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# Establishing Short-Term Communities in Eucharistic Celebrations of Antiquity*

## Abstract

Despite traces of their self-conceptualisation as long-term groups, Christian community meetings established groups with a presumably small and stable long-term core group and with a certainly instable group of other participants. In this respect, Christian groups abided by group-styles of other social bodies in their cities. Gatherings of Christians were as stable and unstable as other fellowships at a banquet or as the group of clients who met a certain patron in a morning *salutatio*. In the fourth century, the celebration of Eucharists becomes embedded in a performance *sui generis*, which contemporary preachers cannot explain by analogies to contemporary institutions. They have recourse to far-fetched and highly metaphorical notions in order to describe and legitimise these performances. Current sociological studies about the developments of groups thus provide important analytical categories for the reconstruction of the early history of Christian liturgies.

**Keywords:** Christianity, liturgy, Eucharist, group-style, meals, morning *salutatio*, Mass, Christianity, *Didache*

## 1 Preliminary considerations

Christianity manifested itself in groups. Before and after cities, villages, regions, or even the Roman Empire were regarded by many of their inhabitants as Christian, they were populated by Christian groups among others. The following essay examines the role of the customs and rituals of the Eucharist in the life of these groups and tries to find a basis for assumptions about the persistence and coherence of these groups vis-à-vis the development of these customs and rituals.

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From a modern point of view, both baptism and Eucharistic banquets compete for the status of being the decisive factor in the constitution of Christianity as a long-term group. Yet, baptism involves individuals. It does not manifest a group in actual practice, although it may be interpreted as such in normative theory and explanatory rhetoric.[1] The Eucharistic banquet has much more tangible social effects. It supports an experience of the group's existence for its members and guests. Banquets (i. e., Eucharists) played an important role in the constitution of Christianity.

Yet, early Christians were not the only ones that met for the celebration of meals. Invited guests at the dinner party of host N. N.,[2] followers of Mithras,[3] Jews,[4] priests of a certain deity,[5] members of voluntary associations, and many others had partly similar reasons for holding banquets and thus forming groups. People's self-conception makes them convene in groups and groups that show up in the historic record may point to some aspects of their members' self-conception. This line of reasoning leads into an impasse: the typical Christian is a member of a Christian group which is Christian because it is made up of Christians. The following paper tries to dissolve this circle, projecting it into a narrative of development from the creation of differing forms of groups through changing group styles in Eucharistic banquets of the first centuries CE.

Furthermore, taking Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe as a source of inspiration for the study of ancient texts, it may be expected to find a multiplicity of identities of individual persons and ambiguous group memberships.[6] The literary character of the ancient sources and the remoteness of the epoch to be studied add further layers of uncertainty. Nevertheless, Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe point to concepts of sociology that may be used as heuristic tools in the study of rituals, such as behavioural involve-

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1   Until the age of Constantine, baptism remains a short and unspectacular ritual. Fourth century churches try to change this situation, which creates a new reality for the ritual of baptism. Paul Bradshaw 1993 shows that the heyday of adult baptism as a grand ritual lasted less than a century (before efforts to reinstate it in the late twentieth century).

2   A more or less private (or a more or less publicly observed) invitation to a banquet creates a temporary and instable group. Literary texts reflect and establish rules in order to recommend desirable behaviour and to create boundaries for acceptable behaviour. The group style of private dinner parties is discussed in literary texts (cf. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*) and implied in the introductory stories about symposia like Plutarch's *Septem sapientium convivium* and Xenophon's *Symposium*.

3   Cf. Eckhardt and Leonhard 2009, 1028. 1038. 1040–1043.

4   Cf. tBer 4–5.

5   Tertullian refers to the meals of several important groups in the world of the Roman Empire in contrast to the frugality of the Christian meal in his *Apologeticum* 39.

6   Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004, e. g. 86.

ment. One can assess 'the degree to which the person engages in actions that directly implicate the collective identity category in question'.[7]

The concept must be used cautiously regarding contemporary as well as ancient data, because 'indices of behavioral involvement do not necessarily constitute unambiguous indices of collective identification.'[8] It is significant that church attendance serves as example for the ambiguity of behavioural involvement in that article. On the one hand, participation in a ritual may convey a social message that can be much less ambiguous than a verbal utterance.[9] Its social meaning and public representation is specified by widely known norms. Even if rituals may disambiguate social messages, this does not, on the other hand, uncover the individual's motives for participation in the rituals. It may point to that individual's act of believing – if the meaning of 'believing' is not limited to 'considering certain theological tenets as true'.[10] It is worthwhile, therefore, to consider participation in ritual acts of groups as indications for collective identity, if one bears in mind that this reflects more or less accurately the individuals' personal attitudes in this respect.

The study of ancient liturgies does not have empirical data at its disposal in the way that sociological investigations of present phenomena do. With due caution, one can try to read ancient texts in a remotely related way, asking what someone who said that he or she regarded himself or herself as a typical Christian in the second century would have described as features of his or her identity: e. g., being a Christian in comparison with being a dealer in incense, a monotheist, a vegetarian, a native speaker of Aramaic, a venerator of Apollo and Asclepius, or a philosopher. An imaginary person would combine aspects of several of such identities in him- or herself. He or she could also mention rituals or at least certain elements of widely performed rituals which were regarded as indications of one's identity as a Christian. Individuals could point to their membership in groups in a manner that was somehow connected with baptism and manifested in one's regular participation in the group's Eucharistic meals.

The following essay presents four case studies in order to substantiate this discussion: (1) the *Didache* and (2) Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, proceeding (3) to remarks about the situation of Cyprian's church in Carthage, and leading (4) to fourth and early fifth century preachers, especially Theodore of Mopsuestia.

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**7**  Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004, 92–93.
**8**  Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004, 92–93.
**9**  Rappaport 1999, chapter 4.
**10**  O'Neill 2012; Bell 1992, especially chapter 8.

## 2 The community of the Didache (case 1)

Gerard Rouwhorst typecasts three forms of Christian groups in the Early Church according to the shape of their initiation rituals:[11] first, the closed, sect-like house-church; second, the group of spiritually advanced (and continuously advancing) believers; and third, the late fourth century stratified church. The first and third types of Christianity are relevant here, because they point to phenomena of groups. The members of a closed house-church would regard themselves as belonging to a small group of people who share important aspects of their lives (e. g., eating together) and require their members to undergo baptism and to adhere to certain rules of behaviour. Continuing Rouwhorst's line of reasoning, the rituals of this group would not create short-term communities. They would establish and maintain the strong internal ties of a clearly demarcated group. Thus, *Didache* 9 states:

Nobody should eat or drink from your Eucharist[12], except for those who are baptised into the name of the Lord. For the Lord said about this: Do not give the holy thing to the dogs.[13]

Baptism, which is only performed once in a lifetime, appears to be an unmistakable token of permanent membership. Baptism as a ritual to be performed once and for all is not described in the *Didache* explicitly. Taking the risk of a gross anachronism, it is read into *Didache* 7. Even if baptism may have been understood as a watershed in one's life, it does not, by definition, determine membership in a real group. Moreover, in times when rebaptism was an issue, a person would not be required to be baptised each time he or she changed groups – as long as the old group was recognised as orthodox by the new one. In comparison with the fuzziness of the social effects of baptism, participation in Eucharistic banquets seems much less ambiguous. The compiler of the *Didache* may have intended the banquet to manifest a stable long-term group. The rules set out in this text indicate, however, that the Eucharist also establishes short term communities. Its power to define the boundaries of a long-term group is at best limited.

Rouwhorst observes that there are two groups of people who continuously blur the clear-cut boundaries of Christian groups: candidates for membership and yet unbaptised children of members. Regarding the latter group,

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**11** Rouwhorst 2006.

**12** The meal is called 'Eucharist' in 9.1. McGowan 2004 and McGowan 1997 shows that the distinction between Eucharists and non-Eucharistic Agape-meals is a modern concern. Ancient writers did not make this distinction.

**13** *Didache* 9.5.

there is no reason to assume that all persons belonging to the social unit of a house joined the adult members of the household in their participation in communal meals.[14] The *Didache* does not discuss the status of children of Christians of any age. A third group of members, of an even more precarious status, are not mentioned here: absentees. Several inscriptions of Greek and Roman voluntary associations imply that participation in meetings is compulsory and absentees are rather punished than provided with portions of the meal *(apophoreta)*.[15] In contrast, Justin's group used to distribute portions of the meal to members who were not present at the meeting.[16] Absentees are not envisaged in the *Didache*, although not all people who were entitled to participate in the meals belonged to the central, long-term group that is presupposed in the background of the text.

The text of the *Didache* betrays a high degree of permeability of the borders of the envisaged group in spite of its apparent interest in tight group boundaries. The group is part of a larger network of other, not necessarily similar groups. It apprehends claims to sustenance by cross-border commuters, like prophets, envoys *(apostoloi)*, teachers, artisans, and impostors.[17] These persons do not only take part in the Eucharistic meal, but are also allowed to dominate the performance of its central prayers – the only part of the performance that is governed by special rules at all in the text. As these cross-border commuters do not belong to the group, their social background is either not obvious or may at least be dubious. Therefore, the group tries to impose rules upon foreigners in order to distinguish between real and honest prophets, envoys, or artisans and charlatans who want to exploit the group's generosity undeservedly.[18] A prophet, an *apostolos*, or any kind of dubious traveller was apparently presumed to have been baptised somewhere. Nevertheless, all of those people are invited to participate in the Eucharist despite very explicit doubts regarding their credibility.

The *Didache* does not indicate that the meal customs of this group provided any means to distinguish between different statuses of participants. Desirable behaviour at the meal entails very few ritualised acts. The internal social structure of the group is indicated and manifested in subtle elements of the performance of the meal: '… likewise, when you open a bottle of wine

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**14** Cf. Vössing 2011, 63 n. 129 with regard to Corinth in Paul's time.

**15** The notable exceptions from this rule are discussed by Klinghardt 1996, 149 para. 3.

**16** Justin, *1 Apology* 67.5. Justin's testimony postdates the *Didache* by half of a century if the *Didache* was written early in the second century.

**17** *Didache* 11–13. Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28 for a similar list of inter-group roles.

**18** *Didache* 11.3–6.

or oil, take the firstling *(aparchē)* and give it to the prophets'.[19] In the absence of prophets, the group should support the poor.[20] It stands to reason that a Christian cook who wants to open an amphora of oil in a domestic kitchen or a tavern would not stop working, leave the place, and search for a prophet who was entitled to receive the first spoonful of oil. This rule can only be applied at communal meals, where certain members of the group or guests are honoured by their integration into the fulfilment of certain customs of tithing. They receive oil and wine first. In the case of the firstling of the dough, which cannot be consumed on the spot and which the cook must hence separate in the kitchen, no recipient is mentioned.[21]

The *Didache* emphasises 'bonding social capital'.[22] It does not try to legitimise the existence of itself as a group by referring to some benefit for the broader society.[23] Nevertheless, its members also acquire considerable 'bridging social capital'. The short term integration of – presumed to be baptised – prophets, artisans, *apostoloi*, teachers, and cheaters (who were not baptised and/or who were only interested in exploiting the group's generosity) suggests that it does not propose totally innovative measures of how to treat Christians, but rather alludes to well established and reciprocal customs of how to treat members of a larger network of groups.[24] Thus, permanent membership in the group of the *Didache* would entitle such a person to some degree of informal integration into other nodes of this network, too. The visiting prophet is not required to undergo baptism before taking part in the meal and before being offered the first cup of wine from a new amphora.

These observations cast considerable doubt on reconstructions of the communal background of the *Didache* as a close-knit, self-contained, secluded house-church. It is true that its rules and customs restrict the number of eaters at the group's meals. Yet, these rules also show that Eucharists create short-term communities that will by definition break up after the meeting and which will not likely reassemble again in the same constellation of people. The heavy language regarding the restriction of access to the Eucharist in *Didache* 9.5 is certainly normative rather than descriptive. Read

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19  *Didache* 13.6. It stands to reason that the size of meal portions and similar distinctions that were customary in other groups highlighted a person's status.

20  *Didache* 13.3.

21  *Didache* 13.5.

22  Lichterman 2006, esp. 538.

23  The 'poor' (13.4; similarly, almsgiving in 15.4; and at the prophets' instigation, 11.12) who are to be given the firstlings in the absence of prophets are of course members of the short-term group, perhaps also of the long-term congregation, because these firstlings are distributed during the meal.

24  Cf. Ascough 1997.

through the lenses of the following chapters (11–13), the requirement of baptism emerges as a very low threshold for access to this group – a threshold that could not be secured in actual practice. The group and its gatherings at the occasion of its meals are open for guests as well as newcomers. Newcomers are required to be sincere. Guests must be able to behave according to a kind of group style that is called 'manners of the Lord' *(tropoi kyriou).*[25] Thus, *Didache* 14.2 and 15.3 make sure that diners are not unreconciled with each other.[26] Guests must show some consistency of their table talk with their general behaviour.[27] They must also be careful not to exploit the group's generosity in an obvious way.[28] Prophets should be able to perform table prayers.

These observations are borne out by the liturgical texts that may be recited at these meetings. They emphasise the permeability of the group boundaries:[29]

Like this broken (piece of bread) that was scattered over the mountains, was brought together, and became one (piece), thus bring together [addressing 'God, our father'] your congregation from the (four) corners of the world into your kingdom […]

The Didachist does not yet know the act of breaking bread as a metaphoric ritual.[30] Its ritual thwarts such an alleged message of the gesture. The bread is already served in pieces. Breaking has been carried out before the beginning of the meal. Breaking of the bread does not stage the participation of group members as consumers of one single loaf.[31] On the contrary, any piece of bread (whether broken or not) is interpreted as a metaphor for the assembled community because it is an assemblage of grains of cereals. The reference to the ingathering of the community from all over the world cannot refer to a close-knit long term congregation, because it refers to the eaters of the bread, i. e., the participants of the banquet in the context of the ritual who are gathered together here and now like the concrete grains that went into their pieces of bread. Especially if the chapters 9 and 10 are read together with 11–15, the Eucharist includes quite foreign people into a short term

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**25**  *Didache* 11.8.

**26**  Apart from considerations of purity whose influence should not be underestimated, the prevention of conflicts at meals is a broadly attested concern of normative texts for meals; cf. Vössing 2011, esp. 57 n. 93.

**27**  *Didache* 11.10.

**28**  *Didache* 11.5. 9. 12; 12.5. Deriding philosophers who take money for their teaching is a trope; cf. Hahn 1989; 79–85. 105. 110.

**29**  *Didache* 9.4.

**30**  Cf. Leonhard 2016.

**31**  Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:17.

community, while it may incidentally serve as a device for internal bonding of a long term community. The Eucharistic banquet as such does not establish or manifest a long-term community.

## 3 A Christian group in Corinth according to First Corinthians (case 2)

### 3.1 First Corinthians 11–14

These observations are supported by a cursory look at a text that predates the *Didache* by several decades, Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Matthias Klinghardt has pointed out that these chapters are best understood on the background of a communal meal of a group followed by discussions.[32] The structure of meal customs is borne out by many specimens of symposium literature. *Didache* 9–14 and 1 Corinthians 11–14 reflect very similar customs as well as the same literary tradition: 1 Cor 11 (vv. 16–34) gives an outline of the meal. It mentions what Paul sees as signs of deterioration that became entrenched during the regular celebration of these banquets. Like *Didache* 11–15, the ensuing chapters 12–14 contain material pertaining to the meetings of the community after the meal.

Konrad Vössing analyses the situation at the meetings of the Corinthian community of Christians with regard to its Greco-Roman context.[33] The Corinthian group of Christians meets for communal meals with supposedly several dozens of diners. It cannot be known in which interval of time this group would meet for a banquet. The institution of Sunday as a day for Christian gatherings and banquets is not visible.[34] The Corinthian congregation is split up into smaller table groups at its meetings. This is a regular feature of Greco-Roman dining customs, supported by the layout of houses and clusters of *triclinia* in temples. Even where the Gospels of Mark (6:39) and Luke (9:14; not Matthew 14:19–20 or John) describe Jesus as host of thousands of people, they imagine a large crowd that is subdivided into smaller table groups.

Attested bylaws of associations include severe penalties for walking around in the larger building complex and trying to leave one's assigned dining group in order to join another one, thereby causing strife and social unrest. It was customary that the host (or in voluntary associations, an elected magistrate or the common fund of the association) would just pro-

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**32** Klinghardt 1996, para. 13 esp. 343–344. 361–365.
**33** Vössing 2011.
**34** Leonhard 2006, 121–140.

vide bread, wine, and (warm) water to be mixed with wine. The food could be brought by the diners and distributed among them – i. e., within the subgroups. Paul chides the rich Corinthians for celebrating sumptuous meals within their own subgroup at the same occasion when the poorer members of the community must settle for a sparse meal.

The rich Corinthians do not, however, behave improperly. On the contrary, they act according to normal standards, where the stratification of the society is reflected in the quantities and qualities of food that people consume at those events of public or semi-public eating. Paul's innovative position only requires a *partial* disruption of the normal way to hold banquets. He wants the rich to perform their luxurious meals among themselves 'at home',[35] not within the community of Christians – obviously not at the same time. 'Eating at home' obliterates one of several social effects of the meal, because the diners at the communal banquet at Corinth want to be seen during the consumption of the larger portions of a better meal. Thus, Vössing interprets Paul's advice for the rich Corinthians to eat at home 'if they are hungry' as an ironic suggestion to spare the congregation their display of grandeur and richness.

Paul analyses the Corinthian congregation of Christians as a large group with internal bonding problems because of the way they celebrate their communal banquets. He speaks about external bridging only as far as his own connections (including the collection of money for Jerusalem) are concerned. The Corinthian group is challenged by their own staging of social distinctions in an ideological context that calls for a display of commensal equality. Needless to say, this is not a specifically Christian problem. The antagonism between sympotic isonomy or equality and the likewise sympotic replication of outward or inward hierarchies is known from other specimens of symposium literature.[36]

Membership in the church of Corinth does not disrupt one's normal life as a member of the society of one's city. The rich Corinthians continue their businesses and the poor remain poor. Paul's point is just that the social distinctions should be concealed during the celebration of 'the Lord's banquet' that deserves its name (which Paul invented in order to lend credence to his claims). On the basis of this letter, it is not possible to assess the gain in social capital of single members of the Corinthian community thanks to their membership in this group, as it is not clear whether or not the encoun-

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**35** 1 Corinthians 11:22. 34.
**36** Klinghardt 1996, para. 7.

ter of the poor and the rich at the community meal had any impact on the every-day life of its members.

### 3.2 Eating meat sacrificed to idols

Paul's discussion of the consumption of meat sacrificed in Greek temples suggests that the participation in the Eucharistic banquets did not create an exclusive long term community. In this difficult text, Paul apparently quotes different statements in a dispute. The following reading suggests firstly that Paul's position is fairly obvious in the end and secondly that his theoretical analysis of the situation is inconsistent.

In a first approach to the topic, Paul assumes that Corinthian Christians continue to buy meat at the market that may come from animals slaughtered in the course of sacrifices.[37] Corinthian Christians may continue to accept invitations to dinner parties from their pagan colleagues and even take part in publicly visible symposia in temples.[38] As Paul wants his readers to believe that the gods of Greece are just nothing, he cannot forbid the consumption of sacrificial meat. If there are no gods, a sacrifice offered to them cannot have any effect upon the food. Hence, meat sacrificed to these gods cannot be harmful. Paul just suggests abstaining from consuming it in view of members of the community who may be troubled by this public display of a double loyalty with regard to different networks or types of groups.

Paul's second approach to the question severely disrupts his first one, when he tries to establish the notion that the consumption of sacrificial meat makes the diners 'participants with demons'.[39] This approach suggests an essentialist understanding of the contamination of the food, which must hence be shunned – whether or not one would be seen eating it by a 'weak' member of one's group. The difference between these two approaches strongly suggests that group membership is at stake here and not the contamination of meat.

The addressees of Paul's letter, i.e., the Corinthian group of Christians, did not regard their social contacts as limited to this one group. Corinthian Christians may have gained some social capital by their participation in the rituals of their community. In any case, they did not lose social capital, because this participation did not entail the severance of bridging outside of the community of Christians or bonding within other groups. Rich and

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**37**  1 Corinthians 10:25.
**38**  1 Corinthians 10:27 and 8:10.
**39**  1 Corinthians 10:20–21.

well-established Corinthian Christians continued to dine among members of their social stratum and to enjoy participation in the public cuisine of sacrifice.

With regard to long-term consequences of the performance of meals, both the *Didache* and 1 Corinthians assume that the groups of diners will reconvene, although they may also participate in many other similar social events, forming other groups whose religious principles need not be compatible with the basic tenets of Christianity or Judaism.

### 3.3 Sympotic communication and group style

Banquets were not characterised by absolutely free and egalitarian ways of communication. Paul's rules for prophetic speaking, the restriction of performances of *glossolalia* (the actual shape of which cannot be recovered any more), the role of women, etc. reflect Greek and Roman ways of structuring table talk. From the perspective of the later development of the Eucharist, it must be emphasised that communication was not restricted to the interaction of individuals with the presider (or with gods). Even *glossolalia* must be interpreted in order to be understood by everyone, including the literary or even proverbial figure of the uninvited guest according to Paul.[40] He does not bother to discuss who would be responsible for the recitation of collective table prayers. The attention of the whole group may be engaged for contributions that arguably concern all members of the group. In Paul's absence, there is no person who would naturally be in charge to re-establish the proper way to hold the congregational meeting as a veritable 'banquet of the Lord'.[41] The group style of the Eucharist conforms to contemporary customs of organising banquets.

Even if the members of the sub-groups of the Corinthian Eucharistic banquet would not interact with their fellow Christians at other tables during the meal, there was nevertheless free communication amongst them. This kind of communication was not regarded as a disruption of the social order of the group. The whole group might have been united for performances after the meal: e.g., one member's 'singing of a psalm', or for debates of issues pertaining to the *ekklesia* of Corinth and the like.[42] These rules try to establish a kind of order, apparently because everyone was entitled to active

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**40**  1 Corinthians 14:23.
**41**  Cf. Vössing 2011, 66. An equivalent to the role of the presider (*proestōs; 1 Apology* 65.3; 67.4) in Justin's group is not visible or not important in Corinth.
**42**  Vössing 2011, 67–68.

participation in the public communication. Paul emphasises that 'everyone has a song, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation …'.[43] The degree of participation was limited by one's gender[44] and one's abilities, not by one's clerical status. As in similar institutions, the flow of communication was not centred upon a functionary of the meeting or upon a group of clergy.

Furthermore, ritualised communication could only have taken up a very small fraction of the whole duration of the meeting. The performance of the pre- and post-prandial prayers recorded in *Didache* 9–10 and hinted at in 1 Cor 11 could have taken up no more than a few minutes of the meeting, unless a 'prophet' gave a longer presentation.[45] Christian groups succumbed to the isomorphic pressure[46] of other organisations like voluntary associations and official bodies below the level of the city, by appointing 'overseers' and 'attendants',[47] thus claiming a place in the world of well-structured institutions. Officers have prerogatives, rights, and duties. Yet as long as banquets were regarded as the central means to establish and maintain groups, the style of behaviour in these groups could remain egalitarian within the boundaries of the customary performance of banquets.

## 4 Abandoning the Eucharist as a meal in third century Carthage (case 3)

Cyprian's letter 63 discusses the problem that some presiders of Eucharists deviated from that which Jesus 'taught and did' by using a cup of water instead of wine. The presider was supposed to imitate Christ during the Eucharistic celebration, which meant that he must use wine instead of water. Cyprian is the first one to emphasise the role of the presider as proxy of Jesus and to hint at the notion that this celebration should stage the situation of the Last Supper – at least partly.[48] Two points are decisive in the present context. First, Cyprian remarks that both his and his adversaries' Eucharist is gener-

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**43** 1 Corinthians 14:26.

**44** 1 Corinthians 11:34–35.

**45** The history of Christian ritual texts begins with centuries of improvisation, see Bouley 1981. In the course of time, certain topics came to be regarded as standard components of important prayers.

**46** DiMaggio and Powell 1983.

**47** *Didache* 15.1.

**48** Cf. McGowan 1999, 204–211. 270–276 for a description of Cyprian's opponents who refused the consumption of wine and meat as part of their total rejection of the Roman cuisine of sacrifice.

ally celebrated in the morning,[49] even though sympotic Eucharists would be expected to begin in the late afternoon and to last into the evening. Second, he feels the need to legitimise this custom with a practical and a theological argument. Regarding the practical argument, he remarks:

But when we sup, we cannot call the people together to our banquet, so as to celebrate the truth of the sacrament in the presence of all the brotherhood.[50]

The theological argument is farfetched and reveals Cyprian's desperate rhetorical situation. On the one hand, he emphasises that the presider of the Eucharist must imitate Jesus (using wine instead of water). On the other hand, the standard celebration of the Eucharist is not a banquet any more (as the Last Supper has been described), but some kind of non-sympotic celebration in the mornings. Thus, he argues that the time frame of the Last Supper (just not the contents of the chalice) must be interpreted allegorically:

It behoved Christ to offer about the evening of the day, that the very hour of sacrifice might show the setting and the evening of the world; […] But we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord in the morning.[51]

Even if some wealthy members of the church may continue to hold Eucharistic banquets like the rest of the more affluent people of non-Christian Carthage, the Eucharist had ceased to convene and hence to manifest the local group of Christians on the occasion of a banquet. Cyprian's church apparently abolished the Corinthian-style cluster of dining companies and adapted what it came to regard as the new shape of the Eucharist to an entirely different social institution, the *salutatio matutinalis*. Meeting in contexts reminiscent of the *salutationes matutinales* provided a social stage for the manifestation of the bishop as the leader and benefactor of his congregation.[52]

Eucharists as banquets could be given up because well-established social institutions and customs could carry over many of their functions. Participants in meals had been used to taking home left-overs from meals. Hosts could also distribute *apophoreta* to people who were not present at the meal.

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**49** Cyprian, *Epistulae* 63.16.1.

**50** Cyprian, *Epistulae* 63.16.1. Like Cyprian but half a century earlier, Tertullian had felt the urge to point to the fact that this does not correspond to Jesus' practice at the Last Supper, which would be held at 'meal-times', i. e., in the afternoon and evening; *De Corona* 3.3. In Tertullian's time, presidents would distribute *apophoreta* from a sympotic Eucharist that was held previously. The group of people who receive the 'sacrament' there did not, apparently, take part in the Eucharistic banquet.

**51** Cyprian, *Epistulae* 63.16.2.

**52** Leonhard 2014.

One could even receive a present (of food) *instead* of an invitation to a meal. While the upper class literary figure portrayed in some of Martial's epigrams might have preferred an invitation to a lavish symposium over the reception of a *sportula*, less wealthy people would have been happy about exactly that.

Roman patrons and politicians received clients almost every morning in their houses. The clients were used to line up in front of their patron's house, in order to wait to be admitted. In the atrium or in other parts of the house, they were greeted by their patron. They could ask him a favour and/or receive a *sportula*. Cyprian's correspondence suggests that a distribution of Eucharistic bread and wine in this situation was understood as 'the Eucharist'. Cyprian does not distribute *apophoreta* of a previous sympotic Eucharist.

The morning *salutatio* as the social model behind this new form of Eucharist creates a different form of short-term group than the celebrations of Eucharists as banquets. The decisive communication takes place between each single client and the patron. Clients may also have talked to each other while they waited in front of the patron's door in order to be admitted into his house. Not only their relationship to the bishop, but also their relationships to each other were, however, fundamentally different from the situation of banqueting groups. Clients were competitors for their patron's favours (money, food, time, power to support someone in other situations). By contrast, in spite of all display of hierarchy that could imbue behaviour at banquets, the dining group was at least ideally egalitarian and implied multicentric communication.

The relationship between the clients and their patrons was precarious and unstable in a similar way as the short-term relationships between the diners at a banquet. Christians could accept invitations to non-Christian banquets in New Testament times. They could also line up in front of another pagan patron's, even in front of another bishop's, house trying to establish a new relationship to that person and abandoning the tending of their relationship to their former bishop-patron. With regard to the unstable long-term consequences of short-term groups, Cyprian's Eucharists do not differ essentially from the Eucharists of his forbears. Christian groups met frequently for meals and continued to meet even more frequently for morning *salutationes*-style Eucharists. However, the internal relationships that are presupposed and maintained by the two different settings among the members of the group, as well as the role of the presiders, differ markedly. Now the Eucharistic community was no longer a cluster of table groups, but a queue in front of the house of one person. The Eucharist was not a meal to be performed, but a *sportula* to be received.

## 5 Grouping together the masses at the Mass in the late fourth century (case 4)

A celebration of the Eucharist that concentrates most of the attention upon the presider and de-emphasises or even isolates the individual members of the congregation is well compatible with similar social institutions and customs (other than meals). Thus, elements of behaviour and styles of clothing of powerful men facing crowds of subjects found their way into the ritual of the Eucharist. From late Antiquity onwards, the Eucharist is only celebrated after – and considered to constitute a ritual unity together with – a service of the reading of the Bible, its exposition, prayers, etc.[53] This combined ritual (the later 'Mass' in the Catholic Church and the 'Divine Liturgy' in Orthodoxy) becomes a well-established standard in all churches until the Reformation, after which several churches dissociated the two parts of the Roman Mass, reducing the frequency of celebrations of its Eucharistic part.

In Antiquity, this state of affairs shaped the structure of buildings that served as locations for Eucharistic celebrations as part of the Mass. The large churches that were designed for Christian liturgies followed the model of town halls. They were neither shaped as temples nor as clusters of *triclinia* around a courtyard (of a private house or a temple).

The next stage in the process of changing the Eucharistic meetings can be observed in Theodore of Mopsuestia's Catechetical Homilies of the late fourth or early fifth centuries. Theodore teaches his listeners how to decode the acts of the clergy that they observe during the grand episcopal Eucharistic celebrations. The congregants are supposed to interpret these acts as likenesses of a heavenly ritual. According to Theodore, earthly rituals are images of a heavenly performance of the Day of Atonement. Theodore adopts the basic cosmology of the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews. Yet, the earthly counterpart to the heavenly Day of Atonement is not only Christ's death, but also each celebration of the Eucharist. Heavenly liturgies are roughly conceptualised in terms of Plato's ideas. Earthly acts of the temple cult in Jerusalem would be mere shadows of heavenly realities. Christian, ecclesiastical liturgies come closer to heavenly truth although they are likewise mere images. Truth and reality are only conceptualised as being celestial or transcendent.

According to Theodore, few of the ritual elements of the Eucharist are said to contain images of earthly events, namely Jesus' death and burial. By no means is the Eucharist to be regarded as a re-enactment of the Last Supper.

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**53** Cf. Meßner 2006.

Although the presider of the liturgy is said to be an image of Christ in some instances, he does not represent the earthly Jesus at the Last Supper, but the heavenly Christ officiating as heavenly high priest:

Because Christ our Lord offered Himself in sacrifice for us and thus became our high priest in reality, we must think that the priest who draws nigh unto the altar is representing His image, not that he offers himself in sacrifice, any more than he is truly a high priest, but because he performs the figure of the service of the ineffable sacrifice (of Christ), and through this figure he dimly represents the image of the unspeakable heavenly things and of the supernatural and incorporeal hosts.[54]

Christ is also present in bread and wine in the same liturgy. These are distributed to the congregants and consumed. Yet, Theodore is conspicuously uninterested in an interpretation of the liturgy of the Eucharist as a meal. Unsurprisingly, the most salient difference between this liturgy and a meal is the character of the group that is convened here. The audience of Theodore's sermons who celebrate the Eucharist are conceptualised as an assembly of silent individuals whose interrelationship is entirely irrelevant for the performance of the ritual. Their acts are fully ritualised. Even the kiss of peace[55] that is exchanged by neighbours is said to symbolise the unity of Christ's body and the like. It is not designed to manifest friendship among members of a group, let alone among neighbours. Gossip, networking, discussion, etc. among the members of this group might occur, but they are at best a disturbing factor. The performance of the ritual is designed to create a short-term gathering of people who do not need to know the names of their neighbours and whose participation in the ritual will not decrease the distance to other persons present there.

Preachers of this epoch resort to baptism as the grand scheme for the integration of new members into the church as a long-term group. Yet, adult baptism is still staged and interpreted in individualistic terms. Performed in partial or total nakedness, the candidates' immersion or affusion with water was not visible in the public sphere of the larger group. In an epoch when preachers explained the experience of baptism as a watershed in a person's life, many of their listeners were shunned away from its performance. David Wright has shown that full membership in the church with all its beneficial consequences, but also with all its obligations, was not of primary concern for the majority of Christians in late antiquity.[56] In actual practice, baptism did not create long-term bonds between the members of Christian con-

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**54** *Catechetical Homilies*, 15.21. Cf. Leonhard 2013 for the style and methods of liturgical interpretation of Theodore's homilies.
**55** *Catechetical Homilies* 15.39–41.
**56** Wright 1997; Wright 1998; Wright 1999.

gregations (including people who were formally only candidates for baptism) any more than the frequent celebration of the Eucharist. Paradoxically, unbaptised participants in the liturgies of the word that preceded the celebrations of the Eucharist must have interpreted their participation as a manifestation of their inclusion in the church.

It stands to reason that this group of permanent candidates was large enough in order not to make anybody feel lonely in this status.[57] The members of this sub-group of the Christians of a town or congregation thus resisted the preachers' attempts to force the performance of baptism upon them. This was neither a planned revolution nor the outcome of theological deliberations, but a group's set of individual arrangements of how to be a proper Christian.

Eliasoph and Lichterman analyse language of empowerment in cases involving groups which do not include ritualised acts as an important part of behaviour or which were not recorded among the data analysed.[58] In one of the case studies, the 'responsibility [of the members of the group Planet Friends] to respect the monthly host's plan for a group exercise' might have been an occasion for the acting out and negotiation of power relations within the group.[59] This point indicates that comparisons between historical data and results of modern empirical research should include group styles comprising significant portions of ritualised behaviour. The amount of time that is spent with ritualised acts during a meeting of a Christian group rises dramatically during the period under consideration here, i. e., between the first and the fifth centuries. This increase in ritualised behaviour is one of the most salient features of the change in group styles of Christian groups during this epoch. A classification of behaviour and an analysis of group styles with regard to the amount of ritualised acts that are performed during meetings will increase the repertoire of group styles in antiquity and modernity that lend themselves to comparison.

Ritualised behaviour may have a bad reputation, for rituals seem prone to support totalitarian structures by silencing disagreement and subordinating people, making them compliant with a certain group style.[60] Yet, Catherine Bell shows how rituals empower group leaders on the one hand as well as group members on the other.[61] The ancient preachers' attempt to standard-

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57 Cf. Wright 1999.
58 Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003, 746–756.
59 Cf. Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003, 757.
60 Cf. Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003, 762–763 for a case where Eliasoph and Lichterman even seem to take over this notion from opinions in the field into their meta-language.
61 Bell 1992, chapter 3.

ise the right time in one's life to approach baptism had probably little short-term effects and certainly no long-term effects at all. In the negotiation of a default group style for Christianity as a religion for large portions of the society, the leaders' urge to stage an individual conversion from paganism to Christianity somewhat at the beginning of one's adult life was just as unsuccessful among people who already regarded themselves as members of the Church. Not much later, Augustine supplied a theological legitimation for infant baptism that led to the final abandonment of the project of establishing baptism as conversion of adults. The normal members' backstage acts as well as their backstage arguments won the competition over front stage normative language.[62]

## 6 Concluding observations and perspectives for further discussions

Ancient Christianity used well-established patterns of convening groups and holding meals, thereby creating small groups (as well as assemblies of several such small groups) with temporally visible borders and a temporally manifested membership. The growth and proliferation of the number of members of these groups led to pervasive changes in the patterns of bonding as well as the shape of the procedures at the meetings, long before Constantine in certain areas. In the course of the third century, churches of Carthage abandoned sympotic Eucharists and began staging Eucharistic celebrations taking the Roman morning *salutationes* as their model. This pattern for celebrating the Eucharist expanded to form the forerunner of the medieval Mass/Divine Liturgy. In the late fourth century, a large part of the people who considered themselves to be Christians redefined the style of their integration into – and their distance towards – the churches according to their own terms (interpreting themselves as candidates for baptism and abstaining from its performance throughout most of their lives).

Whether celebrating Eucharistic banquets or arranging meetings of the bishop with his congregation each morning, Christian groups before Constantine abided by default group styles. Even while trying to argue in favour of their uniqueness and superiority, they kept affirming their abidance by the default group styles of their society. The implied recipients of the First Letter to the Corinthians were even reproached by their founder, Paul, when they adopted a mode of interaction that would have been regarded as weird

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**62** Cf. Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003, 772 on subordinate group styles articulated backstage and gaining in importance.

to outsiders of the group *(glossolalia)*. Group boundaries were not tight, despite pithy statements in this direction. Members of Christian groups were not, or could not be, prevented from participating in meetings of other groups (implying the public consumption of sacrificial meat in Corinth).

On the one hand, this situation changes in the fourth and fifth centuries. Now, the large-scale service of the word followed by the Eucharist was no longer patterned upon a well-known, limited set of rules for behaviour and interaction. On the other hand, the membership of Christianity had reached a size within the society that enabled these groups to set new standards of default group styles. Before the fourth century, insiders debated and explained their meetings as 'a (kind of) meal' or they could have said that they behaved like clients at their patron's *salutatio*. From the fourth century on, the ritual of the Mass (or the Divine Liturgy) becomes a celebration *sui generis*. Theologians are now perplexed and helpless when they assume the task to explain these liturgies, the roles played within them, and the implements used therein. It is a sign of his intellectual desperation and astute observation of social procedures at the same time, when Theodore of Mopsuestia claims that the Eucharist should be the earthly image of a kind of Platonic, heavenly sacrifice. Actually, the sentence 'the Eucharist is a …' cannot be finished in that epoch, because there is no social institution as a *genus proximum* (meal, morning *salutatio*, emperor's reception, business meeting of a voluntary association, etc.) available for it.

Between the New Testament and Theodore of Mopsuestia, the shape of the celebration of Eucharists changed significantly. Sociological models and observations about group styles help to analyse different stages in this development and to reconstruct the respective functions of these celebrations in their social environment. The present study shows that the celebration of Eucharists mainly created short-term groups before Constantine, although normative sources tend to regard their function as part of the manifestation and maintenance of clearly demarcated long-term groups. Celebrations of the Eucharist in the fourth and fifth centuries inherited and increased an earlier tendency towards individualisation and the marginalisation of bonding within the group.

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