CHAPTER 6

PRELIMINARY ISSUES OF CULTIC IMAGERY IN THE PAULINE CORPUS

1. Cultic imagery and its interpretation

1.1 The identification of cultic terms

Cultic imagery may be discerned in passages where Paul uses the traditional language of a communal worship cult. In the context of the Graeco-Roman world contemporary to Paul, cult was related to the worship in or concentrated around a sanctuary. Paul abundantly attests to this ancient context of cult, both in his exhortation against pagan idolatry (e.g. 1 Cor 8) and in his references to Israel’s worship cult (e.g. Rom 9:4, 1 Cor 10:18). In view of this context contemporary to Paul, I exclude from my survey terms which are either too general to have specific cultic connotations, like οἱ ἄγιοι, ‘the saints’, or στῦλοι, ‘pillars’ (in Gal 2:9), or terms which are too much intertwined with descriptions of singular rituals. Paul’s references to rituals such as Jewish circumcision (cf. Gal 2:7-9, 5:6-12), baptism (1 Cor 1:13-17), and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34) may be distinguished from cultic imagery. Cultic imagery conveys aspects from a religious worship cult which was centred around a sanctuary. By contrast, the above mentioned rituals concern initiation or ‘institutionalisation’4 which by themselves do not stand for a temple cult or are unrelated to it.

With respect to cult contemporary to Paul’s time, one can hardly speak of a distinctly Christian cult. Christian worship, as described by Paul, is of course determined by Christian rituals, such as the Lord’s Supper and Christian baptism. On the other hand, Christian Jews in Paul’s time participated in the Jerusalem Temple cult (cf. Acts 21:17-26; chap. 3). Furthermore, the Christian religious calendar as we know it had not yet become fully institutionalised. For instance, the Sunday as the Christian first day of the week was instituted at a later stage in Christianity’s separation from Judaism (cf. Barnabas XV, 1-8), whereas Paul thought in terms of a Jewish calendar, as is revealed by his use of the expression κατὰ μίαν σαββάτου in 1 Cor 16:2.

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2 Cf. the analogy between ἄγιοι and believers in Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1, 4:22. Strack, Kultische Terminologie, 141-176 rightly categorises ἄγιοι among general ecclesiological terms, just as ἐκκλησία and ἐκκλησιαστήριον / κυκλήτη.

3 Klinzing, Die Umdeutung des Kultus, 200 categorises Gal 2:9 among ‘Zweifelhafte Belege’ and refers to general, metaphorical connotations to the term στῦλοι in the Old Testament and Greek literature. Siegert, “‘Zerstört diesen Tempel . . .!’”, 108-139 at 129-130 reads Gal 2:9 as Paul’s polemic against “jenes Christentum, das an den Jerusalemer Tempel noch Heilshoffnungen (…) zu knüpfen pflegte”. This seems a misinterpretation to me, since Paul’s polemic against the hypocrisy of compelling Gentiles to live like Jews in Gal 2:1-14 does not necessarily entail his denouncement of the Jerusalem Temple cult. Gal 2:15 may reflect the idea that Paul does not polemically against Jews or Jewish institutions per se. On the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem in Gal 4:25-26, see my chap. 4, section 4.3.

Paul and God’s Temple

Paul uses the cultic imagery of priesthood, sacrifice, and the Temple in his Letters to congregations in Christ. For an accurate historical interpretation, Paul’s cultic terms should be compared with the usage of cultic terms in contemporary pagan Hellenistic as well as Jewish culture. It further depends on the context of Paul’s Letters whether implicit cultic connotations of certain terms can be discerned and can be made relevant for our survey. The historical interpretation of Paul’s cultic imagery should thus take into account the ancient cultural context in which Paul and his original readers lived.

What did Paul’s cultic imagery of a priestly service and sacrifice mean for his original readers? What cultic and religious context does Paul have in mind when using cultic terms? A rhetorical-critical approach to Paul’s Letters may illuminate the historical interpretation of these issues, in particular in the case of 1-2 Corinthians. However, aspects of the rhetorical situation of cultic imagery in the other Pauline Letters will also be surveyed in this chapter.

The identification of cultic terms in the Pauline corpus at large demands further precision. The present chapter will make clear how the distinction between Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Letters matters for the historical interpretation of cultic terms in particular.

Among the undisputed Pauline Letters (1 Thess, 1-2 Cor, Gal, Rom, Phil, Phlm), the exclusive appearance of temple imagery in 1-2 Corinthians (1 Cor 3:16-17, 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16) attracts immediate attention. 1 Corinthians also contains references to the priestly service and to Israel’s Temple cult (1 Cor 9:13, 10:18). The Corinthian correspondence deserves extra attention for reasons to which I will return at the end of this chapter.

Apart from 1-2 Corinthians, Paul’s Letters to the Romans and to the Philippians include definite examples of cultic imagery. By contrast, 1 Thessalonians, Galatians and Philemon do not comprise cultic terms. My search for cultic imagery in the authentic Pauline Letters other than the Corinthian correspondence will concern Romans and Philippians in this chapter.

1.2 The application of cultic imagery

The problem of interpretation of Paul’s cultic imagery concerns, to speak with Gordon D. Fee, the fact that “the imagery itself is much clearer than its points of application” 5. If we have determined what a particular cultic term signified in the Graeco-Roman world in which Paul and his original readers lived, the question arises how and why Paul adopts such a cultic term in the context of his Letters. The interpretation of Paul’s cultic terms may have important implications for people’s perspective on how Paul’s religious thought can be related to Jews and Greeks respectively, both of whom he addresses (cf. Rom 1:16, 11:13-14; 1 Cor 1:22-24).

Since Paul uses cultic imagery in diverse contexts and applies it to himself, his audience or others, it is important to ‘de-rhetorise’ 6 Paul’s cultic language and to examine which theology underlies Paul’s cultic imagery. A historical interpretation of Paul’s cultic terms needs to address the context in which Paul makes concrete references to cultic worship as well as the question of how his concrete and figurative uses of cultic terms are related to each other. Among the authentic Pauline Letters, only 1-2 Corinthians and Romans contain both concrete and figurative uses of explicit cultic imagery.

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5 Cf. Fee, *Philippians* NICNT, 251 n. 50 about Phil 2:17: “Perhaps we should confess that we are fishing for answers to a very difficult metaphor, on which certainty will be hard to come by”.

2. The delimitation of Pauline authorship from pseudepigraphy and interpolation

2.1 Pauline Letters and Deutero-Pauline Letters

Thirteen Letters in the canon of the New Testament claim Pauline authorship. However, only part of these Letters are recognised as authentic Letters written by Paul, whereas the rest is usually regarded as pseudepigraphy in New Testament scholarship. My discussion will follow the scholarly consensus which recognises seven authentic Pauline Letters (1 Thess, 1-2 Cor, Gal, Rom, Phil and Phlm) and regards six other Letters (Col, Eph, 2 Thess, 1-2 Tim, Titus) as Deutero-Pauline Letters, written by followers of Paul and presented under his name. This consensus is supported by important arguments, in particular in the case of cultic imagery.

In view of an accurate survey of Paul’s cultic terms, it is very important to keep the discussion of the Pauline Letters distinct from the Deutero-Pauline Letters. The authors of the Deutero-Pauline Letters, probably followers of Paul, may have envisaged the transmission of Pauline ideas which circulated orally, or an elaboration on Paul’s thought. However, it is methodically flawed to analyse these Letters as materials for the reconstruction of Paul’s thought or to harmonise the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline evidence, as has been done in certain previous studies on cultic terminology and temple imagery. There are important literary and historical reasons to suppose that Paul’s thought underlying his use of cultic terms differs fundamentally from the ideas behind the cultic terms employed in the Deutero-Pauline Letters.

The first reason concerns the relation between cultic terms and ecclesiology. The Letter to the Ephesians is an important example of this. The building and temple imagery in Eph 2:18-22 conveys a very different perspective from that in 1 Cor 3:9-17. Paul envisages Jesus Christ as the foundation of God’s building (1 Cor 3:11), God’s Temple (1 Cor 3:16-17), whereas the author of Ephesians refers to the “foundation of the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone of it being Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:20). Paul himself, however, still struggled with the opposition by other ‘superlative apostles’ (2 Cor 11:5,12-15; cf. Gal 1:6-9). Eph 2:20 reflects a hindsight viewpoint on the contributions of the apostles to the growth of the church. Paul is included by the author of Ephesians in the ‘foundational generation’, as Andrew T. Lincoln has noted.

The contrast of ‘the least among all the saints’ in Eph 3:8 with ‘the least of the apostles’ in 1 Cor 15:9 also attests to this hindsight perspective.

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9 Gärtnert, The Temple and the Community, 60-71 mentions the doubted authenticity of Ephesians, but still refers to Paul as its author and describes the Pastoral Epistles as “the most recent and most discussed of the Pauline Letters” (66). Strack, Kultische Terminologie, 321-373 discusses Eph 2:11-22, 1 Pet 2:4-10, 1 Tim 3:15, Hebrews 3:6, 8-10 as ‘Pauline tradition’, implying elaboration on Paul’s building and temple imagery.


In addition, we may note the use of the non-Pauline terms ξένος, πάροικος and συμπολίται τῶν ἄγνων in Eph 2:19, which address Gentile converts (cf. Eph 2:11, 3:1). These terms in Ephesians convey metaphorical language from the socio-political process of naturalisation. Paul instead writes in terms of κοινωνία / κοινωνεῖν in the case of both association with the faith in Christ (1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 13:13; Gal 2:9; Rom 15:27; Phil 1:5; Phlm 6) and the expected dissociation from (previous) idolatrous practices (1 Cor 10:16, 2 Cor 6:14). Thus, the picture in Ephesians of the congregation as Temple is rooted in a different, more hierarchical context than Paul’s temple imagery in 1-2 Corinthians.

Most importantly, the ‘kyriocentric’ designation of the community as ‘a holy Temple in the Lord’, ναός ἄγιος ἐν κυρίῳ, in Eph 2:21 contrasts with Paul’s consistent ‘theocentric’ reference to ‘God’s Temple’, ναός (τοῦ) θεοῦ, in 1 Cor 3:16-17, 6:19, and 2 Cor 6:16. The seemingly subtle difference between the ‘kyriocentric’, that is, Christ-centred, and the ‘theocentric’ temple imagery is in fact a marked contrast. That is, the Ephesian temple imagery is entirely focused on the identity of the church in relation to Christ, whereas Paul’s metaphor of God’s Temple may echo the Jewish tradition of a monotheistic worship cult in the Second Temple period in a certain way, since Paul also refers to examples from this cult (cf. 1 Cor 10:18, Rom 9:4). Moreover, Paul represents Israel and the Israelites both in a sense of speaking about the Jewish people (e.g. 2 Cor 3:7, 11:22; Rom 9:3-5, Phil 3:5), and in a metaphorical, Christian sense (e.g. Rom 9:6f.), whereas the author of Ephesians refers to Israel exclusively in the light of the faith in Christ (Eph 2:12). I will return to the issue of the Second Temple period context and the breaking point of 70 CE in my discussion below on the historical grounds for a disjunction between cultic terms in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Letters.

The second reason to suppose a difference in perspective between the Pauline and the Deutero-Pauline Letters concerns the apocalyptic perspective which invests cultic terms. This point can be clarified by a comparison between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians. 2 Thessalonians is usually categorised as a Deutero-Pauline Letter. The author of 2 Thessalonians refers to the self-proclamation of the ‘man of lawlessness, the son of destruction’ (2 Thess 2:3) as God in the Temple of God, ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (2 Thess 3:4). This observation figures in the context of apocalyptic warnings about catastrophic events preceding the day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:1-12), which may be compared with those in the Synoptic Gospels in certain respects. On the other hand instead, Paul writes about God’s protection of the congregation as his holy Temple against any violation (1 Cor 3:17), after

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12 Lincoln, Ephesians WBC, 150-151 contrasts the meaning of ἄγιος as ‘all believers’ in Ephesians to its frequent designation of the Jerusalem church in Paul’s Letters (Rom 15:25, 26, 31; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:4, 9:1).

13 A term coined by McKelvey, The New Temple, 100-107, writing about the “traditional theocentric orientation of the temple concept”.

14 Cf. Lindemann, Der Epheserbrief, 55-56 and Lincoln, Ephesians WBC, 156-157.

15 Cf. Lindemann, Der Epheserbrief, 56 on the exclusive focus of Eph on the Christian believers as God’s people, without attention for the Israelites as a term for the Jews being God’s people as in Romans 9-11.


17 Cf. 2 Thess 2:1-3 about the apocalyptic circumstances preceding the Second Advent (παρονήσιον) of Christ and 2 Thess 2:9 about the ‘false signs and wonders’, σεμένεται καὶ τέρατα φεύγοντι, accompanying Satan’s activity, in comparison with Mark 13:4,22-27; Matt 24:3-5,15-31; Luke 21:7-9,20-28. Contrary to Malherbe, The Letters to the Thessalonians AB, 420-421, who relates 2 Thess 2:3-4 to an event in the past (the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes), a comparison with apocalyptic language in Matt 24:15 par. strongly suggests the contemporary (or recent past) setting of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.
having alluded to the testing of individual works on the day of the Lord (1 Cor 3:13). Thus, the reference to the Temple of God in the context of 2 Thess 2:1-12 implies an apocalyptic perspective provoked by contemporary circumstances which is altogether different from Paul’s apocalyptic perspective inherent in 1 Cor 3:9-17.

The third reason to keep the discussion of cultic terms in the Pauline Letters distinct from those in the Deutero-Pauline Letters concerns the relation between cultic terms and the addressees of moral instructions. 1 Timothy may serve as an example here. 1 Tim 3:15 exhorts its readers to proper conduct in the ‘house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and firm base of the truth’. It may be inferred from the preceding passage, 1 Tim 3:1-14, that this proper conduct applies in particular to those who minister in the ‘house of God’, that is, the overseers and the deacons. By contrast, Paul uses the metaphor of the Temple in his Letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor 3:16-17, 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16) to address moral issues concerning the congregation at large. Thus, the institutional focus of 1 Timothy also affects the building and temple imagery in 1 Tim 3:15, and thereby conveys a perspective distinct from Paul’s temple imagery.

The fourth reason to distinguish cultic terms in the Pauline Letters from those in the Deutero-Pauline Letters concerns the historical argument about the turning point of 70 CE. As I have already pointed out in chapter three, the turning point of 70 CE matters in particular for a historical reconstruction of traditions about the early Jesus-movement, since this reconstruction is based on post-70 CE texts reflecting later circumstances when Judaism and Christianity parted ways. The religious crisis following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE also effected this separation. The Deutero-Pauline Letters are generally dated after 70 CE. Therefore, the different historical circumstances which provoked the composition of these Letters have to be kept in mind in a comparative analysis on the Pauline Letters. A literary search for connections between Paul and the later ‘Pauline tradition’ with regard to cultic terms, among which temple imagery, carries the danger of underestimating the historical differences between Paul’s time and the post-70 CE period.

We may summarily conclude this section by stressing that the cultic terms from the Deutero-Pauline Letters cannot be included into our survey about Paul’s use of cultic terms without doing injustice to sensitive issues, such as the different rhetorical and ecclesiological contexts of cultic terms in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Letters respectively.

2.2 The question of interpolations

The other issue is the delimitation from interpolations which may also occur within the Letters regarded as authentically Pauline. The recent study by William O. Walker Jr. categorises various types of evidence for the identification of an interpolation. Walker supports the a priori probability of interpolations in view of the literary history of the Pauline corpus within the emerging canon of the New Testament, but he also recognises the burden of proof required for establishing an interpolation as a credible hypothesis.

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18 See Schnelle, Einleitung, 328-401; Conzelmann & Lindemann, Arbeitsbuch, 237-238, 295, 302, 313.
19 Klinzing, Die Umdeutung des Kultus, 167-191 and Strack, Kultische Terminologie, 270 focus on a comparison between 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19, 2 Cor 6:16 and Eph 2:22 and point to “Traditionszusammenhang” (Klinzing, 191) or “traditionsgeschichtliche Ähnlichkeiten” (Strack, 271).
There are, however, complications to Walker’s considerations about types of evidence for an interpolation. The evaluation of certain ideational, situational or motivational evidence for an interpolation may partly depend on the critic’s understanding of Paul’s theology and Paul’s reaction to certain rhetorical situations. Thus, the argument for interpolation may sometimes depend on subjective grounds. Furthermore, the linguistic evidence of *hapax legomena* as ‘non-Pauline’ in my view provides a rather tenuous argument for interpolation, as may be illustrated by an example from the pericope 2 Cor 6:14-7:1. The argument for the *hapax legomenon* μετέχειν in 2 Cor 6:14 as a non-Pauline word is problematic, since the related verb μετέχειν does occur quite frequently elsewhere in Paul’s Letters (1 Cor 9:10,12; 10:17,21,30).

The issue of interpolation will be discussed in individual cases of literary units within the Pauline Letters, where applicable (on 2 Cor 6:14-7:1, see my chap. 8). I will only deal with the question of interpolation in a particular case if it is an issue in scholarly literature.

3. Cultic imagery in the Pauline Letters other than 1-2 Corinthians

3.1 Romans

In contrast with his other Letters,22 Paul’s Letter to the Romans addresses a church which he had not yet visited (Rom 1:8-13). Contrary to the Corinthian congregation, whose foundation he claims for himself (1 Cor 3:10-11), Paul calls Roman Christianity ‘other man’s foundation’, ἀλλότριος θεμέλιος (Rom 15:20). However, Paul knew Roman Christians from previous missionary contacts. The Roman audience addressed by Paul included believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds (Rom 2:17-29, 11:13-14, 16:3).

3.1.1 Rom 3:21-26

Romans 3:21-26 stands apart as a literary unit about God’s righteousness to sinful humankind through redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις) in Christ Jesus.23 Paul writes about this redemption in terms which might have cultic connotations. Thus, we read in Rom 3:25a about Christ Jesus, διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν τῷ αἵτω σάματι, ‘whom God presented publicly as a means of expiation, through [the] faith, by his blood’. This redemption serves the twofold purpose of overcoming sins in the past and of demonstrating God’s righteousness at the present time (Rom 3:25b-26).

Contemporary Jewish literature provides evidence for the idea that the term ἡλαστήριον may be related to the *place of propitiation* in the Israelite worship cult.24 The related verb ἀπαύγασθαι also denotes the activity of propitiating related to the Israelite worship cult at certain occasions in Josephus’ works (Ant. 8.112; J.W. 5.385). On the other hand, the usage of ἡλαστήριον as a *means of propitiation* may be quite general without specific cultic connotations (Ant. 16.182).25

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22 Cf. 1 Thess 1:5-9, 2:1; 1 Cor 1:14-16, 2:1-5; 2 Cor 10:1f., 13:1-2f.; Gal 1:8-9; Phil 3:18, 4:15-16; Phlm 17.


24 The LXX term ἡλαστήριον mainly translates the Hebrew *κάρας*, that is, the covering or mercy seat upon the ark as the place around which rituals of atonement were centred. Cf. LXX Exod 25:17-22, 31:7, 35:12, 38:5-7-8; Lev 16:2.13-15; Num 7:89. Cf. Philo, *Cherubim* 25 quoting Exod 25:19; Hebrews 9:5.

25 The verb ἀπαύγασθαι may generally stand for making someone sympathetic toward someone or something (Ant. 6.124; Ag.Ap. 1.308). I disagree with the argument of D.A. Campbell, *The Rhetoric of Righteousness in*
In a pagan Hellenistic context, the verb ἱλάσκεσθαι may also both denote a cultic activity of propitiation and an intra-human or non-cultic religious activity of appeasing or conciliating, while the term ἱλαστήριον further stands for propitiation in Graeco-Roman literature as well. In the early Roman context, the idea of propitiation could further be related to both a cultic context of sacrifices within the cultus deorum, as the means to ward off omens, and a figurative context of morality and intra-human relationships.

The above mentioned contextual evidence does not unequivocally point to a connection of Paul’s term ἱλαστήριον with cultic connotations. Ferdinand Hahn has in fact argued against the idea of relating atonement to cultic tradition in Rom 3:25, considering this indemonstrable. In general terms, Paul applies the idea of atonement for sins, and thereby reconciliation of God with his people, to Christ Jesus in Romans 3:21-26. This general idea of redemption in Christ Jesus is probably corroborated by Paul’s statement in Rom 3:22 that ‘there is no distinction’, οὐ γάρ ἔστιν διαστολή. This statement rhetorically counters the idea that the Law, and by extension the Jewish worship cult, can create an absolute distinction between Gentile impurities and Jewish holiness. Thus, Paul appears to defy the idea that the levitical commandment which distinguishes between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean (Lev 10:10) should entail a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. In this way, Paul opposes ideas voiced by his opponents, among whom were the most traditionalist circles within the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:11-14). It would therefore make sense to Paul’s argument that ἱλαστήριον expresses a notion of redemption in terms apart from the law (Rom 3:21), and, by extension, in terms apart from the Jewish worship cult.

The redemption through Christ Jesus in Rom 3:25a does not entail the abrogation of the old covenant of God with Israel mediated through the priestly Temple cult. Just as Paul refers to righteousness through faith as a principle which upholds the law (Rom 3:27-31), so does Paul’s theology of atonement serve to unify Jewish and Gentile converts in faith. Paul, however, mentions the worship cult as a privilege of the Israelites in Romans 9:4 (see the next section).

Romans 3.21-26 (Sheffield AP, JSOT Press: Sheffield, 1992) 130-133 that Paul’s mentioning of ἱλαστήριον necessarily derives its meaning from the Yom Kippur in a Jewish context, addressing Christian Jews in Rome.

26 See Burkert, Greek Religion, 195 and 273-274 respectively. Cf. BDAG, 473-474.
27 Cf. BDAG, 474. Another term for cultic rituals of propitiation may be τὰ (ἱερὰ) μειλιστήματα in a pagan context (LSJ) as well as in an Israelite context (cf. Josephus, J.W. 4.462 and 5.385).
31 Contra Campbell, The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3:21-26, 132-133 who argues that Paul makes subtle Levitical allusions (Rom 3:25a, 8:3.34) to adapt his message to Christian Jews in Rome.
32 Cf. W.S. Campbell, ‘Romans III as a Key to the Structure and Thought of Romans’, in K.P. Donfried (ed.), The Romans Debate (Revised and Expanded Edition; T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1991) 251-264 at 254-255 who notes in relation to Rom 3:21-26 that Paul’s gospel “is universal not in opposition to Jewish particularism, as has often mistakenly been believed, but precisely on the basis of that Jewish particularism which, through the fulfilment in Christ of the promises to Israel, is now opened up to include Gentiles also”.
3.2.2 Romans 9-11

Romans 9-11 forms a thematic unity, because it defines the place of Israel in Paul’s theology of salvation. It is important for our understanding of Paul’s theology on contemporary Judaism and Israel, which pertains to converts from the Gentiles in God’s covenant with Israel. Within Rom 9-11, certain issues directly (Rom 9:4) or indirectly (Rom 9:33, 11:26-27) relate to Jerusalem (Zion) and the Temple cult.

Rom 9:1-5

Romans 9:1-5 is a statement from religious conscience, which expresses Paul’s view about his relation to the Jews, “my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:3). Paul writes in Rom 9:4-5 that they indeed are “Israelites to whom belong belong the adoption of sons and the glory and the covenants and the lawgiving and the worship service and the promises, of whom are the patriarchs and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh; the One Being over all, God be blessed for ever, amen”.

Among the blessings of the Israelites, the worship, ἡ λατρεία, is of interest to our survey of cultic imagery, since it concerns the Israelite worship cult, that is, the Jerusalem Temple cult in Paul’s time. The term ‘glory’ (ἡ δόξα) might further be related to the worship service of the Temple which was filled with the ‘glory of the Lord’ according to 1 Kings 8:10-11. Nevertheless, the latter identification is less sure in view of its place in Paul’s enumeration, which is distant from ἡ λατρεία; and because the ‘glory’ may also be more broadly connected to the manifestation of God’s glory to Israel through the covenants recounted in the Bible, and reinterpreted by Paul (cf. e.g. 2 Cor 3:7-11).

The context for Paul’s description of, among other Israelite privileges, Israel’s Temple cult is a theological dilemma. That is, in Rom 9:1-3, Paul phrases the dilemma that his gospel mission in Christ separates him from fellow Jews who do not believe in Jesus Christ, while Paul views faith as the only way of salvation (cf. Rom 10:1-4, 11:23). Without this faith the word of God is empty according to Paul (Rom 9:6). Nevertheless, Paul also views God’s gifts and call as irrevocable (Rom 11:29) and stresses his sense of belonging to the Israelite tradition at the same time in Rom 9-11 (cf. Rom 11:1, καὶ γέροντος ἐδόθη Ἰσραήλ ἐλπίδα).

Just as Paul concludes Rom 9:1-5 with a prayer-like blessing formula, he also expresses his ‘heart’s desire and prayer to God’ in Rom 10:1 that these Jews may be saved through faith. Paul’s perspective on the Israelite prerogatives, including the Temple cult, is determined by faith which enlightens the tradition. Paul’s theology of Israel opens the

33 See e.g. Fitzmyer, Romans AB, 550-554 with bibliography.
36 Metzger, Textual Commentary, 520-523 notes that ὁ δὲ ἐστὶ πάντας, if linked to the preceding phrase ὁ Χριστὸς κατετάχθη σάρκα in Rom 9:5, yields an un-Pauline idea of Christ as God. See LXX Exod 3:14 about God as ὁ δὲ καὶ Philo, Spec.Laws 1.270 about the ‘Temple of the truly Existent’, τὸ τοῦ ἄνω τοῦ ἁγίου.
37 Cf. LXX 1 Chron 28:13, 1 Mac 2:19.22; Josephus, J.W. 2.409; Fitzmyer, Romans AB, 547 translates υἱ τοῦ ιεροῦ as ‘the cult’, that is, Israel’s Temple cult as opposed to “the idolatrous worship of Israel’s neighbors”.
38 Fitzmyer, Romans AB, 546 notes examples from Exod 15:6, 11; 16:10; 40:34; 1 Kgs 8:11 about the different contexts to God’s glory through God’s covenants with “Israel’s ancestors”.
39 Cf. Rom 8:35-39, in which Paul stresses that nothing can ‘separate us from the love of Christ’ (v. 35).
perspective of salvation up to the Gentiles, but at the same time stresses the weight of Israelite tradition through the metaphor of the olive tree in Rom 11:17-24; a metaphor which associates the Israelites with the natural position in God’s plan of salvation.

Rom 9:30-33

In the context of his theological elaboration on the theme of God’s election, Paul voices the idea that righteousness is not only attained by those who descended from Israel but also by the Gentiles (Rom 9:6-29). Thus, God’s calling addresses not only the Jews but also the Gentiles, οὐ μόνον ἐξ Ἰουδαίων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξ ἐθνῶν (Rom 9:24); an idea for which Paul quotes from the prophets Hosea and Isaiah as prooftexts in Rom 9:25-29. By emphasising faith as the quality which brings Jews and Gentiles together, Paul aims to correct a wrong kind of perception of righteousness from the Law devoid of faith (Rom 9:30-32).

In the context of this argument, Paul ‘quotes’ from Scripture in Romans 9:33: καθὼς γέγραπται: ἵδον τίθημι ἐν Σιὼν λίθον προσκόμματος καὶ πέτραν σκαλνάλου, καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ οὐ κατασχυνθήσεται, ‘as it is written: behold, I lay a stumbling stone in Zion and a rock of temptation to sin, and the one who believes in him will not be ashamed’. This ‘quotation’ appears to be collated from Isa 28:16 and 8:14, for Paul has the image of a ‘stumbling stone’, ὁ λίθος τοῦ προσκόμματος, already in his mind (Rom 9:32) and refers the reader back to scriptural prooftexts.

Since Zion denotes the city of Jerusalem, Paul implicitly expresses a critical view on the centrality of Jerusalem and its Temple. Paul alludes to prophetic criticism of Zion and appropriates it for his view about the contemporary situation of unbelief. Paul’s critical view on the contemporary place of Jerusalem and its Temple appears to play a central part in the background of Paul’s theology of salvation. In the rhetorical situation of opposition to his mission (Galatians), Paul is even far more polemical and direct in his view about Jerusalem, since he distinguishes between the ‘present Jerusalem’ in slavery and the ‘Jerusalem above’ which is free in Gal 4:25-26. Nevertheless, the context of Rom 9-11 precludes this kind of polemic against Jerusalem, since the stumbling block in Zion may make the Israelites stumble (Rom 9:32), but it does not make them fall (Rom 11:11) in Paul’s perspective.

Rom 11:1-16

Paul explicitly counters the idea of God’s rejection of his people in Rom 11:1-16, quoting from 1 Kgs 19:10,14 in Rom 11:3 and from 1 Kgs 19:18 in Rom 11:4 to elaborate the notion of God’s grace for a faithful remnant in the midst of a hardened, unbelieving rest. In Rom 11:16, Paul uses terms derived from a cultic context of a dough offering and the figure of a tree with its branches as two examples to illustrate the idea that God’s covenant with Israel naturally extends from the patriarchs to contemporary Israel.

Thus, Rom 11:16 reads: εἰ δὲ ἡ ἄπαρχῇ ἀγία, καὶ τὸ φύραμα καὶ εἰ ἡ ῥίζα ἀγία, κατι οἱ κλάδοι, ‘If the first fruit (of dough) is holy, so is the lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches’. The cultic context of a dough offering is found in Numbers 15:18-21; and m. Hallah refers back to this original context of the Temple cult for the dough offering.

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40 Cf. BDAG, 925 about Mt. Zion, a “hill within the city of Jerusalem”, and Zion as Jerusalem, cf. Jer 3:14.
41 Cf. Fitzmyer, Romans AB, 602-618 about Rom 11:1-10 on Israel’s hardening being ‘partial’, and Rom 11:11-24 on Israel’s disbelief being ‘temporary and providential’.
42 Fitzmyer, Romans AB, 614 points to divergence in the identification of the two images in Rom 11:16, and links the first fruits of dough with the remnant “which has already accepted Christ” and the root with the patriarchs. The preceding verses, Rom 11:11-15, in my view strongly implies that both images concern Israel.
Thus, Paul uses cultic imagery to reaffirm the holiness of the Israelites, whose acceptance by God is understood by Paul as a life which saves from death (Rom 11:15). The second example of the root of a tree and its branches marks the transition to Paul’s elaboration of the metaphor of the olive tree in Rom 11:17-24.

Rom 11:25-32

Paul emphasizes the eventual salvation of all Israel in the concluding part of Romans 9-11, that is, Rom 11:25-32. In Romans 11:26-27, Paul presents a collation of scriptural quotations about Zion and God’s covenant with the Israelites. Paul here unfolds his eschatological perspective on God’s covenant with Israel. Since Zion stands for Jerusalem and may therefore illuminate Paul’s eschatological perspective on Jerusalem and the Temple, Romans 11:25-32 deserves specific attention for our survey.

In Rom 11:26-27, Paul refers to words from LXX Isaiah 59:20-21 and 27:9 about the covenant of God with his people through the Deliverer who is to come from Zion. The Deliverer is identified as the Lord in the context of Isaiah, but Paul’s use of Zion-traditions (cf. Rom 9:33 previously discussed) suggests that faith in Christ is the context for the covenant and salvation here. Paul in fact identifies Jesus Christ as the Deliverer from the wrath to come, that is, in the expected end-time, in 1 Thess 1:10. On the other hand, Paul writes about God’s agency in redemption in 2 Cor 1:9-10. The salvation of all Israel through God’s irrevocable call (Rom 11:26-29) appears to reinforce the privileged place of the Israelites. Since Zion, which stands for Jerusalem, is apparently central to this eschatological salvation and the eventual renewal of the covenant, it appears unlikely that Paul had the supersession of Israelite privileges in mind.

Paul’s perspective on the contemporary worship in the Jerusalem Temple, however, has been troubled by the sharp ritual boundaries between Jews and Gentiles and a similar pressure to draw such ritual boundaries as exerted by the ‘circumcision party’ (cf. Gal 2:11-14, 6:12). In view of Paul’s redefinition of his understanding of Jewish identity (Rom 2:28-3:8) and of his belief in the one God of the Jews and the Gentiles together (Rom 3:29-30), Paul’s idea of valid Temple worship would probably correspond with the prophetic tradition in Isaiah 56:7 of God’s Temple as a ‘house of prayer for all peoples’.

3.2.3 Rom 12:1-2

From ἡ λατρεία in Rom 9:4 (cf. section 5.2.1), Paul’s theological discussion turns to ἡ λογική λατρεία ὑμῶν, ‘your reasoned worship’, in Rom 12:1. This verse addresses the worship of the Roman congregation in cultic terms, urging its members to present ‘your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God’, παραστήσατε τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἐγίνησαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ. The fact that Paul refers to the bodies of the Roman believers as a living sacrifice may be explained in the context of dangers of persecution (Rom 12:14). The body as a living sacrifice could then represent the idea of endurance of hardships for the sake of the faith in Christ. Paul’s sense of a reasoned worship may well be informed by what he writes in Rom 12:2, namely that the Roman congregation should not be conformed to this world, but should focus on the renewal of the mind in light of God’s will. The will of God comprises what is good, acceptable, and perfect (Rom 12:2).

The expression ἡ λογική λατρεία in Rom 12:1 has often been interpreted as ‘spiritual worship’. Wolfram Strack, for example, has associated Paul’s use of the term λογικός in

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43 Cf. the translation from RSV; Gärtner, The Temple and the Community, 73 n. 1: “Rom. xii.1 has the word λογικός (‘spiritual worship’) in a context similar to that of 1 Pet ii. 5.”; and Strack, Kultische Terminologie, 362. See, however, the translation ‘a cult suited to your rational nature’ by Fitzmyer, Romans AB, 637.
this passage with the usage of πνευματικός in 1 Peter 2:5, which denotes the explicitly spiritual idea of the church as a Temple in the end time, as distinct from the contemporary Temple cult.44 The term λογικός figures in 1 Pet 2:2 in the expression τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, which the Revised Standard Version translates as ‘the pure spiritual milk’. In Paul’s own Greek, however, the term πνευματικός consistently signifies something spiritual (1 Cor 3:1-2, 10:3-4).45 It remains to be argued rather than to be assumed whether the word λογικός means the same in Paul’s Greek as in the Greek of 1 Peter. The context to the usage of λογικός in Rom 12:1 is certainly different from that of 1 Pet 2:2-5. Contrary to 1 Pet 2:5, Paul does not write about spiritual sacrifices in Rom 12:1, but about the bodies as living sacrifices which are acceptable to God. Strack’s association of Paul’s term λογικός with πνευματικός in 1 Pet 2:5, therefore amounts to a harmonisation of evidence from the New Testament writings and fails to do justice to Paul’s Greek. It is even misleading to think that Paul and the author of 1 Peter had a fixed idea in mind with the term πνευματικός, for this depends on the context of their messages.

Moreover, Christine Mohrmann observed that traditional associations of the term λογικός with ‘reasonable’ and ‘rational’ may have persisted in early Latin Christianity, as is revealed by the Latin translation rationabilis of the Greek term λογικός. The Latin term rationabilis was far less well defined than the pair spiritualis-carnalis in later Latin Christianity according to Mohrmann.46

Paul has a figurative notion of cultic worship in mind in Rom 12:1-2, as becomes clear from his use of the term sacrifice in a non-literal way. However, it does not necessarily follow that this figurative notion of cult concerns spiritual worship, in contrast to the contemporary Jerusalem Temple cult.47 For if ἡ λογικὴ λατρεία ὤμοιον in Rom 12:1 were necessarily contrasted to ἡ λατρεία in Rom 9:4, by the same reasoning τὰ ἱερά in Jewish diaspora communities (Ant. 14.213-214, 227-228, 234, 237, 240, 242, 245, 258) would have to be contrasted to τὰ ἱερὰ of the Jerusalem Temple cult (J.W. 4.279). This latter idea is not at all implied by Josephus.

R.J. McKelvey and G. Klinzing have rightly noted that Paul’s reference to the bodies of the Roman addressees as a living sacrifice, θυσία ζώσα, precludes the identification of ἡ λογικὴ λατρεία, with Hellenistic spiritualisation.48 Hellenistic Jewish literature applies the figurative idea of sacrifice to the soul, as we read for instance in a treatise of Philo: ‘Genuine worship is that of a soul presenting the truth as its simple and only sacrifice’ (Worse 21).49

In my view, Paul had in mind not so much a distinction from the Jerusalem Temple cult but rather a contrast with the surrounding Graeco-Roman world in Rom 12:1-2. Thus,
Paul contrasts the surrounding world, ὁ κόσμος ὁ οὐτός, to which his readers should not conform, with the renewal of the mind in light of God’s will in Rom 12:2. As I have already mentioned, Paul’s sense of the body as a ‘living sacrifice’ may be understood in the context of endurance of hardships for the sake of the faith in Christ. This idea becomes even more tangible when Paul refers to an apparent imminent context of tribulation, persecution, and evil in Rom 12:12-21.

3.2.4 Rom 15:14-33

Romans 15:14-33 unfolds Paul’s travel plans and links Paul’s mission to the Gentiles with his service for the Jerusalem church. It is significant that Paul uses cultic imagery in this connection, since this may tell us something about how Paul understood the relation between Jerusalem and the Gentiles.

Rom 15:16

In Rom 15:16, Paul expresses his service for the Gentile congregations in cultic terms ‘to be a servant of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles, administering the gospel of God as a priest, in order that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable,’ sanctified by the Holy Spirit, εἰς τὸ εἶναι με λειτουργὸν Χριστοῦ Ἡσυχαίοι εἰς τὰ ἑνή, ἱεροπροσκύνητα τῷ θεῷ, ἵνα γένηται ἡ προσφορὰ τῶν ἔθνων εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἡμαισμένη ἐν πνεύματι ἐγώ. Paul’s mode of expression in Rom 15:16 evokes the analogy between Paul’s gospel mission and cultic worship, as the terms λειτουργός, ἱεροπροσκυνεῖν, and ἡ προσφορὰ τῶν ἔθνων reveal. Through this analogy, Paul associates his own role with that of priestly service in cultic worship; terms which by themselves may have both pagan and Jewish connotations. Even though there may be parallels with pagan cultic usage of these terms, it is unlikely that Paul would have an analogy in mind other than that with the priestly service of God represented by the contemporary Jerusalem Temple. For Paul also points to the gospel of God in Rom 15:16 and to his preaching the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum in Rom 15:19.

50 Cf. BDAG, 32 about the Jewish dichotomy between ἡ θύελλα ήθους and ἡ θύελλα ἄθροισθης, underlying Paul’s term ὁ κόσμος ὁ οὐτός (parallel to ὁ κόσμος ὁ οὐτός) in Rom 12:2.

51 Cf. the parallel between Paul’s hope in Rom 15:16 that the ‘offering of the Gentiles’ may be acceptable, εὐπρόσδεκτος, and in Rom 15:31 that his service for Jerusalem may be acceptable, εὐπρόσδεκτος, to the saints. See J.D.G. Dunn, WBC 38B Romans 9-16 (Word Books: Dallas, Tex., 1988) 854 about Rom 15:14-33 as “the intimation of travel plans”; cf. 856-857 about the use of cultic terms in Rom 15:15-16 and 15:27-28.

52 The ‘offering of the Gentiles’ stands in my view for that which the converts from the Gentiles have to offer to God, that is, their faith and works out of faith.


In fact, several passages in the Septuagint refer to servants, λειτουργοί, in the Jerusalem Temple, which may also be a general designation applied to the priests.\(^{55}\) The term ἱεροσύνη occasionally designates the priestly service in the Septuagint.\(^{56}\) In Josephus’ works, the verb ἱεροσύνη often denotes the activity of worshippers who participate in the sacrificial rites of the Jerusalem Temple (J.W. 5.14, 16; Ant. 3.237; 5.333; 11.110), but sometimes it is specified as priestly service (Ant. 14.65, 67; 17.166). Philo also alludes to the Temple cult a few times through the term ἱεροσύνη (Spec.Laws 1.125; Moses 2.73).\(^{57}\)

J. Ponthot has argued that the focus in Rom 15:16 is not so much on the priestly formulation of Paul’s mission but on the ‘ecclesiological and soteriological vision’ underlying the cultic imagery which relates to the Gentiles.\(^{58}\) This interpretation still leaves the question why Paul couches his theological message in cultic terms, a dimension which is apparently important to Paul.

Significantly, the term ἡ προσφορά τῶν ἐθνῶν, meaningless in the context of pagan Hellenistic cults as it refers to the offering of the ‘Gentiles’ from a Jewish point of view,\(^{59}\) was charged with dispute in the Jewish context contemporary to Paul. That is, the place of Gentile offerings in the Jerusalem Temple cult was hotly disputed by Palestinian-Jewish movements (cf. my chap. 1). The revolutionary movement which gained the upper hand among the priestly factions of the Jerusalem Temple at the eve of the Jewish war would accept no gift or sacrifice from any foreigner according to Josephus (J.W. 1.409). The Qumran text 4QMMT further expresses a negative sectarian viewpoint on the offering of Gentile sacrifice, βασιλείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν (MMT B 8).\(^{60}\) On the other hand, Josephus and early rabbinic literature provide evidence that the priestly establishment generally accepted certain forms of participation of Gentiles in the Jerusalem Temple cult.\(^{61}\)

Within this contemporary Jewish context, Paul’s cultic imagery may serve a deliberate rhetorical purpose. Paul’s expressed hope that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, εὔπροσδέξατος, could be related to his wish to conciliate his mission among the Gentiles with the Jerusalem church. The fact that he expresses this hope in cultic imagery may reveal that Paul expects the saints of Jerusalem, as opposed to the ‘unbelievers in Judaea’, to show goodwill to his Gentile mission (Rom 15:31).

*Rom 15:27-28*

The relation to Jerusalem brings us to the other part of Paul’s service, that is, his service for the Jerusalem church, which he mentions in Rom 15:25-33. Paul states in Rom 15:27 that

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55 Cf. LXX 2 Esdr 7:24 (λειτουργοί οἱ σωτ.); Sir 7:30f about servants. Cf. LXX 2 Esd 20:40 (οἱ ἱερεῖς οἱ λειτουργοί); Isa 61:6 (ὑμεῖς δὲ ἱερεῖς εὑρίσκετε κοιλήθηκασθέ, λειτουργοί θεοῦ) about priests.
56 4 Macc 7:8 mentions of ἱεροσύνηντες τῶν νόμων, ‘those who administer the law as priests’, and 4 Macc 3:20 refers to the Temple service, ἱεροσύνη.
57 Other Philonic terms are τὰ ἱερεῖα (Drunkenness 85) and ἡ περὶ τῶν νεῶν λειτουργία (Spec.Laws 1.123).
60 Cf. MMT B 3 about the contribution of the wheat of the Gentiles (חנוניות ועננים זכר היהודים) and B 4-5 that it should not be eaten nor brought into the Temple. Cf. MMT 5.1f about the sanctification of the Gentiles (מצודות חנוניות זכר יהודים ולא נファッション המזון). ועננים זכר יהודים
61 E.g. Josephus, J.W. 2.411-414; m. Zebah. 4.5. m. Menah. 5.3.5 and 6.1 about the meal-offering of a Gentile; m. Hal. 1.1, however, focuses on the uncleanness of animals killed for food by Gentiles.

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converts from the Gentiles should serve, ἱεροσυνάψις, the congregation in Jerusalem. This passage about the other part of Paul’s service, which is related to the Jerusalem church, establishes the other half of the cultic metaphor which Paul began in Rom 15:16.

Having compared his own position as an apostle with the priestly service, Paul puts the position of the Gentile congregations in perspective in Rom 15:27-28. Thus, Paul refers to their material service, ἐν τοῖς σάρκικοις ἱεροσυναπτούσι τοῦτοις, in Rom 15:27 and to the fruit of this service (ἱεροσυναπτός) delivered by himself in Rom 15:28. Here the analogy may again stem from the priestly service which mediated spiritual blessings (e.g. the priestly blessing), but presupposed a material sustenance by the worshippers.62

Significantly, Rom 15:26-27.31 underlines the centrality of the Jerusalem church in the gospel mission to the Gentiles, since the Gentiles have come to share in the spiritual blessings of the saints in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Paul apparently does not count the Roman church among the churches of the Gentiles who are expected to make a contribution for the poor to the saints at Jerusalem (cf. Rom 15:26-27, 16:4). Contrary to the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian congregations, the Roman church included Christian-Jewish missionaries, like Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3-4), among its numbers.

The Roman readers are demanded to pray that Paul’s mission to Jerusalem may be found acceptable by the saints and that he may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judaea (Rom 15:30-31). Paul thereby presupposes that the Jerusalem church had this central place in the gospel mission and its spiritual blessings also for the Roman congregation(s).

3.3 Philippians

Paul wrote his Letter to the Philippians in a relatively late stage of his gospel mission, while being imprisoned in Rome (cf. Phil 1:13-14). Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12, cf. Phil 4:22) and the congregation in Philippi may have largely consisted of Gentile converts (cf. Phil 4:15). Nevertheless, Paul found it necessary to write about his Jewish background (Phil 3:5-6) and to warn the Philippians against opponents, ‘evil-workers’ (Phil 3:2), who would impose a Jewish way of life on Gentile converts. This suggests a certain extent of (Christian-)Jewish influence or presence in Philippi.

3.3.1 Phil 2:12-18

In a rhetorical unit about that which the Philippians share with Paul ‘as in my presence, but much more in my absence’ (v.12), Paul emphasises their partnership in faith. He urges the Philippians to do all things without complaints and disputes, in order to become unblemished and pure, blameless children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil 2:14-15). In Phil 2:16, Paul stresses that, in that case, he may not have run in vain when the day of Christ has come.63 Paul brings the idea of partnership to a climax in Phil 2:17 where he uses a cultic metaphor about the sacrificial offering of the Philippians’ faith together with a libation of Paul himself: Ἄλλα ἐστι καὶ σπένδομαι ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργεῖ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν, χαῖρω καὶ συγκάλλει πᾶσιν ὑμῖν, ‘But even if I am offered up as a libation over the sacrificial service of your faith, I am delighted and I rejoice with all of you’. Through this hyperbole, Paul also urges the Philippians to show solidarity with him (Phil 2:18).

62 Cf. BDAG, p. 591. Contra J.D.G. Dunn, WBC Romans 9-16 (1988), 876 who interprets Paul’s language as a turning of tables, “Gentiles ministering (as priests) to Jews”; this seems to me an overinterpretation of λειτουργεῖν in this context. The material service concerns the contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26) and is not specified as cultic imagery, as is the case in Rom 15:16 with λειτουργεῖς.

63 οὖν εἷς κενὸν ἔδρασον. Cf. the very similar phrase μὴ ποιεῖς εἰς κενὸν τρέχοι ἢ ἔδρασον in Gal 2:2.
The expression ἡ θυσία καὶ λειτουργία τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν, literally ‘the sacrifice and service of your faith’, here conveys the Philippians’ part in Paul’s cultic metaphor. According to recent commentaries, Paul refers to the theme of common suffering rather than to martyrdom or death, since the latter idea must be refuted on lexical, contextual, and theological grounds. The idea in commentaries suggests that we have to deal with a difficult verse containing a cultic metaphor, but it should be noted that the combination of the adjectives ἐμελπτος, ἀνέρχομαι and ἐμωμος in Phil 2:15 probably also has cultic overtones. This language conveys the idea of an unblemished, unmixed state which corresponds to a state beyond reproach which was required of priests in the Temple service (cf. Ant. 3.278).

If Phil 2:17 expresses the theme of common suffering, why does Paul couch this idea in sacrificial language? Was it common to use such terms as proverbial language for suffering in contemporary Jewish tradition or in the Graeco-Roman world at large? The work of Josephus comprises a number of cases of figurative usage of σπένδομαι: ‘to become reconciled (with someone), reconcile oneself with, to make an agreement’ (cf. Life 324) or as a middle voice also ‘to covenant, to enter into (a contract)’ (Ant. 5.51). The word σπονδή can also stand for treaty, treaties, conclusion of peace, truce (Ant. 13.242) or covenant, alliance (Ant. 1.313; 12.154).

In the pagan Graeco-Roman context, sacrifice and libation could take place in religious associations, while aspects of rituals apparently even took place in domestic settings. Paul refers to the pagan sacrificial context when he discusses food offered to idols in 1 Cor 8, but his exhortation is also firmly set against idolatry in 1 Cor 10:14. By analogy, it therefore appears very unlikely that Paul would have had an allusion to pagan cultic practices in mind with his use of sacrificial imagery in Phil 2:17. The context of Phil 2:12-18 may also imply a contrast with the pagan environment, since Paul addresses the Philippians as the ‘children of God’ in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil 2:15).

The idea of the covenant mediated through the priestly service of God was familiar and probably also important to Paul. Paul exhorts the Philippians to become blameless and pure. His sacrificial imagery in Phil 2:17 apparently serves to underline the opposite of a vain mission to the Gentiles (Phil 2:16). Since the figurative idea of a sacrificial service of faith clearly derives from the cultic domain, it may have been patterned on the Israelite tradition of the Temple cult which stood for the worship of the one God and which applied to Paul’s mission to the Gentiles through the faith in Christ.

3.3.2 Phil 4:14-20

Paul uses cultic imagery in Philippians 4:14-20, where he also introduces the idea of partnership and solidarity. In Phil 4:18, Paul describes the gifts sent by the Philippians in cultic terms. The gifts stand for the fruit of the Philippians’ helpful partnership in the gospel of Christ. Thus we read in Phil 4:18: ἀπέχω δὲ πάντα καὶ περισσεύων πεπλήρωμαι δεξάμενος παρὰ Ἐπαφροδίτου τῷ παρ’ ὑμῖν, ὁσιόν εὐφροσύνης, θυσίαν δεσποτήν, εὐάρσιστον τῷ κυρίῳ ‘Now I have received all things in full and I have more than enough; I am filled with the things which you have received from you on the part of Epaphroditus, a pleasant fragrance, a pleasing sacrifice, acceptable to God’.

G.F. Hawthorne, WBC 43 Philippians (Waco, Tex., 1983) 105-106; Fee, Philippians NICNT, 250-252.


Cf. Phil 3:3 οἱ πνεῦματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες καὶ καυχόμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Θεοῦ.
The cultic language of offering and sacrifice is related to the ‘fruit’ among the Philippians (Phil 4:17). This ‘fruit’ may be connected to the ‘fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God’ in Phil 1:11. Paul voices the partnership in faith through a metaphor from the cultic domain which also expresses partnership between human beings in the covenantal relationship toward God.

4. Summary

Contrary to much previous scholarship on cultic imagery in the New Testament, we have important historical and literary reasons to suppose a disjunction between the evidence of cultic imagery in the Pauline and the Deutero-Pauline Letters respectively.

The evidence of Romans yields information about how Paul’s cultic imagery may be related to his mission to Jews and Gentiles. Paul’s reference to expiation by Christ’s blood in Rom 3:25, however, does not necessarily have cultic connotations, but expresses the general christological orientation of Paul’s thought about redemption in God’s righteousness.

Paul’s reference to Israel’s worship cult in Rom 9:4 figures in the context of the theological theme of Rom 9-11 about the temporary hardening of part of Israel in unbelief, which paradoxically brings salvation for the Gentiles who are included in God’s covenant. Paul was undoubtedly critical towards the contemporary Jerusalem and its Temple. However, Paul’s argument in Rom 9-11 does not point out that Paul had the supersession of the Temple cult in mind. Just as in the case of the Law, Paul instead redefined the idea of Israel’s cult in light of the faith in Christ to include the Gentiles in God’s covenant.

The idea of a substitution for Israel’s cult in the form of spiritual worship needs to be reconsidered, especially in the case of Rom 12:1-2, since the idea of spiritualisation does not do justice to Paul’s Greek, nor to the context of the passage. Paul’s term ‘reasoned worship’, ἡ λογικὴ λατρεία, in Rom 12:1 rather denotes a juxtaposition with the way of life in the surrounding world, to which the Roman congregation should not conform. Reasoned worship is related to the renewal of the mind in light of the will of God (Rom 12:2).

The cultic imagery in Rom 15:14-33 may have a deliberate, rhetorical purpose, expressing Paul’s hope that the Jerusalem church may be conciliated with his Gentile mission. Paul further presupposes the assent of Christian Jews in Rome to his mission, among whom were fellow missionaries of Paul, like Prisca and Aquila. His cultic imagery could play on contemporary Jewish discussion about the part to be played by the Gentiles in the Jerusalem Temple cult.

Philippians includes two passages, Phil 2:12-18 and 4:14-20, where Paul uses cultic imagery (Phil 2:17, 4:18). Paul’s figurative use of cultic terms here may be understood in the light of the important Israelite tradition of a priestly covenant. As Paul has opened the perspective of this covenant up to the Gentiles, he also applies the idea of the priestly covenant to his mission to the Gentiles.

In view of the cultic imagery in the Pauline corpus, I will proceed to closer examination of cultic imagery in 1-2 Corinthians in the next chapters (chaps. 7 & 8) for a number of reasons.

1. Among Paul’s authentic Letters, only 1-2 Corinthians comprise explicit temple imagery which is applied to different issues (1 Cor 3:16-17, 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16).
2. The Corinthian correspondence provides the most extensive discussion of pagan idolatrous practices as juxtaposed to Israelite tradition (cf. e.g. 1 Cor 8-10), and thereby provides the most extensive context for our question of how Paul’s cultic imagery can be related to his mission to both Jews and Gentiles.
3. The explicit use of examples from Israel’s history and from the Israelite cult in the Corinthian correspondence is unparalleled in the other Pauline Letters, and lends itself particularly for rhetorical analysis.

4. The evidence of cultic imagery in the other Pauline Letters is either very limited (Philippians) or does not apply as directly and explicitly to the addressed community (Romans) as we encounter it in the Corinthian correspondence. The evidence of 1-2 Corinthians may further be contrasted with Romans, in that Paul did not found the congregation(s) in Rome, whereas he was intensively engaged in the gospel mission to Corinth from the beginning.

In cases where needed, the interpretation of cultic imagery in 1-2 Corinthians may be illuminated by the larger context of the other Pauline Letters.