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Human Sacrifice

in Jewish and Christian Tradition

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Preface

> If sacrifice resembles criminal violence, we may say that there is, inversely, hardly any form of violence that cannot be described in terms of sacrifice—as Greek tragedy clearly reveals.[1]

The core of this volume goes back to a small conference on "Human Sacrifice in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Its Reflections in Modernity" held at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in October 2002 which was organized by Professors Yaakov Ariel and Armin Lange. The contributions of Yaakov Ariel, Armin Lange, Bennie H. Reynolds, and Christopher Roberts go back to talks held at this conference.

The conference and the present volume ask in how far ancient practices and traditions of human sacrifice are reflected in medieval and modern traditions. In antiquity, the volume focusses especially on rituals of human sacrifice and ancient polemics against it or transformations of it in the Israelite-Jewish (see the contributions of Michaela Bauks, Karin Finsterbusch, Armin Lange, Bennie H. Reynolds, Kathell Berthelot, and Tal Ilan) and Christian cultures (see the contribution of Peter Lampe) while the Ancient Near East and ancient Greece is not excluded (see the contributions of Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Gabriele Weiler).[2] For medieval and modern times the volume discusses human sacrifice in Jewish (see the contributions of Rainer Walz and Yaakov Ariel) and Christian traditions (see the contributions of Jasper Hopkins and Christopher Roberts) as well as the debates about euthanasia and death penalty in the western world (see the contributions of Udo Benzenhöfer, Wilhelm Rimpau, and Randall Styers).

[1] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (trans. P. Gregory; Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 1.

[2] For human sacrifice in the Phoenicio-Punic cultures see also the article of Bennie H. Reynolds.

Human Sacrifice and Pauline Christology

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Struggling with image problems, the early Christians had to defend themselves against allegations that they were celebrating Thyestean feasts (Θυέστεια δεῖπνα), sacrificing and eating human flesh (of children) during their Eucharist (Athenagoras, *Supplic.* 3; 31). They vehemently rejected these allegations. Was there, however, some truth to the accusations, at least some symbolic truth? Did not God, for example, sacrifice his own child, letting his sadism run free, as one modern writer put it?[1] We will explore early Christian Christology, particularly Paul's Christological thinking (I.), before we analyze its application in the eucharistic ritual (II.). The source texts are seldom exegetically uncomplicated.

I. Christology

Jesus of Nazareth died on a Roman cross as a criminal. In a limited time span after this death, Peter and other apostles had visions of the deceased Jesus. Instead of interpreting these visual experiences as apparitions of a ghost, they understood them within the framework of the Jewish category of "resurrection" (Dan 12; etc.), believing that God had raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned him as Lord (κύριος) at God's right hand (e. g., 1 Cor 15:3–8; Rom 1:4). For them, in the light of this resurrection, the senseless and shameful death of Jesus suddenly took on a positive meaning: Jesus died "for our sins" (ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν 1 Cor 15:3; the expression is part of a pre-Pauline formula). There is "deliverance in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a *place of atonement because of his blood* . . . " (χάρις διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον διὰ πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι

[1] Tilmann Moser, *Gottesvergiftung* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 20: "Bei deinem eigenen Sohn warst du dann ungeniert und hast deinem Sadismus freien Lauf gelassen."

Rom 3:24 f.). He was "sacrificed" as "our paschal lamb" (τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός 1 Cor 5:7). His blood makes possible a "new covenant" (τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι 1 Cor 11:25, which is another pre-Pauline formula).

Particularly the Old Testament category "*place of atonement*" (ἱλαστήριον) needs explanation. Does it mean that Christ's crucifixion was understood as a human "sacrifice," a "sacrifice of atonement" ("*Sühnopfer*")? In a further step, we will need to explore whether sacrificial categories other than "atonement" were applied to the Christ event. Finally, we will need to ask how prominent the sacrificial categories were in Pauline Christological thinking. Are the numerous ὑπέρ formulations ("for us" 1 Cor 11:24; "for our sins" 15:3; etc.) to be interpreted within the framework of the ἱλαστήριον idea or of other sacrificial categories?

The result will be differentiated. In Paul, Christ's death on a Roman cross can be seen in analogy to the offering of a Passover lamb, and in analogy to the covenant "burnt offerings" and "peace offerings" of Exod 24 (the latter always were connected with a festive communal meal). Contrary to widespread opinion, however, Paul did *not* interpret Christ's death as a "sacrifice of atonement" for sins (Lev 4 f.; 16), and he did *not* see an analogy to the attempted offering of Isaac in Gen 22. The ὑπέρ formulations do *not* represent a sacrificial category.

1. Leviticus 4 f.; 16: Sacrifice of atonement (כפר) for sin / offence (חטאת / אשם)

According to Old Testament tradition, rituals of atonement broke the connection between wrong doing and its damaging consequences, between sin and resulting disaster. One of these rituals was the animal sacrifice of atonement (Lev 4 f.; 4:20: כפר). By slaughtering an animal and sprinkling the altar with its blood, i. e., by offering the animal's life and vitality to God (17:11), the sacrificing person eliminated the imminent disastrous consequences of sinful behavior.

This sacrifice of atonement only wiped out sins that were committed ignorantly (4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:2–4, 15, 17 f.), not transgressions deliberately done. Therefore, the older scholarly opinion, according to which the sacrificial animal died *on behalf of* the sinner, needs to be discarded.[2]

[2] Cf. the discussion in, e. g., Manfred Oeming, "'Fürwahr, er trug unsere Schuld': Die Bedeutung der alttestamentlichen Vorstellungen von Sünde und Sündenvergebung für das Verständnis der neutestamentlichen Abendmahlstraditionen," in: *Sühne, Opfer, Abendmahl: Vier Zugänge zum Verständnis des Abendmahls* (ed. idem and Andreas Wagner; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1999), 1–36, and Siegrid Brandt, *Opfer als Gedächtnis: Auf dem Weg zu einer befreienden theologischen Rede von Opfer* (Altes Testament und Moderne 2; Münster: Lit, 2001), 133–40.

If it had died "on behalf of" the sinner, *representing* the sinner's entire existence, the deliberate sins also would have been eliminated by this death. But they were not.[3]

Furthermore, sins committed in ignorance did not deserve death. Therefore, there was no need for a death *in lieu of* that of the sinner. Thirdly, if the sacrificial animal had been perceived as representative of and identical to the sinful existence of the sacrificing person, the animal would have been construed as ritually unclean. On the contrary, however, it was perceived as extremely holy.[4] Fourth, by laying the hand on the head of the sacrificial animal, the sacrificing sinner did not express that the animal *represented* the sinner. Laying the hand on the animal's head was not an act of *identification*.[5] It was less complicated: This gesture made sure that the sacrifice was given in the name of this person, that is, that the resulting atonement was an atonement for exactly this person who laid a hand on the animal's head—and for nobody else (Lev 1:4; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33). Since the person, who performed the atoning ritual, a priest, was not identical with the person(s) who needed atonement (4:15 f., 24 f., 29 f., 33 f.), a ritual gesture was needed to identify the person(s) for whom the atonement ritual was celebrated. By laying a hand on the animal, the sacrificing person also expressed the wish that God would accept the offering: "He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted" (Lev 1:4).

In Lev 4, the only act of identification or representation was that the elders of the congregation of Israel could represent the entire congregation when laying their hands on the sacrificial animal. If Gese[6] were right, we would have to assume a complicated process of double identification: The congregation was represented by the elders, who in turn would have been represented by the sacrificial animal. The latter would have died in place of the elders, who in turn symbolically would have died in place of the whole congregation. Things do not need to be made more complicated than they were.

A second misunderstanding would be to assume that the animal took over the burden of sin and eliminated it by dying.[7] It was rather the sprinkling of blood at the altar that constituted the center of the atoning ritual and that brought about the atonement. God, as creator, gave the animal's blood, i. e., the animal's life, to the sacrificing person, who

[3] Cf., e. g., Num 15:30 f.; 35:6–34. The only exceptions from this rule were formulated in Lev 5:1, 20–26. Lev 5 lists special cases.

[4] See Brandt, *Opfer*, 133. For additional reasons against the identification / representation theory, which are not repeated here, see 134–36.

[5] Contra Hartmut Gese, "Die Sühne," in: *Zur biblischen Theologie: Alttestamentliche Vorträge* (ed. idem; BEvT 78; München: Kaiser, 1977), 85–106, 96 f. Cf. the discussion in, e. g., Brandt, *Opfer*, 126 f., 134–36.

[6] Previous note.

[7] This was true for the eliminating scape-goat ritual (Lev 16:10, 21 f.), which is not to be confused with the sacrifice of atonement that concerns us.

in return gave this life and energy back to God (instead of consuming it, which was forbidden).[8] The effect was that the sinner was reconciled with God (e. g., Lev 4:20). The sprinkling of blood / life was like "sowing seed" for a new beginning in life.[9] Sins that had accumulated before God's presence at the altar were cleansed away by the force of the blood / life.

The ἱλαστήριον that Paul's Christological text uses as a metaphor (Rom 3:25) refers to a special case of the Israelite animal sacrifice of atonement. On Yom Kippur, Israel's great Day of Atonement (Lev 16; cf. 23:27 f.; 25,9), the high priest approached the *kapporet* (כפרת = ἱλαστήριον), the "place of atonement," which was located in the most inner part of the sanctuary, in the Holy of Holies. He sprinkled the *kapporet* with the animal's blood (16:14 f.). In this way, all of Israel was reconciled with God (16:16).

What was this "place of atonement" where sins were forgiven? And how could it metaphorically be applied to Christ? According to Exod 25:17 ff. (cf. Heb 9:5), the golden ark in which the tablets of the covenant were kept was covered with the golden *kapporet* / ἱλαστήριον.[10] Two cherubim of gold were at the two ends of the *kapporet*, overshadowing it. God was perceived as using the *kapporet* as his throne, "appearing in a cloud upon it" (Lev 16:2). By sprinkling the *kapporet* with animal blood (life), the high priest offered this blood to God. The "place of atonement" represented God: there, God reached out, receiving this

[8] Lev 17:14. Verse 11 reads: "The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I (God) have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement."—Some scholars still adhere to the misleading idea that in this ritual the sacrificed animal represented the sacrificing person and that the animal was used on behalf of this person (see above). They therefore interpret the offering of an animal's blood / life in this way: This offering of life symbolically showed that the sinner turned over his or her own life to God, and therefore God forgave (e. g., Bernd Janowski, "Sühne II," in *RGG* 7 [ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al.; 4th edition; Tübingen: Mohr, 2004], 1844), or this offering of life at the altar showed that the sacrificing person symbolically reunited his or her own life, which was ruined by sin, with God, and therefore it was healed (e. g., Gese, "Sühne," 85–106). These interpretations seem to be reading too much Christian thought into an archaic ritual. Early Christians indeed were ready to formulate metaphorically that they turned themselves and their lives over as a "living sacrifice" to God (cf. Rom 12:3; 15:16; Phil 2:17; 4:18; 1 Pet 2:5). However, these formulations do not occur in the context of atonement categories. The whole idea of representation, according to which the animal in the Israelite sacrificial ritual of atonement was used in lieu of the sinner, needs to be dropped for lack of evidence (see above).

[9] Cf. Brandt, *Opfer*, 136–40.

[10] English Bible translations traditionally render it as "mercy seat."

offering; there, Israel came into close contact with God; there, heaven and earth met; there, Israel's relationship to God, which was troubled by sin, was healed.

Christ as, metaphorically speaking, ἱλαστήριον, thus was construed as representative of the enthroned God, as mediator between God and the human race. In him, God was present. He was the "place" where atonement and reconciliation between God and humans took place. However, this does not imply that Christ's death was interpreted as "sacrifice." Nowhere does the text metaphorically equate Christ's blood with the sacrificial animal blood with which the *kapporet* was sprinkled. On the contrary, Christ himself was the *kapporet*.

The misunderstanding that Paul in Rom 3:25 construed Christ as a "sacrifice of atonement"[11] could arise because this verse *does* talk about Christ's blood, but in a different way. There are two alternative readings of Rom 3:25: "God put Christ forward as a place of atonement, effective through faith / trust *in*[12] his blood (i. e., in his death on the cross as a saving event)." Or, "God put Christ forward as a place of atonement because of his blood (i. e., because of his death on the cross), effective through faith / trust." Both readings are possible. Christ's cross was the reason for his becoming the *kapporet*, but this does not imply that his cross was interpreted as a "sacrifice of atonement."[13]

The same is true for Rom 8:3; 4:25, and 2 Cor 5:21. Especially Peter Stuhlmacher[14] saw these verses as permeated by sacrificial terminology and used them as evidence that Paul interpreted Christ's death as a "sacrifice of atonement" or as a "guilt offering." He was

[11] English Bible translations such as the NRSV falsely translate Rom 3:25: "Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood." Rudolf Bultmann, among other scholars, also wanted to interpret ἱλαστήριον in this way (*Theologie des Neuen Testaments* [8th edition; Tübingen: Mohr, 1980], 295). However, the text itself does not say this.

[12] For πίστις ἐν = "faith / trust in," see Gal 3:26; Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; etc.

[13] One of the alternatives would be, e. g., to interpret the cross as a non-sacrificial representation (see below 6. 1.) in analogy to Isa 53: Christ died in place of the sinners, taking over their punishment, and therefore he became the *kapporet* between God and the sinners.—The intricate scholarly debate about Rom 3:25 cannot be picked up and unfolded here. For a summary, see, e. g., Brandt, *Opfer*, 204–14.

[14] "Zur neueren Exegese von Röm 3,24–26," in *Versöhnung, Gesetz und Gerechtigkeit: Aufsätze zur biblischen Theologie* (ed. idem; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981, 117–35); idem, "Sühne oder Versöhnung," in *Die Mitte des Neuen Testaments: Einheit und Vielfalt neutestamentlicher Theologie* (Festschrift Eduard Schweizer; ed. Ulrich Luz and Hans Weder; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 291–316, 308 f.

convincingly refuted by Cilliers Breytenbach and others.[15] Their arguments do not need to be repeated here.

2. Passover Lamb

Paul twice clearly understood Christ's death as a symbolic "sacrifice." In an ethical context, he formulates: "Our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed" (τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός 1 Cor 5:7). The Passover image refers to liberation (from Egypt), in Paul's context to liberation*liberation* from the power of sin. The Christian congregation, therefore, is challenged to start an *exodus* from sinful behavior (1 Cor 5).

At first glance, Christ is also referred to as a *Passover* lamb in John 1:29, 36 ("Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"). However, the function of a Passover lamb offering was not to "take away sin." More likely, John's lamb metaphor was an echo of Isa 53:7, 12: The Suffering Servant "was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter ... he bore the sin of many" (53:7 f. is quoted in Acts 8:32). A third alternative would be to connect John's metaphor with the daily Jewish *tamid* offering of a lamb. In the morning, it took away the sins of the night; in the evening, it cancelled the sins of the day.[16] In 1 Pet 1:19, the exegesis likewise has to decide between the Passover lamb and the Isa 53 lamb (cf. 1 Pet 2:23).[17]

Interestingly enough, where we clearly find a sacrificial image as a symbol for Christ's death, the idea of *human* sacrifice is suppressed in favor of an explicit animal metaphor.

3. Exodus 24

The second text that clearly uses sacrificial categories is the pre-Pauline eucharistic formula: "This cup signifies the new covenant because of my blood" (τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι

[15] Cilliers Breytenbach, "Versöhnung, Stellvertretung und Sühne: Semantische und traditionsgeschichtliche Bemerkungen am Beispiel der Paulinischen Briefe," *NTS* 39 (1993), 59–79, 73; idem, *Versöhnung: Eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie* (WMANT 60; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1989), 159–66, 203. For 2 Cor 5:21, see also Otfried Hofius, "Sühne und Versöhnung: Zum paulinischen Verständnis des Kreuzestodes Jesu," in *Paulusstudien: Band 1* (ed. idem; WUNT 51; Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), 33–49. For Rom 4:25, see, e. g., Brandt, *Opfer*, 220 f.

[16] Cf., e. g., Gerhard Friedrich, *Die Verkündigung des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament* (Biblisch-theologische Studien 6; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1982), 50 f.

[17] For a third alternative (the Jewish sacrifice of a lamb that integrated pagan proselytes into the people of Israel), cf., e. g., Norbert Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief* (EKKNT 21; Zürich: Benzinger, 1979, 82 n. 281.

1 Cor 11:25).[18] The Old Testament background can be found in Exod 24, especially 24:8. At a feast at the Sinai, animals were slaughtered for "burnt offerings" (עלת) and "peace offerings / offerings of well-being" (זבחים שלמים). The flesh of the animals slaughtered for the "offerings of well-being" (24:5) was eaten by the congregation, and God was perceived as sharing in this communal meal by receiving the blood and fat pieces. However, Moses deviated from the rule that usually *all* blood was given to God.[19] He only used half of the blood to sprinkle the altar. After having read the rulings of the covenant between God and Israel, he dashed the other half of blood on the people of Israel and said: "See the blood of the covenant that the Lord makes with you" (23:8). In this exceptional scene, a new relationship between God and Israel was established, the Sinai covenant. God and Israel shared in the blood (life) of the sacrificed animals, and this communal act constituted their new covenant—not unlike a blood brotherhood. "Because of this blood" (cf. the eucharistic formula), the new covenant was established.

The Exod 24 background of the eucharistic ritual has both elements: (1) the blood of slaughtered and sacrificed creatures makes possible a new covenant, and (2) the feast that is connected to the founding of the new covenant is connected with a communal meal of the congregation.[20] In other words, Christ's giving up of himself and his life for others, his death, is seen in analogy to the slaughtered animals of Exod 24. This sacrificial death constituted a new relationship / covenant (1) between God and the believers and (2) between the believers themselves, who were supposed to be united in a sharing community. The atonement category does not play a role at all in this world of images evoked by Exod 24.[21]

[18] See also 1 Pet 1:2 for the same set of ideas.

[19] Cf. Deut 12:24.

[20] The flesh of a sacrifice of atonement, in contrast, was never eaten by the congregation. It was taboo and excluded from the fellowship of the congregation (Lev 4:3–21; 16:23–28). It is therefore not surprising that the Old Testament sacrifice of atonement category cannot be found behind the early Christian eucharistic theory. Contra, e. g., Gerd Theißen, "Ritualdynamik und Tabuverletzung im urchristlichen Abendmahl," in *Ritualdynamik: Kulturübergreifende Studien zur Theorie und Geschichte rituellen Handelns* (ed. Dietrich Harth; Heidelberg: Synchron, 2004), 275–90, who uses this asocial taboo feature of the Israelite sacrifice of atonement as a building block for his theory of the eucharistic ritual.

[21] Thus correctly also Brandt, *Opfer*, 249.

4. Genesis 22

Some authors such as Jon D. Levenson[22] have tried to interpret Christ's crucifixion as the new *akeda*, the father's sacrifice of his own son. In *Gen 22*, Abraham almost offered Isaac as a burnt offering. Can the sacrifice of an only child be an expression of divine love? Can salvation and life result from such a cruel constellation? The question needs to be put in an exegetical-historical way: Did the writers of the New Testament anywhere perceive Christ's death as a sacrifice that his divine father had enacted? Did the New Testament authors anywhere pick up Gen 22 in order to interpret Christ's crucifixion? Sigrid Brandt[23] recently dedicated a thorough analysis to this question—with the result that explicit references to Gen 22 never connect Jesus' death and the binding of Isaac. These references do not occur in Christological, but rather in soteriological-ethical contexts (Heb 11:17–19; Jas 2:21–23). Perhaps Rom 8:32 ("he did not withhold—οὐκ ἐφείσατο—his own Son, but handed him over—παρέδωκεν—for all of us," cf. also 4:25) comes close to an allusion to Gen 22. However, φείδομαι in Gen 22:12, 16 has a meaning quite different from Rom 8:32. In Genesis, Abraham did not withhold his son from *God*; in Romans, God did not withhold his son from the *world* and from becoming a human being. This difference makes it more difficult to assume that Paul alludes to Gen 22. Φείδομαι belongs to the apostle's own active vocabulary (Rom 11:21; 1 Cor 7:28; 2 Cor 1:23; 12:6; 13:2); its usage did not need to be motivated by tradition. Furthermore, in Paul's context παρέδωκεν (Rom 8:32; cf. 4:25) does not exclusively or even primarily refer to Christ's death, but more generally to his being handed over to human existence, which is marked by the undoing and the curse of sin (cf. ὁ θεὸς παρέδωκεν in Rom 1:24, 26, 28)—a curse that Christ broke by not being caught in the vortex of sin. If there is any Old Testament background to Rom 8:32, it is not to be found in Gen 22, but in the Greek text of Isa 53:6 (παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἡμῶν "the Lord handed him [i. e., the Suffering Servant] over to our sins"). Last but not least, according to Gal 1:4, not the father, but Christ himself "gave himself for our sins." And in his Abraham texts of Rom 4 and Gal 3, Paul even avoided Gen 22 by only referring to Gen 12:3; 15:5 f.; 17:5, 10 f. Within the framework of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, it was not Abraham's ἔργα that mattered, not his obedient acting and *akeda*, but Abraham's πίστις in God's promises. It is improbable that Gen 22 ever played a role in Paul's Christological thinking. An allusion to Gen 22 would have been counterproductive to his doctrine of justification by πίστις. Also, no support for a "new *akeda*" theory can be found in the Gospel of John (3:16 τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν): God's "giving" of his son refers to God's sending him as revealer. The goal of this sending is not the obliteration of the revealer, but the successful revelation and proclamation of the "father."

5. Additional post-Pauline texts with sacrificial imagery

In the deutero-Pauline Letter to the Ephesians (5:2; cf. LXX Ps 39:7) and the Letter to the Hebrews (7:27; 9:28), Christ's death was interpreted as a "sacrifice" (θυσία; ἑαυτὸν ἀνενέγκας), even as a sacrifice of atonement (μίαν ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν θυσίαν 10:12). Less clear are 1 John 2:2 and 4:10: Christ is labelled "expiation—ἱλασμός—for our sins." However,

[22] *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

[23] *Opfer*, 146–73.

1 John 4:10 shows that Christ's entire mission (ἀπέστειλεν) was seen as "expiation," not just his death on a cross. And ἱλασμός, "a means of appeasing," does not automatically imply a cultic sacrificial aspect.

6. Paul's ὑπέρ formulations

In a recent study, building on the previous scholarly discussion and its arguments, Breytenbach[24] refuted the idea that the Pauline Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ... (a person) ἀπέθανεν formulations[25] are to be understood within the framework of sacrificial categories. But how then are they to be understood? There are two alternative interpretations.

6. 1. The ὑπέρ formulations are based on the idea of *representation* ("Stellvertretung"; ὑπέρ = "on behalf of," "in place of"), which is *not* a sacrificial category, as we saw above, contrary to a widespread misunderstanding.[26] Paul, in 2 Cor 5:20, illustrates the category of representation: "We are representatives / ambassadors for (ὑπέρ) Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you in place of / on behalf of (ὑπέρ) Christ." Accordingly, the Pauline ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν formulations and their equivalents imply that Christ took our place and died instead of us—in analogy to the Suffering Servant of Isa 53:4 ff.[27] Similarly, Deut 24:16 reads: "The fathers shall not be put to death *in lieu of* their children (ὑπὲρ τέκνων), nor shall the children be put to death *in lieu of* the fathers (ὑπὲρ πατέρων); every man shall be put to death because of his own sin (τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ἁμαρτίᾳ)." According to Paul, human beings as sinners deserve nothing but eternal death (e. g., Rom 5:12, 17, 21), but Christ steps in on

[24] "'Christus starb für uns': Zur Tradition und paulinischen Rezeption der sogenannten 'Sterbeformeln,' *NTS* 49 (2003), 447–75.

[25] E. g., 1 Thess 5:10; 2 Cor 5:14 f., 21; Rom 5:6–8; 14:15.

[26] See above 1.

[27] See, e. g., 53:4 f. and 12: "He has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases ... upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed ... he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." In Isa 53, the category of representation is not connected with cultic, sacrificial ideas. As, e. g., Bernd Janowski has shown, Isa 53:10 does not refer to a guilt offering or a sacrifice of atonement, although some translations suggest this (e. g., NRSV: "an offering for sin"). אשם in v. 10 has its pre-cultic meaning ("abolition of culpability and responsibility"). See convincingly Janowski, "Er trug unsere Sünden: Jesaja 53 und die Dramatik der Stellvertretung," in *Gottes Gegenwart in Israel: Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Festschrift Hans-Walter Wolff; ed. idem; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1993), 303–26. The idea of representation (dying on behalf of) is also conveyed by 4 Macc 6:29 (ἀντίψυχον), but without an ὑπέρ formulation.

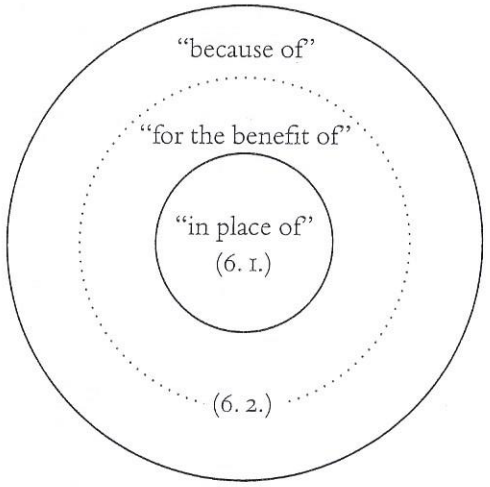
their behalf and takes over this curse and deadly fate, so that his human followers may live (e. g., 6:6–8). He went under the "curse in lieu of us" (Gal 3:13; cf. 2 Cor 5:21).[28]

Besides Isa 53, the Greek world offers analogies for this category of representation. Although Alcestis did not need to die herself (παρόν μοι μὴ θανεῖν),[29] she, as a loving spouse, happily died in place of (ὑπέρ = ἀντί) her husband in order to rescue him from death (θέλουσ' ὑπερθανεῖν; θνήισκω ὑπὲρ σέθεν; σὺ δ' ἀντιδοῦσα τῆς ἐμῆς τὰ φίλτατα ψυχῆς ἔσωσας; ἀντὶ σοῦ γε κατθανεῖν).[30] Herakles' daughter, Makaria, was ready to die in place of her siblings (ἀντὶ τῶνδε κατθανουμένην and θνήισκειν ἀδελφῶν τῶνδε κἀμαυτῆς ὕπερ).[31]

6. 2. A second cluster of possibilities is ὑπέρ = (1) "in the interest of," "in favor of," "for the benefit of," "for the protection of" ("zugunsten," etc.), or simply (2) "because of" ("wegen").[32] The parallelism between verses 1 Cor 8:11 (ἀπόλλυται ὁ ἀσθενῶν ἐν τῇ σῇ γνώσει, ὁ ἀδελφὸς δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν) and Rom 14:15 (ὁ ἀδελφός σου λυπεῖται . . . , μὴ ἐκεῖνον ἀπόλλυε ὑπὲρ οὗ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν) helps support this second cluster of possibilities. Both texts treat the same ethical problem, the eating of idol meat. They establish the equation δι' ὃν ἀπέθανεν ("he died on account of whom," "for the sake of whom," "because of whom") = ὑπὲρ οὗ ἀπέθανεν.

In the Greek world, King Kreon's son, Menoikeus, deliberately died for the benefit of his fatherland, liberating it in this way (ὑπερθανὼν χθονός and Κρέοντος παῖς ὁ γῆς ὑπερθανών).[33] The Maccabean patriots died for the benefit of their country and for the benefit and protection of the covenant and of the laws (δότε τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν ὑπὲρ διαθήκης πατέρων and ὑπὲρ τῶν νόμων καὶ τῆς πατρίδος ἀποθνήσκειν).[34]

Logically, the second cluster of semantic possibilities (6. 2.) is automatically implied in the first semantic possibility (6. 1.)—like concentric circles. Whenever a rescuer like Christ steps in and takes the place of somebody else, voluntarily taking over this person's punishment and fate (6. 1.), this happens "for the benefit" and thus also "because of" this person (6. 2.).



[28] Of course, one could state that this rescuing death in lieu of somebody else was a voluntary "self-sacrifice." However, this would be a figurative expression, which blurs the categories. "Representation" lacks the cultic setting and therefore needs to be distinguished from clearly cultic sacrificial categories.

[29] Euripides, *Alc.* 284.

[30] Euripides, *Alc.* 155; 284; 340 f.; 524. Cf. also προύθανε 620; 698; 1002. Plato, *Symp* 179 b: ὑπὲρ τοῦ αὑτῆς ἀνδρὸς ἀποθανεῖν and ὑπεραποθνήσκειν. *Anthologia Graeca* (7. 691) and Pseudo-Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca* 1. 106) also use ὑπέρ in respect to Alcestis' death. *IG* XIV 607 e, f, i = *CIL* X 7567: ὑπὲρ γαμέτου Πώμπτιλλα τὴν ζωὴν ἀντέλαβεν θανάτου; *IG* XIV 607 q = *CIL* X 7578: θανεῖν Πώμπτιλλαν λύτρον ὑπὲρ γαμέτου. Like Alcestis, this Pomptilla died as a price of release (as a ransom) in lieu of her spouse. Here the categories of ransom and representation are combined. For the non-cultic, non-sacrificial category of ransom, see 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 3:13 below.

[31] Euripides, *Heracl.* 580; 532.

[32] All references, listed in n. 25, could be repeated here. Ὑπέρ indicates the reason ("because of") in, e. g., Isocrates, *Evag.* 60:1: ὑπὲρ τῶν γεγενημένων ὀργιζόμενος. "For the protection of" = e. g., Plutarch, *Comp. Ages. Pomp.* 4:3: μαχόμενον ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος. "In the interest of" = e. g., Demosthenes, *Chers.* 66: λέγειν ὑπὲρ Φιλίππου.

[33] Euripides, *Phoen.* 998 and 1090.—See further Plutarch, *Pel.* 21. 3 (in battle, the Spartan king, Leonidas, died ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἑλλάδος) or Euripides, *Iph. aul.* 1375: Agamenon's daughter, Iphigenia, voluntarily died for the benefit of Hellas in order to liberate it from a hopeless situation. An explicit ὑπέρ formulation, however, is missing here. For Iphigenia, see Sam K. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept* (HDR 2; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1975), 155 f.

[34] 1 Macc 2:50 (cf. 6:44); 2 Macc 8:21; 6:28; 7:9; 4 Macc 1:8, 10 and 10:20 (ὑπὲρ τοῦ θεοῦ "because of," "for the sake of," "in the interest of God"). For ὑπέρ = περί, see 2 Macc 7:37; 13:9. For ὑπέρ = διά, see 4 Macc 6:27.—For the Greek parallels and for the parallels in the Maccabean Books, see further, e. g., Hendrik S. Versnel, "Quid Athenis et Hierosolymis? Bemerkungen über die Herkunft von Aspekten des 'effective death,' " in: *Die Entstehung der jüdschen Märtyrologie:* Originally presented as Papers at a Workshop held in Leiden 1985 (ed. Jan W. van Henten; StPB 38; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 162–93; Marinus de Jonge, "Jesus' Death for Others and the Maccabean Martyrs," in: *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A. F. J. Klijn* (ed. Tjitze Baarda and Albertus F. J. Klein; Kampen: Kok, 1988), 142–51.

6. 3. If the semantic field of 6. 2. is the larger of the two concentric circles, what happens to the area not covered by 6. 1.? Does Paul use this semantic area, too? Besides the ὑπὲρ ... (a person) ἀπέθανεν formulations, Paul picks up the pre-Pauline formula ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν in 1 Cor 15:3. Similarly, he writes δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν in Gal 1:4. Does this imply a cultic, sacrificial idea? There is no evidence for this. A simple "because of" suffices: He died because of (ὑπέρ) our sins. Rom 4:25 conveys the same idea in the expression παρεδόθη διὰ (*because of*) τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν. The universal power of sin made Christ's coming necessary, as Paul elaborates in several chapters of Rom (1–3; esp. 3:9, 23–24). Later, the post-Pauline 1 Peter (3:18) formulates: Χριστὸς περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἀπέθανεν: "*because of* sins he died in place of us / for the benefit of us." And Isa 53:5 describes the Suffering Servant, who represents the sinners: "He was wounded *because of* our transgressions, crushed *because of* our iniquities (two times διά + accusative); upon him was the punishment that made us whole."[35] A direct philological parallel is 1 Kgs 16:19: "Zimri ... died *because of* the sins that he committed" (ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτοῦ ὧν ἐποίησεν).[36] And Ps 37:19 LXX reads: "I am troubled *because of* my sins" (μεριμνήσω ὑπὲρ τῆς ἁμαρτίας μου). Again in the Septuagint, Odes 12:10 reads "to refuse me *because of* my sins" (ἀνανεῦσαί με ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν μου). To be able to load a little preposition (ὑπέρ) with heavy sacrificial associations, we would need clear evidence from the context. Paul does not give this evidence. The pre-Pauline expression "he died because of our sins" (1 Cor 15:3) can be easily understood within the framework of non-

[35] Breytenbach, "Christus starb," 469 f., denies that Isa 53 is in the background of 1 Cor 15:3. However, his proposal lacks philological soundness. He interprets ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν as a septuagintism, allegedly meaning "he died, in order to eliminate the consequences of sins" ("um die Auswirkungen ihrer Sünden zu tilgen"). The Septuagint references that he quotes do not support this unusual translation at all; most of them do not even offer ὑπέρ.

[36] See also 1 Esd 7:8: "They offered ... twelve male goats because of the sin (ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτίας) of all Israel." Here we do have a sacrificial context, but it is conveyed exclusively by the rest of the sentence, not by the ὑπέρ itself. The same needs to be said about Mic 6:7 (ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτίας), Ezek 43:22, 25; 45:22 f. and 40:39; 44:29; 45:17, 25; 46:20 LXX. The latter verses translate "sin offering" and "guilt offering" as τὰ ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτίας καὶ ὑπὲρ ἀγνοίας, which is unusual (cf. LXX Lev 4:3 et al..; Ezek 42:13: τὰ περὶ ἁμαρτίας; περί and ὑπέρ were equivalents in this respect; see also 1 Pet 3:18 above). However, the literal translation even here would be "the (offerings) because of sin and because of mistaken conduct." Heb 5:1 and 10:12 need to be taken in the same way (θυσία ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν).

cultic, non-sacrificial representation in analogy to Isa 53; very easily, the expression κατὰ τὰς γραφάς in 1 Cor 15:3 refers to Isa 53.

7. Plurality of soteriological concepts

Paul's ὑπέρ formulations are placed in the immediate context of other soteriological concepts, as Rom 5:6–8, for example, shows. In 5:9, the forensic category of *justification* is used (δικαιωθέντες), in 5:10 the originally political category of *reconciliation* (κατηλλάγημεν; also 2 Cor 5:14 ff.). We already discussed the category of *representation*, which is not cultic. Rom 8:23, 1 Cor 1:30, and Gal 3:13 mention deliverance by payment of *ransom* (ἀπολύτρωσις, ἐξηγόρασεν). The point being made is that cultic sacrificial categories are by no means the only, and not even the central, soteriological categories in Paul's work. Paul approaches the same Christ event from *different* angles, picking up *different* traditional terms and ideas, since he knows that no traditional category by itself can plumb the depths of the soteriological μυστήριον.

II. Eucharist

Early Christian Christology molded ritual acts, particularly the eucharistic ritual. The early Christians interpreted the Eucharist as a ritual that makes Jesus' death present for the participants. After quoting the eucharistic tradition in 1 Cor 11:23–25, Paul, in v. 26, summarizes this tradition in his own words: "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you *proclaim the Lord's death* until he comes" (ὁσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε).

Several questions arise for the interpreter. How is Christ's death made present in the eucharistic ritual? Is it only through "proclaiming"—a proclaiming through words and / or ritual acts such as breaking bread that symbolize Christ's death? Or is Christ (realistically or symbolically) sacrificed over and over again in the eucharistic ritual? More dramatically, is his sacrificed body (realistically or symbolically) even eaten during this ritual, in a taboo-breaking manner? How is the risen Lord perceived to be present at the meal? The apostle Paul's answers are mainly to be found in 1 Cor 10–11.

1. Christ's presence as host

There is no doubt that, for Paul and the Corinthians, the risen Christ, with his saving power, was *personally present*[37] at the Eucharist *as the host*[38] *of the ritual*. In this aspect, the Eucharist did not differ, for example, from a sacrifical meal of the Sarapis cult. Sarapis was considered present at the table both as guest and host. The participants at the sacrificial meal contributed food; Sarapis received these contributions and served them out to all who were present (Aelius Aristides, *Sarapis* 54. 20–28[39]). Paul himself does not shrink from drawing a parallel between the Lord's Supper and pagan cultic sacrificial meals (1 Cor 10:18–22). The risen Lord is present as the host;[40] his saving power is inherent in the sacramental act (15:29; 10:1–13).[41]

2. Is Christ present *in the elements* of bread and wine?
Is his self-sacrificing death therefore *repeated* in the ritual?

2. 1. Whether Paul and the Corinthians also believed in a real presence of the Lord *in the elements* of bread and wine (cf. John 6:52–58) is another and exegetically controversial question. In any case, such an assumption cannot be based on 1 Cor 11:23–25.

The cup or the wine is *not* equated with Christ's blood. The cup signifies the new *covenant* that was established *because* of Christ's blood on the cross (τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι 11:25, see above).

[37] Cf. ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν (2 Cor 3:17), and τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν (1 Cor 3:16).

[38] Cf. the expressions ποτήριον κυρίου πίνειν ... τραπέζης κυρίου μετέχειν as opposed to τραπέζης δαιμονίων (1 Cor 10:21). Furthermore, by quoting the Jesus sayings of 1 Cor 11:24 f. during the eucharistic ritual, the liturgical leader of the eucharistic meal necessarily gave the impression that Christ himself was handing out the bread and serving the cup.

[39] *Aristides* (ed. Wilhelm Dindorf; Leipzig: Weidmann, 1829).

[40] This kind of "real presence" (Realpräsenz) is labeled "prinzipale Realpräsenz" in the framework of categories developed by Hans-Josef Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum ersten Korintherbrief* (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen NS 15; Münster: Aschendorff, 1982), 373 f.: "Der erhöhte Kyrios ist personal zugegen ... als Princeps, das heißt als Tischherr und Gastgeber." For the parallel to the Sarapis cult, see Peter Lampe, "Das korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch-römischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis (1 Kor 11,17–34)," *ZNW* 82 (1991), 183–213, 196 f., 199, 206.

[41] Cf. also Paul's formulations that "spiritual food" and "spiritual drink" are consumed at the Eucharist (10:3–4), i. e., "food belonging to and given by the Spirit."

In a similar way, the expression "this is my body for you" (τοῦτό μού ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν 11:24) does not necessarily refer to the bread. It is also possible that the demonstrative pronoun "this" picks up on the liturgical act of blessing and breaking the bread (11:24): This act of breaking blessed bread symbolizes "my body (broken) for you;"[42] this act points to Jesus' body on the cross and to his death on the cross. The formulation "*do* this (τοῦτο ποιεῖτε) in remembrance of me" (11:24) supports the reading that, not the element of the bread, but the entire liturgical *act* of blessing and breaking the bread is what is interpreted in 11:24.

Thus, the pre-Pauline eucharistic tradition in 1 Cor 11:23–25 does not prove that Christ was present *in the elements* and that pre-Pauline or Pauline Christians thought they were, at least symbolically,[43] eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood when eating eucharistic bread and drinking wine.

2. 2. Without any solid evidence that Christ was considered present *in the elements*, these verses also do not prove that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was *repeated* in the ritual. Christ's death happened "once for all" (ἐφάπαξ Rom 6:10). The sacramental ritual only "proclaims" (καταγγέλλειν 1 Cor 11:26) Christ's unique sacrifice; the ritual makes it present for Christians and allows the power (δύναμις) of Christ's death to affect the existence of participating Christians. In a similar way, Paul's missionary *preaching* makes Christ's crucifixion present with its saving and condemning power (ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ ... δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστιν ... 1 Cor 1:18–2:5).

2. 3. However, there are still other Pauline texts.[44] Is the idea of a real presence of Christ *in the elements* implied in 1 Cor 10:16 f. (cf. 11:27)? In these verses, cup / blood and bread / body are made parallel. Does this parallelism mean that Christ's body was considered to be consumed

[42] "This is" (τοῦτό ἐστιν) can be interpreted as "this means / signifies / symbolizes." In the immediate context, see 11:25 τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν κτλ. See also the allegorical equations of Gal 4:24; Mark 4:15–16, 18.

[43] "Symbolically," they would eat the body of Christ if 11:24 were to be understood as "this (bread) signifies my body" (see previous note). "Realistically," they would eat the body of Christ if 11:24 were to be understood as "this (bread) is my body." Both readings are possible, but both readings are not the only possible ones (see above). Therefore, none of these readings can be used as proof of anything.

[44] For the discussion of 1 Corinthians 10–11, see Peter Lampe, "The Eucharist: Identifying with Christ on the Cross," *Int* 48 (1994), 36–49.

in the eucharistic elements? These texts, too, are open to alternative readings, and their ambiguity should alert us to the fact that the New Testament Christians concentrated on questions other than the ones we are asking here. For Paul, the *ethical implications* of the Eucharist (11:17–34) were far more vital than the intricate speculative discussion of *how* Christ might be present in the Lord's Supper. The fact *that* Christ was present mattered for Paul; the *function* in which Christ was present (saving and judging; cf. 11:29–32) was of importance.

In 10:16, the expression κοινωνία τινος can be rendered as either "community with" or "sharing in" the Lord's body and blood. Can the context help us make the choice? In 10:20, κοινωνία τινος denotes "people who are *in community with* the demons" as their partners, because they participate in the sacrifices offered to the demons. Analogously, 10:16 seems to suggest that the participants in the Eucharist are put into a close "community with" Christ's body and blood, that is, with the dying Christ on the cross: In the sacrament, they die with him (Rom 6:3–8). Christ's presence *in the elements* is not indicated by this understanding. Also, it cannot be gleaned from the expression "partaking of" (μετέχω 1 Cor 10:17, 21): Paul speaks of "partaking of the one bread" and "of the table of the Lord"; he does not signal that Christ's body is eaten in the eucharistic elements. It is significant that 10:16 does *not* read: "The cup, is it not the blood of Christ? The bread, is it not the body of Christ?"

2. 4. In summary, there is no solid evidence that the pre-Pauline or Pauline Christians interpreted the eucharistic ritual as a "sacrifice." Yes, through "remembrance" (ἀνάμνησις 1 Cor 11:24 f.) and "proclaiming" (καταγγέλλειν 11:26), through liturgical words and symbolizing[45] sacramental acts, the ritual made Christ's unique death on the cross *present*. And yes, this death could also be construed as a "sacrifice" (see above I.)—among other interpretations. However, all this does not mean that the "sacrifice," which once took place in Jerusalem in the 30's C. E., was *repeated* in the eucharistic ritual.

2. 5. In the subsequent tradition after Paul, things changed. Mark 14:22 reads: "this (bread) is / signifies[46] my body . . . this (cup) is / signifies my

[45] Breaking bread symbolized (but did not repeat) the breaking of Christ's body on the cross. Drinking from *one* cup symbolized the covenant founded by this death on the cross.

[46] Both readings are possible. See above n. 43.

blood."[47] Now we are getting closer to the idea that Christ is present *in the elements*—or that at least the elements symbolize Christ's crucified body. John 6:52–58 finally presupposes the idea that the participants in the Eucharist "chew" (τρώγων 6:54, 56, 57) Christ's flesh and drink his blood, although the author of the Gospel of John distances himself from this scandalous (6:52) materialistic idea by spiritualizing it.[48]

III. Christology and the Eucharist

The different New Testament interpretations of the Eucharist share the understanding that this ritual referred back to Jesus' death—a death that could be interpreted as a "sacrifice" (among other soteriological concepts). This contributed a profound and fascinating tension to the ritual.[49] On the one hand, the meal of bread and wine was unspectacular, non-aggressive and peaceful; no animal was slaughtered, no blood seen. The ritual was intended to facilitate communion and fellowship, strengthening the social ties among the participants. It was intended to fortify the cooperative and social skills of the Christians (see especially 1 Cor 11:17–34). On the other hand, the Christological point of reference of this ritual was dramatic, brutally violent and broke a taboo: A man had been slaughtered for the benefit of others. On the one hand, the ritual was progressive by leaving behind bloody animal sacrifices practiced in the Jewish and pagan cults, nurtured social qualities and conveyed the idea that sharing and fellowship enable life. On the other hand, it represented a regression by alluding to an archaic and brutal human self-sacrifice. A life had been taken so that others could live. The lives of the Christians existed at the expense of somebody else's life.

[47] Καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς and λάβετε exclude that "this is / signifies. . ." refers to the liturgical acts; clearly, reference is made to the elements of bread and wine. Not surprisingly, Paul's τοῦτο ποιεῖτε is missing. For the Lukan version of the eucharistic tradition, which still can be read along the lines of Paul's understanding, see Lampe, "Das korinthische Herrenmahl," 207.

[48] "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words (about chewing Christ's flesh, etc.) that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (6:63). In other words, these words need to be understood metaphorically, not literally. Their symbolic understanding, however, would not be possible without the materialistic idea in the heads of people whom the Gospel of John addresses. In the second century C. E., Justin, for example, seems to have adopted this materialistic idea (*Apol.* 1. 66. 2).

[49] See Gerd Theißen and Anette Merz, *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch* (2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1997), 384–85; more detailed Theißen, "Ritualdynamik" (see above n. 20), 275–90.

The tension could only be tolerated and overcome because Christ's "sacrifice" led to a *resurrection* of the sacrificed—which exploded all Old Testament sacrificial logic. For the pre-Pauline and Pauline Christians, a pneumatic, risen Christ was present in the eucharistic ritual as host of the meal (see above), not as the meal itself. And this host, who once sacrificed himself in order to share his life with his followers, invited a congregation to a communal meal and to sharing.

The interpretative category of "sacrifice" was picked up by the early Christians in order to explain the saving power of Christ's death, and therefore they necessarily ended up talking about a "*human* sacrifice"—which seems like an archaic regression to a level even lower than that of the *animal* sacrifices of the Old Testament cult. The early Christians sensed the scandal of this regression and tried to soften it by using the animal metaphor of "lamb" when talking about Christ (e. g., Rev 5:12 τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον). Moreover, they even burst open the category of "human sacrifice" by confessing the resurrection of the victim. The victim became Lord (κύριος) with power (ἐν δυνάμει Rom 1:4). The dead sacrificial creature became the living center of communion and community.

Picking up the category of human sacrifice as an interpretive tool and at the same time transcending and breaking it apart, the early Christians played with fire without getting burned.

Religious rituals often play with the *fascinum* of the taboo and the scandalous, but at the same time stay at a safe distance from it. This is not unlike modern spectators of the recent Mel Gibson movie, *The Passion of Christ*. The movie brutally showed blood and torture beyond historical authenticity. However, since the movie was a religious Jesus movie, created by a conservative and pious Catholic, this kind of demonstration of violence was socially accepted. Children were admitted to this display of atrocious violence, although the same display would have been X-rated in another movie. For some church communities, seeing the movie as a group was a sort of religious ritual.[50]

Religious rituals often toy with the taboo and atrocious. They allow us once in a while to break the rules in a socially accepted manner. In

[50] In order to avoid misunderstandings: This "sort of ritual" with its voyeurism cannot really be compared with a ritual such as the Eucharist. The one and only tertium comparationis is that they both break taboos in a socially accepted manner. In case of the Eucharist, a taboo is broken in even a socially constructive manner. Whether this can be said about the Mel Gibson movie voyeurism is doubtful.

this way, the rules are not nullified. On the contrary, in this way, the acceptance of the rules often is stabilized.[51]

[51] See the Roman Saturnalia, as one of many examples. Once a year, the slave and the master changed roles, the slave bossed his master. The ritual of breaking the rules made it easier for the slave to return to everyday life in which masters bossed their slaves.