

The Church of Antioch and the Eucharistic Traditions (ca. 35-139 CE)
2018 Middlesex University PhD
Drimbe, Amiel

ABSTRACT

It is a widespread view in modern scholarship that, in the earliest church of Syrian Antioch (ca. 35–130 CE), there came together ‘divergent theological traditions’. Yet here these traditions were ‘balanced’ and ‘synthesized’. So, from Antioch, there emerged a ‘middle [traditional or theological] position’, the *via media* that facilitated the ‘Christian unity’ of the ‘universal church’. This *via media theologica* offered a way of keeping together the divergent Jewish and Hellenistic groups of Antioch.

This study challenges this view and proposes a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of the theological traditions in the earliest church of Antioch. It is beyond reasonable dispute that ‘divergent traditions’ did emerge at Antioch. However, the case for the formulation of a ‘synthesized... middle position’ needs to be re-examined. To this end, the present study 1) analyses the eucharistic traditions of earliest Christianity, focusing on the following key texts: 1 Cor. 11.23–25 (Lk. 22.17–20), Matt. 26.26–29, *Did.* 9.1–10.6, and Ignatius, *Phld.* 4.1; and 2) traces their use within the earliest church of Antioch, arguing that all these traditions were composed (or adapted) and used here, between ca. 35–70 CE.

Having located the eucharistic traditions in the church of Antioch, their internal dynamics are subsequently investigated. While these internal dynamics cannot be conclusively unravelled, due to the lack of adequate data, it is highly improbable that, in Antioch, the eucharistic traditions were ‘balanced’ or ‘synthesized’. Rather, there seems to be a pattern of recurrent additions: a recent tradition was added to those already existing, while the older traditions were also kept and revalued. It is by this pattern of the ‘addition’ of new traditions and ‘reevaluation’ of older traditions that the church of Antioch sought to keep and consolidate the unity of its factions. Finally, since existing scholarship concerns both 1) ‘the divergent groups/traditions’ and 2) ‘the Christian unity... of the universal church’, this study seeks to find an appropriate model of ‘unity and diversity’ in Antioch, by locating the internal dynamics of the Antiochene eucharistic traditions into the larger context of the ‘unity and diversity in earliest Christianity’. The patterns and dynamics uncovered in this study appear to corroborate Hurtado’s more recent ‘interactive diversity model’.