

Paul the First Personal Witness to Jesus—in Context

Kathy Ehrensperger, University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

In the past, three major areas of Paul-Jesus research have been identified:¹

1. Jesus-tradition in the Pauline letters (words of the Lord)
2. Theological issues, mainly stressing the theological continuity between Jesus and Paul
3. Christ as the template which should be imitated

These three dimensions can be found in approaches which presuppose either similarity or dissimilarity, or continuity or discontinuity, between Jesus and Paul. They thus are not indicators of different evaluations of the relationship between Jesus and Paul but, as areas which have been identified by scholars who advocate differing stances, they represent the present scholarly consensus concerning the relevant aspects of the Jesus-Paul debate. I will focus in what follows on the third dimension identified, although the three are clearly intertwined and cannot be neatly separated whilst additional dimensions of the debate are not covered by these themes.

My approach is based on the hermeneutical presupposition that Paul, before and after his call, was embedded in the context of first century Judaism and that his letters should be read in light of this rather than with the assumption of an intended or actually “achieved” parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity. Significant research in this area has provided substantiated arguments for this perception of Paul. An even greater output of research and data has in my view conclusively demonstrated such an embeddedness for Jesus.² In comparative research into Paul and Jesus this notion of “double similarity” could provide illuminating insights in relation to the process and role

¹ Cf. C. Wolff, “Humility and Self-Denial in Jesus’ Life and Message and in the Apostolic Existence of Paul,” pp. 145–60 in Wedderburn, *Paul and Jesus*, p. 145.

² Cf. S. Freyne, *Jesus: A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story* (London: T&T Clark, 2004). Among his numerous publications, see G. Vermes, *Jesus in His Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), but for a view which challenges this consensus see the recent article by J. H. Elliott, “Jesus the Israelite was neither a ‘Jew’ nor a ‘Christian’: On Correcting a Misleading Nomenclature,” *JSHJ* 5 (2007): 119–54.

of individual and collective remembering, the transmission of earliest stories/histories remembered and the function of these “remembered traditions” for the shaping of a corporate identity of the early Christ assemblies.

To state that Paul is the first personal witness to Jesus known to us with historical certainty, does not mean that he is the most direct and immediate and thus historically the most reliable witness to the earthly Jesus. What can be asserted with as much certainty as the above is that he is an indirect witness since he joined the movement after the death and resurrection of Christ. What he may or may not have known about Jesus and his group of followers before these events is a matter of historical imagination if not speculation. There are indications that he probably did live in Jerusalem during Jesus’ earthly life-time.³ But even if this could be confirmed, it still leaves open the question what he may or may not have known. What can be asserted with certainty is that Paul himself had his knowledge secondhand. On the other hand it can be asserted that Jerusalemites were part of the circle Paul was closely associated with, and that Paul knew, and was in communication with, “eyewitnesses” who remembered the earthly Jesus (Gal 1:18–19).⁴ Whether he did know and meet disciples other than Peter and James, again, is a matter of informed imagination. Thus, it can be asserted that, although a “secondhand” witness, Paul did know and communicate with “firsthand” witnesses.

In presupposing that both Jesus and Paul, as part of the movement in its earliest time, were firmly embedded in Judaism, I consider it as a given that the Scriptures, in whatever form and language,⁵ were the framework, content and authority which provided the symbolic and social, cultural, religious universe for the movement. Thus the Jesus remembered and confessed as the Messiah/Christ by Paul and the group around him (the

³ Paul’s reference to himself as a Pharisee implies that he was educated in Jerusalem since there is no evidence to suggest that such education could be obtained in the Diaspora. See A. L. A. Hogeterp, *Paul and God’s Temple: A Historical Interpretation of Cultic Imagery in the Corinthian Correspondence* (BibTS 2; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), pp. 235ff.

⁴ Cf. K. Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, pp. 4–11.

⁵ The issue whether Paul knew the Scriptures in Hebrew as well as Greek cannot be discussed here. Since there existed no “canon” of Scriptures, the question which writings were perceived to be “Scriptures” by Paul and his team needs further investigation. Cf. C. Tuckett, “Paul and Jesus Tradition: The Evidence of 1 Corinthians 2:9 and Gospel of Thomas,” in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict* (eds. T. J. Burke and J. K. Elliott; NovTSup 109; Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 55–73.

Jesus testimony of Paul) is a testimony within the context of a Jewish symbolic and social world. Another dimension shared by Jesus, Paul, and the earliest followers is the fact that to live in this Jewish world meant that they lived in the context of a subculture under the conditions set by the political and cultural predominance and power of the Roman Empire.

“Become Imitators of Me as I Am of Christ” and “Welcome One Another as Christ Has Welcomed You”

Paul’s call to imitation is a call to embody the gospel, to embody the message. To embody something one needs a perception of what ought to be embodied. Significantly, Paul does not outline a concept or an idea but refers to “Christ” as the paradigm to be imitated. What this actually implied is less obvious than one might expect, as scholarly debate demonstrates. In my view it can hardly refer simply to a Christ kerygma, the mere fact of Christ’s death and resurrection, which Bultmann so famously emphasized as the only aspect in which Paul, apparently, was interested.⁶ Neither the death of Christ at the hands of the Romans nor the resurrection of Christ by God can be imitated. Despite the Pauline language of death and dying with Christ (Rom 6:5–11), Paul is actually very much alive when he is writing and interacting with communities in the movement. Moreover, to claim a resurrection experience for himself would very much resemble an understanding of the message which the first letter to the Corinthians tries to correct (cf. 1 Cor 4:8). Resurrection is a hope (Rom 8:24–25; 1 Cor 15), and it concerns people as a corporate entity, not individuals as such.⁷

The focus on the cross, the dimension of death and dying, has been taken as one of the significant dimensions of Pauline theologizing which oriented itself on this central aspect of Jesus’ earthly existence.⁸ Without denying the significance of the cross in

⁶ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 3–32.

⁷ For a more detailed analysis of Paul’s discourse of imitation see Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, pp. 137–54; cf. D. A. Brondos, *Paul on the Cross: Reconstructing the Apostle’s Story of Redemption* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), pp. 70–72.

⁸ E.g. Wedderburn, “Paul and the Story of Jesus,” in Wedderburn, *Jesus and Paul*, pp. 161–89.

Paul's letters, I want to focus here on another aspect related to the notion of imitation—which may shed light on the significance of Jesus in the Pauline letters.

Significant parts of the Pauline letters deal with issues of hospitality, that is, with welcoming others (Rom 14:1; 15:7), and accommodation to the needs of others (Rom 14:15–21; 1 Cor 9:20–22). I am quite aware of the fact that it is not very original to emphasize that issues related to table-fellowship were very important to Paul. Most prominently, of course, these issues are seen as being related to what is called Paul's relativization of food laws and as such as exemplary for the relativization of the Torah in the Christ-movement. If the incident at Antioch (Gal 2:11–18) was the “catalyst of the perception of incompatibility between faith in Christ and life as a Jew,”⁹ and the event which separated the Christ-movement from Judaism,¹⁰ then table-fellowship is the major issue which separates Paul from Jesus. Most scholars agree that Jesus himself did not cross the boundaries of his people, and did not start a mission to people from the nations. Moreover, there are traditions which attribute to Jesus a clear adherence to the Torah, even where its interpretation was disputed (Mt 5:17–19; 12:1–8 etc.). If it is really Paul's emphasis that the Torah, and the food laws in particular, are rendered obsolete in Christ, or at least of no real significance in Christ, and adherence to these are merely tolerated as long as it takes for Jewish Christ-followers to come to a full understanding of the new faith, there is actually a striking dissimilarity between Jesus and Paul. Nevertheless there is an aspect in relation to table-fellowship which, in my view, provides a strong indication to the opposite, indication of a deep and thorough knowledge and understanding of Paul concerning the mission and message of the earthly Jesus.

At the Table: Separated or United? A Word of the Lord

⁹ Which Campbell clearly argues is not the case, see “Perceptions of Compatibility between Christianity and Judaism in Pauline Interpretation,” *BibInt* 13.3 (2005): 298–316.

¹⁰ J. D. G. Dunn asserts, “The Antioch incident convinced Paul that justification through faith and covenantal nomism were not two complementary emphases, but were in direct antithesis to each other,” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1990), p.162. Although Dunn is aware that the parting of the ways did happen in various stages, he sees Paul as setting up a foundational incompatibility between “being in Christ” and Judaism.

The focus of many of the passages in which Paul refers to issues related to table-fellowship cannot be subsumed under the Jew/Gentile dichotomy arising from issues related to food laws. In my view it is highly significant that in one of the few cases where Paul actually does refer explicitly to a word of the Lord, in 1 Cor 11:18–26, and thereby demonstrates his concern for being true to the traditions handed down to him, he writes in a context where the dispute around table-fellowship has nothing to do with the Jew/Gentile “problem.” Kosher or non-kosher food is not mentioned here at all.

Paul refers to problems around the sharing of the table but clearly in relation to the issues addressed in the earlier part of the letter (1 Cor 1:10–17). The divisions and factions within the Corinthians’ assembly obviously have a major impact also on their table-fellowship.¹¹ The reason why in Paul’s view they are not eating the Lord’s supper (οὐκ ἐστὶν κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν, 1 Cor 11:20) when they come together is that they do not actually “eat together.” Paul deplores that they do not share a common meal, but eat and drink when it suits each one individually. This indicates that the Lord’s Supper was meant to be a shared meal and table-fellowship implied that you shared company with those around the table in sharing the food on the table!¹² The Corinthians’ pattern of commensality seems to replicate patterns and values of social hierarchies as was characteristic of the practice of commensality of the Graeco-Roman elite. The distribution of food portions, table arrangements, etc., served the explicit purpose of registering and confirming the hierarchical social system.¹³ This pattern causes a huge gap in the Corinthian community between those who have (that is, have too much to

¹¹ Whether Paul in 1 Cor 11:19 actually confirms the necessity of factions or whether he is simply being ironic about them ought to be seriously considered.

¹² This characteristic feature of a shared table as an expression and constituting element of community formation is of course not unique to the Christ-movement. For overviews see the relevant chapters in A. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in Its Mediterranean Setting* (NTM 8; Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2005), D. E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), also Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” in *Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge, 1975), pp. 249–75.

¹³ Cf. e.g. O. M. Van Nijf, *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East* (Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 17; Amsterdam: Gieben, 1997), pp. 149–35; P. Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 113–43. I am indebted here to W. Braun, “The Greco-Roman Meal: Typology of Form or Form of Typology?”, paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, Atlanta, Ga., November 2003.

drink), and those who have not (have not eaten and thus are starving). The implicit promotion of the “freedom of the individual” by some Corinthian Christ-followers must be seen as the exercise of dominating power by the stronger (table-fellow) over and at the expense of the weaker!

The temporal dimension of the problem expressed with *prolamba/nein* has been taken as an indication that a situation caused by different social classes meeting as an assembly of Christ-followers was at the heart of the issue. Those who eat before others arrive could be taken as an indication that those who arrive later had to work late, whereas the others were in the privileged position of either not working with their own hands at all, or at least not for long hours. Paul’s question in v. 22, “Do you not have houses” (*mh\ ga\r oi0kiav ou0k e1xete*), and the reference to those who are humiliated by the behavior of those who eat and are already drunk prior to the latter’s arrival as “those who have nothing” (*tou\v mh\ e1xontav*) could well refer to their respective social status. Even though it cannot be asserted what exactly was the difference between the groups, what can be asserted with certainty is that a power asymmetry is exercised to the disadvantage of the weaker members.

At stake at the table then is not the food on the table but the concern for the “other” follower of Christ who is in a socially weaker position and thus hindered from joining the “table-fellowship” at the same time as the others, these being most likely more affluent members of the community, who did not have to “work with their hands.”¹⁴ Paul’s major concern seems to be with the effect of this abuse of power. The “late-comers” are exposed to humiliation, which is in absolute contradiction with the ethos of the Christ-movement and actually means despising not only the weaker brother and sister, but in defying core values this means despising the entire assembly.¹⁵ It should be noted that the act of humiliating others is condemned and the humiliated are not admonished to bear their humiliation with dignity, in humbleness, or as a sign of Christ-

¹⁴ Cf. E. W. Stegemann and W. Stegemann, *The Jesus-Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (trans. O.C. Dean, Jr.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 20–27.

¹⁵ Paul argues in a similar vein in 1 Cor 12:12–26. Similarly R. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), pp. 838–9.

like life!¹⁶ The abuse of power is not an *adiaphoron* which should be tolerated or put up with in the Christ-movement. Paul here voices his strong protest against non-hospitality, that is, against denying the brother/sister the respect owed in Christ expressed in sharing the food at the table. He sees such denial as equivalent to humiliating the brother/sister.

Power Asymmetries at the Table

There is no “weak-strong” language used in this passage but the issue, although different, nevertheless has some parallels to the “weak-strong” debate in relation to table-fellowship in Rom 14:1–15:13. Coming together at the table as the fellowship of Christ but causing the weaker brother and sister to stumble (Rom 14:15), or humiliating him/her (1 Cor 11:22)—for whatever reason this may be—is not in accordance with the way of life in this movement. At this table the welcoming hospitality of Christ himself has to be imitated (Rom 15:7).

The reference to a word of the Lord in a context which is concerned with the social implications of table-fellowship rather than dietary aspects is, in my view, an indication that the primary significance of table-fellowship for Paul (in accordance with traditions remembered in the gospels) has to do with issues concerning power/hierarchical structures in society.¹⁷ Paul insists in this passage as elsewhere that in the assemblies (e0kklhsi/ai) of God there is no room for the static hierarchy of power and honor which dominated the Graeco-Roman elite as well as society as a whole.¹⁸

As with other aspects of life in Christ which are addressed in 1 Corinthians, the Christ-followers there seem to be struggling with “translating” and incorporating the message of the gospel into their lives. Bartchy and others have drawn attention to the

¹⁶ I cannot elaborate on this here, but this has implications for what are perceived to be virtues in Christ. Cf. also K. Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, pp. 98–116.

¹⁷ See R. Jewett’s useful discussion of common meals in Thessalonica and in Rome where he stresses that “it appears likely that the food for the love feast in Thessalonica was being provided by community members rather than by patrons.” Jewett concludes from his analysis that there existed “a social system . . . that enabled congregational groups to function without patrons,” *Romans*, pp. 68, 69; cf. pp. 64–69.

¹⁸ I am not arguing that the Christ-movement was egalitarian as such but there is a difference in the exercise of power as domination or empowerment as well as in social organization according to static and flexible hierarchical structures. For a more detailed analysis see my *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, pp. 16–35, and pp. 55–62.

difficulties of this “translation” or enculturation process.¹⁹ The actual table-fellowship and the sharing of bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord are crucial dimensions of life in Christ not on the symbolic level alone but foremost in its social dimension. There is no division between the symbolic and social dimensions of table-fellowship discernable from the Pauline letter, for Paul they are inseparable.²⁰

The prominence of issues related to table-fellowship in the Pauline letters is a strong indication that Paul and the Pauline communities did actually share in the remembering of Jesus’ and the early disciples’ table-fellowship during his earthly life. The fact that this emphasis matches the emphasis on table-fellowship in the Gospels could indicate that we here have traces of historical Jesus traditions. It seems that the Pauline communities of Christ-followers as well as those associated with the Gospel tradition practiced something which had been practiced prior to Jesus’ death. Jesus was remembered at the table, or more precisely, the remembrance of Jesus was reenacted around the table, as the early testimony of 1 Cor 11:23–25 clearly demonstrates. The traditions about the importance of this dimension of Jesus life and ministry are doubtless very consistent.

The fact that narratives and sayings in the Synoptics as well as in the Gospel of John attribute a central role to table-fellowship in a number of contexts is evidence that this was a decisive characteristic of the movement certainly at the time of the emergence of the written gospels. Thus we find Jesus invited by Pharisees to share the intimacy of a meal at their house (Lk 14:1), and in one narrative the name of the host is remembered: Simon, the Pharisee invites him to a meal at his home thus providing time and space for conversation over issues about which they both were concerned (Lk 7:36–50). Jesus’ and his followers’ habit of eating and drinking together was apparently noted by those who had not joined the movement, and raising questions concerning the significance of this

¹⁹ S. S. Bartchy, “When I’m Weak, I’m Strong: A Pauline Paradox in Cultural Context,” in *Kontexte der Schrift, Band II: Kultur, Politik, Religion, Sprache-Text* (ed. C. Strecker; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), pp. 49–60.

²⁰ The significance of daily common meals emphasized by R. Jewett, “Are There Allusions to the Love Feast in Rom 3:8–10?” in J. V. Hills, et al., eds., *Common Life in the Early Church: Essays Honoring Graydon F. Snyder* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1998), pp. 265–78. See also his *Romans*, pp. 804–15.

characteristic habit (Lk 7:34; Mt 11:19). Moreover, it was noted that Jesus sometimes shared a table with people who, by some members of Jewish society, were regarded as dubious table fellows (Mt 9:10–11; Mk 2:15–16; Lk 5:27–30). John mentions the tradition of table fellowship at some points, e.g. when Jesus is a guest in Martha's, Mary's, and Lazarus's house (12:2). The centrality of hospitality is also evident in the narratives of the feeding of the multitude (Mt 14:13–21; Lk 9:11–17; Mk 6:33–44; Jn 6:2–14) and in some of the parables, not least of all in the parable of the Great Banquet (Lk 14:16–23), and the parable of the prodigal son which notably ends with a great feasting (Lk 15:11–32). The order in which guests and hosts sit/recline at the table is another significant issue of discussion (cf. Lk 14:7–11 par). The fact that these traditions were of obvious importance to communities in the late first century combined with the many references to table-fellowship or issues related to table-fellowship in the Pauline letters are indications of shared traditions, practices, and concerns within the movement.²¹ The prominence of the theme and practices surrounding table-fellowship as evidenced in the Pauline letters, and the fact that Paul actually underscores the significance of “appropriate” behavior at the table, especially of those who are in a socially more powerful position, with a word of the Lord is, if not a clear, then at least a very strong, argument that we here get a glimpse of a reference to earliest Jesus tradition if not the earthly Jesus.

Table-Fellowship and “Non-Negotiables” in Christ

Many of the dimensions which are emphasized by Paul as being non-negotiable for “life in Christ” are related to “table-fellowship.” Romans 14:1–15:13 is another example of this emphasis. The main concern here, as in 1 Cor 11:17–26(34) is that the fellowship at the shared table, and thus the fellowship of the community, is at risk of being disturbed if not destroyed. The passage in Romans ends on the admonition that what actually counts in Christ is that his followers welcome each other as Christ has

²¹ The significance of communal meals within “*havurot*” during the late Second Temple period should be taken into account here as well. See A. Oppenheimer, “*Havurot* in Jerusalem at the End of the Second Temple Period,” in *Between Rome and Babylon* (ed. N. Oppenheimer; TSAJ 108; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2005), pp. 102–9.

welcomed them (Rom 15:7) almost certainly indicating a shared table-fellowship.²² Hospitality is of absolute importance and thus table-fellowship the key practice of life in Christ.²³ This does not imply that at this table all are the same, all have to become identical and thus eat the same. The kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking but about “justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). Table-fellowship, that is hospitality of course, cannot be exercised without eating and drinking but the eating and drinking together serves the purpose of fellowship or, to formulate it differently, it has to do with the covenant renewed in Christ and remembered in table-fellowship. The food should not hinder that fellowship. This has been taken as an argument that Paul actually perceived *any* concern about kosher food by Jews as a hindrance to this table-fellowship. It has even been argued that this was one of the main concerns of Paul in that such so-called boundary markers are supposedly a primary obstacle for true fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christ-followers.²⁴

Several aspects deserve further and more detailed consideration here. The fact that Paul refers to a word of the Lord in relation to a problem within the Corinthian assembly which had nothing to do with issues of kosher food, but with the ruthless and shaming behavior of some Christ-followers over others, makes it obvious that the main concern at the table of the Lord is to be sensitive to the needs of the other. This means that the one in the stronger, more powerful position is obligated to accommodate to the needs of the “other.” Such obligation resonates with aspects of life in Christ emphasized elsewhere by Paul (e.g. 2 Cor 10:1ff; 2 Cor 1:24). This is actually the emphasis also in the passage of Rom 14:1–15:13 which many scholars perceive as being in the first instance concerned with the issue of kosher food having a divisive effect among Christ-followers. I have argued elsewhere that the focus here too is a concern for the weaker in the conflict—and the ones who are admonished to accommodate are not the weak but the strong.²⁵

²² J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB 33; London: Doubleday, 1993), p. 689.

²³ On this see also Jewett, *Romans*, pp. 835–6.

²⁴ J. D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *BJRL* 65 (1983): 95–122.

²⁵ See my *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*, pp. 181–9, cf. also P. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (CRINT sec. 3, Jewish traditions in early Christian literature 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), pp. 236–45.

The issue is not the food on the table but the fellowship at the table. And in order to render fellowship possible the more powerful must accommodate to the weak. This is not an option in Christ, since the weak are not supposed to be at the mercy of, or dependent on, the goodwill of the strong. It is the condition *sine qua non* of life in Christ that the shame and honor hierarchy of the dominating Graeco-Roman society is overcome/rendered obsolete, and by no means the identity of Jews as Jews. The obstacle to table-fellowship is not Jewish identity but hierarchies, dominating power structure and the humiliation of the brother/sister in Christ. I think that the supposed emphasis on issues of food laws in relation to table-fellowship actually reverses the priorities at stake here. The main concern is not what food and drink is eaten at the table; this is the secondary issue and serves only the purpose of enabling the primary concern, facilitating true hospitality, meaning welcoming one another in Christ. In the case of Jewish traditions this can easily be achieved by accommodating to the needs of those, who as a matter of identity, require certain dietary requirements. The main issues Paul is concerned about in 1 Cor 11:17–25 and Rom 14:1–15:13 are the social hierarchies and the issues of contempt and domination involved in these. The ethos and characteristics within the Christ-movement ought to seek orientation in admonitions like “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God” (Rom 12:2). This ethos is not under threat by Jewish Christ-followers who maintain their identity as Jews but by those followers who are boasting and puffed up and try to “lord” over others.²⁶ Thus when Paul insists that the kingdom is not about eating and drinking (Rom 14:17), this cannot mean that table-fellowship is not significant, but that what truly matters is that no one imposes his/her power on others.²⁷

²⁶ This emphasis is also found in the later Gospel traditions. One example has to be sufficient here: the conversation over the order at table (Mt 20:20–23/Mk 10:35–40/Lk 22:24–27 cf. also Jn 13:3–17) indicates that what has been identified above as Paul’s main concern when it comes to table-fellowship is the issue of hierarchy and imposition of power. This is something which is not part of life in Christ since Christ the servant emphasizes, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mt 20:23–28).

²⁷ The incident at Antioch would require a more detailed discussion than space allows in this article but the issue here too is primarily the “breaking-up” of the table-fellowship in a context which is

Hospitality in Christ has to do with the glory of God, “that you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:6). This praise by Jews and Gentiles of the one God of Israel and the nations is compromised not by the identity of the Jews which it requires and presupposes, but by a continued adherence to the worship practices of other gods (this is most likely the issue discussed in 1 Cor 8–10) and the imposition of dominating power and practices of contempt over against each other. In a context of rising tensions between Jews and Gentiles in the middle of the first century in Palestine as well as in some cities of the Graeco-Roman world, the implications of table-fellowship between Jews and people from the nations, that is the risks, difficulties, but also promises inherent therein should not be underestimated. These contextual factors cannot be explored in detail here but they are of major significance when we try to understand what was at stake in the emphasis on hospitality in the form of table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. To reduce the problem to problems of so-called boundary markers in my view diminishes its significance as a practice of reconciliation and anticipation of the coming kingdom of God.

Conclusion

Paul’s recurring and consistent emphasis on the importance of table-fellowship has been found to be consistent with the importance of table-fellowship during Jesus life-time as remembered in the Gospels. No indications for a dissociation of Paul from the Jesus traditions as remembered in the Gospels could be identified. The fellowship of Jews and Gentiles at the table does not render Jewish identity obsolete and Paul does not argue that in order for such fellowship to be possible Jewish would have to accommodate to a Gentile way of life. Quite the opposite. The spread of the Christ-movement into the Gentile world is an inclusive move rather than an exclusive one: the inclusion of Gentiles as Gentiles does not imply the exclusion of Jews as Jews. Issues concerning table-fellowship between Jews and Gentiles should be seen as subordinate to Paul’s primary

already marked by the rising tension between Jews and Gentiles, the radicalization of some Jewish groups, which eventually lead to the Jewish-Roman War. Cf. also M. Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity at Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation Between Judaism and Christianity* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 113–21.

concern is “to pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Rom 14:19), so that the Gentiles will rejoice with his people (Rom 15:10). If such problems around table-fellowship arise due to differences between Jews and Gentiles, as obviously was the case in Antioch, this is not a cause for a parting of the ways but a problem which requires a solution. Since such a problem had not arisen earlier, when the movement was an entirely Jewish movement in the realm of Eretz Israel, of course, new solutions had to be found. But the necessity to find new solutions to new problems in new contexts should not be confused with a necessary departure from tradition, nor be seen as a rejection of or an inconsistency with the “original” Jesus tradition. Thus, Paul and those working for the gospel among the Gentiles should be seen as trying to find ways of life in Christ in new circumstances and true to tradition.

The reading of Paul in light of Jesus traditions and vice versa informed by the presupposition of double similarity (the Jewishness of both Paul and Jesus), has led us to see Paul’s emphasis on peace at the table as coherent with the Jesus tradition of table-fellowship as remembered in the Gospels. They are both embedded in, and draw from, Jewish traditions which associate the coming of the kingdom of God with a heavenly banquet of abundance and peace for all.