

Ultimate Reality in Ancient Christianity

Christ and Redemption

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3.1 Introduction

In Christianity, as in Judaism, God is the ultimate reality—the absolute foundation of everything that is, and the end toward which all points. To grasp the conception of God that informed the religious convictions of those first Christians whose work survives in the New Testament (NT), we could all stop reading here and move directly over to Saldarini's essay: the God of (non-Gnostic) Christians was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Later Trinitarian and Christological theology will articulate strong variations on this idea of deity, but its basic contours, identifiably biblical, remain. To focus on their idea of God, then, will not move us very far along in an investigation of what made these early generations Jews of a peculiar sort—that is, Christians. To do that, we must attend to Christianity's characteristic, indeed foundational, ultimate reality: Jesus Christ.

I propose to ignore those NT passages so favored by the high philosophical formulations of patristic theologians, such as the Johannine Prologue or Philippians 2:5–11. The Christologies they classically supported—essences, substances, persons, and processions—only obscure

our view of the ways that “Jesus Christ” functioned as an ultimate reality for the first generations of the new movement. I propose, rather, that we attend to the ways that Jesus *appears as, is imagined as, or functions as* a blood sacrifice. I will concentrate on the earliest stratum of the NT evidence, namely, the Pauline epistles, to present a reconstruction of the way that both Paul as a Jew of the late Second Temple period, and Paul’s mid-first-century formerly pagan audience would have understood the ‘person and work’ of Jesus Christ. I will then move from this reconstruction to see how it makes coherent the rich sacrificial imagery that we have in other, slightly later NT writings: the Gospels of Matthew and John, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apocalypse of John. We have to stop thinking theologically and instead think sacrificially. Purity, holiness, separation, blood, flesh, eating: these orient us in the first-century understanding of the new reality wrought in Christ.

3.2 Paul, the Gentiles, and the God of Israel

“... in the priestly service of the gospel of God.” (Romans 15:16)

Moderns tend to analyze ancient religions in terms of their ideas. Thus, ancient Judaism was monotheist, ‘nationalist’, and exclusive; paganism, polytheist and, while local, in principal ecumenical.¹ In terms of religiously motivated practices and behavior, however, Jews and pagans were much more alike than different. What bound them together—indeed what distinguishes all modern Western religion, *grosso modo*, from ancient—was *cult*: the offerings, blood sacrifices, and purity rules universally prescriptive of antiquity’s religious etiquette.

Greek males sacrificed, usually within the *oikos*, by pouring out the animal’s blood and burning the fat and bones to or for the god(s), parcelling out and eating roasted viscera (liver, lungs, hearts, and kidneys), boiling and distributing other meat to a wider circle of worshipers (including, perhaps, women). The point of the act was not the animal’s death, but the ritual reorganization of its body, which in turn culticly established lines of kinship and generated for these men a family relationship through the pure blood of sacrifice that women could achieve only through the impure blood of childbirth.² As in majority culture, sacrifice in Judaism was a male preserve. Jewish men—primarily priests but, depending on the category of the offering, also non-priests—sacrificed at the temple in Jerusalem.³ The details of these offerings bulk large in the

last four of the five books of the Torah, and they might be brought for many reasons: worship and communion with God, glorification of him, purification, atonement, thanksgiving, commemorative feasting.⁴ Again, the blood would be poured out on the altar, the animal’s body reorganized and distributed (some to the altar, some to the priest, some to the worshiper; though in the case of a burnt offering the altar’s fire consumed the entire animal). For both Jews and Gentiles, those in proximity to the altar had to be in the correct state of purity—an objective ontological category as much if not more than a moral category.⁵

Jewish proximity to holiness was governed by another binary distinction: not only *impure/pure* but also common or *profane/holy* (Heb. *chol/kadosh*). A blemished animal, or a priest with a physical imperfection, was not suited to be brought near or minister at the altar. Such a priest may eat sacred food—that is, he can be pure—but he may not serve because, since blemished, he is common. His presence would profane the altar, not (since purity is not at issue) defile it.⁶ Gentiles did not have direct access to the altar for a similar reason: “though not inherently impure, Gentiles are inherently profane,”⁷ that is, common, by definition not members of the holy nation set apart by God, Israel. Paul composed the letters we have to his Gentile communities in the mid-first century—that is, well before Titus’s destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. This means that Paul’s (Pharisaic) religious sensibility was rooted in the ancient and prestigious cultic practices of Israel established by God as a sign of his special favor toward Israel (the *latreia/avodah* of Romans 9:4), practiced in the Temple where his *kavod* (Paul’s *doxa*, again 9:4) uniquely dwelled. It is an obvious point, but it bears considering, as does another: when he wrote, the movement for which he served as apostle was itself within Judaism: the God his Gentiles were now to worship was the God of Israel. A third point: Paul’s position—that Gentiles do not have to become Jews in order to participate in Israel’s salvation—is itself traditional, to be found at least as early as some passages in the classical prophets, and as late as a century or so later in other Jewish apocalyptic texts and (less exotically) in synagogue prayers.⁸ Taking all this together, then, we may proceed to our main question: How, in Paul’s mind, does Christ as blood sacrifice effect Gentile redemption and, indeed, the redemption of the world?

“The transference of the language of sanctuary and sacrifice to Christian life is central to Paul.”⁹ But how does this transference work, and what does it tell us about Paul’s Christology? He easily uses the forms of *latreuo*, the word for cultic service (cf., *latreia* above) to characterize the piety of the community: “We are the true circumcision who *worship* by

the spirit of God" (*hoi pneumati theou latreuontes*, Philippians 3:3). His Gentiles now serve "the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9); through Christ's sacrifice, they have been swept up into the redemptive drama of Israel, itself in its final stages. Paul presents Christ as a blood sacrifice at a number of points in his letters, but he neither coordinates these usages nor particularly explains them.

3.2.1 1 Corinthians 5:7: Christ as Paschal Sacrifice

"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ our pascha has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

3.2.2 2 Corinthians 5:21: Christ as Sin Sacrifice

"We beseech on behalf of Christ, be reconciled with God. For our sake he made him hamartia who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

3.2.3 Romans 3:24: Christ as Atonement Sacrifice

"Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a hilastērion through faith by his blood."

If, as I suggested above, Paul's sacrifice-language must be understood within the context of Temple and Torah, we must note that his usages here seem impressionistic and certainly unsystematic. The reference to the *pascha* in 1 Corinthians 5:7, for example, upon examination, turns out to be less a Christological image than a very Jewish way of keeping time. The immediate point of this passage is Paul's exhorting the (Gentile) Corinthians in the *ekklesia* to seemly behavior (cf. their boasting, in chap. 4, and misplaced arrogance, v. 2 above). He then moves into a sustained metaphor combining morality and preparations for Pesach. "Leaven" obviously stands in for pride (which "puffs up"). Christ as paschal sacrifice then comes in as a way of warning the Corinthians that it's too late in the day to persist in acts of *porneia*. In the language of Paul's metaphor, it's already 14 Nisan and there's still *chometz* in the house—a thought that would probably panic a trained Pharisee more than this audience. Compared to the analogies between Christ and the paschal lamb drawn in the passion narrative at John 19:36, Paul hardly exploits his Christological possibilities here at all.

Comparison with other NT writings—the operative metaphors in Hebrews or Revelation with Christ as blood sacrifice; or John's offensive teasing in chapter 6 about eating Christ's flesh, or even in chapter 2 with Christ's body compared specifically with the Temple—underscores how foggy Paul's use of blood sacrifice language for Christ really is. Examples 2 and 3 above, for example, lose their clarity once considered in light of the practicalities of Levitical sacrifice. *Hilastērion* may mean "atonement," but it might also mean "act of reconciliation," Stanley Stowers has recently noted, having nothing to do with sacrifice. He also observes that ancient Mediterranean sacrificing cultures, Jewish and Greek, attached no special significance to the death of the animal itself. "The sacrifice was the ritual use—disorganization and reorganization—of the animal's body that took place after the killing." Sacrifice is not about death, "whereas Paul's reference in Romans 3 is precisely on the significance of Christ's death."¹⁰

So too with *hamartia* at 2 Corinthians 5:21. The Hebrew *hattat* behind the Septuagint's (LXX) translation would mean a sin offering (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3: Christ died "for our sins"). But such sacrifices cleanse the place (and *sancta*), not the person. Blood offerings purge the Temple, or its altar: they do not cleanse the sinner.¹¹ The closest analogy to the way Paul seems to imagine the dynamics of cleansing here is the scapegoat, offered at Yom Kippur, who bears away the sins of the community. But Paul nowhere avails himself of this image, and besides—a nod to his eucharistic instruction—you don't eat scapegoats.

Unpacking Paul's language of sanctuary and sacrifice does not get us very far in terms of his Christology: an image of Christ as a particular sort of sacrifice never emerges. But given that Christ's ultimate importance for Paul is the way that he integrates Gentiles into the redemptive drama of Israel, we might get further in our investigation by attending to the way Paul speaks about these Gentiles. The Thessalonians, for example, having once worshiped idols, now turn and serve "the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). This results in their *hagiasmos*, rendered in the RSV, via the Latin, as "sanctification." Accordingly they must now abstain from morally polluting acts such as *porneia*; each should use his wife or his own body (*skeuos*) "in *hagiasmo* and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God." For these Gentiles who, through the gospel, do know God have been called "not for impurity" (*akatharsia*, the moral consequence of fornication and idolatry) but "in holiness" (*hagiasmos*; 4:4,8). Elsewhere, he addresses such Gentiles simply as "holy," *hagioi* (Romans 1:7, RSV "saints"; 1 Corinthians 1:2). They have been made holy in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Paul exhorts his Gentiles to non-Gentile behavior by asking, "Do you not know that you are God's Temple, and God's spirit dwells in you? . . . For God's Temple is *hagios*, and you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16). "Your body is a temple of the holy spirit"—like the one in Jerusalem (6:19; cf. Matthew 23:2). "We are the Temple of the living God," (2 Corinthians 6:16). His Gentiles are also sacrifices (*thusia*) to that God, "holy and acceptable" (Romans 12:1). Through baptism, God's spirit has incorporated them, somehow, into the eschatological, sacrificed, and resurrected body of Christ: false gods, hostile astral powers, and Sin itself no longer have power over them (1 Corinthians 12:12–13, 27; Galatians 3:28, 4:3–9; cf. Romans 6:11). Thanks to Christ, through his death, by the Spirit, in baptism, they have been set apart.

To be "set apart" for God is, of course, the biblical understanding of "made holy." If we understand Paul's language of separation and sanctification in terms of the biblically based binary terms governing proximity to holiness, we can begin to make sense of his vision of Gentile redemption in Christ. For the Gentile's proximity to holiness is what Christ, through his death and resurrection, has accomplished. "In Christ," these Gentiles have eschewed their former morally polluting acts, with respect to which they are now "clean." *But the operative term, the one that signals their eschatological change of status, is hagiasmos*, holiness: they now—through his spirit, miraculously—are set apart for and by God. To hear this (as we do through the Latinized English of our translations) as "sanctification" has us facing off toward a sacramental, ecclesiastical future that Paul did not know would exist. Understood within the context of Paul's religion, however—pharisaically oriented late Second Temple Judaism—the term means simply that, through Christ, in the Spirit, *these Gentiles are no longer common or profane (chol) but holy (kadosh), and thus suitable to be brought close to Holiness.*

Understanding how Paul constructs the ultimate reality of Christ and of Gentile redemption within this Levitical matrix in turn opens up his understanding of his mission, what he felt himself called to, the ultimate (and existential) reality of his apostolate, especially as he prepares to go to Jerusalem: *to einai me leitourgon Christou Iesou eis ta ethne hierourgounta to euangelion tou Theou hina genetai he prophora ton ethnon euprosdektos hagiasmene en pneumatihagio*; "to be a [Temple] servant of Christ Jesus to the nations, sacrificing the Gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, made holy by the holy spirit" (Romans 15:16).

A caveat about translation. Just as the RSV obscures Paul's Temple language at Romans 9:4, where *doxa* becomes "glory" (Lat. *gloria*) and

latreia becomes "worship" (Lat. *obsequium*), so here with *leitourgos* as "minister" and *hierourgeo* as "priestly service."¹² Behind Paul's *doxa* stands the Hebrew *kavod*, God's glorious presence that dwells on earth in the Temple in Jerusalem—Paul's named destination in this closing chapter. *Kavod* evokes the *Shekinah*. Similarly, *latreia* in Paul's native context recalls *avodah*: the cult revealed by God through Moses on Sinai to Israel, and preserved before God's presence at his altar in Jerusalem. "Worship" is too bloodless a translation.

If Temple and Torah stand behind Romans 9, so too Romans 15. "Minister" seems fair for the Latin *minister*, but given the inevitable interposition of the Reformation between Paul's day and ours, its ancient meaning specifically of "a priest's attendant" (Lewis and Short), and thus its specific association with the Jerusalem altar, disappear.¹³ And while "priestly service" fits *hierourgounta*, the Latin *sanctificans* inevitably conjures sacrament. Paul's "priestly service" means cult: when Paul says *hieros* here, he's thinking *cohen*.

In brief, Paul draws deeply on the wellsprings of his religious tradition—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; the ultimate reality of Torah—to articulate his convictions concerning the newly revealed ultimate reality of the Gentile's redemption in Christ. Hence too the catena of prophetic quotations (*nevi'im*, the next canonical layer after Torah in Tanak) with which Paul closes Romans, praising God for his gracious inclusion of the Gentiles in Israel's worship. The Gentiles' moral and spiritual transformation articulated and evinced the miraculous change in their status vis-à-vis the Temple—thus God—from common to holy.¹⁴ It confirmed Paul's religious convictions *as a Jew* that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God had begun the final transformation of the world, as he had promised Israel so long ago. "For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (15:8–9).

Paul's use of these biblical images can be confusing if we look for some kind of system. He has none. He's improvising, playing stunning variations from the scriptural sheet music. All the images spill, merge, and mix messily with each other. The Gentiles are the offering and they send their offering too. They have been made both pure and holy. They are God's Temple and so may come near it. Christ is some kind of blood sacrifice, but no single biblical paradigm controls the metaphor. His death empowers the Gentiles to break free of the cosmic forces that encourage their moral impurity; the spirit sets them apart, in holiness, for God.

One last observation: familiarity with biblical imagery aside, Paul's language of purity and sacrifice—not the Levitical details, but the principles

of purity, sacrifice, and eating—would have intrinsically made sense to his Gentile audience because of their own embeddedness in their own ancient Mediterranean sacrifice culture. And Paul presents the Eucharist—“flesh” and “blood” of the sacrificial meal—as controlled by altar etiquette (1 Corinthians 10:14–21; cf. 11:23–30, on the consequences of participating in the sacrifice and meal when unfit). Finally, Paul’s use of meat language for the Eucharist speaks to his effort to upgrade this meatless, bread-centered meal within its pagan context, where such were the meals of females, and meat meals the singular preserve of men and method of binding together the household (*oikos*) in social birth.

3.3 Christ as Blood Sacrifice in Later NT Writings

“Behold the Lamb of God.” (John 1:29)

All the other writings in the NT collection are composed after the year 70, thus after the destruction of the Temple. Whether as Christian Jews (Matthew, John, and arguably the authors of Hebrews and Revelation) or Christian Gentiles (again, the author of Hebrews and Revelation),¹⁵ these authors had to make sense of Judaism without a Temple, and thus without cult—the burden, again, of much of God’s instruction in four of the five books of Torah. As the chapter on Judaism in this volume reminds us, traditional narratives, laws, prophecies, revelation, history itself are “ultimate realities” alongside—or as acts of—the ultimate Ultimate Reality, God. In these changed circumstances, then, without the Temple, we see how these authors begin to fill the void left by Rome by using Temple language and sacrificial imagery specifically to define and describe Christ, the Reality to whom they and their communities appeal in making their claim to be the sole legitimate interpreters of the revelation to Israel.

Two significant differences between these later writers’ use of sacrificial imagery for Christ and Paul’s are the dropping away of purity and holiness language, and the way that they regard the (now no-longer standing) Temple. Both points are related. For Matthew and John, Christ’s death serves as a metonymy for the Temple’s destruction—explicitly in John 2:19–21; narratively in Matthew 24 and at 27:51, when the Temple’s curtain tears in two.¹⁶ For the author of Hebrews, the earthly Temple is relativized by the existence of the heavenly, eternal Temple, the one in which Jesus himself perpetually serves both as perfect high priest and as perfect blood sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11–12). For these writers, ab-

sent the earthly Temple, God’s holiness is no longer localized, so purity and holiness as cultic terms no longer matter: they continue to be used, but only as moral metaphors. The author of Revelation goes yet a step further: Christ is Sacrifice (the Lamb); but when he returns and the heavenly Jerusalem descends, it comes without any Temple, “for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” (Revelation 21:22).

All these authors understand Christ’s crucifixion specifically as a blood sacrifice. Matthew’s Christ at the last supper presents the bread and wine as his own body and blood, to be eaten. This effects “forgiveness” (26:28 thus, a sin offering; cf. 20:28, a ransom). An implication of Hebrew’s image of Christ as high priest and sacrifice might be the Yom Kippur offering of a goat (cf. 9:12); in any case, the author is explicit on the mediating role of priesthood and blood offerings (“For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins,” 5:1). The author of Revelation consistently presents Christ as “the Lamb,” specifically on Mount Zion (14:1); a slain lamb who “by [your] blood did ransom men for God” (6:1, 9); his sacrifice enabled his followers to serve as priests (hence their white robes) before God’s throne “and within his Temple” (7:13–15).

If any one thing categorizes the Johannine images for Christ, it is their bewildering variety: Christ appears as God’s Word, Lamb, Son, True Vine, Eternal Water, Bread of Life, Bread from Heaven, the Sheepgate, the Light of the world. Nonetheless, John’s two clearly developed references to Christ, his body, the Temple, and Passover are foregrounded by their rhetorically important position in his narrative: at the beginning of the mission, on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (2:13–22); at the end, again in Jerusalem, on the cross (19:14, 31–33). This particular sacrificial image—tied in via 6:47–58 specifically with eating bread/flesh and drinking wine/blood, and with resurrection/lifting up—thus forms a sort of dramatic inclusio bracketing John’s story. John knows his LXX. His blackly humorous emphasis on eating Christ’s flesh to have eternal life (which makes the narrative audience and even some of the disciples too queasy to stay on, v. 60) recalls the corban Pesach, which commandment is fulfilled explicitly by eating (Exodus 12:7 on its blood, which saves from death; v. 9ff: “They shall eat the flesh . . . and you shall let none of it remain until the morning . . . you shall eat it”; Deuteronomy 16:7, “and you shall boil it and eat it”).

It’s a good analogy. The person offering does not get to eat the sin sacrifice, and nobody eats the Yom Kippur sacrifice. Everyone must eat the Pesach sacrifice. Perhaps it was John’s development of this theme that led him to shift the narrative chronology of the Passion, moving it back one day from Mark’s, wherein Jesus dies the night of the Passover meal. Here,

Jesus dies on the day and at the time when, in the Temple courts, the Passover lambs were still being slaughtered. And, in case anybody missed the point, John alone emphasizes that the Romans did not break Jesus' legs (19:32–33), thus preserving his status as a kosher offering (cf., Exodus 12:46, "you shall not break a bone of it"). Exodus might have redeemed from Egypt; but this Passover offering brings eternal life and redemption from the darkness of the lower cosmos.

3.4 Ultimate Realities

True to its Jewish matrix, earliest Christianity focuses on Torah, Temple, offerings, and community as it speaks of the ways that God works redemption in history. Metaphysics will come to dominate the Christian understanding of biblical revelation, and the revelation of Christ, only centuries after the period we have studied here. The fundamental—or ultimate—emphasis early on is social: eating a sacrifice together binds and creates community with others and with God.

At this stratum, then, there is little to be said of intellectual models of apprehending ultimate reality (cf. Eckel's remarks on Buddhism and rational cognition). God as Ultimate Reality will be parsed, in the patristic period, with the same commitment to intellectual elegance and clarity as we find in Vedānta Deśika's *Īśvarapariccheda*, when the texts we have looked at will provide a hermeneutical point of departure for theological speculations. But the earliest Christian communities whether Jewish or Gentile were evidently comfortable with intellectual messiness—something, perhaps, that we should expect of any new religious (and thus social) movement in its radioactive first phase.

In its insistent concreteness, the Chinese sensibility on these issues is perhaps truest to the tone of our authors. And its construction of Reality (*shi*) as "solid, substantial, hard, authentic, real" (see 1.1.2) stands in sharp contrast to the platonizing intellectual tradition—where non-empirical is precisely more "real"—which, blended with biblical narrative, defines Christianity in its classical phase. The experience of Ultimacy in Paul's communities, brought about by the shared sacrifice meal of the Eucharist, produces concrete effects, both spontaneous (the disruptive charismata of glossolalia and prophecy) and ordered (correct moral behavior toward others and in oneself): as Kohn points out, "Reality, if it is to be real at all, has to be part of experience" (1.1.2).

But the early Christian cosmos is much less stable than the Chinese, thanks to its eschatology. The cosmos stands on the brink of a huge transformation, imagined historically: even the astral stoicheia, the elements

of the universe, are being affected by Christ's resurrection and will be defeated or transformed at his (imminent) return (Galatians 4). So too will be the bodies of those in the community, their flesh changed from "physical" to "spiritual" in keeping with the new order (1 Corinthians 15, *passim*). Thus while following the Dao leads to harmonious realization of cosmic order in the self, following "the Way" does not, because the cosmos is damaged, disrupted, subject to futility, and groaning while it awaits transformation (Romans 8). And nothing like the sage's realization of the ultimate occurs, or has time to occur, in paleo-Christianity's social world: the spirit of God, accessed through ritual acts like immersion and eating, is a disruptive, kinetic jolt presaging the Kingdom to come.

Christ as blood sacrifice, ekklesia as sacrifice-created community, sickness and death as the consequence of approaching the sacrifice in the wrong state ("this is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" 1 Corinthians 11:30)—all point to the non-abstract, concrete, intrinsically social way that earliest Christians imagined both Christ and salvation. It is this mode of imagining the Ultimate that marks earliest Christianity as the ancient Mediterranean religion it was, and marks off the point from which it will grow from a sect within Judaism into the separate religion and culture—neither Jew nor Greek—that it will later become.

Notes

1. Hence Nock's distinction between 'adherence' and 'conversion'. See Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).
2. My very condensed characterization rests on Stanley Stowers, "Greeks Who Sacrifice and Those Who Do Not," *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 293–333. See also (for Jewish biblical sacrifices as well) Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
3. In principle, such sacrifice was restricted to Jerusalem. In fact, we know from Josephus of at least one other temple, built by dissenting Zadokite priests during the turmoil of the early Hasmonean period, in Leontopolis in Egypt; and Philo states that Jews in the diaspora sacrificed the paschal lamb where they were.
4. Most recent complete study: E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), esp. chap. 7.
5. Semen defiles, according to Leviticus and Numbers, not because sexual activity (always understood: between married partners) was sinful, but because semen was specifically one of the polluting genital effluvia. With some pagan cults, the two categories, ontological and moral, evidently were sometimes

mixed: "In many pagan cults, rules of sexual purity governed entry into a temple and sometimes participation in worship. Generally they excluded people who had recently had sex or specifically committed adultery, but the exclusion was usually brief. Before sleeping in Pergamum's great shrine of Asclepius, clients were expected to have abstained from sex for two days; elsewhere, one day, or a quick wash, sufficed. . . . The rules for a public cult in Pergamum demanded a day's interval after sex with one's wife, two days' after sex with someone else's." Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London: Harmondsworth, 1986), 347.

On moral impurity as a distinct category within Judaism, see Jonathan Klawans, "Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 20.2 (1995): 285-312, esp. 290ff.

6. I rely here esp. on Klawans, *ibid.* On the blemished priest, e.g., see Lev 21:18.
7. *Ibid.*, 292.
8. For the full argument, see P. Fredriksen, "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2," *Journal of Theological Studies* 42 (1991): 532-64.
9. William Horbury, "Land, Sanctuary and Worship," *Early Christian Thought in its Jewish Context* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 207-24, at 219.
10. For Stower's entire argument on construing *hilastērion*, see *A Rereading of Romans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 206-13. The quotation is from p. 207, with specific reference to the work of Jacob Milgrom.
11. For a review of the biblical evidence, see Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973). On Levitical impurities, J. Milgrom's *Leviticus 1-16 A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991). Mary Douglas, in *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), and her more recent "In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers," *Religion* 26 (1996): 69-89, offers a cultural-anthropological analysis of the ancient Israelite purity system.
12. Lexicographical information from Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).
13. Cf. the LXX's use of *leitourgia* at Num 8:25 for the performance of service in the Tabernacle; cf. 4:32 LXX.

14. This might be one reason to take seriously the accusation related (and disavowed) in Acts 21:28, where Paul is accused of "bringing Greeks into the Temple."
15. I incline to think that both were Jews, because of their deep familiarity with biblical texts, which were not commonly available outside of synagogue communities. This same fact accounts for Paul's unselfconscious usage of biblical texts, tropes, and figures for his Gentiles: they too must have frequented the synagogue (and probably continued to), or they would have had no prayer of understanding him.
16. This is a theme that Matthew picks up from his narrative source, Mark. For the full argument, see Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).