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FIRST CENTURY INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

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Words matter.¹ Language used by members of a group or community can be a very important factor in their identification, solidarity and signaling of difference.² The specific language used within the Pauline house church communities defined their relationship to each other and also their difference from the greater community.

I will argue here that the distinct use of Pauline household language and the location of the gatherings in the houses facilitated a new set of relationships based on a fictive kinship rather than blood kinship, that made it easier for women to assume leadership roles alongside men. Fictive kinship language and the house church location embedded in the household culture assisted in the formation of the new Christian communities. As the communities developed, the language reflected and shaped the new identity of the members of the house churches and it also brought it into tension with the very culture from which it emerged. The appearance of household codes in both Colossians and Ephesians exposes the tension between the prevailing culture of patriarchal and hierarchical household and the fictive kinship relationships of the house churches at just the moment when the language that shaped the community is in transition from Paul to those who then write in his name.

According to sociolinguistics, social identity is significantly created through language. By definition sociolinguistics "is that part of linguistics which is concerned with language as a social and cultural phenomenon."³ Further to this, the study of linguistic practices enters the realm of linguistic anthropology, an interdisciplinary field, which "starts from the theoretical

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²Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1974), 24.

³Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics*, 32.

assumption that words matter and from the empirical finding that linguistic signs as representations of the world and connections to the world are never neutral.⁴

This article will address the existence of women in leadership in Pauline house churches in the Lycus Valley by examining the texts of the Pauline corpus in relation to the language that describes and defines the house churches, the gatherings in the houses and the women as hosts and leaders in the gatherings. The relationships that were established within and between the house churches formed a new set of relationships where women and men, slaves and free persons had their belonging and identity firmly set in their fictive familial relationship with Jesus in *tēs ekklēsia tou theou*, "in the church of God." Here the focus is on the letters to the Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon in the Second Testament. Both Colossians and Philemon relate specifically to Colossae in the Lycus Valley. The letter to the Ephesians has significant similarities with the letter to the Colossians and may have been intended as a circular letter or one addressed to more than one church or to another location altogether such as Laodikeia.

In examining these texts it is necessary to view them in relation to the Pauline Corpus and other texts of the period in order to understand the language that shaped the communities and provided or qualified opportunities for women to hold leadership roles. Terminology of house church and fictive kinship traverses across the Pauline texts from those undisputedly written by Paul to the pseudepigraphal. In this transition a tension arises as later generations translate the Pauline language to their current context and seek greater social legitimacy. The changes in this language also appear to affect the position of women as leaders in these communities.

AUTHORSHIP

While Paul is the accepted author of the letter to Philemon, the authorship of both Colossians and Ephesians still raises healthy debate. Both Philemon and Colossians share the same named writers and greet a list of almost the same people and may be closely dated. The differences in style and development of thought would indicate different writers, so perhaps Paul and a close disciple of Paul.⁵ The letter to Colossians can be considered "a

⁴Alessandro Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5.

⁵Dunn argues for a date for the writing of the Letter to the Colossians late in Paul's lifetime

bridge” between the undisputed Pauline and the post-Pauline writings.⁶ While the structure of Colossians is similar to Paul’s letters, the familiar address to “my brothers and sisters” is absent.⁷ The introduction of Christ as *head* of the church (Col 1:18; 2:19) and the household code add a hierarchical dimension absent from Pauline letters up to this point.

Colossians and Ephesians share a number of similar phrasings and Ephesians, as a post-Pauline writing, may have been modeled on Colossians.⁸ Scholars who opt for Paul as author cite his development of thought and theology as explanation of the differences, but this seems a major stretch of thought, language and structure. Particularly pertinent to the argument here is the inclusion in both Colossians and Ephesians of Christ as head of the body that is the church, *hē ekklēsia*, and the household code. These two ideas dramatically shift the shape of the Pauline communities. Both inject a hierarchy into a model that was seen initially in Paul’s writings to be anchored in the *adelphoi* relationships of members. The effect is noticeable in the change of personal greetings customary in Paul’s letters that are still evident in Colossians but absent in Ephesians. As noted earlier, it could be that Ephesians is a letter meant for more than one church. The words “in Ephesus” (*en Ephesō*) are absent from some of the significant manuscripts and there is a suggestion that, due to the difficulties in the grammatical construction, the original may have included two names, possibly Laodikeia and Hierapolis,⁹ or even, as a circular letter, a gap for *any* town in the region to be slotted in as a copy was received.¹⁰

The phrasing of *hē kat’ oikon...ekklēsia* carries over from the undisputed Pauline writings of Romans, 1 Corinthians and Philemon to Colossians but then disappears. This points to Colossians being a transitional or bridging text as it continues this phrasing *hē kat’ oikon...ekklēsia*, yet introduces the household code and no longer states the inclusivity of gender as a priority

or soon after his death. James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 37.

⁶Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 19.

⁷Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, (SPS; Colledgeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 7.

⁸Similar phrasing, structure and content cited include Col 1:1–2/Eph 1:1–2; Col 1:4/Eph 1:15; Col 2:13/Eph 2:5; Col 2:19/Eph 4:15–16. For a full discussion see Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 36. See also George H. Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School: Colossians and Ephesians in the Context of Graeco-Roman Cosmology, with a New Synopsis of the Greek Texts* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), Appendix II.

⁹MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 17.

¹⁰This would follow the model of Imperial/Provincial manuscripts.

of membership. What Colossians holds in tension, Ephesians resolves in the loss of the house phrasing along with the loss of *adelphoi* greetings and the expansion of the household code. Colossians may be witness to the tension of a new community managing its identity within the local culture and needing to retain some social acceptance. The casualty, in the long run, of maintaining some social acceptance may well have been the significant and radical inclusion of women in leadership.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE HOUSE CHURCH

The terminology, *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia*, appears in Philemon, Colossians, Romans and 1 Corinthians. It appears as a distinct description of the house church that carries across from undisputed writings of Paul to Colossians but is absent from Ephesians and subsequent deutero-Pauline writings. In Colossians the phrase appears in relation to Nympha, in the greeting: *Aspasasthe tous en Laodikeia adelphous kai Numphan kai tēn kat' oikon autēs ekklēsian*, "Greet the brothers and sisters in Laodikeia and Nympha and the church in her house."¹¹ (Col 4:15)

In Philemon 2, *tē kat' oikon sou ekklēsia* may refer to the church in Colossae, although the basis of this assumption is the list of shared greetings in both the letters to Colossians and Philemon. It is not clear whose house it is but it appears likely that it belongs to Philemon. The relationship between Philemon, Apphia and Archippus is also unclear. Philemon is considered leader of the church at Colossae and appears to share that leadership with Apphia and Archippus.¹² Apphia is referred to as *hē adelphē*, the sister, in the same manner as Timothy who is *ho adelphos*, the brother (Col 1:1). This use of the article indicates Apphia was singled out not because of her relationship with Philemon or Archippus but as "a faithful outstanding member, perhaps leader, of the Colossian community."¹³ This fits with the use of fictive familial language in the early Christian assemblies, which I explore below.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul sends greetings from Aquila and Prisca and the church in their house in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19), *Akulas kai Priska sou tē kat' oikon autōn ekklēsia*. Prisca and Aquila share the leadership of a house church. Aquila is always mentioned with Prisca (Priscilla) and often Prisca is mentioned first signifying the importance of her role in the

¹¹My translation.

¹²MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 183.

¹³Florence Gillman, *Women Who Knew Paul* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 78.

mission. In Acts 18:26 Prisca and Aquila take Apollos aside and correct his teaching, indicating Prisca is actively involved in teaching: "In a rare and unusual portrayal in Acts, we see a woman exercising decisive leadership and sustained intellectual engagement and instruction with a male who himself was an 'eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures.'"¹⁴ The phrase *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia* is found in similar form in Rom 16:5 (*tēn kat' oikon autōn ekklēsian*), again referring to Prisca and Aquila as the leadership of the household. Here they are also noted as working with Paul and risking their lives for him.

The apocryphal Acts of Paul, composed before ca. 190 probably in Asia Minor, refers to Paul speaking in the church in the house of Onesiphorus: *tēs ekklēsias en tō Onēsiphorou oikō* (Acts of Paul and Thecla 7).¹⁵ This terminology closely resembles the phrasing of *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia*. In an investigation of other texts of the time the particular phrasing *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia* does not seem to appear. Other combinations, such as *kat' oikon* is found in Josephus (A.J. 4.74 and 4.163) but not in the sense of a gathering in the house. In each instance it denotes the house as location, rather than the people dwelling in the house.

Katoikia describes either a separate settlement or a group of residents within a foreign city.¹⁶ *Katoikia* is included here for its close sound to *kat' oikon* and because of its use with groups of Jewish residents in cities. With Paul's mission often beginning in a city among the Jewish community a double meaning may be implied. In Hierapolis there is an inscription from the Roman period advising of the payment of a fine: *tē katoikia tōn en Hierapolei katoikountōn Ioudiaōn*.¹⁷ The sense here is of a group of Jewish residents in Hierapolis.

The phrase *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia* appears to be a signature of Paul for the developing household church. Appearing in three undisputed Pauline writings, Romans, 1 Corinthians and Philemon, this phrase makes the transition to Colossians but then disappears other than in an approximation in the Acts of Paul and Thecla. This is significant in that it links the author

¹⁴J.J. Martin, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *Searching the Scriptures* (ed. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1993), 777.

¹⁵As noted in L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture: Texts and Monuments for the Christian Domus Ecclesiae in Its Environment* (HTS 43; Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1990), 2:47.

¹⁶Paul Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 171.

¹⁷Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 171.

both to the language of Paul and to the particular formation of communities with women leadership. The terminology of *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia* is not the only means of describing the gathering or *ekklēsia*. Significantly, though, the designation of *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia* is linked with women and men who appear to be benefactors and/or leaders of the church that gathers in the house.

FICTIVE KINSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

Paul addresses his communities as *adelphoi*. In the seven undisputed Pauline letters, this term is used 112 times, appearing approximately once per page.¹⁸ As both *adelphos* and *adelphē* are also referred to in the writings there is no precedent for consistently arguing for *adelphoi* as inclusive of brothers and sisters. Even if it were conceded that the word *adelphoi* was purely masculine, there is still argument for inclusion of women through the embeddedness of identity in fictive kinship relationships as in blood relations. In this way members of the Pauline communities took their identity from their sibling relationship to Jesus and each other in *hē ekklēsia tou theou* where God was father of Jesus and of them all. The phrase *theou patros hēmōn*, "[from] God our father," appears in the salutations: Rom 1:7, 1 Cor 1:3, Gal 1:3, Phlm 3, Col 1:2, Eph 1:2, Phil 1:2, 2 Cor 1:2, firmly setting the centredness on God. Jesus is declared "Son of God" in Rom 1:4, and the same phrase is used in 2 Cor 1:19, Gal 2:20, and Eph 4:13. The "fictive kinship" centred on God as father with all members in sibling relationship with Jesus as Son of God was particularly spelled out in Gal 4:4-7:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

The communities of the house churches developed their group identity not through "family centredness" of blood kinship, but through a "family

¹⁸For a full breakdown of the occurrence of *adelphos/adephē* in the Pauline corpus see the appendix in David G. Horrell, "From Ἀδελφοί to Οἰκοσθεοί: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity," *JBL* 120 (2001): 311.

centredness" on God.¹⁹ Family centredness formed the foundation for society in the first century. Social identity was dyadic, deriving from the group orientation, so family relatedness, embedded in the head of the family, defined individual identity.²⁰ Individuals were known by their relationship to their family, such as "son of" or "wife of." In the Pauline house churches members came to be known by their relationship to the community, such as "beloved brother" or "sister," or to Paul as "fellow co-worker" or "fellow servant."

The use of *adelphoi* is "horizontal self-designation."²¹ It indicates that members of the community understood themselves as being in sibling relationship across families and cities: "The prominence of this kinship description would seem to imply that Paul both assumes and promotes the relationship between equal siblings, who share a sense of affection, mutual responsibility, and solidarity."²² As seen above, by the end of the first century the strength of this unique self-designation was already being weakened. Apart from the *adelphoi* relationships across kinship and household groups, *patēr*, "father," is only used in Paul's letters in relation to God.²³ This cements the sibling relationship and centredness on God.

The use of fictive familial language is not peculiar to early Christian gatherings. It is found to be used in associations and is argued by Harland to be common ground with early Christian gatherings. There were also specific household-based associations where the membership was primarily made up of family members including men, women, slaves and freed persons. Harland disputes Meeks' view that Paul's use of fictive familial language was unique.²⁴ Meeks bases his view on the rarity of associations using familial

¹⁹"Family centredness" is further explained in Mark McVann, "Family-Centredness," in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (eds John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 75-79.

²⁰For further explanation of dyadic orientation see Jerome H. Neyrey, "Dyadism," in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (eds John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 53-56.

²¹Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (WUZNT 166; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 72.

²²Horrell, "From Ἀδελφοί to Οἰκοσθεοί," 299.

²³In 1 Cor 4:15 the NRSV translation suggests Paul refers to himself as "father." However closer examination of the context indicates that the Greek is not "father" but *egennēsa* which is the aorist of *gennaō* meaning beget. As a verb it indicates an action and in context I think it is more likely naming Paul as facilitator of their new life in Christ through the gospel. Whatever was intended, Paul has not chosen to call himself *patēr*.

²⁴Harland reflects on the study by Meeks in Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress,

language in a fictive manner and observing familial language as pertaining to actual families connected by kinship and blood line relationship. Harland notes that it was common for groups that were not related by kinship to express gratitude to benefactors through the use of titles of familial affection such as "mother," "father" or "son."²⁵ He does, however, note that the bestowal of this sort of title may not necessarily have meant that the holder would address the members of the association as "children" in the manner of the Pauline communities.²⁶ However, "when a member of a guild called a fellow 'brother', that member was (at times) expressing in down-to-earth terms relations of solidarity, affection, or friendship, indicating that the association was a second home."²⁷

The titles of "mother of the synagogue" and "father of the synagogue" represent further evidence of the use of fictive familial language outside of the Pauline communities. In addition to this, parental address of "mother" and "father" was known among associations devoted to Dionysos, Cybele, Sarapis and others.²⁸ The even more colloquial and affectionate term "papa" was used among initiates of Dionysos.²⁹ Harland suggests that this alludes to there being the same sort of family atmosphere in the group that "brothers" and "sisters" would evoke.³⁰

While there may well have been common ground between associations, synagogues and assemblies with the use of fictive familial language it is difficult to ascertain whether it is used in the same manner as in the Pauline communities. Neither does the use of this familial language in other contexts such as associations and synagogues appear to be reproducing new relationships that would be more inclusive of women.

CHURCH OF GOD

The people who belong to the house church communities are collectively *hē*

2003), 30–31.

²⁵Harland gives a number of examples including one of an all female association of initiates of the Great Mother (Cybele) at Serdica in Thracia where the leader of the association is referred to as "mother of the tree bearers." Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 32.

²⁶Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, 32.

²⁷Philip A. Harland, "Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: 'Brothers' (Ἀδελφοί) in Associations of the Greek East," *JBL* 124 (2005): 513.

²⁸Harland, "Familial Dimensions," 509.

²⁹Harland, "Familial Dimensions," 513.

³⁰Harland, "Familial Dimensions," 504.

ekklēsia tou theou, the church of God. The terminology of this community that is connected locally and universally is established in the undisputed Pauline writings: 1 Cor 1:2, 1 Cor 10:32, 1 Cor 11:22, 1 Cor 15:9, Gal 1:13, 1 Thess 1:1, 2 Thess 1:1. Interestingly this terminology is absent from Philemon and Colossians where *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia* survives. In Ephesians there is a change from *hē ekklēsia tou theou*, church of God, to *oikeioi tou theou*, (Eph 2:19), household of God.³¹ The use of *oikeioi* rather than *ekklēsia* may deliberately frame the relationship of the members in relation to the order of the household code. This would lead to the development that is seen in 1 Timothy.

1 Tim 3:15 brings together that the household of God is also the church of God: *en oikō theou anastrepsesthai, hē tis estin ekklēsia theou zōntos, stulos kai edraiōma tēs alētheias*. However, this designation heralds a return to an Aristotelian understanding of the household model:

....the predominant view is *not* that members of the “household of God” are all regarded as “brothers and sisters”, as we see in the undisputed Paulines. Rather as in the household, men are leaders and women are not, and there is a hierarchy even within the group of men – between those who are leaders and others who are not, between older men and younger men, older women and younger women. This means that the place of the “father” has been reasserted, and so we get the emphasis on hierarchy within the “household of God”.³²

If the date of writing of the Pastorals is between 80 and 100 CE the unique fictive familial language adapted by Paul in the Pauline churches can be seen to have a short life of some thirty to fifty years.³³

HOUSEHOLD LANGUAGE

So far references to gatherings in the house and to the house of God have been explored and mention has been made of the “fictive kinship” or fictive familial relationships of the Pauline households. The language of

³¹ *ekklēsia* does appear a number of times in Ephesians, and it could be argued that it is equivalent to *hē ekklēsia tou theou*. This phrase is not consistent to all authentic Pauline writings however; the particular point is to emphasise the significance of the use of *oikeioi*.

³² Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 562–63.

³³ Trebilco argues for this date with the observed similarities to 1 Clement and the slight development of the structure of the church observed by Ignatius on his travels in Asia Minor 105–110. Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 205.

these relationships appears to go hand in hand with *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia* and *hē ekklēsia tou theou*. These relationships are also contingent on the statement of the centrality of identity in Christ without ethnic, gender or status discrimination. All of this appears to build a new interpretation of the "collective representation" or culture.³⁴ This new interpretation brings the culture into tension with society which can be understood as "collective consciousness." The language of kinship and blood line relationships and households was given new meaning and symbolic value in the Pauline communities in fictive kinship relationships of all members in the household of God. This new meaning created a new reality. The legitimation of this begins to occur as soon as the language is transmitted.³⁵ This new interpretation is nurtured and developed in the house churches as the stories of Jesus are told and the letters of Paul are read. However a culture is not just in the stories that are recounted among members, but also in the encounters or gatherings where these stories take place.³⁶ What is observed in the letters of Paul is the development of a new interpretation and culture in the personal interaction and encounter in the house churches. It is here that the "rules" about who can participate and who is left out, who is to give or take orders and who asks the questions and who answers them is worked out. So in Colossians where we have: "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" (Col 3:11), the ethnic division is reworked from the similar phrase in Galatians (Gal 3:28) to ensure that there is inclusion beyond either Greek or Jew to those circumcised and a particular mention given to barbarians and Scythians.³⁷ The culture is being teased out so that the language meets the needs of the community. There is no mention of male or female so it is

³⁴Collective representation represents culture, in Emil Durkheim's view; culture which provides both opportunities for conformity or new actions arising from new interpretations. This is distinct from "collective consciousness" which would represent society and its uniformity of thought, feeling and action. For further discussion see Douglas E. Oakman, "Culture, Society and Embedded Religion in Antiquity," *BTB* 35 (2005): 4-5.

³⁵Berger and Luckman describe four levels of legitimation: 1) pre theoretical - e.g. transmission of a kinship vocabulary; 2) theoretical propositions in a rudimentary form - which includes stories on how to behave; 3) explicit theories - comprehensive frame of reference; 4) symbolic universe - overall integration into the total system of knowledge, e.g. religion, politics. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 110-12.

³⁶Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology*, 8.

³⁷"Barbarians" is a term used in a derogatory manner of all non-Greeks and Scythians, inhabitants of the northern coast of the Black Sea who were considered a particularly barbaric race. For further information see MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 139.

likely that gender has become a contentious issue which is then addressed through the household code. "Greek" precedes "Jew" probably indicating a larger proportion of Greeks than Jews in the congregations.

In the process of this new interpretation and the fitting of the language to meet the needs of the communities, it is important to note that, in the Lycus Valley, while *tēn ekklēsiān tou theou* does not appear in Philemon or Colossians, *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia* does. However neither appear in Ephesians. Furthermore, *adelphoi* does not appear in Philemon but both *adelphē* and *adelphos* do. *Adelphoi* does appear in Colossians and Ephesians. The discrimination of gender is not explicitly ruled out of the identity in Christ in Colossians.

Further to this, linguistic anthropologists see that it is "the role of language in institutional efforts...to organize and hence control the private lives of members of society including their conceptualization of self, ethnic identity and gender relations."³⁸ This is explained with particular reference to schools, hospitals and prisons; however, its application to the early church is easily deduced. The language used in the Pauline communities organized its members in a way that changed their view of self, ethnic identity and gender. The language named and supported the new "fictive kinship" relationships that were not dependent on ethnic identity or gender.

THE HOUSEHOLD CODE

Significantly, Colossians attests the introduction of the household code. This code echoes some "rule-like statements" such as are found in Paul's earlier writings regarding women and slaves in 1 Corinthians and Philemon.³⁹ The letter to the Colossians, however, develops a specific organisation of relationships within the household code (3:18- 4:1). Interestingly it does not refer to the language of the authentic Pauline letters of "brothers" and "sisters" but rather conforms to the hierarchy of the society at large, addressing "wives" and "husbands," "children" and "fathers," "masters" and "slaves". The address of each of these indicates their presence in the household gathering. The code appears to draw its origins from the original *topos* "concerning household management" that appears often in literature of the ancient world and particularly in Aristotle's *Politics* I.⁴⁰ The household

³⁸Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology*, 12.

³⁹1 Cor 7:20-24; 11:2-16; 14:34-36; Phlm 10-20. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 166.

⁴⁰MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 160-61, draws on work by David Balch in this area and discusses further the use of this *topos* in relation to Colossians and Ephesians.

code reasserts the hierarchical and patriarchal system of the social world in the realm of the house church. The terminology of *hē ekklēsia tou theou* and the supporting fictive kinship language seems to have been replaced with the metaphor of a spiritual body headed by Christ. The community is affirmed in membership in this spiritual body and in the ultimate reward in heaven beyond the pressures of life in the earthly realm. Then they are given a code of behaviour that allows them to be less visible in the Greco-Roman urban environment.⁴¹ MacDonald suggests that this may have produced a “double consciousness” that provided a strategy for survival in a hostile environment.⁴² Such a “double consciousness” would mean that while the non-discrimination by gender and status would exist in the religious realm, women and slaves would be subject to the social world’s conventions in daily life. In discerning how best to live the Christian life the writer of Colossians compromises some of the ideals which set them apart from society in order to survive within it.

With Christ as head of the body, the church, Christ moves into the position of affirming and qualifying the role of the *paterfamilias*.⁴³ From this position the members of the church are subservient to Christ and the sibling relationship loses much of its radical nature. Lincoln suggests that the household code is part of “an alternative Christian wisdom” to counter criticisms of subverting the social order and to distinguish their communities from “an ascetic competitor in Asia Minor.”⁴⁴ In adopting a mode of wise living in the household and society, the communities were able to survive and develop within their changing circumstances.

Despite this reassertion of the hierarchical and patriarchal system, the reference to the church in Nympha’s house remains. MacDonald warns against assuming that the insertion of the code meant the end of the practice of women in leadership.⁴⁵ She goes on to argue the distinction of power and authority, stating that while authority may be again rested in the *paterfamilias* that did not preclude women from exercising power.⁴⁶

⁴¹MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 166.

⁴²For a full discussion of a “double consciousness” as MacDonald names it, see MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 165–66. Note that this is not to be confused with the “collective consciousness” of Emil Durkheim referred to earlier.

⁴³Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Household Code and Wisdom Mode of Colossians,” *JSNT* 74 (1999): 106.

⁴⁴Lincoln, “The Household Code,” 110–11.

⁴⁵MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 167.

⁴⁶MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 167.

SUMMARY

Second Testament texts attest to leadership of house churches by women as well as men. The particular phrasing *hē kat' oikon...ekklēsia* appears to be used specifically in Pauline communities and may be a signature of these communities, at least via the language provided by the authentic Pauline letters and Colossians.

Gathering in houses gave credence to the terminology of family which facilitated wives and husbands, parents and children, strangers and relatives to be known to each other as brothers and sisters. The language of the Pauline communities supported and maintained the "fictive kinship" relationships. As *oikos* has been shown to be the base of people's identity and belonging, the house churches could act as a symbol of the belonging to the community of God, *hē ekklēsia tou theou*.

The language of the Pauline communities was not static and appears to be in transition in the Lycus Valley with the change of authorship from Paul to those who write in his name after his death. The words that were used within and between the communities were important. The changing language resulted in significant alterations to the way the communities continued to operate. This was not just a changing of metaphors but a reshaping of the communities. The language that had included women in egalitarian relationships and listed them as leaders of house church communities was not sustained beyond Colossians. The language that emerged married with the household code to replicate the order of society at large.

Paul instituted a brief radical moment in history where the house churches demonstrated new ways for people to be in relationship with each other, with God and with the world, and in so doing facilitated women in leadership positions. He did this in the context of a culture that was primarily male dominated but was changing. The language that described and formed the house churches under Paul was embedded in the location and the relationships of the community and, by its existence, challenged the prevailing culture. In examining the nature of our church communities today, Paul's use of language and location in the context of the culture can begin important discussions for the full inclusion of women in leadership.