

Noah and Moses in Acts 15: Group Models and the Novelty of the Way*

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This article argues that Acts 15 alludes both to commandments associated with Noah and pentateuchal legislation on the *gerim*, though without consistently developing either of these allusions. As a result, this chapter presents the Way as a novel movement that both corresponds with and transcends familiar categories. By discussing Acts' simultaneous evoking and negation of other models (voluntary associations, Bacchic mystery cults, philosophical schools and ethnic groups), I argue that Acts 15 reflects a literary strategy evident throughout Acts. This strategy enabled the author of Acts to anchor the Way into the structures and traditions of the early Roman Empire.

Keywords: Acts 15, Noahide laws, resident alien, group models, anchoring innovation

To account for the background of Acts' portrayal of the meeting in Jerusalem and the apostolic decree in Acts 15, most scholars have argued for a connection with commandments associated with Noah, pentateuchal legislation for the *gerim*, or both. In this article I argue that Acts indeed refers to both traditions, but develops these allusions to 'Noah' and 'Moses' only in part. These partial allusions mimic Acts' use of other group models to characterise the Way: throughout his work, the author of Acts suggests connections between the early Jesus movement and voluntary associations, philosophical schools, ethnic classifications and mystery cults, though without developing any of these parallels in full. By means of this literary strategy the author of Acts constructs an image of the Way as a movement that simultaneously corresponds with and

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transcends familiar categories. By so anchoring the Way in familiar models, Acts aims to make this new movement acceptable and understandable.

1. Previous Suggestions on Acts 15

Previous scholarship on the background to Acts 15 can be classified according to four approaches.¹ The first recognises parallels between the apostolic decree and commandments associated with Noah in literary sources ranging from Genesis to the Talmudim. Going back to Gen 9.4–5, ‘the laws of Noah’ emerged as an identifiable concept only in rabbinic literature. Its first attestation, in t. ‘Abod. Zar. 8.4, lists seven Noahide commandments, including references to idol worship (עבודה זרה), illicit sexual relationships (גילוי עריות), bloodshed (שפיכות דמים) and ‘the limb of a living animal’ (אבר מן החי). These commandments may parallel the terms of the apostolic decree, but the parallel is not obvious: three commandments from the Tosefta are absent from Acts, and the terms in Acts may have different connotations from their alleged counterparts in the Tosefta. More importantly, the Tosefta’s list fits a broader rabbinic discourse which differs notably from that in Acts.² In the Tosefta, as Christine Hayes has shown, ‘some of the Noahide laws posit not just different *punishments* for Jews and non-Jews, but substantively different *prohibitions*’.³ In contrast to Acts 15, where the apostolic decree seeks a basis for Jewish and gentile participation in the same movement, the Tosefta excludes non-Jews.⁴

Ancient Jewish writings, most notably the Genesis Apocryphon and Jubilees, also attest to commandments associated with Noah, though without employing the technical term ‘Noahide laws’.⁵ These sources are closer in time to Acts 15

- 1 For different classifications, see C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: T&T Clark, 1998; repr. 2004) 733–4; T. R. Hanneken, ‘Moses Has his Interpreters: Understanding the Legal Exegesis in Acts 15 from the Precedent in *Jubilees*’, *CBQ* 77 (2015) 686–706, at 689–97; C. Keener, *Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 369.
- 2 See C. Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) 354–70; *eadem*, ‘Were the Noahide Commandments Formulated at Yavne? Tosefta Avoda Zara 8:4–9 in Cultural and Historical Context’, *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: The Interbellum 70–132 CE* (ed. J. J. Schwartz and P. J. Tomson; Leiden: Brill, 2018) 225–64.
- 3 Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law?*, 359 (emphasis original).
- 4 See also A. Ophir and I. Rosen-Zvi, *Goy: Israel’s Multiple Others and the Birth of the Gentile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 194–7.
- 5 These commandments should not be considered direct forerunners of the later rabbinic concept. See M. Lavee, ‘The Noahide Laws: The Building Blocks of a Rabbinic Conceptual Framework in Qumran and the Book of Acts’, *Meghillot* 10 (2013) 73–114 (Heb.); Ophir and Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, 194–7; Matthias Morgenstern, ‘The Quest for a Rabbinic Perception of a Common Humanity’, *The Quest for a Common Humanity: Human Dignity and Otherness in the Religious Traditions of the Mediterranean* (ed. K. Berthelot and M. Morgenstern; Leiden: Brill, 2011) 41–66, at 47–8 (n. 27).

and attest to debates on commandments associated with Noah and their implications in Second Temple times.⁶ Acts 15 might participate in these debates, though its exact role remains disputed. For Moshe Lavee, the apostolic decree brings together several previously distinct elements and so paves the way for later rabbinic developments.⁷ Todd Hanneken, by contrast, emphasises the central role of Jub 6–7, which, he argues, ‘make clear how Moses was taught in the first century of our era’.⁸ This lack of scholarly agreement on Acts’ position in debates on the Noahide commandments in the Second Temple period is eloquent testimony to the fact that the Noahide connection of the apostolic decree is not self-evident, though – as I shall argue below – it is not entirely absent, either.

A second approach points to pentateuchal legislation for the *gerim* as a background to Acts 15. The levitical Holiness Code (Lev 17–26), especially Lev 17–18, has attracted most attention, as the term גר is particularly prominent there.⁹ Though not all parallels are equally clear, the terms of the apostolic decree do appear to find parallels in the Holiness Code. A problem with the link between Acts 15 and legislation for the *gerim* is the partial nature of the link: not all pentateuchal commandments directed at both Israelites and *gerim* are mirrored in Acts 15.¹⁰ Terrance Callan has argued that the terms of the apostolic decree go back to ‘passages ... which are introduced by יִשְׂרָאֵל and followed by a warning that the violator will be cut off from the people’.¹¹ Richard Bauckham proposes an exegetical link between Jer 12.16, Zech 2.11, 15 and references in Leviticus to ‘the *ger* who

6 See Lavee, ‘The Noahide Laws’; Hayes, ‘Were the Noahide Commandments Formulated at Yavne?’; C. Werman, ‘The Noahide Commandments and Land-of-Israel Related Commandments’, *Daat* 86 (2018) 333–48 (Heb.).

7 Lavee, ‘The Noahide Laws’, 99–101.

8 Hanneken, ‘Moses has his Interpreters’, 697.

9 H. Waitz, ‘Das Problem des sog: Aposteldekrets und die damit zusammenhängenden literarischen und geschichtlichen Probleme des apostolischen Zeitalters’, *ZKG* 55 (1936) 227–63; R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 13–28)* (Zürich: Benziger, 1986) 81; H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 118–19; P. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (SNTSMS 57; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 99; H.-W. Neudorfer, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas: 2. Teil* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1990) 100; J. Wehnert, *Die Reinheit des ‘christlichen Gottesvolkes’ aus Juden und Heiden: Studien zum historischen und theologischen Hintergrund des sogenannten Aposteldekrets* (FRLANT 173; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AYB 31; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 556–8; J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 396–8; J. B. Chance, *Acts* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2007) 258.

10 So also M. Klinghardt, *Gesetz und Volk Gottes: Das lukanische Verständnis des Gesetzes nach Herkunft, Funktion und seinem Ort in der Geschichte des Urchristentums* (WUNT 32; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988) 185–6.

11 T. Callan, ‘The Background of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25)’, *CBQ* 55 (1993) 284–97, at 295.

sojourns in your midst' as a background to Acts 15.¹² Callan's and Bauckham's studies show that, if Acts 15 alludes to Lev 17–18, the allusion is mediated by other passages in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Jewish literature.¹³

A third approach denies any relation between Acts 15 and the Hebrew Bible. Most outspoken is S. G. Wilson, who emphasises the apostolic rather than Mosaic origins of the decree in Acts 15.¹⁴ Following Wilson's lead, A. J. M. Wedderburn reads the decree as serving a demonological purpose, with no 'particular textual basis ... in the Old Testament'.¹⁵ In both Wilson's and Wedderburn's arguments, the term *πικατόν* – which according to both authors does not allude unequivocally to either Gen 9 or Lev 17–26 – plays a decisive role. Alternatively, C. K. Barrett perceives a connection between the decree and certain areas where, even in emergency situations, Jews are not allowed to compromise the law. These areas, which overlap partially with the Noahide commandments, are idolatry (עבודה זרה), bloodshed (שפיכות דמים) and illicit sex (גילוי עריות).¹⁶ Ben Witherington proposes a third possibility. Emphasising the cultic character of the terms of the decree, he argues that the most suitable social setting for the decree would be pagan temple worship.¹⁷ Rather than alluding to pentateuchal legislation, therefore, the decree serves to convince non-Jewish followers of the Way to leave their idols behind and turn towards the God of Israel.

Wilson, Barret and Witherington raise critical issues for the study of Acts 15, but their proposals remain problematic. Seeing that the other terms in the decree allude to pentateuchal legislation, the difficulties surrounding *πικατόν* must not be regarded as denying a connection between Acts 15 and the Pentateuch.¹⁸ Rather, an attempt should be made to explain how *πικατόν* forms a coherent unity with the other terms of the decree. As to the rabbinic commandments to which Barrett refers, it has been observed that '[t]he evidence for these cardinal sins is ... late'.¹⁹

12 R. Bauckham, 'James and the Gentiles (Acts 15.13–21)', *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. B. Witherington, III; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 154–84.

13 For detailed criticism of both Callan and Bauckham, see Hanneken, 'Moses has his Interpreters', 693–5.

14 S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Law* (SNTSMS 50; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 94.

15 A. J. M. Wedderburn, 'The "Apostolic Decree": Tradition and Redaction', *NovT* 35 (1993) 362–89, at 389. For an elaborate critique of Wilson's and Wedderburn's reference to a pre-Lucan significance of the apostolic decree, see Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 209–13.

16 Barrett, *Acts*, 735–6. See also Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 99–101.

17 B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 461–6.

18 See also D. L. Bock, *Acts* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007) 505–8, who does see parallels between the terms of the decree and pentateuchal legislation, but ultimately holds that '[t]he list [in Acts 15, PBH] seems to reflect an ethos instead of being the invocation of a specific text' (507).

19 R. I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009) 377.

What is more, Barrett's proposal explains most terms of the apostolic decree, but fails to offer an explanation for *πνικτόν*. An interpretation that covers all four commandments is therefore to be preferred.²⁰ Finally, as I shall argue below, Acts 15 does not fulfil a primarily legislative purpose, but provides a self-understanding of the Way as a movement in which Jews and non-Jews come together. For Acts' portrayal of the Way the pentateuchal allusions in the decree play a crucial role.²¹

The fourth approach posits both the Noahide commandments and legislation for the *gerim* as backgrounds to Acts 15. For Bauckham, as noted above, Acts connects its allusion to Lev 17–18 with passages in Jeremiah and Zechariah. Markus Bockmuehl and Cana Werman have adduced additional parallels from the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Jewish literature.²² The main claim of this line of research is that Acts' employment of Gen 9, Lev 17–18 or any other pentateuchal tradition is mediated by the ways in which these traditions were received in other scriptural writings and in ancient Jewish literature. An elaborate suggestion along these lines comes from Holger Zellentin, who holds that Gen 9, Lev 17–18 and Acts 15 belong to a broader tradition of Judaeo-Christian legal culture, which 'obliged gentiles to maintain those purity laws the Hebrew Bible had imposed on aliens residing in Israel'.²³ Participating in this tradition, the levitical Holiness Code would offer a reformulation of the covenant between God and

20 Unless, of course, we assume with W. A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (SNTSMS 71; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 87–105 that *πνικτόν* is a latter addition to the decree. I am hesitant to accept Strange's proposal, as I find it difficult to see how a term which 'carried little or no expressive element in Judaism' (99) could serve as 'an exegetical addition made in the second century to explain the meaning of *σῆμα*' (105).

21 Witherington, *Acts*, 464–5 denies this, pointing out that the commandments in Lev 17–18 were directed towards *gerim* living in the land of Israel, whereas the decree in Acts 15 addresses non-Jews in the diaspora. His point is well taken, but I am not sure how decisive it is. If, as I argue, Acts 15 offers a self-understanding of a movement in which Jews and non-Jews live together, the situation is similar to that in Lev 17–18: in both cases the question is how Jews and non-Jews can be part of the same group.

22 M. Bockmuehl, 'The Noahide Commandments and New Testament Ethics: With Special Reference to Acts 15 and Pauline Halakhah', *RevB* 102 (1995) 72–101; Werman, 'The Noahide Commandments'. A shared Noahide-levitical background to the decree in Acts 15 also seems to be implied in G. Gilbert, 'Acts of the Apostles', *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (ed. A.-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 197–252, at 229 (ad loc.)

23 H. M. Zellentin, 'Judaeo-Christian Legal Culture and the Qur'an: The Case of Ritual Slaughter and the Consumption of Animal Blood', *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam: Papers Presented at the Colloquium Held in Washington DC, October 29–31, 2015 (8th ASMEA Conference)* (ed. F. del Río Sánchez; Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) 117–59, at 117. See also *idem*, 'Gentile Purity Law from the Bible to the Qur'an: The Case of Sexual Purity and Illicit Intercourse', *The Qur'an's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins* (ed. H. M. Zellentin; London: Routledge, 2019) 115–215.

Noah. According to Zellentin, this discourse between Gen 9, Lev 17–18 and other passages from the Hebrew Bible and ancient Jewish literature inspired the terms of the apostolic decree. Thus, allusions in Acts 15 to the laws of Noah or Mosaic legislation for the *gerim* are not mutually exclusive.²⁴

This article proceeds in line with the fourth approach, but develops it in a slightly different direction. I propose that the author of Acts is consciously ambiguous in drawing connections between the apostolic decree and both Noahide commandments and pentateuchal legislation for the *gerim*. Such ambiguous allusions to previous groups models occur throughout the book of Acts and serve as a literary strategy allowing Acts' author to anchor the Way in familiar terms without denying its novelty.

2. The Purpose of Acts 15

Many studies of Acts 15 assume that this chapter fulfils a primarily legislative – even halakic – aim.²⁵ At first sight, such an understanding appears self-evident: Acts 15 presents the decree as an answer to the question which type of behaviour non-Jewish members of the Way should exhibit (cf. vv. 1–2). Yet the narrative exhibits some characteristics that point to a reworking of earlier tradition on the part of the author of Acts. This reworking stresses not so much the legislative aspects of the decree as its status as an identity document ascribing a particular status to non-Jewish members of the Way. Thus, Acts 15 must be taken, with Burkhard Jürgens, as a 'Versu[ch] einer *kommunikativen Identitätskonstruktion*'.²⁶

24 See also J. Taylor, 'The Jerusalem Decrees (Acts 15.20, 29 and 21.25) and the Incident at Antioch (Gal 2.11–14)', *NTS* 46 (2001) 372–80, who argues that both Gen 9 and Lev 17–18 lie behind the apostolic decree, but that the two images of non-Jewish members of the Way as children of Noah and *gerim* represent two distinct opinions voiced at the incident at Antioch.

25 See e.g. Bockmuehl, 'Noahide Commandments', 93 ('central halakhic problem'); Bauckham, 'James and the Gentiles', 154 ('the problem under discussion is one of *halakhah*'); Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 209–62 and *passim*. The term 'halakic' may not be appropriate here, seeing that the decree explicitly addresses non-Jewish members of the Way. Even so, most scholars would assume that the decree regulates a type of behaviour that, even if not in itself 'halakic', reflects halakic concerns. I thank Lutz Doering for this suggestion.

26 B. Jürgens, *Zweierlei Anfang: Kommunikative Konstruktionen heidenchristlicher Identität in Gal 2 und Apg 15* (BBB 120; Berlin: Philo, 1999) 3 (emphasis original). R. Deines, 'Das Aposteldekret – Halacha für Heidenchristen oder christliche Rücksichtnahme auf jüdische Tabus?', *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World: Jüdische Identität in der griechisch-römischen Welt* (ed. J. Frey, D. R. Schwartz and S. Gripenrog; AJEC 71; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 323–95 correctly stresses identity as a central concern in Acts 15, but continues to read the chapter as prescribing the behaviour of non-Jewish members of the Way. Cf. also how L. T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) 270 writes about 'the fundamentally edifying quality of the story'.

With many scholars I assume that Acts 15.29 (par. 21.25) contains a more original formulation of the apostolic decree than its reworking in Acts 15.20.²⁷ On this view, v. 29 presents a pre-Acts tradition which the author of Acts incorporated, in reworked or unchanged form, into his own account of the Jerusalem meeting and James' speech.²⁸ A legislative purpose might be assumed for the decree as presented in v. 29, even though its terms, with the exception of εἰδωλόθυτος, are not very specific. Αἷμα may refer to bloodshed, blood consumption, or both. Πνικτός is a notoriously difficult term, which 'in Classical sources ... refers to a particular method of cooking, though precisely what is meant is not clear'.²⁹ This culinary meaning does not fit with the context of Acts 15, but the exact reference of πνικτός in Acts remains unclear.³⁰ Πορνεία is a well-known term for sexual misbehaviour, but leaves open precisely which sex acts are prohibited.³¹ Thus, the only clear term in the decree is εἰδωλόθυτος, which Paul already uses to refer to meat sacrificed to idols.³²

In spite of its unclear terms, the reception history of Acts 15 shows that the apostolic decree was taken as a legislative document.³³ In order for the decree to be implemented, additional instruction may have been necessary. In this context Lutz Doering points to the letter-form of the decree. Like other letters, the decree would have been read aloud in Antioch or throughout 'Antioch and Syria and Cilicia' (v. 23); Judas and Silas, who carried the letter to Antioch (vv. 22–3), may have provided additional information to specify its broadly formulated terms.³⁴ Even so, adherence to the decree

27 The wording of the decree presents thorny textual difficulties. For a discussion, see B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971) 429–35; Barrett, *Acts*, 735–6; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 460–1; Strange, *Problem*, 87–105. With most scholars (and *pace* Strange) I accept an originally four-clause decree and take the Western text to be a secondary development. See also n. 20 above.

28 On the literary history of Acts 15, see e.g. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 455–72; G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte: II. Teil* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982) 174–7, 187, 189–92; Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 33–55; L. Doering, *Ancient Jewish Letters and the Beginnings of Christian Epistolography* (WUNT 298; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 464–5. How one envisions the literary history of Acts 15 will depend on one's views regarding the historical meeting in Jerusalem and the relationship between Acts 15 and Gal 2. Cf. however Barrett, *Acts*, 731, who raises the possibility that 'there was an original prohibition of idolatry which ... developed into a specific prohibition of εἰδωλόθυτα'.

29 Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 89.

30 I will tentatively adopt a connection between πνικτός and Lev 17.15 below.

31 So also M. Klinghardt, 'Das Aposteldekret als kanonischer Integrationstext: Konstruktion und Begründung von Gemeinsinn', *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen: Gemeinschaft und ihre Ordnung* (ed. M. Öhler; WUNT 280; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 91–112, at 108.

32 1 Cor 8.1, 4, 7, 10; 10.19. See also Rev 2.14, 20.

33 See Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 145–208; Zellentin, 'Judaean-Christian Legal Culture', 132–48.

34 L. Doering, 'First Peter as Early Christian Diaspora Letter', *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition* (ed. H. Niebuhr and R. Wall; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009) 215–36, at 227–8; *idem*, *Ancient Jewish Letters*, 463–9 and personal communication d.d. 4 May 2020.

was not a criterion for inclusion into the Way: it addresses non-Jewish individuals who had already become followers of the early Jesus movement. The terms of the decree, therefore, express the status of these non-Jewish followers of Jesus and imbue them with a manner of understanding themselves as part of the Way.³⁵

In his reworking of v. 29, the author of Acts, though not categorically denying the legislative value of the decree, highlights its nature as a charter for construing the identity of the Way and its Jewish and non-Jewish members. To begin with, Acts 15.20 replaces the clear enough term εἰδωλόθυτος in v. 29 with the 'etwas vage'³⁶ or 'more cumbersome'³⁷ ἄλισγήματα τῶν εἰδώλων. Unparalleled in the New Testament, the latter expression could refer either to idol worship³⁸ or, as a gloss on εἰδωλόθυτος, to the consumption of meat sacrificed to idols.³⁹ The use of ἄλισγέω in Mal 1.7, 12 LXX, where it refers to the consumption of meat sacrificed to the Lord,⁴⁰ may bolster the equation of ἄλισγημα with εἰδωλόθυτος; yet the occurrence of the term in 4 Bar 7.32 shows that ἄλισγημα could also refer to idols.⁴¹ This replacement of a clearer with a more veiled term is difficult to explain on the assumption of a primarily legislative purpose for Acts 15. It does, however, make sense if the chapter serves to characterise non-Jewish members of the Way in view of previous categories: the explicit reference to idols draws a clearer allusion to the levitical Holiness Code, which forbids both the Israelite and the *ger* to sacrifice to idols, than does εἰδωλόθυτος.⁴²

This scenario suggests the possibility of different applications of the decree in the different localities where it was implemented.

35 Cf. Deines, 'Aposteldekret'.

36 F. Avemarie, 'Die jüdischen Wurzeln des Aposteldekrets: Lösbare und ungelöste Probleme', *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen*, 5-32, at 11.

37 Bock, *Acts*, 513.

38 So Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 462; Barrett, *Acts*, 731; C. R. Holladay, *Acts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016) 302.

39 So P. J. Gloag, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870) II.77-8; J. Zmijewski, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1961) 569; Haenchen, *Acts*, 449; Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 81; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 118-19; Avemarie, 'Die jüdischen Wurzeln', 11-13; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 557; Johnson, *Acts*, 266; D. Marguerat, *Les actes des apôtres (13-28)* (Geneva: Labor et fides, 2015) 101; Keener, *Acts*, 370. See also Jervell, *Apostelgeschichte*, 396, who reads ἄλισγημα as referring to the consumption of food sacrificed to idols, but adds: 'Es handelt sich natürlich nicht nur um das Essen oder den Kauf von Fleisch der Tiere, sondern um alles, was mit Götzen zu tun hat.'

40 Cf. Sir 40.29 LXX; Dan 1.8 LXX, where the verb also refers to defilement through eating.

41 This passage, whose formulation depends on Acts 15.20, reads: '[Jeremiah] continued to teach them to abstain from the defilement of the Gentiles of Babylon (ἀπέχεσθαι ἐκ τῶν ἄλισγημάτων τῶν ἐθνῶν τῆς Βαβυλώνος)' (J. Herzer, *4 Baruch (Paraleipomena Jeremiou)* (Writings from the Greco-Roman World 22; Atlanta: SBL, 2005) 31).

42 The command to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols has a parallel in Exod 34.15 (cf. Num 25.2); see Avemarie, 'Die jüdischen Wurzeln', 14. The change of terms in Acts 15 would serve

What is more, the author of Acts transcends the limitation of the decree to non-Jewish Christ-followers ‘in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia’ (v. 23) and turns it into a charter for all non-Jewish followers of the Way (e.g. Acts 15.7–19; 21.25).⁴³ As a result of these changes, the episode in Acts 15 stresses the way in which the terms of the apostolic decree exemplify the identity of those non-Jews who had joined the Way. What is at stake is not the exact terms of correct behaviour, but the question of how non-Jewish members of the Way should be considered, now that ethnic boundaries no longer suffice as criteria for entry.

In this light, Matthias Klinghardt’s observation that Acts 15 is not chiefly about the terms of the decree but about their ‘Begründungsstrukturen’ proves relevant.⁴⁴ For Klinghardt, the proliferation of ‘Begründungsstrukturen’ in Acts 15, in combination with an alleged late date of Acts, defines this chapter as a canonical ‘Integrationstext’ that brings together different views prevalent elsewhere in the canon.⁴⁵ Yet even if we reject Klinghardt’s late dating of Acts, thinking of Acts 15 as an ‘Integrationstext’ makes good sense, in that the chapter develops a characterisation of the Way in which Jews and non-Jews are integrated into this novel movement. Acts’ portrayal of the meeting in Jerusalem and the apostolic decree answers not the question which regulations non-Jewish members of the Way should follow but how non-Jewish members of the Way should be viewed (or view themselves), given their inclusion alongside Jews in the new movement that emerged around the testimony of the apostles. Through the regulations of the apostolic decree the author of Acts communicates his view on the character of the Way and its non-Jewish members.

3. Noah, Moses and the Way

In his portrayal of the Way as a movement in which Jews and non-Jews unite, the author of Acts 15 alludes to two group models familiar to his readers –

to restrict the allusions in this chapter to Noahide commandments and the levitical Holiness Code.

43 Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 82 observes: ‘Die Beschränkung der Adressaten zeigt, daß der Brief auf den „Antiochenischen Konflikt“ reagiert (24) und nicht von Lukas mit universalkirchlicher Auswertung entworfen ist.’ His comment is apt for Acts 15.29; yet in 15.20 such a universal application of the decree to ‘gentiles who are turning to God’ (15.19) does occur. See also Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 564; A. F. Segal, ‘Acts 15 as Jewish & Christian History’, *Forum* n.s. 4 (2001) 63–87 (who attributes ‘a moral and universalistic perspective’ to Luke (76)); Barrett, *Acts*, 740.

44 Klinghardt, ‘Das Aposteldekret als kanonischer Integrationstext’, 108–9.

45 Klinghardt proposes that Luke’s Gospel is an anti-Marcionite redaction of the earlier gospel which Marcion included in his Bible. See his ‘Markion vs. Lukas: Plädoyer für die Wiederaufnahme eines alten Falles’, *NTS* 52 (2006) 484–513. For Klinghardt, Acts 15 is part of this anti-Marcionite redaction and must be dated in the mid-second century CE (‘Das Aposteldekret als kanonischer Integrationstext’, 105).

that of the descendants of Noah and that of the *gerim* – and the legislation connected with these groups.⁴⁶ Two or three terms in the apostolic decree bring to mind commandments associated with Noah. The command to abstain from *πορνεία* may allude to the episode about Noah and his sons in Gen 9.20–7. Jubilees supports this connection: it records both the incident in Noah's tent (Jub 7.7–13) and Noah's admonition that his sons should 'keep themselves from fornication' (Jub 7.20), thus suggesting a link between the story and the admonition.⁴⁷ The abstention from idolatry – if that is what *ἀλίσγημα* means – might be related to Noah's sacrifice after the flood (Gen 8.20–2; Jub 6.1–3; cf. 7.1–6) or be implied in the reference to *αἶμα*.⁴⁸ Yet the clearest parallel between laws associated with Noah and the apostolic decree is the reference to *αἶμα*: both bloodshed and blood consumption are forbidden in Gen 9.4–5 and Jub 7.23–5, 27–33. To be sure, the command not to consume blood appears elsewhere (including in Lev 17),⁴⁹ but the fact that Gen 9 constitutes its first mention in the Pentateuch (on a synchronic reading) and presents the command as the key term of God's post-flood covenant with Noah – and hence a basic rule for new life on earth – lends it a prototypical significance within the pentateuchal narrative.⁵⁰ It is likely, therefore, that Acts' readers would intuitively associate the command with Noah.⁵¹

At the same time, Acts 15 does not develop the Noahide paradigm in full. First, *πνικτόν* finds no exact parallel in pre-rabbinic Noahide commandments, but

46 For a similar argument, see Segal, 'Acts 15 as Jewish & Christian History'. Segal holds that the terms in the apostolic decree resemble 'neither exactly the law of the resident alien nor the Noahide commandments', but constitute 'a peculiar, ambiguous mélange, perhaps even a combination of both' (73). This ambiguity, in Segal's view, bolsters the aim of the decree as an expression of 'a culturally plural toleration of gentile customs, provided a certain minimum of moral behavior was attained' (75). As I aim to show, the ambiguity we find in the decree is not restricted to Acts 15, but is characteristic of how Acts' author employs group models to portray the Way and to write this new movement into familiar categories, which it also supersedes.

47 Hanneken, 'Moses has his Interpreters', 704–5.

48 Hanneken, 'Moses has his Interpreters', 703–4 points out that Jubilees connects blood consumption with idolatry (e.g. Jub 11.2, 4). In Acts 15, however, the parallel between *αἶμα* and idolatry remains tacit, and more explicit denunciations of idolatry elsewhere in the Pentateuch provide a stronger parallel than the evidence from Jubilees.

49 In connection with *αἶμα* Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 557 refers to Lev 3.17; 7.26–7; 17.10–11, not to Genesis, and argues for a levitical (not Noahide) background to the decree. In my view, his strong denial of possible Noahide allusions in Acts ('the four are not derived from the so-called Noachic regulations') reckons insufficiently with the ambiguous nature of the terms in the decree. The same holds for Johnson, *Acts*, 267; Holladay, *Acts*, 303.

50 See e.g. H. Frey, *Das Buch der Anfänge: Kapitel 1–11 des ersten Buches Mose* (Die Botschaft des Alten Testament; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1950⁵) 115–16.

51 On the Noahide background to *αἶμα* in the decree, see W. Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Oliphants, 1973) 174; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (rev. edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 296; Barrett, *Acts*, 732.

alludes, most probably, to the prohibition against eating ‘what dies of itself or what has been torn by wild animals’ in Lev 17.15. The first explicit association of this commandment with Noah occurs in the Tosefta, which prohibits the consumption of ‘the limb of a living animal’.⁵² What is more, Acts 15, unlike Gen 9, Jub 6–7 and t. ‘Abod. Zar. 8.4, contains no explicit reference to Noah. The contrast is striking:⁵³ unlike Jubilees, which incorporates laws not explicitly connected with Noah in the Pentateuch into its retellings of Gen 9–10, Acts brings in commandments linked with Noah (most conspicuously the abstention from blood consumption) within an overall non-Noahide framework.

Parallels between Acts 15 and the Holiness Code are more straightforward. Lev 17.10–14 repeats the command not to consume blood,⁵⁴ and Lev 18.6–30 offers elaborate legislation on sexual misconduct, to which *πορνεία* in Acts 15 may refer.⁵⁵ Πνικτόν, literally meaning ‘strangled meat’, may reflect the avoidance of meat with blood in it (Lev 17.13)⁵⁶ or, more probably, that of animals ‘found dead or torn by wild animals’ (Lev 17.15).⁵⁷ Finally, ἀλίσημα, if it does indeed refer to idolatry, may allude to Lev 17.8–9⁵⁸ or Lev 20.2,⁵⁹ where the Israelite and the *ger* are forbidden to sacrifice their children to Moloch. The parallel

52 This command is absent from MS Erfurt. I thank Dineke Houtman for discussing this omission with me.

53 Barrett, *Acts*, 734: ‘[T]here is nothing in the text of Acts to call Noah to mind.’ So also Conzelmann, *Acts*, 118 (n. 23). Pace Hanneken, ‘Moses has his Interpreters’, 696, for whom the central position of τὰ ἔθνη in Acts 15 alludes to ‘the Noah cycle, including the “table of nations” (see esp. Gen 10:32)’.

54 On the link between αἷμα in Lev 17 and Acts 15, see Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 87; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 119; Esler, *Community and Gospel*, 241 (n. 108); Bauckham, ‘James and the Gentiles’, 173; Deines, ‘Aposteldekret’, 352; Avemarie, ‘Die jüdischen Wurzeln’, 20–3; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 557.

55 So Zmijewski, *Apostelgeschichte*, 569; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 119; Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 183–4; Esler, *Community and Gospel*, 241 (n. 108); Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 299; Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 81; Bauckham, ‘James and the Gentiles’, 173; Deines, ‘Aposteldekret’, 352; Avemarie, ‘Die jüdischen Wurzeln’, 23–7; Jervell, *Apostelgeschichte*, 397; Chance, *Acts*, 258–9. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 557–8 adduces CD 4.12b–5.14a as ‘the missing link’ between Lev 18 and Acts 15 and argues that *πορνεία* refers explicitly to illicit unions between family members. Some scholars have taken *πορνεία* metaphorically to refer to idol worship, but this explanation cannot convince. See Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 558.

56 So C. H. Lindijer, *Handelingen van de apostelen* (2 vols.; PNT; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1975–9) II.79; Bauckham, ‘James and the Gentiles’, 173; Deines, ‘Aposteldekret’, 352.

57 So Conzelmann, *Acts*, 119; Esler, *Community and Gospel*, 241 (n. 108); Avemarie, ‘Die jüdischen Wurzeln’, 17–18; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 557; Segal, ‘Acts 15 as Jewish & Christian History’, 76–8.

58 So Conzelmann, *Acts*, 118–9; Esler, *Community and Gospel*, 241 (n. 108); Bauckham, ‘James and the Gentiles’, 173; Deines, ‘Aposteldekret’, 352. This reading is problematic, however, as Lev 17.8–9 serves to specify the location where sacrifices must be made and not to idolatry. See Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 87.

59 Cf. Avemarie, ‘Die jüdischen Wurzeln’, 12.

between Leviticus and Acts may be bolstered by the reference to Moses in Acts 15.21, which appears to support James' proposal in 15.20.⁶⁰

Even here, however, the parallel is not fully fledged. Although *πορνεία* captures the essence of Lev 18.6–30, the actual term is absent from Lev 18 LXX.⁶¹ Nor do we find explicit references to *gerim* in Acts 15. The Greek term that renders Hebrew *גֵר* in Lev 17–18 LXX is *προσίλυτος*, but this term is absent from Acts 15. Moreover, *προσίλυτος* in Acts carries a different meaning from *גֵר* in Leviticus, as it refers not to a resident alien, but to a person who had adopted a Jewish way of life.⁶² Hence, both the association with Noah and that with pentateuchal legislation for the *gerim* assume the shape of veiled allusions rather than fully developed conceptual parallels.

I propose that the author of Acts uses the ambivalence attached to both the Noahide and the Levitical backgrounds to Acts 15 to depict the Way as a movement that both fits within and transcends familiar categories. Concentrating on the fellowship of Jews and non-Jews within the movement, the author of Acts 15 suggests that this fellowship can be considered in line with the commandments given to Noah's descendants as well as with pentateuchal legislation for the *gerim*. At the same time, the author makes it clear that the analogies that he presents are not complete: previous models are helpful in understanding the Way, but the early Jesus movement remains something fundamentally new.

4. Group models in Acts

This proposal gains support from other group models that the author of Acts uses to characterise the Way. I will here discuss, in brief, four such models (which may show some overlap), arguing that the analogies that Acts draws between these models and the Way are both evident and yet not consistently developed. In these instances, too, the author of Acts suggests a relationship whilst denying a full correspondence.

⁶⁰ Acts 15.21 is notoriously difficult and scholars have disagreed on its import. The verse is commonly taken as supporting 15.20, as suggested by the connective *γάρ*. D. R. Schwartz, 'The Futility of Preaching Moses (Acts 15,21)', *Bib* 67 (1986) 276–81 has challenged this reading, but, as Deines correctly observed, he fails to address the question 'wieso die negative Aussage über den Toragehorsam der Heiden als Begründung dafür dienen kann, dennoch das Dekret zu beachten' ('Aposteldekret', 342). I tend to embrace Deines' reading that 15.21 offers support to 15.20, though without necessarily implying that non-Jews should adopt Mosaic law.

⁶¹ As pointed out by Barrett, *Acts*, 732. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 557–8 remarks that the acts prohibited in Lev 18 would come to be known as *זנות* and that *πορνεία* translates *זנות* in Jer 3.2, 9 LXX. However, the term *זנות* does not occur in Lev 18 (though cf. Lev 17.7, where *זנה* features in connection to idol worship, and Lev 19.29).

⁶² See Acts 2.11; 6.5; 13.43.

The first model is that of voluntary associations. It has often been noted that local groups of Jesus followers, in their urban environments, resembled trade and other voluntary associations and were commonly perceived as such by outsiders.⁶³ Acts' portrayal of such local communities also regularly employs terms reminiscent of associations. Markus Öhler lists several such terms, including friendship ideals, common possession, the use of kinship terminology – especially ἀδελφός – for members to address one another, feasts, the use of various meeting places – including private houses, and a hierarchical structure (which did not, however, preclude a basic equality between members).⁶⁴ At the same time, Öhler observes notable differences between associations and the Way as Acts presents it. First, whilst the relative status of members of voluntary associations would depend on their financial contributions to the association, that of members of the Way reflects their connection with the earthly Jesus and their share in the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵ Second, the Way exhibits a missionary zeal unparalleled in voluntary associations. Related to this, the Way, unlike associations, did not levy any financial contribution on entry. Leaving aside the socio-historical implications of these similarities and differences between the Way and associations for the moment, I suggest that their literary effect is to portray the early Jesus movement as an association-but-not-quite. In Öhler's words: Acts depicts the Way not as '[ein] ideal[er] Verein', but rather as 'eine neue Form von Gemeinschaft, die antike Ideale verwirklicht und übersteigt'.⁶⁶

A second model is that of mystery cults, specifically that of the Bacchae. Euripides' *Bacchae* has played a key role in this line of research, with various scholars pointing to both conceptual and terminological parallels between this tragedy and Acts.⁶⁷ These parallels suggest, for instance, that Acts portrays the

63 See e.g. W. O. McCready, 'Ekklesia and Voluntary Associations', *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. J. S. Kloppenborg and S. G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996) 59–73; P. A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009); J. S. Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

64 M. Öhler, 'Die Jerusalemer Urgemeinde im Spiegel des antiken Vereinswesens', *NTS* 51 (2005) 393–415.

65 This difference must be considered in view of Luke-Acts' negative overall view of wealth. See e.g. Esler, *Community and Gospel*, 164–200.

66 Öhler, 'Die Jerusalemer Urgemeinde', 393; cf. 415.

67 See e.g. D. Dormeyer, 'Bakchos in der Apostelgeschichte', *Griechische Mythologie und frühes Christentum* (ed. R. von Haehling; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005) 153–72; D. Ziegler, *Dionysios in der Apostelgeschichte: Eine intertextuelle Lektüre* (Münster: LIT, 2008); J. Schäfer, 'Zur Funktion der Dionysiosmysterien in der Apostelgeschichte: Eine intertextuelle Betrachtung der Berufungs- und Befreiungserzählungen in der Apostelgeschichte und der Bakchen des Euripides', *ThZ* 66 (2010) 199–222. The most extensive study to date is C. J. P. Friesen, *Reading Dionysius: Euripides' Bacchae and the Cultural Contestations of Greeks, Jews, Romans, and Christians* (STAC 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

Pentecost event as resembling Bacchic festivities⁶⁸ or Paul's transformation in Acts 9 as mimicking Pentheus' transformation in *Bacchae*.⁶⁹ Yet the link between Acts and the Bacchic mysteries is not consistent, and differences are evident alongside similarities. The clearest case, perhaps, is the Pentecost event, where Acts emphasises that the apostles' inspiration – unlike Bacchic experiences – has nothing to do with wine (2.13, 15).⁷⁰ The appropriation of other group models in addition to that of mystery cults also renders too strong a focus on Bacchic parallels to the Way unlikely. The result of Acts' nuanced engagement with this previous model is a complex picture of the Way, which in my view neither aligns the early Jesus movement with Bacchic mysteries⁷¹ nor 'construct[s] a clear delineation between Christianity and Dionysiac religion'.⁷² Rather, it speaks with two words, and explains the Way in familiar terms whilst also stressing its novelty.

A third group model that Acts employs is that of philosophical schools. C. H. Talbert points to the use of *παραδίδωμι* and *ἀσφάλεια* – which can carry philosophical connotations⁷³ – in Luke 1.1–4, the use of *ἄρρεσις* to describe the Way and other 'philosophical echoes in the narrative of Acts'⁷⁴ to argue that Acts

68 Friesen, *Reading Dionysius*, 221–34.

69 Schäfer, 'Zur Funktion', 208–15. Cf. however Friesen, *Reading Dionysius*, 213: '[P]rior to his conversion, Paul's madness ... drove him to extreme persecutions of Christians. His conversion entailed a repudiation of such madness ... This represents an inversion of the Dionysiac religious experience, which involved an embrace of divine madness.'

70 Friesen, *Reading Dionysius*, 222–8. Cf. Acts 26.24–5, where Paul is presented as a rational speaker rather than being guided by *μανία*. On this latter passage, see Friesen, *Reading Dionysius*, 213–21.

71 As Schäfer, 'Zur Funktion' tends to argue.

72 As Friesen, *Reading Dionysius*, 234 holds. My main issue with Friesen's conclusion concerns not his argument that Acts distinguishes between the apostles' *σωφοροσύνη* and Bacchic *μανία*, but the receptive attitude towards other traditions which features elsewhere in Acts: how can this attitude be squared with a sharp polemic against Bacchic mysteries? On Acts' incorporation of local traditions into the global/glocal Way, see P. B. Hartog, 'Where Shall Wisdom be Found? Identity, Sacred Space, and Universal Knowledge in Philostratus and the Acts of the Apostles', *Jerusalem and Other Holy Places as Foci of Multireligious and Ideological Confrontation* (ed. P. B. Hartog, S. Laderman, V. Tohar and A. L. H. M. van Wieringen; JCP; Leiden: Brill, 2021) 131–49.

73 On *παραδίδωμι* and the related notion of succession in philosophical discourse, see S. Mason, 'Philosophia: Graeco-Roman, Judean and Christian', *Voluntary Associations*, 31–58; C. H. Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts in its Mediterranean Milieu* (NTSup 107; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 19–55. On *ἀσφάλεια*, see Plut., *Superst.* 171e and Justin, *Dial.* 8.1, where Justin describes how he, after considering other options, found in Christianity 'this one philosophy, both true and profitable'. References are taken from C. H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (rev. edn; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005) xviii.

74 Talbert, *Reading Acts*, xviii. See also C. H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (SBLMS 20; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1974) 89–99.

portrays the Way as a philosophical school. Amongst these latter echoes Talbert reckons the apostles' confirmation before their accusers that they obey God rather than humans (4.19; 5.29), which brings to mind Socrates' defence in Plato, *Ap.* 29d. Moreover, Talbert holds that 'the portrait of Paul in Acts ... [echoes] various components of the tradition about Socrates'⁷⁵ and that 'Paul's defense before Agrippa in Acts 26:26 ... [echoes] numerous facets of philosophic argument'.⁷⁶ Yet Acts again does not fully subscribe to this model. To begin with, Acts' characterisation of Peter and John as 'uneducated and ordinary men (ἀγράμματοί ... καὶ ἰδιῶται)' (Acts 4.13) contrasts with the alleged philosophical character of the Way.⁷⁷ Moreover, Acts' use of the term αἵρεσις – 'philosophical school' – is ambiguous. Steve Mason has shown that Acts mimics Josephus' use of αἵρεσις to refer to Jewish philosophical schools such as the Pharisees and the Sadducees.⁷⁸ The same term is applied to the Way, but never by its members. In Acts 24.5, Ananias and the elders introduce Paul to Felix as 'a ringleader of the sect (αἵρεσις) of the Nazarenes', and in Acts 28.22 the Jewish leaders in Rome enquire about Paul's views, 'for with regard to this sect (αἵρεσις) we know that everywhere it is spoken against'. In these cases, it is outsiders who label the Way a αἵρεσις, as Paul expresses in his reference in Acts 24.14 to 'the Way, which they call a sect (ἣν λέγουσιν αἵρεσιν)'. This ambiguous use of αἵρεσις plays with the suggestion that the Way constitutes a philosophical school, but defines such a characterisation of the Jesus movement as alien to its members. The Way may resemble other philosophical movements, but it ultimately surpasses them.

The fourth model is Acts' use of ethnic terminology to portray the Way. In Acts, as is now generally recognised, ethnic boundaries and markers between Jews and non-Jews remain in place, resulting in what Aaron Kuecker has called a 'trans-ethnic' image of the Way.⁷⁹ Does this trans-ethnic movement, in the eyes of

75 On Acts' Socratic portrait of Paul (focusing particularly on the Areopagus episode in Acts 17) see also E. Plümacher, *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller: Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972) 19; D. Zweck, 'The Exordium of the Areopagus Speech, Acts 17.22, 23,' *NTS* 35 (1989) 94–103.

76 Both quotations from Talbert, *Reading Acts*, xviii.

77 On the difference between φιλοσόφοι and ἰδιῶται, see e.g. Arrian, *Epict. diss.* 3.19.1–6, *Epict. ench.* 29.7.

78 S. Mason, 'Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Philosophies', *Religious and Theological Studies* (ed. J. Neusner; Approaches to Ancient Judaism n.s. 4; Atlanta: Scholars, 1993) 1–28; *idem*, 'Philosophical.' On the Pharisees and Sadducees as αἱρέσεις, see Acts 15.5; 26.5 (Pharisees); 5.17 (Sadducees).

79 A. Kuecker, *The Spirit and the 'Other': Social Identity, Ethnicity and Intergroup Reconciliation in Luke-Acts* (LNTS 444; London: T&T Clark, 2011) 181–215; *idem*, 'Filial Piety and Violence in Luke-Acts and the *Aeneid*: A Comparative Analysis of Two Trans-Ethnic Identities', *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (ed. J. B. Tucker and C. A. Stoh; London: T&T Clark, 2016) 211–34. D. G. Horrell, 'Ethnicisation, Marriage and Early Christian

Acts' author, constitute an ἔθνος in its own right? The most straightforward answer must be negative, as Acts nowhere explicitly labels the Way an ἔθνος. At the same time, at certain points in its narrative Acts does employ ethnic terminology to characterise the early Jesus movement. In Acts 15.14, James remarks that 'God looked favourably on the ἔθνη, to take from among them a people for his name (λαβεῖν ἐξ ἐθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ)'. Elsewhere in Acts λαός is as common designation for Israel,⁸⁰ but here the term carries a similar connotation to ἔθνος:⁸¹ it refers to a 'people' of non-Jews, taken from the ἔθνη, which God has chosen for himself. This passage therefore depicts the Way as a group which unites two peoples: Israel and a new people taken from amongst the non-Jews. Yet these two peoples do not constitute homogeneous entities: just as the Way as a whole, both the Jewish ἔθνος and the non-Jewish λαός are trans-ethnic entities. Acts 2.5 describes those present at Pentecost as 'devout Jews from every nation under heaven (ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν) living in Jerusalem' and so offers a trans-ethnic image of the Jews. Similar terminology occurs in Acts 17.26, which describes how God 'made all nations (πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων) to inhabit the whole earth', thus stressing the variety of non-Jewish ἔθνη.⁸² This variety is evident in our text, too: the Amos quotation in Acts 15.17 speaks of God's acceptance of 'all the ἔθνη over whom my name has been called'. Thus, Acts conceives of the Way as being made up from different ἔθνη, both Jewish and non-Jewish, but its author never defines the Way as a whole as a

Identity: Critical Reflections on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Peter 3 and Modern New Testament Scholarship', *NTS* 62 (2016) 439–60; *idem*, 'Judaean Ethnicity and Christ-Following Voluntarism? A Reply to Steve Mason and Philip Esler', *NTS* 65 (2019) 1–20 has criticised the work of Kuecker and others for supporting 'a dichotomy between an ethnically particular Judaism and a trans-ethnic, inclusive, universal Christianity' ('Ethnicisation, Marriage and Early Christian Identity', 441). Even if not all of Horrell's criticism is warranted (see S. Mason and P. F. Esler, 'Judaean and Christ-Follower Identities: Grounds for a Distinction', *NTS* 63 (2017) 493–515), Horrell is justified to draw attention to the risk of promoting – perhaps unconsciously – Christian truth claims through our research of early Christianity. In response to Horrell, I would clarify that the tensions in Acts between ethnic particularity and trans-ethnicity must be situated squarely within ancient Judaism. Consider, for instance, how Acts explicitly portrays the Jews as a trans-ethnic group in Acts 2.5.

80 Deines, 'Aposteldekret', 336–7: 'Standardbezeichnung Israels'.

81 For λαός and ἔθνος used as synonyms, see e.g. Ps 2.1 LXX; Justin, *Dial.* 19.5; 24.2. The quotation of Ps 2.1 LXX in Acts 4.5 breaks down the parallelism in the Hebrew and Greek versions of the verse and applies its two terms ἔθνος and λαός to non-Jewish and Jewish opponents of the apostles, respectively (see v. 27). If we assume that λαός in Acts 15.14 carries a similar meaning to ἔθνος (in its broad sense of 'an ethnic group'), the use of λαός rather than ἔθνος in this verse probably reflects an attempt at stylistic variation or disambiguation (ἔθνος in Acts 15.14 carries the more restrictive meaning 'non-Jewish ethnic group', whereas λαός refers more broadly to 'an ethnic group').

82 See also Acts 10.35; 14.16; 15.17.

new ἔθνος. Just as in the other cases discussed above, Acts' author employs familiar categories to characterise this new movement, whilst simultaneously demonstrating how the Way transcends those previous types of group.

5. Anchoring Innovation

In accounting for the ambiguity that surrounds Acts' use of group models the concept of 'anchoring innovation', as recently developed in an OIKOS research consortium,⁸³ may be relevant. For the members of this consortium, the concept refers to the process of making innovations acceptable by relating them to known categories. The rationale behind the concept is that '[i]nnovations may become acceptable, understandable, and desirable when relevant social groups can effectively ... connect what is perceived as new to what they consider familiar, known, already accepted'.⁸⁴ The point here is that the process of anchoring does not negate the innovative aspects of the innovation. Innovations, in their turn, never originate in a vacuum, but are indebted – or will have to construct an indebtedness – to what came before.

This necessity of innovations to be anchored calls attention to the ways in which the early Jesus movement negotiated its position vis-à-vis related groups and traditions.⁸⁵ One of the main aims of the book of Acts, as I see it, is to develop a (self-)understanding for the early Jesus movement as a novel movement of Jews and non-Jews.⁸⁶ The eschatological paradigm developed throughout Acts underscores the novelty of this movement: the Way, in Acts' view, is the realisation of eschatological expectations expressed in the Jewish scriptures, which foresaw the joining of non-Jews with Israel. What happens in the Way, therefore,

83 See www.ru.nl/oikos/anchoring-innovation/.

84 I. Sluiter, 'Anchoring Innovation: A Classical Research Agenda', *European Review* 25 (2016) 20–38, at 23.

85 Cf. Sluiter, 'Anchoring Innovation', 32–3, who labels the 'multiple anchors' through which 'the new religion of Christianity anchors itself in its relationship to paganism and Judaism' 'an example of what we might term "negative" anchoring'. The statement undoubtedly holds true for some early Christian writings, but the image Acts paints of the Way does not, as I see it, imply a wholesale denial of the groups to which Acts compares the Way. On attitudes towards innovation in ancient Judaism and early Christianity, see now also J. Klawans, *Heresy, Forgery, Novelty: Condemning, Denying, and Asserting Innovation in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

86 I consciously speak of '(self-)understanding', as I reckon with a mixed Jewish/Christian-Roman audience for Acts. Space does not permit me to develop this view here; I would only point out that in my view the aims of Acts are not dissimilar to those of Philo's historical works, which, as P. W. van der Horst has persuasively argued, addressed a mixed Jewish-Roman audience. See P. W. van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus: The First Pogrom. Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series 2; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 15–16.

is something fundamentally new, brought about by the expectation of the imminent end of history. Yet this new movement does not come unexpected: through its quotations from the Jewish scriptures,⁸⁷ Acts not only develops its eschatological outlook, but also anchors the Way, *qua* eschatological movement, within Israel's literary heritage. Innovation and anchoring go hand in hand.

In Acts' presentation of the Way as a new movement of Jews and non-Jews, Acts 15 plays a central role. Through his portrayal of the apostolic decree the author of Acts clarifies how this new movement should be perceived. On the one hand, the coming together of Jews and non-Jews in the Way exhibits similarities with previous categories: that of Israelites and resident aliens inhabiting the same land and that of non-Israelites keeping to the Noahide commandments. On the other hand, the Way, as an eschatological movement, cannot be equated with these previous categories: it supersedes them and remains something new and innovative. In this passage, too, anchoring and innovation are intricately connected and reinforce one another.

As I have aimed to show, this dynamic of anchoring and innovation, or old and new, permeates the entire book of Acts and characterises its use of group models to portray the Way. By presenting the Way as simultaneously fitting into and moving beyond familiar categories, Acts seeks to find a place for this novel movement within the Roman world in which it emerged. Thus, Acts presents us with a negotiation of the position of the Way that moves beyond the binary options of acceptance or polemics, which often continue to inform scholarship on Acts' attitude towards, for instance, the Jews, the Roman Empire or Greek philosophical and religious traditions. Rather than proceeding in line with either one of these alternatives, Acts offers a dynamic image of the Way as simultaneously resembling and transcending other types of group in the early Roman Empire.

87 See most evidently the quotations of Joel 3.1–5 in Acts 2.17–21; of Isa 53.7–8 in Acts 8.32–3; of Hab 1.5 in Acts 13.41; of Isa 49.6 in Acts 13.47; of Amos 9.11–12 in Acts 15.16–17; and of Isa 6.9–10 in Acts 28.26–7.