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# **The Thecla Narrative: Gender, Eschatology, and Divine Patronage in Second Century Social-Sexual Identity.**

Thesis submitted to the  
Theology Department for the  
Master of Arts Degree in Theology

Gina Lea Christ  
University of Saint Catherine  
Saint Paul, MN  
Spring 2013

Abbreviations used:

AAA.....*Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*

APTh.....*The Acts of Paul and Thecla*

ÉAC.....*Écrits Apocryphes Chrétiens*

NRSV.....*New Revised Standard Edition*

PE.....*Pastoral Epistles*

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## I. Introduction and Thesis Statement

Graduate students at St. Catherine University are often introduced to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla (APTh)* in our New Testament class. As we approached the end of the section of the course dedicated to exploring Paul's extant letters, we examined the Thecla story vis-à-vis the Pastoral Epistles as a glimpse into second-century appropriations of the Pauline legacy. Thus the Thecla narrative offers another second century perspective. As an example of extra-canonical writing in the early church we see how the cultural values of honor-shame provided part of the framework for early Christian views on gender and sexuality. In my graduate studies I was drawn to Thecla and her story because it seemed to depict social disruption that the early church may have caused in some Greco-Roman communities as the early Christians tried to find their way in the matters of women's roles and sexuality.

There is no evidence that Thecla of Iconium actually existed, therefore some historically-focused scholars have been dismissive of apocryphal works based on their presuppositions about the priority of canonical works over non-canonical and on the notion that the Thecla text contains fantastic stories that could not represent *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, how it really was, that is, what actually happened. A good example of this sort of rejection is Robert Grant's perspective that can be found on the Claremont School of Theology website, which concludes with: "...It should be added that since the norms for determining authenticity must lie in the canonical gospels, it is hard to see what contribution apocryphal gospels could make even if some of the materials in them should be judged genuine."<sup>1</sup> Grant's use of the word "genuine" represents a gross undervalue of extra-canonical texts for appreciating the spectrum of religious experiences that make up early Christian theology and spirituality beyond the narrow

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Grant, "Chapter 12 Apocryphal Gospels," *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* 1963, Claremont School of Theology, 7 June 2012 <<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1116&C=1232>>

confines of canonical texts. The story of Thecla provides an important glimpse into second century Christian theological ideas. For example, an examination of the *Sitz im Leben* of second-century Christians reveals that the delay in the *parousia* was felt more acutely than the very earliest post-resurrection Jesus movement who shared heightened eschatological expectations, as can be seen in Paul's earliest epistles and Mark's Gospel. That is to say, the second century, when the Apocryphal Acts were written, was a time in Christian history when the notion of the immediate return of Christ was slowly changing into the idea of a heavenly experience or a post-death union with God.

The change in the treatment of the *parousia* is not the only theological concept that is found the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. We also find other examples of Christian theologies that were ultimately rejected or that differed in important ways from the canonical texts, most notably the focus on chastity. Additionally, we are shown how house churches were employed to spread the message (*kyrygma*) about Jesus' ministry and mission, death and resurrection, and return at the *parousia*. The apocrypha reveal additional Christian appropriations of cultural myths and literary styles. In these important texts, we receive a glimpse into a different perspective on some of the earlier apostles and their works, and in several of the texts there are stories about the roles of women that offer specifics not available in the accepted canon.

## ***A. Method and Description***

At the genesis of my research I wanted to write about how Thecla shows us that women could take on any role necessary in communities when it was believed that the world is going to end soon, that women's roles were deliberately changed as eschatology changed and developed in Christianity. There are so many problems with this original idea that I will only discuss a few of them. One, the diversity of early Christian beliefs is very deep and broad. There was no single

early Christian idea of eschatology. Two, the social roles and guidelines around women's behavior in second century Greco-Roman society was certainly powerful, but there were and have always been exceptions based on economic and social hierarchy. The spectrum of women's roles pre-dates the introduction of Christianity. Last, it is not academically sound to try to prove intent, especially based on a specific result a priori. As Christianity grew there were efforts to make its message more centralized and unified (e.g. Luke's Acts of the Apostles), in the second century some ideas from early Christianity were abandoned, altered, and reframed, and the messages around women's roles and eschatology both changed.

And so I was left with the Thecla text, which is where I had started. Its very existence illuminates how some early converts encountered Christianity. In the narrative eschatology, chastity, and gender roles are linked in a way that is very compelling. Thecla undergoes a change, and it starts with the idea of continence, and the promise that a practice of radical chastity will bring one to a salvific God, and she is saved in the present moment (a realized eschatology) and yet she has faith that she will be saved in the future, referred to as *the resurrection, Day of Judgment and Day of the Son* (III,5, III,6, IV,13). Paul's beatitudes in the beginning of the story (III,5-6) are one of several allusions to what we now think of as Paul's "already/not yet" eschatology. His teaching, like the beatitudes in Matthew and Luke, also center on the paradox of not having something now, for having something in the Kingdom of God later. In the case of the Paul described in the narrative, the macarisms are centered on chastity now and salvation both now and later. The last teaching in III, 6 reads:

Heureux les corps des vierges, parce qu'ils seront agréables à Dieu; ils ne perdront pas le salaire de leur pureté, parce que la parole du Père deviendra pour eux une oeuvre salubre au jour de son Fils, et ils trouveront le repos pour toute éternité.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Willy Rordorf and Pierre Cherix. *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens (ÉAC)*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1997) 1131. ÉAC is the critical French translation from Greek.

Blessed are the bodies of virgins, because they will be pleasing to God; they will not lose the reward of their purity, because the word of the Father will become for them beneficial work on the day of his Son, and they will find rest for all eternity.<sup>3</sup>

This is significant because it links continence directly with the promise of salvation. As the story of Thecla unfolds in Chapter III and IV of the *Acts of Paul* it is revealed how chastity and protecting one's "purity" saves Thecla now, and assures her future salvation "in the day of his Son." The lesson around chastity and salvation is reinforced by the storytelling method and the repeated themes within the story, which I will explore first. Less obvious for the modern reader, Thecla's gender also reinforces the connection between chastity and eschatology because of the cultural understanding of the female role in upholding familial honor through sexual modesty and obedience. This social context and gender identity are examined second.

There are two main literary frameworks throughout the text. First, Paul's teachings in the beginning of the story are used like a frame, as events unfold Thecla herself fulfills the conditions of Paul's macarisms presented as lessons in the beginning of the story (*APTh* III,5-6); Thecla sees Jesus while on the Pyre (III,21), receives comfort (IV,3-4), is saved (III,22, IV,9-12), and lastly her life ends with her laying "down with a good sleep" (IV,17). Because Thecla's story unfolds just as Paul promised, the role of Paul as disciple and prophet is reinforced. Therefore, it is clear that Paul has intimate knowledge into the ways of God. Simultaneously, the message is sent to the listener that Thecla is in fact doing exactly as she should, because she is receiving the promised gifts. The sanctity of Paul is strengthened by the redemption of Thecla. The other frame for the story is Thecla's spiritual growth. She not only experiences a sudden conversion that takes hold of her at the window listening to Paul for the first time (III,7), but she then grows in her knowledge and relationship with God and the Son.

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<sup>3</sup> Translation by Vincent Skemp, Ph.D from the critical French translation in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, "Actes de Paul," edited by Willy Rordorf, with Pierre Cherix and Rudolphe Kasser (Paris: Gallimard, 1997) 1129-1142. All the quotes from *APTh* are taken directly out of the translation attached. Please see Appendix A for the entire document.



There is an evolution; she is greatly changed, with a new home, identity, voice, and a fully altered role in the community.

Thecla's spiritual development is predicated upon her complete continence, and in the narrative it is taken quite seriously. Abstaining from all sexual activity is directly linked to being saved, both with the promise of purity, and with the idea that the transformation of the cosmos at the return of Christ. In the thesis below I will argue that sexual purity functions as an initial means of shedding of prescribed social roles, which would account for some of the conflict in the text between some Christians and non-Christians (i.e., outsiders) in that dyadic culture. In the case of Thecla, the faith that is required to take the step out of social roles and into the body of Christ is publicly received (that is, acknowledged) by God; the ancient audience was thereby led to accept her unconventional behavior. Chastity alone is not what protects her; it is God's patronage.

## ***B. Thesis Statement***

Making use of these two overarching literary frameworks, this thesis undertakes a careful reading of the text. My thesis studies the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* as an independent work and treats it as an interesting second-century Christian text that sheds light on Christian views on eschatology vis-à-vis chastity and women's roles in other Christian texts, especially Paul's extant letters and the second-century appropriations of Paul in the Pastoral Epistles. In anticipation of my conclusion, I shall argue that Thecla evolves into a spiritual self that transcends gender, which may have been understood in terms of the primal myth of the androgyny. A key theological feature of this transcendence concerns God's role as Thecla's patron. When she announces herself "a slave of the living God" (IV,12) at the end of the story, she takes on the role of God's client. The way patronage works in the Thecla story will be

further elaborated on below; for now I mention that as a woman unattached to any men in the story, a key moment in the story occurs when Paul declines claiming Thecla as his client (IV,1). Her chastity is part of the ambiguity around her gender, and also in the social context of the story her chastity is an essential part of her honor. She is changed at the end of the story to a female who is not embedded in a household with a *paterfamilias*, nor shamed, which is not unheard of in other stories of the Apocrypha,<sup>4</sup> but is very unusual for second-century women.<sup>5</sup> I will argue this was made palatable to the second-century audience by introducing the idea that Thecla was mystically embedded with Jesus Christ, with God as the “head of household.” The social consciousness of the second century required Thecla to belong to someone, and her acceptance from God made her no longer entirely female, and no longer required her to be socially embedded with a male.

To begin I will briefly summarize the story and locate it within the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. Then there will be an examination of the social setting within second century culture as a means of speculating on how early listeners may have understood the story in light of cultural values of honor and shame and the importance of patronage in the Greco-Roman world. Then we will turn to Paul’s extant letters to examine his thoughts on gender roles and eschatology. Even in *APTh* and the Pastoral Epistles we can begin to see the eschatological adjustments that were being made to the urgency that Paul felt about the coming *parousia*

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<sup>4</sup> Virginia Burriss in her chapter “Social-Historical Interpretation” (*Chastity as Autonomy* [Lewistown: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987] 81-109) summarizes the various female followers who “leaves her house” to go and visit an apostle. In the *Acts of Thomas* Mydonia leaves both during the day accompanied by a slave, and at night, alone. Artemilla also leaves at night to be baptized by Paul. Maximilla and her servant leave the house to visit Andrew, and even invites him into her bedroom. Burriss summarizes (90): “In all of these stories, it is clear that the woman’s proper place in the inner world of her husband’s house, while the husband moves in the outer, public world. By remaining in the house, the woman accepts her place in society, marriage, and sexual relationships. When she leaves the house, she is closing boundaries, intruding into the male world and provoking disapproval, hostility, and suspicion of infidelity. Sometimes she leaves secretly or at night, which underlines the suspiciousness of her behavior. By defying the physical boundaries of her proper sphere, she is also defying the boundaries of the social-sexual role assigned to her within the institution of patriarchal marriage: she leaves the house, and leaves the husband’s rule.”

<sup>5</sup> Mary Rose D’Angelo notes (“(Re)presentations of Women in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke-Acts,” *Women and Christian Origin* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999] 236-253, here 189) “...the prospect of a wife leaving a husband was seen as an assault on good order and particularly dangerous to a community under suspicion of un-Roman activities.”

evident in his genuine letters. Last we will look at the myth of the primal androgyny. I will argue that the audience understood Thecla as having transcended her gender, becoming neither male nor female in terms of her role in society. This study of eschatology and gender roles sheds light on the Thecla story even as it also leaves us with many questions.

## **II. The Acts of Paul and Thecla**

### ***A. History of the Story***

*The Acts of Paul and Thecla* is a second-century extra-canonical Christian writing which belongs to a greater group of works called the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles (AAA). There are several leading characters of these apostolic stories; the Acts of Peter, John, Philip, Andrew (with and without Matthew), Thomas and Paul. Only the Acts of Thomas is complete.<sup>6</sup> Each of the stories within the Apocryphal Acts gives us a snapshot of beliefs within a particular community, which offers us historical and theological value. Full of raising the dead, performing miracles, healings, journeys and conversions the apocryphal Acts can be contrasted with the canonical *Acts of the Apostles* because they expand on the saga of missionizing for individual apostles usually starting with a post-resurrection mission that concludes with martyrdom. In the apocryphal Acts there is a greater focus on chastity, including within marriage, indeed in some cases evidence of Gnosticism, and women play a larger role in the spreading of early Christianity. Scholars look to these works for evidence of women's roles, diversity of ideas in early Christianity, linguistic comparisons, and as a means of shedding light on views that were discouraged and eventually eliminated by the growing institutional church. They are also useful because they give us a picture of early house churches, second century Christian teachings, and social struggles within the movement.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Pervo, *The Making of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010) 156-7.

The *Acts of Paul* is typical of the Apocryphal Acts: women play a central role, there are amazing stories, and it's focused on chastity as a central virtue. The *Acts of Paul* has three parts; *Third Corinthians*, and *Martyrdom of Paul* surround Chapters III and IV of the *Acts of Paul*, referred to as *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. These middle two chapters are unique because they are complete and there are many early copies available to scholars.<sup>7</sup> Scholars agree that *Acts of Paul and Thecla* was written between 160-200 C.E, based on a remark made by Tertullian in *Baptism* 17. 4-5 dated circa 198 C.E.<sup>8</sup>

But if certain Acts of Paul, which are falsely so named, claim the example of Thecla for allowing women to teach and to baptize, let men know that in Asia the presbyter who compiled that document, thinking to add of his own to Paul's reputation, was found out, and though he professed he had done it for love of Paul, was deposed from his position. How could we believe that Paul should give a female power to teach and to baptize, when he did not allow a woman even to learn by her own right? *Let them keep silence* he says, *and ask their husbands at home* [1 Cor 14:35].<sup>9</sup>

Significantly we are told the writer was in Asia, commonly concluded to mean Asia Minor, which scholars also accept as a likely location for its inception. Hans-Josef Klauck thinks that it may have been written near where the *Acts of John* was composed, and perhaps it was modeled after that work.<sup>10</sup> The location is important to this thesis because it places *APTh* where the *Pastoral Epistles* (PE) is also thought to originate. As I will note further below, scholars have found several links between Thecla narrative and the *Pastoral Epistles*, including that the names, Demas and Hermogenes, who appear in Second Timothy (Demas in 4:10; Hermogenes in 2:17). While such links between the Thecla text and the *Pastoral Epistles* may be

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<sup>7</sup> Pervo, *The Making*, 159, claims over 40 manuscripts are available.

<sup>8</sup> This historical peg is almost universally used in scholarship surrounding the *APTh*. Some scholars who site this quote are: Gail Streete, *Redeemed Bodies* (Louisville: Westminster Knox Press, 2009) 90; Jeremy Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla: A Critical Introduction and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Seibeck, 2009) 14, 21-22; Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 32. Specifically Street (*Redeemed Bodies*, 90) explains that it is so commonly used because historians site Tertullian as a means of dating the material, and feminists use it as proof of a proto-feminist movement in the early church.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from Ernest Evans, ed. and trans. *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964) 36-37.

<sup>10</sup> Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* trans. Brian McNeil (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008) 50.

circumstantial, there is widespread agreement that the Pastor's views on women and gender are diametrically opposite of those espoused in the Thecla narrative.<sup>11</sup>

Tertullian directly refers to Thecla when he states that women ought not to use the story as authorization to baptize or to teach men. He goes on to explain that the person who wrote the material has been found, and forged the whole story out of love of Paul. This reference is important because it tells us that by the turn of the third century Thecla's story was well known enough to merit such a reference, which helps confirm a rough date for the *APTh*.<sup>12</sup> The most significant piece of information we get from Tertullian is that he is denouncing people who use the story of Thecla to support women teaching and baptizing. We are not told who is doing that, but obviously someone is otherwise the statement would not have been necessary.

Tertullian's words did not have the desired effect; Thecla grew in popularity, separate from the complete *Acts of Paul*. The story was expanded in the fifth century to *The Life and Miracles of Thecla*, which included miracles of healing and teaching in Seleucia and a longer and more fanciful ending. We know that provinces in Asia Minor were "devoted to the veneration of the virgin martyr."<sup>13</sup> The name "Thecla" is popular well into the Middle Ages. By the fifth century Thecla's tomb in Seleucia had become a destination for pilgrimage, the alleged site of miracles and the center of a monastic order of virgins led by a female deacon. Thecla is still considered a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and was recognized as a saint in the Catholic Church

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<sup>11</sup> The most recent thorough analysis of the *APTh* vis-à-vis the Pastoral Epistles is by Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling, *Thekla -- Paulusschülerin wider Willen? Strategien der Leserlenkung in den Thekaakten* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2008) 25-70 and 304-308.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis MacDonald (*The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* [Philadelphia: Westminster, Press 1983] 21) writes: "Tertullian's admission that the story circulated orally as a "holy story" (or *hieros logos*) for women's ministries, the saturation of folkloric themes, the memory of Queen Tryphaena, and the popularity of Thecla despite the limited acceptance of the Act of Paul – all suggest that the Asian presbyter borrowed the story from an old but still vital oral tradition. I know of no one who believes in Tertullian's charge that the author created the stories from scratch." The authorship is debated.

<sup>13</sup> Dennis MacDonald, "Thekla, Acts of" *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 2005) 443-444

until Vatican II.<sup>14</sup> Whatever controversy was surrounding Thecla and women's roles in the early church it did not go away with Tertullian's accusation of the questionable heritage of the *Acts of Paul*.

## ***B. A Summary of the Acts of Paul and Thecla***

### **i. The Story**

In the story of Thecla (see Appendix A for a complete translation), we meet Paul first. He enters the city of Iconium, with two other men who are not to be trusted, Demas and Hermogenes. Paul is expected, and his host is waiting for him at the city gate to welcome him and bring him to his house. Paul sets to preaching, for three days and nights, and the text quotes him as instructing in a style similar to the beatitudes. Paul's focus is on self control and resurrection: "Heureux les cœurs purs, parce qu'ils verront Dieu. Heureux ceux qui gardent chaste leur chair, parce qu'ils seront des temples de Dieu. Heureux les continents, parce que Dieu parlera avec eux."<sup>15</sup> "Blessed are the pure of heart, because they will see God. Blessed are those who chastely guard their flesh, because they will be temples of God. Blessed are the chaste, because God will speak with them" (III,5).

Thecla lives next door and is sitting at her window absorbing everything that Paul says. She does not go to Paul, rather she sits and listens. Thecla is betrothed at the time and so is committed to marriage when we meet her. Thecla's mother, Theocleia, is very concerned about this new development, and calls for Thamyris, the betrothed. Thamyris is troubled, as he seems to have lost all influence over Thecla, and begins to investigate who Paul is and what he is

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<sup>14</sup> Gail Streete, "Buying the Stairway to Heaven – Perpetua and Thecla as Early Christian Heroines," *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament Apocrypha*, Ed: Amy-Jill Levine (London: T&T Clark International, 2006) 186-205, here 190 and 202-3.

<sup>15</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1130-1.

teaching in Iconium. He comes upon Demas and Hermogenes, invites them to dinner, and presses them for information. Seeing an opportunity, the text reads (III, 14):

Or Démas et Hermogène dirent comme d'une seule bouche: "Thamyris, conduis-le au gouverneur Cestillius et accuse-le de séduire les foules par l'enseignement vain des chrétiens; ainsi, il le fera périr et toi, tu auras Thècle pour femme. Et nous t'enseignerons que cette résurrection, dont cet homme dit qu'elle est future, est déjà survenue par les enfants que nous avons, et que nous ressuscitons en reconnaissant le vrai Dieu."<sup>16</sup>

But Demas and Hermogenes spoke in unison: "Thamyris, escort him to governor Castellius and accuse him of seducing the crowds by teaching Christian frivolity. In this way he will be put to death and as for you, you will have Thecla for your wife. And we are teaching that this resurrection, which this man says is future, has already happened through the children that we have, and that we rise by acknowledging the true God."

Thamyris does not take all of their advice: rather he, with other citizens, brings Paul before the Proconsul seemingly on the charge of influencing the women of the town with false teachings and magic (III, 15). On the first day Paul is heard and sent to prison where Thecla visits him. When citizens of Iconium find Paul and Thecla together it results in Paul being flogged and thrown out of town and Thecla being sentenced to death by burning, a fate her mother strongly supports (III,20). The flames do not seem to hurt her, then an earthquake and storm cloud come, save Thecla, and she is ambiguously released (III,22). Soon she is reunited with Paul, and asks to be baptized and allowed to follow him. Paul responds by delaying the baptism, but allows her to accompany him to Antioch (III,25-6).

At the (Pisidian) Antioch city gate Paul and Thecla meet Alexander who is immediately smitten with Thecla. Thinking she is under Paul's patronage, Alexander speaks with Paul about Thecla (IV,1). Paul, however, denies responsibility for her, he does not lay claim to her as having protection under his patronage: "Je ne connais pas cette femme de la manière que tu dis; elle ne m'appartient pas."<sup>17</sup> "I do not know this woman in the way that you say; she does not

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<sup>16</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1133.

<sup>17</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1137.

belong to me” (IV,1). Alexander tries to take her for himself, but she claims divine patronage and elite status: “Ne fais pas violence à l'étrangère! Ne fais pas violence à la servant de Dieu! Je suis parmi les premières d'Iconium...”<sup>18</sup> “Do not do violence to the stranger! Do not do violence to the slave of God! I am among the leading women of the Iconians...” (IV,1). The text also states that she fought back physically: “Elle déchira sa chlamyde, arracha la couronne de sa tête et l'exposa au mépris public.” “Then taking hold of Alexander, she tore his mantle,<sup>19</sup> removed the wreath from his head and exposed him to public scorn” (IV,1). This public humiliation of Alexander at the hands of a woman initiates a second set of trials for Thecla. Paul disappears completely from the story, not to be seen again until the final paragraphs. Thecla is sentenced to the arena, and she asks only that her virginity be preserved until she must “fight against the beasts” (IV,2). Her wish is granted and she is allowed to stay in the home of Queen Tryphaena, who has recently lost a daughter of her own. Falconilla, the deceased daughter, had visited her mother in a dream, telling her to ask Thecla to pray for her so that she “transférée dans le séjour des justes”<sup>20</sup> “be transferred to the abode of the righteous” (IV, 3). Thecla spends one night with Tryphaena, gains her love and trust, and is sent off to the arena the next day.

The lengthy arena scene in chapter IV, 3-13 is a bit chaotic and laden with symbolism. The first lion sent into the arena to kill Thecla is female, and defends her instead, eventually killing a bear and a lion but dying while protecting Thecla (IV, 8). More beasts are sent in, and Thecla throws herself into a pool of killer seals to baptize herself (IV, 9). The seals are killed with lightning. Fire surrounds Thecla and protects her both from being seen naked, and the wild

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Pervo (*Making*, 163) writes about Alexander's “mantle” describing it more as a crown. “Alexander was a priest of the imperial cult, and his crown bore the image of Caesar.” Pervo uses a translation from the Armenian version to describe this scene, believing that “the Greek text has been bowdlerized.” The quote he cites from this translation says Thecla “attacked Alexander and rent his raiment, and tore off the golden crown of the figure of Caesar, which he had on his head, and dashed it to the ground, and left him naked, destitute and full of shame.” Pervo's work is the only place I found a reference to this more embellished translation.

<sup>20</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1138.



beasts. Thus God protects Thecla and her honor by not allowing her to be seen publicly naked. The women in the audience disorient animals with fragrant oils (IV, 10). Finally Thecla is tied, naked, to fierce bulls which “they applied to their genitals irons heated by fire” (IV, 10), but the ropes are miraculously burned. Tryphaena faints and is thought dead, and the citizens are concerned because they fear that Caesar will be upset with them because Tryphaena is his “kinsperson.” The games are stopped, and Thecla is freed by order of the governor who asks who Thecla is and who protects her. Thecla responds by claiming God as her protector, that is, her patron. “I am the slave of the living God” (IV,12). Thecla makes a statement of faith (IV,13) that results in the governor issuing a decree in which he officially accepts Thecla’s claim to divine patronage: “Je vous rends libre, Thècle, la servante de Dieu, Thècle, l’adoratrice de Dieu.”<sup>21</sup> “I release you, Thecla, slave of God, Thecla, adorer of God.” Acting as the chorus,<sup>22</sup> the women then state: “There is only one God, the one who saved Thecla!” (IV,13). The result is that Thecla’s claim to have God as her patron brackets the Antioch chapter: twice Thecla claims to be God slave, IV,1 and IV,12, and finally the claim is affirmed by the leading human authority and the chorus of women (IV,13).

Thecla stays in Antioch with Tryphaena for eight days (IV,14), teaching and growing a community, at the end of which she sets off, dressed like a man (IV,15, “girded her loins, and, arranging her tunic to make a coat in the style of the men”), to find Paul. She finds Paul in Myra, tells her story and informs him that she has been baptized: “J’ai reçu le baptême, Paul. En effet, celui qui a oeuvré avec toi pour la bonne nouvelle a aussi oeuvré avec moi pour que je sois baptisée.”<sup>23</sup> “I have received baptism, Paul. In fact, he who worked with you for the good news

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<sup>21</sup> Rordorf, ÉAC, 1141.

<sup>22</sup> Vincent Skemp, Thecla translation note at note 43 at IV, 3 see Appendix A for details.

<sup>23</sup> Rordorf, ÉAC, 1141.

has also worked with me so that I am baptized” (IV, 15). Paul is duly impressed, sends her out saying: “Go and teach the word of God” (IV, 16).

## ii. The Theme of Opposites

There are several fascinating recurring themes that are worthy of note. The trickster<sup>24</sup> role of women, both with Thecla’s silence, perhaps mocking those that say women should be silent, and Tryphaena’s fake death that brings an end to the games, are interesting to note (IV, 11). The Queen’s fainting in the Antioch story is not only an example of trickery, but also strength and weakness being used simultaneously, resulting in the protection of Thecla’s life. In neither example does the author tell us that the women are being sly or tricky. It is left up to the listener to decide if that is what happened. There are moments of humor throughout the story, where the audience is in on the joke and the characters are not, particularly the men, which lead one to believe that the trickery is indeed intended.

This guides us directly to the theme of opposites. The trickster women are doing what is by the letter of the law correct, but simultaneously subverting the intent of the communal norms. They are using their position of weakness to exert strength. This is an example of what Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling refers to as an ongoing theme of “angetäuschte Einstimmigkeit,” roughly translated means “unanimous interchanged” or “consistent switching out” throughout the entire story. She asserts that the employment of opposites is strategic storytelling, and that there is a superficial story, and upon deeper examination, the opposite lesson lies underneath,

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<sup>24</sup> Magda Misset-Van de Weg warns against the use of the word “trickster” in her article “Answers to the Plight of Thecla” *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament Apocrypha* (London: T&T Clark International, 2006) “Because in the Acts of Thecla the ‘deception’ is used as a means of power by women, who do not have access to legitimate means of power, and because the well-being of those who lack authority is promoted, the ‘deception’ of Tryphaena and the handmaidens might be designated as a form of trickery. However, in order to avoid annexation of a complex paradigm as well as a too easy identification of women with morally ambivalent trickery, another suggestion might be to consider the actions of the women as prompted by their wit, understood as the intelligence and understanding to make the right decision or take the right action in a particular situation” 156. I do not identify the word “trickster” as necessarily morally ambiguous, but rather as subversive, and have therefore chosen to use it.

and is the authentic position of the storyteller.<sup>25</sup> I will extend the relationship and tension between opposites to be literary and theological technique throughout the story: masculinity and femininity, honor and shame, life and death, now and the hereafter, are consistently switching around. This consistent switching out applies to the theology in the story as well, where Paul's already/not yet eschatology gets extended to the role of the gender in this world and judgment in the next.

The exchange and on-going struggle between Alexander and Thecla in the Antioch chapters illustrates the concept of consistent interchange quite well. Thecla has no power, no patron, and no protector when she and Paul enter Antioch. Paul is clear, when asked about Thecla by Alexander, that he is not her Patron, nor is she part of his household:

“Je ne connais pas cette femme de la manière que tu dis; elle ne m'appartient pas.” Et l'homme, qui avait un grand pouvoir, enlaça Thècle dans la rue. Or elle ne le supporta pas, mais elle chercha Paul.<sup>26</sup>

“I do not know this woman in the way that you say; she does not belong to me.” And the man, who had great power, embraced Thecla in the street. Now, she did not tolerate it, but she sought out Paul. (IV,1)

This grips the listener because the text indicates that Alexander has earthly power, and has no reason to treat Thecla with respect. As the chapter continues the power, along with honor, will move from Alexander to Thecla. Thecla will exchange her humble position as an unembedded female for recognition from the governor for her elite position as a slave of the Living God. In the following section the social culture of honor/shame and the patron-client dynamic will be greatly expanded to comprehensively examine how this transfer was illustrated to the early audience.

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<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling (*Thekla – Paulusschülerin Wider Willen? Strategien der Leserlenkung in den Theklaakten*. [Münster : Achendorff Münster 2008] 64) writes: “Die Strategie der ActThecl lässt sich mit dem Schlagwort *angetäuschte Einstimmigkeit* umschreiben. Im Text manifestiert sich eine Ablehnungsstrategie, die sich durch einen Kunstgriff Aufmerksamkeit für ihr Konzept verschafft: Oberflächlich wird Verständnis für diejenige Position aufgebracht, die der eigenen Position im Grundtenor widerspricht.” If it is helpful to the reader my translation for this is: “The strategy of the *APTh* can be outlined with the motto *unanimous interchange*. In the text this negation strategy manifests itself with a trick as to where our attention goes: Superficial understanding is applied to a position, and the storytellers own position, in general, is contrary to it.”

<sup>26</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1137.

For now let us say that the use of power is an example of this consistent switching out between Alexander and Thecla. In IV, 1 Alexander is described as “having much power,” when the real power lies with Thecla’s spiritual connection with God, who is her patron and protector.

It is important to keep our eyes on the flow between the opposites, the movement from one to the other, because that is where the action is happening. While we focus on eschatology and gender we will see that there is a movement within those themes, and between each of the opposites. Thecla offers to cut her hair (III, 25), and in the end dresses as a man (IV, 15), becoming in her appearance more male; Falconilla is dead throughout the story, but she still speaks to her mother (IV, 3), and is moved from one place to another after death through Thecla’s prayer (IV, 4), twice breaking the boundary between life and death. The story begins with strict gender roles and then has its characters, especially Thecla, move into a middle ground. And likewise, we get some clear eschatological messages about both a realized eschatology, and a future eschatology. Once again it will be the heroine who moves into the space between the two. Thecla, by the end of the story, lives in the fluid center of the exchange of opposites: neither male nor female, and saved now and in the coming Day of Judgment.

### ***C. Cultural Setting of the Acts of Paul and Thecla***

If one is to understand the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in its original context, it is necessary to take into consideration women’s roles, the cultural value of honor and shame, and patron-client relationships. The first listeners were living in what Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh describe as a “high-context society.” They go on to explain “writers in such societies usually produce sketchy and impressionistic writings, leaving much to the reader’s and hearer’s

[sic] imagination.”<sup>27</sup> In high context societies there were many shared experiences and the social context of a story would not have been spelled out for the reader or listener. This is significant because the concepts of honor-shame and patron-client-broker relationships would not have needed to be explained, the audience would be able to recognize the social components as self evident parts of the text.<sup>28</sup> So first it is important for us to understand that the social setting of Thecla narrative for the original listeners would not have required the explanation that we need. Any information of honor-shame systems and patron-client-broker relationships would have been presupposed and part of the shared experience of the ancient audience.

There are several nuances in play when discussing the social setting of the text. The original audience would certainly have expected that the values of honor and shame, and also the patronage system, would influence the action of the narrative. The patronage system is significant because it not only explains some of the actions in the storyline, but it also explains how the early audience would have understood the narrative’s theology. Notably, gender would have worked quite distinctly in each of these social systems. “Some would claim that in traditional Mediterranean cultures the only real honor for woman is that of her family and its dominant males, while for her there is only appropriate sensitivity to shame, expressed in shyness and sexual exclusivity.”<sup>29</sup> As we look at the characteristics of the honor system it is important to remember that for the original audience Thecla’s public participation is very radical, and so God’s approval and patronage is necessary and must be hard fought.

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<sup>27</sup> Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels Second Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) 11; Cf. David A deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 18-19.

<sup>28</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh (*Synoptic*, 11) continue the discussion by explaining that by contrast American culture is “low-context,” meaning we “produce highly specific and detailed documents that leave little for the reader to fill in or supply.” That is to say, our experience in day to day life is specialized, and when telling a story more explaining is necessary because we have comparatively limited shared knowledge.

<sup>29</sup> Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonanld, *A Women’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2006) 7-8.

## i. Honor-Shame Societies

The Mediterranean society in the second century was a culture dominated by the concern for honor. The following points briefly summarize the characteristics of honor-shame societies:

- Honor is one's public reputation. "It is one's status or standing in the community together with the public recognition of it." The public aspect of honor is the domain of men. Women are responsible for "appropriate shame."
- Honor is a limited commodity, and honor won by one person is always lost by another. It is linked to control and goes up and down based on how well one is able to control their goods, family, and image.
- Honor can be either ascribed (one is born into, such as being born into an honorable family) or acquired (gained as the result of skill).
- Family honor must be defended at all cost.
- Even small slights or injuries must be addressed otherwise honor could be permanently lost.
- "To have shame" is to have proper concern about one's honor.
- It is helpful to think of "positive shame" as modesty.
- Women's honor is wrapped up in her sexuality. Like one's virginity, typically for women once honor is lost it can not be regained.<sup>30</sup>
- "Achieved honor...derives from virtue, especially the famous four: courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom."<sup>31</sup>

In thinking about the text we can see places where the Greco-Roman cultural values surrounding honor-shame influence what was happening. When Thecla's mother, Theocleia, yells: "Brûle cette criminelle, brûle cette ennemie du mariage au milieu de théâtre, afin que toutes les femmes instruites par cet homme soient épouvantées!"<sup>32</sup> "Burn this criminal, burn this enemy of marriage in the middle of the theater so that all the women instructed by this man are terror-stricken!"(III,20)—this was a final attempt to restore the family honor. If her mother had not

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<sup>30</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh ("Honor-Shame Societies" *Synoptic*, 369) briefly summarize honor-shame in the reading scenario. Cf. deSilva, *Honor*, 23-42.

<sup>31</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey *Render to God: New Testament Understandings of the Divine* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2004) 262.

<sup>32</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1135.

abandoned Thecla at this point her family's honor and social position would have been completely lost. Also when Theocleia is first describing Thecla's sitting at the window to Thamyris, she says, "Je suis surprise de voir la pudeur si grande de la vierge troublée d'une manière aussi pénible."<sup>33</sup> "I was surprised to see the virgin's such great shame troubled in a manner so painful" (III,8). Here her mother refers to Thecla's proper shame as a woman betrothed to Thamyris. It is important to note here that Theocleia is helping us understand the tenuous nature of female involvement in the honor-shame system. Thecla, here at the beginning of the story, can only have proper shame. Were Thecla at this point to snap out of her stupor and marry Thamyris as planned, she would have been embedded in his family for her entire life. Her only involvement in the honor shame system would be as attached to Thamyris, remaining in the private household, as one exhibiting proper shame. We will see that Thecla's journey is something else entirely. But it is important to note that, as a woman, her movement in the public sphere is very radical. It is a statement to the power of God that she transcends this honor/shame boundary when she enters the public sphere despite not being embedded in a family with a male head of household.

The second significant example of honor, or because she is female "proper shame," is Thecla's ability to maintain her virginity throughout the entire story. This would have been universally viewed as the maintenance of positive shame. Paul's resistance to link his honor with Thecla moves the story forward from Iconium to Antioch, as is the case when Paul will not baptize Thecla (III,25) or claim responsibility for her (IV,1).

The entire second chapter is driven by Alexander's need to regain his honor after Thecla rejects and shames him at the city gates in Antioch (IV,1). "But he, on the one hand loving her, and also *ashamed at what had happened to him*, brought her before the governor; and when

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<sup>33</sup> Rordorf, ÉAC, 1131.

she had confessed to have done these things, he condemned her to the beasts, which had been brought together by Alexander” (IV,2 emphasis mine). The audience would have understood that the Christian Thecla had shamed the cult of the empire, represented by the wreath that Alexander wears which she tore in the opening of the Antioch sequence (IV,1).<sup>34</sup> As the second act unfolds Alexander tries relentlessly to reclaim his own honor, and thereby also to shame Thecla (representing Jesus followers), he fails repeatedly, however, because she is so powerfully protected by God, her patron. The tension of this shift in hierarchy would have been obvious to a second century audience. Equally clear would have been the importance of what was playing out: implied in the public challenge and riposte is that Thecla’s Christian group was gaining honor while Alexander’s cult was losing honor.

The Thecla narrative is not so much undermining the social structure as it uses the structure of honor/shame to illustrate the power of God and Thecla’s spiritual status. Thecla, at the end of the story, is embedded with God, and therefore under the protection and honor of God and Jesus Christ. Additionally, perhaps, her honor is accepted because of her extraordinary virtue: chastity, self control, and courage, not normally attainable for a female from the public sphere. The following are examples of her acquired honor, or a positive change in her status in the narrative: during her first trial and martyrdom in Iconium “the governor wept and he admired the strength that was in her” (III,22), and later in Antioch her public teaching of the governor (IV,12-13), the crowd of women praising God and Thecla (IV,13), and becoming Tryphaena’s kin and heir in IV,14. Later we will examine gender boundaries that Thecla crosses as she moves into the public area, which are legitimated by her role as God’s client made clear during her baptism and put into action with her teaching and travels.

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<sup>34</sup> Barrier, *A Critical Introduction*, 141.



## i. Patronage System

Thecla's miraculous protection by God throughout the story may have been understood by the early listeners as a patron-client relationship.<sup>35</sup> What is the patronage system?

"Patron-client relationships describe the vertical dimension of exchange between higher and lower-status persons."<sup>36</sup> These are voluntary relationships that take on a "kinship glaze." Some prominent features of the patronage system are: the involvement of people of different status groups, an element of favoritism, a focus on honor and respect, debt is created, and it is held together by social expectations and goodwill.<sup>37</sup> The patron-client relationship was a means of people of lower status to get access to the resources of more elite members of the community, so the relationship was focused on wealth and social class. Significantly to this story, a person's relationship to one does not necessarily decide a relationship to another, patron, client and broker are fluid roles and gender is not a determining factor.<sup>38</sup> This is important throughout the text because Thecla will have multiple functions at the end of the story. For example, in IV,16 the text states that Paul and Thecla prayed for Tryphaena and then "for her part, Tryphaena sent a great deal of clothing and gold to Thecla, so that she left much to Paul for service to the poor," effectively making Thecla the broker of a relationship where Tryphaena is the patron of Paul at the end of the story.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Neyrey (*Render*, 254) argues that gods in Greco-Roman society were consistently seen as patrons. Words such as "King," "Benefactor," "Father," "Creator," "Savior," and "Sovereign" would all be words that "early church authors would understand by describing God as patron and/or benefactor." Cf. deSilva, *Honor*, 19; Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did. A Sourcebook in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 13-17; Richard Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>36</sup> Neyrey, *Render*, 249-51; deSilva, *Honor*, 95-119.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Misset-Van de Weg, "Answers," 156-162.

<sup>39</sup> There is an argument to be made here that this representation of Paul will have him accepting goods from a female patron, but not protecting Thecla at the gates of Antioch, that is, publicly defend a woman. The Paul in this narrative, to my mind, does not come off well overall, perhaps representing the greater shift in the early church away from women in leadership.

Once Thecla is outside of her kinship circle of Iconium, a patron-client relationship is her only means of being safely embedded anywhere in society. Paul's refusal at the gates of Antioch to acknowledge her—"I do not know this woman in the way that you say; she does not belong to me" (IV,1)—denies that she is either kin or client. The refusal is somewhat baffling, because it leaves Thecla completely unprotected and vulnerable, putting the last bit of her honor in jeopardy: her virginity.

Thecla asks the Governor during her trial in Antioch to broker a patron-client relationship: "Thècle demanda au gouverneur de pouvoir rester pure jusqu'au moment où elle aurait à lutter contre les bêtes. Et elle fut confiée à la garde d'une femme riche, nommée Tryphaine, de famille royale, dont la fille était décédée, et cette femme fut la consolation de Thècle."<sup>40</sup> "Thecla asked the governor that she be able to remain pure until the moment when she would have to fight against the beasts. And she was confined to the care of a wealthy woman named Tryphaena, of royal family, whose daughter had died, and this woman was the consolation of Thecla" (IV,2).<sup>41</sup> She is hoping to remain safe from certain rape in prison. The person who helps her may gain some honor for protecting a virgin, although more likely, the audience would have interpreted this type of patronage as "generalized reciprocity" which would fall under the category of hospitality where the patron would give without expectation of return.<sup>42</sup> The patron client relationship could be quite balanced, and did not necessarily exclusively favor the patron in terms of goods.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Rordorf ÉAC 1138.

<sup>41</sup> In *APTh* III,6 Paul states: "Blessed are those who fear the words of God, because they will be consoled." Here we see an intertextual allusion to the teachings of Paul in III,5-6. This is one of the examples of both Paul and Thecla having their spiritual status simultaneously affirmed: Paul as a prophet, and Thecla as an obedient follower of Christ.

<sup>42</sup> Neyrey, *Render*, 253.

<sup>43</sup> Misset-Van de Weg ("Answers," 161) does not agree with this. She argues that Tryphaena is emerging as the new model of Christian patronage, contrasted sharply with Alexander. The Christian patron is supposed to "give freely in recognition of spiritual benefits and without expecting the honor and loyalty which were the normal responses to patronage. As such her patronage is an example of Christian benefaction where the *gratia*, due as honour, worship, and loyalty, is and must be directed to Christ." Whether Tryphaena was entering into a patron-client relationship with Thecla for her daughter, for her own honor, as a member of a community following the customs of hospitality, or as a model of Christian generosity is a matter of opinion. Significant for this work is that she is an elite woman and would

So Tryphaena, first introduced as wealthy and later revealed to be queen, becomes Thecla's patron for one night. Thecla's visit was presaged in a dream in which Tryphaena was visited by her dead daughter, Falconilla. Thecla is to pray for the Queen's dead daughter so that Falconilla "may be transferred to the abode of righteous" (IV,3) in exchange for the protection of her virginity. This act switches who is indebted to whom, another example of switching roles, this time patron and client. Tryphaena is now devoted to Thecla, and prays before Thecla is taken away—"God of Thecla, my child, help her!" (IV,5)— and is instrumental in ending the arena scene (IV,11).

But the most important type of patronage in the Thecla narrative is the theological-Christological patronage that God and Christ provide. Thecla says at the end of the second trial: "Je suis la servante du Dieu vivant; la protection qui m'entoure, c'est d'avoir cru en celui en qui Dieu a mis son bon plaisir, en son Fils; c'est par lui que pas une seule des bêtes ne m'a touchée."<sup>44</sup> "I am the slave of the living God. The protection that encircles me, it is to have believed in the one whom God put his good pleasure, in his Son. It is by him that not a single beast has touched me" (IV,12). In this statement of patronage the authors are effectively using the patronage system to reflect a direct line of spirituality, brokered by Christ, the Son. Within the understanding of patronage Thecla has come to God's protection and power through a belief "in the one whom God put his good pleasure, in his Son" (IV,12). It is a voluntary exchange between unequal entities, a typical characteristic of the patronage system, with Christ as the intermediary. This is also evident in the Iconium chapters: first, Thecla sees Christ "And while she examined the crowd, she saw the Lord seated, in the guise of Paul" (III,21); and then she makes a cross (either by stretching out her arms or the sign of the cross, the editors note

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have been able, in ancient culture, to initiate a patron-client relationship with Thecla without the ancient audience perceiving her as stepping outside of her gender boundaries.

<sup>44</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1140-1.

that the text is not clear on this point) (III,22); last, God saves her “God had pity and aroused an underground noise, and, from above, a cloud filled with rain and hail spread its shadow” (III,22). The order of events puts Christ at the center of the theology in the *APTh*. In the opening paragraphs Paul is teaching about the life and good works of Christ (III,1), Thecla sees Christ (III,21), she emphatically baptizes herself in the name of Jesus Christ (IV,9), and, as stated above, her belief in Christ is at the center of her relationship with God as God’s client (IV,12). The Christian nature of the patron-client relationship is that Christ is the broker, and in the center of the dynamic between God and Thecla. Moreover “the authority of women in leadership positions was established on the basis of resurrection appearances.”<sup>45</sup> When Thecla sees Christ before getting onto the pyre in III,21 the theological focus is shifting from Paul to Christ, and Thecla’s authority is being established as a true apostle of Jesus.

God as Thecla’s most powerful patron is a significant rhetorical device. Tryphaena, even though she is related to Caesar is not able to save Thecla from the arena, although God is; she is both physically saved and spiritually completely accepted and saved. That God is Thecla’s patron is the explanation of how a woman could possibly become an itinerant follower of Christ in a culture that demanded female embeddedness as a matter of honor (both family reputation and acceptable female behavior). Later Thecla’s unconventional behavior and the narrative’s claim of divine patronage will be contrasted with female honor and salvation as connected to traditional roles in the household as argued in the Pastoral Epistles. There were two notions of women’s modesty growing in early Christianity: the Apocryphal Acts connected modesty with virginity and the Pastoral Epistles argued that women’s modesty within the Christian community depended on proper observance of social expectations.

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<sup>45</sup> Deirdre Good, “Early Extracanonical Writings.” *Women’s Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition with Apocrypha*, Eds. Carol Newsome and Sharon Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 1998) 476.

To summarize, the social interactions within the Thecla story may seem remote to the modern reader, but should be treated as important cues to the ancient audience explaining the theology of the narrative. The honor-shame and patron-client social constructs would have been considered inevitable elements of the story because they permeated every aspect of life. Gender plays significantly into Thecla's maintenance of honor and her virginity. Once she is an outsider, sent out of Iconium, by her mother, Thecla's virginity, as a woman, would be her only remaining virtue (absent familial honor and the positive shame, proper sense of place, which came with it). Interestingly, gender is not significant in patron-client relationships. First we are shown gender plays no role through Queen Tryphaena and Thecla forming a patron-client relationship, insofar as Tryphaena can not save her from the arena (IV, 5-8). Gender also does not affect Thecla's ability to help Tryphaena's daughter, an example of Thecla brokering a relationship. Then Thecla announces herself the client of God (IV, 12-13), whose power to save and protect was just miraculously demonstrated. The listener knows that she is the client of God and Christ because she is able in that role to broker more relationships for God, that is, convert and teach (IV,14-18). The fluid roles (patron, client, and broker) and exchanges were not confusing to the ancient audience. They are cultural and narrative facts and reflections of a complicated social structure that would have permeated every area of ancient social life.

Gender is significant in terms of what would have been considered virtuous for Thecla, and within her reach in terms of her honor and social status. Typically women would not have been able to acquire public honor, as the public sphere was predominantly considered space appropriate only for males in the Greco-Roman world. But Thecla blurs the gender lines at pivotal moments in the story, and in the end she received the undisputed protection and care of God, showing the listener that in the cases of exemplary virtue there may be exceptions to the cultural gender lines. Thecla exhibits traditionally female virtues: obedience, silence, modesty,

and obviously chastity. But she also displays typically masculine virtues: self control, courage, and intellect. As out of the ordinary as it would have been for a woman to be unembedded, or to acquire honor through a public display, because in the end God is her patron it is plausible that the divine patronage in the narrative is designed rhetorically to sway the audience to accept these eccentricities. When we examine the Pastoral Epistles we can see what another community expected regarding women's roles. This comparison will highlight how different communities were addressing the growing concerns of the roles of women in the Christian movement. Further I will argue that the Thecla narrative is suggesting the possibility of spiritual transcendence of gender roles altogether.

#### ***D. Restatement of the Thesis***

Gender clearly plays a significant role in the Thecla narrative: there is no mention of Thecla's father, thus no acting *paterfamilias*; Thecla is a female who acts contrary to cultural expectations for women; her mother turns on her because of her refusal to fulfill the betrothal agreement (III,20); Paul does not claim Thecla as a client under his protection when Alexander inquires about her; Paul refuses to baptize her because of her female beauty (III,25); absent both a patron and family to protect her, Thecla is vulnerable to Alexander's advances (IV,1); Queen Tryphaena and her daughter play significantly into the preservation of Thecla's virginity; there is an overarching theme of continence (preservation of female sexual virtue); and the female crowd in Antioch act as a chorus defending Thecla's unconventional actions (IV,3; IV,7; IV,13). Women are very conspicuous throughout the story, and have a voice in it.

Thecla is not only the female in the story, but she exercises significant power in her own life, which is unusual for a female in the ancient world. In part, her autonomy may be explained socio-historically Thecla being "a leading woman of the Iconians" (IV,1). An elite woman could

exercise more autonomy than non-elite. However, the key aspect of the story is ultimately theological: Thecla's unembedded autonomy is derived from her enslavement to God. Rhetorically the story is theologically driven. The Thecla narrative aims to influence the audience to understand that God approves of Thecla's actions even though no human authority, either social or political, does. This approval is mediated through Thecla's faith in Jesus Christ. God alone saves Thecla. It is significant that neither Paul nor Queen Tryphaena is able to save Thecla from her trials. Her absent father can not save her, her mother calls for her execution (III,20). The women of city who act as a chorus also cannot save her, although they empathize with her situation and defend her. It is God's power and protection that saves her, and it is not contingent upon Thecla's social position.

There is great importance put on Thecla's virginity and its meaning to her salvation. This is not uncommon for the AAA, which all have a focus on chastity. They were written before the Christian monastic tradition, but reflect the vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience associated with it. It can not be overstated how important Thecla's virginity would have been to her modesty as an unembedded woman in ancient culture. Her virginity is also an example of the literary technique of things not being as they seem; as a female without kin or patron Thecla certainly would have appeared to be neither a virgin nor with proper modesty, as exemplified by Alexander's brazen advances at the gates of Antioch (IV,1). Thecla's positive shame, or modesty, is theologically affirmed throughout the story: first, by maintaining her virginity, and second by God covering her naked body in the arena after her self-baptism (IV,9). Her chastity, however, is also not enough to save her. Ultimately salvation comes from God, through Christ,<sup>46</sup> and that is what saves Thecla, and keeps her safe for eternity.

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<sup>46</sup> The Christological feature of the patron-client relationship becomes very clear at the end of the narrative. In Appendix A see Skemp's footnote #66 attached IV, 17, to which I would add an emphasis on Christ is especially clear just prior to martyrdom. First Thecla makes the sign of the cross before climbing on pyre (III, 22), and second, the two mentions of Thecla baptizing herself "in the name of Jesus Christ" (IV, 9).

Thecla's story is one of opposites: the last is first, the weakest is the most courageous and strong, the rejected is protected by God. Again reviewing the recurring themes in the story and the social structures that were part of the message for the ancient audience we see there is a frequent switching out of what would be expected with the unexpected; the fire does not burn Thecla (III,22), and Alexander, the strongest of men, can not overpower Thecla (IV,1-11), to name two examples. First highlighted by Esch-Wermeling with her observation of the interchange between opposites, we can observe that the action of the story happens within the flow of those interchanges. For the purposes of this study of gender and eschatology, the idea that things may not be as they seem, the power may be with the weak, and God's salvation may happen now or later. The interchange of opposites is driving the story. Even though it looks as if Thecla is losing honor by not marrying Thamyris, she is gaining honor and protection from God, her patron, by remaining devoted to Paul's God. Just as Paul refers to himself as a "slave of Jesus Christ" in Romans 1:1, so Thecla refers to herself as "a slave of the living God" when answering the question "Who are you?" (*APTh* IV,12). Although Thecla's autonomous, unembedded behavior was unconventional for a woman in the Greco-Roman world, the narrative vindicates her actions particularly through divine approval but at key moments also through human affirmation—for instance, the chorus of women and the governor (IV,3; IV,7; IV,10; IV,13). In effect, the narrative guides the audience rhetorically to understand that there is a spiritual location in Christianity where gender roles are obsolete.

This thesis now turns to texts from the Pauline heritage. This will place the *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* within the framework and context of the authentic letters of Paul and the Pastoral Epistles. These works influence the story of Thecla and are the frame for a possible larger conversation about chastity, gender and eschatology. How are the author(s) of the Thecla narrative influenced by Paul and other groups who are following the Pauline tradition?



### III. St. Paul the Apostle

#### ***A. Introduction to Eschatology and Pauline Studies***

Paul the apostle is an historical figure. He lived during the very beginnings of the Christ movement, and although he was an early persecutor of the followers of Jesus (Gal 1:13), his experience of the risen Christ changed the course of his life. He felt strongly that he had been given a divine mission to bring the gentiles into the body of Christ; he insists that no human authority called him to his apostolic ministry. This mission changed the direction of Christianity, creating the initial shift from a sect of Judaism to an independent Christ-following movement. Pauline theology distinguishes itself from the theology in the synoptic gospels because it is not centered on the life of Jesus. Paul, as a second generation Jesus-group member “took up witness of the first generation yet [was] largely not concerned with what Jesus said and did.”<sup>47</sup> His mission and teachings were focused on the growth of the early church, what it meant to be a member of the Body of Christ, the terms and conditions of gentile membership in the Christ-movement, and the imminent return of Christ. For this study the following section will briefly summarize Paul’s eschatology, examine his writings about women in the church, and look at two excerpts from his letters on the topic of chastity and continence.

The study of eschatology is “that which is concerned with the last things, the final destiny both of individuals and of humanity in general, and of the cosmos,”<sup>48</sup> and is itself a complicated issue and important in early Christianity. Closely linked to the idea of soteriology and salvation, eschatology points to when the full realization of salvation occurs, and if it is a bodily or spiritual

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<sup>47</sup> Bruce Malina and John Pilch, *Social Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2006) 9.

<sup>48</sup> S.G.F. Brandon and J.A.T Robinson, “Eschatology” *Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 318.

experience. In the *APTh* IV:13 we see how they are almost one in the same: “The one who has clothed my nakedness while with the wild beasts, this one will clothe me with salvation on the Day of Judgment.” The end times represents a penultimate salvific moment. But this is not as simple as it seems. There is strong evidence in Paul’s writings that he thought the *parousia* was coming in his lifetime. Therefore, Pauline eschatology is not a clear cut set of ideas systematically presented to us, the reader. Rather, his eschatology in the extant canonical letters rises out of several concerns, including: (1) the return of Christ as being “at hand;” (2) in response to a community’s questions. For example First Thessalonians addresses the problem of those who have already died before the *parousia* and relates this concern to eschatological hope for the people there; (3) ethical advice to the communities with matters that they seek help in navigating. Paul is writing to help communities live lives filled with hope and agapic love as they wait in faith for Christ’s imminent return.

The allusions in the story of Thecla to both a realized eschatology (being saved in the present) and the idea of a future eschatology *as linked to chastity and gender* are not represented in the works of the canonical Paul, and so they should not be seen as an extension of the historical Paul. *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* is not believed to represent authentic material on Paul’s views, but rather is commonly interpreted as using the image of Paul, a literary construct, to authenticate itself and its message. When we examine Paul’s letters and contrast the message to the one in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* a shift can be detected. Paul, although he does prefer chastity and sexual abstinence (1 Cor 7:1-10), does not require it. It is noteworthy that the authors of the Thecla narrative were very familiar with Paul. *The Acts of Paul* gives us valuable information about second century interpretations of the Christian message. For women, in particular, there seems to have been different camps addressing what

would be their role in the hierarchy of the church, each using the teaching, letters, and the legacy of Paul.

## ***B. APT<sup>h</sup> vis-à-vis the Pastoral Epistles***

The Pastoral Epistles (PE) is a term applied to three letters, First and Second Timothy, and Titus, ascribed to Paul, but likely written by early follower(s) of Paul, who will be referred to as “the Pastor.”<sup>49</sup> This group of letters concerns itself with safeguarding holy tradition, the Christ-followers becoming part of the world peacefully, and church authority. There is not scholarly unanimity about the authorship of the Pastoral letters, but it is commonly thought that they were written by a later disciple providing guidance.<sup>50</sup> There are several distinctions that can be made between the historical Paul and the Pastor. Christiaan Beker describes the Paul of the Pastoral Epistles as having achieved “such an exclusive status that he simply argues from his unquestionable authority to a submissive church rather than being forced to argue for it from his detractors in his churches as the historical Paul was forced to do.”<sup>51</sup>

It is common to compare the Pastoral Epistles and the *Acts of Paul Thecla*, and to draw some connections between the two works because of various points of contact between the texts. Both were likely written in the second century in the area of Syria. Within the first paragraphs of the *APT<sup>h</sup>* we are told that Onesiphorus is looking for Paul based on a description given by Titus (III,2), a devoted member of Paul’s early evangelizing group and the supposed recipient of the third Pastoral Epistle, which is difficult to believe is a coincidence. The mention of Titus in the first few lines may be an attempt at a direct statement of apostolicity. One of the

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<sup>49</sup> Raymond Collins (*1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002]) is among those who refer to the author of the Pastoral Epistles as “the Pastor.”

<sup>50</sup> Margaret M Mitchell, “Introduction to the Pastoral Epistles” *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. (Oxford 2010) 2084.

<sup>51</sup> J Christiaan Beker, *Heirs of Paul: Paul’s Legacy in the New Testament and the Church Today*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) 38.

earliest translations of *APTh* by Jeremiah Jones is titled *The Life of the Great Martyr Thecla of Iconium, Equal to the Apostles, as recorded in the Acts of Paul*,<sup>52</sup> that title along with the other connections between the two texts alludes to the possibility that it is a statement of equality to Timothy and Titus, not Paul.

Since there are no continuous and significant linguistic similarities or words and phrases between the PE and *APTh*, most scholars do not argue that one is in direct response to the other.<sup>53</sup> Rather they are thematically related. Some names appear in both texts; Paul and Titus are the most obvious examples of name sharing between the two. As already noted above the twin characters of Demas and Hymenaeus, who accompanied Paul to Iconium, are mentioned in Second Timothy. They are referred to as untrustworthy and deserters: “Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” (2 Tim 4:9-10 Oxford NRSV); and again “You are aware that all who are in Asia have turned against me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes” (2 Tim 1:15). Onesiphorus is also mentioned as a friend twice in Second Timothy (2 Tim. 1:16, 2 Tim 4:19). The cities of the *APTh* are also mentioned in the same letter: “my persecutions, and my suffering the things that happen to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them” (2 Tim. 3:11). Alexander is named, not in a role of leadership, but rather first as a coppersmith, “Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message” (2 Tim. 4:14-15); and second in connection with another unfaithful follower, “By rejecting

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<sup>52</sup> Jeremiah Jones, “The Life of the Great Martyr Thecla of Iconium, Equal to the Apostles, as recorded in the Acts of Paul” 1693-1724. *Conflict and Community in the Corinthian Church*, 6 June 2012, United Methodist Church <<http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/corinthians/thecla.stm>>

<sup>53</sup> Barrier, (*Critical Introduction*, 43) makes this point. Although Esch-Wermeling (Paulusschülerin, 60-63) does a line by line analysis of 1 Tim 5:11-16 in her work. She describes it as an “inhaltlichen Analyse” (content analysis). “Direct response” is merely intended to clarify that one community did not write their work (*APTh* or PE) as a response to an already existing text from the other community. At the time this thesis was written the critical Greek of *APTh* had not yet been published. After its publication new scholarship on this subject will surely be written. Thematically they are certainly related and both address the same concerns within the community, albeit differently.

conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith; among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:19-20). There is not complete uniformity between the names in each text; Demas and Hermogenes do not appear together in the PE, and the occupation of Alexander is inconsistent. Other names, such as Tryphaena, appear elsewhere entirely (Rom. 16:12) and blur the argument that the name similarities point to a direct relationship between the two texts.<sup>54</sup>

### **i. How Women are Saved**

Three topics are primarily cited as shared themes between the PE and *Apth*: chastity, women’s place in the church, and eschatology, in addition to both using Paul as a “function of their legitimation.”<sup>55</sup> As Margaret MacDonald notes these themes stand in tension when comparing the two works: “The practice of women remaining unmarried is clearly viewed with suspicion in the Pastoral Epistles, and strong efforts are made to encourage the adoption of traditional gender roles. In contrast, the story of Paul and Thecla reflects a belief system in which Paul’s preference for celibacy has become the conviction that celibacy is fundamental to one’s acceptance of the gospel.”<sup>56</sup> In sharp contrast to the message in the Thecla story the Pastor insists:

Let women learn in silence with full submission. I permit no women [wife] to teach or to have authority over a man [husband]; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a

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<sup>54</sup> Raymond Collins writes on the subject of shared names (*1 & 2 Tim*, 180): “To sum, many of the people cited in 2 Timothy whose roles in Paul’s ministry are difficult to identify on the basis of his letters and Acts of the Apostles have names that occur in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*. The names are similar, but the roles and relationships to Paul are not always the same. These data suggest that a number of individual names were bandied about as legends about the apostle developed in the centuries after his death. They were stock figures in a divided church’s battle for theological loyalty...” Collins goes on to assert that the “center of the battle was faith in the resurrection.” Women’s role in leadership and resurrection having a different theological meaning for men and women seems to have been at the center of the debate.

<sup>55</sup> Burris, *Critical Introduction*, 105.

<sup>56</sup> Margaret MacDonald, “Rereading Paul: Early Interpreters of Paul on Women and Gender” *Women and Christian Origins*. Eds. Ed. Mary Rose D’Angelo and Ross Shepard Kraemer, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 236-253, here 238.

transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing,<sup>57</sup> provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

1 Tim 2:11-15 (Oxford NRSV 2010)

We see in this passage the injunction to silence and subordination of women to the male in the household based on Genesis 2-3, and then a distinction made to female salvation through child rearing/bearing. As it is this excerpt can mean that women will be saved by maintaining their social honor or modesty, distinct from how men are saved. In the Iconium portion of the *APTh* there is an example of this message of salvation through childbearing, but as oppositional to Paul's teaching on chastity. The false friends, Demas and Hermogenes, end up being questioned by Thamyris, the man Thecla refuses to marry after hearing the teachings of Paul. The traitors explain, after being questioned about who Paul is and what he is teaching:

Et Démas et Hermogène lui répondirent: "Qui il est, nous ne le savons pas; mais il écarte les jeunes gens des femmes et les vierges des hommes, en disant: 'Il n'y aura de résurrection pour vous que si vous restez purs et ne souillez pas la chair, mais la gardez pur.'"<sup>58</sup>

And Demas and Hermogenes responded to him: "Who he is, we do not know, but he causes the young women and virgins to set aside the men by saying, 'There will be no resurrection for you unless you remain chaste and do not sully the flesh but keep pure.'" (III,12)

And they promise Thecla's distraught betrothed that if he can get Paul out of town they will teach the people that the resurrection "already it has happened upon these children we have, and we have been risen knowing the true God" (III, 14). This is a fascinating moment in the narrative: it clearly presents a realized eschatology as incorrect, because the teaching is ascribed to false followers. They sit over a luxurious meal and discuss theology as public

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<sup>57</sup> Childbearing might refer to child rearing but that the distinction, though interesting, need not detain us for the purposes of this study. Specifically, in the *APTh*, Thecla does not have children. When Paul sends Onesiphorus back to Iconium with his family (*APTh* 3:26) presents a contrast to Thecla, perhaps related to the children and childrearing.

<sup>58</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1132.

strategy rather than a matter of the spirit. Here the eschatology and the model of a female Christian which Demas and Hermogenes are suggesting is a point of tension and criticism between the Thecla narrative and the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>59</sup> In both the Pastoral Epistles and the *Acts Paul and Thecla* we can see how female positive shame (modesty) connects to eschatology, a realized eschatology from the pastor manifested in childbirth and childrearing, and an already/not yet eschatology in the story of Thecla with a future Day of Judgment still to come. We see a pattern where women are asked in the Pastoral letters to maintain female modesty through silence and submission, thereby preserving familial honor (the public representation of the family name) and by extension the honor of the growing group of Christ followers. By contrast, in the *APTh*, female modesty is maintained through continence, faith, and obedience to God.

In the Thecla narrative, God is the sole patron with salvific power. Thecla receives God's blessing without being properly embedded in a household. And in the Pastoral Epistles there is an obvious connection between the traditional social boundaries imposed on women and their salvation (1 Tim 2:11-15). It's worth noting that Thecla's renunciation of social norms is not without its limits. She is unable to shed her social identity fully until God intervenes. Next we will examine the transition between Iconium and Antioch, and place the exchange between Paul and Thecla within the context of First Corinthians and First Timothy.

## ii. The Limits of Renunciation

Significantly, in the *APTh* Paul refuses to baptize Thecla during their exchange at the end of the Iconium chapter, III, 25:

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<sup>59</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests (*In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* [New York: Crossroad, 1983] 311-314) that there are concerns of maintaining "legal and economic control" of the women referred to as "widows" in the PE. (1 Tim 5:14, Tit 1:1-14); Streeter writes (*Redeemed*, 84) "Thecla is....the kind of Christian woman of whom the author of 1 Timothy would strongly have disapproved, one who 'forbids marriage' (1 Tim 4:3)."

Et Thècle dit à Paul: “Je vais me faire couper les cheveux, et je te suivrai partout où tu te rendras.” Mais il lui répondit: “Le temps est mauvais, et tu es belle; et je crains qu’une autre épreuve ne t’emporte, pire que la première, et que tu ne puisses la supporter, mais qu’en elle tu ne faiblisses.” Et Thècle dit: “Donne-moi seulement le sceau dans le Christ, et aucune épreuve ne m’atteindra.” Et Paul dit à Thècle: “Sois patiente, et tu recevras l’eau.”<sup>60</sup>

And Thecla said to Paul, “I am going to cut my hair and I will follow you wherever you go.” But he responded to her, “The time is wicked and you are beautiful. And I fear that another trial, worse than the first, carries you away, and that you may not be able to endure it, but that in it you weaken.” And Thecla said: “Only give me the seal in Christ and no trial will overtake me.” And Paul said to Thecla: “Be patient, and you will receive the water.”

This brief scene is an intersection between Pauline letters, the story of Thecla, and the Pastoral Epistles. Here notions of female modesty, proper place for young women (and/or young widows),<sup>61</sup> baptism, and the symbolism of hair all converge. Paul’s refusal both of Thecla’s offer to cut her hair and to baptize her could be interpreted as inter-textual allusions to First Corinthians and/or First Timothy. In looking at both of these texts it is clear that the authors of *Acts of Paul Thecla* did not think Thecla could transcend any and every social boundary; rather there are limits to Thecla’s freedom, as God’s client she may not shed all social constructs around respectability.

In light of 1 Cor 11:4-5 Thecla’s offer to cut her hair would have been excessive to Paul. He writes: “Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any women who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved” (1 Cor 11:4-5 NRSV 2010). And later in the same chapter: “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to

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<sup>60</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1136.

<sup>61</sup> Osiek and M. MacDonald (*House Churches*, 76) write “as is suggested especially by Ignatius’s greeting in his letter to the ‘virgins called widows’ (Ignatius, Smyrn. 13.1), the labels associated with single and celibate women in early Christianity were flexible; in this case [PE] the phrase most likely refers to the admission of virgins into the group or ‘order’ of widows that existed in this period in some communities (compare 1 Tim 5:3-16).”



him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering” (1 Cor 11:14-15). Thecla’s offer to cut her hair may have been an attempt to hide her gender identity or a means of communicating that she understands that she is perceived now as shameless.<sup>62</sup> The text seems to symbolize some kind of finality, as if perhaps Thecla believes she has arrived at a spiritual location that Paul does agree with. If cutting her hair is meant to indicate that she is no longer female, the Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* certainly thinks otherwise, because he declines Thecla’s request for baptism citing her beauty as one of the reasons (III, 25).

Whatever the original meaning, a woman volunteering to cut her own hair is certainly a stark contrast with the overarching concern throughout the Pastorals with the “opinion of outsiders.”<sup>63</sup> Each interpretation shows Thecla’s willingness to leave her sexual identity behind her, and gives an indication of Paul’s possible motivation for both separating himself from her at the gates of Antioch (IV,1) and greeting Thecla with some suspicion at the end of the story in Myra (IV,15). Thecla is willing to cast off social norms to a degree that even the Paul represented in the Thecla narrative finds dangerous and the Paul who authored First Corinthians certainly defines as disgraceful.

First Tim 5:11-12 reads: “but refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge.” It is possible that Paul’s refusal to baptize Thecla comes

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<sup>62</sup> The most common reading of *APTh* is through the lens of a romance or adventure novel, there is not a lot of scholarship or speculation as to what was meant by this offer to shave her head. Most scholars are not speculating as to the social science contained therein. Several scholars (including Good 478, Boyarin 198) when describing the conclusion of *APTh* state that Thecla shaves her head and dressed like a man when she set off to Myra to find Paul. In the three versions of the text that I consulted I did not find any reference to her cutting her hair at the end of the story. Scholars are either conflating this part of the story with the end, reading a version I can not find, or assuming that by dressing like a man she also cuts her hair.

<sup>63</sup> Jouette Bassler, “Limits and Differentiation: the Calculus of Widows in 1 Tim 5: 3-16” *Feminist Companion to Paul: Deutero-Pauline Writings*. Ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (London: T&T Clark International 2003) 132-133.

out of a suspicion of her motives and abilities to uphold the rigorous moral standard of abstinence. This is a multilayered response to the message contained in First Timothy and perhaps First Corinthians. First, Paul<sup>64</sup> follows the directions given in First Timothy and it results in immediate danger for Thecla, denying her as a full member of his community under his protection at the gates of Antioch (IV, 1). Second, Paul's refusal to baptize her is not lasting. Thecla will be baptized soon, which Paul predicts, with divine approval, and she will be unmarried when it happens. Also it is significant that Thecla did not cut her hair at this point. A shift in her public sexual/gender identity happens upon baptism, not before.

Third, Thecla's radical offer to cut her hair is the beginning of a separation from Paul that is completed at the gates of Antioch.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps it is a rhetorical technique to indicate that hair cutting is too far over the boundary to shamelessness. It is a means of indicating that Paul would not have approved, and whatever Thecla's motives for the offer, had she done it the result may have been even more problematic. For example, Tryphaena may not have been able to receive Thecla into her household had she cut her hair. It is important to understand that Thecla does have proper shame, but she isn't embedded in a traditional household. Similar to men in that society, she still must observe basic decorum, which is what her hair symbolizes.

### iii. Summary of Comparison to the Pastoral Epistles

The rhetorical aim of the Thecla narrative could not be clearer: it persuades the audience to accept Thecla's unconventional conduct as a Christian on the basis of divine patronage that

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<sup>64</sup> References to Paul in this section can be confusing. I am by no means representing the Paul in the *APTh* as historically accurate or equal in Pauline authority to the undisputed letters of Paul. When I refer to Paul as represented in the *APTh* I am discussing the fictional Paul of the narrative.

<sup>65</sup> Anne Jensen (*Thekla-die Apostolin: Ein Apokrypher Text Neu Entdeckt* [Freiburg:Herder 1995] 100-116) has an interesting addition to the subject of hair cutting, dressing like a man, and the relationship between Paul and Thecla. She argues that in the ascetic culture men and women dressed alike, and that would not have been unusual (114) and as part of her overall analysis of the story she asks if Paul's entire character is interpolated into a martyrdom story of a woman named Thecla and that may explain why the ties between the two (Paul and Thecla) seem so weak. She puts *APTh* into the context of other martyrdom stories, not into the social context of the Greco-Roman culture and asserts that the ascetic communities are already well into existence. Hers is a historical feminist perspective.

trumps the absence of human patronage and human approval. God's power to save is certainly limitless, as Thecla is saved repeatedly from death. But Thecla's transcendence of social expectations has a limit, and those limits add credence to the argument that she is without limits in other areas. Despite the persuasiveness of the Pastor teachings prohibiting female autonomy outside the male *oikonomia*, and despite Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* seemingly backing that perspective in the narrative by keeping Thecla "off the list," that is, by not baptizing her (III,25) or claiming her as a member of his community (IV,1), Thecla's bold actions of following Paul and remaining chaste receive God's approval, surpassing human authority.

It is easy to see why scholars think there is a conversation going on between the Pastoral Epistles and the *Acts of Paul Thecla*. They are mirrors of each other, each touting its own ideas, while seemingly cutting the other down. The advice in First Timothy 4:7, "Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales," has some scholars thinking of as a direct reference to the *Apocryphal Acts* as a whole, or the story of Thecla specifically.<sup>66</sup> The triumph of Thecla at the end of the story, God's blessings so clearly and directly given, yet remaining devoted to Paul, is easy to interpret as an alternative message about women's potential contributions to the Christian community in contrast to the writings of the Pastor.

It goes without saying that the Pastoral Epistles has been given much more credibility because they are part of the canon. Both texts, the letters of the Pastor and the Thecla narrative, claim Pauline heritage. First and Second Timothy and Titus indicate the beginning of the household codes that are even more explicit in Colossians, Ephesians, and the Petrine epistles thought to be more direct responses to the ascetic teachings that were disruptive to communities.<sup>67</sup> It has long been noted that the early Christian movement produced a spectrum

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<sup>66</sup> Stevan Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980) 70-94 and D. MacDonald *Anchor Bible* 444 are just two of the scholars who support the hypothesis that "old wife's tales" is a reference to either the AAA or *APTh*.

<sup>67</sup> M. MacDonald, "Rereading," 243.

of roles available to women. The Pastoral Epistles represent a part of the spectrum that is more attached to assimilating into the Greco-Romans culture's patriarchal norms, and so encourages women to take on traditional roles maintaining their place upholding the family's ascribed honor. The story of Thecla is on a different part of the spectrum, wherein Thecla is herself acquiring honor, and is embedded in a patron-client relationship with God. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* represents a place where women can lose the social honor associated with family, and still have honor before God. This is not a possibility for women in the Pastoral letters, whose sense of honor is exclusively embedded in the male *oikonomia* that demands acceptance of the traditionally prescribed role of women: silent, obedient, and dependant on the male head of house.

### ***C. Already/ Not Yet***

The next two sections of this discussion around Paul will center on his eschatology and his notions of chastity. The purpose of looking at these subjects is primarily comparative. It is important to put the theology in the Thecla narrative, assuming it came out of communities within the Pauline tradition, on the spectrum of Paul's teachings. The Thecla narrative can be firmly placed in the school of Pauline thought, both in its direct message and rhetorical style, an interpretation of Pauline theology. The repeated theme of a reversal of values and a reversal of roles is closely linked with eschatology and gender identity in both *APTh* and Pauline theology. When comparing the two it becomes clear that the Thecla narrative was certainly part of the Pauline tradition. By closely examining Paul's thoughts on chastity and eschatology we can see why. In this section Paul's "already/not yet" eschatology will be briefly explained, and in the following section we will elucidate Paul's writings on chastity.

There was some urgency to Paul's message about the impending return of Jesus Christ at the *parousia*. Simultaneously Paul offers very clear ethical guidelines for actions in the present focused primarily on agapic love (Rom 6:3-4, 1 Corinthians). So both are true, the *parousia* is coming (Thess 5:2, 1 Cor. 7:26-29), and something mystical is happening right now that provides a glimpse into what is going to happen, a promise of the fulfillment that is still coming. This straddling of the two ideas of salvation and union is often referred to as Paul's "already/not yet eschatology," meaning the early Christ-followers were already in Christ, but not yet experiencing the *parousia*.<sup>68</sup> Pauline scholar James Dunn explains:

As the terms indicate, "already—not yet" is a way of summarizing the recognition that something decisive has *already* happened in the event of coming to faith, but that the work of God in reclaiming the individual for himself is *not yet* complete.<sup>69</sup>

There is a sense of an ongoing process<sup>70</sup> and an element of a mystical union with Christ, starting in the present and being complete later.<sup>71</sup> Following this thought it is still the "already/not yet" age, because the baptized are certainly "in Christ" and have some ideas of salvation, transformation, redemption, and inclusion, yet salvation is not entire, as Christ has not yet returned to fulfill the "new creation."

The "already/not yet" concept is important in Thecla studies because the narrative's eschatology is similar to the Pauline notion briefly outlined above. Thecla is both saved in the moment (*APTh* III,22; IV,3; IV,8-10) and is taught and believes in a Day of Judgment (III,6; IV,13). The chorus of Iconium women express present moment salvation with the statement in IV, 13, "One is God who has saved Thecla," after Thecla is taken out of the arena. And yet,

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<sup>68</sup> Jouette Bassler, *Navigating Paul: An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) 87-96. E.P Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 32-40.

<sup>69</sup> James D.G Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998) 466.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid* 405

<sup>71</sup> Bassler, *Navigating*, 46-7.

Thecla also clearly awaits the *parousia*, as indicated in later in IV, 13 with “this one will clothe me with salvation on the Day of Judgment.”

Esch-Wermeling, however, thinks the emphasis is on a present salvation. God is not just powerful in the hereafter; rather God’s power stretches into the here and now. The earthly and concrete rescue of Thecla functions as a guarantor of the salvation of humankind both now and in the hereafter. Thecla wants to show people that everyone here and now can be saved from their current distress. Only secondarily, according to Esch-Wermeling, does the narrative point to the power of God for a future eschatological event.<sup>72</sup> This perspective, in my view, seems somewhat mistaken: the social disruption in the *Acts of Paul Thecla* is clearly due to the troubles that Thecla encounters by not remaining embedded in her betrothed’s household in Iconium. If the emphasis is too strongly on a realized eschatology then it becomes a story of social disruption as an extension of God’s salvific powers in the here and now, and that is simply not very likely. Second, a realized eschatology is mocked in the exchange in Iconium between Demas, Hermogenes, and Thamyris (III,13-16), which makes it more likely that the references to realized eschatology are balanced by references to future eschatological salvation, albeit farther in the future than indicated in Paul’s authentic writings.

An emphasis on God’s ability to save in the present is consistent with a general shift away from an imminent but future apocalyptic eschatology in second-century thinking. The delay in the *parousia* is thus more evident in the *APTh*, just as it is in the PE. Bart Ehrman, when discussing this shift in early Christianity, explains:

When Christians no longer expected Jesus to be returning sometime next week, the emphasis shifted from the kingdom that would arrive in the future to the kingdom that was above. The apocalyptic dualism that proclaimed a dividing line between the current

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<sup>72</sup> Esch-Wermeling explains (*Paulusschülerin*, 243) “Gottes Macht wirkt nicht nur im Jenseits, sondern streckt ihre Fühler ins Diesseits aus. Die irdische, konkrete Rettung Theklas wird zum Garant für die diesseitige und jenseitige Rettung der Menschen. Thekla will den Menschen in erster Linie zeigen, dass jede und jeder hier und jetzt aus gegenwärtiger Bedrängnis gerettet werden kann. Erst in zweiter Linie bezieht sie die Rettungsmacht Gottes auf einen endzeitlichen Vorgang.”

evil age and the future utopian age mutated into a non-apocalyptic dualism between this evil world and the world of God. In other words, a horizontal dualism that was sketched in time – this age and the age to come – was transformed into a vertical dualism sketched in space: this world and the world above.<sup>73</sup>

This is a helpful observation about how the teachings of Paul began to be reframed in the decades after his death. Ehrman makes this statement in the context of discussing the message of chastity, and its connection to the second coming of Christ, and the popularity of Thecla through the Middle Ages. He asserts that it is just as easy to see Thecla as remaining “pure” in preparation for the world above, as it would be to see her chastity as preparation for the *parousia*. Similar to Paul’s already/not yet eschatology, Pauline writings on chastity were being appropriated differently in the second century than was written in his letters.

## ***D. Paul and Chastity***

It is important to look at what Paul wrote about abstinence and chastity to help us better understand how his teachings were appropriated by the second-century communities surrounding the Thecla story and the Pastor. This brief study will highlight the critical differences between the Acts of Paul and the Epistles. First, we will look at two passages from Paul’s genuine letters, First Corinthians and First Thessalonians and discuss why they are of interest when looking at the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. The call to chastity in the Thecla narrative does not line up neatly with Pauline exhortations on sexual relationships in his genuine letters, yet the comparison is significant. Theological message around chastity in the Thecla narrative possibly uses the authentic teachings of Paul, but then appropriates it into the second century world, where the urgency around the *parousia* has diminished. Additionally, the Pauline teachings on chastity and abstinence are a meeting point of the *Acts of Thecla*, Pastoral Epistles and the

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<sup>73</sup> Bart D Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 148-149.

genuine letters of Paul. The passages we will examine deal directly with the question of sexual abstinence and give us a good idea as to Paul's teachings. They are not the only choices when looking at Paul's letters and the question of sex, but they represent his writings as a whole well.

We will start with the quote from First Thessalonians:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion, like the gentiles who do not know God; that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God does not call us to impurity but in holiness.

1 Thess 4:3-7 (Oxford NRSV)

There are several different types of sexual relationships that Paul is addressing here. Sanders reminds us "that Paul based ethical injunctions on the idea of participation in Christ, not on a supposed doctrine of legal justification."<sup>74</sup> Paul is always writing to a group that he considers in the Body of Christ, and the moral perfectionism that he preaches<sup>75</sup> is intended for people who are already baptized and does not include abstaining from marriage or from abstaining from sex within marriage. We see this high moral standard carried over quite clearly in the story of Thecla. The Paul portrayed in that story advocates chastity as means of keeping the body clean: "Blessed are those who have kept the flesh chaste, for they will be a temple of God. Blessed are the self controlled, for God will speak to them" (*APTh* III, 5). As in Paul's authentic teachings, his moral codes apply to men and women alike; he does not assume that one gender

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<sup>74</sup> Sanders, *Very Short Intro*, 127.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid* 118



is more suited to abstinence than another, for example.<sup>76</sup> The second quote comes from First Corinthians and deals directly with the question of complete sexual abstinence:

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman." But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each women her own husband....To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self control they should marry.

1 Cor 7:1-2, 9-9a (Oxford NRSV)

It is clear from this passage that within marriage Paul allows sexual relationships, he could hardly do otherwise as a Hebrew male. It seems that some in Corinth were maintaining celibacy even within marriage on account of the heightened eschatological hope of the imminent *parousia*. It is impossible to know what exactly Paul taught. We surmise that the urgency of the *parousia* has Paul and his audience "[rethinking] the most basic relationships, with the result that marriage and other statuses are relativized in importance by the eschatological 'calling' of the Lord."<sup>77</sup>

Paul's injunction in v.8, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am" provides a fascinating point of intersection between Paul's thinking and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, on the one hand, and a point of tension between Paul and the Pastor, on the other hand. Once again we return to the phrase from First Timothy: "but refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge" (5:11-2 Oxford NRSV). Paul's teaching in v. 8 is closer to what Thecla is exemplifying; that young

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<sup>76</sup> I am not as concerned with Paul's belief in the equality of the genders overall as I am with his sexual ethics as they apply to both genders. It is commonly accepted that Paul certainly assumed it proper for females to be in the submissive position during sex and that he did not think men and women were equal partners in the act of sex (Rom, 1 Cor).

<sup>77</sup> Laurence Welborn, "Notes to 1 Corinthians 7:1-40" *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 2007.

women who are virgins would do well to stay that way, in contrast to the instruction in the pastorals, where it would be best for young women to marry and procreate. In the Thecla narrative God as patron and protector is preferable to a husband, regardless of age. The Pastoral Epistles certainly has a more favorable view of marriage than Paul does, written at a time when the eschatological urgency has been replaced by a greater need to conform to societal values. By contrast, *Acts of Paul and Thecla* does not put any restraints on who can or should observe celibacy, whereas Paul in his own letters admits it is not for everybody. Another possible reason for a Christian in the second century to maintain chastity is as means of recall. “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ” writes Paul in 1 Cor 11:1, which it seems Thecla is determined to do. The abstainer focuses attention on the spiritual, and away from the material world. Schüssler-Fiorenza writes: “Early Christian theology (as well as all subsequent theology) is the process of interpretative remembrance of Jesus, the Christ.”<sup>78</sup> So the connection between Jesus and Paul and on to Thecla can be drawn through chastity, trials, and a type of “un-embedded-ness,” because they all share a social dislocation. Chastity, then, becomes a means of imitating and joining both Christ and Paul.

## ***E. Summary of Pauline Theology within the Context of the Thecla Text and the Pastor***

The connections between Paul’s genuine letters and the *Acts of Thecla* noted above indicates that the Thecla narrative contains an awareness of Pauline heritage and theology, and familiarity, to some extent, with Paul’s letter and probably also with the deutero-Pauline tradition represented in the Pastoral Epistles. Specifically there is a familiarity with Paul’s eschatological teachings, and advice on sexual relations. It is safe to say that the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is

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<sup>78</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 102.

not arbitrarily about its use of Paul because of his church authority; no, this story is indisputably influenced by Paul's theology.

But the story also betrays tension in the changing Christian landscape. The Thecla narrative was seemingly in conversation with the Pastor, who also claimed the authority of Paul. The rhetorical aim of the Thecla story is to explain and appropriate the Pauline legacy in the second-century world in a way that affirms female ministry as divinely sanctioned despite disapproval from men and women both inside and outside the Christian family. By the end of the Thecla saga she is standing before the male leaders of the community in Iconium teaching them about the power of God, a sharp contrast to the picture painted in the Pastoral Epistles of the ideal young women taking her rightful and silent place at the side of her husband. The story of Thecla seems to be asking the question if there is another kind of ideal Christian female, perhaps one who is entirely committed to God and not tethered to the world in the way expected of a woman in the Greco-Roman culture insofar as her commitment to God is not through the paterfamilias or a human patron, but rather through the Christian community and divine patronage. Thecla is certainly ideal in her faith; rejecting marriage, learning from Paul, twice accepting dire consequences over rejecting her faith, twice being saved from bodily death through miraculous intervention, and setting out to turn others toward God and Christ.

The tension with the Pastoral Epistles is highlighted with the different messages on the resurrection, women's roles in the church as well as women's roles in the community if they are still of childbearing age. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is clearly influenced by Paul, although the story makes an effort to separate Thecla from Paul as well. It is not Paul who baptizes Thecla (*APTh* III,25), as we will discuss momentarily, it is God. It is not Paul who saves Thecla, rather it is God. Even this separation from Paul can be found in First Corinthians:

So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or present or the future—all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. (3:21-23 NRSV)

In the first part of this thesis locates the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in history and in early Christian thought. The work was informed by Paul's authentic letters, although it does not slavishly conform to his ideas. There is a shared notion of God's approval trumping all human authority in both works. Paul's already/not yet eschatology is closely represented in the Thecla narrative and fits nicely into the repeated theme of a reversal of values and social roles; linked with both eschatology and gender identity. A delay in the Day of Judgment can be detected, which is consistent with second-century theology, in contrast to the historical Paul for whom the impending *parousia* was a reality. But this delay does not shift the focus of eschatology in the story of Thecla to a realized eschatology, which we will examine next. Last, the Apostle Paul and *Acts of Paul* share a high ethical standard and an ideal of apostolic celibacy. Again, the Thecla story is broader in its interpretation of continence for Christians, although it is possible that the story is influenced by some of Paul's ideas and writings on the subject.

We will now return our attention more fully to the text. First examining the eschatology and second the gender roles as we move toward the conclusion that Thecla, having received God's undeniable blessing, transcends gender to go on to fulfill the role as a disciple of Christ.

## **IV. The Eschatology within the *Acts of Paul and Thecla***

### **A. The Baptism**

The eschatological message represents the typical two-fold eschatology in Paul's teachings, along with reflecting the changing notions in the second and third century around the urgency of Christ's return. As we heard Ehrman explain earlier, we can detect the lines delineating this time from the next shifting from the vertical position to the horizontal, delineating

this world from God's kingdom. In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* the term "Day of Judgment" is used (III, 6 and IV, 13). This term leads to some ambiguity if the Day of Judgment is a universal experience, or if it is an individual's experience upon death. What is clear in the Thecla narrative is that the eschatology, the warning of the end times and the second coming of the Messiah and the connections to Paul's already/not yet eschatology, are tools for describing God's power. This power of God will save people now and in the world to come. The Paul of *Acts of Paul* explains during his first trial in Iconium that God "sent me to wrest them from corruption, impurity, every desire and death, so that they might not longer sin" (III, 17). Here Paul is describing a realized eschatology where people are saved now. Later in the text the daughter of Tryphaena, Falconilla, is promised eternity (IV, 4), a clear example of a delay in salvation. Chastity also plays a significant role as a means of withdrawing from the world and corruption in the Thecla narrative. In the story chastity is used as a symbol of spiritual purity, the listeners would have understood the chastity of a female to be intrinsically linked to her family's honor, and the sacrifices and trials that Thecla undergoes to maintain her sexual purity is a symbol of her commitment as slave of God to her divine patron, which is similar to both Paul and Jesus who also based their claims on divine patronage and were operating outside the familial kinship structure in an alternative fictive kinship group. In that dyadic culture, Thecla, like Paul and Jesus, was vulnerable to criticism for being outside the kinship structure.

But Thecla's dilemma was far more complicated on account of her gender, since women did not normally lay claim to public space the way Thecla tries to do in the narrative, making her chastity all the more central to the narrative. Thecla's chastity also keeps her pure for her baptism, where her chastity and the eschatology intersect:

On lâcha alors de nombreuses bêtes fauves, pendant que, debout, Thècle étendait les mains et priait. Lorsqu'elle eut fini sa prière, elle se retourna, vit une grande fosse pleine d'eau et dit: "C'est maintenant le moment de recevoir le bain." Et elle s'y jeta en disant: "Au nom de Jésus-Christ, je suis baptisée à mon dernier jour." Voyant cela, les femmes

et tout le peuple gémissent en disant: "Ne te jette pas toi-même dans l'eau!" C'était au point que même le gouverneur pleurait à l'idée que les phoques allaient dévorer tant de beauté. Elle s'était donc jetée dans l'eau au nom de Jésus-Christ; mais les phoques, voyant l'éclat flamboyant d'un éclair, remontèrent à la surface, morts. Et un nuage de feu s'étendit autour de Thècle, de sorte que les bêtes ne la touchèrent pas et que sa nudité échappa aux regards.<sup>79</sup>

Then they released numerous wild beasts, while Thecla, standing, stretched out her hands and prayed. When she had finished her prayer, she turned, saw a big pit full of water and said, "Now is the moment to receive the bath." And she threw herself in, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I am baptized on my last day." Seeing this, the women and all the people cried out by saying: "Don't throw yourself into the water!" It was then that even the governor shed tears at the idea that the seals were going to devour such beauty. She then threw herself into the water in the name of Jesus Christ, but the seals, seeing the sudden flash of lightning, floated to the surface, dead. And a cloud of fire spread around Thecla so that the beasts did not touch her and her nakedness escaped their notice. (IV, 9)

First, she baptizes herself, by throwing herself into the pool of water, saying, "Now is the moment to receive the bath" (IV, 9). Thecla casts herself into a pool of water in the arena, saying "In the name of Jesus Christ I am baptized on my last day" (IV,9a). The "last day" that Thecla refers to here is her own. She desperately wants to depart this world baptized, otherwise she will be like Queen Tryphaena's daughter, trapped in a between world. She has remained virginal and true to this point. Her virginal body is a reflection of the purity of her spirit, which has not wavered in its devotion to God. It is interesting that Thecla has never said God would save her from the beasts, she seems quite certain she is going to die, and she wants to be baptized before that happens. And so she receives the bath.

The second baptism is far more interesting and less straightforward. God baptizes her with a pillar of smoke and fire that obscures' the observer's view: "And there was a cloud of fire around her, so that neither the beasts could touch her, nor could they see her naked" (IV,9b). Welborn notes in his notes on First Corinthians that "Paul typologically constructs Israel's

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<sup>79</sup> Rordorf, ÉAC, 1139-40.

Exodus experience as prefiguring Christian baptism,<sup>80</sup> so it is not a surprise that authors using Paul's teachings would create an allusion to the pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus 13:21-22. The smoke and fire is not only a sign of God's presence,<sup>81</sup> but also shows a transitional moment for Thecla. She survives this trial and is baptized into the body of Christ. The point is made twice that Thecla is baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" (*APTh* IV,9) perhaps a reference to the story in Acts 19:1-7 surrounding Paul:

Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.' Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them...

Acts 19:1-7 (Oxford NRSV 2010)

Obviously Thecla is not experiencing a "baptism of repentance" because she has taken such pains to "keep the flesh pure" and therefore has nothing to repent of. Thecla's baptism is the end of her trials. It also seems to strongly represent a realized eschatology because she is saved in the moment, symbolized by the death of the killer seals and the disorientated animals, and a preparation for the *parousia* whereby she received "the only way of salvation and the substance of deathless life" (*APTh* IV, 12) as Thecla herself describes it to the governor when explaining who she is and why she was able to survive the trials of the arena.

There may also be an allusion to 1 Cor 1:12-13 in Thecla's baptism and its direct relationship to God. In that letter Paul writes: "What I mean is that each of you says. 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been

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<sup>80</sup> Welborn, "1 Cor Notes," 2013.

<sup>81</sup> Stephen Davis, "A Pauline Defense of Women's right to Baptize? Intertextuality and Apostolic Authority in the Acts of Paul." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press 2000) 456-7.

divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (NRSV 2010). This is significant in Thecla studies, because, as Dunn explains, it may be that “baptism...was thought to form some kind of mystical bond between baptized and baptizer.”<sup>82</sup> This bond would only underscore the idea that the baptism in the story of Thecla is a display of Thecla’s direct connection to God. Recalling Paul’s already/not yet theology, this is not a perfect union with God, rather it is a foretaste to what is to come. The same allusion is drawn with clothing when Thecla is just out of the arena:

À ces paroles, le gouverneur ordonna qu’on apporte des vêtements et dit: “Revêts ces habits, Thècle.” Mais elle dit: “Celui qui m’a revêtu quand j’étais nue au milieu des bêtes fauves, celui-là, au jour du jugement, me revêtira du salut.”<sup>83</sup>

At these words, the governor ordered that the clothing be brought and said, “Put on these garments, Thecla!” But she said, “The one who clothed me when I was naked in the midst of the wild beasts, that one, on the Day of Judgment, will clothe me for salvation.” (IV, 13)

The cloud of fire and the clothing after the arena both represent the same thing: what is happening now is just a shadow of what will happen in the end times. Baptism is presented here as a symbol of the way all will be judged in the future. Additionally, in terms of gender the already/not yet eschatology is symbolized with the obscuring of her naked body and therefore the obfuscation of Thecla’s gender, which starts now, and will be completed at the second coming or in the afterlife. Now that she has been baptized, dramatically, in the name of Jesus Christ, Thecla is protected by God. Thecla is also no longer held to a gender role. She is now a servant of God, and the governor grants her freedom (IV, 13), just as she is now granted some social freedoms, albeit still within strict ethical guidelines.

The baptism is certainly the culmination of the eschatology in the story, but it is not the only example of the end times and afterlife in the Thecla narrative. As with most of the themes

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<sup>82</sup> Dunn, *The Theology*, 449.

<sup>83</sup> Rordorf, *ÉAC*, 1141.



within the story, we can find a connection to the canonical Paul but there are variations on the theme. By examining the eschatology we find evidence of the second-century shift in focus toward a more remote *parousia*, in contrast to Paul's letters. There is evidence of a movement toward the idea of an afterlife, most especially with the example of Queen Tryphaena's daughter. What follows is a survey of the eschatology throughout the story.

## ***B. Further Examples of Eschatology in the Acts of Paul and Thecla***

Appendix B is a grid of most of the references to an endtime or Day of Judgment throughout the story of Thecla illustrating several points. One, the action is moving toward Thecla as the primary agent. The grid is in chronological order of the story. By the end of the story we see that Thecla has been saved and has a message about being saved. She stands very much alone. Additionally, there is a constant switching between being saved now, an earthly experience, and being saved spiritually, an example of the pervasive "consistent switching out" observed by Esch-Wermeling.<sup>84</sup> The final example on the grid is from Queen Tryphaena who embraces Thecla after she is released from the arena and says "Now I believe that the dead are raised. Now I believe that my child lives. Come inside my child, into my house, and I will transfer all my property to you" (IV,14). It is clear that Thecla's social position is saved by being safely embedded into the Queen's household and with the transfer of goods. This is a direct result of Falconilla, the daughter, being saved. Thecla has brokered a change in Falconilla's status in eternity. Thecla's acceptance as God's agent is so complete that when she is saved, so is the person, in this case Queen Tryphaena's daughter, whom she replaced in the

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<sup>84</sup> Esch-Wermeling, *Paulusschülerin*, 64 (reference note #24 above).

household. Thecla receives the status of an embedded person from both God and Tryphaena for her spiritual work. Tryphaena's protection and prosperity are a dim reflection here on earth of God's gifts in heaven, just like the clothing that was brought to Thecla at the end of the arena scene.

Lastly, from the Eschatology grid (Appendix B), we can examine how many references to "the end" there are in the story and what we can observe from a quick overview. There are thirteen different references to death, an end time, or a Day of Judgment. And the idea of eschatology moves with the rest of the story from an intimate inside setting to a public event, just as the action moves from a window in a house overlooking a neighbor (III,7-10) , to a community spectacle at the arena (IV,7-11). The salvation and eschatology start with Thecla's chastity and end with her public teaching and itinerant movement. The rhetorical and spiritual movement is from passive lessons and an idealization of Paul in a house in Iconium, to an internalized spiritual understanding as Thecla engages the world through her new choices in a way that is respectful of Paul, but also independent of him.

It is clear from our examination of the Pastoral Epistles and the quote from Tertullian that there was some tension in the second century around women's role in the church. The Pastor differentiates between men and women in the eschatology that it supports, encouraging women to be saved through childbearing/childrearing. What is most fascinating about the eschatology presented in *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is that it is not gender specific. There is an emphasis on gender in the story, and yet it does not extend to different methods of salvation for the different genders. The gender and eschatology are connected in the story of Thecla, but not in a way that separates men and women. Quite the opposite, the treatment of gender is moving toward the conclusion that in certain spiritual states, there are no gender distinctions. Just as at the *parousia* the judgment will be equally shared, and as in paradise (or Eden) before, men and

women become a type of non-gendered spiritual being. In the next section the topic of gender will be explored. There are certainly gender differences acknowledged in the Thecla narrative, although these differences do not follow the expected social roles typical of the second century.

## **V. Gender roles in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla***

### **A. Observations**

In the analysis thus far we have seen how gender plays a role in the social emphasis on honor and shame. Noting how women would have been expected to observe the social norms and have proper shame, whereas men were responsible for acquiring honor for the family and community. In the Pastoral Epistles gender differentiates how salvation and community membership apply. Men and women are not equal members of the community, in that women are forbidden to lead or teach, and even from speaking or asking questions publicly. Because of these strong statements and social conditions around gender Paul's writings and the patron-client system are all the more noteworthy. Men and women both acted equally within the patron-client system, and gender did not determine one's role in the system, rather access to goods and services was the primary feature of the system. Tryphaena could take on a client, regardless of her gender, and Paul could have female patrons. The other example we have looked at of men and women having equal standing has been in the letters of Paul: his teachings about chastity applies equally to both genders, and his soteriology does not vary depending on gender. Paul certainly believed there were differences between men and women, but, in terms of salvation, eschatology, and ethics he does not outline different codes based on gender, in contrast to the Pastoral Epistles, where the path to salvation is quite different. In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* we know that gender is pivotal. Stevan Davies writes "the strong emphasis in the [AAA] on sexually continent lifestyle means that those who compiled the Acts

were acutely aware of human gender.”<sup>85</sup> It is not just the focus on chastity that highlights sexuality; there are sexual images throughout the story: Thecla is betrothed when we first meet her and her devotion to Paul is interpreted as a seduction, not without reason after “Thecla rolled herself on the ground to the place where Paul, seated in prison, had taught” (III,20); Thecla’s offer to cut her hair is linked to her gender (III,25); the assault by Alexander at the city gates was sexually driven (IV,1); in the arena there are several references to gender and sexuality, including a female lion who defends Thecla to the death and bulls that are prodded with “flaming hot iron under their genitals” (IV, 8-10). Noteworthy is that gender is highlighted, and the women throughout the story are presented as having more control over their sexuality than the men. Control was a masculine trait in antiquity, so this is another aspect of the switching out and transvaluing that we see throughout the story.<sup>86</sup>

Some scholars, including Bassler, observe that early Christian females may have believed they were becoming more male by entering into “the Body of Christ,”<sup>87</sup> speculating on the notion of gender identity and baptism. In the context of Gal 3:28, “there is no male and female,” Bassler notes: “passages once read as evidence of the egalitarian ethos of the early church can just as easily be read as evidence that the self-definition of women who experienced the indwelling presence of Christ was shifted toward the male end of the spectrum.”<sup>88</sup> This is supported in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in the final paragraphs when Thecla dresses as a man to set off to meet Paul in Myra (IV,15).

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<sup>85</sup> Davies, *Revolt*, 51.

<sup>86</sup> Streete explains (*Redeemed*, 75) “...women’s sexual restraint was seen as their gender’s *sōphrosynē*, self-control, which was also one of the cardinal virtues for men, the highest task of the *psychē*, itself characterized as male.”

<sup>87</sup> Bassler, *Navigating* 45-46. Also see Helen Rhee (*Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* [London: Routledge, 2005] 137), who writes: “The firmly polarized male and female distinctions pointed to the impenetrable gulf between men and women. Conversely, the model of a continuum running between opposite poles of masculinity and femininity, according to one’s level of metaphysical perfection (independent from biological sex), indicated a certain fluidity and blurring between the two.”

<sup>88</sup> Bassler, *Navigating*, 45-6.

Beyond the idea of a women becoming more masculine, there is another possible explanation of what people may have believed was the spiritual result of baptism: androgyny. The myth of the primal androgyny may at first seem more remote than a traditional western understanding of gender. The theory has a more theological emphasis in contrast to the social and cultural alternative of the description of masculine and feminine on a spectrum. Because of theological connection to gender, baptism, eschatology, and salvation it is worth exploring in the context of Thecla.

## **B. *Myth of the Primal Androgyny***

When analyzing the myth of the primal androgyny it is important to begin with Galatians, review what we have discussed about Thecla's baptism, and finally look at what scholars have written on the subject. Scholars discuss Gal 3:28 in association with the Thecla narrative for several reasons.<sup>89</sup> Galatians 3:28 is thought to be part of the early Christian baptismal formula in the Pauline tradition. "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-8 Oxford NRSV). Because of the importance of baptism, with Paul's refusal to baptize Thecla at the end of the Iconium story (III, 25), and then Thecla's baptism in the arena in the Antioch story (IV, 9), the Galatians' passage (as well as other Pauline texts and ideas) is thought to have been known to the authors of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. The phrase "male and female" is often connected to Genesis 1:27, "So God created Humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Oxford NRSV). Boyarin explains: "The myth of a primal androgyny, a pre-lapsarian state before difference, was very widely spread in late antiquity, particularly

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<sup>89</sup> Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 205-24. M. MacDonald 236-244.

among Platonists in the Jewish (and then Christian) traditions.”<sup>90</sup> It is important for us to keep in mind that this would not have been an obscure reference for the original listener. For us today the connection may seem a bit stretched (see diagram in App C), but the correlation between baptism and androgyny may have been a standard part of ancient thinking, as Boyarin notes above.

The primal androgyny is a reference to the human being before there was an Adam and an Eve, a belief that God created human without distinction between male and female, which associates a non-gendered state in paradise, and God’s original vision of humanity. Thecla’s chastity would have been an essential first step toward this non-gendered state, Boyarin goes on to explain:

The best representation, however, of an androgynous status for Christian celibate women in late antiquity is the story of Thekla... This apocryphal female companion to Paul refuses to marry, cuts her hair short like that of a man, dresses in men’s clothing, and accompanies Paul on his apostolic missions [sic] ...Insofar as the myth of the primal, spiritual androgyne is the vital force for all of these representations, androgynous status is always dependent on a notion of universal spiritual self which is above the differences of the body, and its attainment entails necessarily one or the other of the practices of renouncing the body: ecstasy or virginity or physical death.<sup>91</sup>

There are several reasons I find the myth of the primal androgyny credible in the context of the Thecla narrative. First, the men are not well represented in the story. The argument that Thecla is becoming more masculine, as an ideal, through baptism, can not be supported within the text. Masculinity and the men in the narrative are consistently criticized. Thecla’s betrothed, Thamyris, is not superior to the early Christian message that Paul brings to Iconium, the male devotees to Paul are not loyal to him at all, Alexander is publicly shamed at the gates of Antioch and Paul questions Thecla’s intentions, abandons her at the gate, and is first suspicious when

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<sup>90</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 19.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid 198.

seeing her at the end of the story, before ultimately accepting her ministry ex post facto, that is, only after it has been affirmed by virtually everyone else in the narrative: the governor, the women of the polis, and, above all, God. Had the story's authors wanted Thecla to become more masculine than masculinity would have been presented as more desirable or represented more positively. Not specifically addressing *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, but rather the ethos of the times, Bassler argues that "it is now plausibly claimed that the original unity was not regarded as asexual or bisexual, but rather as masculine. Thus the elimination of sexual differentiation would not promote a doctrine of sexual equality of men and women. It would mean that the feminine was swallowed up by the masculine, the weaker by the stronger."<sup>92</sup> I reject this reasoning as it applies to the Thecla narrative because of the transvaluing that is consistent throughout the work. At no point during Thecla's trials do we have an example of an earthly or social power overcoming or engulfing a weaker entity successfully. In each instance, the stronger is overcome through divine intervention. In the case of Thecla transcendence and God's divine patronage overcome all social structures, many of them very masculine, for example, the paterfamilias of the household, and the social freedom of male leaders to take an unembedded female for themselves.

Thecla is transcending a gender identity, not trading one for another. The original listeners would have understood her to be in a weakened and vulnerable position, which a man would not have necessarily been in. But rather than making Thecla more male, she transcends gender and becomes a model for a "universal spiritual" state. Her identity is male and female, transcending gender to a fluid state defined as a "servant of God."

Thecla overcomes obstacles from one stage of the story to the next; from city to city and within the story with trial after trial in the arena. With gender being such a powerful theme

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<sup>92</sup> Bassler, "*Limits*," 125.

throughout the entire saga, it stands to reason she also transcends gender, as an obstacle to her pursuing her Christian apostolic identity. Thecla embedded into God's honorable patronage, to safety, and to an "original, divine, androgynous image"<sup>93</sup> because God is her ultimate patron, and protector.

Additionally, her gender is a reflection of an already/not yet eschatology. Contrasting strongly with the Pastor, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* suggests that eschatological experience will not vary depending on gender. The Day of Judgment and a spiritual union with Christ, the narrative is postulating, will involve a transcendence of our humanity, including gender and gender roles. A fuller acceptance of Paul's already/not yet eschatology over the realized eschatology of the Pastoral Epistles supports moving away from gender roles in the eschaton, rather than emphasizing them all the more by compelling women to seek salvation through childbearing/rearing. There is mystery in traditional Pauline eschatology, and the Thecla narrative moves its central character into the tension of ambiguity of the unknown. As Thecla shifts away from a strong gender identity she becomes a stronger symbol of the baptized Christian who awaits the Day of Judgment; upholding a strong moral standard, still very much in the world, and yet separate from its social demands.

The final example of the gender bending is the dual roles of God and Tryphaena as Thecla's patrons. Tryphaena's only child is deceased and declared risen, she protects Thecla and embeds her in her household, and Tryphaena gives her provisions for her travels. She is the Sophia of the narrative so to speak, the female motherly reflection of God the father, reflecting the patron role of God. The patron role of Tryphaena also uplifts the feminine qualities of the epic. Her role as Thecla's patron, and then Paul's at the very end of the story does not

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<sup>93</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 205.



diminish her feminine attributes, rather it further reinforces the suggestion that there is a spiritual level where one is no longer viewed as male or female.

## **VI. Conclusion**

### ***A. Review of Theology-Christology and Influences***

At the end of the narrative Thecla prays in Iconium where her journey began:

“Ô notre Dieu, Dieu de cette maison où la lumière a brillé pour moi, Christ Jésus, Fils de Dieu, mon secours dans la prison, mon secours devant les gouverneurs, mon secours dans le feu, mon secours parmi les bêtes, tu es, toi, le Dieu à qui appartient la gloire pour les siècles. Amen.”<sup>94</sup>

“O, our God, God of this house where the Light shined for me, Christ Jesus, Son of God, my relief in prison, my relief before governors, my relief in the fire, my relief among the beasts, you are the God to whom belong the glory forever, Amen.” (IV, 17)

This is a clue for the audience that there can be no doubt that Christ has been present throughout the trials of Thecla. Christ is emphasized during the baptism in the arena, where Thecla twice says “in the name of Jesus Christ” (IV, 9), and again when Thecla sees Christ and makes the sign of the cross before climbing onto the pyre in Iconium (III, 21-22). Thecla’s salvation and divine patronage has a high Christology. It is Christ who makes it even possible for Thecla to be embedded with God; it is Christ who makes it even possible for Thecla to be saved and enlightened. Generally speaking the theology is typically Christian. The Christology is high, the already/not yet eschatology conforms to Paul’s teachings, and God is the ultimate power. The theological message does not deviate from Christianity. What makes the Thecla narrative so fascinating is that Thecla, a woman, articulates and illustrates the theology, otherwise it is normative.

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<sup>94</sup> Rordorf, ÉAC, 1142.

## ***B. Restatement of Thesis***

This work has been a close reading of the text of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* read through the lens of three influences: the cultural milieu of second-century Greco-Roman society, the theological influence of Paul's extant letter and the Pauline tradition in the Pastoral Epistles, and, lastly, the myth of the primal androgyny. The second-century audience would have understood Thecla to be God's client. The miraculous baptism, with God being the only possible baptizer, is a scene portraying a direct relationship between Thecla and God. The culture that the narrative was conceived in is one defined by the maintenance of one's honor, and in the case of women, the family's honor and criss-crossed with patron-client relationships that granted people of lower status access to the goods of the elite. For the ancient audience the two rescues of Thecla would have been a symbol of patronage, and even more radically, honor. *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* is a story full of opposites; chastity and sex, male and female, inside and outside, political power and spiritual power, client and patron. The list is long. Obviously duality plays a part in the rhetorical nature of the story. Beginning with this broad observation, and locating ourselves firmly in the text, next we see that within the opposites there is an exchange; usually the typically weaker of the two becomes the more commanding. This is subtly exemplified in Thecla's silence at the beginning of the story having more power than the words of her mother and betrothed (III,10), and being supplanted at the end of the story with Thecla declaring herself a servant of God, teaching, and praying (IV,12,14,17). Esch-Wermeling refers to this consistent interchange as "angetäuschte Einstimmigkeit."<sup>95</sup> We keep our eyes on these value exchanges between the exterior social status given to a person or group and the interior spiritual power that eventually takes its rightful position. Significantly, the action in the

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<sup>95</sup> Esch-Wermeling 64.

narrative moves from passive lessons and an idealization of Paul early in the Iconium chapter to an internalized spiritual understanding as Thecla engages the world through new choices.

By the end of the narrative, Thecla's gender is ambiguous. Scholars who argue that she becomes male ignore that the text does not actually state that she cuts her hair (III,25); and that she dresses in male garb to go in public (IV,15) concerns the reality of the culture that was not accustomed to females in the public sphere. And so that important text does not indicate she has become male. Thecla undergoes a change, and it starts with the idea of continence, and the promise that a practice of radical chastity will bring one to a salvific God, and she is saved in the present moment -- a realized eschatology -- and yet she has faith that she will be saved in the future, referred to as the *Day of his Son* (III, 6) early in the text and as *Day of Judgment* (IV, 13). She transcends her gender, first with chastity, and then by becoming God's client.

Thecla's continence alone did not grant her security or social freedom. She needed God's acceptance and protection to receive those gifts and an acknowledgement of honor from the community. Her chastity did not protect her at the city gates of Antioch. She could not even enter the city except as a prisoner! Thecla's chastity is significant, but alone it did not grant her any freedom. She needed the full approval of God, witnessed by the early listeners as God taking her into a patron-client relationship, to give her the security and embedded identity Thecla needed to survive.

Thecla's freedom from a defined gender role at the end of the story may be an interpretation of the type of freedom early Christians were expecting based on the baptismal formula referred to in Galatians 3:28 "there is no male and female," which may also be referred to in 1 Cor 11:11.<sup>96</sup> There is a blurring of sexual identity in the story of Thecla, just as there is a

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<sup>96</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza states (*In memory*, 229) "the best translation of v.11, then, would be, 'In the Lord woman is not different from man nor man from women.' In other words, as Christians women and men are equal."

blurring between what is happening now and what will happen on the Day of Judgment. Particularly after her baptism Thecla is less confined to social roles, able to teach, and travels dressed as a man (IV, 15-18) and is not compelled to bear and raise children for her salvation, in direct contrast to 1 Tim 2:11-15. Some scholars see her gender as shifting from a strictly female identity to a more masculine gender identity. These scholars point to fluid social perspective of gender where people in the ancient world moved up and down a masculine-feminine spectrum, with the goal of becoming more masculine because of its cultural preference. Another theory is that Thecla was becoming more androgynous, first through her virginity, and then a more fully realized state of androgyny after her baptism, where her gender identity becomes meaningless and her role as “servant of God” takes the foreground. I think the latter conclusion is better supported by the text, because the overall theology throughout the story draws on Paul’s already/not yet eschatology and the allusion to Genesis 1:27 in Galatians 3:28 hints at cultural knowledge of the myth of the primal androgyny.

One of the rhetorical aims of the Thecla narrative was to explain and appropriate the Pauline legacy in the second-century world in a way that affirms female ministry as divinely sanctioned despite disapproval from men and women both inside and outside the Christian family. By the end of the Thecla saga she is standing before the male leaders of the community in Antioch teaching them about the power of God, which is in sharp contrast to the picture painted in First Timothy of the ideal young women taking her rightful and silent place at the side of her husband. As unusual as Thecla’s behavior was for a woman in her time, it is within the realm of possibility that she was accepted and revered as a deeply Christian, somewhat androgynous, client of the living God. By the end of the story I argue that Thecla was not seen as entirely female, or even as having a gender at all, and therefore was able to teach and

baptize. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* guides the audience rhetorically to understand that there is a spiritual location in Christianity where gender roles are obsolete.

### ***C. Feminist Appropriation Today: The World in Front of the Text***

Obviously there are some complications appropriating the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* with a feminist perspective. Inherent in the story is to some extent a denying of gender and sexuality; Thecla becomes less female, and relinquishes her sexuality in pursuit of a Christian ideal. Additionally, the Thecla narrative comes from a culture that was hetero-normative insofar as it presupposed that women would be married and bear children. Even though Thecla rejected that one option, today women have more than celibacy as an alternative to traditional roles of submission to a male head of household. To expect more from the ancient culture is what Joann Conn calls “the fallacy of ‘presentism’” whereby the people of the past are blamed for not seeing a problem the same way that we define it with our contemporary perspective.<sup>97</sup> When closely reading the text it is difficult to defend the notion that the Thecla narrative represents a proto-feminist community where women were asserting their equal rights. But what remains obvious, despite the difficulties within the text, is that female membership and leadership with Christianity are at the center of the narrative.

By reclaiming the Thecla narrative, we reclaim a voice for women’s roles that transcend the rigid confines of the male paterfamilias, which expected women to be dutiful mothers. The notion that women are not fit to lead, teach, or baptize –to be absent from the public

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<sup>97</sup> Joann Wolski Conn, “Toward Spiritual Maturity,” *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader* Ed. Kenneth Collins (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) 361.

sphere—simply based on their gender is patently absurd. Churches that do not allow women to have apostolic roles in leadership are losing credibility by embracing ideas enshrined in the Pastoral Epistles, which ironically, were first brought into Christianity to fit into Greco-Roman culture,<sup>98</sup> making paradoxical the argument that a change to allow women into leadership is submission to social pressure. Also, using the teachings from the Pastoral Epistles and its own tradition to explain why a gender-biased tradition continues is an example of being too self-referential. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* challenges us to go out of the church and find where it is that God is holding up our future leaders.

Thecla does not hear the “the instruction and interpretation concerning the birth and the resurrection of the Beloved” (III,1) within a church, rather she is next door, on the outside of a house church. As Thecla grows in her faith; visiting Paul in Prison (III, 18-19), and meeting him in a tomb (III, 24-5), none of her instruction happens within the walls of a church or house church. She is what we would call today “a consummate outsider.” Thecla’s full acceptance by God happens in an arena, and is fully acknowledged by the highest secular authority, the governor (IV,13), before she is accepted by Paul (IV, 16). Thecla describing herself as a “slave to the *living* God” is a call to find God among the living, not encased in teachings that exclude. This is a story of women asking the same question Paul asks in Romans 8:31 “If God is for us, who is against us?”

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<sup>98</sup> Peter Brown begins his book (*The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1988] 5-17) outlining the extent of the social pressure to marry and have children using a revised version of *APTh* as his starting point. In this version Thecla’s betrothed gives a well prepared speech about the dangers of spreading a doctrine that encourages chastity and discourages marriage.

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## **Appendix A – Chapters 3 and 4 of the *The Acts of Paul: The Acts of Paul and Thecla***

**Translation of the Thecla narrative (the “Acts of Paul and Thecla”) from the critical French translation in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, “Actes de Paul,” edited by Willy Rordorf, with Pierre Cherix and Rudolphe Kasser (Gallimard, 1997) pp. 1129-1142. Translation by Vincent Skemp, Ph.D.**

The footnotes to the translation below are Skemp’s unless otherwise indicated. From time to time I refer to the Greek text in Lipsius and Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha* (Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1891-1903; Reprint, Hildensheim: G. Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1959). This Greek text is reproduced by Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling in her *Thekla—Paulusschülerin wider Willen? Strategien der Leserlenkung in den Theklaakten* (2008) pp. 311-325. Jeremy Barrier’s Thecla commentary, *A Critical Introduction and Commentary on the “Acts of Paul and Thecla”* (2008, WUNT 2009), also largely works from the Lipsius edition with emendations based on *ÉAC*.<sup>99</sup>

There are fourteen chapters in the “Acts of Paul”; the Thecla narrative comprises chapters 3-4.<sup>100</sup> *ÉAC* French translation is in preparation for the critical edition to appear soon in CChrSA (Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum).

### **III. Iconium.**

(1) But, as Paul went up to Iconium, after his escape from Antioch, Demas and Hermogenes the blacksmith<sup>101</sup> became his traveling companions. They were full of hypocrisy and flattered Paul, as if they loved him. But Paul, looking only at the goodness of Christ, did them no harm, rather, he loved them very much, so that to them all the words of the Lord are pleasant, as are those [words] of the instruction and interpretation concerning the birth and the resurrection of the Beloved. And he explained to them word by word the wonders of Christ, as that had been revealed to him:<sup>102</sup> that it is from Mary and from David’s seed<sup>103</sup> that the Christ was born.

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<sup>99</sup> Barrier’s English translation, therefore, is often very different from Rordorf’s French translation in *ÉAC*. One must be cautious with comments and translations from scholars such as Barrier and Esch-Wermeling working largely from the Lipsius edition.

<sup>100</sup> The enumeration (chapters or acts) follows *ÉAC*. The three editors were responsible for different parts of the Acts of Paul: Willy Rordorf (Greek), Pierre Cherix (Coptic) and Rudolphe Kasser (Coptic of Bodmer XLIX) “Actes de Paul”, in François Bovon and Pierre Geoltrain, eds., *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Saint Herblain: Gallimard, 1997). *ÉAC* provides the old Lipsius numbers in brackets next to the new enumeration system.

<sup>101</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note: “The same names appear in the Pastoral Epistles (Demas in Col 4:14; Philem 24; 2 Tim 4:10; Hermogenes in 2 Tim 1:15; a blacksmith Alexander in 2 Tim 4:14).

<sup>102</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note: See *Acts of Paul* IX,6; Gal 1:12.

<sup>103</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note: See Rom 1:3-4; *Acts of Paul* X,4-5.

**(2)** A man named Onesiphoros,<sup>104</sup> having heard that Paul was going to arrive in Iconium, left with his sons Semaia and Zenon, as well as with his wife Lectra, to meet Paul in order to receive him at their home. Titus, in fact, had described Paul's outward appearance; but he did not know him physically, only spiritually.

**(3)** He walked up to the royal route that leads to Lystra and he rested there waiting for Paul. He observed the people who were arriving based on Titus' description [of Paul]. Now, he saw Paul coming, a man of small size, bald head, bow-legged, sturdy, with eyebrows joined, with the nose slightly hooked, full of grace, and he had the countenance of an angel.

**(4)** When he saw Onesiphoros, Paul smiled. And Onesiphoros said, "Hello, slave of the Blessed God!" And Paul responded, "May grace be with you and with your house!" But Demas and Hermogenes were jealous and displayed still more hypocrisy, so much that Demas said, "the rest of us belong to the Blessed God, yet you do not greet us in the same way?" Onesiphoros replied, "I do not see in you the fruit of righteousness, but if you are worth something, come, both of you, into my home, and rest yourselves!"

**(5)** When Paul had entered Onesiphoros' home, there was great joy, knees were bent, bread was broken, they received the word of God concerning chastity and the resurrection, Paul said:

Blessed are the pure of heart, because they will see God.

Blessed are those who chastely guard their flesh, because they will be temples of God.

Blessed are the chaste, because God will speak with them.

Blessed are those who have renounced this world, because they will please God.

Blessed are those who have women as if they did not have,<sup>105</sup> because they will be heirs of God.

Blessed are those who have awe of God, because they will be angels.

**(6)** Blessed are those who fear the words of God, because they will be consoled.<sup>106</sup>

Blessed are those who have received the wisdom of Jesus Christ, because they will be called children of the Most High.

Blessed are those who have maintained baptism, because they will find rest close to the Father and his beloved Son.

Blessed are those who have made room for the understanding of Christ, because they will be in the Light.

Blessed are those who, through love of God, have left behind the appearance of the world, because they will judge angels<sup>107</sup> and they will be taken up to the right of the Father.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note: See 2 Tim 4:19.

<sup>105</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note: See 1 Cor 7:29.

<sup>106</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note at *ils seront consolés*: See Matt 5:4.

<sup>107</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note at *ils jugeront les anges*: See 1 Cor 6:3.

<sup>108</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note here there is likely an allusion to the separation of sheep and goats in Matt 25:34.

Blessed are the merciful, because they will find mercy and they will not see the bitter Day of Judgment.

Blessed are the bodies of virgins,<sup>109</sup> because they will be pleasing to God; they will not lose the reward of their purity, because the word of the Father will become for them beneficial work on the day of his Son, and they will find rest for all eternity.

**(7)** While Paul spoke thus in the presence of the assembly in the house of Onesiphoros, Thecla, a virgin, whose mother was Theocleia, and who was betrothed to a man by the name of Thamyris, situated herself at the window of her house and listened in day and night to the word of God proclaimed by Paul coming from the window next door, concerning purity, faith in Jesus Christ and prayer; and she did not turn aside from the window, but at the height of joy, she was overcome by faith. Moreover, as she saw many women enter close to Paul, she desired that she also be considered worthy of being face to face with him and to listen to the word of Christ; but she had not yet seen Paul's features, but had only listened to his eloquence.

**(8)** However, since she would not leave the window her mother sent for Thamyris. He came full of joy thinking that he had already received the girl in marriage. Therefore, Thamyris said to Theocleia, "Where is my Thecla that I may see her?" And Theocleia responded to him: "I have to let you know something new, Thamyris. It's been in fact three days and three nights that Thecla hasn't left the window, neither to eat nor to drink; but her attention is fixed as on a rejoicing, she is so attached to a strange man who teaches deceitful, ambiguous and frivolous words that I was surprised to see the virgin's such great shame<sup>110</sup> troubled in a manner so painful.

**(9)** "Thamyris, this man has upset the city of the Iconians, and your Thecla also. In fact, all the women and young people go to him and he teaches them that they must believe in only one God and live in purity. By turns, my daughter also, immobilized by his words as a spider to the window, is under the control of a new desire and a strange passion: she is suspended by his words and has succumbed. But go to her and speak with her, for it is to you that she should be united."

**(10)** Thamyris approached Thecla, at the same time full of love for her and full of fear of her ecstasy,<sup>111</sup> and said, "Thecla, my betrothed, why do you remain seated thus? And what passion has sway over you that it makes you act so unusual? Turn yourself toward your Thamyris and

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<sup>109</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note that *vierges* "is not meant only for female ascetics but also male ascetics."

<sup>110</sup> Shame here is positive shame in the sense of modesty. The idea is that heretofore Thecla had an excellent sense of modesty, appropriate to a woman in her culture, but that her mother fears she is losing her proper sense of shame/modesty.

<sup>111</sup> Fr. *crainte devant*, lit "fear in front of." The sense is that she is deeply apprehensive and fearful of her ecstasy.

show shame!”<sup>112</sup> At his side, her mother also said the same thing: “Thecla, my child, why do you remain seated thus, looking below,<sup>113</sup> and scarcely responding, but dumbstruck?”<sup>114</sup> And everyone in the house wept copiously: Thamyris, because he had lost his woman; Theocleia, her child; and the young slaves, their mistress. Great was thus the disturbance and grief in the house. And in spite of all this, Thecla did not turn back, but maintained all her attention on the word of Paul.

**(11)** Then Thamyris, leaping up, went out into the street and began to observe those who were going in to [see] Paul and those who were leaving from there. And he saw two men who were violently quarreling, and he said to them: “Men, tell me who you are and who is this seducer who remains with you inside, who beguiles the sensibilities of young people and virgins, in order that they don’t marry but remain as they are? I promise to give you a lot of money if you tell me about him. For I am one of the leading men of the city.”

**(12)** And Demas and Hermogenes responded to him: “Who he is, we do not know, but he causes the young women and virgins to set aside the men by saying, ‘There will be no resurrection for you unless you remain chaste and do not sully the flesh’<sup>115</sup> but keep pure.”

**(13)** Thamyris said to them: “Come, men, let’s go to my home and rest there!” And they departed for a sumptuous meal, with much wine, a great display of opulence and a splendid table. And Thamyris, who loved Thecla and wanted to have her for his wife, made them drink. And during the meal Thamyris said: “Men, tell me what is his teaching, so that I too may know about it. For I am in great pain on account of Thecla, because she loves this stranger so much and I am deprived of marriage.”

**(14)** But Demas and Hermogenes spoke in unison:<sup>116</sup> “Thamyris, escort him to governor Castellius and accuse him of seducing the crowds by teaching Christian frivolity. In this way he will be put to death<sup>117</sup> and as for you, you will have Thecla for your wife. And we are teaching

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<sup>112</sup> The word for “shame” here has the sense of proper shame in Greco-Roman context. He demands that she return to the social expectations of a woman in that culture, which was to know her place and act with modesty. Proper shame meant she would obey the wishes of her betrothed, who is head of the house in which she is embedded.

<sup>113</sup> I’m not sure if *en bas* refers to “looking down” or “looking below.” The latter might be preferable since she is at a window and listening in. The former can have the sense in English of introspectively not responding, a sense that goes with the next clause.

<sup>114</sup> Fr. *frappe de stupeur*, lit. “enwrapped by stupor,” i.e., enwrapped in a stupor = overcome with amazement.

<sup>115</sup> Fr. *ne souillez pas la chair* can have the sense of “do not pollute the flesh.” The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at this phrase: “See Ap 14,4; this encratic affirmation comes from Paul’s enemies and hardens his point of view; the apostle of the *Acts of Paul* does not forbid marriage.” The future eschatology described here as Paul’s is therefore unreliable.

<sup>116</sup> Fr. *d’une seule bouche*, lit. “from a single mouth.”

<sup>117</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at this phrase: “The idea that the Christians are condemned on account of their name is anachronistic to the period of Paul. The author here alludes to a situation that is familiar to him.”

that this resurrection, which this man says is future, has already happened through the children that we have, and that we rise by acknowledging the true God.”<sup>118</sup>

**(15)** When he heard this, Thamyris was filled with jealousy and rage; at dawn he got up and went to the house of Onesiphoros in the company of the magistrates, functionaries, and a rather large crowd armed with sticks. He said to Paul, “You seduced the city of the Iconians and my betrothed, so that she no longer wants to marry me. We are going in front of governor Castellius!” And the entire crowd said: “Take away the magician,<sup>119</sup> for he has seduced all our women!”

**(16)** And Thamyris, standing before the tribunal, said with a loud voice: “Proconsul, we do not know from where this man comes, who hinders the virgins from marrying; he speaks before you because he teaches that.” But Demas and Hermogenes said to Thamyris: “Denounce him as Christian and he will perish immediately.” But the proconsul made his decision, addressed Paul and said to him, “Who are you and what do you teach? For this is not a small matter that they accuse you of.”

**(17)** And Paul raised his voice saying, “Since today I have to give an account of my teaching, listen, proconsul. The living God, the God of chastisement, the God who is self-sufficient but who desires the salvation of humans, sent me to wrest them from corruption, impurity, every desire and death, so that they might not longer sin; it is because God sent his own Son that I proclaim and I teach that men have in him their hope, in him who alone had pity on the world gone astray, so that men no longer fall under the blow of judgment, but who receive faith and fear of God, knowledge of sanctity and love of truth. If then I teach that which has been revealed to me by God, in what way am I wrong, proconsul?” After having heard these words, the proconsul ordered that Paul be chained and brought to prison, until he had the time to understand more thoroughly.<sup>120</sup>

**(18)** But Thecla, at night, removed her bracelets and gave them to the doorkeeper; the latter opened the door for her, and she went toward the prison. She gave the prison guard a silver mirror and she entered near Paul. She sat at his feet and listened to the wonders of God. And

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<sup>118</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at this phrase: “Here we see that Demas and Hermogenes, who are mentioned several times (III,1, IV,12 and ff) adhere to a teaching dear to Gnostics—resurrection is not future and bodily but present and spiritual (see 2 Tim 2:18). The children about which they speak are without doubt the believers whom they have begotten spiritually. In this respect see *Acts of Thomas* 12....P.J. Lalleman, in *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla* (see bibliography), p. 134-39, thinks that it is a matter of an erroneous interpretation of the sadducean position.”

<sup>119</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at this word *le magicien*: “See III,20. The accusation of magic is frequent in the apocryphal Acts. See G. Poupon, ‘L’Accusation de magie dans les Actes apocryphes’ in F. Bovon et alii, *Les Actes apocryphes des apôtres*, cited in the bibliography, p. 71-93.

<sup>120</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at III,17: “Paul’s discourse reveals the divine plan and apostolic mission of Paul; see X,4; VIII,5-7.”



Paul had fear of nothing, but conducted himself with the assurance<sup>121</sup> of God. Her faith was growing in her, and she kissed his chains.

**(19)** While her family<sup>122</sup> was looking for Thecla, and Thamyris, believing her lost, ran into the street; one of the slaves, friend of the doorman, declared that she had gone out at night. Then they questioned the doorman, who told them that she had proclaimed, “I am going to the side of the stranger in prison.” They went, according to what the slave had taught them, and they found her so to speak prisoner with him in love. And going out from there, they brought the crowd and disclosed to the governor what had happened.

**(20)** He then ordered that Paul be brought before the tribunal. But Thecla rolled herself on the ground<sup>123</sup> to the place where Paul, seated in prison, had taught. And the governor ordered her also to be brought before the tribunal. Then she departed with joy in cheerfulness. When Paul was brought from the prison, the crowd shouted out stronger, “He is a magician, kill him!” However, the proconsul heard Paul with pleasure speak of his works; having taken counsel, he had Thecla called forth and said to her, “Why do you not marry Thamyris according to Iconian law?” But she remained there, her eyes fixed on Paul. Since she did not respond, Theocleia her mother exclaimed, “Burn this criminal,<sup>124</sup> burn this enemy of marriage in the middle of the theater so that all the women instructed by this man are terror-stricken!”

**(21)** The governor suffered strongly.<sup>125</sup> He had Paul flogged and banished from the city and he condemned Thecla to be burned. Immediately the governor rose and went to the theater. The entire crowd went out to this imposed spectacle. But just as a lamb in the desert looks all about to see the shepherd, so Thecla looked all about to see Paul. And while she examined the crowd, she saw the Lord seated, in the guise of Paul,<sup>126</sup> and she said, “Paul has come to observe me as if I were without endurance.” And she turned her eyes to him and stared at him; but he went up to heaven.

**(22)** However, the young people and young girls carried wood to burn Thecla. When she was introduced naked, the governor wept, and he admired the strength that was in her. The executioners erected the wood and ordered her to mount the pyre. She, en forming the image of

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<sup>121</sup> In an article Willy Rordorf notes that “*l’assurance de Dieu*” relates to Greek *parrhysi*, a. See his “Quelques jalons pour une interprétation symbolique des *Actes de Paul*” in *Early Christian Voices in Texts, Traditions, and Symbols* (David Warren et al., eds.; Biblical Interpretation 66; Brill, 2003) 251-66, here 260.

<sup>122</sup> Fr. *les siens*, lit. “her own.”

<sup>123</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at this phrase: “Strange passage. It seems to be a matter of ecstatic phenomenon.”

<sup>124</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) comment on the phrase *brûle cette criminelle*: “This reaction of Thecla’s own mother is shocking; but see Gen 38:24!” The editors’ comment shows a lack of awareness of how shocking Thecla’s behavior was in that honor-shame culture.

<sup>125</sup> This comment is reminiscent of the apologetics of Luke’s Gospel insofar as it seems to be an indication that the author is at pains to indicate Roman governor did not necessarily want to punish Paul and Thecla. The governor weeps in III,22 when Thecla is brought forth naked for the burning. The governor weeps again in IV,9 and in IV,10 is unenthusiastic about Alexander’s plans.

<sup>126</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *Le Seigneur ... les traits de Paul*: “see V,5; IX,20.”

the cross,<sup>127</sup> mounted the wood. They set the fire. But, although a high flame burned, the fire did not touch her. In fact, God had pity and aroused an underground noise, and, from above, a cloud filled with rain and hail spread its shadow; a huge amount of water poured out so that many of the men were put in danger and died, but the fire was extinguished and Thecla was saved.

**(23)**<sup>128</sup> Paul was fasting with Onesiphoros, his wife and children, in an open tomb on the road that goes from Iconium to Daphne. As they had spent several days in fasting, the children said to Paul: “We are hungry.” But they had nothing with which to buy bread;<sup>129</sup> in fact, Onesiphoros had abandoned the goods of the world and was following Paul with his entire family. Paul then lifted up his mantle and said, “Come, child, purchase some bread and bring it back!” While the child was purchasing, he saw Thecla, the neighbor; he was amazed and said, “Thecla, where are you going?” She responded, “I am looking for Paul, after having escaped the fire.” The child said, “Come. I will lead you to him, but he moans about your situation, and he prays and fasts for six days already.”

**(24)** When she arrived at the tomb she saw Paul who was on his knees and was praying by saying, “Holy Father, Jesus Christ, may fire not touch Thecla, but help her, for she is yours.” She, standing behind him, cried out and said, “Father, you who make heaven and earth, Father of your holy Child, I praise you<sup>130</sup> because you have saved me, so that I may see Paul.” And Paul got up, saw her, and said, “God, you who know the hearts, Father of Jesus Christ, I praise you for having so quickly granted my request and listened to me.”

**(25)** And there was inside the tomb great conveyance of affection.<sup>131</sup> Paul, Onesiphoros and all the others were joyful. They had five loaves of bread, vegetables, and water. And they were gladdened by the holy works of Christ. And Thecla said to Paul, “I am going to cut my hair and I will follow you wherever you go.”<sup>132</sup> But he responded to her, “The time is wicked and you are beautiful. And I fear that another trial, worse than the first, carries you away, and that you may not be able to endure it, but that in it you weaken.” And Thecla said: “Only give me the seal in

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<sup>127</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *formant l'image de la croix*: “either by extending the hands or by making the sign of the cross.” The translation indicates that the translators do not want to state emphatically that she is making the sign of the cross before mounting the pyre. It's not entirely clear what she did in forming the image of the cross.

<sup>128</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at III,23-25: “This scene invokes Easter.”

<sup>129</sup> Fr. *ils n'avaient pas de quoi acheter des pains*, can mean that they didn't have money to buy bread, that they didn't have enough to buy bread; however, in the Greco-Roman barter economy coin money was not necessarily the usual or only way to purchase, hence the translation, “nothing with which to buy bread,” which takes into account that they had with them in the tomb neither coin money nor anything to barter with.

<sup>130</sup> Gk *euvlogw*, “I bless.”

<sup>131</sup> Although we await the critical edition based on the original languages, the Gk reading, *avga,ph mega,lh*, “much agapic love,” likely indicates the type of affection not discernible in French.

<sup>132</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *je vais me faire couper les cheveux*: “By this gesture Thecla becomes a man.” Cf. 4:15, where Thecla dresses in the style of men.

Christ<sup>133</sup> and no trial will overtake me.” And Paul said to Thecla: “Be patient, and you will receive the water.”

#### IV. Pisidian Antioch.

(1) But at the moment when they were entering, a Syrian named Alexander—a citizen of high standing among the Antiochenes, very active in that city in the office<sup>134</sup> that he exercised—saw Thecla and fell in love with her. He strove to ensure Paul’s complacency with money and gifts. But Paul said, “I do not know this woman in the way that you say;<sup>135</sup> she does not belong to me.”<sup>136</sup> And the man, who had great power, embraced Thecla in the street. Now, she did not tolerate it, but she sought out Paul. She began to cry and say bitterly, “Do not do violence to the stranger! Do not do violence to the slave of God! I am among the leading women of the Iconians, and it is because I have refused to marry Thamyris that I was driven from that city.” Then taking hold of Alexander, she tore his mantle,<sup>137</sup> removed the wreath from his head and exposed him to public scorn.

(2) Then he, at the same time loving her and ashamed at what had happened to him, brought her to the governor. Since she had confessed to having done it, the latter condemned her to be thrown to the beasts. It happened that Alexander organized the animal games. The women of the city were seized with indignation and cried out before the tribunal: “Criminal judgment! Impious judgment!” Thecla asked the governor that she be able to remain pure until the moment when she would have to fight against the beasts. And she was confined to the care of a wealthy woman named Tryphaena, of royal family, whose daughter had died, and this woman was the consolation of Thecla.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *le sceau dans le Christ*: “that is, baptism; see XIV,6.”

<sup>134</sup> Fr. *la charge* may have the sense of “responsibility,” but a high office in the city seems implied. In IV,2 we learn that he organizes the arena sports where people are sent to battle beasts as entertainment. Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk 6, chap. 8.

<sup>135</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *je ne connais pas cette femme de la manière que tu dis*: “Paul purposely exposes Thecla for a new trial in order to give her an occasion of triumph. The traditional enumeration of the chapters of this episode are provided in italics in brackets.” The editors’ understanding of this sentence—that Paul is deliberately exposing her to a new trial—is possible but is neither explicit in the text nor the only way to understand this passage. The interpretation also presupposes that Paul is always a positive character in the narrative.

<sup>136</sup> Jeremy Barrier misconstrues this aspect of IV,1 in his dissertation when he makes it a matter of *either* Paul’s abandonment of Thecla *or* the motif of the ancient novel in which the lovers create a story to protect themselves (*A Critical Introduction*, 225-26; cf. published form in WUNT, Mohr Siebeck, 2009). The clause, *de la manière que tu dis*, “in the way that you say,” indicates that Paul is replying honestly to Alexander by stating that Thecla is not embedded within his house, whether as wife or concubine or relative, that he is not her kin, patron, or husband. Presupposed in the passage is how embeddedness operated in the Greco-Roman world. Paul’s response, though honest, puts Thecla at great risk by leaving her unprotected without kin or patron. It is closer to abandonment than the ancient novel motif because Paul does nothing to protect her from Alexander. Alexander sees Paul’s not claiming her as an invitation to do what he wants without repercussion.

<sup>137</sup> The French word *chlamyde* is a transliteration of the Greek *clamu,da*, “mantle,” which refers to a loose outer garment worn by men. It also could refer to a short mantle worn by Roman soldiers.

<sup>138</sup> The French translation indicates that Tryphaena was a solace to Thecla. It has sometimes been understood the other way around because the Greek texts is ambiguous, *kai. ei=cen eivj paramuqi,an*, so that it is unclear who consoled whom in that version. The critical French translation indicates that the editors think the best reading is that Tryphaena was Thecla’s solace in the time before she was about to enter the arena to be torn apart by wild beasts.

(3) When the parade of beasts began, Thecla was attacked by a ferocious lion,<sup>139</sup> and Queen Tryphaena followed her. But the lioness on which Thecla was mounted licked her feet, and the whole crowd was upset. The grounds of conviction listed on the inscription was this: “Sacrilege.”<sup>140</sup> The women with their children cried out, saying, “Impieties are committed in this city.”<sup>141</sup> And, after the parade, Tryphaena again took Thecla to her home. Her deceased daughter appeared to her in a dream, saying, “Mother, you will take Thecla, the stranger, the abandoned one, in my place, so that she may pray for me and I may be transferred to the abode of the righteous.”

(4) After the parade, Tryphaena then welcomed Thecla into her home. On the one hand, she was grieved because had to battle the beasts the next day; on the other hand, she loved her daughter Falconilla. And she said, “Thecla, my second child, behold,<sup>142</sup> pray for my daughter, so that she may live. It is in fact this that I have seen in a dream.” And Thecla without delay lifted up her voice and said, “God of the heavens, Son of the Most High, grant her, according to her wish, that her daughter Falconilla live for eternity!”<sup>143</sup> And having heard these things, Tryphaena grieved thinking of such beauty that was to be thrown to the beasts.

(5) When dawn arose, Alexander went to take Thecla—for he was the one who organized the animal games—and said to Tryphaena: “The governor is seated and the crowd clamors against us. Let me lead the condemned to the beasts.” But Tryphaena began to shout, so as to make Alexander flee, and to say, “Falconilla, this is a second mourning that falls on my house! And nobody will help me, neither child, since she died, nor parent, since I am a widow. God of Thecla, my child, help her!”

(6) Then the governor sent soldiers to take Thecla away. However, Tryphaena did not abandon her, but taking her herself by the hand, she lead her in saying, “My daughter Falconilla, I took her to the grave, and you, Thecla, I will take you to fight against the beasts.” Thecla then wept bitterly, groaned to the Lord, saying, “Lord, God in whom I believe, at whose side I took refuge, who extracted me from the fire, reward Tryphaena for having had pity on your slave and for having preserved my purity!”

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<sup>139</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *On attach a Thècle sur une lionne*: “that is, above the cage of the animal.”

<sup>140</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *Sacrilège*: “This grievance must refer to Thecla’s gesture of tearing away the wreath of magistrate Alexander (see IV, 1).”

<sup>141</sup> In the Thecla narrative, the women of the city act as a Greek chorus commenting on the action, always in defense of Thecla. Like a Greek chorus, they are the conscience of the narrative and are a significant rhetorical device to guide the audience to view the events through their critical lens. The female chorus first appears here in IV, 3 and comments also at crucial moments to provide rhetorical guidance for the ancient audience in IV, 7 (in contrast to the crowd’s reaction); IV, 8 (gasping and stricken with grief); IV, 9 (fearful for Thecla’s safety); IV, 10 (cry out and defend her with aromatic herbs); IV, 13 (affirm the governor’s decree to release her and declare her “slave of God”).

<sup>142</sup> Fr. *voyons*, lit. “see,” but likely in imitation of biblical *vidou*.

<sup>143</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *vive pour l’éternité*: “There is indeed in the ancient church an intercession for dead non-believers. See W. Rordorf, ‘La Prière de sainte Thècle pour une défunte païenne et son importance oecuménique,’ *Liturgie, foi et vie des premiers chrétiens*, 445-55.”

(7) There was then commotion, loud noise of beasts and cries of people and women seated together. The people said, “Bring the sacrilegious one!” whereas the women were saying, “May the city perish for this injustice! Kill us all, proconsul! Hateful spectacle! Criminal sentence!”

(8) As for Thecla, she was taken from the hands of Tryphaena, they stripped her, a loin-cloth<sup>144</sup> was put on her, and they threw her into the stadium. The lions and bears were released against her. Then, the ferocious lioness, rushing up, lay down at her feet. And the crowd of women gasped. And a bear rushed at Thecla; but the lioness went to meet the bear and tore it to pieces. In turn, a lion, trained to devour humans and [who] belonged to Alexander, rushed at Thecla; but the lioness fought against the lion in a *mêlée* and perished with him. And the women were even more grief stricken because the lioness who had come to Thecla’s aid had also died.

(9)<sup>145</sup> Then they released numerous wild beasts, while Thecla, standing, stretched out her hands and prayed. When she had finished her prayer, she turned, saw a big pit full of water and said, “Now is the moment to receive the bath.” And she threw herself in, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I am baptized on my last day.” Seeing this, the women and all the people cried out by saying: “Don’t throw yourself into the water!” It was then that even the governor shed tears at the idea that the seals were going to devour such beauty. She then threw herself into the water in the name of Jesus Christ, but the seals, seeing the sudden flash of lightning, floated to the surface, dead. And a cloud of fire spread around Thecla so that the beasts did not touch her and her nakedness escaped their notice.

(10) As the other ferocious beasts were released, the women uttered cries; and each threw aromatic spices—some nard, others cassius,<sup>146</sup> others cardamom,<sup>147</sup> so that there was a mass of fragrances. Then all the released animals, as if overpowered by sleep, did not touch her, so that Alexander said to the governor: “I have very ferocious bulls;<sup>148</sup> fasten the condemned to them!” Gloomily, the governor consented: “Do what you want.” Then they fastened Thecla by the feet in the midst of the bulls, and they applied to their genitals irons heated by fire, so that, excited to the highest degree, they might kill her. They indeed began to spring up, but the flame extending all around burned the ropes, and Thecla was found as if she had not been bound.

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<sup>144</sup> Fr. *pagne* = loin-cloth. Since Thecla’s modesty vis-à-vis nudity in IV,9 is important to the narrative, it is worth noting that a loin-cloth implies that her top remains uncovered. Barrier translates *diazw,stran* as “underpants” (256). The Greek lexeme has the sense of “that which is tied or put around” but does not indicate what specifically is covered: below the waist only or also the top? The French word implies lower covering; the Greek lexeme behind Barrier’s translation may refer to a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist for men but possibly wrapped around the shoulder for women. Was an uncovered top considered nudity in Greco-Roman culture?

<sup>145</sup> In IV,9-10 Thecla goes through the baptismal rite; in IV,10-11 she undergoes trials and overcomes them with divine assistance; and finally in IV,12 she preaches her first sermon as a baptized, consecrated Christian, commissioned by God her patron.

<sup>146</sup> Fr. *casse* seems to be a type of cinnamon.

<sup>147</sup> Fr. *amome* = *amomum*, which is a spice plant, likely cardamom.

<sup>148</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *Taureaux*: “There is perhaps an influence of the myth of Hippolytus. See L. Radermacher, *Hippolytos und Thekla*, Vienne, 1916.”

(11) However, Tryphaena, standing near the arena toward the first seats,<sup>149</sup> fainted, so that her slaves said, “Queen Tryphaena is dead.” The governor ordered that the spectacle be stopped, and the entire city was in anguish. Alexander, throwing himself at the feet of the governor, said: “Have pity on me and this city, and release the condemned, lest the city also perish!” For, if the emperor learns of these things, he will no doubt destroy the city, because his relative Queen Tryphaena died by the best seats.”

(12)<sup>150</sup> Then the governor had Thecla led from the midst of the beasts and said to her, “Who are you? And what protection surrounds you so that not a single beast touched you?” Thecla responded, “I am the slave of the living God.<sup>151</sup> The protection that encircles me, it is to have believed in the one whom God put his good pleasure, in his Son. It is by him that not a single beast has touched me. He alone in fact is the cornerstone of salvation, the foundation of immortal life; for he becomes refuge for those who are tossed by the storm, rest for the afflicted, shelter for the desperate; in a word, those who have not believed in him shall not live, but will die for eternity.”

(13) At these words, the governor ordered that the clothing be brought and said, “Put on these garments, Thecla!” But she said, “The one who clothed me when I was naked in the midst of the wild beasts, that one, on the Day of Judgment, will clothe me for salvation.”<sup>152</sup> And having taken the clothing, she covered herself with them. And the governor immediately issued a decree, saying, “I release you, Thecla, slave of God, Thecla, adorer of God.”<sup>153</sup> Then the women cried out in a strong voice and, as one mouth, praised God by saying, “There is only one God, the one who saved Thecla,” so that the city was unsettled by this clamor.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Fr. *vers les premières places*. The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at this clause: “These seats were covered with marble or wood.” Barrier (274-75) renders Greek *evpi. tou.j a;bakaj* with “upon the sideboard of the theater,” and writes: “it appears that the *abacus* or *sideboard* was a technical name for a marble/wood slab that was next to or part of the theater.”

<sup>150</sup> See Barrier’s comments on this scene regarding its connections with the theme of the untouched virgin from ancient novels. Barrier also writes (282): “it is clear that the author of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is bringing to a climax [in IV,12] the theological agenda associated with women and authority in the early church.”

<sup>151</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) have a note at *la servant du Dieu vivant*: “See Luke 1:38. Thecla pronounces her confession of faith; see her prayer in IV,17.”

<sup>152</sup> Here is a mixture of present/realized eschatology and future eschatology: Thecla was just presently rescued/saved from the beasts (IV,9-12) and baptized (IV,9), and will be saved at the future final judgment.

<sup>153</sup> God as Thecla’s patron with the phrase “slave of God,” was first affirmed by Thecla herself in IV,1 when she is attacked by Alexander; and then is reaffirmed several times in the narrative: by Tryphaena (IV,6 “your slave”); Thecla again (IV,12 “slave of the living God”); and now here by the governor in IV,13. The governor’s decree is affirmed here in IV,13 by the women of the city who have acted as a Greek chorus commenting on the action, always in defense of Thecla, throughout the Thecla narrative.

<sup>154</sup> This sentence is crucial to the Thecla narrative: it indicates through the chorus of women that the audience is supposed to understand that the governor’s decree is correct, that God is Thecla’s patron who saves her, and that this message is unsettling for the city.

(14) and so that Tryphaena, after having learned the good news,<sup>155</sup> went to meet Thecla with the crowd, embraced her, and said, “Now I believe that the dead may rise again; now I believe that my daughter lives. Thecla, my child,<sup>156</sup> enter into my house,<sup>157</sup> that I may inscribe all my goods to your name!<sup>158</sup> Thecla entered then with Tryphaena and rested in her house for eight days, teaching her the word of God, so that Tryphaena believed, as well as most of her slaves, and joy was great in the house.

(15) But Thecla ardently desired to see Paul again and had envoys search for him everywhere; they informed her that he was in Myra. She then took some young male slaves and young female slaves, girded her loins, and, arranging her tunic to make a coat in the style of the men,<sup>159</sup> she went to Myra. She found Paul expounding the word of God and drew near him. However, he was amazed in seeing her and the crowd that was accompanying her, thinking that some other trial had happened to Thecla. But she, having come to understand him, said to him: “I have received baptism, Paul. In fact, he who worked with you for the good news<sup>160</sup> has also worked with me so that I am baptized.”

(16) Paul took her with him and led her away into the house of Hermias. Then Thecla recounted to Paul everything that had happened to her, so that Paul was greatly surprised by it, and those listening<sup>161</sup> were strengthened and prayed for Tryphaena. And Thecla, standing up,<sup>162</sup> said to

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<sup>155</sup> Clearly the reference to “good news,” Greek *euvaggelisqeí/san*, is an allusion to the good news of God’s salvation just pronounced. Cf. Barrier (287): “[the reference to good news] further demonstrates the *gospel-like* character of this document. Thecla’s ‘resurrection’ from the dead provides this post-resurrection confession of faith by queen Tryphaena.”

<sup>156</sup> Barrier (288) notes—in reference to an article by Misset-Van de Weg in *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament Apocrypha*, 156-62—that when Tryphaena refers to Thecla as “my child,” “the development of a patron-client relationship is the most likely explanation of what is going on in the text, although specific patronage terminology is missing.” In my view, patronage is much more pervasive in the Thecla narrative than Barrier is aware.

<sup>157</sup> Fr. *entre dans ma maison*: Thecla is now embedded once again. Tryphaena becomes her patron and protector. In the Greco-Roman world, an unembedded woman, as was Thecla up to this moment, is extraordinarily vulnerable, as was the case throughout the Thecla narrative when she was no longer embedded in the house of her betrothed (III,10), her mother would not claim her (calls for her execution in 3:20), and Paul does not claim her (IV,1).

<sup>158</sup> Fr. *que j’inscrive tous mes biens à ton nom*, “that I may inscribe/write down/transfer all my property to your name,” indicates that upon her death Thecla will inherit all of Tryphaena’s wealth/property/goods. Tryphaena becomes her legal kin taking the place of her deceased daughter. As a type of adoption, it’s an additional step beyond Tryphaena being patron and Thecla being client, because usually the client is not physically embedded in the patron’s home with primary inheritance expectations. The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note: “The conversion of Tryphaena is followed by the distribution of her goods, but Thecla’s victory over the beasts becomes for her the proof of her deceased daughter’s salvation.”

<sup>159</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note at *à la manière des homes*: see III,25.

<sup>160</sup> Greek *to. euvagge, lion*, “the gospel.”

<sup>161</sup> Ancient texts were often read aloud to a largely illiterate audience. At the narrative level, the reference to listeners here refers to the listeners in the story. At the level of discourse—the rhetoric designed to persuade the original Greco-Roman audience hearing the text—the statement about the listeners is ironic if the rhetorical goal of the Thecla narrative is to persuade the audience to accept Thecla’s apostolic role on the basis of divine patronage. Just as the listeners in the narrative are strengthened, so also is the audience, who are encouraged to accept Thecla’s unconventional roles and behavior. Cf. Robert Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand. Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark*.

<sup>162</sup> The word for “stand” in Greek is related to resurrection. Here the Greek reads *avnasta/sa*.

Paul, "I am going to Iconium." Paul responded to her: "Go and teach the word of God."<sup>163</sup> For her part, Tryphaena sent a great deal of clothing and gold to Thecla, so that she left much to Paul for service to the poor.

**(17)** Then Thecla went to Iconium. And she entered into the house of Onesiphoros, threw herself to the ground at the place where Paul, also, had taught and wept by saying, "O, our God, God of this house where the Light shined for me, Christ Jesus, Son of God, my relief in prison, my relief before governors, my relief in the fire, my relief among the beasts, you are the God to whom belong the glory forever, Amen."<sup>164</sup>

**(18)** And she found Thamyris dead, but her mother was living; and she sent for the latter and said to her: "Theocleia, my mother, are you able to believe that a Lord lives in the heavens? In fact, if you desire wealth, God will give them to you through me; if you desire your child, I am close to you." And rendering this testimony, she left for Seleucia, and having enlightened many people<sup>165</sup> with the word of God, she fell asleep in a good sleep.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note that "Paul judges her worthy of the apostleship." In my view, although Paul's approval of her apostolic teaching is a culmination of the narrative, her role as God's slave, with God as her patron, and her endorsement by the governor and the female chorus (IV,13), make Paul's approval somewhat (but not entirely) anticlimactic, particularly since she matter-of-factly in IV,15-16 informs Paul that she has been baptized and is going to embark on her apostolic work now. Paul's approval is important insofar as he is the hero of the "Acts of Paul" of which the Thecla narrative is part, but it should not be missed that the text asserts Thecla's independence from Paul and allows for some critical distancing from the character Paul through his refusal to claim Thecla in IV,1. The narrator's ambiguous comment in IV,15,"having come to understand him," is not necessarily entirely positive. As an elite woman backed by her patron Tryphaena, Thecla becomes Paul's patron, which in turn gives her more authority and independence vis-à-vis men and her clients than women would usually have.

<sup>164</sup> The Christology of this prayer elides the Son with God so that the patronage of the Thecla narrative, predominantly theological patronage, has to be adjusted to include the Christology here. We find out here emphatically that whenever God acted to save Thecla, Christ also was there even when only God was explicitly mentioned.

<sup>165</sup> The editors (Rordorf, Charix, Kasser) note here: "The *Acts of Paul*, with primary interest in the apostle, scarcely recounts Thecla's apostolic activity in Seleucia, but legends on this subject will not take long to develop. See R. Dagon, *Vie et miracles de sainte Thècle*, Bruxelles, 1978.

<sup>166</sup> To fall asleep (or to fall asleep in the Lord) is a circumlocution referring to a person's death (e.g., 1 Thess 4:13).



## Appendix B – Eschatology Grid

WHERE	WHAT IS SAID OR DESCRIBED	WHO SAID IT OR IS AFFECTING IT	WHAT KIND OF ESCHATOLOGY IS IT?
Iconium Inside the house of Onesiphorus	“Blessed are they who have come out of the image of this world through the love of God, for they will Judge angels, and they will be blessed on the right hand of God and will not see a bitter day of judgment.” III, 6	Paul in his beatitudes	Already – Not yet
Iconium Inside the house of Onesiphorus	Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well pleasing to God and they will not lose the rewards of their purity, because the word of the father shall be to them a work of salvation in the day of his son, they shall have rest forever.” <sup>167</sup> III, 6	Paul in his beatitudes	Future, not yet.
Iconium Outside on the street	On the one hand, this one, who is he? We do not know, but on the other hand, he takes away wives from young men and virgins from husbands, saying ‘There is no other resurrection for you, if you do not remain pure and do not stain the flesh but keep it pure.’ III, 12	Demas and Hermogenes in their first exchange with Thamyris. Dodging the question of their own identities, they cast doubt upon Paul’s character.	Future, based on upholding a law. Reframing the above marcion.
Iconium Inside the house of Thamyris	“And we will teach you, what this one says happens in (respect to) resurrection. For (since) already it has happened upon these children we have, and we have been risen knowing the true God.” III, 14	Demas and Hermogenes in their next exchange with Thamyris, over an expensive meal with wine.	Already happened upon the acceptance of faith and knowledge.

<sup>167</sup> “Will not see a bitter day of judgment” and “they shall have rest forever” are repeated at the end of the *APTh* as “lay down with a good sleep.” (*APTh* 4:18)

Iconium Public, Before the Proconsul	...he sent me, in order that I should withdraw them from the corruption and uncleanness and from every pleasure <i>and death</i> , so that they might not sin any longer; Therefore God sent his own child, whom I proclaim as good news and I teach people to have hope in that one..." III, 17	Paul, summarizes his teachings before the Proconsul	Already, Jesus as the agent, law following and hope (faith) driven.
Iconium Public, on the burning pyre.	"Even though the great fire was shining, it did not touch her. For God who has compassion caused an underground roaring, and a cloud from above full of water and hail, and all the contents were poured out, so that many were at risk and died, and the fire was extinguished and Thecla was saved...." III, 22	Narrator describing Thecla being saved on the pyre through divine intervention.	Already Present moment salvation from death. God did it now, mystery.
Antioch Private, in a dream	"Mother, the deserted stranger, named Thecla, you will take in my place, in order that she might pray on my behalf and I might be translated into the place of righteousness." IV, 3	Falconilla, the dead daughter of Tryphaena, speaking to her mother in a dream.	Now Disembodied spirit Prayer and grace, Thecla is the agent
Antioch Public	"May the city be wiped out concerning this unlawful act. Wipe us all out, Proconsul. A bitter spectacle, evil judgment." IV, 7	Chorus, the women of the city	Now and destructive. Punishment for upholding pagan law.
Antioch Public, in the arena	"And she cast herself into the water, saying, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I baptize myself for the last day.'....And there was a cloud of fire around her, so that neither the beasts could touch her, nor could they see her naked." IV, 9	Thecla, baptizing herself in the arena, because she thought she was surely going to die.	Now, earthly and corporeal salvation from death. Jesus Christ as agent, centered on mystery, faith.
Antioch Public, in the arena	"And he bound her from the feet to the midst of the two bulls and he placed a flaming hot iron under their genitals, in order that by being stirred up more they might kill her. Therefore, they leapt up, but the flame inflaming itself burned through the good ropes, and it was as if she had not been bound." IV, 10	Narrator, describing what is happening to Thecla.	Now, salvation from death. Centered on mystery.

<p>Antioch Public, speaking to the governor, may be inside the arena or just outside of it.</p>	<p>“I am a slave of the living God. But the things concerning me, I have placed my trust in the one whom God blessed, namely his son; on account of which not one of the beasts touched me. For this is the only way of salvation and the substance of deathless life. For to the one being storm-tossed he is a place of refuge, a loosening to the one being oppressed, a shelter to the one who is in despair, and in general, whoever should not believe in him, shall not live but will die forever.” IV, 12</p>	<p>Thecla, slave of God</p>	<p>Already, salvation from the present circumstances. Faith driven. God, the father, and Jesus Christ, the blessed Son.</p>
<p>Antioch Public, same as above</p>	<p>“The one who has clothed my nakedness while with the wild beasts, this one will clothe me with salvation on the Day of Judgment.” IV, 13</p>	<p>Thecla</p>	<p>Not yet, future salvation.</p>
<p>Antioch Public in a crowd</p>	<p>Now I believe that the dead are raised. Now I believe that my child lives. Come inside my child, into my house, and I will transfer all my property to you.” IV, 14</p>	<p>Queen Tryphaena to Thecla</p>	<p>Now</p>