

Chances and Limitations of Ritual Analysis of Early Christian Meals
A Response to Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal. Social Experimentation and Early
Christian Identity*: Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2009

Greco-Roman Meals Seminar, New Orleans 2009
Matthias Klinghardt, TU Dresden

With his book 'In the Beginning Was the Meal', Hal Taussig summarizes and advances the work of the 'Meals in the Greco-Roman World' seminar since 2002. Applying the methodical approach of Ritual Analysis, Taussig presents meals as the one determining social institution, in which early Christians formed as groups and created their social and religious identity. He recounts the broad socio-historical description of ancient meals that had been the seminar's methodological basis¹ and establishes it as the basis for the reconstruction of Christian Origins.

The important innovation of 'In the Beginning Was the Meal', however, is not simply a new shift in reconstructing Christian Origins, but the pivotal methodological step of applying Ritual Analysis: Hal Taussig uses recent approaches of Ritual Theory and applies them to the phenomenon of the early Christian meal in order to overcome a picture of Christian Origins that is primarily oriented in beliefs and thoughts but not in social institutions. The chapter about Ritual Theory and Ritual Analysis (55-85) is thus not by accident the centerpiece of the book.² After succinctly summarizing the results of the seminar's work on Greco-Roman meals and laying out the questions and aporias of the conventional study of Christian Origins (1-54), Hal Taussig cuts the key of Ritual Analysis, with which he unlocks new doors to further rooms of understanding early Christianity.

We have known this key since 2007 because this central topic is basically identical with Hal Taussig's paper that we discussed in San Diego.³ The new feature of the book, however, is that Hal Taussig uses this methodological key of Ritual Analysis to explore completely new rooms.

Since Hal's refreshing new perspective allows for a great variety of illuminating new perspectives, this response needs to concentrate on the most important aspect, that is: Ritual Analysis as a methodological tool and what it can or cannot achieve when applied to early Christian meals. Naturally, I chose topics which raised my questions: Does Ritual Analysis

really allow us to arrive where Hal would lead us? Subsequent to this, we can better evaluate the innovative value of Ritual Analysis.

1. Ritual and Text

The first room that Hal Taussig unlocks by means of Ritual Analysis is the relation of the ritual and the text – a difficult problem which we had been preoccupied with over and over again during the past years. Hal Taussig's starting point is the thought that the ritual of the meal (understood as a ritualized sequence of action in a clearly defined order) was the basis of a given group's social identity.⁴ Since this ritual basically looked alike in all groups we have encountered so far, the particular identity of Christian groups needs to find its expression in specific (Christian) *texts* that had a function *in the process of the ritual*.

It is important to note that Hal is careful *not* to use the Words of Institution at this point: Although they appear in texts *about* the meal, they were never *recited in the course of the meal ritual* in the first two centuries; therefore, they clearly could not *ritually* define the groups' religious identity. Originally, this function was taken over first and foremost by the hymns that were sung during the libation and/or the symposium. Therefore, the question is: Which texts can we classify under the notion of ritual identity formation?

Hal Taussig adduces the well-known Christological texts from the New Testament that are written in succinct, seemingly 'poetic' language, namely Phil 2, John 1, Col 1, often labelled as 'hymns' in New Testament studies. Form-critically, however, this label is not justified for these texts: All three of these examples belong to narrative-descriptive genres. Although they all contain some elements that are also distinctive of hymnic texts, they all belong to the genre of the Encomium that has a clearly epideictic-biographical function; this is in particular evident for John 1 and Phil 2.⁵ In my opinion, all three of the examples were produced as *written texts for readers* but were never sung. To the few examples of hymns in the New Testament, which actually display the genre-critical features of hymns, we can count texts like Acts 4:24-30 (prayer of petition) or Rev 11,17-18 (thanksgiving prayer); for neither of them, however, is it plausible to assume that they were ever recited in the course of a *symptic ritual*. I am afraid that Hal Taussig blundered into the trap of form-critical ambiguity, set by the widespread flaw to ingenuously identify texts in succinct language as 'hymns'.

Nevertheless, the assumption that there must have been hymnic texts that *ritually* expressed the specific Christian identity (i.e., as a *part* of the ritual) is correct and promising: At this point I perceive the potential of Hal's thesis. The door that Ritual Analysis can unlock

here is leading into a room that has been widely neglected by scholarship, namely the field of early Christian hymnody and meal prayers: Especially early Christian hymnody is a real Sleeping Beauty, for nearly a century waiting to be awakened by the kiss of daring scholarship.⁶ The same is true for the research into meal prayers because the focus has, of course, completely been on the eucharistic prayers, especially those in later liturgies.⁷

In fact, Ritual Analysis attests that the transition is fluid between the sympotic hymn and the thanksgiving prayer. Apart from the few examples of sympotic hymns (which include the dance song in Acts of John, for example)⁸, the more numerous meal prayers add substantially more material for investigation.⁹ This is a treasure that cannot be ignored anymore, once the ritual function of the sympotic hymns for the formation of early Christian social and religious identity is established by Ritual Analysis.

In this respect, it must be assumed that the examples to be sought after should fulfill two criteria: With respect to formcriticism, they should be hymns rather than narrative texts; with respect to content, they should mainly serve an *ecclesiological* rather than christological function because this hymn is to be expected to elaborate the respective group's particular self-understanding. Neither criteria is, in my opinion, met by the christological texts of the New Testament mentioned above.

As a counter-example I briefly hint to the thanksgiving prayer after the meal in Did 10:2-6b. Formcritically, the genre is out of question: It is a prayer proper. Furthermore, should the considerations about the Paeon and the basic similarity of prayer and hymnody within the libation be correct,¹⁰ then we definitely have a 'hymn' at the intersection of meal and symposium. With respect to content, this prayer clearly refers to the community that says (or sings) the prayer: The praying people give thanks to God that he has honored them with his presence (God lets his 'name dwell in our hearts') and that he has led them to knowledge and immortality (10:2). They praise God that for giving them – and *only* them – eternal life by the means of pneumatic bread and wine (10:3), and, decidedly as a group, they ask him in the *memento* prayer for their own perfection in the *basileia* (10:5). Despite the various statements about creation, Christology and Pneumatology, the entire prayer aims reflexively at the *self-conception of the praying group* (note the use of the first pers. pl.).

The major contribution of the Ritual Analysis approach for the issue of the relation between meals and texts lies, above all, in the possibility to reach a well-defined (because functionally determined) ascription: Those texts where there is good reason to assume that they actually appeared in early Christian meals are the hymns we are looking for. This not only excludes the Christ Encomiums of the New Testament that Hal Taussig had mistaken for hymns, but also a number of other texts about which we have hitherto not talked in detail (although they covertly played a role in seminar's discussions), particularly, the narrative of the institution or (parts of) the passion traditions (as re-enactments in the course of the meal). Therefore, I am skeptical that we will be able to confidentially ascribe certain New Testament

texts or traditions about Jesus' death to the setting of early Christian meals. For me, one of the inspiring results of this line of thought is the changing picture of how religious identity was formed within the ritual: Christological statements may have played a lesser role than one might expect.

With Ritual Analysis, Hal has given us a rather sharp tool to distinguish between texts that did play an important *ritual* role to form Christian religious identity and others that were not (verifiably) part of the early Christian meal ritual.

2. *Ritual Analysis and Social Experimentation*

The other very important and new area that Hal unlocked with the key of Ritual Analysis is called Social Experimentation or Social Perfection. The methodological basis of this enterprise is the definition of the difference between everyday experience/behaviour and ritual performance. The ritual thus appears as a reflection to, perfection of or deployment of an everyday experience/behaviour.

Hal Taussig unfolds this difference with regard to three areas for which he assumes that the problem of social unity vs. diversity was crucial: social classes, gender, and ethnicity: In these areas, the experience of social life in a (horizontally and vertically) highly segmented Roman society on the one hand and the conceptions of overcoming them ritually in early Christian meals on the other hand clash. The image, which Hal Taussig mediates covertly rather than overtly, shows – very generally speaking – that the differences between people of different social ranks, between men and women, and between different ethnic groups are reduced at least in essence in and through the ritual practice of Christian meals. The early Christian meal thus appears as an experimental ground, on which a new society is forming.

This idea of the Christian meal as the grounds of Social Experimentation is as innovative as it is fascinating; yet, it also is difficult. I will only name two aspects that triggered my questions and probably will need further clarification:

a. Does the idea of Social Experimentation imply an awareness of the difference between the social experience 'outside' and its ritual performance in the meal?

On the one hand, the metaphor 'Social Experimentation' implies a discontent with the general social conditions, which early Christians – at least within the meal community – wanted to solve differently. Thus they experimented in the confined frame of the meal. Although such experiments (or the reasoning about the experimental character of the meal) are attested for in Hellenistic discourses about the meal community,¹¹ I can barely see this

awareness of Social Experimentation for the three areas (social class, gender, ethnicity). Only in regard to the issue of ethnical differences between Jews and Gentiles (*e.g.*, Gal 2) can I find a similar instance of Social Experimentation within a meal situation, for which a certain awareness exists. In other texts, there is no such indication at any rate.

I use the meal problems between rich and poor diners in the Corinthian community (1Cor 11) as an example for the issue of different social rank. Clearly, Paul is aware of the social differences existing outside the ritual situation (1Cor 11:19: ἵνα οἱ δόκιμοι φανεροὶ γένωνται ἐν ὑμῖν), and likewise does he intend to solve this problem within the ritual situation by suggesting a different ritual practice. The question is: Did Paul intend this changed practice (i.e. dividing the food that was brought to the meal amongst the participants) to reach an adjustment between these people when outside the frame of the meal? Certainly not: He only wants to avoid tensions during the meal; if he planned this to be an ongoing ritual practice in Corinth, he would have acquiesced in the continuance of social diversity among Christians outside the ritual situation. In this case, the postulated relation between ritual and general experience is missing: We can easily see the procedure of ritually negotiating a social problem within the meal but not its experimental character for the greater societal problem.

On the other hand, it is obvious that – in the long run – a ritual practice among Christian groups that basically differed from the social practice outside Christian meals would certainly set free repercussions on the society as a whole (if only the run was long enough). For such repercussions only a changed *practice* was required, not necessarily the deliberate *intention* to experiment with solutions that were supposed to be useful for the society as a whole.

Hal Taussig is cautious here: He speaks about a ‘semiconscious ritual address to important social issues of the Hellenistic era’ (170) and thus avoids a one sided commitment. Yet, the question of whether Social Experimentation was a deliberate act can indeed barely be answered in an absolute sense. In some cases, the participants of the meals might have been aware of their ritual deployment of general societal problems. In other cases, this awareness was probably completely missing. His cautious phrasing is therefore appropriate.

b. The second question that the notion of Social Experimentation evoked for me, relates to the specific function of Christian meals for Social Experimentation. Even if Christian meals caused some kind of Social Perfection in the long run, the question remains if that was a particular characteristic of *Christian* meals, as Hal Taussig indicates.¹²

This idea is certainly agreeable, but it might prove methodologically difficult, for in this case Ritual Analysis elaborates on a basic difference between the ritual meal practice of Christians’ and of other groups, thus annihilating its own methodological foundation. Just to keep in mind: Ritual Analysis as developed in Hal’s book rests on a ‘Thick Description’ of ancient meals that systematically integrated Christian and other meals and, for principal reasons, refused to assume a particular Christian meal practice.

Consequently, my question is: Is it possible to establish the exceptional role of Christian ritual practice for Social Experimentation through the instrument of Ritual Analysis? How is the meal practice of the *Therapeutae* with their high awareness for gender equality to be dealt with? Also, to bring yet another analogy, how do we perceive the meals of the Nabataean kings or the Saturnalia?¹³ Is this not Social Experimentation as well?

Considering these analogies, claiming an exceptional character of Christian meals as to Social Experimentation does not really convince me. If we follow this thought only a little bit, we would probably reach the conclusion that the disintegrative aspects within the Hellenistic-Roman society were quite commonly perceived as deficits to be tackled by Social Experimentation and perfected by the meal rituals of society's sub-groups. In this respect, it is reasonable to conclude that the overwhelming diversity of (meal) communities was an *integral* (meaning: not a particular Christian) phenomenon of the whole of society. These groups, then, carried out essential societal functions. It probably was for this reason that the various attempts at restricting associations in Rome failed in the long run: They were inevitable and necessary for the functioning of the society as a whole. The associations and their meals (understood as Social Experimentation) are in fact one characteristic feature of the society rather than an attempt at overcoming its weaknesses. This would also be true for Christian communities and their meals: Being a part of the Hellenistic-Roman society, they fulfilled a 'communitarian' function for this society.

3. Ritual Analysis as an Analytical Instrument: Limitations and Chances

In my understanding, these questions consequently point to the fundamental methodological problem of historical understanding and the role that Ritual Analysis can play along these lines. Since Ritual Analysis is a completely new instrument for research into early Christian meals, it should thoroughly discussed. As was the case before, some questions remain for which I have no answers yet.¹⁴

a. In my opinion, the main problem is the relation between the overall picture and its individual elements. Both poles refer to each other reciprocally. Thus, individual matters (such as distinctive incidents, developments or social institutions etc.) can be perceived only against the background of a general picture. On the other hand, this overall picture is composed by these individual instances. This relation between the 'General' and the 'Individual' has been a cumbersome issue of the seminar's work in the past years, and we have not been able to reach any conclusion in regard to Greco-Roman meals because of the

lack of sustainable categories for structuring the general picture: We rightly rejected the prevalent meal ‘types’ that the older scholarship had argued for; however, we have not been able to distinguish between different meals phenomenologically (!): neither between Roman and Greek meals, nor between private and arranged meals, or between meals with or without a particular occasion (wedding, funeral), or between meals with or without the participation of women or slaves, and so on. The material proved to be too extensive temporally, geographically, and culturally as to achieve a convincing categorization.

Therefore, we ever again returned to the ‘Thick Description’ as our reliable starting point, putting up with its weakness that the resulting picture does not show individual features and differences between the single pieces of evidence. At least, the thick description (provided that it is thick enough) allows for the determination between typical and individual features.

b. I am convinced that the Ritual Analysis introduced by Hal Taussig cannot achieve this categorization either (although I must admit that temporarily I was inclined to believe it could: the idea was too sexy!), because the starting point of Ritual Analysis is – strictly speaking – only the ritual itself. A ‘ritual itself’ (the ‘bare ritual’ that corresponds to historiography’s *brutum factum*), however, never existed. If we try to get through to the ‘ritual itself’ by applying the ‘thick description’, we lose the chance to comprehend the peculiarities of Christian meals. Moreover, this will render us unable to apply Christian texts to the meals or to understand them as characteristically Christian Social Experimentation.

The questions that came to my mind while reading Hal’s book, therefore, do not relate to Ritual Analysis, but to its usage as a *synthetic* instrument to describe a *general* practice. The example of Social Experimentation thus shows how historical ambiguity regarding the description of *the* ancient meal ritual (which did not exist as such) converges with the ambiguity of the perception of *the* Hellenistic-Roman society (which did not exist as such, either).¹⁵

Maybe we should take the concerns of recent Ritual theorists more seriously: According to them, their theories are not supposed to be applied as universally applicable instruments for an understanding of ‘the’ ritual.¹⁶ This makes a lot of sense to me – not only for the theoretical part of Ritual Theory, but also of its application to historical phenomena.

c. While Ritual Analysis cannot be considered a suitable synthetic instrument for a systematic description of general phenomena, I believe it to be an excellent *analytical* tool. This is feasible because Ritual Analysis focusses on the ritual itself rather than on what people supposedly thought about it. Ritual Analysis should therefore have the potential to

examine individual accounts about Christian meals better from now on. In this respect, the examples given by Hal Taussig also belong to the passages, which convinced me most (such as the ritual negotiation of the problems in Rm 14). Only after the diverse accounts have been analyzed individually according to Ritual Analysis, will it be possible to understand the respective individual rituals (and the differences between them) and to describe their value for Social Experimentation or Social Perfection (within a limited field, however). Equipped with this information, it will also be possible to expound a Ritual History of the Christian Meal, that takes into account the differences of which we now have taken notice.¹⁷ Such a Ritual History of Christian meals – needless to say – would of course include later forms of ‘the Eucharist’ as we find them from the 3rd cent. on.¹⁸

* * *

Looking back to this evaluation of Ritual Analysis and the new areas it makes accessible, the question might arise whether my overall result is too negative. Am I too critical? Do I think that Ritual Analysis has failed, that it is an unapt instrument for historically exploring early Christian meals?

No. Not at all. On the contrary. I am convinced that Hal has unlocked a complete new level of historical investigation (although I am hesitant to walk through the doors he has opened). The implementation of a new methodological tool cannot expect to convincingly answer all the questions at once. If it did, it were not so useful at all. The most noble and rewarding task of scholarship is not to give new answers to old questions and thus bring them to a close, but to find new questions that further trigger scholarship and lead it to spheres that are yet unexplored. This is exactly what happened to me when I read the book. I never thought: ‘Oh, that’s the answer! I’d never guessed; well, good to know.’ Instead it made me curious and triggered my questions (some of them mentioned here). When putting together this response I was itching to further follow the paths that Ritual Analysis made visible, and I had to restrain myself to stay with the task of writing a response instead of going beyond what I was reading. What else can you expect from a scholarly book? ‘*In the Beginning Was the Meal*’ is the most inspiring book I have read in years.

Notes:

-
- ¹ The main references being M. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (TANZ 13), Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 1996); D. E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
- ² It is to note that Hal Taussig's approach rightly distinguishes itself from the work of the DFG Project in Münster (not Munich) where 'Ritual Analysis' of early Christian meals is almost exclusively constituted by the interpretation of the Words of Institution, cf. G. Theissen, "Sakralmahl und sakramentales Geschehen. Abstufungen in der Ritualdynamik des Abendmahls", in: M. Ebner (ed.), *Herrenmahl und Gruppenidentität* (QD 221), Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2007, 166-186.
- ³ Hal Taussig, "Greco-Roman Meals and Performance of Identity: A Ritual Analysis" on the Website of SBL. Also to find there, the responses by Dennis Smith and Matthias Klinghardt.
- ⁴ The catchwords from Dennis Smith's work are 'social bonding' and 'social boundaries'.
- ⁵ Cf. K. Berger, *Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments*, Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1984, 239ff.
- ⁶ The latest attempt (unfortunately, it is exactly that) at a comprehensive account is: J. Kroll, *Die christliche Hymnodik bis zu Klemens von Alexandria, 1921/22* = Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, ²1968. Since then, there have been a few scattered efforts, but no summary of the whole issue. At least some beginnings in: M. Lattke, *Hymnus: Materialien zu einer Geschichte der antiken Hymnologie* (NTOA 19), Fribourg (Ch) – Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991.
- ⁷ This following (rather arbitrary) list shows that comprehensive, critical analyses are missing: K. Berger, "Art. Gebet IV. Neues Testament", *TRE* 12, (1984), 47-60. – L. Biehl, *Das liturgische Gebet für Kaiser und Reich*, Paderborn 1937. – L. Bouyer, *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*, Notre Dame (In.), 1968 [= Eucharistie. Théologie et spiritualité de la prière eucharistique, Paris 1966] . – P. F. Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Divine Office*, New York 1982. – Fr. J. Dölger, *Sol Salutis: Gebet und Gesang im christlichen Altertum*, Münster 1932. – E. von der Goltz, *Das Gebet in der ältesten Christenheit*, Leipzig 1901. – E. von der Goltz, *Tischgebete und Abendmahlsgebete in der altchristlichen und der griechischen Kirche*, TU 29/2b, Leipzig 1905 (this is the only study known to me dealing with meal prayers proper and at the same time distinguishing them from Eucharistic prayers). – F. Probst, *Lehre und Gebet in den drei ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten*, Tübingen 1871. – R. Reitzenstein, P. Wendland, "Zwei angeblich christliche liturgische Gebete", *NGWG.PH* 1910, 324-334. – Th. Schermann, *Ägyptische Abendmahlsliturgien des ersten Jahrtausends in ihrer Überlieferung* (SGKA 6,1/2), Paderborn 1912. – Th. J. Talley, "The Eucharistic Prayer of the Ancient Church According to Recent Research: Results and Reflections", *Studia Liturgica* 11 (1976), 138-158.
- ⁸ ActJoh 94-96 (Lipsius/Bonnet II/1, 196,17-199,6). It is possible that the Odes of Solomon as a collection of hymns could be insightful for this question, M. Lattke, *Oden Salomos* (NTOA 41,1-3), Fribourg – Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999-2005.
- ⁹ Apart from Did 10 (probably with a fragment of a hymn in Did 10,6, cf. M. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl* 380ff; see also L. Clerici, *Einsammlung der Zerstreuten. Liturgiegeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Vor- und Nachgeschichte der Fürbitte für die Kirche in Didache 9,4 und 10,5*, LWQF 44, Münster 1966), the following examples belong to this context: the meal prayers in ActThom 50 (Lipsius/Bonnet II/2, 166), some of the prayers from the collection of Serapion of Thmuis (ed. Fr. X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* II, Paderborn 1905, 158-195; G. Wobbermin, *Altchristliche liturgische Stücke aus der Kirche Ägyptens nebst einem dogmatischen Brief des Bischofs Serapion von Thmuis*, TU 27/2b, Leipzig 1899), the prayer of P. Deir Balizeh (C. H. Roberts, B. Capelle, *An Early Euchologium: The Dêr-Balizeh Papyrus Enlarged and Reedited*, BMus 23, Louvain 1949), the collection of Const. Apost. VII (cf. W. Bousset, "Eine jüdische Gebetssammlung im siebenten Buch der Apostolischen Konstitutionen", in: *Religionsgeschichtliche*

Studien (NT.S 50), Leiden: Brill, 1979, 231-285; D. A. Fiensy, *Prayers Alleged to Be Jewish: An Examination of the Constitutiones Apostolorum*, BJS 65, Chico [Ca.] 1985) *et al.* Of course, the impressive examples of later hymn collections (such as those of Ephraem, Ambrose, Synesius, Prudentius) are worthwhile and promising for a ritual analysis approach, although New Testament scholars will, admittedly, feel less familiar with them: Here, Patristic experts are called for.

- ¹⁰ M. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl* 101ff; idem, “Prayer Formularies for Public Recitation: Their Use and Function in Ancient Religion”, *Numen* 46 (1999), 1-50; idem, “Tanz und Offenbarung: Praxis und Theologie des gottesdienstlichen Tanzes im frühen Christentum”, *Spes Christiana* 15/16 (2004/05), 9-34.
- ¹¹ A good (but rare) example for the awareness of the difference between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ or between the social differences and the intended equality at the meal is given by Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* I 2 (615C-619A) in his discussion about the placement of guests at the meal: Behind the discussion stands the problem if the community at the meal is meant to be an image or a counter-image of the social conditions outside. Timon’s vote for equality (616F) implies the idea of a counter-society; the whole discussion shows a strong awareness of the different possibilities of ritual practice.
- ¹² ‘The category of social experimentation must be considered as (a?) more centrally characteristic of early Christianity’ (171).
- ¹³ Cf. Strabo, *Geogr.* 16,4,26 (the Nabataean king is so much a man of the people [δημοτικός], that he himself is the servant for his guests); Lucian, *Saturnalia* 17 (despite the guests’ different social ranks, no differences are to be made regarding the allocation of a place and of food: ‘Everybody shall be treated equally [ἰσότης ἐπὶ πᾶσιν]).’
- ¹⁴ I am finally trying to make up for the methodical reflection that I had not given so far.
- ¹⁵ I want to mention that the similarly comprehensive phenomenon of ancient associations has brought about analogous results. It is equally difficult to find convincing categories to structure the abundance of material on ancient associations as it is for the ancient symposium: it is not possible to phenomenologically distinguish between Greek, Roman, Egyptian, etc. or between Pagan, Christian, or Jewish associations. Likewise, a classification according to designation, social structure or the purpose of associations (religious, professional, or philosophical, etc.) fails just as well. *The* ancient association is a Chimera, and so is *the* ancient meal. Hence, it is impossible to find out the political and social function of associations in regard to *the* whole of society. This is only accomplishable through an analysis of the associations in a very limited environment, such as in a specific period of time, and in a specific place. That way, the analysis of the political and social function of a polis gains shape.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Catherine Bell: Ritual is not ‘an intrinsic, universal category or feature of human behavior’ (57); similarly for Jonathan Z. Smith (59).
- ¹⁷ Apart from the meal of the *Therapeutae* by Philo (*De vita contemplativa* 32-39.64-89) *cf.*, e.g., the description of the Sunday assembly by Justin (1 *Apol* 67) or the arrangements of the *Traditio Apostolica* for both the *lucernarium* (ch. 25-26.28 ed. Botte) and the *cena dominica* (*Trad. Apost.* 27).
- ¹⁸ Hal’s very sharp distinction between the ritualized Eucharists of later liturgies and the ancient meal rituals (55-56) is understandable only as a means to prevent the reader from a wrong notion of ‘Ritual’. Otherwise, these liturgies describe ‘rituals’ plain and simple: There is no difference to the ‘Ritual Theory’ ritual of ancient meals. Ritual Analysis is, in my opinion, well equipped to uncover those liturgies’ ritually embodied meanings (which, of course, is not necessarily identical to the theological reflections on these rituals).