

INTRODUCTION

The Corinthian Ekklēsia and Greco-Roman Associations

In approximately 42 BCE, eighty-six kilometres west of ancient Corinth, a certain Diodoros founded an association (κοινόν) in Athens that was devoted to Artemis the Saviour (σώτειρα). Diodoros's service as the association's priest in 38/37 BCE, during which time he functioned as a host of the club's common meals, indicates that he continued, here and there, to take on leadership roles in the group that he founded. In honour of Diodoros, the association voted in 36 BCE to give commendatory awards to their founder: yearly crownings, proclamations, and an honorific inscription ($IG II^2 1343.32-40 = GRA I 48$). The inscription does not state how the honours were funded; however, the presence of common funds (τὰ κοινά, 1.18) in this group suggests that the Athenian κοινόν collected subscription dues regularly from all members, and used these to help cover expenses such as honorifics.

The three associative behaviours described here (i.e., selection of officers, commendation of service providers, and collection of subscription dues) were so typical for the thousands of associations throughout the ancient Mediterranean that they now form part of the very definition of an ancient association for Jinyu Liu. Curiously, given the ubiquity of these three practices in ancient associations, there stands an impressive consensus *against* the presence of these organisational features in Paul's Corinthian group.²

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¹ Jinyu Liu, 'Pompeii and *collegia*: A New Appraisal of the Evidence', *AHB* 22 (2008), 53–69 (54).

² Three recent articulations of the position will suffice for now. Gerd Theissen, while commenting on the Corinthians' hierarchical organisation, states that 'it is obvious' that the Corinthians did not elect or appoint temporary officers. Eva Ebel, in her analysis of the *ekklēsia*'s usage of money, suggests it is 'unübersehbar' that the Christ group would not have collected subscription fees. And Wayne Meeks contends that the *ekklēsia* was 'quite different' from associations, in that it did not 'reward its patron[s] with encomiastic inscriptions, honorary titles, [and] wreaths'. See Gerd Theissen, 'The Social Structure of



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The majority position that 'There [was] no organization ... no hierarchy of ministries, no priestly state ... no firm regulating of the cult, but only the occasional instruction when the "management" threatens to get out of control' affects more than just scholarship on the Corinthians. The Corinthian ekklēsia often serves as the model for understanding the organisational and financial structure of firstcentury ekklēsiai more generally. Specifically, the Corinthian group's supposed absence of officers, crowns, and fees is typically taken to mean that these structural features of Greco-Roman associations were comprehensively absent from cult groups who took Christ as their patron hero/deity, at least until later periods when the Jesus movement had become institutionalised and lost its special prior pneumatic substance (variously understood) in the process.⁵ This volume highlights evidence from the Corinthian correspondence and wider Mediterranean antiquity that casts doubt on the traditional portrayal of the Corinthian group's organisational structure as underdeveloped in comparison with other associations. In doing so, this book provides the framework for a new social history of the Corinthian group's formative years, and it lays the groundwork for alternative ways to understand the founding and growth of Christ groups more generally in pre-Constantine periods.

Pauline Communities: Some Critical Remarks on J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*', *JSNT* 84 (2001), 65–84 (78); Eva Ebel, *Die Attraktivität früher christlicher Gemeinden: Die Gemeinde von Korinth im Spiegel grichisch-römischer Vereine* (WUNT II/178; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 217; and Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003 [1983]), 78.

- ³ Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 267–8.
- ⁴ Richard S. Ascough recently commented on the 'assumption, explicit or implicit, that Corinth is the paradigm for other Pauline communities'. See Richard Ascough, 'Of Memories and Meals: Greco-Roman Associations and the Early Jesus-Group at Thessalonikë', in *From Roman to Early Christian Thessalonikë*. *Studies in Religion and Archaeology*, ed. Laura Nasrallah, Charalambos Bakirtzis, and Steven J. Friesen (HTS 64; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 49–72 (58).
- ⁵ This narrative is so pervasive in scholarship that it has been the subject of critical reflection in two paramount methodological studies. See Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion 14; London: The School of Oriental and African Studies; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 19–25, 34, 45, 143; and John S. Kloppenborg, 'Egalitarianism in the Myth and Rhetoric of Pauline Churches', in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honouring Burton L. Mack*, ed. Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hal Taussig (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 247–63.



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What difference will the placement of fees, officers, and crowns in Paul's Corinthian group make for our understanding of the social history of the Jesus movement? Let us first consider subscription dues and look at how the Corinthian group's collection of them changes our image of Pauline ekklēsiai. By requiring payment of membership fees at each banquet from each participant, as this book suggests the Corinthians did, the ekklēsia would have shut its doors to the poorest small artisans and merchants in the city who lived dangerously close to, or below, the level of subsistence - and the scores of others who could not have afforded the luxury of membership in a Christ group. This scenario is incompatible with aspects of the charitable ethic that supposedly shaped the ethos of Pauline groups.⁶ No longer can it be assumed that the Corinthians handed out free meals to their destitute recruits out of 'brotherly love', or that they were interested enough in 'desiring the well-being of the other' (1 Cor 10:24) to count the destitute among their ranks.⁷

On a related point, if the Corinthians collected subscription dues, this would raise new questions about the economic status of the group's members – and it would caution, particularly, against the notion that there was a 'nearly complete absence of wealth' among Pauline Christ believers. ⁸ Unless Paul's groups offered free membership, the economic

⁶ Gerd Theissen understands Pauline groups' brand of care for the poor as distinctive, and calls it 'love patriarchalism', while Justin Meggitt labels it with the phrase, 'economic mutualism'. See Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 107; and Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 155–64. The Thessalonian group in particular has been described as 'remarkable for its love' in Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (New York, Doubleday, 2000), 256; cf. Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010), 148–9.

⁷ Recently, Bruce Longenecker proposed that Paul's care for the poor 'must have been shared by the communities he had founded and that their practices were not (usually) negligible in that regard' (*Remember the Poor*, 156). Longenecker is unable to find any evidence from the Corinthian correspondence to support this claim. For the secondary literature that supposes charitable practices among *ekklēsiai*, see Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 140–55; and Judith Lieu, 'Charity in Early Christian Thought and Practice', in *The Kindness of Strangers: Charity in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean*, ed. Dionysios Stathakopoulos (CHS Occasional Publications; London: King's College London, 2007), 13–20.

⁸ The quote is from Steven J. Friesen, 'The Wrong Erastus: Ideology, Archaeology, and Exegesis', in *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society*, ed. Steven J. Friesen, Daniel N. Schowalter, and James C. Walters (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 231–56 (256); cf. Steven J. Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus', *JSNT* 26 (2004): 323–61; and Meggitt, *Paul* (throughout).



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profile of Pauline Christ believers needs to be situated within the range of economic levels held by members of other associations, individuals who were typically expected to provide subscription dues regularly to their club. In these ways and others, this volume's new position concerning the requirement of fee payment in the Corinthian *ekklēsia* requires an alternative to older models of finances and morality in the Corinthian *ekklēsia*.

The implications of this book's description of leadership in the Corinthian ekklēsia also reach beyond the Corinthians themselves. The evidence from Paul suggests that Corinth's Christ group selected administrative officials and rewarded magistrates with typical forms of symbolic capital (e.g., proclamations, crowns, honorific inscriptions, and exemptions from liturgies and fees). The presence of these structures in the 50s CE is incompatible with the more pervasive narrative that early Christ groups evolved slowly from charismatic and pneumatic organisation in the first-century to structurally organised churches under the authority of regional bishops and various subservient clerics in the fourth century.9 That old framework fails to account for crucial details in the Corinthian correspondence relating to organisational structure in the early Corinthian ekklēsia; in fact, its assumptions about the organisational structure of first-century Christ groups are disturbingly identical with Paul's own ideals (1 Cor 12) and, overall, are inattentive to problems on the ground level that would be created by 1 Cor 12 if an association were to put it to action. Since institutional features such as officers, formal commendation, and collections can be demonstrated in the Corinthian group in the 50s CE, the present model for understanding the evolution of institutional forms in Christ groups during the first four centuries requires nuancing and revision.

While these broader implications are addressed here and there, the book focuses primarily on the narrower outcomes of a Corinthian group re-described with officers, crowns, and fees – namely, the book underscores how this new description of the Corinthians' financial and leadership practices changes the social setting of the *ekklēsia*. In this respect, I make two contributions. First, the Corinthians are stripped of their

⁹ The modern narrative of Christ groups beginning in a charismatic mode of leadership is rooted in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century works, such as Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 2 vols. (Theological Translation Library 19. Rev. and enl. ed.; New York: Putnam's Sons, 1908), 202–15. James Tunstead Burtchaell traces it as far back as the fourteenth century in his *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–190.



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special financial status: the prevalent notion that they could survive even if 90 per cent of members failed to pay for food, wine, and a host of other expenditures is untenable. 10 As a new group devoted to a Galilean hero otherwise unknown in Corinth, the Christ group would have struggled to compete with local associations for recruits and benefactions. Income needed to be collected from all of the few recruits they managed to secure in order to avoid debt and promises of formal commendation for service providers needed to be issued and even advertised to the public in order to keep up with the θιασῶται, so to speak. Second, the so-called weak (ἀσθενεῖς; e.g., 1 Cor 8:8–12) will be strengthened. Since the 1970s, it has been commonplace to imagine factions, hostilities, theologies, and leadership in the Corinthian ekklēsia according to the hypothesis that the group was divided between fixed economically strong and economically weak factions. But social-hierarchical rankings in the group would have been more fluid than this, and would have been constantly subject to change based on individual efforts of zeal. All members would have had opportunities to generate status, show generosity, hold offices, and enhance their honour in the ekklēsia by showing more zeal for their Christ group than what other members provided recently. The modest symbolic capital they earned from the ekklesia would eventually be superseded by the outcomes of more recent competitions for honour, though, and so the current placement of any member in the group's social hierarchy was fragile. Evidence in support of these two contributions comes from both association inscriptions and papyri, as well as from Paul's description of Corinthian behaviour and ekklēsia practices.

A Pneumatic Consensus

The contemporary conviction that the Corinthians lacked organisational features that were ubiquitous in Greco-Roman associations (i.e., officers, membership fees, and crowns) is indebted to a long trajectory of principally Protestant scholarship, tracing back to the fourteenth century according to James Burtchaell. Rudolf Sohm's and Adolf Harnack's important contributions from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century have particularly shaped the current discussion. Sohm and Harnack described ancient Christ groups as endowed with a special

¹⁰ Peter Lampe, 'Das korinthinische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistischrömischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis (1 Kor 11, 17–34)', *ZNW* 82 (1991), 183–212 (191–3); and Theissen, *Social Setting*, 148–56.

¹¹ Burtchaell, From Synagogue, 1–190.



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religious character (the divine pneuma) that made them 'better' ¹² than the 'second-class religion' and 'rudimentary' cults known to Greeks and Romans. ¹³ In Harnack's words,

Other religions and cults could doubtless point to some of these actions of the Spirit [so common in the churches], such as ecstasy, vision, demonic and anti-demonic manifestations, but nowhere do we find such a wealth of these phenomena presented to us as in Christianity.¹⁴

For Harnack and Sohm, the religious superiority of early Christianity generated Christ groups that lacked ecclesiastical organisation (especially in the Corinthian $ekkl\bar{e}sia$). The divine pneuma, it was supposed, empowered all Christ adherents to contribute to the good of their $ekkl\bar{e}sia$ according to their God-given gifts ($\chi\alpha\rho$ iσματα), such as wisdom, prophetic abilities, and miracleworking (1 Cor 12:8–10). Since the pneuma was available to all, the result was status equity, where no member was ranked higher than any other. Rudolf Sohm described this leadership model in early Christ groups as follows:

The Church has no absolute need of any class of officials. They are all born ministers of the Word and ministers they ought to be. They all, by the Holy Spirit living within them, are bearers of the keys of heaven, and of the royal power which in the House of God is given to the Word of God.¹⁵

The possession of divine pneuma by all members of the Corinthian Christ group (1 Cor 12:1–31), and the resultant needlessness to select guild officers in this group, was reiterated by Adolf Harnack. Harnack received positively Edwin Hatch's groundbreaking work on economic and administrative structure in early Christ groups, ¹⁶ but he believed that the first-century Corinthian group, unlike the Macedonian *ekklēsiai* that were equipped with financial administrators, had 'no organization

¹² Rudolf Sohm, Outlines of Church History (London and New York: MacMillan and Co., 1895), 11.

Harnack, Mission and Expansion, 291, 432; cf. Sohm, Outlines, 31–40.

¹⁴ Harnack, Mission and Expansion, 202.

¹⁵ Sohm, Outlines, 34.

¹⁶ Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches: Eight Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford in the Year 1880 on the Foundation of the Late John Bampton* (London: Rivingtons, 1881).



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whatsoever ... for a decade, or even longer. The brethren submitted to a control of "the Spirit". ¹⁷ What emerges from Sohm and Harnack is a model where 'guild-life may have paved the way' for social formations in the Jesus movement, but remained 'rudimentary' and lacked the 'spiritual benefits' of Christ groups. ¹⁸

Sohm's and Harnack's description of the Corinthians' pneumatic organisation was rooted in a peculiar reading of 1 Cor 12–14, a sequence of chapters that, ironically, illuminates little about *ekklēsia* leadership other than Paul's ecclesiastic idealisations that revolve around his supposition that the Corinthians enjoyed the presence of the divine pneuma. In other words, 1 Cor 12–14 primarily tells us about the Pauline Church – a fictive, apologetic, construction that is present nowhere in antiquity outside of Paul's own mind. Paul's prescriptions in 1 Cor 12–14 bear no resemblance to any social practice in this *ekklēsia*. As this book shows, Pauline description of actual Corinthian activities can be located mostly outside of these chapters.

The legacy of Sohm and Harnack on scholarship until the sociological turn in the 1960s and 1970s need not be reviewed in full here ¹⁹ – it is enough to say that it was pervasive. For example, Eduard Schweizer's position on the group's polity is very similar to what Sohm and Harnack already established. For Schweizer, there existed 'no fundamental organization of superior or subordinate ranks, because the gift of the Spirit is adapted to every Church member ... the enumerations of the different kinds of gifts are quite unsystematic, with no sort of hierarchical character'. Even well into the 1960s, Hans von Campenhausen imagined the impact of pneumatism on early Christ group organisational structure as equally idyllic: 'love [was] the true organising and unifying force within the Church, and [it] creates ... a paradoxical form of order diametrically opposed to all natural systems of organization'. ²¹

¹⁷ This quotation is from a later printing of Harnack's, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (2 vols.; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 1.51 n.1.

¹⁸ Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1.432–3; cf. Sohm, *Outlines*, 4–5.

¹⁹ For reviews, see Burtchaell, *Synagogue to Church*, 1–190; Kloppenborg, 'Egalitarianism', 247–63; and John S. Kloppenborg, 'Pneumatic Democracy and the Conflict in *I Clement*', in *Early Christian Communities Between Ideal and Reality*, ed. Mark Grundeken and Joseph Verheyden (WUNT I/342; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 61–81.

²⁰ Schweizer, Church Order, 99–100.

²¹ Hans von Campenhausen, Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1969), 46.



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The Pneumatic Consensus in Current Scholarship on the Corinthians

The misrecognition of Pauline idealisation for Corinthian social reality in some recent scholarship is fostered by Paul's rhetorical strategy for creating 'alternative communities'. ²² As Stanley Stowers observes,

Paul did not merely try to persuade those whom he wanted as followers that they ought to become a very special kind of community. He told them that they had in their essence already become such a community. This was a brilliant strategy. Instead of putting an impossible ideal before them and saying, 'try to reach this goal', he said 'you are this community of transformed people so live up to what you are.'²³

Recent social historians of the Jesus movement, including Stowers, have detected vestiges of Harnack's and Sohm's model of Corinthian organisation in contemporary scholarship. It was the observation of this that led Stowers to label some contemporary traditional scholarship on the Corinthians as 'academic Christian theological modernism'.²⁴ Stowers's critique builds from the works of Burton Mack and Jonathan Z. Smith

²² Richard Horsley famously used this descriptor for Paul's vision of the *ekklēsiai* in his '1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul's Assembly as an Alternative Society', in *Paul and Empire. Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 242–52. Horsley also imagines the groups themselves as alternative communities: 'Nor ... were Paul's communities modeled on the associations or guilds ... Paul's communities were both far more comprehensive (even totalistic) in their common purpose, exclusive over against dominant society, and parts of an intercity, international movement ... Paul's *ekklēsiai* are ... local communities of an alternative society to the Roman imperial order ... It has often been observed that Paul's communities were exclusive, separated from "the world." More than that, however, Paul's alternative society stood sharply against the Roman imperial order' (Richard Horsley, 'Building an Alternative Society: Introduction', in *Paul and Empire*, 206–14 [208–10]).

²³ Stanley K. Stowers, 'The Concept of "Community" in the History of Early Christianity', *MTSR* 23 (2011), 238–56 (242).

²⁴ Stanley Stowers, 'Kinds of Myth, Meals, and Power: Paul and the Corinthians', in *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (Early Christianity and Its Literature 5; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 105–49 (106–9). Examples of this tradition, according to Stowers, include 'the scholarship documented by Werner Georg Kümmel in *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. Michael Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972)'. As well, Stowers continues, 'A very important spinoff from this tradition, but remaining within it, in my view, is the movement to do social history and work inspired by the social sciences pioneered by such figures as John Gager, Wayne A. Meeks, Gerd Theissen, and Bruce Malina.' See 'Kinds of Myth', 106 n.7 and 107 n.8.



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from the 1990s. Particularly relevant for this volume is Mack's observation that much scholarship tends to assume that the Corinthians were destined to succeed – and it overlooks how real the possibility was for an early Christ group to disband in the face of economic and recruitment challenges. An equally crucial insight by Stowers is that many post-1970 descriptions of the earliest Christ groups include statements concerning their moral superiority to Greek and Latin associations, which we have seen to be central already in Sohm's and Harnack's programme. Harnack's programme.

For present purposes, the most significant agreement between Sohm/ Harnack and most contemporary scholarship is the supposed impact of a pneumatic presence on the ecclesiastic structure of the Corinthian *ekklēsia*. It will be recalled that pneumatic presence was the basis for Sohm's and Harnack's argument concerning the lack of organisational sophistication in the Corinthian group. While this notion continues to shape contemporary sociological analysis of organisational structure in Pauline groups, one difference is that modern social historians now describe the pneuma as a construct of *ekklēsia* members rather than an objective presence of divinity in the *ekklēsia*,²⁷ but little else has changed: 1 Cor 12–14 continues to be wheeled out in defence of Corinthian organisational uniqueness, the divine pneuma still equalises members socially and ecclesiastically, and pneuma still directs the Christ group away from economic and hierarchical practices generalised in the associations and necessary for their survival.

The now classic articulation of Sohm's and Harnack's position from a sociological perspective is Wayne Meeks's 1983 monograph, *The First*

²⁵ Burton L. Mack observes that in previous scholarship the successes of Christ groups have been imagined as 'the overwhelming activity of a god' in his 'On Redescribing Christian origins', *MTSR* 8 (1996), 247–69 (254). While there is no direct evidence of this position in the sociological contributions to the study of the Corinthians by Meeks or Theissen (comparable to, say, Sohm, *Outlines*, 6: 'By virtue of the spirit which is alive within her, the Christian Church in its slow upward growth had power to outlast the great Roman Empire, to join the ancient to the modern world, and to be the educator of the race of men that was to come'), there are hints in post-1970 research in general. Most obvious is the entirely undocumented thesis that the Corinthian group – a still new cult at the time of the Corinthian correspondence – had large membership numbers, somewhere between 40 and 100 (see Chapter 2 for bibliography and an alternative proposal).

²⁶ Stowers, 'Kinds of Myths', 107–9.

²⁷ Meeks (*First Urban*, 120) speaks of the 'general framework of interpretation' held by the Corinthians. An example of this is the notion that 'God's spirit ... is at work in glossolalia'.



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Urban Christians. In terms of methodology, Meeks – like Sohm and Harnack – finds association data ultimately of little value for understanding the ethos of the Corinthians.²⁸ He evaluates 1 Cor 12–14, wherein Paul instructs the Corinthians to organise their group pneumatically, to be crucial for understanding the structure of the *ekklēsia*. For Meeks, it is texts such as 1 Cor 12–14 that were causative factors in the creation of 'a unique culture' among Pauline groups.²⁹ The following quote is illustrative:

Paul and the other founders and leaders of those [Christ] groups engaged aggressively in the business of creating a new social reality. They held and elaborated a distinctive set of beliefs ... They developed norms and patterns of moral admonition and social control that, however many commonplaces from the moral discourse of the larger culture they might contain, still in ensemble constituted a distinctive ethos. They received, practiced, and explicated distinctive ritual actions. None of these was made ex nihilo ... The resultant, nevertheless, was an evolving definition of a new, visibly different subculture.³⁰

Meeks's notion that the Corinthians' 'visibly different subculture' was distinct from, yet to a lesser extent similar to, the ethos of associations is continuous with Harnack's perspective that 'guild-life may have paved the way' for Christ groups; however, ultimately, the Christ groups were 'novel and unheard-of' social formations; ³¹ and it is also consistent with Sohm's notion that 'Seen from the outside, the Christian community seemed to be only one more newly formed club' but that ultimately was distinct 'By virtue of the spirit'. ³² In other words, there were some similarities between Christ groups and associations, but these were two distinct categories of social formation due to the presence of the pneuma within *ekklēsiai*.

In terms of the Corinthians' organisational structure, for Meeks it is still 'The Spirit [which] counted as authority par excellence in the

²⁸ See Meeks, First Urban, 75–84. See now Meeks's revised assessment of the association model: Wayne A. Meeks, 'Taking Stock and Moving On', in After the First Urban Christians. The Social-Scientific Study of Pauline Christianity Twenty-Five Years Later, ed. Todd D. Still and David G. Horrell (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 134–46, (140–1).

²⁹ For this phrase, see Meeks, *First Urban*, 85.

³⁰ Meeks, *Frist Urban*, 104–5 (emphasis added).

³¹ Harnack, Mission and Expansion, 432–3.

³² Sohm, Outlines, 5-6.