

## Beyond Identification of the Topos of Household Management: Reading the Household Codes in Light of Recent Methodologies and Theoretical Perspectives in the Study of the New Testament\*

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From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s New Testament scholars produced groundbreaking work illustrating that the household code had its origins in discussions of ‘household management’ among philosophers and moralists from Aristotle onward. Despite this general consensus, many points of disagreement remained, especially with respect to the function of the codes in particular New Testament documents and what the codes reveal about the relationship of Christians with the wider world. This article revisits some of the initial debates and traces their influence on subsequent scholarship. The recognition of the household codes as a type of ‘political’ discourse is of particular interest, as well as its impact on subsequent feminist, political and postcolonial interpretation. The conclusion suggests five promising directions, closely tied to the study of early Christian families, for future analysis of the codes leading to a more complete understanding of household management in a house-church setting.

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In his impressive commentary on Colossians, James D. G. Dunn offered the following remark about the origins of the household code: ‘The debate as to where this material was derived from has rumbled on for most of the twentieth century, but should probably now be regarded as settled. The model, insofar as there is one, was that of οἰκονομία, “household management”’. Here Dunn cites the

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work of Lührmann, Thraede, Müller and Balch all of which was published from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s.<sup>1</sup> A survey of commentaries on the Disputed Paulines and 1 Peter would quickly reveal the accuracy of Dunn's statement. Scholars have generally accepted that the references to the three pairs of relationships found in NT household code material (sometimes lacking one or more pairs of the relationships or exhorting only one of the partners) represent an appropriation of common themes found in discussions of household management from classical Greek times to the Roman era which assumed the interdependence of household and civic welfare (including state, economy and religion). The purpose of this article is to consider how this scholarly consensus has influenced our understanding of the significance of the household codes especially since the mid-1980s and to suggest some promising avenues for further exploration.

It is important to state at the outset that while the broad issue of origins may be regarded as settled, the function of the household codes within documents remains a subject of lively debate, especially in work on women and slavery. Moreover, one senses differing ideologies of interpretation shaping treatments of the presence (or absence) of any 'distinctively Christian' features of the codes and, more generally, discussions of the inclusion of traditional material and conventional ethics. There is an enormous amount at stake in the interpretation of the *Haustafeln* for NT scholars themselves and their students. Household codes have also been of great interest to theologians and ethicists who draw upon the work of biblical scholars and to those who investigate or feel personally shaped by the legacy of domination which is fundamentally tied to these codes.<sup>2</sup>

A central goal of this article is to explore the variety and sometimes even contradictory positions of interpreters concerning the function of household codes in

1 James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 243. He cites D. Lührmann, 'Wo man nicht mehr Sklave oder Freier ist. Überlegungen zur Struktur frühchristlicher Gemeinden', *WD* 13 (1975) 53–83; D. Lührmann, 'Neutestamentliche Haustafeln und antike Ökonomie', *NTS* 27 (1980–81) 83–97; K. Thraede, 'Zum historischen Hintergrund der "Haustafeln" des NT', *Pietas* (B. Kötting FS; ed. E. Dassmann and K. S. Frank; Münster: Aschendorff, 1980) 359–68; K. Müller, 'Die Haustafel des Kolosserbriefes und das antike Frauenthema. Eine kritische Rückschau auf alte Ergebnisse', *Die Frau im Urchristentum* (ed. G. Dautzenberg et al.; QD 95; Freiburg: Herder, 1983) 263–319; David L. Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBLMS 26; Chico: Scholars, 1981).

2 See, for example, Wayne A. Meeks, 'The "Haustafeln" and American Slavery: A Hermeneutical Challenge', *Theology and Ethics in Paul and his Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish* (ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr. and Jerry Sumney; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 232–53; J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) 165–92; Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, 'Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21–33: Why Feminist Scholarship Has (Often) Left them Unmentioned, and Why They Should be Emphasized', *A Feminist Companion to the Deutero-Pauline Epistles* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Miriamme Blikerstaff; London: T&T Clark, 2003) 88–97.

church documents. Ultimately, it will be argued that scholarly impasse can largely be avoided with the recognition of two central facets of the evidence, both related to the complexity of actors and voices reflected in NT documents and both emerging from the adoption of new perspectives and methodologies. First, informed by a thorough knowledge of families in the Roman world, scholars need to recognize that the identities and circumstances of the recipients of the household codes were often more complicated than an initial cursory reading of the codes—with their seemingly clear-cut categories—would suggest. Secondly, on the basis of feminist, political/empire and, most recently, postcolonial readings of the text, the household codes are appearing more and more ideologically complex and, it will be posited here, are best understood as encoding both culturally compliant and culturally resistant elements.

The article is divided into the following sections: Part 1 considers the nature of the scholarly claims concerning the household codes and the household management *topos* especially from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, highlighting points of contention and unresolved issues. Part 2 considers the impact of such work on feminist interpretation of the 1980s and 1990s, which has in turn strengthened our appreciation of the ‘political’ implications of the codes, their ideological dimensions, and significantly advanced our understanding of the codes’ indebtedness to conventional ethics. Part 3 points to recent theoretical perspectives and methods of interpretation which are moving us forward beyond identification of the *topos* to a more nuanced understanding of the manner in which the *Haustafeln* reflect engagement between church and society. The use of Empire as an interpretative grid and postcolonial analysis are especially significant. Finally, Part 4 identifies five promising directions, closely tied to the historical and ideological dimensions of the study of early Christian families, as leading to a more complete understanding of household management in a house-church setting.

### 1. Points of Contention and Unresolved Questions

In a comprehensive essay published in 1988, David Balch summarized the research to date on the form and function of the household codes.<sup>3</sup> While it is impractical to summarize the essay here, his conclusion referring to the work of many of the same scholars cited by Dunn reveals points of debate which continue to surface in current discussions. Like Dunn, Balch spoke of a general consensus

<sup>3</sup> David L. Balch, ‘Household Codes’, *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament* (ed. David E. Aune; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988) 25–50. For a more recent survey and discussion of research on the household codes, see Johannes Woyke, *Die Neutestamentlichen Haustafeln: Ein kritischer und konstruktiver Forschungsüberblick* (SBS 184; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000).

with respect to the theory of the origin of household codes, but highlighted differences of opinion that remained in 1988.<sup>4</sup> Here I would like to highlight some of the most important of these, which, I would suggest, largely remain two decades later. The first concerns the nature of Jewish and pagan influences and, more particularly, whether household code ethics represent any type of ‘advance’ in relation to the ethical discourse of writers of the same period. The second is whether the codes should be viewed as mainly reflecting (with little significant alteration) or even encouraging the adaption of conventional ethics in contrast to earlier times in church communities. The question of whether the codes reflect a change over against earlier patterns in the early Jesus movement and Pauline Christianity was enormously significant for feminist interpreters of the 1980s and 1990s. They sought to understand the relationship between the codes and the patriarchalization of church offices and the attempt to marginalize the leadership of women (to be discussed further in Part 2). Finally, whether the household codes truly represent the church’s apologetic response to Greco-Roman social and political order remains vigorously debated among scholars. These points of contention are admittedly interrelated. Nevertheless, there is value in treating each separately in turn in order to gain a greater appreciation of the historical issues at stake and to point to promising new directions.

With respect to influences from the contemporary environment, Balch and others argued against an earlier generation of scholars that the codes were borrowed from the Stoics or Hellenistic Judaism, arguing rather that the codes are derived from Hellenistic discussions of ‘household management’ that find classic expression in Aristotle’s *Politics* I 1253b 1–14, but can also be found in works from the general era of the NT which refer to the same relationships, such as Dio Chrysostom’s fragmentary oration on the topic (LCL 5.348–51), Seneca’s discussion concerning the need to address each relationship differently (Seneca *Ep.* 94.1–3), and Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s encomium of Rome praising Roman household relationships and emphasizing authority and obedience (*Roman Antiquities* 2.25.4–26.4).<sup>5</sup> Balch responds especially to Thraede’s thesis that the household codes represent a type of middle position between the vision of patriarchal authority found in the works of some ancient authors, and more egalitarian visions:

Wer eine mit demokratischem Denken verträgliche Auslegung sozioethischer Texte des NT erreichen möchte, muss innerhalb des Kanons wählen, aber selbsts die frühen ‘Haustafeln’ stehen für das Vorhaben, ‘Herrschaft Christi’

4 Balch, ‘Household Codes’, 35–6.

5 For extensive documentation of the household management tradition and its close association with guidelines for civil (*politeia*) responsibilities, see John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday [Random House], 2000) 505–6.

gesellschaftskritisch einzusetzen schwerlich zur Verfügung. Besagte Option für eine verantwortungsvolle *μεσότης* zwischen Macht und ‘Gleichheit’ stellt dem Verfasser des Kolosserbriefes, gemessen an den Anschauungen seiner Zeit, immerhin auch kein schlechtes Zeugnis aus. Die Nachbarschaft Plutarchs, wenn auch nicht die des enger zu Antipater gehörenden Musonius, und der Abstand zu allem, was an unverblütem Herrschaftsdenken bei Philo oder im Rahmen römischer ‘Hausgewalt’ möglich war, beschreibt den Ausgangspunkt der ‘Haustafeln’ vielleicht etwas treffender als das bislang geschehen ist.<sup>6</sup>

Balch instead finds a syncretistic body of texts among Stoic-Cynic and Neopythagorean literature. He also questions the assumption that the ideas of the Hellenistic Jews Philo and Josephus were more repressive than those of Greek thinkers. Moreover, he demonstrates that the ‘egalitarian’ tendencies of Plutarch and the Roman Stoics such as Musonius must be seen against other assertions where these authors seem much more in keeping with traditional values.<sup>7</sup>

The body of literature reflecting the *topos* of household management is complex and diverse; the tendency to view certain authors as repressive and others as egalitarian is often misleading, misrepresenting the range of evidence. Recent work on women in the ancient world has continued to showcase this complexity and the dangers of anachronism associated with modern labels such as ‘repressive’ or ‘liberating’. Among much evidence that could be cited are the points in common between the Pythagorean collection, which generally reflects ‘the conservative male perspective’, and Plutarch, well known for his vision of marriage as ‘partnership’, with respect to the advice that wives should remain steadfast with their husbands while tolerating their husbands’ failings in this regard.<sup>8</sup> Yet, Thraede’s insight of a ‘middle position’ has to a certain extent found a new voice in contemporary scholarship viewing the household codes as encoding a type of admixture of traditional and counter-cultural voices—

6 Thraede, ‘Zum historischen Hintergrund der “Haustafeln” des NT’, 367. Balch (‘Household Codes’, 27) represents Thraede’s thesis concerning the household codes as follows: ‘This position is expressly anti-egalitarian, but supports a mild, more humanitarian idea of authority, which means that it is a conservative position between two extremes, a realistic, humane middle position, a responsible, rational Aristotelian mean (*mesotes*) between unqualified patriarchy and equality’.

7 Balch, ‘Household Codes’, 29–32.

8 See Perictione *On Feminine Harmony* 3; Plutarch *Advice to Bride and Groom* 140B. Adding to the complexity of the Pythagorean evidence is that the collection contains fragments and whole letters supposedly written by five philosopher women of illustrious background, including Perictione, Plato’s mother. So the advice purports to be from woman to woman. There is substantial debate with respect to dating and whether there is any real influence of women’s authorship. See Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald (with Janet Tulloch), *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2006) 22–3, 148–52.

with the result being a complex amalgam at some distance from either revolutionary or patriarchal extremes. As will be explored below, the use of imperial ideology as an interpretive grid, often in conjunction with postcolonial analysis, is leading to surprising results that call for further exploration.

These newer approaches are also leading to a renewed interest in the household codes and Jewish sources. This is partly in response to David Verner's important study which, while supporting the theory of the external origins of the general reciprocal form and household management theme, nevertheless argued in favor of a specifically Christian schema.<sup>9</sup> Yet, scholars have noted close parallels with respect to the shape of individual exhortations in wisdom literature and Hellenistic-Jewish ethical material. While Verner's insights remain useful in demonstrating the way the Christian material is introduced in the codes by highlighting such features as 'justification clauses' that typically include 'the Lord', or 'in the Lord', Verner's schema tends to overemphasize the uniqueness of the Christian exhortations.<sup>10</sup> To name just a few examples, one is struck by the presence of address, instruction, and motivation in the teachings concerning fathers, mothers, and children (and their bearing on relations with God) in Sirach 3.1-16<sup>11</sup> or the manner in which Philo seeks to temper the authority of masters in *De specialibus legibus* 3.137 and his albeit indirect address to both social groups in *De specialibus legibus* 2.67-68.<sup>12</sup>

In some recent studies it is the interlacing of household code material with biblical allusions and themes that has led to an appreciation of multiple dimensions of household ethics. The offering (Col 3.24) of the share of the inheritance promised to Abraham (a concept which, according to Dunn, has eschatological undertones and spiritual connotations as the promise of eternal life) takes on new force with the irony of such a gift offered to slaves who under Roman Law stood outside the realm of inheritance altogether.<sup>13</sup> As we will see, the concept of inheritance has figured prominently in readings of the Colossian code as a type of 'hidden transcript', innocuous to outsiders, but ultimately undermining the dominant categories of the slave-master relationship.<sup>14</sup> The identification of

9 David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (SBLDS 71; Chico: Scholars, 1989). For a detailed structural and semantic analysis of the codes in Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter, see Marlis Gielen, *Tradition und Theologie neutestamentlicher Haustafelethik: Ein Beitrag zur Frage einer christlichen Auseinandersetzung mit gesellschaftlichen Normen* (BBB 75; Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1990).

10 See also Balch, 'Household Codes', 36-40.

11 See Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 244.

12 See Balch, 'Household Codes', 37.

13 Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 257. On inheritance and eschatology Dunn cites Ps 37.9; Isa 54.17. On the idea of inheriting eternal life, he cites Pss. Sol. 14.10; 1 En. 40.9; Sib. Or. frag. 3, line 47; Tes. Job 18.6-7.

14 See Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 209. They cite James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of*

parallels with Jewish sources has instilled caution with respect to claims of a uniquely Christian ethical stance envisioned by the codes, but at the same time is leading to a growing appreciation of the complex negotiations required with respect to group identity in the Roman imperial world which early Christians shared with Jews. As is typical of discussions of household management in the Greco-Roman world generally, Eph 5.22-33 uses familial relationships, in this case marriage, to address the realities of the broader community. But there are also elements of resistance to the dominant social order taking the form of the presentation of the *ekklesia* as that which is purified and set apart in Eph 5.22-33. These elements of resistance become most obvious in the references to purity, fidelity, and unity which are grounded in scriptural references and allusions (Eph 5.26-27 [Ezek 16.9]; Eph 5.28 [Lev 19.18]; Eph 5.31 [Gen 2.24]) and demonstrate points of contact with Jewish literature of the period (cf. Josephus *Against Apion* 2.190-203).<sup>15</sup>

With respect to the second key point of debate noted above, whether the codes should be viewed as mainly reflecting (with little significant alteration) conventional ethics, it must be said that scholars who have generally accepted that the basis of the household codes lies in the *topos* of household management have increasingly been arguing that parallels are not just a matter of general form and content, but of quite specific form and content. The range of texts cited, however, is striking.<sup>16</sup> To offer two contrasting examples: In 2000 Angela Standhartinger turned her attention to inscriptional evidence, noting the similarities in form between the Colossian household code and the Philadelphian inscription found on a stele referring to the ethical requirements of a cultic association, including interaction between various familial groupings.<sup>17</sup> In 2006, J. Albert Harrill compared the Colossian and Ephesian household codes to agricultural handbooks, noting a pattern whereby the subordination of slaves to the farm master or bailiff is presented as ultimately reflecting the farm master's subordination to the *paterfamilias* (thereby offering the same type of symbolic lordship that provides theological justification in the household codes).<sup>18</sup> But what

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*Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990). Walsh and Keesmaat emphasize the traditions of jubilee.

15 For full discussion of conventional and countercultural elements in Eph 5.22-33, see Osiek and MacDonald (with Tulloch), *A Woman's Place*, 123-6.

16 See David L. Balch, 'Neopythagorean Moralists and the New Testament Household Codes', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2, no. 26.1 (1992) 389-404. Balch offers several examples from Hellenistic street philosophy, which offer particularly good parallels to the genre of the Colossian code.

17 Angela Standhartinger, 'The Origin and Intention of the Household Code in the Letter to the Colossians', *JSNT* 79 (2000) 117-30. For the inscription see SIG 3.985.

18 Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 85-7.

needs to be probed more deeply is why the identification of parallels is leading to such different conclusions in these valuable studies. For Standhartinger the parallels with the inscription illustrate how the code functions to reassure outsiders that the congregation respects the traditional *oikos*-model, but the familial 'in-group' receives some counter-cultural messages.<sup>19</sup> For Harrill, the parallels suggest that the household codes have much in common with traditional slave management strategies: '...the writers/compilers of the *Haustafeln* select certain ethical material about elite slaves from wider classical culture, call it the "traditional" teachings of the church, and use it to bolster the domestic framework of their nonhousehold authority'.<sup>20</sup>

The difference of opinion here lies not in the extent of the conventionality of the ethics but in their overall function. In both cases, there seems to be a desire to identify the ethical stance as either counter-cultural or as thoroughly conventional, serving to reinforce the status quo. For Harrill, the appearance of conventional ethics leaves little doubt as to the overriding agenda in sympathy with the interests of slaveholders. Standhartinger, on the other hand, reads the conventionality of ethics largely as an apologetic strategy which has little bearing on the true ethical stance of the community. As will be illustrated below, however, there is a need for greater nuance with respect to the function of the codes in community life to allow for more complexity and even contradiction based on the variety of actors and perspectives that shaped NT communities and texts.

Ongoing work since the early 1980s suggests that the uniqueness of the ethical material contained in the codes should not be overlaid. Yet, it remains the case that no precise parallels have been found in other traditions. The address to subordinate groups (especially slaves, but I would argue also children, including child slaves) directly rather than via the *paterfamilias* is at least unusual. In his study on ancient slavery and early Christianity Franz Laub called attention to this and the integrative potential of the codes uniting members into one house-*ekklesia* in 1982:

Das Besondere - im modernen Verständnis das besonders Negative - an dieser Art Sklavenmahnung ist es nicht, dass der Sklave dabei zu Unterordnung und Willfährigkeit aufgefordert wird. Ähnliches erwartet die Haustafel auch von der Frau und den Kindern. Das ist zunächst einfach der Alltag des antiken Oikos. Das Besondere gerade in Hinsicht auf die Sklaven ist es vielmehr, dass hier zwar der sozialen Schichtung des Oikos entsprechende Gruppen angesprochen werden, die Sklaven eingeschlossen, aber nicht mehr als Oikos-Gemeinschaft, sondern in der neuen Formierung der *ekklesia*.<sup>21</sup>

19 Standhartinger, 'The Origin and Intention of the Household Code', 125.

20 Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 113.

21 Franz Laub, *Die Begegnung des frühen Christentums mit der Antiken Sklaverei* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1982) 90. See also Balch, 'Household Codes', 33; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale



Yet, as I will discuss further in Part 4, our appreciation of the integrative function of the codes has often been hampered by our lack of understanding of the complexities of family life in the Roman world. The house church is at once a place of family life and a ritual context. The experience of being called out by name as a member of a familial group in church meetings might resonate with unity-generating potential while at the same time speak to various levels of experience of community members who could belong to more than one category—one might be a mother and slave, a child and parent, a wife and master. What kind of relational messages might a member, often living out multiple identities, take away from a church meeting? For example, how can one obey one's parents in all things when one's (perhaps non-believing) master demands the opposite? The impact of the household codes on community life has been of great interest to scholars, as will be discussed in the next section, but recent work leads to great caution with respect to single-dimension assessments of the social location of community members. Instead, as will be argued here, one should acknowledge ideologies of domination while at the same time recognizing evidence of overlapping aspects of identity in family life which would have impacted how the codes were heard by various members.

A final set of unresolved issues emerging from the discussions of the early 1980s concerns the apologetic function of the codes. While 1981 saw the publication of Balch's groundbreaking study on the household code of 1 Peter, *Let Wives be Submissive*, it also saw the publication of an important sociological study of 1 Peter by John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*.<sup>22</sup> While Balch argued for an apologetic function, Elliott viewed the household code as part of the strategy for encouraging cohesion in the face of external pressures to conform—offering a home for strangers and aliens (cf. 1 Pet 1.1, 17; 2.11). In subsequent publications, Balch and Elliott continued to refine their positions, challenging scholars to reflect upon the role of the household code both in mediating between the church and the world and in offering organizational structures for community integration.<sup>23</sup>

One of the greatest benefits of the Balch–Elliott debate is that it set the stage for increasing recognition of varying degrees of apologetic responses across various

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University, 1983) 78–9 and 86–94. On reciprocal ethical exhortations and the unusual nature of the direct address, see also Gielen, *Tradition und Theologie neutestamentlicher Haustafelethik*, 37–8, 69–71, 102, 118, 145.

22 John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

23 See David L. Balch, 'Hellenization/Acculturation in 1 Peter', *Perspectives on 1 Peter* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1986) 79–101; John H. Elliott, '1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy: A Discussion with David Balch', *Perspectives on 1 Peter* (ed. Talbert) 61–78; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 509–10.

documents. With its explicit reference to relations with nonbelievers within the code (1 Pet 3.1-6), 1 Peter has seemed to some to offer much more obvious material for an apologetic argument than the other codes. Nevertheless, the apologetic argument has often shaped interpretation of Colossians as in the Standhartinger article cited above or in the thesis put forth by Dunn that there is a double apologetic slant in the code of Colossians, aimed not only at pagan outsiders but also at Jews.<sup>24</sup> Although I have continued to argue for an apologetic function for Eph 5.21-6.9, the feminist work of Sarah J. Tanzer is notable for questioning this theory in light of the author's sustained attempt to distinguish early Christian behavior from that of outsiders and for arguing, in fact, that the code is a later addition to Ephesians.<sup>25</sup> The question of what constitutes 'apologetic' underlies these assessments, often closely connected to the extent to which texts adopt (or return to) conventional patriarchal patterns. Commenting on scholarship on 1 Peter, David Horrell has recently stated that there is a need for perspectives that can '...enable us to move beyond a somewhat unsatisfactory categorization of a text as either conformist or resistant'.<sup>26</sup> But before exploring some of the avenues suggested by Horrell and others that I will propose, it is important to pay special attention to the impact of *Haustafeln* scholarship from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s on feminist interpretation of the 1980s and 1990s. This feminist interpretation constitutes an important transitional stage in scholarship on the household codes, advancing our understanding of the ideological dimensions of the codes, calling attention to the circumstances of wives and other subordinate members of house-church communities, and laying much of the groundwork for new perspectives and methods in the study of the *Haustafeln*. Real advances in the study of the *Haustafeln* were made (and are ongoing) as scholars moved beyond basic discussions of literary structure and historical context to acknowledge the impact of particular social locations—as reflected in both ancient texts and modern analyses of texts—and the political and theological implications of interpretation.

## 2. The Codes and Feminist Analysis

Household code discourse was of central interest in the groundbreaking feminist work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza published in 1983, *In Memory of*

24 Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 250.

25 See Sarah H. Tanzer, 'Ephesians', *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (ed. E. S. Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1994) 325-48, esp. 330, 340-1. See also Winsome Munro, 'Col III.18-IV.1 and Eph V.21-VI.9: Evidence of a Late Literary Stratum?', *NTS* 18 (1972) 434-47. Arguing against the apologetic function of the Ephesian household code, see Daniel K. Darko, *No Longer Living as the Gentiles: Differentiation and Shared Ethical Values in Ephesians 4.17-6.9* (Library of New Testament Studies 375; New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

26 David G. Horrell, *1 Peter* (London: T & T Clark, 2008) 92.

*Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*.<sup>27</sup> Fiorenza's argument concerning the introduction of patriarchy via the household code was and continues to be hugely influential in feminist analysis: 'In taking over the Greco-Roman ethic of the patriarchal household code, Colossians not only "spiritualizes" and moralizes the baptismal community understanding expressed in Gal 3.28 but also makes this Greco-Roman household ethic a part of "Christian" social ethic. However, it is important to keep in mind that such a reinterpretation of the Christian baptismal vision is late—it did not happen before the last third of the century'.<sup>28</sup> Citing many of the scholars mentioned above, Fiorenza argued: 'Western misogyny has its root in the rules for the household as the model of the state. A feminist theology therefore must not only analyze the anthropological dualism generated by Western culture and theology, but also uncover its political roots in the patriarchal household of antiquity'.<sup>29</sup>

In subsequent work, where her use of rhetorical analysis emerges more plainly, Fiorenza articulates her commitment to political and theological engagement in a manner that sharply reminds us of what is at stake in the interpretation of the household codes. Fiorenza seeks to '...work out a process and method for a feminist political reading that can empower women who, for whatever reasons, are still affected by the Bible to read "against the grain" of its patriarchal rhetoric'.<sup>30</sup> Household code discourse is patriarchal discourse par excellence. Fiorenza, however, has sometimes preferred the term *kyriarchal/kyriocentric* echoing the double meaning inherent in the Greek term for lord and master which is so well exploited by the author(s) of Colossians and Ephesians. Such language underscores '...that domination is not simply a matter of patriarchal, gender-based dualism but of more comprehensive, interlocking, hierarchically ordered structures of domination, evident in a variety of oppressions, such as racism, poverty, heterosexism and colonialism'.<sup>31</sup> With this last comment, Fiorenza anticipates the political and postcolonial readings of recent years and points the way towards the lines of enquiry that will be discussed subsequently.<sup>32</sup>

One cannot overestimate the impact of Fiorenza's vision on scholarly conclusions concerning the implications of the household codes for the lives of

27 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983).

28 Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 253.

29 Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 257.

30 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992) 7.

31 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) ix.

32 Postcolonial scholarship and Empire Studies have offered increasingly important conversation partners for Fiorenza in recent years. See especially Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

women. Feminist commentators have lamented what has seemed like a retreat from some of Paul's most important theological principles. In 1992, commenting on Ephesians, Elizabeth Johnson expressed the results in very strong terms: 'The result for women is thus a retreat from the initial freedom promised them in Paul's preaching and a reassertion of conventional patriarchal morality'.<sup>33</sup> One of Fiorenza's most influential insights about the nature of the codes, however, is that they are prescriptive rather than descriptive. In the period of the codes women were still pushing against the grain, expecting to exercise leadership roles, and early Christianity was being accused of having a subversive influence on women and slaves.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, we have a fine example of women's leadership within Colossians which includes the only unambiguous reference in the Pauline Epistles to the independent leadership of a house church by a woman, Nympha (Col 4.15).<sup>35</sup>

Both directly and indirectly, Fiorenza's insights have continued to shape discussions from the mid-1980s to the present, but other scholars have made their own important contributions. To name a few of the diverse examples: In a 1993 commentary on Colossians, Mary Rose D'Angelo focused on the symbolism of the letter, the theological shaping of the symbolism, and the disjuncture between the household code and certain aspects of the symbolism.<sup>36</sup> According to D'Angelo, the baptismal imagery of Colossians becomes masked or limited by household code ethics which ultimately lead to a type of '...double consciousness in women and slaves, demanding that they deny their subjected status in the religious realm while submitting to it in the social world'.<sup>37</sup> The problematic relationship between household ethics and symbolism is also of primary concern in Carolyn Osiek's 2003 essay on Eph 5.22-33 where she draws on literary criticism on simile and metaphor to explore the sexual undertones of the text, which comes close to suggesting that 'female biology is destiny'.<sup>38</sup>

In some feminist work the focus has been more directly on the audience of the household codes and the nature of the codes as prescriptive rather than descriptive. In 1995 Turid Karlsen Seim published an insightful essay which drew attention to the idealized nature of the Ephesians code, suggesting that the audience to

33 E. A. Johnson, 'Ephesians', *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. C. A. Newsom and H. R. Ringe; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 341.

34 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1985) 74-7. See also Tanzer, 'Ephesians', 331.

35 See Margaret Y. MacDonald, 'Can Nympha Rule this House? The Rhetoric of Domesticity in Colossians', *Rhetoric and Reality in Early Christianities* (ed. Willi Braun; Studies in Christianity and Judaism 16; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier, 2005) 102.

36 Mary Rose D'Angelo, 'Colossians', *Searching the Scriptures* (ed. Fiorenza) 318. She speculates that the Christ-hymn in Col 1.15-20 may have originated as a hymn to Sophia with the end result of the transformation being that 'the Christ of Colossians is the incarnation of a divine female persona, but his person hides hers with a male mask'.

37 D'Angelo, 'Colossians', 320.

38 Carolyn Osiek, 'The Bride of Christ (Eph 5.22-33): A Problematic Wedding', *BTB* 32 (2003) 29-39.

which Ephesians was addressed probably included wives whose husbands were nonbelievers.<sup>39</sup> The subversive presence of women without their partners in church groups was of major interest to me in my 1996 book on pagan reaction to early Christian women, where I called the wives of 1 Pet 3.1-6 'quiet evangelists'.<sup>40</sup> More generally, I sought to explore how the stereotypical impressions of women offered by the first pagan critics might have shaped early Christian household ethics while women continued to challenge tradition and convention.

Feminist scholarship has not been uniform in its assessments, however, particularly with respect to the transformation in Pauline thought that occurs from Paul to Deutero-Paul. Here the work of Lone Fatum has been especially important for it seriously challenges the optimistic picture of the very beginning of the Pauline era based on 'liberating' understandings of Gal 3.28.<sup>41</sup> In a recent essay Fatum has described 'the Pastoral Paul's' institutionalization project not in terms of patriarchalization of the real Paul, but in terms of a shift in theological justification away from a 'vertical', 'already/not yet' eschatology to the 'horizontal' here and now (at the expense of apocalyptic, asceticism, and charismatic spirituality).<sup>42</sup> The Pastoral Paul is concerned with the patriarchal household order of the church and dwells in a world where '...social status and personal identity are regulated by rules and conventions of the emperor and his local representatives (1 Tim 2.1-2; Tit 3.1-2), the publicness of the city, the opinion of others, and the talk of neighbors'.<sup>43</sup> The vision of household as microcosm of the state is clearly visible. The result is a depiction of the Pastoral Paul as a political strategist and a defender of masculinity.

Few scholars share Fatum's pronounced pessimism for recovering the agency of women and elements of their resistance to the dominant social order.<sup>44</sup> Yet

39 T. K. Seim, 'A Superior Minority: The Problem of Men's headship in Ephesians 5', *Mighty Minorities? Minorities in Early Christianity—Positions and Strategies: Essays in Honor of Jacob Jervell on His 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday, 21 May 1995* (ed. D. Hellholm, H. Moxnes, and T. K. Seim; Oslo/Copenhagen/Stockholm/Boston: Scandanavian University, 1995) 167–81.

40 Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996) 195–206.

41 See, for example, Lone Fatum, 'Images of God and Glory of Man: Women in the Pauline Congregations', *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (ed. K. E. Borresen; Oslo: Solum 1991) 56–137; '1 Thessalonians', *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (ed. E. S. Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1994) 250–62.

42 Lone Fatum, 'Christ Domesticated: The Household Theology of the Pastorals as Political Strategy', *The Formation of the Early Church* (ed. Jostein Ådna; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 193. Fatum's contribution to the study of the Pastorals has been extensively discussed by Marianne Bjelland Kartzow in *Gossip and Gender: Othring of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles* (Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 2009) 121–6, 129–31.

43 Fatum, 'Christ Domesticated', 193.

44 See L. Schottroff, S. Schroer, and M. T. Wacker, *Feminist Intepretation: The Bible in Woman's Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 203.

many are increasingly hesitant to accept arguments that posit a dramatic shift from the Paul of the undisputed letters to the Paul of the disputed letters on household hierarchies and ethics. In fact, it is helpful to think in terms of a trajectory of institutionalization from Paul to Deutero-Paul.<sup>45</sup> Household codes are essentially familial idealizations that need to be read in relation to complex family realities. Rather than representing a definitive break with earlier patterns, the codes appear to actualize or articulate conventional arrangements in house-church communities that probably were always present in the Pauline churches alongside challenges to traditional family structures through various forms of asceticism and the allegiance to church groups of subordinate members of non-believing households. External pressures were no doubt important factors in leading to conventional assertions of identity that may sometimes have served apologetic functions. Moreover, now forming part of the 'symbolic universe' of some communities, the household codes could shape behavior in certain ways and were available to offer justification for further institutional developments such as the kind of merger between household ethics and the criteria for church offices we find in the Pastoral Epistles. But the pace and uniformity of these social dynamics should not be exaggerated. The fact that *Haustafel* traditions are found in works such as Colossians (4.15) and the letters of Ignatius where women appear as house-church leaders and patrons (e.g., *Smyrn.* 13.2; *Pol.* 8.2-3) suggests that despite their often devastating legacies, in their own day these texts did not necessarily lead to any immediately dramatic changes in the lives of women and other subordinate members. As hostesses and benefactors, women may simply have been carrying on with the leadership roles they knew as pagan and Jewish women: '...it is actually very difficult to know if the women who heard these instructions would have interpreted them as a call to change their behavior in any way (for example, perhaps relinquishing earlier ascetic inclinations) or whether the specific ethical recommendations would sound so familiar as to seem banal, perhaps to be quietly ignored'.<sup>46</sup>

One of the strongest defenders of seeing the *Haustafeln* as an indication of a radical difference between the historical Paul and his deutero-Pauline interpreters has been Neil Elliott, a contributor to the volumes on Paul, empire, and politics edited by Richard A. Horsley. Referring to close readings of Paul's references to slavery by S. Scott Bartchy and Norman Peterson and to work on women's leadership in the undisputed letters by feminist scholars, Elliott warns against the assimilation of Paul's message to the 'pseudo-Pauline *Haustafeln*'. Referring to his 1994 volume, *Liberating Paul*, he argues that '...interpretative strategies that assimilate

45 See Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986).

46 Osiek and MacDonald (with Tulloch), *A Woman's Place*, 131.

Paul to the pseudo-Paulines, under the guise of describing a “Pauline school” or “Pauline churches”, misconstrue literary resemblances, an effect of pseudepigraphy, as historical continuity’.<sup>47</sup> According to Elliott, ‘the pseudo-Pauline letters already began to modify Paul to serve the churches’ agenda in the post-apostolic period, and to an extent to accommodate the word of the cross to the interests of empire’.<sup>48</sup> Influenced by feminist scholarship in particular, Elliott does admit that subordinationist language is present in the undisputed letters which closely resembles the wider Roman culture.<sup>49</sup> But his thesis about the overall force of an anti-imperial Paul in contrast to his deuterio-Pauline interpreters comes under question when one considers the growing body of literature which carefully examines the disputed Paulines and finds a complex picture of subordinationist language and empire-resistant elements that is also typical of Paul’s letters. Careful studies have demonstrated that such links cannot simply be attributed to an attempt to mimic or assimilate Paul’s thought, but rather are often rooted in the unique perspectives of the epistles themselves.

### 3. Recent Perspectives: Reading the Households Codes in light of Empire and Family

As interest in Paul and Empire has grown over the past decade, scholars are now producing detailed and nuanced studies of the disputed Paulines using this interpretative grid and challenging long-held views about the function of the household codes—especially views about their tendency to reinforce acceptance of the dominant social order categorically. Harry Maier’s study of Colossians’ appropriation of imperial motifs offers us a case in point.<sup>50</sup> Maier has interpreted the symbolism and ethics of Colossians in light of the temple complex of Sebasteion at Aphrodisias dedicated to the Julio-Claudian emperors and located about 100 km from Colossae. This sculptural display celebrates the triumph of the emperors and their families who stand together with Olympian deities over pacified peoples assimilated in imperial harmony. Among the Pauline baptismal proclamations of unity, Col 3.11 is notable for its reference to ethnic boundaries which Maier reads in relation to an Empire that ‘celebrated

47 Neil Elliott, ‘Paul and the Politics of Empire’, *Paul and Politics: Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2000) 26. See also *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).

48 Elliott here is referring specifically to Paul’s theology of powers which the authors of Colossians and Ephesians link to the heavenly/spiritual realm but which Paul himself maintains as earthly, tied to Jesus’ death, using apocalyptic concepts. See ‘The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross’, *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1997) 178; see pp. 179–81.

49 Elliott, ‘Paul and the Politics of Empire’, 26.

50 Harry Maier, ‘A Sly Civility: Colossians and Empire’, *JSNT* 27 (2005) 323–49.

its dominion over subject peoples iconographically' and proclaimed a 'trans-ethnic order'.<sup>51</sup> There are several texts that echo and seemingly subvert imperial strategies and ideals in Colossians. In addition to Col 3.11, we should consider the veiled references to the experience of triumphal procession and captivity to describe the conquering of the powers in Christ (Col 2.14-15) and even the unusual use of the verb in Col 2.8 (σὺλαγωγέω: to plunder, to take as captive, to carry off as booty)—appearing only here in the NT—referring to the dangers of being taken captive by philosophy.<sup>52</sup> According to Maier, Colossians offers a 'hybrid vision' where the *Haustafel* plays an important role: 'It urges believers gathered in house churches to realize by love what Rome seeks to achieve by the force of arms, and thereby to be the visible ecclesial manifestation of an alternative cosmic rule centred finally in an empire-renouncing logic'.<sup>53</sup>

In his analysis Maier is influenced by the postcolonial theories of Homi Bhabha.<sup>54</sup> Postcolonial Studies has emerged as an increasingly important conversation partner for Biblical Studies. In the words of R. S. Sugirtharajah, 'Postcolonial studies emerged as a way of engaging with the textual, historical, and cultural articulations of societies disturbed and transformed by the historical reality of colonial presence'.<sup>55</sup> Its usefulness for explorations of the place of early Christianity within the Empire is tied to the dual interests of postcolonial critics in analyzing '...the diverse strategies by which the colonizers constructed images of the colonized' and in studying '...how the colonized themselves made use of and went beyond many of those strategies in order to articulate their identity, self-worth, and empowerment'.<sup>56</sup> It is this latter interest which has been of particular importance for analysis of the household codes; interpreters have sought to understand how early church groups opposed elements of the dominant imperial culture and essentially lived the experience of the colonized and displaced, while at the same time expressing an ethos in ways that appeared to call upon the strategies of domination of the imperial order. When examining household codes, the notions of 'hybridity and micmicry' have proven to be especially illuminating. Essentially, they become a strategy by which the colonized respond to imperial rule. According to Homi Bhabha, hybridity is a type of 'in-between'

51 Maier, 'A Sly Civility', 341. Reference to the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias is central to recent postcolonial reading of Galatians by Davina C. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

52 On the use of this term, see Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 114.

53 Maier, 'A Sly Civility', 349.

54 See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 93-102.

55 R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002) 11. For the influence of postcolonial theory on biblical interpretation, including that of Bhabha, see also Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006).

56 Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 11.



space: 'A contingent, borderline experience opens up *in-between* colonizer and colonized. This is a space of cultural and interpretive undecidability...'.<sup>57</sup> As will be discussed in more detail in Part 4, through the lens of Bhabha's theories, the significance and impact of the household codes appear to be culturally complex, representing a type of inter-cultural exchange between the emerging early Christian ethos and the values and ethics of the broader society.<sup>58</sup>

Empire/political readings of Pauline literature have also been influenced by the theories of political scientist, James C. Scott, especially with respect to the concept of 'hidden transcript' (typical of oppressed groups, a way of expressing their outlook in a way that only insiders will understand).<sup>59</sup> Scott described the 'social sites' of 'hidden transcript' in a manner that is very suggestive for understanding early church communities. Spaces of the least inhibition are those where the hidden transcript '...is voiced in a sequestered social site where the control, surveillance, and repression of the dominant are least able to reach, and second, when this sequestered social milieu is composed entirely of close confidants who share similar experiences of domination'.<sup>60</sup> Among the circumstances discussed by Scott is the place of Eph 6.5-9 in the lives of the slaves of the US south. He argues that under surveillance of the master or the master's representative, public religious ceremony meant that '...slaves were expected to control their gestures, facial expression, voice, and general comportment'. But outside the surveillance and with the use of devices to prevent sound from carrying '... an entirely different atmosphere reigned—one of release from the constant guardedness of domination, permitting dancing, shouts, clapping, and participation'. Ephesians 6.5-9 might have called for '...a plea for a sincere official transcript from slaves', but '... the offstage Christianity...stressed the themes of

57 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 206.

58 It is important to acknowledge that countercultural or resistant elements of the household codes have also been recognized by scholars before and independent of the appeal to political and postcolonial theories. See, for example, Angela Standhinger, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte und Intention des Kolosserbriefs* (NovTSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 1999); 'The Origin and Intention of the Household Code in the Letter to the Colossians'; 'The Epistle to the Congregation in Colossae and the Invention of the Household Code', *A Feminist Companion to the Deutero-Pauline Epistles* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Miriamme Blickerstaff; London: T&T Clark, 2003) 88-97; Mollenkott, 'Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21-33', 88-97. For some of these scholars, it is not a matter of 'either /or', but of ambiguity and even contradiction in a given text. See especially J. Barclay, 'Ordinary but Different: Colossians and Hidden Moral Identity', *ABR* 49 (2001) 34-52.

59 See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. On the influence of Scott's work more generally on the study of Paul see Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Semeia Studies 48; Atlanta, GA: SBL 2004).

60 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 120.

deliverance, and redemption, Moses and the Promised Land, the Egyptian captivity, and emancipation'.<sup>61</sup>

In his 2008 commentary on Colossians, Jerry Sumney employs Scott's concept of 'hidden transcript' to read Colossians within a Roman setting and believes the concept has direct implications for how we should understand the household codes: 'The tension between what the code *seems* to require and what Colossians proclaims about the cosmos and believers' place in Christ, as well as some statements within the code itself...indicate that something other than the usual straightforward reading is in order'.<sup>62</sup> According to Sumney, if indeed Colossians employs a hidden transcript, there is less incongruence between the letter's proclamation and its ethics than is often thought and the promise that slaves are to receive 'inheritance' in Col 3.24 has definitive social repercussions: 'Giving slaves the status of heirs, Colossians signals a reorientation of the structure of society... At this juncture, others might not treat them with the dignity appropriate to their identity; but this is temporary. The promise of recompense—indeed of an astonishing reward—assures slaves that God will not allow their current treatment to be the final word'.<sup>63</sup>

Postcolonial and political theories have also been applied to household code traditions in 1 Peter. David Horrell refers to the work of both James C. Scott and Homi Bhabha concluding that their theories help us see '...how a writer like the author of 1 Peter is not being simply conformist, or accommodating the church to the world, even if he does take a less radical, anti-Roman stance than, say, the author of Revelation'.<sup>64</sup> While to the best of my knowledge, postcolonial theories have yet to be applied to the household code of Ephesians, there is a growing awareness of the value of using imperial ideology as an interpretative grid for the

61 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 116.

62 Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (NLT; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2008) 237.

63 Sumney, *Colossians*, 250. Here Sumney cites Müller, 'Die Haustafel des Kolosserbriefes', 274–5. Although in general I am somewhat less confident of Colossians' internal consistency than is Sumney, I have argued that the author of Colossians does present a fundamental bestowal of honor on slaves. See Margaret Y. MacDonald, 'Slavery, Sexuality, and House Churches: A Reassessment of Colossians 3.18–4.1 in Light of New Research on the Roman Family', *NTS* 53 (2007) 94–113, see esp. 108.

64 Horrell, *1 Peter*, 94. On the application of Scott's perspective to the study of 1 Peter, see also Warren Carter, 'Going All the Way? Honoring the Emperor and Sacrificing Wives and Slaves in 1 Pet 2.13–3.6', *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles* (ed. Amy Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004) 14–33. On the use of postcolonial theory for the study of 1 Peter more generally, see David G. Horrell, 'Between Conformity and Resistance: Beyond the Balch–Elliott Debate Towards a Postcolonial Reading of 1 Peter', *Reading 1 Peter with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of First Peter* (ed. Robert L. Webb and Betsy Bauman-Martin; LNTS; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2007) 111–43. On feminist postcolonial analysis of 1 Peter, see Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 162–94.

work; we find notions of citizenship and membership in the household of God (Eph 2.19) and remembrances of dislocation (Eph 2.11–22), not unlike the social dynamics of 1 Peter.<sup>65</sup> By means of a comparison of Ephesians to apologetic texts like Josephus, *Against Apion*, one might explore inter-textual links between Eph 2.11–22 as representing the macro-vision of heavenly citizenship and Eph 5.22–33 as representing the micro-vision of household holiness and loyalty.<sup>66</sup>

The *Haustafel* material in the Pastoral Epistles is far less revealing of elements of resistance. Yet, we should not forget the usefulness of the ‘hidden transcript’ concept for shedding light on the perspectives and activities of the opponents who surface in NT texts sometimes as counter-voices to the dominant reinforcement of household hierarchies. In her 2009 monograph, *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles*, Marianne Bjelland Kartzow has drawn attention to Scott’s inclusion of gossip as one of the means by which power may be critiqued behind a veil of anonymity.<sup>67</sup> This carries interesting implications for the labeling of the young widows of 1 Tim 5.13 as gossipers by the author who seeks to quell their problematic behavior by encouraging marriage. But even the dominant voice with respect to women and gender in the Pastoral Epistles sometimes sounds surprising notes. Given the overall importance of teaching, and the prohibition against women teaching in 1 Tim 2.12, it is striking to find the recognized word for teacher (διδάσκαλος; cf. 2 Tim 1.11) applied to the older women who must teach (καλοδιδάσκαλος) younger women the duties of household management (Tit 2.3–5). This is unquestionably a strategy of social control, but the terminology does indicate a valuing of instruction on par with other types of instruction received from male teachers on other subjects in a house-church setting.<sup>68</sup> Noting that ‘self-control’ is an ideal for men and women alike in the Pastorals, Gail Corrington Streete states that for women it is to be exercised in ‘...supporting a disciplined household, in which the woman as elder sets the example for other members of the household who are to lead a disciplined life that subjects the unruly individual will to that of a spiritual “father”, “master”, and “head of the household”’.<sup>69</sup> Competing voices

65 On imperial ideology and Ephesians, see especially Eberhard Faust, *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief* (NTOA 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); Carmen Bernabé Ubieta, “Neither *Xenoi* nor *paroikoi*, *sympolitai* and *oikeioi tou theou*” (Eph 2.19): Pauline Christian Communities: Defining a New Territoriality,’ *Social-Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible* (ed. John J. Pilch; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 260–80; Margaret Y. MacDonald, ‘The Politics of Identity in Ephesians’, *JSNT* 26 (2004) 419–44.

66 See MacDonald, ‘The Politics of Identity in Ephesians’. See also Osiek and MacDonald (with Tulloch), *A Woman’s Place*, 127–9.

67 Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender*, 33.

68 See Osiek and MacDonald (with Tulloch), *A Woman’s Place*, 91.

69 Gail Corrington Streete, ‘Askesis in the Pastoral Epistles’, *Asceticism and the New Testament* (ed. Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush; New York: Routledge, 1999) 313.

have long been recognized with respect to doctrines and ethics, but it may be helpful to study NT documents with an eye for competing and/or overlapping hidden transcripts.

#### 4. Promising New Directions: The Convergence of Family, Ideology, and Empire

Building upon the discussion of recent perspectives in Part 3 and taking into consideration current approaches to the study of families in the Roman world, I have identified five promising directions for future analysis of the *Haustafeln*; these may address some of the unresolved questions and help move us beyond the various and even contradictory positions of scholars concerning the function of the codes in early church documents.

(1) *Recognizing the household codes as familial ideology that has a complex relationship to the lives of real people.* As noted above, feminist scholars long ago observed that the relationship between the household codes and community life is prescriptive rather than descriptive. But this insight gains further weight when one draws upon the reflections of historians of the family in the ancient world on the relationship between ideology and reality. Noting the fundamental polarity of male outdoor/female indoor work and ideals of female domesticity over centuries and a variety of genres of literature, Richard P. Saller has observed:

...these works should be treated not as sociological observation of behavioral patterns but as expressions of (adult male) moral ideals. Having acknowledged as much, I would also argue that these representations of women are not merely arbitrary fictions, unconnected with their lives. Rather, there is a substantive, as well as methodological, issue here: that is, to what extent did the ideology have practical effects, limiting women's ownership and labor participation? The brief answer is that few, precious, relevant corpora of documents point to strong asymmetries of gender in accord with the ideology.<sup>70</sup>

Historians of the Roman family offer useful analysis that can help us to address the substantive and methodological issue specifically with respect to the household codes. For example, in her study of motherhood in the Roman world, Suzanne Dixon has pointed to a series of informal conventions concerning women's roles in the overseeing of the proper running of households, supervising the affairs of children, management of household business in the absence of

70 Richard P. Saller, 'Household and Gender', *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (ed. Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris, and Richard Saller; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007) 89.

husbands, care of guests, etc., that functioned in conjunction with formal expressions of the authority of the male head of the household.<sup>71</sup> This means that recipients of the household codes may well have assumed that wives and mothers were granted powers in managing households that were simply taken for granted as associated by convention with the traditional model of family life. Such observations may lessen the discontinuity between gender pronouncements contained within the codes and evidence for women's leadership in the Pauline churches.

While an understanding of the household codes as familial ideologies can call into question simplistic readings of the codes as conventional discourse, it can also strengthen our understanding of conventional elements of the codes. It is only in very recent years that scholars have begun to discuss the association of the codes with concepts of ownership of slave bodies and strategies of slave management within the context of family life, including sexuality. Jennifer Glancy's interpretation of Pauline ethics in light of common societal expectations concerning the sexual use of slaves is particularly thought-provoking. Doubting that any expectation of restraint can be read into the exhortation that masters are to treat slaves 'justly and fairly' (Col 4.1), she views the Colossian *Haustafel* as promoting '...the interests of slaveholders, not of slaves'.<sup>72</sup> Glancy's study raises valuable questions about what the audiences of the household codes would have heard in the explicit directives for slaves to obey masters in the Lord. When it comes to sexual behavior we must acknowledge the conventional expectations concerning familial behavior and the exercise of authority. Yet, more work needs to be done in assessing the relationship between such expectations and the symbolic reversals of power inherent in baptismal proclamations, promises of inheritance to slaves, and language of collaboration with Paul which involves being a 'fellow-slave'.<sup>73</sup> A greater appreciation of the interrelationship between the *realia* of family life and ideology is central to a more complex understanding of household management in a house-church setting.

(2) *Reading the household codes as ideologies of masculinity.* As already suggested by Saller's observations cited above, traditional ethical texts like the household codes call for analysis as ideologies of masculinity. The issue of masculine authority is especially important when seeking to understand the importance

71 Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London: Croom Helm, 1988) 44, 62–3, 233. See also Osiek and MacDonald (with Tulloch), *A Woman's Place*, 24–25, 131–2; Geoffrey S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of a Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000) 17, 19.

72 See Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 149. On the household codes and strategies of slave management, it is also valuable to consider the scholarship of J. Albert Harrill cited above.

73 See my more detailed response to both Glancy and Harrill in 'Slavery, Sexuality and House Churches'.

of 'image' in the household codes and may help us get beyond the impasse in NT scholarship between those who view the codes as largely shaped by a desire to lessen tension during interactions with outsiders and those who focus mainly on their ability to encourage internal cohesion. Emphasis on ideologies of masculinity can draw our attention to the household codes' reinforcement of paternity, male control of household dependents, and male control of women's sexual experience (Eph 5.22-33), but perhaps most importantly, to the close connection between household norms and expectations, and the articulation of male leadership structures—the *Haustafel* material in the Pastorals obviously comes to mind. The study of masculinity is an increasingly important area of NT research<sup>74</sup> and J. Albert Harrill's research on the household codes and agricultural handbooks cited in Part 1 is in keeping with this work. But more research needs to be done on the household codes as prime assertions and defenses of masculinity; further investigation is required of how they operate in conjunction with other rhetorical features of the texts to bolster authority and communicate a broad variety of messages. Studies on the imperial context of the NT offer a natural conversation partner as notions of civic rule are closely tied to the dominion of the *paterfamilias*.

Moreover, we should not neglect the value of exploring the references to marriage and families in ideological discourse among pagans, Jews, and Christians—in both narrative and artistic forms—to uncover powerful cultural codes linking household behavior with broader social and religious expectations. For example, Eph 5.22-33 needs to be assessed in light of the pervasive presence of Roman imperial marriage values and depictions of harmonious unions.<sup>75</sup> Despite its explicitly inward focus on marriages between believers as a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church, the text should be considered against the background of celebrations of marital concord clearly intended as vehicles of social comment and/or political propaganda within society more broadly and reflecting the most sentimental ideals of the Roman family. Ultimately, such celebrations reinforce male dominion while concurrently conveying messages about the stability and honour of the household within the broader imperial society. Examinations of the *Haustafeln* in terms of familial ideologies and ideologies of masculinity offer a new way of approaching the long-debated question of how this ethical discourse reflects interaction between church and society and establishes the boundaries of identity.

74 See, for example, Stephen D. Moore, *New Testament Masculinities* (Semeia Studies 45; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Osiek and MacDonald (with Tulloch), *A Woman's Place*, 132-6, citing Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Roman Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999).

75 Osiek and MacDonald (with Tulloch), *A Woman's Place*, 119-23. See Suzanne Dixon, 'The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family', *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (ed. Beryl Rawson; Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 99-113.

(3) *Moving beyond a literal reading of the audiences of the household codes.* There has been a tendency in NT scholarship to treat the audiences of the household codes as simply reflecting the small number of clear-cut categories that were typically part of household management discourse. Yet, it is much more likely that the audiences represented a diverse group of people living in complex family circumstances. Dale Martin's study of inscriptional evidence, for example, is particularly helpful in reminding us of the overlapping categories of identity that could shape the lives of slaves.<sup>76</sup> Commentators often separate the treatment of slaves from treatment of marriage in the codes, but can sharp lines really be drawn given the use of marital terminology in slave inscriptions? Slaves sometimes formed marital alliances across households and could be slave owners themselves, bailiffs, and parents. In addition, the role of parents in relation to children is rarely considered with respect to the situation of slaves. Slaves and freeborn children were frequently cared for by the same slave caregivers and lived in the same spaces on a daily basis. Sometimes slave children were adopted as pseudo-siblings of freeborn children.<sup>77</sup> All of such overlapping categories of identity and diverse experiences need to be considered when one examines the impact of the household codes in church communities.

Beyond an internal focus on the shape of family relations, the interaction between the believing and non-believing worlds, and the transgression of limits and violation of norms also should be considered with respect to family life and their bearing on the household codes. Despite the evidence of mixed marriage and of the slaves of nonbelievers being part of church groups, it is surprising to find scholars who continue to view the codes as exclusively inter-believing directives; in the case of Colossians at least, the text does not plainly state that all the members belonging to the various pairs are Christians. Idealizations of life in the Lord should not be taken literally to mean that every spouse, child, or slave addressed will have a believing partner, parent, or master. Such considerations should help remind us of the complex familial circumstances of church members and need to be kept in mind in assessments of the role of the codes in relations between Christians and the wider world.

(4) *The new interdisciplinary interest in children and childhood.* With a few notable exceptions, the household codes have not been examined with a focus on children or the parent-child relationship to any great extent.<sup>78</sup> Yet, there

76 See Dale B. Martin, 'Slave Families and Slaves in Families', *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 207–30. See also MacDonald, 'Slavery, Sexuality and House Churches', 103–4.

77 For inscriptional evidence see Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003) 259–61.

78 Notable exceptions include: Peter Müller, *In der Mitte der Gemeinde: Kinder im Neuen Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluy: Neukirchener Verlag, 1992) 326–48; Peter Balla, *The Child-*

have been great advances especially in the study of children in the Roman world in recent years and a growing body of literature on children in early Christianity.<sup>79</sup> This new work might expand our understanding of the critical tension between the audience hearing the household codes and the directives in two significant and related ways. First, although there is plenty of counter-evidence in the opposite direction, there is inscriptional evidence to suggest that some slave children were raised with the expectation that they would one day share in the promise of the free children of the family.<sup>80</sup> Should such material evidence of boundary-crossing influence our interpretation of the promise of inheritance delivered to slaves in Col 3.24 or even of the warning to slave owners that they are themselves, in an important sense, slaves, subject to the same Lord—called in Eph 3.14, the Father from whom every family (πατριώ) in heaven and on earth is named? Secondly, reading texts through the ‘lens’ of children and childhood may bring to our attention heretofore neglected aspects of the *Haustafel* material such as the considerable interest in the education/socialization of children in a house-church setting that begins with Eph 6.4 (cf. 1 *Clem* 21.6, 8; *Did* 4.9; *Pol. Phil.* 4.2).

The theme of children and education as it surfaces in household code discourse is one which has the potential to challenge our perception of house-church assemblies. Of the various ‘models from the environment’ which have been compared to Pauline Christianity, the philosophical school has been identified as shedding light on the emphasis on instruction and exhortation in the Pauline churches.<sup>81</sup> But we have paid little attention to the house church as a locus for children’s education. The education of children at home especially in the early years, and particularly for girls and slaves, was the preferred choice of many and sometimes involved the hiring of tutors for a few children of the neighborhood.<sup>82</sup> The direct address to children in the household codes may originate from the school atmosphere of certain house-church meetings. Moreover, we

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*Parent Relationship in the New Testament and its Environment* (WUNT 155; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 165–78; See also now Margaret Y. MacDonald, ‘A Place of Belonging: Perspectives on Children from Colossians and Ephesians’, *The Child in the Bible* (ed. Marcia J. Bunge; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008) 278–304.

79 See R. Aasgaard, ‘Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity: Research History and Central Issues’, *Familia* (Salamanca, Spain) 33 (2006) 23–46. For very recent studies, see Bunge, ed., *The Child in the Bible*; Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens, ‘Let the little children come to me’: *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 2009).

80 See n. 78.

81 See Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 81–4.

82 The question of whether a child should be educated at home or sent out to school was debated in antiquity, especially in relation to the effect of the choice on the child’s morality. See for example, Quintilian *The Orator’s Education* 1.2. For further discussion see Osiek and MacDonald (with Tulloch), *A Woman’s Place*, 85–90.



cannot rule out the possibility that some children in the audience were recruited from neighborhood children who were otherwise abandoned or neglected. Certainly, Celsus accused the early Christians of encouraging the recruitment of unruly, rebellious, and inadequately supervised children—challenging the authority of legitimate fathers and school masters (Origen *Against Celsus* 3.55). This polemical critique finds support in various aspects of the Jesus tradition which might be used to sanction a rejection of the traditions of one's elders (e.g., Matt 11.25). We need to think carefully about the possible identities of the children addressed in the household codes, as potentially members of believing families, children of mixed marriage with one parent as a believer, neglected children who made their way into meetings without parents, or slave children. How would such children have heard the household codes depending on their circumstances? How many parents were actually pseudo-parents in the Lord? If the household codes represent an apologetic stance in relation to society as scholars have often suggested, then the time has come to examine this need for apologetic not only in relation to wives and adult slaves, but also in relation to children.

(5) *Postcolonial analysis*. Especially in dialogue with feminist interpretation and the study of early Christian families, there is still much to be learned from the use of postcolonial analysis. This is especially the case with respect to the role of the household codes in relation to the broader symbolic, rhetorical, and ethical dimensions of a given work. While postcolonial analysis is sometimes used to build an argument that Colossians is largely a 'resistant' document,<sup>83</sup> most commentators have drawn upon theories to highlight a complex relationship between conformity and resistance.<sup>84</sup> The notion of 'hybridity' discussed in Part 3 has much to add to our understanding of the household codes of Colossians and Ephesians as we seek to untangle the complex interaction between the developing early Christian ethos and the dominant social order. Language of triumphal procession (Col 2.14-15) is the language of the colonizer, but it is claimed by early Christian insiders and given new meaning. It is also left to stand in a certain amount of critical tension in relation to the language of subordination (Col 3.18-4.1), which at once is shared between the colonizer and the colonized and in its own way bears the marks of hybridity.

Postcolonial analysis may, in fact, offer a new way for us to approach the question of the apologetic function of the codes. The *Haustafeln* surface in early Christian literature at the time when early church groups are drawing attention from their neighbours, beginning to be subject to rumours and slander. As manifestations of the ethical stance of believers, they were almost certainly shaped by 'moments of panic' when slaves, women, and children are discovered as non-

83 See, for example, Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*.

84 See, for example, Horrell, *1 Peter*, 94; Maier, 'A Sly Civility'.

compliant with respect to figures of authority, despite the projections of obedience revealed by the codes. Household codes offer insight into what Bhabha calls 'borderline experience': 'The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences "contingently" and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience'.<sup>85</sup> As is revealed especially by Colossians and Ephesians which introduce the household code into Pauline literature for the first time, dislocation and displacement came to be celebrated within early church circles as present heavenly citizenship and heavenly enthronement, at the same time as the apologetic voice was emerging with respect to lifestyle and ethics. Such apparently contradictory tendencies have often been noted by scholars, but have yet to be fully understood; postcolonial analysis may offer a promising way forward in investigation of the relationship between certain ethical stances and what NT scholars have come to label 'realized eschatology'.

The identification of the *topos* of household management by scholars working from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s on the household codes called us to probe the literature and social history of Greco-Roman society. These scholars also introduced us to the political implications of the codes that carried enormous implications especially for feminist interpretation of the 1980s and 1990s. It is striking that now, over twenty years later, their work continues to provide the foundation for postcolonial analysis of the household codes and the basis for reading the ideological assertions of the codes in relation to our ever-expanding knowledge of early Christian families. Built upon a firm foundation of past scholarship, the use of new methodologies and theoretical approaches is helping us to realize that household codes were heard by family members facing complex challenges and are themselves ideologically complex (neither purely culturally compliant, nor purely culturally resistant) expressions of the challenge of being the *ekklesia* in the Roman imperial world.

85 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 207.