UNITING OR SEPARATING:
THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS RITUALS IN SHAPING CHRISTIAN GROUPS' BONDING IN THE 2ND AND 3RD CENTURY CE

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ABSTRACT. The paper considers the role of religious rituals for the early Christian communities during the second and third centuries CE. The majority of Christians were illiterate, thus at that time rituals might have been as important as the written texts for Christian communities in terms of group bonding and group identity. They were easier to perceive and remember, and more likely to instill a sense of unity within a group. The question is whether these religious rituals united various Christian groups as well or distinguished and separated them from each other. Two Christian rituals are examined: baptism and eucharist, since they are different regarding their frequency and emotional arousal. We can see that the Christian authors paid more attention to the theological grounds of baptism, but practical issues of eucharist, and naturally demonstrated greater diversity in these parts. Moreover, eucharist being a repetitive ritual, seems to have been more important for discriminating "heretics", i.e., representatives of other Christian groups, who were allegedly performing this ritual "incorrectly".

KEYWORDS: early Christianity, religious rituals, baptism, eucharist, Christian group bonding, early Christian identity.

Introduction

For many decades the religious ritual either had remained secondary to the written text or was not taken into consideration at all in the studies of early Christianity. This view changed with the development of cognitive approach in religious studies. Within Cognitive Science of Religion, the religious ritual has been explored by

Pascal Boyer and Pierre Liénard[1], E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley[2], Harvey Whitehouse[3], Joseph A. Bulbulia and Richard Sosis[4], etc. Their findings have been applied to the study of early Christian ritual and its significance by Colleen Shantz[5], Risto Uro[6], István Czachesz[7], etc.

From the cognitive perspective, the religious ritual is generally acknowledged to be an integrative force for a community as well as a tool for shaping its identity. Since common rituals, while creating strong bonding within religious groups, are also capable of distinguishing them from each other, this research is trying to explore early Christian writers' views[8] on the rituals to assess the extent to which the Christian world was united and homogeneous in the second and third centuries.

This research is limited to the second and the third centuries for several reasons. First, by this period Christianity had been spread enough throughout the Roman Empire. Second, at this time there seems to have been no universally accepted Christian teaching/dogma, and Christians must have been trying to establish the foundation for what the "right" Christianity was[9]. In the focus of this research two Christian rituals are placed, they are baptism and eucharist, since there is a sufficient number of Christian writings of the given period with a description of these rituals. Moreover, they are different in terms of their impact on human emotions and memory, thus they must have played different roles in bonding Christians and shaping their identity.

1.   The Role of the Written Text for Early Christianity

Christianity offered a new type of community for the ancient world, consequently, it was critical for its followers to find the points that would help them to form group boundaries and shape their identity. While Christianity, similarly to Judaism, is acknowledged to be a "religion of the book", which implies the identity based on the written text, early Christian groups were likely to organize themselves around rituals as well as the text. The former could help Christians to feel unity with their

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[1] Boyer, Liénard 2006.

[2] Lawson, McCauley 1990; McCauley, Lawson 2002.

[3] Whitehouse 2004.

[4] Bulbulia, Sosis 2011.

[5] Shantz 2009.

[6] Uro 2016.

[7] Czachesz 2017.

[8] The nine authors taken into account are given at the beginning of part three. All the texts, excluding the Epistles of Cyprian and Origen's Homily on Exodus, were considered in the original.

[9] Boyarin 2001, 455–457; Boyarin 2003, 71–74.

group mates, building the boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Simultaneously, rituals might have facilitated the integration of newcomers into the community, and contributed to transmission of Christian beliefs. Trying to prove this assumption, it is necessary to start with examining the role of the written text in antiquity.

First of all, it is important to understand how literate the population was in the Greco-Roman world. In fact, at the beginning the vast majority of Christian followers were Jews, while later Gentiles from various parts of the Roman Empire joined this community. Thus, Christianity was a part of the Greco-Roman world and was deeply embedded into it, while being derived from Jewish tradition as well. One may suppose that, having become Christians, these people could not immediately acquire literacy skills and gain a large amount of new information through books.

The task to estimate a proportion of literate people at that time is hard if not almost impossible. William V. Harris conducts comprehensive research trying to figure out how far people were literate in Classical Greek, Hellenistic and Roman periods. Examining the conditions which were mandatory for the rise of literacy among the population in different historical contexts, Harris points out that none of these existed in sufficient amounts in antiquity. Consequently, lack of literate citizens seems to have been typical for the time[10]. The majority of the Greek and Roman population throughout the ancient period could live sustainably without acquiring any writing or reading skills, the elite only mastering and using them[11]. Harris's estimation of literacy rate at the time varies, in some Hellenistic cities it might have been around 30–40% among the freeborn men, but such conditions are considered to have been outstanding for a city[12]. When it comes to the Roman period, in particular, the proportion of literate people could be different depending on the region, social group, and the period of time. In the Roman Republic the growth of literacy could be observed during the third and second centuries BCE., but it apparently was not higher than 10% in the mid-republican period. While during the Empire period between 200 and 400 CE, literacy declined substantially[13].

As for the reasons for such a low rate of literacy, first of all, the number of those who could read books in antiquity was limited by their prices. Handwritten books were expensive to produce and consequently were pricey. In the Greco-Roman

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[10] Harris 1989, 3–25.
[11] Harris 1989, 29–30.
[12] Harris 1989, 141, 329.
[13] Harris 1989, 173, 282.

world it was the elite who could afford to purchase books[14]. Of course, antiquity was familiar with libraries, which became especially widespread in the Roman Empire[15], but again education was apparently available for the elite only and they were the main library visitors. Thus, the written text was created by literate people for literate people[16], while the rest of the population apparently lived without getting closer to the world of literacy.

Second, literacy apparently was associated with political power and authority[17], and society was differentiated according to this aspect. The circle of literate people was restricted by access to education. While elementary education seems to have been available for broader range of citizens, rhetorical education was limited to the elite[18]. These people might have learned for the sake of justifying their being in the privileged class because of their superiority in knowledge[19].

The Roman Empire had one more reason to have problems with literacy, because its population was highly diverse in terms of language[20]. Greek and Latin were *lingua franca* for the Roman provinces, but only some people had to learn them for commercial benefits or because of social demands, while the majority of the local rural population apparently did not have any need to practice them, continuing to use their local languages for communication[21]. For example, the rate of literacy in the western provinces of the Roman Empire is assumed to have never been higher than 5–10%[22].

We can conclude that antiquity was much more an aural/oral culture[23] then it is generally acknowledged. The first evidence is that reading a book aloud to a

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[14] Gamble 1995, 4; Czachesz 2010, 428.

[15] Czachesz 2010, 427.

[16] Lieu 2004, 29.

[17] Morgan 1998, 19.

[18] Harris 1989, 333.

[19] Morgan 1998, 270.

[20] Harris lists a great many local languages spoken in the Roman Empire, but he emphasizes that multilingualism was distributed unevenly across its territories. Some regions, such as Britain, which did not have a developed writing system prior to the period of the Roman Empire, found it easier to introduce Latin into their daily life, while the so-called semi-Hellenized areas, like Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, etc., continued to use their local languages despite prolonged interaction with Rome (Harris 1989, 183; 185).

[21] Harris 1989, 175.

[22] Harris 1989, 272.

[23] Graham 1987, 34.

group was a typical pastime in antiquity[24]. People gathered together in market-places, bookstores, or at somebody's place to get access to a text read aloud. Sometimes it could be the author who hosted guests to read them their writings[25]. Second, copying a text was a kind of aural/oral exercise too. Professional scribers are known to have sat in a room (scriptorium) where they were listening to a reader pronouncing a text slowly, and they were writing this text down on a papyrus or a parchment. While listening they could and did alter the text processed by their mind[26]. Thus, texts were quite fluid in antiquity, as people relied mostly on their memory and were reluctant to compare the "copy" of the text with its original. Czachesz points out that texts with limited circulation and created by less famous writers were especially vulnerable to modifications[27]. It is apparent that with all ancient people's respect for the written text they were not very accurate when dealing with it.

Compared to other religious traditions in antiquity where texts were some kinds of guidance, if ever existed at all, the written text was a "source of divine wisdom" for Christianity[28]. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the proportion of literate people in early Christian communities could ever have surpassed the overall literacy percentage in the Roman Empire. Although Harry Gamble, following Wayne Meeks' investigations, argues that the Pauline communities were mainly composed of freeborn people, artisans and craftsmen, who were supposed to be moderately literate, neither of the researchers estimates the proportion of literate people higher than 10% among Christians during the times of Paul[29]. It seems that in the second and third centuries Christian movement remained what Uro describes as "popular movements, not supported by ecclesiastical institutions, systematic teaching, or a dependence on literacy"[30].

Thus, a regular Christian could not just take the Scripture or other writings by Christian writers and read it. This contributed neither their group identity nor transmission of Christian ideas. As a result, Christian communal readings to get new believers familiar with the Scripture was a way to solve the problem.

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[24] Johnson 2000, 618–619.

[25] Czachesz 2010, 428.

[26] Metzger, Ehrman 2018, 26–27.

[27] Czachesz 2010, 431.

[28] Harris 1989, 298; Fox 1994, 126.

[29] Meeks 1983, 72–73; Gamble 1995, 5.

[30] Uro 2016, 76.

However, as Christianity had spread all over the Mediterranean world, different Christian communities found themselves speaking different languages, only Christian authorities being able to read and write Greek and/or Latin[31]. So, it can be assumed that for those who were barely familiar with Greek and/or Latin, communal reading turned into a kind of ritual which might have been similar to the later medieval liturgy when laypersons learned their religion through emotions and senses rather than through words[32].

Being mostly illiterate, like an average person of the Greco-Roman world, a regular Christian could not read the sacred texts, in spite of the fact that they were highly valued. The written text was available for most Christians only at communal meetings and only when it was read aloud or interpreted and explained by their leaders. Reading a scripture may have been included in the order of rituals. Having little chance for bonding through reading texts, regular Christians were united through these common rituals, which also helped them to acquire the essence of Christianity and transmit it to others.

2.   Religious Rituals from Cognitive Perspective

To prove that rituals had a significant role in shaping early Christian communities and developing their group identity, we refer to the Cognitive Science of Religion, where religious ritual is one of the major topics. These works show how ritual could be remembered and transmitted to further generations even in non-literate communities (McCauley & Lawson), how they correspond with different types and sizes of groups (Whitehouse), and how they influence group bonding (Bulbulia & Sosis).

McCauley and Lawson describe how rituals are firmly established in the human mind and then transmitted further among the population. They claim that in terms of cognitive representation every action involves an agent, an act by means of an instrument, and an object (patient) of an action[33]. The scholars call it the *action representation system* in which religious rituals are included[34]. So, in the human cognitive apparatus there is no separate system which would be specifically designed for religious ritual[35]. The difference between performing everyday actions and participating in a religious ritual is that the latter presupposes intervention of

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[31] Gamble 1995, 9–10.

[32] Birge Vitz 2009, 24–25.

[33] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 13.

[34] Lawson, McCauley 1990, 89.

[35] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 11.

a culturally postulated superhuman agent (CPS-agent, i.e., God)[36], with help of which some changes are brought into the religious world[37]. The scholars assume that the presumption of a CPS-agent's critical role in religious rituals is universal. No matter whether a person has ever been engaged in rituals or not, they intuitively estimate their efficiency with regard to absence or presence of a CPS-agent[38].

McCauley-Lawson's theory links religious ritual, memory, and emotional arousal[39], on this basis the scholars distinguish two types of rituals. The first type is frequent repetitive rituals, involving low sensory stimulation and arousing emotions on a low level. The second type is non-repetitive rituals, having higher sensory stimulation and causing higher levels of emotional arousal[40]. McCauley and Lawson insist that, while evolving, every ritual is inclined to one of these "attractor positions". Thus, either repetition or high emotional arousal provides rituals with a comparatively stable pattern in comparison with other cultural units and increases rituals' chances to be accumulated in the memory of participants[41]. In addition, it is one-time or rare rituals that motivate the participants to diffuse their religious knowledge further[42]. The participant's motivation appears thanks to their conviction that the changes they have undergone have happened through the involvement of a CPS-agent. It is a "certified practitioner" such as bishop, rabbi, imam, etc.[43] that provides this connection. Thus, a kind of "super-permanent" agreement is established[44].

McCauley and Lawson claim that in comparison with everyday actions, religious ritual actions do not tolerate any deviation, and they are less likely to experience any innovation. Rituals should always contain a recurrent pattern so that everybody is able to recognize a particular ritual as quickly as possible, while any deviation in rituals is less likely to be accepted by the public without excuse[45]. It is the involvement of a CPS-agent into religious rituals that makes participants follow the exact pattern, because they feel responsible and are afraid of being punished for any deviation.

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[36] Lawson, McCauley 1990, 89.

[37] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 13.

[38] Lawson, McCauley 1990, 89; Barrett, Lawson 2001.

[39] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 38.

[40] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 42.

[41] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 44.

[42] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 113–114.

[43] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 121.

[44] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 122–123.

[45] Lawson, McCauley 1990, 82.

The role of rituals in group formation has been explored by Whitehouse. According to his theory of "modes of religiosity", all religious beliefs and rituals can fall under either the doctrinal or imagistic mode in terms of frequency of ritual performance, form of leadership, group type and size, etc[46]. This division is not absolutely clear and final, and describes rather a tendency than a strong polarization. Thus, it is typical that rituals of both modes co-exist in one religious tradition.

Whitehouse emphasizes that the doctrinal mode tends to have frequent and tedious rituals, while the imagistic mode has rare and highly emotional arousing rituals. In line with McCauley and Lawson, he states that each type of rituals involves a different type of long-term memory: repetitive rituals activate semantic memory, and rare rituals activate episodic memory[47].

Whitehouse also shows how each of the modes corresponds with the size of a group. The dogmatic mode rituals are typically related to large-scale anonymous communities, while the imagistic mode rituals are associated with small and tightly bound groups. Later Whitehouse and Jonathan A. Lanman explored how rituals enable people to unite and form groups different in size[48]. The scholars determine two types of cohesion which arise either from frequent and routinized, or infrequent and emotional arousal rituals. These are identity fusion and group identification, which the authors associate with the imagistic and doctrinal modes respectively. Identity fusion influences deeper parts of a person's self, modifying their self-identity, which finally leads towards the person's altruistic behavior. In contrast, group identification does not reach a person's self. It does not "arise out of internal reflection on salient life experiences"[49], it rather helps a person to find similarities ("prototypical features") with their group mates, but this type of cohesion is unlikely to urge a person to protect their mates from external threat[50].

Whitehouse and Lanman point out that rituals that shape either fusion or identification emerge in response to different triggers. Identity fusion crops up when a group of people faces some highly emotional arousal events. This is especially noticeable when a group has shared some dysphoria experience, such as a war, or a life-threatening hunt. But high emotional arousal and group dysphoria are also triggered by "rites of terror" such as initiation with extreme forms of humiliation, punishment and abuse, which are typical for the imagistic mode. Having under-

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[46] Whitehouse 2004, 76.

[47] McCauley, Lawson 2002, 85–87; Whitehouse 2004, 64.

[48] Whitehouse, Lanman 2014, 675.

[49] Whitehouse, Lanman 2014, 680.

[50] Whitehouse, Lanman 2014, 676.

gone this experience, people feel a strong emotional bond with their mates. Identity fusion usually creates smaller groups, as only those who have similar experience can be part of the community[51].

Meanwhile, group identification springs up from frequent and tedious ritual actions, which are hallmarks of the dogmatic mode. Group identification is more likely to form a larger complex society with sufficiently developed and centralized economies, where strangers have to show relative trust to each other in order to cooperate[52]. The dogmatic mode presumes a religious community based on strict hierarchy, with an established leader, who is believed to be a mediator between God and the herd. As a large-scale community makes it impossible to control each member, the idea of moralizing God assumes this role. Morality and presumption about an invisible watcher increase prosocial behavior, which, in turn, enhances cooperation, being a signal of reliability for others in the group[53].

On the basis of William Irons' investigations, where he compared religious behavior with stotting in animals, Bulbulia and Sosis developed their own view on religious cooperation. The authors found that religious communities are more likely to last longer than the secularized ones. It was observed that religious beliefs themselves are not sufficient for group cooperation, while religious rituals, especially synchronized ones, can be an efficient tool for cohesion[54]. Inasmuch, practitioners of a ritual show their commitment by being part of these actions[55]. It is a reliable signal that is too hard to fake[56].

All in all, the theories discussed above show that religious rituals, being integrated into the action representation system, are successfully fixated in the human mind. In general, there are two mechanisms that are responsible for people to remember a ritual in all details: frequent repetition of the same actions, or high emotional arousal. The religious ritual is a hard-to-fake signal, which helps to show a person's commitment to the group. As a result, they are beneficial for group bonding. In this regard, frequent and repetitive rituals, being associated with the dogmatic mode, are more likely to form a large-scale anonymous community, while infrequent and highly emotional rituals, being typical for the imagistic mode, are more likely to form a small-scale community of close mates.

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[51] Whitehouse, Lanman 2014, 679–680.

[52] Whitehouse, Lanman 2014, 679.

[53] Whitehouse, Lanman 2014, 680.

[54] Bulbulia, Sosis 2011.

[55] Uro 2016, 132.

[56] Uro 2016, 134–135.

3.   Baptism and Eucharist in Early Christian Writings

Despite a definite lack of descriptions of rituals by early Christian writers, it is possible to use them to compare and contrast the customs of various Christian communities. Those writers who described the rituals were apparently the leaders of their communities, thus we can conclude that their descriptions were a kind of instructions for the rest of the community, rather than just a subjective view.

Two rituals, baptism and eucharist, have been selected for the current research for two reasons. First, these rituals are apparently most frequently mentioned by the early Christian authors, thus more data are available. Second, each of the rituals is related to one of the two major groups, defined by both McCauley-Lawson and Whitehouse. Baptism is known to be a one-time emotionally-loaded ritual, while eucharist is an example of a repetitive one.

The sources, which provided descriptions of baptism and/or eucharist to examine, are: *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (*Didache*) (Syria or Egypt),[57] the *Epistle of Barnabas* (presumably, Alexandria),[58] texts by Ignatius of Antioch (Asia Minor),[59] Justin Martyr (Asia Minor, Rome), the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Rome), Clement (Alexandria, Egypt), Origen (Alexandria, Egypt), Tertullian (Carthage, North Africa), Cyprian (Carthage, North Africa).

3.1.   Baptism

Having been apparently a significant ritual for Christians in the first century, baptism remained the same in the second and third centuries. It seems to have been a ritual of initiation, thus it had to be gone through at least once by a newcomer[60]. Thus, baptism was a means that separated those who accepted Christian tradition from those who were out of it. It is important to point out that the Christian authors' descriptions of baptism procedure are typically terse, as they seem to find it

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[57] The date and place of the text are under debate. Metzger mentions that some scholars argue for the first century, while others assume that the *Didache* was written in the third or even in the fourth century. Meanwhile, most of the scholars place the text in the first half of the second century. Either Syria or Egypt is suggested to have been the place where the *Didache* was written. Metzger argues for Syria to be the area where the text was composed (Metzger 2019, 49).

[58] Metzger claims that most of the scholars suggest that the text was written in the first half of the second century (Metzger 2019, 56).

[59] There is lack of evidence about Ignatius' life, except that he had been a bishop of Antioch and then was sent to Rome where he died as a martyr. On his way from Antioch to Rome he wrote seven letters from Smyrna and Troy (Metzger 2019, 43).

[60] Uro 2016, 83–84.

more important to discuss theological foundations of this ritual. While in general baptism appears to have been a kind of replenishment for Christians or for those who were about to become one, with a closer look it becomes clear that the authors hold different views on this ritual.

Most frequent explanation of its purpose is getting clean from previous sins. Both the *Epistle of Barnabas* and Origen describe baptism as "remission of the sins" (ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν) (*Barn.* 11:1; Origen. *Ex. Mart.* 30); for Clement baptism is a ritual of "cleaning of the sins" (ἐπισκοτούσας ἁμαρτίας) (*Paed.* 1.6.28.1).

Moreover, Clement and Justin call baptism "illumination" (φωτίζομαι) (Clement. *Paed.* 1.6.26.1; Justin. *I Apol.* 61). Clement, Cyprian and the *Shepherd of Hermas* describe baptism as "rebirth" (ἀναγεννηθέντας) (Clement. *Strom.* 2.9.41.3) or "second birth" (Cyprian. *Ep.* 73.5)[61], or even becoming alive after being dead (...εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ οὖν καταβαίνουσι νεκροὶ καὶ ἀναβαίνουσι ζῶντες[62]) (Hermas. *Simil.* 9.16.4) and "washing death away" (lavacro dilui mortem) (Tertullian. *Bapt.* 2.2).

Other views on baptism include:

-       getting understanding and knowledge (*I Apol.* 61.9–10) and receiving a spiritual circumcision (*Dial.* 43.2) for Justine;

-       getting "armor and weapons" (ὅπλα) for Ignatius (*Pol.* 6.2);

-       establishing an agreement with God and renouncing Satan for Origen (*Ex. Mart.* 17);

-       acquiring "fear in the heart" and "hope in Jesus in the soul" (καρποφοροῦντες ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τὸν φόβον καὶ τὴν ἐλπίδα εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ἔχοντες) in the *Epistle of Barnabas* (11:11);

-       cleaning body spiritually and spirit corporally for Tertullian (*Bapt.* 4.5).

What concerns the ritual itself, the *Didache*, Justin, Ignatius, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Clement, Cyprian, Origen, and Tertullian argue for water to be the central element in baptism.

The *Didache* states that baptism in "living water" (ἐν ὕδατι ζῶντι) is preferable, but if there is no such water, it is possible to find other sources, warm or cold. If nothing is available, three drops of water should be poured over the head of those undergoing the ritual (*Did.* 7.1–3). Similarly, Cyprian says that if people are baptized being sick or weak it is possible to sprinkle them with water instead of "washing" them (*Ep.* 75.12).

Interestingly, while in *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin opposes Jewish cleaning with water and Christian "baptism of the soul" (βαπτίσθητε τὴν ψυχὴν) (*Dial.* 14.20) and

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[61] Hägg 2011, 979–980.

[62] "So, into the water they descend dead and ascend alive" (my translation).

"baptism of life" (βάπτισμα τοῦτο τὸ τῆς ζωῆς) (*Dial.* 19.2), in *First Apology* he stresses that water is a source of regeneration (ἀναγεννηθῆναι) of the newcomers (*I Apol.* 61.10). Similarly, Tertullian begins his work *On Baptism* mentioning a heretical movement that apparently rejected the necessity of water for baptism, but this approach is unacceptable for true Christianity (*Bapt.* 1.1–3).

Although Ignatius does not write a lot about baptism, he points out that Jesus was born and baptized to purify water afterwards (*Eph.* 18), and this argument seems to be for water being important in baptism.

The *Shepherd of Hermas* mentions that "[a Christian's life] is saved by water" (*Vis.* 3.3.5) when they "rent down into it" (*Mand.* 4.3.1). For Origen baptism is rebirth through water and spirit (*Ex. Mart.* 30)[63]. Similarly, Clement says that baptism is "regeneration through water" (*Paed.* 1.12.98.2).

As for other elements of the procedure, only four sources give additional recommendations. The *Didache* (*Did.* 7.4), Justin (*I Apol.* 61.2) and Tertullian (*Bapt.* 20.1) mention that those who are about to be baptized should fast before doing it. According to the *Didache*, fasting must last for one or two days. In addition, the *Didache* and Justin insist on fasting not only for the individuals who are about to undergo baptism, but for everyone to take part in it.

Only Justin and Tertullian pay attention to a prayer preceding baptism. Justin argues for a communal prayer, while Tertullian says that those who are about to be baptized are supposed to pray numerous times on their knees, staying awake all night long (*Bapt.* 20.1).

Tertullian (*Bapt.* 20.1) and Clement (*Paed.* 1.6.32.1) point out that repentance of the sins is important prior to being baptized, while Justin says that it is important for people to be convinced and believe in the truth of the Christian ideas before being baptized (*I Apol.* 61.2).

When it comes to actions right after baptism, there are only descriptions made by Justin and Tertullian. As Justin states, after baptism is done, all the participants start a communal prayer (κοινάς εὐχάς) and do eucharist (*I Apol.* 65.5). Tertullian is more meticulous in this regard. Right after baptism the person is anointed with blessed oil (beniedicta unctione) (*Bapt.* 7.1) and then they impose their hands in benediction calling and inviting the Holy Spirit (*Bapt.* 8.1).

Finally, there is the issue of how many times baptism is supposed to happen. First of all, some of the authors mention baptism as a metaphorical word for absolving sins and purification. It seems obvious that none of them means that the actual ritual of baptism could be repeated, they may be saying there might be "a second chance" after the actual baptism. For example, the *Shepherd of Hermas*

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[63] Hällström 2011, 991.

(*Mand.* 4.3.4–5) mentions an opportunity for a sinful Christian to be forgiven for their mistakes again "after being baptized", but only once. Tertullian claims that a sinner can be forgiven for a second time, "as God leaves room for repentance but there will be no other chance" (*Bapt.* 15.3; *Paen.* 7.10). The most unusual picture is drawn by Clement who describes a situation when a baptized man left Christian community and became a robber, but afterwards he confessed and was "baptized for a second time by tears" (τοῖς δάκρυσι βαπτιζόμενος) (*Quis dives salvetur* 42.15)[64]. It does not seem to be the same ritual, but may be something that was similar in effect.

The fact that baptism is a one-time ritual seems to be critical for the authors who mention this issue. They distinguish Christians from non-Christians on this ground. Justin in *First Apology* mentions "the devils" (δαίμονες) encouraging people to wash themselves before entering a temple (*I Apol.* 62.1). This, according to Justin, is a kind of imitation of the Christian ritual. Tertullian also condemns Jews, who wash daily, because it means that they "defile" daily (*Bapt.* 15.3).

The same reason was used to expose wrongdoings by heretics calling themselves Christians. Thus, Justin and Tertullian condemn heretics who "wash for many times". Tertullian emphasizes that Christians have only one baptism in contrast to heretics, who are "strangers", since they regard baptism differently (*Bapt.* 15.2). It is quite peculiar, that Cyprian, while agreeing that baptism should be undergone only once, states that it is different with those who were baptized by heretics and then come into Church. These people should be baptized anew, as only baptism by Church is "granted of the divine condescension" (*Ep.* 73.3).

To sum up, most of the authors considered pay more attention to the theological reasoning of baptism and feel the need to define its purpose. While of course the general idea of baptism is not completely different in their writings, they do not define baptism identically. Surprisingly, only three of them state that baptism is a cleaning of sins, "second birth" is mentioned in three cases too. Other explanations vary even more, including "spiritual circumcision", "having an armor and weapons", "getting new knowledge", etc.

As for the ritual part, almost all the authors (eight out of nine) show the necessity of water for baptism. But only four authors provide us with further details, and here significant differences are observed. Thus, fasting before baptism is mentioned by three writers, two authors insist on prayer before baptism, and two authors show the importance of the repentance of the sins, while only one claims that it is crucial to believe truly. Finally, only two authors show what is to be done right after baptism.

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[64] Hägg 2011, 980.

The authors who write that baptism is a one-time ritual for Christians use this point to distinguish themselves from other groups who do it many times and thus are called heretics. And those heretics who decide to get to the "true" Church should be baptized anew.

3.2.   Eucharist

It has been recently generally accepted that Christians had different names for their communal suppers[65]. The scholars examining eucharist emphasize that neither universal practice of this ritual, nor a common interpretation of what it means exactly existed at the beginning of the third century[66].

Similar to Jewish as well as Greco-Roman meal gatherings, Christian communal suppers were a tool of social bonding that brought all the participants closer together, creating a community of "brothers and sisters". The *Didache* mentions that "the Church, resembling gathered pieces of bread, would get together from all over the world" (*Did.* 9.4). Justin puts forward a similar idea that "on the day of eucharist Christians gather together from the surrounding areas" (*I Apol.* 67.3). Moreover, in his *Apology* Tertullian mentions that the Christian dinner represents "what Greeks call love" (dilectio), as people gather there to help those who are in need (*Apol.* 39.16). Justin says that upon finishing eucharist "distribution" (διάδοσις) is done among the community and deacons bring food to those who have been absent, as well as to those "who are in need" (*I Apol.* 67.5).

Of course, Christians tried to emphasize that their ritual was different and more effective than gatherings of other traditions. Justin claims that Christians "bring sacrifice to God" (προσφερομένων αὐτῷ θυσιῶν) in form of bread of eucharist and cup, while Jews' sacrifices God rejects (*Dial.* 41.3; 117.1). Tertullian emphasizes that in contrast to Greek meals, Christian practice is a spiritual one (*Apol.* 39.16).

The authors pay much attention to the practical aspect of eucharist such as day and time of their ritual, prayer and readings, bread and wine taken in the process.

There are two authors paying attention to the time of eucharist. Justin in *First Apology* names "day of the Sun" (ἡλίου <...> ἡμέρᾳ) being a typical day for eucharist, because it is the same day when God created the world, and when Jesus resurrected (*I Apol.* 67.3). While Cyprian considers whether morning or evening is preferable for it. He says quite plainly and practically that, while Jesus is known to have "offered the mingled cup" on the Last Supper, i.e., in the evening, "we cannot call the people together to our banquet" at this time, thus Christians of his group should

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[65] Kaše 2018, 410.

[66] Larson-Miller 2018, 539.

gather together in the morning to celebrate "the truth of the sacrament" and resurrection (*Ep.* 62.16).

Regarding participation in eucharist, the *Didache* claims that only baptized Christians are allowed to join (*Did.* 9.5). Justin expands the point, saying that Christian eucharist can be joined by those people "who believe in the truth of Christian teaching", not just who "wash themselves to remiss their sins and reborn" (*I Apol.* 66.1).

Three of the texts emphasize that prayer is an integral part of this ritual. Tertullian says that Christians start their meal only after pronouncing a prayer, "and they eat until hunger is satisfied, and they drink no more than it can be beneficial for modest people" (*Apol.* 39.17–18). A similar idea is found in the *Didache*. The prayer is done "to bestow a favor on the cup giving thanks to Father for [His child] David's holy grape-vine, and then to bestow a favor on the broken bread giving thanks to Father for life and knowledge which were received through [His child] Jesus" (*Did.* 9.1–3). Justin's *Apology* also mentions communal readings of "the memorial of the apostles or the writings of the prophets" for as long as "they have time" (*I Apol.* 67.3). At the end of the reading the "president" (προεστώς) says his words and prays with others (*I Apol.* 67.5).

According to the *Didache*, right after eucharist there is also a prayer to pronounce (*Did.* 10.1–6)[67]. Justin refers to prayers and gratitudes (εὐχάς <...> καί εὐχαριστίας) too, adding that the service is concluded with the word *Amen*.

Surprisingly, not every author pays attention to association of bread with Jesus' flesh (σὰρξ), or body (σῶμα) and wine with His blood. Those who do it are Ignatius, Justin, Clement, Cyprian, Origen, and Tertullian.

Bread only is mentioned by Ignatius and Origen. The former says that eucharist is Jesus' flesh (τὴν εὐχαριστίαν σάρκα εἶναι τοῦ <...> Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) (*Smyrn.* 7.1). According to the latter Christians receive bread through eucharist (thanksgiving), and this bread by the prayer becomes sacred body (σῶμα), sanctifying all of the participants (*Cels.* 8.33). This bread Christians call eucharist (εὐχαριστίας ἄρτος «εὐχαριστία») (*Cels.* 8.57). Every particle of this bread is important, so no one should let even a crumb fall (*Hom. Exod.* 13.3).

The rest of the authors mention both bread and wine. Tertullian in *Against Marcion* refers to the New Testament to prove that bread (panis) is an image of Jesus' body (corpus), and wine is an image of His blood (sanguis) (*Ad Marc.* 4.40.3–5). Justin first mentions bread and some "drink" (πόμα) (*I Apol.* 66.2), and in the next

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[67] Vojtěch Kaše notes that the passage in the *Didache* does not include any association of eucharist with the Last Supper, as well as it does not identify bread with Jesus' flesh and wine with his blood (Kaše 2018, 416).

chapter he writes that bread (ἄρτος), wine (οἶνος), and water (ὕδωρ) are brought on eucharist (*I Apol.* 67.5). Moreover, he indirectly emphasizes that wine is particularly important, because this distinguishes the Christian ceremony from other traditions (*I Apol.* 66.4).

We find more details on the issue in Clement's and Cyprian's writings. For example, Clement points out that "bread and wine serve a type of eucharist" (ὁ τὸν οἶνον καὶ τὸν ἄρτον <...> εἰς τύπον εὐχαριστίας) (*Strom* 4.25.161.3). He also adds that bread crunches being put into mixture [wine] "absorb it similarly to flesh absorbing blood" (*Paed.* 1.6.47.1). Moreover, they both express direct concerns about water being used instead of wine, claiming that water alone is not enough for eucharist. Cyprian in the *Epistles* criticizes eucharist with water only, insisting that it should be mixed with wine, as a sign of Jesus' struggles, which were described in the Old Testament (*Ep.* 62.4–5). Clement points out that those who, in contradiction with the Church canons, use water and bread, or even water only, for their eucharist follow heresies (αἱρέσεις) (*Strom.* 1.19.96.1), which means they are not true Christians.

In fact, wrongdoings in connection with eucharist are rather popular with some Christian writers, namely Ignatius and Cyprian. Ignatius claims that it is critical to have only "one eucharist, one cup, one altar, and one bishop" (*Phil.* 4.1), and beware of division in the Church (*Smyrn.* 8.1). He says that a Christian must abstain from those people who do not consider eucharist as flesh of Jesus having suffered for people's sins. He even insists on "not talking about these people either in private or in public" (*Smyrn.* 7.2). Ignatius emphasizes the role of Christian clergy in eucharist and stresses that those doing something without informing the bishop serve to devil (τῷ διαβόλῳ λατρεύει) (*Smyrn.* 9.1), as the Christian unity is "formed around bishops, presbyters, and deacons" (*Smyrn* 8.1; *Phil.* 4.1).

Cyprian describes various defections from eucharist too. He mentions some groups in which eucharist is given to participants without penitence and confession being made and without a bishop and clergy laying their hands upon the herd (*Ep.* 9.2, 10.1). In addition, Cyprian states that eucharist is impossible without a church because there is no altar to get oil sanctified (*Ep.* 69.2). Finally, Cyprian criticizes a woman, who, having sanctified bread, celebrated eucharist without pronouncing "accustomed utterance" (*Ep.* 74.10).

All in all, it is evident that Christian writers of the second and third century did not have a consolidated view on eucharist. Two out of the nine authors stress that only baptized people are allowed to join this ritual. Other two discuss the most appropriate time. Three texts tell us that prayer is critical. But particular diversity is displayed by their stances regarding bread and wine as the components of this ritual. Four of them indicate both bread and wine as vital for eucharist, other two

authors mention bread only. Wrongdoings and deviations in eucharist seem to bother the authors considerably. There are concerns expressed about those who use water instead of wine in their eucharist. Moreover, some of the authors emphasize the importance of gathering around bishops and in church for their eucharist to be "true". Thus, we can see that this type of ritual can result in a particular group within Christianity distinguishing itself from other similar groups as the only "true" one[68].

Conclusion

In the second and third centuries, similar to the rest of the Greco-Roman world, most of the Christians were illiterate. Having written texts read aloud to them, they might have perceived, remembered, and then retold this information with some deviations. Moreover, as Christian communities were spread all over the Roman Empire, their members were speaking different languages, while Greek and Latin were actively used by the elite only. These two major factors apparently complicated the spreading of Christian ideas among the community and beyond. Thus, Christianity, though considered a "religion of the book", could not completely rely on the written text when it came to developing group bonding and group identity.

Christian rituals were apparently more reliable in this regard. First, rituals are easy to remember, because of either their frequent repetition or high emotional arousal. Consequently, they can facilitate the transmission of ideas. Second, it is possible for rituals to bind participants through either identity fusion or group identification. High emotional arousal dysphoric rituals, when participants undergo some struggles together, are especially successful in creating strong group bonding. Third, rituals are a kind of hard-to-fake signal that is produced by a participant to show their commitment to the group. Finally, rituals do not tolerate any variations, thus, those who perform the group's rituals differently become "outsiders" for the community.

Early Christian texts describe the rituals of baptism and eucharist in different ways. While in baptism, a one-time high emotional arousal ritual, they seem to be concerned more with theological reasoning for it, in eucharist, a repetitive "tedious" ritual, they mostly discuss practical aspects.

We find a considerable plurality of views on what baptism is actually about, every of the authors providing their own epithets and metaphors. In contrast, when it comes to eucharist, the authors are not so creative, they concentrate on the practical part and provide the audience with the instructions that must be rigorously followed, otherwise these actions would be considered defections from

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[68] Smith 2003, 282–283; Larson-Miller 2018, 546.

"true" Christianity. Surprisingly, the authors present to us an even more notable range of variations for the eucharist procedure.

If we try to compare how much attention is paid to wrongdoings and heresies in these rituals, it is apparent that eucharist is more fruitful in that respect. Defections seem to bother the authors even more than Jews' and Gentiles' practices. It is possible to conclude that an "outsider" (Jew/Gentile) was viewed as less threatening than an "insider" doing something important in a wrong way. While the former may need just persuasion and conversion, the latter must be a potential trouble as they believe that they are true Christians and are doing everything right.

Thus, it can be concluded that in the second and third centuries Christianity was represented by small and diverse groups, spread all over the Mediterranean world, as even the authors from the same region did not present the exact similar stance on baptism or eucharist. The texts demonstrate Christians of the time looking for ways to alleviate diversity within Christianity and unite these small groups to create one extended "orthodox" Christian community.

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