

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

**ΘΛΙΨΙΣ IN THESSALONICA:
A STUDY OF THE CONFLICT RELATIONS OF PAUL AND
THE THESSALONIAN CHRISTIANS WITH OUTSIDERS**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

BY

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JUNE 1996

Abstract

The purpose of this project is to explore the discordant relations of Paul and the Thessalonian Christians with non-Christian outsiders. My thesis is that conflict characterized the interaction of believers with unbelievers and that there were particular reasons for and results of the hostile relations between the two groups.

1 Thessalonians (inclusive of 2:13-16 which some scholars [erroneously] regard as a later interpolation [chapter one]) serves as the primary source for this attempt to delineate the contours of the conflict. 2 Thessalonians (chapter two) and Acts 17:1-10a (a secondhand account of the conflict in Thessalonica [chapter three]) function as secondary resources for this study and are used with due caution. Ancient literary parallels, non-literary evidence, and theoretical material culled from the social sciences (social-scientific theories of deviance and conflict are set forth in chapters four and five respectively) also inform this interpretive task.

Parts three and four comprise the core of this investigation. I argue in these sections that non-Christians perceived both Paul and the Thessalonian Christians as deviant and that they actively opposed these non-conformists in their midst. In chapter six I maintain that Paul encountered conflict with outsiders while in Thessalonica and that he was ultimately driven from the city by some unbelieving Jews. Those Jews who banished Paul likely regarded him as a threat to the integrity of the Jewish community for his laxity in association with Gentiles and for his "Law-free" instruction of Pauline Christians (chapter seven). In chapter eight I suggest that the apocalyptic and polemical texture of 1 (and 2) Thessalonians may be usefully explained as Paul's specific reaction to the non-Christian opposition to him and his converts in that city.

Concerning the Thessalonian believers' conflict, I contend that they experienced verbal (and perhaps physical) abuse, social ostracism, and political sanctions at the hands of their own Gentile compatriots (chapter nine), who seemingly viewed these Pauline Christians as an exclusive assembly which was (potentially) subversive to the family, religious, and political life of the wider community (chapter ten). In chapter eleven I note that the church's growth in faith, love, and hope was positively linked to its conflict with outsiders. By way of conclusion, I summarize the study, comment upon its significance, and make a few suggestions for further research.

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Acknowledgements

The writing of this thesis has been a strenuous, yet satisfying, task. Thankfully, I have received the support of various individuals and institutions along the way. I gratefully acknowledge some of them here. Firstly, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. John M. G. Barclay. I selected to carry out my post-graduate research at the University of Glasgow so that I could be under Dr. Barclay's tutelage, and I am pleased that I did. If ever there were a "gentleman and a scholar," it is he. I can only hope that this piece reflects, at least at points, his rigorous, stimulating, and fair-minded scholarship. If not, the student, not the supervisor, is to blame. I also want to express my appreciation to Dr. Philip F. Esler for meeting with me on a couple of occasions in the autumn of 1993 when Dr. Barclay was on sabbatical leave.

Post-graduate study for overseas students is extremely expensive. I am thankful to those who have helped me to absorb the tremendous costs. I extend my sincere gratitude to the University of Glasgow and to the Overseas Research Students Award Scheme for awarding me generous scholarships. I also want to thank my parents (Willard and Betty Still) and my parents-in-law (Dennis and Radene Christian) who offered financial and other kinds of assistance. The unsolicited gifts of caring couples also helped to lighten the financial load. These couples include: J. P. and Carolyn Sims, Ron and Melanie Mittel, David and Katherine Middelbrook, Dr. Todd and Alison Moffatt, Dr. Jeff and Tami Holt, Shawn and Cheryl Todd, Rob and Stephanie Tanner, Todd and Jill Hawkins, Billy and Tracye Beacham, and Dr. Herbert and Joy Reynolds. Additionally, I am thankful to the wonderful people at Uddingston Baptist Church who granted me the privilege to serve

as their pastor from February 1993 to December 1994. They not only provided for my wife (Carolyn) and me a lovely manse ("Shalom"), but they also graciously endured many a message in a "foreign tongue." Carolyn, my companion and friend, also worked to help support her husband's dream of pursuing a PhD overseas.

Living in Scotland, while not always easy (especially in the winter months!), was a memorable and enjoyable experience. Friendships with Dr. David and Mary Graham, Paul and Cheryl Gahm, the folks at Uddingston Baptist (in particular, the Campbell, Cloudsley, Durham, Leitch, and Marren families), Dr. Eddie Adams, Marion Carson, and Richard Gibbons made it all the more pleasurable. The hospitality of the Biblical Studies faculty, particularly the Barclay family, was also a highlight of our sojourn in Scotland.

In December of 1994, Carolyn and I returned to Texas where, at the invitation of President Gary Cook, I took up a position teaching New Testament at Dallas Baptist University. I would like to offer my appreciation to Dr. Cook and to my colleagues Dr. Davey Naugle and Dr. Mike Williams for the encouragement they have offered me as I completed my thesis. Dr. E. Earle Ellis, Dr. R. Bruce Corley, Dr. H. Alan Brehm, Dr. Robert Sloan, Dr. Charles Tolbert, Dr. Harold Osborne, Dr. Allan Walworth, Jason Bradley, and Jeff Fish have also lent their support as I worked on this project.

The birth of our first child, Samuel Christian, has been a pleasant distraction for me during the final stages of thesis preparation. I can only hope that his mother and I can be the type of Christian role-models and care-takers for him as my parents have been for me. Mom and Dad, I dedicate this project to you in thankful appreciation.

Notes

This thesis has been prepared using an Apple Macintosh® computer (PowerBook 100), a MicroSoft Word® program (4.0D), and a Hewlett-Packard® printer (LaserJet 4MP).

The style of documentation employed throughout this project (largely) follows Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 5th ed., rev. and expanded by Bonnie Birtwistle Honigsblum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Full documentation of sources is provided only in the bibliography of works cited section at the end of the volume. In the footnotes, works are referenced by using the author's last name, an abbreviated title, and the appropriate page(s), except in the case of Thessalonian commentaries which are referred to by citing the author's last name and pertinent page(s) only.

The Greek NT text with which I worked throughout this thesis is the Nestle-Aland 26th ed. The LXX text that I used is the one edited by Alfred Ralphps. With some (usually minor) variations, biblical translations (including deuterocanonical books) are taken from the RSV or the NRSV. Unless indicated otherwise in the footnotes, texts and translations of Greek and Latin authors are from the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann). Translations of Old Testament Pseudepigrapha are drawn from the two volumes edited by James H. Charlesworth.

Throughout this thesis, American conventions for spelling and punctuation are followed.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations employed in the text, footnotes, and bibliography of works cited which do not appear below may be found in the *SBL Membership Directory and Handbook 1994* (= "Instructions for Contributors," *JBL* 107 [1988]: 579-596) and/or in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2d ed., eds. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

<i>AJS</i>	<i>American Journal of Sociology</i>
<i>Anti-Semitism</i>	<i>Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith</i> , eds. Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.
<i>Apocalypticism</i>	<i>Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East</i> , ed. David Hellholm. Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1983.
<i>CD</i>	<i>Crime and Delinquency</i>
<i>CPJ</i>	J.-B. Frey, ed. <i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i> . 2 vols. Rome, 1936-1952.
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> , eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid. Downers Grove, IL/Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
<i>IT</i>	Charles Edson, ed. <i>Inscriptiones graecae Epiri, Macedoniae, Thraciae, Scythiae, Pars II Inscriptiones Macedoniae, Fasciculus I Inscriptiones Thessalonicae et vinciniae</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972.
<i>JSI</i>	<i>Journal of Social Issues</i>
<i>PT 1</i>	<i>Pauline Theology</i> . Vol. 1, <i>Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon</i> , ed. Jouette M. Bassler. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991.
<i>NAC</i>	<i>New American Commentary</i>

SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>SocProb</i>	<i>Social Problems</i>
<i>SQ</i>	<i>The Sociological Quarterly</i>
TC	<i>The Thessalonian Correspondence</i> , ed. Raymond F. Collins, BETL 87. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990.

Introduction

Though it long lay fallow,¹ in recent years Thessalonian research has been a fertile Pauline field.² In addition to the publication of important commentaries on 1 and/or 2 Thessalonians³ and of the papers given by leading scholars on the Thessalonian letters at the Leuven colloquium,⁴ contemporary interpreters have produced studies focusing on rhetorical features,⁵ theological themes,⁶ and pastoral/congregational issues⁷ in the epistles.

Even though much fruitful work has been done on the Thessalonian correspondence over the past twenty-five or so years, there is still room in this Pauline field for scholars to plow, sow, and harvest. One important interpretive issue in Thessalonian studies which has yet to receive adequate attention is the frequent talk of "affliction" (1:6; 3:3-4), "opposition" (2:2b; cf. 2:15b,

¹Prior to the publication of Best's commentary and Trilling's monograph (*Untersuchungen*) in 1972, scholarly study of the Thessalonian correspondence was sparse and sporadic. Important commentators in the early to mid twentieth century include: Milligan (1908); Dobschütz (1909); Frame (1912); Dibelius (1923); Rigaux (1956); and Masson (1957).

²For a review of Thessalonian research from 1972-1989, see Richard, "Research."

³E. g., Best (1972); Trilling (1980; 2 Thessalonians only); Bruce (1982); Marshall (1983); Holtz (1986; 1 Thessalonians only); Wanamaker (1990); Martin (1995); and Richard (1995). Malherbe (AB); Donfried (ICC); and Koester (Hermeneia) are currently working on commentaries of 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

⁴TC, ed. Collins. See also the collection of essays (*Studies*) and the monograph (*Birth*) written by Collins.

⁵On 1 Thessalonians, see Johanson, *Brethren*; Schleuter, *Measure*; and Smith, *Comfort*. On 2 Thessalonians, note Hughes, *Rhetoric*; and Holland, *Tradition*.

⁶Donfried, "Theology."

⁷On 1 Thessalonians, Malherbe, *Paul*; and Hill, *Establishing*. On 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Jewett, *Correspondence*.

2:16a, 2:17a), and "suffering" (2:2a, 14) in 1 Thessalonians (cf. 2 Thess 1:4-7; Acts 17:1-10a). To be sure, commentators and writers of books⁸ and articles⁹ on 1 Thessalonians have noted and discussed this terminology with varying degrees of thoroughness and success. But to the best of my knowledge, no one has carried out a full-length study on the topic. This thesis is meant to fill this gap in the secondary literature.

In this work I raise and attempt to answer the following question: How is the language of "affliction/opposition/suffering" employed by Paul in 1 Thessalonians in reference to his converts and to himself best construed? Does the talk of "affliction" (and the like) which appears throughout the letter merely signal a Pauline theological *topos*¹⁰ or psychological *Angst*¹¹ as some have suggested? I think not. As the sub-title of this work indicates, I am convinced that external conflict relations between Christians and non-Christians stand behind the terminology.

Although others who have worked on the Thessalonian letters have arrived at a similar conclusion, greater precision is required in describing "a situation of rather complicated antipathy toward the Christians."¹² Who opposed Paul and his converts? How were they harried? Why were they harassed? What effects did the conflict have on Paul and the Thessalonian church? These questions merit careful attention. In what follows, I will substantiate my thesis that Paul and the Thessalonians were targets

⁸Malherbe, *Paul*, 46-52.

⁹See esp. the essays of Barclay, "Conflict"; and Donfried, "Purpose."

¹⁰So Pearson, "Interpolation," 87; and Reese, 14.

¹¹Malherbe, *Paul*, 46-48.

¹²Morgan-Gillman, "Jason," 44.

of non-Christian opposition through careful exegesis of pertinent texts, and I will delineate in detail (with the aid of literary parallels, non-literary evidence, and the social-scientific study of deviance and conflict) the apparent reasons for and the results of Paul's and the Thessalonian Christians' discordant relations with outsiders.

In carrying out this study on the conflict between believers and unbelievers in Thessalonica, I will also contribute to several other areas of interest and import to interpreters of the Thessalonian letters, including: the integrity of 1 Thess 2:13-16; the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians; the place of Acts 17:1-10a in the study of Pauline Christianity in Thessalonica; the intention of 1 Thess 2:1-12; the nature of the relations of Paul with the Thessalonian Christians and of the believers with one another; the contents of Paul's original proclamation in Thessalonica; the composition and formation of the Thessalonian assembly; the apocalyptic and polemical texture of 1 (and 2) Thessalonians; and the meaning of and reason for the moral and eschatological instruction in 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and 2 Thessalonians 2-3.

The first part of this project (chapters one to three) is devoted to treating texts of disputed authenticity (1 Thess 2:13-16 [chapter one]; 2 Thessalonians [chapter two]) and accuracy (Acts 17:1-10a [chapter three]). This is a necessary first step because the interpretive decisions made about 1 Thess 2:13-16, 2 Thessalonians, and Acts 17:1-10a will determine what data is and is not admissible in this project, thereby impacting the course of the discussion.

Part two of this project introduces the reader to the sociological study of deviance (chapter four) and to the sociological, social psychological, and cultural anthropological study of conflict (chapter five). Theoretical insights drawn from

these disciplines inform and reinforce some of the arguments set forth in parts three and four of this work. Despite the objections of some, it has now become commonplace for biblical scholars to employ the social sciences in their studies.¹³ Unlike some NT interpreters who make use of the social sciences, however, I do not focus on any one theorist or theory, nor do I try to construct a global/formal "model" with hypotheses which can be predicted or tested.¹⁴ I apply deviance and conflict theories where they fit. These theoretical perspectives serve to supplement, not supplant, careful textual and historical analysis.¹⁵ Herein, the social sciences are used as heuristic tools to create original angles of inquiry into particular historical issues and to generate a fresh agenda of questions to put to specific texts.

I proceed in parts three and four, which comprise the bulk (roughly three-fifths) of this study, to consider Paul's and his converts' conflict, being mindful all the while of the conclusions drawn and questions raised in the first five chapters. Chapters six to eight focus on the opposition which Paul himself encountered from non-Christians in Thessalonica. Based upon a thorough analysis of various verses in 1 Thessalonians 2 (cf. Acts 17:5-10a, 13), it is suggested in chapter six that Paul was actively and forcefully opposed in Thessalonica, particularly by some of his

¹³For an introduction to social-scientific criticism, see the work, with full bibliography, by Elliott, *Criticism*. See also Holmberg, *Sociology*; Barton, "Approaches"; and Garrett, "Sociology." For a defense of using the social sciences in interpreting the NT, see Esler, *Community*, 12-16.

¹⁴On the use of models in social-scientific criticism, see the remarks of Esler, "Introduction," 4-8.

¹⁵ Although some practitioners might object to the pragmatic approach employed here, such a strategy allows one to treat the textual, historical, and social-scientific materials in a nuanced manner. No attempt is made to fill in historical gaps with social theories. See the still useful remarks by Meeks (*Christians*, 5-7) on the caution needed when using the social sciences in biblical studies.

fellow Jews who ultimately drove him from the city. Why Paul was maltreated by his compatriots in Thessalonica and elsewhere is addressed in chapter seven. In an effort to discern the reasons that Paul experienced frequent conflict with his own people, Hellenistic-Jewish texts which indicate responses to Jews deemed "apostate" are considered as are Paul's own comments about his persecutory activity and about his being persecuted by other Jews. Paul's "Law-free" living and teaching are identified as causes of contention between him and "stricter" Jews. In chapter eight, it is averred that the apocalyptic and polemical texture of the Thessalonian letter(s) may be positively linked to the hostility which Paul and his converts encountered from non-Christian outsiders.

The final part of this project considers the Thessalonian Christians' affliction. Chapter nine deals with the nature and the source of the assembly's conflict. I contend that the church, which Paul depicts as exclusively Gentile (1 Thess 1:9; cf. Acts 17:4), suffered verbal (and perhaps physical) abuse, social ostracism, and political sanctions at the hands of their Gentile compatriots (1 Thess 2:14). Chapter ten addresses why the congregation encountered such opposition. It is held that the Thessalonians' conversion to Pauline Christianity coupled with their rejection of their former gods (= "idols" for Paul; 1 Thess 1:9) incited the ire of their compatriots. Furthermore, the church's exclusive mentality, aggressive proselytism, and (perceived) subversive character (along familial, religious, and political lines) likely heightened non-Christian opposition. The final chapter considers the consequences of the Thessalonians' conflict with outsiders. Apparently the hostility the church encountered from without facilitated the congregation's growth in faith, love, and hope.

By way of conclusion, I not only provide a brief summary of this study, but I also highlight some contributions of this work and offer a few suggestions for further research. There is much ground to be covered between here and there, and with preliminary remarks behind us, we may now proceed.

PART ONE:
A TREATMENT OF DISPUTED TEXTS

Chapter One

1 Thess 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation?

Introduction

1 Thessalonians will serve as the primary source for this project. Two major factors lead to this interpretive decision: 1. References to the topic being studied occur most frequently in 1 Thessalonians; and 2. Virtually all commentators have judged the letter to be authentically Pauline.¹ Although scholars affirm the authenticity of 1 Thessalonians, some interpreters aver that 2:13-16, or a portion thereof, is a post-Pauline interpolation.² The text reads as follows:

We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, the word of God, which is also at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators [μιμηταί] of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered [ἐπάθετε] the same things at the hands of your own compatriots [ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν] as they [suffered] from the Jews [Ἰουδαίων] who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose all people by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they might be saved--so as

¹The only exception of which I am aware in the twentieth century is Morton and McLeman, *Computer*.

²For the argument that 2:13-16 is inauthentic, see e. g., Eckart, "Brief"; Pearson, "Interpolation"; Boers, "Study"; Koester, *Introduction*, 2:112-114; Schmidt, "Interpolation"; Gager, *Origins*, 255-256; Beck, *Christianity*, 40-50; 90-92; Gaston, *Paul*, 137; 195; and Setzer, *Responses*, 19. For the suggestion that 2:14-16 is an interpolation, see e. g., Baur, *Paul*, 2:87; and Richard, 119-127. Cf. Sanders, *Schismatics*, 7. Meeks (*Christians*, 227, n. 117) doubts the authenticity of 2:15-16 (cf. Bruce [49] who suggests that the authenticity of 2:15-16 remains *sub judice*), as Moffatt (*Introduction*, 73) did 2:16c.

Friedrich's ("1 Thessalonicher 5,1-11") suggestion that 1 Thess 5:1-11 is an interpolation has won no scholarly support. For a critique of Friedrich's view, see Plevnik, "1 Thess. 5,1-11." I will presume with other scholars (without further discussion) that 5:1-11 is authentic and will employ the passage in this thesis where appropriate.

always to fill up the measure of their sins; but [God's] wrath has come upon them at last [ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος].

Because this pericope specifically speaks of conflict which Paul and his Thessalonian converts experienced with non-Christians, it is of obvious import to this investigation. However, in light of the repeated arguments raised against the passage's authenticity, it is incumbent upon an interpreter who would treat the text as genuinely Pauline to respond to those who would not.

I, along with the large majority of NT scholars, consider the whole of 2:13-16 to have been written by Paul.³ But, as stated above, not all interpreters are of the same mind. F. C. Baur was among the first commentators to suggest that 2:14-16 was un-Pauline.⁴ He contended that the statement about the Jews displeasing God (θεῷ μὴ ἀρεσκόντων, 2:15c) "fits strangely on the lips of Paul" and is "inconsistent with what we know of Paul's attitude toward his race."⁵ Additionally, Baur thought that the phrase ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος (2:16b) referred to "the punishment that came upon [the Jews] in the destruction of Jerusalem."⁶ In Baur's estimation, 2:14-16 was composed after 70 CE when both Jewish and Pauline Christianity regarded the Jews as enemies.⁷ Baur's understanding of 2:14-16 was one of the major factors that led him to reject the authenticity of 1 Thessalonians

³See, among others, Schluter, *Measure*; Johanson, *Brethren*; Sandnes, *Paul*, 191-194; Lyons, *Autobiography*, 202-207; Jewett, *Correspondence*, 36-42; Collins, *Birth*, 145-146; Smith, *Comfort*, 35; Best, 123; Marshall, 11-12; Wanamaker, 29-33; Donfried, "Paul"; Hurd, "Paul"; Broer, "Zorn"; Simpson, "Solution"; Okeke, "Fate"; Wick, "Gesamtzusammenhang"; Weatherly, "Authenticity"; and Davies, "Paul," 6-9.

⁴*Paul*, 2:87.

⁵*Paul*, 2:88.

⁶*Paul*, 2:88.

⁷*Paul*, 2:320.

altogether.⁸ Apart from a few scholars, particularly those in the Tübingen and Dutch schools, post-Baurian interpreters have affirmed the Pauline authorship of 1 Thessalonians.⁹ However, Baur's ideas about 2:14-16 have influenced a number of subsequent scholars to view these verses as (part of) an interpolation.¹⁰

In recent years, some writers have questioned the integrity of not only (parts of) 2:14-16 but the whole of 2:13-16.¹¹ Birger A. Pearson is the most noted proponent of the interpolation hypothesis of 2:13-16. In a 1971 article ("Interpolation"), Pearson argued against the authenticity of the pericope on historical, theological, and structural grounds. His carefully crafted essay has thoroughly convinced some scholars.¹²

In this chapter I will seek to counter the work of Pearson and others who attribute 2:13-16 (or portions thereof) to a later editor.¹³ Herein I will deal in turn with the form-critical,

⁸Rightly noted by Schleuter, *Measure*, 15.

⁹So Hurd, "Paul," 24.

¹⁰Pearson ("Interpolation," 79), the most influential proponent of the interpolation theory of 2:13-16 (see below), acknowledges his indebtedness to Baur.

¹¹See n. 2 above.

¹²E. g., Boers ("Study," 152) remarks, "Although all [of Pearson's] arguments may not be equally compelling, the sum of the evidence is overwhelmingly in his favour. He has produced decisive evidence that the passage is an interpolation." Schmidt ("Evidence") has sought to buttress Pearson's position along linguistic lines (see below).

¹³In her recently published monograph (*Measure*), Schleuter argues for the authenticity of 2:14-16 on rhetorical grounds. She thinks that 2:14-16 is best explained as an instance of polemical hyperbole. She does note in her study (38) that "Much stronger structural, stylistic, linguistic, theological and historical evidence needs to be at hand before one can judge what is or is not compatible with Paul's literary structure, style, syntax or theology, and what historical referents to his words are reasonable." Nevertheless, she does not seek to defend the genuineness of the passage on such grounds. Therefore, her useful work in no way renders this chapter redundant. Throughout this thesis, I

grammatical/syntactical, historical, and theological arguments forwarded against a passage which boasts universal external attestation.¹⁴

I. Form-Critical Concerns

Scholars are largely in agreement that 2:13 marks a transition in 1 Thessalonians. The question is what type of transition. Answers to this query vary. Suggestions concerning the function of 2:13 in the epistle range from the more novel proposals that the verse signals the beginning of a letter¹⁵ or that it points to the presence of an interpolator¹⁶ to the less radical suggestions that the verse marks the start of a renewed (or second) thanksgiving,¹⁷ of a thought digression,¹⁸ or of a historical recollection.¹⁹ How, if at all, does 2:13-16 fit into the structure of the letter?

Building on the work of Robert W. Funk (*Parousia*), Pearson contends that 2:11-12 flows naturally into the apostolic *parousia* which commences in 2:17 and that 2:13-16 interrupts the flow of the text. Pearson further suggests that the appearance of a second

will be in conversation with Schleuter's important contribution to Thessalonian studies.

¹⁴For similar categories in dealing with the arguments against the authenticity of 2:13-16, see Lyons, *Autobiography*, 202-207. I have chosen to deal with objections to the non-Pauline origin of 2:13-16 in order of their merit. I will move from the less problematic areas of structure and syntax to the more difficult categories of history and theology.

For the argument that there are multiple interpolations in the Pauline epistles without manuscript attestation, see Walker, "Proof" and "Evidence."

¹⁵So Schmithals, *Gnostics*, 176-181; and recently Richard, 11-17.

¹⁶E. g., Pearson, "Interpolation," 88-90; Eckart, "Brief," 32-34; Boers, "Study," 149-152; and Schmidt, "Evidence."

¹⁷So e. g., Lyons, *Autobiography*, 203; and Hurd, "Paul," 28.

¹⁸Wanamaker, 109-110; and Smith, *Comfort*, 36.

¹⁹See Marshall, 76-83; and Johanson, *Brethren*, 94-98.

thanksgiving in the letter is an anomaly and that the epistle reads more smoothly once the interpolated thanksgiving is removed.²⁰ Hendrikus Boers also claims on structural grounds that the passage was not a part of the original composition.²¹

Is 2:13-16 best viewed as an epistolary intrusion as Pearson and Boers claim? Their form-critical arguments against the text's authenticity founder (among other reasons) upon the fact that there is no typical Pauline epistolary pattern. While Paul's letters may have a similar structure, by no means do his occasional epistles rigidly adhere to a fixed literary pattern. For example, in reading Galatians one is immediately struck with the absence of a thanksgiving. Even though this is an exception when compared with Paul's other extant writings, the contingencies of the communication provide a satisfactory explanation as to why. And it could well be that Paul's fond memories of his ministry among his Thessalonian converts prompted him to recapitulate his praise to God for their receptivity of his gospel message.²² Because there are so few extant Pauline letters and because each epistle which has survived has distinctive features, talk of a normative Pauline letter form is misguided.²³ Furthermore, even if, like Pearson, one considers the transition between 2:12 and 2:13 to be unnatural,²⁴

²⁰"Interpolation," 89-90.

²¹"Study," 151-152.

²²Lyons (*Autobiography*, 177) suggests, "Whereas Paul's dissatisfaction with the Galatians leads him to omit the thanksgiving period entirely . . . his satisfaction with the Thessalonians is so complete that the first three chapters of the letter assume the form of thanksgiving."

²³Hurd, "Paul," 28.

²⁴Contrast Lyons (*Autobiography*, 203) who remarks, "From Paul's almost doxological reference to God as the one who calls the Thessalonians to his kingdom and glory in 2:12, the transition to a thanksgiving to God for them in v. 13 is not all that abrupt. . . ." Jewett (*Correspondence*, 38) suggests that from a

it need not be thought of as illogical.²⁵ In fact, 2:13-16 may reasonably be viewed as a vital communicative link between Paul's recollection of his past ministry among his converts in 2:1-12 and his description of his present anxiety for his converts in 2:17-20.²⁶

Karl Gottfried Eckart ("Brief") has also suggested on form-critical grounds that 2:13-16 is a post-Pauline interpolation. He rejects the authenticity of the pericope because of its close resemblance to 1:2-10.²⁷ Despite Eckart's contention, the similarity between 1:2-10 and 2:13-16 does not necessarily render the latter passage inauthentic. Contrariwise, the affinity in contents and structure between the two passages could well suggest the integrity of 2:13-16. John C. Hurd has observed that it is not unusual for Paul to discuss one point (A), to digress to another point (B), and then return again to the first point (A'). Hurd detects the presence of this A B A' pattern in 1 Thess 1:2-2:16.²⁸ He suggests that 2:1-12 (= B) is sandwiched between two thanksgivings (1:2-10 = A; 2:13-16 = A').²⁹ Whether or not 1:2-10

rhetorical perspective the transition between 2:12 and 2:13 is "smooth and logical."

²⁵Smith, *Comfort*, 36.

²⁶Wanamaker (32) perceptively observes that "Without 2:13-16 it would not be at all clear why Paul was so concerned about his converts. Undoubtedly, 2:13-16 does not tell the whole story, but it would most likely have been adequate for the original readers, who had shared in the untimely separation from Paul implied in v. 17." Additionally, Weatherly ("Authenticity," 81) notes that the emphatic ἡμεῖς in 2:17 would be superfluous if 2:13-16 was an interpolation.

²⁷See similarly, Pearson, "Interpolation," 91.

²⁸"Paul," 28. Hurd detects the A B A' pattern not only in 1 Thess 1:2-2:16, but also in 1 Thess 2:17-3:13 (2:17-20 = A; 3:1-8 = B; 3:9-13 = A'). This leads him to suggest that the first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians forms a double triptych (30). Hurd also finds what he calls "the sonata form" in 1 Cor 8-10 (8 = A; 9 = B; 10 = A') and 12-14 (12 = A; 13 = B; 14 = A').

²⁹Hurd outlines the structural similarity of the two thanksgivings as follows:

and 2:13-16 are sufficiently similar to posit this chiastic structure³⁰ and whether or not one would label 2:13-16 a "thanksgiving," when the two passages are compared and when Paul's tendency to reiterate himself, albeit with variance, is taken into account, 2:13-16 does not appear to be un-Pauline or out of place. My contention, then, is that these verses fit both in their immediate and larger context.

II. Grammatical/Syntactical Issues

Assuming that Pearson's conclusions about the form and contents of 2:13-16 were correct, Schmidt ("Evidence") sought to support Pearson's work by arguing against the text's authenticity on linguistic grounds. Recently, Jon A. Weatherly has thoroughly and persuasively countered Schmidt's essay.³¹ I need not duplicate

1 Thess 1:2-10:

- A. We give thanks to God
- B. always for you all, *constantly*
- C. knowing . . . your election
- D. for *our gospel* came to you
- E. *not* only in word
- F. *but* also in power
- G. and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction . . .
- H. And *you became imitators* of us and the Lord.
- I. for you received the word in much *affliction* . . .
- J. (The success of the missionaries)
- K. You turned to God from idols,
- L. to serve a living and true God and to wait for his Son . . .
- M. who delivers us from the *wrath* to come.

1 Thess 2:13-16:

- A. We also give thanks to God
- B. *constantly*
- C. that when you received
- D. the *word of God* which *you heard from us*
- E. you accepted it *not* as the word of men
- F. *but* as what it really is, the word of God,
- G. which is at work in you believers.
- H. for *you, brethren, became imitators* of the churches . . .
- I. for *you suffered*
- J. (The suffering of the missionaries)
- K. hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles
- L. that they may be saved . . .
- M. But God's *wrath* has come upon them at last.

³⁰Hurd ("Paul," 30) notes that each panel in the triptych begins with a formal structural signal and closes with an eschatological climax. Lyons (*Autobiography*, 203) also sees striking similarities between 1:2-10 and 2:13-16 but does not suggest a chiastic structure.

³¹"Authenticity," 91-98. Rightly recognized by Schleuter, *Measure*, 34.

Weatherly's efforts here. The purpose of this section is to summarize Schmidt's arguments and Weatherly's counter-arguments and to offer a few additional criticisms of Schmidt's article.

Schmidt begins his syntactical study of 2:13-16 by commenting on καὶ διὰ τοῦτο. He maintains, "Nowhere else in 1 Thessalonians is καί used to connect two matrix sentences [i. e., semantically prominent independent clauses], and no other undisputed letter of Paul uses the construction καὶ διὰ τοῦτο (though it is imitated in 2 Thess 2:11)."³² Weatherly notes that there is at least one instance, namely 2 Cor 1:15, where Paul uses καί to introduce a matrix sentence and that there are multiple examples in the undisputed letters of Paul where καί "introduces and joins cola and even fuller compound sentences."³³ Thus, Schmidt's observation regarding καί is accurate but limited to 1 Thessalonians, thereby diluting its strength. Concerning καὶ διὰ τοῦτο, Schmidt is correct in stating that the construction is used in no other undisputed letter of Paul.³⁴ However, Weatherly rightly notes that Schmidt's explanation of καὶ διὰ τοῦτο in 2 Thess 2:11 as an imitation of the phrase in 1 Thess 2:13 substantially weakens his argument. If the writer of 2 Thessalonians did indeed copy the phrase from 1 Thess 2:13, then the so-called interpolated passage would have had to have been composed and circulated before the writing of the 2 Thessalonians.

³²"Evidence," 273.

³³"Authenticity," 92. For examples of καί introducing and joining cola and compound sentences, Weatherly lists: Rom 1:28; 2:27; 3:8; 5:16; 9:29; 11:9; 13:11; 15:10, 11, 12; 1 Cor 5:2; 6:2, 11; 7:17; 12:16, 26, 28, 31; 13:2; 14:32; 2 Cor 1:7, 15; 2:3, 16; 7:15; 8:10; 11:14; 12:3, 9; Gal 6:16; Phil 1:9, 25; 4:7; and 1 Thess 1:6.

³⁴"Evidence," 273.

It therefore appears more likely that καὶ διὰ τοῦτο in 1 Thess. 2.13 is part of the original text of the Epistle, and that 2 Thess. 2.11 is either an 'imitation' of this authentic portion (if 2 Thessalonians is pseudepigraphical) or an example of Paul's own use of the phrase (if 2 Thessalonians is authentic).³⁵

Schmidt also maintains that 2:14-16a is "out of harmony with the pattern of the larger section [i. e., 1:2-3:10]."³⁶ In particular, he suggests that the multiple levels of embedded sentences (i. e., dependent clauses) and the separation of κύριον and Ἰησοῦν (2:15a) are at odds with "typical" Pauline syntax.³⁷ Schmidt is right to observe that 2:14-16a contains more subordinate clauses than the sentences surrounding it.³⁸ There are, however, other complex sentences both in 1 Thessalonians (see e. g., 1:4-6 [five embeds]) and in other Pauline letters (e. g., Rom 4:16-17 [nine embeds]; Rom 15:15-16 [six embeds]; Phil 1:12-15 [seven embeds]; and Phil 1:27-30 [eight embeds]).³⁹ With regard to the separation of κύριον and Ἰησοῦν by the participle ἀποκτεινάντων, Schmidt correctly notes that the word order is unusual. Nevertheless, there are occasions in Paul's other epistles where a verb form separates a noun from an attributive adjective (e. g., 1 Cor 7:7, 12; 10:4; 12:24; 2 Cor 7:5; Phil 2:20).⁴⁰ Therefore, "the particular syntactical combination represented by κύριον ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν is not distinctively un-Pauline."⁴¹

³⁵"Authenticity," 93.

³⁶"Evidence," 273.

³⁷"Evidence," 273.

³⁸Schmidt ("Evidence," 273) claims that there are seven embeds. Weatherly ("Authenticity," 93) disputes this, noting six embeds.

³⁹See Weatherly, "Authenticity," 94.

⁴⁰As noted by Weatherly, "Authenticity," 95.

⁴¹Weatherly, "Authenticity," 95.

Recognizing that not all interpolation hypotheses include 2:13-14, Schmidt returns to these verses to find additional linguistic evidence to support Pearson's claim that 2:13-14 as well as 2:15-16 are interpolated. Schmidt sees the hand of a redactor in two places in 2:14. Firstly, he posits that the phrase τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ points to an "overly-Pauline construction."⁴² Although Schmidt is accurate in saying that Paul does not combine these elements elsewhere in his epistles, his suggestion that an imitator was responsible for the construction does not follow.⁴³ Paul does join together various aspects of this noun phrase elsewhere, as Schmidt himself observes (see e. g., 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:22; Phil 1:1). It stands to reason, therefore, that Paul *could* have formulated such a construction. Such a suggestion gains credence when the particular contents of the construction are considered. A common Pauline designation for Christian churches (τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ) begins the phrase; τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ forms the comparison between the Thessalonian and Judean Christians; and the final expression (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), which may be taken with τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, identifies the Judean assemblies as distinctly Christian⁴⁴ and denotes that it is Christ Jesus who binds the believers together.⁴⁵ Because Paul's style is so variable and tends toward verbosity, Schmidt's contention that this construction is overly-Pauline carries little weight.

⁴²"Evidence," 274.

⁴³Because Schmidt argues that some parts of 2:13-16 are non-Pauline and other parts are too Pauline, his hypothesis cannot be disproved. On the weaknesses inherent in this methodological approach, see Hurd, "Paul," 26.

⁴⁴Wanamaker, 112.

⁴⁵Bruce, 45.

Schmidt also suggests that the separation of τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν from its head noun μιμηταί by the vocative ἀδελφοί is uncharacteristic for Paul (2:14).⁴⁶ It is true that Paul usually places the vocative ἀδελφοί in front of the head noun which is followed in turn by the genitive. But in light of the syntactical limitations brought on by the multiple modifiers of τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν (cf. Gal 2:20; 4:28; Phil 3:17), the structure of the sentence is plausible as it stands.⁴⁷

Finally, Schmidt suggests that the participial phrase in 2:13 (παραλαβόντες λόγον ἀκοῆς παρ' ἡμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ) "is an amalgamation of several different Pauline constructions, each one found somewhere in the Pauline corpus, but the final combination itself is not typical of Pauline syntax."⁴⁸ The simple suggestion that τοῦ θεοῦ was a Pauline afterthought added to clarify the origin of the λόγον seems to be as acceptable a solution as positing the presence of an astute redactor.⁴⁹ Sometimes Ockham's razor is sufficiently sharp!

What then are we to conclude of Schmidt's linguistic study? In brief, Schmidt has stacked the investigative cards in his favor to insure that his conclusions would correlate with his presupposition that 2:13-16 is an interpolation. To be sure, Schmidt has made some astute syntactical observations of the passage. However, he "neglects relevant data from other undisputed Pauline Epistles which suggest that the linguistic phenomena of 1 Thess 2.13-16 are consistent with Paul's style."⁵⁰ While Schmidt's linguistic

⁴⁶"Evidence," 274-275.

⁴⁷Weatherly, "Authenticity," 98.

⁴⁸"Evidence," 276.

⁴⁹Wanamaker, 111.

⁵⁰Weatherly, "Authenticity," 91.

arguments against the text's authenticity are weightier than the structural reasons considered above, in the end they do not undercut the integrity of the text. "Hence Schmidt's arguments are compelling only for someone who has already accepted Pearson's viewpoint."⁵¹ We turn now to consider Pearson's historical understanding of 2:13-16.

III. Historical Matters

Historically speaking, Pearson thinks that 2:13-16 must have been written after 70 CE for two primary reasons. First of all, he maintains that the aorist verb ἔφθασεν in 2:16c refers to an event in the past, namely, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.⁵² Pearson also asserts that "there was no significant persecution of Christians in Judaea before the war [i. e., the Roman-Judean War which commenced in 66 CE]."⁵³ I will seek to demonstrate in this section that these two contentions are dubious.

Although Pearson is correct to translate ἔφθασεν as "has come,"⁵⁴ one need not follow his suggestion that 2:16c refers to the sacking of the holy city. Robert Jewett perceptively notes,

That Christian writers interpreted the destruction [of Jerusalem] as a sign of divine wrath is clear, but there is an unmistakable quality of retrospection in Pearson's argument. From the perspective of those who know about the Jewish-Roman War, it is surely the most appropriate choice. But to someone who lived before that catastrophe, . . . other events

⁵¹Jewett, *Correspondence*, 41.

⁵²"Interpolation," 82-83.

⁵³"Interpolation," 87.

⁵⁴"Interpolation," 82. So similarly, e. g., Donfried, "Paul," 252; Hurd, "Paul," 35. Cf., among others, Weatherly ("Authenticity," 90) who takes ἔφθασεν to be a prophetic aorist (= "has drawn near; is coming").

could easily have appeared to be a final form of divine wrath.⁵⁵

Commentators have suggested that Paul could have had in mind, among other things, the expulsion of some Jews from Rome in 49 CE (Acts 18:1; Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4)⁵⁶ or the massacre of twenty to thirty thousand Jews in Jerusalem the same year (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.112; *B.J.* 2.225).⁵⁷ While virtually any large-scale catastrophe which befell the Jewish people would suffice, it may well be that Paul did not have any major disaster in mind when stating ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος.⁵⁸ For apocalyptically-minded people like Paul (and his Thessalonian converts [cf. 2 Thess 2:2]), God's wrath can be detected in seemingly insignificant events, and the final consummation of history is ever close at hand.⁵⁹ But if 2:16c does in fact refer to a specific historical occurrence, it need not be dated 70 CE.

"With reference to the alleged persecutions in Judaea," Pearson writes, "1 Thessalonians 2:14 would be the only New Testament text--were it a genuine expression of Paul--to indicate that the churches in Judaea suffered persecution at the hands of the Jews between 44 AD and the outbreak of the war against Rome."⁶⁰ While this statement as it stands is seemingly accurate,

⁵⁵*Correspondence*, 37. So similarly, Hurd, "Paul," 35; and Setzer, *Responses*, 18.

⁵⁶See Bammel, "Judenverfolgung," 300.

⁵⁷See Jewett, *Correspondence*, 37-38. Jewett also lists a number of other scholarly suggestions.

⁵⁸Davies ("Paul," 7) is convinced that "it is not necessary to explain the notion that 'the wrath has fallen upon the Jews finally and fully' in terms of any extraordinary contemporary event." So also Best, 120; and Hurd, "Paul," 35.

⁵⁹For a recent discussion on the apocalyptic worldview and on millenarian groups, see Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalyptic*, 19-84. Cf. Jewett, *Correspondence*, 161-178.

⁶⁰"Interpolation," 86.

the way Pearson frames the issue of the suffering of the Judean Christians is misleading. Unlike Pearson, 2:14 does not specify when the Judean churches suffered Jewish opposition. Presuming that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians c. 50 CE and that 2:13-16 is authentic, possibilities for the "persecution" of Judean congregations post-50 CE need not be considered. Furthermore, the contention that Judean Christians were not targets of Jewish opposition from 44 (following the execution of James by Herod Agrippa I) to 50 CE amounts to an *argumentum e silentio*.⁶¹ But what about the conflict between Jews and Christian Jews in Judea that occurred from c. 33-44 CE which Pearson dismisses?⁶²

Both Paul and Acts attest that Judean Christians suffered at the hands of their fellow Jews during this period. Despite arguments to the contrary,⁶³ it is likely that Paul carried out his own persecutory activity in Jerusalem and the surrounding vicinity (Gal 1:13, 22-23; 1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6; cf. Acts 8:3; 9:21).⁶⁴

⁶¹Although explicit NT textual verification is lacking for conflict between Jews and Christian Jews in Judea between 44-50 CE, based on Paul's opposition of Judean Christians prior to his conversion (see text below) and his opposition from Judean Christians after his conversion (Acts 21:15-36; 23:12-15; cf. Rom 15:31; see further Seland, *Violence*, 256-298), it seems reasonable to think that things were not as harmonious during these years as Pearson imagines. Okeke ("Fate," 129) suggests, "Paul's persecution of the Church prior to his conversion is not an isolated case of an eccentric Jew who oppressed the Church while the rest of the Jews welcomed Christianity as a popular sect within Judaism." He continues: "It seems less probable that the Diaspora Jews had more zeal and persecuted Christians to more or less a degree as Paul personally encountered as a Christian, while the churches of Christ in Judea (in the very heart of Judaism) enjoyed a comfortable and peaceful co-existence with other sects within Judaism."

See also Jewett ("Agitators," 205-207) and Reicke ("Judaean-Christianity," 148) who argue that Judean Christians were victims of Jewish zealotism from c. 33 to 54 CE.

⁶²Pearson ("Interpolation," 86, n. 45) notes the "persecution" of the "Hellenists" (Acts 8:1) but does not regard this event as relevant since it "had occurred almost 20 years prior to the writing of 1 Thess."

⁶³E. g., Haenchen, *Acts*, 625; and Schleuter, *Measure*, 45.

⁶⁴So rightly e. g., Hultgren, "Persecutions," 105-107; and Hengel, *Paul*, 72-79. See further chapter seven.

Additionally, Acts reports that the apostles (5:17-42) and other Jerusalem Christians (8:1; 12:1) were objects of Jewish persecution and that two Christian leaders, Stephen (7:58) and James (12:2), were martyred during this time frame. Even if Acts exaggerates the severity of the Jewish opposition of the Jerusalem Christians, as most scholars suspect, this does not negate the basic facts that from c. 33-44 CE at least some of the Jerusalem church and its leaders were harassed by non-Christian Jews and that two prominent spokesmen of this aberrant Jewish movement were killed.

Pearson contends that Judean Christians did not encounter "significant persecution" before the War.⁶⁵ If by "significant persecution" he means some type of pogrom,⁶⁶ I would concur. But it should be observed that 2:14 does not state that there was widespread persecution; it simply suggests that Judean Christians experienced some type of suffering at the hands of their fellow Jews. As noted above, there is sufficient evidence to corroborate this Pauline claim. And Paul, given his first-hand knowledge of the non-Christian opposition that both the Judean and Thessalonian believers encountered, was able to draw a comparison: the churches in Judea and the church in Thessalonica were opposed in similar ways by their respective compatriots.⁶⁷ Pearson's

⁶⁵"Interpolation," 87.

⁶⁶This is the clear implication. See "Interpolation," 87.

⁶⁷Pearson ("Interpolation," 87-88) also suggests that the *mimesis* terminology in 2:14 "does not cohere with Paul's usage elsewhere" and thinks that Paul would not have held up Judean Christians as an example for the Thessalonians. While it is true that Paul typically admonishes his churches to imitate himself (see e. g., 1 Thess 1:6; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; cf. 2 Thess 3:9), he does hold up churches as models elsewhere in his epistles (1 Thess 1:7; 2 Cor 8:1-9:4). Furthermore, as Wanamaker (32) notes, Paul does not exhort the Thessalonians to be imitators of the Judeans; he simply states that they had become imitators. Despite Pearson's belief that Paul would surely not have praised the Judean churches (one detects traces of Baur here), Paul had both freedom and reason to cite the Judean churches as a pattern for the

contention notwithstanding, then, 2:14 makes good historical sense coming from Paul.⁶⁸

IV. Theological Considerations

The vitriolic rhetoric directed against the Jews in 2:15-16 appears to be the primary reason that Pearson and other interpreters view (parts of) 2:13-16 as a deutero-Pauline interpolation.⁶⁹ Seemingly embarrassed by this blight on Paul's theology,⁷⁰ advocates of the passage's inauthenticity seek to explain (away) these hostile comments as incompatible with "Paul's thought as elsewhere expressed in his epistles," particularly in Romans 9-11.⁷¹ While the vituperation of 2:15-16 may well offend modern sensibilities and may appear to be un-Pauline, there are good reasons to think that Paul authored these words.

To begin, one should note that Pearson and most other scholars who judge 2:13-16 as inauthentic do so based upon Paul's

Thessalonian assembly. Jewett (*Correspondence*, 39) observes, "Since a major issue in the congregation was the relation between persecution and faith, it is understandable that Paul should have selected the earliest Christian communities as having experienced the same thing [i. e., suffering] as the Thessalonians."

⁶⁸Although Schleuter (*Measure*) believes 2:14 to be authentic, she thinks that Paul exaggerates the Judeans' and Thessalonians' suffering (51-53). This conclusion is based on her (and Pearson's) misconception that severe suffering is to be equated with organized opposition and multiple martyrdoms. "Persecution" need not be systematic nor even physical to be serious. On the nature of the Thessalonians' affliction, see chapter nine.

⁶⁹Pearson ("Interpolation," 85) writes, "I find it virtually impossible to ascribe to Paul the *ad hominem* fragment of Gentile anti-Judaism in v. 15." He also remarks (85-86) that "the thought that God's wrath has come upon the Jewish people with utter finality (v. 16) is manifestly foreign to Paul's theology. . . ."

⁷⁰Mason ("Polemic," 197, n. 74) maintains that "the crucial argument for interpolation is embarrassment. . . ." Cf. similarly, Jewett, *Correspondence*, 40-41.

⁷¹Pearson, "Interpolation," 85. Scholars who affirm the authenticity of 2:13-16 have also compared Paul's statements about the Jews in 2:15-16 with Romans 9-11 and have concluded that they are more (see e. g., Donfried, "Paul") or less (e. g., Okeke, "Fate") compatible.

other epistles. To say that Paul could not have said something in one place because he did not say the same thing in another is tenuous. Although there does appear to be a basic coherency in Pauline thought, one does not find in his occasional correspondence a static consistency.⁷² Therefore, an attempt to harmonize fully Paul's statements about Jewish people in 2:15-16 with remarks he makes about his compatriots in other letters may be misguided.⁷³ That there are tensions (or some would say contradictions) in Paul's epistles has become more or less an axiom in Pauline studies. For example, scholars frequently point out that Paul's thinking on the Law or on eschatology is, to say the least, not easily reconciled. It makes good sense, therefore, to allow for some variation in Paul's theologizing about his fellow Jews.

Having said that, it is important to recognize that the Pauline polemic in 2:15-16 is not directed at all Jews. Indeed, scholars have suggested that the word Ἰουδαῖοι, which appears in 2:14 and serves as the antecedent to the participial phrases in 2:15-16, should be translated "Judeans."⁷⁴ Although the term may be so rendered,⁷⁵ it appears that the locale of those Jewish people specified in 2:15-16 (namely, those Jews who killed the Lord Jesus⁷⁶ and the prophets,⁷⁷ who drove Paul and his co-worker[s]

⁷²See Beker's coherence-contingency interpretive scheme in *Paul*, 23-36.

⁷³So Schleuter, *Measure*, 62.

⁷⁴See e. g., Weatherly, "Authenticity," 86-87; and Hill, *Establishing*, 11.

⁷⁵See further Lowe, "ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ." On Paul's use of this term elsewhere, see Holtz, "Judgment," 287.

⁷⁶Pearson ("Interpolation," 85), noting 1 Cor 2:8, states that Paul "never attributes the death of Jesus to the Jews." While the charge of 2:15a is unique to Paul, it should be noted that: 1. Paul does not specify in 1 Cor 2:8 who "the rulers of this age" who crucified the Lord actually were. So rightly Furnish, *Jesus*, 70. Pace Pearson (85) who equates the rulers with "Roman imperial authorities." 2. At least some early believers were convinced that some Jewish leaders and people were culpable for the death of Jesus (see Martin, 91). 3.

out, and who displease God and oppose all people by hindering Paul and his helper[s] from sharing the gospel with the Gentiles) extends beyond Judea,⁷⁸ even if one construes Judea here in the broadest way possible so as to include Samaria and Galilee.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, Paul's invective here is best viewed as a polemic directed at particular Jews for opposing those whom he believed to be God's messengers (i. e., Jesus, the prophets, himself, and his co-worker[s]) and for hindering that which he believed to be God's message (i. e., the gospel).⁸⁰ That Paul was not referring in 2:15-16 to Jews in general is supported by the fact the churches in Judea which he held in high esteem were comprised mainly, if not exclusively, of Jews. Additionally, Jesus, the prophets, and Paul were Jewish! Although it is commonplace for commentators to depict this passage as anti-Jewish,⁸¹ such a description is an anachronism largely prompted, I suspect, by a scholarly sensitivity to the hideous horrors of the Holocaust.⁸² Since the sharp attack against the Jews recorded in 2:15-16 arises from an attempt of

Historically, it is quite probable "that the Jerusalem ruling elite were guilty of complicity in Jesus' death" (Wanamaker, 31).

⁷⁷Gilliard ("Prophets") argues that the prophets mentioned in 2:15 are prophets of Jesus, not prophets of the Jews. Note, however, Rom 11:3.

⁷⁸So rightly, Bruce, 46.

⁷⁹Wanamaker, 112.

⁸⁰*Contra* Meeks ("Breaking Away," 105, n. 14) and Richard (126) who take 2:15-16 to be a global condemnation of Israel as a nation. So rightly Gilliard, "Comma," 498; Davies, "Paul," 8; and Holtz, "Judgment," 285.

⁸¹In addition to those who deny the authenticity of the text on such grounds, see the following interpreters who affirm the integrity of 2:13-16: Best, 122; Wanamaker, 48-49; Hurd, "Paul," 36; Jewett, *Correspondence*, 40-41.

⁸²Holland ("Anti-Judaism," 191) issues a needed reminder: "Paul is not a contemporary Christian addressing contemporary Judaism. He is not speaking of a faith with a history of oppression manifested in ghettos, pogroms, and the Holocaust."

some (Thessalonian) Jews to hinder Paul from preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, the sardonic statements are better labeled "anti-oppressor."⁸³

Sharp Pauline polemic is not only present in 1 Thessalonians (in addition to 2:15-16, see the typical Jewish polemic Paul employs against Gentiles in 1:9 and 4:5; cf. 1 Cor 5:1; Rom 1:18-32; and Phil 2:15), but is also found in Paul's other letters. He frequently set aside rhetorical courtesies when speaking to his converts about his Jewish Christian opponents. For example, in Gal 5:12 he wishes that those who are unsettling the Galatians by preaching circumcision would emasculate themselves! In 2 Corinthians he refers to his rivals as "false apostles," "deceitful workmen," and even "servants of Satan" (11:13-15). And in Phil 3:2 he tags his Jewish detractors "dogs," "evil-workers," and "mutilators of the flesh."

Although Paul reserves his harshest words for his Jewish Christian competitors,⁸⁴ he does make caustic remarks about Jews and Judaism as well.⁸⁵ For instance, in Romans 9-11, the chapters to which scholars usually appeal when discussing Paul's normative attitude toward the Jewish people, Paul suggests that his unbelieving compatriots are under a curse (9:3) and implies that they are "vessels of wrath made for destruction" (9:23). In 11:3 Paul recites Elijah's indictment against Israel that "they killed the prophets" (1 Kgs 19:4; cf. 1 Thess 2:15a). He also refers to those

⁸³Patte ("Thessalonians," 126-127) followed by Lyons (*Autobiography*, 205) followed by Hill (*Establishing*, 13) uses the label "anti-persecutor." By inference Paul's polemic in 2:15-16 is also directed toward those Gentiles who oppose his Thessalonian converts. So rightly Wanamaker, 114; Schleuter, *Measure*, 124; and Smith, *Comfort*, 36.

⁸⁴Schleuter, *Measure*, 124-195.

⁸⁵See further Mason, "Paul," 192-223.

Jews who do not (yet) believe in Jesus as "broken off branches" (11:20), "enemies of God" (11:28), and "disobedient" (11:31). While it is true that Paul declares that "all Israel will be saved" (11:26a), to read this statement in its larger context makes it clear that Paul believes that salvation for Jew and Gentile alike comes through Christ (9:6-33; 10:3-13; 11:1b-16).⁸⁶ Paul, then, is capable of saying unflattering things about both Christian and non-Christian Jews. And while 2:15-16 is an especially harsh verbal onslaught upon particular groups of unbelieving Jews, such polemic is not as foreign to Paul as Pearson and others have supposed.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that there are no pressing form-critical, syntactical, historical, or theological reasons to consider either all or part of 2:13-16 as a post-Pauline interpolation. I have not attempted here to "prove" the integrity of the passage, but I have sought to demonstrate that there are no convincing arguments against the text's authenticity and that there is much in the pericope which is plausible in and compatible with a Pauline context. Coupled with the text's universal external attestation, it is justifiable to precede on the assumption of authenticity.⁸⁷

It may be that 2:15-16 has fostered anti-Jewish attitudes among some of its readers. And it is indeed deplorable to think that this text has been illegitimately used to harm innocent Jewish people. However, if my line of interpretation is correct, then it is not appropriate to read 2:15-16 as a piece of anti-Jewish

⁸⁶So rightly Mason, "Paul," 221; Sanders, "Attitude," 183; and Holtz, "Judgment," 288. *Pace* Stendahl, *Paul*, 281.

⁸⁷Cf. similarly Davies ("Paul," 7) who remarks that "it is more justifiable to regard it [i. e., 2:13-16] as Pauline than otherwise."

propaganda. Even though Paul was convinced that those Jews who refused to accept the gospel and opposed his efforts to share with the Gentiles were under wrath, he does not categorically condemn the Jewish people here or elsewhere. One might think or wish to think that Paul's soteriology was errant, but to accuse him of anti-Judaism for defending what he believed to be the crux of Israel's hope seems unfair.⁸⁸ And even if one is embarrassed or offended by the Pauline polemic in 2:15-16, attempts to dismiss the text on such grounds amount to censorship.⁸⁹ In short, "Unless and until further [internal and/or external] evidence is forthcoming in support of the interpolation hypothesis, it should be assumed that 2:13-16 formed part of the original text of the letter."⁹⁰ Throughout this thesis I will draw upon this pericope in an effort to comprehend better the contours of the conflict of Paul and the Thessalonians Christians with Jewish and Gentile outsiders.

⁸⁸Holland ("Anti-Judaism," 200) notes that Paul's prophetic proclamations to the Jews were not intended to be "anti-Jewish" nor can they be properly read as such. Furthermore, Holland notes that Paul may not be rightly blamed for Christian anti-Judaism "as if there had been no such thing [as anti-Judaism] in the Greco-Roman world before Paul, or as if bigotry really needs a scriptural warrant."

⁸⁹Johnson, "Polemic," 421, n. 4.

⁹⁰Wanamaker, 33.

Chapter Two

Is 2 Thessalonians Authentically Pauline?

Introduction

Contemporary scholars studying Pauline Christianity in Thessalonica confront the conundrum of where to place 2 Thessalonians in the discussion. Michael D. Goulder summarizes this scholarly quandary well when he writes, "We cannot assume it [i. e., 2 Thessalonians] to be Pauline, since so many scholars dispute that; but we cannot assume it to be irrelevant, when so many of the major commentators have thought Paul to be its author."¹ To be sure, some recent interpreters have simply assumed the epistle's authenticity² or pseudonymity³ in their work. But Goulder correctly maintains that to dismiss prematurely either side of the authorship argument is to make an interpretive misstep.⁴ The prudent path, it seems, is to observe what NT scholars have said/are saying about the epistle's genuineness and then in conversation with other commentators to state one's own view on the issue. In this chapter, I will do precisely that. To begin, I will note the four factors that lead a sizeable majority of modern day Pauline scholars to judge 2 Thessalonians as

¹"Silas," 96. Goulder notes (96, n. 1) the following commentators who consider 2 Thessalonians to be inauthentic: the large majority of scholars (some 90%) contributing to *TC* (ed. Collins), Trilling, Marxsen, and Laub. One could now add, among others, the American scholars Donfried ("2 Thessalonians") and Richard to his abbreviated list. Goulder also indicates that until 1980 "almost all commentators held to Pauline authenticity" (96, n. 2). He mentions by name Dobschütz, Dibelius, Rigaux, Best, Marshall, and Jewett, *Correspondence*. In this group one could now place, among others, Wanamaker and Martin.

²E. g., Winter, "Setting."

³E. g., Beker, *Heirs*, 9.

⁴So similarly Holland, "Contribution," 395.

inauthentic.⁵ Secondly, I will evaluate these particular arguments raised against the authenticity of the epistle. I will then assess various audience hypotheses for the letter before setting forth what I deem to be the most satisfactory *Sitz im Leben* for 2 Thessalonians. By way of conclusion, I will indicate how I will employ the evidence from this disputed epistle in my study.

I. Arguments against Authenticity

Proponents of the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians have marshalled multiple arguments to support their position. I will not rehearse them all here.⁶ For the purposes of this project, it will suffice to introduce briefly the issues most frequently raised by exegetes who argue against the epistle's authenticity: namely, the epistolary remarks in 2:2 and 3:17; the authoritarian tone of the letter; the eschatological divergence between 1 and 2 Thessalonians; and the literary dependence of 2 Thessalonians on 1 Thessalonians.⁷

Authenticating comments

Scholars seeking to establish the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians often contend that the epistle's closing greeting in 3:17 ("I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the

⁵Marshall (29) suggests that since 1970 "the tide of critical opinion has shifted decisively in favour of inauthenticity. . . ."

⁶For a fuller discussion and defense of the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians, see e. g., Wrede, *Echtheit*; Trilling, *Untersuchungen*; Bailey, "Who?"; Collins, *Letters*, 209-245; Holland, *Tradition*; Hughes, *Rhetoric*; Menken, 27-43; and Richard, 19-29. On the arguments against the authenticity of the epistle, see also the following commentators who ultimately opt for the Pauline authorship of the epistle: Marshall, 28-45; Jewett, *Correspondence*, 3-18; and Wanamaker, 17-28.

⁷See e. g., Hollmann, "Unechtheit," 38; Bailey, "Who?," 132-139; Donfried, "2 Thessalonians," 130; Menken, 28; Collins, *Letters*, 218-224; Thurston, *Reading*, 160-161. Jewett (*Correspondence*, 7) notes that these four arguments against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians remain at the center of the present discussion. Cf. also Best, 50. I have ordered the arguments for pseudonymity from the weaker to the stronger.

mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.") when coupled with the mention in 2:2 of a "letter as if from us" (δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν) betrays the work of a forger. Although other universally recognized Pauline letters have postscripts similar to 3:17 (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; and Phlm 19; cf. Col 4:18), it is reasoned that this particular epistolary ending is too emphatic to be authentic. Raymond F. Collins expresses a common scholarly sentiment when he states, "The modern reader has the impression that the author of 2 Thessalonians, as Hamlet's queen, protests too much."⁸ Moving from such an inference, Collins (and other supporters of the epistle's pseudonymity) contends that 2:2 provides another clue for positing the presence of a pseudographer. Although advocates of pseudonymous authorship disagree whether the letter referred to in 2:2 should be understood as a reference to an epistle forged in Paul's name⁹ or to (sections of) 1 Thessalonians,¹⁰ they agree that this cryptic phrase points to a post-Pauline imitator seeking to authenticate his epistle (cf. 2:15; 3:17).

A detached, authoritarian tone

Many exegetes have noted that the tone of 2 Thessalonians differs significantly from 1 Thessalonians and have employed this observation to argue against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians.¹¹ Interpreters contend that while 1 Thessalonians is warm and personal, 2 Thessalonians is cool and formal. Scholars wishing to contrast the tone of the letters draw attention to the obligatory

⁸*Letters*, 223. Cf. similarly Bailey, "Who?," 138; Laub, "Autorität," 409; Menken, 35-36; and Richard, 394.

⁹So e. g., Beker, *Heirs*, 74.

¹⁰So e. g., Bailey, "Who?," 138.

¹¹See, among others, Bailey, "Who?," 137; Collins, *Letters*, 222-223; Beker, *Heirs*, 73; Richard, 23-24; and Thurston, *Reading*, 160.

thanksgivings of 2 Thess 1:3 and 2:13,¹² the less frequent use of familial terminology in 2 Thessalonians,¹³ the lack of emphasis on author and reader relations in the letter,¹⁴ and the appeals to apostolic tradition and authority in 2 Thess 2:15 and 3:6-15.¹⁵ In brief, not a few interpreters think it improbable that Paul would, or even could, write two letters so distinctly different in tone to the same congregation within a short space of time.¹⁶

Eschatological inconsistencies

Numerous Pauline interpreters maintain that Paul's instruction on the *parousia* in 1 Thess 4:13-5:11 is entirely incongruous with the apocalyptic schema set forth in 2 Thess 2:1-12.¹⁷ It is held that since Paul stressed a sudden and an imminent *parousia* in 1 Thessalonians he would not have said, at least while

¹²E. g., Menken, 31.

¹³So Collins, *Letters*, 222.

¹⁴See e. g., Bailey, "Who?," 137-138.

¹⁵Vander Stichele ("Tradition") argues that the strong emphasis on tradition in 2 Thessalonians is un-Pauline. Laub ("Autorität") and van Aarde ("Fight") suggest that the use of apostolic tradition and authority in 2 Thessalonians differs from Paul's genuine letters.

¹⁶See, for instance, Collins, *Letters*, 222-223. Most scholars who think that 2 Thessalonians is authentically Pauline tend to think that Paul wrote what we call 2 Thessalonians not long after he had written 1 Thessalonians. See, among others, Frame, 19; Best, 59; and Bruce, xl-xlii. Some interpreters who affirm the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians have suggested that it was written before 1 Thessalonians. See e. g., West, "Order"; Manson, "Thessalonians"; Thurston, "Relationship"; and most recently Wanamaker, 37-45. (Interestingly, Wanamaker's revision of this thesis seems to have caused some recent commentators to remain noncommittal on the sequence of the Thessalonian epistles. See Simpson, "Thessalonians," 937; and Martin, 30-33). Most scholars have rejected this theory. As to why, see e. g., Jewett, *Correspondence*, 26-30. Some exegetes who think that 2 Thessalonians was written by Paul have sought to explain the relationship between 1 and 2 Thessalonians by positing that 2 Thessalonians was intended for a different reading (listening) audience than 1 Thessalonians. For a review of some of the more well-known theories of separate recipients, see Jewett, *Correspondence*, 21-24.

¹⁷So e. g., Hughes, *Rhetoric*, 79-83; Holland, *Tradition*, 91-127; Beker, *Heirs*, 73; Thurston, *Reading*, 160; and Koester, "Eschatology."

in Thessalonica (2 Thess 2:5), that signs must precede the coming of the Lord. John A. Bailey's remarks are typical:

These two eschatologies [i. e., the eschatology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians respectively] are contradictory. Either the end will come suddenly and without warning like a thief in the night (I Thessalonians) or it will be preceded by a series of apocalyptic events which warn of its coming (II Thessalonians). Paul might have said both things--in differing situations to one church, or to different churches--but he can hardly have said both things to the same church at the same time, i. e. to the Thessalonian church when he founded it.¹⁸

Bailey and other commentators use what they view to be contradictions between the eschatologies espoused in 1 and 2 Thessalonians as a primary piece of evidence in their case against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians.

Literary imitation

The classic studies of William Wrede (*Echtheit*) and Wolfgang Trilling (*Untersuchungen*), both of which sought to establish the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians by demonstrating its literary dependence upon, yet divergence from, 1 Thessalonians, have persuaded a number of scholars to conclude, primarily on literary grounds, that 2 Thessalonians is a forged letter.¹⁹ Wrede argued in a volume first published in 1903 that the structural, linguistic, and thematic similarities between the two epistles suggest that either Paul slavishly imitated 1 Thessalonians when writing 2 Thessalonians or that a forger liberally drew upon Paul's letter to the Thessalonians when producing an epistle in the apostle's name.

¹⁸"Who?," 136.

¹⁹E. g., Donfried, "2 Thessalonians," 131. Menken (36) remarks that "Since W. Wrede's . . . book on 2 Thessalonians, the literary relationship between 1 and 2 Thessalonians counts as the decisive argument for the non-Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians." Jewett (*Correspondence*, 3) states that "a substantial shift in critical opinion among leading New Testament scholars has been visible since the publication of Wolfgang Trilling's monograph contesting its authenticity in 1972."

For Wrede, the latter option was clearly the better one.²⁰ He surmises that this Pauline imitator wrote 2 Thessalonians sometime in the first decade of the second century CE.²¹ In his influential monograph, Trilling reinforces the work of Wrede by arguing against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians on stylistic, form-critical, and theological grounds. Although Trilling concedes that the vocabulary of 2 Thessalonians is basically Pauline, he contends that the author's style and thought diverges significantly from that of Paul.²² Trilling's comparative study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians ultimately leads him to conclude that 2 Thessalonians was an apocalyptic tract put out in Paul's name by a believer living in Asia Minor sometime between 80 and the early second century CE.²³ While the astute literary observations of Wrede and Trilling have led a large number of Pauline interpreters to conclude that 2 Thessalonians is pseudonymous, their respective proposals for the letter's *Sitz im Leben* have not been as eagerly endorsed by the scholarly community (see further below).

II. Evaluating Objections to Pauline Authorship

Space prohibits a detailed response to the points that scholars have raised against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. Nonetheless, a few evaluative remarks are in order here. In

²⁰So also Bailey ("Who?," 136) who thinks that "it is impossible to conceive of a man as creative as Paul drawing upon his own previous letter in such an unimaginative way."

²¹See *Echtheit*, 95-96.

²²For a response to and refutation of Trilling's work, see esp., Marshall, 32-40; Jewett, 10-14; and Wanamaker, 21-28. Schmidt ("Style") seeks to support the work of Trilling by performing a syntactical analysis of 2 Thessalonians. He concludes that the complex syntactical style of 2 Thessalonians is closer to that of Colossians and Ephesians, letters which Schmidt also views to be pseudonymous. Collins ("Paradigm") discerns in 2 Thessalonians a shift away from the kerygmatic language of 1 Thessalonians and employs this observation to argue against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians.

²³See Trilling's commentary on 27-28.

regards to the letter mentioned in 2:2 and the closing greeting in 3:17, these verses indicate a forger's ruse only to the reader who has already opted for the theory of pseudonymity.²⁴ As we have observed above, the letter's postscript is not unlike that of other universally recognized Paulines. Moreover, the epistolary ending, although emphatic, is no more so than, e. g., Galatians, a(nother) letter where Paul finds it necessary to reinforce his message and to reassert his authority.²⁵ Additionally, if Paul had suspected, rightly or wrongly, that his previous letter to the Thessalonians had been misconstrued by some of the congregation or that a spurious letter was circulating among the church in his name, thereby distorting his eschatological instruction, then the authenticating signature in 3:17 makes good sense, as does the ambiguous remark about an epistle in 2:2.²⁶ In reference to the remarks in 2:2 and 3:17, Judith L. Hill asks with good reason: "How else would the real author [for her, Paul] have approached such a misunderstanding?"²⁷

As to the tone of 2 Thessalonians, scholars have rightly detected that it is much more detached and authoritarian than 1

²⁴On this point, the remarks of Menken are particularly revealing. He comments that 2:2 "is best understood on the *presupposition* that Paul was not the author of 2 Thessalonians" (34-35, *italics added*). After acknowledging that 1 Thessalonians may have also contained a greeting in Paul's own handwriting, he suggests that 3:17 can be considered "as an indication against Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians *only* in as far as the emphasis on the authenticity is *somewhat* too heavy" (36, *italics added*). Menken's qualifications here are telling (and accurate).

²⁵Cf. Phlm 19. In this little epistle Paul also seeks to assert his influence, albeit gently. See O'Brien, *Philemon*, 267-268.

²⁶Wanamaker (239) rightly notes the author's uncertainty as to what was disturbing the congregation (a πνεῦμα, λόγος, and/or ἐπιστολή) and the ambiguity of the phrase ὡς δι' ἡμῶν. Does ὡς δι' ἡμῶν refer to ἐπιστολή only? (So e. g., Bruce, 164). Or does the phrase refer to ἐπιστολή, λόγος, and πνεῦμα? (So e. g., Best, 278). Either of these readings is possible (as is the reading that takes ὡς δι' ἡμῶν to refer to ἐπιστολή and λόγος), but one can say with certainty that ὡς δι' ἡμῶν goes with at least ἐπιστολή.

²⁷*Establishing*, 5.

Thessalonians.²⁸ But a shift in tone between letters does not necessarily indicate that 2 Thessalonians is the product of a Pauline imitator.²⁹ When he deemed it necessary, Paul could alter his tone, as Gal 4:19-20 shows. (My dear children . . . how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone [ἀλλάξαι τὴν φωνήν μου], because I am perplexed with you" [cf. 1 Cor 4:21]). And although Bailey is inclined to think that there is no good explanation for the difference in tone between the two letters, spare the pseudonymous origin of 2 Thessalonians,³⁰ he fails to recognize that the false rumor circulating among the congregation that the day of the Lord had arrived and the disruptive behavior of the ἄτακτοι might well have prompted Paul to write to his converts in a cooler, firmer tone.

Concerning the perceived contradictions between the epistles' eschatologies, I would note that variations in eschatology do not, at least automatically, indicate pseudonymity.³¹ For some scholars, myself included, the emphasis on the suddenness of the *parousia* in 1 Thess 4:13-5:11 is not thought to be wholly incompatible with the various signs which, according to the author

²⁸Contrast Marshall (34) who thinks that "it is surely time that the myth of the cold tone of the letter was exploded." Cf. similarly, Aus, "Background," 438. Although the tone of 2 Thessalonians is not as severe as (portions of) other letters in the Pauline corpus, neither is it as personal and affirming as 1 Thessalonians, as Marshall himself concedes (34).

²⁹*Pace* Collins (*Letters*, 223) who holds that "The hypothesis of the pseudepigraphical origin of 2 Thessalonians . . . clearly explains the different relationship [detected in the letters' tone] between the community and the authors of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The relationships are different because the authors are different." Cf. the more sober assessment of Menken (31) who acknowledges that "the difference in tone *per se* is not a sufficient reason to deny Pauline authorship but in combination with other factors, it has some weight."

³⁰"Who?," 137.

³¹Contrast, e. g., Koester, "Eschatology."

of 2 Thessalonians, must precede the *parousia* (2:1-12).³² To be sure, the eschatological outlooks of the two letters have different nuances and emphases, but, so do, for instance, Paul's ideas about the resurrection of the dead at the *eschaton* (cf. e. g., 1 Thess 4:15-17 with 1 Cor 15:22-53 and with 2 Cor 5:1-5).³³ Maarten J. J. Menken, a proponent of the pseudonymous authorship of 2 Thessalonians, remarks:

In general, Paul is able to express his ideas in various ways, dependent upon the situation of his audiences and himself . . . and when it comes to a description of what will happen at God's final intervention in human history, it is only expected that a variety of ideas and images will be used.³⁴

But even if one does contend that the eschatological schemes of the letters are inconsistent this does not necessarily signal the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians. John M. G. Barclay, who is inclined to think that 2 Thessalonians is authentically Pauline, remarks,

Apocalypticists are notoriously slippery characters. Many apocalyptic works present conflicting scenarios of the end and inconsistent theses concerning signs of imminence. That Paul should write both of these apocalyptic passages [i. e., 1 Thess 4:13-5:11 and 2 Thess 2:1-12], and do so within a short space of time, is by no means impossible; why should his apocalyptic statements be any more consistent than his varied remarks about the law?³⁵

³²This is true among interpreters who argue for (e. g., Marshall, 37) and against (e. g., Donfried, "2 Thessalonians," 136) the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians. Scholars often note that the Synoptic apocalypses and Revelation (also) juxtapose the suddenness of the end with premonitory signs. See e. g., Bicknell, xxvii; Best, 55; Bruce, xlii-xliii; Morris, 20; Wanamaker, 18; and Pate, *End*, 222.

³³So Menken, 29.

³⁴Quote appears on 29-30. So similarly, Hill (*Establishing*, 5-6) noting Beker's (*Paul*, 23-26) coherency-contingency argument. Menken goes on to concede that the difference in eschatology between 1 and 2 Thessalonians "can only become a reasonable hypothesis [against the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians] when it is strengthened by other pieces of evidence" (30).

³⁵"Conflict," 525.

My contention, then, is that it will not suffice to argue against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians merely on the grounds that its eschatology diverges from or conflicts with that of 1 Thessalonians.

The apparent literary dependence of 2 Thessalonians on 1 Thessalonians is, in the words of Karl P. Donfried, "the most neuralgic topic in the current scholarly debate [over the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians]."³⁶ It seems to me that the close correlation between the vocabulary, themes, and structure of the two letters is undeniable. What one makes of such a relationship is, of course, the pressing issue. Some interpreters use the leverage of literary arguments to build a case against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians (see above), while other scholars are loath to think that literary arguments, strong though they may be, are weighty enough to overturn a verdict for Pauline authorship.³⁷ Regardless of what one ultimately makes of the literary relationship between the letters, advocates both for and against the epistle's authenticity (rightly) recognize that a satisfactory *Sitz im Leben* for 2 Thessalonians is the vital piece to the authorship puzzle.³⁸ It is to this issue that we now turn.

III. A *Sitz im Leben* for 2 Thessalonians

I noted above that even though much of NT scholarship has eagerly endorsed Wrede's and Trilling's work on the literary features of the Thessalonian letters, it has not been as supportive

³⁶"2 Thessalonians," 130.

³⁷E. g., Frame, 53.

³⁸So e. g., Jewett, *Correspondence*, 18; Marshall, 40; Hughes, *Rhetoric*, 84; and Donfried, "2 Thessalonians," 131-132.

of their respective proposals for the setting of 2 Thessalonians.³⁹ This is evidenced by the number of suggestions for the epistle's *Sitz im Leben* that continue to appear in print. Here I will briefly present and critique six audience hypotheses advocating pseudonymity which have been published since Trilling's *Untersuchungen*.⁴⁰ Having considered these proposals, I will offer a *Sitz im Leben* which allows for the Pauline authorship of the letter.

In a frequently cited article entitled "Who Wrote II Thessalonians?," Bailey contends that a Pauline imitator, probably in the 90s CE, wrote a letter for all Christians (though he addressed it to the Thessalonian church) in an attempt to counter gnostic opponents who were asserting that the day of the Lord had already come and that their spiritual resurrection had already occurred. Bailey imagines that the author was a second or third generation Christian who, during a period of apocalyptic resurgence, took up 1 Thessalonians as a model to address the concerns of his day, in particular the delay of the *parousia*.

While Bailey sees the forger as a friend of Paul's, Andreas Lindemann ("Abfassungszweck"), reviving the earlier work of Adolf Hilgenfeld ("Briefe") and Heinrich J. Holtzmann ("Thessalonicherbrief"), views the writer of 2 Thessalonians as Paul's foe. According to Lindemann, the writer seeks to identify 1

³⁹Donfried's ("2 Thessalonians," 131-132) remarks are representative. He writes, "Although I find the most cogent argument for non-Pauline authorship to be that of literary dependence, I am not persuaded that those critics [in context he mentions by name Wrede and Trilling] have correctly or compellingly described the circumstances that prompted the writing of this letter [i. e., 2 Thessalonians]. . . ."

⁴⁰I am aware that there have been other significant proposals made for the setting of 2 Thessalonians since Trilling's volume was published in 1972. I have selected what I perceive to be a few of the more important contributions to the discussion.

Thessalonians as a forged letter (2:2) in order to discredit and to replace its errant eschatology. In Lindemann's view, the epistle mentioned in 2:15 refers to 2 Thessalonians, and the authenticating signature in 3:17 is the forger's attempt to mark 1 Thessalonians as non-Pauline. Lindemann pictures the author of the letter as writing near the end of the first century CE, at a time when Christians were being persecuted, in order to oppose apocalyptically-minded Christians who believed that the day of the Lord was at hand.

Frank Witt Hughes, in the published form of his doctoral dissertation (*Rhetoric*), propounds that near the end of the first century CE a "right-wing" Pauline Christian penned 2 Thessalonians to refute the realized eschatology which had been (erroneously) attributed to Paul by the authors of Colossians and Ephesians. Hughes contends that the author of 2 Thessalonians was so outraged by the authoritative claims of his adversaries, i. e., the authors of Colossians and Ephesians, that he used 1 Thessalonians as a model to craft "a powerful and well-argued reply, . . . a polished piece of religious rhetoric."⁴¹

Glenn S. Holland also devoted a portion (pp. 129-158) of his now published doctoral work (*Tradition*) to proposing a *Sitz im Leben* for 2 Thessalonians. Holland views the letter as a forged document produced by a second generation Paulinist for the whole Pauline church. For Holland, the imitator was a thorough-going apocalypticist, not unlike other Jewish and Christian authors living and writing in the last third of the first century CE. Holland thinks that the author attempts to supplement and to explain the eschatological instruction given in 1 Thessalonians for a Christian

⁴¹*Rhetoric*, 95.

generation seeking to cope with the delay of the *parousia*. Additionally, Holland sees 2 Thessalonians as a direct polemic against advocates of realized eschatology (e. g., the authors of Colossians and Ephesians), who Holland equates with the ἄτακτοι! The affinities of Holland's thesis with the proposals of Bailey and Hughes are apparent.

The recently published study of Menken on 2 Thessalonians follows in the vein of Holland. Menken, in agreement with Trilling, thinks that 2 Thessalonians was written by a Paulinist sometime between 80 and the early second century CE to Christians living in Asia Minor. Menken also avers that the writer advocated an apocalyptic eschatology similar to that found in Revelation, Mark 13 and parallels, and *Didache* 16, and that he opposed realized eschatology.

While each of the preceding proposals are able, with varying degrees of success, to account for the eschatological upheaval reported in 2:2,⁴² other particular features of the letter (e. g., the non-Christian opposition of Thessalonian believers [1:4-9] and the

⁴²That realized eschatology is being countered in 2 Thessalonians is commonly proposed by scholars who accept and reject the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. It seems unlikely, however, that "a belief in the present enjoyment of the blessings of heaven could be likely to 'shake' Christian believers" (Barclay, "Conflict," 527). Furthermore, the presence of ταχέως in 2:2 "suggests a sudden turn of events, not a developing theological tendency" (Barclay, "Conflict," 527, n. 24).

If the author of 2 Thessalonians is in fact countering a *spiritualized* eschatology, then his appeal to *historical* events which must precede the day of the Lord makes little sense. Contrast Paul's approach in opposing (over-)realized eschatology in Corinth (see e. g., 1:5-8; 3:13-15, 17; 4:5, 8-13; 5:5; 6:13-14; 7:26-31; 11:26, 32; 15:24, 51-56; 16:22). Additionally, the fact that "day of the Lord" language does not appear in either Colossians or Ephesians considerably weakens the arguments of Hughes and Holland, as Barclay ("Conflict," 527, n. 54) observes. To be sure, Colossians and Ephesians advocate a thoroughly realized eschatology (note, however, Eph 4:30), but there is no compelling reason to read 2 Thessalonians as a polemic against such. The recipients of 2 Thessalonians were convinced that the day of the Lord had (somehow) come; the writer of the letter seeks to redress this misconception by offering an eschatological timetable. This is rightly recognized by Richard (344) who advocates the epistle's pseudonymity.

disruptive conduct of the ἄτακτοι in the Thessalonian assembly [3:6-15]) are neither sufficiently explored nor explained. Having effaced some of the specific contours of the letter, these (and other) proponents of pseudonymity are required to offer vague suggestions about when and where the letter was written and about who wrote and received the forged epistle. To my mind, the exceedingly specific nature of the letter argues against such general proposals.⁴³ For, as Donfried suggests, "It is difficult to imagine a setting where a letter specifically addressed to the Thessalonians by Paul would be relevant and convincing to a non-Thessalonian church some thirty or more years after the Apostle's death."⁴⁴

Yet, Donfried's recently proposed theory (see "2 Thessalonians") is not completely satisfactory either. Convinced that Paul himself is not the author of the letter and that the epistle addresses concrete circumstances in the Thessalonian church, Donfried posits that Timothy (or perhaps Silvanus) penned 2 Thessalonians not long after the first letter had been written and signed it in Paul's name for added authority. While I would agree with Donfried that 2 Thessalonians is directed toward real congregational issues current in Thessalonica, it seems unnecessary to remove Paul from the authorship picture altogether. Paul, although accompanied by Silvanus and Timothy

⁴³The letter is addressed to a church which is (still) experiencing affliction, which is subject to eschatological confusion, and which is plagued with congregational "parasites." It seems unlikely that each of these congregational details was concocted solely for the sake of a forgery, particularly when the issues addressed dovetail so well with what we know of the congregation from 1 Thessalonians. If 2 Thessalonians is inauthentic, one may complement the imitator for being exceedingly clever (or criticize the forger for being thoroughly deceptive). So similarly, Jewett (*Correspondence*, 17) who remarks, "If a forgery occurred, it was remarkably skillful, which presents a major barrier to the acceptance of any forgery hypothesis hitherto proposed."

⁴⁴"2 Thessalonians," 132.

(1:1), is clearly the author of 1 Thessalonians (2:18; 3:5; 5:27; cf. the prescripts of 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; and Col 1:1). The same is seemingly true of 2 Thessalonians (1:1; 2:5; 3:17).⁴⁵

Having concisely considered and countered a number of audience hypotheses for 2 Thessalonians, I will now set out briefly what I believe to be the most convincing *Sitz im Leben* for the letter. Not long after Paul dispatched his first epistle to the Thessalonian assembly (from Corinth c. 50 CE), he is informed, perhaps by the courier (Timothy?) of 1 Thessalonians (cf. Rom 16:1-2) upon return to Paul in Corinth, that the assembly was still encountering hostility from outsiders (2 Thess 1), that some of his converts (the ἄτακτοι?) were convinced the the day of the Lord had arrived (2 Thess 2), and that the ἄτακτοι had stopped working and were now meddling in the affairs of others and living off the goodwill of fellow church members (2 Thess 3).⁴⁶ At this juncture Paul pens a quite pointed epistle to encourage his beleaguered converts in the throes of affliction, to correct the misconception that the day of the Lord had come by reiterating previous instruction concerning the Lord's *parousia*, and to counsel the congregation how best to deal with the ἄτακτοι. While it is true that the tone of 2 Thessalonians is more distant and direct than 1 Thessalonians and that its vocabulary, structure, and contents are strikingly similar to the first letter, these factors do not require one to view 2 Thessalonians as pseudonymous, nor do the seemingly irreconcilable eschatologies. While the limited range of

⁴⁵To explain Timothy's signing off in Paul's name, Donfried ("2 Thessalonians," 134) appeals to the notion of "corporate personality." He overlooks, however, the presence of ἔλεγον in 2:5 (cf. 1 Thess 2:18; 3:5; 5:27).

⁴⁶Each of these congregational issues raised in 2 Thessalonians is discussed in part four of the thesis. Therefore, I will forego a treatment of them at this point.

topics addressed in 2 Thessalonians adequately accounts for its close literary relationship with 1 Thessalonians, Paul's effort to address what he perceived to be potential congregational problems sufficiently explains the change in tone and in eschatological tact. Paul likely stresses the necessity of following his verbal and written instructions, as well as his example, to give guidance to the still young assembly. Paul may well have reckoned that an immature congregation facing external opposition needed both strong affirmation and admonition to stay on spiritual course.⁴⁷ While my *Sitz im Leben* for 2 Thessalonians is neither as novel nor as radical as some of the other proposals on offer, it does seem to make good sense of all the evidence at our disposal.

Conclusion

Although my study of the issues surrounding the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians leads me to conclude (against the majority of NT scholars) that the letter was written by Paul, for the purposes of this project I will treat the letter as a secondary source. I will do so for two primary reasons. First and foremost, 2 Thessalonians contributes only a small amount of data to the topic under consideration, and even then, the majority of that information is spelled out more fully in 1 Thessalonians. Secondly, given the widespread scholarly skepticism concerning the letter's authenticity, it seems unwise to construct an argument from evidence that many interpreters consider irrelevant. My affirmation of 2 Thessalonians as authentically Pauline, yet my decision not to employ it as a primary source in this study, might be deemed by some exegetes on either side of the authorship issue as an interpretive error, but in light of the current state of the

⁴⁷Note Paul's grave concern in 1 Thessalonians 3 that his converts stand firm in their newfound faith.

scholarly discussion on the (in)authenticity of the epistle such an approach seems advisable.⁴⁸

⁴⁸So also Jewett (*Correspondence*, 92) who writes, "Given the problematic status of 2 Thessalonians at the present moment of research, it is prudent to build the picture of the congregational situation primarily on the basis of the clues in 1 Thessalonians."

Chapter Three

Acts' Account of the Conflict in Thessalonica

Introduction

Modern NT interpreters tend to be skeptical of the historical veracity of Acts.¹ In Acts, it is commonly suggested, historical accuracy is (often) subverted by Luke's literary, apologetic, and theological tendencies.² The not so subtle Lucan agendas that permeate (Luke-)Acts prompt some exegetes to devalue greatly³ or to dismiss totally⁴ Acts 17:1-10a when studying Paul and the Thessalonian church.⁵ While I would concur with the majority of scholars that the Lucan interests present in 17:1-10a should signal caution and that 1 Thessalonians must be given priority over the second-hand account in Acts, I would also agree with Raymond F. Collins who remarks that "one cannot afford to be hypercritical [of

¹Sanders is among the most critical. He remarks in one place ("Christians and Jews," 435) that "one simply cannot turn to Acts for direct information about Christianity. My own working assumption is not to accept information from Acts at all unless it can be corroborated." The work of Hengel (*Acts*), Jervell (*Paul*), and Hemer (*Acts*) and the series being edited by Winter (*Acts*) calls such extreme skepticism into question.

²Throughout this thesis I will refer the author of Acts as "Luke." This practice is customary among today's commentators and is not meant to prejudge authorship of this anonymous writing.

³E. g., Best, 7.

⁴Richard (6) maintains that "the Acts account of the mission owes more to Luke's project and remote acquaintance with the Apostle's role than to first-hand data." Koester (*Introduction*, 108) contends that "all of the individual events of Paul's activity in the city [i. e., Thessalonica] are legendary."

⁵Contrast Donfried ("Paul," 247) who, while discussing the account of the Pauline mission in Thessalonica recorded in Acts 17, comments that "there must be the realism that Acts contains much valuable and accurate information about the Pauline mission even though the writer's theological tendencies are quite apparent."

Acts 17:1-10a]. [For,] Luke has not written his account of Paul's visit to Thessalonica as a simple figment of his imagination."⁶

Before rejecting (parts of) the Lucan account of Paul's Thessalonian mission as unreliable, then, a critical study of the text itself is in order. The purpose of this chapter is to consider how accurate Acts' description of the conflict between Christians and non-Christians appears to be, particularly when compared with Paul's remarks in 1 Thessalonians. To begin, I will treat in turn the reported origin of and reason for the opposition. I will then address the purported attack on the house of Jason and the accusations leveled against Paul (and others) before the politarchs. Next, I will discuss the indicated outcomes of the clash. By way of conclusion, I will assess the value of Acts' account of the conflict for this project.

I. The Proposed Origin of the Opposition

According to 17:5, "the Jews" (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) were responsible for instigating an attack on Paul, whom they thought to be present in Jason's home. Scholars have countered Luke's claim that Jews sought to hinder Paul's Thessalonian mission on several grounds. Recently, a few interpreters have wondered if Luke is correct in reporting that there were Jews in Thessalonica at this point in time.⁷ Since there is no other explicit literary evidence indicating that Jews were living in Thessalonica c. 50 CE⁸ and since the archaeological record is silent about Judaism in the city during this period, it is implied that Luke may have erroneously assumed that

⁶*Birth*, 31. So similarly, Barrett (*Acts*) who remarks, "There are features of Lucan style [in this account]. . . . This is not of course to say that Luke made it all up out of his imagination." Malherbe (*Paul*, 13) suggests that "the account is more valuable than has sometimes been thought."

⁷See Koester, "Eschatology," 443; and Lührmann, "Beginnings," 239.

⁸But see my discussion of 1 Thess 2:15-16 in chapter six below.

there was a Jewish community in the city with whom Paul could come into contact and into conflict. While it is true that there is no archaeological evidence to support Luke's record of Jews residing in Thessalonica at this time, this comes as no great surprise given that Thessalonica has been continuously inhabited since its founding in 316 BCE, thereby preventing a systematic excavation of the city.⁹ But even if such work were to be carried out and no evidence surfaced to support the Acts account, the wide dispersion of Jews throughout the eastern half of the Roman Empire¹⁰ makes it possible, if not probable, that a (significant?) Jewish community would have existed in Thessalonica, a strategically located port city of substantial size.¹¹

Even if there were Jews in Thessalonica when Paul visited, some scholars doubt that Luke is correct in reporting that Paul was in close contact with them. Exegetes often suggest that Acts' claim that Paul commenced his Thessalonian mission in the synagogue, as was his custom (κατὰ τὸ εἶωθός, 17:2; cf. 13:5, 14; 14:1; 16:13; 17:10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8; Luke 4:16), is part of a stylized pattern

⁹For a relatively recent introduction to the archaeological record in Thessalonica, see Hendrix and Koester, *Resources*. See also Koester, "Archäologie"; and Collins, *Birth*, 8. For a discussion of the archaeological material of Jewish origin found in and near Thessalonica dating from the third century CE onward, see e. g., Sandnes, *Paul*, 187-189; Hill, *Establishing*, 51-56; Luhrmann, "Beginnings," 239; and Riesner, *Frühzeit*, 304-308. Sandnes (*Paul*, 189) suggests that such data indicates "not innovations, but a continuation of what already existed."

¹⁰Philo (*Leg.* 281) notes that there were Jews in Macedonia. On the dispersion of Jews, see also Josephus, *B.J.* 2.398; *Ant.* 14.115; *c. Ap.* 2.282; and 1 Macc 15:22-23. Sanders ("Christians and Jews," 439) maintains that "*there was no place in the eastern Roman Empire where Christianity could expand where there were not Jews already. Jews were simply everywhere*" (*italics his*). See also Wilson, *Strangers*, 21.

¹¹Meeks (*Christians*, 46) remarks, "There is no reason to doubt the report in Acts of a strong Jewish community [in Thessalonica]." So also Jewett, *Correspondence*, 119-120. Donfried ("Cults," 356, n. 93) claims, "There has always been a significant Jewish community in Thessalonica. . . ." Estimates of the city's population at the time of Paul's visit range from 50,000 to 200,000.

and stands in contradistinction to Paul's understanding of himself as the apostle to the Gentiles (see e. g., Gal 1:16; 2:7-9; Rom 1:5, 13-15; 11:13-15; 15:15-21).¹² Interpreters also indicate that the Gentile composition of the Thessalonian congregation (1 Thess 1:9; 2:14) renders inaccurate Luke's contention that some of the Jews were persuaded by Paul's preaching and joined up with him and Silas (καὶ τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπείσθησαν καὶ προσεκληρώθησαν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Σιλᾷ, 17:4).¹³ It may be that Luke's placement of Paul in the synagogue at the start of his ministry in a given city is more a Lucan literary convention than a Pauline missionary custom. Furthermore, Paul does address the Thessalonian church as though it were comprised solely of Gentiles.¹⁴ Should one conclude, then, that Paul did not interface with Thessalonian Jews at all and that Luke has simply added the familiar refrain of Jews opposing Paul?¹⁵ Before arriving at such a conclusion, the following observations merit at least some consideration.

Although Gentiles were the focus of Paul's missionary endeavors and appear to have constituted the Thessalonian church, 2 Cor 11:24 indicates that Paul had close contact with at least some Diasporan Jewish synagogues.¹⁶ This verse also shows (as do 1

¹²So Slingerland, "Jews," 312-314; Sanders, "Attitude," 177; and Meeks, *Christians*, 26.

¹³So Lührmann, "Beginnings," 239.

¹⁴See further chapter nine.

¹⁵So Mason ("Paul," 198, n. 77) who states, "Were it not for Acts 17:5, which thematizes Jewish opposition to Paul . . . no one would have supposed that his Thessalonian opponents were Jewish."

¹⁶Rightly noted by, among others, Sanders, *Paul*, 192; and Meeks, *Christians*, 26. Stowers ("Preaching," 65) maintains, "Even though Paul's major mission was to Gentiles, the synagogue must be considered one locus, and perhaps an important one for his preaching where he by birth and heritage would have a recognized although often controversial status as a Jewish Christian." Note also Paul's statement in 1 Cor 9:20, which does not seem to be mere hyperbole (*pace* Sanders, "Attitude," 177).

Thess 2:15-16; 2 Cor 11:26d; Gal 5:11; 6:12) that Paul was opposed by some of his compatriots in some places.¹⁷ Commentators may be correct in maintaining that Acts emphasizes, and even embellishes, the Jewish opposition to Christians in general and to Paul in particular.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Paul's own epistolary remarks in 1 Thess 2:15-16 (cf. 2:2; 2:17a) suggest that one should not reject too quickly the possibility that Acts could be accurate in reporting that Paul was the object of Jewish harassment in Thessalonica.¹⁹

II. The Reason Given for Jewish Opposition

If Luke may be intelligibly followed in recording that Paul was a target of Jewish hostility in Thessalonica, can the reason he gives for Jewish opposition also be accepted? Acts 17:5 states that jealousy prompted the Jews to act against Paul (ζηλώσαντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι). Such a claim is sometimes thought to be yet another Lucan redaction (cf. 5:17; 7:9; 13:45).²⁰ To be sure, several arguments can be made against Luke's report that the Jews opposed the Pauline mission because they were jealous. First of all, one might suggest that such a statement cannot be trusted coming

¹⁷For a full treatment of these texts, see chapters six and seven. Hultgren ("Self-Definition," 88) notes, "If Paul had lived solely as a gentile among gentiles, or if he evangelized gentiles alone, it is difficult to explain why he would have been persecuted [by his fellow Jews]."

¹⁸I would disagree, however, with Slingerland ("Jews") and Sanders (*Jews*) who contend that Luke was decidedly anti-Jewish. Dunn ("Anti-semitism," 195) and Fusco ("Future," 17) also reject the idea that Luke was anti-Jewish. It is worth noting that although Paul is *frequently* opposed by Jews in Acts, it is not *only* Jews who seek to hinder his mission (see e. g., 14:5, 19; 17:5; 16:19-25; 19:21-41). See further, Cassidy, "Opponents"; and Rosenblatt, *Paul*, xiv. Furthermore, according to Acts, some Jews do respond positively to Paul's message (see e. g., 13:43; 17:4, 12; 18:4). See further Brawley, *Luke-Acts*.

¹⁹So also Wanamaker, 8; and Goulder, "Silas," 96. Sanders ("Attitude," 177) rightly notes that "1 Thess. 2.14-16 indicates that [Paul] ran into Jews in Thessalonica." Contrast Haenchen (*Acts*, 513) who supposes that "Paul was driven out of Thessalonica by a Gentile anti-Christian movement. . . ."

²⁰So e. g., Best, 7; Lüdemann, *Acts*, 185; Sanders, *Jews*, 272; and Richard, 5.

from Luke because of his anti-Jewish tendencies. It might also be argued that Acts is incorrect in saying that Paul was in contact with the synagogue. Furthermore, one might note that it is unlikely that Paul could have provoked such jealousy in such a short space of time. Or, one could question if Luke can be trusted in saying that a goodly number of God-fearers and leading women left the synagogue to follow Paul. Having already rejected above the first two possible reasons for discounting the reported Jewish jealousy (i. e., Luke's alleged anti-Judaism and Paul's lack of contact with the synagogue), I will consider here the two other objections mentioned.

It is widely recognized that Paul's founding visit to Thessalonica lasted longer than the three sabbaths that he is said to have preached in the synagogue.²¹ Paul's Thessalonian mission was at least long enough for him to form an intimate relationship with his converts, to receive aid from Philippi ἄπαξ καὶ δις (Phil 4:16), and to work at his trade (1 Thess 2:9; cf. 2 Thess 3:7-9).²² It does in fact appear that Luke has compressed his account to focus solely on Paul's entry into (17:1-4) and exit from (17:5-10a) the city.²³ It makes good sense, therefore, to envision a (significant?) passage of time between Paul's separation from the synagogue and the Jewish opposition which forced his departure from the city.²⁴ The seed of jealousy might have been planted

²¹See, among others, Neil, xii; Malherbe, *Paul*, 13-14; Wanamaker, 7; and Lührmann, "Beginnings," 238. Marshall (5) and Morris (4) suggest that Paul's stay was about a month in duration. Cf. similarly, Donfried, "Cults," 356, n. 92.

²²Malherbe (*Paul*, 13) suggests the Paul's founding mission lasted as long as two or three months.

²³So also Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 125-126; and Stegemann, *Zwischen*, 226.

²⁴See Malherbe, *Paul*, 13-14; Hemphill, *Gifts*, 20; and Martin, 24.

during Paul's stint in the synagogue, but it evidently bloomed at a later time.

But what might have caused Thessalonian Jews to be jealous of Paul? The Acts account implies that it was Paul's success in converting people who attended the synagogue that incited Jewish envy. Luke reports in 17:4 that some Jews and a significant number of God-fearers (σεβόμενοι)²⁵ and prominent women (benefactresses of the synagogue?) were persuaded by Paul's preaching and joined him.²⁶ Paul's statement that his converts "turned to God from idols" (1 Thess 1:9) when combined with Luke's penchant for mentioning (and perhaps exaggerating) conversions among the well-to-do²⁷ has led some commentators to doubt that Acts is correct in claiming that Jews, God-fearers, and "leading women" were a part of the Thessalonian congregation.²⁸

²⁵Although some scholars have suggested that Luke invented this category to promote his own theological agenda (see e. g., Kraabel, "Disappearance"; and Kraabel with MacLennan, "God-Fearers"), most historians rightly maintain that there were indeed God-fearing Greeks (in some places large numbers of them) who frequented the synagogue, even if they did not always have a particular title. Among the many, see Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Aphrodisias*; Trebilco, *Communities*, 145-166; Hultgren, *Mission*, 137-143; Wilson, *Strangers*, 21-22; Esler, *Community*, 36; Meeks, *Christians*, 207-208, n. 175; Feldman, "God-Fearers"; Donaldson, "Proselytes," 5-6, n. 3; and Cohen, "Crossing," 31-33.

Epigraphical evidence indicates Gentile support of and presence in the Jewish communities in Aphrodisias and Miletus. For the inscriptions and a commentary thereon see Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Aphrodisias*, 48-66. For a survey of the archaeological remains of Diaspora synagogues, see Meyers and Kraabel, "Archaeology." Although Jewish-Gentile relations were not as cordial in all places (e. g., Alexandria!) as they were in Aphrodisias and Miletus, Diaspora Jews did fraternize with Gentiles, and Gentiles frequented Jewish synagogues. So Wilson, *Strangers*, 22. Luke's report that there were God-fearers present in the Thessalonian synagogue is altogether plausible.

²⁶It is implied here that Paul had already established an alternative religious community apart from the synagogue, i. e., a church.

²⁷On Luke's tendency to call attention to conversion from the upper classes, see Haenchen, *Acts*, 507; Johnson, *Acts*, 310; and Lentz, *Portrait*, 98-99. Luke particularly likes to point out the conversion of wealthy women (see e. g., 16:14-15; 17:12; cf. Luke 8:1-3).

²⁸For a useful discussion on the composition of the Thessalonian church, see Hill, *Establishing*, 195-200.

As noted above, 1 Thess 1:9 (cf. 1:1; 2:14) suggests that Paul was writing exclusively to Gentiles. But neither 1:9 nor any other statement in 1 Thessalonians prohibits one from thinking that there were both God-fearers²⁹ and prominent women³⁰ in the church. And if Paul did indeed have some success in luring God-fearing and well-off Gentiles (like Jason?; cf. Titius Justus [18:7]) away from the synagogue by his preaching and continued to poach on Jewish preserves even after he had severed ties with the synagogue, then there is good reason to think that such activity would have (understandably) incited Jewish hostility.³¹ Not only would the Jewish community have viewed Gentiles adherents as potential proselytes, but they would also have valued their financial and social support.³² While jealousy (or from the Jewish perspective, legitimate anger or zeal³³) was not the only or

²⁹Hultgren (*Mission*, 140) comments, "The fact that Paul speaks of his converts as persons who had turned from idolatry to worship God does not negate or undermine the view that many of his converts were formerly gentile God-fearers." Paul's "idolators" could well be Luke's "God-fearers." While Luke viewed Gentile sympathizers of the synagogue as devout, Paul perceived them as "pagans" who had not/would not turn to God from idols (see 1 Thess 4:5). This simply shows that sympathizers could be viewed from two distinctly different angles. Wilson (*Strangers*, 22) suggests that "in many synagogues in the diaspora Gentiles were a significant and viable minority presence, the majority of them intrigued by and compliant with Jewish ways but unwilling to face the social and physical (i. e., circumcision) disadvantages of full proselytization."

³⁰Although Paul writes using masculine terminology and does not mention any of the Thessalonian Christians by name (cf. Phil 4:2), based on the fact that there were a number of women (some of whom appear to have been wealthy) associated with the Pauline mission elsewhere (see e. g., Rom 16:13, 15-16; Phlm 1-2; Col 4:15), it is reasonable to think that the same was true in Thessalonica. So also, Hill, *Establishing*, 212-213. On women in the Pauline churches, see further, Morgan-Gillman, *Women*.

³¹Barrett (*Acts*) comments, "The Jews feared that they were losing control of the synagogue and their appeal to religious non-Jews, and objected to the success of the Christian preachers."

³²Pohill (*Acts*, 361) remarks, "The Gentiles' presence in the synagogue probably gave the Jewish community a degree of acceptance in the predominantly Gentile city and probably also some financial support." So similarly, Haenchen, *Acts*, 509.

primary cause for Paul's conflict with his compatriots in Thessalonica,³⁴ it could well have been a reason for the Jewish opposition that Paul encountered there (and elsewhere).³⁵

III. The Reported Attack

According to Acts 17:5-6, the Thessalonian Jews, being jealous, sought to oppose Paul by gathering some ruffians in the marketplaces (προσλαβόμενοι τῶν ἀγοραίων ἄνδρας τινὰς πονηροὺς), forming a mob (ὀχλοποιήσαντες), and setting the city in an uproar (ἐθορύβουν τὴν πόλιν). The Jews (and their enlisted helpers) then storm the house of Jason (ἐπιστάντες τῇ οἰκίᾳ Ἰάσονος) in an effort to locate Paul and Silas so that they might be brought before the assembly (προαγαγεῖν εἰς τὸν δῆμον). Once at Jason's house, the Jewish-incited mob discovers the missionaries are not there.³⁶ So, they drag Jason and some other believers before the city authorities. Many details of this dramatized attack deserve and demand detailed treatment (e. g., the identity of Jason;³⁷ Lucan crowd creation and control;³⁸ the mention of the city assembly [δῆμος]³⁹ and local authorities [πολιτάρχαι]⁴⁰). In keeping with the

³³Seland (*Violence*) has recently demonstrated how pervasive zealotism was among Palestinian and Diasporan (particularly Alexandrian) Jews.

³⁴See further chapter seven below.

³⁵So also Smith, "Persecution," 264, 268. Cf. Hultgren ("Self-Definition," 88) who thinks that "The most probable explanation of Jewish persecution and flogging was that Paul offended leaders of Jewish communities due to some success in evangelizing Jews and God-fearers."

³⁶There has been much speculation as to the missionaries' whereabouts. Had they been placed in hiding? Or, did they just happen to be elsewhere when their opponents arrived at Jason's house?

³⁷See further Morgan-Gillman, "Jason."

³⁸See Collins, *Birth*, 229, n. 193.

³⁹Note Bruce, *Acts* (Greek), 370.

⁴⁰On the politarchs, see, among others, Burton, "Politarchs"; and Horsley, "Politarchs."

purpose of this thesis, however, my goal here is to discover if Luke's claim that unbelieving Jews sought to hinder the Pauline mission (either directly or indirectly through the Gentile mob they are said to have fomented⁴¹) can be meaningfully correlated with the remarks Paul makes about affliction in 1 Thessalonians.

There are at least three possible interpretive options open to an exegete who is trying to compare Luke's account of the trouble in Thessalonica with Paul's statements in 1 Thessalonians about his and his converts' conflict with outsiders. One can maintain: 1. that Acts has completely misrepresented the conflict; 2. that Luke has conflated Paul's and his converts' conflict; or 3. that Acts does not take into account the church's suffering which Paul refers to in 1 Thessalonians (1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4; cf. 2 Thess 1:4-7).

Some commentators are convinced that the conflict as it is depicted in Acts 17:5-10a has more to do with Lucan apology than with Paul's ministry in Thessalonica.⁴² In discounting Luke's account, critics note that it "is in keeping with his usual style of inculping the Jews while exculpating the Gentiles."⁴³ They also appeal to 1 Thess 2:14 where Paul compares the suffering that the Thessalonian Christians had experienced at the hands of their fellow Gentiles to the suffering that Judean Christians had endured from their fellow Jews.⁴⁴ I would not wish to deny that Luke tends

⁴¹The implied subject "they" in 17:6 makes it unclear who precisely is carrying out the attack and who is making the accusations against Jason and the believers. So also Johnson, *Acts*, 307. In Luke's view, however, it is the Thessalonian Jews who are ultimately responsible for the riot.

⁴²Collins (*Birth*, 36) remarks that Luke "is more interested in the conversion of some Gentiles and the Jews' growing hostility to the gospel than he is in the real situation of the church in Thessalonica." See also e. g., Haenchen, *Acts*, 513-514; Lührmann, "Beginnings," 243; Lüdemann, *Traditions*, 185; and Sanders, *Schismatics*, 264, nn. 36-37.

⁴³Manus, "Account," 36.

⁴⁴E. g., Haenchen, *Acts*, 513.

to "play up" Jewish opposition and to "play down" Gentile opposition here (and elsewhere).⁴⁵ Nor would I wish to refute that Paul speaks of Gentile opposition for his Gentile converts. However, it does not seem necessary to disregard entirely the report that Paul was a target of Jewish hostility in Thessalonica, especially when one takes into account Paul's own comments in 1 Thess 2:15-16 about his conflict with Thessalonian Jewry as he sought to carry out his ministry to the Gentiles.

Might it be that Luke has woven disparate conflicts into his condensed account? Some interpreters are inclined to think so. It is suggested that although Jews incited the riot against Paul and Silas, it was actually Gentiles who took action against Jason and the believers.⁴⁶ This leads to the conclusion that Luke has combined the apostles' conflict with Thessalonian Jews and the Christians' clash with their Gentile compatriots.⁴⁷ Although the Acts account is ambiguous as to who actually carried out the attack and accusations against Jason and the believers, three observations about 17:5-10a are merited here: 1. Jews are said to be responsible for organizing the opposition; 2. Paul and Silas were clearly the focus of the attack and accusations (note αὐτούς in 17:5, 6); and 3. The Jewish-incited uproar is the reported reason that Paul and Silas

⁴⁵Non-Christian Gentiles presumably played a larger role in Paul's departure from the city than Luke's narrative (and Paul's letter[s]) suggests. Even though Paul's opposition was seemingly Jewish in origin, it was the city authorities' action against Jason and the believers that appears to have led to Paul's untimely departure from the city.

⁴⁶See e. g., Bicknell, 27; Morris, 82; Moule, *Birth*, 158; Pohill, *Acts*, 361; and Morgan-Gillman, "Jason," 44. Each of these commentators is seeking to explain the Acts account in light of Paul's statement in 2:14.

⁴⁷Jewett (*Correspondence*, 116-118) contends that the accusations made and the actions taken against Jason and the believers arose from developments among the Thessalonian church after Paul had departed. Cf. similarly Morgan-Gillman, "Jason," 48.

had to leave Thessalonica (17:10a). These details seem to suggest that Luke is interested in reporting the Jewish reaction to Paul and that he is not thinking about the church's opposition from fellow Gentiles which is spoken of in 1 Thessalonians.⁴⁸

It seems best to think, then, that either Luke was not interested and/or informed about the Thessalonian Christians' conflict with their fellow Gentiles or that he was aware of it and was not predisposed (for whatever reason[s])⁴⁹ to elaborate upon it. It follows to suggest that Paul was probably not thinking of the events recorded in Acts 17:5-10a when he speaks of his converts' affliction and suffering,⁵⁰ although it does seem likely that such an episode would have exacerbated his converts' ongoing conflict with Gentile outsiders.⁵¹ (If Paul was thinking of the incident recorded in Acts when he mentions his converts' conflict, then he, unlike Luke, did not consider the Jews to be involved in the proceedings before the politarchs). As for the Jewish opposition to Paul in Thessalonica reported in the Acts account, as indicated above, I am inclined to think that it is historical, even if not every detail in Luke's narrative about the conflict may be regarded as such. And I will argue in chapter six that Paul's conflict with Thessalonian Jewry is echoed in 1 Thessalonians 2 (esp. 2:15-17).

⁴⁸Jason and the believers appear in Luke's account because of their association with Paul. Haenchen (*Acts*, 508, n. 3) rightly notes that Luke's account "deals with the danger in which Paul found himself, and not with Jason or his bail."

⁴⁹Might Luke be interested in demonstrating to his readers that it is Jews (in league with the local riff-raff), not Christians (who find allies among the elite), who stir up trouble?

⁵⁰So also Dobschütz, 109-110.

⁵¹Similarly, Lake and Cadbury, *Beginnings*, 206; and Tajra, *Trial*, 44.

IV. The Recorded Accusations

Once Jason and some other believers had been dragged before the politarchs, Luke places on the lips of Thessalonian Jews (and the Gentiles they had enlisted for support) the following charges: "These men who have disturbed the empire [οἱ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἀναστατώσαντες οὗτοι]⁵² have come here also, and Jason has received them; and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar [τῶν δογμάτων Καίσαρος], saying there is another king [or emperor (βασιλέα)], Jesus."⁵³ Although the number of and the nature of the accusations are not altogether clear, it appears that (at least) two charges are leveled against Paul and Silas, and by extension, those people associated with them, i. e., Jason and the other Christians. The missionaries, who had been welcomed by Jason into his home,⁵⁴ are charged, in effect, with disrupting the social order through their ministry (which was now taking place in Thessalonica!) and with defying the decrees of Caesar through their message.⁵⁵ Here I will seek to determine if these charges are simply a Lucan creation or if such allegations could have realistically arisen during Paul's Thessalonian mission.

Some commentators are convinced that the accusations are Lucan inventions which are totally divorced from Paul's ministry in Thessalonica. For example, Wolfgang Stegemann has recently

⁵²In support of this translation of οἱ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἀναστατώσαντες οὗτοι see Stanton, "Turned,"; and Johnson, *Acts*, 307.

⁵³Note that a similar charge is leveled against Jesus by Jews in Luke 23:2 (cf. John 19:12, 15).

⁵⁴Jason apparently extended hospitality to Paul and to the Thessalonian church. It may be that Paul lived at Jason's residence for a portion of his Thessalonian mission.

⁵⁵I take the final clause of 17:7 (βασιλέα ἕτερον λέγοντες εἶναι Ἰησοῦν) to be an explanation of the charge (οὗτοι πάντες ἀπέναντι τῶν δογμάτων Καίσαρος πράσσουν). So also Pohill, *Acts*, 362; and Barrett, *Acts*.

argued that the charges recorded in 17:6-7 are best understood as Luke's attempt to exonerate Christianity of involvement with Jewish insurrectionist movements during Domitian's reign.⁵⁶ While the precise wording of the allegations made against Paul may have been rephrased by Luke, I will argue below that Paul's mission and message in Thessalonica provides an adequate *Sitz im Leben* for the basic content of the accusations.

The meaning of the first charge, i. e., that the missionaries had disrupted the empire, is difficult to discern.⁵⁷ Apparently, the allegation was that Paul and Silas had created social upheaval elsewhere and were now responsible for fomenting public turmoil in Thessalonica (as evidenced by the disturbance at hand).⁵⁸ However, in light of the second, more concrete, accusation, the initial allegation might have had political overtones as well.⁵⁹ If the general nature of the first charge lends credence to the view that the recorded accusations are simply Lucan redactions, the particular content of the second allegation (i. e., that Paul and the others were "acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar") suggests

⁵⁶See *Zwischen*, 226-237.

⁵⁷Pohill (*Acts*, 362) describes the charge as "nebulous."

⁵⁸Might Paul's Jewish detractors in Thessalonica have been aware of the trouble that he had created/encountered in Philippi (see 1 Thess 2:2; cf. Acts 16:19-40) and elsewhere? Taira (*Trial*, 35) suggests, "The Jewish leadership is charging Paul with causing disarray and commotion in their communities all over the world."

⁵⁹Pohill (*Acts*, 362, n. 59) notes that "ἀναστατώω can mean *to stir up sedition, be a political agitator*" (*italics his*). So also Bruce, *Acts* (Greek), 371. Bruce remarks (371) that outbreaks of Jewish unrest in Judea, Alexandria, and Rome around this time might have stood behind such an allegation and that "The authorities could not be expected to distinguish the militant messianism of the Jewish nationalists from the messianism proclaimed by Paul and Silas." Judge ("Decrees," 7) suggests that "There may have been an imperial edict covering Jewish messianic agitation which the Thessalonian informers invoked." He goes on to note, however, that "accusations of disturbing the peace in general were always a good lever to open a case, which here rests on other grounds."

that Luke had to hand at least a shred of tradition when framing the charges.⁶⁰

The second accusation immediately raises at least two important questions: 1. What are the decrees of Caesar that Paul *et al.* are charged with defying?; and 2. How were Paul and those associated with him thought to be guilty of violating such decrees? The first question has sparked a good deal of discussion. Some commentators suggest that the Christians were charged with sedition (*maiestas*),⁶¹ "an offense against public law that required no special decree of Caesar to make it illegal."⁶² Other interpreters,⁶³ following Edwin A. Judge, are inclined to think that Paul and his associates were thought guilty of violating particular decrees, namely, oaths of loyalty to the emperor which inhabitants of the empire were required to take.⁶⁴ It is thought that the Thessalonian politarchs would have been responsible for enforcing such decrees on a local level.⁶⁵ While Judge may well have

⁶⁰So rightly Morgan-Gillman ("Jason," 45) who observes that this is an unique charge of which Paul is accused nowhere else in Acts. Judge ("Decrees," 1) criticizes Sherwin-White (*Law*, 96; 103) for suggesting that the accusation is "possibly garbled" and "the most confused of the various descriptions of the charges in Acts. . . ." Judge maintains that Acts is remarkably accurate on legal and political issues and regards the difficulty of the charge as an argument for its authenticity.

⁶¹See e. g., Lightfoot, "Church," 262; Haenchen, *Acts*, 510; Stegemann, *Zwischen*, 237; and Tajra, *Trial*, 36.

⁶²Bruce, *Acts* (Greek), 371.

⁶³See e. g., Donfried, "Cults," 342-344; Morgan-Gillman, "Jason," 45-46; Manus, "Account," 33-34; and Collins, *Birth*, 35.

⁶⁴Judge ("Decrees," 3-5) cites two texts from Cassius Dio (56.25.56; 57.15.8; cf. Ulpian, *Mos. et Rom. legum coll.* 15.2; Paulus, *Sententiae* 5.21) referring to imperial decrees limiting or prohibiting predictions which he thinks might be identified with the "decrees of Caesar."

⁶⁵To support this suggestion, Judge ("Decrees," 6-7) refers to a Paphlagonian oath of personal loyalty to Caesar's household (text found in Ehrenberg and Jones, *Documents*, 315) and to a Cypriot oath of allegiance to Tiberius on his assumption of power (for text see, Mitford, "Oath"). Judge also notes an inscription from Samos where the local magistrates assume

pinpointed the type of decrees envisioned in 17:7 (and how they were enforced locally), it is impossible to determine with any degree of certainty the *δογμάτα Καίσαρος* that are in view here.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the allegation that Paul and his followers were (in one way or another) flouting the rule(s) of Caesar would have been particularly appropriate (and serious) in Thessalonica, a city which at that time had an acute interest in procuring and maintaining Roman favor.⁶⁷

How might such an accusation have arisen? It was apparently some eschatological elements in Paul's preaching at Thessalonica that gave rise to the charge that the Christians were setting up Jesus as Caesar's rival.⁶⁸ If 1 (and 2) Thessalonians are at all indicative of Paul's proclamation in the city, then there are indeed aspects of his message which could have been (mis)construed in an overtly political way.⁶⁹ While preaching in Thessalonica, it is likely that Paul spoke of a God who called people into his kingdom (*βασιλεία*, 2:12; cf. 2 Thess 1:5) through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who had died and rose again (4:14) and would soon come (*παρουσία*) from heaven bringing both wrath and salvation (1:9-10;

responsibility for administering an oath of loyalty in 5 BCE (text in Herrmann, "Samos," 73-75).

⁶⁶So also Barrett, *Acts*.

⁶⁷See esp. the study by Hendrix, "Thessalonians."

⁶⁸So also Judge, "Decrees," 2-3; Lake and Cadbury, *Beginnings*, 206; Bruce, *Acts* (Greek), 371-372; Donfried, "Cults," 344; Morgan-Gillman, "Jason," 45; and Perkins, "Practices," 328. Lightfoot ("Church," 262-263, n. 8) remarks that the correlation between Paul's proclamation as evidenced in Thessalonian letters and the accusation recorded in Acts is "an undesigned coincidence of a striking kind. . . ."

⁶⁹For a fuller reconstruction of Paul's proclamation in Thessalonica, see chapters eight and ten. On the political nuances of Paul's proclamation in Thessalonica, see chapter ten.

4:13-5:11; cf. 2 Thess 1:5-2:12).⁷⁰ If taken out of context, such language could arouse suspicion and prompt the type of accusation recorded in 17:7.⁷¹ Although the eschatological character of Paul's message is not apparent from Luke's stylized summary of his synagogue preaching in 17:3,⁷² it is probable that eschatological elements (not unlike what one finds in Paul's letter[s] to the Thessalonians) would have been a central part of Paul's proclamation to Jew and Gentile alike. It seems likely, then, that the eschatological language of Paul's gospel in general and the talk of Jesus as Lord in particular served as fodder for the accusation that the Christians were defying Caesar's decrees.⁷³

⁷⁰In Revelation such eschatological language is indeed politically subversive as Wengst (*Pax Romana*, 118-135), among others, rightly notes.

⁷¹We know that Romans were anxious about the activity of "soothsayers" and "diviners." See esp. MacMullen, *Enemies*, 128-162. According to Cassius Dio (56.25.5-6), Augustus prohibited inquiries into and predictions about anyone's death (particularly the emperor's!). Tiberius is reported to have forbidden all divination and to have put to death all foreigners and to have banished all citizens who practiced the art after he had issued his decree (Cassius Dio, 57.15.8). Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.27-32) records that Libo Drusus was prosecuted for predicting the future. Given the Roman influence on Thessalonica and the city's desire to honor Rome and her rulers, one can imagine that talk of a Lord who had died and rose again, who had a kingdom, and who was soon to return to execute justice would not have been well-received by all.

⁷²Foakes-Jackson, *Acts*, 161. For a treatment of Paul's preaching based upon 1-2 Thessalonians and Acts 17:2-4, see Kemmler, *Faith*.

⁷³Barrett (*Acts*) remarks,

There may not have been a decree specifically to this effect [i. e., a decree prohibiting the proclamation of a rival emperor], but [Christian declaration of a(nother) emperor] would hardly be encouraged by the reigning emperor. The charge was one that could readily be used against the Christians; the term βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ runs deep into gospel tradition and must have found its way from time to time into Christian preaching, especially in the synagogue. The preachers could hardly deny that they were proclaiming Jesus as βασιλεύς; Lk 23.2 shows how dangerous this could be and Jn 18.36 may reflect explanations that Christians found it necessary to give.

V. The Purported Outcomes

According to the Acts account, the accusations against the Christians had three effects: 1. They disturbed both the people and the politarchs (17:8); 2. They prompted the politarchs to require Jason and the others to post bond (17:9); and 3. They resulted in the Thessalonian Christians sending Paul and Silas away from the city immediately (17:10a). Setting the first reported result aside as less significant (and/or as a Lucan addition to add suspense and color to the narrative), I will proceed to consider what Acts reports to be the second and third consequences of the event.

Luke claims that before the politarchs released Jason and the others that they required security from them (ἵκανὸν λαβεῖν = *satis accipere*). Although the narrative details in 17:9 are in all likelihood historical,⁷⁴ one is left to wonder what the posting of bail entailed. Presumably, "By exacting the payment of security, the Politarchs made Jason legally responsible for Paul and Silas. [And they ruled that] the bond would be forfeited and Jason hauled into court anew in the event of any recurring trouble involving the two apostles."⁷⁵

Commentators often suggest on the basis of Paul's statement in 1 Thess 2:18 ("We wanted to come to you--I, Paul, again and again--but Satan hindered us.") that Jason was ordered by the politarchs to see that Paul and Silas left the city and did not return.⁷⁶ However, Paul's remarks in 2:17-3:10 suggest a repeatedly anticipated, yet heretofore thwarted, return to Thessalonica. It is doubtful that Paul would have attempted to

⁷⁴See Lüdemann, *Traditions*, 187-188.

⁷⁵Tajra, *Trial*, 43. So similarly Sherwin-White, *Law*, 95-96.

⁷⁶See e. g., Ramsay, *Paul*, 231; and Bruce, *Acts* (Greek), 372.

come back to Thessalonica time and again (καὶ ἅπαξ καὶ δις, 2:18) if he thought that his visit would have placed his converts in undue danger. Therefore, it seems more likely that other (now unknown) factors than the terms of the posted bond kept Paul from returning to the Thessalonian church.⁷⁷

It has also been noted that the action taken by the politarchs was quite mild given the gravity of the charges leveled against the Christians.⁷⁸ Might it be that Luke has intentionally distorted the true nature of the magistrates' decision in an attempt to preserve the reputation of the Christian movement?⁷⁹ I am prone to think that Luke is correct in reporting the politarchs' action on this particular occasion. After all, according to Luke, the persons thought to be directly responsible for the unrest were not even present.⁸⁰ However, it is clear from 1 Thessalonians that Paul's Gentile converts suffered much affliction from their fellow Gentiles. This leads me to think that the public accusations may have led to additional political sanctions for Paul's converts and may have heightened Gentile opposition to the church.⁸¹

The other outcome of the uproar recorded by Luke is the departure of the missionaries from the city. In light of the circumstances, the believers apparently thought that the continued presence of the apostles in the city was ill-advised. Acts reports that the Christians immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to

⁷⁷So also Whiteley, 49-50; Morris, 6; and Morgan-Gillman, "Jason," 47-48.

⁷⁸Tajra, *Trial*, 44.

⁷⁹On the role of politics in Luke-Acts, see esp. Esler, *Community*, 201-219.

⁸⁰Also noted by Lake and Cadbury, *Beginnings*, 206.

⁸¹Cf. Tajra, *Trial*, 44.

Beroea (17:10a; cf. 1 Thess 2:15c, 17a).⁸² It is likely that Paul, too, perceived the non-Christian opposition to him and his converts to be a real threat. For according to Acts, Paul stays on for a substantial amount of time both in Corinth and in Ephesus after encountering Jewish resistance. This does not appear to have been the case in Thessalonica. And if Luke may be followed in reporting that (some of) the Thessalonian Jews also caused trouble for Paul in Beroea (17:13; cf. 14:19), then this further highlights the intensity of the Thessalonian Jews' hostility toward Paul.

Conclusion

Although Luke's account of Paul's entry into and exit from Thessalonica has been judged as largely unreliable due to its alleged anachronistic and anti-Semitic character,⁸³ my study of this pericope had led me to conclude that it is likely to be accurate along the following lines: 1. Paul's contact with Thessalonian Jews in their synagogue; 2. Paul's success in converting Gentiles sympathizers to Judaism; 3. Paul's conflict with Thessalonian Jews during his stay in that city; 4. Jason's and some other believers' appearance before the politarchs because of their association with Paul; 5. The charge leveled against the Christians of defying (by their preaching?) Caesar; and 6. Paul's untimely departure from the city due to Jewish opposition.

This is not to suggest that the Acts account is void of Lucan stylization. Luke's hand *may* be detected in: 1. the report that Paul first went to the synagogue as *per* his custom; 2. the summation of Paul's preaching in the synagogue; 3. the conversion of some Jews; 4. the motivation for Jewish opposition (i. e., jealousy); 5. the way

⁸²Johnson (*Acts*, 307) notes that a substantial amount of activity takes place in Acts at night. See also e. g., 5:19; 9:25; 12:6; 16:33.

⁸³Note e. g., the remarks of Manus, "Account," 34.

that the Jews are said to have enlisted support for opposing Paul; 6. the precise wording of the charges; 7. the reaction of the people and politarchs upon hearing the accusations; and 8. the departure of the missionaries by night.

In short, Acts' account of the conflict in Thessalonica is not in any way comprehensive. It is a highly condensed and simplified narrative which focuses upon Paul. But even though Luke's report of the conflict is incomplete and shaped by his own interests, it seems to be correct in reporting that Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica because of his conflict with Jews there. The Acts' narrative also points to a likely cause of the Christians' clash with non-Christian Gentiles, namely, the suspicion that the believers were politically subversive (see further chapter ten). Since Paul's banishment from Thessalonica at Jewish hands and his politically provocative proclamation in Thessalonica (which likely led to [further] conflict between Paul's converts and their Gentile compatriots along political lines) is strongly implied in 1 Thessalonians,⁸⁴ it may be reasonably concluded that the Acts' account is at least correct on these two issues and that it may be used to supplement this study at these particular points.

⁸⁴I thereby comply with the strict standards of Sanders (see n. 1 above).

PART TWO:

**THE SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC STUDY
OF DEVIANCE AND CONFLICT**

Chapter Four

The Sociological Study of Deviance

Introduction

Having treated disputed texts above, I now turn to discuss in theory the sociological study of deviance (chapter four) and the sociological, social psychological, and cultural anthropological study of conflict (chapter five). In this part of the project I will carefully survey these complex disciplines on their own terms so that I might intelligibly use insights from these fields of social study in parts three and four below.¹

Although I will not attempt here to create formal models as grids through which to run texts,² I, like those scholars who do construct such models, view the social sciences as heuristic devices (or theoretical tools) that can help biblical interpreters to notice social aspects in the texts, to take fresh questions to the texts, and to gain new angles of vision for looking at the texts. In chapters four and five I hope to demonstrate the understanding needed to apply, with at least some degree of social-scientific sophistication,

¹ Superficial knowledge and slipshod application of social theory is a glaring weakness in many biblical studies which seek to employ the social sciences. So rightly Malina and Neyrey, *Calling*, 35. Space prohibits a review and critique of how exegetes have (mis)used the social sciences. I have done so elsewhere ("Interpretation"). See further, Stowers, "Study."

² Cf. Malina and Neyrey, *Calling*; and many of the contributors to Neyrey (ed.), *Luke-Acts*; and Esler (ed.), *Modelling*. Sometimes the term "model" is used interchangeably with or alongside the word "theory" (so Elliott, *Criticism*, passim). If "modeling" is understood as "theorizing," then one could describe my use of the social sciences here as "modeling." But if by "model" one means a simplified representation or generalized "map" of reality used for purposes of control or prediction (see Elliott, *Criticism*, 40-48), then I would suggest that what one encounters in this thesis is not "modeling." Here I seek to use social-scientific theory for descriptive or illustrative purposes, not generative or predictive ones. Although the theories employed in this project are, of course, abstract, throughout this thesis textual and historical data will provide the necessary contextualization and will serve as control mechanisms to curb broad-sweeping theoretical generalizations.

the pertinent principles which emerge from this theoretical discussion in parts three and four of this project.

At this point I should state why I think it is appropriate to apply deviance and conflict theory to this study. I am arguing in this thesis that Paul and the Thessalonian Christians experienced conflict relations with their respective compatriots. The fact that some non-Christians opposed Paul and his converts suggests that these believers in Jesus were perceived by unbelievers as different and that this difference was seen in a negative light. The sociology of deviance can shed light on how cultures create "deviants," how they treat those so deemed, and how disagreement over societal norms can escalate into conflict. Conflict theory can assist one to understand better the characteristics and dynamics of discordant social interaction. To my mind, these two theoretical perspectives are particularly well-suited for use in this project.

In this chapter the sociological study of deviance will be considered. To begin, I will note how other NT scholars have employed deviance theory. I will then offer a broad survey of the sociology of deviance before turning to a more involved discussion of three particular theories of deviance. Having done so, I will be in a position to offer a definition of deviance and to explain the deviance process. By way of conclusion, I will pose some questions raised by this discussion.

I. The Use of Deviance Theory by NT Scholars

In recent years, a number of NT exegetes have employed insights from the interactionist (or labeling) perspective of deviant behavior in their studies.³ These interpreters include Bruce J.

³For detailed discussion on this perspective, see below. In a pioneering effort, Aune ("Magic," 1514-1516) used the *anomie* theory of deviance as he sought to explain the phenomenon of magic in early Christianity. On *anomie* theory, see further n. 12 below.

Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, Anthony J. Saldarini, Jack T. Sanders, and John M. G. Barclay. Malina and Neyrey have applied this particular perspective to narrative episodes in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke,⁴ while Saldarini⁵ and Sanders⁶ have drawn upon labeling theory to discuss the separation of Judaism and early Christianity.⁷ Barclay ("Deviance") has applied this approach to deviance in a recent study on "apostasy" in the first century CE.

These studies differ not only in their contents, but also in their claims,⁸ coherence,⁹ and competence.¹⁰ Nevertheless, for the purposes of this project each study need not be scrutinized individually. At this point I only wish to note the theory of deviance these scholars have selected and the subjects to which

⁴*Calling*, chaps. 2-3, and "Conflict."

⁵"Conflict" and *Community*, esp. 107-116.

⁶*Schismatics*, esp. 129-149.

⁷While Saldarini ("Conflict" and *Community*) focuses specifically on the relations between Christian Jews in Matthew's community and non-Christian Jews, Sanders (*Schismatics*) is interested in applying deviance theory to the relations between Jews and Christian Jews in Palestine up until 135 CE.

⁸E. g., Sanders (*Schismatics*, 150) is convinced that deviance theory as developed by Erikson (*Puritans*) provides the answer to the enigma of why there was conflict between early mainstream Judaism and Jewish Christianity in Palestine. On the other hand, Barclay ("Deviance") is content to speak of the interactionist perspective as a "sensitizing concept" and is unwilling to attempt to crack little historical nuts with large sociological hammers.

⁹E. g., it remains unclear to me what Malina and Neyrey (*Calling* and "Conflict") are attempting to accomplish historically by applying labeling theory to the trial narratives of Matthew and Luke.

¹⁰Saldarini ("Conflict") does not appear to understand the deviance and labeling process as set forth by Erikson (*Puritans*). Erikson demonstrates in his study that boundaries are erected by the norm-abiding majority to exclude the norm-breaking minority. Saldarini, although appealing to Erikson (who Saldarini refers to as "Ericson") all the while, concludes that Jews in Matthew's community remained part of Judaism. This begs the question that labelling theory is meant to address, namely, in the perception of whom? While some Jews might have considered Matthew's community within Judaism, other Jews who were not believers in Jesus would have judged the Matthean Christians to be apostate.

they have applied this theoretical perspective. As previously indicated, the aforementioned scholars have utilized the so-called labeling theory of deviance in their studies. To this point, however, this popular sociological perspective has not been applied to a particular phase of Paul's ministry,¹¹ nor has this theory been used to study a particular Pauline congregation.¹² I, too, will utilize the labeling approach to social deviance. However, unlike these other recent studies, I will also discuss and employ other sociological perspectives of deviant behavior. In an effort to proceed with at least some degree of theoretical sensitivity, I will now survey the sociological study of deviance.

II. The Sociology of Deviance

The following survey will not be and need not be exhaustive. Numerous sociological textbooks are devoted to such a task, and I will not duplicate such efforts here.¹³ Nevertheless, since the

¹¹Barclay ("Deviance," 122-123) has appropriated this theory to discuss Paul's "apostasy" from Judaism.

¹²While Jewett (*Correspondence*) thinks that the Thessalonian congregation was viewed as socially deviant, he does not apply deviance theory to his study. (Although Jewett thinks other Thessalonians perceived Paul's converts to be "politically provocative" [132], he is not particularly interested in the relations of the Thessalonian Christians with outsiders. Instead he focuses upon the internal dynamics of the congregation, convinced that there was a significant amount of internal dissension being created by the ἄτακτοι [Jewett's millenarian radicals]). Interestingly, there are distinct correlations between Jewett's explanation of why the Thessalonians converted to Jesus and the strain or *anomie* theory of deviant behavior. Jewett thinks that the Thessalonian church was comprised of free artisans and small traders who were "suffering from a degree of relative deprivation" (121). According to Jewett, this state of economic dislocation coupled with the cooptation of the Cabiric cult by the Thessalonian elite led to their conversion. Or to state it another way, Jewett believes that the economic and religious woes of these working class people made Paul's apocalyptic message particularly appealing. The emphasis that Jewett places on economic factors in the Thessalonians' conversion is akin to the strain theory of deviance as developed by Merton (*Theory*, 131-194). Simplistically stated, Merton maintained that lower class people are more likely to engage in deviant behavior. Sociologists have shown that Merton's theory cannot be substantiated (see e. g., the remarks of Stark, *Sociology*, 188-189). On the Thessalonians' conversion, see chapter ten below.

¹³Some surveys on deviance which I have found particularly helpful include: Clinard and Meier, *Deviant Behavior*; Siegel, *Criminology*; Phohl, *Images*; and Thio, *Deviant Behavior*. Furthermore, most introductions to

sociology of deviance is a complex academic discipline with multiple perspectives,¹⁴ it is necessary to survey the field thoroughly enough to see where the particular theories of deviance which I have selected for use in this project fit into the grand scheme of deviance study.

Deviance theories may be divided into three broad theoretical categories: 1. biological; 2. psychological; and 3. sociological.¹⁵ My interest is in the third group of theories. Although there seems to be an increased openness among some sociologists to allow for biological and psychological explanations of deviant behavior, sociologists remain (rightly) convinced that physical and mental theories of deviance are limited in their explanatory power.¹⁶ Furthermore, given the nature of the data being treated in this project and the inaccessibility of the subjects being studied for observation and testing, the biological and psychological theories of deviance may be passed over with no further comment.

Sociologists categorize social theories of deviance in various ways. Some scholars, like Alex Thio, speak of positivist and humanist theories of deviance.¹⁷ Thio suggests that "The positivist perspective holds the absolutist view that deviant behavior is intrinsically real, the objectivist view that deviance is observable as

sociology contain a section on deviant behavior. Two such texts which merit mention are: Eshleman and Cashion, *Sociology*, 148-177; and Stark, *Sociology*, 174-206.

¹⁴Thio (*Deviant Behavior*, 4) cleverly remarks that "the study of deviant behavior is probably the most 'deviant' of all the subjects in sociology."

¹⁵So e. g., Eshleman and Cashion, *Sociology*, 159.

¹⁶For a succinct survey and critique of the biological and psychological perspectives of deviance, see Pfuhl, *Process*, 38-48.

¹⁷*Deviant Behavior*, 8. Cf. similarly Troyer and Markle, "Rules."

an object, and the determinist view that deviance is determined behavior, a product of causation."¹⁸ Thio places strain theory, differential association theory, and control theory in this category. On the other hand, he assigns the labeling, phenomenological, and conflict theories to the humanist category, which he describes as follows: "The humanist perspective consists of the relativist view that the so-called deviance is largely a label given at a given time and place, the subjectivist view that deviance is itself a subjective experience, and the voluntarist view that deviance is a voluntary, self-willed act."¹⁹

Other specialists in deviance studies, such as Larry J. Siegel, describe the various deviance perspectives as social structure, social process, or social conflict.²⁰ Siegel maintains that social structure theories, e. g., strain theory, "suggest that people's places in the socioeconomic structure of society influence their chances of becoming [deviant]."²¹ In addition, Siegel suggests that social process theories, e. g., the differential association, social control, and labeling perspectives, approach deviance as a result of "people's interaction with various organizations, institutions, and processes in society."²² Lastly, the social conflict perspective as defined by Siegel is the view that deviance is a result of conflict between the classes.²³

¹⁸*Deviant Behavior*, 22.

¹⁹*Deviant Behavior*, 22.

²⁰*Criminology*, 213. Although Siegel's work focuses specifically on crime, his discussion is applicable to the study of deviance. In fact, crime may be viewed as a form of deviance. See Clinard and Meier (*Deviant Behavior*) for the same classification scheme.

²¹*Deviant Behavior*, 214.

²²*Deviant Behavior*, 249.

²³*Deviant Behavior*, 276.

Both positivist and humanist theories of deviance, in Thio's classification scheme, and the social process perspective, in Siegel's categorization pattern, are applicable here. The type of deviance perspectives which are suitable for this study are those processual theories which emphasize both the social origins of and the social reactions to deviant behavior. Since I am convinced (along with the large majority of sociologists²⁴) that deviance cannot be positively linked to one's social class or status, I will not employ in this work those conflict and structural theories which attribute deviance to economic factors.²⁵ Furthermore, due to space limitations, I will not seek to discuss or apply many other potentially fruitful approaches to deviance.²⁶ After having read widely in the sociology of deviance, I have selected three theories for further discussion and application, to wit, the differential association, social control, and labeling theories. Although these approaches have different theoretical roots (see below), they may be used alongside one another in an attempt to understand deviant behavior more fully.²⁷ These three theories provide different angles of vision for studying deviance. A discussion of the differential association, social control, and labeling perspectives of deviant behavior now follows.

²⁴See e. g., Stark, *Sociology*, 189.

²⁵Although deviant behavior is not caused by one's social economic status, the fact remains that the poor usually lack power and are particularly susceptible to being labeled as deviant. Labeling theorists alert us to this social dynamic. See e. g., Schur, *Politics*.

²⁶The number of deviance theories on offer is considerable as a scan through a textbook on deviant behavior will show. Stark (*Sociology*, 177) accurately notes that "Deviance is one of the most active areas of sociological study."

²⁷So also Thio, *Deviant Behavior*; Stark, *Sociology*; and Siegel, *Criminology*.

III. Three Approaches to Deviance

Differential association theory

This perspective of deviance is one of the most popular among sociologists. Its origins and classical expression can be traced to Edwin Sutherland, who, until his death, was usually considered to be the United States' premier criminologist. In his study of criminal behavior,²⁸ Sutherland suggested that criminal behavior is the product of socialization. Furthermore, he argued that one's conformity to or deviation from social norms, i. e., expected behavior in society, is contingent upon a person's relationships and the frequency and intensity of these relations. Sutherland's differential association theory consists of nine statements.²⁹ Modified to refer to deviant behavior, instead of criminal behavior,³⁰ the theory unfolds as follows:

1. Deviant behavior is learned.
2. Deviant behavior is learned in interaction with other people in a process of communication.
3. The principal part of the learning of deviant behavior occurs within intimate personal groups.
4. When deviant behavior is learned, the learning process includes both techniques of and rationale for such behavior.
5. The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of norms as favorable or unfavorable.

²⁸See Sutherland, *Criminology*. Sutherland developed his theory even further in the fourth edition of this work. In due course, Sutherland's associate Donald Cressey expanded his mentor's work. See Sutherland and Cressey, *Criminology*.

²⁹Sutherland and Cressey, *Criminology*, 77-79.

³⁰Modified by Clinard and Meier, *Deviant Behavior*, 84-85.

6. A person becomes deviant because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of norms over definitions unfavorable to violation of norms.

7. An individual's interaction with others may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.

8. The process of learning deviant behavior by association with deviant and nondeviant patterns involves all of the processes involved in any other learning.

9. While deviant behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values since nondeviant behavior is an expression of the same needs and values.

Although this perspective of deviant behavior is both general and incomplete, it does possess some strengths.³¹ Firstly, this theory is flexible enough to study both individual and collective deviance of all kinds. Secondly, this perspective stresses that deviant behavior is learned behavior.³² Thirdly, the differential association approach describes deviance as a violation of societal norms and conventions.³³ Fourthly, it allows for the active decision of an individual to associate with deviant groups and to participate in deviant activity.³⁴ Fifthly, this theory is able to

³¹For a relatively recent defense of the differential association theory see Matsueda, "State." In this article, Matsueda is countering the criticisms of Kornhauser, *Delinquency*.

³²For the argument that deviance is a role one learns see Turner, "Avowal."

³³Some sociologists have suggested that to perceive deviance in such a manner is to superimpose moral categories onto the study of deviant behavior. This critique, however, does not hold. Norms exist in all societies. In fact, I will argue in parts three and four of this work that Paul and his converts experienced significant opposition because of their (perceived) violation of Jewish and Greco-Roman conventions.

³⁴*Contra* Pfuhl (*Process*, 53) who wrongly maintains that the differential association theory is deterministic. The theory does suggest that substantial interaction with deviant groups will lead to deviant behavior. However, this perspective does not contend that a person is passive and pliant in this process.

account for deviant behavior which is or is not detected.³⁵ And sixthly, this perspective seeks to explain, though in a general way, the cause of deviance.³⁶

In spite of its strengths, the differential association theory is not without problems. This perspective has been rightly criticized for giving the impression that all deviance is linked to learning and doing.³⁷ The learning of deviant behavior and the breaking of social conventions is not a total explanation for deviance. Some people commit acts perceived as deviant with little prior learning, and other individuals are perceived to have done things which they did not do. Differential association theory should be modified to allow for individual deviation without the influence of a deviant subculture and for the possibility of unwarranted labeling. Another common criticism of this perspective is that it is guilty of tautology. To suggest that deviance is the violation of norms and then consider a norm-violation as evidence of deviance does tend toward circular reasoning. However, this logical fallacy can be avoided if adequate proof is given for existing societal norms apart from deviant conduct.³⁸

Sutherland's theory of differential association continues to exert a significant influence on the study of deviance. Sociologists continue to draw upon and to modify Sutherland's seminal work as

³⁵In his now classic work *Outsiders*, Becker resorts to the category of "secret deviant" to explain deviance which goes unlabeled.

³⁶Thio (*Deviant Behavior*, 36) thinks that this theory of is little use for explaining individual deviant acts. This is not necessarily the case. The theory contends that deviant behavior is learned through group interaction, not that it is actually carried out in groups.

³⁷See e. g., Pfuhl, *Process*, 53-55.

³⁸So rightly Clinard and Meier, *Deviant Behavior*, 87.

they seek to understand more fully deviant behavior.³⁹ For our purposes, this socialization perspective gives us a clearer picture of the group dynamics that foster and facilitate deviance. Furthermore, this particular theory underscores the important role that social norms play in the deviance process. Social control theory also emphasizes the importance of social norms.

Social control theory

This particular perspective on deviant behavior is among the most influential in sociological circles today. Although Travis Hirschi is usually credited with devising this theoretical approach,⁴⁰ elements of the theory may be traced back to Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), one of the founders of modern sociology.⁴¹ This perspective seeks to study deviance from a different angle. Social control theory does not try to discover what causes deviance. Rather, this approach is driven by the question "What causes conformity?"⁴² Social control theorists are convinced that if they can explain why people conform to social norms, then they will also be able to discover why people deviate from social conventions.

This approach maintains that people conform to the prescribed norms of a given society because of social bonds. It is

³⁹See e. g., Glaser, "Theories"; and Akers, *Deviant Behavior*.

⁴⁰See Hirschi's *Delinquency*. Although there are many variations of control theory, we will focus on social control theory as developed by Hirschi. In a recently published study, Braithwaite (*Crime*) argues that society is able to control people through shaming. Given the interest in honor and shame among NT students today, someone should seek to apply the insights of Braithwaite's work to NT texts.

⁴¹So Stark, *Sociology*, 191.

⁴²Becker, one of the foremost labeling theorists, was interested in the same question. Becker (*Outsiders*, 26-27) remarks, "Instead of asking why deviants want to do things that are disapproved of, we might better ask why conventional people do not follow through on the deviant impulses they have."

argued that a person's strong ties to society produces conformity. Hirschi suggests that there are four ways for an individual to bond him/herself to society. One way is by *attachment* to conventional people. When one is closely associated with norm-abiding others and is concerned about their opinions, the cost of deviant behavior is high, and most people will opt not to run the risk of rupturing such relations. The second way in which one can formulate social ties is through *commitment*. Social control theory suggests that an individual's investments in normative activities (e. g., legitimate acquisition of possessions or earning a good reputation) is a safeguard against deviance. Social bonds can also be created through *involvement* in conventional activities. It is maintained that if one is engaged in norm-conforming activities, then that person will have little time to participate in or to ponder upon deviant acts. The final element in formulating strong ties to society is *belief*. Social control theorists contend that internalization of norms serves as a control against deviance. What one believes, it is suggested, will invariable impact how one behaves.

Hirschi also points out that the factors which facilitate social bonding are interrelated.⁴³ For instance, an individual's belief system is reinforced by her/his social attachments.⁴⁴ Therefore, if those factors which reinforce conventional behavior are strong, then a person is likely to conform to the established norms.

⁴³Recently Hirschi and Gottfredson have co-written a book (*Crime*) suggesting that poor social bonding, or "low self-control," is a result of ineffective parenting.

⁴⁴Berger and Luckmann (*Construction*, 158) make a similar point when they suggest, "Saul may have become Paul in the aloneness of religious ecstasy, but he could *remain* Paul only in the context of the Christian community that recognized him as such and confirmed the 'new being' in which he now located this identity" (*italics theirs*).

However, if one's social bonding is weak, then there may be a loosening of social ties, and one may slip into deviant activity.

Critics of this theory contend that this perspective of deviance has a simplistic view of social control. They suggest that by focusing upon social control as a preventer of deviance this approach fails to consider the possibility that control can actually be a cause of deviance.⁴⁵ Those who conform to the system have also been known to find ways to beat it! Social control theory also fails to note that what is normative behavior for one group may be deviant activity for another.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding these weaknesses, by highlighting some of the elements that tie a person to conventional behavior, social control theory serves as a helpful tool for studying some of the potential causes of deviance.

Labeling theory

While social control theory is perhaps the preeminent perspective of deviance in the 1980s and 1990s, labeling theory⁴⁷ was undoubtedly the most popular approach to deviant activity in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁸ Even though the origins of labeling theory may be traced to the writings of George Mead ("Justice), Frank Tannenbaum (*Crime*), and Edwin Lemert (*Social Pathology*), this perspective is most often associated with Howard S. Becker and his

⁴⁵See Thio, *Deviant Behavior*, 42.

⁴⁶Labeling theory emphasizes the relativity of norms. See further below.

⁴⁷Goode ("Labeling Theory") argues that the labeling theory is not a theory at all. Goode is accurate in pointing out that this approach to deviance does not operate with precise definitions or predictive hypotheses. Nevertheless, in a general sense of the term theory, i. e., speculation or reflection, one may call the labeling approach a theory. In theoretical terms, the labeling approach is actually a version of symbolic interactionism. On the labeling perspective, see further Schur, *Deviant Behavior*.

⁴⁸The number of books and articles published on labeling theory is staggering. In discussing this perspective I will only be able to highlight some of the most important literature.

now classic work *Outsiders*.⁴⁹ Unlike the differential association and social control theories, the labeling approach is not concerned with the causes or origins of deviance. Rather, the labeling perspective is interested in the application and amplification of the deviant label (e. g., "alcoholic" or "prostitute"). Labeling theorists pose the questions: Who labels whom?; and How are those who are involved in the labeling process impacted?⁵⁰

The main points of the labeling approach may be somewhat simplistically summarized as follows.⁵¹ 1. Deviance is defined socially, not metaphysically. Becker emphasizes this point with his now famous remarks,

Deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender.' The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.⁵²

2. People in powerful positions, referred to as "agents of censure" or "moral entrepreneurs," distribute the labels. Labeling theorists argue that those who possess power create deviance when they interpret behavior as deviant, define people as a particular type of deviant, and treat them as deviants.⁵³ 3. A person is stigmatized when labeled deviant.⁵⁴ And, 4. When a person is labeled deviant

⁴⁹Although Becker is the most renowned labeling theorist, he is not the only important pioneer of this perspective, nor was he the initial one. The work of Kitsuse ("Reaction") and Erikson ("Notes") was equally programmatic.

⁵⁰As suggested by Thio, *Deviant Behavior*, 47.

⁵¹I am indebted to Broom *et al.* (*Sociology*, 100-101) for the points that follow.

⁵²*Outsiders*, 9.

⁵³On this process, see further Schur, *Politics*.

⁵⁴On this point, see Payne, "Labels."

and thereby stigmatized, a deviant identity may be formed and a deviant career may be set in motion.

At this point I digress briefly to indicate that some sociologists such as Kai T. Erikson (*Puritans*)⁵⁵ and Nachman Ben-Yehuda (*Deviance*) have usefully combined insights from labeling theory and Durkhemian functionalism.⁵⁶ Although functionalism is a flawed theoretical orientation that must be used with considerable caution (as to why see chapter five), it can be usefully applied to simpler forms of community where norms and roles are more clear-cut and well-defined than in most modern industrialized societies. In their respective studies, Erikson and Ben-Yehuda have demonstrated that communities characterized by mechanical solidarity (i. e., those groups which use little energy or information) tend to possess a collective conscience or agreed-upon norms.⁵⁷ These conventions give such groups a sense of cohesion and serve as boundary markers.⁵⁸ A community's boundaries provide a group with a sense of stability and identity. In more homogeneous communities, when these markers of accepted normality are perceived to be threatened, then there may be a reaction from those who are interested in preserving the *status quo*. In cases where behavior is deemed to be particularly odd or to touch upon sensitive societal nerves, then a reaction,

⁵⁵Note also Dentler and Erikson, "Functions."

⁵⁶Note also the work of Coser, "Functions."

⁵⁷The differences between mechanical and organic (i. e., groups that use a great deal of energy and information) societies is helpfully discussed and illustrated by Cohen, "Systems."

⁵⁸Erikson (*Puritans*, 9-10) describes a community's boundaries as "a specific territory in the world as a whole, not only in the sense that it [i. e., the community] occupies a defined region of geographical space but also in the sense that it takes over a particular niche in what might be called cultural space and develops its own 'ethos' or 'way' within that compass."

perhaps even a violent one, is likely to take place. Deviant acts, then, serve to reinforce a community's boundaries and to refocus a group's energies by excluding those who are seen to challenge such symbolic markers. This is not to suggest, however, that deviance is automatically boundary-maintaining; it may play a boundary-changing role.⁵⁹ In spite of the ultimate outcome, deviant behavior "creates a sense of mutuality among the people of a community by supplying a focus for group feeling."⁶⁰

Following this important theoretical detour, we come to consider a few of the criticisms brought against the labeling perspective. Critics of the labeling approach often point out that the theory fails to address the etiology or origin of deviant acts.⁶¹ This frequently leads to the corresponding criticism that labeling theorists portray the labeled person as passive and innocent, thereby totally absolving the deviant of any responsibility for his/her actions.⁶² While these related critiques appear cogent, one should note that the labeling perspective is not concerned with the causes of deviance as such, nor is the approach necessarily interested in attaching blame. Rather, this perspective is concerned with how, why, and under what circumstances a certain group selects particular people from within the group and labels them as deviant. Labeling theorists are also interested in the social ramifications of a person's status degradation. Others have criticized the labeling perspective for being relativistic to an

⁵⁹So Ben-Yehuda, *Deviance*, 20.

⁶⁰Erikson, *Puritans*, 4.

⁶¹See e. g., Stark, *Sociology*, 203.

⁶²So Piven, "Deviant Behavior"; and Schervish, "Labeling Perspective."

extreme⁶³ and for being imprecise in identifying who is doing the labeling, what labels are being used, who is considered deviant, and what the results of being labeled are.⁶⁴ The fact that labeling theorists insist that deviant behavior is contingent upon place, time, activity at issue, people involved, etc., creates the impression of imprecision. And at a high level of abstraction, the labeling perspective, like other theories of deviance, is quite blunt. When applied to particular people, places, and events, like apostasy among Jews and Christians in the first century (Barclay), the witch hunts in Europe in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth century (Ben-Yehuda), the Quaker invasion among the Puritans of seventeenth century New England (Erikson), and marijuana smokers in the United States in the 1960s (Becker), labeling theory becomes a helpful heuristic tool. In combination with the differential association and social control theories, the labeling perspective of deviance will prove a sharp instrument in enabling us to better dissect the socio-historical complexities of the conflict relations which Paul and his Thessalonian converts experienced with non-Christian outsiders. Having discussed the three theories of deviance upon which I will draw in this thesis, I will now try to arrive at a suitable definition of deviance.

IV. Defining Deviance

Deviance is a difficult term to define. In fact, Lemert ("Issues") maintains that the term is better left undefined. Despite the fact that no one definition of the term will be satisfactory for all, it will be useful to offer at least a working definition. In doing so I will draw upon the theoretical discussion to this point.

⁶³Gibbs, "Conceptions."

⁶⁴See e. g., Liazos, "Deviance"; and Hagan, "Labelling."

There are a plethora of definitions of deviance on offer. When the dust of debate settles, however, four basic definitions of deviance emerge.⁶⁵ The first is the statistical. This view maintains that deviance is anything that departs from the average. This view is not adequate for the obvious reason that to be different from the majority does not necessarily constitute deviance. A person may stand seven-feet tall, and while this is unusual, it is certainly not deviant. Another conception of deviance is the absolutist perspective. This view maintains that there are universal values that are operative in all places at all times and that violation of these values constitutes deviance. This view fails to take into account that different cultures have different understandings of what is and is not deviant. For example, it is taboo to consume alcoholic beverages in most Southern Baptist Church circles in Texas, and those people who do drink alcohol, especially in social settings, run the risk of being viewed by fellow Baptists as "sinful." On the other hand, many Scottish Baptists drink in moderation in both private and public settings, and such behavior is usually considered to be acceptable. This example drawn from personal observation shows that an absolute definition of deviance will not work.

To my mind, deviance is best defined by combining the last two approaches to defining deviance, namely, the normative and the relativist views. While the normative perspective highlights the fact that deviance is "behavior that does not conform to the prevailing social norms,"⁶⁶ the reactionist conception stresses the

⁶⁵I am following Clinard and Meier (*Deviant Behavior*, 4) at this point. Becker (*Outsiders*, 3-8) mentions five views of deviance: the statistical, the pathological, the functional, the relativistic or normative, and the labeling or reactionist.

⁶⁶Broom *et al.*, *Sociology*, 349.

relative nature of conduct deemed deviant. Becker gets the balance just right when he remarks, "In short, whether a given act is deviant or not depends in part on the nature of the act (that is, whether or not it violates some rule) and in part on what other people do about it."⁶⁷ *Deviance, then, is any behavior (or belief) that is perceived by a particular social group as a violation of their given norms or conventions.* Such a definition, however, should not lead to the erroneous conclusion that sociologists believe that all deviance is of the same ilk. Students of society usually differentiate between higher-consensus or "hard" deviance (e. g., murder, rape, and robbery) and lower-consensus or "soft" deviance (e. g., drug and alcohol [ab]use and prostitution).⁶⁸ Traditionally, positivists have studied the former type of deviant behavior, while humanists have investigated the latter kind. With a working definition of deviance in hand, some attention will now be given to the deviance process.

V. The Deviance Process

As indicated above, the three perspectives of deviance being employed in this project may be classified as processual theories. That is to say, these theories focus on the influence that social instruction and interaction has on individuals.⁶⁹ At this point it is

⁶⁷*Outsiders*, 14. Douglas and Waksler (*Deviance*, 10) also combine the normative and reactionist perspectives in defining deviance. The comments of Erikson on the meaning of deviance (*Puritans*, 6) are also instructive at this point. He writes that deviance "refers to conduct which the people of a group consider so dangerous or embarrassing or irritating that they bring special sanctions to bear against the persons who exhibit it." He continues: "Deviance is not a property *inherent in* any particular kind of behavior; it is a property *conferred upon* that behavior by the people who come into direct or indirect contact with it. The only way an observer can tell whether or not a given style of behavior is deviant, then, is to learn something about the standards of the audience which responds to it" (emphasis his).

⁶⁸See e. g., Thio, *Deviant Behavior*, 22; and Ben-Yehuda, *Deviance*, 10.

⁶⁹See Siegel, *Criminology*, 222.

appropriate, then, to consider the deviance process. In doing so, the definition of deviance arrived at above will be clarified and expanded upon. I will begin by commenting on social norms and social control.

Social norms

In a few words, norms are cultural values which guide behavior in specific places at specific times.⁷⁰ Norms serve two basic functions.⁷¹ First of all, they clarify what type of behavior is and is not deemed appropriate. Prescriptive norms inform a person what to do, whereas proscriptive norms guide an individual concerning what not to do. Secondly, norms indicate what type of behavior is anticipated in a particular culture. While norms may be formal rules or laws, they may also be traditions or customs. In any event, norms are shared and observed by a given society or community. This is what makes norms distinctly social.

Communities pass along their norms from generation to generation in codified and uncoded form. Frequently, social norms are as much caught as they are taught. The impact that a community's written and unwritten norms has on an individual's perception of reality and behavioral patterns is immense.

What is normative is contingent upon the given cultural context. To this extent, norms are relative. As a result, deviance is also relative and must be viewed through the spectacles of the social audience which interprets a given act. It is true that some acts (e. g., murder) are *usually* considered deviant universally.⁷² Nevertheless, many, if not most, acts are open for interpretation

⁷⁰Similarly, Broom *et al.*, *Sociology*, 45.

⁷¹See further Meier, "Norms."

⁷²So Ben-Yehuda, *Deviance*, 10-11.

based upon the social setting. For example, while polygamy is a criminal offense in the United States, it is lawful, indeed honorable, among some Muslims in some Arab countries.⁷³

How can one determine the existence of a norm in a given cultural context? The qualitative approach to studying normative behavior suggests that norms are so woven into the fabric of a given group that they can only be analyzed within that community. The inferential strategy maintains that a negative reaction to a particular behavior is proof positive that a norm has been violated.⁷⁴ Ancient literature and artifacts assist NT interpreters in studying a given community's norms.

Social control

How groups respond to and deal with norm-violating behavior is known as social control. There are both internal and external aspects to social control. The internal facet is linked with the socialization process. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann define socialization as "the comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world or a sector of it."⁷⁵ While primary socialization introduces an individual into society, secondary socialization introduces a person into different areas of social life.⁷⁶ Resocialization, or alternation, involves a reorientation of one's social world and a revision of one's symbolic universe.⁷⁷ It is during these different phases of the socialization

⁷³I am indebted to Stark (*Sociology*, 177) for this example.

⁷⁴These two strategies for studying norms are mentioned by Clinard and Meier, *Deviant Behavior*, 12.

⁷⁵*Construction*, 130.

⁷⁶*Construction*, 130.

⁷⁷*Construction*, 157.

process that a person is taught to conform or to transgress the given cultural norms. Internalization of a culture's customs, beliefs, values, attitudes, and traditions is a perpetual process that often occurs in a rather unstructured and unconscious fashion.

Sanctions comprise the external aspect of social control and are used to accomplish compliance to norms. Sanctions can be both formal or informal and positive or negative. Positive formal sanctions (e. g., bonuses) and positive informal sanctions (e. g., verbal encouragement) reward and reinforce norm-conforming conduct. On the other hand, negative formal sanctions (e. g., imprisonment) and negative informal sanctions (e. g., verbal harassment) are designed to discourage deviant behavior. Each type of sanction can have a powerful effect on an individual's identity and conduct.⁷⁸

Becoming deviant

How does a person become deviant or assume a deviant identity? This question merits some discussion. As indicated above, a person learns how to act and to react socially as a result of a continuous process known as socialization. In this process one acquires the ability to perform certain roles. A role involves the various duties and behaviors learned by and expected of a given person.⁷⁹ Social roles are inextricably linked to social rules. How a person behaves is contingent upon one's recognition of and understanding of her/his roles. For instance, teachers and students, employers and employees, parents and children all know

⁷⁸The differential reinforcement theory as developed by Akers (*Deviant Behavior*) highlights the important role of positive and negative reinforcement in the development of a person's behavioral patterns. Braithwaite (*Crime*) stresses the effect that the largely informal sanction shame can have on an individual.

⁷⁹Drawn from Broom *et al.*, *Sociology*, 351.

their respective roles and are anticipated to behave accordingly. If these roles were reversed, social chaos could occur. Social roles make social control possible.

The sum of a person's prescribed roles is known as a role set. Role prescriptions and norm requirements are learned through social interaction. The roles one performs are based upon an individual's attachments and involvements. A person's roles will vary from group to group. Any group, be it a family, business, sports team, or church, is comprised of various role relations and has particular behavioral expectations. Often a person's role behavior differs from her/his prescribed roles. This may be due to any number of reasons, including role confusion, role strain, or role conflict.

If an individual fails to fulfill a prescribed role and deviates from a community's norms, at some times and in some places a person may be treated as an outsider and labeled as deviant. Labeling occurs when a particular characteristic of a person or a specific aspect of one's behavior or belief is brought to the fore by (a) community member(s) seeking to condemn, control, or censure such a person. For example, in some communities a person who engages in extra-marital relations is considered an "adulterer." In other groups those who are homosexual or participate in homosexual activity are called "queer." Or an individual who fails to complete a course of formal study is spoken of by some as a "drop-out." A label, then, is a tag that highlights a perceived "negative or unfavorable" aspect of a person while ignoring his/her "positive or favorable" features. If a person is placed in a labeled pigeon-hole, then it is possible that a pattern of deviant behavior (or belief) will set in.⁸⁰ An individual who

⁸⁰Becker (*Outsiders*, 101) refers to such a pattern as a deviant career.

restructures life and reorients her/his behavior around a given label is known as a secondary deviant.⁸¹ When secondary deviance occurs, deviance amplification tends to follow (i. e., the gradual isolation of the labeled individual from former social networks and the reiteration of one's social role and identity as a misfit).

Actually being labeled deviant is neither certain nor automatic. When an individual is accused of or caught in an act considered deviant, there are various ways that this person can manage, lessen, or even avoid negative sanctions and stigma. Sociologists have noted several ways individuals seek to avoid and/or neutralize deviant labels.⁸² A list and description of seven so-called "management techniques" follows.⁸³

1. Secrecy. If a deviant act is not public knowledge, negative sanctions and stigma will not follow. Some deviants, therefore, will keep their activity under wraps in order to avoid negative labeling.
2. Manipulating the physical environment. Those deemed deviant will sometimes try to alter their behavior in a particular setting in an attempt to convince others that there is nothing different about them.
3. Rationalization. A person considered deviant may attempt to explain away his/her deviance. This may be done by denying responsibility for the act, by maintaining that their behavior or

⁸¹So Lemert, *Social Pathology*. Primary deviance, according to Lemert, is a norm violation that may go unnoticed and have little influence on the actor.

⁸²The so-called neutralization theory is frequently identified with Matza and Sykes, "Techniques." See also Matza's *Delinquency*.

⁸³The first five management techniques are found in Elliott *et al.*, "Stigma." The last two neutralization devices are located in Pfuhl, *Process*, 65-68. See also the useful discussions Turner, "Avowal"; Rogers and Buffalo, "Adaptation"; and Levitin, "Deviants."

beliefs harmed no one, and by claiming that their actions or attitudes are justified given the circumstances.

4. Altering behavior. Some folks who are labeled deviant attempt to counter this stigma by changing their roles in an effort to alter the perception of others.

5. Deviant subcultures.⁸⁴ Becoming a part of a deviant subculture may help one to avoid negative sanctions and stigma. The less one relates to others outside a particular group the less one has the chance to experience outsiders' disapproval. All the while, however, deviant subcultures facilitate and reinforce deviant activity and tend to be labeled by outsiders.

6. Condemnation of the condemners. A technique often utilized by those who are considered deviant is to lash back verbally at the enforcers and labelers in an effort to blunt the blow of negative sanctions and stigma. Instead of passively and pliantly allowing deviance amplification to occur, some people attempt to resist being labeled.

7. Appeal to higher authorities. When tagged with a label, people may also appeal to a higher level norm or to a higher authority figure. This is an attempt on the part of the one thought deviant to clarify the rationale for her/his behavior or beliefs.

Having surveyed the sociological study of deviance in some detail, some concluding remarks and questions are in order.

Conclusion

Although some biblical scholars remain skeptical of employing social-scientific insights in the exegetical task and label those who use the social sciences as "determinists" or "reductionists," social theory can be a useful tool when used

⁸⁴On deviant subcultures see the pioneering work of Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*; and Cohen and Short, "Research."

appropriately. While general social theories cannot, of course, answer specific historical questions, they can help an interpreter to raise interesting questions of the historical material under investigation.⁸⁵

In this chapter I have sought to survey in an informed manner the state of the sociological discussion on deviant behavior. In light of the fact that Paul and his Thessalonian converts differed from most of their respective compatriots in both behavior and beliefs, it stands to reason that the sociology of deviance can aid this investigation. In fact, given that Paul and his converts were considered by their compatriots as different in a threatening way, one may rightly conclude that they were thought by some to be deviant.

By way of conclusion, some theoretical informed questions, which will be addressed (though not sequentially or systematically) in parts three and four below, are raised.

- How did outsiders react to Paul and the Thessalonian Christians? What type of negative sanctions and stigma did these believers encounter? (See chapters six and nine).
- How were the boundary lines drawn in the various communities under consideration? Was there much tolerance? At what point would tolerance give way to resistance and why? (See chapters seven and ten).
- What norms were Paul and his converts thought by non-Christian outsiders to have violated? Did the deviance of Paul and his converts from the *status quo* create and perpetuate their conflicts with outsiders? In what important ways did Paul's and the Thessalonian believers' behavior and beliefs differ from their respective compatriots? (See chapters seven and ten).

⁸⁵See Long, *Art*, 135-142.

- Why did some Jews oppose Paul? (See chapter seven).
- Why did the Thessalonian Christians encounter opposition from their fellow Gentiles? Why would these Pauline Christians have been viewed as a dangerously deviant subculture? Was movement into and/or out of the Thessalonian congregation encouraged or discouraged? (See chapter ten).
- How did the Thessalonian Christians' compatriots view their conversion? How did their conversion affect their attachments, commitments, involvements, and beliefs? (See chapter ten).
- How did Paul and the believers in Thessalonica react to the negative sanctions and stigma they incurred? What impact did external opposition have on Paul's communication with the Thessalonians and on community formation? (See chapters eight and eleven).

These intriguing questions posed here demonstrate how insightful and fruitful deviance theory will be for this study. Granted, some of these queries might have been raised without assistance from the sociology of deviance. Nevertheless, drawing upon the social study of deviant behavior not only aids in formulating interesting questions, but it also allows for greater precision of expression. Before addressing the questions raised above, however, I will first discuss another fruitful field of social theory for this study.

Chapter Five

The Social-Scientific Study of Intergroup Conflict

Introduction

Having discussed the sociological study of deviance in chapter four, I will now consider the social-scientific study of conflict.¹ Conflict theory, it is proposed, will allow for a fuller understanding and a clearer articulation of the conflict relations between Christians and non-Christians in Thessalonica. In this chapter useful insights about conflict will be garnered from theorists in the fields of sociology, social psychology, and cultural anthropology.² To be sure, a general discussion of the social-scientific study of conflict cannot serve as a substitute for a thorough investigation into a given conflict situation. Nevertheless, a careful consideration of conflict relations from a

¹These two theoretical fields are compatible in that "Conflict represents a clash of interests instigated by some sort of deviance from accepted norms, often resulting in specific kinds of countermeasures" (Seland, *Violence*, 6).

²Political scientists (e. g., Touval and Zartman, *Mediation*) and economists (e. g., Schelling, *Conflict*; and Boulding, *Conflict*) have also furthered our knowledge of conflict. See also the recent contribution to the field of political anthropology by Ross, *Conflict*.

At this point it is useful to note that in sociology conflict theory is but one of several theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, while conflict theory is often associated with the social theoretician Karl Marx (1818-1883; on Marxian thought, see, among others, Coser, *Masters*), it is not in any way coterminous with Marxism. Theorists other than Marx (e. g., Georg Simmel, Max Weber, William G. Sumner, Gaetano Mosca, Roberto Michels, Lewis A. Coser, C. Wright Mills, and Ralf Dahrendorf) have contributed to the development of conflict theory, and the theoretical underpinnings of conflict theory are broader than Marxism. For an overview of conflict theory and theorists, see Duke, *Conflict*.

In the discipline of social psychology, conflict studies tend to focus on intergroup conflict, and the study of intergroup conflict is only one area of specialization within the field of intergroup relations. Two collections of essays on intergroup relations from which I have benefited are Worschel and Austin, eds., *Relations*; and Turner and Giles, eds., *Intergroup Behavior*.

In the field of cultural anthropology I have drawn upon three studies which address the issue of group conflict, namely, Turner, *Schism*; Beals and Siegel, *Divisiveness*; and LeVine and Campbell, *Ethnocentrism*.

social-scientific perspective can help one in interrogating certain biblical texts and in making new observations about those texts.

I am not the first NT interpreter to see the potential of applying conflict theory to the study of relations between Christians and non-Christians. John G. Gager (*Kingdom*), John H. Elliott (*Home*), Graham N. Stanton ("Perspective"), and Jack T. Sanders (*Schismatics*) have all preceded me.³ However, these exegetes have been fixated on the *functional outcomes* of conflict on the given Christian communities under investigation. Furthermore, these scholars have relied heavily, if not exclusively, upon one work: Lewis A. Coser's *The Functions of Social Conflict*, which is essentially a commentary on the earlier work (*Conflict*) of Georg Simmel (1858-1918).⁴ Coser's study is indeed a classic in the field of conflict studies, but this seminal contribution is now forty years old, and the theoretical study of conflict has made significant strides since the publication of this work. And although subsequent discussions on conflict relations have not totally discredited Coser's important study, his conclusions have been thoroughly modified, especially the functionalistic assumptions which undergird his work.⁵

³Seland (*Violence*) has recently used conflict management theory in his study of establishment violence in Philo and Luke.

⁴Sanders (*Schismatics*, 128-129) does mention, albeit briefly, the work of Kriesberg, *Social Conflicts*. Each of the scholars mentioned in the text above also note the work of Simmel (*Conflict*), but with the partial exception of Elliott (*Home*, 113), who actually quotes another person's evaluation of Simmel, none of them attempts to understand Simmel on his own terms.

⁵Functionalism, which was at one time the dominant theoretical orientation in sociology, must be used with caution. Functionalism is frequently critiqued for the following reasons. 1. Functionalism is thought to be circular in its argumentation. Functionalists frequently assume that the existence of X (let X = a social system) explains the appearance of Y (let Y = manifest and/or latent functions and/or dysfunctions) which in turn perpetuates the existence of X. 2. Functionalism has come under sociological fire for its illegitimate teleological orientation, i. e., the erroneous assumption that consequences create causes. 3. Another common criticism of functionalism is its reification of society and its tendency towards determinism. In the functionalist perspective social processes

In this chapter the social-scientific study of conflict will be discussed under the following headings: 1. factors affecting conflict; 2. classifying conflict; 3. defining intergroup conflict; 4. characteristics of intergroup conflict; 5. causes of intergroup conflict; 6. the cycle of intergroup conflict; 7. consequences of intergroup conflict; and 8. coping with intergroup conflict. At the conclusion of this chapter we will know a good deal more about conflict theory in general and will be in a better position to apply insights from the social-scientific study of conflict to this particular investigation. Furthermore, in this chapter I hope to broaden and to update the previous work of NT interpreters who have utilized insights from the sociological study of conflict.

I. Factors Affecting Conflict

Knowing what issues demand close scrutiny is one of the keys to doing effective research. When studying a particular conflict in detail, it is useful to consider the particular elements which shape the conflict. Morton Deutsch, one of the foremost conflict

are personified; the social system is thought to have needs and wants. Understanding society in such a reified fashion underestimates human initiative and involvement. And, 4. Critics maintain that functionalism wrongly assumes commensurability between radically different societies.

Coser does manage to avoid some of the pitfalls of extreme functionalism, like speaking of societal needs or functional prerequisites. Nevertheless, Coser's work on conflict is analytically one-sided. In an attempt to underscore the potential benefits (= "functions") of conflict, he significantly down-plays the harmful effects (= "dysfunctions") of conflict. A balanced conception of social conflict takes into account both constructive and destructive aspects. See Porter and Taplin, *Conflict*, 6. Rex (*Conflict*, 74) rightly remarks that "the theory of the 'functions of social conflict' is a part, but only a small part, of the total theory of conflict." I have explored Coser's work and the functionalistic assumptions on which it rests more fully elsewhere ("Outcomes").

As one might expect, Simmel (*Conflict*) also focused on the positive outcomes of conflict. Duke (*Conflict*, 105) notes that "Simmel's optimism did not allow him to dwell long on the negative side of conflict. He gained no pleasure himself in describing and analyzing the seamier side of social life as Marx seemed to do, so Simmel contented himself with discussions of the benefits to be derived from social conflict." On Simmel's contribution to conflict theory see the following: Turner, *Theory*, 121-142; and Coser, *Masters*, 176-215.

theorists in social psychology, suggests that one should do the following when studying conflict relations:⁶

1. Identify the characteristics of the parties in conflict (e. g., their values and motivations; their aspirations and objectives; their physical, intellectual, and social resources for waging or resolving conflict; and their beliefs about conflict, including their conceptions of strategy).
2. Investigate the prior relations of the parties in conflict. Explore their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about one another.
3. Study the nature of the issue(s) giving rise to the conflict. Consider the scope, rigidity, motivational significance, formulation, and periodicity of the conflict issue(s).
4. Examine the social environment within which the conflict occurs, including the nature of the social norms and the way the culture tends to respond to conflict.
5. Consider the interested audiences to the conflict, particularly their relationships to the parties in conflict and their interests in the outcomes of the conflict.
6. Explore the strategy and tactics employed by the parties in the conflict.
7. Observe the consequences of the conflict to each of the participants and to other interested parties.

These factors affecting conflict will be kept in mind when treating Paul's and his converts' conflict with non-Christians in parts three and four of this study. By paying attention to these aspects of conflict, a more critical and complete understanding of the conflict will be gained.⁷

⁶*Resolution*, 5-7.

⁷One might suggest that these factors affecting conflict could be dealt with intuitively. I would not dispute this claim (but note numbers two and four). However, it is helpful to spell out clearly the variables which shape social conflict.

II. Classifying Conflict

Conflict can occur at both an individual and a group level. Furthermore, conflict can take place both within and between people and groups. Conflict within a person is known as "intrapersonal," and conflict between at least two people is referred to as "interpersonal." When conflict exists within a group it is called "intragroup," and conflict experienced between groups is tagged as "intergroup."⁸ Although it is quite easy to compartmentalize conflict in theory, in reality it is rather messy. For example, in this study it is difficult to determine whether the Thessalonian Christians' conflict with their Gentile compatriots should be described as intragroup and/or intergroup. Additionally, it is hard to classify Paul's conflict. Is his conflict best described as intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, or even intergroup? Due to the complexities of the conflict relations under investigation I will not attempt here to label Paul's and the Thessalonian Christians' conflict separately. Instead, I will consider the conflict between believers and non-believers in Thessalonica as intergroup conflict, with Paul and his converts comprising one group and their respective opponents formulating another. In a recent study (*Conflict*), Ronald J. Fisher has rightly noted that intergroup conflict can and usually does occur simultaneously on multiple levels (i. e., the individual, group, and intergroup levels). Furthermore, to conceive of the conflict in Thessalonica as intergroup conflict is in keeping with Paul's dualistic perspective as set forth in his letter(s) to the Thessalonians. He tends to lump

⁸For these (and a few other) categories of conflict, see Deutsch, *Resolution*, 10.

people into one of two groups: insiders and outsiders; "us" and "them"; "children of light" and "children of darkness."⁹

Social scientists also make a distinction between real and imagined conflict. Conflict which is concrete and involves incompatibilities between the concerned parties is known as realistic conflict. Conflict which occurs primarily or solely in the mind is called unrealistic conflict. While realistic conflict is based on objective differences and requires social interaction between the involved parties, unrealistic conflict arises from perceived problems and does not, at least at the outset of the psychological discomfort, demand social intercourse with the other party.¹⁰ I understand the conflict relations in Thessalonica to fall in the category of realistic conflict.¹¹ Because I understand the conflict in Thessalonica as realistic, in this study the Realistic Conflict Theory (RCT) will be drawn upon.¹² The basic thrust of this social psychological theory is that real conflict of interest leads to intergroup conflict.¹³ Conflict theorists, such as Muzafer Sherif¹⁴

⁹See further chapter eight below. Reat ("Insiders," 459) maintains that "Every religious tradition, by its very existence and regardless of its claims to universality, divides the world into two sets: insiders of the tradition and outsiders to the tradition."

¹⁰Fisher, *Conflict*, 31. For the understanding of realistic conflicts as "Conflicts which arise from frustration of specific demands within the relationship and from estimates of gains of the participants . . ." and of unrealistic conflicts as interaction for the purpose of "tension release," see Coser, *Functions*, 49.

¹¹Contrast Malherbe (*Paul*, 46-48) who psychologizes the Thessalonian Christians' affliction. I would not necessarily suggest, however, that Paul and his converts perceived and responded to the conflict in an objective way.

¹²For an overview of RCT, see Taylor and Moghaddam, *Relations*, 33-57. See also, Fisher, *Conflict*, 22-28.

¹³RCT has its intellectual roots in the work of Sumner, *Folkways*.

¹⁴See Sherif's *Predicament*.

and Morton Deutsch,¹⁵ are interested not only in how conflicts arise but also in the course that conflicts take and how group conflicts can be resolved.¹⁶

When categorizing conflict, social theorists often seek to distinguish between conflict and competition and between constructive and destructive (or beneficial and detrimental) conflict.¹⁷ Such distinctions are notoriously difficult to make, and these perspectival differentiations need not detain us here. I will pause at this point, however, to present Deutsch's typology of social conflict.

Deutsch suggests that there are six types of conflict: veridical, contingent, displaced, misattributed, latent, and false.¹⁸ He describes these kinds of conflict as follows. *Veridical conflict* is conflict which "exists objectively and is perceived accurately." That is to say, "It is not contingent upon some easily altered

¹⁵See Deutsch's *Resolution* and his more recent article "Resolution."

¹⁶While RCT is a useful theoretical perspective, it is not a complete theory of intergroup conflict. It may be usefully combined, however, with the Social Identity Theory (SIT) to form a more comprehensive theory of intergroup conflict. This theory, developed by the late Henri Tajfel (see e. g., *Human Groups*), focuses on "conditions in which people will feel motivated, individually or collectively, to maintain or change their group membership and their intergroup situation" (quoting from Taylor and Moghaddam, *Relations*, 59). For a recent attempt to integrate RCT and SIT, see Fisher, *Conflict*, 87-115.

¹⁷On these vexed issues, see the remarks of Fisher, *Conflict*, 32. See also Deutsch, *Resolution*, 10, 17.

¹⁸*Resolution*, 11-15. Bisno (*Managing Conflict*, 30-33) also offers a six item typology of conflict. He speaks of the following conflict types: interest/commitment, induced, misattributed, illusionary, displaced, and expressive. Bisno's interest/commitment category of conflict is analogous to Deutsch's veridical type, and his illusionary type is equal to false conflict in Deutsch's paradigm. These authors share in common the categories misattributed and displaced conflict. Then Bisno speaks of two types of conflict, induced and expressive, not considered by Deutsch. By induced conflict Bisno is referring to "conflicts intentionally created in order to achieve other than explicit objectives" (31). And when speaking of expressive conflicts Bisno means "conflicts characterized by a desire to express hostility, antagonism, or other strong feelings" (31).

feature of the environment."¹⁹ *Contingent conflict* is conflict which can be easily resolved if the involved parties are willing to opt for readily available alternatives. *Displaced conflict* occurs when an underlying conflict gives rise to a surface conflict. Presumably, if the underlying conflict were resolved, then the manifest conflict would not occur. A *misattributed conflict* takes place when parties engage in conflict over wrong issues or erroneous assumptions. This type of conflict begins when a previously uninvolved party is drawn into a conflict by a faulty attribution or perception of another party. The fifth type of conflict in Deutsch's schema is *latent conflict*. Latent conflict is conflict which is "brewing under the surface" and could "explode" at any point. *False conflict* is the last conflict type Deutsch identifies. This type of conflict occurs when there is no objective reason for it. In his work Deutsch is careful to point out that more than one type of conflict may be present in any given conflict situation,²⁰ and I suspect that such was the case with Paul's and his converts' conflict with outsiders.

III. Defining Intergroup Conflict

Having considered some of the factors affecting conflict and various types of conflict, I will now attempt to define intergroup conflict. There are, of course, a plethora of definitions of conflict. This is due largely to the fact that conflict is such an ambiguous, elastic concept. Raymond W. Mack and Richard C. Snyder remark, "In its broadest sense it [i. e., conflict] seems to cover everything from war to choices between ice-cream sodas or sundaes."²¹ Some

¹⁹Both quotes appear in Deutsch, *Resolution*, 12.

²⁰*Resolution*, 15.

²¹"Analysis," 212. Interestingly, Mack and Snyder do not attempt to offer a definition of conflict; instead, they seek to describe conflict by highlighting its essential elements. They suggest that conflict: 1. requires at least two parties,

conflict theorists attempt to account for this broad range of meaning when defining conflict. For example, Deutsch describes conflict as existing "whenever incompatible activities occur."²² Because this definition is so broad, it is also, at least for our purposes, too blunt. Greater specificity is desired.

Other authors, such as Louis Kriesburg, stress the perspectival character of conflict. Kriesburg suggests that "Social conflict is a relationship between two or more parties who (or whose spokesmen) believe they have incompatible goals."²³ In discussing deviance, the importance of perspective was stressed. I will argue in chapters seven and ten below that incompatible perceptions/goals led to external clashes between Christians and non-Christians. Kriesburg rightly stresses the perspectival nature of conflict. It is possible, however, to expand and to fine-tune his definition.

In his work on group dynamics, D. R. Forsyth observes that the Latin term *conflictus* suggests a "striking together with force."²⁴ Applying the meaning of this word to group interaction,

units, or entities; 2. arises from "position scarcity" or "resource scarcity"; 3. involves behaviors designed to destroy, injure, thwart, or otherwise control the other party; 4. requires interaction among parties in which actions and counteractions are mutually opposed; 5. involves the attempt to acquire or to exercise power; 6. constitutes a fundamental social-interaction process having important consequences; 7. represents a temporary tendency toward disjunction in the interaction flow between parties; and 8. does not represent a breakdown in the regulated conduct, but rather a shift in the governing norms and expectations (218-219). The work of Mack and Snyder will be used below to identify some of the characteristics of intergroup conflict.

²²Resolution, 10.

²³*Social Conflicts*, 17. See similarly Pruitt and Rubin, *Conflict*. These authors define conflict as "a perceived divergence of interests or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously" (4). Note also Fisher (*Conflict*, 6) who describes conflict as "A social situation involving perceived incompatibilities in goals or values between two or more parties, attempts by the parties to control each other, and antagonistic feelings by the parties toward each other."

²⁴*Group Dynamics*, 353.

Forsyth suggests that group conflict occurs when "the actions or beliefs of one or more members of [a] group are unacceptable--and hence are resisted by--one or more of the other group members."²⁵ Building upon the definitions of Kriesberg and Forsyth (and others), then, I would define intergroup conflict as *disputatious social interaction between groups which results from the fact that the behaviors and beliefs of one or more group members are deemed incompatible with the behaviors and beliefs of one or more members of another group.*

IV. Characteristics of Intergroup Conflict

Although it is not possible to predict when and with whom conflict will occur, social theorists have noted some characteristics or conditions which tend to accompany intergroup conflict. In this section three factors which facilitate intergroup conflict will be considered. First of all, there must be *interaction* or contact between the two groups.²⁶ As Seneca (*Epistles* 103.5) once said, "People collide only when they are traveling the same path." Where there is no social interaction, there is little potential for friction. Alternatively, contact with another party, especially if it is frequent and/or consistent, can sow seeds of discord. Although this point may appear trite, it is of some significance for this study. It was Paul's interaction with Thessalonian Jews that created his poor relations with some of them. As I argued in chapter three above, Luke's report that Paul frequented the synagogue in Thessalonica and was driven from the city by unbelieving Jews is likely to be

²⁵*Group Dynamics*, 353. Cf. Boardman and Horowitz ("Management," 4) who define conflict as "an incompatibility of behaviors, cognitions (including goals), and/or affect among individuals or groups that may or may not lead to an aggressive expression of this social incompatibility." In Thessalonica the divergent behaviors and beliefs of Christians and non-Christians did lead to "aggressive expression" of "social incompatibility."

²⁶See, among others, Mack and Snyder, "Analysis," 218.

accurate. Additionally, the fact that Paul's Gentile converts would probably have had little sustained contact with Jews, at least subsequent to their conversion, renders unlikely the view that the Christians were opposed by Jews. Rather, they were harassed by their fellow Gentiles.

In order for intergroup conflict to occur there must also be a degree of *collective identity*.²⁷ That is to say, "the outgroup must be visible and in some way distinguishable from the ingroup."²⁸ As with deviance, boundaries play an important role in the creation and perpetuation of conflict.²⁹ Furthermore, the research of Muzafer Sherif (*Groups*) and Henri Tajfel (*Human Groups*) has shown that the tendency of a group to glorify itself and to vilify other groups can and frequently does lead to conflict.

Opposition (or competition) is the final component of intergroup conflict to mention. As we will see below, a number of factors can prompt one group to oppose or to compete with another. More often than not, however, the group with influence and power is able to prevail over the weaker other.³⁰ Students of society have been and continue to be interested in the use and abuse of power.³¹ The absence or presence of power has certainly shaped the relations of Christians and non-Christians across the

²⁷So Kriesburg, *Social Conflicts*, 99.

²⁸Deutsch, *Resolution*, 68.

²⁹See further, Holmes *et al.*, "Boundary Roles."

³⁰This is one of the foundational principles of conflict theory in sociology. See esp. the discussion of Duke, *Conflict*, 235-254. On the issues of influence and power, see also Bisno, *Managing Conflict*, 40-45; and Deutsch, *Resolution*, 84-93.

³¹In fact, Thio (*Deviant Behavior*) seeks to explain deviant behavior on the basis of power.

centuries³² and may have impacted the conflict between believers and unbelievers in Thessalonica.

V. Causes of Intergroup Conflict

Conflicts are similar to fingerprints or snowflakes to the extent that no two are precisely alike. Nevertheless, social scientists who study conflict suggest that there are some common causes or sources of conflict. Some of the proposed causes of conflict are so all-encompassing that they are not particularly illuminating. For example, in their study of intragroup conflict Alan R. Beals and Bernard J. Siegel (*Divisiveness*) maintain that conflict can be traced to internal strains and external stresses. But this is not saying much. More helpful is the work of Daniel Katz. Katz contends that there are three basic reasons for conflict between groups: economics, ideology (i. e., values or beliefs), and power.³³ Although these suggested causes of conflict are quite broad, most intergroup conflicts may be linked to at least one of these three sources.³⁴ Economic conflict arises over competition for scarce material goods and resources,³⁵ while value conflict "revolves around incompatible preferences, principles, or practices that people believe in and are invested in with reference to their

³²Moore (*Formation*) has produced a fascinating study highlighting this fact.

³³"Resolution," 373-374. Mack and Snyder ("Analysis," 220-221) identify two primary sources of conflict: ideology and culture. On the sources of social conflict, see also the discussion of Oberschall, *Conflict*, 30-84.

³⁴Mack and Snyder ("Analysis," 221) observe that "Most social scientists now accept the principle of multiple causality; hence, there is no one basic source of conflict."

³⁵Marx (*Capital*; see also Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*) maintained that economics is *the* source of conflict. Surely this is too simplistic. Bisno (*Managing Conflict*, 28-29) broadens the category of economic conflict to structural conflict. This is a helpful expansion. While including economic elements, the concept of structural conflict addresses the struggle for nonmaterial advantages and rewards, such as honor and status. On conflicts over status and honor, see further Weber, *Organization*, esp. 132-135.

group identity."³⁶ Power conflicts take place when parties of more or less equal power attempt to extend their influence by controlling the other.

Three comments are in order concerning the causes of conflict Katz sets forth. First of all, when trying to assess the source(s) of a conflict, one should also take into account personality and interactional styles.³⁷ Although it is difficult to measure such dynamics, there is little doubt that they help to create and to shape relational conflicts.³⁸ Secondly, although a conflict may be realistic in nature, unrealistic factors (i. e., misperception) are frequently present as well.³⁹ Finally, one should note (as Katz himself does) that a given conflict results from a combination of causes, and in the ebb and flow of social interaction these sources of conflict can converge to the degree that they are impossible to distinguish.⁴⁰ Furthermore, as Fisher notes, "It is not uncommon for a conflict to originate from one

³⁶Fisher, *Conflict*, 34. On value conflict, see further Turner, "Conflict." Deutsch (*Resolution*, 15-16) makes a distinction between conflicts over values and conflicts over beliefs. He suggests that values represent what "should be" (i. e., the ideal), whereas beliefs mirror that which "is" (i. e., the real). In practice, there tends to be more of an interplay between values and beliefs than Deutsch suggests.

³⁷So rightly, Bisno, *Managing Conflict*, 28. Although groups do not possess a personality or interactional style as such, the members of groups do, and individuals formulate their impressions of a group by their interaction with another group's members.

³⁸In a recently published article, Wortham ("Anti-Judaism") suggests that Paul's feelings of inadequacy and insecurity were partly responsible for his vituperative outburst against his fellow Jews in 1 Thess 2:14-16.

³⁹Williams (*Reduction*, 39) suggests that the combination and mutual reinforcement of realistic and unrealistic conflict elements perpetuates intergroup hostility.

⁴⁰See Katz, "Resolution," 374. Fisher (*Conflict*, 34) remarks, "Typologies of conflict, like all categorization systems, have the appeal of simplifying social reality through analysis, thus initially increasing our understanding. However, none can do total justice to the complexity of social life." So similarly, Bisno, *Managing Conflict*, 29-30.

source and then proliferate to include other sources and issues and to escalate through a combination of realistic and unrealistic factors."⁴¹ The reasons for Paul's and the Thessalonian believers' conflict with outsiders will be considered in chapters seven and ten respectively. It will be suggested that a variety of factors led to their conflict with Jewish and Gentile outsiders.

VI. The Cycle of Intergroup Conflict

Different disputes have different dynamics. As a result, the only way one can pinpoint the particulars of a conflict is to study it carefully.⁴² This thesis is an attempt to describe in as much detail and with as much precision as possible the complex conflict situation between believers and unbelievers in Thessalonica. Notwithstanding the need to spell out the specifics of a given conflict, conflict theorists have been able to detect general stages of conflict. In this section we will consider two proposed patterns of conflict relations.⁴³

Victor Turner likens conflict to a four-act social drama.⁴⁴ The first act of the conflict is the occurrence of a breach of regular norm-governed relations. Act two is typified by a period of mounting crisis, i. e., the intensification of conflict. In the third stage of the conflict, various attempts are made by the concerned parties to contain or to resolve the crisis. Then, in the fourth act, there is either the restoration of ruptured relations or an irreparable breach between the groups.

⁴¹Fisher, *Conflict*, 34.

⁴²So rightly Beals and Siegel, *Divisiveness*, 170.

⁴³There are, of course, other proposed patterns of conflict relations which we will not consider here. See e. g., Filley, *Conflict*, 7-18. Filley suggests that conflict unfolds as follows: antecedent conditions, perceived and felt conflict, manifest behavior, conflict resolution or suppression, and resolution aftermath.

⁴⁴*Schism*, 92.

Kriesburg has also proposed a cycle of social conflict.⁴⁵ His model has five stages. According to Kriesburg, a conflict begins with parties having conflicting goals. These rival aims, which are not always recognized at first, constitute the objective grounds for conflict between the concerned entities. The second stage of conflict occurs when the involved parties become aware that an incompatibility exists, and they seek some way to contend with the other. The third phase of the conflict cycle centers upon the pursuit of contradictory goals by the respective sides. During this stage the conflict will often escalate, i. e., will increase in magnitude. Prior to the fourth aspect of conflict, the so-called termination stage, there will be a de-escalation of the conflict. However, in a prolonged conflict there may be a recurrence of escalation and de-escalation. Once a conflict is terminated, then the last stage is reached: the outcome stage.⁴⁶ The potential outcomes or consequences of conflict on a given group will now be addressed.

VII. Consequences of Intergroup Conflict

How can conflict with an outgroup impact the ingroup? This is the question to be dealt with in this section. At the outset it is necessary to note that I am not seeking to determine the so-called "functions" of intergroup conflict like Coser and those biblical scholars who have followed in his functionalist footsteps.⁴⁷ (As

⁴⁵*Social Conflict*, 19.

⁴⁶Due to the paucity of data, it is not possible to run Paul's and the Thessalonian Christians' conflict with non-Christians through these proposed cycles. My purpose for considering these potential patterns of conflict is to consider how conflict can unfold.

⁴⁷At the Context and Kerygma Conference held at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, in September 1994, John Elliott encouraged this author in the course of conversation to beware of Coser's functionalist orientation. (Of course, the irony of this advice is that Elliott drew upon Coser in his study *Home*).

noted in the introduction, social theorists have significantly revised Coser's one-sided analysis of conflict). Rather, I merely want to describe some of the potential outcomes of social conflict on groups thus engaged.⁴⁸

Firstly, *intergroup conflict may lead to ingroup hostility toward the outgroup*. The presence or absence of hostility appears to be contingent upon the (perceived) reason(s) for the conflict⁴⁹ and the opportunity for social interaction between the involved parties.⁵⁰

Intergroup conflict may also result in ingroup solidarity,⁵¹ enhanced awareness of ingroup identity,⁵² and tightening of group boundaries.⁵³ Frequently (though by no means always or automatically) in the face of conflict groups pull together in order to weather the cold winds of disapproval blowing from outside.⁵⁴ On the other hand, when intergroup conflict is minimal or non-existent, there is a tendency for groups to be less unified, for

⁴⁸The insights of Coser (*Functions*) are helpful here. Unlike Coser, however, I am not seeking to demonstrate that social conflict fulfills "a number of determinative functions in groups and other interpersonal relations" (8).

⁴⁹Sherif *et al.* (*Conflict*, 45) observe that the more important the values at stake in the intergroup conflict, the greater the possibility for hostility.

⁵⁰Coser (*Functions*, 67-72) suggests that the closer the relationship between the parties in conflict the greater the conflict will be. Stark (*Sociology*, 296) notes, "Contact accompanied by inequality and competition breeds contempt. It can even turn former friends into strangers [and even enemies]."

⁵¹On this ubiquitous principle in conflict studies see, among others, Simmel, *Conflict*, 92-93; Sherif, *Conflict*, 21; Coser, *Functions*, 87-95; Levine and Campbell, *Ethnocentrism*, 31; and Filley, *Conflict*, 6-7.

⁵²So Coser, *Functions*, 104-110.

⁵³Coser, *Functions*, 95-104; and Deutsch, *Resolution*, 76.

⁵⁴Cartwright ("Cohesiveness," 103-105) suggests that group cohesiveness has consequences, including: increased member loyalty, increased participation in group activities, greater conformity to group norms, and a greater sense of security for group members.

member loyalty to be low, and for a group to break up into smaller units.⁵⁵

When a group is experiencing conflict with another party, *there is also the possibility that the ingroup will exaggerate its virtues and magnify outgroup vices.*⁵⁶ Frequently, conflict with an outgroup heightens ingroup bias⁵⁷ and results in a stereotypical perception and portrayal of outsiders by insiders.⁵⁸ That is to say, ingroup glorification and outgroup denigration are common dynamics of groups, particularly those engaged in conflict.

A final potential consequence of intergroup conflict which merits mentioning is that *conflict can cause a group to "crack down" on those who would seek to deviate from group norms.*⁵⁹ When in the throes of conflict, it is suggested that groups tend to punish and to reject deviants more than they do when relations with outsiders are harmonious.⁶⁰ Furthermore, some conflict theorists have observed that conflict relations tend to reduce

⁵⁵So Deutsch, *Resolution*, 76. For the presence and absence of conflict and the impact that such had on the Pauline congregations in Thessalonica and Corinth, see Barclay, "Contrasts."

⁵⁶As noted by Sherif, *Conflict*, 21; Levine and Campbell, *Ethnocentrism*, 32; and Deutsch, *Resolution*, 75-76.

⁵⁷The term "ethnocentrism" is appropriate here, if by ethnocentrism one means a "cultural narrowness" in which an individual rigidly accepts those who are culturally similar and rigidly rejects those who are culturally dissimilar. On ethnocentrism, see further Summer, *Folkways*; Fisher, *Conflict*, 22-24; and particularly Levine and Campbell, *Ethnocentrism*.

⁵⁸As observed by Kidder and Stewart, *Relations*, 26-35.

⁵⁹See further, Lauderdale *et al.*, "Threat."

⁶⁰So Coser, *Functions*, 70-71; Deutsch, *Resolution* 76; and Levine and Campbell, *Ethnocentrism*, 33. For a interesting look at how the Amish, an Anabaptist group which defines itself over against culture, deal with deviance see Hostetler, *Amish Society*, esp. 292-312.

group defection.⁶¹ This tendency is usually linked to the increased internal solidarity of a group engaged in conflict.

Having said that, conflict with an outgroup can also divide and destroy an ingroup. It appears that the way a group responds to conflict is based in large measure on how it interprets (or is led to interpret) a given conflict. If a group perceives a conflict as (ultimately) beneficial (e. g., a labor strike), then it may well be unified in and through conflict (and *vice versa*). As it happens, the Thessalonians' conflict with their Gentile compatriots seems to have solidified their faith and their fellowship--both one with another and with Paul (see further chapter eleven). An overview of how (leaders of) groups attempt to manage conflict with other groups will conclude our survey.

VIII. Coping with Intergroup Conflict

How do groups (or representatives thereof) who are engaged in conflict seek to deal with it? The obvious and correct response to this query is: in a variety of ways. Here, four possible ways of dealing with conflict are noted and commented upon.⁶² One common approach to managing conflict is to *compete* with or fight against the other party with a view to impose one's aims onto the other group. Such an approach, sometimes called the "win-lose" approach, usually results in either victory for one party and defeat for the other or in a stalemate typified by perpetual tension. Those groups which opt for this particular conflict management approach tend to have a strong ingroup bias.

⁶¹E. g., Coser, *Functions*, 95-104; Levine and Campbell, *Ethnocentrism*, 33. On the dynamics of disaffection, see further Toch, *Movements*, 157-181.

⁶²In formulating this section I have drawn upon the following resources: Kriesburg, *Social Conflicts*, 206-208; Bisno, *Managing Conflict*, 60-98; Fisher, *Conflict*, 187-191; and Filley, *Conflict*, 48-59.

Another tactic for dealing with conflict is *avoidance or withdrawal*. This strategy for managing conflict concludes that a degree of isolation, be it physical or psychological, is preferable to and safer than attempting to counter overt opposition.

Seeking to *accommodate* the opposing group is also a way of dealing with conflict. This approach assumes that expediency is the best policy and that it is wise to limit one's losses by acceding to the demands of the other and by trying to smooth over strained relations.

A fourth strategy for coping with conflict is to enter into *dialogue* with the other group. This course of conflict management assumes that the other party is willing to discuss the reason(s) for conflict and hopes that creative alternatives to the conflict can be found. Such social interaction requires a degree of trust and respect between the involved parties. Nevertheless, the ingroup is not opposed to converting the outgroup to their own perspective while in the course of the negotiations! It remains to be said that there may be a combination of responses on the part of a group to a given conflict.

Conclusion

In this chapter the social-scientific study of intergroup conflict relations has been explored. Various aspects of conflict have been noted, a definition of intergroup conflict has been offered, and classifications, characteristics, causes, and consequences of intergroup conflict have been considered. Furthermore, we have observed how intergroup conflict can unfold and how groups engaged in conflict may seek to deal with it. Although this social-scientific discussion of conflict has been intentionally theoretical, a good grasp of the characteristics and dynamics of intergroup conflict has been gained. Due caution has

been and will be taken in this study not to allow the general to take precedence over the particular. Nevertheless, it stands to reason that one should take a careful look at conflict in general if one wants to understand more thoroughly the specifics of a given conflict. General observations about conflict do not dictate the conclusions at which one arrives; rather, the social-scientific study of conflict assists one by suggesting possible directions to look and helpful questions to ask.

The preceding discussion will be particularly informative when addressing the following questions below:

- How and by whom were Paul and his converts opposed? (See chapters six and nine).
- Why did Paul and the Thessalonian believers encounter conflict with outsiders? (See chapters seven and ten).
- What impact did the conflict have on Paul and on the church? And how did the Christians seek to cope with their "afflictions"? (See chapters eight and eleven).

With a theoretical framework for exploring deviance and conflict now in place, we turn to investigate the contours of Paul's and the Thessalonians' conflict with Jewish and Gentile outsiders. In the chapters which follow, I will return to the preceding theoretical discussion of deviance and conflict time and again in an attempt to understand better particular texts and the social realities which stand behind them.

PART THREE:
THE APOSTLE'S AGON

Chapter Six

Non-Christian Opposition of Paul and His Thessalonian Mission

Introduction

In this chapter, verses in 1 Thessalonians which signal non-Christian opposition to Paul and his missionary efforts in Thessalonica will be considered. As it happens, each of the verses is located in 1 Thessalonians 2, the chapter where Paul reflects upon his initial visit to Thessalonica (2:1-16) and records his deep desire to see his converts again (2:17-20). The first verse which will be examined is 2:2. Portions of two other verses, namely 2:15b and 2:16a, will then be studied in an effort to shed additional light on our subject. Finally, I will discuss 2:1-12 with a view to discovering Paul's primary purpose in writing these verses.¹ I will complete this chapter by indicating my conclusions about Paul's troubles in Thessalonica.

I. Opposition in Thessalonica

In 1 Thess 1:2-10 Paul gives thanks to God for the Thessalonian congregation. In particular, he offers thanksgiving for his converts' faith, love, and hope (1:3), and for their election (1:4-5), imitation (1:6-8), and conversion (1:9-10). Paul's reflection on his mission to Thessalonica and the results thereof prompts him to remind the church in 2:1 that the missionaries' coming (εἰσοδος) to them was not in vain (οὐ κενὴ γέγονεν).²

¹Did Paul intend for this passage to function as an apology against actual or potential accusations and/or as *parenesis* for the Thessalonian congregation? If there is validity to the view that 2:1-12 is a Pauline apology, is it possible to detect the source(s) of and the reason(s) for the slander against Paul?

²It is now impossible to know precisely who assisted Paul in Thessalonica. While it is clear enough that Silvanus (or Silas) was present with Paul when the church was founded (Acts 17:10a), it remains an open question whether or not Timothy was with them at this point. Although Timothy is included in the

At this juncture a reader might anticipate Paul to give additional reasons why he thought his sojourn in Thessalonica successful (note 2:13). Instead, he precedes to speak of the circumstances surrounding the apostles' initial visit to the city and to remark upon the character of their message and ministry (2:2-12).³ In 2:2 Paul maintains that the Thessalonian believers were knowledgeable of the fact (καθὼς οἴδατε) that even though⁴ the preachers "had already suffered [προπαθόντες] and been shamefully treated [ὑβρισθέντες] in Philippi, [they] had courage [ἐπαρρησιασάμεθα] in [their] God to declare to [the Thessalonians] the gospel of God in spite of great opposition [ἐν πολλῷ ἁγῶνι]."

The intended meaning of the term ἁγών in 2:2 is debated. Some interpreters think that ἁγών refers to Paul's intrapersonal psychological conflict and anxiety.⁵ Others contend that Paul uses

address of 1 Thessalonians (1:1) and had been to Thessalonica by the time Paul wrote the epistle (3:2, 6), Paul does not explicitly state that Timothy was with him and Silas in Thessalonica. Furthermore, Acts does not indicate Timothy's presence.

Although it is usually assumed by scholars that Timothy was in Thessalonica when the church was founded (see e. g., Bruce, xxii; Haenchen, *Acts*, 512; Collins, *Birth*, 20; Bercovitz, "Paul," 123), there may be validity in Schmithals's suggestion (*Gnostics*, 181) that he was absent on Paul's initial visit to the city. Could it be that Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica because he had not been there previously and had not experienced the controversy with outsiders which Paul and Silas had?

Because Timothy's presence in Thessalonica when the church was founded is unclear, when referring specifically to Timothy's presence at the founding visit, I will use qualifiers such as "perhaps" and "maybe." When the reader encounters co-worker(s), colleague(s), or helper(s), it should be taken as short-hand for Silvanus and perhaps Timothy (and for all we know other Pauline associates as well!). Since my interest revolves around Paul himself and the conflict which he encountered, at times I will simply speak of Paul without reference to his co-worker(s). For a treatment of Paul and his helpers see, Ellis, "Coworkers."

³Rightly observed by Ellingworth and Nida, *Handbook*, 20.

⁴I take the participles in 2:2a to be circumstantial participles denoting concession or opposition. See also e. g., Lightfoot, *Notes*, 19; Pfitzner, *Paul*, 114; and Morris, 59, n. 7.

⁵So Dobschütz, 85; Rigaux, 405; Malherbe, 48; and, albeit cautiously, Frame, 94. If Paul had intended to indicate that he overcame anxiety in order to declare the gospel in Thessalonica, one is left to wonder, despite the position of

the word to speak of the exertion entailed in the proclamation of the gospel.⁶ Still others suggest that ἐν πολλῷ ἁγῶνι depicts the hostile circumstances surrounding the apostles' ministry in Thessalonica.⁷ As suggested by my translation above,⁸ I hold to the latter view.⁹

Contextual considerations lead me to arrive at such a conclusion. Although ἁγών may suggest spiritual or internal striving, as it apparently does in Col 2:1,¹⁰ the fact that Paul links the dissemination of the gospel in Thessalonica with the suffering (προπαθεῖν) and shameful treatment (ὕβριζεν) that the missionaries encountered in Philippi strongly suggests that they also encountered non-Christian opposition in the course of their

these commentators, why he did not employ the term μέριμνα (cf. 2 Cor 11:28). I will give further and weightier objections to this interpretation in the text itself.

⁶E. g., Lightfoot, *Notes*, 20; and Dibelius, 7. Holtz (70) maintains that the conflict of which Paul speaks is that which exists between the gospel and the world.

⁷See, among others, Milligan, 17; Best, 92; Marshall, 64; Wanamaker, 93; Pfitzner, *Paul*, 114; and Morris, 61, n. 12. Chrysostom (*Homilies*, 13:329) seems to have thought that Paul was struggling with both internal and external conflict. This could well have been the case (cf. 2 Cor 7:5). However, here (i. e., in 2:2) Paul is in all likelihood maintaining that he and his helper(s) were facing external pressure. Malina (*World*, 32-33) maintains that Mediterranean culture is an *agonistic* culture characterized by conflict over and competition for a much sought after but limited good: honor. Malina (*World*) discusses the concepts of honor and shame and limited good in chapters two and four respectively.

⁸Note similarly NRSV and NIV.

⁹Apparently Paul was thought of and treated as dangerously deviant by some non-Christian outsiders in Thessalonica. Seemingly some people in positions of civil/religious power (i. e., "agents of censure" interested in protecting and perpetuating the *status quo*) sought to thwart the ministry of the apostle by means of negative informal and formal sanctions. See further my discussion of labeling theory (pp. 80-84) and the deviance process (pp. 88-91). On how Paul was opposed by unbelievers in Thessalonica, see pp. 128-129; 141 below. As for the reasons that Paul encountered conflict with his fellow Jews in Thessalonica (and elsewhere), see chapter seven.

¹⁰So Bruce, 25; and Frame, *Thessalonians*, 94. See, however, Pfitzner (*Paul*, 109-113; 126-129) who holds that the term is used in Col 2:1 to refer to external circumstances.

Thessalonian mission.¹¹ (On the trouble in Philippi see Phil 1:30, where Paul uses the term ἄγών to describe his external opposition there.¹² Cf. Acts 16:19-40). Furthermore, Paul's claim that the missionaries had courage (παρρησιάζεσθαι) in God to speak the gospel in spite of considerable conflict suggests a situation of opposition.¹³ Ernest Best suggests that the apostles' "preaching can only be described as courageous if there is external opposition."¹⁴

One should also observe Paul's previous remarks in 1:6 where he speaks of the Thessalonians' θλίψις as an imitation of the apostles' affliction. He states "you [i. e., his converts] became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in considerable affliction [ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ], with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit." The Thessalonian believers became imitators of their apostles and of the Lord in that they too experienced affliction.¹⁵

¹¹Rightly noted by Barclay ("Conflict," 513) who maintains that "The parallel with Philippi suggests vigorous, possibly physical, opposition."

¹²So also, among others, Silva, *Philippians*, 98.

¹³So also Cranfield, "Study," 220. Pfitzner (*Paul*, 112) notes that "In Acts the word [παρρησιάζεσθαι] designates the joyful and fearless courage which accompanied the early proclamation of the Easter message in the face of opposition (Acts 9:27f., 13:46, 14:3 and 19:8; also Eph 6:20)."

Malherbe ("Gentle" and "Exhortation") places Paul's παρρησία against a Cynic backdrop. While Malherbe marshalls some striking parallels from the writings of Dio Chrysostom (40-c. 120 CE), he fails to take sufficient account of the oppressive circumstances which gave rise to Paul's bold declaration. He also neglects to note that Cynics also encountered opposition. (See further below). As a result, Malherbe's Paul emerges looking more like an ideal Cynic philosopher than a Jewish apostle to the Gentiles (1 Thess 2:6, 14), despite his qualifications in "Paul." Winter ("Entries," 73, n. 73) rightly opposes Malherbe's placement of Paul in a philosophical frame.

¹⁴Best, 92. Pfitzner (*Paul*, 113) adds, "[I]t is hard to understand how Paul could have spoken of the boldness of his preaching in one breath, and of his fear and anxiety in the other--unless one avoids the obvious contradiction by an artificial distinction between his external behaviour and inner feelings!"

¹⁵Rightly recognized by de Boer, *Imitation*, 114; and Pobee, *Persecution*, 70.

This Pauline commendation of his converts takes on added significance given Paul's affliction among them.¹⁶

My position that Paul is referring in 2:2 to external opposition which he and his co-worker(s) encountered from non-Christians in Thessalonica becomes even more persuasive when viewed alongside additional remarks in the epistle. Another statement indicating the ministers' conflict in Thessalonica occurs in 2:15b.

II. Expulsion from Thessalonica

In 2:15b Paul contends that certain Jews ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων. This cryptic phrase, which occurs in the context of Paul's polemic against some of his fellow Jews (2:15-16), immediately raises a number of questions. What is the meaning of the NT *hapax legomenon* ἐκδιώκειν? To whom does ἡμᾶς refer? Who precisely are the Ἰουδαῖοι who ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων? I will treat these closely related queries in reverse order.

As indicated in chapter one, the term Ἰουδαῖοι in 2:14 may be translated as either "Judeans" or as "Jews." I concluded that the latter is more probable. Nevertheless, it was emphasized that Paul was not referring to all Jews, but to those particular Jews whom Paul saw as opposing the work of God by causing Judean Christians to suffer, by killing the Lord Jesus and the prophets, by banishing or persecuting Paul and his co-workers(s), and by hindering the Pauline mission. Therefore, I suggested in chapter one that the Jews to whom Paul refers did not share a common locality. Rather, they shared the same ethnicity and a similar hostility toward those

¹⁶It could well be that ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ (1:6) and ἐν πολλῷ ἁγῶνι (2:2) are more or less synonymous expressions. Wanamaker (93) remarks, "Since 1:6 (cf. 2:13-17; Acts 17:5-9) makes it clear that the gospel was delivered in a situation of opposition in Thessalonica, it seems probable that Paul is recollecting that opposition here [i. e., in 2:2]."

people (i. e., the Judean Christians, Jesus, the prophets, Paul and his helper[s]) and/or things (i. e., the gospel message and its proclamation to τοῖς ἔθνεσιν) that Paul perceived to be from/of God. This interpretive decision leaves open for discussion the specific cross-section of Jews about whom Paul was thinking when he wrote ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων.

Detlef von Dobschütz is convinced that Paul is speaking in 2:15b of his persecution or expulsion at the hands of Jerusalem Jews, particularly those zealous Jews who belonged to what Dobschütz calls the "Thorapolizei," i. e., a corps of young men which existed in Jewish communities both in Palestine and the Diaspora to take (forceful) action against non-conformers.¹⁷ He maintains that prior to his conversion Paul was closely affiliated with such a group and that subsequent to his Damascus experience was strenuously opposed by the same, particularly in Jerusalem. In fact, Dobschütz thinks, "Da Paulus in seiner frühchristlichen Zeit den Gemeinden von Judäa persönlich unbekannt war (Gal 1, 22), ist anzunehmen, daß die Juden (1 Thess 2, 15) ihn aus Jerusalem vertrieben haben."¹⁸ I am unconvinced by Dobschütz's suggestion that it was some radical Jerusalem Jews who ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων. Although Dobschütz's argument could be countered at many points,¹⁹ I only need to note here the fact that in constructing this creative scenario, which is heavily dependent upon Acts 9:26-30, Dobschütz neglects to consider the all-important first person plural personal pronoun in 2:15: ἡμᾶς. Before one can determine

¹⁷*Paulus*, 102.

¹⁸*Paulus*, 102.

¹⁹For a summary and critique of Dobschütz's work, see Seland, *Violence*, 29-30.

the group of Jews who ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων, it is necessary to consider to whom ἡμᾶς refers.

There are at least three possible ways to construe the "us" of 2:15b.²⁰ The pronoun may either refer to Paul and his co-worker(s), to Paul and other apostles in general, or to Paul and the Thessalonian Christians. Against the last of the three options²¹ is the fact that it appears to have been Gentiles, not Jews, who opposed the Thessalonian believers.²² Furthermore, if ἐκδιωξάντων is to be understood as "banished" (see below), this was clearly not the case for Paul's converts.

Could it be that "us" is used in reference to Paul and other leaders of the Christian movement? Schlueter is in favor of this interpretive option, that is, "us" as referring to Paul and other Christian apostles. To arrive at this position, however, Schlueter offers the far-fetched suggestion that when Paul speaks of "apostles of Christ" in 2:7 he possibly had in mind the Jerusalem apostles who, unlike himself, received financial support from the believers to whom they ministered (cf. 1 Cor 9:3-14)!²³ Furthermore, she turns to "parallels" in Matthew and Luke where she finds "us" referring to "us apostles" (see Matt 23:34-36; Luke 11:49).²⁴

One need not go this far afield to discover the referent of "us." Time and again in 1 Thessalonians 2 (2:1, 2 [twice], 3, 4 [twice], 5, 6 [twice], 7, 8 [three times], 9 [four times], 10, 11, 13 [twice], 15, 16, 17 [twice], 18 [twice], 19, and 20), Paul uses the

²⁰Schlueter, *Measure*, 70.

²¹*Contra*, Rigaux, 78.

²²For a full discussion of this position, see further chapter nine below.

²³Schlueter, *Measure*, 72.

²⁴Schlueter, *Measure*, 72.

first person plural to refer to at least himself and Silvanus and possibly Timothy. And while it is true Paul can use the first person plural to refer to all Christians (1:10; 4:7; 5:5-10) and perhaps of himself (3:1, 2, 6), his predominate pattern in 1 Thessalonians is to refer to himself and his co-worker(s) in the first person plural and to the Thessalonian Christians in the second person plural. This is clearly the case in the immediate context of Paul's statement in 2:15b. It seems best, then, to understand the "us" of 2:15b in reference to Paul, Silvanus, and possibly Timothy.²⁵ The high probability that ἡμᾶς is to be understood here as it is throughout practically all of the epistle, that is as shorthand for Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (?), leads me to take the phrase ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων as a reference to an experience that Paul and his co-worker(s) had with some Jews in Thessalonica.²⁶ Although the meaning of the phrase is not immediately clear to belated readers of the letter, it would have not been lost on the epistle's initial recipients.²⁷ The Thessalonian Christians would have readily recalled the clash of Paul and his helper(s) with some of the local Jews and that this conflict culminated in the apostles' departure from the city.

The term ἐκδιωξάντων is an aorist participle. The verb from which it is derived is the compound ἐκ-διώκειν. Interpreters are divided on how best to translate and to understand this NT *hapax legomenon*. Best thinks the translation "persecuted" best captures the meaning of the term.²⁸ To support this position he maintains

²⁵Rightly recognized by Frame, 112; Best, 116; and Marshall, 79.

²⁶That Paul is alluding in 2:15b to a particular incident that he and his colleague(s) experienced in Thessalonica is rightly recognized by Hill, *Hellenists*, 37, n. 69.

²⁷Marshall (79) maintains that the readers of the letter would have readily picked up on this allusion. Noted also by Lightfoot, *Notes*, 33; and Frame, 112.

²⁸Best, 116. So also, Morris, 84.

that "in the Greek of this period prepositions had lost much of their value when attached to verbs and served only to intensify their meaning."²⁹ Furthermore, Best comments that ἐκδιωξάντων should be taken "as a real past tense referring to the persecutions Paul and his companions (and perhaps the Thessalonians also) suffered on their visit to Thessalonica and which were instigated by Jews (Acts 17.1ff)."³⁰ Drawing upon Best's work, Schlueter also argues for the translation "persecuted," although she does not think it necessary to conceive of a particular episode of opposition.³¹

Alternatively, other scholars, myself included, are convinced that ἐκδιώκειν is best rendered "to drive out, banish, or expel."³² In arguing for the translation "to drive out," Charles A. Wanamaker appeals to the term's "literal" meaning and to the aorist tense of the participle.³³ I offer here two further observations in support of the translation "to drive out." First of all, in 2:17a Paul speaks of being torn away or orphaned from (ἀπορφανίζεσθαι) the Thessalonian Christians. The aorist passive participle employed by Paul connotes an enforced separation between the missionaries and their converts. Given the tense and voice of the participle and the

²⁹Best, *Thessalonians*, 116. Note similarly Lünemann, 69; and Cranfield, "Study," 225, n. 9.

³⁰Best, 116. See similarly, Lightfoot, *Notes*, 33; and cautiously, Frame, 112.

³¹Schlueter, *Measure*, 68-70.

³²Dobschütz, *Paulus*, 102; Bruce, 47; Malherbe, *Paul*, 62; Marshall, 79; Richard, 121; and Wanamaker, 115. Robertson (*Pictures*, 4:21-22) states that the "old verb [means] to drive out or banish, to chase out as if a wild beast."

³³Wanamaker, 115. Dobschütz (*Paulus*, 102) contends, "Gelegentlich kann aber auch die Vorsilbe ἐκ bei διώκω die Intensität einer Verfolgung ausdrücken. Gegen die Deutung 'heftig verfolgen' spricht hier jedoch der Aorist ἐκδιωξάντων, der auf eine einmalige Handlung weist."

immediate context in which it occurs (i. e., where Paul is referring to the Jewish opposition of himself and his Gentile mission), it makes good sense to understand the participial phrase (ἀπορφανισθέντες ἀφ' ὑμῶν) metaphorically and as an further allusion to the expulsion of Paul and his co-worker(s) from Thessalonica by some Jews.³⁴

In further support of translating ἐκδιώκειν as "to drive out," one may note that this is the usual meaning of the term both in the LXX (see e. g., Deut 6:19; 1 Chron 8:13; 12:15; Ps. 36:28; Jer 27:44; 29:19; Joel 2:20) and in other Greek literature (e. g., Thucydides, 1.24; Demosthenes, *Orations* 32.6; Josephus, c. *Ap.* 1.292). Even though ἐκδιώκειν can, on rare occasion, mean "to persecute,"³⁵ lexical and contextual evidence suggests that the term is best rendered "to drive out, banish, or expel." Such a translation allows the preposition ἐκ- to take on a strong sense and preserves the full value of the past participle as referring to a single event (like the preceding participle [2:15a] and unlike the subsequent ones [2:15c-d; 2:16a]).

Although I disagree with Best's translation of ἐκδιωξάντων, he rightly suggests that Paul was thinking of a particular event when writing ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων. In fact, I would contend that Paul was referring to the occasion when he, Silvanus, and Timothy (?) were driven from Thessalonica by some unbelieving Jews.³⁶

³⁴Wanamaker (120) reasons, "Since the passive form of the participle would require Paul to be portraying himself as an orphaned child, it seems better to understand the participle in a metaphorical sense as referring to the sudden and violent loss of the Thessalonians, which the apostle had experienced as a result of Jewish intervention (see 2:15f.)." So also Marshall, 79; 84-85; and Malherbe, *Paul*, 62.

³⁵I was able to locate two references in the LXX: Ps 118:157 and Sir 30:19.

³⁶If Acts 17:13 can be followed, then Paul was also driven out of Beroea by some Thessalonian Jews. Holtz ("Judgment," 285) reckons, "This [detail] is

In further support of this position, I would draw attention to the apposite remarks of Claudia J. Setzer. Although she concludes that 1 Thess 2:13-16 is not authentically Pauline, in her discussion of 1 Thess 2:15b she astutely observes:

The idea of Christian missionaries being driven out of a particular place meshes with Paul's testimony about himself (1 Cor 15:9; 2 Cor 11:26; Gal 1:13; 5:11; 6:12; Rom 15:31) as well as with the image of him in Acts as a perpetrator and victim of mob actions (8:1-3; 11:19 [?]; 13:45, 50; 14:2-5, 19; 17:5-9). It also harmonizes with Josephus' report of revolutionaries making life unbearable for more moderate members of the community in Judea in the midst of general anarchy and intolerance [see *Ant.* 20.5; *B.J.* 2:13; 4:5].³⁷

My contention that Paul and his co-workers(s) were driven out of Thessalonica by some Jews is supported, then, not only by Paul's statements in 2:15b and 2:17a, but also by Paul's remarks elsewhere,³⁸ by the multiple reports in Acts of Paul being harassed by unbelieving Jews (in spite of the fact that these episodes may be stereotyped and/or exaggerated at points),³⁹ and by the willingness of some less-tolerant Jews in some places (e. g., the zealous Judean Jews spoken of by Josephus⁴⁰) to oppose, sometimes even violently, those with whom they disagreed.⁴¹

not likely to have been a free invention by Luke." Contrast Lüdemann, *Traditions*, 186.

³⁷Setzer, *Responses*, 21.

³⁸For a fuller treatment of the Pauline texts cited by Setzer, see chapter seven below.

³⁹Goddard and Cummins ("Conflict," 120) rightly note that "The record of Acts is unlikely to have totally fabricated the numerous accounts of Paul's physical suffering and persecution." So similarly Smith, "Persecution," 261.

⁴⁰Jewett ("Agitators," 198-212) argues that there was an increase of zealous activity in Judea in the late forties and early fifties CE which spread to surrounding regions.

⁴¹It is precisely at this point where Dobschütz's study (*Paulus*) is most convincing. See now also the work of Seland, *Violence*. Seland argues that Philo (*Spec. Leg.* 1.54-57, 315-318; 2.225-254) and Acts (6:8; 7:60; 21:15-26, 27-36; 23:12-15) indicate the presence of Jews, both in Jerusalem and in the Diaspora,

III. Prohibited from Preaching to the Gentiles

In 2:16a Paul contends that some Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι of 2:14b is still serving as the subject) were responsible for "hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles in order that they might be saved [κωλυόντων ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἔθνεσιν λαλῆσαι ἵνα σωθῶσιν]." This participial phrase is to be taken as an explanatory participle (note the absence of καί) of at least 2:15d (καὶ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἐναντίων)⁴² and in all likelihood of 2:15c as well (καὶ θεῷ μὴ ἀρεσκόντων).⁴³ In 2:15c-16a, then, Paul maintains that the Jews who hinder him and his co-worker(s) from proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles displease God and oppose people. But who were the Jews doing the hindering? Whom precisely were they hindering? And how were they preventing Paul and his helper(s) from speaking to the Gentiles?

I argued above that Paul, Silvanus, and possibly Timothy were driven out of Thessalonica by some of the Jews residing there (2:15b, 17a). (I also noted above that such Jewish hostility was not an anomaly for Paul). Given the two other allusions to Jewish opposition of Paul's Thessalonian mission in the immediate context, I would maintain that it is likely that Paul is once again thinking of the circumstances surrounding his visit to Thessalonica in 2:16a.⁴⁴ If this is indeed the case, then it also seems likely that the ἡμᾶς of 2:16a should be understood as referring to Paul,

who stood ready to perform zealous vigilante actions against non-conformers to the Torah. Conflict theorists contend that ideological conflict between parties who interact closely and frequently can be particularly intense (see pp. 104-105; 110).

⁴²Thus Frame, 112; and Marshall, 79.

⁴³So Lightfoot, *Notes*, 34; Best, 117; Wanamaker, 115.

⁴⁴Rightly recognized by Marshall, 79. For the position that Paul is referring in 2:16a to being hindered by some Thessalonian Jews, see also Sanders, *Paul*, 190-191; and Hobbs, "1-2 Thessalonians," 273.

Silvanus, and Timothy (?). As demonstrated above ἡμεῖς usually refers to Paul and his colleague(s) throughout 1 Thessalonians and clearly does so throughout chapters one and two.

The present tense participle (κωλυόντων) in 2:16a, however, seems to indicate that Paul is referring here not only to the missionaries' experience in Thessalonica, but also to the continued Jewish opposition of the Pauline mission. Unfortunately, Paul does not indicate in 1 Thessalonians or elsewhere in his extant letter corpus the other places where he was prevented by Jews from preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. However, if 1 Thessalonians was written by Paul in Corinth c. 50 CE⁴⁵ and if the reports in Acts of the Jewish opposition of Paul and his missionary efforts prior to that time can be given any credence at all, then in 2:16a Paul could have had in mind former controversies with his compatriots in Damascus (Acts 9:23), Pisidian Antioch (13:44-45), Iconium (14:2-5), Lystra (14:19), and Beroea (17:13) as well as his past conflict with Thessalonian Jews and his present (?) conflict with Corinthian Jews (18:5-6, 12-17; cf. 1 Thess 3:7; 2 Thess 3:2). However, even if one dates 1 Thessalonians differently and/or is highly skeptical or completely dismissive of the reports of Jewish opposition of Paul in Acts, there is enough evidence in Paul's own letters to conclude that Thessalonica was not the only place that Paul ran into trouble with non-Christian Jews (see esp. 2 Cor 11:24, 26d; Gal 5:11; 6:12). Paul's caustic denunciation of some of his kin in 2:16b, then, appears to have been prompted by his experience of

⁴⁵This is my position and the opinion of the majority of Thessalonian scholars today. Morris (14) remarks, "Almost all commentators are agreed that the epistle must be dated in the early 50s." Note, however, that Donfried ("Theology," 12) and Richard (8) follow Lüdemann (*Paul*, 262) in dating 1 Thessalonians in the early 40s CE.

Jewish resistance to his Gentile mission, particularly in Thessalonica (see further chapter eight).⁴⁶

How was it that non-Christian Jews prevented Paul and his co-workers from speaking to the Gentiles? Based on Paul's statements in 2:15b and 2:17a, I am led to conclude that the Thessalonian Jews hindered Paul's ministry efforts by somehow forcing him to leave the city.⁴⁷ Beyond this it is impossible to know what Paul had in mind in 2:16a. Was he referring to Jewish attempts to incite Gentile political opposition against him (see e. g., Acts 17:5-10a; 18:12-17)? Could Paul be thinking of being excommunicated from particular Jewish synagogues, thereby being prohibited from reaching God-fearers with the gospel? Unfortunately, we simply cannot say. Nonetheless, thus far I have positively concluded that Paul and his colleague(s) encountered Jewish opposition in Thessalonica which resulted in their expulsion from the city. We now turn to consider one final question: Does non-Christian opposition stand behind Paul's self-presentation in 2:1-12?

IV. 1 Thess 2:1-12: Apology and/or *Parenesis*?

Following Paul's claim that the apostles' visit to Thessalonica was not in vain and that they declared the gospel with God-given courage despite external opposition (2:1-2), Paul rehearses, in language which is strikingly negative and antithetical, the nature of their ministry among the Thessalonian believers (2:3-6). Paul contends that their appeal was not made from error, uncleanness, or guile (ἡ γὰρ παράκλησις ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐκ πλάνης οὐδὲ ἐξ ἀκαθαρσίας οὐδὲ ἐν δόλῳ, 2:3). Moreover, he maintains that they did not attempt to

⁴⁶Frame (110-111) writes, "The past experiences in Thessalonica and Beroea (Acts 17:1-15), the insinuations alluded to in vv. 1-12, and the present troubles in Corinth (3:7; cf. Acts 18:5ff.) explain sufficiently [the] prophetic denunciation of the Jews [in 2:15-16] (cf. Phil. 3:1ff.)."

⁴⁷*Contra* Schlueter, *Measure*, 69. So rightly Kruse, "Price," 261-262.

please people when sharing the gospel (οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωποις ἀρέσκοντες, 2:4), nor did they use words of flattery or seek to be greedy while in Thessalonica (Οὔτε γάρ ποτε ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας ἐγενήθημεν . . . οὔτε ἐν προφάσει πλεονεξίας, 2:5). He also states that they did not seek glory from the Thessalonian believers or others (οὔτε ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων οὔτε ἀφ' ὑμῶν οὔτε ἀπ' ἄλλων, 2:6). On the contrary, Paul appeals to his converts (καθὼς οἴδατε, 2:5; cf. 1:5; 2:1, 2, 9, 10, 11; 3:4; 5:2) and to God (θεός μάρτυς, 2:5; cf. 2:10) to attest that as apostles of Christ (ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι, 2:7) they "have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel" (δεδοκιμάσμεθα ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πιστευθῆναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, 2:4) and that they seek to please God, the one who tests their hearts (οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωποις ἀρέσκοντες ἀλλὰ θεῷ τῷ δοκιμάζοντι τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν, 2:4). In 2:3-6, then, Paul is denying that the missionaries are guilty of error (πλάνη), uncleanness (ἀκαθαρσία), deceit (δόλος), "buttering people up" (ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκοντες), using flowery speech (ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας), greed (πλεονεξία), and seeking glory from people (ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων). This is quite a collection of denials!

The tone of 2:7-12 is more positive. In these verses Paul maintains that while in Thessalonica the missionaries were gentle (ἡπιοι)⁴⁸ to their converts (2:7), that they shared their very selves with them (2:8), and that they cared for them like a nursing mother (2:7) and an encouraging father (2:12). Nevertheless, even in these verses Paul calls upon his converts and God to bear witness

⁴⁸*Contra* Nestle-Aland 26th ed. and UBSGNT 3d rev. ed. which read νήπιοι. *Pace* also Fowl, "Metaphor"; Gillman, "ΕΙΣΟΔΟΣ," 63, n. 4; and Morris, 69. Although manuscript evidence may favor the reading νήπιοι (P65 κ* B C* D* F G I Ψ* 104*. 326c. 2495 pc it vg^{ww} sa^{ms} bo; Cl), "only ἡπιοι seems to suit the context, where the apostle's gentleness makes an appropriate sequence with the arrogance disclaimed in ver. 6" (Metzger, *Commentary*, 630). See also Koester ("Text," 225) who rather dogmatically remarks: "Considering context and subject matter, there cannot be the slightest doubt that νήπιοι is wrong."

(ὁμεῖς μάρτυρες καὶ ὁ θεός) to their "holy and righteous and blameless [ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως]" behavior among the Thessalonian believers (2:10; cf. 1:5b). On the surface, 2:1-12 seems easy enough to understand: Paul is reviewing with his converts the character and conduct of the apostles in their presence. But what prompted Paul to pen this pericope? The answer to this question is a source of scholarly contention.

Scholars tend to take one of two basic positions with regard to Paul's motivation for writing 2:1-12. Some hold that Paul is presenting an apology for his ministry in these verses and that his impassioned defense is occasioned by actual or potential accusations made against him in Thessalonica. Others assert that Paul's self-presentation in this passage is meant to encourage and to instruct the congregation, not to counter slanderous charges. In what follows I will evaluate both interpretive options and will state and offer support for my own position.

Trends in Pauline studies are difficult to detect. However, it appears that there has been a shift in recent years among students of 1 Thessalonians as to how 2:1-12 is best read. Due in large measure to the work of Abraham J. Malherbe,⁴⁹ it appears that many, if not the majority, of contemporary Thessalonian scholars now stand persuaded that Paul's purpose in writing 2:1-12 was primarily *parenetic*.⁵⁰ That is to say, these interpreters contend that Paul's intention in 2:1-12 is to place before the Thessalonian

⁴⁹Malherbe, "Gentle" and "Exhortation." In "Gentle," Malherbe appeals to the earlier commentaries of Dobschütz (106-107) and Dibelius (7-11). These German exegetes also thought that Paul was not responding to slanderous remarks in 2:1-12.

⁵⁰One can especially detect Malherbe's mark on the work of Boers, "Form," 150; Koester, "Experiment," 41; Palmer, "Thanksgiving"; Lyons, *Autobiography*, 190-201; Aune, *Literary Environment*, 206; Wanamaker, 91; Richard, "1 Thessalonians," 48; and Simpson, "Thessalonians," 936.

believers an ideal example which they are to emulate. This line of interpretation signals a shift from the traditional view that Paul is countering charges in these verses.

In a 1970 essay, Malherbe contends that it cannot be determined from Paul's self-description in 2:1-12 that he was defending himself against accusations.⁵¹ He seeks to establish this contention by observing verbal and formal parallels between Paul's statements in 2:1-12 and Dio Chrysostom's (40-c.120 CE) *Orations*, particularly *Oration* 32. Malherbe persuasively demonstrates that there are distinct similarities between the negative and antithetic language employed by the Cynic philosopher Dio in his *Orations* and the Christian preacher Paul in 2:1-12. He also usefully highlights in his discussion that accusations against philosophical charlatans were common in antiquity. While I would concur with Malherbe that there are striking parallels between Paul and Dio in the particular passages examined and that wandering philosophers were frequently lambasted in Paul's day, I do not endorse his thesis for the following reasons.

In his *Orat.* 32 Dio attempts to paint a portrait of an ideal philosopher (a person remarkably similar to himself!). Not only does Dio describe such a person as an individual who defies the ὄβρις of the crowd and gets involved in the ἀγών of life (32.8, 20), but he also asserts that the *bona fide* philosopher does not speak in vain (32.9), nor for the sake of glory or personal gain (32.11). The genuine philosopher, like Dio, is divinely directed to speak (ὑπὸ δαιμονίου τινὸς γνώμης, 32.12) and does so with boldness and purity of mind and without guile (32.11). In the course of

⁵¹Malherbe, "Gentle," 217.

describing the ideal philosopher, Dio laments the fact that there are numerous so-called Cynics who

achieve no good at all, but rather the worst possible harm, for they *accustom thoughtless people to deride philosophers in general*, just as one might accustom lads to scorn their teachers, and, when they ought to knock the *insolence* out of their hearers, these Cynics merely increase it (*Orat.* 32.9; *italics added*).

This statement indicates that it was not uncommon for people (people who Dio believed were "thoughtless") to slander philosophers in general. And despite Malherbe's claim that Dio himself had not been maligned,⁵² given the widespread derision and criticism of philosophical types in antiquity (in addition to Dio's own comment, see e. g., Lucian [ca. 125-180 CE], *The Passing of Peregrinus; Philosophies for Sale*) there is good reason to conclude that Dio's own self-presentation was influenced to some degree by concrete accusations which he himself had encountered as a philosopher. Furthermore, in light of the fact that charges often flew around wandering sophists in antiquity, it would come as no surprise to find people trying to affix negative labels to Paul, nor would it seem unusual for Paul to attempt to defend himself and his mission against harmful accusations. Statements made by Dio (and Lucian, among others) about the philosophical life, then, can actually be used against Malherbe's conclusion that Paul's purpose for penning 2:1-12 was purely *parenetic*.

There are yet further reasons to conclude that Paul wrote these verses primarily for apologetic purposes, not the least of which is the great intensity of Paul's self-presentation in this pericope.⁵³ Having mentioned the considerable external

⁵²Malherbe, "Gentle," 214-215; 217.

⁵³Also noted by Sandnes, *Paul*, 198.

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opposition which the apostles had encountered in Thessalonica (2:2), Paul immediately begins in 2:3 to mount a thorough defense. In 2:3-6 Paul seeks repeatedly to exonerate the missionaries from any alleged wrong doing. On the charges of error (πλάγη), uncleanness (ἀκαθαρσία), deceit (δόλος), people pleasing (ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκοντες), flattery (ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας), greed (πλεονεξία), and glory seeking (ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων), Paul pleads not guilty. It is extremely unlikely that Paul would list so many negatives at the outset of his self-presentation purely for *parenetic* purposes.⁵⁴ Unless Paul was responding to specific accusations which had been/were being leveled against him and his colleague(s), why would he sense the urgent need to review so explicitly the ministry of the missionaries among the Thessalonians? If Paul merely intended in 2:1-12 to exhort and encourage his converts, then he miserably missed the mark. It is hard to imagine how his Thessalonian converts would be in danger of becoming like this or behaving in these ways!⁵⁵

My argument that 2:1-12 is primarily apologetic is further buttressed by the fact that Paul emphatically denies charges against the preachers' character and conduct by appealing to the Thessalonians and to none other than God (2:5, 10). Such a emphatic defense is paralleled in Paul only in Galatians 1 and 2 (note esp. 1:20: ἃ δὲ γράφω ὑμῖν, ἰδοὺ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ὅτι οὐ ψεύδομαι)

⁵⁴Riesner (*Frühzeit*, 328) rightly contends:

Es wäre höchst erstaunlich, wenn sich der Apostel des Christus (1.Thess. 2,7) nur aus Gründen der Ermahnung mit einem Philosophen verglichen hätte. Der Text wird aus der Feder (oder dem Diktat) des Paulus sofort verständlich, wenn er an tatsächliche oder mögliche Vorwürfe der Täuschung, Unlauterkeit und Arglist (1. Thess. 2,3), der Schmeichelei und versteckten Habsucht (1.Thess. 2,5) denkt.

⁵⁵Marshall (61) correctly observes that "the comments [in 2:1-12] are more concerned with the characteristics of missionaries and pastors than of ordinary members of the congregation."

where, notwithstanding the arguments of George Lyons to the contrary,⁵⁶ Paul is responding to the agitators' contention that his gospel had a human/Jerusalem origin.⁵⁷ When these foregoing observations are coupled with the fact that talk of the apostles' external conflict in Thessalonica permeates 1 Thessalonians 2 (note again 2:2, 15, 16, 17), the scales are tipped decidedly to the side of 2:1-12 being a Pauline apology.⁵⁸ Paul's primary purpose in penning 2:1-12, then, was to defend himself, not to exhort his converts. Whatever *parenetic* intentions there may be behind this pericope are secondary.

Having established that Paul is responding to slanderous statements in 2:1-12,⁵⁹ the possible origins of and reasons for such verbal assaults will now be considered. There is no shortage of suggestions when it comes to identifying the opposition that Paul is seeking to counter in 2:1-12. Some scholars, most notably Walter Schmithals,⁶⁰ have contended that Paul directed his apology toward Christian opponents who had infiltrated the Thessalonian congregation. Schmithals suggests that Paul was attempting to counter Gnostic intruders in 1 Thessalonians. To arrive at such a position, Schmithals argues that Gnosticism stands behind Paul's

⁵⁶Lyons, *Autobiography*, 75-176.

⁵⁷So rightly, Barclay, *Obedying*, 41, n. 10.

⁵⁸A number of scholars have held and others still hold to this view, including Findlay, 61; Frame, 90-91; Holtz, 94; Bruce, 27-28; Marshall, 61; Kruse, "Price," 261; Sandnes, *Paul*, 198; Barclay, "Conflict," 513; and Williams, 36.

⁵⁹It is possible that Paul is responding to accusations made against him in 2:17-20 as well. In this pericope Paul thinks it necessary to emphasize emphatically that he misses the Thessalonians desperately and that he had attempted repeatedly to return to them but had been hindered by Satan. Perhaps it had been suggested when Paul had failed to return to Thessalonica that he truly did not care about his converts after all.

⁶⁰Schmithals, *Gnostics*, 123-218.

statements in 1:2-2:12; 4:3-8; 4:9-12; and 5:12-14. The vast majority of scholars have rightly rejected this exotic theory.⁶¹ In addition to the fact that Schmithals' conception of a fully developed Gnosticism in the first century CE is highly unlikely,⁶² there is not a trace of evidence in 1 Thessalonians that Christian interlopers had invaded the congregation (cf. Galatians, 2 Corinthians 10-13, and Philippians 3).⁶³

Another line of interpretation suggests that Paul was seeking in 1 Thess 2:1-12 to counter opposition which had arisen within the congregation. Interpreters such as Wilhelm Lütgert ("Vollkommenen") and Robert Jewett (*Correspondence*) have labeled these Pauline dissidents as "spiritual enthusiasts" and as "millenarian radicals" respectively. Karl P. Donfried likewise stands convinced that Paul's apology in 1 Thess 2:1-12 "is in response to criticisms received from that Christian community."⁶⁴ Whereas Lütgert and Jewett are convinced that Paul is combating theological problems among his converts, Donfried thinks that Paul is contending with congregational criticism which had arisen as a result of the Christians' continued affliction and prolonged separation from Paul. A detailed discussion of these three scholarly positions is not necessary here. I will note, however, some general points which lead me to disagree with the idea that Paul is responding to internal opposition in 2:1-12 (see also chapter eleven).

⁶¹The one exception of whom I am aware is Harnisch, *Eschatologische Existenz*.

⁶²So Marshall, 18.

⁶³Also noted by Wanamaker, 54.

⁶⁴Donfried, "Cults," 351.

First of all, the tone of 1 Thessalonians is that of affirmation, not correction (see e. g., 2:20; 4:1, 9; 5:11). Secondly, it is not likely that Paul would have referred to the church as an exemplary assembly (τύπος, 1:6; cf. 2 Thess 1:4) if they were critical of him and his ministry!⁶⁵ Thirdly, there is no explicit talk in the letter of divisions within the congregation (contrast e. g., 1 Cor 3:3; Phil 2:1-4; 4:2). When Paul wrote the epistle, Timothy had just returned to him from Thessalonica. Upon his return Timothy indicated to Paul that the Thessalonians "remember[ed] [them] kindly and long[ed] to see [them]" (3:6). This does not sound like a relationship in tension. While there was, of course, potential for strained relations between Paul and the Thessalonians, nothing in 1 Thessalonians leads me to conclude that Paul was countering criticism from his converts in the letter.

My contention, then, is that Paul crafted 1 Thess 2:1-12 in response to verbal abuse that he had received/was receiving from non-Christians in Thessalonica. In all likelihood Timothy reported to Paul that the slander which he and his co-worker(s) had experienced from unbelievers during their sojourn in Thessalonica was continuing and perhaps even escalating. Though 1 Thessalonians was intended for Christian consumption (5:27), Paul probably thought it prudent to remind his converts (2:1, 2, 5, 9 11) of the apostles' upright character among them and of their continued concern for them lest they be swayed by contrary non-Christian opinion.

Can we be more precise still with regard to the source of the slander? Not a few interpreters have held that Paul's apology is in response to accusations that some Thessalonian Jews had made

⁶⁵Contrast 1 Cor 3:1-3 where Paul contends that the Corinthians are babes in Christ and still of the flesh.

against him.⁶⁶ In support of this position exegetes have appealed to the Septuagintal (as opposed to the philosophical) background of Paul's vocabulary in 2:1, 3 (particularly the terms κενός, παράκλησις, πλάνη, ἀκάθαρτος, δόλος)⁶⁷ and to the opposition of Thessalonian Jewry alluded to by Paul in 2:14-16.⁶⁸ While in agreement with those scholars who seek to understand Paul's apology against primarily a Jewish backdrop, I would hasten to note that the particular vocabulary Paul employed in his defense may have been his own mode of expression and not actual charges brought against him by his Jewish opponents in Thessalonica. Nevertheless, it is possible that the accusations which Paul seeks to deny in 2:3-6 would be similar to those brought against him by his fellow Jews in that city and elsewhere.⁶⁹

I have argued above that Paul was opposed by some Thessalonian Jews when they banished him from the city. It makes good sense to conclude that some of these same Jews would also have sought to undermine his mission both during and after his stay in Thessalonica by maligning him. In all likelihood, however, Paul would have also encountered Gentile criticism as well. As we will see in chapter nine, the Thessalonian congregation was comprised of those who had abandoned idols and turned to God, i. e., Gentiles (1:9). In light of the congregation's composition, it is quite conceivable that Paul would have have experienced Gentile

⁶⁶E. g., Denney, 70; Frame, 90; Williams, 36; and Holtz, 94.

⁶⁷See esp. Horbury, "I Thessalonians ii.3." Cf. Sandnes, *Paul*, 199-211; Denis, "L'Apôtre Paul"; and Henneken, *Verkündigung*.

⁶⁸So Horbury, "I Thessalonians ii.3," 493; and Denny, 70.

⁶⁹Cf. also Acts 21:28 and 24:5 for the types of charges brought against Paul by his compatriots.

opposition as well. But why would some Jews and Gentiles have spoken ill of Paul at all?

The charges may have been mounted in an attempt to explain (away) the success that he had experienced while in Thessalonica. Although we have no way of knowing how many people responded positively to Paul's gospel,⁷⁰ one gets the impression that the church at Thessalonica was a vital congregation (1:5-10; 2:13; cf. 2 Thess 3:1; Acts 17:4), despite its experience of severe affliction and the loss of some of its membership to death (4:13). One way Paul's detractors could have accounted for the accomplishments of Paul in Thessalonica would have been to accuse him of crafting a message designed to please people (ἄνθρωποις ἀρέσκοντες) and of presenting this message in an enticing way (ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας). Although Paul was no silver-tongued orator in the estimation of his Corinthian opponents (2 Cor 10:10), his presentation was apparently convincing enough to win over some people and to incite unfavorable criticism from others.

An attempt on the part of outsiders to undercut the Thessalonian Christians' claim that they had found the truth is another reason that Paul could have been criticized. Non-Christians in Thessalonica might have reasoned that if they could defame the messenger and thereby lessen his converts' admiration for him (3:6), then they might also be able to discredit the message and even put an end to the cult altogether.⁷¹ Seeking to discredit

⁷⁰Hill (*Establishing*, 247-248) figures that the church numbered thirty to seventy-five. Craig S. de Vos, a PhD student at Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia, is arguing in his forthcoming doctoral thesis that the Thessalonian assembly was comprised of ten to twenty members. In truth, there is no way of knowing the congregation's numerical size.

⁷¹Holtz (94) writes, "Denn mit dem Boten steht und fällt die Botschaft."

leaders with the intention of altering the opinions of followers was a common mode of operation in antiquity (and remains so today).

A careful reading of Galatians and 2 Corinthians suggests that this was precisely what was happening to Paul in Galatia and Corinth. Paul's Christian opponents attempted to undermine Paul's message by maligning him. Similarly, the Matthean Jesus remarks, "If they [i. e., outsiders, particularly Jews] called the master of the house Beelzebul [see Matt 9:34; 12:27], how much more will they malign those of his household" (Matt 10:25b). Regardless of the precise *Sitz im Leben* of this statement, it is clear that non-believers sought to unsettle believers by slandering Jesus. We should probably understand Matt 11:19 in a similar way, where Jesus is described as "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (φάγος καὶ οἰνοπότης, τελωνῶν φίλος καὶ ἁμαρτωλῶν).

Such a slanderous strategy was also utilized by Gentiles against Jews in antiquity. Josephus writes that

Apollonius Molo [first century BCE] and Lysimachus [first or second century BCE?] and some others, partly through ignorance but mainly through malevolence, have made statements about our lawgiver Moses and his laws which are neither just nor true, slandering the former as a charlatan and cheat and alleging that the laws have instructed us in vice and not in any virtue (c. *Ap.* 2.145).⁷²

These parallels support my argument that Paul's apology in 2:1-12 is best understood as a response to his being verbally abused by Jews and Gentiles in Thessalonica. It is likely that Paul's non-Christian opponents asserted that he was a slick-talking, money-hungry, glory-seeking charlatan who peddled a second-rate message which could not be trusted. Such slander was probably an

⁷²Trans. Whittaker, *Jews and Christians*, 60.

attempt on the part of unbelievers to explain away the success of Paul's Thessalonian mission and to undercut his converts' confidence in him and in the Lord.⁷³

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued from various texts in 1 Thessalonians 2 that Paul experienced considerable opposition from non-Christians both during and after his Thessalonian mission. Furthermore, on the grounds of 2:15b, 16a, 17a, I have demonstrated that Paul encountered conflict with some Thessalonian Jews. In fact, Paul maintains that he and his co-worker(s) were driven out of the city by some Jews (2:15b) and were thereby prematurely torn away from the Thessalonian congregation (2:17b). Paul understood this particular episode of Jewish opposition, as well as some of the other conflicts which he had experienced/was experiencing with his compatriots, as a hindrance to his preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (2:16a).

Unfortunately, Paul does not indicate how Thessalonian Jewry sought to hinder him nor how they actually expelled him from the city. However else some Jews in Thessalonica tried to oppose Paul, the Pauline apology in 2:1-12 suggests that slander was one way they (and unbelieving Gentiles) sought to harm Paul. In all likelihood, then, Paul experienced at least verbal harassment and possibly physical violence from non-Christian outsiders (Jews in particular) during his Thessalonian mission and continued to be maligned after his forced departure.⁷⁴

⁷³Note well the grave concern expressed by Paul for his converts' faith in 3:1-10.

⁷⁴From all appearances, Paul was thoroughly deviantized by his opponents. Some Jewish outsiders seemingly considered Paul to be a threat to the stability and integrity of their community, and some Gentile unbelievers seemingly thought that Paul's presence was having a negative effect on the city of Thessalonica and its inhabitants. (As to why, see chapters seven and ten below). Accordingly, Paul's detractors apparently attacked his credibility in an

Lastly, I would note that the conclusions arrived at in this chapter are based upon my exegesis of portions of 1 Thessalonians 2. It may now be observed, however, that there is a direct correlation between Paul's remarks and Luke's narrative (Acts 17:1-10a) concerning who forced Paul and Silas to leave Thessalonica. Even if one is loath to accept as historical Luke's depiction of how the missionaries' expulsion took place, it is probable, especially in light of the corroborating evidence in 1 Thessalonians 2, that Acts is correct in reporting that Paul and Silas were objects of Jewish opposition and that Jewish hostility cut short their stay in the city. Acts 17:1-10a, then, provides a commentary, albeit a tendentious one at points, on Paul's cryptic comments about being "banished," "hindered," and "orphaned" at the hands of some Thessalonian Jews. Conflict with his fellow Jews was seemingly a common experience for Paul. In the following chapter I will explore why this was the case.

effort to undermine his ministry. From the perspective of the non-Christians opponents of Paul, his forced exit from the city signaled that their stigmatization and degradation of the apostle was successful.

Chapter Seven

Why Did Some Jews Oppose Paul?

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that the Jew who considered himself to be an apostle to the Gentiles (see e. g., 1 Thess 2:16; Gal 2:8-9; Rom 15:16) experienced opposition from some Thessalonian Jews both during and after his founding of the Thessalonian church. Paul's cryptic comments about his disharmonious relations with Thessalonian Jewry, however, provide us with few details as to how and why he was hindered.¹ Piecing together the specifics found in 1 Thessalonians, I concluded that Paul was verbally harassed and physically banished from the city by some Thessalonian Jews. Concerning why the conflict with Jews in Thessalonica occurred, Paul is silent.² However, even if Paul had explicitly stated why he was opposed, the discussion of social theory above has alerted us to the perspectival nature of social interaction (see esp. pp. 84; 86-88; 103-104). And given the

¹This is typical of Paul. Although he often speaks in his extant letters of having suffered and of having been opposed, afflicted, and persecuted (e. g., 1 Cor 4:9-13; 15:32; 16:9; 2 Cor 1:3-11; 4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:23-29; 12:10a), he seldom elaborates upon the source of, the nature of, and the reasons for his conflict. Despite Paul's tendency to speak of his suffering in generalities, however, there is no good reason, as we will see below, to dismiss all such statements as a product of Pauline paranoia.

²In Acts 17:5 Luke maintains that the Jews resisted Paul because they were jealous of his missionary success. In chapter three above I concluded that jealousy may well have been a reason for the Jewish opposition of Paul. I would reiterate here (but will not in the text which follows) that it makes good sense to think that Thessalonian Jews could have been "envious" (or from the Jewish perspective "zealous") of Paul's poaching people from their synagogue, particularly if Luke is correct in maintaining that Paul experienced some success among Gentiles in the synagogue. Nevertheless, Jewish "jealousy" of Paul's missionary success is a partial explanation at best and fails to capture the complexities of Paul's conflict with his own people.

In 1 Thess 2:16 Paul does comment on what he considers to be one of the practical outcomes of his conflict with his compatriots (including Thessalonian Jews). Paul thinks Jewish opposition of him and his mission keeps Gentiles from being saved.

relativity of social reality, one should be loath to arrive at definitive conclusions as to why events transpire based upon any one party's perception of a given situation. Nevertheless, a subjective Pauline view would certainly be an advance on what we presently possess!

Since Paul does not suggest why Thessalonian Jews opposed him in 1 (or 2) Thessalonians, one must turn to other literature (including Paul's other extant letters) for clues. My working presupposition in this chapter is that it is possible that those issues which created controversy between Jews in other social-historical contexts could shed light on why Paul came into conflict with Jews in Thessalonica.³ Although the literary parallels I will treat here cannot provide a definitive answer as to why Paul experienced conflict with some Thessalonian Jews, at the very least this chapter will highlight the kinds of activities and attitudes that provoked disagreement among Jews in antiquity.⁴

³This is not to suggest, of course, that the reasons for conflict would be precisely the same in any two particular settings. Jewett ("Matrix," 67) maintains that when Paul wrote the Thessalonian letters "the obligation to obey the Torah still remains intact, and it appears perfectly consistent that no hint of an antithesis between law and gospel is given." If Jewett's contention is correct, then it is not likely that the reasons for Jewish opposition of Paul which come to light in Galatians (i. e., Paul's stance on circumcision and dietary laws) are applicable to Paul's conflict with Thessalonian Jewry. It is more likely, however, that Paul already detected a tension between Law and gospel by the time he wrote the Thessalonian epistles and that his thought and practice were already shaped by such an understanding. See e. g., Donaldson, "Zealot."

Paul's pre-Christian persecution of the church suggests that he detected some significant differences between Torah and Christ prior to his conversion (see further below). And it stands to reason that other Jews, perhaps even those in Thessalonica, could have arrived at similar conclusions and participated in the opposition of Paul because of perceived breeches of Torah before the "Judaizer" crisis arose. (I am assuming with most scholars that 1 Thessalonians was written prior to Galatians. If Galatians was the first letter that Paul wrote, as some interpreters contend, then one may be even more confident that Paul saw the Law and his gospel as incompatible prior to his sojourn in Thessalonica).

⁴Sanders ("Paul," 86) comments, "One would like to understand better just what it was about the Christian movement which some Jews found offensive enough to require punishment." One aim of this chapter is to further our understanding along these lines.

I will begin by noting from selected Hellenistic-Jewish writings some reasons that particular Diaspora Jews were looked at askance and even as "outsiders" or "apostates."⁵ In the second section of this chapter I will inquire as to why Paul persecuted the church prior to his conversion. The final portion of this chapter is devoted to the interpretation of texts (except those which have already been treated in chapters three and six) indicating conflict between Paul and his fellow Jews. After having considered some of the causes of discord between different stamps of Jews in antiquity, I will offer some concluding remarks on Paul's troubled relations with his compatriots.

Before commencing, it merits mentioning at this point that the ensuing discussion is informed by insights drawn from the social-scientific study of deviance and conflict (see chapters four and five above). The following theoretical principles will be particularly pertinent to the remarks made here: 1. Behaviors and beliefs are learned through social interaction and intimate association with others (see differential association theory, pp. 75-78). 2. Strong ties to a given community enhance the probability of conformity to that particular group's norms (see social control theory, pp. 78-80). 3. When an individual fails to comply with a community's conventions, at some times and in some places such a person may be perceived as and treated as deviant by some influential people within the group (see labeling theory, pp. 80-84). 4. When a community's boundaries are threatened by deviant behavior and/or belief, those who are keen to preserve and to

⁵In his study ("Apostate") of "apostasy" among Diaspora Jews, Barclay refers to and comments upon many of the Hellenistic-Jewish texts which I will treat below. I have chosen to concentrate on Hellenistic-Jewish texts here because they provide the closest parallels possible to the situation in Thessalonica and to other places in the Diaspora where Paul was seemingly opposed by his Jewish compatriots.

protect a group's *ethos* may seek to condemn, control, and/or censure those who disregard the behavioral and/or ideological *status quo* (see pp. 82-83; 90). 5. Social conflict occurs when two (or more) parties disagree about what behaviors and beliefs are acceptable (pp. 102-104). 6. Social conflict is complex and is often multi-causal (pp. 106-108). And, 7. Particularly intense social conflicts may be unresolvable and may ultimately result in an irreparable breach between the involved parties (as noted on p. 108).

I. Passing Out of Judaism in the Diaspora

What kinds of actions and attitudes would have been judged as outside of the pale of Judaism in the Diaspora?⁶ In this section we will look at six things that Diaspora Jews did and/or thought which were considered by one or more Hellenistic-Jewish writers as unacceptable in Judaism.⁷ In this section, I will pay particular attention to remarks made by the authors of 3 and 4 Maccabees, Philo, and Josephus.

Abandoning Jewish ways

In our sources, the most common charge leveled against those Diaspora Jews thought to be apostate is the general accusation that they forsook the Jewish ancestral customs. At the outset of his work, the writer of 3 Maccabees (first century BCE) speaks of one Dositheus, the son of Drimylus, who foiled an

⁶On Diasporan Jews in general, see Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*; and Barclay, *Jews*.

⁷In his colossal work *Jew and Gentile*, Feldman gives terse treatment to the topic of "apostasy" from Judaism. In his brief section on the subject, he attempts to differentiate between "apostasy" and nonobservance of the commandments. As we will see, however, such a distinction is not always detectable in our sources. (In Feldman's opinion, "apostasy" from Judaism was not common. In fact, he maintains that the only two "apostates" from Judaism of whom we can be certain are Dositheos and Antiochus of Antioch). Cf. Smallwood, *Jews*, 204; 234, n. 59; 258; 281, n. 84; 359; 360, n. 16; 361-363; 378; 380-381; 385; 391; 473.

attempted assassination of Ptolemy IV Philopator, king of Egypt (221-204 BCE). Dositheus, who may be the same individual spoken of as the eponymous priest of Alexander and the deified Ptolemies (*CPJ* 1.127d, 127e; from 222 BCE), is depicted by the author of 3 Maccabees as "a Jew by birth who later renounced the law and was estranged from his ancestral traditions" (μεταβαλὼν τὰ νόμιμα καὶ τῶν πατρίων δογμάτων ἀπηλλοτριωμένος, 1:3). In the estimation of 3 Maccabees, Dositheus had rejected the Jewish way. Seemingly the author thought Dositheus's intimate association with Egyptian authorities (and deities) to be tantamount to apostasy.⁸

Philo (c. 15 BCE-45 CE) also emphasizes that maintaining the ancestral customs is an essential part of being Jewish. In *Jos.* 254, Philo reports that Joseph's father, Jacob, was both grateful for and fearful of his son's success in Egypt. As Philo would have it, Jacob was thankful to God for Joseph's safety and prosperity. Nevertheless, he was afraid that his young son, being surrounded by people who are blind towards the true God, being tempted by the lures of riches and renown, being separated from the support network of his family, and being cut off from good teaching would depart from his own customs and adopt foreign ones. In another place, Philo contrasts transformed Jewish proselytes with those Jews he depicts as "rebels of the holy laws" (τοὺς τῶν ἱερῶν νόμων ἀποστάντας) who have "sold their freedom" (ἐλευθερίαν πεπρακότας) for "delights of the belly and the organs below it" (*Virt.* 182). For Philo, such sensual rebellion flies in the face of divine instruction. One other passage from Philo, a text to which we will return below, merits mentioning at this point. In the course of his commentary on Moses's instruction on marriage, Philo maintains that Moses

⁸Barclay, "Apostate"; and Collins, *Athens and Jerusalem*, 20, n. 49.

commands that Israelites should not marry a person from another nation lest they succumb to opposing customs. Philo is particularly concerned that the sons and daughters of exogamous marriages will be enticed to set aside "genuine customs" for "spurious" ones (*Spec. Leg.* 3.29). In Philo's opinion, then, neglect of Jewish customs places one on a slippery road toward apostasy. In fact, one may reasonably conclude that Philo would regard as apostate those Jews who defied the holy laws and disregarded the Jewish way with no visible signs of repentance.⁹

Turning to Josephus (37/38-? CE), one discovers at least four instances of "apostasy" outside of Palestine, all of which involved the rejection of Jewish traditions and the adoption of Gentile ones.¹⁰ Antiochus of Antioch was one individual that Josephus thought to be apostate (see *B.J.* 7.46-53). Josephus indicates that hatred of the Jews was widespread at the outset of the Roman-Judean War (7.46-47). It was at precisely this point, according to

⁹So Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:75-76; and Seland, *Violence*, 95. Cf. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 80.

¹⁰So Barclay, "Apostate." Josephus also considered Menelaus and the sons of Tobias to be apostate on the same score. Josephus reports that these men "abandon[ed] the ancestral laws and the way of living according to them . . . to follow the king's [i. e., Antiochus IV Epiphanes' (ruled 175-164 BCE)] laws and adopt[ed] the Greek way of life" (τοὺς πατρίους νόμους καταλιπόντες καὶ τὴν κατ' αὐτοὺς πολιτείαν ἔπεσθαι τοῖς βασιλικοῖς καὶ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν πολιτείαν ἔχειν, *Ant.* 12.240; cf. 1 Macc 1:11). In reference to Menelaus and the sons of Tobias, Josephus reports that they petitioned Antiochus to build a gymnasium in Jerusalem. Once granted permission, Josephus maintains that they sought to cover up their circumcision "in order to be like Greeks even when unclothed." Then he adds that these deserters of Judaism were guilty of "giving up whatever other ancestral traditions they had" in order to imitate "the practices of foreign nations" (τά τε ἄλλα πάνθ' ὅσα ἦν αὐτοῖς πάτρια παρέντες ἐμμοῦντο τὰ τῶν ἁλλοεθνῶν ἔργα, 12.241).

In *Ant.* 4.100-115, Josephus records a story which further demonstrates the significance of the Jewish ancestral traditions in his eyes. He reports that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were charged of sedition and idolatry by the other tribes. In response to such accusations, Josephus has the representatives of the tribes under trial saying: "Have a better opinion of us and cease to accuse us of any of these crimes, for which all would justly deserve to be extirpated who, being the stock of Abraham, *embark on newfangled ways that are perversions of our customary practice*" (4.113, *italics added*).

Josephus, that Antiochus, a Jew who was highly regarded because his father served as the chief magistrate of the Jews in Antioch, came before a city assembly and accused his father and other Jews of plotting to set Antioch aflame (7.47). Furthermore, we are told that Antiochus offered proof of his conversion and of his detestation of Jewish customs by sacrificing according to Greek custom (περὶ μὲν τῆς αὐτοῦ μεταβολῆς καὶ τοῦ μεμισηκέναι τὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἔθνη τεκμήριον ἐμπαρέχειν οἰόμενος τὸ ἐπιθύειν ὥσπερ νόμος ἐστὶ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν) and by recommending to the Antiochenes that the rest of the Jews be compelled to do likewise (7.50-51). Additionally, Josephus reports that Antiochus gained the aid of Roman military troops to oppress further his people by abolishing the Sabbath rest (7.52-53). In Josephus's eyes, Antiochus's betrayal of his people, departure from Jewish customs, and conversion to Greek ways rendered him apostate.

In Josephus's perception, Tiberius Julius Alexander (born ca. 15 CE) was another individual who abandoned Judaism.¹¹ Alexander, the son of a devout, wealthy man who had once served as an alabarch in Alexandria (*Ant.* 20.100; see also 18.159-160, 259; 19.276-277) and the nephew of Philo, was extremely successful in Roman administration. Over the course of his career, Alexander held such posts as: procurator of Judea (ca. 46-48 CE; *Ant.* 20.100), army officer under Corbulo in Armenia (63 CE; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.28), governor of Egypt (66-69 CE; *B.J.* 2.309, 487-98; 4.616), and chief of the general staff of Titus at the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE (*B.J.* 5.45-46; 6.237). Although Alexander's administrative positions required him to honor Egyptian and Roman gods,¹² Josephus does not present him as an apostate in his

¹¹For a fuller treatment of Alexander, see Turner, "Alexander."

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Bellum, which was composed in the late 70s CE (see e. g., the laudatory remarks about Alexander in *B.J.* 2.220). In his *Antiquitates Iudaicae* (published 93 CE), however, Josephus judges that Tiberius Alexander was inferior to his father in "piety toward God" (πρὸς τὸν θεὸν εὐσεβεία) because he "did not abide by his ancestral practices" (τοῖς πατρίοις οὐκ ἐνέμεινεν οὗτος ἔθουσιν, *Ant.* 20.100). It seems clear enough that Josephus ultimately considered Tiberius Alexander to have renounced Judaism. Why did Josephus speak of Alexander's "apostasy" only in the *Antiquitates*? He probably thought it politically prudent not to offend a powerful Roman official during his lifetime. In all likelihood, Alexander was dead by the time Josephus wrote his *Antiquitates*.¹³

Josephus reports two other cases of "apostasy" which merit mentioning at this point. The first of which involves the children of another Alexander who had married a non-Jewish princess, Jotape (*Ant.* 18.138). According to Josephus, Alexander's offspring were apostates for they "abandoned from birth the observance of the customs of the Jews and changed over to the ways of the Greeks" (ἅμα τῷ φυῆναι τὴν θεραπείαν ἐξέλιπε τῶν Ἰουδαίοις ἐπιχωρίων μεταταξάμενοι πρὸς τὰ Ἑλλησι πάτρια). As in the cases of Antiochus and Tiberius Alexander, Josephus regards the children of Alexander, who adopted a Greek way of life, to be outside of Judaism. Another individual that Josephus presents as an apostate is the Jewish proselyte Polemo, the Cilician king. Polemo converted to Judaism (i. e., he got circumcised) in order to marry Berenice. Shortly thereafter, however, Berenice deserted Polemo. As a result, he was released from the marriage and from further adherence to

¹³As noted by Turner, "Alexander," 63.

the Jewish customs (τοῖς ἔθεσι τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐμμένειν ἀπῆλλακτο, *Ant.* 20.147; cf. *c. Ap.* 2.123).

The writer of 4 Maccabees (late first century CE [?]) is another author who understood as apostate those individuals who abandoned the Jewish customs for a Greek way of life. In an attempt to persuade his fellow Diaspora Jews to hold fast to their ancient traditions and to resist the temptation of assimilation, the author of 4 Maccabees showcases the self-control, courage, justice, and piety (5:23-24) of nine devout Jews (an aged priest named Eleazar, seven brothers, and their mother) who were tortured and martyred by Antiochus IV Epiphanes for their stubborn refusal to renounce Judaism. For the author of this pseudo-philosophical tract, faithful Jews (represented by the praiseworthy martyrs) must overcome the pressure "to deny the ancestral laws of [their] national life [ἀρνησάμενοι τὸν πάτριον ὑμῶν τῆς πολιτείας θεσμόν] . . . by adopting the Greek way of life and by changing [their] manner of life" (μεταλαμβάνοντες Ἑλληνικοῦ βίου καὶ μεταδιαιτηθέντες ἐντρυφήσατε ταῖς νεότησιν ὑμῶν, 8:7-8). As will be noted further below, in 4 Maccabees the litmus test of Jewish fidelity is the refusal to eat forbidden, defiling foods (1:33; 4:26), particularly pork and food sacrificed to idols (5:2).

Worshipping other gods

In addition to the general charge of abandoning Jewish ways, one finds in Hellenistic-Jewish writings the accusation of apostasy for more specific offenses. The worship of other gods (i. e., "idolatry") is one activity frequently understood by our sources to signal desertion of Judaism. In the historical novel 3 Maccabees, it is reported that Egyptian Jews were rounded up by the command of Ptolemy IV Philopator and pressured to offer sacrifice to Dionysus. Although the "majority acted firmly with a courageous spirit and

did not abandon their religion" (οἱ δὲ πλεῖστοι γενναία ψυχῇ ἐνίσχυσαν καὶ οὐ διέστησαν τῆς εὐσεβείας, 2:32), some 300 Jewish men "willfully transgressed against the holy God and the law of God" (7:10). For the author, a willingness to participate in the cult of Dionysus and thereby become citizens of Alexandria rendered these men "apostates." The writer of 3 Maccabees believed that those Jews who attained Alexandrian citizenship by worshipping Dionysus did so to gain a good reputation with the king (2:31) and to satisfy their stomachs (7:11). Those Jews who compromised themselves in such a way are, according to the author, to be detested, ostracized, and thought of as profane enemies of the Jewish nation (2:33; 7:15). The climax of 3 Maccabees is the destruction of these "defiled" people at the hands of their "holy" compatriots (7:10-15). The spirit of hostility which the author displays toward those Jews who in his view had jettisoned monotheism (and other things distinctly Jewish) by becoming Alexandrian citizens makes it clear whom and what he considered to be outside of Judaism.

In the course of their commentaries on the "seduction" of Israelite men by Midianite women (see Num 25:6-15), both Philo and Josephus seem to equate idolatrous worship with defection from Judaism. Philo comments on this story in three places: *Mos.* 1.295-305, *Spec. Leg.* 1.54-58, and *Virt.* 34-44. Philo viewed the young men of Israel who participated in the worship of Midianite gods in return for sexual pleasures as converts to paganism (*Mos.* 1.298). Furthermore, Philo thought the sacrifices and libations offered by the Israelites to foreign gods "estranged them from the service of the One, the truly existing God" (ἀλλοτριούσι τῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς καὶ ὄντως ὄντος θεραπείας θεοῦ, *Virt.* 40).¹⁴

¹⁴In his writings, Philo also instructs his readers to avoid involvement in the mysteries (*Spec. Leg.* 1.319-321) and to exercise extreme caution in joining

In his treatment of this story (*Ant.* 4.126-155), Josephus includes dramatized speeches of the Midianite women and of Zambrias. Josephus reports that the Midianite women told their Israelite suitors that if they wanted to live with them (and with the rest of the world for that matter!), then they needed to set aside their strange customs (i. e., eating and drinking in a particular way and worshipping a peculiar god). Josephus indicates that the Israelite youths succumbed to their demands. Not only did they accept the belief in multiple gods and sacrifice to them, but they also partook of foreign foods in order to please their Midianite lovers. Josephus depicts these men as transgressors of the ancient customs (παρέβησαν τὰ πάτρια, 4.139).

In the mouth of one "apostate," Zambrias, Josephus puts a scathing attack on the tyrannical rule of Moses (4.145-149). During his speech, Zambrias asserts his free will by flaunting the facts that he had married a foreign wife, Chosbia, and that he had offered sacrifice to her gods (4.149). For Josephus, Zambrias's devotion to Chosbia's religion and his neglect of the decrees of Moses placed him outside of Judaism (Ζαμβρίας . . . κελευσθεὶς ὑπὸ τῆς γυναικὸς πρὸ τῶν Μωυσεῖ δοχθέντων τὸ πρὸς ἡδονὴν αὐτῇ γενησόμενον ἐθεράπευεν, 4.141). It may be noted in passing that Antiochus of Antioch (see further above) was judged by Josephus as a deserter of Judaism partly because of his willingness to renounce Jewish customs and to convert to worshipping in a Greek manner (*B.J.* 7.50).

Disregarding dietary laws

For the writers of 3 and 4 Maccabees in particular, worshipping foreign gods and eating forbidden foods are closely

clubs and associations (*Ebr.* 20-21, 95). Seland (*Violence*, 96-97) notes that Philo viewed the mysteries and associations as inducements to apostasy.

correlated. In their thinking, faithful Jews were not to participate in such "base" activities. One of the reasons given by the author of 3 Maccabees for the "apostasy" of more than 300 men is their desire to satisfy their stomachs (7:11).¹⁵ This, of course, is a reference to the "apostates'" willingness to abandon Jewish food laws. In 4 Maccabees infidelity to Jewish dietary laws is synonymous with rejection of Judaism. Those who eat defiling foods are thought by this author to have renounced Judaism (4:26; 5:3). On the other hand, those Jews like Eleazar, the seven brothers, and their mother who remain faithful to the food laws are conceived of as models of Jewish piety.¹⁶

Philo and Josephus also comment upon the harmful effects of laxity toward the Jewish dietary laws. Unlike the authors of 3 and 4 Maccabees, neither Philo nor Josephus seems to regard a neglect of dietary laws as apostasy. Nevertheless, both authors appear to think that a compromised position on the food laws is characteristic of those who abandon Judaism. While contrasting "rebels from the holy laws" with proselytes, Philo remarks that the former "sold their freedom" for, among other things, food and drink (*Virt.* 182). Philo believes that enjoying such sensual pleasures ultimately inflicts severe injury both to body and to soul (ὧν τὰ τέλη βαρύνταται ζημίαι σώματός τε καὶ ψυχῆς εἰσι). For Philo, such behavior is harmful and paves a path leading away from Judaism. In his commentary on Numbers 25 (*Ant.* 4.126-55), Josephus mentions the willingness of the Israelite youths to set aside their

¹⁵As noted above, these men are also considered by the author as "enemies of the nation" (2:33) for participating in the Dionysiac cult and for pursuing Alexandrian citizenship (2:30).

¹⁶Wolfson (*Philo*, 1:75) rightly sees that in 4 Maccabees dietary laws "are treated as a symbol of any law for which a Jew is to give up his life if forced openly to violate it."

"peculiar" stance on food and drink at the request of the Midianite women (4.139). Josephus's narrative suggests that abandonment of dietary requirements played a role in their apostatizing process.

Perhaps one reason that our Hellenistic-Jewish sources stress fidelity to dietary laws is because of the functions that the food laws served in the life of the community.¹⁷ These laws not only erected a social boundary between Jews and non-Jews,¹⁸ but they helped to provide the Jewish people with a distinct social identity. Despite the fact that the Jewish dietary laws were often misconstrued by Gentile outsiders (e. g., Strabo, *Geographica* 16.2; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.4), these laws served to strengthen the solidarity of Jewish communities living in the Diaspora. A general reluctance to marry foreigners seems to have operated in a similar way. To this topic we now turn.

Marrying other peoples

Although the Mosaic law only specifically prohibits Israelites from marrying certain Gentile nations (Exod 34:16; Deut 7:3-4; 23:3; cf. Josh 9:3-27; 11:19; Judg 3:5-6; Ezra 9:1-2; Neh 10:30), Philo and Josephus make this particular Pentateuchal prohibition a general ordinance forbidding exogamy.¹⁹ Philo maintains that

¹⁷See further Esler, *Community*, 71-109. See also the discussion on community boundaries in chapter four above.

¹⁸So Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:74.

¹⁹While some Jewish writings take a "hard line" against intermarriage (see e. g., *Jub* 30.7, 14-17; Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9.5; 18:13-14; 21:1; 30:1; 44:7; 45:3; Tob 4:12), others display a more liberal attitude (see e. g., *Ruth*, *Joseph and Aseneth*). The writer of *Joseph and Aseneth* seemingly advocates conversion of Gentiles to Judaism prior to marriage. Cf. also Josephus, *Ant.* 20.139.

Though exogamy was probably not widespread, it did occur. In addition to the examples given below, note Acts 16:1 where Luke reports that Timothy's mother, a Christian Jew, was married to a Greek man. Furthermore, Acts indicates that Timothy was uncircumcised (16:3). This marital relationship between a Jewish woman and a Gentile man is a prime example of why many Jews denounced intermarriage. Timothy's mother failed to observe the Jewish custom by not having her son circumcised.

Moses says "do not enter into the partnership of marriage with a member of a foreign nation" (*Spec. Leg.* 3.29), and Josephus suggests that Moses "forbade marriage with persons of other races" (*Ant.* 8.191-192). Although neither Philo nor Josephus states that exogamy is apostasy *per se*, they were both aware (and afraid) that intermarriage would lead Jewish spouses and/or their progeny away from their customs and ultimately from their God.²⁰

Philo suggests that Moses prohibited intermarriage because the customs of other nations conflict with those of the Jews and cause one to turn aside from the pious path. Philo also comments that even if a Jew who intermarries is able to stand firm in Judaism, it is probable that his/her children will prefer the "spurious customs" and will "unlearn the honor due to the one God" (*Spec. Leg.* 3.29). Elsewhere Philo illustrates the perils of exogamy on the offspring. He tells of a man whose mother, a Jewess, married an Egyptian. Philo reports that this "base-born" man chose the "atheism" of the Egyptian father over the "ancient customs" of his Jewish mother (*Mos.* 2.193).

In the course of his commentary on Solomon and women, Josephus reports that in an attempt to gratify his foreign wives and his passion for them Solomon discarded his customs and worshipped their gods. Josephus suggests that Moses forbade intermarriage because he knew that it would lead to the observance of foreign customs and the worship of other gods (*Ant.* 7.192).²¹

²⁰Seland (*Violence*, 95) maintains, "Philo condemns [intermarriage], explicitly pointing to the inherent danger of apostasy."

²¹See similarly Josephus' comments on the Midianite apostasy, *Ant.* 4.126-155, esp. 4.139-140.

Josephus further illustrates the folly of exogamy in his story of two Jewish brothers, Asineus and Anileus (*Ant.* 18.310-379). According to Josephus, this pair of brothers had gained control over the whole of Mesopotamia. At the peak of their power, however, things began to deteriorate. Anileus decides to marry a foreign woman. Shortly thereafter, she begins to worship openly her household gods. Despite warnings from friends and family, Anileus continues to associate with this woman, who, in Josephus's view, was ultimately responsible for his political downfall and his death. For Josephus, exogamous relations are a transgression of Jewish law, and intermarriage can debilitate, and even destroy, the strongest of Diaspora Jews. In Philo's view, as we will now see, the quest of some Alexandrian Jews for wealth had equally ruinous consequences.²²

Seeking financial prosperity

Philo suggests that although Moses was seated in the lap of Egyptian luxury, he regarded riches as "spurious" and "was zealous for the discipline and culture of his kin and ancestors" (τὴν συγγενικὴν καὶ προγονικὴν ἐξήλωσε παιδείαν, *Mos.* 1.32). Contrariwise, Philo speaks of some Jews in Alexandria who had experienced some degree of financial success and had grown insolent as a result. Philo reports that these people

look down on their relations and friends and transgress the laws [νόμους δὲ παραβαίνουσι] under which they were born and bred and subvert the ancestral customs, to which no blame can be justly attached, by changing their mode of life, and in their contentment with the present, lose all memory of the past [κινουῦσιν ἐκδεδιητημένοι καὶ διὰ τὴν τῶν παρόντων ἀποδοχὴν οὐδενὸς ἔτι τῶν ἀρχαίων μνήμην λαμβάνουσιν, 1.31].

²²In his commentary on Israel after Joshua's death, Josephus also comments upon the potentially negative effects that material prosperity can have on spiritual fidelity (*Ant.* 5.132).

For Philo, these fortune seekers had passed out of Judaism. As Harry A. Wolfson remarks, "To adopt different modes of life and to lose all memory of the past naturally means to become completely severed from the body Israel."²³

Before considering one final reason for which Diaspora Jews were thought of as deserters of Judaism, the close correlation of the items treated above should be noted. Reverence for and adherence to the ancient customs was part of what it meant to be Jewish.²⁴ Observance of dietary laws and endogamy were two Jewish practices in particular which helped to distinguish and to establish the Jews among other peoples. The Hellenistic-Jewish authors being read suggest (albeit in distinct ways) that Jews should be (exceedingly) wary of joining in with the Gentile majority in eating, drinking, and marriage. These writers think it wise to hold fast to their customs and to exercise caution in fraternizing with Gentiles so that they might remain loyal to and holy before the only true God.²⁵

The Alexandrian Jew who wrote *The Letter of Aristeas* (c. 150-100 BCE) explicitly indicates such:

²³Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:78. Contrast Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 81.

²⁴On group norms, see pp. 87-88.

²⁵Sanders ("Association," 180) rightly notes, "Monotheism is what led to [Jewish] separatism." So similarly Boccaccini, *Judaism*, 252. Social control theory (pp. 78-80) contends that conformity to a community's norms is achieved through social bonding and that bonding is accomplished through attachment to conventional people, commitment to agreed-upon conventions, involvement in norm-conforming activities, and belief in conventional ways. Differential association theory (pp. 75-78; see also p. 89) suggests that all behavior, conventional and otherwise, is learned through socialization. Though in other words, the Hellenistic-Jewish authors we have just discussed emphasize the importance of bonding to and being socialized in the Jewish way. Philo, Josephus, and the authors of 3 and 4 Maccabees (see text above) depict those people who have jettisoned those things which they (i. e., the writers) regard as distinctly Jewish as having turned, or even fallen, away from (their versions of) Judaism.

In his wisdom the legislator [i. e., Moses] . . . surrounded us with unbreakable palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter, being thus kept pure in body and soul, preserved from false beliefs, and worshiping the only God omnipotent over all creation (139-140).

A survey of our sources thus far, then, suggests that those Jews who "affronted" the greatness and glory of Yahweh by failing to observe God-given customs (particularly those instructions concerning worship, diet, and marriage) were frequently considered outsiders.²⁶ There is one other category of Jewish "detractor" yet to consider: the critics of the Jewish Scriptures.

Criticizing the Scriptures

On a few occasions in his writings Philo indulges in polemic against those people he depicts as "malicious critics" (κακοτεχνούντες, *Agr.* 157) of the Law. In all likelihood, Philo has such Scripture-critics in mind when he speaks: of those "wretches" who "ridicule" the story of God making garments of skin for Adam and the woman (*Quaest. Gen.* 1.53; cf. Gen 3); of those "not belonging to the divine chorus" who "mock" at the story of God's changing the name of Abram to Abraham (*Quaest. Gen.* 3.43; cf. Gen 17); of those "impious scoffers" who seek to devalue the story of Abraham's offering of Issac (*Abr.* 178-193; cf. Gen 22) and the story of Babel (*Conf.* 2-13; cf. Gen 11) by comparing them to Greek myths; and of those "uncultivated," "uneducated," "stupid," and "perverse" people who deride the story of the pottage sold by Jacob to Esau (*Quaest. Gen.* 4.168; cf. Gen 25).

In his repeated invective against these people, Philo fails to disclose their identity or arguments. It is likely, however, that

²⁶Labeling theory (pp. 80-84) propounds that those who fail to comply with a community's customs run the risk of being viewed as a threat and treated as a deviant.

these critics were "well-educated Jews whose attitude to their Scriptures was less adulatory than that of Philo."²⁷ From all indications, Philo had little affinity with or tolerance for these innovative antagonists who "reject[ed] the sacred writings and talk[ed] nonsense about them" (*Quaest. Gen.* 2.2). In fact, Philo would have viewed those "who cherish[ed] a dislike of the ancestral constitution and ma[d]e it their constant study to denounce and decry the Laws" (*Conf.* 2) as outside of Judaism.²⁸

Having considered in some detail the actions and attitudes of Diaspora Jews which were judged by various Hellenistic-Jewish writers as leading to or constituting apostasy, I will now examine Paul's persecution of Christians prior to his conversion. By considering Paul's pre-Christian persecutory activity, additional insight may be gained as to why some Jews opposed Paul.

II. Paul's Pre-Christian Persecution of the Church

Prior to his experience on the Damascus road, Paul, by his own admission, "persecuted (ἐδίωξα) the church of God" (1 Cor 15:9; cf. Gal 1:13-14, 23; Phil 3:6; 1 Tim 1:13; Acts 8:3; 9:1, 21; 22:4, 19; 26:10-11).²⁹ And based upon what Paul says in Gal 1:22-23, the story of his conversion from a persecutor of the church to a proclaimer of faith in Christ circulated widely among early believers, at least among the Christian churches in Judea. Although where and how Paul carried out his pre-Christian persecutory activity has generated a good deal of interest and

²⁷Barclay, "Apostate."

²⁸So also Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:83-84.

²⁹It is often suggested that Acts bungles and exaggerates some of the specifics of Paul's persecutory activity. Even if one is loath to accept some of the specifics of Acts' record of Paul's persecutions (e. g., the location of Paul's persecutions, Paul's association with the stoning of Stephen, the way Acts depicts Paul opposing Christians), at the very least Acts reinforces Paul's claim that he used to oppose Christians prior to his conversion.

debate among NT scholars,³⁰ for our purposes here we need not consider these intriguing issues.³¹ Rather, my aim in this section is to discover why Paul "tried to destroy" (πορθεῖν)³² the church prior to his revelatory encounter with Jesus Christ.

Although Paul does not specifically indicate in his extant letters what prompted him to oppose Christians, on two separate occasions he links his persecution of the church with his zeal for things Jewish (Gal 1:14; Phil 3:6; cf. Acts 22:3-4). This correlation between zeal and persecution suggests that at least in retrospect Paul believed that it was fervor for his ancestral customs, particularly the Law and its interpretation in Pharasaic oral tradition, that led him to oppose believers in Jesus.³³ As discussed above, faithful observance of time-honored traditions was a part of being Jewish, and those who failed to keep the ancestral customs were frequently thought of and treated as deviants. Paul maintains that in his "former life in Judaism" he was "extremely zealous" in his keeping of the customs (Gal 1:13-14).³⁴ And looking back, Paul

³⁰See e. g., Hultgren, "Persecutions"; Légasse, "Pre-Christian Career," 379-389; and Hengel, *Pre-Christian Paul*, 63-86.

³¹In passing I would note that Paul probably carried out the majority of his persecutions in Judea, particularly in and around Jerusalem, and that for the most part he employed the means of punishment which were at his disposal through the synagogue, namely, the thirty-nine stripes and ostracism. I would not dismiss out of hand, however, that Paul also participated in the incarceration of Christians and in mob action against Christians. So similarly, Légasse, "Pre-Christian Career," 385-386.

³²I take ἐπόρθουν as a conative imperfect in both Gal 1:13 and 1:23. On the translation and meaning of this term, see P. H. Menoud, "πορθεῖν." In this article, Menoud seeks to argue that Paul attacked the church, not Christians. So similarly Hultgren, "Persecutions," 108-110. To my mind, this is a false distinction. See further Hengel, *Pre-Christian Paul*, 71-72; and Légasse, "Pre-Christian Career," 381-385.

³³So similarly, Dupont, "Conversion," 183-187; Légasse, "Pre-Christian Career," 383-384; Kim, *Origin*, 41-46; Setzer, *Responses*, 10; 13; and Lührmann, *Galatians*, 28.

³⁴In fact, in Phil 3:6b Paul reports that he was blameless as to righteousness under the Law.

thinks of his persecution of the church as an example of this zeal.³⁵

By claiming to be a "zealot," Paul was not, of course, identifying himself with the anti-Roman revolutionary group known as the Zealots.³⁶ Rather, the proper background against which to view Paul's statements about zeal is the long line of zealotism in Jewish tradition.³⁷ For the love of Yahweh and Torah, Jewish zealots violently opposed people (usually fellow Jews!) whom they perceived to threaten the boundaries of the community lest the purity and identity of Israel be undermined.³⁸ Even though only certain people are highlighted in extant Jewish literature as zealots for Yahweh,³⁹ there is good reason to believe that the ideal of zeal

³⁵After his conversion, Paul would have deemed such zeal as unenlightened (1 Cor 15:9; cf. Rom 10:2).

³⁶So rightly Rhoads, "Zealots," 1045. In fact, it is doubtful that such a group even existed in Paul's lifetime. Although many scholars have linked the so-called "fourth philosophy" started by Judas of Galilee in 6 CE with the Zealots (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.9; cf. *B.J.* 2.118; see e. g., Hengel, *Zealots*), the present scholarly consensus suggests that the Zealots were only one of several anti-Roman revolutionary factions which arose in Jerusalem during the Roman-Judean War in 66-70 CE (see e. g., Donaldson, "Bandits").

³⁷So rightly Donaldson, "Zealot," 672.

³⁸Rhoads ("Zealots," 1044) defines zeal as "behavior motivated by the jealous desire to protect one's self, group, space, or time against violations." He adds that "In the biblical tradition, human acts of zeal punished idolatrous violations of God's right to exclusive allegiance from Israel." Communities that have clearly defined boundaries can react rather forcefully against those who deviate from the accepted norms. See further Coser, *Functions*, 67-73; 95-104.

³⁹Phinehas, the OT character who slew Zimri, the Israelite, and Cozbi, his Midianite woman companion (Num 25), is usually considered to be the prototype of zeal for Yahweh (cf. Ps 106:31; Sir 45:23-24; 1 Macc 2:26, 54; 4 Macc 18:12a; Philo, *Mos.* 1.301-305; *Spec. Leg.* 1.56-58; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.153-155). Other zealots who are celebrated in Jewish literature include: Simeon and Levi, who slew the men of Shechem for raping their sister Dinah (Gen 34:1-31; on Simeon: cf. Jdt 9:2-4; on Levi: cf. *Jub.* 30:19; *T. Levi* 6:3; *T. Ash.* 4:2-5); Moses, who disposed of the immoral Israelites at Baal-peor (Num 25:1-5); Elijah, who killed the prophets of Baal at the brook Kishon (1 Kgs 18:40; cf. Sir 48:1-2); Jehu, who slaughtered Baal worshippers in Israel (2 Kgs 10:16-27); and Josiah, who turned Israel back to God (2 Kgs 22:1-23:30; 2 *Bar* 66:5). Zeal for the Law was especially pronounced during the Maccabean period. The author of 1 Maccabees presents the revolutionary activity of Mattathias and his cohorts

was pervasive throughout ancient Judaism.⁴⁰ For instance, Acts records James as saying to Paul in Jerusalem that there are thousands among the Jews who have believed who are "zealous for the law" (ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου, 21:20). And Paul is recorded in Acts as saying to a group of Jews gathered at the Temple that he was once zealous for God even as they themselves still were (ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τοῦ θεοῦ καθὼς πάντες ὑμεῖς ἐστε σήμερον, 22:3). Philo contends that those Jews who speak falsely in God's name should and would be swiftly and severely punished "for there are thousands who are watchful, full of zeal for the laws [ζηλωταὶ νόμων], strictest guardians of the ancestral institutions [φύλακες τῶν πατρίων ἀκριβέστατοι], merciless to those who do anything to subvert them" (*Spec. Leg.* 2.253; cf. 1QS 9:23; *m. Sanh.* 9:6). Prior to his conversion and subsequent mission to the Gentiles, Paul was one of the thousands of zealous custodians of the Jewish customs.

If Paul's persecutory activity was spurred on by his zeal for his Jewish ancestral traditions, as he himself indicates, then it stands to reason that those people whom Paul persecuted were behaving and/or believing in some manner which Paul perceived to be incompatible with his understanding of the Law.⁴¹ To be sure, scholars have sought to pinpoint who⁴² and what⁴³ incited Paul's

against the Syrians as something which was prompted by zeal for the Law and the covenant (2:27, 50).

⁴⁰On the pervasiveness of zealotism in ancient Judaism, see esp. Dobschütz, *Paulus*; and Seland, *Violence*. One Jewish writer is concerned that zeal not be used as an excuse for needless plunder (*Pss. Sol.* 2:27).

⁴¹So also Donaldson, "Zealot."

⁴²It is frequently suggested that Paul persecuted Hellenistic-Jewish Christians because of their supposed liberalism toward the Temple and Torah. See e. g., Kim, *Origin*, 44-50; Hengel, *Pre-Christian Paul*, 79-84; and Räisänen, "Conversion." This line of interpretation has been called into question by the work of Hill, *Hellenists*. Hill demonstrates that Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking Jews in Jerusalem shared more in common, both ideologically and sociologically, than has usually been imagined.

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zeal, but the paucity of evidence renders all such suggestions speculative.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it is clear that the pre-Christian Paul (violently) resisted fellow Jews that he deemed to be out of conformity with Torah.⁴⁵ Furthermore, consideration of multiple Hellenistic-Jewish texts in section one has alerted us to some of the potential points of friction between Diaspora Jews.⁴⁶ In an attempt to determine why Paul himself was opposed by his Jewish compatriots, some germane Pauline texts will now be considered. These texts will allow us to identify more precisely the sorts of

⁴³Proposed reasons for why Paul persecuted the church include: 1. The church's proclamation of a Messiah who was a condemned criminal and was crucified with the approval of an authoritative Jewish court. So e. g., Kim, *Origin*, 44-50; Hengel, *Pre-Christian Paul*, 79-84. In arguing for this view, scholars tend to appeal to 1 Cor 1:23; Gal 3:13 (Deut 21:3); 5:11; 6:12. This interpretation has been challenged by, among others, Tuckett, "Conversion"; and Fredriksen, "Paul," 11-13. 2. The Hellenistic-Jewish Christians' "liberal" stance *vis-à-vis* the Temple and Torah (for bibliography, see note directly above). On the centrality of the Temple in the early controversies between Jews and Christian Jews, see Bauckham, "Parting." For the view that the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah led some Christian Jews to reject parts of the Law, see Setzer, *Responses*, 12. 3. The veneration given to Jesus by believers with the related issue of monotheism. So Hurtado, *Monotheism*, 2; 122-123; 130, n. 4. 4. The claims that the Christians made about themselves as Jesus's disciples, i. e., that the Messiah had appeared to them. So Donaldson, "Zealot," 678-679. 5. The followers of Jesus use of the Hebrew Scriptures to support their beliefs and behavior. Thus Harvey, "Ways," 54. And, 6. Paul's belief that aggressive proclamation of the kingdom of God would be offensive to the Romans. See Fredriksen, *Origins*, 155-156.

⁴⁴It comes as no great surprise that Paul did not elaborate on his pre-Christian persecution of the church. In fact, based upon 1 Cor 15:9 we may infer that Paul deeply regretted his persecutory activity. See similarly, Becker, *Paul*, 67.

⁴⁵Prior to his conversion, Paul enthusiastically tried to protect and to preserve what he (and other zealous Jews) perceived to be the proper Jewish way. Sociologically speaking, the pre-Christian Paul was an agent of censure, a guardian of Jewish boundaries, who opposed (by means of formal and informal negative sanctions) those Jews who deviated from the time-honored conventions.

⁴⁶Erikson (*Puritans*, 6) contends that the only way an outside observer can determine what type of behaviors (and beliefs) a group considers unacceptable (i. e., deviant) is to learn something about the standards of the group and how it responds to those group members who fail to uphold these standards. This is what I have sought and will continue to seek to do in this chapter.

things which Paul did and said that caused controversy between him and other Jews.

III. Paul's Conflict with His Own People

According to Paul, he encountered almost every conflict and hardship imaginable in his effort to disseminate the gospel (see e. g., 2 Cor 11:23-29), including opposition from his own people. In 2 Cor 11:26d, Paul claims to have been endangered by his fellow Jews (κινδύνους ἐκ γένους).⁴⁷ This cryptic comment indicates that Paul felt substantially and continually harassed by his fellow Jews in the course of carrying out his apostolic call.⁴⁸ In the previous chapter I demonstrated that Thessalonica was one place where Paul was opposed by some Jews. But why did Paul experience such resistance from his own people as he carried out his mission to the nations?

Paul and the synagogal discipline

In an attempt to answer this complex question, we turn first to an important passage where Paul provides us with some specific information about his conflict with other Jews.⁴⁹ In 2 Cor 11:24

⁴⁷In Rom 15:31 Paul asks the Roman Christians to pray that he might "be delivered from unbelievers in Judea, and that [his] service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints" (cf. 2 Thess 3:2). It is likely that the Judean unbelievers to whom Paul refers were Jerusalem Jews. So Dunn, *Romans* 9-16, 883. Acts' record of Paul's arrest and trials in Jerusalem suggest that Paul's fears about his collection visit to the city were well-founded (21:17-23:22).

⁴⁸Barrett (*Second Corinthians*, 299) suggests that Paul is alluding in 2 Cor 11:26d to incidents with his fellow Jews where Paul considered his life to be at risk.

⁴⁹In 2 Cor 11:25b Paul indicates that on one occasion he was stoned. Although he does not indicate who it was that stoned him or where this incident took place, most commentators connect this comment with Acts 14:19, a text which indicates that Jews and Gentiles in Lystra stoned Paul, dragged him out of the city, and left him for dead (cf. 2 Tim 3:11). See e. g., Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 516; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 298; Bruce, *Acts*, 279; and Lüdemann, *Traditions*, 165.

Becker (*Paul*, 174-176) makes much out of Paul's statement in 2 Cor 11:25b and its supposed parallel in Acts 14:19. Appealing to Lev 24:10-14 and Deut 17:2-7 as the proper biblical backdrop against which to view this incident and referring to Acts 7:58-59 and to John 8:5 as NT parallels, Becker suggests that Paul's statement and Luke's narrative refer to the Jewish synagogal practice

Paul writes, "Five times I have received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes." Paul is referring here to the Jewish synagogal discipline of flogging. Josephus remarks that the forty stripes save one was a "most disgraceful penalty" (τιμωρίαν αἰσχίστην, *Ant.* 4.238), and descriptions of this punishment elsewhere lead us to accept Josephus's judgment.

Deut 25:1-3 indicates that if a guilty man deserves to be beaten, then the judge decides how many strokes he will receive based upon the nature of the crime. The maximum number of strokes allowed was forty. Later sources indicate that over time this number was reduced to thirty-nine (so 2 Cor 11:24; *Ant.* 4.238, 248; *m. Mak.* 3:10),⁵⁰ probably to avoid exceeding the prescribed limit due to miscounting.⁵¹ Although Paul's own experiences of receiving the synagogal discipline of scourging may not mirror precisely the pattern set forth in the later Mishnah tractate *Makkot*, it is probable that there were some distinct similarities.⁵² To consider the procedure for scourging as

of capital punishment by stoning. Such a reading clearly goes beyond the evidence. Even if Paul was referring to the Lystra episode recorded by Luke, there is no good reason to assume with Becker that it was only the Jews who participated in the stoning of Paul. In fact, Acts suggests otherwise (14:19). Becker also ignores the fact that Luke reports Paul being stoned inside the city, not outside. Furthermore, if this were a "legal" Jewish punishment, they would have made sure that Paul was dead. The incident in Lystra, then, should not be seen as an official Jewish punishment as provided for in *m. Sanh.* 6:1-6, but as a mob action of Jews and Gentiles against Paul (cf. Acts 14:5-6). 1 Clem 5:6 also indicates that Paul was stoned, but the text gives no further details. On this verse see further, Quinn, "Chains."

⁵⁰Barrett (*Second Corinthians*, 296) remarks that "there can be no doubt that [thirty-nine strokes] represents common practice in the first century."

⁵¹So Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 515-516; and Pabee, *Persecution*, 10. Pabee also suggests that the maximum number of strokes became thirty-nine due to the introduction of the three-thronged scourge. To be struck with this instrument thirteen times would equal thirty-nine stripes. In *m. Mak.* 3:11 it is required that the number of stripes estimated be divisible by three.

⁵²So Gallas, "Synagogalstrafen."

described in *Makkot*, then, may give us a clearer image of what Paul endured on at least five different occasions.

According to *m. Mak.* 3:12-14, the guilty party's hands would be bound to a pillar on either side. Then the synagogue attendant would disrobe the individual and proceed to administer the punishment. One-third of the strokes were given in front and two-thirds were applied from the rear. The attendant was to strike the person as hard as possible with a three-pronged instrument made from calf-hide. While the stripes were being doled out, Deut 28:58-59 was read repeatedly.⁵³ The force of the blows must have been great, for instructions are given in *Makkot* about what should be done in the event that a recipient befouled him/herself during the discipline or worse yet was killed as a result of the strokes.

According to *m. Mak.* 3:15, scourging often served as a substitute for extirpation and resulted in the reconciliation of the transgressor to the community.⁵⁴ Synagogal stripes were a high price to pay for renewed relations with the synagogue, and it is likely that some felt this excruciating punishment was too high a price and opted to leave the Jewish community altogether.⁵⁵ Apparently, Paul reckoned that the stripes were worth it.⁵⁶ At the

⁵³The text reads as follows: "If you do not diligently observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, fearing this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, then the Lord will overwhelm both you and your offspring with severe and lasting afflictions and grievous and lasting maladies."

⁵⁴On the subject of extirpation in Second Temple Judaism, see Horbury, "Extirpation."

⁵⁵See the perceptive comments of Harvey, "Apostasy," 80-82.

⁵⁶We do not know where and when Paul received the thirty-nine stripes. There is no good reason, however, to assume that these floggings occurred either prior to Paul's conversion or early on in his ministry in Judea. *Contra* Sanders, *Schismatics*, 6-10; 203-204; 263, n. 26. Prior to his conversion, it appears that Paul was meting out punishment, not receiving it (Gal 1:13, 23). Furthermore, why would a zealous Pharisee who diligently observed the Law be punished? Those who are committed to and observant of agreed-upon community norms tend to be supported, not opposed. Additionally, according to Paul, he

time he wrote 2 Cor 11:24, Paul had yielded to this discipline on five occasions.⁵⁷

Why was Paul persecuted/punished in this way?⁵⁸ According to *m. Mak.* 3:1-9, a person was liable to the lashes for a variety of reasons, including: engaging in "improper" sexual or marital relations (3:1); eating food deemed unclean (3:2-3); taking a mother bird and her young (3:4); cutting one's hair in a way that transgressed the law or cutting the hair of a dead person at all (3:5); writing or pricking one's skin in a permanent fashion (3:6); and breaking various Nazarite rules (3:7-9). How applicable these later Mishnaic laws (ultimately compiled around the close of the second century CE) were in (Diaspora) Jewish circles in Paul's day is impossible to know. This uncertainty notwithstanding, Sven

experienced conflict with his fellow Jews throughout his ministry (note Gal 5:11; Rom 15:31).

⁵⁷Hultgren ("Persecutions," 101, n. 8) asserts that Paul did not submit to the synagogal discipline. But it is clear that he did. If Paul had wanted to avoid the beatings, he could have stayed away from the synagogue. As Sanders ("Paul," 89) maintains, "The only way to receive the thirty-nine stripes would be to show up voluntarily in a Jewish community and to submit to community discipline. *Punishment implies inclusion*" (*italics his*).

Why did Paul submit to these scourgings? Paul does not indicate why, but the following two reasons seem likely. First of all, despite the fact that Paul's deepest devotion lay with the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16; cf. 3:7, 29), i. e., the church, Paul had a deep love for and loyalty to his people (e. g., Rom 9:2-3). Furthermore, he stood convinced that Jews needed to confess Jesus as Lord in order to be saved (e. g., Rom 10:1-13). Apparently, Paul felt it a necessity to receive the stripes so that he might maintain access to the synagogue and thereby have the opportunity to share the gospel with "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Cor 10:18; cf. Rom 9:3; 11:14; 16:7, 11). Secondly, it is likely that Paul yielded to the synagogal discipline so that he might have continued contact with Gentile God-fearers, who appear to have been particularly responsive to Paul's proclamation.

⁵⁸Sanders ("Paul," 86) notes that while Paul would have perceived the stripes as persecution, the Jews who administered the thirty-nine lashes would have considered them as appropriate punishment. Once again we discover the difference one's perspective makes. The synagogal discipline can be described as a negative formal sanction (an external aspect of social control). As noted on p. 89, groups will sometimes impose negative sanctions on wayward members in an attempt to affect conformity and to discourage additional deviance.

Gallas has appealed to *m. Mak.* 3:2 in arguing that Paul received the thirty-nine stripes for eating unclean food.⁵⁹

In arriving at this conclusion, Gallas notes other scholarly suggestions as to why Paul was scourged. He mentions the following proposed reasons for Paul having received the stripes: Paul's becoming a Christian and preaching Jesus as Messiah; his depreciation of the Law and his denial of salvation through Torah; his offering of Messianic salvation to Gentiles; his social interaction with Gentiles, including eating unclean food and encouraging others to do likewise; his bringing of ill-repute on Judaism; his blasphemy of Yahweh; his encouragement of people in the synagogues and in the cities to apostatize; his heresy or defection from Judaism; and his missionary success among proselytes.⁶⁰

The diversity of scholarly opinion indicates the complexity of the issue at hand. Since neither Paul nor Acts indicates why he was flogged, one must seek to surmise such. In an effort to eliminate futile speculation, it will be most fruitful at this point to broaden the question from why Paul received the thirty-nine strokes on five occasions to why Paul was opposed by Jews at all (which is the central concern in this chapter) and to turn straightway to Paul's letters in an attempt to gather an answer.

Circumcision as a source of contention

We will look initially at Paul's letter to the Galatian congregations. References to persecution are plentiful in this

⁵⁹Gallas, "Synagogalstrafen," 184. Gallas cross-references Rom 14:14 and 1 Cor 8:8. Although what Paul ate and drank could well have been an offense for which he was disciplined, it is methodologically suspect to argue such from the tractate *Makkot*. In fact, Sanders ("Paul," 86) suggests, "It is fruitless here to search the list of things in Mishnah Makkot for which the rabbis decreed corporal punishment."

⁶⁰Gallas, "Synagogalstrafen," 183-184.

epistle.⁶¹ As noted above, Paul mentions in Gal 1:13, 23 his pre-Christian persecution of the church. Furthermore, in the course of the letter he alludes to the external opposition of his Galatian converts (3:4; 4:29; cf. 1:7; 5:12) and of himself (4:12-20[?], 29). Because of the veiled nature of these remarks it is not possible to determine the specifics of the conflicts to which Paul alludes, although it seems clear enough that in 4:29 Paul is referring to Jewish oppression of at least Pauline Christians.⁶² In Gal 5:11 and 6:12, however, Paul expresses his opinion why he is and his Jewish Christian opponents are not being persecuted. These remarks merit careful consideration.

In 5:11a Paul poses the following rhetorical question: "If I myself, brothers, am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?"⁶³ Paul's query raises at least the following questions for the interpreter: 1. Was there a time that Paul actually preached circumcision and, if so, when?; and 2. By whom was it that Paul considered himself "persecuted"? Paul's statement about "still preaching circumcision" continues to befuddle exegetes.⁶⁴

⁶¹Noted by, e. g., Baasland, "Persecution"; and Goddard and Cummins, "Conflict."

⁶²Paul's allegory of Sarah and Hagar in 4:21-5:1 has been the subject of much discussion. Here, it will suffice to say that I take Sarah/Jerusalem above/Issac/children of promise to refer to Christian believers who are free from the Law. And I understand Hagar/present Jerusalem/Ishmael/those of the flesh to represent Jews, and perhaps Jewish Christians, who are under the Law. In any event, when Paul suggests in 4:29 that even as Ishmael persecuted Issac so those of the flesh persecute those of the Spirit today, he seemingly has in mind at least some non-Christian Jews. See further Dunn, *Galatians*, 256-257. For the argument that the children of Hagar are the agitators see Matera, *Galatians*, 178.

⁶³The adverb ἔτι appears twice in 5:11a. A few ancient manuscripts, including D* F G 6. 1739. 1881 pc a b vg^{mss}; Ambst, omit (probably in error) the first of the two.

⁶⁴Betz (*Galatians*, 270) states, "What the Apostle has precisely in mind will in all likelihood always be hidden from our knowledge."

Scholars are in basic agreement that this is a charge made against Paul by the Jewish Christian missionaries who had come to the Galatian congregations after Paul. But this is where the agreement ends.⁶⁵ Were the Jewish Christian "teachers"⁶⁶ suggesting that Paul preached circumcision before he was converted?⁶⁷ Did they understand Paul to be advocating spiritual circumcision?⁶⁸ Or did Paul's rival missionaries accuse Paul of preaching circumcision to the Jews and not to the Gentiles?⁶⁹

Regardless of how one chooses to interpret 5:11a, it is clear that Paul flatly denies that he is currently preaching circumcision and that he believes this is why he is presently being persecuted.⁷⁰ In 5:11b Paul seeks to defend on theological grounds his position that Gentile believers should not be circumcised (or obligated to keep Torah) in order to be Abraham's descendants (3:7, 29; 4:28-31). He states that if he were to preach circumcision (like his Jewish Christian adversaries) then "the scandal of the cross" (τὸ σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ) would be removed. Paul's opponents in Galatia would have likely agreed with the author of *The Preachings of Peter* (written late second century CE in Syria [?]) who described Paul as "the enemy man" who promulgated a "lawless and absurd doctrine" (2:3).⁷¹

⁶⁵As observed by Dunn, *Galatians*, 278.

⁶⁶The term is Martyn's. See e. g., "Mission."

⁶⁷See e. g., Burton, *Galatians*, 286.

⁶⁸So Borgen, "Observations."

⁶⁹Dunn, *Galatians*, 279-280.

⁷⁰So rightly Zeisler, *Galatians*, 73, 79.

⁷¹On anti-Paulinism in the Pseudo-Clementine literature, see further Lüdemann, *Opposition*, 171-194.

But who was it that persecuted Paul for not requiring Gentiles to enter the covenant community through circumcision? Some exegetes suggest that Paul considered himself to be persecuted by his rival Jewish Christian missionaries in Galatia.⁷² This, however, is not likely. Paul was not present in Galatia at the same time as his opponents were, and it does not appear that Paul is speaking in 5:11 about some sort of psychological affliction which he was currently experiencing.⁷³

Gal 6:12 may be of some benefit in helping to determine who was involved in what Paul considered to be persecution. Having no more than picked up the pen Paul asserts to his converts: "It is those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised [ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι], only in order that they may not be persecuted [μὴ διώκωνται] for the cross of Christ." Paul's claim seems to be that his Jewish Christian missionary opponents required circumcision of Gentile converts, which would have included the Galatian Christians (4:8), in order to avoid persecution, presumably from their fellow Jews.⁷⁴ While it is doubtful that Paul has accurately captured the true motivation of his rival missionaries for requiring circumcision of Gentile converts,⁷⁵ he is almost certainly correct in claiming that their

⁷²E. g., Matera, *Galatians*, 184.

⁷³In 5:11 Paul employs the verb διώκειν, the same term he uses in 1:13 and 1:23 to speak of his own persecution of the church. Baasland ("Persecution," 136) remarks, "There is hardly any doubt that διώκω functions more or less as a technical term for persecution of Christians." Furthermore, Cosgrove (*Cross*, 84) notes that the verb διώκειν is always used in the NT to refer to external strife. (But note Gal 3:4).

⁷⁴So rightly Longenecker, *Galatians*, 291; Borgen, "Church," 71-72; and Sanders, "Circumcision," 24-25.

⁷⁵The reason these missionaries and other Jewish Christians zealously observed Torah was because of their convictions. So rightly Borgen, "Church," 72. Jewett ("Agitators") has suggested that the "agitators" who had infiltrated the Galatian church came from Judea on a nomistic campaign which came about

willingness to adhere to this (and presumably other) Jewish custom protected them from the persecution/punishment which Paul received from the Jews, likely in the form of the thirty-nine lashes.⁷⁶

It may be that some Jewish Christians who were zealous for their traditions participated in the persecution/punishment of other Jewish Christians who were neglecting the Law, but this is far from clear.⁷⁷ It is fascinating to note that in Gal 4:17 Paul remarks that "[his rival missionaries] are zealous [ζηλοῦσιν] toward [his converts], but for no good purpose."⁷⁸ Were they also zealous enough to punish fellow Jewish Christians who jettisoned circumcision? Elsewhere Paul indicates that he himself faced "danger from false brothers" (κινδύνους ἐν ψευδαδέλφοις, 2 Cor 11:26). Even if some Law-observant Jewish Christians opposed some Law-neglectful Jewish Christians, it is likely that they would have done so in consultation and cooperation with other Jews.

It remains to be said that Paul's remark in 6:12 is more or less an inverted form of his statement in 5:11. Surely it is more

as a result of rising Zealotic pressures. He maintains that the goal of the "agitators" was "to avert the suspicion that they were in communion with lawless Gentiles" (205). Jewett believes that these Judean Christians had "convinced themselves that circumcision of Gentile Christians would thwart Zealot reprisals" (205).

Jewett's thesis has found acceptance among some commentators. See e. g., Bruce, *Galatians*, 269; and Longenecker, *Galatians*, 291. Jewett may be right in suggesting that there was a rising tide of nationalism in the 40s and 50s in Judea. I am prepared to follow him that far. Nevertheless, as indicated above, I believe that he is wrong to speak of a formal Zealot party during these decades. Furthermore, he fails to take into account the fact that zeal for the ancestral customs was widespread among the Jews of that period.

⁷⁶So also Sanders, "Circumcision," 24. Social control theory (pp. 78-80) contends that those who conform to group conventions thereby escape the threat of negative sanctions. See also the insights of labeling theorists on pp. 81-83.

⁷⁷So Sanders, *Paul*, 191.

⁷⁸On this verse see the insightful comments of Goddard and Cummins, "Conflict," 114-115.

than a fortuitous occurrence that in both 5:11 and 6:12 circumcision and persecution appear together. It should also be noted that in these two verses Paul asserts that his persecution results from his proclamation of the cross of Christ. At least in Paul's mind, then, both circumcision and "Christ crucified" were factors in his conflict with his fellow Jews. Although Paul maintains that his preaching of the crucified Christ was a source of contention between him and other Jews (cf. 1 Cor 1:23), it is difficult to decipher from Paul's apologetic comments in 5:11 and 6:12 how large a role that Paul's claim of Jesus's Messiahship played in his conflict with other Jews.⁷⁹ While Paul suggests that his preaching was the cause of his persecution, Paul's Jewish Christian opponents would probably have maintained that it was Paul's refusal to encourage his Gentile converts to be obedient to Torah that incited the ire of other Jews.

It does appear that some Johannine Christians were later expelled from Jewish synagogues because of their belief in Jesus as the Messiah (9:22, 34; cf. 12:42; 16:2).⁸⁰ And Christology was undoubtedly a source of significant controversy between Jews and Christians in the second century CE (as evidenced e. g., in Justin's *First Apology* and *Dialogue with Trypho*).⁸¹ But as is often pointed out, other Christian Jews contemporary with Paul (e. g., the Jerusalem apostles and Paul's opponents in Galatia) who *both* proclaimed Jesus as Lord *and* observed the Law do not appear to have experienced as much resistance from other Jews as Paul did.

⁷⁹On the subject of the Messiah in Judaism, see, among others, Smith, "Figures"; and Neusner, "Varieties."

⁸⁰So, among others, Setzer, *Responses*, 179.

⁸¹On Justin's Christological assertions, see further the useful studies by Setzer, "Dispute"; and Stanton, "Polemic."

It may be, then, that it was the social implications that Paul drew (and taught others to draw) from his proclamation of Christ crucified that caused some Jews to stumble over Paul's gospel and to oppose him.⁸² Precisely how offensive the Jewish hearers of Paul's preaching would have found his belief in Jesus as Messiah is unclear, but of this we can be certain: the fact that Paul did not require circumcision of his Gentile converts was a primary reason that Paul encountered conflict with other Jews, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Even though Paul never objects in his letters to the circumcision of Jews or Christian Jews and according to Acts 16:3 circumcised Timothy,⁸³ it is clear from his letters that Paul attached no religious significance to this practice.⁸⁴ Of course Paul passionately insists in Galatians that Gentile converts must not be circumcised or forced to live under the Law (2:3; 5:2-12; 6:12-16), but rumors abounded that Paul instructed Jews and Christian Jews in the Diaspora along similar lines (cf. Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11). When Paul arrives in Jerusalem, Acts reports that Paul was told by James and other elders that Jewish Christians who were "zealous for the law" (ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου) had been informed that Paul taught "all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to abandon [ἀποστασίαν] Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs" (λέγων μὴ περιτέμνειν αὐτοὺς τὰ τέκνα μηδέ τοῖς

⁸²Barclay ("Paul") comments: "Perhaps Paul's social practices made explicit the potential of this message to question the validity of the law (Gal 2.19; 3.13; 5.11)."

⁸³On the vexed issue of Paul circumcising Timothy, see, among others, Trebilco, *Communities*, 23-24; and Cohen, "Timothy."

⁸⁴Fee (*First Corinthians*, 312) remarks that "even though [circumcision] was a matter to which [Paul] could acquiesce for pragmatic reasons (Acts 16:3), he was absolutely unyielding when anyone tried to give it religious significance." Cf. similarly Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 112.

ἔθελον περιπατεῖν, 21:20-21).⁸⁵ Whether or not such an accusation is historically accurate (Acts argues that it is not), some statements which Paul makes in his letters about circumcision could surely give rise and substance to such reports. In Gal 5:6 Paul asserts that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is any avail, but faith working in love." He similarly states in 6:15 that "neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." Additionally, in 1 Cor 7:19 he remarks, "For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God," as if to say that circumcision was no longer a binding commandment! Furthermore, in Rom 2:29 Paul spiritualizes circumcision altogether by maintaining that "real circumcision is a matter of the heart."⁸⁶

Philo, Paul's erudite contemporary, could also speak of circumcision in a spiritual sense (*Mig.* 92; *Spec. Leg.* 1.9, 305; *Quaest. Gen.* 3.47-52; *Quaest. Ex.* 2.2), as could writers in the Hebrew Scriptures (Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25; Ezek 44:7, 9) and in Qumran (1QpHab 11:13; 1QS 5:5-6). However, even though Philo (and others) could speak of circumcision philosophically, he expected both Jews and Jewish proselytes to be physically circumcised.⁸⁷ In *Mig.* 92 Philo remarks: "It is true that

⁸⁵On Acts 21:20-21, see the comments in Moore (*Judaism*, 2:21) and Segal (*Paul*, 145). See also Acts 21:28 where Luke reports Asian Jews saying that Paul is "the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the Law and this place," and Acts 24:5 where Tertullus is recorded as calling Paul "an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world."

⁸⁶On Paul's devaluation of physical circumcision, see further Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 106-135.

⁸⁷Whether or not Philo thought that converts to Judaism should be circumcised is a debated issue in Philonic studies. The dialogue centers upon the meaning of Philo's statement in *Quaest. Ex.* 2.2: "a sojourner [proselyte] is one who circumcises not his uncircumcision, but his desires and sensual pleasures and the other passions of the soul." Some scholars (e. g., McEleney "Conversion") take this text to mean that Philo did not insist on circumcision of proselytes. But Nolland ("Uncircumcised Proselytes?") and Borgen ("Church," 67) counter McEleney by demonstrating that for Philo spiritual and physical

receiving circumcision does indeed portray the excision of pleasure and all passions, and the putting away of impious conceit . . . but let us not on this account repeal the law laid down for circumcising."

There were Diasporan Jews other than Paul who devalued physical circumcision. Philo's comments in *Mig.* 92-95 indicate that Philo knew of Jews who had completely spiritualized circumcision. Additionally, Ignatius, albeit in the early second century CE, informs the Philadelphians that "it is better to hear Christianity from the circumcised than Judaism from the uncircumcised" (*Phld.* 6:1). Peder Borgen suggests that this comment may indicate that there were some Jews in Ignatius's day who neglected physical circumcision.⁸⁸ And, of course, there is the famous story which Josephus relates about the conversion of King Izates to Judaism and the counsel that Ananias gave him not to be circumcised (*Ant.* 20.34-48).

Circumcision of Jewish males and of male proselytes to Judaism was "quintessentially Jewish."⁸⁹ It is quite likely, therefore, that those Jews who neglected or encouraged the neglect of physical circumcision would have been contested by other Jews. In fact, Philo admonishes his Alexandrian Jewish readers to be faithful to the feasts and to circumcision on a physical level lest they "incur the censure of the many and the charges they are sure to bring" (πρὸς τῷ καὶ τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν μέμψεις καὶ κατηγορίας ἀποδιδράσκειν, *Mig.* 93). The practice of

circumcision belonged together. In Judaism, a male was not considered to be a full proselyte until he received circumcision. See e. g., Cohen, "Boundary," 26-30.

⁸⁸"Church," 68.

⁸⁹So Cohen, "Boundary," 27.

physical circumcision, then, was a source of contention among Jews in Paul's day.⁹⁰ Tension was created by those Jews who were indifferent to and/or neglectful of the ancestral tradition. And as Philo suggests, those Jews who did not faithfully observe the established rite of circumcision were objects of their compatriots' censure. Paul was one such object.

Controversy over dietary issues

Thus far I have argued that circumcision was a primary source of conflict between Paul and his contemporary Jews. Did other factors come into play as well? Based on Paul's account of the Antioch incident in Gal 2:11-14 and other statements which he makes about food in his epistles (e. g., 1 Cor 8-10; Rom 14:13-23), one can surmise that Paul's lack of scruples about table fellowship with Gentiles also agitated his fellow Jews.

Seeking to buttress his apostolic authority and the validity of his own gospel, Paul tells his Galatian converts a story of how he rebuked Peter at Antioch (2:11, 14). According to Paul, Peter and other Jewish Christians were eating with Gentile believers prior to the time that certain men from James arrived. Paul reports that these men, to whom he refers as "those of the circumcision" (τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς), caused Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of the Jewish Christians in the church to separate themselves from Gentile Christians at meal times. And Paul charges Peter with hypocrisy because of his tactical readjustment at the table upon the arrival of the Jerusalem delegation and maintains that by his actions Peter had distorted the truth of the gospel (2:13-14). At this point, we need not enter into what has become a very convoluted discussion

⁹⁰On p. 104, I noted that social conflict occurs when one party acts or thinks in a way is incompatible with and unacceptable to another party.

about Jewish table fellowship with Gentiles.⁹¹ For our purposes only two observations need to be made from this pericope.

First of all, Paul more or less calls Peter a "coward" in 2:12. If Peter did indeed draw away from table fellowship with Gentile Christians because of fear, as Paul suggests, of what or of whom would Peter have been fearful? Peter may have been informed by James's men that if reports were circulated about him associating freely with Gentiles, then it could undermine his mission to the Jews (2:8-9). Additionally, Peter could have been told by the Jerusalem delegation, perhaps at James's request, that if his behavior among Gentiles became known by Jerusalem Jews, then there might be negative repercussions for the Christians in that city.⁹² In fact, it is conceivable that Peter himself could have faced a charge in a Jerusalem synagogal court for unscrupulous fraternization with Gentiles. And if in his defense Peter failed to convince the court of the validity and purity of his behavior, then he too might have been subjected to the dreadful strokes.⁹³

It is also important to notice from Paul's account of his dispute with Peter at Antioch that Paul's view on eating with Gentiles was the minority position among Jewish Christians. Paul reports that even Barnabas withdrew from table fellowship with Gentile believers once the men from James had arrived (2:13). If Paul's "soft" stance on eating with Gentiles was anomalous among Jewish Christians at Antioch, one can but imagine the controversy that Paul's dining habits would have created among "strict" non-

⁹¹On this issue, see the useful article by Sanders, "Association." In this piece Sanders is in dialogue (and dispute!) with Dunn ("Incident") and Esler (*Community*).

⁹²Sanders, "Association," 185-186.

⁹³As noted by Harvey, "Apostasy," 85.

Christian Jews.⁹⁴ While it is clear that some Jews of that time dined (and experienced other types of social intercourse) with Gentiles, it seems that the majority of Jews did so on their own terms, i. e., they ate their own food and drank their own wine (see e. g., Dan 1:3-17; Jdt 10:5; 12:17-19; *Arist.* 181-294).⁹⁵

As observed in section one above, Jews were for the most part leery of idolatry, and many, if not most, Jews were convinced that intimate association with Gentiles at the table (and elsewhere) could lead to idolatrous practices.⁹⁶ Against a backdrop of cautious social interaction of Jews with Gentiles and the Gentile way, such Pauline statements as "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience" (1 Cor 10:25), and "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself" (Rom 14:14a) would certainly have sounded a note of warning to Law-observant Jews.

Unlike the some 300 men mentioned by the author of 3 Maccabees and Tiberius Julius Alexander, for example, we know that Paul himself would not have participated in idolatrous worship. Furthermore, he would have been uncomfortable with knowingly eating meat offered to idols (1 Cor 10:14-22). But his fellow Jews would likely have been set on edge by the fact that Paul casually dismissed Jewish dietary laws when interacting with and instructing those he considered to be children of Abraham.⁹⁷

⁹⁴So similarly Barclay, "Paul."

⁹⁵Sanders ("Association," 178) remarks that in spite of some possible exceptions (e. g., *Jub* 22:16; *Joseph and Aseneth* 7:1) most of the Jewish evidence suggests that "There was no barrier to social to intercourse with Gentiles, as long as one did not eat their meat or drink their wine."

⁹⁶Esler (*Community*, 85-86) maintains that Jews avoided table-fellowship with Gentiles because the former regarded the latter as ritually unclean.

⁹⁷The fact that Paul used the Jewish Scriptures in his letters to support his radical thinking and acting could have further engendered hostility between him and his fellow Jews (if indeed non-Christian Jews read his writings).

Many Jews would have viewed Paul's interaction with and instruction to his converts as irresponsible⁹⁸ and even as immoral.⁹⁹ Paul and (many of) his compatriots would have agreed that God wanted them to *love* the nations, but for the most part they would have had different views on how God required Jews to *live* among the nations. It may be deduced, then, that Paul would have been among a small minority of Jewish Christians in his day who believed that ancestral rituals such as circumcision and dietary laws should be, if necessary, completely abrogated for the sake of the gospel. Such a radical--or from the perspective of Paul's opponents "deviant"--stance often incited an unfavorable response.

Additionally, when Paul was afforded the opportunity to speak in a Jewish synagogue, his (mis)use of the Scriptures in his message might have incited a negative response from those who were not convinced. Furthermore, it is also likely that Paul defended himself with Scripture in his various synagogue trials. On at least five occasions (2 Cor 11:24), we know that his hermeneutics were not favorably received by the synagogal authorities. Philo viewed those who criticized the Scriptures as deserters of Judaism. It is possible that some Jews could have formed a similar opinion of Paul for his "innovative" interpretation and application of the Hebrew Bible.

⁹⁸Paul's instruction to the Corinthian widows to marry "in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39) serves as an example. It appears that there were some Jewish people in the Corinthian congregation (7:18). If so, we know from the parallels adduced above that many Jews would not have approved of Paul advising Jewish widows in this manner. Such an exhortation could be viewed as an invitation to exogamy. Additionally, Paul frequently encourages congregations to whom he writes to exchange "a holy kiss" (1 Thess 5:26; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; Rom 16:16) with no ethnic qualifications. We will see in chapter ten below that the "sacred kiss" could encourage promiscuity.

⁹⁹In Rom 3:8 Paul claims that he is slanderously charged by some people (probably Christian Jews) to promote evil so that good may come. Some of Paul's Gentile converts did not hold what Jews would have considered to be high moral standards (e. g., 1 Cor 5:1-2; 6:12-20). Paul's gospel could have been perceived as an invitation to such behavior. So also Kruse, "Price," 271.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to stress that Paul's conflict with his compatriots goes beyond the external acts of clipping a male's foreskin and eating with Gentiles. In order to understand the controversy between Paul and his people aright, one must give adequate attention to the all-important issue of community boundaries, which, of course, are based upon group norms. For Paul, incorporation into the people of God entailed co-crucifixion with Christ through baptism (e. g., Rom 6:1-11; Gal 2:20-21; 3:27; 5:24). And while Paul believed that the Law of God is good (Rom 7:7, 12), he thought that Torah had reached its τέλος in Christ (Rom 10:4). As a result, Paul taught that he and his converts no longer needed to live under the Law (1 Cor 9:20). Paul's vision was for a new community which was not defined along ethnic, power, or gender lines (Gal 3:28). But Paul's ideal was slow in taking shape and was met with much Jewish resistance.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps this is part of the reason why Paul had so much difficulty in defining precisely what the church was and in articulating his own position in relation to Judaism.¹⁰¹ Although Paul could refer to the church as a third entity (1 Cor 10:32) and speak of his "former life" in Judaism (Gal 1:13) as σκύβαλον (Phil 3:6), *he* appears to have seen himself and his converts in some way as part of Judaism, albeit Paul's unique version of Judaism (Gal 3:29; 6:16; Rom 9-11).¹⁰² It likewise seems that some of his fellow Jews, at least at the outset of Paul's association with a given synagogue, would have agreed that he fell

¹⁰⁰As noted on p. 106, divergent and competing ideologies can lead to (intense) conflict. See also chapter ten.

¹⁰¹Hostility can result in boundary ambiguity, as Erikson (*Puritans*) and Ben-Yehuda (*Boundaries*) have demonstrated.

¹⁰²See Sanders, "Paul," 89-90; and Barclay, "Paul."

within Judaism. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why some Jews would have punished Paul or why Paul would have yielded to negative formal sanctions (i. e., the thirty-nine lashes) on at least five occasions.¹⁰³

What Paul and his people do not appear to have agreed upon is who constituted the people of God and what the entry requirements into this community were. This is where their conflict reached the boiling point. While Paul could turn a blind eye to what he came to consider to be merely peripheral aspects of the Law (e. g., circumcision and food laws) and could be so bold as to assert that his Gentile converts were part of the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16; cf. 1 Thess 4:5; 1 Cor 5:1; 6:11; 12:3), it appears that a significant majority of his fellow Jews, even those who were "Christian," thought that careful and faithful observance of Torah was part of the proselytizing package. And these Jews perceived Paul's lowering of the standards which were entrusted to the Jewish people by Yahweh to pose a serious threat to the integrity and identity of the Jewish community.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, especially zealous Jews, like Paul himself prior to his conversion, would have sought to make Paul toe the Torah-line in instructing his Gentile converts.

Jewish suspicion of Paul and his mission would also have been heightened by the fact that Paul was by his own admission a

¹⁰³Sanders (*Paul*, 192) states: "*Punishment implies inclusion*. If Paul had considered that he had withdrawn from Judaism, he would not have attended synagogue. If the members of the synagogue had considered him an outsider, they would not have punished him" (*italics his*).

¹⁰⁴Esler (*Community*, 88-89) observes that Paul's clash with the Jerusalem church was created by the former's revolutionary belief that "the old boundaries which preserved the Jewish *ethnos* from outside contamination have, in Christ, ceased to have any significance . . ." and by the latter's conviction that the Jewish *ethnos* was elected by God and that the gospel should be distinctively and exclusively Jewish.

"chameleon" toward the ancestral customs.¹⁰⁵ He treated as disposable that which was most valuable to his people, i. e., living under the Law which God had so graciously provided. To paraphrase Paul, he could take or leave the Law contingent upon the circumstances at hand (1 Cor 9:20-21).¹⁰⁶ Paul's pattern of occasional conformity in order "to win the more" would have been viewed by many Jews as hypocrisy and would have understandably engendered hostility.¹⁰⁷ Whereas the pre-Christian Paul was known as a boundary-maintainer, a keeper of Israel's customs, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was perceived as a boundary-breaker, a perverter of his people's traditions. Those viewed as traitors are seldom treated with tender loving care!¹⁰⁸ His compatriots might have wondered how Paul thought that he could be all things to all people when he blatantly disregarded the standards which his own people required! One could rightly say that what Paul did and failed to do and what he led others to do and not to do was what brought Paul and his compatriots into conflict and was what prompted some, if not many, of his fellow Jews to view him as an apostate.¹⁰⁹ While it is likely that Paul's message of "Christ

¹⁰⁵Contrast e. g., Nanos (*Mystery*) who has recently argued that Paul was a thoroughly Law-observant Jew.

¹⁰⁶On Paul's ethic of accommodation, see Chadwick, "All Things"; Richardson, "Inconsistency." In terms of deviance theory, Paul sought to avoid being labeled and/or treated as a deviant Jew by "manipulating his physical environment," i. e., by strategically altering his behavior.

¹⁰⁷So rightly Smith, "Persecution," 263.

¹⁰⁸Barrett (*Paul*, 1) notes: "[Paul] was one of the most hated men in the ancient world; and not without reason. It was natural for Jews to think him a traitor. He had betrayed their Law and therewith their national identity; he seemed to have renounced the natural responsibility that he owed to his fellow-countrymen by constituting himself an 'apostle for the Gentiles.'"

¹⁰⁹Barclay ("Deviance," 123) remarks, "Inasmuch as [Paul] *was viewed* by his contemporary Jews as an apostate, he *was* (historically speaking) an apostate, and no amount of pleading about the Jewish elements in his theology or the diversity within first-century Judaism can mask or alter that reality" (*italics his*).

crucified" was offensive to some Jews, it is a certainty that the practical implications which Paul drew from his *kerygma* created conflict between him and his fellow Jews.¹¹⁰

Over time in a given city, after Paul's message and methods had become known and after the disciplinary action taken against him had not accomplished its desired effect, it is possible that Paul was cast out of the Jewish community altogether. Luke records that some Jews saw Paul as one who was leading Israel astray (Acts 18:13; 21:21). If this were indeed the case, then it seems quite unlikely that the relevant Jewish communities would have allowed Paul to remain perpetually in their fold. As Philip F. Esler writes, "One must assume that those Jews [like Paul] who did fudge the boundaries between Jew and Gentile were rightly regarded as endangering the ethnic identity of the Jewish people and came under heavy pressure to conform or to abandon Judaism altogether."¹¹¹ Paul's pattern of occasional conformity was probably judged by (many) Jews in Thessalonica (and elsewhere) as blatant non-conformity, i. e., "apostasy," and it seems likely that Thessalonian Jewry would have forced Paul out of their synagogue prior to the time that they drove him out of their city.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Paul's preaching of Christ and his neglect of the Law are perhaps best viewed together. Davies ("Paul," 4) remarks, "The immediate cause of the Jewish opposition to Paul centred in the Law. But his understanding of the Law was inextricably bound up with the significance which he ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and with the challenge that this issued to all the fundamental symbols of the Jewish life."

¹¹¹*Community*, 86.

¹¹²The seemingly irreconcilable differences between Paul and Thessalonian Jewry resulted in an irreparable breach between the two parties (see p. 108). This was seemingly a common experience for Paul with his Jewish compatriots (pp. 164-165) as he traveled throughout the Western Mediterranean seeking to share his gospel with the Gentiles (cf. Rom 15:18-21).

The social-scientific study of deviance and conflict lends support and clarity to the scenario being suggested here. In social-scientific terms, Paul failed to adhere to the time-honored conventions of Judaism and to fulfill the prescribed roles (or "role set") of a "Law-observant" Jew. Paul's neglect of Jewish norms, when coupled with his newfangled behaviors and beliefs, would have frequently created controversy between Paul and his compatriots (particularly those functioning in the capacity of "moral entrepreneurs" or "agents of censure") who would have considered Paul as dangerously deviant and would have denounced him as an apostate. Apparently, not a few Diaspora Jewish communities viewed the praxis and proclamation of this Jewish itinerant preacher to the Gentiles as a threat to their boundaries (i. e., their cultural space, *ethos*, or way). And as a result, they sought to control and to censure Paul by means of formal (e. g., the synagogal discipline) and informal (e. g., verbal harassment) sanctions. In most instances, it is likely that Paul did not possess sufficient social power to counter or to neutralize the judgments and/or actions of his non-Christian Jewish opponents.¹¹³ Therefore, more often than not, Paul was likely labeled and treated as a "sinner" by Diaspora Jews, at least by some of the more powerful and influential people in a given synagogue (i. e., those engaged in creating and legitimating the *status quo*).

Paul has been described by scholars as a "sinner," "renegade," "heretic," "traitor," and "apostate" in relation to Judaism. Regardless of the title that one chooses to depict Paul's stance *vis-*

¹¹³Barclay ("Deviance," 123) suggests, "Paul's social position in the Diaspora [Jewish] communities was generally weak: he was a newcomer, of low social status, with no economic or political power base on which to build his defence, and power struggles in the synagogue almost inevitably turned to his disadvantage."

à-vis Judaism, this comparison of Paul with other Diaspora Jews who were rejected as deviant and this examination of pertinent Pauline texts suggests that such labels (and others!) were already affixed to Paul in his own day. It is indeed ironic that the apostle who preached a gospel of grace to the Gentiles was perceived by many of his own people to have repeatedly transgressed God's covenant mercy. Indeed, the very *στίγματα* which Paul bore on his body were perpetual and painful reminders of the fact that his compatriots judged him (on numerous occasions) to be a transgressor of Torah (Gal 6:17).

Based upon this investigation, then, I would conclude that it was a combination of Paul's own laxity in association with Gentiles and of his "Law-free" instruction of converts whom he claimed to be children of Abraham that engendered opposition from his fellow Jews. And although I am unable to say definitively that these were the reasons that Paul came into conflict with Thessalonian Jewry, this study points favorably to such an explanation.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴So also Trebilco, *Communities*, 21. Since social conflict is a complex phenomenon and is often traceable to multiple causes, it seems likely that Paul's conflict with his fellow Jews involved other issues than those which are discernable in our extant sources.

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Chapter Eight

Apocalyptic¹ and Polemic: Paul's Reaction to Opposition in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians

Introduction

In the previous chapter some reasons that Paul might have experienced Jewish opposition in Thessalonica (and elsewhere) were considered. It is my intention in this chapter to explore how Paul reacted to the conflict that he and his Thessalonian converts experienced with non-Christians. Since Paul does not directly indicate how he was affected by the conflict relations in Thessalonica, one is left to infer as much from the Thessalonian correspondence.

In what follows I will examine how Paul employs apocalyptic and polemical language in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians. Although many scholars have recognized the apocalyptic texture of and the polemical rhetoric in these letters, they usually fail to correlate these epistolary features with the particular socio-historical circumstances of Paul and the Thessalonian congregation.² Below

¹Throughout this thesis I use the term "apocalyptic" as both a noun (cf. the German "Apokalyptik") and an adjective (as it usually is in English works) to speak of a particular theological worldview, not a specific literary *genre*. So also e. g., Wright, *Origins*, 1:280-338. Since Paul's apocalyptic perspective is not limited to matters of eschatology, I will not use "apocalyptic" and "eschatology" interchangeably (so Ladd, "Apocalyptic"). Nor will I describe Paul's thought-world as "apocalyptic eschatology" (so Scholer, "Apocalyptic Eschatology"). Cf. Menken, 44-66; and Hanson, *Dawn*.

There has been no small amount of debate among scholars about how "apocalyptic" is best defined and about the importance of apocalyptic for Paul. It is not necessary here to enter into the fray of this discussion. (For a useful introduction to the scholarly controversy over the term "apocalyptic," see Strum, "Apocalyptic." On the significance of apocalyptic for Paul, see de Boer, "Paul"). In section one below I will note some apocalyptic motifs employed by Paul in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians which are widely recognized by the scholarly community as core components of apocalyptic.

²E. g., in her monograph *Measure*, Schlueter rightly detects the "eschatological" and polemical language in 1 Thess 2:14-16. In an attempt to emphasize the hyperbolic character of this passage, however, she pays

it will be demonstrated how the contingency of the conflict between believers and unbelievers in Thessalonica helps to explain, at least in part, the prominence of apocalyptic motifs and the intensity of Pauline polemic in the Thessalonian correspondence. In the course of this discussion I will draw upon NT parallels that show a positive correlation between conflict relations on the one hand and apocalyptic and/or polemical language on the other.

I. Apocalyptic and Conflict

Studies on apocalyptic in general³ and on Pauline apocalyptic in particular⁴ have proliferated in recent years. As a result of the increased scholarly interest in things apocalyptic, a more precise understanding of the traits of apocalyptic writing and thinking has been achieved.⁵ Furthermore, it is now widely recognized by students of Paul that an apocalyptic perspective permeates his writings, even the Corinthian correspondence and Romans where the apostle's apocalyptic worldview has often gone undetected or

inadequate attention to the influence of the historical conflict in Thessalonica on Paul's language.

Wanamaker ("Apocalypticism") roundly criticizes Pauline scholars for focusing on the theological aspects of Paul's apocalyptic thought while neglecting the social dimensions of Paul's apocalypticism. Yet in his discussion of the apocalyptic character of the Thessalonian epistles, he fails to note the relationship between the social conflict of Christians with non-Christians and Paul's apocalyptic language.

³See e. g., Koch, *Rediscovery*; Hanson, *Dawn*; Minear, *Apocalyptic*; Rowland, *Open Heaven*; and Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism*. See now also Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalyptic*.

⁴See e. g., Beker, *Paul and Apocalyptic Gospel*; Baumgarten, *Apokalyptik*; Meeks, *Christians*, esp. chp. 6; Keck, "Paul"; Branick, "Apocalyptic Paul?"; Martyn, "Epistemology" and "Apocalyptic Antinomies"; and Ellis, *Pauline Theology*, 1-25.

⁵Meeks ("Functions," 689) detects the following characteristics in apocalyptic literature: revealed secrets to the author; sudden and certain cosmic transformation; divine judgment; and dualistic thinking. Cf. the more detailed lists of apocalyptic characteristics upon which there is some scholarly agreement in Branick, "Apocalyptic Paul?," 665, n. 3; and Aune, "Apocalypticism."

unacknowledged.⁶ The work of J. Christiaan Beker, J. Louis Martyn (and his students), and Wayne A. Meeks in particular has sharpened our understanding of apocalyptic in Paul, as did the writings of Ernst Käsemann in a previous generation.⁷

The apocalyptic one encounters in Paul's writings is, of course, not identical to what one finds in Jewish apocalyptic.⁸ Nor is the way which Paul seeks to employ apocalyptic necessarily the same as his Jewish predecessors. Apocalyptic is a relatively fluid ideology which may be applied in various ways and in divergent circumstances.⁹ Nevertheless, at least three themes in Jewish apocalyptic writings are detectable in Paul's epistles, namely, vindication, imminence, and dualism.¹⁰ My present interest is to highlight these particular apocalyptic traits in 1 (and then 2) Thessalonians. In doing so I aim to give yet further support to the common scholarly claim that 1 (and 2) Thessalonians is (are) Paul's most apocalyptic letter(s).¹¹

⁶See e. g., Scholer, "Apocalyptic Eschatology."

⁷See e. g., Käsemann's "Anfänge" and "Thema."

⁸This is noted by Gundry ("Eschatology") in reference to the Thessalonian letters. Perhaps the most obvious difference in Paul's apocalyptic orientation is the prominence he gives to Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection. (See Keck, "Paul," 241). Segal (*Paul*, 159), who depicts Paul as an apocalyptic Jew, suggests that Paul's belief that the final days had begun and his abrogation of special Jewish laws in the service of converting Gentiles makes his apocalyptic view of community unique. On Jewish apocalyptic literature, see, among others, Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*.

⁹See Nickelsburg, "Aspects," 648. Note also Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalyptic*.

¹⁰These characteristics are drawn from Beker, *Apocalyptic Gospel*, 30.

¹¹E. g., Hurd ("Paul," 33) contends that "The most obvious observation that can be made about 1 Thessalonians is that it is a highly apocalyptic document." Wanamaker ("Apocalypticism," 2) remarks that 1 and 2 Thessalonians "have the strongest apocalyptic orientation of any of the Pauline letters." The presence of apocalyptic terms in 1 Thessalonians (in particular ὁδῖνες, θλίψις, and τέλος) is noted by Court, "Apocalyptic Pattern."

As to vindication, Paul speaks of God's wrath (ὀργή θεοῦ) in both a present (2:16) and a future (1:10; 5:9) sense in 1 Thessalonians. In 2:16 Paul declares that divine judgment has already fallen upon those Jews who oppose the servants and the work of God. Paul also informs the Thessalonian Christians that God did not destine them for future wrath, but for salvation through the Lord Jesus (5:9).¹² He assures his afflicted converts (1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4)¹³ that they are loved, chosen, and even instructed (1:1; 1:4; 2:12; 4:7, 9; 5:24)¹⁴ by the living, true, and faithful God (1:9; 5:24) and that this God of power and peace (1:5; 5:23) will rescue them from the coming destruction through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (1:10; 5:9). Paul contends, then, that God does and will vindicate himself (and by extension Paul and his converts) by judging unbelievers and by delivering believers.¹⁵ One may also note that in 1 Thessalonians, as elsewhere (Rom

¹²Interestingly, Paul instructed the Thessalonians about sexual purity by telling them that the Lord will judge "pagans" who live in the passion of their lusts (4:5-6).

¹³On the Thessalonians' affliction, see chapter nine below. Paul offers much instruction on suffering in 1 Thessalonians. Paul informs his converts that their affliction: links them with the apostles, the Lord, and other Christian congregations (1:6; 2:14); was met with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit (1:6; 5:16); made them a model Christian assembly (1:7); was to be expected because of their election by God and their affiliation with Christ (3:3-4); and involved the cunning schemes of Satan (3:5). If one accepts 2 Thessalonians as authentically Pauline, then three additional aspects of Paul's theology of suffering may be noted: 1. Present afflictions serve as a sign of God's righteous judgment in the future (1:5); 2. Suffering refines faith and prepares one for God's kingdom (1:5); and 3. Those who suffer now will be comforted at the *parousia* (1:6-10).

¹⁴Roetzel ("Election," 215-219) notes the concentration of election language in 1 Thessalonians. On the NT *hapax legomenon* θεοδίδακτος (4:9), see Roetzel, "Theodidaktoi."

¹⁵Elias ("Apocalyptic and Peace") rightly recognizes the present and future aspects of salvation and judgment in 1 Thessalonians.

12:14-21), Paul instructs beleaguered believers not to retaliate against their enemies, but to love and to do good to all people (3:12; 5:15). Such instruction indicates, among other things, that Paul was convinced that God would, in due course, "settle the score" with those who resisted him and his people and that harassed Christians should not take recourse into their own hands.¹⁶

Imminence is another characteristic of apocalyptic which is readily detectable in 1 Thessalonians. Paul is persuaded in this epistle that the *parousia* of Jesus (= the day of the Lord) would take place shortly and suddenly.¹⁷ Despite the fact that a few of the Thessalonian believers had already died (4:13-14),¹⁸ Paul seems to think that he and his converts would be alive when the Lord descended from heaven (4:15-17; cf. 5:10). Therefore, Paul encourages the Thessalonian believers to stay morally alert and sober and to don the spiritual armor of faith, love, and hope as they await the imminent day of the Lord, which will come like a thief in the night (5:1-11). Paul is not only convinced that the coming of the Lord will be soon, but he also believes the *parousia* will be a sudden and sure phenomenon, like labor pangs upon a pregnant woman (5:3). At the Lord's advent, unbelievers, who think that are at peace and secure, will experience inescapable

¹⁶It was noted on p. 113 that avoidance or withdrawal is one tactic for dealing with conflict.

¹⁷Hunter (*Paul*, 105) suggests that Paul inherited the belief of the imminent *parousia* of Christ from pre-Pauline Christian tradition and that "Paul probably believed to the end of his days in a speedy return of Christ." Cf. Ellis, *Pauline Theology*, 16.

¹⁸Most likely Paul did not thoroughly instruct his converts about the future of the deceased during his stay in Thessalonica because of his belief that they would live to participate in the *parousia*. (Note 4:13a: "But we would not have you ignorant concerning those who are asleep. . .").

destruction, while believers will inherit a glorious salvation (5:3, 9). In 1 Thessalonians, then, Paul is convinced that God will soon vindicate himself and his own through the cataclysmic and climatic coming of his Son, Jesus Christ.

In addition to and in keeping with the traits of vindication and imminence, one finds frequently in 1 Thessalonians the apocalyptic motif of dualism. The following dualities are present in the epistle: a cosmic (or spatial) duality: heaven/earth (1:10); a temporal duality: this age/the coming age (1:10); and a social (or ethical) duality: those who know/do not know God (4:5), insiders/outsideers (4:12), the elect/the rest (4:13; 5:6), children of light/children of darkness (5:4-5).¹⁹ In Paul's apocalyptic perspective, believers are to view themselves over against the world and its inhabitants, for they are called by God to be different than unbelievers (4:5), who are subject to divine destruction (5:3). Although outsiders can still be converted and become insiders (1:9), insiders are instructed to remember that they are no longer children of darkness who have no hope (4:13; 5:5). Christians, according to Paul, though hindered and tempted by Satan (2:18; 3:5) and subject to non-Christian opposition (3:4), will shortly inherit salvation when Jesus descends from heaven to gather believers to himself (4:16-17). As the elect wait for the imminent *parousia*, they are to serve the Lord in all that they say and do (4:1-12; 5:12-21) so that they might be found holy and blameless before God when Christ comes (3:13; 5:23). In this epistle Paul looks through apocalyptic spectacles as he places all people into one of two categories and assigns them to one of two destinies.

¹⁹These categories are drawn from Meeks, "Functions," 689.

One also discovers in the disputed 2 Thessalonians the apocalyptic traits being discussed. Compared to 1 Thessalonians, the motif of vindication is emphasized more, and the idea of imminence is stressed less. But these differences in emphasis may be attributed to events affecting the congregation, namely, the continuation (and perhaps escalation) of external conflict (1:4) and the erroneous assumption of some Thessalonians that the day of the Lord had come (2:2). In any event, in the second letter Paul instructs the afflicted and persecuted church (1:4-5) that God will repay those who oppose them when the Lord Jesus is revealed (1:6-7). Although the *parousia* of Jesus has yet to occur (2:1-12), the faithful Lord (3:3) will come in due course (2:6). At his coming, the harassed elect (1:11; 2:13) will receive rest (1:7), and the Lord will pour out vengeance on those who neither know God nor obey the gospel (1:8). Furthermore, Paul contends that unbelievers "will suffer eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord" (1:9).

That apocalyptic language suffuses the Thessalonian correspondence is beyond question. But why the concentration of apocalyptic in these epistles? While not denying other possible influences, I would contend that the apocalyptic *leitmotifs* of 1 (and 2) Thessalonians may be viewed as Paul's theological response to the hostile social relations that he and his converts had experienced/were experiencing with non-Christians.²⁰ The sociological study of deviance indicates that people who are socially opposed may appeal to their belief system in an attempt to explain and to cope with their circumstances (see further pp. 91-

²⁰So also Donfried, "Purpose," 244

92). I would suggest that Paul uses apocalyptic theology for such a purpose in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians. Paul's dualistic outlook helps him and his converts to make sense of the rejection, opposition, and separation they had encountered/were encountering from Jewish and Gentile outsiders. Furthermore, Paul uses the antithetical language of apocalyptic to reinforce further the boundaries between insiders and outsiders and to foster greater group loyalty and solidarity, thereby preparing them for continued hostility.²¹ In keeping with his apocalyptic *Weltanschauung*, Paul maintains that God would save Christians and punish their oppressors at the imminent *parousia* of Jesus.

Apocalyptic need not arise out of a social setting of opposition and alienation.²² Nevertheless, like 1 (and 2) Thessalonians, many apocalyptically-oriented documents did originate in a social context of conflict. The most notable NT example is the Apocalypse. In this writing, John violently denounces Rome (= the throne of Satan [2:12-13; 12:9; 13:2]) for, among other reasons, its hostile treatment of Christians.²³ Most likely John himself (1:9) and Antipas of Pergamum (2:13) were

²¹Cf. similarly Meeks, "Functions," 692; Segal, *Paul*, 161-166; and Barclay, "Conflict," 518. I noted on p. 110 that intergroup conflict can result in ingroup solidarity, enhanced awareness of ingroup identity, and tightening of group boundaries. Paul's apocalyptic rhetoric would have encouraged and facilitated ingroup awareness and cohesiveness. Given the opposition that his converts were facing from outsiders, it is not surprising that Paul stresses the importance of ethical excellence and internal discipline in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians (e. g., 1 Thess 4:1-8; 5:12-22; 2 Thess 3:6-15). On pp. 111-112 we saw that external conflict can cause a group to stress internal norms and to "crack down" on members who deviate from such.

²²Collins, "Genre," 546-547.

²³It is also likely that John (and his followers?) are in conflict with Jews (2:9; 3:9) and other believers in Jesus (2: 2, 6, 14, 15, 20). Some scholars (e. g., Räisänen, "Clash," 163-164) suggest that John is inventing, or at least exaggerating, the social opposition to Christians.

objects of Roman opposition.²⁴ Through the medium of an apocalypse, John expresses his intense antipathy toward Rome and its oppressive political system.²⁵

There is also a clear connection between apocalyptic theology and social hostility in 1 Peter.²⁶ This epistle is addressed to believers in Asia Minor who are experiencing conflict relations with non-Christians. These Petrine Christians, who are seemingly Gentiles (2:12; 4:3), are, at the least, being verbally abused by their former associates (3:16; 4:4, 14) for their new-found faith. The writer of the letter encourages "God's people" (2:10) to stand fast (5:12) and rejoice (1:6; 4:13) in the face of their sufferings and to fix their "hope fully upon the grace that is coming to [them] at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13; cf. 1:5, 7; 4:13; 5:1). Even though they are presently being harassed by unbelievers, the author informs them that their detractors "will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (4:5). Furthermore, he instructs his readers that "the end of all things is at hand" (4:7; cf. 1:20). "And after [they] have suffered a little while, the God of grace, who called [them] to glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen [them]" (5:10). Those who do not obey the gospel of God (= the word of the Lord [1:25]), however, will be

²⁴Furthermore, John reports that some of the Christians to whom he writes are enduring tribulation and believes that such persecution will continue and even intensify (e. g., 2:9-10).

²⁵On Revelation as a response to a social crisis, see esp. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*.

²⁶So rightly Volf, "Difference," 17-19. This correlation is lost on Holdsworth ("Sufferings," 230) who argues that the apocalyptic terminology present in 1 Peter bears no relation to the specific social circumstances of the Petrine congregations. He explains the apocalyptic language in 1 Peter as part of "a missionary theology which sees a constant, ongoing and necessary disjunction [*sic*] and struggle between powers antipathetic to the Gospel. . . ."

damned (4:17-18) when the "chief Shepherd is manifested" (5:4). As in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians, the correlation between apocalyptic and conflict in 1 Peter is a positive one.

Additional examples both inside²⁷ and outside²⁸ the NT which demonstrate the link between apocalyptic language and social dislocation could be discussed. At this juncture, however, I need not belabor the point. I have already shown from 1 (and 2) Thessalonians, Revelation, and 1 Peter that apocalyptic and conflict are compatible partners. To attribute the presence of apocalyptic in the Thessalonian correspondence solely to the hostile social relations that Paul and his converts had experienced/were experiencing with outsiders would be too simplistic. To be sure, apocalyptic is a vital part of Paul's thought-world and is never far from the surface of his mind. But in his occasional correspondence with Christian congregations Paul could emphasize or de-emphasize apocalyptic themes according to the circumstances at hand. I would contend, therefore, that the prominence of apocalyptic in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians may be usefully explained by taking into account Paul's and his converts' conflict with non-Christians. An apocalyptic symbolic universe

²⁷E. g., Stanton ("Matthew and Judaism," 146-168) has suggested that the prominence of apocalyptic in Matthew's gospel may be attributed to the conflict relations that the Matthean Christians were experiencing with Jewish and Gentile outsiders.

²⁸E. g., some writings of the Qumran community (esp., CD, 1QM, and 1QS), 1 Enoch, the *Didache*, 4 (and 5) Ezra, 2 Baruch, and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. For a useful study on Qumranite apocalyptic, see Martínez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic*. On 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as apocalyptic responses to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, see Esler, "Honour."

aids Paul and his Thessalonian converts²⁹ in explaining and in enduring non-Christian hostility.

II. Polemic and Conflict

In chapter one above, I concluded that 1 Thess 2:13-16 is authentically Pauline. Here I will reflect further on Paul's vitriolic polemic against particular Jews in 2:15-16. By doing so my position that Paul wrote the whole of 2:13-16 will be strengthened further. In this section I will seek to show that Paul's harsh denunciation of his (and in his view, God's) Jewish opponents can be reasonably and convincingly explained as a heated reaction on Paul's part to his recent negative experiences with fellow Jews. Furthermore, it will be contended that Paul not only uses polemic as a tool to gain linguistic leverage in his struggle with fellow Jews, but also as a device to justify his mission to the Gentiles and to buttress his afflicted converts in the faith.

In 2:15-16 Paul depicts "the Jews" as those

who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose all people by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved--so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but [God's] wrath has come upon them at last.

In this text which understandably troubles post-Holocaust readers, Paul makes the startling statement that the wrath of God has fallen upon those Jews who have set themselves against God's messengers (i. e., Jesus, the prophets, and Paul and his helper[s]). But what prompts Paul to say in this particular letter that his Jewish opponents are the targets of God's anger, that they are forever

²⁹I will show in chapter ten that Paul's initial proclamation to the Thessalonian church was thoroughly apocalyptic. As a result, the apocalyptic character of his correspondence would have been intelligible to his converts.

stockpiling their sins, and that they displease God and oppose all humanity?

Scholarly strategies for answering this query are plentiful. The plethora of opinion will not be rehearsed here, but I will mention a few of the explanations on offer before setting out my own view. As noted in the first chapter, some exegetes explain the polemic in 2:15-16 by denying the passage's authenticity. Other scholars seek to soften the ferocity of Paul's rhetoric here by appealing to pre-Synoptic tradition and/or to Paul's later remarks concerning Israel in Romans 9-11.³⁰ Additionally, interpreters have suggested that Paul's sardonic statements in 2:15-16 can be explained as a product of Paul's prejudicial attitudes,³¹ or as an example of Pauline hyperbole,³² or as an expression of apocalyptic theology.³³

But even if one recognizes that Paul is speaking apocalyptically, hyperbolically, and perhaps even prejudicially in 2:15-16 and acknowledges the influence of traditional material upon this text, one is still left to wonder why Paul so violently castigates and condemns his Jewish opponents in this particular letter. Nowhere else in his extant letters do we encounter Paul so

³⁰E. g., Donfried, "Paul." Cf. Munck, *Romans 9-11*, 64. At the other end of the spectrum, Mason ("Polemic") views Paul's negative comments in 1 Thess 2:15-16 as representative of Paul's position *vis-à-vis* Judaism and understands Paul's more positive statements about the Jewish people in Romans as an exercise in diplomacy.

³¹Wortham, "Anti-Judaism."

³²Schlueter, *Measure*.

³³Okeke, "Fate"; and Hurd, "Paul."

caustically denouncing his Jewish adversaries.³⁴ How may this polemical anomaly be explained?³⁵ As indicated above, I believe that the intense rhetoric in 2:15-16 is best understood as Paul's specific reaction to the Jewish opposition that he had experienced in Thessalonica.³⁶ Paul was apparently quite bitter about the Thessalonian Jewish hostility which had cut short his ministry to the Gentiles in that city. He was angry enough to take up the type of slanderous language used by Gentiles against Jews³⁷ and use it against his (Thessalonian) Jewish opponents.³⁸

This line of interpretation is, of course, not novel.³⁹ Other commentators have arrived at a similar position.⁴⁰ For example,

³⁴Milligan (30) notes "that this is the only passage in the Pauline writings in which the designation 'the Jews' is used in direct contrast to Christian believers in the sense which St John afterwards made so familiar in his Gospel."

³⁵It is also intriguing to note the polemic in 2 Thess 1:6, 8, 9; 2:10-12 against those who afflict the Thessalonian Christians. Drawing upon OT texts (e. g., Isa 2:10, 19, 21; 66:6-9; Jer 10:25; Ps 79:6; Mal 1:11; Zech 14:5), Paul roundly condemns those who trouble his converts by asserting that God will inflict vengeance upon them.

³⁶While Schleuter (*Measure*, 53) acknowledges that Paul pens 2:14-16 in response to present or recent Jewish opposition, she stresses the hyperbolic and *parenetic* character of the passage. I am giving greater emphasis to the circumstances which prompted the polemic.

³⁷Paul remarks that those Jews who hinder him from speaking to the Gentiles so that they might be saved "displease God" and "oppose all people." Cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.2; and Josephus, *c. Ap.* 2.121.

³⁸Johnson ("Slander") notes that even though such polemical language may well offend modern sensibilities such caustic comments were common in antiquity. In concluding his useful article he remarks that "there were not many [ancient] Jews or Gentiles who did not have at least one curse to deal with" (441).

³⁹The fact that Paul's outburst against "the Jews" is linked to his conflict with some Thessalonian Jews, however, is often overlooked by commentators. E. g., Best (115) is left to surmise that the vitriolic language of 2:15-16 is prompted by "an unknown persecution in Paul's situation as he writes from Corinth."

⁴⁰In addition to the commentators mentioned in the text, see Donfried, "Paul," 248; Kruse, "Price," 261; and Stuhlmacher, *Paul*, 16.

George Milligan suggests that Paul's attack on his Jewish adversaries in 2:15-16 was prompted by "what he himself had suffered at the hands of his fellow-countrymen. . . ." ⁴¹ And Gottlieb Lünemann maintains that Paul's recent conflict with his compatriots "is the natural and easily psychologically explanatory occasion of the polemic in vv. 15, 16." ⁴²

The contention that the polemic in 2:15-16 is best explained as a Pauline denunciation of those Jews (particularly in Thessalonica) who hindered his Gentile mission becomes even more persuasive when one considers other NT examples of polemic against particular Jews and the conflict situations which gave rise to such vituperative remarks. ⁴³ We turn to the Gospels of Matthew and John for illustrative purposes. ⁴⁴ It is widely held among Matthean scholars that the writer of the First Gospel and his community had a hostile relationship with Jewish outsiders, particularly the scribes and Pharisees. ⁴⁵ Some interpreters of Matthew also suggest that the intense polemic in this gospel arises from such conflict (note e. g., "hypocrites" - 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; "brood of vipers" - 3:7; 12:24; 23:33;

⁴¹Milligan, 29. So similarly, Frame, 110-111; and Neil, 50-51.

⁴²Lünemann, 67.

⁴³There are, of course, examples of Jews polemicizing against Jews outside of the NT. Perhaps the most notable example is the fierce polemic of the Qumran community against those teachers and authorities of the Jewish establishment with whom they disagreed. On Qumranite polemic, see Evans, "Faith and Polemic."

⁴⁴See also Rev 2:9 and 3:9 and the insightful studies of Collins, esp. "Vilification."

⁴⁵See the somewhat dated but still useful study by Hare, *Persecution*. See also, Stanton, "Matthew and Judaism"; Saldarini, "Conflict"; Meeks, "Breaking Away"; Freyne, "Vilifying the Other"; McKnight, "Matthew's Polemic"; Smigna, *Pain and Polemic*, 52-96; Tilborg, *Jewish Leaders*; and Garland, *Matthew 23*.

"son(s) of hell" - 23:15; "blind" - 23:17, 19, 26; "blind guides" - 15:14; 23:16, 24; "whitewashed tombs" - 23:27; "his blood be on us and our children" - 27:25; cf. 23:35). Graham Stanton, for instance, understands this welter of Matthean polemic as a "real" response born out of "anger and frustration" which "should be seen as part of the self-definition of the Christian minority which is acutely aware of the rejection and hostility of its 'mother,' Judaism."⁴⁶ Like Paul, then, Matthew employs polemic to condemn his Jewish opponents, to confirm his own position, and to comfort harried believers.

Since the seminal contributions of J. Louis Martyn (*History and Theology*) and Raymond E. Brown (*John*), it has become almost axiomatic for students of the Fourth Gospel to view the bitter polemic therein as a response of the Johannine community to their recent experience of expulsion from the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2).⁴⁷ Regardless of why (Was the rift over christological concerns?) and how (How, if at all, did the "Twelfth Benediction," the *birkat ha-minim*, factor into the expulsions?) this rupture occurred, the scathing rhetoric of John's Gospel indicates that these expelled Christian Jews were deeply scarred and resentful. In a position of dislocation from Judaism, the gospel writer strikes out against his Jewish competitors: by defining the Johannine community over against "the Jews" and Judaism (e. g., 2:6, 13; 3:25; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55); by informing his readers that "the Jews" are to be feared (e. g., 7:13; 9:22; 19:38; 20:19); by often portraying "the Jews," and particularly Jewish leaders, as enemies

⁴⁶Stanton, "Matthew and Judaism," 157.

⁴⁷E. g., Kysar, "Anti-Semitism."

of Jesus and his disciples and in concert with the "world" (e. g., 1:10; 2:18, 20; 4:1; 6:41; 7:32; 8:13, 48; 12:42; 16:33; 17:14; 18:3, 12, 19); by judging "the Jews" to be untrue to their faith and tradition (e. g., 5:39-40; 7:19; 8:39-44; 10:31-39; 19:15); and by declaring that "the Jews" are fathered by the devil and that they wish to carry out his desires (8:44).⁴⁸ John's vicious attack against "the Jews" is connected to and exacerbated by the painful parting of the Johannine community from "the Jews."

The polemic in 1 Thess 2:15-16 has puzzled many Pauline interpreters. I have suggested that this passage (and analogous texts in Matthew and John) is best understood as a (over-)reaction of the leader of an ostracized minority to opposition from a dominant majority. Paul and his Thessalonian converts were facing hostile treatment from outsiders, as were the Matthean and Johannine communities. In an effort to help their readers (and themselves!) cope with the conflict and to compensate for their respective groups' lack of power,⁴⁹ Paul, Matthew, and John paint their opponents in dark hues and portray them in a less than flattering light. On p. 92 above it was noted that condemnation of one's condemners is one way that people who are marginalized seek to neutralize their alienation. Furthermore, we observed on p. 105 (see also pp. 110-111) that conflict relations can lead to hostile interaction between groups and to ingroup glorification and outgroup denigration. Additionally, there may be some validity to

⁴⁸On polemic in the Fourth Gospel, see further Meeks, "Johannine Sectarianism"; Whitacre, *Johannine Polemic*; and Smigma, *Pain and Polemic*, 134-173.

⁴⁹Johnson ("Slander," 424) makes the pertinent point that "Abuse tends to gain in volume when it lacks power." Katz ("Resolution," 373-374) suggests that intergroup conflicts frequently revolve around the issue of power. See further pp. 106-107 above.

Bruce J. Malina's suggestion that first-century Mediterranean people (like Paul) were typically dyadic (i. e., group oriented) and were bent upon defending the honor of their group against other groups in ways which modern Westerners might deem excessive and offensive (Paul's polemic in 2:15-16 is a case in point).⁵⁰ Paul's virulent response to his Jewish opposition becomes understandable, though not commendable, when viewed through such lens.

Conclusion

In this chapter it has been argued that Paul responded to the conflict which he and his Thessalonian converts faced/were facing by emphasizing apocalyptic motifs of vindication, imminence, and dualism and by employing polemical rhetoric. While realizing that apocalyptic is part and parcel of Pauline thought and that polemic (or *vituperatio*) was an ancient rhetorical convention, I have contended that the prominence of apocalyptic and the presence of polemic in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians is usefully explained as Paul's (uncharitable) response to the hostility that he and his fledgling converts had encountered/were encountering. It is commonly suggested that apocalyptic and polemic are reactions of an oppressed minority group to a dominant majority group with which it is at odds.⁵¹ In the Thessalonian correspondence Paul combines apocalyptic with polemic to offer a powerful, if vengeful, response to his and his converts' plight.

⁵⁰*World*, 51-70. While Malina may be accurate in claiming that intense ingroup loyalty marked (or marks) Mediterranean culture, he seems to oversimplify the matter by maintaining that in the NT world "the individual was symptomatic and representative of some group" (58). Paul, for example, demonstrates some degree of distinct individuality which is not merely determined by group loyalties (see e. g., Galatians 1-2; 2 Corinthians 10-13; and Philippians 3).

⁵¹E. g., Stanton, "Matthew and Judaism," 165.

PART FOUR:
THE THESSALONIANS' ΘΛΙΨΙΣ

Chapter Nine

The Nature and Source of the Thessalonian Christians' Conflict

Introduction

Having treated Paul's trouble in Thessalonica in part three of this project, I now turn in part four to explore the conflict relations of Paul's Thessalonian converts with non-Christians. In this chapter I will focus upon two aspects of the Thessalonian Christians' conflict with outsiders. To begin, I will consider how the Thessalonian believers' were afflicted. I will then seek to determine at whose hands the church suffered. The conclusions reached here on the nature and source of the Thessalonians' affliction are important in their own right¹ and will be foundational for the discussion in the chapters which follow.

I. The Thessalonians' ΘΛΙΨΙΣ

In 1 Thessalonians Paul indicates that his converts experienced θλίψις both in conjunction with their conversion (1:6: "you received the word in much affliction" [δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ]) and subsequent to it (3:3: "that no one be shaken by these afflictions" [ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύταις]). Paul also reminds the Thessalonian Christians in 3:4 that he had told them while he was still with them to expect affliction (καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἦμεν προελέγομεν ὑμῖν ὅτι μέλλομεν θλίβεσθαι). That the church in Thessalonica suffered θλίψις is further attested in 2 Thess 1:4-7 and in 2 Cor 8:2.

But what does Paul mean when he states that the Thessalonians were subject to θλίψις? In order to answer this

¹So also Wanamaker, 81.

question, the meaning of the term as Paul employs it in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians must be determined. Although *θλίψις* seldom appears in extra-biblical Greek, when it does it denotes "pressure."² In time, *θλίψις*, along with its corresponding verb *θλίβειν*, came to mean external or internal "affliction" or "oppression." The term *θλίψις* occurs with some frequency and with various nuances throughout the LXX. Most often, however, it is used "in relation to the ills that befall the people of God."³ Turning to the NT, *θλίψις* is found forty-five times. NT writers in general and Paul in particular employ the word to speak of external tribulation. On the rare occasion, however, Paul can use the word to refer to mental distress (see 2 Cor 2:4; Phil 1:17).

How does Paul utilize the word in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians? First of all one should note that when Paul speaks of his own "distress and affliction" (*ἀνάγκη καὶ θλίψει*) in 1 Thess 3:7, he *may* have only mental duress in mind.⁴ But what about the Thessalonians' *θλίψις* to which Paul refers? Was their affliction purely psychological? Malherbe seems to think so. He remarks that "it is reasonable to understand *thlipsis* in 1:6 [and 3:3-4] as the distress and anguish of heart experienced by persons who broke with their past as they received the gospel."⁵

²See e. g., Galen's reference to the pressure of the pulse in *De Differentiis Februm* 1.9. In treating this term I am drawing upon the work of Schlier, s. v. *θλίβω*, *θλίψις*, *TDNT*, 3:139-148; and *BAGD*, s. v. *θλίψις*, 362.

³Best, 79.

⁴So Bruce, 67. But see 2 Thess 3:2.

⁵Malherbe, *Paul*, 48. Despite this statement, Malherbe's view of the Thessalonians' *thlipsis* may be more nuanced. On p. 45 of the same work, he remarks about the "social dislocation" and "public criticism" that converts in antiquity (like the Thessalonians) encountered. Experiences such as these surely go beyond the private, psychological sphere! And it is quite likely that Paul and his converts would have perceived "social dislocation" and "public criticism" as "persecution." In fact, I will argue in this chapter that verbal abuse and social

While Malherbe may be correct in contending that Paul's converts, like other converts in antiquity, experienced mental discomfort as a result of their conversion,⁶ the following considerations make it clear that Paul had more than psychological turmoil in mind when speaking of his converts' *θλίψις*.⁷ First of all, in 1:6 Paul claims that the Thessalonians became imitators of the apostles and of the Lord through their experience of *θλίψις*. Certainly the apostles and the Lord (2:15; cf. 4:13) encountered far more than psychological turmoil. Secondly, Paul remarks in 1:7 that as a result of their (positive response to) affliction the Christians in Thessalonica "became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (cf. 2 Thess 1:4). "This [statement] implies very strongly that in v. 6 Paul was speaking about more than mere 'distress and anguish of heart.' After all, every convert to the faith could be said to undergo 'distress and anguish of heart' in the sense suggested by Malherbe."⁸ Thirdly, in 2:14 Paul maintains that the Thessalonians suffered the same things as the Judean churches did. This comparison suggests that the Judean and Thessalonians Christians shared some type of external, verifiable afflictions. Otherwise, how would Paul have been able to measure the similarity of their suffering? Fourthly, Paul indicates

ostracism comprised a substantial part of the Thessalonians' affliction of which Paul speaks.

⁶It may be, however, that Malherbe's proposal of psychological affliction for Paul's Thessalonian converts is more attuned to the Western individualistic interpretive tradition than to a Mediterranean cultural milieu. See, among others, Malina (*World*, esp. 53-60), who contends that Mediterranean culture past and present is characterized by a dyadic personality; but see above, p. 204, n. 50.

⁷So rightly Best, 79; Frame, 83; Martin, 62; Morris, 48, n. 37; Wanamaker, 81; Barclay, "Conflict," 514-515; and Meeks, *Origins*, 224, n. 32. Furthermore, Malherbe fails to indicate that Cynic converts, for example, could also suffer more than mental anguish (see e. g., Epictetus, *Diss.* 3.22.53-55).

⁸Wanamaker, 81. The quote within the quote is from Malherbe, *Paul*, 48.

that he sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to encourage them lest they be shaken by their continued afflictions and be lured away from the faith (3:2-3, 5). Furthermore, he tells his converts that he had tried time and again to return to them (2:17) and reminds his converts that he had told them to anticipate affliction, for such is the Christian's lot (3:3-4). Paul's intense and continued concern for the spiritual steadfastness of his converts suggests that were facing something far more serious than psychological *Angst*.

Paul provides a solid clue as to the nature of his converts' affliction in 2:13-14. He states here that the Thessalonian believers, like the Judean Christians, were subject to suffering as a result of their having received the gospel.⁹ Although one can interpret 1:6 and 3:3-4 apart from 2:14, there is no compelling reason to do so. In fact, it seems best to view the affliction mentioned in 1:6 and 3:3-4 in the light of the suffering spoken of 2:14. Against Malherbe, I would contend that the Thessalonians' *θλίψις* is best understood as external, non-Christian opposition (see more fully below).¹⁰

If credence may be given to the evidence in 2 Thessalonians, then the nature of the Thessalonians' affliction becomes clearer still. In 1:4 Paul praises his converts for their "steadfastness and faith in all [their] persecutions [*διωγμοῖς*] and in the afflictions [*θλίψεσιν*] which [they] are enduring." Here, as in Rom 8:35 (cf.

⁹The parallels between 1:6 and 2:13-14 are, in my view, unmistakable. In both passages Paul speaks of the trying circumstances that his converts faced as believers.

¹⁰Pearson ("Interpolation," 87) thinks that the *θλίψις* terminology in 1 Thess is a "theological *topos*, revealing [Paul's] eschatologically oriented theology. . . ." Although Paul can use *θλίψις* to speak of Christian suffering in general terms (e. g., Rom 5:3; cf. similarly *ἀνάγκη* in 1 Cor 7:27), I have shown that in 1 Thessalonians Paul employs the term to speak of his converts' external troubles. So also, Bammel, "Preparation," 99-100.

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Matt 13:21; Mark 4:17), θλίψις is virtually synonymous with διωγμός,¹¹ a term denoting external strife.¹² Furthermore, 1:5-8 maintains that God will afflict those who presently oppose the Thessalonians at the *parousia* of Jesus. Texts in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians clearly indicate that Paul's converts were troubled by unbelievers.

Moreover, the church in Thessalonica was not the only Pauline congregation to encounter external, non-Christian opposition. Paul's converts in Philippi also experienced hostile treatment at the hands of outsiders, as Phil 1:27-30 indicates (cf. 2 Cor 8:2).¹³ In this pericope Paul exhorts his converts to live worthily of the gospel and not to be intimidated by their opponents. Then in language strikingly similar to 2 Thess 1:5-8,¹⁴ he informs the Philippians that their steadfastness in the face of conflict serves as a sign to their opponents of their destruction and of the church's salvation. Furthermore, Paul reminds his converts that the suffering which they are experiencing for Christ is a privilege (cf. 1 Thess 3:3). Although it appears that not all of the Pauline congregations clashed with non-Christians (e. g., the church in Corinth),¹⁵ Paul claims that the Thessalonians and their sister congregation in Philippi suffered at the hands of unbelievers. And there is every reason to trust his report.

¹¹So also Best, 253; Marshall, 172; and Wanamaker, 219.

¹²Note Paul's use of the related verb διώκειν in Gal 1:13, 23; 4:29; 5:11; 6:12; and Phil 3:6.

¹³On the Philippian congregation's conflict, see Tellbe, "Conflict."

¹⁴Rightly noted by Bloomquist, *Suffering*, 158-159. On this instructive monograph, see further my review.

¹⁵On the seeming cordial relations of the Corinthian church with outsiders, see Barclay, "Contrasts."

Unfortunately, Paul does not specify the way(s) that outsiders opposed his converts in Thessalonica. This leaves one to conjecture about the precise nature of the Thessalonians' hardships. One option which may be eliminated from the outset, however, is some kind of systematically organized and officially supervised effort to eradicate the Thessalonian church.¹⁶ Nothing in either letter would suggest such a scenario. (In fact, commentators on the Thessalonian letters might consider mothballing the term "persecution" in reference to the church's affliction lest they leave the reader with an erroneous impression.¹⁷ At the very least, interpreters should clearly indicate what they mean by this loaded and often misleading word which only represents the perspective of those opposed and conjures up images of protracted, organized violence).

To speculate further about the nature of the conflict, in my estimation it is probable that the Thessalonians, like their founder, were objects of verbal abuse. One may in fact infer from Paul's injunction "to aspire to live quietly" and so "command the respect of outsiders" (4:11-12) that his converts were all too ready to respond to the non-Christian criticism to which they were subject.¹⁸

According to 1 Peter, believers in Asia Minor were also verbally abused by unbelievers. On multiple occasions in this epistle the author tells his readers to anticipate verbal attacks and advises them how to respond to hostile accusations (e. g., 2:12, 15; 3:9, 16; 4:4, 14). The writer admonishes these assailed "aliens" to

¹⁶So rightly Hare, *Persecution*, 64; and Collins, *Birth*, 112.

¹⁷Donfried ("Purpose," 255, n. 53) recognizes that the term "persecution" may be misleading but continues to use it nonetheless.

¹⁸Barclay, "Conflict," 522.

emulate Christ who uttered no deceitful word and refused to retaliate when his enemies hurled insults at him (2:21-23).¹⁹ It may be that some Matthean Christians were also pelted by verbal stones hurled by outsiders. In Matt 5:11 one reads: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (cf. 5:44). Although one would like to know more about the content of such insults, verbal harassment suggests that there were tense social relations between Matthean and Petrine Christians and the non-Christians with whom they interacted.²⁰

Similarly, it is likely that the Thessalonian Christians suffered strained social relations with unbelievers. In fact, the Thessalonians' turning to God from idols (1:9) appears to have altered, or even ruptured, a number of their former relational networks (2:14). One can imagine that Paul's converts were criticized and even ostracized by their non-Christian family, friends, and associates for joining an upstart sectarian movement whose leader encouraged a certain degree of social dislocation from the "rest" (4:13; cf. 1 Cor 5:9-13). Although Paul taught his Thessalonian converts to view non-Christians as outsiders subject to wrath (1:10; 4:5, 12; 5:1-11; cf. 2 Thess 1:5-12; 2:11-12), socially speaking, the Thessalonian believers would have been viewed and treated as a minute minority on the periphery of society (see further chapter ten).

Although it is now impossible to know the precise steps that non-Christian Thessalonians took to suppress the deviants in their

¹⁹On 1 Peter as a response to slander, see further Balch, *Wives*. See also Elliott, *Home*, esp. 78-84.

²⁰Elliott (*Home*, 81) suggests that "Such harassment of Christians by local opponents seems to have been the rule rather than the exception."

midst, according to Acts 17 local political authorities were appealed to in an attempt to squelch this aberrant movement. According to Luke, Jason and some of the other believers in Thessalonica were taken before the politarchs and were subjected to political sanctions (i. e., posting bond) for their association with Paul and Silas and for defying Caesar's decrees by proclaiming Jesus as king. I noted in chapter three above that Luke draws upon reliable tradition when reporting that some of Paul's Thessalonian converts were brought before the local civil authorities.²¹ While Luke may be right in reporting that the politarchs' initial reaction to Jason and the rest was quite mild, it is possible that the Thessalonian Christians were not always treated so kindly by the local assembly (δῆμος) and authorities (πολίταρχαι).²²

In fact, some exegetes have suggested that a few of the Thessalonian Christians were martyred for the faith.²³ Interpreters arrive at such a conclusion by combining Paul's statements about the Thessalonians' affliction in 1:6; 2:14; and 3:3-4 with his instruction concerning those believers who have died in 4:13-18. John Pabee, who is followed by Karl Donfried, contends that the

phrase οἱ κοιμηθέντες διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ [4:14] refers to the Christians who died in their zeal for Jesus as was demonstrated by their patient endurance of persecution, before the Parousia of Christ. The attendant circumstances

²¹So also, e. g., Lüdemann, *Traditions*, 188.

²²Haenchen (*Acts*, 513) suggests that Gentile opposition against the assembly increased in severity after Paul's departure and likely "cost the Christians of Thessalonica a good deal more than the price of bail." In chapter ten I will argue that the church's conflict with their Gentile compatriots was due partly to the fact that Paul's converts were viewed as politically subversive.

²³E. g., Pabee, *Persecution*, 113-114; Donfried, "Cults," 349-350 and "Purpose," 254-256; and Collins, *Birth*, 112. One also finds the suggestion that some of the Thessalonian Christians were martyred among earlier interpreters (see e. g., Lake, *Epistles*, 88).

of the death were the persecutions raging in the church of Thessalonica.²⁴

Although Pobeë is probably correct in taking διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ with τοὺς κοιμηθέντες instead of with ἄξει and in suggesting that διὰ is best understood as expressing attendant circumstance, it is highly unlikely that Paul is alluding in 4:14 to the martyrdom of some of his converts. (Pobeë's argument that the present participle κοιμωμένων in 4:13 "is a reference to the continued and protracted persecution of Christians at Thessalonica which was taking the lives of some Christians" is misdirected.²⁵ The participle refers to continued sleep, not continued "persecution"!) Instead, Paul seems to be saying in 4:14 that God will bring with Jesus at the *parousia* those Thessalonian believers who have died in Jesus (i. e., as Christians; cf. 1 Cor 15:18).²⁶

Although I would not positively identify the Christian dead in 4:13-18 as martyrs, I am nevertheless reluctant to dismiss altogether the possibility that some of Paul's converts were victims of physical violence and that perhaps on the rarest occasion such opposition might have resulted in death. It is true that Paul does not explicitly indicate²⁷ or celebrate²⁸ martyrdom among the Thessalonians. He does state in 2:14, however, that the

²⁴Pobeë, *Persecution*, 114; Donfried, "Purpose," 256.

²⁵Pobeë, *Persecution*, 113.

²⁶So similarly Dobschütz, 191; Marshall, 124; Bruce, 98; and Wanamaker, 169.

²⁷Bruce (98) remarks that "the references in both 1 and 2 Thessalonians to the 'afflictions' endured by the Christians of Thessalonica scarcely give the impression that positive martyrdom was involved." Contrast Bruce, *Acts* (Greek), 372.

²⁸Barclay ("Conflict," 514) contends that Paul would have surely lauded those who died as martyrs and refers to Phil 2:25-30 and Rom 16:4 where Paul applauds those who have risked their lives for the service of Christ to support his position.

Thessalonian congregation *suffered the same things* (τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε) as the Judean churches did. If this statement is to be taken literally,²⁹ it is possible that one or two of the Thessalonian Christians experienced martyrdom as the Judean Christians Stephen (Acts 7:54-8:1) and James (12:1-3) did.³⁰ The fact that Paul speaks of the death of Jesus and the prophets in close connection with the Thessalonians' affliction may also lend support to the view that a few of Paul's converts in Thessalonica died for the faith (2:15; cf. 1:6).³¹

Although Paul does not disclose precisely how the Thessalonians' suffered, he does indicate that his converts faced considerable hostility (1:6). Schlueter, who has been unduly influenced by Pearson, erroneously equates "severe persecution" with martyrdom.³² And because she finds no evidence for martyrdom in 1 Thessalonians, she concludes that Paul exaggerates the severity of the Thessalonians' sufferings. While not denying that Paul can speak hyperbolically, there is good reason to accept Paul's claim that his converts' were sorely afflicted. In addition to my interpretation of the pertinent texts above, I would note that our study of social conflict has alerted us to the fact that intergroup conflict can be quite intense, particularly in cases where the conflicting parties are familiar with one another and are

²⁹Schleuter (*Measure*, 53) maintains that Paul is speaking hyperbolically at this point. But see Donfried, "Cults," 349. Frame (110) suggests that the comparison "is intended to express not identity but similarity."

³⁰We know of two other Christian martyrs in the first century CE, namely, James, the brother of Jesus (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.200-203), and Antipas (Rev 2:13).

³¹Collins, *Birth*, 112.

³²Schlueter, *Measure*, 52-53; and Pearson, "Interpolation." "Persecution" simply suggests ill-treatment. It may or may not be physical; it may or may not result in death.

embroiled in ideological disputes. (Consider the current world conflicts in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Palestine, and Afghanistan). I would hold, then, that it is best to conceive of the Thessalonians' affliction as external (i. e., real/actual) non-Christian opposition which took the forms of verbal harassment, social ostracism, political sanctions, and *perhaps* even some sort of physical abuse, which on the rarest of occasions *may* have resulted in martyrdom.³³

II. The Origin of the Thessalonians' Opposition

To this point I have discussed how the church in Thessalonica was afflicted. The source of the Thessalonians' suffering will now be considered. Paul provides a helpful hint as to the origin of his converts' opposition in 2:14b when he remarks: "you suffered the same things from your own compatriots [τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν] as they [i. e., the Judean churches] suffered from the Jews [ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων]." But who precisely were the Thessalonian Christians' συμφυλέται? The way one answers this question significantly shapes how one conceives of the conflict relations between Christians and non-Christians in Thessalonica. Therefore, in this section I will set forth my understanding of how Paul employs συμφυλέτης in 2:14 and will offer lexical, contextual, and historical arguments for my viewpoint.

Lexical issues

Although the word συμφυλέτης is a biblical Greek *hapax legomenon* and appears infrequently in other extant Greek literature,³⁴ there is little doubt that this Hellenistic Greek

³³Regardless of whether or not the Thessalonians experienced physical abuse, one may still rightly regard their suffering as severe. From my perspective, verbal harassment, social ridicule, and political sanctions qualify as "considerable affliction."

³⁴BAGD note that the word appears in *Inscriptiones Graecae* 7.2.505.18; *Doxographi Graeci* 655.8; *Rhetores Graeci* 7.49.22; Isocrates 12.145 (in the

compound literally denotes those who belong to the same φυλή.³⁵ Presumably, συμφυλέτης is synonymous with the more common Attic Greek term φυλέτης.³⁶ That Paul would choose to prefix σύν to φυλέτης comes as no great surprise. This was commonly done in later Greek, and Paul was particularly fond of forming compounds with σύν (e. g., 2 Cor 6:18; Gal 1:14; Phil 2:2; 3:10, 17). The practice of prefixing a preposition to a word without altering its original meaning or force was frowned upon by the second century CE grammarian Herodianus: πολίτης δημότης φυλέτης ἄνευ τῆς σύν.³⁷ Such lexical niceties, however, were lost on Paul in the first century CE.

With a broad definition of συμφυλέτης (i. e., of or from the same φυλή) in place, the possible semantic range of the term and its intended meaning in 2:14 may now be explored. Theoretically, the word could be used quite narrowly to refer to a particular citizenry division or voting tribe. The term φυλαί was certainly used this way in Classical Greek (e. g., Herodotus, 6.111.1; Thucydides, 6.98.4). Furthermore, Nicholas F. Jones has noted that in Thessalonica "four phylai are attested by inscriptions ranging in date from the Hellenistic period (?) to the third century A.D."³⁸

Blass edition); Herodianus; Philetaerus; and Hesychius. A *TLG* search indicated that early church historians and theologians such as Origen (*Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* 10.18.25; *Epistula ad Africanum* 11.72.16) and John Chrysostom (*In epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses*) employed the term when quoting and commenting on 1 Thess 2:14.

³⁵So also Liddell and Scott, 667; Lünemann, 67; Milligan, 29; and Meeks, "Social Functions," 691.

³⁶Frame, 110; and Bruce, 46. Interestingly, although φυλέτης is often found in Greek literature (e. g., Isocrates, *Panathenaicus* 145.2; Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 16.1; *Pericles* 10.1; *Pelopidas* 18.2; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 9.41.3; Philo, *Abr.* 67.2; *Spec. Leg.* 2.82, 129; *Quis Her.* 9.6; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.14, 174, 175; 5.154, 299), it does not appear in the Greek NT.

³⁷Frame, 110.

³⁸*Organization*, 267.

These facts notwithstanding, it is doubtful that Paul would have used *συμφυλέτης* in a political sense. While it is conceivable that a few of Paul's Thessalonian converts could have been citizens (some may have been artisans [4:11; cf. 2 Thess 3:6-13]), it is most unlikely that the majority of the assembly belonged to voting tribes, which would needed to have been the case for Paul's analogy to hold (see below). In fact, citizenship in Greek cities was not particularly common and was quite difficult to acquire. John C. Lentz notes, "Citizenship in Greek cities was not simply acquired by everyone upon birth in a given locale. Rather, citizenship throughout the Greek cities of the [Roman] empire was earned, bought, or inherited." Lentz continues: "Full citizenship in a Greek city was reserved . . . for those of landed wealth and was a mark of status that many longed for but few achieved."³⁹ The source of the Christians' opposition, then, was broader than given citizenry divisions.

At the other end of the semantical spectrum are those scholars who suggest that Paul used *συμφυλέτης* to refer to all local townspeople, so as to include Jews as well as Gentiles in the opposition of the Thessalonian church.⁴⁰ Interpreters who arrive at such a view, however, are guided more by their reading of Luke's account of Paul's sojourn in Thessalonica than they are by lexicology. As we have already seen in chapter three above, Acts 17 reports that the Jews of Thessalonica collected a group of Gentiles from the *agora* who in turn assisted them in gathering a

³⁹*Portrait*, 33. See further, Jones, *Greek City*.

⁴⁰Findlay, 75; Lightfoot, *Notes*, 32; following Lightfoot, Morris, 82, n. 69; Milligan, 29; following Milligan, Donfried, "Paul," 248; following Donfried, Sandnes, *Paul*, 186, n. 4; Rigaux, 443; Best, 114; Marshall, 79; Williams, 79; and Martin, 89-90.

mob and attacking the house of Jason where Paul and Silas were apparently residing. While some of Paul's converts were caught up in the conflict for having harbored the apostles, a careful reading of Luke's narrative suggests that the Thessalonian Jews were only interested in getting at Paul and Silas. (Jewish opposition to the Pauline mission in Thessalonica is evidenced in 1 Thessalonians 2 as well as in Acts 17). If, however, Luke's condensed account of Paul's entry into and exit from Thessalonica is meant to indicate *Jewish* opposition of Thessalonian Christians *per se* (as scholars who understand συμφυλέτης as local townspeople tend to argue), then there are good grounds to question the accuracy of the Lucan report on this particular point (see below).

Along lexical lines I would point out that the term φυλή, which appears frequently in the LXX (410 times) and occasionally in the NT (thirty-one times, twenty-one of which are in Rev), carries the primary meaning "tribe" and by extension can mean "people, race, or nation."⁴¹ As for Paul, he uses φυλή on two occasions in reference to his belonging to the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5). Although he does not employ φυλή in a more general way, throughout his epistles Paul displays an acute awareness of his Jewishness (see e. g., Rom 9:3; 16:7, 11, 21 where Paul speaks of his Jewish kinspeople [συγγενής]⁴²) and is consistently careful to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles (see e. g., Rom 1:16; 2:9, 14, 28-29; 3:9, 29; 9:24, 30-31; 11:11, 13-14, 25-26; 15:7-13, 15-18, 26-27; 16:4; 1 Cor 1:24; 5:1; 10:32; 12:13; 2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:2-3, 7-9, 12-15; 3:28; Col 3:11).⁴³ Gal 2:15 is particularly telling as Paul

⁴¹So Mauer, *TDNT*, s. v. φυλή, 9:245-250.

⁴²Suidas lists συγγενής as an alternative meaning of συμφυλέτης.

⁴³Noted also by Donaldson, "Gospel." Strathmann (*TDNT*, s. v. λαός, 4:56) rightly remarks that Paul "had no thought of surrendering his national

differentiates between those who are "Jews by birth" (φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι) and "Gentile sinners" (ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί).

In reference to 1 Thessalonians in particular, I would call attention to three texts where Paul distinguishes Jews from non-Jews. In 1:9 Paul earmarks his converts as Gentiles when he comments that they had "turned to God from idols [ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων], to serve a living and true God" (cf. 1 Cor 12:2; Gal 4:8).⁴⁴ Like other Jewish writers, Paul underscores here the difference between the living God of the Israelites and the "dumb idols" from which his Gentile converts had turned (see e. g., Bel 5; Sir 18:1; *1 Enoch* 5; *Sib. Or.* 3:763; *Joseph and Aseneth* 8:5-6; cf. Pss 114:4-8; 135:15-18; Isa 40:18-20; 44:9-20; 46:6-7; Jer 10:3-9; Hab 2:18-19; Wis 13:1-15, 17).⁴⁵ Paul also differentiates between Jews and non-Jews in 2:16 when he remarks that the Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι [2:14] is best understood ethnically [see chapters one and six above and also below]) hinder his mission to "the nations" (τὰ ἔθνη). Finally, and somewhat ironically, one gains a glimpse of Paul's Jewish consciousness in 4:5. Here he encourages his male,

consciousness as a Jew. Nor did he require a similar surrender of Greeks. The distinctions remain and are acknowledged in their own national and historical sphere."

By distinguishing between Jews and non-Jews Paul stands in the long line of Jewish tradition. Note, e. g., the use of ἀλλόφυλος to refer to peoples other than Jews in Exod 34:15; Isa 14:29; 1 Macc 4:12; Acts 10:28; Philo, *Virt.* 160.3; 222.8; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.338; 4.183.

⁴⁴Luke *could* conceivably be correct in claiming that there were some Jews in the Thessalonian church (Acts 17:4). Goulder ("Silas," 96) suggests, "It [i. e., the Thessalonian church] was probably a mixed body like the churches at Rome and Laodicea, which are addressed as if though they were Gentile (Rom. 11.13; Eph. 2.11-13; 3.1)." However, a Jewish presence in the congregation is not detectable in 1 (or 2) Thessalonians. To argue for or against the presence of Jews among Paul's Thessalonian converts from 1 (or 2) Thessalonians, then, would be to argue from silence. Therefore, it seems most prudent to follow Paul and to assume that the Thessalonian congregation was comprised of Gentiles. On this vexed issue, see further chapter three.

⁴⁵See further Goodwin, "Conversion."

Gentile converts to avoid living "in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God" (τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότες τὸν θεόν).⁴⁶

Given the fact that Paul is careful to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles in 1 Thessalonians and elsewhere, it seems unlikely that Paul would have indiscriminately used συμφυλέτης to refer to all local townspeople.⁴⁷ Instead, I would contend that Paul intended συμφυλέτης, which is best translated as "one's people/ compatriots,"⁴⁸ to speak of his converts' fellow Gentiles.⁴⁹ I hereby record my agreement with those commentators who understand συμφυλέτης to refer to non-Jewish, Thessalonian townsfolk.⁵⁰ This signals, then, Gentile opposition for Paul's

⁴⁶It may also be that by employing the *nomen gentilicium* θεσσαλονικεύς in 1:1 (cf. 2 Thess 1:1; see similarly Gal 1:2) Paul is emphasizing the Gentile composition of the church. Contrast 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; and Rom 1:7. Richard (30) suggests that τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ θεσσαλονικέων is best translated "to the community made up of Thessalonians [i. e., of Gentiles]."

⁴⁷Barclay ("Conflict," 514) comments, "With his acute consciousness of the racial distinction between Jews and non-Jews, Paul could hardly refer to Jews as *symphyletai* (2:14) of his non-Jewish converts (1:9)."

⁴⁸Collins (*Birth*, 111) rightly observes that "The most obvious meaning of 'compatriots' (*symphyletoi*) is those who belong to the same race (*phyle*)."
Schmidt (*TDNT*, s. v. ἔθνος, 2:369) suggests that φυλή denotes "people as a national unity of common descent."

⁴⁹One is left to wonder why Paul did not select a more common term to speak of his converts' fellow Gentiles. As already alluded to in the text above, he could have used either φυλέτης or συγγενής to refer to the Thessalonian Christians' compatriots. Furthermore, he might have employed other terms current at the time to denote relationship by race, including ὁμόφυλος (see e. g., Isocrates, *To Philip* 108.4; 2 Macc 4:10; 3 Macc 3:21; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 2.80; 4.19; 4.159; *Virt.* 66.2; 82.3; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.13, 382; 4.204; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 32.36; *1 Clem* 4:10) and ὁμοεθνής (see e. g., Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 2.73, 122; *Virt.* 102.1; *Leg.* 212.6; Josephus, *Ant.* 10.203; 11.130, 233, 322; Diodorus Siculus 1.70.2; 5.24.3. 12.11.3; 12.29.3; 14.114.1; 17.100.4; 33.20.1; 37.2.6; and Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 48.5). If Paul had wanted to indicate that his Gentile converts had suffered at the hands of both Jews and non-Jews, as some commentators suggest, then the term συμπολίτης (= fellow townsman) would have been more appropriate (see e. g., Eph 2:19; Josephus, *Ant.* 19.175).

⁵⁰E. g., Dobschütz, 109-110; Frame, 110; Dibelius, 11; Lenski, 264; Hendriksen, 70-71; Hiebert, 113-114; Ward, 73; Marxsen, 46; Bruce, 46; Wanamaker, 113; Foakes-Jackson, *Acts*, 161; Haenchen, *Acts*, 513; Malherbe, *Paul*, 47, 95; Meeks, *Origins*, 47; Sanders, *Schismatics*, 8; Schluter, *Measure*,

Gentile converts. Contextual considerations make this interpretation even more persuasive.

Contextual factors

That Paul was referring to the Thessalonian believers' fellow Gentiles when using συμφυλέτης is further supported by the immediate context in which the word appears. Paul claims in 2:14 that his converts became imitators of the Judean churches by suffering at the hands of their fellow Gentiles the same things that the Judean churches suffered from their fellow Jews.⁵¹ That the Thessalonians' opposition was Gentile in origin is evidenced in 2:14 when Paul describes his Gentile converts' opponents (τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν) in explicit and direct contrast to the Ἰουδαῖοι, the people who opposed the Judean believers.⁵² The point of Paul's comparison in 2:14 between the churches in Judea and the church in Thessalonica is not only that both Judean and Thessalonian Christians suffered, but that the suffering of both groupings came from their own compatriots (i. e., respectively, Jews and non-Jews).⁵³ To buttress this position even further, I will now offer some historical observations.

197; Holtz, "Judgment," 283; Barclay, "Conflict," 514; and Collins, *Birth*, 111-112.

⁵¹In 2:14 Ἰουδαῖος could very well mean "Jew," "Judean," or a combination thereof. The broader meaning "Jew" is required, however, in 2:15-16 where Ἰουδαῖος in a more general sense serves as the antecedent to the multiple participial phrases. So rightly, Bruce, 46; and Gutbrod, *TDNT*, s. v. Ἰσραήλ, 3:380. It seems best, then, to take Ἰουδαῖος ethnically and in accord with my understanding of συμφυλέτης. If one were to interpret συμφυλέτης as a fellow townsman, then one would presumably need to translate Ἰουδαῖος as "Judean," as Moule (*Birth*, 158) indicates.

⁵²Frame (110) curtly comments: "συμφυλέται are Gentiles as Ἰουδαίων shows."

⁵³So also e. g., Wanamaker, 113; Meeks, *Origins*, 47; Collins, *Birth*, 112; and Sanders, *Schismatics*, 8.

Historical elements

I have noted above that Paul addresses the Thessalonian congregation as though it were comprised solely of Gentiles. Presuming with Paul that the church was comprised of non-Jews, it is unlikely that Paul's Gentile converts would have been opposed by Thessalonian Jews, as those who interpret συμφυλέται as local townspeople contend. The following facts lend support to this claim. First of all, the Jews in Thessalonica were a minority group as were Jews in most other places in the Diaspora.⁵⁴ While the civil authorities in Thessalonica may have been tolerant of Jewish religious practices and may have extended to the Jews religious privileges,⁵⁵ Thessalonian Jews would not likely have been powerful or daring enough to oppose Gentiles on their own.⁵⁶ To do so would have put in jeopardy their own religious liberty as well as their potentially precarious place in Gentile society.

Secondly, it does appear that Jews cooperated with Gentiles in opposing Gentile Christians in some places (see e. g., Acts 14:5; 17:6; *Mart. Pol.* 7.2) and that Jews in some cities turned Jewish Christians over to the relevant authorities in an attempt to distance themselves (see e. g., Acts 18:12; 24:9; 25:2; cf. Josephus, *B.J.* 6.5; 7.10, 11). Additionally, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul encountered opposition from some Thessalonians Jews for various perceived offenses. One might also contend that the Jewish

⁵⁴Alexandria is a possible exception. Feldman (*Jew and Gentile*, 79) suggests that "[Alexandrian] Jews constituted the largest single religious and ethnic group in the city's cosmopolitan population. . . ."

⁵⁵On the ability of Jews to practice freely their religion during this time period, see e. g., Josephus, *Ant.* 14.202-210, 225-230, 241-264; 16.162-173.

⁵⁶See further Setzer, *Responses*, 82. Tellbe ("Conflict," 115) notes in reference to Philippi that the Jews would not have dared to oppose Christians without the consent of the relevant authorities. This would likely have been the case in Thessalonica as well.

community would have punished Jewish proselytes who had embraced Paul's gospel if they, like their leader, were thought to be negligent of Jewish customs, yet continued to maintain contact with the synagogue. On the whole, however, it is doubtful that the Gentile Thessalonian congregation would have had (much) interaction with the Jewish community of that city given their background in idolatry.⁵⁷ Furthermore, it is hard to imagine any compelling reason that the Thessalonian Jews would have afflicted Paul's Gentile converts.⁵⁸ Jews naturally only attacked Gentiles if they posed a real threat to their own community (e. g., the situation reported by 1 Maccabees). And a small band of former "idolaters" hardly impinged upon the integrity or security of the Jewish community in Thessalonica!

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to illumine the nature and source of the Thessalonian Christians' affliction. I have argued that the Thessalonians' conflict is best understood as vigorous non-Christian opposition which likely took the form of verbal harassment, social ostracism, political sanctions, and *perhaps* (some kind of) physical abuse. As for the source of the church's suffering, I concluded, based upon lexical, contextual, and historical evidence, that Paul's Gentile converts were troubled by

⁵⁷So rightly Meeks, "Breaking Away," 106. The social-scientific study of conflict alerts one to the fact that conflict requires contact.

⁵⁸Collins (*Birth*, 112) suggests that it is not impossible to imagine that troublemaking Jews opposed Paul's Gentile converts for their having been informed by Paul that they were God's chosen and beloved and that they were no longer sinful Gentiles (1:4; 4:5). While it is possible that some Jews thought that Paul's mission to the Gentiles fell within Judaism, it is highly doubtful that such Jews would have opposed Paul's Gentile converts directly. Their gaze would have focused upon Paul himself. It was he who was Jewish; it was he who was thought by some Jews to be a perverter of the Jewish customs and an agitator of the Jewish people (see Acts 21:21; 24:5). It is true that Paul considers his Galatian converts as objects of Jewish-Christian compulsion. But the situation in Galatia is distinctly different than the one in Thessalonica.

unconverted Gentiles, the precise people who continued to worship the "idols" from which the Thessalonian Christians had turned. In this unit I purposefully did not address why this fledgling Pauline church might have been opposed by its Gentile culture. The following chapter is given over to this important and intriguing issue.

Chapter Ten

Why Did the Thessalonian Christians Encounter Conflict with Their Gentile Compatriots?

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that Paul's Thessalonian converts experienced external conflict with their Gentile compatriots. Here I wish to explore the causes of the church's clash with unbelievers. Unfortunately, Paul's Thessalonian correspondence does not satisfy our curiosity along these lines of inquiry. In fact, one searches 1 (and 2) Thessalonians in vain for any explicit explanation as to why the conflict between the Thessalonian congregation and non-Christians occurred.¹ In all likelihood, Paul was aware of at least some of the factors which created and perpetuated the conflict, but for whatever reasons chose not to divulge such information.

One who attempts to explain the causes of the conflict relations between Paul's converts and their own people needs to have an interpretive strategy. In what follows, I will seek to determine the causes for the conflict between believers and unbelievers in Thessalonica by reading between the lines of the 1 (and 2) Thessalonians, by marshalling applicable literary parallels,²

¹1 Thess 1:6 does associate the church's affliction with conversion. And Acts 17:7 suggests that the conflict was political in nature. I will explore these clues about the conflict in this chapter.

²A word of methodological defense is in order here. I am aware that some of the parallels adduced in this chapter are geographically and chronologically removed from Thessalonica c. 50 CE. Furthermore, I recognize that the conflict in Thessalonica could be (and in some respects probably was) wholly unique. By drawing in other texts, which are, of course, products of other particular social-historical contexts, I am not claiming that $x = y$ (or this = that). I am suggesting that x and y *seem* to be speaking of and reflecting *similar* types of situations and that y *might* therefore further illuminate x . Every effort is made here (as elsewhere in this thesis) to be sensitive to the particularities of the conflict in Thessalonica and to ancient life in that city. In fact, I begin with the situation in Thessalonica as evidenced in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians before I turn to other texts for illustrative purposes.

by drawing upon pertinent archaeological materials, and by utilizing social-scientific theory. I will begin by considering the non-Christian reaction to the Thessalonian believers' conversion. I will then discuss how the ideological and social exclusiveness of Paul's converts could have fostered suspicion among outsiders and led to accusations against the Christians. In the second section of this chapter I will also explore the possible effects of the evangelistic efforts in which some of the Thessalonian church seem to have been engaged. Finally, I will consider how Paul's converts could have been perceived by their compatriots as subversive to the basic traditions and institutions of Greco-Roman society.

I. Conversion to Pauline Christianity

According to Paul the Thessalonian Christians experienced affliction in conjunction with their conversion (δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ, 1:6). Presumably, the Christians' decision to abandon their former gods (viewed by Paul as "idols") in order "to serve a living and true God" (1:9) sparked the conflict with their Gentile compatriots.³ While Paul is obviously pleased with the "turn" that his converts have made, his perspective would not have been typical. In fact, what delighted Paul would have disgusted the Christians' associates.⁴ To abandon time-honored traditions for

I am seeking to counter here in advance any potential charge of "parallelomania." In truth, most all NT scholars appeal to literary parallels in carrying out their work. The question is not if we use parallels, the question is how we use them and if the parallels selected are appropriate. Ultimately, the reader him/herself must judge whether the texts I have considered as parallel actually are or are not. Nevertheless, even if the reader deems (a) particular text(s) to be unparallel, I have sought to construct my arguments in such a way that they will stand even if the parallel(s) fall(s).

³Perkins ("Practices," 326) remarks, "Conversion implied a break, a separation with one's past and social environment, which frequently led to hostility."

⁴Whittaker (*Jews and Christians*, 133) suggests that the friends and neighbors of Gentile Christian converts would have viewed "their conversion from paganism with amazement and horror." On conversion in the Greco-

what Suetonius would later call "a new and mischievous superstition" (*superstitionis novae ac maleficae*, *Nero* 16.2) would have been perceived as a sacrilege.

Celsus (fl. c. 178 CE) thought that it was "impious to abandon the customs which [had] existed in each locality from the beginning" (c. *Cel.* 5.25).⁵ Additionally, Porphyry (232/3-305 CE) maintained that to honor the divinity according to one's ancestral custom was the hallmark of piety (*Ad Marc.* 18). Eusebius, a church historian living and writing in the third and fourth centuries (c. 260-340) is still sensitive to the novelty of Christianity (see e. g., *Praep. Evang.* 4.1; and *H.E.* 1.4).

However, it was not only the novelty of Pauline Christianity that would have raised the ire of the Thessalonian believers' compatriots. The very act of converting to another religion, and thereby abandoning their own religious customs, would likely have provoked controversy, if not hostility, among the Christians' family and friends. Gentile proselytes to Judaism, a religion whose antiquity was noted by Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.1; cf. Origen, c. *Cels.* 5.25), were criticized, and even ostracized, by their associates for their willingness to convert.

The Hellenistic-Jewish writer of the romance *Joseph and Aseneth* (first century CE [?]) highlights the plight of the Jewish proselyte when he has Aseneth say, "All people have come to hate me, and on top of those my father and my mother, because I, too, have come to hate their gods and have destroyed them, and caused them to be trampled underfoot by men" (11.4; cf. 12.12; 13.11).⁶

Roman world, see Nock, *Conversion*; Green, *Evangelism*, 144-165; and more recently, Segal, *Paul*, esp. 72-114.

⁵Trans. Chadwick, *Origen*.

⁶On the theme of conversion in *Joseph and Aseneth*, see now Chesnutt, *Death to Life*; and Boccaccini, *Judaism*, 254-256.

Additionally, Aseneth prays that the Lord, "the father of orphans," "a protector of the persecuted," and "a helper of the afflicted" will have mercy on her (12.13), as one who is now "an orphan, and desolate, and abandoned by all people" (12.7).

In his writings, Philo contends that proselytes, whom he mentions alongside widows and orphans (see e. g., *Som.* 2.273), should be treated by Jews with special sensitivity because of their having turned kinsfolk into mortal enemies by leaving the "mythical fables and multiplicity of sovereigns, so highly honored by their parents and grandparents and blood relations" (*Spec. Leg.* 4.178; cf. *Virt.* 102-103). Elsewhere Philo encourages his Jewish readers to honor proselytes, not only by respecting them, but also by extending to them extraordinary friendship and goodwill (*Spec. Leg.* 1.52).

Josephus's story of Izates's conversion to Judaism further confirms the potentially precarious state of the proselyte among his/her own people.⁷ Helena, the mother of Izates, counsels her son against being circumcised. She regards circumcision as dangerous because "if his subjects should discover that he was devoted to rites that were strange and foreign to themselves, it would produce much disaffection and they would not tolerate the rule of a Jew over them" (*Ant.* 20.38).

The comments of these three Hellenistic-Jewish writers indicate the unpopularity of proselytes in general and proselytes to Judaism in particular. Caustic comments from the Roman *literati* clarify why these three authors were concerned about the well-being of the Jewish proselyte. Tacitus remarks that those rascals who renounce their ancestral traditions and convert to Judaism are

⁷For a fuller treatment of this story, see Gilbert, "Making."

taught at the outset to "despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account" (*Transgressi in morem eorum idem usurpant, nec quicquam prius imbuuntur quam contemnere deos, exuere patriam, parentes liberos fratres vilia habere, Hist. 5.5*). Juvenal's commentary on proselytes to Judaism is no more positive than his contemporary's. He states:

Having been wont to flout the laws of Rome, they learn and practice and revere the Jewish law, and all that Moses handed down in his secret tome, forbidding to point out the way to any not worshipping the same rites, and conducting none but the circumcised to the desired fountain (*Romanas autem soliti contemnere leges Iudaicum ediscunt et servant ac metuunt ius, tradidit arcano quodcumque volumine Moyses, non monstrare vias eadem nisi sacra colenti, quaesitum ad fontem solos deducere verpos, 14.100-105*).

Such abusive statements show that much of the offense of conversion to another religion laid in abandoning one's own traditions.⁸ Therefore, even if Paul's converts would have been (mis)perceived by their compatriots as Jewish proselytes, which as we will see below is unlikely, this would have in no way eliminated the potential hostilities. In fact, it may be that the novelty of Pauline Christianity heightened non-Christian opposition.

In light of the above observations, there is good reason to conclude that Paul is accurate in saying that the Thessalonian Christians experienced affliction in conjunction with their conversion. As noted in chapter four above, the sociology of deviance suggests that perceived violations of cultural conventions often prompt the majority (or those who wield power) to oppose

⁸Barclay ("Conflict," 514) remarks, "From our cultural and historical distance we easily underestimate the social dislocation involved in turning, as Paul puts it, from 'idols' to the 'true and living God' (1:9); and we barely appreciate the offense, even disgust, which such a change could evoke."

the innovators. Although conversion appears to have been the initial cause of contention between believers and unbelievers in Thessalonica, this is only part of the story. The question remains: what was it about Pauline Christianity that the believers' compatriots found offensive enough to oppose? We turn now to address this question.

II. The Thessalonian Christians as Exclusive

Commenting on the conflict which the Thessalonian Christians experienced with their Gentile compatriots, Wayne Meeks remarks:

The reasons for this hostility are not too difficult to imagine. Unlike the many little clubs that were so much a part of the city life in the Roman empire, unlike even the multitude of cults into which one might be initiated, the Christians were exclusive.⁹

Although the conflict situation in Thessalonica is more complex than Meeks suggests here, he has correctly noted a primary reason for the tension between Paul's converts and outsiders, namely, the Christians' exclusiveness.¹⁰ What caused the Thessalonian believers to be so standoffish? Their exclusivity may be positively linked to their reception and internalization of Paul's apocalyptically-oriented instruction.¹¹

⁹"Functions," 691.

¹⁰Ayer ("Intolerance," 86) is convinced that it was the Christians' exclusiveness that "was responsible for their early persecution by the Romans. . . ."

¹¹The differential association theory of deviance emphasizes that alternative patterns of belief and behavior are learned through instruction.

Pauline apocalyptic and his Thessalonian converts

In chapter eight I emphasized the apocalyptic texture of 1 (and 2) Thessalonians. If Paul's written communication to the Thessalonians may be taken into account, then one may conclude that his initial proclamation among the Thessalonians was also apocalyptic. In fact, some scholars have suggested that a snippet of Paul's preaching in Thessalonica has been preserved in 1 Thess 1:9b-10.¹² In these verses Paul recalls "how [the Thessalonians] turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." If these verses were a part of Paul's original message to the Thessalonians, then we have proof positive that the Thessalonian Christians received an apocalyptically-laden gospel. But even if Paul did not use the precise words of 1 Thess 1:9b-10 in his missionary preaching, the concepts communicated in these verses were likely *leitmotifs* in his gospel proclamation to the Thessalonians. Other *kerygmatic* statements which are present in the epistles may indicate as much (see below). Additionally, in light of Paul's repeated references to his first visit to Thessalonica (1:5; 2:1, 5, 10, 17; 3:4, 6) and to the content of his initial preaching and his converts' response to it (1:5, 9; 2:1-2, 9-12; 3:3-4; 4:1-2, 11; 5:2; cf. 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6), one can reconstruct with some degree of certainty the content of Paul's original instruction.

¹²On these verses as a pre-Pauline formula which Paul used in his mission among the Thessalonians, see Best, 85-87. For arguments against this position see Munck, "1 Thess. i.9-10"; and Wanamaker, 85-89. For the view that 1:9b-10 have similarities with Hellenistic Jewish missionary propaganda but are not a pre-Pauline formula as such, see Holtz, "1 Thess 1,9f"; and Richard, 75.

Reading between the lines, then, Paul's original message to the Thessalonians was probably similar to what follows.¹³ The Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again (4:14) and is soon to return to earth from heaven (4:17) with the holy ones (3:13; cf. 2 Thess 1:7). When Christ returns, he will rescue God's elect (1:4), i. e., those who turn from idols and believe in the one true God and his Son, Jesus (1:9-10). At Christ's *parousia*, which Paul thought and taught was imminent (4:15),¹⁴ the ὀργή of God will fall on the children of darkness, i. e., those who oppose the gospel and reject Jesus (2:16; 5:9; cf. 2 Thess 1:8-9). Even though Christ's followers should expect to experience suffering in the present age (3:4), in heaven believers will be given respite from their earthly afflictions as they are given salvation by God through the Lord Jesus Christ (5:8; cf. 2 Thess 1:7). Furthermore, on the day of the Lord, God will inflict vengeance on those who have opposed him and afflicted his people (5:2-3; cf. 2 Thess 1:6, 8). But until the day of reckoning, believers must live as children of light (5:5-8) by doing that which is good and pure (5:21-22). As those taught by God (4:9), they must avoid sexual impurity (4:1-8), love and support one another in the Lord (4:9-10; 5:14), work diligently (4:11; cf. 2 Thess 3:6-13), await eagerly the *parousia* (5:6), respect spiritual

¹³On the appropriateness of and controls for reading between the lines of a text, see Wedderburn, *Romans*, 67. He suggests that while such an enterprise is risky it is necessary nonetheless. When reading between the lines, Wedderburn suggests the following safeguards: 1. "what is read between the lines must not contradict what is palpably set forth in the lines"; and 2. what is read between the lines "will become more plausible the better it helps to explain the connections between the ideas actually expressed in the text."

¹⁴Mearns ("Development") contends that Paul did not think or teach that the *eschaton* was imminent when he was in Thessalonica. Mearns maintains that Paul adopted this perspective between leaving the city and writing 1 Thessalonians. Despite Mearns's novel proposal, Paul assumes in 1 Thessalonians that his readers hold to a futuristic eschatology (1:9-10; 5:1-2). For further refutation of Mearns's position, see chapter eleven.

authority (5:12-13), and resist the temptation to retaliate against those who oppose them (4:11-12; 5:15; cf. 2 Thess 1:5-6).

From all indications, the Thessalonians eagerly embraced Paul's apocalyptic gospel.¹⁵ In fact, some members of the congregation may have become more apocalyptic than their teacher (5:14; cf. 2 Thess 3:6-13)! As noted in chapter two, 2 Thessalonians may be in part Paul's attempt to quell the millenarian obsession of some of his converts. It is probable that there were various degrees of enthusiasm among the Thessalonian Christians with regard to the *parousia*. Nevertheless, it is clear that the gospel which they received from Paul was inextricably linked to apocalyptic ideology. Below I will argue that the Thessalonian believers' reception of Paul's apocalyptic perspective impacted both their interaction with non-Christians and their formation as a congregation.

In their important work, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann contend that people inherit from their particular culture a symbolic universe, i. e., a way of viewing reality.¹⁶ Berger and Luckmann maintain that conflict may occur when the symbolic universe of the *status quo* is called into

¹⁵We are left to wonder what ideological and experiential factors prompted the Thessalonian Christians to respond positively to Paul's apocalyptic gospel. Jewett (*Correspondence*, 131-132) surmises that Paul's proclamation contained striking similarities to the Cabiric cult from which, according to Jewett, Paul's converts had come. Kee ("Pauline Eschatology") contends that there are elements of apocalyptic in Stoic thought which correlate remarkably well with Paul's apocalyptic message. Consequently, Kee is convinced that such thought-parallels made the Pauline gospel intelligible and appealing to Gentiles. MacMullen ("Conversion") maintains that the vast majority of Gentile converts to Christianity were drawn to the faith not by words and logic, but by displays of divine power. (In support of his thesis, see Paul's statements in 1 Thess 1:5, 2 Cor 12:12, and Rom 15:19). On how educated Gentiles would have construed miraculous works, see Whittaker, "Signs and Wonders."

¹⁶*Construction*, 92-104. The insights of Berger and Luckmann have been fruitfully employed by other NT interpreters. See esp. Esler, *Community*, 16-23.

question.¹⁷ The authors suggest that society discourages rival versions of reality which oppose the symbolic construct of the majority and that it attempts to perpetuate the dominant perspective by attaching a deviant label to those who adopt alternative ideologies.¹⁸ However, despite societal pressures to conform, people often opt to undergo alternation, i. e., a resocialization process which significantly alters their symbolic construction of reality.¹⁹

In the case of the Thessalonian Christians, their conversion to Pauline Christianity involved an ideological shift.²⁰ The apocalyptic perspective which they inherited from Paul encouraged them to adopt a new view of reality, which involved, among other things, the drawing of boundary lines between themselves and the rest of society. They, now, were children of light, others were children of darkness (5:4-8); they were "beloved and chosen by God" (1:4), others were "pagans who [did] not know God" (4:6); they were insiders, others were outsiders (4:12); and they were going to be saved (5:9), whereas others were going to be destroyed (5:3). As observed in chapter eight, Paul's propensity is to think dualistically and to view people in either/or categories.²¹ It stands to reason

¹⁷*Construction*, 119. Coser (*Functions*, 111-119) maintains that intergroup conflict on ideological issues is often intense.

¹⁸*Construction*, 122. For a fuller discussion on the labeling perspective of deviance, see chapter four above.

¹⁹*Construction*, 157-59.

²⁰For an insightful discussion of conversion among Paul's Gentile congregations see Segal, *Paul*, 150-183. On the Thessalonian congregation in particular, see 161-66.

²¹E. g., 1 Thess 1:9 indicates that in Paul's thinking a person is either an idolator or a worshipper of God (cf. Rom 1:18-32). Cf. 2 Thess 3:15 where one is either an enemy or a brother.

that he instructed and encouraged his Thessalonian converts to organize their thought-world likewise.

Interestingly, the opposition which the Thessalonian Christians' experienced from their fellow Gentiles would have reinforced their apocalyptic perspective. Having been instructed by Paul that they would suffer affliction as Christians (3:3b-4),²² conflicts with Satan (2:18; 3:5) and those ensnared by him were anticipated. And when opposition arose, it served to confirm their inherited ideology and to buttress the boundaries between the Christians and the rest of society.²³

The offensiveness of social exclusiveness

The Thessalonian Christians' new view of reality did not, of course, occur in an ideological vacuum. Their symbolic constructions had practical implications in everyday life. Conversion to the Christian faith as proclaimed by Paul appears to have altered the Thessalonian believers social interaction with non-Christians. It is of significance to note at this point that Paul applauds his converts' ethical behavior among the "pagans" who do not know God (4:1, 5).²⁴ The forceful, Jewish ethical language that Paul employs in 4:3-8 when instructing the Thessalonians about ἁγιασμός is meant to remind them of the perils of πορνεία and to reiterate that ἀκαθαρσία is not acceptable among those to whom God has given his Holy Spirit. That is to say, Paul's purpose in this

²²Meeks ("Functions," 692) suggests that instruction on suffering was part of the "catechism" in Pauline mission areas. Hill ("Suffering," 183) maintains that instruction on the inevitability of suffering "formed part of the parenetic tradition of the primitive Church."

²³On the dialectical pattern of the Thessalonian Christians' conflict see further Meeks, "Functions," 692; and Barclay, "Conflict," 516-20.

²⁴So rightly, Yarbrough, *Marriage Rules*, 66. *Contra* Jewett (*Correspondence*, 105-106) who maintains that the Pauline sexual ethic is being challenged by the ἄτακτοι.

pericope appears to be preventative, not corrective.²⁵ In fact, the affirmative tone of the letter suggests that Paul is hopeful that his converts will continue to live in the light and not return to their former nocturnal lifestyles (3:6-13; 5:4-11). He is pleased that the assembly is loving, encouraging, and building up one another and admonishes them to do more of the same (4:9-10; 5:11). Paul's affirmation of his converts and their care for one another suggests that the Christians were spurning their previous social networks. Furthermore, his commands for the church "to aspire to live quietly" and "to mind [its] own affairs" (4:11) would have encouraged additional distance between believers and outsiders, thereby reinforcing the boundaries between the two groups.

It seems plausible to suggest that the Thessalonian Christians withdrew from participating in many socio-religious activities as a result of their conversion and their eager reception of Paul's apocalyptic instruction. And although their guarded social interaction with non-Christians met with Paul's approval, the believers' fellow Gentiles would (understandably) have been offended by such seemingly snobbish behavior. 1 Pet 4:4 reports that Petrine Christians had stopped participating in routine social activities (referred to by the writer as "excesses of reckless living" [τῆς ἀσωτίας ἀνάχουσιν]) with their fellow Gentiles. And according to the author, unbelievers responded to this social withdrawal with astonishment and slander (ἐν ᾧ ξενίζονται μὴ συντρεχόντων ὑμῶν . . . βλασφημοῦντες). In an attempt to be holy (see e. g., 1 Thess 4:3-4, 7; 5:23; 1 Pet 1:14-16; 2:9; 3:5), Pauline and Petrine believers altered their social/moral behavior. The Christians' cultural

²⁵Neil (77) rightly notes that "the advice given here is prophylactic." See further Carras, "1 Thess 4,3-8." The suggestion that Paul is seeking in this passage to address the problem sexual misconduct within the church is not necessary. *Contra* e. g., Best 166.

aloofness would not have been understood or appreciated by outsiders.²⁶ In fact, one classical historian contends that the early Christians' social exclusiveness was "the chief cause of ['pagan'] suspicion, dislike, and readiness to persecute."²⁷

In chapter seven it was observed that many Jews in antiquity were also socially exclusive in certain respects. I noted there that in some matters (e. g., dietary restrictions and circumcision) the majority of Jews were more exclusive than Paul (and Pauline Christians). The refusal of most Jews to assimilate culturally often resulted in the charge of misanthropy. For example, Diodorus of Sicily (mid first century BCE) remarks that the Jews "made the hatred of humanity [τὸ μῖσος πρὸς τοὺς ἄνθρώπους] into a tradition" (34.1.2). Similarly, Tacitus comments that the Jews "are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity" (*apud ipsos fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu, sed adversus omnes alios hostile odium*, *Hist.* 5.5). It seems clear that Jewish and Christian exclusivity was derided and disdained by some Greeks and Romans.

Although the Thessalonian believers had less than cordial relations with outsiders, it would be erroneous to conclude that all of Paul's churches experienced conflict with non-Christians. It would be equally wrong to surmise that all of Paul's congregations

²⁶MacMullen, *Paganism*, 19. Benko (*Pagan Rome*, 47) writes, "The Christians' withdrawal from many daily activities of pagan life . . . [was] held against them as it alienated them from society." Benko further notes that Celsus suggested "if everybody acted the way the Christians did, the empire would fall apart" (Origen, *c. Cels.* 8.48).

²⁷MacMullen, *Christianizing*, 19. Kelly (*Epistles*, 171) remarks that it was the Christians' reluctance "to participate in the routine contemporary life, particularly conventionally accepted amusements, civic ceremonies, and any function involving contact with idolatry or what they considered immorality, that caused them to be hated, despised and themselves suspected of illicit practices."

were exclusive in their social affiliations. Based upon the extant Corinthian letters, the Corinthian believers seem to have had harmonious relations with unbelievers. Unlike the Thessalonians, the Corinthians were well integrated and actively involved in society. The willingness of some of the believers in Corinth to take their personal grievances to civil law courts (1 Cor 6:1-6), to engage in extra-marital sexual relations (6:12-20), and to participate in temple meals (10:14-22) indicates as much. Furthermore, it appears that non-Christians in the community felt welcomed at the church's worship gatherings (14:24-25). Although Paul maintains that some within the Corinthian church had been afflicted (11:30-32), this affliction was not caused by non-Christians.²⁸

Non-Christian suspicion of Christians

While not all Pauline congregations were exclusive and had strained social relations, this was clearly the case in Thessalonica. As a result of their being exclusive, the assembly may have been perceived by observant outsiders as a secretive group trying to conceal questionable or immoral practices. Non-Christians could have gained such an impression from the believers assembling in private quarters, be it a *villa* or an *insula*-workshop/apartment, for worship (5:27; cf. Acts 17:5-6).²⁹ Furthermore, if unbelievers were aware that the church consistently, if not daily, shared meals together, then their suspicion of the Christians might have

²⁸On the different relational dynamics between Christians and non-Christians in Thessalonica and Corinth, see Barclay, "Contrasts."

²⁹The Acts' account suggests that at least some of the church was gathering in Jason's home. Jewett ("Tenement Churches") has argued that the Thessalonian church met in *insula*-shops like some of the Christian communities in Rome seem to have done.

increased.³⁰ Additionally, if Paul's female and male converts exchanged the "holy kiss" publicly (5:26), as William Klassen has argued,³¹ outsiders could have viewed this intimate exchange as some kind of coded, if not perverted, sign.

Caecilius, whose criticism of Christianity we know of through the writings of Minucius Felix (fl. 200-240), made much of Christian secrecy. He depicts Christians as "a secret tribe that shuns the light, silent in public, but talkative in private. . ." (*Oct.* 8.4). In his invective against Christians he also remarks that "They recognize one another by secret signs and marks. . ." (9.2). Caecilius's perception of Christians as a secretive tribe led him to be suspicious of them. He contends that "suspicions naturally attach to their secret and nocturnal rites" (9.4). He deduces, therefore, that the charges leveled against the Christians must be true due to "the secrecy of this depraved religion" (*pravae religionis obscuritas*, 10.1). Caecilius wonders, "Why do [Christians] make such efforts to obscure and conceal whatever is the object of their worship, when things honorable always rejoice in publicity, while guilt loves secrecy?" (10.1).

Roman distrust of foreign religions

For the most part, the Romans were suspicious of foreign cults. And when the Romans were given reason to believe that outside groups threatened the stability of Roman society by engaging in anti-social acts, they would move swiftly and forcefully

³⁰Jewett ("Tenement Churches"), largely on the basis of a form-critical analysis of 2 Thess 3:10, contends that the Thessalonian church shared communal meals together daily. We know that the Corinthian assembly ate together (see 1 Cor 11:17-34), although it is not possible to discern how frequently. (On this passage see the work of Theissen, *Setting*, 145-174). Pliny (*Ep.* 10.96) reports that Bithynian Christians were in the habit of sharing a weekly meal.

³¹Klassen, "Kiss." On the "sacred kiss," see further below.

against them.³² The Latin historian Livy (59 BCE-12 CE) recounts how the feared Bacchanalian conspiracy was suppressed in 186 BCE by the Roman Senate for purposes of State security (39.8-19). Valerius Maximus reports that in 139 BCE Chaldeans (astrologers) and Jews were expelled from Rome by Cornelius Hispalus for infecting the Romans with foreign customs (1.3.3). In a later period, the Julio-Claudians took a strong stand against the Druids due to reported degrading rites,³³ and Tiberius demolished the temple of Isis in Rome because of a case of gross sexual immorality in 19 CE.³⁴

Although "hard" evidence against foreign cults may have been slight at times, the Roman suspicion of these cults was great. Therefore, when there was some reason to believe that these outsiders were undermining Roman customs and decorum, the political system took action against these suspect strangers.³⁵ The Romans' prevalent distrust of foreign cults appears to be one of the primary reasons that Nero's charge against the Roman Christians stuck. Although Tacitus apparently did not believe that Roman Christians started the fire,³⁶ he clearly believed that they were deserving of the "exemplary punishment" which they received at Nero's behest (*Ann.* 15.44). Tacitus, as well as his contemporaries Pliny and Suetonius, regarded Christianity as a

³²See MacMullen, *Enemies*.

³³See Pliny, *N.H.* 29.54; 30.13; Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.5.

³⁴Josephus, *Ant.* 18.65-80.

³⁵Judge ("Judaism," 360) suggests that since most Romans did not know what the Christians did at their meetings they would have concluded the Christians were engaged in criminal behavior.

³⁶So Sherwin-White, "Persecutions," 208; and Frend, "Persecutions," 153, n. 6. Cf. Benko, *Pagan Rome*, 16.

deplorable "superstition" ([*superstitio*] Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96; Suetonius, *Ner.* 16.2). But if one were able to ask Tacitus why the Christians were due the wrath of Nero, he would have likely replied, because of their "hatred of the human race" (*odio humani generis*, *Ann.* 15.44). Tacitus's charge of misanthropy against the Christians was probably based on his perception of their exclusive, secretive ways.³⁷

Holland Hendrix's 1984 Harvard ThD dissertation, "Thessalonians Honor Romans," highlights ancient Thessalonica's ongoing concern for good relations with Rome. Given the sensitivity of the citizenry to this all-important relationship, is it possible that some Thessalonians construed the Christians as an anti-Roman association and opposed them based upon such a perception? I will take up this interesting question later in the present chapter when I explore the possibility that Paul and the Thessalonian assembly were judged by some outsiders as politically subversive.

Common accusations against the Christians

"Pagan" suspicion of and disdain for the Christians' exclusive and secretive ways often led to rumors about and accusations against the Christians.³⁸ In addition to atheism, a charge which will be treated fully below, early believers were accused of cannibalism and sexual libertinism.³⁹ Caecilius gives a revolting description of what he claims to be a Christian initiation. He reports that an

³⁷Tacitus appears to have been relatively well-informed about Christian origins. One may conclude that he knew something about their practices as well.

³⁸Benko (*Pagan Rome*, 59) suggests, "The Romans believed that when Christians claimed exclusive possession of divine knowledge, they were capable of anything. This attitude encouraged the Romans to give credence to the most outrageous rumors about Christians."

³⁹On the charges of sexual immorality and cannibalism, see the discussion in Benko, *Pagan Rome*, 54-78.

infant is beaten to death by a neophyte, then its blood is drunk, and its body is eaten (*Oct.* 9.5). Octavius and other Christian apologists would dismiss such a charge as nonsense (*Oct.* 31.1-2; and e. g., Athenagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.* 35-36).⁴⁰

More applicable for this study is the common (later) perception among non-Christian critics of Christianity that Christian believers engaged in sexually immoral activity. For example, in *Metamorphoses* Apuleius depicts the baker's wife, who is most likely a Christian, as "cruel and perverse, crazy for men and wine, headstrong and obstinate, grasping in her mean thefts and a spendthrift in her loathsome extravagances, an enemy of fidelity and a foe to chastity" (9.14).⁴¹ Interestingly, Paul instructs his converts in 1 Thessalonians that it is the will of God that they "abstain from unchastity" (ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας, 4.3), for "God has not called [believers] for uncleanness [ἀκαθαρσία], but in holiness [ἀγιασμῶ]" (4:7; cf. 2:3, where Paul maintains that his appeal did not spring from error or uncleanness [ἀκαθαρσίας]).

Karl Donfried has suggested that by stressing the importance of sexual purity to his converts that Paul is attempting "to distinguish the behaviour of the Thessalonian Christians from that of their former heathen and pagan life which is still alive in the various cults of the city."⁴² Furthermore, Donfried, and others, have indicated that the cults of Dionysus and Cabirus were

⁴⁰Origen (c. *Cel.* 6.40) remarks, "These allegations [of cannibalism] are now condemned even by the multitude and by people entirely alien to our religion as being a false slander against the Christians." Trans. Chadwick, *Origen*.

⁴¹Caecilius contends that Christians "fall in love almost before they are acquainted; everywhere they introduce a kind of religion of lust, a promiscuous 'brotherhood' and 'sisterhood' by which ordinary fornication, under cover of a hallowed name, is converted to incest" (*Oct.* 9.2).

⁴²"Cults," 342.

particularly influential in Thessalonica during Paul's time and that these groups had strong phallic and sexual symbolism.⁴³ If the cults of Dionysus and Cabirus were as important and as sexually oriented as it appears, then it is possible that these cults were subject to rumors and accusations from outsiders.⁴⁴ Paul did not want the church to be accused of, much less guilty of, sexual immorality.

Ironically, Paul's admonition to the congregation to "greet all the brothers [and sisters] with a holy kiss [φιλήματι ἁγίῳ]" (5:26) might have led outsiders to conclude that the church members were sexually involved with one another, particularly if the kiss, a lip to lip encounter,⁴⁵ was exchanged publicly and not only liturgically.⁴⁶ Klassen suggests that by exchanging the sacred kiss the Christians "risked the slander of those who were outside looking in. . . ."⁴⁷ And Lillian Portefaix thinks that "the Christian practice of greeting sisters and brothers with a holy kiss must have contributed greatly to the bad name of Christians and have affected particularly the wife of a 'mixed marriage.'"⁴⁸ The early

⁴³"Cults," 342. On the cults of Thessalonica, see also Edson, "Macedonia, I," and "Macedonia, III"; Witt, "Cults"; Evans, *Eschatology*, 63-86; and Jewett, *Correspondence*, 113-132. But note Koester's ("Eschatology," 442-445) strong words of caution about going beyond the evidence in an attempt to comment more fully on the cultic life in ancient Thessalonica (and his scathing critique of Jewett for doing so).

⁴⁴On the conflict between the cult of Dionysus and Greek society, see Euripides, *Bacchanals* 200; 215; 233; 260; 352; 1325. See also the Roman ban on this mystery cult as recorded by Livy, 39.8-19.

⁴⁵See Benko, *Pagan Rome*, 83.

⁴⁶Even if the kiss was exchanged only in the private Christian meeting, word of such a custom could have eventually spread to the non-Christian community.

⁴⁷"Kiss," 133.

⁴⁸*Sisters*, 189-190. Tertullian states that a non-Christian husband would not allow a believing wife to exchange a kiss with a Christian brother (*Ad Uxorem* 2.4).

church writers found charges of sexual licentiousness much more difficult to deflect than other accusations. This is most likely due to the fact that some Christians did engage in sexually immoral practices. Intriguingly, in some cases the sacred kiss may have encouraged and culminated in immorality (see e. g. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.11-12).

Active Christian proselytism

Even though the Thessalonian congregation tended toward separatism and as a result of their being perceived as standoffish was likely subject to non-Christian suspicion and accusations, there are some statements in 1 Thessalonians which suggest that neither Paul nor his converts were wholly exclusive in their perspective and praxis. Paul instructs the church in 4:11-12 "to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may behave properly toward outsiders, and be dependent on nobody." These verses indicate that there was still some interaction between Christians and non-Christians, as do 3:13 and 5:15, where Paul encourages the church to love and to do good to *all people*. But why is it necessary for Paul to remind the assembly to live quietly, to mind their own affairs, and to work with their hands? And how do these injunctions relate to Paul's concern that the Christians behave properly toward those outside and be dependent on no person?

The majority of interpreters have suggested that Paul is seeking in these verses to counter an eschatological extremism among his converts which had led to the cessation of everyday activities.⁴⁹ Other commentators have contended that Paul is

⁴⁹E. g., Frame, 159; Bicknell, 41; Neil, 86; Rigaux, 519-521; Best, 175-177; and Bruce, 91.

addressing those poorer church members who were depending on wealthier believers to provide for them.⁵⁰ Yet both of these interpretations fail to account for Paul's instructions "to live quietly" and "to mind your own affairs."⁵¹ Furthermore, both explanations give inadequate attention to Paul's concern that his converts "behave properly toward outsiders." Although Ronald Hock's theory that Paul is advocating political quietism in 4:11-12 avoids these particular pitfalls,⁵² it is far from clear how involved Paul's converts would have been in the political affairs of the city. In fact, given the presumed proximity of the *parousia* and the "heavenly" mentality among Paul and the church in Thessalonica (cf. Phil 3:20-21; Rom 13:1-7, 11-14), it seems unlikely that the Thessalonian Christians, even if some were citizens and thereby members of the city's *demos*, would have been actively engaged in the political process.⁵³

What, then, is the most compelling explanation for the Pauline injunctions in 4:11 and the desired results of such commands in 4:12? I would concur with those scholars who argue that Paul is addressing in 4:11-12 (and perhaps in 5:14 and 2 Thess 3:6-13) those within the congregation who have abandoned their daily tasks in order to propagate the gospel.⁵⁴ Barclay contends that Paul rebukes in 4:11-12 "those who interfere all too readily in the business of nonbelievers and behave disgracefully towards

⁵⁰Wanamaker, 163; Williams, 149-150; and Russell, "Idle."

⁵¹Noted by Barclay, "Conflict," 521-522.

⁵²*Context*, 46-47. See the remarks of Martin (137) on the unlikelihood of Thessalonian Christians' political involvement.

⁵³Note the insightful discussion of Niebuhr, *Culture*, 159-167.

⁵⁴See Malherbe, *Paul*, 99-101; and particularly Barclay, "Conflict," 520-525.

them."⁵⁵ He also suggests that Paul encourages those Christians who are actively promoting the gospel not to provoke outsiders needlessly and not to place undue pressure on the congregation to support their full-time evangelistic activity.⁵⁶ Malherbe maintains that Paul is counseling his converts in 4:11-12 to be different than those Cynic converts who abandoned their occupations for meddlesome evangelism.⁵⁷ For the good of the gospel as well as for the protection of the congregation, Paul did not want his converts to be meddlers in others' affairs (4:11b), mere busybodies (περιεργαζόμενοι) as 2 Thess 3:11 puts it. Similarly, Petrine Christians are encouraged not to interfere in others' business and thus bring unnecessary hardship upon themselves (1 Pet 4:16).⁵⁸

That at least some of the Thessalonian believers were engaged in active evangelism may be further implied by Paul's statement that "the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you [ἄφ' ὑμῶν . . . ἐξήχηται] not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place your faith in God has become known."⁵⁹ The verb

⁵⁵"Conflict," 522.

⁵⁶"Conflict," 522-523. Barclay notes that Paul may have emphasized his own ministry among them (2:1-12) to remind them of the need to follow "his methods as well as his message."

⁵⁷*Paul*, 99-101.

⁵⁸The meaning of the term ἄλλοτριοεπίσκοπος is not entirely clear, but it likely means "busybody." So Selwyn, *Epistle*, 225. Selwyn suggests that the author is encouraging his readers not to be social nuisances and to avoid engaging in "tactless attempts to convert neighbours" (225). Kelly (*Epistles*, 189) conjectures that the writer may be countering the Christians' "excessive zeal for making converts," their sowing seeds of "discord in family or commercial life," and their "over-eager denunciation of pagan habits."

⁵⁹So also Ware, "1 Thessalonians 1,5-8"; Bruce, 171; Neil, 22; Marshall, 56. Cf. otherwise, Bowers ("Mission," 98-99) who contends that the Thessalonian Christians were not involved in spreading the gospel.

ἐξηγεῖν is a NT *hapax legomenon* which means "to ring out."⁶⁰ Paul remarks in 1:8 that the word of the Lord (= gospel) has actually sounded forth from the congregation, not merely that there had been positive reports about the Thessalonians' reception of the gospel circulating among other Christian assemblies.⁶¹ While Paul does portray the gospel as an active force ringing forth from the assembly, thereby stressing the power of the word of God (1:5; 2:13; cf. Rom 1:16), it is probable that it was the believers themselves who communicated the word of the Lord to others.⁶² It takes human messengers to dispense the gospel (Rom 10:14-16).

Active dissemination of one's religion is not without parallel in ancient Thessalonica. A first century CE inscription (*IT*, no. 255) recovered in the excavations of Thessalonica's Sarapeion states that Xenainetos was instructed by Sarapis in a dream to return to his hometown (Opus) and to instruct his political rival (Eurynomos) to establish in the city the worship of the Egyptian deities Sarapis and Isis. Hendrix suggests that this inscription may indicate "the 'metropolitan' character of Thessalonica's Egyptian cult establishment and presents an interesting parallel to the diffusion of early Christianity from the city to which Paul may refer in 1 Thess 1:8."⁶³

Following Paul's lead, who "saw in the outsider a potential insider,"⁶⁴ some of the church seemingly sought to win over

⁶⁰*BAGD*, s. v., ἐξηγέω.

⁶¹*Contra* Wanamaker, 83. It may be of significance that the prepositional phrase to be taken with ἐξηγεῖν is ἀφ' ὑμῶν not περὶ ὑμῶν.

⁶²So Ware, "1 Thessalonians 1,5-8," 128; and Thomas, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," 247.

⁶³"Thessalonica," 525.

⁶⁴Meeks, *Christians*, 107.

unbelievers by propagating the apocalyptic gospel that they had readily received (2:13). The content of their presentation may have included: the denunciation of their former gods as "idols" (1:9); the condemnation of some of their former social customs (4:5; 5:7); and the declaration that the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again would soon return to rescue Christians and to judge non-Christians (1:10; 4:14; 5:9; cf. 2 Thess 1:5-10; 2:10-12). Some people may have been persuaded by the Christians' message, while other outsiders likely found the provocative message (and its messengers!) to be offensive.⁶⁵ Although aggressive evangelism was a good way to win converts, it was also a good way to make enemies, as the church's founder could readily attest (2:2). In fact, the Thessalonians' evangelistic activity could have heightened the hostility and antipathy of outsiders toward the Pauline community.

Presently, there is a significant amount of scholarly discussion whether or not Judaism was a missionary religion, or, to state the topic of intense debate another way, whether or not ancient Jews engaged in active proselytism.⁶⁶ Although I am inclined to think that individual Jews in antiquity actively promoted their religious beliefs,⁶⁷ I need not enter into the fray of this complex conversation here. It is worth noting, however, that at least in Rome interest in and conversion to Judaism appears to

⁶⁵Barclay ("Conflict," 524) suggests, "Christians who continually reminded their unconverted spouses or friends of the sudden destruction about to fall on idolators surely aroused extreme annoyance among those they did not intimidate."

⁶⁶E. g., Feldman (*Jew and Gentile*), Boccaccini (*Judaism*), and Georgi (*Opponents*) think that Jews in antiquity were engaged in missionary activity, while McKnight (*Light*), Cohen ("Missionary"), and Goodman (*Mission*) do not.

⁶⁷In addition to passages cited in the text below, one could note the book of Jonah; *Joseph and Aseneth*; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.24-42; and Matt 23:15.

have been quite common.⁶⁸ Actual conversion to Judaism would obviously have required significant interaction between Jews and non-Jews. Whether one can rightly refer to such interaction as "proselytism" is a debated issue, as are the reported expulsions of the Jews from Rome for proselytizing activity (see Dio Cassius, 57.18.5 [cf. Suetonius, *Tib.* 36; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85] on the 19 CE expulsion; and Suetonius (*Clad.* 25) on the expulsion in the 40s [cf. Dio Cassius, 60.6.6]). As we have seen earlier, however, it is clear that at least conversion to Judaism (and probably Jewish proselytism itself) was a subject of scorn by Roman *literati* (note Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5; Epictetus, *Diss.* 2.9.20; Juvenal, *Sat.* 5.14.96-106; cf. Horace, *Sat.* 1.4.143; Augustine, *De civ. D.* 6.11; Origen, *c. Cel.* 5.41.4-6).

In Thessalonica we know that conversion to Pauline Christianity was a source of contention between believers and unbelievers. And I would argue, based on the preceding discussion, that it is possible that the Christians' promotion of their novel religion created conflict between insiders and outsiders. Aggressive proselytism would have been particularly offensive to those self-respecting Thessalonians who valued their established socio-religious customs. In fact, some non-Christian Thessalonians might not only have viewed Paul's converts as exclusive and offensive, but also as disruptive, and even subversive, to the basic institutions of Thessalonian culture.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Mason, "Invitation."

⁶⁹According to Broom *et al.* (*Sociology*, 164) an institution is "an established pattern of norms and values that organizes social life to fulfill social functions." They, like other sociologists, suggest that there are five basic institutions in modern society: the family, religion, government, education, and the economic system. In what follows I will consider the perceived adverse effect of the Thessalonian Christians on the familial, religious, and political life of their day. I am aware that the labeling of these particular aspects of social life is a modern phenomenon. Nevertheless, I would suggest that these basic institutions were in existence in antiquity as well, though not in such "neat" categories.

III. The Thessalonian Christians as Subversive To the family

In a Greco-Roman context, the family, or the household (οἶκος), would have been "the primary social unit."⁷⁰ The household served as "a chief basis, paradigm and reference point for religious and moral as well as social, political, and economic organization, interaction, and ideology."⁷¹ Furthermore, for the Greeks and Romans, the home represented a place of harmony, security, and identity. For sure, such lofty ideals were not always

In the following discussion I will not treat the institutions of education or economics as potential sources of conflict between Christians and non-Christians, although one might do so with interesting results. Extant evidence concerning the negative impact that the Christian presence had on education and economics is sparse. However, it is interesting to note that some "pagans" apparently perceived Christianity as an inferior philosophical school. Galen saw the Christians as such (*De Pulsuum Differentiis* 2.4; 3.3; and statements found in Arabic sources. On Galen's statements about Christians, see Benko, "Criticism," 1098-1100). Pertaining to economics, Luke reports that in Ephesus Demetrius incited his fellow silversmiths and in time the community itself to turn against Paul because of the negative impact that Christianity had had on his business, that of making silver shrines of Artemis (Acts 19:23-41). In addition, Pliny reports to Trajan that the spread of Christianity in Bithynia had led to the temples being almost entirely deserted (*Ep.* 10.96). This, too, would have had financial implications. Furthermore, as we will see, the Christians were often blamed for droughts and famine. Such accusations would have been linked to the economy. Although financial demise can certainly lead to conflict, we do not have any evidence that the arrival of Christianity in Thessalonica had any economic impact one way or another. Although Jewett (*Correspondence*, 118-23; 165-68) makes much of the Thessalonian Christians' economic plight, he does not consider the economic effect that Pauline Christianity might have had on the larger economic community in Thessalonica. As indicated above, evidence is simply lacking.

It is fair to say that educational and economic issues might enter into the ensuing discussion. This simply indicates that there is often an overlap in the selected categories. These categories, while not arbitrary, are surely not "air-tight" compartments. This would have been especially true in antiquity. Family, piety, politics, education, and economics all tend to blend together at points. Despite inevitable blurring of the lines, the categories are useful for presentation purposes and are therefore retained. I have sought to select the categories (i. e., the institutions) most pertinent to the conflict situation in Thessalonica.

⁷⁰So rightly Elliott, *Home*, 221. So also Towner ("Households," 417) who asserts, "The basic unit of the Greco-Roman society in which Paul lived and ministered was the household (oikos, oikia)." On the use of οἶκος/oikia in ancient Greek literature, see further de Vos, "Significance."

⁷¹Elliott, *Home*, 213.

actualized. Nevertheless, "secular ethicists saw the stability of the city-state as dependent upon responsible management of the household."⁷²

According to Acts, the Christian mission experienced considerable success in converting entire households. Perhaps the most notable example is the conversion of the household of the Roman centurion Cornelius at Caesarea (10:1-11:18). Luke also indicates that Paul converted Lydia and her household (16:15), the Philippian jailor and his household (16:32-34), as well as Crispus, the Corinthian ἀρχισυνάγωγος, and his οἶκος (18:8). Paul himself mentions in 1 Corinthians his having won and baptized the household of Stephanas (1:16; 16:15). It may have been a missionary strategy of the early church to convert the head of the household with the knowledge that the rest of the household would likely (feel obligated/be required to) follow suit. By employing such an approach, Christian missionaries could preserve the unity of the family and add much-needed members to their nascent assemblies.

Although converting entire households may have been the preferred strategy of the early Christian mission, such an approach was not always possible to implement. It is clear that in some instances conversion to Christianity divided families. Such was the case in Corinth where Paul advised believing spouses not to divorce their unbelieving mates so that the non-Christian partner might be saved (1 Cor 7:12-16). Christian wives in the congregations 1 Peter addresses were dealing with a similar relational dilemma. The

⁷²Towner, "Households," 417. Cicero (*De Officiis* 1.53-55) saw the household as a microcosm of the state. Meeks ("Boundaries," 9) suggests that "One of the most powerful causes for the hostility of the Roman literary classes toward oriental cults, including Judaism and Christianity, was precisely the fear that they would disrupt households and, consequently, undermine the social order."

author of the letter exhorts Christian wives to "be submissive to [their non-Christian] husbands, so that some [non-Christian husbands] may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives" (3:1). The writer of 1 Peter also exhorts Christian slaves to be submissive to their unbelieving masters (2:18-25).⁷³ Such texts suggest that conversion to Christianity by some household members and not by others could cause considerable tension in domestic relations.⁷⁴ It is also clear that at some times and in some places conversion to Christianity created acute conflict among family members. The Lucan Jesus remarks:

Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law (Luke 12:49-51//Matt 10:34-39; cf. Luke 8:21).

Early critics of Christianity observed the divisive effect that the Christian movement had on some households, and they were critical of such. Celsus is convinced the Christianity divides families. He claims that illiterate yokels and stupid women (i. e., Christians) deceptively buttonhole impressionable children and teach them to disobey their fathers and tutors (Origen, *c. Cel.*

⁷³For an insightful study on domestic relations in 1 Peter see Balch, *Wives*. Balch explains the Christian suffering which is repeatedly mentioned in 1 Peter (2:18-25; 3:13-17; 4:1-5, 12-19; 5:9-11) in the following manner: "[C]ertain slaves and wives converted to Christianity; therefore, persons in Roman society reacted by accusing them of being immoral, perhaps seditious, and certainly insubordinate. The author of 1 Peter directed the Aristotelian household duty code to this tense situation" (95). On the tensions between Christian wives and their non-Christian husbands, see further, Portefaix, *Sisters*, 192-199.

⁷⁴On the familial disruption created by conversion to the Christian faith as evidenced in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, see now Barton, *Discipleship*. Note e. g., Mark 3:31-35 and Matt 10:34-39; 12:46-50. See also Luke 8:19-21; 9:59-60; 12:49-53; 14:26-27; 18:28-30.

3.55). Aelius Aristides († 181 CE) also seems to have thought that Christianity had a disruptive effect on the family. In the course of a speech in which he defends the heroes of the Golden Age of Greece, he berates the Cynics. In the midst of his scathing critique, he compares the behavior of the Cynics to "those blasphemous people in Palestine" ('Υπὲρ τῶν τεττάρων, 2.394).⁷⁵ Aristides continues his speech by claiming that

They [i. e., the Cynics and by comparison the "blasphemous people in Palestine"] are incapable as far as they are concerned of contributing any matter whatsoever toward any common good, but when it comes to undermining home life, bringing trouble and discord into families and claiming to be leaders of all things, they are the most skillful men ('Υπὲρ τῶν τεττάρων, 2.394ff).⁷⁶

Stephen Benko has argued "those blasphemous people in Palestine" referred to by Aristides are Christians.⁷⁷ Such a conclusion is plausible. However, even if Aristides is not referring to Christians in this passage, his comments highlight the fact that Greeks and Romans looked with much suspicion and disdain on movements that sowed familial discord. Christianity fell into such a category.

Abraham Malherbe has observed that there is a concentration of kinship language in 1 Thessalonians,⁷⁸ and he convincingly argues that one of the reasons for the frequency of familial terminology in the letter is that Paul was aware of the fact

⁷⁵Trans. Benko, *Pagan Rome*, 46.

⁷⁶Trans. Benko, *Pagan Rome*, 46.

⁷⁷*Pagan Rome*, 46.

⁷⁸*Paul*, 48. Malherbe notes that God is referred to as "father" on five occasions; that Paul refers to himself as the Thessalonians' "father" and "nurse"; and that the Thessalonian Christians are called "children" and "brothers." The term "brothers," Malherbe observes, is used eighteen times in 1 Thessalonians. He notes that this number is exceeded only by 1 Corinthians, a letter which is approximately three times longer.

that the Thessalonian Christians' conversion had created domestic tensions.⁷⁹ Throughout 1 Thessalonians Paul seeks to reinforce the believers' affection for their sisters and brothers in the Lord and to drive a wedge between the congregation and the members' former associations.⁸⁰ As we have seen, those Thessalonians who turned to Christ through Paul's ministry became a part of a new family, the ἐκκλησία.⁸¹ Their incorporation into this new community *via* conversion and baptism prompted them to supplement, or even supplant, natural kinship ties with spiritual ones.⁸²

The alteration of former relational networks is common in cases of religious conversion. Although in most instances a convert does not completely sever his/her ties with family, friends, and associates, these relationships often become secondary, and social interaction within the community to which one is converted is given priority.⁸³ Stephen Barton has recently demonstrated that adherents to other groups in antiquity, in particular, converts to Judaism, Cynicism, and Stoicism, also subordinated family ties for the sake of their religious or philosophical commitment and that they often encountered

⁷⁹Paul, 50.

⁸⁰So rightly, Smith, *Comfort*, 99.

⁸¹Lucian considered familial talk among believers to be nonsense which was begun by "their first lawgiver," whom Lucian identifies as a "crucified sophist" (*De Morte Peregrini* 13). Caecilius also scorned the Christian use of familial language among themselves. He contended that by calling one another "brother" and "sister" the Christians merely turned fornication into incest (*Oct.* 9.2).

⁸²See Meeks, *Christians*, 88.

⁸³In the case of Christianity, this community would be the church. Significant and frequent interaction between fellow Christians in the church context is essential to reinforce one's faith commitment. For, "it is only within the religious community, the *ecclesia*, that the conversion can be effectively maintained as plausible" (Berger and Luckmann, *Construction*, 158).

criticism and opposition for doing so.⁸⁴ The sudden shift of commitment on the part of the Thessalonian Christians from their "real" family to a "fictive" one was likely viewed as subversive and could have created sharp disagreement between believing and unbelieving family members.⁸⁵ Meeks is right to suggest that "concern about replacement of family loyalties by this new 'family of God' may have been one reason for the 'affliction' and suffering of the [Thessalonian] believers in this letter [i. e., 1 Thessalonians]." ⁸⁶

To religion

In all likelihood, the Thessalonian believers' religious exclusiveness was another cause of conflict with their compatriots.⁸⁷ To worship a deity to the exclusion of all other gods would not only have been viewed by outsiders as strange and snobbish, it would also have been perceived as disruptive, or even subversive.⁸⁸ In Thessalonica, as in other Greek communities, there was a panoply of gods who were looked to for protection and provision. These gods were a significant aspect of Thessalonian life

⁸⁴Barton, *Discipleship*.

⁸⁵Wright (*Origins*, 1:450) states, "What we seem to be faced with [in early Christianity] is the existence of a community which was perceived to be subverting the normal social and cultural life of the empire precisely by its quasi-familial, quasi-ethnic life *as a community*" (emphasis his).

⁸⁶*Moral World*, 129.

⁸⁷I am aware that "In the cities of the ancient world, religion was inextricably intertwined with social and political life" (Wilken, *Christians*, 58). The purpose of this section is to highlight the Christians' monotheism (or "atheism") and the conflict that such a belief might have caused. Earlier I focused on the Christians' social exclusivity and the results thereof. Here I look at the religious or theological exclusivity of the Christians. The categories certainly overlap. The difference is largely one of emphasis.

⁸⁸Garnsey ("Toleration," 3) notes, "Religious deviance was dangerous in principle because it prejudiced that good relations between gods and men on which the safety of the state was held to depend."

and culture, and it was assumed that inhabitants would pay proper homage to at least some of the city's gods.⁸⁹ As Robert Wilken suggests, "Piety toward the gods was thought to insure the well-being of the city, to promote a spirit of kinship and mutual responsibility, indeed, to bind together the citizenry."⁹⁰ The Thessalonian Christians' refusal to worship any god but their own, coupled with their newfangled assumption that the very gods which they had previously venerated were "dumb idols," would have branded them as "dangerous atheists."⁹¹

The charge of atheism against the Christians appears frequently in Christian apologetic literature from the middle of the second century CE onwards.⁹² How significant the charge of atheism was in Christian and "pagan" relations up until this time is a matter of debate. Joseph Walsh is convinced that the charge of atheism against the Christians did not take on major significance until the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE).⁹³ By surveying the primary literature of the period, Walsh concludes that the accusation of atheism was only one of many sources of "pagan"

⁸⁹Garnsey ("Toleration," 24) remarks that in antiquity each community "was proud and protective of its indigenous cults and in normal circumstances was not disposed to supplement them or permit them to be undermined or subverted from within." On cultic life in Thessalonica, see, among others, Donfried, "Cults"; Hill, *Establishing*, 61-66; and Jewett, *Correspondence*, 126-132.

⁹⁰*Christians*, 58.

⁹¹Frend ("Persecutions," 155) suggests that it would have been a serious source of contention between Christians and "pagans" that "while living as members of a community, [the Christians] deliberately rejected the gods on whom the prosperity of that community rested."

⁹²See e. g., Justin Martyr, *1st Apol.* 4-6; 13; 46; *2nd Apol.* 3; *Diog.* 2.6; *Mart. Pol.* 3.2; 9.2; 12.2; Tertullian, *Ad Nat.* 1.1-3; and Athenagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.* 3. Note also Lucian, *Alex.* 25; 38; and Julian, *c. Gal.* 43B.

⁹³"Atheism." Frend ("Persecutions," 156) argues that the charge of atheism against the Christians had gained prominence by c. 130 CE.

disgust with Christianity before 150 CE.⁹⁴ He maintains that the charge of atheism came to the fore only after "pagans" learned more about Christianity, the more sensational and fear-inspiring charges against the Christians had lost their credibility, and the natural catastrophes of 160/61 CE heightened the "pagans'" awareness of Christian atheism.⁹⁵ Although Walsh helpfully highlights a vast array of reasons that the non-Christian Gentiles found Christianity repulsive, he fails to give sufficient weight to the fact that they would have considered the Christians' religious exclusiveness as particularly offensive from the very beginning. The fact that the charge of atheism does not feature prominently in the literature until after 160 CE does not necessarily mean that atheism was not a source of contention prior to that time. A similar charge can be expressed in a variety of ways. As we have seen, social exclusiveness (misanthropy) and religious exclusiveness (atheism) would have been closely linked in Greco-Roman culture. To refuse to participate in civic cultic events would have been viewed as denial, or at least blatant neglect, of the gods. The Christians' refusal to honor the gods would have been a source of conflict from the first.⁹⁶

But why would religious exclusiveness on the part of Christians have been so repulsive to the "pagan"? The answer to this query, which has been hinted at above, may now be addressed more fully. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix gives a plausible answer to this question. He contends,

⁹⁴"Atheism," 255-56.

⁹⁵"Atheism," 264-67.

⁹⁶de Ste. Croix ("Why?," 26) rightly contends that even though the earliest surviving apologies concerning the charge of Christian atheism are mid-second century CE, "there is no reason to think that the situation was different earlier."

The monotheistic exclusiveness of the Christians was believed to alienate the goodwill of the gods, to endanger what the Romans called the *pax deorum* (the right harmonious relationship between gods and men), and to be responsible for disasters which overtook the community.⁹⁷

It was a common belief among Gentiles that the neglect of the gods could lead to the wrath of the gods. Horace, a first century BCE poet, eloquently states his respect for and fear of the gods.

For the sins of your forefathers, Romans, not for your own deserts, shall you pay retribution, until you have restored the temples and the ruinous shrines of the gods and images befouled with black smoke.

You hold empire, because you walk humbly before the gods: from this everything should start, to this refer every outcome. The gods because they were neglected have imposed much suffering on the sorrowing West (*Odes* 3.6.1-8).⁹⁸

Fear of the gods' wrath was seemingly a common anxiety among Greeks and Romans. And in many communities, and most likely in Thessalonica from the time Pauline Christianity was introduced, it would have been apparent to family and friends that the Christians rejected, or at least neglected, the gods.⁹⁹ Therefore, if the gods' wrath was manifested (e. g., if crops failed or natural disasters struck), the Christians could have become the scapegoats. Tertullian (c. 160-200 CE) claims that "If the Tiber

⁹⁷de Ste. Croix, "Why?," 24. Fox (*Pagans*, 425) is similarly convinced that Christian atheism would have been the "basic cause of [Christian] maltreatment." He adds, "Some intellectual pagans decried the forms of contemporary cult, but almost all concurred with them when necessary; the Christians refused to concur, and their lack of respect was intolerable."

⁹⁸Trans. Whittaker, *Jews and Christians*, 206.

⁹⁹It is true that the Thessalonian congregation was not very large at first. As a result, their abstention from worshipping the gods may have gone unnoticed by the larger community. If, however, some of the Christians were involved in active proselytism and had been subject to political sanctions, then their withdrawal from worship could have been detected by the observant outsider. Furthermore, in ancient city life privacy was not easily had. People tended to live close together and to interact frequently with one another. See Stambaugh and Balch, *Environment*, 107-110.

reaches the walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the sky doesn't move or the earth does, if there is famine, if there is plague, the cry is at once: 'The Christians to the lion!'" (*Apol.* 40.2).¹⁰⁰ The Thessalonian Christians' refusal to worship any deity but their own would have been viewed with suspicion and could have left Paul's converts open to accusations if anything "abnormal" were to happen.

It is true that the Jews were also "atheists" and were reviled by Gentiles for their worship of a single, invisible deity.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, "atheism" does not seem to have created the same degree of conflict for the Jews as it did for the early Christians. How can one explain their divergent experiences? In all probability, it was the antiquity of the Jews which spared them such acute conflict with the Gentiles over the issue of exclusive monotheism.¹⁰² Even Tacitus, who was by no means a friend of the Jews, could bring himself to admit that at least some of the religious practices of the Jews were "commended by their antiquity" (*antiquitate defenduntur*, *Hist.* 5.5). In a society where the ancient was valued, the Jews were excused for their extravagant superstition. According to de Ste. Croix, "The gods would forgive the inexplicable monotheism of the Jews, who were, so to speak, licensed atheists."¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Cf. Tertullian, *Ad Nat.* 1.9; Cyprian, *Ep.* 75; Arnobius, *Ad. Gent.* 1.1, 1.13; and Augustine, *De civ. D.* 2.3.

¹⁰¹See e. g., the comments of Elder Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 13.46; Dio Cassius, 37.17.2; Josephus, *c. Ap.* 2.65-67, 79, 148; Lucian, 2.592-93; and Juvenal, 14.97-98.

¹⁰²So rightly de Ste. Croix, "Why?," 25. See also Fox (*Pagans*, 428-429) who supports such a conclusion and gives several other reasons why the Jews, by and large, had more amiable relations with the Romans.

¹⁰³"Why?," 25.

In some cities in the Diaspora, Christianity may have been linked by some "pagans" with Judaism.¹⁰⁴ However, it is doubtful that such would have been the case in Thessalonica. As argued in chapters three and six, the Jews of Thessalonica repudiated Paul and his message. Consequently, the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity occurred quite early on in Thessalonica, much nearer to 50 CE than to 70 CE.¹⁰⁵ These distinct lines of division between the parent religion and its offspring in this particular context would have made it difficult for Christianity to pass itself off as a sect within Judaism and thereby receive the privileged treatment frequently afforded the ancient faith.¹⁰⁶ Because of the conflict between Paul and the Thessalonian Jews, it would have been obvious to all astute observers that Pauline Christianity in Thessalonica was neither Jew nor Greek, but a third entity (cf. 1 Cor 10:32).

Greco-Roman religion is often portrayed as passionless and merely perfunctory. While it may be true that the thrust of "paganism" was more communal than it was personal, such a locus of worship should not be interpreted to mean that Gentiles were disinterested in religion.¹⁰⁷ In truth, many Gentiles were quite

¹⁰⁴Judge ("Judaism") has recently argued that Romans never saw Christianity as a part of Judaism.

¹⁰⁵Lieu ("Parting") is right to stress that relations between Jews and Christians differed from place to place and that any attempt to discover in a general sense when and how the parting of the ways between the two groups occurred is misguided.

¹⁰⁶Tellbe ("Philippians 3.1-11") argues that Paul seeks to persuade his Philippian converts who were encountering conflict with Roman authorities not to seek shelter under the umbrella of Judaism. Winter (*Welfare*, 124-143) suggests that Paul's Gentile converts in Galatia were moving toward Judaism in an attempt to avoid having to participate in the imperial cult.

¹⁰⁷On the vitality of Greco-Roman religious life, see Nock, *Conversion*; Fox, *Pagans*; and MacMullen, *Paganism*.

pious and held strong convictions about their religious life.¹⁰⁸ Even though "pagans" were often tolerant of others' religious beliefs, their tolerance toward others' beliefs does not necessarily indicate indifference toward their own. In fact, the opposition of Christians by their fellow Gentiles in Thessalonica (and elsewhere, e. g., Philippi) indicates that at times "pagans" were neither indifferent nor tolerant of other religious convictions.¹⁰⁹ It would be less than precise to aver that the Thessalonian Christians' monotheistic exclusiveness was the only reason that they encountered conflict with their compatriots. Nevertheless, it makes good sense to think that it was a factor in their clash with outsiders.

To government

In chapter three, I treated Luke's account of Paul's sojourn in Thessalonica. According to Luke, Paul, Silas, Jason, and some other believers were charged before the πολιτάρχαι for "acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (17:7). This alleged accusation against Paul *et al.* provides a good springboard for our present discussion. Because the charge recorded by Luke indicates that the hostility experienced by the Thessalonian Christians was politically related, the role that politics played in the conflict merits further exploration. In this section I will attempt to discern how this accusation of political subversion could have

¹⁰⁸Saturninus, the proconsul of Scillium, while trying Christians remarks, "We too are a religious people. . ." (*Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum* 3). For text and translation Musurillo, *Martyrs*, 86-87. Wilken (*Christians*, 63) notes "the Roman belief in divine providence, in the necessity of religious observance for the well-being of society, and in the efficacy of traditional rites and practices, was no less sincere than the beliefs of the Christians."

¹⁰⁹Garnsey ("Toleration," 24) contends, "The usual picture of civic cults as supple and receptive to foreign influences is a distortion of the truth." Fox (*Pagans*, 425) suggests that "The persecutions [post 250 CE] are good evidence that the essential continuity of pagan religiousness was still significant."

arisen by considering statements in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians which might have mirrored Paul's original proclamation and which could have been politically (mis)construed by outsiders and by examining pertinent epigraphic, numismatic, and artistic evidence which might give us a better grasp of the political atmosphere in Thessalonica in the middle of the first century CE.¹¹⁰

Earlier in this chapter I noted that in 1 Thessalonians Paul repeatedly refers to his initial visit to Thessalonica and to the content of his instruction on that occasion. Because of Paul's reiteration of his previous instruction, I was able to reconstruct with some degree of confidence the basic content of Paul's preaching in Thessalonica. 1 Thessalonians will now be searched in an effort to discover possible political overtones in Paul's original message.

At the outset, it is worth noting that Paul frequently refers to the παρουσία of the Lord [Jesus Christ] (2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; cf. 2 Thess 1:10; 2:1, 2, 3).¹¹¹ There is also mention of waiting for the Son of God (1:9), who is soon to be revealed from heaven (5:2; cf. 2 Thess 1:10; 2:2). On the ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου the ὀργή τοῦ θεοῦ will be poured out upon "those who do not know God" (1:10; 5:9; cf. 2 Thess 1:5-10; 2:10-12). Paul also reminds the Thessalonian Christians that they are citizens of another kingdom, the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (2:12; cf. 2 Thess 1:5). All of these statements could have political overtones and could have been understood by outsiders as politically subversive (see further chapter three). As PHEME

¹¹⁰Donfried ("Cults," 344-46) employs a similar strategy in attempting to understand the interplay between Paul's proclamation and the political situation in Thessalonica.

¹¹¹Koester ("Eschatology," 446) suggests that the term παρουσία "has been introduced by Paul in this letter" and "that it is a political term which is closely related to the status of the community." Note also Gundry, "Eschatology," 162.

Perkins points out, "Taken out of context . . . there is quite enough in the language of Christian belief to arouse suspicion and even hostility without presuming that the Christians engaged in any direct polemic against the civic cult."¹¹²

Nevertheless, there is one statement in the Thessalonian correspondence which does appear to be a polemical attack by Paul against the political system of his day,¹¹³ and as we will see, this remark takes on added importance given the close ties between Thessalonica and Rome. In 1 Thess 5:3 Paul declares, "When they say, 'Peace and security,' [εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια] then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape." Here, in an apocalyptic *tour de force*, Paul declares that those who are convinced that they are safe (i. e., non-Christians, the children of darkness) will encounter sudden destruction on the day of the Lord's visitation.

The phrase εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια is of particular interest. It is clear from the context of the passage that this statement reflects the perspective of those who are outside the Christian community. In 1960 Ernst Bammel ("Staatsanschauung") proposed that εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια was a Roman imperial slogan. For the most part, Bammel's suggestion has been either ignored or rejected by exegetes. However, in the 1980s both Karl Donfried¹¹⁴ and Klaus Wengst¹¹⁵ proposed that εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια be understood as a Roman slogan which was in circulation when Paul penned 1

¹¹²"Practices," 326.

¹¹³Donfried ("Cults," 344) suggests that 1 Thess 5:3 is a "frontal attack on the *Pax et Securitas* programme of the early Principate."

¹¹⁴"Cults," 344.

¹¹⁵*Pax Romana*, 77.

Thessalonians. Then in an article published in 1990 Helmut Koester ("Eschatology") argued for such an understanding of the phrase, as his student Holland Hendrix ("Eschatology") did one year later in an essay for a *Festschrift* in Koester's honor.

In his monograph *Pax Romana*, Wengst remarks on the meaning of this slogan. He suggests that

the combination of these terms [i. e., εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια] expresses an important claim of the Pax Romana: Roman power brings peace as a permanent state free of wars; it guarantees security from hostile attacks from beyond the bounds of the empire and by preventing armed quarrels within its frontiers; and finally, too, 'inner security', the maintaining of order and the preservation of the security of law is part of that. So 'peace and security' is a conservative slogan which affirms the existing order and wants to see it preserved. Paul takes it up in 1 Thess. 5:3. However, he regards it as a foolish slogan, which Christians will not repeat.¹¹⁶

But why does Paul's critique of the *Pax Romana* arise particularly in 1 Thessalonians (cf. e. g., Rom 13:1-7)?¹¹⁷ And why would such a perspective receive a hostile response in Thessalonica? The judicious work of Hendrix is helpful at this point in our discussion. In his aforementioned article, "Eschatology and Archaeology," Hendrix discusses various archaeological materials in an effort to demonstrate "a distinctive sensitivity to propaganda about Roman rule in the Julio-Claudian period on the part of the Thessalonians."¹¹⁸ The evidence he presents is pertinent here.

¹¹⁶*Pax Romana*, 78-79.

¹¹⁷For a fascinating study of the Christian apologists' critique of the Roman State, see Pagels, "Attack."

¹¹⁸"Archaeology," 114.

Epigraphic materials from the first centuries BCE and CE indicate the following:¹¹⁹ 1. some of the decrees of the city's assembly were issued in conjunction with an official Roman group;¹²⁰ 2. "Roma and Roman Benefactors" became a part of the city cult of "the gods";¹²¹ 3. the priesthood of "the gods" became less significant as a civic religion,¹²² while the "priest and agonothete of the Emperor Caesar Augustus" became more prominent;¹²³ and 4. a temple was built, probably between 27 BCE and 14 CE, in honor of Augustus.¹²⁴ Based on the Thessalonian epigraphic record from this period, Hendrix suggests that "Thessalonica's [political and civic religious] interests increasingly were influenced by Romans and by regard for the Roman emperor."¹²⁵

¹¹⁹I will list the specific inscriptions referred to by Hendrix. These inscriptions have been conveniently collected in *IT* (ed. Edson).

¹²⁰*IT*, nos. 32, 33.

¹²¹*IT*, no. 4.

¹²²*IT*, nos. 4, 31, 32, 132, 133, 226.

¹²³*IT*, nos. 31, 32, 132, 133.

¹²⁴*IT*, no. 31.

¹²⁵"Archaeology," 115. Hendrix ("Beyond," 308) contends, "In Macedonia, thresholds for offering divine honors to humans were generally high." He notes elsewhere ("Archaeology," 112, n. 15), "Relative to other quarters of the Roman Empire, Macedonia manifests a rather low imperial theology and a comparatively restrained religious response to Roman benefactors, magistrates, and emperors." Hendrix is prone to think, therefore, that the term "imperial cult" is misleading and that it should not be used in reference to the Thessalonians' benefaction of the emperor (see "Archaeology," 112, n. 15; "Thessalonians," 253; and "Beyond"). It does appear, however, that in Thessalonica there was an acute sensitivity to Rome and her representatives. And there is good reason to think that those who criticized or failed to recognize the authority of Rome and her rulers would have invited opposition.

Price (*Rituals*) has demonstrated that the imperial cult had made significant inroads into Asia Minor around the middle of the first century CE. Winter (*Welfare*, 125-126) notes the presence of the imperial cult in Corinth around this time. Tellbe ("Conflict," 108-110) suggests that in Philippi, a city located only some one hundred miles west of Thessalonica on the *Via Egnatia*, "the Imperial cult played a conspicuous and important role in the city life as a means of demonstrating loyalty to Rome." Certainly one should allow for local

Turning to numismatic evidence, "one encounters [in the Julio-Claudian period] a significant number of issues of a coin type that was novel in Thessalonica's minting history."¹²⁶ This particular coin type featured "the laureate head of Julius on the obverse with the legend $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ and a bare-headed Octavian on the reverse with the legend 'of the Thessalonians.'"¹²⁷ What is of particular interest about this Thessalonian issue is that it is a direct, "unoriginal imitation of an *as* issued by Octavian in 38 BCE in honor of Julius's deification."¹²⁸ According to Hendrix, such a rigid imitation of Roman numismatic propaganda is striking and significant.¹²⁹

In his valuable article, Hendrix also mentions that fragments of a statue of Augustus, which many experts date to Claudius's reign, have been found in Thessalonica.¹³⁰ It is not clear, according to Hendrix, whether the statue was made in Thessalonica or imported to Thessalonica, although Hendrix favors the latter option. Regardless, this statue "represents a Claudian adaptation

diversity and not assume facilely that distinct socio-historical contexts can be equated. Nevertheless, it is striking how close Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia Minor are geographically. I am inclined, therefore, to think that the imperial cult may also have played a larger role in Thessalonian religious life than Hendrix has suggested. Benefaction may have led to veneration, at least for some, even if there is no "hard" evidence to support such a claim.

¹²⁶"Archaeology," 115.

¹²⁷"Archaeology," 115. As Hendrix notes, this coin type may be found in Head, *Coins*, 115, nos. 58-59, 61.

¹²⁸"Archaeology," 116. As Hendrix indicates, this issue may be seen in Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, pl. 30, no. 3.

¹²⁹"Archaeology," 116.

¹³⁰"Archaeology," 116-117.

of a Augustan prototype" and further demonstrates the Thessalonians' interest in imperial media.¹³¹

Based upon his careful investigation of the archaeological material, Hendrix contends that there is "a distinctive sensitivity to propaganda about Roman rule on the part of the Thessalonians" and that Paul's citation of the slogan εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια "was intended to resonate with a feature of the Thessalonian political environment. . . ." ¹³² Furthermore, Hendrix suggests that "if the Thessalonians' θλίψις had been a result of political opposition involving Roman or Roman-related interests, Paul's apocalyptic critique of Roman 'peace and security' might seem more comprehensible." ¹³³ Unfortunately, the purview of his article does not allow Hendrix to discuss the implications of Paul's indictment of the Roman government.

It is at this point, then, that I might be able to add a note to Hendrix's work. Based on the political overtones of Paul's original proclamation as evidenced in 1 Thessalonians (see above) and the significant archaeological materials indicating the city's sensitivity to Roman interests, I would suggest: 1. Paul's apocalyptic message was sufficiently disturbing to some Thessalonians to lead to

¹³¹"Archaeology," 117. Tacitus observes that Jews do not set up statues in their cities, and especially not in their Temples, in honor of their kings or of the Caesars (*Igitur nulla simulacra urbibus suis, nedum templis s[ist]unt; non regibus haec adultatio, non Caesaribus honor, Hist. 5.4*). It is likely that Paul, given his disdain of "idolatry" (1:9), would have instructed his "pagan" converts to pay no heed to such "idols/icons."

Barclay ("Conflict," 584) notes that "when passions were high and opportunity provided, Jews engaged in acts of vandalism against religious objects they scorned." I am not suggesting, of course, that Paul vandalized the statue of Augustus or that he encouraged his Gentile converts to do so. (Interestingly, Caecilius [*Oct. 8.5*] remarks that Christians "spit upon the gods"). I am contending, however, that Paul and his converts would not have attached the same significance to such politically-oriented "idols" as other Thessalonians did.

¹³²"Archaeology," 117-118.

¹³³"Archaeology," 118, n. 43.

political accusations against him and his converts during his stay in the city. 2. Political accusations factored into Paul's forced departure from the city. And, 3. A few of the converts he left behind may have been brought (again) before the δῆμος and the πολιτάρχαι on charges of political subversion, and if so, were likely to have been subjected to more severe sanctions than previously (i. e., beyond the posting of bond).¹³⁴

Donfried is convinced that the Thessalonian Christians' affliction was caused by political opposition.¹³⁵ As we have seen, the conflict situation in Thessalonica defies a single explanation. Nevertheless, I would concur with Donfried that political issues played an important role in the conflict which Paul's Thessalonian converts experienced with their compatriots.

Conclusion

In this chapter some possible explanations as to why the Thessalonian Christians experienced conflict with non-Christians have been explored. In short, it has been suggested that the Thessalonian believers' conversion marked the start of their strained relations with outsiders. Furthermore, I contended that because Paul's Thessalonian converts tended toward separatism, both ideologically and socially, they were likely looked upon by

¹³⁴It appears that Christians and Jews elsewhere were also thought to be politically subversive. It may be that the author of 1 Peter is seeking to dissuade his readers/listeners from being or perceived as being politically subversive when he writes, "For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by [God] to punish those who do wrong and praise those which who do right" (2:13-14). Pliny informs Trajan that some former Christians had recanted their faith and demonstrated as much by worshipping his statue and the images of the gods and cursing Christ (*Omnes et imaginem tuam deorumque simulacra venerati sunt: et Christo maledixerunt*, Ep. 10.96). Presumably, those Christians whom Pliny had executed would not worship the emperor and the gods. Pliny may well have viewed such "inflexible obstinacy" as political subversion. 3 Macc 3:7 indicates that some Jews living in and around Alexandria were accused of being disloyal to the king (Ptolemy IV) and hostile to his government.

¹³⁵"Cults," 347.

unbelievers with suspicion and may have been subject to rumors and accusations. Additionally, active proselytism on the part of some Thessalonian Christians seemingly exacerbated the already tense relations. Herein I also maintained that the conflict in Thessalonica was perpetuated because the Christians were viewed by non-Christians to be subversive to the foundational institutions of Greco-Roman society, namely, family, religion, and government. I would submit that my treatment of the topic of the church's conflict has been sensitive to the textual, socio-historical, and archaeological evidence and would suggest that my conclusions are entirely plausible given the paucity of materials at our disposal.

By way of conclusion, I would note that the reason I have not suggested a single explanation as to why the Thessalonian believers encountered conflict with their compatriots is because no single explanation will suffice. It is almost a certainty that different factors would have prompted different people to oppose Paul's converts. Social scientists who study conflict suggest that any given conflict can be traced to a variety of causes (see p. 107). Despite the fact that the precise reasons for the conflict between Christians and non-Christians are all too allusive, it may be positively concluded that the clash between believers and their culture arose because unbelievers wanted to control and to censure a novel religious movement in their midst which they perceived to be ideologically and socially deviant. Despite pressure from outsiders, however, Paul's converts refused to reverse their "turn" to the Lord (1:9; 3:5) in order to return to their previous beliefs and practices. When coupled with the fact that some of the Thessalonians were all too prone to return κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ (5:15; cf. Rom 12:17-21), conflict between the believers

and their compatriots became all but inevitable and was likely intense.

Chapter Eleven

The Impact of Intergroup Conflict on the Thessalonian Congregation

Introduction

What were the consequences of the discordant relations between Christians and non-Christians in Thessalonica on the fledgling Pauline assembly in that city? I will seek to answer this question in the final chapter of this project. In attempting to do so, 1 Thessalonians will, of course, be the primary source. I will scour this letter for evidence which might shed light on the stated query. Additionally, in this unit social-scientific theory will once again aid my inquiry. The social-scientific study of conflict will be especially useful in helping to assess the outcomes of the conflict with outsiders on the Thessalonian church. I will also consider below seemingly relevant data from 2 Thessalonians. However, because of the prevalent scholarly skepticism concerning the letter's authenticity, I will treat the epistle as a secondary source and will not build arguments nor base conclusions on its contents.

In what follows I will argue that intergroup conflict had three principal effects on the Thessalonian church. Firstly, I will contend that the external opposition encountered by these Pauline believers reinforced their new-found faith. It will then be suggested that the conflict served to strengthen congregational relations. Finally, I will seek to show that the afflictions which the Christians experienced at the hands of their compatriots heightened their eschatological hope.

I. Affliction and Faith

Paul's unplanned, premature departure from Thessalonica left his converts in a precarious position. Not only was the

Thessalonian assembly relatively immature spiritually,¹ but it was also faced with the formidable challenge of coping with external hostility.² 1 Thess 2:17-3:13 indicates that Paul was exceedingly concerned about the spiritual survival of the church (note esp. 3:1, 5, 7). In particular, he was worried that his converts might be shaken (σαίνεσθαι)³ by their afflictions and as a result abandon the faith (3:3).⁴

Although extant Christian sources tend to conceal such, defection from certain Christian congregations did occur from time to time (see Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96).⁵ The writer of Hebrews indicates as much by repeatedly urging his readers to persevere and not to emulate those who have fallen away (παρὰ πεισόντας, 6:6).⁶ The "apostasy" of which the author speaks may have been

¹In 3:10 Paul indicates that he prays continuously to see his converts "face to face" in order to "supply what is lacking in [their] faith." Donfried ("Theology," 20-21) suggests that hope was the particular aspect missing from the Thessalonians' faith. Such a theory is not necessary. (Furthermore, we will see below that the majority of the assembly was not flagging in hope). Paul's statement merely indicates that the Thessalonian congregation "is a young community whose formation and development are not yet sufficiently advanced. . ." (Richard, 171). So similarly, Marshall, 98; and Bammel, "Preparation," 92.

²Paul states in 1:6 and 2:14 that his converts had suffered for their faith in the past. Paul's remark in 3:3 (θλίψεσιν ταύταις) indicates the continuation of external opposition in the present (cf. 2 Thess 1:4-5 and 2 Cor 8:1-2). So rightly, Donfried, "Purpose," 251; Johanson, *Brethren*, 57; and Barclay, "Conflict," 514, n. 5. Pace Wanamaker (42; 130), who argues that the Thessalonians' afflictions had passed.

³On the meaning of this NT *hapax legomenon*, see Chadwick, "σαίνεσθαι."

⁴Roetzel ("Election," 217) suggests that Paul's repeated use of election and sanctification language in 1 Thessalonians may be explained in part by the fact that "The danger of [the Thessalonians'] defection was real . . . and the need for [their] encouragement was urgent."

⁵See further Wilson, "Apostate." In this article, Wilson suggests that "apostasy" was not as uncommon as scholars of early Christianity usually suppose. For a sociological perspective on religious "apostasy," see now the collection of essays edited by Bromley, *Apostasy*.

⁶On the topic of apostasy in Hebrews, see now deSilva, "Apostasy." See also, Marshall, "Apostasy," 74.

prompted in part by external opposition from non-Christians, including public harassment, confiscation of property, and imprisonment (10:32-34).⁷

Paul was aware that the temptation to forsake one's faith was particularly real when suffering for one's faith (3:3-5). Consequently, he was anxious to see the Thessalonians further established in their received faith (3:2) lest they, like those individuals of whom Pliny and the writer of Hebrews speak, decided to leave the faith to which they had been converted and in which they had been instructed. It was Paul's grave concern for the Thessalonians' steadfastness in the face of affliction that prompted his (unsuccessful) attempts (καὶ ἅπαξ καὶ δίς) to return to Thessalonica (2:18) and that ultimately led him to send Timothy from Athens in his stead (3:1-2). Paul remarks, "[W]hen I could bear it no longer, I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain" (3:5; cf. 2 Thess 3:3).

Timothy's return to Paul in Corinth allayed, at least temporarily,⁸ Paul's intense anxiety about his converts' continuation in the faith. For when Timothy comes to Paul from Thessalonica, he brings with him the good news of the church's faith (3:6). This positive report comforts Paul in the midst of his "distress and affliction" (ἀνάγκη καὶ θλίψει, 3:7; cf. 2 Thess 3:2) and

⁷Wilson, "Apostate," 205. See also Lane, *Hebrews*, 296-301.

⁸Paul continued to be concerned about his converts' steadfastness in the faith even after Timothy's positive report, as 3:8, 10 indicate. Rightly recognized by Patte ("Thessalonians," 131), Palmer ("Thanksgiving," 29), and Johanson, *Brethren*, 58.

prompts him to write his converts to comfort and to encourage them in the Lord.⁹

Some interpreters have taken Paul's exhortation to "help the weak" (ἀντέχεσθε τῶν ἀσθενῶν, 5:14c) as evidence that at least a few of the Thessalonians were flagging in their new-found faith.¹⁰ It may be that the continued external opposition experienced by the congregation, the death of fellow Christians, or some other unspecified hardship had unsettled the faith of some.¹¹ But even if this were this case, one may reasonably conclude, based upon Paul's explicitly positive comments about the church's faith (3:6-7; cf. 2 Thess 1:3), that the majority of the assembly was persevering in the faith and weathering the storm of suffering. Although intergroup conflict can result in ingroup defection, conflict theorists point out that conflict relations can also reduce ingroup disaffiliation (see further chapter five). This appears to have been the case in Thessalonica, for there is not a shred of evidence in 1 (or 2) Thessalonians to suggest that Paul's converts had "apostatized."¹² Granted, it is conceivable that Paul was uninformed or sought to conceal congregational disidentification. However, such is unlikely in light of Timothy's recent visit to the

⁹So also Best, 15; and Patte, "Thessalonians," 126. On 1 Thessalonians as a letter of consolation (λόγος παραμυθητικός), see Donfried ("Purpose") and Smith (*Comfort*). Although Chapa ("Consolation") notes multiple features that 1 Thessalonians shares in common with letters of consolation in antiquity, he stops short of identifying 1 Thessalonians as such.

¹⁰See e. g., Black, "Weak"; Bruce, 123; Richard, 277; Hill, *Establishing*, 233-241, and Hemphill, *Gifts*, 31. Frame (198) and Bicknell (59) suggest (unconvincingly) that Paul is referring here to those who are morally weak.

¹¹If so, the commands to "Rejoice always, pray constantly, [and] give thanks in all circumstances" (5:16-18a) would have been particularly relevant to such people.

¹²So also Bammel, "Preparation," 100. The apostasy spoken of in 2 Thess 2:3 is to take place in the future.

assembly and Paul's repeated praise of his converts in 1 Thessalonians (see further below).¹³ How could it be that the believers' conflict with unbelievers buttressed the Christians' faith commitment? While in Thessalonica, Paul had instructed his converts to anticipate affliction (καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἡμεν, προελέγομεν ὑμῖν ὅτι μέλλομεν θλίβεσθαι, 3:4), for such was their lot (3:3).¹⁴ Paul also taught the *ekklesia* to view itself as distinct from the rest of society.¹⁵ Therefore, when the Thessalonians actually encountered opposition from outsiders, it served to confirm and to reinforce Paul's apocalyptic instruction all the more. The apostle's apocalyptic teaching prepared his converts for external opposition and provided them with a ready explanation of non-Christian hostility.

As other scholars have noted,¹⁶ there seems to have been a complex correlation between the Thessalonians' social dislocation and ideological orientation. On the one hand, the Christians' conflict with unbelievers would have severely strained, or even severed, former relational networks, thereby making it undesirable for the believers to return to their pre-conversion associations and activities. On the other hand, the converts' conflict with their compatriots would have confirmed their new worldview and

¹³Cf. Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians. The apostle does not tend to cover over what he perceives to be congregational problems. Even at those points where Paul seeks to be extremely tactful, e. g., in parts of Romans and Philemon, he is also quite frank.

¹⁴Jewett (*Correspondence*, 94, 171) suggests that the congregation was surprised at the presence of "persecution." This seems unlikely in light of the facts that they "received the word in much affliction" (1:6) and that Paul had instructed them to expect continued affliction (3:4).

¹⁵On the social (ethical) dualisms in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians, see further chapters eight and ten above.

¹⁶In particular, Meeks, "Functions," 689-695; and Barclay, "Conflict," 516-520.

convinced them that there was no pressing reason to revert to their old patterns of life, even if they could.¹⁷ Conflict with their fellow Gentiles, therefore, fortified the Thessalonians' faith and urged them to curtail, or even to cut-off, intimate social contact with outsiders. In writing 1 Thessalonians, Paul seeks to strengthen further his converts' faith by reiterating that suffering as a Christian is inevitable and profitable (3:3-4; cf. 2 Thess 1:5) and by reinforcing the community's boundaries through the use of dualistic apocalyptic categories and fictive kinship language.

II. Conflict and Community

Not only did the believers' clash with outsiders seemingly bolster the church's faith, but the affliction that the assembly experienced also appears to have engendered especially strong relations between Paul and the Thessalonians and among the Thessalonian Christians themselves. Paul's admiration of and approval of the church in Thessalonica is apparent throughout 1 Thessalonians.¹⁸ For example, in 1:7 Paul refers to the congregation as an exemplary assembly (a τύπος)¹⁹ for all those believers living in Macedonia and Achaia.²⁰ That the Thessalonian

¹⁷For insightful treatments of the conversion process and its social effects, see Berger and Luckman, *Construction*, 157-163; and Segal, *Paul*.

¹⁸Most commentators agree that in 1 Thessalonians Paul displays his fondness of and pleasure with the Thessalonians. E. g., Lünemann, 4; Milligan, xxx-xxxi; Neil, xxvii-xxviii; Best, 15; Marshall, 10; and Martin, 47. Jewett (*Correspondence*, 177) thinks that Paul is responding to "the crisis of a radicalized and hence vulnerable millenarianism by writing 1 Thessalonians." Paradoxically, earlier in his work (72) Jewett concurs with those scholars who stress the primarily affirmative tone of the letter.

¹⁹Patte ("Thessalonians," 134) takes τύπος to mean "typical of what happens to those who receive the word." This interpretation may be partially correct. However, such an understanding misses the fact that Paul is holding up the Thessalonian church as an example for other believers to follow.

²⁰Paul remarks in 1:8-9a that the Thessalonians' faith was so widespread that in his contact with other Macedonian and Achaian Christians he did not have to say anything about his fruitful Thessalonian mission because these believers had already heard of it and were speaking about it to him. Although

Christians were special to Paul is also suggested by Paul's frequent use of familial language throughout 1 Thessalonians.²¹ In this epistle Paul refers to his converts as ἀδελφοί eighteen times. Additionally, he speaks of himself as a father and as a nurse to his converts and likens them to children (2:7, 11). Furthermore, in 2:8 Paul records his deep care for the church and his commitment to share himself and not merely his message with the assembly because of their being so dear to him. Paul's eager desire to see his spiritual children "face to face" also shows his fond affection for the congregation (2:17-18; 3:6, 10). Paul's referring to the Thessalonian believers as "beloved by God" (ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] θεοῦ, 1:4), as "taught by God" (θεοδίδακτοί, 4:9), and as his "glory and joy" (δόξα καὶ χαρά, 2:20) at the *parousia* further indicates the high esteem in which he held them.

1 Thessalonians teems with Pauline accolades of his converts, and I am unconvinced that such repeated and sustained praise is simply a clever, yet manipulative, epistolary/rhetorical strategy on Paul's part.²² Such an outflow of affection from Paul toward his converts is uncommon in Paul's other extant letters.²³ How may we explain the elevated status of the Thessalonian congregation in

Paul did not need to boast about the Thessalonians to other believers, it is likely that he did. So also Best, 81. Cf. 2 Thess 1:4; and 2 Cor 8:1-5.

²¹Malherbe ("Family") helpfully highlights the concentrated use of fictive kinship language in 1 Thessalonians.

²²Scholars have identified the epistolary genre of 1 Thessalonians as *parenetic* (so Malherbe, *Paul*, 68-78) and the rhetorical genre of 1 Thessalonians as *epideictic* (e. g., Jewett, *Correspondence*, 71-72). Praise is a central feature of both classifications. I am not aware of an interpreter who has called into question Paul's basic sincerity in writing to his Thessalonian converts in such a way. Neil (xxvii-xxviii) notes that "the praise which [Paul] lavishes upon these ordinary working-folk of Thessalonica might be dubbed flattery or insincerity. But he is so obviously in deadly earnest."

²³So also Bammel, "Preparation," 91.

Paul's thinking? While not denying other possible explanations,²⁴ I would suggest that it was the Christians' imitation of Paul and of the Lord in suffering joyfully (1:6) and their continuation in the faith in the face of continued hostility that so endeared them to him.²⁵

Did the Thessalonians also have a positive view of Paul? Some think not. As noted in chapter six, scholars such as Lütgert, Schmithals, Jewett, and Donfried contend, with reference to 2:1-12, that some of Paul's converts (identified by Lütgert and Jewett as the ἄτακτοι) were openly critical of their apostle.²⁶ Paul may well be engaged in impression management in 1 Thessalonians; however, views that posit problems between Paul and the Thessalonians do not commend themselves. For while there is no unequivocal textual evidence to support arguments for poor relations between Paul and his converts, upon his return from Thessalonica Timothy tells Paul that the church has fond memories of their missionaries and longs to see them (3:6). And it seems

²⁴E. g., the Thessalonians' eager reception and internalization of Paul's apocalyptic message (see chapter ten above) and the reciprocity of loving-kindness from his converts (see further below).

²⁵Wanamaker (83) concurs that it was the Thessalonians' experience of and response to external hostility that "accounts for the unique esteem in which the community in Thessalonica was held by Paul and his mission congregations." See also Koester, "Gemeinde."

²⁶Cf. Goulder ("Silas") who suggests that Paul's converts, many of whom were former God-fearers, opposed Paul and his teaching and that Silas, a "Jerusalem man," was the person responsible for sowing seeds of congregational and theological discord. When Paul addresses in 1 Thessalonians the need to keep working, the proximity of the *parousia*, matters pertaining to sexual purity, and issues concerning his own integrity, Goulder is convinced that he is countering problems created by Silas's teaching of a realized eschatology. Goulder also thinks that 2 Thessalonians is meant to oppose realized eschatology. It should be noted that Goulder draws the vast majority of his parallels from 1 Corinthians. I will indicate in the text below why I do not follow the type of proposal which Goulder offers. Goulder spells out this "two missionaries, two missions" argument, which is basically a restatement of Baur's well-known thesis (as Goulder himself acknowledges), more fully in *Two Missions*.

doubtful that Paul would have distorted Timothy's report to smooth over troubled relations with the church. To have wittingly falsified the situation would have been an "ironical insult" and would likely have undermined the goodwill which existed between Paul and the Thessalonians.²⁷ From all indications, the Thessalonian Christians were as fond of Paul as he was of them.

Interestingly, some conflict theorists suggest that intergroup conflict can strengthen the relational bonds between a group's leader(s) and followers providing that the leader(s) respond(s) to conflict with skill and sensitivity.²⁸ Indeed, portions of 1 Thessalonians may be read as Paul's attempt to help his converts cope with their continued conflicts (1:6-10; 2:13-16; 2:17-3:13; 4:11-12; 5:1-11, 15; cf. 2 Thess 1:5-12). One can imagine that this personal and carefully crafted epistle buoyed the congregation when it was read (5:27) and further strengthened the church's relations with Paul. In short, I would suggest that Paul and the Thessalonians shared a reciprocal affection which was forged on the anvil of affliction.

We turn now to investigate the impact of the conflict on the believers' relations with one another. Under some circumstances, intergroup conflict can adversely affect a group by undermining its sense of unity. For instance, the external opposition experienced by the Philippian congregation seemingly exacerbated that assembly's disunity.²⁹ In other contexts, however, external adversity can draw a community closer together thereby enhancing

²⁷Quotation and insight from Johanson, *Brethren*, 52.

²⁸So Rex, *Conflict*, 40; 43; and Deutsch, *Resolution*, 77-80.

²⁹Peterlin, *Disunity*, 55.

its sense of solidarity, identity, and boundaries.³⁰ This appears to have been what happened in Thessalonica.

Now, it is true that Paul commands his converts to respect and to esteem their leaders and "to be at peace with one another" (5:12-13). And building upon the work of Schmithals and Lütgert,³¹ Jewett understands these commands, along with 2:1-12 and 5:19-22, as Paul's attempt to counter criticism from the ἄτακτοι (5:14).³² For Jewett, the ἄτακτοι (or "millenarian radicals")³³ were those rebellious, lower-class Thessalonian congregants

who resisted on principle the structures of everyday life including the work ethic, the sexual ethic, and the authority of congregational leadership. They refused to prepare for a future παρουσία of Christ because in principle they were

³⁰Roberts (*Religion*, 71) notes that hostility from without can create internal cohesion. On the possible outcomes of intergroup conflict, see further chapter five.

³¹Schmithals, *Gnostics*; and Lütgert, "Volkommenen."

³²Jewett, *Correspondence*, 102-105. Cf. Frame, 195; and Hemphill, *Gifts*, 28-29. Contrast Best (228) who rightly notes that "There is insufficient evidence to indicate any division between the [leaders and members]."

³³There is a significant amount of scholarly debate about how best to translate ἄτακτος. Originally, the term was used to speak of "people who failed to keep their proper position, whether in the army or in civil life" (Marshall, 150). Over time the word came to mean "undisciplined, unruly, or disorderly" (Hill, *Establishing*, 224). The term is often rendered as "idle" (RSV, NRSV, and NIV). This interpretation is in keeping with the apparent meaning of the verbal and adverbial cognates of ἄτακτος in 2 Thess 2:7, 11 and in P.Oxy. 275 and 725 (so Milligan, 153-154). Other translators (KJV, NASB) render the word more literally as "disorderly." Can these seemingly divergent translations be correlated? Many commentators believe so. See e. g., Frame, 197; Morris, 168; Bruce, 122; Malherbe, *Paul*, 92; Russell, "Idle," 108; and Black, "Weak," 315, n. 20. See otherwise, Collins (*Birth*, 94) and Richard (276) who contend that the term clearly means "disorderly." I am prone to think that Marshall (151) is on the right track by suggesting that "the general context in the letter [i. e., 1 Thessalonians] indicates that the specific type of disorderliness in mind here lay in a refusal to work and conform to the normal way of life of employees." I will show below that Jewett's understanding of the ἄτακτοι as insubordinate to the church's leaders (including Paul) lacks textual support.

experiencing and embodying it already in their ecstatic activities.³⁴

Although I would agree with Jewett that the Thessalonian assembly had a millenarian mindset,³⁵ there is insufficient evidence to support his particular understanding of the ἄτακτοι. It does in fact appear that some of Paul's converts were more interested in meddling than in working (4:11-12; cf. ἐργαζομένους in 2 Thess 3:11). Furthermore, it is probable that Jewett (and many other commentators) is correct in correlating 1 Thess 4:11-12 with 5:14a and with 2 Thess 3:6-13, thereby identifying the ἄτακτοι as those who would not work.³⁶ However, Jewett's contention that the ἄτακτοι called into question the eschatological and sexual instructions of the apostle and overtly challenged the authority of congregational leaders is not convincing.

Here I am interested in pursuing the supposed congregational dissension created by the behavior of the ἄτακτοι. To begin, it should be noted that the commands given in 5:12-22 are directed to the entire congregation, not simply the ἄτακτοι (note the presence of ἀδελφοί in 5:12, 14; and ὁρᾶτε μή τις in 5:15). This fact renders unlikely Jewett's suggestion that 5:12-13 and 5:19-22 were written specifically to counter the ἄτακτοι, which in turn calls into question the idea that the ἄτακτοι were intentionally flouting

³⁴*Correspondence*, 176.

³⁵I would disagree, however, with Jewett's contention that the Thessalonians eagerly embraced a radically realized eschatology because of "an unwillingness to live with the uncertainty of a future eschatology" (97). See further below.

³⁶*Correspondence*, 104-105. See also e. g., Best, 230; Marshall, 150-151; Bruce, 122-123; Wanamaker, 163; Hill, *Establishing*, 225-226; Goulder, "Silas," 88-89; and cautiously, Barclay, "Conflict," 525, n. 46. It may be that some of the ἄτακτοι thought that the παρουσία was imminent (or even present [see 2 Thess 2:2]) and that this conviction reinforced their decision not to work. So e. g., Neil, 124; and Menken, "Paradise." For the argument that there is no correlation between the eschatological and "vocational" issues, see Russell, "Idle."

Pauline authority and disrupting the assembly. Additionally, it does not appear that the activity of ἄτακτοι was opposed by the church nor that their behavior had undermined congregational relations.³⁷ In fact, it seems clear enough that it was Paul, not the Thessalonians, who was concerned about the potentially adverse effect of the ἄτακτοι on the assembly (5:14; cf. 2 Thess 3:6-15).³⁸

It is also worth noting here that although the whole of Paul's *parenesis* in 5:12-22 is directly applicable to the Thessalonian congregation,³⁹ it is neither necessary nor advisable to read the entire pericope as an attempt on Paul's part to redress congregational deficiencies. In fact, the overall affirmative tone of 1 Thessalonians⁴⁰ and the lack of space Paul devotes to addressing these congregational matters should caution one from concluding that any significant problems stand behind the terse injunctions given in 5:12-22.⁴¹ In particular (*contra* Jewett), I understand Paul's commands in 5:12-13, 19-22 as preventative, not corrective.

³⁷Jewett (178) correctly observes that the ἄτακτοι remained a part of the assembly and that they were supported financially by the church. However, this leads him to offer the implausible suggestion that "their behavior and theology were approved by a sizable and influential segment of the membership."

³⁸As to why Paul, if it is indeed he, is so authoritarian and forceful in tone when dealing with the ἄτακτοι in 2 Thess 3:6-15, one might note that intergroup conflict can prompt a group's leader(s) to tighten group boundaries by "cracking down" on those who would seek to deviate from group norms. Paul set forth his (and thereby the church's position) concerning work through instruction (3:6, 10) and by example (3:7-9). Even still, Paul recommends ostracism (at meal times?), not excommunication, for these "deviant" congregants (3:6, 14-15; cf. 1 Cor 5:2). On Paul's instruction in 2 Thess 3:6-15, see further Forkman, *Limits*, 132-139.

³⁹Also noted by e. g., Malherbe, *Paul*, 89; and Hemphill, *Gifts*, 24.

⁴⁰For useful remarks on how to detect Paul's tone in a particular letter, see Barclay, "Mirror-Reading," 84.

⁴¹Marshall (146) states, "In view of Paul's general commendation of the Thessalonians elsewhere in the letter it would be wrong to find serious deficiencies in the life of the church reflected in this section [i. e., 5:12-24]."

Paul was sufficiently skilled as a pastor to recognize that "an ounce of prevention was worth a pound of cure"!

The fact that Paul does not explicitly mention actual congregational divisions at any point in 1 (or 2) Thessalonians reinforces further my position. The conspicuous absence of such evidence stands in marked contrast to Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:10; 11:18-19), the Romans (12:16; 14:1-15:6), and the Philippians (2:1-4; 4:2). Paul's silence on the issue of infighting should not, of course, lead one to conclude naïvely that there was no internal tension whatsoever within the Thessalonian congregation. It is doubtful that such a church ever has or ever will exist!⁴² One may reasonably infer, however, that since Paul does not directly speak of internal divisions among the Thessalonians that he was sufficiently pleased with the congregation's unity. It is likely that upon his return Timothy would have informed Paul of significant tensions among the Thessalonians if they had indeed existed. And based upon Paul's other extant writings, I am led to think that Paul would have directly addressed disruptive church infighting if he were aware of it. 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 5:1-11, as well 2 Thess 2:1-15 and 3:6-15 (if Pauline), demonstrate Paul's tack in dealing with issues that he believes serve as a threat to the congregation. He states the particular problem (in the aforementioned pericopes, deep grief, questions and/or confusion about the *parousia*, and idleness) and then proceeds to offer instruction and admonition. So, when Paul says that the Thessalonians have no need for anyone to write them concerning love one for another (4:9; cf. 2 Thess 1:3), it makes

⁴²Hemphill (*Gifts*, 31) remarks, "When believers are working together in a community setting there will almost invariably be disagreements and the resulting tension."

good sense to conclude that congregational relations are strong. His admonition for his converts to "encourage one another and build one another up, *just as you are doing*" (5:11) points in the same direction.

As indicated at the outset of this section, it appears that the believers' conflict with outsiders was a factor in forging the congregational cohesion and cooperation of which Paul so happily speaks. I have argued in part four of this thesis that the Thessalonians' conversion to Pauline Christianity was met with hostility by their Gentile compatriots and that for various reasons the congregation continued to experience conflict relations with non-Christians even after their conversion. It is likely that the believers would have avoided, if at all possible, those people who were viewing and opposing them as social deviants and that they would have turned to their faith community (or from the unbelievers' perspective, "deviant subculture") for support. That the Christians' conflict with outsiders encouraged them to avoid and/or to neglect former reference groups and to strengthen their relations one with another⁴³ is a plausible, if but a partial, explanation for the unity which apparently typified the Thessalonian assembly.

III. Opposition and the *Parousia*

Even a casual reader is likely to detect the eschatological tenor of the Thessalonian letters as eschatology suffuses 1 and 2 Thessalonians (1:10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:13-5:11; 5:23; 2 Thess 1:5-

⁴³It is a frequent observation among students of religion that conversion prompts a person to detach him/herself from former relational networks and to commit her/himself to the group to which s/he has converted. (See e. g., Roberts, *Religion*, 118-119. Note 1 Thess 1:9-10 in this context). This is particular true in cases where one's former associates actively oppose that person's conversion.

2:12).⁴⁴ I suggested in chapters two and eight above that the eschatology of both of these letters is of the not-too-distant future variety. Although, as we have seen, many scholars who hold to the inauthenticity of 2 Thessalonians emphasize the differences between the eschatologies of the two letters, I am inclined to think that the apparent eschatological disparities are better explained by the contingencies of the Thessalonian situation rather than by the presence of a pseudographer. Nevertheless, whether a scholar attributes one or both of the letters now known as 1 and 2 Thessalonians and the eschatological orientation(s) therein to Paul, there is virtual unanimity among Pauline interpreters that the "real" Paul clearly believed that the *parousia* was imminent and instructed his converts in Thessalonica (and elsewhere) to think likewise.⁴⁵ Here I wish to explore how the opposition which the Thessalonians experienced from unbelievers shaped their inherited eschatological orientation.

⁴⁴I understand eschatology, "the study of last things," to be a specific aspect of apocalyptic theology.

⁴⁵Mearns ("Development") offers the suggestion that Paul's eschatological outlook changed from a realized to a future eschatology between his visit to Thessalonica and his writing of 1 Thessalonians because of the death of some of the Thessalonian believers. Then by the time that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, Mearns maintains, he had shifted to a deferred apocalyptic. It seems quite unlikely that Paul would have made such an eschatological *volte-face* because a few of his converts had died. It stretches the imagination to think that Paul had not encountered the death of other believers in the fifteen or so years that he had been a Christian prior to the writing of 1 Thessalonians. Furthermore, as Wanamaker (87) notes, futuristic eschatology was a part of the "initial élan of early Christianity. . . . Had the early followers of Jesus not believed that he would soon return from heaven as the messianic Lord, Christianity would almost certainly not have come into existence." For further critique of Mearns's ingenious theory, see Kretzer, *Eschatology*, 177-179.

It is more likely that Paul had not fully instructed his converts concerning the future of the faithful departed at the *parousia* (because of his own conviction about the proximity of the *parousia*?) and that he seeks to do so in 4:13-18. (So also, e. g., Bruce, 95; and Jurgensen, "Return," 92). As for 5:1-11, it is clear that Paul is *reminding* (see 5:1-2; cf. 1:9-10) his converts, some who appear to have been overly anxious for the *parousia* (cf. 2 Thess 2:2), that the day of the Lord, which had not yet come, would come suddenly and surely. See further below.

In his important work *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (a volume from which I have learned much and with which I have interacted frequently throughout this project), Jewett suggests that the Thessalonians had rejected Paul's future eschatological stance for a thoroughgoing realized eschatology.⁴⁶ In Jewett's opinion, the congregation's eschatological perspective had been called into question by the church's experience of "persecution"⁴⁷ and by the death of some fellow Christians.⁴⁸ He avers, "In the case of the Thessalonians, the radicality of the realized eschatology rendered them vulnerable to collapse when death and persecution arose."⁴⁹ Furthermore, Jewett holds that 5:1-11 is designed to counter the Thessalonians' "unwillingness to live with the uncertainty of future eschatology."⁵⁰

It is clear that Paul thought the deaths of some church members had created consternation among the Thessalonians (4:13). However, it does not appear that unforeseen deaths, continued conflict, or realized eschatology had caused those believers who remained to jettison their eschatological hope. 1 Thess 4:13-18 suggests that Paul's converts were grieved because they had not anticipated that death would precede the *parousia*,

⁴⁶So also, Goulder ("Silas") who, like Jewett, Lütgert, and Schmithals, tends to read 1 and 2 Thessalonians while wearing "Corinthian spectacles."

⁴⁷Jewett (*Correspondence*, 94) remarks that "the Thessalonians were for some reason surprised or perturbed that persecution would be a part of their life in the new age, and that its presence cast doubt on the vitality of their faith."

⁴⁸Jewett (*Correspondence*, 96) writes, "[I]t appears that the Thessalonians believed that the presence of the new age should have eliminated the possibility of death for true believers, so that when deaths occurred, they fell into despair about their eschatological faith, discounting the possibility of ever seeing their loved ones again."

⁴⁹*Correspondence*, 177.

⁵⁰*Correspondence*, 97.

not that they had grown weary in waiting for the *parousia*. If some among the living were in danger of losing hope,⁵¹ it was seemingly not for themselves, but for those who had died prior to the *parousia*, an event which they had been led to believe would soon come like a "thief in the night" (5:2).⁵² Paul's comments about "the times and the seasons" (5:1-11), therefore, should not be understood as an attempt to counter his converts' waning enthusiasm in a future eschatology, but as a pastoral reminder to be patient and morally prepared for the *parousia*.⁵³

If one considers 2 Thessalonians to be authentically Pauline, as both Jewett and I do, then the plea for the Thessalonians not to "be quickly shaken in mind [ταχέως σαλευθῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ νοῦς] or excited [θροεῖσθαι], either by spirit or word or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come [ὥς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου]" (2:2) is applicable at this point in the discussion. Here, Paul urges his converts not to give credence to the claim that the day of the Lord has arrived. How did such an assertion arise and what did the Thessalonians understand it to mean?

As one might anticipate by now, Jewett thinks that the claim originated from those millenarian radicals who championed, in

⁵¹Some scholars understand Paul's admonitions to "encourage the fainthearted" (παραμυθεῖσθε τοὺς ὀλιγοψύχους) and/or to "help the weak" (ἀντέχεσθε τῶν ἀσθενῶν) to suggest as much (5:14). See e. g., Black, "Weak," 321; Hill, *Establishing*, 230-241; Jewett, *Correspondence*, 97; and Hemphill, *Gifts*, 31.

⁵²So also Barclay, "Conflict," 517 and "Contrasts," 52. That Paul had instructed his converts when he was with them to expect the *parousia* to be both soon and sudden is evidenced in 4:15, 17; and 5:1-3. It may be that Paul so stressed the imminence of the Lord's coming that he failed to prepare properly the church for the possibility that death might come before Jesus did. (Paul's remark that "we would not have you ignorant" [4:13] signals new instruction).

⁵³So rightly Barclay, "Conflict," 517.

not that they had grown weary in waiting for the *parousia*. If some among the living were in danger of losing hope,⁵¹ it was seemingly not for themselves, but for those who had died prior to the *parousia*, an event which they had been led to believe would soon come like a "thief in the night" (5:2).⁵² Paul's comments about "the times and the seasons" (5:1-11), therefore, should not be understood as an attempt to counter his converts' waning enthusiasm in a future eschatology, but as a pastoral reminder to be patient and morally prepared for the *parousia*.⁵³

If one considers 2 Thessalonians to be authentically Pauline, as both Jewett and I do, then the plea for the Thessalonians not to "be quickly shaken in mind [ταχέως σαλευθῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ νοῦς] or excited [θροεῖσθαι], either by spirit or word or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come [ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου]" (2:2) is applicable at this point in the discussion. Here, Paul urges his converts not to give credence to the claim that the day of the Lord has arrived. How did such an assertion arise and what did the Thessalonians understand it to mean?

As one might anticipate by now, Jewett thinks that the claim originated from those millenarian radicals who championed, in

⁵¹Some scholars understand Paul's admonitions to "encourage the fainthearted" (παραμυθεῖσθε τοὺς ὀλιγοψύχους) and/or to "help the weak" (ἀντέχεσθε τῶν ἀσθενῶν) to suggest as much (5:14). See e. g., Black, "Weak," 321; Hill, *Establishing*, 230-241; Jewett, *Correspondence*, 97; and Hemphill, *Gifts*, 31.

⁵²So also Barclay, "Conflict," 517 and "Contrasts," 52. That Paul had instructed his converts when he was with them to expect the *parousia* to be both soon and sudden is evidenced in 4:15, 17; and 5:1-3. It may be that Paul so stressed the imminence of the Lord's coming that he failed to prepare properly the church for the possibility that death might come before Jesus did. (Paul's remark that "we would not have you ignorant" [4:13] signals new instruction).

⁵³So rightly Barclay, "Conflict," 517.

contradistinction to Paul, a realized eschatology.⁵⁴ Although Jewett is right to insist that ἐνέστηκεν means "already arrived,"⁵⁵ his contention that the congregation understood "the day of the Lord" as having come in some internal and personal way is unconvincing.⁵⁶ As others interpreters have recognized, it is quite unlikely that Paul would have opposed a spiritualized interpretation of the day of the Lord by spelling out the external signs to occur prior to Jesus' coming.⁵⁷ It is more likely that the Thessalonians' eager expectation of the *parousia* prompted some of the membership, sufficiently armed with Paul's verbal and written instruction, to interpret an unspecified and unusual external calamity (cf. 1 Thess 2:16) as marking the day of the Lord and to conclude that the Lord himself would soon descend with all his saints to rescue them from their present plight and to punish their opponents.⁵⁸ Roger Aus is correct in writing,

⁵⁴*Correspondence*, 176. Cf. Lütgert, "Vollkommenen," 82-87; Schmithals, *Paul*, 202-212; Donfried, "Theology," 88; and Goulder, "Silas," 98-100.

⁵⁵*Correspondence*, 97-98. So also e. g., Bicknell, 74; Martin, 227-228; and Menken, "Paradise," 280-281. Dobschütz (267-268) and Dibelius (29) sought (unsuccessfully) to argue that ἐνέστηκεν means "is imminent."

⁵⁶The idea that the Thessalonians thought that the day of the Lord had come in some spiritualized sense is rightly rejected by, among others, Marshall, 186; Wanamaker, 240; and Richard, 343-344.

⁵⁷So Dobschütz, 267; Best, 276; Martin, 228-229; Menken, "Paradise," 274-275; and Barclay, "Conflict," 527. *Contra* Goulder ("Silas," 99) who suggests that "Paul" resorted to spelling out an eschatological program in 2 Thess 2:3-12 because his attempt to alleviate grief in 1 Thessalonians 4 was unsuccessful.

⁵⁸So Barclay, "Conflict," 527-528. Barclay notes that although Paul probably intended no temporal distinction between the *parousia* of Christ and the day of the Lord, some of his converts seemingly did. Cf. Holland, *Tradition*, 96-105. Menken ("Paradise," 285) imagines that the author of 2 Thessalonians is countering the claim that "Christ had already returned on earth and was already performing his task or was on the point of doing so." If this were indeed the situation, one is left to wonder why the writer, who Menken understands to be someone other than Paul, did not identify such an individual as deceptively evil. If Paul wrote the letter, Menken's suggestion is even less plausible, for the Thessalonians were instructed in the initial epistle that they would be caught up

The addressees of Second Thessalonians do not maintain that the *parousia*, the visible coming of the Lord Jesus in his glory, has occurred. They do maintain, however, that his Day has *started* to come, therefore they can also express it as 'having come.'⁵⁹

Furthermore, Aus (and others) have rightly noted the positive correlation between the Thessalonians' eschatological orientation and their afflictions.⁶⁰

From all appearances, then, the Thessalonian Christians eagerly embraced Paul's instruction concerning the imminent *parousia* of Christ. And the afflictions which the Christians were experiencing served to heighten their enthusiasm for and preoccupation with the *parousia*. In 1 Thessalonians Paul seeks, among other things, to comfort his converts in their suffering and in their loss of Christian loved ones and to encourage them to steadfastness as they await the coming of their heavenly Savior.⁶¹ 2 Thessalonians may be plausibly read as Paul's attempt to support his converts in the throes of intensified intergroup conflict⁶² and to correct what he considered to be potentially disastrous eschatological excesses⁶³ which were linked to, if not generated by,

in the clouds upon the Lord's return. This fact in and of itself would have nullified the claim which had shaken the congregation.

⁵⁹Aus, "Relevance," 264 (*italics his*). Note similarly Neil, 159; Morris, 216-217; Richard, 343-344; and Marshall, 186.

⁶⁰Aus, "Relevance," 263-264 and "Background," 438; Barclay, "Conflict," 519; 527-528; Wanamaker, 240; Martin, 229; and Bammel, "Preparation."

⁶¹Garrett ("Affliction," 90) rightly notes that Paul is concerned in 1 Thess 3:1-5 that his converts patiently endure their sufferings. Cf. 1:3; 2 Thess 1:4; 3:15; Jas 5:11; and 1 Pet 5:8-9.

⁶²Krentz ("Lens") rightly suggests that 2 Thessalonians is a response to suffering. Krentz is not completely accurate, however, when he claims that "2 Thessalonians is essentially a letter with one theme: faithful endurance under persecution."

⁶³Some of the assembly became even more eager for the *parousia* than their teacher. So also Cadbury ("Overconversion," 46-47) who insightfully remarks, "To judge from his letters Paul's mind was antithetic in structure just as

the church's experience of external hostility. The desire to escape to another time and another place is a common reaction of those who are suffering oppression.⁶⁴ Paul's verbal and written instruction about the imminent return of the Lord which would result in salvation for Christians and destruction for non-Christians appears to have led some of his beleaguered converts to cope with their plight on earth by looking eagerly, sometimes too eagerly, for their hope from heaven.

Conclusion

At the outset of 1 Thessalonians, Paul informs his converts that he thanks God in his prayers for their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope" (τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος, 1:3; cf. 2 Thess 1:3). Was the Thessalonian congregation truly characterized by faith, love, and hope, or are Paul's repeated prayers of thanksgiving simply an exercise in wishful pastoral thinking? In this chapter I have noted that some commentators are convinced the church in Thessalonica was flagging in faith, lacking in love, and/or waning in hope. My evaluation of the evidence in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians has led me to conclude otherwise. Although Paul does reiterate to his converts the importance of putting on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope (5:8), I have shown that there are good reasons to think that they had never actually taken off these vital pieces of the spiritual panoply. Unless Paul is less than honest with his converts (and consequently we belated readers) and/or my interpretation of Paul's correspondence with his converts is off-

his speech tends to elaborated antithesis . . . and such a preacher is sure to make some converts who are more radical than himself."

⁶⁴See Roberts's (*Religion*, 265-276) useful discussion on this topic, which includes a fascinating section on the theme of future eschatology in the hymnody of oppressed Christians.

target, the church seems to have been persevering in apocalyptic faith, excelling in brotherly/sisterly love, and thriving (some too much so) in Christian hope. Although the presence of faith, love, and hope among the Thessalonians may be usefully explained in a variety of other ways, I have sought to demonstrate here that conflict with outsiders played a pivotal role in reinforcing their received faith, deepening their shared love, and heightening their Christian hope. Conflict theorists indicate that intergroup conflict can have both constructive and destructive effects on an ingroup. With the aid of Paul's apocalyptic theology, the Thessalonians were able to flourish in faith, love, and hope while experiencing external opposition. From Paul's perspective, this was clearly positive.

One is left to wonder how the Thessalonian congregation fared in subsequent years. The church disappears from apostolic history altogether (note the name of the city in Phil 4:16 and 2 Tim 4:10) and from ecclesiastical history (apart from a couple of passing references in Eusebius, *H.E.* 4.26 and Tertullian, *De praescr. haeret.* 36) until the fourth century when Theodoret comments on the city of Thessalonica and its church (*H.E.* 5.17). In the tenth century Cameniata gives Thessalonica the title of "the orthodox city."⁶⁵ This is indeed ironic, for as we have seen in this study Paul and his converts would have been regarded by their respective compatriots as anything but "orthodox."

⁶⁵Noted by Lightfoot, "Church," 269, n. 1.

Conclusion

In this project I have addressed an important issue in Thessalonian research which has heretofore received inadequate scholarly attention, namely, the discordant relations between Christians and non-Christians in Thessalonica. By engaging in detailed exegesis and by drawing upon the social sciences, I have been able to spell out in some detail the specifics and the dynamics of Paul's and his converts' clash with outsiders. Paul, I have contended, was vigorously opposed by unbelievers while in Thessalonica and was ultimately driven from the city by some Thessalonian Jews. Paul's controversy with his Jewish compatriots was seemingly over the apostle's "Law-free" living and teaching. I also suggested that the apocalyptic and polemical nature of the Thessalonian letter(s) may be partially (and usefully) explained as Paul's reaction to non-Christian opposition. Paul's converts in Thessalonica, I have argued, were verbally, socially, and perhaps physically harassed by their fellow Gentiles and were perceived by some of their former associates as exclusive, offensive, and even subversive. The conflict which the Christians encountered with outsiders apparently reinforced the congregation's faith, love, and hope.

Concerning the contributions of this thesis, I have demonstrated in this work that the language of affliction/opposition/suffering in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians is best construed as external opposition which Paul and the Thessalonian Christians experienced at the hands of unbelievers. This interpretation has significant implications not only for how one understands such terminology in the epistle(s) but also for how one goes about reading the whole of 1 (and 2) Thessalonians. I have shown in this

project that the Thessalonian correspondence is best read with the intergroup conflict between insiders and outsiders clearly in view.

Furthermore, I have evinced that the conflict in Thessalonica had varied origins, multiple causes, and mixed effects. While Paul ran into trouble (primarily) with Thessalonian Jews for his controversial message and methodology, Paul's Gentile converts came into conflict with their own compatriots over their conversion to Pauline Christianity and the resocialization process that this "turning" entailed. Paul responded to the conflict in Thessalonica with apocalyptically-laced and polemically-charged rhetoric which may be described as pastoral toward insiders and as less than charitable (if not vengeful) toward outsiders. To paraphrase 1 Thess 5:21-22, the Thessalonian believers reacted to their affliction by holding fast to that which was "good" (i. e., Pauline Christianity) and by abstaining from that which was "evil" (i. e., their former life in "idolatry"). This study has enabled, then, a more nuanced view of the conflict between Christians and non-Christians in Thessalonica in particular and of the conflict between believers and unbelievers in early Christianity (where it existed) in general.

Additionally, my work has underscored the probability that 1 Thess 2:13-16 is authentically Pauline and has highlighted the congruity which exists between 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Although most scholars affirm the integrity of 1 Thess 2:13-16, the majority of exegetes deny the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. Perhaps this project will prompt some interpreters to re-evaluate their position on the authorship of 2 Thessalonians. I have suggested here that both epistles were written by Paul to an immature, yet committed and close-knit, congregation which (like their founder) was opposed by outsiders and preoccupied with the *parousia*.

Furthermore, my approach to employing the social sciences in this work is somewhat distinct. Although I do not devise a "model" *per se*, I discuss thoroughly the social-scientific materials which I selected for my study and apply carefully these theoretical insights where they legitimately fit. As a result, the integrity and complexity of the particular biblical texts and social theories are not jeopardized. I view my use of deviance and conflict theory here in somewhat the same way that David Horrell views his use of Anthony Giddens's "structuration theory" in his work, i. e., as an heuristic tool which "offers resources for a theoretical framework, yet encourages the researcher also to remain open to the contextually and historically specific nature of the arena of investigation."¹ By drawing upon the social-scientific study of deviance and conflict in this thesis, I have been able to demonstrate how differences can arise between parties, how difference can be thought of as deviance, and how deviance can lead to disagreement. Specifically, I have discovered that Paul and his Thessalonian converts were viewed as dangerously different by their respective compatriots and that Jewish and Gentile outsiders pressured Paul and the *ekklesia* to conform to the accepted conventions of the day. In 1 (and 2) Thessalonians we discover traces of Paul's perception of and response to this non-Christian opposition/oppression.

It is my contention that the conflict relations between Christians and non-Christians which are evidenced in e. g., Philippians, 1 Peter, and Revelation, and the controversy between believers which is indicated in e. g., the Corinthian correspondence, Galatians, the Pastoral epistles, the Johannine letters, 2 Peter, and Jude, might be usefully explored by using

¹"Ideology," 224. See more fully Horrell's doctoral thesis *Social Ethos*.

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¹"Ideology," 224. See more fully Horrell's doctoral thesis *Social Ethos*.

insights from the social-scientific study of deviance and conflict. These theoretical constructs could sensitize interpreters to the social realities which stand behind the heated, and at times hostile, rhetoric in these documents.

Ideally, this study will not only contribute to the critical inquiry of 1 (and 2) Thessalonians and to the social-scientific interpretation of the NT, but will also spark further discussion and research in the following areas: Acts' depiction of the Pauline mission; the conversion of God-fearers to Christianity and their presence in Pauline assemblies; Jewish responses to Paul; early Jewish-Christian relations; evangelism in the early church; the phenomenon of "apostasy" in Diaspora Judaism and early Christianity; apocalyptic elements in Pauline thought; the presence of polemic in apocalyptically-oriented documents; and the response of Greeks and Romans to the early Christians.

This study has demonstrated that Paul's and the Thessalonians' conflict was, in part, a clash between "deviant" Christians and particular power structures of that day. Indeed, 1 (and 2) Thessalonians may be instructively read as Paul's attempt to manage and to sort through his and his converts' conflict with non-Christian outsiders. People embroiled in conflict, both then and now, face the challenge of how to respond to such. Ultimately, those in the throes of conflict must discover for themselves how to use conflict creatively, to express dissent responsibly, and to wield power equitably. In the Thessalonian correspondence, God is at points depicted as a God of peace (1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16; cf. Rom 16:33). Would that all of humanity embraced and embodied this characteristic of the divine.

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