"COME DINE WITH ME": A SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC INTERPRETATION OF THE MEAL MOTIF IN REV 3:20

by

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ABSTRACT

Conceptions of the Eucharist in contemporary Western Pentecostal discourse appear domesticated since, compared to their forebears, the rite is typically not central to the worship and identity of many Western Pentecostal churches.

My thesis explains how a eucharistic reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 is instrumental to understanding the nature of this domestication and its implications concerning Pentecostal engagement in the cultural domain. I argue that the meal motif symbolises the Eucharist in the message to the Laodicean church in the Apocalypse. Moreover, I argue that understanding the meal as the Eucharist and as central to addressing the problematic aspects of the Laodicean church's culture can be instructive to Pentecostal eucharistic theology and cultural engagement.

I interpret the meal motif in Rev 3:20 using a social-scientific hermeneutic method. This method comprises three investigative lenses: historical (historical analysis of the passage), theoretical (using René Girard's mimetic theory and Wendy Griswold's 'Cultural Diamond'), and phenomenological (reflecting my UK Pentecostal perspective).

Finally, I conclude the thesis with a literary contextual analysis and interpretation of the Rev 3:20 passage based on a combined reading of aspects of my Girardian conception of the Eucharist and the Pentecostal full gospel theological framework.

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Also, this project would not have been possible without the support of the members of the church I have served for almost twelve years. I am incredibly grateful for this.

[1] See John Onelum, "Towards liberating the Eucharist in the West: An experiment in chastened defamiliarization," *JPCC* 42, no 2 (2022): 125–42, https://10.1080/18124461.2021.1995693; idem, "Discerning the Affections: Affect Theory in Conversation With Pentecostal Spirituality on the Problems With the Prosperity Gospel," *PentecoStudies* 21, no. 2 (July 27, 2023): 166–87, https://journal.equinoxpub.com/PENT/article/view/22880.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my wife and three daughters. I could not have undertaken this journey without the peace of mind and joy their company afforded me throughout. Thank you!

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ABBREVIATIONS

BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BLT	*Brethren Life and Thought*
BTSR	*Bulletin for the Study of Religion*
CBQ	*The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
CCP	Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism
CRR	*Critical Research on Religion*
DJG	Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels
DLNTD	Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments
DPL	Dictionary of Paul and his Letters
JBV	*Journal of Beliefs & Values*
JEPTA	*Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*
JPCC	*Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*
JPT	*Journal of Pentecostal Theology*
JPTSup	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series
JSFSC	*Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JTAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
NIDPCM	The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements

NIV	New International Version
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NT	New Testament
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OT	Old Testament
PHMTR	The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion
PRS	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
RHPT	The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology
SPCK	The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast," the late management thinker Peter Drucker allegedly stated.[2] And I have come to appreciate the wisdom behind this quip. Just over a decade ago, I assumed the leadership of my present church, which I also had to lead through change. The change process, supported by a strategic plan developed over several months, also included applying ministry models from 'successful' churches. Nevertheless, the process encountered more resisters than adopters. It would appear that the church's dominant culture (i.e., its outlook and assumptions) ate the change strategy for breakfast.

To be sure, my characterisation of the challenges surrounding the change process bears no reflection on the church's commitment to the Christian mission, which was positive. Nevertheless, as the alleged 'Druckerism' on culture mentioned above implies, success in implementing organisational change requires more than having access to the best strategic or ministry planning tools. Instead, it also requires getting to grips with that powerful socio-psychological phenomenon we tend to label 'culture'.

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[2] See J. J. Willis, "'Culture eats strategy for breakfast': An in-depth examination of police officer perceptions of body-worn camera implementation and their relationship to policy, supervision, and training," *Criminology & Public Policy* 21, no. 3 (2022): 730, https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12591.

Later in the change process, I discovered Walter Wink's contribution to understanding such phenomena in his analysis of 'the powers' in the NT.[3] Wink described 'the powers' as "the inner and outer aspects of any given manifestation of power."[4] Simply put, it refers to the spiritual and material properties of human power structures. Wink also drew a correlation between this reading of the powers and the angels of the churches in Rev 1–3, which he also associates with "the group spirit or group culture"[5] (which I describe in this thesis as the group's behavioural norms and assumptions).[6]

In addition, Wink also suggests that a church's angel can become "wounded" when it does not fulfil its "divine will."[7] Yet, he suggests that there is still hope for such a church since the "wounded angel" could experience healing as it realigns itself to the will of God. And this realignment is possible as the church "encounters"

[3] Hence, I decided to analyse Wink's conception of the angels and their implications for ministry practice in my master's dissertation. See John Onelum, "Rumours of Angels: An assessment of the contribution and implications of Walter Wink's interpretation of the angels of the churches in Revelation 1:20 and 2—3." MA diss., London School of Theology, London, 2017.

[4] Walter Wink *Naming the powers: the language of power in the New Testament* (Fortress Press, 1984), 5.

[5] Walter Wink, *Unmasking the powers: the invisible forces that determine human existence* (Fortress Press, 1986), 80. Discussing the seven churches of Revelation, Wink notes, "The angel [of a church] . . . can be nothing less than the sum total of all its parts." Wink, *Unmasking the powers*, 79.

[6] For a summary of some of the varied expressions of the angel of the church that Wink discusses (e.g., "class" and "power structures") that correspond with culture as I have described it so far, see Wink, *Unmasking the powers*, 73–76.

[7] See Wink, *Unmasking the powers*, 79, 81.

the empowering and redemptive—ministering presence—of "Christ as the Spirit" in the church.[8]

Such conceptions of a relationship between Christ's 'ministering presence' and the 'health' of a church's angel raised other questions for me, such as, "To what extent could it be argued that Christian worship rituals position a church to encounter the ministering presence of "Christ as the Spirit" so that it may maintain a healthy culture, if not have one restored?"

It was this line of questioning that led me to focus on the Eucharist (as a significant Christian worship ritual) and to see a eucharistic symbolism in the meal motif in Rev 3:20. I felt the meal motif in the passage could be understood to have sacramental overtones insofar as it indicated to me how, through the meal, the Laodicean church could have a more direct and intimate experience of the risen Christ. It seemed to me that this meal with the ascended Christ would precipitate the healing and restoration of the angel/culture of the church, as "Christ as the Spirit" renews the individuals that make up the group. Therefore, for me, the meal symbolised how the centralisation of the sacrament of the Eucharist, not least in Pentecostal worship, could be conceived of as a means to renew a church's culture as congregants prepare to "come dine with"[9] the risen Christ each week.

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[8] Wink, *Unmasking the powers*, 79–82.

[9] This phrase is from the popular Channel 4 diner party competition series. I have also chosen the show's title as part of my thesis title because it captures aspects of the social

1.1. Research Topic

My reflection on Wink's conception of the angels of the churches also led me to René Girard's mimetic theory. Unlike Wink, who focused more on biblical concepts of culture through his discourse on 'the powers', Girard's theory included an assessment of culture and its relationship with sacrifice and religion. Given the Apocalypse's wider Greco-Roman societal setting, I thought such Girardian assessments could be valuable to biblical interpretation since they could highlight the apparent sacrifice and culture-related themes associated with the meal motif in Rev 3:20.

Hence, my research offers a social-scientific interpretation of the Rev 3:20 passage, which examines the 'correlation' between a) the mimetic theory understanding of a relationship between ritual sacrifice and human institutions and b) conceptions in studies in theology and antiquity of a relationship between the sacral dimensions of commensality and social order in Greco-Roman cultures (i.e., groups). Furthermore, since I write from within a UK/Western Pentecostal context, I am also interested to know the significance of my experience and research concerning some noted trends and gaps in Pentecostal reflections on the Eucharist in this context.

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dimensions of the commensality that I am addressing in my thesis. See "Come Dine with Me," Channel 4, accessed October 13, 2023, https://www.channel4.com/programmes/come-dine-with-me. This title was also the name of several unpublished talks on the topic I have given at my church.

1.2. Trends and Gaps in Pentecostal Eucharistic Discourse

Several problems concerning Pentecostal conceptions of the Eucharist underpin my thesis. First, in his seminal work *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom,* Pentecostal scholar Chris E. W. Green[10] notes that there is a lack of focused studies in Pentecostal scholarship on the Eucharist from passages other than the 1 Cor 11 Lord's Supper narrative and the 'narratives of institution' selections in the Bible. Consequently, I fear that Pentecostal theology of the Eucharist risks missing out on the exciting perspectives non-traditional readings typically offer. And my fear appears not to be unfounded, given the trends in Pentecostal approaches to constructing eucharistic readings.

[10] See Chris E. W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2012). I also understand Green's masterful work on the warp and woof of Pentecostal eucharistic theology to capture, within Pentecostalism, something akin to the concerns of the Liturgical Movement of the 20th century. For instance, Green's work highlights the importance he and others (i.e., Pentecostal pioneers and contemporary Pentecostals) confer on the Eucharist in Pentecostalism in their work. And like the varied campaigns of reform and renewal that characterised the Liturgical Movement, these works also seek to make "divine worship more meaningful for participants and to give a more prominent place to liturgical forms [in our case, the Eucharist]." See description of "liturgical movement" in Donald K. McKim, "liturgical movement," in *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 162. A related contention for the significance of the Eucharist is particularly reflected in Anglicanism's so-called 'Parish Communion Movement', advocated by Arthur Gabriel Herbert and others that sought in the post-First World War era to move the Eucharist from the periphery of Anglican worship to "making the Parish Eucharist with the communion of the people the central act of worship on every Sunday." A. G. Hebert, *Liturgy and Society*: *The Function of the Church in the Modern World* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1935), 13. See also Martin D. Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 216.

For instance, in the same work, Green summarises the methodological trends in "key influential works of leading"[11] Pentecostal scholars on the sacraments, particularly from the mid-1930s to 2010.[12] Green identifies the underpinning theological motivations evident in the varied conceptions of the Eucharist in Pentecostal scholarship that he reviewed, namely, an emphasis on: "Christian dogmatic and exegetical traditions," "biblical and pastoral grounds," "church history and historical Christian practice – including those experiences and practices peculiar to the Pentecostal tradition," and finally, "Scriptures."[13] Also, in summary, Green's own method reflects a method he claims "rings true to the form of life recognizable to Pentecostals as devotion to the God of the gospel."[14]

Such approaches to theological construction reflect faithfulness to Scripture and Christian-group traditions that I deem commendable from a Pentecostal-Christian confessional standpoint. Nevertheless, given the apparent focus on

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[11] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 5.

[12] Since this time, there have been more published works that either focus on Pentecostal conceptions of the Eucharist or featured discussions on the topic. For example, Daniela C. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2019). And articles by Jonathan Black, "The Holy of Holies: Pentecostal Spirituality and the Breaking of Bread." *JSFSC* 13, no. 1 (May 2020): 62–87; idem, "On the Possibility of Presence: Overcoming Mere Memorialism in British Pentecostal Eucharistic Theology." *JEPTA* 40, no. 2 (2020): 120–31; idem, "Sancta Sanctis." *JPT* 30, no. 1 (2021): 103–22; "Pleading the Blood," *JPT* 31, 2 (2022): 242–60. Like Green, I have not sought here to outline every published work, but those I deem significant to Pentecostal discourse on the Eucharists (also they address themes and a geographical context related to my thesis, namely, the social dimension of the Eucharist and UK context). See Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 5.

[13] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 72–73.

[14] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 182.

'Scripture' and 'tradition', it would not be an overstatement to suggest that the trend in Pentecostal theological constructions on the Eucharist is less indicative of constructions guided by social-scientific methods; approaches that also engage the intersection between a historical-critical, social theoretical and context assessments of the rite.[15]

For example, concerning intersectional issues associated with 'context', many Western Pentecostals decry what might be termed the "domestication"[16] of the Eucharist in Western Pentecostal churches. By 'domestication', I mean the lack of the centrality and rigorous reflection on the significance of the Eucharist in contemporary Pentecostal worship as expressed in the infrequent celebration of the rite in many Western churches.[17] Such a claim reflects my and other Pentecostals' lived experience and some empirical findings. In my experience of worshipping in a neo-Pentecostal church, the Eucharist was usually celebrated twice a year.[18] Also, in

[15] Green also lists eight trends in Pentecostal hermeneutics, one which also highlights the premium Pentecostals place on narrative and literary approaches "over against" historical-critical approaches. Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 183.

[16] I am grateful to Balasuriya, who used the phrase "domestication of the sacraments." See Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 5.

[17] A similar charge was also levelled by British Pentecostal David Allen, who decried what he also described as the "marginalisation and minimalist celebration" of the Eucharist amongst UK Pentecostals. See David Allen, *Neglected Feast: Rescuing the Breaking of Bread* (Nottingham: Expression, 2007), 85.

[18] For example, for the first fourteen years of my Pentecostal experience in the UK, when I was part of an independent North American Pentecostal network that rarely celebrated the Eucharist. In a leadership training manual belonging to this network, it was suggested, at the time of its publication, that celebrating the Eucharist "once or twice a year is adequate and does no harm." John W. Gooding, ed., *Helps and Guidelines: A Handbook for the Pastors,*

my current classical Pentecostal denominational context, I have noticed that a monthly celebration of the rite is typical in most churches.

Other Europe-based Pentecostals have observed this trend, too, and some have provided empirical evidence. In a survey conducted by Hilborn in 2011 in conjunction with his field research "on ten core services in eight Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations," he noted that contrary to assumptions of the centrality of the rite amongst early Pentecostals, "communion was celebrated in only one of these ten services."[19] Also, based on a sample from fifty European churches, Dyer reports in a published work in 2016 that "The frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper varied – only 11% weekly . . . most (75%) monthly and for a very few only every three months."[20]

These statistics do not represent the experience of all UK/European Pentecostal communities. They, however, highlight what appears to be an enduring trend in attitudes to the Eucharist, which the North American Pentecostal scene seems to mirror.[21] In addition, these statistics indicate a shift in Pentecostal liturgical

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Pioneers and Workers of the Christian Fellowship Churches Worldwide (Prescott: Potter's Press, 2004), 39.

[19] David Hilborn, "Anglicans, Pentecostals and Ecumenism: Bilateral Dynamics and Broader Resonances," in *Pentecostals and Charismatics in Britain: An Anthology*, ed. Joe Aldred (Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2019), 109.

[20] Anne E. Dyer "Pentecostal in Europe worship practices," in *Scripting Pentecost: A Study of Pentecostals, Worship and Liturgy*, eds. Mark J. Cartledge, and A. J. Swoboda (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 142–43, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[21] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 316.

approaches from the once central position the Eucharist had with the early Pentecostals[22] to an emphasis on "singing, prayer, and preaching" instead.[23]

It seems to me that this shift severely impacts Pentecostal eucharistic praxis vis-à-vis Pentecostal cultural engagement. If, as Green rightly suggests, the Eucharist offers an opportunity for "deep moral formation,"[24] then it is likely that many Pentecostals, because of their infrequent celebration of the Eucharist, are forfeiting key opportunities to develop, to borrow Vondey's phrase, "eucharistic discernment."[25] In summary, by this phrase, I mean the ability of worshipers to develop critical theological and socio-ethical values that can assist them in navigating the shifting sands of societal values. Developing these values is especially possible through celebrating the Eucharist because, as a worship ritual, it captures the central

[22] As per Green's survey of early Pentecostal periodicals in North America and the UK. Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 177–81.
[23] See Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 316. Also Black, "The Holy of Holies," 84; Daniela C. Augustine, "The Spirit in Word and Sacrament: Reflections on Potential Contributions of Eastern Orthodoxy to the Development of Pentecostal Liturgical Theology," *JPT* 29, no. 1 (2020): 61, https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02901004; Allen, *Neglected Feast*, 13; Richard Bicknell, "In Memory of Christ's Sacrifice: Roots and Shoots of Elim's Eucharistic Expression," *JEPTA* 17, no. 1 (1997): 78–79, https://doi:10.1179/jep.1997.17.1.006. Also, Green and Black recently discussed aspects of this shift in the context of North American and British Pentecostalism. See Chris E. W. Green, "'Don't Get Bored with Jesus': a conversation with Jonathan Black on tradition, contemplation, prophecy, and revival," *Speakeasy Theology*, February 17, 2023, audio, 1:03:55-55:19, https://cewgreen.substack.com/p/dont-get-bored-with-jesus?utm_source=direct&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&triedRedirect=true&s=03.
[24] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 312.
[25] Wolfgang Vondey, "Pentecostal Ecclesiology and Eucharistic Hospitality: Toward a Systematic and Ecumenical Account of the Church," *Pneuma* 32, no. 1 (2010): 49, https://doi.org/10.1163/027209610X12628362887596.

Christian discourse: the paschal mystery.[26] Thus, given the claims about the possibility of embodying and transferring discourses through rituals,[27] it seems that worshipers can incorporate and share these values through weekly, engaging celebrations of the rite.[28]

The extent to which the consequences of the infrequent, engaging celebration of the rite are evident in specific hot-button issues in Pentecostal cultural engagement—like the contentious nature of the prosperity gospel—is, in my opinion, an area that could benefit from focused analysis.[29] The cultural implications for Pentecostals of the decentralisation of a "deep moral" forming rite like the Eucharist

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[26] By 'paschal mystery' I mean, as Crichton notes, the "culmination . . . of God's self-revelation and self-giving in Christ was the passion, death, and resurrection . . . his ascension into heaven, the apparent end of the Lord's earthly work of redemption." J. D. Crichton, "A Theology of Worship," in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold SJ and Paul Bradshaw (London: SPCK, 1992), 13. I also contend, as Crichton does, that "Just as the paschal mystery was the culmination of Christ's redeeming work, so the Eucharist becomes the culmination and centre of Christian worship." Crichton, "A Theology of Worship," 13.

[27] I am grateful to Stringer and his analysis of the relationship between ritual, embodiment, and discourse in Christian worship. Following his assessment of scholarly reflections on embodiment and culture, he asserts, "It is in embodiment within the ritual context, therefore, that the discourses of society are most explicitly expressed and transferred from generation to generation." Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship,* 17. The value of such claims for my thesis is that they help to bolster the notion that changes in church culture are possible through regular participation in rites like the Eucharist.

[28] Other Pentecostals have made similar connections between the prevalence of specific problems in charismatic churches and congregations' infrequent exposure to the moral training the Eucharist can offer. See Allen, *Neglected Feast*, 69–70.

[29] I acknowledge that this issue has received some attention in recent Pentecostal scholarship. For example, based on Eastern European Pentecostal experiences, Daniela Augustine has recently discussed the value of a eucharistic philosophical outlook and praxis that engages economics and, by extension, the prosperity gospel. See Daniela C. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2019).

are worth pursuing, not least because, as Green's study confirms,[30] there seems to be a shortage of focused discussions on the rite's social dimension, especially its relationship with the cultural and religious domain.[31]

By reviewing the Eucharist through the historical and social theoretical components of my social-scientific hermeneutic method, I have concluded that the social dimension of the Eucharist is a significant line of enquiry. This is mainly because such historical and social theory-informed analysis offers hermeneuts the opportunity to examine the rite's apparent association with Greco-Roman banqueting traditions and the nature and implications (in the past and present) of such associations. Thus, notwithstanding the value of theological/sacramentality-focused studies on the Eucharist, this social-scientific, multidisciplinary approach is also critical to a comprehensive understanding of the nature and function of the rite in the past and how it may address issues of cultural significance for Pentecostals/Christians today.

1.3. Thesis Argument

Using mimetic theory, my thesis aims to show how the meal motif in Rev 3:20, set within the discourse on the relationship between the church and broader Greco-Roman culture in the Apocalypse, could be understood by Pentecostals as significant

[30] There has been a focus in recent years on discussions about the rite's sacrament and ordinance-related factors. See Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 72.

[31] Since Green's writing, I also note the publication of Daniela C. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2019).

to understand better the connection between the Eucharist and the early and present church's relationship with the cultural domain. I also hope to explain how a conception of the Eucharist, informed by mimetic theory, can promote "eucharistic discernment" that is beneficial, not least to discourse concerning Pentecostal engagement with the prosperity gospel.

1.4. Contributions

From this analysis, I hope to contribute significantly to various fields within Pentecostal studies and mimetic theory.

First, concerning Pentecostal eucharistic discourse, I will offer a study on the Eucharist from Rev 3:20, a 'non-narrative of institution' passage in the Bible, and therefore respond to the appeal for such interpretative contributions. This interpretation will feature a literary contextual analysis of the passage incorporating the 'five-fold gospel' framework. This Pentecostal theological framework scarcely features in Pentecostal discourses on the Apocalypse.[32]

Second, I will introduce a new model for discussing the Eucharist (i.e., the Girardian Model Eucharist) and use it to explain how my mimetic theory conception of the Eucharist highlights the importance of emphasising the rite's social dimension

[32] See Jon K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 48. I note the work by Larry R. McQueen, *Towards a Pentecostal Eschatology: Discerning the Way Forward* (JPTSup 39; Blandford Forum: Deo, 2012). McQueen employs the fivefold gospel theological framework in his study on the Apocalypse and focuses on the eschatological motifs in Revelation, chapters 21–22.

and, therefore, contribute to the limited, focused discussions of the social dimension of the rite in Pentecostalism.

Third, and concerning Pentecostal cultural studies, I will show how mimetic theory-informed conceptions of the Eucharist can be helpful in Pentecostal cultural engagement and contribute to the discourse on the opportunities and challenges of Pentecostal engagement with the prosperity gospel.

Fourth, my multidisciplinary approach signals another significant contribution of my thesis; it will offer a "model of engagement"[33] between Pentecostal studies and mimetic theory. My thesis will highlight points of contact between theological, cultural and affect theory-related concepts within the two disciplines.

Fifth, and concerning the mimetic theory pole of my thesis, by demonstrating the ability of the mimetic theory to explain issues in Pentecostalism, my thesis will contribute to claims made by mimetic theory scholars that affirm the heuristic value and universality of mimetic theory.[34]

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[33] Teresa Berger, *@ Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), xii.

[34] Dumouchel offers a balanced assessment of such claims, which I endorse when he notes that mimetic theory, as a "'theory of everything' does not claim to explain everything within its domain of relevance. Rather, what it claims is relevance within the whole domain. In biology, for example, there are many phenomena that are clearly not Darwinian. Nonetheless, natural selection and evolutionary processes will often figure, with greater or lesser importance, in their explanation. Similarly, mimetic theory claims relevance over all phenomena within the domain of human affairs, which does not mean that it claims to

Sixth, I will also apply mimetic theory to explicate conceptions of ancient Mediterranean sacrifice, which resulted in my development of a unique model (i.e., a Girardian model of sacrifice) for conceiving the phenomenon. Thus, I will be contributing to conceptions of 'sacrifice' in mimetic theory.

Seventh, by engaging mimetic theory in my interpretation of the meal motif in Rev 3:20, I will be contributing to the applications of the theory to the Apocalypse in Girardian scholarship, which have been noted to be limited.[35]

Finally, I will apply Wendy Griswold's cultural diamond to my analysis of Pentecostal theology and mimetic theory (e.g., to diagram conceptual relationships). In so doing, I will make significant contributions to sociological and cultural studies.

1.5. Key Terminology

Three complex and much-debated terms that repeatedly appear in my thesis need clarification on how I understand and apply them. They are 'culture', 'Eucharist', and 'Pentecostal'.

1.5.1. Culture

"Culture" is a problematic term.[36] In the mid-1970s, the British cultural theorist Raymond Williams claimed that it "is one of the two or three most complicated

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provide a final or even a partial explanation for all these phenomena." Paul Dumouchel, "A Theory of Everything? A Methodological Tale," in *PHMTR*, eds. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 61, Kindle.

[35] See Stephen Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos: René Girard and the Apocalypse* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 57.

words in the English language."[37] However, the difficulties surrounding defining the term do not preclude one from using it altogether. The term, if provided with a working definition, can be helpful.[38] Therefore, I will be adopting Williams' etymological assessment of the word "culture" to discuss the foundational and sophisticated (i.e., including "range and overlap of meanings")[39] descriptions of the modern understanding of culture.[40]

Williams noted that the modern use of the word culture relates to three "broad active categories of usage," namely, a) culture as a description of the processes of human "intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development," b) culture as a description of the way of life of people, a group or a particular era, and c) culture

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[36] In the early 1950s, American cultural anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckohn identified over 160 definitions of the term! A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum, 1952), 39–72.

[37] Raymond Williams, Keywords (Routledge Revivals): A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 76.

[38] Gustav Jahoda, "Critical Reflections on Some Recent Definitions of 'Culture,'" *Culture & Psychology* 18, no. 3, (2012): 300, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X12446229. Walton, *Doing Cultural Theory*, 2. Williams, *Keywords,* 80.

[39] Williams, *Keywords,* 80.

[40] William's assessment of culture has been identified as the typical "starting point for modern definitions"; his categories of meaning, which I focus on, address how the word is typically used. See Walton, *Doing Cultural Theory*, 5. Another definition prevalent in the social sciences and contemporary sociology is E.B. Tylor's definition of culture. See Wendy Griswold, *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013), 7. Like Williams', Tylor's definition also highlighted the complexity of the concept of culture because of its pervasiveness in the diverse and overlapping spheres of human life. He stated that culture "is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*. Vol. 1. Cambridge Library Collection – Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1, http://doi:10.1017/CBO9780511705953.

as a description of the works and practices of intellectual, and especially, artistic activity.[41] Therefore, in this thesis, I will refer to Williams' assessment of culture as a triptych understanding of culture. Like a triptych painting, my understanding depicts culture as comprising three different yet connected impressions. To me, these three impressions reflect aspects of Kroeber and Kluckhon's classifications of the definitions of culture, namely, and respectively, their "historical," "normative," and "genetic" classifications.[42] Therefore, I will also use these classifications as shorthand to refer to Williams' three categories of understanding culture.

The triptych understanding of culture identifies the varied social and creative human phenomena implied in modern notions of culture. Thus, identifying these phenomena can militate against definitions of culture that reify a single meaning and

[41] Williams, *Keywords*, 80. Williams traced the etymology of the word "culture." He noted that from the early 16th century, the previously assumed farming understanding of the word (i.e., describing tending of plants or rearing of animals) began to be used concurrently with the metaphorical sense of the word (i.e., describing the process of "human development"), the latter of which characterised its use in the modern period. Williams, *Keywords*, 78.

[42] "HISTORICAL"— "Emphasis on social heritage or tradition," "NORMATIVE"— "Emphasis on ideals or values plus behavior," and "GENETIC"—"Emphasis on culture as a product or artefact." Kroeber and Kluckohn, *Culture*, vii. These three dimensions of culture are also reflected in Kroeber and Kluckohn's working definition of culture when they note that "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols [Normative], constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts [Genetic]; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values [Historical]; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action." Kroeber and Kluckohn, *Culture*, 181. Thus, I understand them to correspond with Williams's categories of culture (a, b, and c), i.e., a is "historical," b is "normative," and c is "genetic."

do not account for the complexities characterising human social existence.[43] Therefore, the triptych understanding of culture offers a basic yet robust framework for describing the beliefs and practices of multifaceted religious movements like Pentecostalism.[44]

Finally, the 'triptych' metaphor highlights the symbiotic relationship between the three diverse understandings of culture.[45] It recognises that one aspect of a society's culture may necessarily connect to other elements, therefore requiring their analysis.[46] Thus, the triptych understanding of culture accounts for the fluidity that characterises our understanding of culture but does not purport to account for every dimension of human experience and creativity.

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[43] For example, Griswold discusses the negative implications of emphasising culture as the "cultivation of the human mind and sensibility," thus divorcing it from the "everyday existence" that the triptych meaning brings to bear on the term. Griswold, *Cultures*, 6.

[44] For example, the triptych understanding of culture can help to distinguish between the discourse on Pentecostal culture that may pertain to a) its historical roots in the Wesleyan Holiness Movement (historical), b) a description of a particular Pentecostal community's way of life, e.g., African or European Pentecostals (normative), or c) a unique product of Pentecostalism, such as the theology of glossolalia as the initial evidence of Spirit baptism (genetic).

[45] As Williams noted, "The complex of senses indicates a complex argument about the relations between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence." Williams, *Keywords*, 80–1. Also, the logic of the interdependence of concepts is captured in Peter Paul Rubens's *Elevation of the Cross* insofar that the image in the centre panel in the piece is key to understanding the other images in the wing panels. Thus, connecting the parts is critical to appreciating the whole painting.

[46] For example, a discussion on the Pentecostal theology of the altar as a cultural product also has historical and normative cultural connections. Thus, an analysis of the Pentecostal altar's historical aspects, e.g., its roots in the Wesleyan renewal movement and its normative function in Pentecostals' worship practices, can help one attain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance of the Pentecostal theology of the altar, as a cultural product. E.g., see Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Marston Gate: Amazon.co.uk, 2010).

1.5.2. Eucharist

As McKim notes, "Eucharist" (Greek, *eucharistein*) means "to give thanks."[47] It is a term used to describe the Lord's Supper. It stems specifically from Jesus' prayers of thanksgiving for the bread and wine, which he identified with the salvific offering of his body and blood.[48]

UK Pentecostals typically refer to the Eucharist as "Breaking of Bread."[49] In this thesis, however, I will use terms like the "Eucharist" and "Christian eucharistic banquet" interchangeably to describe references to early Christian commensality in the NT and early post-apostolic literature that are typically associated with the Eucharist (e.g., references to the *agape* feast and the Lord's Supper).[50]

In addition, my decision to capture the description of varied early Christian meals in the term 'Eucharist' is supported by Bradshaw's observation that "the evidence" from early Christian worship sources suggests that:

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[47] See McKim, "Eucharist," 95.

[48] McKim, "Eucharist," 95. See Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Cor 11:24. Also, in his seminal work on Christian worship, Dom Gregory Dix offers an augmented description of the term relative to the rite as a whole and the prayers in the rite when he notes, "The eucharist is an action—'do this'—with a particular meaning given to it by our Lord Himself—'for the *anamnesis* of Me'. The action is performed by the rite as a whole, the meaning is stated by the eucharistic prayer." Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy, New Edition* (Bloomsbury Publishing), 238, Kindle.

[49] See Black, "Possibility of Presence," 120.

[50] See G. Wainwright, "Lord's Supper, Love Feast," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 686, WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

> [F]or some communities, *agape* was the name given to their eucharistic meal. Moreover, while in some places the eucharistic action proper may have become detached from the meal at an early stage, in others the two may have remained united for much longer than is often supposed.[51]

Therefore, my application of the term in this thesis could be described as a 'thick description'[52] application, focusing on common themes in the meals over their differences.

I find further support for collapsing terms related to early Christian gatherings to the 'Eucharist' and 'Christian eucharistic banquets' in the claim some theologians have made concerning 1 Cor 11:18 and its signalling of a so-called "triunity" between the assembly, church, and the Eucharist—the last of which is understood as "the sacrament of the assembly, the sacrament of the Church."[53] Thus, as an assembly, the church and its defining sacrament, the Eucharist, are conceptually inseparable.

1.5.3. Pentecostal

Pentecostalism is not a monolithic religious movement. Anderson offers a helpful taxonomy of the key Pentecostal groups (i.e., "Classical Pentecostals," "Older Church Charismatics," "Older Independent Churches," and "Neocharismatic Churches")

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[51] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 2002), 70.
[52] That is, "interpretive characteristic of description rather than detail per se." Joseph A. Maxwell and Kavita Mittapalli, "Thick Description," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Lisa M. Given (2 vols.; Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 880.
[53] See Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), ix.

and the multiple (and often overlapping) "subtypes" that underpin them.[54] Therefore, offering broad-stroke evaluations of the movement is often unhelpful. As I have demonstrated, however, specific trends along geographical lines, for example, can be discerned within the different strands of the movement and evaluated for their global significance. Therefore, unless otherwise stated in this thesis, I will use the term 'Pentecostal' to address what I think are the typical practices and assumptions across the different strands of the movement, even though I pay particular attention to the Western (North American and UK) Pentecostal context.[55]

1.6. Research Scope

My thesis features a social-scientific interpretation project on the meal motif in Rev 3:20. Although I discuss Western Pentecostal theology and practice, my thesis focuses on interpreting the passage over empirical factors related to Western Pentecostal eucharistic praxis based on quantitative research. Concerning my discussions on Western Pentecostal eucharistic praxis, I will pay particular attention to Green's conception of Pentecostal theology of the Eucharist. Green's concept offers a model rooted in Western Pentecostal discourse that aims to reflect the critical approaches in the earliest Pentecostal reflections on the topic. These reflections are assumed in

[54] See Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5–7, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[55] This 'North American and UK Pentecostal context' focuses more on Classical Pentecostals and Neocharismatic churches than the other groups in Anderson's taxonomy. These groups reflect my experience in Pentecostalism and thus provide a critical backdrop to my phenomenology.

Pentecostal scholarship to represent the undeniable tenets of the movement.[56] Nevertheless, since my thesis also emphasises the significance of the Eucharist in Christian worship, it also has a 'catholic' quality.[57]

I will not focus on historical and contemporary eucharistic rites and prayers. Even though sacramental themes like the 'presence of the divine' in meals loom large in my discussions on the Eucharist, I will not offer a comprehensive treatment of the sacramental dimensions of the Eucharist, except to make tangential comments on sacramental and practical matters in discussions about my thesis's significance to Pentecostal eucharistic praxis. It seems to me that the sacramental dimension of the Eucharist is a line of research in Pentecostalism that, as Green's study attests, has received much attention. Therefore, I am more concerned with developing an equally weighted discussion of the intersection between the Eucharist's anthropological, sociological, and theological dimensions. Finally, while I assume that other sources contributed to the Apocalypse's final form, I am more concerned with discussing the

[56] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 244.

[57] I do not assume that my conception of the Eucharist addresses the so-called problem of "basic difference," which, concerning the sacrament of the Eucharist, relates to the doctrinal differences on the rite held by different Christian sects (such as whether the Eucharist is a means of grace). See R. David Nelson and Charles Raith II. *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 105. However, I understand that my thesis offers anthropological insights on the Eucharist beneficial to ecumenical discussions.

probable historical and social context as surmised in the commentaries and special works on the Apocalypse that I will review.[58]

1.7. Research Questions

The following questions guide the discussions in my thesis:

1. What are the common interpretations of the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage, and how might they inform its eucharistic reading?
2. What key cultural elements are associated with the passage?
3. What anthropological and theological insights might mimetic theory contribute to discussions on the cultural elements associated with the passage?
4. How can aspects of the mimetic theory be used to support a eucharistic reading of the passage?
5. How might a mimetic theory-informed eucharistic reading of the passage help us better understand the nature of the problems identified in Pentecostal eucharistic theology and cultural engagement?
6. How can mimetic theory and Pentecostal theology be combined to inform a eucharistic reading of the passage?

[58] I am grateful to Finamore, who made a similar distinction concerning the hermeneutic scope of his work. See Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos*, 57.

1.8. Thesis Outline

There are three parts to my thesis. Part I (Chapters 3–4) is where I discuss matters relating to the Rev 3:20 meal motif's historical, grammatical, cultural, and contextual aspects. Thus, in Chapter 3, I identify and analyse the common interpretations of the meal motif and discuss how the result of this analysis justifies my accruing of eucharistic meal associations to the meal. In doing so, I address how common interpretations of the meal motif might inform a eucharistic reading of the passage.

In Chapter 4, I analyse matters relating to the composition of the Apocalypse, which will assist in identifying the cultural significance of the meal. In addition, I will identify four cultural elements associated with the meal: sacrifice, Greco-Roman banqueting traditions, Eucharist, and imperial cults. I will analyse these cultural elements to understand the nexus between the sacramental and social dimensions of the Eucharist, which I claim the meal motif in Rev 3:20 symbolises.

Part II (Chapters 5–10) of the thesis aims to address the anthropological and theological insights that mimetic theory offers to the discussion around the cultural elements (Chapters 5–9) as a prelude to developing a mimetic theory-informed eucharistic reading of the meal motif (Chapter 10). Therefore, in Chapter 5, I will introduce René Girard's mimetic theory and identify the aspects of his theory that I will use to evaluate the cultural elements identified in the previous chapter.

In Chapter 6, I discuss how the mimetic theory conception of sacrifice compares with discussions in scholarship on ancient Mediterranean sacrifice. I also propose what I refer to as a 'Girardian model of sacrifice', a mimetic theory-informed model of sacrifice that captures the central view of Greco-Roman animal sacrifice debated in scholarship.

In Chapter 7, I examine conceptions of typical Greco-Roman commensality and use my Girardian model of sacrifice schema as a heuristic device to explore the cultural significance of these conceptions. I argue that my Girardian reading of the pagan meals can help us better understand the simultaneous striving for utopian ideals and the mirroring of Greco-Roman societal norms that characterised those meals.

In Chapter 8, I turn to the Eucharist and claim that it is a sacral meal in the genus of the typical forms of the Greco-Roman banquet. Building on my Girardian model of sacrifice, I introduce what I term the 'Girardian Model Eucharist', a model I use to discuss how the Eucharist, in its idealised form, could be conceived as a sacred meal for cultivating socio-ethical change as much as nurturing sacramental experiences.

Chapter 9 discusses imperial cults, the last of the four cultural elements I identified for analysis. I propose new frameworks for discussing cults based on objections in scholarship to typical conceptions of the hegemony of the imperial cults

in NT studies. I also discuss how a mimetic theory analysis of the cults informs the eucharistic reading of the Rev 3:20 meal motif.

I end part two of my thesis with Chapter 10, in which I offer a mimetic theory-informed eucharistic reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 and discuss how such reading can help highlight the social as much as the sacramental dimensions of the Eucharist.

Part III (Chapters 11–14) addresses the question of the significance of the mimetic theory-informed eucharistic reading of the meal vis-à-vis problems in contemporary Pentecostal eucharistic discourse and cultural engagement. Therefore, and given that I am using Green's proposal for Pentecostal theology of the Eucharist as a benchmark for my engagement with Pentecostalism on the topic, in Chapter 11, I outline the key themes in Green's proposal for an authentic Pentecostal theology of the Eucharist. Notwithstanding the fundamental difference in our approaches, I highlight points of contact between my eucharistic model and Green's schema. Finally, I will signal how my work could contribute to the sociocultural factors (i.e., social factors of cultural significance) he addresses in his schema on Pentecostal eucharistic theology.

In Chapter 12, I focus on the sociocultural determinants of the Eucharist vis-à-vis Pentecostalism. I discuss conceptions of typical Pentecostal engagement with the cultural domain. I also discuss the significance of conceptualising the Eucharist for its

social dimension vis-à-vis Pentecostal cultural engagement. I highlight entry points for exploring how aspects of my Girardian Model Eucharist could address issues in Pentecostal cultural engagement.

In Chapter 13,[59] I discuss the significance of the affect-related motifs in mimetic theory and how they correspond to affect themes in Steven Jack Land's conception of Pentecostal spirituality. By highlighting how the two disciplines compare on the topic of affect, I signal a micro-level connection of cultural significance between the two disciplines. I use my combined reading of Girard and Land's affect-related ideas to formulate "eucharistic discernment" motifs for analysing Pentecostal engagement with the prosperity gospel and, by extension, the cultural domain.

In Chapter 14, I offer a eucharistic interpretation of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 from a combined reading of aspects of the mimetic theory-informed study of the passage and the Pentecostal full gospel theological framework. In this interpretation, I also consider how such a reading could contribute to our understanding of the importance of the rite's social as much as its sacramental dimension and the importance of its centralisation in Pentecostal worship.

[59] This chapter is an adapted version of my recently published article, John Onelum, "Discerning the Affections: Affect Theory in Conversation With Pentecostal Spirituality on the Problems With the Prosperity Gospel," *PentecoStudies* 21, no. 2 (July 27, 2023): 166–87, https://journal.equinoxpub.com/PENT/article/view/22880.

Finally, I will conclude my thesis with a chapter discussing its significance, the potential contribution to Pentecostal studies and mimetic theory, and areas for further research.

What follows in Chapter 2 is a discussion of my methodology. I will discuss my ontology and the social-scientific hermeneutic framework underpinning my interpretation of the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Central to my methodological approach is that I write with an academic interest in the Eucharist's sociological as much as sacramental dimensions amongst early Christians.[60] I am interested in the relationship between these dimensions of early Christian eucharistic conceptions and the banqueting traditions of their pagan Greco-Roman counterparts.[61] I am also interested in the implications of this relationship for understanding the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage. In addition, I also want to know how a eucharistic understanding of the meal motif in the passage could inform Pentecostal eucharistic theology and practice in the West.[62]

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[60] I recognise that the early followers of Jesus (i.e., the first one hundred years) did not describe themselves as 'Christians'. However, I will use 'early Christians' as a catchall phrase to describe the followers of Jesus during this early period. See Erin Vearncombe, Scott, Brandon, Taussig, Hal, *After Jesus Before Christianity: A Historical Exploration of the First Two Centuries of Jesus Movements* (HarperCollins, 2021), 11–29, Kindle.

[61] I will employ typology-based studies on Greco-Roman banquets (the so-called "Smith-Klinghardt typology"). As Tasussig states, these studies focus on an alleged "common meal tradition … that lay at the basis of all active meals of the Greco-Roman era" and can help us to understand the "social formation" of rabbinical and early Christian communities. Moreover, they may also be described as typically concerned with, as Klinghardt described his approach, "the phenomenology of the external form of meals" before including "ideas attributed to meals." See Hal E. Taussig, "Introduction," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, eds. Dennis E. Smith, and Hal E. Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1, 2; Matthias Klinghardt, "A Typology of the Communal Meal," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, eds. Dennis E. Smith, and Hal E. Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9.

[62] By the "West," I mean the UK and North American (UK-American) Pentecostal scenes, as both face similar challenges concerning how much emphasis is placed on the centrality, sacramentality, and sociological implications of the Eucharist within their Pentecostal communities. However, although my discussions oscillate between the two regions, I will pay particular attention to the UK Pentecostal scene as this is my immediate context.

By expressing my 'academic interest' in these topics, I do not mean to say that my Pentecostal context will not influence my examination. Indeed, as I discuss in my introduction, my research problem stems from my Pentecostal context. Pentecostal eucharistic theology and its implications for practice are the primary subjects of my theological analysis and construction. My methodology will feature key elements of a typical Pentecostal epistemology, such as writing from a Christian faith perspective and attending to references to the person and work of the Holy Spirit that form part of the literary context in the passage under consideration.[63]

At the same time, my goal is not to produce an "explicitly" Pentecostal treatment of the Eucharist and its relationship to Rev 3:20 exclusively for the Pentecostal community.[64] And my methodology is only in some respects wedded to any of the distinctively Pentecostal hermeneutical elements or frameworks that have emerged from the North American Pentecostal contexts (see below). Instead, my methodology reflects a fluid and eclectic (yet chastened) approach to biblical hermeneutics. Such an approach perhaps mirrors what Davies suggests is typical of reading the Bible in the UK Pentecostal context. Compared to North American Pentecostals, who have established an academic tradition concerning Pentecostalism,

[63] See Robby Waddell, "Hearing What the Spirit Says to the Churches: Profile of a Pentecostal Reader of the Apocalypse," in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, ed. Lee Roy Martin (Leiden: BRILL, 2013), 191, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[64] I am grateful to Waddell's distinction between Pentecostals who engage in topics of interest to them without using an "explicitly Pentecostal method" compared to Pentecostals who are engaged in an "explicitly Pentecostal examination of a topic." See Waddell, "Hearing What the Spirit Says to the Churches," 175.

there is an absence of a "British tradition of academic use of the text [i.e., the Bible] from a distinctively Pentecostal perspective."[65]

Thus, given my British Pentecostal context, how do I characterise my hermeneutic? How do I write about the sociological dimensions of the Eucharist in the early church and its implications for reading the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage? Also, how do I examine these topics so that they reflect my Pentecostal ethos and inform Western Pentecostal eucharistic theology and practice and broader Christianity?

2.1. Social-Scientific Approach to Biblical Hermeneutics

I will adopt a social-scientific approach to interpreting Scripture. Social-scientific approaches to biblical interpretation developed in response to modern influences on historical criticism and have allowed biblical scholars to engage in multidisciplinary

[65] See footnote in Andrew Davies, "What Does it Mean to Read the Bible as A Pentecostal?" in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, ed. Lee Roy Martin (Leiden: BRILL, 2013), 249–50, ProQuest Ebook Central. I also bring my eclectic Christian background to my Pentecostal studies. I was born into the Roman Catholic tradition and catechised in it until my early teens. I have also undergone theological training with Pentecostal, Baptist, and Evangelical colleges. My rather eclectic approach may also indicate what Yong has described as the "global and elastic" outlook of the so-called "Hollenweger School." This school of thought, he notes, was "initially at Birmingham, England, [and is] now centered at the Free University of Amsterdam and in relationship with the European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism [Glopent]." This approach, Yong also notes, contrasts the Wesleyan Holiness associated and full gospel theological framework focused approach of the so-called "Cleveland school" and the "interdisciplinary self-understanding including pentecostal, charismatic, and other renewal movements" focused approach of the now-defunct Centre for Renewal Studies at Regent University School of Divinity. See Amos Yong, "Why Is the "Correlation" between Paul Tillich and Pentecostal Theology Important, and Who Cares?" in *Paul Tillich and Pentecostal Theology: Spiritual Presence and Spiritual Power*, eds. Nimi Wariboko and Amos Yong (Indiana University Press, 2015), 1.

studies, which have generated fresh insights into the social world of biblical texts.[66] I am particularly interested in this approach's holistic outlook since such an outlook corresponds with aspects of the early church's understanding of knowledge that I also hold. As Holmes reminds us, the early church maintained the "universality" and "unity of all truth in God" based on early Christianity's appropriation of the *Logos* motif.[67] Also, Gunton notes that Irenaeus' ground-breaking contribution to the Christian theology of creation upheld the goodness of all of God's creation because, Irenaeus argued, creation is mediated by Jesus and the Spirit. Therefore, through this theology of creation, "God can be understood to be involved in the world, guiding its movement and enabling anticipations of its final perfection to take place."[68] So, far from appearing to critique biblical texts and Pentecostal traditions via the integration of social sciences for the sake of the *avant-garde*, my choice to adopt social-scientific methods reflects my quest for 'God's truth and goodness in all creation' or, as

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[66] William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 78.

[67] See Arthur Holmes, who convincingly argues that, for example, based on the early Christian appropriation of the *Logos* concept (i.e., John 1:1) and writings of early church fathers (e.g., Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*, I.xii, xvi and Justin Martyr's *Second Apology*, xiii), "The *Logos* is revealed both in the Incarnation and in the written words of Scripture and, if less specifically, in the intelligible order of his creation. Hence non-Christians as well as Christians perceive the truth, if fragmentarily. All truth, no matter where it be found or by whom it be discovered, is still God's truth." Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), 14.

[68] Gunton references Irenaeus's "two hands of God" motif in *Against Heresies, Book V, Chapter VI. 1*. See Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 10, 52–56.

Kenneth Archer describes it, "the voice of the Spirit," which also resounds in non-Christian settings.[69]

These settings extend to three lines of enquiry of the social-scientific method concerning biblical hermeneutics. These lines of enquiry (which I discuss further in the next section) attend to historical, theoretical, and contextual matters. First, concerning historical matters, the social-scientific method is a study of the social history of the text to understand, for example, the social dynamics that characterised the lives of people groups described in the text.[70] Second, the theoretical aspect of social-scientific methods pertains to the application of sociological and anthropological theories about human behaviour from studies on various cultures (past and present) to, for example, function as a heuristic tool—shedding light on possible social dynamics that underpin the production of the text.[71] Third, the contextual concerns refer to a stated goal of social-scientific criticism, namely, "to

[69] Archer argues that "Pentecostals will not limit the work of the Spirit to their community but recognize that God's prevenient grace has been bestowed upon all of humanity. Furthermore, they fully expect the Holy Spirit to be actively working upon the lives of non-Christians and in the lives of all Christians." Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2009), 250. This understanding of the Spirit's "plurivocality" is akin to Yong's notion of "transculturality" in his conception of "pneumatological imagination" insofar that "the pneumatological imagination harnesses both multi- and inter-cultural communication in all of their variegatedness into a sphere of trans-cultural inquiry and probes both deeper and wider in the search for understanding and truth." Amos Yong, "The Pneumatological Imagination: The logic of Pentecostal theology," in *RHPT,* ed., Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis, 2020), 156, 157, VitalSource Bookshelf.
[70] Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 79–83.
[71] Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 83.

explore the social dimensions of the interpretive process"[72] (i.e., to discern to what extent the interpreter's social context informs the interpretation of the passage).[73] So, how will these three lines of enquiry—historical, theoretical, and contextual—function in my hermeneutic strategy?

2.1.1. Historical—attending to the "horizon" of the text

My social-scientific approach emphasises the value of the passage's historical context, which would span the context the passage emerges from and addresses. It seems to me that examining the text's historical setting, particularly through historical-critical methods, is critical to a comprehensive exegesis of the Rev 3:20 passage.[74]

By "historical-critical,"[75] I mean, first, "A means of biblical criticism that studies text according to their historical setting(s). This includes their time and place

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[72] M. Daniel Carroll R., "Introduction: Issues Of 'Context' Within Social Science Approaches To Biblical Studies," in *Rethinking Contexts, Rereading Texts: Contributions from the Social Sciences to Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Carroll R., Mark Daniel, and Daniel, M. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000), 15. "A second key context, to which social sciences have contributed increased awareness and sensibility, is that of the reader and community of interpreters." Carroll R., "Introduction," 17.

[73] There is some overlap between the social-scientific method described here and the typical reader-response criticism insofar as the reader's context is also considered in the former. However, the emphasis on the historical and theoretical lines of inquiry in the social-scientific approach distinguishes it from the typical reader-response criticism.

[74] For a perspective on the comparative value of historical methods in hermeneutics, see Blomberg, "The Historical-Critical/Grammatical View," 41; Philip F. Esler, *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), 18.

[75] I will also refer to my application of this method in my thesis with terms like 'historical analysis', 'historical-critical analysis', or 'historical-critical method'.

of composition, circumstances, author(s), how they came to be written, and audience(s) addressed. To reconstruct the historical situation is the main task."[76] Second, unlike the typical modernist/anti-supernatural outlook on historical-critical methods, I acknowledge the reality of the supernatural wherever affirmed within the text by the biblical authors.[77] Third, my approach will include a grammatical analysis of the passage under consideration to try to determine "the meaning its author(s) most likely intended for its original audience(s) or addresses."[78] Finally, the critical dimension of my approach reflects my aim not to be swayed by so-called "Christianising assumptions" about certain biblical motifs (e.g., imperial cults) and to my questioning of biblical data to "evaluate the evidence for the Christian claims in light of all the alternative truth claims."[79]

Social-scientific criticism "represents a subcategory of the historical-critical method."[80] Therefore, my historical-critical approach represents the foundational historical research exercise that will contribute to producing a social-scientific interpretation (comprising social theoretical and contextual reflections) of the meal

[76] See McKim, "criticism, historical," 67.
[77] See Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 85.
[78] Craig L. Blomberg, "The Historical-Critical/Grammatical view," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 27, 30.
[79] Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 163.
[80] See Philip F. Esler, "Social-Scientific Criticism," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Ian Boxall and Bradley C. Gregory. Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 129.

motif in Rev 3:20 (as presented in my thematic reading of Revelation 3:14–22 and close reading of 3:20 in Chapter 14).[81]

Also, because I apply specific historical-critical methods in my text interpretation, I consider my historical analysis to feature a 'very high historical sensitivity'.[82] While not typical of Pentecostal hermeneutics, such an outlook on historical research in biblical studies is not entirely foreign to Pentecostal scholarship.[83] Grey notes that for Pentecostals, the biblical "text still holds a

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[81] Furthermore, the "results" of the social-scientific hermeneutic approach "are necessarily suggestive, not definitive. That is, the social sciences can provide heuristic frameworks for the interpretation of the biblical data, which must be constantly evaluated until more viable and comprehensive perspectives become available. These studies are usually considered to be complementary (yet also at times corrective) of more traditional historical and grammatical analyses." Carroll R., "Introduction," 15.

[82] I am grateful to Berger for this caveat when he points out that his method aimed to engage in "very high empirical sensitivity" and not strictly "empirical theology." See Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1970), 47.

[83] Some Pentecostal scholars highlight the value of historical analyses. For example, while noting the significance of contemporary readers' context, Keener has cautioned that "The ancient meaning, however, does matter, and . . . that ancient, canonical meaning must be the anchor and arbiter for claims to interpret the text today." Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 117, ProQuest Ebook Central. Also, while arguing for a "redemptive hermeneutic" (i.e., something akin to virtue ethical considerations in historical analysis), Fee has argued that historical analyses "serves as a *corrective*, or sets some limits, as to what texts may *not* be made to mean." Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1991), 43, 48. Keener helpfully summarises the "tension in Western Pentecostal scholarship" as existing "between those who favor a historical-critical hermeneutic and emphasize historical context, on the one hand, and those who, on the other, favor a postmodern hermeneutic and play down the importance of the original historical horizon." Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 117, ProQuest Ebook Central. A cognate issue is that Pentecostal scholars have also been noted to "align themselves with Evangelicals" in their interest in historical approaches. However, they differ from Evangelicals in emphasising the "reliability of the biblical narrative" over and above an

privileged position" relative to historical-critical methods.[84] She also observes that some Pentecostals value the historical method because it "safeguards interpretations from relativism" and "values the context in which God spoke to the earlier community."[85] Thus, even though Pentecostals are broadly sceptical of historical criticism, some still draw upon it in their hermeneutic and theological constructions. Therefore, my appeal to historical matters in biblical interpretation resonates with the emphasis some Pentecostal scholars[86] place on the historical dimensions of biblical inquiry.

I am conscious of the charge of positivism against historical-critical approaches to biblical studies. Therefore, my historical research approach will adopt aspects of McLean's hermeneutic strategy that address such charges in historical analysis. McLean's strategy contends for the relationship between the historical and

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investigation into authorial intent. However, this engagement with historical-critical approaches by Pentecostal scholars has not been without problems within the Pentecostal community. For example, it has resulted in the dissonance between the church and the academy as the former tends to emphasise the phenomenological aspects of interpreting scripture. See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Making: On the Way From Fundamentalism to Postmodernism," *JEPTA* 18, no. 1 (1998): 81–82, https://doi.org/10.1179/jep.1998.18.1.006. This 'dissonance' is an issue I am mindful of given the ecclesiological and 'high historical sensitivity' focus of my project. For a summary of other debates in this field, see Jacqueline Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture with the Spirit in community," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis, 2020), 129–39, VitalSource Bookshelf. Cf. Alicia R. Jackson, "Reception History As Literary Historical Methodology: Implications For Pentecostal Hermeneutics," in *Receiving Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition: A Reception History,* eds. Daniel D. Isgrigg, Martin W. Mittelstadt and Rick Wadholm, Jr (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2021), 32–38, Kindle Edition.

[84] Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 133.

[85] Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 133.

[86] For example, Grey, but not Davies.

present understanding of biblical texts by emphasising that the text's "founding sense-event" (i.e., its probable intended meaning or its sense/"value" to its recipients) "*is always implied*" in the "subsequent sense-events" (i.e., history of the text's reception).[87] The "present sense-event" (which is the final meaning attributed to the text by the interpreter "within a changed set of 'value' relations"), however, may go beyond the founding sense-event meaning since "biblical texts possess a latent potential of 'sense'."[88] Thus, the contemporary interpretation does not pretend to be a completely objective reading of the passage.

Similarly, I do not aim to offer a meaning of the Rev 3:20 passage that, in its final analysis, claims to be void of any subjective perspectives. Instead, in keeping with McLean's strategy, I will trace the historical context to the Rev 3:20 passage (i.e., founding sense-event) and review its reception within specific periods and contexts (i.e., subsequent sense-event) before considering the relationship between the findings and my contemporary Western Pentecostal eucharistic context (i.e., present sense-event). Therefore, my historical research could be understood to span the

[87] B.H. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 30.

[88] McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 31. This strategy also corresponds with the Pentecostal hermeneutic understanding of the biblical text as an 'open text' which makes room for contemporary meaning through the illumination of the Holy Spirit; as Waddell notes, "Normally, Pentecostals read with an eye open towards the plain meaning of scripture; however, they are open to the multiple meanings in the texts which the Spirit can and does afford them when they read, a common testimony being 'every time I read, the Lord shows me something new'." Waddell, "Hearing What the Spirit Says to the Churches," 186.

"horizons" of the text and reader to create, as Hans-George Gadamer describes, a "fusion" of "horizons" with the past informing the present interpretation.[89]

Moreover, with other biblical scholars, like Esler, who apply social-scientific approaches to biblical studies, I maintain that "To understand the horizon of the past, historical analysis is indispensable."[90] By emphasising the need for historical analysis of the passage, I aim to attend to the historical horizon of the text—as a critical requirement for developing contemporary (present sense-event) meanings. I consider this emphasis necessary because historical analyses can offer insights into the social, political, and religious commensality shared between early Christians and their pagan Greco-Roman counterparts, informing the understanding of the Eucharist in contemporary pluralistic Western societies. Consequently, my analysis (Parts I and II) will review historical matters such as political, religious, and cultural contexts and the literary and grammatical issues related to investigating texts within their historical context.

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[89] I agree with Gadamer that the historical analysis of a text is vital to arriving at a contemporary meaning of the text when he cautions that "the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves."* Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth And Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marsh (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2004), 305.

[90] See Esler, *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds*, 3.

2.1.2. Theoretical—mimetic theory as a defamiliarization tool and the Cultural Diamond as a culture modelling tool

My historical analysis will reveal the underpinning power dynamics that characterise the wider Greco-Roman societies of which early Christians were a part. The analysis will also highlight the often complex socio-political and religious dynamics that characterised the banqueting traditions of these societies. This is where theoretical analysis, the second line of enquiry of the social-scientific method, is vital.

Applying social-scientific theories about human social behaviour can help explain the social-political and religious complexities that underpin these ancient social dynamics (and, ultimately, the production of the text). They can help identify to what extent contemporary settings, where the interpretation is applied, reflect such dynamics. Thus, I will use social-scientific theories to evaluate the findings of my historical analysis (Parts I–II) and the theological and social factors that concern my Pentecostal context (Part III).

These social-scientific theories will help to evaluate critically my Pentecostal context to see to what extent my context reflects the power dynamics discovered in the historical analysis. Such concerns about a possible correlation are relevant because, as Grey suggests, Pentecostalism has tension around "the lingering

divisions of race, gender, ethnic and social differences" that characterise Pentecostal communities and their implications for meaning-making as individuals (or groups).[91]

2.1.2.1. Mimetic theory

I will employ René Girard's mimetic theory as my leading theoretical framework for evaluating the nature and implications of ancient and contemporary societies' socio-political, and thus cultural, dimensions. Girard's theory, as Palaver notes, is a "theory of conflict" that helps to "explicate violent conflict in human society" and thus "elucidate the causes of interpersonal clashes and also offers solutions to them."[92] Therefore, it can serve as a helpful heuristic tool for analysing the apparent power dynamics that characterise the horizons of the text and my context.

My multidisciplinary approach to the study of the Eucharist also aims to reimagine Pentecostal and broader Christian approaches to the Eucharist while remaining sensitive to the core tenets of Christianity.[93] Again, I maintain that Girard's mimetic theory can be instructive here since it reflects a Christian-friendly theoretical framework. For example, Girardian anthropology (which "explains the origins of

[91] Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 136.
[92] Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. by Gabriel Borrud (Michigan: Michigan State University, 2013), 33.
[93] Johnson has similar aims in his application of intertextuality, noting that "the Pentecostal (con)text is another text to be interpreted" and "In the process of dialogue with the Pentecostal (con)text, both the Pentecostal (con)text and the intertext of the reader are (re)formed and (re)imagined." David R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse: An Intertextual and Pentecostal Exploration* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2018), 7.

archaic religions")[94] leads to Christian anthropology.[95] This Christian anthropology emphasises that the Passion of Christ[96] indicates God's wisdom over the Satanic victim mechanism,[97] the liberating effect of which the Holy Spirit unveils.[98] Therefore, I describe the application of mimetic theory to my thesis as a 'chastened' form of what sociologists call "defamiliarization."[99] By 'chastened defamiliarization', I am drawing attention to how, on the one hand, mimetic theory offers an alternative anthropological perspective on traditional Christian teaching on 'sin' and its impact on human social interaction. On the other hand, in its final analysis, the mimetic theory addresses the ills of the human condition that typify Trinitarian and soteriological discourse.

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[94] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 15.

[95] I maintain that the Christianity-friendly outlook of mimetic theory also addresses concerns about using social-scientific theoretical methods in biblical hermeneutics that are not sympathetic to Christianity. See Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 84–86.

[96] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, ed. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 138–39.

[97] Girard, *I See Satan*, 43, 152.

[98] Girard, *I See Satan*, 189–90. It reflects what Kärkkäinen describes as a "Christo-centric trinitarian orientation"—an essential principle for discerning the Spirit. See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "The challenge of discerning between the genuine and counterfeit 'Signs of the Spirit': toward a Pentecostal theology of the discernment of the Spirit(s)," *JPTA* 39, no. 2 (2019): 180, https://doi.org/10.1080/18124461.2019.1627510.

[99] Inglis explains the process as follows: "[W]hen we are defamiliarizing ourselves with our everyday routines, what we are doing is, as it were, 'escaping' from the life-world and coming to look at it 'from the outside', as if it were foreign to us. . . [D]efamiliarization means coming to see our own life-world, which we generally never realize is anything other than 'natural', as not 'natural at *all*'." David Inglis, *Culture and Everyday Life* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 9.

2.1.2.2. Sociology of Culture and the Cultural Diamond

As I noted in my introduction, 'culture' is not fixed. The fluidity around the meaning of culture stems from human being's (as cultural agents) situatedness in society. Such assessments of culture are of interest to practitioners in the sociology of culture discipline.[100]

For example, Griswold highlights the fundamental premise behind the sociological perspective of culture, noting that "the sociological analysis of culture begins at the premise that culture provides orientation, wards off chaos, and directs behavior toward certain lines of action and away from others."[101] Griswold states that culture offers meaning to societies through "symbols," "ideas," or aspects of "behavior," that is, things considered "cultural objects" and "are endowed with significance over and above their material utility."[102] Griswold's analysis of the sociological perspective of culture, which understands culture as a society-stabilizing force that facilitates the production of "objects" that are meaning-bearers for societies, is very useful to my thesis. This is because, first, such sociological perspectives on culture corroborate the Girardian analysis of how cultural forms like ritual sacrifice are instrumental to maintaining societal peace by mitigating mimetic crises. Second, in Pentecostalism, certain theological concepts—like the four/five-fold gospel theological framework—function like the "cultural objects" motif Griswold

[100] Griswold, *Cultures*, 21.
[101] Griswold, *Cultures*, 22.
[102] Griswold, *Cultures*, 22.

describes; endowed with significance, they provide stability and meaning to Pentecostal communities.

Furthermore, Griswold notes, "[c]ulture mirrors social reality. Therefore, the meaning of a particular cultural object lies in the social structures and social patterns it reflects."[103] This understanding of culture is based on reflection theory and thus understands "culture as a faithful reflection of social life."[104] Griswold also notes that the sociological view of culture also understands that society reflects culture. Practitioners typically assume this latter reflection to be an ancillary reflection.[105] The reflection theory analysis of culture concerning society reflects a "common sense" understanding of how social phenomena influence culture and vice versa.[106] Also, the workings of the reflection theory of culture are evident in the inception of Pentecostalism. For example, Droogers highlights how the birth of the Pentecostal movement in the West corresponded with the high point of modernism and the pinnacle of the Industrial Revolution; thus, there is a correlation between the dire

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[103] Griswold, *Cultures,* 23.

[104] Griswold, *Cultures,* 23. The understanding of culture as a reflection of society is central to her "working definition" of culture, which states that "Culture refers to the expressive side of human life—in other words, to behavior, objects, and ideas that appear to express, or to stand for, something else. This is the case whether we are talking about explicit or implicit culture." Griswold, *Cultures,* 11. Elements of this definition (e.g., expressed behaviour, objects) are also reflected in Williams' assessment of the meanings/uses of the word "culture" discussed in my introduction. Thus, I emphasise the sociological assessment that Griswold offers to the discussion on culture.

[105] Griswold, *Cultures,* 23. For a similar perspective on the culture-society nexus, see Inglis, *Culture and Everyday Life*, 3.

[106] Griswold further notes how violence on television reflects violence in the social world and vice versa. Griswold, *Cultures*, 23.

socio-economic landscape of the time and people's responsiveness to proclamations about the empowerment offered by the person of the Holy Spirit.[107] This correlation describes an intersection between social "deprivation" and spirituality, which others have observed concerning Pentecostalism's global rise.[108] Therefore, there is some value in understanding the social dimensions in which specific cultural phenomena emerge to appreciate their significance fully.

With the social dimensions of culture in mind, Griswold discusses the "cultural diamond."[109] The cultural diamond features four points, namely, "cultural objects,"[110] "social world,"[111] "creators,"[112] and "receiver,"[113] and six lines that link the

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[107] André Droogers, "The Cultural Dimension of Pentecostalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr and Amos Yong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 200, https://doi:10.1017/CCO9780511910111.015.

[108] E.g., Stone discusses the "political work of the spirit" to make disciples of "underprivileged" people during this period. Selina Stone, "Pentecostal power: discipleship as political engagement," *JEPTA* 38, no. 1 (2018): 29–32, https://doi: 10.1080/18124461.2018.1434727. Also, see Davies' summary of the relationship between people experiencing poverty and the rise of Pentecostalism worldwide. Andrew Davies, "Because They Can: Hillsong and Social Transformation," in *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Called Me Out Upon the Waters*, eds. Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 199. Also see Johns' discussion on the "Sociological Factors of Conscientization," where she discusses some of the typical reasons offered for the "rise of religious movements," namely, "social disorganization, deprivation and psychological maladjustment." Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Sheffield: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1993), 101.

[109] Griswold notes, "The sociology of culture, however, looks for social meanings. And in our cultural diamond, meaning links cultural objects with the social world." Griswold, *Cultures*, 21.

[110] This is "a socially meaningful expression that is audible, visible, or tangible or that can be articulated." She also understands it to "compose part of a larger cultural system that we may want to analyse." Griswold, *Cultures*, 11, 14.

[111] The social world pertains to the social contextuality of the cultural objects, agents, and recipients. It describes "the economic, political, social, and cultural patterns and exigencies that occur at any particular point in time." Griswold, *Cultures*, 14.

points together (see fig. 2.1).[114] The cultural diamond reflects the critical elements in the production and reception of culture and their relationship. Griswold described it as follows:

> [T]he cultural diamond is an accounting device intended to encourage a fuller understanding of any cultural object's relationship to the social world. It does not say what the relationship between any of the points should be, only that there is a relationship . . . Therefore, a complete understanding of a given cultural object requires understanding all four points and six links.[115]

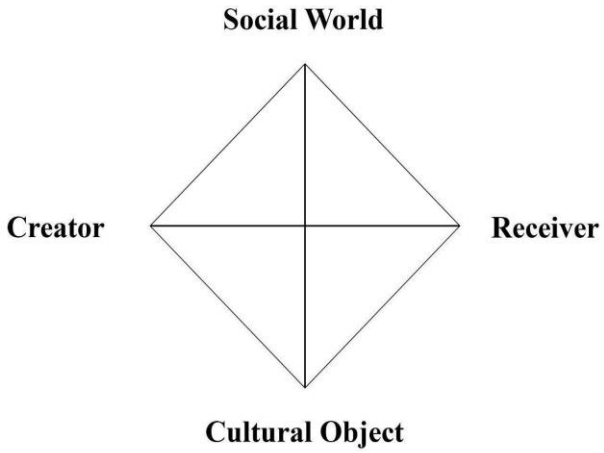

Fig. 2.1. Wendy Griswold's "Cultural Diamond"

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[112] The cultural diamond assumes that "[c]ultural objects are made by human beings." These people are called "creators," and they "may be the people who first articulate and communicate an idea." Griswold, *Cultures,* 14.
[113] This describes those who receive the cultural objects, i.e., "people who hear, read, understand, think about, enact, participate in, and remember them" and are thus also "active meaning makers" and not a "passive audience." Griswold, *Cultures,* 14.
[114] Griswold, *Cultures*, 16.
[115] Griswold, *Cultures*, 15–16.

The cultural diamond helps us to understand any cultural phenomenon under investigation comprehensively. With its multiple points of analysis (i.e., social world, creators, receivers, and cultural objects), the cultural diamond addresses some of the issues that some cultural studies practitioners have raised concerning the lack of disciplinarity in cultural discourse.[116]

The triptych understanding of culture outlined in my introduction and the disciplinarity of the cultural diamond offer valuable starting points for discussing culture. This is because they overlap at specific points, thus offering a more comprehensive understanding of any cultural phenomenon under investigation.[117]

2.1.3. Contextual—my lived experience as a UK Pentecostal

The challenges around asserting a single definition of culture are, as intimated in my introduction, reflected in discussions around defining Pentecostalism because of its

[116] For example, Cohn, Mitcho, and Woolsey contend for cultural studies' disciplinary dimensions as an antidote to what they note as the "purely negative conception of 'discipline'" in cultural studies discourse. Thus, they contend that a "legitimate interdisciplinary methodology protocol" for cultural studies is based on the understanding that the discipline is a cultural study on the "social totality" of its subject. They argue that to safeguard the discipline from "subjectivists, neoidealist methodology," it must also address the subject's social, political, and economic dimensions, thus recognising humans as "*Homo economicus*." These are some of the issues the Cultural Diamond tries to address in its analysis of the "social world." Randall K. Cohn, Sara Regina Mitcho, and John M. Woolsey, "Cultural Studies Always Already Disciplinary," in *The Renewal of Cultural Studies*, ed. Paul Smith (Temple University Press, 2011), 30, 32.

[117] For example, the "social world" motif of the cultural diamond has an obvious connection with the "historical" and "normative" motifs in the triptych understanding of culture. However, the cultural diamond analysis unravels the sociological contributions to the cultural production of cultural objects making for a more sophisticated analysis of the cultural phenomenon under investigation. Nevertheless, both motifs allow me to discuss culture with an appreciation of its fluid use/meaning within a disciplinary context.

diverse expressions.[118] Such diversity has implications for biblical interpretation in the Pentecostal tradition. As Grey notes, some scholars are already attending to the consequences of this diversity on biblical interpretation within Pentecostalism by taking an interest in meaning-making that reflects the social and religious idiosyncrasies of "grass-roots" Pentecostal ministries outside North America.[119] Such interest in localised meaning-making (i.e., valuing the potential contributions of the interpreter's context to the interpretation process) also pertains to the third line of enquiry in my social-scientific approach, namely, the analysis of the reader's context (or the interpretative community).

The interpreter's context (as a significant revelatory feature in the hermeneutic process) is a helpful foil to the typically dogmatic approach to theology in Pentecostalism.[120] Thus, my phenomenological, lived experience perspective on typical contemporary Western Pentecostal eucharistic theology and practice informs

[118] See Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 5–7.
[119] See Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 136.
[120] As Davies has rightly noted, "[l]ived practices are, on a number of levels, sometimes rather different from espoused beliefs." Andrew Davies, "Heritage and Hope: A Story of British Pentecostalism," in *Pentecostals and Charismatics in Britain: An Anthology*, ed. Joe Aldred (Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2019), 18. I also aim to produce a praxis-based meaning of the biblical text. The praxis aims of this project are predicated on the epistemological concerns already discussed, namely, the dissonance between the type of knowledge gained from the lived experiences of Pentecostals *vis-à-vis* Pentecostal dogma. This is also why my investigation into the cultural dimensions of Pentecostalism is significant to my thesis (Part III). This is because such culture-focused inquiries typically feature more concrete, empirical observations than the theological ideals reflections of dogma-focused projects.

my discussion.[121] As I discussed in my introduction, I have observed what I described as the domestication of the Eucharist in the West. By this, I mean that contemporary Western Pentecostal eucharistic theology and practice, especially at the local church level, does not typically reflect the centralisation of and rigorous engagement with the rite in the worship service afforded by the early Pentecostals. The consequence of this relegation of the rite is undermining its historical social dimensions.[122] Thus, my historical analysis of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 also seeks to address how the meal[123] symbolises the Eucharist and signal its significance in addressing the "changed set of 'value' relations" that typify my Pentecostal context.[124]

So, given that I write within a Pentecostal context, how does my social-scientific strategy compare to the typical (albeit mainly North American) approaches to Pentecostal hermeneutics? What additional points of convergence and divergence can I note, and what is the significance of those points of divergence to the broader academic interests, Christian faith outlook, and Pentecostal theology that underpin the choice of my interpretive strategy?

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[121] See my "Introduction" for aspects of my UK/Western Pentecostal experience that have informed my thesis. Moreover, my initial UK Pentecostal church experience (i.e., first fourteen or so years) is characteristic of what Anderson describes as "*different independent churches*" that sit under the Neocharismatic churches type of Pentecostalism and typically reflect a hodgepodge of other Pentecostal types, beliefs, and practices. See Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 7.

[122] See "Introduction."

[123] I understand this meal with Christ is referenced in this passage as part of the solution to the problematic socio-religious situation in the Laodicean church.

[124] For example, 'prosperity gospel' issues.

2.2. Scripture, Spirit, and Community—Engaging Pentecostal Hermeneutics

The Scripture, Spirit, and Community model depicts the critical concepts that have emerged as distinctive of Pentecostal hermeneutics.[125] Grey also rightly notes, "there is yet no consensus on the place and importance of these elements as part of a Pentecostal biblical hermeneutic," and as such, they "are worth considering in their own right as formative of a Pentecostal biblical hermeneutic."[126] Therefore, my analysis will outline some of the less disputed principles in each concept.[127] The following discussion does not trace the development of this model within Pentecostalism in chronological order.[128] Nor does it offer an analysis of how

[125] This hermeneutic model can be traced to Pentecostal scholar John Christopher Thomas' Spirit, Word, and Community triadic interpretation model. This triadic interpretation model was developed from his analysis of the decision-making process of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, where he highlights how the Spirit, Scripture and community functioned in concert to discern how to proceed with the issues of gentile converts. See John Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: an Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *JPT* 2, no. 5 (1994): 49–50, https://doi.org/10.1177/096673699400200504. Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 131. Also, the significance of the model to Pentecostal interpretation is indicated when Melissa Archer notes that the Spirit, Word, Community interpretation model "resides at the heart of Pentecostal hermeneutics." Melissa Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day: A Pentecostal Engagement with Worship in the Apocalypse* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2015), 52, Kindle. See also Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 213–52. Cf. J.C. Thomas, "Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), II, 89–97.

[126] Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 133.

[127] In addition, I am following suit with other Pentecostal scholars, like Green, who have collapsed other popular themes in Pentecostal hermeneutics, like "experience", "narrative analysis," and "history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*)" under relevant headings within the triadic interpretive model. See Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 182– 83.

[128] For a summary of the history of Pentecostal hermeneutics, see Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, 16–22.

Pentecostal scholars have used this model in their discourses on the Apocalypse.[129] Instead, I discuss this model here to address more specific points of convergence and divergence with the academic-Christian faith-Pentecostal theology intersectionality that characterises my interests and underpins my social-scientific interpretive approach.

2.2.1. Scripture

Pentecostals typically have a high view of 'Scripture'.[130] Kenneth Archer describes an aspect of this view of Scripture that resonates with my multidisciplinary interpretive strategy when he notes that:

> Pentecostals believe that God still speaks today and when God speaks, God has more to say than just Scripture, yet it will be scripturally sound. This results from the Holy Spirit being immanent in creation and the community. This is possible because humanity is created in God's image and God took upon God's self humanity; consequently, there exists an essential relatedness which makes communication possible.[131]

I maintain the Christian faith presupposition, reflected in Kenneth Archer's comments above, that God still speaks through biblical texts.[132] More specifically, this

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[129] Newton has recently produced a summary of how recent works on the Apocalypse by Pentecostal scholars apply these and other related Pentecostal hermeneutic approaches to their work. See Newton, *Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 47–48.
[130] Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 133. Anderson, *To the Ends of The Earth*, 122. See also Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect," 135.
[131] Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect," 147–48.
[132] Notwithstanding the significance (to some Christians) of the claim that "God superintended their [i.e., the authors] writing so that what they wrote comprised his message precisely," I am keen to explore the equally attested claim that the composition of Scripture was not least also impacted by the authors existential, socio-cultural contextual matters and agenda. See Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 145.

is evident in the interpretative aims of my interpretation of the Rev 3:20 passage, namely, to highlight the spiritual value of the regular celebration of the Eucharist and emphasise its sacramental and sociological dimensions for contemporary Western Pentecostal theology and practice. Nevertheless (based on the doctrine of the Spirit's relation to creation), I am also pursuing what God could be saying 'beyond Scripture' that may also be, as Kenneth Archer put it, "scripturally sound"[133] and can further support the theology and ministry practice analysis of my eucharistic study.

Kenneth Archer also notes that Pentecostals are "inherently storytellers" insofar that they "primarily transmit their theology through oral means" and have thus "been conditioned to engage Scripture as story."[134] Consequently, he understands some connection between their storytelling culture and 'aspects' of the narrative critical approach to interpreting texts, a view attested by other Pentecostal scholars.[135] Also, he notes another aspect of the narrative critical approach that complements the Pentecostal reading strategy: it "attempts to understand the biblical text on its own terms."[136] Of significance within those "terms" for some Pentecostals

[133] Moreover, I find in the Girardian analysis another way of maintaining "scriptural soundness." As discussed above, mimetic theory straddles anthropology and Christian theology in a way that still honours claims of the sacredness of the Bible and its redemptive narrative.
[134] Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 226.
[135] Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 226. See also Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 61. However, their theologically motivated application of the method could be conceived as different to classical understandings of the method, which, as Klein et al. note, focus less on the "theological or moral value" of the text. See Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 65.
[136] Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 228.

is understanding the biblical text's final canonical form.[137] This view means that concerns for the social and cultural context of the text, typical of historical-critical approaches, are not 'typically' prioritised[138] since the Pentecostal appropriation of narrative criticism is more concerned with the canonical reception and the "story world" of the text.[139]

Therefore, while I engage in aspects of historical-critical analysis, I will also be sympathetic to certain reader-response/contextual readings of the Apocalypse, given my Pentecostal context and the contextual dimensions of my social-scientific interpretation methodology. And in keeping with Keener's caution about the significance of historical analysis vis-à-vis contextual readings,[140] I will remain cautious about oversimplifying what I consider pertinent historical data.

2.2.2. Spirit

The 'Spirit' concept indicates, as Grey notes, the Pentecostal reliance on the "Spirit to provide revelatory guidance in the reading of Scripture."[141] And as Philemon discusses in his work on "pneumatic hermeneutics," this Pentecostal proclivity offers an important response to a "substantial lacuna" in contemporary discourse on the

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[137] Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 228. Klein et al. also discuss the value of focusing on the "final form of the text" in the method vis-à-vis evangelical theology and method. See Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 70.

[138] As noted earlier, this pattern has a few exceptions, as some Pentecostals engage in historical criticism.

[139] Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 228.

[140] See Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 117.

[141] Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 134.

theological interpretation of Scripture: the Holy Spirit's role in interpreting Scripture.[142] Moreover, the "revelatory guidance" includes how, as Kenneth Archer notes, "The Holy Spirit enables the interpreter to bridge the historical and cultural gulf between the ancient authors of the Scriptures and the present interpreter."[143]

There are some points of contact between my hermeneutic method and the assumptions of a typical Pentecostal hermeneutic concerning the role of the Holy Spirit. For example, my thesis concerns the "founding sense-event" meaning of the Rev 3:20 passage and the "present sense-event" or contemporary meaning. By contending for a contemporary meaning, I also mean that I am concerned with a contemporary understanding of the passage borne of the "revelatory guidance" of the person of the Holy Spirit. As discussed above, I do not reduce the scope of the Spirit's "revelatory guidance" to operating within Scripture or in Christian communities alone. From my appeal to the early church's theology of creation, I contend that all creation bears the marks of the goodness of God (and therefore

[142] In this work, Philemon reviews the contemporary discourse on the theological interpretation of Scripture as it relates to the role of the Spirit in theological interpretation. And, given the significance of pneumatology in the Pentecostal tradition, he examines how Pentecostal theologians discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in theological interpretation and sees in their assessments a way to address the gap in contemporary discourse in this field. This assessment also includes his discussion of the value of a "pneumatic hermeneutic" that, typical of Pentecostal hermeneutics, explores how the Spirit interacts with the interpretative community: the Church. See Leulseged Philemon, *Pneumatic Hermeneutics: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2019), 9, 37, 169. In the next section, I discuss the extent to which certain dynamics of the community motif are reflected in my thesis.

[143] Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect," 145.

contains God's truth), with creation mediated by "the two hands of God," Jesus and the Spirit.

The pneumatic dimensions of Pentecostal hermeneutics also emphasise the possibility of a "dynamic encounter with the Spirit in contemporary life" as much as through reading biblical texts.[144] Thus, there is an assumed nexus between experience and the Spirit as a means by which one may receive "revelatory guidance." As Martin notes, "Like the early Church in Acts 15, the first Pentecostals included their own experiences as a means of discerning the guidance of the Holy Spirit."[145] Again, my thesis reflects this subjective-pneumatic interpretative dynamic. Typical of emic approaches, my thesis has emerged from my lived experience as a UK Pentecostal concerned about the lack of reflections on the sociological dimensions of the Eucharist and the significance of its centralisation for Pentecostal worship.

Therefore, the eclectic (yet chastened) dimension of the pneumatology in my theological approach aligns with Oliverio's conception of "hermeneutical realism" insofar that by also contending for a chastened form of "defamiliarization" in my hermeneutic project, I share a preference for a hermeneutic strategy that "allows for multiple productive hermeneutics to emerge that can faithfully account for the reality of the faith" and which assumes that "[w]hile new beliefs and practices will

[144] Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 135.
[145] Lee Roy Martin, "Introduction to Pentecostal Biblical Hermeneutics," *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, ed. Lee Roy Martin (Leiden: BRILL, 2013), 7, ProQuest Ebook Central.

surely emerge as a result of the continuing growth of Pentecostalism, this approach allows for more truth to be manifest than what would come through a single prescribed methodology."[146]

2.2.3. Community

Finally, 'Community' typically pertains to the notion that the Pentecostal community (church or academy) should guard against individualistic and relativistic interpretations of biblical and spiritual experiences.[147] I will refer to this as hermeneutics-by-community. My thesis reflects this understanding also, to the extent that my research problem a) stemmed from my UK Pentecostal and local church context, b) appeals to teachings representative of the wider Christian community, and c) as this section demonstrates, I write giving attention to the implication of my work for the Pentecostal academic community.

A cognate aspect of the community interpretative motif is *Wirkungsgeschichte* (history of effect).[148] Concerning biblical hermeneutics, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, as Melissa

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[146] L. William Oliverio Jr., *Theological Hermeneutics in the Classical Pentecostal Tradition: A Typological Account* (Boston: BRILL, 2012), 17, 361, ProQuest Ebook Central. Also, see Philemon, *Pneumatic Hermeneutics*, 160–61.

[147] Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 136. Davies, "What Does it Mean to Read the Bible as A Pentecostal?" 260. Robby Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation* (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2006), 118.

[148] Gadamer describes his theory of the history of effect: "The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. A hermeneutics adequate to the subject matter would have to demonstrate the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself. I shall refer to this as "history of effect." Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event." Gadamer, *Truth And Method*, 299. Thomas also discusses the different ways the word has been translated and applied in the hermeneutic enterprise. And

Archer notes, "seeks to understand the impact, influence, or effect that biblical texts have had on the Church and society throughout the centuries."[149] In recent years, this approach to hermeneutics has become popular amongst Pentecostals (especially in North America).[150] As used by Pentecostal scholars, the method typically involves an exegetical analysis of a biblical passage, which is then reviewed in light of its reception in Pentecostalism, as can be extracted from a review of early Pentecostal literature. The aims of such an approach are succinctly stated by Melissa Archer when she notes that "*Wirkungsgeschichte* complements Pentecostal hermeneutics by offering Pentecostals a means for both 'appreciating Scripture' and 'the interpretive tradition of Scripture by the community'."[151] Indeed, such aims also indicate a complementary relationship between Scripture and the Pentecostal community that I discussed above.

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while highlighting the distinction between the approach and "history of interpretation approaches," I understand him to offer a succinct description of the key aspects of its current scope in biblical hermeneutics when he states that "reception approaches . . . are interested in how biblical texts have been received across a variety of media, both inside and outside the church." John Christopher Thomas, "The Spirit, the Text, and Early Pentecostal Reception: The Emergence of a Discipline," in *Receiving Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition: A Reception History*, eds., D.D. Isgrigg, M.W. Mittelstadt, and R.J. Wadholm, Jr. (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2021), 51. Cf. Robert Berg, "'All Men Are Created Equal': An Introduction to Reception History," in *Receiving Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition: A Reception History*, eds., D.D. Isgrigg, M.W. Mittelstadt, and R.J. Wadholm, Jr. (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2021), 12.

[149] Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day,* 61.

[150] For a survey of Pentecostal scholars that have used this method, see Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day,* 56–58. Also, see D.D. Isgrigg, M.W. Mittelstadt, and R.J. Wadholm, Jr., eds., *Receiving Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition: A Reception History* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2021) and especially, Thomas, "The Spirit, the Text, and Early Pentecostal Reception," 51–92.

[151] Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day,* 56.

My examination of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 does not feature an analysis of early Pentecostal publications as described in the typical Pentecostal appropriation of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* approach.[152] Instead, in search of a manageable dataset, I will review comments on the Rev 3:20 passage from a) some more readily available English translations of ancient patristic commentaries on the Apocalypse and related writings covering late antiquity to the early Middle Ages,[153] b) frequently-cited commentaries and special studies in non-Pentecostal scholarship on the Apocalypse[154] and c) commentaries and special studies on the Apocalypse by

[152] I consulted the *Consortium of Pentecostal Archives* website to gather data on the Rev 3:20 passage from digitally available copies of the early UK Pentecostal periodical *Confidence* (1910 - 1918). This periodical recorded conferences, revival sermons, and reports of the earliest UK Pentecostals. However, I found no direct reference to the Rev 3:20 passage, so I could not form an opinion on the perspective held by the earliest UK Pentecostals on this passage.

[153] McAllister has recently published a list of early medieval commentaries on Revelation. I have sourced a fair sample of the relevant English translations he cites. See Colin McAlister, "Appendix: Early Medieval Commentaries on the Apocalypse," in *The Cambridge Companion to Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. Colin McAllister (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 342–44. My sample offers a comprehensive range to understand the key themes in early Christian commentaries and citations on Revelation.

[154] For example, some of the commentaries and special works I consult have been noted by Keener to be amongst the most significant commentaries and works on Revelation. See Craig S. Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary: From biblical text...to contemporary life (*Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 47–52. These include David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5,* Word Biblical Commentary New Testament, Vol.52a (Thomas Nelson, 2002); G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999); George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (London: Oliphants, 1974); G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Black, 1966); Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); J. M. Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary,* The Anchor Bible, Vol.38 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975); Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Vol.17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John, A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

Pentecostal scholars published since 2000.[155] Therefore, to the extent that my reception history analysis involves assembling and evaluating literature concerning the reception of texts and the historical periods and traditions in which they present themselves, my approach is indicative of Jackson's reframing of reception history as "literary-historical methodology" since she contends (and my approach may be argued to demonstrate) reception history "necessarily involves both literary and historical analysis, thereby fusing methodological approaches, which have been . . . at times unnecessarily polarized."[156]

Finally, a few comments concerning my engagement with North American Pentecostal scholarship are in order. Any distinction I make between UK and North American Pentecostal scholarship in this thesis is not meant to imply a value judgment where I assume one is somehow intrinsically 'worthier'. I recognise the influence of the Pentecostal academic tradition that has emerged from the North

[155] I am grateful to Newton, who has provided a list of commentaries and special studies on the Apocalypse by Pentecostal scholars in the North American context since 2000. See Newton, *Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 42–47. These works are John K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation* (Wipf and Stock, 2021); David R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse: An Intertextual and Pentecostal Exploration* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2018); John Christopher Thomas, and Frank D Macchia, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016); Melissa Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day: A Pentecostal Engagement with Worship in the Apocalypse* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2015); Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary* (Havertown: Lutterworth Press, 2013); Rebecca Skaggs and Priscilla C. Benham, *Revelation* (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2009); Robby Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation* (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2006); Craig S. Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary: Revelation* (Zondervan Academic, 2000). I will also add to this list John Christopher Thomas, *The Apocalypse: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2012).

[156] See Jackson, "Reception History As Literary Historical Methodology," 32.

American context, not least for its conceptualisation of many aspects of the early Pentecostal theological and hermeneutical strategy. Therefore, I have taken aspects of these conceptualisations of the theological and hermeneutic tradition as key conversation partners—informing my theological analysis and construction. Underpinning this approach is my understanding that the 'Pentecost event' is the baseline of my "global and eclectic" 'Hollenweger School' outlook. This understanding is attuned to Anderson's description of the unifying features of the global Pentecostal self-understanding vis-à-vis theology when he states, "It is the experience of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and the practice of the gifts of the Spirit that ensued that form the common denominator uniting many different kinds of Pentecostal theology worldwide."[157] Therefore, while I acknowledge the historical (and theological) significance of the theological frameworks that characterise North American Pentecostal scholarship, I am also aware of the possibility that they may also reflect what Anderson described as "contextual Pentecostal theologies," reflections (systematisations) of the Spirit's work in particular contexts.[158] My recognition of this issue should explain any apparent tension in my interaction with North American Pentecostal scholarship.

[157] Allan Heaton Anderson, "Pentecostal Theology as a Global Challenge: Contextual Theological Constructions," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 21, VitalSource Bookshelf.
[158] See Anderson, "Pentecostal Theology as a Global Challenge," 22.

I will begin to discuss the findings of my reviews in the next chapter, where I first examine the ground for suggesting that the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage relates to the Eucharist.

PART I

CHAPTER 3

PERSPECTIVES ON THE MEAL MOTIF IN REV 3:20

In this chapter, I will assess the typical interpretations of the meal motif in Rev 3:20. This assessment features an analysis of primary sources as part of my *Wirkungsgeschichte* evaluation. I will review interpretations of the meal motif from a sample of early Christian commentaries and writings, non-Pentecostal and Pentecostal commentaries, and a selection of special studies on Revelation. These interpretations reflect 'meanings' that the reference to the meal evokes in readers because of its symbolic potency and correlation with the sacred meals in the early church and Greco-Roman cultures.

Driven by the historical-critical leanings of my research, I also wonder what is forfeited by an uncritical acceptance of these interpretations and not asking questions about, for example, their historical integrity. Also, what value could historical findings related to the meal's meaning add to church worship today? Addressing these questions has driven me to find the 'meanings' of the meal that suggest it has 'eucharistic meal associations'[159] more compelling than the other interpretations. But first, how have Christians, past and present, been noted to interpret the meal?

[159] I have coined this phrase from some scholars' description of this position: "eucharistic associations." See Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol.17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 114.

3.1. Interpreting δειπνήσω

The word often translated as "meal" in Rev 3:20 is the Greek verb δειπνήσω (*deipneésoo*), which is from the noun δεῖπνον (*deipnon*), is typically understood to describe the main meal of the day that is usually eaten in the evening and was often the "occasion for hospitality."[160] This is not the final word on the matter, however. Some writers and scholars have also proposed other possible meanings for the word, suggesting it has eucharistic meal associations. Therefore, in this section, I will first outline some of the typical proposals for the passage's meaning, namely, a) fellowship meal, b) eschatological focus, and c) eucharistic meal associations.[161] Finally, I will discuss an interpretation of the passage that allows for multiple meanings of the meal motif.

3.1.1. Fellowship meal

Unfortunately, we do not have a comment on this passage from the earliest commentary on Revelation written in mid-AD. 300 by Victorinus of Petovium. This commentary (along with that of Tyconius, which is extinct, though recovered from

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[160] See Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 822.

[161] This reflects Aune's taxonomy of the various meanings that have been proposed, namely, "intimate fellowship," "eschatological messianic banquet", and "the celebration of the Lord's Supper". David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary New Testament, vol. 52a (Thomas Nelson, 2002), 249, WORDsearchCROSS e-book. Also, some commentators share views with positions other than those I have categorised in this review (e.g., Mounce). Therefore, my categorisation reflects what I understand as the emphatic opinions of the commentators on each topic, notwithstanding that they overlap with other views. Aune also indicates this feature of overlapping views when he states that "these interpretations can hardly be considered mutually exclusive." Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 250.

its extensive quotations by other Latin writers) was one of the two earliest commentaries in the Latin West.[162] Nevertheless, from some of the available early Christian works I reviewed, an early popular conception of the meal emerged, symbolising a close friendship between those who ate it together (i.e., the risen Christ and the respondent).

Some authors suggest profound expressions of love and devotion characterise this close friendship between the parties. For example, Tyconius' commentary, written circa the fourth century A.D. (the second oldest Latin commentary), likens the meal to a loving fellowship anticipated in the church.[163] This meal may follow a positive response to portrayals of the evangelistic effort of the risen Christ to the other party. For example, Ambrose writes (circa fourth century A.D.), "For Christ standeth at the door of thy soul. Hear Him speaking. 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man open to Me, I will come in to him, and I will sup with him, and he

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[162] See Victorinus of Petovium et al., *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, trans. William C. Weinrich (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), xx–xxi. Also, Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou (Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 6–7.

[163] See Tyconius, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 60–62. Also, Jerome, writing about monastic living (Rome, A.D. 384), refers to this passage in commenting on devotion. See Jerome, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, NPNF 2, vol. 6, trans. W. H. Fremantle (1893; reprint, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 33. Also, Bede's Latin commentary on Revelation (circa early eighth century A.D.) comments on the passage with a devotional emphasis. See Faith Wallis, trans. and ed., *Bede: Commentary on Revelation* (Liverpool University Press, 2013), 130. Themes of loving union and devotion are evident in the poems of St John the Cross (Toledo, late sixteenth century). See St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and the Bridegroom Christ*, trans. David Lewis (Electronic Edition with Modernization of English by Harry Plantinga, 1995), Stanza XV, https://ccel.org/ccel/john_cross/canticle/canticle.xxi.html#fna_xxi-p14.1.

with Me.'"[164] These perspectives of the meal from these early Christian commentaries and writings may indicate the significance of the 'fellowship meal' motif in the early church, particularly in the West. However, they do not appear to be interpretations predicated on a critical analysis of the passage. Thus, in my opinion, they are less likely to reflect the likely authorial and even first-century A.D. meaning (based, for example, on a historical, cultural and grammatical analysis), which also concerns my thesis.

Some modern scholars also echo this allegedly 'early Christian' understanding that the reference to the meal in the passage depicts a fellowship meal.[165] For example, Swete (who wrote at the turn of the twentieth century) maintained that the word translated 'meal' referred to the meal at the end of the day and was typically

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[164] Ambrose, *Some of the Principal Works of St. Ambrose*, NPNF 2, vol. 10, trans. H. De Romestin (1896; reprint, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 264. Also, Apringius of Beja's Latin commentary on Revelation (mid-sixth century A.D.) seems to correlate a 'fellowship' meal with evangelistic ideas. See Victorinus of Petovium et al., *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, 38. And the same could be said of the comments by St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622 A.D.) See St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God by St. Francis of Sales*, trans. Henry Benedict Mackey (1884; reprint, Rockford: Tan Books and Publishers, 1997), 85.

[165] For example, Ladd argues that the meal motif indicates a shared meal in the ancient Jewish world, noting that this meal would have been a "symbol of affection, of confidence, of intimacy." He supports this by highlighting how the critics of both Jesus and Peter were upset with them for sharing meals with sinners and Gentiles (see Luke 15:2 and Acts 11:3). Thus, he concludes that the verse "contains a promise of the most intimate fellowship possible." George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 68. Ford also supports theories suggesting this was a sign of loving, enduring, and intimate fellowship. See J. M. Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary,* The Anchor Bible, vol.38 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 422. Beale also sees the motif of the returning master depicted in Luke 12:36-37 as key to understanding the passage. Thus, he argues that this has to do with the renewal of fellowship. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 308.

the occasion for hospitality.[166] Regarding the definition of the word translated 'meal', Swete is right to claim that it refers to a meal eaten at the end of the day. While I do not agree with his conclusion, he does, however, seem to intimate (by cross-referencing Matt 26:29) that the meal may also have a eucharistic association, as it mirrored the intimacy in the Eucharist. Swete states:

> If any Church (or individual) gives heed to the call of Christ . . . and opens the door, Christ will enter that dwelling . . . and exchange with such and one the fellowship of intimate communion . . . in that endless feast of Love of which the Eucharist is the earnest.[167]

Again, although in the final analysis, Swete assumes a fellowship meal interpretation of the passage, his further contextualisation of the motif within the Eucharist resonates with my assumptions about the eucharistic association of the meal. The intersectionality I see him drawing between the two concepts is also instructive for Eucharistic theology and practice. Indeed, as Paul wrote to the church at Corinth concerning their Lord's Supper, the Eucharist is meant to be characterised by loving fellowship between all parties (1 Cor 11:17-33). The loving fellowship highlights a qualitative aspect of the meal experience. Therefore, Swete's comments here also signal an overlap between the concept of the fellowship meal and the Eucharist, which speaks to the quality of the meal experience that one could argue was undermined at the church in Corinth.

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[166] Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices*, 3rd ed (London: Macmillan, 1909), 63.
[167] Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 63.

Other scholars see other juxtapositions of concepts regarding the meal in the passage. For example, Morris also indicates that the meal conveys the idea of a fellowship meal—focusing instead on what it would have meant to the church in Laodicea in light of their moral condition.[168] He indicates that in light of the connection between the phrase "and he with me" and the meal motif, the meal invites the believer into active fellowship; thus, "It all forms a remarkably tender appeal to a church far gone from its rightful state."[169] While Morris does not interpret the meal for its eucharistic meal associations, his focus on the meal concerning the moral condition of the Laodicean church is extremely useful to my thesis. This is because his claim of the moral determinants of the meal resonates with my interpretative assumptions about the utility of the meal in bringing about spiritual transformation to the Laodicean church.

Such correlations with the meal and the moral condition of the church also feature in some of the works of scholars associated with the Pentecostal tradition. For example, like Morris, Fee also treats the passage as addressing the ills of the Laodicea church, stating:

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[168] He argues that the word for the evening meal in the passage suggests that the occasion was an informal affair, conveying the idea of "familiar intercourse" and not a meal eaten by estranged people or eaten in a hurry. See Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1987), 83.
[169] Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 83.

> Whether the Lord's Table is in view here is moot, since the overall picture is one of hospitality; and whatever else, one must be careful not to push such imagery beyond its immediate reason for being: to call a lacklustre community of faith to repentance.[170]

Again, while I maintain that there is value in interpreting the meal for its eucharistic meal associations, I agree with Fee[171] that a significant message of the passage is the offer of the risen Christ to dine with the church so they can repent. This is because, as Morris points out above, the language around the passage attests to an invitation and thus satisfies my thesis's critical (literary contextual analysis) demand. Also, and as already intimated above, I am concerned about the instrumentality of the Eucharist for social as much as spiritual transformation and formation in the church. Therefore, claims that attest to the clear appeals to spiritual and social transformation via the meal in Rev 3:20 are also vital to the aims of my thesis.

On the other hand, non-Pentecostal scholar Koester appears more confident that the passage does not betray any eucharistic association. He claims, "Revelation does not develop Eucharistic imagery here or elsewhere."[172] Instead, he argues in favour of an understanding of the meal indicative of the fellowship meal motif, claiming that the passage "can be best understood as an invitation to relationship in the present with hope for life in the future."[173] I do not entirely agree with Koester

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[170] Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary* (Lutterworth Press, 2013), 60.
[171] This is even though he could be considered cautious against eucharistic readings.
[172] Koester, *Revelation*, 341.
[173] Koester, *Revelation*, 340.

that "Eucharistic imagery" cannot be gleaned from the passage (or elsewhere in the book of Revelation), given, for example, Swete's comments above that signal a eucharistic potential to his understanding of the meaning of the meal. Even while contending for a fellowship meal motif, Swete can still construe a eucharistic symbolism in the passage, even though it may be shown to be vaguely present in his thinking.[174] However, I agree with Koester that the passage can also be understood as describing an invitation to a relationship since such a claim is easily verifiable by the passage itself.

In summary, one of the popular interpretations of the meal motif in the passage is the emphasis on the friendship aspects (with its cognate motifs of evangelism and devotion) that allegedly underpin the meaning of the word translated 'meal' in the text. Hence, I have described this as the fellowship meal emphasis. Consequently, some modern scholars do not see any eucharistic meal associations with the text, while others, like Swete, are prepared to assume that such meals 'signal' a Eucharist theme insofar that the Eucharist also promotes the idea of friendship and devotion.

Some interpretations that seemed to me to reflect a fellowship meal emphasis did so while referencing other theological concepts about the possible meaning of the meal. For example, when the Pentecostal affiliated scholar Keener states that "The

[174] I also discuss some compelling claims for the eucharistic meal associations of the meal in the sections (and chapters) to follow.

personalized nature of the invitation suggests that not only the future messianic banquet (2:17; 19:9) but a present foretaste of the intimacy available to those who respond to Jesus' call,"[175] he also signals an eschatological theme associated to the meal; a theme I discuss in the next section.

3.1.2. Eschatological focus

Another popular suggestion for the meaning of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 is that it has an eschatological focus if not explicitly referring to a future messianic banquet (a feast echoed in eucharistic celebrations). For example, writing on the virtues of chastity in the fourth century A.D., the Christian monk John Cassian ties the 'arrival' and 'fellowship' motifs in John 14:23 with comparative motifs in the Rev 3:20 passage to emphasise his reflections on the second coming of Christ.[176] Thus, the commentary on the passage and eschatological matters, particularly the Parousia, are connected.

As indicated in Keener's comments above, the future messianic banquet motif is also a perspective modern scholars uphold. For example, Ressiguie infers an eschatological focus beyond the fellowship motif, suggesting that the meal is also "an anticipation of the great feast at the end of time when the Lamb sits down to table

[175] Craig, S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary: From biblical text...to contemporary life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 161.
[176] John Cassian, "The Institutes of John Cassian," in *Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian*, NPNF 2, vol. 11, trans, Edgar C.S. Gibson (Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1894; reprint Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 1995), 240.

with his bride."[177] Although I concede that from the fellowship motif surrounding the reference to the meal, it could also be interpreted for its likely eschatological fellowship meal meaning, I, however maintain that there is also no reason from the passages' historical and literary context to infer that the passage is alluding to a meal eating "at the end of time."

Pointing beyond apparent fellowship motifs and taking a more objective stance on the matter of the meal's alleged eucharistic meal associations, Mounce concludes, "Whether eucharistic associations are intended or not, it is hard not to see in the picture at least an anticipation of the future messianic kingdom. All present fellowship with God is a foretaste of eternal felicity."[178] There is some merit to Mounce's non-committed position concerning claims of the meal's "eucharistic associations" in favour of what he perceives to be the salient messages of intimacy with God connected to the eschatological motif. Indeed, what is indubitable in the discussion around the meaning of the meal, as he suggests, is, "All [temporal] present fellowship with [the eternal] God is a foretaste of eternal felicity." I, however, maintain that there is value in analysing the 'instrument' of this "fellowship": the meal. And, given the assumption of the sacramental dimension of the Eucharist, I maintain that a eucharistic reading of the meal offers an appropriate framework for such analysis. Also, and central to my thesis, as I discuss later, because of the

[177] James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 103.
[178] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 114.

passages' socio-religious context, it appears there is still some value to analysing the meal for its eucharistic meal associations.

To summarise, the eschatological focus interpretations, particularly more modern proposals, tend to highlight the messianic meal emphasis of the meal. At the same time, as I discuss in the next section, some scholars seem open to entertaining the idea of undoubtedly eucharistic connections with the meal motif in the passage.

3.1.3. Eucharistic meal associations

Of the very few patristic theologians who wrote a commentary on the book of Revelation, only Oecumenius' commentary (the earliest Greek commentary on Revelation, sixth century A.D.) appears to associate the reference to the meal in Rev 3:20 with the Eucharist insofar that he describes it as "the supper that is with the Lord signifies the reception of the holy mysteries."[179] While Oecumenius's comments here do not reflect any critical analysis and appear later than the earliest commentary in the West, they are still significant to my thesis because they provide commentary evidence that suggests that eucharistic meal associations were attributed to the passage by the early (medieval) church. At the same time, I find stronger evidence for the claim of the earlier Christian attributions of eucharistic meal associations to

[179] Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans. John N. Suggit (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 52. For example, a parallel has been drawn between Oecumenius' reference to the "mysteries" and the "Lord's Supper." See the footnote in Oecumenius and Andrew of Caesarea, *Greek Commentaries on Revelation,* trans. William C.Weinrich, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 20.

the passage in historical analysis carried out by some modern scholars, which I discuss later in this section. First, I will survey various proposals for the position of the eucharistic meal association in modern scholarship.

Some scholars have suggested that the Eucharist is necessarily associated with the meal motif in Rev 3:20 because the meal is considered a metaphor for the future messianic feast, of which the Eucharist is its foretaste. Such claims are usually supported by an appeal to other Revelation and NT passages that juxtapose the idea of a meal—if not the celebration of the Eucharist—with the Parousia and the future messianic feast. For example, Caird argues that by referring to a supper, John uses language that signals a reference to the Eucharist but only to describe the intimacy anticipated at the second coming of Christ; he states that John "is using language resonant with eucharistic associations to describe a coming of the Lord even more intimate and personal than that experienced in the corporate worship of the church."[180] One of the main arguments that he marshalled in support of his claim was to suggest that in the same way that Jews celebrated the Passover as a memorial of the salvation they experienced at the Exodus and as a foretaste of the messianic banquet, the Christians (citing 1 Cor 11:26) celebrated the Eucharist to proclaim Christ's death until he returns.[181] In addition, Caird claimed that "The mention of a supper with Christ could hardly fail to conjure up pictures of the last supper in the

[180] G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Black, 1966), 58.
[181] Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 58. See also Roloff, *Revelation of John*, 65.

upper room and of subsequent occasions when that meal had been re-enacted as the symbol of Christ's continuing presence."[182] Caird's view that the meal (as Eucharist) signalled a future experience of intimacy at the Parousia is persuasive, significantly since he can correlate it with the ideas of messianic hope associated with other sacred meals like the Passover meal and Eucharist. However, I found compelling his suggestion of a symbolic reading of the meal in Rev 3:20 as being in the genus of the Last Supper/Eucharist meals because of its emphasis on Christ's presence. This is because he can highlight the shared sacramental motif between the Rev 3:20 meal and the Last Supper, a point that justifies the claims for the eucharistic symbolism in the meal motif in Rev 3:20 that some, like Koester discussed above, deny.

Other scholars also see the promise of Christ's presence as a critical indicator for the eucharistic reading of the meal. For example, Reddish also argues that the meal motif has eucharistic meal associations, arguing that "The reader cannot help hearing eucharistic overtones in the promise that Christ will come in and eat with whoever invites him in, for in the sharing of the bread and wine, Christ is supremely present with his people."[183] He, however, interprets this passage within an eschatological framework, arguing that while not exclusively referring to the future, the promise of fellowship is speaking more of a future fellowship with Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb—the value of which he implies contemporary

[182] Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 58.
[183] Mitchell Glenn Reddish, *Revelation*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishers., 2001), 83.

celebrations of the Eucharist also capture.[184] He supports the claim for an eschatological focus by arguing that the Eucharist is a foretaste of the messianic feast, citing passages like Rev 19:9, Matt 26:29, Luke 13:29; 22:18, 30.[185] As with Caird, Reddish's perspective on the meal's "eucharistic overtones" (albeit against an eschatological backdrop), with its emphasis on the 'presence of Christ', adds weight to my broader argument that the meal can be read not least as a metaphor for the Eucharist.

Boxall takes a slightly different position on the emphasis of the metaphor. He suggests that the early Christians probably read this passage primarily focusing on its eucharistic connotations.[186] He supports this claim from his grammatical analysis of the word translated 'meal', arguing that the verb and noun form of the word in the

[184] Reddish argues, "This promise, then, of fellowship with Christ is a promise that looks forward to its future fulfilment. Now fellowship with Christ is an anticipatory communion that will find its perfection in God's final kingdom. The future orientation of these verses does not diminish the significance of Christ's presence with the church in the current situation. On the contrary, it suffuses the present experience with Christ with a deeper meaning." Reddish, *Revelation*, 84.

[185] Reddish, *Revelation*, 84. Also, Roloff highlights the possible interface with the Eucharist and eschatological focus, suggesting that Rev 3:20 paralleled Luke 12:35-38 and has an eschatological perspective, of which the present celebration of the Eucharist should be considered as "an allusion to the imminent coming of the Lord and anticipation of the future meal with him in its perfection." Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 65.

[186] Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John,* Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers; London: Continuum, 2006), 78.

passage feature in the narrative on the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:20, 25; cf. Rev 19:9, 17.[187]

Also, some Pentecostal scholars entertain that the meal has eucharistic meal associations based on grammatical and intertextual analysis. For example, Thomas and Macchia, arguing from a theological perspective, also contend that the meal had eucharistic overtones and base their argument on a comparative reading of the word for "meal" in John's gospel; they argue:

> The appearance of the verb δειπνήσω (deipnēsō, "I will eat") might well remind readers that δεῖπνον (*deipnon*, "dinner") occurs in four places in John's gospel (12:2; 13:2, 4; 21:20), each of which has sacramental overtones, suggesting that Jesus' words in Rev 3:20 might be taken as a subtle reference to the Eucharist, as a sign of the fellowship to be enjoyed by Jesus and the church. The intimacy of this meal is made clear by the phrase "I with him and he with me."[188]

There is some merit to the conclusions of Boxall, Thomas, and Macchia that, based on grammatical and intertextual analysis, the meal can be understood to have eucharistic meal associations. For example, even though a claim for the eucharistic meal associations predicated on grammatical and intertextual analysis may be guilty

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[187] Thus, Boxall concludes that the church would have read the meal motif passage as "a summons to wake up and be ready to eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord worthily (1 Cor 11:27). What each of the seven congregations are now doing, and what countless other congregations do in every time and place, is an anticipation of that final banquet when the Lamb will feast with his bride (19:7)." Boxall, *Revelation*, 78. Smalley makes a similar argument from a grammatical analysis in support of a Eucharistic reading of the meal motif in Revelation 3:20. See Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 102.

[188] John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 120–21, ProQuest Ebook Central.

of a too narrow perspective, which overlooks other historical data, they do offer significant insights on possible shared understandings of the meaning of the word used to describe the meal, which also enriches my discussion on the eucharistic symbolisms of the meal.

Finally, Melissa Archer takes a thematic approach to the topic in her suggestion that the "liturgical setting of the Apocalypse" makes it likely that the meal references the Eucharist.[189] I found Archer's liturgical focus, which also underpinned her openness to the view that the meal possibly had a eucharistic association, quite compelling. This was not least because she sees a connection, as do others, between John's comments in Rev 1:10 of being ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ ("in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" the day he received the vision) regarding worship on a Sunday.[190] Thus, it is based on a contextual analysis of the passage that highlights its likely liturgical context, which would warrant a eucharistic attribution to the meal. At the same time, as with the grammatical and intertextual approaches discussed above, I maintain that a thematic analysis would also benefit from critical

[189] Archer argues, "In light of the liturgical setting of the Apocalypse and Jesus' messages to the churches, it is plausible that this imagery would be understood as referencing the Eucharist. In such a setting, this final plea from Jesus becomes all the more striking. While they eat and drink the flesh and blood of Jesus (John 6), the very one whose presence they invoke stands outside." Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 170, Kindle. Also, Newton, citing Archer in a footnote, suggests that "a reference to the Eucharist is probable." Newton, *Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 116.
[190] Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 130.

historical analyses to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the meal in the passage.

In summary, metaphorical interpretations of the meal motif of the Rev 3:20 passage also suggest an alleged future messianic meal meaning and, thus, a necessary eucharistic association or eucharistic sense likely to have been ascribed to it by some early Christians.

All variations, however, suggest that it is not unreasonable to claim, as I do, that the meal has eucharistic meal associations to some degree or another. Most of the approaches discussed above reflect some critical approaches (e.g., literary-contextual, grammatical and intertextual analyses). But, as a test for historical integrity, are there historical-critical attuned reflections on the meaning of the meal that support my claim of its eucharistic association?

3.2. Aune's Multiple Meanings Proposal

Aune argues that the knocking on the door and meal motif in Rev 3:20 are fundamentally metaphorical and thus reflect a "polyvalent ambiguity."[191] This refers to multiple meanings, reflecting the influence of the "conceptual world of Hellenistic magical divination" on the author and "the author's combination of imagery from Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman traditions" in his writing.[192] Thus, I understand his perspective to reflect a historical-critical attuned evaluation of the passage by

[191] Aune, *Revelation*, 253.
[192] Aune, *Revelation*, 253.

indicating the possible cultural influences on the author at the time of the passage's composition.

Furthermore, Aune supports his claim of the passages' "polyvalent ambiguity" by discussing a range of Greco-Roman sacral meal customs. For example, he examined the various papyri, highlighting invitations to dine with the god *Sarapis*.[193] He argues that the general understanding was that the god was present at the meal, a notion supported by the claim that the worshipper placed offerings to the deity on a sacrificial table in anticipation of the god being present.[194] Given such understanding, one can understand why Aune notes that in a "Christian context," the passages' meal motif could refer to the Lord's Supper, where the risen Christ was assumed to be "spiritually present."[195]

Also, Aune discusses how Greco-Roman magicians prepared meals to solicit the services of and establish a perpetual bond with a divine being (referred to as

[193] Aune, *Revelation*, 250.

[194] Aune, *Revelation*, 250. However, Aune also notes the impact of the Greco-Roman practices of such traditions on the Christian community (which will be developed in subsequent chapters), suggesting it may have been behind the prohibition concerning eating foods sacrificed to idols, he notes, "Though such banquets apparently had little to do with revelatory divination, they do reveal an ancient conception of one type of relationship between worshipers and deities that provides a possible background for understanding early Christian problems regarding eating sacrificial meat (a taboo of particular concern to John)." Aune, *Revelation*, 250.

[195] Aune, *Revelation*, 250. Aune also offers a caveat to this view, noting, "The meal to be shared by Jesus and the worshiper may be construed as the Lord's Supper, but it probably is a meal intended to be shared only by two, Jesus and the worshiper." Aune, *Revelation*, 253.

πάρεδρος δαίμων, i.e., *paredros diamon*) that also had oracular abilities.[196] He also notes that the sacral meal often consisted of bread and wine, though it may include other food and ritual items.[197] Aune also draws a correlation between the sacral meal tradition and the Rev 3:20 text, suggesting that the latter caricatured the sacral meal custom insofar that it is the risen Christ, not the practitioner in control of the situation.[198]

Furthermore, Aune highlights parallels with the sacral meal custom in Christian apocalyptic tradition. He notes that the Shepherd of Hermas *Vis*. 5:1 also cites a similar idea of a sacral meal identical to the Greco-Roman practices and the Rev 3:20 meal motif. He notes, "Hermas was eating when the Shepherd appeared to him. This and other passages in Hermas reveal that Hellenistic magical divination has had a positive impact on the author's conception of revelatory phenomena."[199]

Finally, I will note that Aune draws attention to how other phrases in the Rev 3:20 passage resonate with the Greco-Roman sacred meal tradition. For instance, he contends that the term "to enter in" (i.e., εἰσέρχεσθαι), though a common term for entry, is also a technical term for describing the entrance of the divine being in the vocabulary of the Greco-Roman tradition of sacred meals.[200] He notes, however, that in the case of the Greco-Roman sacral meal traditions, as it also appears to be the case

[196] Aune, *Revelation*, 252.
[197] Aune, *Revelation*, 252.
[198] Aune, *Revelation*, 263.
[199] Aune, *Revelation*, 253.
[200] Aune, *Revelation*, 254.

of Rev 3:20, the meal was with one person, whereas Eucharist celebrations involved a congregation.[201]

Aune's perspective implies that the meal motif in the passage yields multiple meanings because the author combines concepts from Greco-Roman, Christian, and Jewish traditions regarding sacral meals. Also, it signals a eucharistic association within a Christian context. This is a view on interpreting the meal that I find most compelling. I will discuss the reason in the next section, where I compare his analysis with the common interpretations (i.e., fellowship meal, eschatological focus, and eucharistic meal associations) discussed.

3.3. Meal Motif in Rev 3:20 as Symbolic of the Eucharist

The common interpretations discussed above indicate the varied meanings that the meal motif in Rev 3:20, as a symbol of "meaning-making and meaning-bearing potency,"[202] has and continues to evoke in readers. To that extent, all of them could be argued to be helpful 'proposals' for interpreting the meaning and significance of the meal for early and modern-day Christians. However, the historical agenda of my social-scientific method requires a critical examination of the interpretation of the meal to see what is at risk of being forfeited by not emphasising particular

[201] Aune, *Revelation*, 254.
[202] Lucretia B. Yaghjian, *Writing Theology Well 2nd Edition: A Rhetoric for Theological and Biblical Writers* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 249.

perspectives of historical significance, such as the eucharistic association view of the meal.

Therefore, given my assumption of symbolic meanings vis-à-vis the meal motif, it seems to me that most of the earliest written evidence reflects a fellowship meal understanding—often with evangelistic and devotional emphasis. It is not until we get to the sixth-century commentary of Oecumenius that we see a reference to the meal that probably reflects a eucharistic association. It seems fair to say that most of the early Christian commentary and writings on the Rev 3:20 passage, on balance, reflect and are content with devotional ideas of the perceived symbolism of the meal rather than critical appraisals. Therefore, as I have already indicated, they may not be the best places to look for meaning that betrays some historical assessments, as is my agenda in evaluating the symbolic meanings evoked by the meal.

As I indicated above, the recent scholarly proposals for the meaning of the meal motif reveal a quest for the passage's meaning that reflects some critical approaches to interpreting the passage and suggests they are not merely detailing the religious interest of the interpreter. For example, literary-contextual and lexical analyses underpin most proposals characterising the fellowship meal perspective. Likewise, even though the eschatological and eucharistic meal proposals highlighted a metaphorical meaning of the meal, these meanings were often supported by contextual and intertextual analysis. Finally, the multiple meanings positions, which

also highlighted a sacred meal motif, claimed to be predicated on a much broader historical and cultural evaluation of the passage, including comparing the Greco-Roman sacred meal tradition with Christian and Jewish sacred meal traditions.

Consequently, I find Aune's interpretation more compelling because his critical analysis considers the Greco-Roman world's shared cultural practices, thus highlighting the limitations of the non-eucharistic interpretations—especially when presented as the definitive meanings of the meal. For example, Aune convincingly shows the limits of perspectives that suggest the meal refers only to a fellowship meal when noting that the verb form of the word translated "to eat a meal" does not indicate the time of the meal, though he acknowledged that the noun form could refer to the evening meal or principal meal of the day.[203] In addition, he argues that the verb form may refer to the Jewish and Christian Passover meal (citing Luke 22:20 as an example) and the pagan sacral meal.[204]

I agree with Aune's claims concerning the inability to tell the exact time of the meal from the verb form of the word translated meal—for instance, Luke 17:8 uses the same word, too. However, while the passage's narrative plot may lead one to infer that the meal refers to a meal eaten at the end of the working day, the passage itself does not explicitly say so. Thus, it still leaves the time of the meal open to conjecture. Therefore, it seems plausible to suggest that the meaning of the word

[203] Aune, *Revelation*, 261.
[204] Aune, *Revelation*, 261.

translated meal may be alluding to much more than a description of the main meal of the day, which also makes it open to metaphorical interpretations by the author of the Apocalypse.

While arguably less concerned with evaluating the merits of the theological focus of the eschatological motifs of the meal for Christian praxis, Aune's critical assessment, however, adds weight to interpretations that argue for the meal's eucharistic association and can still be used to bolster eschatological motifs with eucharistic leanings. Aune's assessment achieves this in the ways it convincingly demonstrates how it is possible that ideas from Greco-Roman, Christian, and Jewish sacred meal traditions were being drawn upon in this passage insofar that he was able to make clear parallels between the description of the meal in the passage with accounts of sacral meals in some of these other traditions.

These sacral meal perspectives suggest that assessing the meal motif in Rev 3:20 for its "paradigmatic associations"[205] with these other sacral meal traditions, as Aune does, is worthwhile. I maintain that such a diverse cultural and literary context likely informs the meaning of the meal; thus, eucharistic (and eschatological) meaning proposals emphasising the sacredness of the meal may reflect a more faithful interpretation of the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage, notwithstanding the value of the other perspectives of the meal's symbolic meaning.

[205] McLean defines "paradigmatic associations" as "an associative field of interrelated words that belong to a single conceptual category." McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 22.

Aune's historical assessment of the meal motif of the passage suggests that the meal's meaning is 'open' but not 'borderless'. By this, I mean that the common interpretations of the meal discussed do not represent the definitive meanings. Therefore, the meaning is 'open'. At the same time, the meal's meaning is limited to interpretations reflecting sacral meal traditions. Therefore, the meaning is not 'borderless'. Thus, Pentecostals (and non-Pentecostals alike) can understand the meal motif in Rev 3:20 as a "meaning-making and meaning-bearing" symbol to offer a non-narrative of institution text to develop a theology of the Eucharist.[206]

3.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have reviewed some of the early Christian commentaries and writings, non-Pentecostal and Pentecostal commentaries on the meaning of the meal motif in Rev 3:20. I also claimed that the various perspectives on the meaning of the meals might describe the meal motif when considered as a symbol of "meaning-making and meaning-bearing" potency. However, based on Aune's historical-critical attuned analysis of the Rev 3:20 passage, I found the view that the meal has eucharistic meal associations more compelling. I noted that Aune's analysis indicated that the passage was fundamentally metaphorical, offering multiple meanings insofar as various sacral meal traditions informed it. Thus, I claimed that the meal has an 'open' (i.e., not restricted to, for example, fellowship meal interpretations) but

[206] Indeed, Pentecostal scholars, like Melissa Archer, have already signalled the significance of this passage, and the Apocalypse in general, for eucharistic considerations. See Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 325.

not a 'borderless' scope of meaning (i.e., meanings cannot reflect anything more than a sacral meal motif to be historically accurate). Furthermore, I argued that the significance of identifying the meal's sacral meal association justifies my proposal for a eucharistic reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20.

Finally, I also understand that the significance of this eucharistic reading of the meal, particularly with its appreciation of its Greco-Roman context, opens additional lines of enquiry of socio-political significance besides the obvious sacramental factors associated with its sacral meal association. Therefore, in the next chapter, I contend that the relationship between the socio-political and religious determinants of the meal becomes more apparent after analysing the compositional matters of the book of Revelation and the setting of the seven churches.

CHAPTER 4

COMPOSITION OF THE APOCALYPSE

In the previous chapter, I argued that interpreting the meal motif in Rev 3:20 as having eucharistic meal associations was more compelling than the other common interpretations discussed. Such interpretations were more convincing to me because they reflected a historical analysis of the meal, signalling its comparability with Jewish and wider Greco-Roman meal traditions. Consequently, I claimed that understanding that the meal had eucharistic meal associations also gives Pentecostals a non-narrative of institution text to discuss the Eucharist.

A significant claim of my thesis is that the meal motif in the message to the church in Laodicea, in Rev 3:20, can be interpreted to highlight what appears to me to be the social as much as the sacramental dimensions of the Eucharist. By social dimensions of the Eucharist, I also mean the societal determinants of the practice of the rite (e.g., its society critiquing, shaping and ordering potency).[207] But, is there any justification for such interpretations?

In this chapter, I will argue that given the social themes evident in the compositional matters relating to the Apocalypse in general and the Rev 3:20 passage

[207] There is an overlap here with my understanding of 'social/society' and 'culture' insofar as I am alluding to social/society here to capture various aspects of the "historical," "normative," and "genetic" aspects of culture that I described in my triptych understanding of culture in my introduction.

in particular, claims of the meal's eucharistic meal associations necessitate considerations of its social as much as religious dimensions from contemporary hermeneuts. Finally, I will highlight how such a social consideration bears on the contemporary discussion about the social and sacramental dimensions of the Eucharist in Pentecostalism.

First, however, I will analyse some secondary sources by reviewing some frequently-cited non-Pentecostal commentaries and special studies on the Apocalypse and discuss matters relating to its composition. In this composition review, I will identify interpretative traditions and shared scholarly assumptions concerning the book's composition. Therefore, for the most part, the epistemology and methodology of the scholar's work reviewed are not evaluated for their possible influence on their claims. To avoid repetition, I will not include the discussions on this topic from the Pentecostal commentaries I also review, except to occasionally highlight how my ideas compare with other scholars writing in the Pentecostal tradition.

The composition review will also summarise common claims concerning the book's author, date, social setting, and literary genre (i.e., historical issues I understand are indispensable to a comprehensive interpretation of the Rev 3:20 passage within my proposed social-scientific interpretive framework). The review will also highlight critical themes of socio-religious and, consequently, cultural

significance that emerged from my analysis. These themes impact the meaning of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 (i.e., emphasising the social as much as religious dimensions of the meal and, by extension, the Eucharist). These themes are sacrifice, Greco-Roman commensality, the Eucharist, and the imperial cults.

Finally, by highlighting these four critical themes of cultural significance, I also aim to signal early on in my thesis the connection I see between the relationship between these themes and the meal motif vis-à-vis the 'culture' concepts in mimetic theory.

4.1. Author

Many NT scholars have found identifying the author of the book of Revelation quite problematic. This problem exists not least because, as Beasley-Murray notes, although the book bears the same name as the author of the Fourth Gospel (and thus one may assume they have shared authorship), it, however, betrays a difference in style with the Fourth Gospel, which makes it difficult to claim with complete confidence that the same author wrote both works.[208] Consequently, some scholars seem more prepared to place a premium on the message's content rather than the messenger's identity. For example, Beasley-Murray notes:

[208] George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (London: Oliphants, 1974), 35–36.

> The issue of real importance regarding this book is not the identity of the author but the authenticity of the claim in its opening paragraph: 'The revelation *of Jesus Christ*, which God gave him . . . That is settled not by the name of the writer, but by the nature of his work. [209]

My Christian faith commitment commends the high view of Scripture that arguably underpins such perspectives as Beasley-Murray's on the topic of authorship. However, because of my academic interests (which also stem from my Christian faith commitment), I am also intrigued by the more critical leaning views about the significance of the message vis-à-vis the messenger that reflect a historical-critical attuned analysis of the topic.

This intrigue persists because such historical-critical attuned perspectives typically aim to identify often overlooked critical social, political, and cultural, as much as religious, factors that existed during the time of the composition of a literary work. I also want to ascertain to what extent these factors could have impacted the author's outlook and its significance to the reference to the meal motif in Rev 3.20.[210]

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[209] Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 37. Similarly, Beale is unconcerned whether John the Apostle or another John wrote the book. Instead, he argued that the author's identity as either an Apostle or another John does "not affect the message of the book." Beale, *Revelation*, 35.

[210] Such concerns about the implication of the 'intersections' in John's life are reflected in Thomas's assessment of John's vision while "in the Spirit." For example, Thomas notes, "Thus the Apocalypse is that point of dynamic convergence and intersection of all that John is, including the revelation he experiences. Consequently, it is precisely because of John's knowledge of the OT, the apocalyptic tradition, the Johannine Jesus tradition, and the worshipping community of which he is a part that enables him to write 'in the Spirit'." John Christopher Thomas, *The Apocalypse: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Cleveland: CPT

From this assessment of the text's "horizon," how these factors bear on a contemporary and particularly pious reception and appropriation of the texts can then be analysed.

Therefore, in the next section, I outline the two broad views on the authorship of Revelation and how they address these factors.[211] I will end the section by identifying and discussing which view I found the most compelling and signalling its significance to my thesis's theoretical and contextual aspects.

4.1.1. John the Apostle, John the Elder

The views that claim that the author of Revelation was either John the Apostle or John the Elder do not typically rely on biblical texts (internal evidence) but on early Christian writings (external evidence).[212] For instance, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Swete argues that the author of the book of Revelation is John the

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Press, 2012), 45. Thus, it could be said that my concern is what the Spirit allows John to write given his social, cultural, and political context.

[211] Discussions about the authorship of Revelation are often presented under two broad headings. The first is views that rely on external evidence, especially the comments of early Christian writings. The second is views that rely on internal evidence by appealing to the comments on the authorship from within the text.

[212] Some scholars seemed more prepared to vacillate between views that reflected the internal and external outcomes, as discussed in this section. For example, Ladd, on the one hand, could be understood to support the John the Apostle authorship view insofar that he argued that such authorship is also possible because, he argues, there is enough historical evidence to support the notion that John lived in the city of Ephesus to a ripe old age. That said, he notes that John did not describe himself as an apostle but rather a prophet (Rev 22:9) and called the book of Revelation a prophecy (e.g., Rev 1:3; 22:7). Thus, he concludes that the author was probably a well-known prophet in the churches of Asia if he was not the apostle. See Ladd, *Revelation*, 7.

Apostle, based on traditional Christian assumptions of authorship.[213] At the same time, he is open to the view that the author could have been John the Elder because he claimed that a vast majority of second-century testimonies do not deny this possibility and also because John of Asia is called a "disciple" and not an "apostle" in many of the earliest references to him.[214] Thus, he concludes that the notion that the earliest Christian tradition maintained that it was John the Apostle who wrote the book still does not exclude the possibility of John the Elder.[215]

Proponents of the claim that John the Apostle wrote the book also have to address the often-noted stylistic differences between the Fourth Gospel and the book of Revelation.[216] One of the ways they refute these differences is to claim that John was not using an *amanuensis* (someone akin to a secretary) when he wrote the book of Revelation, hence the presence of solecisms. For instance, Ladd noted the difficulty of reconciling the diverse writing style of the Fourth Gospel and Revelation, arguing that it was probably the case (as in Rom. 16:22) that a secretary wrote the Gospel—

[213] See, Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, clxxxv.
[214] Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, clxxviii.
[215] Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, clxxxv.
[216] For example, there is consensus among many contemporary scholars that the Fourth Gospel is written in impeccable Greek, while the book of Revelation is replete with solecisms. See G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Revelation, Book Of," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1032, WORD*search*CROSS e-book.

while John wrote Revelation, reflecting his unpolished Hebraic Greek.[217] Claims of authorship from internal evidence, however, yield other possibilities.

4.1.2. John, a Christian-Jewish Prophet, with Possible Palestinian associations

The view that suggests that the author of Revelation was a Christian-Jewish Prophet named John centres on internal evidence, that is, comments about the author's identity from the text itself. Proponents of this view include Charles, who argued that the author of Revelation was "John the prophet—a Palestinian Jew, who late in life migrated to Asia Minor."[218] The internal evidence[219] he points to includes the claim that John, the author of the Fourth Gospel and Epistle, did not include his name in his work, whereas John, the writer of the Apocalypse, did.[220] Moreover, he claims that John, who wrote the Apocalypse, did not claim to be the beloved disciple of the Lord.[221] Also, he notes that John, the writer of the Apocalypse, does not claim to be an apostle but a prophet.[222]

Consequently, for most proponents of this view, the author's association with the prophetic tradition is often seen as key to determining the identity and, therefore,

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[217] Ladd, *Revelation*, 7–8.
[218] R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John: With Introduction, Notes, and Indices, also the Greek Text and English Translation,* The International Critical Commentary, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), xxxviii.
[219] Charles also marshals some external evidence to support this claim by noting what he claims to be the silence of church writers from A.D. 180 regarding the residence of John, the Apostle in Asia Minor, which is also indicative of him not being the author. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, xlv.
[220] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, xl.
[221] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, xl.
[222] Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, xl.

the author's vocation. They typically support this claim by citing passages like Rev 1:1-3, 10:11, 18-19, 22:7 and 22:9,[223] highlighting the author's apparent association with the prophetic tradition.

Some commentators have also suggested that the internal evidence indicates that the author might have had Palestinian associations also. For example, Charles argued that John was a Palestinian Jew because it best explains what he claims to be John's close familiarity with the OT texts that characterise the book of Revelation.[224] Likewise, Aune also argued that this view is probable, mainly because the author wrote with a keen awareness of the OT (and that he wrote an apocalypse, which was popular in early Palestinian Judaism) and also that the author displayed an understanding of the Jewish Temple and cult in Jerusalem.[225]

4.1.3. A writing with the social and spiritual foci of the prophetic tradition

The views based on the 'external' and 'internal' evidence discussed above have some merit. Considering the external evidence, this view, for example, can be instrumental if one attempts to develop a biblical interpretation of the Eucharist based on a strictly phenomenological or synchronic hermeneutical approach. Such an interpretation

[223] E.g. see Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 68; Aune, *Revelation*, liii; Reddish, *Revelation*, 19–19; Beale, *Revelation*, 36; Gerhard Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 62, 64; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 49–50.

[224] Charles, *Revelation*, xliv.

[225] Aune, *Revelation*, xlix.

could be based on a comparative analysis of meal motifs in NT works attributed to John the Apostle, which also feature in Revelation. Thus, in this example, the "manna" discourse of John 6:31ff, with its arguably eucharistic overtones, can inform the "hidden manna" discourse in Rev 2:17. The significance of this reading for my thesis is that it indicates how eucharistic motifs can be used to inform interpretations of the meals in the letters to the seven churches.[226]

However, while such interpretations may contribute to eucharistic theology, they are simultaneously open to making hasty generalisations about authorship, given the contrary evidence for the Christian-Jewish Prophet identity of the author within the text itself. Furthermore, the early church appeared to have had some flawed practices regarding canonising certain documents. For example, Koester makes the compelling claim that it was the practice of the early Christians to attribute an apostle to a work they valued.[227] Likewise, Caird also argues that the second-century sources from which the claims of John the Apostle's authorship of the book of Revelation stem are "demonstrably unreliable."[228] He points out how the early church fathers were wrong about other people's identities in their work, citing, for

[226] Some scholars have made this correlation, although they were not arguing for a synchronic hermeneutic reading of the text that claims John the Apostle and the author of Revelation to be the same person. See Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 88; Aune, *Revelation*, 189; Boxall, *Revelation*, 60.
[227] Koester, *Revelation*, 66.
[228] Caird, *Revelation*, 4.

example, how Irenaeus confuses James the Apostle with James, the brother of Jesus.[229]

Such early church customs and the apparent errors associated with them raise questions about the accuracy of the claims of the authorship of Revelation based on the comments of the early church fathers.[230] And these questions only increase my scepticism towards the claim that John the Apostle wrote the book of Revelation. Thus, claims for the authorship of Revelation based on the external evidence, as discussed above, leave more to be desired for me concerning the identity of the most likely author of the book of Revelation.

On the contrary, the view that the author was a man named John, a Christian-Jewish Prophet with probable Palestinian associations, offers a clearer picture of the identity of the author of Revelation. This is because the view centres on verifiable internal evidence (i.e., the author's information about his identity that can be gleaned directly from the text itself).

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[229] Caird, *Revelation,* 4. Citing *Haer*. iii. 12.14 f.

[230] Furthermore, other significant external evidence contradicts the view from the external evidence discussed so far. For instance, Krodel noted the implausibility of the claim that John the Apostle is the author of Revelation because he claims that if the composition of the book were during the reign of Domitian (i.e., circa A.D. 95), this would mean that John was over ninety years old. Krodel, *Revelation*, 62. However, from other claims from external evidence, it seems improbable that John the Apostle was alive at this time. For example, Charles argued that it is likely that John the Apostle was martyred before A.D. 70, according to the "Papias-tradition." Charles, *Revelation*, xxxviii.

The association of John with the prophetic tradition signals a counter-cultural theme in his message. As Boxall also indicated, within the cultural context of his writing, John's revelation contains messages of the hope of renewal and restoration and prophetic exhortations and warnings about complacency and compromise (Rev 2:5; 8:13; 9:21; 13:9–10; 14:12; 16:15).[231] Thus, John's prophetic exhortations reflect spiritual transformation and counter-cultural themes (or 'socio-religious' themes). The prophetic perspective on John highlights his social as much as spiritual foci.

As I have indicated so far and will argue later in my thesis, these social, as much as religious, foci are significant to reflections on the eucharistic meal associations of the meal motif in Rev 3:20. Much has been said about the spiritual-sacramental dimensions of the Eucharist in Pentecostal eucharistic theology. However, there is also a need to consider the social dimension and its relation to the spiritual-sacramental dimension.

An emphasis on the prophetic calling of John as described also helps to highlight the need for this social consideration in interpreting the meal motif in Rev 3:20 and, by extension, the Eucharist. I also see the justification for this line of enquiry in my findings concerning the date of the composition of the Apocalypse, which I discuss next.

[231] See Boxall, *Revelation*, 2.

4.2. Date of Composition

Dating the book of Revelation is also beset with many challenges. One challenge is that one can marshal internal and external evidence to support the two leading perspectives on this topic. These perspectives are the earlier (i.e., pre-A.D. 70) and later-date perspectives (i.e., sometime between A.D. 80-100). Another critical issue characterising discussions on dating Revelation is whether Christians experienced persecution during its composition. Furthermore, what one concludes on this matter can affect one's interpretation of the messages to the churches. In the following sections, I discuss the two leading perspectives and end the section with comments that also include a discussion on the significance of the findings to my thesis.

4.2.1. The early first-century A.D. and late first-century A.D. date view

The early first-century A.D. view typically centres on two claims. First, a claim based on Rev 17:9-11 suggests that John endured persecution under Nero since the sixth head of the beast allegedly coincided with Nero's reign.[232] Second, there is the claim based on Rev 11:1-2, which suggests that the Temple was not yet destroyed (although a literal reading of the passage might imply that certain aspects of it appear destroyed, proponents of this view also argue that the sanctuary remained

[232] See Beasley-Murray, "Revelation, Book Of," 1027.

intact).[233] Consequently, some scholars have argued for a composition period during the reign of Nero before A.D. 70.

However, the consensus amongst most contemporary scholars is that the book was composed later, with the most popular period being during the end of the reign of Emperor Domitian circa A.D. 95-98. This later date perspective rests on a) the commentary on the date by the early church fathers, especially Irenaeus,[234] b) the assumption that Domitian persecuted Christians, [235] and finally, c) the textual evidence which highlights how the Nero *redivivus* myth and the reference to Babylon as a pseudonym for Rome were prevalent after A.D. 70.[236]

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[233] Beasley-Murray, "Revelation, Book Of," 1027. For a perspective on the impact of the beleaguered state of the Temple, see Smalley, *Revelation*, 3.

[234] See Reddish, *Revelation*, 16; Krodel, *Revelation*, 62; Collins, *Crisis*, 76. A case for the later dating of the book of Revelation is based on Irenaeus' comments, in which he is noted to have said about the book of Revelation, "That was seen no very long time since, but almost in our own day, toward the end of Domitian's reign." Irenaeus *Haer.* 5.30.3, as cited by Beasley-Murray, "Revelation, Book Of," 1027. It has also been noted that Eusebius echoed this conclusion in Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 3.18-20; 5.8.6. See Beasley-Murray, "Revelation, Book Of," 1027. This is perhaps the most popular external evidence that proponents of the later date view marshal. Proponents of this view also often use it to support the notion that Christians in Asia Minor experienced persecution during the reign of Emperor Domitian. In addition to Irenaeus, Ladd cites a third-century writing of Victorinus that states that the emperor Domitian condemned John to the mines of Patmos. See Ladd, *Revelation*, 8.

[235] Aune helpfully summarises the reason for this when he notes that "The Domitianic date for Revelation has often been justified by correlating the evidence for the persecution of Christians within the book with the view widely held among ancient authors, both pagan and Christian, that Domitian was a detestable autocrat and incompetent ruler whose principate was a reign of terror." Aune, *Revelation*, lxvii.

[236] For instance, Reddish claims that Rev 13 and 17 are probably allusions to the Nero *redivivus* myth, which he claims was popular during the end of the first century. Also, he notes the use of "Babylon" as a pseudonym for Rome in passages like Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21, claiming that this was a popular way of referring to Rome post the destruction of the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70. See, Reddish, *Revelation*, 13. Also, Collins notes the use

4.2.2. A text written at a time of social and religious unrest

Though in favour of a later date, Beale also notes the complexity surrounding the composition of the book and concedes that "there is no single argument that point clearly to the early or the late date. The early date could be right, but the cumulative weight of evidence points to the late date."[237] He argues that both the early and late dates still deliver the same interpretative outcomes, that is, understanding the book of Revelation as a "polemic against Rome and especially against compromise with ungodly Roman culture."[238]

I agree with Beal that both perspectives on the date are plausible—if the idea of the obvious 'anti-empire-rhetoric' meta-theme of Revelation is the warrant for such a claim. Also, the idea of a 'two dates' reading is entertained by other scholars and, therefore, based on some scholarly consensus (e.g., Aune develops this inference in his two "editions" view).[239] Thus, while I acknowledge that there is perhaps more compelling evidence for the later date perspective, I do not see the need to claim any

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of the symbolic name for Rome (i.e., Babylon) in Revelation as the most apparent evidence for a later date by arguing that the name was used after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. See Collins, *Crisis*, 76. Other early external sources, like 2 *Baruch* and 4 Ezra, which condemn Rome as Babylon because of the temple's destruction, are also used to support this point. See Beasley-Murray, "Revelation, Book Of," 1027.

[237] Beale, *Revelation*, 4.

[238] Beale, *Revelation*, 4.

[239] Aune argues that there are some merits to the arguments for both the earlier and later date for the composition of Revelation and suggests that the book comprises two editions—with the first edition probably written at an earlier time, before A.D. 60, and the final edition at the later time, during the reign of Domitian or Trajan. See Aune, *Revelation*, lvii.

particular date in light of the jumbled findings associated with them.[240] Instead, given the plausibility of the various views discussed, it seems to me that a 'living document' understanding of the composition of the text is needed (i.e., one that understands it to be a redacted document that communicates a central message).[241]

Also, I agree with the second part of Beale's comment[242] because it addresses what also seems to me to be the central message from both the early and late date perspectives: Revelation presents a culture-critical outlook. Indeed, the arguments from the earlier date view[243] and the arguments for the late date view[244] all reflect a

[240] For example, regarding the external evidence claims, Aune notes the claim that Irenaeus introduced the view that the book was written during the reign of Domitian is undermined by the title of two Syriac versions of Revelation, which places John's exile to Patmos during the reign of Nero. Moreover, regarding the jumbled views in the internal evidence, Aune highlights how the situation of the early churches could be set between the early A.D. 70s and the early A.D. 90s. For example, he notes how, after the earthquake in circa A.D. 60–61, the church in Laodicea would have needed time to amass its wealth and have the independent reputation it is claimed to have had in Rev 3:17. Therefore, it is more likely that the letter to the church is addressed at a later—end of the first-century date—rather than an earlier date. On the other hand, he also notes that the reference to the church's wealth and independence has been linked to its ability to rebuild itself without imperial assistance after the earthquake above, which took place during the reign of Nero. Aune, *Revelation*, lxiii, lxviii, lxix. Thus, the varied and overlapping social context that the book of Revelation describes is challenging to use as a marker to identify the date of the book for an exclusive early or late composition date theory.

[241] I am also aware of other proposals that discuss the possible polyvalent and thus almost 'spiritual' sense of the day of John's vision noted in Rev 1:10 (i.e., not least giving its possible OT connection, John's pneumatic experience on the day, and the Parousia motifs that it also may be understood to highlight). See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 40. However, my project focuses on the more 'concrete' aspects concerning the possible date of the composition that could be gleaned from the social setting of the composition.

[242] I.e., Revelation as a "polemic against . . . compromise with ungodly Roman culture." Beale, *Revelation*, 4.

[243] Whether arguing for the persecution of Christians under Nero or the beleaguered state of the Temple.

sense of social and religious unrest, which John can be understood to claim is a consequence of Roman culture and Christian accommodation of such culture.

This central message is not held hostage by any one perspective on the date of composition. Because the two edition's view synthesises both early and late-date views, it also preserves the social aspect of this central message. Nevertheless, again, I see in this observation of social unrest surrounding the production of the reference to the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage a warrant for examining the meal (and thus, the Eucharist) for its social dimensions, too. In the next section, I will further discuss the hermeneutical implications of this central message, where I evaluate perspectives on the book's social setting.

4.3. Social Setting

In this section, I will review some of the typical views of the social setting of the book of Revelation discussed in the commentaries reviewed. In summary, these views suggest that the social setting is either characterised by a) widespread persecution of Christians, b) imminent persecution of Christians, the experience of suffering and so-called "sporadic and local" persecution, or c) a diverse social context. I will discuss what I consider is the most convincing view and signal its significance to social factors I claim are associated with the meal motif in Rev 3:20.

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[244] Whether arguing for the persecution of Christians under Domitian or the destruction of the Temple.

4.3.1. Widespread persecution of Christians

Reflecting what has been a popular evangelical Christian perspective, Preston and Hanson argue that the author of Revelation wrote it during a period of actual persecution of Christians in Asia during the reign of Emperor Domitian.[245] They support this claim by arguing that Domitian's reign was characterised by emperor worship, noting that he demanded his officials refer to him as "our Lord and God" and that he had close members of his family either executed or banished because, as Christians, they would not participate in emperor worship.[246] Also, they contend that the worship of the emperor was blasphemous to Christians since he was a man and note:

> This is what gives its sense of crisis to John's book. A 'no compromise' issue had arisen, the outcome of which would mean death for the Christians. It could only be avoided by apostasy, by publicly throwing incense on one of the altars to the Emperor.[247]

[245] While I acknowledge that this is a relatively older commentary, it does offer a technical and comparatively fuller explanation of this view than I had come across in other more recent evangelical commentaries. For example, writing more succinctly, Elwell is also equally convinced that Domitian "abused his imperial power by demanding that he be worshiped as a deity and he viciously persecuted the church." Walter A. Elwell, "Revelation," in *The Marshal Pickering Commentary on the NIV*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (London: Marshal Pickering 1991), 1199.

[246] Ronald H Preston and Anthony T. Hanson, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine: Introduction and Commentary,* Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1949), 25.

[247] Preston and Hanson, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*, 25.

They suggest that Domitian resembled Nero because he also persecuted the church.[248] Thus, they argue that "John therefore takes this current belief and uses it to symbolise the Roman Empire in its character as persecutor of the church."[249]

Although the view that there was widespread persecution of Christians by Emperor Domitian has become the popular Christian view of the setting of the book of Revelation, some scholars have provided contrasting evidence that undermines the negative portrayal of Domitian and the general persecution of Christians motif. Aune contends that the traditional view that Christians experienced persecution during the reign of Domitian is indefensible because, for example, he claims that Irenaeus never mentions that Domitian persecuted Christians, even though he (Irenaeus) introduced the idea that the author of Revelation composed the work during his reign.[250] In addition, Aune suggests that the negative characterisation of Domitian by the Roman politicians was, to some extent, the outcome of a vindictive strategy on the part of these politicians because Domitian challenged the way they

[248] This persecution, they add, is substantiated by referencing contemporary writers like Juvenal (circa A.D. 100), who they claim compared Domitian with Nero in one of his poems. See Preston and Hanson, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*, 95.
[249] Preston and Hanson, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*, 95–96.
[250] Aune, *Revelation*, lxvii. Moreover, he cites comments from Croix, a Roman social historian who claimed that "We know of no persecution by the Roman government until 64, and there was no general persecution until that of Decius. Between 64 and 250 there were only isolated, local persecutions; and even if the total number of victims was quite considerable (as I think it probably was), most individual outbreaks must usually have been quite brief." Croix, *Early Christians*, 211, as cited by Aune, *Revelation*, lxvii.

managed the provinces in that they did not reflect his concern for the welfare of the poor and upper classes.[251]

4.3.2. Imminent persecution of Christians, the experience of suffering and "sporadic and local" persecution of Christians

Another view on the setting proposed by scholars is that John anticipated persecution, which underpins the references to suffering in the book of Revelation. For example, Caird argues that the purpose of Revelation was to warn and prepare the churches for imminent persecution.[252] He supports this claim by suggesting that it rests on the biblical prophetic tradition and the purpose of prophecy, which John claims his message to be (Rev 1:2-3), and its aim of revealing God's purposes to humanity.[253]

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[251] Aune, *Revelation*, lxviii. Moreover, Boxall also argued that the 'persecution under Emperor Domitian' claim is undermined by other external sources, like the early-second-century Ascension of Isaiah text, which he claims depicts the persecution of Christians under Nero and not under Domitian. Moreover, he notes that the historical sources from which we get the notion that Domitian persecuted Christians were biased insofar that they were written by historians (i.e., Pliny the Younger, Dio Chrysostom, Suetonius, and Tacitus) whom he claimed had a vested interest in denigrating the Flavians (and thus, Domitian) in favour of the Antonines. See Boxall, *Revelation*, 13. Caird also claims that the popular notion that Emperor Domitian was a persecutor of the church is not based on incontestable evidence. He notes, for example, that the letter Pliny wrote to Trajan in 112 A.D. (Ep. x.96) indicates that Christians were not persecuted in masses, or significantly enough since the letter describes Pliny as being unsure as to how to handle legal cases that involved Christians. Also, Caird claims it is possible the Domitian, whom he also described as an insecure emperor, ordered the execution of high-ranking persons accused of being Christians because they were simply that (i.e., "high-ranking persons") and not because they were Christians. See Caird, *Revelation*, 20–21.

[252] Caird, *Revelation*, 12.

[253] Caird, *Revelation*, 11–12. Also writing much earlier, Swete notes: "The Churches of Asia knew themselves to be on the brink of an encounter with the greatest power the world had seen . . . In the light of the revelation vouchsafed to him the prophet John sees clearly that an

Some have also argued that Christians experienced suffering in general, which, as it is often referred to, was also "sporadic and local"[254] during the composition of Revelation. For example, Ladd argued that contrary to some scholars that posit Revelation was written in anticipation of an imminent worldwide persecution of the church, the prophecy of Revelation, he claims, should not be assumed to characterise the experience of a global persecution of the church because it "goes far beyond any known historical situation in the first century."[255] He claims this is because while it may be the case that Christians were experiencing local troubles (e.g., John's exile to Patmos and Antipas' death in Pergamum cited in Rev 2:13), there is, in his opinion, no indication of widespread persecution of the church during this period. Furthermore, he argues that the persecution inflicted by Domitian was not general but towards select families in Rome.[256] He claims, "Concrete references to persecutions in the Revelation are all illustrations of the hostility the world bears to the church."[257]

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age of persecution is beginning, and that it will affect not only the Churches of Asia, but the Church throughout the Roman world." Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, xcii.

[254] See Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 50, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[255] Ladd, *Revelation*, 9.

[256] Ladd, *Revelation*, 9.

[257] Ladd, *Revelation*, 10.

Also, in keeping with this so-called "minimalist" view of early Christian persecution,[258] some scholars have argued that the apparent references to persecution suggest an application of the persecution motif as a literary device that points the reader back to an earlier time of persecution to create a sense of tension. For example, Boxall contends that the persecution motifs of the book of Revelation have to do more with the influence of Nero's past activity against Christians in Rome and what he claims to be the visionary anticipation of what Rome will be like. He supports this claim by arguing that the internal evidence suggests that the churches of Revelation had a mixed experience, with some appearing to be undergoing or anticipating persecution (Rev 2:9, 13, 3:9), while others were not, and thus were being criticised for their complacency and compromise (Rev 2:4, 14-15, 20, 3:1-2, 16).[259] Also, while noting the scant historical evidence for the alleged widespread persecution of early

[258] See Paul Middleton, "Introduction," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Paul Middleton (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2020), 3, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[259] See Boxall, *Revelation*, 12–13. Aune also argues that the suffering motif of the book of Revelations appears to be predicated on a past or future (or combination of the two) suffering and not so much present suffering at the hands of the Romans. He supports this claim by arguing that in the first instance, Rev 2–3 does not suggest that Christians suffered at the hands of Roman authorities as much as suggesting they suffered at the hands of "Jews" (citing Rev 2:9–19 and 3:9). Moreover, he notes that those responsible for the death of Antipas in Pergamum are not mentioned and claims that the textual context indicated that this happened in the past and not at the hands of the Roman authorities. He notes that there are also references to suffering in the future in the rest of Revelation, citing passages like Rev 7:14, which depict people who have died in the great tribulation. However, Aune also notes that John speaks of sharing the suffering with the saints (Rev 1:9). See Aune, *Revelation*, lxiv–xv.

Christians, Moss problematises the term 'persecution' altogether.[260] And she makes the compelling claim that some early Christians utilised the language of violence for theological purposes.[261]

These claims in the "minimalist" view tradition suggest that the time-honoured view of the widespread persecution of Christians during the reign of Domitian is not irrefutable. They make these proposals (i.e., imminent persecution, the experience of suffering and "sporadic and local" persecution) more convincing to me as they are based on historical and literary contextual analysis. Moreover, they do not categorically deny that Christians suffered (in contrast to the biblical witness) but, for the most part, rightly limit such discourse on suffering (and possible persecution) to periodic local events or as something emerging that will intensify sometime soon.[262]

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[260] Moss highlights the anachronistic issues that underpin the discourse on the ancient conception of persecution. She cautions against the uncritical application of the term that does not account for its, at times, apparently less than severe meaning. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 50–51.

[261] Moss observes that in Asia Minor, "The instrumental role that suffering plays in Paul is mirrored in Revelation's statement that a certain number of deaths was required to fulfill some kind of cosmic lack (Rev 6:11). Even before historical Christians started to die, therefore, there was a very strong sense both that death was inevitable and that these deaths would be connected to the greater affairs of the cosmos: either because they served an instrumental purpose in the divine plan, or because they were the result of demonic intervention. There was, therefore, from the beginnings of the Christian mission in Asia Minor, a demonstrable interest in theologizing violence." Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 51–52. Also, see Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013).

[262] Beale also argues that a middle ground could be taken concerning the debates around persecution. He notes that all agree that sporadic persecution of Christians took place until

4.3.3. Diverse social context

Other commentators have argued that multiple issues characterise the setting of the book of Revelation. I will discuss some examples from two methodological assumptions in this section. First, writing from a synchronic perspective, which also sees the author of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel as the same person, Smalley argued that internal conflicts within the communities of believers in Asia Minor (and not just persecution from without) are essential to understanding the social setting and purpose of the writing of the book of Revelation.[263] He supports this claim by first arguing that the book of Revelation is part of the Johannine corpus, of which he claims that the Fourth Gospel is also an essential text. Second, Smalley also argues that this corpus captures the history of what he refers to as the "Johannine community,"[264] which he claims was initially made up exclusively of the seven churches of Revelation.[265]

John wrote. However, he also notes that John seems to talk of future persecution, which he perceived gradually intensifying during his writing. See Beale, *Revelation*, 29.

[263] Smalley, *Revelation*, 5.

[264] Smalley, *Revelation*, 4.

[265] Smalley, *Revelation*, 52. Moreover, he suggests that the Fourth Gospel was written to three different types of communities of Christians in Asia Minor. These communities were the Jewish converts to Christianity, which had a low view of Christ's divinity; the Hellenistic Christians, which had a low view of Christ's humanity; and a third group that he claims had a more balanced view of Christianity. By citing passages like John 4:42, 13:34-35, and 21-23, he argues that the Fourth Gospel set out to address the conflicts that arose from the communities because of their living together with diverse Christologies. Thus, he concludes that the letters to the churches in Rev 2–3 likewise betray evidence of people from mixed backgrounds, and by citing passages like Rev 2:2, 5; 3:1-2; 9:20, he suggests that the messages are intended to challenge them to faithful living. Smalley, *Revelation*, 4–5

On the other hand, writing from a historical-critical perspective, which does not assume shared authorship of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel, Collins argued that the book of Revelation indicates that the congregations in Asia Minor faced many issues. These issues included conflict with both Jews and Gentiles and also a conflict around wealth in Asia Minor during the book's composition.[266] She indicates that the issues around conflict with Jews can be gleaned from the discourse in the message to Smyrna in Rev 2:9-10.[267] The conflict with Gentiles, she argues, was a result of the charge of Christian exclusiveness by their gentile neighbours, which she claims can be gleaned from the warning about the teaching of the Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel, whom she argues were probably trying to discourage Christians from practices that gave rise to such charges.[268] Finally, the issues around wealth, she claims, can be gleaned from the message to the church in Laodicea.[269]

Thus, I conclude that the most convincing view of the setting of the book of Revelation is the diverse social context view, particularly that of Collins. While plausible, Smalley's perspective on the various social contexts reflects a hermeneutical starting point on the book's authorship (i.e., shared authorship of the Fourth Gospel and Revelation) that is at odds with critical aspects of my methodology. On the other hand, Collins' perspective is more convincing because the

[266] See Collins, *Crisis*, 85–88.
[267] Collins, *Crisis*, 85.
[268] Collins, *Crisis*, 88.
[269] Collins, *Crisis*, 88. Koester also proposed a similar theory. See Koester, *Revelation*, 85.

various conflicts she proposes can all be identified within the text itself, thus eliminating the need for speculations based on external sources.

But, how can I account for the similarities and differences between these views on the book's social setting? I address this question in the next section.

4.3.4. A writing that reflects a churchwide problem of "cultural accommodation"

The diverse social context theory highlights how the issue of compromise could be understood to underpin the social setting. For example, Reddish signals this in his critique of the persecution under Domitian theory. He claims that the real issue with Christians in this period was the issue of "cultural accommodation," stating, "Persecution and emperor worship are often cited as the primary problems addressed in Revelation. More precisely, these issues are specific instances of the larger problem of cultural accommodation."[270] I agree that the crisis of the "cultural accommodation" motif is a more effective way of describing the social setting of Revelation because it offers a more unified consideration of the diverse social situations revealed in the book.[271]

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[270] Reddish, *Revelation*, 11. Boxall also noted, "Warnings against assimilation to and compromise with an idolatrous and unjust culture run like threads throughout the book." Boxall, *Revelation*, 13.

[271] There are other perspectives on the church's challenges in Revelation. For example, Thomas distinguishes but also recognises the overlap between two types of opposition the churches faced, namely, a) "cosmic" type (i.e., ultimately, "Satan"), and b) "concrete" type (i.e., "Rome," "the Jewish Community," "false teaching, false prophet(esse)s, false apostles, and immoral behavior"). See Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 26–30. Through my Girardian analysis, which examines the nexus between the sacred and the profane, I seek to understand how

In this thesis I will focus on the relationship between this crisis and the imperial cults because the latter was a significant locus of the interface between religion and society and a cultural force that Christians had to negotiate. Even Collins agrees that imperial ruler cult worship, while not the only issue that characterised the social context of Revelation, is simultaneously indispensable to the origin of Revelation.[272] As I discuss further later, the influence of the imperial cult can be inferred from the messages to the churches, not least in the discourses on eating meat offered to idols in Rev 2:14, 20 and also the social context John describes in Rev 13 (i.e., the beast of the land).

Finally, it remains for me to discuss how the messages to the seven churches also help to highlight the social themes that I argue are pertinent to understanding the meal motif and, therefore, the Eucharist.

4.4. The Message to the Seven Churches

The location of the seven churches of Revelation were the ancient cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea in Asia Minor, now modern-day Turkey. Rev 1:11 introduces the churches to the reader, and Rev 2–3 features the messages to the churches. Scholars have put forward different proposals concerning the genre of the messages. This section aims to evaluate some of these

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these expressions are unified under the mimetic theory's theo-anthropological analysis of 'culture'. Hence, my particular interest is in the "cultural accommodation" motif.

[272] See Collins, *Crisis*, 104–5.

proposals. First, I will present an overview of the seven messages, starting with a summary of the situation that affected each of them and an overview of their structure and scope. Finally, before offering concluding comments, I will discuss various proposals concerning the genre of the messages.

4.4.1. Situation, structure, and scope

As discussed in the previous section, I hold the view that the fundamental crisis facing the churches, in John's opinion, is the threat of "cultural accommodation." This crisis was born of the churches' engagement with the religious and cultural outlook of first-century Asia Minor. And the imperial cult represents a significant symbol of the interface between religion and culture during that time. Also, archaeological evidence attests to the cult's pervasiveness in the churches' location. For example, one study suggests that except Thyatira, all church locations had a temple (with some having more than one), and all, except for Laodicea and Philadelphia, had imperial altars and priests.[273]

In addition, the criticisms in some of the messages to the churches capture the interface between religion and society symbolised by the imperial cults. For example, and as Boxall noted, the message accuses the angel of the church in Ephesus of losing its first love (Rev 2:4), the Laodicean church is labelled lukewarm (Rev 3:17), and the believers in Pergamum and Thyatira are warned not to engage in idolatry (Rev 2:14,

[273] Reddish, *Revelation*, 252.

20).[274] Indeed, other inter-community conflicts characterise some of the messages, for example, the apparent Jew and Christian conflict (particularly in the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia). Even those conflicts appear to some extent to be the fruit of both parties trying to negotiate public policies on religion and religious observance.[275]

There is a consensus in Revelation scholarship[276] that the messages to the seven churches have a typical structure. In summary, the description of Christ presented in the first chapter introduces each message to the church. Following the introduction are words of commendation concerning the virtuous qualities of each church, except Laodicea, which received no praise. Next is criticism of each church—except Smyrna and Philadelphia, which receive no complaints. Finally, each message concludes with a promise (especially to those who conquer) and appeals to listen to the Spirit. Also, each message appears written so all seven congregations (and every Christian community) can read them (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, and 22).[277] In the next section, I will discuss the different perspectives on the genre of the letters to the churches.

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[274] Boxall also notes, "Most likely, this implies an enthusiastic participation in the lives of their respective cities, in which religion, politics and economics were intricately interwoven." Boxall, *Revelation*, 13.

[275] See Collins, *Crisis*, 85.

[276] See Ladd, *Revelation*, 36; Caird, *Revelation*, 27; Beasley-Murray, "Revelation, Book Of," 1029.

[277] Beasley-Murray points out, "By the generalization which concludes each one, the messages to the individual congregations are applied to all churches—to the seven, and to those beyond their circle in Christendom generally." Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 29.

4.4.2. Genre analysis

The main trends that emerged from my review of the commentaries were that some scholars held to a single genre perspective, which focuses on the prophetic aspects of the letters. Others, however, argue for a mixed genre approach, which proposes that the messages contain prophecy and letter form.

The typical single genre view that emerged from my commentaries review highlighted the prophetic qualities of the messages by comparing them to other prophetic traditions in Israel (e.g., Amos 1:3-2:16)[278] and by highlighting how the moral emphasis of the messages is also typical of the prophetic tradition.[279]

Conversely, the mixed genre model synthesises the prophetic message format with the imperial edict format.[280] This synthesis helps present the messages as both a

[278] Beasley-Murray claims that the letters are more like prophetic oracles than formal epistles. He supports this claim by noting how some have indicated that they are parallel to the prophetic oracles in the first two chapters of Amos insofar that they feature seven proclamations of judgements against the neighbours of Israel and do not indicate that they were sent separately to each nation addressed in the oracle. Moreover, he notes that each of the seven letters begins with the prophetic formula, *tade legei*, "thus says," and argues that they contain qualities of biblical prophecy insofar as they appeal for faithfulness and holiness. See Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 72.

[279] Smalley likewise argues that the letters to the churches indicate the work's prophetic features. He contends they are prophetic and oracular because they include "an exhortation to respond to the commands of the Spirit." Smalley, *Revelation*, 7. Moreover, Smalley notes that judging from the letters, the key issues amongst the churches were "complacency and compromise, and the need to repent." Smalley, *Revelation*, 105.

[280] Aune suggests that the author of the Seven Letters to the churches has used what may be called a mixed genre format, with the primary literary genre being the "imperial edict" and the secondary literary genre being the "prophetic speech." Aune, *Revelation*, 119. He supports the claim for the imperial edict by suggesting that "The seven proclamations share a similar structure, which consists of (1) an introduction, (2) a central section (introduced by οἶδα, "I know"), and (3) a double conclusion, containing (a) a call for vigilance and (b) a victory

prophetic word to the faithful and a subversive message insofar as it contrasts the edicts of the Roman emperor.[281] This latter perspective is scarcely treated in Pentecostal discussions on genre analysis of the Apocalypse.[282] What value, however, does the evaluation of the genre of the letters vis-á-vis the discussion on the situation and structure of the messages add to my thesis? This is what I will discuss in the next section.

4.4.3. A writing that uses literary styles that signal the author's social as much as religious concerns

Both perspectives on the genre of the messages outlined above have merits. At the very least, both indicate that the messages used conventional literary styles (providing modern interpreters with established interpretation guidelines to help analyse the messages to arrive at their possible original meaning).

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saying." Aune, *Revelation*, 129. For a similar example of 'mixed genre analysis', see Reddish, *Revelation*, 51.

[281] Aune claims that the author strategically used edicts to highlight the contrast between the true sovereign—God/Jesus—and the imitator and false sovereign—the Roman Emperor. Aune, *Revelation*, 129.

[282] The mixed-genre view is also popular amongst Pentecostal scholars who have written on the Apocalypse. They discuss the Apocalypse genre as typically reflecting combinations of genres that include "prophecy," "apocalyptic literature," "letters," and "visionary" literature. See Rebecca Skaggs and Priscilla C. Benham, *Revelation: Pentecostal Commentary* (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2009), 1–2; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 8–17; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 302; David R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse: An Intertextual and Pentecostal Exploration* (Cleveland: CPT Press. 2018), 196; Newton, *Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 17–19. However, the imperial edict comparison, its likely subversive application vis-à-vis the message to the churches, and its implications for understanding the theo-anthropological issues in the book do not appear to have received any treatment.

I, however, find the mixed-genre proposal more convincing than the single genre. This is because the prophetic speech and imperial edicts styles are evident in the messages' content (e.g., moral exhortations in the tradition of Jewish prophecy) and structure (e.g., introductions in the tradition of imperial edicts). It seems to me that this choice of literary styles (i.e., the mixture of prophetic speech and imperial edict) offers clues concerning the scope of the focus of the author's message. For instance, since Aune suggests that the author used the imperial edict style subversively, it appears to me that the author is also signalling a social-political dimension of his message. Thus, the style choice reflects his social as much as religious concerns.

In the final analysis, however, I recognise that both genre proposals suggest a common theme that runs through the message to the churches: a call to moral reform and fidelity to the risen Christ. This theme corresponds with the warning against "cultural accommodation" and the imperial cult's impact on society that typifies the book. Thus, both suggest that a core theme of Revelation is the nature of Christian religious observance and how it intersects with broader culture (particularly social norms).[283]

[283] I understand this theme is pertinent to global as much as Pentecostal scholar Melissa Archer assumes it is relevant to American Pentecostals when she cautions (while reflecting on the social context of Revelation vis-à-vis American Pentecostalism), "For Pentecostals, the temptation towards false worship might seem to be irrelevant; after all, Pentecostals seek above all an authentic and experiential encounter with God. Pentecostals, however, should constantly discern whether or not they are unwittingly engaging in false worship. It can

4.5. Sacrifice, Greco-Roman Banquets, the Eucharist, and the Imperial Cults as Cultural Objects Embodying a Sacred-Profane Nexus

From my analysis of the composition of the Apocalypse, it seems to me that specific 'entities of cultural significance'[284] embody the Christian religious observance-broader culture intersection. Indeed, my claim that the sacral meal motif in Rev 3:20 (as Eucharist) has social as much as sacramental dimensions exemplifies this embodiment within a cultural entity.

In addition to the Eucharist, I also understand that the analysis signals the presence of other cognate cultural entities embodying a 'sacred-profane' (i.e., holy and non-holy/social-political dimension) interface. They are sacrifice (which characterised the ritual practice of the ancients), Greco-Roman banquets (which I understand sacral meals, like that of Rev 3:20 and the Eucharist, are a type), and imperial cults (the pagan socio-religious structural force John's hearers had to negotiate).[285]

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come in the guise of elevating Pentecostal pastors or leaders onto platforms from which the glory reserved for God is ascribed to them. It can happen in worship where style is worshipped more than God. It can happen when edifices are built 'to the glory of God' but then the community has no resources or desire to engage the world outside its doors. The rising popularity of Pentecostalism and its growing acceptance in the mainstream of American culture likely offers the most subtle temptation." Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 311.

[284] By this, I also mean entities that could be understood to correspond with elements in my triptych understanding of culture.

[285] The order, sacrifice, Greco-Roman banquets, Eucharist, and imperial cults are also deliberate, as I understand, at the very least, sacrifice, Greco-Roman banquets and Eucharist warrant a diachronic assessment that highlights how they inform each other.

I also understand that these cultural entities (sacrifice, Greco-Roman banquets, Eucharist, and imperial cults) typify Wendy Griswold's conception of "cultural objects."[286] Henceforth, I will identify them as such. Furthermore, they also impact our understanding of the sacral meal described in Rev 3:20 and highlight the significance of a eucharistic conception.

Consequently, in Part II of this thesis, I will evaluate these cultural objects through the lens of mimetic theory as my 'defamiliarization' tool. This evaluation offers fresh anthropological and theological perspectives concerning the sacred-profane intersectionality and embodiment features of the abovementioned cultural objects. This is because the mimetic theory is also concerned with the sacred-profane nexus.

4.6. Conclusions

I reviewed some of the often-cited commentaries and special studies on the book of Revelation in this chapter. This review aimed to ascertain the leading views on matters relating to the book's composition and highlight the social, as much as religious, determinants that underpin the meal motif in Rev 3:20. More specifically, I claimed that, on the strength of the internal evidence, the author of Revelation was a man named John, a Jewish-Christian Prophet with possible Palestinian associations

[286] I understand sacrifice, Greco-Roman banquets, Eucharist, and imperial cults as cultural objects because they are "visible" and "tangible" "socially meaning expressions" that I have identified for analysis. See Griswold, *Cultures*, 11, 14.

and highlighted the social and religious factors that underpinned the prophetic tradition. In the section on the book's composition date, I supported the view that Revelation features two overlapping editions, which account for the references to earlier (pre-A.D. 70) and later (A.D. 80-100) events that appear to feature concurrently in the book. I also highlight how it was composed around social and religious unrest. In the section on the social setting of the book, I agreed with the view that Revelation features a diverse social setting, which includes conflicts between Jews and Gentiles and frustrations around wealth distribution in the Empire. Here, I highlight how the problem of "cultural accommodation" concerning the imperial cult characterised the diverse social settings of the seven churches. In the section on the genre of the messages to the churches, I argued that the mixed genre view (prophetic speech and imperial edict) was more convincing than the single genre view (prophetic speech) insofar that the evidence for aspects of the mixed genre feature in the messages. Again, here I highlighted how the choice of literary style supports the significance of focusing on the social as much as religious concerns of the messages.

Finally, I have categorised sacrifice, Greco-Roman banquets, the Eucharist, and the imperial cult as cultural objects embodying a sacred-profane nexus. I suggested that these four cultural objects justify my use of mimetic theory as my theoretical framework since the theory is also concerned with the sacred-profane nexus: sacrifice and its relationship to religion and society. Therefore, to draw more

robust connections between aspects of René Girard's mimetic theory and the sacrifice, sacral commensality traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean world and the imperial cults, in the next chapter (Part II), I will offer a summary introduction to Girard and then discuss the aspects of his theory that are relevant to these topics.

PART II

CHAPTER 5

MIMETIC THEORY

I concluded the previous chapter by suggesting that the Apocalypse's social and religious compositional context necessitates reflections on the meaning of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 using social-scientific theories that claim a nexus between the sacred and 'everyday life'. I contended that René Girard's mimetic theory is one such theory.

Therefore, before discussing how Girard's theory can further inform the discussions on sacrifice, Greco-Roman banquets, the Eucharist and the imperial cult, in this chapter, I will first review some critical aspects of Girard's universal theory of culture, particularly his conceptions of the nexus between violence, religion, and society. I will claim that Girard's theory can offer fresh insights into the alleged socio-religious themes that characterise the Apocalypse in general and the Rev 3:20 meal motif in particular.

5.1. René Girard, a Brief Introduction

René Girard (1923–2015) was a Franco-American literary critic and historian. Although his theory has many moving parts, I understand it as a theory of religion and violence vis-à-vis human culture, or to cite Girardian scholar Wolfgang Palaver,

"an all-encompassing theory of culture."[287] Girard's theory has polarised scholars in the fields it covers—not least because it purports to be a universal theory of the origin of culture. I maintain, however, that Girard's theory functions best as a heuristic tool: a theoretical framework that offers an insightful, but not definitive, theological and anthropological (theo-anthropological) explanation on the topic.

Girard's theory's theo-anthropological motifs feature four fundamental concepts, which, in most cases, build upon each other. These fundamental concepts are, first, "mimetic desire," which suggests that people desire what other people desire. Next, "collective violence/founding murder," which he argues is the origin of human culture insofar as it transforms the crisis of mimetic desire into social order by identifying a "victim" or "scapegoat" to be sacrificed to achieve peace. What follows from this is the "victim" or "scapegoat mechanism," that is, the religious veiling of the victim, which is sustained by, for example, persecution texts and religious rituals such as sacrifices. Finally, Girard claims that the Bible exposes the violent origins of ancient religions (and, thus, human culture and institutions) by indicating that the God of the Bible identifies with victims.[288]

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[287] Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. Gabriel Borrud (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 135.

[288] I am grateful to Palaver for summarising Girard's key concepts. See Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, viii. Also see René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), xv.

5.1.1. Epistemology

As indicated, Girard's theory straddles the fields of science and theology, and this hybrid quality can, in turn, make it difficult to classify his theory neatly. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suggest that, epistemologically, Judeo-Christian and phenomenological assumptions concerning the origin of religion and violence underpin his theory. First, it is worth noting that Girard admits that the Gospels shaped his thinking. He stated:

> I have problems in trying to establish these sources precisely. For instance, the reading of Greek tragedy played an essential role in my discovery of the victimary mechanism, parallel to the modern novel in relation to my discovery of mimetic conflict . . . I found my way in myth and ritual through Greek tragedy, seen both as a form of ritual and a form of revelation, although a partial one, less radical than Christianity. The main source of my intuition is the Gospels, which unmask the role of collective foundational murder.[289]

Girard's comment suggests that traditional Christian epistemology alone does not underpin his thinking. His comment indicates that his epistemology reflects a phenomenological quality insofar as it combines his later reflections on Christian theology and his previous engagement with Greek tragedy and Western novels. Thus, one may conclude that his epistemology has a multidisciplinary dimension. And this dimension is evident in his methodology.

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[289] René Girard, Pierpaolo Antonello, and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2007), 136.

5.1.2. Methodology

Girard's theory features an eclectic methodology. This eclecticism consists of a critical philosophy insofar as his theory seeks to challenge the mainstream view of violence and religion and address the inequalities stemming from what he perceives as an uncritical and positivistic view of modern scientific research methods. It also features historical analysis since he critically engages with historical topics and artefacts, such as the great myths and sacred texts. Therefore, as an interpreter of literature, Girard can also be described as a reader-response interpreter in general[290] and a "Reader-Respect"[291] interpreter, more specifically. Such labelling seems warranted because he offers interpretations that reflect a phenomenological understanding of texts that are also not void of (nor has an aversion to) historical data. Further support for this claim is evident in Girard's agreement with Erich Auerbach's "figural interpretation," in which:

[290] For example, Cojocaru notes that Girard's literary criticism style reflects a reader-response criticism. See Daniel Cojocaru, *Violence and Dystopia: Mimesis and Sacrifice in Contemporary Western Dystopian Narratives* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 17.

[291] Archer discusses Vanhoozer's analysis of the "Reader-Respect" and "Reader-Resistance" categories within reader response interpretations. In summary, he notes how contrary to "Reader-Resistant" approaches (which are less concerned with the horizon of the text), "Reader-Respect" approaches are also interested in the horizon of the text as much as the author's and are concerned with "filling in the gaps of the text." See Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 235–36.

> Fact A doesn't produce fact B as a linear effect, but only prefigures it. That is, instead of beginning the interpretation with fact A, one starts with fact B, in order to reinterpret the full meaning of A, which is only given its fulfilment in fact B. Moreover, the figural interpretation is always concerned with actual historical events.[292]

As I discuss next, this strategy has obvious risks concerning how the phenomenological aspects imported into the interpretation process may, in turn, affect the outcome of the interpretation. While any subjective effects on the interpretation do not have to be considered problematic (as supporters of Girard often contend), the liabilities of Girard's arguable reader-response method must be acknowledged, not least to indicate the extent to which I will engage with his theory. In the next section, I will present some of the issues that some scholars have raised about Girard's theory, along with responses from supporters of Girard (and Girard himself).

5.1.3. Criticisms and support

The common criticisms of Girard[293] is that, first, Girard's theory features existentialist tendencies; that is, it presents *a priori* arguments concerning the origins of violence

[292] Girard, Antonello, and Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 180. See also discussion of Girard's endorsement of *figura Christi* in Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 270–73.

[293] The two criticisms discussed here are like that which have also been posited, in the same order, by Hamerton-Kelly. See Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, "A Girardian interpretation of Paul: rivalry, mimesis and victimage in the Corinthian correspondence," *Semeia* 33, (1985): 66.

and its manifestation in human relationships.[294] For instance, Frankfurter contends that Girard's theory of violence and religion has become an "etiological myth"[295] unmoored from history and professed by Girard and his devotees as the basis for understanding the origins of violence and religion.[296] Moreover, Frankfurter suggests a better methodology in the study of religion when he contends that:

> The best methodology in the study of religious violence and the monstrous other is one that allows generalizations to be generated from real historical materials, articulated theoretically according to the most basic and flexible social theories, whether Durkheim, Weber, Turner, Douglas, or others.[297]

Although I agree with Frankfurter's comments about the importance of a scientific approach to studying religion, not least because such approaches are evidence-based and critical,[298] I contend that his suggestion that the Girardian method does not engage with historical material and other social theories is misinformed. This is because, as discussed below, in *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard engages with historical and cultural items and other social scientists—even though he may disagree with

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[294] A related criticism is that Girard's theory does not address aspects of his theory (like mimesis and sacrifice) within the historical and socio-cultural context of the artefacts he evaluates. Consequently, it is often argued that Girard's theory reflects anachronistic and ahistorical traits (i.e., projection of his theory and idea of sacrifice on historical data that undercuts their likely historical and contextual meaning). See Steven Weitzman, "Mimic Jews and Jewish mimics in antiquity: a non-Girardian approach to mimetic rivalry," *JTAAR* 77, no. 4 (2009): 922–40. Also, Ra'Anan S. Boustan, "Confounding Blood: Jewish Narratives of Sacrifice and Violence in Late Antiquity," in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*, eds. Jennifer Wright Knust and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 265–86.
[295] David Frankfurter, "The Study of Evil and Violence without Girard," *BTSR* 45, no. 3–4 (2016): 18, https://doi:10.1558/bsor.v45i3-4.31354.
[296] Frankfurter, "The Study of Evil and Violence without Girard," 17.
[297] Frankfurter, "The Study of Evil and Violence without Girard," 20.
[298] These are approaches that are important to my thesis methodology.

them.[299] Furthermore, while Hamerton-Kelly concedes that Girard's theory is not a "historical account," he also draws attention to its scientific quality by noting that it has a "historical referent" insofar that it centres on Freud's hypothesis of the origins of sacrifice.[300] Also, as Goodhart rightly notes, Girard's theory is just that, "a theory" predicated on scientific data and, as such, should be afforded the intellectual engagement other science-based theories receive.[301] Therefore, due to the scientific and theoretical basis of Girard's claims, I engage with them for their heuristic value, that is, their ability to present an explanatory (even contestable), and not the definitive, theory of the origins of culture.[302]

The other major criticism against Girard's theory is that it has a 'fideistic' quality insofar as it suggests that the Bible alone adequately captures the alleged

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[299] Girard also discusses his scientific approach when he notes that his conclusions are predicated on synthesis and patterns that emerge from the data he is investigating. He states: "I see myself as an interpreter who is combining anthropological, archaeological and ethnological accounts to construct a general theory of culture and its origins . . . Like all scientists, I am in search of the common factor, the pattern, rather than difference." Girard, Antonello, and Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 144.

[300] Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 195.

[301] Goodhart rightly contends, "It offers an hypothesis, a theory of all cultural order in the primitive and modern universe, an account of the data as provided for us by ethnologists and other social scientists. It is open to be qualified or challenged by other equally comprehensive accounts." Sandor Goodhart, "Criticism, Critique, and Crisis in Assessing the Work of René Girard," *BTSR* 45, no. 3–4 (2016): 13, https://doi:10.1558/bsor.v45i3-4.31428.

[302] Palaver also notes the scientific basis of Girard's theory when he asserts, "Girard . . . attempts to use the truths contained in literature to systematically explain human existence; his work, therefore, can be called a scientific theory." Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 30. Other arguments have been made about the scope and limitations of theoretical reflections on conflict, which is related to Girard's theory; that is, they tend to be constrained by the theoretical assumptions of the particular field of the theorist. See Otomar J. Bartos and Paul Wehr, *Using Conflict Theory*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.

bond between violence and religion.[303] Klawans made such criticisms when he argued that Girard's work is particularly biased towards the Christian religion and not as scientific as he and his supporters purport.[304] This is because Klawans sees Girard as asserting that the Gospel is a unique revelation and is, therefore, 'superior' to other religious texts.[305]

Klawans' criticism of the Christian tone in Girard's work has some merit, not least because Girard admits that the Gospels influenced his thinking. However, I take issue with what seems to be an implicit claim he makes, one that suggests a religious epistemology, and a Christian one for that matter, does not have a place in scientific enquiry or is indicative of 'poor science'. I base such objections on Girard's

[303] Some Christian scholars also take issue with this claim insofar as they argue that Girard's theory does not reflect a traditional Christian anthropology. E.g., see Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, "Violence and Vengeance, Mimesis and Murder, Conflict and Cross: A Critical-Constructive Engagement with René Girard," *BLT* 62, no. 1 (Spr 2017): 60–74.
Palaver offers a rebuttal to such claims, which this study agrees with, when he contends that "Girard's primary objective exists much more in an anthropological apologetics of biblical thought, or rather in displaying the plausibility of biblical revelation without having to revert to any rash theological presupposition." Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 228.
[304] Also, Strenski makes a similar claim but looks at Girard's focus on Christianity as a consequence of his reaction to the teaching of sacrifice in the Catholic Church. He notes, "Girard's theory of sacrifice should be seen as a rejection of a view of sacrifice originally developed in the seventeenth–century Eucharistic theology of Roman Catholic reaction to the Reformation in France." Ivan Strenski, *Religion in Relation: Method, Application, and Moral Location* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 204.
[305] Jonathan Klawans, "Something Bigger than Girard," *BTSR* 45, no. 3–4 (2016): 24, https://doi:10.1558/bsor.v45i3-4.31358.

compelling argument in support of the compatibility of science and religion as a consequence of the general understanding of the objectivity of God.[306]

Also, Goodhart insists that Girard's theory (because of its anti-violence outlook, which is generally embraced universally and thus betrays an objective quality) can be applied to other religious systems and not just Christianity; he argues:

> Girardian thinking reads the texts of Jewish scripture and the texts of Christian scripture as articulating prophetic truths about the sacrificial (and to some extent about the mimetic nature of desire and its dynamics) and his thinking may be extrapolated and applied to the ways Christians read or Jews read or Buddhists read or Hindus read or Muslims read. But it is not interchangeable in any manner with a Christian ethical position, or a Jewish ethical position or any other religiously structured (or secularly structured) ethical position for that matter.[307]

[306] Girard states: "I do not see why God could not be compatible with science. If one believes in God, one also believes in objectivity. A traditional belief in God makes one a believer in the objectivity of the world . . . I still operate within a traditional epistemology, which considers things as real and sees God as the guarantor of that reality." Girard, Antonello, and Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion*, 147. Also, for more arguments in support of the scientific quality of Girard's theory, see Kirwan, referencing Robert Hamerton-Kelly's view of the scientific characters of Girard's theory, "as a form of 'scientific realism', which incorporates the view that 'it is in principle proper to posit the existence of unobservables by 'abductive' or 'retroductive' inference from observables', provided the posited entity can be seen to produce observable effects. This approach (unlike empiricism) 'gives permission' to posit causal mechanisms of the kind put forward by mimetic theory. The procedure of abduction of unobservable structures is equivalent to the proposal and testing of hypotheses and the formulation of laws: it is a legitimate procedure which ensures that 'the scientific status of the theory of sacred violence is secure within the context of responsible debate within the philosophy of science' (Hamerton-Kelly, 1992: 44)." Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2009), 29.

[307] Goodhart, "Criticism, Critique, and Crisis," 12.

Goodhart is right to draw attention to the universal appeal of Girard's theory, notwithstanding its religious overtones.[308] Indeed, insofar as the theory is predicated on a socio-psychological phenomenon like 'mimesis', it can be used to evaluate cultural forms, like many religious and secular groups, which also are characterised by such social phenomena because they are made up of humans (with their propensity to imitate each other). Moreover, the value of such claims of the theory's universality for my thesis is that they support my claim of the heuristic quality of mimetic theory and how it can be useful to particularist discourse, such as discussions on Pentecostal theology of the Eucharist and cultural engagement.

Having discussed some common criticisms of Girard's theory, the next section outlines how I aim to engage with Girard's theory to explain what I claim are the socio-religious determinants surrounding the meal motif in Rev 3:20.

5.2. Reading Strategy and Summary of Girard's Key Theories

Girard's theory provides a unique theo-anthropological insight into the socio-religious themes that characterise Revelation. These feature in his concept of a) violence as an outworking of acquisitive mimesis, b) the symbiotic relationship between violence and pagan religion, c) the sacrificial ritual as a means of establishing and maintaining social order, and d) the Bible and the Holy Spirit, as

[308] Girard has also produced a work which applied his theory to Vedic religion. See René Girard, *Sacrifice: Breakthroughs in Mimetic Theory*, trans. Mathew Patillo and David Dawson (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011).

agents of revelation par excellence. These four concepts, which I discuss in the next section, have, by and large, remained consistent throughout Girard's writings.[309]

As these four concepts receive extensive treatment in the three works that form the backbone of Girard's meta-theory on violence and religion; for that reason, they will be given priority in my review of his work. These works are *Violence and the Sacred* (published in 1972)—his second book in which he lays out his anthropology and theory of religion. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (published 1978) and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (published in 2001)—both address interdisciplinary implications of Girard's anthropology, with the latter focusing significantly on the impact on Christian theology.[310]

I will use the anthropological and theological claims from these and other supporting works by Girard and the major proponents of his theory to aid the discussion on these topics as they relate to the cultural objects (i.e., sacrifice, Greco-

[309] In some way, they represent the canonical or final treatment of Girard's views on these theories and consider some of the clarifications Girard made through his writing on these topics. For example, see Williams's comments on Girard's clarification on the nature of sacrifice in his later works., i.e., from his initial focus on the violent nature of sacrifice as a means to obtaining peace to his emphasis on how peaceful relationships do not necessarily stem from violent sacrifice but discussion on peace or "nonsacrificial and nonviolent relationships" are better informed by a discussion on sacrifice. See James G. Williams, ed., *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 70.

[310] I am grateful to Mäkelä for categorising some of Girard's works into their broader academic themes. See Hanna Mäkelä, "Narrated Selves and Others: A Study of Mimetic Desire in Five Contemporary British and American Novels" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, Helsinki 2014), 12 https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/42776/m%C3%A4kel%C3%A4_dissertation.pdf?sequence=1.

Roman banquets, Eucharist, imperial cults) identified earlier. First, however, I will discuss the critical mimetic theory concepts that buttress those anthropological and theological claims.

5.2.1. Violence as an outworking of acquisitive mimesis

Girard's theory of culture centres on his theory of imitation, or what he describes in his works as "mimetic desire." Girard argues that human beings are fundamentally imitative creatures and that it is this propensity to imitate others, especially in desiring to acquire and appropriate what others desire ("acquisitive mimesis"),[311] that is at the heart of human conflicts (what he calls "mimetic rivalry").[312] In what is allegedly Girard's favourite article introducing his theory, Girard describes the process of acquisitive mimesis as follows:

> If the appropriative gesture of an individual named A is rooted in the imitation of an individual named B, it means that A and B must reach together for one and the same object. They become rivals for that object. . . . Violence is generated by this process; or rather violence is the process itself when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means.[313]

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[311] Or also "possessive mimesis." René Girard, *Things Hidden Since The Foundation Of The World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 8.
[312] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 15.
[313] Girard, "Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism," as cited in Williams, *The Girard Reader*, 9. This article is deemed one of Girard's favourite explanations of his theory of mimetic desire. See Williams, *The Girard Reader*, vii. See also René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1972.), 145–146. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 7–9.

Therefore, for Girard, violence is not a necessary or inevitable outworking of mimesis among humans. Instead, violence is a specific by-product of acquisitive mimesis. It is the negative outworking of mimesis. This less-than-narrow perspective on mimesis also suggests that there can be a positive outworking of mimesis, that is, not characterised by greed and possessiveness on the part of the actors. This qualification is essential because, as Palaver notes, some have accused Girard of promoting violence as an "instinctual" aspect of human beings.[314]

Girard also emphasises that mimetic desire is not only a fundamental part of the human experience but is "intrinsically good."[315] By this, he means that mimetic desire helps people to learn from others and ultimately to be predisposed to the divine.[316] He supports this claim by highlighting how, for example, children learn from those around them in their formative years and, consequently, learn to speak a language and pick up social mores.[317] Thus, in the Girardian reading, mimesis can be seen as an in-built human pedagogical tool that distinguishes humans from other creatures and supports human flourishing.

Conversely, the fruit of violent mimesis left unchecked in a community will result in what Girard calls a "mimetic crisis," which Palaver succinctly describes as

[314] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 35.
[315] Girard, *I See Satan*, 15.
[316] Girard, *I See Satan*, 16.
[317] Girard, *I See Satan*, 16.

"instances of disorder caused primarily by the consequences of violent mimesis."[318] Girard also discusses the relationship between the mimetic crisis and acquisitive mimesis by describing the "contagious"[319] effects of acquisitive mimesis on a community. He explains how acquisitive mimesis (i.e., two or more people converging on the same desire) can morph into what he calls "conflictual mimesis" (i.e., two or more people annihilating a single enemy/victim/scapegoat to address the mimetic crisis the community is experiencing), which stemmed from acquisitive mimesis.[320] Girard also argues that this dynamic underpins pagan religions and helps to address the often-discussed ambiguity in anthropological studies about the relationship between violence and religion.

5.2.2. The symbiotic relationship between violence and pagan religion

Girard also claimed a symbiotic relationship between violence and religion—mainly expressed in the sacrificial rituals of primitive societies. Through an extensive review of some of the leading anthropological studies available at the time of the writing of his second book, *Violence and the Sacred*,[321] Girard tries to unpick a Gordian Knot in

[318] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 137. See also Girard's discussion on 'mimetic crisis,' in Girard, *Things Hiding*, 18–21.
[319] Girard, *Things Hiding*, 25.
[320] Girard, *Things Hiding*, 25.
[321] Unlike Frankfurter's earlier claim that Girard's theory lacked robust engagement with other sociologists and anthropologists.

anthropological studies, that is, the "ambivalence"[322] that he understands to have characterised discussions about the relationship between violence and the sacred.

This ambivalence, he suggests, pertains to the question of how the killing of a victim deemed sacred could be perceived as both a criminal act and a sacred act—insofar as the killing also confers a sacred status unto the victim.[323] The ambivalence, he argues, is latent in the full range of the Latin word *sacer* ("sacred"), which also includes the "maleficent" (i.e., meaning "accursed") as well as the "beneficent."[324] Girard maintains that anthropologists also know this ambivalence in defining the sacred.[325] Girard's solution to this problem suggests that violence necessarily connects with sacrifice and vice-versa. He concludes, "If sacrifice resembles criminal violence, we may say that there is, inversely, hardly any form of violence that cannot be described in terms of sacrifice."[326] He also notes that:

> In primitive societies the risk of unleashed violence is so great and the cure so problematic that the emphasis naturally falls on prevention. The preventive measures naturally fall within the domain of religion, where they can on occasion assume a violent character. Violence and the sacred are inseparable.[327]

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[322] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1.
[323] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1.
[324] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 257.
[325] He states that "Although ethnologists are generally disposed to acknowledge that violence exists at the heart of the sacred, they also hasten to add that the sacred includes another, more important and directly contradictory element. The sacred, as they see it, involves order as well as disorder, peace as well as war, creation as well as destruction. In fact, the sacred seems so heterogeneous that the specialists have despaired of ever sorting it out." Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 258.
[326] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1.
[327] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 19.

Here, Girard makes the connection between his theory of violence and religion and the religious practices of "primitive societies" by suggesting that religion masks violence in these societies. This is because the sacrificial ritual practices within the sacred acts of "primitive societies" were, in Girard's understanding, seen as remedial even though violence characterises them (i.e., they are the offshoot of acquisitive mimesis).[328] For Girard, there is a reflexive (i.e., mutually influencing) relationship between violence and the sacred, as in "primitive," myth-based religions. This reflexive relationship not only serves to mask the violent aspects of "primitive religions" but also serves (as intimated in the earlier discussion of Girard's theory of "conflictual mimesis") to establish and maintain social order.

5.2.3. Sacrificial ritual as a means of establishing and maintaining social order

Building on this idea, Girard offers a theory of the practice of sacrificial ritual and the establishment and maintenance of social order. He contends that all human societies stem from violent religious rituals insofar that such religious rituals centre on what he often also refers to as "the single victim, or scapegoat, mechanism,"[329] that is, sacrificing a "surrogate victim" to achieve social order.[330] He argues, "I contend that the objective of ritual is the proper reenactment of the surrogate-victim mechanism; its function is to perpetuate or renew the effects of this mechanism; that is, to keep

[328] This is a fundamental aspect of Girard's theory, "the whole structure of religion can be traced back to the mechanism of acquisitive mimesis." Girard, *Things Hidden*, 17.
[329] Girard, *I See Satan*, 94.
[330] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 307.

violence outside the community."[331] Girard claims that the scapegoat mechanism is reinforced by what he described as a "delusion" ("misrecognition"), a social phenomenon that, in summary, describes the delusional act of concluding that 'others' are guilty of inciting violence.[332]

In addition, Girard describes the surrogate victim killing as "generative violence"[333] because it is replicated through ritual to initiate a "constructive cycle"[334] that aims to maintain order in the community.[335] Thus, Girard concludes, "Human societies are the work of the mimetic process that has been disciplined by ritual."[336]

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[331] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 92. Furthermore, he claims that the scapegoat mechanism still functions as a powerful cultural force in modern communities and is present in "all the phenomena of nonritualized collective transference that we observe or believe we observe around us". Girard, *I See Satan*, 160. Therefore, social ills such as nationalism and racism indicate the workings of the scapegoat mechanism in modern society. See Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 36.

[332] Girard also referred to this "delusion" as "ignorance" and "*méconnaissance*" (translated misrecognition), which in mimetic theory "refers to the delusion on which the social efficacy of scapegoating violence depends. Characteristic of misrecognition is the mistaken belief that violence originates in and issues from the other, whether individually in the form of the rival who is vilified and blamed, or collectively in the form of the scapegoat who serves as the common target of, and repository for, the group's exteriorized violence. Those involved do not recognize or simply do not know or understand what is at work in the process of mimetic desire, crisis, conflict, accusation, and expulsion or lynching of a victim or victims. The sacrifice of an object, animal, or human to their deity is performed for purposes of appeasement, but its actual raison d'être is to reactivate the blind force of the sacrificial mechanism whose outcome is to reconcile humans who have been in conflict." James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver, eds., *PHMTR* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), n.p., Kindle. See also Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 152.

[333] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 93.

[334] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 93.

[335] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 93.

[336] Girard, *I See Satan*, 92.

This claim will not make sense outside the context of Girard's fundamental assumption about the origins of culture vis-à-vis the victim mechanism. Girard claims that this surrogate victim on which rituals centre is a "founding murder"[337]—a claim, he argues, can only be deduced from the many myths and memorial rites that stem from a killing.[338] He states:

> If sacrifice has a real origin, the memory of which myths keep alive in one way and rituals commemorate in another, then it seems clear that we are dealing with an event that initially made a very strong impression. Very strong, but not unforgettable for in the end it is forgotten. But this impression, although subject to later modification, lives on in the religious observances and perhaps in all the cultural manifestations of the society.[339]

Therefore, Girard argues that this founding murder is the foundation of human culture since the repetition of sacrifices in rituals is understood to keep the emergence of any other mimetic crisis at bay and act as a means to establish peace and maintain social order.[340]

Finally, Girard claims that the founding murder marks the creation of the "sacred,"[341] or pagan gods in archaic communities and thus the origin of religion

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[337] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 195.
[338] See, Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 92, 93. He also understands Freud, in *Totem and Taboo*, to have understood this phenomenon. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 92. Also, see discussion in Girard, *Things Hidden*, 99–118. Moreover, Girard's discussion on Cain and Abel as an example of "founding violence" in the Bible. Girard, *I See Satan*, 83–85.
[339] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 92.
[340] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 92–93. See also Girard, *I See Satan*, 94.
[341] In mimetic theory, "*Sacred* names what archaic religion considers as both beneficent and terrible, being the name for what both protects the community from without and threatens it from within. The sacred is good to respect at a distance, and to ritually and reverently

because by the murder of the victim, peace and social order are also established. This paradoxical "outcome" is what he termed "false transcendence," which he also indicates is parallel to "idolatry."[342] Moreover, Girard argues that by ascribing evil to the victim that is murdered and simultaneously crediting the victim for the peace established following their murder, the persecutors execute an "aggressive transference followed by a reconciliatory transference," a process which he described as "double transference."[343]

A few comments are in order concerning these aspects of Girard's theory, which also reflect the earlier supportive comments in response to criticisms of his theory. First, even though Girard's anthropology of the origins of human culture features speculative assessments of past events, it does offer a compelling theory for Christians because aspects of the theory resonate with established theories about religion and a Scriptural testimony of the birth of an ancient civilisation, and therefore, makes it useful for my analysis. For example, as it contends that all human institutions derive from archaic rituals, the mimetic theory is in keeping with

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propitiate in quest of its protection; it is terrible in its proximity; being imagined as the unearthly cause of natural calamities: plague, drought, famine. Ritual propitiation does not allay these scourges, but scrupulous attention, variation, and refinement of ritual techniques may advance technologies, affording possibilities of prescientific induction in metallurgy, agriculture, and animal husbandry." Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p.

[342] See Girard, *I See Satan*, 96. Also, "false transcendence" describes the deity (in this case, pagan god) and its character. Thus, the deity is identical to the transcendence, and the term does not simply describe the paradoxical "outcome" of the mimetic cycle. Hence, I also speak of transcendence, false or otherwise, as a descriptor of the deity.

[343] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 35; Also see Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 87; Girard, *I See Satan*, 67; Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 153–154.

Durkiem's theory of religion and society.[344] It is, therefore, wedded to established theories about the origins of religion.[345] Accounts like the forming of the Cainite civilisation in Genesis 4:1-24, in which fratricide preceded the birth of culture,[346] offer significant ancient evidence that makes his claims compelling. But, how else does Girard connect his anthropology with Christian theology to highlight the latter's significance in addressing the cycle of violence he discusses?

5.2.4. The Bible and the Holy Spirit as agents of revelation par excellence

Girard's theory also branches into Christian theology. First, for Girard, biblical revelation is 'superior' to other religious narratives and myths. This is because, as he purports in his "apocalypse"[347] theory, it reveals the violent workings of myth-based religions and addresses the socio-religious issues stemming from their victim

[344] See Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 28. Also, Girard discusses the parallels between his theory of "false transcendence" and Durkheim's "social transcendence," noting, however, that the latter does not include a discussion of the role of the "mimetic cycle" and the scapegoat mechanism and thus this is where they depart. See Girard, *I See Satan*, 100.

[345] Also, Palaver has provided a helpful summary of the connection between the mimetic theory and "intellectual development" from 1860 to 1939, which helps to support the claim that mimetic theory is wedded to established theories, not least about the origin of human civilization. See Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 31.

[346] See Girard, *I See Satan*, 83–85.

[347] Generally, in the mimetic theory, "Apocalypse is unveiling of the human origin of violence, and thus also of the nonviolent nature of God . . . For mimetic theory, then, apocalypse is precisely the opposite of and a commentary on the apocalypse of judgment and violent destruction, but it still has an ominous side since without effective sacrificial checks mankind's violence risks escalating uncontrollably." Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p.

mechanism framework.[348] He suggests that the Bible offers an alternative cultural narrative that understands the God of the Bible to be on the side of victims.[349]

Girard sees the Bible as explicitly addressing his theory of mimesis. And he understands the prohibitions in the Decalogue as an index to his theory of mimetic desire.[350] In support of such an understanding of the commandments, Girard emphasises the tenth commandment, which states that one should not covet (which Girard argues also means "desire") [351] what belongs to their neighbour. He argues, "The commandment that prohibits desiring the goods of one's neighbor attempts to resolve the number one problem of every human community: internal violence."[352] Thus, a Girardian reading understands the prohibition as militating against the violence that may ensue when one covets one's neighbour's belongings.[353] Girard also argues, following the apostle Paul, that the more effective way to counter violence is to give people "models that would protect them from mimetic rivalries rather than involving them in these rivalries."[354]

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[348] This is what he also refers to as the "essential divergence . . . biblical *truth* from the *lie* of mythology." Girard, *I See Satan*, 113.
[349] See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 195–96; Girard, *I See Satan*, 130.
[350] To be sure, other religions also prohibit murder. For example, see Palaver's discussion (where he also cites Sura 5:32 as an indication of the prohibition of murder in Islam) in Wolfgang Palaver, "Monotheism and the Abrahamic Revolution: Moving Out of the Archaic Sacred," in *PHMTR*, eds. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 14, Kindle.
[351] Girard, *I See Satan*, 7.
[352] Girard, *I See Satan*, 9.
[353] Girard, *I See Satan*, 9–10.
[354] Girard, *I See Satan*, 14.

For Girard, the Gospels highlight the importance of models in mimetic desire. For example, Girard sees, in the use of the word "scandal" (*skandalizo* often translated as "stumbling block" or "obstacle") in the Gospels, a reference to mimetic rivalry and the cunning actions of models.[355] Girard suggests that the workings of scandal in mimetic rivalry involve the model spinning an almost inescapable web of attraction in the mimetic situation—insofar that the model is understood to be "causing attraction to the extent that it is an obstacle and forming an obstacle to the extent that it can attract."[356] Girard concludes, therefore, that scandal in the gospels "is the obstacle/model of mimetic rivalry; it is the model in so far as he works counter to the understanding of the disciple and so becomes an inexhaustible source of morbid fascination."[357]

To that extent, Girard also sees the Gospels as describing Satan as the "mimetic model and scandal *par excellence*."[358] He supports this claim by, for example, citing the occasion in Matt 16:22-23, where Jesus interprets the thoughtful comments

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[355] Girard, *Things Hidden,* 397.
[356] Girard, *Things Hidden,* 397.
[357] Girard, *Things Hidden,* 397. Girard also states that the scandal in the Gospels "is never a material object. It is always someone else, or . . . myself." Girard, *Things Hidden,* 397.
[358] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 400. This notion is also connected to Girard's demonology. He argues that "the mimetic concept of Satan enables the New Testament to give evil its due without granting it any reality in its own right that would make of Satan a kind of god of evil." Girard, *I See Satan*, 44. Moreover, Girard argues that Satan "sustains himself as a parasite on what God creates by imitating God . . . in the rivalistic sense of the word." Girard, *I See Satan*, 44–45. This also means that Satan is not an independent entity that can be scapegoated by humans nor a mythical figure whose existence can then be denied. For further discussion on the implication of Girard's characterisation of Satan within the mimetic rivalry motif, see Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 260–61.

of Peter to him as ultimately an attempt of Satan to derail him from his mission.[359] Thus, by also citing the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness discourse in Matt 4: 8-10, Girard argues, "Satan still appears as the mimetic obstacle and model—the violent principle underlying all forms of earthly domination and all forms of idolatry, who tries to divert toward himself the adoration that is strictly due to God alone."[360]

Also, Girard sees biblical revelation as disclosing a connection between Satan and the emergence of human social institutions and structures of power. As I discussed in the previous section on 'sacrificial ritual', he does this by suggesting that ancient institutions ultimately centre around a founding murder (which divinised the victim) and rituals that emerged from them[361] and, therefore, were "material and simultaneously spiritual."[362] Girard argues that the biblical revelation assumes this hybrid nature of institutions using terms like "principalities and powers."[363]

For Girard, these institutions are subject to Satan's influence as a consequence of being underpinned by a founding murder.[364] He finds support for this claim in the

[359] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 399.
[360] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 400.
[361] Girard, *I See Satan*, 93.
[362] Girard, *I See Satan*, 96.
[363] Girard, *I See Satan*, 96.
[364] Girard understands the origin of Satan in the founding murder and understands Satan to be the orchestrator of the entire victim mechanism process and, thus, human culture that stems from it. Girard, *I See Satan*, 87. For Girard's treatment of the principalities and powers, see Girard, *Things hidden*, 183–88. Elsewhere, Girard also acknowledges some of the other popular understanding of the role of the 'principalities and powers' when he notes:

NT by, for example, arguing that Peter's quotation of the second psalm recorded in Acts 4:26 indicates that "Peter finds a special connection between the Cross and the powers in general because the powers are rooted in collective murders similar to what befell Jesus."[365] Girard acknowledges the hyperbolic language characterising the passage and cautions against a literal reading. And, as I will discuss, his understanding of the gospel's unique cultural agenda allows him to see this juxtaposition of the powers and the crucifixion as another account of how the Bible exposes the founding murder that underpins institutions and structures of power.

Girard contends that these institutions and structures of power are not the same as Satan *per se.* He argues that they are associated with Satan insofar as they are the offshoot of the false order that Satan creates through the victim mechanism because the violence of the victim mechanism is used to counter the violence of the mimetic crisis to achieve social order.[366] Girard argues that by associating Satan (the "murderer from the beginning" and the "father of lies" John 8:44) with the mimetic cycle, the Bible shows that what stems from the victim mechanism is a false peace

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"Depending on how we look at them and relate them to historical periods—before or after the intervention of Jesus in the affairs of this world—these 'powers of the heavens' will appear either as positive forces that maintain order and prevent men from destroying each other, in expectation of the true God, or as veils and obstacles that obstruct the fullness of revelation." Girard, *Things hidden*, 183.

[365] Girard, *I See Satan*, 96.

[366] Girard, *I See Satan*, 69–70, 96. See also Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 258–59. Girard also argues that this is what Satan casting out Satan means in Mark 3:23-26. See Girard, *I See Satan*, 34–38. Girard also describes this process as a "mimetic cycle," i.e., a constant cycle of a state of disorder that follows the establishment of order. Girard, *I See Satan*, 30, 41.

("false transcendence") that is in rivalry with God's peace.[367] Therefore, in Girard's reading, Satan is in a mimetic rivalry with God, or as Girard remarks, "Satan is the ape of God."[368]

Conversely, Jesus as the ideal model and his desire to reflect the image of his Father in his words and deeds is the ideal object of human desire.[369] For Girard, imitating Jesus will lead to a more peaceful existence since neither the Father nor the Son "desires greedily, egotistically."[370] Instead, he argues that God is characterised in Scripture by a "detached generosity,"[371] that is, generosity toward others, which does not expect reciprocation.[372] Thus, the God of the Bible is indicative of a "Holy"[373] transcendence.

Girard suggests that it is against the backdrop of the violence in the mythical narrative of primitive religions, which his theory purports, that the Bible, particularly

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[367] Girard, *I See Satan*, 38–42. See also Girard, *Things Hidden*, 156.
[368] Girard, *I See Satan*, 45.
[369] Girard, *I See Satan*, 13–14.
[370] Girard, *I See Satan*, 14.
[371] Girard, *I See Satan*, 14.
[372] Girard, *I See Satan*, 14.
[373] I have used "holy" to designate the character of the God of the Bible because in the Girardian register "*Holy* refers to the peaceful, luminous side of religion. Michel Serres wrote: 'The holy is distinguished from the sacred. The sacred kills, the holy pacifies. Nonviolent holiness roots out envy, jealousy, ambition for high position, sanctuaries of mimeticism, and thus delivers us from rivalries that spur us on towards the violence of the sacred. Sacrifice devastates; holiness gives birth. … The sacred unites violence and lying, murder and falsity; its gods are modeled by the collective in its fury. Inversely, the holy brings love and truth into accord.' The God of the Holy is foreign to all violence." Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p. For a similar analysis by Girard about the distinctions between "false" and "holy" transcendence, see Girard, *I See Satan*, 131. Also see his discussion on "transcendent violence" and "transcendent love" in Girard, *Things Hidden*, 208.

the Gospel narratives on the Passion of Christ, can be best understood.[374] He argues that similarly, Jesus was a victim of collective violence of conflictual mimesis.[375] He contends, however, that Jesus' Passion does not constitute a 'sacrifice' in the cultic sense of the word that would depict God as responsible for the violence enacted on Jesus.[376] Instead, he contends that Jesus' Passion reflects how "God Himself reuses the scapegoat mechanism, at his own expense, in order to subvert it."[377]

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[374] Regarding the OT, Girard sees the story of Joseph and Job, for example, to depict, contrary to myths, that those who are innocent are the victims and not the persecutors. In both accounts, Girard argues that God is depicted as the God of victims, not persecutors. Girard, *I See Satan*, 106–20.

[375] Girard emphasizes the victimization of Jesus as understood within his theory by highlighting passages (like John 15:25 and Psalm. 35:19) that described him as innocent and, therefore, not deserving of the object of conflictual mimesis. Girard, *I See Satan*, 127. Moreover, Girard stresses that the revelation of Jesus as the victim and revealer of the truth of the scapegoat mechanism makes him divine; thus, he is not divine due to conflictual mimesis, like the pagan gods. For Girard's treatment of how his theory corroborates conventional Christology views, see Girard, *I See Satan*, 130–36.

[376] He supports this claim of the "non-sacrificial" understanding of the Passion noting NT passages that underplay cultic sacrifice like Matt 5:23-24; 9:13. See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 173, 202, 205.

[377] René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 43, as cited in S. Mark Heim, "Approaches to Atonement: How Girard Changes the Debate," in *PHMTR*, eds. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 24, Kindle. Also, Alison offers an excellent summary of the Girardian understanding of Christ's self-giving as sacrifice vis-à-vis cultic ideas of sacrifice that I find compelling and is worth citing at length here; he notes that "This way in which the same word can function as the subversion from within of the meaning it normally has is key to any understanding of words applied to Christ and God in Christian theology, because thereby hangs the question of analogy: If the sheer goodness, loving-kindness and beauty of God is so utterly other than anything we can imagine from within our sacrificially structured world, then God can communicate nothing of God's self to us, because nothing in us would be available to pick up anything of what is being communicated. However, in fact, God does and can communicate with us by, out of unfathomable generosity, "brushing up" against the structures which run our patterns of thought, in order to lead us away from them toward something entirely different. Our realities can only truly be subverted if that subversion starts from within." James Alison,

Furthermore, the goal of biblical revelation is to reveal and rebuff the violent origins of pagan religion and human culture and depict the God of the Bible, as particularly shown in the Passion of Christ, as distinct from other deities and the ideal model of human desires; Girard notes:

> Against the mythic deities stands a God who does not emerge from the misunderstanding regarding victims but who voluntarily assumes the role of the single victim and makes possible, for the first time, the full disclosure of the single victim mechanism.[378]

Finally, Girard argues strongly for the uniqueness of the Holy Spirit in liberating people from the mimetic cycle's grip and downward spiral motion. He notes:

> WHAT IS THIS POWER that triumphs over mimetic violence? The Gospel respond that it is the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit takes charge of everything. It would be false, for example, to say the disciples "regained possession of themselves": it is the Spirit of God that possesses them and does not let them go.[379]

Girard supports this claim by suggesting, for example, that the name of the Spirit given in the Gospel of John (*parakletos*, "defence of the accused") vis-à-vis the name of Satan, "accuser before a tribunal,"[380] is indicative of the anti-victim mechanism vocation of the Spirit. Moreover, he argues that:

"Eucharist and Sacrifice: The Transformation of the Meaning of Sacrifice Through Revelation," in *PHMTR*, eds. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 27, Kindle.

[378] Girard, *I See Satan*, 130.

[379] Girard, *I See Satan*, 189.

[380] Girard, *I See Satan*, 190.

> [T]he Spirit enlightens the persecutors concerning their acts of persecution. The Spirit discloses to individuals the literal truth of what Jesus said during his crucifixion: 'They don't know what they are doing.' We should also think of the God whom Job calls 'my defender.'"[381]

He also offers two examples of conversions, namely those of Peter and Paul, as indicative of the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal and deliver people from the grips of a mimetic cycle.[382]

Again, I would offer a few supportive comments on Girard's theological anthropology. First, I agree in principle with Girard's application of his theory to Christian theology as presented in this section, insofar that I consider it to represent, as Palaver notes, "anthropological apologetics of biblical thought"[383] and not an appeal for a new Christian orthodoxy of "biblical thought." I also understand that Girard's application of his theory to Christian theology reflects universal Christian assumptions on the theological topics he addresses, not to mention how his 'pneumatology' also typifies aspects of Pentecostal views of the revelatory and empowering role of the Spirit.[384]

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[381] Girard, *I See Satan*, 190.

[382] As a result, Girard concludes, "What the two converts become capable of seeing, thanks to their conversions, is the violent social instinct, the adherence to the will of the crowd, which neither knew possessed him. This is the violent contagion that compels us all to participate in the Crucifixion." Girard, *I See Satan*, 191. Also, see Girard's more elaborate discussion in "History and the Paraclete," in René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 207–12.

[383] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 228.

[384] For an analysis of how such understanding of the Spirit relates to the Pentecostal understanding of spiritual gifts, particularly the prophetic and empowerment conceptions of

Also, many of his conclusions are self-evident from his analyses of biblical texts. For example, the application of acquisitive mimesis and scandal reflects the traditional Christian understanding of the negative consequence of 'sin'[385] and the sinister activity of 'Satan' predicated on the Hebrew meaning of his name (i.e., accuser, adversary), a point Girard makes.[386] Also, his claim that there is an overlap between the institutional structures of power and the spiritual world is self-evident from the different and interchangeable language used to describe the structures of power in the NT.[387] Finally, the positive outworking of mimesis (i.e., the imitation of

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the gifts, see Matthias Wenk, "Spiritual Gifts: Manifestations of the kingdom of God," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 302–4, VitalSource Bookshelf.

[385] 'Sin' here describes "the human condition of separation from God that arises from opposition to God's purposes." McKim, "sin," 260. Hamerton-Kelly describes Adam's sin from his reading of Paul, which is based on Girard's theory of mimetic desire, referring it to the "deformation of desire to acquisitive and conflictual mimesis." Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 92

[386] See Girard, *I See Satan*, 41. Satan in Hebrew means "accuser" or "adversary." See McKim, "Satan," 248. See also Duffield et al. commentary on Satan as the 'God of this World, or Age' as an example of a point of contact between Girard's theory of Satan's "rivalistic" mimesis of God and a typical Pentecostal understanding of the "rivalistic" nature of Satan. Guy P. Duffield and N.M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (California: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1987), 503–4. Moreover, Pentecostal theologians like Macchia have also echoed Girard's notion that it is not adequate to maintain that Satan is a separate entity—as that contradicts the notion of the sovereignty of God. Instead, Macchia points out that the activity of Satan must also be considered in the light of the human failure to live up to their responsibility to obey God in order to prevent an "arrogant ethical dualism." See Frank D. Macchia, "Repudiating The Enemy: Satan and Demons," in *Systematic Theology*, ed. Stanley M. Horton (Springfield: Logion Press, 2003), 203, 206. I recognise that there is scope for a both/and view on demonology within the Pentecostal context. This is a demonology that, on the one hand, acknowledges the human factors in the discussion of evil and, on the other, accounts for the references to demons as disembodied spirits (e.g., Mark 1:23–28) and also understands that demons can be experienced as disembodied spiritual entities. See also Duffield and Van Cleave, *Foundation of Pentecostal Theology*, 498.

[387] For a study that develops the hybrid view of the powers in the NT, see Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 3–12.

Jesus) also explains what is central to traditional views of Christian discipleship.[388] As has been argued, Girard's theological appropriation is an example of the heuristic quality of his theory.

On the other hand, I acknowledge that some may question the extent to which his theory, particularly his conceptions of 'sacrifice' vis-à-vis the Passion of Christ, reflects orthodox Christian teachings. I maintain that Kirwan is right when he states concerning such issues, "The construction of a 'theological anthropology' is a contribution to, and not the entirety of, a doctrine of salvation, a 'soteriology'."[389]

Indeed, my theological construction based on a Girardian theological anthropology does not pretend to offer the final word on the doctrine of salvation. It seems to me, however, that the Girardian discourse on the "non-sacrificial" nature of the Passion of Christ offers a helpful contribution to a theo-anthropological discussion of the relationship between sacrifice and the Passion as it relates to, for example, a) understanding the "qualitative difference"[390] between Christianity and pagan religion, b) the relationship between the violence of scapegoating and the Passion, c) conceptions of how God identifies with victims of scapegoating and d) how to conceive the resurrection as undermining "socially therapeutic violence."[391]

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[388] For example, Hamerton-Kelly highlights the Girardian reading of Paul's discipleship strategy in 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1, suggesting that Paul was a "model/mediator of Christ, not a model/obstacle." Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 174.
[389] Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 55.
[390] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 15.
[391] For the last three points, I am grateful to Heim, "Approaches to Atonement," chap. 24.

Therefore, I am trying to negotiate the 'theo-anthropological value of' and "and not the entirety of" Christian soteriology by utilising Girard's theories concerning Christianity.

As I have repeatedly stated, I apply Girard's theory in my work, understanding that it offers a helpful explanatory schema for discussing conceptions of the interface between religion and society from a multidisciplinary standpoint. And, as Girard makes clear in his appropriation of biblical texts in his analysis, this multidisciplinary standpoint also complements traditional Christian understanding concerning the unveiling potency of the Bible and the person of the Holy Spirit.

Thus far, these mimetic theory themes have not been applied to the Apocalypse as often as to other biblical texts.[392] This is perhaps because some might find it difficult to reconcile the violent rhetoric in the Apocalypse with conceptions of the God of the Bible's love and nonviolent outlook that is germane to the mimetic theory. Girard seemed to allude to this difficulty when he described the Apocalypse as "a text which is clearly less representative of the gospel inspiration than the apocalyptic chapter in the Gospels themselves."[393] As I discuss in the next section, this difficulty has not stopped some scholars from developing interpretations of passages in the Apocalypse informed by mimetic theory.

[392] Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos*, 57.
[393] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 181.

5.3. Mimetic Theory and the Book of Revelation

Jackson and Redmon offer compelling proposals for integrating mimetic theory with the Apocalypse in interpreting the "slaughtered Lamb" motif in Rev 5:5-6. They argue that, faithful to the logic of the mimetic theory, the violence in Revelation depicts the "revelation of violence" of the apocalyptic expression of the scapegoat mechanism.[394] Thus, they contend that the revelation of Christ as the "slaughtered Lamb," which in mimetic theory reading is indicative of the failure of the scapegoat mechanism and the victory of God's love, offers a hermeneutic key for interpreting the Apocalypse and its violence rhetoric and understanding its challenge to the churches to imitate the Lamb and not violent models.[395]

Finamore reflects the same understanding of the "slaughtered Lamb" motif within the framework of scapegoating, quintessential to mimetic theory in his mimetic theory-informed study on Rev 4-6.[396] In his mimetic theory reading of the chaos scene in Rev 6, he argues that the rider of the white horse is a metaphor for the "activities" of Christ and his followers and the apocalyptic nature of the gospel as a means of exposing the latent scapegoating cycle that underpins human culture.[397]

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[394] J. A. Jackson and Allen H. Redmon, "'And They Sang a New Song': Reading John's Revelation from the Position of the Lamb," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 12, no. 13 (2006): 100, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41925285.
[395] See Jackson and Redmon, "'And They Sang a New Song," 101–4.
[396] Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos*, 195–96.
[397] Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos*, 202–203, 215–16.

To summarise, it appears to me that both treatments of the Apocalypse through the lens of mimetic theory offer different ideas within a shared foundational view of their understanding of the "wrath of God" motif in Revelation (e.g., Rev 6, 16-20). Jackson and Redmon do not understand the motif as an expression of God's violence but as an expression of human suffering in mythological language.[398] Finamore would also not attribute violence to God; however, in his reading of Rev 6, he claims that the cultural chaos is set into motion by the gospel (the first rider), thus he connects divine judgement (and not wanton violence) to God as an eschatological concept.[399]

Nevertheless, both offer helpful insights into understanding the violent rhetoric in the Apocalypse. For example, the eschatological contextualisation of God's divine judgement can remind us of human epistemic limitations, which impact our ability to comprehend certain spiritual motifs. Also, these works are significant for my thesis because they show how, despite appearances, John's narrative, particularly the "slaughtered Lamb" motif, can be construed as a foil to the violence that characterised the society in which his hearers were a part. My project, however, differs from both of these works. I address how the mimetic theory reading of meal motifs, like in Rev 3:20, is instrumental in bringing about cultural renewal. This is

[398] Jackson and Redmon, "'And They Sang a New Song," 111.
[399] He describes the "wrath of God," which the gospel introduces, as an eschatological concept whereby humans are presented "with a final crisis in which the choices are the gospel or destruction." Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos*, 214, 219.

because of its association with the "slaughtered Lamb" and its connection to motifs of sacrifice and social order in the ancient world.

5.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I offered a brief introduction to René Girard. I highlighted the multidisciplinary nature of his epistemology (i.e., phenomenological approach with a Christian theological leaning) and methodology (i.e., reader-response interpreter). Next, I discussed some common criticisms of his theory. I supported it mainly because of its universal appeal and, therefore, its heuristic value. I claimed that for this reason, Girard's theory provided a distinctive theo-anthropological insight into the socio-religious themes identified in my analysis of the composition of Revelation and the meal motif in Rev 3:20. I also identified which Girardian concepts were best suited to discussing the theo-anthropological themes, namely, his concept of a) violence as an outworking of acquisitive mimesis, b) the symbiotic relationship between violence and pagan religion, c) the sacrificial ritual as a means of establishing and maintaining social order, and d) the Bible and the Holy Spirit, as agents of revelation par excellence. I discussed how mimetic theory helps to highlight the blurred boundaries between the sacred and 'everyday life' in archaic communities. Next, I discussed how Girard's theological anthropology complements traditional Christian understanding about the unveiling potency of the Bible (especially OT victim and Passion narratives) and the person of the Holy Spirit concerning the scapegoat mechanism that acts as a dangerous social force in the

world. Finally, I reviewed some works that apply mimetic theory to studying the Apocalypse. I signalled how my thesis contributes to this discussion.

In the remainder of Part II of my thesis, I will address the application of mimetic theory to the four cultural objects I identified (i.e., sacrifice, Greco-Roman banquets, Eucharist, and imperial cults) and develop Girardian readings[400] on each one. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will begin this analysis by discussing points of contact between Girard's theory of sacrifice and studies of sacrifice, particularly in the ancient Greek context. This investigation is necessary to understand the possible sacrificial ideas behind certain meals in the Greco-Roman world. These ideas may also be associated with the meal motif in Rev 3:20. And they could benefit our contemporary understanding of the possible sacrificial dimension of the meal motif, especially if considered for its eucharistic value.

[400] By "Girardian readings" and "Girardian model," I am alluding to my impressions of the topics under review using mimetic theory. Thus, I am not suggesting that these are Girard's personal opinions.

CHAPTER 6

SACRIFICE

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the relevant aspects of Girard's mimetic theory to my thesis. I claimed that Girard's theory functions best as a heuristic tool: a theoretical framework that offers a compelling theo-anthropologically informed explanation of the origin of human culture, particularly the interface between the sacred and profane domains of life. I also suggested that this interface typified the sacrificial underpinnings of meals in archaic communities like that of the Greco-Roman cultures from which Christianity emerged.

Sacrifice is the first of the four cultural objects I considered pertinent to interpreting the meal motif in Rev 3:20. Therefore, in this chapter, I will review it through the lens of Girard's mimetic theory and develop Girardian readings, which discuss key points of contact between Girard's theory of sacrifice (particularly about his view on the 'sacred' in archaic, pagan communities)[401] and studies on Greco-Roman sacrifice.

[401] See Chapter 5, section 5.2.3. There is an emphasis on pagan conceptions of sacrifice because, in Girard's analysis, the pagan analysis precedes the Judeo-Christian analysis. Palaver succinctly captures the development and overlap in Girard's analysis of pagan gods and the God of the Bible when he notes, "According to Girard, it was biblical revelation that led from the archaic sacred to the holy: 'The God of the Bible is at first the God of the sacred, and then more and more the God of the holy, foreign to all violence, the God of the Gospels.' This difference is at the centre of Girard's theory of religion." Palaver, "Monotheism and the Abrahamic Revolution," chap. 14. Thus, this discussion marks the start of a broader analysis in my thesis concerning 'transcendence' in Girard's theory that begins with the "false

6.1. Locating Girard in the Sacrifice Debate

Recent studies on sacrifice in the Greco-Roman world, as Faraone and Naiden confirm, have focused on "animal sacrifice" and its alleged central role in Greco-Roman cultures.[402] Moreover, Faraone and Naiden have summarised the so-called "prevailing view"[403] that continues to generate scholarly debate on the nature of animal sacrifice in the Greco-Roman world,[404] stating:

> First, animal sacrifice differed from other rituals, including other kinds of sacrifice. It was unique. Second, animal sacrifice, and especially the meal occurring after it, accounted for male bonding, group formation, and cultural self-definition. Besides being unique, animal sacrifice was socially and politically determinative. These two qualities gave it the status of a central ritual.[405]

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transcendence" of archaic, pagan communities and ends with the discussion of the 'Holy transcendence' of biblical revelation, which will be covered in the discussion on the Eucharist in Chapter 8.

[402] Christopher A. Faraone and F. S. Naiden. "Introduction," in *Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice: Ancient Victims, Modern Observers*, eds. Christopher A. Faraone and F. S. Naiden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1. https://doi:10.1017/CBO9780511894602.002.

[403] Faraone and Naiden. "Introduction," 6.

[404] A vital aspect of these debates could also be summarised to centre around questions concerning to what extent these components could be accepted as universal explanations of Greco-Roman animal sacrifice given, for example, questions about the complexity and variety of sacrifices that appear to decentralise animal sacrifice, e.g., occasions of incense burning in the Roman context. Faraone and Naiden. "Introduction," 4, 5. See also support for more local interpretations of ancient sacrificial practices in Jennifer Wright Knust and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi, "Introduction: Images, Acts, Meanings and Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice," in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice,* eds. Jennifer Wright Knust and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4. However, I focus on developing a conception of sacrifice based on the understanding that such components, namely, the killing and alimentary aspects, did exist. And I am more concerned about their relevance to the Eucharist. Thus, I am keen to understand to what extent they could inform the specific aims of my thesis.

[405] Faraone and Naiden. "Introduction," 2.

The value of this summary of the prominent view for my thesis is that it identifies two aspects that offer a baseline for discussing the conception of sacrifice central to Greco-Roman ritual and commensal understanding. This conception of sacrifice involved killing and (almost always) consuming a sacrificial animal. These fundamental components of animal sacrifice in the Greco-Roman era resonate with aspects of Girard's universal theory[406] of the origins and nature of sacrifice.[407]Therefore, in the following sections, I summarise the two prominent views[408] of animal sacrifice in the Greco-Roman context that underpins this "prevailing view."[409]

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[406] Walter Burtket also notes the pervasiveness of animal sacrifice in the ancient world, arguing that "The Greeks did not perceive much difference between the substance of their own customs and those of the Egyptians and Phoenicians, Babylonians and Persians, Etruscans and Romans, though ritual details varied greatly among the Greeks themselves." Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 9. In addition to highlighting the pervasiveness of animal sacrifice, I understand such comments also highlight the possibility of a shared understanding among the ancient cultures. This gives some credence to applying universal theories of sacrifice as espoused in the mimetic theory analysis.

[407] Indeed, Girard is one of the leading scholars contributing to this view. See Graf, Fritz, "One Generation after Burkert and Girard: Where Are the Great Theories?" in *Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice: Ancient Victims, Modern Observers*, eds. Christopher A. Faraone and F. S. Naiden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For a summary of the prominent theories on the origin of ritual and sacrifice (i.e., René Girard's founding murder motif, Walter Burkert's Palaeolithic hunting motif, and Jonathan Z. Smith's ritual killing of domesticated animals motif), see Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard & Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 6–51.

[408] In addition, my claim of the prominent status of these views can also find support in Faraone and Naiden's observations about the roots of the violence and commensal emphasis in Greco-Roman animal sacrifice when they state, "Burkert's theme of violence goes back to the French reactionary de Maistre, and the French school's theme of commensal solidarity goes back to Durkheim and the Enlightenment. The work of both sides appears as the latest,

6.1.1. Killing-violence emphasis on sacrifice

The first view is the killing-violence emphasis on ancient Greek sacrifice. Girard would fall into the camp of scholars that espouse this view of ancient Greek sacrifice insofar as the view argues that killing or violence characterises sacrifice.[410]

In his seminal work on ancient Greek sacrifice, *Homo Necans*, Burkert argued that Homer and Greek tragedy offer the sources for creating a comprehensive theory of the ancient Greek sacrificial practices.[411] He notes:

> If a man is able to draw near to the gods, as the priest Chryses with Apollo or as Hektor or Odysseus with Zeus, he can do so because he has "burnt many thigh-pieces of bulls" (*Il*. 140, 22.170; *Od*. 1.66), for this is the act of piety: bloodshed, slaughter—and eating. It makes no difference if there is no temple or cult-statue, as often occurs in the cult of Zeus.[412]

Thus, he concludes that "Sacrificial killing is the basic experience of the 'sacred'"[413] and further supports this claim by, for example, drawing a parallel to ancient Israel's

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but not necessarily the last, stage in two centuries of debate." Faraone and Naiden. "Introduction," 5.

[409] See Bruce Lincoln, "From Bergaigne to Meuli," in *Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice: Ancient Victims, Modern Observers,* eds. Christophe Faraone and F. S. Naiden, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13, https://doi:10.1017/CBO9780511894602.004. https://doi:10.1017/CBO9780511894602.005. I am also grateful to Knust et al. for presenting a classification of scholarly opinions of ancient sacrifice (e.g., discussion on "The Violence at the Heart of Sacrifice" and "Sacrifice as Cuisine"). See Knust and Várhelyi, "Introduction," 7–11.

[410] See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 92, 307.

[411] Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 3. As I discuss, Burkert can be understood to straddle the killing and alimentary conceptions of sacrifice. However, his view of sacrifice understands killing as a core feature of the phenomenon; hence, I am discussing him under the category of killing-violence to address this aspect of his understanding.

[412] Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 2.

[413] Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 3.

sacrificial rites practised up until the destruction of the temple (citing Lev 6:2; Dan 8:11).[414]

Burkert also suggests that sacrifice, the act of killing in particular, was central to the sacrificial rite, even though vegetables were also offered.[415] He, however, acknowledges that there was more to sacrifice in the ancient Greek context than killing the sacrificial animal; he argues, "The core is always the experience of death brought about by human violence . . . And this is nearly always connected with another human—all too human—action, namely, eating: the festive meal of those who share in the sacred."[416] For Burkert, there was also an alimentary aspect to the sacrificial rite. Elsewhere, he discusses how this perspective of sacrifice distinguished him from others, like Girard, who espouses a strictly killing-violence perspective; he states:

> If there is annihilation in the scapegoat complex, it is characteristically left to "the others," to hostile forces, be they demons or real enemies. The basic action seems to be abandonment. It is different with normal sacrifice, which through killing leads to the communal meal.[417]

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[414] Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 2.
[415] Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 12.
[416] Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 12.
[417] Walter Burkert, "The Problem of Ritual Killing," in *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 172.

Thus, even though killing-violence is essential to understanding ancient sacrifice in the ancient Greek context for Burkert, he understands it to be a key stage in ancient sacrifice of which eating is the ultimate goal.

Furthermore, he argues that this qualified view of ancient sacrifice is an aspect of the phenomenon that those, like Girard, who hold a killing-violence view fail to observe.[418] Burket suggests that Girard is misinformed by his emphasis on the socio-psychological issues that he claims lead to sacrifice. In the final analysis, however, Burkert's theory of sacrifice adds some weight to Girard's claim of the central role of violence in the origin of culture, if it as also assumed that matters of cultural origin are encoded in ancient Greek sacrifice and their supportive myths.

Burkert also notes the limitations of his theory of the hunt vis-à-vis Girard's account of the religious and moral dimensions of sacrifice, stating that:

> [T]he scapegoat complex . . . is an important phenomenon that is not accounted for in *Homo Necans*. The abandonment of the scapegoat and related forms of "purification" sacrifice, and even ritual killings termed purge and substitution, cannot be directly derived from the hunting-and-eating complex.[419]

By insisting on the significance of the eating practices at the end of the hunt itself, Burkert signals another aspect of the phenomenon that other historians of ancient

[418] Burkert, "The Problem of Ritual Killing," 172.
[419] Burkert, "The Problem of Ritual Killing," 173.

sacrifice claim to be significant, if not central, to understanding the sacrificial customs of the ancient Greeks.

6.1.2. Alimentary emphasis on sacrifice

The ancient Greek sacrifice featured an alimentary (and by extension, the social-hierarchical implications of sacrifice) and not just a killing-violence aspect. The major proponents of this view were French scholars Vernant and Detienne, the latter of who argued that, from the Promethean myth, the division of meat between Zeus and Prometheus is vital to understanding the Greek alimentary emphasis of sacrifice.[420]

Peirce is another proponent of this view that has directly contested Burket's view. In her crucial article on ancient Greek sacrifice, Peirce refutes claims that the ancient Greeks associated violence with their thinking on sacrifice (*thysia*).[421] In so doing, Peirce also supports the theory of the so-called "Paris school," which she notes contend *thysia* is:

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[420] See Jean-Pierre Vernant, "At Man's Table: Hesiod's Foundation Myth of Sacrifice," in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks: Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant; with Essays by Jean-Louis Durand ... (Et Al.)*, trans. Paula Wissing, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 21–86. I am grateful here to Faraone for providing the summary of the alimentary view of Vernant and Detienne. See Faraone, and Naiden. "Introduction," 1–2.

[421] She defines sacrifice as "alimentary blood sacrifice." Sarah Peirce, "Death, Revelry, and 'Thysia'," *Classical Antiquity* 12, no. 2 (1993): 219, https://doi:10.2307/25010995. For other iterations of this perspective, see Gunnel Erkoht, "Burnt, Cooked or Raw? Divine and Human Culinary Desires at Greek Animal Sacrifice," in *Transformations in Sacrificial Practices from Antiquity to Modern Times*, eds. Eftychia Stavrianopoulou, Axel Michaels, and Claus Ambos (Berlin: Lit, 2008), 87–111.

> [A] classificatory ritual that, through the establishment of modes of eating proper to each species, determines man's place in the universe in distinction from gods and beasts. Sacrificial meaning in this theory stems from the use of the animal as food.[422]

Through an evaluation of drawings on Attic Vases, Peirce claims that the sacrifices had less to do with violence and more with alimentation and the construction of social order between the gods, humans, and beasts. She supports this argument by highlighting how, in most instances, the absence of the killing of the animal on the vases suggests that violence was not in view. For instance, she argues that there is little evidence of how the Greeks felt about the ritual killing of animals to argue for a theory based on violence;[423] hence, her desire to look at the Attic vases as visual indicators of the understanding of the Greeks concerning *thysia*.[424]

Peirce notes some fundamental differences between the Paris school and Burkert that stem from the difference between a universal and particularistic approach to discussing sacrifice. She argues:

[422] Peirce, "Death, Revelry, and 'Thysia'," 222.
[423] Peirce, "Death, Revelry, and 'Thysia'," 225.
[424] Peirce, "Death, Revelry, and 'Thysia'," 225. She claims, "What we see on the vases is a system of conventional representation whose referent is a conceptual consensus between the painters and the viewers regarding *thysia.*" Peirce, "Death, Revelry, and 'Thysia'," 227.

> The intellectual foundation of Burkert's theory of sacrifice is in the first instance evolutionism (though the superstructure is quite eclectic): Burkert's first principle is the definition of sacrifice as a universal category, whose character as murder in its Greek context is determined by its origins in a primordial ritual of the Palaeolithic hunt. The Paris-Lausanne school by contrast, as a fundamental principle of method, rejects the concept of global cultural phenomena such as sacrifice, defining *thysia* by its particularity, as a symbolic system that is uniquely bound to and expressive of one particular society, the Greek polis.[425]

Peirce's caution not to press meta-narratives on sacrifice too far has some merit, not least if such interpretation approaches cause universal theories of sacrifice to overshadow significant local factors under investigation. Nevertheless, I do not consider it unreasonable to suggest some overlapping of sacrificial concepts between certain prehistoric eras and the ancient Greek period. As Graf notes, Greek conceptions of animal sacrifice likely owe their origins to "some basic forms of animal sacrifice" performed by early Neolithic societies in Northern Syria and Southeastern Turkey, probably during their transition from hunters to agriculturists.[426] Graf suggests this because of what he claims appears to be a shared conception of the need to select and hierarchically categorise animals between

[425] Peirce, "Death, Revelry, and 'Thysia'," 224.
[426] For example, he cites the "rich animal iconography," indicative of a "hunting culture" found in Göbekli Tepe, and the "evidence both of domestic meat consumption and of lavish group meals on large amounts of meat" in Çatal Höyük. See Fritz Graf, "One Generation after Burkert and Girard," in *Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice: Ancient Victims, Modern Observers,* eds. Christopher A. Faraone and F. S. Naiden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 49–51.

Neolithic societies and Ancient Near Eastern cultures.[427] Such observations about the Neolithic domestication practices and the Ancient Mediterranean conceptions of animal sacrifice offer compelling links between the two cultures. And in my opinion, this should caution against pushing Peirce's particularistic narrative too far.

Also, in light of the distinction Peirce makes between the fundamental premise of the Paris school and Burkert's view, it is not entirely accurate to conclude from her distinction that Burkert focuses on killing-violence at the expense of the alleged alimentary aspects of sacrifice. My objection here is critical because, as mentioned above, Burkert also claims that there was an alimentary element in ancient Greek sacrifice, if not an alimentary goal.

As Williams rightly observes, the alimentary aspect does not foreclose a discussion on what might have given rise to it in the first place but only raises more questions about the relationship between sacrifice and the meal, he notes:

> [T]he meal is better explained by sacrifice than sacrifice by the meal. The meal, specifically the communal consumption of the sacrificial victim, presupposes very definite rules, differences, practices that must be done just right. Where do they come from? What is their origin? The meal model simply presupposes some prior system that must be posited or speculated.[428]

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[427] For instance, he observes that "We already have the ubiquitous triad of bovines, ovicaprids, and pigs, with pigs by far the least common of the three in the Çatal Höyük bone material, but this is true for historical Greece as well. We have the domination of the sheep as the main meat-producing animal, reflected in the dominant role of sheep sacrifice in all Near Eastern cultures, including Greece." Graf, "One Generation after Burkert and Girard," 50.
[428] James G. Williams, "Sacrifice, mimesis, and the genesis of violence: a response to Bruce Chilton," *BBR* 3, (1993): 43–44.

I agree with Williams that the evident rites and customs around the meal signal the existence of a "prior system." And the killing-violence motifs of sacrifice offer a compelling answer to what this "prior system" might have been. Nevertheless, from a *prima facie* reading, the arguments from both sides of the sacrifice debate seem plausible, with both sides also calling on historical evidence to support their claims. Faraone and Naiden note how some scholars are now calling for alternative readings of the Neolithic basis of Burkert's theory and the Homeric and Hesiodic basis of the Paris school position.[429] Also, they note that others, such as Cristiano Grottanelli, have highlighted the shortcomings of both perspectives, arguing that they do not address the socio-political issues associated with the distribution of meat beyond the sacrificial event.[430]

What does not seem to be a disputed point in the debate is the existence of a mode of sacrifice that involves animal sacrifice and meat consumption.[431] As I discuss in the next section, overlapping conceptions of sacrifice are an opportunity for

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[429] Faraone and Naiden, "Introduction," 2–3.

[430] Faraone and Naiden, "Introduction," 3. This is a point Naiden also discusses when he contends that in ancient Greece, there was not enough meat to feed large groups of people and those who typically benefited from such sacrifice were limited to those officiating the sacrifice and the few people they invited to dine with them, i.e., their assistants called "parasites." See F. S. Naiden, "Blessèd Are the Parasites," in *Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice: Ancient Victims, Modern Observers,* eds. Christopher A. Faraone and F. S. Naiden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 55–56, https://doi:10.1017/CBO9780511894602.007.

[431] Also, it is interesting to note the relationship between sacrifice and beef consumption, which Donahue argues would have been rarely consumed by most outside the realm of sacrifice because it was expensive. See John F. Donahue, *Food and Drink in Antiquity: Readings from the Graeco-Roman World: A Sourcebook,* Bloomsbury Sources in Ancient History (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 115.

scholars to develop conceptions of the phenomenon that can help in theological construction projects like mine. These are projects that aim to discuss sacrifice within the bounds of historical findings and scholarly debates.

6.2. Developing a Useful Conception of Sacrifice

As a consequence of the above claims and counterclaims on the issue of ancient Greek sacrifice, I will take my cue on the matter from the following recommendations by Knust and Várhelyi concerning issues to consider in the study of ancient sacrifice in general:

> Approaching ancient sacrifice in a new way requires attention to the particular and local character of both practices and meanings as well as a recognition that sacrifice is often a contested, fluid category. As Folkert Van Straten has argued, sacrifice is better understood if we think of it as "a continuous field of overlapping shades of meaning or potential meaning" rather than as a single, static category. Participants at the very same ritual performance may not share the same set of assumptions or symbolic associations, even when taking part in shared ritual acts. Thus varied meanings, functions, and symbols can coexist simultaneously—not only among distinct religious groups, but even within a shared interpretative circle.[432]

Knust and Várhelyi's comment about a possible fluidity in the understanding of sacrifice in the ancient Mediterranean world is significant to the social-scientific aspects of my methodology. This is because such suggestions of fluidity only highlight the importance of using theoretical conceptions, such as I do with the use of

[432] Knust and Várhelyi, "Introduction," 4. This comment highlights the appeal of contemporary sacrifice scholarship for a move from meta-theories to particular approaches in ancient sacrifice studies. This is an important appeal, which I have noted in my above discussion on Peirce's review of Burket's approach.

mimetic theory, to help explicate the particular artefacts of sacrifice under investigation.

Given some recent claims about scholarly practice in this field, it seems reasonable to conclude that the study of sacrifice is also characterised by theory-determined interpretations—even after considering relevant historical matters. For example, Knüsel and Glencross note the way, they claim, archaeologists have typically conceptualised the bone remains found at Çatalhöyük as alluding to "ritual" and not violence. They state:

> Evidence of conflict was not sought, and potentially linked finds were ascribed to a different (often ritualistic) cause or significance. Fortifications and the weapons accompanying individuals in the grave became symbolic of status or indicative of social identity. Human remains continue to be referred to as "burials"—even in the absence of prepared graves. The above comments can thus appear as covering arguments for a particular interpretive framework, one increasingly unable to account for the emerging archaeological patterns observed.[433]

To be sure, all sides of the sacrifice debate could charge the other side with having predetermined conceptions about the evidence under investigation.[434] Such debates can remind us, however, that one's epistemology and present investigative goals

[433] They offer a compelling argument for evidence of violence and scapegoating from discoveries of human remains with marks of injury at the Çatalhöyük site that indicate that blunt force trauma and sling stones were the causes of injury. See Christopher J. Knüsel and Bonnie Glencross, "Çatalhöyük, Archaeology, Violence," in *PHMTR,* eds. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 10, Kindle.
[434] Indeed, such charges can also characterise objections to the "prevailing view." See Faraone and F. S. Naiden, "Introduction," 1–5.

may also play a role in interpreting ancient artefacts—reflecting the old positivism vs. objectivism dilemma.

Consequently, it seems to me that what is more critical is for scholars to disclose their epistemology and investigative goals and incorporate such into their study of ancient sacrifice. I assume such disclosure is necessary to establish trust with readers, especially those who might be aware of the ongoing debates around the two prominent perspectives that characterise the "prevailing view" discussed and the continued research in this field.

Therefore, concerning my discussion of sacrifice in my thesis, I must note again that, notwithstanding my social-scientific interpretive method, I also write with a Christian epistemological perspective. Also, it seems to me that applying Girard's universal theory of sacrifice can significantly help explicate particular evidence of sacrifice to determine their religious and social dimension.[435]

Therefore, in the remaining half of this chapter, I will discuss how I incorporate the above findings on the alimentary emphasis of ancient Greek sacrifice (since this is what is underdeveloped in Girard's theory of sacrifice) with the killing-

[435] I agree that "Girard's perspective provides archaeologists with the opportunity to support a more literal reading of imagery with physical evidence that might support the mimetic thesis: that there is a relationship between violence and religion in the genesis and maintenance of culture." Knüsel and Glencross, "Çatalhöyük, Archaeology, Violence," chap. 10.

violence emphasis in Girard's theory of sacrifice by reflecting on the relationship between food, gods, and conflict in ancient Greek myths.

6.3. A Focus on Myths

The focus on myth is essential because, for Girard, myths are codified forms of founding murders, that is to say, "all myths must have their roots in real acts of violence against real victims."[436] I found Girard's claim about the value of myths for understanding ancient sacrificial rituals quite compelling, not least because, to borrow Palaver's analysis of Girard's claims about the utility of myths, such claims centre on a review of "ancient artefacts," which makes it analogous to "historical analysis," and thus indicative of theories based on established methods in historical scholarship.[437] As Girard puts it, in an objection to claims that the collective murders in myths do not pertain to anything real, "I think a purely 'symbolic' interpretation, the invocation of some fantasy or another, to explain all these scenes of violence is

[436] See Girard, *Scapegoat*, 25. As Palaver notes describing Girard's conception of myths: "myths are oral accounts or written texts that portray the founding murder from the persecutors' perspective. They tell in distorted form of an actual happening and are derived from the collective violence directed at an actual victim." Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 180. Alison and Palaver describe the mimetic theory conception of myths, stating that ". . . all myths narrate cultural origins as issuing from a supernatural intervention, the action of a sacred being, a divinity which is to be worshipped and propitiated by ritual sacrifice. For mimetic theory, this god is a mystified transformation of the victim of uncontrolled violence, when the rivalry of all against all streamlines into the violence of all against one, resulting in concord, in harmonious action. Myth hides the communal violence that leads to the unanimous destruction of a victim, which is retrospectively viewed as a god for the unified order which its unanimous destruction occasions." Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p.

[437] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 180.

dictated by a systematic prejudice against the real."[438] Indeed, giving the plausibility to the claim that myths codify actual events, it could also be argued that categorical objections to such claims may have something to do with subjectivism in the application of scientific approaches to historical analysis.

Other non-Girardian scholars have affirmed that there was a reflexive dynamic between myths and certain ancient beliefs and practices. For example, Gilhus notes that the function of the sacral meal was to connect the participants with the past through the "myths and mythological prototypes" on which the meal was founded.[439] She rightly highlights how, for example, in the mysteries of the Mithras, the ritual meal is based on a mythological prototype, the meal that Mithras had with the Sun following his butchering of an ox.[440] Also, she rightly notes how the celebration of the Eucharist centres on the death of Jesus, in which the participants communicate with God through the ritual and points to the hope of salvation for them.[441] These studies of the connection between myths and ancient Mediterranean

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[438] Girard, *I See Satan*, 64. I also agree with Palaver's compelling response to objections in contemporary ethnology to the use of myth for interpreting ritual sacrifice when he asks, "Can we not assume the metaphor and figurative speech are ultimately based on reality? By the same token, is it not absurd to deny that sacrifice accounted for the origins of these "bloody" metaphors?" Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 184.

[439] Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, "Ritual Meals and Polemics in Antiquity," in *Commensality: From Everyday Food to Feast,* eds. Susanne Kerner, Cynthia Chou and Morten Warmind (London; New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 207.

[440] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 207. For a corroboration of this claim by other scholars, see Payam Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief That Shaped the Christian World* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2005), 24–25, 27.

[441] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 207. See 1 Cor 11:23-26.

commensality indicate how myths, especially those characterised by violence, sit at the centre of ancient commensal conceptions.

These concepts relate to the mimetic theory analysis of myths of sacrifice and community forming in primitive societies, which I discuss in the following section. It appears to me that mimetic theory reflections on key ancient Greek myths that informed the banqueting traditions of the Greco-Romans can help me identify points of contact between the killing-violence emphasis of sacrifice in Girard's mimetic theory and the Paris school claims of an alimentary emphasis of sacrifice within those myths.

6.3.1. Food, gods, and conflicts in myths

A review of some of the great myths of ancient Mediterranean culture indicate that food has played a pivotal role in helping people to understand their relationship with the gods and their place in the world vis-à-vis other creatures. As Wilkins observes, "Mediterranean cultures, for example the Jews, Greeks and Romans, imagined their mythical origins at the point where human beings were separated from the gods and recognized their need for nourishment that would henceforth be met by agriculture."[442] Wilkins' claim has some merits, not least because in the

[442] John Wilkins, "Food," in *A Companion to Ancient History*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Somerset: Wiley, 2012), 385, ProQuest Ebook Central.

account of the creation of humans and the so-called "fall of man" in Genesis, for example, food, as he indicates, plays a crucial role in the narrative.[443]

From a literary perspective, food in the Genesis creation account appears to function as a literary tool. For example, it is endowed with a moral agency (2:9) and then used to create a plot conflict (2:15-17). More importantly for my analysis, food is at the centre of the story's tragedy (3:2-19) and, as a whole, is used to explain why there is both a physical and existential separation between the God of the Bible and humans (3:22-24). [444]

A literary analysis of many ancient Mediterranean myths and narratives of origins reveals that "separation from the gods" appears to be the outcome of encounters between the gods and humans around the subject of food. These separations do not happen in a moral vacuum. Some conflicts espoused by Girard (e.g., mimetic rivalry and victim mechanism) often precipitate them. The notion that conflicts often underpinned the Greek myths of sacrifice features in the anthropological analysis of the Promethean and Dionysus myths of sacrifice by

[443] Wilkins, "Food," 385.

[444] Garnsey notes how the Hebrew Bible starts with the story of Adam and Eve and their failure to abstain from eating. The result was that food would now have to be acquired with difficulty in agriculture. He also notes the Promethean myth in which the result again had to do with the difficulty in acquiring food; he concludes: "Agriculture was a punishment imposed upon mankind, and a diet of cereals a drastic comedown from the divine menu of nectar and ambrosia, or from the free produce of the Garden of Eden." Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 1.

proponents of the French school of sacrifice discussed earlier: Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne.

6.3.2. Jean-Pierre Vernant on Prometheus

Vernant regards the Promethean myth as a 'foundation myth' for understanding the alimentary features of Greek sacrifice and, by extension, depicting the pivotal role sacrifice plays in distinguishing humans from the gods.[445] In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Prometheus tricked Zeus into choosing the bones of the ox he offered to him (by covering them with fat). Prometheus, then, ended up with the more desirable meaty part of the offering, which he had covered with the ox's stomach. As a result "wrath came around him [i.e., Zeus] in spirit, when he saw the white bones of the ox arranged with guileful art. And thenceforth the tribes of men on the earth burn to the immortals white bones on fragrant altars."[446] Thus, Vernant concludes that:

> The alimentary rite that brings men into contact with the divine underscores the distance that separates them. Communication is established by a religious procedure that in reminding men of the Promethean fault emphasizes the insurmountable distance between men and gods.[447]

Vernant points to how the division of the parts of the sacrificed animals highlights the distance; namely, the gods receive the bones and not the flesh of the animal, that is, those things that are assumed not to undergo putrefaction and are therefore

[445] See Vernant, "At Man's Table," 24–25.
[446] See lines 550–55 in Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Gregory Nagy and J. Banks, adapt. Gregory Nagy (Centre for Hellenic Studies Harvard University, 2019), https://chs.harvard.edu/primary-source/hesiod-theogony-sb/.
[447] Vernant, "At Man's Table," 25.

associated with decay and death.[448] Thus, for Vernant, ancient Greek sacrifice has two essential functions, especially when viewed through what he argues to be its alimentary attribute. On the one hand, it affords worshipers a moment of intimacy with the gods; on the other, it creates a distance as they recall the fraudulent acts of Prometheus.

The above interpretation of the Prometheus myth offers a compelling explication of the story's cultural implication and resonates with the mimetic theory aspects of my thesis. Moreover, it indicates that the Greco-Roman banquets can be seen as an evolution of a) a mythical narrative of human intimacy with the gods and b) the realisation that human beings have competitive tendencies. Vernant draws a correlation between what he understands to be the "rivalistic" (to borrow Girard's word) underpinning of the Promethean myth and the so-called 'fallen' state of the human condition insofar as this fallen state features the expression of rivalry. He notes, "Humanity's fall is thus directly connected with competition, jealousy, and quarrelsomeness."[449] These claims of a conflict situation indicate that social order

[448] Vernant, "At Man's Table," 25. Wilkins challenges this view, arguing that it is "structuralist." He notes that the myth suggests that Zeus did not assume he was receiving the better part of the sacrifice. He knew he was getting the worst part and was still committed to taking it. So, it is not only the case that the story is about how the sacrifice highlighted the differences between the god, man and animals in the created order, but, as Wilkins notes, the "unrelenting relationship between men and gods." John Wilkins, "The Social and Religious Context of Food and Eating," in *Food in Antiquity*, eds. John Wilkins, F. D. Harvey, and Michael J. Dobson (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), 173.
[449] Vernant, "At Man's Table," 29.

resulted from conflict-rivalry (and thus, violence) between the gods and humans within the context of food when they met at some point in their mythical past.

To be sure, the above mentioned account of Prometheus's trickery of Zeus lacks the victim mechanism of the collective type discussed so far concerning Girard's theory.[450] Of course, a Girardian reading will argue that such myths hide some actual founding act of violence. What is vital to my argument is that this alimentary reading of ancient Greek sacrifice highlights a relationship between food, gods, and conflict (resulting in a reorganising of society). This allows us to amalgamate the killing-violence elements of sacrifice with the alimentary view. But do other Greek myths of origins and banqueting traditions have a stronger resonance with mimetic theory themes?

6.3.3. Marcel Detienne on Dionysus

Detienne also makes a case for the alimentary purpose of ancient Greek sacrifice. To support this claim, he discussed the Orphic story account of the death of Dionysus.[451]

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[450] Girard also identifies "two brothers or enemy twins" myth conflicts, where "one of the two triumphs over the other." See Girard, *I See Satan*, 63.

[451] Detienne takes the mutilation of Dionysus as a core narrative in the varied versions of the myth in antiquity. In his notes, he cites the discussion in the chapter on the "Myth of the Dismemberment of Dionysus" in Ivan M. Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1941), 307–64. See M. Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks: Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant; with Essays by Jean-Louis Durand ... (Et Al.)*, trans. Paula Wissing, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 221. Here, Linforth discusses the breadth of allusions to the dismemberment of the myth in ancient texts and notes that "The fundamental feature of the dismemberment of the god is common to all the texts in which the story is referred to, but within the recognizable framework which it supplies there are many variations in detail." See Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus*, 308.

Detienne draws attention to the fact that the Titans did not just dismember the body of Dionysus in the act of sacrifice, but they also consumed his body (apart from his heart). He argues that this act of dismembering and eating suggests an alimentary function to ancient Greek sacrifice, especially as the Titans cooked the body of Dionysus (i.e., boiled and roasted) before consuming it.[452] Thus, Detienne concludes, "It is precisely these specifications for cooking which refer in the myth to the familiar and ritual gestures of the blood sacrifice."[453] Moreover, Detienne notes that Herodotus, in his *Histories*, noted the Egyptians' disdain for Greek utensils because they were associated with sacrifice.[454] Such observations highlight the connection between Greek sacrifice and commensality.

Besides the alimentary focus of these accounts of the origins of Greek sacrifice, another aspect of the account is of particular interest to my Girardian reading of how the establishment of ancient societies rests on violent acts, and those same societies try to maintain social order through ritual violence.

As Girard notes, the Orphic account of the omophagy of Dionysus by the Titans reflects aspects of the victim mechanism insofar as a mob, fuelled with rivalry, murdered Dionysus.[455] The actions of the Titans are precipitated by Hera's jealousy, an instantiation of acquisitive desire. As is typical of victim mechanisms, the story

[452] Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," 1–2.
[453] Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," 2.
[454] Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," 3.
[455] Also see Girard's comments about this in Girard, *I See Satan*, 64.

ends with Zeus establishing some social order of sorts. This is because a state of social conflict is resolved by Zeus scorching the Titans with a lightning bolt.[456]

6.3.4. Summary

To summarise, what Vernant and Detienne's readings of the founding myths of Greek sacrifice highlight is, first, an intrinsic connection between the gods and food. This suggests that the ancients assumed that they could experience intimacy with the gods through meals—as I will discuss in the next chapter for its significance to the Eucharist. Second, and more critical to the current discussion, is that they also highlight the way that motifs like conflict, sacrifice, and the subsequent establishment of social order loom over the history and practice of the Greco-Roman banqueting.

To be sure, drawing straight-line comparisons between Girard's theory and such readings of Greek myths may stretch the proverbial metaphor too far. But what such a reading does is show the role of religious myths and social conflict in Greek and Roman banqueting traditions. The implications of such Girardian readings of Greek myths about sacrifice for our understanding of the possible relationship between the killing-violence and alimentary motifs of sacrifice within the Girardian register will be discussed next in my conception of a Girardian model of sacrifice.

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[456] See Book IV, lines 169–206 in Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, *Volume I: Books 1-15*, trans. W. H. D Rouse, Loeb Classical Library 344 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 227–29. Girard also reviewed Dionysus as depicted in Euripides' *Bacchae*, discussing the bacchanal as indicative of some "sacrificial crises" reflected in the festival's chaos. See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 126–28.

6.4. A Girardian Model of Sacrifice

Developing a Girardian model of sacrifice is my attempt at synthesising the two aspects of the "prevailing view" in the sacrifice debate (i.e., killing-violence and alimentary emphases) and their relationship to transcendence within myths and the Girardian register.

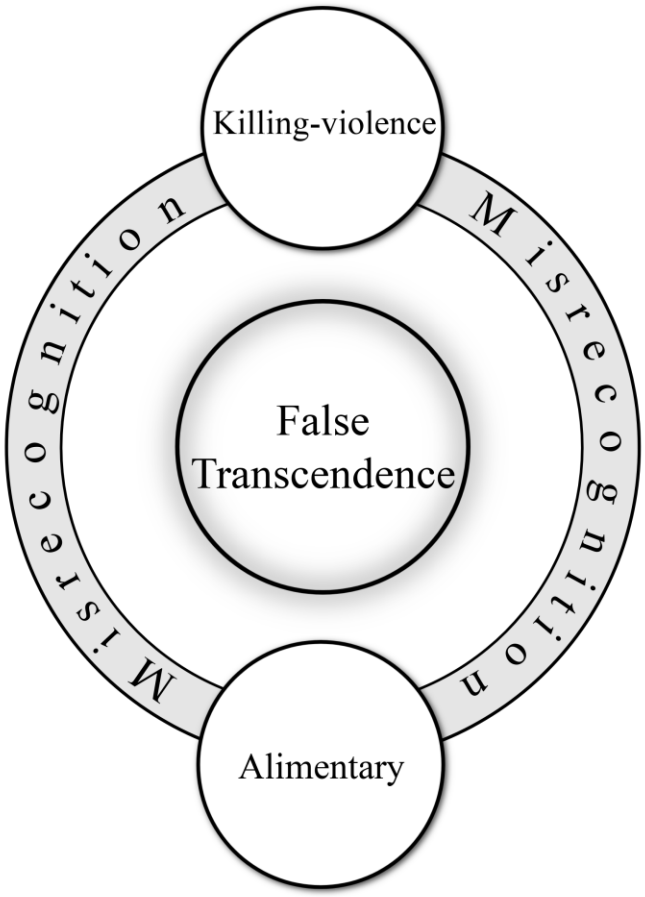

Fig. 6.1. A Girardian model of sacrifice.

In this model, the two prominent perspectives of sacrifice are always in view in the discussion on ancient Mediterranean conceptions of sacrifice.[457] They are assumed to have a shared origin situation. They are both understood to be precipitated by violence, whether in the traces of mimetic rivalry or the victim mechanism in their founding myths. Therefore, the model links them together because of this shared origin situation characterised by violence, which, in Girardian parlance, remains particularly in pagan conceptions, 'misrecognized' by the community.[458]

The gods are also always in view in the model. They feature in the centre of the diagram (as a form of transcendence) to illustrate that the gods are central in the alimentary emphasis of sacrifice (which the myths also highlight). This centralisation of gods also complements Girard's conception of "false transcendence" in his killing-violence analysis. In this analysis, the "false transcendence" represents the 'sacred', the capricious transcendence that emerges following the victim mechanism that the

[457] It is likely that many modern historians work with both views, but perhaps not in the way I have presented in my Girardian model of sacrifice.

[458] The distinction is drawn here between pagan and Judeo-Christian conceptions of sacrifice in the Girardian register because, as Palaver reminds us, "misrecognition" is countered in the latter since "biblical texts also challenge the mythic pattern of the archaic sacred by directly siding with victims of collective persecution. Penitential psalms , the dialogues in the Book of Job , passages in the writing prophets—especially the Suffering Servant of Yahweh (Isa 52–53)—*tell us about collective violence against an innocent victim* [emphasis mine]. The most important passages in the Bible in this regard are the passion narratives in the New Testament. Like mythical texts, these narratives talk about collective violence against a single individual. Unlike myths, however, they do not side with the persecutors *but reveal the innocence of the scapegoat Jesus* [emphasis mine]." Palaver, "Monotheism and the Abrahamic Revolution," chap. 14.

sacrificing community must negotiate.[459] Thus, the model (particularly the motifs of "misrecognition" and "false transcendence") also offers a foundation for assessing (as I do in the following sections) the socio-religious determinants of sacral meals in Greco-Roman societies. Finally, this model offers a comprehensive framework for discussing sacral meals associated with sacrifice because it accounts for the critical aspects of the "prevailing view" of sacrifice in the ancient Mediterranean world.

6.5. Conclusions

In conclusion, I discussed the two prominent perspectives on ancient Greek sacrifice in this chapter: the killing-violence and alimentary emphasis. I also claimed that Girard's mimetic theory, as a theory of sacrifice, fits squarely within the killing-violence emphasis views. Given the difficulty in defining the concept of sacrifice in the ancient world, I discussed the need for scholars to develop a conception of sacrifice that they will use in their analysis. Consequently, I developed a Girardian model of sacrifice after disclosing my characteristically Christian epistemological outlook and my interest in mimetic theory conceptions of sacrifice. This model synthesised the killing-violence, alimentary emphases, and their related concepts of the gods (via myths) to depict how they might feature within the Girardian register of sacrifice. The model diagram illustrated how the killing-violence motifs and the

[459] See Chapter 5. The significance of this topic of transcendence for the theological aspects of my thesis is that the Girardian emphasis on transcendence, as Finamore rightly points out, "is concerned to restore the idea of transcendence to discourse about human culture and society." Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos*, 57.

alimentary motifs of sacrifice are connected insofar that they can both be understood as characterised by violence. The model also captures how the idea of transcendence/gods was central to the killing-violence motifs in Girard's theory of the founding murder (as "false transcendence") and the ancient Greek myths that emphasised alimentary concepts of sacrifice. I intimated how the model could be used to describe how the community must carefully negotiate with the 'gods' and offer a starting point for discussions about the socio-religious factors associated with Greco-Roman sacral meals.

Finally, I noted that a significant value of this model for my analysis is that it offers a plausible Greco-Roman conception of the relationship between food, sacrifice, and transcendence. But to what extent can such a model be helpful to understanding some of the religious and social aspects of Greco-Roman commensality and, by extension, the meal motif in Rev 3:20? I will address this question in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

GRECO-ROMAN BANQUETS

In the previous chapter, I introduced my Girardian model of sacrifice. I discussed how it offered a combined assessment of the killing-violence and alimentary emphases of sacrifice. I also discussed how it could be helpful to theological construction projects like mine that address the topic of Greco-Roman sacrifice by accounting for a likely interplay between the different emphases on the topic. I demonstrated how this Girardian model of sacrifice also reflects the critical idea of a relationship between food, gods and sacrifice in the ancient Greek world.

This relationship is also featured in the banqueting traditions of Greco-Roman cultures, which is the second of the four cultural objects I identified in my commentary review. I also consider this cultural object central to the interpretation of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 insofar as I have established that the meal could be conceived, in its broadest meaning, to be in the genus of Greco-Roman commensal customs.

In this chapter, I will discuss the nature of Greco-Roman banquets, mainly focusing on a) the interface between the religious and social[460] dimensions of the meals and b) the social implications of the alleged ideology of the banquets. This analysis is necessary to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the claims

[460] 'Social' here includes economic, political, and cultural as well.

of the association between sacrifice, Greco-Roman commensality, and the meal motif in Rev 3:20 and, by extension, the Eucharist.

The methodology I have adopted for the analysis reflects a synchronic appraisal of commensality among Greco-Roman cultures.[461] Also, the appraisal will mainly cover commensality in the Greco-Roman era that spans the classical Greek period (6th century B.C.) [462] to early Christianity under the Roman Empire (A.D. 1st–2nd century).

7.1. Sacrifice and Greco-Roman Banquets

The banquet was a sophisticated medium of social organising in Greco-Roman cultures. In discussing the nature of banquets in the *poleis* post the 7th century, Evans notes that "In these public dining rooms throughout Hellas citizens transmitted their social, religious, and political values, and observed a type of commensality that reinforced the power structure of the polis and celebrated the worship of ancestral gods."[463] Evans' comments capture two widely claimed aspects of the Greco-Roman banqueting traditions relevant to my argument about the meal motif in Rev 3:20.

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[461] This appraisal highlights some of the shared commensal ideas and practices that most scholars note existed across the varied Greco-Roman cultures. See also Gilhus's comments about the synchronic approach vis-à-vis diachronic approach to the study of Greco-Roman commensality, where, in the synchronic approach, a premium is placed on insights from the study of shared practices. Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 205.

[462] See Dennis Edwin Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 20.

[463] Nancy A. Evans, "Evidence for Slaves at the Table in the Ancient Mediterranean: From Traditional Rural Festivals to Urban Associations," in *Meals in the Early Christian World Social*

First, Evans' comment about the social instrumentality of the ancient banquets[464] echoes widely attested claims that the two-part Greco-Roman banquet[465] was a "social institution." For instance, Smith argues that these banquets were the "social institution of the first order and permeated all levels of ancient life" and insists that they are instrumental to understanding the "form and ideology of the banquet," which in turn can assist in "reconstructing the social realities of ancient life."[466] By appealing to the works of ancient Greek authors like Plato and Aristotle, Schmitt-Pantel echoes this claim and offers a convincing argument for the social-forming quality of banquets as perceived by notable classical Greek authors.[467]

Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table, eds. Dennis Smith and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 151.

[464] That is, how they were a means by which people "transmitted their social, religious, and political values, and observed a type of commensality that reinforced the power structure of the polis." Evans, "Evidence for Slaves," 151.

[465] Distinctions can be made between *deipnon* and *symposium* in Greek culture and the *cena* and *convivium* in Roman culture. But the two-part meal (i.e., food section followed by a drinking part) was generally assumed to be the standard meal format. See Matthias Klinghardt, "A Typology of the Communal Meal," in *Meals in the Early Christian World Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, eds. Dennis Smith and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 10.

[466] Dennis E. Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet as a Social Institution," in *Meals in the Early Christian World Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, eds. Dennis Smith and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 32.

[467] She notes "The development of common meals was seen by Greek authors as contemporary with the introduction of rules which ensure proper coherence in a community; common meals were on the same level as the mastery of bloody sacrifice. Meals were thus regarded as the fundamental structures of a social group and the driving force for sociability. This is confirmed in numerous texts, including Plato (Rep. 2,372af), Aristotle (Pol. 7,1329bf.) and Theophrastus (in Porphyrium de abstinentia 2,28,4-31) in the 4th and 3rd cent. BC." Pauline (Paris) Schmitt-Pantel, "Table Culture," in *Brill's New Pauly*, eds. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, Section C. Meals, para. 3, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e402730. Schmitt-Pantel also notes that while some of the banqueting traditions of early antiquity (such as the emphasis on festivity) may have waned during the early

Although Schmitt-Pantel's observations could be understood to be addressing an earlier time in classical antiquity, because of the reference to classical Greek authors, it would appear, as I discuss in this chapter, that these conceptions of the social dimension of the banquets characterised most if not all Greco-Roman cultures banqueting traditions into late antiquity. Thus, they offer significant insight into the shared conceptions of the social function of the banquet in the Greco-Roman world.[468]

Second, Evans' comment about the banquet's simultaneous social and religious aims highlights what other scholars have rightly noted concerning the symbiotic relationship between banquets and rituals among Greco-Roman cultures. For example, Detienne notes that in ancient Greece, no non-ritually slaughtered meat could be sold in the marketplace and supports this claim by noting that from the fifth century B.C. onwards, a single person, called the "*mageiros*" functioned as the "butcher-cook-sacrificer."[469] The juxtaposition of the sacrifice and the cook highlights the connection between sacrifice (the religious) and everyday meals. Also, Garnsey also notes that in the classical era, all commensality had a religious aspect to them, even though they varied in intensity. To support this claim, he notes how, for

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Christian period, banquets in this later period still contributed to the socio-political formation of distinct communities insofar as she notes, "they were closely linked to the definition and reproduction of a political system, albeit according to guidelines manifestly dictated by the structures of an entirely different society." Schmitt-Pantel, "Table Culture," para. 5.

[468] Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 32. Schmitt-Pantel, "Table Culture," para. 3, 5.

[469] Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," 11.

example, at an earlier time in antiquity, in the account of the Arval Brothers,[470] there is an emphasis on sacrificial killing and distribution of the meat, while at a relatively later time in antiquity, in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* (late A.D. 200),[471] libation is the only expression of religion.[472] Nevertheless, he notes that sacrificial meals were the typical form,[473] thus emphasising the significance of sacrifice to Greco-Roman commensality. Smith also echoes the claim that sacrifice and commensality were fundamentally connected in the Greco-Roman era, concluding that "Any banquet in the Greco-Roman period could have been connected with a sacrifice in some way; in fact, among Greek and Romans, they almost always were."[474] Gilhus corroborates such claims about the association of sacrifice with commensality in the Greco-Roman cultures in particular by citing Dio Chrysostom's comment (*Or*. III, 97A) that sacrifice is pleasing to the gods when it involves feasting; she concludes, "Sacrifices to the

[470] The more ancient history of the Arval Brothers is indicated by Scheid, who notes that "The twelve Arval Brethren, resuscitated or reformed by Augustus in about 29/28 BC, celebrated the sacrifice to Dea Dia (in late May) and tended the goddess 's grove." John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 139, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[471] See John Paulas, "How to Read Athenaeus' 'Deipnosophists,'" *The American Journal of Philology* 133, no. 3 (2012): 406, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23269874.
[472] Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 132.
[473] He states that "In between these extremes lie a great variety of public ceremonial occasions revolving around a dinner, where the meal follows a sacrifice and consists of sacrificial food in the first instance. The 'sacrificial banquet' is the quintessential 'civic banquet'." Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 132.
[474] Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 85. See Dennis Edwin Smith and Hal Taussig, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (London; Philadelphia: SCM Press; Trinity Press International, 1990), 22.

gods usually ended with people eating the sacrificial meat together in the family, at banquets among the ruling elite or in different associations and *collegia.*"[475]

The above findings from scholars add weight to the claim that sacrifices and banquets were fundamentally connected in the Greco-Roman world. And in the next section, I will discuss what such connections mean for the killing-violence and alimentary components of my Girardian model of sacrifice.

7.2. A Girardian Model of Sacrifice and Greco-Roman Banquets

My Girardian model of sacrifice conception of Greco-Roman banquets necessarily includes the violent myths and ritual killing of animals connected to Greco-Roman banquets (see fig. 7.1). This inclusion highlights how the meals are 'conceptually' (i.e., in the case of their founding myths) and 'actually' (i.e., in the case of sacrificial killings) associated with killing and violence.

[475] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 205–6. Gilhus also highlights the scope of the sacrificial underpinning of banquets when she states that "Different types of commensality could be based on sacrifice and expressed in a ritual meal, for instance domestic commensality; and political commensality." Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 206.

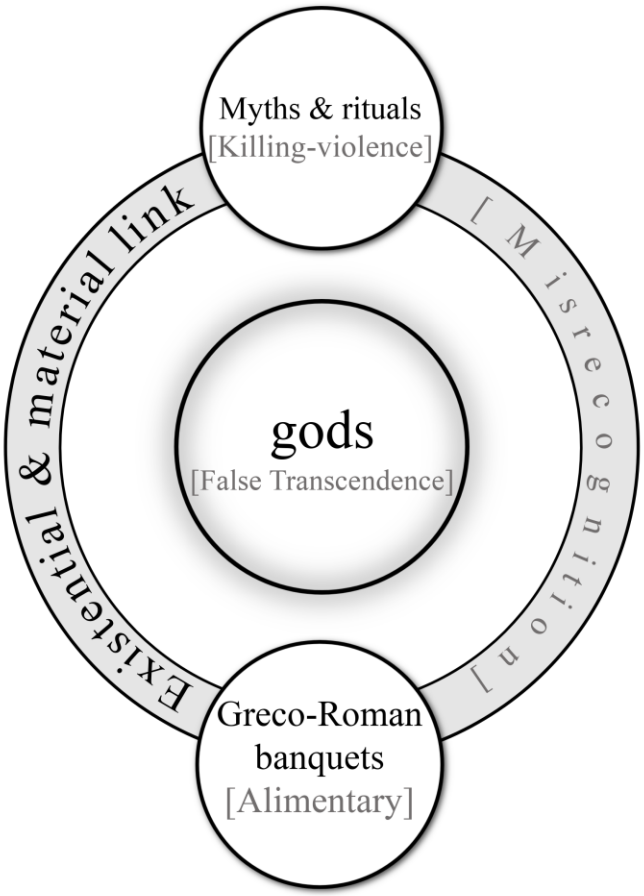

Fig. 7.1. A Girardian model of sacrifice and Greco-Roman banquets.

Building on Figure 6.1, the founding myths and ritual killings reflect the killing-violence view of sacrifice. On the other hand, the Greco-Roman banquets reflect the alimentary conceptions of sacrifice because of the food/eating in the banquets and the banquet's society-forming and ordering features. Also, the band on the left side of the model connects the founding myths and ritual killings with the banquets. This connection also depicts an existential (mythical past) and material (ritual killing) link between the two. The band on the right side of the model represents the perennial

problem of 'misrecognizing' the violence associated with the myths and rituals and how they interface with the banquet and its ideology (particularly in the pagan context). Finally, in this updated model, the divine ("false transcendence") is always in view, if not central, in the banquets and their founding myths and ritual killings.[476] And by associating the gods engaged during meals with the "false transcendence," I also signal a further socio-religious critique my Girardian model of sacrifice brings to the discussion of pagan Greco-Roman banquets in particular. Insofar as they are deemed to be founded on and sustained by violence, they are centred around a transcendence that, according to Girard, masks the mimetic cycle of violence that underpins human social relations and institutions. I will develop this critique further in subsequent sections. First, there are some other cognate, foundational features that my Girardian model of sacrifice brings to bear on the discussion of the Greco-Roman banquet and its relationship to the analysis of the social as well as sacramental determinants of the Eucharist, which is the subject of my thesis.

[476] I am not suggesting that my two-tier (i.e., 'myth and ritual' and 'meal') conception of the essence of Greco-Roman banquets neatly maps onto the distinctions in my model (i.e., killing-violence and alimentary) since the distinctions also overlap. However, I also understand that this overlapping is only to be expected given the likely fluidity of understanding of ancient Mediterranean sacrifice I noted earlier (see Chapter 6). Thus, I understand the above model diagram as a work in progress: offering an initial representation of a mimetic theory reading of sacrifice and its implications for discussing the Greco-Roman banquet predicated on the likely fluidity between killing-violence and alimentary views of sacrifice that characterised ancient Mediterranean conceptions of sacrifice.

7.2.1. Highlighting the religious-social nature of the Greco-Roman banquet

My Girardian model of sacrifice reading of the Greco-Roman banquet adds weight to Girard's claim that social institutions (such as Greco-Roman banquets), with their penchant for violence, stem from violent origins: violence encoded in myths (e.g., of Prometheus and Orphic Dionysus) and replicated through sacrificial rituals.[477]

More specifically, the model highlights that when these banquets are understood to straddle the religious (ritual) and social (non-ritual, everyday, political) domain of human life, it reflects Girard's claim that there exists a sacred-profane nexus to human institutions predicated on a founding murder and the sacrificial rituals that ensue from this violent origin.[478] The model features this sacred-profane nexus, highlighting the link between the myths and rituals (sacred)

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[477] Indeed, ancient societies typically based the *raison d'etre* for their cultural outlook and practices on myths, and the ancient Greeks were no exception (see Chapter 6). Such a phenomenon is characteristic of the human condition, which is still evident today. For instance, Morales offers an excellent example of how myths can be selectively adapted to function as an "ideological tool" when she notes how the Greek myth of Europa was appropriated in the creation of modern Europe by the inclusion of the image of Europa riding on a bull in the 2 Euro coin. The aim, she argues, was to connect ancient Greece with modern Europe, thus giving the latter a feeling of "classical antiquity," which also helps to justify the existence of the European Union. See Helen Morales, "Without bulls there would be no Europe," in *Classical Mythology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2007; online edn, Very Short Introductions online, Sept. 2013), n.p., http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192804761.003.0002. Such examples of the adaptation of myths in the shaping of society add weight to claims that, as this study purports, myths can contribute to the cultural outlook of society and should thus be evaluated for their ideological contributions to the society's cultural outlook.

[478] Central to this claim is Girard's understanding of the nature of the biblical Satan and "principalities and powers," i.e., how they are ontologically related to social structures of power. This is related to Girard's claim that "Satan is the absent subject of structures of disorder and order, which stem from rivalistic relations among humans." See Girard, *I See Satan*, 69–70.

and the meal, with its social dimensions (profane). It features the idea that the gods (sacred/transcendence) also permeate the alimentary and killing-violence dimensions of sacrifice associated with the meals.

Finally, these observations about the relationship between sacrifice as killing-violence and 'institutional forms' like Greco-Roman banquets are significant to my interpretation goals concerning the eucharistic reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20. If indeed the Rev 3:20 meal is paradigmatically associated with Greco-Roman meals it is reasonable to ask questions about the meal's possible relationship with the concept of sacrifice as killing-violence, too. Therefore, my eucharistic reading of the passage, with its association with the death of Jesus, makes this a relevant line of enquiry.

Consequently, I want to pay further attention to the sacred-profane nexus of the Greco-Roman banquets using the Girardian model of sacrifice to evaluate critically the sacrificial factors associated with such meals. It seems to me that this evaluation is critical to highlighting the substantive difference between the pagan Greco-Roman banquet and the meal motif in Rev 3:20 and its eucharistic reading. Therefore, in the next section, I will first discuss aspects of the religious dimensions of the meals.

7.3. The Sacramental Features of Greco-Roman Banquets

As discussed above and as my Girardian model of sacrifice illustrates, Greco-Roman commensality had a religious element. This religious element was evident in private communal meals through state-sponsored banquets.[479] What is of interest for my thesis is how religion was perceived or how the 'religious' was activated in the meals vis-à-vis the Girardian model of sacrifice's notion of the sacred/transcendence. [480]

Furthermore, it would appear, and could be inferred from Aune's analysis discussed in Chapter 3, that there was an understanding that the meal could have sacramental features of the kind suggested in typical Christian conceptions of the Eucharist (i.e., Eucharist as a means to experiencing the presence of Christ in the eating and drinking of the emblems and as a means to spiritual transformation).[481]

For example, Gilhus notes that the religious meals had scope for what appears to me as a description of 'sacramental experiences' (i.e., where the divine is present to confer blessings on those present). Her view centres on the definition of religion that

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[479] Discussing the religious inference via the act of libation, see Klinghardt, "A Typology of the Communal Meal," 11. Also, for a discussion of the homogenising aims of the religious aspects of the meal at the state level, see Wilkins, "Food," 390.

[480] Vernant notes what appears to be an activation of the religious in ancient Greek sacrifice, which resonates with the connection I make with the emergence of gods and sacrifice in my Girardian model sacrifice when he states that "It aims to honor the gods by inviting them to take part in a feast that is thereby at least theoretically their own, a *dais theōn*, at which they make themselves present in some manner and the offering of which they can either accept or reject." Vernant, "At Man's Table," 24.

[481] Another aspect of the meals, as described by some scholars, is that it could be argued that the sacral meal evoked existential participation on the part of the participants. For example, Vernant also discusses the ability of Greek sacrifice to generate memories of a mythical past when humans ate with gods. Vernant, "At Man's Table," 25.

she uses to discuss the meaning and function of the meals. She assumes the description of religion as "'communication with culturally postulated superhuman beings'" and suggests that the meals were associated with the three common "superhuman beings", namely, "gods," "intermediary beings as angels and demons," and "the dead."[482] Therefore, Gilhus argues that communication with "superhuman beings" re-contextualised the meals into sacred rituals that gave the meal "non-nutritious purposes."[483] She also notes that there could be "minimal" or "maximum" interaction with the "superhuman beings" in this meal.[484] The maximum religious interaction could involve the "superhuman beings" present, for example, by their image. The minimal religious interaction could involve "libation or a blessing, as a token of devotion to the gods."[485] She concludes, "Gods could preside over the banquet, it could be devoted to them, or the divine substance could be devoured in a sacramental meal."[486] While I do not agree with Gilhus's definition of religion,[487] her analysis of the way partakers may interact with the gods and the way

[482] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 206.
[483] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 206.
[484] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 206.
[485] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 206.
[486] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 206.
[487] That is, on the grounds of my Christian understanding of the God of the Bible's transcendent ("over and beyond the created order") nature. See McKim, "God, transcendence of," 118.

the gods may manifest themselves in the meals adds weight to the claim of a sacramental dimension to the meals.[488]

Further support for such claims in her work includes her claim that a function of the sacral meal in the ancient world was "to promote extra-mundane prosperity."[489] By this, she means supra-normal rewards and includes what she describes as "supra-biological life," establishing "a closer relationship to superhuman beings, a better lot after death and salvation."[490] She supports these claims by discussing the Eucharist and the meal of the Manicheans, both of which she argued "promised a future salvation."[491] And in the Eucharist, she argues that "the salvation of the participant was the goal."[492] Gilhus's comments about the supra-normal rewards that could be received in the meal provide critical insights on the sacramental features of the meals. More specifically, these comments support ideas of a sacramental feature to the Rev 3:20 meal motifs (giving its paradigmatic association with the sacral meals of the Greco-Roman cultures). Also, her comments about the function of the meals, that is, stimulating "extra-mundane prosperity," could be argued to correspond with assumptions that the meal motif in Rev 3:20 and,

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[488] Gilhus's comments about the maximum religious interaction could be argued to correspond with the *"praesentia Christi"* (presence of Christ) theology of the Eucharist. See McKim, "presence of Christ," 219.
[489] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 206.
[490] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 206.
[491] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 207.
[492] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 206.

by extension, the eucharistic sacrament, is a means of God's grace[493]—in keeping with the ancient notion that sacral meals may result in the spiritual transformation of the worshiper.

This transformation of the guests/worshipers has social implications, too. Hence, in the next section, I discuss the social aspects typical of Greco-Roman banquets at length because it is central to my emphasis on highlighting the social as much as the religious dimensions of the Eucharist in my thesis.

7.4. Societal Formation Through Greco-Roman Banquets

In addition to the distinction that ancient commensality made between humans and the gods discussed above,[494] Greco-Roman banquets also served community forming and social (including political) roles, not least because, as Wilkins noted, "Food consumption was closely linked to systems of state control, private patronage, and a combination of the two."[495] Thus, as some scholars have argued, in antiquity, food, as a necessary means of sustaining human life, was politicised and used to form communities and structure social status within them. For example, Schmitt-Pantel states that:

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[493] See McKim, "sacrament of the Lord's Supper," 245.

[494] Also, Schmitt-Pantel notes, "On Mount Olympus, banquets were a favourite pastime of the gods. They ate and drank the food of the immortals - nectar and ambrosia; they listened to music, conversed and were untouched by the worries that humans caused them; the banquet is the symbol of their carefree happiness. By contrast, a human banquet stood for the fate of mortals, who cultivated the earth, who consumed earthly foods and who were excluded from the divine status. In short, it defined the human status." Schmitt-Pantel, "Table Culture," section C. Meals, para 2.

[495] Wilkins, "Food," 390.

> The blood sacrifice, the consumption of meat and cereal thus became a a *[sic]* way to define the *condition humaine*, all more exactly: citizenship, i.e. political identity. For that reason, individuals refusing to partake in the consumption of the sacrificial meat (such as the vegetarian members of Orphic and Pythagorean groups) placed themselves at the margins of the political system.[496]

Schmitt-Pantel's comments here about the relational and, thus, political dimension of food in antiquity is also corroborated by other classicists. For example, Detienne also notes that sacrifice gets its significance from what he refers to as "the necessary relationship between the exercise of social relatedness on all *political* levels within the system the Greeks call the city. Political power cannot be exercised without sacrificial practice."[497] Such perspectives on the politicisation of food in antiquity are significant to my thesis. This is because they highlight a relationship between food and the social-political realm in the ancient world that my Girardian model of sacrifice aims to explain, not least through its conception of the origins and socio-religious implications of cultural forms like sacrifice in antiquity.

A cognate aspect of the politicisation of food in antiquity is its community-forming and ordering implications. For example, concerning community formation, Klinghardt noted the universal nature of communal meals in Greco-Roman culture and indicated how it was an essential aspect of community formation in Greco-Roman societies; he notes that:

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[496] Schmitt-Pantel, "Table Culture," para 7.
[497] Detienne, "Culinary Practices," 3.

> [T]he central event in the many associations coming into being in early Hellenism, as well as in the early Principate, was the communal banquet meal. Social exchange and the experience of community on virtually all levels between the private household and gatherings of all citizens in the theater had their institutionalized place in the communal meal. [498]

Klinghardt's comments here indicate how the communal meals were the key to a sense of what seems to me to be descriptive of elements of community formation (i.e., experiencing friendship, accountability, "social exchange and the experience of community") in gatherings like the associations. Other scholars have also noted such notions of this function of Greco-Roman commensality. For example, Smith also notes how communal meals were essential to community formation and makes mention of the "friendship-making" quality of the meals by noting how Plutarch spoke in the highest terms of the bonds created by the meal, referring to the "friend-making" power of the meal based on the shared wine and conversation.[499] Again, these community-forming motifs add weight to my claims of the significance of studying the social dimensions of Greco-Roman meals through the lens of mimetic theory. This is because, as my Girardian model of sacrifice reflects, it analyses how cultural phenomena like the violence-sacrifice underpinning ancient commensality

[498] Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 10. Klinghardt supports his claim of the commonplace nature of communal meals in Greco-Roman culture by claiming that it was a consequence of "depoliticization" of banquets, which he claims were formerly characterised by a political context (i.e., an indicator of one's sophistication and political status) up until the third century B.C. See Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 10.

[499] Smith cites Plutarch noting that "A guest comes to share not only meat, wine, and dessert, but conversation, fun, and the amiability that leads to friendship" (*Quaest*. *conv*. 612D, 660B)." Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 28.

may impact social formation (e.g., through examining motifs like mimetic desire and rivalry).

Besides the community-forming function of the banquets, classical scholars have argued that the meals served an ordering function in ancient society.[500] Such observations of the ordering function of the banquets also indicate a weaponising element within the meal tradition[501] that would benefit from an analysis, such as what my Girardian model of sacrifice offers, of the possible motivations behind such actions.

In the final analysis, the above observations highlight the ubiquity of the "communal banquet meal"[502] in the Greco-Roman world. While such observations raise questions about the possible differences between the banquet types over different periods, they also show that it is plausible to conceive of certain shared practices and assumptions across the meal types and periods that can be the basis of analysis.

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[500] For example, Garnsey also notes that "Outside the home, commensality demonstrated and confirmed the membership and solidarity of the group, paraded the status of the group vis-à-vis outsiders, and set out the hierarchies that existed both in the society at large and within the group itself." Garnsey, "*Food and Society*," 128.

[501] Concerning Greco-Roman banquets in particular, Schmitt-Pantel notes how, from Greco-Roman literature Greco-Roman, "food standards" were also used for something akin to propaganda insofar that she notes that it was used to distinguish between civilised (Greeks) and barbarians (non-Greeks), a "democrat" and a "tyrant." Schmitt-Pantel, "Table Culture," para. 1. n.

[502] Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 10.

Such conceptions of shared practices and assumptions, particularly concerning community formation and ordering through the banquet, are akin to what Smith and Taussig call the shared "banquet ideology" underpinning these banqueting traditions. They note that meals "represent a 'social code' which expresses patterns of social relations."[503] A summary of typical descriptions of the function and implications of the meal's ideologies follows[504] with my remarks at the end.

7.4.1. "Social bonding" and "social boundaries"

Smith and Taussig discuss "social bonding," where "the meal creates a special tie among the dinners."[505] To support this claim, they cite Plutarch's claim of "'the friend-making character of the table' (*Table Talk* 614A—B)," and the refrain that Jesus is a friend of tax collectors and sinners as an example of such bonding.[506] Smith notes that a "social boundary" was drawn due to the group bonding through the meal.[507] He notes that this boundary formation was often the unwitting result of a group with a shared identity dining together, and, at other times, it was the result of a group's

[503] Smith, and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 30–31.
[504] Other scholars have discussed some banqueting ideologies examined here using other labels. For example, in discussing the typology of commensality in Greco-Roman associations, Ascough argues that the Greco-Roman associations' practices could be described as "segregative, exceptional, or transgressive commensality, and in some instances might be considered work-related commensality." Richard S. Ascough, "Forms of Commensality in Greco-Roman Associations," *The Classical World* 102, no. 1 (2008): 45, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472000. Also, Gilhus argues that food could be used to mark out "external others" and "internal others." See Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 208, 211.
[505] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables,* 31.
[506] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables,* 31.
[507] Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 28.

deliberate attempt to separate themselves from the rest of society (also citing Paul's comments in 1 Cor 10:21 as an example of social boundaries that groups draw concerning banqueting).[508]

The 'bonding' and 'boundary-making' conceptualisations of the banquet are amongst the most obvious indicators of the community forming and ordering potency of the banquets as experienced by pagan and Christian communities in the Greco-Roman era. What also appears to be a significant aspect of the banquets are the assumptions about mutual obligation that seem to bolster the bonds and boundaries.

7.4.2. "Social obligation"

Smith and Taussig also discuss the "social obligation" that characterised the meals, the "ethical obligation of each to the other," predicated on the social bond the meal creates.[509] To support this claim, they cite how, for example, the By-Laws of the Guild of Zeus Hypsisitos denounced making "'factions'" and Paul's commands concerning edifying conversations at the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:17-34 and 14:26-33[510] as examples of such expectations placed on participants of the banquets.

It seems plausible to argue, as Smith and Taussig do, that the exhortations cited in these documents indicate that the banquets characterised mutual ethical obligations placed on those in attendance. Moreover, at least from the situation at the

[508] Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 28.
[509] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables,* 31.
[510] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 32.

Lord's Supper described in 1 Cor 11:17-34, it would appear that the interplay of stratification and equality that have also been noted to typify the banquets impacted these ethical obligations.

7.4.3. "Social stratification" and "social equality"

Smith and Taussig also note that as tools of social formation, the banquets played a double role. This double role involved what they argue to be the "social stratification" and "social equality" that the meals generate. By "social stratification," they mean the different social statuses of those who ate at the table, citing how ranking at the table, by where guests sat at the table, and the "quality" and "quantity" of the food dished to guest were indicative of this stratification.[511] By "social equality," they meant how "meals tended to break down social barriers."[512] They cite as one exemplary piece of evidence Plutarch's instruction to ensure no mirroring of the social differences outside the club at the table (*Table Talk*, 616C—F).[513]

Smith highlights the mixed message the two roles created when he notes, "Social stratification and social equality coexisted in an uneasy tension in the

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[511] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 32–33.
[512] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 33.
[513] Also, they cite Philo's *Therapeutae* (*On the Contemplative Life*, 67-72), where no enslaved peoples were present at the meals and women reclined with men at the table (albeit they note that this does not mean there was no stratification). Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 34. For examples of how equality and stratification are reflected in the NT texts, see Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 29.

banquet; in a sense, it meant that some were more equal than others." [514] This mixture of messages concerning social stratification and equality in Greco-Roman banquets indicates a societal tension of sorts. It reflects a society that, on the one hand buck the trend and, on the other, maintains the status quo.

Other scholars who have written on the demographic impact of the gestures of social stratification and equality in banquets have also echoed this tension. For example, regarding differences between men and women, Wilkins notes how, in the Greek symposium, the women did not eat with the men except they were *hetaerae* (i.e., a courtesan). And while there was equality of status amongst those who attended, the exclusion of those of lower status was likely.[515] He, however, also notes a slight difference in the Roman context, stating that:

> At the Roman cena, food and drink were less strictly separated, women of status were present (though often in fewer numbers than the men), and a hierarchy was visibly displayed through the seating order and sometimes through tableware and the foods served. [516]

Thus, it would appear that although the Roman scene, by modern standards, looked more progressive than the Greek banqueting scene, what remained consistent across

[514] Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 29.
[515] He notes, "This was the creative time of the evening, with elaborate rituals surrounding the mixing of wine with water. It was a time devoted to Dionysos and set apart from normal family life in other ways through the exclusion of women of status (but not female "companions" or hetaerae) and through a rule of equality between all male participants who drank equally and were in theory of equal status." Wilkins, "Food," 389.
[516] Wilkins, "Food," 389.

both traditions was that women were not of equal status with men at the banquets as reflected in either their absence or unequal treatment at the banquets.

The tension between equality and stratification also characterised elites and non-elites, free persons and enslaved people relations. *Euergetes* (benefactors/patrons) and elites were afforded certain dining rites and used the meals to distinguish themselves.[517] This, too, served to stratify the members at banquets. In the Hellenistic period, additional public banquets (outside of those that coincide with the religious calendar) were also instituted and sponsored by *euergetes* to bolster their reputation and secure their dominance in society. [518] Civic banquets were occasions for competition and rivalry amongst the Greeks and Romans elites who held feasts for people experiencing poverty.[519]

Simultaneously, banquets could play counter-cultural roles. The tension between stratification and subversion is highlighted by Klinghardt who writes:

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[517] For example, Garnsey notes that the Romans instituted dining rites, which distinguished the elites from others who could eat the sacrificial meat; he notes, "Division of the meat after the sacrifice continues, but participation is limited to those at the top of the social hierarchy. 'Dining rights' … is a privilege for priests, magistrates and senators in general, perhaps equestrians (lesser aristocrats). Other citizens benefited from sacrifices only in so far as they could purchase the portion of the sacrificial meat released on the market; or, if they were admitted to the banquet, they sat apart from their social and political superiors, and ate less." Garnsey, *Food and Society,* 134. He supports this by noting the hierarchy in the banquets of the Arval Brothers, pointing out that "Within the Arval Brothers, the president ate first after the god and the ordinary members followed. At a certain point on the second day of the three-day feast of Dea Diva, the slaves and freedmen of the brotherhood participated in the banquet, but were given white bread decorated by laurel rather than meat." Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 135.
[518] Garnsey, *Food and Society,* 134.
[519] Wilkins, "Food," 390.

> The main difficulty, however, results from conflicting aims. On one side is the expectation that the symposium reflects participants' social status outside the gathering. On the other is the appraisal that the extremely high esteem for equality embedded in the symposium will serve as a counter model for community in which otherwise important social differences are evened out. In this view, the symposium and its seating arrangement must under no circumstances repeat the social divisions that exist outside.[520]

One of the ways that the symposium represents a stark marker of social equality that contrasts with the "social divisions that existed outside" was on the occasions enslaved people were included in the communal meals. For instance, Evans notes, "Even though slaves were culturally constructed as available bodies, Roman and Greek cultic practices made room for slaves at the reclining banquet, albeit in very circumscribed circumstances." [521] These "circumscribed circumstances" include festival days[522] and participation in cults and clubs.[523] These counter-cultural gestures indicate the Greco-Roman people's aspirations for an otherworldly "social reality" characterised by peace and order.

7.4.4. The pursuit of "utopian perfection"

The banqueting traditions of Greco-Roman cultures can also be understood to be attempts at attaining social order of another worldly kind. This is what scholars like

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[520] Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 15.
[521] Evans, "Evidence for Slaves," 150.
[522] For example, she cites how in Athens – "Still, in the Athenian state calendar, slaves did recline at a handful of festivals: the Anthesteria, the rural Dionysia, and the Cronia." Evans, "Evidence for Slaves," 152.
[523] For example, she cites that in Rome – the Mithras cult allowed enslaved people to eat with freemen, and the collegia (dining clubs) allowed enslaved people to eat with their masters. Evans, "Evidence for Slaves," 161–62.

Klinghardt intimate when they argue that the banquets strove for "utopian perfection."[524] In addition, as Klinghardt also discusses the material significance of the "utopian quality"[525] of the banquets is evident in discussions around social equality. Klinghardt also suggests that the social equality experienced in the symposium contrasts against the inequality people experienced, especially as seen between the servers and those served.[526] He notes, "This experience, however, is partial and/or limited to particular ritual situations: The difference between the ritual perfection and the 'perfect', that is, fully realized perfection is still something to be desired."[527] Noting Paul's comments about the anticipation of the second coming of Jesus, Klinghardt notes that the utopia of the symposium was also considered a precursor to a fuller utopia.[528]

Nevertheless, can any substantive difference between the pagan and Judeo-Christian banquets be claimed, giving the Girardian theo-anthropological reading of

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[524] Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 17. Moreover, Klinghardt states that "The values—good order, quietness, peace—attributed to the symposium clearly relate to its utopian character. Indeed, there are many hints that the symposium provided an experience that transcended the limitations of everyday life and became important for exactly this utopian quality." Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 16.

[525] Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 16.

[526] He states, "Either the free do without the service of slaves and attend to themselves, which means that the social difference is leveled and no longer visible; or the free serve, even the slaves, which means that the usual hierarchy is reversed. Among the references are well-known examples from the New Testament and others from Saturnalia tradition." Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 17. He supports this claim, citing "Jn 13:1–20; Luke 22:24–30. [And he notes that] The most prominent example from the Saturnalia tradition is the "sympotic laws" in Lucian, *Sat*. 17." Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 22.

[527] Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 17.

[528] Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 17.

the moral dimensions of ancient institutions? I will address this question in the next section.

7.5. Assessing the Shared Banqueting Ideology Proposition

The above review of the Greco-Roman banquet ideology assumes that Christian eucharistic banquets are in the genus of Greco-Roman banquets. It also assumes, however, that the ideological features of the Greco-Roman banquet preceded the Christian (and Jewish) banqueting traditions. It seems to me that the banquet features discussed so far indicate the popular, antecedent 'pagan' (as much as Hellenistic) conceptions of religious and social formation through banquets. These are ideas that Jews and Christians adopted and adapted.[529]

By blending the varied banqueting types of the Greco-Roman era, I am concerned with identifying the evident commonality between them featured in the available writings (e.g., as discussed above in the bonding and boundary-making claims). Such a conception of a shared banqueting ideology, especially between pagans and Christians, often lacks a treatment of the "theological" differences

[529] I am grateful here to Shimoff's analysis of the Greco-Roman banquet, which I understood also featured a diachronic perspective of the Greco-Roman banquet insofar as it distinguished the "dominant," antecedent Greco-Roman banqueting customs from the Jewish and Christian adaptations of such banquets. See Sandra R. Shimoff, "Banquets: the Limits of Hellenization," *JSJ* 27, no. 4 (1996): 440–52, https://doi.org/10.1163/157006396X00166.

between the pagan ethical outlook and practices in the banquets vis-à-vis the Christian eucharistic banquet.[530]

As I discuss in the next chapter, the shared banqueting ideology requires an understanding of the moral character of the divinity (transcendence) the Christians worshipped and the new way of life that the sacrificial killing of Jesus, which underpinned their banqueting identity, was to shape their lives. It seems to me that the Girardian 'self-giving' conception of the sacrificial death of Jesus can be conceived as the fundamental ethical force for early Christians insofar as the commemoration of his death was a central feature of their banquets.[531]

Thus, how can we understand the nature of the pagan banquets in the Greco-Roman era, given that the death of Christ did not underpin the conceptions of sacrifice that buttressed their commensality? This is where I contend my Girardian model of sacrifice can provide some insights.

7.6. Pagan Banquets as Tool of War and Peace

The abovementioned Greco-Roman banqueting ideology reflects cultural change, particularly aspects of the "equality" and "utopian" motifs. And given that it is descriptive of pagan (i.e., non-Christian) banquets as well, it might be surprising to learn that it highlights a progression towards more positive attitudes towards the

[530] However, I understand that such limitations are to be expected, given the typically anthropological focus in the analysis of the banquets.
[531] See Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 207.

alleged members of the underclass of the time. To that end, such an understanding of the banquets also indicates that the Judeo-Christian ethic was not responsible for every arguably good and progressive cultural reform in human history. At this point, my Girardian model of sacrifice reading of the Greco-Roman banquet offers an alternative, if not an unflattering (a Christian theologian might add), critique of the pagan permutation of the banquet.

Specifically, my Girardian model of sacrifice critique of the sacramental features of the pagan banquets highlights the moral nature of the transcendence engaged during the meal. Given the model's Girardian framework, this transcendence is the capricious "false transcendence," also described as the 'sacred' and, speaking theologically, 'satanic'.

Such a claim supports Shimoff's comparison of the pagan and Jewish meal traditions; she states, "the Greco-Roman banquet was rooted in idolatry, and was marked by flagrant hedonism."[532] Shimoff's comments also juxtapose the worship of a deity in her reference to "idolatry" and ethics in her reference to "hedonism" in a way that rightly infers a causality between the transcendence/gods and socio-ethical mindsets and behaviours.[533]

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[532] Shimoff, "Banquets: the Limits of Hellenization," 444.

[533] Shimoff further highlights this nexus between the sacred and ethics concerning the Greco-Roman banquet when she highlights the rabbinical concerns about the cultural implications for Judaism if Jews uncritically accommodated Greco-Roman banqueting customs. She states: "Whatever else might be said about these banquets, it is clear that they were not appropriate expressions of traditional Jewish religious values. The Greco-Roman banquet

I assume such causality within my Girardian model of sacrifice reading of the Greco-Roman banquets. And given my Girardian reading, I conclude that there is a reflexivity between the "false transcendence" (as products of the founding victim murder) engaged in the pagan banquets and the latter's social dimension. This is a reflexivity, it seems to me, that the contradictory ethics (i.e., stratification-equality dilemma) of the social and institutional dimensions of the pagan banquets mainly reveal.

Thus, the pagan banquet's social ethics is fundamentally flawed in a Girardian reading because it centres on the pseudo-peace-making strategy of the victim mechanism. A strategy that deludes (as in, "misrecognition") society of the violence that underpins the myths, rituals and interfaces the banquets themselves. Moreover, a Girardian reading will argue that the consequence of this peace-making-by-victim mechanism is, to borrow the words of Hammerton- Kelly, "institutional hypocrisy"[534] (highlighted, for example, in the stratification-equality dilemma discussed above).

Gilhus's perspective on the motive behind the binding and boundaries supports the Girardian reading, too. For example, Gilhus argued that because "religions and religious societies of the empire were developed together, shared the

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thus represented an important boundary condition, the limiting case of how far a Jew might go in accepting, adopting, or adapting hellenistic cultural practices. In a sense, then, if we want to appreciate the true extent of hellenization among Jews in Eretz Israel, and how the rabbis reacted to hellenization, Greco-Roman banquets are of special significance; no other hellenistic practice was at once so culturally-attractive and so religiously reprehensible." Shimoff, "Banquets: the Limits of Hellenization," 444.

[534] Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 156.

same cultural context and had much in common,"[535] in the Roman Empire, banqueting traditions were used for polemical purposes "to create boundaries against external and internal others."[536] She adds, "In this way the meal constructs a power relationship based on the ranking of the participants and on an opposition between those who participate in the ritual meal and those who are excluded."[537] Gilhus's insightful and compelling comments here suggest that banquets symbolise instruments of power that individuals or groups might weaponise to validate some, exclude, and, by extension, victimise others (if it is assumed the latter can preserve the differences the ranking signifies within the community).[538]

The cultural diamond below (fig. 7.1) can help illustrate the exclusionary (and, I would add, by extension, victimising) practices and conflicting social-ethical agendas of the pagan banquets discussed in this section. It also signals how a mimetic theory reading helps explain the nuances shrouding the topic.

[535] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 204.
[536] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 203.
[537] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 208.
[538] This nuanced manifestation of violence also reflects what Augustine notes in her evaluation of scapegoating, as discussed by Charles Taylor when she states, "Even when hatred is kept subviolent and contained through restraints stipulated by and enacted according to the social contract, its latent morbidity may be manifested in various forms of social exclusion and the pathology of systemic alienation of individuals or entire groups of people (as in cases of categorical violence)." See Daniela C. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2019), chap. 2, Kindle.

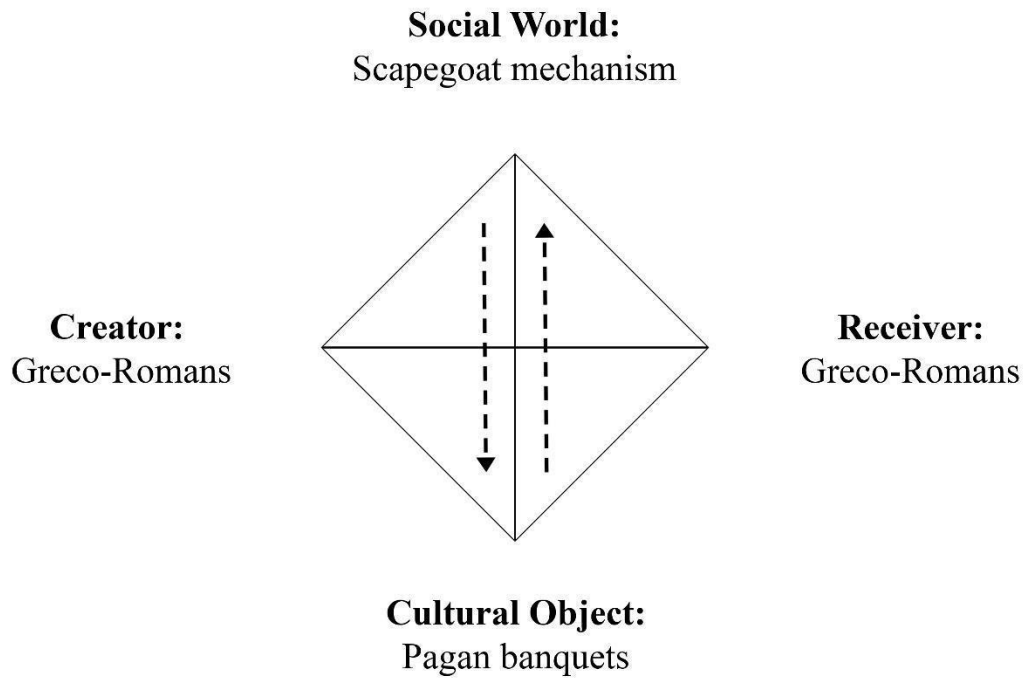

Fig. 7.1. Pagan banquets as cultural object

The downward pointing arrow in the diagram depicts how, for example, through gender and class stratification, the pagan banqueting ideology mirrored the victimising dynamics of the scapegoat mechanism at work in Greco-Roman society. On the other hand, the upward-pointing arrow depicts how aspects of the pagan banqueting ideology undermine the victim dynamics of the scapegoat mechanism in Greco-Roman society through, for example, the pursuit of "utopian perfection."

To be sure, such contradictory messages seem to have been a feature in some early Christian eucharistic banquets (1 Cor 11: 17-34). Thus, some early Christian

eucharistic banquets reflect "institutional hypocrisy"[539] too. Moreover, Gilhus includes the banqueting traditions of early Christians in her unflattering characterisation of how religious groups used meals. She cites Christians not taking part in sacrificial meals and not eating meat sacrificed to idols (although some Christians took exception to this) as an example of how Christians would have used meals to mark out external others in a polemic manner.[540]

While Christian meal traditions were, to some extent, wedded to their pagan counterparts and, in so doing, often appear to reflect their ideology, this only tells half the story. As I discuss in the next chapter, the 'ideals' of Christianity, as characterised in the Passion-centred liturgical narratives of the Eucharist, offer a critique of the ethic transmitted through the pagan banquets.

7.7. Conclusions

In this chapter, I claimed that since the Greco-Roman banqueting tradition was associated with sacrifice, it could benefit from a Girardian model of sacrifice reading to offer fresh perspectives on the socio-religious dimensions of the meals. I also examined the sacramental features of Greco-Roman banqueting traditions. The value of this exercise was that it helped support the sacramental interpretation of the meal motif in Rev 3:20, insofar as the typical Greco-Roman banquet assumed that "superhuman beings" could be present at the meal. I then offered a review of aspects

[539] Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 156.
[540] Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 209–10.

of the Greco-Roman banquets' societal forming features: the typical banqueting ideology. The value of this exercise was that it helped demonstrate how, within a Girardian-based theory of sacrifice, attempts at creating social order through such institutions are less than adequate because of the conceptual (myths) and actual (ritual killings) violence that characterise the system. Furthermore, I noted how, within such a reading, "superhuman beings" engaged in the strictly pagan permutations of the banquet symbolised a "false transcendence" and, in theological terms, the 'satanic'. Finally, I also mentioned that the implications of the "false transcendence" claim are more apparent in light of the "institutional hypocrisy" gleaned from the review of the social and, thus, institutional dimensions of the pagan expressions of the banquets.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the third cultural object identified in my composition analysis of the meal motif in Rev 3:20: the Eucharist.

CHAPTER 8

THE EUCHARIST

In the previous chapter, I argued that when Greco-Roman banquets are considered a social institution connected to violent myths of origin, it supports Girard's theory that human institutions stem from violent origins (founding murders). I concluded that the Greco-Roman banquet ideology, mainly expressed among the pagan cultures, reflected a false sense of social order and progress insofar that the violence characterising the system remains hidden.

I further noted that the Christian eucharistic meals also shared a particular understanding with their pagan counterparts about engaging the divine in the meals. This claim of a shared understanding concerning communal meals also raised questions about what makes Christian eucharistic meals different from their pagan counterparts' banquets. Such questions are relevant to my interpretation of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 since I am exploring the significance of the meal's "eucharistic associations".

In this chapter, I will examine how the Eucharist, as a cultural object, fits within the broader Greco-Roman banqueting traditions by first offering a more focused discussion on how Christian eucharistic meals mirror certain aspects of the dominant pagan Greco-Roman banqueting traditions. In so doing, I will expand on the discussion in the previous chapter about the commonality between the banquets

in the Greco-Roman era and further discuss the uniqueness of the Christian eucharistic meals. Second, I will discuss how my Girardian model of sacrifice relates to the Eucharist. Third, I will argue that my Girardian model of sacrifice can highlight how the Passion (as the critical anthropological, as much as a theological, interpretative concept underpinning the Eucharist) offers an unfavourable appraisal of the pagan Greco-Roman banqueting ideology discussed at length in the previous chapter. This unfavourable appraisal further highlights my conclusion that the pagan Greco-Roman banquets are fundamentally flawed instruments of social order because of their violent origins and ongoing expression of subviolence (typically expressed as injustice) to the so-called weaker members of society.

8.1. Greco-Roman Banquets and the Eucharist

The claim that Greco-Roman banquets stem from violent origins (founding murders), masqueraded in ancient Greek myths of origins, and which, through their commemoration through ritual, aim to establish social order, has implications for the theology of the Eucharist. This is because, as most classicists and scholars of religion writing on commensality in antiquity rightly observe, there is an essential connection between early Christian meals and the banqueting traditions of the Greco-Roman world. For example, Glancy notes that "Communal dining was central to early Christian practice, perhaps in part not only because Jesus had modeled such

behavior, but also because of the centrality of common meals in Greco-Roman cultures." [541]

Glancy's point is relevant for my argument because it reframes the topic of Christian banqueting. It moves it from a focus on theological matters (i.e., a focus on the acts of Jesus and his followers) to an anthropological framework. It does so by highlighting the Christian banquets connection with the broader Greco-Roman commensal tradition it also appeared to mirror. It seems to me that this reframed, theo-anthropological, perspective demands a broader critical lens for discussing the possibly wider aims and function of the Eucharist. This broader critical lens is what Smith and Taussig champion when they note that:

[541] Jennifer A. Glancy, "Temptations of the Table: Christians Respond to Reclining Culture" in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, eds. Dennis Smith and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 230. See also, Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 204. Regarding particular references to Christian commensal communities, Smith, for example, persuasively demonstrates how the twofold understanding of the Greco-Roman meal, i.e., the meal (*deipnon*) and the drinking party (symposium) is also reflected in the NT, in 1 Cor 11:23-25, where he notes that there was a supper and then a drinking session which followed. Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 23–24. Also, Bradshaw offers a compelling justification for assuming a shared understanding of religious thought and practice between the Greco-Roman cultures when he states that "Although both Judaism and primitive Christianity were in certain important respects exclusivist and kept themselves apart from what other religious groups were doing, neither of them existed in a vacuum, insulated from language, images, and practices of the religions and cultures around them. Thus, albeit often quite unconsciously, they could not help but be affected by their contemporaries and have the words and actions of their worship shaped by the society in which they lived." Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 22.

> [T]he evidence suggests that any social group that came into existence in the ancient world commonly celebrate communal meals together. This factor offers adequate explanation for the phenomenon of communal meals in early Christian groups . . . It furthermore provides the basis for the development of the "ideology" connected with their meals. That is to say, the Greco-Roman banquet provided both the form and the basic ideology for the development of early Christian meal liturgy.[542]

Smith and Taussig's comments here are crucial because they suggest an inherent connection between the early Christian eucharistic meals and the banqueting traditions of the wider Greco-Roman world; early Christian eucharistic meals were not *sui generis*.

These observations raise other vital questions relevant to the theological and anthropological concerns of my thesis. For example, as discussed in chapter four, it is clear that John, the author of Revelation had concerns about pagan Greco-Roman banqueting customs (Rev 2:14, 20). However, the shared meal customs between the pagan and Christian Greco-Roman communities could be understood to undermine such concerns. How then can one support the argument that John's concerns about the pagan banqueting customs were warranted?

My Girardian model of sacrifice assessment of the Eucharist can help answer this question. This is because the model's critique of the moral determinant of so-called 'deep structures' and universal principles on sacrifice can help us critique and

[542] Dennis Edwin Smith and Hal Taussig, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (London; Philadelphia: SCM Press; Trinity Press International, 1990), 35.

thus reimagine the connection between the two meal traditions. To highlight what my Girardian model of sacrifice reading of the Eucharist challenges vis-à-vis Greco-Roman banqueting traditions, I will proceed by first affirming the notion that Christian communal meals have much in common with that of their pagan Greco-Roman counterparts.

8.2. The Eucharist and its Pagan Parallels

As already stated, the Eucharist was not without its antecedent. It emerged from a Jewish festival meal tradition, which also "parallelled" the Greco-Roman and, therefore, pagan banqueting traditions.[543] Some have objected to this claim. For example, Marshall argued that Jesus' Last Supper reflects more of the Jewish meal and has nothing to do with "pagan cultic meals."[544] Despite the objections he raises,[545]

[543] For example, in his seminal work, Bahr traces the overlapping banqueting traditions and shared roots of the Jewish and Greco-Roman banqueting meals of the Tannaitic period, stating that "An important point to note about the Jewish festive meal of the Tannaitic period is that it paralleled the contemporary Graeco Roman festive meal, except for the specifically religious elements, e.g., prayers were said at the same points in both meals, but the content of the prayers were different in the respective meals. In their dining habits as well as in numerous other ways, the Jews were a part of the Graeco-Roman world, but not yet fully integrated. The similarities between the dining habits of the Jews and those of their contemporaries can be demonstrated for a long period prior to the age of the Tannaim, and both Tannaitic and Graeco-Roman texts point to the East as the source of their table customs." 181. Gordon J. Bahr, "The Seder of Passover and the Eucharistic Words," *Novum Testamentum* 12, no. 2 (1970): 181, https://doi.org/10.2307/1560045.

[544] I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper & Lord's Supper* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980), 27.

[545] He claimed that "It emerges that the pagan background has nothing to do with the origins of the Lord's Supper. The one point where a parallel can be seen is in the pagan meals after sacrifices to which Paul explicitly refers in 1 Corinthians 10, but these meals were the one which had parallels in Judaism, including above all the Passover meal itself. But we cannot use the mystery religions to throw light on the Lord's Supper since we have no reliable

Marshall concedes that it is worth reviewing such pagan meals —since Christianity moved into pagan worlds and pagans joined the movement, bringing in their pagan meal tradition (which appears to be indicated in the Pauline writings on the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 8–10).[546]

I am, however, not convinced by Marshall's claim that the Lord's Supper does not share its origins with the broader Greco-Roman banqueting traditions. This is because the consensus in contemporary scholarship (based on historical-critical and anthropological studies) on the topic suggests otherwise. For example, Klinghardt argues that there was indeed an overlap between the Christian communal meals and the Greco-Roman banqueting traditions, with the latter acting as a precursor to liturgical rites like the Eucharist; he notes:

> The ubiquitous twofold structure provides needed context for understanding Christian meals within the first two centuries of the Common Era. They were not "sacramental meals" in token form but real meals. Citations of "bread" and "wine" refer to the two main parts of any communal meal rather than to the sacramental aspects of a token meal, which first appears during the third century CE.[547]

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information about any aspects of them which would provide parallels to the Christian meals." Marshall, *Last Supper & Lord's Supper*, 29.

[546] Marshall, *Last Supper & Lord's Supper*, 27–28.

[547] Klinghardt, "Typology of the Communal Meal," 10. Smith indicates that early Christian theology and liturgical practices are in many ways indebted to the Greco-Roman banqueting traditions and ideologies when he contends that "Banquet ideology provided a model for creating community, defining behaviour within the community, sharing values, and connecting with the divine . . . banquet ideology is also the foundation for the development of early Christian liturgy." Dennis Edwin Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 279. See also, Warmind, who describes the meal in 2 Cor 11 as a "pot-luck supper," which he claims is "best understood as a precursor to the Eucharist." Morten Warmind, "The Role of Food in the Life of Christians

While the understanding of shared meal practices between the traditions[548] seems clear in contemporary scholarship,[549] Klinghardt's claim, however, that "sacramental aspects of a token meal" only emerged during the third century A.D. is difficult to corroborate with the evidence of Christian liturgy in the first century A.D. I suggest that this is especially the case if one also assumes that by "sacramental," he means something akin to the typical understanding of the word, namely, a means of grace or sanctification and/or the presence of the divine.

As Wainwright rightly suggests, as early as the first two centuries A.D., Christians appeared to distinguish between the *agape* and the eucharistic rite.[550] The celebration of the Eucharist may feature in the sacramental tone in chapter 14 of the *Didache*, written circa A.D. 60–200, which reads, "On the Lord's day of the Lord,

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in the Roman Empire," in *Commensality: From Everyday Food to Feast*, eds. Susanne Kerner, Cynthia Chou and Morten Warmind (London; New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 197.

[548] That is, Greco-Roman/pagan and Jewish-Christian.

[549] The "two main parts" would refer to the eating and drinking sections of the banquet, that is, in the Greek context, the *deipnon* and the *symposium*. There are other conjectures about the number and chronology of the alleged 'parts of the meal' shared between the traditions. For example, Bahr noted similarities between the three-part structure of Jewish festival meals (and its expression in the eucharistic prayers) of the Tannaitic period and the three-part structure of contemporary Greco-Roman festival meals. See Bahr, "The Seder of Passover and the Eucharistic Words," 200.

[550] Also, Blue notes that "The separation of the *meal*/*agapē* from the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, was made in the second century. Justin Martyr (c. 150) indicates that by his time the common meal and Eucharist (as sacrament) were separate observances. He speaks of the Eucharist without referring to a meal. Accordingly, a portion of bread accompanied by the water and wine constituted the Eucharist (Justin Martyr *Apol.* 1.65-66)." B. B. Blue, "Love Feast," in *DPL*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, 1993), 1, WORDsearch CROSS e-book.
See also, Wainwright, "Lord's Supper, Love Feast," 686.

come together, break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure."[551] In the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (martyred in A.D. 110), Ignatius appears to have distinguished between the communal meal ("lovefeast") and the eucharistic rite:

> Let that be regarded as a valid Eucharist which is under the bishop or someone appointed by him. Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church. Without the bishop it is not lawful either to baptize or to hold a lovefeast. (Ign. *Smyrn.* 8.1-2).[552]

As a result, I maintain that "sacramental aspects of a token meal," referred to as the "Eucharist" in the *Didache* for the first time,[553] were referenced and administered in diverse ways as early as the first century.[554] This began at the time of Jesus at the Last Supper as recorded in the synoptic gospels (earliest writing circa A.D. 60) and also inferred in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (writing circa A.D. 51).[555]

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[551] Wainwright, "Lord's Supper, Love Feast," 690.
[552] Wainwright, "Lord's Supper, Love Feast," 690.
[553] LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist*, 1–2.
[554] An example of this diversity and fluidity about the meal over the first two centuries A.D. included the reference to the Eucharist as "breaking of bread" in the Book Acts (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 24:30). See R. H. Stein, "Last Supper," in *DJG*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 449, WORD*search* CROSS e-book. Also, a perspective on the diversity of practice is posited by Denis and Taussig, as they argue that the aim of Christians in diversifying the meals was to allow them to ritually respond to their unique social contexts and use the traditional meal traditions as a vehicle to do so. See, Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 37–38.
[555] See Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20, and 1 Cor 11:23-25. I acknowledge that some scholars, such as Smith and Taussig, hold that the "Last Supper" was not a historical event and that no "single liturgical tradition" underscores the Lord's Supper tradition during the first century. Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 40–42.

Therefore, in the final analysis, Christian communal meals (i.e., *agape* and Eucharist) were not *sui generis* but emerged from the concomitant Greco-Roman (indeed, pagan) banqueting traditions. Notwithstanding the substantive differences between these meal traditions,[556] a Girardian-based theory like the Girardian model of sacrifice offers a helpful framework for analysing the Eucharist for its anthropological (as much as its theological) value.[557]

Moreover, to emphasise the further connections between the Eucharist and the Girardian model of sacrifice, I will address two additional points of contexts that appear to me to relate the Eucharist to the killing-violence emphasis of sacrifice: the Passover and Passion context of the Last Supper.

8.3. The Passover Context

Some scholars have argued that while the Last Supper was not a Passover meal, its administration was within the context of the Passover meal.[558] For example, Eugene LaVerdiere argues that the purpose of the synoptic presenting the Last Supper as

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[556] I will discuss this later. However, I note here that I am also mindful of Spinks's caution that "It seems not unreasonable to conclude that it is not what the New Testament meals might have in common with Greco-Roman Symposia that are of particular importance, but rather, their *differences* and their *theological significance*." Bryan D. Spinks, *Do this in Remembrance of Me: The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present Day* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2013), 5.

[557] Moreover, such anthropologically sensitive approaches seem relevant to Pentecostal and, indeed, Christian theology insofar that Pentecostal scholar Vondey argues that the church "from the perspective of Pentecost, both engages with and consists of the emerging cosmopolitan culture and character of the world." Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 205.

[558] Marshal argues for this reading by noting that the synoptic gospels (Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13) offer the Passover as the backdrop to the Last Supper. See Marshall, *Last Supper*, 21.

celebrated in the context of the Jewish Passover was to signal that Jesus was ushering in a "new Passover" that he "would eat in the Kingdom of God."[559] Thus, such views could also be considered to understand the Passover motif 'functionally', that is, used to contextualise the Last Supper motifs.

Leonhard is more cautious about drawing wholesale parallels between the Eucharist and the Passover, arguing, however, that in the absence of a complete correlation between the Passover and Eucharist narratives, the reason for the connection between the early accounts of the Pesach and the Eucharist has more to do with the "theological imagination" and the "literary bridges" made by the NT authors, because both Eucharist and Passover are "associated" with the death of Jesus.[560]

There is some value to these measured approaches to discussing the relationship between the Passover and the Eucharist, not least because they also highlight the possibility that NT writers were, at times, working with theological strategies and aims and not historical facts so that modern interpreters do not need to feel compelled to defend the indefensible in such cases. Consequently, I take the view that the celebration of the Last Supper was within the 'theological context' of the

[559] LaVeridier, *The Eucharist*, 192. Also, Stein suggests that the "third cup of blessing" of the "four *cups of wine*" of the Passover meal was perhaps the one referred to in the Last Supper texts (he cites, Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25). See Stein, "Last Supper," 446.
[560] See Clemens Leonhard, "Eucharist and Pesach," in *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts: Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity, Volume 1*, eds. David Hellholm and Dieter Sänger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 308.

Passover. This is because of the internal evidence, that is, the Passover backdrop in the Synoptics, and the evidence of theological reconstruction of the meal within a Passover motif.[561]

Moreover, Streett also argues in favour of the Passover perspective of the Last Supper in his study on the socio-political impact of the celebration of the Eucharist under Roman rule during the first century A.D. He states:

> This emphasis provides a basis for interpreting Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples as being an anti-imperial praxis that points to Rome's defeat and the arrival of God's kingdom. In turn, Jesus' final Passover lays the foundation for the Christian communal meal, i.e., the Lord's Supper, as being anti-imperial in character. [562]

Streett's claims of the anti-imperial character of the Eucharist reflect critical aspects of my thesis insofar that it, too, posits that germane to Christian sacred meals is a critique of institutions and structures of power (or "principalities and powers").

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[561] The theological reflection position of the Eucharist and Passover can also find support in the reading of Paul's thanksgiving and salvific meal recorded in Acts 27. For example, Marguerat highlights commentaries that draw a correlation with the possible Passover motif that underpins the eucharistic motif in Act 27:33-38— in light of the NT writer's emphasis on Paul's thanksgiving and salvific meal on the 14th day and its possible correlation with that the 14th day of the night of the Passover recorded in Exodus 12:6. See Daniel Marguerat, "Meals and Community Ethos in Acts of the Apostles," in *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts: Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity, Volume 1*, eds. David Hellholm and Dieter Sänger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 531.

[562] R. Alan. Streett, *Subversive Meals: An Analysis of the Lord's Supper under Roman Domination during the First Century* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 53. This work was reviewed at a later point in my thesis. I came to my ideas independent of this work.

Where I differ from Streett is that I analyse the institution-critiquing quality of the Eucharist with Girard's mimetic theory. Nevertheless, Streett's claims support my thesis insofar that it recasts the Passover meal (and, by extension, the Last Supper/Eucharist) back to the story of the Exodus and thus re-introduces a narrative of deliverance from hegemonic structures of power into the discourse on the Eucharist. I will return to this in later sections.

What should not be lost on the reader, however, due to the varied scholarly explanations behind the recasting of the Last Supper to the Passover, is the association of the Passover with the sacrificial killing of a lamb. As Kulp compellingly argues concerning anachronistic readings that conflate the Passover meal Jesus celebrated with the seder, "In summary, pre-rabbinic descriptions of the Passover ritual emphasize the sacrificial aspect of the meal and lack the major features of the seder as described in rabbinic literature."[563] Therefore, I conclude, in the Passover, as with Greco-Roman banquets, the prominent motifs of sacrifice—'killing-violence' and 'alimentary' motifs and their relationship to the divine—are present. Moreover, since the Eucharist is theologically associated with the Last

[563] J. Kulp, "The Origins of the Seder and Haggadah," *CBR* 4, no. 1 (2005): 113, https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X05055642. Kulp supports this claim by appealing to majority consensus in scholarship on the topic. "This overwhelming trend among historians and rabbinic text critics leads to the conclusion that Jesus' last supper, even if it did occur on the eve of Passover, was not a 'seder', for there was no 'seder' in the Second Temple period. Scholars who persist in accepting the Mishnah (or even worse, later rabbinic literature) as depictions of Second Temple practice, and hence as containing practices that may have been observed by Jesus and his disciples, are not sufficiently familiar with the research conclusions of nearly a generation of scholars of rabbinic literature." J. Kulp, "The Origins of the Seder and Haggadah," 113.

Supper and, by extension, the Passover, it seems to me that such associations warrant my analysis of the Eucharist with the Girardian model of sacrifice.

There are, however, other contexts where the connection between the killing-violence, as much as the alimentary emphasis of the Eucharist, is more evident.

8.4. The Passion Context

There is evidence that the early church creatively applied the Eucharist to address particular social experiences. For example, Moss discusses the "Eucharistic meals as commemorative," highlighting the possible reframing of eucharistic meals as funerary meals by early Christians—on the occasions the Eucharist was performed in a funerary context.[564] This view of the early church's liturgical practices, also associated with the debate on the historicity of the liturgical aspects of the Christian meals, is also of value to my phenomenological interpretation agenda. This is because it justifies my strategy to review and reimagine, through social-scientific hermeneutic methods, the eucharistic motif in the meal referred to in Rev 3:20 for my contemporary Pentecostal-Christian needs.

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[564] See Candida R. Moss, "Christian Funerary Banquets and Martyr Cults," in *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts: Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity, Volume 2*, eds. David Hellholm and Dieter Sänger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 822–23. Also, the concept of "averaging" (the on-balance "beliefs, values and expectations" of the members of a group vis-à-vis their "social reality") may help shed some light on the diverse practices of the eucharist and also why and how aspects of the eucharist may have had a particular emphasis within certain Christian communities. They may reflect a snapshot of particular beliefs of, or emphasis on, the Eucharist by a group given their "social reality". It does not preclude that there were no universal beliefs held. For discussion on "averaging." See Bartos and Wehr, *Using Conflict Theory*, 74–75.

At the same time, scholars across the spectrum of positions on Greco-Roman and early Christian commensality have also acknowledged the sacrificial tenor of the Eucharist. For example, concerning the reference to the Lord's death in the Lord's Supper narrative in 1 Cor 11:26, Smith and Taussig claim that:

> The idea is that "the Lord's death" is proclaimed not so much in word but in liturgical witness. It is proclaimed in the act of formation and celebration of the community through the eating of a festive banquet together, a community brought into existence by means of the death of the Lord.[565]

Smith and Taussig are right to claim that Jesus' death was central to the Corinthian church's banquets since, indeed, Paul indicates in the passage that their banquets were a tacit proclamation of Jesus' death. This observation is also significant to the historical analysis of my thesis because it connects discourse on the centrality of Jesus' death in early Christian worship to the earliest documentary evidence of the Christian celebration of the Eucharist.

In the final analysis, [566] I agree that there is a sacrificial tenor in the Eucharist liturgical narratives, not least because Jesus' prayers of thanksgiving in the narratives of the Last Supper in the Synoptic associate the bread and wine with the offering of

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[565] Smith, and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 65–66.

[566] Gilhus notes, notwithstanding objectors to a sacrificial view of Jesus' death, that "Christianity rejected animal sacrifice, but redefined and took over the sacrificial discourse and promoted a sacrificial reading of the gospel. In line with this reading they constructed their most important ritual meal, the Eucharist, as a sacrificial meal." Gilhus, "Ritual Meals," 207.

his body and blood for all.[567] Therefore, here I also approach the interpretation of the passages of the Eucharist canonically, that is, accepting the Scriptural view that connects the Eucharist to the sacrifice of Christ. But how can we understand Jesus' 'sacrifice' as it relates to the Eucharist, vis-à-vis the killing-violence and alimentary aspects of the "prevailing view" of sacrifice?

8.5. The Girardian Model Eucharist

To help address this question, I have recontextualised the 'Girardian model of sacrifice' to reflect the Christian parallels of its various elements. This recontextualised model is what I refer to as the Girardian model of the Eucharist, hereafter referred to as the 'Girardian Model Eucharist'.

[567] See Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20.

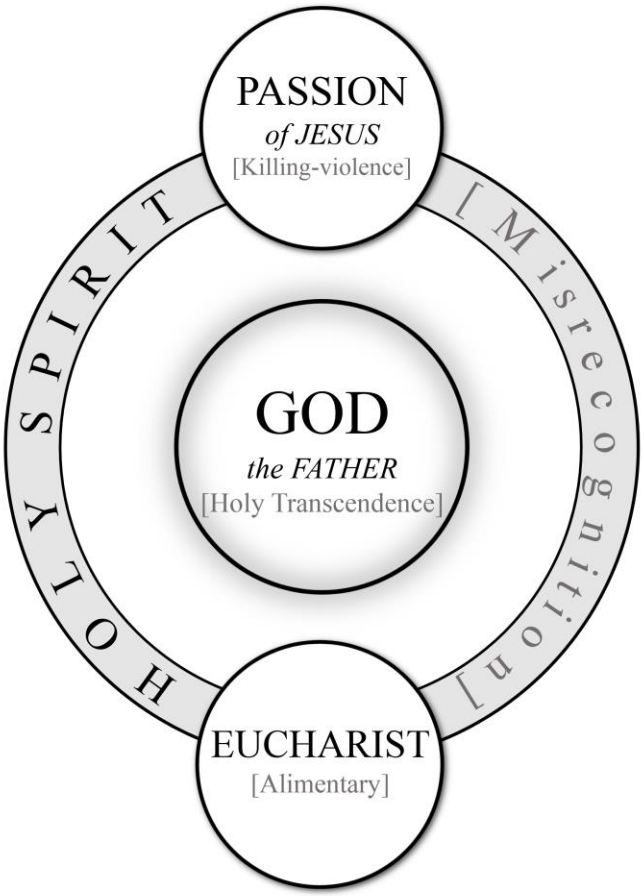

Fig. 8.1. The Girardian Model Eucharist

In this model, the Eucharist rite corresponds to the alimentary motifs of sacrifice because of its association with food, 'remembrance' of the Passion, and connection with the divine/Holy transcendence. Unlike the analysis of the pagan sacrifice model, the connection with the divine by participants in the Christian reading of the model is not strictly with the transcendence at the centre or the deified victim, but also the Holy Spirit and Jesus the Son, who are in the centre's orbit.

Furthermore, unlike the Paris school's alimentary conceptions of sacrifice that do not see a fundamental connection between the alimentary and killing-violence

motifs of sacrifice,[568] in my model, the alimentary dimension of sacrifice assumes an antecedent, historical killing-violence event, the historical Passion of Jesus event signified in the Eucharist rite.

William captures this symbiotic relationship between the killing-violence and alimentary conceptions of sacrifice concerning the application of Girard's theory to the Eucharist when he notes that "those who henceforth 'eat' his flesh and blood renounce any participation in killing the innocent victim and feast on the spiritual body of love and forgiveness he has offered them."[569] Thus, from a "Christology from below"[570] perspective, the historical, scapegoat-motivated killing of Jesus is connected with the meal eaten in commemoration of his death.

Moreover, in this model, the Holy Spirit is the revelatory force that connects the Passion of Jesus (killing-violence) to the Eucharist (alimentary). This reflects how, within my Girardian reading, the Holy Spirit functions with the Passion of Jesus the Son and the Eucharist to expose the victim mechanism that underscores the dominant pagan Greco-Roman banqueting system (and, by extension, human institutions), thus countering the 'misrecognition' that characterised the connection

[568] See Chapter 6.
[569] This is a comment by William James in the "Foreword" in Girard, *I See Satan*, xiv.
[570] By "Christology from below," I also mean "Methods of developing a view of Jesus Christ that begins from his human nature as known by historical research." McKim, "Christology from below," 48. This is contrasted with "Christology from above," which addresses "Methods of developing a view of Jesus Christ that begins from his preexistent nature as the second Person of the Trinity and moves to his incarnation (John 1:1)." McKim, "Christology from above," 48.

between the killing-violence and alimentary motifs in the pagan version of the banquet.

Anthropological-leaning conceptions of the Eucharist vis-à-vis sacrifice necessitate further theological discussions about how, for example, Christological, trinitarian, pneumatological, soteriological and sacramental aspects of the Eucharist feature in the model.[571] I will address these issues in the sections that follow.

8.5.1. The divinity of Christ and the non-mythic foundations of the Passion

The historical event of the Passion of Christ corresponds with the killing-violence emphasis of sacrifice in the Girardian Model Eucharist I have presented. The Passion also highlights the scapegoat mechanism and, therefore, social dimensions of the death of Jesus.

Moreover, the Passion, as an event of a single victim murder, parallels Girard's conception of the deification of the founding murder victim in archaic societies. In the Girardian schema, this does not mean that the conception of Jesus' divinity is, in every case, similar to the deification process in his conception of the victim-mechanism-based emergence of the pagan gods captured in myths. For instance, Girard asserts:

[571] Cowdell offers a helpful summary of Girard's 'theo-anthropological method' in his theory when he states that "Girard appropriates the central Trinitarian and Christological dogmas of Catholic faith in terms of the mimetic theory, as uniquely powerful means of articulating the difference that Jesus makes." Scott Cowdell, "Embodiment and Incarnation," in *PHMTR*, eds., James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 26, Kindle. Thus, what follows is a summary of the Girardian understanding of key Christian beliefs relative to my model guided by this theo-anthropological method.

> The divinity of Christ is fully revealed when he is the victim of the mimetic event of all against one, but it owes absolutely nothing to this phenomenon of violent contagion and scapegoating. To the contrary, he subverts it.[572]

Girard supports this claim by, first, claiming that unlike the mythic deification process, which he argues is predicated on the original community accruing guilt before accruing divinity to the 'founding murdered victim', Christians do not accrue any "demonization" or "guilt" to Jesus as a prelude to their proclamation of his divinity.[573] Therefore, he asserts, Christ's divinity "cannot rest on the same process as mythic deifications."[574]

Second, he asserts that the divinity of Jesus, the witness to "Jesus as the Son of God and God himself," is not predicated on the "unanimous mob of persecutors" but on the claims of a "small group of dissidents," the "apostles and those who gathered around them," who were the "first witnesses to the Resurrection."[575] Thus, he implies this is "unique" because he states that such a dissident group "has no equivalent in the myths."[576]

Third, Girard argues that the uniqueness of Jesus' death and conceptions of his divination, as can be gleaned from the NT, is not typical of the mythical pattern

[572] Girard, *I See Satan*, 131.
[573] Girard, *I See Satan*, 123.
[574] Girard, *I See Satan*, 123.
[575] Girard, *I See Satan*, 123.
[576] Girard, *I See Satan*, 123.

since two unequal groups coalesce around the deity, and the smaller of the groups assert the divinity of the god.[577]

Such readings of the divinity of Jesus do not consider the cosmic, 'Christology from above' notions of Christ's divinity. They reflect 'Christology from below' perspectives, that is, perspectives that focus on the anthropological conceptions of the nature of Jesus. Nevertheless, Girard offers signs of an incarnational theology that counters wholesale 'Christology from below' understandings to his Christology when, for example, he states:

> Against the mythic deities stands a God who does not emerge from the misunderstanding regarding victims but who voluntarily assumes the role of the single victim and makes possible, for the first time, the full disclosure of the single victim mechanism.[578]

This incarnational language still allows for an accounting of the divinity of Jesus within such 'Christology from below' perspectives. This is a view that other Girardian scholars have taken.[579] Thus, the anthropological priority of Girard's Christology does not foreclose perspectives on Christ's divinity. Therefore, concerning my Girardian Model Eucharist, the killing-violence focus I bring to bear

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[577] Girard, *I See Satan*, 123.

[578] Girard, *I See Satan*, 130.

[579] For instance, writing on the incarnational motifs in Girard's theory, Cowdell observes that "Girard is an orthodox Christian who believes that the real God . . . is uniquely present in Jesus and his impact. Jesus comes from outside the system of social stability based on violence, hence his nonviolent virginal conception, divine status, resurrection, and his sending of the Holy Spirit as 'advocate for the defense'—against the satanic principle that creates order by blaming the victim." Cowdell, "Embodiment and Incarnation," chap. 26.

on the Passion of Jesus also echoes the Girardian commitments to orthodox Christian conceptions of the divinity of Jesus.

8.5.2. The Trinity and an anthropological view of the economic Trinity

The Girardian Model Eucharist reflects a trinitarian model, which can also help articulate aspects of the economy of the Trinity in the eucharistic rite from an anthropological perspective. The model supports eucharistic conceptions of how, in the reenactment or remembering of the drama of the Passion in the rite, God the Holy Spirit unveils to celebrants the workings of the single victim mechanism that underpinned the Passion of God the Son (Acts 2:23b), who was sent into the world by God the Father (John 3:16).

The Girardian Model Eucharist reflects how God the Holy Spirit connects, through the invocation (*epiclesis*) during the rite, the historical and salvific Passion event of God the Son with the elements of the Eucharist, and places all in the orbit of God the Father who sent God the Son and the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13),[580] and is centred for praise and thanksgiving through the Son (and in Pentecostal-Charismatic context, by the Holy Spirit also).[581]

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[580] Again, in Girard's analysis, "God . . . *does not emerge from* [emphasis mine] the misunderstanding regarding victims but . . . *voluntarily assumes the role* [emphasis mine] of the single victim." See Girard, *I See Satan*, 130. Thus, in my model, God (the Father, revealed in the Son, John 1:14-18) retains the distinction (person) and transcendence motifs typical of a Christian theology of the Trinity.

[581] This resonates with Crichton's comments about a eucharistic prayer when he states, "In the eucharistic prayer we give praise and thanksgiving to the Father through the Son, whose redeeming acts are recalled, and in the Holy Spirit, who is invoked on the offering

8.5.3. Pneumatology and the Spirit's unveiling action

In this model, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, the revealer of the victim mechanism that permeates human relationships and precipitates the Passion of the Son.[582] The unveiling action of the Holy Spirit also replaces the 'misrecognition' that buttressed the connection between the myths of origins, rituals, and banquets in the Girardian model analysis of the nature of pagan sacrifice.[583] Thus, the Girardian Model Eucharist reading can be understood to offer an analysis of the anthropological and theological aspects of the Eucharist that are amenable to biblical conceptions of the 'edifying' work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13).

8.5.4. Atonement and the "One True Sacrifice"

As already discussed, the Girardian understanding of the sacrifice of Christ accounts for the anthropological (as much as the theological) impact of the crucifixion of Jesus and its salvific value as the result of the 'victim mechanism', which is understood to be associated with the Passion. This salvific value vis-à-vis the victim mechanism is associated with the 'work' or ministry of Jesus, which, as Cowdell notes "are primarily revelatory and salvific insofar as humanity is disabused of the false sacred

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(epiclesis)." J. D. Crichton, "A Theology of Worship," in *The Study of Liturgy: Revised Edition*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold SJ and Paul Bradshaw (London: SPCK, 1992), 19. Also,

[582] Girard, *I See Satan*, 3.

[583] Girard, *I See Satan*, 189–90.

and freed to know the true God. They reveal a God who is on the side of victims, nonviolent, and non-punishing."[584]

At the heart of the Girardian conception of the salvific work of Jesus lies human 'liberation' from societal and religious norms, systems, and structures found wanting by the Passion's unveiling of the ubiquity of the victim mechanism in human culture. One could say that in the Girardian register, the salvific work of Jesus is where "false transcendence" ends and Holy transcendence begins.

I agree with the notion that such anthropological readings of the salvific work of Jesus do not have to be considered fundamentally problematic within Christian orthodoxy, particularly, as Heim rightly reminds us:

> The ecumenical creeds do not pronounce on the matter of Jesus' saving work as they do on the Trinity or the nature of Christ, in principle welcoming cumulative accounts of various aspects of that work. These are represented by the models of the cross—ransom theories, moral influence theories, *Christus Victor* theories, satisfaction/substitution theories—each with their distinct explanations of how it is that Jesus died "for us."[585]

Indeed, as other Girardian scholars have discussed, the Girardian understanding parallels the *Christus Victor* conceptions of atonement to the extent that both reflect a victory over evil powers.[586] Also, as has been noted by other scholars, the Girardian understanding also could be understood to parallel the moral influence theory of

[584] Cowdell, "Embodiment and Incarnation," chap. 26.
[585] Heim, "Approaches to Atonement," chap. 24.
[586] See Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 70–73.

atonement insofar that the Girardian view also conceives Jesus' death on the cross as a model of God's love and that the imitation of such a model can yield salvific and ethically transformative outcomes in a person's life.[587]

The anthropological focus of my Girardian conception of the "cross" and, by extension, the Passion, complement traditional Christian atonement conceptions of "Jesus' saving work" and not undermine them. Instead, it will highlight the anthropological significance of Jesus' death, which can also be of value to Christian apologetics since it will evaluate sacrifice from its anthropological through to its theological determinants.[588] Moreover, the "saving work" is particularly captured in my Girardian model of sacrifice reading of the Eucharist, in the killing-violence motifs of the narratives of Jesus' death, the Passion of Christ.

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[587] See commentary on the similarity between the moral influence theory and Girard's view of the salvific work of Jesus in Jacob Sherman, "Metaphysics and the Redemption of Sacrifice: On René Girard and Charles Williams," *The Heythrop Journal*, 51 (2010): 52, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2009.00541.x. Concerning definition of moral influence view adapted here, see McKim, "moral influence theory of the atonement," 178.

[588] Again, I agree with Heim on the heuristic value of anthropological analysis of Jesus' death when he notes that "[Jesus'] death is not merely a bare antecedent to resurrection as a victory over generic mortality (rendering all the details of the passion beside the point). Nor is it a kind of existential absurdity that cries out for a transcendental transactional explanation as its sole viable meaning (for which the details are relevant only to frustrate our efforts to draw any earthly moral). There is already an intrinsic anthropological significance to the narratives of Jesus' death, provided by the passion narratives' empirical account of its occurrence, as well as an explicit counter-sacrificial theology built on that descriptive ground. According to the first, the cross is scapegoating sacrifice, and the revelation is that it is seen as such. According to the second, the cross is God's identification with the victims of such violence, and resurrection is an overturning of its legitimacy, a definitive withdrawal of supposed divine endorsement of socially therapeutic violence." Heim, "Approaches to Atonement," chap. 24.

Also, within the Girardian anthropological conception, Jesus' death is considered a 'sacrifice'; that is, as Girard states, it represents the 'shift' from the thinking of victim mechanism-based conceptions of sacrifice, which sees it as a "sacrifice of an object to the self-sacrifice exemplified in Jesus—a type of sacrifice that ranks as the noblest possible form of conduct."[589]

Consequently, my Girardian Model Eucharist conception reflects an anthropological conception of Christ's death as the "One True sacrifice"[590] that focuses on the liberty from 'evil powers' and the life-giving potency of the salvific work of Christ, which forms, as Alison describes, "a new way of being human

[589] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 227. Girard finds the word 'sacrifice' as a reference to Christ's saving work problematic because of its association, within his schema, to the victim mechanism that underpins pagan conceptions of deities. Nevertheless, he uses the story of Solomon's judgment of the women in 1 Kgs 3:16-38 to describe two understandings of the use of the word (sacrifice of an object vs self-sacrifice) and how conceptions of the sacrifice of Christ, as in Heb 10:5-7, are indicative of the self-sacrificing, and life-giving actions of the woman in the story that wanted the baby to live at the cost her losing custody of the child. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 220, 221, 232–33. Thus, he concludes about Jesus' life-giving actions: "We must beware of calling his actions sacrificial, even if we then have no words or categories to convey its meaning. The very lack of language suggests that we are dealing with a type of conduct for which there is no precedent in the realm of mythology or philosophy, or indeed in the pragmatic sphere." Girard, *Things Hidden*, 232.

[590] Alison uses this phrase to distinguish Jesus' sacrifice from "the mendacity and murderousness of the fine-seeming cultural constructs we call 'sacrifices.'" However, by this phrase, Alison also means that in the Girardian conception, the 'self-giving' of Christ is both positive and unparalleled; he states, "So, if you say that Christ's death is the One True Sacrifice, you are not saying that it is merely the best member of the series "sacrifice." Rather it is the only member, and all those other deceptive cover-ups of violence and displacements of responsibility are not really properly called sacrifices at all. You have chosen to use "sacrifice" as the positive word, whose barely imaginable meaning subverts from within the mendacity and murderousness of the fine-seeming cultural constructs we call 'sacrifices.'" Alison, "Eucharist and Sacrifice," chap. 27.

together, extending the forgiveness which flows from the divine self-giving victim."[591] Thus, the Eucharist then is, within my model, as Alison further describes,

> [T]he sign of the foundation of the new humanity to which Christians are called. And it is perfectly reasonable that what believers do, in the Eucharist, is, by praise and thanksgiving, to enter into a certain real participation in the One True Sacrifice, one which strengthens the ability to live it out in daily life.[592]

Alison's comment of how the Eucharist symbolises the "foundation of the new humanity" corresponds to the notion in my model that the Eucharist represents a qualitatively different basis ('new foundation') for ordering society; one that is not based on scapegoat mechanism. Also, his comments about how believers may "enter into a certain real participation" signals sacramental themes germane to the Eucharist that I discuss next.

8.5.5. Sacramentality and embodiment

The Roman Catholic understanding of the "principle of sacramentality," which conceives "all realities (animate and inanimate) potentially or in actual fact as bearing God's presence and being instruments for God's saving activities on behalf of humanity"[593] offers a broad conception of sacramentality that helps me explain its relationship to 'embodiment' in mimetic theory and, by extension, the Girardian Model Eucharist.

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[591] Alison, "Eucharist and Sacrifice," chap. 27.
[592] Alison, "Eucharist and Sacrifice," chap. 27.
[593] McKim, "sacramentality, principle of," 245.

Cowdell uses a philosophical approach to explicate what he argues is an 'embodiment' motif in the mimetic theory. He states that, at a fundamental level, I might add, "mimesis shapes our response to bodily appetites in areas such as hunger, the sex drive, and care for children."[594] By this, he is highlighting an intersection between mimesis and bodily desire; that is, how, for example, our desire for certain foods may stem from our imitating the desire of others (a human trait marketers seem to know all too well). Thus, our often assumed 'independent' desires, and by extension, sense of self, can also be understood to be predicated on our imitation of the desire of others. Such phenomena are what Girard labelled "interdividual."[595] Cowdell understands the conception of a "coextensive bodily state" as signalling "an integral role for embodiment in mimetic theory."[596]

Cowdell seems right to claim a relationship between embodiment and mimetic theory, not least because he supports his claim with compelling evidence that corroborates the claim of mimetism at the neurological level.[597]

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[594] Cowdell, "Embodiment and Incarnation," chap. 26.
[595] See Girard, *I See Satan*, 137; Girard, *Things Hidden*, 269. Moreover, "interdividuality" suggests that "the very genesis of the self is relational and that the independent Cartesian subject as such is an illusion." Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p.
[596] Cowdell, "Embodiment and Incarnation," chap. 26. Cowdell also states that "The Catholic tradition (until the Middle Ages) of Christ's threefold body undivided between Jesus' own person, his Church, and his sacramental presence in the Eucharist can be rewoven in terms of mimetic abiding." Cowdell, "Embodiment and Incarnation," chap. 26.
[597] For example, Cowdell highlights the discovery of the "mirror neuron system" and states that "If the desires of others are automatically intuited and our own desires follow, via a dedicated and multilayered neurological system, then mimetic dynamics turn out to be integral to our bodily reality." Cowdell, "Embodiment and Incarnation," chap. 26.

Also, Cowdell's analysis offers a point of contact with the embodiment motifs in sacramentality. For instance, Girard, with his 'Christology from below' perspective, discusses Jesus' mimesis of the Father, stating that "[Jesus'] goal is to become the perfect *image* of God. Therefore he commits all his powers to imitating his Father. In inviting us to imitate him, he invites us to imitate his own imitation."[598] Therefore, within the Girardian schema Cowdell has developed, such 'imitation of Jesus' by the believer could also be construed to signal the locus of the believer's embodiment of Christ and, by extension, reflect an idea of sacramentality within the mimetic theory.

From such understandings, it is not difficult to also conceive of—as I do concerning my Girardian Model Eucharist—our participation in the Eucharist as an act of, to borrow Cowdell's phrase, "mimetic abiding"; that is, remembrance and obedience[599] to Jesus' invitation to imitate him (Luke 22:19) and therefore position ourselves to encounter his sacramental presence and the graces signified in the offering (Matt 26:27-28).

Therefore, the Girardian Model Eucharist is critical to capturing the apparent nexus between the social (e.g., political, economic) and sacred (concerning the

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[598] Girard, *I See Satan*, 13.

[599] My understanding of "ordinance" here is "A religious rite, similar to a "sacrament," engaged in as a memorial or act of obedience rather than as having sacramental efficacy." Mckim, "ordinance," 196. However, my qualified use of the language of the ordinance here is to highlight the memorial and obedience motifs associated with the Eucharist and not deny what I understand to be the rite's sacramental quality.

presence of the divine) dimensions of the meal. This is possible because placing the Eucharist in the alimentary category in the Girardian model of sacrifice speaks to its obvious connection with food and the divine and highlights the connection between the alimentary category and the killing-violence of the Passion. Thus, the model helps underline the Eucharist's connection to the social (including political) factors of the Passion. As I discuss next, the latter is indispensable to analysing the Eucharist.

8.6. The Girardian Model Eucharist and the Social Dimension of the Eucharist

Other Girardian scholars have discussed this social dimension of the Eucharist made possible by the theo-anthropological reading of the Passion of Christ. For example, in discussing the relationship between sacrifice and the Eucharist, Alison argued that the mimetic theory helps us to see that "sacrifice is not principally a liturgical matter, but a constitutively anthropological and, thus, ethical matter." He supports this claim by using the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 to show how it undermines the emphasis on the liturgical dimension of sacrifice. He suggests that the religious officials in the story, who "keep themselves pure for the liturgical worship of 'the living God' through animal victims," fail to attend to "the real-life human victim" on the roadside. Thus, unlike the Samaritan who helped the man in need, the religious officials fail to model "what it looks like to inherit eternal life."[600]

[600] Alison, "Eucharist and Sacrifice," chap. 27.

While the passage does not explicitly state the motivations of the priest and Levite in overlooking the man left for dead by the roadside, others, like Nolland, have suggested that, concerning the priest's response, "a hint of a distinction between formal religious practice and covenant obligation to one's neighbor" could be understood to characterise his behaviour.[601] Thus, it would appear that framing a critique of the passage around the intersectionality of sacrifice, liturgy, and ethics, as Alison does, is not completely unwarranted. Therefore, Alison's reader-response reading of the passage has some value to my thesis. It highlights a relationship between cultic and social-ethical factors, which the parable's characters and plot bring to bear on the reader, albeit ever so subtly.

Also, it seems to me that my Girardian Model Eucharist can also help to bolster Alison's broader point, and one I am also making, about the significance of the social dimension of the Eucharist vis-à-vis its liturgical dimension. This is because, as I have demonstrated in my model, the anthropological, social-ethical dynamics of the scapegoat mechanism associated with the killing-violence category (and Passion) necessarily precede the alimentary conception of the eucharistic meal.[602]

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[601] John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary New Testament, vol. 35b (Thomas Nelson, 2002), 592, WORD*search*CROSS e-book.

[602] I am not suggesting that the alimentary aspect is necessarily liturgical by emphasising it as secondary. However, I am highlighting the point that the social and ethical dimensions associated with the killing-violence aspect of sacrifice precede every other conception of the sacrificial dimensions of the Eucharist.

The Girardian Model Eucharist can help to construe the rite as a cultural object of social and ethical renewal, one which impacted the community of believers (and the broader Greco-Roman social world), thus contributing to its centrality in early Christian worship. It seems to me that one can also find support for such claims in the attention given to social concerns by early Christians vis-à-vis their eucharistic celebrations.

8.6.1. The Eucharist as a cultural object central to socio-ethical renewal in the early church

Some scholars have also claimed that early Christianity was concerned with socio-ethical issues because of their connection to the Greco-Roman banqueting traditions. Smith argues, "Ethics in early Christianity was largely social ethics, and social ethics discourse was founded primarily on banquet ideology."[603] Smith supports this claim by noting the significant role of the "philosophical discourse" on conduct in banquets in the ancient world, noting how:

> [O]ne was to conduct oneself in such a way as to think of the other first and put the good of the community first. Since the meal was an occasion in which community was the focus, behaviour was defined according to that which enhanced the community as a whole.[604]

The value of Smith's comments for my thesis is that it places the Eucharist within a social and ethical framework that makes it possible to evaluate the Eucharist's sociological and anthropological significance with theories about human social

[603] Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 283.
[604] Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 283.

systems and interpersonal conflicts, like Girard's mimetic theory, and my Girardian Model Eucharist analysis.

Such assumptions of the value of my analysis for understanding the socio-ethical dimensions of the Eucharist also receive support from Smith's observations about the socio-ethical power of the liturgical element (Eucharist) of the Christian banquet in Paul's churches; he states:

> The meals at his churches, evidently like those of all other early Christian groups, were modeled on Greco-Roman banquet and provided a ritualization of social bonding. Paul utilized a separate version of a Last Supper tradition, but gave it his own interpretation. According to this interpretation, special emphasis was placed on the power of a meal, when conducted according to proper rules of etiquette (and theology), to break down boundaries and create the kind of community solidarity that should characterize what the church was to be.[605]

[605] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 69. Elsewhere, Smith writes, "it is the meal that created a sense of belonging, of social bonding with the community . . . thus the meal provided the occasion and ideology for a truly radical move in Christian history. And it was Paul who noted it and gave it a theological framework. In doing so he drew on the rich resources of Greco-Roman banquet ideology." Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist,* 185. To cite another example of reflections on the social dimensions of the celebration of the Eucharist in the early church, I note the socio-ethical sentiments in the practice of the offertory in Western and Eastern Christian communities up until the start of the fourth century CE, where, as Wannenwetsch describes "The small portions of wine that the individuals had brought forward would be poured together in the big silver pots whence the eucharistic element was taken to the chalice. Thus the eucharistic elements, consisting of an irreducible composite of expensive and cheap wine (and bread), given by poor and wealthy parishioners, represented the congregation as a whole. The purity of taste is sacrificed for the sake of the theological point of a communal representation of the congregation, with all its members and all aspects of their lives: success and failure, conflict and reconciliation, exclusion and inclusion, and so on." Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Liturgy," in *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. William T. Cavanaugh, and Peter Manley Scott (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2019), 85, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Such anthropologically based observations capture Paul's apparent understanding of the culturally revolutionary nature of the Eucharist. More specifically, I maintain that the "power of the meal," the Eucharist, which Smith alludes to, cannot be separated from the concept of the death of Jesus, the Passion. This theological motif, I purport, is indispensable to an anthropologically informed understanding of the Christian Eucharist, given the Passion-killing-violence nexus that my Girardian Model Eucharist highlights.

The cultural diamond diagram below (fig. 8.2) illustrates my understanding of the strong connection between a Passion-focused Eucharist (like my Girardian Model Eucharist)[606] and the social ethics that underscore the Greco-Roman social world.

[606] In this cultural diamond diagram, the Eucharist, "as a cultural object," discussed here also reflects my vision of the Eucharist in the Girardian Model Eucharist. Thus, it features the socio-political as much as the sacramental theology of the Eucharist, which I propose should feature in the regular celebrations of the Eucharist in Western Pentecostal churches. Furthermore, the arrows in the diagram demonstrate how I understand this eucharistic model to resist the problematic aspects of the social world since the Girardian Model Eucharist embodies the Girardian critique of the scapegoat mechanism alleged to characterize the 'social world'.

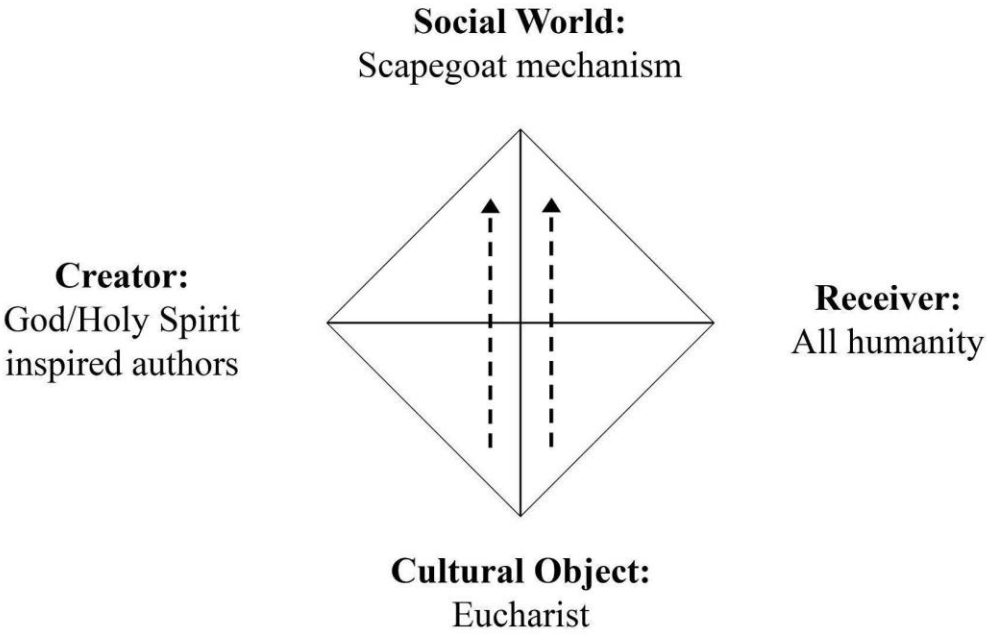

Fig. 8.2. The Eucharist as a cultural object

In this context, in its ideal form and as a cultural object in the genus of Greco-Roman banquets, the Eucharist plays a more consistent polemical role than other communal meal types of the Greco-Roman world. The Eucharist, with its focus on the Passion and its centring around a Holy transcendence, constantly challenges wider Greco-Roman society's scapegoat mechanism-saturated social ethics.[607]

[607] Also, see Wieser's analysis of communities in the NT in which he argues, using Girard's mimetic theory, that Jesus' message introduced a new community (the Kingdom of God) insofar that it exposed and also undermined the scapegoat mechanism of established human communities. See Thomas Wieser, "Community: Its Unity, Diversity and Universality," *Semeia* 33 (1985): 83–95.

To be sure, I am not claiming that Paul held to a Girardian model of sacrifice understanding of the Eucharist. As I discuss in the next section, I argue that there is enough Passion-related material in Paul's invocation of the Last Supper tradition in the Lord's Supper discourse in 1 Cor 11:23 to propose a 'Passion-centred' *sensus plenior* (i.e., fuller meaning) reading of his discourse on the Eucharist.[608]

8.7. διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα and Socio-Ethics in the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11 offers a unique glimpse into how the Last Supper tradition was invoked in a Christian communal meal by Paul. It offers an excellent snapshot of how it addressed the socio-ethical issues underpinning the conflict around the meal. Smith and Taussig echo other commentators when they note that the reason for the conflict around the meal was that wealthier members, who had more control over their leisure time, arrived earlier to the meals than their less

[608] I also acknowledge that other examples of Paul's writing feature an ethic of a liturgical meal. For example, Smith and Taussig rightly argue that the conflict between Paul and Peter concerning the distinctions that were drawn within the Christian community at Antioch, recorded in Gal 2, highlights Paul's understanding of the power of liturgy in forming communities, stating that "He saw the communal meal as a highly effective, fundamental means for drawing boundaries and establishing community identity . . . Here Paul can be seen to be a strong believer in the power of liturgy. He saw the action of the Jerusalem group as an act of ritual exclusion." Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables,* 62. However, I am focusing on the Corinthian's Lord's Supper for its fuller narrative presentation of a relationship between the Eucharist, an early church's social ethics and divisions, and the wider Greco-Roman society. Also, as Jones rightly notes, the Corinthian passages referencing the Eucharist (i.e., chapters 10 and 11) are the earliest reference to the Eucharist in the NT since archaeological findings attest to the notion that the Corinthian texts were written approximately twenty years after the crucifixion. See C.P.M Jones, revised by C.J. A Hickling, "The Eucharist: The New Testament," in *The Study of Liturgy: Revised Edition*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold SJ and Paul Bradshaw (London: SPCK, 1992), 190.

wealthy counterparts; therefore, they were able to eat more than them.[609] They also argue that what might contribute to the impatience of the wealthier members is that they were bringing their "difference in social status," which characterised the wider Greco-Roman society, into the group.[610]

Therefore, it seems reasonable to surmise that issues around social inequality underpinned the tension around the meals in the Christian community at Corinth. Smith and Taussig conclude that Paul invoked the Last Supper tradition, and the "body" motif, in particular, to address the inequality;[611] thus, Smith and Taussig note:

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[609] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 64. For similar claims and references to other works that maintain this view, see James A. Davis, "1–2 Corinthians," in *The Marshal Pickering Commentary on the NIV*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (London: Marshal Pickering, 1991), 976. Other views suggest that economic difference was not so much at play as was the lack of consideration for others insofar that some, arguably wealthier members brought and ate the better-quality meals before the arrival of other arguably poorer members to the banquets—the latter might have brought poorer quality food. See Paul Duff, "Alone Together: Celebrating the Lord's supper in Corinth (1 Cor 11:17–34)," in *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts: Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity, Volume 1*, eds. David Hellholm and Dieter Sänger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 566–67. Martin D. Stringer, *Rethinking the Origins of the Eucharist* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2010), 25, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[610] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 64. Also, Wannenwetsch frames this claim of a bias against the poorer members of the church within a discussion on what he claims to be the impact of household customs on the public image of Christian worshipping communities, arguing that by privileging people of "higher-status," patrons where undermining the public character of the church with household codes – i.e., customs that saw the patrons as the ultimate authority, even over "ecclesial authority." Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Liturgy," *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. William T. Cavanaugh, and Peter Manley Scott (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2019), 83, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[611] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 64.

> The solution was that they should eat together. The basis for the solution was an interpretation of the Last Supper tradition that centred on the term "body" . . . Accordingly, what they were to do was to "discern the body" when they ate and drank (11:29). This they would do when they ate together, for in this way they would exemplify the unity that is to characterize the banquet.[612]

Smith and Taussig see in the Lord's Supper discourse an occasion where the statement about the need to "discern the body" (διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα) is a crucial means to address the insensitivity, if not also a sense of rivalry that appeared to plague the group. They are not alone in this regard.

Duff also suggests that a Passion motif is at the heart of Paul's strategy in bringing about peace by noting that "In Paul's eyes, those who do 'not discern the body' represent the members of the community who fail to recognize . . . the inclusive community made possible by Christ's sacrificial death."[613]

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[612] Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 64. Elsewhere, Smith notes, "Paul takes the position that all such actions are schismatic, including the imputing of rank to individual members. He does this because he is working with a model of unity as an inherent aspect of a communal meal. Consequently, his main argument in 11:17-34 is to provide that the meal truly be a communal one so that the discussion of unity can naturally follow and build on that fact." Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 196. See also Ascough's comments on Macrae: "Paul promotes equality, humility, and mutuality, a radical change to normative social and behavioural patterns, including those displayed by the Christ adherents; 'in effect, Paul uses the meal ritual to create a new Christian social identity'." Richard S Ascough, "What Are They Now Saying about Christ Groups and Associations?" in *Currents in Biblical Research* 13, no. 2 (February 2015): 207–44. doi:10.1177/1476993X14522900, 215

[613] Duff, "Alone Together," 571.

To that end, and at the risk of me being anachronistic, Paul seems to be using the Eucharist as a "conflict action" insofar that he invokes the Eucharist, with its unifying "body" rationale, as the solution to the interpersonal conflicts.[614]

There is debate over what is meant by διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα since the textual context in which the phrase appears makes it open to be an allusion to the blood and body of the crucified Christ or the unity of the church,[615] or even alluding to the presence of Christ,[616] or perhaps all three. I will take the view that the focus of the phrase, διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα is the 'blood and body of Christ'—a position that also recognises the plausibility and theological worth of the other possible meanings noted. Therefore, if the phrase means the blood and body of the crucified Christ, which appears to me to be, by extension, associated with the Passion, then the Passion can be a basis for "eucharistic discernment" concerning socio-ethical issues.

The socio-ethical implications of a Passion focused understanding of the Last Supper tradition that Paul invokes are highlighted by Marshall when he notes that:

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[614] Conflict theorists, Bartos and Wehr, make a helpful distinction between "conflict actions" and "conflict behaviours," noting, "We speak about participants' conflict 'action' when we are assuming that they are guided by rational considerations; when we assume that they may be rational or nonrational, we use the term conflict 'behavior.'" Bartos and Wehr, *Using Conflict Theory*, 22–23.

[615] I. Howard Marshall, "Lord's Supper," in *DPHL*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1, WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[616] Davis, "1–2 Corinthians," 977.

> The meal was thus intended to be a memorial of his death, through which it would be proclaimed. It followed that conduct which was contrary to the spirit of self-giving seen in the death of Jesus would negate that proclamation. Hence it was the contempt and lack of love for the poorer members of the church which specifically aroused Paul's anger.[617]

Indeed, "the spirit of self-giving" is a virtue displayed in the Passion. As discussed above, this 'self-giving' motif of the Passion is also what 'sacrifice' means in the Girardian register (i.e., the "One True Sacrifice").

Thus, the self-giving of Christ as the "One True Sacrifice," recalled in the Eucharist, can bring about constant renewal to participants. This is also because it is at the eucharistic meal that the revelatory power of the person of the Spirit exposes the violence that saturates human culture (in Girard's estimation). This exposure offers participants attuned to the Girardian reading of human history and the Bible an opportunity, through the embodiment of such discourse during the rite, to be a) emancipated from the violence that, to cite Hamerton-Kelly, "drives the social system,"[618] b) constrained by the ethical directives that come from engaging with a portrayal of the God of the Bible as a victim, and c) to cultivate the "contrast-culture"[619] community that I also understand a eucharistic reading of the meal motif

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[617] Marshall, "Lord's Supper," 1.
[618] Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence,* 196.
[619] In keeping with other Girardian scholars, I will now refer to "contrast" instead of "counter" to depict the non-reciprocal nature of the Girardian understanding of the proper community response to the social ills of victim mechanism. For a full discussion of the difference between the "contrast" and "counter" motifs in Girardian thought, see René Girard et al., "Colloquium on Violence and Religion - Creative Mimesis and Peace with René

in Rev 3:20 promises. To that extent, the Girardian Model Eucharist is of value in discussing how the phrase, διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα (as a reference to the Passion) offers an interpretative framework for discussing the Eucharist as an instrument of socio-ethical renewal.

The Lord's Supper controversy recorded in 1 Cor 11 also raises questions about how early Christian communities exemplified the ethical ideals of the Passion-focused interpretation of the Eucharist. I will discuss this issue in the next section.

8.8. The Church in Flux—Between "Social Reality" and Ethical Ideals

I have demonstrated in my discussion on the Girardian Model Eucharist that there are some points of contact between the early Christian and Girardian understanding of the anthropological and theological significance of the Passion of Christ and its relationship to the Eucharist. These points of contact feature, for example, in the significance Girard's theory places on the crucifixion as a culturally revolutionary event and how this relates to Paul's assumptions of the significance of the ethical ideals of the Passion in building Christian communities despite the problematic aspects of their Greco-Roman cultural context.[620]

Girad, Walter Wink, Duncan Morrow and Vern Redekop," *USPottawa YouTube Channel*, November 30, 2016, video, 27:39– 29:00. https://youtu.be/ih6nNxFBOwk?t=1659.

[620] As mentioned, the Galatian controversy also exemplifies how Paul understands the crucifixion as a culturally revolutionary event. Smith and Taussig are right when they argue that for Paul, theology, that is, justification by faith in Christ Jesus for Jews and Gentiles (Gal 3:15-16), trumped ethnicity, arguing that "For him, Liturgy had to cohere with theology." Smith, and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 62. What is also interesting to me is that in the Galatian case, Paul targets aspects of Judaism, mainly the function of the Law, as problematic to the

Establishing these ethical ideals in the early churches was not (at least in some of Paul's churches) without its challenges. Indeed, the challenge of building Christian communities vis-à-vis their "social realities"[621] is evidenced in the Lord's Supper controversy at Corinth (1 Cor 11) and indicated in the meal controversy at Antioch (Gal 2). These passages suggest a gap between Paul's rhetoric and the "social reality" of his churches.[622] Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, I suggest that the rhetoric featured the ideals of the gospel according to Paul; the reality was the newly founded Christian communities' weddedness to Greco-Roman ideology.

I account for this fissure by suggesting that the early church was still at its teething stage of applying the culturally revolutionary ideals of the gospel and was gently moving forward on this new agenda. Moreover, it may be that what we have in the NT is a snapshot in time, an early account of the impact of eucharistic banquets on the socio-ethical and religious mindset of some early Christian communities. Thus, it seems to me that the NT portrays a record of the church in flux, grappling

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redemptive aims of the gospel. Girardian scholars like Hammerton-Kelly have analysed how Girard's theory of religion and culture problematises the Law in Judaism, describing it as an agent of scapegoating. See Hammerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 142–44.

[621] That is, the communities particular social situation. See Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 32.

[622] Such assumptions about the gap between rhetoric and reality are also discussed in Bradshaw's analysis of sources of early Christian worship. For example, he discusses how contemporary liturgists should be careful not to assume that "authoritative-sounding statements are always genuinely authoritative," and that "liturgical legislation is evidence of actual practice," not least because we cannot account for how all churches responded to authoritative statements and liturgical legislations, and, I would add, some it would appear were slow-adopters of the guidance giving in such rhetoric. See Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 17–18.

with its "social realities" and the demand to model the new ethical ideals of the gospel.

This 'church in flux' view does not overlook some convincing claims that Deutero-Pauline texts were a stumbling block to the cultural change the gospel, as understood by Paul, demanded of his Christian communities.[623] Nor, on the other hand, does it overlook some of the other apologetic-leaning claims that suggest that the problematic "household codes" were also used by NT writers as part of a virtue ethic strategy—or "creative middle ground"[624]—that was arguably mission-focused and sought to bring about cultural change in, for example, a more socio-politically savvy manner.[625]

Instead, on the one hand, this 'church in flux' view also aims to track the presence and power of the equality-stratification motif that underpinned my earlier charges of the practice of "institutional hypocrisy" in pagan Greco-Roman banqueting traditions and, evidently, some Christian eucharistic banquets (1 Cor 11).

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[623] For example, see discussions by Larsen on the Deutero Pauline theory as the basis for the less progressive positions in the NT. See Lillian I. Larsen, "Early Christian Meals and Slavery," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, eds. Dennis Smith and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 193–94.
[624] P. H. Towner, "Household Codes," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 515, WORDsearch CROSS e-book.
[625] For a critical commentary on possible pros and cons of the household codes, which also compares and contrasts how they were used in the apostolic and post-apostolic period, see Towner, "Household Codes," 513–19. I acknowledge the problematic nature of the "household code" for contemporary social consciousness and only discuss it here to demonstrate my awareness of other arguments about a possible negotiation ("creative middle ground") some Christian communities might have been making, which supports my 'church in flux' argument.

On the other hand, this 'church in flux' view aims to signal how the burgeoning ethical, Holy transcendence ideals of the Christian eucharistic banquets attempted to buck the trend in the unequal treatment of women and other disenfranchised members of society, like enslaved people.

Such assumptions support Wannenwetsch's discussion on how the Christian community revolutionised the dichotomy between "private existence" and "political life" that characterised Greco-Roman society.[626] Arguing from passages like Acts 4:32, Phil 1:27 and Eph 2:19, he claims that the worship of the Christian community reflected the hybridity and tension that underpinned the two concepts, but how passages like Gal 3:26 suggest that the idea of Christian citizenship subsumes the separation that stems from the political dimension.[627] Thus, I agree with his assertion that "[a]s a corporate action, worship includes in full participation all the representatives of the debased household: women, slaves, children, artisans, and so on – a reconciliation of hitherto unreconciled groups and realms of social life."[628]

Concerning the treatment of women in banquets, for example, Christian women appear to have had more of a say than their Greco-Roman counterparts. Streett, for example, is correct in noting how the practice of Christian women exercising speaking gifts in the symposium part of the banquet (1 Cor 11:5; 12:4-11)

[626] Wannenwetsch, "Liturgy," 81.
[627] Wannenwetsch, "Liturgy," 82.
[628] Wannenwetsch, "Liturgy," 82.

was indicative of the socially progressive tenor that the Eucharist introduced to Greco-Roman culture.[629]

Moreover, concerning the role of enslaved people in the Christian banquets, Glancy highlights a dilemma in discussing the issue of slavery in these banquets. She notes:

> We are confronted by a spectrum of possibilities about who served at Christian tables, a spectrum enabled by the silence of our sources. On one end of the spectrum, we may speculate that table service by community leaders quickly became such a Christian norm that our sources do not bother to comment on it. On the other end of the spectrum, we may speculate that Christian sources are silent about the identity of table servers because their communities conformed so closely to the universal practice of table service by slaves. [630]

Both perspectives likely represented reality. Indeed, the Deutero-Pauline reading would suggest that some Christian communities could be described as slow adopters if not complete resisters to the liberating ideals of the gospel.[631]

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[629] See his discussion of what he claims to be the anti-imperialistic nature of the Eucharist. Streett, *Subversive Meals*, 213. Also, for a plausible theory on the contribution of women to the eucharistic liturgy and, by extension, an example of the social uplift they experienced as a consequence of the gospel, Standhartinger argues that the Last Supper tradition perhaps originates in the funerary meal practices and funerary lament traditions, the latter of which women were tasked to fulfil. She supports this claim by noting that the Passion motif characterises Paul's words of institution because it references the Passion (1 Cor 11:22). She claims this may suggest that the words of institution originated within the funerary lament and sacral-meal tradition. See Angela Standhartinger, "Women in Early Christian Meal Gatherings: Discourse and Reality," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, eds. Dennis Smith and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 99.

[630] Glancy, "Slaves at Greco-Roman Banquets," 207.

[631] See Col 3:22-25; 1 Tim 6:1-2, 1 Pet 2:18-21.

I will take the view that the ideal position was for a Christ-centred ethic of unity, empathy, and the fair treatment of all regardless of abilities.[632] Such ideals find support in Paul's comments in passages like 1 Cor 12:15ff and Gal 3:21. Moreover, such ideals can be reflected in, as Glancy may be understood to infer in part, the admonition in Philo's *Therapeutae* for young men to serve, and Jesus' teaching at the Last Supper on the value of service vis-à-vis 'being served' (Luke 22:26b-27).[633] Finally, the narratives of the Gospel of John at the Last Supper (see John 13:1-17) can be understood to signal the gospel's ethical trajectory on the issue of slavery. This is because, in this pericope, Jesus offers something akin to a masterclass on service and authentic leadership in the Kingdom by taking on the role of the servant, washing the feet of his disciples and then instructing them to do the same.[634]

In the final analysis, no simplistic answers will be sufficient in light of the complexities around these topics and the vast gulf between the past and the present, which hinders our ability to gain a comprehensive picture of the matter. However, it seems to me that the gospel pushed people toward a Passion-centred ethic (cf. Holy

[632] On the issue of a Christ-centred unity and appreciation of the diversity of giftedness, I agree with Wieser when he argues that in 1 Cor 12:9, "Paul reminds the Corinthians that the work of the Spirit is to maintain unity in the midst of diversity and thus to make diversity an instrument for the 'manifestation of the common good'." Wieser, "Community," 91.
[633] Glancy, "Slaves at Greco-Roman Banquets," 206.
[634] Street also makes a similar claim; see Street, *Subversive Meals*, 214–15. Another reference to a possible act of subversion instigated by Jesus within the context of enslaved people and banquets is the miracle in the wedding in Canaan, in which John records that it was the servants, and not the master, that was privy to this significant miracle of Jesus (John 2:9). From this act, it could be argued that Jesus was in this inaugural miracle offering yet another "sign" by empowering the servants through the knowledge of the miracle he was indicating the cultural revolution that will characterise life in the Kingdom.

transcendence), which challenged the "social realities" (e.g., problematic aspects of the banqueting ideologies and household codes) of the Greco-Roman world and was a foretaste of the socio-ethical and political reality of the 'present but not yet' Kingdom of God.[635]

8.9. Conclusions

In conclusion, in this chapter, I argued that there is a relationship between Christian eucharistic meals and the Greco-Roman banqueting traditions, arguing that the former paralleled the latter. I argued that the value of this perspective on the shared custom of the meals offered a framework for analysing the Eucharist for its anthropological as much as its theological significance when reviewed through a Girard-based theory like the Girardian model of sacrifice. Next, I argued that the Eucharist was also theologically connected to the Jewish Passover and historically to the Passion of Christ. The value of this argument was that it demonstrated how the socio-political factors such contexts betray (e.g., conflict, rivalry) are germane to the Eucharist. It also corroborated the socio-political emphasis of the meal that I argued

[635] I see here a link between the instrumentality of a kingdom resource like the 'eucharistic rite' (presided over by the communities spokesperson within a given "social reality") and the 'new opportunities focus' germane to conceptions of the 'spacial dimensions of the kingdom of God' motif as discussed by Wenell. For example, she argues that "As a spatial resource, the kingdom continues to have potential for new meanings, for drawing in controversies and new understandings of order and space, for reconsideration of the connections and character of any or all of the different aspects of the God-people-kingdom relationship. It helps us to turn our attention to . . . the way that religious spokespersons draw on and create cognitive resources – some of them spatial – to formulate and speak for 'their' group." Karen J. Wenell, "Kingdom, Not Kingly Rule: Assessing the Kingdom of God as Sacred Space," *Biblical Interpretation* 25, no. 2 (2017): 230, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00250A01.

exists, giving my analysis of the Eucharist through the Girardian model of sacrifice (i.e., the Girardian Model Eucharist). I also argued that the Girardian Model Eucharist could be understood to complement traditional Christian views of the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, the work of the Holy Spirit, conceptions of atonement and sacramentality. It can be construed to capture not only the nexus between the social and sacred dimensions of the rite but also highlight the significance of the social dimension to a more comprehensive reading of the socio-ethical transformative potency of the rite.

Finally, I argued that the Eucharist can be understood as a cultural object of socio-ethical renewal today as much as for its sacramental features, notwithstanding the evident gaps between the ethical ideals espoused by church leaders like the apostle Paul and the "social reality" of the early churches. This "social reality" was characterised by ongoing negotiations with the imperial cult, the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 9

IMPERIAL CULTS

In the last chapter, I argued that the Girardian Model Eucharist also highlights how the Passion of Christ, the critical theological interpretative motif of the Eucharist, offers a damning appraisal of the pagan Greco-Roman banqueting ideology. This is because such Girardian (anthropology) informed theology of the Eucharist discloses how the pagan underpinnings of the Greco-Roman banqueting traditions could be conceived as fundamentally flawed instruments of social peace and order as it unveils their violent origins and ongoing expressions of violence.

The pagan aspects of the Greco-Roman banquet were only part of the broader cultural elements that early Christians, such as John and the seven churches of Revelation, had to negotiate in the Greco-Roman world. In this chapter, I will discuss the other significant cultural force the early Christians had to negotiate: imperial cults.

The imperial cult is the fourth and final cultural object I will explore as part of my focused analysis of critical cultural themes that inform my understanding of the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage. In this chapter, I will first discuss the need to reexamine the discourse within the academy and the church on the imperial cult by reflecting on critical conceptions of how Greco-Romans and early Christians most likely understood the cult. This discussion will signal how the mimetic theory

understanding of the origins and dynamics of culture can help to explain further, from its unique theo-anthropological perspective, the theological and socio-ethical concerns that underscored John's apocalyptic speech, namely, idolatry, and injustice. Moreover, I argue that such theo-anthropological reflections on the imperial cult can help to highlight the significance of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 as a meal of socio-religious potency that is instrumental to community formation and the perseverance of the faithful in a social world characterised by the scapegoating mechanism.

9.1. Imperial Cults in Scholarship

Most of the works of classicists and scholars of ancient religion I reviewed argue that the imperial cult reflects a much more nuanced cultural phenomenon than is typically presented in NT scholarship. For example,[636] they argue that NT scholarship in this area tends to treat imperial cults as a monolithic cultural phenomenon that typified nothing other than Roman hegemony. Moreover, they argue that this outlook on the imperial cult accounts for the condemnation of early Christians connected to formal aspects of the cult. In addition, they claim that this view of the cult has also negatively impacted the interpretation of the interconnections between cult worship and the other mandatory aspects of civic life, which the early Christians had to negotiate to survive in the quasi-pluralistic social context that characterised the dawn of their movement.

[636] The following examples are discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

There appears to be some warrant for these criticisms about interpreting early Christian-imperial cult relations. For example, it is possible to see how one could doubt whether John had a sophisticated understanding of imperial society, considering some of the sweeping and unflattering parallels he makes concerning imperial Rome. For instance, he likens some popular contemporary religious symbols of evil, like 'Jezebel' and 'Babylon', to imperial Rome and those within the churches participating in imperial society (Rev 2:20 and 13:1-18). Such wholesale attributions of evil to imperial Roman society do not, at a *prima facie* level, reflect the outlook of someone cautious not to overlook nuances and overlaps in the topics they assess.

Equally, it is also possible that some doubts about whether John had a sophisticated understanding of Roman culture are guilty of anachronisms, imposing a contemporary postmodern cultural outlook onto John's characteristically Judeo-Christian worldview. Such a worldview was typically communicated through the genre of the apocalypse, which, like its contemporary, the *Sibylline Oracles*,[637] would have been deemed by John and his contemporaries as an acceptable mode of conceptualising and critiquing social issues and speaking about the 'end times'—despite its at times fiery rhetoric and violent imagery, by modern standards. Also, where such anachronistic reading exists, they may subvert what appears to me to be John's sincere attempt at presenting, through the arguably problematic genre of the

[637] See Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 49.

apocalypse, a vision of the world that reflects the theological and ethical concerns characteristic of Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God.[638]

Therefore, by using the theo-anthropological framework of Girard's mimetic theory as a demythologising tool, I aim to distil the socio-religious concerns that I claim are intrinsic to John's apocalyptic and, at times, fiery rhetoric regarding Roman imperial society.[639] The socio-religious concerns are idolatry and injustice.[640]

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[638] For example, 'The Beatitudes' in Matt 5:3–12. To be sure, compared to the Synoptics, the Kingdom of God motif is not prominent in John's gospel, except, as Caragounis convincingly argues, to "typically" feature as "'eternal life' (seventeen times or simply 'life' (nineteen times . . .)." Also, the Kingdom of God and eternal life are often used interchangeably in the Synoptics (e.g., Mk 9:43–47; Matt 25:31–46). See C. C. Caragounis, "Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven," in *DJG*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 428, WORD*search* CROSS e-book. Cf. M. M. Thompson, "John, Gospel Of," in *DJG*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 379-380, WORD*search* CROSS e-book. Moreover, as Kim rightly suggests, given the sovereignty motif in the Apocalypse (e.g., Rev 4), the Kingdom of God motif can be understood as "the theme of Revelation" and thus, "to study it is to survey the whole content of the book [including the messages to the churches]." S. Kim, "Kingdom of God," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 633, WORDsearch CROSS e-book. Hence, there appears to be some warrant for my 'qualified' association of Jesus' message of the Kingdom with the Apocalypse.

[639] By 'demythologising', I mean something in keeping with what Palaver claims to be Girard's approach to deconstruction, which he suggests was predisposed to 'transcendence' and thus in keeping with Christian tradition. See Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 261–62.

[640] Carey noted these two themes as representing what some scholars claim to be central to Revelation's ethical concern. See Greg Carey, "Revelation's Violence Problem: Mapping Essential Questions," *PRS* 42, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 303, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLAiFZK160730000655&site=ehost-live.

The issue of idolatry features in the messages to the churches in the εἰδωλόθυτα motif in Rev 2:14, 20,[641] the antichrist/beast motif (e.g., Rev 13:4, 14:9, 19:20), and in the discourse on the imperial cult (Rev 13:11-17).[642] Also, a perspective on John's concern for justice can be extrapolated from his condemnation of Rome (which he characterised as Babylon) in Rev 17–18, not least because of its apparent exploitation of people (18:13) and targeting of Christians (17:6 and 18:20; cf. 19:2; 2:13; 6:9-10).[643] I will also signal how, using the Girardian model of sacrifice, meal motifs, such as Rev 3:20, could be understood by contemporary readers as vital to addressing these concerns. I will achieve this by also reviewing critical insights in the scholarship of the imperial cult in what I have described as 'Cult-Talk' as continuity, emperor worship, and diversity.

9.2. Cult-Talk as Continuity

The 'Roman imperial cult' was not an entirely new cultural phenomenon that citizens of Asia Minor had to negotiate. It emerged from ancient Greek cults, which predated Roman rule in the region,[644] as Price notes in his significant work on Roman imperial

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[641] That is, "food sacrificed to idols," NIV

[642] See P. A. Rainbow, "Idolatry," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 529, WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[643] See, A. B. Luter Jr., "Martyrdom," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 719–20, WORD*search* CROSS e-book; A. J. Beagley, "Babylon," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 110–11, WORD*search* CROSS e-book; Craig R. Koester, "The Apocalypse, Archaeology, and the Dead Sea Scrolls - Schaff Lecture 2013 - Part 2," 40:00–44:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLI3YsEaGcs.

[644] Price traces the roots of imperial cults in Asia, noting, "The three hundred years of the Hellenistic period which lie between Alexander the Great and Augustus saw the

cults in Asia Minor.[645] Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the ancient people of these regions understood cult, to a significant extent, as 'continuity', that is, as a shared cultural phenomenon, adaptable over time to address a society's socio-political needs.

Not all cults were the same, however. Price also notes that there was diversity between the cults in the rural part of the countryside and cities.[646] Nevertheless, the fact that imperial cults, for the most part, were based on and were distributed via pre-existing ancient Greek cults suggests that an investigation into imperial cults would be better served by also considering aspects of its antecedent Greek cult practices. One of them is animal sacrifice, a topic pertinent to my thesis.

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development of ruler cults in the Greek world, from its beginnings earlier in the fourth century." S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 21. Also, Beard et al. note the continuity between aspects of Greek and Roman cult practices when they note that "In structure, though not in detail, the [Roman] ritual was closely related to the Greek ritual of sacrifice." Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 36.

[645] Price comments, "Communities and associations not made up of Roman citizens did not seek to replicate the Roman system, but responded to Rome in their own fashions. In the East, Greek towns maintained their traditional religious systems, worshipping their own selection of the Olympic pantheon, as Pausanias was to describe in the second century A.D." S. R. F. Price, "The Place of Religion: Rome in the Early Empire," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, eds. Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, and Andrew Lintott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 845, https://doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521264303.029. Price also offers an indication of when cults started when he notes that the practice of establishing cults in the East (which also reflected cult practices in the Roman West) started "when the Greeks of Asia and Bithynia-Pontus were given permission in 29 B.C. to establish cults of Roma and Augustus." Price, "The Place of Religion," 846.

[646] Price notes, "There was another world of local culture, especially in the countryside, to which the imperial cult remained alien." Price, *Ritual and Power*, 79. The diversity of cult will be discussed later.

It would also appear that the pre-existing cult traditions were not the only structures co-opted by the Romans during the empire's expansion in the East. Classicists have also suggested pre-existing power dynamics between the diverse people groups in the East and that this power dynamic characterised traditional cults in the Roman provinces.[647] Moreover, Price notes:

> The imperial cult, like the cult of the traditional gods, created a relationship of power between subject and ruler. It also enhanced the dominance of local élites over the populace, of cities over other cities, and of Greek over indigenous cultures. That is, the cult was a major part of the web of power that formed the fabric of society.[648]

Price's comments suggest that pre-existing power dynamics appear to have also been the catalyst for establishing and maintaining imperial cults in Asia Minor, as they were for the traditional cults. Thus, there was some continuity between the two cult traditions.

Price also suggests that the negotiations around the establishment of the cult, particularly between the Romans and Greek élites, reflects a multifaceted "system of exchange," a mixture of unspoken objective and subjective desiring factors that

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[647] For a more comprehensive discussion on the power dynamics between Rome and its colonies that led to the start of imperial cults in Roman provinces, see also Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 352, 356–57. However, more recently, Scheid argues that it was a bottom-up initiative, with local people initiating cults to manage the impacts of successive emperors. He argues, "Recent research has shown that this worldwide movement frequently originated among the people, in the cities and provinces — for it offered a way, through religion, of conceptualising the development and success of an altogether new type of political power." Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 164–65.

[648] Price, *Rituals and Power*, 248.

created uncertainty, which made the system work.[649] Apart from this, Price does not offer any suggestions as to 'why' the cult was instrumental in negotiating power and relationships amongst the various people groups. Moreover, he does not discuss what the ancient Greeks may have or may not have understood about cults as a means of negotiating new or existing relations, a process that I understand from my mimetic theory analysis is susceptible to conflict.

Granted, Price clarifies that his aim was not to speculate what cults meant to the ancients as much as it was to describe their engagement with cults.[650] Moreover, he also argues that the search for meaning, which he argues tends also to place a premium on the individual's emotion as a means to understanding ritual, is essentially Christian and labelled such approaches "Christianizing assumptions."[651] For Price, such strategies are indicative of making category mistakes, that is, "to apply the standards of one religion to the ritual of another society without consideration of their relevance to indigenous standards."[652]

Price's approach to analysing the cults is commendable because he is careful not to distort his historical analysis with anachronisms that reflect what he claims to be a modern Christian worldview of religion. Such approaches, however, are not exempt from falling prey to positivistic outcomes. We forfeit a more vivid vision of

[649] Price, *Rituals and Power*, 65–77.
[650] Price, *Rituals and Power*, 9, 11.
[651] Price, *Rituals and Power*, 11.
[652] Price, *Rituals and Power*, 10.

the human condition when an emphasis on historicity results in the downgrading of plausible grand theories about, for example, the anthropological basis for specific historical actions.[653] Girard's theory of violence and religion, and by extension, the origins of culture, represents one such grand theory. And in the next section, I will discuss how it can shed light on the essence of the cults.

9.2.1. A Girardian perspective on the violence-abating essence of the cult

The notion that cult functioned as a means to negotiate power between entities of unequal standing that desire the same things (e.g., land/territory, power and prestige), [654] and thus, ultimately stopping the possible outbreak of violence between them, resonates with the anthropological aspect of Girard's mimetic theory. For example, suppose we understand cults as institutions that promote social peace and order within the Girardian register. In that case, it stands to reason that they embody the mimetic cycle that creates the scapegoat mechanism, with all its accoutrements of violence and "false transcendence". Moreover, perhaps the sacrificial killing act in the cult had a cathartic effect on all parties involved in the power negotiations. Perhaps it diffused the tensions of acquisitive mimesis and rivalry (or even the likely tension that stemmed from the uncertainty created by the alleged gift-exchange

[653] See Chapter 6, section 2, for a discussion of the positivism vs. subjectivism issues that underpin my judgment here.

[654] This seems fair to suggest since Price also concluded that "The imperial cult was the product of a competitive world." Price, *Rituals and Power*, 122.

system) that accompany imperial expansion or those living in societies of people of different socio-economic status?

Granted, this is a somewhat impressionistic application of how Girard's theory of acquisitive mimesis and sacrificial ritual could inform an understanding of the use of cults to negotiate power relationships and prevent the outbreak of violence. This Girardian reading, however, offers a perspective on the possible sociological and psychological reason for the uncanny appropriation of cults (with their sacrificial ritual practices) to mitigate violence in ancient cultures in a way that corroborates the claims that Price and others have made about the instrumental value of cults to that end.

Girard's understanding of the ritual roots of institutions and their ability to create social order also resonates with what appeared to be the imperial view of maintaining social peace through cult sacrifice. For example, the socio-political currency of cult sacrifice (amongst other aspects of cult practices) is captured by Beard et al. when they note that:

> Sacrifice and other religious rituals were concerned with defining and establishing relationships of power. Not to place oneself within the set of relationships between emperor, gods, élite and people was effectively to place oneself outside the mainstream of the whole world and the shared Roman understanding of humanity's place within that world. Maintenance of the social order was seen by the Romans to be dependent on maintenance of this agreed set of symbolic structures, which assigned a role to people at all levels.[655]

Thus, approving ritual sacrifice is among the vital cult practices that indicate that a citizen is committed to maintaining social order. Moreover, insofar as one actively participated in ritual sacrifice, one is acknowledging their place in society, which a Girardian reading would conceive as an action that limits the potential for any punitive action taken against them for subverting the system.

Again, such claims could be guilty of making a hasty generalisation insofar as suggesting a causal relationship between resistance to participate in cult sacrifice and the enactment of violence on the alleged dissenters. However, considering how—in the Greek East—offering sacrifices vis-à-vis the emperor functioned, and in light of the consequences of not participating in such practices, such views may not be as far-fetched as they appear.

Most classicists note that there was a distinction between imperial sacrifices "for the emperor" and sacrifices offered "to the emperor," suggesting the former was

[655] Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 361. For similar views on the relationship of sacrifice to community-forming acts, see Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 23.

more common in the provinces.[656] Also, and more pertinent to my focus on the implications for early Christians, Price notes that, unlike Jews who were happy to offer sacrifices for the emperor, Christians, with their view of the supremacy of Christ's sacrifice, repeated in their celebration of the Eucharist, found such acts problematic and suffered as a result.[657]

To be sure, Price does not reify animal sacrifice as though it were the only ritual practice of the imperial cult.[658] From Price's observation here, however, and my Girardian reading, it seems reasonable to conclude that the failure to participate in the sacrificial custom can occasion a mimetic crisis of sorts, creating new scapegoats or victims that become the object of institutional violence. For example, Rainbow

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[656] See Price, *Rituals and Power*, 210, 216. Beard et al. support this view as they note the difference between practices in the East and West. They note, "In the Greek east sacrifices were made on behalf of the emperor to the Greek gods of the Olympian pantheon. In the west most often it was specifically Roman gods that were emphasized in this role." Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 351. Also, Rives echoes this view and provides some supporting evidence: "Offerings and dedications 'on behalf' of the emperor in fact seem to have been the rule in provincial cults and typical in civic cults as well." James Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 152. To support this, Rives notes how in the cult in Gytheon, sacrifices were not directed to emperor Tiberius as though he were a god, but they were offered as they would be for ordinary people, i.e., "'on behalf of his well-being.'" Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 152.

[657] See Price, *Rituals and Power*, 221. Testimonies of the martyrdom of early Christians can corroborate such views. For example, by citing "*Acts Just.* Rec. A, B, C 3-5," Reasoner notes this amongst the reasons for the martyrdom of Justin in c165 AD. See M. Reasoner, "Persecution," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 911–12, WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[658] Price notes that in imperial cult sacrifices, "Sometimes libations or ritual cakes were offered, but the burning of incense, perhaps on special altars, or the killing of an animal, normally a bull, were the standard offerings at public festivals." Price, *Rituals and Power*, 208. Also, more recently, Faraone and Naiden note that, as corroborated by the images of offerings by Roman generals and emperors, in the imperial cult context, offering of incense and wine (and not meat) was demanded of those suspected of not worshipping the emperor. Faraone and Naiden, "Introduction," 4.

notes the punishment of Christians for not offering incense or decorating their doors during public processions.[659] Also, the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan on the issue of people accused of being Christians indicates that offering prayers, incense, and wine to the deities before the emperor's image was a sign of recantation and a means to avoid punishment.[660]

Furthermore, as Chapter 5 discusses, Girard's theory perceives a fundamental relationship between religion and human institutions, indicating the conflation of the two phenomena in antiquity. This conflation of religion and institutions in the ancient's outlook is no less visible in matters relating to the honours given to the emperor in the imperial cult system. As I discuss in the next section, within such matters are the more significant implications of the 'continuity' of cults on the early Christians like John and the seven churches of the Apocalypse.

9.3. Cult-Talk as Emperor Worship

Giving divine honours to Roman emperors in the Greek East had an antecedent in Greek culture.[661] Herz notes how this pre-existing system of relating to rulers suited Augustus' imperial ambitions insofar that a system that would give him unilateral control and power, that is, "Sacrifices, temples, competitions, statues, identifications

[659] See Rainbow, "Idolatry," 529.
[660] See book X, sections XCVI–VIII in Pliny the Younger, *Letters, Volume II: Books 8–10. Panegyricus,* trans. Betty Radice, Loeb Classical Library 59 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 285–93.
[661] E.g., see Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 149.

between ruler and god," was already in place and just needed to be co-opted.[662] Scholars have also noted Emperor Augustus' reign as marking a significant change in the honouring of the emperor insofar that, as Rives notes, "from Augustus on, the primary focus of all provincial assemblies was the worship of the emperor."[663] Price noted that these divine honours were unprecedented in the relationship between the Greeks and their rulers insofar that they were not issued as a consequence of some good deed of the emperor as much as a consequence of decrees issued during Augustus' reign.[664]

Also, it would appear that since Augustus, the emperor, had taken on a hybrid nature or was, at least, perceived to have had such a nature,[665] he could be perceived as a god insofar as he was the stock of the traditional gods.[666] He could,

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[662] Peter Herz, "Emperors: Caring for the Empire and their Successors," in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 330, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[663] Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire,* 150.
[664] One such decree he cites is that of the Coan decree, which he notes starts, "Since Emperor Caesar, son of god, god Sebastos, has by his benefactions to all men outdone even the Olympian gods…" Price, *Rituals and Power*, 55.
[665] To this point, Rives notes, "The emperor was in a sense both divine and human, so that one's perspective in specific circumstances determined with aspect came into focus. It was for this reason that people employed such varied and ambiguous strategies to represent his religious role." Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire,* 153.
[666] For example, Rives also notes that images were also means by which the religious role of the emperor could be expressed. For example, he notes how on the local coins in Ephesus, emperor Domitian's image features on one side, while the goddess Artemis, which characterised the identity of the Ephesians, featured on the other. He argues that this was meant to suggest that, in some way, Domitian was similar to Artemis and "just as Artemis symbolized their local identity, so too the emperor symbolized their Roman identity." Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire,* 153. Also, Herz provides evidence for the perception of the emperor as a god when he notes how, in the town of Akraiphia in central Greece, an inscription which declares the liberation of the Greeks announced by Nero during his visit to

however, also be perceived as human since, as noted above, sacrifices had to be made to the gods on his behalf in the East. [667]

With his focus on understanding religion in the Roman Empire, Rives offers keen insights into how the emperor could have this hybrid nature. First, he notes that within the Greco-Roman thought on religion, there was no stark divide between the divine and human.[668] Moreover, pointing to Herakles and Asklepios as examples, he notes how this divide was complex because there were myths about people who were born the mortal children of the gods and who had also achieved the status of gods through their merits.[669] Second, Rives suggests that the role of the emperor as the benefactor of the people, acting on their behalf for their good, placed him in a godlike status in the people's imaginations insofar that the emperor was now the interface between the divine and the human realm. Thus, Rives concludes, "people prayed to the gods to bless the emperor, because it was through the emperor that they [i.e., the gods] bestowed some of their most important blessings."[670]

Greece depicts Nero as a god, insofar that he is described as being able to free people, and the local people established a cult "'the liberating Zeus Nero, for all eternity.'" Herz, "Emperors: Caring for the Empire and their Successors," 333.

[667] Price, *Rituals and Power*, 233.

[668] Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire,* 153.

[669] Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire,* 154–55.

[670] Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 155. Herz also suggests that a reason for conferring divine honours on the emperor in the east was because he was seen as a conduit of mercy on behalf of the gods to the people. He supports this by citing a decree of Kyzikos in Asia Minor in which Caligular is identified with the Sun-god. See Herz, "Emperors: Caring for the Empire and their Successors," 332–33.

The suggestion that the emperor was perceived to have a hybrid nature, 'god-man', raises other pertinent questions about religion in antiquity. For instance, are there any similarities with contemporary views of religion, which mostly assume religious and non-religious domains in human existence? Also, what are the implications of this answer for our understanding of cult and the broader social context of Revelation?

Much ink has been spilt over these questions, and the resounding answer from most historians to the first is negative.[671] For example, in keeping with most scholars, Rüpke is reluctant to talk about ancient religion because he claims that Christian assumptions of religion get in the way of such discussions.[672] He compares the contemporary notion of religion with the apparent religious practices of the ancient world. He concludes that there were some similarities insofar as they had "gods and their temples . . . holy days and priests."[673] That said, Rüpke also cautioned that there were certain limitations to the notion that religion permeated every aspect of life in antiquity. For example, he suggests that the apparent pervasiveness of religion in the ancient world becomes evident when relativised to contemporary views of religion, which understand religion as less pervasive. Thus,

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[671] For example, see Price, *Rituals and Power*, 247. For how the élite exploited the conflated nature of religion and politics, see Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 247, 359; Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, 4.

[672] See Jörg Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, trans. and ed. Richard Gordon (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 5–6.

[673] Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, 6.

he argues that in the ancient world, "this bond between religion and many aspects of social life does not mean that more or less everything was 'religious'."[674] He supports this claim by arguing, for example, how words, such as the notion of *sacer* (which he translates as holy and belonging to the gods) and its antonym *profanus (*which he translates as describing outside the sacred ground), implicitly suggested that not everything was viewed as religious by the ancients.[675]

On the other hand, it will appear that the ancients did not have a strictly binary view of reality, that is, religious vis-à-vis non-religious domain. Wink argued that the ancients had an "integral worldview" that "sees everything as having an outer and an inner aspect."[676] Nevertheless, there is some merit to the calls to exercise restraint in the discussion of the integral worldview of the ancients as well. The value of Rüpke's caution not to overstate the interface between the religious and everyday life in antiquity is that it sets necessary discursive limitations on reflections on religion in the ancient world. For example, although one might argue, as Wink does, that there is compelling evidence to claim that the ancients had an "integral worldview," one must also be mindful that they are looking back and making judgments relative to their contemporary experience of the scope of religion in society (which is not as pervasive as it appears to have been in the ancient world).

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[674] Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, 7.
[675] Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, 8.
[676] Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 5.

That said, it seems as though the notion of the 'supernatural' was far-reaching enough in the ancient mindset to conclude that there existed in most aspects of people's lives a significant overlap between what contemporary people understand as the religious and non-religious spheres of life.

Also, concerning the implications of the interface between religion and non-religious domain, Herz notes that there was also a corporate and almost duty-bound dimension to the worship of the emperor in the cult:

> As a rule imperial cult did not mean presenting an individual declaration of faith; such a perception is clearly influenced by the Christian tradition of religion. Imperial cult meant the individual was expected to take part in collective religious acts. Each human being under Roman rule was obliged to participate in such religious activities not as an individual but as a member of the citizenship of his home town, a soldier in a military unit, a member of a local city council, or a member of the Roman senate.[677]

Herz's comment suggests that for the ancients, the focus was on the corporate actions of the community and not so much the individual or personal beliefs of the worshipper (as is the case with the current view of the religious). This aspect of the cult appears to have been a significant problem to some early Christians, captured in the issues relating to ritual sacrifice discussed earlier. What else can this overlap between religion and culture mean within the imperial context that Revelation depicts when considered through a mimetic theory lens?

[677] Herz, 'Emperors: Caring for the Empire and their Successors,' 334.

9.3.1. A Girardian perspective on 'the powers' in the NT

As discussed, Girard claims that all institutions stem from the founding murder principle and the emergent ritual practices that seek to create and maintain social order. Moreover, I noted that Girard understands the nature of institutions as simultaneously material and spiritual because of the divinising of the founding sacrificial victim.

Thus, Girard's theory of the material and spiritual reality of institutions can help to demythologise John's perspective of the demonic nature of the emperor and imperial society in passages like Rev: 13 and 17: 3-12. From a Girardian perspective, we can conceive John as indirectly highlighting the Roman Empire's violent origins, the imperial cult, and the false peace and order of the *Pax Romana*.

As discussed, Girard's theory suggests that what underpins archaic communities' rituals and institutional order is a cover-up of a founding murder and the victim mechanism that precipitated them. Also, Girard suggests that negative mimetic attitudes (e.g., acquisitive mimesis, conflictual mimesis, mimetic rivalry) underpin the victim mechanism. This Girardian outlook can help to reframe the characterisation of imperial society in Revelation as one that is charged with rivalry (as noted amongst the élites and cities) and social injustice (as noted in the condemnation of Rome's treatment of minorities and the disenfranchised). The Girardian frame of reference can further demonstrate how we can conceive John as

addressing ethical issues (such as greed, competition, violence, injustice, and inequity) that concern contemporary audiences.[678]

The above discussions about the shortcomings in understanding the sacred-secular conception in antiquity by contemporary scholars also raise other questions about the contemporary use of the 'language of cult'. For example, given Price's observations of the differences between cults in the cities and the countryside, is it appropriate, as is often done, to speak of 'the imperial cult' as though one was referring to a monolithic entity that stands as a pseudonym for Roman hegemony in Asia Minor? I address this question in the next section.

9.4. Cult-Talk as Diversity

In recent years, some scholars have offered different perspectives to some time-honoured assumptions about the relationship between early Christians and the wider Greco-Roman society. For example, central to Beard et al. argument is that there is no such thing as 'the imperial cult' because the cults were diverse and set in different contexts.[679] This view contributes partly to the discussion concerning John's

[678] In my opinion, these ethical issues have often been held hostage by focusing on questionable readings of John's eschatological motifs in popular contemporary Christian novels like the *Left Behind* series. For a critical commentary on the series, see Jon K. Newton, *Revelation Reclaimed: The Use and Misuse of the Apocalypse* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 26–33.

[679] Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 358. Price also contends for a less monolithic view of the cult when he notes, "it is misleading to categorize this as 'the imperial cult'. The term arbitrarily separates honours to the emperor from the full range of his religious activities, and it assumes that there was a single institution of cult throughout the empire." Price, "The Place of Religion," 847. Also, Galinsky contends that the imperial cult 'cannot be

use of violence-power rhetoric insofar that such rhetoric can also be understood to characterise his response to the Asian churches' possible engagement with the diverse forms and expressions of cult outside the so-called imperial cult.[680]

More recently, Galinsky identified several areas of study overlooked, in his opinion, because of a failure to appreciate the diversity of the imperial cult. For example, as was highlighted earlier, he notes how many NT scholars do not often recognise the enmeshment between the imperial cult and other local gods. To support this claim, Galinsky cites, for example, how Paul challenged the goddess of Artemis in Ephesus and not the imperial cult in Act 19.[681] Galinsky's point here is that

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reduced to a single, let alone simple, matrix.' Karl Galinsky, "The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?" in *Rome and Religion: a Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue On the Imperial Cult*, edited by Jeffrey Brodd (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 3, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.31288. Friesen also opines, "Let us stop referring to the worship of the emperors with the singular "imperial cult" and insist on the plural 'imperial cults.'" Steven J. Friesen, "Normal Religion, or, Words Fail Us: A Response To Karl Galinsky's 'The Cult of The Roman Emperor: Uniter of Divider?'," in *Rome and Religion: a Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue On the Imperial Cult*, ed. Jeffrey Brodd (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 24, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.31288. Gradel comments that the phrase 'imperial cult' is flawed since it gives "the impression of a neat and independent category." Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, 7.

[680] John does not discuss the diversity of cults in Asia Minor. From Rev 13 (in which he depicts cults as the beast of the land), one can extrapolate that he characterised all forms of cult as imperial serving. Also, see Philip Harland's commentary on how, assuming the Christian groups, like the diaspora Jewish groups, functioned like associations, they too would have had to interface with aspects of imperial society, such as seen in 1 Peter where he claims it could be argued that there is an appeal to offer "(non-cultic) honours for the emperors within civic networks." Philip A. Harland, "Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life Among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John." *JSNT* 22, no. 77 (July 2000): 115–17, https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X0002207705.

[681] Galinsky, "The Cult of the Roman Emperor," 5.

the imperial cult was not dominant and isolated as the only cultural phenomenon that the early Christians opposed—as he claims is often assumed by NT scholars.

Moreover, Galinsky echoes Price's observation concerning how, in the East, Roman rule helped to accentuate the dominant Greek culture; thus, it is erroneous to speak of a dominant, uniformed imperial rule in the East. Therefore, he is dubious about any claims concerning wholesale resistance to the imperial cult by early Christians in NT studies; he argues:

> In this context, resistance cannot be isolated as resistance to Rome or the imperial cult alone, but to a whole nexus of phenomena, and that is another, differentiated issue that needs, at least at times, to be more clearly addressed in the contextualization of the New Testament with its times.[682]

In addition, he sees the value of this "contextualization" of the reading of the NT into the Roman world because he argues that it helps to provide a clearer understanding of the robust political context of the early Christians and their neighbours.[683]

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[682] Galinsky, "The Cult of the Roman Emperor," 6.

[683] He notes "It is a political environment, but not in a narrow, totalizing way that has provoked an equally narrow and totalizing "anti-imperial" response. Instead, that environment, call it *politeuma* (a term used by Paul; Phil 3:20), as an amalgam of local structures of power, traditions, social customs, and the Roman framework." Karl Galinsky, "In the Shadow (or Not) of The Imperial Cult: A Cooperative Agenda," in *Rome and Religion: a Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue On the Imperial Cult*, ed. Jeffrey Brodd (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 222, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.31288. Other Religious Studies scholars also agree, suggesting that much is lost when we look at the socio-political context of the NT as a lifeless backdrop. Snyder notes, for example, "The narrow focus on the New Testament and an instrumental approach to background—that is, letting the foreground determine what elements of background are given weight or even seen—not only imports distortions and exaggerations but also leaves important things out of account." Gregory H. Snyder, "Response to Karl Galinsky, 'In the Shadow (or Not) of The Imperial Cult: A

There is some merit to the above calls for a holistic approach to NT studies that consider the ancient world's multifaceted social and political reality. Central to them is the suggestion there is more to the imperial cult, especially as experienced by early Christians, than opposition to Roman rule or Roman hegemony. To be sure, and as already discussed in my chapter on the composition of the Apocalypse (Chapter 4), there appears to be some evidence of conflicts between Christians and Roman authorities when the book of Revelation was written. Also, through the apocalyptic genre, John projected a negative image of Roman imperial society (Rev 13: 4-8, 12-17) and those who engaged with it (Rev 14:9-12; 20:4).[684] But it seems to me that the notion that provincials and even some Christians engaged in aspects of cult as a means to negotiate power between their fellow inhabitants and the authorities should caution theologians against making totalising claims.

The following excerpt from Elwell's commentary on Rev 2:20 is an example of such totalising leanings, which readers would have been better served if supported by a discussion on the implications of the civic impact of cult for the early Christians. Elwell states:

Cooperative Agenda'," in *Rome and Religion: a Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*," ed. Jeffrey Brodd (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 228, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.31288. Friesen also agrees with such sentiments; after noting how it would have been absurd to describe cults like that of Artemis in the singular, he argues "because the singular undercuts our efforts to develop sophisticated, nuanced interpretations of imperial cults." Friesen, "Normal Religion, or, Words Fail Us," 24.

[684] M. Reasoner, "Emperor, Emperor Cult," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 324, WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

> The church at Thyatira allowed itself to be deceived by a prophetess who was called (or called herself) Jezebel, bringing to mind the great conflicts of Elijah's day (1 Kings 16; 2 Kings 9). She and her followers advocated radical paganism and were warned by God to repent.[685]

Clearly, because of John's symbolism to describe the antagonist (i.e., Jezebel), Elwell can be forgiven for recasting the narrative into the OT context of God's judgement on those who mislead others.[686] To conclude, however, that "radical paganism" was "advocated" by this individual may not be a fair assessment. This is especially in light of the diverse ways people could consume meat and, therefore, understand themselves not to be directly connected with a cult.

What if, as some scholars have argued, Jezebel "tolerated"[687] and advocated for eating meat sacrificed to idols as a prudent survival strategy that reflects her strong faith in God and the virtue-ethical perspective of Paul concerning the eating of meat sacrificed to idols in 1 Cor 8 and 10?[688]

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[685] Elwell, "Revelation," 1205. Also, Kraybill alludes to Jezebel's actions as 'pagan worship.' See Nelson J. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 132 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 40.

[686] Some have emphasised that "John the prophet was evidently acquainted with all that background, for it is recognized by virtually all scholars that his work reflects a mind soaked in the OT, and his language is dominated by it. A knowledge of this background is a prerequisite for a right understanding of his book." Beasley-Murray, "Revelation, Book Of," 1025, WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[687] To borrow Duff's phrase. See Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?: Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57.

[688] For example, Carter offers five convincing possible reasons for her encouragement to the congregations to engage in Roman culture, viz., "Survival," "Social Reputation and Evangelism," "Theologically Knowing," "Biblical Examples of Blessed Imperial

First, it seems to me that while one may uphold the conclusion from the apocalyptic reading emphasis in the end, the detour into an analysis of the church's possible socio-political negotiations, as intimated in the 'survival strategy' motifs discussed above, can also be instructive, not least because it also has currency in the contemporary Western pluralistic and multicultural mission context.

I also maintain that it is not fair to suggest that John was fundamentally at odds with Jezebel (and, by extension, Paul) on whether the Roman imperial society in its final analysis was evil because he was fanatical. Such a suggestion often cast what I claim are unworthy reflections on John's character. For example, Snyder notes:

> I was again reminded that we're reading something by an extreme individual, someone approaching Rome rather like an apologist for the Taliban would approach America, along with its allies and collaborators. The people he's excoriating, and the figure he dubs "Jezebel," are probably involved in quite modest accommodations with Roman society.[689]

I am concerned that Snyder's considered comments about the arguably noble intentions of Jezebel are at risk of being overlooked by the rather unflattering

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Participation," and "Recent Events" (such as the destruction Jerusalem). Warren Carter, "Accommodating 'Jezebel' and Withdrawing John: Negotiating Empire in Revelation Then and Now," *Interpretation* 63, no. 1 (January 2009): 37–39, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001699008&site=ehost-live; See also, Warren Carter, "Roman Imperial Power: A New Testament Perspective," in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*, ed. Jeffrey Brodd (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 144; Snyder, "Response to Karl Galinsky," 230. See also Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 57–58.

[689] Snyder, "Response to Karl Galinsky," 230.

comparison he draws between John and modern-day terrorists (the latter of whom want to destroy the democratic aspects of civilisation that Christian texts, such as the book of Revelation, appear to have played a part in establishing!).[690]

Also, although Jezebel appears to be accommodating Roman culture on the surface, it would also appear that she was just as counter-cultural at a 'deeper level' as John. This is a point that Carter makes when he argues that if one is to push her stance of indifference to pagan gods and ritual to its logical conclusion, it would mean that she was at odds with the expectations of imperial society by this very indifference (since Roman authorities expected citizens to take the cult practises seriously).[691]

The debate over totalising interpretations and John's temperament also raises other issues about John's outlook on violence and power. Scholarly perspectives on these issues also indicate the presence of diverse reading strategies for evaluating John's outlook. These reading strategies range from what I term conservative-leaning[692] to critical-leaning[693] reading strategies. For example, it seems fair to say that

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[690] For example, Koester suggests that some nineteenth-century abolitionists reflected on Revelation 18 to support their campaign to end slavery. See Koester, "The Apocalypse, Archaeology, and the Dead Sea Scrolls," 00:00–01:46, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqUgR2YPRPo.

[691] Carter, "Accommodating 'Jezebel' and Withdrawing John," 47.

[692] Insofar as Newton suggests that the Pentecostal approaches to the study of Revelation are "sympathetic and literal," they could also be described as 'conservative-leaning'. See Newton, *Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 49.

[693] 'Critical-leaning' is my shorthand for historical-critical and hermeneutics of suspicion reading strategies.

Elwell's comments discussed above reflect a more conservative-leaning reading strategy. These reading strategies are often not ahistorical or non-critical. In the final analysis, they tend to reflect a confessional Christian (if not evangelical Christian) reading of the Revelation passages. Such readings, which offer a unique (and not necessarily problematic) perspective, tend to highlight the contextual (OT allusions), literary (apocalypse genre) and Christian theological (confessional Christian epistemology) determinants for interpreting John's outlook on violence and power.[694]

On the other hand, and as, to some extent, indicative of Snyder's remarks, there are critical-leaning strategies, which are not always opposed to conservative-leaning interpretations either. In their final analysis, the critical-leaning reading strategies are assumed to reflect a hermeneutics of suspicion as much as historical-critical readings. They often examine the significance of the violent rhetoric in Revelation and what is perceived as the internal power dynamic that underpins John's discourse—outside of a confessional or theological standpoint.[695]

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[694] With regards to studies on the book of Revelation, outside of commentaries, possible proponents and their works of such an approach include: Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 11 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986); David A. DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

[695] Outside of commentaries, possible proponents and their works of such an approach include: Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); Paul, B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?: Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). I am

Both strategies can and do yield helpful insight into the aims and implications of John's rhetoric in Revelation. They can, however, be equally problematic because they sometimes overemphasise the aspects of Revelation that appeal to the interpreter's agenda, which often do not account for contrary claims and evidence.

Therefore, I will attempt to forge a middle-of-the-road reading strategy to account for the theological emphasis and arguably human-centred ethical concerns indicated in the debate about John's outlook on violence and power. I aim to achieve this by demythologising John's apocalyptic and mostly religious rhetoric to distil its underlying non-religious ethical issues while preserving its religious sentiments. This development of an alternative reading strategy will continue in the next section, where I use Girard's theory to reframe the violence-power motifs associated with the discussion on the diversity of cults, which is evident in John's apocalyptic rhetoric.

9.4.1. A Girardian perspective on John's violence-power rhetoric

It seems fair to conclude that a Girardian reading of the Apocalypse would insist that one uses a non-hegemonic frame of reference to evaluate John's violence-power rhetoric. This is because, in mimetic theory, violence and power, as expressions of hegemony, are intrinsic to institutions due to their origin in the victim mechanism. The mimetic theory also claims that the Bible, especially the gospel, seeks to expose the stealth operation of this victim mechanism in its account of the collective violence

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grateful to DeSilva for pointing out that some scholarly material on Revelation, such as Duff's, reflects a hermeneutics of suspicion. See DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 66.

directed toward innocent people (like Joseph and Jesus). In turn, the mimetic theory argues that the Bible is an exceptionally sacred narrative because it depicts the God of the Bible as on the side of victims who are typically the objects of societal violence.

Thus, the Girardian reading of John's violence-power rhetoric would recontextualise such rhetoric by clarifying it as different from both the violence and power dynamic characteristic of institutions like the Roman Empire. In such readings, John's violence and power rhetoric are not on the same conceptual and moral wavelength as the violence and power indicative of hegemonic power structures. Instead, the Girardian reading understands John's focus to be exposing the inherent violence of Roman imperialism (as the leading cultural force of the time) and showing how it is ultimately at odds with the purposes of the God of the Bible, as revealed in the Passion of Christ's exposé of the embeddedness of violence in human culture.

Equally, I also understand the presence of violent imagery and Christian triumphalist overtones in John's apocalypse (e.g., Rev 19:11-21) to be problematic for anyone wanting to present Revelation as an exemplary ethical text. There are, however, two perspectives on this issue, one which suggests that Revelation has a non-violent ethos and the other that suggests that it promotes violence.[696]

[696] See Susan Hylen, "Metaphor matters: violence and ethics in revelation," *CBQ* 73, no. 4 (October 2011):
777, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001859230&site

Building from the Girardian contextualisation of John's violence-power motif discussed above, I advocate for a more nuanced reading that recognises what I describe as a 'nonviolent-eschatological judgement nexus' in Revelation. My claim that such a nexus exists, in the first place, rests on the notion that Revelation's metaphor of divine acts of violence has a unique quality: it features within the conceptually opaque context of the eschaton. Thus, framing the ethical discussions on Revelation within a 'nonviolent–violent nexus'[697] may not be the best framework for evaluating the moral tenor of the work.

Moreover, my preference for a 'nonviolent-eschatological judgement nexus' is predicated on the work of scholars, writing within and outside the Girardian register, that have tried to address the seeming nonviolence-violence nexus in some of the metaphoric speeches of Revelation. First, I take, as a foundational position, the perspective espoused by scholars like McDonald that suggests that in Revelation the slain Lamb (i.e., the crucified, non-violent victim) is the dominant interpretative metaphor for understanding the ultimate ethical focus of the book.[698] McDonald suggests that early Christians are not encouraged to respond violently on others but

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=ehost-live. These positions also correspond with the conservative-leaning and critical-leaning reading strategies respectfully.

[697] That is, the difference between, on the one hand, non-violence and, on the other, something like 'gratuitous evil'—violence without a positive, praiseworthy *telos*.

[698] McDonald cites crucifixion and Lamb motifs in passages like Rev 1.18; 5:6, 12; 12:11; 13:8. See Patricia M. McDonald, "Lion as Slain Lamb: On Reading Revelation Recursively," *Horizons* 23, no. 1 (Spr 1996): 31–32, 34, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001010767&site=ehost-live.

to conquer through imitating the non-violent model of the crucified Christ—thus, to conquer through "passion" and not "action."[699] This view also places a premium on the context in which the verb νικῶν (to "conquer, overcome, prevail, get the victory")[700] features in the letters to the churches in particular, in which, as McDonald argues, "is mostly used in an absolute sense, i.e., without an object."[701] It thus does not encourage those in agreement with John to inflict violence on others.

McDonald's view resonates with the general mimetic theory emphasis on the Passion of Christ as key to understanding the agenda of the gospel in exposing the operation of the victim mechanism in culture.[702] More specifically, and as discussed in my chapter on mimetic theory (Chapter 5), the premium she places on the 'slaughtered Lamb' as a hermeneutical key for understanding the Apocalypse is also emphasised in, to cite one example of a Girardian analysis, Jackson and Redmon's analysis of the violent rhetoric in the Apocalypse.[703]

Jackson and Redmon echo the idea that conquering is about imitating the Lamb. They do so by suggesting that the caution to avoid imitating the scapegoat

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[699] McDonald, "Lion as Slain Lamb," 30. Carey makes a similar point, noting that concerning the letters to the churches in Rev 2–3, Christians are admonished to reject the false teachers but are not encouraged to do so with violence. Carey, "Revelation's Violence Problem," 299.
[700] *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*, 2006 ed., s.v. "νικάω."
[701] McDonald, "Lion as Slain Lamb," 34.
[702] Palaver also indicates that the "lamb of God" motif indicates the victimhood of Jesus and is instrumental to disclosing the "scapegoat mechanism." See Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 214.
[703] Jackson and Redmon, "And They Sang a New Song," 101–4.

mechanism is also in view, claiming it is the system that all "communal existence depends."[704] In so doing, they offer a Girardian anthropological explanation of the violent dynamics that McDonald's alleges John addresses by using ancient Near Eastern combat myth motifs. Thus, by emphasising the Lamb as a key hermeneutical theme, such Girardian readings highlight how one can explain the violence in Revelation through reflections on Christological concepts like the Passion of Christ, which exposes the scapegoating dynamics of human violence and the God of the Bible's response to such phenomena.

At the same time, I acknowledge Hylen's caution about Revelation's imagery. She argues that it is essential to note the complexity of the imagery in Revelation insofar that both violent and non-violent imagery and motifs are often juxtaposed (e.g., 'Lion' and 'Lamb' imagery in Rev 5); thus, she argues, contributing to the understanding of the 'complex' phenomenon discussed.[705] Jackson and Redmon, writing in the Girardian register, address this concept by contending that both motifs are not separate and conflicting but as "metonymic," that is, "The Lamb is, and has never not been, the Lion of Judah."[706] Such an understanding rests on the notion that

[704] Jackson and Redmon, "And They Sang a New Song," 102.
[705] See Hylen, "Metaphor matters," 786-87.
[706] See Jackson and Redmon, "And They Sang a New Song," 101.

'true strength' (as characterised in the Lion of Judah motif) manifests in the humility of the Lamb depicted as slaughtered.[707]

Moreover, Hylen's observation concerning the 'metaphor-imagination' nexus—that is, how "the violent content shapes the imagination of the interpreter"[708]—is often taken for granted in defence of the non-violent reading of the book.[709] This is likely to be an issue in claims for the ultimately nonviolent reading of passages like Rev.19. Here, passive (or even canonical) readings of the passage may ignore the potentially negative impact of the passages' violence/combat language on the reader's imagination.

There is yet another perspective to this discussion, highlighting the challenge of human epistemic limitations. In my chapter on mimetic theory (Chapter 5), I discussed how Finamore, writing in the Girardian register, understood the "wrath of God" introduced by the gospel as an eschatological concept insofar as it presents a "final crisis" to humanity. Hylen complements such views when she argues that John uses "multiple metaphors" to describe not so much violence but the complex phenomenon of the eschaton.[710]

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[707] Such reflections on the Lion-Lamb motif, which reflects a 'triumph through Christ's sacrifice motif', have also been proposed for the motif's meaning in Pentecostal scholarship on the Apocalypse. See Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 135; Fee, *Revelation*, 80; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 185; Skaggs and Benham, *Revelation*, 69.
[708] Hylen, "Metaphor matters," 780.
[709] Hylen, "Metaphor matters," 780–84.
[710] Hylen, "Metaphor matters," 793.

There is some merit to this claim insofar that from recognising the complexity of the eschaton, the term "violence" might not be the best descriptor of God's actions in Revelation. We may also conceive of God's actions as having more to do with the eschatological judgement than gratuitous acts of violence or mimicking the hegemony ascribed to Rome. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude, as Hylen also intimates, that understanding divine action in Revelation requires a broader context of the Judeo-Christian understanding of the end times as a "rectification of evil."[711] Hence, I advocate for a 'nonviolence-eschatological judgement' nexus motif (rather than a nonviolence-violence nexus) to characterise John's violence-power rhetoric accurately.

Consequently, I also welcome Hylen's other caution that the challenge of the interpreter is to be aware of and be transparent about the ethical choices made in the pursuit of any line of interpretation.[712] Thus, I note that my interpretative goal is to highlight the non-violent-victim motifs germane to the Passion of the Christ and indicated in the slain Lamb motifs in the letter to the churches in particular. I also take the view that the expressions of violence-power rhetoric in Revelation are, as Carey notes, "symptomatic of the pervasive violence of the imperial reality it resists."[713] Thus, I also see in a Girardian reading an opportunity to demythologise the imperial context as presented by scholarship and John and thereby distil the

[711] Hylen, "Metaphor matters," 792.
[712] Hylen, "Metaphor matters," 792.
[713] Carey, "Revelation's Violence Problem," 305.

imperial-resisting and nonviolent-victim motif characteristic of the Passion of Christ and the slain Lamb motifs. I assume that such motifs are significant to the Christian church's mission and spiritual formation agenda.

I also assume that such a plain reading of the nonviolence-victim perception of God allows us to still talk about Christian engagement with broader culture—both in first-century Asia Minor and now—but not in a totalising way. This is especially important in the face of Carter's criticism of the logic of John's apparent counter-cultural position. Carter asks:

> [W]hat precisely does he want his reader to do—culturally, economically? What practices does he want them now to adopt to redefine their cultural interaction in terms of cultural distance? . . . The rhetorical effect of this lack of and explicit and specific program is by default accommodation.[714]

It is difficult to confidently state John's sustainability strategy for the church because, as Carter rightly observes, John does not explicitly state one. Nevertheless, I assume John's command to "come out of her [Babylon/Rome]" (Rev 18:4b) to be hyperbolic, characteristic of, as Aune notes, a "prophetic summons to flight" (cf. 2 Cor 6:17), which had much to do with a call to moral reform than a call to flee Rome, literally.[715] Consequently, one is left to wonder how John expects the church to be spiritually renewed and sustained in the imperial society he has characterised as patently evil.

[714] Carter, "Roman Imperial Power," 148.
[715] Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 1010.

My Girardian model reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 seeks to address this issue by offering a unique proposal for understanding the meal as a eucharistic and, thus, sustainability strategy for the churches. This is because it involves an invitation to spiritual transformation and to develop a 'contrast-culture', not a 'counter-culture' ethic amidst the scapegoat mechanism that saturated the Greco-Roman social world. For example, in this reading, the meal, as Eucharist, rooted in the forgiveness and eschatological hope of the Passion of Christ, is understood to counter the impact of the church's unwitting and, at times, unavoidable engagement with the overt and covert expressions of violence that characterises human relations in imperial society.

Moreover, the eschatological hope associated with the meal as Eucharist could be conceived to challenge the church to be self-critical about their possible imitation and endorsement of such subviolence and making that self-critical challenge the basis for their cultural outlook and community structuring, as indicative of the more explicit narratives about Christian eucharistic meals.[716]

In the final analysis, the Girardian assessment of the various ways I described imperial cults (continuity, emperor worship, and diversity), to varying degrees, reveals how violence could be understood to underpin the imperial cult system.

[716] For example, in 1 Cor 11: 17-34, Paul's challenge to the church in Corinth about their responsibility to each other around the Lord's table is a case in point. He also appears to use the Eucharist celebration to bring about moral reform, starting with the Christian assembly (17:27-34).

Thus, I contend that such anthropological reading of the nature of imperial cults can inform one's understanding of aspects of John's concerns about the idolatrous and socially violent underpinnings of imperial society.

Furthermore, such readings broaden the scope of analysis to include historical and anthropological factors about the cults, highlighting critical theo-anthropological themes that support John's concerns about the churches' engagement with imperial society (even though it is difficult to conclude with absolute confidence that such readings were part of John's reflections).

9.5. Conclusions

In this chapter, I discussed the significance of the imperial cults for understanding the meal motif in Rev 3:20 by identifying various conceptions of the cults: continuity, emperor worship, and diversity. I also drew connections between Girard's theory and the various cult conceptions to highlight the theory's value as a heuristic and demythologising tool. These discussions also highlighted how the mimetic theory understanding of the origins and dynamics of culture could help to explain further, from its unique theo-anthropological perspective, socio-religious concerns that underscored John's apocalyptic speech, namely, idolatry, and injustice.

More specifically, the discussions under the heading cult-talk as emperor worship helped to highlight better the implications of the cult-talk as continuity for John and his hearers insofar as it spelt out the specific threat the greed, competition,

violence, and injustice of the imperial society posed to the early Christians. Moreover, under the discussion of cult talk as diversity, I responded to different scholarly positions on John's apparent 'counter-cultural' position, often expressed using violence-power rhetoric. I concluded that the value of Girard's theory is that it helps to recontextualise this rhetoric and thus distinguish it from the concept of wanton violence and hegemony. Also, I argued that it is better to evaluate John's violence-power imagery within a 'nonviolence-eschatological judgement' nexus since his rhetoric has more to do with divine judgement at the eschaton than with anything else. Finally, I claimed that the Girardian analysis of the imperial cults helps to highlight how the Girardian model reading of the Rev 3:20 meal, also understood as the Eucharist, could be conceived as John's sustainability strategy for the community of faith living in the scapegoat mechanism saturated Greco-Roman social world.

In the next chapter, I will attempt to reconstruct the cult's presence in Laodicea from the details in the message. I will highlight how mimetic theory conceptions of culture can explain the significance of reading the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage for its eucharistic association and the cognate social as much as the sacramental factors it points towards.

CHAPTER 10

TOWARD A MIMETIC THEORY READING OF THE MESSAGE TO THE LAODICEAN CHURCH

In the previous chapter, I argued that the imperial cults were a significant cultural force that early Christians like John and the seven churches of Revelation would have had to negotiate. I also discussed how a Girardian reading of the three themes that emerged from my review of scholarly material about the imperial cults further highlighted the significance of John's theological and ethical concerns (i.e., idolatry and injustice), which are alluded to in the book of Revelation in general and in the message to the church in Laodicea in particular.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will reconstruct the presence of imperial culture in Laodicea from themes that reflect the imperial backdrop in the message. I will claim that, like other churches in Asia, the church in Laodicea characterised the 'mark of the beast', the mark of imperial society's negative influence. I will further argue that if we understand that John is using homologous contrasts in his writing, we can see how the meal motifs in the messages to the churches function to offer a distinction between the Eucharist and εἰδωλόθυτα (idolatry). Finally, I will discuss how the Girardian Model Eucharist could be used to explain the significance of a eucharistic reading of the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage that accounts for the social as much as religious dimensions of communal meals in Greco-Roman cultures.

10.1. The Mark of the Beast in Laodicea

From a cursory reading of the letter to the church in Laodicea, it would appear that the church was not entangled in any significant social and religious issues of imperial significance. Some might argue, therefore, that the cult context is irrelevant to the letter.[717] This view, however, is not entirely correct. A recent archaeological study indicates that Laodicea was also honoured with the *neokoros* title, just like Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum.[718] Thus, it is highly probable that specific social and religious issues characterised the church in that city due to its imperial presence. Therefore, it seems reasonable to me to suggest that the proverbial 'mark of the beast'[719] is also evident in the church. This suggestion matters especially when one looks, as I do, at the church in Laodicea within the context of the broader imperial society-related issues that John addresses in the message.

Koester agrees with critics who argue that a less-than-adequate characterisation of the social context of the individual messages to the churches

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[717] For example, this is what Hemer concludes when he notes that "It may be added that this letter makes little contribution to the wider understanding of the problems of the church in Asia. It offers no light on persecution or on racial and religious tensions." Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 11 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 209.

[718] Fairchild notes, "A *neokoros* was considered the guardian of an imperial temple dedicated to the emperor. Inscriptions from the large, prestigious cities of Asia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon) boasted of the many times they had received the honor. Coins minted in Laodicea indicate that this midsized city was also given the honor of an imperial temple for Domitian." Mark R. Fairchild, "Laodicea's "Lukewarm" Legacy: Conflicts of Prosperity in an Ancient Christian City," *BAR* 43:2, (March/April 2017): 37.

[719] Used here to describe signs of imperial society, *cf.* Rev 13.

stems from a failure to address their shared experiences.[720] Thus, Koester argues that the letter to the church in Laodicea also includes allusions to other broad concepts and experiences that would have made the issues of the church that John addresses not only recognisable but also relevant to the other churches in Asia Minor.[721] To support his argument, Koester notes that, for example, the reference to the Laodiceans being neither hot nor cold but lukewarm in Rev 3:15-16 is not a reference to the local water supply to Laodicea (i.e., hot water from the springs at Heliopolis and cold water from Colossae). He argues that such reading does not account for the fact that, for example, hot water would not be drunk but used for things like dying and bathing. Therefore, he asserts that alleged local allusions to Laodicea's water supply are not in the author's mind and that he is speaking about a universal experience that the Asian churches would recognise.[722]

Koester's claim about the shared experiences of the churches has some merit. This is because implicit in Koester's claim is the suggestion that the shared experiences (including topography) should guide the interpretation of the messages to reach a more accurate interpretation. I endorse such notions because they reflect the significance of historical-archaeological analysis to biblical interpretations, which,

[720] Craig R. Koester, "The Message to Laodicea and the Problem of Its Local Context: A Study of the Imagery in Rev 3.14–22," *NTS* 49, Cambridge University Press (2003): 408, https://doi:10.1017/S0028688503000201.
[721] Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 408.
[722] Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 409–11.

like mine, purport to be critical.[723] Such approaches can aid the 'generic reconstruction'[724] of the Laodicean church, which I will develop in this chapter.

Others have drawn a more vital link between the imperial society that John addresses in the book of Revelation in general and the local situation of the church in Laodicea. Friesen highlights the imperial context of Laodicea by expanding on references to the churches' relative economic status to other churches and then comparing it with John's condemnation of imperial society and wealth in Rev 17–19.[725] He concludes that:

> Laodicea . . . had relatively more economic resources than the other assemblies. The strong condemnations in their message and the resonance of these condemnations with the critiques of Roman economic imperialism in Rev. 18 suggest that this economic standing probably led to greater participation in imperial society.[726]

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[723] While I acknowledge Koester's analysis is a reaction to historical-critical approaches, by "critical," I am alluding to our shared aim of challenging certain common scholarly proposals on the socio-historical context of the seven churches of Revelation. For example, Koester states, "Our task will involve critically evaluating the proposed allusions in this message and developing an alternative approach to the imagery by interpreting it in light of common practices rather than special local knowledge." Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 408.

[724] I am grateful to Carter for my coining of this phrase to describe the attempts to highlight the influence and presence of cults in the NT in areas where they appear to be in the background. He notes, "in the absence of the specific, the generic, the likely, and the typical are what we have to work with." Carter, "Roman Imperial Power," 140.

[725] Steven J. Friesen, "Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation," *JSNT* 27, no. 3 (March 2005): 371, https://doi:10.1177/0142064X05052510.

[726] Friesen, "Satan's Throne," 373. Bauckham also offers a similar comment that ties the economic status of the church with John's broader discourse of imperial wealth when he notes that "the domestic problems within the churches in part parallel Revelation's depiction of the world ruled by the devil and the beast. The complacent affluence of the Laodicean Christians (3:17) is reminiscent of Babylon's exploitative self-indulgence (cf. 18:7). The idolization of material prosperity characteristic of Rome here characterizes a whole church.

I agree with Friesen's comments because they rightly highlight how imperial influence in the Laodicea church is discernible through references to the church's economic status (Rev 3:17), which corresponds with John's broader discourse on imperial wealth. Moreover, Friesen's comments are also helpful for my attempt at reconstructing the message to Laodicea because they highlight the influence of Roman imperialism in the church.

Also, it seems reasonable to claim that cult practices like eating meat sacrificed to idols would have also taken place in Laodicea because there is a temple in the city.[727] This claim is pertinent to my thesis because even though there is no explicit reference to such practices in the letter to the Laodiceans, the presence of a temple in the city and its cognate sacrificial practices make the contrast I discuss around Greco-Roman communities and meals in the letter relevant. This contrast is what I will develop in this chapter by adopting and modifying Koester's claim that the framing of the message to the church adopts three "concentric rings of thought" (see fig. 10.1), which highlight themes of "Sovereignty" (3:14, 21), "Dining" (3:16, 20), and "Prosperity" (3:17-18).[728]

Their repentance of this will be equivalent to coming out of Babylon, as God's people are urged to do, renouncing her sins lest they share her judgment (18:4)." Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 123.

[727] And because the other messages to the churches refer to this practice as a challenge of imperial culture.

[728] Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 411.

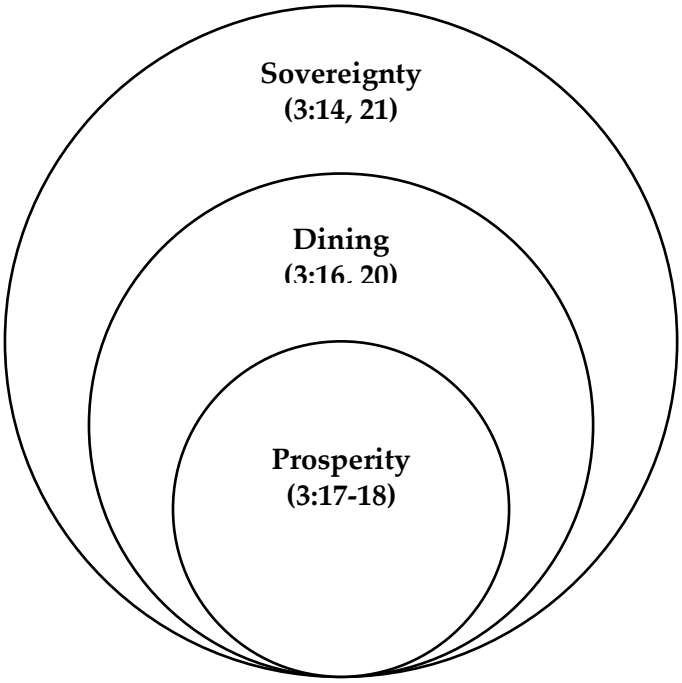

Fig. 10.1. A diagram of Koester's "concentric rings of thought" in Rev 3:14-21.

What follows is a discussion of how these three themes, understood as nodal points in the message to the church in Laodicea, highlight connections between John's broader concerns about the ills of imperial society and the issues he wants to address to the church in Laodicea. Further connections are made between the meal motif of Rev 3:20 and the Girardian Model Eucharist reading to highlight the heuristic value of a Girardian-based theory to my social-scientific interpretation aims. This connection makes a case for the passages' apparent eucharistic meal associations, with its cognate contrast-culture community making as much as spiritual transformation qualities. The connection also bolsters my claim that such meals indicated John's sustainability strategy for the church.

10.1.1. The sovereignty/ruler motifs

Koester points out that the outer ring of the three concentric circles of thought in the message to the church in Laodicea pertains to "Sovereignty." He cites Rev 3:14 and 3:21-22 as representing these themes. To support this claim, Koester demonstrates how the contextual analysis renders the 'ruler' title the most plausible interpretation of the ἀρχὴ term, arguing that firstly, the opening passage of the letters to the churches tends to correspond with the identity of Christ in Rev 1:5—in which the word translated ruler there is also the word ἀρχὴ. Second, he notes the linguistic use of the word to describe "positions of authority that included civic offices (*I.Laod*. 65.3; 83.7; *I.Smyr*. 641.7), the proconsulate, and imperial power (Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist*. 39.9.3; 51.21.6). By extension, [Koester continues] the word was also used for the persons in such positions of power."[729] Thus, Koester concludes that one could infer that 'ruler' and not the other commonly cited descriptors like 'origin' and 'source' best describe the title of the risen Christ referred to in this passage.[730] He supports this further by noting how the ruler title finds 'visionary expression' with the worship scene in Rev 5:13 and corresponds with the enthronement reference in 3:21-22; thus, he argues, "the author creates the outer frame of the message to Laodicea."[731] The value of Koester's comments for my generic reconstruction of the

[729] Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 412.
[730] Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 412.
[731] Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 412.

mark of the beast in the message to the church in Laodicea is that by emphasising the 'ruler' motif, it highlights the imperial social context of the message.[732]

As I noted in Chapter 4, the messages in Revelation mimic the contours of an imperial edict and the risen Christ is characterised as the true ruler and sovereign in a manner similar to the Roman Emperor.[733] Such perceptions of the moral supremacy of the rulership of the risen Christ vis-à-vis the Roman Emperor lend supports to the notion that the message to the church in Laodicea references (albeit subtly) the ills of imperial society.

It seems to me that John's specific disdain for the emperor cult, which is explicit in his broader discourse in Revelation, is also in the background of his message to the church in Laodicea. As I discuss next, other motifs, like prosperity, characterised the Laodicean church.

10.1.2. The prosperity motifs

Koester places the issues around prosperity as representing the core circle in his schema. I have already discussed aspects of the parallel between John's broader discussions on wealth and the economic status of the church in Laodicea above.

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[732] Insofar, as Koester evidenced, the ruler term also described the imperial authorities.

[733] See Chapter 4. See Peppard, who highlights how the son of God motif mirrors that of Roman imperialism. Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in its Social and Political Context* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), https://doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199753703.001.0001. Also, for a discussion on how the New Jerusalem depicted in Revelation mirrors elite Roman architecture, see Candida R. Moss and Liane M. Feldman, "The New Jerusalem: Wealth, Ancient Building Projects and Revelation 21–22," *NTS* 66, no. 3 (2020): 355, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688520000053.

Also, Koester suggests that the references to eye salves, gold, and wool are not just an issue with Laodicea but could relate to most of the churches John addressed.[734] The value of Koester's claims for my reconstruction of the message to Laodicea is that it suggests that references to the local context in John's discussions of issues in a particular church do not suggest that those issues were irrelevant to other churches. This is because, as Koester notes, the inhabitants of the cities where the churches were based had similar occupations and associations.[735] The absence of an explicit reference to specific shared experiences in some messages might be because those issues were in the background and not pertinent enough to warrant being singled out in the message to the church addressed.

Harland also draws a connection between John's condemnations of participation in activities, such as guilds, that would have been associated with cult when he argues that:

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[734] By citing several primary sources to support his arguments, Koester argues, "First, the principal banking center in Asia was Ephesus, where enormous sums of money were deposited in the temple of Artemis; and Pergamum also had a banking industry. Gold was traditionally associated with Sardis, where King Midas was said to have rid himself of his golden touch by washing in the river near the town, and the wealth of the former kings of Sardis was legendary. Smyrna had a guild of goldsmiths and a famous street named for gold. Second, medicine was practiced at Pergamum, where the physicians at the shrine to Aesclepius were said to have cured eye diseases and other ailments. Smyrna had a medical school, and Ephesus had an association of physicians, and competitions in the writing of medical treatises. Third, wool and textile production were important to many of the cities in the region; and Ephesus, Smyrna, Sardis, Thyatira, and Philadelphia all had one or more guilds associated with the textile industry: wool merchants, linen workers, dyers, and garment makers. One could as easily relate the admonitions in Rev 3.18 to institutions in Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum as to those in Laodicea, which suggests that the imagery might be interpreted in a broader context." Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 417–18.
[735] Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 417–18.

> The suggestion that John is objecting, in part, to Christians participating in guilds corresponds well with other economic dimensions of the book: his criticism of the Laodicean Christians who are wealthy, probably also due to involvement in commercial activities (3.15-18).[736]

Although Harland's claim is speculative, it also suggests good reasons (i.e., attaining wealth via "involvement in commercial activities" with their likely cult associations) to assert that cult activity was in the background in the message to Laodicea. Indeed, the message to Laodicea has no explicit reference to cult. Nevertheless, one may infer it from the references to themes related to cults explicitly discussed in the other messages to the churches or in the book of Revelation as a whole. Moreover, as I discuss next, the issues around meals suggest that this view has merits.

10.1.3. The dining/meal motifs

The meal motif is central to my thesis. Thus, this topic will be more emphasised than the other 'mark of the beast' discussed above. In Koester's framework, the meal motif represents the second inner circle of topics in the message to the church in Laodicea. Concerning the meal motif, Koester argues, as already stated above, that the reference to the lukewarmness of the church has more to do with a shared understanding of banqueting than the topography of the city of Laodicea. As such, the reference to lukewarmness has a universal application.[737] To support his claim of

[736] Harland, "Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast," 119.
[737] Koester suggests that this phenomenon would have been general knowledge to Greco-Roman cultures, stating, "The message to Laodicea rebukes the congregation by declaring that its works are lukewarm rather than cold or hot. Drawing on the imagery of a meal, the

the ‘universality’ of the phenomenon of ‘lukewarmness’ concerning beverages in Greco-Roman banquets in general, he notes the ancient Greco-Roman practice of heating water or wine in dining.[738] For me, such historically based corroboration adds weight to the claim of the shared understanding of the lukewarm phenomenon.

Moreover, Koester also sees the reference to vomiting in the message (3:16) as contrasted with the following invitation to dine (3:20):

> Vomiting the lukewarm out of the mouth is a disturbing way of warning readers about the prospect of rejection, while eating together is a vivid way of extending the prospect of continued fellowship; and through the interplay between the threatening and the encouraging uses of the meal imagery the author seeks to move readers toward the repentance for which the message calls.[739]

There is more than one good reason for entertaining Koester’s claims here. It offers a sound, logically consistent proposition of an alternative way to read the passage to show its thematic correlations and moral teachings. Moreover, the value of Koester's claim here for my thesis is that it suggests more than one prominent meal motif (besides Rev 3:20) in the message to the church in Laodicea. In Koester’s reading, the references to the hot and cold and vomiting signal reference to banqueting and are

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author expected readers to know that cold and hot beverages stand in contrast to their environment, and that diners find them refreshing. In contrast, the temperature of a cup of lukewarm water or wine is more like that of its surroundings; it does not distinguish itself to the touch. When applied to the Christians at Laodicea the imagery suggests that their works in no way distinguish them from others in their society.” Koester, “The Message to Laodicea,” 415.

[738] Koester, “The Message to Laodicea,” 413–15.

[739] Koester, “The Message to Laodicea,” 416.

not just indicative of the local terrain of the Laodicean church. Also, the meal motifs are paralleled and recast into a relational context that understands commensality as a critical spiritual formation feature because, in Koester's reading, the meal motifs describe how the church could either be accepted or rejected by a meal. Thus, focusing on the Rev 3:20 passage, one can see how the meal with the risen Christ and the worshipper(s) can be interpreted as a means to restore broken fellowship with the risen Christ.

In the final analysis, what Koester does by arguing for the concentric circle of thought in the message to the Laodicean church is show the messages to the seven churches include shared themes that inform one another and speak to broader themes of imperial society that are of importance to John.

There are also more ways of discussing how the meal motif in Rev 3:20 can be analysed to highlight its universal application. As I discuss in the next section, it can be analysed to demonstrate how it can function as a counter-ritual that exposes the ills of the imperial society that John condemns and challenges believers not to imitate such practices.

10.2. Rev 3:20 as Polemic and Eucharist

If Koester highlights how the meal motif functioned as a contrasting device in the messages to the churches, then Royalty demonstrates how the meal motif functions as a polemical tool. Royalty argues that meals play a significant role in the narrative

of Revelation as they did in other NT writings.[740] He notes that the typical discussions around dining in Revelation have focused on "Jewish traditions of the wedding feast and the eschatological banquet."[741] He also argues, however, that dining functions as a symbolic tool that is part of a rhetorical strategy to highlight the contrast between those on God's side and those not.[742] Thus, they can function as a sort of "Polemical Parallelism," a means of "pitting demonic characters against divine ones."[743] Also, Royalty states that:

> The Apocalypse portrays the symposium of Babylon as one element of the evil of the Roman Empire, while the marriage supper of the Lamb expresses the pure goodness of God and the forces of heaven. Revelation is not a text of nuance and subtlety, but one of sharp binary divisions and stark opposites between good and evil, in which a church in the middle is condemned to be vomited up because it is neither hot nor cold. Rome is completely evil, ruled by demonic forces. And those who do not join John and his circle of prophets within the *ekklësiai* of Asia are similarly condemned to dine to their destruction by God.[744]

He supports this by suggesting that there is "polemic parallelism" in the text insofar that he claims that the "demonic drunkenness of Babylon" (14:2, 17:2; 18:3)[745]

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[740] For a more detailed discussion and comparison with NT witness and Greco-Roman symposium customs, see Robert M. Royalty, "Demonic symposia in the Apocalypse of John," *JSNT* 38, no. 4 (June 2016): 507–51, https:// doi:10.1177/0142064X16637780.
[741] Royalty, "Demonic symposia," 504.
[742] Royalty, "Demonic symposia," 504.
[743] Royalty, "Demonic symposia," 516.
[744] Royalty, "Demonic symposia," 519.
[745] Royalty, "Demonic symposia," 519.

contrasts with the promises from God connected with a meal motif (Rev 7:16; 21:6; 22:17).[746]

There is some merit to what Royalty suggests here, and I agree with his central thesis. First, he provides compelling internal evidence to support his claim of 'contrasts', demonstrating that it is predicated on some critical (intertextual) analysis. Moreover, his comments about "polemic parallelism" can also find corroboration with the observations of other scholars who have argued that John uses contrasts within similar classifications to highlight what he deems is opposed or is not to God's purposes. For example, Duff elaborates on the homology theory to understand the contrasts that John uses to drive his narrative in the book of Revelation. He notes that the theory was used in Revelation studies by Thompson, who defined it as "a literary relationship between or among various phenomena in the narrative"[747] (e.g., Jezebel is homologous with Babylon).[748] He argues that the problem with Thompson's view is that "transformation" is paramount in his theory of homology and not "opposition" of the entities, which Duff claims is what John discusses.[749]

Additionally, Duff argues that John's homology does more than "compare" phenomena but also "contrast" phenomena in the book of Revelation.[750] Thus, he notes that Babylon is a homologous contrast to Jerusalem, and Jezebel is a

[746] Royalty, "Demonic symposia," 518.
[747] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 76.
[748] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 91.
[749] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 79.
[750] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 79.

homologous contrast to the woman in Rev 12.[751] Moreover, Duff also suggests that there exists a homologous contrast in the reference to eating food sacrificed to idols with the themes of the Eucharist in the book of Revelation.[752] To support this claim, he argues that the food offered to the woman in Rev 12: 5-6 indicates the Eucharist since the woman seeks refuge in the wilderness, where God feeds her.[753] He claims that this is indeed indicative of the feeding of the "messianic community" and that it "would certainly call to mind the eucharist, in light of the fact that both texts suggest that the woman is nourished in the wilderness with *food from God*, a phrase that could certainly apply to the eucharistic meal."[754] He also sees this pericope as contrasting the actions of the enormous red dragon that waits before the woman to devour her unborn child in Rev 12:4.[755] He notes:

> As most commentators have indicated, the child in this passage refers, at least on one level, to Christ. If this is the case, then the devouring of the body of the child (i.e., Christ) must ironically correspond to the Christian understanding of the eucharist, where the believer consumes the body of Christ.[756]

Thus, Duff concludes, "John wants to force the reader into seeing the eucharist and εἰδωλόθυτα as mutually exclusive. In other words, fellowship with pagans excludes

[751] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 93.
[752] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 102–3.
[753] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 103.
[754] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 103.
[755] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 104.
[756] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 104.

the possibility of fellowship in the Christian community."[757] The value of Duff's perspective for my thesis is that it provides a further supporting argument for a Eucharistic reading of the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage. This is because it allows me to understand that the passage is a homologous contrast to not only the Rev 3:16 passage (i.e., vomit motif) but also the specific references to εἰδωλόθυτα in the other messages to the churches (i.e., Rev 2:14, 20).

Such a reading could also recast the Eucharist meal in the passage into the context of a 'contrast-cultural' community-making meal as it stands in diametric opposition to the other community-forming cult rituals involving meals.[758] Also, it lends some weight to the theory that the celebration of the Eucharist might have been John's sustainability strategy for the church insofar as it signals a community-defining and spiritually sustaining meal in the passages discussed above. But does Girard's theory offer any new perspectives to the reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 in the light of the marks of the beast identified in the message?

[757] Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 105.

[758] Support for this perspective can also be found in Sumney's discussion on "adversaries" in the book of Revelation, in which he argues that the major fault of the so-called Jezebel and the Nicolaitans and Balaamites was their culturally accommodating acts of eating meat sacrificed to idols, and not the charges of sexual immorality, which he argues was typical of "stock charges" levelled against one's adversaries. J. L. Sumney, "Adversaries," in *DLNTD*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 25, WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

10.3. Mimetic Theory and the Message to the Laodicean Church

There are points of contact between the message to the church in Laodicea and aspects of mimetic theory and its expression in the principles of my Girardian model. These points of contact can also be understood to overlap with Koester's essential themes of Sovereignty, Prosperity, and Dining used above to analyse the universal application of the message to the Laodicean church. Thus, these themes will function as the thematic basis for my Girardian reconstruction of the message.

First, under the discussion of the sovereignty/ruler motif, I suggested that the notion that titles that signify imperial authority function to describe Christ's nature as sovereign in Rev 3:14 could be indicative of John wanting to highlight the true sovereignty of the risen Christ vis-à-vis the false sovereignty of the emperor. A Girardian reading would not only see this passage as signalling the presence of the sovereignty/ruler 'mark of the beast' in the Laodicean church (and the other churches in Asia), but it would (for consistency) also see it as signalling the universal reality of a mimetic rivalry between the emperor and the risen Christ—Satan and God. In this context, by wanting to be worshipped and purporting to be a god-man, the emperor characterises a scandal to the church—the obstacle and model, which, like Satan, dominates and demands ultimate worship that belongs to God alone.

Conversely, the presentation of the risen Christ as the true sovereign/ruler and the reference to Christ as the 'Amen' and 'the faithful and true witness'[759] in the same verse indicates the positive model that Girard insists Jesus represents. This motif of Christ as a positive model, and thus an agent of spiritual change, can also be deduced from the discussion around the prosperity motif (3:17-18) in the passage. In the Girardian reading, the passage could be depicting Christ encouraging the church to redirect its energy and devotion away from mimetic models that offer false security and prosperity and to direct them to Christ, the positive model that the church needed.

Such notions of Christ as a positive mimetic model capture the tenets of *imitatio Christi*[760] and the spiritual change it affords.[761] This concept is made more evident in the final section, the dining/meal motifs of the message. The Rev 3:20 passage includes an offer of Christ to dine with the church, which I claim has a eucharistic overtone. The Girardian Model Eucharist reading of the meal allows us to conceive of the meal as allowing the worshipper to experience social as much as spiritual transformation. Such reading assumes first that the meal, as the Eucharist, is

[759] Aune also points out that the title 'Amen' stems from the title of God in Isaiah 65:16, which speaks of his faithful and truthful nature. See Aune, *Revelation*, 254.
[760] Understood here as "A devotional commitment to the conforming of one's life and actions to those of Jesus Christ." McKim, "imitation of Christ," 138.
[761] Also, for a review of the concept of martyrdom (as a cognate of *imitatio Christi*) in Revelation as an example for Christians to mimic, see Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2010), 38–39, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199739875.003.0001.

a reenactment of the violence endemic to the origins of human culture also enacted on Christ (cf. "false transcendence"). Thus, the meal, as Eucharist, depicts the God of the Bible as one who stands against this violence and alongside those who are victims of violence (cf. Holy transcendence).

Hamerton-Kelly makes a similar point on the Girardian reading of the Apostle Paul's view of the sacraments that I find compelling because it supports my Girardian model analysis for its emphasis on killing-violence reading of the Eucharist when he notes:

> The nature of the sacraments preclude mimetic rivalry because they are essentially rites of identification with the victim. The celebration of the eucharist is the center of self-awareness for this community and it is a celebration of the death of Christ (1 Cor 11:26).[762]

Thus, with the aid of a Girardian perspective in my Girardian model, one may conceive of the Rev 3:20 meal as a eucharistic meal that, by the unveiling action of the person of the Spirit present in the meal, exposes the violence hidden (misrecognised), not least, in Greco-Roman society. This way, the invitation to the meal (as the Eucharist) constitutes a call for the church to assemble around its key "centre of self-awareness."

Moreover, one may understand that the person of the Spirit present at such meals also challenges participants (the churches in Asia) to identify with Christ and

[762] Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 180.

model Christ's suffering and nonviolent resistance response to this violence. From Rev 3:21, it can be argued that the one who conquers does so because, with the help of the person of the Spirit, they imitate (through "mimetic abiding") the 'conquering' paradigm described in the Passion of the Christ, remembered and likely embodied in the 'eucharistic meal' (Rev 3:20).[763]

We may further understand that the manifestation of the risen Christ in the Rev 3:20 meal indicates how such 'eucharistic meals' occasion a 'fuller' disclosure of Christ, who, before the meal, appears to be 'spiritually' present in the church (Rev 2:1). This raises the question, however, how can we reconcile such claims of a fuller disclosure of the risen Christ vis-à-vis the meal with the depiction of the risen Christ as standing outside the door of the Laodicean church? In other words, how is it that the risen Christ in the church in Laodicea is 'present but outside'? This seeming dissonance may be an accident of literary style, which does not affect the overall message to the church and the book of Revelation.

A Girardian reading, however, reframes this portrayal of Christ as 'present but outside', to Christ as the "marginal insider"[764] of the church. Thus, it is not that Jesus is "on the mainline," as the old African American spiritual goes; instead, Jesus

[763] On the point of imitating the conquering paradigm of the Passion, I am grateful to McDonald, "Lion as Slain Lamb," 38.
[764] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 18. This describes how crowds, in times of crises, turn "on those who originally held exceptional power over them." Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 18–19.

is 'on the margin'![765] A Girardian reading sees this positioning of Christ as a "marginal insider" as a direct consequence of what happens when the church (like the Laodicean church) has entangled itself with false models of power and success because of a lack of the kind of "eucharistic discernment" that the mimetic theory reading and its representation in my Girardian model affords.

10.4. Conclusions

This chapter has argued that the message to the church in Laodicea features the mark of the beast, the marks of the 'God opposing' influence and impact of imperial society. I argued that the message to the church in Laodicea not only addresses matters related to the topography of Laodicea but also addresses shared social and religious concepts, most of which were indicative of all the churches in Asia's engagement with imperial society. I discussed these shared concepts under sovereignty/ruler, prosperity, and dining/meal motifs. I claimed that the meal motif in Laodicea (i.e., Rev 3:20) forms part of polemical parallelism in the book of Revelation that uses meal motifs to highlight the difference between those who seek to do God's purposes and those who do not. I also argued that at a foundational level, that is, making comparisons with the meal motif of Rev 3.20 and other meal motifs in the messages to the churches, John could be understood as using

[765] Koester makes a similar point when he observes, "Christ is standing at the door and knocking, which suggests that he is in some way an outsider to the congregation that one would expect to bear his name." Craig. R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2001), 69.

homologous contrasts to show how the meal motifs in the messages to the churches function to offer a distinction between the Eucharist and εἰδωλόθυτα. Thus, I argued that the meal motif of Rev 3:20 could show that the Eucharist developed within a volatile social context that highlighted its spiritually transformative and community-forming potential as a sacral meal. Finally, I outlined a Girardian reading of the message to the church in Laodicea. The reading demonstrated how my Girardian Model Eucharist reading, with its emphasis on killing-violence and alimentary themes, can serve to highlight the eucharistic reading of the Rev 3:20. It showcases God's self-giving nature (Holy transcendence) and the social as much as the sacramental dimension of the meal as expressed in its "contrast-culture" making and spiritual transformation qualities.

These are aspects of early Christian eucharistic meals vis-à-vis imperial society that contemporary readers, in my opinion, need to be mindful of, not least because they highlight how the Eucharist could also be instrumental to Christian spiritual formation and perseverance in a pluralistic mission context. But how does my Girardian Model Eucharist reading compare with typical Pentecostal approaches to the Eucharist? To what extent do my Girardian reflections on culture vis-à-vis the Eucharist apply to the contemporary Western Pentecostal scene? These are some of the critical questions I address in the final part of my thesis that follows.

PART III

CHAPTER 11

ENGAGING PENTECOSTAL EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY

So far, I have argued that the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage is paradigmatic of a eucharistic meal. I have also shown how contextual and compositional matters relating to the passage highlight four cultural objects that intersect with John's socio-religious concerns and impact reading the meal motif for its eucharistic and cultural implications. I also used the mimetic theory to analyse the cultural objects, highlighting their cultural factors and theological and anthropological significance.

The first cultural object I discussed was 'sacrifice', and using mimetic theory analysis; I developed the Girardian model of sacrifice to reflect a combined reading of the mimetic theory view and the so-called "prevailing view" of sacrifice. I used this Girardian model to analyse the second cultural object, Greco-Roman banquets. I argued that the model helps a) conceive the nexus between the social and sacred dimensions of the banquets and b) depict how the transcendence engaged in the pagan meals reflects a "false transcendence" and how this view impacts the contradictions, if not injustices, reflected in the pagan banqueting ethics. Next, I discussed the implications of this analysis for the third cultural object: the Eucharist. I developed a eucharistic reading of my Girardian model, called the Girardian Model Eucharist. With this model, I argued that the Eucharist, in its ideal form, offered a contrasting cultural ethic since it centred around the narrative of a self-giving deity

who identified with victims. The last cultural object I discussed was the imperial cults. I argued that their interface with religion and violence explains John's rhetoric of violence and power. This violent revelation reveals the violence of the pagan Greco-Roman culture.

In the preceding chapter, I then offered a mimetic theory interpretation of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 as a eucharistic meal, which in varied degrees reflected the points discussed above and highlighted God's identification with victims and the nexus between the social and sacred dimension of the meal. But what is the relevance of this Girardian analysis to Pentecostal eucharistic reflections and my UK Pentecostal context?

In the chapters of the final part of my thesis, I hope to show that the mimetic theory analysis of the eucharistic reading of the meal motif, with a particular focus on its social dimension, is significant to understanding better the problem of the domestication of the Eucharist and the rites implications for Pentecostal cultural engagement. In so doing, I hope to evaluate claims by other Pentecostal scholars about the significance of the rite's sacramental dimension and centrality to Pentecostal worship.

First, what are the critical themes in Pentecostal discussions on the sacramentality of the Eucharist? Also, what points of convergence and divergence

are discernible between such themes and my Girardian Model Eucharist? These are the questions this chapter will address.

11.1. Chris E.W. Green's Pentecostal Theology of the Eucharist

I have decided to focus on Chris E. W. Green's proposal in his seminal work *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom.* To be sure, Green's work is not the 'holy grail' of Pentecostal theology of the Eucharist. His work, however, captures some critical concerns and theological approaches relevant to Pentecostal theology. It offers a comprehensive analysis of the Eucharist from his survey of key periodicals of early Pentecostals and key contemporary works on the Eucharist by Western Pentecostal scholars.[766]

11.1.1. Summary of Green's methodological assumptions

Green approaches his study with a "revisioning Pentecostal theology" agenda.[767] This revisionist methodology assumes that because Pentecostalism is a "living tradition," it should perennially be revised "without betraying itself or losing its character."[768] At the same time, Green contends that a Pentecostal theology must be wedded to the traditions of the "earliest years of the movement" and that this period should be

[766] In addition, Chris writes within the 'Scripture, Spirit, Community' hermeneutic motif and sees his weekly practice of celebrating the Eucharist in his church as the senior pastor as an informative tool for developing his Pentecostal theology. See Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 244–45.
[767] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 1.
[768] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 1.

considered a key conversation partner in the "revisioning" process.[769] He supports this assertion by appealing to Walter Hollenweger's observation that "the spirituality of early Pentecostalism represents the heart and not the infancy of the movement."[770] Thus, while Pentecostal theology should be a biblical theology, it should also reflect the particular theological outlook of early Pentecostals.[771] Also, Green highlights the emphasis on the practical dimensions of theology in Pentecostalism, arguing that Pentecostals value the application of theology in the life and ministry of the Pentecostal church and, thus, contends that "orthodoxy theologoumena must always already concern themselves with ortho*praxy* as well."[772] Therefore, in Pentecostalism, there is a fundamental connection between theology and practice.

Concern for the interface between theology and practice features also in Green's hermeneutic strategy of choice. For instance, he claims that the "Spirit, Word, and Community" hermeneutic model, which he notes is becoming increasingly popular amongst Pentecostal scholars,[773] will underpin an authentic Pentecostal hermeneutic.[774] Given this emphasis on Pentecostal tradition and practice, Green

[769] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 1.
[770] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 1.
[771] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 2.
[772] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 2.
[773] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 183–84.
[774] Moreover, he notes that when applied to his study of the Eucharist within the Pentecostal rubric, this Pentecostal hermeneutic model "calls for literary/theological readings of Scripture in the context of the worshipping and God-experiencing community, readings that remain sensitive to a text's canonical fit and that take seriously the history of effects, always remaining focused on how the Spirit uses Scripture to transform the community into Christ's *ecclesia*." Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 193–94.

also suggests that Pentecostal theology needs to be what I call an ecumenically-friendly-theology too; that is, it "should be conversant with the theological tradition(s) of the church catholic, so that the finished product is not only distinctly Pentecostal but also recognizably *Christian*."[775]

Therefore, a summary of themes that undergird Green's methodological assumptions includes a Pentecostal theology informed by Pentecostal theological traditions and hermeneutic priorities but remains agreeable to ecumenical readings. There are some critical points of convergence and divergence between my methodology and Green's. And I will discuss these in the section that follows.[776]

11.1.2. To Pentecost and Beyond!

My methodology reflects some aspects of the typical (North American) Pentecostal hermeneutic strategy (i.e., Spirit, Word, and Community) insofar that I also prioritise the text and aim to move beyond the text's "horizon" (i.e., founding sense-event meaning) to highlight a contemporary, pneumatically informed meaning of the text (i.e., present sense-event meaning). Also, underpinning such an approach is the quintessential Pentecostal assumption that the Spirit's interface with the lived experience of the interpreter is critical to the theological enterprise.[777] Moreover, my

[775] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 2.
[776] What follows (i.e., 11.1.2–11.3) summarises and, in some sections (e.g., discussion on "play"), slightly expands on my methodology chapter.
[777] See comments on Pentecostal Spirituality in Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 21–24.

methodology features a 'community impact dynamic', not least because my thesis problem has emerged from my ministry within the Pentecostal community.

That said, my methodology also strays from the typical Pentecostal hermeneutic approach insofar that my move 'beyond the text' extends beyond the contours of the typical Pentecostal approach since I have adopted a social-scientific hermeneutic method. This method also attends to the historical matters relative to the passage to identify the social (e.g., cultural, religious, political) dynamics related to the passage. Moreover, the method will use René Girard's mimetic theory as a heuristic tool to explain the likely causes and implications of the social ills that characterised the Greco-Roman world and feature in early Christian eucharistic practices.

Nevertheless, my work will still reflect strong links with fundamental tenets of Pentecostal theological methods, not least in my combined reading of the full gospel Pentecostal theological method and mimetic theory to interpret the message to the church in Laodicea in my final chapter.[778] My social-scientific hermeneutic methodology adopts and adapts Pentecostal theology/theological methods to offer new ways of reflecting on the passage while maintaining an affinity to and respect for core Pentecostal beliefs. In the following sections, I will further discuss how this

[778] Also, I understand that the full gospel's creedal quality can offer more prominent points of contact between mimetic theory and Pentecostalism.

adoption and adaptation of Pentecostal theological methods features in my social-scientific hermeneutic method.

11.2. Context

My social-scientific method also features a phenomenological perspective that reflects my engagement with popular Western Pentecostal eucharistic theology (focusing on Green's work) and the theology-culture nexus in Steven Jack Land's "orthodoxy," "orthopathy" and "orthopraxy" themed analysis of Pentecostal spirituality.[779]

By "phenomenological perspective," I also refer to my observations of UK Pentecostal eucharistic practices as an insider to that movement; therefore, such perspectives also pertain to my "lived situation" within the UK Pentecostal scene.[780] Such approaches, typically understood as indicative of emic methods, have inherent epistemological limitations since they customarily appeal to a subjective interpretation of events.[781] Using such an approach in this project does not preclude me from using empirical and other scholarly studies on Pentecostal culture and eucharistic practices.

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[779] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 31.

[780] See Robert Wuthnow, *What Happens When We Practice Religion? Textures of Devotion in Everyday Life* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 4.

[781] For a discussion on the limitations of emic and etic conceptualisations and approaches in the sociology of religion studies, see S. Owen, "Etic/Emic Considerations in Horii's 'Religion' and 'Secular' Categories in Sociology," *CRR* 11, no.1 (2023); 113–14, https://doi.org/10.1177/20503032221148463

Furthermore, I contend that the phenomenological dimensions of my social-scientific methodology are warranted because, firstly, as Davies has rightly argued, Pentecostal theology is better served by analyses that stem from both dogma and first-hand experiences, since "[l]ived practices are, on a number of levels, sometimes rather different from espoused beliefs."[782] As I discuss in the next section, other Pentecostal scholars have also offered reflections that attend to the interface between dogma and experience.

11.3. Play

My hermeneutic methodology also addresses issues that some Pentecostal scholars have argued are critical to Pentecostal theological construction. For example, cautioning against Pentecostal theological constructions that do not reflect Pentecostal theological concerns, Vondey has proposed a framework for doing Pentecostal theology. Put succinctly, he suggests that the Pentecost event, the full gospel, and the understanding and experience of the Pentecostal ritual of the altar must shape Pentecostal theological constructions.[783]

Vondey also contends that Pentecostal theology remains underpinned by a theological approach reflecting the Spirit's freedom in the theological enterprise. He

[782] Davies, "Heritage and Hope," 18.
[783] Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 5, 8. See also support for the significance of "the event of Pentecost" in Pentecostal theological construction in Daniela C. Augustine, "The Spirit in Word and Sacrament," *JPT* 29, no. 1 (2020): 59, https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02901004.

describes this approach as "play."[784] For Pentecostal theology, he suggests that play functions "as a redemptive method of living and interpreting the logic of reality by transforming and transcending its existing structures and demands towards the realm of alternative expectations motivated by an unlimited imagination."[785] Thus, play as paradigmatic of Pentecostal theological methods, presents Pentecostal theology as instrumental to both deconstructing and reconstructing "theology's own symbols and practices in redemptive engagement with God." Such "play" based approaches, he contends, however, are achieved within specific theological parameters that represent Pentecostal theological outlook and concerns.[786]

Vondey's more comprehensive proposal for a Pentecostal theological methodology offers a more robust framework for integrating mimetic theory with Pentecostal theology. This is because it captures a variety of fundamental Pentecostal theological themes and makes it easier to highlight points of contact between the two fields. For example, and as already indicated, concerning Vondey's insistence on the full gospel as providing a narrative framework for Pentecostal theological construction, the Girardian focus on the Passion of Christ could be argued to

[784] As a theological methodology, he generally describes 'play' as having "the character of spontaneity, enthusiasm, improvisation, and the free engagement of others in an unbounded movement of God's Spirit." See Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 13.
[785] Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 13.
[786] These parameters of play, which are indicative of those already discussed (i.e.., Pentecost event, full gospel, etc), are "(1) the spirituality of the Pentecostal movement, (2) the mediation of that spirituality in the experiences of the Holy Spirit, (3) the testimony to the experiences through the Pentecostal story, (4) the living expression of that testimony through the affections, (5) the participation in theological practices, and (6) the embodiment of such practices in Pentecostal life and worship." Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*,14.

correspond with the Christ the Saviour/Sanctifier motif within that full gospel schema.[787] Also, the mystical attributes of the Pentecostal altar fit with the transformation possibilities (*theosis*) that the Girardian Christology promises by the *imitatio Christi,* which is a consequence of having Christ as a model. Moreover, Vondey's emphasis on the Pentecost event as being the bedrock of Pentecostal theology finds contact with Girard's tangential treatment of the Holy Spirit as the revealer of the scapegoat mechanism (possibly evidenced in the Apostle Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost).[788] This is notwithstanding the other significant correlation between Girard's perspective on human desire and religion and the Pentecostal understanding of affections as not only providing the impetus for Pentecostal theology but as representing the seat of the amalgamation of theology and practice in the Pentecostal believer.[789]

Furthermore, in the spirit of "play," I aim to achieve something intimated in Vondey's discussion on the parameters of play in Pentecostal theological

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[787] The other motifs correspond to aspects of Girard's Christology. For example, Girard's emphasis on the Holy Spirit as an advocate for the innocent victim and emancipator of those bound to the mimetic cycle and his emphasis on the Kingdom of God as representing the end of human violence could be discussed in relation to liberation themes germane to Christ the Baptizer, Healer and Coming King, respectively. For Girard's comments on the Holy Spirit's role in mimetic theory, see Girard, *I See Satan*, 190–91. Also, Gerard, *The Scapegoat*, 207–12. See note below for possible connections between Girard's understanding of the Spirit and the impact of Christ the Baptizer. For Girard's comments on the Kingdom of God and the Apocalypse vis-à-vis Christ's preaching and the Passion, see Girard, *Things Hidden*, 194–95.

[788] This synthesis is the least developed theme in this chapter. There are other contact points concerning the Girardian theory and the Pentecost event. For example, the Spirit's spotlight on those on the margins/victims - Acts 2:17-18, Peter's Passion/Christology from below - Acts 2:23b, 36, and the Spirit as the liberator of those bound to the mimetic cycle Acts 2:37.

[789] See Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 24–26, 183–84. Also, Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality,* 33–34.

construction. In discussing the significant role that the altar plays in Pentecostalism, which in Pentecostalism is, as Vondey notes, also a signifier for the "eucharistic table,"[790] Vondey suggests that it has been the place where Pentecostals have been more open to entertaining other theological beliefs and practices. This is because he suggests Pentecostals have typically reimagined the meaning and application of the full gospel concerning the altar. He argues:

> [T]he full gospel is an open narrative; it invites and requires additional practices and interpretations. Since the most widely accepted Pentecostal doctrines have emerged from the elements of the full gospel experienced in the context of the altar, Pentecostal theology is most prepared to engage other doctrines from the practices and concerns of the altar space. [791]

Therefore, Vondey could be understood to see a dialectic between the altar and the full gospel. Furthermore, within that dialectic, he sees the opportunity to develop the full gospel narrative by infusing other theological and "philosophical" reflections on the altar.[792] Thus, the focus on the altar (communion table) forms a bridge for the thoughts on a mimetic theory-based conceptualisation of the Eucharist (e.g., the

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[790] See Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 57.

[791] Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 32. Vondey also notes, "The altar stands as the source and summit of Pentecostal theology, a metaphor of the salvific work of God into which all other theological concerns can be integrated. Pentecostal theology is thus by nature hospitable to the theological constructs of other traditions, inviting and transforming them through exposure to salvation at the altar as the central locus of the Christian life." Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 57.

[792] For example, he states, ". . . conceptualized doctrines and philosophical considerations have to be brought into the embodied world of the liturgies, rituals, sacraments and practices surrounding the altar. In this embodied environment of worship, the full gospel can expand into a constructive and systematic framework for the traditioning of Pentecostal Theology." Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 32.

Girardian Model Eucharist) to engage with—and if not inform—Pentecostal theology and practice.

Therefore, my theological strategy aims to go beyond Pentecostalism, that is, to inform further the full gospel by integrating cultural/anthropological studies and Pentecostal theology. Thus, I also aim to counter, as Vondey warns, the "reduction" of the features of the full gospel to a single aspect or "propositional" claims related to the features.[793]

To that extent, I use Girard's theory as a heuristic tool to attain a chastened form of defamiliarization. My work reflects a chastened form of defamiliarization because I consider Girard's mimetic theory a critical but Christian-friendly theoretical framework.[794] As such, mimetic theory can act as a critical tool that can help Western Pentecostals step out of theological and cultural bubbles so that they can critically review the nexus between their eucharistic beliefs/theology and culture.[795]

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[793] Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 34.

[794] This Christian-faith-based parameter of my project's 'defamiliarization' goals is important because it helps to support the claim that the interpretation is committed to the "full *gospel*" and not a "full *doctrine.*" See Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 23. This is especially the case if the "full *doctrine*" is deemed to reflect an interpretation that emphasises Pentecostal dogma over and above the activity of the Spirit. Consequently, what could be lost from rigid applications of certain Pentecostal theological concepts is a present and often geographically relevant message of the Spirit to the church (as in the refrain about hearing "what the Spirit says to the churches" in Revelation 2–3).

[795] I also assume that many aspects of Pentecostal theology (such as those detailed in Vondey's theological framework) reflect a sound construal of biblical revelation. By analogy, they can be likened to the "treasure in jars of clay" (2 Cor 4:7), with the jars of clay denoting

Echoing Land's convictions about the ideals of Pentecostal spirituality,[796] such a review via mimetic theory analysis, with its assumptions about the relationship between the sacred and ritual violence, aims to emphasise the importance of assessing the relationship (or "integration") between "beliefs, affections and actions" in determining an authentic Pentecostal spirituality.[797] Such emphasis on the relationship between these components of Pentecostal spirituality is also indicative of what I have argued to be John's socio-religious concerns vis-à-vis the invitation to dine with Christ recorded in Rev 3:20. One may conceive of Christ as revealing how to attain such an integrated spirituality through the pedagogy of sacral meals.

Having discussed how Green's methodological assumptions compare with my social-scientific hermeneutic method and the implications of the latter for my context and Pentecostal reflections on "play," in the following sections, I will discuss how Green's theological framework compares to the theological notions that underpin my Girardian Model Eucharist.

11.4. Pentecostal Sacramentality of the Eucharist and the Girardian Model Eucharist

Green's theological framework focuses on three broad themes that reflect the theological emphasis on Pentecostal theological tradition and practice and its

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human moral shortcomings and epistemic limitations concerning matters of faith. However, I find intriguing the interface between the treasure and the jars of clay, i.e., the often-apparent dissonance between right belief, desire and practice, which is reflected in aspects of Pentecostal culture.

[796] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 30, 34.

[797] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 30, 34.

ecumenical concerns. I will summarise key ideas within his discussion that resonate with themes in my Girardian Model Eucharist. In so doing, I am not claiming that my model is 'authentically Pentecostal' in a 'Greenian' sense. Instead, I am simply showing points of contact between the two schemas, notwithstanding the possible differences that such resonance also signals.

11.4.1. "Prescription"

Green discusses what God wants from worshippers in the Eucharist ("Prescription").[798] In summary, this theme addresses the 'ordinance' ideas associated with the Eucharist, that is, the focus on Christ's command to celebrate the rite in remembrance (Luke 22:18-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25).[799] Green notes that an emphasis on the command to celebrate the Eucharist is something most early Pentecostals took seriously.[800] And echoing other Pentecostal scholars, Green also makes a case for the more frequent celebration of the supper amongst Pentecostals based on this command, stating that "the celebration of Holy Communion belongs at the centre of our life with one another before God in the world."[801]

The centrality Green places on the Eucharist due to his study of Pentecostal traditions also resonates with the centrality I seek to establish concerning the

[798] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 246.
[799] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 246.
[800] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 246.
[801] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 246–47.

Eucharist in the UK Pentecostal scene vis-à-vis my Girardian Model Eucharist. And thus, it indicates an essential complement to my thesis and model.

Furthermore, Green highlights the spiritual formation processes that underscore the command to celebrate the Eucharist, noting that it allows the participant to imitate Christ ("*imitatio Christi*")[802] and, in the process, be "made like him."[803] He argues that this is achieved, as a first step, "liturgically," claiming that it is in the very process of passing the emblem of the bread at communion that we not only "*pre*-enacting the marriage feats" in the eschaton but also "re-enacting the Last Supper and the agonizing events of Christ's last days."[804] This 're-enaction' corresponds with the *anamnesis*—"*re-calling* Christ."[805] Green argues that in remembering Christ at the Eucharist, we remember him, firstly, "as he *was*,"[806] that is, remembering "the historical realities of the life of one Jesus of Nazareth, to his

[802] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 248.
[803] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 248.
[804] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 248.
[805] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 254.
[806] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 254. At another level, he claims that Christ is remembered "as he *is*," i.e., "To 'remember' rightly, then, is to receive the meal in such a way that Christ is present to us and the benefits of his victorious death are made effective in our lives." He argues that this is achieved through connection with Christ in the "Spirit-mediated presence of the living Christ" and connection with Christ in the gathering of the assembly, the body of Christ of which Christ is the head. Finally, in the Eucharist, Christ is remembered "as he *shall be*," i.e., taking his cue from passages like Luke 22:16-18 and John 6.39-40, Green argues that the "eucharist-event" is an occasion for the "'desent' of the enthroned Lord, the coming of Christ to the church in and with the bread and wine given and received in thanksgiving for the one as is, and is to come." Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 255, 256.

subversive table-fellowship and his Last Supper, and to the event of what the church understands as his once-for-all agonizing death for us and for the world."[807]

Such themes of remembrance and imitation resonate with my Girardian Model Eucharist's emphasis on a) the Passion of Christ (vis-à-vis the historical "agonizing events of Christ's last days"), b) the possible "contrast cultural" dimensions of the Last Supper/Eucharistic meal (vis-à-vis "subversive table-fellowship") and c) the imitation-embodiment nexus (vis-à-vis "*imitatio Christi*") that my model also brings to bear on the liturgy of the Eucharist.

11.4.2. "Promise"

Green also discusses what God will do in the Eucharist ("Promise"), namely, to be present in the Eucharist event and to transform people's lives by his presence.[808] Of particular interest to my thesis in Green's discussion on this theme is his Christocentric focus. Using aspects of the full gospel, Green also indicates that the locus of transformation in Pentecostalism has been Christocentric insofar that he argues that "a renewed emphasis on the Eucharist can help us remember, in the first place, that God's salvation is not merely juridical or 'positional' but truly *transformational* and, in the second place, that his transformation necessarily comes in

[807] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 254.

[808] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 262. Green also talks about how the Eucharist event transforms the participant. He states it does so by "enflaming the believers' passion for God and the kingdom." Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 269. Also, he states that the sanctifying action of the Spirit in the Eucharist event is seen in its "quenching of the 'fleshly' appetite for God's presence and blessings." Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 270.

and through the *body* of Christ."[809] He supports this claim by referencing other Pentecostals, past and present, who have indicated that Christ is the locus of transformation to show that such an assumption typifies Pentecostal thinking.[810]

Such conceptions of the significance of the body of Christ as a symbol of transformation correspond to my Girardian Model Eucharist insofar that it too conceives of Christ as the model par excellence and, therefore, central to transformation. Moreover, the transformation focus of the salvific work of Christ dovetails with the moral influence atonement theory that is comparable to my understanding of the sacrifice of Jesus as the "One True Sacrifice."[811]

In addition, Green discusses how participation in Christ's "ongoing humiliation" vis-à-vis the scandal of a crucified saviour that the Eucharist signifies is transformative.[812] He states:

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[809] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 273. Milton also notes that Pentecostals place a premium on the penal substitutionary atonement model, albeit "Typically, salvation is seen in terms of the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from evil, and healing of the body manifested through a whole range of experiences including personal-spiritual, individual-physical, communal, socioeconomic, and ecological dimensions of life: salvation is personal, familial, ecclesial, material, social, cosmic, and eschatological." See Grace Milton, "Salvation: Participating in the story where earth and heaven meet," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 227, 230, VitalSource Bookshelf.

[810] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 274.

[811] See Chapter 8.

[812] Green predicates this line of argument on the problematic motif associated with the Eucharist in John 6, which, since he does not offer specific verses, I assume has to do with verses 53-60, for he states, "As John 6 teaches, Christ's Eucharistic promise is purposefully *scandalous*'. Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 270.

> Because the Jesus who is present in humiliation is none other than the Christ of new creation, and the Spirit who makes Jesus' presence possible and effective is none other than the eschatological Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus' resurrection and the restitution of all things.[813]

Thus, he claims that the Eucharist is transformative because of its eschatological quality: "'God brings the future down to the present tense' and in this way *eschatologizes* us, just as he does the bread and wine."[814] He supports this 'eschatologisation' claim by referencing Heb 6:4–5, stating it is possible because "At the Lord's Table, we share in the Spirit and just in this way taste the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come."[815]

Green offers a caveat to the glorification motifs germane to the eschatology he discusses. He argues that we should not forget that the "triumphant Christ" present at the Eucharist event is also the "*crucified* one."[816] Consequently, he asserts that the Eucharist celebration should feature a humility that reflects this aspect of Christ. Thus, he claims:

> Participants come to share in Christ's glory (now and in the End) precisely as they take up their cross and allow the Spirit to lead them where they do not want to go (cf. Jn 21.18-19). Disciples come to learn that precisely in humbling themselves, they are availing themselves of the glorifying mercies of God.[817]

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[813] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 270–71.
[814] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 271.
[815] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 271.
[816] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 271.
[817] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 271.

Again, such themes of humiliation of Christ vis-à-vis the affective quality of the Eucharist resonate with the emphasis on the Passion motif and its affective impact on participants in my Girardian Model Eucharist. For example, in both Green and my schema, the affective impact can be understood as how the 'humble' Spirit of Christ works to redirect desires away from the idolatrous models to Christ. Like the ethical factors of my model, Green's conception is cautious of the *telos* of the believer's transformation: that they do not reflect the power of the world but the power of the crucified messiah.

Also, Green's conception of the eschatological dimension to the experience at the Eucharist resonates with the non-sacrificial reading of the death of Jesus presented in my model. For instance, both concepts allude to a new, transcendental ethical ideal brought into focus in the socially and ethically attuned participation of the Eucharistic rite.

11.4.3. "Presence"

Green discusses how God, by the Spirit, will achieve God's transformative aims by making the risen Christ "bodily present" through the "transfigured bread and wine" in the celebration of the Eucharist ("Presence").[818] Thus, he concludes, contrary to objections to the efficacy of sacramental instruments, "sacramental means do not interfere or come between God and the worshipper but exist as the very stuff (*ousia*),

[818] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 282. He contends, "Plainly put, the church's Eucharist-event *is* an experience of Christ's personal presence, by the power of the Spirit immediately mediated and mediately immediate." Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 288.

the raw material of the direct encounter."[819] There is some virtue to Green's perspective of the efficacy of the sacramental instruments or means, not least because he supports his argument with a reflection on the self-evident notion that "all human experiences . . . are always already necessarily mediated."[820] Such reflections about sacramentality, when used to discuss the *imitatio Christi* as a means to 'knowing' God in particular, dovetail with my Girardian Model Eucharist conception of the dynamics of embodiment vis-à-vis sacramentality.[821]

Green notes a gap in the Pentecostal understanding of the relationship between the Eucharist and the Trinity. He suggests that the rite has an underdeveloped theology of the economy of the Trinity, not least because of a "focus on the unitary presence of God" within the tradition.[822] Green offers a proposal of how to develop an economy of the Trinity in the rite in his characterisation of the role of the person of the Spirit vis-à-vis Christ. For example, Green states that:

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[819] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 288.
[820] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 286.
[821] That is, "mimetic abiding" (the result of imitating Jesus and, consequently, experiencing his presence). See Chapter 8.
[822] He notes that "Pentecostals have yet to articulate an adequately clear explanation of how Christ's presence and work in the Sacrament is related to the Spirit's work and presence, and how their personal contributions relate to the will and purposes of '*our Father* in heaven'. This is so, at least in part, because the desire for *personal* relationship leads believers to focus on the unitary presence of God." Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 289.

> In terms of the Sacrament, the Spirit is the 'remembrancer divine', the one who brings the historical realities of Christ's life and the eschatological realities of the not yet realized kingdom to bear on the celebrants and their shared meal. He is the *subject* of our receiving Christ in the Meal. However, because Christ is the Spirit baptizer, the Spirit is in a sense also an *object* of our sacramental experience.[823]

I will note a few contact points between my schema, Green's above comments, and his overall schema. First, there could be a role for my Girardian Model Eucharist to play concerning Green's observations about the lack of Pentecostal conceptions of the Eucharist that offers a comprehensive analysis of the economic Trinity vis-á-vis the rite.

While my model is not strictly theological, its anthropological foundations offer a heuristic perspective of the economy of the Trinity in the Eucharist event. For instance, from my model one may understand that the person of the Father wills to expose the ills of the victim mechanism, which leads to the incarnation of the person of the Son, the subject of the single victim mechanism. The person of the Son's victimhood and its implications for human relations with each other and the Godhead is revealed to humanity by the person of the Holy Spirit in the drama of the Eucharist event.

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[823] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 291. I also note that Green concludes this part of his discussion by also making a case for the significance of the past and "ongoing Pentecost-event" vis-à-vis the Eucharist, insofar that he concludes "If Pentecost is possible only because of the incarnate work of Christ, so the post-ascension ministry of Christ — including his sacramental ministry — is possible only because of Pentecost." Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 292–93.

Second, Green's characterisation of the Spirit as the "remembrancer divine" that also brings to bear the "realities of Christ's life" can be construed to correspond to notions in my Girardian Model Eucharist's conception of the Spirit's role in unveiling the single victim mechanism that underpinned the death of Jesus.

Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that some aspects of Green's theological framework for an authentically Pentecostal Eucharistic theology resonate with aspects of my Girardian Model Eucharist. As with Green's framework, which corresponds broadly with wider Christian dogma, my Girardian Model Eucharist, though placing a premium on anthropological concerns as much as theological ones, is also rooted in catholic Christian teaching, predicated on Girard's theological reflections in his mimetic theory.

So, notwithstanding the methodological differences between my (social-scientific based) and Green's (Pentecostal theology-based) schema on sacramentality, there are some clear points of convergence between the two that Pentecostals might find beneficial to their reflections on the Eucharist.

Having discussed the sacramental themes in Green's schema, in the next section, I will discuss the implications of such schema for the social focus of my thesis on the Eucharist.

11.5. Witness, "Worship" and "Mission" Themes and Opportunities

Green also discusses the implications of the Eucharistic themes for Pentecostal thought and practice.[824] Of particular interest to the social emphasis of my thesis is his discussion on, first, the interface between an authentic Christian witness and the mission motifs the Lord's Supper brings to bear on our understanding of the Eucharist.[825] And as a consequence, Green is adamant that the Eucharist should have a missional dimension. He supports this claim by making the compelling point that the Christ offered and worshipped in the Eucharist is also "himself the embodiment of the *missio dei.*"[826] Thus, also, eucharistic "worship" and "mission" go hand in hand.[827]

Green's compelling claims concerning a relationship between authentic Christian witness, worship, and mission are significant to the social factors of my

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[824] These included implications for hermeneutics and theological methods. In summary, Green assumes that regarding Pentecostal hermeneutics, "Scripture and the Eucharist are bound together divinely in a mutually-informing relation." Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 296. Concerning theology, he argues that the interconnectedness between Scripture and the Eucharist should also inform theological reflection and formulation amongst Pentecostals. Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 297–98.

[825] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 308. Green makes the compelling point that "the church's mission to and for the world depends on the integrity of the gospel-message, an integrity that must be *maintained*. Therefore, mission always already necessarily entails the upholding of the purity of the church's theology (*dogma*) and gospel-proclamation (*kerygma*) to God and God's creation and the striving for and —insofar as it is achieved—the maintenance of the church's visible unity." Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 308–9.

[826] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 307.

[827] Moreover, Green cites what he claims to be an interface between worship and mission in the account of the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24: 31-35). He argues that after they experienced worship with Jesus in the breaking of bread, they were emboldened to do mission in Jerusalem, where they reencounter Christ, who inspires them again. In turn, they worshipped (24:36-53) and remained in Jerusalem until the Day of Pentecost, where they were thrust into mission. Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 309.

thesis. It highlights considerations within Pentecostalism of what can also be construed as social implications of the Eucharist, even though such construal may not stem from social-scientific methods. Consequently, the witness, worship, and mission motifs in Green's schema highlight further points of convergence between mine and his work; points I also understand justify my social scientific reflections on the social dimensions of the rite and its implications for Pentecostal eucharistic praxis.

In the final analysis, the critical difference between Green's work and mine is that, whilst I review Pentecostalism from what I refer to as a chastened form of defamiliarization perspective, Green speaks with a distinctive and arguably North American Pentecostal voice. I am concerned with how my work can contribute to Pentecostal discussions on the Eucharist and how my social-scientific studies can enrich the conversation.

11.6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I offered a summary of the key findings of my thesis thus far. Next, I offered a summary of methodological assumptions underpinning Chris E. W Green's seminal work on Pentecostal eucharistic theology. I noted his emphasis on a Pentecostal theology informed by Pentecostal theological traditions and hermeneutic priorities while remaining palatable to ecumenical readings. I also outlined his methodological assumptions and how they could be understood to correspond and

differ with my social-scientific hermeneutic method. In addition, I noted the significance of my context and the "play" motif, which I understood offered an inroad for integrating social-scientific methods in the Pentecostal discourse on the Eucharist. Next, I outline some key themes in Green's theological framework and proposal for Pentecostal sacramentality of the Eucharist. While I accepted that the social-scientific currents in my method meant that there would be significant differences between our work, I still indicated corresponding themes within my Girardian model and Green's schema. Finally, I discussed how Green's discussion on the themes of witness, "worship" and "mission" could be understood to signal discussions within Pentecostalism on the social dimension of the Eucharist and, thus, justify my chastened, social-scientific exploration of the social dimensions of the rite for Pentecostal eucharistic praxis.

The following chapters address my phenomenological, contextual Pentecostal theology analysis of the interpretation of the passage. More specifically, these chapters will reflect a theological analysis with a particular inquiry into the relationship between Pentecostal beliefs, eucharistic conceptions, and engagement with the culture domain. Thus, what follows in Chapter 12 is a discussion on Pentecostal cultural engagements and their relation to the Eucharist. In Chapter 13, I draw a parallel between the affect-related themes in mimetic theory and Steven Jack Land's conception of Pentecostal spirituality as a means to highlight connections at the micro-level on the topic of culture between mimetic theory and Pentecostalism

using the prosperity gospel as a case study. In Chapter 14, I will offer an interpretation of the Rev 3:20 passage drawing on the themes of the mimetic theory and the full gospel theological framework.

First, what does the celebration of the Eucharist have to do with Pentecostal cultural engagement? This is a question I will address in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 12

PENTECOSTAL CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AND THE EUCHARIST

I ended the last chapter by highlighting the significance of what I understood were Chris E. W. Green's conceptions of the social determinants of the Eucharist, namely, witness, "worship," and "mission." Such themes are critical to a key concern in my thesis: the interface between the Eucharist and Pentecostal engagement with the cultural domain.

By "engagement with the cultural domain," I also mean to determine how to discuss the interface between Pentecostalism and the concept of culture, which is not limited to discussions about how Pentecostals engage with others outside their communities. For example, within my triptych meaning of culture, evaluating Pentecostal cultural engagement also involves analysing "normative" behaviour patterns amongst Pentecostals, thereby identifying expressions of cultural significance within the movement.

In my introduction, I noted that most Western Pentecostals focus on sacramental motifs of the Eucharist in their eucharistic worship. In addition, I noted that the Eucharist is not typically celebrated weekly in Pentecostal churches. Thus, I have suggested that such approaches unwittingly domesticate the Eucharist within Pentecostalism—and establish a norm (a culture) around the Eucharist in Pentecostalism.

However, my Girardian Model Eucharist conceives the Eucharist as central to Christian worship, connects the ritual to the social world and understands the rite as a tool of socio-ethical reform of cultural significance.[828] Thus, I also want to understand how such conceptions of the Eucharist can inform Pentecostal approaches to the rite.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will first discuss the typical approaches to Pentecostal engagement with the cultural domain, as discussed in a recent work by Pentecostal scholar Néstor Medina. Second, I will discuss what I consider are amongst the first-order cultural objects of social significance in the Pentecostal tradition relevant to my thesis. Third, I will discuss how some Eastern European Pentecostal approaches attuned to aspects of the socio-political dimensions of the Eucharist might inform Pentecostal eucharistic praxis in the West. Fourth, I will discuss the defamiliarization aspect of my social-scientific approach and highlight how it differs from the typical Pentecostal approaches to analysing Pentecostalism's relationship with the cultural domain. Finally, by highlighting the key Girardian theories related to culture and identifying points of contact with reflections on related matters in Pentecostal scholarship, I will signal the contributions of such a Girardian reading on culture to discourse on Pentecostal cultural engagement.

[828] Indeed, as I noted in my introduction, some Pentecostals have already discussed the significance of the social dimension of the Eucharist. Therefore, my aim with my Girardian analysis of the Eucharist is to contribute to such discussions.

How do Pentecostals understand and apply the term 'culture' in their discourse? This is a question I will address in the next section.

12.1. A Pentecostal Conception of Culture

Pentecostal scholars also discuss some challenges concerning using the term "culture." For example, in his recent study, *Culture: Disruption, accommodation, and pneumatological resignification*, Medina notes a growing trend towards reviewing the "use and scope of this category [i.e., culture]" by Pentecostal scholars worldwide.[829]

Medina argues that Pentecostals should adopt plural senses of the word "culture"—namely, "*cultural* domain" and "*cultural* realms"—to account for the diversity of beliefs, practices, and meaning-making experiences and capabilities of different people and their engagement with Christianity.[830] Thus, for Pentecostals, Medina argues that the cultural realm should also denote "the internal dynamics of socialization by which believers borrow 'with ease' cultural elements from the communities of which they are part in order to make sense of the gospel message and to live out their Pentecostal experience."[831]

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[829] Néstor Medina, "Culture: Disruption, accommodation, and pneumatological resignification," in *RHPT,* ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 106, VitalSource Bookshelf. Medina's recent assessment represents the primary source of my review of Pentecostal engagement with the cultural domain.

[830] Medina, "Culture," 107.

[831] Medina, "Culture," 106–7. The notion that Pentecostals "borrow 'with ease' cultural elements…" is qualified in his assessment (discussed in the next section) of the selective way Pentecostals accommodate and resignify cultural elements from wider society.

He makes this claim based on his concern over the disputed narrow use of the term "culture" to denote "a universally shared experience."[832] He is concerned that such narrow characterisations of the term "carries a self-referential and colonializing understanding of Europeans as racially and culturally superior."[833] He asserts this because such an understanding of culture emerged, he claims, during European colonial exploits.[834] Medina also addressed the troubling consequence of such narrow and definite understandings of culture in Pentecostal missionary endeavours. He noted that "[e]arly Pentecostal missionaries, along with their missionary zeal, also exported their cultural traditions, including their Eurocentric theological views of local cultural customs and cultural artifacts, as well as Eurocentric ideas of how to live out the Pentecostal experience."[835] Therefore, Medina challenges contemporary Pentecostals engaged in cultural discourse at the global level to understand this legacy of European colonialism on Western Christianity.

Medina is right to question such narrow and definite uses of 'culture'. As noted in my earlier discussion of the triptych understanding, other ways to describe culture besides the popular "way of life/normative" motifs underpin the most

[832] Medina, "Culture," 107.
[833] Medina, "Culture," 107.
[834] Medina references E.B. Tylor, amongst other sources, in his criticism of singular/universal applications of the meaning of culture. Medina, "Culture," 107.
[835] Medina, "Culture," 108.

narrow descriptions of the term.[836] Such narrow and definite uses of the term "culture" represent a fixed notion that does not account for the social dimensions of cultural meaning that the cultural diamond suggests is essential to understanding a cultural object/subject at any given time. Thus, Medina's assessment of the term "culture" reflects an approach to cultural meaning akin to sociological approaches. It highlights the value of a more forensic, sociological, and location-centred approach to assessing the cultural dimensions of religious communities.

12.1.1. Typical Pentecostal approaches to the cultural domain

In addition to tracing the debate of Christian engagement with broader society and cultures,[837] Medina also echoes the views of other Pentecostal scholars when he discusses ways in which Pentecostals "engage with the cultural dimension as part of their cultural traditions."[838] The first way is through what Medina refers to as "disruption," which occurs in the conversion to Pentecostalism experience, which, as Medina notes, "often requires a radical break in lifestyle including from one's

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[836] As discussed, E.B. Tylor introduced this meaning of culture into English in the late 19th century. It is also noted to inform dictionary definitions in the social sciences.

[837] Medina highlights how Pentecostal engagement with culture is part of the wider Christian debate on how to engage with culture. He indicates that this debate involves analysis of recent revolutions in socio-economic systems, which give rise to discussions about how Christians should address issues of cultural significance like gender and race. See Medina, "Culture," 109. These are issues I will also be discussing later in this dissertation.

[838] Medina, "Culture," 106. See also Droogers' discussion on "Rupture and Continuity" in André Droogers, "The Cultural Dimension of Pentecostalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr and Amos Yong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 203–8, https://doi:10.1017/CCO9780511910111.015. Also, Vondey discusses "Sanctification as transformation of culture," Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 206–11, ProQuest Ebook Central.

previous religious affiliations."[839] Droogers succinctly summarises the cultural implication of such decisions on the Pentecostal convert when he notes:

> The convert is introduced into the corporate culture of the pentecostal community that she is entering. Conversion is a cultural change. Part of a group's culture is its attitude towards the outside world. The do's and don'ts that are part and parcel of these culture politics will influence the convert's way of life.[840]

It would appear, however, that severing cultural ties with the "outside world" is not as thoroughgoing in Pentecostalism as it appears. For example, as Droogers notes, some Pentecostal leaders may appropriate fashion items that signify respectability in society (e.g., "wearing three-piece suits, even in a tropical climate").[841] Thus, Pentecostal scholars have also noted an element of continuity with the "outside world." Medina describes this continuity as the process of "cultural accommodation."[842] He states:

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[839] Medina, "Culture," 110.
[840] Medina, "Culture," 208.
[841] Droogers, "Cultural Dimension," 206. Furthermore, Droogers also notes the "capitalist consumer" culture of the prosperity gospels that has characterised Pentecostalism as an example of this continuity with the "outside world." Droogers, "Cultural Dimension," 204–7. See also Vondey's observation of the nuanced and contradictory nature of Pentecostal relationship with culture; he argues that the result of this is that Pentecostal formation can be characterised as "contradictory," reflecting its contrasting formational drivers (i.e., "social engagement" and "self-improvement"), which are a consequence of the relative socio-economic and cultural situation the movement encounters. Wolfgang Vondey, "The Impact of Culture and Social Justice on Christian Formation in Pentecostalism," *JPT* 24, no. 2 (Oct 2015): 202, 214–15, https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02402007.
[842] Medina, "Culture," 110.

> Pentecostals interact with their immediate cultural and social contexts. Pentecostals do not entirely reject local cultures but selectively choose elements to accommodate to in order to articulate the "Pentecostal" logic. In so doing, they unwittingly ensure the survival and expansion of the movement.[843]

Thus, for Pentecostals, this 'continuity' indicates their strategic engagement with the "outside world," even though they might not always be aware of the implications of such engagement.

Finally, Medina contends that Pentecostals transcend the binary approaches (i.e., disruption vs. accommodation) to cultural engagement, arguing that they are also involved in "dynamic resignification."[844] This process builds on the strategic aims of Pentecostal "cultural accommodation" noted earlier. It involves a process whereby Pentecostals recontextualise accommodated cultural elements and, therefore, modify their local cultural traditions.[845]

From this brief sketch of the typical Pentecostal engagement with the cultural domain, Pentecostals appear to be "active" receivers; they do not uncritically imbibe

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[843] Medina, "Culture," 112.
[844] Medina, "Culture," 112.
[845] Medina notes, "As they engage in that borrowing process, Pentecostals establish new relations with the larger social context and local cultural traditions in ways that go beyond simple dualistic models for Pentecostal theology: hard-and-fast antithetical framings, on one hand, or wholesale embracing of cultural traditions, on the other. Instead, Pentecostal theology enters a deeper level of contested interaction, resignification, and cross-fertilization of cultural values and symbols, which end up transforming local cultural traditions." Medina, "Culture," 112.

cultural objects on offer.[846] Instead, they selectively accommodate and resignify (through their distinct pneumatology) cultural objects, appropriating them to fit their worldview. Medina also indicates that this strategy (i.e., accommodation and resignification) has challenges. For example, Medina notes how (indicative of the strong connection between Pentecostals and cultural traditions and the often-unwitting importation of cultural traditions into their Pentecostal expression) some patriarchal societies have accommodated the gospel into their culture and hindered women's leadership potential within certain communities.[847]

These are accommodation and resignification issues that I am also concerned about because, as the reference to the women's leadership issues above indicate, they raise questions about the ethical issues concerning the accommodation and resignification of culture that are often overlooked by Pentecostals. And I will also explore them later in this chapter through my Girardian analysis of Pentecostal cultural engagement. Next, I will discuss how Pentecostals are also engaged in making cultural objects and the extent to which these objects contrast the moral forces that govern the social world.

[846] This describes those who receive the cultural objects, i.e., "people who hear, read, understand, think about, enact, participate in, and remember them" and are thus also "active meaning makers" and not a "passive audience." Griswold, *Cultures*, 14.
[847] Medina, "Culture," 111.

12.2. First-Order Cultural Objects

Vondey discusses how Pentecostal doctrines of soteriology and sanctification may underpin notions of "discontinuity" and "continuity" in Pentecostal engagement with the cultural domain.[848] Thus, to the extent that the disruption, accommodation, and resignification represent theologically informed Pentecostal responses to the cultural objects of their social context, I also understand them, in turn, to represent cultural objects produced by Pentecostals. This is because these Pentecostal responses also represent "ideas/beliefs" created by Pentecostals that help create solidarity vis-à-vis the wider society and thus reflect the functional understanding of culture/cultural objects that sociologists observe.[849]

For the same reasons, it seems to me that theological traditions and rites nurture these responses and represent entities I consider cultural objects. Thus, to highlight the interdependency and mutual causality between the responses and theological traditions and rituals, I will refer to the responses (i.e., disruption, accommodation, resignification) as second-order cultural objects and theological traditions and rites as first-order cultural objects—since the theological traditions and rites underpin and nurture the responses.

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[848] See Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 206–11.

[849] Moreover, the decision to designate items as "cultural objects" is based on Griswold's understanding that "Cultural objects compose part of a larger cultural system that we may want to analyze." Griswold, "Culture," 14.

12.2.1. Pneumatological theologies as first-order cultural objects

One such cultural object of the first order that Pentecostals (and my focus here is on Pentecostal scholars) have created is their pneumatological theologies concerning the varied domains of the social world (e.g., socio-political, economic institutions/structures/systems). And, by 'pneumatological theologies', I also mean to include their emphasis on the Pentecost event of Act 2 as signifying a critical hermeneutical lens for discussing the interface between Pentecostals and the social world.

For example, Dempster makes a case for a Pentecostal-Christian social action informed by an understanding of the social-material concerns embedded in the Kingdom of God and predicated on a Luke-Acts reading of the mission of the Spirit ("Pentecost-kingdom logic").[850] More examples of the pneumatological emphasis in Pentecostal theology feature in Johns' (who building on Paulo Freire's theory of "conscientization") proposal that the Holy Spirit acts as a means of "actualizing the kingdom of God among a people who 'know something different and are prepared out of their own anguish and amazement' to expose the falseness of the closed world of managed reality and to make God's history upon the earth."[851] Finally, another

[850] See Murray Dempster, "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective: Reformulating Pentecostal Eschatology", *JPT* 1, no. 2 (1993): 51–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/096673699300100203.

[851] Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Sheffield: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1993), 71. See Wariboko's "Pentecostal Principle" as "a pneumatological methodology of ethics." See Nimi Wariboko, *The Pentecostal*

example of the emphasis on pneumatological theologies in Pentecostalism is evident in Yong's understanding of the "pneumatological imagination" as a means to "navigate the pluralism . . . of a dynamic and complex world."[852] Certain rites, however, also emerge within Pentecostal scholarship as first-order cultural objects.

12.2.2. The case for the Eucharist as a first-order cultural object

In recent years, as Green's work has evidenced, many Pentecostal scholars have been reflecting on the significance of the Eucharist for Pentecostal theology and ministry practice. Although the rite, as I argue, appears domesticated at the church level and not often discussed in connection with the social world, it appears to me that this recent interest indicates the possibility of the rite 'emerging' within Pentecostal scholarship as a first-order cultural object of the kind I have discussed above.

The recent interest in the Eucharist reflects an understanding within key factions in the movement of the significance of the Eucharist to Pentecostal identity. Through my Girardian Model Eucharist reading, I also understand that such growing emphasis on the sacramentality of the Eucharist has implications for Pentecostalism's situatedness[853] in the social world.[854] Hence, I categorise the

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Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit (Grand Rapids: William N Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 19–36, 35.

[852] See Yong, "The Pneumatological Imagination," 152.

[853] By "situatedness," I also refer to how Pentecostals typically respond to wider culture (i.e., through disruption, discontinuity, resignification).

[854] I understand that the connection between the Eucharist and the social world is supported by the Girardian Model Eucharist insofar that in the model, the Eucharist also functions as a

Eucharist as a first-order cultural order within the movement, even if interest in the rite is at the 'emerging' stage.

I also find support for the case for the Eucharist as a possible first-order cultural object in Pentecostalism in the notion that the earliest Pentecostals placed a premium on the rite (albeit primarily for its spiritual value).[855] Green cites a report in the US Assemblies of God's *Pentecostal Evangel* periodical on the value of the Lord's Supper in British Pentecostal churches from British Assembly of God pioneer Donald Gee. In this article, Gee comments on the sacramental and transformative value of the "weekly 'Breaking of Bread' ceremony" referred to as the "fellowship meeting."[856] Green notes Gee commenting that the Eucharist celebration is "the central feature" of the church service, of which participants anticipate "fellowship with Christ Himself" and the manifestation of Spiritual gifts.[857] The frequency and inspirational character of the celebration of the Eucharist features in a statement Green notes that Gee makes:

> Only a 'fresh Unction' can preserve the weekly Communion celebration from becoming 'mere custom.' However, when properly observed, the Lord's Supper 'provides real point [*sic*] and helpfulness to the meeting by definitely centering the thoughts upon Christ.'[858]

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ritual of socio-ethical reform given its challenge to the scapegoat mechanism that characterises the social world.

[855] Green reviewed a sample of North American and UK early Pentecostal periodicals between 1906–1931 to assess to what extent they reflected sacramental outlook.

[856] *Pentecostal Evangel* 894 (April 18, 1931), cited in Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 158.

[857] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 158–59.

[858] Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 159.

Thus, in keeping with the 'Hollenwegerian' understanding of the essence of Pentecostalism, which guides Green's methodological assumptions concerning the contours of authentic Pentecostalism, the Eucharist was a rite at the heart of the movement.[859]

Although Gee does not refer to the social implications of the centring of the Eucharist in the British Assemblies of God churches at the time of his writing, one may infer that the social implications of the Eucharist, which makes the Eucharist a first-order cultural object in my analysis, are assumed when he also states that "When such meeting are the weekly experiences of hundreds of like Assemblies, representing a Great Movement, they can provide a backbone to the spiritual side of the work of inestimable value and of far-reaching effect."[860] It seems fair also to assume that the "work" of the "Great Movement" of which the spirituality of the Eucharist provides a "backbone" is undoubtedly connected to the movements situatedness in the world. Thus, one may conclude that while the social implications of the rite were not given as much focus as I do through my Girardian Model Eucharist, for the early UK Pentecostals, the Eucharist was akin to a first-order cultural object: a foundational ritual that helped to situate UK Pentecostals within the social world.

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[859] That is, the "spirituality" of the early Pentecostals signifies the essence of Pentecostalism and not just an account of the origin of the movement. See Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 1.
[860] Donald Gee, "The Sunday Morning Service: Hints for conducting Fellowship Meetings," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, April 18, 1931, 3.

The adapted cultural diamond in fig. 12.1 below helps to depict how the pneumatological theologies and the Eucharist function as cultural objects in my schema. By categorising the pneumatological theologies with the Eucharist as cultural objects in the cultural diamond motif, I am also highlighting what I understand are the intrinsically socio-cultural determinants of the Eucharist.[861] I also understand that such socio-cultural perspectives of the rite complement the sacramental motifs, which, as Green's study demonstrates, have characterised the discussions amongst contemporary UK/Western Pentecostals.[862]

[861] That is, highlighting the connection between the cultural objects and the varied dimensions of the social world.

[862] Some Pentecostals rightly contend that the Eucharist represents as much a sacramental view as the memorial view alleged to be held by UK Pentecostals. See Jonathan Black, "On the possibility of presence: Overcoming mere memorialism in British Pentecostal eucharistic theology," *JEPTA* 40, no. 2 (2020): 120–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/18124461.2020.1795417; Allen, *Neglected Feast*, 52–53.

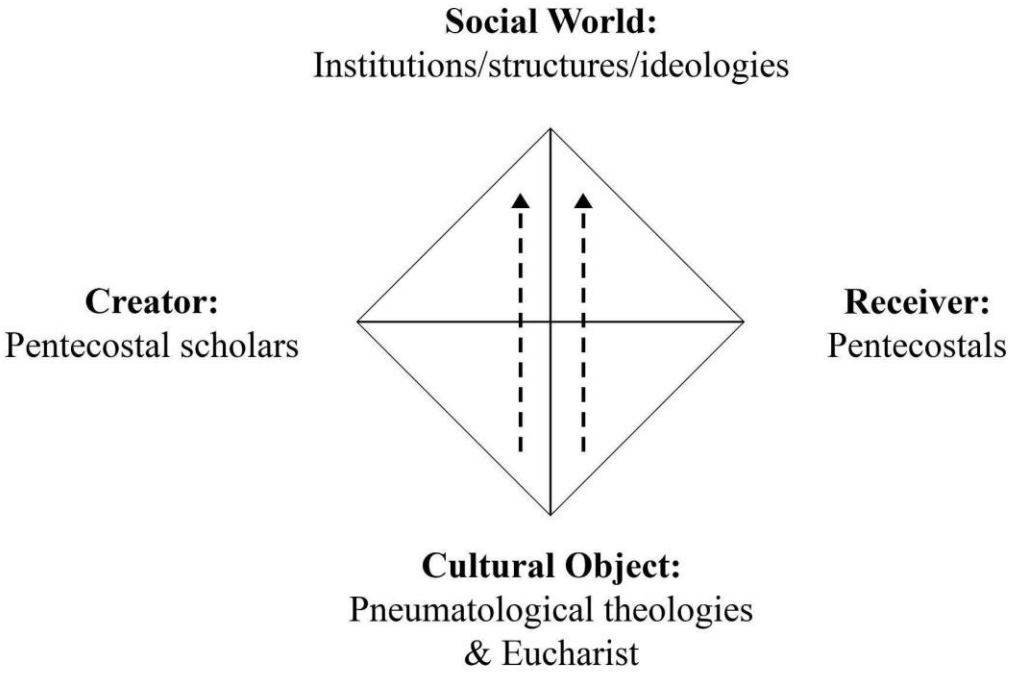

Fig. 12.1. Pneumatological theologies and the Eucharist as first-order cultural objects

The diagram can help one to conceive how the Eucharist[863] (as much as pneumatological theologies) can be analysed (as the vertical arrows indicate) to highlight its socio-cultural and moral transformative potential within the Pentecostal context.

To be sure, such conceptions of the Eucharist reflect my 'vision' for the rite in Pentecostal praxis. Moreover, my thesis is about how such a conception of the Eucharist's impact on the social world needs to be further developed and seen as necessary instead of incidental to the contemporary Pentecostal eucharistic

[863] Especially the Girardian Model Eucharist reading.

celebration. As I discuss in the following section, these are conceptions of the Eucharist that some Pentecostal scholars are also keen to promote.

12.3. Cultural Renewal by the Eucharist

Writing with insights into the Eastern European Pentecostal experience, Pentecostal Scholar Daniela Augustine understands the church and its liturgical-sacramental life as instrumental to cultural renewal.[864] I will be leaning heavily on her work in this section because she is also concerned with how the Eucharist is instrumental to cultural renewal. This process highlights the Eucharist's spiritual and socio-economical utility when, for example, Daniela Augustine states that:

> The eucharist provides a pedagogy of discerning the ontological, soteriological, and eschatological continuity and interdependence between humanity and the rest of creation (Rom. 8:18-25). It instructs the believers toward disciplining their desires in prioritization of the well-being of both the anthropic and non-anthropic others and points to the practice of liturgical asceticism of reverent consumption (see 1 Cor. 11:27-34).[865]

This "disciplining" of "desires" that Daniela Augustine speaks about appears in the practice of "pre-eucharistic" fasting, which she notes is performed by some Eastern-European Pentecostals.[866] She notes that, unlike their Western counterparts, Eastern

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[864] Thus, "The church of Pentecost, herself a sacrament…embodies, mediates, articulates, and enacts this process of cosmic renewal in her liturgical life." Also, she concludes that "the sacramental life of the Church continually brings culture face to face with its need of cleansing and consecration." Daniela C. Augustine, *Pentecost, Hospitality, and Transfiguration: Toward a Spirit-inspired Vision of Social Transformation* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2012), 131.
[865] Augustine, "Theology of economics," 373.
[866] The pre-eucharistic activities include prayer and "personal and common confessions." Augustine, "Theology of economics," 374. Augustine notes how the Eastern Orthodox

European Pentecostals engage in pre-eucharistic fasts as part of their "spiritual hygiene" and opposition to the "demonic forces" expressed through dominating systems and structures.[867]

There is some merit to Daniela Augustine's theology of the Eucharist and economics[868]—especially the aspects of its Eastern Orthodox underpinnings. Daniela Augustine's depiction of Eastern European Pentecostal eucharistic practice models the fundamental relationship between the Eucharist (as a cultural object) and the social world I have been discussing (and have depicted above in fig. 12.1). Moreover, her reference to the "disciplining" of "desire" problematises "desire" concerning Christian living and participation in the Eucharist in a similar way as the Girardian problematisation of desire concerning the cultural domain.

Besides, Daniela Augustine's observation about Eastern European Pentecostal eucharistic practice and its Western counterparts highlights what I have also indicated is a shortcoming with most UK Pentecostal conceptions of the Eucharist. As mentioned, I observe that most UK Pentecostal churches typically focus on sacramental and ordinance motifs of the Eucharist, and do not typically celebrate the Eucharist every week. In my opinion, such approaches unwittingly domesticate the

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Church's liturgical tradition has influenced the theology and practice of Eastern European Pentecostal communities. See Daniela C. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good*, chap. 3.

[867] Augustine, "Theology of economics," 374.

[868] Her claim of a socio-economic dimension of the Eucharist is corroborated by the democratic sentiments in the practice of the offertory by Western and Eastern Christian communities up until the start of the fourth century CE. See Wannenwetsch, "Liturgy," 85.

Eucharist. In addition to decentralising the rite in Christian worship, such approaches also separate the Eucharist from its connection to the social world and its relative socio-economic, and therefore also, political transformation agenda (as understood in my Girardian Model Eucharist). Consequently, for UK/Western Pentecostal communities, the Eucharist is not often considered a direct, if not also fundamental, means of addressing 'social' ills and evils—as it is for their Eastern European counterparts.

My Girardian Model Eucharist seeks to contribute to discussions about the Eucharist's social and cultural utility, the rite's significance to spiritual formation and social transformation inside and outside the Pentecostal community. As discussed in the next section, my methodology differs from the typical Pentecostal approaches to analysing Pentecostalism's relationship with the cultural domain.

12.4. An Experiment in a Chastened Form of Defamiliarization

As noted above, my Girardian Model Eucharist seeks to contribute to ongoing Pentecostal discussions about the Eucharist's value as a means to spiritual formation and social transformation. Whereas Pentecostal scholars like Daniela Augustine develop their eucharistic theology based on anthropology reflecting Christian assumptions about human origins and the human condition,[869] my starting point is

[869] For example, in an earlier work, Daniela Augustine discusses the birth of human civilisation (the city/culture) as a consequence of the fratricide in Genesis 4:1-17. She does speak about the relationship between the need to form a city and the relational needs of humans as a means to wholeness and self-actualisation (which Girard does not address). See

Girard's non-biblical anthropology. Notwithstanding the Christian *telos* of Girard's theory (i.e., its ultimately Christian reflection on violence and religion), it offers a theory of human culture that assumes humans' evolutionary origins, which features in his claim that the scapegoat mechanism marked the beginning of "hominization."[870]

Girard's anthropology is also my starting point because my thesis represents an experiment in a chastened form of defamiliarization. Again, I emphasise the "chastened form" because, notwithstanding its non-biblical anthropology, I consider Girard's mimetic theory (the defamiliarizing tool) a Christianity-friendly anthropological framework. I also assume Girard's mimetic theory offers a sophisticated multidisciplinary analysis of the relationship between the religious and cultural domains[871] (the sacred and profane). Therefore, it seems to me that integrating Girard's theory with Pentecostalism might encourage some Western

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Augustine, *Pentecost*, 111–17. Thus, I understand Augustine to be more concerned with the question, "Why do humans want to live in communities?" Whereas Girard focuses on "Why do human communities break down?" This is a theme that Girard addresses, albeit he discusses the psychological, ritualistic, and interpersonal dimensions of conflict.

[870] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 91–92. I understand that engagement with evolutionary science ought not to be problematic for Pentecostals since Pentecostals are also known to entertain theistic evolutionary theories in addition to the young and old earth creation positions. Moreover, because the trajectory of Girard's analysis is from anthropogeny to Christian anthropology, Pentecostals across the spectrum of the creation debate should be able to find something useful to aid their theological constructions, even if they disagree with his conclusions. See Mike Tenneson and Steve Badger, "A Brief Overview Of Pentecostal Views On Origins," *Enrichment*, Spring 2010, https://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/Issues/2010/Spring-2010/A-Brief-Overview-Of-Pentecostal-Views-on-Origins.

[871] That is, culture as comprising the scope of meanings in the triptych model.

Pentecostals to step out of their theological and cultural spaces to review critically the relationship between their Pentecostal theology and the cultural domain.

Finally, as I intimated in my methodology chapter, I assume that such a multidisciplinary approach is essential to my hermeneutic quest for, as Archer describes, "the voice of the Spirit"[872] concerning Revelation 3:14-21 (or the "present sense-event"[873] meaning of the passage). I am also confident that what I refer to as a chastened form of defamiliarization will not impede this quest. This is because, as discussed, Girardian anthropology ultimately leads to Christian anthropology. This Christian anthropology emphasises that the Passion of Christ[874] indicates God's wisdom over the Satan-victim mechanism, [875] the liberating effect of which is made known to people by the Holy Spirit.[876] Thus, it reflects what Kärkkäinen described as a "Christo-centric trinitarian orientation"—an essential principle for discerning the Spirit.[877]

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[872] Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 250. I am also guided in this direction by Kärkkäinen's observations about a need for a comprehensive Christian framework of discernment when he states, "All human discernment is just that – human – and hence liable to mistakes and misuse. Continuing and patient mutual assessment of discernment, both within the Pentecostal communities and outside, in tandem with other Christians, is thus badly needed." Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "The challenge of discerning between the genuine and counterfeit 'Signs of the Spirit': toward a Pentecostal theology of the discernment of the Spirit(s)," *JEPTA* 39, no 2, (2019): 180. https://doi.org/10.1080/18124461.2019.1627510.
[873] McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 30.
[874] Girard, *I See Satan*, 138–39.
[875] Girard, *I See Satan*, 43, 152.
[876] Girard, *I See Satan*, 189–90.
[877] Kärkkäinen, "The challenge of discerning," 180.

In the next section, I examine specifics of Girard's theory's cultural dimensions to identify points of contact with Pentecostal theology and cultural dimensions.[878]

12.5. Girard on Culture

The scapegoat mechanism is Girard's leading theory on the origins of culture.[879] The scapegoat mechanism alludes to the othering/scapegoating (and, theologically speaking, satanic)[880] aspects of the social order[881] Girard claims are still operative

[878] What follows are focused and expanded discussions on concepts in mimetic theory discussed in Chapter 5 pertinent to cultural assessments in both mimetic theory and cultural studies.

[879] As Palaver notes, "This is the crux of Girard's theory of the origins of culture." Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, viii.

[880] As discussed in Chapter 2, Girard links the scapegoat mechanism to his demonology. For example, he argued that "Satan still appears as the mimetic obstacle and model—the violent principle underlying all forms of earthly domination and all forms of idolatry, who tries to divert toward himself the adoration that is strictly due to God alone." Girard, *Things Hidden,* 400.

[881] The scapegoat mechanism is comparable to Wink's notion of the "Domination System," which he uses to describe "what happens when an entire network of Powers become integrated around idolatrous values." Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 9. Wink suggests that the "domination system" is indicative of the biblical references to the alienated state of a) the world system (*cosmos*, John 8:23), b) the epoch/time (*aiōn*, Galatians 1:4) and c) the flesh (*sarx*, 2 Corinthians 10:3–5). Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 33–63. I am not developing Wink's domination system in this thesis since, as a biblical analysis of "the powers," it does not feature the multidisciplinary approach to studying religion, culture and violence espoused in Girard's mimetic theory.

today.[882] Therefore, I will develop my analysis of Girard's perspective of culture by focusing on his concept of the scapegoat mechanism.[883]

12.5.1. The scapegoat mechanism and the cultural domain

The cultural diamond is a helpful tool for discussing the cultural determinants of Girard's theory of the scapegoat mechanism.[884] For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, Girard argues that in "archaic communities," sacrificial rituals re-enact a founding murder,[885] preceded by the violent social force of the scapegoat mechanism. The

[882] "Archaic rituals of scapegoating and sacrifice stem from this social force [i.e., scapegoat mechanism], which continues to operate in modern times even though ancient religious rituals have generally lost their effectiveness." Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p. See also Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 92.

[883] Girard also referred to it as "mechanism of the surrogate victim" and "victimage mechanism." Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 152. Also, "single victim mechanism." Girard, *I See Satan*, 94.

[884] The scapegoat mechanism can also be analysed within the triptych meanings of culture insofar that the scapegoat mechanism is a theory of the origins of culture that also offers commentary on a) the process of human development through "the repetition of sacrifices in a spirit of corporation and harmony" (historical), b) mimesis, as descriptive of the human "way of life" (normative) and, c) rituals, as indicative of human intellectual/artistic production (genetic). See Girard, *I See Satan*, 94. Also, see Palaver's summary of the way the scapegoat mechanism relates to the process of human development insofar as it marked the dawn of social differences (i.e., distinguishing between the sacred and profane), time (i.e., "before" and "after" the social crisis) and space (i.e., designating "insider" and "outsider" communities). See Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 173.

[885] Girard states, "Bloody sacrifices are attempts to repress or moderate the internal conflicts of primitive or archaic communities, and they do this by reproducing as exactly as possible, at the expense of the victims substituted for the original victim, a real act of violence that had occurred in the intermediate past. This original violence had really reconciled these communities, thanks to its unanimity." Girard, *I See Satan*, 78.

relationship between the scapegoat mechanism, sacrificial ritual, and the community can be plotted onto the cultural diamond for further analysis (see fig. 12.2).[886]

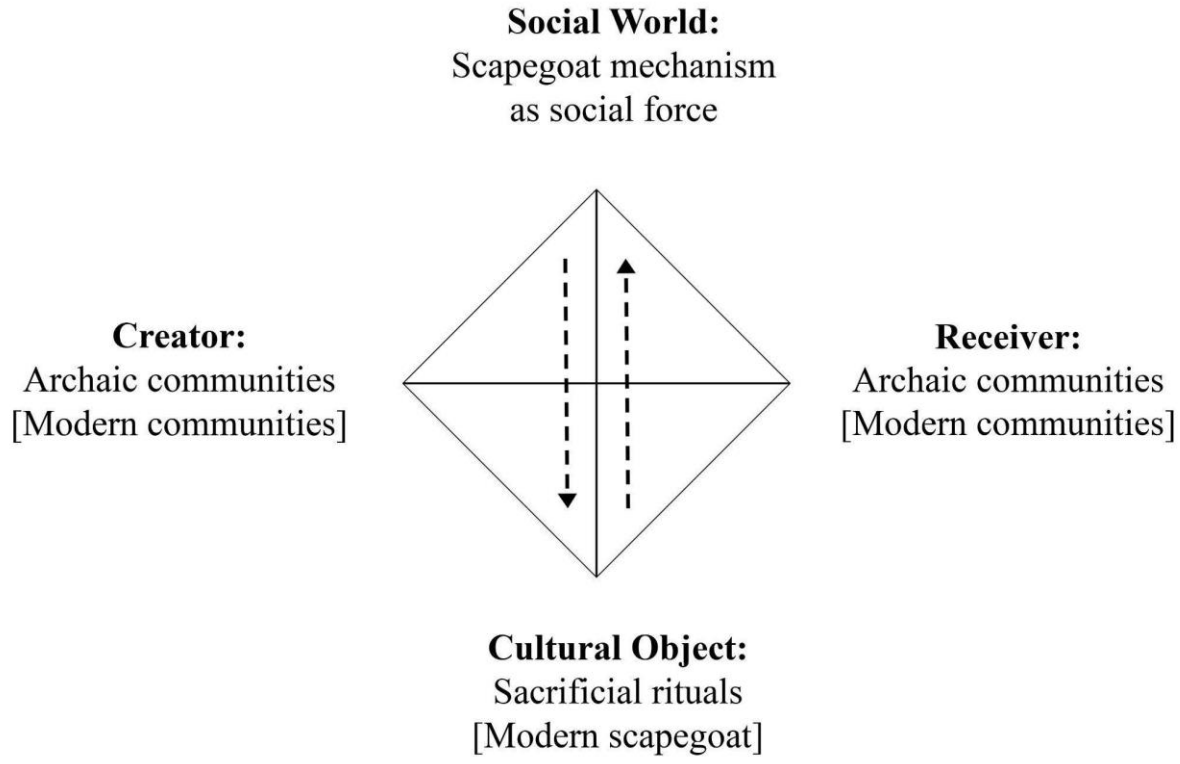

Fig. 12.2. The cultural diamond and the dynamics of the scapegoat mechanism

[886] I have placed the scapegoat mechanism in the "social world" category because it represents a "social force" or system. Also, since "cultural objects" are essentially the aspect of a wider cultural phenomenon identified for analysis, I have chosen to focus on sacrificial ritual as a cultural object in this example. Indeed, there are other items I could have included that relate to Girard's understanding of what human communities create as a response to the dynamics of the scapegoat mechanism, e.g., "prohibitions." See Girard, *I See Satan*, 12–14. Also, "post-ritual institutions" like "judicial and political system." See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 159.

To be sure, there are multiple ways to read the above cultural diamond diagram. For my argument, however, the left-hand side of the diamond shows the human (albeit social world, and therefore, scapegoat mechanism influenced) contribution to the creation of the cultural object: the sacrificial ritual. The vertical lines-arrows in the centre of the diamond illustrate the symbiotic relationship between the social world and cultural objects. This is a relationship that the mimetic theory vividly describes in its conception of the relationship between the scapegoat mechanism as a social force that gave rise to the creation of sacrificial ritual (cultural object), that is, the "controlled repetition of the scapegoat mechanism"[887] as means to maintain social order.

The above cultural diamond framing of Girard's scapegoat mechanism also illustrates what he understands to be the correlation between the archaic and modern (in brackets) communities' impact and response to the scapegoat mechanism. For instance, Girard suggests that victims of ritual sacrifice (sacrificial rituals) in the archaic context (who were the object of anger, guilt, and resentment)[888] are replaced by modern scapegoats today. By modern scapegoats, Girard means "all the phenomena of nonritualized collective transference that we observe or believe we observe around us."[889] Girard also discusses modern societies' repulsion with the

[887] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 154.
[888] Girard also analysed the scapegoat mechanism concept through the lens of the expelled atonement scapegoat discussed in Leviticus 16:21. See Girard, *I See Satan*, 154.
[889] Girard, *I See Satan*, 160.

idea of scapegoats[890] and notes how the modern concern for victims (emanating from the Judeo-Christian conception of the victim)[891] determines what these societies conceive as crucial in intellectual and artistic activities and, hence, "culture" (within the triptych meaning).[892]

Therefore, I have included "modern scapegoat" as a cultural object/product of modern communities. The modern scapegoat as a cultural object/product indicates modern communities' engagement with the varied facets of the scapegoat mechanism.[893] As discussed in Chapter 5, Girard described one such facet as "misrecognition," which, in summary, signals what he argues is the unconscious and even deceptive workings of the scapegoat mechanism in individuals and society.[894] These 'workings' are captured in the arrows in the diagram.

There is some value to Girard's theory of the scapegoat mechanism and its relation to social crises, especially his observation about its connection to violence. For instance, when he cites Hitler's systematic elimination of European Jews as an

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[890] Girard, *I See Satan*, 160.
[891] Girard, *I See Satan,* 163–64.
[892] For example, Girard states, "In all areas of activity—economic, scientific, artistic, and even religious—it is the concern for victims that determines what is important." Girard, *I See Satan*, 178.
[893] For example, mimetic desire and conflicts.
[894] In his Christian writings, Girard also suggests that this deceptive social dynamic has also resulted in a weaponising of the scapegoat/victim in modern times and thus problematises the progress that has been made concerning victim awareness. For example, he notes, "The victims most interesting to us are always those who allow us to condemn our neighbors. And our neighbors do the same. They always think first about victims for whom they hold us responsible." Girard, *I See Satan*, 164.

example of the modern practice of scapegoating,[895] he successfully shows a correlation between what he has described as the archaic communities' violent approach to addressing social crises and modern examples of violent non-ritualized scapegoating of individuals or groups as a means to create community solidarity.

Other notable philosophers have also explored Girard's theory of scapegoating. For example, Charles Taylor developed Girard's concept in his theory of "categorical violence."[896] Also, in her recent work, Daniela Augustine has also connected tangentially with Girard's scapegoat mechanism. She developed Taylor's theory in her analysis of the "common good,"[897] noting how the violence perpetrated against others is violence against God, insofar that the "other" bears the face of God (thus demonstrating what she referred to as the "iconoclasm of violence").[898]

Also, concerning my hermeneutic aims, Girard's theory of the scapegoat and the dynamic of misrecognition offers a fresh perspective on the risen Christ's status

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[895] See Girard, *I See Satan*, 158–59.

[896] By this, Taylor meant violence "exercised against whole categories of others, people therefore that one may never have known or been in contact with. I'm thinking of the violence wrought against a scapegoat minority or phenomena such as ethnic cleansing or genocide." Charles Taylor, "Notes on the Sources of Violence: Perennial and Modern," in *Beyond Violence: Religious Sources of Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. James L. Heft (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 15.

[897] Defined as "Looking first at the divine face before turning one's eyes toward the face of the fellow human is pedagogy toward recognizing the face of God in the other and treating them accordingly. Learning to share the divine face (as recognition of shared humanity) becomes the foundation for mutual flourishing in a shared world." Augustine, *The Spirit*, chap. 2.

[898] Augustine, *The Spirit*, chap. 2. For example, she states, "The villainization of the other as a social plague provokes the collective imagination toward the possibility of their extermination, awarding it the status of a sacred moral duty." Augustine, *The Spirit*, chap. 2.

in the meal motif in Rev 3:20. For example, and to elaborate further on my discussion in Chapter 10, the risen Christ also appears to be present in spirit in the churches (Rev 2:1 cf. 3:20; Luke 24:30-31). My Girardian reading helps me problematise this present-but-undisclosed Christ's status as a "marginal insider." In this reframing, Christ is now understood as one conveniently, but not wholly "othered" by the Laodicean community insofar as the passage depicts him as standing outside the church's door. Thus, the passage reflects some aspects of the ignorance and deception indicative of the workings of "misrecognition" in society.

12.5.2. The apocalypse and the cultural domain

Girard maintained that biblical revelation aims to reveal the violent origins of pagan religion and human culture (i.e., the dynamics of the scapegoat mechanism). Within the Girardian register, the Bible aims to reveal the God of the Bible's true non-violent nature,[899] especially in the Passion of Christ.[900] This process of revelation is called "apocalypse" in mimetic theory.[901]

[899] As mentioned in Chapter 2, Girard suggests that the stories of Joseph and Job in the OT indicate, contrary to myths, that innocent people tend to be the victims of violence and not the persecutors. In both accounts, Girard argues that God is depicted as the God of victims, not persecutors. See Girard, *I See Satan*, 106–20.

[900] As previously noted, Girard highlighted the victimisation of Jesus, considering passages like John 15:25 and Psalm. 35:19, which described Jesus as innocent. Girard, *I See Satan*, 127.

[901] Contrary to the popular Christian understanding of "apocalypse" as referring to God's judgement at the end of the age, mimetic theory retains its traditional meaning, namely "revelation." See Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p.

The cultural diamond below (fig. 12.3) depicts the relevance of the Bible/OT victim narratives and the Passion narrative to the cultural domain in Girard's anthropology.

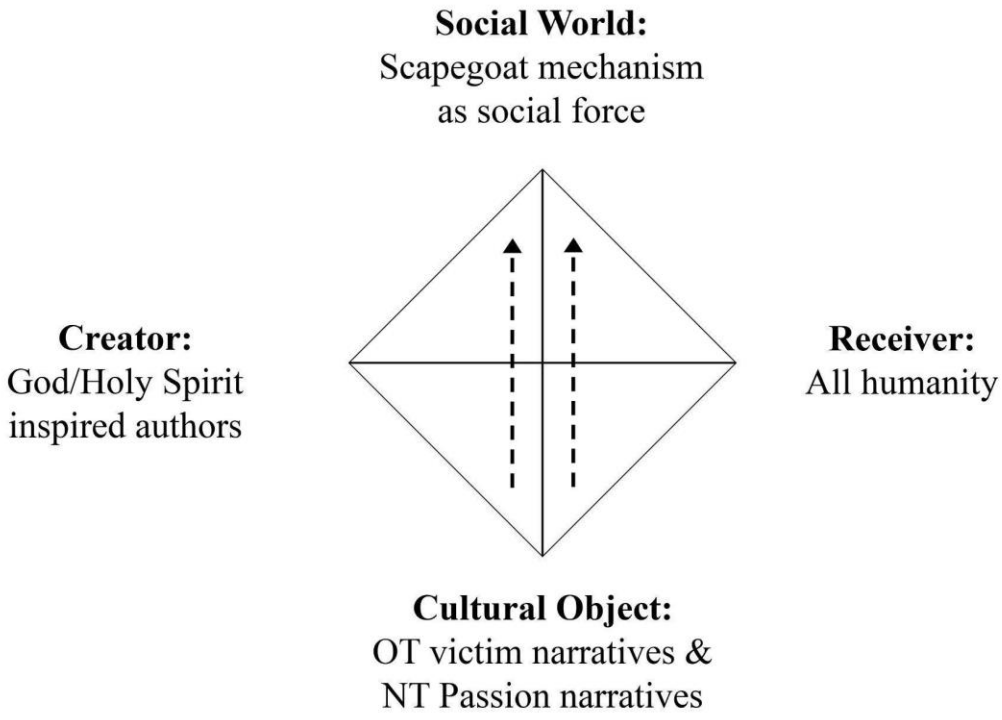

Fig. 12.3. The cultural diamond and the dynamics of revelation in mimetic theory.

In this rendition of mimetic theory in the cultural diamond register, the cultural objects, that is, the Bible, and precisely, OT victim and Passion narratives, supported by the Holy Spirit, also signified by the vertical arrows in the middle of the diagram, works to unveil and undermine the scapegoat mechanism that permeates the social world. Finally, as cultural objects borne of the Holy Spirit, the OT victim and Passion

narratives do not mirror the ethics of the scapegoat mechanism that dominates the social world. Instead, they buck the trend and offer an alternative ethical outlook for society.

There is some virtue to Girard's emphasis on how the OT victim narratives and the Passion narratives (considered here for analysis as "cultural objects") can disclose the scapegoat mechanism's violent workings. For instance, such conception of the OT victim narratives and the Passion narrative reflects theological themes that resonate with mainstream Christian-Pentecostal teaching on how God has defeated evil systems and structures through the cross (see Col 2:15).[902] This Christian-Pentecostal nuance in Girard's anthropology highlights yet another chastened aspect of my defamiliarization agenda and why my thesis can be of value to Pentecostals-Christians.

I have suggested that the creators of cultural objects are "God/Holy Spirit inspired authors" to highlight the significance Girard places on the Holy Spirit in the apocalypse. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, Girard emphasised the Holy Spirit's uniqueness in "enlightening persecutors" and liberating people from the

[902] For an interpretation of this passage that purports that the principalities and powers also refer to socio-political structures, see Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 55–60. Moreover, Girard's emphasis on the Passion dovetails with the *Christus Victor* model of atonement, a model Pentecostal scholar Yong describes as the "classical pentecostal theology of salvation" and which he uses to underpin his theological treatise on a Pentecostal view of spiritual warfare and the cross and principalities and powers. (Yong describes the "classic pentecostal model theology of salvation" as "deliverance from the powers of darkness."). See Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 122.

mimetic cycle's grip and downward spiral.[903] Hence, the OT victim narratives and the Passion narrative 'counter' and do not 'mirror' the scapegoat mechanism in the social world, as the arrows in the diagram are also meant to depict.

Girard's statement of the revealing and liberating role of the Holy Spirit concerning the scapegoat mechanism offers a point of contact with what I have described as "pneumatological theologies" created by Pentecostals writing on matters on the cultural domain. For example, Daniela Augustine emphasised the liberating role of the Spirit, stating:

> Indeed, Pentecost reveals that God has opened his future for the other, and the Spirit (who enfleshes that future in the human *socium*) demands the same from all flesh. The Spirit of Pentecost condemns the spirits of racism, sexism, tribalism/ethnocentrism, and nationalism as manifestations of sin's fracturing and antagonizing of the human community.[904]

Daniela Augustine's claims concerning the ministry of the "Spirit of Pentecost" can also find support in Girardian readings of some post-Pentecost event accounts of the Spirit's activity in the early church. For example, the Spirit's spotlight on those on the margins in Acts 2:17-18, and the Spirit's role as liberator of those bound to the mimetic cycle in Acts 2:37. These examples of Girardian readings of the Spirit's activity following the Day of Pentecost indicate how the Spirit could be construed as being at work in the early church's life, helping people break free from the grip of the scapegoat mechanism on their lives.

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[903] Girard, *I See Satan*, 189.
[904] Augustine, *The Spirit*, n.p.

12.6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have outlined the typical Pentecostal engagement with the cultural domain as discussed by Medina. I argued that Medina's assessment of the term "culture" reflects an approach to cultural meaning akin to sociological approaches insofar as it also encourages a context-sensitive approach to assess the cultural dimensions of religious communities. Next, I discussed typical Pentecostal approaches to the cultural domain, namely, "disruption," "cultural accommodation" and "dynamic resignification." I concluded that in the typical Pentecostal engagement with the culture, Pentecostals are "active" receivers of culture. By such conclusions, I meant that Pentecostals do not uncritically imbibe cultural objects on offer. Rather, Pentecostals typically appropriate cultural objects, which they selectively accommodate and resignify to fit their worldview. I then discussed what I considered first-order cultural objects of socio-political significance in the Pentecostal-Christian tradition: pneumatological theologies and the Eucharist. I contended that the pneumatological theologies could reflect Pentecostalism's typical focus on the Pentecost event of Acts 2 as signifying a critical theological and hermeneutical lens. And I contended that the Eucharist was an emerging first-order cultural object in Pentecostalism, not least because of the focus it has received from some Pentecostal scholars in recent years. I claimed that we can find support for such assumptions of the rite in the early UK Pentecostal's emphasis on the centrality of the

rite and also because of the social implications my Girardian Model Eucharist brings to bear on the rite.

I also discussed how Daniela Augustine's assessment of some Eastern European Pentecostal approaches to the Eucharist could be instructive to Western approaches, which typically focus on ordinance/remembrance and sacramental themes, insofar as she highlights that they have a social-economic as much as sacramental dimensions to their eucharistic celebration.

In addition, I discussed how my methodology differs from the typical Pentecostal approaches to analysing Pentecostalism's relationship with the cultural domain insofar as I evaluated the cultural domain through the lens of mimetic theory. This exercise is what I labelled 'a chastened form of defamiliarization'. I discussed the Girardian conception of culture, focusing on the scapegoat mechanism and apocalypse. I also identified contact points between these Girardian concepts and reflections on related matters in Daniela Augustine's reflections on Pentecostal ethics.

Finally, Daniela Augustine's observation of the "disciplining" of "desires" that the practice of "pre-eucharistic" fasting among Eastern-European Pentecostals seeks to address is another significant point of contact between a Pentecostal reflection and mimetic theory.

This is because "desire"[905] is a phenomenon of the affective domain and is one of the mimetic theory's core principles. Also, in the Girardian register, acquisitive (possessive) desire contributes to the "idolatry of models"[906] and its associated problems. Thus, mimetic theory reveals inherent problems with desire. Such revelations concerning the relationship between desire and the concept of idolatry can be valuable to Pentecostal discussions about the affective-spirituality-theology nexus.[907] This nexus highlights connections of cultural significance between Girardian studies and Pentecostalism as the 'affect' motifs in both disciplines are overlapping micro-level factors.

Furthermore, these nexuses have implications for Pentecostal engagement with the cultural domain, particularly Pentecostal accommodation of capitalist ethos. My emphasis on the interface between Pentecostalism and the capitalist ethos (as expressed in the relationship with the prosperity gospel) rests on Medina's observations about the relevance of evaluating (in addition to "political

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[905] According to mimetic theory, "Desire is what makes us human, as opposed to biological needs, such as food, shelter, and reproduction, which we share with other members of the animal kingdom. Desire is essentially, inherently other-centered, dependent on models, such as parents and peers, to identify its objects and represent them as desirable. Desires issue from culture, not from nature; from other humans, not from instincts or the individual self; human beings are according to mimetic theory relational and mutually interdependent." Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p.

[906] Palaver uses this phrase to describe the "'religious' dimensions of interpersonal relations," which the mimetic theory is trying to address. See Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 15. However, I also see the phrase as descriptive of a non-human "model" or object of desire.

[907] For a summary discussion of the "interface" between Pentecostal theology and spirituality vis-à-vis the "dominant approaches" (i.e., "integrationist, philosophical, liberationist, and mystical"), see Castelo, "Pentecostal Theology as Spirituality," 29–32.

participation") Pentecostalism's "embracing of the capitalist ethos" for understanding "how Pentecostals engage local cultural traditions and dynamics in the form of accommodation."[908] The Pentecostal connection with the capitalist ethos typically features in the discourse around the Pentecostal-prosperity gospel connection. These are issues I will be discussing in the next chapter.

[908] See Medina, "Culture," 111.

CHAPTER 13

DEVELOPING "EUCHARISTIC DISCERNMENT" FOR PENTECOSTAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND WIDER CULTURE

Theological discussions concerning the problems with the prosperity gospel typically highlight the hermeneutic factors that underpin these problems.[909] Considering the affective-economic nexus in passages like 1 Tim 6.10,[910] however, I argue in this chapter that these discussions could also benefit from moving beyond hermeneutics to studying the affective dimension.[911] I contend that these discussions would also benefit from a combination of a close reading of Pentecostal spirituality in conversation with theories of affect from the social sciences.

The significance of such reflections on the relationship between the spiritual-affective domain and economic life to Pentecostals cannot be overstated, considering

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[909] E.g., see Gordon D. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1985), 8; Andreas Heuser, "Prosperity Theology: Material Abundance and Praxis of Transformation," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 413, VitalSource Bookshelf.

[910] The typical English translation of φιλαργυρία (i.e., "the love of money") in 1 Tim. 6.10 highlights a connection between the affective domain and economic life.

[911] By affective dimension or domain, I also mean the locus of religious affections, theological and natural virtues, vices/seven deadly sins, emotions, passion, and desire. My understanding of the term also encompasses what Seigworth and Gregg described as the "anthropomorphic" dimension of affect, namely, "those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability." Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

their keen interest in "prosperity messages" relative to other Christians.[912] Pentecostalism's interest in prosperity messages[913] may stem from the arguably unifying assumption of these messages that "God wants to bless Christians spiritually, physically, and materially."[914] Such themes correspond to the Pentecostal "material view of salvation,"[915] in which, as Miroslav Volf notes, "salvation is not merely a spiritual reality touching only an individual person's inner being but also has to do with *bodily* human existence."[916] Thus, salvation in the Pentecostal soteriological schema is also understood to have this-worldly material implications for the believer.[917] This material dimension of Pentecostal soteriology thus helps shed light on why Pentecostals embrace prosperity messages.[918]

This intersectionality between Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel is not without nuances. For example, Pentecostals often adopt and deploy the prosperity gospel differently.[919] Thus, evaluations of the prosperity gospel in relation to

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[912] See Katherine Attanasi, "Introduction: The Plurality of Prosperity Theologies and Pentecostalisms," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 3–4.
[913] I will use "message," "gospel," and "theology" synonymously to describe prosperity teaching in general. Moreover, I will be focusing on the wealth dimensions of the prosperity gospel in this study.
[914] Attanasi, "Introduction," 3.
[915] Attanasi, "Introduction," 4.
[916] Miroslav Volf, "Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26.3 (Summer 1989), 447–67, at 448, as cited in Attanasi, "Introduction," 4.
[917] Attanasi, "Introduction," 4.
[918] Attanasi, "Introduction," 4.
[919] See Attanasi, "Introduction," 5. Also, there is evidence of some resignification within the movement "from an individualistic image of material betterment into a holistic praxis of transformation." See Heuser, "Prosperity Theology," 418. Moreover, the prosperity gospel is

Pentecostal affection should also account for some of these nuances and, where necessary, their ethical implications. Therefore, my assessment of the prosperity gospel and Pentecostal affection will discuss what I consider are exemplary and problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel.[920] This rather broad value categorisation is not meant to be uncharitable to proponents of prosperity messages but to offer a typological analysis based on a thick description of conceptions, expressions and issues within the phenomenon.

Thus, in my schema, the exemplary expressions allude to aspects of the prosperity gospel phenomenon that reflect a more balanced theology of prosperity, those depicting a moderate outlook on Christian economic well-being. A significant hallmark of these expressions includes a focus on the believer's faith in God and an emphasis on responsible stewardship (which does not exclude economic enterprising).[921]

The problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel contrast the properties of

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also dubbed a type of Pentecostal theology "relevant for social ethics" since it promotes health and wealth. See Cheryl J. Sanders, "Social Justice: Theology as Social Transformation," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 431, VitalSource Bookshelf.

[920] I aim to also account for the biblical references to material wealth and stewardship (e.g., Deut. 8.17-18; Acts 4.32-5; 2 Cor. 9.6-11; 1 Tim. 6.10) and thus the need to negotiate between model and problematic contemporary conceptions of wealth and stewardship. Moreover, the ethical criteria I have developed from Steven Jack Land's theory of Pentecostal spirituality and René Girard's mimetic theory (which I discuss later) inform my evaluation of these nuances.

[921] The "exemplary" expressions would also be fitting examples of the "contextual," "missional," and "balanced" arguments in Yong's taxonomy. See Amos Yong, "A Typology of Prosperity Theology: A Religious Economy of Global Renewal or a Renewal Economics?," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 21–26.

the exemplary expressions described above. In my schema, this categorisation captures what Gordon Fee described as the "American dream" outlook on Christian living, reflecting an image of a prosperous life that does not resemble Jesus' testimony of simplicity.[922] Such an image of a prosperous life typically reflects the wealth-pursuing and ostentatious representations of the prosperity gospel, which many Pentecostals of all stripes decry.

Equally concerning is the issue of how Pentecostals engage the prosperity gospel, given noted concerns about the prosperity gospel's at times uncritical relationship with the worst elements of capitalism.[923] Coupled with the Pentecostal tradition to engage critically aspects of the cultural domain,[924] reservations about the prosperity gospel-capitalism nexus also make it difficult for me not to treat as problematic Néstor Medina's report that the "capitalist value system" (which emphasises numerical growth and upward social mobility) indicates "spiritual success" in megachurches.[925] Thus, to the extent such success value systems are often

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[922] Fee, *Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, 7.

[923] Daniela C. Augustine, "Pentecost and Prosperity in Eastern Europe: Between Sharing of Possessions and Accumulating Personal Wealth," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 191; Douglas A. Hicks, "Prosperity, Theology, and Economy," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 240.

[924] Néstor Medina notes that Pentecostals reflect "disruption," "cultural accommodation," and "dynamic resignification" strategies in their cultural engagement. Medina, "Culture," 109–11.

[925] Medina, "Culture," 112. To be sure, the "signs of progress" attributed to capitalism are comparable to certain Christian concepts, such as the Old Testament notion of "fruitfulness," i.e., the manifestation of prosperity because of faithfulness to God (e.g., Lev. 25:18–19; Amos

applied uncritically, I would designate such applications as descriptive of the less attractive trends in Pentecostal engagement with the prosperity gospel.

The problematic expressions discussed above also raise ethical concerns that interest my thesis. First, how can contemporary Pentecostal Christianity, with its roots in the alleged self-effacing and altruistic outlook of early Pentecostals,[926] account for the problematic expressions of prosperity in Pentecostalism, apart from claiming that hermeneutics-related issues underpin such expressions? This question is deemed critical given that many who reflect such expressions typically claim that they are based on faithful readings of the Bible and, by extension, represent sound theological constructions.[927] Second, given the emphasis on the affective domain in Pentecostal spirituality and the resourcefulness of prosperity messages, what might the contours of a sound Pentecostal Christian engagement with the prosperity gospel entail?

Therefore, in this chapter, I will develop my claim that the theological discourse around the problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel could benefit from focusing on affect-related motifs evident in the broader discussions on the prosperity gospel movement. In so doing, I will highlight how these affect-related

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9:14; Zech. 8:12). Thus, one can also understand why some Pentecostals may accommodate such capitalist success indicators in their ministries.

[926] Early Pentecostals, as a stream of radical Holiness groups, are noted not to have aspired to "embourgeoised elitism." See Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 60.

[927] E.g., the Word of Faith movement is predicated on the doctrine of trichotomy, i.e., that humans are body, spirit, and soul. See Robert M. Bowman Jr., *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 98–99.

motifs signal some of the dangers of an uncritical engagement with prosperity/wealth motifs vis-à-vis the affective life. Next, I will summarise Steven Jack Land's conception of Pentecostal spirituality and René Girard's mimetic theory[928] and highlight specific affect and ethical themes related to my thesis. I will discuss how these themes correspond to the affect-related motifs I identified in the broader theological discussions on the prosperity gospel. In so doing, I will also signal how such comparative analysis can contribute to discussions about the contours of a sound Pentecostal Christian engagement with the prosperity gospel. Finally, I will discuss how the Girardian Model Eucharist can be understood to embody the affective and ethical factors in Land's schema of Pentecostal spirituality and Girard's mimetic theory. I will also discuss how this joint reading of both studies in the Girardian Model Eucharist can be instrumental in developing what I consider "eucharistic discernment" values, which could benefit Pentecostal engagement in the cultural domain.

[928] Within the varied and often overlapping concerns and approaches in affect theory, I understand Girard's discourse on mimesis to reflect the psychological approach, within which, as Seigworth and Gregg describe, the human subject "remains co-creatively open to ongoing impingements and pressures from intersubjective and interobjective systems of social desiring . . . [Moreover, the approach is] also quite likely to provide operationally defined contours for a particular range of affects, with ultimate aims that are often more human-centred." Seigworth and Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 7. Also, for a discussion on the interface between mimesis and affect, see Anna Gibbs, "After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony, and Mimetic Communication," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 186–205.

13.1. Problems Beyond Hermeneutics

While theological discussions concerning alleged hermeneutics-related issues underpinning the problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel have been critical,[929] I contend that such discussions only address part of the problem and that the issues go beyond hermeneutics to matters concerning the affective domain. These matters form part of the broader theological discussions around the prosperity gospel, and I refer to them here as the problem of desire, denial, and mirroring consumer culture. Moreover, because they, to varying extents, characterise what Seigworth and Gregg describe as the "*in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon,"[930] which is the condition that gives rise to affect, I understand them to resonate more with themes concerning the affective domain than hermeneutics. Also, it seems to me that Pentecostal practitioners typically overlook the ethical implications of such affect-related themes and their intersectionality with spirituality and ministry practice, often favouring more pragmatic approaches that typify Pentecostal ministries.[931]

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[929] E.g., Fee convincingly argues that a proper exegesis of 3 John 2 (one of the popular prooftexts for prosperity teachings) suggests that the "soul prosper" motif of the passage historically, culturally, and contextually pertains to ancient greeting protocols and is not a command to gain wealth as is often suggested by prosperity teachers. See Fee, *Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, 10. Cf. also J. C. Thomas, *1 John, 2 John, 3 John* (Pentecostal Commentary Series; Sheffield Academic Press, 2004), 22–23.

[930] Seigworth and Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 1.

[931] As Ware observes, Pentecostals are typically driven by pragmatic concerns, i.e., they tend to do whatever it takes to accomplish their mission. See S. L. Ware, "Restorationism in Classical Pentecostalism," in *NIDPCM*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 1021.

13.1.1. The problem of desire

Some Pentecostal scholars have highlighted a correlation between aspects of the affective domain and Pentecostal belief and practice and the development and reception of prosperity messages against the backdrop of capitalist aspirations. For example, in discussing the prosperity gospel in the African context, Wariboko observed that "prosperity preachers … do not merely address poverty and fuel greed. In a more serious and fundamental way, they produce desires and dreams and connect them to a transcendental God."[932] Wariboko continues, however:

> After months and years of this kind of production of desires and dreams, consumerism and greed make their abodes in their victims' deep unconscious, where they are very difficult to control. At this deep level are produced not only incessant quests for material accoutrements but also the desire to align God with the restlessness of material desires in the unconscious. All desires (for God and material consumption) are then linked to the capitalist system's production of desires (demand).[933]

Wariboko's observation on the involvement of the affective domain, particularly desire, in the production and reception of the prosperity gospel and its relationship to cultural forces, such as capitalism, is significant to my thesis. This is because the

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[932] Nimi Wariboko, "Pentecostal Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 39.

[933] Wariboko, "Pentecostal Paradigms," 40. Also speaking of the Eastern European context, Augustine highlights the correlation between desire and capitalism when she notes that "overall, in continuity with capitalist spirituality, the prosperity message nurtured a continual discontent with one's economic condition and an aggressive pursuit of one's consumerist identity perpetually enlarged by intentionally provoked covetousness." Augustine, "Pentecost and Prosperity in Eastern Europe," 205.

observation highlights a nexus between the human actors, secular social forces, and religious beliefs and practices, thus capturing an "in-between-ness" human actors experience that gives rise to affect—in this case, the misalignment of desires to the capitalist system. The observation about the misalignment of desire signals one of the critical theological problems that often feature in the broader discussion on the problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel.

13.1.2. The problem of denial

Problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel do not typically feature passion-centred[934] concerns that often promote faith-filled realism, which can help people manage the vicissitudes of life. For example, Joyce Meyer's recent journey to questioning the prosperity gospel seems to have been precipitated by an epiphany about the possibility of people suffering despite their profession of faith in God and claiming biblical promises.[935] Indeed, Pentecostal scholars who have written on the problems of the prosperity gospel have highlighted the importance of theologies that

[934] I.e., a view of the Christian experience that accounts for what I contend is an essential aspect of God's self-disclosure with significant ministry implications, namely, the suffering characterized by the passion of Christ.

[935] Meyer comments, "There is nowhere in the Bible where we're promised we will never have any trouble. I don't care how much faith you have, you're not going to avoid having trouble in your life. Jesus said, "in the world, you will have tribulation [but] cheer up, I have overcome the world." As cited in Premier Christian Communications Ltd., "Joyce Meyer Admits Her Prosperity and Faith Views "Got Out of Balance,'" *Premier Christian News*, January 12, 2019, https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/joyce-meyer-admits-her-prosperity-and-faith-views-got-out-of-balance.

account for human suffering vis-à-vis faith in God.[936] For example, Hicks states:

> The vocabulary of theodicy names both moral evil (caused by humans) and natural evil (unexplained evil beyond human-caused evil). A misplaced faith in God—expecting divine blessing and overlooking moral and natural evil in the world—can give persons a false sense of security or divine sanction, leading them to act recklessly in the market.[937]

Hicks's notion of a human actor's "misplaced faith in God" based on a revelation of God that denies suffering in the search for certainty, which can negatively impact them in the market, again highlights affect themes that Pentecostals seldom explore for the implications of their interface with Pentecostal spirituality. Affect theory helps us to understand the human actor as having the capacity to be acted upon by misplaced faith and possibly to act through denial, which produces a false sense of security and irresponsible actions in the market. Thus, it highlights unique spiritual and ethical dynamics often overlooked in the typical discussion on prosperity hermeneutics.

The misalignment of desires and the denial of suffering in the search for certainty are not the only affect-related themes one may glean from the discussions concerning the problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel.

13.1.3. The problem of mirroring consumer culture

Some Pentecostal scholars have also pointed to possible cultural factors that impact

[936] E.g., see Fee, *Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, 12–13; Hicks, "Prosperity, Theology, and Economy," 243–45.
[937] Hicks, "Prosperity, Theology, and Economy," 244.

the prosperity gospel, which again speaks to a tension, an "in-between-ness" between forces that human actors negotiate, giving rise to affect. For example, some suggest a symbiotic relationship between the prosperity gospel and capitalism.[938] Thus, notwithstanding the positive correlations often drawn between the prosperity gospel and Weber's idea of the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism,[939] certain extreme versions of the prosperity gospel also seem to mirror capitalism's individualistic, consumeristic, and profit-focused traits.[940] Thus, it appears to me that problematic prosperity gospel types are a cultural product of a religious movement characterised by (acting out, mirroring) the less charitable elements of neoliberal economic systems.[941] As with the problem of desire and denial, it seems to me that the mirroring of consumer culture is an affective-related issue that

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[938] E.g., see Augustine, "Pentecost and Prosperity in Eastern Europe," 191; R. Andrew Chesnut, "Prosperous Prosperity: Why the Health and Wealth Gospel is Booming across the Globe," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 215; Gerardo Marti, "'I Determine My Harvest': Risky Careers and Spirit-Guided Prosperity in Los Angeles," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 131.

[939] E.g., Nolivos coins the phrase "Pentecostal ethic" to highlight the increasingly accepted view that alleges a similarity between the hard-working ethic of Pentecostals and their Puritan forebearers, which Weber described as the "Protestant ethic," and which Weber argued complemented capitalism. See Eloy H. Nolivos, "Capitalism and Pentecostalism in Latin America: Trajectories of Prosperity and Development," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 93.

[940] Marti, "'I Determine My Harvest,'" 131; Chesnut, "Prosperous Prosperity," 215; Hicks, "Prosperity, Theology, and Economy," 241.

[941] I am grateful here for Wendy Griswold's analysis of the sociological meaning of cultural objects. Griswold notes, "The sociology of culture . . . looks for social meanings. And in our cultural diamond, meaning links cultural objects with the social world." Griswold, *Cultures*, 21.

stealthily contributes to the problems of the prosperity gospel.

So far, I have aimed to explain the probable causes of the dissonance with problematic aspects of the contemporary Pentecostal prosperity gospel movement vis-à-vis the early Pentecostals' outlook on wealth. I also, however, want to highlight what I perceive are the dangers of an uncritical engagement with prosperity/wealth motifs relative to the affective life and, in so doing, contribute to discussions about the contours of a sound Pentecostal Christian engagement with the prosperity gospel. Thus, in the next section, I will discuss how the problems of desire, denial, and mirroring consumer culture contribute to such discussions when evaluated with key affective and ethical factors in Land's schema of Pentecostal spirituality and Girard's mimetic theory.

13.2. Pentecostal Spirituality and the Theory of Affect

For my enquiry into Pentecostal spirituality, I will focus on Steven Jack Land's *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, particularly his claim that Pentecostal spirituality comprises a nexus between correct beliefs, practices, and affections, with the affections for the kingdom as the 'centering' feature.[942] Thus, I want to understand the intersection between the alleged Pentecostal interests in the "human interiority"[943] (what I also mean by the affective domain) and the problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel I discussed above.

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[942] See Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 34, 174.
[943] Daniel Castelo, *Revisioning Pentecostal Ethics: The Epicletic Community* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2012), 37, Kindle.

Other Pentecostals have discussed the affective domain and its relationship to Pentecostal spirituality and ethics.[944] However, I focus on Land's work because of its significance to Pentecostal and wider Christian scholarship on the relationship between spirituality and theology.[945] It is difficult for me to claim confidently that the reason for the popularity of Land's work also has to do with his claim that his findings reflect the core tenets of the earliest Pentecostals, thus representing indubitable features of Pentecostalism.[946] Nevertheless, foundational studies such as Land's are essential to my comparative analysis, focusing on the founding motifs of the cultural phenomenon under investigation. Land offers a robust theological schema that emphasises the centrality of the affective domain (relative to its relationship to the domains of belief and practice) in the earliest Pentecostal believers.

Land juxtaposes the domains of "orthodoxy (right praise-confession)" with

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[944] E.g., for a discussion of the interface between Pentecostal affection and philosophy (especially Affect Theory), see J. Aaron Simmons, "Philosophy: Inspiration for Living Relationally and Thinking Rigorously," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 399, 408, VitalSource Bookshelf. For a discussion of the interface between the affections and the full gospel, see Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 24–27. For a discussion on the social and liberation-theological dimensions of orthopathos (as an addendum to Land's orthopathy) vis-à-vis Pentecostal spirituality, see Samuel Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 11–12.

[945] Indeed, Land's work has been noted to be among the most popular and cited work on the subject. See Christopher A. Stephenson, *Types of Pentecostal Theology: Method, System, Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 29.

[946] Land indicates that his work is based on his agreement with Walter Hollenweger's claim that the first ten years of Pentecostalism characterized the movement's heart and not its infancy. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 1.

"orthopathy (right affections)" and "orthopraxy (right praxis)" to highlight what he claims to be the reflexive relationship that must exist between such domains as proof for any claim for an authentic God/Spirit-led Christian theological reflection or practice.[947]

Land highlights the premium Pentecostals place on the affective domain when he notes that orthopathy is "the heart of Pentecostal spirituality," "the personal integrating center of orthodoxy and orthopraxy."[948] He also understands orthopathy to describe "affections [that] are distinctively shaped and determined by the biblical story."[949] Thus, while cautioning against reductionist views of the affections, he discusses affections such as "gratitude," "compassion," and "courage," affections he understands to reflect the theological virtues, and he anchors them to strands of the four/fivefold gospel motifs.[950] These affections highlight the Christocentric and missional dimensions of Pentecostal spirituality. These affections, Land also contends, are somehow subsumed by the "passion for the kingdom of God" ("the integrative center of the affections") and thus by a "ruling affection."[951]

Thus, Pentecostal affections distinguish themselves from what he claims are "episodic," "feeling states," and "individualistic sentiments."[952] Land, however,

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[947] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 34.
[948] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 34.
[949] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 34.
[950] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 134–35.
[951] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 174. Hence, also "apocalyptic affections." See Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 133–35.
[952] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 34.

concedes these affections court with fleeting "emotions" and "feelings" which "intermingle in the affections over time."[953] Although he does not immediately describe what those "emotions," "feelings," and "individualistic sentiments" are, from later comments, one can assume they also have to do with the "inner resistances, the cares of this life, [and] carnal desires" he maintains, impinge on the affections.[954] Nevertheless, Land's proposal makes it clear that Pentecostal spirituality and ethics, particularly in its earliest conception, are rooted in the affective domain.

Similarly, the relationship between belief, affection, and practice is central to René Girard's mimetic theory.[955] The affective domain also plays a pivotal role in his theory of the founding of archaic religion and modern human systems and structures. Also, Girard's mimetic theory has its roots in his theory of imitation, or what he describes in his works as "mimetic desire."[956] Girard argues that human beings are fundamentally imitative creatures, and this propensity to imitate others, especially in desiring to acquire and appropriate what others desire (i.e., "acquisitive mimesis"[957]), is at the heart of "mimetic rivalry" or human conflicts.[958] Girard also

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[953] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 34.
[954] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 141.
[955] What follows summarises some relevant concepts to the affect discussion, which have already been covered in Chapter 5.
[956] In summary, in the Girardian register, "Desire is essentially, inherently other-centered, dependent on models, such as parents and peers, to identify its objects and represent them as desirable." Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p.
[957] Or also "possessive mimesis." Girard, *Things Hidden*, 8.
[958] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 15.

emphasises that mimetic desire is "intrinsically good,"[959] that is, it helps people learn from others and ultimately predisposes them to the divine.[960]

Conversely, acquisitive mimesis left unchecked in a community will result in what Girard labels a "mimetic crisis," which Girardian scholar Wolfgang Palaver succinctly describes as "instances of disorder caused primarily by the consequences of violent mimesis."[961] Girard describes how acquisitive mimesis (i.e., two or more people converging on the same desire) can morph into what he calls "conflictual mimesis," that two or more people converging on a single enemy/victim/scapegoat to annihilate it in order to address the mimetic crisis experienced, and which stemmed from acquisitive mimesis.[962] This process is also what Girard referred to as the "single victim, or scapegoat, mechanism,"[963] that is, sacrificing a "surrogate victim" to achieve social order.[964]

Girard also discusses what he understands to be the correlation between the ancient and modern societies' responses to the scapegoat mechanism. For instance, Girard suggests that victims of ritual sacrifice in the ancient context have now been replaced by modern scapegoats, that is, by "all the phenomena of nonritualized

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[959] Girard, *I See Satan*, 15.
[960] Girard, *I See Satan*, 16.
[961] Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 137. See also Girard's discussion on "mimetic crisis" in *Things Hidden*, 18–21.
[962] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 25.
[963] Girard, *I See Satan*, 94.
[964] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 307.

collective transference that we observe or believe we observe around us."[965] Furthermore, Girard describes this transference's unconscious and latent workings in individuals and society as "misrecognition." Finally, through his theory of the "apocalypse," Girard argues that the Bible—especially Old Testament victim narratives and the passion of Christ—unveils the scapegoat mechanism in archaic religions and human culture.[966] Thus, the Bible reveals God as on the side of the victim.

In summary, Land's schema outlines and discusses the comparative weightiness of the varied domains of Pentecostal spirituality, making for a more straightforward correlation to what appear to me to be similar themes within René Girard's mimetic theory, namely, "mimetic desire," "passion and apocalypse," and "scapegoat mechanism and misrecognition." In the next section, I integrate Land's analysis of Pentecostal spirituality with Girard's mimetic theory (and applications of mimetic theory in Girardian scholarship). I maintain that Girard's theory offers Pentecostals a fresh perspective on the affections-spirituality dynamic relative to Pentecostal engagement with the prosperity gospel.

13.3. Convergence and Conversation

The affective domain is central to Land and Girard's theoretical analyses of the human religious and social dimension. This centrality makes Girard's epistemology a

[965] Girard, *I See Satan*, 160.
[966] Girard, *I See Satan*, 130.

vital conversation partner with Pentecostal spirituality. For Land, the affections (burdened by negative "emotions" and "feelings" or vices) are the seat of Pentecostal spirituality and, thus, ethics. On the other hand, in Girard's mimetic theory, desire, which is in the genus of affective phenomena,[967] can be positive or negative and is the bedrock of archaic religions[968] and their progeny: modern human institutions, including social, political, and economic systems.

Girard's theory can also be understood to offer Pentecostals a critical perspective on the affections-spirituality nexus, particularly concerning understanding the problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel that expand on the affect-related problems discussed so far and contribute to outlining the contours of a sound Pentecostal Christian engagement with the phenomenon (see Table 13.1 for an overview of the comparative analysis to follow).

[967] The strong emphasis Girard placed on the relationship between mimetic desire and culture is indicated by the following statement: "If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish." Girard, *Things Hidden*, 7. My focus here is on drawing connections between the centrality of the affective domain in both the Girardian and Pentecostal schemata.

[968] Building on his comments about the significance of mimetic desire to culture, Girard argued that the "whole structure of religion can be traced back to the mechanism of acquisitive mimesis." Girard, *Things Hidden*, 17.

Table 13.1. Assessing the prosperity gospel (PG) with Land's Pentecostal spirituality and Girard's mimetic theory.

Themes from Land's Pentecostal spirituality	**Corresponding themes in Girard's mimetic theory** (*response to problems with PG*)	**Potential problems with the prosperity gospel**
passion for the kingdom (*orthopathy*) acknowledgement of "carnal desires" that impinge on passion for the kingdom	**mimetic desire** the problem of acquisitive mimesis in religious observance (*understanding the affective domain*)	**problem of desire** avarice as a motivator for prosperity
the passion of Christ (*orthodoxy*) the need for passion-nurtured affections	**passion and apocalypse** objectification of the violence-unveiling quality of the passion of the Christ *(passion-centred prosperity)*	**problem of denial** denial of suffering in the quest for certainty
mission to the world (*orthopraxy*) the need for discernment in Pentecostal cultural engagement	**scapegoat mechanism and misrecognition** misrecognition of the scapegoating cycle that underpins human institutions and systems (*a cautious engagement with capitalism*)	**problem of mirroring consumer culture** risks associated with Pentecostals amalgamating the prosperity gospel with a neoliberal economic ethos

13.3.1. Understanding the affective domain: a response to the problem of desire

Land distinguishes between "carnal desires" and the Pentecostal affections in his treatment of Pentecostal spirituality. He, however, does not precisely discuss how they may work against the Pentecostal affections, whose ruling affection is the

"passion for the Kingdom." Girard's analysis of human desire can help to fill this lacuna. First, the Girardian analysis helps us understand how, for example, acquisitive mimesis, identified as "carnal desires" such as covetousness (and thus a vice), can pose a specific motivational problem to the Pentecostal hermeneutical process and affective life even with its alleged "passion for the Kingdom." For example, the Girardian analysis helps us see how acquisitive mimesis, perhaps having "intermingle[d] in the affections over time," may also be at the driving seat of the believer's affective life. Thus, it can help explain why, although the object of one's religious observance might be God, the fruit of that observance might still leave much to be desired (such as in the case of the crude expressions of the prosperity gospel).

Reflecting on Girard's theory, Kirwan discusses the implications of this flawed motivational dynamic for religious observance when he claims that "human desire for transcendence," rather than being considered as something unquestionably positive, can be problematic due to the dynamics of acquisitive mimetic desire, which opens the possibility for the desire for God to be "misdirected or distorted."[969] Thus, Girard's theory problematises the affective domain (and thus religious affections) by rendering it prone to acquisitive tendencies and thus to supporting neo-idolatrous

[969] Thus, Kirwan argues, "rather than reciprocating God's gratuitous love, … that desire is being 'lived as idolatry, a complete missing of the point'; it is the difference between the grasping appetite of a tourist and the calm possession of a resident." Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 54, citing James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1998), 47.

aspirations, such as could be described of the proponents of the problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel.[970] Thus, Girard's acquisitive mimesis motifs can provide a criterion for discerning motives and, to borrow Daniela Augustine's phrase, assist the "disciplining and reordering of affections" [971] towards authentic worship and ministry praxis based on a correct vision of God.

13.3.2. Passion-centred prosperity: a response to the problem of denial

Concern for an exemplary vision of God also underscores Land's schema of Pentecostal spirituality. Of particular interest to my aim to highlight the importance of incorporating passion-centred concerns in the prosperity dialogue is Land's emphasis on the passion in his atonement-based description of the ultimate source of the believers' "compassion." For example, Land states, "compassion is borne of inner peace with God based on and flowing from the peace made at Calvary."[972] Land emphasises the importance of the suffering of Christ as a means to grow in compassion when he contends, "to become compassionate is to carry daily in one's

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[970] Such critiques about desire for God (and by extension, spiritual matters) can find support in the Apostle Paul's teaching on the right attitude towards the desire of spiritual gifts (e.g., see 1 Cor. 14:1, where the exhortation to desire spiritual gifts is qualified by the command to "follow the way of love."). See Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 215–17. Pentecostal scholars also echo this exhortation. See Matthias Wenk, "Spiritual Gifts: Manifestations of the Kingdom of God," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 307, VitalSource Bookshelf. Also, concerning the idolatrous proclivities of prosperity gospel proponents, Heuser has noted similar criticisms by ecumenical councils and Christian scholars of the reified, idol-like status of "material abundance" in prosperity theology. See Heuser, "Prosperity Theology," 413–17.

[971] Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good*, chap. 3.

[972] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 143.

body the dying of the Lord."[973] Such comments (supported by passages such as Luke 9:23-24) signal the importance of the passion, the suffering of Christ, as a model for the believer in discussions concerning the ethical dimension of Pentecostal spirituality. Thus, according to Land's assessment of traditional Pentecostal theology, there is a connection between the passion motif and one's growth in compassion, which does not deny the reality of pain and suffering in life because of one's faith in Christ. Instead, the passion–compassion relationship in Land's account of traditional Pentecostal theology bears the trappings of a "soul-making theodicy."[974]

Such acknowledgement of the reality of a suffering–saintliness relationship converges with the premium Girard places on the passion of Christ. As discussed earlier, Girard's passion motif acknowledges God's ability to identify with those who suffer because Christ, God incarnate, suffered, thus highlighting the indubitable suffering dimension of the vision of the God of the Bible. This vision, I contend, must feature in any alleged faithful reading of God's attributes, particularly concerning God's response to human aspirations and suffering.[975] Therefore, the suffering–growth (orthopathy–orthopraxis) tension serves to offer a fuller picture of spiritual

[973] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 144.

[974] John Hick discusses the instrumentality of suffering (as much as pleasure) in God's fatherly care for his children in order for them to grow into spiritual maturity—the supreme reason why this world exists. See John Hick, "Soul-Making and Suffering," in *The Problem of Evil*, eds. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 168–71.

[975] A further qualification must be noted about Girard's view of Christ's relation to atonement theory insofar as he opposes the sacrificial tone ascribed to certain Christian atonement theories (e.g., substitutionary death), which he argues reflect pagan religions' violent underpinnings. See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 173–74.

growth linked to a correct vision of God (orthodoxy), a tension, as Joyce Meyer's epiphany about the relationship between suffering and faith indicate, seldom upheld by some proponents of the prosperity gospel, especially at the problematic end.

Macchia further emphasises the significance of a passion motif in prosperity discourse when he notes that Christ will have to be the "chief criterion for judgment"[976] and appeals to the self-sacrificing motifs related to the "path of the cross" as a criterion for discernment in the prosperity gospel.[977] Such comments bear the marks of a passion-centred outlook on prosperity that objectifies the suffering of Christ, placing it as a corrective and authenticating feature of Christian spirituality and ministry.

Similarly, the Girardian passion analysis can provide moral direction to Christian living and ministry and help foster a passion-centred prosperity outlook that mitigates the excess that characterises problematic expressions of the prosperity gospel. Indeed, the Girardian passion analysis highlights how the objectification of the passion of Christ unveils the scapegoat mechanism germane to such problematic expressions.

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[976] Frank D. Macchia, "A Call for Careful Discernment: A Theological Response to Prosperity Preaching," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 234.
[977] Macchia, "A Call for Careful Discernment," 235.

13.3.3. A cautious engagement with capitalism: a response to the problem of mirroring consumer culture

Finally, in Land's analysis, the early Pentecostals avoided the "world" because of their passion for the kingdom.[978] This appears to be a moot point because early Pentecostals came from the lower strata of society and appealed to the poor and socially marginalised, who experienced the liberating qualities of Pentecostalism; therefore, the early evangelistic fervour of the early Pentecostals also had broader, socially transformative implications.[979] Nevertheless, Land's proposal for a re-visioning of Pentecostal spirituality also contends for a focus on a passion for the kingdom, which encourages the church to practice what may be described as kingdom-ethical discernment in its engagement with structures; that is, Pentecostal spirituality encourages the church to "participate in those activities which more nearly embody righteousness, dignity, and love for people."[980]

As discussed earlier, contemporary discussion of the prosperity gospel suggests that Pentecostalism's pragmatic proclivities have caused an uncritical accommodation and mirroring of the capitalist ethos in some quarters of the movement. Also, there is a groundswell of Pentecostals flagging concerns about the

[978] In Land's estimation, early Pentecostalism's eschatological vision was driven by theological and pious themes, i.e., "justification," "sanctification," and "Spirit baptism." See Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 75, 87, 97, 98, 193–94.
[979] Wonsuk Ma and Julie C. Ma, "Missiology: Evangelization, Holistic Ministry, and Social Justice," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 280, VitalSource Bookshelf.
[980] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 206.

nature of this accommodation and mirroring.[981]

The Girardian epistemology of the capitalist economic system can add to the voices that question the seeming amalgamation of capitalism and Pentecostalism via the prosperity gospel. Girard's mimetic theory offers an anthropology of human institutions that explains the social violence often felt at the hands of modern institutions. For example, as Bernard Perret discusses in his analysis of mimetic theory and the free-market economy, ancient society's social order was predicated on "sacrificial cultural strategies," while in modern times, social order stands on the development of a "self-regulated peaceful social order based on individual freedom and the limitless promotion of acquisitive desires."[982] Regarding free-market economics, he notes:

> Violence and sacrifice remain omnipresent beneath the "peaceful enjoyment" of capitalist prosperity, so intimately embedded in ordinary social activity that they are hardly recognizable. Bloody violence has always been a threatening reality, and the typical modern means of controlling violence is institutionalized competition.[983]

In addition to pointing out obvious conflict markers in free-market economies, such as "class warfare," Perret supports his claim by highlighting what he asserts is the

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[981] E.g., see Augustine's analysis of the limitations of capitalism and socialism relative to the Orthodox concept of *sobornost*, i.e., "Christ-centered spiritual togetherness." See Augustine, "Pentecost and Prosperity in Eastern Europe," 197–98.
[982] Bernard Perret, "The Economy as the Opium of the People," in *PHMTR*, eds. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 38, Kindle.
[983] Perret, "The Economy as the Opium of the People," chap. 38.

"sacrificial character of utilitarianism."[984] For example, he claims the unemployed are often used as scapegoats: as "potential competitors for salaried workers," the unemployed help keep salaries low because they provide a "sufficient level of lay-off fear" for the employed.[985] Thus, he concludes, "from a purely utilitarian perspective, individuals can be legitimately sacrificed if this proves necessary for increasing the global well-being of a population."[986]

I agree with Perret's assessment to the extent he can tie the problems with the free market he identifies to some unquestionably virtuous sentiments (e.g., fair treatment for all) at the heart of Girard's mimetic theory. Perret's assessment of the free market from a Girardian perspective also highlights, from an anthropological and economic perspective, why a critical engagement with the free market is necessary for the prosperity gospel discussion. The anthropological analysis highlights typically misrecognised scapegoating elements in the competitive underbelly of the free market and its propensity to promote social violence. These are issues of moral and ethical proportion that Pentecostals are typically concerned about, as exemplified in Land's proposal for re-visioning the passion for the kingdom to uphold a vision for the "disinherited."[987]

To what extent can the combined reading of Land and Girard's theories inform our understanding of the value of the Eucharist for addressing the prosperity

[984] Perret, "The Economy as the Opium of the People," chap. 38.
[985] Perret, "The Economy as the Opium of the People," chap. 38.
[986] Perret, "The Economy as the Opium of the People," chap. 38.
[987] Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 208.

gospel in particular and broader culture in general? These are issues I will discuss in the following sections.

13.4. Eucharistic Perspectives on the Problems with the Prosperity Gospel

The combined reading of aspects of Land's Pentecostal spirituality and Girard's mimetic theory offer critical ideas for a sound Pentecostal engagement with the prosperity gospel. They can also be understood, to varying degrees, to correspond with aspects of the Eucharist, as I have discussed so far. [988]

For example,[989] the call to understand the "affective domain" in both Land and Girard's analysis can be reviewed through the lens of the Eastern-European Pentecostal eucharistic practice of pre-eucharistic fasts to highlight how the latter can

[988] Land discusses the Eucharist in his work as part of his reflection on early Pentecostal approaches to the rite. To this end, he discusses how the early Pentecostals understood the Eucharist as not the "*sine qua non* of Christian existence." Instead, he notes that the rite was considered "important because Jesus was present keeping the Passover and promising the parousia in the Holy Spirit." Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 111. However, Land identified aspects of the early Pentecostal approach that complement my thesis on the rite's social dimension when he states that for Pentecostals, "To eat or drink with unconfessed sin was to court danger, sickness, or even death. Pentecostals took the warnings of the Corinthians to heart, thus making communion a solemn time of soul-searching and consecration." Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 110. However, what is 'missing' in Land's work is a full discussion on the social dimension of the rite — even though he could also be understood to discuss the positive implications of the rite for spiritual formation and discipleship in contemporary Pentecostalism when he notes that "Moral integration will be an ongoing, daily gift of grace through all means of grace [which includes the Lords Supper]." Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 204.

[989] What follows is a brief analysis of the points of contact between my Land-Girard analysis and my analysis of the Eucharist. The following section will further develop these points (where I discuss the Eucharist vis-à-vis the Pentecostal engagement with the broader culture).

function as a strategy for addressing the problems of desire.[990] Also, the principle of a "passion-centred prosperity" objectifies the suffering of Christ, the paschal mystery central to the Eucharist.[991] Thus, the Eucharist embodies the passion-centred ethos that I have argued can bring a corrective to the prosperity gospel. Finally, the "cautious engagement with capitalism" corresponds with the themes of equity and sharing that characterise the Eucharist celebration in 1 Cor 11:17-34.

I am also interested in ascertaining to what extent Pentecostals can conceive the Eucharist as instrumental to the discerning of these concepts (i.e., addressing the problem of desire, passion-centredness, and cautious engagement with capitalism) beyond the particular discourse around the Pentecostal-prosperity gospel relationship (discussed so far in this chapter) to addressing Pentecostal engagement with broader culture in general. This is what I will discuss in the next section.

13.5. "Eucharistic Discernment" and Developing Contrast-Cultural Pentecostal Communities

Daniela Augustine has highlighted the pedagogical value of the Eucharist and reflected on the implications of the "common good" within the context of eucharistic celebrations.[992] Her reflections on the Eucharist celebration's socio-ethical implications correspond with my Girardian model reading of the Eucharist, particularly its ethical aspirations.

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[990] See Chapter 12.
[991] See Crichton, "A Theology of Worship," 13.
[992] See Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good*, chap. 3.

My departure with her, however, is my interest in the Girardian claim of the scapegoat mechanism's clandestine workings and cognate forces (acquisitive mimesis, the idolatry of models, misrecognition). I am interested in how the Eucharist's celebration in Western Pentecostal assemblies can respond to this spiritual and cultural (i.e., anthropomorphic) phenomenon.

Thus, as fig. 13.1 illustrates, I correlate the Girardian Model Eucharist to ethical values of significance to Pentecostal engagement, given my discussions about the criteria of a sound engagement with the prosperity gospel as discussed in the above Land-Girard analysis. By drawing this correlation between my model and the criteria developed from the Land-Girard analysis, I aim to highlight how the teaching of the model fosters, to borrow Vondey's phrase, "eucharistic discernment"[993] by helping churches develop corresponding values, namely, disciplining the affections, passion-centredness, and equity for all. Thus, "eucharistic discernment" in my analysis spans the mimetic theory-informed teaching of the Eucharist and the ethical values that I purport likely to result from its application.[994]

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[993] Vondey states, "eucharistic discernment means to recognize in the meal the continuing presence of Christ and as a consequence the possibility of and responsibility for creating and sustaining the unity of the church. It is an exercise that seeks to recognize the presence of Christ in the other and thereby acknowledges the other as a member of the one body . . . It is as much a theological undertaking as it is an emotional, psychological, ethical, and social responsibility." Vondey, "Pentecostal Ecclesiology," 49.

[994] Vondey's "focus" is on "prayer, teaching, fellowship, and the breaking of the bread (see Acts 2:42) *through* which the act of discernment takes place." Vondey, "Pentecostal Ecclesiology," 48. My "focus" in using the term "eucharistic discernment" is on the "ethical, and social" dimensions of the Eucharist and is also concerned with "prayer, teaching,

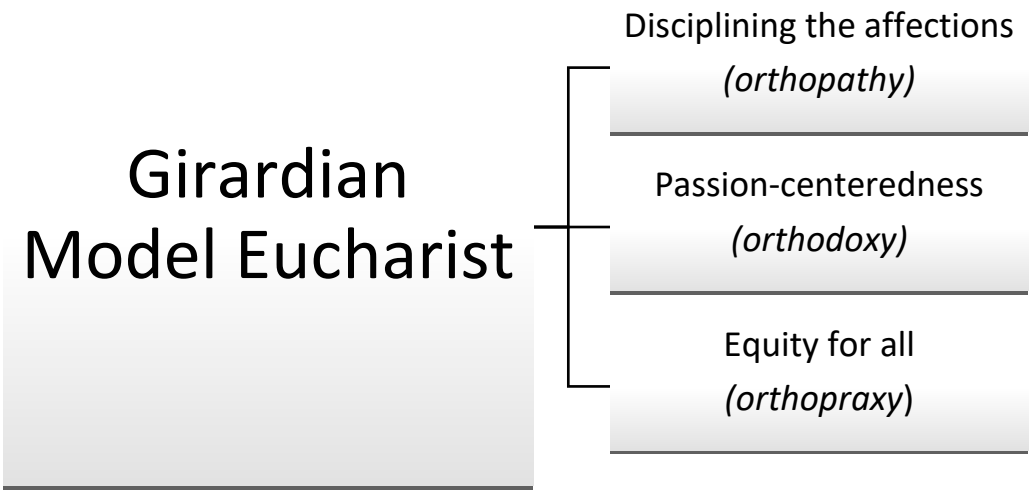

Fig. 13.1. The Girardian Model Eucharist and "eucharistic discernment"

In the following sections, I discuss how the Girardian Model Eucharist could be incorporated into Pentecostal eucharistic worship. As discussed in Chapter 1, my thesis focuses on interpreting the passage;[995] thus, the discussions do not pretend to offer a 'comprehensive' outline of how the model could be applied to the Communion service.

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fellowship, and the breaking of the bread." I also class all these acts as forms of "teaching," that is, direct teaching ("teaching" proper) and indirect teaching ("prayer . . . fellowship, and the breaking of the bread"). Nevertheless, I understand the "prayer . . . fellowship, and the breaking of the bread" as key acts of discernment (teaching/learning) that are ancillary to the foundational mimetic theory-informed eucharistic "teaching" that directs these other acts so they can help nurture values of disciplining the affections, passion-centredness, and equity for all amongst participants.

[995] This also involves the broader task of developing a "model of engagement" between Pentecostal theology (including cultural engagement) and mimetic theory.

13.5.1. Disciplining the affections and the Girardian Model Eucharist

As already discussed, Eastern European Pentecostals have discussed the relationship between desire, the Eucharist, and the social world. The Girardian Model Eucharist also addresses the 'disciplining of desires' issue as it challenges Pentecostal worshipers (as receivers) to remember (Luke 22:19) Christ's Passion at the table.

While not the only way to consider how Pentecostals may 'remember', a possible occasion for the process can occur during the call to "examine" oneself (1 Cor 11:28), a time of introspection and private prayer that is typical of Pentecostal eucharistic celebrations.[996] In this moment of 'remembering', worshippers could be encouraged to reflect on Christ's 'Father glorifying' desires during his Passion (Luke 22:42). Reflective moments during the Eucharist centred on such passages could promote a form of "mimetic abiding," opportunities for worshippers to reflect on the object of their desires as they contemplate Christ's decision to glorifying his Father (which is an example of 'disciplining the affections').

In this model, eucharistic celebrations can also be conceived of as being attuned to the risks associated with the "cultural accommodation" and "dynamic resignification" practices that plague Pentecostal cultural engagement, as discussed in the case of the prosperity gospel. This is because eucharistic celebrations predicated not least on teaching (directly/indirectly) the social as much as

[996] Of course, the Pentecostal churches in the West could also adopt the pre-eucharistic fasting practices of their Eastern European counterparts.

sacramental dimensions of the Eucharist (as characterised in the Girardian Model Eucharist) will necessitate a constant critique of the social world's value systems relative to the ideals about God's character central to the model itself.

13.5.2. Passion-centredness and the Girardian Model Eucharist

One such ideal is what Robinette describes as the "pacific reality of God,"[997] the idea of God's self-giving and peace-oriented nature. In the Girardian schema, maintaining the "pacific reality of God" can be conceived as key to advancing an authentic Christian ethic and ministry insofar that if the self-giving Christ of the Passion is not imitated/worshipped, mimetic rivalry stemming from the desire for idol-models (i.e., anything other than Christ as described) will ensue.[998]

This is why Hamerton-Kelly's Girardian reading of the apostle Paul's appeal to his hearers to consider his apostolic ministry as paradigmatic of authentic Christian ministry is essential (see 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). Hamerton-Kelly convincingly argued that Paul's apostolic ministry mimicked the crucified Christ—his "self-sacrifice"—and thus is exemplary of the "divine agape" at work in a ministry.[999] Thus, Paul's ministry sets the tone for how Christian ministry should be expressed,

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[997] See Brian D. Robinette, "Contemplative Practice and the Therapy of Mimetic Desire," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 24, no. 1 (2017): 76, https://doi:10.14321/contagion.24.1.0073.

[998] Such a view is also based on Hamerton-Kelly's application of Girard's theory to Pauline studies, especially when he argues that "divine agape", of which he asserts that passages like Romans 5:1–11 indicate, is most revealed in the crucifixion. Thus, it can "never be rivalrous; [since] the mediator is ontologically beyond comparison and agape is the desire to give, not to acquire." Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 171, 173.

[999] Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 174–79.

that is, essentially as an "agapeic mimesis [that] is a way of knowing the other that is the opposite to the status-laden way of the 'flesh' (2 Corinthians 5:16)."[1000] Such themes resonate with the objectification of the suffering of Christ in the passion-centredness motif (and therefore self-lessness and compassion motifs) of my Girardian Model Eucharist, which could be taught not least as part of the eucharistic celebration.

Furthermore, the Girardian Model Eucharist proposes a crucicentric-eucharistic-remembering (i.e., a remembrance focused on the socio-critical and peace-oriented quality of the Passion).[1001] Again, this could be incorporated into the self-examination period of the rite (or perhaps as part of the teaching of the Word in preparation for the celebration of the rite).[1002] Amongst the possible outcomes of this crucicentric-eucharistic-remembering in this manner is that it invites worshipers to reflect critically on the socio-critical acts of God in the Passion of Christ.

[1000] Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 178.

[1001] Indeed, Black notes that early British Pentecostals espoused a cross-centred contemplation of the Eucharist. But this seemed to reflect an emphasis on salvation and evangelism over and above the implications of contemplating the cross at the Eucharist as a means to societal critique and social action. See Black, "The Holy of Holies," 12–15, 20–21.

[1002] While not a custom of Pentecostal churches, another possible way the socio-critical acts of God in the Passion vis-à-vis the eucharistic service can be brought to the attention of worshipers can be to adopt and modify the time of "Confession and Absolution" in preparation for the Eucharist which is typical of the Lutheran liturgical tradition. For a brief discussion on this aspect of Lutheran liturgy, see James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship: Third Edition Revised and Expanded* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 268. Also, the incorporation of "dismissals" in the Anglican liturgical tradition, prayers which "often refer to service to the world" following the eucharistic worship service. See Geoffrey Wainwright, "Recent Eucharistic Revision," in *The Study of Liturgy: Revised Edition*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold SJ and Paul Bradshaw (London: SPCK, 1992), 335.

Such a crucicentric focus in the act of eucharistic remembering also reflects Hamerton-Kelly's compelling claim, which argues that what the early church imitated was the "summary act of …[Christ's] crucifixion" as also lived out in Paul's life, and not "any specific pattern of ethics drawn from the memory of his life."[1003]

13.5.3. Equity for all and the Girardian Model Eucharist

In addition, the Girardian Model Eucharist can be instrumental in encouraging Western Pentecostal worshipers to think of the marginalised 'other' through their regular sharing and self-examination at the table.

The mimetic theory principles of 'modelling' vis-à-vis God's self-giving and identification with victims may find expression during this part of the service in asking groups of church members to serve each other the elements at the table(s). Also, an offertory procession could be introduced to the service, where, for example, pressing issues that affect minority communities in the church and a biblical-mimetic perspective on them could be held up by members of the procession on a banner for all to see. Such action may help communicate the church's cognisance of such issues and help mitigate "marginal insider" experiences in the church.

Also, such actions can occasion repentance and reconciliation with God and others if people see how they might be instruments of scapegoating themselves.

[1003] Based on passages like 2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:5–11; cf. Phil 3:10; Rom 15:1–3; Gal 6:17, see Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence,* 176. Also, the crucicentrism aspects of the *anamnēsis* are emphasised in this study because "As the prayer following the consecration of the elements it 'recalls' the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11:24, 25)." See McKim, "anamnesis," 10.

Overall, this critical self-reflection allows for the church's spiritual transformation, or as O'Brien implies, it is a type of *theosis* via *kenosis*.[1004]

Besides, the Girardian Model Eucharist seeks to open the door (Rev 3:20) for the Spirit of Christ to be present at the table. This dynamic manifestation and the teaching and learning opportunities it produces (John 16:13) can occasion liberation from the idolatrous and violent effects of the God-alienated social order, such as the penchant for marginalising or scapegoating minorities. This is because, as discussed already, the Spirit in the Girardian reading also functions as the 'unveiler' of the scapegoat mechanism, especially to those described as dominant or in the 'in-group'. This unveiling action of the Spirit is instrumental in conforming Christian communities to the image of Christ, the model par excellence (Rev 3:18).

These proposals of the application of the Girardian Model Eucharist signal what I consider a significant aspect of my thesis: the model aims to prevent Christian communities—like Pentecostals—that traffic in the affective domain in their production and reception of cultural objects from unwittingly being sullied (even

[1004] O'Brien notes, "In human beings *theosis* and *kenosis* are intimately linked: the more a human being empties self and lets go of one's ego, the closer he or she can come to divinity. A 'god by grace' is one who no longer has self in self, but is more conscious of God in self. Or as the Apostle Paul writes, 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2:20)." Scott O'Brien, "Partakers of the divine sacrifice: liturgy and the deification of the Christian assembly," *Liturgical Ministry* 18, no. 2 (2009): 74. Also Black echoes this theme in his discussion on Pentecostalism and the Eucharist when he notes "Sanctification is an aspect of the theosis which takes place at the Lord's Table." Black, "The Holy of Holies," 22.

through "dynamic resignifications"!) by the self-aggrandising and unjust values of the God-alienated social order.[1005]

Instead, the disciplining of desires, passion-centredness, and equity that resonate with a Girardian model-informed reading of the Eucharist develop a "contrast" instead of a counter (or intra-)[1006] cultural approach to engaging (and thus, redeeming) the God-alienated social world.[1007] This approach describes Christian communities organised around the ethical and socio-economic vision of the present-but-not-yet Kingdom of God (Matt 5:3-12, Luke 3:11; 12:15; Acts 2:44-45).[1008] I will develop these themes in the next chapter, combining the various strands of my social-scientific method to interpret the meal motif in Rev 3:20.

[1005] Through my social-scientific interpretation of the Rev 3:20 passage, I will also be looking at how the Eucharist can be understood to function as an antidote to the othering-scapegoating that characterises the God "alienated" social world order, to borrow the 'Winkian' phrasing on these matters. See Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 52.

[1006] "intra" addresses accommodations and "dynamic resignification" methods.

[1007] In keeping with other Girardian scholars, I refer to the "contrast" instead of "counter" to depict the non-reciprocal nature of the Girardian understanding of an ideal community response to the evil of the victim mechanism in society. For a full discussion of the difference between the "contrast" and "counter" motifs in Girardian thought, see René Girard, Walter Wink, Duncan Morrow and Vern Redekop, "Colloquium on Violence and Religion. Mimesis, Creativity, and Reconciliation. May 31 to June 4, 2006," *Saint Paul University YouTube Channel*, https://youtu.be/ih6nNxFBOwk?t=1659, 27:39– 29:00.

[1008] With regards to political and economic systems, my interpretation of a "contrast-culture" is one that contends for the application of the values of the Kingdom of God inaugurated at the resurrection and continued by the Holy Spirit. At the same time, however, my interpretation of the contrast culture does not advocate an ignorance of or lack of engagement with economic and political systems. I agree with Meeks when he suggests that "every Christian should be prepared to think about economics and to participate in economic life according to the criterion of God's righteousness in Jesus Christ." See M. Douglas Meeks, *God The Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 3. See also similar sentiment in Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (London: The IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1991), 336.

13.6. Conclusions

In conclusion, I have argued that while the theological discussions of the problems of the prosperity gospel have been necessary, they have typically focused on hermeneutics, leaving the affective and economic dimension largely unexplored within Pentecostal theology. I have demonstrated that further reflections on affect and economic relations offer unique perspectives on the theological problem of the Pentecostal prosperity gospel, rooted in the problem of desire, denial, and mirroring consumer culture. These reflections about the affect-related perspectives vis-à-vis economic life help to account for the spiritual-affect nexus that characterises Pentecostal spirituality and interest in prosperity messages. I have also argued that these reflections would benefit from a comparative reading of Steven Jack Land's conception of Pentecostal spirituality and René Girard's mimetic theory. Thus, I have identified points of contact between Land's schema of Pentecostal spirituality, ethics, and cognate aspects in Girard's mimetic theory. I drew attention to the fact that they both focus on human interiority, the affective domain, whether in speaking of what may be deemed virtues (e.g., compassion, passion-centred ethic) or vices (e.g., carnal desires, acquisitive mimesis, scapegoating) and that this was foundational to their schema of spirituality (Land) or the human condition (Girard). In so doing, I highlighted how the two disciplines correspond on the topic of affect and signalled what seems to me to be a micro-level connection of cultural significance between them.

Based on my comparative reading of Land and Girard's theories, I offered

responses to the affect-related problems I identified, noting how this combined reading can offer a better understanding of the affective domain and promote passion-centred prosperity and cautious engagements with capitalism. In so doing, I signalled how incorporating both theories into the theological discussions might help Pentecostals further discern the contours of a sound Pentecostal-Christian engagement with the prosperity gospel.

Finally, I discussed how the Girardian Model Eucharist embodies the affective and ethical factors in Land's schema of Pentecostal spirituality and Girard's mimetic theory. I also discussed how such a conception of the Eucharist can be instrumental to developing a commendable Pentecostal engagement with the prosperity gospel and broader culture.

In the next chapter, I offer a literary contextual reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20. I will offer a eucharistic interpretation of the meal motif from a combined reading of aspects of my mimetic theory-informed analysis of the passage and the Pentecostal full gospel theological framework.

CHAPTER 14

INTERPRETING THE MEAL MOTIF IN REV 3:20 FOR A PENTECOSTAL CONTEXT

Some Pentecostal scholars have highlighted the significance of the Apocalypse for understanding the issues around cultural engagement in contemporary Western Pentecostalism that I discussed in the previous chapter. For example, writing within the North American Pentecostal context, Melissa Archer cautions that:

> The rising popularity of Pentecostalism and its growing acceptance in the mainstream of American culture likely offers the most subtle temptation [to false worship]. While the Apocalypse called John's hearers to resist the trappings of Babylon, it calls Pentecostals to resist the trappings of current culture.[1009]

The message to the Laodicean church (3:14-22) also emphasises this call to "resist the trappings of Babylon" in the Apocalypse. The message to the Laodicean church also highlights the error, often committed in some Pentecostal and Charismatic church circles, of a wholesale characterisation of societal indicators of prosperity (such as wealth, social standing, and influence) as 'spiritual blessings' (3:17-18). In addition, and through my mimetic theory reading of the origins of culture and its relationship to violence, I argue that these characterisations also persist because of a failure (due to "misrecognition") to account for the violence Girard alleges to underpin social orders and their related philosophies of success and well-being.

[1009] Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 311.

Therefore, with this mimetic theory reading of the message to the church in Laodicea in mind, in this chapter, I examine how the message to the Laodicean church can speak to the concerns around cultural engagement in contemporary Western Pentecostalism which I discussed in the previous chapters (i.e., Chapter's 12–13). More specifically, through a literary contextual analysis and close reading exercise, I examine the pedagogical quality of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 and how it highlights the spiritual and social renewal a church can experience through the weekly celebration of the Eucharist that focuses on the social, as much as the sacramental, factors of the ritual.

14.1. Revelation 3:14-22: Mimetic Theory and Pentecostal Theology Informed Interpretation.

In Chapter 10, I highlighted several points of contact between the message to the church in Laodicea and aspects of Girard's mimetic theory. To discuss those points of contact, I also reconstructed the message to the church in Laodicea by adapting Koester's claim that the message has three "concentric rings of thought" which highlight themes of "Sovereignty," "Prosperity," and "Dining." This reconstruction, particularly the discussion on "Dining," further served to justify my claim that the meal motif in Rev 3:20 has eucharistic meal associations. I further argued that the Girardian Model Eucharist reading of the "Dining" motif could help to highlight the social as much as the sacramental dimensions of the Eucharist while emphasising why the Eucharist should be central to the Pentecostal worship service.

In this chapter, I will engage in further theological construction of Revelation 3:14-22. I will highlight further points of contact between my mimetic theory reading of the Laodicean church's issues and the problems concerning the absence of the social dimensions of the Eucharist in contemporary Western Pentecostalism discussed in the previous chapter.[1010] This further analysis highlights how reading Rev 3:20 through the Girardian Model Eucharist can be used to understand these contemporary issues.

Also, and in keeping with typical Pentecostal theological and hermeneutic traditions, I have, first, adapted Koester's notion about the "concentric rings of thought" (which I will also refer to as 'motifs') that underpin the message to the Laodicean church by including 'Spirit' and 'Divine Healing' motifs to Koester's list. Second, I have paired the alleged motifs with the dominant elements of the Pentecostal full gospel narrative theological framework:[1011] Jesus the Spirit Baptizer,

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[1010] Again, this is because the sociological factors are the focus of my thesis. As discussed in the previous chapter, other Pentecostal scholars have already addressed the gaps concerning the sacramentality (and, in turn, centrality) of the Eucharist.

[1011] Typical presentations of the full gospel feature the 'Saviour' as the first element in the framework. However, as I am doing here, it is common for Pentecostals to apply the elements of the full gospel in creative ways; as Vondey notes: "The elements of the full gospel are never logically isolated or adhere to a strict theological sequence...Although the full gospel possesses an inherent narrative plot which proceeds through each of the five motifs, the connections between the different elements are not just linear but perhaps more akin to the stabilizing strands of a web that hold together the story of Pentecostal experiences and practices". Wolfgang Vondey, "The Full Gospel: A Liturgical Hermeneutic of Pentecost," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 176, VitalSource Bookshelf. Cf. McQueen, *Towards a Pentecostal Eschatology*, 216.

Jesus the Saviour, Jesus the Sanctifier, Jesus the Healer, and Jesus the Coming King[1012] (see fig. 14.1).

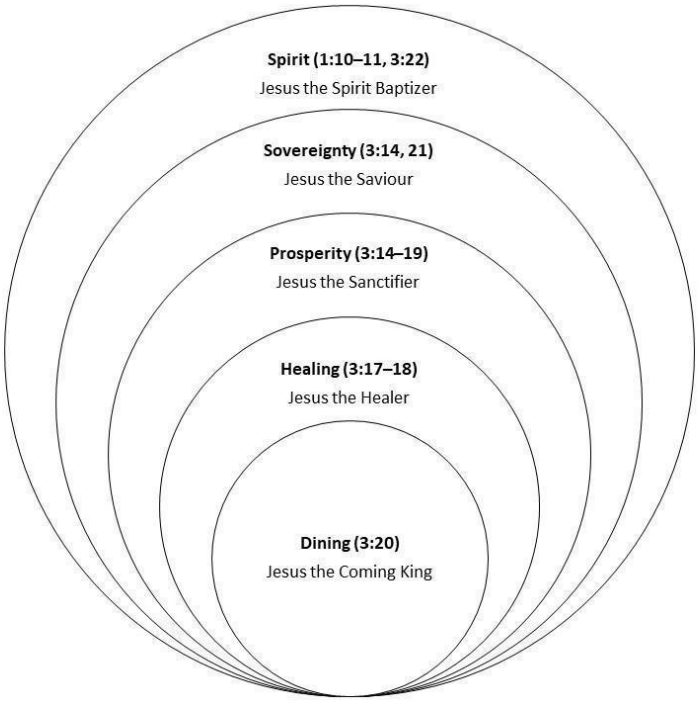

Fig. 14.1. Model of the "concentric rings of thought" for interpreting Rev 3:14-22 and their full gospel associations.

Larry R. McQueen's *Towards a Pentecostal Eschatology: Discerning the Way Forward* (JPTSup 39; Blandford Forum: Deo, 2012) also employs the fivefold gospel theological framework in his study on the Apocalypse. His theological construction

[1012] I am working with the five-fold (Wesleyan tradition) model of the full gospel, which, unlike the four-fold (Finished Work tradition) model, makes a further distinction between the Saviour (emphasis on Justification) and Sanctifier (emphasis on sanctification as a "second definite work of grace") elements. See Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 6. However, distinct from the second work of grace motif, I use 'Sanctifier' to describe psychological and socio-ethical dimensions of sanctification. See Kenneth J. Archer, "Nourishment for our Journey: The Pentecostal Via Salutis and Sacramental Ordinances," *JPT* 13 (2004): 89, https://doi.org/10.1177/096673690401300105.

focuses, however, on the eschatological motifs in Revelation, chapters 21–22, while mine is on the historical context of the Laodicean church and its relation to the meal motif in Rev 3:20. Moreover, McQueen's construction is exemplary of a theological interpretation of Scripture. On the other hand, mine, because I integrate Pentecostal and Girardian studies, represents a social-scientific interpretation of biblical texts. However, there perhaps are contact points between his work and my thesis that signal my contribution to Pentecostal studies on the Apocalypse using the fivefold gospel theological framework.

The elements of the full gospel emphasise the centrality of Christ and critical experiences in Scripture that are associated with the activity of the person of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal theology and experience.[1013] The lack of standardisation concerning the descriptions of each element of the full gospel means that the descriptions I discuss reflect statements akin to theologoumena since there is no authoritative statement on each element. Consequently, I will not offer a critical analysis of each description. Instead, I will highlight how the mimetic theory understanding of each motif contributes to the theological conceptions discussed under each element of the full gospel.

[1013] Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 21.

I find it appropriate to use the full gospel narrative framework as an "organizing paradigm"[1014] in my Pentecostal interpretation of the message to the church in Laodicea because, first, its Spirit-Christology focus parallels the focus on the risen Christ and the activity of the Spirit within the church in the passage (3:22, cf. 1:10-16). Second, as discussed in my introduction chapter, I agree with Wink that the angel of the churches in Rev 1—3 refers to the "spirituality of the congregation[s] as a single entity," and in the case of the Laodicean church, the fallen state of its angel, what I also describe as its 'unhealthy culture'. Therefore, it seems to me that the Spirit-Christology emphasis in the full gospel (with its exaltation of Christ's soteriological activity through the Spirit) serves as a fitting theological framework for evaluating the dissonance between the angel/culture problem of the Laodicean church and Christ-honouring ideals and practices, like the weekly celebration of the Eucharist, that I argue promote health in the church. Finally, the organising value of the full gospel comes to the fore in how I use it to correlate with the rings of thought. I argue that the Spirit (1:10, 3:22), Sovereignty (3:14, 21), Prosperity (3:14-19), and Divine Healing (3:17-18) themes correspond with the 'Spirit Baptizer', 'Saviour', 'Sanctifier' and 'Healer' elements of the full gospel, respectively. The discussions under each section will highlight how the full gospel narrative correlates with aspects of my mimetic theory reading of Scripture. In addition, these discussions

[1014] Kenneth J. Archer, "The Fivefold Gospel and the Mission of the Church: Ecclesiastical Implications and Opportunities," in *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology: The Church and the Fivefold Gospel*, ed. John Christopher Thomas (Cleveland, CPT Press, 2010), 29.

provide a critical thematic backdrop highlighting the social problems that I discuss under the Dining motif theme (3:20), with its corresponding 'Coming King' element in the full gospel. Furthermore, this latter-themed discussion, which represents the core theme in my rendition of the "concentric rings of thought," will address the mimetic theory and Pentecostal reading of the meal motif (3:20) that is the focus of my thesis.

14.1.1. Spirit motifs in 1:10-11 and 3:22 and Jesus the Spirit baptizer

A distinctive aspect of the Pentecostal experience is baptism in the Holy Spirit.[1015] As Vondey notes, this baptism occurs:

> [I]n the subject by means of the affections, abiding dispositions resulting from the encounter with the Holy Spirit and directing a person more fully toward God and neighbor . . . On the outside, Spirit baptism ignites a passion directed beyond one's self to the church and to the world.[1016]

Besides the evident parallels between the Spirit baptizer element and the prophetic factors in John's message (1:3),[1017] it is, however, Vondey's statement concerning the direction toward one's "neighbor," "church," and "world" (as much as God)

[1015] Wolfgang Vondey, "The Full Gospel: A Liturgical Hermeneutic of Pentecost," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 178, VitalSource Bookshelf.

[1016] Vondey, "The Full Gospel," 178.

[1017] Indeed, some Pentecostals assume an intersectionality between the baptism in the Spirit and charismatic gifts. See Frank D. Macchia, "Spirit Baptism: Initiation in the fullness of God's promises," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 254, VitalSource Bookshelf. Matthias Wenk, "Spiritual Gifts: Manifestations of the kingdom of God," in *RHPT,* ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 301, VitalSource Bookshelf.

following an encounter with the Holy Spirit in baptism that is of concern to my interpretation of the message to the Laodicean church. This "direction" highlights a social and, I contend, the critical orientation of the Spirit to that end (John 16:8-11) and the tenor of John's prophecy. Furthermore, this critical orientation of the Spirit is indicative of the discernment capabilities (i.e., truth disclosure, wisdom, knowledge) of the Spirit (John 16:13-14, 1 Cor 12:10, 11), which I label as "pneumatic discernment," to borrow Johnson's phrase.[1018]

My conceptualisation of "pneumatic discernment" overlaps with my conceptualisation of "eucharistic discernment" discussed so far. This is because I also assume the teaching ministry of the person of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) to be operative during the rite and is central to developing the Girardian Model Eucharist values of 'disciplined affection', 'passion-centeredness', and 'equity for all' (see Chapter 13). Thus, "pneumatic discernment" and "eucharistic discernment" are indelibly linked in my analysis.

Moreover, "pneumatic discernment" also corresponds with what I argue (according to Girard's mimetic theory) is the revelatory role of the Spirit in unveiling

[1018] I employ the Johnson phrase here. It alludes to the notion that in the Apocalypse, "Truth is discerned and received . . . ('in the Spirit') because the Spirit is the means by which divine discernment and truth are conveyed." David R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse: An Intertextual and Pentecostal Exploration* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2018), 352. The notion

the truth of the scapegoat mechanism in human societies.[1019] For example, "pneumatic discernment," as the act of the Spirit in unveiling the truth of the scapegoat mechanism (following the baptism of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost), can be attributed to (as I also discussed in Chapter 12), first, the Spirit's spotlight on those on the margins in Acts 2:17-18. Second, Peter's Passion-Christology-from-below in Acts 2:23b, 36. [1020] Third, the Spirit's role as liberator of those bound to the mimetic cycle in Acts 2:37. [1021]

More specific to the passages under investigation, my mimetic theory reading of "pneumatic discernment" can be attributed to the Spirit and the Spirit's function in prophecy in the messages to the churches in the Apocalypse. For instance, the messages also depict the result of Christ's act of unveiling (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) imminent events (1:1).[1022] This act of 'unveiling' can also be attributed to the

[1019] Mimetic theory focuses more on the unveiling, revealing meaning associated with the word apocalypse; as James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver note, "Apocalypse for certain Christians refers to God's judgment on and violent destruction of sinful humanity at the end of time. Yet it also retains its traditional meaning of "revelation," which mimetic theory emphasizes, giving it a specific content: Apocalypse is unveiling of the human origin of violence, and thus also of the nonviolent nature of God." See Alison and Palaver, *PHMTR*, n.p.

[1020] For an example of a Girardian reading of Acts 2:23, see Eric Lawrence Gans, "Christian Morality and the Pauline Revelation," *Semeia* 33 (1985): 97–98.

[1021] McQueen highlights how the "Spirit enables the Church's witness of Jesus," which includes "revealing to the world the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgement." McQueen, *Towards a Pentecostal Eschatology*, 245. My Girardian analysis of the Spirit's revelatory power here, therefore, represents a theo-anthropological reading of this view of the Spirit's 'witness' through the Church to the world.

[1022] I note the debate over whether this phrase should be translated as describing a 'revelation' 'from' or 'about' Jesus. However, I agree with Melissa Archer and Johnson who take the view that it is a revelation from Jesus to John—one which also reveals Jesus. See

Spirit in the description of John's pneumatic state (ἐν πνεύματι) on the Lord's Day (1:10). Thus, references to the act of unveiling and the Spirit, can be seen to be connected also to emphasise the role of the Spirit in unveiling[1023] the scapegoat mechanism (i.e., in the mimetic theory worldview). Also, this mimetic theory reading of "pneumatic discernment" offers a unique perspective to the refrain to the churches to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches (Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις), which is stated to the Laodicean church in 3:22.

In sum, my mimetic theory reading understands the reference to the Spirit in 3:22 as calling the Laodicean church (and the other churches in Rev 1—3) to "pneumatic discernment," which unveils the workings of the scapegoat mechanism and its cognate vices like idolatry. As intimated in Melissa Archer's comments cited earlier, such themes around discernment and false worship resonate with issues around the idolatry of models in contemporary Pentecostalism as well. These are issues that my integration of the saviour element with my mimetic theory reading on sovereignty in the message to the Laodicean church also addresses.

Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 121; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse*, 197.

[1023] Johnson also suggests a connection between the unveiling act of Christ and the reference to the Spirit in 1:10 in his conception of pneumatic discernment by arguing, through an intertextual reading of Isaiah 11:2, that the Holy Spirit is referenced in the "seven spirits" in 1:4, since, like the Spirit in Isaiah 11:2, they are near Jesus (the Messiah) and 'seven' attributes of the Holy Spirit are referenced in Isaiah 11:2, with three of them referring to "wisdom," "understanding" and "knowledge." Moreover, he argues that the Holy Spirit ("seven spirits") is referred to in the unveiling John experiences on the Lord's Day in 1:10. See Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, 198–99, 201.

14.1.2. Sovereignty motifs in 3:14 and 21 and Jesus the Saviour

In summary, the Jesus the Saviour element of the full gospel highlights the Pentecostal conviction that salvation is found in Jesus alone.[1024] Closely linked to this understanding of salvation is a conviction about the "lordship of Christ" that also emphasises the supremacy of Christ over all else in the Pentecostal believer's life.[1025] It would appear that in the contemporary Pentecostal cultural engagement context, such convictions are also at risk of being misplaced, given Melissa Archer's warning concerning the risk of misplaced worship practices in Pentecostalism:

> Pentecostals . . . should constantly discern whether or not they are unwittingly engaging in false worship. It can come in the guise of elevating Pentecostal pastors or leaders onto platforms from which the glory reserved for God is ascribed to them. It can happen in worship where style is worshipped more than God. It can happen when edifices are built 'to the glory of God' but then the community has no resources or desire to engage the world outside its doors.[1026]

What Melissa Archer challenges Pentecostals to be cautious about (i.e., the prominence given to pastors, worship styles and buildings) is the vice of the idolatry of models in the Girardian register. It seems to me that these vices, which have

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[1024] Kenneth Archer offers a succinct statement that offers doctrinal content for this element when he notes, "Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Heb.12.2). When persons call upon the name of Jesus, repenting from sin and turning to God, they are saved. They experience justification and regeneration. They are born again and have the Holy Spirit." Archer, "Nourishment for our Journey," 90.

[1025] This conviction is particularly observed in the Pentecostal worship-altar experience, as Vondey notes, "the walk to the altar is a conversion experience when it functions as an acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God, the lordship of Jesus Christ". Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 47.

[1026] Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 311. I also consider Archer's comments here to resonate with global Pentecostalism and not just addressing Pentecostals in North America.

apparent implications for Pentecostal conceptions of salvation-lordship as discussed above, also emerge partly because of the blurred line between the societal indicators of success-wellbeing and conceptions of spiritual blessings that characterise some Pentecostal ministries. Therefore, it appears to me that Pentecostal conceptions of salvation-lordship for contemporary times could benefit from a hermeneutic of suspicion analysis of culture, such as mimetic theory, which proposes a flawed dimension to social order and consequently invites more scrutiny of success-wellbeing indicators normative in broader society.[1027]

To this end, and for my interpretation of Rev 3:14-22, I have paired the salvation-lordship theme I ascribe to the saviour element in the full gospel with the sovereignty motif I have used to analyse Rev 3:14 and 21. [1028] First, under the discussion of the sovereignty motif, I suggested that through terms like ἀρχὴ in 3:14, which I argued signify imperial authority, John was comparing the sovereignty of the risen Christ with the normalised, though false sovereignty of the emperor. Second, I also argued that the emperor (insofar that he is worshipped and purported to be a 'god-man') characterises a "scandal" to the church (i.e., an obstacle and

[1027] See Chapter 11.

[1028] The sovereignty motif also addresses salvation and lordship themes as it relates to normative societal conceptions of success-wellbeing insofar that an additional backdrop to the sovereignty motif is the contrast that can be made between the good news of peace and salvation (*Pax Romana)* that the Roman Empire promoted in the Mediterranean (which, as it turned out, for many was a negative experience because of the violence at the heart of Roman imperialism), and the good news of peace and salvation of the Kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed. See Erin Vearncombe, Scott, Brandon, Taussig, Hal, *After Jesus Before Christianity*, 54–55.

negative model in the Girardian register), who, like Satan, dominates and demands the worship that belongs to God alone.

Therefore, John can be understood to be challenging the esteemed Greco-Roman societal norms of peace and salvation (*Pax Romana*), suggesting that by their violent underpinning, they do not represent true salvation, which is found in Christ and is not worthy of the worship and honour typically ascribed to Christ. Finally, from 3:21, I qualified the nature of Christ's sovereignty and rulership by suggesting, as McDonald does, that the one who 'conquers' (νικῶν) does so because they imitate the 'conquering' paradigm described in the passion of Christ.[1029]

The value of comparing my mimetic theory reading of the sovereignty motif with the saviour element (salvation-lordship) of the full gospel is that, first, besides signalling the usefulness of reimagining the meal motif in 3:20 as a Eucharist celebration attuned to social issues, the comparison reinforces the Pentecostal salvation-lordship idea of the supremacy of Christ, above all else in the believer's life.

Second, the comparison highlights the value of scrutinising (against the backdrop of passion-centered motifs) esteemed normative indicators of success-

[1029] McDonald, "Lion as Slain Lamb," 38.

wellbeing in society to safeguard ministries from unwittingly imitating probable violent aspects associated with those norms.[1030]

Finally, my reflection on a commendable practice of 'ruling' (3:21) cautions against the temptation for contemporary Pentecostal leaders and ministries to be self-serving and highlights the need for them to continue to imitate Christ's selfless leadership model,[1031] a theme that I develop next in my discussion on the prosperity motif of the passage.

14.1.3. Prosperity motif in 3:14-19 and Jesus the sanctifier

Jesus the sanctifier[1032] element of the full gospel, addresses the traditional Pentecostal emphasis on the believer's growth in holiness made possible through spiritual

[1030] McQueen also makes a similar point about the ethical implications of the saviour element for the Church when he notes that "Jesus is still *active* as Savior. He is bringing to pass or 'unpacking' the weighty significance of his redemptive Word-in-action on the cross, especially through the cruciform suffering of the Church (Acts 9. 5; Col. 1.24). This . . . insight has special relevance as a call for the Church to avoid both the extremes of pessimism and of triumphalism, and to adopt a discerning optimism about the future." McQueen, *Towards a Pentecostal Eschatology*, 225. Also, to the extent that McQueen highlights how Jesus' salvific work is especially manifest through the "cruciform suffering of the Church," which has implications for church ethics, he adds weight to my claim concerning the value of the examination of the relationship between the suffering/passion motifs of the saviour element and church ministry.

[1031] For example, by pushing back on the often-unbridled honour and privileges some churches afford their leaders because of their charisma or titles. Cf. Matt 8:18; John 6:15.

[1032] Again, distinct from the "second work of grace" motif, I use 'Sanctifier' to describe the psychological and socio-ethical dimensions of sanctification. See Archer, "Nourishment for our Journey," 89.

formation, which Kenneth Archer succinctly describes as centred around the ongoing intercessory work of Christ and the renewing activity of the Spirit.[1033]

The emphasis on the role of Jesus in the sanctification process (so-called "Christological pole") is significant to my analysis of the topic because the messages to the seven churches in the Apocalypse casts Jesus' role as a catalyst of sanctification into sharp relief (1:9-19). [1034]

Concerning the message to the church in Laodicea in particular, Jesus' sanctifying qualities are particularly noticeable when reading the titles used to describe Jesus in the opening passages of the message in light of mimetic theory concepts of 'models'. These sanctifying qualities associated with the titles stand out when set against the description of the risen Christ's intervention to address the misguided assumptions of spiritual blessings in the church.

[1033] E.g., Kenneth Archer describes the sanctification element: "He is our High Priest who intercedes for us praying that we would be sanctified (Jn 17). We realize that holiness flows from the very nature of the Holy Spirit through whom we participate in the divine life. Holiness is to permeate our entire being, affecting all aspects of our life as we continue in the *via salutis*." Archer, "Nourishment for our Journey," 91. Archer's distinction between the role of Jesus and the Spirit in sanctification reflects the understanding of two interconnected poles (Christological and pneumatological) held together by "divine love" that underpins Pentecostal discourse on sanctification. The Christological pole highlights aspects of sanctification that could be attributed to the atoning work of Jesus (i.e., "the healing of the soul through pardon from guilt and purification from the disease of sin . . . grounded in the blood of Christ"). The pnuematological pole highlights an aspect of sanctification that is attributed to the Holy Spirit (i.e., the understanding that "healing unfolds through ongoing moments of deliverance made possible by the Spirit's outpouring of love"). See Dale M. Coulter, "Sanctification: Becoming an icon of the Spirit through holy love," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 245, VitalSource Bookshelf.

[1034] Notions of the sanctifying work of the Spirit have already been intimated in my discussion on the Spirit motif, especially my comments on the unveiling function of the Spirit.

Therefore, as I have already discussed in Chapter 10, it seems to me that the presentation of Christ as 'the Amen' (ὁ ἀμήν) and 'the faithful and true witness'(ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός)[1035] in 3:14 speak of not only the moral supremacy of the risen Christ vis-à-vis the emperor but is also indicative of the positive model that Girard insists Jesus represents. This 'positive model' conception of Christ can help highlight the 'Christological pole' sanctification motif that underscores the narrative on prosperity in 3:17-18. Therefore, one may now interpret the passage as describing the risen Christ encouraging the church to redirect its energy and devotion away from models (idols) that offer false security and prosperity (3:17) unto himself, the positive model, the giver of "spiritual blessings" that the church needed (3:18).[1036]

As previously mentioned, such notions of Christ as a positive model reflect ideas of *imitatio Christi* and the transformation (sanctification) that it affords.[1037] Finally, the pericope on prosperity ends in 3:19 with a further sanctification theme,

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[1035] Aune also points out that the title 'Amen' stems from the title of God in Isaiah 65:16, which speaks of his faithful and truthful nature. See Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 254.

[1036] McQueen also discusses this dimension of sanctification in his analysis of the sanctification motifs in Rev 21:2-3. For example, he highlights how the New Jerusalem contrasts with Babylon (which tries to "mimic the glory of the holy city"). He notes that the challenge to the believer is to separate themselves from Babylon, the "false source of salvation." Furthermore, he discusses the implications of this understanding of sanctification vis-à-vis Babylon for the churches in Asia Minor when he states that John's challenge to the believers was not to flee their respective cities "but rather to repent and put away the sins that were prevalent there." See McQueen, *Towards a Pentecostal Eschatology*, 230. For discussions that also complement this idea of sanctification in my thesis, see my closing comments in Chapter 9, where I discuss how the Girardian reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 articulates a type of spiritual transformation that promotes a 'contrast-culture' and thereby understands such meals (and the Eucharist) as a 'sustainability strategy for the churches' while they exist in the scapegoat mechanism culture of 'Babylon'.

[1037] See chapter five.

namely, a call to holy living insofar as the risen Christ, the positive model, is described as reassuring the church of his love and commitment to those he disciplines (ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω) and encouraging the church to be zealous and to repent (ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον).

These prosperity issues (i.e., the pursuit of false models of success-wellbeing) find a parallel with aspects of the contemporary Pentecostal scene discussed in the previous chapter. For example, the Laodicean church appeared, like some proponents of the prosperity gospel, to have wrongly assumed that their material wealth was on all accounts an indicator of spiritual blessings. As with the sovereignty motif, the value of the mimetic theory reading of sanctification as I have described above (i.e., Christ as a positive model) is that it can contribute to Pentecostal views of sanctification based on the Christological pole. It does so by highlighting how Jesus as a positive model can serve to not only offer a critique of models of success-wellbeing (as with the sovereignty motif) but also, through its mirroring of the *imitatio Christi* motif, emphasise conceptions of Jesus as a catalyst of sanctification, who, as I discuss next, also offers the healing that the church needs.

14.1.4. Divine healing motif in 3:17-18 and Jesus the healer

In the full gospel, Jesus the healer accounts for the testimony of the healing ministry of Jesus.[1038] Within Pentecostalism, as Kenneth Archer notes, "Healing is not limited to just the physical but extends to the whole person; hence emotional or inner healing is also included."[1039] This understanding of healing, which involves a spiritual as much as a physical dimension, is echoed in aspects of the renewal motifs I discussed in the mimetic theory reading of sanctification, which emphasises the Christological pole of sanctification. For example, the notion that the risen Christ, the 'positive model', offers the "spiritual blessings" that the Laodicean church needed (3:18) can be recontextualised under the topic of healing to argue that it also relates to the possibility of divine healing offered by Christ, if the description of the spiritual state of the church in 3:17b is also understood to be an indication of the 'spiritually unwell' state of the church.

Drawing parallels between the 'spiritually unwell' state of the Laodicean church and certain forms of contemporary Pentecostalism does not seem too farfetched. Indeed, the self-assured state of the Laodicean church reflects the self-assured posture of some Pentecostal ministries that espouse problematic prosperity doctrines, which some scholars (as discussed in the previous chapter) caution are a real temptation for Pentecostal ministries. The prosperity (success-wellbeing) issues

[1038] As Kenneth Archer notes, "Jesus healed people of diseases and performed exorcisms, manifesting the presence of the Kingdom of God in a tangible restorative manner (Acts 10.38)." Archer, "Nourishment for our Journey," 93.

[1039] Archer, "Nourishment for our Journey," 93.

also highlight the nexus between the spiritual and sociological dimensions of the social order which churches operate within, a dimension of social order that it seems to me that the meal in 3:20 sought to address in the Laodicean church. Hence, in this thesis, I have contended for interventive (and preventative) strategies like a weekly celebration of the Eucharist in the church informed by conceptions of the social dimensions as much as the sacramental factors of the ritual.

This social dimension of the Eucharist that is the focus of my thesis is also significant to the Pentecostal conceptions of divine healing.[1040] First, it is not unusual for Pentecostals to anticipate divine healing during their eucharistic celebration,[1041] an event whose locus is the church altar.[1042] The Pentecostal understanding of divine healing at the altar in Pentecostalism also applies to the physical and, by extension, social dimensions of human experiences.

[1040] McQueen also notes that "Jesus heals so that those who are made whole contribute to the wholeness of the community, becoming conduits of health, not only among one another but also to the broken society and creation around them. Healing always has a social dimension." Although he makes this point in connection to his discussion on the peace and wholeness experienced by the Church as a "proleptic sign of the healing of the nations" in the eschaton, it does also highlight a general understanding of a nexus between divine healing and society assumed in Pentecostalism. See McQueen, *Towards a Pentecostal Eschatology*, 134.

[1041] See Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 85–86.

[1042] E.g., Vondey suggests that "the altar is …the eucharistic table." Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, *57*. See also Green, who suggests that "The Eucharist-event finds its home within the altar-event because the sacramental and the mystical/charismatic are made for each other." Chris E.W. Green, "Sacraments: Rites in the Spirit for the presence of Christ," in *RHPT*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 316, VitalSource Bookshelf.

I make such claims based on the Pentecostal understanding of divine healing that Vondey suggests also takes place at the altar[1043] when he states that "The materiality of this liturgy extends not just to bodily healing but also to remedies for unemployment, family quarrels, racism, marital conflict, and to the well-being of the nation and the environment."[1044] Such views about the intersectionality between the social dimension of divine healing and the Eucharist offer a critical backdrop to my analysis of the dining motif in 3:20 and the Eucharist-fellowship meal typically connected with the coming king element of the full gospel.

14.1.5. Dining motif in 3:20 and Jesus the coming king

Pentecostals tend to connect the coming king element of the full gospel and the Eucharist fellowship meal. For example, Kenneth Archer notes that:

> Jesus is coming soon to receive his eschatological community, his Bride. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper dramatically reenacts our Savior's death (1 Cor. 11.23-26) but also prophetically recalls our Savior's promise that he will come again, and we, his people, will one day partake in that grand eschatological meal—the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Mt. 26.29). At this meal we will dine in the fully-realized identity and dignity of being God's people, saved and sustained through the mission of the Son and Spirit! [1045]

[1043] E.g., Vondey notes, "The liturgical contours of this theology [of healing] remain thoroughly connected to the altar while diversifying rapidly through three intersecting dynamics: (1) those saved, sanctified, and filled with the Spirit come to the altar to find healing; (2) those who experience healing at the altar take the altar into the world; (3) and those in the world who receive healing come to the altar for salvation." Vondey, "The Full Gospel," 179.

[1044] Vondey, "The Full Gospel," 179.

[1045] Archer, "Nourishment for our Journey," 94. He was also developing the claim made by Thomas, who proposed that "With regard to Coming King, the sacramental sign is appropriately the eschatological banquet, the Lord's Supper, a meal in which past, present, and future converge as we long for his appearing." John Christopher Thomas, "Pentecostal

This connection between eschatological and the Eucharist-fellowship meal has also been drawn by commentators concerning the dining motif in 3:20.[1046] It, therefore, echoes a correlation I am drawing between the social aspect of my Girardian Model Eucharist reading of the dining motif and the coming king element of the full gospel. Kenneth Archer's description of the coming king element, with its Eucharist-fellowship meal overtones,[1047] also draws attention to the social transformation and missionary emphasis that characterises early Pentecostal eucharistic theology, thus echoing the claim I make concerning the social dimension of the Eucharist.

Other Pentecostal scholars, like Vondey, have offered more comprehensive theological reflections on this topic, which makes it easier for me to highlight a relationship between the social and missionary dimensions of the Eucharist, considering its eschatological factors. For example, Vondey's reflections on the

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Theology in the Twenty-First Century," *Pneuma* 20, 1 (1998): 19, https://doi.org/10.1163/157007498X00027.

[1046] E.g., see Krodel, *Revelation*, 145; Reddish, *Revelation*, 84; Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 103.

[1047] See chapter one. McQueen's treatment of the 'Jesus as Coming King' element of the fivefold gospel narrative focuses on the 'coming' saying of Jesus in Rev 22:7, 12, and 20, among other related passages. He offers a compelling reading of the eschatological events in the Rev 19–20 passages, suggesting that they should be read as key stages, culminating in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Thus, he discusses the eschatological meal here as a key marker (final stage) in the events surrounding the eschaton, not for its theo-ethical implications or how it is anticipated in the Eucharist. Elsewhere, however, he offers discussions that give some weight to the connections that have been made concerning the relationship between theo-ethical considerations relating to the eschatological meal and its anticipation in Jesus' table fellowships (and, by extension, I would add, the Eucharist). For instance, under his discussion of the 'Jesus as Sanctifier' element, McQueen discusses the eschatological banquet as a motif of final salvation. And he rightly notes that Jesus' socially revolutionary approach to table fellowship during his earthly ministry anticipates the inclusion of not least the socially marginalised in the eschatological banquet (Matt. 11:19; Lk. 5:30. Cf. Lk. 6:20-26, 14:12-24). See McQueen, *Towards a Pentecostal Eschatology*, 234–35, 257, 269.

missionary implications of the eschatological motifs that underpin the coming king element of the full gospel help to focus the missionary dimension of Pentecostal eschatology to the events at the altar, of which the eucharistic table is a crucial feature. Vondey argues:

> [E]schatology not only draws Pentecostals from the altar to the ends of the earth but urges them to return to the altar for the signs and wonders of salvation, sanctification, Spirit baptism, and divine healing. Pentecostal eschatology culminates in an apocalyptic mandate to go and seek the lost, to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to bring the world to the altar.[1048]

The value of Vondey's description of the coming king and its relation to the altar for my interpretation of the dining motif in the 3:20 passage is that it first suggests that the Pentecostal eschatological impulse directs Pentecostals to the altar, of which the eucharistic table is also a key feature. Second, his description helps to tie the elements of the full gospel (i.e., Spirit baptism, salvation, sanctification, and healing) together so that they fuse at the altar-eucharistic table to empower worshipers who come to the table so they can continue their mission to the world. Similarly, it seems to me that the issues I raised in their corresponding motifs from my interpretation of the 3:14-22 passage (i.e., Spirit, sovereignty, prosperity, and healing) find their solution in the dining motif (which corresponds with the coming king).

Finally, and more specifically to the interests of this section, this juxtaposing of the altar-eucharistic table and the mission motifs of the coming king elements of the

[1048] Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 133.

full gospel resonate with the socially conscious factors I bring to bear in my Girardian Model Eucharist reading of the meal motif in 3:20. For instance, I have claimed that the 3:20 passage includes an offer of Christ to dine (δειπνήσω) with the church, which I claim has a eucharistic overtone.[1049] Moreover, because of the presence of the risen Christ, the meal positions the worshipper near the risen Christ in a ritual practice charged with spiritually therapeutic possibilities and socially transformative ones as well (as I emphasise in the socio-anthropological aspects of my Girardian Model Eucharist). This possibility of social transformation is present because the theoretical component (i.e., mimetic theory analysis) of my social-scientific reading of the meal motif in 3:20 claims the meal is associated with the social order by sacrificial systems alleged to characterise Greco-Roman banqueting traditions.

As I have argued in Chapter 8, this is a 'positive' association since the mimetic theory reading of Christian eucharistic banquets suggests a foundational difference between the early Christian eucharistic banquets and the banquets of their pagan counterparts. This difference exists not least because early Christian meals were predicated on the self-giving ethic of the passion and infused with "pneumatic discernment" (cf. Holy transcendence). Therefore, the ethics of this idealised version of the Christian eucharistic meal was meant to contrast the misrecognition of

[1049] See Chapters 3 and 4.

violence that characterised their pagan counterpart's meals (cf. "false transcendence").

My reading understands that the socially conscious issues discussed in what I claim, based on my mimetic theory reading, are the interpretive motifs of 3:14-22 (i.e., Spirit, sovereignty, prosperity, healing) are also addressed by a mimetic reading (Girardian Model Eucharist) that understands the meal motif in 3:20 as ladened with socially as much as spiritually transformative dimensions. These socially transformative dimensions, predicated on the self-giving ethics of the passion, call wholesale appropriations of societal norms of success-wellbeing into question.

Therefore, to the extent that Pentecostals (scholars and church leaders alike), as an exercise in "pneumatic discernment," can make mimetic theory connections in their interpretations of eucharistic-type meals in the Bible (and thereby foster "eucharistic discernment"), there is potential for such readings to offer unique socio-anthropological critiques on such meals, and thereby contribute to Pentecostal reflections on the Eucharist's missional dimensions.[1050]

Concerning Pentecostal worship services, articulating the mimetic theory reading of such eucharistic-type meals could be done, as I discussed in the previous chapter, during, for example, the call to 'examine' oneself (1 Cor 11:28), typically given during Pentecostal eucharistic celebrations. Such an articulation at this point of

[1050] E.g., see Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 307. I also discuss the impact of my work in my ministry practice in my conclusion chapter.

the service can foster discernment characteristic of the pneumatic/eucharistic type discussed so far in worshipers, enabling them to become more attuned to the socio-critical implications of God's actions in the passion of Christ. This can be achieved as they are a) led to draw parallels between the passion and the alleged violent underpinnings of human culture and b) challenged to identify with Christ's suffering and nonviolent resistance response to this violence.

14.2. A Close Reading of Revelation 3:20

> Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.[1051]

My thesis has argued that John's imagery of the meal with Christ at the end of his discourse on the problems in the church in Laodicea helps us better understand how the Eucharist may function in churches as a means of social and spiritual renewal. A close reading of Revelation 3:20 can be understood to support this claim.[1052]

[1051] NIV.

[1052] Featuring at this point in the thesis, this reading will, in part, be informed by my prior contextual analysis of the letter to the Laodicean church (especially in this chapter and Chapter 10) and the survey of the interpretations of the meal motif in particular (see Chapter 3). The reading will indicate how the passage can be understood as connected to the socio-religious problems I identified in the church in Laodicea. Also, it will highlight how the meal referenced in the passage can be understood to have eucharistic associations and support an argument for the weekly celebration of the Eucharist in Pentecostal churches.

The imperative Ἰδοὺ, also translated, "Here I am!" seems to connect the passage to the socio-religious problems I identified in the Laodicean church.[1053] The word's placement at this point in the letter—following a call to repentance (3:19b)—may suggest that the risen Christ is also trying to get the attention of the church,[1054] which, not least as a result of its prosperity,[1055] appears to be self-willed (3:17a) and distracted from its foundational calling to listen to and depend on him (3:18).[1056] Christ is, therefore, summoning the church to refocus its gaze on him as a prelude to its healing and restored fellowship with him.[1057]

This connection between the imperative Ἰδοὺ, the church and its characterisation as 'self-willed and distracted' is significant to understanding the problematic nature of the church's culture—a 'nature' its members could not discern.

[1053] Also, "behold" and "see" in the King James Version. See James Strong, *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* (Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc, 1994, 2003, 2006), n.p.

[1054] Aune's characterisation of "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock" as an "epiphany motif" seems to support the alleged 'attention-grabbing' connotations I propose here. See Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 259.

[1055] See discussion in section 14.1.3. Other Pentecostals have alluded to the prosperity motif in these passages. For example, Newton states, "Outward prosperity masked inward spiritual poverty and shame." Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 113. Also, Thomas and Macchia note that "The previous inversion of poverty and riches in the message to the church at Smyrna suggests that the emphasis of 3:17 means the church in Laodicea was rich financially and materially and understood itself to be rich spiritually as well, having need of nothing. An accommodating attitude to their environment may have led to their financial stability, as well as their prosperous spiritual self-assessment. Their claims, however, could not be further from the truth." Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 118.

[1056] Thomas and Macchia compare the 'purchase motif' in Isa 55:1-3 with 3:18 to make the compelling claim that "such purchases are synonymous with listening to the Lord and following his ways." Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 118.

[1057] Such an appeal is in keeping with the risen Christ's earlier pleadings to the church to seek his advice and to repent (3:18a, 19b).

The "angel of the church" addressed (3:14) is not only a reference to one of the key characters in the letters to the seven churches[1058] but it can also be understood as a reference to the church's 'culture', which can be described as unhealthy.[1059] Also, a significant aspect of this unhealthy status can be attributed to the problem of "cultural accommodation," which is implied in the assessment of the church's spiritual condition (3:15-18).[1060]

Therefore, it seems that the imperative mood in the word Ἰδοὺ, with its cognate meaning 'see', can be understood to signal the author's awareness of the lack of spiritual discernment operating in the church[1061] and its most egregious implication for their community: a) the lack of spiritual sight—seeing the risen Christ who "walks among the seven golden lampstands [the churches]" (1:20 and 2:1), and b) the socio-ethical implications of this blindness indicative of the church's door being closed to Christ (3:20a).

More specifically, one may understand the 'closed-door' imagery as symbolising the church establishing and maintaining social boundaries. Since the risen Christ now appears to "stand at the door and knock," he could now be

[1058] In Revelation 1–3, the main characters are John, Jesus and the churches. See Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 240.
[1059] See Chapter 1, where I discuss the Winkian understanding of the "angel of the church" as indicative of the church's culture.
[1060] See Chapter 10 and the analysis in the above sections in this chapter.
[1061] Something akin to the dynamic of "misrecognition."

described as 'present' but 'outside' the church, symbolising a boundary of sorts and thus an estranged relationship between Christ and the church.[1062]

At the same time, the depiction of the risen Christ as standing at the door and knocking could be understood to reveal a quality of his character.[1063] He can be understood to be meek and longsuffering[1064] insofar that he is depicted as waiting to be granted entry by those who have marginalised him from the very institution he gave up his life for (Ephesians 5:27).[1065] Such virtues complement the portrayal of Jesus as the "slain" lamb (5:6) and support the qualified view of the non-violence reading in some studies on the Apocalypse.[1066]

[1062] Thomas and Macchia also note how the "door" language signals an estranged relationship in the passage. However, they take their cue from the identification of Jesus with the door, who, ironically, is now depicted as standing "before the door of the church" as indicative of broken fellowship between him and the church. See Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 120. Also, as discussed in Chapter 10, a Girardian reading might reframe this portrayal of an estranged relationship as depicting Christ as a "marginal insider" in the church. Therefore, this passage could be read as a warning of what may result when churches imitate false models of power and success: Christ and all that he stands for ethically are at risk of being pushed to the margins of the church!

[1063] As Thomas and Macchia note, "The perfect tense verb 'I stand' indicates that Jesus has taken up a position outside the door of the church and remains there. The present tense verb 'I knock' reveals that he is continuously knocking, seeking entry." Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 120. Cf. also Rienecker and Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 822.

[1064] Such a description of his character seems appropriate here because the passage has also been noted to correspond with the 'lovers call' motif in Song of Songs 5:2. See Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 263. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 212.

[1065] Christ's humility in this action is further emphasised when compared to his earlier disclosure that he alone has the power to open and shut doors (3:7). See Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 120.

[1066] See Chapters 5 and 9.

However, such revelation and its salvific potency must be spiritually discerned. This is reflected in the language used in the conditions that are a prelude to his promise of renewed fellowship with the church: "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door." From the reference to φωνῆς, typically translated as "voice," there appears to be both speaking and knocking at the door.[1067] The reference to 'hearing his voice' is reminiscent of the words of Jesus in John 10:27, where he implies it is a definite quality of his followers.[1068] Thus, the church, its 'angel', seems to be suffering from impairment to its spiritual 'sight' and 'hearing', too! It also appears that this hearing includes a call to action, for the "door" must be opened by the church after the hearing to attain the promise of fellowship.[1069] Thus, the call to see, hear and act indicates the church's need for spiritual discernment,[1070] particularly of an 'active' kind.[1071]

[1067] "Christ is . . . announcing himself and knocking." Osborne, *Revelation*, 212.
[1068] Thus, I assume that "anyone" refers to the specific members of the church community.
[1069] Thomas and Macchia also see a connection between the hearing of the voice of Jesus motif here and in the Johannine corpus, particularly its relationship to "identity and discernment (10:3-5, 16, 27)." See Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 120. Such rich imagery indicates that the activity of hearing Jesus' voice reveals whether they know him and are identified as his sheep. Thus, this image pushes the hearers to discern their status vis-à-vis the resurrected Jesus. Again, my Girardian reading will attribute the impairment of their sight and now hearing to the workings of "misrecognition" in the Laodicea church.
[1070] This is supported by the refrain in the letters to the seven churches to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (e.g., 3:22).
[1071] See my discussion in section 14.1.1. By 'active' kind of discernment, I am drawing attention to the broad dimension of my understanding of "eucharistic discernment," which includes the relationship between theology, affection and action insofar as this concept of discernment also encompasses orthodoxy, orthopathy, and orthopraxy. See section 13.5.

Christ promises the discerning respondent, "I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (3:20c). As I discussed in Chapter 3, the word δειπνήσω, usually translated as 'to eat,' is the verb form of the noun δεῖπνον, which describes the main meal of the day. I also noted there that the word can carry sacral meal connotations and, by extension, have eucharistic meal associations. I have also argued that the claim of eucharistic meal associations seems plausible when the meal motifs in the letters to the churches are understood to offer a homologous contrast with motifs of idolatry in the Apocalypse[1072] and when they are analysed for their "paradigmatic associations" with other Greco-Roman sacral meal traditions.[1073]

Therefore, one may understand that John used the imagery of a meal with the risen Christ to describe how the Laodicean church could have a more direct, intimate, and redemptive experience with him through such a meal.[1074] In such an experience, 'seeing', 'hearing', and 'acting', the elements of 'spiritual discernment' discussed, are engaged and, therefore, can be renewed by the revelation of Christ's marginalised, vulnerable and 'self-giving' state, reminiscent of his passion.

This experience is akin to the revelation and spiritual awakening one may experience in the Eucharist. This is because at the Eucharist, through the agency of

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[1072] See section 10.2. For comments from Pentecostal scholars concerning the possible connection between the meal motifs in the letters (e.g., 2:7, 17) to the Eucharist, see Archer, *I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*, 141. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 96.
[1073] See section 3.3.
[1074] The statement in 3:20c also reveals the intimacy between Christ and the respondent to be expected during the meal. See Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 121.

the Spirit, a spiritual awakening could take place, for example, by a) seeing Christ in the emblems and recalling his passion, b) hearing the eucharistic prayers, c) the act of examining oneself in preparation for receiving the emblems (typical of Pentecostal assemblies), d) sharing a meal with a church community, and e) returning to the world to act out the ethic of the passion remembered at the table.[1075]

Finally, the relational tone of Christ's offer suggests that such meals should have occurred more frequently.[1076] Or if they were, perhaps they were not performed with the consciousness that would have kept the dynamics of "misrecognition" at bay and not resulted in making Christ a "marginal insider" in the church.[1077] While one may not be able to hold such claims about Christ's and the church's motives with complete confidence, they do offer a sound rationale for why the weekly celebration of the Eucharist, particularly with the Girardian Model Eucharist consciousness,[1078] should be considered by Pentecostal-Christian churches. Such consciousness and careful eucharistic practices can help centre the liturgical life of the church around the paschal mystery and position the church to clearly "hear what the Spirit says to

[1075] Luke 24:30-33 also offers an example of how the elements of discernment discussed (i.e., sight, hearing and action) are engaged and renewed due to a meal with the risen Christ. Their 'actions' change following the meal because, at the meal, they 'hear' Jesus' words and 'see' him. Furthermore, this type of spiritual awakening within my Girardian Model Eucharist framework is also possible because the passion-centred revelation of "Christ as the Spirit" encountered in the Eucharist unveils the dynamics of "misrecognition."
[1076] Since his "marginal insider" status is not normative cf. 1:20 and 2:1.
[1077] Perhaps something akin to the celebration of the Lord's Supper in Corinth is at play here (1 Corinthians 11:17-34), where Christ's body is not discerned because of the blinding effects of social conflicts that could be argued to be characterised by "misrecognition."
[1078] Also summarised in the 'disciplining the affections', 'passion-centredness', and 'equity for all' motifs.

the churches" so that Christ and his passion-centred ethic are not 'misrecognised' and driven to the margins.

14.3. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have drawn a correlation between my mimetic theory reading of Rev 3:14-22 and the full gospel theological narrative. This correlation highlighted the relationship between some critical social issues germane to the passage and the concerns in contemporary Pentecostal cultural engagement and eucharistic theology discussed in the previous chapter. Finally, I gave particular attention to the meal/dining motif in 3:20, claiming that my mimetic theory analysis (i.e., Girardian Model Eucharist) highlights the meal's socio-anthropological dimensions and, by extension, the Eucharist too, and can contribute to Pentecostal reflections on the missional dimension of the Eucharist.

CHAPTER 15

CONCLUSIONS

My thesis aimed to explain how the meal motif in Rev 3:20, with its setting within the discourse on the relationship between the church and wider Greco-Roman culture in Revelation, could be conceived, with the help of mimetic theory, as important to Pentecostals in understanding the relationship between the Eucharist and the church's connection to the cultural domain.

By using a social-scientific hermeneutic method to interpret the Rev 3:20 passage, I concluded that conceptions of the Eucharist, which emphasise the social dimension of the rite, are just as important as the emphasis on the sacramentality of the rite (see especially Chapters 4, 6–8 and 10). I claimed that understanding the social determinants of the rite is significant to asserting the centrality of the Eucharist in Pentecostal worship (see especially Chapters 11–12). I concluded that my Girardian conception of the rite could be instrumental to Pentecostal eucharistic praxis and the nurturing of "eucharistic discernment" that reflects values such as the 'disciplining of desires', 'passion-centredness' and 'equity for all' that can benefit Pentecostal engagement with the prosperity gospel and the broader cultural domain (see especially Chapter 13–14).

My thesis has addressed the main research questions identified as key to examining the plausibility of claims for the eucharistic reading of the meal motif in

Rev 3:20. First, concerning the question, "What are the common interpretations of the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage, and how might they inform its eucharistic reading?" in Chapter 3, I evaluated the prominent proposals for the meaning of the meal motif in the passage. Using Aune's historical-critical analysis of the passage, I demonstrated how the meal could be considered helpful in developing reflections on the Eucharist as it is understood to have sacral meal associations. Thus, by identifying the meal's sacral meal association and, by extension, its eucharistic meal associations, I showed how the reference to the meal offers a response to the appeal for more Pentecostal studies on the Eucharist developed from non-narrative-institution-texts.

In response to the question, "What key cultural elements are associated with the passage?" I discussed how the conceptualisation of the meal as a sacral meal typical of Greco-Roman cultures raises other questions concerning the sociocultural factors related to sacral meals, which the composition of the Apocalypse reflects. Thus, in Chapter 4, I identified four cultural objects that I understood to impact how we understand the meal: sacrifice, Greco-Roman commensality, the Eucharist (its historical and theological factors), and imperial cults. Furthermore, I affirmed how these cultural objects justify my use of mimetic theory as my theoretical framework since it is also a theory of the origins of culture concerned with the concept of sacrifice and its relationship to other cultural forms (i.e., religion and society).

In Chapter 5, I addressed the question, "What anthropological and theological insights might mimetic theory contribute to discussions on the cultural elements associated with the passage?" I introduced René Girard's mimetic theory and the anthropological and theological aspects of his theory that resonate with the cultural objects I identified in the previous chapter. The following four chapters (six to nine) featured focused analyses of the four cultural objects through the lens of mimetic theory.

Thus, Chapter 6 focused on discussions on ancient Mediterranean conceptions of sacrifice. I discussed the prominent emphases reflected in the so-called "prevailing view" of animal sacrifice: the killing-violence and the alimentary emphasis. I located Girard's conception of sacrifice in the debate, suggesting it belonged to the scholarship tradition that emphasises the killing-violence aspects of sacrifice. I acknowledged the contemporary objections to the "prevailing view" of sacrifice. And I responded to them by developing a model of sacrifice that accounted for the heuristic value of such a model and the epistemic determinants of my thesis (i.e., my Christian faith and mimetic theory conception of sacrifice). I described this model as the Girardian model of sacrifice. In addition, I demonstrated how this model could explain how the killing-violence motifs and the alimentary motifs of sacrifice are connected insofar that they are both understood within the Girardian register to be associated with violence. Furthermore, by placing "false transcendence" at the centre of the model, I demonstrated how the model could be used to describe how the idea

of ‘gods’ was central a) to the killing-violence motifs in Girard’s theory of the founding murder and, b) in the ancient Greek myths from which the alimentary view emerged. I claimed that the value of the Girardian model of sacrifice for my thesis is that it offers a plausible model for discussing the ancient Mediterranean conception of the relationship between food, sacrifice, and transcendence and the socio-religious determinants of that relationship.

Therefore, I used the model in Chapter 7 to analyse Greco-Roman commensality. I outlined how conceptions of the presence of the divine in the Greco-Roman banqueting compare with the Girardian model of sacrifice reading. Furthermore, I argued that because of the “misrecognition” of the mythical violence associated with the sacrificial killing of animals, the ‘divine’ engaged in Greco-Roman pagan meals symbolised a “false transcendence” and, in Christian theological terms, ‘satanic’. I also demonstrated how the implications of the “false transcendence” claim are more evident considering a review of the ethical double standards that became apparent in my socio-ethical analysis of the social and institutional dimensions of the pagan Greco-Roman banquets. Such an analysis also raised questions about the relationship between the pagan banqueting ideology and Christian eucharistic banquet, given my claim of their shared practices.

Therefore, in Chapter 8, I discussed the Eucharist and demonstrated how the Girardian model of sacrifice could explain the rite’s social dimensions. I also labelled the adaptation of the model for such a purpose as the ‘Girardian Model Eucharist’. I

discussed this model's compatibility with aspects of Christian dogma relevant to the Eucharist. In addition, I discussed how the Girardian Model Eucharist could highlight how the Passion (cf. Holy transcendence) offers an unfavourable appraisal of the ethics of the pagan banquets (cf. "false transcendence"). By integrating the model's reading of the Eucharist into the cultural diamond analysis, I demonstrated how the Eucharist could be conceived, in its idealised form, as a cultural object that can cultivate socio-ethical change as much as evoke sacramental reflections.

In Chapter 9, I discussed the critical cultural force that John and his readers would have had to negotiate: the imperial cults. I discussed the limitations of the trend in NT studies to treat imperial cults as a monolithic cultural phenomenon that typified nothing other than Roman hegemony. I recommended three new frameworks for analysing cults: cult talk as a) continuity, b) emperor worship and c) diversity. I also demonstrated how these frameworks feature themes about the interface between violence and religion (i.e., the violence-abating essence of the cults, the 'powers', and John's rhetoric of violence and power), which made them ideal candidates for a mimetic theory analysis. This analysis also highlights how John's rhetoric of violence and power and the Girardian Model Eucharist reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 is an exposé of the interface between violence and religion in the cults.

In Chapter 10, I addressed the question, "How can aspects of the mimetic theory be used to support a eucharistic reading of the passage?" first by

demonstrating how the imperial cults could be understood to have been a significant feature in the life of the Laodicean church. Second, I showed how John could be understood to have been using homologous contrasts as a device to show how the meal motifs in the messages to the churches function to offer a distinction between the Eucharist and εἰδωλόθυτα. Therefore, I concluded that the meal motif of Rev 3:20 illustrates how it is likely that the Eucharist featured in a volatile social context that highlighted its social as much as spiritually transformative quality as a sacral meal. To this end, I also demonstrated how aspects of Girard's mimetic theory, applied in conjunction with studies on Revelation, could be used to highlight the social and sacramental dimensions of the meal and, by extension, the Eucharist.

Having addressed the historical and cultural matters relating to the meal considering my Girardian theoretical framework, I turned my attention to its significance to Pentecostalism in chapters nine to eleven to address the question, "How might a mimetic theory-informed eucharistic reading of the passage help us better understand the nature of the problems identified in Pentecostal eucharistic theology and cultural engagement?" Thus, in Chapter 11, I discussed the scope of my social-scientific analysis by comparing my methodological assumptions with Green's sacramentality-focused proposal of Pentecostal eucharistic theology. I concluded that Green's discussion on the intersection between the Eucharist and conceptions of authentic witness, "worship" and "mission" could be understood to signal discussions within Pentecostalism on the social dimension of the Eucharist. And

thus, justify my exploration of a social scientific analysis of the social dimension for Pentecostal eucharistic praxis.

In Chapter 12, I discussed the typical Pentecostal approach to cultural engagement. I claimed that Pentecostals typically appropriate cultural objects, which they selectively accommodate and resignify to fit their worldview. Using the cultural diamond, I demonstrated how pneumatological theologies and the Eucharist typify first-order cultural objects of sociocultural significance in Pentecostalism. I compared the 'cultural renewal by the Eucharist' understanding of the Eucharist of some Eastern-European Pentecostals, as indicated by Daniela Augustine, with what appears to me to be the domestication of the Eucharist in the UK/West at the local church level.

Furthermore, I also identified points of contact between aspects of mimetic theory and Daniela Augustine's eucharistic theory. I highlighted the compatibility between the two theories on scapegoating, the person of the Spirit's role in addressing injustice and the relationship between desire and idols. Here, I also stated that this relationship highlights connections of cultural significance insofar that the 'affect' motifs in both disciplines (i.e., 'desire') are what I consider shared micro-level factors that exist in both disciplines' cultural objects (assuming the 'mimetic theory' and 'Pentecostal theology' are considered as cultural objects, too).

In Chapter 13, I further developed these desire-idols relationships by discussing their cultural relevance, not least to Pentecostal engagement with the

prosperity gospel. I demonstrated how the combined reading of the affect-related aspects of Girard's mimetic theory (i.e., mimetic desire, passion and apocalypse, and scapegoat mechanism and misrecognition) and Steven Jack Land's conception of Pentecostal spirituality (passion for the kingdom, the passion of Christ, and mission to the world) help to evaluate expressions of the prosperity gospel within Pentecostalism. I then recast these affect-related themes within eucharistic discourse to evidence how these themes could find parallels in aspects of the Girardian Model Eucharist. Thus, I claimed that in such a reading, they embody the model of a social and spiritually transformative eucharistic ritual, which I claim the Girardian Model Eucharist reflects. I demonstrated how this conception of the Eucharist is significant in explaining the problems in Pentecostal cultural engagement, not least with the prosperity gospel.

Finally, in Chapter 14, I addressed the question, "How can mimetic theory and Pentecostal theology be combined to inform a eucharistic reading of the passage?" I demonstrated how my mimetic theory reading of Rev 3:14-22 can be synthesised with the Pentecostal full gospel theological narrative. To achieve this, I further developed Koester's model of the concentric rings of thoughts. I showed how this developed model of the ring of thoughts complements the full gospel's five-fold conceptual framework. I demonstrated how such a synthesis highlighted the relationship between the critical social issues germane to the passage and the

concerns in contemporary Pentecostal cultural engagement and eucharistic theology discussed in the thesis.

15.1. Significance

My thesis has sought to address the issue of the domestication of the Eucharist in contemporary Western Pentecostal churches and its implication concerning Pentecostal engagement with culture. More specifically, I have argued that the domestication of the Eucharist does not allow the social dimensions of the rite and the importance of its centrality in worship to emerge, given the rite's association with Greco-Roman banqueting traditions and the cognate anthropological factors of socio-religious significance that underpin such traditions. Thus, my thesis has demonstrated that social-scientific approaches to hermeneutics and theological constructions significantly highlight and extrapolate the underpinning historical and anthropological determinants associated with the rite.

The mimetic theory theoretical focus of my social-scientific hermeneutic method bore significant anthropological insights concerning the interface between ritual sacrifice and the ordering of society latent in the sacral commensal customs of Greco-Roman cultures—a topic scarcely discussed in Pentecostal scholarship on the Eucharist. Also, by using mimetic theory as my theoretical framework, I developed the 'Girardian model of sacrifice'. The significance of this model for studies in ancient sacrifice was that it helped to synthesise the aspects of the "prevailing view" of

ancient Mediterranean sacrifice with mimetic theory concepts of sacrifice and religion. Thus, it offered a model that helps to articulate the value of the combined reading of the plausible components of the "prevailing view." Also, I developed a derivative model, the Girardian Model Eucharist, and used it to analyse the Eucharist. This model also highlights the social (as much as the sacramental) dimension of the Eucharist insofar as in the model, the rite reflects both the killing-violence and alimentary conceptions of sacrifice, with their cognate socio-psychological factors that the mimetic theory reading adds to these concepts. Thus, the model is significant to theological and anthropological studies as it illustrates how the Eucharist concerns sacred and 'everyday'/social matters.

Furthermore, my application of Wendy Griswold's cultural diamond also points to the significance of my thesis. Her model helped illustrate how the Girardian Model Eucharist is a cultural object that could benefit Pentecostals if kept central to their worship. After all, the model contains critical cultural discourse that can be instrumental to social change and, thus, ideal for addressing issues relating to Pentecostal engagement with the cultural domain. My application of the cultural diamond, with its reflexive logic central to its analysis, helped to highlight how the ideal Eucharist does not 'mirror' but 'contrast' the ethics of the social world. Again, my harnessing of the cultural diamond's illustrative power and its ability to depict a nexus between the sacred and the secular signals my social-scientific hermeneutic method's theological and anthropological value.

Finally, the multidisciplinary nature of the social-scientific hermeneutic method creates opportunities for scholars in other disciplines to join the conversation. The historical and theoretical aspects offer entry points for scholars in biblical studies, anthropology, and psychology, for example, to engage with my research.

15.2. Contributions

My thesis has made 'methodological' and 'theoretical' contributions to both Pentecostal studies and mimetic theory. Using Wendy Griswold's cultural diamond sociological analysis of culture, my thesis has offered both fields of study a framework for discussing cultural phenomena uniquely within their disciplines. For example, the terminology and diagramming that the cultural diamond provided offered unique terms and illustrations to describe the interconnectedness and causal dynamics between the varied and often complex themes discussed in Pentecostal theology and mimetic theory.

Concerning Pentecostal hermeneutics and theology, my thesis contributes to responses to the call for more Pentecostal studies on the Eucharist from non-narratives of institution passages in the Bible. Using a social-scientific hermeneutic method, I have developed a eucharistic reading of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 that accounts for understanding the passage from a historical, theoretical, and contextual perspective. Also, my interpretation of the meal motif in Rev 3:20 has contributed to

Pentecostal studies on the Apocalypse as it featured a novel application of the full gospel theological framework in such studies.

My 'Girardian Model Eucharist' hypothesis also contributes to the growing Pentecostal discussions concerning the value of the social as much as the sacramental dimension of the Eucharist and the significance of its centralisation in Pentecostal worship and practice.

Furthermore, my thesis has offered a "model of engagement" between René Girard's mimetic theory and Pentecostal theology. This is especially evident in a) the correlations I made between Girard's conception of the scapegoat mechanism and apocalypse with the ethics-related works by Daniela Augustine and b) the nexus I highlighted between the affect-related aspects of Girard's mimetic theory and Steven Jack Land's assessment of Pentecostal spirituality, which provided contours for a sound engagement with the prosperity gospel.

In addition, this "model of engagement" between the mimetic theory and Pentecostalism also signals my contribution to studies in mimetic theory. Insofar as I applied the principle of mimetic theory to Pentecostal studies, I also demonstrated the heuristic value and universal appeal of mimetic theory within a particular field of study.

Also, I developed the Girardian model of sacrifice, which synthesised the prominent perspectives on ancient Mediterranean sacrifice with the mimetic theory

conception of sacrifice. This model allows for the conception of motifs of sacrifice in mimetic theory to be understood to address the killing-violence and alimentary views of sacrifice. Therefore, the model reflects my contribution to the mimetic theory and ancient Mediterranean studies on 'sacrifice'. Also, the Girardian Model Eucharist hypothesis offered a unique application of the mimetic theory motifs on sacrifice to studying the Eucharist in mimetic theory.

Finally, my mimetic theory-informed interpretation of the Rev 3:20 passage also addresses the shortage of mimetic theory reflections on the Apocalypse and thus contributes to mimetic theory studies.

15.3. Scope for Further Study

My claim about the domestication of the Eucharist in this thesis has, to some extent, focused on my observations of the relegation of the Eucharist in some UK Pentecostal churches. And, in my introduction, I also noted that some published works have corroborated such claims, confirming the declining trend in the weekly celebration of the Eucharist in the UK/Western Europe.

Nevertheless, there seems to be scope for further studies focusing on localised expressions of the celebration of the Eucharist within, for example, individual Pentecostal churches and intra and inter-denominational Pentecostal networks in the UK/West. Informed by the Girardian Model Eucharist hypothesis, such studies could also test to ascertain to what extent churches/denominations make correlations

between the quality of their eucharistic celebrations and the culture of the church/denomination.

Second, there is scope for further studies on the implications of my model for Pentecostal churches in the so-called Global South, where the movement has experienced much success and the prosperity gospel phenomenon has gained as much traction as it has in the West.

Third, while I did offer some discussions and recommendations about applying the Girardian Model Eucharist in Pentecostal worship settings, there is scope for further reflections on ways to embed such a novel conception of the Eucharist in wider Pentecostal church educational programmes, such as sermon series, small group studies, church leadership and ordination training programmes.

Fourth, there is also scope for further studies that build on the correlations I have drawn between the Pentecostal discourse of the economy of the Trinity, atonement, and pneumatology relative to anthropological perspectives of the mimetic theory conceptions of these themes (see sections 8.5 and 11.4).

Finally, I introduced my thesis with the adage "culture eats strategy for breakfast." And I have discussed the significance of nurturing "eucharistic discernment" in Pentecostal ministry. In addition to emphasising weekly eucharistic celebrations, what scope is there for embedding such "eucharistic discernment" motifs in strategic planning so that 'strategy' engages and manages 'culture', perhaps

through tools that churches typically employ in their strategic planning (e.g., replace the 'Evaluate' criteria with 'Eucharistic' in the 'SMARTER' objectives planning tool)?

In my introduction, I shared my experience of leading change in my church and how I saw the reference to the meal motif in the Rev 3:20 passage as a symbol of how the Eucharist is a means to renew the church's culture/angel. Well, I decided to test my hypothesis. Building on the existing monthly celebration of the Eucharist in the church, we began to celebrate the rite weekly, supported by the teaching on the nexus between the sacramental and cultural implications of the rite as per my mimetic theory understanding. This was roughly eight years ago. And the benefit to the church's spiritual, social, and ethical outlook has been immeasurable. The premium placed on ministry planning tools as a primary means to experience what I later understood as the 'idol of ministry success' has been replaced with a focus on how such tools can complement the centrality of the Eucharist in our worship. Thus, the culture of the church has developed a new appetite. Rhetoric on 'ministry success' has been replaced with a hunger for "eucharistic discernment" in the weekly call to "come dine with" the risen Christ.

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