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Leisure Ressurrected: An exploration of an early Christian dynamic for the church today

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Leisure resurrected:

An exploration of an early Christian dynamic for the church today

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For the award of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

As the universal church emerges from a worldwide shutdown from the effects of the Covid-19 virus, how will the church reimagine and reengage in its mission? With the disruption to congregational activity, including in-person worship, comes an opportunity for congregations to set a new course. How will the local church organize itself, engage with the neighbourhood and world, and offer pastoral care to a planet dealing with the significant mental health, economic, and social issues that were heightened during Covid? Returning to old patterns of behaviour, such as ministry informed by the Protestant work ethic, resuming with busy work to justify position, power, or salary, or with a recreation- and entertainment-based ministry to pacify congregants and fill pews, would be a wasted opportunity. A theological opportunity for the church lies in the rediscovery of the classical aim of leisure.

The early church during the first two centuries—marginalized and definitely not in a position of privilege or power—might offer an understanding of leisure quite unique from the dominant expressions of leisure such as Greek *scholē*, Roman *otium*, and the Jewish *Sabbath*, which has aspects of leisure. By looking backwards, we might notice insights about leisure for today by exploring the early Christian practices of setting aside a single day of the week to gather to worship (before or after work), share in a common meal open to all (regardless of status, gender, or position, and available to both working and non-working participants) and, finally, following the meal, incorporate into weekly non-work time (also regardless of status, gender, or position) care and engagement in the health and vitality of the community in the name of the resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ. All of this leads one to ask: How can a theology of classical leisure inspire and inform the church in a post-Covid world? The followers of Jesus were clear and consistent, if extraordinary, in meeting weekly, on the Lord's Day, to worship, eat together, and then go out into the neighbouring areas to live out their faith.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

(i) RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question asks if there are elements of early Christian writings (first century to mid-second century) that can inform a Christian understanding of leisure today. From here, a number of secondary questions emerge: Do elements of early Christian writings reflect a Greek *scholē* understanding of leisure that can inform a Christian understanding of leisure today? Do elements of early Christian writings reflect a Roman *otium* understanding of leisure that can inform a Christian understanding of leisure today? And finally, can the first day of the week and the activities associated with it, as described in early Christian writings, be considered a reinterpretation of classical leisure that can inform a Christian understanding of leisure today?

(ii) SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The emergence of recreation and leisure studies as a field of study in Western civilization dates back at least to Aristotle (384-22 BCE). While there is tremendous evidence of a variety of expressions and experiences of recreation and leisure both prior to Aristotle and beyond,¹ the formal discipline is consistent in citing Aristotle as the foundational, systematized source.² Building on Aristotle's definition of leisure (σχολή) as the pursuit of a life that is focused on happiness, human flourishing, and well-being, history reveals that the experience and pursuit of leisure have gone through numerous twists, turns, redefinitions, and understandings—most significantly, it will be demonstrated, in the periods of the Roman

¹ John Hemmingway, 'History of Leisure,' in *Leisure Matters: The State and Future of Leisure Studies*, ed. by Gordon J. Walker et al. (State College, PA: Venture Publishing, 2016), pp. 25–32.

² Thomas L. Goodale and Geoffrey Godbey, *The Evolution of Leisure: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives* (State College, PA: Venture Publishing, 1988); Karl Spracklen, *Constructing Leisure: Historical and Philosophical Debates* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Johan Bouwer and Marco van Leeuwen, *Philosophy of Leisure: Foundations of the Good Life* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Empire, the Industrial Revolution, and finally, the 21st century as the entire world emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic, which has essentially brought us, particularly in light of the restriction of travel (people isolated in their houses and socialization restricted to immediate family), tremendous economic difficulty (the nature of work, employment, and the flow and purchasing of goods and services were severely restricted and under profound social constraint). This pandemic has not only affected the world in terms of recreation and leisure, as many people have had incredible amounts of discretionary time, it has also dramatically affected the church. Church services, on the first day of the week, were cancelled, and the eucharist could not be celebrated; all that was remaining for Christians to participate in was the care of their neighbour—practiced by social distancing, wearing a mask, making contact via technology with other isolated and vulnerable people/communities (such as those in hospital, long-term care, nursing homes, on the streets, etc.), and receiving, as it became available, a vaccine. How to live, to survive, to flourish, as Aristotle describes it, became the focus of the entire world. How to use one's leisure time—beyond watching Netflix, endlessly scrolling social media, or engaging in other distractions to relieve the boredom or fill the time—became the challenge. It is in this moment, especially as the world is slowly being vaccinated against the coronavirus, that the church has a profound opportunity to reclaim the theological implications of classical leisure as practiced in the early church. As the experience of Covid and its restrictions linger, the church can help theologially reflect on our collective and individual experiences and offer a theological response found uniquely in Christian leisure as described in the pre-Constantinian church.

Leisure studies scholar George Karlis offers three distinctions in the leisure studies field: leisure as discretionary time, leisure as free-time activity, and leisure as personal

experience and state of being.³ Leisure studies scholar Paul Heintzman lists seven: classical leisure, leisure as activity, leisure as free time, leisure as a symbol of social class, leisure as a state of mind, feminist leisure, and holistic leisure.⁴ Finally, Jeffrey Godbey and Thomas Goodale (1988), pioneers in leisure research, offer this understanding: “Leisure is living in relative freedom from the external compulsive forces of one’s culture and physical environment so as to be able to act from internally compelling love in ways which are personally pleasing, intuitively worthwhile and provide a basis for faith.”⁵ These categories will offer helpful guides as we navigate the landscape of leisure. There are three primary etymological sources of the modern understanding of leisure. The old French *leisir* derives from the French term “licer,” which relates to both freedom and signifying permission or license. The other two sources are Greek *schole* and Latin *otium*, both of which will be explored throughout the body of this thesis. In its present-day understanding, leisure signifies free time, freedom from or freedom for some activity, unoccupied time, and time at one’s own disposal, but in its definition, it is often confused with recreation. The difference, as this thesis will argue, is tremendous. Ironically, in our present-day understanding, where leisure and recreation are often indistinguishable, people consider their non-work time as a time to exercise, run errands, sleep, or rest in preparation for work again. Sadly, the high and noble calling of classical leisure is lost, waiting to be reclaimed and rejuvenated.

From the beginning of human activity, there have been accounts of work and of recreation and leisure. When one notices paintings on cave walls, hears music, tells stories, plays games, has sex, recognizes the transcendent in a variety of expressions, or simply gazes at the night sky filled with stars, one acknowledges moments of non-work activity throughout

³ Karlis, *Leisure and Recreation in Canadian Society: An Introduction* (Toronto: Thompson, 2016), p. 28.

⁴ Paul Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality: Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2015).

⁵ Goodale and Godbey, *The Evolution of Leisure*, p. 9.

history.⁶ Indeed, humanity has experienced moments of awe, mystery, and creativity through the ages. As one approaches Aristotle, the first to define, philosophize, and record his thoughts about leisure, one must hold on to the myriad of experiences and understandings of leisure as offered by Bouwer and Leeuwen:

measuring human progress, revealing human purpose, reflecting the meaning of life, free time, free from obligations and commitment, different kinds of activities, different kinds of qualities, recreation, a state of mind, work-related representations, festivity and celebration, recuperation, nourishment of the human soul, relaxation, entertainment, communicative rationality, a paradox between freedom and constraint, agency and identity, unforced and positive activity, and the representation of place and space.”⁷

All of these aspects and so many more find their origins in Greek *scholē*, Roman *otium*, and the Jewish *Sabbath*. Holding the tensions of these three understandings and experiences of leisure—*scholē*, *otium*, and *Sabbath*—Christians upheld the noblest aspect of Aristotle’s ideals of leisure as the pursuit of the Divine in worship, prayer, and contemplation.

Furthermore, consistent with Aristotle’s emphasis on ethics and virtue, Christianity also strove for the virtuous life, as later exemplified by Pope Gregory in 590: the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice and the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. At the same time, Christianity held *otium*, the notion of escaping the obligations of work, in disdain and suspicion. An excellent example is the list of the seven deadly sins, also from Pope Gregory: pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth. Indeed, the early Church would come to label non-work as “accidie,” “sloth,” and “idleness,” and would eventually name it a “deadly sin”—that is, something of the devil. The seeds were being sown to redefine leisure and recreation in dualistic terms. Leisure as contemplation and worship of the Christian God was cast as virtuous and holy, while *otium*, as understood in Roman terms, was put forth as idle, lazy, corrupt, and ultimately, of the devil.

⁶Spracklen, *Constructing Leisure*, 2011, p. 34.

⁷Bouwer and van Leeuwen, *Philosophy and Leisure*, 2017, p. 15.

This dichotomy emerges in the early Church and continues throughout its history. On March 7, 321 CE, Constantine established an edict that set in motion an official empire-wide understanding of Christian worship, practices, and Sabbath. Constantine set the definitions of the Christian life and with it created an orthodoxy, practices, and beliefs that continue today. Constantine enforced that,

On the venerable Day of the Sun, let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits; because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain-sowing or for vine-planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations, the bounty of heaven should be lost.⁸

This decision marked the official day for Christian worship as Sunday and not the Sabbath (Saturday); further, Constantine also decreed who was able to work on Sunday and who was not, for obvious practical reasons. Gone was the idea of the Jewish Sabbath, as Constantine's decree simply dictated a day of "rest" for some and worship for all. It did not take long before the Church began discerning what activities were permissible on the day of worship. Consequently, on the Lord's Day, Sunday, there was a rise in the concern about idleness or how one spent one's non-work time.

As Christianity became the Roman Empire's religion, a position of prestige and power, concern grew for how people spent their time and for what purpose. Drawing on the letters of St. Paul, the post-Constantinian church was clear that idleness and virtuous behaviour were of grave concern to one's spiritual life, to one's leisure, commanding the followers of Jesus "to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us." The passage continues: "For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not

⁸ Justinian I, 'The Code of Justinian, 3.12.3', in *A Brief History of Sunday: From the New Testament to the New Creation* by Justo L. González (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), p. 43.

eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you.... Anyone unwilling to work should not eat."⁹ This understanding of work, or busyness, as a mark of the Christian life would provide the blueprint for the Protestant work ethic, drawing heavily on St. Paul's description of the desires of the flesh for Christian virtue:

Now, the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹⁰

With clear lines drawn in regard to Christian worship on Sunday, Christian preference for work against idleness, and Christian virtue as against the pleasures of the flesh and oriented towards spiritual matters, the tensions become clear: *Sabbath* as rest, holiness, and relationship with all of creation in the worship of the one living God; *schola* as contemplation, freedom, and virtue; *otium* as recreation, a break or distraction, rejuvenation from work and Jesus' fulfillment, joy, and serving others as the source of Christian leisure. All of these have all been twisted into something else. This tension will surface and resurface in Christian leisure from Constantine to today.

Christian perspectives on leisure, from Constantine's establishment of Christianity as the Empire's religion until today, are diverse, especially when considering Sabbath rest, Roman idleness, and Greek virtue. Consider the variety of Christian perspectives on how leisure is conceptualized—from the Scriptures and early church fathers like Tertullian (155–220 CE), to the Desert Fathers and Mothers (250–350 CE), to Constantine's (272–337 CE)

⁹ 2 Thess. 3:6–8, 10 NRSV. New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

¹⁰ Gal. 5:19–23, NRSV

establishment of Christianity as legal practice among the Roman Empire's numerous religious observances (313 CE), from Augustine (354–430 CE) until today, especially when considering Sabbath rest, Roman idleness, and Greek virtue.

Writing from Carthage, Christian apologist Tertullian is crystal clear about his theological stance against the Roman games, theatre, festivals, and, interestingly for this thesis, the cult of Bacchus, the god of wine and pleasure. The Romans, at their own request, obtain from it skilled performers—the proper seasons—and the name too, for it is said that the performers are called Ludi, from Lydi. And though Varro derives from the name Ludi, from Ludus—that is, from play, as they also called the Luperci Ludii, because they ran about making sport—the sporting of young men belongs, in his view, to festival days and temples, and objects of religious veneration. However, the origin of the name is of little consequence, when it is certain that the thing springs from idolatry. The Liberalia, under the general designation of Ludi, clearly declared the glory of Father Bacchus; for Bacchus these festivities were first consecrated by grateful peasants in return for the boon he conferred on them for, as they say, making known the pleasures of wine.

He reiterates his point by categorizing the various Roman “pleasures” as sins of idolatry. Tertullian is clear that Roman pleasures are anchored in idolatry and goes on to insist that idolatry is behind all aspects of Roman culture:

We have, I think, faithfully carried out our plan of showing in how many different ways the sin of idolatry clings to the shows, in respect of their origins, their titles, their equipment, their places of celebration, their arts; and we may hold it as a thing beyond all doubt, that for us who have twice renounced all idols, they are utterly unsuitable.¹¹

¹¹Tertullian, ‘*De Spectaculis*’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. vol. 3, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, XIII.1–5, XXVIII (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), p. XIII.

Tertullian reemphasizes how a Christian community's worship and meal, the eucharist, are fundamentally different from Roman idolatry worship:

...we do not offer sacrifices to the gods, and we make no funeral oblations to the departed; nay, we do not partake of what is offered either in the one case or the other, for we cannot partake of God's feast and the feast of devils.¹²

Concluding that Christians need to make a decision about pleasure—whether they will succumb to its idolatries and devil-inspired ways or stamp out their natural desires for pleasure so that they might receive the pleasures of heaven—Tertullian sets the stage, in his writings, for Christians to choose between pleasure and following Jesus. Certainly, as this thesis will demonstrate, it is a false dichotomy, but still important for us to note the rapidly growing division. Tertullian, never one to disappoint, weighs in with his opinion that pleasure is to be dealt with, disengaged from, and defeated:

Thou art too dainty, Christian, if thou wouldst have pleasure in this life as well as in the next; nay, a fool thou art, if thou thinkest this life's pleasures to be really pleasures. The philosophers, for instance, give the name of pleasure to quietness and repose; in that they have their bliss; in that they find entertainment: they even glory in it. You long for the goal, and the stage, and the dust, and the place of combat! I would have you answer me this question: Can we not live without pleasure, who cannot but with pleasure die? For what is our wish but the apostle's, to leave the world, and be taken up into the fellowship of our Lord? You have your joys where you have your longings.¹³

Prior to and following the Constantinian law allowing Christians the freedom to legally practice their faith alongside all of the other legal Roman expressions of faith, groups of people and individuals escaping the pressures of the politics and complications of faith that often resulted in isolation, ostentation, punishment, ridicule, exclusion, etc.—in both the Roman Empire and within the church itself, as described in Benedicta Ward's *The Sayings of The Desert Fathers*¹⁴—left the cities and villages and headed into the desert to dedicate their lives to contemplation, prayer, and simplicity. Their aim was to defeat the desires of the flesh

¹²Ibid., XIII.

¹³Ibid., XXVIII.

¹⁴ Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1975) p. xxiii.

and to be at peace in the holiness of God and God's grace—or, in the terms of this thesis, to defeat Roman leisure and replace it with the mind of Christ.

A few simple examples of the Desert Fathers' sayings are from Egyptian-born Anthony (251–355 CE), known as the father of the monks who devoted himself to a life of asceticism. Notice the emphasis on work and prayer as the source of joy:

When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert he was beset by accidie, and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God “Lord, I want to be saved but these thoughts do not leave me alone; what shall I do with my affliction? How can I be saved?” A short while afterwards, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to prayer, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, “Do this and you will be saved.” At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.¹⁵

Arsenius (360–449 CE), a tutor of princes who left the palace for the desert mountains of Egypt to learn how to overcome passions, notices that human passions are a source of conflict that must be subdued and conquered: “A brother questioned Abba Arsenius to hear a word of him, and the old man said to him, ‘strive with all your might to bring your interior activity into accord with God, and you will overcome exterior passions.’”¹⁶

Finally, Abba Poemen (dates unknown), called “the shepherd” in Egypt, wrote about the highest calling of a Christian: interior peace, worship, and service. Poemen said, “if three men meet, of whom the first fully preserves interior peace, and the second gives thanks to God in illness, and the third serves with a pure mind, these three are doing the same work.”¹⁷

Moving from the desert edges of Christianity to the centre of its growing power and prestige in the Roman Empire, we turn to St. Augustine (354–430 CE), who reinforces the theological struggle with leisure, which he deals with in terms of acedia, idleness, and a

¹⁵Ibid, 1.

¹⁶Ibid, 10.

¹⁷Ibid, 171.

“playground” for the devil and its dreadful consequences, but with an interesting twist. While numerous Christian writers are writing about the passions, the seven deadly sins, the struggle with pleasure, Augustine is crystal clear that *otium*, leisure, is a positive term and that when one is in one’s happiest state, it is through an experience of *otium* that the contemplation of God is possible:

The charm of leisure must not be indolent vacancy of mind, but the investigation or discovery of truth, that thus every man may make solid attainments without grudging that others do the same... Accordingly no one is prohibited from the search after truth, for in this leisure may most laudably be spent... And therefore, holy leisure is longed for by the love of truth.¹⁸

Augustine maintains that the contemplative life is the sweetest of all possible experiences, but it is interesting to note that he is also clear that care for one’s neighbour, and observance of charity, is essential as well. Augustine’s writings are beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is crucial to observe that contemplation and action, for Augustine, are both necessary for a life of faith.

In the Benedictine monasteries (500s CE), there was a focus on work, rest, study, and worship in balance to defend against idleness, the enemy of the soul. Dahl offers an insightful comment: “the primary purpose of a Christian’s life was to offer special spiritual works unto God—to pray, to meditate, to withdraw from the concerns of this life and embrace a discipline which actively suppressed the interests of the flesh.”¹⁹ Others, who remained within the mainstream of Christianity, often experienced worship as passive participants in the liturgy and as a prescribed moral code for living that was primarily against the flesh (pleasure, enjoyment) and for the soul. It was clear that separation between the pleasures of the body and the soul, keeping busy and holy, was of top concern. Christian leisure, it would appear, was against *otium* (non-work time/activities) and for *scholē* (virtue and

¹⁸Augustine, ‘City of God’, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. by Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), pp. 1–511 (p. 168).

¹⁹ Gordon Dahl, *Work, Play and Worship in a Leisure-oriented Society* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), p. 44.

contemplation) but not as Aristotle understood it, nor, as it will be argued, the early church experienced it. The Christian leisure that emerges is one of papal control and conformity. While various Catholic orders, such as the Franciscans, were able to pursue aspects of classical leisure, the entire enterprise of the church remained under the supervision and leadership of the Catholic hierarchy, and ultimately, the pope. Of particular interest was the growing lack of serving one's neighbour, as leisure was preoccupied with individual salvation, virtue, and holiness and with a rule-bound, predetermined, and programmed compulsory Sunday worship.

PROTESTANT REFORMATION

The Protestant Reformation brought forth a renewed interest in the early church, education, and the notion of grace. Luther insisted that God's salvation could not be bought or sold or earned; it was achieved by grace alone. Calvin's attacks on religious leaders as gatekeepers to God's grace and Zwingli's insistence on serving the poor as crucial to Christian faith both brought into question the expressions and practices of Christian leisure. Ryken notes, "The cornerstone of Protestant thought was the sovereignty of God over all of life, and from this flowed an awareness of God's creation of the world and his providential care for it. Given this affirmation of the world in which God has placed his creatures as stewards, it was inevitable that the Reformation tradition would attach dignity to work in the world."²⁰ As with all reforms, extremes emerged, and in this case, the Puritans, with their intensely moral attitudes towards non-work time and activity, left a lasting mark on Christian leisure.

²⁰ Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), p. 76.

The Protestant work ethic, aided by the Industrial Revolution, the rise of capitalism, and dismal working and living conditions, created an atmosphere that caused Christian leisure to struggle to find a place as a spiritual experience.²¹ Enter the Industrial Revolution, the age of *otium*. Cross notes that the Industrial Revolution represented an industrial application of the Puritan work ethic and moral values.²² One might also suggest that it was a significant production and consumption model. With its emphasis on work, work time, the workforce, social class, and non-work time, it could be argued that the Industrial Revolution tipped the scales in *otium*'s direction. Goodale and Godbey offer a powerful summary: "Not only did industrial capitalism bring about a small 'leisure class' which had both time and money, but it also brought about a class of workers who often had to be forced to work, and eventually, forced into a model of open-ended consumption which they would eventually come to accept and desire."²³ *Otium* was alive and well as the working class, which made up the majority of the population, worked a set number of hours for a set number of days, in a non-creative, routine setting (e.g., an assembly line), for a set amount of money. In non-working time, relief from work was sought. The rise of drinking, gambling, and sporting events, to name only a few,²⁴ was enormous, causing dramatic social effects, particularly on family life. The work/non-work environment took a toll on people's health, safety, and well-being. Added to this, as the Industrial Revolution shaped people's lives, the Church maintained its emphasis on virtue and worship as the meaning and purpose of life, thereby causing resentment among the working classes as it maintained its campaign against idleness and the very activities that workers were pursuing as relief from work (gambling, alcohol, etc.). *Schole* and *otium* entered into a collision course.

²¹Ibid.

²² Gary S. Cross, *A Social History of Leisure Since 1600* (State College: Venture Publishing, 1990), p. 76.

²³ Goodale and Godbey, *The Evolution of Leisure*, 102.

²⁴ Cross, *A Social History*, 54.

Christian leisure as virtue and against idleness was, not surprisingly, reinforced by the social elite and wealthy. Drawing on the “holiness” of punctuality, soberness, and obedience, along with long working hours to combat idleness, those in power easily manipulated the Church to reinforce their needs. While Protestant Christianity was in favour of virtue and against idleness, there was no uniformity as each denomination had a different understanding of idleness. The Puritans’ utilitarian approach to leisure²⁵ was rule-bound, but John Wesley and the Methodists, for example, actively sought “holiness” through sanctification and experience. The Methodists participated in their leisure, equating the Gospel’s attitude towards Christian leisure with care for their neighbour. By building schools, hospitals, and housing, tending to those who were sick, in prison, or dying, feeding those who were hungry, and fighting injustices like slavery and the treatment of women, the Methodists worshipped outside of the prescribed worship time and lived out their faith, in their leisure time, serving others.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

As the twentieth century approached, however, the Christian perspective on leisure became increasingly confused. The Church enjoyed the benefits of privilege, wealth, and power but followers knew that their “calling” was to humility, virtue, and service. The societal tensions were enormous with regard to economics, politics, social class, and gender; thus, too, were the differences in people’s understanding of and ability to participate in leisure. As the twentieth century unfolded, there was a profound shift in Western culture as the mass production of goods and services not only kept people employed but created opportunities for an easier life (e.g., through innovations such as the washing machine, the

²⁵ Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 102–4.

automobile, the telephone). Working conditions improved as workers' unions and workers' rights were established. Public parks and public recreation and leisure opportunities—such as playgrounds, the YMCA, golf courses, public libraries, and swimming pools—appeared. Communication was rapidly developing, and professional entertainment and sports industries were being established. The Church was slowly becoming simply another recreation and leisure activity such as bowling on Friday night or a picnic on Saturday afternoon. As production and consumption found a steady pace of progress, so did income, and with income, there arose a middle class. The need for *otium* from work quickly shifted to recreation as activities for pleasure. There was a fundamental shift from relief from long working hours to working in order that one could enjoy one's free time, one's recreation and leisure. That thought was not lost on Veblen, author of *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, who argued that leisure was being used as a means of showing off or distinguishing oneself from others as a visible sign of class distinction. Not only class and economics but also gender and race would play an important factor in recreation and leisure activity and participation as recreation and leisure would soon become divisive. Through two world wars, a Great Depression and a United Nations Declaration in 1948 that "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay,"²⁶ all Western people would gain access to recreation and leisure in one form or another, although the question of who could participate—where, when, and at what cost—would emerge in a contentious way. It is here that the "big seven leisure pursuits shine: the annual holiday, drinking, gambling, sex, television, drug use, and shopping."²⁷ It takes no time to recognize who has the freedom to participate in which of those leisure pursuits. For example, it requires money and time for holidays and shopping, drinking, drugs, sex, and gambling,

²⁶ "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

²⁷ *Routledge Handbook of Leisure Studies* ed. by Tony Blackshaw (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 1.

which were often recreational experiences that were targeted toward lower-income workers. Television, and today gaming, “the drug of a nation,” has become the primary influencer of children. It must be noted with television (gaming) that the influence of consumerism and personal identity were embedded in both the programming and the commercials (e.g., Coca-Cola’s “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing”). Again, it takes no imagination to realize that not everyone had access to the “big seven leisure pursuits,” especially considering race, gender, class, etc.

Sadly, the Church was, generally, following the direction of culture in trying to be relevant. While some attempted differentiation from culture, in reality, as two world wars and the Great Depression reshaped leisure, most sought to incorporate it to attract people. It appeared that as a generation returned from war to a society that was well versed in production and consumption, entertainment, and individualism, worship, Sabbath rest, virtue, and holiness were fruitless or “a waste of time.” *Otium*, a break from work, was dominating the stage once again. One could achieve one’s own meaning and purpose in life without God. For all the achievements of the YMCA movement, soup kitchens, Sunday school programming, and other efforts to keep *scholae* leisure rooted in community and serving others, disillusionment with organized religion was profound and lasting. Individualism and personal enjoyment rapidly drew the attention of people, and there was a shift in how leisure was experienced and decreasing involvement with the Church.

EMERGING QUESTIONS TODAY

My concern with this shift is the reason that I am writing this thesis. In 1989, I sat in a first-year Philosophy class, with eight or nine other students, at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. Dr. Chester Warendt, SJ, with his long white beard, his lit

smoking pipe and black clothing, stood away from us, staring out a window. I was intimidated, as I was told in high school that I was not bright enough to go to university, that I should look at working at a factory in Hamilton, Ontario. My father applied to university for me, and Laurentian took a chance on me. There I sat as Father Warena turned and asked us: What is freedom? What is time? What is the meaning of life? And then, he began walking us through the concept of *schole*, Greek leisure. I have never forgotten the shivers that ran through my body. Now, decades later, as ordained clergy, I continue to incorporate into my parish life those insights that continue to deepen, asking myself: What is work, recreation, and leisure? How do we navigate the world? What is the meaning of our lives? What brings us joy? What is our high and noble calling?

Like the sown seed, these questions, for some, have found fertile ground. I write this thesis with a keen hope to reclaim Christian leisure, to reinterpret *schole*, as parts of our world are emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, a pandemic that generally “put the world on pause”; we have yet to see its lasting effects, especially in terms of mental health, isolation, economics, and family dynamics, to name only a few. Alongside Covid, our North American context has been deeply affected by various social movements, like the #MeToo movement (against sexual abuse), Black Lives Matter (against racism), and in Canada in particular, struggles against rising Islamophobia and the horrific legacy of residential schools, where generations of Indigenous children were abused, raped, and, as we are learning, tragically “forgotten” as many children were discarded into unmarked graves. The Canadian government, institutions, and churches have a great deal of soul searching, listening, and reconciliation to engage in. Finally, our North American context is entangled in a culture of distraction (for example, the constant stream of notifications on one’s mobile phone) and recreational passivity (for example, binge watching Netflix). The need for intentional

contemplation, for leisure, as Aristotle argues, is necessary for the health, vitality, and meaningfulness of humanity.

MISSIOLOGY

It is at this exact moment that I see a profound opportunity for the Church. With a “reset” for the entire world at this moment, the Church has the opportunity to re-member, re-discover, and re-cover the essence of its mission. The Church’s mission is not “busy work” or “entertaining work” or “distractive work.” The mission of the Church is to reaffirm that humanity is made in the image of God and is blessed. We are blessed with joy, hope, belonging, and profound and deep love. The God we worship is a God who offers the gifts of forgiveness and grace as we discard that which distracts and weighs us down from knowing, experiencing, and flourishing in God’s love. The Church has an opportunity to learn from the first few centuries of its existence before it becomes the “Empire’s religion” with all its trappings, so that we might once again know a Christian expression of *schole*, of flourishing, as expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is time for the Church to remember its high and noble calling of Christian leisure. An examination of the history and development of *schole*, *otium*, and *Sabbath* is crucial to our calling as a church. Further, once deeper understandings of Greek *schole*, Roman *otium*, and Jewish *Sabbath* are established, it becomes evident how it is that early Christian communities, comprising slaves, workers, and the elite, the educated and uneducated, and men, women, and children, all under the Roman Empire, are redefining the meaning, purpose, and experience of Christian leisure. The research question will examine just that—leisure, resurrected—for a study of how first to mid-second century Christian writings have the potential to offer a fresh perspective on the understanding of leisure for us.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The foundational work on Christian leisure that most leisure scholars writing about leisure and Christianity turn to is philosopher and Catholic theologian Joseph Pieper's book *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*. In it he observes that

Leisure, it must be clearly understood, is a mental and spiritual attitude. It is not simply the result of external factors, it is not the inevitable result of spare time, a holiday, a week-end or a vacation. It is, in the first place, an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul, and as such utterly contrary to the ideal of "worker" in each and every one of the three aspects under which it was analysed: work as activity, as toil, as a social function. Compared with the exclusive ideal of work as activity, leisure implies (in the first place) an attitude of non-activity, of inward calm, of silence; it means not being "busy." But letting things happen.²⁸

Pieper argues that leisure has been misunderstood as laziness, acedia, and sloth through the centuries, instead of being associated with its noble experiences of silence, contemplation, and freedom. This leads Pieper to his second observation:

Compared with the exclusive ideal of work as toil, leisure appears (secondly) in its character as an attitude of contemplative "celebration," a word that, properly understood, goes to the very heart of what we mean by leisure. Leisure is possible only on the premise that man consents to his own true nature and abides in concord with the meaning of the universe (whereas idleness, as we have said, is the refusal of such consent).²⁹

Pieper expands on the particular meaning of the celebration in his argument, stating, "The festival is the origin of leisure, and the inward and ever-present meaning of leisure. And because leisure is thus by its nature a celebration, it is more than effortless; it is the direct opposite of effort."³⁰ Pieper is crystal clear that leisure does not exist for the sake of work;

²⁸ Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. by Alexander Dru (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952), pp. 40–41.

²⁹Ibid., 42.

³⁰Ibid., 43.

leisure is not simply a relief from toil; no, “leisure, like contemplation, is of a higher order than the *vita activa*.”³¹

Which leads Pieper to his conclusion that the fullest expression of leisure is found in Christian worship, particularly in the eucharist:

What is true of celebration is true of leisure: its possibility, its ultimate justification, derive from its roots in divine worship. That is not a conceptual abstraction, but the simple truth as may be seen from the history of religion. What does “day of rest” mean in the Bible, and for that matter in Greece and Rome? To rest from work means that time is reserved for divine worship: certain days and times are set aside and transferred to “the exclusive property of the gods.”³²

Arguing that Christian divine worship, with its emphasis on the celebration as sacrament and visible and experiential expressions of leisure, Pieper elaborates: “That is the sense of the visibility of the sacrament: that man is ‘carried away’ by it, thrown into ‘ecstasy.’”³³ A life without worship, he argues, is a life of drudgery, boredom, “toil.” Drawing on the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the participatory worship of him, Pieper argues that there one finds the ultimate source of leisure and the celebration of life that it promises.

A contemporary of Pieper, Benedictine monk Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., writing about leisure during roughly the same time, also offers a profound theological exploration of leisure. Jean Leclercq, focusing on pre-Christian understandings of leisure and then exploring those insights through the Patristics and Monastic traditions, writes in his ground-breaking book, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*,

The second theme is that of leisure. Because it anticipates eternal rest, monastic life, the life in the “cloistered paradise” is a life of leisure. That is the definition most frequently found, and in this case it is expressed in terms like *otium*, *quies*, *vactio*, *sabbatum*, which are occasionally used to reinforce each other: *otium*, *quietis*, *vacation sabbati*.³⁴

³¹Ibid., 43.

³²Ibid., 57.

³³Ibid., 63.

³⁴Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. by Catharine Misrahi, 3rd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), p. 67.

Continuing the theme of leisure and monasticism, Leclercq, quoting from the writings of Giustiniani (a fifteenth-century Camaldolese monk, who later became a hermit), links the concepts of solitariness and leisure together: “The hermit in his solitude is free from all the ordinary occupations of other men. In this sense, the solitary life is a life of leisure. Contrary to what one might think, however, it is leisure full of work, the most laborious of *leisures*, *negotiosissimum otium*. It must be so: otherwise, eremitic life would be worthless rather than useful.”³⁵ This is followed by a profound reflection, again from Giustiniani:

Is it idleness to repent our past misdeeds, to combat temptation and inordinate desires, to arm ourselves in advance against the near occasions of disturbance and downfall, to think of death and to place it before our eyes so that it may not catch us unawares? Is it idleness to meditate on human and divine realities worthy of ceaselessly occupying noble minds, and to ponder these, not in haphazard daydreams, but with order and concentration? Is it idleness to raise our voices frequently by day and by night in psalms, canticles, praising God the creator, and thanking him for all his benefits? Or with a voice still more ringing and effective to ascend by mental prayer toward the divine majesty in so far as mortal man can? Thus may we as it were, leave this world in so far as our mortal state allows and converse in heaven with the blessed spirits, with the holy angels, and with the divine Creator and ours.³⁶

This reflection concludes with Leclercq’s call for those who follow a life of leisure: “He should possess and radiate the gift of joy, *iucunditas*. His whole life has but one purpose: “to serve God voluntarily in a more perfect way, for the love of Christ, with spiritual joy.”³⁷

Following the insightful work of Pieper and Leclercq, other forerunners to leisure scholarship engaging with the topic of leisure and Christianity since the 20th century include John Huizinga, whose book *Homo Ludens* explores the role of play. Interestingly, he claims that early Christianities thwarted play with its ethical and moral imperatives, speaking of ancient Rome: “Life has become a game of culture; the ritual form persists, but the religious spirit has flown. All the deeper spiritual impulses withdraw from this culture of the surface

³⁵Jean Leclercq, *Alone with God*, Translated by Elizabeth McCabe (Bloomington: Ercam Editions, 2008), p. 62.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 64–65.

³⁷Jean Leclercq, *Camaldolese Extraordinary: The Life, Doctrine, and Rule of Blessed Paul Giustiniani* (Bloomington: Ercam Editions, 2008), p. 285.

and strike new roots in the mystery religions. Finally, when Christianity cut Roman civilization off from its ritual basis, it withered rapidly.”³⁸ Huizinga, while making a striking argument, remains hopeful that “play,” an act of freedom that it is not “ordinary” or “real,” occurs within the limits of time and place, the “temporary suspension” of reality, and creates its own rules and opportunities for imagination: “This temporary suspension of normal social life on account of the sacred play-season has numerous traces in the more advanced civilizations as well. Everything pertains to saturnalia and carnival customs belong to it.”³⁹ It is precisely here that Huizinga lays the groundwork for the fundamentals of play and festival: “The sacred performance is more than an actualization in appearance only, a sham reality; it is also more than a symbolic actualization—it is a mystical one. In it, something invisible and ethereal takes beautiful, actual, holy form. The participants in the rite are convinced that the action actualizes and effects a definite beatification, and brings about an order of things higher than that in which they customarily live.”⁴⁰ Agreeing with Pieper and Leclercq about the divine act as transformative, in Huizinga’s case as play, Huizinga observes that Christianity is a hindrance to this transformation, while Pieper, in the worship and the feast, or sacrament, and Leclercq, in worship and contemplation, argue that Christianity is the purest expression of leisure. Huizinga’s work is key to following the secularization and development of leisure, especially understood as “play.”

Following Pieper, Leclercq, and Huizinga, leisure scholars tend to move towards using Judaeo-Christian texts to support their insights and arguments about leisure, work, and recreation. Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel, in his book *The Sabbath*, re-examines the Sabbath, and writes, “On the Sabbath it is given us to share in the holiness that is in the heart of time. Even when the soul is seared, even when no prayer can come out of our tightened

³⁸ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 178.

³⁹Ibid., 12–13.

⁴⁰Ibid., 14.

throats, the clean, silent rest of the Sabbath leads us to a realm of endless peace, or to the beginning of an awareness of what eternity means.”⁴¹ Political Science scholar Sebastian de Grazia, in 1962, describes Christian leisure as contemplation and meditation of the Divine. De Grazia, focusing on a biblical text from Matthew 6:26 about the birds of the air and how their needs are provided for, argues that Jesus was not against work but interested in the “turning of men’s hope toward God and the coming Kingdom.”⁴² De Grazia claims, correctly, that Jesus is pointing to the contemplation of the Divine as the highest form of contemplation. What makes De Grazia’s work important as a counterpoint to this thesis is his comment regarding the early Christians: “Work in a sense was something one did in his free time. Any activities other than those bearing on salvation were strictly speaking not essential.”⁴³

This brings us to leisure scholars Goodale and Godbey (1988), who in their book *The Evolution of Leisure*, offer two paragraphs on Jesus and the apostle Paul, without referencing the New Testament or other early Christian writings. In the first, speaking of Jesus, they claim that, “The problem was that work and wealth were distractions from the important matter of seeking and serving God. Worldly goods and efforts to obtain them resulted in cares and woes and the peril of squandering the opportunity to reach the kingdom of heaven. If you put your faith in the Lord, the necessities of everyday life would be provided.” This argument is continued in the second paragraph: “Still, in itself, money had no value. If anything, wealth indicated lack of Christian faith and service; it was clearly not the route to a favourable view in God’s eyes.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York, HarperCollins, 1951), p. 101.

⁴² Sebastian De Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure* (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), p. 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁴ Goodale and Godbey, *The Evolution of Leisure*, 32–33.

Meanwhile, also in 1987, leisure scholars Dare, Welton, and Coe wrote *Concepts of Leisure in Western Thought*, where they demonstrate how leisure was identified and experienced through history. Again, not much is offered in regard to Christian leisure, but they do add an interesting comment about Jesus and perfection: “We are also challenged to seek the perfect life: Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect: and we are told that fundamental change is imminent: Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”⁴⁵ What makes this comment interesting is that Dare, Welton, and Coe correctly speak of Jesus’ teaching as being about the good life but equally clear is that the good life is not materialistic. Quoting Luke, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Lk 6:21), Dare, Welton, and Coe turn to texts about the rich young man (Matt 19:16–22), John the baptizer exposing hypocrisy (Matt 3:7–12), and Jesus rebuking the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:4–33) before ending with Acts 2:44–46, a text about the followers of Jesus holding all things in common and each receiving as each had need. Moving from Jesus’ critique of materialism, Dare, Welton, and Coe incorrectly claim that the early Christians withdrew from society: “But even this withdrawal from society could not mask the underlying tension between the spiritual focus of the early Christians and the increasingly material focus of Rome.”⁴⁶ The early Christian writings clearly demonstrate a profound engagement with Roman society. Finally, Dare, Welton, and Coe draw on the writings of Paul to argue, incorrectly, that “The tension was solved by Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, with its stress on the separation of the spiritual and physical.” They conclude their section on the early church by stating, again incorrectly, that “Paul’s writings suggest that the physical world is a world

⁴⁵ Byron Dare, George Welton, and William Coe, *Concepts of Leisure in Western Thought: A Critical and Historical Analysis* (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 1987), p. 65.

⁴⁶Ibid., 66.

of pain and suffering, which can only be dealt with by accepting what is and living for the rewards of an eternal, unchanging, and perfect afterlife.”⁴⁷

Leisure scholar Ibrahim observes that, “The early Christians kept well in mind what Jesus Christ said about the birds of the air: ‘They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?’” (Matt. 6:26). Work was to be done in one’s free time; most time was to be devoted to contemplation, the focus of which was obligatory and unitary.”⁴⁸ It would appear that Ibrahim has taken a saying of Jesus’ (Matt. 6:26) and then drawn a conclusion about the daily lives of early Christians without supporting evidence. It is curious how work and free time are conflated. Further, if Ibrahim is referring to the monastic movement (which is likely) then it would be helpful for the Benedictine orders to be explained, beyond a single de Grazia reference, as the work and free time aspect of the monastic orders is quite revealing about a work/non-work life of faith—a life that did not exist nor was imagined in the time of the early Christian writings.

Leisure scholar Sylvester, particularly through Aristotelian concepts, comments that in the early Christian writings, there is an emphasis on spiritual development, or the inner life, using Luke 10:38–42 as his proof text. While early Christian writing emphasised work against idleness, which included maintaining one’s virtue, sobriety, and focus, there was also a spirit of generosity or charity that needed to be developed, of service and care for one’s neighbour. Furthermore, quoting 2 Thessalonians, 3:10–13, he writes: “Judeo-Christian beliefs mainly emphasize the importance of labor,” which brings him to the conclusion that a

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Hilmi Ibrahim, *Leisure and Society: A Comparative Approach* (Dubuque: Wm. C Brown, 1991), p. 23.

“legitimate place for leisure was evident in early Christian teachings.”⁴⁹ While Sylvester does not expand, he notes that this marks a distinctive break from the Greco-Roman experience of leisure. Sylvester’s concept will be explored in later chapters. Leisure scholar Sager, after examining Aristotle, Cicero and Seneca, moves on to the early Christian writings, adding that “the early stages of the rise of Christianity also preserved many aspects of the ancient conception of leisure. In the Gospels, Jesus says of the fowls of the air that ‘They sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?’”⁵⁰

Although leisure literature frequently discusses leisure in ancient Greece and Rome, very few leisure books mention early Christianities and early Christian writings, including the New Testament. A recent example might be *The Palgrave Handbook of Leisure*, edited by Spracklen et al. and published in 2017, which offers a chapter by Heintzman on Christianity and leisure that highlights Jesus’ Sabbath practices (Matt 12:1–14; Mk 2:23–27; Lk 6:1–4; Mk 3:1–5; Lk 13:10–17; 14:1–6; Jn 9:13–16) and the theme of rest (Heb 4:9–11 and Matt 11:28–30). Heintzman also touches on feasts (Lk 15:11, 31; Matt 9:14–17, 22:1–14, 25:1–13) and friendships (Lk 7:34; Matt 21:31–32; Lk 19:1–10; Jn 8:2–11), culminating with the story of Mary and Martha (Lk 10).⁵¹ Following his exploration of biblical themes related to leisure, Heintzman turns to 2 Thessalonians 3:10 to discuss a biblical view of work in which he corrects a profound misunderstanding in leisure studies scholarship: “To understand this verse, it needs to be seen within its historical and literary context.”⁵² When done so, the saying “Anyone who is unwilling to work shall not eat” occurs in a very specific context

⁴⁹Charles Sylvester, ‘The Western Idea of Work and Leisure: Traditions, Transformations, and the Future’, in *Leisure Studies: Prospects for the Twenty-first century*, ed. by E.L. Jackson and T.L. Burton (State College: Venture, 1999), p. 24.

⁵⁰Blackshaw, *Routledge Handbook of Leisure Studies*, 7.

⁵¹ *The Palgrave Handbook of Leisure Studies*, ed. by Karl Spracklen et al. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), p. 210.

⁵² Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality*, 212.

where the original readers were not working as they had a confused understanding of eschatology and expected Christ's immediate return." Heintzman's themes will be covered in more depth in the next section as Heintzman's book goes into more detail.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS AND LEISURE: CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

A survey of leisure research incorporating early Christian writings and the Sabbath reveals a wide variety of interpretations and treatments of the early Christian writings. It is crucial to note that we have only a fragment of the evidence surviving, and that there is no tradition of mining the material that is available for instances or evidence of classical leisure. This means that the exploration of leisure in early Christian writings is patchy; we need to interpolate from our extant sources for a more fulsome picture, and this thesis serves as an opening up of the questions and initial revelations of classical leisure in the first century of the Roman Empire. Certainly, this thesis offers a starting point for other researchers to add their scholarly insights. It is important to note that none of the noted leisure scholars, when exploring classical leisure concepts in early Christian writings, employ contextual criticism or translation of the original Greek or Aramaic,⁵³ nor do they ask questions of the meanings of the text in the social world from which it emerges. The authors do, however, provide a framework for their interpretation of leisure from a Christian perspective. Doohan, in his chapter on Sabbath living, offers his interpretation of the story of Jesus' miracles on the Sabbath (Lk 6:6–11, Mk 3:1–6, Jn 5:1–9, 9:1–41), pointing out that the Jews "fell into a trap" of legalism that turned the Sabbath rest into a yoke, instead of a joy.⁵⁴ Doohan's interpretation of Jesus healing on the Sabbath is used to highlight his theology of a Christian

⁵³ See the following exceptions: Jeff Crittenden, 'Holy Leisure: A Life of Prayer, Contemplation and Celebration' (master's thesis, University of Alberta, 2001); Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality*, 2005; and Ben Witherington III, *The Rest of Life: Rest, Play, Eating, Studying, Sex from a Kingdom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

⁵⁴ Leonard Doohan, *Leisure: A Spiritual Need* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1990), p. 47.

Sabbath as joy, as liberation, which supports his pastoral understanding of leisure as a spiritual need. Doohan does not engage in questions regarding the response to and consequences of the healing, the understanding of healing in the first two centuries, the parties that enforced Sabbath rest, or the experience of the Sabbath for those outside of the city of Jerusalem, perhaps significantly highlighting that Jesus asks first if the person wants to be healed. A poignant question is to be discerned here. Ryken, framing his argument for the Sabbath, employs the early Christian stories of Jesus resting in prayer (Mark 6:45–47; Luke 6:12, 9:28), taking a break from work to eat (Mark 6:30–32), interacting with Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42), and conversing about the lilies of the field being in need of nothing (Matt 6:25–34), as well as the epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrew 4:9–11), to highlight that rest and contemplation are at the heart of Christian leisure: “The accounts that the Bible gives us of God’s creation of the world and Jesus’s life and personality suggest that God is playful as well as serious.”⁵⁵ Johnston’s leisure scholarship is robust in its exploration of the Sabbath, which in turn leads to an interesting perspective of Sabbath in the early Christian context.

Johnston points to an interpretation of the historical context of the Sabbath:

What is significant for our present discussion is that Sabbath-keeping was so uniform in Israelite life that it became almost the trademark of Jewish faith and practice. By the time of the Maccabees, for example, the practice of keeping the Sabbath was so central to Judaism that, according to Josephus, the Romans had to exempt the Jews from military service because they were useless as soldiers on the Sabbath. Seneca could not understand the Sabbath exercise and chided the Jews for spending every seventh day of their lives in idleness.⁵⁶

From there Johnston builds a case for a Christian interpretation of Sabbath through the lens of Jesus:

[I]t is this same connection between Sabbath rest and human restoration that Jesus recognized, as he did not let the Sabbath stop him from collecting needed food (Mark 2:23–28), from restoring a man’s withered hand (Matt. 12:9–14), or from healing a

⁵⁵Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 171.

⁵⁶Robert K. Johnston, *The Christian at Play* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 93.

chronically ill woman (Luke 13:10–17). Whether it be rest from unrest, refreshment from drudgery, or release from endless competition, the Sabbath exists to serve humankind as much today as in Jesus' day.⁵⁷

Johnston continues to expand his interpretation of Jesus and leisure through an exploration of festival, dance, feasting, hospitality, and the friendships of Jesus, all of which will be explored in the following paragraphs.

In previous work, I note that,

Jesus experienced difficulty in reaction to his understanding of celebration in terms of obedience to the rules and regulations surrounding the celebration of Sabbath. Jesus' emphasis on the freedom to celebrate with all people, sinners and tax collectors alike, caused quite a stir among his Jewish culture. In Jesus' understanding of celebration was abundance, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10).

I then move from Sabbath celebration to the eucharist as the culminating moment of the celebration.⁵⁸

Heintzman opens his exploration of Jesus and the Sabbath with this observation:

By the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the true meaning of the Sabbath had been hidden by the many restrictions governing its observance. Sabbath-keeping was primarily external and formal. Rigid observance of a day was put before the needs of the people. Thus Jesus entered a situation in which human tradition was confused with the commands of God.⁵⁹

While one may be curious to know if that was the experience of all Jews or if there were variations of Sabbath experiences, Heintzman goes on to argue that Jesus upheld the Sabbath law but not how it was enforced. Using six examples of Jesus' interactions with the Sabbath law, such as picking grain (Matt 12:1–4; Mk 2:23–26; Lk 6:1–4), and those who enforced it, Jesus declared himself the lord of the Sabbath (Lk 6:5; Matt 12:8; Mk 2:28), even healing on the Sabbath (Mk 3:1–5; Lk 13:10–17; Jn 9:40–41). Heintzman concludes that,

⁵⁷Ibid., 93.

⁵⁸Crittenden, *Holy Leisure*, 89, 90.

⁵⁹Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality*, 101.

The Sabbath's one day of rest in seven is not just a day of inactivity. It is not just a time period. It is a time set aside for humans, a time for bringing healing and wholeness.⁶⁰

Heintzman goes on to point out that “it was very likely” that the New Testament church continued to keep the Sabbath, citing numerous biblical texts regarding early Christians going to synagogue (Acts 9:20; 13:14; 14:1; 17:1–2) and interpreting what the Sabbath means in the light of the resurrection of Jesus (Colossians 2:16–17, Romans 14:7) and how God's invitation into God's rest might be experienced (Heb 4:1–10) to make his case. Heintzman adds that “Jesus' teaching and practice of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–14; see Mark 2:23–27; Luke 6:1–4; Mark 3:1–5; Luke 13:10–17; Luke 14:1–6; John 9:13–16) suggests that leisure is a time for wholeness and healing.”^{61 62}

Heintzman's scholarship on the Sabbath builds on a book of conference papers that he edited with Van Andel and Visker in 1994, revised in 2006, titled *Christianity and Leisure*. While on the broad topic of Christianity and leisure, it has two chapters dedicated to a biblical and historical perspective of leisure. In the first chapter, Johnston explores the Genesis creation story followed by a number of early Christian writings (Jn 9:4; Col 3:23–23; 2 Thess 3:10–13) to emphasize the concept of work. Moving from these writings, Johnston explores his thesis on play. Using biblical writings about the Sabbath (Ex.34:21–22), the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5), and Qoheleth (Eccl. 9:7–10), combined with early Christian writings about Jesus being called a drunkard and glutton (Lk 7:34), the tension between Mary and Martha over work and contemplation (Lk 10:38–42), and the woman who poured perfume over Jesus (Mk 4), Johnston establishes that the biblical tradition expresses a balance between work and play: “But alongside Christ's work was his play. Like God himself, Jesus

⁶⁰Ibid., 103.

⁶¹Paul Heintzman, ‘Have Leisure and Know that I am God: Christianity and Leisure’, in *Handbook of Leisure Theory*, ed. by Karl Spracklen et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 203–222 (p. 205).

⁶²Note that in this range of evidence—from Romans circa 60 CE to Acts, which could be 125 CE—there is a very wide timespan (three generations) and so our pictures are composites.

both worked and rested.”⁶³ In the second chapter, Heintzman explores the concept of Sabbath and rest, first through the Torah, prophets, and the Psalms and then through the early Christian writings, observing that “Jesus’ teaching on the Sabbath suggests that leisure is more than quantitative; it also has a qualitative dimension to it. The Sabbath’s one day of rest in seven is not just a day of inactivity. It is not just a time period, but a time set aside for humans, a time for bringing healing and wholeness. The same may be said about leisure.”⁶⁴ Commenting on Matthew 11:28–30, Heintzman notes about rest that it “indicates not a future hope, nor a rest in heaven, but a rest immediately available to all who follow Jesus. Second, the rest is not that of inactivity or idleness; it includes the yoke of discipleship. There is no discipleship without a task. Jesus does not promise freedom from work, toil or burden, but rest or relief which will make all burdens light.”⁶⁵

Neville clearly states that the early church, particularly the gentile-based congregations, moves away from Sabbath practices: “The Gentile churches had never tried to observe the seventh day by refusing to do any work on it. Their attention was focussed on the risen Lord and his rising on the first day of the week. Sunday was the day to be observed, not Saturday.”⁶⁶ This argument continues in Witherington as he makes a similar case in his exploration of the epistle to the Hebrews regarding the Sabbath:

Christians are not called to, nor required to, follow the retrospective approach of Sabbatarianism when it comes to the issue of rest and sleep and restoration. We live out of the new creation and Kingdom that is coming, not out of the old creation and form of this world that is passing away. We are no longer under the Mosaic provisions; rather, we are new covenant people looking forward to the Day of the Lord and celebrating the first Lord’s Day, the day of resurrection. We live betwixt and

⁶³Robert K. Johnston, ‘Work and Play: A Biblical Perspective’, in *Christianity and Leisure: Issues in a Pluralistic Society*, ed. by Paul Heintzman et al. (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1994), pp. 3-13 (p. 11).

⁶⁴Paul Heintzman, ‘Implications for Leisure from a Review of the Biblical Concepts of Sabbath Rest’, in *Christianity and Leisure: Issues in a Pluralistic Society*, ed. by Paul Heintzman et al. (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2006), pp. 14-31 (p. 22).

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁶Graham Neville, *Free Time: Toward a Theology of Leisure* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2004), p. 11.

between, as the Kingdom has already come and is yet to come. How this affects our theology of rest and restoration is that we still need rest and restoration, but this does not require keeping Sabbath.⁶⁷

While not discussed in detail by leisure scholars, it is obvious from the early Christian writings that the practices and understandings of the Sabbath experience were shifting in light of the resurrection, as Karl Barth (1961) highlights in his third book of church dogmatics: “Hence his [man’s] history under the command of God really begins with the Gospel and not with the Law, with an accorded celebration and not with a required task, with a prepared rejoicing and not with care and toil, with a freedom given to him and not an imposed obligation, with a rest and not with an activity, in brief, with Sunday only after a succession of gloomy working days.” Barth then continues by describing God’s rest on the seventh day—and his blessing and sanctifying of that day—as the “first divine action” that humans are permitted to witness. The implications for humankind are as follows: “And the first word said to him, the first obligation brought to his notice, is that without any works or merit he himself may rest with God and then go to his work. It really consists in the fact that he is obliged to be free: free to behold the particular thing that God in His freedom has purposed to perform in His created world: free to behold the way and fulfilment of the kingdom of grace.”⁶⁸ The Sabbath is then taken not only as an institution granted to humankind—a divine instruction—but also as evidence of the freedom that God, as Creator, has given to God’s people.⁶⁹

It is notable and will be discussed later that observing the Jewish Sabbath was not the primary point of division between Jews and early followers of Jesus; rather his claim to be the messiah was. Leisure scholars, employing the early Christian writings, offer interesting

⁶⁷Ben Witherington III, *The Rest of Life: Rest, Play, Eating, Studying, Sex from a Kingdom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 37.

⁶⁸Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3 (London: T & T Clark, 1961), p. 51.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 52.

perspectives on how the early church understood the Jewish Sabbath, but clearly further examination is needed for a more fulsome understanding of Christian leisure.

Following an emphasis on a Christian interpretation of the Sabbath, leisure scholarship's interaction with early Christian writings often includes, but is not exclusive to, topics such as rest, festivals, feasts, dance, hospitality, and friendships.⁷⁰ Heintzman, commenting on rest, notes that, "Rest in its ultimate and deepest sense is available through Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:28–29). This rest along with peace (John 16:33; 14:27; Phil. 4:7), abundant life (John 10:10), and freedom (John 8:32) are descriptive of the quality of life we have in Christ, and as such, explicate the qualitative dimension of leisure."⁷¹ Similar to the theme of rest is the call of Jesus to consider the lilies of the field (Matt. 6:25–34), how they are not anxious. De Grazia comments on this text, offering that, "Christians were not to waste their time thinking, planning, and working for tomorrow," and continues by clarifying, "It is not Jesus' warnings about work that affect the idea of leisure but His turning of men's hope toward God and the coming of the Kingdom."⁷² Dahl warns that, "He not only left his own work as a carpenter, but he called countless others away from their jobs also and preached again and again about the spiritual hazards of becoming too preoccupied with worldly work and the pursuit of wealth and power."⁷³ Ryken offers that, "The overall message of the discourse is that people must set a curb to the human impulse to be acquisitive and to reduce life to ceaseless striving."⁷⁴ Ryken goes on to point out that Jesus' command also entails a call to pay attention to our sensory and artistic life, which often leads to an exploration in the early Christian writings of the human need to rest. Ryken comments on Jesus needing rest to go to pray in Mark 6:45–47 and the disciples needing rest in Mark 6:30–32 because they had

⁷⁰Heintzman, "Have Leisure and Know," 2017, 205–210.

⁷¹Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality*, 119.

⁷²De Grazia, *Of Time, Leisure, and Worship*, 23.

⁷³Dahl, *Work, Play and Worship in a Leisure-oriented Society*, 43–44.

⁷⁴Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 180.

been working non-stop, and then concludes with the story of Jesus being with Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42) and telling an “anxious” Martha that Mary had chosen the good portion, or as it is often interpreted, had chosen contemplation and rest.⁷⁵ Neville comments on the Mary and Martha story (Luke 10:38–42) but is concerned with the interpretation of the story as understood in the Middle Ages.⁷⁶ So too does Deschenes, as he is interested in “homo faber and homo ludens” in Christ as a state of mind or spiritual well-being.⁷⁷

Heintzman is more fulsome in his exploration of Jesus’ experiences of rest, adding that

In the life of Jesus we see this practice of being away: before he began his ministry he spent forty days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11); before he chose his disciples he spent the night in the desert (Luke 6:12); when he heard of John the Baptist’s death he withdrew in a boat to a place apart (Matt. 14:23); after the feeding of the five thousand he went up into the hills (Matt. 14:23); after a long night of work he got up early and went to a lonely place (Mark 1:35); when the disciples had returned from a mission, he instructed them to come to the wilderness (Luke 5:16); with three disciples he went up a mountain for the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–9), and before his death, he went to the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46).⁷⁸

It is interesting that no one comments on the epistles of the early Christian writings regarding rest as there are many possible examples of Paul having the opportunity to do so—perhaps, for example, resting during his numerous journeys throughout the empire. Clearly, as Heintzman and Ryken point out, rest is an important aspect of the early Christian writings.

The experience of religious festivals, while primarily Jewish—the festivals of Purim (Est. 9:26), of Booths (Lev. 23), of Passover (Exod. 12:14, for example)—drew together followers of Jesus to either participate in the festival or to redefine it in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (for example, the Eucharist in 1 Cor. 11:23–27 or Mark 14:22–24; or Pentecost in Acts 2). Festivals often included pilgrimage, a rest from work for play,⁷⁹

⁷⁵Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 168.

⁷⁶Neville, *Free Time: Toward a Theology of Leisure*.

⁷⁷Gervais Deschênes, ‘Scriptural Illustration Applied in the *Homo Faber-religious-ludens* Spiritual Model of Leisure’, *Leisure/Loisir* 42, no. 3 (2018) 259–279.

⁷⁸Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality*, 228.

⁷⁹Johnston, *The Christian at Play*, 112.

and celebration or enjoyment. There is a warning to this enjoyment, as Ryken comments: “In the New Testament, for example, we read about ‘lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God’ (2 Tim 3:4); about foolish and disobedient people who are ‘slaves to various passions and pleasures’ (Titus 3:3), and about how Moses by faith preferred to ‘share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin’ (Hebrew 11:25).”⁸⁰ Interestingly, Ryken chose those passages of scripture instead of Paul's letters concerning behaviour, such as Paul's clarity in Galatians 5:9–21 that drunkenness, carousing, fornication, and so forth—all aspects of the context of the early Christians in Roman culture—are against God.

While Ryken is trying to make an argument about the dangers of enjoyment, as identified by him in the fall story (Gen. 3), what he misses are the very words of Jesus: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10); and as Heintzman points out, the words of 1 Timothy 4:4 that “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving,” and that there is a tremendous joy. In Jesus, Heintzman says, there is a friendship that at its core personifies the joy of the Kingdom.⁸¹ Jesus is constantly seeking out those who have been excluded, shamed, or denied. Johnston and Heintzman offer no shortage of examples of early Christian writings on this subject: Jesus as a friend to drunkards and gluttons (Luke 7:34), tax collectors and prostitutes (Matthew 21:31–32), and a woman caught in adultery (John 8:2–11).⁸² While there are two references to dancing in the early Christian writings (Luke 5:15 and Luke 15:25), both in contrast to mourning, the only leisure references to dance were found in the Hebrew scriptures. Without question, the festivals, the celebration, the friends gathered

⁸⁰ Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 188.

⁸¹ Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality*, 131.

⁸² Johnston, *The Christian at Play*; Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality*.

together, and the hospitality offered⁸³ often culminated in a meal. Waller summarizes it beautifully: “During his extraordinarily busy public ministry, Jesus, on several occasions, found time to withdraw (Matt. 4:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:10). According to the gospels, one of his favourite activities was socializing with friends and acquaintances at dinner parties.”⁸⁴ It is pointed out by numerous authors⁸⁵ that there are several feasting texts in the early Christian writings (John 2:1–11, a wedding in Cana; Luke 7:34, Jesus being called a glutton and drunkard; Luke 15, a feast for the prodigal son; Matt. 14:13–21, Mark 6:30–44, Luke 9:10–17, and John 6:1–15, the feeding of five thousand, etc.). Interestingly, none speak of the feeding of the four thousand in Matthew 15:29–39 or Mark 8:1–10, nor in John 21:12 when Jesus feeds Peter after the resurrection, nor in Luke 24:29–31 when all is revealed to two disciples. It is also interesting that only Witherington, in addition to me, makes any significant commentary on the eucharistic meal (1 Cor. 11:23–25, Matt. 26:17–30, Mk. 14:12–26, Lk. 22:7–39, and Jn. 13:1–17:26).⁸⁶ In previous scholarship, I maintain that “One of Jesus’ lasting celebrations was the celebration of his life with his disciples in an upper room just before he was betrayed and crucified,” adding, after quoting the eucharistic story in Luke 22:14–20, that “This moment perhaps provides the single greatest insight for understanding holy leisure.”⁸⁷ This eucharistic meal will be explored throughout this thesis.

Witherington adds numerous texts about feasting in the early Christian writings (Matt. 11:19; Matt. 24:38; Luke 7:34; Luke 12:45; Luke 17:27; Luke 17:28; 1 Cor. 10:7; Galatians 5:21; and 1 Peter 4:3). The fascinating aspect of Witherington's offering is that the texts he

⁸³Johnston, *The Christian at Play*; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*; Crittenden, *Holy Leisure*; Heintzman, “Have Leisure.”

⁸⁴Steven Waller, *Leisure and Fellowship in the Life of the Black Church: Theology and Praxis* (Bloomington: Xlibris Press, 2015), p. 24.

⁸⁵See, for example, Johnston, *The Christian at Play*; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*; Crittenden, *Holy Leisure*; Heintzman, “Have Leisure.”

⁸⁶Crittenden, *Holy Leisure*; Witherington, *The Rest of Life*.

⁸⁷Crittenden, *Holy Leisure*, 90.

offers and comments on are predominantly about overindulgence and/or immoral behaviour, which is also a perspective often used for Jesus by those who oppose him, as discussed earlier.⁸⁸ Kelly summarizes Jesus well:

The Gospels and other sources depict an image of "Jesus the bon vivant," who had a well-known—and, to some, notorious—practice of regularly engaging in feasting and wine-drinking, especially with the social and religious lowlife of the day. Given that feasts and banquets in Jesus's culture were elaborate affairs, involving "a formal meal in a luxurious setting with the best food and wine that the host and his family could offer," alongside various forms of entertainment, Jesus's reputation as a partier reveals a ready acceptance of recreation.⁸⁹

Witherington correctly points out that feasting and festivals are experiences associated with immoral pagan behaviours.⁹⁰ While he does not go further in his comments, the context of the early church is that followers of Jesus are immersed in a Roman culture that celebrates emperor worship, the various deities and gods, social status, military victories, political aspirations, and so forth, with a festival and a meal. Heintzman offers a discerning quotation from Packer: "all through the Bible, the feast table is the place and the emblem of refreshing, celebratory fellowship—a very proper leisure activity, and certainly one to encourage."⁹¹ It is interesting to consider the ethical considerations of the early Christian church, which realized having to live and work within the context of the Roman Empire and its cultural expectations, such as feasting and idol worship, was potentially problematic.

Heintzman is correct in his assessment that there are few publications in leisure and Christianity,⁹² and to go further, the only publication with a meaningful reference to Christianities in a pre-Constantinian framework is Heintzman's book *Leisure and Spirituality*. Building from his chapter in *Christianity and Leisure, Leisure and Spirituality*

⁸⁸Witherington, *The Rest of Life*.

⁸⁹Conor M. Kelly, *The Fullness of Free Time: A Theological Account of Leisure and Recreation in the Moral Life* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2020), p. 24.

⁹⁰Witherington, *The Rest of Life*, 69.

⁹¹Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality*, p. 130.

⁹²Ibid.

offers the foundational book in the exploration of the evolution of leisure from a Christian perspective. Here Heintzman offers a thorough exploration of the biblical, historical, and contemporary expressions of leisure and Christianity. Heintzman concludes that Christian leisure would ultimately lead one to rest, renewal, learning, and appreciation and enjoyment of God and the gift of creation.

Following Heintzman's book, a few offerings have emerged, such as Waller's *Leisure and Fellowship in the Life of the Black Church: Theology and Praxis*, which explores leisure and Christianity as experienced in a variety of Black congregational contexts. Waller's unique approach invites one to see how biblical leisure experiences of the Sabbath, work, and rest are incorporated in a practical, repeatable manner. Heintzman and Van Andel published *Christianity and Leisure: Issues for the Twenty-First Century*, in which they offer a practical template for the incorporation of leisure into a variety of professional and Christian devotional settings. The categories of leisure theory, leisure research, ethical and applied issues, therapeutic recreation and wellness, and spirituality and health offer a diversity of approaches. In the first chapter, leisure scholar Hothem profoundly states that, "For those who have not reflected on the various meanings of leisure in our society, I am not defining leisure as free time or as recreational-diversionary activities, but I call us back to the classical meaning of leisure that is rooted not only in Greek philosophy, but in a Christian world view."⁹³ Hothem, using predominantly texts about the Sabbath and the psalms, offers a convincing case for Christian leisure, but, like Doohan, it is anchored in a spirituality of leisure.

While references to early Christian writings in scholarly leisure research are sparse, the notable exceptions point predominantly to the Torah and its writings about the Jewish

⁹³ Peggy Hothem, 'The Wonder of Leisure', in *Christianity and Leisure: Issues for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. by Paul Heintzman and Glen Van Andel (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2017), pp. 5-14 (p. 7).

Sabbath (for example, Gen. 2:3, Ex. 20:8–11, Ex. 31:12–17, Lev. 25:10, Deut. 5:12–15), including its invitation to rest from work or liberation from work as a gift and command from God. A Jewish understanding of Sabbath is important for the understanding of leisure in early Christian communities, but, as will be discussed in a later chapter, the Sabbath as understood in the Torah is not the same as an early Christian description of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is reinterpreted through the lens of the early Christian writings on the experience of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The final word regarding the literature review of Christian leisure belongs rightly with Pieper as Pieper lays a foundation for the exploration of leisure. While Pieper offers no biblical texts, he concludes his work *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* with an insistence that the fullest expression of leisure is found in Christian worship, arguing that "separated from the sphere of divine worship, of the cult of the divine, and from the power it radiates, leisure is as impossible as the celebration of a feast."⁹⁴ The celebration of the feast and what happens following, in the writings of the early church, mark the primary questions that this thesis will explore.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research will be focused on a critical explanation or interpretation of the primary sources (exegesis), the difficulties or problems that emerge from the primary sources (hermeneutics), and the origins of primary sources in relation to other contemporaneous texts; the aim will be to examine aspects of authorship, audience, and probable original intention of the source as possible (historical-critical). This methodology of exegesis, hermeneutics, and the historical-critical will then inform the interpretation and subsequent analysis of the first-

⁹⁴Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, p. 63.

to mid-second-century literature produced by the Jesus community (“the Christians”) about Christians and their activities. This literature will include the letters of Paul and others, the Gospels, the Didache, and authors writing about the early church from a Jewish (Josephus) or Roman (Pliny, Tacitus) perspective. The research will focus on the Lord’s Day (the first day of the week), the eucharistic meal⁹⁵ (the Eucharist), and engagement.

⁹⁵ It is important to recognize that the Eucharistic meal is not uniform, but rather diverse in its various faith communities’ practices. Bradshaw comments, “Now, however, there are added complications which we have already observed, that first-century Jewish liturgy, from which Christian worship took its departure, was not nearly so fixed or uniform as was once supposed, and the New Testament Christianity was itself essentially pluriform in doctrine and practice.” Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 63.

CHAPTER ONE: GREEK *SCHOLE*

To set early Christian conceptualizations of leisure in context, it is crucial to discuss three powerful influences on Christian expressions of leisure: Greek philosophy, Roman philosophy, and Jewish understanding of the Sabbath. Given the multifaceted context from which the early communities of faith emerge, this thesis will explore primary sources of writings from and about the early church. For the Greek cultural background we shall examine the place of *schole* in the writings of Plato and Aristotle; for the Roman background we shall look at Cicero's notion of *otium*; and for the *Sabbath* we shall use contemporary Jewish writings such as those by Philo, the community of Qumran and targums of the Torah. Finally, as the descriptions of *schole*, *otium*, and *Sabbath* are established, the writings of the early Christians will be assessed to discern whether the early Christian communities offer a distinctive interpretation of leisure.

GREEK *SCHOLE*

Inherited from and then developed through the works of Plato and Aristotle, *schole* is the Greek word for leisure that describes the aim, philosophy, and experience of leisure. While Plato and Aristotle are the first to express *schole* in the written, philosophical form, the idea of *schole* is found in Greek mythology, particularly in the myth of Sisyphus and in the "choice of Heracles."

Greek Mythology: Sisyphus

Greek mythology has a powerful way of offering insight into the human condition, and in particular, the dichotomy between work and leisure. One of the long-remembered myths is that of Sisyphus and his endless punishment of rolling a stone uphill, only to have the stone

roll back down to the bottom of the hill right at the very edge of completing the task. The myth of Sisyphus is timeless as many relate to this experience: working at something only to realize how futile or meaningless the task was, as the effort put into something was wasted. The interesting aspect of the myth of Sisyphus is why he was punished, and it is often missed in the telling of the myth.

Sisyphus, a man known for his cunning and ability, was the son of Aeolus and Enarete but what initially made him famous was that he founded the city of Corinth (he named it Ephyra initially). The city of Corinth, in a few chapters, will play a crucial role in the apostle Paul's ministry and our understanding of Christian leisure. Homer, in the *Iliad*, describes it this way, "There is a city, Ephyre, in the corner of horse-pasturing Argos, where Sisyphus ruled, who was born most cunning of men, Sisyphus the son of Aeolus; he fathered a son, Glaukos."⁹⁶ After founding the city of Corinth, while establishing the Isthmian Games (like the Olympic Games in Athens but in alternate years) and fortifying the city, he saw something that changed his life.

According to mythology, Sisyphus caught sight of Zeus carrying off the river nymph Aegina. Aegina's father, Asopus, gave chase, eventually discovering from Sisyphus the story of Zeus carrying her off. In exchange for this information, Asopus promised a spring of fresh water on the Acrocorinth in Corinth. When Zeus discovered Sisyphus's disclosure, he punished him by sending him to Thanatos (Death) to take him off to the house of Hades. While in Hades, Sisyphus, a human, tricked Thanatos and bound him in prison. With Thanatos tied up, mortals ceased to die. The gods, noticing that humans were not dying, sent Ares to release Thanatos. Thanatos was furious and vowed to punish Sisyphus, but cunning Sisyphus gave his wife careful instructions on what to do. She left Sisyphus's body unburied

⁹⁶Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Caroline Alexander (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2015), pp. 152-155.

and made none of the customary offerings to the dead, allowing Sisyphus to return to the upper world, back to Corinth, where he lived a long life. Zeus, vowing revenge, waited until Sisyphus's death. Upon death, Sisyphus was forced to roll a great stone eternally up a hill. When he had nearly pushed it to the top, it always rolled down again to the bottom..⁹⁷

The story of Sisyphus—ultimately a story about telling the truth, securing water for a city, and outwitting the gods—becomes a cautionary tale about the punishment of meaningless work. The focus of the story seems to point not to the saga of his fascinating life but to the great effort with which Sisyphus pushes a rock to the brink of the top of a hill, only to watch all his efforts wasted as it rolls back down. It is no wonder that the myth of Sisyphus's punishment is located in Hades, a place of the dead and punishment, just as it is no wonder that this story has been used to describe work that brings no joy, meaning, or purpose.

Greek Mythology: Heracles

Another myth, not often associated with leisure but that has a profound link, is “The Choice of Heracles.” Heracles, demigod and son of Zeus, famous for his strength and labours, is given a choice, at an early age, between vice and virtue. The story, attributed to Socrates, is a retelling of a decision that every person must make. Heracles, passing from boyhood to manhood, according to the myth, went to a quiet place to ponder whether he would live a life of virtue or vice. As he sat thinking, two women of great stature approached him:

“The one was fair to see and of high bearing; and her limbs were adorned with purity, her eyes with modesty; sober was her figure, and her robe was white. The other was plump and soft, with high feeding. Her face was made up to heighten its natural white

⁹⁷Grant and Hazel, *Who's Who in Classical Mythology* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 304.

and pink, her figure to exaggerate her height. Open-eyed was she; and dressed so as to disclose all her charms.”⁹⁸

The woman of vice, named happiness, was first to speak, offering Heracles a life of pleasure, of ease: “Make me your friend; follow me, and I will lead you along the pleasantest and easiest road. You shall taste all the sweets of life; and hardship you shall never know . . . And should there arise misgiving that lack of means may stint your enjoyments, never fear that I may lead you into winning them by toil and anguish of body and soul. Nay; you shall have the fruits of others’ toil, and refrain from nothing that can bring you gain.”⁹⁹

Next, the woman of virtue speaks, telling Heracles to train his mind and body to prepare himself for the complexity of life: “I will not deceive you by a pleasant prelude: I will rather tell you truly the things that are, as the gods have ordained them. For of all things good and fair, the gods give nothing to man without toil and effort.”¹⁰⁰

With their cases made, both women are silent as they wait for Heracles’s decision. Will he choose the hard and long road to joy or the short and easy road to happiness? Standing at the fork in the road, virtue makes one more plea: “What good thing is thine, poor wretch, or what pleasant thing dost thou know, if thou wilt do nought to win them?”¹⁰¹ Heracles is immortal but will be outcast by the gods and people if he chooses a life of vice. What is of particular interest in virtue’s argument is the focus on craftspeople, fellow workers, guardians of the house, servants, and friends. She is imploring those who work at their occupations to influence Heracles’s decision. Virtue continues by pointing out that those

⁹⁸Xenophon, ‘Memorabilia’, in *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, vol. 4, ed. by E. C. Marchant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), p. 2.23.

⁹⁹Ibid., 2.23.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 2.28–29.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 2.30.

who follow in her ways eat when they are hungry, sleep soundly due to their toil, and do not neglect their duties. Because of this, they are filled with joy.¹⁰²

Heracles's story is situated at the crossroads of virtue and vice. Each presents its case to Heracles: Do you want the hard work, the toil, and discipline that bring happiness and good rest? Or do you want the easy way of pleasure and ease? Socrates is sharing this story to make a point about the rewards of virtue, which will bring happiness, meaning, and purpose against the "easy and short road" to happiness that vice offers. The story needs little explanation as the choice is clear, and in Heracles's case, his life is certainly one of toil, hard work, and discipline, which in the end bring him the reward or happiness he seeks. Socrates is crystal clear: each of us must make this decision just as the gods do.

Greek Mythology: Dionysus

Finally, let us consider the myths about Dionysus. Dionysus, the god of wine, tragedy, and ecstatic liberation or freedom, is a minor god in Homer's *The Odyssey*,¹⁰³ appearing in only one line as an apparent intruder, but his legacy lingers. Dionysus, born a son of Zeus, has a complicated story of deceit, adultery, and the death of his mother, Semele, the daughter of the founder of Thebes, one of the most dramatic of the gods. In Euripides's play *The Bacchae*, Dionysus is young and furious that he is not recognized as a deity by the house of Cadmus, his mortal family of origin. In his fury, he gathers groups of women, a cult, who drink, dance, and go into fits of wild frenzy while worshipping him. The playwright, Euripides, builds the tension of this tragic play by having Dionysus appear, in disguise, to exact revenge on his family. He is in disguise because the king, Pentheus, has imposed a ban on worshipping

¹⁰²Ibid, 2.32–34.

¹⁰³Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by Emily Wilson (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 11. 327

Dionysus by his family; while this story ends in profound tragedy, the description of the Dionysus cult is crucial. In the chorus, Euripides describes it this way:

The Bacchic one, raising the flaming torch of pine on his thyrsos, like the smoke of Syrian incense, darts about, arousing the wanderers with his racing and dancing, agitating them with his shouts, casting his rich locks into the air... He holds this office, to join in dances, to laugh with the flute, and to bring an end to cares, whenever the delight of the grape comes at the feasts of the gods, and in ivy-bearing banquets the goblet sheds sleep over men.¹⁰⁴

Dionysus was a strange and wild god, associated with fertility and the energy of nature and particularly the seasons. Dionysus travelled widely according to legend (to Eastern lands such as Syria, Egypt, and India), and one of his most famous journeys was to Hades to fetch the playwright, Euripides, from the dead. Why? Because Dionysus was utterly bored with Athenian theatre. In *Aristophanes*, we hear the story of Dionysus as the jokester, making profound mistakes but not suffering any consequence. Dionysus employs his half-brother, Heracles, for advice but receives none, so Dionysus disguises himself as Heracles. The comedic situations Dionysus encounters would have the theatre rolling in laughter, to the point of tears. When Dionysus finally finds Euripides, who had only just recently died, Euripides is arguing with Aeschylus over who is the best tragic poet, and somehow Dionysus is made the judge of the contest. In the end, Dionysus is allowed to bring one back to life, and Aristophanes describes the decision this way:

So it is refined not by Socrates
to sit and chatter
casting aside the pursuits of the Muses
and neglecting what's most important
in the art of tragedy.
But to spend time idly
in pompous words
and frivolous word-scraping
is the act of a man going crazy.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Euripides, *Bacchae*, 135–150; 370–385. Perseus Digital Library. Tufts University. <https://perseus.tufts.edu>.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 1491.

Dionysus had rich, dark hair and wore a purple robe. He was an inspirer of frenzied women and loved wine, celebration, and excess. Dionysus liberated people, especially through wine, with the idea that through drunkenness, one could experience life, as the gods did, as divine; or as was often the case, the opposite (i.e., through the wine they were devastated in their drunkenness). It comes as no surprise that Dionysus is so closely attached to the theatre—of tragedy and comedy—and that people could easily relate to him. He was not only outside of them, he was also within them. They could be transformed by him into being like him. The momentary exultant power of wine-drinking could give only a sign to show people that they had within them more than they knew; they themselves could become like the gods. The Dionysus festivals were celebrated with fervour. They took place in the spring and lasted for five days. They were days of peace and enjoyment. All ordinary business of life stopped. The place where people gathered to honour the god was a theatre, and the ceremony was the performance of a play. The greatest poetry in Greece, and among the greatest in the world, was written for Dionysus.¹⁰⁶

Those who gathered together to celebrate Dionysus also lifted up his tragic tale. While he was a god who brought so much life and revelry, he was also a god who suffered a tragic fate every fall and winter. With the coming of the cold, he died a terrible death, being torn to pieces. He was always brought back to life; he died and rose again. “It was his joyful resurrection they celebrated in the theatre, but the idea of terrible deeds done to him and done by men under the influence was too closely associated with him ever to be forgotten. He was more than the suffering god. He was the tragic god.”¹⁰⁷

As with most great hero stories, Dionysus died every year and was resurrected to life every year in a cyclical fashion. Dionysus’s life and death were symbolic of the life and death

¹⁰⁶ Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 61–62.

that people experience every day and particularly of the life and death of the soul: “He had still another side. He was the assurance that death does not end all. His worshippers believed that his death and resurrection showed that the soul lives on forever after the body dies.”¹⁰⁸

The tales of Dionysus’s adventures provide an important background for the concept of leisure. Dionysus’s association with liberation and tragic suffering through wine, theatre, frenzied dancing, and abandoning oneself to the passions establishes an insight into the human condition of sensual pleasure, vice, and escapism. The festivals honouring Dionysus, later known as the Roman god Bacchus, will also prove to be problematic for the Romans, a culture steeped in sensual pleasure. For Roman historian Livy the festivals originating from a low-born Greek didn’t offer the splendour and depths of the arts and sciences of Greece to cultivate the mind but rather superstitions, the overindulgence of wine, and intense feasts filled with sexual abandon: “When they were heated with wine and the nightly commingling of men and women, those of tender age with their seniors, had extinguished all sense of modesty, debaucheries of every kind commenced; each had pleasures at hand to satisfy the lust he was most prone to.”¹⁰⁹

Livy pointed out that nocturnal drinking, eating, and sexual pleasure were just the beginning of the Dionysian mischief that Livy described as a disease that needed to be dealt with: “Many crimes were committed by treachery; most by violence, which was kept secret, because the cries of those who were being violated or murdered could not be heard owing to the noise of drums and cymbals.”¹¹⁰

Livy appealed to those who were indoctrinated by the Bacchus influence to return to the Roman gods and make a sacrifice: “For it reminds you that it is these gods whom your ancestors ordained that we should worship, reverence, and pray to; not those who have driven

¹⁰⁸Ibid, 62.

¹⁰⁹ Livy, *A History of Rome* 39.8, <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/txt/ah/livy/Livy39.html>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

the minds of people enslaved by foul and foreign superstitions, as though by goading furies, into every form of crime and every kind of lust.”¹¹¹

Livy pointed out to both the masses and the Senate that this “new” worship of Dionysus was both dangerous and growing rapidly, by the thousands, and that not many understood the implications for the Empire and traditional Roman worship. Livy described his argument:

In the first place, then, women form the great majority, and this was the source of all the mischief. Then there are the males, the very counterparts of the women, committing and submitting to the foulest uncleanness, frantic and frenzied, driven out of their senses by sleepless nights, by wine, by nocturnal shouting and uproar.... Have you any idea what these nocturnal gatherings, these promiscuous associations of men and women are? If you knew at what age those of the male sex are initiated, you would feel not only compassion for them, but shame as well.¹¹²

Livy concluded that all must be done to eradicate this new religion by dragging those in the darkness out into the light so that the traditional Roman gods would not be displeased. The end result was the consul’s decision to destroy all of the Bacchanalian shrines, beginning in Rome and spreading throughout all of Italy and the Empire. The Senate made the declaration that the worship of Bacchus was banned. They did leave a small opening, however: if anyone considered the worship of Bacchus necessary, then they could make their case with the Senate. If the Senate gave permission, they could observe the rites on the condition that no more than five people took part in the service, that they had no common fund, and that there was no priest or conductor of the ceremonies.¹¹³

Dionysus had clearly left his imprint on the hearts and minds of many, who, in their leisure, sought an escape from the drudgery of life, or perhaps simply wanted a taste of what it might be like to approximate the gods.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 39.9.

¹¹² Ibid., 39. 13.

¹¹³ Ibid. 39.16–18

The mythology of Sisyphus labouring a rock up a hill endlessly, and the choice of Heracles between a life of vice and virtue and the hedonistic tales of Dionysus, offer important insight into the understanding and experience of leisure prior to the rise of Plato and Aristotle. From the foundations of these mythological stories, Plato and Aristotle begin the systematic exploration of *scholē*, the pursuit of leisure, as different from endless labour, freedom of choice between vice and virtue, and happiness, a flourishing in life, that temporary drunkenness and sensual pleasures cannot offer.

It is important to recognize the power of mythology and how mythology can describe timeless truths and insights about the human condition. Mythology often reveals the less obvious aspects of a culture and its values. When considering the mythology of Sisyphus, Heracles, or Dionysus, the natural human struggle for meaning transcends the perceived limits or obstacles. Mythology enriches our glimpse into a culture and its values, which in turn paves the way for scholars like Plato and Aristotle to systematically examine the human condition and context that mythology addresses.

PLATO

Plato, in *Phaedo*, argues, through Socratic dialogue on *scholē*, that in leisure one is able to pursue truth¹¹⁴ because one is free of the cravings and needs of the body that “interrupt, disturb, distract and prevent” one from realizing a glimpse of the truth.¹¹⁵ Plato continues: “In this way, by keeping ourselves uncontaminated by the follies of the body, we shall probably reach the company of others like ourselves and gain direct knowledge of all that is pure and uncontaminated—that is, presumably, of truth.”¹¹⁶ In *Theaetetus* Plato points out, in a

¹¹⁴Plato, ‘Phaedo’, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 65e.

¹¹⁵Ibid. 66d.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 66d.

discussion of truth, that “The free man always has time at his disposal to converse in peace at his leisure.”¹¹⁷ This freedom, *scholē*, Plato continues, moves the discussion towards happiness or fulfilment. “That is why we should make all seek to take flight from this world to the other, and that means becoming like the divine so far as we can, and that *scholē* is to become righteous with the help of wisdom.”¹¹⁸ This, in turn, leads to Socrates’s conclusion: “there are two patterns, my friend, in the unchangeable nature of things, one of divine happiness, the other of godless misery.”¹¹⁹

Plato makes his case for *scholē* clear: one must be free of the needs of the body, free from occupation, free from obligation or debt, and be virtuous in order to contemplate, in *scholē*, truth. This philosophical and disciplined description of *scholē* is juxtaposed with Plato’s assertion that to develop into a noble citizen, one needs to play. In Plato’s *Laws* we see him argue that “so we may say, in fact, the sum and substance of education is the right training which effectually leads the soul of the child at play on to the love of the calling in which he will have to be perfect, after its kind, when he is a man.”¹²⁰ Continuing in the development of his argument regarding leisure and play that ultimately bring peace, Plato writes that, “We should pass our lives in the playing of games—certain games, that is, sacrifice, song, and dance—with the result of ability to gain heaven’s grace, and to repel and vanquish an enemy when we have to fight him.”¹²¹ He concludes thus:

Furthermore, an authority which is to make these arrangements to our satisfaction must be possessed with the conviction that the like of this society of ours is not to be found in the world for ample leisure and abundant provision for all necessities, that its business, like

¹¹⁷Plato, ‘Theaetetus’, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 172d.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 176b.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 177a.

¹²⁰Plato, ‘Laws’, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 643d.

¹²¹Ibid., 803d.

that of an individual man, is to live well, and the indispensable precondition of a happy life is that we commit no sin against ourselves and suffer no wrongs from others.¹²²

Plato is developing two different visions of *scholē*. The first is that of the philosopher who, via *scholē*, is free to discern truth and virtue to experience eudaimonia—happiness, fulfilment. The second is the experience of happiness, via *scholē*, through play. There are two things to note: that both experiences are limited to those who have the means and freedom for *scholē*, and that *scholē*, in the philosophical description, would have very limited participants, and in the play description would be those who outgrow their childhood innocence.

ARISTOTLE

Aristotle, Plato's student, takes up this paradigm and redefines *scholē*. Prior to engaging with Aristotle's work, it needs to be noted that there is also its opposite, *ascolē*. While it is true that *ascolē* means work, Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* held that more often it means being preoccupied, being busy, or being industrious. In Greek, the word *argia* means idleness or laziness; *ponos* means toil, suffering, or struggle, but the most common word for work was *ergon*.¹²³ With this in mind, perhaps a more nuanced meaning of the opposite of leisure is pre-occupation or being consumed by something, giving it a greater richness than simply work.

The primary sources for Aristotle's interpretation of *scholē* are found in *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle ultimately links a life of leisure with being free from necessity—that is, free from having to work, free from having to be at war, and free from responsibility or obligation. Above all, it is about being free to choose, as he writes in *Politics*:

¹²²Ibid., 828d.

¹²³ Liddell and Scott, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 594.

The whole of life too, however, is divided into unleisure and leisure, war and peace, and of things doable in action some are necessary or useful, others noble. And where these things are concerned it is necessary to make the same choice as in the case of the parts of the soul and their actions. War must be for the sake of peace, unleisure for the sake of leisure, necessary and useful things for the sake of noble ones.¹²⁴

Aristotle's argument for *scholē* is rooted in *eudaimonia*—happiness, flourishing, prosperity—but he is quick to differentiate *eudaimonia* from amusement or play: “Hence happiness does not lie in amusement, since it would indeed be strange if the end were amusement and we did all the work we do and suffered evils all our lives for the sake of amusing ourselves. For, in a word, we choose everything—except happiness, since it is for the sake of something else.”¹²⁵

This is a key move away from Plato's expression of play as an aspect of *scholē*. Aristotle writes about children's education in *Politics*. Essentially, he argues that the kind of learning that serves as a foundation for education follows two paths. He continues: “And there are pretty much four that are customarily taught: Reading and writing, athletics, music, and fourth, in some cases, drawing. Reading, writing, and drawing are taught because they are useful for life and have many uses, whereas athletics is taught because it contributes to courage.” Music, however—which consists of a “puzzle” that people must unravel—is mostly learned for the purpose of pleasure. And such pleasure is important, as “the capacity to be at leisure in a noble way” is essential, the starting place of all else.¹²⁶

Aristotle's insistence on education, from childhood onward, as the basis of leisure, continues to dominate as he then turns to those building blocks leading towards contemplation, the noblest experience of leisure. He writes in *Nicomachean Ethics* that, “Therefore the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be

¹²⁴Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2017), p. 1333 30a.

¹²⁵Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), p. 1176b27–1117a2.

¹²⁶Aristotle, *Politics*, 1337b21–30.

contemplative; and of human activities, therefore, that which is most akin to this must be most of the nature of happiness.”¹²⁷ He goes on to say that happiness is exceptional to humans alone—rather than animals—as contemplation is a quintessentially human activity that is the basis of all happiness: “those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not accidentally, but in virtue of the contemplation; for this is in itself precious. Happiness, therefore, must be some form of contemplation.”¹²⁸

Contemplation as the aim of *scholē* leads us to Aristotle’s final analysis of a person’s engagement with leisure. Here, he argues that while both work and leisure are necessary, it is leisure that is preferable. By leisure, he does not simply mean play—“for that would inevitably be to make play our end in life, which is impossible”—but rather something more. He argues that “leisure seems to contain pleasure, happiness, and the blessed life. This is a state attained not by those who work but those at leisure, because he that is working is working for some hitherto unattained end, and happiness is an end, happiness which is universally regarded as concomitant not with pain but pleasure.” While pleasure is subjective, with each person having their own ideas as to what constitutes it depending on personality and preferences, “it becomes clear that, in order to spend leisure in civilized pursuits, we do require a certain amount of learning and education, and that these branches of education and these subjects studied must have their own intrinsic purpose, as distinct from those necessary occupational subjects which are studied for reasons beyond themselves.”¹²⁹

Aristotle clearly established that *scholē* was not the opposite of work, nor was it an end to itself. Rather *scholē* is the freedom from necessity of being occupied or obligated, so that leisure truly becomes the noblest human experience of life. But there is a limitation: the experience of *scholē* was only possible, according to Aristotle, for those who were free.

¹²⁷Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1179b10.

¹²⁸Ibid, 1178b25–31.

¹²⁹Aristotle, *Politics*, 1337b33–1338a14.

Aristotle points out that not all were free to enjoy *scholē*. In *Politics* he writes, “For otherwise there could also be a city of slaves and of the other animals, while as things stand there is not one, because these share neither in happiness nor in living in accord with deliberate choice.”¹³⁰ And, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, he concludes that “Moreover, any random person—even a slave—can enjoy bodily pleasures no less than the best person can. But no one assigns a share in happiness to a slave any more than a share of the relevant sort of life.”¹³¹

Scholē, a freedom from necessity, is freedom for leisure and is realized in contemplation, in virtue, and in a lifetime of happiness, as opposed to just fleeting moments of happiness, amusement, or recreation. For Aristotle, leisure was primarily contemplation, and contemplation was considered an activity of the soul, an activity of the gods. Leisure, therefore, was the highest ideal and the ultimate source of happiness or flourishing in one’s life. Aristotle’s definition of leisure is based on a culture where the only “true” participants in a life of leisure could be the free and wealthy upper class. This understanding of leisure as “good,” “noble,” “virtuous,” “ethical,” and “of the gods” entailed a certain social standing inclusive of wealth, education, status, and citizenship. To be clear, *scholē* was a metaphysical experience but was only available, according to the Greek philosophers, to those who were completely free of obligation. Nussbaum remarks, “Aristotle understands human vulnerability more profoundly than the stoics do. He does not, however, understand human equality.”¹³² In contrast, while early Christian writings also valued contemplation, happiness, and virtue, the experience of leisure was available for all social classes without reservation, and inclusive of slaves and children.

¹³⁰Ibid, 1280b31–32.

¹³¹Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 117a7–9.

¹³² Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (New Jersey: Princeton Classics, 2009), p. xvii.

CHAPTER TWO: ROMAN *OTIUM*

Following Aristotle's contributions, *scholē* fades as nothing but an interesting concept, and with its descent, the rise of the Latin word "*otium*" begins to take hold as the Roman Empire establishes itself. This transition from Greece to Rome, inclusive of significant cultural shifts, includes a significant linguistic transition. The mix of and redefinition of Greek and Latin concepts enable a tremendous creativity in redescribing and understanding the world of the Roman Republic and later Empire. It is during this time of transition that a matrix of interpretative possibilities emerges for early Christian communities. Considering that the early Christian communities were administered in Rome's dominant Latin, and that most were reading and writing in Greek—not to mention expressing themselves in a variety of local dialects, Jewish concepts, and contextual understandings of meaning and purpose—an experience like leisure could clearly find new life in the Roman world. During the transition from *scholē* to *otium* in the Hellenistic period, the word *scholē*, as Aristotle intended it, with a focus on *eudaimonia*—happiness, flourishing, freedom from work or preoccupation, and the highest aspect of humanity (i.e., to be like the gods)—is slowly altered by Roman philosophers and artists, in Latin, to mean a place where one learns about the nature of things or explores the human condition, a school, a place where theory is examined and dissected.

STOICISM

The exploration of the human condition is made evident in the writings and practical teachings of the Stoics (300 BCE). Stoicism is a philosophy that focuses on *eudaimonia* through the acceptance of what is happening at the moment, as it presents itself, whether it be pleasant or unpleasant, filled with ecstasy or suffering, through the use of one's own intellect or reason. Particular to stoicism is asking oneself questions about what is happening and then

deciding how one will respond. The four virtues of stoicism, built on Plato's writings in the *Republic*, will ring familiar: "courage, temperance, justice and wisdom."¹³³ The word "stoic" means a person who can endure pain or hardship without showing their feelings or complaining and originates in late Middle English via Latin from Greek *stōikos*, from *stoa* (with reference to Zeno's teaching in the *Stoa Poikilē* or Painted Porch, at Athens) but that hardly begins to describe the richness of this profound philosophy. More importantly, the Stoics, while not using the word "*scholē*," restrict it to the philosophy of the Roman Empire where it will disappear into a different understanding of leisure, named *otium* in Latin.

Stoic philosophy, not Epicureanism (that maintains pleasure is the chief aim in life) or Cynicism (that dictates an individual, by freeing themselves of social norms and expectations, can be self-sufficient in the goal of achieving happiness, through practice of virtue) marks a powerful shift in thinking as stoicism incorporates the virtue aspect of the Cynics but is ever mindful of others. Beginning with Posidonius (135 BCE–51 BC), from whom we have no direct writings but only fragments found in others, writers often spoke about the costs of ambition and insatiable appetites. Ironically, it is Posidonius who will become close friends with Pompey and Cicero, an influence that we will pick up in a later chapter as they both have a tremendous impact on the transition from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire. Posidonius was famous for his scientific, mathematical, and geographical studies as well as his travel, which saw him visiting cities and ports throughout the Empire. We begin with Posidonius because, like the Apostle Paul, he took the ideals of stoicism and spread them throughout the Empire. His stoic values, "Be wary of ambition. Avoid the mob. Luxury, as much as power, rots,"¹³⁴ and the passing on of the teachings of Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus

¹³³Plato: *The Collected Dialogues* ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 426–435.

¹³⁴Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman, *Lives of the Stoics: The Art of Living from Zeno to Marcus Aurelius* (Toronto: Penguin Random House, 2020), p. 102.

and others, originating in the “Stoa” or “Painted Porch” of Athens, made a tremendous impact.

Born in Etruria, Musonius Rufus (20–101 CE), was a person of wisdom, courage, self-control, and virtue. Musonius was not of great money, position, or power but a free person. What is most noteworthy about Musonius’s stoic teachings is not only his emphasis on hard work, suffering, and enduring toward virtue but that women were equally capable of learning philosophy, that benevolence and care of the other were crucial to virtue, and that children should not be left exposed to die just because of their gender. An incredible example of Musonius’s character is when Emperor Nero had exiled Stoic teacher Plautus in 60 CE, so Musonius went with Plautus into exile. While in exile, Nero had Plautus executed. Musonius returned to Rome, but now Seneca was on the run from Emperor Nero, and Musonius found himself also exiled, this time to a desolate island named Gyara. When asked why he didn’t kill himself instead of running from Nero’s wrath, he replied, “One who by living is of use to many, has not the right to choose to die unless by dying he may be of no use to more.”¹³⁵ Musonius is allowed to return to Rome after Nero’s death, revealing the stoic virtue of learning from the joy and sorrows of life. Once back, a student who was a former slave of Nero appears in Musonius’s life; his name is Epictetus, who states that, “Philosophy is nothing else than to search out by reason what is right and proper and by deeds put into practice.”¹³⁶

Epictetus (55–135 CE), whose name literally means “acquired one,” a slave until he was thirty years of age, was one who, when writing about freedom, did so from the memory of chains and a brutal master and not as a philosophical proposition. Eventually, Epictetus found his way into the Roman Emperor’s courts, serving Emperor Nero’s court until under Emperor

¹³⁵Ibid., 243.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 248.

Domitian all philosophers were expelled from Rome; it was then that he left for Nicopolis, Greece. In his works *Discourses* and *Enchiridion*, Epictetus teaches about the chief aim of a stoic life, a life of freedom or leisure: “Seek not that the thing which happen should happen as you wish; but wish the things which happen to be as they are, and you will have a tranquil flow of life.”¹³⁷ Epictetus comments that, in order to enjoy a tranquil life, those who have “received the impression (φαντασίαν) of any pleasure” should be careful that they are not “carried away by it”; rather they should delay the gratification, allowing for a sense of anticipation through deferral of or abstention from the pleasure: “think of both times, of the time when you will enjoy the pleasure, and of the time after the enjoyment of the pleasure when you will repent and will reproach yourself.” Abstaining from pleasure allows for a sense of mastery—it represents a triumph that one should commend oneself for.¹³⁸

Or, as Epictetus writes in *Discourses*, one should “shrink” from the task of looking clearly at the goals one has met—“the things which you proposed to yourself at first, which you have secured”—and one’s losses or things that one has failed to secure. The mix of pleasure and pain that such self-reflection brings up should help one, he insists, to recuperate one’s failures: “For we must not shrink when we are engaged in the greatest combat, but we must even take blows.”¹³⁹

Highlighting that the greatest challenge that we encounter is perception, Epictetus writes that at the root of all human evil is a failure “to adapt the general preconceptions to the several things.” While there are differing opinions about the cause of evil, he insists that in

¹³⁷A.A. Long, *How to Be Free: An Ancient Guide to the Stoic Life, Epictetus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 8.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 34.1–11.

¹³⁹ Epictetus, *Discourses*, 3.25.1-5. Perseus Digital Library, Tufts University, <https://perseus.tufts.edu>.

each and every case “the fact is that he [man] does not adapt his preconceptions right.”¹⁴⁰ All of this leads him to the following conclusion:

Remember that not only the desire of power and of riches makes us mean and subject to others, but even the desire of tranquillity, and of leisure, and of travelling abroad, and of learning. For to speak plainly, whatever the external thing may be, the value which we set upon it places us in subjection to others.... But a tranquil and happy life contains nothing so sure as continuity and freedom from obstacle. Now I am called to do something: I will go then with the purpose of observing the measures (rules) which I must keep, of acting with modesty, steadiness, without desire and aversion to things external; and then that I may attend to men, what they say, how they are moved; and this not with any bad disposition, or that I may have something to blame or to ridicule; but I turn to myself, and ask if I also commit the same faults. How then shall I cease to commit them?¹⁴¹

The Stoic influence moves *scholē* into a way of learning to control the passions by making a decision about how to respond, to seek logic, to eliminate distractions and false beliefs or attachments. Stoicism, it will be argued, carried *scholē* into the Roman world of *otium* and because of the Stoics’ adamant foundation on virtue, regardless of the cost, was later a significant influence on the early Christian movement. Its influence, it will be argued, was a significant contribution to the early Christians recovering the concept of *scholē* and incorporating it into Christian practice.

ROMAN PLAYWRIGHTS AND POETS

Moving from Aristotle’s *scholē* to the Stoics’ *scholia* or school, there is a third influence that leaves a lasting impression on leisure and that is the influence of playwrights and comedians. The first reference to leisure as *otium* appears in Ennius’s *Iphigenia* (circa 239-169 BCE) fragment where some Greek soldiers are sorting out what to do with themselves as there is no fighting, no work to be done and all they have is time. The soldiers complain, like so many do, that leisure is more work than work.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 4.1.

¹⁴¹Ibid, 4.4.

He who knows not how to use leisure when there is leisure, in leisure has more work than he has in work when there is work. For he for whom a task is set to do, does it without any work; he attends to it; therein too he delights his mind and his thoughts. In leisurely leisure a sick mind knows not what it wants. Thus it is with us also; look you, we are now neither at home nor afield. We go hither and then thither; and when thither we have come, away again it pleases to go. Our mind wanders unsure; our lives we live but more or less.¹⁴²

Ennius's repetition of "hither and thither" reinforces the fact that leisure requires a purpose, a discipline. It is interesting to notice how Ennius is pointing out, in a play, a truth that many face: How do I live in my non-work time?

It will come as no surprise, from Ennius's insight, that a playwright like Plautus immediately takes the use of *otium* and exposes its division during a time of peace and stability in the public sphere—public, civic *otium*. There is ample time for the private expression of *otium*, which he expresses in the *Truculentus* as existing in love affairs and deception: "In fine, in a great nation, amid numberless persons, the state being tranquil and in quiet, the enemy vanquished, it befits all to be in love who have anything to give."¹⁴³

Or in Plautus's play *Menaechmi*, where the hard working are contrasted with those who are at leisure, the audience finds its place and begins to ponder why. A final example is the last scene in Terentius's play, *Adelphi*, where Terentius is crystal clear about the dangers that emerge in the midst of idle *otium*: "The plot of Adelphoe is framed by the contrast between the otiose Micio and his hardworking brother Demea. Micio's personal leisure consists of life in the city and the absence of a wife or family; Demea, by contrast, has a wife and two sons, lives in the country, and labors hard. Micio's leisure makes him indulgent to his brother's sons, whereas Demea's diligence makes him stern."¹⁴⁴ The profound moment that exposes idle *otium* occurs when Demea finally lays out clearly what he thinks of Micio; that he is

¹⁴²Dan Hanchey, 'Otium as Civic and Personal Stability in Cicero's Dialogues', *The Classical World*, Vol. 106, No. 2 (Winter 2013), 171-197 (p. 174).

¹⁴³Titus Maccius Plautus, *Truculentus*, ed. by Henry Thomas Riley, p. 75, www.perseus.tufts.edu.

¹⁴⁴ Dan Hanchey, 'Otium as Civic and Personal Stability' p. 177.

squandering his life, appeasing and convincing others, in comparison to the virtue that Dema holds to.

From these influences in early Roman literature and comedy, which make a distinction between public and private *otium*, emerge Cicero's new philosophical understanding of *otium*. This is an understanding that is far from the *scholē* of Aristotle, yet an understanding that the early church will find itself engaging constantly.

CICERO AND SENECA

Otium, in Latin, translates as leisure—time for idleness, retirement, peace, quiet, holiday, tranquillity, spare time—but this is not an accurate translation. Often, two other words are often included in the translation and definition of *otium*: *feria* (festival/holy day, day of rest/holiday/leisure) and *quiesco* (rest, quiet/calm, peace/rest, inactive/neutral, permission, sleep). The opposite of *otium* has been interpreted as *negotium*—pain, annoyance, distress, business, trouble, work—but like *scholē/ascholē*, *negotium* has an emphasis on being preoccupied, consumed by something, not free. The Romans had many words for work at their disposal, such as *laboro* (work, labour, produce, take pains, be troubled/sick/oppressed, be in distress), *opus* (need, work, fortifications), *negotium* (pain, trouble, annoyance, distress, work, business, activity, job), or *opera* (work, care, aid, service, effort/trouble), but *negotium* was most commonly understood as the opposite of *otium*. *Otium* now describes two different experiences: the private and the public. In one's private life, *otium* could imply leisure, freedom from work, but it could also mean idleness (*inertia*), laziness (*ignavia*), sloth (*desidia*), voluptuousness (*luxuria*); in public life, *otium* is described as a state of peace, order, and security from the threat of civil war. *Otium*, not *scholē*, was now the focus and had nothing to do with Aristotle's philosophical vision of happiness but everything to do with

private life and public service. Cicero writes: “our talents are for the sake of public *otium* and it leaves our private *otium* only what it does not require for its overriding purposes.”¹⁴⁵ In the division of *otium* it is clear that Cicero, during a tumultuous period, holds the public sense of leisure as the most significant. Cicero’s context is key as his position in the state continues to shift—from hero to exile, from leader to villain. Drawing on *otium*, Cicero emphatically implores his fellow citizens to use their *otium* for the good of the state, for peace, arguing that “honours, powers, and riches are usually acquired by such men out of tumult and civil dissent.” He continues: “those whose influence is situated in your votes, whose liberty is situated in the laws, whose rights are situated in the courts and the fairness of the magistrates, and whose property is situated in peace, you ought to preserve your *otium* in every way.”¹⁴⁶

Cicero is cleverly appealing to the citizens of the state to differentiate between public and private leisure so that public *otium* will prevail and bring peace, and so that there will be freedom for private leisure. It is a compelling argument, one that leaves a lasting effect on the understanding of leisure, especially as Seneca, picking up Cicero’s interpretation, composes an essay entitled *De Otio*, in which he basically discards *otium* as a public aim for peace, focusing instead on *otium* as a private experience, and attributing concepts like mental and physical rest, idleness, peace and quiet, inactivity and sloth. Cicero’s emphasis on *otium* for public peace is moved to the private sphere by Seneca, and with it, *otium* becomes an exercise in private, individual morality in which he has little good to say about humanity’s perversions and depravity, arguing that one must guard against them. “Do I give you the impression that I am praising inactivity? I have hidden myself in this place and the doors are shut so that I can be of benefit to the greater member. I have not spent any days in

¹⁴⁵Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to His Friends*, trans. by W. Glynn Williams (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970) p., 1.8.1–8.9.

¹⁴⁶Cicero, *On the Republic and On the Laws*, trans by David Fott (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), Ag. 2, 102.

idleness.”¹⁴⁷ Seneca’s plea is for one to use, to act in, *otium* so as to live a virtuous life, and in doing so, avoid the shipwrecks of immorality:

Now if such a state as we have dreamed of cannot be found on earth, it follows that leisure is necessary for everyone, because the one thing which might be preferred to leisure is nowhere to be found. If anyone says that to sail is the best of things, and then says that we ought not to sail in a sea in which shipwrecks were common occurrences, and where sudden storms often arise which drive the pilot back from his course, I should imagine that this man, while speaking in praise of sailing, was really forbidding me to unmoor my ship.¹⁴⁸

It is fascinating to note that, for Seneca, the experience of *otium* “cannot be found on earth.” This assertion leads Seneca’s understanding of *otium* either as both an individual and a moral experience to be discerned through study and somehow connected with the Divine, outside of the bounds of earth, or not humanly possible.

Building on Cicero’s and Seneca’s description of *otium* as public, for the greater good of the state, and as private, as a decision for virtue or connecting with the Divine or for debauchery and immorality, Roman writings offer numerous practical examples of both. For example, an epitaph discovered in Rome reads, “Baths, wine, and sex ruin our bodies. But what makes life worth living except baths, wine and sex?”¹⁴⁹ The Roman Empire used public *otium* effectively. Athletic activities such as chariot racing, gladiatorial combats, and public executions entertained large crowds. Baths offered relaxation; theatres and amphitheatres offered the retelling of history or comedy or tragedy; dinner parties entertained and displayed status; safe travel throughout the Empire offered adventure; shopping markets provided commerce; religious festivals for the gods and Emperor worship reinforced power to he who had a vested interest in maintaining public *otium*. It is clearer why *negotium*, the word often used as the opposite of *otium*, means far more than work, as it implies preoccupation, being

¹⁴⁷Cicero, *Letters to His Friends*, 8.1.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 8.9–12.

¹⁴⁹See Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 309.

consumed by, in this case, distraction and entertainment. Meanwhile, private *otium* was described as enjoying the pleasures of reading, walking in solitude, swimming, quiet contemplation, writing personal letters, private religious devotion, etc. What is fascinating is that the division between public and private was growing, and with it a judgement about which was better. In response to the public expressions of *otium* that were growing bloodier, more vulgar, and more inhumane, we see leaders like Seneca the Younger writing that the greatest danger to character is “attendance at some spectacle, because vices more easily creep into your soul while you are being entertained.” He then draws on personal experience to claim “When I return from some spectacle, I am greedier, more aggressive, and more addicted to pleasurable sensations; I am more cruel and inhumane—all because I have been with other humans!”¹⁵⁰

This progression of thought leads us ultimately to the profound insight of Tacitus as he responds to the changing experience of *otium*:

But, little by little, our traditional moral values weakened and then were completely subverted by an imported licentiousness, so that we began to see here in our city everything that could corrupt or be corrupted: our young men were ruined by their eagerness for foreign ways, their enthusiasm for gymnasia, for idleness, for perverted sex, and all with the approval of the Emperor and the Senate, who not only granted permission for such offensive behaviour but even applied pressure on Roman noblemen to disgrace themselves with stage performances of speeches and poetry.¹⁵¹

Tacitus was not alone in his understanding of leisure. *Otium*, in practical experience, was moving from being used for the public good to being used by the Roman Empire as a means through which to establish distraction from boredom, inequality, and poverty. In short, *otium* was being used to manipulate and distract the masses and had clearly become something quite different from Cicero’s vision and was now completely unrecognizable to *scholē*’s ideals of virtue, happiness, and contemplation in freedom. The Romans had reinterpreted

¹⁵⁰Shelton, *As the Romans Did*, 348.

¹⁵¹Tacitus, *Tacitus’s Annals*,. Trans. by Cynthia Damon (New York: Penguin Classics, 2013), 14.20.

leisure, adding another twist to the public sphere of *otium*, which was ultimately for the masses while private *otium* was for the elite. Both would create a leisure crisis that would open an opportunity for the reinterpretation of leisure, as expressed in early Christian writings.

ROMAN INSCRIPTIONS AND GRAFFITI: DEPICTING LEISURE

Important to our discussion of leisure is to leave the writings of the elite, such as Cicero, Seneca, and Pliny, and turn to the question of the aspects of leisure for the masses, the everyday person. One could explore aspects of daily Roman life such as the baths and the gladiatorial games as in Pompey where we hear, “The gladiatorial troop hired by Aulus Suetius Certus will fight in Pompey on May 31. There will also be a wild animal hunt.”¹⁵² Each of these would offer an interesting glimpse at what the experiences of leisure might entail but, to go a little deeper, spending time exploring the discovered graffiti, epitaphs, and inscriptions depicting leisure events or leisure experiences, particularly in Pompey, Herculaneum, and Rome itself, will provide a fascinating snapshot of a Roman community and its leisure. While it is impossible to know for sure what people did in their leisure, what is possible to consider is the stories left behind.

Beginning with Plutarch’s *On Curiosity*, we hear the cautionary words about gossip and graffiti, the terrible habit of inquiring after things which are none of our business. Plutarch advocates self-control as the best mechanism for curing ourselves of this “affliction,” arguing that it requires gradual training acquired “little by little,” beginning with the most insignificant things: “What difficulty is there about refraining from reading the inscriptions on tombs as we journey along the roads? Or what is there arduous in just glancing at the

¹⁵²*Latin Inscriptions: Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 6.15258, <http://www.attalus.org/docs/cil>, CIL 4.1190.

writing on walls when we take our walks? ...It may seem that no harm will come from reading these, but harm you it does by imperceptibly instilling the practice of searching out matters which do not concern you.”¹⁵³ As a cautionary example, Plutarch points to the man who “searches out everybody’s business” but finds that through his curiosity he tastes aconite, which kills him before he “had got his taste.” In the same way, he maintains that “those who search out the vices of those more powerful than themselves destroy themselves before they acquire their knowledge.”¹⁵⁴

However, human nature being what it is, Roman graffiti offers a number of snapshots of leisure in the Roman world. For example, on behaving oneself at a dinner party: “Keep your lascivious looks and bedroom eyes away from another man’s wife. Maintain a semblance of decency on your face. Be sociable and put aside, if you can, annoying quarrels. If you can’t, go back to your own home.”¹⁵⁵ In Pompey, there were the following two signs painted outside of a hotel: “Guest lodging available to rent, has a triclinium with three couches, and all conveniences,”¹⁵⁶ and “For one ass, you can get a drink here. For two asses, you will get a better drink. For four asses, you will drink Falernian wine.”¹⁵⁷ In Isernia, a town in central Italy, the graffiti sign playfully speaks of a hotel prostitute:

“Innkeeper, my bill please!”

“You had one sextarius of wine, one ass worth of bread, two asses worth of relishes.”

“That’s right.”

“You had a girl for eight asses.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“And two asses worth of hay for your mule.”

“That damn mule will ruin me yet.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³Plutarch, *De Moralia*, 4.11.56–57, Perseus Digital Library. Medford, MA: Tufts University. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 4.4.22-24.

¹⁵⁵*Latin Inscriptions*, 4.7698.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 4.807 .

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 4.1679.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 9.2689.

Other graffiti was not nearly as funny or kind: for example, “May you be crucified,”¹⁵⁹ “Go hang yourself,”¹⁶⁰ or the scrawled-out curse on Chios, “I hope your hemorrhoids rub together so much that they hurt worse than they ever had before.”¹⁶¹ Other times, the graffiti is filled with love, as some wall markings refer to an unknown woman as the sweetest and most lovable girl, or state “Anyone who has not seen the painting of Venus by Apelles should take a look at my girl: she is equally radiant,”¹⁶² concluding with “Love dictates what I write, and Cupid guides my hand: I would rather die than be a god without you.”¹⁶³ Graffiti also allows us a glimpse into travel and faithfulness as a woman, named Ario, inscribed her fears about the temptations her husband might face while away: “Venus is a weaver of webs; from the moment she sets out to attack my dearest, she will lay temptations along his way: he must hope for a good voyage, which is also the wish of his Ario.”¹⁶⁴ Sometimes the graffiti is philosophical: “To be discerning in life, one must know something of death.”¹⁶⁵ Graffiti could also be about running for public office: “Birius, together with Biria, ask you to elect Gnaeus Helvius Sabinus aedile, a good man, worthy of public office: Onomastus, vote for him eagerly.”¹⁶⁶ Which is interestingly supported by, “The dice throwers ask for Gnaeus Helvius Sabinus.”¹⁶⁷ Staying with politics, it is fascinating to note some of the support for candidates: “all late night drinkers ask that you elect M. Cerrinius Vatia as edile”¹⁶⁸ or “the petty thieves ask that you elect Vatia as aedile.”¹⁶⁹ Sometimes the graffiti was about death; we hear the touching words of Pyrrhus, “Pyrrhus to his colleague Chius: I am in sorrow because I hear

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 4.2082

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.1864

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 4.1820

¹⁶² Ibid., 4.6842

¹⁶³ Ibid., 4.1928

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.1410

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.8832

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.9885

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 4.3485

¹⁶⁸ CIL 4.581

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 4.576

that you have died; and so, farewell,” an unknown, whimsical writer, “I was not, I was, I am not, I care not,”¹⁷⁰ or perhaps a poignant personal message regarding death, “Learn this well: while I am alive, you are my enemy, Death. When you are dead, you are nothing.”¹⁷¹ Graffiti invites one into the realm of the ordinary where gambling and gaming, athletics, the baths, dinner parties, travel, prostitution, the theatre, the circus, the festivals, where to get the best bread and so much more are depicted in a few words or pictures to offer a glimpse of everyday Roman life. Remains of graffiti highlighting ordinary lives, dreams, hurts, and expressions of life trace what everyday Romans, free and slave, men and women, were experiencing. The ordinary expressions, particularly of leisure, will be an important thread in this thesis, because as one encounters the Pauline letters to the various Christian communities regarding what activities are faithful to the Christian community and what activities are not, an immediate tension emerges. It takes little imagination to hear the thunder of Paul’s letters to a Christian gathering in Corinth echo throughout the dominant Romanized culture, especially considering the suspicion of the Bacchus festivals of wine, feasting, and gratuitous sex:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons—not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? God will judge those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”¹⁷²

A diversity of Roman leisure, from the writings of the elite to the graffiti that remains on the walls of the Roman Empire, points towards an incredible kaleidoscope of expressions.

Leisure, as defined in Latin by the Romans, is alive and well in the Roman Empire, but

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.2893

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 4.5279

¹⁷² 1 Cor 5:9–13, NRSV

leisure had shifted from being a metaphysical, god-like experience and was now divided between public and private leisure. Public leisure was on display for all to see and engage in; private leisure was for those contemplative and restorative, relaxing, recreational experiences. Little did Rome realize that, while Romans—free and slave—engaged in numerous leisure pursuits, small gatherings of Christian communities were about to challenge the Roman perception of leisure and expose the purposes of leisure, whether it be public manipulation of the masses or economic exploitation or social control or entertainment as capital punishment to reinforce law and order or festivals whose aim was solely to keep the Pax Roma at any cost. Early Christian communities challenge Roman leisure and reinterpret leisure in stunningly unique ways that, if one were to reengage with it, would be transformative.

CHAPTER THREE: THE JEWISH SABBATH

Beyond a Greco-Roman expression of leisure, as found in *scholē* and *otium*, there was another expression of leisure—or certain aspects of—within the Roman Empire that emerged from the Jewish tradition. Unlike *scholē* and *otium*, the *Sabbath* offers a definitive Jewish experience that is unique for Jews. While *scholē*, according to Aristotle, is for the elite, and *scholē*, according to Cicero and Seneca, is divided between public and private leisure, the *Sabbath* is intended for all Jews to participate in regardless of age, gender, geography, and so forth. The Sabbath is created for all Jews but therein lies the limitation: the Sabbath is intended for the Jew to observe and is not concerned with the observance of any other.

THE SABBATH IN JEWISH SCRIPTURE

Long before life under the Roman Empire, a Jewish understanding of leisure developed in the Torah of a Jewish creation account, the covenant, and the Sabbath. Beginning with the creation story, God creates the world, day after day adding to creation until finally God creates humanity in God's image, declaring that all creation is good. The text says that on the seventh day, God rested after all of the work that God had done:

And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.¹⁷³

From the creation account of God blessing and resting, the Jewish tradition established that there is a covenant, a holy bond, between God and God's people.¹⁷⁴ In this covenant, there is a clear expectation that people will work for six days but on the seventh day will rest—an echo of the Genesis story. It is crucial to remember that in the creation story God worked six days and then rested. Humanity is created in the image of God and is instructed to

¹⁷³Gn 2:2–3, NRSV

¹⁷⁴Ex 31:12–17, NRSV

work for six days and then rest on the seventh, the Sabbath. Moses is instructed to tell the Israelites to adhere to God’s Sabbath as “a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people.” While work is to be performed for six days, God says, the seventh day is to be set aside. This keeping of the Sabbath through the generations is to be observed as a “perpetual covenant”: “It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.”¹⁷⁵

The seriousness of the Sabbath, of non-work, of solemn rest, of observing the Sabbath as a sign of relationship, at the risk of being cut off or put to death, offered a powerful insight into the nature of God and God’s insistence on a time for work and a time for rest as the foundation of the relationship between God and humanity. The instructions on how to honour the Sabbath profoundly includes slaves, women, animals, and even strangers, both alien residents in one’s town and those who are outside of the covenant made between God and God’s holy people:

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.¹⁷⁶

Further, the Sabbath is extended to include the land that people depend on for their livelihood and their economic systems. This becomes evident in another Sabbath instruction from God. In the Torah’s Deuteronomy account there is a clear reminder that the people were

¹⁷⁵Ex 31:12–17, NRSV

¹⁷⁶Ex 20:8–11, NRSV

once slaves under Pharaoh. From slavery and all its implications, God delivers God's people to freedom: "you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you." God's instructions involve an imperative not to forget: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day."¹⁷⁷

Then, in a profound expansion of the Sabbath, God includes a radical redistribution of worldly arrangements and offers rest for all in the Jubilee: "And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family."¹⁷⁸

While there is no exact word to describe leisure in the Jewish tradition, clearly the Jewish God has an understanding of and preferential option for work and then rest, freedom, right relationships, blessing, and the health of all of creation, inclusive of all the inhabitants of the Earth. A Jewish expression of leisure, as seen through the lens of the Sabbath, was not an object or an idol that had to be worshipped or an experience that could be possessed; rather it was to be participated in. It was the time set aside for Jews to be intentionally aware of God's creation, covenant, and presence in their lives; it was at once "rest," "relational," and "worship." While the Jewish tradition does not use the word "leisure," Sabbath clearly implies freedom and blessing. We will establish how these ancient and already distinctly sacred and normative works were read and received in the first century C.E. by exploring how they were commented upon in the works of Philo and in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

¹⁷⁷Deut 5:12–15, NRSV

¹⁷⁸Lev 25:10, NRSV

The foundations of how Judea was incorporated into and perceived in the Roman Empire are important. It is crucial to recognize that Jews were living throughout the Roman Empire, in places such as Rome, Alexandria, Corinth and so forth, for hundreds and hundreds of years. While the Temple stood in the centre of Jerusalem for over five centuries, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were spread throughout the Empire. While many lived in exile from Jerusalem, by choice or otherwise, the Temple was the centralized government of Israel; thus, the high priest and Sanhedrin, the governing body, were the highest level of power in Israel. The Temple government would send out messages to those throughout the Empire to proclaim holidays, festivals, feasts, and information concerning Jewish law and observances. One important reminder about the Temple and its governance is that no one who was Gentile, a non-Jew, was permitted to enter into certain areas of the Temple, and definitely not the Holy of Holies in the heart of the Temple. The diaspora of Jews living throughout the Empire continued to gather, on the Sabbath, to read, study and interpret the Torah in a place named the synagogue. The origins of the synagogue are unknown, but it is clear from Josephus, Philo, and the early Christian writings that synagogues were plentiful throughout the Empire.

The Roman Empire enters the Judean scene when General Pompey, during his Eastern military campaigns, conquers and establishes Roman Syria in 64 BCE, followed by the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE. During a heightened conflict between two Jewish princes, Hyrcanus, whom the Pharisees favoured, and Aristobulus, whom the Sadducees favoured, Judean self-rule shifted forever. During Passover in 63 BCE, Hyrcanus attacked Aristobulus and the Sadducees in the Temple of Jerusalem. Aristobulus sent word to Pompey for help and Pompey responded by marching his Roman military to Jerusalem. According to historian Josephus, the story becomes complicated, but what matters for this thesis is that, in the end, Pompey switches alliances to help Hyrcanus against Aristobulus, who makes a last

stand with the Sadducees in the Temple. At this treatment Pompey was very angry and took Aristobulus into custody.

It is fascinating that Pompey, even while attacking the Jews in the area of the Temple, notes that the Jews continue to perform their religious duties:

Now here it was that, upon the many hardships which the Romans underwent, Pompey could not but admire not only at the other instances of the Jews' fortitude, but especially that they did not at all intermit their religious services, even when they were encompassed with darts on all sides; for, as if the city were in full peace, their daily sacrifices and purifications, and every branch of their religious worship, was still performed to God with the utmost exactness.¹⁷⁹

Perhaps to show his understanding of the Sabbath, Pompey refrains from attacking on the Sabbath. Pompey conquers Jerusalem, and it is recorded that he enters the Temple, straight into the holy of holies, as a gentile. Interestingly, not much is said as the story finishes with Pompey realizing that he has done something wrong and leaving immediately. This is quite a different experience from Titus, when he enters the holy of holies in 70 CE. The battle for control between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus is resolved, and the Roman Empire is now in charge of the Judean Province. Behind the scenes, in the battle between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, was a general named Antipater. Antipater was the real power of Hyrcanus's throne, and as time passes, with numerous murders and fragile alliances, one of Antipater's sons, Herod the Great, arrives on the scene.

Civil war between Pompey and Julius Caesar erupts, ending with Pompey's death in Egypt and Caesar's return to Rome in 47 BCE. With Julius Caesar now in firm control of the Roman Republic, the provinces of Rome, such as the Roman province of Judaea, are sorting out alliances and allegiances. Caesar appoints Antipater the high priest of Jerusalem and with this appointment, Antipater is given Roman citizenship, relief from Roman taxes and the

¹⁷⁹ Josephus, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. by William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal, 1999), p. 679.

highest status position in the Roman province, and ultimately with all Jews, wherever they reside in the Roman Empire.

The act of Caesar establishing a high priest and more, Antipater procurator of Judea,¹⁸⁰ is key to our thesis as the Roman Empire has interfered with Jewish autonomy, particularly in Jewish religious traditions and ethnic customs. This interference will later be a root cause of the first revolt against Rome in 66 CE, ultimately leading to the destruction of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the absolute slaughter of Jews and the banishment of remaining Jews from Jerusalem. The destruction of the Temple will be discussed in more detail in later chapters as it had a tremendous impact on both communities of Jews and communities of followers of Jesus.

Circling back to Caesar's appointments, they will also give rise to two life-changing events for Jews in the Roman Empire: freedom of Jewish worship throughout the Empire and Herod the Great. Caesar decreed and the Roman Senate approved, according to Josephus, a number of laws that give power, privilege, and most importantly, validity to the practice of Judean religion. Caesar continues with his decree that the city of Jerusalem belongs to the Jews and is clear about observing Jewish law when it comes to the payment of Roman taxes, with considerable emphasis regarding the Sabbath. He affirms the Jewish leadership and even goes as far as to offer the best seats at the gladiator fights amongst the Roman Senators. It takes little imagination to notice that what Caesar is doing is inviting Jews to be normalized in Roman society.

It is the pleasure also of the senate that Hyrcanus the ethnarch, and the Jews, retain those places, countries, and villages which belonged to the kings of Syria and Phoenicia, the confederates of the Romans, and which they had bestowed on them as their free gifts. It is also granted to Hyrcanus, and to his sons, and to the ambassadors by them sent to us, that in the fights between single gladiators, and in those with beasts, they shall sit among the

¹⁸⁰ Josephus, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. by William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), p. 465.

senators to see those shows; and that when they desire an audience, they shall be introduced into the senate by the dictator, or by the general of the horse; and when they have introduced them, their answers shall be returned them in ten days at the furthest, after the decree of the senate is made about their affairs.¹⁸¹

Caesar continues in his decree that Jews can freely worship, even in Rome. In offering this freedom it is important to note that Caesar uses the example of the worship of Bacchus, the Bacchanal rioters, who are forbidden to meet in the city. As previously noted, the worship of Bacchus is problematic for the Roman Empire, and while Jews celebrate a common meal that is only for Jews, on the evening of Shabbat, they are not to be punished or deterred: “they are not forbidden so to do even at Rome itself; for even Caius Caesar, our emperor and consul, in that decree wherein he forbade the Bacchanal rioters to meet in the city, did yet permit these Jews, and these only, both to bring in their contributions, and to make their common suppers.”¹⁸²

Caesar clarifies that Jews do not need to serve in the Roman military. This is a huge statement as it was the backbone of power for the Roman Empire. To not serve in the Roman military would seem extremely odd, suspect, if not treasonous, to Roman citizens and slaves alike. However, Caesar persists, noting that “they are not allowed to bear arms or to travel on the sabbath days, nor there to procure themselves those sorts of food which they have been used to eat from the times of their forefathers.”¹⁸³

Finally, Josephus offers numerous examples of edicts that were sent throughout the Roman Empire concerning the freedom of Jews to celebrate their ancient traditions. It is obvious throughout Caesar’s decrees that while he offers incredible freedoms and status to the Jews, he is unwavering on the place they are given in the context of Roman worship and Roman traditions. One such communication, sent to the Greeks, is noteworthy when

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 14.225

¹⁸² Ibid, 14.213

¹⁸³ Ibid., 14.225

considering the strict monotheistic nature of Judaism. Josephus points out that as the Jews receive special treatment or favours, they also offer favourable treatment or favours in return inclusive of Roman banquets, honours and games: “[T]hat by this treatment it may appear how our people receive the good kindly, and repay them a suitable reward; and he may be induced to proceed in his affection towards us, by the honors we have already paid him.”¹⁸⁴

Under Julius Caesar, Judaism was officially recognised as a legal religion, Jews were permitted to gather to worship and study on the Sabbath, honour their kosher diets in the midst of a heavily pork-eating culture, and perform circumcision rituals; they were also released from having to make a sacrifice to the Roman deities, or later, to the image of Caesar himself as the Temple in Jerusalem offered a daily sacrifice for the well-being of the Empire. They were relieved from having to serve in the Roman military; they were free to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the great festivals,¹⁸⁵ and they had their own governance in the position of a high priest, albeit Roman-appointed and -controlled. In short, Jews were given status in the Roman Empire, under the decree of Julius Caesar, to live as Jews. Critical to this thesis is one more action that Caesar understood: in approximately 40 BCE, by the Roman Senate, he declared Herod the King of the Jews. Then, a short four years later, Julius Caesar, on the Ides of March, in 44 BCE, was murdered.

During the uncertainty of leadership in the Roman Empire, this period also saw the rise of Herod the Great in Judea. While Herod was dexterous at forming loyalties to secure his kingship and the freedoms for the Jews offered by Caesar’s decrees, as “King of the Jews” he was on questionable ground. Herod was born in 73 BCE, the son of Antipater, from Idumea,

¹⁸⁴Josephus, *New Complete Works*, 14.152-155

¹⁸⁵ Neusner points out, “All persons possessed of autonomy of will are liable to bring an appearance offering, that is, to make the pilgrimage. Excluded is the standard list: those who are impaired in body or mind, and those subject of the will of another: 1. The deaf mute, 2. The idiot, 3 a minor, 4. One without pronounced sexual characteristics, 5. One who exhibits the sexual traits of both sexes, 6. Women, 7. Slaves who have not been freed, 8. The lame, 9. The blind, 10. The sick, 11. the old, 12. And one cannot go up on foot.” Jacob Neusner, *Judaism when Christianity Began* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 141.

which is where gentiles who were forced to convert to Judaism lived, and his mother, named Cyprus, was the daughter of an Arab sheik, a gentile. Herod's pedigree will become an important aspect of his rule within the context of the Roman Empire as many Jews considered Herod to be a puppet king for Rome. Josephus stated that many Jews lived in fear of Herod, "because they saw that Herod was a violent and bold man, and very desirous of acting tyrannically."¹⁸⁶ While Herod's reign saw a profound consolidation of power under his leadership, it also saw incredible building projects such as fortification of the wall of Jerusalem, the Antonia Fortress to guard the walls of the temple, an amphitheater, a theater, a new building where the Sanhedrin could convene, a new royal palace, new buildings in Jericho, Samaria, and surrounding areas, and more. They were his glory because they connected Jerusalem with the Roman Empire in trade, commerce, and transportation. Dedicated in 9 BCE, Caesarea was built with a market for trade, an aqueduct for fresh water, government offices for Roman business, Roman-style baths, surrounding villas, a circus, and pagan temples that included a structure where the emperor could be worshipped. King Herod the Great had achieved his dream. Israel was becoming a prominent Roman province, but at what cost? Josephus writes succinctly,

But now the Jewish nation is by their law a stranger to all such things, and accustomed to prefer righteousness to glory; for which reason that nation was not agreeable to him, because it was out of their power to flatter the king's ambition with statues or temples, or any other such performances; And this seems to me to have been at once the occasion of Herod's crimes as to his own courtiers and counselors, and of his benefactions as to foreigners and those that had no relation to him.¹⁸⁷

King Herod's death in 4 BCE resulted in the Roman province of Judea being divided into three tetrarchs, each ruled by one of Herod's children. Rome consented to this arrangement but made clear that with the death of each ruler, the territory would then be solely under

¹⁸⁶Neusner, *Judaism When Christianity Began*, 14.165.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 16.158–59

Roman oversight. Following the death of Herod, the Roman presence in the Roman province of Judea grows, leading to the Roman leadership of Pontius Pilate, who will be discussed later in this thesis as his rule, as a Roman, will have a dramatic effect on the early Christian movement. In reaction to Herod's Romanization of Judea, a religious group known as the Essenes gain attraction.

THE QUMRAN LITERATURE

Josephus tells us that during the reign of King Herod there were three sects of Jews who had very different opinions concerning God and holiness; they were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes.¹⁸⁸ Little is known about the Essenes; however, the writings of Pliny, Philo, and those found in the Dead Sea Scrolls entitled *The Rule of the Community* and *The Damascus Document* offer significant insight when it comes to describing the Essenes, particularly for their thesis on virtue, communal life, and observing the Sabbath. The Essenes paid careful attention to the pedigree and leadership of the high priest, who was appointed by Rome. Unsatisfied, the Essenes voluntarily retreated to the desert with their self-appointed "teacher of righteousness" and there they lived out their righteousness in simplicity and strictness and as a community. The Essenes believed that their community was like the temple, a living temple of the Lord God.

These are their paths in the world: to enlighten the heart of man, straighten out in front of him all the paths of justice and truth, establish in his heart respect for the precepts of God; it is a spirit of meekness, patience, generous compassion, eternal goodness, intelligence, understanding, potent wisdom which trusts in all the deeds of God and depends on his abundant mercy; a spirit of knowledge in all the plans of action, of enthusiasm for the decrees of justice, of holy plans with firm purpose, of generous compassion with all the sons of truth, of magnificent purity which detests all unclean idols, of unpretentious behaviour with moderation in everything, of prudence in respect of the truth concerning the mysteries of knowledge.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Josephus, *New Complete Works*, 13.171

¹⁸⁹ Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), p. 383.

It is difficult to miss the strands of stoicism, and later, of St. Paul's rhetoric on virtue and even the Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, as the Essenes describe their goal of living a righteous life, one that will be the reward for the sons of truth in the end times. Conversely, the Essenes write about the path of darkness. It takes little imagination to know that the Essenes are describing what they see in King Herod's ambition to create a Roman culture, inclusive of Roman worship practices, in Judea.

However, to the spirit of deceit belong greed, frailty of hands in the service of justice, irreverence, deceit, pride and haughtiness of heart, dishonesty, trickery, cruelty, much insincerity, impatience, much insanity, impudent enthusiasm, appalling acts performed in a lustful passion, filthy paths for indecent purposes, blasphemous tongue, blindness of eyes, hardness of hearing, stiffness of neck, hardness of heart in order to walk in all the paths of darkness and evil cunning.¹⁹⁰

This is a reality, according to the Essenes, that ultimately leads to an eternal punishment and not to the eternal flame of the glory of Rome.

With the focus of the Essenes highlighted, the practicalities emerge. The Essenes voluntarily gather, take a vow of poverty, and participate in daily washing rituals for purity. Interestingly, Josephus describes the Essenes in this way:

The doctrine of the Essenes is this: That all things are best ascribed to God. They teach the immortality of souls, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for; and when they send what they have dedicated to God into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves; yet is their course of life better than that of other men; and they entirely addict themselves to husbandry. It also deserves our admiration, how much they exceed all other men that addict themselves to virtue, and this in righteousness; and indeed to such a degree, that as it hath never appeared among any other men, neither Greeks nor barbarians, no, not for a little time, so hath it endured a long while among them.¹⁹¹

As Josephus highlights, the Essenes value virtue that comes from God alone; they do not offer sacrifices in the temple, their lives are a living sacrifice, they hold all things in common,

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p 384.

¹⁹¹ Josephus, *New Complete Works*, 18.18

they do not marry or keep servants, and they live by themselves, apart from other Jews and especially, while not stated, from Herod's reinvention of Israel into a Roman image. Now, comparing Josephus with *The Rule of the Community* and the Damascus document, both found in the caves of Qumran, where at least one of the Essene communities resided, we read about their communal eating: "They shall eat together, together they shall bless and together they shall take counsel. In every place where there are ten or more men of the Community council, there should not be a priest missing amongst them."¹⁹²

The interpretation of holy scripture is an interpretative and relational event where all participate in the activity as opposed to simply being told what the text says and being expected to understand it and trust it, whether it is understood or not.

And in the place in which the ten assemble there should not be missing a man to interpret the law day and night, always, each man relieving his fellow. And the many shall be on watch together for a third of each night of the year in order to read the book, explain the regulation and bless together.¹⁹³

Pliny the Elder, a Roman historian, offers a slightly different view of the Essenes:

...they have no women among them; to sexual desire they are strangers; money they have none; the palm-trees are their only companions. Day after day, however, their numbers are fully recruited by multitudes of strangers that resort to them, driven thither to adopt their usages by the tempests of fortune, and wearied with the miseries of life. Thus it is, that through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, this people eternally prolongs its existence, without a single birth taking place there; so fruitful a source of population to it is that weariness of life which is felt by others.¹⁹⁴

Philo comments at great length, after describing the virtue of other philosophers from other areas such as Greece, that the Essenes are the highest example of living out virtue and

¹⁹² Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, p. 388.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 388.

¹⁹⁴ Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, 5.17, Perseus Digital Library. Medford, MA: Tufts University. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

piety: “they are above all men devoted to the service of God, not sacrificing living animals, but studying rather to preserve their own minds in a state of holiness and purity.”¹⁹⁵

A community, dedicated to aspects of classical leisure, contemplation, and worship.

Finally, *The Damascus Document*, while highlighting many similar themes of *The Community Rule*, adds that the community must observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, stating, for example, that no one should say a useless or stupid word, discuss riches or gain, speak about matters of work or of the task to be carried out on the following day, wear perfumes, sleep with his wife, and so forth; the focus is to keep the unclean apart from the clean and distinguish between the holy and profane.¹⁹⁶

The Essenes’ voluntary dedication to virtue, purity, and worship provides a stark contrast to King Herod the Great and his successors’ blatant integration of all things Roman into a Judean context. The impact of the Essenes’ beliefs and practices will later be revealed in both the early Christian movement and in the Jewish wars of revolt with Rome. From Caesar’s declaration of Jewish freedom within the Empire to the monastic-like desert practices of the Essenes, the final voice to be heard about virtue and sabbath is Philo’s. Towards the end of his life, Philo will stand before the Roman Empire and what is in the balance is how Rome and the Roman province of Judea will proceed.

PHILO

The Jewish theologian and philosopher, Philo from Alexandria, writing in the first century, incorporates and comments on the Torah as a guide to the Roman context in which he lives, using the philosophy of Plato as a guide. Philo appears familiar with the concepts of *scholē* and *otium* but the lens he uses to describe leisure is of neither of those concepts but of

¹⁹⁵ Philo, ‘Every Good Man is Free,’ in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. by Charles Duke Young (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 12.75-76

¹⁹⁶ Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, p. 59.

Sabbath, as described in the Torah. Philo is committed to there being one God, as revealed through both the Torah and tradition, who has a covenantal relationship with a particular people: the Jews. At the core of this covenantal relationship are the Commandments; in terms of leisure, the commandment for observing Sabbath is key. God creates, labours, is consumed with the work of creation for six days, and then on the seventh day rests in the goodness of creation. As previously discussed, humanity is created in the image of God and blessed; hence the seventh day of Sabbath is to be observed and indeed even celebrated. For Philo, observing the Sabbath is an act of contemplation, a virtuous act of contemplating the holy, the good, and the Divine. This is a notable shift from the understanding of Sabbath as prohibitive, restrictive. Philo clearly understands Sabbath as a community or individual engaged with God's gift of holiness.

Moses names the Sabbath, which can be interpreted as meaning "rest," or "the sabbath of God." Rest is not meant to be construed as laziness or lack of action here, as nature is essentially "energetic", but is rather intended to connote "an energy completely free from labor, without any feeling of suffering, and with the most perfect ease."¹⁹⁷

Philo continues by invoking again the commandment to emulate God by setting aside one of seven days, which allows one to embody or exemplify obedience to God's law. This commandment, he elaborates, is "an example from which you may learn the propriety of studying philosophy; as on that day, it is said, God beheld the works which he had made; so that you also may yourself contemplate the works of nature, and all the separate circumstances which contribute towards happiness."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷Philo, 'On the Cherubim', in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. by Charles Duke Young (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 2.87.

¹⁹⁸Philo, 'The Decalogue', in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. by Charles Duke Young (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 1.99–100.

The Sabbath is thus understood as a sacred day devoted to communion with God. Philo argues that the Sabbath celebration is significantly different from the Greco-Roman festivals and celebrations where the participants wash their bodies, wear their robes, and offer their sacrifices but are polluted, their virtue compromised and their passions running wild:

In every festival then and assembly among men, the following are the most remarkable and celebrated points: security, relaxation, truce, drunkenness, deep drinking, reveling, luxury, amusement, music at the doors, banquets lasting through the night, unseemly pleasures, wedding feasts during the day, violent acts of insolence, practices of intemperance, indulgence of folly, pursuits of shameful things, an utter destruction and renunciation of what is good, wakefulness during the night for the indulgence of immoderate appetites, sleep by day when it is the proper time to be awake, a turning upside down of the laws of nature.¹⁹⁹

Philo is clear in his conviction that yes, there are a variety of festivals and celebrations; however, it is when addressing the experience of the festival or celebration as it directly impacts one's virtue that Philo soars in his critique:

At such a time virtue is ridiculed as a mischievous thing, and vice is caught at as something advantageous. Then actions that ought to be done are held in no honour, and such as ought not be done are esteemed. Then music and philosophy and all education, the really divine images of the divine soul, are reduced to silence, and such practices as are panders and pimps of pleasure to the belly, and the parts adjacent to the belly, are alone allowed to raise their voice.²⁰⁰

Concluding with a stinging insight—"they wash their bodies with baths and purifications, but they neither desire nor endeavor to wash off the passions of their souls, by which their whole life is polluted"²⁰¹—Philo goes on, particularly about drunkenness, saying it signifies covetousness and greediness. Philo's comment on drunkenness, festivals and Sabbath is straightforward—learn to be temperate.

Philo offers a profound insight and launching point for a Jewish expression of leisure-like experience. This is quite unique from the surrounding Roman culture—one deity, one Sabbath, one law that is located solely in the Jewish religious and cultural traditions—and

¹⁹⁹Philo, *On the Cherubim* 2.91-93

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 2.91-93

²⁰¹Philo, *On the Cherubim* 2.95

yet, Philo continues to point to virtue and ethics (prudence, temperance, courage, and justice) as the way in which one's life is improved. This observation will later influence directly, or at least be a common thread with, St. Paul. St. Paul will also point to a day, a meal, and activities that are counter-cultural to Roman culture—only, unlike Philo, Paul will not be celebrated for his philosophical insights until much later in time.

For the moment, Philo's writings about Sabbath and devotion to the one true God as the source of freedom, virtue, happiness, and the source of life in relationship with the God of Israel lead us back to the group known as the Essenes. Philo, giving an example of his observations regarding Sabbath and leisure as contemplation of the God of Israel, points towards the Essenes:

And they, looking upon the seventh day as one of perfect holiness and a most complete festival, have thought it worthy of a most especial honor, and on it, after taking due care of their soul, they tend their bodies also, giving them, just as they do to their cattle, a complete rest from their continual labors.²⁰²

Philo, using the experience of Sabbath, makes a philosophical case for Sabbath as leisure, as a day of rest from labour, from being consumed by work or distraction, so that one can contemplate the Divine. In the contemplation of the Divine, there is included virtue, study of the Torah, and celebration of the Sabbath as God's holy day—a seventh day in which humanity remembers and participates in the holiness of God's rest, a day of freedom and original blessing. The grace of Philo's teaching, in a hostile Roman environment, will struggle to release its blessing as orators like Seneca, who represent numerous voices, continue to argue that Jews are accursed, that they have gained influence throughout the world and, moving to the point of this thesis, that the Sabbath is nothing but superstitious, a waste of time, "because by introducing one day of rest in every seven they lose in idleness

²⁰² Philo, 'On the Contemplative Life', in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. by Charles Duke Young (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 1.36.

almost a seventh of their life, and by failing to act in times of urgency they often suffer loss.”²⁰³

Philo is up to the challenge as the freedom that Philo presents both so eloquently and thoughtfully, drawing on Greek, Roman, and Jewish philosophy and practices, sets the stage for the emergence of a transformative understanding and experience of leisure. Ironically, Philo will still be alive and active at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, just as Greek, Roman, and Jewish expressions of leisure are reimagined or resurrected.

²⁰³ Seneca. *De Superstitione*, apud: *Agustinus, De Civitate Dei*, VI, 11. <http://cojs.org/10-b-c-e-65-c-e-seneca/>.

CHAPTER FOUR:

LEISURE IN THE FIRST- AND SECOND-CENTURY ROMAN CONTEXT

The Greek understanding of *scholē* is freedom for leisure and is realized in contemplation, in virtue, and in a lifetime of flourishing, as opposed to just fleeting moments of happiness, amusement, or recreation. Aristotle was clear that only those who were completely free of obligation, work, or being consumed by work, and who were virtuous, were able to participate in *scholē*, which immediately excludes some participants, such as slaves. *Scholē* as a philosophical experience was incorporated and reinterpreted by the Stoics as a school or disciplined education in order to restrain the passions. The satirical Greek poets pointed out how leisure often led to non-virtuous activities such as drunkenness, sexual immorality, and violence. As the meaning of *scholē* faded, the rise of the Latin word for leisure, *otium*, emerged. During an intense time of civil war and instability, Roman philosopher Cicero reinterpreted *otium* as one's freedom as it related to the peace and stability of the state. Cicero maintained that one's virtue and honour, in *otium*, were to be employed for the betterment of the public. Seneca, following Cicero's interpretation, clearly divides *otium* into the public sphere and the private sphere. Public *otium* moves from describing one's commitment to bettering the state to being used as a means to entertain, manipulate, reinforce Roman values of law and order and civic pride, and pacify the inhabitants of the Empire, while private *otium* moves towards an individual pursuit of virtue and happiness. The division between public and private *otium*, while available to all people, of every class, race, gender, and context, reinforces class distinctions and inequalities of available *otium* for all people, and serves as a highly manipulative tactic: those with power and influence will use *otium* towards their own ends in terms of control of the masses and individual standards for judging one's virtue or happiness. Alongside *scholē* and *otium*, the Jewish understanding of *Sabbath* adds a unique

perspective to leisure. While there is no direct word for leisure in Hebrew, the Torah clearly points to the Sabbath as including aspects of a leisure experience. The philosopher Philo points to the Torah's account of Sabbath, making a potential connection between the holiness of Sabbath rest and a leisure flourishing experience as co-participants with God's holiness, only in Philo's understanding he posits leisure in the Divine, in the God of Israel, which makes this experience only available for a Jew. All three expressions of leisure—*scholē*, *otium*, and *Sabbath*—provide the context and the background for the emergence of a new expression of leisure as found in and expressed by the early Christian communities in the Roman Empire.

LEISURE TRANSFORMED IN JESUS OF NAZARETH AND EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The experience and understanding of leisure, in the first century, forever changed with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Writings describing early Christian communities from the first to mid-second century in the Greco-Roman Empire offer a distinct insight about the experience of and participation in leisure, from *scholē*, *otium*, and *Sabbath*. In fact, it is fascinating to note that the words “*scholē*” and “*otium*” do not appear in any of the early Christian writings, which were primarily composed in Greek. The only text in English translation (New Revised Standard Version) that has the word “leisure” is found in Mark 6:31: “He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.” The words οὐδὲ...ἐνκαίρουν are translated as “they had no leisure,” but with a more literal meaning of “they had no opportunity” this can be discounted as a reference to leisure such as we are concerned with.

The word “Sabbath” is referenced often, but again, it is often a description or reinterpretation of the Jewish Sabbath day: Jesus goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath to teach and heals a man with an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21–25) or Jesus asks if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1–6) or Jesus is resurrected after the Sabbath has passed (Matthew 28:1). While the words “*schole*” and “*otium*” are not used, and the word “Sabbath” is reinterpreted, it is clear from the writings of the early Christians that the essence, the meaning, that originates from *schole*, *otium*, and *Sabbath* are present and redescribed with a new meaning—a meaning that is nourished, sustained, and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, according to the accounts of early Christian communities, he blessed those who followed him with the Holy Spirit. Originating in the Jewish tradition, *ruah* means wind or breath of the Holy Spirit of God; early Christian communities emphasize that that same spirit was in Jesus of Nazareth. The Holy Spirit in Greek, *pneuma*, and Latin *spiritus*, also meaning “breath” or “wind,” is a crucial aspect of understanding leisure in the life of Jesus and those who follow him. The Holy Spirit, the breath of life, is, of course, essential for life but there is more; the Holy Spirit, as will be explored shortly, provides an untameable, invisible, and God-inspired experience which early Christian communities will express as essential to experiencing and living their faith. According to Paul, for example, in his earliest letter to the Galatians, our freedom, as a child of God, is found in the Holy Spirit:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Galatians 4:4-7, NRSV

Or, later, in Luke-Acts, Luke 24:49 instructs followers of Jesus to “stay here in the city until you are invested with power from on high.” This passage is followed by Acts:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.²⁰⁵

Or, following the Johannine Christian communities, in the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is received on the same day as the resurrection, differing from Luke-Acts’ recollection that the gift of the Holy Spirit occurred on Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”²⁰⁶

While there is great diversity in views as to when the Holy Spirit was received, the essential point is that the Holy Spirit was received and with it the power that will reshape followers of Jesus. In this way, leisure as it was experienced will be transformed and reinterpreted in three distinct and profound ways.

A DAY, MEAL, AND ENGAGEMENT (POST-MEAL ACTIVITIES)

The reinterpretation of Christian communities’ leisure is clearly demonstrated in the establishing of a single day (The Lord’s Day) for weekly worship, a meal (which included worship, preaching, singing, and conversation), and following the meal, engagement, action, living out one’s faith, as evidenced by activities like providing resources for the poor, care for

²⁰⁵ Acts 2:1–4, NRSV

²⁰⁶ John 20:19–23, NRSV

the sick and orphaned, and working to remove class distinctions.²⁰⁷ All of this emerges from the first to mid-second century in various Christian communities' professions of faith that Jesus Christ died on Friday, was dead and in the grave on the Sabbath (Saturday), and then rose from the dead on Sunday, the day after the seventh day, which was described by the early writers as the first day of the week (Mark 16:2; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1; Matthew 28:1; John 20:1; John 20:19; Acts 20:7; and 1 Corinthians 16:2).

As Gonzalez points out, “the first day of the week—the Lord’s Day—was not to be a day of particular sobriety or austerity. On the contrary, this was a day of joy and celebration, connected first of all with the resurrection of Jesus, but also with the beginning of the new creation on the same day of the week when creation began, and with the eschatological expectation of the “eighth day.” Since it was a day of celebration, fasting was not permitted.”²⁰⁸ This day is known as a day of new creation, new life for the participant, which is then ultimately celebrated in worship through the Eucharist: a Christian meal initiated by Jesus of Nazareth, first described by Paul the Apostle, and said to summarize the whole of Christian faith, leading to post-worship activity, a non-work activity, a voluntary leisure activity.

This first-century expression of leisure builds from the Greco *scholē*, where an emphasis on freedom for contemplation, virtue, and happiness as leisure is recast as contemplation, virtue, and joy in the experience of Jesus Christ, which is available to all participants and not just some. Roman *otium*, with its division between the public experience of leisure (such as Emperor worship, public festivals, gladiatorial games, banquets) and the private experience of leisure (such as reading, travelling, resting), is expressed in public

²⁰⁷ Witherington comments, “Paul’s reference to the call to be holy or to be set apart from the larger culture, particularly in a spiritual and ethical sense, is part of his effort to establish moral boundary markers. His primary concern is with ongoing behaviour and the social theological presuppositions that fuel it.” Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 80.

²⁰⁸ González, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 39.

service (e.g., caring for the sick, the poor, the outcast, and the well-being of the Empire) and in private service (e.g., worship, the eucharist, singing, prayer) where everyone could participate regardless of gender, class, age, status, or ability. Finally, the idea of the Jewish *Sabbath* expression of leisure is incorporated into the early Christian community's leisure experience but on another day—the first day of the week. On the first day of the week—every week, a set day before or after work—the early Christian communities gathered together to meet. This meeting was not one of refraining from work, as the Sabbath was, but was set aside for the celebration of the resurrection, for new life in Jesus Christ.

Further, through the exploration of the day, the meal, and engagement (post-meal activities), the expressions of how leisure is experienced and participated in will become evident in the writings from early Christian communities and writings about early Christian communities such as a new experience of social class (slaves and Roman citizens participating in leisure activities together), ethical behaviours (as Paul's letters differentiate how followers of the Way interact in their cultural context, such as not worshiping idols or sexual immorality), participation in worship (singing, reading, storytelling), homiletics and prayer (word and silence), volunteerism (care of the poor, the sick, and strangers), community welfare, philanthropy (the great collection and investing one's money), pilgrimage, and belonging/identity, among others. All of these and more will become identifying marks of an early Christian community's participation in leisure, resurrected and empowered by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Different from Aristotle's *scholē*, Roman *otium* and the Jewish *Sabbath*, early Christian leisure, as described in the first to mid-second century, will reimagine leisure that is available for all to participate in, anchored in the common good, and rooted in release from constant preoccupation, with an invitation to be fully human, as we were created to be, in the

image of God. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we are transformed, and we respond by worshipping on the Lord's Day with a meal, and then through our actions.

CHAPTER FIVE: LEISURE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The experience of the Holy Spirit in early Christian communities establishes the foundation for Christian leisure. The Holy Spirit is present at baptism, in the sacraments, in prayer, in faithful activities, and so forth. This marks a tremendous difference from *scholē*, *otium*, and *Sabbath* as the means of experiencing and participating in leisure via the Christian description of the Holy Spirit. It implies that God provides what is necessary, through God's Spirit, to experience the freedom and joy that leisure aims for. While contemplation, virtue, ethical behaviour, community engagement for the public good, private activities for renewal, and refraining from effort or preoccupation on a certain day or set of days may offer experiences of leisure, in the early Christian communities leisure was an opportunity for anyone to experience and it was a gift from a single living God, as revealed through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: PAUL'S LETTERS

Beginning with the authentic letters of St. Paul, a pattern is quickly discerned. In Galatians, Paul asks about the Galatians' experience of the Holy Spirit; following the crucifixion of Jesus, he wonders: did you receive the Spirit by the law or by simply hearing the gospel?

Further, Paul makes it clear that God supplies the Holy Spirit and that miracles, not described in detail, occur due to the Galatians trusting, believing in God's gift. As Paul was writing to the Gentiles, many Gentiles wondered if they needed to be circumcised to be a follower of Jesus and to receive this Holy Spirit; Paul responds clearly and dramatically, "For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is

faith working through love.”²⁰⁹ Then, Paul goes on to describe a gift of the Holy Spirit that he juxtaposes against the desires of the flesh:

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.²¹⁰

In Paul’s first epistle, early in his ministry, he sets the stage for the freedom found within the Holy Spirit, which in turn establishes the foundations of developing Christian leisure as unique. Paul concludes his letter with this description of the Holy Spirit:

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another. My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor’s work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads.²¹¹

The emphasis on the fruit of the spirit to nourish and nurture the interior life and its intention, to serve others, to bear one another’s burdens, to be careful of temptations that surround us and to pay attention to our own lives so that we experience the grace of God, sets Christian leisure apart from *schole*, *otium*, and *Sabbath* and refocuses leisure as a gift from God,

²⁰⁹ Gal 5:5–6, NRSV

²¹⁰ Gal 5:13–21, NRSV

²¹¹ Gal 5:22—6:5, NRSV

offered to anyone who trusts what they have heard about Jesus' death and resurrection, which gives an individual peace through active care and concern for others.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, we read in the opening lines,

For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.²¹²

Paul describes the Holy Spirit as 'coming in power' and not just in words, indicating that it is not simply a teaching or philosophy, like the Stoics, but originates from God. Further, as the followers of Jesus in Thessalonica are facing persecution, Paul implores them to remember that the Holy Spirit is filled with joy. This will become an important attribute of leisure in the Holy Spirit—that it is a joyful, celebratory experience.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he emphasizes the wisdom of the Holy Spirit being very different from the wisdom of philosophers and teachers of this or any age, as it is from God alone; further, Paul describes how the Holy Spirit searches us and offers us understanding. It is crucial to remember that this gift is offered to any Christian believer regardless of status, gender, intellect, geographical location, etc.:

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.²¹³

Paul then makes a bold move: he claims that "you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you."²¹⁴ Remembering that the Roman world is filled with statues, shrines, places of worship of divinities and of idols, and recalling that, for the Jewish listeners, any reference to

²¹² 1 Thess. 1:4–7, NRSV

²¹³ 1 Cor. 2:12–13, NRSV

²¹⁴ 1 Cor 3:16, NRSV

the temple would lead their imaginations straight to the temple of Jerusalem, this would have been a shocking assertion. Paul claims that, since the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we are a holy temple—which is to say, we contain holiness within us. As Paul is dead set against worshipping idols, his further claim that in God’s Holy Spirit we are not only holy but that God will destroy those who destroy another’s holiness reveals a bold clarity about the power of the Holy Spirit and what it offers as a gift. In this same Holy Spirit, we find a Christian expression of leisure, which names our bodies as holy. He goes on to say, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”²¹⁵ Being washed implies baptism, which in many early Christian communities was the initiation rite into the community of believers.²¹⁶ More importantly to the point of the Holy Spirit is the connection to first-century religious language: one is washed, one is sanctified, one is justified. All of these words imply purification, dedication, and identity, from Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit of God.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans—again to Christian communities who are facing hardship, this time in Rome, at the heart of the Roman Empire—we notice that Paul has developed his understanding of the power of the Holy Spirit: now a believer is justified by faith, offered peace, and able to “boast” of sharing the glory of God. If we ponder that passage, with its suggestion of sharing in the glory of God, we can hear the power of those words. This statement about sharing glory, with God, in the first century of the Roman Empire, would have been considered extremely radical. Paul goes on to say that, even in this time of trial and tribulation, God’s love is poured into the heart through the power of the Holy

²¹⁵ 1 Cor 6:11 NRSV

²¹⁶ Wright notes, “The primary point of baptism, then, is not so much ‘that it does something to the individual’, though it does, but that it defines the community of the baptized as the Messiah’s people. Those who submit to baptism are thereby challenged to learn the family codes, the house rules, the way of life that this community is committed to precisely because it is the family of the Messiah.” N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), p. 426.

Spirit. The Holy Spirit, without restrictions, is nourishing followers of Jesus, who share in the glory of God. Paul boldly declares, most likely in Emperor Nero's narcissistic and brutal reign,

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.²¹⁷

Paul is clear that in the power of the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus are adopted by the living God, are heirs of God's glory, embody the power of the Holy Spirit as a living temple, are humble, are given access to the fullness of life in freedom, in understanding the mysteries of God and of life, are nourished with love, offered peace and, regardless of adversity, celebrate joy—and more, this experience is available to anyone, slave or Roman citizen, living in the wilds outside of the Empire or sitting on the throne of the Empire, from the one true living God. The letters of Paul, circulating in the Roman Empire in the first century, articulate the power of the Holy Spirit and how a leisure experience clearly emerges from its grace.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE GOSPELS

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the experience of the Holy Spirit is expressed differently. The emphasis shifts—with the exception of Acts, the second half of the gospel of Luke—from the followers of Jesus being filled with the Holy Spirit to how Jesus himself was filled. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the synoptic gospels present a similar pattern but each with their own interpretation. Each gospel is clear that Jesus was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke and Matthew begin with Jesus' conception being through

²¹⁷ Romans 5:1–5, NRSV

the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41; Matthew 1:18), while Mark remains silent on his conception. Moving from Jesus' birth to his baptism, all three gospels record that the Holy Spirit was present at Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:21–22). Recall that God, as Paul proclaimed about being adopted and co-heirs of God's glory in the letter to the Romans, declared, "This is my son." It is also interesting to note that, just prior to Jesus' baptism, in all three gospels (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16), John the baptiser declared, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."²¹⁸ Following his baptism, Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days and nights and tempted by the devil (Mt 4:1; Mk 1:12–13; Lk 4:1–2). Jesus then began his public ministry; he began to teach in the synagogues and was praised by everyone as recounted in Luke 4:14—only we learn quickly that not everyone was excited about this Holy Spirit ministry, which the hearer of the gospel realizes is about liberation, justice, and peace. Throughout his ministry, the activities of Jesus—healing, storytelling, feeding, etc.—will exemplify his mission through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is interesting to note how Jesus names the Holy Spirit as his power for casting out demons (Mt 12:28), for speaking truth (Mark 13:11), and more. Luke beautifully reinforces how the Holy Spirit is available to all (10:21; 11:9–13), but the last explicit reference to the occurrence of the Holy Spirit in the synoptic gospels is at the end of Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."²¹⁹ Matthew's final words indicate that Matthew's community of Jesus followers has incorporated the Holy Spirit fully into its understanding of both Jesus and their

²¹⁸ Matt 3:11, NRSV

²¹⁹ Matt 28:19, NRSV

mission. As for Paul, the power of the Holy Spirit is now at the heart of the faith experience and is to be spread, and taught, throughout the Roman Empire and beyond with the promise that Jesus himself will accompany them. While Luke concludes the gospel without mention of the Holy Spirit, the second half of the Gospel of Luke, the Book of Acts, is entirely based on the activity of the Holy Spirit.

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”²²⁰

From the beginning of Acts through to the end, the author tells the listener about the events and power of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the apostles and its presence among the followers of Jesus. In particular, there are five different and revealing stories of how the Holy Spirit affects a variety of people in specific ways. Here is the Pentecost story:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.²²¹

With its evocative imagery, the community gathered, like a violent wind, filled the house, and divided tongues, but it is the conclusion that is of most interest to this thesis: the ability to communicate in other languages. The author of Acts is making the point that all people can understand what is being said about God and Jesus via the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes understandable the grace of God, or the Holy Spirit enables anyone to understand leisure, which in turn offers anyone the opportunity to participate in its joy:

²²⁰ Acts 1:1–5, NRSV

²²¹ Acts 2:1–4, NRSV

And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.²²²

In this second Holy Spirit experience, believers facing adversity are given not only the words that anyone can understand but also the ability to heal and offer signs and wonders. It is interesting to note that as the Jesus followers pray, they are shaken and filled with the Holy Spirit. Prayer is essential to this story as it demonstrates that when the followers of Jesus pray, God offers the Holy Spirit. The fact that there is an immediate, physical response to prayer that has no financial cost²²³ differentiates the prayer of the followers of Jesus from that of many of the Roman idols and gods that surround them. Finally, it is crucial to emphasize that the followers of Jesus receive power for healing. The Holy Spirit is a healing agent.

The third instance is fascinating for two reasons. The first is that during baptism, the assumed entry point into the community of Jesus' followers, the most recent member did not receive the Holy Spirit. This point will provide interesting contemplation for people of faith throughout the generations, but suffice it to note that, in this story, being baptized does not mean that one receives the Holy Spirit; it is through the laying on of hands. Second, on learning that the most recent convert has not received the Holy Spirit yet, Simon asks to purchase the Spirit. In the Roman context, where favours from gods were purchased, where the religious economy was well-rehearsed, where philosophical schools cost money, this is an honest request. The response, while perhaps commonplace for future generations, was riveting for those in the first century:

The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the

²²² Acts 4:29–31, NRSV

²²³ Marty points out, "He taught them to pray, simplifying worship along the way to the point that financially it cost nothing. No one needed to invest in animals for temple offerings or incense." Martin Marty, *The Christian World* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2007), p. 9.

name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness." Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."²²⁴

God's Spirit can neither be bought nor sold, Peter declares, and with that announcement, once again, the followers of Jesus are clear that this gift of God is intended for anyone, especially the poor.

Then, in a ground-breaking move, in the fourth instance, the Holy Spirit "falls on" all who heard Peter speaking, including Gentiles, or non-Jews. While one may take this for granted, especially considering that Paul's epistles pre-date the Luke-Acts Gospel, one must be intrigued by the subtlety with which Acts builds the case to include gentiles in the Holy Spirit ministry:

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"²²⁵

Finally, at the conclusion of the gospel of Acts, Paul is preaching in Rome to a group of people, primarily Jewish, who are divided, and just as they are leaving the event, Paul says,

Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, 'Go to this people and say,

You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull,

²²⁴ Acts 8:15–24.

²²⁵ Acts 10:44–47, NRSV

and their ears are hard of hearing,
 and they have shut their eyes;
 so that they might not look with their eyes,
 and listen with their ears,
 and understand with their heart and turn—
 and I would heal them.’

Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles;
 they will listen.’²²⁶

Paul, in the Acts version, draws on Isaiah, on Jewish prophecy, to make his case about not receiving the message that he is sharing. He makes his declaration that the Holy Spirit will be shared with the gentiles, as it already has been in Acts, and offers those beautiful words about the Holy Spirit, about understanding with their heart, to turn, which indicates that one must freely choose to acknowledge the Holy Spirit and that there will be healing. The Holy Spirit is a healing spirit that is available for all people without monetary cost.

Finally, let us turn to the Gospel of John, which outside of the synoptic tradition follows many of the traditional Holy Spirit stories—for example, the baptismal story, the temptation story, and the healing stories. What is unique to John about the Holy Spirit appears in chapters fourteen to sixteen; we will only highlight three aspects of many. The first is that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth, which abides with the followers of Jesus. Now, truth is an intentional word, in John’s case, as the truth he is pointing to is beyond “philosophical truth” as taught by the philosophers and Roman religious leaders; John is pointing to “the” truth in Jesus Christ. Further, the truth he points to abides with the followers of Jesus as he offers comfort to the disciples, which is particularly poignant as Jesus is sharing his teaching about the Holy Spirit arriving as he speaks about his crucifixion, his departure:

“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will

²²⁶ Acts 28:24–28, NRSV

do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”²²⁷

Secondly, still speaking about his departure, Jesus continues: the Holy Spirit will abide with you, and more, it will offer peace. It is fascinating that the peace Jesus describes is not as the world gives, which is perhaps a reference to the Roman Empire’s *Pax Romana*. Instead, it is a peace that encourages the followers of Jesus not to be afraid or troubled. More, it is a Holy Spirit that is within the followers of Jesus. John makes a claim that is similar to Paul’s analogy that a believer is like a holy temple containing the Holy Spirit, but in John’s claim, the point is clearer: the Holy Spirit is a gift that cannot be taken from you. No one can take the Holy Spirit from you, not the Roman military, not the local officials, not Caesar himself, no one. Given the context, those profound words that the Holy Spirit offers a peace that can face adversity are refreshing, comforting, and enabling.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”²²⁸

Finally, John adds an interesting dimension to the Holy Spirit. Repeating that the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will arrive on Jesus’ departure, a profound difference from the Acts story where the Holy Spirit arrives fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection, John then turns to a tone of judgement. When John declares that the ruler of this world is condemned, John is clearly describing Caesar and the consequences of Roman rule. Then, John moves to tell Jesus’ followers that the Holy Spirit has more to tell them, but that they are not yet ready to hear it.

²²⁷ John 14:12–17, NRSV

²²⁸ John 14:25–27, NRSV

The Holy Spirit will declare “things to come,” implying that the Holy Spirit will reveal the future to the followers of Jesus. In this section of judgment, it is fascinating that the Holy Spirit will be active, informing, pointing towards a new future, one that replaces the current evil age. While this eschatological approach is commonplace with Paul when John offers this revelation about the Holy Spirit, the followers of Jesus can hear the profound power of the Holy Spirit as ushering in God’s truth, justice, peace, and holiness and replacing the present evil age:

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”²²⁹

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts, and John describe the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways that each point to the Holy Spirit as a gift from God that cannot be bought or sold, only experienced. The Holy Spirit offers clarity, healing, and empowerment for the followers of Jesus, just as it is a clarion call for the followers to go and do the same with all people—to “bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”²³⁰ The Holy Spirit provides an invitation to understand the mysteries of God, the truth and majesty of God, and to live, knowing that one is a co-heir in God’s salvific grace for all people, which is key to

²²⁹ John 16:4–15, NRSV

²³⁰ Luke 4:18–19, NRSV

our understanding of the Holy Spirit as the source of a theology of leisure. Building on the examination of the Holy Spirit as the source of a theology of leisure, we will explore a pneumatology of leisure in chapter nine.

CHAPTER SIX: THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, THE DAY OF THE LORD

Building on the power, presence, and momentum of the Holy Spirit, it is easy to notice how a single letter from Emperor Trajan to Pliny drew the attention of the early Christian communities. The letter, while dated circa 112 CE, offers an important insight into the Roman context of dates, festivals, and religious tolerance. Note in this exchange that Pliny is asking Emperor Trajan how to deal with followers of Jesus, but what is of interest to this thesis is the “fixed day,” “before dawn” and that they depart, presumably “go to work” and assemble again, presumably on the same day to eat together.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.²³¹

In order to move towards the Sunday celebration of the Day of the Lord that was marked by the followers of Jesus, one must first recognize that Sunday was a work day in the Roman Empire, the day following the Sabbath observance for Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire, and that this unique day has numerous expressions and traditions, yet maintains a Sunday date.

ROMAN CALENDAR

²³¹ Pliny. *Letters: Pliny and Trajan on the Christians*, <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/pliny.html>, 10.96–97.

In the 50s BCE, the Roman calendar and the dating system were in considerable disarray. Cicero, in *De libus*, offers a mild reform to sort out the disarray; the details of his reform are interesting, but it is why he wishes for reform that matters: “However, his intention at the level of sacral law was not to bind feast days to astronomical data but to facilitate the detailed observance of the rules for sacrifices – animals of a particular age, precisely defined fruits (of the field) – by correlating the festal calendar with the seasons. Cicero did not have wholesale reform in mind; he wished to curb excess in current practice.”²³² Julius Caesar, on January 1, 45 BCE, implemented three significant reforms. First, he redefined and implemented the length of a natural year, 365.25 days, as reflected in a civic, 365-day year and a recalculation every four years to keep the calendar in alignment with the natural seasons of the year.²³³ While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in depth, it is interesting to note that having a single day (or leap year) every four years to correct the calendar created a dating system that made it difficult to manipulate the calendar for political, economic, or social reasons. It provided a common dating system for administrative functions, military operations, and political decisions. Caesar Augustus, Julius’s adopted son, was the first to implement the seven-day week rhythm, differing from the previous eight-day week. Finally, with the move from a system of twelve hours for the day, twelve hours for night measurements—measured in the third century BCE by the introduction of the shadow clock (sun dial) and water clock to a Solar Clock of Augustus, erected in the Campus Martius at Rome in 9 BCE—time was observed by year, day, and hour.²³⁴ With a regular pattern of counting the days of the year, Rome established a calendar that was consistent, reliable, and in harmony with the solar year. The solar year will be an

²³² Jorg Rupke, *The Roman Calendar from Numa to Constantine* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2011), p. 110.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 111.

²³⁴ Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 338.

important aspect as it was different from the Jewish lunar calendar. Once again, it must be clearly stated that the Roman Empire reinvented the calendar and then imposed its calendar on those within its domain; hence, by approximately 9 BCE,²³⁵ it was universally understood how time would be measured.

With the Roman calendar established, dates for religious festivals, celebrations, great victories, anniversaries, public games, and public holidays needed to be adjusted, and with those adjustments, measurable, repetitive, reliable rituals were established. Make no mistake, the transition between calendars was far from smooth, but it is exactly for this reason that, after exploring the Jewish Sabbath, the early followers of Jesus fit the first day of the week or the Lord's Day into the disarray of marking time in the new calendar.

DAILY LIFE IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

What remained the same, without regard to the calendar, was work. In summary, most people within the Roman Empire woke with the morning sun, at dawn, dressed, and had a drink and bread or porridge or whatever was left over, before heading off to daily activities or work. There was no bathing, as that would happen at the end of the day—for some but not all. Work depended on a person's gender, age, and status. The Roman Empire was largely an agriculturally based society that relied heavily on slavery for production, and as Oakes points out, "the non-elite, over 99% of the Empire's population, could expect little more from life than abject poverty."²³⁶ Producing and importing grains, fruits, vegetables, dates, olives, grapes, fish, and a variety of meats was labour intensive and time-sensitive.

The life of the peasant farmer (and his wife and children) was filled with endless, back breaking toil: cleaning, plowing, planting, hoeing, pruning, weeding, irrigating,

²³⁵ Rupke, *The Roman Calendar from Numa to Constantine*, 121.

²³⁶ Paul R. Oakes, 'Using Economic Evidence in Interpretation of Early Christian Texts', in *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, ed. by Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 9–36 (p. 28).

and harvesting grain, grapes, olives, vegetables, fruit and fodder; feeding, cleaning, breeding, raising, shearing, milking, slaughtering goats, cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, and draft animals; building barns, fences, and sheepfolds; cutting firewood, making and repairing tools and equipment, squeezing grapes, pressing oil, grinding grain; making baskets, jars and boxes for storage. The list of chores is endless.²³⁷

Or perhaps, from the pen of Cato himself, other tasks could be accomplished on a rainy day:

If the weather has been rainy, remind him of the chores that could have been done on rainy days: washing out wine vats, sealing them with pitch, cleaning the villa, moving grain, hauling out manure, making a manure pit, cleaning seed, mending ropes and making new ones. The slaves might also have repaired their cloaks and hats.²³⁸

While the majority of those within the Roman Empire spent their day working in agricultural contexts, there was also military service. Forbidden from marriage but guaranteed secure food and pay, with clothing provided and status heightened, the life of a male Roman soldier between the ages of 17 and 46 was extremely appealing. The downside, of course, was being far from home and family and under the command of others, not to mention the likelihood of being maimed or encountering death in battle. Most of our information about work in Roman society is found in mosaics, paintings, and archaeological discoveries, which means that we have little information about working conditions, what the jobs entailed, and job security, but we do have, in the literature, some descriptions of work, especially when associations and guilds are described. We read about guilds such as the fruit sellers, mule drivers, goldsmiths, carpenters, slave traders, fishermen, cloth dryers, innkeepers, bakers, barbers, porters, millers, chicken sellers, masons, gladiators, philosophers, lawyers, teachers, mat makers, farmers, grape pickers, etc.²³⁹ Burford points out that, “One of the most important limiting factors in the ancient economy, and one which was

²³⁷ Shelton, *As the Romans Did*, p. 161.

²³⁸ Cato the Elder, *On Agriculture*, trans. by W. D. Hooper (New York: Loeb Publishing, 1934), pp. 57–59.

²³⁹ Richard Ascough and John S. Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012)

partly responsible for the institution of slavery, was the distribution of skilled labour.”²⁴⁰

Whether one was working on a Temple or shipbuilding or a soldier, the need for skilled trades was always in demand, especially as goods were not mass produced, but rather made on demand. Whether the depiction of the worker is of a slave or free person, we often do not know, but those at the time would have known without hesitation who had what status.

Finally, in a brief survey of work in the Roman Empire, there was the upper class who worked in administration or in political office or were simply members of the “wealthy elite.”

As Carter offers, “We also saw that the elite used taxes, rents, loans, interest, tribute, and trade to redistribute production from peasant farmers, artisans, and unskilled workers to themselves. The ruling few gained considerable wealth, enjoyed lavish lifestyles and consumed much of the production.”²⁴¹ To summarize, in the first century, “The economy was

underdeveloped, as measured by the poverty of the mass of the people, the predominance of agricultural labour, the backward state of technology, the importance of land as a source of wealth and power, and the dominance of the value system of the landed aristocracy.”²⁴² Or as

Corcopino comments, “Rome’s political supremacy, her gigantic urban development, condemned her to display intense and unremitting activity not only in speculation and trade, but in varied manufactures and productive work.”²⁴³ This brief snapshot of work, during

Paul’s activities throughout the Empire, needs to be highlighted by Ascough’s insight:

“People struggled to make ends meet, their surroundings were dirty and noisy, work was menial and took a physical toll, and medical knowledge was rudimentary. Life expectancy was on average only about twenty years or so, and those who lived longer could expect a continued struggle through their thirties with infectious diseases, malnutrition, parasites,

²⁴⁰ Alison Burford, *Craftsmen in Greek and Roman Society* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 58.

²⁴¹ Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), p. 100.

²⁴² Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire, Economy, Society and Culture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), p. 230.

²⁴³ Jerome Corcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 194.

rotting teeth, and declining eyesight. And this is only those who survived infancy, for which there was a very high mortality rate.”²⁴⁴ It was certainly the best of times and the worst of times.

ROMAN LEISURE AND RECREATION

After a long day of work, into mid-afternoon, before the sun was readying itself to submerge into the horizon, the majority of those in the Roman Empire would prepare for eating and relaxation, except for those, of course, who would begin their work of providing others with relaxation. For some, this meant going to the baths, the gymnasium, the theatre, or public games such as the circus, chariot racing, and gladiatorial fighting; for most, it meant simply the cessation of work. From sunrise to late afternoon, most people worked in some manner or another.²⁴⁵ Retirement was only for aristocrats, public servants, and, if they survived, gladiators who won their freedom;²⁴⁶ the rest worked, as they could, until death.

ROMAN FESTIVALS AND ALLEGIANCE TO THE ROMAN EMPIRE

There are two important exceptions to this daily routine. The first is the Roman festivals, holidays, or appointed days for visiting temples, offering prayers, performing rituals, making sacrifices, and reaffirming one's loyalty to the gods or Roman Empire. Public festivals were often recognized by the state, which prescribed that work and business ceased. While it is not clear how many festival days occurred in the first century, we are aware that food was often provided to the public, that there was a religious element incorporated into them, and that some festivals were on fixed dates, as per the Julian calendar, while others

²⁴⁴ Richard Ascough, ‘What Kind of World Did Paul’s Communities Live In?’, in *The New Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* by Bruce Longenecker (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 48–66 (p. 48).

²⁴⁵ John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 118.

²⁴⁶ John Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (London: The Bodley Head, 1969), p. 169.

were irregular or added either as necessary or created. Festivals included the festival to Janus on January 1, which marked the beginning of the year; the festival to Lupercus on February 15 when worshippers gathered at a cave called Lupercal on the Palatine Hill, where Romulus and Remus were supposed to have been suckled by a wolf; the festival of Caristia on February 22 to renew family ties and patch up quarrels; a five-day festival beginning on March 19 in honour of Mars (and Minerva); April 4 to 10 was the Megalesia festival with games at Rome in honour of Cybele; April 23 saw the opening of the wine casks and the first draft offered to Jupiter; April 23 to May 3 was a festival of Flora, of flowers; July 6 to 13 was a festival of games in honour of Apollo; following the games, there were six days set aside for markets and fairs; July 20 saw a festival in honour of Julius Caesar and the goddess Nike's victory; December 17 to 23 was the festival of Saturnalia to honour Saturn as the god of seed sowing. While certainly not an exhaustive list of festivals, as every month had three or four days of celebration, as well as localized festivals depending on where one lived in the Roman Empire, it offers an example of exceptions to the daily work routine for both slaves and free people. There was a cessation from the ordinary time for a time of worship, feasting, and honouring the numerous gods, as one chose to. The interesting aspect of festival days is that they were state-sanctioned, which meant festivals, such as Bacchus, as previously discussed, became illegal affairs that needed to be participated in privately. This situation had a direct impact on the gatherings of the early followers of Jesus as they sought to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

JEWISH FESTIVALS AND ALLEGIANCE TO GOD

The second exception necessary for this thesis is Jewish festivals. As already explored, the Jewish tradition received permission from Julius Caesar and the Senate to

worship and live according to the ancestral custom. Jews were exempt from military service, making offerings to the various gods during civic festivals, and did not have to make a sacrifice to the Emperor. These exemptions, of course, made the Jews suspect in terms of not being loyal to the Roman Empire or to its traditions and values. Added to the suspicion, we hear Roman writers make comments about the male Jews' barbaric mutilation of their genitals, their bizarre Sabbath laziness, their prohibitions once every seven days, and their refusal to integrate into the dominant Roman civil society.²⁴⁷ The Jewish faith's recognition of only one true living God, its rite of circumcision, its observance of a strict moral code, its dietary constraints, and its study of the Torah and honouring of the Sabbath tended to generate both interest and repulsion from Roman neighbours. It is important to note that while there was an emphasis on pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, for those living in the Diaspora throughout the Roman Empire, there were a number of Jewish festivals, such as the harvest festivals of Unleavened Bread or Booths or, perhaps better known, the festival of the Pentecost, the festival of the Passover that remembers God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement when Israel is reconciled with God and forgiven of its sin, and the festival of Hanukkah to celebrate the rededication of the temple after the Syrians desecrated it. Each of these festivals has a focus on the actions of a single God who loves God's people, and in each festival, there is a clear commandment to disengage from work. Walter Brueggemann describes it succinctly:

First, "no work" means to disengage from the world of production and control, in order to be in a receptive mode for the blessings of the creator. Second, the practice of sacrifice, outlined in detail and with punctiliousness, is perhaps the counterpoint to "no work"; sacrifice entails offering back to YHWY a part of the blessing YHWH has given, thus making clear in public ways that life is a gift; the character of holiness is to dramatize the gift of YHWH being in turn generous toward YHWH.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷James B. Rivers, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 194.

²⁴⁸Walter Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), p. 16.

This leads one straight to the Jewish weekly observance of the Sabbath. As already discussed, it is crucial to understand that Jews celebrated a weekly festival. In a practice quite different from that of their Roman neighbours, every Sabbath Jews refrained from work, gathered, and worshipped their one God. This point cannot be understated: Jews, wherever they were located within the Roman Empire, gathered weekly for worship. Sabbath observance did not depend on anything except to wait for the sun to set at the end of the sixth day, a moment that anyone could observe regardless of status, gender, age, or geography. The weekly festival of the Sabbath, as Philo pointed out, was for worship and for the study of wisdom.

Circling back to leisure, it is crucial to point out that while Roman *otium* can clearly be employed in the understanding of a work/non-work dualism, especially when considering religious life, in terms of Greek *scholē*, Jewish *Sabbath*, and the early Christian reinterpretation of leisure, leisure does not fit into these simple categories. In *scholē*, being preoccupied is implied as working, which means one could be done their physical labour or workday but still be pre-occupied with work or work-related concerns. In the Jewish *Sabbath*, not working, on the Sabbath, means rest, refraining from work to worship, and then, for the followers of Jesus, serving others, eating together, and worshipping, not simply engaging in non-work or recreation. This distinction is profoundly significant as the Lord's Day is recognized before and after a workday.

The Lord's Day

The followers of Jesus gathered for worship on the Lord's Day. Exploring the few areas of evidence found in Paul's letters, the gospel accounts, the Didache, the Book of Revelation, and St. Ignatius's letters, it will be shown how the Lord's Day was established as different from the Jewish Sabbath. It is interesting to note that there is no evidence, to date,

that early followers of Jesus took two days off without work every week, meaning no one accused the followers of Jesus of being “lazier” for not working than the Jews observing the Sabbath. Second, the terms “the first day of the week” and “the Lord’s Day” are actually accurate descriptions of what was happening: the first day of the week was after the Sabbath day, which was also a work day in the Roman Empire. Finally, the first day of the week, as the gospel accounts will proclaim, is the day of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For followers of Jesus, the first day of the resurrection is also the first day of God’s empire, not Rome’s, ending violence, sorrow, and death and bringing justice, peace, and belonging for all who trust in God’s promise. This is a day of tremendous joy and celebration even in the midst of a work day; perhaps better put, a work day begins and ends with the Lord’s Day.²⁴⁹

The Lord’s Day: Paul’s Letters

The first appearance of the Lord’s Day is found in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. While it does not explicitly mention worship, it does point to a gathering of Jesus followers and the invitation to bring an offering during that gathering: “Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come.”²⁵⁰ While some argue against the first day of the week and Sunday worship being one and the same,²⁵¹ it seems reasonable to presume that the weekly gathering, every week, on the first day of the week, fits into a pattern for the followers of Jesus to gather, as will be demonstrated.

²⁴⁹ James Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Beginning in Jerusalem* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 642.

²⁵⁰ 1 Cor 16:1–2, NRSV

²⁵¹ Turner argues that Sunday worship and the first day of the week are not compatible until after the first century: “the first day has nothing to do with what he considers to be later Sunday worship.” See Max Turner, ‘The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts’, in *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day*, ed. by Don Carson (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1999), pp. 99–158 (p. 131).

The second reference to the first day in Paul's writings is in Romans:

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.²⁵²

In this instance, Paul is making a case for a certain day to be understood as special, different from other workdays. On this day, for those who observe it, Paul says that it is in honour of the Lord as opposed to, say, Aphrodite or Zeus or a local deity. Those who eat or abstain from eating do so in honour of the Lord, meaning that the feast is not dedicated to any god or gods or patronage or honour status, as will be discussed fully in the next chapter.

In the teachings of the *Didache*, an instruction manual of sorts for the followers of Jesus, we find the term "the day of the Lord" clearly describing a gathering of the followers of Jesus for worship.

On the day which is the Day of Lord gather together for the breaking of the loaf and giving thanks. However, you should first confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be a pure one; and do not let anyone who is having a dispute with a neighbour join until they are reconciled so that your sacrifice many not be impure, and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.²⁵³

The Lord's Day: The Gospels and Revelation

Gathering together on the first day, the Day of the Lord, is described in all four gospels, beginning with Mark, Matthew, and Luke-Acts:

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.²⁵⁴

Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those

²⁵² Romans 14:5–6, NRSV

²⁵³ Thomas O'Loughlin, *The Didache* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), p. 93.

²⁵⁴ Mark 16:1–2, NRSV

who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.²⁵⁵

The Gospel of Mark clearly indicates that the Jewish Sabbath was over, meaning the day of rest was complete by the setting of the sun on Saturday; then, early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, Mark is as clear as he can be in the timeline. On Sunday morning, a work day in the Roman Empire, as the sun rose, three women missed going to work and instead were making their way down to the graveyard. In the second ending to the Gospel of Mark, we hear Mark tell his listeners once again that he rose early on the first day of the week. Mark indicates that before everyone headed out to work, the resurrection of Jesus Christ occurred. Matthew tells a similar story, clearly pointing out that the Sabbath was over and that the morning sun was just breaking the horizon when Jesus was raised to life—but this time, only two women skipped their morning work to go to the graveyard. “After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.”²⁵⁶ Finally, in Luke, we notice that there is no mention of the Sabbath, no mention of how many or who is missing work to go to the graveyard, only that it is the first day of the week, and it is early dawn: “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.”²⁵⁷

In the second half of Luke’s Gospel, the Book of Acts, in an account that is distinctly different from the break-of-dawn stories, we hear that Paul is with the followers of Jesus late in the evening and that he is leaving first thing in the morning: “On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight. There were many lamps in the

²⁵⁵ Mark 16:9–11, NRSV

²⁵⁶ Matt. 28:1, NRSV

²⁵⁷ Luke 24:1, NRSV

room upstairs where we were meeting.”²⁵⁸ What is not clear is if this gathering began in the morning, and because of Paul’s talking, they were all still gathered late into the evening. It is unlikely, as most people would have to go to work; however, certainly this is a humorous moment in the text indicating that Paul was long-winded. Perhaps Eutychus needed a little extra instruction. Or, if one remembers what Pliny said about gathering in the morning before dawn and in the evening after work, perhaps this is simply a story about evening worship with a meal.

Before moving on to John’s Gospel, it needs to be mentioned that Jesus, Paul, and presumably numerous Jewish followers of Jesus struggled with which day to worship Jesus, as both Jesus and Paul observed the Sabbath. It is noteworthy that in Paul’s letters he does not mention worshipping Jesus or celebrating the resurrection on the Sabbath—only that he went to the synagogue to teach, proclaim, and evangelize about Jesus Christ, which again, very peculiarly, is only found in Luke’s book of Acts. There is a profound difference between going somewhere to find an audience to share the good news about Jesus and attending a gathering where one is worshipping. In Jesus’ case, according to the Gospel accounts, he goes into the synagogue not to worship but to proclaim the good news of God.

In Mark, we notice that Jesus is reinterpreting the Sabbath: “Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath,’” establishing himself as the Lord, the source of the Sabbath and then teaching his declaration, “On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue.”²⁵⁹ Mark offers a bold move in claiming that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.

²⁵⁸ Acts 20:7–8, NRSV

²⁵⁹ Mark 2:27–28, NRSV; Mark 6:2, NRSV

Matthew, making the same claim, concludes, “Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”²⁶⁰ Following the Beatitudes, Matthew is making a case that followers of Jesus do not have to follow Sabbath restrictions if they are looking after and loving their neighbour.

In Luke, Jesus is much softer in his approach, emphasizing the teaching aspect of the Sabbath. Consider the following passages: “When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read”; “He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbath.”; “Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught”;²⁶¹ Then, expounding on his teaching, Jesus asks, “is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?”²⁶² which is really Jesus’, in Luke, approach to the Sabbath restrictions. Jesus even extends his argument to a beast of burden: “If one of you has a child^[c] or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?”²⁶³

Following a similar pattern to Jesus, Paul, in the book of Acts, also restricts his Sabbath interactions to proclamation and teaching: “And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.”²⁶⁴ Or consider this example of how, from the synagogue gathering, the entire gentile community wants to hear this “new” teaching that Paul is offering about Jesus Christ, on the Sabbath:

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and sat down....So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next

²⁶⁰ Matthew 12:8, NRSV

²⁶¹ Luke 4:16; Luke 4:31; Luke 6:6; Luke 13:10, NRSV

²⁶² Luke 6:9, NRSV

²⁶³ Luke 14:5, NRSV

²⁶⁴ Acts 16:13, NRSV

Sabbath...On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.²⁶⁵

Notice how Luke claims that it was Paul's "custom" to go to the synagogue: "Then Paul, as his custom was, went into them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures."²⁶⁶ Finally, in Acts 18, Luke highlights how Paul is travelling throughout the Roman Empire, following his pattern of proclaiming about Jesus, on the Sabbath, in the synagogue:

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila from Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. Every Sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.²⁶⁷

On the first day of the week, it is curious that Paul makes little mention in his letters of the Sabbath, except in broad strokes, not being under the law, but free in Christ. Yet the Gospels, and especially Luke-Acts, redefine what Sabbath means and does not mean for followers of Jesus. This brings us to the Gospel of John, written after Mark, Matthew, and Luke-Acts.

Similar to Mark, Matthew, and Luke-Acts, John names the first day of the week, noting that it was still dark: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb."²⁶⁸ What is different here is that the phrase "while it is still dark" also tells the listener that not only are most still sleeping but that the work day has not yet begun. Later, that same day, the first day of the week, Jesus appears to his disciples and does two things: first, he gifts them with the Holy Spirit, as discussed earlier, and second, he offers peace. On the first day of the

²⁶⁵ Acts 13:14, 42, 44, NRSV

²⁶⁶ Acts 17:2, NRSV

²⁶⁷ Acts 18:1–4, NRSV

²⁶⁸ John 20:1, NRSV

week, there is a gift of peace: “When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’”²⁶⁹ Finally, following the theme of peace, earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus heals someone on the Sabbath, and on the heels of the rebuke for breaking the Sabbath law, Jesus turns the argument around and proclaims that the Sabbath is also a day for healing: “If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”²⁷⁰ The day of the Lord is a day filled with healing, with peace, with the promise of God’s empire dawning.

While a complicated text, it is fascinating to note that in the book of Revelation, followers of Jesus hear a developed clarion call for the day of the Lord:

I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”²⁷¹

In the opening lines of the book of Revelation, a book about the final battle between good and evil, there are these lingering lines: “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s Day.” By then in the early church communities, these words were a clear code for “I was in the spirit, on the first day of the week, when I was gathered with others, in the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ.” And in that spirit, John shares the triumph of God’s empire over the Roman empire.

The Lord’s Day: The Letters of Ignatius of Antioch

²⁶⁹ John 20:19, NRSV

²⁷⁰ John 7:23–24, NRSV

²⁷¹ Revelation 1:9–11, NRSV

Finally, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop of Antioch, are traditionally interpreted, via Eusebius, as during the reign of Trajan circa 110 CE, but recent scholarship indicates that Ignatius was executed by the Roman Empire in the 140s CE at the earliest, under the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–61).²⁷² We hear that followers of Jesus are entrusted with new hope, and that one does not need to observe the Sabbath but instead live in observance of the Lord's Day. This is a crucial development and indicates how attitudes shift over time. While Ignatius does not describe how one lives observing the Lord's Day, it is reasonable to presume that it means gathering with other followers of Jesus for worship: "If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death."²⁷³

Then, in his letter to the Trallians, we encounter a fascinating analogy of what the Sabbath means for Christians. Ignatius is brilliant in his metaphor as he honours the Sabbath but redefines it to fit with his Christology and reaffirmation of the Lord's Day. Notice how Ignatius even uses Jonah, a Jewish prophet, to illustrate his point:

He also rose again in three days, the Father raising Him up; and after spending forty days with the apostles, He was received up to the Father, and "sat down at His right hand, expecting till His enemies are placed under His feet." On the day of the preparation, then, at the third hour, He received the sentence from Pilate, the Father permitting that to happen; at the sixth hour He was crucified; at the ninth hour He gave up the ghost; and before sunset He was buried. During the Sabbath He continued under the earth in the tomb in which Joseph of Arimathaea had laid Him. At the dawning of the Lord's day He arose from the dead, according to what was spoken by Himself, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the

²⁷² Timothy Barnes, in his persuasive article, notes that "Ignatius' knowledge of Ptolemaeus provides just such a decisive proof. It was probably in the 140s that Ignatius was sent from Antioch to Rome under military escort by way of the south coast of Asia Minor. That he was exposed to wild beasts in Rome during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–61) will not surprise anyone who has correctly analysed the nature and incidence of the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire during the age of the Antonines." Barnes's research points out that Eusebius's dating may have been for the purpose of establishing the "threefold ministry" of bishop, presbyter, deacon for the first century. Timothy Barnes, 'The Date of Ignatius', *The Expository Times*, 120(3) (2008), pp. 119–130 (p. 128), <http://ext.sagepub.com/content/120/3/119>.

²⁷³ Ignatius of Antioch, 'Letter to the Magnesians', in *Early Christian Writers*, trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, p. 9. <http://earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-magnesians-roberts.html>.

Son of man also be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The day of the preparation, then, comprises the passion; the Sabbath embraces the burial; the Lord's Day contains the resurrection.²⁷⁴

Like the consistency and expectations of the Sabbath for Jews, counting down to the Friday sunset, followers of Jesus could also anticipate that on Sunday, the first day of the week, they would celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, wherever they were in the Roman Empire. Beginning with Paul's request that followers of Jesus bring their offering when they gather on the first day of the week, through to the Gospel's declaration of the resurrection on the first day of the week, to the Sabbath as the Lord's, which is reimagined from a day of non-work to a day of healing, joy, and peace, to John's proclamation of gathering in the Spirit, to the Lord's Day as containing the resurrection—all this suggests that a mark of being a follower of Jesus is to gather on the first day of the week in celebration of the resurrection. It is overwhelming to imagine that throughout the Roman Empire, at the break of dawn, on the first day of the week, before the household oil lamps were lit, all gathered together to worship. Then, after a day of work, on that same day, at the setting of the sun, followers of Jesus gathered together to worship and eat together.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE MEAL

On the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, followers of Jesus gathered together to worship and to eat a meal as a community. The sunrise gathering, as previously explored, would consist of prayer, perhaps the reading of a Psalm or hymn, and most importantly, prayer for the Holy Spirit to provide what was needed for that day. The evening gathering, however, was much more structured and likely followed Roman evening meal traditions, but in order to speak about meal traditions, we must recognize the powerful influence of one's family identity and then one's associations in the community.

ROMAN MEALS

Depending on where one lived, one belonged to common religious, social, political, and economic organizations—for example, the society of Aphrodite, the guardian of the city, and the protector of women. The inscriptions described the monument and the names associated with the gift; in this inscription, a synagogue leader is, interestingly, both a member of the society of Aphrodite and dedicating a monument, a statue of the goddess.

On behalf of the leader and king Pairisades, son of king Pairisades, mother-adoring, queen Kamasarye daughter of Spartokos, child-adoring, and Argotas son of Isanthos, husband of queen Kamasarye, the synagogue-leader (synagōgos) Theokritos son of Demetrios and (10) the society-members (thiasitai) dedicated the monument to Aphrodite Ourania ("Heavenly") ... of Apatouron (?) ... guardian goddess. (AGRW ID# 1753)²⁷⁵

There might be a cultural identity association; for example, in Thessaloniki, there was a large population of Diasporic Jews, and in this inscription, it is clear that the association is with the synagogue in Thessaloniki, and that its membership with the synagogue included funerary rites:

²⁷⁵ Ascough and Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World*, 190.

Marcus Aurelius Jakob, also called Eutychios, while he was still alive, prepared this for his wife Anna who is also called Asynkriton and for himself as a memorial. If anyone buries another here, he shall pay the synagogues (*synagōgai*) 75,000 shiny denarii.²⁷⁶

Occupational associations provided guilds and clubs related to masonry, weaving, wine making, etc. For example, “The city, the association of Roman merchants, and the inhabitants dedicated this to emperor Caesar Augustus, god, son of god.”²⁷⁷ Or, “To good fortune! The guild (*synergasia*) of silversmiths (*argyrokopoi*) and goldsmiths (*chrysochooi*), having repaired a statue of Athena, restored her for the homeland when L. Vinicius was civic commander (*stratēgountos epi tōn hoplōn*).”²⁷⁸ Regarding public works, consider this honour offered by a corporate body of Judeans for an unnamed benefactor:

Whereas Decimus Valerius Dionysios son of Gaius . . . is an honorable and good man and continues . . . and does good whenever he is able, both for the community and for each of the citizens individually, and . . . he had the amphitheater floors plastered and the walls painted.

The leaders and the corporate body (*politeuma*) of the Judeans in Berenike resolved to engrave his name in the . . . and to be free from services (*leitourgia*) of every kind. Likewise they resolved to also crown him with an olive crown and wool ribbon at each meeting (*synodos*) and new moon. Now after they have engraved the decree on a monument of white Parian stone, let the leaders (*archontes*) place it in a conspicuous place in the amphitheater.

All pebbles white. (AGRW ID# 3311)²⁷⁹

Notice the details of the work: that he is honourable and good and does what he can for both individuals and the community, the honour of an olive crown and wool ribbon to be presented to him at each meeting, and that all the pebbles were white, indicating a unanimous decision.

Focusing on three particular aspects of associations, guilds and clubs, membership, ethical codes of behaviour, and a meal, it will be demonstrated that the followers of Jesus’

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 52.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 37.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 114.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 190.

gatherings were not unusual but were unique.²⁸⁰ While the examples could be exhaustive, a single example illustrates the point.

Often associations, guilds, and clubs had a membership fee; for example, in 57 BCE in Athens, this inscription was discovered:

The association (*koinon*) of the Hero-devotees resolved to make provision for the income of the association, so that those of the Hero-devotees who are away from home for whatever reason shall pay three drachmas for the sacrifices, and those living at home but not in attendance shall be required to pay six drachmas as the contribution, and they shall not receive the portion of the sacrifice. And if they do not make a contribution, it was resolved that they should not participate in the contribution-society (*eranos*), except if one should be absent because of mourning or because of sickness.²⁸¹

The followers of Jesus, while not having a membership fee, requested a free-will offering (1 Cor. 16:1–4) and relied on the support of generous patrons to provide a place to gather and food to eat (1 Cor. 16:19; Romans 16:5).

Associations, guilds, and clubs often had a code of ethical behaviour. While too long to reproduce, an inscription from Egypt between 14 and 37 CE offers an excellent example of the expectations of the guild for sheep or cattle owners. There were banquet requirements, fines for misbehaviour, and customs to be observed and expectations when a member died. Perhaps most intriguing, while the members are publicly named, which was common practice for associations, guilds, and clubs, the author of the inscription tells the reader that members of this guild are illiterate.²⁸²

Roman meal compared to various Christian communities

The followers of Jesus had a variety of ethical standards and expectations. Taking, for example, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Paul is clear about sexual immorality (1 Cor.

²⁸⁰ John Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 33.

²⁸¹ Ascough and Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World*, p. 12.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 183.

5:9-13), lawsuits amongst believers (1 Cor. 6:1-8), fornication and adultery (1 Cor 6:9-11), marriage (1 Cor 7:1-16), eating (1 Cor), orderly worship (1 Cor 14:26-40) and the giving of money to the community (1 Cor 16:1-4). The following of group norms and expectations of an association, guild, or club would be without question in the Roman world.²⁸³ What was not expected was that the followers of Jesus would challenge the Roman culture of sex, drinking, worship of deities, and banquets, imposing such high ethical standards to remain a member in good standing. While there was not a fee for joining for Jesus followers, there was certainly a significant cultural cost. Even though Paul writes and asks the Corinthian congregation, “What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?”,²⁸⁴ perhaps some would have preferred the stick.

Finally, the evening meal, lasting about three hours, beginning before sunset, ending with darkness, was a time for feasting, drinking, entertainment, and conversation; it was the highlight of Roman cultural society.²⁸⁵ Whether the banquet was philosophical, sacrificial, or a gathering of a club or association, there would come at some point, usually the beginning, an acknowledgment of the gods and the Emperor.²⁸⁶ New Testament scholar Dennis E. Smith points out that the Roman meal “used the common meal symbols of celebration, community, and equality as constituent parts of its religious definition and developed rules of social obligation based on that idealization of the meal.”²⁸⁷ New Testament scholar Richard S. Ascough dives straight into the event itself, with all of its embedded meanings:

Communal meals in Roman antiquity were framed as semi-public events. While not everyone was invited—indeed, only a small cadre of the especially chosen took part—banquets were often located and structured so that they could be observed, to a

²⁸³ John Kloppenborg, ‘Associations, Guilds, Clubs’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, ed. by Risto Uro et al., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 154–170 (p. 155).

²⁸⁴ 1 Cor 4:21 NRSV

²⁸⁵ Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), p. 58.

²⁸⁶ Alan Streett, *Subversive Meals* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), p. 46.

²⁸⁷ Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 85.

greater or lesser degree. With the meal setting itself, seating arrangements were such that each participant was also an observer. The rituals and ritualized behaviours that were embedded into the communal meals served primarily to negotiate social relations among participants and observers. Strong social bonds were forged and maintained among those present at the meal, and when fractures occurred through aberrant behaviours, regulations ensured that decorum was re-established. At the same time, Roman social differentiation was also clear and obvious throughout the meal, and not all participants were treated equally.²⁸⁸

To be clear, the communal meals were not for the elite alone but for nearly every class; keeping in mind the discussion about associations, guilds, and clubs, there were various social classes represented among members—but as one went down the social status pecking order, the meal quality decreased. Make no mistake, the Roman meal, with its emphasis on status, seating arrangements, food quality, wine quality, entertainment, and conversation, was a performative event. These events reinforced social bonding with people who were of the same status or above one's status as meals of association and belonging.²⁸⁹ While the details vary, it is crucial to understand that the early followers of Jesus were not unique in that they gathered for a meal together; how they gathered, with whom, and how they worshipped were peculiar, but their gathering would have resembled numerous groups, before sunset, throughout the Roman Empire.

It is an important point that followers of Jesus resembled other groups gathering to eat because critics claimed that the Jesus meal was either a version of the outlawed Bacchus gathering or a revision of the Jewish Passover meal. While we can agree that the followers of Jesus certainly did not follow Jewish purity laws or kosher laws in their dining practices, there is little to no evidence of meal practices in Palestine in the first century. Smith writes:

Formal meals in the Mediterranean culture of the Hellenic and Roman periods, the period encompassing the origin and early development of Christianity, took on a homogeneous form. Although there were many minor differences in the meal customs

²⁸⁸ Richard Ascough, 'Communal Meals', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, ed. by Risto Uro et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 204–19 (p. 204).

²⁸⁹ Zeba Crook and Gary Stansell, 'Friendship and Gifts', in *The Ancient Mediterranean Social World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020), p. 258.

as practiced in different regions and social groups, the evidence suggests that meals took similar forms and shared similar meanings and interpretations across a broad range of the ancient world.²⁹⁰

And New Testament scholar Vojtech Kase puts it this way,

From what scanty evidence is available, it appears that Judaic festive meals in Palestine were greatly influenced by Greco-Roman norms (Kraemer 2010: 413-18). It therefore does not make sense to argue that the background of Jesus' Last Supper is in the Judaic tradition of the Passover meal, and that consequently this was the source upon which Jesus' followers modelled their communal meals known as the Eucharist.²⁹¹

Finally, McGowan makes sure that we are clear that “the normative pattern of bread and wine central to the Christian communal meal reflects the staple food and drink of the ancient Mediterranean, not just a specific ritual or tradition associated with Jesus.”²⁹² At the heart of the identity of the followers of Jesus was the meal. When gathered together to eat,²⁹³ they worshipped, prayed, learned, sang, and encouraged one another.²⁹⁴ The meal was central to the community, and it was, interestingly, because of the meal that new people were excited to join; for others, it was the source of their criticism of or attack on the followers of Jesus. The explicit evidence of the meal of the followers of Jesus is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the Didache, the gospels, and the letters of St. Ignatius.

The Meal: Paul

²⁹⁰ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 2.

²⁹¹ Vojtech Kase, 'Meal Practices', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, ed. by Risto Uro et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 409–425 (p. 410).

²⁹² Andrew McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship* (Ada: Baker Academic Publishing, 2014), p. 23.

²⁹³ Hurtado reminds us that a gathering of Christians to eat, in Roman cities, would range between a few to, at most, fifty. “Excavation of the homes of the prosperous in Roman cities shows that dining rooms could rarely accommodate groups of more than nine or so, when one allows for couches on which diners reclined in the Hellenistic fashion that was so widely followed in the Roman period. Even if the atrium area of the home were used for additional dining space, most Roman villas could have accommodated a group no larger than 40 to 50.” Larry Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), p. 41.

²⁹⁴ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 159.

Paul writes to the Corinthian followers of Jesus, in the first section of the letter, explicitly about abuses at the Lord's Supper. One can hear the frustration in his voice as he begins with a list of admonishments:

Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!²⁹⁵

First, when you gather as a church, you are “divided into factions.” Paul is not clear on this point, but it appears that everyone brings their own food and drink to the meal, and when the time arises to eat together, one is full while another is hungry, and one is drunk while another is sober. If this is the case, then Paul is identifying clearly that the social status of the members is quite different, for mentioning that one is full and drunk implies that there is enough food and drink. Asking those who have plenty of food and drink if they cannot eat and drink at home before the gathering is interesting as one would think that Paul would implore the followers of Jesus in Corinth to share what they bring, so that all have enough, but he does not. Instead, Paul is stating that by bringing enough food and drink for oneself alone and consuming it, one is humiliating those who have nothing. When Paul asks if he should commend those who have plenty, his rhetorical question reveals the previous discussion about status in the group. Should I applaud you, that you have so much food and drink, he asks, because that is how the Roman banquets operate—through a semi-public display of status and wealth? Paul adds one more twist when speaking about the humiliation of those who have nothing; anyone who has nothing—for example, a slave, or anyone who

²⁹⁵ 1 Cor 11:17–22 NRSV

has gone hungry while staring at their master's table—can not only relate but also join in Paul's rebuke. The meal, as Paul claims, is for all to participate in, not just some.

Next, Paul turns to what O'Loughlin states is “an account of a memory of an activity by Jesus which is intended as giving guidance to the performance of an activity.”²⁹⁶ First, Paul is claiming that he, first-hand from Jesus, received instructions about what he is to tell the Corinthian followers of Jesus; second, he is reminding the Corinthians that he has already passed on this tradition to them. Paul is as clear as he can be: this ritual of eating needs to be remembered correctly and re-enacted with intention.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.²⁹⁷

Paul frames the meal in its context of the betrayal of Jesus, reminding the Corinthians that Jesus is Lord, a political, social, and theological declaration that Caesar is not Lord but Jesus is. The words “on the night” indicate that it was an evening meal that the Corinthians were gathered at. Finally, “was betrayed” invites the listener to begin the story in their imagination. Like “once upon a time,” “on the night he was betrayed” marks the entry point to the betrayal, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

As the story begins to unfold in the midst of the gathered community, Paul's next move describes what Jesus did in the midst of betrayal: “he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you.’” While much has been written about these words, the point is that Jesus, surrounded by his disciples, took the common, the ordinary—a simple loaf of bread that was the staple food for all people, that

²⁹⁶Thomas O'Loughlin, *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London: T&T Clark Publishing, 2015), p. 4.

²⁹⁷ 1 Cor 11:23–26, NRSV

could be found anywhere in the empire—gave thanks to God, an acknowledgement that God is the source of everything, even this simple loaf of bread, then broke it and reinterpreted what broken bread meant to his followers: “My body that is for you.” Every time the disciples saw bread broken, they would be instantly reminded of this meal. It takes little explanation to point out that in order to eat bread, one must break it. What is different now is that that bread, in this meal of the followers of Jesus, is his body, a gift for each follower. Each person at the meal is somebody who will receive a piece of broken bread that is Jesus' body, even the one who betrays him. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore, it is interesting to ponder that Jesus gave bread to the one who betrays, who denies, and all who will flee into the night, especially in the context of the followers of Jesus navigating the Roman world of idols and emperors and their constant decision making about what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus. The final line of the bread section, “Do this in remembrance of me,” reemphasizes Paul's point: Remember what has been handed down to me and then you. Further, when Jesus invites us to remember him, there is again a powerful moment of imagination. For what do you remember about Jesus? Remember me, Jesus asks, when you hear the story of the good Samaritan: attend to those on the margins. Remember me when you heard the Beatitudes, and remind the poor that they are blessed, not cursed. Remember me when you hear about a king who held a great banquet and invited those from the highways to feast at the king's table. Remember me when you pray “Our father,” to eat with anyone, to forgive as you are forgiven by God. Remember me when you hear that Pilate, the Roman, has sentenced me to death; never forget that on the third day, the first day of the week, I was raised to life, and with it, God's empire was let loose on earth, as it is in heaven. Yes, “do this”—the breaking of the bread—in memory of me.

Next, Paul turns his attention to the cup. After supper, Paul reminds us, as in a Roman banquet, Jesus took the cup and proclaimed that “this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Once again, a cup of wine, a common staple throughout the Roman Empire, is infused with new meaning. The new covenant implies God’s new promise, which in its newness is filled with mystery, joy, celebration. As often as you drink it, remember me. Paul concludes his memory of what Jesus taught him about the meal with “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,” which clearly suggests that this Jesus meal was not restricted or limited to one day per week but rather was an invitation for followers of Jesus to participate in as often as they gathered together. As often as we participate in this meal, “you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” This final statement anticipates that Jesus will return, a statement that Paul develops in his eschatological understanding of the imminent return of Jesus.

This Jesus meal, as Paul remembers it, is definitely not an “anything goes” occasion. Paul has already spoken about the abundance and scarcity of food and drink; he has described clearly, again, how the meal is to be re-enacted. Paul now turns to those who are abusing their membership in this Jesus group:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.²⁹⁸

Not much needs to be added to Paul’s admonishments. Eating and drinking at the Supper require self-examination. While he does make a list of what to examine, we can hear the

²⁹⁸ 1 Cor 11:27-34, NRSV

philosopher's voice emerging: What are your intentions? How are your relationships? Are you preoccupied with many things or focused on receiving the Lord's meal? Paul turns up the rhetoric with this declaration or warning: if one does not examine oneself, one may become weak, or ill, or die. But in reality, he is returning to where he began his argument: search yourself. Can you not see for yourself that one should not go hungry while another is full? This leads him to his conclusion on the Lord's meal: "So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another." And he suggests that he has more to teach them about the meal: "About the other things I will give instructions when I come."

The Meal: The Didache

In the teaching of the Didache, the Lord's supper, the Eucharist, is described in great detail and with a number of additions to Paul's instructions to the Corinthians. The opening lines of Chapter 9 of the Didache are awkward in that the Lord's supper is described as the Eucharist: "And concerning the Eucharist, hold Eucharist thus."²⁹⁹ However, it becomes clear that the author is simply pointing out that one is giving thanks to God, in this way.³⁰⁰

The Didache, having already addressed how a follower of Jesus is to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays and to pray (Did. 8:1–3), now turns to the Jesus meal itself:

First concerning the Cup, "We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David thy child, which, thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be glory for ever." And concerning the broken Bread: "We give thee thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy Child. To thee be glory for ever."³⁰¹

While it is interesting that the cup precedes the bread, more importantly, the Didache tells the community what it is to say, to remember, and to re-enact when gathered to pour the cup and

²⁹⁹The Didache, "Early Christian Writings," 9:1. <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-lake.html>.

³⁰⁰O'Loughlin, *The Didache*, p. 85.

³⁰¹Didache, "Early Christian Writings," 9:2–3.

break the bread.³⁰² The imagery of the broken bread is breathtaking: “As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, but was brought together and became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy Kingdom, for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever.”³⁰³ There is a boundary line established: “But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, ‘Give not that which is holy to the dogs.’”³⁰⁴ Baptism becomes the entry point for gathering at the Lord’s meal. While that may irritate some, considering the discussion on status in the Roman Empire, does it not make sense that in Jesus’ community, one would be baptized, as discussed earlier, in the Holy Spirit, and thus every person would have equal status?³⁰⁵ To push further, considering that baptism was available, at no cost, to anyone who sought it, regardless of gender, language, economics, geography, etc., baptism in the Holy Spirit—the great equalizer of status—seems God-inspired.

Once the meal is finished, which in the *Didache* is described as a full meal, the *Didache* tells us the prayers of thanksgiving and celebration that its community used:

But after you are satisfied with food, thus give thanks: "We give thanks to thee, O Holy Father, for thy Holy Name which thou didst make to tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy Child. To thee be glory for ever. Thou, Lord Almighty, didst create all things for thy Name's sake, and didst give food and drink to men for their enjoyment, that they might give thanks to thee, but us hast thou blessed with spiritual food and drink and eternal light through thy Child. Above all we give thanks to thee for that thou art mighty. To thee be glory for ever. Remember, Lord, thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love, and gather it together in its holiness from the four winds to thy kingdom which thou hast prepared for it. For thine is the power and the glory for ever. Let grace come and let this world pass away.

³⁰² O’Loughlin, *The Didache*, p. 93.

³⁰³ *Didache*, “Early Christian Writings,” 9:4

³⁰⁴ *Didache*, “Early Christian Writings,” 9:5.

³⁰⁵ Fox reminds us, “The lasting impression left by the early church membership is one of social diversity. Yet it went with an ideal of human equality: in Christ, taught the Christians, all were equal and the distinctions of rank and degree were irrelevant.” Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 336.

Hosannah to the God of David. If any man be holy, let him come! if any man be not, let him repent: Maranatha, Amen."³⁰⁶

Finally, later in the Didache, in Chapter 14, the teaching is clear and reemphasizes many previously discussed items, but then adds one striking feature about reconciliation:

On the Lord's Day come together, break bread and hold Eucharist, after confessing your transgressions that your offering may be pure; but let none who has a quarrel with his fellow join in your meeting until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice be not defiled. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord, "In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice, for I am a great king," saith the Lord, "and my name is wonderful among the heathen."³⁰⁷

Whereas Paul focused on status and examining one's life, the Didache makes a bolder move and names confession and reconciliation. As Meeks points out, the Didache emphasizes the "integrative implications of the ritual."³⁰⁸ Now whether confession and reconciliation are to occur prior to meeting on the Lord's Day or prior to eating the Eucharist, the text is unclear, but either way, the Didache community is emphasizing that a Jesus follower needs to confess their transgressions. The text is silent on the question of to whom one needs to confess, but presumably it is to God. One also needs to seek reconciliation with anyone with whom one is in a quarrel. Without restating what was pointed out in a previous chapter, what is fascinating in this instance is that the Lord declares that "my name is wonderful among the heathen," which is unlikely given Roman sources, and yet a Jesus follower in this community needs to "confess and reconcile" with his brothers. It causes one to wonder if the Didache is referring only to members of the community. What if it isn't? What if the Didache is offering an invitation to reconcile with heathen, pagan, etc.?³⁰⁹

The Meal: The Gospel of Thomas

³⁰⁶ Didache, "Early Christian Writings," 10:1–6

³⁰⁷ Didache, "Early Christian Writings," 14:1–3

³⁰⁸ Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 97.

³⁰⁹ O'Loughlin, *The Didache*, p. 98.

Moving from Paul, the Didache, to the Gospel of Thomas, it is clear that one of the memories of Jesus' ministry by early Christian communities is the power of the banquet. The Gospel of Thomas offers several insights that highlight the meal and its participants. First, the story opens with the invitation; as demonstrated earlier, the invitation is anchored in status, honour, and shame. A slave is sent to invite the guests; one owed money, indicating that the invited guest is involved in trade or goods but will not attend. The next has bought a house, indicating significant wealth, and has been called away for a day, indicating that whoever called them is of greater importance than the dinner host. The next invited person is responsible for organizing a marriage banquet, indicating that that person is already engaged in the social status invitation game, not to mention the considerable attention necessary for organizing a wedding banquet. In regard to the third invitation, it is noteworthy that the initial invitation from the master is simply for an evening meal. Later, in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, it will be revealed that the initial invitation from the master is indeed a wedding banquet. Finally, the last invitee has bought an estate, indicating their wealth, and is off to collect the rent; they will not attend. The slave returns empty-handed and, in a Roman context, in shame, for his master has made all of these particular invitations, and they were all denied for reasons ranging from time, wealth, and preoccupation. Then, the reversal. What should be a moment of tremendous shame is turned into a moment that runs counter to the entire Roman meal customs; the invitation is offered to anyone the slave finds in the streets! Thomas describes it this way:

Jesus said, A person was receiving guests. When he had prepared the dinner, he sent his slave to invite the guests. The slave went to the first and said to that one, "My master invites you." That one said, "Some merchants owe me money; they are coming to me tonight. I have to go and give them instructions. Please excuse me from dinner." The slave went to another and said to that one, "My master has invited you." That one said to the slave, "I have bought a house, and I have been called away for a day. I shall have no time." The slave went to another and said to that one, "My master invites you." That one said to the slave, "My friend is to be married, and I am to

arrange the banquet. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me from dinner." The slave went to another and said to that one, "My master invites you." That one said to the slave, "I have bought an estate, and I am going to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me." The slave returned and said to his master, "Those whom you invited to dinner have asked to be excused." The master said to his slave, "Go out on the streets and bring back whomever you find to have dinner."³¹⁰

It is the last lines in particular that will resonate in the early Christian communities: "bring back whomever you find to have dinner."³¹¹

The Meal: The Gospels

In the gospels, the early communities of Jesus' followers remember and reflect on different aspects of the meal. We saw in Paul the complexities of the invitation; in the Gospels, following the Gospel of Thomas's lead, it is clear that the meal is the central activity of the gathering on the first day of the week. What is extremely interesting is, regardless of whether the meal is indoors or outdoors, the same formula emerges: "takes, gives thanks, breaks, shares." This pattern identifies the meal as being for a follower of Jesus. Beginning indoors, with the "last supper" in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, the emphasis on following the liturgical pattern and to "remember me" lingers.

In the Gospel of Mark's remembering of the story, we hear particular details about what happened prior to the meal. First, we are given the context, the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed. The early followers of Jesus remember that this Jesus meal occurs at Passover, not Yom Kippur (the day of atonement, when sins are forgiven) or Shavuot (when the Ten Commandments were received) or Chanukah (when the Temple was rededicated after resisting the Greeks). Each of those Jewish festivals would

³¹⁰ Gospel of Thomas, 64.

³¹¹ Van Eck adds, "Note, however, from the perspective of the kingdom of God, the point Jesus wanted to make with the parable. In the kingdom patrons are real patrons when they act like the host: giving to those who cannot give back, breaking down physical (walls) and manmade boundaries (purity and pollution), and treating everybody as family (generalized reciprocity), without being afraid of being shamed." Ernest van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2016), p. 115.

have been suitable to remember Jesus celebrating a meal with his disciples, especially Yom Kippur, but it is the Passover, the celebration of freedom from slavery, that is remembered. Mark describes it this way: “So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.”³¹² Waiting for sunset, Jesus gathered with his twelve disciples, and once they had taken their places, which Mark does not describe according to who sat where to indicate the order of social status, they ate. It is noteworthy that the passage following the Jesus meal has James and John arguing with one another about who can sit at Jesus’ left and right side in glory. Perhaps there was more to the seating arrangements in Mark’s story than we are told! Jesus disrupts the festive meal with the accusation or statement that “one of you” will betray me. Following a scurry of “not me” replies, Jesus says, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me.”³¹³ Again, it is interesting to note that, for Mark, Jesus talks about betrayal, and either everyone continues eating, with an awkward conversation hanging in the air or Mark is describing a different point in the meal. Either is plausible as the text does not offer a timestamp. Remembering Paul’s letter to the Corinthians and the Didache, it is clear that Mark’s community has learned the cadence of “take, bless, break, give.”

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”³¹⁴

Mark describes the meal following the pattern of Paul and the Didache; what is unique is how Mark’s community emphasizes the cup. Mark will ask the listener repeatedly if Jesus followers can “drink the cup that Jesus drinks” or be “baptized with the baptism that Jesus is

³¹² Mark 14:16, NRSV

³¹³ Mark 14:30, NRSV

³¹⁴ Mark 14:22–25, NRSV

baptized in,” which is Mark’s community’s way of asking the Jesus followers if they are willing to share in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus regardless of the cost. Finally, the meal that Jesus offers, his body and the blood of the covenant, celebrated on the Passover, neither requires a sacrificial animal nor the rituals associated with a sacrificial animal (cleaning, butchering), nor an appointed priest to offer the sacrifice. The Jesus meal is simply a meal that can be shared around a table, with Roman bread and perhaps Jewish wine, in memory of Jesus.

The followers of Jesus in Matthew’s community follow a similar pattern to Mark’s Gospel, beginning with the plot of betrayal, moving to the Passover preparation, adding only that there is a certain man, unnamed, that the disciples are to find and that, in his house, Jesus will celebrate the Passover. Similar to Mark, the betrayal story of dipping the bread in the bowl while they were eating is followed by “while they were eating” again, leaving either an awkward conversation or a different point of time in the meal.

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.³¹⁵

Matthew’s community remembers the meal slightly different from Mark’s, adding that Jesus instructs the disciples to drink the cup, with “all of you” indicating that even Judas, the betrayer in the story, is included and that the cup is “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” This addition continues the bloodless, sacrificial aspect of Jesus “sacrifice” that Mark’s community presents and profoundly includes Judas as a participant. To circle back to this meal being on the Passover, it is obvious that it could have occurred during the festival of

³¹⁵ Matt 26:14–35, NRSV

Yom Kippur (the forgiveness of sin), but the themes of freedom from slavery, God's liberation of God's people, and the Passover are crucial, as are the aspects of the forgiveness of sin that accompany Yom Kippur.

The Gospel of Luke frames the story with the chief priests and scribes looking for a way to kill Jesus, but they are afraid of the people; when Judas shows up, they are relieved that they can access Jesus without a crowd. Luke follows Mark's and Matthew's communities' memory of the meal. With the Unleavened Bread, the Passover, Peter and John are sent to the city to make arrangements. More details are offered as James and John are to find a person carrying a jug of water and then ask for a room in his guest house, indicating that this man has wealth, to eat the Passover meal.

Luke's community provides much more detail in its memory of Jesus' meal. Notice how Jesus "eagerly desires" to eat Passover with his disciples before he suffers; he changes the order of the meal—the cup is first—and he asks the disciples to "divide the cup amongst themselves," takes a "loaf" of bread, does this "in remembrance" of me, and then takes "the cup" again, after supper. The emphasis on the cup is key to Luke.

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table."³¹⁶

Following Mark and Matthew's memory, a squabble after the meal about greatness amongst the disciples emerges, only in Luke's remembering Jesus points back to the table as his example of greatness:

³¹⁶ Luke 22:14–21, NRSV

“For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials, and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”³¹⁷

The primary aspect of remembering the indoor meal, the last supper, in Mark, Matthew, and Luke’s Gospels is that Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and shares the bread and the cup, that those who participate in the meal are to remember Jesus in the breaking of the bread and the cup, that everyone receives both the bread and the cup, that this meal is sacrificial in terms of remembering Jesus but does not require making a sacrifice to an idol (through the Jerusalem Temple system, it is a bloodless sacrifice) and finally that this meal can be celebrated anytime, together, with ordinary bread and wine, common staples throughout the Roman Empire.

Turning to the outdoor meals, which include all four gospels and the book of Acts, it is clear that the “take, bless, break, and distribute” formula is in place, thus offering consistency. Beginning with the stories of the feeding of five thousand people, it is crucial that one realizes that the death of John the baptizer occurs immediately before the outdoor feeding stories. John the baptizer was executed by King Herod, and throughout Israel and the diaspora, there was political unrest. Recall the political drama that appointed Herod the King of the Jews as discussed earlier; Herod ordering the death of John was noteworthy and sent a clear message to the Jews regarding a prophet critiquing a Roman appointment. It is clear, as Mark, Matthew, and Luke recall this event, that there was tension in the air. Over five thousand men from the villages on the northern shore of the Galilee leave their places of work to find Jesus. The wildcat protest that results in five thousand men in the wilderness is key to the story. While many interpret this story through the lens of Moses and the outdoor

³¹⁷ Luke 22:27–30, NRSV

meal manna stories, it is clear that the gospel writers are communicating that a legion has been formed, a legion of five thousand men, which is the number of men in a Roman military unit. The gospel writers want us to recognize the power of the gathering, a full legion ready for battle. Mark describes it this way:

Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.” But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii[i] worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?” And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.³¹⁸

With five thousand men gathered, presumably ready for Jesus to give the battle cry of revenge, a dispute occurs about where the food will come from and how much it will cost. Remember that Caesar provides his armies with rations, bread, and wine; Jesus organizes the gathering into groups of fifties and hundreds—again, following a Roman legionary grouping system. Jesus then takes the loaves and fish, blesses them, breaks the bread, and distributes them, following the pattern for the meal. The story concludes with everyone gathering to eat, indicating that one’s worthiness or purity or status mattered; everyone received the meal and was filled. Finally, the meal that Jesus provided, in a legion of five thousand, was followed by Jesus’ teaching, which was presumably about inclusion, forgiveness, love of neighbour, and the blessing of the poor. The teaching of non-violence in a violent context was accompanied by the taking, blessing, breaking, and distributing of bread.

³¹⁸ Mark 6:32–44, NRSV

Matthew's memory of the feeding of the five thousand is similar, with the addition of Jesus curing the sick in the gathered crowd, the omission of how Jesus organized the men, and finally, the recollection that there were five thousand men, a legion, and women and children. Matthew's memory of the event is clear to identify that men, women, and children all ate the meal that Jesus provided.

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.³¹⁹

Luke remembers a similar version of Mark and Matthew's community but adds that Herod is perplexed about the death of John, locates the outdoor meal near Bethsaida, and includes the organizing of groups into fifty:

He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured. The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place." But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each." They did so and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.³²⁰

³¹⁹ Matthew 14:13–21, NRSV

³²⁰ Luke 9:10–17, NRSV

The Gospel of John remembers the story in a different order; in John's telling, Jesus' outdoor meal does not follow the death of John the baptizer. Instead, it follows a monologue about believing in Jesus, that is, trusting that Jesus' message is authentic and true. John retells the story with many of the same details as Mark, Matthew, and Luke but adds geographical differences like naming the sea of Galilee its Roman name, the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus climbing a mountain; adds a timeline, the Passover festival is near. Adds characters to move the drama of the story, Philip saying not enough money, the disciples pointing to a young boy with bread and fish, and finally he adds the detail that everyone had as much bread and fish as they wanted.

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.³²¹

It is important to note that only Mark and Matthew, in their memory of the outdoor Jesus meal, add the feeding of four thousand. This time there are seven loaves and some fish. Clearly, Mark and Matthew, given the geographical location of the stories, are focused on gentiles receiving the outdoor meal. All of the same elements of the stories of the feeding of the five thousand are present—take, bless, break and distribute—and Matthew's memory continues to name that women and children were there along with the four thousand men.

³²¹ John 6:1–15, NRSV

In Mark's retelling, the outdoor feeding story is preceded by the Pharisees looking for a sign and Jesus saying:

"I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance." His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.³²²

Matthew's retelling is set up with Jesus' teaching about what defiles people, the Canaanite woman's faith, and Jesus curing people without discrimination.

Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way." The disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" Jesus asked them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all of them ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children.³²³

The outdoor meals follow the pattern of Jesus' "take, bless, break, and distribute," making it immediately recognizable as a Jesus meal. This pattern is repeated in other feeding stories, such as Luke remembering Jesus' parable of the great dinner. As we explored in the Gospel of Thomas, Luke thus retells the story, adding a description of those invited from the streets such as the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, the same people that Jesus declared his mission was for:

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner

³²² Mark 9:2–10, NRSV

³²³ Matthew 15: 32–39, NRSV

and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”³²⁴

Matthew tells a similar story, but Matthew’s version focuses on wearing the proper garment to the meal, indicating that one must be baptized to enjoy the king’s feast or face the consequence of being removed and tossed into the outer darkness.

“So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are invited, but few are chosen.”³²⁵

In both Luke and Matthew, it is notable that missing from the story is “take, bless, break and distribute.” Instead, the focus is on who is invited to the banquet.

To return to Luke’s memory of the Jesus meal cadence of take, bless, break, and distribute, the story of the walk to Emmaus is profound. Following the death and resurrection of Jesus, Luke tells the listener that two disciples are walking away, heavy-hearted, from Jerusalem. It is interesting that they are walking away, as Jesus instructed his disciples to stay in the city until they were clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit. In any case, as these two disciples are walking away, Jesus appears in the stranger’s guise, shares in conversation about what happened to Jesus, and helps them reinterpret the event in terms of the Jewish

³²⁴ Luke 14:15-24, NRSV

³²⁵ Matthew 22:10-14, NRSV

scriptures, but it is not until the stranger takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and shares it that they realize that the stranger is Jesus himself. Jesus immediately disappears as the disciples recognize him in the breaking of bread.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.³²⁶

Luke continues to reinforce the pattern of take, bless, break, and distribute in the book of Acts. Following the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Luke remembers that the first converts, the first members of the church, were baptized and "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."³²⁷ Luke then adds that,

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Notice that in Luke's remembering they gather at the Temple, but Luke is clear: they broke bread at home, indicating that the house church movement, the gathering for the meal, happened at home. This detail once again points to the fact that the meal is not associated with the Jewish Temple but with the family home. Continuing in Acts, Luke reminds us that

³²⁶ Luke 24: 28-35, NRSV

³²⁷ Acts 2:42, NRSV

Paul met with followers of Jesus—notice that it was on the first day of the week—to break bread, which by now is code for the Jesus meal.

On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight. There were many lamps in the room upstairs where we were meeting.³²⁸

Finally, in Acts, Luke retells the story of a storm at sea where Paul is with a group of sailors who have not eaten for fourteen days. The time of day is fascinating as it is just before daybreak, indicating that it is before the workday begins. It is also interesting that Paul takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and then he eats and encourages the others to eat the bread.

Just before daybreak, Paul urged all of them to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food, having eaten nothing. Therefore, I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive; for none of you will lose a hair from your heads.” After he had said this, he took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat. Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves. (We were in all two hundred seventy-six persons in the ship.)³²⁹

The Gospel of John does not repeat the take, bless, break, and distribute formula in its memories of Jesus; instead, John’s community interprets what the meal means. Following the feeding of the five thousand, John remembers Jesus walking on water, and then, following that event, John has Jesus ask the crowd why they are following him—is it because he fills their bellies? But he then goes on to describe the bread as a gift that cannot be bought, sold, earned, or saved, only received and eaten. Using the example of manna, in the Moses story, John’s community tells the followers that God alone gives the bread of heaven:

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them,

³²⁸ Acts 20:7-8, NRSV

³²⁹ Acts 27:33-36, NRSV

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”³³⁰

This is followed by the theological testimony that Jesus is the bread of life who satisfies all hunger and thirst: “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”³³¹ The debate begins as this teaching is obviously confusing, so Jesus clarifies it by saying,

“I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.³³²

In John’s theological reflection on the Jesus meal, John is crystal clear that the Jesus meal is not a metaphor but the actual body and blood of Jesus and that if a Jesus follower eats the Jesus meal, then they are eating Jesus, who will offer everlasting life.

The Meal: Ignatius of Antioch

³³⁰ John 6:25–34, NRSV

³³¹ John 6:35, NRSV

³³² John 6:48–59, NRSV

Much could be written on the meaning of John's interpretation, but for the scope of this thesis, what is important to note is that John does not include the "take, bless, break, distribute" formula, perhaps because it was taken for granted by the time John remembers these events and John moves to interpret the meal as the actual flesh and blood of Jesus, a detail that is found in neither the indoor meal stories nor the outdoor meal stories of the gospel but a detail, a theology, that obviously circulated as we see in the writing of St. Ignatius, the third Bishop of Antioch, ca 140s CE under the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–61).³³³ Ignatius describes his journey to martyrdom:

I am God's grain, and I am being ground by the teeth of wild beasts in order that I may be found [to be] pure bread for Christ. My love has been crucified, and there is in me no fire of material love, but rather a living water, speaking in me and saying within me, 'Come to the Father.' I take no pleasure in corruptible food or in the delights of this life. I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who is the seed of David; and for drink I want his Blood which is incorruptible love.³³⁴

Prior to his martyrdom, Ignatius is clear in his view of the Jesus meal as the actual body and blood of Jesus, as he describes those who abstain from the meal and prayers:

They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes.³³⁵

LaVerdiere adds, "Focussed on his approaching martyrdom, he emphasized the Eucharist as the Church's celebration of Christ's sacrifice. Ever the pastor, concerned for the Churches he was leaving behind, his letters were written sermons on unity, on avoiding heresy and everything that was not in keeping with 'the gift of God' and the Eucharistic flesh

³³⁴ Ignatius, 'Letter to the Romans', in *Early Christian Writers*, Trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 7:3. <http://earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-romans-lightfoot.html>.

³³⁵ Ignatius, 'Letter to the Smyrnaeans', in *Early Christian Writers*, trans. by J. B. Lightfoot, 6:2–7:1. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-smyrnaeans-lightfoot.html>.

of Christ.”³³⁶ Following the early Jesus followers’ code for the meal, “take, bless, break and distribute,” it is clear that the Gospel of John and leaders like Ignatius, writing in 140s CE or later, add a theological interpretation to the meal, with a profound emphasis on unity and participation in the passion and resurrection of Christ.³³⁷ Rowan Williams summarizes it best,

As early as the beginning of the second century we find the martyred bishop Ignatius from Antioch calling Jesus ‘God’; Jesus needed no defense against rival, and so was free to take on himself the burden of human suffering without being crushed or destroyed by it. And because of his own freedom in the face of appalling suffering, he could make it possible for his disciples to face their own suffering with the same resolution and steadiness.³³⁸

It is the Eucharist that sustains and nourishes followers of Jesus to engage in the struggle of God’s hope.

The Jesus meal is central to the Jesus followers’ gatherings and worship. Unlike Roman banquets, the early followers of Jesus were clear that there is no hierarchical status at the meal; the meal is a simple meal of ordinary bread, occasionally fish and wine, and the Jesus meal is to be recognized in the taking, blessing, breaking, and distributing of the bread and cup. This Jesus meal is a profound leisure event as eating, in the Roman context, was a leisure event, a time for conversation, worship, eating, entertainment, etc. The followers of Jesus, while unique in their practices of the Jesus meal, as demonstrated, continued to gather to share in the meal. Surrounding the meal event was scripture reading, interpretation, conversation, the singing of hymns, etc., but at the heart of the gathering was the meal—a meal that everyone was welcome to attend and participate in, regardless of their life situation. The only entrance requirement to the meal was baptism, an act that reminded participants that death had no power over them, that status was such that everyone was equal in the community, and that there is new life in Jesus, which is nourished by a meal. This meal is not

³³⁶ Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 163.

³³⁷ Willy Rordorf, *The Eucharist of the Early Christians* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1976), p. 61.

³³⁸ Rowan Williams, *The Two Ways* (New York: Plough Publishing, 2018), p. xv.

a blood sacrifice to a marble god, not an animal slaughtered at the Jerusalem temple, but rather a meal in one's leisure before or after work; it is clear to see that in the early Christian communities the Holy Spirit was present as those who followed Jesus gathered on the first day of the week to take, bless, break, and distribute the bread and cup, as they worshipped and remembered Jesus Christ. This act of worship, no matter the diversity of practices, is at the core of Christian communities.³³⁹ This act leads followers of Jesus to arise from the table to then live out their faith in their daily lives, which sends ripples of confusion, questioning, and profound hope throughout the Roman Empire.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Jesus Remembered*, p. 230.

³⁴⁰ Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), p. 140.

CHAPTER EIGHT: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (POST-EATING ACTIVITY)

Following their gatherings on the Lord's Day—on the first day of the week, for a meal in which they remembered the death and resurrection of Jesus—the early Christian communities lived out their faith in their local communities. While it is unknown to what degree early Christians were committed, it is clear from the letters of Paul, the Didache, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospels that a loose blueprint of activity was being engaged in. The proof, outside of the early Christians' writing about themselves, is found in Roman writings about the early Christian groups. Reading the Roman and Christian sources together, it is evident that the various Jesus communities were making an impact. What is crucial to this thesis is the observation that the early Christian communities engaged their faith voluntarily,³⁴¹ and more often, their faith activities were either disrupted due to their work day or occurred before and after work.

ENGAGEMENT (POST-MEAL ACTIVITIES): PAUL

Starting with Paul's letters, it is established that Paul's first priority was not worshipping or sacrificing to idols. Fredriksen notes that “gentiles absolutely could not worship their own gods or sacrifice before their images anymore. By immersing in Jesus' name, by receiving the holy spirit, by being empowered to prophesy, to receive visions, to exorcise daemons, to heal, these ex pagans had to shut the door on the old age and step into the new.”³⁴² Paul makes it known that the idols are simply sticks, stones, and superstitions wrapped up in excellent storytelling, social traditions, and economic systems; hence offering sacrifices is a complete waste of time. This view alone caused a great deal of social anxiety in

³⁴¹ Larry Hurtado, *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), p. 71.

³⁴² Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 142.

the Roman communities as some Christian communities refused to participate in worshipping local gods or making a sacrifice to the Roman Emperor. Early Christian communities were able to draw on the Jewish exceptions for the worship of idols as they, in the early stages, were considered a version of Judaism, but as time progressed they were quickly seen by the Roman Empire and Jewish communities as quite distinct from Judaism. Added to this non-observance of local gods was that early Christian communities declared that none of the gods were real and that Jesus Christ, son of the one true living God, was the only God. In a Roman world where numerous gods were worshipped and religious tolerance for the diversity of gods was the social norm, this perception created a rupture in the shared communal life. Adding another layer to the complexity are the social and economic systems built around the festivals and worship of the numerous gods. While the story of Paul in Ephesus, in Acts, as the silversmiths' guilds, who make statues of Artemis protest Paul and his teaching, serves as a case in point (Acts 19:23–41), it is important to remember that no matter how much or little the early Christian communities disengaged with the Roman festivals and worship of gods, a leisure activity, their teachings alone caused instability and concern.

Paul's proclamation that the Roman gods are not real and the festivals are in celebration of idols creates an interesting dilemma for early Christian communities around eating. Often, in the marketplace, the meat, in particular, and occasionally the produce that was being sold had been dedicated as an offering to the Roman gods. This detail—that they are different from purchasing idols or sacred objects—is the basis of an important argument for Paul, which was agreed upon as meaningless; this argument is about whether Christian communities can eat the offered food. In Paul's time, all food was dedicated to a god of some sort, at some point in the process from planting to harvesting to the marketplace display. Paul responds by saying, yes, followers of Jesus can eat the offered food, but he adds the caveat

that if eating the offered food causes another believer to “stumble” then one should refrain from eating it. Again, this argument is crucial for leisure as most activities after work, as argued in the previous chapter, involve meals. If a follower of Jesus was not allowed to eat sacrificed meat, then they would immediately be ostracized from all social settings and their diet would be extremely limited. Paul writes, in First Corinthians (1 Cor 8:4-13) that while we are not to cause another believer to stumble, we are also aware that meats sacrificed to false idols is nothing more than meat.

Paul continues his argument regarding social engagements thus:

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, for “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.” If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I mean the other’s conscience, not your own.³⁴³

Finally, he concludes that, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.”³⁴⁴

The power of Paul’s argument is that followers of Jesus use their non-work time, their leisure time, to *not* engage in Roman leisure activities that are associated with Roman gods. This use of leisure, to not participate, in time will be viewed by the Romans as “deviant” leisure that needs to be addressed, as we will see in the letters of Pliny to the Emperor. The next significant argument of Paul is against the need for followers of Jesus to be

³⁴³ 1 Cor 10:25-29, NRSV

³⁴⁴ 1 Cor 10:31-33, NRSV

circumcised.³⁴⁵ On the surface, one might wonder what this has to do with leisure, but a closer investigation reveals that Paul's argument is about who can be included in the Jesus communities. While Paul argues against the need for circumcision, an act that only happens to Jewish males, he instead makes an argument for baptism. Baptism becomes the entry point into the communities of faith, an act in which anyone, regardless of gender, status, age, economics, etc., can participate. Baptism hence becomes the initiation ritual into a life of leisure, and it cannot be stressed enough that in baptism, all people who voluntarily engage in it belong and become members of this voluntary association. The decision to be baptized is the decision for a new life, for participants, in leisure, to follow the risen Christ in their daily activities.

Now, before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 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 Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.³⁴⁶

Paul reaffirms this point in his letter to the Romans, adding that a baptized follower of Jesus is a child of God and clothed in Christ. Paul also adds that, following our death, we will be united with Christ in the resurrection.

By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too 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.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Raymond Brown notes, "A most important decision was made in early Christian history when Peter, Paul, and James agree to admit Gentiles without requiring circumcision." Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p. 68.

³⁴⁶ Galatians 3:23–29, NRSV

³⁴⁷ Romans 6:2–5, NRSV

Who can participate as followers in the Jesus movement cannot be understated.

Considering the Roman system of status, the early Christian movement was turning heads by encouraging slaves, free men, women, eunuchs, prisoners, etc., to worship together, eat together, and serve the local community together, as equals in status, in Christ. The voluntary baptismal rite cut through all status, clearly marking each person simply as a member of the body of Christ; there was no hierarchy in the body. Paul will go to great lengths to emphasize this equality. While everyone has unique gifts and ministries, no one is above another.³⁴⁸ In fact, as the gospels reveal, to be the greatest, one must be a slave to all. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians about a slave's status:

Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God.³⁴⁹

Then again, in his letter to the Romans,

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."³⁵⁰

Finally, in a fascinating letter regarding a slave in Philemon, Paul is clear about the new relationship in Christ that both a master and slave need to embody. Note the voluntary invitation to not only hospitality but also brotherhood and belonging:

I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Neither Jew Nor Greek*, p. 824.

³⁴⁹ 1 Cor 7:21–24, NRSV

³⁵⁰ Romans 10:12–13, NRSV

³⁵¹ Philemon 1:13–17, NRSV

While the invitation to slaves to be full and equal members of Jesus' community of followers was revolutionary, another aspect, while not unique to the Roman Empire, was the significant leadership positions for women. Notice how Paul names Euodia and Syntyche as his 'co-workers':

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.³⁵²

Profoundly, in Romans 16 as Paul concludes his letter, there are numerous references to women in official leadership roles, such as Phoebe as well as Prisca and Aquila, co-workers of Paul and Mary, who "ha[ve] worked very hard for you." It is not to be missed that Andronicus and Junia, who are "prominent" among the apostles, were in Christ before Paul, meaning that their leadership predates even Paul.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.³⁵³

Stegemann and Stegemann point out that, "Unfortunately, an estimate of the proportion of women in the communities is hardly possible. Of approximately eight prosopography references that Meeks has collected from the letters of Paul (outside of the Pastoral letters and Acts), around one-fifth are women."³⁵⁴ Having established the varying degrees of social disruption in terms of not worshipping idols, eating the sacrificed and dedicated meat as the

³⁵²Philemon 4:2-3, NRSV

³⁵³Romans 16:1-7

³⁵⁴Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 389.

faith of others permits, baptism offering the entry point for all people and women clearly in roles of leadership,³⁵⁵ we move on to other aspects of leisure activities in Paul's letters. While not an exhaustive survey of leisure activities, it is important to remember that all of these actions are voluntary. First, the care for the poor is a prominent leisure activity. Throughout scripture, the care of the poor, orphans, and widows, which is to say, care of the vulnerable, is of the highest priority. The care of the poor is a pivotal leisure activity for the early Christian communities, an activity that will not only turn heads in the Roman Empire but also singlehandedly transform the pockets of Roman society. In a profound way, the early Christian communities' care of the vulnerable will identify and define their leisure activities:

and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do. You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you; though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.³⁵⁶

As noted in 1 Thessalonians 1:6–9 even in persecution they carried on with perseverance, knowing the difference that they were making. Using one's freedom, leisure becomes a way to serve one's neighbour: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ It is important to note that while the Didache is silent on the role of women, it can also be argued, as Crossan does, that, "the Didache's total silence about submission of wives to husbands and about their nonparticipation in leadership roles points more likely to Rose-Gaier's conclusion that 'there are no prohibitions recorded against women as trainers, baptizers, eucharistizers, apostles, prophets, or teachers so it must be assumed that these functioning roles within the community were open to women.'" John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 371.

³⁵⁶ Galatians 4:2–14, NRSV

³⁵⁷ Galatians 5:13–14, NRSV

Paul is consistent on the need for teaching, which implies a teacher and students; hence, in one's leisure, there is an opportunity for learning. More will be said about this when we come to virtue, but it is important to note a few aspects of teaching in the early Christian communities. First, the instruction is free, unlike in many philosophical schools: "What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation, I may make the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel."³⁵⁸ Second, it is available to all members of the communities regardless of status, gender, or class, whether slave or free, a profound offering when considering that it is possible that slaves would learn how to read and write in a Christian community. Finally, the opportunity for education in the communities of Jesus followers incorporated and reinterpreted Jewish, Greek, Roman, and numerous other writings and perspectives in order to recognize the significance of the Christ event. This implies that all members might touch on subjects such as Philo, Cicero, Homer, Aristotle, etc., as the story of Jesus was remembered. So when Paul tells us that he sends Timothy to teach, while there are the Jesus teachings and the teachings on how to be followers of Jesus, there is also the knowledge of the Roman context to be shared. "For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church."³⁵⁹

Or concerning reading,

For we write you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end—as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.³⁶⁰

Due to the incredible Roman system of travel, whether by land or sea, the early communities of Jesus were able to establish a significant network for travel, again a leisure activity. In Paul's case, there is little need to expand on a single point: that Paul travelled

³⁵⁸ 1 Cor 9:18, NRSV

³⁵⁹ 1 Cor 4:17 NRSV

³⁶⁰ 2 Cor 1:13–14 NRSV

throughout the Roman Empire with relative ease. His reception at the destinations is another case, but in regard to actual travel, with the exception of a shipwreck, it was without incident. This is not a comment on Jesus' followers as they did not establish or secure the roads and ships, but what is of interest to this thesis is that the followers of Jesus travelled and that there was a network of destinations for travellers to safely arrive at and leave from. As Malherbe points out, being welcomed at one's destination by fellow Christians seems to be an assumed aspect of being a Christian.³⁶¹ In essence, as with hospitality, followers of Jesus could go from Corinth to Ephesus and they would have a safe place upon their arrival.³⁶² While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in-depth, pilgrimages to holy sites—a leisure activity, particularly to Jerusalem—will grow in popularity over time. Paul boasts of the Jesus followers' network in Corinthians and Romans when he visits the church in Corinth:

I will visit you after passing through Macedonia—for I intend to pass through Macedonia—and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.³⁶³

This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.³⁶⁴

Within this network, it is apparent that neither Paul nor anyone associated with Paul wanted to be a financial demand on the community. In fact, Paul is quite clear that anyone within the community needs to work, as they are able, to support themselves. This is another key point

³⁶¹ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 67.

³⁶² Wright concludes that, "Paul urges an ethnically mixed and potentially fractious network of churches to welcome one another." N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament and its World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), p. 526.

³⁶³ 1 Cor 16:5–9, NRSV

³⁶⁴ Romans 15:22–26, NRSV

in the expression of leisure among the early followers of Jesus: one needed to provide for oneself, if possible. “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”³⁶⁵

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.³⁶⁶

Paul becomes very defensive and specific in his letter to the Thessalonians. It is interesting to note that this section of Paul’s letter is often quoted in leisure studies, without the context of a network of communities where Paul is clear that everyone, even in their leisure, must contribute and not impose a financial strain.

You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.³⁶⁷

Or, again in 1 and 2 Corinthians,

Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk?³⁶⁸

Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God’s good news to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁵ Galatians 6 9–10, NRSV

³⁶⁶ 1 Cor 3:5-9, NRSV

³⁶⁷ 1 Thess 2:9–12, NRSV

³⁶⁸ 1 Cor 9:6–7, NRSV

³⁶⁹ 2 Cor 11:7–9, NRSV

As one delves more into the theme of work, the topic of money emerges. An important aspect of early Christian communities is their generosity. Voluntarily, followers of Jesus offer money from their labour to provide for others in need. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul asks for a voluntary donation, but is clear that a donation should not impoverish the giver, even though this seems to be the case in the Macedonian community. It is fascinating to imagine the various amounts that would have been collected given the range of economic positions that members of the community would have occupied. The key is that, from their labours, some followers of Jesus voluntarily offered to assist other communities of faith, particularly the Jerusalem community. I imagine that Paul needed to be explicit that this offering was for the poor and Jesus communities in Jerusalem, not for growing the anti-Roman sentiments in Jerusalem that were pointing towards revolt. Paul writes,

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints—and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.³⁷⁰

Paul's letter hits a powerful note for the ages: the gift is in accordance with what one has and not with what one does not have. Paul returns to the theme of money as a voluntary gift—and not extortion—to help others in his second letter to the Corinthians:

So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion. The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for

³⁷⁰ 2 Cor 8:1–8, NRSV

God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.³⁷¹

Paul uses his personal life as an example in his letter to the Philippians; while it may appear at first glance as a vow of poverty, instead, what Paul seems to be arguing is that he has what he needs and not anything in abundance, indicating that a life of Christian leisure is anchored in the contentment of having enough, or perhaps, put in other words, having our daily bread.

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.³⁷²

Finally, an example of leisure activities in the Jesus communities is prayer.³⁷³ In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes about prayer being able to restore what is lacking in one's faith, which is to say, prayer will help one overcome obstacles to living in leisure, a life that is not burdened or preoccupied with distractions or emptiness: "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith."³⁷⁴ Or in his letter to the Philippians, Paul goes further, adding that in prayer one will grow even more righteous, in the nature of Christ, so that in the day of Christ, or on the day of Christ's return, one will be found blameless, living a life of leisure.

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ 2 Cor 9:5–8, NRSV

³⁷² Philippians 4:5–14, NRSV

³⁷³ Larry Hurtado, *Ancient Jewish Monotheism and Early Christian Jesus-Devotion* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), p. 633.

³⁷⁴ 1 Thess 3:10 NRSV

³⁷⁵ Phil 1:9–11, NRSV

This ultimately moves us to Paul's letter to the Romans where he is longing to see the community that he may share some spiritual gift to strengthen it, and without hesitation, he adds, so that we might encourage one another.

For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.³⁷⁶

Paul clearly sees the need for prayer, for a relationship with the one true living God, for support, direction, courage, in essence, for life. Prayer, connection with the Divine, is at the core of leisure, as Paul recasts a life of faithful leisure.

With a voluntary, inclusive focus on other people's well-being, in practical and tangible ways, Jesus' community is nurtured in its core beliefs about Jesus and how to live as a follower of Jesus. Paul is consistent in his appeal to freedom and virtue. It is here that Paul is picking up the character of a follower of Jesus, which, in turn, is a return to the Aristotelian notion of *scholē* as anchored in freedom, virtue, and the Divine. Unlike Aristotle, Paul claims that leisure, as it emerges in early Christian communities, is a gift from God, specifically in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A life of virtue, for Paul, is founded on living one's life like Christ, which ultimately means letting go of those aspects of life that cause one to be weighed down, to stumble, or in Paul's words, to sin. Paul is clear that in Christ, regardless of status, no one is a slave, nor is anyone subject to the "spirits" or "gods" that saturate the culture. Paul writes to the Galatians that followers of Jesus are adopted as children, "And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" So you are no longer a slave but

³⁷⁶ Romans 1:9–12, NRSV

a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”³⁷⁷ And as such an heir, Paul lays out that true, or perhaps better yet, authentic—as it does not carry the weight of true and false but rather of intention—followers will live with values such as Paul outlines in his epistle to the Romans:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.³⁷⁸

Notice how Paul's emphasis is on relationships with others as the primary focus of his teachings on virtue. The inner work of virtue leads Paul to comment that each follower of Jesus needs to examine their interior life, the source of their motives and actions (2 Cor 13:5), and, like Socrates insisted, search themselves to discover the meaning of life. Paul goes further. First, Paul is clear in his lists of activities, often leisure activities, that lead one away from the nature of Christ. While there are numerous codes of conduct for Paul,³⁷⁹ two succinct ones are laid out in his letter to the Galatians and the Corinthians,

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.³⁸⁰

And,

³⁷⁷ Galatians 4:6-7, NRSV

³⁷⁸ Romans 12:3-21, NRSV

³⁷⁹ Larry Hurtado, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2016), p. 37.

³⁸⁰ Galatians 5:19-21, NRSV

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.³⁸¹

It is clear how fornication, idolatry, drunkenness, for Paul, do not fit into a virtuous life for followers of Jesus, but the point must be made again: many of Paul's descriptions of the virtuous life take direct aim at Roman life, the context in which followers of Jesus would find themselves immersed daily. The point is that Paul's virtue encourages the individual to go beyond the passions, particularly the passions that arise in leisure time, and to be transformed into the nature of Christ. Why this is crucial in understanding the reinterpretation of leisure is that whereas, until now, leisure has either been activity-based—such as drinking-, sex-, travelling-, or contemplation-based—now one's non-work time, one's leisure time, is filled with becoming more Christ-like:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.³⁸²

This means refraining from the immediate pleasures of the body, refraining from studying great works of philosophy, and instead, through the power of the Holy Spirit, becoming more like Christ through prayer, worship, and a voluntary life of service with and for others. No longer does one look at living a solitary life of ethical purity and contemplation; now, a follower of Jesus, in this redefined experience of leisure, offers themselves for the good of the community, for it is in the community that Christ's nature will be revealed and experienced. Paul's letter to the Philippians summarizes this well:

³⁸¹ 1 Cor 6:9–11, NRSV

³⁸² Romans 12:1–2, NRSV

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.³⁸³

Paul reemphasizes his point that the voluntary service of others is key in numerous places, perhaps most bluntly in his letter to the Romans: “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor.”³⁸⁴ When Paul makes his point about serving the neighbour, looking after the poor, feeding the hungry, etc., he always does so in the context of the gift of the Holy Spirit. As previously discussed, the Holy Spirit is crucial in the re-definition of leisure, as the Holy Spirit is the source of power and nurture for followers of Jesus. A brief summary of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, far from making followers of Jesus the same, reminds us of the diversity that the Holy Spirit encourages in us for the common good.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.³⁸⁵

Paul is clear that while each of the followers of Jesus is gifted with a variety of aspects of the Holy Spirit, together, each gift contributes to the building up of the body of Christ. This is to say, the community of Christ has a diversity of gifts found within each of the followers of Jesus. Horsley notes, “Paul’s use of the standard ‘body’ metaphor for the ‘body-politic’ exemplifies the way he envisioned the assemblies of Christ as an alternative society to the

³⁸³ Philippians 2:1–4, NRSV

³⁸⁴ Romans 15:1-2, NRSV

³⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:4–7, NRSV

established Hellenistic-Roman order”³⁸⁶ This diversity is key to understanding that while the Holy Spirit is the source of leisure, each participant has different experiences and opportunities to serve others and to grow into Christ’s nature. There is not one way for all people, but rather numerous ways. Leisure, in the Holy Spirit, hence becomes an experience that is individual in one’s voluntary participation in it but relies on the community for nourishment just as the community relies on it for diversity.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.³⁸⁷

Paul goes further, claiming that not only does the community encourage and support the individual aspects of the community but that when one part of the body or community suffers, the entire body suffers. A community that pays attention to both joy and woe is a powerful experience and testimony that followers of Jesus belong to one another, that the community will withstand the difficult times just as it celebrates in the joyful ones (1 Cor 12:26). This aspect of the community is crucial as the followers of Jesus, in many cases—in their offering of a counter-cultural lifestyle and faith—face persecution. The scriptures are full of insights into the cost of following Jesus; Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, names the hardships and continues to advocate for followers of Jesus to press on in their faith.

To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.³⁸⁸

Or in a flourish of rhetoric,

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down,

³⁸⁶ Richard Horsley, *Wisdom and Spiritual Transcendence at Corinth* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), p. 124.

³⁸⁷ 1 Cor 12:12-14, NRSV

³⁸⁸ 1 Cor 4:8-13, NRSV

but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.³⁸⁹

This leads one to the final aspect of Paul's virtue being anchored in becoming more like Christ through the voluntary service of others and attention to one's personal virtue; in Paul's writings, he insists that followers of Jesus need not fear death because of the promise of God's Kingdom, of eternal life with God.³⁹⁰ Paul preaches that death has no power over the followers of Jesus as God's grace is eternal, and then turns back to the followers of Jesus to encourage them to cultivate their lives and communities to reflect the Kingdom of God and God's priorities of peace, forgiveness, compassion, hospitality, justice, etc. Without a fear of death—whether it is Caesar and his violent enforcements of idol worship or a threatening neighbour who is furious that you will not engage in a banquet or that you refuse to buy an idol or sex from his market-stall—a follower of Jesus is free to engage in a life of leisure.

Notice Paul's profound assertions to the Corinthians:

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ 2 Cor 4:7-12, NRSV

³⁹⁰ Longenecker adds, “Prior to Constantine, the cross was not primarily an aid to Christian worship or a feature of Christian architecture, adorning centralized places of collective adoration; instead, it was often used as an all-important mark of identity in an insecure world in which evil lurked virtually everywhere.” Bruce Longenecker, *The Cross Before Constantine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), p. 187.

³⁹¹ 1 Cor 15:50-58 NRSV

Yes, there is a cost, but if one believes that living in the leisure of the Holy Spirit, which is anchored in virtue and the service of the community, is also the ‘reward’ or ‘will,’ or better put, the ‘gift’ of God, then the cost seems tolerable. Further, while attacks and difficulties may arise due to disengagement from the common Roman life, the care of the vulnerable, poor, hungry, lonely, outcast, exposed, orphaned, etc., must have brought an endorphin-filled peace and joy through the Holy Spirit. As Paul looks around the Roman Empire, he can see that many leisure activities, such as drinking and fornication, only lead to suffering or, at best, are simply empty activities of pleasure. Paul’s letters are clear that attending to one’s personal deepening in virtue, as he describes a life in Christ and voluntary service to the community, is fundamental to living a life of leisure as followers of Jesus.

ENGAGEMENT (POST-MEAL ACTIVITIES): THE DIDACHE.

The Didache highlights many of Paul’s points regarding virtue and voluntarily serving the community, only the Didache frames Jesus followers’ voluntary leisure in terms of the way of life and the way of death. The Didache instructs followers to abstain from fleshly and bodily lusts (1:9), to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays (8:1), to pray (8:4–10) three times per day, to offer the meal to those who were hungry or were absent,³⁹² and to offer hospitality to a traveller, but with the following caveats:

12:3 If the comer is a traveller, assist him, so far as ye are able;

12:4 but he shall not stay with you more than two or three days, if it be necessary.

12:5 But if he wishes to settle with you, being a craftsman, let him work for and eat his bread.

12:6 But if he has no craft, according to your wisdom provide how he shall live as a Christian among you, but not in idleness.

³⁹² Bradshaw points out, “The earliest Christian eucharistic meal, therefore, did not merely express symbolically the love that the believers had for one another but was itself a practical expression of that love, as those who had means fed those in the community who were hungry, sending them home with leftovers to sustain them during the week and districting portions to those unable to be present.” Paul F. Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), p. 23.

12:7 If he will not do this, he is trafficking upon Christ.

12:8 Beware of such men.³⁹³

And then, the Didache describes the meal. Notice in the description from the Didache that there are a number of expectations at the meal for followers of Jesus. First, there is the expectation that one confess one's transgressions, which points to the virtue aspect of leisure for Jesus' followers. At the heart of the community's relationship is confession. Far from being a time to wallow in guilt and shame for one's actions or non-actions, confession implies that one reveals the areas of one's life that are in need of further maturity and growth; in confessing, one is identifying the spirit to reconcile or move forward in a different way. In confession comes the assurance that God's grace is enough and that God's spirit will heal, forgive, encourage, and resurrect us, so that we will continue in the journey of life in Christ. Following confession, the Didache states that one must reconcile with one's brother or sister prior to receiving the blessed, broken bread of the Lord's meal. Perhaps one of the most challenging teachings in the Didache is to reconcile within the body of Christ prior to eating together:

14:1 And on the Lord's own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.

14:2 And let no man, having his dispute with his fellow, join your assembly until they have been reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be defiled.³⁹⁴

Finally, the Didache encourages followers of Jesus to engage in the community as Jesus did: "But your prayers and your almsgivings and all your deeds so do ye as ye find it in the Gospel of our Lord."³⁹⁵ The Didache offers a refreshing look at a community of Jesus' followers and, like Paul, points to inner virtue and community service as key to being a follower of Jesus in one's leisure.

ENGAGEMENT (POST-MEAL ACTIVITIES): THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

³⁹³ Didache, "Early Christian Writings," 12:3–8

³⁹⁴ Didache, "Early Christian Writings," 14:1–2

³⁹⁵ Didache, "Early Christian Writings," 15:7

The Gospel of Thomas picks up the themes already discussed in Paul and the Didache and then adds to them:

Jesus said, "I took my stand in the midst of the world, and in flesh I appeared to them. I found them all drunk, and I did not find any of them thirsty. My soul ached for the children of humanity, because they are blind in their hearts and do not see, for they came into the world empty, and they also seek to depart from the world empty. But meanwhile they are drunk. When they shake off their wine, then they will change their ways."³⁹⁶

This simple story of those who are drunk, who arrived and will depart from the world 'empty,' has Jesus making a point about living a life of purpose. While the disciples are arguing with Jesus about what to eat, when to fast, how to pray, Jesus continually, in the Gospel of Thomas, implores the disciples to immerse themselves in the community and offer to heal: "When you go into any region and walk about in the countryside, when people take you in, eat what they serve you and heal the sick among them."³⁹⁷ While not as explicit as Paul's letters or demands as the Didache, the Gospel of Thomas continues to develop the leisure theme of voluntary service to the community and attention to one's inner life, one's virtue, or Christ's nature.

ENGAGEMENT (POST-MEAL ACTIVITIES): THE GOSPELS

The Gospel's reflection on leisure engagement following the Lord's Day meal is filled with stories and teachings that linger throughout time. Early Christian communities took great effort to record how both Jesus and the disciples lived out their faith throughout the Roman Empire.³⁹⁸ The Gospel of Mark, like Paul, the Didache and the Gospel of Thomas,

³⁹⁶ Gospel of Thomas, 28.

³⁹⁷ Gospel of Thomas, 14.

³⁹⁸ Crossan offers a profound insight describing Jesus and his disciples ministry: "Neither Jesus nor his followers are supposed to settle down in one place and establish there a brokered presence. And, as healers, we would expect them to stay in one place, to establish around them a group of followers, and to have people come to them. Instead, they go out to people and have, as it were, to start anew each morning." John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 346.

spends time exposing the layers of shame and common obstacles ³⁹⁹ that Jesus followers challenge and transform. Beginning with foods that defile,

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them, “Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”⁴⁰⁰

Mark’s gospel, addressing the food dedicated to idols in any way, is clearly stating that food itself is not unclean, but rather a person’s intentions and inner life. Picking up on virtue, like Paul, Mark goes on to describe that which pollutes or weighs down a follower of Jesus, such as adultery, fornication, drunkenness. As Mark’s community sets up the list of that which is not a Holy Spirit leisure activity, they continue to push the boundaries of who can be included in the Jesus community. It is fascinating to note, especially in Mark’s memories of Jesus, that the very leisure activities that are listed as ‘evil’ involve the very places that Jesus goes to share the good news about God and God’s liberation. Notice that as Mark remembers a dinner at Levi’s house, the guests are tax collectors and sinners sitting with Jesus and his disciples. The setting is perfect for Mark’s point:

And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Kloppenborg summarizes the Jesus movement this way: “God’s actions and reign had everything to do with the basics of life: food, debt, the supports of ordinary life and the threats to it.” John Kloppenborg, *The Earliest Gospel* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 97.

⁴⁰⁰ Mark 7:14–23 NRSV

⁴⁰¹ Mark 2:15–17 NRSV

In this profound memory about Jesus, as the great physician who came to call the ‘sinners’ or those who are searching for life—meaningful life and not the emptiness described in the gospel of Thomas—followers of Jesus are reminded that in their voluntary leisure, they are welcome to join with those who eat, drink, worship idols, are engaged in dishonourable employment and so forth, with the sole purpose of offering life, meaning and purpose in the name of Jesus Christ. In Mark, Jesus is remembered as healing someone on the Sabbath, and Jesus’ response redefines the Sabbath as a day of healing: “Then he said to them, ‘The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.’”⁴⁰² This reinterpretation of the Sabbath will, of course, inform the Lord’s day, the day after the Sabbath, a work day, as a day of celebration of the resurrection and new life in Christ. Mark remembers the disciples being sent out into the community, in their leisure, to heal and proclaim the good news. Of particular note, the disciples were to take nothing with them, in Mark’s version, but rather to rely completely on the community for support.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.⁴⁰³

It is fascinating to notice that after the disciples return from their voluntary leisure activity, immediately there is concern about ‘other’ people casting out demons in Jesus’ name and how the disciples tried to ‘stop them.’ Mark’s gospel makes the claim that one group of Jesus followers does not have sole possession of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As Mark remembers it,

⁴⁰² Mark 2:27–28 NRSV

⁴⁰³ Mark 6:6–13 NRSV

Jesus is blunt: “Do not stop them.” John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.”⁴⁰⁴

Similar to Paul and the others, Mark warns of persecution for being a follower of Jesus:

“As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”⁴⁰⁵

Finally, in the Gospel of Mark, following the crucifixion, the shorter ending has the women who witness the resurrection “saying nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (Mark 16:5–8), which in reality provides a wonderful literary device for followers of Jesus to speak up where others were silent, but in the longer ending of Mark’s gospel, it is noted that the disciples are instructed, by the risen Christ, to go into the world and proclaim the good news.

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”⁴⁰⁶

Notice the shift toward the disciples’ engagement in living out their virtue and service to the community in Mark’s gospel. The stark difference is not in the voluntary activities such as

⁴⁰⁴ Mark 9:38–41 NRSV

⁴⁰⁵ Mark 13:9–13 NRSV

⁴⁰⁶ Mark 16:12–18 NRSV

healing and proclamation but in the ‘signs’ that will accompany those experiences. Not only can a disciple heal, in Jesus' name, according to Mark, but a disciple can also heal and pick up a snake or drink poison and not be affected. The need for signs is diminishing to the testimony as the voluntary leisure activities of healing and community involvement are more than enough evidence that God is transforming the world that God so loves.

The Gospel of Matthew’s community remembers similarly to Mark’s community, such as Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors as a great physician (Matthew 9:9–13), and sending out the disciples to heal but only to Israel;

Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.⁴⁰⁷

There are warnings of coming persecutions (Matthew 10:16–23) and food that defiles (Matthew 15:20). Some key differences are found in the descriptions of Jesus' ministry and his teachings. Matthew offers many details of the people and places Jesus healed. This approach to remembering Jesus’ active ministry is an excellent tool of engagement for Jesus followers to notice the diversity:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.⁴⁰⁸

And the beatitudes, the sermon on the mount, offer profound insight into the virtue that Matthew’s community wants for its followers of Jesus to both learn by heart but, more importantly, to live. In the beatitudes, virtue statements are founded on the rock of blessing.

A blessing is issued to all who are listening:

⁴⁰⁷ Matthew 10:5–8 NRSV

⁴⁰⁸ Matthew 4:23–25 NRSV

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”⁴⁰⁹

In Matthew’s ‘blessed are’ list, it is clear that Jesus is turning the Roman context on its head.

What most would consider a curse—poverty, mourning, meekness—Jesus redefines as blessing. This blessing then becomes the heart of the Jesus followers’ ministry: to seek out the poor, the mourning, the meek in order to remind them of the blessing that God alone offers. Perhaps it is more: for the followers of Jesus to be integrated into the communities where there is poverty, mourning, and meekness and be fully present to offer their witness and presence; perhaps it is a reminder of what Paul said about how, when one member of the body is hurting, the entire body experiences it.

Matthew’s community virtue goes into detail concerning anger, which interestingly reminds us of the Didache instruction to reconcile with our brother or sister prior to eating the Lord’s meal together (Matthew 5:21–26). Concerning adultery, Matthew tells us that it is better to lose a body limb than to succumb to sin (Matthew 5:27–30); concerning retaliation, Matthew argues for love of our enemy (Matthew 5:38–38). Then there are Matthew’s reflections on generous almsgiving (Matthew 6:1–4) and humble prayer (Matthew 6:5–15), and in a uniquely Matthew way, an often-quoted text about not worrying:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body

⁴⁰⁹ Matthew 5:1–12 NRSV

more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”⁴¹⁰

This text about Solomon's glory is often used, particularly in contemporary leisure circles, without its context. This text is clearly not mere escapism from the realities of life so that one can simply live in some sort of disconnected bliss, as Matthew sets up Jesus’ saying about not worrying. Jesus asks the listener to consider the lilies of the field. Consider, ponder, study, reflect, and notice their beauty, which is, in fact, a gift from God. Notice that they live or exist following their natural inclinations. When Jesus speaks about not worrying about what we eat or drink, it has far more to do with the stark contrast of the Roman context where food, drink, clothing, and status mattered so greatly that the entire honour/shame system of Rome was based on displaying one’s status. When Jesus points to nature and its God-infused glory, Jesus is pointing out the absurdity of the social structure that is in place and how Jesus' followers can disrupt the imposter status and reveal the glory of God that surrounds us, that is within us and beyond us.

Matthew’s memory of Jesus offers two particularly unique and striking instructions for the followers of Jesus. Remembering that the focus of this chapter is to show what followers of Jesus did voluntarily, observe that following the meal on the Lord's Day, Matthew could not be clearer. Matthew’s community remembers Jesus instructing his

⁴¹⁰ Mathew 6:25-34 NRSV

disciples to offer food, water, hospitality, clothing, care for the sick and visitation to those in prison:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”⁴¹¹

Finally, Matthew concludes his gospel with, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁴¹² Matthew’s Gospel is heavy with instructions on virtue and on how followers of Jesus are to engage voluntarily in the community, through their leisure. It is important to note how heavy with instructions the gospels are. Considering the competing voices of the dominant culture of Rome, the local voices of wisdom teachers, such as the stoics, and the leisure opportunities in the local neighbourhoods, it should come as no surprise to us that in order to instil in the early Christian communities a ‘how to’, there is

⁴¹¹ Matthew 25:31–46 NRSV

⁴¹² Matthew 28:16–20 NRSV

advice included regarding a practical application of leisure to one's everyday life. Practical, understandable, repeatable instructions of eating practices or community norms or taking care of others in the neighbourhood become a template from which early Christian communities can begin to live in leisure, and more, begin to expand and deepen those practices to enrich both the individual and the community.

The Gospel of Luke, like the previous discussion, remembers many similar virtue and activity instructions from Jesus. What is unique to Luke's memory of Jesus is found in Luke's reoccurring theme of justice and compassion. Beginning with Mary's Magnificat, the listener is made aware that the good news of Jesus Christ is going to disrupt the political, economic, and social arrangements of the Roman Empire: "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty."⁴¹³ This passage is followed closely by Jesus' vision of ministry, which in essence is the blueprint for discipleship:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."⁴¹⁴

Following Mark's and Matthew's pattern, Luke remembers Jesus healing, blessing those on the margins, and loving his enemies (Luke 6:17–36). There is a poignant moment when Jesus tells the disciples of the words of his cousin, John the baptizer, to "Go and tell John what you

⁴¹³ Luke 1:51–53 NRSV

⁴¹⁴ Luke 4:18–21 NRSV

have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them” (Luke 7:18–23).

Jesus then adds the line that blessed is anyone “who takes no offense at me”; Luke continues with the theme of eating with sinners,⁴¹⁵ only in Luke’s account, he adds, “the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”⁴¹⁶ Unique to Luke are descriptions of women being engaged in their leisure, in the voluntary activities of Jesus, inclusive of their financial resources:

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.⁴¹⁷

Another unique aspect of Luke concerns how a follower of Jesus might navigate the Roman social world of eating and banqueting. What Jesus suggests is brilliant as it challenges the table designations; more profoundly, Jesus instructs his followers not to invite people of the same status or from whom one can gain something. Rather, invite people to a banquet table in the manner that Jesus taught, where one’s status is their baptismal promise that all are adopted into the family of God, none above another:

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble

⁴¹⁵ Segal adds, “Jesus’ original support came from the country folk of Galilee, whose ways and interests were different from those of the Jerusalemites. He appealed to a number of people in the society whose rank was inferior but whose economic satiation was not hopeless, including prostitutes, tax collectors, and others considered disreputable or impure by Sadducees or Pharisees, as well as many ordinary Jews, Samaritans, and Galileans with no specific party affiliation.” Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca’s Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 81.

⁴¹⁶ Luke 7:3 NRSV

⁴¹⁷ Luke 8:1–3 NRSV

themselves will be exalted.” He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”⁴¹⁸

The Gospel of Luke, finally, concludes with Jesus instructing his disciples to remain in the city of Jerusalem until they are clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit. As previously discussed, Luke continues the memories of Jesus and the adventures of the disciples in the book of Acts. Starting with the reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, the book of Acts is filled with memories of the activities of the followers of Jesus. It is clear from Acts that proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection, baptism, and healing is at the core of the Jesus followers’ post-meal activities, describing the thousands who received their message. We hear that “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”⁴¹⁹ And it goes on to say about the disciples that,

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.⁴²⁰

It is fascinating to note that in Luke’s memory of some of the followers of Jesus that ‘all’ who believed sold their possessions and held all things in common, which appears to be unique to the Lukan story. The story is then retold in chapter four, with the addition that there was not a needy person among them and that when they sold their possessions, they gave the money to the disciples to distribute (Acts 4:32–37).

The healing ministry of the disciples remains at the forefront of Luke’s memory of the first followers of Jesus to the point where we hear that even if Peter’s ‘shadow’ falls on

⁴¹⁸ Luke 14:7–14 NRSV

⁴¹⁹ Acts 2:41 NRSV

⁴²⁰ Acts 2:37–47 NRSV

someone, they will be healed (Acts 5:15), that healing from God cannot be bought or sold (Acts 8:18–24), that Ethiopian eunuchs are included in God’s grace (Acts 8:26–40), that unclean food does not exist for the followers of Jesus (Acts 10:9–29), that Gentiles can receive the Holy Spirit just as Jews can (Acts 10:44–48), and that Peter and Paul came to an understanding about the mission of Jesus followers and what is at the essence of core beliefs around food: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”⁴²¹

As Luke continues to remember the activities of an early church community, there are some unusual moments that stand out, like when Paul is in prison he sings in his leisure time (Acts 16:25); or when Paul is a tourist in Athens, he takes the opportunity to point out that nestled into the pantheon of gods and their image is the ‘unknown god’ and then goes on to preach about it (Acts 17); or those moments that are described when Paul is working, as a tentmaker, and he offers comfort to a couple in Corinth because Emperor Claudius had expelled them from Rome (Act 18:1–3), which in itself is interesting as, if Pontus and Priscilla were expelled because they were Jewish but in fact were followers of Jesus, it is clear that during the reign of Claudius there was no great distinction between Jew and Jesus followers as of yet. The incident in Ephesus, over the Artemis idols and healing (Acts 19:1–41), is a story that must have been repeated over and over as nearly every follower of Jesus would have faced a similar experience in a variety of ways. The conclusion of Luke’s story has Paul under arrest in Rome. Throughout the book of Acts, Luke has emphasized proclamation, healing, generosity, and community involvement in spite of the suffering or

⁴²¹ Acts 15:28–29 NRSV

hardship that accompanies it; perhaps above all, what is realized through Luke's memories is the incredible expansion and network of the followers of Jesus. Even while under arrest, the conclusion of Acts emphasizes that "The believers from there, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage."⁴²² The growing movement of Jesus followers indicates that the good news about Jesus and the Kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven, was flourishing. Gathering on the Lord's Day to break bread, and then, following the meal to voluntarily live out Christ's mission in the community, was an active form of leisure for Jesus' followers. Leisure was redefined in light of the Jesus movement.

The Gospel of John, including many aspects previously discussed, such as prayer, persecution, and a life of forgiveness and peace, also offers another profound insight for a Jesus follower's leisure activities. John's community clearly remembers that Jesus was focused on the service of others. In a moving scene, Jesus teaches his disciples that the essence of their ministry is in the washing of others' feet, of tending to the vulnerable. After Jesus pours water into a basin and washes the disciple's feet, Jesus explains his actions:

"Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."⁴²³

While this story is not unique to the Gospel of John, it is the most detailed and invitational of the gospel memories of Jesus washing feet. John retells the story in such a way that the point is not to be missed by Jesus' followers: wash one another's feet, love one another as Jesus has loved, and perhaps most poignantly, let the followers of Jesus know that they are messengers

⁴²² Acts 28:15 NRSV

⁴²³ John 13:12–17 NRSV

of the good news. The invitation is clear: to act and proclaim this transformative experience. This is an experience that cuts against the essence of the societal arrangements of the Roman Empire; imagine, a free Roman citizen washing the feet of a slave in brotherly/sisterly love.

The pinnacle of John's memory of Jesus appears at the conclusion of John's gospel when Peter, following the execution and resurrection of Jesus, finds himself on a beach on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. It appears that Peter has simply gone back to fishing, to his work, when the resurrected Jesus appears, looking for breakfast. Jesus, entering into the workday of Peter, can clearly see that Peter is trying to process the last three years of his life and perhaps his future. Peter, who denied Jesus three times, is definitely preoccupied with many things, including being at work. As Jesus meets Peter at work, the conversation is liberating. Peter, Jesus asks thrice, do you love me? And each time Peter responds, I do; Jesus instructs Peter to feed his sheep and tend his lambs. The calling is clear; in essence, Jesus offers Peter forgiveness for denying him three times and then invites Peter to return to active ministry:

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."⁴²⁴

Peter, forgiven and restored—presumably as the text is silent—begins active ministry once again. The Gospel of John offers powerful insight for leisure as Jesus, appearing at Peter's

⁴²⁴ John 21:9–19 NRSV

work, is able to offer healing and redirection for Peter. How Peter responds is left for the listener to imagine, but the invitation is clear: follow me.

THE ROMAN RESPONSE TO ENGAGEMENT (POST-MEAL ACTIVITIES)

Moving from the Gospels' presentation of how followers of Jesus engaged in their faith after meeting on the Lord's Day for a meal and worship, we turn to how the Romans experienced the variety of followers of Jesus.⁴²⁵ The Roman references to the various Jesus movements are few and appear later than the evidence presented in this thesis but are nonetheless an important reflection. As stated in previous chapters, the writings about followers of Jesus tend to appear from the upper, educated, ruling class and not from graffiti sources or inscriptions. Turning to three commentators regarding followers of Jesus, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny offer a glimpse into the difficulties that the Roman Empire was encountering due to this new 'faith.'

The Roman historian Suetonius, writing in approximately 100 CE, is clear that the Christians were problematic, causing disturbances, and incredibly superstitious, which is laughable given the Roman penchant for superstition. Suetonius writes in the *Life of Emperor Claudius* that "He banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus"⁴²⁶ and in the *Life of Emperor Nero* that "He likewise inflicted punishments on the Christians, a sort of people who held a new and impious superstition."⁴²⁷ The key insight that Suetonius offers is that the Roman Empire is

⁴²⁵ Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. xiv.

⁴²⁶ Suetonius, *Divus Claudius*, ed. by Alexander Thomas xxv.4

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0132%3Alife%3Dcl.%3Achapter%3D25>

⁴²⁷ Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, ed. by Alexander Thomas, xvi

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0132%3Alife%3Dcl.%3Achapter%3D25>

beginning to notice these early followers of Jesus, and their reception is one of disruption.⁴²⁸ Given the letters of Paul, the Didache, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospels, it is easy to see why one would call the followers of Jesus disruptive as their insistence on not worshipping the empire's idols, of eliminating a status culture, and on the voluntary care for the vulnerable would have been a stark difference from the Roman context. Roman historian and politician Tacitus, writing around 110 CE, dealing with Emperor Nero's political maneuvering regarding the great fire in the summer of 64 CE, points out that Nero blames a group named 'Christian' for the fire. More than blame, Nero 'fastens guilt' and 'exquisite torture' for the Christians. Ehrman adds, "The problems mounted with the passing of time, as Christians grew in number and openly refused to worship the state gods."⁴²⁹ Tacitus is descriptive in offering details about this 'Christus' movement, including about Christus, executed in the time of Tiberius, under Pontius Pilate, as being 'mischievous and following superstitions.' Tacitus describes the Christians as a source of evil, first in Judea and then in Rome. Where Tacitus offers a profound glimpse into his report is when he claims that Christians were arrested, in large numbers, not so much for the fire but for 'hatred of mankind.' This 'hatred' is key as it offers the exact opposite opinion that the followers of Jesus held of themselves as virtue-oriented, voluntary servers of the community and the vulnerable—believers in a peaceable faith that sought the well-being of the world. Fascinatingly, Tacitus reports that the followers of Jesus 'hate' mankind.

Moving on from the hatred of mankind, Tacitus describes in detail the sort of death that these followers of Jesus endured under Nero:

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most

⁴²⁸ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ, Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), p. 606.

⁴²⁹ Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 316.

exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.⁴³⁰

Tacitus' closing sentences are of extreme importance. The punishment did not equal the crime in Tacitus' opinion, nor, apparently, that of the general populace of the Roman Empire. The fact is that Tacitus was willing to record, as a historian, that compassion arose for the followers of Jesus due to Nero's inhumane cruelty—cruelty that was excessive even for bloodthirsty Romans but it was clear, as Frend notes, “the Roman governing class seem to have regarded the affair as the destruction of conspiracy fomented by some extremist sect among the Roman Jews, and these were crushed in exactly the same way as the Bacchanals and other purveyors of malevolent tires, such as the Druids had been.”⁴³¹ Finally, Pliny, a Governor of Pontus/Bithynia from 111 to 113 CE, writes to Emperor Trajan about ‘Christians.’ While lengthy, this correspondence debates a number of points. The first is whether one should be punished for simply ‘being identified as a Christian’ or if there needs to be a punishable deed that accompanies the person. It is fascinating that Pliny describes followers of Jesus, about whom he himself declares he knows nothing, as stubborn and inflexible—and for Pliny, that is enough to punish them! A list of names has been circulated

⁴³⁰ Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 44

⁴³¹ William Hugh Cecil Frend, *The Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), p. 43.

according to Pliny, but on interrogation, many offer worship of the traditional gods and emperor and then are released. This list offers a glimpse into which of Jesus' followers were interested; they are named but not committed to 'the way' unto death. This is not a judgment of faith, but rather an interesting observation:

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.⁴³²

Pliny continues in his description of the Christians by next describing that the followers of Jesus were accustomed to meeting on a fixed day before dawn, which is to say, before work, to worship Christ. Pliny then goes on to describe how followers of Jesus make an oath to not commit fraud or adultery or engage in criminal behaviour; then, just as previously argued,

⁴³² Pliny, *Letters* 10.96-97

Pliny states that the followers of Jesus met again, on the same day of the week, to eat together—a meal that he describes as consisting of ordinary and innocent food. And yet, while Pliny names a day, a meal, and a virtuous oath, like Suetonius and Tacitus, he remarks that the Jesus followers are superstitious.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.⁴³³

Pliny is concerned, he writes, not so much with the nature of worship or association with Jesus but because of the growing number of followers, inclusive of both sexes, who are disrupting the social, cultural, economic and political situation.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.⁴³⁴

Emperor Trajan replies to Pliny—offering an olive branch of sorts to the followers of Jesus—that they are not to be hunted down, or sought after; rather, they are to be dealt with as the occasion presents itself. It is ironic to note that it is via ‘repentance’ that an accused Christian can be reinstated into the Roman culture without penalty, as repentance for worshipping idols is at the heart of following Jesus.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshipping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.⁴³⁵

Clearly, the Romans writing about the followers of Jesus were pointing out a problem that was not unique to them alone. We glean from the tone of the letters that the authors, representing the view of the Empire, wanted to dismiss Christianity as superstitious, evil, divisive, punishable, and not to be promoted. It is also clear from the letters that the Jesus movement is growing quickly and was problematic due to followers' withdrawal from cultural norms. Ehrensperger notes, "The implications at every level of life for Christ-followers from the nations were enormous and potentially dangerous"⁴³⁶ Later, Roman writers will comment on the followers' voluntary commitment to virtue and to the well-being of the vulnerable, but at this point in time, there is simply much confusion about Jesus followers; yet what is clear is the view that they are disruptive and need to be dealt with before they spread their teachings further.

ENGAGEMENT (POST-MEAL ACTIVITIES): IMPLICATIONS

Early Christian communities gathered on the Lord's Day, on the first day of the week, for a meal and worship in which they remembered the death and resurrection of Jesus; the early Christian communities then lived out their faith in their local communities. Working through the letters of Paul, the Didache, the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospels, it is clear that

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ K. Ehrensperger, 'Between Polis, Oikos, and Ekklesia: The Challenge of Negotiating the Spirit World', in *The First Urban Churches 2*, ed. by James R. Harrison and L. L. Welborn (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), pp. 105-132 (p. 128).

voluntary commitment to virtue, as expressed in ‘the nature of Christ’ and the voluntary service of one’s neighbour and community, including the vulnerable, is at the heart of the Christian faith. The proof, outside of the early Christians’ writing about themselves, is found in Roman writings about the early Christian groups. Reading the Roman and Christian sources together, it is clear that the various Jesus communities were making an impact that was disrupting the various Roman cultures and values. What is crucial to this thesis is that the early Christian communities were living out their faith voluntarily, and more often their faith activities either disrupted their workday or occurred before and after work. Christian service, as virtue and love of one's neighbour, is a redefined participatory leisure experience. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, a follower of Jesus is engaged in deepening their soul to be more like Christ as they love and serve others in a variety of ways. The key is that in this voluntary experience, one chooses to freely give one’s time, effort, money, abilities, identity, etc., for the purpose of God’s Kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven. The aim of using one’s leisure for the purpose of helping others is to experience leisure—God’s leisure of peace, justice, compassion, joy, and above all, grace.

The followers of Jesus were clear and consistent, if extraordinary, in meeting weekly, on the Lord’s Day, to worship, eat together and then go out into the neighbouring areas to live out their faith. The impact of the Jesus followers is staggering, as pointed out. Horsley succinctly notes that the movement is “an international anti-imperial movement of communities that he saw as constituting an alternative society of justice, co-operation, and mutuality opposed to the Roman Imperial order, which was finally being terminated through God’s action in Christ.”⁴³⁷ The voluntary commitment to a weekly meeting, possibly before and definitely following work, that required no dues, included a meal, education, a sense of

⁴³⁷ Horsley, ‘Paul’s Assembly in Corinth: An Alternative Society’, in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth*, ed. by Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 372–395 (p. 394).

belonging, and a purpose in life—to care for others—is profound. The network of congregations for safe travel, for all people, slave and free,⁴³⁸ the emphasis on reading and writing,⁴³⁹ the inclusion of all people regardless of status, wealth, or gender, the focus on virtue and refraining from those things that only cause suffering—such as drunkenness, adultery, and thievery—and above all, the experience of living a life of faith rooted in a living God, not an idol or Caesar, that wants peace, justice, and joy for all God’s creation, is moving. The voluntary care of the poor, orphans, prisoners, and the sick—of people who would otherwise have been simply left alone to suffer—offers companionship, and comfort from a stranger, in the name of God. Clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus engage in a life of leisure that is redefined from the perspective of Greek *scholē*, Roman *otium*, and Jewish *Sabbath*. Leisure is now understood, in the Christian communities, as living in the divine nature of Jesus Christ to serve others, especially the vulnerable. This radical experience of leisure will change the world and continues to do so.

⁴³⁸ Timothy A. Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 119.

⁴³⁹ Longenecker adds, speaking about Jesus followers, “As unschooled, ordinary men, they would have been in good company alongside the majority in the Roman age who were low in literary status.” Bruce Longenecker, *In Stone and Story: Early Christianity in the Roman World* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2020), p. 150. The low literacy of the general Roman population makes it even more interesting that letters and writings containing significant teachings were orally shared and distributed, free of charge.

CHAPTER NINE: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF LEISURE FOR A POST-COVID WORLD

A theology of classical leisure, as evidenced by early Christian communities, can both inspire and inform the church in a post-Covid world. As I write this thesis (Advent, 2021), the entire world is in the midst of a global pandemic known as Covid. Every single person on the planet is affected, regardless of how religious, intellectual, righteous, or wealthy they are. The entire world economic system of production and consumption is interrupted, causing ripple effects in the stock market, local employment, and the distribution of goods and services.⁴⁴⁰ While vaccination rates—with vaccinations serving as a preventative measure, not a cure—are high among wealthy countries, the world is struggling to inoculate its population.⁴⁴¹ The nature of communication (Zoom, Skype, etc.), travel (restricted), and work (remote, reduced, or non-existent) has changed forever, impacting the predictable and reliable patterns of living that most citizens, in the G8 countries, have come to participate in, and creating confusion, anxiety, and often profound lethargy among many people.⁴⁴² During the lockdowns, people were suddenly faced with a great deal of time but limitations on possible activities. Story after story emerged about learning how to grow vegetables, bake bread, knit sweaters, make beer, etc., but the underlying question during Covid sounded something like this: Am I what I do? Who am I when I cannot do? What do I do when it appears that there is nothing to do? Aristotle's notion of work as being pre-occupied, doing something, keeping busy, was on full display. Covid, in essence, forced the world to step away from its normal

⁴⁴⁰ Globe staff, 'The Supply Chain Crisis Explained: What B.C. Floods, Inflation and Global Shortages Mean for Canadians ahead of the Holiday Season', *The Globe and Mail*, Nov. 23, 2021.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-supply-chain-issues-canada-covid-19-holiday-explainer/>.

⁴⁴¹ Dan Avery, 'World Health Organization warns of global syringe shortage next year', *Msn.com*, Nov. 10, 2021. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/medical/world-health-organization-warns-of-global-syringe-shortage-next-year/ar-AAQyu3R?ocid=BingNewsSearch>.

⁴⁴² Government of Canada, 'COVID-19: Taking Care of Your Mental and Physical Health During the Pandemic', accessed Nov. 23, 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/mental-health.html>.

way of doing things. While there is a romantic cry for return—“When we get back to normal” or “When everything is as it was”—most know that it is not possible. As with many traumatic life events, we are changed. The lingering question pursued here is how the church is also changed.

Speaking now, in particular, of Western Christianity, the buildings of places of worship closed during Covid and public gatherings were not permitted.⁴⁴³ Congregations were in shock as routines were interrupted. This interruption led to creativity as numerous congregations moved to gather over Zoom for worship, had distanced outdoor services, and delivered supplies to the doorsteps of those in need. But it also led to an opportunity for people to reconsider what a congregation is and how it matters. With the interruption of the pandemic, there was an end to the busy-making work of the church, the endless meetings, the events that were a tradition whether anyone remembered why. There was also the question: Do I need to belong to a worshipping congregation? Can I do this at home instead, in my comfortable chair with a cup of tea?

Now is the time for the church to seize the opportunity to rekindle its passion and redefine its purpose. The church is not a gathering of people for busy work; it is a gathering of people for transformative engagement. While Covid has interrupted the entire world with its devastating effects, it has given the church time to pause and reclaim its mission, to remember its purpose. Early Christian communities offer an excellent blueprint as those who have gone before us, prior to Constantine’s empire of power, control, and uniformity. Early Christian communities, in their profound diversity, trusted in the Holy Spirit, gathered on the Lord’s Day to celebrate the risen Christ, and ate a meal together in which there was teaching, singing, and remembering, in the bread and the cup, the life of Jesus—all of which finally,

⁴⁴³Toronto Public Health, “COVID-19 Guidance for Places of Worship,” November 15, 2021.

after the meal, led to voluntary action or a voluntary living out of one's faith in the neighbourhood. The church must reclaim this simplicity in its leisure.

First, regarding the Pneumatology of Leisure, the church needs to reclaim the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Spirit, we find our nourishment, encouragement, and power to live and move and experience our being in the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is available to all people, regardless of their situation. Ironically, in the busyness, in the anxiety-ridden toil of a day, the Holy Spirit can still meet us to remind us that we are more than work, more than a job, more than an activity. The Holy Spirit reminds us that we are created in the image of God, that we are a beloved child of God, that we belong to God, and that nothing can separate us from God. As one spends one's life unwrapping God's gift of love, it becomes clear that God created us with the freedom of choice. While social, political, economic, and health constraints may push against us, humanity has freedom of choice. We can decide what will preoccupy us, whether it be anxiety, revenge, and anger, or generosity, compassion, and forgiveness; it is our free choice. Hence, when the ancients speak of virtue and the choice between virtue and vice, as Heracles did, it is left to us whether we will spend our time engaged in deviant leisure—as Paul writes in his ethical code, drunkenness, immorality, and gossip—or if we will spend our time shedding that which weighs us down and causes us to stumble in our pursuit of holiness. In baptism, one makes a choice for Christian leisure as one chooses to belong to a community whose purpose is not to escape from the world but rather to live at peace, God's peace, within it. In our baptism, we know that we belong to God and that nothing and no one can ever take that away from us; our status is not found in wealth, power, or position but in our heavenly citizenship, in our high and noble calling to love God and serve others. Finally, the Holy Spirit is the spirit of God that makes accessible God's leisure. What makes the Holy Spirit unique is that the Holy Spirit is living, moving through

time and space, always changing, adapting, meeting us in a changing world so that we are equipped and empowered to offer ourselves, in our leisure, in any situation, even in a pandemic. A Christian theology of leisure must be rooted in the Holy Spirit.

On the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, the followers of Jesus set aside time in the morning and evening, on a work day, to gather and worship. During Covid, many people commented that each day felt like the others before it. Why get up, why get dressed, why do anything, when every day feels like a repetition of the previous day? Many people have this experience of ennui as they continuously get up, go to work, come home, eat, watch television, and sleep, day in and day out. Many look forward to the weekend or to a holiday as a break from the monotony; for many people, their entertainment has become their high holy days. As with Roman *otium*, many mark their calendars with Monday night football, a match between the Celtics and the Rangers, or recently added episodes on Netflix. While entertaining, it is clearly a distraction and often fleeting—a temporary reprieve from the boredom of life. The church has an opportunity to reintroduce the celebration and joy of the resurrection. This shift will require the church to actually participate in the celebration and joy as many congregations exhibit little evidence of joy, nor do they exude excitement about Christ having risen from the dead; yet in his resurrection, there is freedom, forgiveness, healing, hope, love, belonging, and new beginnings. Instead, we often hear about the need for money and for volunteers to run a program that no one appears to want; we witness general rote, controlled participation in worship. Yet it is vital, and potentially revitalizing, to set aside a Sabbath day to reorient oneself, to remember that we are more than units of production and consumption, to disconnect from work, cellphones, and whatever else is preoccupying us so that we can celebrate the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit—gifts from a living God who wants for us to experience the fullness of love, in a relationship

so profound that we are changed significantly.⁴⁴⁴ A Christian theology of leisure includes setting aside time to break through the ordinary routines to gather together to celebrate.

Early Christian communities gathered together on a work day. Some gathered before work began to praise God, and most gathered after work, to eat together and praise God. The church has an opportunity to reimagine this practice of eating and worshipping together. Instead of fixed pews in a row, facing the eucharist table and pulpit, perhaps congregations would gather around tables. It is clear that early church communities were considerably small—twenty to forty people—but the Western church is quickly catching up; while it would be noisy, messy, busy, and perhaps somewhat chaotic to gather in this way, we would see one another, and more importantly, participate. People are craving participatory experience in worship, rather than simply reading a few lines of a psalm or reciting the announcements. Early Christian communities describe eating together, breaking a single loaf of bread, drinking from a cup, and worshipping by telling stories about Jesus, about discipleship, praying, singing, and testimony, and about simply leaning into the mystery of God around a meal. It is powerful to ponder how the bread and cup are gifts from God, blessed for our nourishment, and are to be shared with all gathered, without exception, as our baptism is the great equalizer. One aspect of the heavenly banquet feast to be emphasized is prayer—in particular, the prayer of confession and reconciliation—which manifests a relationship with our living God. As Paul, the Didache, and the gospels point out regarding actively seeking to restore and nurture right relationships with others before eating and joining in worship, how would that change the nature of the eucharist? To confess in prayer is

⁴⁴⁴ In *Sabbath as Resistance*, Brueggemann adds the profound point that “‘No-Sabbath’ existence imagines getting through on our own, surrounded by commodities to accumulate and before which to bow down. But a commodity cannot hold one’s hand. Only late does the psalmist come to know otherwise. Only late may we also come to know. We may come to know, but likely not without Sabbath, a rest rooted in God’s own restfulness and extended to our neighbors who also must rest. We, with our hurts, fears, and exhaustion, are left restless until then.” Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), p. 89.

a powerful act of liberation. It is the naming of broken or damaged relationships; it is recognizing where it is that one struggles, aches, hurts, carries hurt, or has inflicted it on others, knowingly or not, and perhaps it is confessing how one is complicit in systems of injustice or inhumanity. Naming and confessing what is missing the mark, in us and around us, reminds us of the opportunity for transformation. Moreover, the power of the prayer of confession is the liberation of forgiveness with only one instruction: to go and forgive others, as we have been forgiven. A Christian theology of leisure includes participation in worship, like a meal and self-examination, otherwise known as confession.

Early Christian communities were actively engaged in their communities and the world in their volunteer, non-work time.⁴⁴⁵ Thankfully, there were endless opportunities to be involved in a ministry that makes an impact through the power of the Holy Spirit. The church needs to reclaim its focus on ministry as an aspect of every baptized Christian life—and not just for those who are paid to do so (clergy) or those with particular gifts. The adage that mission is the “work” of the church needs to be replaced with every member ministry is the church at leisure. What an adventure to equip, encourage, and bless Jesus followers, to send them into their communities to offer healing, reconciliation, compassionate listening, or whatever is needed and for that ministry to not only be recognized by the congregation but celebrated. How different might the experience of a follower of Jesus be if, after gathering on the Lord’s Day, after eating and worshipping with their community, they were sent—with the purpose of revealing God’s grace in tangible ways—to engage with the world at work, at home, in places of entertainment, on the bus, etc.? Imagine the testimonials that would emerge from our experiences. A Christian theology of leisure includes followers of Jesus

⁴⁴⁵ Pope Francis is clear that Christians are to work towards a world where work is just and equitable. Following a Roman Catholic tradition of the social gospel, he emphasizes meaningful work that benefits the community with dignity, hope, and justice. Christopher Wells, ‘Pope: Work to Build a More Solidary, Just, and Equitable Work’, *Vatican News*, Oct. 23, 2021.

actively engaging their faith in their daily lives and offering testimony of where they noticed the presence of our living God in their experiences.

Another area that congregations could reclaim is that of teaching practical and spiritual life skills. While there is no shortage of information and opinions in our postmodern age, there is a shortage of wisdom about the matters of the soul, a deficit of knowledge about contemplation, prayer, and silence, not to mention an attitude of defeatism about one person or a small group of people making a difference and a profound deficiency of understanding the differences between virtue and vice. The above is not intended as a scolding or moral lecture but rather as an engaging opportunity to share the wisdom that the church has been entrusted with, and that it has preserved and treasured for centuries but seems to want to keep as a secret, even from its own members. A Christian theology of leisure includes educational events that focus on the soul, virtue, and leisure, as argued in chapter four of this thesis.

Early Christian communities were diverse and connected through a network of congregations. The emphasis on diversity in congregations only strengthens the whole. Not every congregation is excellent at practicing all aspects of the faith; each congregation offers its unique witness in the world. Diminishing one another is devastating and against our gospel calling. Stepping out a little further, how refreshing it would be for a congregation to pray for one another, to celebrate the strengths of one another, to engage in the neighbourhoods together without the dogmatic or theological street fights. Celebrating the network of congregations could only benefit the entire body of Christ as we encourage one another, eat together, and worship, honouring the uniqueness of each congregation. Then there are the incredible pilgrimage and travel opportunities we could enjoy. We have such a rich tapestry of approaches to following Jesus; it is a shame to be stuck in a rigid, narrow box of believing that one congregation or one clergy has all of the truth of the entire tradition. A

Christian theology of leisure has the humility to engage in and celebrate the diversity of faith expressions from around the world.⁴⁴⁶

Finally, a theology of leisure centred in the Holy Spirit will be focused on others and the neighbourhood, particularly the vulnerable. As this point is clear without expansion, I will close with a brief paraphrased story from the Acts of Thomas, a story from the mid-second century. In the Acts of Thomas, following the death and resurrection of Jesus, Thomas, a skilled labourer, is moved by the Spirit to go to India. Thomas refuses to go but eventually discovers himself in the employ of King Gondophares with the instruction to build the king a new palace. The king provides vast sums of money to Thomas for this purpose, but Thomas, instead, gives all of the king's money to the poor and vulnerable. The king arrives on the scene, asking "Have you built me the palace?" And he says, "Yes, I have built it." The king asks, "Then when shall we go see it?" But he answers him and says, "Now, you cannot see it, but when you depart this life, you shall see it."⁴⁴⁷ The king is furious, has Thomas thrown in prison, and is contemplating flaying him alive; then the king's brother dies and is carried up to heaven where he sees the palace that Thomas has built. Desiring to buy it from his living brother, he returns to earth and demands to see the king, pleading "Sell me your palace in heaven!" The king replies, "I cannot sell it, but I desire to live in it someday." The king races to Thomas, where he confesses and begs for forgiveness. The king then says, "our souls are at leisure and we are zealous for God."⁴⁴⁸ Thomas responds by giving thanks to God, rejoicing, and then sharing in the Eucharist with the king. A Christian theology of leisure understands

⁴⁴⁶ While this thesis offers a theoretical approach to a theology of leisure, it needs to be noted that it has been applied in a practical way. The Centre for Practical Theology, an organization that the author founded, is dedicated to incorporating the ideas of this thesis. Whether it is leading pilgrimages in Spain, Israel, or Turkey, offering participatory worship centred around a meal after a work day, or engaging in voluntary activities such as participating with our local consistory, as we offer much-needed medical equipment for the community or supplies for the local elementary school, the Centre for Practical Theology is an expression of a theology of leisure. More information can be found at www.cptfairmont.ca.

⁴⁴⁷ *The Other Bible* ed. by Willis Barnstone (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), p. 472.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

the value that people place on work, money, privilege, and status, but knows that God's kingdom has a different set of values; hence a Christian theology of leisure engages in the care of the vulnerable, here and now.

Which illuminates the missiology of leisure, as evidenced during this time of Covid, when systems of production and consumption are paused, and health care systems often stretched to their limits. In this time, individuals and communities have been faced with difficult questions: How do I spend my time? Am I more than I do? The church, which is included in this reckoning, has an incredible opportunity to engage with the world through a theology of leisure. Our North American context is ripe with distraction and recreation, as Aristotle illustrated within his own context centuries ago, and scarce in contemplation. The church has a profound opportunity to hold the space for people to pause from endless distractions and aimless recreation in order that we can catch a glimpse of something far more lasting, meaningful, and beautiful. The church, long steeped in contemplation while abandoning contemplative voices and writings from time to time, has an opportunity to first reclaim its inheritance of contemplation, and second to share with the neighbourhood and world the practices and insights that nurture leisure. Classical leisure, as the early Christian communities redefine, experience, and reflect upon it, clearly demands effort, intention, and a guide. Breaking the cycles of constant distraction and recreation needs to be a purposeful decision and often requires the support and guidance of those who have made a similar decision; hence a day, a meal, and engagement is a communal experience. Thankfully, the Christian communities of the first and second centuries and their experience of navigating the meanings of *scholē*, *otium*, and *Sabbath* offer an invitation to experience and participate in leisure through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is available for all.

CONCLUSION

How can a theology of classical leisure inspire and inform the church in a post-Covid world? Returning to leisure's roots in mythology, Sisyphus—endlessly pushing a stone in Hades up a hill until the stone is right at the crest of the hill, only for it to roll back down to the bottom and the task to be repeated as a timeless punishment—highlights one's pointless, meaningless, joyless activities, like work or effort, that many of us experience in life. The decision for virtue or vice is highlighted by Heracles. This is a crucial question for all humanity. Should one choose immediate bodily and mental pleasures that come without effort or the discipline and effort of virtue that lead to flourishing? The decision Heracles faces on the cusp of adulthood echoes to this day. Finally, the demi-god Dionysus or Bacchus (Roman) invites his followers to engage in a life of sensual pleasure to escape Sisyphus' endless work and meaningless efforts and to answer Heracles's dilemma between virtue and vice. But in a twist, Dionysus claims that his followers, in the ecstasy of drinking, sex, feasting, and all other sorts of pleasures, will become "like the gods." It is important to remember that followers of Dionysus celebrated his death and resurrection every year. The followers of Dionysus will impact the early Christianities in the Roman Empire in a significant way as they celebrated the death and resurrection of a god, ate and drank together in secret gatherings, and, most profoundly, were outlawed by the Roman Senate as a danger to the Roman Empire. The Greek mythology of the freedom of leisure and the burden of work or labour is well established in the stories of Sisyphus, Heracles, and Dionysus that continue to present a choice for us all.

The Greek philosopher Plato, having been immersed in the stories of Sisyphus, Heracles, and Dionysus, develops a foundational philosophy about *scholē*. Plato argues that the pursuit of truth, *scholē*, is anchored in contemplation. Contemplation requires that one is

free from the needs of the body, free from occupation, free from obligation or debts, and free to pursue a life of virtue. In this freedom, one is able to contemplate the divine, the realm of absolutes, which will bring one happiness. Included in Plato's metaphysical pursuit is the concept of play. Plato identifies a child-like innocence to *scholē* or contemplation that ignites one's experience of the "absolutes." It is clear in Plato's philosophy of *scholē* that one must be completely free of any constraint or obligation, which in turn reveals that, for Plato, very few people can experience *scholē*. Certainly, Plato is excluding slaves, women, and anyone who labours.

Aristotle, a student of Plato, defines *scholē* as an activity of gods and thus the highest purpose or hope of humanity. Aristotle dispenses with Plato's idea of having childlike innocence, replacing it with education, like music, geometry, grammar, that begins in childhood. Aristotle posits that humanity must learn how to contemplate *scholē* and that the pursuit of *scholē* cannot be for any other purpose than its own sake. Aristotle agrees with Plato that one must be free in every sense and not preoccupied or consumed with labour or necessity. Included in Aristotle's understanding is a high regard for virtue, and the view that in one's virtue, one must have complete freedom so that one can pursue *scholē*, an activity of the gods, which alone will bring one happiness. Again, like Plato, Aristotle's understanding of *scholē* as only available to those who are completely free from constraint or obligation limited dramatically those who could participate. One of the numerous revolutionary shifts to the understanding of leisure by early Christian communities will be the inclusion of all people, regardless of constraint or obligation, who can participate in leisure.

As the Roman presence expands, the Greek understanding of *scholē* is in a time of transition and redefinition. As *scholē* is slowly forgotten, it is replaced with the Latin *otium*. The Greco-Roman Stoic influences redefine *scholē/otium* as a school of thought that

emphasizes the control of the passions by making a decision about how one will respond to whatever situation presents itself, whether pleasurable or painful. Using logic to eliminate distractions and false beliefs, attachments to emotions, and moments of pleasure or pain, one relies on the virtues of courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom to experience *schole/otium*. The Stoics maintain *schole/otium*, through contemplation, are fundamental to happiness, but gone is the inclusion of the gods or outward influences. *Schole/otium* is an individual experience and decision that is anchored in virtue and logic. A significant shift in *schole/otium* is that anyone can participate in a stoic life—slave, free, woman, or man.

Moving from the Stoics' inclusive *scholia* or school, there is a third influence that leaves a lasting impression on leisure in its time of transition from *schole* to *otium*, and that is the Greco-Roman playwrights and comedians. Here we notice the entertaining or tragic play between work, non-work, virtue, and non-virtue. As the creative genius of the playwrights explores the nuances, implications, and consequences of leisure, it is clear, moving into the Roman expression of leisure, *otium*, that a divide is emerging between private leisure and public leisure. This division will have tremendous implications as the metaphysical nature of leisure—contemplating the divine—while still present, is slowly manipulated into contemplating Pax Romana and is reduced to personal and corporate experience that benefits the empire and the individual—or perhaps just the Empire, ultimately.

Roman philosophers and politicians Cicero and Seneca, building on *otium* as time for idleness, retirement, peace, quiet, holiday, tranquillity, and spare time, divide *otium* into public and private spheres. The Romans had reinterpreted leisure, adding another twist, for the public sphere of *otium*, which was ultimately for the masses with events that glorify the Republic, public peace, and security, public celebrations, etc., while private *otium* was for the elite to enjoy travel, dining, reading, etc. While Cicero and Seneca wrote their polished

arguments, one aspect of leisure communication often forgotten is Roman graffiti and inscriptions, where it is clear that ordinary people within the empire enjoyed leisure activities primarily as entertainment and that *otium* still had its foundations in virtue, but the virtue it now served was for the benefit of Roman power and control. Inscriptions detailing dinner parties and chariot races, along with graffiti indicating where the best prostitutes or gaming houses were, reveal an active public leisure scene. In essence, *otium* had become a way to manipulate, pacify, and entertain people in a difficult, often violent, labour intensive, unpredictable life of the masses while appealing to the elite, in private, with its allure of pleasure and, above all, personal status. Early Christian communities will redefine *otium* from its focus on Roman peace to the Kingdom of God's peace and justice and from the freedom to enjoy personal pleasures to the freedom to enjoy serving the needs of the community.

Alongside Greek *scholē* and Roman *otium* is a Jewish understanding of the *Sabbath*. While not exactly leisure as the Greeks and Roman interpreted it, a Jewish expression of leisure is found in the honouring of the Sabbath or a day of rest. Every seventh day, Jews would refrain from labour and preoccupation with worldly concerns to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the one true living God. It is important to note that Jews are monotheistic, a peculiarity in the Greco-Roman world. On the Sabbath, the communal emphasis on freedom, non-work, and the worship of God creates a powerful insight into Jewish experiences of leisure. Following the laws of Moses as virtue teachings, and establishing a day of rest as leisure for worship, is unique within the Roman empire. While this pattern of life is generally followed by Jews throughout the Empire, regardless of location, one group in particular, the Essenes, establishes an entire community that is separate. Following the laws of Moses and Sabbath, the Essenes deepen the concept of leisure

by establishing a discipline, a routine, for living. More than a philosophical school, the Essenes established a closed community that organized work and leisure into the routines of daily life. Finally, the Jewish philosopher Philo, writing at the time of Jesus, using the experience of Sabbath, makes a philosophical case for Sabbath as leisure, as a day of rest from labour, from being consumed by work or distraction so that one can contemplate the Divine. In the contemplation of the Divine, there is included virtue, the study of the Torah, and celebration of the Sabbath as God's holy day—a seventh day in which humanity remembers and participates in the holiness of God's rest, a day of freedom and original blessing. A Jewish understanding of leisure, quite unique from *schole* and *otium*, while offering much to the early Christian communities, remains a closed community. Jews could be slave or free, male or female, but those who are not Jewish are not able to participate in Jewish leisure.

Schole, *otium*, and *Sabbath* are inscribed with new meaning because of the resurrection. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ lead to a new understanding of leisure in the ancient world. After Jesus' resurrection, Jesus entrusts to his followers the Holy Spirit, the spirit of God, who nourishes, sustains, inspires, and sends the disciples out into the world with one purpose: to share the good news of the resurrection, which is the good news that God's kingdom, God's justice, and God's love for all of humanity is available for all to participate in and enjoy forever.

Leisure as *schole*, as *otium*, and as *Sabbath* is redefined as virtue, freedom, and celebration that is experienced through a day, a meal, and voluntary, non-work, activities that serve others and the community in Jesus' name. The day, meal, and activities following the meal are the heart of Christian leisure—leisure that anyone can participate in, free of charge, that offers the promise of life transformation and peace, joy, and belonging. In Christian

leisure, realizing that one is a child of God, created in God's image, and that the purpose of life is to shed that which causes one to forget that truth—and then to do the same with others through the power of the gift of the Holy Spirit—offers meaning and purpose to life that is unquenchable.

Clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus engage in a life of leisure that is redefined from the perspective of Greek *scholē*, Roman *otium*, and Jewish *Sabbath*. Leisure is now understood, in the Christian communities, as living in the divine nature of Jesus Christ to serve others, especially the vulnerable. This radical experience of leisure will change the world and continues to do so. The first- and second-century followers of Jesus revealed leisure resurrected to the world.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Pieper, with his emphasis on worship and the sacrament as the heart of leisure, and Leclercq, with his focus on the one purpose of leisure as “serv[ing] God voluntarily in a perfect way, for the love of Christ, with spiritual joy”⁴⁴⁹ have laid the foundations for the exploration of Christian leisure. While many leisure scholars have quoted bits and pieces of scripture or dismissed the classical leisure theories due to their exclusion of groups of people, no one has seriously examined the context of leisure expression in the ancient world. Picking a text or two and identifying them as leisure is not enough; rather a robust examination of what the text is saying in its original setting is necessary. The best example is that of slavery, as in a Christian expression of leisure slaves are welcome to be full, equal participants in leisure, but this fact has not been explored in leisure studies or in Christian theology. This thesis leaves many questions to be explored: How does eschatology—the waiting for the fulfilment of time—impact one's leisure? How does the concept of the eighth day, the

⁴⁴⁹Leclercq, *Camaldolese Extraordinary: The Life, Doctrine, and Rule of Blessed Paul Giustiniani*, 285.

paradisical day, with its promise of renewal, impact leisure? As the church moves out of the second century, how does leisure shift, through the church fathers, in Augustine, and in the time of Constantine, into a position of power and influence? Does the church have the courage to reengage with leisure, as expressed in early Christian communities through the Holy Spirit, on the Lord's Day, with a meal, worship, and engagement (post-eating activities)?

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APPENDIX 1

As I preached on June 13, 2021:

I went out for an evening stroll—like so many of us do. So much on my mind, in my heart. Two hundred and fifteen Indigenous children’s remains were found in an unmarked grave. Devastating. Children-sized shoes placed on the steps of the church—tiny shoes that did not know the comfort of belonging. Here at Met, a family placed children’s shoes on our steps. I happened to be walking by and offered to pray with them. They asked why there weren’t more shoes. Was this a Catholic Church? I said it was down the street. They went to pick them up, but I said, “No, the United Church ran schools too.” Then we prayed.

I went out for an evening stroll—like so many do. So much on my mind, in my heart. I could see shop owners arranging their wares, delivery trucks hurriedly trying to keep pace. I could see the streets filling as the bars and restaurants were opening, people enjoying the sunshine, a meal, a moment of feeling connected again.

I went for an evening stroll—like so many do. The rainbow colours were awash throughout the city. Pride. Pride in love is love. Pride in knowing that God’s love showers us—whether boys love boys, girls love girls, girls love boys, or boys love girls. Whether one is unsure, whether it's complicated or whether there’s a myriad of possibilities, God offers God’s blessing of joy as we sort through our relationships.

I went out for an evening stroll—like so many do. Seeing the flowers laid where a family of five once stood—now, only one, in hospital, an orphan. The favourite colours of purple and green were affixed to the fence of the mosque; the politicians gave their speeches, the moving opening words of the host acknowledged the traditional land, the moving invitation to silence. All so we remember the 215 children before the inconsolable sigh of grieving, in a tragedy.

I went out for an evening stroll—Friday night—like so many do. Many of you were there and accompanying us in prayer. I give thanks for your witness. I stood behind the mayor. To keep him inspired and moving, I stood beside so many faith leaders, all calling for peace. We drank the water provided along the way by our brothers and sisters in faith. I carried a letter from our Moderator; he wrote such a beautiful pastoral letter on our behalf. I spent time with the Imam as I offered our continued engagement. Ten years ago, we began this journey—First St. Andrew’s, St. Paul’s, Metropolitan, Temple Shalom and the mosque. We began the multi-faith poverty coalition, and we learned and grew, laughed and wept together. As I walked with thousands and thousands of Londoners towards the mosque, I could not help but think of George. Dr. Goth walked in Selma with King. He must have been smiling with encouragement.

I went out for an evening stroll—like so many do. So much on my mind, in my heart. It seems like so much, too much, I know. I hear many of the stories you are enmeshed in, that you carry, that we are dealing with. As we experience stage 1 of Covid release, we are learning and noticing how much so many are struggling with. Isolation, fear, boredom, loneliness—profound loneliness. We are learning how to greet one another, how to be

together, social skills that have been set aside by the isolation. It draws us here, to those relentless words of Jesus. Jesus said, the Kingdom of God is like....

Jesus is so clear today. The Kingdom of Heaven—on earth as it is in heaven—is a reality in our midst, waiting to be recognized. Jesus reveals everything he could about the Kingdom of Heaven plainly: breaking bread, sharing a cup, welcoming those who have been pushed down and out, healing those who are in pain or suffering, forgiving those who thought forgiveness would *never* visit their heart, forgiving those who could not bear to forgive themselves. Restoring those buried in shame and guilt, walking with tenderness and with a fierce love for those trampled on by racism and injustice, pushed around for their identity, for what they wear or who they love.

Yes, hate and fear try to diminish us with anger and blame and indifference, but Jesus stands his ground and reveals God's profound grace, God's inextinguishable love, God who is for us and with us. Yes, the Kingdom of Heaven is like... a mustard seed.

A mustard seed, we snort. So small, so annoying. It's a weed. It will grow anywhere; it is uncontrollable if left unattended. Jesus, please pick a mighty cedar or powerful oak, or something at least useful like an olive tree or vine filled with grapes.

A mustard seed. The Roman philosopher Pliny describes the mustard seed likethis: "With its pungent taste and fiery effect, mustard is extremely beneficial for the health. It grows entirely wild, though it is improved by being transplanted: but on the other hand, when it has once been sown, it is scarcely possible to get the place free of it, as the seed when it falls germinates at once."⁴⁵⁰ On and on, Pliny goes.

We pause. A mustard seed. We can see it, smell it, imagine it: a small seed that spreads everywhere. And then it dawns on us. It begins to settle in. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a weed. We try our very best to control it, tame it, domesticate it, make it fit into our understanding, our needs, and our ways, but it refuses.

Jesus is poking at the idea that heaven is this magnificent tree at the centre of the world. No, he says, it is more like a common weed—a mustard seed—that spreads uncontrollably! It is all around us. The Kingdom of God is all around us, shooting its way through the cracks of pavement that try to suppress it, the tidy gardens that do not welcome it, the hard soil that scoffs at it. It springs forth from the places where it has been bullied and beaten and left as dead. *There* is where it takes root.

That was something that the Roman Empire learned. This Jesus—this small, unwanted weed—who told stories about the lost being searched for until found, about everyone being welcome at his table, about compassion and forgiveness and love and serving, about seeing the image of God in others. This Jesus. Rome thought that they had stomped him out. High on a cross, pointing to the heavens. On a mighty tree that stretched him out. Notice his arms still welcoming everyone, his heart still forgiving... he was executed. Dead and gone. Three days.

⁴⁵⁰ Pliny the Elder, 19.54

And then, God went out for an evening stroll—just at the break of dawn. So much on God’s mind, in God’s heart. And God spoke a word of love and that tomb that thought it held Jesus secure was opened wide. Death and suffering, injustice and pain, racism and hatred and revenge. They tried to cling to him, but Jesus, he burst forth, resurrected, alive, engaged and calling us.

I AM the resurrection and the life. Follow me, and I will stand with you in silence, weep with you in tragedy. I will walk with you for justice, I will tend to you in loneliness and uncertainty. I am the resurrection. Come, follow me, and I will show you where the wild weeds grow. I will show you that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed—the smallest of seeds that spreads like a weed. In Holy Spirit wildness.

I went out for an evening stroll—like so many do. So much on my mind, in my heart. And I thought of all of this, as I thought of us and how it is that we walk together, and I am grateful. Thanks be to God. Amen.