

APPROVAL CERTIFICATION

THIS DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION WAS

APPROVED MAY 1, 2022

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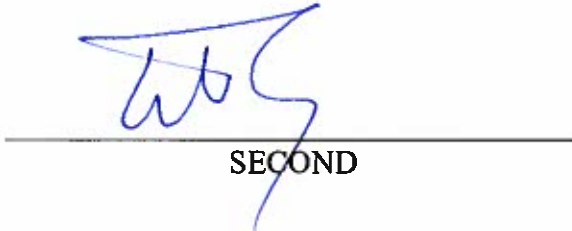
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MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A WORSHIP SERVICE OR AN ASSEMBLY:

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TERMINOLOGY USED
TO DESCRIBE CHURCH MEETINGS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

OFFICE OF DOCTORAL STUDIES

BY

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KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

MAY 2022

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This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Nancy,
who has been my companion, my conscience, and my connection to reality
through 45 years of study of this topic

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ABSTRACT

This project sought to discover why NT writers did not describe Christian assemblies as “worship.” The project’s methodology analyzed fifteen NT assembly passages and the five NT Greek words that are translated as “worship.” The study concluded that NT assemblies were primarily for mutual edification. Most assembly activities were horizontally oriented toward one another, although a few events were vertically oriented toward God. The Greek “worship” words largely pertained to temple activities, and the NT teaches that the sacrifice of Christ nullifies the temple and its ritual practices. Consequently, these Greek words did not apply to NT Christian meetings.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

What is the purpose of the Christian assembly?¹ John MacArthur, the Baptist pastor and author, answers this question: “We go to church to worship God. That is why we, as Christians, gather together on Sunday.”² Modern Christian vernacular would support MacArthur’s contention. Today, attending a weekly assembly is widely referred to as “going to worship.” Church buildings are often called “houses of worship.” Church meetings are often known as “worship services.” These meetings often follow a prescribed “order of worship” and are often led by a worship pastor, a worship leader, or a worship team. This worship terminology supports MacArthur’s idea that the purpose of the Christian assembly is “to worship God.”

While modern Christians, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox, commonly view their regular meetings as worship, many NT scholars have noted that the biblical text fails to support this notion.³ For example, when I. Howard Marshall studied this

¹ In this dissertation, “Christian assembly” refers to the regular (weekly) gathering of a group of Christians. See page 4 for other qualifications of this term.

² John MacArthur Jr., *True Worship* (Panorama City, Calif.: Word of Grace Communications, 1985), 8. Such statements are common. For example, John Burkhart begins his book with the four words, “Christians gather for worship,” in *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 9.

³ See Bo Reicke, “Some Reflections on Worship in the New Testament,” in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson, 1893-1958*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 196; Franklin W. Young, “The Theological Context of New Testament Worship,” in *Worship in Scripture and Tradition*, ed. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 89;

issue in 1985, he argues that in the NT, “Christian meetings are not said to take place specifically in order to worship God, and the language of worship is not used as a means of referring to them or describing them.”⁴ He concludes that ‘worship’ is not an appropriate term to describe what Christians do when they gather together.⁵

Is Marshall correct? If so, how did the church adopt the idea that the assembly is a worship service? Is Marshall’s perspective merely a matter of semantics, or does his perspective require some significant changes to our understanding of “going to church”? These questions are not trivial matters. They are intensely practical problems that affect the central activity in which Christians participate around the world every week. The answers to these questions affect the net result of each Christian gathering, what individual Christians gain from each meeting, how the church evaluates each activity within each assembly, and how the church develops over the long term. When Christians describe this congregational activity as “worship,” can such terminology be justified

Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M. H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 17; Ferdinand Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 35-36; Ervin Bishop, “The Assembly,” *Restoration Quarterly* 18:4 (1975): 219; Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Original Setting*, Rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 88; I. Howard Marshall, “How Far Did the Early Christians Worship God?” *Churchman* 99:3 (1985): 217; David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 219; John P. Richardson, “Is ‘Worship’ Biblical?” *Churchman* 109:3 (1995): 210; Streeter S. Stuart, “A New Testament Perspective on Worship,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 68:3 (1996): 209, 220; Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 5. See chapter 2 for a review of these scholars and their comments on this topic.

⁴ Marshall, “How Far,” 220.

⁵ Ibid.

biblically? If not, what needs to change in order to restore biblical perspectives of this fundamental experience of Christians around the world?

The Purpose and Scope of this Investigation

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate why the NT does not use Greek “worship” terminology when it discusses Christian assemblies. As a necessary part of the investigation, this dissertation will examine the evidence to see if the NT indeed fails to use worship terminology in reference to Christian meetings. If worship terminology is absent, was it intentionally avoided? On the other hand, did the NT writers consider their meetings to be “worship services” but simply neglected to use that terminology in the NT documents?

The NT documents should reveal the normative way that these early Christians described their meetings and the normative use of Greek worship terminology. The study of worship terminology will focus on the Greek words that are typically translated as “worship” in the NASB, with occasional reference to other translations that may illuminate the investigation. Specifically, those Greek words are προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, σέβομαι, and θρησκεία, along with their cognate forms.

The investigation will involve several key research questions. First, are the Greek words for worship absent from references to the Christian assembly in the NT? This notion has been alleged by several scholars,⁶ but the evidence must be examined. Another key question is: What terminology is used in the NT to describe Christian

⁶ See footnote 3.

meetings? Answering these questions will help to determine the common biblical vocabulary and understanding of the nature of the Christian meeting.

After establishing the biblical understanding of the Christian assembly, this dissertation will then explore questions about the Greek terms that are commonly translated as “worship.” For example, does the semantic range of προσκυνέω, the most common Greek word for worship, have any connection with Christian meetings in the NT? The same question must be asked about λατρεύω, λατρεία, λειτουργέω, λειτουργία, θρησκεία, and σέβομαι (and related σεβ-terms such as εὐσεβέω, θεοσεβής, σεβάζομαι, and σέβασμα).⁷ If these “worship words” have no connection with Christian assemblies, what is missing in our understanding of “worship” in the NT? If it is determined that the NT church never held “worship services,” what are the implications for today’s church?

Definitions and Terminology

As in all scholarly investigations, key terms must be defined. In this investigation, the phrase ‘the Christian assembly’ will be a generic designation for the regular meeting of Christians. ‘Christian assembly’ is not a common phrase today. Modern churches are more likely to use phrases like ‘church service’, ‘worship service’, or ‘Christian worship’. Since these phrases are not used in the NT and may impede or mislead our study, these terms will be avoided in favor of generic phrases like ‘the Christian meeting’, ‘the assembly’, and ‘the weekly gathering’.

⁷ Of the 81 times that the English word ‘worship’ is found in the ESV NT, προσκυνέω or προσκυνητής is the Greek word 53 times (65 percent), λατρεύω or λατρεία 14 times (17 percent), σέβομαι or its cognates 11 times (14 percent), λειτουργέω or λειτουργία twice (3 percent), and θρησκεία once (1 percent).

‘Worship’ is also a fundamental term for this investigation. However, using the term can create confusion and misunderstanding. ‘Worship’ is commonly used in scholarly circles today to refer to the formal activities of the regular meetings of a Christian church.⁸ For example, Andrew McGowan, in the introduction to his 2014 book on “ancient Christian worship,” discusses this semantic problem at length. He says, “We must admit something difficult at the outset: in the ancient world, what we now call ‘worship’ did not quite exist.”⁹ Noting that “the English word ‘worship’ has changed drastically in meaning,” he says that ‘worship’ in the KJV means “not gatherings, nor beliefs, nor song, nor ritual.”¹⁰ Even though he admits that it would be “problematic” to fail to acknowledge this change in meaning, the remaining 300 pages of his book persist in using the term ‘worship’ in reference to gatherings, songs, and ritual. In other words, even though McGowan knows that ‘worship’ is a misnomer for his topic, he nonetheless uses the term in the book’s title and throughout the book as if it refers to “Christian assembly activity.” McGowan’s approach inevitably results in confusion. Unfortunately, this problematic terminology is the standard approach by scholars. In the past hundred

⁸ In 1956, Eduard Schweizer defined ‘worship’ as “what takes place in regular gatherings of a Christian congregation.” See Schweizer, “Worship in the New Testament,” *The Reformed and Presbyterian World* 24 (March 5, 1957): 196. Merriam-Webster defines it as “a form of religious practice with its creed and ritual” in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003), 1445.

⁹ Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 5. See also D. A. Carson: “The Hebrew and Greek words that are sometimes rendered by the English word *worship* sometimes mean something rather different from what we mean by worship,” in *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 15.

¹⁰ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 2-3.

years, scholars have written many books about ‘worship’ in the New Testament, with the assumption that ‘worship’ is what Christians do in assembly.¹¹ These books examine the various events of the early Christian assembly, such as prayer, preaching, singing, Scripture reading, the Lord’s Supper, the holy kiss, baptism, etc. But to McGowan’s credit, he is one of few scholars to acknowledge this fundamental terminological problem.

Scholars are not the only ones to perpetuate this problem. In common vernacular, particularly in evangelical churches, the term ‘worship’ frequently refers to the musical portion of the church meeting. For example, a ‘worship leader’ today is usually someone who leads the music portion of a church meeting.¹² This worship leader does not usually

¹¹ Here are several of these works, listed in chronological order by publication date: Alexander B. MacDonald, *Christian Worship in the Primitive Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1934); Oscar Cullman, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953); C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1961); Gerhard Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, trans. Percy Scott (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., ed., *Worship in Scripture and Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963); Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M. H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968); Ferdinand Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973); Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); John E. Burkhardt, *Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982); D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014); Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014). Many scholarly journal articles have also been published about “worship” where the discussion is about the Christian assembly.

¹² For example, see Ed Stetzer, “Worship Leaders are Not Rock Stars,” *Christianity Today* (March 31, 2015), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/march/worship-leaders-are-not-rock-stars.html>. See also John D. Witvliet,

have anything to do with the sermon, the collection, baptisms, or the Lord's Supper. Rather, the worship leader's focus is on music. Similarly, the phrase 'worship music' is typically synonymous with 'praise music'.¹³ Yet, when the term 'worship' appears in standard English translations of the NT such as the KJV, NIV, or ESV, does the term ever refer to music or praise?¹⁴ So, to avoid this semantic confusion, this study will use the word 'worship' sparingly. By minimizing its use in this way, this investigation hopes to decrease misunderstanding, increase clarity, and maintain consistency with the biblical evidence.

Why should the term 'worship' be avoided? If this dissertation were to study the Christian assembly as if it were a "worship service," the investigation would be tainted from the beginning. The modern English term 'worship' inherently delivers religious connotations of ritual, ceremony, and sanctity,¹⁵ while the terms 'gathering', 'assembly',

"Pedagogical Reflections on Changing Uses of the Term 'Worship'," *Worship* 95:1 (Jan 2021): 4-5.

¹³ Since 1995, *Christianity Today* has published dozens of articles that use the term 'worship music' synonymously with 'praise music'. For example, see Karl Vaters, "6 Important Differences Between Performance Music and Worship Music," *Christianity Today* (April 2, 2019), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/karl-vaters/2019/april/performance-music-worship-music.html>. The idea that worship music is the same as praise music raises several questions. Do songs that encourage Christians to greater holiness, service, or fellowship qualify as "worship songs"? If a song does not praise God or express worship to God, does it qualify as "worship"? See also John Frame, who says that "praise and worship music" is a redundant phrase, in John M. Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1997), 9.

¹⁴ See the conclusions to chapter 4 on pages 253-55.

¹⁵ Merriam-Webster defines 'worship' as "a form of religious practice with its creed and ritual" and "reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power," in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1445.

and ‘meeting’ convey none of these concepts.¹⁶ For this investigation, the simpler terms will be preferred, so as to avoid the unnecessary assumption that the meetings were perceived as sacred ceremonies. In addition, if this study used the term ‘worship’ as synonymous with Christian assembly activity, the term itself would imply that the meeting was directed toward God. But the terms ‘assembly’, ‘meeting’, and ‘gathering’ imply nothing about the meeting being an offering toward God. If the Christian meeting in the NT was intended as a service to God to be performed with ritual, ceremony, and sanctity, the NT text should be allowed to demonstrate those ideas on its own. So, by avoiding worship terminology, this study hopes to stay true to the biblical evidence and avoid the problem of bias and tainting the investigation.

Many of the scholarly books that investigate the topic of “worship in the New Testament” begin with an attempt to define the English term ‘worship’.¹⁷ However, the key task of this investigation is not to define the English term ‘worship’ but to define the Koiné Greek words that are commonly translated as “worship.” Defining the English word ‘worship’ does not help us understand biblical perspectives about the assembly, especially if the English term is not used in the NT to describe the assembly. So, this effort to determine biblical perspectives of the Christian assembly will focus on the Greek words in the Christian Scriptures that pertain to the assembly.

¹⁶ The dictionary definition of a ‘gathering’ merely connotes the coming together as a group. See *ibid.*, 517-18.

¹⁷ See, for example, Burkhart, *Worship*, 15-16; Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 18-30; and Glen O’Brien, *Christian Worship: A Theological and Historical Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 15-16.

Anachronistic Fallacies

Semantic Anachronism

A problem that is related to the issue of definitions is anachronism, which hinders efforts to recapture the nature of historical events. One particular variation of anachronism is the fallacy of semantic anachronism, which, according to D. A. Carson, “occurs when a late use of a word is read back into earlier literature.”¹⁸ He uses the example of the Greek word δύναμις, which is commonly translated as “power” in Rom 1:16 (the gospel is “the power of God for salvation ...”). He notes that modern preachers have often transliterated δύναμις into “dynamite,” saying that the gospel is “the dynamite of God.” Thus, they take a late use of the word (dynamite) and erroneously inject it into first-century literature (dynamite of God).¹⁹ If ‘worship’ is not used in the NT to refer to the assembly, scholars would be taking the modern use of a term and erroneously applying it to first-century Christian culture. So, this study will consider the possibility that semantic anachronism is the reason that the term ‘worship’ has been misapplied to NT Christian assemblies.

Another example of the same fallacy would occur when the modern definition of ‘saint’ is applied to the same word in the NT. Today, the word ‘saint’ often refers to a special elite class of Christians.²⁰ However, in the NT, the term is used in reference to all

¹⁸ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 33. See also Darrell L. Bock, “Lexical Analysis: Studies in Words,” in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 150.

¹⁹ On this point, see also Craig L. Blomberg, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 137.

²⁰ See “Saint,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 1096.

disciples.²¹ If this dissertation were a study of “Christian Saints of the New Testament” and attempted to identify only special individuals like Paul (“Saint Paul”), Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the dissertation would be guilty of semantic anachronism. It would be using a modern definition of the term ‘saint’ and applying that definition to the same word found in the English Bible.

In a similar way, the term ‘church’ (ἐκκλησία), which is frequently used today in reference to the Christian assembly,²² presents two anachronistic challenges for this study. First, in modern English, the term ‘church’ often refers to “a building for public and especially Christian worship.”²³ Yet, the Greek term ἐκκλησία is never used in the NT in reference to a building or even to a place.²⁴ “Calling a place where they met in the

²¹ See Moisés Silva, ed., “ἅγιος,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1:128-33.

²² “A public divine worship” is one of the standard definitions of ‘church’, in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 222. These common phrases use the term ‘church’ synonymously with ‘the assembly’: “going to church,” “sitting in church,” “getting dressed for church,” “church service,” “church times,” etc.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Everett Ferguson says, “The use of the word ‘church’ for a building is proper in English, but this is not true for the Greek word it translates,” in *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1996), 129-30. Louw and Nida: “In the rendering of ἐκκλησία, a translator must beware of using a term which refers primarily to a building rather than to a congregation of believers,” in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 126. See also Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich (BDAG), “ἐκκλησία,” *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303-04.

first century a ‘church’ would be anachronistic,” says Daniel Block. “The word *ekklesia* then referred to an assembly of people, not the place where they gathered.”²⁵

Second, the modern English word ‘church’ almost always carries religious connotations, while the NT Greek word ἐκκλησία usually means “assembly” without religious connotations. Robert Banks says, “The term (ἐκκλησία) clearly does not have an intrinsic religious meaning. It simply means an assembly or gathering of people in a quite ordinary sense and can refer to meetings that are quite secular in character.”²⁶

Consequently, this study’s investigation into the nature of the Christian assembly must be cautious about using the term ‘church’ because the term itself may imply that the NT Christian assemblies had religious and sacral connotations that might not be intended by the NT writers. Wayne Meeks of Yale, known for his investigation into the social history of earliest Christianity, says that translating ἐκκλησία as “church” is an “anachronism, which cannot fail to mislead.”²⁷ While few scholars would anachronistically assume that the NT church was a physical building, it is more likely that scholars would think of the term ‘church’ in sacral or ceremonial terms.

²⁵ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 322, n. 46.

²⁶ Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: Spirit and Culture in Early House Churches*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 26-27. For example, the civic meeting at Ephesus is called an ἐκκλησία in Acts 19:32, 39, 41. See also Everett Ferguson: “Since the word ‘assembly’ (ἐκκλησία) in itself says nothing about the nature of the assembly, often descriptive phrases are added to the word in order to characterize the Christian assembly,” in *The Church of Christ*, 132.

²⁷ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 108.

Herein is a fundamental terminological problem for this study. Many modern English terms that refer to the Christian assembly contain sacral connotations that were absent in the NT period. As Eduard Schweizer says, “We again have to note the absence of all religious and ritualistic concepts (in the NT); and the Sunday service is therefore not separated as a holy event in a sacred sphere from everyday service.”²⁸ The word ‘worship’ is a key part of that problem. The word itself anachronistically injects “religious and ritualistic concepts” into the investigation.

Presentism and Pan-Liturgism

Presentism is a similar anachronistic fallacy that obstructs efforts to recover a clear picture of the Christian assembly in the NT. In historiography, presentism is “any attempt to read present assumptions back into the past,” assuming “that what is true of the present was true of the past in more or less equivalent ways,” says historian Nathan Finn.²⁹ Catholic theologian John O’Malley says presentism occurs when “the paradigms and judgments proper to one society and to one era might be applied erroneously in the evaluation of other periods of history, producing many misunderstandings.”³⁰ This anachronistic error is particularly prevalent when studying issues related to the biblical

²⁸ Eduard Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 220.

²⁹ Nathan Finn, *History: A Student’s Guide* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 30-31. Presentism has also been described as “an inevitable tendency towards representing the past in terms of contemporary sensibilities,” in Petri Luomanen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, Risto Uro, eds., *Explaining Christian Origins and Early Judaism: Contributions from Cognitive and Social Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 13.

³⁰ John O’Malley, “Church History in the Service of the Church,” *America* 147:10 (1982): 190.

Christian gathering, since scholars have demonstrated a tendency to assume that NT assemblies are similar to modern assemblies. D. A. Carson admits, “We unwittingly read our ideas and experiences of worship back into Scripture, so that we end up ‘finding’ there what, with exquisite confidence, we know jolly well ought to be there.”³¹ For reasons such as these, French historian Marc Bloch has called anachronism “the most unpardonable of sins in a time-science.”³² Because of these problematic anachronistic errors, this investigation must use biblical words and concepts (like ‘worship’) in the way they were originally intended and applied, not in the way the modern church might use them.

An example of presentism in NT assembly studies is ‘pan-liturgism’, a term coined in 1959 by the Dutch scholar W. C. van Unnik. Writing during a time when liturgical studies were popular,³³ van Unnik was one of many scholars who investigated the biblical roots of liturgical forms.³⁴ Specifically, van Unnik examined the biblical

³¹ Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 13. David Aune agrees, saying, “There has been a marked tendency to read early, fragmentary evidence anachronistically in the light of later, more detailed accounts of Christian liturgical practices,” in “Early Christian Worship,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:974.

³² Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 173.

³³ ‘Liturgy’ is often used synonymously with ‘worship.’ In this dissertation, ‘liturgy’ is defined as “formal and scripted rituals or responsive recitations used in certain church assemblies.” Liturgy and liturgical studies are more common in Catholic, Orthodox, and many mainline Protestant denominations. See Ralph P. Martin, “Worship and Liturgy,” *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments (DLNT)*, Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1225; and J. G. Davies, *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. J. G. Davies (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), vii.

³⁴ See H. Ellsworth Chandlee, “The Liturgical Movement,” *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 307-14; and Martin, “Worship and Liturgy,” 1224-38.

roots of the liturgical recitation, “Minister: ‘The Lord be with you.’ Congregation: ‘And with thy spirit.’” In van Unnik’s analysis, he criticizes “a certain ‘pan-liturgism’ which sees everywhere in the Pauline epistles the background of the liturgy whenever a simple parallel in wording between them and the *much later* liturgies is found.”³⁵ His identification of the ‘pan-liturgism’ fallacy struck a chord that has been sounded frequently ever since. In subsequent decades, many other scholars cited the same term, cautioning against the practice of carelessly identifying a New Testament word or passage as a clear example of a liturgical practice in early assemblies.³⁶

For example, in 1961 C. F. D. Moule begins his book, *Worship in the New Testament*, by citing van Unnik’s ‘pan-liturgism’ term, adding, “It is certainly true that it is fashionable at present for students of the New Testament to find liturgy everywhere.”³⁷

³⁵ W. C. van Unnik, “Dominus Vobiscum: The Background of a Liturgical Formula,” in *New Testament Essays in Memory of T. W. Manson*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 272.

³⁶ Here is a chronological list of others who have cited the problem of pan-liturgism: C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1961), 7; Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 109; John Henry Paul Reumann, “Holy Scripture and Worship,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 20:1 (February 1968): 24; Raymond B. Williams, “Liturgy and the New Testament,” *Worship* 42:8 (October 1968): 451; James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1990), 146; David Aune, “Early Christian Worship,” *ABD* (1992), 6:974; Martin, “Worship and Liturgy,” *DLNT* (1997), 1224; John M. Koelpin, “The Uniqueness of the Rite of Baptism in Christian Worship,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 94:1 (Winter 1997): 20; Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47; Ardeo Caviggiola Russo, *Behind the Heavenly Door: Earthly Liturgy and Heavenly Worship in the Apocalypse of John* (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2009), 47; Larry Hurtado, “NT Christian Worship,” *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 5:914.

³⁷ Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, 7.

Moule, professor of New Testament at Cambridge, elaborates on “the temptation to detect the reverberations of liturgy in the New Testament even where no liturgical note was originally struck.”³⁸ In spite of that temptation, Raymond Williams acknowledges the dangers of pan-liturgism yet takes the position that Christian liturgy actually pre-dates the NT writings, so that, in effect, the NT writers “plagiarized from the liturgy.”³⁹ Some scholars have assumed that the early church’s participation in the Lord’s Supper was a “liturgical recitation” before the Gospels were written.⁴⁰ Yet, Andrew McGowan examines the evidence and concludes that “there really is no good and clear case, prior to the third century” for such recitations to be developed. He says that this anachronistic error was “the reading back not only of fourth-century evidence but of nineteenth- and twentieth-century experience, working under that common assumption that, in their liturgical practice as otherwise, early Christians were ‘people like us.’”⁴¹ J. D. G. Dunn identifies more than a dozen NT scholars who have “found” ancient baptismal liturgies in 1 Peter and Ephesians, ancient eucharistic liturgies in Philippians and John, and ancient lectionaries for the liturgical year in Matthew and Mark.⁴² Dunn says these theories are

³⁸ Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, 7.

³⁹ Williams, “Liturgy and the New Testament,” 451.

⁴⁰ Andrew McGowan, “‘Is There a Liturgical Text in this Gospel?’: The Institution Narratives and their Early Interpretive Communities,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118:1 (1999): 75, 85.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴² Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 141-48.

“unconvincing” and “flimsy.”⁴³ D. A. Carson also decries the habit of certain scholars who “ransack the New Testament for any hint of liturgy, and thereby to establish afresh the importance of more formal liturgy today.” He immediately adds that “the evidence turns out to be very slender.”⁴⁴

Are scholars from liturgical churches more likely to “find” liturgy in the NT text?⁴⁵ If a scholar had never attended a liturgical church and read the text of Revelation, would that scholar conclude that the book is filled with references to the liturgy of the NT church? Pan-liturgism, as a kind of presentism, assumes that the forms and practices of modern Christian assemblies are found in ancient Christian assemblies. In the same way, the widespread practice of viewing a NT assembly as a “worship service” may force modern concepts and terminology onto the biblical text, assuming “that what is true of the present was true of the past in more or less equivalent ways.”⁴⁶ This practice is “arrogant,” says Finn, and it “fails to interpret the past on its own terms.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 143, 145.

⁴⁴ D. A. Carson, “‘Worship the Lord your God’: The Perennial Challenge,” in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, D. A. Carson, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1993), 14.

⁴⁵ Cullman, for example, was accustomed to liturgical practices, having been a member of the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace and Lorraine, and he was heavily involved in dialogue with liturgy-intensive churches in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox tradition. See Felix Corley, “Obituary: Oscar Cullmann,” *Independent* (January 30, 1999), <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-oscar-cullmann-1077098.html>.

⁴⁶ Finn, *History*, 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

Anachronism in English Translations

English translations of the New Testament have also fallen prey to the presentism fallacy of using ‘worship’ terminology to describe biblical assemblies. Several standard Bible versions use worship terminology to describe the contents of 1 Corinthians 14, which contains the longest discussion of Christian assembly activity in the NT. Some printed versions of the RSV,⁴⁸ NIV,⁴⁹ ESV,⁵⁰ and NRSV⁵¹ use “Orderly Worship” as the subhead for 1 Cor 14:26-40, while the Contemporary English Version uses “Worship Must Be Orderly” for the same passage.⁵² The TNIV uses “Intelligibility in Worship” for 1 Cor 14:1-25 and “Good Order in Worship” as the subhead for 14:26-40.⁵³ The Greek text of 14:25 does include προσκυνέω, but it refers to the gesture of prostration.⁵⁴ When

⁴⁸ *Revised Standard Version New Testament* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946), 376. Some editions of this version have different pagination and treat subheads differently.

⁴⁹ *New International Version New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 384. Some editions of this version treat subheads differently.

⁵⁰ *Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 1156. Some editions of this version treat subheads differently.

⁵¹ *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), 134 (in NT). Some editions of this version treat subheads differently.

⁵² *Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1995), 1201. Some editions of this version and treat subheads differently.

⁵³ *Today's New International Version: TNIV New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 243-244. Some editions treat subheads differently.

⁵⁴ When the term follows the act of falling on the face, knees, or ground, προσκυνέω almost certainly refers to prostration. Such cases are found some thirty times in the NT. See the discussion by Heinrich Greeven, “προσκυνέω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, Gerhard Friedrich, ed. (Grand Rapids:

Bible translations are also guilty of semantic anachronism and presentism, it is understandable why anyone would perpetuate the improper use of worship terminology.

Confirmation Bias

However, how could dozens of scholars write books and articles about assembly activities and anachronistically label their study as “Worship in the NT,” if indeed the NT itself never uses such language?⁵⁵ In psychological terms, this subconscious desire is referred to as “confirmation bias,” which is “the tendency to treat evidence selectively when a valued belief is at risk.”⁵⁶ Psychologist Raymond Nickerson says that the confirmation bias is pervasive and strong, even among intelligent and educated adults.⁵⁷ Nickerson recommends that “simply being aware of the confirmation bias” is a helpful step in reducing its effect.⁵⁸ Since confirmation bias and the presentism fallacy are so prevalent, this investigation of the Scriptural view of Christian assemblies will strive to *identify ancient terminology, not to justify modern terminology.*

A key component of this study, then, will be to remove present-day assumptions and to examine carefully the first-century evidence, using first-century terminology in its

Eerdmans, 1968), 6:762. The problem of mistranslating προσκυνέω will be discussed in chapter 4.

⁵⁵ See the sample list in footnote 11.

⁵⁶ Raymond S. Nickerson, “Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises,” *Review of General Psychology* 2:2 (1998): 176. Nickerson quotes Francis Bacon as saying, “The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion ... draws all things else to support and agree with it.” (Ibid.)

⁵⁷ Ibid., 180, 205, 211.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 211.

first-century context as much as possible. As Finn urges, “A keen sense of historical context helps protect historians from the temptation of presentism.”⁵⁹ Pulitzer prize-winning historian Gordon Wood adds that “any good historian needs constantly to worry about the problem of injecting his or her contemporary consciousness back into the past.”⁶⁰

Worship-Related Anachronisms

‘Worship’ terminology is only one example of modern assembly terminology that must be replaced with assembly terminology from the historical context of the first century. Another example is the modern practice of referring to the assembly as a “service,” as in “worship service,” “church services,” “Sunday services,” “early and late services,” “service of the word and sacrament,” etc.⁶¹ In these examples, ‘service’ refers to the entirety of the Christian assembly.⁶² However, does the NT ever use the term ‘service’ in this way? Is this another example of anachronism, where scholars are applying a modern idea of a formal “service” where the NT implies a simple “meeting”? When Christian meetings are characterized as services, they are perceived in more formal

⁵⁹ Nickerson, “Confirmation Bias,” 30. Historian Gordon Wood adds, “The more we study the events and situations in the past, the more complicated and complex we find them to be,” in *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁶¹ This use of the term is so widespread, documentation is hardly needed. For example, C. C. Richardson uses the term ‘service’ in this way more than twenty-five times in “Christian Worship in NT Times,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, George Arthur Buttrick, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 4:883-94.

⁶² Marshall says that “‘service’ has come to mean little more than a gathering of Christians to perform certain rites,” in “How Far,” 216.

and ceremonial tones than may be warranted by the evidence. The term ‘service’ also implies that the event is intended as a service or offering to God. Marshall says that ‘service’ might be an appropriate term to use in reference to the Christian assembly, but it would need to be understood that “it is primarily a case of God serving us and not vice versa; unfortunately the traditional associations of the word are probably ineradicable.”⁶³ In Marshall’s analysis of “How far did the early Christians *worship* God?” he concludes, “To speak of a Christian meeting as being ‘a service of worship’ with the implication that everything which takes place must somehow be related directly to this primary purpose is to depart seriously from the NT pattern.”⁶⁴ Therefore, since terms like ‘worship’ and ‘service’ have questionable validity as appropriate terminology, this study will avoid such fallacies of presentism and anachronism and will minimize modern terminology and confine characterizations to where the biblical text may lead us.

Consequently, in this investigation the Christian assembly experience of eating the bread and wine will be called the “Lord’s Supper” (as it is described in 1 Cor 11:20 - κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) and not “Eucharist” or “communion.”⁶⁵ Some church traditions routinely call the Lord’s Supper the “Holy Eucharist.” However, the term ‘Eucharist’ is never used in the NT in reference to the Supper, and terms like ‘holy’, ‘rite’, and ‘ritual’,

⁶³ Marshall, “How Far,” 228.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 226-27.

⁶⁵ A few of the earlier English translations of 1 Cor 10:16 render κοινωνία τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ as “a communion of the blood of Christ” (viz., Geneva Bible, KJV, RV, ASV). As I. Howard Marshall says, “Modern translations have rightly abandoned the use of the term ‘communion’ in this verse,” opting instead for ‘participation’ and ‘sharing.’ See Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 15.

may bias the reader to think of the event in more sacral and ceremonial terms than is warranted by the NT text. Examples of other modern assembly terms that may lack NT support include ‘liturgy’, ‘benediction’, ‘doxology’, ‘sacrament’, ‘unction’, ‘offertory’, ‘lection’, ‘litany’, ‘sermon’, ‘homily’, and others. This statement should not be viewed as a condemnation of these terms. Rather, this strict approach to terminology should simply be viewed as an essential part of an unbiased scholarly investigation that seeks to avoid the anachronistic error of reading modern concepts back into the NT text. In order to get inside the mind of the first-century Christian, this study must use first-century Christian terminology. This approach to terminology will help us reduce the pervasive influence of modern practices and beliefs, and it will help us discover the ancient paths of the earliest Christians.

Semantic Methodology

A key task of this dissertation is to determine the meaning of certain Greek words found in the New Testament. The field of study used to determine the meaning of these terms is lexical semantics, which has made much progress since the work of James Barr in 1961.⁶⁶ Barr’s work can be described as the driving force behind Louw and Nida’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*⁶⁷ and Moisés Silva’s *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*

⁶⁶ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

⁶⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, editors, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989).

(*NIDNTTE*).⁶⁸ It is not necessary to chronicle the history of lexical semantics and all its facets, but it is necessary to identify this study's methodology of determining the meanings of Greek words found in the NT. In short, the fundamental lexical methodology used in this dissertation is that "context determines meaning"⁶⁹ or as Constantine Campbell summarizes it, "the context ... virtually makes meaning."⁷⁰ This simple summary contains several implications.

By focusing on a term's context, this study will determine meaning through a synchronic analysis of the term's use at a particular moment in time and specifically in

⁶⁸ Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1:8. Silva had previously hailed Barr's work as "a trumpet blast against the monstrous regiment of shoddy linguistics," in *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 18.

⁶⁹ This specific summary statement comes from Dr. Alan Tomlinson, professor for my Pauline Epistles class at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He said, "Context determines meaning—and nothing else. It's true in all languages," in Class notes, Ph.D. in New Testament, Pauline Epistles, Kansas City, MO, January 2017.

⁷⁰ Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 75, 89. The primary importance of context has been emphasized by many others. See James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press), 38; Anthony C. Thiselton, "Semantics and New Testament Interpretation," *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 79; Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1989), 178-81; Moisés Silva, *God, Language, and Scripture: Reading the Bible in Light of General Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 124; Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 138; Darrell L. Bock, "Lexical Analysis: Studies in Words," in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 137-38; Andreas J. Kostenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer (hereafter abbreviated as KMP), *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 475-76.

the NT. A term's etymology focuses on diachronic analysis, i.e., its use throughout its history. Etymology is important but only in surfacing a range of possible meanings. As Barr says, "The etymology of a word is not a statement about its meaning but about its history."⁷¹ So, prior to analyzing a term's synchronic meaning in its NT setting, this dissertation will briefly review a term's diachronic meanings in previous usage, such as in the Septuagint and in Second Temple Judaism.

Context itself is a complex issue.⁷² In short, this study will consider the situational and literary context where these Greek "worship words" are used. In addition to reviewing the historical situation that prompted the drafting of the document in which a word appears, this analysis will also cover the literary context of the immediate sentence(s), the larger section in which the term appears, the entire book, as well as other writings by the same author.⁷³ Ultimately, the quest to find a word's meaning is a quest to find "authorial intent."⁷⁴ When a particular word is used in a document, the author made a lexical choice to use that term.⁷⁵ By analyzing the context and the author's intent, the meaning of a term can usually be deciphered.

⁷¹ Barr, *Semantics*, 109. See also Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 81-82.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 75-78.

⁷³ This approach is widely accepted in the field of NT study. See KMP, *Going Deeper*, 484-89, and Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 76.

⁷⁴ Darrell L. Bock, "Lexical Analysis: Studies in Words," 145.

⁷⁵ Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 78-79. See also Thiselton, "Semantics and New Testament Interpretation," 83; Silva, *Biblical Words*, 159-61.

Limitations of the Study

This dissertation will limit itself to issues related to NT terminology that describes the nature of the Christian assembly. Discussions about early Christian assemblies can easily become mired in controversies that are related to the specific events of the assembly, such as speaking in tongues, the Lord's Supper, baptism, officers, the persons who speak or preside, Scripture reading, music, prayer, Sabbath vs. Sunday, as well as clerical garb, buildings, furniture, and accoutrements. While these elements have a role in helping us understand the nature of the gathering, this study will focus on the larger issues of the church's overall perception of the meeting itself. What did the early church hope to achieve at these meetings? If early Christians were to describe the essence of these meetings, what words would they use? By focusing on the larger issues of the nature and purpose of the meeting, this dissertation hopes to provide a better perspective that allows others to assess the viability and effectiveness of the component parts of any assembly.

A key assumption of this study is that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are the authoritative basis for Christian doctrine and practice today. When a church seeks justification for its beliefs and practices concerning its regular assembly, the teachings of the NT are foundational and cannot be dismissed. In 1956, when Eduard Schweizer spoke on this topic at a conference in Emden, Germany, he said, "We are concerned ... to seek the determinative, normative lines of original Christian worship, because these remain binding upon us, and we must order our own worship accordingly,

whatever changes take place in our circumstances.”⁷⁶ I. Howard Marshall held a similar assumption about the NT and this topic: “If we regard the New Testament pattern for Christian meetings as a normative one, then clearly we need to explore this difference with care and consider whether our understanding of Christian practice needs to be reformed in the light of the Word of God in Scripture.”⁷⁷ In other words, this study is more than a curious exploration of a minor detail of little importance. Rather, the outcome of this study could have implications for any church that regards the NT documents as authoritative.

The Structure of this Investigation

This study is organized into five chapters. After this first chapter about important introductory matters, chapter 2 is a review of literature by scholars who have written about the nature of Christian assemblies in the NT period. This review focuses on (1) their observations about using worship terminology to refer to the Christian assembly and (2) their observations about the origins of the Christian assembly and whether it is based on temple activities, synagogue meetings, mystery religions, Greco-Roman sacred meals, civic assemblies, association meetings, symposiums, or some combination of these. The review of origins is relevant because it affects our understanding of the nature of the early Christian assembly and its connection to worship terminology.

⁷⁶ Schweizer, “Worship in the New Testament,” 196. Note that Schweizer here uses ‘worship’ in an unbiblical sense. This 1957 article was a translation of Schweizer’s speech delivered at the Emden Conference of the European Area Council in August 1956.

⁷⁷ Marshall, “How Far,” 217.

Chapter 3 is a focused investigation of NT terminology used to refer to church meetings. This analysis focuses on all texts that provide some helpful detail about Christian assemblies in the first century. These texts are primary: Mt 18:17-20; Acts 2:42-47; 4:23-35; 11:21-30; 12:12-17; 13:1-4; 14:21-28; 15:4-35; 20:6-12; 1 Cor 11:17-34; 14:1-40; 1 Tm 2:8-12; 4:11-16; Heb 10:23-25; Jas 2:2-4. Chapter 4 is an analysis of the common Greek words for “worship” (viz., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, σέβομαι, θρησκεία) to determine why they might not be used to describe church gatherings in the NT. This analysis focuses on all texts that use a Greek word that may be translated as “worship.” These are some of the key texts: (for προσκυνέω) Mt 4:9-10; Jn 4:20-24; 1 Cor 14:25; Rv 4:10; 14:7-9; (for λατρεύω) Mt 4:9-10; Lk 2:37; Rom 12:1; Phil 3:3; Heb 12:28; (for λειτουργέω) Acts 13:2; Heb 9:21; (for σέβομαι) Mk 7:7; Acts 16:14; 17:23; Rom 1:25; (for θρησκεία) Jas 1:26-27; Col 2:18. These texts are primary texts; other relevant texts will also be reviewed as needed.

Chapter 5 then summarizes the dissertation’s findings, reflects on implications for church life today, and offers suggestions for further study. These reflections consider implications for terminological as well as systemic changes that affect the modern church’s approach to its assemblies. These changes are considered from various viewpoints, including a Christian’s perspective of how to participate in the assembly, a pastoral viewpoint of how to plan or evaluate an assembly, as well as how these changes might affect the Church over the long term.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Part 1: The Worship Anomaly

This chapter reviews scholarly literature on two topics: the “worship anomaly” and the origins of the Christian assembly. This first portion of this chapter provides an analysis of how scholars have written about the use of worship terminology to describe the Christian assembly in the NT. While many scholars have written about “New Testament worship,” relatively few have noticed or focused on the “worship anomaly,” i.e., the absence of worship terminology in NT references to Christian assembly activities. This review of literature will proceed chronologically, beginning around 1950, which appears to be the first time when scholars noticed the anomaly. While hundreds of books and articles have been written on the general topic of “Christian worship,”⁷⁸ this review will focus primarily on scholarly efforts from biblical experts who discuss the NT evidence.

For each reviewed scholar, his church denominational background and his country of origin will be noted. Ideally, such background data should have no bearing on a scholar’s assessment of the evidence. However, as David Aune notes, scholars have shown “a marked tendency to read early, fragmentary evidence anachronistically in the

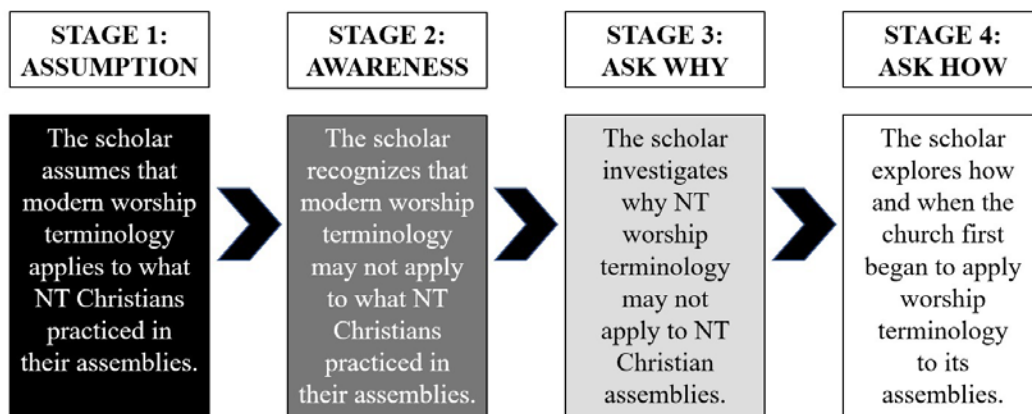
⁷⁸ For example, more than 500 books on the general topic of Christian worship were published between 1994 and 2006 alone, according to a review of books at Worldcat.org.

light of later, more detailed accounts of Christian liturgical practices.”⁷⁹ Consequently, there is a concern that scholars may unwittingly allow their church or their liturgical background to influence their assessment of the NT text. Such background data should not disqualify any scholar’s views, but it seems reasonable to take this data into consideration as appropriate context for understanding each scholar’s conclusions.

This review will specifically target four key issues related to this dissertation. These issues are four potential stages that each scholar may or may not address (see Chart 1 below).

CHART 1

PROGRESSION OF STEPS TO RESOLVE THE “WORSHIP ANOMALY”



A scholar in Stage 1 (Assumption) assumes that modern worship terminology applies to what NT Christians practiced in their assemblies. A scholar in Stage 2 (Awareness) recognizes that the NT evidence may not support the use of worship terminology to refer to Christian assemblies. A scholar in Stage 3 (Ask Why) has explored reasons why the NT evidence lacks such worship terminology. Scholars in

⁷⁹ David Aune, “Early Christian Worship,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 974.

Stage 4 (Ask How) have explored how the early church eventually came to apply worship terminology to its assemblies. Scholars in this review will be assessed to see which of these four stages they have entered, along with their other pertinent observations and conclusions. The goal of this review is to gauge the status of research into the worship anomaly.

1952: Gerhard Delling

In 1952, the Lutheran scholar Gerhard Delling, professor of New Testament at the University of Halle (East Germany), published *Gottesdienst im Neuen Testament*, which was later published in English in 1962.⁸⁰ Like most scholars, Delling never questions the appropriateness of using the term ‘worship’ to refer to the assembly.⁸¹ He also freely refers to the meeting as a ‘service,’ never considering whether the early Christians would have regarded it as such. So, in that respect, Delling is representative of a scholar in Stage 1. However, Delling is aware of a significant change in NT terminology regarding matters involving Christian assemblies (Stage 2), and he attempts to find a reason (Stage 3). He observes that “a *complete refashioning of the cultic language* takes place” (emphasis original) in the NT, particularly with respect to the idea of sacrifice.⁸² “It is really surprising what a relatively small place this word [sacrifice] occupies in the New

⁸⁰ Gerhard Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, trans. Percy Scott (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962).

⁸¹ In a preface to the English translation of the book, the translator says, “The word Worship, with a capital initial, is used as the normal translation of *Gottesdienst*, and when so printed is always used to mean ordered worship.” (Ibid., vii.)

⁸² Ibid., 9.

Testament (apart from Hebrews) in view of the place it occupies in the later development of the Church,” he adds.⁸³

Delling surmises that the reason for this new terminology (Stage 3) is that Jesus did not simply spiritualize the temple cult;⁸⁴ He rather established a new relationship between man and God.⁸⁵ Because of this new reality, “all human religious forms are overthrown,” says Delling.⁸⁶ When he analyzes the structure and framework of these early meetings, Delling notes that the concepts of place, furniture, and symbolic items are absent. “It appears as though primitive Christianity, again in marked difference from the religion of its Greek environment, attached no importance to the external framework of its Worship: we hear nothing of the use of visible symbols, nothing at all about arranging the room, etc. That cannot be a matter of chance.”⁸⁷ So, while Delling is still in Stage 1, his observations reveal aspects of Stage 2 (awareness of new terminology) and Stage 3 (exploring reasons for that new terminology).

⁸³ Delling, *Worship in the NT*, 9.

⁸⁴ ‘Cult’, ‘cultus’, and ‘cultic’ are common terms used in scholarly discussions of OT and NT worship, but these terms require definition. When used in the context of religious worship, the terms commonly refer to a sacrificial system of rituals and priestly activity such as in the Jewish or a pagan temple. In a sense, the terms refer to the idea of ‘cultivating’ the favor of a deity. See J. G. Davies, “Cult, cultus,” *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. J. G. Davies (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 202-03.

⁸⁵ Delling, *Worship in the NT*, 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

1953: Peter Brunner

In 1953, Peter Brunner, a Lutheran scholar and professor at Heidelberg University, authored *Zur Lehre vom Gottesdienst der im Namen Jesu versammelten Gemeinde*.⁸⁸ Since Delling's book never cites Brunner, and Brunner's book never cites Delling, it appears that these two Lutheran scholars independently discovered the worship anomaly. Unlike Delling, Brunner exhibits a greater appreciation for the terminological problem. He begins with a full awareness that "it is difficult to find an appropriate term for the subject of our study," adding that the NT "does not permit us simply to use the word 'worship' (*Gottesdienst*) to designate the subject of our investigation."⁸⁹ After examining Greek words that are commonly translated as "worship," he concludes:

We are confronted with a very significant fact. Not any of the terms used by the Greeks or those used in the Old Testament for the specific adoration of the Godhead in the worship service is able to express the experience of Christians assembled for worship. What happens in this worship of Christians is manifestly something radically new.⁹⁰

Brunner notes that in the NT these typical worship terms have been "peculiarly reinterpreted and stripped of their concretely ritualistic sense ... but they are deliberately not used in speaking of the particular worship in which the congregation sings, prays, listens to the Word, and celebrates Holy Communion."⁹¹ Consequently, he says that the

⁸⁸ The English translation appeared fifteen years later: Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M. H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968). His biographical background is mentioned on page 9.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁹¹ Ibid.

word ‘cult’ is “unsuited to express the essence of the worship of the Christian church.”⁹² Nonetheless, Brunner persists in describing NT assemblies as “worship.” He concludes his analysis of terminology by saying, “As we designate these assemblies on the following pages with the collective term *Gottesdienst*, we are aware of the inadequacy of this term.”⁹³ So, even though Brunner has advanced to Stage 2 in admitting that worship terminology does not apply to NT assemblies, he reverts to Stage 1 and uses that terminology throughout the remainder of his book. He ventures little into Stage 3 (asking why the terminological change), but he observes that NT assembly terminology “is borrowed from the sphere of everyday life and not from the area of worship” so that “the former cultic terms founder on this newness.”⁹⁴

1956: Eduard Schweizer

In 1956, Eduard Schweizer, professor of New Testament at the University of Zurich and a minister in the Swiss Reformed Church,⁹⁵ presented a conference speech that was published in 1957 in a Presbyterian theological journal under the title of “Worship in the New Testament.” After that article was published, he authored several other works on this general topic between 1959 and 1964.⁹⁶ In the 1957 article, he says,

⁹² Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 20.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁵ These biographical details are mentioned in James Tunstead Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 150.

⁹⁶ See Eduard Schweizer, “The Service of Worship: An Exposition of I Corinthians 14,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* (October 1959): 400-8;

“It is very significant that nowhere in the New Testament the usual terms of the cult (sacrifice, offering, even worship) are applied to the assembling of the church for its services.”⁹⁷ Rather, when the Christian gathering is being discussed, the NT employs everyday secular terms that have no religious overtones, such as ἐκκλησία, συναγωγή, and συνέρχονται.⁹⁸ Schweizer emphasizes the importance of 1 Cor 14, in which the upbuilding (οἰκοδομή) of the congregation is “the only rule by which worship may be measured.”⁹⁹ While he continues to designate assembly activities as “worship,” he concludes that there is a stark difference between the modern assembly and its ancient counterpart. In his conclusion, he calls for church meetings to embrace a greater emphasis on fellowship and lay participation.¹⁰⁰ So, Schweizer is similar to Delling and Brunner. Even though he is aware of the problem of worship terminology (Stage 2), he continues to use it anyway (Stage 1).

1959: Bo Reicke

In 1959, another European NT scholar added to the discussion in a festschrift in honor of T. W. Manson. Bo Reicke, an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden and a professor of New Testament at the University of Basel

Church Order in the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1961); and *The Church as the Body of Christ* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964).

⁹⁷ Schweizer, “The Service of Worship,” 400. The words in parentheses are from Schweizer.

⁹⁸ Eduard Schweizer, “Worship in the New Testament,” 196.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

(Switzerland),¹⁰¹ is aware that worship studies have broken new ground in his recent past. He says that he seeks “to emphasize certain points of view which have not always been observed.”¹⁰² Speaking of worship terminology, Reicke says that he was struck by the fact that λατρεία, λειτουργία, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, and προσκυνέω “have nothing to do with any worship practiced within the New Covenant, but refer to the Jewish temple service.”¹⁰³ The absence of worship terminology in the NT is so striking that Reicke asks, “Does not ‘worship’ have any importance for the New Testament authors?”¹⁰⁴

Reicke advances to Stage 3 and asks why. He concludes that the NT authors avoided such worship terms because of their semantic connection with the Jewish temple and the concept of temple sacrifice.¹⁰⁵ Since the temple and its sacrifices are rendered obsolete by Christ, such sacrificial and temple terminology is greatly diminished in the NT. He explains, “These circumstances show forcefully that in the New Testament all

¹⁰¹ His biography is included in Bo Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of 1 Peter 3:19 and its Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), ix-xi.

¹⁰² Bo Reicke, “Some Reflections on Worship in the New Testament” in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson, 1893-1958*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 194.

¹⁰³ He adds that there is one exception: the use of λειτουργέω in Acts 13:2, where the prophets and teachers at Antioch engage in something of a prayer ministry (Reicke, “Some Reflections on Worship in the NT,” 195). The meaning of λειτουργέω in Acts 13:2 will be investigated in chapter 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 196.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 196-99.

stress is placed on what God does for man in Christ. It is impossible to find here any general instruction as to what man is to do for God in worship.”¹⁰⁶

Reicke is aware that the NT’s lack of worship terminology could be viewed as supporting the cause of “anti-liturgists,” whom he describes as “purists.”¹⁰⁷ He opposes the anti-liturgist position, and he launches a few arguments in support of the view that the NT assembly was indeed liturgical. He claims that the conceptions of worship in Hebrews and Revelation are “explicitly ‘liturgical’”¹⁰⁸ and were similar to “the liturgical ideas of Our Lord.”¹⁰⁹ He further claims that the stories of Mary and Martha (Lk 10:38-42) and the woman anointing Jesus (Mt 26:6-13 and par.) were both recorded “to show that Jesus stressed the importance of worship as well as social work.”¹¹⁰ He believes that the story of the choosing of the seven in Acts 6:1-6 likely provided “a certain tension between the ideals of worship or liturgy and social work or *diakonia*,” which resulted in the Twelve being devoted “to liturgy.”¹¹¹ In his comments about Acts 2:42, Reicke claims that “the Apostles and the first Christians in Jerusalem from the very beginning

¹⁰⁶ Reicke, “Some Reflections on Worship in the NT,” 198.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 196. An undercurrent throughout Reicke’s article is an awareness of a contemporary ecclesiastical battle (in 1959) about the NT evidence that supported liturgy (a set and rote ceremonial approach to assembly events) in the church’s meetings. The “anti-liturgists” argued that such liturgy was absent in the NT period and was later added to the assemblies of the patristic period.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 200.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 201.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 201.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 202.

took up a liturgical service of God in the Temple.”¹¹² Consequently, he says that the main factors of the “liturgical forms of the Church” were “already present in the environment of Jesus and his Apostles.”¹¹³

So, even though Reicke begins with being amazed at the absence of worship terminology, he somehow concludes, “Worship is certainly to be found throughout the New Testament, even in the technical sense of liturgical action ... This is the reason why the Church regards its liturgical traditions as venerable and holy.”¹¹⁴ In summary, Reicke is aware of the lack of worship terminology used to refer to NT Christian assemblies (Stage 2). He asks why (Stage 3) and concludes that the absence of a temple and sacrifices are the reason. Yet, eager to defend the pro-liturgy position, he insists that liturgical worship was firmly in place even with Jesus and the Apostles. In the next few years, a growing number of scholars will begin to question the assumption that the NT contains evidence of liturgical practices in early church meetings.¹¹⁵

1961: C. F. D. Moule

In 1961, C. F. D. Moule begins his book, *Worship in the New Testament*, by citing van Unnik’s concept of ‘pan-liturgism’, noting that “it is certainly true that it is

¹¹² Reicke, “Some Reflections on Worship in the NT,” 205.

¹¹³ Ibid., 207.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ As detailed in chapter 1, in 1959, W. C. van Unnik coined the term ‘pan-liturgism’ to refer to scholars’ misguided tendency to “see liturgy everywhere” in the NT. Ironically, Van Unnik’s comment was published in the same volume that contains Reicke’s article. See W. C. van Unnik, “Dominus Vobiscum: The Background of a Liturgical Formula,” in *New Testament Essays in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 272.

fashionable at present for students of the New Testament to find liturgy everywhere.”¹¹⁶ Moule, an Anglican priest and professor of New Testament at Cambridge,¹¹⁷ is aware of the then-current liturgical movement¹¹⁸ and its “temptation to detect the reverberations of liturgy in the New Testament even where no liturgical note was originally struck.” He adds, “It is possible, in one’s enthusiasm, to squeeze the evidence beyond its capacity.”¹¹⁹ He then embarks on this study of early Christian assemblies, seeking to avoid this problem of anachronism. Moule makes little mention of the lack of worship terminology in the NT, but his book is important because it marks a turning point in scholarly studies toward a greater awareness of faulty assumptions about the sacramental and liturgical nature of early assemblies.

Moule observes that the NT reveals “very little trace of any technical name such as ‘Eucharist’ or ‘Holy Communion’ to distinguish the rite.”¹²⁰ He confesses that the NT evidence is “slight and vague” for several of the modern assumptions about eucharistic practice, such as the presiding celebrant, a precise procedure, and sacramental

¹¹⁶ C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1961), 7.

¹¹⁷ “C. F. D. Moule,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._F._D._Moule.

¹¹⁸ The liturgical reform movement of the Roman Catholic Church is not a part of this investigation. But it should be noted that many Catholic liturgical reforms were widely discussed in the 1950s and then ratified in the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965. Many of these liturgical reforms were ecumenical efforts to find a common liturgy that would be acceptable to Protestants and Catholics. See H. Ellsworth Chandlee, “The Liturgical Movement,” *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 307-14.

¹¹⁹ Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

concepts.¹²¹ Unlike other liturgical scholars, Moule does not find a baptismal liturgy in 1 Peter,¹²² he questions whether a congregational confession of sin ever occurred in NT assemblies,¹²³ and he says it is “highly probable that Christians sometimes met ... without any distinctively sacramental activity.”¹²⁴ Nonetheless, he retains the idea that early Christians came together weekly “for the more formal, more dignified public worship”¹²⁵ and that the service must contain a sense of awe and of the mysterious.¹²⁶ Yet, agreeing with Schweizer, Moule concludes that the NT community no longer maintains any cultus, because “to revert to a specialized cultus means incurring the peril of over-formalization.”¹²⁷ So, Moule remains in Stage 1, and he maintains his solidarity with a high-church Anglican experience.¹²⁸ Yet, he provides some balance against the trend in the 1950s to view NT assemblies as “liturgical worship services.”

¹²¹ Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, 45; see esp. 18-46.

¹²² Ibid., 58, 67.

¹²³ Ibid., 60.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 61.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 79.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 83.

¹²⁸ “High church,” a phrase often connected to the Anglican tradition, refers a church’s emphasis on formality, vestments, liturgy, and rituals in its assemblies. The “worship services” in such churches are often considered to be closer to the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox experience. See “High church,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_church.

1963: Franklin Young

In 1963, with the publishing of *Worship in Scripture and Tradition*, American scholars entered the discussion about these new perspectives on worship that had previously been dominated by European scholars. In that 1963 volume, the first American scholar to contribute to this new wave of understanding was Franklin W. Young, an ordained priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church and professor of New Testament at Princeton University.¹²⁹ In a chapter on “The Theological Context of New Testament Worship,” he begins by noting that the NT does not use “a vocabulary of worship in the narrow sense of that word” (Stage 2).¹³⁰ He says:

Recent scholarship has repeatedly underscored the fact that the New Testament refrains from using traditional cultic terminology (e.g., *latreia*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, etc.) to refer to its cultic worship. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. There must have been a good reason.¹³¹

He sets out to determine why such terminology is missing (Stage 3).¹³² Young believes that the answer is found in the temple and its destruction. “It is an historical fact that the New Testament Church had no *holy place*, spatially located, which could be designated as *the place* where God, in some special sense, was present to his people,” he

¹²⁹ Young also taught at Yale Divinity School, Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest, and Duke Divinity School, where he retired in 1985. See “Obituary: Franklin Woodrow Young (March 16, 1915 - September 25, 2010),” Cremation Society of the Carolinas, <https://www.cremnc.com/obituary/franklin-young>.

¹³⁰ Franklin W. Young, “The Theological Context of New Testament Worship,” *Worship in Scripture and Tradition*, ed. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 78.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 78.

says (emphasis original).¹³³ In this respect, Christianity was different from Judaism and any other religion in the Greco-Roman world. Consequently, Young says that “the Christians had no *place of worship*. More than that, they had nothing to do that could be called worship in the cultic sense” (emphasis original).¹³⁴ Young then sees a connection between the loss of the sacred building and Paul’s new emphasis on upbuilding (οικοδομή) in the “one lengthy passage in the Pauline epistles where cultic worship is described (1 Cor 12-14).”¹³⁵ In other words, a “building” still matters in man’s engagement with God, but it is not a physical building; it is the upbuilding of the body of believers.

Historically, the Lord’s Supper (the “Holy Eucharist”) has been the foundation for a cultic approach to the Christian assembly because the elements have been viewed as sacred, and the procedures surrounding it have often been accompanied with liturgical forms.¹³⁶ However, says Young, since the Supper can happen in any place, in any house, and on any table, it actually “shattered the possibility of conceiving of worship adequately in traditional cultic terms and forms.”¹³⁷ He says that the Lord’s Supper posed a stark contrast to other religions where “the adherence to exact technical religious

¹³³ Young, “The Theological Context of New Testament Worship,” 78.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹³⁶ See Paul F. Bradshaw, “Eucharist,” *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. J. G. Davies (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 227-29.

¹³⁷ Young, “The Theological Context of New Testament Worship,” 91-92.

formulae and liturgies was necessary.”¹³⁸ In sum, Young helped to call attention to the absence of worship terminology in NT references to the Christian assembly, he pointed to the primacy of edification (οἰκοδομή) as the purpose of the assembly, and he discouraged the tendency of scholars to promote a cultic and liturgical approach to assembly activities.

1964: Ralph Martin

In 1964, the British Baptist scholar Ralph P. Martin, a long-time professor of New Testament at Fuller, published *Worship in the Early Church*. The book adds little to the ongoing effort to understand the NT approach to its assemblies, but it deserves mention because of Martin’s popularity in the 1960s and 70s. He says that his book is targeted less to the scholarly community and more toward “clergymen ... and persons in the pew.”¹³⁹ Unlike other scholars of the 1950s and 1960s, Martin never mentions that worship terminology is not used in the NT to refer to Christian assemblies. Consequently, he discusses early Christian assemblies with the presumption that these practices were identified as “worship.”¹⁴⁰ In addition, he comments about the problem of pan-liturgism, but he extensively assumes that early church meetings were liturgical.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Young, “The Theological Context of New Testament Worship,” 93.

¹³⁹ Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), back cover.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 109.

In the subsequent twenty years, Martin published two more books on this topic: *The Worship of God: Some Theological, Pastoral, and Practical Reflections*¹⁴² and *The Spirit and the Congregation: Studies in 1 Corinthians 12-15*.¹⁴³ These later books also never mention the terminological problem, but by 1984, Martin began to reflect more seriously about the potential conflict between modern notions of “worship” and Paul’s directive about edification in 1 Corinthians. He says:

Finally, I return to the question that has haunted me in preparing these studies. If one verse (1 Cor 14:26) enshrines an apostolic dictum—that all church members have, with their individual contributions, a part to play in worship—why is public worship in the mainstream denominations so obviously at odds with the Pauline rubric? Do we need to understand Paul’s writings in another way?¹⁴⁴

In short, Martin is a Stage 1 scholar. He acknowledges the “haunting” importance of 1 Cor 14:26, but he does not answer his own question of how to understand this apostolic mandate. Throughout all three books, Martin never questions whether ‘worship’ is an appropriate term to describe the Christian assembly, and he persists in assuming that NT assemblies were liturgical services. As he says in his 1984 book, “We may concede that what this chapter (1 Cor. 14) depicts is the coming-together of a house congregation (v. 26), yet it must not be overlooked that, for all their divisiveness and cliquishness, the Corinthians did unite in a common liturgical meeting.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Ralph P. Martin, *The Worship of God: Some Theological, Pastoral, and Practical Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

¹⁴³ Ralph P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation: Studies in 1 Corinthians 12-15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., vi-vii.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 64.

1967: Ferdinand Hahn

German scholar Ferdinand Hahn, a minister in the Evangelical Church¹⁴⁶ and professor of New Testament at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany, authored his own book on worship in 1967. In the preface, John Reumann says the book is “a comprehensive analysis, bringing order out of a topic where there has been a considerable amount of literature in recent years.”¹⁴⁷ As Reumann says, Hahn approaches the topic from the perspective of the Bultmann school, analyzing “worship” in various presumed communities of the first-century church, such as the Aramaic-speaking community, the Hellenistic Jewish community, and the early Gentile community. Reumann also notes that the German word for ‘worship’ (*Gottesdienst*) literally means “service of God.” However, he says that this word can be understood as “man’s service of God” or “the service that God gives to man.”¹⁴⁸ Hahn, like Brunner before him, takes the latter approach. Hahn concludes that God serves His people in the assembly, not the other way around. But Hahn’s approach seems rather contrived since “worship” is not likely to be offered to humans, and the natural understanding of a “worship service” is that it is a “service of worship” to God.

¹⁴⁶ This is how Reumann describes Hahn in the preface to the English edition, in Ferdinand Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), vi. The “Evangelical Church,” also known as Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), here refers to a postwar group of Lutheran and Reformed churches in Germany. See “Evangelical Church in Germany,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Church_in_Germany.

¹⁴⁷ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, v.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi.

For Hahn, the surprising lack of NT worship terminology (Stage 2) is a fundamental key to his perspectives. He says that this terminology situation is rarely appreciated, and it means that Christianity is essentially non-cultic, non-liturgical, and non-ritual. “The terminological evidence means not only that any cultic understanding of Christian worship is out of the question, but also that there is no longer any distinction in principle between assembly for worship and the service of Christians in the world.”¹⁴⁹ He says that primitive Christianity maintained that “worship can no longer take place within well-defined and sanctified precincts.”¹⁵⁰

In the NT he sees “no trace of any obligatory liturgical order.”¹⁵¹ He says that Jesus rejects the liturgical ordinances of Judaism, tearing down all ritual precepts and all walls separating the sacred from the secular.¹⁵² Even in the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus “removes prayer from the liturgical sphere of sacral language and places it right in the midst of everyday life.”¹⁵³ In the Sermon on the Mount, Hahn says, “It is impossible to overlook the open declaration of war on the cult ... (where) proper performance of the prescribed ritual is all that matters.”¹⁵⁴ Hahn sees that Jesus is making two fundamental

¹⁴⁹ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 38.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 19. Hahn exhibits an appreciation for the work of Ernst Lohmeyer, *Lord of the Temple: A Study of the Relation Between Cult and Gospel*, trans. Stewart Todd (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962).

¹⁵³ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 22. Here, Hahn is quoting Joachim Jeremias, “The Prayers of Jesus,” *Studies in Biblical Theology* 2:6 (1967): 76.

¹⁵⁴ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 25.

points about Jewish worship: “He repudiates Jewish observance of the law and its concomitant ritualization of life, and he proclaims the end of the temple cult.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, the earliest Christians understood that Jesus taught against sacralization, ritualization, and the cultic way of approaching God.¹⁵⁶

Yet, within the first century, “there were tendencies at work relatively early among the Jewish Christian communities of Palestine that occasioned a return to ritualism and to Jewish observance of the law.”¹⁵⁷ Paul scolds the Galatian Christians for reverting to the ritualism of “observing special days and months and seasons and years” (Gal 4:10), and he calls them back to freedom (Gal 5:1). When considering the positive elements of a productive Christian assembly, Hahn sees a dominant role for edification (οικοδομή) as the guiding principle of 1 Corinthians 14.¹⁵⁸

Throughout most of his chapters, Hahn is in Stage 3, explaining why the NT rejects worship terminology. But unlike most scholars, Hahn advances to Stage 4, explaining briefly how the early church (outside the NT) began to revert to liturgy, cult, and ritual. In *1 Clement* and later, he says that the church made increasing use of Jewish

¹⁵⁵ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 30-31.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 39, 43. Gunther Bornkamm, a pupil of Bultmann, takes a different view of liturgy in these NT assemblies, speaking confidently of a “liturgy of the Lord’s Supper” at Corinth, in Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 170-72.

¹⁵⁷ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 50.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 68. Here, Bornkamm agrees with Hahn that Paul “subjects all events of worship to the single and clear criterion of the ‘edification’ of the congregation,” in Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 162.

liturgical tradition to develop a Christian liturgy.¹⁵⁹ The *Didache* applies cultic sacrificial terminology to the Lord's Supper, while Ignatius "accepts a massive sacramentalism" and allows only the bishop to officiate at the Supper.¹⁶⁰ In essence, Hahn says that these steps represent the early church's rejection of Jesus's war on the cult.

In his conclusion, Hahn reaffirms that "Christian worship is no longer cultic in nature."¹⁶¹ He adds that it does not help to try to water down the definition of 'cult' and that we must face the fact that the cult has been abolished in Christ.¹⁶² Consequently, he believes that "worship must as much as possible be kept free of rigid institutional order" so that the Spirit has opportunity to function.¹⁶³

Since many of Hahn's ecclesiastical peers would likely have been strongly in favor of liturgy and sacramentalism, it seems that his book might have been met with opposition. However, Hahn blunts the impact of his book by concluding that "the New Testament evidence cannot be made normative," and that "the proper form of worship is always proper only to its own age."¹⁶⁴ Hahn's approach to the authority of Scripture is the opposite of his contemporary Eduard Schweizer. Only a few years earlier, Schweizer

¹⁵⁹ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 101.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 106. See also Ernst Käsemann, another Bultmann pupil, who says that there is no room left for cultic thinking, in Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 191-92.

¹⁶² Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 106-07.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 104-05.

wrote: “We are concerned however to seek the determinative, normative lines of original Christian worship, because these remain binding upon us, and we must order our own worship accordingly, whatever changes take place in our circumstances.”¹⁶⁵ Hahn arguably made more progress than any other scholar in his analysis of worship terminology and the early Christian assemblies, and he is one of the few who advanced into all four stages in his understanding of the worship anomaly. Yet, even though he perceives a radically new approach to worship terminology in the NT, he does not consider the NT text to be authoritative for the church today.

1975: Ervin Bishop

After the 1960s, the primary experts on this topic no longer came from Germany and mainland Europe. Instead, America and the United Kingdom began to produce the leading voices for Christian assembly studies in the NT. By the mid-1970s, the lion’s share of scholarly input on the topic began to shift to English-speaking scholars. In 1975, a journal article by Ervin Bishop, an American Bible translator with the Church of Christ, began to put some of the pieces together. Note that his article is titled “The Assembly,” not “Worship in the New Testament.” Bishop appears to be the first scholar to reveal an interest in moving away from ‘worship’ terminology in favor of adopting ‘assembly’ terminology for the Christian gathering. “On the popular level, such common expressions as ‘the worship service’ or ‘going to worship’ both reveal and promote the idea that Christian worship is to be limited to and equated with the Christian assembly,” he writes. “It is significant, however, that current usage does not correspond to New Testament

¹⁶⁵ Schweizer, “Worship in the New Testament,” 196.

terminology.”¹⁶⁶ In his analysis of the biblical evidence, Bishop notices a remarkable unity of approach to “worship” among the New Testament documents. “Not only Paul, but all the New Testament writers avoid the application of either the idea or the vocabulary of worship to the assembly,” he says. “The concept of the assembly as a ‘worship service’ is completely foreign to the New Testament.”¹⁶⁷ From this Stage 2 awareness, he moves to Stage 3 to ask why worship terminology is inappropriate. After examining the NT Greek words for worship, he concludes that these terms are not used to refer to Christian assembly activity and that the NT concept of worship represents a marked departure from Jewish and pagan cultic concepts of formal ceremonial worship.¹⁶⁸ Instead, the NT uses worship terminology, not in a literal sense of cultic practice, but in a spiritual sense of a life of service.

In a 2002 interview, Bishop was asked how he came to his conclusions in this article. He replied that his investigation began while he was studying in Athens. Since he had visited Orthodox churches a few times, the layout and the decorations of the churches struck him as strange. He wondered, “Where does this come from?” He concluded, “It came right out of (the cultic regulations in) Leviticus.”¹⁶⁹ So, while Bishop does not explore how the church resurrected cultic worship (Stage 4), he observes that such a

¹⁶⁶ Ervin Bishop, “The Assembly,” *Restoration Quarterly* 18:4 (1975): 219. Bishop served as vice president of translations at the World Bible Translation Center in Arlington, Texas.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 219, 222.

¹⁶⁹ Ervin Bishop, Vice President of Translations, World Bible Translation Center, telephone interview by Tom Wadsworth, July 22, 2002.

formal and ceremonial approach is well entrenched in the modern Orthodox Church experience.

1980: Robert Banks

In 1980, in *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Original Setting*, the Australian Robert Banks viewed the issue from Paul's perspective of the early house churches.¹⁷⁰ Banks left the Anglican Church in 1969 because of "its status distinction between clergy and laity, its ceremonial view of the sacraments, and its over-emphasis on its members serving the institution and activities of the church rather than fulfilling their vocation in and witnessing to the world."¹⁷¹ Earning his PhD from Cambridge, Banks served as director of the Macquarie Christian Studies Institute in Sydney, Australia, and later on the faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary. Since Banks views Paul's writings from the perspective of first century house churches, it may have been easier for him to avoid the presumption that the early church embraced cultic concepts of liturgy, rituals, vestments, and sacred "houses of worship."

Banks is aware of the absence of worship terminology in NT references to the assembly. He writes:

One of the most puzzling features of Paul's understanding of ἐκκλησία for his contemporaries, whether Jews or Gentiles, must have been his failure to say that a person went to church primarily to 'worship.' Not once in all his writings does he

¹⁷⁰ Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Original Setting*, Rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994). The book's third edition was published in 2020: *Paul's Idea of Community: Spirit and Culture in Early House Churches*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020).

¹⁷¹ "Robert J. Banks (theologian)," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_J._Banks_\(theologian\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_J._Banks_(theologian)). See also Richard Begbie, "Bringing the Church Back Home," *The Canberra Times*, October 3, 1992, at <http://www.home-church.org/canberra.html>.

suggest that this is the case. Indeed it could not be, for he held a view of ‘worship’ that prevented him from doing so.¹⁷²

Banks notes that Paul’s use of ἐκκλησία is free of religious and cultic connotations; as an ordinary term, it simply implies a gathering. “(Paul) did not see his gatherings as more religious in character than any other activity in which Christians were involved,” says Banks.¹⁷³ When Paul uses cultic language (worship, offer, offering, sacrifice, holy), he never applies it to the assembly, but he applies it metaphorically to the Christian life.¹⁷⁴ A similar transformation occurs when Paul uses priestly terminology; he never applies it to a sacred caste, activity, or object within Christianity. Instead, all believers are priests, and priestly services can be performed through acts of kindness and service. Banks says, “This means that distinctions between priest and layperson, mediatorial and common service, cultic ritual and secular activity, do not exist within the church.”¹⁷⁵

So, Banks embraces Stage 2, being aware that ‘worship’ does not apply to NT assemblies. He explains the change in terminology (Stage 3) by noting that worship terminology is part of the temple terminology of cultic regulations for ritual and ceremony. Since the temple is invalidated and redefined in Christianity, so also is worship terminology. Instead of the assembly being guided by the principle of worship,

¹⁷² Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches*, 88.

¹⁷³ Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: Spirit and Culture*, 40.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 112, 115.

Banks says edification (1 Cor 14:26) is the guiding principle for all assembly activities.¹⁷⁶

Other scholars have made similar points about worship, the cult, and edification, but Banks is a unique example of a NT scholar who made substantial adjustments in his church affiliation in order to apply these concepts to his own church assemblies.¹⁷⁷

1982: John Burkhart

In 1982, John Burkhart, an ordained Presbyterian minister who served as professor of theology at McCormick Theological Seminary from 1959 to 1993, authored *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience*. He is included in this review so that the “liturgical viewpoint” can be represented. Like other liturgical scholars before him, Burkhart seeks to “help those who do worship to understand what they are doing.”¹⁷⁸ Burkhart’s analysis of the NT advances to a form of Stage 2, as he notes the extensive transformation of cultic and worship terminology, such as worship, priests, temple, sacred, and sacrifice.¹⁷⁹ He says, “Worship is no longer properly understood as the ritual service of the gods. No longer is it necessary to win their favor by attending to

¹⁷⁶ Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 3rd ed., 87-94.

¹⁷⁷ See Robert and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home: Building Community and Mission Through Home Churches* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998).

¹⁷⁸ John Burkhart, *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience* (Richmond: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 10. Two notable earlier attempts to explore the early development of liturgy are William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship: Its Development and Forms* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936) and Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1945).

¹⁷⁹ Burkhart, *Worship*, 18-20.

the sacred, sacrificing, or otherwise serving them cultically.”¹⁸⁰ He also sees that this terminological shift affects the concept of liturgy: “The linguistic roots of our word ‘liturgy’ extended so widely and flourished so abundantly in the ancient world, yet they appear with what may seem such strange infrequency in the New Testament.”¹⁸¹ He adds that the terminological shift includes the idea of service, since the NT uses such common, ordinary, and secular words as διακονέω, διακονία, and διάκονος. Burkhardt explains, “Since God does not have the needs of the pagan gods, humans are released from cultic functions and are free to serve one another. Such is the import of the terminological shifts.”¹⁸² But, he says, this change in terminology unraveled “perhaps as early as the *Didache*, where the Christian gathering to break bread is alluded to as a ‘sacrifice’—the New Testament itself nowhere makes such a connection and, indeed, seems even to resist it; and the table used is nowhere called an altar.”¹⁸³ So, Burkhardt observes that the broad range of worship terminology (priests, service, liturgy, temple, altar, and sacrifice) has been transformed in the NT (Stage 3) and that the church began to revert back to ritual OT concepts of worship in the post-NT period (Stage 4).

At this point, Burkhardt himself departs from NT concepts, as he launches an extended defense of a ritual and liturgical approach to modern worship, defining

¹⁸⁰ Burkhardt, *Worship*, 21.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 20.

liturgical acts as “expressive symbolic acts of response that celebrate God.”¹⁸⁴ Burkhart’s determination to promote liturgy seems to contradict his earlier affirmation that the early Christians “turned their backs” on cultic practices and “sacred rituals.”¹⁸⁵ Yet, his book’s stated mission is to defend and explain the theology of “the liturgical experience.” In essence, he skillfully lays out the biblical evidence, but he exhibits little interest in applying it to the modern church, other than to support his concept of worship and liturgy. Throughout the book, he presses the case of what “worship is” (to him), using that phrase more than fifty times. His concern is to define the modern English term ‘worship’ rather than to define the first-century biblical approach to the assembly. So, even though Burkhart offers helpful insights in Stages 2, 3, and 4, he essentially remains in Stage 1, assuming that modern worship terminology is appropriate. Burkhart may be a good example of a liturgical scholar who comes to the debate with the assumption that a liturgical approach to the assembly is normative, appropriate, and desired.

1985: I. Howard Marshall

If only one scholar is responsible for bringing the clearest and most focused attention to our key question, that scholar would be I. Howard Marshall, professor of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Aberdeen, a Methodist, and the long-time editor of *Evangelical Quarterly*. In 1985, he wrote an article with the odd title, “How Far Did the Early Christians *Worship* God?” Marshall puts the term ‘Worship’ in italics, fully aware that the modern term ‘worship’ is problematic. He says, “It is my thesis that this use of [worship] language incorporates a fundamental misunderstanding of what ought to

¹⁸⁴ Burkhart, *Worship*, 23-34.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

be at the center of Christian meetings and that it leads to a serious shift in practice from what ought to be happening when we gather together.”¹⁸⁶ After reviewing the meaning of the Greek terms λειτουργέω, λατρεύω, προσκυνέω, σέβομαι, and their cognates, Marshall concludes:

The remarkable fact is that Christian meetings are not said to take place specifically in order to worship God, and the language of worship is not used as a means of referring to them or describing them. To sum up what goes on in a Christian meeting as being specifically for the purpose of ‘worship’ is without New Testament precedent. ‘Worship’ is not an umbrella-term for what goes on when Christians gather together.¹⁸⁷

Marshall is firmly in Stage 2, aware of the worship terminology problem. He explores the reasons for the problem (Stage 3), concluding that, while ‘worship’ is properly understood as a vertical action (from people to God), New Testament assembly activities are “clearly seen to be directed towards the congregation itself and only indirectly towards God.”¹⁸⁸ He prefers a triangular image of the assembly, with God serving people (downward), people serving one another (sideward), and people responsively offering prayer and praise to God (upward).¹⁸⁹ He does not investigate the Stage 4 exploration of how the church gradually developed this erroneous approach to its assemblies. In his conclusion, he expresses the need for a fresh look at better terminology for the meeting and a better structure of assembly activities.¹⁹⁰ He also calls for a greater

¹⁸⁶ Marshall, “How Far,” 217.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 220.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 223.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 227.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 228.

focus on mutual upbuilding in the assembly (1 Cor 14:26), suspecting that “the one-man ministry” is greatly hampering the ability of members to minister to one another.¹⁹¹

1992: David Peterson

In 1992, Marshall wrote the foreword in David Peterson’s *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. “The author cuts back through the undergrowth of our inherited traditions to the clarity and straightforwardness of the biblical teaching and lets it challenge us,” writes Marshall.¹⁹² Peterson, a conservative Anglican¹⁹³ and lecturer at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, had already authored a number of articles on the topic dating back to 1984.¹⁹⁴ In his 1992 book, Peterson seeks to present a comprehensive theology of the English term ‘worship.’ Unlike many scholars before him, Peterson presents his study of “worship” as if the Christian assembly is only a small part of the discussion. As indicated by the book’s title, he defines worship as “an engagement with (God) on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible.”¹⁹⁵ With this broad definition, he sees worship as a “Christ-centered, gospel-serving, life-

¹⁹¹ Marshall, “How Far,” 228-29.

¹⁹² I. Howard Marshall, “Foreword,” in David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 10.

¹⁹³ In an interview with this writer in 2003, Peterson said that he identified with the conservative and evangelical wing of the Anglican Church. David Peterson, then Principal of Oak Hill College in London, interview by Tom Wadsworth, Dec. 29, 2003.

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, David Peterson, “Towards a New Testament Theology of Worship,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 43:3 (1984): 65-73; and “Further Reflections on Worship in the New Testament,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 44:2 (August 1985): 34-41.

¹⁹⁵ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 20. See also 283.

orientation.”¹⁹⁶ Consequently, only one of his ten chapters deals specifically with the assembly, while the rest of the book deals with the broader topic of engaging with God in the Old and New Testaments.¹⁹⁷

Peterson grasps the terminology problem: “Contemporary Christians obscure the breadth and depth of the Bible’s teaching on this subject when they persist in using the word ‘worship’ in the usual, limited fashion, applying it mainly to what goes on in Sunday services.”¹⁹⁸ Peterson frequently uses the phrase “transformed worship terminology” to denote that the NT takes OT cultic concepts and applies them instead to the Christian ministry or lifestyle.¹⁹⁹ He also notes that Paul, when discussing the assembly, regularly uses the terminology of upbuilding or edification rather than the language of worship.²⁰⁰ Nonetheless, since Peterson defines worship as “engaging with God,” he defends the use of ‘worship’ as an appropriate term to describe the assembly. He explains, “We meet with God when we meet with one another.”²⁰¹ In other words,

¹⁹⁶ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 293. See also 17-19.

¹⁹⁷ Chapter 7 is “Serving God in the assembly of his people.” *Ibid.*, 194-227.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24, 151, 166, 180, 227, 237, 253, 286. Peterson also calls it “transformed cultic terminology” at 182, 191, 203, 246, and “transformed sacrificial terminology” at 183.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 198. In Mt 18:20, Jesus says, “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” Yet, Peterson cites no NT evidence that describes the assembly as a meeting with God.

since “meeting with God” is a form of “engaging with God” (which is “worship”), the congregational gathering constitutes as “worship.”²⁰²

The book does not extensively explore why worship terminology is not used in NT assembly contexts (Stage 3), other than an occasional note that the OT cultic approach has been fulfilled by the sacrifice of Jesus.²⁰³ The book also does not explore how Christians eventually reverted to cultic worship terminology (Stage 4), except to say:

Church history shows that there soon developed the notion of a Christian cult, focusing on the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, incorporating Old Testament concepts of priesthood and sacrifice in a Christian guise. The reasons for this are complex and the investigation of such matters falls outside the scope of this work.²⁰⁴

In summary, Peterson holds a difficult—and perhaps contradictory—position about applying worship terminology to the assembly. He repeatedly criticizes those who describe Sunday meetings as worship,²⁰⁵ and he criticizes the idea of orienting assembly activities around the concept of worship.²⁰⁶ Yet, at the same time, he defends the idea that ‘worship’ is an appropriate term to describe assembly activities. He walks on a fine line that declares ‘worship’ to be both inappropriate and appropriate terminology. The source of Peterson’s dilemma may be found in his broad definition of the English term ‘worship’

²⁰² He also says that “the exercise of gifts in any context may be regarded as an expression of worship, if the ministries are genuinely for the benefit of others and for the glory of God,” in Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 219.

²⁰³ Ibid., 148, 219, 228-33, 245-46, 286.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 125.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 16, 17, 18, 21, 24, 70, 73, 100, 219.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 160, 187, 195-96, 212, 214.

as “engaging with God.” This terminological dilemma will be explored in chapter 4 of this dissertation when the definitions of the Greek words for “worship” are analyzed.

1994: Robert Webber

Robert Webber deserves mention in this review because of his extensive writing on the topic of Christian worship from 1980 until his death in 2007.²⁰⁷ Popular in evangelical circles, Webber taught at Wheaton College from 1968 to 2000 and thereafter at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1993, he founded the Institute for Worship Studies in Jacksonville, FL.²⁰⁸ In 1982, because of his convictions about worship, he famously left his Baptist roots to join the Episcopal Church, feeling that the evangelical approach to worship is inadequate.²⁰⁹ Ironically, Robert Banks did the opposite in 1969 when he left his Anglican roots to pursue a simpler, less ceremonial approach to the assembly.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Webber wrote forty books on worship along with dozens of articles. Notable among his books is the eight-volume reference work, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, 8 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993-1995).

²⁰⁸ Tabby Yang, “Robert E. Webber, Theologian of ‘Ancient-Future’ Faith, Dies at 73,” *Christianity Today* (April 30, 2007). See the online version of the article at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/aprilweb-only/118-12.0.html>.

²⁰⁹ Matthew Ward, “Kingdom Worship: James K. A. Smith, Robert Webber, and Western Civilization,” *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 3.1 (2016): 130. See also Robert E. Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (Waco: Word, 1985; Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1989).

²¹⁰ See the section on Banks on pages 49-51.

In 1994, Webber published the revised edition of *Worship Old & New*, his only textbook on the topic of “Christian worship.”²¹¹ In this book, Webber stays in Stage 1, as he assumes that worship terminology applies to NT Christian assemblies. He says, “Because the New Testament does not provide a systematic picture of Christian worship, guidance may be sought regarding worship from the practice of the early church.”²¹² Webber’s devotion to a high-church liturgical approach to Christian assemblies stems from his reliance on post-New Testament Christian writings. Webber explains the lack of elaborate descriptions of Christian assemblies in the first and second centuries by claiming that early Christians “consciously withheld” exposing such information so that they might maintain secrecy about their gatherings and especially about the Lord’s Supper.²¹³

Webber concludes that the early church assemblies featured “a twofold sequence of Word and sacrament.”²¹⁴ His argument assumes that Acts 2:42 is identifying the two parts of the common Christian assembly. He says that Luke’s reference to “apostles’ teaching and fellowship” represents “the liturgy of the Word,” and the reference to “the breaking of bread and the prayers” represents “the Eucharist” or “sacrament.” He admits that this interpretation is not certain, but he says that 1 Cor 16:20-24 is a firmer basis for

²¹¹ Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

²¹² *Ibid.*, 49.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

this twofold sequence of Word and sacrament.²¹⁵ Webber's notion is questionable, because 1 Cor 16:20-24 contains no obvious connection to teaching in the assembly or to the Lord's Supper. In summary, Webber remains in Stage 1, never mentioning the absence of worship terminology in these NT assembly contexts. He also never cites NT scholars who have reflected on this anomaly, and he regards the assemblies of later centuries as representing the "accepted" and "normative" structure for Christians today.²¹⁶

1995: John Richardson

In 1995, John Richardson, an evangelical Anglican clergyman in London, bluntly challenged common thinking about worship in an article titled "Is 'Worship' Biblical?" published in the same journal that carried Marshall's article ten years earlier.²¹⁷ Noting that Marshall's article had generated considerable interest, Richardson is disappointed that "few of Marshall's conclusions seem to have been acted upon, even in evangelical

²¹⁵ Webber, *Worship Old & New*, 55. The triggers for the alleged connection between 1 Cor 16:20-24 and "the twofold sequence of Word and sacrament" are Paul's encouragement to "Greet one another with a holy kiss" in v. 20 and the word "Maranatha" in v. 22. A century later, Justin Martyr said that, in his church assembly, the Lord's Supper followed the kiss of greeting (*Apology* 1.65). Also, in the *Didache* (10.6), the word "Maranatha" appeared in a lengthy prayer that followed the Lord's Supper. See Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 148; and John A. T. Robinson, "Traces of a Liturgical Sequence in 1 Cor. 16:20-24," *Journal of Theological Studies* 4:1 (April 1953): 38-41.

²¹⁶ Webber, *Worship Old & New*, 150.

²¹⁷ John P. Richardson, "Is 'Worship' Biblical?" *Churchman* 109:3 (1995): 197-218.

circles. On the contrary, things have moved in the opposite direction.”²¹⁸ The thesis of his paper is that “there is no such thing as ‘worship’ – at least ‘not as we know it.’”²¹⁹ He argues that the modern notion of worship “actually obscures our understanding of the Bible, distorts our relationship with God, and masks the true outworking of what it means to be His people.”²²⁰ Richardson says that the English word ‘worship’ no longer conveys the same meaning as when it was first used in translation.²²¹ Because of this semantic change, he proposes that ‘worship’ is no longer a proper translation for the Hebrew תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה or the Greek προσκυνεῖν.²²²

From his Stage 2 recognition of the terminology problem, Richardson advances to Stage 3, asking why the NT’s perspective is so different from the modern perspective. He says that the modern idea of worship is “regarded as the thing we offer to God.”²²³ Yet, Paul explicitly says that God is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything (Acts 17:24-25).²²⁴ Thus, the problem with ‘worship’ is that it necessarily

²¹⁸ Richardson, “Is ‘Worship’ Biblical?” 197. Of his life, see Lee Gatiss, “John Richardson (1950-2014),” *Church Society*; 08-04-2014, https://churchsociety.org/blog/entry/john_richardson_1950_2014.

²¹⁹ Richardson, “Is ‘Worship’ Biblical?” 197-98.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, 199.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 211.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

implies that, in the assembly, we perform actions for God.²²⁵ This cultic approach to God, common in Jewish and pagan temples, is no longer needed, thanks to the sacrifice of Christ.²²⁶ The modern focus on worship essentially introduces “a substitute cultus” that returns us “to spiritual bondage in defiance of the freedom Christ has obtained for us!” (emphasis original).²²⁷ He agrees with Marshall that the emphasis in the assembly should be on building up one another.²²⁸ Consequently, “the meeting needs to spend less time addressing God and more time addressing one another.”²²⁹

1996: Alastair Campbell

In a subsequent article in *Churchman*, Alastair Campbell challenges Richardson’s points, claiming that “much of Richardson’s article is implausible and his arguments fallacious.”²³⁰ Campbell agrees that the Greek worship terminology does not usually mean assembly activities in the NT,²³¹ and that “there is a startling lack of any sacrificial

²²⁵ Richardson, “Is ‘Worship’ Biblical?” 216.

²²⁶ Richardson uses the Oxford dictionary definition of ‘cultic’ as “a system of religious worship especially as expressed in ceremonies.” Ibid., 199.

²²⁷ Ibid., 209.

²²⁸ Ibid., 217.

²²⁹ Ibid., 218.

²³⁰ Alastair Campbell, “Once More: Is Worship ‘Biblical’?” *Churchman* 110:2 (1996): 132.

²³¹ Ibid., 137.

language with reference to anything done in the meeting.”²³² He also agrees that there is nothing we can do to earn God’s favor.²³³

However, Campbell contends, contra Richardson, that God is changed by our praise.²³⁴ He offers no biblical text to prove this, except to say that “fathers delight to be addressed in love and trust by their children.”²³⁵ Campbell also argues that the question whether worship is biblical depends on your definition of ‘worship’ and “whether New Testament Christians engaged in cultic, ceremonial, or congregational activity, and whether this was directed toward God.”²³⁶ He prefers David Peterson’s definition of ‘worship’ as “engaging with God.”²³⁷ Using this definition, he says that prayer and praise both qualify as God-engaging assembly activities, and thus, “it is legitimate to say that the early Christians did indeed meet for worship.”²³⁸ Consequently, Campbell remains a representative of the Stage 1 approach.

²³² Campbell, “Once More: Is Worship ‘Biblical’?” 138-39.

²³³ Ibid., 137.

²³⁴ Ibid., 136.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid., 137.

²³⁷ Ibid., 134.

²³⁸ Ibid., 139. Michael B. Thompson, an Episcopalian priest, sides with Campbell. He says that the NT’s lack of worship terminology does not conclusively imply that the early Christians did not worship. He contends that Paul did not use worship terminology because Paul “assumed that Christians gathered as church for worship.” See Thompson, “Romans 12:1-2 and Paul’s Vision for Worship,” in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology*, ed. Markus N. A. Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 121-32, esp. 127-29.

Richardson, however, responded in 1997 with another article that defends his original claims and offers refutations to Campbell's points: "Unfortunately, whilst Campbell's desire to defend our current understanding of 'worship' is understandable, I feel that his article neither does entire justice to my own, nor presents quite as sound a case as he evidently thinks."²³⁹ Noting the issue of the definition of 'worship', Richardson argues that what Campbell means by 'worship' "simply does not fit either the biblical vocabulary or practice."²⁴⁰ Further, Richardson argues that Campbell's "fundamental flaw" is to center the debate over the definition of 'worship'²⁴¹ and that the Bible does not identify prayer and praise as 'worship'.²⁴² The Richardson-Campbell exchange highlights key issues in the debate, reveals how discussion about 'worship' can be easily misunderstood, and illustrates that clearer terminology may help to clarify these discussions.

1996: Streeter Stuart

In 1996, a new article on the controversy appeared in Marshall's *Evangelical Quarterly* journal.²⁴³ The article was written by Streeter Stuart, an evangelical American with a PhD in religion (biblical studies and early church) and a minister in the Church of God (Anderson, IN). At the beginning of the article, Marshall writes a brief introduction

²³⁹ John P. Richardson, "Neither 'Worship' nor 'Biblical': A Response to Alastair Campbell," *Churchman* 111:1 (1997): 7.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁴³ Streeter S. Stuart, "A New Testament Perspective on Worship," *Evangelical Quarterly* 68:3 (1996): 209-21.

that cites the problem of definitions: “[Stuart’s] lexical examination of the ambiguous term ‘worship’ will help to bring clarity to an area which is often befogged by a failure to offer careful definitions.”²⁴⁴ After Stuart reviews worship and assembly terminology in the OT and NT, he contends that the NT does not define ‘worship’ as particular acts or practices done at particular locations, which is starkly unlike the practice of modern Christians.²⁴⁵

So, Stuart is in Stage 2 awareness of the terminology problem, but he does little to explain why NT worship terminology is not applied to its assemblies (Stage 3). Unlike other scholars, he explores how worship terminology, and specifically προσκυνέω, is used in the Apostolic Fathers. He finds that the post-NT church is like the NT church in that προσκυνέω is rarely used and that it is only used to speak of pagan acts or practices, confirming again that the modern use of worship terminology is “far removed” from the world of the NT and the Apostolic Fathers.²⁴⁶

1996: Everett Ferguson

Everett Ferguson, professor at Abilene Christian University and a Church of Christ scholar in early Christianity, has produced numerous works about the early church, and he has written on the topics of worship and the early Christian assembly.²⁴⁷ In his

²⁴⁴ Stuart, “A New Testament Perspective on Worship,” 209.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 220.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 219.

²⁴⁷ See Ferguson, *Worship in Early Christianity* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993); *Early Christians Speak: Faith and Life in the First Three Centuries*, 2 vols. (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 1999-2002); *The Early Church and*

1996 *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*, he includes a 73-page chapter on worship and the assembly. Ferguson embraces the terminological shift (Stage 2), noting the possible exceptions of 1 Cor 14:25 (προσκυνέω) and Acts 13:2 (λειτουργέω).²⁴⁸ He explains why ‘worship’ is not used in NT assembly contexts (Stage 3) by noting, “Worship to the ancient world meant temple with its accompanying statue, altar for the sacrifice of animals and other food products, and priesthood.”²⁴⁹ In the NT, these elements (temple, altar, sacrifice, and priesthood) were seen as fulfilled in Christ.²⁵⁰ He is aware of the inadequacy of the modern penchant to use the word ‘worship’ to describe assembly activities, noting that a proper understanding of ‘worship’ covers all acts of service to God in the Christian life.²⁵¹ He says that it would be better to describe Christian meetings as ‘assemblies’ instead of ‘worship’, but he nonetheless repeatedly uses the term ‘worship’ to apply to the assembly.²⁵² Ferguson makes several valid points, but when he uses the term ‘worship’ both in its ancient sense of cultic temple activities and its modern English sense of assembly activities as well as the Christian moral life, confusion results.

Today, Vol. 1, *Ministry, Initiation, and Worship* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2012).

²⁴⁸ Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1996), 211.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 220.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

1997: Elmer Towns

In 1997, Elmer Towns authored *Putting an End to Worship Wars*, which marked the beginning of a long controversy, mostly in Protestant circles, about music styles in “worship services.”²⁵³ His book is not a scholarly assessment of our topic, but it provides a helpful landmark for a significant rise in the use of worship terminology on a congregational level. Towns does not advance beyond a Stage 1 assumption that worship terminology refers to assembly activities, but he may have been the first to popularize the term ‘worship wars’.²⁵⁴ The rise of the so-called ‘worship wars’ in the late 1990s may have greatly increased the popular use of the term ‘worship’ to refer to assembly activities. In this period, the ‘worship’ term was used heavily in church circles (e.g., ‘worship leader,’ ‘worship songs,’ ‘worship time,’ ‘vertical worship,’ ‘praise and worship music,’ ‘worship team,’ ‘worship arts,’ etc.). This expansion of ‘worship’ terminology along with its popular controversy likely added to the difficulty of discussing the topic in its biblical sense and increased the volatility of such discussions.

²⁵³ Elmer Towns, *Putting an End to Worship Wars* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1997).

²⁵⁴ For another early reference to the term ‘worship wars’, see Marva J. Dawn, “Beyond the Worship Wars,” *Christian Century* (June 4-11, 1997): 550-52. Syndicated columnist Terry Mattingly may have been the first to address the “worship wars” issue in the secular media in Terry Mattingly, “Worship Wars 1998,” *Terry Mattingly’s On Religion*, Oct. 28, 1998, <http://www.tmatt.net/columns/1998/10/worship-wars-1998>.

2002: D. A. Carson

D. A. Carson, professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, addressed the ‘worship’ terminology problem in 2002 with the publishing of *Worship by the Book*.²⁵⁵ Aware of the “worship wars” prevailing at that time, he notes, “The sad fact of contemporary church life is that there are few subjects calculated to kindle more heated debate than the subject of worship.”²⁵⁶ In this book, Carson sees his task as developing a “theology of worship,”²⁵⁷ which is a different task than discerning the biblical approach to the assembly.

Carson sees that the Greek words for ‘worship’ are used differently in the NT (Stage 2). He says that it is “striking” how OT cultic worship language has been transformed in the NT: “Worship is no longer something connected with set feasts, such as Passover; or a set place, such as the temple; or set priests, such as the Levitical system prescribed. It is for all the people of God at all times and places, and it is bound up with how they live (e.g., Rom 12:1-2).”²⁵⁸ The terminology has changed, he says, because the

²⁵⁵ D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002). Carson penned chapter 1, “Worship under the Word,” 11-63. See also his earlier works: *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) and D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1993).

²⁵⁶ Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 11.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

cultic functions, such as temple, priest, and sacrifice, have been fulfilled in Christ (Stage 3).²⁵⁹

Carson identifies some problems with modern terminology concerning worship and the assembly. He considers it “badly off base” when Christians today consider only singing and praying as “worship” but not “the ministry of the Word.”²⁶⁰ He also says that the common Christian statement that “worship leads us into the presence of God” is “simply untrue”: “Objectively, what brings us into the presence of God is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If we ascribe to worship ... something of this power, it will not be long before we think of such worship as being meritorious, or efficacious, or the like.”²⁶¹

However, Carson addresses scholars who contend that the assembly should not be considered a “worship service” but rather should be directed toward edification. He says they have a good point, but “a good part of their argument turns on a definition of worship that is tightly tied to cultus.”²⁶² So, he proposes his own 173-word definition of the English word ‘worship’. He admits that his definition is too long and too complex, but it essentially involves ascribing worth to God.²⁶³ Armed with his new definition, he concludes, “Would it not be better to say that the New Testament emphasis is that the

²⁵⁹ Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 37.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 50.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid., 25.

²⁶³ Ibid., 26.

people of God should worship him in their individual lives and in their family lives and then, when they come together, worship him corporately?”²⁶⁴ So, Carson refutes those who argue against “worship service” terminology because their argument is based on a definition of ‘worship’ that is based on cultus. Yet, Carson’s own argument is based on his own definition of ‘worship’ that conveniently fits his argument. The question remains: Do the NT Greek words that are commonly translated as “worship” have more in common with cultus or with Carson’s definition of ascribing worth to God? This question will be explored in chapter 4.

2002: Paul Bradshaw

Also in 2002, Paul Bradshaw published the second edition of *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*.²⁶⁵ In this volume, Bradshaw, an Anglican priest and professor of liturgy at the University of Notre Dame, provided an update on the advances made in liturgical scholarship in the previous ten years. Bradshaw’s focus on the roots of Christian liturgy follows in the footsteps of others such as Anglican scholars William Maxwell (1936)²⁶⁶ and Gregory

²⁶⁴ Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 46.

²⁶⁵ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). The first edition came out in 1992.

²⁶⁶ Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship: Its Development and Forms* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936).

Dix (1945),²⁶⁷ and the Presbyterian scholar John Burkhart (1982).²⁶⁸ Bradshaw does not offer any substantial discussion of worship terminology in the NT, but this second edition of Bradshaw's 1992 work is significant because of his comments about the latest progress in the study of the origins of Christian liturgy.

Bradshaw notes that the latest studies have brought a growing number of liturgical scholars to conclude that "we know much, much less about the liturgical practices of the first three centuries of Christianity than we once thought that we did."²⁶⁹ He notes that much of the earlier thinking about the use of liturgy in NT assemblies was "more like wishful thinking or the unconscious projections back into ancient times of later practices."²⁷⁰ This faulty thinking, he says, was likely due to liturgical historians showing "a greater degree of naiveté in relation to their primary sources than have their counterparts in biblical studies."²⁷¹ Further, he reports that new questions have arisen about the form(s) of first-century Jewish liturgy that may have inspired early Christian liturgy. This early Jewish liturgy "was not nearly so fixed or uniform as was once supposed."²⁷² In addition, he feels it necessary to consider that Christian meetings may

²⁶⁷ Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1945).

²⁶⁸ John Burkhart, *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience* (Richmond: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982).

²⁶⁹ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, x.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 7, 36.

have been influenced by the wider pagan environment.²⁷³ Bradshaw also casts significant doubt on widespread theories that many NT passages or complete books were based on early Christian liturgy. He says, “Most of these theories do not have the slightest evidence to support them.”²⁷⁴ In summary, Bradshaw admits that his conclusions “may be less satisfying than the picture painted by earlier scholarship but a much better representation of the truth.”²⁷⁵ While he is a Stage 1 scholar who does not address the ‘worship’ terminology problem, he puts a spotlight on the problem of liturgical scholars who make assumptions about NT assemblies that are based on anachronism and not on the facts of the text.

2006: Allen Ross

Perhaps the largest book on worship is *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, authored in 2006 by Allen Ross (PhD, University of Cambridge), professor of Old Testament at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University.²⁷⁶ Its 591 pages include fifty-five pages of bibliography, citing about 1,000 works. Ross has been associated with the Episcopal Church since 1979. He says that his book is “not trying to get people to change their denominational affiliation, although that might happen,” adding that certain churches have effectively implemented his “principles and patterns of worship that are found in the

²⁷³ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 23.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 48.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 231.

²⁷⁶ Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2006).

Bible.”²⁷⁷ As an OT professor, he says that this book emerges from his years of teaching the Psalms, Leviticus, and Jewish backgrounds to the New Testament.²⁷⁸

Ross’s goal is that “what we call worship will be transformed from a routine gathering into a *transcendent meeting with the living God*” (emphasis original).²⁷⁹ This goal is evident in every chapter. He admits that “we do not have biblical instructions for building churches,” but he believes that the Bible offers guidance nonetheless.²⁸⁰

According to Ross, “practicality required” that early church buildings “have the appropriate features for the ritual,” and the addition of symbolism in these buildings identified them “as special places, places where the Lord’s presence was manifested in special ways.”²⁸¹ The story of the Garden of Eden, he says, teaches God’s people that “in their worship they should be reminded either by the service or the surroundings that they are entering into the presence of the Creator in a very special and spiritual way.”²⁸²

The book’s lack of research in NT studies is apparent. He never mentions Marshall’s article on “worship” nor the fundamental terminology problems noted by Brunner, Delling, Hahn, Peterson, and others. He touches on the meaning of προσκυνέω once, but he never mentions λατρεία or λατρεύω, the most common Greek words for

²⁷⁷ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 25. The contents of the book indicate that he is likely referring to the Episcopal Church.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 39.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 252.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid., 108.

cultic worship. Consequently, the entire volume remains in Stage 1, continually assuming that worship terminology applies to what NT Christians did in their assemblies. The terminology problem is mentioned only once. He says, “It should be noted that a regular ‘worship service’ *per se* is not commonly found in the Bible.”²⁸³ But that observation does not deter him from viewing NT assemblies as “worship services” throughout the book. Ross’s tome is a good example of hundreds of other books on Christian worship produced in the 1990s and 2000s that routinely assume that worship terminology is appropriate for characterizing Christian assemblies in the NT.²⁸⁴

2009: Larry Hurtado

Several Bible dictionaries provide an entry on New Testament worship.²⁸⁵ Instead of reviewing them all, Larry Hurtado’s entry is noteworthy because it is recent and lengthy (about 12,000 words), and Hurtado is known for his expertise in early Christianity and Christian “devotional practices.” Ordained in the Assemblies of God, Hurtado was NT professor at the University of Edinburgh and director of the Centre for

²⁸³ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 68.

²⁸⁴ A review of books at Worldcat.org reveals more than 500 books published between 1994 and 2006 on the general topic of Christian worship.

²⁸⁵ C. C. Richardson, “Christian Worship in NT Times,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 4:883-94; I. Howard Marshall, “New Testament Worship,” *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 389-91; David E. Aune, “Early Christian Worship,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:973-89; J. G. Davies, “Worship,” *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 851-52; Ralph P. Martin, “Worship and Liturgy,” *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1224-38; Mark Allan Powell, “Worship, New Testament,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1391-92; Larry W. Hurtado, “Worship, NT Christian,” 5:910-23.

the Study of Christian Origins. Hurtado notes, “A good deal of earlier scholarship on the subject can be criticized for dubious assumptions and inappropriate questions,” criticizing studies that assume a liturgical order to NT assemblies and assume a close dependency on synagogue meetings.²⁸⁶ However, his article never advances to Stage 2; he never mentions the New Testament’s lack of using Greek worship terminology to refer to Christian assemblies. Rather, he begins with his own definition of the English term ‘worship’: “Worship comprises those actions by which people express and reaffirm their devotional stance toward, and relationship to, a deity.”²⁸⁷ Hurtado touches on some aspects of Stage 3, noting how the “worship” of early Christianity differed from the surrounding culture, lacking blood sacrifice, temples, altars, and images.²⁸⁸ Unlike most treatments of the topic, Hurtado gravitates to the issue of the “worship of Jesus” and the “binitarian shape” of early “Christian devotion,” about which Hurtado has written extensively.²⁸⁹ This emphasis results in an imbalanced handling of the topic, but it offers the advantage of discussing the elements of the assembly from a different perspective. However, since he builds his entire report on a definition of the modern English term ‘worship’, he offers little to advance the discussion of the fundamental terminological problem.

²⁸⁶ Hurtado, “Worship, NT Christian,” 5:912-14.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 5:910.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 5:911.

²⁸⁹ See, for example, his 746-page volume on *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) and his earlier shorter work, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

In 2014, Daniel Block, an evangelical OT scholar with Mennonite Brethren roots, authored *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship*.²⁹⁰ The book deserves special attention because Block approaches the topic of “NT worship” from the perspective of an OT scholar, which yields some unique and problematic results. Block’s book, his attempt at a “biblical theology of worship,” approaches the subject with the assumption that “NT worship” is a continuation of “First Testament worship.”²⁹¹ He acknowledges “the relative silence of the New Testament on ... principles of worship” (Stage 2?), and he affirms that “the sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood, and the temple have all been declared passé through the death and resurrection of Jesus” (Stage 3).²⁹² But, he adds, “Does this mean that God’s first instructions on worship have no bearing on contemporary worship? Hardly.”²⁹³ He concludes that “unless the New Testament

²⁹⁰ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014). His faculty page at the Wheaton College website says that he was “nurtured in the faith in a Mennonite Brethren context” but for the last four decades he has been involved with “Evangelical Free, Plymouth Brethren, Baptist General Conference, Evangelical Covenant, and Southern Baptist, and independent congregations.” See “Daniel Block, D.Phil.,” Wheaton College, <https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/school-of-biblical-and-theological-studies/faculty/faculty-emeriti/daniel-block-dphil/>.

²⁹¹ Throughout the book, Block insists on calling the Old Testament the “First Testament.” See Block, *For the Glory of God*, 3.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

expressly declares First Testament notions (of worship) obsolete, they continue.”²⁹⁴ He repeats this concept throughout the book. For example, he later says, “Although ... the New Testament offers little guidance in normative patterns of corporate cultic celebration, the theology and principles underlying First Testament festivals have much to teach us.”²⁹⁵

Block’s questionable exegesis and theology lead him to several questionable conclusions. Even though many NT scholars doubt whether NT Christians engaged in “cultic worship” at all, Block takes the opposite position. While he admits that the NT “hesitates to speak of corporate worship in cultic terms” and that the NT assembly “is never explicitly called a liturgical event,”²⁹⁶ he nonetheless affirms the meeting’s liturgical and cultic nature.²⁹⁷ He claims that the NT “uses First Testament language of cultic service to speak of Christian worship,” but he presents no NT evidence to support it.²⁹⁸ Stressing the “profoundly cultic” nature of the Lord’s Supper,²⁹⁹ Block says that outsiders who partake of the Lord’s Supper may “bring on themselves the wrath of

²⁹⁴ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 7. While the lack of NT information on “worship” prompted Block to turn back to rely on the OT, the same lack of information prompted Robert Webber to turn forward to rely on patristic sources. See page 58.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 296.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 22-23.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 20, 21, 27. He claims that *δοῦλος* is an example of OT cultic language in the NT (page 20), but he later admits, “Remarkably *δοῦλος* is never used specifically of cultic service” (page 21).

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 27.

God.”³⁰⁰ Arguing from 1 Pt 3:7, he claims, “God is not obligated to accept the cultic worship of those who fail to keep their marriage vows.”³⁰¹ He also claims that early Christians used the temple for “purification rituals and sacrifices for Jewish Christian converts.”³⁰² Block makes an extensive argument for Christians to observe the Sabbath, a position that has been widely discredited.³⁰³ Concerning the design of church buildings, he favors kneeling benches³⁰⁴ and the elaborate “design of the worship environment” by Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican churches,³⁰⁵ and he argues that church buildings should be oriented toward Jerusalem.³⁰⁶ He criticizes the use of “nondescript or transparent stands” instead of “pulpits that highlight preachers’ roles as spokespersons for

³⁰⁰ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 165. He adds that leaders who encourage outsiders to take the Lord’s Supper “are accomplices in the offense.”

³⁰¹ Ibid., 72. 1 Pt 3:7 urges husbands to honor their wives “so that your prayers will not be hindered.”

³⁰² Ibid., 317. He supports this argument by citing Acts 21:26, where Paul is advised go to the temple with four men under a vow.

³⁰³ Ibid., 283-85. See D. A. Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982). In Carson’s chapter in the book, “Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels,” he says, “One dare not conclude ... that Sabbath observance is still mandatory. The same argument would require that we continue to sacrifice in the temple” (p. 84). In the book’s concluding chapter, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,” A. T. Lincoln says, “The literal Sabbath day of rest has been abrogated and has not been transferred to Sunday” (p. 404).

³⁰⁴ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 330.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 327.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 327-28.

God,”³⁰⁷ and he decries churches that call their meeting room an “auditorium” instead of a “sanctuary.”³⁰⁸ While several NT scholars in this review have noted the horizontal dynamic of early assemblies (i.e., Christians interacting with one another), Block emphasizes that the gathering is a “vertical exercise”³⁰⁹ in which Christians “gather for an audience with God”³¹⁰ and “for corporate acts of homage and submission.”³¹¹

In summary, Block’s book is built on his assumption that OT information about temple and cultic practices has direct application to Christian gatherings in the NT. Even though he acknowledges that worship terminology is avoided in the NT, he nonetheless stays in Stage 1, persisting in using the term ‘worship’ to refer to assembly activity. His flawed terminology and questionable hermeneutics lead his book into a tangled theological mess. One might even wonder if he is leading Christians back into “a yoke of slavery” to an abolished system of cultic theology (cf. Gal 5:1-4; Col 2:16-23).

2014: Andrew McGowan

The most recent scholarly work on the topic appeared in 2014 with Andrew McGowan’s *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective*.³¹² An Anglican priest from Australia, McGowan is

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 170.

³⁰⁸ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 329.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 6.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 324; cf. 78.

³¹¹ Ibid., 325.

³¹² Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

professor of pastoral theology at Yale Divinity School. In his first chapter, he faces the reality of Stage 2, saying that “communal rituals of the Christian community are not actually presented as ‘worship’ in the NT.”³¹³ Noting that προσκυνέω is the primary Greek word that is translated “worship” in the NT, he says that the word actually refers to the physical gesture of bodily prostration. He says, “So when, for instance, the apostles are depicted ‘worshipping’ the risen Christ, they are not singing, reciting prayer, or (only) experiencing a feeling or attitude; they are flat on their faces (Mt 28:17).”³¹⁴ He affirms that the early Christian community certainly participated in eating together, fasting, praying, and teaching, but that these activities have an “uneasy relationship with the language or concept of ‘worship’.”³¹⁵ Nonetheless, he concludes, “In this book, ‘worship’ henceforth means these practices that constitute Christian communal and ritual life ... not merely or specifically what the NT itself calls ‘worship’.”³¹⁶ Aware of this awkward terminology problem, McGowan cautions against an anachronistic examination of the NT evidence, saying that “appropriate critical attention must be given to how imagination tends to favor present experience and preferences.”³¹⁷

McGowan advances to Stage 3, exploring why NT worship terminology is so different from modern worship terminology. “We must admit something difficult at the

³¹³ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 7.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 10.

outset: in the ancient world, what we now call ‘worship’ did not quite exist.”³¹⁸ He says that the early Christians were unlike contemporary pagans and Jews who referred to their ritual/temple practices as “worship.” Consequently, says McGowan, it would be “misleading” to say that Christians engaged in worship.³¹⁹ He does not trace how or when ‘worship’ began to be applied to Christian communal activity (Stage 4), but he indicates that the Christian aversion to regard assembly activities as ‘worship’ persisted for the first four centuries.³²⁰

The delicate hazard of using the term ‘worship’ to refer to assembly activities is obvious throughout McGowan’s book. In his opening introductory chapter, in which he explains the acute terminology problem, he usually—but not always—puts quotation marks around the word (“worship”). Generally speaking, when the word appears without quotation marks (Christian worship), he is using the term in the modern sense of “the set of communal practices of prayer and ritual.”³²¹ When the term appears with quotation marks (Christian “worship”), he is generally signaling that he is discussing these early communal practices, even though the early church would not have called them “worship.” In that short chapter of only seventeen pages, he uses the term ‘worship’ more than 100 times in only seventeen pages of text (about six times per page).³²² After chapter

³¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

³¹⁹ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 6-8.

³²⁰ Ibid., 7.

³²¹ Ibid., 1.

³²² This count, conducted by a search of a PDF copy of the book, does not include mentions of “worship” in footnotes where other book titles on “worship” are cited.

1, McGowan greatly reduces his use of the term, using it around sixty times in the remaining 240 pages (about one time for every four pages), which is remarkably infrequent for a book about “Ancient Christian Worship.” In these subsequent chapters, he occasionally returns to using quotation marks in a way that signals the reader of the problem with worship terminology. McGowan is certainly aware of the problem of using the term ‘worship’ to refer to assembly activities, but due to the prominence of that word in modern Christian vocabulary, it is difficult to avoid it entirely. Ironically, McGowan’s final statement in the book affirms that ritual assembly activities, “offered as service to God, constitute Christian worship” (with no quotation marks around ‘worship’).³²³

Summary: The Worship Anomaly

This review of literature about the “worship anomaly” has revealed several important conclusions about this topic. The first is that, of the twenty-five scholars in this review, seventeen scholars have noted the anomaly, i.e., that worship terminology is lacking when the NT writers speak of the Christian assembly. Eight of these reviewed scholars did not even mention the anomaly. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that most Christians recognize this terminological problem. The scholars in this survey almost universally noted that NT terminology is at odds with current thinking. They described the worship anomaly as “striking,”³²⁴ “surprising,”³²⁵ “astonishing,”³²⁶

³²³ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 262.

³²⁴ Reicke, “Some Reflections on Worship in the NT,” 194; Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 23.

³²⁵ Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, 9.

³²⁶ Schweizer, *The Church as the Body of Christ*, 60.

“startling,”³²⁷ “remarkable,”³²⁸ “very significant,”³²⁹ “strange,”³³⁰ “puzzling,”³³¹ and “something difficult.”³³² As Hahn says, the terminological anomaly “is not always sufficiently appreciated,”³³³ and Stuart observes that it poses “a stark contrast to the common popularity of and approach to ‘worship’ in our day.”³³⁴ In other words, the scholars in this review generally recognize that the terminology problem is a significant one that runs against the grain of current thought.

Even though the significance of the worship anomaly has been recognized by scholars since the 1950s, Carson and McGowan are the only two who noticed the anomaly in the last twenty-five years. Fifteen of the seventeen made their observations between 1952 and 1996. The sharp drop of recognition of the worship anomaly since 1996 may be due to the apparent increase of “worship talk” since the beginning of the “worship wars” of the late 1990s. Since such “worship wars” discussions commonly

³²⁷ Campbell, “Once More: Is Worship ‘Biblical?’” 138.

³²⁸ Marshall, “How Far,” 220; Richardson, “Is ‘Worship’ Biblical?” 197; Stuart, “A New Testament Perspective on Worship,” 209.

³²⁹ Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 17; Schweizer, “The Service of Worship: An Exposition of I Corinthians 14,” 400; Bishop describes it as “significant” in “The Assembly,” 219.

³³⁰ Young, “The Theological Context of NT Worship,” 78; Burkhart, *Worship*, 99.

³³¹ Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: Spirit and Culture in Early House Churches*, 77.

³³² McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 5.

³³³ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 38.

³³⁴ Stuart, “A New Testament Perspective on Worship,” 220.

identify “worship” with assembly activity, it is possible that this extensive “worship talk” has obscured the ability to recognize the worship anomaly and assess its significance. The questionable approaches of Ross (2006) and Block (2014) may have been negatively influenced by this heightened focus on “worship.”³³⁵ It is worth noting that no one has brought focused attention to the terminology problem since Howard Marshall’s article in a little-known journal (*Churchman*) in 1985, John Richardson’s article in the same journal in 1995, and the 1996 article in *Evangelical Quarterly* by the little-known Streeter Stuart. (See Chart 2 below.) These three articles were published prior to the advent of the so-called “worship wars” controversy in 1997.

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF KEY STATEMENTS ABOUT ‘WORSHIP’ TERMINOLOGY

Year	Scholar	Statement about Terminology
1952	Brunner	The NT “does not permit us simply to use the word ‘worship’ (<i>Gottesdienst</i>) to designate the subject of our investigation.” ³³⁶
1959	Reicke	“Does not ‘worship’ have any importance for the New Testament authors?” ³³⁷
1963	Young	“Christians ... had nothing to do that could be called worship in the cultic sense.” ³³⁸

³³⁵ In 2021, a new book on “Biblical Worship” was published, containing 34 chapters from 36 scholars who attempt to show “what various portions of the biblical text have to say about worship” [Benjamin K. Forrest, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., and Vernon M. Whaley, eds. *Biblical Worship: Theology for God’s Glory* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 20]. In its opening acknowledgements, the editors state that “nearly all” of the book’s authors “readily admitted their appreciation for and dependence on” the worship books by Block and Ross (*Ibid.*, 9). Like Block and Ross, the 2021 book proceeds with the broad assumption that “worship” is what the early Christians did in their assemblies.

³³⁶ Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 11.

³³⁷ Reicke, “Some Reflections on Worship in the NT,” 196.

³³⁸ Young, “The Theological Context of NT Worship,” 79.

1973	Hahn	“Worship can no longer take place within well-defined and sanctified precincts.” ³³⁹
1975	Bishop	“The concept of the assembly as a ‘worship service’ is completely foreign to the New Testament.” ³⁴⁰
1980	Banks	Paul never said that “a person went to church primarily to ‘worship’.” ³⁴¹
1985	Marshall	“‘Worship’ is not an umbrella-term for what goes on when Christians gather together.” ³⁴²
1992	Peterson	“Contemporary Christians obscure the breadth and depth of the Bible’s teaching on this subject when they persist in using the word ‘worship’ in the usual, limited fashion, applying it mainly to what goes on in Sunday services.” ³⁴³
1995	Richardson	“There is no such thing as ‘worship’ – at least ‘not as we know it.’” ³⁴⁴
1996	Stuart	“‘Worship’ was not associated with particular acts or practices done at particular locations as we are accustomed to think of ‘worship’.” ³⁴⁵
1996	Ferguson	“It would be better to speak of ‘assembly’ or some such word to describe the congregational gatherings of Christians.” ³⁴⁶
2014	McGowan	“We must admit something difficult at the outset: in the ancient world, what we now call ‘worship’ did not quite exist.” ³⁴⁷

Another conclusion that arises from these reviews is the possible futility of defining the English term ‘worship’. Many of these scholars crafted their own unique definition of ‘worship’ and then conformed their argument around that self-made definition. In other words, if the Greek terms translated as “worship” do not refer to

³³⁹ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 43-44.

³⁴⁰ Bishop, “The Assembly,” 224.

³⁴¹ Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches*, 88.

³⁴² Marshall, “How Far,” 220.

³⁴³ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 18.

³⁴⁴ Richardson, “Is ‘Worship’ Biblical?” 197-98.

³⁴⁵ Stuart, “A New Testament Perspective on Worship,” 220.

³⁴⁶ Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, 226.

³⁴⁷ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 5.

Christian assembly activities, a way to bypass the problem is to create a definition of the English word ‘worship’ that applies to the assembly. It seems more appropriate to determine definitions of the Greek terms προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, and σέβομαι than to craft one’s own definition of an English term that was never used by the biblical writers to refer to the assembly. If it is determined that “worship” is an authentic translation of any of these Greek terms, then it must be determined if that particular nuance of “worship” applies to Christian assemblies in the NT. This will be considered in chapter 4.

About half of our reviewed scholars advanced to Stage 3 to find reasons for the lack of worship terminology in descriptions of NT assemblies. Their most common conclusion is connected to the abrogation of the temple and its cultic rituals. Their line of reasoning follows a common pattern. Worship terminology (i.e., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, and λειτουργέω) is temple terminology that largely refers to the ritual ministry of the “temple cult.”³⁴⁸ Since Jesus has replaced the temple as the way to God and the way to redemption from sin, all such temple activities are rendered obsolete. Consequently, Christians have no need of literal sacrifices, literal altars, literal priests, and a literal temple. In “the new and living way” (Heb 10:20) enabled by the blood of Jesus, these cultic concepts have meaning only in a transformed and figurative sense. Now, when Christians offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, they perform a figurative λατρεία (Rom 12:1). While there is general agreement on these concepts, some of these scholars vary on their views of the appropriateness of having Christian rituals, liturgy, sacred places,

³⁴⁸ The review revealed that the terms ‘cult’, ‘cultus’, and ‘cultic’ all have application to worship terminology since they commonly refer to the (sacrifice-related) work of priests in the temple.

sacred items, ceremonies, sacraments, and a Christian cult. Yet, as Bradshaw noted in 2002, scholars have increasingly questioned the idea that the NT contains references to Christian liturgy. If the temple approach to “worship” has indeed been abolished, do these cultic and liturgical ideas have any place in our understanding of NT assemblies? This question will be explored in chapters 3 and 4.

Only three scholars (Hahn, Peterson, and Stuart) attempt to trace how the early church gradually resurrected the use of worship terminology to refer to its assemblies (Stage 4) in the patristic period after the first century. But the comments by these three scholars are brief and undeveloped, and Peterson considered that investigation to be outside of the scope of his work.³⁴⁹

Part 2: The Origins of the Christian Assembly

This second review of literature moves from scholarly reflection on the worship anomaly to scholars’ views of the origins of the Christian assembly. Did the first Christians create their first gathering *ex nihilo*, or were their first assemblies based on an existing gathering tradition? The answer to this question could shed light on why ‘worship’ terminology might not have been used to describe the Christian assembly. This review of literature will examine the primary views on this issue over the last century, with a special look at theories raised in the last thirty years.

³⁴⁹ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 125.

The Christian Assembly Came from the Synagogue

The person who set the standard view in the early twentieth century was the Anglican scholar, W. O. E. Oesterley, in his 1925 book, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy*.³⁵⁰ Coming from a liturgical church background, Oesterley seeks “to show that the Jewish Liturgy has left many marks of its influence, both in thought and word, on early forms of Christian worship, and, therefore, ultimately in the Christian Liturgy itself.”³⁵¹ He claims that the “Jewish Liturgy” was used in the synagogue, which had also borrowed some elements from the temple.³⁵² Oesterley was not the first to propose that the Christian meeting bore synagogue origins. Orville Watson, reviewing Oesterley’s work, notes that 200 years earlier, Campegius Vitringa had “found in the Synagogue not only Christian canons and ritual but even the very furniture of the chancel.”³⁵³ Of the dozens of scholars covered in this review, no one else has proposed the fanciful theory that the early Christian assembly included “furniture of the chancel.”

The assumed typical features of the synagogue meeting have often been claimed to be carried over into the early church meetings, such as Scripture reading (1 Tm 4:13), psalms and hymns (1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16); prayers (Acts 2:42; 1 Tm 2:1-8), saying, “Amen” (1 Cor 14:16), an exposition of Scripture (1 Cor 14:26; Acts 20:7); a

³⁵⁰ W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (1925, repr., Gloucester: Peter Smith Publishing, 1965).

³⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

³⁵² Ibid., 34, 39, 73.

³⁵³ Orville Ernest Watson, review of *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy*, by W. O. E. Oesterley, *Anglican Theological Review* 9:1 (July 1926): 70.

confession of faith (the synagogue's Shema) (1 Cor 15:1-4; 1 Tm 6:12); and perhaps giving (1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 9:10-13).³⁵⁴ Evidence for these elements in the first-century synagogue is harder to find. The synagogue lacked the Lord's Supper, and Maxwell suggested that the Christian assembly emerged from a combination of the "synagogue worship" and the Lord's Supper.³⁵⁵ This basic theory (synagogue + Lord's Supper = Christian assembly) has been reiterated or endorsed by a long string of scholars over the last century, including W. D. Maxwell (1936), C. W. Dugmore (1944),³⁵⁶ Gregory Dix (1945),³⁵⁷ O. S. Rankin (1948),³⁵⁸ J. H. Srawley (1957),³⁵⁹ Massey Shepherd (1963),³⁶⁰

³⁵⁴ The cited Scriptures refer to the biblical evidence of these features in the Christian meeting. This list comes from W. D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship: Its Developments and Forms* (1936; repr., London: Oxford, 1945), 4-5. Lists by other scholars vary. Some of the items in Maxwell's list were later contested.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁵⁶ C. W. Dugmore, *The Influence of the Synagogue upon the Divine Office* (London: Oxford, 1944), 8.

³⁵⁷ Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1945), 36.

³⁵⁸ O. S. Rankin, "The Extent of the Influence of the Synagogue Service Upon Christian Worship," *The Journal of Jewish Studies* 1 (1948): 29.

³⁵⁹ J. H. Srawley, *The Early History of the Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 34.

³⁶⁰ Massey H. Shepherd Jr., "The Origin of the Church's Liturgy," *Worship in Scripture and Tradition*, ed. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 146.

Samuel Sandmel (1978),³⁶¹ Leon Morris (1992),³⁶² Robert Webber (1994),³⁶³ Mark Powell (2000),³⁶⁴ Everett Ferguson (2003),³⁶⁵ Wayne Meeks (2003),³⁶⁶ James Dunn (2006), and many others.³⁶⁷

Problems with the Standard View of the Synagogue

Since 1980, however, a growing number of scholars have identified various problems with the commonly held view of the components of the first-century synagogue

³⁶¹ Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 418.

³⁶² Leon Morris, “The Saints and the Synagogue,” in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 51. Morris additionally says that the weekly basis of the synagogue meeting, which was something new in the first-century Graeco-Roman culture, was also carried on by the Christian assembly.

³⁶³ Webber, *Worship Old & New*, 38, 41, 55-58.

³⁶⁴ Powell, “Worship, New Testament,” 1391.

³⁶⁵ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 575. See also Ferguson, *The Early Church and Today*, Vol. 1: Ministry, Initiation, and Worship (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2012), 216. Here, Ferguson says, “The early history of the liturgy, however, may not have been everywhere so neat, and recent study is more cautious about generalization and points to greater variety in early Christian practice.”

³⁶⁶ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 80-81. Meeks notes that adjudicating internal disputes was handled in both the synagogue and Christian assemblies, but they had different terminology for leaders, their membership requirements were “drastically different,” and women were allowed a greater role in Christian meetings.

³⁶⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2006), 80. Dunn also sees a close parallel between the Christian meeting and the Graeco-Roman associations (*collegia*). This theory is discussed on pages 105-07.

assembly. Valeriy Alikin (2010) says, “The view that each and every element of the early Christian gathering could be derived from the synagogue service on the Sabbath began to lose ground during the last decade of the twentieth century.”³⁶⁸ Alikin adds that the view lost ground because of (1) a new emphasis on studying the sociological background of Graeco-Roman culture, (2) the scarcity of information about pre-70 AD synagogues, and (3) the acknowledgment of anachronistic errors that assumed the existence of liturgical customs in the first century.³⁶⁹ Indeed, many of the statements by the earlier Anglican liturgical scholars (e.g., Oesterley, Dugmore, and Dix) have been exposed as affected by anachronism and as lacking evidence. For example, J. A. Smith (1984) notes that Dix’s book contains “many sweeping statements and doubtful claims (and) stretches historical credibility to absurd limits by reading back elements of fourth-century Christian practice into the first century and then assuming their synagogal origin.”³⁷⁰ As noted in chapter 1 of this dissertation, anachronism has been a recurring problem in scholarly examinations of early Christian meetings as well.

The assumption that first-century synagogues included singing is one of these problems. J. A. Smith (1984) observes, “No contemporary sources make any mention of singing in the ancient synagogue during the first and second centuries.”³⁷¹ He was

³⁶⁸ See Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 12.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

³⁷⁰ J. A. Smith, “The Ancient Synagogue, the Early Church and Singing,” *Music & Letters* 65:1 (January 1984): 2.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 5.

followed by James McKinnon (1986), who observes that “the evidence against psalmody in the synagogue at the time of Jesus appears overwhelming,” adding that daily synagogue singing did not begin until several centuries later.³⁷²

In addition, while Scripture reading is widely confirmed to be a first-century synagogue practice,³⁷³ it is now doubted that these readings followed a fixed lectionary approach as had been assumed. Paul Bradshaw (2002) says:

Not only has recent Jewish scholarship revealed that there was no fixed Sabbath lectionary in existence in the first century but we have no reason to suppose that Gentile churches would necessarily have wanted to preserve a Jewish system of Scripture reading in their worship, nor is there any sign that Christians assigned particular passages of Scripture to specific occasions.”³⁷⁴

Bradshaw, himself an Anglican liturgical scholar, adds, “Indeed, on the basis of both archaeological and literary evidence, a growing number of scholars now doubt that any form of regular Sabbath liturgy as such was a feature of the synagogue before the third century.”³⁷⁵

The destruction of the temple in 70 AD was likely the precipitating event that resulted in the synagogue gradually adopting sacral characteristics that had previously

³⁷² James W. McKinnon, “On the Question of Psalmody in the Ancient Synagogue,” *Early Music History* 6 (1986), 190. He adds that, unlike certain Christian scholars, Jewish liturgical scholars have not made this mistake (p. 182). For example, Oesterley boldly says (without offering any evidence): “The liturgical use of psalms in the Jewish Church in pre-Christian times is too well known to need many words” (Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy*, 73).

³⁷³ Acts 15:21 says, “Moses ... is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” Even if the date of Acts is assumed to be in the second century, this verse still supports the idea of Scripture reading in the synagogue at a very early date.

³⁷⁴ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 49.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

been associated with the temple.³⁷⁶ Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the temple was known for sacrificial offerings, cultic functions and functionaries, adherence to ceremonial laws, and liturgy, but the ancient synagogue was not. But when the temple disappeared, it seems logical that the Jews' centuries-long attachment to sacred space would transfer to the synagogue. J. A. Smith, writing in 2011, twenty-seven years after his first findings about psalmody were published, says, "There seems to have been no fixed liturgy for the (first-century synagogue) proceedings and no fixed scriptural passages for reading except that they were taken from the Torah and the Prophets."³⁷⁷ However, by the end of the second century, the synagogue meetings had been transformed from their earlier focus on religious instruction into "something approaching a liturgy of worship," says Smith.³⁷⁸

In 1994, Heather McKay systematically examined evidence of synagogue practice from a wide range of sources that dated from 200 BC to 200 AD. These sources include the Hebrew Bible, intertestamental apocryphal works, early Jewish literature such as Philo and Josephus, pertinent Graeco-Roman writings, the New Testament, early Christian writings, the Mishnah, as well as archaeological data, inscriptions, and papyri. She concludes: "When Jews (of this period) assemble on the sabbath, it is not to worship,

³⁷⁶ See, for example, Larry Hurtado, "Worship, NT Christian," *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006-2009), 5:913.

³⁷⁷ John Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 131.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

but to read, study, and discuss Torah.”³⁷⁹ Her conclusion is based on defining ‘worship’ as “rites and rituals which pay homage, with adoration and awe, to a particular god or gods.”³⁸⁰ According to her definition, such activities include singing hymns or psalms, reading or reciting sacred texts, prayers, and blessings. However, she says, reading, studying, and explaining sacred texts do not qualify as worship, “unless given a place in a planned session of worship.”³⁸¹

McKay’s study has been criticized for her tendency to downplay the role of prayer in these ancient synagogue gatherings.³⁸² Since Matthew records Jesus as criticizing hypocrites who “love to stand and pray in the synagogues” (Mt 6:5), it is hard to conclude that prayer (as “worship”) did not take place in the synagogue in the first century. Also, some scholars have criticized McKay’s definition of ‘worship’. Is that definition correct? Lee Fields points in a more-profitable direction when he asks, “Does her definition of worship correspond with the ancient definition?”³⁸³ In spite of these two criticisms, the overall strength of McKay’s argument forced synagogue scholars to reexamine their presuppositions about the early synagogue. As Anthony J. Saldarini says,

³⁷⁹ Heather A. McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 77.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁸² See Pieter W. Van der Horst, “Was the Synagogue a Place of Sabbath Worship Before 70 CE?” in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction During the Greco-Roman Period*, ed., Steven Fine (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 31-34.

³⁸³ Lee M. Fields, review of *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism*, by Heather A. McKay, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:1 (March 1997): 137.

“This detailed, disciplined study is a precise corrective to anachronistic retrojections of later synagogue worship into the first century.”³⁸⁴ McKay’s conclusions are important to consider because they are similar to the terminological and anachronistic errors that scholars have been making with regard to early Christian assemblies of the same era. In other words, is it possible that first-century synagogue assemblies were not “worship services” for the same reason(s) that first-century Christian assemblies were not “worship services”?

The Christian Assembly Did Not Come from the Synagogue

Even though many scholars have espoused the idea that the Christian gathering emerged from the Jewish (synagogue) gathering, some notable scholars have denied the premise altogether. In the last century, one of the first to do so was Gerhard Delling (1952) who concludes, “The primitive Christian service did not take over the constituent parts of that of the synagogue.”³⁸⁵ Alikin (2010) comes to a similar conclusion: “The Christian gathering did not evolve out of a Jewish meal or synagogue assembly.”³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Anthony J. Saldarini, review of *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism*, by Heather A. McKay, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58 (1996): 558. In a similar reaction, Gerard Sloyan notes that McKay’s study hits “hard on a great cloud of scholarly witnesses who get all their exercise from jumping to conclusions,” in Gerard S. Sloyan, review of *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism*, by Heather A. McKay, *Worship* 70:4 (July 1996): 353.

³⁸⁵ Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, 42. See similar—but less adamant—remarks by Schweizer, “Worship in the New Testament,” 202; Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 52; Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 159-60.

³⁸⁶ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 285.

Leon Morris (1992) notes that Dugmore and Delling came to opposite conclusions after reviewing the same data. He says, “Clearly we must take care when such opposite conclusions can be reached, and we must not read too much into the data.”³⁸⁷ When Don Carson (1993 and 2002) assessed scholar’s opinions about the Christian dependence on the synagogue, he notes the problem of anachronism³⁸⁸ and offers some appropriate balance: “It has been repeatedly shown that all the evidence for liturgy in the Jewish synagogue system is considerably later than the New Testament documents: we simply do not know what a synagogue service looked like in the first century.”³⁸⁹ It seems clear that assumptions about the connection between the Christian gathering and the Jewish synagogue need either to be proven with clear data or to be acknowledged as mere guesses.

The Christian Assembly Came from the Temple and the Synagogue

But what about the temple? Did the Christian assembly inherit some practices from this dominant centerpiece of the Jewish religion? Since Christianity emerged from the context of temple and synagogue, as C. F. D. Moule (1961) notes, “It has always been tempting to find already there the two components of Christian worship—the Sacraments, corresponding to the Temple, and ‘the Word,’ corresponding to the non-sacrificial, non-

³⁸⁷ Leon Morris, “The Saints and the Synagogue,” in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 45.

³⁸⁸ Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 21.

³⁸⁹ Carson, *Worship: Adoration and Action*, 14-15. See similar comments by Hurtado, “Worship, NT Christian,” 5:913; and Morris, “The Saints and the Synagogue,” 39.

sacramental synagogue, with its strong element of reading and instruction.”³⁹⁰ Ralph P. Martin (1974) also supported the idea that “Temple ritual and synagogue Liturgy (provided) ... the background of early Christian worship.”³⁹¹ However, this viewpoint may be plagued again with the problem of anachronism. Are these scholars presuming that the early Christian assemblies contained “ritual” and “liturgy” that existed in the fourth century? Where is the evidence?

More recently, Margaret Barker (2007) devoted an entire book to the theory that “temple worship became the worship of the Church.”³⁹² The fundamental elements of her theory are that Jesus was viewed as the “great high priest” (Heb 4:14), the earliest disciples continued in the temple “day by day” (Acts 2:46), and the temple imagery found in Revelation (11:1-2).³⁹³ Her book, however, has been criticized for its “weak argumentation filled with logical non sequiturs and the highly disputable nature of many of her conclusions.”³⁹⁴ Anachronism again appears to be a problem, as Barker often

³⁹⁰ Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, 12. Yet, on p. 61, Moule adds that it “may ... be a mistake” to adopt this view.

³⁹¹ Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 19. See similar viewpoints by Reicke, “Some Reflections on Worship in the New Testament,” 206; Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 418; and Block, *For the Glory of God*, 230.

³⁹² Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), ix.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁹⁴ Max Frederick Rogland, review of *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*, by Margaret Barker, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:3 (September 2009): 585. See also Nicholas H. Taylor, review of *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*, by Margaret Barker, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31:5 (2009): 25-26; and Carla Swafford Works, review of *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*, by Margaret Barker, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65:2 (2012): 246-47.

compares temple concepts, not to verified first-century Christian meetings, but to later reflection by church fathers who incorporated temple themes into their writings.

While Barker allows that the synagogue also contributed to the Christian assembly, Peter J. Leithart (2002) took the view that the Christian assembly did not come from the synagogue but rather came from the temple. He asserts, “If the church is the temple, it stands to reason that her worship is a new covenant development of temple worship.”³⁹⁵ He explains: “The inclusion of the Lord’s Supper as a central event of Christian worship is conclusive proof that early Christian worship did not derive from the synagogue service. ... Blood was never poured out in the synagogue; that blood is present in Christian worship is proof that Christian worship is modeled on the temple.”³⁹⁶ Leithart, however, never mentions the idea that the NT does not use worship terminology in reference to Christian meetings. Also, his idea that Christian meetings have a blood sacrifice implies a potentially heretical view that partaking in the Lord’s Supper constitutes the offering of a sacrifice that remits sin.

The Christian Assembly Did Not Come from the Temple

In spite of the minority views expressed by Barker and Leithart, several scholars reject the idea that the Christian gathering is indebted to the temple. W. D. Maxwell (1945) cites two reasons why the temple “left little mark” upon the Christian assembly. First, the temple meant little to Gentile Christians and to Jews of the Dispersion.

³⁹⁵ Peter J. Leithart, “Synagogue or Temple? Models for the Christian Worship.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2002): 131.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

Secondly, the destruction of the temple in 70 AD virtually eliminated its influence.³⁹⁷

Burkhart (1982) posits an additional reason. The early Christians, he says, “seem deliberately to have turned their backs” on the temple, priests, and sacred rituals. He adds, “It appears, linguistically at least, that for the writers of the New Testament, (temple) cult and idolatry were virtually synonymous.”³⁹⁸

A key distinguishing feature of the synagogue meeting, which likened it to the Christian meeting, was the absence of a sacrificial cult, which was central to the temple. J. A. Smith (1984) notes that Dugmore, Dix, and Reicke assumed more cultic elements in the synagogue because they used the Mishnah as a source, wrongfully assuming that the Mishnah is a reliable source for first-century practice. However, he says, the Mishnah reflects the tendency after 200 AD for the synagogue to gradually adopt cultic elements from the destroyed temple.³⁹⁹

James McKinnon (1986) notes that the same tendency to assume that first-century synagogues contained (temple-like) cultic practice of later-century synagogues can also be observed in assumptions about the primitive church.⁴⁰⁰ As Bradshaw (2002) says, “Many conclusions about worship in the New Testament ... are arrived at only by

³⁹⁷ Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship*, 2.

³⁹⁸ Burkhart, *Worship: A Searching Examination*, 19.

³⁹⁹ Smith, “The Ancient Synagogue, the Early Church and Singing,” 1. Lidia D. Matassa says, “There can be little doubt that the synagogue began to take on its more sacral functions after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, and that this happened far from Jerusalem,” in Matassa, *Invention of the First-Century Synagogue*, ed., Jason M. Silverman and J. Murray Watson (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 216.

⁴⁰⁰ McKinnon, “On the Question of Psalmody in the Ancient Synagogue,” 190.

assuming that liturgical customs found in later centuries must have been in continuous existence from the first century.”⁴⁰¹ The point here is that, if the NT church lacked the liturgical and cultic customs that were common to the temple, it is less likely that the church inherited anything from the temple.

Other scholars have also explicitly opposed the idea that the temple influenced the Christian assembly. I. Howard Marshall (1985) says there is “no evidence” that Christians modeled their meetings on the temple.⁴⁰² Rather, he says, the church saw itself as the new temple, not because they adhered to temple ceremonial laws but because of the belief that God was in their midst.⁴⁰³

Related Problems with Studying Christian Origins

Any assessment of the origins of the Christian assembly must note that, in addition to a study of the synagogue and the temple, there are a wide range of questions involving the origins of various components of the Christian gathering. These questions involve the origins of the Lord’s Supper, the origins of the “eucharistic prayer,” the origins of the Lord’s Prayer, the origins of the Christian offices (e.g., deacons, elders, bishops), and the origins of a variety of liturgical customs.

⁴⁰¹ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 51.

⁴⁰² Marshall, “How Far,” 224.

⁴⁰³ I. Howard Marshall, “New Testament Worship,” *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. J. G. Davies (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 389. See also Brad Blue, “The Influence of Jewish Worship on Luke’s Presentation of the Early Church,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. H. Marshall and David Peterson (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 483-84.

This review will not cover these various elements, but it is important to report that, here again, problems of anachronism have been noted. For example, I. Howard Marshall (1980) studies the origins of the Lord's Supper, warning that "great caution should be exercised in reading back" from post-NT documents, assuming that the NT had already adopted later practices.⁴⁰⁴ Dennis Smith (2003) also says that commonly accepted views of the origins of the Lord's Supper are based on later (e.g., fourth century) practices, which represents "a retrojection onto the ancient sources."⁴⁰⁵

In Bradshaw's (2002) study of the origins of the "eucharistic prayer," he laments of "a wild-goose chase (caused by) the unquestioned assumption that an early Christian community's eucharistic prayer ... would always have been a single, flowing, seamless whole."⁴⁰⁶ Rick Byargeon considers whether the Lord's Prayer was based on the Jewish Qaddish prayer, concluding that scholarly anachronism may again be a problem "since it is not absolutely certain when the Qaddish originated or what form it may have had in the first century and since it did not become a fixed element within the worship of the synagogue until well after the first century."⁴⁰⁷ The study of the origins of Christian congregational leaders is likewise fraught with anachronism. James Burtchaell (1992)

⁴⁰⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 146.

⁴⁰⁵ Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 4.

⁴⁰⁶ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 141.

⁴⁰⁷ Rick W. Byargeon, "Echoes of Wisdom in the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:3 (September 1998): 354.

decries, “The beguilements of reading later usages back into an undefined past have led to much myth and mischief.”⁴⁰⁸

The Impact of “House Churches”

The topic of house churches has not attracted as much attention as, for example, the Lord’s Supper. However, since “house churches” are mentioned frequently in the NT,⁴⁰⁹ any assessment of the origins of the Christian assembly must consider the home-based nature of these early meetings.⁴¹⁰ Whatever the source of the assembly, it must be compatible with a meeting that takes place in a residential dwelling, surrounded by the people, furniture, and provisions that were commonly found there.

As early as 1939, Floyd Filson stressed the importance and function of the house church. He says, “The New Testament church would be better understood if more attention were paid to the actual physical conditions under which the first Christians met

⁴⁰⁸ Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices*, 273. Bradshaw says that the now “hotly debated” origins of the Christian “elder” were based on mistaken assumptions for 200 years, prior to the discovery of the *Didache*. See Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 192-93.

⁴⁰⁹ The certain house churches are mentioned in Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 1:2; 2 Jn 1:10. Other possible references to house churches include Acts 9:17; 10:17; 12:12; 17:5; 20:20; 21:8; 21:16. Edward Adams recently contested the view that Christians of the first two centuries gathered “almost exclusively” in houses. He contends that they “could plausibly have met in a variety of other available places too,” in Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* Early Christianity in Context. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 200.

⁴¹⁰ Wayne Meeks describes the house church as the “basic cell” of the Christian movement, and “its nucleus” was an existing household, in Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 75.

and lived.”⁴¹¹ He adds, “The creative and controlling aspects of their faith and life ... found unhindered expression not in temple or synagogue but in the house gatherings.”⁴¹² Unfortunately, it was almost sixty years later before another scholar devoted significant research to the topic.

Studies of the house church have revealed some other parallels between the early Christian assembly and the synagogue assembly, “particularly since many of the activities in the house-church resembled those of the house-synagogue,” says Brad Blue (1998).⁴¹³ In the same way that early Christian meetings were house-based, it is likely that early synagogue meetings were also held in homes.⁴¹⁴ In addition, just as there is no evidence that early house churches were viewed as “places of worship,” there is no evidence that any συναγωγή in the first century was understood to be a “place of worship.”

Blue says, “It is abundantly clear that the Jewish antecedents to Christian assembly ... are felt throughout (Acts),” and the domestic nature of each assembly is a

⁴¹¹ Floyd Filson, “The Significance of the Early House Churches,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 58 (1939): 105-06.

⁴¹² Ibid., 109.

⁴¹³ Blue, “The Influence of Jewish Worship on Luke’s Presentation of the Early Church,” 474.

⁴¹⁴ Howard Clark Kee says there is no evidence of synagogues as architecturally distinguishable edifices prior to 200 AD, in Kee, “The Transformation of the Synagogue after 70 C.E.: Its Import for Early Christianity,” *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990): 9. See also Eric M. Meyers, “Synagogue,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed., David Noel Freedman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 6:255.

factor that connects the two gatherings.⁴¹⁵ He suggests that the Christians called their meeting an ἐκκλησία instead of συναγωγή or προσευχή in order to demonstrate the Christian separation from Judaism. Other than that distinction (as well as meeting on Sundays instead of Saturdays), the church was “a Christian synagogue.”⁴¹⁶ He agrees that the Christians used the synagogues, but not as Christian meeting places. Instead, Christian evangelists used the synagogues, as well as lecture halls and the temple precincts, as platforms to proclaim the gospel to gain converts.”⁴¹⁷ The house was then used for Christian gatherings because it provided the culinary provisions for the Lord’s Supper and the ἀγάπη meal, as well as a comfortable and informal environment for facilitating fellowship.⁴¹⁸

If scholars assume that the early Christian assemblies included liturgy, rituals, cultic functionaries, and sacred elements, they must also presume that these sacral details were routine components of domestic gatherings. Home-based meetings are widely attested in the NT itself, and evidence of separate non-residential structures for Christian meetings does not exist until the third century.⁴¹⁹ When faced with the reality of

⁴¹⁵ Blue, “The Influence of Jewish Worship on Luke’s Presentation of the Early Church,” 497.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 482.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 475, 486.

⁴¹⁹ The earliest known excavation of a house church is at Dura-Europos (modern Syria) and can be confidently dated to 232-233 AD, according to Bradley Blue, “Acts and the House Church,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting*, ed., David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 166. See also Ramsay

documented house assemblies, along with the newfound awareness that assumptions of early liturgy are based on anachronism, liturgiologists are left with a minimal likelihood that first-century churches included any liturgy or sacred ceremonial features.

The Christian Assembly Came from the Graeco-Roman Associations

In the last thirty years, some have proposed the idea that the Christian meeting was largely indebted to the Graeco-Roman associations or *collegia*.⁴²⁰ What are associations? Philip Harland defines them as “small, unofficial groups that met together on a regular basis for a variety of social, religious, and other purposes.”⁴²¹ He sees association members organizing themselves along three kinds of connections: occupational, cultic, and household.⁴²² Why are association meetings seen as similar to Christian meetings? James Dunn (2006) explains that the early Christian home churches must have seemed “very odd” in comparison to other religions of that culture, since Christians had no priests, no sacrifices, and no temple. “The nearest parallel,” he adds, “would be the *collegia*—formally recognized associations for shared purpose or interest.”⁴²³ Wayne Meeks (2003) says that Christian gatherings and association meetings both engaged in common meals and other “fraternal” activities, both depended on the

MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 1-10.

⁴²⁰ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 77. See also Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 37; and Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, 119.

⁴²¹ Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 18.

⁴²² Ibid., 28-29.

⁴²³ Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, 107.

generosity of wealthier persons who acted as patrons, and both “had a more or less important place for rituals and cultic activities.”⁴²⁴ Yet, would the first-century Christians have seen themselves as engaging in “rituals and cultic activities”? If Ferdinand Hahn is right, “Any cultic understanding of Christian worship is out of the question.”⁴²⁵ And L. Michael White (1990) suggests that the early form of Christian meetings did not evolve into “stylized eucharistic liturgy” until the early third century.⁴²⁶

In spite of the striking similarities, Meeks also notes that there were important differences between Christian groups and typical voluntary associations. The Christian groups, for example, were “exclusive and totalistic.”⁴²⁷ He concludes that “the Christian groups did not consciously model themselves on the associations” because of “the almost complete absence of common terminology for the groups themselves or for their leaders.”⁴²⁸ He adds that none of the common terms for associations, such as *thiasos*, *factio*, *curia*, *corpus*, were ever used in the NT to refer to Christian meetings, and he could find no examples of association meetings being called an *ekklesia*.⁴²⁹ A unique factor of the association origins theory is that, unlike the synagogue and temple,

⁴²⁴ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 78.

⁴²⁵ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 38.

⁴²⁶ L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture: Building God’s House in the Roman World*, vol. 1 (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 120.

⁴²⁷ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 78.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*

associations provide a (mostly) non-religious source for the Christian meeting. This factor seems to be in concert with the fact, as previously noted, that ἐκκλησία and other NT terms for the Christian “meeting” and “gathering” were secular terms in Koiné Greek, free of religious connotations.

The Christian Assembly Came from the Graeco-Roman Banquet Tradition

A proposal that is related to the idea that Christian meetings emerged from association meetings is the theory that Christian meetings developed out of the Graeco-Roman banquet tradition. Dennis Smith (2003) believes that this proposal “can provide a surer basis for historical reconstruction of Christian origins.”⁴³⁰ The banquet theory is connected to the association theory because banquets were a common central highlight of association meetings.⁴³¹ As Smith describes it, these banquets featured two key components: the *deipnon* (the meal) followed by the entertainment/symposium, which could take varying forms. In some groups, this post-meal event could feature drunkenness with “promiscuous and lewd activities” involving prostitutes.⁴³²

But Christians, he says, followed the tradition of the philosophical symposium, known for its enlightened discussions. “Here,” he claims, “is located the foundation for early Christian worship.”⁴³³ The banquet carried its own “social code” that provided “a model for creating community, defining behavior within the community, sharing values,

⁴³⁰ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 287.

⁴³¹ See Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 4.

⁴³² Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 34-38.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 281.

and connecting with the divine ... (which provided) the foundation for the development of early Christian liturgy.”⁴³⁴ Smith finds the essential values of a banquet + symposium to be also found in Paul’s specifications for the Christian meeting found in 1 Corinthians 14.⁴³⁵ As the Christian assembly evolved over the first three centuries, this banquet culture eventually gave way to a ceremonial culture. “The community that began its existence in private homes around a banquet table,” he says, “evolved into a church that met in a meeting hall before an altar.”⁴³⁶

Smith (2003) and Alikin (2010) have been major proponents of the proposal that the Christian meeting grew out of the banquet + symposium tradition. The theory bears several appealing aspects, but the case is beset with several assertions that are not supported with adequate evidence. Scholars have voiced praise for Smith’s work on the details of the Graeco-Roman banquet, but they have also criticized his creation of “a monolithic banqueting model”⁴³⁷ and his stretching the evidence beyond its limits.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 279. See also Alikin’s comments about the influence of the banquet culture in *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 1.

⁴³⁵ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 281.

⁴³⁶ Ibid. Alikin sees this evolution culminating in “a limited number of ‘orthodox’ liturgies” in the fourth or fifth centuries, in Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 37.

⁴³⁷ Bruce Chilton, review of *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, by Dennis E. Smith, *Theology Today* 61:3 (October 2004): 408. See also Andrea Lieber, review of *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, by Dennis E. Smith, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 96:2 (Spring 2006), 264.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 265; Alistair C. Stewart, review of *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, by Dennis E. Smith, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 48:2-3 (2004), 326; and Charles A. Wanamaker, review of *From Symposium to*

Alistair Stewart, in his review of Alikin's book, agrees that Christian congregational "preaching" may—in part—originate from the symposium, but Stewart says that other aspects of Alikin's argument "do not convince."⁴³⁹ Ken Neller questions the premise that the banquet had a unique influence on the Christian gathering. "One may argue," he says, "that such (banquet) practices are typical of meals around the world, both formal and informal, ancient and modern."⁴⁴⁰ Neller concludes, "The existence of similarities does not necessarily indicate a common influence."⁴⁴¹ It is worthy of note that scholarly reviews have often criticized Alikin's and Smith's books for their failure to convince the reader.

Other Theories of the Assembly's Origin

This review has covered the major theories of the origin of the Christian gathering, but two others should be mentioned. J. A. Smith (1984) sees a strong resemblance between the early Christian meetings and private (non-synagogue) Jewish meetings. These two meetings held several aspects in common. They shared "corporate

Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World, by Dennis E. Smith, *Neotestamentica* 39:2 (2005): 460.

⁴³⁹ Alistair C. Stewart, review of *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries*, by Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 62:2 (2011): 733-34.

⁴⁴⁰ Kenneth V. Neller, review of *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, by Dennis E. Smith, *Stone-Campbell Journal* 9 (Spring 2006): 133-34.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

worship with a meal,” a domestic setting, the holding of vigils, singing, and the presence of women.⁴⁴²

Like many other scholars, Wayne Meeks (2003) thinks that Christian meetings were influenced by the house, the association, and the synagogue, but he adds a fourth influence: the philosophical school.⁴⁴³ All four of these models offer appealing commonalities, he says, but the major appeal of the philosophical schools is their “organization of instruction and exhortation.”⁴⁴⁴ Unlike other theories of the origin of the Christian assembly, these two have attracted few proponents. However, like most of the theories, these two proposals contain attractive elements that offer some plausibility.

Summary: The Origins of the Christian Assembly

In summary, scholars have suggested several different sources that may have served as the origin(s) of the early (first-century) Christian assembly. The primary proposal with a long history of support is the synagogue. A few scholars reject the idea, but since Christianity emerged from Judaism, and early Christians were certainly familiar with synagogue meetings, most scholars believe that the synagogue is a credible source, even if it is only “an influence.” A small number of scholars have suggested the temple as the origin, but this proposal is plagued with significant problems that are related to the temple’s sacrificial cult and the Christians’ lack thereof.

⁴⁴² J. A. Smith, “The Ancient Synagogue, the Early Church and Singing,” 13-15.

⁴⁴³ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 75-84.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

In the last thirty years, two other theories have gained some support: voluntary associations and the banquet/symposium. If the temple and synagogue might be described as “religious” sources, these latest proposals might be described as “non-religious” sources that mirror some of the secular qualities of the early Christian assemblies.⁴⁴⁵ Associations and the banquet/symposium proposals have provided much food for thought, but at best, they merely offer interesting similarities to the Christian meeting.

Would the early Christians have relied on a secular or “worldly” convention as the definitive model for their meetings? Jesus said that He, His kingdom, and His disciples were “not of this world” (Jn 17:16; 18:36). Paul urged Christians to “not be conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2). James said that pure religion is “to keep oneself unstained by the world” (Jas 1:27) and that “friendship with the world is hostility toward God” (Jas 4:4). And John urged the faithful to “not love the world nor the things in the world” (1 Jn 2:15). Given these fundamental teachings from nascent Christianity, it is hard to conceive that the early church would have adopted a Graeco-Roman social convention as the model for the perpetual assembly of the faithful.

Whatever “origins” might be proposed, it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify a certain source that gave birth to the Christian gathering. Since the NT itself never speaks of a model assembly upon which the church gathering was based, scholars are left

⁴⁴⁵ For example, words like συνέρχομαι, ἐκκλησία, διακονία, and διάκονος, have all been noted for their status as non-religious terminology. Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: Spirit and Culture in Early House Churches*, 26-27, 114-15.

to speculation. And their speculation inevitably focuses on meetings that are “similar.” But as Ken Neller aptly noted, similarities do not necessarily indicate influence.⁴⁴⁶

While scholars have intently searched for the origins of the Christian meeting, the possibility exists that there is no origin. Brunner sees the Christian assembly as “manifestly something radically new,”⁴⁴⁷ and Dunn says that the early home churches must have seemed “very odd” to the surrounding culture.⁴⁴⁸ Since Christianity was known for its new wine that needed fresh wineskins (Mk 2:22), its new covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24), its new and living way (Heb 10:20), its new teaching (Acts 17:19), and its new song (Rv 5:9; 14:3), it is not a far-fetched idea that its gatherings might also be “new.” The “newness” of Christianity does not negate the possibility that its meetings are patterned after some other meeting. However, the God who “makes all things new” (Rv 21:5) would not need to recycle some existing meeting tradition, whether from Jews or Greeks. The “fresh wineskins” of the gospel should prompt—at least—the possibility that Christianity required no model.

Questions for Chapter 3

In chapter 3, our attention turns to the NT Greek terminology used to refer to church meetings. Here are the key questions. Is it true that worship terminology is not used to refer to assembly activities? What terminology was used by Christians in the NT period to describe their gatherings? If indeed worship terminology is absent in NT

⁴⁴⁶ Neller, review of *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 134.

⁴⁴⁷ Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 17.

⁴⁴⁸ Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, 107.

discussions of Christian assemblies, chapter 3 will seek to determine reasons for that absence.

In addition to these questions, the literature review has revealed other important questions to explore in chapter 3. First, did the Christian assemblies in the NT bear sacral characteristics? The idea of “worship” implies activities offered to God. Such activities would naturally take upon themselves a certain “sacred” quality in the form of liturgy, rituals, and prescribed ceremony. Some scholars clearly conducted their investigation with the presumption that the early assembly was a liturgical assembly, i.e., containing ceremonial-type recitations of specific words that are repeated in each meeting. But was the assembly liturgical? Most scholars lean toward the conclusion that the early church assemblies mirrored the synagogue assemblies, which have often been presumed to contain liturgy. But the newest synagogue research raises strong questions of whether the first-century synagogue meetings contained any liturgy or “worship.” If the synagogue contained no liturgy, and the early church sprang from the synagogue, is it not likely that the early church contained no liturgy? Is this not especially true if indeed the early church was primarily a home-based event for 250 years? The chapter 3 investigation of the NT data will look for such liturgical elements.

A second issue is the question of whether assembly activities are performed for God or for people. The idea of a “worship service” presumes that the meeting is directed toward God, not people. Some scholars emphasize that the NT assembly is for God (e.g., Ross, Block), some emphasize that the assembly is for people (e.g., Reicke, Hahn, Banks, Burkhart, Richardson), and some observe that the assembly includes activities that point

both to God and people (e.g., Marshall, Peterson, Ferguson, Carson). This directional question (toward God or toward people) will be explored further in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

TERMINOLOGY FOR CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES IN KEY NT PASSAGES

Chapter 2 identified several scholars who have acknowledged the “worship anomaly,” i.e., the absence of Greek worship terminology (e.g., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω) in reference to Christian assemblies in the NT.⁴⁴⁹ Even though I. Howard Marshall drew attention to the dilemma in 1985,⁴⁵⁰ no one has brought focused attention to resolving this terminological problem. After the so-called “worship wars” emerged in the late 1990s, awareness of the worship anomaly seemed to disappear as worship terminology only increased in church parlance, thus perpetuating and intensifying the problem. Chapter 2 also reviewed scholarly assessment of the origins of the Christian assembly. While the Christian meeting may have some similarities to other kinds of first-century gatherings, it is difficult to determine whether Christianity borrowed from other meetings. It is possible that the first-century Christian gathering was entirely something new.

This chapter will analyze how the NT describes Christian assemblies, with the goal of establishing a baseline understanding for how Christians in the NT period viewed their gatherings.⁴⁵¹ If they did not view their assemblies as “worship services,” how then

⁴⁴⁹ Since the focus of this dissertation is the absence (in assembly contexts) of the Greek words normally translated as “worship,” it might appear that this dissertation is pursuing an “argument from silence.” However, this dissertation is investigating the apparent absence of these Greek terms in an effort to determine the significance and reasons for that absence, which will be pursued in chapters 4 and 5.

⁴⁵⁰ Marshall, “How Far,” 216-29.

⁴⁵¹ Some view these passages as prescriptive for the church today, while others say the passages are merely descriptive. The analysis provided in this chapter essentially

did these early believers view these meetings? After establishing this baseline understanding, chapter 4 will then analyze the common Greek words for “worship” (viz., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, σέβομαι, θρησκεία) to determine why these words might not be used to describe church gatherings in the NT.

In this chapter, fifteen primary texts will be analyzed. These texts were selected because they contain clear references to Christian assembly settings as well as helpful details about these meetings. Other texts that contain less assembly information will also be noted to gain a clearer picture of assemblies in the New Testament period. The analyses of these fifteen passages will be brief, except when the passage contains problematic content that needs investigation. Full-scale exegetical examinations of these passages have been performed by other scholars and are outside of the scope of this investigation. Yet, appropriate exegetical concerns will be considered as each passage is reviewed.⁴⁵² The goal for this portion of our investigation is to create an accurate snapshot of the prevailing terminology used to describe Christian assemblies in the New Testament period.

Four questions, which emerged from chapter two, will be asked of each passage. First, what terminology is used to describe the meeting? Was it a “service,” a

suspends that debate. The goal here is to discover the assembly terminology used by Christians in the NT period. The application of that discovery will be addressed later as needed.

⁴⁵² Some scholars discount certain NT books as less reliable (e.g., the so-called deuterio-Pauline letters). However, for this study, the debates surrounding authorship and date are relatively insignificant. All twenty-seven NT documents are important witnesses to the assembly terminology that was used in a very early period of Christian history.

“ceremony,” a “holy convocation,”⁴⁵³ or was it just a “gathering” of believers?

Reviewing this terminology should provide a glimpse into how the NT writers viewed the meeting. Second, do any of the Greek words for “worship” (προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, σέβομαι, θρησκεία) appear in the passage? This question should confirm or clarify the idea that “worship” terminology is not used in reference to Christian assemblies. Third, a key issue raised by some scholars in chapter 2 is the directional nature of the gathering. Were the events of the meeting vertically directed toward God, horizontally directed toward the people in the assembly, or both? If meeting attendees understood that “worship” is the purpose of these meetings, we could expect the events of the meeting to be vertically directed toward God. A fourth question also arises from chapter 2. Did Christian meetings in the NT contain liturgical elements?⁴⁵⁴ If these meetings were viewed as “worship” offered to God, it seems likely that the proceedings would follow a prescribed ceremonial approach that would be acceptable to God. By asking these four questions of each passage, this chapter should reveal a clearer picture of how early Christians perceived their meetings and whether “worship” is a proper way to describe these meetings.

⁴⁵³ As defined in Leviticus 23, the holy convocations of Israel were primarily characterized by a day of rest (Lev 23:3, 7-8, 21, 24-25, 28-32, 35-36, 39; cf. Ex 12:16) and by the offering of specified sacrifices (Lev 23:8, 12-20, 25, 26, 36-38).

⁴⁵⁴ As noted in chapter 1, “liturgy” is defined in this dissertation as “formal and scripted rituals or responsive recitations.”

Mt 18:17-20: Tell It to the Church

¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church ... ²⁰ For where two or three have gathered together in My name I am there in their midst.”⁴⁵⁵

Of all four Gospels, only Matthew uses the term ἐκκλησία, which is found on Jesus’s lips three times. One refers to the universal church (“upon this rock I will build my church,” Mt 16:18), and the other two refer to a local assembly (Mt 18:17). This latter verse is the focus of our attention. Even though it seems odd for Jesus to discuss a Christian assembly during His lifetime, scholars commonly affirm that these two uses of ἐκκλησία indeed refer to a Christian meeting.⁴⁵⁶

What does the passage tell us about the Christian gathering? Here, the ἐκκλησία is an assembly that can receive reports of disputes between brothers (ἀδελφός 18:15) and then issue a judgment that seeks to resolve those disputes. In verse 18, Jesus emphasizes that the judgment of the ἐκκλησία is binding. Two sentences later, Jesus adds, “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Mt 18:20). Here, Matthew uses the term συνηγμένοι in a likely reference to the assembly of v. 17.⁴⁵⁷ The term συνάγω is used twenty-four times in Matthew. In each case, the word refers to a

⁴⁵⁵ Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this dissertation are to the *New American Standard Bible, Updated Edition* (NASB) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁴⁵⁶ Since Jesus here speaks of the church before the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when the church is commonly thought to begin, some have questioned the authenticity of several aspects of Matthew’s account. These issues are outside of the purview of this study. For a recent defense of the historicity of Matthew’s account, see Benjamin L. Merkle, “The Meaning of Ἐκκλησία in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (July-September 2010): 281-91.

⁴⁵⁷ Συνηγμένοι is from συνάγω, to “gather together.”

simple gathering or assembling, such as of wheat (3:12; 6:26; 13:30; 25:24, 26), fish (13:47), vultures (24:28), or people (2:4; 13:2; 18:20; 22:10; 22:34, 41; 25:32; 26:3; 57; 27:17, 27, 62; 28:12).⁴⁵⁸ All of Matthew's twenty-four occurrences of συνάγω support the idea that the assembly of 18:20 is an ordinary gathering of people, although the meeting is done "in My name" (εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα), which likely means "under His authority."⁴⁵⁹ So, in response to the four questions, (1) the meeting is described as a "gathering" in Jesus's name, and (2) Greek worship terminology is absent. (3) While Jesus "in their midst" may convey some vertical implications, the meeting primarily involves horizontal activities (resolving a dispute between brothers). (4) The gathering contains no evidence of liturgical or ceremonial events.

Acts 2:42-47: Community Life

⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ... ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people.

This passage is one of Luke's summary statements that chronicles the ongoing progress of the Christian movement.⁴⁶⁰ The primary focus for this investigation is v. 42

⁴⁵⁸ The *NIDNTTE* describes most NT occurrences of συνάγω as "everyday uses," in Moisés Silva, ed., "συναγωγή, et al.," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDNTTE)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 4:399.

⁴⁵⁹ Matthew uses the phrase thirteen times. In each case, the action performed in Jesus' name (e.g., prophesying, coming, receiving, giving) is done on His behalf or under His authority. See Mt 7:22; 10:41-42; 18:5, 20; 19:29; 21:9; 23:39; 24:5; 28:19-20. In Mt 12:30 συνάγω is the opposite of σκορπίζω (to scatter). See also Silva, ed., "ὄνομα, et al.," *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 3:520.

⁴⁶⁰ For other examples of summary statements, see Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31.

and its reference to four activities: apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.⁴⁶¹ Each of these four items is identified with a definite article (τῇ διδασκίᾳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς), which likely indicates that each item is a specific known activity.⁴⁶² The presence of definite articles has led some modern interpreters to think of these four items as “the sequence of an early Christian service,”⁴⁶³ but there are several reasons to doubt this conclusion.

First, it is likely that the phrase τῇ διδασκίᾳ τῶν ἀποστόλων does not refer to the apostles' congregational teaching but to evangelistic preaching. This view is consistent with Luke's use of διδασκίᾳ and διδάσκω in Acts, especially in the first five chapters.⁴⁶⁴ A second reason to doubt that v. 42 refers to “the sequence of an early Christian service” is that κοινωνία likely refers to the general “sharing” of possessions (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 35, 36-37; 5:1-11), not to the modern sense of church “fellowship.”⁴⁶⁵ A third reason

⁴⁶¹ Contra NASB, “prayer” is plural in the Greek text (ταῖς προσευχαῖς “the prayers”).

⁴⁶² See KMP, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek*, 283; Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 165.

⁴⁶³ Joachim Jeremias championed the view that Acts 2:42 lists “the sequence of an early Christian service,” in *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 118-22. This view is also embraced by Webber, *Worship Old & New*, 55; and Block, *For the Glory of God*, 7.

⁴⁶⁴ Nine of the sixteen verses with διδάσκω likely refer to evangelistic proclamation: Acts 4:2, 18; 5:21, 25, 28, 42; 18:25; 21:21, 28. Six passages could refer either to preaching to outsiders or to teaching converts: Acts 1:1; 11:26; 15:35; 18:11; 20:20; 28:31. Acts 15:1 is a certain reference to teaching Christians.

⁴⁶⁵ See κοινὸν in Acts 2:44. Keener also leans toward the view that κοινωνία refers to the “sacrificial sharing” elaborated in vv. 44-45, in Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1 – 2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1003. See also Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

stems from the reference to “the” breaking of bread, which likely refers to eating meals together, not to the Lord’s Supper.⁴⁶⁶ The evidence from the immediate context of Acts 2 as well as from Luke’s usage of the term in Luke-Acts lean toward the conclusion that “the breaking of bread” refers to eating meals together.⁴⁶⁷ Furthermore, “bread” is a commonly used term in Luke-Acts to refer to its function as basic food sustenance.⁴⁶⁸

The fourth term, ταῖς προσευχαῖς (“the prayers”), is more likely to refer to assembly prayer, although it could also refer to the continual prayers of the disciples regardless of the venue. Prayer plays a pivotal role in Luke’s narrative, being found thirty times in the twenty-eight chapters of Acts and often at pivotal moments in the church’s

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 150. However, Silva takes the view that κοινωνία in Acts 2:42 refers to “an essential part of the life of worship,” in “κοινός, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 2:710-11.

⁴⁶⁶ Bock (*Acts*, 150-51) says that it likely refers to the taking of meals, as does Brad Blue, “The Influence of Jewish Worship on Luke’s Presentation of the Early Church,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, eds., I. H. Marshall and David Peterson (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 488-89; and I. Howard Marshall, “Lord’s Supper,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds., Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 573. F. F. Bruce disagrees, saying, “The regular observance of the Lord’s Supper is no doubt indicated,” in *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 79.

⁴⁶⁷ In Acts 2:46, only four verses later, Luke uses “breaking bread” to refer to “taking their meals together” (cf. Acts 27:33-34). In Luke-Acts, the general action of breaking (κλάω) bread (without the article) appears six times (Lk 22:19; 24:30; Acts 2:46; 20:7, 11; 27:35). The Lord’s Supper is in view only in Lk 22:19, where the phrase refers specifically to breaking the bread, not to the entire Supper.

⁴⁶⁸ For example: “Man shall not live on bread alone” (Lk 4:4) and “Give us each day our daily bread” (Lk 11:3). See also Lk 4:3; 7:33; 9:3; 14:1, 15; 15:17; Acts 27:35.

progress.⁴⁶⁹ So, it is not surprising that 2:42 characterizes the church's life as devoted to prayers. In theory, the use of the plural with the article could refer to fixed or liturgical prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer, but at this embryonic stage of Christian activity, it seems unlikely that Christians would have so quickly adopted or embraced fixed prayers, especially in the immediate atmosphere of widespread Spirit-led speaking (Acts 2:2-18, 38). Throughout Acts, Luke displays no interest in itemizing the necessary elements of the assembly; he is more concerned with reporting the growth and harmony of the church.⁴⁷⁰

Since some English translations include "meeting" terminology in v. 46 ("attending the temple together" in the ESV and RSV),⁴⁷¹ one might conclude that the verse is a depiction of early Christian assemblies in the temple.⁴⁷² However, the specific Greek terms for "meeting" or "assembling" are absent in this passage. The participle προσκαρτεροῦντες, used also in 1:14 and 2:42, does not carry the connotation of "meeting" but of "continuing" or "persisting."⁴⁷³ The temple activity of these early

⁴⁶⁹ Pivotal moments of prayer are found at Acts 1:14, 24; 8:15; 11:5; 13:3; 16:25. See M. M. B. Turner, "Prayer in the Gospels and Acts," in ed., D. A. Carson, *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 74.

⁴⁷⁰ See the summary statements at Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16; 6:7; 9:31; 11:24; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20.

⁴⁷¹ The NIV has "they continued to meet together in the temple courts," and the CSB, HCSB, and NAB translate it as "they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area." However, the NASB ("continuing with one mind in the temple") rightly avoids injecting "meeting" terminology.

⁴⁷² See, for example, Allen Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 455-57.

⁴⁷³ Balz-Schneider translates Acts 2:46 as "*abiding* together in the temple," noting that προσκαρτεροῦντες "emphasizes the persistent and submissive *perseverance* and

Christians probably included no structured activity other than encountering one another on the temple grounds “where all the Jews congregate”⁴⁷⁴ and participating in the designated Jewish prayer times as Peter and John did, only two verses later, at “the hour of prayer, the ninth hour” (Acts 3:1).⁴⁷⁵

Since the temple is mentioned as a locus of activity, the modern reader might be tempted to envision that these Christians participated in an organized “service” in a “sanctuary.” The modern image of a “house of God” might include an enclosed sacred space with pews and a pulpit, but there is no evidence that the temple included any such items. In the first century, the overall temple area encompassed a space equivalent to thirty-five (American) football fields, and the majority of that space was uncovered and open to the free roaming of non-priestly Jews.⁴⁷⁶ The area would have been ideal for these early Christians because (1) they were all Jews or Jewish converts, (2) they were likely already accustomed to visiting the temple daily, (3) being close to the “dwelling

tenaciousness of a self-enclosed group collectively oriented toward specific goals,” (emphasis original) in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 3:172. See also Silva, ed., “καρτερέω, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 2:630-31; BDAG, “προσκαρτερέω,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 881.

⁴⁷⁴ In Jn 18:20, Jesus described the temple area as “where all the Jews congregate” (ὅπου πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι συνέρχονται).

⁴⁷⁵ While sacrificing was likely the focus in the priestly Holy Place (Lk 2:24; 5:14; 22:7; Acts 21:26; Heb 5:1-3; 9:6-7), prayer was probably the primary activity in the outer courts (Acts 3:1; 22:17). J. D. G. Dunn says that the Jewish tradition of praying daily at the third and ninth (and possibly the sixth) hours may have dated back to Moses, in Dunn, “Prayer,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (DJG)*, eds., Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992): 617.

⁴⁷⁶ Archaeological study indicates that the temple area was roughly 1,600 feet by 1,000 feet, which is about thirty-seven acres. See Michael O. Wise, “Temple,” *DJG*, 812.

place of God” (Acts 7:46) would be the natural inclination for new converts who are “praising God” (Acts 2:47; 4:21-24), and (4) the outer courts may have been the only city area large enough to accommodate the three thousand believers mentioned in 2:41. Solomon’s Portico, a large “porch” area specifically mentioned in Acts 3:11 and 5:12, was likely a favorite space for this large body of new Christians.⁴⁷⁷

What did these believers do in the temple? While the Jewish priests focused on sacrificial rituals in the Holy Place,⁴⁷⁸ the temple courts in the first century were used for commerce,⁴⁷⁹ personal prayer,⁴⁸⁰ free-flowing discussions,⁴⁸¹ and impromptu teaching and preaching.⁴⁸² It seems likely that they found each other when they entered the temple for the daily Jewish prayer times. While it is possible that the Christians employed leader-led prayer, temple prayer in the Gospels and Acts is primarily depicted as an individual activity, each person offering his own personal prayers.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁷ See the reference to Solomon’s portico in Acts 5:12, which contains several elements found in 2:42-27: apostles (2:42-43), signs and wonders (2:43), the people (2:47), the temple (2:46), and being “of one mind” (2:46).

⁴⁷⁸ Mt 8:4; 12:5-6; Mk 14:12; Lk 2:24; 5:14; 22:7; Acts 21:26; Heb 5:1-3; 7:27; 8:3-4; 9:6-7, 25; 10:11.

⁴⁷⁹ Mt 21:12; Mk 11:15-16; Lk 19:45; Jn 2:14-15.

⁴⁸⁰ Lk 2:37; 18:10; Acts 3:1; 22:17.

⁴⁸¹ Mk 11:27-28; 12:35-38; Lk 2:46; Jn 10:23-25; 11:56.

⁴⁸² Mt 21:23; 26:55; Mk 14:49; Lk 19:47; 20:1; 21:37-38; Jn 7:14, 28; 8:2, 20; Acts 3:12ff.; 4:1; 5:20-21, 25, 42.

⁴⁸³ Lk 2:37; 18:10; Acts 22:17. Yet, see Lk 1:10: “the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside.” The text does not specify whether this multitude were individually “in prayer” or if their group prayer was led by someone.

The verse in Acts 2 continues, “and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people” (vv. 46-47). Is “praising God” (αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεόν) a reference to singing in the assembly? The verb αἰνέω is found nine times in the NT; and seven of them are in Luke-Acts.⁴⁸⁴ While the term ‘praise’ in modern evangelical Christianity might be commonly perceived as part of assembly singing (e.g., “praise and worship music,” “praise team”), Luke does not employ the term in singing contexts. Instead, he uses αἰνέω to describe someone speaking admiringly of God, usually after a miraculous or glorious event.⁴⁸⁵ A good example is found only ten verses later when the lame man praises God (αἰνῶν τὸν θεόν) after being healed (Acts 3:8-9). When Luke wants to portray singing, he uses a different term, such as when Paul and Silas are “singing hymns to God” (ᾠμοῦν τὸν θεόν, Acts 16:25).⁴⁸⁶ So, “praising God” is a likely reference to the continual practice of these early converts speaking of the excellence of God, being grateful to God for their newfound salvation in Christ.

In Acts 2:42-47, it is not likely that Luke is explicating the agenda items of a Christian assembly. At this early stage in the church’s development, it is unlikely that the believers had adopted a standard practice for their assemblies. Hahn even says that Acts

⁴⁸⁴ Lk 2:13, 20; 18:43; 19:37; Acts 2:47; 3:8-9.

⁴⁸⁵ See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 429; Silva, ed., “αἰνέω, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 1:172-73.

⁴⁸⁶ The other common terms for singing are ψάλλω (Rom 15:9; 1 Cor 14:15; Eph 5:19; Jas 5:13) and ᾄδω (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Rv 5:9; 14:3; 15:3). Louw and Nida put αἰνέω in a separate semantic domain, apart from such musical terms as ὑμνέω, ψάλλω, and ᾄδω, in Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 401-02.

2:42 is “irrelevant” in any attempt to identify a “specific liturgical order,” since the passage “furnishes only a general description of the life of the primitive community.”⁴⁸⁷

So, in response to the four questions, (1) Luke does not depict a specific meeting here, but he uses the verb προσκαρτερέω to describe their “continuing” activities together (v. 42, 46). (2) Greek worship terminology (e.g., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω) is absent from the passage. (3) The text focuses on the group’s horizontal activities as they share possessions (v. 42, 44-45), meals (v. 42, 46), and oneness of mind (v. 46). Yet, the vertical activities of prayers (v. 42) and praising (v. 47) are mentioned. (4) The gathering contains no evidence of liturgical or ceremonial events. If “breaking bread” refers to the Lord’s Supper, it is debatable whether it was a “liturgical or ceremonial” event at this stage.⁴⁸⁸

Acts 4:23-35: Peter and John’s Release

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.

Luke describes this meeting without any “worship” or cultic terms; he rather uses the verb συνάγω (4:31), the same term used in Mt 18:20, to say that they “gathered together.” This passage repeats many of the same elements of 2:42-47, but it also has some unique features. The common elements are the leadership of the apostles (2:42-43 = 4:23, 33, 35), praying (2:42 = 4:24-31), the Holy Spirit (2:38 = 4:31), the apostles speaking (2:41-42 = 4:31, 33), oneness of the believers (2:46 = 4:24 ὁμοθυμαδὸν, 2:44 =

⁴⁸⁷ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 50.

⁴⁸⁸ Did the early Christians view the Lord’s Supper as a liturgical or ceremonial event? This will be discussed in the analysis of 1 Cor 11:17-34.

4:32), signs and wonders (2:43 = 4:30, σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα),⁴⁸⁹ having all things in common (2:44 = 4:32, ἅπαντα κοινά), selling of property (2:45 = 4:34, πιπράσκω), sharing (2:45 = 4:34-35), distribution “as any had need” (2:45 = 4:35, καθότι ἄν τις χρείαν εἶχεν), and the presence of grace (χάρις) with all (2:47 = 4:33). However, unlike 2:42-47, Acts 4 identifies a specific meeting, and the passage mentions no specific venue or meals. The meeting does not appear to be a regularly recurring meeting but is rather an impromptu meeting that occurs “when (Peter and John) had been released” (4:23). The meeting includes reporting (ἀπήγγειλαν, 4:23) and praying (4:24-30), but some elements seem likely to have taken place outside of this meeting.

For example, a key question involves speaking the word of God with boldness (v. 31) and giving testimony to the resurrection (v. 33). Did this speaking activity take place during this assembly? There are three reasons why this activity is best understood as ongoing speaking to outsiders. (1) In Acts, speaking the “word of God” is synonymous with proclaiming the gospel message to outsiders.⁴⁹⁰ Why would they boldly proclaim the gospel to those who had already believed it? (2) Elsewhere, when Luke writes of speaking “with boldness” (μετὰ παρρησίας, v. 31), he is writing about gospel proclamation to outsiders.⁴⁹¹ Why would boldness be required to speak to those who had

⁴⁸⁹ In 2:43, Luke reports τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα, while in 4:30, he reports σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα.

⁴⁹⁰ Acts 8:25 is a good example: “So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.” See also See Acts 4:29, 31; 6:2, 7; 8:14, 25; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7, 46, 48, 49; 14:3; 15:7, 35, 36; 16:32; 17:13; 18:11; 19:10, 20.

⁴⁹¹ The noun παρρησία is used in Acts 4:13, 29, 31. Forms of the verb παρρησιάζομαι are used in 9:27, 28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26.

already received the gospel? (3) The prayer of the disciples in 4:24-30 notes the strong opposition (4:25-27) and threats (4:29) from Jews and Gentiles, and it concludes with asking God to grant boldness in proclaiming the message (v. 29). God immediately answers their prayer by filling them with the Holy Spirit. Spurred by this divine empowerment, they commence with the ongoing bold proclamation of the gospel in the face of that opposition, which would likely be faced outside the assembly. It is possible that these Spirit-filled apostles began their proclamation inside this assembly, but such proclamation would only yield fruit when presented to nonbelievers who were outside the assembly.

So, in response to the four questions, (1) Luke describes their meeting place as “the place in which they were gathered” (ὁ τόπος ἐν ᾧ ἦσαν συνηγμένοι, 4:31), again using the term συνάγω. It is a gathering. (2) The Greek terms that are commonly translated as “worship” (e.g., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω) are not used in the passage. (3) The congregation engages in reporting (4:23), a horizontal activity, and praying (4:24-30), a vertical activity. If speaking the word of God takes place in the assembly, it is probably horizontal. (4) The gathering contains no evidence of liturgical or ceremonial events. The prayer offered is not a liturgical prayer that would have been frequently repeated. Its content is specifically targeted to the events that occurred just prior to the meeting.⁴⁹² Even though Luke depicts the believers as praying together and saying specific words, it is unlikely that they all spontaneously uttered the same 130+ words. As Bock says, “One person probably prays here with the whole community

⁴⁹² Dunn says the prayer is “not a traditional and well known liturgical form,” in James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 55-56.

sharing in the spirit and nature of the request.”⁴⁹³ Nothing here is done by rote. The meeting appears to be spontaneously assembled, Peter and John spontaneously report, the prayer is spontaneously offered, and the Spirit is spontaneously poured out.

Acts 11:21-30: The Antioch Church

²⁶ ... And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

This passage of ten verses contains three meetings at Antioch. The first is Barnabas witnessing the Gentile converts at Antioch (11:23). The second is a description of Barnabas and Saul meeting with the church for a year (11:26). The third is a specific gathering involving Agabus (11:28).

The first meeting involves Barnabas witnessing “the grace of God,” which is a likely reference to the reception of the gospel by so many Gentile converts among the believers at Antioch.⁴⁹⁴ His immediate reaction is to encourage (παρεκάλει) them to remain faithful (προσμένειν).⁴⁹⁵ Luke’s choice of παρακαλέω to describe Barnabas’s speaking is noteworthy. The word appears 108 times in the NT and twenty-two times in Acts, which is more times than in any other NT book. Its common meaning in a

⁴⁹³ Bock, *Acts*, 203-04. Dunn says, “It would be foolish to ask how they could have said in unison a prayer which was obviously so fitted to the occasion,” in Dunn, *Acts*, 55.

⁴⁹⁴ See Acts 13:43; 14:3, 26; 15:11; Acts 20:24: “... so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.” Dunn considers Luke’s use of “grace” here to be “an anticipation of the Pauline use.” *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁹⁵ The word for “faithful” is not in the Greek (see also 13:43 προσμένειν τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ). Silva says this use of προσμένω is unusual, but the sense of “remaining” is nonetheless present. See Silva, ed., “μένω, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 3:274-75.

congregational setting is to exhort or encourage.⁴⁹⁶ Luke continues to use παρακαλέω to describe the communication by leaders in Christian assemblies. For example, in Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas returned to the churches they established, “strengthening (ἐπιστηρίζοντες) the souls of the disciples, encouraging (παρακαλοῦντες) them to continue in the faith.” In Acts 15:32, after the Antioch church was gathered together, Judas and Silas “encouraged (παρακάλεσαν) and strengthened (ἐπεστήριξαν) the brethren with a lengthy message.” In Acts 16:40, Paul and Silas, after being released from prison, went to Lydia’s house, where they saw the brethren and “encouraged (παρακάλεσαν) them.” In Acts 20:1, Paul sent for the disciples at Ephesus, and then he “exhorted (παρακαλέσας) them.” He then proceeded to visit the Christians in the Macedonia districts where he encouraged them with many words (παρακαλέσας αὐτοὺς λόγῳ πολλῷ, Acts 20:2). The term is also a favorite word in Paul’s letters when he “appeals” (παρακαλῶ) directly to the churches.⁴⁹⁷ In addition, the churches likely heard Paul’s epistolary “exhortations” while they were assembled.⁴⁹⁸ The term is so prevalent in assembly contexts that the *NIDNTTE* says that it is “an almost stereotyped part of the church’s life.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Silva, ed., “παρακαλέω, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 3:627-33. See also Kenneth Grayston, “A Problem of Translation: The Meaning of Parakaleo, Paraklesis in the New Testament,” *Scripture Bulletin* 11:2 (Winter 1980): 27-31.

⁴⁹⁷ Paul uses παρακαλέω more than fifty times. See pivotal locations at Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 1:10; 16:15; 2 Cor 10:1; Eph 4:1; Phil 4:2; Col 2:2; 1 Thes 4:1; 2 Thes 3:12; 1 Tm 2:1; 2 Tm 4:2; Ti 2:15; Phlm 1:9.

⁴⁹⁸ Col 4:16: “When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.”

⁴⁹⁹ Silva, ed., “παρακαλέω, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 3:630.

In the second meeting, summarized in Acts 11:26, Paul and Barnabas “met” (συναχθῆναι, from συνάγω) with the church for an entire year and “taught (διδάξαι) considerable numbers (ὄχλον ἱκανόν).” Luke again uses the term συνάγω to describe the coming together of the church.⁵⁰⁰ In such contexts, he prefers συνάγω to συνέρχομαι, which he uses only once of a gathering of Jesus’s disciples (Acts 1:6).⁵⁰¹ There is no evidence that he is using συνάγω as a technical term for these meetings as if they were the “recognized weekly service.” Yet, since they met with the church for an entire year, these meetings must have established some regular frequency. But thus far in Acts, there is no mention of a designated day of the week for the gatherings or whether they are occurring daily, weekly, or monthly.

The reference to teaching large numbers creates a question. Does this activity refer to teaching the converts or to evangelizing outsiders? As noted earlier, “teaching” in Acts primarily refers to gospel proclamation.⁵⁰² Here in 11:26, Luke says they taught ὄχλον ἱκανόν (singular), which might be better rendered as a “considerable crowd.”⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Luke also uses συνάγω of Christian gatherings at 4:31 (the post-release meeting in Jerusalem), 11:26 (here at Antioch), 14:27 (the return to Antioch), 15:6 (the Jerusalem “council”), 15:30 (delivering the letter to Antioch), and 20:7, 8 (Troas). See also Paul’s use of συνάγω at 1 Cor 5:4: “In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled (συναχθέντων), and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus ...”

⁵⁰¹ Luke uses συνέρχομαι sixteen times in Acts, often in the sense of “accompany.” In Acts 1:6, it describes the pre-ascension meeting of the disciples: “So when they had come together (συνελθόντες), they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’”

⁵⁰² See footnote 464 on page 120.

⁵⁰³ The adjective ἱκανός appears in the NT thirty-nine times, and twenty-seven (69 percent) are in Luke-Acts (nine times in Luke, eighteen times in Acts). Silva says, “In

The term ὄχλος (crowd) is used twenty-two times in Acts. In only one case does it certainly refer to a crowd of believers (Acts 1:15); ὄχλος usually refers to a general crowd of the masses.⁵⁰⁴ In addition, Luke uses the same phrase (ὄχλον ἱκανόν) only two verses earlier in reference to the considerable crowd (of unbelievers) who were brought to the Lord (11:24). In 11:26, if Luke had wanted to identify the kind of activity performed with the church, he could have used the aorist participle of διδάσκω: “they met with the church, teaching a considerable crowd.” Instead, Luke used two aorist infinitives (συναχθῆναι and διδάξαι) to denote Barnabas and Paul’s two primary activities (“met” and “taught”) among two primary audiences (the church and the crowd of unbelievers). Thus, understanding 11:26 to refer to evangelistic teaching is more consistent with Paul’s mission “to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named” (Rom 15:20).⁵⁰⁵ So, while 11:26 certainly identifies an assembly, it tells us little about Antioch’s assembly activity, other than the fact that they “met” and that their numbers increased dramatically.

Acts 11:28-29 may tell us more about a particular assembly at Antioch when Agabus, a prophet, “stood up” and spoke, presumably to the assembled Christians. The disciples responded to his prophecy of a coming famine by determining to send a contribution to help fellow Christians in Judea (v. 29). The text does not specify how the contribution was assembled, but it makes sense that individuals would bring their funds

these Lukan writings the term almost always means ‘much, many, considerable’,” in Silva, ed., “ἱκανός,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 2:530.

⁵⁰⁴ See Acts 6:7 (of priests); 8:6; 11:24; 13:45; 14:11, 13, 14, 18, 19; 16:22; 17:8, 13; 19:26, 33, 35; 21:27, 34, 35; 24:12, 18.

⁵⁰⁵ Many verses attest to Paul’s divine appointment to evangelistic work, such as Acts 9:20; 17:2; 1 Cor 1:17; Eph 3:8; Phil 1:16.

to an assembly where it would be collected and given to Barnabas and Saul to take to the Jerusalem elders (v. 30). Was this collection a vertical activity to God or a horizontal activity for one another? The passage contains no thoughts of this money being a “sacrifice” or “offering” to God. The donation comes from people (the Antioch disciples), and it goes to people (the Jerusalem brethren). It is delivered by people (Barnabas and Saul) to people (the Jerusalem elders). It is clearly a horizontal gesture.

So, to answer the four questions, this Antioch passage teaches that (1) the meeting is described as a gathering (συνάγω, 11:26). (2) Greek worship terminology is absent. (3) The meetings include encouraging (παρακαλέω 11:23), prophetic speaking (11:28), and possibly the activities of teaching (11:26) and pooling of funds (11:29). All these activities can be described as horizontal activities. (4) The gathering contains no evidence of ceremonial events or liturgy.

Acts 12:12-17: Mary’s House

¹² And when (Peter) realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

This gathering appears to be an impromptu meeting, called for the purpose of praying for Peter, who had been placed in prison for speaking in the name of Jesus (cf. Acts 4:18). As Acts 12:5 says, “prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.” The verb συναθροίζω (“were gathered together” v. 12) is used only twice in the NT, here in the passive voice (συνηθροισμένοι) and in Acts 19:25 in the active voice (συναθροίσας).⁵⁰⁶ The passive voice in 12:12 carries the implication that the meeting had

⁵⁰⁶ The word ἀθροίζω, a *hapax legomenon* in the NT, appears without the συν prefix in Lk 24:33.

been intentionally called for a particular purpose.⁵⁰⁷ In this case, it is highly likely that the primary purpose is to pray (προσευχόμενοι) for Peter and/or his release.

The site of the meeting is the Jerusalem house (οικίαν) of Mary, which may be one of several examples of “house churches” in the NT.⁵⁰⁸ The fact that the home has a servant (Rhoda, the παιδίσκη, v. 13) and a door at a gate (τὴν θύραν τοῦ πυλῶνος) indicates that the home is probably a large one with a “a buffer between the inner courtyard and rooms and the street.”⁵⁰⁹ It must also be large enough to accommodate all those at this gathering for prayer. Mary’s house is apparently so well known among the disciples that Peter knows to go directly to her house. Since Peter asks that his release be reported to “James and the brethren” (v. 17), the group in Mary’s house is likely just one small segment of all the Jerusalem disciples. As Luke reported in Acts 2:41, 3,000 were baptized on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. While many of these were “from every nation under heaven” (2:5-11), many others in Jerusalem responded to subsequent gospel speeches in the weeks and months following.⁵¹⁰ By the time of Peter’s release from prison, it is likely that the Jerusalem disciples numbered well over a thousand and

⁵⁰⁷ See BDAG, “συναθροίζω,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 964. Louw and Nida note that the term includes “an emphasis on the element of togetherness,” in Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 199. *NIDNTTE* does not review συναθροίζω or ἀθροίζω.

⁵⁰⁸ Mary’s house may have been used only once for this prayer event, but since Peter seems immediately aware of it, the house was likely the site of regular meetings. The certain house churches in the NT are mentioned in Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 1:2; 2 Jn 1:10. Other references to possible house churches include Acts 2:46; 9:17; 10:17; 17:5; 20:20; 21:8; 21:16.

⁵⁰⁹ This is the observation of Blue, “Acts and the House Church,” 126.

⁵¹⁰ Acts 6:7 says, “The number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.” See also the evangelistic activity in Jerusalem in Acts 4:33; 5:28, 42; 9:28.

possibly many more. Since the temple is never mentioned as a meeting place after Acts 5 (perhaps because of the authorities forbidding teaching in the temple precincts), this large number of Christ-followers must have been content to meet in small groups in many different homes throughout the city.⁵¹¹ When Luke notes that Christian activity continued “from house to house” (Acts 2:46; 5:42) and that Saul persecuted the Jerusalem Christians by “entering house after house” (8:3), it is plausible that these houses were known locations of smaller bodies of believers in the city. Mary’s home is likely one of these. When Peter left Mary’s home and “went to another place,” he may have been going to announce his release to another house where Christians were known to meet. Since “prayer for him was being made fervently by the church” (v. 5), Mary’s group may not have been the only Jerusalem cell that was engaging in prayer for Peter.

The “prayer meeting” in this house seems to be rather informal, as might be expected of a domestic setting. No mention is made of any liturgy or any religious official who is leading this group event. The meeting is flexible enough to handle the interruption of Rhoda running in and blurting an announcement (v. 14), the people brashly stating that she is out of her mind (v. 15), and the two parties continuing⁵¹² to insist that they are correct (v. 15). These informalities would be uncharacteristic of today’s image of a formal “religious service.”

⁵¹¹ The official opposition against Jerusalem Christians is mentioned in Acts 4:18; 5:18, 25-26. The “great persecution” (διωγμὸς μέγας) against the church in Jerusalem, mentioned in Acts 8:1 and 11:19, must also have resulted in Christians abandoning the temple grounds for their gatherings.

⁵¹² The imperfect tense of διῴσχυρίζετο and ἔλεγον (Acts 12:15) indicates that each party “continued” to state their position.

So, (1) the meeting is described as a gathering, using a rare term that has no obvious cultic connotations. (2) No Greek worship terminology is used. (3) The meeting contains praying and reporting by Rhoda (v. 14) and by Peter (v. 17). Praying would normally be perceived as a vertical activity, but reporting is a horizontal activity. (4) The meeting, held in someone's home, contains no evidence of liturgical elements or ceremonial rituals.

Acts 13:1-4: The Commissioning of Barnabas and Saul

² While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

A key question for Acts 13:2 is, "Does the passage describe a church assembly?"

Several scholars believe that λειτουργούντων refers to a full assembly of the Antioch Christians.⁵¹³ However, it seems likely that the activity here involves only the small group of five prophets and teachers.⁵¹⁴ In verse 1, Luke specifically focuses on these five by naming each of them and adding some identifying details (e.g., "Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod

⁵¹³ For example, see Larry Hurtado, "Worship, NT Christian," 913; Alastair Campbell, "Worship in the New Testament," in *In Praise of Worship: An Exploration of Text and Practice*, edited by David J. Cohen and Michael Parsons (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 78; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 554; Silva, ed., "λειτουργέω," *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 106; Robert W. Wall, *Acts*, The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 157.

⁵¹⁴ In support of the small group option are Eduard Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 73, 172, n. 610; Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, 109; H. Strathmann, "Λειτουργέω, λειτουργία," *TDNT*, 4:227; Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 261; Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 150-51.

the tetrarch”). Why would Luke provide such detail if he is actually discussing the activity of the entire church?

But the crucial question is, “Are these five engaging in ‘worship’?” It is undeniable that these five were engaging in some activity together, and several English versions translate that activity (λειτουργούντων) as “worshipping” (CSB, ESV, NAB, NIV, NLT, RSV, NRSV). Furthermore, v. 3 specifies that they engaged in prayer and the laying on of hands, which are consistent with congregational activities. The question then becomes, “Does λειτουργούντων mean ‘worshipping’?” and “Does λειτουργούντων denote performing congregational activities?”

There are four reasons why λειτουργούντων should not be translated as “worshipping.” First, English versions demonstrate a lack of certainty that “worshipping” is a legitimate translation in Acts 13:2. While some versions translate λειτουργέω as “worship” in Acts 13:2, many avoid that translation in the other fourteen occurrences of the λειτουργ- terms in the NT.⁵¹⁵ In addition, several English versions translate the term in Acts 13:2 as “ministering” (KJV, ASV, HCSB, NASB, NKJV) or “serving” (NASB 2020, NET). The NASB, for example, never translates λειτουργέω or its cognates as “worship,” in its fifteen occurrences in the NT or in any of its 150 occurrences in the LXX. All this leaves a question of whether “worshipping” is a legitimate translation in Acts 13:2. Since there is a significant difference between “worshipping” and “ministering,” there is some doubt as to whether “worship” translates λειτουργέω.

⁵¹⁵ For example, the NIV never again translates a λειτουργ- term as any variation of “worship.” The ESV and NRSV translate it with “worship” one other time, in Heb 9:21, where they translate τὰ σκεύη τῆς λειτουργίας as “the vessels of worship” (in the tabernacle), while the NASB renders it, “the vessels of ministry.”

Second, the word ‘worship’ is not even mentioned when the λειτουργ- terms are defined in BDAG,⁵¹⁶ Louw & Nida,⁵¹⁷ Liddell & Scott,⁵¹⁸ and Moulton & Milligan.⁵¹⁹ According to BDAG, the primary definition of λειτουργέω is “to render special formal service ... of cultic or ritual responsibilities.”⁵²⁰ Third, the widespread use of the λειτουργ- word group in the LXX does not support translating the term as “worship.”⁵²¹ The λειτουργέω-related terms appear about 150 times in the LXX, where the terms commonly refer to cultic work of priests in the Holy Place of the temple.⁵²² In none of these 150-some cases is the OT text translated as “worship” in the NASB or the ESV. Fourth, in the only time that Luke uses the λειτουργ- word group, he understands it to refer to “priestly service” in the temple (Lk 1:23), which is consistent with the use of the term in the LXX. Since the term is highly likely a reference to priestly service, the question is now, “Why would Luke here use a well-known term for priestly service?”

⁵¹⁶ BDAG, “λειτουργέω,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 590-92.

⁵¹⁷ Louw & Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:461.

⁵¹⁸ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, “λειτουργέω,” *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. by Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1036-37.

⁵¹⁹ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, “λειτουργέω,” *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930), 372-73.

⁵²⁰ BDAG, “λειτουργέω,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 591.

⁵²¹ For a fuller analysis of λειτουργέω in the LXX and NT, see chapter 4.

⁵²² See, for example, 2 Chr 13:10-11.

Ernest Best may have the answer. As he convincingly argues, Luke is here equating the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul with the commissioning of the Levites in Nm 8:10-26.⁵²³ In Acts 13:2-4, Luke remarkably uses many of the same key terms found in Numbers 8. Just as God set apart (ἀφορίζω, 13:2 = Nm 8:11) and commissioned (ἐπιθήσουσιν ... τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῶν, 13:3 = Nm 8:10, 12) the temple ministry (λειτουργία, 13:2 = Nm 8:22, 25, 26) of the Levites for a work (τὰ ἔργα, 13:2 = Nm 8:11, 15, 19) for the Lord (κυρίου, 13:2 = Nm 8:10-22), the Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul and commissioned them for a work for the Lord.⁵²⁴ For Luke's readers, his figurative use of this special term (λειτουργέω) triggers this connection with the Levites' commissioning.⁵²⁵ Luke's term is remarkably similar to Paul's figurative temple terminology to describe "the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister (λειτουργόν) of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest (ἱεουργοῦντα) the gospel of God, so that my offering (προσφορά) of the Gentiles may become acceptable (εὐπρόσδεκτος), sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:15-16).⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Ernest Best, "Acts 13:1-3," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 11:2 (October 1960): 344-48.

⁵²⁴ The priestly service (λειτουργία) in Numbers 8 is performed for "the Lord" (κύριος), a word found fifteen times within the twenty-six verses of the chapter.

⁵²⁵ David Peterson says that λειτουργούντων "is certainly being used in a transformed sense by Luke," in Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 151.

⁵²⁶ In Rom 15:16, besides the term λειτουργόν, Paul uses several other temple concepts: ἱεουργοῦντα (ministering as a priest), προσφορά (offering), εὐπρόσδεκτος (acceptable), and ἡγιασμένη (sanctified). This Romans 15 passage may be a direct reference to his commissioning in Acts 13.

So, what activities are in Luke's mind when he uses the term λειτουργούντων in Acts 13:2? Some scholars think that λειτουργούντων is a reference to praying.⁵²⁷ However, prayer is never mentioned as part of the work of λειτουργέω or λειτουργία in any of the 150-some passages in the OT or in any of the other fourteen passages in the NT. Prayer also does not make good sense as a figurative sense of priestly services. Since any Jew can pray (not just priests), how is praying an example of priestly services? Plus, if Luke wanted to convey the idea of prayer, he could have simply said, "While they were praying and fasting ..."

Rather, λειτουργούντων likely refers to the five's ministry of prophecy and teaching ("prophets and teachers," 13:1). It is the only other previous activity that Luke identifies. Consequently, Luke is using λειτουργούντων as a flattering way to depict the special ministry of these prophets and teachers, as he records the elevation of Saul and Barnabas from their esteemed role as prophets and teachers to their new appointment—by the Holy Spirit—as apostles.⁵²⁸ As the BDAG lexicon notes, "Through the use of this term (λειτουργέω) NT writers suggest an aura of high status for those who render any type of service."⁵²⁹ In 1 Cor 12:28, Paul alludes to the status of apostles as one level higher than prophets and teachers: "God has appointed in the church, first apostles,

⁵²⁷ See, for example, Reicke, "Some Reflections on Worship," 195; Delling, *Worship in the NT*, 109; Strathmann, "λειτουργέω," *TDNT*, 4:226; Campbell, "Worship in the New Testament," 78; Bock, *Acts*, 440.

⁵²⁸ Luke's high view of the apostles is obvious in Acts 1:2; 25-26; 2:42-43; 4:33-37; 5:2, 12, 29; 6:6; 8:14, 18; 9:27; 15:2ff. After Paul and Barnabas are commissioned in Acts 13:2-4, Luke refers to them as "apostles" (Acts 14:4, 14).

⁵²⁹ BDAG, "λειτουργέω," *Greek-English Lexicon*, 590-91.

second prophets, third teachers.”⁵³⁰ Since apostles, prophets, and teachers are all mentioned in Acts, Luke was probably also aware of this hierarchical structure. Armed with this better understanding of λειτουργέω and the ἀπόστολοι, it seems likely that the purpose of Acts 13:1-4 is to record the pivotal event when Paul and Barnabas are elevated from their esteemed ministry as prophets and teachers to their higher ministry as apostles.⁵³¹ By using the term λειτουργούντων, Luke conjures up the cultic image of devoted priests, to speak highly of their service “to the Lord,” and to set up the scene of their commissioning as apostles.

So, when Luke uses λειτουργούντων, he is not describing a “worship service,” he is not identifying the five as “liturgists,” nor are they “worshiping” in the modern sense of singing and praying in assembly. Such assumptions are the likely result of anachronism, i.e., applying modern concepts to this ancient scene. The translation “ministering to the Lord” is better than the misleading “worshiping the Lord.” Better still is “engaging in priestly service to the Lord,” which brings out Luke’s intentional and metaphorical connotations of priestly service.

So, to answer the four questions, (1) the passage does not use specific language to identify a “meeting” (e.g., συνάγω). While the verse certainly describes joint activity of the five, a full-church assembly is probably not under discussion. (2) Greek worship terminology (λειτουργούντων) is used in the passage, but it is likely a metaphorical

⁵³⁰ Cf. Eph 4:11 “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers ...”

⁵³¹ Luke frequently refers to the apostleship as a ministry (διακονία). See Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4; 20:24; 21:19.

reference to the “priestly ministry” of the five prophets and teachers. (3) The activities of the five include fasting, praying, and the laying on of hands, which can be described as primarily vertical. (4) The passage contains ceremonial language (λειτουργούντων), but the term is used figuratively, not in its literal sense of priestly temple services.

Acts 14:21-28: Strengthening the Churches

²¹ After they had preached the gospel to that city (Derbe) and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith ...

This passage seems to depict a pattern for Paul’s evangelistic activity after his commissioning in Acts 13:2-3. In each city (Salamis, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe), Paul preaches the gospel, gains several disciples, and proceeds to the next city. Luke typically uses εὐαγγελίζω to describe Paul’s preaching activity to non-Christians.⁵³² After preaching to these cities, it would have been much shorter and quicker for Paul and Barnabas to then proceed east to (Syrian) Antioch, their final destination. However, in 14:22-23, Paul and Barnabas go the opposite direction to return to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. But when they return to these cities, preaching (to outsiders) is not their focus. Instead, they strengthen the disciples and appoint leaders for each church.

In these return visits, which must have involved meetings with the believers, the assembly activities are described as strengthening (ἐπιστηρίζω) and encouraging

⁵³² Acts 13:5 (Salamis, καταγγέλλω); 13:32 (Pisidian Antioch, εὐαγγελίζω); 14:3 (Iconium, μαρτυρέω); 14:7 (Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe, εὐαγγελίζω); 14:15 (Lystra, εὐαγγελίζω); 14:21 (Derbe, εὐαγγελίζω). See also Acts 15:35; 16:10; 17:18; Rom 15:20; 1 Cor 1:17; 15:1-2.

(παρακαλέω) the disciples. As previously noted, παρακαλέω is a commonly used term (by Luke and Paul) to describe leaders' communication in the assembly.⁵³³ The term ἐπιστηρίζω appears again in similar assembly contexts in Acts 15:32 (Judas and Silas in Antioch), Acts 15:41 (Paul and Silas in Syria and Cilicia), and Acts 18:23 (Paul in Galatia and Phrygia), where ἐπιστηρίζω summarizes the goal or the net result of assembly activity.⁵³⁴ The same idea of strengthening the church is found in Acts 16:5 (στερεόω) and in Paul (στηρίζω).⁵³⁵ Luke mentions a specific event at each church (κατ' ἐκκλησίαν): elders are chosen. These elders are appointed (χειροτονέω) with prayer and fasting, as was done for the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1-4, and the elders are committed to the Lord (παρατίθημι).⁵³⁶

Verses 27-28 describe a separate meeting, at the (Syrian) Antioch church, where Luke again uses συνάγω to describe the “gathering” of the church. Luke uses the active voice for συνάγω (συναγαγόντες), not the passive voice as he did in 4:31; 11:26; 15:6; and 20:7-8. Since they actively “gathered the church together,” it seems likely that the meeting was an impromptu meeting, called for the specific reason of hearing the report of Paul and Barnabas. At this point in Acts, Luke has still never mentioned whether any of

⁵³³ See the discussion on pages 129-30 and footnote 497. In Acts, see 11:23; 14:22; 15:32; 16:40; 20:1, 2.

⁵³⁴ See the analysis by Silva, ed., “στηρίζω, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 4:373-75.

⁵³⁵ Rom 1:11; 16:25; 1 Thes 3:2, 13; 2 Thes 2:17; 3:3. In Lk 22:32, Jesus tells Peter to “strengthen your brothers” (στήρισον). The verse may foretell and summarize Peter’s mission to the church in the post-resurrection period.

⁵³⁶ See also Paul’s final statement to the Ephesian elders at Acts 20:32: παρατίθεται ὑμᾶς τῷ θεῷ.

the churches are having regular or weekly meetings or whether they are held on a particular day or night of the week. The assembly activity at Antioch is reporting (ἀναγγέλλω), a term also used in the church meetings at Jerusalem (15:4) and Ephesus (20:20, 27). Luke used a similar term (ἀπαγγέλλω) to describe reporting activity at a Jerusalem gathering in 4:23 and at Mary's house in 12:14.⁵³⁷ The reporting likely took place just once, but Paul and Barnabas then "spent a long time with the disciples" there (14:28), a probable reference to many days or weeks, not just one long meeting.⁵³⁸

To summarize these two assemblies, (1) the Antioch meeting is a "gathering." (2) Greek worship terminology is not found in the passage. (3) The activity in both meetings involves strengthening, encouraging, reporting, commissioning, fasting, and praying, which are mostly horizontal activities. (4) The passage contains no liturgical or ceremonial language.

Acts 15:30-35: The Jerusalem Decision

³⁰ ... having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

³¹ When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

³² Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.

The so-called "Jerusalem Council" of Acts 15:4-29 bears marks of a church assembly, but since it was devoted to the resolution of the Gentile controversy, it can be viewed as a nontypical church gathering. When Paul and Barnabas arrive, they are "received by the church and the apostles and the elders" (v. 4). If they were received by "the church," an all-church assembly is implied. But the text then states that "the apostles

⁵³⁷ See also Acts 12:17, where the disciples at Mary's house are told to "report" (ἀπαγγέλλω) the events to "James and the brethren."

⁵³⁸ Luke's phrase, χρόνον οὐκ ὀλίγον, literally means "not a little time."

and the elders came together” to discuss the issue (v. 6), with no mention of the church. Yet, after the discussion, a decision is made that “seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church” (v. 22). But the decision letter comes from “the apostles and the brethren who are elders” (v. 23). It seems likely that the entire church was present for the discussion (vv. 4, 22), but the authority of the discussion and decision came from the apostles and elders.

However this assembly is viewed, it contains many activities that were common in previous meetings. It involves reporting (15:4 = 14:27; 20:20, 27), standing up and speaking (15:5, 7 = 11:28), and choosing and sending representatives (vv. 22, 25; 11:29-30; 13:2-3; cf. 6:3-6). The Acts 15 assembly has the additional activities of debating (ζήτησις, v. 6) and relating (ἐξηγέομαι, v. 12, 14). It is surprising that Luke makes no mention of praying or fasting done prior to arriving at this major decision.

Applying the four questions to the Jerusalem “council,” (1) it is a “coming together” (συνάγω), like several previous meetings. (2) Greek worship terminology is not found in the passage. (3) The meeting involves only the horizontal activities of reporting, speaking, and commissioning. (4) The passage contains no cultic, liturgical, or ceremonial language.

After Luke concludes his narrative of the Jerusalem meeting, he gives a description of Paul and Barnabas returning to Antioch, again using the term συνάγω to describe their “gathering” of the congregation (συναγαγόντες τὸ πλῆθος, Acts 15:30). Verse 31 has the first instance in which a “reading” (ἀναγινώσκω) takes place in a Christian assembly. The reading of the Jerusalem letter produces rejoicing (χαίρω), which had occurred at an earlier meeting in Antioch (Acts 11:23), and encouragement

(παράκλησις, cf. Acts 9:31), the noun form of παρακαλέω. Luke then uses two of his most common words to describe assembly activity as two prophets present a lengthy message to encourage (παρακαλέω) and to strengthen (ἐπιστηρίζω) the disciples (v. 32). After this meeting, Paul and Barnabas decide to stay in Antioch, teaching (διδάσκοντες) and preaching (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι) “the word of the Lord” (v. 35). As noted earlier, Luke commonly uses διδάσκω to denote evangelistic communication, not congregational communication.⁵³⁹

So, this Antioch meeting (1) is again described as a “gathering” (συνάγω). (2) Greek worship terminology is absent in the passage. (3) The meeting involves the horizontal activities of reading, encouraging, and strengthening. Rejoicing might also be perceived as a horizontal activity unless it involves “praising God,” which is not mentioned. (4) No liturgical or ceremonial language is found in the passage.

Acts 20:7-12: Gathered Together to Break Bread

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

F. F. Bruce says that this passage is “the earliest unambiguous evidence we have for the Christian practice of gathering together for worship” on Sunday.⁵⁴⁰ Bruce is correct that it is evidence for a gathering (συνηγμένων) on “the first day of the week”

⁵³⁹ See footnote 464 on page 120.

⁵⁴⁰ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 407-08. See also Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), 102; Max M. B. Turner, “The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed., D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982), 128.

(depending on how days are identified), but Bruce presumes that the Troas Christians considered it a gathering for “worship.” The passage contains no Greek ‘worship’ terminology.

Scholars have debated whether the Troas meeting took place on Saturday or Sunday.⁵⁴¹ If Luke is viewing days from a Jewish perspective, the “first day of the week” (τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων) would start at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday (the Sabbath), which means that the Troas meeting was a Saturday evening meeting.⁵⁴² But if Luke is viewing days from the Roman perspective (which is the same perspective used by Americans today), the Troas meeting was a Sunday night meeting. Luke says Paul broke the bread after midnight (v. 11). If breaking bread is a reference to the Lord’s Supper,⁵⁴³ and if “midnight” (μεσονύκτιον) refers to 12:00 a.m., Paul partook of it perhaps around 1:00 a.m. on Sunday (by Jewish time) or around 1:00 a.m. on Monday (by Roman time). Because of these timing issues, it becomes difficult to assume that the Troas meeting and the breaking of bread occurred within the twenty-four hours of Sunday. This difficulty presents a challenge for viewing Sunday as a sacred time within which the assembly and Lord’s Supper must be taken.

⁵⁴¹ See the discussion by Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak: Faith and Life in the First Three Centuries*, 3rd ed. (Abilene: ACU Press, 1999), 69-73. For a Seventh Day Adventist perspective of Acts 20:7, see Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 101-11. See a refutation of Bacchiocchi by Turner, “The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts,” 128-33.

⁵⁴² Some English translations of Acts 20:7, such as the NEB, REB, and GNB, explicitly say that the meeting took place on “Saturday.” For a defense of the “Saturday” translation, see J. W. Roberts, “Translation: The New English Bible and Acts 20:7,” *Restoration Quarterly* 17:1 (1974): 61-64.

⁵⁴³ See the previous discussion about “breaking bread” on pages 119-21.

A key question for this dissertation is, “Does Acts 20:7 treat Sunday as a special Christian day for their weekly assembly, or is Luke simply identifying which day of the week that the Troas gathering took place?” In this passage, Luke says nothing about a special Christian day⁵⁴⁴ or any special observances or activities other than breaking bread, which likely refers to a farewell meal held prior to Paul’s departure.⁵⁴⁵ As Brunner notes, Luke’s “breaking bread” terminology is not a cultic phrase but “is borrowed from the sphere of everyday life and not from the area of worship.”⁵⁴⁶ This passage contains no religious terms or ceremonial language such as “sermon,” “liturgy,” “sacrament,” or “worship.” Instead, Luke describes Paul’s speaking with the everyday terms of διαλέγομαι (vv. 7, 9), which means “to engage in speech interchange,”⁵⁴⁷ and ὁμιλέω (v.

⁵⁴⁴ Rv 1:10 and 1 Cor 16:2 are often alleged to refer to a weekly Christian meeting on the first day of the week. Rv 1:10, where John says that he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,” is a probable reference to Sunday, but John appears to be alone, and he does not indicate whether an assembly was involved with his vision experience. 1 Cor 16:1-4 likely refers, not to a weekly meeting but to a weekly storing of funds, which was performed individually at each person’s home (ἐκαστος ὑμῶν παρ’ ἑαυτοῦ τιθέτω). See Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community* (3rd ed.), 31; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 813; Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 387. Andrew McGowan’s statement may be the most that can be said about a “Christian meeting day” in the NT: “There are hints that Sunday could have been significant to Christ-believers (or some of them),” in McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 219.

⁵⁴⁵ Brad Blue says, “It is clear the ‘the breaking’ is always, at this early date, a constituent of a meal scene,” in Blue, “The Influence of Jewish Worship,” 488-89. For divergent views, see Max Turner, “The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts,” 130; and F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 408.

⁵⁴⁶ Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 19. See also Martin Stringer, *Rethinking the Origins of the Eucharist* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 186-87.

⁵⁴⁷ BDAG, “διαλέγομαι,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 232.

11), which means “to be in a group and speak.”⁵⁴⁸ When Paul ate the bread, Luke uses the term γεύομαι (“taste, eat, enjoy”),⁵⁴⁹ which is unlike the terms Paul used in 1 Cor 10:17-30 (μετέχω, “we all partake of the one bread”) and 1 Cor 11:20-34 (ἐσθίω, “to eat the Lord’s Supper”).⁵⁵⁰ If Paul’s terminology in 1 Corinthians is deemed to be cultic (“partaking of the Supper”), Luke’s terminology in Acts is certainly ordinary.

In addition, τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων could also be one of Luke’s many “live, in-person” details of this part of Paul’s trip.⁵⁵¹ One of Luke’s “we sections” begins in Acts 20:5, and he exhibits extraordinary attention to the details of time and days in this section. After Paul spent “three months” in Greece (v. 3), Luke says that Paul sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread (v. 6), took “five days” to get to Troas (v. 6), was there for “seven days” (v. 6), meeting on “the first day” of the week (v. 7), and planning to leave on “the next day” (v. 7). They arrived near Chios “the following day” (v. 15), went to Samos on “the next day” (v. 15), and then to Miletus on “the day following” (v. 15). Consequently, it seems likely that the “first day of the week” is simply

⁵⁴⁸ BDAG, “ὁμιλέω,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 705. The much-later religious concept of “homily” must not be read back into this first-century Greek term.

⁵⁴⁹ See BDAG, “γεύομαι,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 195; Silva, ed., “γεύομαι,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 1:564-66. The term is found two other times in Acts: Acts 10:10 “he became hungry and was desiring to eat” and 23:14 “We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.”

⁵⁵⁰ It is likely that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians relatively close to the time frame of his visit to Troas. See Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 268.

⁵⁵¹ Dunn says, “The journey is narrated with an unusual amount of detail so far as the itinerary is concerned.” (*Ibid.*, 266.)

another example of Luke's day-by-day chronicle of Paul's trip.⁵⁵² Throughout Acts, Luke does not identify a particular day of the week as "the Christian meeting day," and he does not indicate whether the Christians met weekly, monthly, or on a regular basis.

Even if it is assumed that Luke regarded Sunday as the Christian meeting day, it is still another matter to presume that Sunday was a "holy day," "a day of worship," or the new "Sabbath."⁵⁵³ The NT lacks support for these ideas.⁵⁵⁴ As Heather McKay has demonstrated, "Many scholars writing on the topic of Sabbath, or on the development of Sunday as the Christian day of worship, make no distinction between Sabbath observance and Sabbath worship."⁵⁵⁵ McKay contends that "Sabbath observance and Sabbath worship are not synonymous," arguing that OT Sabbath observance—for the average Jew—only mandated respite from working and had no requirements for "worship"

⁵⁵² Max Turner argues the opposite, saying, "Luke's specification of the day of the week in Acts 20:7 probably should not be relegated to the category of irrelevant personal reminiscence," in Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts," 132.

⁵⁵³ Willy Rordorf says that the attempt to equate Sunday with Sabbath and to institutionalize Sunday as a day of rest occurred after Constantine in the fourth century, in Rordorf, "Sunday: The Fullness of Christian Liturgical Time," *Studia Liturgica* 14:2-4 (1982): 95. See also Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church*, trans. A. A. K. Graham (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 161-62.

⁵⁵⁴ In Rom 14:5-6, Paul argues that all days are the same, implying that it is the weaker brother who views any day as special (cf. Col 2:16). See the detailed argument by Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts," 99-157.

⁵⁵⁵ McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue*, 3.

activities.⁵⁵⁶ If McKay is correct, it is likely that “Sunday observance” (if indeed this is a biblical concept) should not be equated with “Sunday worship.”

In summary, the meeting at Troas (1) is described as a “gathering” (συνάγω, v. 7) with the purpose of breaking bread (κλάσαι ἄρτον).⁵⁵⁷ (2) No Greek worship terminology is found in the passage. (3) The meeting involves the horizontal activities of talking (διαλέγομαι and ὁμιλέω), a long message (λόγος), breaking bread (κλάσας τὸν ἄρτον), and eating (γεύομαι). If breaking bread is a reference to the Lord’s Supper, the meeting could be perceived as having a vertical element. (4) No liturgical or ceremonial language is found in the passage.

1 Cor 11:17-34: The Lord’s Supper

²⁰ Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper,

²¹ for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk ... ³³ So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

This passage contains several exegetical and theological issues, but this investigation must focus on our four questions.⁵⁵⁸ Additionally, the modern reader must avoid anachronistically viewing the Corinthian Lord’s Supper experience as if it mirrors

⁵⁵⁶ McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue*, 2. McKay says that Jewish priests had temple duties on the Sabbath, but “non-priestly Jews” had no OT-mandated cultic obligations on the Sabbath. See the comments about McKay’s arguments in chapter 2 on pages 93-95.

⁵⁵⁷ The term κλάσαι is infinitive (“to break bread”), which may be an infinitive of purpose or result. See the discussion of infinitives in KMP, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek*, 361-65.

⁵⁵⁸ For a brief survey of the various issues, see Marshall, “Lord’s Supper,” *DPL*, 569-75. See also Eduard Schweizer, *The Lord’s Supper According to the New Testament*, trans. James M. Davis (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), and Stringer, *Rethinking the Origins of the Eucharist*.

modern experience. “As one might well expect,” says Gordon Fee, “one’s own liturgical or nonliturgical tradition often colors this investigation.”⁵⁵⁹ The modern reader must remember that Christianity had no sacred buildings, the Corinthian gathering was likely in someone’s home,⁵⁶⁰ and that the supper (δεῖπνον) was likely a full meal and substantially different than a modern-day “Holy Eucharist.”⁵⁶¹

First, what terminology is used to refer to the assembly? In this passage, Paul uses συνέρχομαι five times to describe their “coming together” (vv. 17, 18, 20, 33, 34).⁵⁶² Additionally, Paul seems to qualify the specific kind of “coming together.” In v. 18, he says συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ, and in v. 20, he says, Συνερχομένων οὖν ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ. The idea of coming together “in assembly” (v. 18) and coming together “in the same place” (v. 20) should likely be understood as a larger meeting of all the Corinthian house churches that came together at one location.⁵⁶³ These additional words (ἐν

⁵⁵⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 465.

⁵⁶⁰ As Marshall observes, “Since there were no church buildings, meals were held in the houses of church members,” in Marshall, “Lord’s Supper,” *DPL*, 571. See also Mark E. Button and Fika Van Rensburg, “The ‘House Churches’ in Corinth,” *Neotestamentica* 37:1 (2003): 12.

⁵⁶¹ How else could some of them become “drunk” (v. 21)? Marshall says, “These occasions were full meals with plenty of food and drink,” in “Lord’s Supper,” *DPL*, 571. See also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 532; and the analysis of δεῖπνον in Silva, ed., “δεῖπνον,” *NIDNTTE*, 1:643-56.

⁵⁶² Paul uses συνέρχομαι only seven times in all his epistles. Five of them are here, and the other two are in chapter 14 (vv. 23, 26).

⁵⁶³ See Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 50; Button and Van Rensburg, “The ‘House Churches’ in Corinth,” 12-13; Murray Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 139; and Silva, ed., “ἐπί,” *NIDNTTE*, 2:237-38.

ἐκκλησία and ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ) probably have the same effect as referring to “the whole church” (ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, cf. 1 Cor 14:23; Acts 5:11; 15:22; Rom 16:23). In 1 Cor 11:20, Paul also implies that the purpose of the Corinthian meeting was “to eat the Lord’s Supper” (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν), even though they were eating it inappropriately.⁵⁶⁴ In sum, Paul refers to the meeting as an assembly of Christians coming together. Even though it is clear that the Lord’s Supper is involved in this gathering, he does not call the meeting a “worship service” or “a celebration of the Holy Eucharist.”

In response to our second question, no Greek worship terminology is found in the passage. The words προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, and σέβομαι, along with any synonymous terms, are absent.

Thirdly, was the assembly activity directed vertically to God, horizontally to other Christians, or both? The only assembly activity identified in this passage is eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper. Activities such as singing, praying, and speaking are not mentioned. So, is eating the Lord’s Supper a vertical or a horizontal activity? In Paul’s view, the Supper has elements of both. In 1 Cor 10:14-17, Paul says partaking of the bread and the cup is a “sharing” (κοινωνία) in the body and blood of the Lord.⁵⁶⁵ In addition, 1 Cor 11:27 says that eating the bread and drinking the cup “in an unworthy

⁵⁶⁴ See also the use of the articular infinitive τὸ φαγεῖν in 1 Cor 11:33: “when you come together to eat” (συνερχόμενοι εἰς τὸ φαγεῖν).

⁵⁶⁵ For the purposes of this dissertation, it is not necessary to engage in the debate about whether the bread and cup become the actual body and blood of Jesus. For a summary of varying views of the Supper, see Gordon T. Smith, ed., *The Lord’s Supper: Five Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008).

manner” makes one “guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.”⁵⁶⁶ Whatever these verses mean, Christians have some connection with the body and blood of Jesus when they partake of the Supper, and that connection is best viewed as vertical.⁵⁶⁷ The phrase “in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor 11:24-25) is another vertical aspect of taking the Supper. Thus, the Supper certainly involves some kind of vertical interaction with the risen Christ.

Yet, in 1 Cor 11:17-34, Paul focuses on the horizontal aspect of the Supper. The specific problem activity at Corinth was that “each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry, and another is drunk” (v. 21). This problem resulted in the Corinthians “despising the church of God and shaming those who have nothing” (v. 22). These interpersonal inequities are resolved when they “wait for one another” (v. 33). Whatever Paul means by this admonition, its “one another” feature clearly supports the horizontal nature of taking the Supper.⁵⁶⁸ So, Paul’s view of the Lord’s Supper has both vertical and horizontal aspects.

Fourth, does the passage contain cultic or ceremonial language? This question revolves around the so-called “words of institution” mentioned by Paul in 11:23-26: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you ...” Were these words

⁵⁶⁶ When Paul speaks of judging “the body rightly” (11:29), he may be citing vertical or horizontal implications, depending on whether “the body” (τὸ σῶμα) is interpreted as the body of Jesus or the body of believers (see 10:17).

⁵⁶⁷ See the explanation of κοινωνία by Silva, ed., *NIDNTTE*, 2:710-13.

⁵⁶⁸ Marshall says that the abuses at the Corinthian meal were of a social character; the over-indulgence of the rich made the poor feel inferior, in “Lord’s Supper,” *DPL*, 570-71. Fee also sees “horizontal and vertical” implications of the Supper in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 531-69.

intended to be recited ceremonially or liturgically to introduce the Lord's Supper at Christian meetings? Bornkamm, following Bultmann, contends that these words were "a liturgical text from the outset."⁵⁶⁹ C. K. Barrett, however, disagrees, saying, "It should not be simply assumed (though this is often done) that the words that follow (in verses 23 ff.) were already in liturgical use at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul gives no indication that he is using words that the Corinthians would recognize in this sense."⁵⁷⁰ Indeed, Paul expresses no concern that the Corinthians were incorrectly reciting these words; his concern is focused on their selfish behavior. Further, Paul does not require that the Corinthians repeat those words when eating the Supper, nor does he require any proper time, procedure, or presiding official for the Supper.

Barrett's comment about 1 Cor 10:16-17 applies here: "Paul ... is neither composing nor reproducing a liturgy but conducting a theological argument."⁵⁷¹ Paul's argument is that the bread and the cup are to be taken "in remembrance of Me" (εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν), which Paul states twice verbatim (v. 24, 25). The Corinthians' selfish behavior (vv. 21, 22, 33) contradicts His selfless sacrifice and incurs guilt (v. 27) and judgment (v. 29, 31, 32, 34). It is possible that Paul's "words of institution" are a liturgical statement that he is using to make his theological argument. But there is no evidence to support the idea that such a liturgical statement exists in his day. As

⁵⁶⁹ Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, trans. P. L. Hammer (New York: SCM Press, 1969), 134. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. K. Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 1:144-46.

⁵⁷⁰ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 264.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 230.

Bradshaw, a liturgical scholar, says, “There is no firm evidence at all for the liturgical use of an institution narrative until the fourth century, and then it has the marks of an innovation rather than a well-established custom.”⁵⁷² Consequently, when modern scholars view this text as a liturgical statement, they are likely being influenced by their own liturgical use of this passage, assuming that Paul used it in the same way.

1 Cor 14:1-40: The Purpose of the Assembly

26 What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

1 Corinthians 14 is the longest passage in the NT about the Christian assembly. It is particularly noteworthy because it contains specific apostolic directives for assembly activity. While chapters 12 and 13 contain only one imperative,⁵⁷³ chapter 14 contains twenty-one imperatives.⁵⁷⁴ In addition to the imperatives, Paul also uses ἵνα with the subjunctive seven times in this chapter in a way that creates a command.⁵⁷⁵ As Paul uses

⁵⁷² Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 62. Andrew McGowan comes to a similar conclusion in “Is There a Liturgical Text in This Gospel?: The Institution Narratives and Their Early Interpretive Communities,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118:1 (1999): 73-87.

⁵⁷³ In 1 Cor 12:31, Paul’s imperative is ζηλοῦτε (“earnestly desire the higher gifts”), but he does not resume that point until 14:1 (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε).

⁵⁷⁴ The imperatives are διώκετε (14:1), ζηλοῦτε (14:1, 39), ζητεῖτε (14:12), προσευχέσθω (14:13), γίνεσθε (14:20, 20, 26, 40), νηπιάζετε (14:20), διερμηνεύετω (14:27), σιγάτω (14:28, 30, 34), λαλείτω (14:28, 29), διακρινέτωσαν (14:29), ὑποτασσέσθωσαν (14:34), ἐπερωτάτωσαν (14:35), ἐπιγινώσκέτω (14:37), κωλύετε (14:39).

⁵⁷⁵ See 1 Cor 14:5, 12, 19, 31. Chrys Caragounis cites 1 Cor 14:5 as a NT example of ἵνα with the subjunctive being used “to give a command,” in *The*

such forceful language, he lays down several directives that he expects the Corinthians to follow. The assembly passages in Acts raise the hermeneutical question, “Are churches today to follow those examples?” But in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul issues apostolic edicts for assembly behavior, and he expects others to “recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (v. 37).⁵⁷⁶ If a modern church regards the NT as authoritative, that church must reconcile itself with this chapter.

The pivotal verse is 1 Cor 14:26 with its mandate that “all” assembly activities be done “for edification.” Its exegetical significance springs from (1) the transitional concluding construction, *Τί οὖν ἐστὶν* (“Therefore, what is the conclusion?”),⁵⁷⁷ (2) the pause to directly address the audience as *ἀδελφοί*,⁵⁷⁸ (3) the use of *ὅταν* with the present

Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 116.

⁵⁷⁶ A small group of Western manuscripts omit *ἐντολή* (e.g., D* G it^{d,g}). Yet, *ἐντολή* is retained in p⁴⁶ ⁸ A B syr^{pal} cop^{bo} eth. The UBS text includes *ἐντολή* with a C rating. Metzger admits that the shorter reading has some merit but notes that these Western witnesses are “obviously untrustworthy in neighboring verses,” in Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 556.

⁵⁷⁷ Paul often uses *οὖν* at key transition points when introducing a concluding exhortation (cf. 1 Cor 10:31). He uses the transitional formula *Τί οὖν* fifteen times in Romans and 1 Corinthians alone (1 Cor 3:5; 9:18; 10:19; 14:15, 26; Rom 3:1, 9; 4:1; 6:1, 15; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30; 11:7; cf. Acts 21:22; Gal 3:19).

⁵⁷⁸ Paul uses the vocative of *ἀδελφοί* to alert the reader to a concluding statement in 1 Cor 7:24; 11:33-34; 14:26, 39; 15:58; 16:15. See John Grassmick, “Epistolary Genre: Reading Ancient Letters,” in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*, eds., Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 233.

subjunctive (“Whenever you meet together”),⁵⁷⁹ and (4) the imperatival construction, Πάντα ... γινέσθω (“All things must be done”).⁵⁸⁰ Within this construction, Paul delivers his major point by using the prepositional phrase πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν, mandating that all assembly activities must be done “for edification.” The term is clearly a keyword for Paul as he uses the noun and verb forms (οἰκοδομή and οἰκοδομέω) seven times in the chapter.⁵⁸¹ Paul also uses several similar concepts to emphasize the importance of benefiting others in the assembly, such as exhorting and comforting them (v. 3), profiting them (v. 6), knowing the meaning of speech (v. 11), engaging the mind (vv. 14-15), instructing them (v. 19), and learning and being encouraged (v. 31). In Paul’s mind, οἰκοδομή is a litmus test for determining an activity’s acceptability in assembly. If an activity does not edify others, it is not acceptable. As Gordon Fee notes, “What is mandatory is that everything aim at edification.”⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁹ BDAG notes that when ὅταν is used with the present subjunctive and “when the action of the subordinate clause is contemporaneous with that of the main clause” (as it is in 14:26), ὅταν carries the meaning of “whenever, as often as, every time that.” Thus, in 14:26, Paul wants his directive to apply to every time they meet together. See BDAG, “ὅταν,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 730-31.

⁵⁸⁰ Paul uses πάντα with γινέσθω in 14:26 (“Let all things be done for edification”) and 14:40 (“All things must be done properly and in an orderly manner”), then again in a key concluding exhortation at 16:14 (“Let all that you do be done in love”).

⁵⁸¹ Οἰκοδομή is found in 14:3, 5, 12, 26; and οἰκοδομέω is in 14:4 (2) and 14:17.

⁵⁸² Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 691. See also Schweizer, “Worship in the New Testament,” 197-98.

In view of today's emphasis on "gathering for worship," one might expect Paul to demand that everything be done for the worship of God. Ralph Martin says that Paul's command about edification (v. 26) has "haunted" him:

Finally, I return to the question that has haunted me in preparing these studies. If one verse (1 Cor. 14:26) enshrines an apostolic dictum – that all church members have, with their individual contributions, a part to play in worship – why is public worship in the mainstream denominations so obviously at odds with the Pauline rubric?⁵⁸³

So, this passage is clearly an important one for this dissertation and for our four questions.

First, what terminology is used to refer to the assembly? Paul uses the same terminology in chapter 14 that he used in chapter 11: συνέρχομαι ("come together" 11:17, 18, 20, 33-34; 14:23, 26) and ἐκκλησία ("assembly")⁵⁸⁴ 11:16, 18, 22; 14:4, 5, 12, 19, 23, 28, 33-35). In both chapters, Paul uses the phrase ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ to describe being "in assembly" (1 Cor 11:18 and 14:19, 28, 35).⁵⁸⁵ In 1 Cor 14:23, the phrase ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ likely refers to the "whole assembly" of several home-based gatherings

⁵⁸³ Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation*, vi-vii.

⁵⁸⁴ While "church" is a common translation of ἐκκλησία, "assembly" is a suitable or better translation in many passages, such as Acts 15:22; 19:39, 41; Rom 16:5, 23; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 1:2; Col 4:16; 2 Thes 1:4; 3 Jn 1:6.

⁵⁸⁵ See Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 537, 675. He says the anarthrous ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ should be translated "in church" or "in assembly" and not "in the church," as the NIV renders it.

coming together “in the same place.”⁵⁸⁶ Paul does not say that the Christians “gathered to worship God” or that they “conducted services.” They simply “came together.”

Second, are any of the Greek terms that are translated as “worship” used in the passage? The answer is yes (προσκυνέω), but it does not refer to something that the Christians did in their assembly. Instead, προσκυνέω refers to the prostration (proskynesis) of an outsider (ἄπιστος ἢ ιδιώτης)⁵⁸⁷ after being convicted by Christian prophesying (14:24-25). Since Paul says that this outsider falls on his face, it is clear that Paul is referring to the common Middle Eastern gesture of prostration.⁵⁸⁸ The term προσκυνέω will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter.

Third, was the assembly activity directed vertically to God or horizontally to other Christians? Paul mentions fourteen different assembly activities in chapter 14: speaking (λαλέω), prophesying (προφητεῦω), tongues (γλῶσσα), revelation (ἀποκάλυψις), knowledge (γνῶσις), teaching (διδαχή), praying (προσεύχομαι), singing/psalms

⁵⁸⁶ Button and Van Rensburg say, “This conclusion really cannot be avoided,” in “The ‘House Churches’ in Corinth,” 12-13. See also Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 75-76.

⁵⁸⁷ H. W. Bartsch claims that ιδιώτης “might refer to a church member whose status leaves him ignorant of glossolalia,” in “ιδιώτης,” *EDNT*, 172-73. However, it seems unlikely that a Christian would react in such a humbling and dramatic fashion. See Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 321; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 672-73; and Silva, ed., “ιδιώτης,” *NIDNTTE*, 2:500-502.

⁵⁸⁸ For other NT cases where falling (πίπτω) precedes prostration (προσκυνέω), or where the prostrating one is on his face, knees, or ground, see Mt 2:11; 28:9 (“at the feet”); Mk 5:6; 15:19; Acts 10:25; Rv 3:9; 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4, 10; 22:8-9. See BDAG, “προσκυνέω,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 882.

(ψάλλω/ψαλμός),⁵⁸⁹ blessing (εὐλογέω),⁵⁹⁰ the “amen,” (ἀμήν), giving thanks (εὐχαριστία), instructing (κατηγέω), interpreting (ἐρμηνεία/διερμηνεύω), and passing judgment (διακρίνω). Of these fourteen activities, only praying and giving thanks are uniquely directed to God, while speaking in tongues,⁵⁹¹ singing,⁵⁹² and blessing may be directed to God or to people. The other nine activities are horizontal activities directed to others.

Christian assemblies, by the time of the Corinthian letter, had clearly not crystallized into a single monolithic pattern. Paul exhibits no desire to identify activities that must take place in a specific chronological order, except to say that interpretation should follow tongues (14:27). Whatever the activity, his primary concern is that it should be done for the (horizontal) edification of the members.

Fourth, does this passage contain liturgical or ceremonial language? Paul presents a picture of an assembly at Corinth that is better described as chaotic than cultic. Even though the informal, free-flowing, Spirit-driven nature of the Corinthian assembly seems to be inconsistent with a liturgical or ceremonial assembly, Ralph Martin claims, “For all

⁵⁸⁹ Singing and psalms are also mentioned in Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16.

⁵⁹⁰ Blessing (14:16), which was common with meals (cf. Mt 14:19; 26:26; Mk 6:41; 8:7; 14:22; Lk 9:16; 24:30), is also mentioned in 1 Cor 10:16 as part of the Lord’s Supper. Since Paul treats the thanksgiving as synonymous with the blessing (14:16), the two (and the “Amen”) may refer to the context of the congregational meal. See Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 238.

⁵⁹¹ Paul says that one who speaks in a tongue speaks to God (14:2). But if the tongue is interpreted, other people benefit (cf. 14:5, 13, 27-28).

⁵⁹² Singing can be directed to one another, yet also be directed to God. See Col 3:16 and Eph 5:19 (“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns”).

their divisiveness and cliquishness, the Corinthians did unite in a common liturgical meeting.”⁵⁹³ Martin offers no proof for this claim. If “liturgical meeting” means a religious meeting organized around formal and scripted rituals or responsive recitations,⁵⁹⁴ Martin assumes too much.

Two examples of possible recited elements at Corinth are the articular τὸ ἄμην and the articular τῇ σῇ εὐχαριστίᾳ (“your thanksgiving”), both in 14:16. In each case, the article likely identifies “the” ἄμην and “the” εὐχαριστία as known elements of a typical assembly.⁵⁹⁵ The BDAG lexicon says that ἄμην in 14:16 is a “liturgical formula,” but BDAG goes too far when it claims that the ἄμην is uttered “at the end of the liturgy.”⁵⁹⁶ To assert that the Corinthians recited the ἄμην “at the end of the liturgy” appears to be a case of pan-liturgism, reading later liturgical practices into the first-century experience.

In Robert Banks’ review of 1 Corinthians 14, he sees that Paul stresses intelligibility, orderliness, and loving exercise: “Paul therefore has no interest in constructing a fixed liturgy. This would restrict the freedom of God’s communication.”⁵⁹⁷ Banks’s statement is consistent with Paul’s message in 1 Corinthians 14. The idea of requiring a liturgical assembly seems to be far from the mind of the apostle.

⁵⁹³ Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation*, 64.

⁵⁹⁴ As defined in chapter 1, page 13.

⁵⁹⁵ See also 2 Cor 1:20. The responsive congregational “amen” has deep roots in Hebrew culture (e.g., Dt 27:15-26; 1 Chr 16:36; Neh 5:13; 8:6; Ps 106:48).

⁵⁹⁶ BDAG, “ἄμην,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 53. See also Conzelmann, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 239; and Heinrich Schlier, “ἄμην,” *TDNT*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:336.

⁵⁹⁷ Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 3rd ed., 91.

1 Tm 2:1-12: Lifting Holy Hands

⁸ Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. ... ¹¹ A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.

In this “Pastoral Epistle,” Paul⁵⁹⁸ gives advice to Timothy concerning his leadership for the believers at Ephesus. In this section (2:1-12), Paul offers some specific advice for assembly behavior. The key phrase that points to an assembly is “in every place” (ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, v. 8). Paul uses this same phrase three other times to refer to Christians in a certain locality, and each time may be a reference to their assemblies (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 2:14; 1 Thes 1:8). Also, since this passage offers instruction to a plurality of men and women (ἄνδρας ... γυναῖκας) about praying and teaching, it is highly likely that Paul is addressing issues relevant to the Christian assembly.⁵⁹⁹ Since Paul’s purpose for writing this letter is to provide his apostolic direction for various pastoral matters, it is consistent for him to address assembly behavior.⁶⁰⁰ Besides his reference to “in every place,” Paul uses no other terminology to identify the meeting.

⁵⁹⁸ In the last century, the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles has been questioned by several scholars, while others have defended Pauline authorship. Since 1 Tm 1:1 identifies the author as “Paul,” this dissertation will do the same. For a review of the related issues, see Charles J. Bumgardner, “Paul’s Letters to Timothy and Titus: A Literature Review (2009-2015),” *Southeastern Theological Review* 7:2 (Winter 2016): 77-116.

⁵⁹⁹ Mounce comes to the same conclusion. See his analysis at William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 106-07. Barrett says, “The author means ‘in every Christian meeting-place,’” in C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 54.

⁶⁰⁰ “I am writing these things to you ... so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God.” (1 Tm 3:14-15)

Second, one of the Greek words that has been translated as “worship” appears in this passage.⁶⁰¹ The noun θεοσέβεια is used in v. 10 when Paul says that good works are “proper for women making a claim to godliness (θεοσέβειαν).” This term appears only here in the NT⁶⁰² and is occasionally translated “worship” in English Bibles. The NIV, for example, translates the noun θεοσέβειαν as if it were an infinitive: “who profess to worship God.” In a comparison of how sixteen major English Bibles translate 1 Tm 2:10, θεοσέβεια is rendered as “godliness” five times, “worship” three times, while the other versions translate it with various forms of reverence, devotion, religion, and honor.⁶⁰³

A related term, εὐσεβεία, is used frequently in the Pastoral Epistles and is found in the immediate context. In 1 Tm 2:2, Paul says that the purpose of praying for the authorities is “so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness (εὐσεβεία) and dignity.”⁶⁰⁴ As in 2:10-12, v. 2 also discusses prayer, quietness (ἡσυχίος), and godliness. The *NIDNTTE* says that θεοσεβής “does not differ essentially from εὐσεβής either in use or in meaning.”⁶⁰⁵ In the fifteen occurrences of εὐσεβεία in the NT, the NASB translates it as “godliness” fourteen times, “piety” once, but never as “worship.” If θεοσέβεια and

⁶⁰¹ For example, the HCSB translates this passage as “but with good works, as is proper for women who affirm that they worship God.”

⁶⁰² The cognate adjective θεοσεβής, another hapax legomenon, is found in Jn 9:31: “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing (θεοσεβής) and does His will, He hears him.”

⁶⁰³ English versions that translate θεοσέβεια as “godliness” are ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, and NKJV. The versions that translate it as “worship” are CSB, HCSB, and NIV.

⁶⁰⁴ The noun εὐσεβεία is found fifteen times in the NT; ten of them are in the Pastorals, while eight are in 1 Timothy alone.

⁶⁰⁵ Silva, ed., “σέβομαι, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 3:272.

εὐσέβεια are indeed synonyms, “godliness” would be an appropriate translation of θεοσέβεια.

“Godliness” also fits better with the immediate context as well as the greater context of the Pastorals.⁶⁰⁶ In 2:10, Paul refers to θεοσέβεια as something that women profess (ἐπαγγέλλομαι). The idea of professing godliness seems much more suitable than the idea of professing worship. The σέβομαι word group will be discussed in more detail later in the next chapter, but for now, it may suffice to note that θεοσέβεια in 1 Tm 2:10 likely refers to godliness and not to “worship” or assembly activities.

Third, are the assembly activities directed to God (vertically) or to one another (horizontally)? Paul mentions two categories of assembly activities: prayer/thanksgivings (2:1, 8) and learning/teaching (2:11-12). In v. 1, Paul identifies four activities (entreaties, prayers, petitions, thanksgivings, δεήσεις προσευχὰς ἐντεύξεις εὐχαριστίας), which can all be understood as various kinds of prayer, since they are offered “on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority” (v. 2).⁶⁰⁷ Praying (προσεύχεσθαι) is also mentioned in v. 8, but with the concomitant activity of lifting up hands.⁶⁰⁸ Prayer activity

⁶⁰⁶ The concept of “godliness” is thematic in the Pastoral Epistles. See Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 62-64.

⁶⁰⁷ Knight considers them as “four words for prayer” and virtually synonymous, in George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 114.

⁶⁰⁸ Standing and praying are frequently mentioned together in the OT and NT, as well as praying and lifting up hands. See Mt 6:5; Mk 11:25; Lk 18:11; 1 Kgs 8:22, 54; Ezr 9:5; Pss 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; Is 1:15; Lam 2:19; 3:41.

should be understood as primarily vertical, and it was expressly identified in other assembly contexts (Acts 2:42; 4:31; 12:12; 14:23; 1 Cor 14:13-15).

The second category of activities is learning and teaching, which are complementary activities.⁶⁰⁹ Learning usually implies that someone is teaching a learner, and teaching usually implies that someone is learning from a teacher. “Being taught,” the passive voice of διδάσκω, is virtually synonymous with μανθάνω.⁶¹⁰ In v. 11, Paul uses the imperative μανθανέτω to urge that women should “receive instruction,” adding that they are not permitted to teach (διδάσκειν, v. 12).⁶¹¹ Paul mentions μανθάνω as an assembly activity in 1 Cor 14:31, 35. He also occasionally reminds Christians that they learned (μανθάνω) from him, and that learning may have taken place in an assembly context (Rom 16:17; Eph 4:20; Phil 4:9; 2 Tm 3:14). The cognate terms of διδάσκω (e.g., διδαχή, διδάσκαλος, διδασκαλία, διδακτικός) are frequent in likely assembly contexts.⁶¹² As elsewhere, 1 Tm 2:8-15 presents a picture of the assembly as a gathering noted for

⁶⁰⁹ See Rom 16:17, “the teaching which you learned” (τὴν διδαχὴν ἣν ὑμεῖς ἐμάθετε).

⁶¹⁰ For example, in Eph 4:20-21, Paul uses the active voice of μανθάνω and the passive voice of διδάσκω as if they are parallel concepts.

⁶¹¹ The controversy of the “women’s silence” issue is outside of the scope of this investigation. For a recent egalitarian interpretation, see Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 164-89. He concludes, “The passage teaches rather that Timothy is to see that, in the worship assembly, each woman’s learning potential is encouraged and enhanced” (p. 181).

⁶¹² In these passages, διδάσκω and its cognates are in likely assembly contexts: Acts 13:1; 15:1, 35; 18:11, 25; 20:20; 28:31; 1 Cor 4:17; 14:6, 26; 1 Tim 4:11-16; Ti 1:9. These contexts may also refer to assembly contexts: Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Gal 6:6; Eph 4:11; Col 1:28; 3:16; 1 Tm 1:10; 3:2; 5:17; 6:2; 2 Tm 1:11; 2:2, 24; 3:10; Heb 5:12; Jas 3:1; 2 Pt 2:1; 2 Jn 1:10.

teaching and learning. These twin activities are human-to-human exchanges that can be described as horizontal.

Fourth, does the passage contain any liturgical or ceremonial language? No such terminology is apparent. Paul calls for the men to lift “holy” (ὅσιος) hands, which raises the question of whether the hands were considered ceremonially sacred because of a cultic setting. However, ὅσιος is not likely to refer to cultic “holiness” but rather to denote prayer that is conducted “without anger and dissension” (v. 8).⁶¹³ In other words, the raised hands are holy probably because they are raised in peace and unity, not because they are liturgical gestures. The silence (ἡσυχία) of the women probably also has nothing to do with ceremonial procedures. When Paul gives the reason for the silence of women, he does not appeal to any cultic or liturgical regulations. Rather, he appeals to their status in creation and the fall (vv. 13-14). Paul’s mandate for women to wear “proper” (κόσμιος) clothing probably also has nothing to do with ceremonial or liturgical garments.⁶¹⁴ When Paul explains his reasons for proper dress, he appeals to the ideals of modesty (αἰδώς) and discretion (σωφροσύνη), not to cultic regulations.

1 Tm 4:11-16: Reading, Exhortation, Teaching

¹³ Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching ... ¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere

⁶¹³ The term ὅσιος is rare in the NT. Paul usually uses ἅγιος to express the concept of holiness. In 1 Tm 2:8, ὅσιος “is in effect defined by the prohibition of anger and disunity” (Silva, ed., “ὅσιος,” *NIDNTTE*, 3:558).

⁶¹⁴ The adjective κόσμιος is found only here in the NT and in 1 Tm 3:2, a few verses later, where it refers to the qualification that an overseer must be “respectable.” Since it etymologically derives from κόσμος, there is no reason to assume that the term has any reference to cultic or sacral matters, but rather to the concept of “order.” See Silva, ed., “κόσμιος, etc.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2:730-36.

in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

This passage does not expressly state that it is discussing the assembly. Paul does not say, “When you gather,” or “In your assemblies,” or anything similar. Paul also does not use the term ἐκκλησία here. Yet, since Paul gives focused attention to Timothy’s reading, exhortation, and teaching (v. 13) and to his activities “for those who hear you” (v. 16), it seems clear that the apostle is discussing the assembly.

The Greek words that are translated as “worship” are absent in this specific passage, but εὐσέβεια appears in 4:7-8, where it clearly refers to “godliness.” None of the sixty-one English translations on BibleGateway.com translate εὐσέβεια as “worship” in 4:7-8.⁶¹⁵

The three activities of reading (v. 13), exhortation (v. 13), and teaching (vv. 11, 13, 16) are all horizontal activities. While the activities of exhortation (παρακλήσις) and teaching (διδασκαλία) are frequently mentioned in Acts and in Paul, this passage contains the New Testament’s only mention of “the public reading of Scripture” in a Christian assembly. It should be noted that the Greek text does not include the words “public” or “Scripture.” It is possible that ἀνάγνωσις refers to personal and private reading,⁶¹⁶ but the concept of public reading is likely implied by the inclusion of the article τῇ and the coupling of τῇ ἀνάγνωσις with τῇ παρακλήσει and τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ.

⁶¹⁵ See <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/1%20Timothy%204:8>, where “godliness” is the preferred translation of the ASV, CSB, ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, and RSV.

⁶¹⁶ The verb ἀναγινώσκω appears in the LXX in Dt 17:19, where the king is urged to read the Scriptures privately (cf. Josh 1:8).

The idea of public reading is also supported by the use of the term elsewhere in the NT. The noun ἀνάγνωσις is found only here and in two other passages where it refers to the public reading of Scripture in the synagogue (Acts 13:15; 2 Cor 3:14-15). The verb ἀναγινώσκω is also used in reference to synagogue reading in Lk 4:16 (“He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read ... the book of the prophet Isaiah”), Acts 13:27 (“the prophets which are read every Sabbath”), and Acts 15:21 (“Moses ... is read in the synagogues every Sabbath”). Paul also uses the verb when he urges that his letters be read to the assembled body of believers (Col 4:16; 1 Thes 5:27; cf. Acts 15:31; Rv 1:3). All these factors lead to the conclusion that ἀνάγνωσις refers to the public reading of Scripture,⁶¹⁷ which is naturally understood to be a horizontal human-to-human activity, as are exhortation and teaching.

Finally, the passage contains no obvious liturgical or ceremonial language. The idea that “reading” (ἀνάγνωσις) refers to a “liturgical reading” is a presumption without evidence.⁶¹⁸ William Mounce says, “Some have assumed that Paul is spelling out a liturgy ... But the point of the passage is not to spell out a liturgy but to help Timothy protect himself from the doctrinal error of the heresy, for which Scripture is paramount.”⁶¹⁹ The idea that Paul is describing a “liturgical reading” is another example

⁶¹⁷ See also Silva, ed., “ἀναγινώσκω,” *NIDNTTE*, 1:278-79.

⁶¹⁸ David Aune, for example, says that 4:13 refers to a “liturgical reading,” in Aune, “Early Christian Worship,” 6:983. J. N. D. Kelly calls this verse “the earliest reference to the use of Scripture in the Church’s liturgy,” in Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963), 105. Ralph P. Martin claims that these early meetings “must have included a lectionary reading,” in *Worship in the Early Church*, 70.

⁶¹⁹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 260.

of anachronistically reading later conventions into the biblical text. In addition, some have asserted that Paul lists reading first because it provides the natural basis for any exhortation and teaching that follows.⁶²⁰ But as Yarbrough notes, “There is no ‘and’ in Greek; the wording of the original can be understood as pointing not so much to a sequence or progression as to three intertwined and perhaps inseparable activities.”⁶²¹ So, while Paul might agree that exhortation and teaching grows out of reading, there is no indication that he is listing a required “liturgical order” of the assembly events.

Heb 10:19-25: Not Forsaking the Assembly

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Throughout Hebrews, the writer reveals a constant concern for the perseverance of his audience (Heb 3:6-14; 4:11-16; 6:4-12; 10:36-39; et al.), hoping to dissuade them from “shrinking back” (10:39).⁶²² In Heb 10:19-25, the writer continues his emphasis on perseverance as he uses three subjunctive verbs to urge his readers to “draw near” (προσερχώμεθα, v. 22) to God, to “hold fast” (κατέχωμεν, v. 23; cf. 3:6, 14) to their confession, and to “consider (κατανοῶμεν) how to stimulate one another to love and

⁶²⁰ See the order described in Lk 4:16-28 and Acts 13:14-15 (cf. Rom 15:4 τῆς παρακλήσεως τῶν γραφῶν “through the encouragement of the Scriptures”). See also Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 249-50; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 261.

⁶²¹ Ibid., 250.

⁶²² Cockerill, for example, says that “the perseverance of the people of God” is the writer’s “ultimate goal,” in Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 62.

good deeds” (v. 24). In verse 25, he implies that stimulating one another and encouraging one another (v. 25) cannot be done if they forsake their assembling together.

Consequently, assembling is a key aspect of drawing near to God and remaining faithful.

What terminology is used to describe the Christian assembly? The writer refers to the meeting as “our own assembling together” (τὴν ἐπισυναγωγὴν ἑαυτῶν, v. 25), and he mentions only the assembly activities of “stimulating one another to love and good deeds” (v. 24) and “encouraging one another” (v. 25). The noun ἐπισυναγωγή is found in the NT only here and in 2 Thes 2:1, where Paul discusses the second coming of Christ and “our gathering together” (ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς) to Him. The term in Heb 10:25 carries a similar meaning to the many uses of συνάγω in Acts and the use of συναγωγή in Jas 2:2, which all refer to Christian gatherings.⁶²³

To respond to the four questions, (1) the writer’s terminology for the meeting is ἐπισυναγωγή (“forsaking our own assembling together”). He continues the persistent NT trend to regard the Christian meeting as a “gathering” or “assembly.” (2) None of the Greek terms that are translated as “worship” (e.g., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω) are found in the passage. (3) The assembly events here are all horizontal “one-anothering” activities, as the writer indicates that the meeting includes stimulating one another to love and good deeds and encouraging (παρακαλέω) one another (vv. 24-25). Once again, συνάγω and παρακαλέω make a joint appearance in reference to the Christian meeting

⁶²³ The verb συνάγω is used to refer to Christian gatherings in Acts 4:31; 11:26; 13:44; 14:27; 15:6, 30; 20:7-8. Paul also uses the term in 1 Cor 5:4, “In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled (συναχθέντων ὑμῶν) ...” BDAG considers ἐπισυναγωγή “scarcely to be differentiated from συναγωγή,” in BDAG, “ἐπισυναγωγή,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 382.

and its activities.⁶²⁴ The prior emphasis on drawing near to God provides the helpful perspective that, although the assembly is primarily horizontal, the overall goal of a Christian life is vertical: to draw near to God and to hold firmly to Him. (4) Even though the book of Hebrews is filled with many cultic references,⁶²⁵ this passage contains no references to any ceremonial or liturgical practices in Christian assemblies.

Jas 2:2-4: The Συναγωγή of James

² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves ...

In Jas 2:2, James uses the standard noun for synagogue (συναγωγή)⁶²⁶ in reference to a Christian assembly: “if a man comes into your συναγωγή.” Since the text of James reveals a distinctly Jewish tone,⁶²⁷ the use of συναγωγή in Jas 2:2 has prompted

⁶²⁴ See the likely assembly use of παρακαλέω and παράκλησις in Acts 9:31; 11:23; 14:22; 15:31-32; 16:40; 20:1-2; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 14:3, 31; Eph 6:22; Col 4:8; 1 Thes 2:12; 3:2; 4:18; 5:11; 1 Tm 4:13; 6:2; 2 Tm 4:2; Ti 1:9; 2:15. Of Paul’s frequent epistolary use of παρακαλῶ and its likely connotations for assembly activity, see pages 129-30.

⁶²⁵ In Hebrews, “sacrifices” are mentioned nineteen times, the “altar” three times, “priests” thirty-six times, the “tabernacle” nine times, and the “sanctuary” twice.

⁶²⁶ In the NT, συναγωγή usually refers to the Jewish meeting places (Mt 4:23; 9:35; Mk 1:39; Acts 13:4, et al.), but it can also be used in a generic sense of “assembly” (Acts 13:43), particularly in the LXX (Gn 28:3; Ex 12:3; Ps 7:7; Sir 4:7). See Silva, ed., “συναγωγή,” *NIDNTTE*, 4:397-401; BDAG, “συναγωγή,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 963.

⁶²⁷ See, for example, the references in James to the twelve tribes of the διασπορά (1:1), the law (1:25; 2:8-12; 4:11-12), OT Scripture (2:8, 11, 23; 4:5-6), “God is one” (2:19; cf. 4:12), Abraham our father” (2:21), Rahab the harlot (2:25), γέννης (3:6), the Lord of Sabaoth (5:4), the prophets (5:10), Job (5:11), and Elijah (5:17). See also Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the

questions about the nature of this assembly, and some of the older English Bibles translate it as “your synagogue.”⁶²⁸ But it should be recognized that James’s letter contains much evidence of a Christian context, such as “a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1), the frequent allusions to Jesus’s sayings,⁶²⁹ and “your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1).⁶³⁰ Thus, it seems likely that συναγωγή should be understood in a Christian context.

In 1969, Roy Bowen Ward posited the theory that the συναγωγή of Jas 2:2 is a Jewish “judicial assembly” because the passage is similar to judicial proceedings that are described in rabbinic texts that also discuss apparel, sitting/standing, judging, and showing partiality.⁶³¹ The theory has attracted some support, but it has several problems. First, it neglects the fact that the rabbinic texts were likely written centuries after the

New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 28; and Dale Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 43.

⁶²⁸ For example, the ASV (1901), Darby Translation (1890), and Young’s Literal Translation (1898) all translate συναγωγή as “synagogue.” These versions were accessed at www.biblegateway.com.

⁶²⁹ McKnight says, “We stand on sure footings when we conclude that James had made Jesus’ teachings his own,” in Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 26-27.

⁶³⁰ See also the frequent references to brethren (1:2, 9, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14, 15; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19), the “law of liberty” (2:12), the emphasis on faith (1:3, 6; 2:1, 5, 14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26; 5:15), “teachers” (3:1), “the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us” (4:5), “the last days” and “the coming of the Lord” (5:3, 7, 8), “the elders of the church” (5:14), et al.

⁶³¹ Roy Bowen Ward, “Partiality in the Assembly: James 2:2-4,” *Harvard Theological Review* 62 (1969): 87-97.

NT.⁶³² Second, when James identifies this meeting, he says, “your assembly” (συναγωγὴν ὑμῶν), as if these Christians have only one regular gathering.⁶³³ It is hard to imagine that the one gathering was a judicial assembly, an event which is rarely found in early Christian history, inside or outside the NT. Third, it is not surprising that James uses the term “judge” (κριτής, v. 4) to describe the common problem of showing partiality to those of higher social status. Showing partiality is inherently an act of “judging,” being prejudicial and discriminatory in any setting. So, James is not likely addressing a judicial assembly, just Jesus is not likely addressing a judicial assembly when he says, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged” (Mt 7:1).

The first question is, what assembly terminology is used in this passage? While James says it is a meeting that you “come into” (εἰσέλθῃ εἰς, v. 2) and a meeting that has seating (κάθημαι, v. 3), the primary term for the meeting is συναγωγή. While this term may sound strange to modern ears, it is fully consistent with the many previous uses of the verb συνάγω to refer to Christian assemblies (Mt 18:20; Acts 4:31; 11:26; 14:27; 15:6, 30; 20:7-8; 1 Cor 5:4) and the noun ἐπισυναγωγή in Heb 10:25. Some scholars postulate that συναγωγή and ἐκκλησία were both initially applied to the Christian

⁶³² Craig A. Evans, “Judaism, Post-A.D. 70,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, eds., Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 605-11.

⁶³³ Ward assumes, as do many modern scholars, that the James assembly was “for worship,” even though Greek worship terminology is absent in the passage. See Ward, “Partiality in the Assembly,” 87, 89, 94; Sophie Laws, *The Epistle of James*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1980), 101; McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 183.

“assembly,” but over time, the term ἐκκλησία became the standard term for the Christian meeting.⁶³⁴

In answer to question two, none of the Greek terms for “worship” are found in the passage. Rather, James says the meeting is “your assembly.”

Are the meeting activities vertical or horizontal? While James reveals that there is sitting and standing, there is no indication for why they are sitting or standing. Some modern churches stand for certain liturgical elements, which might be viewed as a vertical action toward God, but the standing and sitting in James simply refers to a place where the person could find room. Some have assumed that the seating in James requires a formal setting, but as Laws notes, “Such arrangements might however figure in any meeting place,” such as a house gathering.⁶³⁵ James also notes that varying kinds of dress might be worn in the assembly, but he does not indicate any reasons for certain dress, as if the participants are to wear certain clothing “out of respect for God.” Rather, James indicates that any quality of apparel is acceptable, but showing favoritism (ἐν προσωπολημψίαις) to a rich person (πλούσιος) over a poor person (πτωχός) is not. James’s admonition is strikingly similar to Paul’s concerns about the Corinthian assembly: “Do you ... shame those who have nothing?” (1 Cor 11:22). As in Paul, the

⁶³⁴ Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James*, Classic Commentary Library (1913, repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 82-83. See also Laws, *The Epistle of James*, 99-101; and Scot McKnight, who notes that the first-century use of the term συναγωγή does not need to be understood as a physical building, in McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 182-83.

⁶³⁵ Laws, *The Epistle of James*, 100. Adams argues against a home setting for Jas 2:2 but admits, “Of course, a house context cannot be ruled out,” in Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses? Early Christianity in Context*. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 41.

guilty parties in James have “made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives” (v. 4). Both Paul and James use διακρίνω to refer to the discriminatory behavior.⁶³⁶ In sum, it is possible that the James meeting contains vertical elements, but James is focused on the horizontal offense of discriminating against poorer brethren. Yet, for this particular assembly, he mentions no specific horizontal activities such as speaking, reading, eating, or exhorting.

Concerning the fourth question about ceremonial or liturgical elements, the passage contains no evidence of liturgy or ceremony in the assembly.

Summary of the Terminology in Assembly Passages

In summary, it should be noted that in addition to these fifteen passages, there are several NT passages that include a tangential reference to a Christian assembly. For example, a few NT verses that mention singing might be referring to assembly activity, but these verses contain no other assembly information that applies to this dissertation.⁶³⁷ The dozens of verses that mention praying might also be referring to assembly activity, but these verses also contain no other helpful information that illuminates this investigation.⁶³⁸ Dozens of verses use the word ἐκκλησία, and many of them may refer to

⁶³⁶ James says, “made distinctions among yourselves” (διακρίθητε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, v. 4), while Paul says, “if we judged ourselves rightly” (εἰ δὲ ἑαυτοὺς διακρίνομεν, 1 Cor 11:31).

⁶³⁷ See, for example, Col 3:16; Eph 5:19 (“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord”). Singing is relatively rare in the NT (about ten times); praying is mentioned at least fifteen times more often (about 150 times in the NASB).

⁶³⁸ A good example is “Devote yourselves to prayer” (Col 4:2-3; cf. Rom 12:12; 1 Thes 5:25; 2 Thes 3:1; Heb 13:18; Jude 1:20). Paul may have implied that such prayer would be conducted in assembly.

an “assembly,” but they also contain no additional information for this study.⁶³⁹ Another example of a tangential reference that sheds no additional light is Jude’s reference to ἐν ταῖς ἀγάπαις ὑμῶν (“in your love feasts,” v. 12). But again, the Jude passage contains no additional information that has not already been covered in this dissertation.

Table 2 (p. 180, below) summarizes the answers to the four questions asked of the fifteen passages. For the first question about meeting terminology, the most common term used to depict an assembly is συνάγω (gather), which is mentioned in its various cognate forms in nine of the fifteen passages. The term συνέρχομαι (come together) is mentioned in two passages, and ἐκκλησία (assembly) is mentioned in three of the passages. In the NT, the meeting is not described as a “service” or a “worship service,” which are two terms that are commonly used today.⁶⁴⁰ Instead, it is a gathering. Further, while it is clear that Christians gathered, the NT does not mandate a particular day of the week (or month) as “the Christian meeting day.” At the same time, Paul has no problem with esteeming “all days alike” (Rom 14:5-6), and he resists anyone imposing regulations for holy days (Col 2:16-23).

The second question asks whether Greek worship terminology (e.g., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω) is used in the passage. Acts 13:2 includes the word λειτουργούντων, but it should be translated as “ministering” as in the NASB, with the

⁶³⁹ For example, see “greet the church that is in their house” (Rom 16:5; cf. 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2; 3 Jn 6).

⁶⁴⁰ The absence of these terms in the NT should not be viewed as a condemnation of these terms. The goal of this chapter has been to identify the assembly terminology used in the NT and to avoid modern (anachronistic) terminology that may taint the investigation. See chapter 1, pages 20-21.

general idea of “(metaphorically) engaging in priestly service.” In addition, it is likely that λειτουργούντων refers to the activities of the five prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1), not to the congregational activity of the Antioch church. 1 Cor 14:25 includes the word προσκυνήσει, but it clearly refers to the act of prostration by an unbeliever, not to the assembly activities of the church. 1 Tm 2:10 includes the word θεοσεβειαν, but it would be better translated as “godliness.” If the assessment in this chapter is correct, it would be true that Greek worship terminology is not used in the NT to refer to something that Christians did in their assemblies. The common Greek terms for “worship” (e.g., λειτουργέω, προσκυνέω, λατρεύω) will be examined more closely in chapter 4.

The third question seeks to identify whether NT assemblies could be described as having vertical activities toward God and/or horizontal activities toward other people. These gatherings are clearly dominated by horizontal activities; concepts like encouraging (παρακαλέω), strengthening (στηρίζω), and edifying (οικοδομέω) are frequently mentioned in these assembly passages. Vertical activities are occasionally found in NT assemblies, while prayer is mentioned much more frequently than singing. All of the NT assemblies contained horizontal activities with the exception of Jas 2:1-4, which mentions neither vertical nor horizontal exchanges. Several assemblies mention only horizontal activities, while none of the assemblies were focused purely on vertical activities, with the possible exception of the gathering for prayer at Mary’s house in Acts 12:12-17.

Among the fifteen passages, 1 Corinthians 14 stands out as the most specific and the most pertinent passage regarding the Christian assembly. While most of the other passages provide examples of what was done in an assembly, 1 Corinthians 14 contains a

long list of imperatives that offer direct apostolic mandates about the assembly. Paul is clear that all (πάντα) assembly activities, even vertical ones like prayer (14:14-15), giving thanks (14:16-17), and singing (14:15, 26), must be done for the horizontal mandate of edification. In retrospect, it is possible to view the gatherings in all fifteen passages as meetings that have (horizontal) edification as their primary goal.

The fourth question seeks to identify any activities that might be described as liturgical or ceremonial. None of the meetings had clear references to liturgy or ceremony with the possible exception of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:17-34. But it remains a question whether Paul intended the Supper to be a liturgical ceremony that included specific recitations and a specific order. The "amen" in 1 Cor 14:16 is certainly a responsive statement that might be described as a "liturgical formula," but the evidence does not support the idea that the entire meeting can be described as "the liturgy" or as an ordered ceremony.

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF ASSEMBLY PASSAGES

Passage	Terminology	"Worship"?	Direction	Liturgy?
Mt 18:17-20	Gathering (συνάγω) Assembly (ἐκκλησία)	No	Horizontal	No
Acts 2:42-47	Together (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ)	No	Both	No
Acts 4:23-35	Gathering (συνάγω)	No	Both	No
Acts 11:21-30	Gathering (συνάγω)	No	Horizontal	No
Acts 12:12-17	Gathering (συναθροίζω)	No	Mostly vertical	No
Acts 13:1-4	None	λειτουργέω Ministering	Both	No
Acts 14:21-28	Gathering (συνάγω)	No	Mostly horizontal	No
Acts 15:4-29	Gathering (συνάγω)	No	Horizontal	No
Acts 15:30-35	Gathering (συνάγω)	No	Mostly horizontal	No
Acts 20:6-12	Gathering (συνάγω)	No	Horizontal	No

1 Cor 11:17-34	Coming together (συνέρχομαι) Assembly (ἐκκλησία)	No	Both	Possibly in the Lord's Supper
1 Cor 14:1-40	Coming together (συνέρχομαι) Assembly (ἐκκλησία)	προσκυνέω Prostrating by Outsider	Mostly horizontal	Possibly with the amen and thanksgiving
1 Tm 2:8-12	"In every place" (ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ)	θεοσεβεία Godliness	Both	No
1 Tm 4:11-16	None	No	Horizontal	No
Heb 10:23-25	Assembling (ἐπισυναγωγή)	No	Horizontal	No
Jas 2:2-4	Assembly (συναγωγή)	No	Neither	No

CHAPTER 4

THE COMMON GREEK WORDS FOR “WORSHIP”

In chapter 3, the analysis of Christian assemblies determined that the NT writers refrain from using Greek words for “worship” when describing these assemblies. Instead, they tend to describe their assemblies as gatherings, using ordinary terms such as συνάγω and συνέρχομαι, as well as ἐκκλησία, the common word for an assembly. While vertical activities such as singing and praying are occasionally mentioned, the activities of Christian gatherings in the NT are largely focused on horizontal “one another” activities, and these assemblies generally appear to be free of liturgy and ceremony. Paul even mandates that all activities be performed for edification (1 Cor 14:26).

This chapter will analyze the common Greek words for “worship” (viz., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, σέβομαι, θρησκεία) to determine why they would not be used to describe church gatherings in the NT. The possibility exists that NT writers viewed Christian meetings as “worship,” but their writings lacked an appropriate occasion to use such language. While a full-scale analysis of the etymology and lexicology of these Greek terms is beyond the scope of this investigation, this chapter will attempt to answer two key questions. First, what is the meaning(s) of the term in the NT? Second, does the term convey a meaning that applies to attending a Christian assembly or to a particular activity within a Christian assembly?

The semantic methodology used here, as identified in chapter 1, can be summarized as “the context ... virtually makes meaning.”⁶⁴¹ As such, context will play a significant role in assessing these Greek terms. These word studies will focus primarily on NT and LXX usage. Due to the limitations of time and space, usage of these terms in other ancient sources will be limited, except where such usage might shed significant light on the meaning of these terms in the NT. The LXX usage should be particularly helpful, since the NT writers were undoubtedly familiar with the LXX.⁶⁴² Furthermore, the LXX uses these Greek “worship” words hundreds of times in a wide variety of Jewish literature considered to be Scripture by the NT writers, and these words are used in contexts similar to NT usage. Consequently, the LXX provides an extraordinary database of clues as to how the NT writers were likely to understand the definition of these terms.

Προσκυνέω

The first word, προσκυνέω, is by far, the most significant term for this analysis. Of the sixty-one times that προσκυνέω appears in the NT, the NASB translates it as “worship” 87 percent of the time.⁶⁴³ In addition, the English word ‘worship’ appears

⁶⁴¹ Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 75, 89. See also Bock, “Lexical Analysis: Studies in Words,” 137-38; KMP, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek*, 475-76; Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, 138.

⁶⁴² Stanley E. Porter, “Septuagint/Greek Old Testament,” *Dictionary of New Testament Background (DNTB)*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 1104-05. As Karen Jobes notes, some of the words in the NT may have a different sense in the LXX “due to changes during the lapse of time between the production of each or to the influence of classical Greek usage on the LXX,” in Karen H. Jobes, ed., *Discovering the Septuagint: A Guided Reader* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 7.

⁶⁴³ Of the sixty-one occurrences of προσκυνέω in the NT, here is how some other English versions translate it: KJV = 100 percent of the time as “worship,” ASV (1901) =

seventy times in the NASB New Testament, and in three-quarters of these occurrences, προσκυνέω is the Greek word behind the English term ‘worship’.⁶⁴⁴ So, of all the Greek words that might be translated as “worship,” προσκυνέω is likely the most significant for this investigation.

One key προσκυνέω passage that has often been applied to Christian assemblies is Jn 4:20-24 (“the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth”). After προσκυνέω has been analyzed, this investigation will assess its meaning in this passage and determine how the John 4 passage might apply to the Christian assembly.

A key question is, when people (in the LXX or NT) are performing προσκυνέω, what are they doing? Are they attending “religious services”? Are they praying or singing praises to God? Are they conducting liturgy? To be clear, this investigation is not an attempt to determine the meaning of the English word ‘worship’ but rather to determine the meaning of the NT Greek words that are commonly or occasionally translated as “worship.”

When NT writers used the term προσκυνέω in the first century, the word was already a commonly used term in the writers’ Jewish culture. In the Septuagint, προσκυνέω appears in its various forms 204 times. Since the Septuagint was “the Bible of the early church and of Judaism until the late first century A.D.,” the extensive use of

100 percent, RSV (1946) = 87 percent, NEB (1961) = 61 percent, NAB (1970) = 62 percent, NIV (1973) = 84 percent, NRSV (1990) = 85 percent, ESV = 85 percent.

⁶⁴⁴ These seventy occurrences include both nouns and verbs, such as “worship,” “worshipped,” “worshiping,” or “worshiper.” In the NASB, προσκυνέω is the Greek word in fifty-three of the seventy references to the English word ‘worship’ (76 percent of the time).

προσκυνέω in the LXX provides us with abundant background as to how the NT writers and first-century Jews were likely to understand the term.⁶⁴⁵

חזה in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word חזה provides helpful background for determining the meaning of προσκυνέω. The Septuagint translators used the Greek word προσκυνέω to translate every occurrence of the Hebrew word חזה.⁶⁴⁶ Of the 170 times that חזה is found in the OT, the LXX translates it as προσκυνέω 165 times. In the five times that חזה is not translated with προσκυνέω, it appears that the LXX was using a Hebrew text that lacked חזה.⁶⁴⁷ The important point is that the Septuagint translators identified προσκυνέω as the proper word to use every time they translated חזה.

So, what does חזה mean? Its usage throughout the OT confirms that it means to “prostrate oneself.” The Brown Driver Briggs (BDB) Hebrew lexicon is correct when it says that the sole meaning of חזה is to “bow down, prostrate oneself.” BDB rightly adds that the action is performed in three settings: before a monarch or superior, before God,

⁶⁴⁵ Porter, “Septuagint/Greek Old Testament,” 1099.

⁶⁴⁶ Historically, קִשְׁתָּהּ had been seen as emerging from the root of שָׁחָה. This is syntactically difficult since the hithpalel for שָׁחָה should not be קִשְׁתָּהּ. With the discovery of a new Ugaritic verb, scholars now commonly see the root as חָזָה, which has the same meaning as שָׁחָה. See H. D. Preuss, “חזה, etc.” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 4:249; and Edwin Yamauchi, “חזה,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, and Bruce Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:267.

⁶⁴⁷ The five times when חזה is left untranslated in the LXX are Jo 5:14; 1 Sm 1:28; 1 Kgs 11:33; Is 36:7; Jer 7:2. In Is 60:14, חזה is translated as προσκυνέω, but only in a variant reading of the LXX.

and before other gods.⁶⁴⁸ BDB also rightly avoids saying that “worship” is one of the possible meanings of *חזה*. Instead, one of the possible settings where this prostration occurs is “before God,” which the BDB considers to be a “worship” setting. In Matthew Bowen’s recent study of *חזה* and *προσκυνέω*, he concludes that “the concrete act of proskynesis is always denoted” in the 170 times when *חזה* is found in the OT.⁶⁴⁹ The term ‘proskynesis,’ not found in standard English dictionaries, is the transliterated term that scholars often give to the physical gesture of prostration depicted by *προσκυνέω*.⁶⁵⁰ Since *προσκυνέω* is the only word that the Septuagint translators used to translate *חזה*, it is reasonable to conclude that they understood that the meaning of *προσκυνέω* was also to bow down and prostrate oneself.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁸ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, “שחז,” *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 1005. See also Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, “שחז,” *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 959; Yamauchi, “חזה,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:268.

⁶⁴⁹ Matthew L. Bowen, “‘They Came and Held Him by the Feet and Worshipped Him’: Proskynesis Before Jesus in its Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Context,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5 (2013): 69. Bowen’s analysis does not include the OT apocrypha.

⁶⁵⁰ See Alexander P. Kazhdan, ed., “Proskynesis,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3:1738-39. Describing the act through 1,100 years of Byzantine culture (ca. 300 – 1400 A.D.), the *ODB* says, “The physical act ranged from full prostration to a genuflection, a bow, or a simple greeting and concretized the relative positions of performer and beneficiary within a hierarchical order.” See also Takuji Abe, “Proskynēsis: From a Persian Court Protocol to a Greek Religious Practice,” *Tekmeria* 14 (2018): 2. Lozano provides many examples of the gesture in Greco-Roman literature, in Ray M. Lozano, *The Proskynesis of Jesus in the New Testament: A Study on the Significance of Jesus as an Object of “Proskuneo” in the New Testament Writings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2020), 13-20.

⁶⁵¹ Bowen identifies the broad awareness of prostration in ancient Egypt, in the daily temple liturgy of Karnak, in Akkadian literature, in the Gilgamesh Epic, in the El-

The act of religious prostration, prominently addressed in the Decalogue, was such a focal point of Israelite behavior that the rabbis reflected on the proper way to perform the gesture.

Prostrating, how is it done? After he raises his head from bowing the fifth bow, he sits on the ground and falls upon his face to the ground The bowing referred to everywhere is upon the knees. The Qeda bow is upon the nose. Prostration is done with the hands and legs/feet stretched out until you find yourself placed upon the ground.”⁶⁵²

This statement was likely recorded around 1200 A.D. But similar statements can be found as early as 200 A.D.: “Hishtaḥava’a, this is prostrating oneself while spreading one’s arms and legs in total submission.”⁶⁵³ It is important to note that the exact details of the gesture of προσκυνέω may vary in different cultures and times.⁶⁵⁴ But the common details of typical prostration in Scripture place the prostrating person on his knees with his face to the ground.

The Directional Component of Προσκυνέω

The action of προσκυνέω has an inherent directional component that shows that the act is directed “to” or “toward” the person or deity being honored (the “prostratee”).

Amarna letters, and in Sumerian literature where the act is described as “scraping the earth (with one’s nose).” See Bowen, “Proskynesis Before Jesus in its Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Context,” 66-68.

⁶⁵² Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah, Prayer and the Priestly Blessing* 5:13 (ca. 1200 A.D.).

⁶⁵³ Mishnah *Shevuot* 16b:9 (ca. 190 – 230 A.D.). See also Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah, Mishnah *Chizkuni* Exodus 23:24:1, Mishnah *Chizkuni* Exodus 20:5:1 (13th century), and Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, Mishnah *Tur HaAroch*, Exodus 20:5:1 (c. 1269 – 1343 A.D.).

⁶⁵⁴ See the analysis of ancient texts in Abe, “Proskynēsis,” 1-45.

The English word “worship” does not contain a directional component. The directional element of προσκυνέω is accomplished by two factors. First, the word’s prefix, the preposition πρὸς, commonly carries the idea of “to” or “toward.”⁶⁵⁵ Second, προσκυνέω commonly takes the dative case,⁶⁵⁶ which can also connote “to” or “toward.”⁶⁵⁷ The prefix προσ- is frequently found in many compound words in the NT, and as Harris notes, “Most of the 64 NT compounds involving πρὸς express some sense of direction.”⁶⁵⁸ The word προσκυνέω thus encompasses the idea that prostration is performed in front of its intended recipient, with the prostrator’s body pointing “toward” the receiver of the action.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁵ This statement may appear to be an example of a root fallacy, but as Carson acknowledges, “The meaning of a word *may* reflect the meanings of its component parts,” (emphasis original) in D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 32. See also Harris, *Prepositions and Theology*, 189; Liddell and Scott, “πρὸς,” *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1496-99; BDAG, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 873-75.

⁶⁵⁶ In the Hebrew text, ל commonly follows הוה, indicating that the action of הוה is performed “to” or “toward” the honored one. In these 153 cases, the LXX translates הוה with προσκυνέω followed by a dative indirect object 143 times.

⁶⁵⁷ See KMP, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek*, 122-23; F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), 100.

⁶⁵⁸ Harris, *Prepositions and Theology*, 197. He cites the examples of προστρέχω (run up to), προσεύχομαι (pray to), προσλαλέω (speak to), προσκαρτερέω (hold fast to, be devoted to).

⁶⁵⁹ See Ez 8:16-18. The “greatest abomination” was when twenty-five men entered the temple and prostrated with their backs to the temple and their faces toward the sun.

It has often been stated that προσκυνέω literally means “to kiss toward,” noting that the προσ- prefix means “toward” and that the κυνέω stem means “to kiss.”⁶⁶⁰ But this notion has several problems. Chris Jack (2010) says that it is a “prevailing myth that *proskuneo* has something to do with ‘kissing’.”⁶⁶¹ Jack admits that there is a possible ancient etymological connection between προσκυνέω and “kiss toward.” However, he says, the notion that the “root meaning” of προσκυνέω is “to kiss toward” is an example of a root fallacy as identified by James Barr in 1961.⁶⁶² Jack rightly notes that none of the examples of προσκυνέω in the NT or the LXX refers “either explicitly or implicitly” to kissing.⁶⁶³ He further says that “there is nothing in the etymology or early usage of קוה that as much as hints at kissing.”⁶⁶⁴ Greeven, too, expresses doubts about the idea that

⁶⁶⁰ For example, see BDAG, “προσκυνέω,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 882; Silva, ed., “προσκυνέω,” *NIDNTTE*, 4:150; and Horst’s examination of kissing in ancient Greek, Oriental, and Jewish religious practice in Johannes Horst, *Proskynein: Zur Anbetung im Urchristentum nach ihrer religionsgeschichtlichen Eigenart* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1932), 44-66.

⁶⁶¹ Chris Jack, “The *Proskuneo* Myth: When a Kiss Is Not a Kiss,” in *In Praise of Worship: An Exploration of Text and Practice*, eds. David J. Cohen and Michael Parsons (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 84-97. Jack’s conclusions essentially concur with that of Marti, who refers to earlier conclusions by Bolkestein and by Nock, in Berthe M. Marti, “Proskynesis and Adorare,” *Language* 12:4 (1936): 272-82.

⁶⁶² Jack, “The *Proskuneo* Myth,” 89.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

kissing is part of προσκυνέω.⁶⁶⁵ Both Jack and Greeven repeatedly point to the idea that προσκυνέω refers to the gesture of prostration.⁶⁶⁶

The Problems with “Worship”

Translating προσκυνέω as “worship” is problematic for several reasons. First, προσκυνέω and ἵκη commonly denote a specific observable bodily gesture; the modern English term ‘worship’ does not. Second, if προσκυνέω is translated as “worship,” the English reader does not know exactly what the person is doing. But if it is translated as “prostrate,” the English reader understands. Third, the modern English perception of “worship” connotes common (church) activities such as singing, praying, or conducting liturgy. However, there is no evidence that ἵκη or προσκυνέω connotes any of these activities. Prayer and prostration may appear to be similar activities, but the connection is only coincidental.⁶⁶⁷ In all 204 cases of προσκυνέω in the LXX and in all 61 cases of προσκυνέω in the NT, praying is not a part of the action performed.⁶⁶⁸ Singing appears in

⁶⁶⁵ Heinrich Greeven, “προσκυνέω, προσκυνητής,” *TDNT*, Gerhard Friedrich, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:759.

⁶⁶⁶ Jack, “The *Proskuneo* Myth,” 91-93; Greeven, “προσκυνέω, προσκυνητής,” *TDNT*, 6:764. Greeven has greater confidence that προσκυνέω refers to prostration in the LXX, but in the NT, he says that prostration may take a lesser role in the word’s meaning.

⁶⁶⁷ Delling says, “Proskynesis is basically a sign of respect, not a posture of prayer” (Delling, *Worship in the NT*, 105; cf. Greeven, “προσκυνέω,” *TDNT*, 6:765). The *NIDNTTE* claims that, in the book of Revelation, “προσκυνέω comes to denote in particular the prayer of adoration,” but it offers no evidence (Silva, ed., “προσκυνέω,” *NIDNTTE*, 4:152).

⁶⁶⁸ See, for example, Is 44:17; 2 Chr 7:3; Sir 50:17-19.

the context of only four verses where προσκυνέω appears in the LXX and the NT, but in each case, the singing and the prostration are distinct and separate actions.⁶⁶⁹

While it is undisputed that the core meaning of חוה (and προσκυνέω) is “to prostrate oneself,” most English Bibles today rarely, if ever, translate חוה as “prostrate.” The ESV, for example, translates חוה as “worship” eighty-two times (48 percent of the time), as “bow,” “bow down,” or “fall down” sixty-six times (39 percent), “pay homage” nineteen times (11 percent), “prostrate” twice (1 percent),⁶⁷⁰ and “implore” once (.6 percent).⁶⁷¹ A typical approach by modern English Bibles is to translate חוה as “bow down” when the act is performed in front of people and as “worship” when the act is performed in front of deity. Yet, the contexts of most of these verses clearly indicate that חוה connotes a physical movement of the body wherever the action is performed, whether in front of deity or in front of people and whether in a temple or on a road. Even when the context does not expressly indicate prostration, the translation of “prostrate” still fits the setting of the sentence.

For example, there are sixty-three verses in the OT and OT apocrypha and fifteen verses in the NT that make it clear that the action of חוה (or προσκυνέω in the LXX and

⁶⁶⁹ The four are: 2 Chr 29:28; Ps 65:4 LXX; 137:1-2 LXX; Sir 50:17-18.

⁶⁷⁰ The two ESV cases of “prostrate” are Gn 43:28 and Is 49:7. Some versions translate חוה and προσκυνέω as “prostrate” even fewer times, and some more: KJV (0), ASV (0), RSV (1), NIV (7), NRSV (9), NASB (15), CJB (71). The CJB (Complete Jewish Bible) seeks to “restore the original and essential ‘Jewishness’ to God’s word.” See *The Complete Jewish Study Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), xvii.

⁶⁷¹ The one case of “implore” is 1 Sa 2:36: “And everyone who is left in your house shall come to implore him (προσκυνεῖν αὐτῷ) for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread ...” A translation of “to prostrate to him” is still legitimate, if the reader understands that prostrating is often done to receive favor.

NT) is prostration on the ground.⁶⁷² Prostration is clear in these verses because the context adds language that describes the person who is performing הוה as falling down,⁶⁷³ stooping/kneeling,⁶⁷⁴ being “on the ground,”⁶⁷⁵ “on their face,”⁶⁷⁶ or “at the feet”⁶⁷⁷ of the honored one. About half of these OT verses describes הוה before deity, and half describes הוה before people.⁶⁷⁸ In the NT, nine of the verses describe προσκυνέω before

⁶⁷² More than 100 other verses also support the idea that הוה (or προσκυνέω) equals prostration, but the context is not as obvious as in these sixty-three verses.

⁶⁷³ Πίπτω or προσπίπτω accompanies προσκυνέω in Ru 2:10; 1 Sm 20:41; 25:23; 2 Sm 1:2; 9:6; 14:4, 22, 33; 2 Kgs 4:37; 2 Chr 7:3; 20:18; 29:28; Jb 1:20; Ps 21:30 LXX; Ps 94:6 LXX; Dn 2:46; 3:5, 6, 10, 11, 15; Mt 2:11; 4:9; 18:26; Acts 10:25; 1 Cor 14:25; Rv 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4, 10; Rv 22:8.

⁶⁷⁴ Stooping (κύπτω) appears with προσκυνέω in Gn 43:28; Ex 4:31; 12:27; 34:8; Nm 22:31; 1 Sm 24:9 LXX; 1 Sm 28:14; 1 Kgs 1:16, 31; 2 Chr 20:18; Is 46:6; 2 Esd 18:6. Similarly, προσκυνέω is accompanied with κάμπω “bending the knee” in 1 Chr 29:20 and 2 Chr 29:29, or ὀκλάζω “kneeling” in 1 Kgs 19:18. The involvement of the “knees” (γόνατα) is specifically mentioned in Gn 48:12; 1 Kgs 19:18; 1 Chr 29:20; Mk 15:19.

⁶⁷⁵ “Upon the ground” (ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν) is found twenty-nine times with προσκυνέω (Gn 18:2; 19:1; 24:52; 33:3; 37:10; 42:6; 43:26; 48:12; Ex 34:8; Ru 2:10; 1 Sm 24:9 LXX; 25:23, 41; 28:14; 2 Sm 1:2; 14:4, 22, 33; 18:28; 24:20; 1 Kgs 1:23, 31; 2 Kgs 2:15; 4:37; 1 Chr 21:21; 2 Chr 7:3; 2 Esd 18:6 LXX (Neh 8:6); Ps 21:30 LXX; Is 49:23). A similar phrase is “on the pavement” (ἐπὶ τὸ λιθόστρωτον) in 2 Chr 7:3 or “on the ground” (χαμαί) in Dn 2:46; Jb 1:20.

⁶⁷⁶ Προσκυνέω on the face (πρόσωπον) is found in Gn 19:1; 42:6; 43:26; 48:12; Ru 2:10; 1 Sm 20:41; 24:9 LXX; 25:23, 41; 28:14; 2 Sm 9:6; 14:4, 22, 33; 18:28; 24:20; 1 Kgs 1:31; 2 Chr 7:3; 2 Chr 20:18; 2 Esd 18:6 LXX (Neh 8:6); Dn 2:46; 1 Cor 14:25; Rv 7:11; 11:16. Prostrating “to the face” of the honoree is found in 2 Sm 14:33; 1 Kgs 1:23; 1 Chr 16:29; 21:21; Ps 45:12; Is 49:23; Ez 8:16.

⁶⁷⁷ Ποδῶν (feet) or the footstool (ὕποπόδιον) accompany προσκυνέω in 2 Kgs 4:37; Ps 98:5 LXX; 131:7 LXX; Is 49:23; Jdt 14:7; Mt 28:9; Acts 10:25; Rv 3:9; 19:10; 22:8.

⁶⁷⁸ Of these sixty-three verses, προσκυνέω is performed before a person in thirty verses, before deity in thirty-two verses (eight of these are before an idol or a false god),

deity (and Jesus), while six describe προσκυνέω before people.⁶⁷⁹ Since the contexts of all these verses are similar, and the action of prostration is clear, one would think that English translations would consistently translate הָרַח or προσκυνέω as “prostrate” in both settings. But they do not.

When English versions translate προσκυνέω with “worship,” “pay homage,” or “do obeisance,” they add confusion and ambiguity when the idea of prostration would have been clear. When, for example, an English Bible says that someone “worshiped,” what did that person do? Did they offer a prayer or a song? Did they feel a sense of reverence? When a Bible verse says that someone “paid homage,” what exactly constitutes “homage”? Did the person present a gift? Did they offer a sacrifice? Did they say certain words? The reader does not know. Similarly, when an English Bible says that someone “did obeisance,” what exactly did that person do? The reader is left in the dark, especially because “obeisance” is not a common word in American culture. The ambiguity of “worship,” “homage,” and “obeisance” obscures the writer’s intended meaning. However, if an English Bible says that someone “prostrated” to a person or deity, the reader has a clearer idea of what happened. The translator does not need to inject an interpretation of whether the prostrator was feeling “worship,” “homage,”

and before angels in two verses. In one verse (1 Chr 29:20), the same gesture of προσκυνέω is performed before man and God: κάμψαντες τὰ γόνατα προσεκύνησαν τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ.

⁶⁷⁹ These verses clearly describe προσκυνέω before deity or Jesus (Mt 2:11; 4:9; 28:9; 1 Cor 14:25; Rv 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4), and these clearly describe προσκυνέω before humans (Mt 18:26; Mk 15:19—soldiers mockingly prostrate before Jesus; Acts 10:25; Rv 3:9; 19:10; 22:8).

“respect,” or “gratitude.” The dramatic and submissive act of prostration conveys abundant meaning by itself.

An analysis of the 204 occurrences of προσκυνέω in the LXX⁶⁸⁰ reveals that the word can be translated with the English word “prostrate” in every case except one, where it means “to submit,” which is a metaphorical use of the word.⁶⁸¹ In the NT, προσκυνέω can also be translated as “prostrate” in every case. When προσκυνέω is used in temple contexts (e.g., Jn 4:20-24; Acts 8:27), it connotes prostration as an obligatory ritual gesture performed before the deity.

Prostration in a Temple in the OT

When προσκυνέω occurs in a temple or shrine, modern English ears are accustomed to hearing the familiar translation of “worship.” However, it is clear in the LXX that temple προσκυνέω was also prostration. For example, at the dedication of Solomon’s temple, all the people of Israel saw fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple. After they fell down (ἔπεσον) on their faces (ἐπὶ πρόσωπον) on the ground (ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν) on the pavement (ἐπὶ τὸ λιθόστρωτον), they prostrated to the Lord (προσεκύνησαν ... τῷ κυρίῳ, 2 Chr 7:3). Here, the additional descriptive terms of “falling down,” “on their faces,” “on the ground,” and “on the pavement,” make it clear that προσεκύνησαν means “they prostrated.” Throughout the LXX, more than two dozen examples of προσκυνέω in a temple include additional terminology that clearly indicates

⁶⁸⁰ The canonical OT contains 181, and the OT Apocrypha has twenty-three.

⁶⁸¹ The one metaphorical use of προσκυνέω is in 4 Mc 5:12, where the NRSV translates προσκυνήσας μου τὴν φιλόανθρωπον παρηγορίαν as “honoring my humane advice.”

prostration.⁶⁸² Such terms include stooping or bowing (κύπτω) prior to prostration,⁶⁸³ falling down (πίπτω, προσπίπτω, προπίπτω) prior to prostration,⁶⁸⁴ performing the act “in front of” or “before” (ἐνώπιον, ἔναντι, ἐναντίον, κατέναντι) the deity,⁶⁸⁵ falling on the “face” (πρόσωπον)⁶⁸⁶ or “knees” (γόνατα),⁶⁸⁷ and falling at the “feet” (ποδοί) of the deity.⁶⁸⁸ All these contexts support the idea that people went to the temple to perform their obligatory ritual prostration to their deity.

Ezekiel’s vision of the temple (Ez 46:2-9) supports the idea that prostration was the obligatory gesture performed by anyone who entered the temple. Ezekiel identifies the specific temple gate where people were to perform their prostration “before the Lord” (ἐναντίον κυρίου, 46:3, 9) on Sabbaths, new moons, and during the feasts. After performing their compulsory prostration, they then exited by another gate (46:9).

⁶⁸² See temple prostration in 2 Kgs 5:18; 18:22; 1 Chr 16:29-30; 29:20; 2 Chr 7:3; 20:18; 29:29-30; 32:12; 2 Esd 18:6 (Neh 8:6); Ps 5:8; 94:6; 95:8-9; 131:7; 137:2 (all in LXX); Is 27:13; 66:23; Jer 33:2 LXX; Ez 8:16; 46:2, 3, 9; Jdt 16:18; 1 Mc 4:55; Zec 14:16-17; cf. Jn 4:21, 23, 24; 12:20; Acts 7:43; 8:27; 24:11; Rv 11:1.

⁶⁸³ 1 Chr 29:20; 2 Chr 20:18; 29:29; 2 Esd 18:6 LXX.

⁶⁸⁴ 2 Chr 7:3; 20:18; 29:30; Ps 94:6 LXX.

⁶⁸⁵ 2 Chr 20:18; 32:12; Ps 5:8; 94:6 LXX; 137:2 LXX; Is 66:23; Ez 46:3, 9.

⁶⁸⁶ 2 Chr 7:3; 20:18; cf. 1 Chr 16:29.

⁶⁸⁷ 1 Chr 29:20; 2 Esd 18:6 LXX.

⁶⁸⁸ Ps 131:7 LXX “Let us enter his dwelling place; let us prostrate toward the place where his feet stand” (προσκυνήσομεν εἰς τὸν τόπον οὗ ἔστησαν οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ). Translation by author.

Dt 16:16 may provide the foundational principle for this visit to the temple:

“Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God⁶⁸⁹ in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed.” “The place which He chooses” is the temple.⁶⁹⁰ In these three visits, when a Jewish male appeared “before the Lord” at the temple, there is only one appropriate way for him to present himself in the presence of God: prostration. The second requirement of this visit is to not be “empty-handed,” but to have an offering or sacrifice to present to Yahweh.⁶⁹¹

This same obligatory act of prostrating in a temple was also customary for pagans and idolaters.⁶⁹² 2 Kgs 19:37 depicts an example of prostration in an idol’s temple: “As Sennacherib was prostrating (προσκυνοῦντος) in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword.”⁶⁹³ The Hebrew reader knows that

⁶⁸⁹ Literally, “before the face of the Lord your God” (לפני יהוה אלהיך). See also Ex 23:14-17; 34:23-24; Dt 31:11.

⁶⁹⁰ Since the temple had not yet been built, it is described in Deuteronomy as “the place which He chooses.” That the temple is this “place” is made clear in Dt 12:5, 11, 14, 21. It was “the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell,” God’s dwelling place, and Jews were required to bring all their offerings and sacrifices to this place (Dt 12:11).

⁶⁹¹ See Mi 6:6: “With what shall I come to the Lord and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves?”

⁶⁹² For examples of pagans bowing down and prostrating in a temple, see 2 Kgs 5:18; 19:37; Is 37:38; Ez 8:16-17; cf. Acts 7:43. In addition, the many warnings against prostrating and sacrificing (προσκυνέω and λατρεύω/δουλεύω/θύω) to foreign gods are likely references to temple activities (cf. Ex 20:5, 23:24; Dt 4:19; 5:9; 8:19; 11:16; 17:3; 29:25 LXX; 30:17).

⁶⁹³ Translation by author.

prostration is done with the head down, making Sennacherib an easy target for the sword of Adrammelech and Sharezer. The verse does not need to add that he was “on his face” or “on the ground.” 2 Kgs 5:18 is similar. When Naaman’s master prostrates, he leans on the arm of Naaman, who must also prostrate to assist his (probably elderly) master. Naaman knows that prostrating to a foreign god is forbidden in Israel; so he pleads for mercy from the prophet Elisha.

Another reason why προσκυνέω in a temple should be viewed as prostration stems from the word’s function as a greeting. Several ancient sources demonstrate that προσκυνέω is a particular kind of greeting,⁶⁹⁴ and this includes the compulsory greeting to one’s god when entering that god’s dwelling place (temple). Around 430 BC, Herodotus described the different ways that Persians greet one another. If two equals greet one another, they kiss each other on the lips. If there is a slight difference in rank, the cheek is kissed. But if the difference in rank is great, the person of lower stature falls toward the other and prostrates (προσπίπτων προσκυνέει τὸν ἕτερον).⁶⁹⁵ Consequently, Hans Windisch in *TDNT* says that προσκυνέω is a “particularly respectful form of ἀσπασμός (greeting).”⁶⁹⁶ Regardless of whether the act is performed before humans, God, or any deity, prostration is still the proper way to come into the presence of—and greet—the honored one. In ancient Middle Eastern culture, temples were viewed as the

⁶⁹⁴ Prostration greetings that are outside of a temple context are: Gn 19:1; 33:3; 42:6; 43:26; 1 Sm 20:41; 24:9 LXX; 25:23, 41; 2 Sm 1:2; 9:6; 14:4, 33; 18:28; 24:20; 1 Kgs 1:16, 23; 2 Kgs 2:15; 4:37; 1 Chr 21:21; Jdt 10:23; Mt 2:11; Acts 10:25.

⁶⁹⁵ Herodotus, *Histories*, 134.

⁶⁹⁶ Hans Windisch, “ἀσπάζομαι, etc.,” *TDNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:498.

dwelling place of the deity.⁶⁹⁷ When one enters the deity's dwelling place, as Ezekiel reports, the only proper gesture is προσκυνέω, that is, prostration (Ez 46:2-9).

Seeing προσκυνέω as a greeting is supported by its many uses with the terms “come” and “before.” Prior to greeting an honored person, one must first “come” into their presence.⁶⁹⁸ Then, in the presence of the honored one, the prostrator formally greets and demonstrates submission by prostrating “before” the honoree. “Come,” which is used with προσκυνέω twenty-three times in the LXX and fifteen times in the NT, is frequently used with prostration to people⁶⁹⁹ as well as prostration to God in a temple.⁷⁰⁰ The word “before” is used similarly with προσκυνέω, since the gesture of prostration must be done

⁶⁹⁷ In the OT, the temple was frequently called the “dwelling place of God” (Ex 15:17; 25:8; 29:42-45; Dt 12:5, 7, 11; 2 Sm 7:5-7; 1 Kgs 6:13; 8:13; 39; 1 Chr 17:3ff.; 23:25; 2 Chr 2:3; 6:1; 36:15; Ps 15:1; 27:4; 74:7; 76:2; Jl 3:17; Zec 8:3; Mt 23:21; et al.) and the “house of the Lord” (1 Kgs 6:1; 1 Chr 6:32; 2 Chr 36:14; Ezr 1:5; 6:3-8ff.; Ps 116:19; Jer 27:18; Ez 11:1; et al.).

⁶⁹⁸ Various verbs are used to indicate the approach, such as ἔρχομαι (Gn 37:10; 42:6; 2 Kgs 2:15; Jer 33:2 LXX; Mt 2:2, 8, 11; 9:18; 15:25; Acts 8:27), εἰσερχομαι or εἰσπορεύομαι (2 Sm 1:2; 14:4, 33; 1 Kgs 1:23; 2:13 LXX; 2 Kgs 4:37; 5:18; 2 Chr 24:18; Ps 5:8 LXX; Ps 95:8-9 LXX; Ps 132:7 LXX; Ez 46:2, 9), προσέρχομαι (Mt 8:2; 20:20; 28:9), ἤκω (Ps 85:9 LXX; Is 66:23; Rv 3:9; 15:4), ἐξέρχομαι (2 Sm 24:20; 1 Chr 21:21), ἐγγίζω or προσεγγίζω (Gn 33:7; 2 Sm 15:5). Other verbs that generate the similar idea are τρέχω (Mk 5:6), ἀναβαίνω (Jn 12:20; Acts 24:11), and possibly συναντάω (Acts 10:25).

⁶⁹⁹ The idea of “coming” and prostrating before people is found in Gn 33:7 (2); 37:10; 42:6; 2 Sm 1:2; 14:4, 33; 15:5; 24:20; 1 Kgs 1:23; 2:13 LXX; 2 Kgs 2:15; 4:37; 5:18; 1 Chr 21:21; 2 Chr 24:18; Jer 33:2 LXX; Mt 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 20:20; Mk 5:6; Rv 3:9.

⁷⁰⁰ The idea of “coming” (or “going”) and prostrating before God in a temple is found in Ps 5:8 LXX (εἰσερχομαι); Ps 85:9 LXX; Ps 95:9 LXX; Ps 131:7 LXX; Is 66:23; Ez 46:2, 9; Jn 12:20; Acts 8:27; 24:11; Jn 12:20; Acts 24:11; cf. Rv 15:4.

“in front of” the one being honored by this ancient greeting custom.⁷⁰¹ The [prostrate + before] construction, which is found with προσκυνέω twenty-three times in the LXX and eight times in the NT, is used before people⁷⁰² or deity in a temple.⁷⁰³ In these “before” contexts, English translations are inconsistent on how they translate προσκυνέω. When it is done “before” a person, English versions commonly say, “bow down.” But when it is done “before” God in a temple, English Bibles commonly translate προσκυνέω as “worship.” Yet, the Greek and the Hebrew show no distinction between the two acts.

Prostration in a Temple in the NT

The idea that prostration (προσκυνέω) was obligatory in a temple continues in the NT. However, unlike the OT, the NT passages do not frequently contain additional explanatory words (like “fall” and “on the ground”) that make it clear that prostration is the intended meaning. The NT contains five passages that use προσκυνέω to describe—or perhaps summarize—the reason for going to the temple.⁷⁰⁴ While some NT scholars have

⁷⁰¹ To connote the idea of “before,” the LXX uses terms such as ἐνώπιον, ἔναντι, ἐναντίον, or κατέναντι (Gn 23:12; Dt 26:10; 1 Sm 25:23; 2 Kgs 18:22; 2 Chr 20:18; 25:14; 32:12; Ps 21:28 LXX; Ps 85:9 LXX; Ps 94:6 LXX; Is 66:23; Ez 46:3, 9; Dn 3:7; Lk 4:7; Rv 3:9; 4:10; 7:11; 11:16; 15:4), πρὸς (Ex 11:8; 2 Sm 1:2; 9:6; 14:4, 33; 1 Kgs 2:13 LXX; Ps 5:8 LXX; Ps 137:2 LXX; Ez 8:16), or ἔμπροσθεν (Rv 19:10; 22:8).

⁷⁰² Prostration is found “before” people in Gn 23:12; Ex 11:8; 1 Sm 25:23; 2 Sm 1:2; 9:6; 14:4, 33; 1 Kgs 2:13 LXX; Rv 3:9; and before the angel in Rv 19:10 and 22:8.

⁷⁰³ Prostration is found “before” deity in a temple in Dt 26:10; 2 Kgs 18:22; 2 Chr 20:18; 25:14 (gods); 32:12; Ps 21:28 LXX; Ps 5:8 LXX; Ps 85:9 LXX; Ps 94:6 LXX; Ps 137:2 LXX (πρὸς); Is 66:23; Ez 8:16; 46:3, 9; Dn 3:7; Rv 4:10; 7:11; 11:16; cf. Rv 15:4.

⁷⁰⁴ The NT refers to προσκυνέω in a temple in these verses: Jn 4:20-24 (Gerizim vs. Jerusalem); 12:20 (Greeks at the feast); Acts 8:27 (the Ethiopian eunuch at Jerusalem); 24:11 (Paul in Jerusalem); Rv 11:1 (the heavenly temple).

alleged that προσκυνέω in these passages refers to “participation in temple worship,”⁷⁰⁵ the evidence indicates otherwise.

Rv 11:1 is a good example that demonstrates how προσκυνέω in a temple context refers to prostration. Throughout Revelation, those who surround God on the throne (a likely temple reference) are described five times as “falling down” (πίπτω) and performing προσκυνέω,⁷⁰⁶ which is the standard way of describing prostration throughout the LXX and NT. As John explains a few verses later, in Rv 11:16, “The twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God” (προσεκύνησαν τῷ θεῷ). Here, the text includes “fell,” “on their faces,” and “before God,” which often accompany the idea of prostrating in a temple. So, προσκυνέω in Rv 11:1 should be understood in its classic sense of prostration: “measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who prostrate in it.” This understanding is consistent with the common picture of temple prostration throughout the LXX.

Consequently, when a NT writer refers to coming to Jerusalem to perform προσκυνέω, it is consistent to presume that that he is referring to prostrating before God in the temple. In opposition to the assessment of major Greek-English lexicons⁷⁰⁷ and the

⁷⁰⁵ For example, Nützel claims that προσκυνέω is a technical term for participation in temple worship and for Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in Johannes M. Nützel, “προσκυνέω,” *EDNT*, 3:174.

⁷⁰⁶ In Revelation, πίπτω and προσκυνέω appear together before the throne in Rv 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4; cf. 5:8; 19:10; 22:8-9. Two of these verses specifically mention the prostration indicators that they are “on their faces” (ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν, Rv 7:11; 11:16), while four verses mention that they are “before” the throne (ἐνώπιον, Rv 4:10; 7:11; 11:16; 15:4; cf. Rv 3:9; 4:4-5; 5:8; 7:9, 15; 8:2-4; 9:13; 11:4; 14:3; 20:12).

⁷⁰⁷ In addition to the *EDNT*, Greeven also says that Jn 4:20-24, Jn 12:20, Acts 8:27, and Acts 24:11 represent “the technical use of the word for the pilgrimage of Jews

major English translations,⁷⁰⁸ the evidence supports the idea that the person is “prostrating,” not “worshipping” (unless the reader understands that “worshipping” connotes “prostrating”). The *NIDNTTE* says that, in these five verses, “this physical sense (of prostration) has clearly receded so that the verb means simply ‘to worship’.”⁷⁰⁹ The additional terminology of falling and being on the ground may have receded, but it strongly appears that the physical sense of prostration remains intact in these verses. As noted earlier, of the 265 occurrences of προσκυνέω in the LXX and the NT, the term does not refer to the temple activities of sacrificing, prayer, singing, or the conducting of liturgy.⁷¹⁰ The vast weight of evidence indicates that these non-prostration temple activities are separate events that are not included within the semantic range of προσκυνέω.

The Two Fundamental Religious Obligations

In the LXX, προσκυνέω and λατρεύω are frequently understood to be the two fundamental obligatory activities performed for one’s god, usually in a temple. For Jews, these two duties were made clear in Dt 16:16, which required every male Jew to “appear before the Lord” and to bring an appropriate offering or sacrifice. As the second commandment of the Decalogue mandates, “You shall not prostrate to or serve sacrifices

to Jerusalem,” in Greeven, *TDNT*, 6:764. However, there is no clear evidence that προσκυνέω connotes a “pilgrimage” or travel of any kind.

⁷⁰⁸ All these English versions translate προσκυνέω in these verses as “worship”: KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NKJV, NIV, CSB, HCSB.

⁷⁰⁹ Silva, ed., *NIDNTTE*, 4:152.

⁷¹⁰ Gn 22:5 is a possible exception, but the context of this verse is the pre-temple days of Abraham.

to” idols or other gods (οὐ προσκυνήσεις αὐτοῖς οὐδὲ μὴ λατρεύσης αὐτοῖς, Ex 20:5).⁷¹¹

Jesus referred to this commandment when he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness:

“You shall prostrate to the Lord your God and to Him alone you shall sacrifice” (κύριον τὸν θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις, Mt 4:10 and Lk 4:8). 2 Kgs

17:36 expresses the mandate succinctly: “To Him you shall prostrate, and to him you

shall sacrifice” (αὐτῷ προσκυνήσετε καὶ αὐτῷ θύσετε).⁷¹² A long list of [προσκυνέω +

λατρεύω] verses⁷¹³ supports the idea that the customary religious practice was to enter the presence of the deity (usually in a temple), prostrate, and then offer sacrifice.⁷¹⁴ For

example, when the wise men (the magi) from the East find the baby Jesus in Bethlehem, they fall to the ground and prostrate (προσκυνέω), and then they offer gifts (Mt 2:11).

The Second Commandment demands that these two activities must not be performed for any other gods.

⁷¹¹ Translation by author. As has been defended by H. Strathmann, the Greek λατρεύω and the Hebrew לָבַד, in such contexts, refer to the concept of serving the deity with sacrifice. See H. Strathmann, “λατρεύω, λατρεία,” *TDNT*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:60-61.

⁷¹² Translation by author.

⁷¹³ The two terms are coupled in Ex 20:5, 23:24; Dt 4:19; 5:9; 8:19; 11:16; 17:3; 29:25 LXX; 30:17; Jo 23:7, 16; Jgs 2:11-13, 19; 2 Kgs 17:16, 35, 36; 21:(3), 21; 2 Chr 7:19, 22; Dn 3:12, 14, 18, 28; 6:27 LXX; Mt 4:10; Lk 4:8; cf. Jer 16:11; Acts 7:42-43. Προσκυνέω + δουλεύω (instead of λατρεύω) likely has the same likely meaning (1 Kgs 9:6, 9; 16:31; 22:53; 2 Chr 33:3; Ps 71:11 LXX; Jer 8:2; 13:10; 16:11; 22:9; 25:6; Dn 6:28 LXX), as does προσκυνέω + θύω (1 Sm 1:3; Ex 32:8; 2 Kgs 17:36; 2 Chr 25:14; Jer 1:16; cf. 2 Chr 32:12; 1 Mc 4:53-55; Jdt 16:18).

⁷¹⁴ The English word ‘mosque’ derives from the Arabic *masjid*, which means “place of prostration,” that is, the place where the faithful come to prostrate before their God. See John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38; Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, *The Mosque: The Heart of Submission* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 11, 84-85.

The modern English concept of “worship” is not always a visible act. But prostrating and sacrificing are physical and observable acts, and they are presented as such in the OT and NT. If a Jew engaged in prostrating or sacrificing to another god, these actions could be clearly detected and would be severely punished. Throughout the OT, the strongest possible terms are used to describe the egregiousness of violating the second commandment against prostrating and sacrificing to other gods. Idolatry is called an “abomination”⁷¹⁵ that “provokes” God’s wrath,⁷¹⁶ and “kindles” his anger,⁷¹⁷ which then incurs horrific and severe punishments.⁷¹⁸ The reason for these punishments is clear: “If you ever forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and sacrifice to them and prostrate to them (καὶ λατρεύσης αὐτοῖς καὶ προσκυνήσης αὐτοῖς), I testify against you today that you will surely perish” (Dt 8:19).⁷¹⁹ Because of the centrality of the Decalogue to every Jew, and because of the severity of punishment for violating the second commandment, it is likely that every Jew in the first century was trained from childhood in the fundamental principles of prostrating (προσκυνέω) and sacrificing (λατρεύω/θύω).

⁷¹⁵ Dt 7:25; 27:15; 32:16; 2 Kgs 21:11; Is 44:19; Ez 8:6, 9, 17.

⁷¹⁶ Dt 32:21; 2 Kgs 21:11, 15; 22:17; 2 Chr 34:25; Is 65:3; Jer 7:18; 8:19; 25:6-7; 32:29-32; Ez 8:3, 17; 16:26; Zec 8:14.

⁷¹⁷ Nm 25:3; Dt 6:14; 7:4; 11:17; 29:27-28; 31:16; 32:22; Jo 23:16; Jgs 2:13-14; 3:7; 10:6-7; 2 Kgs 22:17; 23:26; Ps 106:40; Is 10:16; Jer 17:4; 44:3-6.

⁷¹⁸ Dt 6:14; 7:4; 11:17 (no rain or fruit), 26-28 (“a curse”); 29:28; 31:17 (“evils and troubles”); 32:23-24; Jo 23:16; Jgs 2:14; 3:7-8; 10:6-8; 1 Sm 26:19; 2 Kgs 21:12 (“such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle”); 23:27; Ps 106:41-42; Is 10:16; Jer 8:2; 16:4, 13; 17:3-4; 25:33 (“they shall be as dung on the surface of the ground”); 32:29, 31; 44:2, 8; Zec 8:14.

⁷¹⁹ Translation by author.

They learned that prostration, as a religious act, was something given only to Yahweh. In the NT, the fundamental theme of the implications of religious prostration are taken up in the book of Revelation, where the act of προσκυνέω itself becomes the separator between the faithful and those who are cast into the lake of fire (Rv 19:20; 20:4).

Adoration and Prostration

One reason why English Bibles might avoid translating προσκυνέω as “prostrate” may stem from the fact that the gesture of prostration is foreign to most English-speaking cultures, particularly in the United States. However, the religious act of prostration has a long history in Latin versions of the Bible through the word ‘adore.’⁷²⁰ The Latin Vulgate, produced by Jerome ca. 400 AD, used the Latin *adorare*⁷²¹ to translate nearly every occurrence of כָּרַע in the OT and προσκυνέω in the NT.⁷²² So, did *adorare* mean “worship” or “prostrate”? In the time of Jerome, *adorare* likely connoted prostration. In the third century, *adoratio* (the noun form of *adorare*) was understood in the Roman Empire as the act of prostrating oneself.⁷²³ Jerome records that Diocletian ordered that

⁷²⁰ A full study of the etymology of the English word ‘worship’ is outside the scope of this project, but in the 1400s and 1500s, one of the meanings of ‘worship’ was “to bow down to.” See “Worship,” *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 2:3826.

⁷²¹ *Adorare* has been thought to be a compound verb formed from *ad* (toward) + *orare* (to pray/beg). See Marti, “Proskynesis and Adorare,” 279-80.

⁷²² The current version of the Latin Vulgate translates the 170 occurrences of כָּרַע with the Latin term *adorare* 167 times, twice with *incurvare* (to bow down, Gn 27:29b; 33:6), once with *salutare* (to greet, 2 Sm 15:5), and once with *orare* (to pray/beg, 1 Sm 2:36). In the NT, the only time when προσκυνέω was not translated with *adorare* is in Mt 18:26, where προσκυνέω is translated with *orare* (to pray/beg).

⁷²³ See the detailed study by William T. Avery, “The ‘*Adoratio Purpureae*’ and the Importance of the Imperial Purple in the Fourth Century of the Christian Era,” *Memoirs*

people must prostrate to him as a god (*Diocletianus adorari se ut deum*).⁷²⁴ *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, which describes cultural concepts in Europe and the Mediterranean for the period between 250 and 750 AD, describes *adoratio* as a court ceremony in which “the participant performed *proskynesis* (prostration).”⁷²⁵

Centuries later, Leonardo DaVinci’s famous 1481 painting, “The Adoration of the Magi,” depicts the wise men cowering on their knees with their hands on the ground, bowing to the baby Jesus. The 1582 Rheims New Testament translated almost all sixty-one cases of the Latin *adorare* with the English word “adore.”⁷²⁶ For example, when προσκυνέω (*adorare*) appears three times in the story of the magi “falling down” and prostrating before Jesus in Mt 2:1-11, the Rheims NT translates the term each time as “adore.”⁷²⁷ This sixteenth century use of this term in the infancy narrative likely gave rise to the later idea of “adoring” Jesus in English Christmas carols, such as in “O come let us

of the American Academy in Rome 17 (1940): 66-80. Avery says that the simple form of *adoratio* in the third century involved only prostration without kissing the purple robe of the emperor, which he describes as *adoratio purpurae* (p. 71).

⁷²⁴ Jerome, *Chronicon*, Diocletianus 33.11.

⁷²⁵ Muriel Moser, “*adoratio*,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, ed., Oliver Nicholson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1:22. The dictionary’s entry for “*proskynesis*” says, “See *adoratio*” (2:1243).

⁷²⁶ Even as late as 1899, the Douay-Rheims versions translated Jn 4:23 as “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeketh such to adore him.”

⁷²⁷ The original 1582 Rheims NT of Mt 2:11 says, “they found the childe with Marie his mother & faling downe adored him” (sic). The 1582 Rheims NT can be viewed online at <https://archive.org/details/newtestamentofie00engl>.

adore him,”⁷²⁸ “Come, adore on bended knee,”⁷²⁹ and “Christ, by highest heaven adored.”⁷³⁰ But what did the English term ‘adore’ mean? Even as late as the 1880s, “adoration” was understood as “prostration” in the English-speaking world. McClintock and Strong’s 1883 12-volume Bible encyclopedia includes a lengthy entry on “Adoration” that frequently mentions the connotation of prostration, noting that “(Hebrew) prostration was conducted in a more formal manner, the person falling upon the knee, and then gradually inclining the body until the forehead touched the ground.”⁷³¹ So, even though modern ears hear the concept of “adoring” as loving, admiring, or perhaps as “worship,”⁷³² the English term ‘adore’ and its Latin counterpart ‘*adorare*’—for hundreds of years before the present era—connoted prostration.

The Case of Jn 4:20-24

Even though this analysis reveals that προσκυνέω refers to prostration, modern commentators have often assumed that the Jn 4:20-24 passage about προσκυνέω “in spirit and truth” refers to Christian assemblies. A review of a dozen major commentaries published since Bultmann reveals that none of them questions the idea that προσκυνέω

⁷²⁸ “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” John Francis Wade, ca. 1743.

⁷²⁹ “Angels We Have Heard On High,” author unknown, ca. 1862.

⁷³⁰ “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” Charles Wesley, 1739.

⁷³¹ John McClintock and James Strong, eds. *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1883), 1:79-80. See a similar definition of “adoration” from the same era, in *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1886), 8.

⁷³² “Adore,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 17.

refers to “worship” in the modern sense of activity in a Christian assembly.⁷³³ The only exception is John McHugh’s 2009 commentary on John. He makes clear that προσκυνέω typically means “*prostrating oneself*,” “*to show reverence by prostration*,” and “*bowing down in reverence*”⁷³⁴ (italics are his). Yet, he ultimately returns to saying that John 4 is about “worship,” alleging that προσκυνέω refers to “offering liturgical praise to Yahweh,” a meaning that it does not exhibit throughout the LXX and the NT.⁷³⁵

Even if “worship” is accepted as the proper translation in John 4, what action(s) does it connote? Today’s reader may envision “worship” as rows of “worshippers” sitting in church pews, singing hymns, or praying. None of these concepts, however, defines biblical προσκυνέω in the LXX or the NT. Such thoughts would be foreign to John’s first century audience. As David Peterson notes, “The fundamental teaching of this fascinating passage (John 4) is lost when we rush too quickly to apply it to our congregational activities.”⁷³⁶ I. Howard Marshall’s comment rings true: “The remarkable fact is that

⁷³³ The dozen commentators are C. K. Barrett (1978), F. F. Bruce (1983), Rudolf Bultmann (1971), Gary Burge (2000), D. A. Carson (1991), Ernst Haenchen (1980), Murray Harris (2015), Craig Keener (2003), Andreas Köstenberger (2009), Barnabas Lindars (1972), John McHugh (2009), Rudolf Schnackenburg (1980). See the bibliography for full reference data.

⁷³⁴ John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 283. To find a commentator who grasps the prostration connotation of προσκυνέω, one may need to reach back more than a century ago to Edwin Abbott, who translated Jn 4:21 as, “Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye bow yourselves down to the Father,” in Edwin A. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1906), 78-79.

⁷³⁵ McHugh, *Commentary on John 1-4*, 285.

⁷³⁶ Peterson, *Engaging With God*, 100.

Christian meetings are not said to take place specifically in order to worship God, and the language of worship is not used as a means of referring to them or describing them.”⁷³⁷

So, what is Jesus saying when he calls for προσκυνέω “in spirit and truth”? The John 4 passage is a discussion about the proper place where a Jew’s obligatory prostration was to be performed (τόπος ὅπου προσκυνεῖν δεῖ). Is that place the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim or the Jewish temple in Jerusalem? The phrase προσκυνεῖν δεῖ, uttered by the woman and by Jesus (v. 20, 24), indicates that temple prostration is a required act. Prostration is necessary because God’s presence dwells in the temple, and the only proper way to “appear before the Lord” (Dt 16:16) is by prostrating oneself.

Jesus uses the woman’s question as an opportunity to announce that “an hour is coming” when one’s prostration to God will take place “neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” The parallel structure of v. 21 and v. 23 draws attention to the fact that the place of prostration (“in this mountain” or “in Jerusalem”) is being replaced by the manner of prostration (“in spirit and truth”).

TABLE 3

THE PARALLEL STRUCTURE OF JN 4:21 and JN 4:23

Verse 21	Verse 23
ἔρχεται ὥρα ὅτε	ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν ὅτε
	οἱ ἀληθινοὶ προσκυνηταὶ
προσκυνήσετε τῷ πατρὶ	προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ πατρὶ
ἐν τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ οὔτε ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις	ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ

Since “God is spirit” (πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, v. 24), a new era is coming when such sacred places are obsolete. Since God is a spirit that cannot be confined to a specific

⁷³⁷ Marshall, “How Far,” 220.

location, the physical building and the physical gesture of proskynesis will become irrelevant. Only the spiritual sincerity (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ) of the believer will remain.⁷³⁸

The ideas that God is not confined to a temple and that one's devotion should be sincere were not new. The book of Isaiah presented the same concept centuries earlier: "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? ... But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Is 66:1; cf. Is 57:15; Mi 6:6-8).⁷³⁹ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also denounced outward displays of piety in giving, praying, and fasting, and He called for sincerity and humility, which the Father prefers (Mt 6:1-18).

Jesus's groundbreaking idea that temple activity would soon become irrelevant was intriguing enough to bring the Samaritan woman closer to belief in Jesus as the Messiah (4:25-29).⁷⁴⁰ In John, Jesus had already launched revolutionary ideas about the temple (2:19-21; cf. 1:14), and Jn 4:20-24 expands on those ideas. Köstenberger goes so far as to say that John's Gospel was written in response to the A.D. 70 destruction of the temple, in an effort to calm fears and to show that Jesus fulfills all that the temple was

⁷³⁸ The meaning of this phrase has been debated for centuries and is not essential to this study. The focus of this study is the meaning of προσκυνέω.

⁷³⁹ Beale makes the same connection between John 4 and Isaiah 66 in G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 138, 221.

⁷⁴⁰ McKelvey says that Jn 4:24 "was of paramount significance for the future expansion of Christianity. ... The way was thus opened for the inclusion of the Gentiles," in R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 88.

meant to be.⁷⁴¹ Marshall concludes that Jn 4:24 implies “that the church is not dependent upon buildings, consecrated or otherwise, and that the development of the building as a sanctuary, as holy space, is alien to the trend in the NT which has spiritualized the temple.”⁷⁴²

So, even though “worship in spirit and truth” has often been applied to church meetings,⁷⁴³ the message of Jn 4:20-24 has little to do with “church worship.” The context of this passage contains no references or allusions to the topic of Christian meetings. Modern readers might assume that the passage deals with “church worship” because (1) modern churches routinely describe their meetings as “worship,” and (2) modern English versions translate προσκυνέω in this verse as “worship.” But as the LXX and NT reveal, these two premises are flawed. As noted in chapter 3, the NT does not describe Christian meetings as “worship.” And, as noted in this section, προσκυνέω does not refer to singing or praying or performing liturgy in any of its 265 occurrences in the LXX and NT. Jn 4:20-24 is discussing an individual’s obligation to perform prostration before God in a temple. But in the NT, Christians do not have temple buildings or holy places.

⁷⁴¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 61-67.

⁷⁴² I. Howard Marshall, “Church and Temple in the New Testament,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 40:2 (1989): 219.

⁷⁴³ For example, see Jack Hayford, “How God Evaluates Worship,” *Leadership Journal* 20:1 (April 1, 1999): 24-31; John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1996). Both of these sources treat “worship in spirit and truth” as a widely accepted biblical principle for Christian assemblies.

It is noteworthy that Jesus's point about προσκυνέω in spirit and truth is not mentioned anywhere else in the NT. It appears that the NT writers perceived no significant teaching here about προσκυνέω or prostration. However, Jesus's radical statements about the temple reverberate throughout the NT. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each devote a significant section to the destruction of the temple.⁷⁴⁴ Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation all contain similar revolutionary concepts about the temple.⁷⁴⁵ When early church fathers reflect on Jn 4:20-24, they commonly recognize that the primary issue is "place" not "prostration" (προσκυνέω). For example, Origen (ca. 230 A.D.) says, "To this opinion of the Samaritan woman, ... the Savior answered that he who would follow the Lord must lay aside all preference for particular places."⁷⁴⁶ Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 350 A.D.) says, "The prejudices of both (Jews and Samaritans) confined the all-embracing and illimitable God to the crest of a hill or the vault of a building. ... For Spirit cannot be cabined or confined; it is omnipresent in space and time, and under all conditions present in its fullness."⁷⁴⁷ The enduring message of Jn 4:24 is that all holy places will soon become obsolete and irrelevant.

⁷⁴⁴ Mt 24:1-51, Mark 13:1-37, Luke 21:10-38.

⁷⁴⁵ For revolutionary statements about the temple, see Acts 7:48-50; 17:24-25 (cf. Acts 21:28); 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2 Cor 5:1-5; 6:16; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pt 2:4-10; Heb 10:1-25; Rv 3:12; 11:2; 11:19; 21:1-4, 10-14, 22.

⁷⁴⁶ *On First Principles*, 1.1.4-5.

⁷⁴⁷ *On the Trinity*, 2.31. See similar statements by Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 400 A.D.) and Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 425 A.D.) in Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 1-10*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 155, 158.

Is Jesus saying that prostration to God will soon become irrelevant? Greeven has noted the “astonishing fact” that προσκυνέω virtually disappears from Christian paraenesis after the Gospels and Acts.⁷⁴⁸ The term appears thirty times in the Gospels and is then found only four times in Acts, where it never describes Christian activity.⁷⁴⁹ Later, it is found twenty-four times in Revelation. But in all the epistles prior to Revelation, the word is found only three times: twice in OT quotations in Hebrews (1:6 and 11:21) and once in 1 Cor 14:25. Greeven concludes: “Proskynesis demands visible majesty before which the worshipper bows. The Son of God was visible to all on earth (the Gospels), and the exalted Lord will again be visible to His own when faith gives way to sight (Revelation).”⁷⁵⁰ In the NT epistles, with the newfound insignificance of the physical dwelling place of God, and with the newfound abode of God within the hearts of His people,⁷⁵¹ the religious ritual of prostration has lost its venue.⁷⁵² Ironically, 1 Cor 14:25 presents the only time when προσκυνέω is used in the context of a Christian assembly. But it is not a Christian who performs the act, and the act is not “worship” in the modern

⁷⁴⁸ Greeven, “προσκυνέω,” *TDNT*, 6:765. There may be other reasons for the relative disappearance of *proskynesis* in the Epistles, but Greeven asserts that the gesture essentially loses its significance in a world where God is no longer physically present, whether in the temple or in Jesus.

⁷⁴⁹ One of the four is Acts 24:11, where Paul notes that he had recently gone up to Jerusalem to perform proskynesis (προσκυνήσων) at the temple, in an attempt to show solidarity with Jewish customs (cf. Acts 21:20-26).

⁷⁵⁰ Greeven, “προσκυνέω,” *TDNT*, 6:765.

⁷⁵¹ Jer 31:31-34; Mt 1:23; Acts 2:38; Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 3:16; et al.

⁷⁵² See Peter’s response to Cornelius’s prostration in Acts 10:25 (“Stand up; I too am *just* a man”) and the angel’s response to John’s prostration in Rv 19:10 and 22:8-9 (“Do not do that”).

sense. It is an unbeliever who falls (πεσὼν) on his face (ἐπὶ πρόσωπον) and prostrates (προσκυνήσει) to God (τῷ θεῷ). This God does not dwell in a sacred building. Rather, He is “certainly among you” (ὅντως ὁ θεὸς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστίν), dwelling within God’s people through His Spirit.

Summary of Προσκυνέω

Of all the Greek words that are occasionally translated as “worship,” προσκυνέω is the one most likely to be so translated. This analysis, which has examined the 204 times the word is found in the Septuagint and its 61 occurrences in the NT, has found that the word retains its core sense of prostration wherever it is found.⁷⁵³ Even though “worship” is a common translation for προσκυνέω, it is not a viable translation because it conjures inaccurate and vague images in the minds of modern English readers. The LXX and the NT give no indication that προσκυνέω connotes singing, praying, or the conducting of liturgy. Rather, the idea of prostration continually clings to προσκυνέω, to its OT Hebrew counterpart, *הִשָּׁתָּחוּ*, and to its ancient Latin counterpart, *adorare*. The act of prostration is a form of greeting, whether performed to humans on a road or to deity in a temple. The word has a distinct directional component, activated by its prefix (προσ-) and its common use with the dative case, indicating that prostration is performed “toward” the targeted honored one. Frequently, in the LXX and the NT, the context surrounding προσκυνέω includes several terms that indicate prostration, such “falling down,” “stooping,” being “on the ground,” on one’s “knees” or “face,” at the “feet” of the one so honored by the act. These terms are frequent, and they make clear that the word should be

⁷⁵³ The one exception is a metaphorical use of the term in 4 Mc 5:12.

understood as prostration. Even in the few verses where the context contains no additional explanatory terms, the idea of prostration still fits the context. In Jn 4:24, the classic verse about performing προσκυνέω “in spirit and truth,” προσκυνέω should be understood as another routine reference to performing prostration in the temple, a meaning made clear in more than twenty other temple contexts in the LXX and NT.

Armed with this insight, we can now answer the question, “Why does the NT never use προσκυνέω to describe what Christians do in assembly?” The answer is that προσκυνέω indicates prostration, and the NT reveals no reason to mandate that Christians prostrate in their meetings. In the NT, a Christian meeting place is not viewed as a “temple” or “the house of God.” Christians met in homes or wherever it was convenient. The “place” of meeting has no sacral significance. Rather, the NT teaches that God now dwells within each Christian’s body (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) and within the body of believers (2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21) through the Spirit. At the end of Revelation, as the loud voice announces from the throne, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (Rv 21:3). Since God is now “with us” (μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός, Mt 1:23) and is in all places (Jn 4:20-24), the necessity of one’s prostration to God is essentially obsolete until one appears in-person before the very throne of God.

Λατρεύω

Λατρεύω/λατρεία is less common than προσκυνέω and is only infrequently translated as “worship” in the NT. As a general rule, English Bibles translate λατρεύω/λατρεία in the NT with some form of “worship” about half of the time and as

“serve” or “service” about half of the time.⁷⁵⁴ While προσκυνέω is found sixty-one times in the NT, λατρεύω/λατρεία is found only twenty-six times in the NT. While προσκυνέω is translated in the NASB as “worship” 87 percent of the time, λατρεύω/λατρεία is translated in the NASB with some form of “worship” only 23 percent of the time.⁷⁵⁵ Of the seventy times that the English word “worship” appears in the NASB NT, λατρεύω/λατρεία is the Greek word behind “worship” only 9 percent of the time.

Λατρεύω/λατρεία in the LXX

What does λατρεύω/λατρεία mean in the NT? Significant help on this question comes from the LXX, which uses λατρεύω/λατρεία more than 100 times, all in contexts similar to NT usage. Since the NT writers frequently quote from the LXX, it provides a substantial and pertinent database of Jewish literature that can help to indicate its meaning(s) in the NT.⁷⁵⁶ Throughout the LXX, λατρεύω is found ninety-eight times, and λατρεία is found nine times.

⁷⁵⁴ For example, the NIV translates λατρεύω/λατρεία as “worship,” “worshiper,” “temple worship,” or “regulations for worship” eleven times, as “serve” or “service” thirteen times, and “minister” or “ministry” twice. The ESV translates λατρεύω/λατρεία fourteen times as “worship,” “worshiper,” or “regulations for worship,” as “serve” or “service” eleven times, and once as “ritual duties.” The NET Bible translates λατρεύω/λατρεία as “worship” twelve times (Lk 2:37; Acts 7:7, 42; 24:14; Rom 9:4; Phil 3:3; Heb 9:1, 9, 14; 10:2; 12:28; Rv 22:3).

⁷⁵⁵ The six times that the NASB translates λατρεύω/λατρεία as some form of “worship” are: Rom 12:1; Phil 3:3; Heb 9:1, 6, 9; 10:2.

⁷⁵⁶ Porter, “Septuagint/Greek Old Testament,” *DNTB*, 1104-05.

For the LXX translators, λατρεύω is one of several Greek terms used to translate עָבַד, which is the standard OT Hebrew word for “serve” or “work.”⁷⁵⁷ The term עָבַד is found in the Hebrew OT 287 times, but the LXX translators translate it as λατρεύω only seventy-eight times. When עָבַד describes service or work for people, the LXX usually chooses δουλεύω, which typically means “to serve as a slave.”⁷⁵⁸ But when עָבַד describes service to deity, λατρεύω is the primary choice of the LXX translators.⁷⁵⁹

“Serving Sacrifices to Deity”

It is a mistake to assume that λατρεύω connotes the idea of generic service. Λατρεύω always refers to a specific kind of service: service performed for deity.⁷⁶⁰ But in the LXX, λατρεύω can be narrowed more specifically than that. It refers to serving

⁷⁵⁷ BDB, “עָבַד,” *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 712-14. In addition, the noun λατρεία is also used to translate the noun עֲבָדָה, which commonly means “labor” or “service” (ibid., 715).

⁷⁵⁸ Δουλεύω in the LXX often indicates “a repressive or at least dependent form of service under the complete control of a superior,” in Silva, ed., “δοῦλος, etc.,” *NIDNTTE*, 1:768-69.

⁷⁵⁹ For example, the LXX translates עָבַד as λατρεύω in Jgs 3:7 when the context refers to service to God, but then translates עָבַד as δουλεύω in the very next verse when the context refers to service to people.

⁷⁶⁰ In the OT, עָבַד is used in reference to serving deity 172 times (60 percent of all instances of עָבַד). Of these 172 cases of performing עָבַד to deity, עָבַד is translated in the LXX as λατρεύω seventy-eight times, δουλεύω sixty-one times, λειτουργέω twelve times, ἐργάζομαι ten times, ποιέω five times, ἐξαίρω once, προσκυνέω once, and προΐστημι once. In three other cases, עָבַד is left untranslated in the LXX. The only time when λατρεύω is used for service to people is Dt 28:48, but in v. 47, עָבַד is used in reference to service to God, and in v. 48, it is used in reference to service to people: “Because you did not serve the Lord your God (οὐκ ἐλάτρευσας κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου) ... therefore you shall serve your enemies (λατρεύσεις τοῖς ἐχθροῖς σου) whom the Lord will send against you.”

deity with sacrifices,⁷⁶¹ whether to the God of Israel or to other gods.⁷⁶² A study of all the contexts in which λατρεύω or λατρεία appears in the LXX reveals that the activity connected with the terms is sacrificing, which is made explicitly clear in more than two dozen passages.⁷⁶³

The connection between λατρεύω/λατρεία and sacrificing is first made clear in the story of Moses and his demands to Pharaoh in Exodus 3-12.⁷⁶⁴ In these chapters, λατρεύω/λατρεία is used seventeen times, and its meaning is clearly explained at least four times. For example, in Ex 3:12, God tells Moses on Mount Horeb, “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.” Here, the Hebrew for “worship God” is וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה, and the LXX is λατρεύσετε τῷ θεῷ. NASB translates the Hebrew as “worship God,” but the translation “worship” only confuses the modern reader, who may think that “worshipping God” involves praying, singing, or liturgy. What exactly was this λατρεύσετε to be performed on that mountain? Ex 3:18 identifies this activity as “that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God” (ἵνα

⁷⁶¹ See the explanation by Strathmann, who says, “λατρεύειν (in the LXX) means more precisely to serve or worship cultically, especially by sacrifice,” in Strathmann, “λατρεύω, λατρεία,” *TDNT*, 4:60.

⁷⁶² Λατρεύω and its cognates are used in reference to deity 107 times in the LXX; fifty-three refer to the serving of sacrifices to God, and fifty-one refer to sacrificing to other gods.

⁷⁶³ The sacrificing connotations of λατρεύω/λατρεία are obvious in Ex 3:18; 5:3, 8, 17; 8:8, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29; 10:24, 26; 12:25-27; Lv 18:21; Dt 7:5; 12:2-3; Jo 22:27-29; 2 Kgs 17:11-12, 29-33, 35; Ez 20:31-32; 1 Mc 1:43; 2:19, 22; 1 Esd 4:52-54.

⁷⁶⁴ For the connection between λατρεύω and θύω in Exodus, see Strathmann, “λατρεύω, λατρεία,” *TDNT*, 4:60-61.

θύσωμεν τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν). The idea that λατρεύω/λατρεία involves the offering of sacrifices to God is reiterated frequently throughout the ten chapters of the story.⁷⁶⁵

Besides the Exodus narrative, many other LXX passages also equate λατρεύω/λατρεία with sacrificing. In Lv 18:21, Israel must not serve (λατρεύειν) their children to the god Molech, i.e., as a sacrifice (cf. 2 Kgs 17:29-33; Ez 20:31-32). In Jo 22:27-29, an altar is built as a reminder “that we do perform the service of the Lord (τοῦ λατρεύειν λατρείαν κυρίῳ) in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and offerings.” In 1 Mc 1:43, the λατρεία involves sacrificing to idols (cf. Ez 20:28-32). In 1 Mc 2:19, 22, the λατρεία involves offering sacrifice on an altar (2:15, 23-24). In 1 Esd 4:52-54, the service of the priests involves burnt offerings on the altar. The opposite of “serving” (ἐλάτρευσαν) foreign gods is to “tear down their altars” (Dt 7:5; 12:2-3), destroy their sacred pillars that were likely a part of sacrificial ceremonies (Ex 23:24; Dt 7:5; 12:2-3; cf. Ex 24:4; 2 Kgs 17:10), and to seek the Lord at His dwelling place by bringing offerings and sacrifices (Dt 12:2-6).

While the LXX provides abundant evidence that λατρεύω/λατρεία is “to serve sacrifices to deity,” a few verses draw a possible connection between λατρεύω/λατρεία and feasting (Ex 18:12; Dt 12:2-7). For example, the Exodus story of the Hebrews “serving” God on Mount Sinai is twice identified as celebrating a feast (Ex 5:1; 10:9).⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁵ See Ex 3:12 (λατρεύω) = 20:24; 24:5 (θύω); Ex 8:1 (λατρεύω) = 8:4 (θύω); 8:16 (λατρεύω) = 8:21, 27-29 (θύω); 10:24 (λατρεύω) = 10:25-26 (θυσία); Ex 12:25-26 (λατρεία) = 12:27 (θυσία).

⁷⁶⁶ The two verses are Ex 5:1 (“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness’”) and Ex 10:9 (Moses says, “With our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord”).

However, this connection of λατρεία with feasting is probably due to the idea that sacrificing to God is the same as offering food to God.⁷⁶⁷ Alternatively, the connection may be due to the idea that the edible proceeds of the sacrificial process were used for feeding the devotees.⁷⁶⁸ The two ideas of offering sacrifice and feasting are thus tied together.

Distinguishing Λατρεύω from Προσκυνέω and Λειτουργέω in the LXX

This assessment of λατρεύω/λατρεία throughout the OT supports the idea that προσκυνέω (prostrating before deity) and λατρεύω (offering sacrifice to deity) were the two fundamental obligatory activities performed for one's god.⁷⁶⁹ When every male Jew was to "appear before the Lord," he was to bring an appropriate offering or sacrifice.⁷⁷⁰ The second commandment of the Decalogue expressly condemns prostrating to (προσκυνήσεις) or serving sacrifices to (λατρεύσης) other gods (Ex 20:5). Jesus reiterates these dual obligations in Mt 4:10 and Lk 4:8: "You shall prostrate (προσκυνήσεις) to the Lord your God and to Him alone you shall serve sacrifices (λατρεύσεις)." ⁷⁷¹

⁷⁶⁷ The OT often describes sacrifices as "the food of God" and as offering "a feast to the Lord." See Ex 10:9; 12:14; 32:5; Lv 3:11, 16; 21:6, 8, 17, 21, 22; 22:25; Nm 28:2, 24; Ez 44:7; cf. Ex 13:6; Lv 23:41; Nm 29:12; Dt 16:15.

⁷⁶⁸ Animal sacrifices were often used as a meal for the offerer and for the priests (Lv 7:11-21; 22:29-30), which "epitomizes the notion that sacrifice is a shared meal of communion between God and humans." See D. G. Reid, "Sacrifice and Temple Service," *DNTB*, 1038.

⁷⁶⁹ See pages 200-203.

⁷⁷⁰ Dt 16:16 mandates the visit three times a year, but 1 Samuel refers to the "yearly sacrifice" (1 Sm 1:3, 21; 2:19; 20:6).

⁷⁷¹ Translation by author.

Even though English Bibles translate both λατρεύω and προσκυνέω as “worship,” the two words are not synonymous. In the LXX, both terms frequently refer to temple activity, but they refer to different temple activities. Προσκυνέω refers to prostrating, not to sacrificing; λατρεύω refers to sacrificing, not to prostrating. Prostration (προσκυνέω) is performed by anyone entering the temple. The serving of a sacrifice (λατρεύω) is also performed in the temple by anyone, but the offering of sacrifice often requires the involvement of the priests (1 Chr 28:13; 1 Esd 1:3-4; 4:53-54; Heb 8:4-5; 9:6-7; 13:10-11).⁷⁷²

One of the Greek words that is used to translate the Hebrew עֲבָד is λειτουργέω, which will be analyzed later in this chapter. But in this analysis of λατρεύω, it is helpful to note how the LXX translators distinguished λατρεία service from λειτουργία service. When עֲבָד is used in reference to the temple service performed by the Levites or priests, the LXX translators typically chose λειτουργέω/λειτουργία, not λατρεύω/λατρεία. Such cases of עֲבָד or עֲבָדָה are found thirteen times.⁷⁷³ Exceptions to the rule are 1 Esd 1:4⁷⁷⁴ and 4:54, where the LXX chose λατρεύω instead of λειτουργέω in reference to the sacrifice-related service of the priests (cf. Sir 4:14). Both terms refer to the activity of

⁷⁷² In Hebrews, λατρεύω/λατρεία has a close connection to priestly duties, but several NT passages indicate that λατρεύω/λατρεία can be performed by non-priestly Jews as well (Mt 4:10; Lk 1:74; 4:8; Acts 24:14; Rom 1:25).

⁷⁷³ See Nm 4:24, 26, 30, 37, 41; 8:22; 16:9; 18:6, 21, 23; 1 Chr 28:13; 2 Chr 35:3 (cf. Nm 4:23; 7:5).

⁷⁷⁴ Note that 1 Esd 1:4 is parallel to 2 Chr 35:3. However, the LXX of 1 Esd 1:4 uses λατρεύω (καὶ νῦν λατρεύετε τῷ κυρίῳ θεῷ ὑμῶν), but the LXX of 2 Chr 35:3 uses λειτουργέω (νῦν οὖν λειτουργήσατε τῷ κυρίῳ θεῷ ὑμῶν).

serving deity in a temple/sanctuary, but in these passages, λειτουργέω focuses specifically on the work of the priests.

Λατρεύω in the NT

In the NT, λατρεύω appears twenty-one times, and λατρεία appears five times. As in the OT, every occurrence of λατρεία/λατρεύω in the NT refers, not just to “service” in general, but to service to deity.⁷⁷⁵ Since explicit sacrificial terminology appears in the context of λατρεία/λατρεύω in half of these verses, it appears that the terms continue to connote “serving deity with sacrifices” or simply “sacrificing.”⁷⁷⁶ However, the NT exhibits a significant shift in the use of λατρεία/λατρεύω as some NT writers use λατρεύω/λατρεία in a metaphorical sense, which was not present in any of the term’s 107 occurrences in the LXX.

The Metaphorical Λατρεία

Paul uses λατρεία/λατρεύω in a metaphorical or “transformed”⁷⁷⁷ sense to show that Christians also serve God with sacrifices but in a spiritual way (Rom 1:9; 12:1; Phil 3:3; 2 Tm 1:3). Rom 12:1 is a good example: “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God,

⁷⁷⁵ Of the twenty-six cases of λατρεία/λατρεύω in the NT, it connotes service to God twenty-four times and service to other gods twice (Acts 7:42; Rom 1:25).

⁷⁷⁶ Sacrificial terminology is found with λατρεία/λατρεύω in Jn 16:2; Acts 7:42; 24:14; Rom 12:1; Heb 8:5; 9:1, 6, 9, 14; 10:2; 12:28; 13:10. The context of six other verses that contain λατρεία/λατρεύω use temple terminology but not necessarily sacrificial terminology (Lk 2:37; Acts 7:7; 26:7; Phil 3:3; Rv 7:15; 22:3).

⁷⁷⁷ “Transformed” is the term used by David Peterson to describe the NT use of λατρεία/λατρεύω and similar terms. See Peterson, *Engaging With God*, 24, 166, 180-81, 227, 253, 286.

which is your spiritual service of worship” (NASB). The only other time Paul uses the noun λατρεία—in all his writings—is in the previous section of Romans 9-11. In Rom 9:4, he identifies the major unique points of pride for Judaism: their status as the children of God, the covenants, the Law, promises, and the “*temple service*.”⁷⁷⁸ The NASB’s translation of λατρεία as “*temple service*” is consistent with the LXX view of λατρεία as a term for the (temple) serving of sacrifices to deity. This sense continues in Rom 12:1, where sacrificial terminology is obvious in the terms ‘present’ (παρίστημι),⁷⁷⁹ ‘sacrifice’ (θυσία), ‘holy’ (ἅγιος),⁷⁸⁰ and ‘acceptable’ (εὐάρεστος).⁷⁸¹ But in 12:1, when Paul adds the qualifier λογικός (however it is translated),⁷⁸² he makes clear that λατρεία is not to be understood literally, but metaphorically.⁷⁸³ When Christians offer their bodies as a living

⁷⁷⁸ NASB italicizes “temple.”

⁷⁷⁹ BDAG describes παρίστημι as “a technical term in the language of sacrifice” in BDAG, “παρίστημι,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 778.

⁷⁸⁰ The idea that a sacrifice is “holy” is common in the OT. See Ex 30:10; Lv 2:3, 10; 6:25; 7:1; 10:12; 14:13; 19:24; 23:20; Nm 5:9-10; 18:8-19.

⁷⁸¹ The idea of “pleasing” or “acceptable” is often used to describe sacrifices. See Ezr 6:10; Ps 20:3; Is 56:7; Jer 6:20; Mal 3:4; Rom 12:1-2; 15:16, 31; Phil 4:18; Heb 12:28; 13:16; 1 Pt 2:5.

⁷⁸² The word λογικός has been variously translated and interpreted. The ESV, CSB, HCSB, RSV, and NRSV translate it as “spiritual,” while the KJV, NKJV, and NET Bible translate it as “reasonable,” and the NIV translates it as “true and proper.” Ian Scott recently argued that λογικός means “a service performed by the reasoning mind,” in Scott, “‘Your Reasoning Worship’: ΛΟΓΙΚΟΣ in Romans 12:1 and Paul’s Ethics of Rational Deliberation,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 69:2 (Oct 2018): 500-32.

⁷⁸³ Some English translations, such as CSB, ESV, NAB, NIV, NRSV, signal this metaphor by inserting the word “as” in “as a living sacrifice.”

sacrifice through a holy and upright life (Rom 12:2), they are metaphorically serving God with sacrificial service.

A recent article by John Street argues that Paul's change of number from the plural "bodies" (σώματα) to the singular "sacrifice" (θυσίαν) is meant to emphasize "the centrality of the local body of Christ and how it worships and functions together as a singular ministry."⁷⁸⁴ While there is no question that one of Paul's messages in Romans is to promote the unity of Jews and Gentiles (Rom 15:5-7), Street's conclusion is flawed in four ways. First, Street ignores the fact that NT Greek often uses the "collective singular" or the "distributive singular" to denote a plural idea.⁷⁸⁵ Paul uses the same collective singular in the very next verse, where he urges the Romans with a plural verb "to be transformed (plural μεταμορφοῦσθε) by the renewing of your mind" (singular τοῦ νοῦς, 12:2), not "your minds."⁷⁸⁶ Second, it is not unusual in the NT era for "sacrifice" (singular) to be used in the sense of "sacrifices" (plural). In other words, "to offer

⁷⁸⁴ John D. Street, James Street, and Jay Street, "One Living Sacrifice: A Corporate Interpretation of Romans 12:1," *Master's Seminary Journal* 31:1 (Spring 2020): 23.

⁷⁸⁵ See the sections on the "collective singular" and the "distributive singular," along with many examples, in F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), 77. Caragounis notes that such a singular is often "signifying category," in *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, 244, n. 39.

⁷⁸⁶ See other similar examples of the collective or distributive singular in Eph 6:14 ("Stand firm [plural στήτε] therefore, having girded your loin [singular τὴν ὀσφὺν ὑμῶν] with truth" [cf. Eph 6:15, 16, 17]); Acts 21:24 ("so that they may shave [plural ξυρῆσονται] their head [singular τὴν κεφαλὴν]"); Lk 1:66 ("All who heard [plural οἱ ἀκούσαντες] them kept them in mind [singular τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῶν]"); et al.

sacrifice” is the same idea as “to offer sacrifices.”⁷⁸⁷ Third, the immediate context of Rom 12:1 gives no clear indication that Paul is discussing assembly behavior. If Paul were discussing how to behave in an assembly, he could have openly stated so in verse 1 and in verse 2. But verse 2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” It seems clear that Rom 12:1-2 is urging holy and righteous behavior, not “the centrality of the local body of Christ and how it worships and functions together as a singular ministry.”⁷⁸⁸ Fourth, Street’s conclusions are based on a faulty understanding of the meaning of “worship” (λατρεία) in 12:1. Street assumes that “worship” is a reference to “the church coming together as one and the real type of worship that the Lord considers to be genuine.”⁷⁸⁹ The NASB may have erroneously led Street to this conclusion when it translates τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν as “your spiritual service of worship.” But, as is demonstrated by the use of λατρεία/λατρεύω throughout the LXX and the NT, the term does not connote a religious gathering. Rather, it connotes the serving of sacrifice to deity (see pages 213-220).

⁷⁸⁷ See Heb 10:5-6, which accurately cites Ps 39:7 LXX with “sacrifice” in the singular (“Sacrifice [θυσίαν] and offering You have not desired”), but then reiterates the same OT text in Heb 10:8 with a plural “sacrifices” (“Sacrifices [θυσίας] and offerings ... You have not desired”). The two quotes demonstrate that “sacrifice” is often a “distributive singular” that can be understood in the plural. See also Mt 9:13; 12:7; Lk 2:24; Acts 7:41-42; Phil 2:17; and Heb 13:15 (“Let us [plural ἀναφέρωμεν] continually offer up a sacrifice of praise [singular θυσίαν]”).

⁷⁸⁸ Street, et al., “One Living Sacrifice,” 23. Paul refers to some assembly gifts in 12:6-8, but these comments fall in the greater context of his general admonitions for holy and righteous behavior, which continue into chapter 15.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 24.

Paul's metaphorical use of λατρεύω/λατρεία in Rom 12:1 is also found elsewhere in his writings. In Rom 1:9, Paul says he offers λατρεύω “in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son.” Paul cannot say that he “serves God with sacrifice” in his preaching; he must add “in my spirit” to denote that ὃ λατρεύω is to be understood figuratively, not literally. The same is true in Phil 3:3, when he says that Christians “are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God (οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες) and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” He cannot say that Christians “serve God with sacrifices” (λατρεύοντες); he must add the qualifier “in the Spirit of God” to show that he means λατρεύοντες in a metaphorical sense. The use of λατρεύω of 2 Tm 1:3 is more difficult to decipher (ὃ λατρεύω ἀπὸ προγόνων ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει).⁷⁹⁰ But λατρεύω here continues to have sacrificial overtones, as it is qualified by “a clean conscience,” a concept connected with sacrificing.⁷⁹¹ Paul may be comparing his own metaphorical sacrificial service, which is done “with a clean conscience,” with the literal sacrificial service of his ancestors.⁷⁹²

The writer of Hebrews ties together the concepts of λατρεία/λατρεύω, sacrifice, priesthood, and a clean conscience, using λατρεία/λατρεύω both literally of the priests and Jews who offer sacrifice at the temple (Heb 8:5; 9:1, 6, 9; 10:2; 13:10) and

⁷⁹⁰ Mounce notes that the “clean conscience” belongs to Paul, not to his ancestors. See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 468-69; cf. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 367.

⁷⁹¹ See, for example, Ex 29:36; Lv 8:15; Nm 8:21; Ezr 6:20; Ez 43:26; Heb 9:13, 14, 22, 23; 10:2.

⁷⁹² Compare Paul's use of λατρεύω in Acts 24:14 and 27:23, where he is either citing his faithfulness in following Jewish sacrificial customs (Acts 21:20-26), or he is using λατρεύω to refer to his metaphorical sacrificial service.

figuratively of the redeemed Christians (Heb 9:14; 12:28). In Heb 12:28, the sacrificial overtones of λατρεύωμεν are made clear by the adverb εὐαρέστως: “Let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service (λατρεύωμεν εὐαρέστως) with reverence and awe.”⁷⁹³ In the following verses (in chapter 13), the writer expands on what constitutes acceptable λατρεία. It is not literal sacrifices, but loving the brethren (13:1), showing hospitality (13:2), remembering prisoners (13:3), keeping marriage undefiled (13:4), being content (13:5), and other practical evidences of a life of sacrificial service (13:7-16).⁷⁹⁴ He concludes the section by describing such sharing (κοινωνία) and doing good (εὐποιΐα) as sacrifices (θυσίαις) with which God is pleased (εὐαρεστεῖται ὁ θεός, 13:16). Heb 13:16 thus becomes an apt definition of the metaphorical λατρεία of 12:28. When Christians live a life of doing good and sharing, they are “serving God with (metaphorical) sacrifices.”

The transformed way that Christians viewed the temple and λατρεία permeated early Christian culture, from the first proclamations in Acts (7:48; 17:24), through Paul, Peter, the writer of Hebrews, and John in Revelation. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, all Christians can be described metaphorically as “priests,”⁷⁹⁵ their bodies as “temples” of God,⁷⁹⁶ and their virtuous lives as “sacrifices.” The concept of

⁷⁹³ On εὐάρεστος, see footnote 780 on page 220.

⁷⁹⁴ Like the section following Heb 12:28, the section following Rom 12:1 also launches into a list of ethical demands after announcing the concept of a metaphorical λατρεία.

⁷⁹⁵ 1 Pt 2:5, 9; Rv 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; cf. Rom 15:16.

⁷⁹⁶ Acts 7:48; 17:24; 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21; Rv 21:3.

metaphorical λατρεία in Hebrews is consistent with Paul's view of metaphorical λατρεία in Rom 12:1: Christians do not serve God with literal sacrifices but with the spiritual offerings of a devoted life of upright behavior.⁷⁹⁷ Peter makes a similar point: "You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5). Peter does not use the term λατρεία, but his description of acceptable "spiritual sacrifices" (πνευματικὰς θυσίας) is a fitting definition of metaphorical λατρεία. Finally, John's vision in Revelation emphasizes that the tabernacle of God is now among people (Rv 21:3) and that Christians are now "priests" (Rv 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) who provide λατρεία service in the heavenly temple (Rv 7:15; 22:3).

Does Λατρεύω Connote Singing or Praying?

In modern English, the congregational activities of singing and praying are commonly considered to be "worship." But λατρεύω and λατρεία are not used in the LXX or the NT in reference to singing or praying, with the lone exception of Lk 2:37, where λατρεύω is used figuratively.⁷⁹⁸ Even in the Psalms, λατρεύω and its cognates are not found. The Psalms contain eight references to לָבַד, but none of them are translated to λατρεύω in the LXX.⁷⁹⁹ If λατρεύω and λατρεία mean "worship," it would seem that this

⁷⁹⁷ Rom 12:1; Phil 2:17; 4:18; Heb 13:15-16; 1 Pt 2:5.

⁷⁹⁸ In Lk 2:37, the 84-year-old Anna "never left the temple, serving (λατρεύουσα) night and day with fastings and prayers." Here, Luke uses λατρεύω figuratively, since women could not participate in any part of the sacrificial process. Thus, her constant offerings of "fastings and prayers" could be described as "serving with sacrifice." See D. G. Reid, "Sacrifice and Temple Service," *DNTB*, 1046.

⁷⁹⁹ Seven references to לָבַד are translated to δουλεύω, and one is translated to προσκυνέω. One contains a reference to singing: "Serve (δουλεύσατε) the Lord with

huge volume of biblical songs, often intended for the praise of God, would be overflowing with references to λατρεύω and λατρεία.⁸⁰⁰ However, λατρεύω and λατρεία do not connote the modern concept of “worship.” Since λατρεύω and λατρεία connote “serving God with sacrifice” throughout the LXX, the translator(s) of the Psalms likely saw no reason to equate λατρεύω/λατρεία with the book’s emphasis on praying or singing to God.⁸⁰¹

Yet, when Christians sing or pray to God, are they offering metaphorical λατρεία to God? The argument of Hebrews seems to support this idea. In Heb 13:15, the writer does not use λατρεύω or λατρεία, but he says, “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise (θυσίαν αινέσεως) to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” Even though αἰνεσις refers to speaking (not singing) of the excellence of something,⁸⁰² and the writer is urging continual (not assembly only) thanksgiving to God, it is reasonable to conclude that singing praises to God is the same as offering a metaphorical λατρεία. But the spiritual λατρεία that God seeks is much

gladness; come into his presence with singing” (Ps 99:2). The verse with προσκυνέω is Ps 96:6 LXX. It appears that the translator(s) oddly chose προσκυνέω for קָנָה because of the influence of another instance of προσκυνέω (for קִנָּה) in the same verse.

⁸⁰⁰ In the Psalms, the NASB mentions “praise” 148 times; all of the other sixty-five books of the Bible together mention “praise” only 119 times.

⁸⁰¹ While a few passages speak of sacrifice in a negative light (e.g., Ps 51:16-17), many more Psalms speak of sacrifice in a positive light. For example, Ps 20:3 says, “May He remember all your meal offerings and find your burnt offering acceptable” (cf. Ps 4:5; 27:6; 50:5,14,23; 51:19; 54:6; 66:15; 107:22; 116:17; 141:2).

⁸⁰² See chapter 3, page 125.

broader than that, requiring a devoted life of service to others, as is made clear in v. 16: “Do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

A different question is, “When Christians sing songs of praise in their assemblies, are they offering ‘worship’?” If “worship” is defined by its twenty-first century English definition, the answer is certainly yes. But there is no evidence that λατρεύω/λατρεία connotes “worship” in the modern sense.

Summary of Λατρεύω

In summary, the LXX and the NT consistently indicate that λατρεύω/λατρεία refers to “the serving of sacrifices to deity.” When modern English Bibles translate λατρεύω as “worship” or “serve,” they miss the crucial concept of sacrificing that is inherent in the term. The NT occasionally uses λατρεύω/λατρεία in a metaphorical sense to denote that Christians now offer to God the spiritual sacrifice of a life devoted to doing good. While Jews and their priests offered God a literal λατρεία of fleshly sacrifices in the temple, Christians can now be viewed metaphorically as priests who continually offer God spiritual sacrifices in their bodies.

Λειτουργέω

Λειτουργέω and its cognates are only rarely translated as “worship,” and the terms are less common than λατρεύω/λατρεία in the NT. While λατρεύω/λατρεία is found twenty-six times in the NT, the λειτουργ- terms appear only fifteen times in the NT, and the NASB translates none of them as “worship.”⁸⁰³ “Worshipping” the Lord, however, is

⁸⁰³ Λειτουργέω appears in Acts 13:2; Rom 15:27; and Heb 10:11. Λειτουργία is used in Lk 1:23; 2 Cor 9:12; Phil 2:17, 30; Heb 8:6; 9:21. The adjective λειτουργικός is

how the NIV and ESV translate it in Acts 13:2.⁸⁰⁴ Of the term's other fourteen occurrences, the NIV never again translates it as "worship." The ESV translates it with "worship" one other time, in Heb 9:21, where it translates τὰ σκεύη τῆς λειτουργίας as "the vessels of worship" (in the tabernacle), while the NASB renders it, "the vessels of ministry."⁸⁰⁵

In addition to the word "worship" being a rare translation of the term, the word 'worship' does not appear within the analyses of any of the λειτουργ- terms in BDAG, where its primary definition is "to render special formal service ... of cultic or ritual responsibilities."⁸⁰⁶ The word "worship" is also not found in the analyses of the λειτουργ- terms in Louw & Nida,⁸⁰⁷ Liddell & Scott,⁸⁰⁸ or Moulton & Milligan.⁸⁰⁹ Yet, the term deserves analysis, primarily because of its use in Acts 13:2, which has sometimes been perceived as a reference to a Christian assembly.

There are two key questions. First, what is the meaning of λειτουργέω in the NT? Second, do the λειτουργ- terms convey a meaning that applies to what first-century

found once, in Heb 1:14. The noun λειτουργός is in Rom 13:6; 15:16; Phil 2:25; Heb 1:7; 8:2.

⁸⁰⁴ See the analysis of λειτουργέω in Acts 13:2 in chapter 3 on pages 136-43.

⁸⁰⁵ "The vessels of the ministry" is how it is translated by the ASV, KJV, and NKJV in Heb 9:21.

⁸⁰⁶ BDAG, "λειτουργέω." *Greek-English Lexicon*, 591.

⁸⁰⁷ Louw & Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:461.

⁸⁰⁸ Liddell & Scott, "λειτουργέω," *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1036-37.

⁸⁰⁹ Moulton & Milligan, "λειτουργέω," *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, 372-73.

Christians did in their assemblies? Answering these questions should also reveal how λειτουργέω is to be distinguished from προσκυνέω and λατρεύω.

Λειτουργέω in the LXX

The λειτουργέω-related terms are common in the Septuagint (LXX), where its use does not support the idea that the terms refer to “worship.” The λειτουργ- terms are used in the LXX about 150 times, and in none of these cases is the OT text translated as “worship” in the NASB or the ESV. More than 80 percent of these λειτουργ- terms in the LXX are used in reference to the temple service performed by priests/Levites.⁸¹⁰ The term in the LXX is always used of attending service to someone greater. While its common use is in reference to attending service by priests to God, it also refers to attending service by a servant to a king (eleven times) or to a prophet (four times).⁸¹¹ What are these services? 2 Chr 13:10-11 describes the kind of services typically included in λειτουργέω “to the Lord”:

The sons of Aaron are ministering to the Lord (λειτουργοῦσιν τῷ κυρίῳ)⁸¹² as priests, and the Levites attend to their work. Every morning and evening they burn to the Lord burnt offerings and fragrant incense, and the showbread is set on the clean table, and the golden lampstand with its lamps is ready to light every evening. (2 Chr 13:10-11)

⁸¹⁰ See similar observations by Strathmann, “λειτουργέω,” *TDNT*, 4:220-21; Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 66; Silva, ed., “λειτουργέω,” *NIDNTE*, 2nd ed., 3:105; and Brunner, *Worship*, 14.

⁸¹¹ The LXX also has one case of λειτουργός in reference to the service to God performed by angels (Ps 102:21 LXX).

⁸¹² This phrase is similar to Acts 13:2 (λειτουργούντων ... τῷ κυρίῳ). See also Ez 45:4 LXX.

So, in the LXX, λειτουργέω and its cognate terms commonly refer to the priestly work of offering sacrifices, burning incense, setting out the showbread, lighting the lampstand, and similar priestly duties in the Holy Place of the temple.⁸¹³

Λειτουργέω in the NT

In the NT, Luke uses this word group in Lk 1:23 and in Acts 13:2. In Lk 1:23, Luke discusses Zacharias and “the days of his priestly service” (αἱ ἡμέραι τῆς λειτουργίας αὐτοῦ) in the temple. In Lk 1:8-9, Luke specifies the nature of Zacharias’s service as burning incense, which is consistent with the use of the term in the LXX. As noted in chapter 3, Luke’s use of λειτουργούντων in Acts 13:2 is also a reference to priestly service, but Luke is here using the term metaphorically in reference to the (priestly) work of the five prophets and teachers at Antioch.⁸¹⁴

While the writer of Hebrews uses the λειτουργ- word group in its literal sense of priestly services in the temple,⁸¹⁵ Paul uses these terms six times in a figurative sense.⁸¹⁶ In Rom 15:16, for example, Paul describes himself as “a minister (λειτουργὸν) of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.” Here, Paul defines the work of λειτουργὸν as “ministering as a priest” (ιερουργοῦντα). He is not speaking of his role as a cleric in presiding over

⁸¹³ See a range of their activities in Ex 28:31, 39; Nm 3:31; 4:14. In 1 and 2 Chronicles, the term is used to refer to the Levites who were charged with “ministering” (λειτουργοῦντας) with music in the Holy Place (1 Chr 16:4-6). See also 1 Chr 6:32; 16:37; 23:28-31; 2 Chr 8:14; 31:2.

⁸¹⁴ See chapter 3, pages 136-43.

⁸¹⁵ Heb 10:11 (λειτουργέω); Heb 8:6; 9:21 (λειτουργία); and Heb 8:2 (λειτουργός).

⁸¹⁶ Rom 13:6; 15:16, 27; 2 Cor 9:12; Phil 2:17, 30. In each case, Paul uses the λειτουργ- term as a flattering way to describe someone’s ministry.

“worship services.” Rather, he is speaking in lofty terms of his role as an evangelist to the Gentiles. He expands on such figurative priestly language, describing the converted Gentiles as an “offering” (προσφορὰ) that is “acceptable” (εὐπρόσδεκτος), because it is “sanctified by the Spirit.” So, just as OT priests performed their daily duties involving temple sacrifice, Paul serves as a kind of “priest” who works daily to present the Gentiles as an acceptable offering to God.

Λειτουργία and Διακονία

A close analysis of the λειτουργέω word group in the NT reveals that the term is often used synonymously with the word group of διακονέω, a common NT term for “minister” and “ministry.”⁸¹⁷ In Josephus and other non-biblical literature of that era, the word διακονέω, much like λειτουργέω, is often used to refer to priestly or temple ministry.⁸¹⁸ In Acts 12:25, Luke refers to Barnabas and Saul’s relief mission to Jerusalem as διακονία. Only two verses later, he describes the work of Barnabas and Saul (along with Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen) as a kind of λειτουργία. In Rom 13:4, Paul describes the role of a civil authority as a διακονός, a minister of God. Two verses later, he refers to the same authorities as λειτουργοί, “ministers of God.” In Rom 15:16, Paul describes himself as a λειτουργός of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, while he usually refers to himself

⁸¹⁷ Acts 1:17 (“For he was counted among us and received his share in this *ministry*”); 1:25 (“to occupy this *ministry* and apostleship from which Judas turned aside”); 6:4 (“devote ourselves to prayer and to the *ministry* of the word”); 20:24 (“so that I may finish my course and the *ministry* which I received from the Lord Jesus”); 21:19 (“the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his *ministry*”).

⁸¹⁸ See Silva, ed., “διακονέω, etc.,” *NIDNTTE*, 1:702; H. Beyer, “διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος,” *TDNT*, 2:83; Moulton & Milligan, *Vocabulary*, 149.

as διάκονος and to his ministry as διακονία.⁸¹⁹ Twice in Romans 15, Paul uses διακονέω (15:25) and διακονία (15:31) to refer to the serving of contributions to the Jerusalem church, but in 15:27, he switches to the term λειτουργῆσαι (15:27) in reference to the same “ministry.” In 2 Cor 9:12-13, Paul refers to the same relief ministry as both a διακονία and a λειτουργία. In Hb 1:7 and 1:14, angels are referred to as λειτουργοί who perform διακονία. This repeated synonymous usage of διακονέω lends support to understanding λειτουργέω as ministry activity, not as “worship.”

Scholarly Missteps Regarding Λειτουργέω

Some scholars have made missteps in translating λειτουργέω, particularly in Acts 13:2. One mistake is to assume that λειτουργία should be understood as “liturgy,” a much-later English word that derives from the λειτουργ- word group. Gregory Dix, for example, cites Acts 13:2 as the scriptural basis for saying, “‘Liturgy’ is the name given ever since the days of the apostles to the act of taking part in the solemn corporate worship of God by the ‘priestly’ society of Christians.”⁸²⁰ Even the 1970 (Roman Catholic) New American Bible translated λειτουργούντων δὲ αὐτῶν τῷ κυρίῳ as “While they were engaged in the liturgy of the Lord.”⁸²¹ But the 2010 revised version of the

⁸¹⁹ See Rom 11:13; 15:31; 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Eph 3:7; Col 1:23, 25.

⁸²⁰ Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 1. Allen Ross also cites Acts 13:2 as biblical support of this statement: “This word *liturgy* is a perfectly good biblical word and need not be avoided as something foreign to historic Christianity,” in Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 462. Frederick W. Danker takes the view that when Paul calls himself a λειτουργός, he is calling himself a “liturgist.” See Danker, “Bridging St. Paul and the Apostolic Fathers: A Study in Reciprocity,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15:1 (February 1988): 87, 89.

⁸²¹ *The New American Bible* (Nashville: Catholic Publishers, 1970).

NAB seems to acknowledge this mistake when it revised the verse to “While they were worshipping the Lord.” However, this translation is also a problem because “worshipping” connotes assembly activity, which λειτουργούντων does not. The term is Luke’s flattering and figurative reference to the priest-like ministry of the five prophets and teachers.

In addition, some scholars have alleged that λειτουργέω means “the work of the people,” assuming that the term comes from two Greek words, λαός (people) and ἔργον (work).⁸²² In 1961, James Barr exposed this error as a classic case of etymologizing, i.e., assuming that the history of a word is a statement about its meaning. Barr further says that λειτουργέω comes from λήϊτος not λαός.⁸²³ Λειτουργέω cannot be understood by what it may have meant hundreds of years earlier (“work of the people”) or hundreds of years later (“liturgy”). Its NT meaning must be determined by the immediate context of the passage.

Summary of Λειτουργέω

In summary, λειτουργέω and its cognates are best understood as terms that refer to priestly ministry, not to “worship” in the modern sense. The idea that λειτουργέω refers to “worship” is not supported by the 150 times the word is found in the LXX, nor

⁸²² See, for example, Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 145; Burkhart, *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience*, 20, 67; and Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 462.

⁸²³ See Barr’s denunciation of this flaw concerning λειτουργέω in *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 149-51. He adds, “It is highly unlikely that the etymology of λειτουργία, whether the right one or a wrong one, was in the minds of either the LXX translators or of the NT writers at any point” (p. 150). Thiselton agrees, saying, “Sometimes interpreters seek to read too much into a dead metaphor,” in Thiselton, “Semantics and New Testament Interpretation,” 81.

by the fifteen times that the word group is found in the NT. It is possible that the mistaken association of λειτουργέω with “worship” arose from the later idea that Christian ministers are “priests” who perform “priestly ministry” when they conduct the church’s “liturgy” in Christian assemblies.

The Σέβω Word Group

The fourth Greek word that is occasionally translated as “worship” is actually a word group related to the verb σέβω.⁸²⁴ The word group contains thirteen different σέβ-terms: σέβω, σέβασμα, σεβάζομαι, σεβαστός, εὐσεβέω, εὐσέβεια, εὐσεβής, εὐσεβῶς, θεοσέβεια,⁸²⁵ θεοσεβής, ἀσέβεια, ἀσεβής, ἀσεβέω. These thirteen words appear fifty-six times in the NT. However, of these thirteen words, the NASB uses some form of “worship” to translate only four of these words a total of ten times: σέβω (six times),⁸²⁶ εὐσεβέω (once),⁸²⁷ σεβάζομαι (once),⁸²⁸ and σέβασμα (twice).⁸²⁹ This investigation will primarily focus on these four words in an attempt to answer two key questions. First,

⁸²⁴ Σέβω appears in the NT only in the middle voice (σέβομαι).

⁸²⁵ As noted in chapter 3, most English versions translate θεοσέβεια in 1 Tm 2:10 as “godliness,” while a few versions, including the NIV, translate θεοσέβεια here as “profess to worship God.” See pages 163-67.

⁸²⁶ The NASB translates σέβω with some form of “worship” six times (Mt 15:9; Mk 7:7; Acts 16:14; 18:7, 13; 19:27).

⁸²⁷ Εὐσεβέω appears only twice in the NT (Acts 17:23b; 1 Tm 5:4). The NASB translates it as “worship” only in Acts 17:23b.

⁸²⁸ Σεβάζομαι appears only once in all the NT and LXX. In its lone occurrence (Rom 1:25), the NASB translates σεβάζομαι with “worship.”

⁸²⁹ The NASB translates σέβασμα with “object(s) of worship” in Acts 17:23a; 2 Thes 2:4.

what is the meaning of these four words in the NT? Second, do these σέβω- terms convey a meaning that applies to what first-century Christians did in their assemblies? To answer these questions, primary attention will be given to the use of these terms in the LXX and the NT since these two bodies of literature are most likely to reflect how NT authors used these terms.

Σέβω: An Internal Feeling or a Physical Action?

Even though BDAG claims that σέβω means “to express in gestures, rites, or ceremonies one’s allegiance or devotion to deity; *worship*,”⁸³⁰ the context of NT and LXX evidence offers better support for viewing σέβω as a feeling or emotion rather than the physical activities of “gestures, rites, or ceremonies.”⁸³¹ Since the Hebrew counterpart of σέβω in the canonical OT⁸³² is ירא (“to fear”), σέβω should be primarily understood as a feeling, not a physical action.⁸³³ In addition, as is frequently noted in other lexicons,

⁸³⁰ Italics are original in BDAG, “σέβω,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 917. BDAG adds that σέβω means “to have a reverent attitude” but only “toward human beings.” The Louw & Nida lexicon concurs somewhat, saying that σέβω means “to express in attitude and ritual one’s allegiance to and regard for deity,” in *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:540. That σέβω connotes an attitude is well attested; but its connection with the performance of rituals is not prevalent in the NT and LXX.

⁸³¹ Σέβω is found ten times in the NT and twenty-one times in the LXX (seven times in the canonical OT).

⁸³² For purposes of this study, the thirty-nine books of the Protestant OT will be viewed as the “canonical OT.”

⁸³³ See Jo 4:24; 22:25; Jb 1:9; Is 29:13; Jon 1:9, where the Hebrew word ירא has been translated into σέβω in the LXX. Both σέβω and ירא are also similar in that they often point to God as the recipient of the action. The usual LXX translation of ירא is φοβέω. See also Silva, ed., “σέβομαι, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 4:273, and “φόβος, et al.,” 4:610.

σέβω in the NT and LXX frequently connotes the feeling or attitude of “revering,”⁸³⁴ which is roughly synonymous with “fearing God.” Foerster adds that, in the Greek world, “σεβ- always denotes awe,” is “used to denote an attitude,” and “is not something visible.”⁸³⁵ When the Wisdom of Solomon speaks negatively of revering (σέβονται) animals, the context adds, “They thought (ἐλογίσαντο) all the idols of the nations were gods” (Ws 15:6). The additional comment supports the idea that σέβομαι is the internal process of revering something and thinking it to be a god.

In Mt 15:9, Jesus cites Is 29:13, saying, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship (σέβονται) Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.”⁸³⁶ Here, since “honors Me” (με τιμᾷ) is parallel with “worship Me” (σέβονται με), it seems likely that σέβονται continues to connote a feeling, just as honoring is a feeling.⁸³⁷ So, the verse should be translated, “In vain do they revere Me ...” In other words, their reverence for God is essentially nullified when they teach the doctrines of men as commandments (ἐντάλματα). The problem with translating σέβονται as “worship” is that modern English readers may be inclined to equate “worship” with “performing rites and ceremonies.” Translating σέβω as “worship” might be acceptable if the English reader understood it as an “attitude of worship” (i.e.,

⁸³⁴ The idea of revering is prominently mentioned as a core meaning of σέβω/σέβομαι in *EDNT* (3:236), Liddell & Scott (1587), Moulton & Milligan (570-71), Louw & Nida (1:540), *NIDNTTE* (4:270ff.), and *TDNT*, 7:168-91.

⁸³⁵ W. Foerster, “σέβομαι, et al.,” *TDNT*, 7:169-70.

⁸³⁶ Mk 7:7 is identical to Mt 15:9.

⁸³⁷ Note also that σέβονται in Is 29:13 is a translation of יָרָא (to fear).

reverence) rather than “acts of worship” (rituals). However, it seems unlikely that modern readers will have such a narrow concept of “worship.”

In addition to the primary meaning of σέβω as “to revere,” the word in the NT can also mean “to adhere to the commandments of one’s god.”⁸³⁸ The idea here is that one’s reverence for a god leads them to obedience to that god.⁸³⁹ This secondary meaning of σέβω may include the performance of physical acts of devotion. For example, the participle σεβόμενοι seems to be used as a technical term in Acts to refer to Gentiles who adhered to Jewish beliefs and practices (Acts 13:43; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7; cf. εὐσεβής in Acts 10:2, 7). In several of these cases, σεβόμενοι is often translated as “God-fearers.”⁸⁴⁰ In other words, their reverence for Yahweh led them to live according to Yahweh’s commandments. Similarly, in 3 and 4 Maccabees, certain Jews are praised for revering God (σέβω), when it is clear that their adherence to Jewish food laws is in mind.⁸⁴¹ Thus, reverence for a deity can be shown in one’s behavior, but “rites and ceremonies” are rarely mentioned as part of that behavior. In only two passages of the twenty-one

⁸³⁸ The idea of adhering to commandments seems clear in Jo 22:23-25; Jb 1:8-9; 2 Mc 1:3-4; 3 Mc 3:4-5, 43; 4 Mc 5:24-26; Is 29:13; 66:14; Mt 15:9; Mk 7:7.

⁸³⁹ These two meanings of σέβω are similar to the two meanings of τιμάω, which can connote the feeling or attitude of “honoring” or the pragmatic action of “setting a price on.” See Silva, ed., “τιμή, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 4:493-98.

⁸⁴⁰ See, for example, CSB, HCSB, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT. The exact requirements of becoming a “God-fearer” in the first century is difficult to determine and has been the subject of debate. See Scot McKnight, “Proselytism and Godfearers,” *DNTB*, 846-47.

⁸⁴¹ See especially 3 Mc 3:4-7; 4 Mc 5:24-26.

references to σέβω in the LXX, such reverence to the deity seems to include offering sacrifice (Jo 22:23-25; Bel and Dragon 1:3).⁸⁴²

Even though σέβω, προσκυνέω, and λατρεύω are all (sometimes) translated as “worship” in English Bibles, there is no evidence that these three terms are synonymous.⁸⁴³ Throughout the LXX and NT, the general idea is that σέβω is performed in the heart, προσκυνέω is performed on the knees, and λατρεύω is performed with the hands in offering sacrifice. While all three words denote something that is performed for deity, each word has its own distinct meaning.

⁸⁴² Foerster cites two examples of σέβομαι from Xenophon and Cornutus in classical Greek where “the reference is obviously to a cultic act,” but he adds that the word in similar classical Greek contexts “denotes reverence rather than a particular form of worship,” in W. Foerster, “σέβομαι, et al.,” *TDNT*, 7:171.

⁸⁴³ In Bel and Dragon 1:4, 23-24, ἐσέβετο is distinguished from προσεκύνει as a separate action.

Εὐσεβέω/Εὐσέβεια: Upstanding Moral Behavior

The εὐσεβ- word group (εὐσέβεια, εὐσεβέω, and εὐσεβής) continues the general idea that σεβ- terms reflect reverence and upstanding moral behavior, with no particular focus on the performance of rites and ceremonies.⁸⁴⁴ The noun εὐσέβεια, which occurs fourteen times in the LXX and fifteen times in the NT, is commonly translated as “godliness,”⁸⁴⁵ not as the noun “worship.” Consequently, Louw & Nida’s lexicon defines εὐσέβεια as “behavior reflecting correct religious beliefs and attitudes - ‘piety, godliness.’”⁸⁴⁶ According to Foerster, Plato views the essence of εὐσέβεια as serving deity by doing good, even though the popular view of Plato’s time was that “εὐσέβεια consists in the worship paid to the gods in cultic acts.”⁸⁴⁷ Jewish (LXX) and Christian (NT) εὐσέβεια share Plato’s view that the term connotes a religious person’s exemplary moral behavior. The idea of performing rituals may be part of that behavior, but rituals do not seem to be the focus.

In the LXX, the specific attributes of those who exhibit εὐσέβεια are wisdom and knowledge (Prv 1:7; Is 11:2; 33:6; 1 Esd 1:21), self-control and righteous behavior (Is 33:6; 4 Mc 5:18-24, 31-36; 6:2-5), and observance of the law (Prv 13:11; 2 Mc 3:1; 4 Mc

⁸⁴⁴ The εὐ- prefix (“well”) typically casts the term in a favorable light, as it is used “to indicate abundance or intensity.” See Silva, ed., “σέβομαι, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2nd ed., 4:272.

⁸⁴⁵ “Piety” would be a better translation since “godliness” tends to connote a sense of being “God like,” which is not inherent in the σεβ- terms.

⁸⁴⁶ Louw & Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:532.

⁸⁴⁷ Foerster, “σέβομαι, et al.,” *TDNT*, 7:177. He notes that these cultic acts include paying for the furnishing of temples.

5:18-20; 6:2), which includes abstaining from defiling foods (4 Mc 5:18-20).⁸⁴⁸ In the NT, εὐσέβεια similarly refers to behavior that adheres to the precepts of one's religion, with no obvious connection to performing rites and ceremonies. In the Pastorals and 2 Peter, εὐσέβεια is listed alongside other Christian virtues such as dignity (1 Tm 2:2), righteousness, faith, love, perseverance, gentleness (1 Tm 6:11), knowledge, self-control, perseverance, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Pt 1:6-7). So, Christian εὐσέβεια describes morally excellent behavior that is attained through spiritual discipline (1 Tm 4:7) and the "true knowledge" of Jesus (2 Pt 1:3-7; Ti 1:1). In the Pastorals, εὐσέβεια is so highly prized that it represents the summary teaching of Christianity⁸⁴⁹ and is "profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Tm 4:8; 6:6). In all NT references to Christian εὐσέβεια, there is no indication that the term connotes the performance of rituals or ceremonies.

The verb εὐσεβέω, found twice in the NT and five times in the LXX, generally means "to act piously" in concert with one's religious scruples.⁸⁵⁰ However, in Acts

⁸⁴⁸ Similarly, the adjective εὐσεβής ("pious") connotes a good person (Prv 13:19-22 LXX) who keeps the commandments (Is 24:16 LXX; Mi 7:2; Sir 12:4; 13:17; 16:13; 23:12; 33:14; 37:12; 39:27) and is known for wisdom (Jdt 8:28-31; Sir 27:11; 43:33), prudence, justice, courage, and mastery over the passions, which includes abstaining from defiling foods (4 Mc 1:1-4; 6:31; 7:16; 13:1; 15:23; 16:1; 18:2). In the NT, εὐσεβής describes Gentiles who adhere to Jewish religious practices (Acts 10:2, 7) or Christians who avoid temptation and maintain righteous behavior (2 Pt 2:7-10). In like manner, the adverb εὐσεβῶς ("godly" or "piously") refers to an admirable conduct of life in concert with one's religious scruples.

⁸⁴⁹ In the Pastorals, Paul speaks of "the truth which is according to godliness" (Ti 1:1) and "the doctrine conforming to godliness" (1 Tm 6:3; cf. 3:16).

⁸⁵⁰ This meaning seems clear in six of the seven occurrences: 4 Mc 9:6; 11:5, 23; 18:1; Sus 1:63; 1 Tm 5:4.

17:23, when Paul finds an altar inscribed, “To an unknown god,” he says to the Athenians, “Therefore what you *worship* in ignorance (ὁ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε), this I proclaim to you.” While English versions commonly translate εὐσεβεῖτε as “worship,” this translation begs the question, Does “worship” here mean “to sing praise,” “to perform rites and ceremonies,” or “to feel reverence”? There is no precedent in the NT for assuming that εὐσεβέω means “to sing praise” or “to perform rites and ceremonies,” and the idea of feeling reverence lacks the inherent behavioral component of the term. So, it seems better to translate εὐσεβέω as “to act piously” or “to piously revere.” The verse then reads: “Therefore what you piously revere in ignorance ...”. Such a rendering reflects the usage of εὐσεβέω and the σεβ- terms throughout the NT and LXX. While the translation of “worship” fits our modern vernacular, it lacks lexical support.

Consider the same term (εὐσεβέω) in 1 Tm 5:4, its only other occurrence in the NT: “If any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn *to act piously* (εὐσεβεῖν) in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.” Here, εὐσεβεῖν clearly has no reference to “worship” or to performing rites and ceremonies but rather to behaving uprightly in concert with one’s religion, “for this is acceptable in the sight of God.” Indeed, none of the sixty-two English Bible versions at www.biblegateway.com translate εὐσεβεῖν in 1 Tm 5:4 with any form of “worship.” So, the evidence in the NT and the LXX supports the idea that εὐσεβέω means “to act piously” or “to piously revere” in concert with one’s religious scruples.

Σεβάζομαι and Σέβασμα

The only other σεβ- terms that are translated as “worship” in the NASB are σεβάζομαι and σέβασμα. Since σεβάζομαι is a hapax legomenon in the NT and is not found in the LXX, it is more challenging to determine its meaning. Its only occurrence is Rom 1:25: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served (ἐσεβάσθησαν καὶ ἐλάτρευσαν) the creature rather than the Creator.” All the major English Bibles use “worshiped” for ἐσεβάσθησαν here, apparently assuming that “worship” is a correct translation for σέβομαι and that σέβομαι and σεβάζομαι are synonymous.⁸⁵¹ But these assumptions are problematic. The New American Bible is probably more correct in rendering ἐσεβάσθησαν as “revered.” However, the -άζομαι ending on σεβάζομαι would typically create “a stronger form of σέβομαι.”⁸⁵² So, taking “revere” as a better translation of σέβομαι, it seems likely that σεβάζομαι means “deify.” Σεβάζομαι, then, is not just to “revere” something, it means to “deify” it, to treat it as a real god. In this passage, Paul is elaborating on the “ungodliness” (ἀσέβεια, Rom 1:18) of the Gentile pagans who had “exchanged the glory” of God for idols of men and animals (Rom 1:23). These idolaters, then, “deified (ἐσεβάσθησαν) and offered sacrifice (ἐλάτρευσαν)⁸⁵³ to the creature rather than the Creator.” They did not just “revere” the idols; they “deified” them, which in effect, transferred the glory of the Creator to the creature (v. 25). Thus, ἐσεβάσθησαν is essentially a parallel idea to endowing idols with

⁸⁵¹ “Worshiped” is the translation of ASV, CSB, ESV, KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, NET, NLT, and many others.

⁸⁵² Moulton & Milligan, “σεβάζομαι,” *Vocabulary*, 570.

⁸⁵³ See the section on λατρεύω/λατρεία on pages 212-25.

the “glory” of deity (v. 23). Σεβάζομαι, like σέβομαι, should be understood as an attitude, an unseen function of the heart.

Σέβασμα, while often translated “objects of worship,” would be better translated as “objects of reverence.” In its five cases in the NT and LXX, σέβασμα is always used in reference to idolatry and specifically to stone or wood idols (Ws 14:20-21; 15:15-18), altars (Acts 17:23), and possibly temples (2 Thes 2:4). In a unique case in *Bel and the Dragon*, the Babylonians revered (ἐσέβοντο) a dragon.⁸⁵⁴ After the dragon burst open, Daniel pointed to its remains, saying, “Behold your objects of reverence” (σεβάσματα, *Bel and Dragon* 1:27).⁸⁵⁵ In these five verses, the translation of “objects of worship” might sound familiar to modern English ears, but “objects of reverence” is more in keeping with contextual evidence of σέβομαι. If altars and temples might also be considered as σεβάσματα,⁸⁵⁶ it is more likely that these objects would be “revered” and not “worshiped,” since it is unlikely that one would perform rites and ceremonies to an altar. Altars and temples, however, might be viewed as sacred and thus become “objects of reverence.”

Summary of the Σεβ- Cognates

All the σεβ- terms should be viewed as stemming from a concept of “revering” (not “worshiping”), with an alternative secondary meaning of “adhering to the commandments of one’s deity.” The BDAG lexicon claims that σέβομαι means “to

⁸⁵⁴ “Revere” is the translation of both the NRSV and NETS.

⁸⁵⁵ The term σεβάσματα is found in the Theodotion version.

⁸⁵⁶ Of Acts 17:23, Foerster says, “Here σεβάσματα are not just idols but all objects connected with the cultus, including altars,” in “σέβομαι, et al.,” *TDNT*, 7:173.

express in gestures, rites, or ceremonies one's allegiance or devotion to deity; *worship*."

But the evidence in the NT and LXX does not connect σέβομαι with the performance of rites and ceremonies. The cognate terms related to εὐσεβεία are somewhat different. They connote upstanding or pious moral behavior that adheres to the precepts of one's religion, but these terms contain no obvious connection to performing rites and ceremonies.

Consequently, εὐσεβεία in the NT can be commonly translated as "piety" or "godliness," while εὐσεβέω should be understood as "to act piously" or "to piously revere."

It must be noted that σέβομαι in the NT is not applied to Christians or Christian activities.⁸⁵⁷ As Foerster notes, "In the NT σέβομαι ... is not used of Christians in relation to Christians."⁸⁵⁸ Yet, in the Pastorals and 2 Peter, εὐσεβέω/εὐσεβεία, with the transformative εὐ- prefix, represent a "good" kind of σέβομαι that does apply to exemplary Christian behavior. The *NIDNTTE* surmises, "It is indeed likely that, in the early years of the Christian church, the words in this (σεβ-) group were avoided ... because of their pagan associations."⁸⁵⁹ The *NIDNTTE* adds that such aversion to the σεβ- group disappeared by the time of the later epistles. But it is possible that aversion to the σεβ- group continued, while the εὐσεβ- group (the "good" kind of reverence) was embraced.

⁸⁵⁷ In the NT, σέβομαι applies to Jews (Mt 15:9; Mk 7:7; Acts 18:13), God-fearers (Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7), and to idolaters (Acts 19:27). In the LXX, σέβομαι applies to Jews and idolaters.

⁸⁵⁸ Foerster, "σέβομαι, et al.," *TDNT*, 7:172.

⁸⁵⁹ Silva, ed., "σέβομαι, et al.," *NIDNTTE*, 4:275-76.

Regardless of any possible aversion or acceptance of the σέβ- terms, it is certainly true that none of the σέβ- terms—or the εὐσεβ- terms—were used in the NT to describe what first-century Christians did in their assemblies. The absence of these terms in assembly contexts may be related to the fact that the NT transforms the idea of the “temple” (Mt 24:1-2), removing the idea of revered places (Jn 4:20-24), priests (1 Pt 2:5-9), and altars (Heb 13:10). In Christ, what matters is εὐσέβεια, an exemplary and pious life that is acceptable to God.

θρησκεία

The fifth Greek term that is sometimes translated as “worship” is the noun θρησκεία. The only time it is translated as “worship” in the NT is in Col 2:18, where θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων is often rendered as “worship of angels.” This analysis will focus on two key issues. The first issue is the meaning of θρησκεία in the NT, which will include a closer look at Col 2:18. The second issue considers whether θρησκεία applies to first-century Christian assemblies.

Since θρησκεία is found only four times in the NT and another four times in the LXX, this analysis will expand the database of samples to include Josephus, who uses the term about ninety times.⁸⁶⁰ While there is no evidence that NT writers were familiar with Josephus (37 – ca. 100 AD), his writings may be helpful as an example of how θρησκεία was understood by a Jew who wrote in Greek in the first century in Judea.⁸⁶¹ Also, since

⁸⁶⁰ Even though the writings of Philo (20 BC - ca. 50 AD) might have some value, they are not included in this analysis for two reasons. First, they were written in Egypt, outside of the area where the NT documents were composed. Second, evidence from the NT, LXX, and Josephus should provide an adequate sampling for the purposes of this dissertation.

⁸⁶¹ Steve Mason, “Josephus: Value for New Testament Study,” *DNTB*, 596-600.

Josephus was a Jew of priestly descent who wrote about religious matters, and since *θρησκεία* is a religious term, his concept of *θρησκεία* may mirror the concept held by NT writers.

θρησκεία in the NT, LXX, and Josephus

A close survey of the use of *θρησκεία* in the NT, LXX, and Josephus reveals that the term has two basic meanings. The first is “religion,” which can be defined as “a set or system of religious beliefs and practices.” The second meaning is “religious rites,” which can be defined as “ceremonial acts performed to or for a god,” such as sacrifices performed in a temple. Three of the four NT references to *θρησκεία* clearly connote “religion” (Acts 26:5; Jas 1:26, 27), while one reference should be understood as “religious rites” (Col 2:18). In Acts 26:5, Paul describes himself as belonging to the Pharisees, “the strictest sect” of the Jews’ *θρησκεία* (“religion”). Since a sect is more naturally understood as a subdivision of a “religion” than a subdivision of “religious rites,” it is likely here that *θρησκεία* should be translated as “religion.”⁸⁶² In Jas 1:26-27, *θρησκεία* is used twice, while the adjective *θρησκός* in v. 26 is commonly translated as “religious.”⁸⁶³ Since James identifies “pure and undefiled” *θρησκεία* as visiting orphans and widows and keeping oneself unstained by the world, “religion” (a system of religious beliefs and practices) is a much better translation than “religious rites,” which are not mentioned or implied in the context.

⁸⁶² In Acts 26:5, *θρησκεία* is “religion” in the ASV, CSB, ESV, KJV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, and RSV.

⁸⁶³ In Jas 1:26-27, *θρησκεία* is “religion” in the ASV, CSB, ESV, KJV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, and RSV. None of the sixty-two English versions at www.biblegateway.com translate *θρησκεία* here as “worship.”

In the four references to θρησκεία in the LXX, the term continues to connote “religion.” Two references are found in 4 Maccabees 5, where θρησκεία is compared to a “philosophy” (v. 11) that includes abstaining from eating pork (vv. 6-9), but the passage includes no mention of ceremonial rites. The other two references are in Wisdom 14, where θρησκεία applies to pagan ceremonial rites that involve carved images (τὰ γλυπτά, v. 17), objects of reverence (σέβασμα, vv. 16-21) and initiations, mysteries, and customs (v. 23). However, this particular θρησκεία also involves such non-ceremonial practices as adultery, theft, perjury, sexual perversion, and debauchery (vv. 23-27). This combination of religious rites and lifestyle behavior fits the idea of a “religion.”

In Josephus, θρησκεία can connote a “religion”⁸⁶⁴ but the term often refers specifically to “religious rites,” such as the ceremonial acts performed in the temple. In *Wars of the Jews*, for example, Josephus reports that the Roman general Pompey admired how the Jews in the temple continued their θρησκεία even though the temple was under siege (ca. 65 BC). Josephus here elaborates on the Jews’ θρησκεία, identifying it as “their daily sacrifices and purifications” in the temple.⁸⁶⁵ Consequently, when Josephus discusses the daily functioning of the temple or the abandoning of these functions, he often refers to these practices as θρησκεία.⁸⁶⁶ Jews were proud of “the great glory” of

⁸⁶⁴ For example, see τῇ Ἰουδαϊκῇ θρησκείᾳ in *J.W.* 2.560, which speaks of women who were “addicted to the Jewish religion.”

⁸⁶⁵ *J.W.* 1.148. The context of θρησκεία focuses on temple sacrificial rites in *Ant.* 6.19, 148, 426; 9.273; 10.53; 11.9; *J.W.* 1.150; 2.10.

⁸⁶⁶ For example, the daily temple functions are described in *J.W.* 1.148; *Ant.* 9.273.

these rites.⁸⁶⁷ Josephus often notes that θρησκεία is conducted according to laws⁸⁶⁸ and ancestral customs,⁸⁶⁹ which can include more than ceremonial rites. For example, θρησκεία can encompass non-temple functions such as abstaining from work on the Sabbath (*J.W.* 1.146; 2.391, 456) or abstaining from alcohol for religious reasons (*J.W.* 5.229).

The Lexicons and θρησκεία

The *NIDNTTE* says the standard translation for θρησκεία is “service of God, religion.”⁸⁷⁰ The *EDNT* takes a similar approach, saying, “This word, which is difficult to explain etymologically ... denotes in its basic meaning holy service, thus religion and its practice, ‘with particular emphasis on the zealousness of such practice’.”⁸⁷¹ The Louw & Nida lexicon provides a similar analysis, saying that θρησκεία means “appropriate beliefs and devout practice of obligations relating to supernatural persons and powers – ‘religion, piety.’”⁸⁷²

⁸⁶⁷ *J.W.* 6.442. The Jews are also described as diligent or zealous about these rites in *Ant.* 1.222; 4.306; 6.19; 8.395; 9.157; 11.85.

⁸⁶⁸ In Josephus, θρησκεία appears with the idea of abiding by laws in *J.W.* 1.148; 6.426-27; *Ant.* 2.211; 4.306, 312; 5.98, 112-13; 8.127, 191-92; 8.229, 395; 9.95, 157, 273; 11.212; 12.253, 271; 13.198-99; 18.287, 349; 20.13.

⁸⁶⁹ Josephus also uses θρησκεία when referring to the ancestral (πάτριον) customs of the temple in *Ant.* 8.229; 9.95; 11.9; 12. 253, 269, 324, 364; 16.174.

⁸⁷⁰ Silva, ed., “θρησκεία, et al.,” *NIDNTTE*, 2:466.

⁸⁷¹ Walter Radl, “θρησκεία,” *EDNT*, 2:154.

⁸⁷² Louw & Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:531. The lexicon notes that θρησκεία can be synonymous with εὐσέβεια and θεοσέβεια.

BDAG, however, prefers the translation of “worship,” saying that θρησκεία is an “expression of devotion to transcendent beings, esp. as it expresses itself in cultic rites.”⁸⁷³ While θρησκεία in Josephus can certainly include “cultic rites,” the evidence in the NT and LXX lacks a focus on ceremonial practices. Is BDAG correct that “worship” is an appropriate translation? If English readers understood “worship” as “ceremonial religious rites,” this gloss can be accurate. However, translating θρησκεία as “worship” is problematic in two ways. First, the English term ‘worship’ does not always represent the full range of behavior represented by θρησκεία, as is clear in Acts 26:5 and Jas 1:26, 27. “Religion” is a better translation in many contexts. Second, “worship” in twenty-first century American English increasingly connotes singing and music. But in the NT, LXX, and Josephus, none of these 100+ references to θρησκεία (or θρησκεύω⁸⁷⁴) implies that singing or praising God with music is inherently a part of the term. So, it seems best to translate θρησκεία as either “religion” or “religious rites,” depending on the context.

The θρησκεία of Col 2:18

Col 2:18 is the lone verse in the NT where θρησκεία has been translated as “worship.”⁸⁷⁵ Much discussion of Col 2:18 has centered around whether θρησκεία τῶν

⁸⁷³ BDAG, “θρησκεία,” *Greek-English Lexicon*, 459.

⁸⁷⁴ The verb θρησκεύω is absent in the NT. In the LXX and Josephus, the verb θρησκεύω is often synonymous with σέβομαι (to revere) and τιμάω (to honor). In *Ant.* 8.192, Josephus uses all three terms in a discussion about Solomon: “He also began to revere (θρησκεύειν) the gods of his wives, [which we should not do] lest we should revere (σέβονται) their gods, neglecting to honor (τιμᾶν) our own God” (translation by author).

⁸⁷⁵ These Bibles use “worship” for θρησκεία in Col 2:18: ASV, CSB, ESV, KJV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, NLT, RSV. “Cult of angels” is Moffatt’s novel translation in James Moffatt, *The Bible: A New Translation* (London: Harper, 1935).

ἁγγέλων (“the worship of angels”) should be understood as a subjective genitive (angels that “worship”) or objective genitive (angels who are “worshipped”).⁸⁷⁶ However, the discussion generally assumes that “worship” is an accurate translation of θρησκεία, which leads the modern English-speaking reader to think of singing, as if the heresy involves “singing praises to angels.”⁸⁷⁷ However, there is no evidence in the NT, LXX, or Josephus that θρησκεία connotes singing or giving praise.

If θρησκεία τῶν ἁγγέλων is presumed to refer to offering “religious rites” to angels, it must be observed that such an idea should be abhorrent to anyone connected to Judaism. The First and Second Commandments prohibit offering such reverence to anything that “is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth” (Ex 20:4-5). It seems unlikely that the Colossian heretics would abandon the fundamental doctrine of the First Commandment, yet embrace Jewish regulations of “a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day” (Col 2:16). So, the θρησκεία τῶν ἁγγέλων could refer to the “religious rites of angels,” i.e., the rites offered by angels to God. Since Paul accuses the heretics of being “inflated without cause by his fleshly mind” (v. 18), such arrogance may

⁸⁷⁶ For a summary of recent scholarly reflection on θρησκεία τῶν ἁγγέλων, see G. K. Beale, “The Temple and Anti-Temple at Colossae,” in *Who Created Christianity?: Fresh Approaches to the Relationship Between Paul and Jesus*, eds. Craig Evans and Aaron White (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 2020), 411-31. See also the discussion of objective vs. subjective genitive in Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface Between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 90-95.

⁸⁷⁷ For example, Sullivan says that Col 2:18 and the Dead Sea Scrolls’ *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, which mention angels singing and praying, “suggest that communities sought to be part of the ongoing heavenly liturgy of angels” (Kevin P. Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 146). But this presumes that θρησκεία refers to singing and praying.

have been prompted by the Colossians' perceived heavenly connection to some special "religious rites" offered by angels.

"Religion of angels" may be a better translation.⁸⁷⁸ Recently, several second-century Colossae-area inscriptions led Greg Beale to make a strong argument that ἐμβατεύων in v. 18 means "entering into the innermost sanctuary," not "going into detail."⁸⁷⁹ Beale assumes that θρησκεία means "worship," and he translates the verse: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, which he has seen, while entering [into the sanctuary], inflated without cause by his fleshly mind."⁸⁸⁰ Assuming that Beale is correct about ἐμβατεύω, the Colossian heresy involves a return to a temple-based religion with all the trappings of cultic regulations involving festivals, new moons, and Sabbath days (v. 16), along with ascetic regulations involving "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch" (v. 21). Since the heresy involves "a system of religious beliefs and practices," θρησκεία should be translated as "religion." Paul, however, emphasizes that Christ nailed these religious dogmas (δόγμασιν, v. 14) to the cross, and Christians must not be "dogmatized" (δογματίζεσθε, v. 20) by such "commandments and teachings of men" (τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ

⁸⁷⁸ Wayne Meeks also considers the Colossian heresy to involve the "religion of angels," in Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 126.

⁸⁷⁹ Beale, "The Temple and Anti-Temple at Colossae," 424-27. Ἐμβατεύω is a hapax legomenon.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., 424. Note that Beale assumes that "worship of angels" is an appropriate translation.

διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, v. 22).⁸⁸¹ The exact nature of the Colossian heresy and the “religion of angels” may never be known, but for purposes of this dissertation, it is important to note that “worship” is a problematic translation and that θρησκεία likely connotes “religion.”

θρησκεία and the Christian Assembly

What does θρησκεία have to do with the Christian assembly? Even though the four references to θρησκεία in the NT are not found in discussions about a Christian meeting, two questions emerge. Did the early Christians view Christianity as a “religion” (θρησκεία)? And did the early Christians view certain activities, such as the Lord’s Supper and baptism, as ceremonies or “religious rites” (θρησκεία)?⁸⁸²

First, when James refers to “pure and undefiled religion” (θρησκεία), he seems to imply that Christians have a “religion.” He says the only religion of value is one that includes self-control and compassionate kindness (bridling the tongue and taking care of widows), but he does not mention observance of rites and ceremonies. James may be equating “pure and undefiled” religion with the “faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ,” which appears in the next verse (2:1).⁸⁸³ Thus, by using the term θρησκεία, James may be

⁸⁸¹ Perhaps intentionally, Paul’s reference to τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων mirrors Jesus’s citation of Is 29:13 and the condemnation of διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων (Mt 15:9; Mk 7:7).

⁸⁸² Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are mentioned because they are widely viewed today as “sacraments” or “religious rites.”

⁸⁸³ This section of James (1:19 - 2:13) focuses on the importance of ethical actions, which fits his idea of “pure and undefiled” religion. Some scholars see James’ idea of pure and undefiled religion as the “literary hinge” that recapitulates the introduction and launches into the overall argument of the epistle. See Mark E. Taylor,

distinguishing the key difference between the “faith of our glorious Christ” and the common religion of his day.

Edwin Judge says that we should discard the idea that early Christianity was defined, in that era, as a religion:

It is hard to see how anyone could seriously have related the phenomenon of Christianity to the practice of religion in its first-century sense. ... Without temple, cult statue, or ritual, they lacked the time-honoured and reassuring routine of sacrifice that would have been necessary to link them with religion.⁸⁸⁴

In addition to lacking temples, statues, rituals, and sacrifices, Meeks adds that first-century Christians also lacked public festivals, performances, and pilgrimages.⁸⁸⁵

Without all these elements, including the lack of altars and a special priestly caste, which were all common to first-century Judaism and Greco-Roman religions,⁸⁸⁶ the early Christians must have seemed strange indeed to their surrounding culture. In Acts, Luke may be noting the non-θρησκεία status of the Christian faith when he says that it was called “the Way” (ὁ ὁδός, Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22; cf. 16:17; 18:25-26).

While θρησκεία was verifiably not applied to discussions of the Christian assembly in the NT, it remains a question whether early Christians viewed their assemblies as containing “religious rites” (θρησκεία). It is true that many church cultures today routinely view such activities as baptism and the Lord’s Supper as “rites.” But did

“Recent Scholarship on the Structure of James,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 3 (2004): 93.

⁸⁸⁴ Edwin A. Judge, “The Social Identity of the First Christians: a Question of Method in Religious History,” *The Journal of Religious History* 11:2 (Dec 1980): 212.

⁸⁸⁵ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 140.

⁸⁸⁶ David E. Aune, “Greco-Roman Religion,” *DNTB*, 917-26.

the early Christians consider such activities as θρησκεία? Since the Corinthians took Lord's Supper meal in such a disorderly manner, and since Paul prescribes no ceremonial procedure for the Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34), it seems unlikely that Paul or the early Christians regarded it as a religious rite.⁸⁸⁷ In addition, the Lord's Supper did not take place in a sacred building and was not performed by a religious official or "priest," which would have been the common idea of θρησκεία activities of the first century. NT baptism has the additional distinction of not being an assembly event since baptisms appear to be performed spontaneously and outside of assemblies.⁸⁸⁸ So, the idea of a Christian θρησκεία, whether as a "Christian religion" or "Christian religious rites," seems unlikely. However, due to the lack of information about θρησκεία in the NT, the question must remain unresolved.

θρησκεία Summary

Evidence from about 100 references to θρησκεία in the NT, LXX, and Josephus indicates that the term has two basic meanings. The first is "religion," and the second is "religious rites." BDAG says the term means "worship," but this term contains connotations that would mislead the modern English-speaking reader. However θρησκεία is translated, this term is not used in the NT in reference to the Christian assembly or to any events thereof. The Christian faith bore little resemblance to the standard view of a

⁸⁸⁷ See the discussion of the Corinthian Lord's Supper in chapter 3 on pages 151-56.

⁸⁸⁸ Cross says that he must agree with the Anglican priest G. W. H. Lampe in saying that the NT lacks evidence that baptism "involved or included" outward and visible ceremony, in Anthony R. Cross, "Spirit- and Water-Baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13," in *Dimensions of Baptism*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 125.

“religion” (θρησκεία) in the first century, and it seems doubtful that first-century Christians viewed any Christian practice as a “religious rite.”

Summary of the Greek Words for “Worship”

Hoping to determine why the NT does not use “worship” terminology in reference to Christian assemblies, this chapter sought to determine the meaning of the five Greek words that are commonly translated as “worship”: προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, σέβομαι, and θρησκεία. After all, it is possible that NT writers could have described their assemblies as “worship” but never had opportunity to do so. However, this chapter has revealed that it is questionable whether any of the five words should be translated as “worship.” While it is true that the English term ‘worship’ and all five Greek words connote “something done for deity,” each of these Greek words has its own distinct “thing” done for that god. Προσκυνέω refers to prostrating. Λατρεύω refers to sacrificing. Λειτουργέω refers to the temple work of priests. Σέβομαι refers either to revering or to adhering to the precepts of one’s deity. Θρησκεία refers to religion or to religious rites. None of these words are synonymous with any of the others.⁸⁸⁹

The key commonality of all these terms is its application to temple functions. Προσκυνέω commonly refers to the obligatory prostration performed before a deity in that deity’s temple. Λατρεύω often refers to serving a deity with sacrifices at a temple. Λειτουργέω refers to the work that priests perform in a temple. Σέβομαι typically refers to the reverent emotion or attitude that one brings when fulfilling the deity’s requirements in a temple. Θρησκεία often refers to the religious rites performed in a temple. All of

⁸⁸⁹ It should be noted that σέβομαι may be synonymous with the verb θρησκεύω, which is not found in the NT.

these terms apply to activities within the Jewish temple and within the temples of the common Greco-Roman religions of the day.

A likely reason why these five words were not used by Christians in reference to their meetings is the fact that Christians had no temple. The once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus, along with his predicted destruction of the temple, obliterated the ongoing need for sacrifice, altar, ritual, priest, and temple. Put in different terms, the sacrifice of Jesus obliterated the need for προσκυνέω worship, λατρεύω worship, λειτουργέω worship, σέβομαι worship, and θρησκεία worship. Going to a temple to prostrate (προσκυνέω) before God is now obsolete; the very idea of a sacred “place” has been erased (Jn 4:20-24). Offering sacrifices for sin in a temple (λατρεύω) is also obsolete because of Jesus’s “one sacrifice for sins for all time” (Heb 10:10-14). Literal λατρεία has been replaced with metaphorical λατρεία, as Christians now present their bodies as “a living and holy sacrifice,” i.e., lives that are not conformed to this world but are transformed by a renewed mind (Rom 12:1-2). The need for the daily work of priests in the temple (λειτουργέω) has been replaced with the idea that all Christians are priests and “holy ones” (οἱ ἅγιοι) who must maintain excellent behavior in society (1 Pt 2:4-12). Since God’s new dwelling place (temple) is in the Christian body, the idea of revering sacred places, persons, and things (σέβομαι) has been replaced with the need for an exemplary and pious life (εὐσέβεια, 1 Tm 4:8; 6:6). In Christ, the very idea of a temple-based religion with its rules and religious rites (θρησκεία) has been replaced with “The Way” of Christ, which strives for the simplicity of a bridled tongue and caring for those in need (Jas 1:26-27).

In short, the sacrificial death of Jesus, which nullified the need for (temple) “worship,” was the likely reason why the early Christians never described their assemblies as “worship.” Christians still praised God and prayed to Him in their assemblies, but these activities were not viewed as “worship” in the first century, i.e., as προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω, σέβομαι, or θρησκεία. The lives of Christians, in society and in their gatherings, were focused on striving for exemplary moral behavior as they offered their bodies as living and holy sacrifices that are acceptable to God. This newfound mission was their “spiritual service of worship,” their λογικὴν λατρείαν.

Chapter 5 will summarize the key findings of chapters 1-4, reflect on their significance for church life today, and offer suggestions for further study. A key focus of chapter 5 will be an analysis of how these findings might affect the common perspective of the modern Christian assembly and how these findings might affect the activities that are performed in those assemblies. This analysis will also consider how warranted changes to the assembly might affect the Church over the long term.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has sought to investigate why the NT does not use Greek “worship” terminology when it discusses Christian assemblies. To answer this question, the investigation reviewed scholarly reflection on this issue since 1950 (chapter 2), analyzed NT descriptions of Christian assemblies (chapter 3), and examined the meaning(s) of the common Greek terms for “worship” in the NT (chapter 4). The task now is to summarize the key findings of this investigation, to identify the major implications of this study for church life today, and to offer suggestions for further research.

The overall conclusion of this dissertation can be succinctly summarized as follows. First, the early Christians did not describe the assembly using “worship” terminology because they viewed the meeting as a simple horizontally oriented “gathering” or “assembly” that was intended to build up one another in Christ, not as a formal vertically oriented offering to God that was intended to secure the remission of sin. A second reason why Christian assemblies were not described as “worship” is because none of the five Greek “worship” words convey a meaning that applied to Christian assembly activity.⁸⁹⁰ Rather, these five words are temple terms, and the NT understands that the temple has been nullified by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. In other words, Christians do not engage in “temple worship,” whether by prostrating (προσκυνέω), sacrificing (λατρεύω), performing priestly functions (λειτουργέω), revering

⁸⁹⁰ As noted in chapter 4, the NT contains two cases where λατρεύω is used metaphorically in a way that might be applied by others to Christian assembly activity. Λατρεύω is used in a metaphorical sense in reference to Anna’s praying and fasting in the temple (Lk 2:37), and the concept of a metaphorical λατρεία is seen in the idea of a “sacrifice of praise” (Heb 13:15).

God (σέβομαι), or performing religious rites (θρησκεία), because the sacrifice of Jesus has enabled “a new and living way” to be sanctified in the presence of God (Heb 10:20). That “new and living way” has been accomplished “by the blood of Jesus,” not by the performance of (weekly) rituals or offerings (Heb 10:19).

Summary of Findings

This investigation has resulted in several significant findings, but the following are the most important. Chapter 3 resulted in four findings. The first is that the NT writers did not use Greek “worship” terminology (e.g., προσκυνέω, λατρεύω, λειτουργέω) to refer to NT assemblies or to NT assembly activities. The second finding is that NT writers described Christian meetings, not with cultic or ceremonial terms, but with common everyday terms such as “gathering,” “meeting,” and “assembly.” The third finding is that NT gatherings included horizontal “one-anothering” activities and vertical activities such as prayer and singing, but the horizontal activities are given more emphasis. The fourth finding is that Paul explicitly states that all assembly activities must be done for edification, regardless of whether they are oriented vertically or horizontally.

Chapter 4 resulted in four key findings. The first finding is that προσκυνέω, the Greek word that is most frequently translated as “worship” in the NT, should not be translated as “worship,” but rather as “prostrate oneself to.” This finding brings clarity to key “worship” passages such as Mt 4:10, Jn 4:20-24, and 1 Cor 14:25. The second finding is that λατρεύω, which is usually translated as “worship” or “serve,” should rather be translated as “to serve with sacrifice” or simply “to offer sacrifice.” This finding sheds light on other “worship” passages such as Rom 12:1 and Heb 12:28. A third key finding is that λειτουργέω and its cognates refer to priestly ministry, not to “worship” in the

modern sense. This finding is supported by the term's 150 occurrences in the LXX and its fifteen references in the NT. The final key finding is that it is best to avoid translating any of the five Greek words as "worship." All five Greek words connote something done for deity, but each word refers to its own distinct activity performed for a deity. The translation of "worship" is likely to mislead and confuse the modern reader.

These findings must be tempered with some caveats. First, while λατρεία is not used in the NT in reference to assembly activities, it is possible to view prayer (Lk 2:37) and praising God (Heb 13:15) as forms of *metaphorical* λατρεία in the sense of offering spiritual sacrifices to God. Second, the NT concept of σέβομαι, in the sense of "revering" God, is certainly something that Christians do, even though the term is not applied to assembly activities. In the NT, Christians did not perceive themselves as needing to go to any place to revere God. Christians had no sacred places. Since God now dwells within each Christian, revering Him is ongoing and does not require cultic rituals.

The findings of this dissertation underscore the benefits of investigating this topic, as much as possible, without preconceived ideas as to the purpose of the Christian assembly in the NT. After erasing presumptions of the nature and purpose of the assembly (which have been acquired over the centuries), the NT should be searched for the reason(s) why Christians met together. After analyzing the evidence objectively, it is unlikely that one could conclude that the purpose of those meetings was "to worship God." Rather, the NT text reveals that the purpose of those meetings was to strengthen and build up one another. In essence, this objective approach was the strategy attempted by this dissertation.

Implications

So, what are the practical implications of these findings? How should Christian assemblies be reformed in the light of the Scriptural evidence presented in this dissertation? The following implications are only a short list of what may be missing in the modern church. It will be left to others to provide a fuller treatment of each topic and to identify other implications outside of this brief list.

The first implication involves changing terminology. Even though Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches routinely identify their meetings as “worship,” this terminology is demonstrably foreign to NT Christianity. Marshall was right when he said, “It is my thesis that this use of [worship] language incorporates a fundamental misunderstanding of what ought to be at the center of Christian meetings and that it leads to a serious shift in practice from what ought to be happening when we gather together.”⁸⁹¹ Since “worship” terminology is so deeply engrained in the Christian vernacular and experience, it may be difficult to change the way Christians talk about their weekly meeting. Nonetheless, changing terminology is an essential first step that would spark further reform toward adopting a biblical perspective of the assembly and its role in the Christian life.

A second major implication pertains to a Christian’s perceived purpose of “going to church.” The two purposes of worship and edification can be viewed as different concepts that create different meetings and, potentially, different people. Today, when Christians “go to worship,” they are likely to feel that their purpose is to offer something that benefits God. However, if Christians were to go to a gathering in which the stated

⁸⁹¹ Marshall, “How Far,” 217.

goal was to “build up one another,” they would know that their purpose is to benefit the spiritual growth of fellow disciples in Christ. These two goals are fundamentally different.

A third implication affects church music, which has become a major emphasis in today’s churches. Since the dramatic rise in popularity of “worship music” in the 1990s, the music portion of many Christian assemblies has expanded to thirty minutes or more, and the financial investment in church music (performers, instruments, lighting, amplification, etc.) has also been significant. In light of the relatively minor role of singing in the NT assemblies, it seems questionable for music to gain such emphasis. Does the modern emphasis on music “build up” permanently or does it merely “pump up” temporarily? Does the music appeal more to the flesh or to the spirit? What can songs do to increase edification? Has the modern emphasis on “vertical music” erased the role of “horizontal” songs that focus on fellowship, compassion, Christian growth, encouragement, mutual forgiveness, and Christian service to others?⁸⁹² It seems that Paul’s fundamental mandate of οἰκοδομή begs these questions.

A fourth implication of this study points to the need for more people to take a speaking or leadership role in the assembly. While Paul’s directives for the Corinthian assembly calls for several members to speak in the assembly, today’s church is substantially different. Marshall targeted this issue in his 1985 article when he decried the stifling affect of “the one-man ministry which is still so common,” as he called for greater

⁸⁹² For example, on Oct. 14, 2021, the top three CCLI songs of 2020-21 were “King of Kings,” “What a Beautiful Name,” and “Here I Am to Worship.” Of the top twenty songs, nineteen could be described as vertical songs of praise to God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit.

opportunities for individual members to speak and exercise their gifts.⁸⁹³ When the writer of Hebrews says, “by this time you ought to be teachers” (Heb 5:12), he indicates that Christians should be expected to develop higher levels of maturity and teaching ability.⁸⁹⁴ How can a church raise up new generations of teachers and experienced leaders when only one person is authorized to lead and speak to the assembly?⁸⁹⁵

A fifth implication affects the nature and purpose of assembly speaking. As Craig Evans has noticed, the NT does not support the idea that the assembly should contain “preaching” (whether as κηρύσσω or εὐαγγελίζω).⁸⁹⁶ Rather, in the assembly, the NT commonly describes assembly speaking as exhorting (παρακαλέω) and teaching (διδάσκω). The common view that assembly speaking should be “proclamation” or “heralding” (i.e., preaching), says Evans, is an idea rooted in tradition, not in the Scriptures.⁸⁹⁷ He concludes that preaching is primarily monologic (one-way speaking),

⁸⁹³ Marshall, “How Far,” 228.

⁸⁹⁴ The next few verses focus on “the mature” (τέλειος, 5:14) and “maturity” (τελειότης, 6:1).

⁸⁹⁵ One could argue that Sunday School and small group studies are helping to accomplish the purpose of edification and training, but these activities are often seen as optional and not as important as the assembly.

⁸⁹⁶ Craig Evans, “‘Preacher’ and ‘Preaching’: Some Lexical Observations,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24:4 (December 1981): 315-22. Evans demonstrates that the Apostolic Fathers also distinguish between “preaching” to outsiders in evangelistic settings, but “teaching” and “exhorting” to those in Christian assembly settings (pp. 318-21).

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., 317.

which is appropriate for evangelistic proclamation, “but it can be detrimental for edifying.”⁸⁹⁸

A sixth implication applies to the language spoken in the assembly. In the assemblies of certain denominations and church cultures, attendees must endure an assembly spoken in a foreign language, such as Latin (Roman Catholic),⁸⁹⁹ German or “Pennsylvania Dutch” (in some Lutheran and Mennonite churches),⁹⁰⁰ Greek (Greek Orthodox),⁹⁰¹ and others. However, Paul demands that assembly speech be intelligible (1 Cor 14:9). When the assembly is viewed as a “service of worship” to God, the language of the “service” can become sacrosanct, as if God is pleased only when a certain language is used. But Paul’s principle of edification demands that the spoken language be intelligible and beneficial to others in the assembly.

Suggestions for Further Research

This dissertation can be viewed as the beginning of several other investigations of related topics. The following paragraphs represent five areas of potentially fruitful research. The full range of potential topics are by no means limited to these five areas.

⁸⁹⁸ Evans, “‘Preacher’ and ‘Preaching’,” 322.

⁸⁹⁹ In 2021, Pope Francis overturned a 2007 decision by Pope Benedict that restored Latin to the Mass. Benedict’s decision essentially reversed reforms of Vatican II in 1963-64. See Nicole Winfield (Associated Press), “Pope reverses Benedict, reimposes restrictions on Latin Mass,” *Miami Herald* (July 18, 2021): 13A.

⁹⁰⁰ See the sections on Lutherans and Mennonites in Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 7th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 156-73.

⁹⁰¹ Clifford T. Argue, “Language of the Liturgy,” *Word Magazine* (December 1963): 9-10.

One key area of investigation is an analysis of patristic literature to determine how and when the church came to view its assemblies as “worship.” One study has advanced the theory that “worship” terminology arose in the fourth century after church bishops began applying literal temple terminology to the Lord’s Supper (“sacrifice”), the table for the Supper (“altar”), the presiding ministers (“priests”), and the building used for assembly (“temple”).⁹⁰² According to this study, after this temple terminology was applied literally, it became natural to refer to Christian meetings as “worship” and as “services” performed for God. If this analysis is correct, today’s pervasive worship terminology is a holdover from errant (Catholic and Orthodox) traditions that have yet to be reformed in the light of Scripture. But these conclusions require further study, along with an analysis of “worship” terms in Latin, a language that became more widely used in Christian literature by the third century.

A second key area of research would investigate the nature of οἰκοδομή or “edification.” Since Paul sees οἰκοδομή as crucial to the assembly, it is important to investigate what οἰκοδομή meant in the first century and how edification happens in God’s people. How is “edifying” to be distinguished from “educating” or “uplifting”? Are there degrees of edification? What kinds of speaker and what kinds of speaking produce a higher level of edification? What kinds of songs are best for edifying the audience? If the reciting of liturgical statements produces little edification, why is that?

⁹⁰² Tom Wadsworth, “The Shift: How the Early Church Evolved from House Meetings to Temple Worship,” a conference paper read at the 2021 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Fort Worth, TX, November 2021.

To answer these questions, this investigation could include modern audience analysis and feedback.

A third area of study involves church architecture. The tall spires and steeples, high-lofted ceilings, and stained glass windows are all architectural features that are appropriate for “a house of worship.” However, if Christians were to build a building that focuses on the goal of edification, what would that building look like? What is an ideal building or room design that maximizes edification? Should a large rectangular room with straight rows of parallel forward-facing pews be replaced with several small circular rooms with individual chairs or couches that face one another?

Schools seem to be built with a common architecture and room design that seeks to maximize the goal of “education.” What would be the difference between an ideal room design for educating students and an ideal room design for edifying disciples? Given the NT role of food in the “Supper” (δεῖπνον) and the love feasts (ταῖς ἀγάπαις), it seems that the sharing of food was integral to the sharing of lives in a Christian assembly. How then should the provision of food affect the ideal design of the building and rooms? This study is likely to involve extensive architectural expertise, and its findings would not have the force of biblical authority. However, such a study could be immensely useful for any church that seeks to build a building that maximizes οἰκοδομή.

A fourth area of further study is the existence of liturgy in the first century, whether in the synagogue or in the Christian community. The current state of research in these areas is not a settled science. A century ago, many scholars assumed that liturgy was a routine part of the first-century synagogue and church. But today, scholarly opinion—for both these venues—has greatly shifted, as is revealed in Bradshaw’s work.

Does the definition of ‘liturgy’ in the first century need to be revised? Assuming that liturgy was gradually developed in both the church and synagogue by the fourth century, when exactly did it develop and why?

A fifth area of investigation is a closer examination of the concept of “OT worship.” Since the common understanding of “NT worship” is flawed, is the common understanding of “OT worship” also flawed? The research for this dissertation revealed a lack of clarity in modern understanding of congregational activity by Jews in the temple. What portion of required temple activity was conducted individually, and what portion was conducted congregationally? Priests certainly offered sacrifices and maintained the Holy Place, but what did non-priestly Jews do, congregationally, in the temple? Some congregational activity took place on a one-time basis (2 Chron 29) and annually (for feasts), but what congregational activity was daily, weekly, or monthly?

Investigation into these five areas should not detract from the conclusions reached in this dissertation. It is also possible that some progress has already been made in pursuing these topics. Nonetheless, investigation into these five areas could help to shed further light on the findings of this study.

A Final Reflection

One can understand why John MacArthur, the stalwart Bible-believing pastor, would emphatically and dogmatically say, “We go to church to worship God.”⁹⁰³ The statement sounds so orthodox and so God-honoring, who could disagree? Yet, as this dissertation has demonstrated, the concept lacks the support of the Christian Scriptures. As a closer examination of the evidence reveals, it seems likely that the Apostle Paul

⁹⁰³ MacArthur, *True Worship*, 8.

would say, “Christians do not go to sacred buildings to make offerings to their God; Jews and pagans did that. Christians gather to build up one another.”

What is the long-term practical difference between these two views? If we are assessing the individual development of Christians, what would be the difference between someone who attended a weekly “worship service” for fifty years and someone who attended a weekly “edification assembly” for fifty years? The church will never know the answer until it tries.

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