

# Travel and Transformation: Saul on the Road to Damascus

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## Introduction

As is well attested, strange things can happen in the ancient world when one embarks on a journey. Odysseus met monsters, demigods, and found paths to places such as the underworld on his journeys to the edge of the earth. According to Herodotus, Phidippides has an encounter with Pan on Mount Parthenium as he traveled to Sparta (*His.* 6.105-106). Ovid depicts the journey of Orpheus to the underworld in order to retrieve his love, Euridice (*Met.* 10.1-11.84; see also Virgil, *Georg.* 4.453-525 for another version of the story). In Exodus, Moses (and Joshua in the LXX) met the God of Israel on Mount Sinai (24:15).<sup>1</sup> Pausanias claims to have seen Niobe on Mount Sipylus (1.21.3).<sup>2</sup> Pliny, in his list of fantastic phenomenon on the eastern edge of the world, notes the satyrs in the mountain of India (7.2.24-25).<sup>3</sup> The author of the *Gospel of Luke* also records a forty day period where Jesus is tempted in the wilderness and interacts with otherworldly entities (4:1-13). Furthermore, the author of *Luke* tells of the transfiguration on a mountain where Peter, James and John

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<sup>1</sup> See Leal for a discussion of wilderness and theophany, especially concerning this particular text. Robert Barry Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible: Toward a Theology of Wilderness*, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: P. Lang, 2004), 153-54. For a study of the routes taken in the Sinai peninsula, see Graham I. Davies, *The Way of the Wilderness: A Geographical Study of the Wilderness Itineraries in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 76-93.

<sup>2</sup> Ada Cohen, "Art, Myth, and Travel in the Hellenistic World," in *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Roman Greece*, ed. Susan E. Alcock, John F. Cherry, and Jas' Elsner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 96.

<sup>3</sup> James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 104-05.

encounter Moses, Elijah and a transformed Jesus (9:28-36). The examples could be proliferated *ad infinitum*.

This theme of place in ancient Mediterranean religious thought is central to our understanding of what is happening to Saul in Acts 9:1-19a. Horden and Purcell state it in the following way:

It is not more true to say that religion is geographical in the Mediterranean than that geography is religious. We see no reason to reject symmetry in the matter. In the history of the Mediterranean religions, there is a cognitive cohesion founded on a certain level of engagement with place and a certain range of ways of conceptualizing it.<sup>4</sup>

It is within the context of those marginal places, or boundaries, that journeys can take a strange and/or dangerous turn. Again, Horden and Purcell explain the phenomenon of the transitional state of boundaries.

Like some sanctuaries on the fringes of mountain, forest or marsh, the sacred island or peninsula partakes of two domains and expresses the difficult zone of transition between them. Wilderness is often less remote and intractable than it appears. Apparently inaccessible, and certainly poor in resources, the islet of Delos was (as we noted earlier) in fact central to Aegean communications, and its centrality was expressed in a cult of Apollo parallel to that at Delphi, which was seen as the navel of the world.<sup>5</sup>

It is Saul's journey to a boundary that encapsulates his journey to Damascus, which is a bounded marker of the sacred land of Israel.

Therefore, in Acts 9:1-19a, Saul is portrayed as a Judean traveling north to Damascus in order to persecute Judean heretics. In the midst of his travels, Saul has a theophany, encountering the resurrected Christ whom he has been persecuting. This moment of riposte on the part of Jesus occurs as Saul moves away from the central places of purity for Judeans

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<sup>4</sup> Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2000), 459.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

and plays a major role in the author's depiction of the message of Jesus reaching Rome. In order to better provide an interpretive framework for this travel narrative, a model of Travel and Ritual will be delineated. This will incorporate ideas of purity and status transformation in order to provide an interpretive framework. Finally, there will be a more thorough analysis of Saul's movement toward Damascus utilizing the model in order to present to modern interpreters a more culturally sensitive lens through which to view the passage.

### **Travel, Ritual, and Marginal Spaces**

#### *Purity*

In terms of a model of travel and ritual, one must take into account ideas of purity when it comes to Saul's movement away from Jerusalem. Purity describes, in abstraction, an ordering of a social system. Purity indicates what is in place, appropriate, and what fits cultural norms. In all cultures, purity represents the lines humans draw in order to create meaning in their world. That which does not fit into a culture's idea of purity has the ability to contaminate what is pure. This concept refers to ideas of pollution. In describing this concept, Mary Douglas uses the term "dirt."

For us dirt is a kind of compendium category for all events which blur, smudge, contradict or otherwise confuse accepted classifications. The underlying feeling is that a system of values which is habitually expressed in a given arrangement of things has been violated.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore:

Pollution rules can thus be seen as an extension of the perceptual process: in so far as they impose order on experience, they support clarification of forms and thus reduce dissonance.<sup>7</sup>

Purity and pollution can also be applied to landscapes.

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Douglas, "Pollution," in *Implicit Meanings: Essay in Anthropology*, ed. Mary Douglas (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

Jerome Neyrey applies this concept in a more concrete way to the “maps and boundary lines” in first century Judea.<sup>8</sup> In a purity conscious group like first century Judeans, patterns of ordering, consisting of *boundaries*, *structure*, and *margins*, would have been used to predict where each person, place, and thing belonged.<sup>9</sup> *Boundaries* determine who is part of the in-group and who is part of the out-group.<sup>10</sup> For Judeans, the covenant people (Lev. 20:26), these boundary markers consisted of circumcision, kosher diet, and Sabbath observance which set them apart from all other people groups.<sup>11</sup>

*Structure* includes, but is not limited to, maps of places and people. For the Judeans, places are measured in terms of holiness. Neyrey provides a list, in ascending order, from *m. Kelim*.

1. The land of Isreal is holier than any other land ...
2. The walled cities (of the land of Isreal) are still more holy ...
3. Within the walls (of Jerusalem) is still more holy ...
4. The Temple Mount is still more holy ...
5. The Rampart is still more holy ...
6. The Court of the Women is still more holy ...
7. The Court of the Israelites is still more holy ...
8. The Court of the Priests is still more holy ...
9. Between the Porch and the Altar is still more holy ...
10. The Sanctuary is still more holy ...
11. The Holy of Holies is still more holy ... (*m. Kelim* 1.6-9).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Symbolic Universe of Luke-Acts: 'They Turn the World Upside Down'," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrikson, 1993), 281.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1995), 115. See also Neyrey, "Symbolic Universe," 281.

<sup>10</sup> Neyrey, "Symbolic Universe," 281.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. For other examples of what is “pure” in first century Judaism, see Jerome H. Neyrey, "Unclean, Common, Polluted, Taboo: A Short Reading Guide," *Forum (Foundations and Facets)* 4 (1988): 76. Douglas, *Purity*, 42-58. Jerome H. Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 26-31.

<sup>12</sup> Neyrey, "Symbolic Universe," 278-79.

Neyrey also provides a list of people, in descending order, from *t. Meg.*

1. Priests
2. Levites
3. Israelites
4. Converts
5. Freed Slaves
6. Disqualified Priests
7. Netzins (temple slaves)
8. Mamzers (Bastards)
9. Those with damaged testicles
10. Those without a penis (*t. Meg.* 2.7).<sup>13</sup>

Some principles may be observed from these lists. First, in reference to place, the heart of the temple contains the highest degree of holiness, and those outside Israel are not even listed. Second, in reference to people, “holiness” stands for wholeness. Therefore, people with damaged bodies are ranked last on the list. Third, the ranking of people coincides with the ranking of place in reference to one’s proximity to the heart of the temple.<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, *margins* refer to those people, places, things, that do not fit, either entirely or partially, into the ordered system. These things are impure and threaten social order. For example, to follow our lists above, those who are not Israelites are “impure” when inside the boundaries of the holy land and of the temple (Acts 21:28).<sup>15</sup> People who are not whole are also “impure.” “Too much” suggests matter out of place. For example, a hunchback is considered unclean because he has “extra” (Lev. 21:20). “Too little” suggests lacking wholeness. This would include the eunuchs, a man with crushed testicles (Lev. 21:20), and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 279. See also Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel," *Semeia* 35 (1986): 95-96.

<sup>14</sup> Neyrey, "Symbolic Universe," 279.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 282.

defective animals.<sup>16</sup> Also, the “defective” are considered “impure.” This includes “lepers,”<sup>17</sup> the blind, lame, or anyone with a bodily deflection (Lev. 21:16-20).<sup>18</sup>

### *Status Transformation Ritual*

While Saul travels from Jerusalem to Damascus, the author of Acts takes his character through what anthropologists call a “rite of passage.” More pointedly, I have argued elsewhere that a Boundary Breaking Ritual best describes what is happening here.<sup>19</sup> In breaking the boundaries of a group, an individual participates in a process that integrates her into another group. For this boundary breaking moment, this study uses the term “recruitment” rather than “conversion.” Using Navarro and Leatham’s understanding of New Religious Movements, we see that recruitment happens when one enters a group, whereas conversion occurs as one spends time and is enculturated while in the group.<sup>20</sup> This means that the out-group individual must permeate managed boundary controls of the in-group, while the in-group facilitates the transition, helping the recruited individual through the

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<sup>16</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "Miracles, in Other Words: Social Science Perspective on Healing," in *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity: Imagining Truth*, ed. John C. Cavadini (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> John J. Pilch, "Understanding Biblical Healing: Selecting the Appropriate Model," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 18, no. 2 (1988): 60-66.

<sup>18</sup> Neyrey, "Symbolic Universe," 282ff.

<sup>19</sup> Jason T. Lamoreaux, "Social Identity, Boundary Breaking, and Ritual: Saul's Recruitment on the Road to Damascus," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 38, no. 4 (2008): Forthcoming.

<sup>20</sup> Carlos Garma Navarro and Miguel Leatham, "Pentecostal Adaptations in Rural and Urban Mexico: An Anthropological Assessment," *Mexican Studies* 20, no. 1 (2004): 147-48.

conversion process.<sup>21</sup> This very process of initiation is represented in Saul's journey to Damascus, as Saul moves to the traditional northern boundary of Israel (Ezekiel 47:17).

In terms of ritual itself, there are a number that involve negative and positive actions toward the new member. For our purposes, it is enough to describe one form of negative initiation. "Such ceremonies communicate to new members how far they must go to win oldtimers' confidence and respect. The realization that they have low status and power in the group should increase their motivation to work hard during socialization."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, entering into the group and establishing oneself can be a rigorous process for both the in-group and the new member.

On a larger, more abstract scale, two groups can understand themselves to be integrated into an overarching group simultaneously.

Thus, as depicted by the "subgroups within one group" (i.e., a same team or dual identity) representation, we believe that it is possible for members to conceive of two groups as distinct units within the context of a superordinate identity. When group identities are highly salient or are central to members' functioning, it may be undesirable or impossible for people to relinquish these group identities or, as perceivers, to become "colorblind" and truly ignore inter-group distinctions.<sup>23</sup>

This multiple personality can work on many levels as far as occupations, ethnic groups, status in society, etc. For example, a Judean in the 1<sup>st</sup> century may see himself or herself as part of the larger category of "Judean" and then he or she may have an embedded identity in the subgroup "Sadducee" or "Christ Follower." This embeddedness can create two reactions on the

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<sup>21</sup> John M. Levine, Richard L. Moreland, and Leslie R. M. Hausmann, "Managing Group Composition: Inclusive and Exclusive Role Transitions," in *The Social Psychology of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. Dominic Abrams, Michael A. Hogg, and Jose M. Marques (New York: Psychology Press, 2005), 149.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>23</sup> John F. Dovidio et al., "Social Inclusion and Exclusion: Recategorization and the Perception of Intergroup Boundaries," in *The Social Psychology of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. Dominic Abrams, Michael A. Hogg, and Jose M. Marques (New York: Psychology Press, 2005), 251.

part of groups. First, two groups that are embedded in a larger category or group may find this similarity strong enough to maintain salience. The groups may remain distinct, but their boundaries overlap in that they are willing to interact or even share members. The second is that the groups build stronger boundaries between one another and exaggerate each other's identities in order to vilify the other .

Tajfel discusses the vilifying of out-groups by in-group members. He notes the causes of inter-group conflict in four classes.

- A) Social differentials in status, power, rank, privilege, access to resources, etc., when the group boundaries are firmly drawn and/or perceived as such and when the social organization on which these differentials are based loses its perceived legitimacy and/or stability.
- B) Intergroup conflict or competition, not necessarily related to previously existing status differences.
- C) Movements for change initiated by social groups which, as distinct from case *a* above, are not always related to impermeable boundaries between groups.
- D) Individually determined patterns of prejudice which have tended for a long time to occupy the center of the stage in much of the traditional research on the subject.<sup>24</sup>

Ng observes that when there are multiple sub-groups embedded in an overarching macro-group, an “exit” by one of the groups is extremely difficult or impossible.<sup>25</sup> The farther away status-wise a group is from the super-ordinate group, the more difficult it is to overpower it. In terms of the Sanhedrin in Acts and the Christ followers, this inconsistency in power is obvious.

Two groups in particular are juxtaposed in Acts 6-9. The first group are those that belonging to the Jesus followers, represented by Stephen (6-7) and Philip (8:4-40), and the second is the group that is willing to persecuted the Christ followers for “blasphemy” (6:11),

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<sup>24</sup> Henri Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations," *Annual Review of Psychology* 33 (1982): 14.

<sup>25</sup> S. H. Ng, "Minimal Social Categorization, Political Categorization, and Power Change," *Human Relations* 31 (1978): 265-78.

the aristocratic ruling class of the Judeans represented by Saul (7:58-8:3; 9:1-2). In Luke-Acts, Saul is angered by the Christ followers' claims to legitimacy through the Mosaic Law.<sup>26</sup> This lines up with Tajfel's group "A" of conflict motivators between in-groups and out-groups.<sup>27</sup> The group that Luke's Saul represents is claiming that Stephen's proclamation concerning the Jesus followers is illegitimate. On the other hand, Stephen's speech, from inside the Jesus group, apologetically places the followers of Christ directly in the line of the legitimate continuation of the tradition.<sup>28</sup> This is made concrete when Jesus appears only to Stephen.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, on a Pilgrimage from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, Philip presents to the Ethiopian Eunuch an interpretation of Isaiah that places Jesus squarely in the fulfillment of the prophet's prophecies (Acts 8:29-35). Clare K. Rothschild comments on Luke's use of predictive elements within his text.

While prediction in Luke-Acts is diverse, in its capacity as an element of historiography it is singular in its aim – through familiarity, clarification and the fact that events were foreseen – to commend and sanction the truth of the author's version of what took place. Foretelling of events in anticipation of their actually taking place in a historical narrative is a subtle form of persuasion, that is particularly useful for preparing audiences to embrace bizarre [inclusion of Gentiles into a Judean community] or extraordinary narrative outcomes.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> David L. Balch, "Metabolh Politeiwn Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function," in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, *Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 139-41, 74, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations," 14.

<sup>28</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A Literary Interpretation: The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2, Foundations and Facets (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1994), 92.

<sup>29</sup> Alfons Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Orig.-Ausg. ed., vol. 1, Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar Zum Neuen Testament ; Bd. 5 (Gütersloh Würzburg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn; Echter-Verlag, 1981), 192.

<sup>30</sup> Clare K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History : An Investigation of Early Christian Historiography* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 182-83.

Luke shows the legitimacy of this interpretation by having Philip immediately baptize the Eunuch (Acts 9:36-39). Acceptance from a marginal member of the Judean community is thus contrasted with those who stoned Stephen.

The story of Saul is sandwiched by the stories of Stephen and Philip (Acts 7:58-8:3). This narrative places Saul within a powerful group that is dishonoring the followers of “The Way” (Acts 9:3), and he is depicted as deeply embedded in his social group. In terms of honor and shame, Saul has affronted the honor of the Christ followers and, as will be demonstrated later in the narrative of Acts, the honor of God (9:4). Balch understands this claim to legitimacy through the changing of the Judean “constitution” to be embedded in this very sort of conflict found in Acts.

The question whether to admit foreigners to the house churches ... generates *stasis* in the church in Antioch (Acts 15:2)... One key charge against Paul before the Roman governor Felix is that he generates stasis among Jews [Judeans] throughout the world (Acts 24:5). However... Paul purifies himself and performs rituals so that “all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you but that you yourself observe and guard the law” (Acts 21:24b). Paul claims simply to be practicing and believing Mosaic Torah, doing nothing that should offend traditional Jews [Judeans] and cause riots. In this Lukan depiction, Paul has not changed Moses’ constitution.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, represented by the journey of Saul, Acts 9 is the beginning of the author’s narrative movement outside the bounds of Israel to legitimize the mission that will bring foreigners into the circle of Christ followers. This apologetic thread is laced throughout the Gospel of Luke (4:19) and is brought all the way through to the end of Acts, with the progression of the Gospel moving outward from Jerusalem and finally reaching Rome (Acts 28) .

Since groups form boundaries around them, many tend to have rituals that allow new members into the group. Some groups are more permeable than others, and those that are less

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<sup>31</sup> Balch, "Metabolh Politeiwn Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function," 160.

permeable are both difficult to break out of and difficult to enter. This will help us to define what happens to Saul on his journey to Damascus.

### *Ritual as Boundary Breaking*

In his text on human institutions, Jonathan Turner describes two sorts of broad definitions for the term “Ritual.” His first definition begins to define a set of rituals that are practiced regularly.

*Calendrical Rituals* are enacted on a regular schedule – whether at the day or night, at the waxing and waning of the moon, at the beginning or ending of seasons, at eclipses and positions of planets and stars, or on the birthdays of supernatural beings.<sup>32</sup>

The other types of rituals that Turner wishes to define are those that break into our existence and are not necessarily predictable.

*Noncalendrical* rituals are performed sporadically, on special occasions, or in times of crisis. Some noncalendrical rituals such as puberty rites or *rites de passage* of many societies follow somewhat of a cycle and occur at certain more or less determined times in the life of an individual, but the time, place, and period of the ritual are not precisely set by the calendar.<sup>33</sup>

As a type of rite of passage, initiation rites can be non-calendrical in nature. Rites of passage change status, taking individuals across social boundaries (outsider to insider, single to married, layperson to priest).<sup>34</sup> These rites place a permanently influential mark on a person’s life. For example, a married person never goes back to being just “single,” but is considered “divorced” after the marriage is ruptured.

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan H. Turner, *Human Institutions: A Theory of Societal Evolution* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 70.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2000), 147.

These transitional rites are patterns that have been appropriated by many cultures throughout the centuries. Van Gennep comments on the all-inclusive nature of rites in the lives of normal individuals.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, this commonality among rites of passage can also be seen in the ancient literature during and prior to the time of Luke's writing. Strecker states that rites of passage can demonstrate and facilitate movement of a person from one group into another.<sup>36</sup> In our case, baptism will mark the culmination of the rite in our analysis and, therefore, initiation rites, or what we are calling a boundary-breaking rite, will be the central focus of this part of the model.

Victor Turner, improving van Gennep's model, expands on the ideas surrounding initiation rites and how they occur. He describes the movement through the rite in three stages: separation, margin and aggregation. These involve a removal from one's core group and everyday activities which leads to an ambiguous state or liminal period and finally ends in a reintegration of the person into a new status.<sup>37</sup> Turner goes on to clarify that rites of passage do not only involve transitions between ascribed statuses like birth, death, marriage, and puberty rites but also involves achieved status as well.<sup>38</sup>

The first phase of initiation rites, or separation, brings a person onto the edge of symbolic death. The individual is removed from society and moves toward a transitional or

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<sup>35</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Christian Strecker, "Die Liminale Theologie Des Paulus: Zugänge Zur Paulinischen Theologie Aus Kulturanthropologischer Perspektive" (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 42.

<sup>37</sup> Victor Witter Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 94.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

liminal phase. This phase is the initiation of “violence,” either physical or symbolic.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, neophytes are separated from the normal rhythms of life. They are secluded from their former group, either kin or fictive kin, and become prepared to accept their new status. It is also important to separate the neophyte from the central places of life, i.e. home, temple, etc. Furthermore, time begins to be disrupted (i.e. long times of no eating or sleeping or forced activity) and violence enters the neophytes existence.<sup>40</sup>

The second phase of initiation, or liminal stage, needs further definition. The stripping of prior statuses and being of no status at all usually identify this period in the initiation rite. First, it must be noted that, at this stage in the ritual, the neophyte is now under the complete authority of any instructors there might be in the ritual.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the neophyte is viewed as possessing nothing, with no status, property, insignia, and position in a kinship system. The initiate is normally passive and must obey the instructors without hesitation. The liminal state is there to strip the person of all former, personal markers so that she can be integrated into a group anew. This period of the rite binds the initiate to others who have been and are being initiated into a status or the community. Turner describes this liminal period as building *communitas*, which he describes in the following way. “Liminality implies that the high [in status] could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low.”<sup>42</sup> The humility that accompanies being stripped of one’s station in

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<sup>39</sup> Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience*, The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures ; 1984 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 181.

<sup>40</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 223-26.

<sup>41</sup> Victor Witter Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage," in *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, ed. Louise Carus Mahdi, Steven Foster, and Meredith Little (La Salle: Open Court, 1987), 9.

<sup>42</sup> Victor Witter Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 97.

life and identity, no matter the prior status, allows that person to experience what everyone has experienced in the confines of her new *communitas*.

This liminal state is also understood to represent a sort of death and the stage of aggregation a rebirth. In her analysis of ritual theory, Bell delineates a number of types of models that have been helpful, including the ideas of death and rebirth.

Ritual as the expression of paradigmatic values of death and rebirth; ritual as a mechanism for bringing the individual into the community and establishing a social entity; or ritual as a process for social transformation, for catharsis, for embodying symbolic values, for defining the nature of the real, or for struggling over control of the sign – the formulations are all tools that help us to analyze what may be going on in any particular set of activities.<sup>43</sup>

The process of becoming a part of a group and attaining a new status or identity can be painful or traumatic at many levels. Death, a natural part of every human's life, is a universal symbol that gets ported into transitional rites.

In his analysis of symbols of death in rituals, Turner gives examples of symbols he has found in his fieldwork. He notes that death symbolism is almost always paralleled or overlapped with symbolisms of birth. The broad number of different symbols is striking and worth noting.

It is interesting to note how, by the principle of economy (or parsimony) of symbolic reference, logically antithetical processes of death and growth may be represented by the same tokens, for example, by huts and tunnels that are at once tombs and wombs, by lunar symbolism (for the same moon waxes and wanes), by snake symbolism (for the snake appears to die, but only to shed its old skin and appear in a new one), by bear symbolism (for the bear “dies” in autumn and is “reborn” in spring), by nakedness (which is at once the mark of a newborn infant and a corpse prepared for burial), and by innumerable other symbolic formations and actions.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual : Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 89.

<sup>44</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols; Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 99.

Since these symbols are so universal in rites of passage, it is not at all odd that the early Christ followers would adapt similar images for their “recruitment speak.” In the Letter of James, the author uses birth imagery to denote entrance into the community. βουληθεὶς ἀπεκύησεν ἡμᾶς λόγῳ ἀληθείας εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἀπαρχὴν τινα τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων (James 1:18). Also, Paul speaks about entrance to the community using death as symbol. συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὡς περ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρὸς, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν (Romans 6:4). Wedderburn points out this very fact in his comments on 2 Corinthians.

The theme of ‘life in death’ is particularly prominent in 2 Corinthians: there Paul speaks of ‘constantly carrying about in our body the putting to death (νέκρωσις) of Jesus, in order that Jesus’ life too might be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are constantly being delivered up to death for Jesus’ sake, in order that Jesus’ life might be revealed in our mortal flesh (4.10f). Of his ministry he says that ‘we are dying and, look, we are alive’ (6.9), a statement which is one of the most vivid of a series of paradoxical antithesis (6.8-10) rather reminiscent of 1 Cor 7.29-31.<sup>45</sup>

So, one might add to Turner’s symbols the rite of baptism. But, Saul’s movement through these three phases as a sojourner is far from foreign in the Greco-Roman context. Although many examples of journeys that reached boundaries were given in the introduction to this paper, only a few will be fleshed out due to special considerations. The two are the character of Odysseus and of Lucian.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is a man who is continually in a liminal state throughout books 1-21. In book 5, Odysseus is encountered for the first time floating upon the sea. His wanderings have caused great dismay for his family back home (Books 1-4). In his separation from all that is normal, Odysseus meets gods, goddesses, and all forms of monsters. This period of his journeys is meant to show Odysseus’ change from Iliadic hero to a slyer and less brash

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<sup>45</sup> A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection : Studies in Pauline Theology against Its Graeco-Roman Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987), 382.

man who will be able to defeat the suitors by subterfuge.<sup>46</sup> Olmsted comments on Odysseus' move into that "far beyond" where liminality occurs.

Odysseus must travel and risk possible transformations into a pig, a mountain, or the consort of a goddess before he can renew his social relations within the household. Paradoxically, the disturbance of internal relations within the household requires that Odysseus experience the most distant external social relations with alien people. Only by traveling to the edge of the world (to the West and to Oceanus) can Odysseus return home and defend himself from being cut down like an ox or slaughtered pig, a fate encountered by Agamemnon and his men (*O* 11.413). Nature is thus not merely other and set apart as a distinct category in the *Odyssey*; it is present in and permeates familial and social relations. When social relations are disordered by change (here in the form of travel), nature threatens to erupt, producing destruction. By traveling to the boundaries of civilized human life, Odysseus explores the limits of nature and culture in order to return home, wiser by knowing the minds of many men and by having undergone contests with such "natural" divinities as Circe, Cyclops, and the Lotus-eaters.<sup>47</sup>

Odysseus faces his monsters and goes through a very long rite of passage. He eventually becomes a blank slate, giving into his teacher, Athena, the right to disguise him, hiding behind a mask that will not allow the hubristic hero that he once was to burst forth (*Od.* 13.375-391). Before this, he declares his name to be "Nobody" (Οὔτις ἐμοί γ' ὄνομα) (9.366). More important for our analysis is his journey to the underworld. While at the edge of Hades, not dead but not alive, he experiences the renewal of life through the knowledge imparted him by the phantoms (*Od.* 11). Circe declares this fact when she sees him once again.

Σχέτλιοι, οἳ ζῶντες ὑπήλθετε δῶμ' Ἀΐδαο,  
δισθανέες, ὅτε τ' ἄλλοι ἅπαξ θνησκουσ' ἀνθρώποι.  
ἀλλ' ἄγετ' Βρώμηγ καὶ πίνετε οἶνον  
αὔθι πανημέριοι.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, this theme of death and rebirth is located in one of the most influential Greek pieces of literature and is also adopted by Virgil in *Aeneid* 6. Virgil expands the idea and shows Aeneas' transformation through a far more elaborate scene than *Od.* 11 does for Odysseus.

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<sup>46</sup> I am deeply indebted to Dr. Robert Rabel at the University of Kentucky for opening my eyes to this interpretation of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*.

Odysseus moves from that former group of Iliadic heroes to a more subtle form of ruler at the end of *Od.* 23.

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* provides another example of status transformation amidst a journey gone awry.<sup>49</sup> Apuleius' text is a complex mixture of journeys and conversions throughout, and Lucius, the main character, moves through adventures searching for magic. In books 1-3, Lucius goes to the city of Hypata and sleeps with his patron's serving girl in order to get her to tell him where he can find magic, and he ends up transformed into an ass. In books 8-10, his life as an ass is told as he lives under the ownership of four different people. Book 11 leads the reader into a different world, that of the mysteries. Here, the long separation of Lucius comes to a head as he proceeds to enter a new community and gain a new status.

To begin his move into liminality, Isis shows up to tell Lucius the ass what to do and how to become transformed into a human again. Isis also states that she has gone to the priest and given him instructions concerning his transformation and initiation into the mysteries (*Met.* 11.4-6). This instruction and subsequent transformation come with the price of loyalty to Isis for the rest of his life.

Meo iussu tibi constricti comitatus decedent populi;  
nec inter hilares caerimonias et festiva spectacula  
quisquam deformem istam quam geris faciem perhorreescet,  
vel figuram tuam repente mutatam sequius interpretatus  
aliquis maligne criminabitur. Plane memineris et penita  
mente conditum semper tenebis mihi reliqua vitae tuae

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<sup>47</sup> Wendy Olmsted, "On the Margins of Otherness: Metamorphosis and Identity in Homer, Ovid, Sidney and Milton," *New Literary History* 27, no. 2 (1996): 173-74.

<sup>48</sup> Unhappy men, who went alive to the house of Hades,  
so dying twice, when all the rest of mankind die only  
once, come then eat what is there and drink your wine, staying  
here all the rest of the day; (*Od.* 12.21-24).  
Translation is from Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Alexander Lattimore (New York,; HarperPerennial, 1999). Greek text from Homer, *The Odyssey I-Xii: Edited with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. William Bedell Stanford, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London,; Bristol Classical Press, 2001).

<sup>49</sup> Again, my conclusions were reached independent of Gallagher, Gallagher, "Conversion and Community," 11-13.

curricula ad usque terminus ultimi spiritus vadata: nec iniurium, cuius beneficio redieris ad homines, ei totum debere quod vives (*Met* 11.6).<sup>50</sup>

With the priest of Isis having been told about Lucius' situation and what he ought to do for him, he approaches the ass, Lucius, and gives him the roses he must eat in order to morph back into a human (*Met.* 11.12-14). This begins Lucius' move from one community, that of "fools" or asses<sup>51</sup> and toward an initiation into the mysteries of Isis.

When asking the priest to initiate him into the mysteries, the priest tells Lucius that the goddess will tell him when it is time, and he makes comments concerning men on the edge of death and returning to health, as if reconstituted.

Nam et inferum claustra et salutis tutelam in deae manu posita, ipsamque traditionem **ad instar voluntariae mortis et precariae salutis** celebrari, quipped cum transactis vitae temporibus iam in ipso finitae lucis limine constitutos, quis tamen tuto possint magna religionis committi silentia, numen deae soleat elicere et sua providential quodam modo renatos **ad novae reponere rusus salutis** curricula (*Met.* 11.21).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Moreover, think not that amongst so fair and joyful ceremonies, and in so good company, that any person shall abhor thy ill-favoured and deformed figure, or that any man shall be so hardy as to blame and reprove thy sudden restoration to human shape. Whereby they should gather or conceive any sinister opinion of thee; and know thou this of certainty, that the residue of thy life until the hour of death shall be bound and subject to me; and think it not an injury to be always serviceable towards me whilst thou shalt live, since as by my mean and benefit thou shalt live, since as by my mean and benefit thou shalt return again to be a man (*Metamorphosis* 11.6). Apuleius, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius*, trans. William Addington, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>51</sup> This has to do with the comic satire infused amidst the serious point of Apuleius' work. For more on the comic and serious in *The Metamorphosis*, see Stephen J. Harrison, "Apuleius," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Nancy Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius' Metamorphoses* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> For the gates of shadow as well as the bulwarks of life were under the Goddess's control; and the act of initiation had been compared to a voluntary death with a slight chance of redemption. Therefore the divine will of the Goddess was wont to choose men who had lived their life to the full, who were coming near the limits of waning light, and who yet could be safely trusted with the mighty secrets of her religion. These men by her divine will she regenerated and restored to strength sufficient for their new career (*Met.* 11.21). Translation from Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. Jack Lindsay, *Indiana University Greek and Latin Classics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962).

Following this statement, the priest instructs Lucius to fast, abstaining from forbidden foods (11.21) and Lucius is depicted as humble and obedient (11.22). At this stage, Lucian is continuing his move from separation to liminality. Soon after, Lucius is appointed a priest, Mithras, to initiate him by the goddess. This leads to his entrance into the temple (his liminal state) (11.22-23) and the following sequence of events occurs.

- 1) Lucius enters the gate of the temple (11.22).
- 2) He is told the secrets of the books written with a strange language (11.22).
- 3) He is brought to the baths and washed and purified by the priest in the waters, “invoking the pardon of the gods” (11.23).
- 4) Lucius fasts for 10 days after receiving more instruction (11.23).
- 5) He is dressed in a new linen robe before entering the innermost part of the temple (11.23).
- 6) He is sequestered in this part of the temple, and he describes it as entering the underworld, where he encounters many various gods (11.23).
- 7) The next day, Lucius emerges “from Hades” and is then vested as a priest of Isis. This is coupled with a three-day celebration that institutes his reaggregation (11.24).
- 8) Having gone through his liminal state and changing identities from ass to priest, Isis instructs him to leave to visit his family who thought him long dead before his transformation. This completes his aggregation and his ritual transformation (11.25-26).

Lucius’ conversion and boundary breaking reflect the double pattern of travel and change through a rite of passage or status transformation ritual.

### **Acts 9:1-19a: Social Identity, Boundary Breaking, and Ritual in Saul’s Conversion**

Having looked at Purity and rites of passage among those who are traveling, we will now turn to the primary purpose of this investigation: an exegesis of Acts 9:1-19a. Prior to Acts 9, the reader has encountered occasions in which non-Judeans have entered the community called “the Way” (8:4-25; 8:26-40). These accounts are sandwiched between the threads of a story line concerning Saul the persecutor. After scattering the Jerusalem church, Saul, on the heels of Stephen’s execution, continues his persecution. This sets the stage both for the author’s apologetic concerns surrounding the inclusion of Gentiles in the church and the journey of Saul as a parallel to this very inclusion.

**Acts 9:1-2:** The author begins Acts 9 with a claim about Saul's status as a Judean. Immediately on reintroducing Saul, the author has him threatening the Christ Followers and having access to the high priest to gain his blessing in his persecutions.<sup>53</sup> Saul gains access to permission from the ruling class in Jerusalem to persecute those he finds to be deviant Judeans.<sup>54</sup> A movement for change in the contexts of Judean groups by Jesus followers causes the dominant, ruling group, represented by Saul, to react in a violent way in order to purge the non-conformist Jesus followers from the over-arching identity of the Judean community.

Luke, then, portrays Paul as a retainer of the governing class in Jerusalem, who acts as their agent, with their authority, and with official documents from them to legitimate his activities and to support his claims.<sup>55</sup>

This places Saul within a certain group opposing another. In terms of SIT, Saul is toward the center of the group, being close enough to the leaders to obtain their blessing for his activities.<sup>56</sup>

As with Odysseus' travels in *The Odyssey*, Saul begins his journeys toward the boundaries of Israel.<sup>57</sup> In traveling to Damascus, Saul moves toward what the author of Ezekiel considers the northern most boundary of the land of Israel (47:17). These outer reaches of the sacred, promised land of Israel represent, for Saul, a journey toward a liminal

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<sup>53</sup> For further discussion on the historicity and jurisdiction of the high priest, see Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity According to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 106-07.

<sup>54</sup> Jaques Dupont, "The Conversion of Paul, and Its Influence on His Understanding of Salvation by Faith," in *Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*, ed. W. Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 185.

<sup>55</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "Luke's Social Location of Paul: Cultural Anthropology and the Status of Paul in Acts," in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 261.

<sup>56</sup> Talbert suggests that the letter from the high priest is reminiscent of 1 Macc. 15:15-24. Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 98.

<sup>57</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 49-54.

state, a rite of passage and a change of identity and status. This movement away from the center of Jewish purity (Jerusalem) takes Saul a step closer to his journey toward his new status as apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).

**Acts 9:3-9:** After the author gives descriptors concerning Paul's motivation and status, he recounts Saul's encounter with Jesus and his Altered State of Consciousness (ASC). Pilch has pointed out that this behavior, that of ASC, is culturally normative for ancient, and modern, Mediterranean cultures. In other words, they experience(d) ASC's and would have seen this as normal when contacted by someone from the divine realm.<sup>58</sup> Neuroscientists and anthropologists have pointed out that intense concentration and travel can induce a person into a trance.<sup>59</sup> This experience is not unlike the experience of Lucius in Apuleius, *Metamorphosis*, 11.4-6, Jesus' experience at his baptism in the synoptics (Luke 3:21-22; Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11<sup>60</sup>), or Scipio's dream in Cicero, *De Re Publica*, VI.10-29.<sup>61</sup>

Saul, in his confrontation with the deity, falls to the ground (9:4). This violent beginning furthers Saul's separation from the familiar and begins the ritual boundary breaking. Here, in terms of honor challenges, Jesus confronts the one who has been attacking him via "the Way" and thrusts Saul into a ritual that will help him to see that he is the one mistaken, not the Christ followers (9:5). The repetition of Saul's name, i.e. Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, acts

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<sup>58</sup> For a more elaborate description and analysis, see John J. Pilch, *Visions and Healing in the Acts of the Apostles: How the Early Believers Experienced God* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), 68-81.

<sup>59</sup> Jean Clottes and J. David Lewis-Williams, *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 19-20.

<sup>60</sup> For an analysis of this passage in terms of Rites of Passage, see Mark McVann, "Rituals of Status Transformation in Luke-Acts: The Case of Jesus the Prophet," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 333-60.

<sup>61</sup> See Apuleius, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius*. and Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Re Publica, De Legibus*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

as an overcode that reminds the reader of the theophanies in the Hebrew scriptures (Gen. 46:23-34; Exod. 3:2-6; 1 Sam. 3:2-10, 10:2; Isa. 6:1-3; Esdr. 14:1).<sup>62</sup>

Saul is now in a fallen and submissive position, beginning his experience of liminality. This is evident in his disoriented state beginning with the question τίς εἶ, κύριε?<sup>63</sup> Saul is then instructed by Jesus to go into the city with no indication of what will happen when he gets there (9:6). This is coupled with the fact that Saul is blinded, compounding his disoriented state, causing him to be led by his companions to the city (9:8-9). This causes problems for Saul's prior embedded status. For a devout and zealous Judean, wholeness of body is crucial in order to be considered within the social group of loyal devotees. Mary Douglas, in terms of Israelite purity, makes the following observations.

We can conclude that holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused.<sup>64</sup>

For Saul, a person who has contact with central authorities in Jerusalem, blindness would bring into question his status within his community. This reflects the negative initiation rites described by Levine, et. al. above.<sup>65</sup> Lastly, in Acts 9:9, Saul is shown as forgoing food for three days while he is sequestered. Like Aseneth (*Joseph and Aseneth*, 20.10), Saul is separated from his normal rhythm by fasting.

**Acts 9:10-16:** Here, Luke introduces the professional that will help Saul complete his transition. Ananias, this professional, also experiences an ASC and receives a message from God, not unlike the message received by the priest of Isis to initiate Lucius into the mysteries

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<sup>62</sup> Howard Clark Kee, *To Every Nation under Heaven: The Acts of the Apostles* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 117.

<sup>63</sup> F. Scott Spencer, "Paul's Odyssey in Acts: Status Struggles and Island Adventures," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 28, no. 4 (1998): 151.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1995), 54.

<sup>65</sup> Levine, Moreland, and Hausmann, "Managing Group Composition," 149.

(Apuleius, *Met.* 11.6). Ananias' recognition of God indicates his true discipleship and membership in the community of Jesus' followers (Acts 9:10) as well as contrasts with Saul's ignorance (Acts 9:5). Furthermore, this double vision in Acts 9 confirms God's orchestration of the activities at hand and also is used as an apologetic toward Saul's true integration into the community.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, Ananias acts as God's broker in the ritual, representing the whole community in which Saul will now enter.<sup>67</sup>

Subsequently, Ananias learns of God's plans for Saul and is instructed to heal his blindness. This enhances the fact that Saul is currently at the mercy of Ananias' help and God's inclusion of himself in the Jesus followers' community (9:11-12).<sup>68</sup> Ananias then protests since Saul's reputation is terrifying (9:13-14). The author is masterful here since God rebuts Ananias' statement and further proclaims that Saul will be the instrument he uses to reach the Gentiles. Once again, this acts as an apologetic for the Jesus followers to accept non-Judeans into the community, which will be further substantiated in Acts 10. In Acts 9, the inevitability of the Gentile acceptance is brought to light on the very lips of God (Acts 9:15). Saul, formerly a zealous Judean, will reach beyond the purity boundaries of his former community to help Gentiles break the boundary of the Jesus community. Saul's honor is destined to be restored and his aggregation into a new community is eminent. All of these ideas are portrayed through Saul's movement away from Jerusalem and eventually beyond the borders of the land of Israel.

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<sup>66</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 5, *Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 167, 69. Johnson goes on to say that what happens to Saul in Acts nine is ritual and liminal, but not a rite of passage as such. What is problematic about this rebuttal is that he does not look at the literature that has developed in ritual studies to ascertain the multiple applications of rites of passage: namely, boundary breaking, conversion, group incorporation, etc. (see comments above in the model).

<sup>67</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, 1st ed., vol. 31, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 421.

<sup>68</sup> F. Scott Spencer, *Acts*, ed. John Jarick, *Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 99.

It is also evident that Saul is forced into service by the deity. Saul has two options. First, he could remain an outcast among his former fictive kin group. Impure and powerless, his status would be stripped, never to be restored: his destiny would to remain in that “dead” state that rites of passage cause in liminal states and remain blind. Second, he could obey the deity and accept aggregation into a new community with a new status.<sup>69</sup>

**Acts 9:17-19a:** In verse 17, Saul’s stage of aggregation begins. At this stage, the action is written out in rapid sequence. Ananias enters the house and lays his hands on Saul. This action places Saul in close proximity to his instructor and represents the transfer of healing power from God to Saul since Ananias is God’s broker. Ananias addresses Saul as ἀδελφέ. This is fictive kinship language that expresses Saul’s breaking of the boundary into the community. His social identity is now morphing into that of a Christ follower and, consequently, new stereotypes of the group. Luke has taken a villain and, masterfully, has legitimated his aggregation into the community, and, by extension, the mission to the Gentiles.

Finally, Saul is healed and “sees” (Acts 9:18). Here, metaphorical as well as physical sight might be intended, connecting his new status with understanding and with restored wholeness. His new identity is then solidified through the rite of baptism. This seems to take the position of punctuating the entire process. Although this is so, there is no mention of death or rising in this context. Rather, it is either implied because this type of ritual does that generally or it is already an established idea within the theology of the church, or, for the author, it is simply a means by which Saul is integrated into the community and, therefore, connected with those who were baptized before: Jesus in Luke 3:21-22 (where, there is another ASC on Jesus’ part) and Acts 2 (here, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which Ananias mentions in 9:17). This places Saul in continuity with the Christ followers’ beginnings and

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<sup>69</sup> In the ancient Mediterranean, individuals were called into religious vocation through divine manifestation. See Euripides, *Bacchae* 467-470 and *Asclepius*, Met. 11.

will act as an apologetic thread for the inclusion of Gentiles into the majority Judean community. For the author, “long ago God revealed this coming event through the prophets, and in the present the Spirit legitimates the fulfillment of this prophecy (Acts 2:17, citing Joel 2:28-29 [LXX 3:1-2]; Acts 10:44-48; 11:12, 16-18; 15:8-9, 17, citing Amos 9:12).”<sup>70</sup> Within Luke’s apologetic discourse in Acts 9, Saul serves as a figure that will link tradition with the coming Gentile inclusion through a narrative about traveling to the edges of Saul’s purity concerns.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Like Odysseus, Lucian, Pan and Orpheus, Saul travels to the edge or boundary and has an altered state of consciousness that reveals the Christ as the one whom he is persecuting. This travel narrative is packed with issues of purity, in-group and out-group concerns, and ritual boundary breaking. Within the context of collectivist cultures, moving from one group to another or changing identities is an arduous and sometimes violent task. In moving from an embedded identity of Judean zealot to becoming a part of the Jesus group, Saul experienced a violent time of separation and aggregation. Both the anthropology of Ritual and Purity give modern readers heuristic tools by which they can better understand what is happening to Saul on the road to Damascus. Here, the author utilizes common ritual structures and altered states of consciousness to legitimate Gentile inclusion through Saul’s movement away from the center of Judean purity concern. Saul’s recruitment to the Jesus group is punctuated by baptism, a rite that signals the breaking into a new community (aggregation) and the change of personal as well as social identity. For the author and his readers, this story must have powerfully connected Saul’s recruitment and baptism to those leaders that had gone before him, legitimating his mission to the Gentiles and their subsequent recruitment into the broader community of Jesus followers.

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<sup>70</sup> Balch, "Metabolh Politeiwn Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function," 187.

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