Exploring the Eschaton
The Lord's Supper as a Cultural Technique Enabling Prefigurative Politics

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Abstract

Focusing on 1 Cor. 11, this article argues that the early Christian meal can be understood as a cultural technique that enables new knowledge and insight, specifically about the world to come. The argument takes its vantage point from an understanding of the early Christian meal as a form of social experimentation that engages in prefigurative practices, thereby anticipating the world to come. To explore the latter phenomenon, this article makes use of a body of theory concerning prefigurative politics, a field not commonly associated with the study of religion. However, it is shown that this body of theory is a useful tool for considering that the kind of knowledge regarding the world to come is made possible through the performance of the early Christian meal, understood as a cultural technique. In this manner, the present article aims to make contributions at the levels of both the theory regarding the study of the early Christian meal and insights into it.

Keywords

Eucharist, eschatology, Lord's Supper, prefiguration, imagination

Introduction

In research on early Christianity, ritual has been increasingly considered as a dimension of early Christian identity of its own (rather than as an illustration of dogmatic positions, for instance), in research that emerged in the last few decades. One way of taking this kind of research further is to seek to understand early Christian ritual through the lens of the topic of the jubilee issue of the *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies*, that is, as a cultural technique.[1] Precisely this is undertaken in the present

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1)   In doing so, the development of the argument as such is emphasized, while the interaction with secondary literature serves the purpose of supporting the argument, rather than providing a full bibliographical account of available literature. Where appropriate, reference is also made to the author's earlier publications so that the trajectory of reflection leading up to this article can be traced.

contribution, focusing on a key early Christian ritual, the common meal in the 'Pauline' tradition.[2] Eventually, the analysis concentrates on the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11, as this is one of the dimensions of the concept of a cultural technique, this article asks in particular what sort of cognition of the eschaton is facilitated by this ritual. In turn, this latter exploration is aided by another concept and the body of theory that pertains to it – 'prefigurative politics,' which, in recent collaborative efforts in the Netherlands, has proven to hold a significant potential for understanding the workings of (early) Christian (ritual) identity. First, a brief outline of the view of cultural techniques that is used here is offered. Second, using early Christian sources, it is argued that the Lord's Supper can be fruitfully understood as a cultural technique. Third, an outline of prefigurative politics is presented. Fourth, it is used to further explore the 'cognition' that is facilitated through the Lord's Supper *qua* cultural technique.[3] In doing so, the present contribution provides a (very) partial answer to the overarching question that is at the core of the *Yearbook's* jubilee edition: "How can rituals be fruitfully explored as techniques, i.e., operational processes involving work with things and symbols which entail both 'know-how' and 'know-that'? Practices-with-things both regularize and habituate the body's movements, on the one hand, and can provide a basis for new spaces for perception, communication, and cognition on the other."[4] Given the nature of this contribution, much attention will have to be paid to theoretical considerations that leave only limited space for detailed exegetical (linguistic and rhetorical) analysis.

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2) The term 'Pauline' is problematic as Paul was certainly a formative force for the communities with which he interacted, on one hand, but equally certainly not the only one of importance, on the other hand.

3) The topic of the early Christian Eucharist as a cultural technique has also been explored by Bernhard Siegert, albeit in a passage that is nigh incomprehensible due to its inconsistency, and it illustrates the potential drawbacks to interdisciplinary work. See his *Cultural Techniques Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real* (New York: Fordham, 2015): "Indeed, there is reason to doubt whether Jesus really celebrated Pesach Seder with his disciples. "It is inconceivable for any Jew aware of its meaning to participate in the Eucharist without being struck dumb with horror. To Jewish culinary habits the very idea of consuming blood is abominable." As a Jew, Jesus could not have spoken the words: "Take, eat, this is my body. Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood" (Matthew 26:26-28). Either the Jesus who presided over the Last Supper wasn't a Jew, or the most important words of the Eucharist – which do not occur in John – were invented by early Christians and retroactively attributed to him. Jesus' words, that is, the very core of the Christian ritual, would constitute a so-called community formation, courtesy of a group of inventive gentiles residing in some eastern Mediterranean port city" (37-38). Siegert continues and notes the appeal to the Gospel of John: "The notion of a sacrificed god, with whom initiates merge in sacramental fashion by consuming blessed bread and sacred wine, would most likely have reminded them of religious exercises associated with certain mystery cults. The Gospel of John supports this view. John, the Greek Christian, made no secret of his anti-Judaism; he removed Jesus from his Jewish environment in order to adapt his sacrament to Greek mystery rituals" (38).

4) Retrieved from IRiLiS, "Call for Papers Jubilee Edition Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies." https://www.pthu.nl/irilis/news-events/news/2021/11/call-for-papers-jubilee-edition-yearbook-for-ritual-and-liturgical-studies/. Accessed September 27, 2022.

1 Cultural techniques and early christian ritual

'Cultural techniques' is a term that seems to originate in the context of farming and describing techniques for cultivating land and animal husbandry that worked well materially, without those employing them necessarily understanding or, in that sense, knowing what they were doing. A key point of the notion of cultural techniques is to move beyond the focus on texts and on understanding to describe what shapes human life and makes it work. Cognition does not precede practices; rather, the reverse is observed to be the case, while texts do not constitute the foundation but are expressions of what is produced by a broader array of (non-textual) cultural techniques. Krämer and Bredekamp sum up the characteristics of cultural techniques:

> Let's recapitulate the outlines of the cultural-technical perspective: cultural techniques are (a) operative processes that enable work with things and symbols; (b) they are based on a separation between an implied 'know how' and an explicit 'know that'; (c) they can be understood as skills that habituate and regularize the body's movements and that express themselves in everyday fluid practices; (d) at the same time, such techniques can provide the aesthetic and material-technical foundation for scientific innovation and new theoretical objects; (e) the media innovations accruing in the wake of changing cultural techniques are located in a reciprocity of print and image, sound and number, which, in turn; (f) opens up new exploratory spaces for perception, communication, and cognition; and (g) these exploratory spaces come into view where disciplinary boundaries become permeable and lay bare phenomena and relationships whose profile precisely does not coincide with the boundaries of specific disciplines.[5]

Unpacking this definition can be combined with an argument about why the notion of cultural techniques fits understandings of the early Christian ritual as they have emerged over the last few decades. A key characteristic of the latter is summed up well in the title of Hall Taussig's monograph: *In the Beginning was the Meal*.[6] Its key direction is summarized well by Lieu in a review of the book, which also positions the work in a larger trend in early Christian studies:

> Hal Taussig's study of early Christian meals joins a growing number of books that seek to interpret the development of a distinctive Christian identity not in terms of doctrinal beliefs or institutional forms, nor its cultural construction through textual rhetoric, but through the patterns of social practice that the early "believers" adopted.[7]

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5) Sybille Krämer & Horst Bredekamp, "Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques Moving Beyond Text," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30 (2013): 20-29, 27, doi: 10.1177/0263276413496287. For another survey, see Bernhard Siegert, "Kulturtechnik," in *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. H. Maye & L. Scholz (München: UTB, 2011), 95-118; and Harun Maye, "Was ist eine Kulturtechnik?," *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 1 (2010): 121-136, doi: 10.25969/mediarep/18443.

6) Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009.

7) Judith Lieu, review published in *Biblical Interpretation* 18 (2010): 512-514, 512, doi: 10.1163/092725610X12603562257234.

The point of citing Taussig's study and Lieu's take on his work is that the trend that Lieu refers to, and of which Taussig's work is expressive, is in many ways parallel to the 'turn' that those working on cultural techniques seek to achieve in the broader fields of the social sciences, the humanities, and also theology (in fact, it would not require a great stretch of the imagination to suggest that all of this is also summed up well in the much older adage *lex orandi, lex credendi*, of course).[8]

When exploring texts – the only extant witnesses, at least for the first two and a half centuries or so – that emerged from the (also ritual) life of early Christian communities, it becomes possible to argue that these texts can be well understood, both as part of a ritual practice and[9] in this setting, more importantly, as cultural techniques. At least a large number of the characteristics of cultural techniques summed up by Krämer and Bredekamp can be related well to the epistles of Paul of Tarsus.

To begin with, the fact that early Christian meals, as discussed in 1 Cor. 8, 10, 11 and Romans 14, are "operative processes that enable work with things and symbols"[10] should be relatively evident, given that things (bread, cups, wine, etc.) are obviously involved, as are (the same objects as) the symbols and work done with them in the sense that meals are partaken with them (Krämer and Bredekamp's characteristic 'a'). The notion that "they are based on a separation between an implied 'know how' and an explicit 'know that'" also seems to fit well. The reason for this is that in all of the Pauline texts just mentioned, practices seem to be running their course, while their practitioners do not necessarily understand them (or at least, not in the sense that Paul wishes them to be understood). The practices 'work' without too much (explicit) theory governing them (Krämer and Bredekamp's characteristic 'b'). Similarly, early Christian meals, which were contested and developing practices – again, the texts just referred to amply witness to this – can well be perceived as "skills that habituate and regularize the body's movements and that express themselves in everyday fluid practices" (Krämer and Bredekamp's characteristic 'c'). It is certainly clear that early Christian meals were deeply physical practices, given that a meal necessarily involves the physical consumption of food, and a common meal implies the physical gathering of bodies. This also means that bodies are disciplined by the course of a meal, which lies at the heart of the discussion of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:17-34.[11] A little less obvious may be the connection with Krämer and Bredekamp's characteristic 'd,' which entails the following: "at the same time, such techniques can provide the aesthetic and material-technical foundation

8)   For a recent publication on this topic, see Herwig Aldenhoven, *Lex orandi, lex credendi. Beiträge zur liturgischen und systematischen Theologie in altkatholischer Perspektive,* ed. U. von Arx, in collaboration with G. Huian & P.-B. Smit (Münster: Aschendorff, 2021).

9)   This argument has been set out recently in Peter-Ben Smit, *Felix Culpa. Ritual Failure and Theological Innovation in Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

10)   This quotation of a characteristic (as all subsequent ones) is taken from Krämer & Bredekamp, "Culture," 27.

11)   For a discussion with a focus on Paul as a theologian of the body, see Peter-Ben Smit, "The Resurrection of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 11: Paul as a Theologian of the Body in Conversation with Judith Butler," *Lectio Difficilior* 2019:1. Accessed September 27, 2022.

for scientific innovation and new theoretical objects." Nonetheless, it is certainly not too farfetched to suggest that precisely the concrete ritual and therefore material practice of early Christian meals gave rise to insights into what good forms of community might and might not be (1 Cor. 11; Romans 14), as well as how the appertaining communities' relationship to their non-Christian context ought to be lived and conceptualized (1 Cor. 8, 10). Given the lack of non-textual sources (and the fact that available textual sources hardly comment on it), Krämer and Bredekamp's characteristic 'e,' ("the media innovations accruing in the wake of changing cultural techniques are located in a reciprocity of print and image, sound and number") is hard to find in the available texts. However, characteristic 'f' (the idea that a cultural technique "opens up new exploratory spaces for perception, communication, and cognition") is a very good fit, which is the focus of this article – the exploration of the imagination (and in that sense, "perception, communication, and cognition") of the eschaton through the Lord's Supper. Characteristic 'g' is described as "these exploratory spaces come into view where disciplinary boundaries become permeable and lay bare phenomena and relationships whose profile precisely does not coincide with the boundaries of specific disciplines." This seems to be more a characteristic of an approach to cultural techniques than a dimension of these techniques themselves. In this article, this is implied in the interdisciplinary approach.

On this, admittedly brief, basis, it is possible to state that early Christian meals, at least as discussed by Paul of Tarsus, can be plausibly understood as cultural techniques. The next step explores what kind of cognition is developed through this technique. To do so, the concept and appertaining theory of prefigurative politics are drawn on.

2 Prefigurative politics: some contours

Prefigurative politics, "an experimental political practice in which the ends of one's actions are mirrored in the means applied in their realisation"[12] is a relatively recent model, used in the analysis of contemporary movements, such as 'Occupy' or earlier movements, for example, the Paris Commune of 1871. Religious movements are not typically analyzed from this vantage point, which constitutes a clear gap in this discourse and the body of knowledge produced by it. Leach describes the functioning of such movements as follows:

> Rather than looking to a revolutionary vanguard to seize existing power structures and implement revolutionary change on behalf of the masses or to trade unions or political parties to leverage reforms within the existing system, a prefigurative approach seeks to create the new society "in

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12) Mathijs van de Sande, "The Prefigurative Power of the Common(s)," *Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices,* ed. G. Ruivenkamp & A. Hilton (London: Zed, 2017), 25-63; see also Mathijs van de Sande, "Prefiguration," *Critical Terms in Futures Studies,* ed. H. Paul (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 227-233.

 the shell of the old" by developing counterhegemonic institutions and modes of interaction that embody the desired transformation.[13]

First developed in the 1970s,[14] the concept facilitates overcoming dichotomies such as that between means and end (the end is present in the means), and between a future ideal and the present; the future is already in the present through its prefigurative performance in communal practices.[15] Thus, prefigurative practices manipulate time to the extent that the dichotomy between the present and the future becomes blurred. However, these are not the only kinds of dichotomies that are called into question in prefigurative practices. Beyond these dichotomies, others include the following:

- the dichotomy between presence and absence because what is (yet) absent is also (already) there;
- the dichotomy between ideal and reality, as the ideal is present in the reality that does not agree with the ideal; with this, also a strict dichotomy between body and mind becomes blurred as the (noetically) imagined future is as it were pictured through physical practices and experiments; and
- the dichotomy between center and margin, as (marginal) prefigurative practices both establish themselves as the center and continue as marginal.

Inherent in the analysis of a religious movement[16] – such as the early Jesus movement, as a form of social experimentation and in terms of prefigurative politics – is the collapse of the dichotomy between religion (a problematic term for any first-century CE phenomenon to begin with) and politics (this would also invite the analysis of not explicitly religious forms of social experimentation from a theological perspective, as forms of 'secular liturgy'). This article does not discuss this matter separately but offers some comments on the relationship between the Markan gospel and the Roman Empire from the vantage point of prefigurative politics.

As it seems that blurring or even collapsing these various dichotomies characterizes prefigurative practices or is at least one of their outstanding characteristics, they are used in the remainder of this article as an organizing principle for the analysis of aspects of the Gospel of Mark through a prefigurative lens.

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13)   Darcy K. Leach, "Prefigurative Politics," *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements,* ed. D. A. Snow et al. (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 1004-1006, 1004.

14)   Usually, reference is made to Carl Boggs, "Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control," *Radical America* 11 (1977): 99-122.

15)   See, for instance, the elaboration of this theme by Dan Swain, "Not Not But Not Yet: Present and Future in Prefigurative Politics," *Political Studies* 67 (2019): 47-62, doi: 10.1177/0032321717741233.

16)   'Religious' is used in a very general sense here. The term is, at least to the extent that it suggests a distinction between the sacred and the secular and the private and the public spheres, of course, not really applicable to first-century CE social movements or cultic groups.

3   Prefigurative politics and early christian prefiguration

Mentioning prefiguration in relation to religious – more specifically early Christian – sources begs the question of the relation between prefigurative politics and prefiguration as a hermeneutical tool and concept in antiquity, particularly in early Christianity (even if typological exegesis also occurred in other forms of ancient Judaism). Erich Auerbach, a theoretician who is of high importance for the conceptualization of prefiguration,[17] refers to prefiguration as a kind of "phenomenal prophecy," which means that it concerns "something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical."[18] Nonetheless, for Auerbach, this kind of prefiguration was understood as being backward looking primarily; it has to be understood as a tool to construct history, not as a means to imagine the future. In recent (and representative) studies of prefigurative politics, the kind of prefiguration at stake is perceived as different from early Christian forms of prefiguration, which occurred often in the form of prefigurative or typological exegesis, along similar lines – typological exegesis constructs prefigurative relationships retrospectively, while prefigurative politics is oriented toward the future. In his essay "Revolutionary practice and prefigurative politics," Paul Raekstad offers a clarifying analysis:

> Although this word [prefiguration] later came to be used to denote political organizations aiming to institute in the present some aspects of what they aspire to in a future society, there are crucial differences. First, to prefigure something in this (sc. early Christian) sense is not actually to do it or to try to do it. For Moses to prefigure Christ does not entail that Moses aspires to the same goals as Christ, or that Moses consciously and deliberately works towards what Christ achieves. By contrast, for a revolutionary organization to prefigure the future society it aspires to bring about is for it consciously and deliberately to aim for that future form of society as a goal and to use this aim to structure the way it organizes in the present. Second, whether something is prefigurative in the first sense is determined only retrospectively. We are able to imagine that Moses prefigures Christ only after Christ has come and gone. Since it is impossible to tell beforehand whether something prefigures anything else, and since prefiguration is disconnected from the intentions and goals of the agents doing the prefiguring, prefiguration in this sense does not offer practical guidance to a social and political movement or organization. The contemporary understanding of what today is called prefigurative politics developed in the 19th century without reference to the religious meaning of the term, and only over a century later did the term start to be used to denote this sort of politics…[19]

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17)   This is not to say that Auerbach's work is unpolitical; on the contrary, his historiographical project had a very specific political context and aim. See, for instance, Avihu Zakai & David Weinstein, "Erich Auerbach and His 'Figura': An Apology for the Old Testament in an Age of Aryan Philology," *Religions* 3 (2012): 320-338, doi: 10.3390/rel3020320.

18)   Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 29.

19)   Paul Raekstad, "Revolutionary Practice and Prefigurative Politics: A Clarification and Defense,"

In the next section, Christian meals are approached with a focus on the way the world to come is imagined through them and with reference to the previously described understandings of prefiguration.

4   Imagining the eschaton

The fact that the early Christian Eucharist has a strongly eschatological orientation is certainly not a new insight.[20] Various dimensions of this – also literal[21] – orientation can be identified, for instance, by Bieler and Schottroff, who function here as representatives of scholars who have worked on the same kind of question (and with comparable results):

> …[W]e consider four dimensions of the Eucharist as eschatological meal. The first of these rests on the Jewish tradition of hope for God's gathering of those who are scattered. Against this background the Eucharist anticipates the feast of the renewed peaceful community of all nations. The second dimension includes the proclamation of the death of Jesus Messiah. Thus the act of eating together anticipates the end of all violence and oppression. The third dimension arises as the eschatological new covenant is made present in the Eucharist: we are bound to God's Torah. The fourth dimension comes from the event of the resurrection of the dead in the Eucharist.[22]

Building on this and other arguments regarding the eschatological orientation of the early Christian sacred meal, while understanding it as a cultural technique that in a non-textual but material or physical manner creates the space for new forms of cognition, early Christian meals are investigated here with the help of the framework offered by prefigurative politics. To do so, it is argued why early Christianity can be understood as a form of 'social experimentation,' which is a key characteristic of any form of prefigurative politics. Fortunately, this argument has been made elsewhere already, both by Taussig and by others involved in social-scientific-oriented research on early Christianity.[23] In this approach,

Constellations 25 (2018): 359-372, 361, doi: 10.1111/1467-8675.12319.

20)   Although it cannot be explored here, both the eschatological orientation and the prefigurative character of early Christian ritual suit Jonathan Z. Smith's emphasis on a ritual's connection with the world as it should be. As he puts it himself, "Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in tension to the way things are." Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago, ²1988), 63.

21)   See also Peter-Ben Smit, "Volk Gottes unterwegs. Zur Frage der Gebetsrichtung in der Eucharistiefeier," *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 102 (2012): 159-179.

22)   Andrea Bieler & Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 49; for their full account, see 49-67. A classical text in this regard is Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (London: Epworth, 1978). For an earlier consideration of eschatology and early Christian meals, as well as an interaction with a fuller body of literature, see Peter-Ben Smit, *Food and Fellowship in the Kingdom: Studies in the Eschatological Meal and Scenes of Nutritional Abundance in the New Testament* (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2008).

23)   Taussig, *Beginning*. See also, for example, Burton L. Mack, "On Describing Christian Origins," *Theory*

in communal practices – in Taussig's case, the Eucharist – the (written) word is taken as the key site of the negotiation of early Christian identities. In the appertaining literature, however, the definition of what a social experiment entails precisely remains somewhat elusive.[24] Therefore, a definition is offered in two stages here, building on the work of others. The first stage concerns a definition of an 'intentional community' as a form of social experimentation, which deviates from the social 'normal' (otherwise, the term 'experimentation' would be meaningless), usually perceived as an activity of such groups. A common definition is Metcalf's:

> [f]ive or more people, drawn from more than one family or kinship group, who have voluntarily come together for the purpose of ameliorating perceived social problems and inadequacies. They seek to live beyond the bounds of mainstream society by adopting a consciously devised and usually well thought-out social and cultural alternative. In the pursuit of their goals, they share significant aspects of their lives together. Participants are characterized by a "we-consciousness," seeing themselves as a continuing group, separate from and in many ways better than the society from which they emerged.[25]

Building on this definition, all of the communal practices that such a group develops to achieve the aim of "ameliorating perceived social problems and inadequacies" can be understood as social experimentation, given that these practices experiment with doing things differently than mainstream society

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and Method in the Study of Religion Twenty-Five Years On, ed. A.W. Hughes (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 177-199, which reacts to and builds on "Conclusion: Redescribing Christian Origins," *Redescribing Christian Origins,* ed. R.D. Cameron & M.P. Miller (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 497-516. For a discussion and exploration, see also Angela Lynn Brkich, *Locating Opportunities: Women, Ritualizations, and Social Experimentation in Early Jesus Groups* (PhD dissertation; University of Alberta, 2014).

24)   In the literature quoted above (and in other literature, not mentioned here), no clear definitions could be found, only descriptions or formulations that assume that the meaning of a 'social experiment' is clear, such as Cameron & Miller's statement, "[T]he plurality of the Jesus groups and the variety of mythologies they produced are better explained as reflexive social experiments than as responses to the historical Jesus or as generative forces set in motion by singular events and personal revelations. These experiments were concerned to shape meaningful collective identities in the face of constraints and challenges of the times and can be compared to similar sorts of social experimentation occasioned by the times" (quoted in Brkich, *Opportunities,* 21). Another example is provided by Braun, whose position is paraphrased by Brkich as follows: "The discovery was that at least in their earliest stages the most progressive Jesus and Christ associations were excited over egalitarian social experiments, and, in keeping with experimental gender egalitarianism, did not merely tolerate women but assigned them status and function that were not derived from dominant Graeco-Roman values and conventions concerning sex and gender" (Brkich, *Opportunities,* 59). Taussig also refrains from a definition but simply assumes that social experimentation is a known quantity.

25)   William James Metcalf, *The Findhorn Book of Community Living* (Forres: Findhorn, 2004), 9-10. For a survey of examples of international communities, see also idem, "Utopian Struggle: Preconceptions and Realities of Intentional Communities," *RCC Perspectives* 8 (2012): 21-30, doi: 10.5282/rcc/6178.

does in order to solve the problems perceived in the latter and to arrive at a different, better way of life. These considerations explain aspects of the strategy (as many scholars argue) that early Christianity, including the 'Pauline' communities and their social practices (for example, meal practices), pursued and that can be understood well as a form of social experimentation.

Thus, it has been established that it can be argued that the meals in Pauline communities can be viewed as cultural techniques and that these communities (along with other early Christian groups) can be perceived as engaging in social experimentation, also through their meals. Therefore, it is now possible to explore one aspect of the effect of a cultural technique in relation to the early Christian meal – the way in which such techniques facilitate new forms of cognition and new insights. In doing so, this meal is understood as a specific form of social experimentation, particularly as a form of prefigurative politics, which explores the 'world to come' and thereby creates new forms of insights. This is done by returning to the dichotomies mentioned above, as these constitute a helpful way of organizing the (potential) effects of prefigurative practices.

5   Prefiguring the future: the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:17–34

The first step that needs to be taken when considering the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:17-34 – the only New Testament text in which the meal is actually called κυριακὸν δεῖπνον[26] – is to establish whether it has an eschatological orientation and what the influence of this orientation is on the meal. In this respect, a key verse is 1 Cor. 11:26: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (NRSVUE, also in all subsequent quotations).[27] The meal has to be celebrated until the Lord's coming (the celebration, which is the shape of the proclamation of the Lord's death, should take place ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ – "until he comes"), suggesting that the meal and all that it embodies will be consummated eschatologically at that point. It is also obvious from verses such as 27-34, which deal with the present and future consequences of celebrating the meal in an unworthy

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26)   See Andrew McGowan, "The Myth of the 'Lord's Supper': Paul's Eucharistic Meal Terminology and Its Ancient Reception," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77 (2015): 503-521.

27)   Greek: ὁσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ (NA28). For instance, Matthias Konradt, *Gericht und Gemeinde* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 421-422, argues convincingly that the 'proclamation' that is mentioned in v. 26 refers to the entire meal, not just to the words being used in the context of this meal. However, different from Konradt, there, a combination of an ecclesiological and a Christological interpretation of Paul's use of the 'words of institution' is preferred, both because (Pauline) ecclesiology can very well be understood as the social shape of soteriology of which Christology is another derivative and because 1 Cor. 12 leaves little doubt as to whether Paul thinks of the community in terms of Christ's body (that needs to be 'discerned' with regard to both its soteriological and ecclesiological dimensions, which can be distinguished but certainly not separated from each other).

manner, that the meal is celebrated within the horizon of an eschatological judgment that already makes its impact felt in the community now. In other words, the boundaries between the world that is and the world to come are porous, and this is experienced on a quite physical level. The norms of the world to come, then, and the Lord of the world to come, Christ, are already in charge now, and the Corinthian community has to perform its ritual (and appertaining social) life accordingly. Considered from this perspective, the expression "the Lord's Supper" (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) is also an eschatologically charged formulation. What Paul seems to be aiming for has been summed up well by Hays:

> … Paul is seeking to redefine their [Corinthian Christ devotees'] identity – which has been shaped by non-eschatological ideas indigenous to their culture – within an apocalyptic narrative that locates present existence in the interval between cross and parousia (cf. 1 Cor 11.26). Within that interval, he calls the Gentile Corinthians to shape their behaviour in accordance with Scripture's admonitions, to act like the eschatological Israel he believes them to be.[28]

The community, which celebrated the Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) as the shape of its commemoration and representation of Christ (Christ's death, see vv. 24-26), is thus eschatologically normed.[29] The body that it commemorates, Christ's 'historical' body, is simultaneously the body of the Lord who is to come and whose social body the community itself is (see the elaboration of this topic in 1 Cor. 12). 'Discerning the body' (v. 29, see also vv. 27-28) is to recognize that this social body has to be shaped according to the eschatological and 'historical' body of Christ. Especially with regard to the eschatological dimension of it all, this means that a form of prefiguration is called for – gathering as a community in such a manner that the ensuing fellowship is a credible anticipation of the (Lord's) world to come.

What sort of new knowledge or new cognition would this then lead to, particularly regarding the world to come? Considering the dichotomies that prefigurative social practices overcome – in this case, as a dimension of the Corinthian meal understood as a cultural technique – can contribute to answering this question.

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28) Richard B. Hays, "The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 391-412, 409, doi: 10.1017/S0028688598003919. For another consideration, see Stephen Richard Turley, *The Ritualized Revelation of the Messianic Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 149-154, or Michael Jonas, *Mikroliturgie: Liturgische Kleinformeln im frühen Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 268-270.

29) It is primarily in this sense, that is, as anamnesis of Christ's self-giving, that it is helpful to underline the Lord's Supper's sacrificial character. One other sense would be that at a meal, food and especially, drink (libation) would be offered to and thereby associated with a deity. However, this does not seem to be the focus of Paul's discourse in 1 Cor. 11 at all, whose focus is on the ecclesiological dimensions of the Corinthian community's cultic practices. For a different viewpoint, see: Petra Dijkhuizen, "Paul's Charge in 1 Corinthians 11:27 ("… Guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord"): Failure of Sacrifice or Disregard for Meal Etiquette?," *Neotestamentica* 55 (2021): 283-309, doi: 10.1353/neo.2021.0031.

First, dichotomy has to do with time. By definition, prefigurative practices invite reconsidering the relation between the already and the not yet, between the present and the future. In terms of new insight and cognition, facilitated by the Lord's Supper as a cultural technique, this entails at the very least a reconsideration of time as a chronological phenomenon. In other words, it is something that has to be counted *ab urbe condita* (since the foundation of the city of Rome) or in Olympiads, to mention two common ways of counting time in antiquity and to look at time that is not determined by a foundational event in the past that is to be received in the present but by a foundational event in the future, which makes its presence felt already. Eschatologically oriented cultural practices open a space for rethinking how time works and, at least in the case of 1 Corinthians, whose time it is and whose norms govern behavior in the space that time constitutes. In this sense, rethinking time is also a politically charged enterprise; if time is counted from the vantage point of God's future world, then it becomes the space for different social practices than if it were to be counted *ab urbe condita*.

Second, the prefigurative dimension of the cultural practice of the Lord's Supper also invites rethinking the relation (and possible dichotomy) between means and end, given that, as fairly obvious from 1 Cor. 11:17-34, the end has to be present in the means already. Regarding insight and cognition, this leads to something that is also stressed by the discourse on cultural practices at large. In other words, practices matter and have to be perceived as more than mere tools. This compels one to re-consider the value of practices in relation to the end toward which they have to pave the way. In the Corinthian context, this means that the social practice of the community needed to be adjusted in the light of the (quite literal) 'end' ('eschaton') toward which it was traveling.

Third, the dichotomy between presence and absence can also be reconsidered, as that what is, at least in its fullness, absent. Christ's rule over all creation, is at the same time also present (or to be present) in the life of the Corinthian community, especially in its celebration of the Lord's Supper. At the very least, this can be taken as opening a space for models of considering presence and absence as polar opposites or as mutually exclusive. In contrast, it is apparently possible for something to make its (future and full) presence felt already by way of anticipation. This should, at least according to Paul, have an impact. In other words, the present has to be shaped according to that which is in many ways absent and only present in the form of its commemoration and expectation – the Lord's body and the Lord Himself. Presence and absence can be thought of as coinciding; this certainly impinges on ways of thinking and the creation of new knowledge.

Fourth, any strict distinction between ideal and reality (and with that, between body and mind) becomes very difficult to sustain, as the future is imagined through physical practices and experiments. What has to be thought and imagined as the (future) ideal is experienced and explored in and through very real (and imperfect) physical practices. Even in its imagination, the ideal is present primarily in lived realities, which are, accordingly, indispensable conduits for the emergence of ideals and their conceptualization. Regarding the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11, this means that what the world to come is

like, for instance, in terms of social equality and the disbanding of hierarchies, is imagined ritually, even in such a way that common forms of rituals, which reproduce and sustain common social hierarchies at the table, have to be revised to become recognizable rituals and physical imaginations of what the ideal has to be.[30] Therefore, new insights take shape bodily and in social experiments in the real world, rather than in the noetic world, first and foremost. Again, this means new insights into the significance of material practices and constitutes an invitation to reconsider how the imagination of ideals works.

Fifth and finally, the relation between center and margin changes in prefigurative practices because they are by definition marginal. It is impossible for the social mainstream to engage in experiments that explore an alternative to the very same social mainstream, while still claiming to explore something of key importance. For Pauline communities, this can easily be perceived as the case; socially speaking, they were marginal groups, while they viewed themselves as embodying the future of the world, particularly, even if not only, in their ritual lives. For the communities themselves, this meant a new insight into their own value and dignity. For scholars studying them, it can lead to a reconsideration of centrality and marginality and the manner in which groups are classed as marginal or central.

6   Concluding reflections

In the above considerations, early Christian meal practices, particularly the meal in the Pauline tradition, focusing eventually on the Lord's Supper as discussed by Paul of Tarsus in 1 Cor. 11, have been considered in terms of cultural techniques, which have been argued to be well possible. These have then been explored further with regard to the new knowledge and insights that such techniques are thought to make possible. This latter exploration has taken its vantage point from an understanding of early Christian, also Pauline, communities (and their meals) as forms of social experimentation that can be perceived as engaging in prefigurative practices, thereby anticipating a desired future, a world to come. By surveying these prefigurative dimensions of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:17-34, it could be argued that new forms of insights, or at least the space for developing new insights, can be viewed as being created through the practice of the Lord's Supper in Corinth, at least through Paul's eyes. Therefore, not only does it make sense to view early Christian meal practices as cultural techniques, but considering them from this vantage point also helps in gaining new insight into the new kinds of knowledge that they themselves have made possible. In doing so, an attempt has also been made to analyze a religious practice from the perspective of prefigurative politics, thereby expanding the discourse on such politics to the realm of religion.

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30)   For a convincing consideration on what was at stake in the Corinthian community, see Rachel M. McRae, "Eating with Honor: The Corinthian Lord's Supper in Light of Voluntary Association Meal Practices," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130 (2011): 165-181, doi: 10.2307/41304193.

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