

No Liturgical Need for a Gospel in the Second Century

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1 Questions and Presuppositions

One of the most important arguments against the assumption that the canonical Gospels were composed in the latter half of the second century (based upon an original text written by a well-known author Marcion of Sinope) would emphasize that the Gospels had already been used in the performance of Christian liturgies.¹ While it may be argued that the weekly meetings of Justin's group in Rome contained readings of the Gospels, no earlier text even hints at this idea.² It may be claimed that these texts were written in order to be read in liturgies. Thus, first century origins of these texts seem to point to first century liturgies where they were read. At the same time such ancient liturgies require the early existence of the Gospels. The mutual confirmation of these two groups of assumptions is not, however, more persuasive than any other bit of circular reasoning. Even though the scarcity of extant data occasionally justifies such arguments, the following paper is designed to show that the history of Christian liturgies does not require the existence of the Gospels in any form or precursor before the later second century. The assumption that there was no need for a Gospel text in the first and early second centuries C.E. does not prove that the Gospels did not exist. However, it prohibits the argument from liturgical use in order to support an early date of the Gospels.

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- 1 HENGEL, *Evangelien*, 95–103 – Kapitel III.4 “Die Sammlung der vier Evangelien beruht nicht auf einer besonderen offiziellen Entscheidung der Kirche, sondern auf dem Gebrauch in den Gottesdiensten” – correctly rejects anachronistic assumptions about a kind of world-wide Christian authority which established a scriptural canon. The fact that one element of this alternative (“offizielle Entscheidung”) is absurd insinuates that the other one should be true. However, the “use” of the Gospels in “the liturgies” of Christian groups in the late first and early second centuries is no less unsubstantiated. Justin is the first one to speak about the reading of the Gospels. Hengel’s claim that the Gospels “besaßen ... hervorgehobene Bedeutung” (98) in his liturgy is incorrect. I am grateful to Jan Heilmann for this reference.
 - 2 Basilides neither used the canonical Gospels nor wrote an *euangelion* containing narratives about – and sayings of – Jesus; KEHLHOFFER, Basilides’s Gospel.

At the same time, the following paper puts theories to the test that argue for second century origins of the Gospels. While it shows that some developments of Christian liturgies can be explained in this paradigm, it does not support, but presuppose it. This line of reasoning requires, nevertheless, a reversal of the burden of proof. It requires good reasons to claim an e.g. first century reading of Gospel texts in Christian groups.

The essay proceeds from two basic assumptions. First, eligible cases must hint at *ritualized* (formalized, standardized, repeated, etc.) performances of Gospel readings.³ A ritual use of a text can only be inferred from other sources than the text itself. Second, a ritualized use of texts *par excellence* is the “Service of the Word” or the “Liturgy of the Word”—modern designations for the sequence of ritual acts preceding the celebration of the Eucharist (as the first part of the mass in the Catholic Church or the Divine Liturgy of the Oriental Churches). The reading of a passage from the Gospels is the point of culmination of the Liturgy of the Word. Such ritualized Gospel readings did/do not play an important role on other occasions than the Liturgy of the Word, although structures like the Liturgy of the Word were attached to various liturgical performances much later.⁴ Thus, the following inquiry will start with the search for Liturgies of the Word (as combined with the celebration of the Eucharist) which contain a proclamation of the Gospel by definition.

2 Celebrations of Liturgies of the Word

When (and why) did Christians begin to perform ritualized readings of Gospel texts within liturgies of prayer and Scripture readings? A cursory glance upon the ancient sources allows one to map the development.

2.1 East of Byzantium in the Fifth Century

Reinhard Meßner observes that the East Syrian churches of the Sassanian Empire adopted the Western custom to celebrate a Liturgy of the Word as preceding the celebration of Eucharists in the early fifth century.⁵ Texts from Eastern synods hint at the fact that Eastern congregations continued to celebrate the Eucharists

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- 3 Cf. BELL, *Ritual*, 138–169 for the concept of “ritualization”. Allowing for a grey area between liturgical readings and the *study* of texts one must, nevertheless, try to distinguish between them as typical and different forms of practice with different reasons for its performance.
 - 4 ROUWHORST, *Reading*, 325 points to an “instruction” as part of a kind of liturgy of the hours in an opaque passage in the Apostolic Tradition.
 - 5 MESSNER, *Synode*, esp. 75–77, 84f. Meßner’s lucid explanation is endorsed here except for the notion that the Christian Liturgy of the Word derives from a form of rabbinic Sabbath liturgy, cf. section 5.2 below.

as (more or less stylized) banquets without preceding Liturgies of the Word. The adoption of the Western custom to add a Liturgy of the Word to every Sunday celebration of the Eucharist and to stop the performance of sympotic Eucharists in houses and apparently also in church buildings led to the dissemination of the Liturgy of the Word East of Byzantium.

Gerard Rouwhorst claims that the practice of reading the Holy Scriptures links Judaism and Christianity, because no other community of the ancient world would perform such services.⁶ This is indisputably true as long as one understands reading services in terms of highly ritualized performances in Christianity and Judaism as they are attested at the end of late Antiquity. Taken in a broader perspective which comprises also less ritualized activities than Christian and Jewish Liturgies of the Word—activities like study sessions of groups of philosophers—Jewish and Christian liturgies lose this kind of uniqueness. Second century Christian as well as Rabbinic groups were firmly rooted within their cultural environment. Groups like Justin's (who did not know a Liturgy of the Word in a strict sense) understood themselves as philosophers. They occupied themselves with important texts and composed and extemporized pieces of explanatory rhetoric.

Meßner's analysis is important for the present purpose, because it shows that the connection of the Eucharist with a Liturgy of the Word was not ubiquitous in the first half of the first millennium C.E. Furthermore, reading of texts from the (canonical) Gospels (and apparently not from the *Diatessaron* etc.) was regarded as a typical if not indispensable component of Liturgies of the Word.

2.2 The Apostolic Constitutions (Late Fourth Century)

Somewhat further to the West—from Seleucia-Ctesiphon towards Antioch—the second and eighth books of the *Apostolic Constitutions* contain obvious attestations of a standardized form of the Eucharist preceded by a Liturgy of the Word.⁷ It mentions the reading of “the Law and the Prophets, our [i.e. the Apostles'] Letters, the Acts and the Gospels”⁸ by a presbyter or deacon and “Moses, Joshua, Judges, Kings, Chronicles, the Return (from the exile, i.e. Ezra); then the writings of Job and Salomon and the sixteen Prophets” followed by the singing of the “hymns of David”, the Acts of the Apostles, Pauline Letters concluded by the Gospels, whose reading is elevated over the other scriptural texts by different liturgical means;⁹ “the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel”¹⁰, or “Prophets and

6 MESSNER, Synode, 78 referring to ROUWHORST, Reading 305f, 326–330.

7 Cf. MESSNER, Synode, 70, note 44. Regarding the celebration of the ordination of a bishop, cf. Apostolic Constitutions 8.5.11–8.15.10 (METZGER 150–215) and as a description of the Liturgy of the Word: 2.57.5–20 (METZGER 312–319).

8 Apostolic Constitutions 8.5.11 (METZGER 150f).

9 Apostolic Constitutions 2.57.5–9 (METZGER 312–315).

10 Apostolic Constitutions 2.39.6 (METZGER 268f).

Gospel”¹¹. Each of the readings is followed by the singing of Psalms. A sermon may be added.¹² After the dismissal of the catechumens,¹³ the assembly prays. The deacons prepare the gifts and men and women exchange the kiss of peace separately. The deacon pronounces intercessions and the bishop blesses the people. The celebration of the Eucharist follows.

These texts assume that the bishop’s church owns a considerable series of books for the performance of the liturgy. They do not address the question how less affluent congregations celebrated Liturgies of the Word. Its representativity is (as often in this genre) debatable. In this system, mostly Old Testament readings precede the reading of the Gospels—the obvious point of culmination of the sequence of proclaimed texts.

2.3 Origen

Harald Buchinger observes that Origen “gives no unambiguous testimony for the connection of the celebration of the Eucharist with a Liturgy of the Word”¹⁴. Nevertheless, circumstantial evidence shows that Origen may already have known this connection as well as the performance of one single Eucharistic prayer over bread and wine following—not preceding—a Liturgy of the Word. It may be inferred from Origen’s extant homilies that Gospel pericopes were read on Sundays and could be preceded by readings from other books.¹⁵ According to Buchinger, “every further reconstruction remains simply a projection of later conditions”¹⁶. Origen’s church most probably performs a common prayer of all faithful and the kiss of peace before the celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁷

Apart from all uncertainty, Origen seems to presuppose that Eucharistic celebrations were preceded by Liturgies of the Word. If this custom should go back to a kind of first century Christianity, it becomes inexplicable why congregations in the Christian East could have been living for centuries in ignorance of this custom. If Liturgies of the Word containing the reading of Gospel texts should be an innovation of the early third century, one would need to postulate a powerful

11 Apostolic Constitutions 2.59.4 (METZGER 326f).

12 The sermon is called *didaskalia*, Apostolic Constitutions 2.54.1 (METZGER 304).

13 Catechumens and penitents were blessed by the presider and then supposed to leave the church before the celebration of the Eucharist; Apostolic Constitutions 2.39.6 (METZGER 268f), 2.57.14 (METZGER 316f); 8.6–9 (METZGER 150–167).

14 BUCHINGER, Eucharist, 211. Buchinger, Eucharist, has been updated and expanded in BUCHINGER, Eucharistische Praxis, 15.

15 BUCHINGER, Eucharistische Praxis, 17 observes that it is not evident that Gospels were necessarily among the readings on Sundays.

16 BUCHINGER, Eucharist, 211; cf. 222. For circumstantial evidence, cf. BUCHINGER, Eucharistische Praxis, 16f.

17 BUCHINGER, Eucharist, 212; BUCHINGER, Eucharistische Praxis, 17f.

hierarchy that could enforce world-wide liturgical reforms. The reconstruction of such an institution would be anachronistic. However, one may imagine a powerful *movement* in Early Christianity whose adherents would propagate liturgical customs on their own initiative. The opposition against Marcion could have been such a movement uniting diverse writers without orchestration from an established authority.

2.4 Tertullian

At this point, two texts from Tertullian's oeuvre must be mentioned as it seems that this author is talking about a Liturgy of the Word that precedes the consumption of the Eucharistic meal as the typical form of Christian meeting.¹⁸ In *De anima* 9, Tertullian mentions visions of a prophetess during *dominica sollempnia*.¹⁹ The prophetess derives subjects for her prophecy from the readings of *scripturae* (*leguntur*), the singing of psalms, or the performance of sermons. The reading of a Gospel text and the Eucharist are not mentioned.²⁰ The list contains activities at a Christian—in this case, a Montanist—meeting. Even if the list does not testify to a complete repertoire of ritual elements of Christian gatherings, a Gospel reading within a Liturgy of the Word and preceding the Eucharist is nothing but mere conjecture.

Similar observations can be collected from Tertullian's (pre-Montanistic) *Apologeticum* 39, a chapter that contains a bright description of the Christian Eucharistic meeting against the background of the dark depiction of other groups' disgusting behavior at meals. Tertullian mentions prayer, the exposition of scriptural texts, and sermons that lead up to ethical topics. This chapter does not describe the reading of scriptures.²¹ Tertullian does not, likewise, mention that Gospels are read as part of Eucharistic or non-Eucharistic meetings. He does not, moreover, refer to a ritual link between the meal and a kind of meeting that may be devoted to learning and study. The sequence of liturgical actions does not,

18 SALZMANN, *Lehren*, 387–429, esp. 387–396 refers to Tertullian's *De anima* 9 (Waszink 792) and *Apologeticum* 39 (Dekkers 150–155).

19 SALZMANN, *Lehren*, 388f note 7 argues against Franz Joseph Dölger for an interpretation of this term as celebrations on a Sunday.

20 SALZMANN, *Lehren*, 390, suggests that *transactio sollempniorum* might refer to the Eucharist. His suggestion that arcane discipline should have prevented Tertullian from mentioning the Eucharist should be treated with great suspicion; cf. the nuanced observations of BUCHINGER, *Eucharistische Praxis*, 11–14 regarding Origen and JACOB, *Arkandisziplin*, 35–117 for an assessment of the concept as a problem of the post-Reformation history of Christian theology.

21 *Coimus ad litterarum diuinarum commemorationem* ... *Apologeticum* 39.3 (Dekkers 150). Regarding the term *commemoratio*, BLAISE, *Dictionnaire*, 172 does not refer to any meaning connected with a liturgical reading.

furthermore, reflect the structure of any single liturgical performance. The chapter discusses diverse topics in a polemical way.²² While theological topics would of course be discussed as parts of the table-talk in Tertullian's congregations, the ritualized performance of scripture readings was not an integral part of Eucharistic celebrations.

With these observations, the search for Liturgies of the Word comes to an end. Christians of Tertullian's time are interested in the Holy Scriptures including the Gospels.²³ Nevertheless, they do not perform Liturgies of the Word connected with the celebration of their Eucharists. Liturgies of the Word apparently emerged only after the demise of sympotic Eucharists—a process that had only begun in Tertullian's church.²⁴ Testimonies for early readings of the Gospels locate those readings in Liturgies of the Word. Liturgies of the Word emerge in the third century. This observation does not, of course, silence the question whether there could have been other forms of ritualized Gospel readings.

3 Liturgical Functions of the Gospels in the Gospels and in 1 Corinthians?

Going back in the history of Christian liturgies, the typical and technical Liturgy of the Word that contained a reading of the Gospels makes its appearance in the middle of the third century. Christian groups were used to engaging in the reading and exegesis of the Bible before that time. One may thus ask whether or not this activity was an integral component of Christian meals before the sources mention the Gospels as part of Liturgies of the Word. Thus, two passages of the Gospel of Luke and the last chapters of the First Letter to the Corinthians may point to more ancient liturgical needs for Gospel texts than the late fourth century Eucharistic liturgies.

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- 22 SALZMANN, *Lehren*, 393f rejects the idea that Tertullian should refer to two liturgical events here. Nevertheless, he reorganizes the information in order to derive a typical, liturgical sequence from it. *Apologeticum* 39.16 (Dekkers 152) refers to the Eucharist by means of the term *agape*. Cf. MCGOWAN, *Naming, and MCGOWAN, Rethinking*, against notions like SALZMANN, *Lehren*, 405.
- 23 SALZMANN, *Lehren*, 401, 416–418 points to *De praescriptione haereticorum* 36.5 (Refoulé 217) that refers to the Law, the Prophets, the Gospels (... *legem et prophetas cum euangelicis et apostolicis litteris miscet, inde potat fidem* ...), and the Apostolic Epistles as sources for the Christian faith in Rome—a passage that does not discuss the liturgical use of the text. Similarly, *De oratione* 9.1 (Diercks 262f) points to the opposite of public readings. The *edicta prophetarum, evangeliorum, apostolorum* etc. are said to be hinted at in the text of the Lord's Prayer. ROUWHORST, *Reading*, 323 bases his claim that Tertullian's church performed Liturgies of the Word upon SALZMANN, *Lehren*, 416–418.
- 24 Cf. LEONHARD, *salutationes* esp. 434–436 for a model which tentatively suggests a reason for the emergence of a Liturgy of the Word as combined with the Eucharist.

3.1 Marcion/Luke 22 and 24

Read as texts from the second century, the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper (especially Luke's) corroborate these observations. Marcion/Luke 22 describes Jesus' last celebration of Pesach as a typical symposium. The account does not have any interest in a historical reconstruction of customs how to celebrate Pesach in Jerusalem in late Second Temple times. It is devoid of anything that points to a first century celebration of a pilgrim festival in Jerusalem. As any etiology, it is created in the image of the celebration that it should furnish with a dignified prehistory. As an etiology for the performance of Eucharists, it is entirely uninterested in Easter. If Eucharistic celebrations should always have been preceded by a liturgy of word, Marcion/Luke 22 would totally fail in this function. For, Jesus and his disciples enter the room and begin to eat their dinner immediately. There is not the slightest trace of reading or talking about scripture *before* the meal.

In a sympotic event, it befits a host to invite his guests to a learned conversation *after* the conclusion of the dinner. According to Marcion/Luke 22, Jesus abides by this rule.²⁵ They discuss several stereotype topics of the literary repertoire of ancient table-talk. This chapter shows that Christians met for communal meals. They may have read and/or discussed biblical and exegetical topics after the meal. Sympotic Eucharists could not have been connected with a Liturgy of the Word *preceding* the meal. The etiology for the Eucharist does not support celebrations preceded by a Liturgy of the Word. Whatever the time of composition of the Gospels, their authors could not yet envisage a celebration like the third/fourth century combination of a Liturgy of the Word with a Eucharist.

Justin's use of a paraphrase of the institution narratives corroborates this understanding. His group does not celebrate a form of sympotic Eucharist that could claim to derive from Jesus' institution. For Justin, the institution narrative is only used in order to legitimize the exclusion of people who do not belong to his congregation from the consumption of the Eucharistic elements.²⁶ Justin is not interested in an etiology for his celebration (which does not fit to the Gospel texts, especially not to Luke) but in a bit of scriptural support for the exclusion of non-members from the participation in the food.

25 KLINGHARDT, *Evangelium*, 1019–1036 (Luke 22:14–34).

26 1 Apology 66.1: "And the food is called among us 'eucharist', of which it is lawful for no one to partake except ..." 66.3 "... Taking bread and giving thanks he said ..." "... and he shared it with them *alone*." MINNS/PARVIS, *Justin* 257 n. 6 (MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 127f) delete "alone" without any basis in the manuscripts (cf. MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 128) although they acknowledge that the alleged "gloss" refers back to 66.1. The term "alone" is the culmination point of Justin's argument.

This is corroborated by the observation that Justin could have used an alternative etiology for his celebration: the account of Jesus' discussion with Emmaus and Cleopas after Jesus' resurrection (Marcion/Luke 24:13–35). Yet, he does not quote this pericope for this purpose. The verse that makes Jesus discuss passages from "Moses and all the Prophets" (Luke 24:27) is Luke's expansion of Marcion's text.²⁷ The idea that Jesus expounded the Torah and the Prophets in front of the two disciples on their way from Jerusalem and thus before they reclined for dinner did not occur to Marcion. However, Luke was interested in a purely theological, anti-Marcionite argument regarding the integration of Jesus' life and death into a kind of Old Testament salvation history. Luke did not want to talk about the Eucharist, let alone about a compulsory Liturgy of the Word preceding it. This is borne out by the fact that Marcion/Luke 24 does not end in a meal. Jesus vanishes and the meeting is disrupted completely *before* the beginning of a meal. Neither for Marcion nor for Luke is the story of Emmaus and Cleopas an etiology for the structure or the meaning of the Eucharist.

Marcionite/Lukan descriptions of the Last Supper and the conversation of Jesus with the two disciples on their way from Jerusalem show that a Liturgy of the Word was just not imaginable, let alone regarded as a constitutive element of the Eucharist. However stylized, the Eucharist is a kind of meal. It could have been followed by sympotic table-talk (Marcion/Luke) or preceded by the study session of a group of philosophers (Justin, see below). Neither a Liturgy of the Word, nor a philosophic study session, nor a (perhaps archaizing) bit of standardized table-talk was regarded as an indispensable constituent of a Eucharist.

3.2 Luke (not Marcion) 4:16–22

In the same way as the author of Luke's Gospel corrected the story of Jesus' meeting with Emmaus and Cleopas, he also added Jesus' reading and exegesis in the Synagogue of Nazareth as an argument against Marcion.²⁸ Jesus reads and expounds a passage from the Old Testament prophets. There is no hint to a meal following the service in Nazareth. In a similar way as Justin wanted the Emperor to understand his own group, Luke depicts Jesus as a teacher who expounds a passage of what should be regarded as Holy Scripture. He explains its importance and meaning for the listeners. There is no reason to doubt that certain Jewish

27 KLINGHARDT, *Evangelium*, 1131–1147 esp. 1142 no. 7. Justin hints at the verse in 1 Apology 50.12 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 208f; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 102); Dialogue 53.5 (MARCOVICH, *Dialogus*, 158) and Dialogue 106 (MARCOVICH, *Dialogus*, 252).

28 The absence of a reading from the Torah emphasizes Luke's lack of interest in Jewish practice. The pericope tells the story of a performance of a ritual in order to communicate a theological (anti-Marcionite) position. Cf. KLINGHARDT, *Evangelium*, 464–472 esp. 466 no. 2.

groups met for the reading and discussion of the Hebrew Bible in the first and second centuries C.E. (see below). Elements of a rabbinic Sabbath morning liturgy can be read into the background of this very brief text, not out of it. The claim that the text should reveal a faint inkling of rabbinic celebrations of Torah reading becomes more plausible, if Luke 4:16–22 originated in the second half of the second century.

3.3 1 Corinthians 11–14

Matthias Klinghardt has shown that 1 Cor 11–14 is a literary unit that also represents a sequence of ritual acts that was immediately comprehensible as a Greek or Roman banquet. The chapters 12–14 collect rules and allude to literary conventions about proper table talk.²⁹ Thus, the structure of the Christian meeting according to the First Letter to the Corinthians does not only rule out that a Liturgy of the Word should have been performed before the meal. It also shows that a kind of reading of a Gospel text (that would have been composed after this letter) did not have a logical slot in this event—neither after nor before the meal.

For the time being, it is the most important structural lesson that must be learned from Paul's letter that reading texts, learned discussions, and other forms of table-talk would take place after the meal rather than preceding it. The letter collects rules for the proper behavior at Christian banquets along the course of a sympotic celebration. Although any kind of text could be read, recited, sung, proclaimed, etc. in Christian meetings, none of them contains a ritual slot that requires or just favors Gospel texts.

4 A Liturgy of the Word in Justin's Congregation?

The preceding discussion led to the conclusion that Gospels were not needed for Christian liturgies for roughly a century after the destruction of the Second Temple—a date that is often associated with the time of composition of the Gospels.³⁰ In the course of this argument, one author had been passed over: Justin, the Philosopher³¹ and Martyr. This omission requires rectification, because the description of the Eucharist in Justin's *First Apology* appears to prefigure the structure of the medieval mass: a Liturgy of the Word followed by the celebration of the Eucharist.

29 Cf. KLINGHARDT, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, § 13; e. g. 345. Salzmann depicts the ritual structure of the Christian gathering according to 1 Corinthians as precursor of the mass.

30 Cf. VINZENT, *Marcion*, 159–214 (chapter 2).

31 Cf. MINNS/PARVIS, *Justin*, 33, 59f, 70.

4.1 Philosophers Reading Texts

Justin's group is convened weekly, on the "Days of Helios".³² At their meetings, someone reads the "memorabilia of the Apostles (*apomnēmoneumata tōn apostolōn*) or the writings of the prophets (*synggrammata tōn prophētōn*) as long as possible"³³. After that, the presider "makes a verbal admonition and stimulation for the imitation of these good things"³⁴. The whole congregation rises and prays. The celebration of the Eucharist follows.³⁵ Like other groups of this epoch,³⁶ Justin's community did not regard this kind of scripture study as compulsory component of Eucharistic celebrations. The group also performed the Eucharist right after a baptism.³⁷

According to the Acts of his Martyrdom, Justin denies knowing any other Christian group in Rome except for his own (which is obviously wrong).³⁸ The ancient editors of a younger recension of the Acts expanded the significance of Justin's testimony making it a statement about all Christians of Rome (which is no less absurd).³⁹ Justin depicts his group as philosophers, open to outsiders and

32 1 Apology 67.3, 8 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 258–263; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 129).

33 1 Apology 67.4 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 258; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 129). The "reader" is not referred to with a term suggesting an established office: "the reading one", *anaginōskōn*. The audible reading is a scholastic and/or liturgical procedure, necessary for the common work of the group. A single reader would read silently; SLUSSER, *Reading*; GAVRILOV, *Techniques*; BURYAT, *Postscript*. Regarding the establishment of offices, Justin's "presider" is the head of the philosophic school; cf. BRENT, *Diogenes Laertius*, 370f.

34 1 Apology 67.4 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 258; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 129). Note 4 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 259–261) calls attention to a problem of reference in the text which is irrelevant here; cf. note 22 for *agapē* and VEGGE, *Paulus*, 191, 230ff, 274–278 for ethics as the major aim of philosophic education and rhetoric.

35 1 Apology 67.5 MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 260–261; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 129.

36 Cf. *Didache* 9f (WENGST, *Didache*, 78–83). Texts like the Acts of Judas Thomas also describe Eucharists without Liturgy of the Word. Thomas blesses and distributes only bread or the text refers to a cup without mentioning its contents: 27 (BONNET, *Acta Philippi*, 143); 29 (146), 49f (165–167), 120f (230f), 133 (240), 158 (268f). The Eucharists follow baptisms in this narrative except for chapter 29. In that case, the Apostle delivers a sermon before the Eucharist, in which he does not partake, because he was fasting before the dawn of the *kyriakē*. There is no trace of a text to be read. The Eucharistic breakfast on the *kyriakē* at the end of ch. 29 is neither connected to baptism nor to any trace of a Liturgy of the Word.

37 1 Apology 65.3 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 252–255; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 125f).

38 SNYDER, *Bath*, 361. Looking for reliable information about Justin in the Martyrs' Acts is not without problems; cf. ULRICH, *Justin's School*, 64.

39 Recension C (2.4f [MUSURILLO, *Acts*, 56f]) abolishes the textual distinction between Roman Christianity and Justin's group making Justin speak about all Christians of Rome. Recensions A and B of the *Martyrium* indicate that Justin only speaks about his group of disciples; cf. SALZMANN, *Lehren*, 274. Not all Roman Christians followed this one philosopher's approach (and would not have fitted into his room); cf. BRADSHAW, *Origins*, 63f.

generous to members who did not participate in the meetings. The group reads texts, because philosophers are interested in texts.⁴⁰

4.2 The Memorabilia of the Apostles

Justin's congregation reads "the memorabilia (*apomnēmoneumata*) of the apostles or the writings of the prophets".⁴¹ The latter group of texts seems to comprise parts of the Hebrew Bible besides other material like the books of Hystaspes and the Sibyl.⁴² Tatian mentions that those books laid the foundation for his own conversion to Christianity.⁴³ He had been "convinced" of their truth. This ter-

40 Cf. note 3 above. BRADSHAW, *Origins*, 70 refers to Philo's Hypothetica/Apology 7.12f (Colson, Philo, 430–433; *apud* Eusebius) describing the study of Scripture on the Sabbath as going on until the afternoon. A similar situation should be envisaged for Justin—not because Justin inherited some Jewish custom, but because Philo and Justin present their respective congregations as a similar type of group. ULRICH, Justin's School; GEORGES, Justin's School; ARAGIONE, Justin, 52–55; MARKSCHIES, Lehrer; and BRENT, Diogenes Laertius, 370f describe the character of Justin's group as philosophers. Cf. also VEGGE, Paulus, 112–117, 191–194 (and 65f as well as BARNES, Philosophers; and GEORGES, Justin's School, 79 for women philosophers); HAHN, Philosoph for a general social context (esp. 67–99); and LÖHR, Christianity, esp. 166, 174; HADOT, Unterrichtsbetrieb, 56, 63–68 for pagan customs of studies along lists of required readings. ABRAMOWSKI, Erinnerungen, 346 suggests that Justin chose *apomnēmoneumata* which means "daß darin des Meisters der Philosophie schlechthin, nämlich Christi, gedacht wird". ULRICH, Justin's School, 66 observes that Justin uses the term *didaskalos* for Christ only. Cf. LEVINE, Synagogue, 90 for a general assessment of the historical realities behind Philo's description of Alexandrian Jewry as groups of philosophers: "... Philo's emphasis is too unique and extreme: he alone calls the synagogue a *didaskaleion*. To assume that ordinary Jews would be interested in such intensive study sessions or would be willing to stay in the synagogue for much of the Sabbath day flies in the face of all we know of human nature and Jewish practice de facto." While several elements of Jewish groups as philosophers are acceptable, they must not be generalized.

41 Justin speaks about *apomnēmoneumata* only in two passages within his oeuvre. ABRAMOWSKI, Erinnerungen 341–344 claims that Dial. 100–107 (MARCOVICH, Dialogus, 241–254) had been written earlier and incorporated into the final form of the Dialogue (as an explanation why the term *apomnēmoneumata* only occurs in this section of the Dialogue). She summarizes the history of research (344f) that explored ways to understand Justin's choice of this term in its ancient literary context; cf. the follow-up survey: ARAGIONE, Justin 45f.

42 1 Apology 20.1 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin 130f; MARCOVICH, Apologiae, 62); 44.12 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 196f; MARCOVICH, Apologiae, 95). Clement of Alexandria (Stromateis 6.5/43.1 [DESCOURTIEU, Clément d'Alexandrie, 146–149]) also refers to the Sibyl and Hystaspes as belonging to the "prophets".

43 Even if it is not certain that Tatian was Justin's student, TRELENBERG shows that he used Justin's works, Oratio 195–203. Tatian, Oratio 29.2 (TRELENBERG, Tatian, 160f; cf. 200 for the parallel to Justin) characterizes these writings as *barbarikos*. God should have taught Tatian through those pagan books, which brought about his conversion to Christianity. Note HAHN, Philosoph, 50–60 for the idea of a "conversion" (*metabolē*) to philosophy. The book

minology echoes one of Justin's elements of the definition of a Christian. One must be "convinced" of the community's teachings.⁴⁴ The study of the Sibyl, the Old Testament prophets, and the ancient philosophers support the community's identity.

Christian authors use the term *apomnēmoneumata* infrequently for writings about famous persons. Thus Origen refers to *apomnēmoneumata of* (i.e. "about") Apollonios of Tyana.⁴⁵ The work was written by a "philosopher" not a Christian. For Origen, it is reliable, because it tells a story that is embarrassing for philosophers. It speaks about a philosopher who falls prey to the witchcraft of Apollonius. Kelsos had claimed that philosophers should be immune against the lures of wizardry.

In an exegetical catena fragment, Apollinaris of Laodicea (died ca. 392) expounds John 20:30. According to Apollinaris "John also teaches us, *why* he deemed the *apomnēmoneumata* of Christ's (earthly) presence worthy of being written down; (*viz.*) that they (are recorded for) the greatest benefit of their readers ...".⁴⁶ *Apomnēmoneumata* are stories about Christ contained within the (canonical) fourth Gospel.

The "memorabilia" of the Apostles and the Prophets are the foundation of Justin's belief of the cosmic function of the Logos. The term is vague enough in order to require Justin to explain it—*apomnēmoneumata*, the "so-called Gospel(s)".⁴⁷ He prefers the term *apomnēmoneumata* over the term "Gospel" (*euangelion/euangelia*). The term *euangelion* could still have been tainted by the fact that Marcion had been the first one to adopt this term as a designation for a—i.e. his—Gospel.

Justin paraphrases the story of Heracles at the crossroads from Xenophon's *Apomnēmoneumata of Socrates* in the *Second Apology*.⁴⁸ He refers to this source as "that Xenophontic one (*Xenophōnteion*)"—apparently "(that) book" (Minns and

of Hystaspes and the Sibyl are also mentioned by Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 7.15.18f (FREUND, Laktanz, 156f) and 7.18.1f F. 164f "*prophetae* and *vates* have foretold ... For, Hystaspes ... says"; (cf. FREUND, Laktanz, 53–69, 440–444, 480–484).

44 1 *Apology* 61.2 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 236–239; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 118); 65.1 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 252f; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 125). Cf. ULRICH, *Justin's School*, 67.

45 *Contra Celsum* 6.41 (BORRET, Origène, 147, 276f); cf. ARAGIONE, Justin, 48. The function of the genitive ("of" versus "about") has been discussed repeatedly; cf. ABRAMOWSKI, *Erinnerungen*, 347f. In the same work; 7.54 (BORRET 150, 140–143.1f), Origen rebuts Kelsos for his inability to produce *apomnēmoneumata* of sayings of Heracles.

46 REUSS, *Johannes-Kommentare*, no. 154.9f, p. 62.

47 1 *Apology* 33.5 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 172f; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 80).

48 2 *Apology* 11.2–5 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 314–317; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 153); cf. Xenophon's *Memorabilia of Socrates* 2.1.21–33 (MARCHANT/TODD/HENDERSON, Xenophon, 94–103). ARAGIONE, *L'Episodio*, studies the parallel passages and their differences in their respective contexts.

Parvis: “story”). Xenophon did not name his book *Apomnēmoneumata*. Nevertheless, it seems to have been known under this designation already in Justin’s time. The term *apomnēmoneumata* is appropriate for the subject that Justin wants to refer to and for the persons who should understand this designation.⁴⁹ Gabriella Aragione admits that many of the attestations of the term as designations for books come from florilegia like Diogenes Laertius which postdate Justin’s time,⁵⁰ even though she assumes that it may have been in use already in the second century.⁵¹ Regarding Old Testament texts, Justin was able to refer to “the Prophets” or to Moses who enjoyed a reputation of honor and seriousness among Justin’s fellow philosophers.⁵² However, he had to appeal to other concepts with regard to the Gospels.

Justin neither invented nor liked the term “Gospel”,⁵³ although he knew its positive connotations.⁵⁴ His readers could be expected to understand this designation. The *apomnēmoneumata* are not, apparently, congruent with material that is extant in the four canonical Gospels.⁵⁵ The term refers to a genre of contents (*viz.* memorable stories about—and sayings of—Jesus), not to a certain text. Justin’s mixed quotations may also point to the use of a Gospel harmony, which may point to the existence of the canonical Gospels as well as Marcion’s.⁵⁶

As the Gospels were brand-new texts in Justin’s time, so was the total lack of conventions to use them in a typically Christian way. Justin’s group did not perform reading sessions that were standardized or ritualized beyond what was

49 Justin uses a designation for a kind of philosophical text that other non-Christian compilers of literary texts would also use for similar texts. Philosophers like Valerius Harpocration, Aelius Theon (cf. ARAGIONE, Justin, 47f), Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, and Athenaeus are mentioned.

50 ARAGIONE, Justin, 48f.

51 ARAGIONE, Justin, 50 quotes Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 33.7.7 (WALTON, Diodorus, 12 [24f]), who suggested a definition: “and when a thing is stated simply, briefly, and without frills, the speaker is credited with a pointed saying, while the hearer has something to remember (*apomnēmoneuma*)”. She also observes (50f) that Justin (1 Apology 14–17 [MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 110–121; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 52–58]) characterizes a list of Jesus’ sayings in the same way as Plutarch speaks about Cato’s and Lycurgus’ *apomnēmoneumata*.

52 ARAGIONE, Justin, 55.

53 1 Apology 66.3 (MINNS/PARVIS, Justin, 256f; MARCOVICH, *Apologiae*, 128) “the so-called Gospels”; cf. VINZENT, Marcion, 37f.

54 Dialogue 12.2 (*ptōchoi euangelizontai* MARCOVICH, *Dialogus*, 90); VINZENT, Marcion, 37f. After the recent re-evaluation of the role of Marcion’s Gospel in the literary history of Christianity, the singular may point to that book, to a Gospel harmony, to Paul’s idea about Jesus’ good tidings, and to Justin’s abstraction.

55 Cf. VINZENT, Marcion, 36f.

56 VINZENT, Marcion, 37.

normal for groups of philosophers. There was neither a yearly cycle of festivals,⁵⁷ nor a well-established catechetical corpus that insiders of the group could be expected to have mastered. Justin's designation for these texts, their use in the meetings of his group, and the fact that he does not quote a single line verbatim would be absurd, if these four books had already been the undisputed basis of the Christians' identity and liturgy for roughly a century. Justin's group read and discussed Gospel material among other texts because they were interesting, new, and controversial. However, they chose the reading material for similar reasons that may have led to the establishment of the Liturgy of the Word later. Old Testament Prophets and canonical Gospels establish and proclaim an anti-Marcionite stance.

5 Celebrations of Torah in Judaism

If the Christian custom to read the Gospels in formalized meetings should emulate rabbinic celebrations of Torah reading, one may construct Christian Liturgies of the Word as created in opposition to their Jewish parallels. In that case, one may wonder what it means that the Gospel does not seem to replace the Torah or why the reading of the Gospel was furnished with special authority by its assignment to certain members of the clergy, if it should have been regarded as inferior to a preceding Old Testament reading.

5.1 Paragons of Jewish Philosophers: Therapeutai and Therapeutrides

Philo claims that Therapeutai and Therapeutrides can be found everywhere in the ancient world, but especially near Alexandria and in a place above the Mareotic Lake living in solitary, detached houses (which they never leave throughout six days of the week).⁵⁸ Regarding books, they only possess "laws, oracles

57 E.g. Justin, Dialogue 8.4 (MARCOVICH, *Dialogus*, 85), 10.3 (87), 18.2f (99f), 23.3 (108), 43.1 (140).

58 Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 30–39 (COHN/REITER, *Opera* 6, 476f; COLSON, Philo, 130–137); for the dissemination and abode of the alleged group 21f (COHN/REITER, *Opera* 6, 474; COLSON, Philo, 124f). ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa* remarks: "whether there were people a little bit like Philo's *therapeutai* or not does not seem to matter much", 48. EBNER, Mahl suggests that the description of the Therapeutai and Therapeutrides actually aims at an ideal image of Judaism (according to Philo's understanding). There is no reason to assume that Philo's story about this ascetic group should be a more realistic description of actual fact than the depraved and repulsive meal customs in chapter 40–63 (COHN/REITER, *Opera* 6, 477–481; COLSON, Philo, 136–150) should be typical for the "symposia of the others (*tōn allōn*)" (ch. 40), held "everywhere" (ch. 48), or for the "symposia (held) in Greece" that brazenly display luxury and decadence (ch. 57–63 including Plato and Xenophon). During some of those debased meetings, the symposiasts are said to bite off parts of their fellows' bodies, ready for cannibalism (40) and murder (43). VAN

(delivered) through the prophets, hymns” as well as other material that is useful for knowledge and piety.⁵⁹ They read the Holy Scriptures and “have also writings (*syngrammata*) of men of old, the founders of their way of thinking, who left many memorials (*mnēmeia*)⁶⁰ of the form used in allegorical interpretation ...”⁶¹.

This group is Philo’s allegory for ideal congregations of Jews. They meet on the seventh day of the week in order to listen to a discourse of the (male) senior scholar among them. Every fiftieth day, they celebrate a festival, beginning with prayer, then reclining for a banquet, *first* listening to an exegetical speech concluded with hymn-singing. After a frugal meal of bread (seasoned with some hyssop) and water, they hold a vigil of singing and dancing.⁶² Philo’s Jews-as-philosophers do not read any text at their gatherings. This group is fictional in a narrow sense (of real persons living near the Mareotic sea and everywhere around the Mediterranean). The properties that they share with Justin’s group are not due to a Judeo-Christian tradition. Such similarities are due to the fact that both Justin and Philo present their own groups as philosophers—like other Greeks and Romans with similar interests.

5.2 Ritualization of Rabbinic Study Sessions

An inscription of the early first century C.E. from Jerusalem mentions a synagogue built for the “reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments” and adds that the donor, Theodotos, also built “the guest room, the chambers, and the water fittings, as an inn for those in need from foreign parts ...”⁶³ Torah reading is thus established as an activity of Diaspora groups and mentioned by a priest.⁶⁴ As the corpus of rabbinic texts does not yield reliable information for this

DER HORST, Chaeremon fragment 10 (16–22, 56–61 *apud* Porphyry) remarks that Philo describes the Therapeutai and Therapeutrides in a very similar way as the Alexandrian priest Chaeremon (died before 96 C.E. in Rome) depicts groups of Egyptian priests: “both authors [i.e. Chaeremon and Philo] largely draw on a traditional vocabulary designed to describe the ideal way of life of a community of philosophizing saints”, 56.

59 Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 25 (COHN/REITER, *Opera* 6, 475; COLSON, Philo, 126).

60 The term is only used here in Philo’s *De Vita Contemplativa*. Several of these points can be compared to information in the last chapters of Justin’s *First Apology*; cf. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, *De Vita Contemplativa*, esp. 56.

61 Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 28f (COHN/REITER, *Opera* 6, 475; COLSON, Philo, 128f).

62 Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 64–89 (COHN/REITER, *Opera* 6, 481–486; COLSON, Philo, 150–169).

63 KLOPPENBORG VERBIN, *Dating* shows that a post-destruction date for this inscription is untenable; translation: p. 244. ROUWHORST, *Reading*, 319f suggests on the basis of Acts 15:21 that Jewish Christian congregations used to read (in whichever way) the Torah in their synagogues. If Acts was written in Rome after the Gospel of Luke (and hence in the latter part of the second century), Acts either reflects a plausible perspective upon Jewish philosophic circles or a desideratum for anti-Marcionite Christian practice.

64 Cf. STEMBERGER, *Öffentlichkeit*, esp. 32f.

epoch, the shape of actual performances of Torah reading that could have influenced Christians of Justin's time, cannot be recovered. Intellectuals such as Rabbis, Justin's Christian group, Pythagorean philosophers, and other groups studied and expounded texts. The typically rabbinic performance of Torah reading developed at the same time as the emergence of Christianity.⁶⁵ Thus, the Tannaim study the sacrificial laws that prescribe the sacrifices on the festival days when these sacrifices were offered in the Temple.⁶⁶ This practice of anamnestic reading was not or not only motivated by an interest in the understanding of texts. It enabled the rabbis to perform a sacred obligation.⁶⁷

Rabbinic services of Torah reading neither provide a structural model for the Christian sequence of a Liturgy of the Word followed by the Eucharist (or the other way round) nor for the internal staging of a hierarchy of importance between different corpora of texts. There is no reason to assume any interdependence between the development of the typically Christian and rabbinic ritualization of the reading of sacred texts. Serious studies cannot reach firmer conclusions than "It is not unreasonable to assume some historical relationship ..." between the rabbinic Sabbath morning liturgy and analogous performances in Christianity.⁶⁸

5.3 The Gospels and the Haggadah of Pesach

It has been claimed that the Gospels or the Passion Narratives should have been written in order to be read or recited during (Proto-/Judaeo-) Christian celebrations of the Pascha as a replacement of the Haggadah of Pesach. The Haggadah is not, however, a literary genre, but a single text. It is first attested in the tenth century. The conclusion of the central rabbinic textual corpora provides a *terminus post quem* for the composition of the oldest recensions of the Haggadah.⁶⁹

65 STEMBERGER, *Öffentlichkeit*, 35f suggests the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt as a *terminus post quem* for the emergence of the rabbinic ritualization of Torah reading as noted in the tannaitic texts. SCHIFFMAN, *Early History* would refer to a slightly higher age (before 70 C.E.) for customs Torah reading as widespread among Jews. Schiffman regards possibly normative utterances and idealized descriptions by Josephus as reflecting mundane reality. If the New Testament passages (in Luke 4 and Acts 13; 15) originated in later second century Rome, their value for the reconstruction of first century Palestine is negligible. Cf. MANDEL, *Scriptural Exegesis* for a critical assessment of reconstructed readings and the "exegesis" of the Torah in the works of Josephus (and Philo).

66 MANDEL, *Scriptural Exegesis*, 28, note 46 emphasizes the study of the laws pertaining to the rabbinic festivals (mMeg 3.4–5) as reflecting an emphasis of the tradition on the discussion and teaching of laws much more than upon the proclamation of the text of the Torah.

67 LANGER, *Study* describes important elements of this change attested in the Talmud Yerushalmi.

68 ROUWHORST, *Reading*, 323.

69 Cf. LEONHARD, *Jewish Pesach*, 73–118 for the provenance of the Haggadah and its historical and literary context.

The Gospels already circulated for half a Millennium before the Haggadah was conceived. Christian groups started to celebrate the Pascha—perhaps as an anti-Pesach—around the middle of the second century.

6 Conclusions

In search of liturgical Gospel readings as part of a Liturgy of the Word, first traces emerge in the third century. The custom is well established at the end of the fourth century. The assessment of predecessors of this practice requires a distinction between testimonies for interests of groups in these texts and a ritualized performance of readings. The mere existence of the texts proves that they were read. It does not point to communal, let alone ritualized readings. Origen's testimony points to a much less standardized situation than it can be reconstructed for sources of the later fourth century. Tertullian discusses scriptural texts at meetings of his Christian group. He does not yet know a Liturgy of the Word. Justin's session of philosophical studies preceding the Eucharist on the Days of Helios is the only possible predecessor of both the Liturgy of the Word and any communal study of Gospel material. However, the claim that Gospel readings began in the latter part of the second century cannot only be based on this *argumentum e silentio*, because the late first and early second centuries are notoriously undocumented in the history of Christianity. Further arguments are required.

Justin's meetings on the Days of Helios are at most remote prototypes of Liturgies of the Word. As leader of a group of philosophers and as a staunch anti-Marcionite, Justin reacted quickly to the newest trends in Christianity. He put the correct versions of the new compositions as well as other texts that supported his approach (apparently Old Testament texts) on the reading list of his group. Justin's brand of Christianity vanished with the demise of Christian groups organized as circles of philosophers.⁷⁰ Even if the practice to study and discuss texts independent of one's sympotic table-talk was neither liturgical nor typically Jewish or Christian, the sudden emergence of Gospel material together with (Old Testament) Prophets cannot be attributed to the novelty of this literature, let alone to a kind of ecclesiastical authority. The choice of texts manifests Justin's opposition against Marcion. Second century additions to Marcion's Gospel (cf. Luke 4:16–22; 24:27) and Justin's reading assignment of "prophets" point into the same direction. Anti-Marcionism is not a re-alignment of Christian and Jewish customs, but an innovative elevation of the role played by the Old Testament in Christianity.

70 Cf. LÖHR, Christianity, 184–188.

This is borne out by the observation that the emergence of the Christian Liturgy of the Word is not dependent upon the ritualization of the rabbinic services of Torah reading and prayer. The developments of both Christian and rabbinic traditions follow different lines and interests. The remote parallels between rabbinic and Christian approaches to the reading of texts (either in literary fiction or in actual practice of groups) are due to their common roots within the Greek and Roman ways of living and studying as philosophers. The supposition that Christian groups adopted or inherited Jewish Diaspora customs of reading and studying Torah does not moreover explain the later prominence of the Gospels in Christian liturgies. Even if the Gospels should have been written in the late first century, there was just no Christian liturgy in which they played an essential role. Symptotic meetings of Christians provided a framework for discussions of all kinds of texts and topics. They do not require Gospel texts like the later Liturgies of the Word. It is still not evident for Origen that Gospel readings were indispensable.

Justin's group does not perform Liturgies of the Word in their third and fourth century shape and function. Therefore, it is not more than a tentative suggestion that these later Liturgies of the Word took their shape independent of Justin but because of the same reasons. Ephrem the Syrian still wrote tractates against Macion (and others). Opposition against Marcion thus united churches which diverged in other questions. Justin's choice of texts reveals the same motivation as later designs of liturgies without being their precursor. In later epochs, an obligatory Liturgy of the Word came to stage the sanctity of the *canonical* Gospels as well as their superiority over other texts. Readings of Old Testament texts supported the same case. The performance of Liturgies of the Word and its ritualized emphasis on the Gospels thus emerged in order to shape and express Christian identity and orthodoxy as Anti-Marcionite.

Apart from these only tentative suggestions, the origins of the Gospels must be reconstructed based on historical and textual data. Gospel texts emerge in the middle of the second century as reading material of a group of intellectuals/philosophers (Justin). A century later, their reading is attested in the first traces of a Liturgy of the Word preceding the celebration of the Eucharist. The history of Christian liturgies does not require a date of origins for the Gospels before Justin. Even that time—as well as several decades after Justin's death—Christianity did not practice any type of liturgy that required Gospel readings.