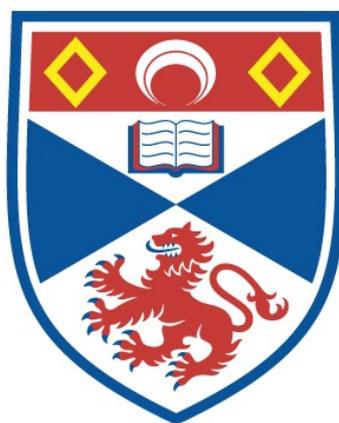


# THE MOTIF OF THANKSGIVING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

David John McFarlane

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MTh  
at the  
University of St Andrews



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THE MOTIF OF THANKSGIVING  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

by

David John McFarlane

in application for the Degree Master of Theology

St. Mary's College

St. Andrews University

August, 1966



## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research for the following thesis has been carried out by myself, that I have composed the thesis myself, and that the thesis has not been accepted in fulfilment of the requirements of any other Degree or professional qualification.

The research has been carried out at St. Mary's College, St. Andrews University.

David John McFarlane

15 August, 1966.

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATION

I certify that David John McFarlane has spent four terms of research on the subject "The Motif of Thanksgiving in the New Testament", that he has fulfilled the requirements of University Court Ordinance No. 61, and that he is qualified to submit the accompanying thesis in application for the degree Master of Theology.

Senior Lecturer in  
New Testament Language and Literature.

## CAREER

In September, 1955, I began studies in the Department of History of the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, which led to my being graduated from that University in June, 1959, with the Degree Bachelor of Arts with a major in History. Between 1959 and 1962 I studied at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was graduated in May, 1962, with the Degree Bachelor of Divinity. In June, 1962, I was ordained a minister of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and since ordination have served as an Associate Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Pittsford, New York, being currently on a Leave of Absence from my congregational duties in order to pursue further study at St. Mary's College, St. Andrews. My residency in St. Mary's College began on 1st July, 1965, and continued through August, 1966. At St. Mary's it has been my privilege to have as my principal adviser Dr. Robert McL. Wilson, whose questions and suggestions have been an invaluable help to my work.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE . . . . .	i
TRANSCRIPTION KEY . . . . .	v
ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	v
CHAPTER I : <u>The Pauline Thanksgiving Periods and Hellenistic Epistolary Form</u> . . . . .	1
The contribution of Deissmann and Milligan (p. 1) : the problem of documenting the thanksgiving period as standard Hellenistic epistolary form (p. 9) : the periods and epistolary conventions (p. 13) : the periods and the health-welfare wish (p. 14) : Babylo- nian epistolary form (p. 21) : Jewish and early Christian epistolary form (p. 23).	
CHAPTER II : <u>The Pauline Thanksgiving Periods and Concepts of Gratitude</u> . . . . .	31
The thanksgiving periods as pedagogical statements (p. 31) : gratitude as central to discipleship (p. 33) : the periods as diplomatic statements (p. 37) : the contribution of Schubert (p. 39) : the absence of gratitude from the periods (p. 50).	
CHAPTER III : <u>Eucharistein and Gnostic Theology in Paul</u> .	55
The problem of similar language in ancient religions (p. 55) : the problem of the relationship of ideas between ancient religions (p. 57) : the concepts of glory, worship, man and history in Judaism (p. 59) : the effects of presently held Mandaean chronology (p. 64).	
CHAPTER IV/.....	

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	Page
CHAPTER IV : <u>Eucharistein as a Translation Term</u> . . .	70
<p>The New Testament occurrences of <u>eucharistein</u> (p. 70) :  ambiguity in the historical usages of <u>eucharistein</u> (p.  74) : ambiguity in the historical usages of <u>charis</u>  (p. 76) : <u>eucharistein</u> as a translation term (p. 79) :  <u>eucharistein</u> in Judaism (p. 82) : the contribution of  J.M. Robinson (p. 84).</p>	
CHAPTER V : <u>Eucharistein as Interpreted by Eulogein</u> . . .	89
<p>The occurrences of <u>eucharistein</u> and <u>eulogein</u> in  connection with the prayer at mealtime (p. 89) : the  mealtime prayer at the Lord's Supper (p. 100) : the  identity of <u>eucharistein</u> and <u>eulogein</u> (p. 109) :  <u>eucharistein</u> in the Gospels and Revelation (p. 111).</p>	
CHAPTER VI : <u>Thanksgiving: a Motif of Affirmation</u> . . .	117
<p>Thanksgiving as affirmation (p. 117) : thanksgiving  and confession (p. 119) : thanksgiving and summaries  of history (p. 120) : affirmation and early Christian  worship (p. 121) : Conclusion (p. 123).</p>	
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	125

## PREFACE

Several years ago while preparing a Bible study on Colossians for a women's study group, I became interested in the frequent mentioning of thanksgiving in that book, and throughout the New Testament, as an appropriate act or response for a Christian. I began to ask, then, in what way thanksgiving and gratefulness were involved in Christian discipleship in the New Testament. It seemed at the time that thanksgiving, so easily considered commonplace, in fact might be of fundamental significance to New Testament theology and ethics. While I have now modified that provisional idea, I am thoroughly convinced of a deliberate and significant role played by the motif of thanksgiving in the life of the early Church.

In English translations of the New Testament the word 'thanksgiving' and its cognate terms 'gratefulness' and 'gratitude' are used to render several different Greek words: the noun charis (Romans 7.25); the verbs eulogein (Matthew 26.26), exhomologeisthai (Matthew 11.25), anthomologeiomai (Luke 2.38), and eucharistein (I Corinthians 1.4); and the phrase charin echein (Luke 17.9). Because of the number of occurrences, and the consistency of translation of eucharistein

(eucharistia, eucharistos) with the concept of 'thanksgiving' it seemed reasonable to centre this study on eucharistein, drawing in the other Greek words as their relationship to the more prominent term became helpful.

When, a year ago, it became possible for me to concentrate completely on this subject, it was suggested to me that the best place to begin would be the thanksgiving periods opening the Pauline letters, for here was a fixed form in which to examine thanksgiving, and a base from which the study could branch out. The thanksgiving periods are explored, therefore, as products of Hellenistic epistolary form in Chapter I, and as products of Biblical and Hellenistic ideas of gratitude in Chapter II. In Chapter III a proposal is discussed that the New Testament occurrences of thanksgiving might be coloured to some extent by Gnostic theology. These several proposals do not, I think, produce sufficient explanation for the New Testament usage of eucharistein, and in Chapters IV and V I turn to explore the employment of this term as a translation term from the motif of praise and affirmation in Judaism which, I feel, does explain its use in the New Testament. Chapter VI attempts to place this employment of eucharistein in relationship to other themes of the ancient world, and concludes with a summation of the course of the study.

It is important to set out a few definitions. Where the term

'gratefulness' appears, I am referring to the subjective emotion within an individual - the humble, warm, friendly feeling toward a benefactor. A doctrine of gratitude thus refers to the usually unexpressed idea lying behind a good deal of the exposition of eucharistein that 'gratefulness' is a significant, if not the primary, response of discipleship. An ethic of gratitude is simply an ethic based on 'gratefulness'. The 'thanksgiving periods' are those defined by Schubert and discussed in Chapter II. Where the term 'thanksgiving' occurs in the text, it refers to an act toward God, frequently to some degree public, and in which God's gracious act in Christ is affirmed.

In a short study such as this one, it is impossible to treat fully all of the issues which are mentioned as being related to the central theme. Such is particularly the case, for example, with Gnosticism in Chapter III and grace in Chapter IV. The attached bibliography cannot deal completely with each tangential issue, but in including some material not directly related to eucharistein, it does suggest some of these issues. Following this preface is a key to the transcription from the Greek alphabet to the Roman script. For easier reading the transcription is simply underlined to indicate the Greek word. There follows, as well, a list of the abbreviations used in the study.

Many people merit a statement of 'gratefulness' from me. The

staff of the University Library, St. Andrews, have been unfailingly polite, wonderfully kind, and marvellously helpful. Principal Black and the members of staff of St. Mary's College, but particularly Dr. Robert McL. Wilson, have listened, talked, and counselled generously and wisely. Dr. Wilson's reading of the manuscript and hours of conversation and warm interest were a creative stimulus and a rich personal experience to me. My family's encouragement has come through teasing, by leaving me in solitude to work, and by the constant assurance of their love and affection.

TRANSCRIPTION KEY

α	- a	ι	- i	ρ	- r
β	- b	κ	- k	σ	- s
γ	- c	λ	- l	τ	- t
δ	- d	μ	- m	υ	- u
ε	- e	ν	- n	φ	- ph
ζ	- dz	ξ	- x	χ	- ch
η	- ē	ο	- o	ψ	- ps
θ	- th	π	- p	ω	- ō

ABBREVIATIONS

I. Titles:-

- "Form and Function" - "The Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings"
- JAOS - Journal of the American Oriental Society
- JBL - Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature
- JEA - Journal of Egyptian Archeology
- LAE - Light from the Ancient East
- NTS - New Testament Studies
- OGIS - Dittenberger, Orientalis Graeci Inscriptio- nes Selectae
- Philologus - Philologus: Zeitschrift für das classische Alterthum

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <u>Selections</u> | - <u>Selections from the Greek Papyri</u>                   |
| <u>TWNT</u>       | - <u>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</u>       |
| <u>ZAW</u>        | - <u>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</u> |
| <u>ZNW</u>        | - <u>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</u> |

II. Miscellaneous:-

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| B.G.U.         | - <u>Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Museen zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden</u> |
| C.P.Judaicarum | - Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum  |
| P.             | - Papyrus  |
| P.Harr.        | - Rendel Harris Papyrus  |
| P.Oxyr.        | - Oxyrhynchus Papyrus  |

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PAULINE THANKSGIVING PERIODS AND HELLENISTIC EPISTOLARY FORM

During the first quarter of the twentieth century there became broadly available to Biblical scholarship the rich discoveries of the Near-Eastern papyri unearthed by the archeological activity flourishing at the end of the nineteenth century: complete, partial, or fragmentary documents tossed on ancient rubbish heaps, wrapped around mummies, or tucked away two millennia previously in some safe spot. The documents were in the form of personal letters, official correspondence, business records, or copies and editions of ancient secular and religious literature.<sup>1</sup> The significance for New Testament studies soon made itself obvious. Here was a wealth of contemporary linguistic material, shedding light on New Testament language, terminology, thought structure, and context.

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1. Consulted for this study, for example, were the papyri from Oxyrhynchus, 1898; the Fayoum, 1900; Tebtunis, 1902; Hibeh, 1906; and the collections of papyri at Giessen, 1910, and Cornell, 1926.

If any particular scholars are to be singled out as opening this whole realm of papyrology for the rest of the scholarly world, it is in particular to Adolf Deissmann and George Milligan that grateful respects must be paid. I do not minimise the contributions of scholars and archeologists such as B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, for example, who realizing the significance of the papyri, searched for this material and then saw to its publication. It was, however, the contribution of Professors Deissmann and Milligan to apply to New Testament studies the results of papyrology. From the perspective that it was of vital importance to see the New Testament literature within the context of the Hellenistic world culture, these two scholars suggested that where the Old Testament did not serve as the context for the New, the Hellenistic world culture evidenced in the papyri did serve, and that where a New Testament word-meaning could be examined from either context, the latter might well be preferred.<sup>2</sup> Although through their independent efforts the old idea was demolished that 'Biblical Greek' was something sui generis, a special language of the Holy Spirit standing in a divine isolation from the literary world, or social milieu, or theological references of its time, it has been the work of more recent years to update and modify the thesis of Deissmann and Milligan.

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2. G. Milligan, Here and There Among the Papyri (London, 1923),  
p. 34

It is now recognised that the linguistic and cultural elements which contributed to the Greek of the New Testament are many and varied. Nigel Turner makes the excellent point that Biblical Greek is to some extent a unique language in that it is a particular blending of various elements, and must be distinguished from classical and Hellenistic Greek, on the one hand, and from its Septuagintal and Semitic influences on the other.<sup>3</sup> Despite this important modification, however, it remains the contribution of Deissmann and Milligan to have proposed a significant relationship between Biblical Greek and the surrounding Hellenistic world.

One area of Biblical scholarship examined by Deissmann and Milligan was the form of the New Testament letters, comprising almost one-third of the content of the New Testament, and in which form nineteen of its twenty-seven books are cast. The significance of the epistolary format had already been observed.<sup>4</sup> That so many papyri contained correspondence, however, was seen to be clear evidence that

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3. N. Turner, in J.H. Moulton, A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Part III (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 4. The work of C.H. Dodd, The Bible and the Greeks (London, 1935), was an early creative modification of Deissmann and Milligan. The summary statements of N. Turner, "The Language of the New Testament" (in Peake's Commentary on the Bible, M. Black and H.H. Rowley ed., London, 1963), and M. Black, "The Semitic Element in the New Testament" (Expository Times, October, 1965, pp. 20ff.), are most helpful.

4. F.W. Farrar, The Message of the Books (London, 1884).

(a) correspondence was extremely popular in the Hellenistic world, (b) Paul was giving evidence of a sort of cosmopolitan Hellenistic personality in his so frequent usage of this form, and (c) Paul's epistolary outline was explained by that of the papyri. To see the extent to which this understanding of the Pauline literary form has been accepted, it is only necessary to look at the twentieth-century commentaries on the Pauline epistles. With very few exceptions, either in his general introduction or in his exegesis of the first dozen verses, the commentator will refer to the Pauline opening as exemplary of the standard Hellenistic opening, and cite either Deissmann or Milligan as evidence.

Included as evidence of a 'standard Hellenistic epistolary form' is the thanksgiving period, so laboriously defined and examined by Paul Schubert,<sup>5</sup> but previously observed by both Deissmann<sup>6</sup> and Milligan.<sup>7</sup> This commonly accepted understanding of these thanksgiving periods, if one traces the citations of contemporary scholarship, rests on the battery of publications which form the great monument to Deissmann and Milligan. By the chronological presentation of this

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5. Paul Schubert, "The Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings", Beiheft 20 to ZNW (Berlin, 1939).

6. A. Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East (London 1910), p. 168, note 3.

7. G. Milligan, Selections from the Greek Papyri (Cambridge, 1912), p. 90.

battery of publications, it is possible to observe the growth of the basic understanding, which, I think, cannot in actual fact be supported from the papyrological evidence:

1895 - Deissmann published his Bibelstudien (translated into English in 1903), in which he erected his premise, valid I feel, that a distinction must be made between a letter (which is intended for a specific person or group) and an epistle (which is for a general public or has an undefined sphere of interest):

"The written words of a letter are nothing but the wholly inartificial and incidental substitute for spoken words. As the letter has a quite distinct and restricted public ... : a circle of readers ~~skil~~ which can readily be brought before the writer's mind. ... A work of literature, (epistle\*) on the other hand, has the widest possible publicity in view: the literary man's public is, so to speak, an imaginary one." <sup>8</sup>

1908 - Deissmann published Licht vom Osten, in which he maintained his earlier letter/epistle distinction, and went on, using a vast compendium of papyri, to place Paul within the category of those who wrote letters, and were therefore "non-literary".

The latter term, to which some scholars took exception, simply

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8. Deissmann, Bible Studies (Edinburgh, 1903), p. 37. G. Delling (Worship in the New Testament (London, 1962), p. 52) discusses the proposal that Paul also had in mind the publication of his letters.

\*Italics mine.

meant that the letters had specific recipients. In this work as well, he links up Paul's thanksgiving periods with those found by him in the secular papyri, calling Paul's use the following of a "beautiful secular custom".<sup>9</sup>

1911 - Deissmann published St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History, in which he details the "address, praescript, religious wishes at the beginning, formulae of greeting" in the papyri as evidence of the 'non-literary' quality of the Pauline letters, leaving unsaid, but permitting the impression that Paul follows precisely this form.<sup>10</sup> One can interpret this phrase as Deissmann's Hellenistic epistolary outline, on the one hand, or, on the other hand, as simply an accumulation of evidence from the papyri for such elements, which also appear in the Pauline corpus. The former interpretation has been the common one, although Deissmann does not actually propose it as an outline.

1912 - Milligan published Selections from the Greek Papyri, in which he endorsed Deissmann's view that Paul is following the 'beautiful secular custom', and called into evidence the same papyrus

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9. Deissmann, LAE, p. 168, note 3.

10. A. Deissmann, St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History (London, 1912), p. 11.

letter as Deissmann.<sup>11</sup> In his introduction, he describes the papyrus letters as

"... content to state the matter at hand as briefly and baldly as possible while the lengthy introductions and closing greetings with their constantly recurring formal and stereotyped phrases produce a general effect of monotony."<sup>12</sup>

Parenthetically it must be observed that not all the letters can be considered brief, nor do the stereotyped phrases of the first century dominate a letter to the point of monotony any more than do those of the twentieth century. Let it suffice at this point, however, to note the presence of the idea of similar stereotyped phrases in Paul and the papyri.

1912 - Deissmann's St. Paul, when translated into English, cites without criticism Milligan's Selections, which endorse Deissmann's views on the similarities in Paul and the papyri,<sup>13</sup> thereby permitting Milligan's interpretation of his ambiguous statements.

1923 - Milligan published Here and There Among the Papyri, an account aimed at the popular reader, that he might understand the significance of the papyri. Here Milligan proposes an

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11. Milligan, Selections, p. 90.

12. Ibid., p. xxvi.

13. Deissmann, St. Paul, p. 11.

'ordinary Hellenistic letter outline': "Sender, Receiver, Greeting, Prayer, Thanksgiving, General Contents, Salutation, and Closing Valediction",<sup>14</sup> and concludes that Paul was using the conventional epistolary form of his time.

1927 - Deissmann's Licht vom Osten, translated into English as Light from the Ancient East, cites Milligan's work in hearty agreement.<sup>15</sup>

Confronted, as Deissmann and Milligan were, with a vast amount of new material, and in eagerness to probe its significance, what very swiftly became obvious were the similarities of the secular Greek language, syntax, vocabulary, and sentence structure in the papyri to the Greek of the New Testament. It was in this atmosphere of noting similarities that an originally ambiguous observation gradually crystallized into the almost unquestioned and unsupported exegetical nugget that Paul and the papyri exhibit the same epistolary formula. Despite the open-ended work of these two men, it has usually been within the context of similarity, rather than as distinct entities, that the Pauline corpus and the papyrus documents have been held side by side. And this has caused an unfortunate oversight, it seems to me,

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14. G. Milligan, Here and There Among the Papyri (London, 1923), p. 38.

15. Deissmann, LAE, p. 168.

in the interpretation of the Pauline thanksgiving periods. At this point, I submit, it is necessary to speak about Paul's thanksgiving periods as distinct from those which might be considered the conventional ones of his time. Furthermore, while the Pauline letters do exhibit the same general epistolary pattern as the papyri (sender, receiver, greeting, general contents, salutation), these thanksgiving periods opening the Pauline letters are a variation upon and departure from the customary Hellenistic epistolary pattern.

Both Deissmann and Milligan document their consideration of the Pauline thanksgiving periods as 'standard epistolary form' from one papyrus letter, mainly, a letter from a young soldier, Apion, to his father, telling him that he has arrived safely in Egypt despite a storm on the Mediterranean Sea while making the crossing.<sup>16</sup> Both regard the letter to be from the second century A.D. What is striking about this piece of evidence is that (a) it comes from a century later than the Pauline corpus, and (b) it stands alone. If a later commentator documents from the papyrus material the supposedly similar epistolary structure of Paul and the papyri, it is quite regularly this letter from a century later that is called into evidence.<sup>17</sup>

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16. B.G.U. 423. Compare Deissmann, LAE, p. 168, and Milligan, Selections, p. 90.

17. William Barclay, "The New Testament and the Papyri", in Anderson - Barclay, The New Testament in Historical and Contemporary Perspective (Oxford, 1965), p. 57.

The question arises, then, whether this is merely a coincidental choosing of the same letter by a wide range of scholars, whether scholars are simply choosing the letter first noticed by Deissmann as a mark of respect, or whether, in fact, this letter is truly representative. In searching through the collections of papyri,<sup>18</sup> it was possible to produce only eight examples of any similar epistolary forms, four of these being from the era of Hadrian,<sup>19</sup> and one the letter of a Christian anchorite monk of the fourth century.<sup>20</sup> It seems significant that the thanksgiving period does not even appear to be a Christian epistolary form, for most Christian letters omit it!<sup>21</sup> Of the remaining three letters, two are from the third century B.C.,<sup>22</sup> and one is from the second century B.C.<sup>23</sup> Only these last three could be said to represent an established epistolary form which was influencing the Pauline style. The Hadrian era letters are all from one town, Heptakomia, and it becomes necessary to ask whether both here and in Paul, perhaps, we are seeing the results, not of a generally accepted epistolary form, but of a form held by a specific group, a

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18. See Bibliography for complete listing of collections and publications consulted.

19. P. Giessen 20; 40; 77; 85.

20. P. Hermopolis 7.

21. The epistle of Ignatius to Smyrna is a notable and dramatic exception to most early Christian letters. See this study, p. 29 below.

22. P. Hibeh 79; C.P. Judaicarum 4.

23. P. Tebtunis 56.

category of people whose form is the result of a specific teacher who adhered to some epistolary form noteworthy precisely because it is different from the ordinary form of the time. The concentrated use of the thanksgiving period following the greeting occurs only in these two individualized contexts. The three scattered letters preceding the Pauline corpus do contain a thanksgiving clause, but in no case does the clause assume the dimensions, in either length or depth, of the Pauline periods. Their occurrence appears to be incidental at the beginning of the letter, and they are clearly related to the simple thanksgiving statements found elsewhere in the papyri, rather than to the formal Pauline period. It is possible, then, to cite a few letters with a construction not dissimilar to the Pauline thanksgiving period, but in the face of the overwhelming evidence of the majority of letters, which simply do not contain at any position such a statement, clause, or phrase, we can hardly speak of the thanksgiving period as part of the 'standard Hellenistic epistolary form'.

If we look for a more general use of eucharistein in the correspondence on papyrus, do we find support for an element which might be termed 'eucharistic' as part of the Hellenistic epistolary form? We have already cited the few examples existing, which are similar to Paul's epistolary form in that a eucharistic clause follows the greeting. It is possible to find examples of such a eucharistic clause in the middle

of the general contents of a letter (P.London 1912; P.Tebtunis 56; P.Oxyr. 811). We will find such a clause on occasion near the close of a letter (P.Oxyr. 396). We will find, as well, the structure of verb and preposition described by Schubert, and considered by him an established literary form. But do we see what might be considered a 'standard epistolary eucharistic period'? Hardly. We see merely sentence-long statements of appreciation, sincere, profound, to be sure, but hardly the parallels of the balanced, majestic, triumphant Pauline creations.

We are forced to note, then, the absence of this Pauline type of eucharistic period in the papyri. Schubert, acknowledging this absence of evidence for Paul's participation in an established epistolary form, attributes the absence of widespread examples to the few letters extant from any single correspondent.<sup>24</sup> Quite to the contrary, however, it would seem that having the letters of so many correspondents, there would be all the more chance of a significant form rising to the surface. It is interesting, too, that so few of the letters containing good form, formality, intimacy, and a genuine personal/religious feeling, which are Schubert's prerequisites for a thanksgiving period, actually contain such a period.

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24. Schubert, "Form and Function", p. 172.

Perhaps one of the most helpful studies of the form of Greek epistolography is that of F.X.J. Exler. His programme was to examine the correspondence on papyrus between the third century B.C. and the third century A.D. After examining a vast quantity of correspondence, he concludes that only three formulae are expressed in the letters: the opening formula, the closing formula, and the formula for dating.<sup>25</sup> Even of these only the first two are dependable, and these are extremely variable. The third formula is both less variable and less dependable. Assuming the presence of the body of the letter, as would seem to be reasonable, there are then only three regular elements to the letters available to Exler: an opening formula, the general contents, and the closing formula.

The fourth section of his work is a study of what Exler calls 'conventional phrases'. He deals with these under the categories of initial phrases, final phrases, the illiteracy formula, and the oath formula, but at no point discusses any convention dealing with the verb eucharistein.<sup>26</sup> We are forced to the conclusion that, since the years intervening between Exler's study and the present offer no reason to alter his findings, the evidence of the correspondence on papyrus

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25. F.X.J. Exler, A Study in Greek Epistolography (Washington, 1923), p. 13.

26. Ibid., pp. 101ff.

suggests that the thanksgiving period which opens the Pauline letters cannot be attributed to a dependable Hellenistic epistolary convention, let alone to what might be considered a standard epistolary thanksgiving period.

In 1929, a small book entitled Private Letters, Pagan and Christian was published.<sup>27</sup> From the two hundred letters cited to show various aspects of ancient correspondence, it is clear that after the initial address and greeting, there is no set form. Many of the letters from Egypt come close to this, however, with a section we might well term the health-welfare wish.<sup>28</sup> This wish, however, seems to be more demonstrative of the personal concern of the correspondent than of any epistolary form, for when correctness of speech is important, or in matters of an impersonal nature, it is precisely this element which is often omitted.

For all its elusiveness, J. Rendel Harris makes an excellent comment when he confesses:

"It occurred to me ... (that the papyri) ... furnished singular parallels to the sentences in the Pauline epistles, especially

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27. D. Brooke, Private Letters, Pagan and Christian (London, 1929), pp. 1 ff.

28. I am adopting the term of J. Armitage Robinson in his St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (London, 1903), p. 37.

with the opening and closing parts of them. There was clearly a conventional element ... and one could not read ... a Greek letter in which the writer spoke of making constant remembrance, usually in some religious sense, of the person addressed without feeling that there was something of a common sentiment ... in the Apostle who was so in the habit of telling his disciples that he made mention of them unceasingly in his prayers.<sup>29</sup>

Harris, however, does not speak of a thanksgiving period, nor does he deal with the appearance of such in the Pauline letters. The mentioning of remembrance and continual prayer, with respect to the one receiving the letter, does occur in the papyri. C.K. Barrett cites a second century B.C. papyrus in which the sender comments that "prayer (is) made continually" on behalf of the recipient (P.Lond. 42).<sup>30</sup> It is also possible to observe the phrase, "Before all things I pray ...", which again is a statement of intense personal feeling.<sup>31</sup> We can observe, then, that there is sometimes present a personal variant which contributes an intimate tone to secular correspondence not unlike the intimate tone present in so many of Paul's letters. Harris' noting of the aspect of remembrance, and Barrett's noting of the aspect of continual prayer can be seen to be personal versions of Robinson's

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29. J. Rendel Harris, "A Study in Letter Writing", Expositor, Fifth Series, vol. viii (1898), p. 162.

30. C.K. Barrett, New Testament Background (London, 1956), p. 28.

31. Note, for example, P.Harr. 107 from the third century A.D. in J.E. Powell, The Rendel Harris Papyri (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 86ff.

so-called 'health-welfare wish'. It thus becomes important to ask whether Paul's thanksgiving period is his own version of a more general theological/personal comment which was an optional Hellenistic epistolary convention.

First of all, it must be said that as with the occurrence of a eucharistein phrase, the number of papyri with any sort of personal variant, or health-welfare wish, immediately following the greeting, was very small when compared with the total amount of correspondence now extant. There were explanatory volumes of papyri which included no such letter. Yet Exler, in his careful and conservative study, does include several of the words of health-welfare in his listing of the three conventional phrases.<sup>32</sup>

Presently extant evidence provides roughly an equal accumulation of papyri containing a phrase in this category from the era preceding the Pauline corpus and that following it.<sup>33</sup> One cannot speak of any particular category of correspondence in which this is or is not present. There is no category of correspondence from which it is

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32. Exler, op.cit., pp. 103ff.

33. This balance has been somewhat altered by the publication in 1966 of volume thirty-one of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri. The private letters included are from the second century A.D. through the fourth century A.D., and of some ten letters, seven contain the health-welfare wish in some form. They do not, however, alter the discussion here.

entirely absent. What seems to govern it, reasonably enough, is not the category of correspondence, but rather the relationship between the correspondents, and the nature of the particular letter. If the correspondents are personally intimate,<sup>34</sup> or if the occasion of the correspondence is real or feared trouble,<sup>35</sup> or if the fulfilment of the purpose of the correspondence depends upon it,<sup>36</sup> the wish for the health and welfare of the receiver may be present but, even in these cases, is not necessarily so. What we can and must say is that the use of correspondence to make such a wish, or the presence of the wish in the midst of correspondence, was known in, and can be documented for, the Pauline era.

When this health-welfare wish occurred, can we speak of a fixed structure or position? The evidence does not support this. While the majority of the evidence posits an early position for the wish,<sup>37</sup> usually immediately following the greeting, at least one-third of the time it occurred at the conclusion of the general content,<sup>38</sup> as part of the termination structure of the letter. Furthermore, we cannot speak of a fixed structure. This depended entirely upon the situation,

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34. P.Rendel Harris 102.

35. C.P.Judaicarum 442.

36. P.Tebtunis 775.

37. B.G.U. 27.

38. P.Oxyr. 292.

the correspondent's personality, and his or the scribe's vocabulary. The gods might be referred to,<sup>39</sup> but as often they were not.<sup>40</sup> The use of one of the words for prayer might give the suggestion of formal liturgical prayers made to a deity,<sup>41</sup> but often it was more in the tone of a deep personal desire<sup>42</sup> rather than the liturgical act.

A third observation must be drawn, despite its obvious nature. When the health-welfare wish occurs, it is with reference to the future,<sup>43</sup> not to the past. It is said within the context of change: hoping that future good will be the reversal of past ill, or hoping that future good will be the reversal of potential disaster. One is confronted in the Pauline thanksgivings with a concern for the future as well, but it is a future based on past good performed by God. It is a continuation, a further fulfilment. One must speak of Paul's thanksgivings more in terms of recitals than wishes, confessions of the goodness of God for which one gives thanks, and toward the continuation of which one looks. This is a radically different posture from the health-welfare wish.

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39. P.Fayoum 130.

40. P.Hamburg 192.

41. P.Aberdeen 71.

42. P.Rendel Harris 104.

43. P.Rendel Harris 102. Cf. G. Delling, *op. cit.*, p. 124, who contrasts the tone of recital in the Pauline thanksgiving periods with the tone of petition in similar pagan structures.

Regardless of the fact, made clear in Exler's catalogue of examples of these health-welfare wishes, that they occur in a variety of position, follow no set formula, and contain a posture suggesting a fundamentally different world-view from the Pauline thanksgivings, it is not impossible to see an underlying similarity. When the wish occurs, it may occur in a similar position to the thanksgiving. When in this position, each serves as a buffer between the stereotyped and formal opening, and the general content of the letter. Each contains, as well, a motif not contradictory to the body and purpose of the letter, and each is a personal statement.

The really parallel example of the health-welfare convention of the papyri to an element in the Pauline letter, however, is the Apostle's remarks at the conclusion of a letter extending his greetings to various individuals.<sup>44</sup> The presence of these personal remarks at the conclusions of letters serves to emphasize the thanksgiving periods as being something other than Paul's adaptation of the health-welfare convention. The convention was known to Paul, apparently, for he seems to employ it. He also, however, opened his letters with a carefully structured thanksgiving period, which is without parallel, and which cannot be seen as simply an adaptation of the health-welfare convention.

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44. Romans 16.3; I Corinthians 16.19; Philippians 4.2; Colossians 4.10; Philemon 23.

It is interesting that in Brooke's citation of the development of the form of the epistle, he notes that Proclus, the Sophist, had forty-one categories of letters, one being named the Eucharistic letter.<sup>45</sup> By the time of the Imperial period, Teuffel's history of Roman literature notes that letter-writing was a brand of the schooling in literary style.<sup>46</sup> That this resulted in a good many spurious letters is of less concern here than the fact that it is not legitimate to discount the possibility that there arose an epistolary form to which Paul was subscribing. That it was the common form, or that it even existed, however, cannot be documented on the basis of presently held evidence.<sup>47</sup>

The examination of available Hellenistic correspondence suggests that Deissmann and Milligan were correct in observing Paul's use of a general epistolary pattern in widespread use in his time. What is also clear, however, is that Paul interjected into that pattern an element of exceptional significance observed elsewhere only infrequently, if indeed at all. This was his thanksgiving period. Its roots do

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45. Brooke, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

46. W. Teuffel, A History of Roman Literature, W. Wagner trans. (London, 1873), par. 33.3.

47. Another excellent commentary on Hellenistic epistolary conventions and forms is in H. Bell, "Popular Religion in Greco-Roman Egypt", JEA, vol. XXIV (1948), pp. 89ff. The health-welfare wish receives particularly thorough discussion.

not appear to be sufficiently explained by Hellenistic epistolary form, and the question therefore arises whence this element did enter into Paul's concept of a letter.

Is it possible to discover a non-Hellenistic epistolary style to which Paul was submitting? Two possibilities come to mind: the epistolary form of the Persian-Assyrian culture in general, and specifically any forms which might have been used particularly by the Jews themselves, either in personal, business, or inter-synagogue correspondence.

Precisely how early epistolary literature arose in Babylonia is not known. It would appear, however, that once the art of writing became generally known the custom of sending envoys with oral messages led to the use of the written word to convey governmental orders. Most of the Assyrian correspondence therefore begins with a phrase patterned after "Thus says X, to Y speak ...". Of great interest to us, then, is the extremely regular convention following the greeting, "May (a god) grant thee life ...", or "May it be well with thee ..."<sup>48</sup> In the study of Assyrian epistolary formulae made by R.H. Pfeiffer in 1923, it is also quite evident that at a point early in the letter, if

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48. Note the thorough presentation of this material in LeRoy Waterman, Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire, Part IV (Ann Arbor, 1936), pp. 4ff.

the sender so chose, he might place his personal and political wishes. While in letters to the king, the names of the gods might be invoked in a long chain, the personal wish might not be couched in theological terminology at all.<sup>49</sup>

Of particular interest are two letters from the seventh century B.C., in which the personal wishes, corresponding to the Greek health-welfare wish, have been expanded into a fairly lengthy passage. They are exceptional, both in the available Assyrian and Greek correspondence, and therefore merit notation:

"To my Father say, thus says Elmeshu: Shamash and Marduk fill with well being the days of my father perpetually. My Father, be thou well, flourish; the God that preserves my father direct my father's source of grace. I have sent to greet my father. May my father's peace endure before Shamash and Marduk ... (general contents)." <sup>50</sup>

"To the king, my lord, thy servant Nabu-bel-shumate. Verily peace be to the king, my lord; may Ashur, Nabu, and Marduk be gracious to the king my lord. Cheer of heart, health of body, and length of days may they grant the king my lord ... (general contents)." <sup>51</sup>

Although the letters considered to be royal correspondence show a quite regular appearance of the health-welfare wish, the same cannot

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49. R.H. Pfeiffer, "Assyrian Epistolary Formulae", JAOS, vol. 43 (1923), pp. 26ff.

50. C.H.W. Johns, Babylonian and Assyrian Laws, Contracts, and Letters (Edinburgh, 1904), p. 332.

51. Ibid., p. 348.

be said of ordinary private correspondence. When the wish does occur, it has several variations, so that while one may speak of a known convention, it is extremely precarious to speak of an established epistolary form. What is of great significance, however, is that Assyrian epistolary literature does record this health-welfare convention from a much earlier period than Greek epistolary literature. It has to be held open as a possibility, then, that Paul's concept of the nature of a letter was derived not simply from the Hellenistic world in which he travelled, but from the non-Hellenistic world to the east, of which he was also a part.

We turn next to the correspondence now available from Jewish sources. The pre-exilic letters which became available as a result of the excavations at Lachish are most interesting. Following the greeting there is most regularly a theologically worded health-welfare wish.<sup>52</sup> The fact that few letters are actually complete, however, prevents the proposal of an established form. Clearly, however, the inclusion of such personal wishes was an accepted option, if not an established form, and in these Jewish letters the wishes are dependably theologically phrased. It is unfortunate that the letters from the

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52. Harry Torczyner, and others, Lachish I : The Lachish Letters (Oxford, 1938), pp. 37ff.

Cave of Letters<sup>53</sup> will not be available for some time yet.

Included within the Bible, however, is a good deal of epistolary information, quite excluding the Pauline letters. In 1893, Sanday noted in his Bampton lecture that Jeremiah 29 was a religious letter, and probably typified the fact that a great deal of inter-synagogue correspondence between Babylonia and Judea took place.<sup>54</sup> J.V. Bartlett, in the Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, lists as inter-synagogue letters: Acts 9.2ff.; 15.22ff.; 22.5ff.; 28.21ff., and II Maccabees 1.10. He lists as letters of introduction Acts 18.27; Romans 16.1,2; I Corinthians 16.3ff.; II Corinthians 3.1ff.<sup>55</sup> Do we find here any possible rootings for the Pauline opening structure? Inspection of these references yields the fact that while these note the existence and apparently familiar use of epistolary communication amongst religious groups within Judaism, only in the case of Acts 15.22ff., I Corinthians 16.3ff., II Maccabees 1.10ff. do we have any actual texts of the letters, and even here the Corinthian passage excludes any opening or closing structure, so can hardly be said to be instructive with regard to epistolary form.

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53. Y. Yadin, The Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters (Jerusalem, 1963), vol. 1, contains only artifact information. The second volume, which is to deal with the letters, will not be available for some time.

54. W. Sanday, Inspiration (London, 1894), p. 334.

55. J.V. Bartlett, "Epistles", Hastings Dictionary of the Bible (Edinburgh, 1898).

The Acts letter is strangely brief, for instead of the formal letter which might have been anticipated between two Christian congregations, we have the same simple format which dominates the letters of the collections of papyri: Sender, Receiver, Greeting, General Content, Farewell. If the argument is advanced that the author of Acts presented only the rudimentary epistolary form so that the distinction could be made between the text of the letter and the narrative of Acts, it still remains clear that a thanksgiving period is not part of that rudimentary outline. If the author of Acts is seen to be Luke, then we are also faced with the interesting fact that even his supposed proximity with Paul did not induce him to adopt the Pauline epistolary form.

Carl Andresen sees this Acts 15 letter as our oldest voucher for the sending of congregational letters between Christian communities.<sup>56</sup> He feels that the author has a distinct epistolary formula which he is following, but raises the question of the source of the formula. The opening (15.23) and closing (15.29) seem to testify to a pagan-Greek source. In the middle, however, 15.25 is seen to suggest something similar to an imperial edict, but also a striking similarity of tone to a letter from Gamaliel to Jewish congregations in the diaspora.<sup>57</sup>

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56. Carl Andresen, "Zur Formular frühchristlicher Gemeindebriefe", ZNW, vol. 56 (1965), p. 233.

57. Ibid., p. 234.

He draws attention to the mixture of Jewish and Greek tones, and compares this letter with I Clement, which he feels follows the formula of a Jewish diaspora letter. This diaspora motif he notes appearing in I Peter 5.13, "in Babylon", and in the opening passage of II Corinthians with its motif of consolation similar as it is to the letter in II Maccabees, although of course the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has transformed the motif of consolation! <sup>58</sup>

The opening chapter of II Maccabees contains two passages of interest to the study of epistolary form. The text suggests the presence of two letters here, 1.1-9, and 1.10ff. Bartlett pointed out the second of these; actually contemporary scholarship considers the first to be an authentic letter from about 124 B.C., with reference to an even earlier letter, and the second letter to be in all probability spurious. Both letters, however, contain a structure strikingly similar to that of Paul. Both follow the opening structure with a theological statement reciting the blessings received from God in the past, and proceed from this into the general content of the letter:

- 1.1-9: v.1 Receiver, Sender, Health and good peace.
- vv.2-5 Blessings: "May God ..."
- v.6 "We are praying for you ..."
- vv.7-9 General content.

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58. Carl Andresen, op. cit., pp. 236-246. Erik Peterson, Frühkirche, Judentum, und Gnosis (Rome, 1959), also sees the Christian letter as descended from the Jewish congregational letter.

- 1.10 ff.: v.10 Date, Sender, Receiver, Health and Welfare.  
vv.11-17 Thanks and Blessing to God for the deliverance  
recounted.  
vv.18ff. General content.

Here two observations are in order. Pederson, in his magnum opus, notes that blessing is the

"... vital power, without which no living being can exist." <sup>59</sup>

"Blessing is the inner strength of the soul and the happiness it creates." <sup>60</sup>

"The greeting is the establishment or confirmation of psychic communion. Therefore it is tantamount to a blessing, and it is necessary for the beginning of intercourse." <sup>61</sup>

"Yahwe is exalted above all blessings ... This does not imply that people shall refrain from blessing him; but on the contrary, that he cannot be blessed enough." <sup>62</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that what might otherwise appear as a simple epistolary device may be fundamentally involved with Jewish theology, devotional life, and culture. Secondly, it also becomes evident that the profound content of the Pauline thanksgiving periods may well be the result of theological necessity on the part of Paul, and not simply the result of an expedient introduction to the body of the letter.

The letter in Jeremiah 29 does not really instruct us in epistolary form, cast as it is in the form of prophecy, "Thus saith the

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59. J. Pederson, Israel: its Life and Culture (London, 1925), p. 182.

60. Ibid., p. 182.

61. Ibid., p. 202.

62. Ibid., p. 204.

Lord ..."<sup>63</sup> The Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum, while mentioning the frequency of thanksgivings addressed to the gods in ancient correspondence, contains only one example of this, so can hardly be said to verify its own conclusion.<sup>64</sup> Since in this letter the thanks are offered to 'gods', it is fairly certain that the letter is not an example of Jewish correspondence, but is included because it mentions material of concern to the history of Jewry.

There are, however, three striking parallels to the Maccabean format. II Corinthians, Ephesians, and I Peter open in precisely the same way. In each case, the first two verses of the epistle contain the Sender, Receiver, and 'Grace and peace wish'. Verse 3 opens: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." The 'blessing' continues for five to eight verses before the general content of the letter is begun. Selwyn is of the opinion that the blessing in I Peter 1.3 is not just a hymn, but actually a Christian shema. He considers, as well, that what is involved here is actually a translation of berakah, which appeared in the Greek "indifferently" as either eulogia or eucharistia.<sup>65</sup>

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63. Jeremiah 29.4,8,10,16,17,21, etc.

64. V.A. Tcherikover, and A. Fuks, Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum (Boston, 1957), vol. I, p. 127.

65. E.G. Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London, 1946), p. 121. Cf. below, p. 116.

It is also of interest that Ephesians still includes a thanksgiving period, this following the blessing, and preceding the general content. Sanders considers this variation in terminology to be indicative of the date of authorship of Ephesians:

"The author of Ephesians knew that a Pauline letter should begin with a eucharistia or eulogia, and he also knew that a eulogia or eucharistia was a hymn ... Put otherwise, the author of Ephesians lived in a period when the word eucharistia still meant hymn, and an interchange between eucharistiai and eulogiai was still possible."<sup>66</sup>

One early Christian letter from outside the Pauline corpus demonstrates what may well be the authentic legacy to this 'blessing' tradition, the epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrneans. After the formal opening comes the following section:

"I render glory to Jesus Christ the Lord Who has given you wisdom ..." Thereafter follows a confessional statement of Christology in sections I through III, and then resumes a conversational tone in section IV, which opens, "Now these things I urge upon you, beloved, ..." <sup>67</sup>

The assumption has been, to date, that the thanksgiving periods as exhibited in the Pauline epistles, and supposedly supported in the correspondence on papyrus, constitute the epistolary element conventional for their time, and that the blessing found in the three New

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66. Jack T. Sanders, "Hymnic Elements in Ephesians 1-3", ZNW, vol. 56 (1965), p. 228.

67. J.H. Srawley, The Epistles of St. Ignatius (London, 1900), p. 90.

Testament letters is a Jewish variant. In view of the fact that the Pauline thanksgivings have been shown to be exceptional, and in view of the fact that we have evidence for at least four authors using the blessing formula, it does become necessary to ask whether, in fact, the blessing formula is an older formula, and the thanksgiving formula the variant. We are asking, then, whether the thanksgiving period of the Pauline epistles might not be seen as an adaptation in the Greek language and world of a Jewish motif, rather than an incorporation into the Judeo-Christian thought world of a Hellenistic idea and epistolary structure.

It seems very clear that the Pauline thanksgiving periods, unsupported as they are from other Hellenistic correspondence, represent the fact that in the creation of his letters Paul was influenced by something quite distinct from Hellenistic epistolary form. When, in addition, it is noted that the Assyrian-Babylonian culture also demonstrates ancient epistolary usage, and that the thanksgiving periods of Paul find closely similar tones in the letters of late Judaism, the possibility arises that that influencing force behind his letters, and behind the thanksgiving periods in particular, is the non-Greek world of which Paul was also a part. This evidence must rest here, however, pending the results of further investigation of the motif of thanksgiving as it is explained from the Hellenistic world.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PAULINE THANKSGIVING PERIODS AND  
CONCEPTS OF GRATITUDE

In his commentary on Philemon, Frederick C. Grant notes that Paul almost invariably "... begins his letters with thanksgiving, even where there is less to be thankful for than he could wish."<sup>1</sup> The assumption that a thanksgiving period would contain some expression of that for which the writer is grateful certainly seems reasonable enough. A second approach to the theme of thanksgiving in modern research has been, therefore, to discover behind the Pauline thanksgiving periods a concept, or even doctrine, of gratitude.<sup>2</sup> This approach has been accomplished through the introduction of parallel Biblical passages on the one hand, or, in the case of Paul Schubert's magnum opus, through the introduction of relevant Hellenistic comparisons. Each of these,

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1. F.C. Grant, The New Testament: Romans-Revelation (New York, 1962), p. 253.

2. N.B. the definitions in the preface to this study.

it seems to me, has produced results that are invalid.

Scholars whose approach involves the introduction of parallel Biblical passages have tended to look upon these epistolary thanksgiving periods in what might be termed a pedagogical light: the thanksgiving period is seen as a vehicle in which Paul expounds the idea of gratitude as a fundamental of the Christian faith, central to personal piety, the underlying emotion of discipleship, the proper and supreme expression for praising God, or any combination of these. The issue here, then, is the role of the idea of gratitude in faith and virtue, and the periods are seen to be expositions of this idea, rather than actual acts of thanksgiving.

The approach by Biblical comparisons exists in many variations, a few examples of which will demonstrate the basic problem which is involved. Some scholars have seen the thanksgiving periods as expressing gratitude to be the basic Christian posture. That is to say, in one passage from Luther, for example, that the 'true' Christian response to the good deeds of men is praise to God:

"(The) true Christian way of praising (God) is not simply to praise men, but to praise, primarily and above all, God in them, and to ascribe to Him all glory."

"... For as we receive all blessings through Him from God, so we must also through Him acknowledge them all as God's."<sup>3</sup>

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3. M. Luther, Commentary on Romans (Grand Rapids, 1954), p. 21.

We have here the locus of human virtue described as the implanted presence of God within man, or God expressing Himself through man. Paul is seen as not giving the Romans credit for having become a part of the church, but rather as declaring that because they are a part, this indicates that God has already been at work in them, and we "must ... acknowledge them ... as God's". Gratitude, then, is properly God-ward, and involves the recognizing that it is God working in and through men that results in good deeds being done. Rather than praising the good men do, then, one should thank God for having led the man to perform the deed.<sup>4</sup>

Moffatt, in his commentary on the first letter to Corinth, quotes a sentence from Chrysostom:

"Nothing is so dear to God as thankfulness on account of oneself and others,"<sup>5</sup>

which, besides a tone which is concurrent with that of Luther, suggests as well that gratitude is of primary value in the Christian scheme of behaviour. When one then goes on to confront a passage such as that created by F.W. Beare in his commentary on Philippians, one becomes

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4. It is not my purpose in the citing of various scholars of the Church to present a full and detailed account of all the remarks about gratitude each might have made. In this chapter, I am simply attempting to sketch the shape of an idea which does emerge in many exegetical studies.

5. J. Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (London, 1938), p. 6.

aware that a tone of hyperbole has crept into the exegesis of these passages in some cases:

"(Paul's) words are no merely conventional expression of thanksgiving. ... He is moved by the deepest affection. ... It is evident from these first sentences that the Apostle feels a closer sympathy ... than with any of his other churches. He prays for all his churches, but he could not always say that he was 'making his supplication ... with joy'. Nor could he feel that other churches had shown the same fellowship in the 'furtherance of the gospel' without a break."<sup>6</sup>

It would appear, in many cases, that the intensity of feeling toward the recipients of the letter, which is demonstrated by Paul, results in an equally intense exegesis. The evidence called upon to support the centrality of the virtue of gratitude in the life of the disciple is summoned from within the sphere of practical or systematic theology, or homiletics, resting in turn on lengthy exposition of individual Scriptural texts.

Ernst Lohmeyer's extended commentary on Philippians focusses for us a succinct statement of this view of thanksgiving as central to Christian faith. In commenting on Philippians 1.4, he says, "(Thanksgiving is) grundsätzlich die einzig mögliche und notwendige Antwort auf Gottes Rede."<sup>7</sup> What immediately comes to mind is the equally succinct

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6. F.W. Beare, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians (London, 1959), p. 252.

7. E. Lohmeyer, Die Briefe an die Philipper, an die Kolosser, und an Philemon (Göttingen, 1956), p. 16.

passage in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians:

"So faith, hope, love abide, these three;  
but the greatest of these is love."

One can suggest that Paul in Corinthians was discussing the person to person relationship, while Beare is discussing the response of man to God's activity. Yet, it is faith, rather than gratitude, that is the issue when the relationship of man to God is discussed in both Romans and Galatians. It is fairly difficult, it seems to me, to move very far away from faith as being the fundamental response for Christian ethics, virtue, emotion - any aspect of discipleship. Thanksgivings occur in the New Testament; thanksgiving as an activity is mentioned. It is also true, however, that with one major possible exception Scriptural evidence for the primacy of the response of thanksgiving, or the centrality of the virtue of gratitude, simply does not exist.

The possible exception occurs in the Colossian letter. In 3.12-17 there is what might be interpreted as the single lengthy epistolary discussion of the relationship of gratitude to the other behaviour expressions of discipleship. The question, here, is whether we have an indication of gratitude as a governing authority. Ernst Lohmeyer feels that this is so, for his commentary on the passage is that 3.17 is the necessary evidence that gratitude is the "höheres Gesetz"<sup>8</sup> which a

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8. E. Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 152.

believer may and can bring to bear. And he repeats his assertion that gratitude is the one possible word to the godly character, answer to each godly summons, echo through the human heart of the Word of Christ. Is it not, however, of some significance that, in the same passage where gratitude is seen to be of such importance, 3.14 quite simply states,

"And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony,"

and that in 3.17 we also read,

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus ..."?

We have, here, placed side by side, several of the themes of the New Testament. The amount of discussion with regard to these other themes, however, suggests that it is gratitude which is attached to the other themes, and not that the other themes are so many amplifications of gratitude. Is it not of primary importance that, while realizing the tremendous significance of a Biblical motif, the church should avoid the danger of inflating that which is significant into that which is fundamental?

An attempt to understand the thanksgiving periods with their supposed idea of gratitude, yet without an inflated centrality, is demonstrated by several scholars. Calvin, with his pastoral duties well in mind, comments that the thanksgiving periods are for the purpose of commending the virtues of those receiving the letters, so

that they will persevere in those virtues. But, says the Genevan, instead of commending the recipients, which would have stirred up false pride, Paul gives thanks, to remind them that "every commendable gift which he says they possess is a benefit which God has given them".<sup>9</sup> The Genevan pastor knows his flock, and the intricacies of sixteenth-century etiquette, and the art of careful correspondence.<sup>10</sup> However, the terminology of Romans 16.1-6, I Corinthians 1.26, Galatians 1.6 or Philippians 4.1 suggests that we hardly can speak of Paul as a man who is concerned about cloaking his true feelings in such a way as to make them acceptable or even more palatable.

Plummer, in his commentary on I Thessalonians, agrees that the Pauline thanksgiving periods are not mere conventional epistolary openings, but rather must be seen as presenting a solemn note to prepare the readers. Gratitude, he suggests, is for Paul a duty, and this explains why this motif appears more in Paul than in the rest of canonical Scripture.<sup>11</sup> One must either discount completely, or else

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9. J. Calvin, The Epistle of Paul ... to the Thessalonians (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 334.

10. Otto Roller, (Das Formular der paulinischen Briefe (Stuttgart, 1933), pp. 62ff.) discusses the forms and conventions following the opening and closing of a letter as Kontexteingänge, and the tone of his work, similar to that of Calvin, is that these are diplomatic and gracious buffers between the opening and the general content of the letter.

11. A. Plummer, Commentary on I Thessalonians (London, 1918), p. 5.

take in the sense of grand or majestic, Plummer's use of the term solemn, for there is certainly nothing morbid or grim about these thanksgiving periods. Whatever his background study for gratitude as a Pauline duty may be, it seems obvious from the variety of length, content, structure, and tone, that the duty was one which was undertaken without any sense of burden on the part of Paul. Plummer's tone does not allow the reader to assume that by 'duty' he means something akin to a compulsive, irresistible desire, which might have expressed some of the profound wonder prevalent in such phrases as,

"In every way you were enriched in him ..." (I Cor. 1.5);

"... our Lord ... who will sustain you to the end ..." (I Cor. 1.8);

"... thankful for your partnership ..." (Phil. 1.5);

"... the hope laid up for you in heaven ..." (Col. 1.5).

One comment of Plummer which is expressed in many interpretations of Paul, written from many different perspectives, is that of the thanksgiving periods as a kind of preparation, or introduction to the body of the letter.<sup>12</sup> Plummer does not really make clear whether he sees the thanksgiving periods in this sense as a literary device, selected arbitrarily rather than some other option of introduction, or whether the use of the thanksgiving period is an economic use of the necessity of some expression of gratitude combined with the necessity

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12. See above, p. 37, n. 10.

of some kind of introduction. It is certainly obvious, from the placing of the thanksgiving periods between the standard epistolary greeting (which itself was expanded and modified in Paul's letters) and the body of the letter, that the periods do serve a transitional and introductory purpose. Taking into account, however, the well-attested non-literary quality of the Pauline letters,<sup>13</sup> the use of the periods as a literary device becomes less than significant. We are forced back to the writer himself to discover the meaning of this remarkable epistolary element.

Whether one considers Luther's and Calvin's circuitous exposition as an attempt to avoid picturing Paul as a flatterer of men, or Lohmeyer's inflation of gratitude as central to discipleship, one is left feeling that justice has not been done the thanksgiving periods as they stand. Drawing all the Biblical occurrences of eucharistein into a discussion of the periods, one simply cannot, I feel, discover any doctrine of gratitude. That gratitude is an appealing quality in a person does not mean that it is necessarily a Biblical doctrine. The importance of gratitude in Hellenism, however, demands further consideration at this point.

Without a doubt, the most laborious and extensive analysis of

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13. See above, p. 5.

the Pauline thanksgiving periods is that undertaken by Paul Schubert in "The Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings".<sup>14</sup> This work can be seen as having made two particularly significant contributions to New Testament scholarship. On the one hand, using the form-critical method most rigorously, the thanksgiving periods were defined and dissected in so thorough a manner that there can be little disowning their identity<sup>15</sup> or structure. Equally thoroughly, Schubert compiled an extensive display of thought on the theme of gratitude from Hellenistic literature. One cannot pay high enough tribute to the gathering together of this material.

At the same time, we feel forced to ask a slightly different question from that asked by Schubert. Observing the presence of the period in each epistle, he felt that the structural relationship of the period to the body of the letter suggested a thanksgiving period as a sine qua non of Paul's correspondence.<sup>16</sup> Beyond this, the individuality of each period demonstrated for Schubert that this was no formal, meaningless device for Paul. This individuality was maintained, he

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14. Schubert, op. cit.

15. Jack Sanders, "The Transition from the Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to the Body of the Letters of the Pauline Corpus", JBL, vol. 81 (1962), pp. 348ff., and J.M. Robinson, "Hodajot Formel in Gebet und Hymnus des Frühchristentums", Apophoreta, Beiheft 30 to ZNW (Berlin, 1964), pp. 194ff., are supplementary and corrective but do not negate Schubert's contribution.

16. Schubert, op. cit., p. 24.

felt, within a seven-sectioned structure:<sup>17</sup>

- 1 - The Principal Verb - eucharistein.
- 2 - The Personal Object - tō theō.
- 3 - The Temporal Phrase - pantote.
- 4 - The Pronominal Object Phrase - this being introduced by peri or uper.
- 5 - The Temporal Participial Clause with the temporal adverbial phrase, expressing intercessory prayer on behalf of the addressee (optional).
- 6 - The Causal Participial Construction or Causal Adverbial Phrase (optional).
- 7 - The Subordinate Clause terminating the period, introduced by ina, opos, eis, or oti.

This form, Schubert felt, was on the one hand fixed, but on the other hand not so rigid as to confine the content in stereotyped phrases.

Since similar verbal-prepositional structures occur when the verb eucharistein appears in Hellenistic literature generally, both from the time preceding Paul as well as that following him, Schubert concluded that one must look further into Paul's Hellenism if one is to understand the thanksgiving periods. One must, in other words, examine the pagan literature of the time to see the matrix of Paul's theme of gratitude. This turning to what he terms Paul's "cosmopolitan Hellenism"<sup>18</sup> rests on the infrequent appearance of eucharistein

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17. Schubert, op. cit., p. 54.

18. Ibid., pp. 180ff.

outside the Pauline corpus of the New Testament, in the Bible. Schubert counts thirty-seven appearances in Paul, thirteen in the rest of the New Testament.<sup>19</sup> Of significance for him as well is the fact that the Matthean and Markan accounts of the Last Supper use eucharistein and eulogein apparently synonymously. Schubert considers the use of eucharistein with reference to the mealtime prayer to be a pagan-Hellenistic influence, and eulogein to be a result of Jewish-Hellenistic influence.<sup>20</sup> The use of eucharistein in Luke 17.15, 18.11 and Acts 28.15 he attributes to Luke's being the mouthpiece of the Hellenized Christian community. John 11.41, Revelation 4.9, 7.11 and 11.16 are considered liturgically oriented. Acts 24.3 is considered to be an expression of official terminology.<sup>21</sup> Thus he accounts for each occurrence of eucharistein as a Hellenistic influence.

Although dissatisfied with what he terms the lexicographical method used by Theodore Schermann,<sup>22</sup> Schubert does support Schermann's conclusion that eucharistein is a word that developed only in the Hellenistic era, and became increasingly popular in the years preceding the advent of Christianity.<sup>23</sup> Paul, he discovers, actually uses the

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19. Schubert, op. cit., p. 83.

20. Ibid., p. 95.

21. Ibid., p. 95.

22. T. Schermann, "Eucharistia und Eucharistein in ihrem Bedeutungswandel bis 200 n.Chr.", Philologus, vol. XXIII (1910), pp. 375ff.

23. Schubert, op. cit., p. 41.

word more times per page than any other Hellenistic writer.<sup>24</sup> This ardent Hellenism of Paul, then, explains his use of eucharistein.

That the commentary of Luther and Calvin did not consist of ideas new to them is clear from the display of eucharistein accumulated by Schubert from the Hellenistic world.<sup>25</sup> What he suggests is that Paul was saturated from the world around him with the idea of gratitude as a fundamental necessity of complete human personality.

From Philo he cites,

"... this very confession (of an act of God) must not be regarded as the work of the soul, but as the work of God, who arouses in the soul the attitude of thanksgiving" (Leg. Alleg. I.82).<sup>26</sup>

and, as well, Philo's statement that man's entire religious duty may be described as thanksgiving (De plant. 126-131).<sup>27</sup> He cites Epictetus:

"From everything which happens in the world, it is easy to praise providence, if man possesses ... the faculty of seeing what happens with reference to the observer, and the attitude of gratitude" (Dissertations. i.6).<sup>28</sup>

He also notes the evidence of the papyri and inscriptions, noting particularly one inscription of Antiochus II (261-246 B.C.) expressing appreciation for a deed performed in his honour by a town and commenting

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24. Schubert, op. cit., p. 41.

25. Cf. pp. 32 and 36-7 above.

26. Schubert, op. cit., p. 125.

27. Ibid., p. 125.

28. Ibid., p. 132.

approvingly that

"... the attitude of gratitude appears to be a universal principle of your conduct" (Dittenberger, OGIS 223).<sup>29</sup>

It is not necessary to cite more than these samplings to see the range of Schubert's exploration. He notes both the centrality of gratitude in the Hellenistic world, and the verbal-prepositional structure used by Hellenistic writers when they used the verb eucharistein, and concludes that this is the matrix of the Pauline thanksgiving periods.

Some immediate questions arise in response to this work of Schubert. In his endorsement of the form-critical method as he understood it, he felt it necessary to limit himself quite severely in the nature of the material he examined. He chose to look strictly within the Greek-writing world, and thereby omitted an examination of the Hebrew-Jewish thought world, as well as the literature of that world, in which Paul also participated. The fact that Paul is considered to have been a rabbi, a Pharisee, and to have studied under Gamaliel himself would seem to imply that no matter how deeply he might have ever been influenced by the Hellenistic world, it is still necessary to deal with his Jewish background. If the work of van Unnik is accurate,<sup>30</sup> then in Paul we have a man whose youth and its deep impressions took

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29. Schubert, op. cit., p. 145.

30. W.C. van Unnik, Tarsus or Jerusalem (London, 1962) p. 55.

place in Jerusalem itself, a man who was not a diaspora Jew originally, but a Jerusalem Pharisee, a man whose Hellenism is a later accretion.

That the Jewish background of Paul, regardless of its specific length or locale, played a significant part in his writings is certainly the opinion of men like C.H. Dodd,<sup>31</sup> or B. Gärtner. The latter concludes one monograph by saying,

"I am forced to conclude that the basis of both the temple symbolism and the doctrine of the body of Christ in the theology of Paul is to be sought in the Palestinian rather than the Hellenistic background." <sup>32</sup>

The question of Paul's complex personality, and the various experiences which are his background, is being asked differently now than at the time of Schubert's work. One can hardly expect him to be master of thinking which took place largely long after his study was published. Nevertheless, to examine Paul's "cosmopolitan Hellenism" without attempting to determine to what degree this is a complete understanding of the man, simply is no longer adequate, if it ever was. One pressing question, then, is the validity of the programme of study followed by Schubert.

Apart from the programme itself, it is also possible to observe unfortunate circular reasoning. Having decided that eucharistein was

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31. C.H. Dodd, op. cit.

32. B. Gärtner, The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament (Cambridge, 1965), p. 142. Cf. H.J. Schoeps, Paul (London, 1959).

a term of great popularity in the Hellenistic world, Schubert then considers each appearance of eucharistein in the New Testament to be the result of the influence of that Hellenistic world upon the writers of the New Testament. To assume that the use of eucharistein demonstrates Paul's Hellenism, and that Paul's Hellenism caused him to use eucharistein is to operate within a closed circle. Both Paul's Hellenism, itself, and other possible sources of the use of eucharistein, as well, challenge the parts of this argument.

It is also significant that Paul simply does not deal with the idea of gratitude in a way parallel to the Hellenistic writers Schubert saw as furnishing a matrix for the Pauline thanksgiving periods. As has already been noted, the New Testament does not discuss the theme of gratitude, although it contains numerous passages where the act of thanksgiving is noted. Philo's influence, Schubert himself admits, does not really strike Christianity until the time of Clement and Origen,<sup>33</sup> although Philo's Hellenistic Judaism is considered by Schubert to be the formative environment of Christianity as early as Paul. Despite the fact of topical and chronological discrepancy, since Paul shares with Philo a similar linguistic structure, Schubert is able to say that Paul represents the Hellenization of Judaism, the same

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33. Schubert, op. cit., p. 126.

influencing that happened to Philo, and Paul's ideas and word meanings must be interpreted on the basis of Hellenistic thought. Significantly enough, however, while attention is paid to the influencing force, the original ideas which were affected by the influencing suffer from disregard.<sup>34</sup>

Schubert suggests at one point that the thanksgiving periods were borrowed from the Hellenistic world, arising out of the epistolary situation, and the need for "a certain epistolary dignity of form".<sup>35</sup> This, however, cannot be documented. We are not confronted in the thanksgiving periods, or in the Pauline letters generally, with statements present for the creation of dignity. To see a letter resounding with dignity, one can look at a bit of official Hellenistic correspondence,<sup>36</sup> or at one of the letters to the Assyrian king,<sup>37</sup> yet these letters have no thanksgiving periods. The periods may indeed lend dignity to Paul's letters; this does not explain why they are there, however. Paul did borrow the verb eucharistein and its accompanying

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34. Note, in this connection, N.H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (London, 1944), pp. 159ff. Of particular interest also is G. Delling (op. cit., pp. 51ff.), who supports Schubert's view that the structure of the Pauline thanksgiving periods is Hellenistic, but considers the content of the periods from the perspective of Jewish thought.

35. Schubert, op. cit., p. 93.

36. C.P. Judaicarum 153.

37. Pfeiffer, op. cit., pp. 26-40.

propositions, as Schubert thoroughly documents, and it is also clear from his amassing of evidence that gratitude was extremely significant in Hellenism, but that Paul assigns the same meaning and emphasis to eucharistein he does not prove, and, I feel, the New Testament does not indicate.

Schubert's attempt to amass evidence for a Hellenistic background of the thanksgiving periods encounters a series of difficulties. Serious, for example, is his moving from the second century B.C. to the eighth century A.D. and subsequently arguing from the evidence of later centuries for concepts held in earlier ones. As Cullmann has pointed out, second-century evidence does not necessarily indicate a clear line of development from the first century, let alone suggest that the later meanings are the same as the earlier.<sup>38</sup>

We have noted methodological, chronological, and topical questions which must be asked of Schubert's work. In addition, it is necessary to question his understanding of the relationship between Hellenism, Judaism, and Christianity. Schubert argues that the appearance of eucharistein only in the later sections of the Septuagint indicates that only under the increasing pressure of Hellenization did Judaism adopt the word. He traces the growth of the pressured usage through

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38. O. Cullmann, Early Christian Worship (London, 1953), p. 8.

the earlier Septuagint, the later Septuagint, the Apocrypha, and finally the Pauline corpus.<sup>39</sup> In recent years, however, this pressure of Hellenization has been seriously questioned by men like Cullmann<sup>40</sup> and Munck.<sup>41</sup> The Tübingen school felt that it was possible to observe the increasing dominance of Hellenistic culture upon post-Exilic Judaism, and saw the Roman branch of Christianity as the Hegelian synthesis of these two cultures. Scholarship is now, however, in what might be termed a post-Tübingen era. Neither Judaism nor Hellenism is held as a monolithic category. It is now necessary to consider whether a word, phrase, or idea developed, not in the inter-cultural exchange, but within the inter-factional exchange of either culture, or whether rather than seeing Judaism and Hellenism in a creative conflict it is more accurate to see each as the expression of contact with a third culture, the Assyrian-Persian-Iranian thought world, for example.<sup>42</sup> There are, simply, more complexities involved in the relationship of the Hellenistic and Judaistic worlds than were assumed when Schubert wrote.

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39. Schubert, op. cit., p. 120.

40. Cullmann, op. cit., pp. 1ff.

41. J. Munck, Paul and the Salvation of Mankind (London, 1959).

42. We have already noted, in Chapter I, Assyrian epistolary form. In Chapter III, we will be discussing a theological motif attributed, in part, to this eastern culture.

Perhaps the most direct method of noting the distinct absence from the thanksgiving periods of any Biblical or Hellenistic idea of gratitude is simply to note with some brief detail the contents of the periods themselves. It does not seem particularly helpful to deal with each of the formal sections proposed by Schubert. Because the periods in the various letters are structured as identically as is the case, observing the content is a fairly simple matter. It is also important to note at this point that we are not dealing with every appearance of eucharistain from the New Testament text which followed Schubert's breakdown. We are dealing only with those passages which open the epistles:<sup>43</sup>

Romans 1.8ff.  
I Corinthians 1.4-9.  
Ephesians 1.15ff.  
Philippians 1.3-11.  
Colossians 1.3ff.  
I Thessalonians 1.2ff.  
II Thessalonians 1.3-4.  
Philemon 1.4-6.

When we examine the above thanksgiving periods, we find that each opens with some form of the verb eucharistain, either first person singular, or first person plural. This has been considered by some to

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43. Note: II Corinthians and Galatians do not contain an opening epistolary thanksgiving period by Schubert's definition, since they do not use the word eucharistain. Ephesians is included in this discussion, since it is widely considered to be part of the Pauline corpus, if not a letter written by Paul himself.

suggest that Paul includes as his co-correspondents others present with him, and certainly this is true in II Thessalonians, for example. It has also been treated as an editorial plural. One can build no cases, however, on the basis of this variable, for any shift of meaning within the thanksgiving period itself. After the main verb, however, what is invariably present is the fact that the act of thanksgiving is addressed to God, on behalf of the recipients of the letter. There appears an interesting duality of direction here. While the thanks are addressed to God, the thanksgiving period is addressed to the recipients.<sup>44</sup> These thanksgiving periods take on a declarative, confessional, recitativel tone. The receivers are being told what it is about them for which Paul performs his act of thanksgiving.<sup>44</sup>

What is the subject of his thanksgiving Paul most clearly states in Philippians 1.5 when he says that he is "thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now". In I Corinthians 1.9 he sets this partnership in the terms of "being called into the fellowship of his Son". In I Thessalonians 1.4 he refers to the recipients'

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44. Claus Westermann (The Praise of God in the Psalms (Richmond, 1965), p. 30) discusses a similar duality of direction evident in the psalms. There is a "forensic element" foreign to our idea of gratitude, but part of the Hebrew motif of praise. (Cf. Psalm 22.22, "I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.") With regard to thanksgiving as a public declaration of God's activity, cf. Delling, op. cit., p. 124.

having been chosen. In II Thessalonians 1.4, he speaks about his sharing of their faithfulness amongst the other churches. That for which he offers his thanksgiving, then, could be said to be the presence of the recipient congregation in the community of God's people.

Their membership in this community is evidenced by two behavioural signs on their part. In II Thessalonians 1.3, Paul puts this most simply when he says, "Your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing." The thanksgiving period in Romans deals only with faith, while that of I Corinthians deals with the grace of God, but in Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and I Thessalonians, the faith and love of the congregations are noted with joy. The positioning of faith and love as evidences of participation in the community of God seems to me to be of great significance. It stands in stark contrast to the frequently inflated views of gratitude as man's primary response, or as the proper foundation of his ethics. In none of these thanksgiving periods does Paul mention the gratitude of the recipients as being the mark of their discipleship. In none of the periods does he even mention gratitude in general, except for the opening verb which is, in fact, a personal declaration of his own faithful and loving response.

The balance of the thanksgiving period is basically a development of the part already discussed. It has to do with the activity of God

which induced the participation, faith, and love of the congregation. I Corinthians speaks of the activity of the grace of God; Ephesians 1.17 of the continuing imparting of wisdom; Philippians about the good work begun and surely to be brought to completion; Colossians 1.5 about the original preaching which the Colossians heard and understood; I Thessalonians about the arrival of the Gospel in their midst "in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction". The subject matter of the thanksgiving periods, then, can most simply be expressed as the experience of the recipient community, both past and present, as a participant in the fellowship of God. The body of the letter then quite reasonably goes on to discuss various specific problems of participation in the community of God, and of living in faith and love. Faith and love are the God-initiated responses to God's mighty deed in Jesus Christ. What we learn from the thanksgiving periods seems to be that the act of thanksgiving is a most appropriate act on the part of a human being - a person whose life is fundamentally a response of faith and love.

The attempt to understand the Pauline thanksgiving periods by constructing a Biblical doctrine of gratitude, or by the introduction of similar verbal-prepositional structures from the Hellenistic world is, simply, inadequate. We are left with Frederick Grant's acute observation, on the one hand, that Paul gives thanks at most unexpected

times, and, on the other hand, we note that having the opportunity to see gratitude as the fundamental human posture (Romans 1.21), or the basis of human ethics (I Corinthians 13), or the supreme vehicle of worship (Colossians 3.14-17), Paul simply does not seize the chance. When the periods themselves are examined, we find that they are recitals of what God has accomplished in the community, the evidences of which are the faith and love of the disciples, not their gratitude. I suggest that it is precisely the absence of the idea of gratitude that distinguishes the New Testament usage of eucharistein from that of the surrounding Hellenistic world. Schubert's turning to Hellenism solves only the problem of the structure of the thanksgiving periods; it does not explain their content. It is necessary, therefore, to ask the question he did not ask: whether Paul's Jewish heritage does influence his creation of the periods, and whether Judaism provides a more adequate matrix for the use of eucharistein throughout the New Testament. One discussion, however, demands prior comment, and to that we turn next.

CHAPTER THREE

EUCHARISTEIN AND GNOSTIC THEOLOGY IN PAUL

In 1929, George Boobyer published his well-known thesis on thanksgiving and the glory of God,<sup>1</sup> in which he examined the popular religious notions of the Hellenistic world which, he felt, formed the background and context of certain New Testament passages.<sup>2</sup> The appearance, in concert, of the terms 'thanksgiving' and 'glory of God' pointed directly, he felt, to the Iranian and Hellenistic thought-world, and represented a very early Christian participation in dialogue with what might be generally termed gnostic ideas.<sup>3</sup> Boobyer makes very clear the fact that his study rests on a few passages where Paul places an unusual stress and value upon the offering of thanksgivings.<sup>4</sup>

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1. G.H. Boobyer, "Thanksgiving" and the "Glory of God" in Paul (Leipzig, 1929).

2. Ibid., p. 2.

3. I am aware that the term 'gnostic' has been given various definitions. Here, however, I am speaking in the sense of the broader definition of Jonas (The Gnostic Religion, Boston, 1958) or, more precisely, the 'gnosticizing trend' of R. McL. Wilson (The Gnostic Problem, London, 1958).

4. Boobyer, op. cit., pp. 2ff.

We have already discussed the assignment to eucharistein of a major role in the New Testament. This, we feel, is unjustified. Boobyer makes a different point. He suggests that although it does not emerge in a major way in the New Testament, an extremely important set of ideas lies behind eucharistein. Those ideas are betrayed by the conjunction, at certain points, of 'thanksgiving' and the 'glory of God'. It is clear from Boobyer's wide documentation that in the Hellenistic world not only was gratitude considered to be a significant personal attribute, but also that the giving of thanks to the gods was of tremendous theological significance. I feel, however, that the evidence from the thirty-five intervening years of study calls for certain modifications to Boobyer's work.

Hans Jonas comments most helpfully that,

"Christianity, even in its 'orthodox' utterances, had from the outset (certainly as early as St. Paul) syncretistic aspects, far exceeded however in this respect by its heretical offshoots: the gnostic systems compounded everything - oriental mythologies, astrological doctrines, Iranian theology, elements of Jewish tradition, whether Biblical, rabbinical, or occult, Christian salvation-eschatology, Platonic terms and concepts. Syncretism attained in this period its greatest efficacy."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps one of the greatest contributions of the years since Boobyer published his work is that it has become increasingly clear to Biblical scholarship that simple cause and effect relationships, that is to say

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5. Jonas, op. cit., p. 25

the apparently direct dependence of the New Testament upon any similar literary forms of the surrounding Hellenistic world, are neither so numerous, nor so uninvolved, as was popularly assumed in the period 1920-1940. One of the most helpful examinations of this intricate problem is that of Samuel Laeuchli, in which he observes the striking similarity of terminology in early Christianity and Gnosticism, and yet also shows how the content of that similar terminology was actually fundamentally different.<sup>6</sup> James Barr, noting that "... the New Testament did not necessarily share the typical forms of Greek thought just because it was written in Greek,"<sup>7</sup> goes on to discuss the complex relationship existing between linguistic phenomena and thought patterns.<sup>8</sup> It is unfortunate that Boobyer's work, with its excellently comprehensive range of study, must be seriously questioned because of this less than cautious assumption that similarity of terminology suggests similarity of meaning.

In his introductory passage, Boobyer states very clearly the perspective of his work, that it treats

"... a special conception of thanksgiving prayer found in the

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6. Samuel Laeuchli, The Language of Faith (London, 1965), pp. 88-93 and 157-159.

7. James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language (Oxford, 1961), p. 9.

8. Ibid., pp. 17-20.

writings of the Apostle Paul. It will also ... supply information about the conceived 'modus operandi' of all true prayer in Hellenistic religious life in general."<sup>9</sup>

The association of the motif of thanksgiving and that of prayer is obvious. Paul states this explicitly,<sup>10</sup> and the Gospel writers concur.<sup>11</sup> The serious problem is that of considering Hellenistic religious life in general. At the time of Boobyer's writing, considerably less detail about Hellenistic religious life was known, and it was more easily assumed that similarities existed amongst various religious groups than can be now assumed. In addition to this, the chronology of the development of religious ideas has been considerably detailed more recently, so that apparent similarities are discovered to be separated in both time and meaning, and their relationship becomes extremely complex.

Another example of a statement containing an easy assumption of similar word meanings appears in Boobyer's opening paragraph:

"We are concerned here with eucharistia in the sense of praise, or general thanksgiving to God, and not with eucharistia in any limited sense as the special prayer of thanksgiving offered up to God on the occasion of, and in return for, some particular benefit received. Eucharistia in Paul, and in the whole of the New Testament has of course that limited usage; but we shall deal with it here in the more general meaning. In this sense

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9. Boobyer, op. cit., p. xvii.

10. Cf. Philippians 1.3; I Thessalonians 1.2.

11. Cf. John 11.41; Matthew 26.26.

the verb eucharistein appears as the synonym of such verbs as eulogein, ainein, honnein, doxadzein, and exhomologeisthai." <sup>12</sup>

As will be later suggested, I hardly disagree with Boobyer's suggestion that the above-mentioned verbs are somewhat synonymous. The point at which I do disagree, however, is that I observe no instance, in the New Testament, in which eucharistein is a general term, and does not refer to a specific benefit received. Where the content or reason for the offering of the thanksgiving is not explicitly stated, it is still not possible to speak of general thanksgiving. Barclay, in one recent article, speaks of the Damascus experience as the key to all that Paul said and wrote.<sup>13</sup> It is always, it seems to me, something similar to this gracious intervention in his own life, to which Paul refers. The gracious intervention of God into the lives of men, either individually or as groups, is that which precipitates Paul's own thanksgivings, or his admonition to the same.

Boobyer sees in the New Testament a two-faceted meaning to eucharistein, not dissimilar to that which underlies our own study. He comments that his study of the Pauline eucharistia

"... is in no way intended to exclude the presence of ordinary and more naive conceptions of eucharistia where only the thought of thanking God for favors received is present. But it is contended here that the Pauline conception of eucharistia cannot

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12. Boobyer, op. cit., p. 1.

13. W. Barclay, "The Key to Pauline Theology", Expository Times, vol. 76 (1964-65), p. 29.

be exhaustively explained that way; that more significant conceptions of its purpose exist - conceptions which attach to it specific relationship to the doxa theou." <sup>14</sup>

Boobyer then turns to examine the Hellenistic concept of doxa, and submits that it is not adequately conveyed by a "purely abstract sense", but rather had "meaning of a more concrete and materialistic character". <sup>15</sup> He compares here the pre-Exilic Jewish concept of the cloud which shrouds God, a substance with the qualities of materiality and visibility. <sup>16</sup> After the Exile, the Jews adopted the concept of light, rather than darkness, to describe that which veiled God from human sight. Despite the reversal of imagery, the function of light, or the 'glory' was precisely the same as that of the cloud. <sup>17</sup> He then goes on to discuss the sense of the remoteness of Yahwe, extant even before the Exile, but which became a prominent feature of post-Exilic Judaism. <sup>18</sup> With the sense of remoteness of Yahwe, worship changed as well. The eighth-century prophets, who stressed God's transcendence, and the Platonic and Aristotelian philosopher, who removed God's dwelling place from the sphere of men, shared in the inauguration of the conception of

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14. Boobyer, op. cit., p. 4.

15. Ibid., p. 7.

16. Ibid., p. 9.

17. Ibid., p. 10.

18. It is of great interest to compare the work of L.H. Brockington on "The Septuagintal Background of the New Testament Use of doxa", in D.E. Nineham, Studies in the Gospels (Oxford, 1955), pp. 1-9. Rather than seeing doxa as dealing with the remoteness of Yahwe, he sees it as representing God's wonder-working and active saving power amongst other indications of his presence.

prayer, praise, and thanksgiving as the acceptable forms of worship, replacing the old material offerings.<sup>19</sup> The Jewish diaspora congregations, who even before the destruction of the Temple found the sacrificial system difficult to maintain, were another active force in the propagation of spiritual worship.<sup>20</sup> That Paul speaks of the pneuma of God which fills man is for Boobyer testimony that Paul shared the Hellenistic view of man in which man was seen as helpless and empty in the presence of God, and in need of being filled by God, and thereby enabled to approach and worship.<sup>21</sup> Worship then becomes one part of a cyclical process in which God fills empty man with the impulse to worship, and filled man returns God's spirit to him.

The spiritualization of worship is an obvious historical development, and while we might see various points of disagreement with Boobyer's tracing thereof, there is little point in discussing them here. What we do note is, as an example, Boobyer's understanding of the doctrine of man mutually shared by the 'gnosticizing trend' of Hellenism, Judaism, and Christianity. Paul does speak of the spirit of God filling his people, both as individuals and as his community. The spirit fills, however, not because man is empty, but because God is

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19. Boobyer, op. cit., p. 15.

20. Ibid., p. 19.

21. Ibid., pp. 20ff.

gracious.<sup>22</sup> Man's problem is not his emptiness, but his rebellion or sin.<sup>23</sup> Man's problem may have its cosmic results, but it is fundamentally a moral problem.<sup>24</sup> The spiritualization of worship does not signify any change in the Jewish concept of man's basic problem. Paul and Hosea stand side by side in marvelling over God's grace.

It is interesting, in conjunction with this noting of Paul's Hebrew understanding of man, to observe Laeuchli's discussion that the theme of repentance was a strong motif of the post-Apostolic age - the very age in which the young Church was attempting to define herself in contradistinction to Gnosticism.<sup>25</sup> J. Philip Hyatt notes the powerful theme of sin to be found in the Thanksgiving Psalms of the Dead Sea Scrolls:

"Two themes ... recur frequently: the weakness and frailty of man as a creature made of clay and dust; and the sinfulness of man."<sup>26</sup>

A few citations from the scrolls demonstrate the accuracy of his observation:

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22. Romans 5.6-6.14.

23. Romans 1.18-32.

24. I Corinthians 7.

25. Laeuchli, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.

26. J. Philip Hyatt, "The View of Man in the Qumran Hodayot", *NTS*, vol. 2 (1955-56), p. 278.

"And as for me - a creature of clay  
and kneaded in water,  
(of the) assembly of shame,  
and a spring of impurity,  
a crucible of iniquity,  
and a structure of sin,  
a spirit of error and perversity,  
without understanding,  
and terrified by righteous judgements." 27

"To thee, O God of knowledge,  
belong all righteous works,  
(and) counsel of truth;  
But to the sons of man  
belong the service of iniquity  
and the works of deceit." 28

Hyatt goes on to note that

"The utter dependence of man upon God is expressed in some of the finest passages of the Hodayot. The author was at times overwhelmed by his suffering and by thoughts of his own weakness and unworthiness, but his experience of God's mercy led him to write such passages as these:

I know that there is hope in thy mercies,  
and confidence in the abundance of  
thy strength.  
For no one is just in thy judgment,  
nor upright in thy contention.  
Mankind is not justified by mankind,  
nor does a man by man prosper;  
Flesh is not honoured by a creature  
of flesh,  
nor is a spirit great from a spirit." 29

What must be observed in these passages is simply that while parallels can be drawn with the religious literature of various types, there also

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27. Hyatt, art. cit., p. 278.

28. Ibid., p. 279.

29. Ibid., p. 281.

remains that which is definitely Hebrew. The borrowing of terminology, or even of imagery, if one wishes to observe this, cannot be inflated into the wholesale accretion of ideas or values.

There are, then, three basic criticisms I would make of Boobyer's work: the assumption is no longer valid that similarity of terminology or even construction means similarity of meaning or necessarily even suggests it; labelling an idea as one held by Hellenistic religious life in general is an extremely precarious decision; and finally, while Judaism does appear to have employed imagery from various surrounding religions, and in its fringe sects may have courted some of their ideas, always also it remained distinct from those other religions and their theologies.

Boobyer devotes a considerable amount of space to Mandaean theology. It is to be noted that at the time of his writing considerably less was known about Mandeism, and a considerably greater relationship was popularly suspected to exist between it and primitive Christianity, than is the case at present. Although specific details of the history of this sect are debated yet, it does seem fairly certain that their fully developed theology is post-Christian, and Dr. Wilson's cautious tone is wise:

"It is possible that the Mandaeans are the ultimate descendents of the Palestine baptist sects of New Testament times and the period immediately preceding, but our evidence is not sufficient

to justify the assertion that these sects were already 'Gnostic' in the second-century sense of the term."<sup>30</sup>

A considerable number of scholars see the origins of the Mandaean community as possibly lying in heretical Jewish circles,<sup>31</sup> but even when pre-Christian Palestinian origins are accepted, it is also clear that the sect only gradually became more and more involved in the gnosticizing movement before becoming, in fact, a fully Gnostic sect. The Scriptures of the group are late, and regardless of earlier strands visible in them, represent a fully developed theology.<sup>32</sup> In view of the modified Mandaean chronology, it is extremely precarious to attempt to interpret a particular juxtaposition of terms in Paul on the basis of a theology not fully emerging for perhaps several centuries.

It is not possible in a work of this scope to examine completely the intricate problem of the development of Gnostic thought. Dr. Wilson's summation, therefore, seems to be most helpful when he suggests that we

"... distinguish three main stages: a pre-gnostic, to which may be assigned the various trends of the Hellenistic syncretism, including Philo and the Dead Sea Scrolls; a Gnostic proper,

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30. Wilson, op. cit., p. 66.

31. K. Rudolf, Die Mandäer, vol. I (Göttingen, 1960), pp. 252ff. Cf. G. Widengren, Mani and Manichaeism (London, 1965); and E.S. Drower, The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran (Oxford, 1937), and The Secret Adam (Oxford, 1960).

32. G. Widengren, op. cit., pp. 15-22.

represented by the sects of the second century; and the later developments in Manicheism, Mandeism, and other similar movements." 33

The purpose of his fourth chapter, Boobyer states,

"... is to show that in the Hellenistic world there existed a special concept of the effect of eucharistia on the Deity, namely, that by thanksgiving, praise, or 'glorifying' the Deity was considered to benefit; his position and power were made stronger, his light was increased, or his glory was made greater." 34

It is possible, of course, that such a special concept as Boobyer proposes did develop in Hellenism. That he depends heavily upon Mandaean and Manichean documentation, however, means that Paul probably was confronted only with the earlier stages, rather than the fully developed form, of this concept. Just how far removed from the special concept Paul remained is demonstrated by the fact that for Paul benefitting the Deity is hardly man's role. Quite the reverse is more true: acknowledging a Deity who benefits is all one can do.

Having examined post-Exilic Jewish literature Boobyer does carefully note that

"This conception of eucharistia is not, of course, a hard and fast one in this Jewish literature. It does not occur to anything like the same extent as in the Mandaean literature. What the passages brought forward do seem to indicate, however, is contact with a circle of thought where the Mandaean conceptions of praise and thanksgiving had already risen. They provide evidence that post-Exilic Judaism before the Christian era knew

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33. Wilson, op. cit., p. 98.

34. Boobyer, op. cit., p. 35.

of such conceptions and had begun to use them." 35

"In view of our knowledge of their background, we have no right to assume that all these remarks about the relation of thanksgiving to the glory of God are merely rhetorical speech. We have seen that in the surrounding world of Paul's day such ideas were understood realistically and concretely; and there is no reason why Paul should not have shared the same concrete conception of eucharistia and its relation to the glory of God. If we are not prepared to admit this, however, we must at least say that the apostle's language has been strongly influenced by surrounding conceptions of thanksgiving and its relation to the glory of God." 36

"Shall we maintain that this surprising stress upon the necessity of eucharistia is explained wholly and entirely from Paul's big sense of the indebtedness of man to divine grace? That this psychological factor does play a part ... cannot ... be denied. But to assert that this is an adequate explanation is most unsatisfactory." 37

Boobyer's work is extremely important because, like Schubert, he suggests that the terms present in Paul are terms of significant usage in the Hellenistic world. That they may be such demands that in their Biblical function they be carefully defined. It is our contention that the passages Boobyer cites in the Pauline corpus simply do not bear the weight of the argument he places upon them. He speaks of a concrete conception of eucharistia and glory, and yet the Jewish documents cited are mainly from the poetic sections of the Old Testament. This means that the attempt to assign literal meaning is an

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35. Boobyer, op. cit., p. 61.

36. Ibid., p. 79.

37. Ibid., p. 83.

extremely precarious endeavour, one whose hazards Boobyer does not appear to take fully into account. If one posits a concrete conception of eucharistia, it is hardly adequate then to demonstrate this from poetry. Apart from his chronological assumptions, which we have already discussed, even if post-Exilic Judaism was acquainted with a "circle of thought where the Mandaean conceptions of praise and thanksgiving had already arisen", it is clear that these conceptions were peripheral to orthodox Judaism, and even to such heterodox groups as those represented by the Dead Sea Scrolls. Although Philo does attach a special importance to eucharistein, as Boobyer notes, this response of the human being is always just that, a response, and in Paul does not contribute materially to the person of God.

What does seem clear from these passages, and from the general material gathered by Boobyer, is that thanksgiving was a significant motif, perhaps not so much as a fixed philosophical or theological point or doctrine, but as a developing, fluid, and loosely connected set of ideas. Boobyer's original observation that this collection of ideas might possibly lie behind a few Pauline passages seems to me to be a far more accurate analysis than his later, more rigid position.<sup>38</sup> Boobyer's great contribution is in observing that it is possible that

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38. Compare the cautious mood cited on p. 55 above with that noted on p. 67 above.

Paul's acquaintanceship with some very undeveloped but increasingly popular ideas may have caused him, from an apologetic standpoint, to employ a terminology used by them, in certain instances. To explain Paul's meaning by those ideas, or even to assume his dependence upon them, does not seem reasonable, however, in the light of present scholarship.

We have explored the thanksgiving periods as products of Hellenistic epistolary form, and as the products of Biblical and Hellenistic ideas of gratitude. Paul's use of eucharistein as the product of a Gnostic influence has been examined. None of these factors adequately explains the occurrences of eucharistein. We turn, then, to the Jewish heritage of Paul and Christianity, in which, I believe, the influence which shapes the use of eucharistein and the motif of thanksgiving in the New Testament can be found.

CHAPTER FOUR

EUCARISTEIN AS A TRANSLATION TERM

The verb eucharistein, with its cognate noun and adjective, appears in the New Testament about fifty times. The majority of cases, however, have the verbal form. About sixty per cent of the occurrences are within the Pauline corpus, and this concentration is made even greater by the breadth of situations in which Paul uses the term, in contrast with its limited usage elsewhere in the New Testament. The double narration of the feeding stories and the narration of the Lord's Supper account for the vast majority of the non-Pauline appearances of eucharistein. Outside the Pauline corpus, it is impossible to speak of a developed motif of thanksgiving, for the term does not occur often enough. As has already been noted, it does not seem to me that Paul raises this term to a major motif but, in contrast with the limited usage in the non-Pauline writings, his use of the term does seem to be clearly deliberate. From the variety of situations in which the term is introduced, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that Paul does have a definite meaning for the term. It is possible then to speak of a term which occurs throughout the New Testament, but the more

subtle and complete understanding of which depends upon the writings of Paul.

It is important to note immediately two most direct, simple, and unsophisticated occurrences of gratefulness: Luke 17.9 (charin echein), and Romans 16.4 (eucharistein). Although it has been suggested that in some way these two instances are meant to be directed to God rather than man, it would appear to me that so to interpret is to torture the simple and obvious meaning in each case. Interestingly enough these are the only two examples in the New Testament of gratefulness with respect to another human being (Philemon 7 has textual difficulties), and in every other instance except that mentioned above the object of eucharistein is God.<sup>1</sup> The significance of these passages is that they prohibit our making the motif of thanksgiving into a purely speculative and theological doctrine. It simply cannot be separated completely from the homely experience of being grateful.

The above point is made in order to place this study in the correct relationship between the work of Claus Westermann and James Barr.<sup>2</sup> Westermann considers it to be of great significance that there

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1. W. Bauer, "Eucharisteō", part 1, in A Greek-English Lexicon, trans. W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich (Chicago, 1957), p. 328.

2. Other comment on Westermann, above, p. 51, note 44; and on Barr, above, p. 57.

is no word for 'to thank' in Hebrew:

"The fact that there is no word for 'to thank' in Hebrew has never been properly evaluated ... We are compelled to imagine a world in which petition plays a thoroughly essential and noteworthy role, but where the opposite role of petition is not primarily thanks but praise."<sup>3</sup>

Seriously challenging this is the work of Barr, who points out that the non-use of terminology in the Bible does not necessarily mean the absence of the concept amongst the people.<sup>4</sup> Although Barr was speaking in this case of the Greek New Testament, we are surely able to make the same observation with regard to the Hebrew Old Testament. The evidence of Luke 17.9 and Romans 16.4 prevents us from drawing the extreme conclusion of Westermann and thus being in danger of the easy assumption of which Barr warned. We do not contend that there was no simple colloquial meaning of eucharistein in use during the time of Paul. It will be our observation, however, that in the vast majority of cases Paul's use of the term is in a considerably different vein from that simple colloquial use.

I submit that there are two strands of meaning assigned to eucharistein in the New Testament. On the one hand, we have the two above-mentioned occurrences of simple personal gratefulness. On the

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3. Westermann, op. cit., p. 25. Unfortunately I have not been able to obtain a copy of the German edition of this work. I assume, however, that the translator's phrase 'the opposite role of petition' means 'the counterpart to petition'.

4. Barr, op. cit., pp. 282ff.

other, we find the term being used when we must speak in terms of an affirmation of God's activity, rather than personal gratefulness.

The passage containing the contrasting elements as sharply as any is I Corinthians 14.13-19, where Paul is discussing glossalalia. The first observation which must be made is the apparently synonymous usage of eulogein and eucharistein which will be mentioned further in conjunction with the prayers at mealtime.<sup>5</sup> In both eucharistein and eulogein we are confronted with terminology which, as is clear from the work of Boobyer and Schubert, has a wide and rich frame of reference in the first century generally as well as in the Pauline corpus. It is clear, however, that the blessing, or thanksgiving, here referred to was an ascriptive declaration. Yet, immediately following this, and in the same discussion, Paul proceeds colloquially to express his gratefulness. There is a distinct difference between the blessing-eucharistein (v.16) and the gratefulness-eucharistein (v.18). The former is an objective statement; the latter a subjective description. Both of these distinct ideas are expressed by the same word.<sup>6</sup>

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5. See pp. 89ff. below.

6. Neither simply colloquial nor formally affirmative are these occurrences: I Corinthians 1.14; II Corinthians 1.11; and I Thessalonians 3.9. It seems to me that the very imprecision of these passages bespeaks a colloquial usage. Still, a more formal interpretation could be given. These passages, therefore, are allowed to stand apart without the weight of argument resting on them.

Why Paul chose to use this term may well rest, in part, on its steadily increasing popularity in the years immediately preceding, and also those following, his writing. Our question, however, moves in the area of what he meant by using it. Apart from the clearly colloquial and the ambiguously mysterious usages listed above, it is clear that usually when the term occurs, Paul is affirming something that has happened, and usually something God has done, either directly, or by means of someone else. Barr warns well with regard to the danger of elaborately contrived etymologies and the arguments dependent upon them.<sup>7</sup> I simply suggest that while the interpretations of eucharistein discussed during the first three chapters of this study do not, it seems to me, lead us to understand Paul's employment of the term, there is another explanation available.

Eucharistein is not a very ancient form, but arose during the Hellenistic era.<sup>8</sup> Theodore Schermann details thoroughly its development,<sup>9</sup> and his work for our purposes needs no criticism. While noting the use of the form in Herodotus and Xenophon, he considers the term to have had its major development in the third century B.C.<sup>10</sup> Schermann

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7. Barr, op. cit., p. 107.

8. Summary citations of its development can be seen in J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament (London, 1914-29); and H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford, 1864-1961).

9. T. Schermann, op. cit.

10. Ibid., p. 375.

observes that the phrase eucharistein tina appears only twice in the ancient sources, both times referring to the veneration of a deity, and thus becomes almost a synonym for eulogein theon.<sup>11</sup> This he notes in conjunction with his observation that 'to thank' is seldom the meaning of eucharistein in its most ancient usage. It is not used in place of charin eidonai, 'to know grace', or 'to have experienced gracious behaviour (from someone)'. Rather it is used in place of charin didonai, 'to give grace', or 'to act graciously'. This is demonstrated by the use of the adjective eucharistos which was descriptive of the person or city or people acting graciously or in a way well-pleasing.<sup>12</sup> The verb-form, which originally had referred to the condition of being or acting in a well-pleasing manner, gradually came to refer, with the help of prepositions, to the condition of being well-pleased by someone's gracious act. To this, then, accrued the connotations of obligation and humble gratefulness.<sup>13</sup>

One of Schermann's most helpful demonstrations is that from his documentation it is clear that an ambiguity of meaning for eucharistein existed even as late as the Christian era. An inscription from as early as 287 B.C. contains eucharistein with the clear and simple

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11. Schermann, op. cit., p. 379.

12. Ibid., p. 377.

13. Ibid., p. 377.

meaning of "Dankbarkeit gegen die Gefallenen".<sup>14</sup> At the same time, a Christian amulet from the first century A.D. prompted Wilcken, whom Schermann quotes, to say,

"Die ursprüngliche Bedeutung des Dankens kann eucharistia kaum haben ... So möchte ich auch in (diesen) Texte eucharistia übersetzen: 'Ich bete!'"<sup>15</sup>

Schermann points out as well that one form of the term became associated with the offering of sacrifice, and he documents this from a writing of 30 B.C. The nature of the ambiguity of meaning, then, is that the term can refer to the performing of a good deed, the response of the recipients to a good deed, or the consequent action of one for whom a good deed has been performed.

In 1903, J. Armitage Robinson published his commentary on Ephesians, in which an excellent brief study of the term charis appears. Robinson lists five variations of meaning extant even in earlier Greek literature:

- (1) objectively, of that which causes favourable regard: grace of form or speech.
- (2) subjectively, of the favourable regard felt towards a person.
- (3) of a definite expression of such favourable regard.
- (4) of the reciprocal feeling produced by a favour: gratitude.
- (5) adverbially, for the sake of another person, to do something to please another.<sup>16</sup>

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14. Schermann, op. cit., p. 361.

15. Ibid., p. 380. For further examples see Bauer, op. cit., "Eucharistia", part 3, p. 328.

16. J. Armitage Robinson, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (London, 1903), p. 221.

It is both clear and interesting that charis and eucharistein move over the same range of meaning according to these two studies from the beginning of this century. The fundamental relationship of charis and eucharistein would also appear to be declared by the editors of Kittel's Wörterbuch, who apparently intend to discuss eucharistein under the subject of charis.<sup>17</sup> That in fact, however, a restriction in the use of eucharistein has occurred in the New Testament is clearly demonstrated by the work of Bauer.<sup>18</sup> In his article on eucharisteō, he suggests three early Christian usages, each appearing in the New Testament: (1) 'be thankful' or 'feel obligated to thank', which he says is "possible in some passages but not absolutely necessary in any", (2) 'give', 'render', or 'return' thanks, mainly to God, and especially before a meal, and (3) 'pray'. It is of interest that he considers the religious use of eucharistein to date from the second century B.C., his earliest reference being Polybius. It is clear that in the New Testament the term is being used quite distinctly from charis, and that even much of its own former ambiguity does not appear. William Barclay comments with regard to charis that as a result of the Damascus road experience, Paul acknowledged the "omnipotence of grace" and reshaped a word seldom used in Hellenistic Judaism to describe his experience.<sup>19</sup>

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17. A discussion of eucharistein not having taken place independently, charis is the reasonable article in which it might be included, but this article has not yet been published.

18. W. Bauer, op. cit.

19. W. Barclay, "The Key to Pauline Theology", p. 27.

We might add that it seems to us that Paul has done something similar with eucharistein.

In 1939, J.A. Montgomery published an article dealing with the relationship between charis, hesed, and hen,<sup>20</sup> and thus participated in a discussion which has occupied the thought of several scholars.<sup>21</sup> Montgomery argued that in the New Testament it is the connotation of hesed that is meant when charis appears, even though it can be argued that the more traditional usage of charis is very closely similar to some aspects of hen. The New Testament writers, he felt, meant far more than the arbitrary whim of an Oriental potentate, the connotation behind hen. It is not particularly relevant to this study to analyze and evaluate the various aspects of the discussion probed by Montgomery. For our purposes, Montgomery's most helpful contribution is that of pointing out that charis, as well as being a vital term in its own right, also existed as a translation term. It is, I suggest, a similar reshaping of usage and meaning, and a similar employment as a translation term, which distinguishes the occurrences of eucharistein in the New Testament.

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20. J.A. Montgomery, "Hebrew Hesed and Greek Charis", Harvard Theological Review, vol. 32 (1939), pp. 97ff.

21. E.g. T.W. Manson, "Grace in the New Testament", in W.T. Whitley, The Doctrine of Grace (London, 1932), pp. 33ff.; C.H. Dodd, The Bible and the Greeks (London, 1935), p. 61; N.H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (London, 1944), pp. 127ff.

The complexity of the nature of Pauline terminology is well expressed by C.H. Dodd. In commenting on dikaiousunē, dikaios, and dikaioun, for example, he says,

"The Pauline use of these terms must be understood in the light of Septuagintal usage and the underlying Hebrew. The apostle wrote Greek, and read the Septuagint, but he was also familiar with the Hebrew original. Thus while his language largely follows that of the Septuagint, the Greek words are for him always coloured by their Hebrew association." 22

Unless one keeps in mind some intricate interweaving of linguistic elements such as that suggested by Dodd, he is not reckoning adequately with the nature of Paul's terminology. It seems to me to be of utmost importance to remember that it is the burden of a translation term that it very often does not mean in its native habitat the same as the ideas from other cultures in which it has been employed. We have to deal with the fact that charis and eucharistein, whose original usage in Greek seems to have been closely inter-related, and whose broad range of meanings cover a large common area, stand as such separate terms in the New Testament. Paul's great emphasis upon charis, for example, is certainly not balanced by a similar emphasis on eucharistein. It seems to me that the explanation for this, to a significant degree, lies in their New Testament usage as translation terms for originally Hebrew motifs.

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22. C.H. Dodd, op. cit., p. 57.

One New Testament phrase interesting at this point is a formulation frequently used by Paul, charis tō theō ... (Thanks be to God, who ...). Despite the fact that the word involved is charis, which is considered to be so fundamental to Paul's understanding of the nature of God, still translations and commentaries have invariably employed the idea of 'thanks' rather than 'grace'.<sup>23</sup> We have already noted that charis could mean 'thanks' (charin echein, as 'to be grateful', occurs in the New Testament itself). The common translation is certainly reasonable.

Still it is clear from the studies of charis previously mentioned that this is not the only translation possible. In the light of the fact that Paul did so significantly employ the term to mean something different from 'thanks' when used with respect to God, it seems reasonable to examine the translation of this phrase charis tō theō. It would be more in harmony with Paul's use of the word charis, I think, to see these exclamations also as ascriptions that "Grace be ascribed to God!" Following the exclamation, in each case, is a specific illustration of the grace of God. When we think in these terms, one of the immediate similarities which strikes us is the Hebrew, "Blessed

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23. E.g. Wetter, Charis (Leipzig, 1913), pp. 206 ff., Moulton and Milligan, *op. cit.*, "Charis", p. 684, E.D. Burton, The Epistle to the Galatians (Edinburgh, 1921), pp. 423ff., and Bauer in Greek-English Lexicon, trans. Arndt and Gingrich, p. 836f.

art Thou, O Lord, who ..."<sup>24</sup> In each of the four passages where charis tō theō occurs, it is joined to a relative clause. In the Romans passage, the relative clause precedes the exclamation as a question, but precisely the same elements of form are presented. We must, then, raise the possibility that we are dealing here not only with the element of gratefulness, although this is certainly the most natural use of the terminology, but also with an ascription of praise, involving a play on a favourite term of Paul, charis, and a Hebrew idea as well as a Greek structure. In this phrase, then, both the common area of meaning of eucharistein and charis, and their polarized New Testament usage become apparent.

That charis and eucharistein had somewhat polarized by New Testament times, and specifically in their New Testament usage, is demonstrated in Vincent Taylor's discussion of charidzomai, in which he makes the following statement:

"The thought (of charidzomai) is that of the setting aside through love of barriers in the way of fellowship. What is suggested by charidzomai in the passages under consideration is the forgiving spirit which is ready to remove obstacles. To the meaning conveyed by aphitemi there is added the suggestion that, in setting aside wrongs, charis, or grace, must be in the mind of those who are wronged. There is no case in which charidzomai is used to suggest the full restoration of broken relationships; action leading to

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24. J.M. Robinson, "Die Hodajot-Formel im Gebet und Hymnus des Frühchristentums", Apophoreta, Beiheft 30 to ZNW (Berlin, 1964), p. 230, discusses this at some length, suggesting that both the charis tō theō and the thanksgiving periods stem from the Berakah of Judaism.

this end, and necessary to it, is the meaning implied."<sup>25</sup>

Here we find a 'benevolent action' such as is not implied by any of the occurrences of eucharistein. We find, furthermore, that charidzomai is used almost exclusively of the response of men toward God. At this point, we only wish to observe that this objective quality, referred to by J.A. Robinson, which might have seen eucharistein performing the role of charidzomai, did not survive in the New Testament usage of eucharistein. In part this undoubtedly is due to modifications of usage in the Hellenistic world generally. In part, it seems to me, the polarization of usage of charis and eucharistein is due to their employment as translation terms in Greek for Hebrew ideas.

The meaning to be assigned to the appearance of eucharistein in the New Testament is even further removed from easy solution when one observes the use of the term in the Septuagint, and in Judaism generally. It has been noted that eucharistein occurs but seldom in the Septuagint, and then only in the latest books.<sup>26</sup> This has been attributed to the conservatism of those who accomplished the translation who, refraining from the new and increasingly popular term, preferred instead exhomo-logeisthai. There are places in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms, in which eucharistein might well have been used.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Vincent Taylor, Forgiveness and Reconciliation (London, 1948), p. 6.

26. Schermann, op. cit., p. 383.

27. J.M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 198.

Westermann, however, considers this absence of eucharistein to be the result of judicious selection.<sup>28</sup> He would concur with C.H. Dodd who, speaking of a different example but the same issue, commented,

"In many of the passages cited the Septuagint has the character of a sort of ... Targum on the Hebrew text, rather than a strict translation."<sup>29</sup>

What seems obvious, and yet requires stating, is that for the purposes of those preparing the Septuagint, and at the particular time in which it was being prepared, exhomologeisthai was a better vehicle for the sense of the Hebrew than was eucharistein. Schermann finally comes to the point where he declares that for him, and we support this in part, eucharistein, eulogein, and exhomologeisthai are fundamentally synonymous. It would be more accurate, it seems to me, to admit that the terms did have some distinction of character, although they share a significant common character as well. It seems to me that one can speak neither of originally clear distinctions becoming blurred over the course of centuries, nor of words originally more or less synonymous hardening into distinct meanings. The issue is not simply chronological development. Rather, it is necessary to determine from particular occurrences of these words whether their relationship with each other is synonymous or distinct.

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28. Westermann, op. cit., p.25.

29. C.H. Dodd, op. cit., p. 23.

One cannot discuss the use of eucharistein without commenting further on the importance placed upon the term by Philo. Although documentation for our position will emerge more fully as this study progresses, it is already possible to point out that attempts to compare the Philonic and Pauline usages of the term seem to us to be on an extremely unsteady foundation. Schemmann points out that an ambiguity of meaning still resides even in the Philonic use of the term, for although he uses it with reference to one's gratefulness to God, he also uses it as a technical term of the Jewish sacrificial system, the 'Sacrifice of Thanksgiving'.<sup>30</sup> J.M. Robinson notes that with reference to thanksgiving or gratitude toward God, with one exception (Genesis 29.35), Philo replaces exhomologeisthai with eucharistein.<sup>31</sup> Out of this apologetic context, although evidence of its original ambiguity can be found, the term was employed in a prominent position which can be seen continuing in post-Apostolic Christianity. In light of this, its minor role in the New Testament stands out in even sharper relief.

Perhaps the most significant work in the sphere of the use of eucharistein as a translation term is the work, already cited, of James M. Robinson. In his study, he discusses the hodayot formula of

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30. Schemmann, op. cit., p. 384.

31. J.M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 198.

Judaism, and submits that it was this formula which passed into Christianity as the eucharisteō to theō of the Pauline thanksgivings and early Christian prayers.<sup>32</sup> Robinson opens his work with a presentation of the so-called Danklieder found at Qumran. Sukenik, who so named them because they opened with the phrase "I thank Thee, God ...", has undergone criticism from such men as Claus Westermann and Fritzlothar Mand.<sup>33</sup> Robinson does not discuss this issue, but as we have noted, it is of significance to our study. Matthew Black points out, and his point is excellently taken, that these so-called 'Hymns of Thanksgiving' "... are for the most part hymns of deliverance, praising the divine mercy and goodness for the salvation of Israel."<sup>34</sup> What is also of interest is that while this is so, Mansoor cites an observation of Millar Burrows that not all the contents correspond with the title.<sup>35</sup> In other words, not all of the material within the hymns justifies the title being one of thanksgiving, in the sense of gratefulness. Professor Black and others are well justified when they move the

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32. A change of form has occurred between the earliest eucharistein noted by Schermann (see above, p. 75) and the Pauline use of the dative. Paul uses the form of his time, as Schubert notes, although retaining, we feel, one objective sense related to the earliest use of the term.

33. F. Mand, "Die Eigenständigkeit der Danklieder des Psalters als Bekenntnislieder", ZAW, vols. 69-70 (1958), p. 185. Comment has already been made on the work of Westermann.

34. M. Black, The Scrolls and Christian Origins (London, 1961), p. 112. Cf. Dellling, op. cit., p. 124.

35. M. Mansoor, The Thanksgiving Hymns (Leyden, 1961), p. 5.

interpretation of these hymns into the realm of praise, and speak with reference to the salvation of Israel. Strikingly parallel to these observations about the Qumran Danklieder is the comment previously noted about the Pauline thanksgiving periods, that not always does the content of the period, or the situation in which it was written, seem accurately reflected by the motif of gratefulness.<sup>36</sup>

Robinson's contribution rests upon the invaluable corrective supplied by men such as C.H. Dodd with respect to the assumptions underlying the work of Schubert and Boobyer. Dodd noted as early as 1935 that

"It has been customary of late to emphasize the influence of Gentile thought upon Judaism, and that influence was unquestionably enormous. But it would not be safe to assume that where Hellenistic Judaism shows parallels with non-Jewish thought, the debt lies always and wholly upon one side. The Poimandres shows that it was possible for a thinker who remained quite outside Judaism to become steeped in ideas which go back by direct lineage to the Pentateuch and the Hebrew prophets."<sup>37</sup>

This citation could have been introduced at several points in our study. It is introduced here simply to demonstrate that Judaism was a contributing and creative factor in the Hellenistic world. Proceeding from this assumption, Robinson then goes on to illustrate from Philo and the Apocryphal Acts of Thomas, for example, that both exhomologeisthai and eucharistein served as what he terms Übersetzungsvariante for

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~~36. See above, p. 31.~~

36. See above, p. 31.

37. C.H. Dodd, op. cit., p. 247.

the Hebrew yada. He places squarely within a Jewish context the use of eucharistein in a wide and significant number of New Testament passages.

In commenting upon the work of Schubert, Robinson makes the form-critical observation that

"Heute aber könnte man über Schuberts wohl gelungene Beweisführung für den brieflichen und hellenistischen Charakter der paulinischen Danksagung hinausgehen und eine formale Verbindung der paulinischen Danksagung, besonders des Typs Ib, mit jüdischen - besonders heterodox-jüdischen - und frühchristlichen Gebeten finden." 38

Not only in the thanksgiving periods however, but in mealtime prayers, hymns, and early Christian prayers which seem to be directly influenced by older Jewish prayers, Robinson observes the use of eucharistein to replace the hoda'ot formula.<sup>39</sup>

Schubert and Boobyer represent the attempt to understand the appearance in the New Testament of terms popular in the Hellenistic world from the viewpoint of the widespread syncretism of New Testament times. It is basically from this position that they approach their examinations of eucharistein. To their assumptions and approach, Dodd and J.M. Robinson supply the necessary corrective, it seems to me, in suggesting that the cross-fertilization of ideas occurred in several

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38. Robinson, op. cit., p. 202.

39. Cf. Dellings, op. cit., pp. 61ff.

directions. Eucharistein did enter the vocabulary of the early Church from the pagan world in which the Church was born, and in an attempt by the Church to speak in terminology familiar to the thought-patterns of the day. It seems also necessary to say, however, that the ideas surrounding the occurrence of the term are distinctly different from the ideas surrounding the occurrence of the term in the pagan and secular literature of the time, and this distinction is explained, I feel, by the fact that eucharistein is a translation term: an attempt to express in currently popular Hellenistic Greek terminology a Jewish idiom. An examination of the relationship between the New Testament usages of eulogein and eucharistein demonstrates this quite directly, and to this discussion we shall proceed.

CHAPTER FIVE

EUCARISTEIN AS INTERPRETED BY EULOGEIN

Ten of the occurrences of eucharistein in the New Testament are found in passages dealing with prayers at mealtime. These are found in two basic categories: the feeding stories of the Galilean ministry, and the accounts of the Lord's Supper. The problem of the relationship between these two categories has been discussed in various places. It can be argued that the feeding episodes are written in retrospect from the importance to the life of the early Church of the Lord's Supper. On the other hand, Sherman Johnson suggests that the tremendous significance of the Lord's Supper for those who participated in it was, in part, due to the fact that they had shared a series of religious meals with Jesus already.<sup>1</sup> These feeding stories are based, perhaps, on some such earlier religious meal. Another interesting theory, that the feeding stories entered the tradition because they demonstrated the fulfilment of the Elijah-Elisha episodes,<sup>2</sup>

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1. Sherman Johnson, exegesis, "Matthew", Interpreter's Bible (New York, 1951), p. 429. A more complete presentation of this complex discussion can be found in Delling, op. cit., p. 137;
  2. I Kings 17.9-16; II Kings 4.42-44.

and are representative of a miraculous plenty story still extant in Syria, is also given expression by Johnson.<sup>3</sup> We will discuss in due course the variety of origins proposed for the Lord's Supper. Despite all this, it is clear that the gospel tradition preserved, however ambiguously, the precise meanings now appear, a striking similarity of narrative form for both categories of episode. This basic agreement of form is evident even in the Lord's Supper passage in I Corinthians, where Paul uses eucharistein in the same manner as it is used in the gospel accounts.<sup>4</sup>

We can say that there are no textual difficulties with the verb eucharistein in any of these passages. In saying this, however, we must note that in John 6.11, some manuscripts vary the relationship of eucharistein and didonai. This does not, however, alter our basic concern here, that eucharistein occurs in the New Testament in conjunction with mealtime prayer.

Of more serious import might have been the variation in I Corinthians 10.16, where the variant reads,

"the cup of thanksgiving, which we bless ..."

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3. Johnson, op. cit., p. 429.

4. J. Jeremias (The Eucharistic Words of Jesus (London, 1966), p. 104) sees the usage of eucharistein without an object, here, as exceptional in Paul, and considers Paul to be handing on the tradition just as he received it.

rather than,

"the cup of blessing, which we bless ..."

Very few manuscripts actually contain this variant, and they are not major manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the reference of the Jews was to a 'Cup of Blessing', so the text adopted by Nestle seems most correct, both on manuscript and historic bases.

The use of eucharistein appears in two formulae. Paul, in the Corinthian passage, says that Jesus

"... took bread, and having given thanks,  
he broke it and said ..."

This is precisely the structure of Matthew 15.26, 26.27; Mark 8.6, 8.7, 14.23; and Luke 22.17, 22.19; and John 6.11. The second structure, which is found in Matthew 14.19; Mark 6.41; and Luke 9.16, includes the posture of eyes heavenward. In neither formula is any great emphasis placed upon the appearance of eucharistein. It seems to be given simply as a detail of form. Jeremias, however, notes that this formula is a technical term of the rabbinial literature for the grace at table preceding a meal.<sup>6</sup> Jeremias' powerful documentation is of no small significance in our attempt to understand the use of eucharistein in the New Testament.

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5. Nestle notes here the ninth-century manuscript Boernerianus, and the Peshito, fifth-century, which here differs from the evidence of the Byzantine text generally.

6. J. Jeremias, op. cit., p. 109.

As early as the Corinthian passage, certainly, the mutual breaking of bread in the Christian congregations had come to have great significance.<sup>7</sup> I Timothy goes even beyond this to declare that nothing is unclean if it is "received with thanksgiving", a note that is similarly expressed in I Corinthians 10.30. That these meals in common be celebrated properly lies behind both the passage in I Timothy and that in I Corinthians. The question in I Timothy is also whether thanksgiving is specifically a technical term, and a liturgically necessary form, or whether it simply refers to a general acknowledgment that all is from God, therefore abrogating the various dietary laws of the first-century world.<sup>8</sup> We have already discussed various theories of the importance of thanksgiving in the Hellenistic world. While these theories might have been brought to bear on these passages, it seems to me that the passages are more adequately understood in the light of Jewish custom, particularly when all the occurrences of eucharistein are considered.

Although it took less than a generation for the Christian community to attach great significance to the breaking of bread, and its origins are clearly seen as being in the life of Jesus Himself, there

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7. Jeremias (op. cit., p. 104) considers this passage to be even pre-Pauline. Cf. above, p. 90.

8. Cf. Romans 14.6.

is no evidence in the Gospels, or even in the Epistles, that the development of these common meals into the Sacrament of the Eucharist arose as a development of a motif from the earliest strata of the tradition: the giving of thanks. It seems fairly clear that Jesus simply gave the Jewish 'grace before meals', and that as He had done, so did the earliest congregations. H.B. Swete would appear to have understood this development well, when he observed that "... the benediction which in the Jewish rite had been incidental and secondary became central in the Christian service."<sup>9</sup> Slowly the grace at table became magnified, and, we can add, for good and justifiable reasons, into the great Eucharistic prayer of the early Church, so that even before the time of Ignatius, the name describing the great prayer had become transferred to the service as a whole. The point here, however, is simply that in examining the New Testament motif of thanksgiving, it is necessary to remember that the later magnification does not permit its being read back into the intentions of either Paul or Jesus. The New Testament records a much more simple and commonplace occurrence, namely grace before a meal.

At the same time, counteracting this minimizing tendency, it is necessary to state that of all the names that might have been chosen

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9. H.B. Swete, "The Eucharistic Belief in the Second and Third Centuries", Journal of Theological Studies, vol. III (1902), p. 163.

for this high point of worship, it was Eucharist that arose. Swete does note that Eulogia was also used,<sup>10</sup> but clearly Eucharist came to dominate. It is possible here to be in the danger already discussed with regard to the Pauline thanksgiving periods, that emphasis upon the Greek word can obscure the word's usage as a translation term, a usage that must be constantly kept in mind. An interesting bit of evidence as to the meaning of eucharistein occurs within the New Testament. The verb eucharistein is actually only one of two verbs, used interchangeably it would appear, to describe this prayer before a meal. Although eucharistein appears ten times in this capacity, appearing seven times in the same capacity is eulogein.

In the feeding stories, Mark 8.7 relates that Jesus took a few small fish, and having blessed them, he commanded the disciples to set them before the people. In Mark's account of the Lord's Supper, Jesus took the bread, and having blessed it, he broke and gave and said ... The same structure occurs in Matthew 26.26, Mark 14.22 and Luke 24.30. A variation of this is the mentioning of the posture in Matthew 14.19, Mark 6.41 and Luke 9.16. In these places we read that Jesus took the food, looked to heaven, and blessed it. Only John fails to use eulogein at any point in these mealtime prayer situations.

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10. Swete, op. cit., p. 163.

Interestingly enough, Luke, who inverts the otherwise agreed-upon order of the receiving of the elements: bread before the cup, and uses eucharistein in each case, uses eulogein elsewhere. From the fact of the two words, it is necessary to enquire into the possibility that they mutually define each other, or that one word is Jewish-Christian and the other pagan-Christian, thus illustrating an often-noted division of the early Christian Church.

Jeremias sees eucharistein as a Graecizing.<sup>11</sup> This is certainly not unreasonable. Eulogein would be the most direct translation from the Hebrew; eucharistein is on the one hand unnecessary, and on the other an admittedly very popular first-century world term. Jeremias suggests that the absolute use of eulogein meaning 'to say grace' was extremely strange to a non-Palestinian. He goes on to note that in Luke 9.16, the attaching of an object to eulogēsen has transformed the mealtime grace into a consecration, and observes that

"This linguistic misunderstanding of the Semitic eulogein in Greek circles has had far-reaching consequences in the history of the Lord's Supper."<sup>12</sup>

In the light of other recent studies, however, it does not seem wise simply to label eulogein as a Jewish-Christian term, and eucharistein

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11. Jeremias, op. cit., p. 113.

12. Ibid., p. 175.

as a pagan-Christian term.<sup>13</sup> One can certainly speak of the Graecizing of terminology. One is not, however, presented with evidence here that eucharistein or eulogein meant anything other than translation terms for the Hebrew barak. One appears to be confronted simply by interchangeability of the Greek terms. W.L. Knox presents an extremely complex pattern of development from eulogein, which he feels to be original to these passages, to eucharistein.<sup>14</sup> The stories, passing through circles of the early Church which interpreted the meaning of the Lord's Supper and its liturgical successors as the 'Sacrifice of Thanksgiving' or Eucharist, picked up the verb, thus making the stories types of the Eucharist. This corrective action, or eucharisticizing tendency, cannot be developed too far, however. The New Testament occurrences stand in sharp contrast with Philo's expanded and explicit use of the term, and with the use in the later appearing 'gnostic' theologies of thanksgiving, already discussed. Here, eucharistein seems to describe a very simple commonplace act in the most common verb of the day.

It is also important to note that while Acts 2.42 refers to the early Christians

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13. N.B.: J. Munck, Paul and the Salvation of Mankind (London, 1959), and W. Schmithals, Paul and James (London, 1965).

14. W.L. Knox, Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity (London, 1944), p. 4.

"... devot(ing) themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers",

there is no necessary connection between the noting of the 'breaking of bread' and the 'prayers'.<sup>15</sup> We do have meals mentioned in the New Testament without any mention of a mealtime prayer, which may or may not be taken for granted. Of particular interest are the post-Resurrection meals recorded in Luke 24.41 and John 21.13, and the meal in which Paul participated in Acts 20.11. Jesus' meals with various individuals or groups are mentioned in the Gospels, but as these are part of the narrative, it could be argued that the notation of the offering of a mealtime prayer was not required. All this, however, actually serves to throw into more prominent position the careful noting of the observance of mealtime prayer, and the interchangeability of eucharistein and eulogein.

The two verbs appear in a less than regular pattern. In the feeding stories, that form which includes the posture of eyes heavenward

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15. Jeremias (op. cit., p. 118) suggests that the verb proskarterein is a technical term for 'to attend worship regularly', and that the four following phrases describe the sequence of early Christian worship. In part this argument depends upon the assumption that the same holy kiss urged in Romans 16.16, I Corinthians 16.20 and I Peter 5.14 both terminated the reading of the Apostolic letter and introduced the table fellowship. This is not a necessary conclusion from the evidence Jeremias presents. O. Cullmann (Early Christian Worship (London, 1953), p. 12) discusses the elements in this verse as components of early worship, rather than as an outline of a worship service.

also includes eulogein (Matthew 14.19; Mark 6.41; Luke 9.16). The other form uses eucharistein and does not include the posture (Matthew 15.36; Mark 8.6; John 6.11). Matthew and Mark use eulogein with the bread and eucharistein with the cup, in their accounts of the Lord's Supper. Luke uses eucharistein with each of the elements, and this agrees with Paul, at least in the use of eucharistein with the bread. Paul, however, makes no similar comment on the prayer, simply saying,

"In like manner, after he had supped,  
he took the cup and said ..."

Luke uses eulogein with the bread in the Emmaus episode. Mark and Matthew are strictly in accord with each other. Luke modifies this, by relating only the one feeding story, reversing the order of the distribution of the food in the Lord's Supper, and using only eucharistein twice, in the Lord's Supper account, although using eulogein in the feeding story and the Emmaus episode. John uses eucharistein in each of the feeding stories. Paul uses eucharistein with the bread, but refers to the 'Cup of Blessing'.<sup>16</sup>

It has been suggested that Luke, John and Paul, in preferring eucharistein to eulogein, were favouring the more popular Hellenistic term. It has been suggested that this is a Graecizing of a Semitic

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16. Jeremias (op. cit.) proposes three strands to the tradition with regard to the Lord's Supper: Mark (Matthew); Luke (Paul); and John.

idiom. Most commentators see the variation in some way to reflect a Hellenizing tendency. In view of the inconsistency of the variations, together with the widespread distribution of this variation, it would appear that the choosing of the most popular term of the time, rather than the more technically correct but easily misunderstood term, would indeed be the case. This, it seems to me, is a better description of the situation than to speak of a theological modification or definition. Both verbs in Greek are used to refer to the same Jewish mealtime prayer:

"Blessed are Thou, O Lord our God, king of the world, who hast brought forth bread from the earth" (created the fruit of the vine).

B.F. Wescott elaborates upon eulogein and eucharistein as being two aspects of a single action.<sup>17</sup> One could bless God for something, or give thanks for the object which exemplifies His goodness. This may be true enough. In the New Testament, however, the evidence suggests the manner of noting the mealtime prayer is Jewish, that eucharistein simply replaces eulogein to express in the most common Greek idiom the simple Jewish act, and that the meaning of eucharistein lies within the act of blessing, rather than within any etymology of eucharistein.

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17. B.F. Wescott, The Gospel According to St. John (London, 1908), vol. I, p. 214. Cf. Delling, op. cit., p. 124.

One of the thoroughly examined areas of the New Testament is that of the accounts of the Lord's Supper. It is clear from Paul's discussion that already the nature, celebration, and meaning of this experience of the Christian community were being examined and discussed, and that varieties of practice required some authoritative word. The supreme evaluation placed upon this high point of Christian liturgy has, sadly enough, produced harsh bitterness as well as profound communion amongst the Christian community of the centuries.

It would appear that, since the traditional name of this high point is the Eucharist, it would be important, in a study of the New Testament motif of thanksgiving, to discuss at length the meaning of the Sacrament. In the New Testament, however, no such name is given. The Synoptics refer to the meal as a Passover meal. John, in the famous discrepancy which we will mention again, refers to it as a meal before the Passover, thus distinguishing it, and yet placing it in conjunction with the ancient Jewish meal. Floyd Filson, who believes that the "evidence is not decisive" as to whether the Synoptic or Johannine presentation is historically accurate, acknowledges that

"The meal certainly occurred at Passover time, and in the atmosphere of Passover thought, and the Church from the beginning interpreted the event with Passover imagery."<sup>18</sup>

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18. Floyd Filson, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London, 1960), p. 273.

Paul refers to the meal as the Lord's Supper. He refers, as well, to the 'Cup of Blessing', which could link the meal with either the proposed Kiddush of Judaism, or a Passover meal. No matter how early we may wish to find the title Eucharist being given to the feast, it is clearly not possible to document this thoroughly from the New Testament. Whether or not it signifies an authentic development from the New Testament is not really of fundamental concern here.

The reason for the discussion of this supreme expression of Christian worship is not its name, but rather the fact that in the accounts of its origins, as they occur in the New Testament, it is carefully and regularly noted that Jesus offered thanks to God. We have already commented upon the idea of grace before an ordinary meal. At this point, it seems important to ask whether it is possible to determine more precisely the meaning represented by eucharistein by noting its presence in these special religious meals of Judaism. It is possible that the careful notation of Jesus' giving thanks is due to the Church's reading back into its historical origins a motif important to its later life. This pattern does affect some passages in the New Testament. It is, however, of no small significance that as recorded, the accounts of Jesus' observance of His supper fit closely the pattern of two frequently discussed ritual meals of Judaism, thus offering a closer understanding of what Jesus was doing in each act during His supper, and what the Apostolic Church had in its mind as it

repeated the event. The closely parallel forms of the narration of the Lord's Supper powerfully argue that the most ancient strata of tradition contained this narrative.

The possibility that its celebration of a cultic meal was the result of the syncretistic efforts of the early Church with regard to the mystery religions has been studied from time to time. It has never been the supreme interpretation of an age, however, and even in 1926, Rawlinson could point out that the Lord's Supper just does not contain the mystery religion outlook.<sup>19</sup> W.L. Knox, examining the Hellenistic elements in primitive Christianity, although seeing the use of the verb eucharistein as a Hellenistic element, does not ascribe this source to the meal itself. He is discussing terminology.<sup>20</sup> It is important to observe here that while the popularity and centrality of the early Christian Eucharist may be related to the cultic meals popular and central in various religions at that time, what we are maintaining is that the Christian meal is not just another of these, and that its origin is not in the Greek but in the Hebrew world.<sup>21</sup>

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19. Rawlinson, The New Testament Doctrine of Christ (London, 1926), p. 281. Cf. Delling, op. cit., p. 142.

20. Knox, op. cit., p. 3.

21. A comment regarding the reciprocal and multi-faceted nature of first-century syncretism can be noted in this study, pp. 86-7 above.

Quite apart from any attempt to dissociate the Eucharist from Hellenistic cultic meals stands the simple observation that the description in the Synoptics and Paul (there is no similar description in John) is quite adequately explained from Jewish sources. In 1925, W.O.E. Oesterley published his interesting study of the elements of Jewish background in the Christian liturgy.<sup>22</sup> Based on the absence of detailed worship instructions in the New Testament, together with the data we do know about early Christian worship in the later Apostolic and post-Apostolic times, which does possess characteristic marks of Jewish synagogue worship, Oesterley's position was that the Christian community followed the synagogue forms, and that its worship was a direct descendant of that of Judaism. The Eucharist, he suggests, is the descendant of a Jewish ritual meal he calls the Kiddush.

Dom Gregory Dix, in his magnum opus,<sup>23</sup> discusses this development at even greater length, seeing the Eucharist as being "of directly Christian development",<sup>24</sup> but with its background the Passover, the Kiddush, and the common devotional meals of Jewish religious brotherhoods. These brotherhood meals had the interesting characteristic

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22. W.O.E. Oesterley, The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy (Oxford, 1925). Cf. C.W. Dugmore, The Influence of the Synagogue upon the Divine Office (London, 1964).

23. Dom Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (Westminster, 1946).

24. Ibid., p. 36.

that

"No kind of food was partaken of without a preliminary 'giving of thanks' - a blessing of God for it, said over that particular kind of food when it was first brought to the table." 25

Of the special prayer that followed such a meal, Dix notes,

"I propose in the future to call it 'the thanksgiving' for purposes of distinction, but the same word beraka = blessing was used for it ... It was of strict obligation on all male Jews after any food ... but on any important family occasion, and at a chaburah supper in particular, a little solemnity was added by its being recited over a special cup of wine ... which was known quite naturally as the 'cup of blessing'" 26

He then goes on to note the absence of the title Eucharist from the New Testament, saying,

"The Last Supper is not a eucharist, for the eucharist is intended to be the response of the redeemed to the redeemer ... The primitive church and not its Lord first celebrated the eucharist, in the necessity of the case. But the primitive church did not create the eucharist. It would be less untrue to say that the eucharist created that primitive church." 27

This understanding of the development of the Lord's Supper into the Eucharist of the early Church permits Dix a more theological explanation of the presence of eucharistein and eulogein in the accounts, and he expands considerably the work of Oesterley. The variation between eucharistein and eulogein occurs because of various stresses in thinking. Where the stress is on the item given, eucharistein occurs; where the

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25. Dix, op. cit., p. 36.

26. Ibid., p. 52.

27. Ibid., p. 77.

stress is on God who gives, eulogein is the verb. He notes the balance of Mark 14.22,23, and Paul's usage of eucharistein balanced by the pointed use of eulogein in I Corinthians 10.16.<sup>28</sup>

We have presented the discussion of Oesterley and Dix without reference to one of the key issues in the history of the Eucharist. That issue is the discrepancy between the Synoptics and John as to whether the Lord's Supper, as celebrated by Jesus Himself, was actually a Passover meal or not. The traditional understanding has been the former, and one of the most recent, and certainly trenchant and thorough, presentations of this position and against the Kiddush theory is that made by Joachim Jeremias.<sup>29</sup> The result of Jeremias' work is largely to eliminate the proposed Kiddush meal as the origin of the Lord's Supper.<sup>30</sup> Also seriously challenged is the description of the Lord's Supper based on the image of the disciples and Jesus constituting a Haburah,<sup>31</sup> and the attempt to see in the meal an intimate relationship between the Supper and Essene community meals.<sup>32</sup> Jeremias then assembles some fourteen points which, he feels, permit the definite conclusion that the Lord's Supper was a Passover meal. He comments

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28. Dix, op. cit., p. 78.

29. Jeremias, op. cit.

30. Ibid., p. 26.

31. Ibid., p. 29.

32. Ibid., p. 31.

that the fact that these points are

"... for the most part of no material significance, and are apparently only mentioned in passing without serving any particular purpose, adds very considerably to their value as evidence."<sup>33</sup>

Jeremias' evidence that the Gospels are discussing a Passover meal can be described as almost incontrovertible. What still remains unresolved, however, is the discrepancy between the Synoptics and John which precipitated the entire discussion.

Intriguing is a proposal developed by A. Jaubert that perhaps the discrepancy between John and the Synoptics arises out of a variety of liturgical calendars in use. It is possible that an Essene calendar would have caused the Passover to be celebrated by that group on a day different from the celebration day of the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup> This would make possible the historical accuracy of both the Synoptic and Johannine accounts; it would also suggest a most interesting relationship between Jesus and the Essene community. Jeremias does seriously criticize any view of the Lord's Supper as an Essene meal, but on the one hand Jesus' acceptance of an Essene calendar is not discussed by him, and on the other hand he is forced to admit that attempts to determine the actual day of celebration from astronomical calculations

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33. Jeremias, op. cit., p. 41.

34. A discussion of A. Jaubert, "La Date de la dernière Cène", is presented in M. Black, The Scrolls and Christian Origins, pp. 199ff., and Jeremias, op. cit., pp. 24ff.

are inconclusive.<sup>35</sup> While it is possible to determine fairly accurately a narrow margin in which the celebration might have taken place, the actual calendar depended on the sighting of lunar new light at the beginning of the month of Nisan, and this actual sighting depends not only on the calculations of astronomy, which can be made, but also on conditions of visibility which are completely beyond the realm of research.<sup>36</sup> That two groups could have sighted the new light on two separate days therefore is a possibility. We introduce this material here simply to note that the discussion over the discrepancy is by no means closed, and as time goes on new evidence will be required to solve the riddle.

We have already referred to the position of 'Graecizing' of eulogein which Jeremias agrees is the explanation for the presence of eucharistein in the New Testament accounts of the Lord's Supper. This he considers to be early, even pre-Pauline. Only Mark, and Matthew following him, uses the earlier eulogein. Luke follows Paul's use of eucharistein, abandoning eulogein altogether in his accounts of the Supper. The original eulogein is clearly a Semitism, and Mark 8.7 and Luke 9.16 suggest how strange the absolute use of eulogein was to non-Palestinian ears. Paul he declares to be involved in a remoulding

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35. Jeremias, op. cit., p. 41.

36. Ibid., p. 41.

of the tradition for the sake of the Greek-speaking Churches.<sup>37</sup> At this point, then, it is important to recall Dix's lengthy discussion of the identity of the meaning shared by these two terms, and the clear understanding shared amongst these scholars that the translation process quite adequately explains the presence of both eulogein and eucharistein in the accounts of the Lord's Supper.

What is of significance for this study is that the presentation of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament is clearly precipitated from Jewish ritual meals, and the overwhelming evidence suggests the Passover itself. We do not agree with T.S. Garrett that the controversy over the Synoptic-Johannine discrepancy is less than crucial.<sup>38</sup> For our purposes, however, what is significant is that regardless of the accounting for the discrepancy, we are speaking about the matter of expressing in Greek idiom that which had been understood within a Hebrew frame of reference. While it is possible, then, to speak of the 'Graecizing' tendency, which resulted in the title Eucharist, rather than Eulogia, it is not possible to speak of a Greek meaning for eucharistein replacing in the New Testament the Jewish meaning for eulogein. Clearly both terms are translation terms for the Hebrew barak. It is this Hebrew word which defines the Greek term eucharistein

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37. Ibid., p. 186.

38. T.S. Garrett, Christian Worship (London, 1963), p. 35.

in the feeding narratives and the accounts of the Lord's Supper, wherever mealtime prayer is the issue.

The underlying identity of eucharistein and eulogein as virtually interchangeable translations of the Hebrew barak, particularly with reference to the mealtime prayer, and possibly as the epistolary opening as well, as seen in an earlier section of this study, demands further comment.

In his Comparative Liturgy, Baumstark maintained that the Eucharistic prayers of the Didache are simply a Christianizing of the Jewish blessing of the bread and wine and the thanksgiving which followed a meal.<sup>39</sup> He felt that when examining the prayers of the early Church it was necessary to separate three elements: the Jewish ancestry, the Hellenistic milieu, and Christianity's own form.<sup>40</sup> It is significant, he suggests, that the Jewish euchological schema is the Berakah (Blessed be Thou ...) followed by a relative or participial assertion praising God in relation to some definite circumstance.<sup>41</sup> The other opening phrase of Jewish prayers is "We give thanks ...", which is met in later Christian prayers as well.<sup>42</sup>

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39. A. Baumstark, Comparative Liturgy (London, 1958), p. 46.

40. Ibid., p. 63.

41. See above, pp. 80-81.

42. Baumstark, op. cit., p. 63.

This fundamentally Jewish approach to the use of eucharistein in prayer is supported by C.F.D. Moule, who sees the thanking of God for specific mercies as a special expression of the Baruch adonai ..., and who considers the Benedictus, Magnificat, and Nunc Dimittis as being Christian psalms on Hebrew foundations.<sup>43</sup> Elbogen observes that it is of significance that rather than asking that the food be blessed, the Jewish grace is

"An expression of thanks to God who has created the various substances that serve for food",<sup>44</sup>

and goes on to say that,

"... according to the Jewish view, every revelation of divine grace, every demonstration of the miraculous power of God, is the occasion for an expression of praise."<sup>45</sup>

Moulton and Milligan carefully point out that the use of eulogēin was by no means confined to the Jews, and cite Dittenberger's collection of inscriptions as documentation.<sup>46</sup> It was a Greek word, used in secular speech, but as Beyer points out, there are few words whose usage in the New Testament is so thoroughly Hebrew, and which must be

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43. C.F.D. Moule, The Birth of the New Testament (London, 1962), p. 19.

44. I. Elbogen, "Benedictions", Universal Jewish Encyclopedia (New York, 1940), vol. II, p. 168.

45. Ibid., p. 168.

46. Moulton and Milligan, op. cit., p. 263.

seen so clearly from the context of the Old Testament.<sup>47</sup> That this word, which is a translation term for barak, is used interchangeably and, we must say, synonymously with eucharistein is, of course, fundamentally important for our understanding of the motif of thanksgiving in the New Testament.

In addition to the evidence of the mealtime prayers mentioned in the feeding stories, and the relationship with the Passover ritual, the New Testament offers still further evidence that the use of eucharistein in it must be seen as a translation term from Judaism. It is interesting that although some commentators have attempted to view eucharistein as a major Scriptural motif, there are strikingly few occurrences of the term associated with Jesus Himself. One passage where eucharistein is used as a word of Jesus, however, occurs in the relating of the raising of Lazarus (John 11.41). The account is straightforward enough as far as the occurrence of eucharistein is concerned. No special attention is drawn to it. Wescott makes the interesting comment that rather than this being seen as a prayer, it must be seen rather as "a proclamation of fellowship with God".<sup>48</sup> This, or something similar to it, seems called for if one is to account for the strange tone of verse 42, which

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47. W. Beyer, "eulogeo, eulogia", TWNT (Stuttgart, 1935), vol. II, pp. 751ff.

48. B.F. Wescott, op. cit., p. 101.

would appear to be some sort of affirmation of special relationship.<sup>49</sup>

Interesting background evidence suggests an understanding for this prayer. Here let us draw attention to the opening verses of the chapter in which the danger of crossing into Judea is presented, and in which Jesus' resolution is declared by his return to Bethany. The prayer then says,

"Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me" (John 11.41,42).

The discussion in the Tractate Berakoth under the category of prayers at a time of danger provides several interesting examples. Each of the prayers for specific dangers concludes with the phrase,

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord, that hearest prayer."<sup>50</sup>

A particularly interesting prayer, with striking parallels to that in John, is:

"The needs of Thy people are many and their intelligence is short, let it be acceptable before Thee, O Lord our God, that Thou shouldst give to each one all his needs and (to) every creature sufficient for its wants, blessed art Thou that hearest prayer."<sup>51</sup>

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49. I do not intend here to discuss the issue of validating New Testament passages as actual words of Jesus, but rather am simply trying to suggest matrices for words or phrases which have been ascribed to Him.

50. A.L. Williams, Tractate Berakoth (London, 1921), p. 31.

51. Ibid., p. 32.

Without discussing the historicity of the raising of Lazarus as recorded in John, and without discussing the problem of validating specific words as actual words of Jesus, we still are confronted here in the Tractate with information about the Jewish devotional life, which provides a simple background for the developed and interpreted narrative recorded in the New Testament.

Intriguingly parallel to the above passage is that in Luke 18.11 in which Jesus tells of the Pharisee who prays and gives thanks that he is not as other men are:

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get' (Luke 18.11,12).

The Tractate Berakoth quotes a most interesting section from the Tosephtha:

"R.Judah says: There are three Benedictions which one must say every day: 'Blessed be he who did not make me a Gentile'; 'Blessed be he who did not make me a woman'; 'Blessed be he who did not make me an uneducated man (some versions here say 'bondman')'" 52

The oral tradition reflected in these writings is from the era of the New Testament, and the similarities of thought and structure provide an undeniable matrix for the words ascribed to Jesus.

Schubert makes a good point when he observes that these passages

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52. Williams, op. cit., p. 84.

are "of great significance for the study of early Christian liturgy".<sup>53</sup> It is possible to argue that these phrases are placed in the mouth of Jesus to be an authority for the rise of a liturgical formula. It is equally possible to argue that they simply declare what the form of prayer in the early Church actually was. We would suggest as well that there are in these passages echoes of an entirely different tradition from early Christian liturgy: first-century Jewish devotional life.

When we turn to the three passages in the Book of Revelation where eucharistein appears, we again find that the mood is ascription or affirmation, and that Jewish devotional life once more provides interesting parallel formations. In each of the passages (4.9; 7.12; 11.17), as with the Gospel thanksgivings, the posture of the worshipper is described, and following this the words of worship:

"And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor, and thanks (eucharistia) to him who is seated on the throne ... the twenty-four elders fall down before him; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, "Worthy art Thou ..." (4.9ff.).

"... and they fell on their faces before the throne, and worshipped God, saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving (eucharistia) and honor and power and might be unto our God for ever and ever!'" (7.11ff.).

"And the twenty-four elders who sit on their

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53. Schubert, op. cit., p. 95.

thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying 'We give thanks (eucharistomen) to thee, Lord God almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign ...!' (11.16ff.).

R.H. Charles in commenting on these passages sees the piling up of terms of ascription as a tendency of Judaism, particularly late Judaism.<sup>54</sup> He notes several examples from the Psalms, one of which serves to illustrate the point:

"Honor and majesty are before him  
Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.  
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples  
Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength" (96.6,7).

He then goes on to give a series of citations from I Enoch and Daniel:

"At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives for ever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation ..." (Daniel 4.34).

Our point is simply this. The appearance of the Greek term eucharistein in papyrus correspondence, in Hellenistic philosophical systems, and in exotic theological systems of the early Christian era, has been claimed to demonstrate that eucharistein entered Christianity from the surrounding pagan world. We believe, with James Robinson, that

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54. R.H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John (Edinburgh, 1920), pp. 127ff.

this term entered Christianity rather as a translation term from Judaism, and that the occurrences of the term in the New Testament are quite adequately explained by this 'translation term' theory. It is possible that in very early stages eucharistein was meant to serve as a translation term for yada, and eulogein for barak. Eventually, however, as is clear from the dominance of eucharistein in connection with the mealtime prayer situation, eucharistein came to be used for both Hebrew terms, not exclusively, but predominantly, although no change of connotation is suggested in the New Testament. Delling observes that in early Christian worship praise and thanksgiving seem to be related to the Jewish blessing of God, rather than possible Greek parallels.<sup>55</sup> I would suggest, even beyond this, that in the New Testament eucharistein is simply a translation term for the Jewish blessing, and that what appears in English as the 'motif of thanksgiving' is in fact a 'motif of blessing' or 'affirmation'.

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55. Delling, op. cit., pp. 61ff.

CHAPTER SIX

THANKSGIVING :  
A MOTIF OF AFFIRMATION

The few remaining passages in which eucharistein occurs bear out the earlier observation that its sphere of meaning is that of affirmation of the activity of God in Christ.<sup>1</sup> F.F. Bruce comments well on Ephesians 5.4, where thanksgiving is contrasted with "filthiness, silly talk, levity ...":

"'Our tongues were made to bless the Lord', as Isaac Watts reminds us, and Christian tongues in particular have unbounded cause for engaging in this most worthy activity. Tongues which are habituated to the praise of God should not readily lend themselves to language which dishonours his name."<sup>2</sup>

Thanksgiving is related to speech.<sup>3</sup> In an equally intimate way, in Colossians 4.2, it is related to prayer.<sup>4</sup> What is clear is that it appears as one facet of the life of the faithful. Perhaps Colossians

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1. See above, p. 52.

2. F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Ephesians (London, 1961), p. 103.

3. See above, p. 51.

4. See above, p. 75.

3.12-17 and I Thessalonians 5.12-22 shed helpful light on the relationship to the other facets of the life of the faithful, for in these passages eucharistein occurs as one of several activities. It is based on what God has done (Col. 3.15). It accompanies praising by hymns and psalms (Col. 3.16). It is directed to God through Christ (Col. 3.17). There is no situation in which it is not appropriate (I Thess. 5.18). It is the will of God for man (I Thess. 5.18). From the Ephesian passage's strange contrast, the direct link with praise in Colossians, and the constant appropriateness in Thessalonians, we are definitely led far beyond simple 'gratefulness', and are at the same time beyond the realm of liturgy. This larger dimension, for want of a better term, I call 'affirmation', and by that also mean the total life resultant from a personal affirmation of the activity of God.

In an article published in 1964, G. Bornkamm observed that the development of both Gott preisen and Schuld bekennen arises from the Hebrew yada, and its Septuagint translation-term, exhomologeisthai. Both, he felt, were preceded regularly by an epiphany of God's power, and arising as an affirmation of God's Machtweis on the one hand and the individual's (congregation's, nations') antithetical status on the other hand, constituted man's response to God's activity.<sup>5</sup> The

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5. G. Bornkamm, "Lobpreis, Bekenntnis, und Opfer", Apophoreta, Beiheft 30 to ZNW (Berlin, 1964), pp. 46-63.

confession of thanks for salvation he noted as being another development of the same root idea.<sup>6</sup> It seems to me that to translate eucharistein with 'to give thanks' in the sense of 'to be grateful' is at least sadly inadequate, and really fundamentally inaccurate. Rather, on the basis of its New Testament usage, eucharistein must be translated idiomatically as 'to affirm that God has acted'.

The interest in the sphere of confession is not a new one. As early as 1910, P.T. Forsyth noted in The Work of Christ that God's purpose in Christ was that of changing the relationship between himself and man, that what was necessary was man's confession of God's holiness, and that only a confessing race could be in right relationship with God. The work of Christ is to bring mankind to the point of the confession of God's holiness.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, Oscar Cullmann began examining the formulae and constructions used in expressing the faith of the early Church. These formulae were occasional, he felt, and arose in various contexts: baptism, worship, exorcism, persecution, and apologetics.<sup>8</sup> In 1963, Vernon Neufeld's study of early Christian confessions dealt at length with the term exhomologeisthai as the Septuagint translation term for

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6. Bornkamm, art. cit., pp. 46 ff.

7. P.T. Forsyth, The Work of Christ (London, 1910), p. 133.

8. O. Cullmann, The Earliest Christian Confessions (London, 1949), pp. 18ff.

yada, and he felt that it "almost always" meant 'to praise' or 'to give thanks'.<sup>9</sup> Also in 1963, Ehrhardt discussed the possibility that euangellion was a technical term of confession in some of its New Testament appearances.<sup>10</sup> There has been, therefore, considerable interest in what we might call the affirmative dimension of early Christianity, which is present throughout, if not elaborately presented, in the New Testament. It should be made clear that it is not the conclusion of this study that eucharistein be seen as a technical term for a liturgical act. That it does not seem justified to consider eucharistein a dominant ethical motif has also been observed.<sup>11</sup> It does seem, however, that in the New Testament eucharistein serves to indicate a general affirmation of the activity of God in Christ, an early stage in the translation of Hebrew ideas into Greek language, and a time before Christian technical terms had become either numerous or narrowly defined.

In mentioning broader areas of inquiry to which our study can be related, two topics in particular might be cited. Ethelbert Stauffer, in his New Testament Theology, deals at length with the proclamation and its resultant credal responses, and also with the ascriptions of

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9. V. Neufeld, The Earliest Christian Confessions (Leyden, 1963), p. 14.

10. A. Ehrhardt, The Framework of the New Testament Stories (Manchester, 1963), pp.155ff.

11. See above, p. 35.

glory which, he suggests, are an old Near Eastern strain, one example of which are the 'theological summaries of history'.<sup>12</sup> This leads us out into a very wide field of literature from the ancient world, the recitals of epiphanies. In Nilsson's history of Greek religion,<sup>13</sup> and Reitzenstein's Hellenistische Wundererzählungen,<sup>14</sup> there occur discussions of the Isis aretalogies, for example, in which it is possible to see to what extent the telling of the activity of the gods existed, in both literature and liturgy. Apuleius is, of course, a classic example of this type of writing. Our concern in mentioning the prevalence of the category is not to compare our extremely modest eucharistein motif with the florid, detailed narrative of Apuleius, but rather simply to draw attention to the variety of forms which the declarative, affirmative motif might take. Essentially the affirmation involved in the story of Apuleius can also be seen, although less controlled, as a description of 'what the gods have done'.

Again without going into detail, recent studies of the early Christian form of worship can be seen as informative to the motif in which eucharistein participated. Delling's work bases its understanding

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12. E. Stauffer, New Testament Theology (London, 1955), pp. 236ff.

13. M.P. Nilsson, Geschichte der griechische Religion (Munich, 1961), pp. 225ff.

14. R. Reitzenstein, Hellenistische Wundererzählungen (Leipzig, 1906).

of the early Christian worship as the gathering of the bearers of the Spirit, as the present realized kingship of God, and as the work of the Spirit.<sup>15</sup> It is this intervention which, as Delling points out, results in gladness, prophecy, instruction, anticipation of future glory, and praise. Bo Reicke notes that worship to the early Church was a prolongation of the activity of God for men, but one which must be accompanied by a prolongation of reaction as well.<sup>16</sup> Reicke suggests the interesting thesis that the avoidance of the term 'worship' in the New Testament is an attempt to avoid the dangerous identification of Christian worship with either Jewish or pagan worship. This forms an interesting comparison, it seems to me, with the avoidance of crystallized terminology for the response of man to God's activity, in general.

Eucharistein was a popular word, in widespread usage, in the first century. As such, it is tempting to suggest that it entered Christianity from that pagan world which was Christianity's environment. Yet the actual occurrences of the word in the New Testament strongly demonstrate that while the word may have been Greek, it was serving as a translation term for a Hebrew idiom. Although the term is not elaborated upon, and cannot be inflated into a major Christian motif by

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15. Delling, op. cit., pp. 24ff.

16. B. Reicke, "Some Reflections on Worship in the New Testament", New Testament Essays (Manchester, 1959).

itself, the conjunction of the term with so many major Christian themes suggests that it was a significant dimension of discipleship that was being represented by the term. I would suggest that to translate it a whole phrase is needed in English: 'to affirm, joyfully, appreciatively, publicly, that God has acted in Jesus Christ'.

It remains now to restate briefly the evidence which leads me to suggest that the motif of thanksgiving, as it is found in the New Testament, is in fact a motif of affirmation. The obvious Greek word around which the study might centre was eucharistein, and the most regular structure in which eucharistein appears is that of the Pauline thanksgiving periods. What became apparent from an examination of the papyri was that while Paul's epistolary form is basically that of the Hellenistic world, it does exhibit marked differences from the standard form of his time. One of these marked differences is the thanksgiving period, highly developed, and of great significance to his letters. While the thanksgiving period cannot be adequately explained from epistolary form, neither parallel Biblical passages, nor structurally similar phrases from the Hellenistic world provide explanation. That a few occurrences of eucharistein may exhibit an acquaintance with very early gnosticizing theology is entirely possible, but contrary to the work of G.H. Boobyer, I do not see how it is possible to assign a gnostic interpretation when the total usage of eucharistein is considered.

When we are confronted with the Jewish correspondence which is available, however, and with the declarative tone of the thanksgiving periods, which J.M. Robinson sees as an inheritance from Judaism, an entirely different possibility arises. The hodayot formula which Robinson suggests, the highly developed motif of blessing which characterised Jewish theology and devotional life in the first century A.D., and specifically the interchangeable usage of eucharistein and eulogein for the grace before a meal, strongly argue for the interpretation of eucharistein within the context of Jewish ascription.

It was noted that eucharistein was a popular first century A.D. Hellenistic term. It would appear that its use in the New Testament is an attempt to use the popular term of the day. Whether the use by Paul of this popular term resulted in a fusion of ideas in the minds of those who confronted his usage is not possible for us to determine. My point is simply that throughout the New Testament where the term occurs the idea present is that of an affirmation of the activity of God in Christ. This, I feel, is best explained from Jewish sources, although, as I suggest, the motif of affirmation occurs in other religions of the time, the Isis aretologies being one example. We are confronted with a term which, because of its wide popularity, is liable to many interpretations. Yet, in its New Testament usage, it seems to me to be used with both deliberation and control to apply to the affirmation by an individual or a congregation of God's activity in Christ.

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