



The Reception of Pauline Thought on Baptism in Syriac Pseudo-Clementines and Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*: Extending the "Within Judaism" Paradigm into Syriac Christianity

La recepción del pensamiento paulino sobre el bautismo en las Pseudoclementinas siríacas y en las *Demonstrationes* de Afraates: expandiendo el paradigma «dentro del judaísmo» al cristianismo siríaco

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Abstract: This article explores the trajectory of Paul's thought on baptism within the Syriac textual tradition, specifically focusing on the Pseudo-Clementine literature and Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*. Applying a "Paul within Judaism" framework, the author argues that these early Syriac Christian texts reflect a prolonged period where the Jesus movement remained culturally and theologically situated within a Jewish milieu. The research highlights two primary Pauline themes: covenant membership via the reception of divine spirit and the forgiveness of sins through union with Christ. The article demonstrates how the Pseudo-Clementines maintained close proximity to Jewish ritual law, presenting baptism as a replacement for animal sacrifice, while Aphrahat, despite an emerging supersessionist tone, continued to engage with Jewish scripture and practice as his primary framework. Ultimately, the study posits that the "parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity was a regional and gradual process not finalized until the fourth century, driven by the changing political realities of the Sassanian and Roman Empires.

Resumen: Este artículo explora la trayectoria del pensamiento de Pablo sobre el bautismo dentro de la tradición textual siríaca, centrándose específicamente en la literatura pseudoclementina y las *Demonstraciones* de Afraates. Aplicando un marco conceptual de "Pablo dentro del judaísmo", el autor argumenta que estos primeros textos cristianos siríacos reflejan un período prolongado en el que el movimiento de Jesús se mantuvo cultural y teológicamente situado dentro de un entorno judío. La investigación destaca dos temas paulinos principales: la pertenencia al pacto mediante la recepción del espíritu divino y el perdón de los pecados a través de la unión con Cristo. El artículo demuestra cómo las pseudoclementinas mantuvieron una estrecha relación con la ley ritual judía, presentando el bautismo como un sustituto del sacrificio animal, mientras que Afraates, a pesar de un tono supersedionista emergente, continuó utilizando las escrituras y prácticas judías como su marco principal. Por último, el estudio plantea que la "separación" entre el judaísmo y el cristianismo fue un proceso regional y gradual que no se concretó hasta el siglo IV, impulsado por las cambiantes

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realidades políticas de los imperios sasánida y romano.

Keywords: Paul within Judaism; Reception of Paul; Pseudo Clementine; Aphrahat; *Demonstrations*. **Palabras clave:** Pablo en el judaísmo; Recepción de Pablo; Pseudoclementinas; Afraates; *Demostraciones*.

Introduction

This research proposes to read the trajectory of the reception of Paul's thought on baptism in the Syriac textual tradition in both the Pseudo-Clementine literature and the *Demonstrations* of Aphrahat, beginning with the "Paul within Judaism" framework and extending that orientation well into the Syriac Christian period. These corpora of texts are remarkably different, yet also exist within a broader, common cultural milieu which is the Syriac language. The Clementine literature is of an unknown provenance and likely was composed in Greek. However, it was translated into Syriac at some point and, therefore, entered into a similar cultural space as Aphrahat, through the vehicle of the Syriac language. Aphrahat, on the other hand, is uniquely and precisely known to have been written in the early 4th century in the area that is now modern day Iraq. The "within Judaism" framework has been extended to other segments of the Jesus movement such as the gospels¹, Acts,² Revelation,³ all of which suggests a re-evaluation of the so-called parting of ways.⁴ Eschewing a more common paradigm that sees the separation occurring in the

¹ John Kampen, *Matthew within Sectarian Judaism* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2019); Jordan Lavender, "The Issue of Jesus' Multilingualism and Mark-within-Judaism" *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 21 (2024), pp. 39-60; Joshua Paul Smith and Matthew Thiessen, "Luke within Judaism," in *Within Judaism? Interpretive Trajectories in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (2023), pp. 139-151; Jörg Frey, "John within Judaism? Textual, Historical, and Hermeneutical Considerations", in Jens Schröter, Brandon A. Edsall, and Joseph Verheyden (ed.), *Jews and Christians: Parting Ways in the First Two Centuries C.E.? Reflections on the Gains and Losses of a Model*, «BZNW» 253., (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 185-215.

² Isaac W. Oliver, "Acts within Judaism", in *Within Judaism? Interpretive Trajectories in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (2023), p. 152; Jason F. Moraff, "Recent Trends in the Study of Jews and Judaism in Luke–Acts," *Currents in Biblical Research* 19, no. 1 (2020), pp. 64-87.

³ Ralph J. Korner, "Revelation within Judaism", in *Within Judaism? Interpretive Trajectories in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (2023), p. 176.

⁴ For a rebuttal of this paradigm, see Matt, Jackson-McCabe, *Jewish Christianity: The Making of the Christianity-Judaism Divide* (Yale University Press, 2020).

second century, it is possible to see the parting as finalizing in the mid third-century.⁵ The inherent theological diversity in the Judaism of the period, it is quite impossible to say that Christianity fell completely outside the bounds of Judaism.⁶ In fact, it might have been the changing political realities of the late third century into the fourth that truly finalized the divide, especially with the conversion of Constantine and the Council of Nicea in 325 CE.⁷

This paper has two objectives: (1) to trace the reception of the Pauline understanding of immersion from a within Judaism perspective to Syriac texts in the recession of the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* and *Homilies* and Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* to show the reliance of these authors on Paul for their development of a doctrine of baptism reflecting its origins within Judaism, and (2) to propose situating both Syriac texts within Judaism as a means of understanding how the practice of baptism as it originated in Paul could be interpreted by Christian authors following him while accepting a late date for the parting of ways among Syriac Christian elites. The paper begins with a presentation of the unique understanding of baptism within Paul's thought from the radical new perspective or the Paul-within-Judaism school of reading the Apostle. It sees two themes within Paul's brief mention of baptism in the authentic collection which is the connection to covenant membership as sons of Abraham (Gal 3:27–29) through the reception of divine *pneuma* and the connection to the forgiveness of sins by living in Christ (Rom 6:1–7). Both of these themes are found in the Syriac literature of the fourth century, yet are applied in different ways. One iteration, in the pseudo Clementine literature situated itself with Judaism and broad Torah observance and the other in Aphrahat, is now filtered through an emerging supersessionist version of proto-orthodoxy. In the case of the Clementine literature, there is an openness to existing in close proximity to Judaism, although with critique of Jewish practice and belief, whereas Aphrahat is less comfortable with that reality. That is, the “within Judaism” paradigm overlaps with the postponing the “parting of the ways” paradigm much later, suggesting a prolonged period in which the Jesus movement — Christianismos was still considered a Jewish movement, with various corners of the elite discourse beginning to push away from Judaism starting in the second century and onwards.

⁵ Lawrence H. Schiffman, E. P. Sanders, Albert I. Baumgarten, and Alan Mendelson, “At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish–Christian Schism”, in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 2: *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (1981), pp. 115–156.

⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁷ Adele Reinhartz, “How Christianity Separated from Judaism”, in Frederick E. Greenspahn (ed.), *Early Judaism: New Insights and Scholarship*, vol. 1 (New York: NYU Press, 2018), pp. 97–123.

Reception of Paul

The focus of reception studies and Paul heavily favors the earlier centuries and western Christian works. That being the case, some early writings such as the *Didache* and *Shepherd of Hermas* do not seem to have known Paul, or do not cite his work.⁸ Others, such as *1 Clement* engage with Paul's earlier writings, likely in this case because Clement is also writing to the Corinthians. *1 Clement* is also the oldest text that shows Pauline influence, written in the last decade of the first century CE in Rome, in which Clement, as the spiritual leader (*episkopos*) in Rome advises the *ekklesia* in Corinth around issues of sectarianism (1 Clem 3:2). Razmerita notes how Clement might cite other Pauline texts beyond the Corinthian correspondence.⁹ Clement portrays Paul as a hero who suffered persecution (1 Clem 5) and a divinely inspired teacher preaching righteousness throughout the world (1 Clem 5) who was inspired by the Spirit and the central theme of justification by faith is found in Clement alongside Paul (1 Clem 31).¹⁰ Paul also had a strong influence on Ignatius of Antioch.¹¹ The same theological concepts found in Paul are echoed in Ignatius. Paul was also received by "heretical" Christians and is found in the Nag Hamadi library, including the Prayer of the Apostle Paul and the Apocalypse of Paul, which draw Christian *gnosis* traditions from the letter collection.¹² Syriac authors also show the development of Pauline themes, such as the theme of the indwelling of Christ found in believers, which is found in the earliest Syrian author, Tatian (*Oratio ad Graecos* xv, 4–5), as well as in other texts, such as the *Acts of Thomas*, where it is

⁸ Clayton N. Jefford, "Missing Pauline Tradition in the Apostolic Fathers? *Didache*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Papias*, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, and the *Epistle of Diognetus*", *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 21, no. 1–2 (2018), pp. 41–60.

⁹ Gheorghe Razmerita, "Paul in Early Christianity: Reception and Perception", *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 21, no. 1–2 (2018), pp. 35–72, here 39.

¹⁰ G. Razmerita, "Paul in Early Christianity", p. 40.

¹¹ Harry O. Maier, "Paul, Ignatius and the Thirdspace: A Socio-Geographic Exploration", in Todd D. Still & David E. Wilhite (ed.), *Apostolic Fathers and Paul* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 162–180; Todd D. Still, "Ignatius and Paul on Suffering and Death: A Short Comparative Study", in Todd D. Still & David E. Wilhite (ed.), *Apostolic Fathers and Paul* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 136–142; David J. Downs, "The Pauline Concept of Union with Christ in Ignatius of Antioch", in Todd D. Still & David E. Wilhite (ed.), *Apostolic Fathers and Paul* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 143–161. For an exploration of the topic of justification see, Jonathon Lookadoo, "What Justification? Pauline Reception and the Interpretation of *Phld.* 8.2," *Religions* 15, no. 4 (2024), p. 405.

¹² Andreas Lindemann, "The Reception of Paul in the Second Century", in Oda Wischmeyer (ed.), *Paul: Life, Setting, Work, Letters*. Translated by Helen S. Heron, with revisions by Dieter T. Roth (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 339–355.

linked to sexual purity and virginity (*Acts* I, 12; IX, 87) and in Aphrahat (*Dem.* I, 2–5).¹³

The Pseudo-Clementine corpus is generally thought to have negatively received Paul, as Lindeman writes:

“A fundamental rejection of Paul and his theology is seen in Jewish-Christian communities, which hold fast to the Law... Direct textual sources have not survived; but one of the source-documents of the ‘Pseudoclementines’, the so-called ‘*Kerygmata Petrou*’ at one place shows massive polemic by Peter against ‘Simon Magus’ (cf. *Acts* 8.9–24), in the course of which the statements allow us to perceive that in fact *Paul* is meant by this Simon Magus. Peter accuses him of not being a true apostle because he was not called by the earthly Jesus but through a vision; what is more, he has opposed him, who is the ‘rock’”.¹⁴

However, the comparison between Simon Magus or Simon of Gitthonin, as he is known in the Syriac recension, is based on a number of assumptions that do not find support in the text. In the Syriac recension, Simon of Gitthonin is clearly identified as a Samaritan, who was a wonder-worker, interpreted as sorcery, who claimed to be the messiah and a divine power himself (*Rec.* 1:12; *Hom.* 1:15; *Rec.* 1:72; *Rec.* 1:74; *Rec.* 2:7; *Hom.* 2:22). Simon Magus is a figure that appears in *Acts* 8 as a sorcerer but whose role was multiplied in apocryphal texts¹⁵ which added to his story. However, his equation with Paul in the pseudo-Clementine literature is not supported by the text.

With regard to the reception of Paul in Aphrahat, there are fewer studies to consult, but Edsall’s paper on *Dem.* 7 and the tension between baptism and marriage in that text is one recent example of work considering Pauline influence in the eastern church. Aphrahat indicates a preference for the ascetic life but provides instructions for those who seek marriage and how the couple should relate to each other.¹⁶ Throughout this text, Aphrahat is ambiguous about the status of marriage and whether or not it is desirable or appropriate. Edsall considers other Syrian and contemporary church fathers’ views on baptism and marriage, noting how the ascetic opposition to marriage was found earlier in Marcion, the *Acts of Paul*, and the *Acts*

¹³ Mark Delcogliano, “Aphrahat on the Modes of Christ’s Indwelling”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 74 (2008), pp. 181–193, espec. 184–185, 187.

¹⁴ Andreas Lindemann, “The Reception of Paul in the Second Century”, in *Paul: Life, Setting, Work, Letters*, ed. Oda Wischmeyer; trans. Helen S. Heron, rev. Dieter T. Roth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), pp. 339–354, here 353.

¹⁵ David L. Eastman, “Simon the Composite Sorcerer”, *New Testament Studies* 68, no. 4 (2022), pp. 407–417.

¹⁶ Benjamin A. Edsall, “Aphrahat and Pauline Reception: 1 Corinthians 7 and Baptismal Reasoning in East and West”, *New Testament Studies* 67, no. 3 (2021), pp. 407–423, here 410.

of *Thomas*, both popular in the Syriac-speaking church, as well as in Tatian. Edsall summarizes Aphrahat's concerns with the married joining the ascetic community by referring to *Dem.* 7:20 and the conflict that the ascetic covenant included virginity and that the married should not join the ascetic community.¹⁷ For Aphrahat marriage can simultaneously be very good (*Dem.* 18:8) and also a means by which Satan can tempt men through the presence of women (*Dem.* 6:3). Being married introduced a struggle that would distract the ascetic from true faith, but Aphrahat also made provisions for married ascetics to join the community and Edsall notes the similarities between Aphrahat and Paul in advising ascetics to be married if they struggle with lust in extreme cases (*Dem.* 18:12; c.f. 1 Cor 7:9).¹⁸ However, an ascetic cannot be married *after* joining the community and taking an oath (*Dem.* 18:12), which Edsall connects to Paul's command to remain in the status one was already in upon baptism (1 Cor 7:20). Overall, Edsall sees a positive orientation towards Paul by Aphrahat and Paul's views were considered authoritative in his community.

From these studies, we can see three ways in which Paul's oeuvre can be detected in Aphrahat's. The first is to present any direct quotations from Paul's letters in the *Demonstrations*. The second is to detect any allusions to Pauline language by looking to common lexical items or phrases between the two texts. Finally, there can be allusions to Pauline ideas but through the use of different language in later texts.

Baptism in Paul as seen within Judaism

Paul considered his Gentile followers as sons of Abraham, making them "eschatological Israelites"¹⁹ existing in their connate pneuma that is activated by Messiah's *pneuma*, infused through immersion (water covering the entire body) and through the oro-nasal cavity in the hearing of Christ's faithfulness. *pneuma* can be identified as the "divine spirit" in Isaiah, in which God's presence is described as 'going forth' (Is. 2:3; 11:1; 42:13; 45:23; 51:4–5) and the restoration of Israel is strongly associated with this pneumatic activity.²⁰ Paul also uses the descriptive *in Christ* to describe his followers: they were individuals who "accepted Christ as part of a new humanity of which He was the head; that he was being ingathered into the true Israel of God". "In Christ" should be understood as a new social concept. Paul considers the body of believers to be the "Israel of God", the righteous remnant of

¹⁷ B. A. Edsall, "Aphrahat and Pauline Reception...", p. 419.

¹⁸ B. A. Edsall, "Aphrahat and Pauline Reception...", p. 420.

¹⁹ Greg K. Beale, "The Old Testament Background of Paul's Reference to 'the Fruit of the Spirit' in *Galatians* 5:22", *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15/1 (2005), pp. 29–54, here 29.

²⁰ Beale, "The Old Testament Background", p. 33.

God's people,²¹ the righteous remnant who observe the law.²² Per Staples reading of Israel and Ioudaios in the literature, this would posit some connection of Gentiles "in Christ" to the covenantal family of the people of God.

Paul's understanding of circumcision is a type of *reinterpretation* of the ritual as not the physical removal of the foreskin but through the circumcision of the heart, which relies on prophetic motifs (Rom. 2:29). This is a novel application of the law to meet the unique situation of his largely Gentile associations in the Diaspora. This could be read in light of Philo's (*Migr. Abr.* 92-93) or Josephus' (*Ant.* 20.41-43) comments on circumcision, where the meaning of and adherence to circumcision are regarded as more important than actual physical circumcision.²³ In other words, Paul maintains that having a foreskin is no impediment to receiving God's blessing and to having Abraham as a father.²⁴ This proposes a *spiritual* circumcision through faith and immersion for non-Jews, but Paul does not seem to oppose circumcision for *Jewish* children, as his audience is primarily Gentile and, even though he does not address the question directly, evidence from the time period shows that a rejection of proselyte circumcision did not accompany a wholesale rejection of circumcision.²⁵

Paul's position likely caused the Gentile believers to occupy an ambiguous social identity status, especially in their location and with Paul's opponents who would not consider them full proselytes but a kind of permanent "partial proselytes" (*ger toshav*). Paul's opponents would have considered them "in Christ" because of their faith and immersion. Their spiritual circumcision through faith and immersion would mark them as "in Christ".²⁶ However, they were not "full proselytes" according to them (against Paul). This had profound practical implications in that Paul's opponents would not allow or expect the vast number of Galatian believers to observe the full law. However, they would also not be accepted as "normal" pagans by their non-believing neighbors, because they exclusively worshipped the God of Israel.²⁷

²¹ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2015), p. 420.

²² A. Andrew Das, "Paul and the Law: Pressure Points in the Debate," in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Given (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), pp. 99-116.

²³ Susan M. Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort: Paul's Letter to the Galatians in Its Anatolian Cultic Context*, col. «Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series» 248 (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2003), p. 248.

²⁴ Karin B. Neutel, "Circumcision Gone Wrong: Paul's Message as a Case of Ritual Disruption", *Neotestamentica* 50, no. 2 (2016), pp. 373-396.

²⁵ Neutel, "Circumcision Gone Wrong", p. 389.

²⁶ Paula Fredriksen, "Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul's Gospel", *New Testament Studies* 56, no. 2 (2010), pp. 232-252, here 244.

²⁷ Fredriksen, "Judaizing the Nations", p. 242.

Paul responds to the desire of some within his community to be circumcised through a reinterpretation of the ritual, leading to a better option, in his view. Paul did not see circumcision as able to bring about the transformation that he required and that his Gentile followers wanted. Circumcision was considered a social horror in Greco-Roman society and subjected circumcised people to contempt, scorn, and ridicule.²⁸ Paul proposes a spiritualized re-interpretation of circumcision via immersion and faith as an alternative means to enter the Abrahamic covenant, instead of through genital circumcision. Gentile believers in Christ do not need physical circumcision *because they are already circumcised in their hearts*.²⁹ Christ becomes their *mohel*, “agent of circumcision” (*diakonon peritomes*, cf. Rom 15:8), affecting a transformation in the heart, making them sons of Abraham.³⁰

The two principle texts in the authentic letter collection that reference baptism are found in Galatians and then again in Romans. I am presenting below both the NRSVue and a Peshitta translation by Lamsa. Both texts highlight the two elements of Paul’s understanding of the function and importance of baptism. In the first text, the emphasis is upon the role that baptism plays in bringing the believer *into Christ*, which the Peshitta adds the important caveat that this refers to baptism in the name of Jesus, which changes the identity of the believer into a covenant member of the Abrahamic family. This fits with the broader theme of Galatians 3 in discussing the way in which Gentiles become justified, that is covenant members, through faithfulness.³¹

Gal 3:27–29, NRSVue	Peshitta (Lamsa)
As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to	For those of you who were baptized in the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah. There is neither Jew or Aramean, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus the Messiah. And if you belong to the Messiah,

²⁸ Josephus, Apion 2.137; Philo, Spec. Leg. 1.1–2; Tacitus, Hist. 5.5; cf. Lester L. Grabbe, “Orthodoxy in First-Century Judaism: What Are the Issues?”, *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 8, no. 2 (1977), pp. 149–153.

²⁹ Joshua D. Garroway, “The Circumcision of Christ: Romans 15.7–13”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34, no. 4 (2012), pp. 303–322, here 303.

³⁰ Garroway, “The Circumcision of Christ”, p. 306.

³¹ Stephen J. Patterson, *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity’s Original Struggle against Bigotry, Slavery, and Sexism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 89. Here in contrast to Boccaccini who considers Paul’s theory of justification by faith as an *additional* means of salvation, alongside the Torah and natural law, for Gentile and Jewish *sinners*, c.f. Gabriele Boccaccini, “Justification and Salvation in Paul and Acts: A Reading within Second Temple Judaism”, in J. Brian Tucker & Aaron W. White (ed.), *Receptions of Paul during the First Two Centuries* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2023), pp. 337–354.

Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.	then you are the offspring of Abraham and heirs in the promise. ³²
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The text in Romans focuses on another important aspect of Paul's understanding of immersion which is to be a remedy to the power of sin. The theme of baptism as a means of providing the forgiveness of sins is more explicitly tied together in the deutero-Pauline collection (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). This emphasizes the other key element in Paul's understanding of the rite as a means of connecting the believer to the life of Christ but also to provide forgiveness of sins and *pneuma* leading to faithfulness.³³ The transfer of *pneuma* to the believer should not be overlooked in Paul's understanding of baptism and is connected to the overall discussion of Galatians 3.³⁴ The type of thinking demonstrated by Paul here is apocalyptic because sin is considered as something beyond human transgression and more a divine power that holds humans captive and in need of a counter divine power for remedy.³⁵ Paul's apocalyptic view of salvation should be considered alongside other contemporary Jewish thinkers, such as Philo, who also saw forgiveness of sins and eschatological liberation as parts of salvation along with healing from sickness and God's rescue of the Jews (*Lega.* 3–4, 196).³⁶

Rom 6:1–7, NRSVue	Peshitta
What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may increase? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ	How, then, do we respond? Shall we remain sinful so that there may be more grace? Not at all! If you have died as far as sin is concerned, how could you ever live sinfully again? Or don't you realize that if you have been baptized into Jesus the Messiah, then it was into his death that you were baptized? When you were baptized into his

³² Quotations from Peshitta taken from Kiraz, George A. and Gorgias Press. *Antioch Bible* (with revisions) *Syriac-English New Testament*, First Edition (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2020).

³³ Boccaccini, "Justification and Salvation in Paul and Acts", p. 430.

³⁴ Christine Zimmeramn, "Water in Early Christian Ritual. Baptism and Baptisteries in Corinth", *The Power of Urban Water. Studies in Premodern Urbanism*, Leck (2020), pp. 85-104.

³⁵ Jamie Davies, *The Apocalyptic Paul: Retrospect and Prospect* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022), p. 37.

³⁶ Cristina Termini, "Philo's Thought within the Context of Middle Judaism", in Adam Kamesar (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 95–123, here p. 106.

was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, so we might no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For whoever has died is freed from sin.

death, you were buried with him; so just as Jesus the Messiah rose from the dead into his Father's glory, so we too will be living a new life. Since we have been planted by his side in the likeness of his death, we shall be so also in his resurrection. We understand that the old person has been crucified with him so that the sinful body may be done away with and so that we need not be sin's servants, for if you are dead, then you are free of sin!

The issue of the importance of baptism in Paul is one that has caused some debate within scholarship. However, generally, it is accepted that Paul considered baptism to be important, especially given its relatively infrequent appearance throughout the authentic letter collection. The overall themes of covenant membership and forgiveness from sin are broadly important themes in Paul's thought and letter collection.

Baptism in the Pseudo-Clementine Literature

The earlier text in the pseudo -Clementine literature (PCL) is the *Homilies* (c. 300 - 320 CE) which is found in both Greek and Syriac versions, although the latter includes selections from both the *Recognitions* and *the Homilies*. The *Homilies* were likely based on an early third-century source, called the *Grundschrift*, and redacted finally in the fourth century, usually thought to be in either Antioch or Edessa.³⁷ Its orientation as a text could easily be understood as entirely within Judaism with the lack of explicit Christian terminology and concern for "Jewish" topics (Hom. 4.7–8, 22, 24, 5.28)³⁸, acknowledging the inherent issues with assigning such topics a label. PCL demonstrates Jewish interpretive methods in its reading of the Pentateuch, relying on the notion of oral tradition which it links to the teaching of both Moses and the True Prophet, i.e. Jesus.³⁹ The True Prophet appeared before Jesus as Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses (*Hom* 18.13.6). Similarly to the rabbinic tradition, it rejects allegorical interpretations of the Torah and preserves the oral nature of ancestral tradition which preserves the correct interpretation of

³⁷ Karin Hedner Zetterholm, "A Reception of Pauline Ideas Shaped by a Jewish Milieu: The Case of the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*", *Religions* 15, no. 8 (2024), p. 903.

³⁸ cf. A. Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors: Negotiating Literary Culture in the Greco-Roman Era* (Baylor University Press, 2020), p. 150.

³⁹ Donald H. Carlson, *Jewish-Christian Interpretation of the Pentateuch in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), pp. 27, 56.

Scripture and protects from allegorism (*Rec.* 10.42).⁴⁰ However, Campbell notes the ongoing popularity of the Clementine literature in orthodox Christian circles by noting the frequency of manuscript remains found in the Latin West and suggests that this text lived an interesting afterlife as a text used to support Western Catholic claims surrounding the papacy.⁴¹

The body of literature is characterized by a strong opposition to animal sacrifices and privileging the moral character in the Ten Commandments (*Rec.* 1.35.2) with an interpretation of the Torah suggesting that Moses distracted the people from idolatry through sacrifices (*Rec.* 1.35-36) and God's ultimate purpose was to wean the Jews off of animal sacrifice towards more pure forms of monotheistic worship (*Rec.* 1.37.3-4).⁴² Jesus' role is seen within this message as the true prophet who sought to abolish sacrifice and teach baptism in its place (*Rec.* 1.39.1). The religious practices of the Clementine group are characterized by adherence to Jewish *halakhah* such as in maintaining dietary restrictions, ritual ablutions, menstrual purity laws (*Rec.* 2.1-72; 6.9-11; 7.29, 34; 8.68; *Hom.* 7.8; 11.28-30; 13.4,9,1).⁴³ The text holds to a philosophy of oral torah which presupposes that human history is shaped by a series of prophets who are sent by God to proclaim the same message of truth and who are opposed by false prophets, including Moses and the Pharisees who teach the truth (*Hom.* 3:18-19; c.f. *Hom.* 2.38; *Ep. Pet.* 1.2; *Home.* 3.18-19; 11.29) alongside Jesus, as the true prophet (*Hom.* 1.19; 2.5-12; 3.11-28; with Jesus and Moses being equal sources of truth, *Hom.* 8.6-7).⁴⁴ The importance of oral tradition is tied to the concept of the false pericopes, which suggests that certain passages in the Torah could have been corrupted through time (*Hom.* 16.14.4-5) but which can be corrected through oral tradition (*Hom.* 3.4; 16.14; c.f. 2.2; *Rec.* 10.42.1-4).⁴⁵ This was due to the understanding that Moses did not write the Pentateuch but transmitted it orally to seventy elders who wrote it after his death (*Hom.* 3.47.1).⁴⁶ The Torah cannot be properly understood without the True Prophet's teaching, especially in identifying which are the false periscopes in the Tanakh, which is emphasized in PCL over his life, death on the cross, or resurrection.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Carlson, *Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, pp. 58, 70.

⁴¹ Warren Campbell, "The Death of 'Jewish Christianity' in the Afterlife of the *Clementine Recognitions*", *Harvard Theological Review* 117, no. 3 (2024), pp. 456-474.

⁴² Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Jewish-Christianity and the History of Judaism*, vol. 171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), p. 34.

⁴³ Reed, *Jewish-Christianity*, p. 104.

⁴⁴ Reed, *Jewish-Christianity*, pp. 105, 191.

⁴⁵ Carlson, *Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, pp. 148, 149.

⁴⁶ Carlson, *Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, pp. 150, 152.

⁴⁷ Carlson, *Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, pp. 201, 213.

Jews help Christians by maintaining monotheism (Hom 4.13; 7.4; 9.16; 11.28) and the message of Jesus was meant for the Gentiles (Hom 3.19; 8.6-7).⁴⁸ The Clementine group thought it was necessary to take refuge with God and to follow him through observing Jewish law in the Torah (Hom 4.22.2). A form of apostolic succession is maintained in this group but it is thought of as the succession of the oral Torah resulting in two equal lines of succession among Christians and among Jews (Hom 8.6-7).

PCL maintained repeated immersions, similar to rabbinic practice, of immersing after the menstrual period and even daily (Hom. 10.1; 11.1; 9.23; 10.26; Rec. 8.1; 4.3; Panarion 30.15.3, Ancoratus 2.30.4; c.f. Ferguson, 2009, Electronic edition). Ferguson reads the absence of any connection between baptism and circumcision in PCL as maintaining that circumcision hadn't been replaced (p. 678). The point is supported by the connection made by other early Christian authors explicitly stating that baptism is a form of spiritual circumcision (Barn. 6:16; 11:6; 16:7; cf Ignatius, *Dial.* 43:2; 19:2-3).

Zetterholm proposed a unique reading of PCL which suggests that the text does not have to be read as anti-Pauline, which she rightly states is only based on vague allusions in the text, particularly in the Epistle of Peter before the main body (2) and in some instances such as when the *Homilies* explain that visions of Jesus are inferior to teaching from another (Hom. 17.13-19). Several passages together form the nucleus of the alleged anti-Paulinism of the text (*Hom* 17.14-19). So-called Jewish Christian texts are often read to be anti-Pauline, including the pseudo-Clementine literature, especially in the *Kerygmata Petrou* and its polemic against Simon Magus, often understood to be Paul because of his claim to be an apostle through visionary experiences.⁴⁹ Zetterholm instead sees convergence between what the *Homilies* ascribe to Peter and what Paul teaches in the undisputed letter collection, particularly around the question of how gentiles can be saved. The *Homilies* use the term *theosebeis* (God-fearer) to identify *all* those who worship God and observe the Torah (*Hom.* 13.4.2; 7.8.1-2), creating a new hybrid identity including both Jews and Greeks. The use of this term to describe the religious identity of the author of the text suggests a connection to Judaism, especially given the connection to the rejection of idolatry by that term in Jewish circles.⁵⁰ The Greeks who turned to the Jewish God (*Hom.* 16.7.1, 3, 5; 16.14.4) were to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (*Hom.* 8.22.6; c.f. 7.8.1; 17.7.1). The Gentiles were assumed to be impure (8.22.2) and baptism gave them a new genetic lineage in the Abrahamic family allowing them to observe the Torah (*Hom.* 9.23.3; 10.25.4; 11.26.1). Zetterholm does not understand the *Homilies* as suggesting that Gentiles become Jews, however, other readings of the *Homilies* do see the text as suggesting a conversion to Judaism. Zetterholm reads the text as indicating that baptized Gentiles are only obligated in the commandments associated with the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 (c.f. *Hom.*

⁴⁸ Reed, *Jewish-Christianity*, p. 106.

⁴⁹ Andreas Lindemann, "The Reception of Paul in the Second Century", p. 353.

⁵⁰ Hedner Zetterholm, "A Reception of Pauline Ideas", p. 903.

7.8.1–3), which can be read in conjunction with Paul who also condemns foods sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8–10, with caveats) and condemns *porneia* (1 Cor 5:1; 6:9–10).⁵¹

Jackson-McCabe's reading is slightly different, as he states, "[N]either Christians nor Christianity [are] in the *Homilies*; there are only Judeans, the Nations, and those called 'from the Nations' to become proselytes of the Judeans and even Judeans themselves".⁵² The Pseudo-Clementine literature imagines a "perpetual law" (*nomon aionion*) to which the Judeans and the proselytes of the Nations adhere. In this view, observance of the law is a reflection of God's will and "worshiping God" is seen as a synonym to "Judean." For the Ebionites, Jesus was a prophet who provided a perfect guide to observing the law, but does not supersede or even really add anything to the Mosaic legislation. The author of the Pseudo-Clementine literature only sees conflict with the Pharisees for their reluctance to spread the message of the Torah to the Nations, the primary mission of Jesus' prophecy. However, it is important to note that "The Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*... do not articulate a distinctly Jewish form of Christianity... but a Judaism seeking Gentile converts".⁵³ The term *Ebionite* is even problematic because it is used by Christian heresiologists to discredit the Judean followers of Jesus, even if it is likely that they used some version of "the Poor" to describe themselves. Jackson-McCabe presents a reading of the development of *Christianism* (*christianismos*) which was considered to be different in kind to all other cultures of the world, especially Judean culture. The distinction between Christianity and Judeans is taken for granted by writers such as Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp, among other second century writers, who see the primary division as being between believers and unbelievers, irrespective of their ethnic background. In this sense, Christians become a new type of *genos* (race) of people, in contrast to the Judeans and the Nations. Maintaining aspects of Judean culture, as Ebionites proposed to do, was deeply problematic for these Christians, which Jackson-McCabe reads as making "Jewish Christianity" inconceivable to the Christians themselves, making Judaism and Christianity incompatible. This makes the maintenance of ethnic cultural practices of the Judeans contradictory to the mission of Christianity, because Judeans are only associated with one territory, language, and ancestry, whereas the Christians come from all Nations.⁵⁴ Alternatively, PCL can be seen on an axis of theological agreement between Jews and Christians around the notion that the Bible contained a law-code for non-Jews, in addition to the uniquely Jewish Mosaic legislation, even though the *Homilies* were

⁵¹ Hedner Zetterholm, "A Reception of Pauline Ideas," p. 4.

⁵² Jackson-McCabe, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 156.

⁵³ Jackson-McCabe, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 165; the same reluctance should be held with regard to the name *Nazarene/Nazoraean* as well.

⁵⁴ Jackson-McCabe, *Jewish Christianity*, pp. 146ff

likely a marginal text within its Christian context.⁵⁵ The *Homilies* specifically propose two paths to salvation depending on the religious status of the person as a Jew or Gentile with Jews needing to follow the Torah and Gentiles needing to follow the laws of Jesus, mirroring rabbinic teaching surrounding the Noahide laws.⁵⁶

This section of the *Recognitions* (1.33–71) is sometimes called the *Ascents of James* and is suggested to be an earlier source for some of the other material found in the text as a whole.⁵⁷ Its dating must be later than the NT because of its quotations or allusions to a variety of texts, additionally, the text mentions the decree of Hadrian (*Rec.* 1.39), suggesting a date after 135 CE.⁵⁸ This section of PCL contains references to the distinctive doctrines of the Clementine literature as a whole, such as the permission by Moses of sacrifice as a concession to the people's weakness (*Rec.* 1.36.1), the reference to baptism replacing sacrifice and completed in the name of Jesus (*Rec.* 1.39.2; 1.39.3; c.f. *Did.* 7:1; Justin, *Apol.* 1.61), the identity of Jesus as a prophet like Moses, who came to end sacrifices (*Rec.* 1.43.1; 1.39–42; 1.40.1, 4; 1.41.1–2).⁵⁹ The *Recognitions* resembles later Aphrahat in one other key element which is the manner in which Jesus' divinity is connected to the use of the name "God" for Jesus which was also ascribed to Moses (Exod 7:1). This indicated a distinction between God and those who bore his name.⁶⁰

Rec. 1:27–71 is considered as an earlier source incorporated into the larger text of the *Recognitions*. It consists of a history of the creation through Jesus' crucifixion and the founding of the church under James and is unique in its positive view of the Pharisees and anti-Paulinist inclinations.⁶¹ However, the different recensions of the *Recognitions* do not agree on the positive orientation towards the traditions of the Pharisees as received from Moses, truthful sayings, and key to entering into the kingdom (*Rec.* 1.54.7), as found in the Latin version but in the Syriac this claim is not endorsed only mentioned.⁶² Bourgel suggests that this indicates that the positive

⁵⁵ Holger Zellentin, "Scriptural Hermeneutics and Purity Laws in the *Clementine Homilies*", in *Negotiating Identities*, pp. 423–454.

⁵⁶ Zellentin, "Scriptural Hermeneutics", p. 424.

⁵⁷ Robert E. Van Voorst, *The Ascents of James: History and Theology of a Jewish-Christian Community* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989).

⁵⁸ Van Voorst, *The Ascents of James*, p. 79

⁵⁹ Van Voorst, *The Ascents of James*, pp. 89, 94, 98, 100, 116.

⁶⁰ William L. Petersen, "The Christology of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage: An Excursus on the Seventeenth *Demonstration*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992), pp. 241–256.

⁶¹ Jonathan Bourgel, "The Holders of the 'Word of Truth': The Pharisees in *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* 1.27–71", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 25, no. 2 (2017), pp. 171–200, here 173, from a Paul within Judaism perspective, we can add that this refers to a negative reaction to the ways in which Paul was *received* by some Christian groups after his death.

⁶² Here is the Syriac version: "And then the Scribes and Pharisees were baptized by John. Thus were they convinced of the Word of Truth, that the Kingdom of Heaven is in the likeness of a key that they received by the hand of Moses to hide. But those who are the pure Disciples of John were exceedingly separated from the people, and they called to their teacher as if he existed in hiding. By means of this, because all these divisions arose

orientation towards Pharisaism is original and was omitted by the Syriac translator either through disapproval or embarrassment.⁶³

Clementine theology presented here in describing the role of Jesus as the true prophet who came to abolish sacrifices and institute water immersion in their place. It mentions several themes found throughout the Pauline corpus, emphasizing the mercy of God (Rom 9:15–16, 18; 11:30–32; 12:8; 1 Cor 7:25; 2 Cor 4:1; Phil 2:7). The connection between baptism and the forgiveness of sins begins in the authentic Pauline collection, as discussed below, however the phrase itself is only found in the pseudo-Pauline collection (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). Other themes found in this passage, such as that of wisdom are prominent themes in the Pauline collection (Rom 11:34;

among the people, alas, the Baptism of the Messiah was prevented from being believed” (*Rec.* 1.54).

The Pharisees are again chastised later for their rejection of Jesus as messiah, “And then a man from the Pharisees, after hearing these things, blamed Philip who had spoken of Jesus as equal with Moses. And against this one, Bartholomew spoke and professed: ‘It is not that we say that he is equal with Moses, but that he is greater than Moses. Because Moses was a Prophet, he is something that even Jesus is, but that which Jesus is, the Messiah, Moses is not. Therefore, whatever Moses is, Jesus also is, but Jesus is something that Moses was not.’ And so he said these things, testified of things corresponding to them, and thereupon became silent. And after him James son of Alphaeus spoke and argued: ‘It is not right to believe in Jesus if the Prophets who came before spoke about him, but rather those Prophets are Prophets if the Messiah testifies about them” (*Rec.* 1.59).

They are also condemned for hiding the true teachings of Moses, “But he did this at the end of the time given for teaching, and he reproved the Scribes and Pharisees on account of their bad doctrine and dishonest deeds, and truly it was not for all of them, but only for those to whom the teaching from Moses had been delivered. They hid it as if it were a key fit for the Temple of the Kingdom. These things, then, he testified about faithful Moses, for he ministered throughout the entire Temple” (*Rec.* 2.30).

However, they are praised on one occasion for mastering the Law, “the purity of the body is acceptable, but it is not higher than the purity of the mind, rather it is also required for good. For even our Teacher, to certain people from us who were Pharisees and Scribes, as if to people separated because of being excellent, and as the Scribes know the Law better than the others, thus reproved them as hypocrites, because they only purified what was visible to human beings, but with impurity they forsook their souls that are only visible to God” (*Hom.* 11:28; *Rec.* 6:10).

A unique interpretation of Matt 23:25–26 is offered to limit Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees to the hypocritical among the Pharisees, “Therefore he made use of this public saying, justly not to all of them, but to the hypocrites. For to some people of them he even commanded us to be obedient, because they were entrusted the Seat of Moses” (*Hom.* 11:29; *Rec.* 6.11).

⁶³ Bourgel, “The Holders of the ‘Word of Truth’,” pP. 177, 179.

1 Cor 1:17–24, 30; 2:1, 4–7, 13; 3:19; 12:8; 2 Cor 1:12), as well as pseudo-Pauline collection (Eph 1:8, 17; 3:10; Col 1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5).

The connection of baptism to the forgiveness of sins is a corollary to the theological opposition to sacrifices found in the Pseudo-Clementines. It proposes that the purpose of baptism was to replace sacrifice as the means of forgiveness of sins, as the law was the primary means of atonement for sins (Gal. 3:19). While the theme of the forgiveness of sins is quite explicitly made here, the theme of covenant membership is somewhat subdued, perhaps because of the context of the passage describing how the Israelites originally fulfilled God’s will in occupying the Land but had erred in building the Temple as a shrine. This led to Jesus being sent to correct that error and provide baptism in place of sacrifices. Shortly after though, the salvation of the Gentiles in great numbers is mentioned (*Rec.* 1.42; c.f. 1.50). The message of Jesus as the messiah and the forgiveness of sins in baptism is for the Jews first and then the Gentiles (*Rec.* 1.63), but when the Gentiles are taught, it is the same message that they receive (*Rec.* 2.33). The author of the text clearly sees Gentiles who believe in Jesus and follow his message as becoming Jews, “, if a person from the Gentiles will keep the Law, he becomes a Jew; but when one will not keep it, he is a pagan. For a Jew is one who believes in God, keeping the Law, and by faith removes the pangs of desires, which are like mountains. But one who does not fulfill the Law, manifestly by not believing in God, is a deserter from the commandments” (*Hom.* 11:16; c.f. *Rec.* 5:34).

Rec. 1:39

“Now therefore, after the want of rectification became necessary, the appropriate time arrived wherein the Prophet formerly proclaimed by Moses was revealed. And in his coming, because of the Mercy of God, he would first instruct them to cease and desist from sacrificing, but so that they would not think themselves defrauded of the remission of sins by means of sacrifices—as this would be an impediment to them so as not to be converted—Baptism by water was appointed for the forgiveness of sins. There was shown to them that which verily in truth gives remission of sins, and to those who are perfect, it (Baptism) is able to sustain them with Eternal Life so that they do not die, for when they have become acceptable to God, by His ineffable Wisdom, they shall be rescued from the war that because of the disobedient is yet to come for their destruction. As they were unwilling to do anything of their own will, once they have gone out from their region and do not have the place that was made desolate by them, although unwillingly, as is acceptable to God, they shall survive and be chastened”.

The identity of the Prophet is made clear in the following passage and connected to the person of Jesus:

Rec 1.48

(Rec. 1:48) I do not speak concerning Moses, but concerning him who by Baptism was named ‘the Son,’ the Messiah who was also called ‘Jesus.’ And he quenched the altar that was there inflamed on account of sins, for after he was revealed the anointing of the Chief Priesthood, of Prophecy, and of Kingdom had ended.

PCL links opposition to Jesus’ baptism to the Sadducean priestly leadership, showing the chief priest opposing the baptism of Jesus, presumably because of its intent to replace sacrifices in the *recognitions* (Rec. 1.55). This same passage links baptism with being in the kingdom of heaven and the resurrection. More polemical critique is presented against the Sadducees in other instances, particularly noting their opposition to the doctrine of resurrection. It frames the mission of the PCL community as spreading knowledge of God among the Gentiles of Jesus as the “eternal Messiah.” The emphasis on the idea of resurrection finds precedent in Paul, beginning with his likely earliest letter to the Thessalonians, in which Paul encourages the Thessalonians to continue in their faithfulness and mentions resurrection toward the end of the letter. In this section, Paul addresses their concerns about belief in the resurrection and presents his understanding of how the appearance (*parousia*) would occur (1 Thess 4:14). Likewise, in the later letter to the Corinthians, Paul presented his thoughts on the resurrection in a more detailed manner in which he presented likely earlier traditions surrounding Jesus’ resurrection and the tradition of how he had appeared to the apostles after (1 Cor 15:4-8). Paul considered the resurrection to be the source of the gospel’s power and especially the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:13-17). Paul also mentions resurrection in Philippians (3:7-8, 10-11, 21) and after Paul the deutero-Pauline collection mentions resurrection (Eph 1:20; Col 1:15-23).

Rec. 1:63

“However, I said these things to him and also things corresponding to them, and we then, idiots and fishermen, witnessed against the Priests about the God Who is alone in the heavens, against the Sadducees about the Resurrection of the Dead, against the Samaritans about Jerusalem—while in truth we had not gone up to their city, but only spoke openly outside—against the Scribes and the Pharisees about the Kingdom of Heaven, and against the Disciples of John so that they might not be offended by him. However, to the contrary of all of them we said that Jesus is the eternal Messiah. And then at last I exhorted them that, before we go out to the Gentiles to proclaim the knowledge of the God over all, they should first make God

known to their own people by accepting Jesus. And I told them: ‘For in this way you are able, once you know Jesus, to receive the Holy Spirit by the true Baptism of the glorious Threefold Invocation, and make confession, believing only in God concerning things that he has taught. And in this way you shall receive Salvation and Eternal Life, for otherwise it is impossible, even if you were to offer up a thousand burnt-offerings to him’.

A following passage connects the practice of being immersed with both forgiveness of sins and entering into the Kingdom of God, which is referenced in the authentic collection (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; 1 Thess 2:12), the deutero-Pauline collection (Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 4:11; 2 Thess 1:5) and the pseudo-Pauline collection (2 Tim 4:1, 18), but considerably less than the 121 references in the Gospels.⁶⁴ Paul connects ethical behavior with kingdom membership (1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:21). The connection from Paul to his reception in the *Recognitions* takes the strands of ethical behavior as necessary to kingdom membership and the nature of being “in Christ” provided through baptism and stringing those two thoughts together through the connection with being in Christ and living without sins.

Rec 1:69

“And thereafter he [Jesus] convinced the people, while showing that except a person be baptized with life-flowing waters in the glorious Threefold Invocation, as the True Prophet himself showed, there shall be no forgiveness of sins for him, nor shall he enter into the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated that all things are the Predestination of the Self-Existent God through the concealment of His existence. And along with these things he said: ‘Therefore, you should not think that we speak of two self-existent ones or one that is divided, or that one is a female vessel of itself, as the wicked say—a female-male.’ However, he even talked about the Son, in what manner and by Whom he is, that he is not without a beginning, and that it cannot now be said of him when it was, for one ought secretly to set aside its existence. He explained many things, even about the Advocate and about Baptism, and he persuaded all the people with the Chief Priest, during seven whole days, to hasten from that place to go forth to Baptism”.

Perhaps the best summary of Clementine theology of baptism can be found in the following text, in which the question is asked, What does it benefit a person in righteousness after being baptized with water? The text responds:

Hom. 11:26; Rec. 6:9

“First, you do something that pleases God, and second, after you are regenerated by water from the Most High, you shall bring to an end your first birth, which was

⁶⁴ Michael J. Vlach, “The Kingdom of God in Paul’s Epistles”, *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 26, no. 1 (2015), pp. 59-74, here 59.

from lust, and likewise you shall be able to inherit Life. But otherwise you are unable, for thus has the True Prophet sworn to us, saying: ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you are regenerated by water in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.’ On account of this, therefore, come near, for she (the Holy Spirit) is there from the beginning, mercifully hovering upon the water, and recognizing those who are baptized in the Threefold Invocation and praise, delivering from future torment and bringing their excellent deeds as an offering to God after Baptism. Come to the refuge of the water, for they alone are able to extinguish the turbulence of fire. But one who until now refuses to come near to them, within him dwells the spirit of frenzy; wherefore he is unable to come near the living water for his advantage”.

The righteous who lack baptism still are lacking one necessary element of salvation (*Hom.* 11:27; *Rec.* 6:9–10), and, according to this text, baptism only provides remission of past sins, those committed after being immersed must be repaid in good deeds. The Clementine *Homilies* link the practice of being baptized with entering the Kingdom of God as necessary (*Hom.* 13:21; c.f. *Rec.* 7:38) for “without baptism you are unable to receive hope” (*Hom.* 11:25; c.f. *Rec.* 6:8) and choosing not to do so would make one an enemy of God. This text is also noteworthy as it is the first mention of baptism outside of the *Ascents of James* found in 1:27–1.71 in the *Recognitions*. Here, the text presents itself as a more explicitly Christian text through baptism in the name of the Trinity, which was not a feature of the earlier text’s approach to the rite.

There are several references to baptism in another sense beyond initiation and forgiveness of sins, which refers to the ritual immersion in water to remove ritual impurity. On one such occasion, Peter arises early in the morning and immerses himself before praying (*Hom.* 10.1). There are other areas where ritual ablutions seem to be implied by the text (*Hom.* 14:3; *Rec.* 8:2–3). Baptism is mentioned in connection to purity in other occasions too and the text suggests that baptism washes the body of impurities (*Hom.* 11:28; *Rec.* 6:10). In later texts, the first partaking of bread with the community is connected to a post-baptismal celebration, perhaps reflecting the eucharist or table fellowship (*Hom.* 14:1; c.f. *Rec.* 7:38). This type of immersion is not alluded to in the Pauline collection, likely due to its connection with ritual purity, perhaps not a concern of Diaspora Jews. The author of Luke-Acts does portray Paul as participating in ritual ablutions while in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17–26). However, the concept of purity itself is found in Paul, as Koltun-Fromm sees in Paul’s discourse surrounding *porneia*, which results in disobedience to the law and participation in it marks one as not a member of the Christ-believing community. She notes how the things that Paul says defile people resemble the levitical purity laws (Gal 5:19–23) and immoral deeds create pollution in the community (1 Cor 5–

6).⁶⁵ In a similar way, Hayes sees a purity framework in Paul's opposition to believers' intermarriage in 1 Cor 7:39 as resulting from Paul understanding mixed marriages as a resulting from *porneia* (1 Cor 6:15–20) and that these relationships are not sanctioned because they mix holy and unholy together.⁶⁶ In a slightly different manner, Vanderkam sees ritual purity considerations in Paul's instructions regarding the purity of the shared eucharistic meal (c.f. 1 Cor 11:27–29; CD 2:11–22).⁶⁷

Baptism in Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*

Syriac Christianity of this period was characterized by the prevalence of ascetic groups called *Bnay qyōmo* ("covenanters"). The word *Qyōmo* can refer to the Church in Aphrahat (using a different system of noting the *Demonstrations*, PS vol. 1, col. 232. 3–4) and that belief in Christ was a kind of covenant that liberated the Christians to become the Church of God, the new covenant (col. 232.3–11, 780.22–781.24; Acta Mart., vol. 3, p. 64; cols. 44.21, 464.24, 573.5, 1040.22, 1049.12; cols. 44.13–16, 72.10–11).⁶⁸ The *bney qyōmo* usually promised a vow of celibacy and poverty at baptism. Aphrahat is also concerned for instruction in ascetic life (*Dem.* 1.4) and believed that faith resulted in doing good deeds and keeping God's commandments (*Dem.* 23.62), a theme found throughout the text.⁶⁹ This also implied walking in Christ's commandments which made the believer a temple of God (*Dem.* 6.14; 9.1; 18.5; c.f. 1.3; 6.14–17; 8.5; 23.47). He allegorized sacrifice as well to refer to the purity of heart in prayer as an interiorized offering and sacrifice.⁷⁰ Even though his work was characterized by a strong sense of anti-Judaism, Aphrahat did not eschew ritual law entirely. For example, he thought that Easter should coincide with Passover and should consist of a seven day festival to mark the fulfillment of the feast of Unleavened Bread in the Old Testament.⁷¹

Monasticism began as an indigenous tradition in Syria, although it was later influenced by Egyptian monastic tradition, which came to be the standard for all

⁶⁵ Naomi Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 80–81 and pp. 83–84.

⁶⁶ Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 92–93.

⁶⁷ James C. Vanderkam, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christianity", in *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Hershel Shanks (New York: Random House, 1992), pp. 181–202, here 194–195.

⁶⁸ Malatius M. Malki, "Revisiting the Institution of *Bnay* and *Bnoth Qyōmo* in the Syriac Tradition", *Religions* 15, no. 6 (2024), p. 686.

⁶⁹ Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, pp. 26–27.

⁷⁰ Sebastian P. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), p. 2.

⁷¹ Lehto, "Moral, Ascetic, and Ritual Dimensions," pp. 178–179.

Christian ascetic traditions. Asceticism might have begun within the apostolic age, as Paul defended his apostolic authority through rejection of certain social norms, such as marriage and child-rearing, to be fully devoted to Christ (1 Cor 7:35).⁷² The Syrian model saw itself as following in the footsteps of the Old Testament forebearers and adopted the model of Anthony with homeless ascetics.⁷³ The Syrian church was relatively new in the fourth century and considerably smaller than the much larger Jewish communities of the East. Perhaps because of this, asceticism was important to Syrian Christian practice through sexual and material renunciation and ascetics held a privileged position within the church. Ascetics in Syriac Christian circles saw themselves as emulating Jesus' homelessness and ascetic wandering, embracing celibacy, poverty, and homelessness, as the imitation of Christ was considered an element of salvation alongside belief.⁷⁴

Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* were published in three stages between 336 and 345 CE and can be dated from the author's inclusion of dates at the end of each text.⁷⁵ This text is the earliest surviving text in Christian Syriac literature. It is likely that he was of non-Jewish origin (*Dem.* 16.7), yet, he also refers to Jacob as "our father" which Lehto suggests means that Jacob is a father of the peoples (Gentiles) but which could be read as Aphrahat as a Jewish proselyte, additional other Torah figures are referred to as "our father" including Jacob, Isaac, and other references (*Dem.* 1.16; 4.1; 4.5; 4.9; 4.12; 8.7; 9.13; 14.27; 16.1; 19.11), as many other Christians were converts from Judaism and might have been tempted to return under times of persecution. Aphrahat recognizes the law and the prophets (2.1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 11, 20, 21.2) which are scriptures (1.16; 4.18; 7.12; 9.1; 11.3; 11.6; 16.4; 17.10; 18.12; 19.12; 20.9; 20.14; 23.18; 3.13; 6.17; 7.10; 7.23; 10.9; 14.32; 18.7; 23.53) or holy scriptures (1.20; 3.1; 14.19; 22.26) and the gospel (1.10; 6.1; 6.20; 12.9; 14.31; 20.10; 20.11; 22.18), new testament (11.11; 12.6; 12.11), which refers to the new covenant and not a text.⁷⁶ Aphrahat refers to the Peshitta Syriac text as Scripture.⁷⁷ He makes no reference to 2 Thess, Phil, 1 and 2 Pet, 1-3 John, Jude or Rev, all of which entered Syriac

⁷² Lee A. Johnson, "The Devolution of Paul's Relationship with the Corinthian Women: The Incongruence between Paul's Apostolic Defence and His Instructions to Women," in *Receptions of Paul in Early Christianity: The Person of Paul and His Writings through the Eyes of His Early Interpreters*, ed. Jens Schröter, Simon Buttica, and Andreas Dettwiler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 207–226; c.f. Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness*, p. 14.

⁷³ Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, pp. 51–54.

⁷⁴ Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, pp. 54–58.

⁷⁵ Adam Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), p. 1.

⁷⁶ Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, pp. 5, 8, 9, 13, 19

⁷⁷ Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, p. 19

Christianity at a later period.⁷⁸ His references to the “gospel” likely refer to the *Diatessaron*, as he never refers to a plural *gospels*.⁷⁹ What concerned Aphrahat more than the Sassanian empire’s persecution of Christianity, which began under the reign of Shapur II and his campaign against the Roman Empire in 335 CE that resulted in persecutions of Persian Christians and their loyalty to his state beginning in 339 CE, was the polemical debate with the Jewish community’s critiques of Christianity.⁸⁰ The political situation of Christians in the Sassanian Empire was caught between the forces of both the Roman Empire’s turn towards Christianity and the reaction of the Persians against Christianity and within this context, the Jewish community had begun to proselytize Christians, showing its own strength within the Persian context.⁸¹

Key to his theology is a type of anti-Judaism that resulted from interactions with Jews.⁸² He believed that Jews had been rejected and the Church was now God’s chosen people, made up of peoples of many ethnicities. Central to his arguments are an opposition to circumcision, observances of Sabbath and festivals and *kashrut*. However, Aphrahat’s opposition to Judaism did not lead to hatred of Jews as found in some western Church fathers.⁸³ The overall theme in his anti-Judaism is that God had rejected the Jews and called Christians as new people of God. His criticisms of Jews are all scriptural and do not indicate any familiarity with rabbinic tradition, per Neusner, which suggests engagement with proto-Karaites.⁸⁴ He was probably addressing judaizing within the Church, living in a context in which Christian conversion to Judaism might have been attractive under the Sassanian persecution of Christianity upon Constantine’s adoption of the religion.⁸⁵ Aphrahat criticizes the Jews for ignoring their own prophecy and asserts that before Israel, the Gentiles were already called through Abraham but rejected due to idolatry and after Israel was subsequently disobedient, the Gentiles were called again.⁸⁶ His fierce critique might have been the result of a felt need to combat judaizing pressures in the Eastern

⁷⁸ Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, p. 20.

⁷⁹ Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, p. 21.

⁸⁰ Ábrahám Kovacs, “A Syriac Christology and Polemics against the Jews: A Theology of Aphrahat”, *Református Szemle* 102, no. 2 (2009), pp. 214-221, here 216.

⁸¹ Kovacs, “A Syriac Christology”, p. 217.

⁸² Marcel Simon, *Vetus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, A.D. 135–425* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 94; c.f. F. Gavin, “Aphraates and the Jews”, *Journal of the Society of Oriental Research* 7 (1923), pp. 95-166; Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971); J. G. Snaith, “Aphrahat and the Jews”, in *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of E. I. J. Rosenthal*, ed. J. A. Emerton and S. E. Reif (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 236-250; Naomi Koltun-Fromm, “Jewish-Christian Polemics in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia: A Reconstructed Conversation”, (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1993).

⁸³ Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, p. 124.

⁸⁵ Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, p. 6, 127.

⁸⁶ Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, p. 134.

church.⁸⁷ There is another way to understand Aphrahat's opposition to Judaism which will be explored in the following section.

Aphrahat's position on baptism was to assign it as one of the key elements of the faith, describing what a Christian believes, "when a person believes in God, the Lord of all, who made heaven and earth, and the seas and all that is in them, and who made Adam in his image. He gave the Torah to Moses, sent [a portion] of his Spirit into the prophets and sent his Anointed One into the world. Such a person also believes in the resurrection of the dead and the mystery of baptism. This is the faith of the Church of God" (*Dem.* 1:19; c.f. *Dem.* 12:13). The same text proceeds to assert that a Christian rejects the observance of the Sabbath, festivals, dietary restrictions of *kashrut* and magical practices. Jesus is proclaimed as the "Great Prophet" who came to reveal the mystery of baptism (*Dem.* 4:6), which ultimately reveals that the old People of God (Israel) had been replaced by a new People of God composed of many Peoples (i.e. Gentiles).

Baptism is key to the faith and it provides the spirit of Christ. The theme of receiving the spirit of Christ is something key to Paul's overall thought and found in *Rec.* 1:63 as a component of baptism, which, from Paul's letters, was the mechanism by which covenant membership was enacted. This same line of thinking is found in Aphrahat, here also connected to the connection of living in Christ after baptism. Aphrahat's thoughts on baptism indicate a reception of the Pauline emphasis on the reception of the spirit with a subdued emphasis on the forgiveness of sins, a common theme in Clementine literature, although not entirely absent from Clementine thinking on baptism (c.f. *Rec.* 1:63), likewise the connection of baptism to forgiveness is not absent from Aphrahat (*Dem.* 11:11).

Dem. 6:14⁸⁸

We too, my friend, have received of the Spirit of Christ and Christ lives in us (c.f. Lev 26:11)... From baptism we have received the Spirit of Christ, for at the moment when the priests invoke the Spirit, heaven opens and the Spirit descends and hovers over the water (Gen 1:2) and those who are baptized put [the Spirit] on. For the Spirit stays away from all those who are born of the flesh, until they come to the water of [re]birth and then receive the Holy Spirit. For in the first birth, they are born with a natural spirit which is created with a person and not subject to death...And in the second birth at baptism, they receive the Holy Spirit from a small portion of the divinity which is not subject to death.

⁸⁷ Simon, *Verus Israel*, pp. 319, 323, Simon suggests that Aphrahat's community might have observed *both* the Sabbath and Sunday and also notes that Aphrahat was not familiar with other practices of Easter and, instead, linked his community's celebration of Easter with the week-long celebration of Passover.

⁸⁸ Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, p. 191.

Baptism is the key identity marker of the new covenant, as God had changed the identity symbol from circumcision of the flesh to the circumcision of the heart, enacted through baptism, which also brought about forgiveness of sins (*Dem.* 11:11), which results from the changing in the composition of God's people from the People (Jews) to the Peoples (Jews and Gentiles) due to Abraham being the father of many peoples (*Dem.* 11:1).⁸⁹ However, the circumcision of the heart mentioned in *Dem.* 11:11 is distinct from baptism, although intimately tied to it, it is the explicitly the action of repenting from sins, which must occur first, and then a person can be baptized and "joined to the people of God" (*Dem.* 12:9).⁹⁰ Aphrahat, like Paul, understood divine spirit to be infused into the believer at baptism and was a type of seal that made the believer a temple of God and clothed with divinity (*Dem.* 6).⁹¹ The imagery of clothing is associated with the dwelling of divine spirit in Aphrahat's writings and relies on biblical language and imagery to convey this message.⁹² Aphrahat clearly links the reception of the spirit at baptism with the ritual means of acquiring covenant membership, becoming the true form of circumcision as the mark of the people of God.⁹³ Given his context within the broader Syrian ascetic

⁸⁹ Although a close reading of *Dem.* 11:2 could arrive at the understanding that Aphrahat did not oppose genital circumcision in principle, only that it be accompanied by faith, presumably meaning faith in Jesus, "Circumcision is of no use without faith, [nor is there] any profit [in it], since faith is before circumcision, and circumcision [was only] a mark. A covenant was given to Abraham when God said to him, "This is my covenant, that you will keep by circumcising every male". During the time that it pleased the one who gave it, [circumcision] was kept along with the commandments of the Law, [and], it benefitted and gave [them] life. But during the time when the Law was not kept, circumcision did not benefit at all (*Dem.* 11:2).

⁹⁰ However, for Aphrahat, uncircumcision is equated with uncleanness (c.f. *Dem.* 12:3) and did not understand baptism as *replacing* circumcision but as the *true circumcision*, meaning that Gentiles who were baptized had, in fact, been circumcised, c.f. Ilya Lizorkin, "Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*: A Conversation with the Jews of Mesopotamia" (PhD diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2009), p. 59.

⁹¹ Daniel L. McConaughy, "Aphrahat on the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian Life", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 86, no. 2 (2020): 345–363, here 355.

⁹² McConaughy, "Aphrahat on the Role of the Holy Spirit," p. 356.

⁹³ Both Aphrahat and the rabbis can be understood as arriving at a similar place vis-a-vis initiation into their respective communities, c.f. "for Aphrahat and his community the first and second circumcisions (faith and baptism and mikvah/amad respectively) are life-giving (*Dem.* 11.12)...according to the Babylonian Jewish sages (bYevamoth 46b-47b) the initiation of a Gentile into an Israelite community consisted of two steps: first, faith and study of the Torah; and then a two-fold initiation process (circumcision and baptism/mikvah)... In other words circumcision in the flesh for BT was not a sufficient sign of admission into the membership of the people of God; rather it must be accompanied by a water ceremony as well"; Ilya Lizorkin, "Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*: A Conversation with the Jews of Mesopotamia" (PhD diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2009), p. 61, 64.

tradition, he mentions baptism along with the vows of celibacy made by the *bnay qyōmo*. The emphasis on virginity and the ascetic lifestyle is found within the Pseudo-Clementine literature as well, given its likely Syrian provenance.⁹⁴

*Dem. 7:20*⁹⁵

On account of this, it is fitting that those who sound the trumpets, the preachers of the Church, should call and warn off those who have made a covenant with God in advance of baptism, those who have vowed themselves to virginity and holiness, young unmarried men, and women, and holy ones.

Aphrahat's supersessionist theology is found throughout the *Demonstrations* and likely resulted from frequent interactions with the Jewish communities of the East. The theme of how the Jews have been rejected as God's chosen people and replaced with the Church is found throughout the text.⁹⁶ Aphrahat's case for this type of supersessionism is built upon his interpretation of Scripture by noting that the covenants God made were changed in each iteration. He links this to the covenant made with Adam, Abraham, and finally Moses and notes how the stipulations and symbols of each covenant changed in each version of the covenant (*Dem. 11:11*).⁹⁷ Lehto connects Aphrahat's concerns about Judaism and his ascetical lifestyle by tracing his positive concept of divine law, an interpretation that saw most of Jewish law as being fulfilled but opening a higher, ascetic way of life, called the law of righteousness, modelled on Abraham and other Old Testament figures who responded to God in faithfulness (2.2, 7; 13.8).⁹⁸ Aphrahat's ethics flow from his emphasis on the two commandments of loving God and neighbor as the entirety of the law, which leads to a faith that results in good works and a commitment to a moral life beyond mere engagement with asceticism but obedience in the heart.⁹⁹ This leads to a contrast between the law of Christ and the ceremonial law which Aphrahat considers to be a "hard yoke" in contrast to that of Christ; additionally, Christian asceticism was embraced freely and not via obligation as in the case of Jewish ceremonial observances per Aphrahat.¹⁰⁰ However, Aphrahat does envision ascetic renunciations of sexual intercourse, property, certain food restrictions, sleep

⁹⁴ Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, p. 65.

⁹⁵ Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, p. 273

⁹⁶ Adam Lehto, "Moral, Ascetic, and Ritual Dimensions to Law-Observance in Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14, no. 2 (2006), pp. 157-181, here 157.

⁹⁷ Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, p. 273

⁹⁸ Lehto, "Moral, Ascetic, and Ritual Dimensions", pp. 159-60, 163.

⁹⁹ Lehto, "Moral, Ascetic, and Ritual Dimensions", p. 163-164.

¹⁰⁰ Lehto, "Moral, Ascetic, and Ritual Dimensions", p. 165.

and comfort, to characterize a truly moral life.¹⁰¹ Additionally, Aphrahat criticized the Jews and predicted their final deliverance would never come and that the Christian persecution by the Persian state was a good thing that emulated the former persecution of Israel (Deut 21:9-10).¹⁰²

Becker argues that Aphrahat's anti-Judaism resulted from a very real threat felt by the Christian community as Christians visited synagogues to receive charity in an analysis of *Demonstration* 20.¹⁰³ A key theme in Aphrahat's writing is care for the poor which he connects to Mosaic legislation (Deut 24:19-22), yet he continues to mention the faithlessness of Israel (*Dem.* 9:1).¹⁰⁴ The discrete categories of "Jew" and "Christian" were still permeable, especially in a lay sense, against the theological orthodoxy of religious elites. This text, *Demonstration* 20, is unique in that it distinctly points towards social interaction between Jews and Christians, unlike other texts in Aphrahat's oeuvre. Aphrahat's theological presuppositions would have led him to see a contradiction in a Christian receiving charity from a Jew, when Christ was the model of charity and the foundation for Christian life was faith in Christ, requiring ethical action, including alms to the poor.¹⁰⁵ This suggests a social reality in which some judaizing Christians would not have seen any problem with attendance at a synagogue and receiving its charity as aberrant and that they could receive some benefit from the Jews who held higher power in Sassanian society.

Syriac Christianity within Judaism

The question of how to best view Syriac Christianity in its earliest iterations via the prism of baptism calls to mind the issue of the so-called parting of the ways between Christians and Jews, which has been subject to a re-evaluation in recent scholarship. Earlier scholarship assumed an early separation based on the *Adversus Judaeos* literature of some western second century church fathers (Fredriksen 2003), yet that date can be pushed much later to the third century.¹⁰⁶ Both "Christianity" and "Judaism" were dynamic traditions with fuzzy boundaries, making a fence to define "outsiders" difficult to establish.¹⁰⁷ There is a convincing case to be made that it was the political reality in the adoption of Christianity by Constantine and the Council

¹⁰¹ Lehto, "Moral, Ascetic, and Ritual Dimensions", p. 172.

¹⁰² Kovacs, "A Syriac Christology", p. 219.

¹⁰³ Adam H. Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor in Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 20", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 3 (2002), pp. 305-327.

¹⁰⁴ Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor", p. 310.

¹⁰⁵ Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor", p. 325.

¹⁰⁶ Lawrence H. Schiffman, E. P. Sanders, Albert I. Baumgarten, and Alan Mendelson, "At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism", in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 2: *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* 2 (1981), pp. 115-156.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

of Nicea of 325 CE that officially created firm boundaries between the two religions.¹⁰⁸ If Nicea created Christian orthodoxy, it might have also led to the crystallization of rabbinic orthodoxy that could have been predated in the rabbinic corpus to an earlier period.¹⁰⁹

This has practical implications for the study of the New Testament and other early Christian literature.¹¹⁰ Most relevant for this study is the timing of the council and the writing of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* about a decade after the council and the changing political realities in the Sassanian Empire in response to Rome's adopting of Christianity.

Through the invention of traditions such as the council at Yavne and the prayer against the *minim* recited in the daily *amidah* prayer. This was ascribed to Gamaliel II at the council of Yavneh in the Talmud.¹¹¹ These practices might have existed in a variant form in Palestine but connected to the present reality of the much later Babylonian sages to reflect their conceptualization of orthodoxy.¹¹²

The rabbis seem to use the category of *minut* quite broadly with a variety of types of people included in it, including belief in the doctrine of the two powers in heaven.¹¹³ This term could even possibly refer to Gentiles and not Jewish sectarians at all¹¹⁴ or Jewish Christians, even considering the problematic nature of that term,

¹⁰⁸ Adele Reinhartz, "How Christianity Separated from Judaism", in Frederick E. Greenspahn (ed.), *Early Judaism: New Insights and Scholarship*, vol. 1 (New York: NYU Press, 2018), pp. 97-123.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Boyarin, "The Diadoche of the Rabbis; or, Rabbi Judah at Yavneh", in *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire*, ed. Richard Kalmin and Seth Schwartz (Louvain: Peeters, 2002); Jacob Neusner, "Judaism after the Destruction of the Temple: An Overview", in *Formative Judaism: Religious, Historical, and Literary Studies*, 3d series, *Torah, Pharisees, and Rabbis*, «Brown Judaica Series» 46 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1983), pp. 83-98.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Motyer, *Your Father the Devil?: A New Approach to John and 'the Jews'* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

¹¹¹ B. Berakhot 28b-29a

¹¹² *Dial.* 16:4; 47:4; 96:2; c.f. Daniel Boyarin, "Justin Martyr Invents Judaism", *Church History* 70, no. 3 (2001), pp. 427-461.

¹¹³ Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), pp. 58, 96-97, 263-264; Alan Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 151-158; Alan Segal, "Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism", in Stephen G. Wilson (ed.), *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, vol. 2: *Separation and Polemic* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), pp. 133-142; Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132-212* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), pp. 105-106.

¹¹⁴ Reuven Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity", in E. P. Sanders (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Self-*

when mentioned in conjunction with Sepphoris.¹¹⁵ Some regard *minut* as something other than theological heresy, and, instead, tie it to the unity and social existence of the Jewish community. In this view, the *minim* are those who separate from the broader community under rabbinic leadership. In some cases, this might include Christians.¹¹⁶ Schremer's concept of *minut*¹¹⁷ rightfully contrasts with the theological heresy proposed by many, who propose that it was primarily an incorrect belief about God,¹¹⁸ or a "theological sin".¹¹⁹ The act of departing from common practice should be the focus of identifying the *minim*.¹²⁰ This definition does not, by any means, exclude Jewish Christians as *minim*, but focuses the issue of their *minut* with detaching themselves from rabbinic authority. Certain contexts of the *minut* passages refers to deviance from common ritual practice, such as m. Hullin 2:9 which prohibits the slaughter of *minim*, which must have differed from rabbinic *shechitah* (c.f. T. Hullin 2:19). According to this view, the *minim* are those who separated against the community, most notably in the realm of practice.¹²¹ The Rabbis even seem comfortable using magic *against* the *minim*, as there are several stories which show the use of magical praxis to harm them.¹²²

Definition, vol. 2: *Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), pp. 228-232.

¹¹⁵ Bellarmino Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians*, Translated by Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan, 1971), p. 107; Ernest W. Saunders, "Christian Synagogues & Jewish-Christianity in Galilee", *ExpT* 3 (1977), pp. 73-75; Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church*, Translated by Douglas R. A. Hare (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), p. 30; Frédéric Manns, *Essais sur le judéo-christianisme* (Jerusalem: Franciscan, 1977), pp. 165-190.

¹¹⁶ Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 16.

¹¹⁷ Adiel Schremer, "Wayward Jews: *minim* in early rabbinic literature", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 64, 2 (2013), pp. 242-263.

¹¹⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 131; Cf. Daniel Boyarin, "Two Powers in Heaven; Or, The Making of a Heresy", en Hindy Nahman & Judith H. Newman (eds.), *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, «Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism» 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 335.

¹¹⁹ Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132-212*, 2nd ed (London & Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000), p. 104; Yaakov Sussman, "The History of Halakha and the Dead Sea Scrolls – Preliminary Observations on *Miqsat Ma'ase Ha-Torah* (4QMMT)", *Tarbiz* 59 (1990), p. 54, n. 176 (Hebrew).

¹²⁰ Y..B. Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text: Tefillin and the Ancient World*, col. «Brown Judaic Studies» 351 (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2008), p. 130.

¹²¹ Schremer, "Wayward Jews", p. 263.

¹²² Gideon Bohak, "Magical means for handling *minim* in rabbinic literature", in Peter J. Tomson & Joshua Schwartz (eds.), *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), pp. 267-278, espec. 267.

Some see a change in the meaning of *minut* from Palestine to Babylon, with some believing that *minut* referred generally to gentile religious beliefs.¹²³ However, the Babylonian Rabbis were familiar with Syriac Christianity and might have interacted with Christian intellectuals on a regular basis.¹²⁴ This leads to the possibility that the polemics in the Talmud (and perhaps later literature) is not between Jew and Jewish-Christian but between Judaism and Christianity.¹²⁵

Minut is mentioned in the Mishnah: (1) mBer. 9:5; (2) mRoHash. 2:1; (3) mSan. 4:5; (4) mHull. 2:9; (5) mPar. 3:3;18 and (6) mYad. 4:8.19 and in the Tosefta: (1) tBer. 3:25; (2) tBer. 6[7]:21; (3) tShab. 13[14]:5; (4) tKipp. 2:10; (5) tMeg. 3[4]:37; (6) tBaMetz. 2:33; (7) tSan. 8:7; (8) tSan. 13:5; (9) tHull. 1:1; (10) tHull. 2:19; (11) tHull. 2:21; (12) tPar. 3:3; (13) tYad. 2:13.¹²⁶ The Rabbis enacted much legislation against the *minim*, declaring that their books should be burned, as their books were not considered sacred.¹²⁷ If they wrote a Torah scroll, it should also be burned.¹²⁸ *Minim* were noted by certain liturgical variations, particularly omitting certain blessings in synagogue was seen as a sign of *minut*.¹²⁹ There might have been as many as twenty-four types of *minim*, if Talmudic records are to be considered accurate.¹³⁰ Certain statements in the Tosefta indicate that the Rabbis thought that *minim*, betrayers, apostates and *Epiqurosin* were punished for longer than Gentile sinners for lying concerning the Torah, departing from the congregation, lied concerning the resurrection and caused others to sin,¹³¹ which points to the types of disagreements they had with the Rabbis. Of course, the *birkat haminim* prayer is thought to refer to them and their expulsion from the synagogue in the first century CE, however there is much doubt about the veracity of these narratives.¹³²

¹²³ Boyarin, *Border Lines*, p. 221.

¹²⁴ Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 5, 16-18; cf. Peter Schafer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 116-129; and Daniel Boyarin, "Hellenism in Jewish Babylonia", in Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert & Martin S. Jaffee (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 336-365.

¹²⁵ Naomi Koltun-Fromm, *Jewish-Christian Polemics in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia: A Reconstructed Conversation* (unpublished PhD diss., Stanford University, 1994; University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI, 1995), p. 133.

¹²⁶ Schremer, "Wayward Jews", p. 246.

¹²⁷ t. Sanhedrin 8:5; t. Yadayim 2:13

¹²⁸ b. Gittin 45b

¹²⁹ y. Berakhot 9c

¹³⁰ y. Sanhedrin 29c

¹³¹ t. Sanhedrin 8:4-5

¹³² b. Berakhot 28b-29a; y. Berakhot 9c

The Talmud contains a number of stories of the interactions between the Rabbis and the *minim*. Some read the narratives about the interaction between Rabbis and *minim* as reflecting actual historical encounters, particularly in Palestine, rather than Babylonia,¹³³ or as reflecting the interactions between Jews and Christians in the Persian Empire.¹³⁴ However, it might be the case that these narratives are intellectual exercises and meant to portray a fictional dialogue to convey rabbinic thoughts on certain matters and not represent actual encounters.

The aforementioned tannaitic references to *minim* include overlapping stories, reducing the total number of references to around twenty-two. Following Schremer's analysis, these passages can be sorted into those references that point to theological divergence (mBer. 9:5; mSan. 4:5; tShab. 13:5; tSan. 8:7), those pointing to halakhic divergence (mRoHash. 2:1; mHull. 2:9; mMeg. 4:8; mYad. 4:8; tHull. 2:19) or social divergence (tBer. 3:25; tKipp. 2:10; tMeg. 3:37; tBaMetz. 2:33; tPar. 3:3). It is important to note that the theological divergence of the *minim* is framed within halakhic divergences. For example, in mBer. 9:5, the *minim* belief that there is no afterlife is framed within their reluctance to use a certain liturgical formula. In mSan. 4:5 the belief in the "two powers" in heaven is presented within the laws of witnesses for capital offenses. The aggadic material in that mishnah stems from the view of the severity of the offense and the importance of being a witness in that case. The aggadic material begins with discussing the value of human life and why God created only one human being originally, which showed the importance of human life but also to disprove the beliefs of these *minim*.

In both Talmuds, there are references to halakhic divergence, such as differing formulae for blessing or for inaccurate pronouncements of rabbinic blessings, as well as a prohibition of using the Torah scrolls, mezuzot or tefillin written by the *minim* (y. Megillah 4:10; b. Berakhot 29a; b. Megillah 24b; b. Gittin 45b; b. Menachot 42b; b. Avodah zara 65a, etc.). There are many stories of divergent interpretation of Scripture verses, which hints at a theological difference but could also refer to a suspicion of rabbinic authority as the sole accepted interpreters of Torah (b. Berakhot 7a; 10a; b. Eruvin 101a; b. Sukkah 48b; b. Yevamot 102b; b. Sanhedrin 39a; 99a; Gittin 57a, etc.). There are also stories that seem to indicate social enmity where one party curses the other (b. Berakhot 56b; b. Shabbat 88b; b. Nedarim 49b). Some have interpreted the passages with varying interpretations of biblical verses as a rhetorical device to deny the connections that existed between the communities or

¹³³ Richard Kalmin, "Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity", *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994), pp. 155-169.

¹³⁴ Shai Secunda, "Reading the *Bavli* in Iran," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 100 (2010), pp. 310-342, espec. 334.

as a warning against heretical polemics¹³⁵ and, perhaps, to specific groups of Christians who were concerned with Scriptural polemics.¹³⁶

The *minim* seem to refer to those who did not embrace rabbinic *halakhah* in its entirety. The abandonment of rabbinic *halakhah* resulted in the social isolation of the *minim* due to the rabbinic legislation enacted against any interaction with them throughout the Talmudic corpus.

Syriac Christianity, in its earliest inception, including the translated clementine literature, existed between the tannaitic legislation against *minim* and the later complete rejection of *minim* as found in the Babylonian Talmud. Theories about Aphrahat's relationship to Judaism make the most sense within this context in particular. The place of Aphrahat, in particular, vis-a-vis Judaism is much clearer when considering the origins of the Peshitta Old Testament as suggested by Weitzman's detailed analysis which suggests a non-rabbinic Jewish origin as a group of Jews adopted Christianity. These origins can be detected through deviations in the Peshitta text from the Masoretic text, such as the Peshitta's translation of Lev 18:21 as condemning relations with foreign women, hinting at a Jewish origin as Christians would not be concerned with intermarriage. However, the Peshitta also shows alienation from other Jews by its translation of texts such as Isa40:7 where the Mt refers to the mortality of humanity but the Peshitta redirects its translation to Isaiah's people (cf Ezek 37:12 P). The Peshitta shows identification with a sectarian elect by introducing the term for the hebrew *pious ones* (Ps 30:5; 31:22; 32:6; 47:5; 50:5; 68:20), this terminology was avoided by the rabbis in order to eliminate sectarians' claim to represent an elect group within Israel. It also presents similar arguments to Aphrahat that God will choose a new people. Weitzman argues that the translation of various passages suggests a Jewish sectarian orientation, noting the Peshitta's translation of *segulah* (treasured possession) as *kenushia*, *congregation* (Mal 3:17). Also in Isa 5:7, the MT has "And the men of Judah are the plant of his

¹³⁵ Adiel Schremer, "Stammaitic Historiography", in Jeffrey L. Rubenstein (ed.), *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggadah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 219-236; Adiel Schremer, "The Christianization of the Roman Empire and Rabbinic Literature", in Lee Levine & Daniel Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 349-366; Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹³⁶ Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, "The Making of a Monk-Rabbi: The Background for the Creation of the Stories of R. Shimon bar Yohai in the Cave", *Zion* 76, no. 3 (2011), pp. 279-304 [in Hebrew]; Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, "Judaism and Syriac Christianity", in *The Syriac World*, (Routledge, 2018), pp. 146-156

delight” in comparison with the Peshitta’s “And the men from Judah are a new and beloved plant” (cf Isa 10:22). The Peshitta of the Hebrew Bible likely dates between 150-200 CE, from a non-rabbinic Jewish community that had a Hebrew text different from the LXX. Its community held to different ritual standards from rabbinic Jewish communities and eventually converted to Christianity and brought their Syriac translation of the Hebrew Scriptures with them. It is quite possible that Weitzman’s suggested historical reconstruction of the Peshitta OT represents what underlies the text that a group of non-rabbinic Jews converted to Christianity between 150-200 CE and brought their texts with them. However, the language of “conversion to Christianity” needs to be nuanced as Weitzman seemingly envisions two discrete categories consisting of “Jews” and “Christians” that one could oscillate between as religious identities. However, the model might function better if the identities in question were instead still conceptualized as a continuum within Judaism. This was especially applicable during the time of the hypothetical reconstruction of the translators of the Peshitta OT in 150-200 CE and I propose as well in Aphrahat’s life in the fourth century. In his case, most scholars accept that he was a convert to Christianity, yet, if we accept the “within Judaism” framework as extending into the fourth century, we would consider him a convert to *Jesus-Judaism* (an unsatisfying attempt to label the Jesus movement within Judaism in a succinct manner), which was still a heterogenous movement with some strands approximating rabbinic practice (in the pseudo Clementine literature), some heterodox forms of Judaism from a rabbinic perspective (in the various strands of Ebionism) and into a new religious movement in the proto-orthodox *Christianismos* (originating in the early second century writings of Ignatius). In Aphrahat, we can see the last generation of the Jesus movement within Judaism from an elite perspective (folk judaizing would continue for much longer). Certainly, Aphrahat is uncomfortable with his position vis-a-vis the Jews but his argumentation against them is on *their* terms and not on Christian theological bases. His source text is the Jewish scriptures and not the NT, broadly speaking. In this sense, Aphrahat and the translators of the pseudo Clementines into Syriac might represent the last iterations of Jesus-Judaism as an existing movement, especially in the case of Aphrahat, who existed uncomfortably on the boundary between emerging orthodoxies.

Conclusion

This research proposed to read the trajectory of Paul’s thought on immersion from Paul’s authentic letter corpus as read through a Paul-within-Judaism historical-critical lens into two texts in the Syriac textual tradition, including the *Pseudo-Clementine literature* and Aphrahat’s *Demonstrations*. The extension of a reception history for the modern reading of Paul-within-Judaism into the Syriac Christian period also fits into the various paradigms of either questioning the “parting of the ways” models or extending that break into the third or fourth centuries CE, as well

as supplementing the idea that the parting of the ways was a regionally-diverse process that occurred over several centuries.

Two elements of Paul's baptismal theology were considered: 1) the idea of covenant membership through the reception of divine *pneuma* via water immersion (Gal 3:27–29) and, 2) the forgiveness of sins by entering new life in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 6:1–7). Each text applied these ideas differently with the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* and *Homilies* in the Syriac recension showing evidence of proximity to Jewish practice and observance, while still showing adherence to these basic theological principles. On the other hand, Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* positively receive Paul but through an increasing distance from Jewish practice and observance with an uncomfortable relationship with broader Judaism, although not yet entirely separated from it.

In sum, by situating these texts in their Syriac milieu and within the enduring "Paul within Judaism" framework, this research confirms that the separation between Christianity and Judaism was not finalized until the fourth century, driven by changing political and theological realities. The Pseudo-Clementines and Aphrahat therefore represent the critical final iterations of Jesus-Judaism, a movement that existed uncomfortably on the boundary between its Jewish origins and its emerging orthodox Christian identity.