

The Last Years of Paul

Essays from the Tarragona Conference, June 2013

Edited by

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Roman Christians under Nero (54–68 CE)

Peter Lampe

A. Roots of First-Century Christianity in Rome: Christian Beginnings in Roman Judaism

Immigrants from the East were highly prevalent in the ancient world's capital and biggest metropolis in the Roman Empire. Juvenal (*flor.* ca. 100) joked (*Sat.* 3.60–65) that the waters of the Syrian river Orontes flowed into the Tiber, carrying eastern rhythms, music, and customs with them. The city of Rome is *Greek*, he complained at the beginning of the second century CE. The majority of the city's inhabitants were not born in Rome, as Seneca (ca. 4 BCE–65 CE) observed (*Helv.* 6; cf. Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 3.6.). What was true for the city population as a whole applied even more to the early Roman Jews and Christians. In Rome “all detestable and appalling things from all over the world come together,” Tacitus (ca. 55/56–post-113 CE) regretted, with particularly the Christians in mind (*Ann.* 15.44.3).

How the first Christians, in general anonymous to us, entered the city remains elusive – except for a few clues that might help concretize the paths of Christianity into the metropolis. After the time of Pompey, imported Jewish slaves and freed slaves continued to stream into Rome through large Roman households such as the *imperial household*, the house of *Marcus Agrippa* (64/63–12 BCE),¹ and the house of the Roman noble *Volumnius*, who had resided in Syria in 8 BCE as Augustus' personal emissary and whose friendship King Herod (ruled 37–4 BCE) enjoyed.² It is in all likelihood from these households that the (first-century CE)³ Roman synagogues of the

¹ Cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 15.350–51; 16.12–16, 21–26.

² Josephus, *B.J.* 1.535–38, 542; *A.J.* 16.277–83, 332, 351, 354; see P. Lampe, “Paths of Early Christian Mission into Rome: Judaeo-Christians in the Households of Pagan Masters,” in S.E. McGinn *Celebrating Romans: Template for Pauline Theology: Essays in Honor of Robert Jewett* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 143–48.

³ Still valid is R. Penna, “Les Juifs à Rome au temps de l'Apôtre Paul,” *NTS* 28 (1982): 321–47, here 328.

Volumnenses (CIL 6.29756; CIJ 1.343, 402, 417, 523), the *Agrippesioi* (CIG 9907; CIJ 1.503, 425, 365), and the *Augustesioi* (CIL 6.29757; CIG 9902–9903; CIJ 1.284, 301, 338, 368, 416, 496) originated.

In a few cases there are clues that also *Christians* were among the families of Jewish slaves and freedmen imported from the East by such households. Although the epigraphically evidenced Jewish synagogue of the (*He*)*rodioi* (CIJ 1.173) cannot be documented for the first century CE, its name at least allows for the possibility that, already in the first century CE, Jewish slaves and freed persons of the Herodian royal household founded a synagogue for themselves in Rome. A branch of the Herodian household was located in Rome; Herod Antipas and Herod Agrippa I, for example, son and grandson of Herod the Great, were raised and educated in Rome. When looking for a possible *Christian* link to the Herodian household in Rome, Romans 16.10–11 comes into focus. Paul sends greetings to “those who are part of Aristobul’s domestic staff.” The formulation shows: Aristobul – and part of his domestic staff – were not Christian themselves. Who was Aristobul? His name was very rare in Rome (CIL 6.17577; 29104; cf. 18908), which probably means that he had immigrated to Rome from the East or even lived in the East, with only part of his household being in Rome. Interestingly enough, the Herodian family favored the name Aristobul; both the father and brother of Herod Agrippa I, for example, were named Aristobul. Thus, a proximity to the Herodian royal household appears possible, although it cannot be proven.⁴

A little firmer ground is gained when looking at a pagan *Valerian* household that had Jewish freed slaves. A Roman inscription from the first century CE (CIL 6.27948) mentions a freed slave (*liberta*) called *Valeria Maria*, who was either Jewish or Jewish-Christian, indicated by her Jewish cognomen.⁵

More importantly, *1 Clement* (63.3; 65.1) mentions a respected Roman Christian named *Valerius Biton*. The elderly man was part of the Roman delegation that brought *1 Clement* to Corinth, thus endorsing the letter with his personal presence. Described as an old man in the 90s of the first century,⁶ Valerius Biton must have been born in the 30s or 40s, living as a child in

⁴ That the partly Christian domestic staff of Aristobul was of Jewish descent is not necessarily implied, but it becomes plausible if Aristobul was affiliated with the Herodian clan and thus his household had ties to Palestine.

⁵ In this case, “*Maria*” is clearly a cognomen, not a *gentilicium*. The use of the cognomen “*Maria*” seldom occurs in CIL 6. Usually “*Maria*” – like “*Marius*” – indicates the *gens Maria* in the Latin inscriptions of the city of Rome. The cognomen “*Maria*” can only be found seven times in CIL 6 (14025; 27948; 12907; probably also 11175; 19039; 13717; 10881). Contrastingly, the *gentilicium* “*Maria*” occurs ca. 108 times in CIL 6). The cognomen, however, represents the Semitic name, so that in all probability our *Valeria Maria* of the first century CE was Jewish or Jewish-Christian.

⁶ Despite disputes about a later date of *1 Clem.*, I adhere to the traditional dating as the most convincing one.

Rome when Roman Christianity experienced its beginnings. His name identifies him as a freedman or the son of a freedman of the *gens Valeria*. It is tempting to assume that the Christian Valerius Biton came into contact with the Christian gospel through Valerian Jewish-Christian freed persons such as Valeria Maria. Was she a close relative? Or was he a pagan member of the Valerian *gens* who got in touch with Christianity through Jewish-Christian members of the *gens*? New epigraphic material would be needed to answer such questions.

This is also true for the question of why *Valerii* had Jews among their freed slaves. In the inscription, Valeria Maria is identified as a freed slave of a certain Lucius Valerius Diogenes.⁷ Diogenes was the heir of a Lucius Valerius Hiero, and Hiero in turn was the heir of a Lucius Valerius Papia. If Valeria Maria died in the 90s of the first century CE at the latest, then the dates of death for Diogenes, Hiero, and Papia can be extrapolated at the latest for the 80s, 50s, and 20s, respectively. This shows that, in any case, Lucius Valerius Papia was born in the first century BC. This was the time when another Lucius Valerius, a republican senator, had shown a friendly attitude towards the Jews (Josephus, *A.J.* 14.145–148). According to Josephus, he presided as praetor over the Roman Senate in a meeting renewing Rome's friendship with the Jewish people in 47 BCE. In addition, other pagan Valerian aristocrats had had connections to the Syrian East and to the Jewish people, such as the Roman rhetorician Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus (ca. 64 BCE–13 CE) who, in 29–28 BCE, had served as governor of Syria and, earlier, had demonstrated a friendly attitude toward Herod the Great (Josephus, *A.J.* 14.384; *B.J.* 1.284; cf. 1.243). Furthermore, a Valerius Gratus had been predecessor of Pontius Pilate as prefect of Judaea in 15–26 CE. (Josephus, *A.J.* 17). It is possible – nothing more – that the lineage of the patrons of Valeria Maria has some connection with one of the lines of heirs of these gentlemen.

Despite the uncertainties in the patchy Valerian source material,⁸ at least it can generally be surmised that Jewish Christianity in the 30s or 40s found one of its paths from the Syrian-Palestinian East into the city of Rome *through some of the aforementioned Roman households, through their Jewish slaves, freed persons, and their descendants.*⁹

⁷ The epigraph presents two groups of freed persons who were given a burial place by their patrons. Both of these patrons, Lucius Valerius Amphion and Lucius Valerius Diogenes, had inherited the place from a man named Lucius Valerius Hiero (probably their father). In the epigraph, Amphion is named first before Diogenes. Therefore, one can assume that the first group of freed persons was dependent on Amphion, while the second, which included our Maria, was dependent on Diogenes. Significantly, in the second group, one of the freedmen carried the name Diogenes again.

⁸ A more extensive survey of the Valerian freed persons and slaves would be helpful only in a very limited way, because many inscriptions are ambiguous with regard to the Jewish background of persons. Jews most often did not show their ethnic background in

Authors such as Suetonius (ca. 70–post-130) cast more light on the scene.¹⁰ Jewish-Christian immigrants from the east of the empire infiltrated one or several of the Jewish synagogues in Rome sometime in the 40s of the first century CE, most likely at the end of the 40s. In the East at that time, the Apostle Paul still lived in Antioch, and the radius of his Christian mission had not reached farther than 500 km (Gal 1.17, 21; 2 Cor 11.32–33; Acts 9.22–25, 27, 30; 11.25–26; 13–14); it was not before 49–50 CE that Paul founded his famous congregations in Galatia, Macedonia (Philippi; Thessalonica), and Greece (Corinth). Testifying about Christ and probably discussing a more liberal attitude toward the Torah (see the traditions behind Mark 2.23–3.6 as Roman material),¹¹ the Jewish-Christian immigrants in Rome caused turmoil within these synagogues, which attracted the attention of the Claudian admin-

their cognomina. Among the Roman Jews, the ratio of Latin and Greek names to Jewish-Aramaic names was 6:1 (H. Solin, “Juden und Syrer im westlichen Teil der römischen Welt,” *ANRW* II.29/2 [1983]: 587–789, at 711). Talmud, *Gittin* 1b: “the majority of the Jews in the Diaspora has the same names as the pagans.”

⁹ If Philippians was written in Rome, as H.-D. Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus in Rom* (Berlin: deGruyter, 2013) now intriguingly argues, then this result is also corroborated by Phil 4.22, where Paul mentions Christians of the imperial household in his environment.

¹⁰ Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4 in combination with Acts 18.2; Orosius, *Hist.* 7.6.15f.; Cassius Dio 60.6.6f. See, e.g., Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (4th ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010 [Augmented English edition of Lampe 1989]), 11–16 (also discussing the dating of the “edict of Claudius” and the Chrestus question).

¹¹ For the localization of Mark in Rome, where he picked up the traditions for his Gospel writing, see, e.g., M. Hengel, “Entstehungszeit und Situation des Markusevangeliums,” in H. Cancik (ed.), *Markus-Philologie: Historische, literargeschichtliche und stilistische Untersuchungen zum zweiten Evangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 1–45. In 12.42, Mark explains that two *lepta*, which were coined under Herod and the later Palestinian procurators, were worth one *quadrans* in Western currency. The *quadrans* was almost exclusively used in the West, particularly in Rome, where it was coined, and in Pompeii, with its use declining toward the end of the first century (C.E. King, “Quadrantes from the River Tiber,” *Numismatic Chronicle* 7.15 [1975]: 56–90). Mark also uses other Latin expressions (*iter facere* 2.23; *in extremis esse* 5.43; *consilium dare/capere* 3.6; 15.1), especially from the economic (*denarius* 6.37; *census* 12.14) and military domains (*legion* 5.9, 15; *speculator* 6.27; *praetorium* 15.16; *centurio* 15.39, 44f). In Mark 7.26, the Tyrian woman is characterized specifically as born in *Syro-Phoenicia*. This made sense for Western readers, who would have associated Phoenicia primarily with the region of Carthage. For Syrian readers, this detail would have been superfluous. Furthermore, Semitic words needed to be translated (Mark 5.41; 7.11, 34; 14.36; 15.22, 34). The late first-century document 1 Peter (5.13) locates Mark in Rome, making him an acquaintance of Peter like the Presbyter John quoted by Papias (in Eus., *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15). Mark’s identity with the Hellenistic Jewish-Christian John Mark of Phlm 23f; Col 4.10; Acts 12.12, 25; 13.5, 13; 15.36–40; 2 Tim 4.11, however, cannot be affirmed; the latter probably would have had better knowledge of Palestinian geography than displayed in Mark 5.1; 7.31; 11.1.

istration. The key persons¹² in this *inner*-Jewish argument were expelled by Claudius' administration in 49 CE, both Jewish and Jewish-Christian. Among those forced to leave were the Jewish Christians Aquila, an immigrant from Pontus, and his wife Prisca (Acts 18.2).¹³ As free tentmakers, they ran a workshop in Rome and were among the first Christian activists in the city. But it is unknown where or how they had made contact with the Christian message; they could have done so even in the synagogues of Rome itself.

The alternative reading of the relevant sources – an unknown Roman Chrestus stirred up the Roman Jews, and Christians had nothing to do with this event – is less likely.¹⁴ (1) According to the oldest source about the events (Acts 18.2), Aquila and Prisca arrived at Corinth after a Claudian expulsion of Jews from Rome. At that time, they were already Christians; otherwise Paul would have mentioned them among the first Corinthian converts, e.g., in 1 Corinthians 1.16. The alternative reading needs to assume, on the one hand, that Aquila and Prisca were stirred up by an unknown instigator Chrestus at Rome and expelled from the city and, on the other, that at the time of 1 Corinthians at the latest they were adherents of Christos, a criminal crucified as potential insurgent – which would have been a strange coincidence. It is therefore most likely that the Claudian expulsion of Jews involved Jewish Christians and not some unknown Chrestus followers. (2) Not only pagans (Tacitus, *Hist.* 15.44: *vulgus Chrestianos appellabat*; Tertullian, *Apol.* 3; *Nat.* 1.3: *Chrestiani pronuntiat a vobis*; Lactantius, *Inst.* 4.7), even Christians themselves could spell their name with an ē: the Codex Sinaiticus (Acts 11.26; 26.28; 1 Peter 4.16) shows this (*Chrestianos*), the Nott gem from late antiquity (*Eëso Chrestos*),¹⁵ and a Christian graffito in the Vatican mausoleum of the Valerii from ca. 300 (*Petrus roga...pro sanc(tis) hom(ini)b(us) Chrestian(is)...*;¹⁶ *Petrus roga* and the e in *Chrestianis* are clearly visible on photographs). (3) Another criminal “instigator” Chrestus besides the crucified one from Palestine is unknown elsewhere. Suetonius, however, assumes that his readers *know* the instigator Chrestus although the preceding text has not introduced him; previously unknown persons are usually introduced with *quidam* (e.g., Suet., *Cal.* 57: *quidam Cassius nomine*). Indeed, at Suetonius' time in the first half of the second century, educated readers could be assumed to know who the Palestinian Christ was, just as Pliny assumes it in *Ep.* 96.10 (“Christians” does not need to be explained). The educated Tacitus was informed about Christ's identity as well (*Ann.* 15.44). (4) Suetonius' phrase *impulsore Chresto* does not necessarily imply that this instigator was present in Rome at the time of the turmoils; Suetonius does not say *impellente Chresto*. The ablative can be easily translated as “because of the instigator Christ,” who had been hanged in Palestine earlier under Tiberius (Tacitus, *Ann.*

¹² Cassius Dio (60.6.6) explicitly states that Claudius never ordered any mass expulsion of Jews, contrary to Tiberius who allegedly did (57.18: *τοὺς πλείονας ἐξήλασεν*; the expression οὐκ ἐξήλασε in 60.6.6. creates a deliberate contrast to 57.18). A mass expulsion under Claudius would have been impossible anyway because of the Roman citizenship of many Jews in Rome (Philo, *Legat.* 155, 157), who would have been entitled to cumbersome individual trials before being exiled. *πάντας* in Acts 18.2 is typical Lukan hyperbole (cf. Luke 12.1; Acts 19.19; 21.20; 4.32, 34f., etc.), and Suetonius' *Iudaeos expulit* does not imply “all.”

¹³ Lampe, “Aquila/Prisca (Priszilla),” *RGG* (1998): 1.666.

¹⁴ *Pace* the essay by Peter Oakes in this volume.

¹⁵ J.G. Cook, *Roman Attitudes Toward the Christians: From Claudius to Hadrian* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 15f.

¹⁶ Ed. Guarducci 1953.

15.44). Not just in Rome, but also in synagogues of a number of cities conflicts among Jews and Jewish Christians developed “because” of the Christ figure and the teachings related to him (1 Thess 2.14-16; 2 Cor 11.24; Matt 10.17; Acts 13.42-45; 17.1-9). (5) Finally, even if the number of Christians in Rome might have been still small in the late 40s, turmoil stirred up by their gospel could have easily reached the ears of Roman officials in the imperial administration, just as the small Jesus group in Jerusalem had caught the attention of the provincial Roman official Pontius Pilate.

As sketchy as the clues about the origins of Christianity in Rome might be, they all point in one direction, at a model of evangelizing that Luke also presupposes for the first gospel preaching in Corinth and Macedonia: Christian missionaries, themselves being Jews, introduced the gospel to a city by first approaching other Jews.¹⁷ There is no evidence that Christian mission in Rome initially was attempted apart from Jewish meeting places. There, the missionaries could succeed, especially among the *sebomenoi*, and there they also met resistance and strife (1 Thess 2.14–16; 2 Cor 11.24; Matt 10.17; 23.34; Acts 13.42–45; 17.1–9). It was a plausible strategy, in Rome and other cities, to first address those who already had a clue about the Hebrew Bible and Jewish traditions, about concepts such as messiahship or Torah obedience, instead of right away going for the steep hill of evangelizing pagans who had never heard about any Jewish traditions. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Jews who already were Christian when arriving at Rome in the 30s or 40s *ab ovo* tried to establish their own congregations apart from existing Jewish synagogues.¹⁸

It was not until after the disruption of the year 49 CE that many Roman Christians appear to have assembled apart from the synagogues. At the latest in the second half of the 50s, at the time of Paul’s letter to the Romans, the Christians in Rome met separately from the Jewish synagogues. The majority of Roman Christians by then were of non-Jewish descent, although very many of these Gentiles may, before their baptisms, have been loosely connected

¹⁷ Also the pre-history of the Matthean congregation in Syria presupposes this model. Matthew’s congregation formed a Christian synagogue with its own scribes and scribal traditions (e.g., 13.52; 23.34; the non-Christian Jews have “their” scribes: 7.29). It still obeyed the Torah (5.17–20). But Matthew’s Christian scribes formerly had evangelized to Jews, living in one or more synagogues in which Christians and non-Christians had been mixed and the Christian members had met fierce resistance (e.g., 10.17; peculiar to Matt 23.34). Matthew’s harsh showdown with the obdurate Israel (especially in Matt 23) presupposes the trauma of being cut off from Judaism, i.e., from one or more Jewish synagogues. In sum, the origins of Matthew’s congregation were in mixed synagogues.

¹⁸ *Pace* the essay by Peter Oakes in this volume. Moreover, many Jewish Christians at that time decidedly considered themselves part of Israel, worshipping where other Jews worshipped (e.g., Acts 2.46).

with Jewish synagogues as uncircumcised sympathizers with Jewish monotheism.¹⁹ In 64, even Nero's administration (ruled 54–68) could distinguish the Christians from the Jews in the city.²⁰

Despite separation from the worship of the synagogues, social contacts between Christians and Jews in the city continued, as the Christian slave Callistus demonstrated in the 180s CE, when he operated a bank with Christian and Jewish customers (author of the *Refutatio*, *Ref.* 9.12).²¹ In the second century, a group of Jewish Christians still observed the Torah (Justin, *Dial.* 47), withdrawing fellowship from other Christians who did not, but probably maintaining contact with non-Christian Jewish synagogues. Cultural exchanges between Jews and Christians – in the fields of art and catacomb architecture – existed throughout the third century.

B. Topographical Aspects

In which quarters of the city of Rome did Roman Christians live in the time of Nero? Considering that Roman Christianity emerged from the Roman synagogues, it makes sense primarily to look at the three areas where Roman Jews

¹⁹ In Romans, Paul assumes that the Roman Christians in general come from paganism: e.g., 1.5f., 13–15; 11.13, 17f., 24, 28, 30f.; 15.15f., 18; 9.3ff. But many contents presuppose some knowledge of the Jewish religion, e.g., proofs from Scripture, which can be easily understood if the Gentile Christians were mainly former *sebomenoi*. See further Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 70–75. If Mark a few years later writes in Rome, he too documents the primarily Gentile Christian character of the Roman Christians; now he has to explain Jewish customs to them (Mark 7.3f.; 14.12; 15.42; in addition, 3.4 seems ignorant of the Sabbath rulings. Quarrels about ritual cleanness and dietary rules are not a present reality in Mark's congregation anymore; these questions have been settled: 7.17–19). At the same time, Mark supports the evangelization of pagans: see, e.g., Z. Kato, *Die Völkermission im Markusevangelium: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1986).

²⁰ For Nero's persecution, see below. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.44.4) holds that Christians were interrogated, who then "confessed" and denounced many others (*fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo*). The following phrase presupposes that the content of their confessions was not only arson (if at all) but also their religious views and the lifestyle corresponding to these views (*haud proinde in crimine incendii quam odio humani generis convicti sunt*). Paul's trial in Rome around 62 might have contributed to the fact that (not only Tacitus but also) the Neronian administration was able to distinguish between Jews and Christians. Paul confirms that Roman officials knew very well that his specifically Christian views led to his arrest (Phil 1.13). Furthermore, if initially Jews denounced Christians as arsonists, as *1 Clem.* (5.2, 4–6; 6.1) seems to insinuate (see further below), then it is even more plausible that the imperial administration knew that Jews and Christians were not quite the same.

²¹ P. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 282–83; *From Paul to Valentinus*, 335.

resided in the first century CE.²² Many lived in Trastevere, the crowded quarter west of the Tiber River across from Tiber Island (Philo, *Legat.* 155; 157). Others of poor economic means settled in the climatically unhealthy valley of the Appian Way outside the Capena Gate (Juvenal, *Sat.* 3.12–16).²³ Other Jewish groups lived in the northeast, where, in the first century CE, they founded a synagogue in the vicinity of the Viminal Gate, close to a fruit merchant's store (*CIL* 6.9821 = *CIJ* 1.531). They probably also started the first Jewish catacomb (Villa Torlonia) on the Via Nomentana northeast of the city as early as the first or second century CE, as more recent radiocarbon dating suggests.²⁴ It is unclear whether this synagogue was identical to one of the synagogues mentioned earlier or whether it was an additional one.

All three residential locations lay outside the Republican Wall, and the synagogue at the Viminal Gate was outside the sacred city limits of the *pomerium*.²⁵ The Egyptian cults, with which the Romans often associated Judaism, were banned from the *pomerium* as well (Cassius Dio 40.47.3; 53.2.4; cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85.4; Suetonius, *Tib.* 36.1; Josephus, *A.J.* 18.65–84; Ovid, *Ars* 1.76–78).

That Jews and Christians settled in perimeter regions was typical for immigrant eastern religious groups in the capital. In the immediate neighborhood of the Jewish and Christian cells in Trastevere and outside the Porta Capena, other eastern cults blossomed, venerating gods such as Sol of Palmyra, the Syrian Hadad, Atargatis, Simios, Iuppiter Dolichenus, Isis, Sarapis, Mithras, and Cybele.²⁶

The topographical results cohere with the situation in the year 64 CE, when a great fire severely damaged ten of the city's fourteen districts (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.38–44). Trastevere and the area outside the Porta Capena were among the quarters that were spared.²⁷ If Christians settled in these perimeter regions, it becomes all the more plausible that Nero could choose them as scapegoats, accusing them of arson. They had safely watched the fire from afar, in addition to the fact that they were known for *odium humani generis* (15.44). These were two good reasons for Nero to divert the suspicion that he himself had set the city on fire, as many contemporaries rumored. The fire,

²² Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 26–35; *From Paul to Valentinus*, 38–47.

²³ Juvenal writes at the beginning of the 2nd century, but does not give the impression that Jews have only recently moved into this quarter. This area does not imply the Aventine hill, although both belonged to Rome's administrative region 12.

²⁴ L.V. Rutgers, K. van der Borg, A.F.M. de Jong, and I. Poole, "Jewish Inspiration of Christian Catacombs," *Nature* 436 (2005): 339.

²⁵ For a similar situation in Philippi, see Acts 16.13.

²⁶ See Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 55, 58.

²⁷ For the spread of the fire, see Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 47.

indeed, was convenient for Nero; he needed space for his construction plans in the city center, planning his new palace, the vast “Golden House,” to stretch all the way from the Palatine hill to the slopes of the Esquiline hill.

C. “Bad Press” about the Christians

Although the Christians were innocent, the fact that they could so easily be used as scapegoats shows what a bad reputation they had. They were disliked in the pagan environment because they were as different as the Jews (see, e.g., Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44 in connection with *Hist.* 5.5.1; Suetonius, *Nero* 16; *Claud.* 25.3; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.8; Justin, *1 Apol.* 1.1).

In addition to bad press among the pagans, Roman Jews eyed the Christians with jealousy, as *1 Clem* 5.2, 4–6; 6.1 seems to allege, suggesting that Jewish denunciations triggered the Neronian persecution. Jewish envy – if it was historical – would have most likely focused on Christian missionary success among the *sebomenoi*.²⁸

However this may be, Mark 13.13, as a presumably Roman document, written only a few years later, lets Jesus prophesy: “*Everyone* will hate you.” The Apostle Paul drastically illustrates the bad reputation under which particularly the early Christian missionaries suffered: “We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things” (1 Cor 4.13). Bad press, immigrant status, being an unimportant ingredient in a melting-pot city of people from all over the empire – this was early Christianity in the city of Rome under Nero. The fire of 64 CE probably even aggravated the Christians’ image problem, because from now on, in the public perception, Christians could even be suspected of setting people’s houses on fire.

D. Mark in the Aftermath of the Neronian Persecution

In the aftermath of the traumatic Neronian persecution – around 70 CE when Mark wrote – numerous Roman Christian families still suffered from the loss of their beloved. At the same time, they probably had to deal with those who had betrayed their faith during the persecution, like Peter’s earlier denial (Mark 14.27–31), and those who had denounced fellow Christians (see Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44 and Mark 13.12), following Judas’ example. Mark obviously does not oppose readmitting those who had denied Christ into Christian fellowship (16.7), but he does not seem to have any sympathy with denunciators

²⁸ Roman Jews themselves had missionary ambitions (Cassius Dio 57.18.5a, for the year 19 CE; cf. also Horace, *Sat.* 1.4.142f.). However, the envy motif also could be a mere literary topos (cf., e.g., *1 Clem.* 45.4).

(14.10f, 43–46). At the same time, he – like Paul – propagates an existentially applied theology of the cross, encouraging his Roman readers to pick up their own cross together with Christ and to be ready to suffer patiently for the sake of Christ if necessary (Mark 8.34f.).

However, this is not all that Mark had to say in the aftermath of the Neronian trauma. Narrating his gospel, he gave it a counter-imperial slant, which is critical of the Vespasian imperial propaganda in particular. Instead of reacting to the Christians' "bad press" by defending Christianity, as the apologists of the second century chose to do, his Gospel created a narrated counter-world to the Roman system under the Flavians – offering an alternative not headed by the emperor but by Christ, the true *basileus* ("emperor, king;" Mark 15) and the true *divi filius* (Son of God; 1.11; 9.7; 14.61f.), as even a *centurio* in 15.39 admits, using a title that also Octavian, Tiberius, and Nero had used for themselves after the *apotheoses* of their fathers. Furthermore, Peter confesses that *Jesus* is the true messiah (8.27–29). In Mark's time, this confession challenged the imperial propaganda according to which Vespasian and Titus had fulfilled all messianic expectations of the Jews (Josephus, *B.J.* 6.312f.; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13; Suetonius, *Vesp.* 4.5). Correspondingly, Mark 13.21–22 alludes to both Flavians as "pseudo-messiahs." For Peter's messianic confession in 8.27–29, Mark carefully chose Caesarea Philippi (the "imperial") – a location where an Augustus-Nero temple stood and, in the year 67, Vespasian had feasted with Agrippa II for three weeks; three years later, Titus celebrated a victory party there with shows and games (Josephus, *B.J.* 3.9.7; 7.2.1).

Moreover, the Markan Jesus, as true Christ and opposite pole to the Roman rulers, performs miraculous healings just like those Vespasian was said to have done in Alexandria in a similar way (cf. Mark 8.22–26; 3.1–6 with Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.81f.; Suetonius, *Vesp.* 7; Cassius Dio 66.8.1), and he commands nature's powers just like political or military potentates allegedly did (cf. Mark 4.35–41 with Cicero, *Manilius* 16.48; *Panegyrici Latini* 7[6].12.8).

In addition, Mark criticized the violence of the Jewish War on both sides, even on a Sabbath (3.4).²⁹ In this light, it speaks volumes that Mark's text calls the demon of 5.9–10, who does not want to leave the country, *legion*, and lets this evil spirit find a new host: unclean pigs. As attentive readers knew, Legio X Fretensis prided itself on a boar as emblem, showing it off on coins and on numerous banners. In the early 70s, these readers could make the association: the healed man's evil demon found a new host, namely the Legio

²⁹ E.g., Jos., *B.J.* 2.449–57; cf. earlier 1.147–49; *A.J.* 14.66; Strabo 16.40; Cass. Dio 37.16; 1 Macc 2.40ff. The motif of killing on a Sabbath is erratic in the context of Mark 3.4. The enigma clears up if political undertones are heard. Then the text says: Jesus' healing on a Sabbath was no sin, especially when compared to what pagans of the Roman sphere of influence, on the one hand, and zealots, on the other, did on a Sabbath, namely killing life.

X Fretensis, which in the Jewish War significantly contributed to the long occupation of Jerusalem, having its camp on Olive Mountain and shooting fatal artillery into the city. After conquering the city, the “boar” legion was stationed in Jerusalem as the only legion left to keep the situation under control (Josephus, *B.J.* 5.70–97, 135, 269–73, 468; 6.237; 7.5, 17, 164; CIL 3.12117; 10.6321).

Even the seemingly harmless “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (12.17) could evoke associations in the reader of the early 70s. Of course, in the narrative, Jesus means the Roman poll tax. But for the reader there also existed another, more disturbing Roman tax: the *Fiscus Iudaicus* that Vespasian imposed on all Jews after the destruction of the Temple to humiliate the Jewish people after the Jewish rebellion. Replacing the Jewish tax for the Jerusalem Temple, the money of the *Fiscus Iudaicus* went to the Jupiter Temple on the Capitol Hill in Rome (e.g., Josephus, *B.J.* 7.218; Cassius Dio 66.7.2). Mark’s readers could ask themselves: Is the tax money for the Jupiter Capitolinus, which earlier was for the Jerusalem Temple, really Caesar’s – or rather God’s?

Parts of Mark’s narrative could be read as a subtle critique of abused political power (10.42), military violence (3.4; 5.9f.), humiliating taxation (12.17), and hubris of rulers who styled themselves as messianic and prided themselves on divine healing power or command of nature’s forces. Positively, Mark propagated a societal alternative to the imperial Roman society in which only God and Christ deserve religious reverence. In addition, this alternative society is based on serving one another, not on egoistic emphasis on social or institutional ranks (9.33–37; 10.35–45). It even allows for criticizing authorities.³⁰ In this society, humans should interact differently from the ways of the world (10.43).

It becomes obvious that such a narrative design also implied Christian self-criticism; the alternative society Mark’s Gospel had in mind was not realized in his congregations. The text does not shy away from criticizing *Christian* readers as well, who initially identify with the apostles in the narrative (1.16ff.; 2.13f.; 3.13–15, 34). But then they have to discover that these disciples are often ignorant and fail in their discipleship (4.40; 6.35–37, 49, 52; 7.18; 8.4 after 6.35, 44; 8.14–21). Despite numerous miracles, they do not acknowledge Jesus’ messiahship until 8.29. Subsequently, they refuse to accept Jesus’ passion and their own cross (8.32–38; 9.31–37; 10.33–45; 14.47), thinking about inner-Christian hierarchies and lofty honors for themselves instead of serving one another (9.33–37; 10.35–45). During Jesus’ passion they fail terribly, literally closing their eyes to Jesus’ tribulation in Gethsemane, betraying or denying him and running away, while others such as several

³⁰ For Mark, authorities are not taboo to criticism: see the harsh criticism of the apostles, below.

Galilean women, Bartimaeus, the anointing woman, and Simon of Cyrene prove to be better followers (10.52; 14.1–10, 32–46, 66–72; 15.21, 40f., 46f.; 16.1–7). Mark made his Roman readers take an uncomfortable look in the mirror when he depicted Jesus' disciples in such critical ways.³¹

E. The Christians' Socioeconomic Situation

The Christians' socioeconomic situation matches the aforementioned image problem.

(1) Mainly people of the lower social strata populated the crowded quarters of Trastevere and of the urbanized Via Appia valley outside the Porta Capena.³² Martial (ca. 38/41–101/4 CE) caricatures the Trastevere inhabitant as a buffoon trading bits of glass for sulfur matches (*Epigr.* 1.41). *Trastevere* as a harbor quarter accommodated people working as porters in large warehouses, unloading ships, making bricks on the Vatican slopes, or making their living as sailors, as millers, who ground grain unloaded from the ships, as shopkeepers, or as small craftsmen such as cabinet makers, potters, ivory carvers, smelly knackers and tanners – the stench of their trade hung over the quarter (Martial 6.93; cf. 12.59). Trade, transport, and industry characterized the area. One can easily picture Aquila and Prisca's tentmaker workshop in Trastevere. Their Christian house congregation (Rom 6.5) most likely met in their workshop, in which a craftsman's family usually also lived, at night sleeping in the back of the shop or the mezzanine above. Apuleius (*Met.* 9.24f.) graphically describes a fuller's workshop, in which he eats with his guests; his tools are scattered about, and the cloth is bleached on a wicker stand with sulfuric steam that burns the guests' noses during dinner. However, the tentmakers Aquila and Prisca also might have resided in the quarter of the

³¹ For further aspects of the political interpretation of Mark, for Mark's theology of the cross, and for his criticism of the readers implied in the Markian image of the disciples, see, e.g., P. Lampe, "Kirche im Neuen Testament," in R. Graf zu Castell-Rüdenhausen (ed.), *Kirche und Johanniterorden* (Berlin: Johanniterorden, 2012), 5–18. For the political reading, see also, e.g., M. Ebner, "Evangelium contra Evangelium: Das Markusevangelium und der Aufstieg der Flavii," *BN* 116 (2003): 28–42; Ebner, "Das Markusevangelium und der Aufstieg der Flavii: Eine politische Lektüre des ältesten 'Evangeliums,'" *BK* 66/2 (2011): 64–69; B. Heiniger, *Die Inkulturation des Christentums* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); A. Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Imperial Propaganda* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); G. Guttenberger, "Why Caesarea Philippi of all Sites? Some Reflections on the Political Background and Implications of Mark 8:27-30 for the Christology of Mark," in M. Labahn and J. Zangenberg (eds.), *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft* (Tübingen: Francke, 2002), 119–131.

³² See further Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 49–58, where the material of the following two paragraphs is discussed on the basis of the relevant sources.

urban stretch of the Appian Way outside the *Porta Capena*, where craftsmen worked with glass, wool, and textiles – which would fit their trade of making linen tents.³³ The area was as crowded as Trastevere. Here the Appian traffic pulsated, and people earned their living not only as craftsmen but also as transport workers, muleteers, porters, traders, or, as Juvenal (3.12ff.) mocks, Jewish beggars.

Both regions were permeated with immigrants from the provinces who swept into the city on the Appian Way and Tiber River. Like most of the population, the immigrants in these quarters usually lived in crowded tenement houses (*insulae*) built of bricks and wood. Five or six floors high, they often became deadly fire traps. Most of them had no water supply or latrines. The ground floors were used as stores, workshops, or storage rooms. The higher a visitor climbed in the tenement houses, the smaller and darker the dwelling units became. Loud noises, odors, and crowdedness were normal. At night, carts clattering under the windows disturbed the sleep since Caesar had banned any cart traffic from the jammed streets of the city during daytime.

(2) For illustration purposes, a glimpse into the early third century is offered, when the church started to assist Christians of little means in acquiring burial space in the S. Callisto Catacomb.³⁴ In this catacomb, still in the fourth century, low-class Christians predominated, as recent stable isotope analyses of collagen from twenty-two randomly selected skeletons from different locations in the Liberian Region of the Callisto Catacomb indicate. These simple people ate cheap freshwater fish from the unhealthy Tiber as their major protein supply and were buried in unassuming tombs.³⁵

(3) How Nero punished the “tremendous crowd” (*multitudo ingens*) of Christians accused of arson and misanthropy is significant. He wrapped them in animal skins, threw them to beasts, or crucified or burned them as an illumination in the Vatican gardens (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.38–44; 1 *Clem.* 6.1). Burning was a lawful sentence for arsonists;³⁶ so was throwing a low ranking person to wild animals (Ulpian, *Dig.* 47.9.12.1).³⁷ In other words, with these two measures Nero did not move totally beyond Roman penal law; Tacitus even

³³ For linen as the usual material of tents, see P. Lampe, “Paulus—Zeltmacher,” *BZ* 31 (1987): 256–61.

³⁴ Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 15–17; *From Paul to Valentinus*, 25–28.

³⁵ L. V. Rutgers, M. van Strydonck, M. Boudin, and C. van der Linde, “Stable Isotope Data from the Early Christian Catacombs of Ancient Rome: New Insights into the Dietary Habits of Rome’s Early Christians,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* 36 (2009): 1127–34.

³⁶ See Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 82, with corresponding source material (Gaius, *Dig.* 47.9.9, a law already in the Twelve Tablets: burning is for those who either set fire to temples – which certainly also happened during the fire of 64 – or to a pile of grain beside a house).

³⁷ Cf. Cook, *Roman Attitudes Toward the Christians*, 72 n.210

hints at hearings of the victims before the executions (Tac., *Ann.* 15.44.4). It is therefore probable that Nero also remained within the boundaries of penal law when he crucified many Christians. This means that those who were crucified did *not* possess Roman citizenship. As a rule, crucifixion was only used for strangers without citizenship, *humiliores*, and slaves.³⁸

Despite a lively current scholarly debate,³⁹ it remains probable that the Apostle Peter was among Nero's crucified victims in 64 (cf. *1 Clem.* 5.4; 6.1f.;⁴⁰ Gaius in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25.7; Dionysius of Corinth, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25.8; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1.1; Tertullian, *Praescr.* 36; Origen, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.2–3; Ignatius, *Rom.* 4.3; John 21.18–19; 2 Peter 1.14).⁴¹ In the middle of the second century, that is, three generations (at the most) after Peter's death, Christians identified a simple grave in the Vatican necropolis as the Apostle Peter's burial place, a hole in the ground covered with tiles. This is all that can be said in a scientifically responsible way about the history of this tomb prior to 160 CE. Around 160, Roman Christians decorated this simple grave with a modest monument, an *aedicula*, before it gradually became the center of more and more architectural activities. Today, the dome of St. Peter's soars high above it.

(4) The topographical result, showing that the lower social strata predominated in first-century Roman Christianity, is confirmed by the literary sources. Most of the Roman Christians were of very modest means (*pauperes*), Minucius Felix still wrote around 200 CE (*Oct.* 36.3). This is to be expected, because low-class people predominated in the city population as a whole (e.g., Seneca, *Helv.* 12.1). However, in spite of this, Roman Christianity gradually infiltrated *all* social levels, even the senatorial at the end of the first century, but this cannot be shown for the Neronian age yet.⁴² At that time, only a modest social stratification within Roman Christianity is presupposed by Paul when he, in Rom 12.13 (cf. also 12.8), differentiates between Christians in need and those who are better off, who can share with and care for the poorer,

³⁸ For the sources, see Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 82f. n.7. That the ones crucified were Gentile Christians, as Peter Oakes at the conference understood it, is not necessarily implied: many – but not all – Jews had Roman citizenship (see Philo, *Legat.* 155; 157, above).

³⁹ See, e.g., S. Heid et al. (eds.), *Petrus und Paulus in Rom: Eine interdisziplinäre Debatte* (Freiburg: Herder, 2011); O. Zwierlein, *Petrus in Rom: Die literarischen Zeugnisse, mit einer kritischen Edition der Martyrien des Petrus und Paulus auf neuer handschriftlicher Grundlage* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

⁴⁰ *Polu plethos* in 6.1 parallels *multitudo ingens* in Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44. That both expressions presumably are hyperbolic does not eliminate the parallel.

⁴¹ P. Lampe, "Petrus: I. Neues Testament," *RGG* 6 (2003): 1160–65.

⁴² The Christianity of Pomponia Graecina (Tac., *Ann.* 13.32) in the Neronian age is only a faint possibility (see Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 196f.).

who engage in trade (16.3f. with Acts 18; Rom 13.6f.),⁴³ and can travel (Rom 15.24).⁴⁴ However, such stratification must have been limited, with well-to-do persons only playing an insignificant role, because sometime in the course of the first century CE, before the time of *1 Clem.*, “many” Roman⁴⁵ Christians sold themselves into temporary slavery in order to raise money for the poor in the church (*1 Clem.* 55.2). Apparently, at that time there were no other profitable means available for the social welfare tasks in hand. Alms of better-off individuals did not suffice to feed all Christians in need. That is, there were either not enough well-to-do Christians in town or those who existed were too reluctant to share.⁴⁶

(5) In Romans 16, Paul lists twenty-six individual Christians in Rome, twenty-four of them by name. The names indicate⁴⁷ that probably four persons were freeborn and nine of slave origin (for the remaining 11 names, no reliable statements can be made).⁴⁸ That is, over two-thirds (9.4) show indications of slave origin. Thus, the Christian staff of the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus did not stand alone with regard to their slave lineage.

For fourteen of the individuals an eastern origin is plausible, while for the others it cannot be excluded⁴⁹ – a result that mirrors the immigrant situation of Roman Christianity. As far as the relation of men and women in the list is concerned,⁵⁰ it is striking that Paul primarily singles out women as active in the church (Junia, Prisca, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, and possibly Rufus’ mother, as opposed to only 3–5 men: Aquila, Andronicus, Urbanus, possibly Apelles and Rufus. This is a proportion of 7 to 5 – maybe even 6 to 3 – in favor of the women). The technical term *kopian*, indicating missionary

⁴³ Rom 13.6f. assumes that Roman Christians have to pay customs, which implies involvement in trade.

⁴⁴ In the 50s/60s CE, one of these socially more advanced persons was Claudius Ephebus (*1 Clem.* 63.3; 65.1), an old man in the 90s CE, who then enjoyed high esteem among the Roman Christians; *1 Clem.* lists him before Valerius Biton (for Biton, see above). Claudius Ephebus was a freedman of the Claudian *gens*, most probably coming from the imperial Claudian slaves (Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 184f.).

⁴⁵ “We” in *1 Clem.* 55.2 are the Roman Christians; cf., e.g., 6.1.

⁴⁶ Later, Hermas in Rome in the first half of the second century will address the latter problem. He compares richer Christians to fruitless elm trees and economically poorer ones, who nonetheless bear spiritual fruit, to vines and encourages the elm to support the vines. The vines need the elm’s stem to climb above ground and bear fruit (*Similitude* 2).

⁴⁷ See Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 170–83, with supporting evidence.

⁴⁸ I only considered a name as a slave name in Rome when more than 50% of the bearers of a specific name in CIL 6 were visibly of slave descent (because *libertus* or similar attributes are mentioned). As CIL 6 encompasses both immigrants and autochthons, the question of whether a person was an immigrant or not cannot have an impact on the decision of whether he or she bore a “slave name” in Rome.

⁴⁹ See Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 167–70, with supporting evidence.

⁵⁰ For the following, see Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 165–67.

work (e.g., Gal 4.11; 1 Cor 15.10), is even exclusively used for women (four times). But already at the end of the first century, *1 Clem.* 21.7, recommending silence to women, sounds very different.

(6) The first-century Roman Christians who sold themselves into slavery in order to support the needy of their church demonstrated an extreme solidarity among members of *lower* social strata⁵¹ that is rare in Roman society. Normally, only the upper classes of the pagan empire presented themselves as fairly consolidated groups, above all the senatorial class, while the lower strata lacked a collective consciousness and the supra-regional cohesion of the noble ranks. The early Christian representatives of the lower social levels, however, also exhibited exactly this: a supra-regional solidarity, granting hospitality to each other and developing a sense of belonging together in spite of ethnic and geographical distances. Christianity here contributed to the social integration of the whole Roman society.

F. Demographics

It would be helpful to have more than just fragmentary demographic statistics in pre-Constantinian times. How many Christians lived in the city? In the middle of the third century, Cornelius (Roman bishop in 251–253) counted 1,500 Christians receiving assistance from the church (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.43.11–12). However, this does not tell us how many Christians of meager means (*pauperes*), who formed the majority in Roman Christianity (see Min. Fel. above), lived in Rome; Minucius Felix's *pauperes*, often misleadingly translated as "poor," usually did make a very modest living on their own and did *not* receive subsidies from the church. Thus, the 1,500 should not necessarily be equated with the majority in Roman Christianity, and we are left in the dark when it comes to estimating the total number of Roman Christians. Already in the time of Nero, the Roman Christians allegedly formed a "large crowd," as Tacitus – possibly hyperbolically – noted. Their number constantly grew in the decades to come (cf. Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 31.7). In the last quarter of the second century, Irenaeus called Roman Christianity the biggest Christian unit in the world (*Haer.* 3.3.2).

⁵¹ See also Paul's exhortation to practice such solidarity in Rom 12.

G. Fractionation – Decentralized Organization

During the entire first two centuries,⁵² Roman Christianity was organized with a similar fractionation as the Jewish congregations in Rome, which were independent units and only loosely connected with one another – contrary to the situation of the Jewry in Alexandria, where the various synagogues constituted one political body.⁵³ As *Jewish* freed persons and slaves of pagan households formed their own synagogues (see above), *Christian* freed persons and slaves of non-Christian masters organized Christian house congregations of their own in Rome (Rom 16.10–11), within the houses and estates in which they lived and worked as slaves or freed persons. In all of these cases, the primary scene of work and living and the place of religious activity were concentric circles. The masters often practiced a religion different from that of their servants,⁵⁴ tolerating the religious plurality within their households, even if the servants were Christian. This was true for Narcissus' and Aristobul's households. In about 56 CE, Paul, in Romans 16,⁵⁵ sends greetings to various Christian circles in Rome, among them (a) "those in the lord who are part of Narcissus' domestic staff" and (b) "those who are part of Aristobul's domestic staff" (16.10–11).

The apostle Paul also mentions: (1) the house church of Prisca and Aquila; (2) the Christians who were together with Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, and Hermas; (3) the saints who were with Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas.

If we assume that the fourteen other persons greeted in the chapter did not belong to any of these five crystallization points and that they could not have belonged to only *one* further group, then, in about 56, at least seven different Christian "islands" existed in Rome. Another Christian circle was established when Paul himself, only half a decade later, gathered an audience around himself in his Roman rental apartment (Acts 28.16, 30).

In private houses or larger apartments of more-well-to-do Christian hosts, in socially rather homogeneous Christian circles within the domestic staff of large pagan households, in groups surrounding a teacher, or in workshops of free craftsmen such as Aquila and Prisca – there were various social formats Christians could use for gathering – the individual Christian groups probably celebrated their own worship services, as at least Rom 16.5 documents. Thus,

⁵² See Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 357–408.

⁵³ For Rome and Alexandria, see Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 367–68; *From Paul to Valentinus*, 431–32.

⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.44.3; Paul's letter to Philemon; 1 Tim 6.1; Titus 2.9–10; Origen, *Cels.* 3.55; Council of Elvira, *Can.* 41.

⁵⁵ See the analysis of Romans 16 in P. Lampe, "The Roman Christians of Romans 16," in K.P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 216–30.

early Christians in Rome formed various house congregations scattered throughout the city. There was no local center or central meeting place for Roman Christianity – certainly not in Aquila’s workshop. Romans 16.5 sounds very different from 16.23, where Gaius is praised for his hospitality for the “whole church” in Corinth.

The fractionation in town, similar to that of the Jews in the city, facilitated a theological pluralism, especially in second-century Rome.⁵⁶ But also in Neronian times we get a glimpse at different theological orientations when looking at the tensions between the “weak” (probably Jewish-Christians) and the “strong” in Romans 14–15. Mark presupposes two different Eucharistic table fellowships in his narrative: one of Jewish-Christians and one of Gentile Christians.⁵⁷ It is possible that the juxtaposition of separate table fellowships in Mark’s narrative mirrors the Roman fractionated situation of independent house churches – which could differ in their dietary practices just like the groups in Rom 14–15.⁵⁸

In view of the Roman fractionation and in contrast to 1 Cor 1.2; 2 Cor 1.1; 1 Thess 1.1, Paul does not address his letter to the Romans to “the church in Rome.” He addresses it “to all who are in Rome” (Rom 1.7) and instead calls one of the individual Christian groups in Rome – such as the one in the home of Prisca and Aquila – “the church in the home of NN.”

The house congregations, scattered over the city, were only loosely connected. Some sent portions of their Eucharist to other Christian groups in the city to express fellowship with them, as Irenaeus later shows (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.15). Written material – such as Paul’s letter to the Romans – was shared among the Christian groups in Rome. It is significant that Paul, in Romans 16.1–16a, formulates: “You, greet NN (who are in Rome), and greet XY (who are in your town), and greet YZ (who are there as well).” Apparently, each group after having read the letter is supposed to send one or two of their members to the next group in town, who are supposed to deliver the letter and send greetings from their own group; Paul does not say: “send greetings from *me*.” As the example of Paul’s letter shows, communication with

⁵⁶ Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 320–34; *From Paul to Valentinus*, 381–96.

⁵⁷ Mark 6.30–44 and 8.1–10. Jewish-Christians can participate in the latter provided they accept that all food is clean (7.19).

⁵⁸ Compare the second-century group of Jewish-Christians still observing the Torah and withdrawing table fellowship from others (Justin, *Dial.* 47, above). If Phil 1.14–17 was written in Rome (see above), then the text would show that there were groups that endorsed Paul’s gospel and other (Jewish-Christian) groups that opposed it in their preaching at the time of Paul’s detention in Rome.

persons or congregations *outside* of Rome had to be coordinated among the groups within the city. Only later, in subsequent centuries, could outsiders perceive the various Roman house churches as *the* Roman church.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Thus apparently, for example, Dionysios of Corinth in ca. 170: “you as Romans” (Eus., *Hist. eccl.* 4.23.10); “you” (plural) sent the letters of *1 Clement* and the one written by Soter to Corinth (2.25.8; 4.23.11).

