See further Trigg (1982) concerning purification from sin following baptism.

and by the baptism of repentance, to make ready a place for the one who will come after me... for his baptism is not corporeal, since the Holy Spirit fills the one who repents, and a more divine fire removes everything material (θειοτέρου πυρός πᾶν ὑλικὸν ἀφανίζοντος), and utterly destroys everything earthly (γεῶδες ἐξαναλίσκοντος).⁹⁸

From this passage, it would appear that Jesus' baptism (=Christian baptism) is not corporeal, and that its sole function was to grant the Holy Spirit. However, it must be understood in its context of a comparison of John's baptism with that of Jesus. In the latter the baptisand also receives the Holy Spirit, while the former was solely for purification; John's baptism was corporeal and visible, while that of Jesus is incorporeal, and destroys the material.⁹⁹ The similarities between the baptism of John and Jesus, however, still stand: the baptism of Jesus is also performed in physical water, upon persons who are a mix of body and soul. Furthermore, it too includes a purificatory aspect – it provides forgiveness of sins and requires repentance.¹⁰⁰ Another passage in the *Commentary on John* goes further in explaining the exact relationship between the washing in water, the purification of the soul and the granting of the Holy Spirit:

⁹⁸ *Comm. Jo.* 6.32.162. For discussions of Origen's baptismal theology in book 6 of the *Comm. Jo.*, see von Balthasar (1937), 38-64; Daniélou (1955), 55; Hanson (1959), 320-1; Blanc (1972), 116-8; der Maur and Waldram (1981), 89-94; Crouzel (1989), 226; McDonnell and Montague (1994), 139-43; Ferguson (2006), 122-3. These scholars are interested more in what Origen has to say on the relationship of the baptismal act with reception of the Holy Spirit than in purification and forgiveness of sins.

⁹⁹ The idea of fire and the Holy Spirit working against the material or earthly elements in baptism is already familiar from Clement. For the earthly in the soul, see also *Hom. Gen.* 13.4, and compare *Acts of Thomas* 58 (cited above p. 243). In *Comm. Matt.* 15.22, Origen speaks of the Jesus' baptism of fire as taking place in the eschaton, while the baptism of John in water appears to be ritual baptism. While baptism in water is purification only "in a mirror darkly," in the future fire baptism a person will become "totally pure of defilement;" Cf. *Cels.* 5.15, with Ferguson (2006), 123-4; Raasch (1968), 39-40; Edsman (1940); Crouzel (1972).

¹⁰⁰ For Origen's view on the human as an inseparable composite of body and soul, see Edwards (2002), 87-122; Edwards (1992); Parnell (2009), 133-209.

... the washing (λουτρόν) through the water, which is a symbol (σύμβολον) of the soul's purification (καθαροῦ) as it washes from itself all the filth (ρύπον) which comes from evil, is no less also in itself the beginning and source of divine gifts to the one who surrenders to the divinity of the power of the invocation of the venerable Trinity... the Spirit resided so manifestly in those being baptised, the water having prepared (προευτρεπίσαντος) the way for the Spirit for those who sincerely approached.¹⁰¹

Thus the immersion in water as a physical medium has a double function: it is a symbol of the purification of the soul and it prepares the way for the Holy Spirit. Origen is the first writer who relates clearly to the relationship between outer and inner, the purification of the body and that of the soul: one, he says, is a symbol of the other. However, the meaning of σύμβολον is not at all clear in this context: is the physical act a “mere symbol,” only reflecting the real transformation which is happening inside the person but not playing an active role in it, or is it an efficacious symbol, in which the physical act is of real consequence?¹⁰²

σύμβολον as used by Origen as well as for Justin and Clement usually connotes an external sign or mark for some more significant reality, and is frequently used in the context of interpretation of the Old Testament through Christian symbolism. Origen employs it for Jewish rituals, and he also calls the Eucharist and baptism σύμβολον, though not a symbol of something.¹⁰³ A simple reading of the passage indicates that the invocation of the Trinity is only

¹⁰¹ *Comm. Jo.* 6.33.166-7.

¹⁰² A fragment attributed to Origen (*Comm. Jo.* Frg. 36 (ed. Erwin Preuschen, *Origenes Werke IV* [GCS 10], 547) appears to answer this question: the body should also be purified in baptism because it is an instrument of the soul, and the water purifying the person is sanctified through the invocation of the Trinity and therefore is not mere water. However, its authenticity is doubtful, see Heine (1986); Ferguson (2009), 413-4.

¹⁰³ Eucharist - *Cels.* 8.57; *Hom. Jer.* 19.13, baptism - *Pasch.* 1.4. Parnell (2009), 203-8, argues that this usage is borrowed from pagan ritual theory, specifically theurgical theories. For uses of σύμβολον in early Christian literature and in Origen, see Crouzel (1961), 225-8; Tzamalikos (2007); Lampe (1961), 1282. For a history of the term in antiquity, see Struck (2004). Clement of Alexandria uses the term in a

responsible for the attainment of the Holy Spirit while prior purification is achieved through other means. Other passages, however, indicate that the invocation is responsible also for purification: “For the things made pure (*mundatur*) are made pure, not by a single invocation, nor by a second, but unless a third invocation is pronounced, no one is purified. For unless you were purified in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, you could not be pure.”¹⁰⁴ In any case, even if immersion only expressed purification of the soul and did not perform it, Origen establishes a clear link between the corporeal and incorporeal elements of baptismal purification, a move which was not performed in earlier theories of baptism.

Origen was the first who discussed infant baptism. If forgiveness of sins is a central objective of baptism, why are non-sinful infants baptised? This question, to which Origen related several times, created an opportunity for defining precisely what is being purified in baptism. The discussion in the previous chapter on sexuality (above pp. 200-203) demonstrated that Origen’s writings are far from unanimous on the matter. In the *Homilies on Luke*, baptism purifies a “stain” which is essentially equal to being clothed in a body, and in the *Homilies on Leviticus*, this stain is tied explicitly to the sexual act which produces the body. While in the *Homilies on Luke* the “stain” is explicitly opposed to sin, in the *Homilies on Leviticus* and the *Commentary on Romans*, baptism is the forgiveness of “sin and iniquity” with which every person is born. Nevertheless, the dominant direction in Origen’s discussions of infant baptism is that the human body itself, whether due to its origin in conception or as a result of its inherent corporeality, is defiled in a way that can be purified through baptism. This defilement is associated with sin to the extent that corporeality is inherently sinful, a question upon which Origen apparently did not come to a clear conclusion. While this defilement is therefore quite

baptismal context (*Strom.* 2.22), saying that external purification (in general) is “practiced as a sign (σύμβολον),” but does not clarify the import of this statement. In *Cels.* 3.51, Origen speaks of a certain group of catechumens as “those who have not yet received the sign that they have been purified (οὐδέπω τὸ σύμβολον τοῦ ἀποκεκαθάρθαι ἀνειληφότων),” However it is not clear if this “sign” is baptism itself or something differentiating between different levels of catechumens, such as exorcism. See der Maur and Waldram (1981), 49-50; Saxer (1988), 151-2 and Kreider (1996), 319 n.11.

¹⁰⁴ *Hom. Lev.* 7.4.5. Cf. *Hom. Lev.* 8.11.10; *Hom. Jer.* 2.2; *Hom. Ex.* 11.7, cited above p. 247.

different from biblical ritual defilement, it shares with it a moral ambiguity in that a person cannot help but be in the body, and therefore be defiled.

4. *Jewish-Christian writings: many baptisms*

Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and Recognitions

The Pseudo-Clementines speak of three kinds of ritual washings in water:¹⁰⁵

1. Voluntary washings performed by individuals before eating and prayer, as well as in the morning or the evening without specific reason, usually using *λυόω* (*Hom.* 8.2=*Rec.* 4.3; *Hom.* 10.26=*Rec.* 5.36; *Hom.* 14.1=*Rec.* 8.1; *Hom.* 9.23, 10.1, 11.1, 14.3).
2. Washings compulsory for the whole community, after sexual relations and after menstruation (*Hom.* 7.4, 7.8 (using *λυόω*); *Hom.* 11.28-33=*Rec.* 6.10-12 (using *βαπτίζω*)).
3. One-time initiatory baptism, using *βαπτίζω* (*Hom.* 6.15=*Rec.* 11.35; *Hom.* 9.19=*Rec.* 4.32; *Hom.* 11.26-28=*Rec.* 6.8-10; *Hom.* 13.4-21=*Rec.* 7.28-38; *Rec.* 1.39-69, 2.71-72, 9.9-11).

The presence of three different types of washing in one text is unique in contemporary Christian writings, probably reflecting the uniqueness of the community from which it originated in maintaining purity customs prevalent in third-century Judaism, together with the adoption of new rituals such as baptism and Eucharist. The three types of washing appear in different contexts and are seldom linked to each other. Furthermore, the vocabulary shows that voluntary washings were seen as distinct from initiatory baptism, though their relationship to washings for sexual purity is unclear.¹⁰⁶ Voluntary washings were clearly not for the purification of some specific defilement, but rather demonstrated heightened purity and praiseworthy ascetic conduct, similar to that found in Second Temple writings.¹⁰⁷ As opposed to washings for sexual purity and initiatory baptism, which are widely discussed in the texts, voluntary washings are presented incidentally, perhaps indicating an expectation that readers

¹⁰⁵ For the date and character of the Ps.-Clementines, see p. 18. The three types of washing are discussed by Gianotto (2008); Wehnert (2010).

¹⁰⁶ For questions of vocabulary, see Molland (1955), 4-5; Ferguson (2009), 250.

¹⁰⁷ See above, p. 63; Gianotto (2008), 228.

would not see them as controversial.¹⁰⁸ Alternatively, the writer may have attempted to create an impression that such washings were normally practiced in the apostolic period in which the novel is set, not requiring comment.

The imperative of washing for sexual purity – after sexual relations and following menstruation – is developed much more, with clear signs of controversy. The most extended discussion follows shortly after a discussion of baptism, though no connection is made between the two rituals.¹⁰⁹ Not approaching a woman while she is menstruating is termed simply “purity.”¹¹⁰ Purity, of both heart and body, is what differentiates human from animal:

If purity (τὸ καθαρεύειν) be not added to the service of God, you would roll pleasantly like the dung-beetles. Wherefore as man, having something more than the irrational animals, namely, rationality, purify (καθάρατε) your hearts from evil by heavenly reasoning (λογισμῶ), and wash your bodies in the bath (λουτρῶ δὲ πλύνετε τὸ σῶμα). For purification according to the truth is not that the purity of

¹⁰⁸ This is somewhat surprising, as such washings were controversial. See Epiphanius *Pan.* 30.15.3: “in the *Travels* they have changed everything... and slandered Peter... saying that he was baptised daily for purification as they are...” Epiphanius links the daily washings to sexual purity washings (30.21): “the other false accusations which they make... that every day, before so much as eating bread, Peter had had immersions... Since they are defiled themselves and often indulge themselves sexually, they make lavish use of water... under the impression that they have purification through baptisms.” This connection, however, is not made in the Ps.-Clementines. Compare the contemporary controversies on the custom of daily immersion in Rabbinic sources, Kiperwasser (2012).

¹⁰⁹ *Hom.* 11.28-33=*Rec.* 6.10-12. Freyne (2010) says that in the Pseudo-Clementines “Christian baptism and Jewish ritual purity support and complement each other,” as opposed to texts such as the *Epistle to the Hebrews* or Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, in which they are seen as contradictory. However, while the Ps.-Clementines indeed perceive both baptism and ritual purity as important, they appear to have been conceived as operating on two completely different levels.

¹¹⁰ See also *Hom.* 7.4 and 7.8, which generally parallel each other, except that in the former the listeners are exhorted “to be washed from all pollution (ἐκ παντὸς ἀπολούεσθαι λύματος),” but in the latter, “to wash (λούεσθαι) after intercourse; that the women... keep the law of menstruation (ἄφεδρον).”

the body precedes purification after the heart, but that purity follows goodness.¹¹¹

Human rationality is the reason for purification of heart but also for washing the body, opposed to a bestial lack of cleanliness. Purity of the body is secondary to purity of heart, but both are essential for worship; bodily negligence prevents true understanding and enlightenment. Jesus' preference for purity of heart over body was directed only towards "the hypocrites" who cared solely about purification of body, and not to those knowledgeable Pharisees and Scribes who purified both heart and body.¹¹² The same concern which we witnessed in other texts concerning the relationship between interior and exterior purification in baptism is found here concerning washing for sexual purity. A further argument for bodily purification is its universality: it is a general religious practice, accepted by most pagans, and truths and good practices should be accepted even if originating in error. Indeed, if idol-worshippers take such pains with purity, how much more should the service of God, in which "it is necessary to attain the one and whole of purity," include bodily purification.¹¹³

The third type of washing, frequently performed in the narrative and expanded upon theoretically, is initiatory baptism. It was ideally preceded by a three-month preparation period, including fasts and prayers (*Hom.* 11.35 = *Rec.* 3.67); a fast of one to several days, however, seen as essential for separation of the baptisand from paganism, is more often described (*Hom.* 3.73, *Hom.* 13.9-11 = *Rec.* 7.34). Baptism is strongly linked to food rituals: table-fellowship, which is the ultimate expression of love (*Ep. of Clement to James*, 9) is conditioned upon baptism, because "the gentiles live impurely" (*Hom.* 13.4-11 = *Rec.* 7.29; *Rec.* 2.71-72), and the ritual was completed by a partaking of the Eucharist.

¹¹¹ *Hom.* 11.28.

¹¹² *Hom.* 11.29 = *Rec.* 6.11.

¹¹³ *Hom.* 11.30-33 = *Rec.* 6.12-14. Compare this respectful attitude towards pagan water purification to that of Justin (above p. 227), and Tertullian, *Bapt.* 5, who says that it demonstrates the power of water. What Justin and Tertullian see as similar to baptism, the Pseudo-Clementines compare to purification from sexual defilement. To the reasons appearing in the *Homilies*, *Rec.* 6.12 adds that purification assures that sex is performed not for pleasure but for reproduction.

Baptism according to the Pseudo-Clementines purifies the person of a number of negative aspects and entities, all closely linked to one another.¹¹⁴

1. As in other sources, baptism brings “forgiveness of sins” (*Hom.* 7.8, 8.22, 9.23, 11.27, *Rec.* 1.39, 1.69) and “washes away sin” (*Hom.* 6.8, *Hom.* 9.19=*Rec.* 4.32). It is explained that pre-baptismal sins can be forgiven because they were performed in a state of ignorance; only following baptismal illumination can the sinner become fully responsible for his sins (*Hom.* 11.27=*Rec.* 6.10). The state of ignorance before baptism, though itself sinful, is the reason that the sins committed are not so serious¹¹⁵.
2. Baptism replaces the original, corrupt generation of the person through sexual desire (ἐπιθυμία) with an incorrupt regeneration “of water.” The water of baptism extinguishes the fire of lust (*Hom.* 11.26). According to Luigi Cirillo, this betrays the influence of the idea, rooted in Second Temple literature and developed in gnostic writings, that ἐπιθυμία is the root of all evil, passed on from generation to generation.¹¹⁶
3. Demons are central in the baptismal theology of the Ps.-Clementines. Illness-causing demons enter the body by participation in pagan sacrifices and are maintained in it through sinful eating and sexual pleasure (*Rec.* 4.32, *Hom.* 9.9-19).¹¹⁷ Baptism purifies and drives out any demons which reside in the “inmost affections of the soul”, and also confers the power to exorcise them from others. The presence of demons explains the prohibition on eating with the non-baptised: the argument originally used by Paul against eating food offered to idols (1 Cor 1:20) is here transferred from the food to those eating it, and generalised categorically to all the non-baptised. As opposed to the

¹¹⁴ See Cirillo (1988); Wehnert (1997), 168-173; Ferguson (2009), 250-3.

¹¹⁵ For ignorance prior to baptism, see 1 Tim 1:13; *Kerygma Petri* fr. 8 (=Clement, *Strom.* 6.6.48); Aristides, *Apology* 17.3. And see *Hom.* 10.12-13=*Rec.* 5.18; Clement of Alexandria cited above p. 240.

¹¹⁶ Cirillo (1988); see also Strecker (1981), 197-201. See above p. 188.

¹¹⁷ For the Ps.-Clementines’ demonology, see Schoeps (1950).

Excerpta ex Theodoto, it is baptism itself which works against the demons; preparatory rituals for exorcism are not mentioned.¹¹⁸

As opposed to the discussion of washing in water for following menstruation, the discussion of baptism includes no clear reference to the relationship between inner and outer purification.¹¹⁹ This is probably because purification following menstruation was much more controversial, and commonly seen as bodily purification only. Baptism, however, was primarily seen as a purification of entities residing inside the person, such as sin, demons and lust, but by implication also of the body inasmuch as it takes part in sinful practices purified through baptism. This inner purification was achieved by the invocation of the divine name over the baptisand as well as by the intense pre-baptismal preparations, repentance and study.

Another facet of the theory of baptism is explained in *Rec.* 1.39 and 1.49, passages dated to circa 200:¹²⁰ Baptism was instituted, according to these passages, as a replacement for the forgiveness of sins that the temple sacrifices afforded.¹²¹ Baptism is again said to extinguish fire, but this time the fire of sacrifices which “the priest kindled for sin” (*Rec.* 1.49). Baptism absolves sin and opens the way for a life of perfection, “being purified not by the blood of beasts, but by the purification of the Wisdom of God.” The idea that the purification of baptism replaces purification through sacrifice is relatively rare; most texts of the period speak of the replacement of temple sacrifices by Jesus’ death, the Eucharist, obedience to God or other moral

¹¹⁸ Kelly (1995), 124-8. A passage appearing only in the *Recognitions* (9.10), and therefore probably late, uses imagery which integrates all three baptismal purifications. A sinful person is likened to a wick covered with pitch, on which the fire kindled by demons immediately catches; “but if the wick is not covered in the pitch of sin, but in the water of purification and regeneration, the fire of the demons shall not be able to be kindled in it.”

¹¹⁹ One exception is *Hom.* 8.23, which says that the baptised are “pure in body and in soul.”

¹²⁰ Jones (1995), 163.

¹²¹ According to the Latin translation; the Syriac implies that temple sacrifice did not truly absolve sins but was only thought to do so. See Jones (1995), 69.

values.¹²² The writer may have preferred this choice as it accorded with his general baptismal symbolism of water extinguishing fire.

Didascalia Apostolorum

The baptismal theory of the Pseudo-Clementines may be compared to the roughly contemporaneous *Didascalia Apostolorum*.¹²³ Like the Pseudo-Clementines, the *Didascalia* believes that baptism brings forgiveness of sins for those of the gentiles “who have believed.”¹²⁴ Its baptismal demonology is also similar: demons are present in the hearts of all gentiles, “even though they suppose they do good works,” and are removed by baptism.¹²⁵ However, based on its demonology, the *Didascalia* sees baptism and washings for ritual purity as mutually exclusive.¹²⁶ Turning to baptised Jewish women who refused to partake in the eucharist or study the scriptures until they were purified of their menstruation by washing, the author claims that their observances are illogical and abrogate their baptism. They are illogical because the Holy Spirit abided in them in baptism, driving away the impure spirits; it remains also when they are

¹²² Justin, *Dial.* 13, speaks of both baptism and Jesus’ death as the replacement of sacrifice, following the link between them made in Rom. 6:2-6. Jesus’ death: Heb 9:11-15 (clearly used in this citation); 1 Clement 36; Justin, *Dial.* 111; Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.14. Eucharist: *Didache* 14; Ignatius, *Rom.* 4.2; Justin, *Dial.* 41; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.17-18. Obedience and faith: *Barn.*, 2-3. And see Ferguson (1980).

¹²³ For the relationship between the Jewish Christianity of the Ps.-Clementines and the *Didascalia*, see Wehnert (1997), 179-84.

¹²⁴ Chs. 20, 25. In Chapter 20, the *Didascalia* appears to claim that baptism remits even post-baptismal sins, provided they are not “mortal” and the sinner has only “heard, or seen, or spoken.” However, the passage is difficult; See 1 John 5.16-17 and the fragment from the *Gospel to the Hebrews* cited by Jerome, *adv. Pelag.* 3.2: “if your brother sinned to you with a word and makes amends, accept him seven times a day... for even among the prophets after they were anointed with the Holy Spirit, there were words of sin.”

¹²⁵ *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26 (Vööbus (1979), II.240-1).

¹²⁶ For the relation of ritual purity to baptism in the *Didascalia*, see van Unnik (1980), 7-39; Brakke (1995), 424-33; Stewart-Sykes (2009), 278-86; Fonrobert (2000), 172-82; Kelly (1985), 128-9.

menstruating, and therefore there is no reason to abstain from eucharist or scriptures. They abrogate their baptism because they demonstrate their belief that baptism is insufficient to purify them, and that further purification is required.¹²⁷ This argument is based on the image of the person as a vessel that must be filled or by the Holy Spirit or by impure spirits, with no option of remaining “empty;”¹²⁸ in baptism, the latter is replaced by the former.

The *Didascalia* thus represents the women’s position as a conflation of purification from sexual defilement and purification from the pre-baptismal state, both based upon a pneumatical-demonological worldview. This spiritual interpretation of sexual purification, which allows the author to put it on the same level as baptism, is opposite the usual Christian strategy of attacking Jewish purity laws by claiming that they relate only to the body. The Pseudo-Clementines appear to link the demonic only to baptism. From this perspective, purification from menstrual impurity has nothing to do with demons, since it is only a purification of the body, and not of the heart or of the soul; therefore, even if the heart is purified of sin, lust and unclean spirits through baptism, this is no reason to neglect the purity of the body. It is difficult to know how the *Didascalia*’s opponents in fact saw the relationship between baptism and purification from menstrual defilement. They may have agreed with the Ps.-Clementines that the latter only concerned the body. Alternatively, they may have thought that baptism isn’t a strong enough seal of the body’s boundaries, so that menstruation, and not only sin, leaves the body’s boundaries vulnerable to demonic penetration.¹²⁹

Elchasai and the Elchasites

Two sources inform us of the baptismal practices of group(s) claiming to be followers of a certain Elchasai, who, if he existed, was active in the second century. These are the *Cologne Mani Codex* (CMC), which describes the confrontation of the young Mani with a group labeled “the Baptists” and his rejection of their baptismal and dietary practices; and the accounts of the doctrines of Elchasai and his followers by patristic authors, especially in the *Refutation of all*

¹²⁷ *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26 (Vööbus II.238-41).

¹²⁸ This theory is already found in Hermas, *Man.* 5.24-27.

¹²⁹ The latter option is the opinion of Brakke (1995), 428.

Heresies attributed to Hippolytus. Both sources are hostile to the Elchasites, and should therefore be read cautiously.¹³⁰

According to the CMC, the community from which Mani originated baptised daily and washed much of their food, practices which Mani opposed as being a futile attempt to purify the body instead of practicing true purification, which is “purification (καθαρότης) through gnosis, i.e., the separation (χωρισμός) of light from darkness, of death from life, of living waters from stagnant waters.”¹³¹ There is no clear indication of the function of these washings beyond their being “for purification” (ἀποκαθαρθέντες); we can only assume that they were similar to those described by the Ps.-Clementines, with the addition of washing food as well, in an attempt to maintain purity also inside the body. A hint to the meaning of these washings may be found in another CMC passage relating a confrontation between Elchasai, the “founder of your law,” and water in which he attempted to bathe. “When he was going to wash in the waters, an image of a man appeared to him from the spring of water and said to him: ‘Is it not sufficient that your animals [strike] me? But even you [yourself] maltreat [my place] and profane (ἄσεβεῖς) [my waters]. Therefore Elchasai [marvelled and] said to it, ‘The fornication, defilement and impurity of the world (πορνεία καὶ ἡ μιαιρότης καὶ ἡ ἀκαθαρσία τοῦ κόσμου) are thrown upon you and you do not refuse (them), but you are grieved at me’.”¹³² According to this

¹³⁰ The general scholarly opinion is that both sources are speaking of the same group, or at least that both relied on the same “Book of Elchasai” as a source for Elchasai’s practice and doctrines. See Henrichs (1973); Henrichs (1979); Klijn and Reinink (1974); Jones (2004). Luttikhuisen (1985), 163-6 dissents, arguing that the CMC and the other sources are speaking of different groups.

¹³¹ 84.9-17. For the meaning, significance and origins of Mani’s attack on the baptists’ practices, see the studies in the previous note, as well as: Stroumsa (1999a), 405-20; Cirillo (2009), 45-60; Buckley (1983); Buckley (1986); Ries (1991); Rudolph (1999); Koenen (1981).

¹³² 94.11-95.5. As Koenen concedes (747-8), the baptists themselves would not have agreed with the Manichaean portrayal of these stories, and even if they thought they were true, they would probably have explained that under certain ritual conditions, purification in water is efficacious and not disrespectful to the water. See Henrichs and Koenen (1978), 181; Buckley (1986), 401, n. 9 and Luttikhuisen (1985), 159.

story, Elchasai believed that washing in water was usually performed not only in order to remove “defilement and impurity” but also to purify “fornication.”¹³³ This would point to washing for purification from sin, which may or may not be identical or connected to the aforementioned daily baptisms. In general, however, the CMC provides us with little information on the meaning of washing for the baptist community, focusing on the alternative proposed by Mani.

Hippolytus describes two kinds of baptism taught by a follower of Elchasai, Alcibiades.¹³⁴ First, Alcibiades is cited as saying that one who desires to obtain forgiveness of sins,

let him be baptised a second time in the name of the great and the most High God and in the name of his son, the mighty king. And let he himself purify and cleanse (καθαρισάσθω καὶ ἀγνευσάτω) himself and let him call upon those seven witnesses that have been described in this book, heaven, water, the holy spirits, the angels of prayer, oil, salt, and the earth...”¹³⁵

Thus this baptism, which was presumably a rare occurrence, included “purifying” and “cleansing,” perhaps indicating the immersion in water itself or an accompanying exorcism. A few sentences later, this baptism is called a “conversion” and it is specified that it is to be performed while clothed. Alcibiades’ baptism is therefore similar to a usual Christian initiatory baptism in the major points: it effects a forgiveness of sins, is conceived of both as a purification and a conversion, and is performed in the name of God.

¹³³ An alternative explanation for this sentence is that fornication and defilement are commonly washed in water, though not for purposes of religious purification: this would accord with the “animals” mentioned, and correspond to *Oxy. P. 840* lines 33-8, where spring water is said to be the place where “dogs and swine have been cast night and day,” and washing in water is equated to the anointing and washing of “the harlots (αἱ πόρναι) and flute-girls.” Bovon (2000), 727, comments on the general similarity between the CMC and *Oxy. P. 840* in their criticism of water rites, but does not relate to this passage.

¹³⁴ See Luttikhuisen (1985), 70-84.

¹³⁵ Hipp. *Haer.* 9.15.1-2.

The second kind of baptism is against rabies, consumption or demonic possession; these are healed through a baptism similar in its details to the first, but with the addition of an oath, attested by the aforementioned seven witnesses, not to sin in the future.¹³⁶ According to Andrea Nicolotti, the diseases were considered to be a result of demonic action; because of the traditional connection between sin and demons, abstaining from sin, together with a rite to distance demons, would lead to healing.¹³⁷ Thus this baptism is basically an exorcism.

The baptisms described by Hippolytus are quite different from those of the CMC; they are performed on highly unusual occasions, and not daily; they are not connected with purifying the body or food as in the CMC, but rather with removing sin or demons from the person. The first kind of baptism appears to be modeled upon the typical Christian baptism, while the second kind is basically an exorcism, without the additional meanings of initiation.

Summary

The survey of baptism in Jewish-Christian texts demonstrates the wide variety of baptismal rituals that were practiced in these communities: daily baptism for ascetic purity; immersion for purification from sexual defilement; baptism as an instrument for exorcism and healing, and initiatory baptism. We also find a variety of purificatory meanings assigned to initiatory baptism: for forgiveness of sins, for purification from the first birth of desire and for release and protection from demons. Even though all of the baptisms had a role of purification of some kind, the multiplicity of baptisms and meanings does not appear to have been strange or incoherent to the writers, and they do not see any reason to link the various baptisms together.

Conclusions

Because of baptism's centrality in Christian ritual and thought and its perception as a ritual of purification, it became a major site for addressing a general problem with purity: the relationship between ritual and moral purity, between the external action and the inner

¹³⁶ Ibid, 9.15.4-6.

¹³⁷ Nicolotti (2008).

disposition. The solutions brought forward by Christian writers for these issues are therefore important not only for the understanding of baptism itself, but also for understanding the development of purity concepts and practices in Christianity in general.

Purification from past sins is the basic understanding of baptismal purification in the second and third centuries. For second century writers, sins reside in the soul, which is therefore the main arena for baptismal action. Valentinian writers explained that material purification is required because the body too is purified; they did not, however, go very far in developing this theory. Writers of the second century created additional perspectives for understanding baptismal purification: purification from demons, from the material itself, and development of the connection between purification and knowledge. These ideas all represent attempts to understand how ritual actions relate to spiritual purification as well as the expression of baptismal purification through Platonic anthropology.

Origen continues to use some of the same terminology, such as burning of the material by divine fire, but his emphasis is on other aspects, such as prior preparation through repentance. His major innovation is of baptism as a purification of some kind of bodily defilement, inherent in all human beings due to their corporeality, which is evil even if not sinful; its origin may be in sexuality, though Origen is not clear on this point. With this concept Origen comes close to the idea present in the Pseudo-Clementines that baptism purifies lust and replaces the generation of concupiscence with a pure generation of water. This defilement is clearly not the defilement resulting directly and physically from sexual relations or from menstruation, which requires repeated purification; but it is similar to it in its connection with sexuality and in its inherence in the human body, without requiring moral action. This similiarity is used also by Clement of Alexandria and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* to demonstrate that repeated washings for purification, associated with Judaism, are superfluous for the baptised.

Another idea which cuts across the various writers is of the connection of baptism with fire. On the one hand, the water of baptism is said to extinguish fire, understood as the fire of concupiscence or the cosmic fire which destroys sinners. On the other hand, baptism itself is likened to a purifying fire, distinguishing between evil and good and destroying sin and corporeality.

The idea that baptism exorcises demons from the soul has its traces already in the *Epistle*

of *Barnabas* and reappears in Clement and in Origen, though not as a central theme, while exorcism preceding baptism appears in the *Excerpta*. These demons are generally equated with sin, and are not provided with much personality. In Jewish-Christian circles the role of demons is more central as a personification of the evil elements which are purified through baptism. In baptism, The Holy Spirit vanquishes the unclean spirits, providing a clear model for how a person is transformed through the ritual.

A common theme is the marking of the water purifications of other groups as external and physical, while the purifications of the author's group is marked as internal and spiritual. This theme, frequently illustrated by a contrast between living water and regular water, is found in the polemics of Christians against Jews and pagans, of Valentinians and other Gnostic groups against other Christians, and of the Manichaeans against the Elchasites. In the first two cases, such polemic against the physical aspect of purification supports a baptismal ritual which is similar in many respects to that of the outside group. Thus its main function is in distinguishing between "our" rituals and "their" rituals, which would otherwise appear too similar. The Manichaeans thus picked up on a well-known trope, but used it more radically.

The developments of the second and third centuries show a general continuity with those of the first in the constant problematization of a clear-cut distinction between moral and ritual purity. Baptism builds upon an ascetic tradition in which actions performed by the body are expressive of the status and disposition of the person as a whole. The divide between moral and ritual, though clearly recognised, is constantly breached, a result of the understanding that the person is indelibly situated in the body, and that a transformation of the person must work through the body.

Baptism is a clear example of the ascendance in early Christianity of the battle type of impurity over the truce type. The defilements removed in baptism, however they are conceptualized, are clearly evil. They cannot be temporarily managed, or given a specific place, away from the sacred. This is why Christians insisted that baptism may be performed only once, as opposed to the "washings of Moses." This stark opposition between good and evil expressed through defilement was challenged to some degree with the development of institutions of catechumenate and of pre-baptismal exorcism. These developments, extending the baptismal process, facilitated the recognition of a distinction between purification and sanctification.

Chapter V: Baptism and purification

Non-Christians could not become immediately and totally pure through the baptismal ritual, but rather required prior purification. A similar move can be seen in post-baptismal sin in the development of rituals of penance. Here too, the defilement of sin was compartmentalized and managed, representing the return of a truce aspect into the system.

General Conclusions

This thesis has demonstrated the importance of purity and impurity for early Christian culture. Far from becoming irrelevant after the first century, purity was continuously a focus of attention, challenged and redefined by the major Christian authors of the second and third centuries. In three major areas of Christian ritual and practice – food, sex and baptism - purity discourse was instrumental in constructing early Christian identity vis-à-vis Jews and pagans, in negotiating the place of the body in Christian practice and thought, and in developing a new ethic out of existing traditions.

Two broad motivations, at some tension with each other, were at the basis of Christian purity discourse. The first was a substantive motivation: the creation and maintenance of anthropologies and ritual theories coherent with the theological principles of the new religion, and the integration of purity traditions and concepts into these worldviews and theories. Christian writers sought to understand what sin does to a person and how it can be removed, and purity and defilement were central concepts in the formulation of the solution to these problems. The second was a polemic motivation: construction of Christian identity by laying claim to true purity while marking the purity practices and beliefs of others (Jews, pagan or “heretics”) as false.

In some areas of purity discourse one motivation took precedence over the other. Thus, concerning food and death, polemical interests serving to buttress Christian identity were much more central, while concerning sexuality and baptism, questions of anthropology, theology and ritual theory are paramount. This difference is rooted and reflected in the sources of the language used in each of the areas. In food issues, where polemical interests were paramount, authors built on the Gospels and on Paul, using them against the purity concepts inherent in the biblical dietary laws; for most cases, there was a break between the traditions found in the Old and New Testaments. The situation was similar concerning questions of death impurity. In sexual issues, which were not focused on anti-Jewish polemics but on substantive questions, the opposite was the case: the sexual sin-impurity tradition, originating in the Hebrew Bible and amplified in Second Temple writings, was taken up in Paul and second-century writers. Although there were certainly expansions and shifts in the meaning of the

concepts, there is continuity of language. This allowed Christian sexual impurity language to reverberate more freely with biblical allusions. In texts discussing baptism, there is little sense of either break or continuity with the Hebrew Bible. Although historically Jewish washings were probably the context for the John's baptisms, early Christian authors ignored this. Rather, baptismal purification language, with its emphasis on knowledge and personal change, drew from biblical penitential images and from Platonic images of self-purification. The language used was also dependent on author, of course. This can be seen especially when comparing Origen to previous writers. In the *Dialogue*, Justin quotes biblical testimonia extensively, but his own purity language is frequently not biblical, and Clement of Alexandria speaks much more of moderation than of purification, hardly using biblical language directly to speak of purity. Origen's writing, on the other hand, is always interwoven with biblical impurity language (both from the Old and the New Testaments), especially in his exegetical and homiletical works, the vast majority of his extant oeuvre. This lends a very different character to his writing, making purity much more prominent.

Determining which motivation is driving the discussion (polemical or substantive) is highly significant. Thus, for example, the description of the relationship between the interior, moral aspects of the person and the exterior bodily aspects is dependent upon the motivation. Concerning food, where the polemical motivation drove the discussion, the central focus of the discourse was of distinction between inner and outer purity. Food purity was cast as external and irrelevant for Christians, for whom only internal purity was relevant, as opposed to Jews who were interested only in external purity. When we turn to sexual issues, where the discussion is not focused on polemic, authors emphasised not the divide between internal and external, but rather how both are integrated in Christian sexual purity.

We may now turn to a more detailed examination of these motivations, starting with the substantive. What was the anthropological and theological theory at the basis of Christian purity discourse?

Christian purity perception was typically that of battle, in which the pure was totally opposed to the defiled, with no possibility of co-existence. The pure and defiled were not circumscribed to certain clearly-defined spheres regulating temporary access to the sacred as in truce conceptions, but were rather overarching categories, relevant in every time and place.

Management of purity and defilement required relating to both ritual and bodily practice, as well as the person's agency, interior faculties and relationship with supernatural entities. Thus, Christian perceptions of purity and defilement expressly concerned both body and soul, maintaining an integrated ethics of the person as a whole, and yet differentiating between these aspects of the person.

It is impossible to reconstruct a clear trajectory of development of theological and anthropological purity theory through the first three centuries: the diversity of authors, interests and influences does not allow this, and many themes appear in the early second century only to disappear and resurface a century later. Rather than reconstruct a trajectory, we may compare the earliest and the latest authors discussed in the thesis: early second century texts with the writings of Origen. In many second century authors, purity language was unsystematic and ambiguous, frequently used ad-hoc to strengthen points. At times we find it used in a more technical and defined fashion, but only in one area, e.g., sex in *Hermas* or the Apocryphal Acts, baptism in the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*. Only with Origen is there an attempt to transform these traditions on purity into a theological concept that can be generalised across different areas, so that the logic of purification which appears in food issues would cohere with that found in baptism and sex, and with other theological, anthropological and exegetical principles. Origen's turn to purity concepts is not only a result of the biblical basis of his writing. Rather, purity concepts offered an expression for the ambivalent relationship between corporeality and sin: the body is a source of sin, but not in itself sinful, creating deep ethical ambiguity.

For Origen, purity concepts were so useful because they mirrored and expressed precisely this ambiguity: a person is said to be pure or impure even if he or she was not responsible for any morally valenced action. This role of circumventing sin can be seen most explicitly in the discussion of infant baptism, where the infant is impure even without sin, but also in the discussion of sex, where the "corruption" of a virgin is at least partly simply a reflection of her physical status. In the case of food, too, food offered to idols is defiled even for one who did not participate in worship; here, demons - ambivalent beings as regarding corporeality and sin - are made to be the carriers of impurity.

Origen's writings make clearest the theological utility of purity concepts. However, the

continued use of purity concepts in early Christian writing in general can be ascribed also to internal social-religious reasons. From the second century onwards, the church developed set rituals and hierarchies. The integration of these hierarchies and rituals into an eschatological worldview in which good and evil were in constant battle required a certain 'routinization of charisma,' a process which was doubtless ongoing throughout the first centuries. Purity concepts were one of the best instruments available to encode this routinization, and yet maintain the sense of duality and battle. This can best be seen in the sexual realm: most of the texts of the second and third century which speak of sex as polluted and as sexual abstinence as the purest option do not clearly support total celibacy for all Christians, but only for a minority. A sliding scale of sexual purity allowed them to clearly mark the moral value of different sex practices, but still retain a legitimate space for married Christians. These texts are playing in the space between battle and truce perceptions of purity: sexual pollution is inherently evil, but it can nevertheless be lived with, as long as it is marked as such. Thus on both the theological and the practical level, the substantive aspect of purity discourse offered welcome slippage, allowing a hierarchy of practice not directly linked to that of sin.

To understand the polemical aspect of Christian purity discourse we must relate both to how Christians perceived purity in other religions and how purity was actually practiced and understood in these religions. The purity discourses of both pagan and Jewish religions were highly complex, and moreover in continuous flux. As we saw in the first chapter, several systems were at play, including permitted or temporary impurities, prohibited or sin impurity, and ascetic purity. Purity discourses may be better described as webs of allusions rather than as systems, even if some texts sought to systemize them. Therefore Christian purity discourse (itself multiform) cannot be seen as a reaction or adoption of any one purity system. Rather, inasmuch as Christian purity discourse related to the discourses of other religions, it selected (consciously or not) certain elements to be attacked and rejected, or, alternatively, adopted and integrated.

In each of the areas we examined the process of selection differed significantly. As concerns pagan purity discourse on defilement or purity of food and death, there is hardly any adoption or rejection (though it is reasonable to assume significant continuity in terms of purity *practice*, not discussed in the texts). Concerning sexuality and baptism there is more

awareness of continuity: both the Ps.-Clementines and Origen argue for the importance of sexual purity from the consensus on it in all religious systems, and Justin is aware of the similarities between pagan washing rituals and baptism, though for him this is a problem rather than an asset. The main borrowing of purity discourse from Greco-Roman religions concerned Platonic anthropological conceptions through which asceticism was explained. Thus, the bifurcation of body and soul and the purification of the latter from the former was in the background of descriptions of baptism as purificatory enlightenment and of sexual asceticism as freeing the soul from the strictures of the body. And yet, in both baptism and sexuality, a simple dualism does not explain purification since for many texts not only the soul but also the body was purified or defiled. This problem of religious action as purifying the soul or the person as a whole is inherent in the Platonic tradition, and is found also in second and third-century pagan Neoplatonists.

The relationship with Jewish purity discourses was more explicit. Christian purity discourse on baptism, food and death was based on constructing a “true” purity practice of Christians opposed to a “false” Jewish one; the former is interior, intentional and thus involves the essence of the person as an agent, while the latter is external, automatic and the person is only instrumental. Although a distinction between moral/spiritual and ritual/bodily purity for polemical purposes was found in Jewish, Greek and Latin literature, it is only with early Christianity that this distinction became a cornerstone of purity discourse. All purity laws and practices were seen through the lens of the battle perception of purity, and from this viewpoint it was easy to attack Jewish practices as irrelevant, insufficiently invested in defeating evil. This construction was not an accurate reflection of reality, first because Jews had various conceptions of impurity as concerning sin or the interior of the person, but also because Christians, too, believed in certain dimensions of defilement which could not be clearly linked to sin, or which were exterior rather than internal. Nevertheless, it is true that in Christianity defilement as an aspect of sin was dominant, while in Judaism we find various types of defilement, some linked to sin and some not.

Despite this polemical construction of an opposition between Jewish and Christian purity conceptions, dimensions of impurity in Judaism which were linked to sin, and therefore more compatible with the battle perception, were integrated into Christian discourse. This is seen

especially in sexual defilement and to a lesser extent in baptism. In these cases, the defilement of sin, which in the Hebrew Bible and in Second Temple Period literature were considered non-purifiable (for the most part) or purifiable only by sacrifice (in specific cases), here received a new ritual formulation. In the case of baptism, prophetic calls for repentance, expressed through images of washing in water, were joined to actual washings for purification from temporary defilements, to create a new ritual of initiation and purification from sin. In the case of sexual relations, sexual sin was reconceptualised as a defilement of the person of the sinner (both body and soul). More radically, marital sexual relations were redefined by many Christians as a defilement of the person, with the body at the focus of this defilement. This focus on the body as the source and expression of defilement was an expression of the rise of ascetic purity, in which defilement was no longer a temporary issue (in the case of permitted defilements) or an unusual one (in the case of prohibited defilements), but a perennial question, accompanying all embodied souls in search for salvation. In this framework, new types of purificatory rituals were called for: rituals which perpetually divided a select group from the rest of humanity through personal transformation, rather than rituals which allowed occasional and relatively non-committal meetings with the divine. The roots for this transformation can be seen already in Second Temple Period writings, where the purity of Israel as a select group is considered to be expressed ritually in the laws of food or sex.

In many of the texts surveyed, demons and impurity are closely linked. Though this link has roots in both Jewish second temple literature and in Greco-Roman culture, its centrality and explicitness is unique to early Christian thought. In earlier thought demons generally acted independently of the human psyche; here, they were transformed into agents of pollution, intruders into the essentially positive or neutral human psyche. One reason for this development was the transformation of the pagan gods, with their pollution inherited from Jewish literature, into demons. For the more systematic thinkers, however, demons were useful as pollutants because they could cross and blur the boundaries of anthropological and cosmological hierarchies, yet leave the system intact without undermining the primacy of human subjectivity as the source of moral value; a similar process occurred among pagan Neoplatonic thinkers.

The conclusions of this thesis have wider implications, beyond the question of the

development of purity concepts. First, in the discussion of the place of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism and Greco-Roman religions, purity has typically been an area which exemplified the change Christianity wrought: from ritual to moral, from external to internal. Our analysis demonstrates that this perception of a break, though not unfounded, has been much amplified by the interests of Christian polemics, and finds significant threads of continuity between ancient purity conceptions and those of Christianity. As in many other areas, also concerning purity issues Christian writers did not discard the concepts of ancient religions, but adapted them to suit their new worldview. Purity conceptions and practices serve universal social-religious needs: the creation and maintenance of hierarchy and identity by a delineation of the place of the sacred. These needs were no less (and at times more) pressing in early Christianity than in the religions surrounding it, and therefore purity concepts could not be dispensed with.

Second, the divide between external and internal, ritual and moral, is a product of a critical, polemical viewpoint, rather than a neutral and objective one. Moral meanings of rituals as distinct from the rituals themselves are not contemplated in societies in which the rituals are totally unproblematic; this is as true of the Hebrew prophets or Greek Sceptics as of early Christians. However, while the former called upon these distinctions when speaking to their own religious group, the Christians (and other late ancient religions) used them against groups from which they were differentiating themselves; this created the danger for a double standard, in which the moral/ritual distinction was applied only to the rituals of others, but not to their own rituals. In Christianity, the polemical distinction accompanied the upheaval and eventual demise of the former cultic systems, and was integrated into the emerging Christian thought-world. Christian ritual thought thus crystallised around a basic tension, between the realities of ritual as exterior happenings and the idea of a ritual/moral, external/internal divide.

The thesis comes to its conclusion with Origen, as the culmination of trends which gathered strength from the first to the third centuries. But in many respects, Origen is also the inaugurator of a new period in the redefinition of purity and defilement. Looking forward to the fourth and fifth centuries, purity discourse continues to develop. The flourishing of the monastic movement brought radical sexual and alimentary asceticism, serving to purify the individual, to the centre of attention. The extensive literature on these subjects continued to develop the anthropology of purification through asceticism. In parallel, the advancement of

Chapter V: Baptism and purification

church hierarchy, architecture and rituals meant that baptism and eucharist became more intricate and structured rituals, with significant purity dimensions. These developments, which set the tone for the status of purity in the late ancient and medieval church, are rooted in the redefinition of purity and defilement formulated in the writings of the second- and third-century writers.

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