

**Paul's Reversal of Jews Calling Gentiles 'Dogs' (Philippians 3:2):
1600 Years of an Ideological Tale Wagging an Exegetical Dog?**

© Mark D. Nanos (January 17, 2008)

Rockhurst University, Kansas City, MO 64113 USA (www.marknanos.com)

Phil 3:2-3a:

βλέπτε τοὺς κύνας,	Beware of the dogs;
βλέπτε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας,	Beware of the evil workers;
βλέπτε τὴν κατατομήν.	Beware of the mutilation.
ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἔσμεν ἡ περιτομή	For we are the circumcision....

Christians I know would not call Jews dogs. Historically, however, that has not been the case, and it is not the case everywhere today.¹ As a Jewish person engaged in Pauline studies, I have discovered that it is not the case in commentaries on Philippians, where in Paul's name Jews are repeatedly called "Dogs."

Regardless of intent, the prevailing interpretations perpetuate the notion that Paul's unspecified reference to "dogs"—along with "evil workers" and "the mutilation"—are aimed at Jews and the values of Judaism, without denunciation of this language as inappropriate, if not also mistaken.² Many interpreters would qualify that

¹ See Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters: Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter* (Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

² Exceptions known to me include Walther Schmithals, *Paul & the Gnostics* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), pp. 83-84, who argues that "for the Jews the Gentiles particularly were regarded as dogs," but he finds it "inconceivable" that Paul would use this epithet to "describe strict law-observing Jews" or Jewish Christians of the Jerusalem church—rather it is aimed at Jewish Christian Gnostics; K. Grayston, "The Opponents in Philippians 3," *Expository Times* 97 (1986), pp. 170-72, although he nevertheless understands Paul's concern to be with opposing circumcision, but it is Gentiles who promote it as an initiation rite based on a "semi-magical belief in ritual blood-shedding"; Herbert Ulonska, "Gesetz und Beschneidung: Überlegungen zu einem paulinischen Ablösungskonflikt," in Dietrich-Alex Koch, et al. (eds.), *Jesu Rede von Gott und ihre Nachgeschichte im frühen Christentum: Beiträge zur Verkündigung Jesu und zum Kerygma der Kirche: Festschrift für Willi Marxsen zum 70. Geburtstag* (Gütersloh: Güterloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1989), pp. 314-31 (318-21), does not see how the name calling that Jews reserved for non-Jews would have been understood by Jews to apply to themselves;

these apply only to Jews who promote their faith to Christ-believing non-Jews (i.e., "Christians"), and even more specifically, that they refer to Christian Jews who do so. The latter are commonly labeled "Judaizers," because they are imagined to be promoting proselyte conversion. The implicit negative valence of this common labeling technique apparently does not need to be explained to readers, since promoting Jewish values among Christians has been valued negatively in Christian tradition in the strongest terms.³ Indeed, the perception that Paul is attacking the promotion of conversion into

instead Paul is applying this to pagans who have been castrated in various orgiastic religions (e.g., Cybele cult), but think of this as comparable to circumcision among Jews, although not with any interest in Torah, but in becoming part of the Agape-cult of Paul's followers; Craig Steven de Vos, *Church and Community Conflicts: The Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian Churches with Their Wider Civic Communities* (SBLDS 168; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1999), p. 268 n. 124; Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Were the Opponents at Philippi Necessarily Jewish?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998), pp. 39-61 (54-56, 60-61), tentatively suggests Christian Gentile Judaizers.

³ One preliminary matter of terminology to get out of the way before proceeding concerns the use of the terms "Judaizing" and "Judaizers" so common in discussions of Philippians, drawing on Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (HCS 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 175-97; Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), pp. 115-19; Idem, "What Was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with Gentiles' at Antioch?," in Mark D. Nanos (ed.), *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), pp. 282-318 (306-12).

"Judaizing" in the Greek texts upon which this terminology is based does not refer to something that Jews do, such as Jews who promote the practice of Judaism or conversion. The referent for the verb "to judaize" is non-Jews. It refers reflexively to behavior that a non-Jew undertakes when seeking to become a Jew (a proselyte), or to behave like a Jew. A proselyte is a judaizer, one who has judaized (proselytized). It could perhaps apply to Jews who had abandoned Judaism and returned (in this case actually "re-judaizing"), but otherwise it simply does not properly refer to the actions of Jews toward seeking non-Jewish converts, or to persuading non-Jews to behave more Jewishly.

Moreover, the way this language is commonly used in Pauline studies is objectionable on ideological grounds. It plays to an assumption that the reader shares the writer's (non-Jewish) viewpoint that there is something inherently negative about a Jew (including a Christian Jew or practitioner of Judaism, or even a "judaized" Gentile) promoting their faith to someone not Jewish, which does not need to be explained to the reader (hence, at work at an ideological level). Note that at the same time the writer and presumed reader often uphold that there is something desirable about a Christian promoting their faith to someone not Christian, or at least a benign attitude toward such behavior. Christians (like Paul!) are described as missionaries or evangelists, not as missionizing or Christianizing, while (supposed) similarly motivated and behaving Jews are described as judaizing or judaizers, which involves an

Judaism as entirely unthinkable is so common that it is reflected in the NRSV translation of the third clause: "beware of those who mutilate the flesh!"—even though the Greek does not refer to mutilators, but to "mutilation." *The HarperCollins Study Bible* refers the reader to a note "p" that admits the Greek is literally "the mutilation," but in the explanatory footnote, it nevertheless informs the reader that, "*Those who mutilate the flesh* is a harsh rejection of literal circumcision of Christians."⁴ In other words, interpreters subscribe to the notion that it is the continued positive valuation of the covenantal norms of Judaism—upholding identity in Jewish terms as an expression of faith, whether Christ-believers, or not⁵—that provides the foundation for Paul's polemical language.⁶ This understanding of Paul is an essential element of the traditional "Pauline" worldview, i.e., of Paulinism, as normally defined.

This study does not share that point of view on Paul, but that larger issue is not the topic to be addressed here. Under investigation is the interpretive tradition's claim that *because* Jews commonly referred to Gentiles contemptuously as dogs, therefore Paul is simply *reversing* the invective. Even when other bases for Paul's language are provided, the nature of his rhetoric as retaliatory is apparently supposed to provide

inherently negative valuation within the grammatical construction, as Shaye Cohen has shown ("izers/izing" endings implicitly carry a negative valence).

⁴ Wayne A. Meeks and et al (eds.), *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (1st ed.; New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 2207. There is also a cross reference made to Gal. 5:12, without any explanation. I do not believe that text constitutes a case of analogizing circumcision to mutilation (castration, in particular), but a sarcastic comment that betrays just how profoundly different the two topics are in Paul's thought and vocabulary in order for the polemic to communicate effectively; it also probably conceptualizes the knife slipping to cut the one doing the cutting, the *mohel*, not the one receiving it, the proselyte candidate; see Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, pp. 204-5.

⁵ For further explanation of this issue, see Mark D. Nanos, "How Inter-Christian Approaches to Paul's Rhetoric Can Perpetuate Negative Valuations of Jewishness – Although Proposing to Avoid that Outcome," *Biblical Interpretation* 13.3 (2005), pp. 255-69.

⁶ E.g., J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (J. B. Lightfoot's Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul; 12th ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), p. 53, reads this as "a stern denunciation of Judaism," and p. 143, as "much more serious" than "social dissensions actually prevalent among the Philippians" is "the infection of Judaism."

sufficient legitimation to persist in this caricature of the Jewish "other" without reservation, hermeneutical distance, or censure being expressed.⁷

It will be shown that although this conclusion is doggedly repeated from interpreter to interpreter, it is not confirmed by the texts upon which this supposed reversal would have to be based—a tale that can be traced back at least to Chrysostom (discussed below). For in order for Paul to be *reversing* this epithet toward Jews, there would have to be evidence that Jews had called Gentiles dogs prior to Paul's text. Yet there is *no* evidence predating Paul that Jews called Gentiles cum Gentiles dogs. And it is also *not* merely *uncommon* in the later rabbinic tradition to describe Gentiles, or Christians, or Christianity, where it would perhaps be understandable (though still not commendable) for a suffering minority community enduring such name calling and concomitant destructive policies—even that anachronistic evidence does not exist.

Calling Jews Dogs

It is important to recognize how often Christian interpreters have called Jews dogs in Paul's name. One finds the following language used by Gerald F. Hawthorne, in the current Word Biblical Commentary on Philippians 3:2. It represents concepts at work generally in Philippian commentaries, variously phrased:

⁷ This Christian polemical tradition, including its basis in a reversal of accusation, can be traced at least to the comments on 3:2 in *Homily X* of Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians*. I have yet to find a straightforward case undermining these suppositions, but some who take exception to the usual views expressed are noted above. It is universal enough to generalize that every interpreter of Philippians believes this, but a listing of some cases beyond the long list of commentaries includes: Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (6 vols.; Munich: C. H. Beck, 1922-1961), 1.722-24; 3.621-22; Michel, κύων, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3.1101-4; Helmut Koester, "The Purpose of the Polemic of a Pauline Fragment," *NTS* 8 (1961-62), pp. 317-32 (319 n. 7); David E. Garland, "The Composition and Unity of Philippians: Some Neglected Literary Factors," *Novum Testamentum* 27.2 (1985), pp. 141-73 (167 n. 92, 168); David Arthur DeSilva, "No Confidence in the Flesh: The Meaning and Function of Philippians 3:2-21," *TRINJ* 15NS (1994), pp. 27-54, who on p. 34 specifically notes his disagreement with Grayston's objection; Mikael Tellbe, *Paul Between Synagogue and State: Christians, Jews, and Civic Authorities in 1 Thessalonians, Romans, and Philippians* (CBNTS 34; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), pp. 259-60; Andries H. Snyman, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians 3:1-11," *Neotestamentica* 40.2 (2006), pp. 259-83, esp. 267-69.

The Jews were in the habit of referring contemptuously to Gentiles as dogs—unclean animals with whom they would not associate if such association could be avoided.... Paul now hurls this term of contempt back "on the heads of its authors."⁸

For Hawthorne the implications are unmistakable:

to Paul the Jews were the real pariahs that defile the holy community, the Christian church, with their erroneous teaching.⁹

The interpretive tradition represented in Hawthorne's language to describe Jews and Judaism is not confined to Philippian commentaries. Since no later than the fourth century, the dogs interpreted to be Jews in Philippians 3:2 have been conflated in Christian tradition with Matthew 15:26, to communicate "an image of Christian children

⁸ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC 43; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), p. 125, who refers the reader to Matt. 15:21-28; Michel, *TDNT* 3.1101-4; Str.-B. 1.724-25; 3.62-22, as the basis for this observation.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125, who refers to Robert Jewett, "Conflicting Movements in the Early Church as Reflected in Philippians," *NovT* 12 (1970), pp. 362-90 (386). The reach of this interpretation is evident when it does not even need to be spelled out in scholarly essays about Philippians, but merely stated: cf. Morna D. Hooker, "Philippians: Phantom Opponents and the Real Source of Conflict," in Ismo Dunderberg, et al. (eds.), *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Heikki Räsänen* (Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2002), pp. 377-95 (377), who, when engaged in arguing that there are not real opponents in Philippi in view in ch. 3, but a general warning should such teachers arrive, nevertheless concludes: "In 3:2 Paul issues a peremptory warning against 'the dogs', who were clearly Judaizers of some kind...."

Some recent interpretations which do not otherwise find Christ-believing Jews, or Jews of any kind for that matter in the context of the implied situation in Philippi (outside of this and some other language in chapter 3, which is equally cryptic, with no clear referent named), instead focusing on the Roman political and Greek cultural contexts; nevertheless, on the basis of v. 2, understand Paul to be opposing a group promoting proselyte conversion (circumcision) of Paul's addressees: see e.g., Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 111-12, 117-18; de Vos, *Community Conflicts* pp. 263-75; Karl Olav Sandnes, *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 120; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Erik M. Heen, "Phil 2:6-11 and Resistance to Local Timocratic Rule: *Isa theos* and the Cult of the Emperor in the East," in *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2004), pp. 125-53; Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (WUNT 2.161; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), pp. 203-5.

hungering for the Eucharist, which 'Jewish dogs' incessantly plot to steal, consume, savage, or pollute."¹⁰ Chrysostom put it this way in his homilies on Philippians:

But whom does he style 'dogs'? There were at this place some of those, whom he hints at in all his Epistles, base and contemptible Jews, greedy of vile lucre and fond of power, who, desiring to draw aside many of the faithful, preached both Christianity and Judaism at the same time, corrupting the Gospel. As then they were not easily discernible, therefore he says, "beware of the dogs": the Jews are no longer children; once the Gentiles were called dogs, but now the Jews. Wherefore? because as the Gentiles were strangers both to God and to Christ, even so are these become this now. And he shows forth their shamelessness and violence, and their infinite distance from the relation of children, for that the Gentiles were once called "dogs," hear what the Canaanitish woman says, "Yea, Lord: for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Matt. 15:27).¹¹

Note that the only evidence presented for Jews calling Gentiles dogs is from the lips of Jesus, in a document that post-dates Paul (an approach followed in some commentaries to this day). And although Chrysostom here is writing of Christ-believing Jews, he

¹⁰ Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, pp. xiv-xv; Stow's ideological-critical discussion of the Christian tradition's development of the notion of "Jewish dogs," starts from the consensus view that Paul in Phil 3:2 was referring to "judaizing" Christian-Jews as dogs.

¹¹ *Homilies on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians*, X, in Philip Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. First Series* (14 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), vol. 13, p. 230. Chrysostom goes on to ensure that his reader knows that the Jews are not to even have the "advantage" the Canaanite woman's appeal affords to the dogs. Citing Matt. 15:27, he writes: "But that they might not have this advantage, since even dogs are at the table, he adds that, whereby he makes them aliens also, saying, 'Beware of the evil workers'; he admirably expressed himself, 'beware of the evil workers'...." See also Idem, "Introductory Discourse 3"; Idem, *Homilies Against the Jews* 1.11.1-2. See also Augustine, *A Treatise Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* ("In Four Books Written to Boniface, Bishop of the Roman Church, In Opposition to Two Letters of the Pelagians, A.D. 420, or a Little Later"), Book III, Chapter 22: "For from the place in which he undertook to say these things, he thus began, 'Beware of *dogs*, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, who serve God in the Spirit,' — or, as some codices have it, 'who serve God the Spirit,' or 'the Spirit of God,' — 'and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.' Here it is manifest that he is speaking against the *Jews*, who, observing the law carnally, and going about to establish their own righteousness, were slain by the letter, and not made alive by the Spirit, and gloried in themselves while the apostles and all the children of the promise were glorying in Christ" (Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [transl. B. B. Warfield], vol. 5, p. 413 [emphasis added]).

elsewhere extends this to all Jews, since the continued participation with non-Christian Jews in the synagogues and festivals brought the polluting influence into the church and the Eucharistic meal:

Tell me, then: How do you Judaizers have the boldness, after dancing with demons [i.e., Jews], to come back to the assembly of the apostles? After you have gone off and shared [bread or ritual] with those who shed the blood of Christ, how is it that you do not shudder to come back and share in his sacred banquet, to partake of his precious blood? Do you not shiver, are you not afraid when you commit such outrages? Have you so little respect for that very banquet? (*Eight Homilies Against the Jews*, 2.3.5).¹²

The perception of Jews as a threat to the sacred institution of the Eucharist eventually developed into an element in accusations of blood libel, resulting in pogroms and the murder of Jews. The fear of pollution extended to Christians in general, the "Body of Christ," so that mere interaction with Jews was to be avoided as corrupting.¹³ Even synagogue prayers were maligned as "barking." It is little wonder that in Hitler's Germany (occasionally attested even in the U.S.) signs would read "No Jews or Dogs Allowed," which had not only Church history on which to draw, but ostensibly, the New Testament itself. Apparently, certain Palestinians and some other Muslims chant to this day, "the Jews are our dogs" ("Al Yahud Kelabna").¹⁴

For those interested to learn more, the unsavory Christian legacy of calling Jews dogs, and the harmful treatment this legitimated, is traced in Kenneth Stow's 2006 Stanford University Press monograph, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters: Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter*. Stow does not himself challenge the prevailing interpretation of Paul's language, or discuss the modern commentary tradition and its claim of reversal, but instead draws on Paul and Matthew as if they have been properly interpreted to refer to Jews as dogs. It appears that nothing in his

¹² Citation from Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, p. 14. The link between the Eucharist and the saying of Matt 7:6 to keep what is holy from the dogs is made as early as Didache 9.5, to articulate an injunction that prohibits the unbaptized from participation.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 6-8, 13-36, passim.

¹⁴ The New York Sun, August 22, 2006, accessed on March 14, 2007, at <http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:RrEz_3Th48IJ:www.hsje.org/pdf/'Jews%2520Are%2520Our%2520Dogs%27.pdf+dogs+hitler+jew&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=30&gl=us&client=safari>.

research gave him cause to question the accuracy of the interpretation of the texts or traditions upon which this legacy depends.

Anyone who understands how prejudice and racism is perpetuated, how it is communicated in the slightest gesture or turn of phrase uttered to a child, or even whispered in their presence, will immediately understand how important it is to challenge this interpretive tradition, which otherwise will continue to inform the development of Bible study and Church materials produced for every level of readership.

There is thus, in addition to the concern for historical and rhetorical accuracy in the task of interpretation that one should always expect the exegete to exhibit, ideological-critical warrant for investigating whether Paul had in view Jews or some expressions of Judaism with the epithet "dogs," and likewise, with the other negative monikers he enlists. Although these other epithets are significant and the subject of my research as well, space does not permit detailed discussion of them, or the broader context of Paul's language in the rest of the chapter, including the relevant polemical language in vv. 18-20. My focus here is on the fact that Paul was not engaged in reversing toward Jews an invective supposedly common for Jews to express toward non-Jews, analogizing them to dogs; moreover, it is not probable that Paul has in view Jews in his warning about dogs. This is an epithet that most likely indicated to Paul's audience in Philippi some kind of "pagan" entity or threat.

"Dogs" in General Polemic

"Dog" or "dogs," and associated epithets and descriptions of dog-like behavior, are so universal in metaphors and polemic that the usage in any given case is itself unremarkable, and unlikely to provide specific information about the referent. Appeal to "dogs" and dog-like behavior is employed to make polemic graphic, usually in negative strokes, although sometimes it is used positively too.

In one direction, dogs are portrayed in positive terms, as watch-dogs, shepherd-dogs, hunting hounds, companions.¹⁵ They have keen senses, tenacity, and legendary

¹⁵ Ancient Greek examples of many of these characterizations are listed in Henry George Liddell, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed.; Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 1015 (κύων).

loyalty. This characterization can also be used metaphorically for people who function as guardians. Dogs are natural hunters, and can be trained to assist in the hunt, so metaphorically, writes Philo, the "lover of instruction *tracks out* the sweet breeze which is given forth by justice."¹⁶ Ostensibly negative traits can be turned to positive ends, such as the aspect of scavenging endlessly, which was appreciated in ancient cities as providing street-cleaning services. This feature was apparently also utilized in certain sacrificial rites, in which impurities were soaked up by a dog, which was then removed from the space, carrying away the transferred impurities.¹⁷ At the same time, this characteristic has a negative side, for example, when a corpse is eaten by dogs, instead of properly buried.¹⁸

Sometimes quintessential positive traits are inverted in polemic. One's loyalty can be degraded as dog-like, meaning, e.g., cute, but without proper thought, failing to realize it is inappropriate in this case. When someone says "he is like a dog with a bone," the positive attribute of tenacity and commitment is communicated. But if delivered with or communicating an edge, as if it would actually be appropriate by this point to leave matters alone, then the usefulness is no longer as important as the nuisance the persistence represents. This can take on an additional twist when it is delivered by a party who will eventually be implicated if the dogged behavior persists. It is then actually a good trait being characterized as bad from their concerned perspective,¹⁹

¹⁶ Philo, *Dreams* 1.49 (emphasis added): "for as it is said that those dogs which are calculated for hunting can by exerting their faculty of smell, find out the lurking places of their game at a great distance, being by nature rendered wonderfully acute as to the outward sense of smell; so in the same manner the lover of instruction tracks out the sweet breeze which is given forth by justice...." (transl. Yonge). For an ancient source extolling the virtues of hunting dogs, see A. A. Phillips and Malcolm M. Willcock (eds.), *Xenophon & Arrian, On Hunting (KYNHΓETIKOΣ)* (Warminster, Eng.: Aris & Phillips, 1999).

¹⁷ Herbert Scholz, *Der Hund in der griechisch-römischen Magie und Religion* (Berlin: Druck: Trilitsch & Huther, 1937), p. 13; a Hittite purification rite for restoring fertility includes a small black dog which is held above the head of the supplicant, and later apparently taken away and burned (Albrecht Götze, and Edgar H. Sturtevant, *The Hittite Ritual of Tunlawi* [American Oriental Series 14; New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1938], pp. 5, 11, 17).

¹⁸ 1 Kgs. 14:10-11; 16:4; 21:19, 24; 22:38; 2 Kgs. 9:35-37; Jer. 15:3; cf. Michel, *TDNT* 3.1101 n. 2.

¹⁹ They wish for the tenacious one "to let sleeping dogs lie," to add another metaphorical example here, metaphor upon metaphor, with both positive and negative implications mixed, to exemplify just how

which is evident to the third party hearing the exchange, who is consoled by the hope that this persistence is a guarantee of eventual justice. What one person or group celebrates as a positive trait in dogs can be turned into a negative direction, for example, as discussed below, if Paul was referring negatively to groups whose iconography incorporated dogs, including Silvanus, Diana, Hecate, and Cybele, or those who used dogs as part of their activities, including sacrifices and magical potions, or in the case of the philosophical group known as Cynics (i.e., "Dogs").

In the other direction, negative characterizations of dogs and dog-like traits are extremely common in polemic. Dogs are associated with voracious appetites, with eating anything that can be eaten, including human flesh, gluttonous to the point of making themselves sick, and then even eating what they eliminate.²⁰ They are scavengers. They search out any food left exposed, including that which is involved in sacrificial offerings. This brings up the negative characteristic of dogs defiling that which is holy, as discussed above in the Christian tradition's polemic toward Jews defiling the host. This topic predates Scriptural texts, for it is expressed in an ancient Hittite text that dogs were not permitted near the temple doors because of fear that they will defile the altar and sacrifices: "since a dog approached the table and consumed the daily bread, they 'consume' the table."²¹ In Deuteronomy 23:18, the wages of dogs are excluded from the Temple service, which has been traditionally interpreted to be a euphemistic reference to temple prostitution.²²

Because dogs parade about naked, defecate, conduct sexual behavior, and generally carry on without regard for "human" conventions of modesty or prudence, they are characterized to be shameless in terms of the prevailing social terms for proper

common this particular language group is employed, and can be mined to communicate even complicated interactions and multiple perspectives.

²⁰ In Prov 26:11, a dog returning to eat its own vomit is used metaphorically for "a fool who repeats his folly."

²¹ David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Dissertation Series Society of Biblical Literature 101; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 105-6.

²² D. Winton Thomas, "Kelebh 'dog': Its Origin and Some Usages of It in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 10.4 (1960), pp. 410-27, in addition to recognizing the possibility of referring to temple prostitution, discusses the possibility that this was a positive reference among Israel's neighbors to priests who served the gods like faithful watchdogs in the temple, and thus were called "the dogs of god" (pp. 423-26).

conduct in human society. Anecdotally, while engaged in research for this paper, I overheard an adult (French-American) woman lamenting the lack of manners common in American culture; for example, the failure to open or hold the door for the elderly or crippled, as well as to offer a seat on public transport to the same, with the following quip: "We are humans, not dogs." Surely, this represents no more than the general stereotype of dogs as unaware of proper decorum for humans, that they are, in those terms, impolite, base, expressing the desire to satisfy their own appetites and carnal pleasures without regard for "good" manners. They are noisy, barking sometimes for what seems to be eternity. And dogs arouse fear, growling, barking, charging. They can travel in packs that roam the streets or countryside, and even the lone watchdog poses a threat to the passerby, a warning not to trespass that strikes fear when the fangs are bared, with angry barking and charging motions.²³ They are the stereotypical aggressor in polemic, such as when the Psalmist cries out: "For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me" (Ps. 21:17 LXX [transl. NRSV Ps. 22:16]).²⁴

In a very real sense, calling someone or group a dog or dogs or referring to dog-like behavior is simply name-calling. It does not make clear precisely who is in view in other definable terms, but functions as a word of reproach, commonly understood without being spelled out. In our case, we may make too much of a general put down when we seek for specificity. Nevertheless, although not the focus of this study, it is a task that must be undertaken by the interpreter of Philippians; thus some suggestions are offered below.

²³ Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 2, 26-27.

²⁴ Philo, *Moses* 1.130-31: "The remaining punishments are three in number, and they were inflicted by God himself without any agency or ministration of man, each of which I will now proceed to relate as well I can. The first is that which was inflicted by means of that animal which is the boldest in all nature, namely, the dog-fly (*kynomuia*) which those person who invent names have named with great propriety (for they were wise men); combining the name of the appellation of *the most impudent* of all animals, a fly and *a dog*, the one being *the boldest of all terrestrial*, and the other the boldest of all flying, animals. For they approach and run up fearlessly, and if any one drives them away, they still resist and renew their attack, so as never to yield until they are sated with blood and flesh. And so the dog-fly, having derived boldness from both these animals, is a biting and treacherous creature; for it shoots in from a distance with a whizzing sound like an arrow; and when it has reached its mark it sticks very closely with great force" (transl. Yonge; emphasis added).

"Dogs" in Jewish Literature Prior to and After Paul

To make the argument that Paul is referring to Jews or Judaism or so-called "Judaizers" in 3:2, most commentators appeal to the example of Jesus and the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30 (Syro-Phoenician), in addition to texts from the Tanakh.

One of my first surprises when beginning to research Philippians 3:2, was failing to find—before it was attributed to Jesus—the term "dogs" used in any Jewish texts to denounce non-Jews as non-Jews per se, that is, to equate Gentileness with doggishness. As you will see, upon examination, I was further surprised to find that it may not be the case with Jesus either, but if it is, he (or the Gospel writer) is apparently the inventor of this rhetorical trope against Gentiles.

Some modern commentaries additionally point to several rabbinic texts; more often, actually, reference is made to Strack-Billerbeck's *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* or Michel's entry for κῶων in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, German works of the early 20th century which list rabbinic texts supposed to indicate Jews regularly referred to non-Jews as dogs. Not content to "let a sleeping dog lie," I checked the rabbinic texts listed. Guess what? I was *again* surprised to find yet another tale.

How likely is it that Paul was involved in reversing invective, if the supposed initial invective against Gentiles is without any literary witness? A review of the sources is in order.

Dogs in the Tanakh

In the case of the Tanakh, the term "dogs" is employed occasionally as a general put down for rivals of various sorts, for sinners and fools, including fellow Jewish (or better: Israelite) ones (e.g., Deut. 23:19; Judg. 7:5; 1 Sam. 17:43; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:8; 16:9; 2 Kgs. 8:13; Ps. 22:16 [LXX 21:16]; 59:6, 14; Prov. 26:11; Isa. 56:10-11; also Sir. 13:18). In the case of Israelite "dogs," it refers to "other" Israelites, those who do not behave like Israelites should, usually political rivals.

There are actually only a few references to dogs that are typically construed to refer to Gentiles from the lists in Strack-Billerbeck, *TDNT*, or in commentaries.

In 1 Samuel 17:43, a Philistine Goliath snarls ironically, "Am I a dog?" He does so because he is insulted by the appearance of a mere boy sent to battle him, armed only

with a stick. It is not his own non-Israeliteness that provokes this ironic bark. The appearance of a mere shepherd boy represents to him an insult to his power as an imposing soldier, against whom one would expect the appearance of the most threatening soldier that Israel could put forth. He is further dishonored by the advancing of this mere youth, David, with but a shepherd's staff (hence, the metaphorical trope of sticks and dogs), not an arsenal to rival his own. This is not a reference to Gentiles as dogs. Note that in a slightly later incident, David asks Saul if Saul is chasing "a dead dog," referring to himself (1 Sam. 24:15), and further, whether he is after "a single flea". Such language is playfully derogatory, but not associated with gentleness; this case is quite the opposite!

In the same vein, the Gentile Hazael of Aram refers to himself as Elisha's "servant," and thus "a mere dog, that he should do this great thing," in response to hearing Elisha's prophecy that he will become the king of Aram, which will lead to horrible destruction for Israelites (2 Kgs. 8:7-13). The point is not that he is a Gentile, but that he is the present King Ben-hadad's mere servant sent to bring word to the king, not in line to become the king himself.²⁵

The psalmist writes: "For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled" (Ps. 22:16 [LXX 21:17] NRSV). It is common to interpret this text to refer to non-Jews, but that is far from certain (here, or as applied by the Gospel writers to Jesus; cf. Matt. 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-37). Many psalms focus on rivalries with fellow-Israelites, especially David's rivalries, e.g., with Saul (cf. Ps 59!; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 7.207-10) or Absalom (cf. 2 Sam. 16:9!). This psalm lacks sufficient specificity to identify the opponents. Dogs and lions are used to colorfully communicate how savage is the attack upon the psalmist, not to identify someone specifically as dogs, or lions, for that matter. If not directed at Israelite rivals, at most, it is a political polemic toward the surrounding kingdoms and their armies which threaten his own, but not Gentiles or even Gentile nations per se. The psalmist does not call Gentiles dogs.

²⁵ Similarly, José M. Galán, "What is He, The Dog," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 25 (1993), pp. 173-80, discusses how the term dog when applied to people in Egyptian correspondence and in the Amarna letters was used to stress "someone's status as inferior, subordinate and dependant."

It is interesting to note that in the rabbinic tradition's Midrash on Psalms (*Tehillim*), Psalm 22:17 (in comment 26 on Ps. 22),²⁶ this language is interpreted to refer to the story of Esther and the persecution under Haman and his sons. In the following comment on the verse about the hands and feet being made repulsive, they are understood to be guilty of sorcery upon the psalmist, who is Esther. Although appeal to this midrash in any direction is of course not relevant to the background of Paul's usage, since it post-dates him by centuries, it is nevertheless to be observed that the rabbis did not indulge the opportunity to call Gentiles dogs, as commonly supposed. It should also not go without mention that this psalm concludes with a positive expectation that there will be those who seek the Lord from all the nations who will enjoy the Lord's rule. This positive outcome is also reflected later in the Midrash on Psalm 22 (comments 29 and following). This psalm does not offer a foundation for interpreting Paul's language in the direction that commentators have claimed.

There are no cases to discuss based on an Accordance²⁷ search of the usage of "dog(s)" in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Sometimes Enoch 89.42-49 is cited, but it is an allegory with several wild animals representing kingdoms that oppress the sheep, and not a case of Gentiles being called dogs because they are not Jews (90.4, does not apply either). Although I have not seen anyone appeal to the Dead Sea Scrolls to legitimate any claims (it was of course not referred to in Strack and Billerbeck or Michel in *TDNT*), a search of an electronic reference library turned up very few references to dogs, and none that could be construed as support.²⁸ There are no references to Gentiles per se as dogs in Philo, or in Josephus.²⁹

²⁶ To which Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 1.724-25, refers to argue that Gentiles are equated to dogs.

²⁷ Version 7.1 (Oak Tree Software, Inc.).

²⁸ Emanuel Tov (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Reference Library 2* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

²⁹ Paul's contemporary, Philo (*Laws* 4.91; *Contemp* 40), refers to gluttonous banquet behavior in collegia. In *Free* 89-91, Philo uses dogs metaphorically to refer to hypocritical oppressors to make the point that such had never prevailed against the Essenes, because of their great virtue. In *Gaius* 139, Philo derides the Egyptians for various animal idols, including dogs. Josephus, *Apion* 2.85, writing at the end of the first century CE, does use it once in a derisive way toward his Egyptian accuser, Apion, which includes a slam on Egyptians having dogs among the gods ("unless he had himself had either an ass's heart or a dog's impudence; of such a dog I mean as they worship").

No literary evidence predating Philippians sustains the charge that Paul was engaged in a reversal of invective.

Dogs in Rabbinic Literature

Some modern commentators have appealed to rabbinic literature to indicate non-Jews are called dogs in Jewish texts, although this evidence post-dates the usage of Paul and the Gospels, so Paul cannot be supposed to be reversing it.³⁰ Moreover, if fair-play is invoked, if there were any cases where Gentiles were called dogs, these would have to be regarded as potential rejoinders to Christian invective in the first place, and thus would not legitimate Paul's behavior in the way supposed.

A brief investigation of the texts listed in Strack and Billerbeck's *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud un Midrasch*, and Michel's article in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, to which interpreters appeal, proves interesting.³¹

Mishnah Nedarim 4.3 does not call non-Jews dogs, in fact, it differentiates between non-Jews and dogs to make its point that one under a vow could either profit in the case under discussion from selling something to non-Jews, or even to use it as dog-food. This represents an exaggerated way to emphasize that one under a vow may do whatever one might wish to do with the carcass of an unclean animal: "For if he wants, lo, he can sell it to gentiles or feed it to dogs" (Neusner transl.). At issue is the productive use of the dead animal: one can either profit from its sale or feed the carcass to dogs. Gentiles and dogs are two very different referents and not equated.³² The dogs are real dogs. The term is not metaphorically applied to humans, real dogs are fed. This aligns with the reward dogs receive according to rabbinic legend: because they protected Israel during the escape from Egypt by not barking at them, thus the dogs receive food that is

³⁰ Modern commentators refer the reader to Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 1.724-25; 3.621-22; Michel, *TDNT* 3.1101-4.

³¹ Occasionally interpreters include the references in Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 1.722-24 (esp. in notes a-d), which have to do with mention of dogs, but even Strack and Billerbeck does not suggest these references have to do with equating Gentiles to dogs.

³² *Contra* Garland, "Composition and Unity of Philippians," p. 167 n. 92: "The two are thus almost synonymous," which he also writes about *m. Bek*, discussed below; *contra* Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 186, who says it is metaphorically applied here to "pagans, who also did not know how to distinguish between pure and impure, sacred and profane."

forbidden to Israelites to eat; moreover, even their excrement is honored by being used in the tanning of the hides on which the Torah scrolls are made, as well as phylacteries and Mezuzot.³³

Likewise, *Mishnah Bekorot* 5.6 does not call Gentiles dogs, but distinguishes between them in a discussion about how payment is to be made when a firstborn animal was sold inappropriately: "[If] they sold it to gentiles or tossed it to the dogs, they return to him the value of the *terefah* [meat, which is cheap, and he repays the difference between what they paid and what they received]" (Neusner transl.). The topic is what to do when meat was sold without proper inspection to ensure that it was unfit to be dedicated and thus available to sell. The argument does not conflate Gentiles with dogs, and is not a metaphorical use of this language. Rather, it explains that if the food was not sold to a Jew, but to a non-Jew, and thus cannot be reclaimed with full restitution of payment made (including for the part already eaten, which would be the case for a fellow Jew), the payment is nevertheless to be made to the non-Jew for the balance of the animal that can be repurchased.

Strack and Billerbeck refer to *y. Sabbath* 9, 11^d, 23.³⁴ The text of *y. Sabbath* 9 deals with Israelites calling what idolaters refer to as the "Face of God," instead to be the "Face of Dog." Tosefta *Avodah Zarah* 6.4, explains that places named for idols are to be given negative epithets; hence, "what is named Face of the Goddess [*pny 'lh*] is called Face of the Dog [*pny klv*]." ³⁵ This is but one of several examples discussed to explain what it means in practice to detest idols. It is not a reference to Gentiles as dogs, but to their idols, or to a specific idol. It is possible that the real life example involved a god or goddess associated with dogs, such as the Egyptian jackal-headed god Anibus, for example, or the dogs on Assyrian-Babylonian monuments who accompanied the Sun-

³³ Louis Ginzberg (ed.), *The Legends of the Jews* (trans. Henrietta Szold; 7 vols.; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 3.6 and n. 4 (in 6.1, he cites *Mekilta Mishpatim* 20, 98a [cf. *Mekilta de R. Ishmael* Exod. 22:30-31 (Kaspa 2)]; *ShR* 31.9 [cf. *Exod. Rabbah* 31,9]; *Targ. Yer. Exod. 22.30* [cf. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus* 22:30]); see also Deut. 14:21; *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus* 11:7; *Targum Onqelos to Exodus* 11:7. Note that *Targum Neofiti 1: Exodus* 22:30, however, negatively compares Gentiles to dogs in the sense that unlike Israelites, they can eat the flesh torn from a living animal, as can dogs.

³⁴ 11d = 9 in a different edition; I did not locate 23.

³⁵ See also 3.6; Tanchuma *Temurah* 6, refers to where it is called "Face of Molech," it should be called the derogatory term instead, "Face of a Dog."

god Merodach,³⁶ or the goddess Hekate (Trivia), to whom idols were constructed and sacrifices commonly made at three-way intersections, and one of the three heads of the goddess, which were on three poles, was sometimes a portrayal of the head of a dog.

After surveying the Mishnaic and Talmudic texts mentioned in Strack and Billerbeck and Michel in *TDNT*, and by an Accordance search of the Mishnah, I find no texts that refer to Gentiles as dogs, or that can be understood to do so. One interesting case to note is that the obstinacy of dogs is a characteristic used *positively* to distinguish Israel among the nations, that is, *that Israelites are like dogs*. In *b. Besah* 25b,³⁷ in a discussion of why the Torah was given to Israel rather than the other nations, R. Simeon b. Lakish explained: "There are three distinguished in strength [fierce]: Israel among the nations [footnoted: 'but the Law tempers their strength'], the dog among animals, [and] the cock among birds."³⁸ Ironically, there is no corresponding negative example equating Gentiles with dogs. In this case, the Gentile nations are decidedly *unlike* dogs!³⁹

Let us consider even later rabbinic texts to which reference is made in Strack and Billerbeck. In the case of Tanchuma *Terumah* 3, on Exodus 25.2, Akiba relates a dream to Tinneius Rufus, the Roman governor of Judea at the start of the Bar Kokba Revolt, wherein he named his dogs Rufus and Rufina. This slam is directed toward a political foe, if indeed also a non-Jew—better: a non-Judean, to keep salient the political context of the slur.⁴⁰ It is not a general equation of Gentiles or even Gentile rulers per se as dogs. Contrary to the comments in Strack and Billerbeck, *Midrash on Psalms*, Psalm 4 (comment 11), does not equate Gentiles with dogs.⁴¹ It refers to *fellow Israelites* who are so wicked and greedy in their prosperity that they are likened to dogs who eat well in the parable of the king's banquet. The midrash does so in order to signify how much

³⁶ Ginzberg (ed.), *Legends of the Jews* 4.275 and n. 82 (in 6.368).

³⁷ Noted by Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 1.723, repeated in Michel, *TDNT* 3.1101-2!

³⁸ M. Ginsberg (ed.), *Hebrew-English Edition of The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo'ed, Bezah* (trans. M. Ginsberg; London: Soncino Press, 1990).

³⁹ In another case, Israel is metaphorically represented by the "unfortunate dog," in that Moab and Midian team up to destroy their enemy Israel like a weasel and cat team up to destroy their enemy the dog (Ginzberg [ed.], *Legends of the Jews* 3.353-54 and n. 721 [in 6.123]).

⁴⁰ Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 1.725.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1.724-25.

more abundant the banquet that God makes for the *blessed* of Israel will be in the age to come.

This political kind of usage is also the context for many of the other rabbinic texts noted in Strack and Billerbeck, including *Leviticus Rabbah* 33.6. These do not equate Gentiles with dogs, but constitute put downs of royal figures. Note also that *Genesis Rabbah* 81.3, is not about Gentiles per se, but a Samaritan.

The only text I have found in some way equating Gentiles with dogs is in an edition of the medieval *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 29, where eating with the uncircumcised *slave* in the house of Israel is likened theoretically to eating with a dog, which also has not had the foreskin circumcised.⁴² It is not present in all editions.⁴³ The example is part of a discussion of why the Abrahamic covenant called for slaves of his house to also be circumcised, since unlike proselytes, who choose in freewill to be circumcised, slaves are compelled to be, and are thus not regarded in this argument to be true converts. Even in this case, it is neither Gentiles per se, nor Christians that are named, but Gentile slaves in a theoretical sense. This text is obviously far too old (after the founding of Islam) to be used as background for Paul, representing centuries of suffering under Christians calling the circumcised Jews dogs who defile, with whom Christians were thus prohibited from eating.

In sum, it is exegetically mistaken, as far as the sources that have been referred to by commentaries to date, or on the basis of the searches I have been able to conduct, to continue to approach Philippians 3:2 claiming that Paul is turning a well-known and common Jewish slur of Gentiles on its head so that it refers to Jews. There are certainly no grounds in Jewish literature for the interpretive tradition to conclude with Michel that the term dogs is "a *common* term to express *Jewish* contempt for other peoples!"⁴⁴ The usage of dogs is multifaceted in rabbinic literature, just as it is in general, with both

⁴² Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser: Nach der Edition Venedig 1544 unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852* (Berlin and New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2004), pp. 322-23.

⁴³ According to Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: (The chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna* (4th ed.; New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981), p. 208, the Vienna manuscript of the 12th-13th century reads: "as though he were eating flesh of abomination," and does not have the next sentence with the reference to dogs.

⁴⁴ Quoting from Michel, *TDNT* 3.1103 n. 11, where he attributes this language to E. Lohmeyer, *Kommentar z. Apokalypse*, 1926, 177 (emphasis mine), in other words, in comments on the NT book of Revelation.

positive and negative examples. When we deal with metaphors, we need to be cautious about making too much out of any image that is used in a particular way, as if it is considered intrinsically so, and limited to only that meaning.

Thus, contrary to the claim of Markus Bockmuehl in his recent Commentary on Philippians, that the "Jewish background, then, offers a clue to Paul's usage....,"⁴⁵ it does not do so. Paul does not "attack[] those who, from the imagined superiority of their Jewish status and practice, reject fellowship with Gentile Christians whose indifference to the purity laws makes them like dogs." It is not the case that "[f]rom this perspective, the Gentiles cannot become part of the people of God without converting to Judaism: only full Jews can be full Christians; others are 'dogs.'" If this is what Paul meant, it will have to be determined apart from his language about dogs.

Ostensibly, then, it is in a saying attributed to Jesus that dogs first arises as a negative reference to non-Jews, i.e., Gentiles as Gentiles per se (Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).⁴⁶ Since it has been shown that there is no evidence Jews called Gentiles dogs before Jesus—which interpreters of the Gospels as well as Paul have consistently claimed, assuming that Jesus was simply repeating a common prejudice (and often not reflecting on the implication that Jesus would engage in such an endeavor anyway)—this logically makes Jesus, or the Gospel writer, the inventor of this polemical development. Or does it?

"Dogs" in Jesus' Engagement with the Canaanite (or Syro-Phoenician) Woman

Although this text represents language written after Paul's letter, as we have seen, it has repeatedly been employed by interpreters to indicate Jewish attitudes and language predating it. An appeal to this incident in the Gospels alone to make the case must

⁴⁵ Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, p. 186, and for the following citations.

⁴⁶ An exemplary case of this common view is witnessed in the note to 15:22 in the HarperCollins Study Bible (1993 version): "*Canaanite*, a scriptural term for ancient Israel's pagan enemies (see, e.g., Deut. 7.1; cf. Mk. 7.26) here used to designate a Gentile" (p. 1886).

Matt 7:6, when stating, "Do not give what is holy to dogs," is likely based on the notion not to distribute sacrificial food improperly, including not to seek to profit from an animal dedicated to the priests, perhaps also not to use the carcass to feed the dogs, that is, to eschew all utilitarian purposes for that which is set apart. In its context, it seems to be about intra-communal behavior (how to treat neighbors), not directed toward non-Israelites in particular, perhaps not at all, if Jesus is understood to be involved at this point entirely in an intra-Jewish context.

presume not only that the language of Jesus recorded in the Gospels predates Paul's usage here, but that Paul was aware of it, and that so too were his addressees in Philippi.⁴⁷ Disregarding these historical problems, not least that the Philippians would not have these Gospels from which to interpret Paul's language,⁴⁸ let us investigate whether this case can support the weight it is required to bear in Pauline scholarship.

According to Matthew, when Jesus was in ("withdrew to" or "retired to") the district of Tyre and Sidon, on the border of the ancient Israelite northern tribal territory, a Canaanite woman seeking relief from a demon for her daughter hounded them, shouting at Jesus for mercy, hailing him as "Lord, son of David" (Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).⁴⁹ This declaration suggests respect for Judahide dynastic aspirations in a way that Canaanites, and arguably, some Israelites of the Northern tribes since the divided kingdom days, would be stereotypically expected to instead deny.⁵⁰ Jesus is portrayed as ignoring her: he "did not answer her at all." When the disciples urged Jesus to send her away, he responded to them, not to her directly, with the enigmatic phrase that he was "sent *only* to the lost sheep of *the house of Israel*."

This case is thus also set in a particular political context, and not a general Jews/Gentiles one, as supposed by those who point to it to as support for the claim that Paul is reversing a Jewish practice of calling Gentiles dogs. In fact, Jesus' response may suggest an intra-Jewish (among and between Israelites and Judahites) context rather

⁴⁷ Jewett, "Conflicting Movements," pp. 382-87, adopts the usual view, nevertheless perceptively observes: "How would the Gentile Philippians know that the Jews used 'dog' to refer to 'foreigners' and that this is the connotation here?" (p. 385).

⁴⁸ The reach of the consensus view is exposed when, in the opposite direction, Kenzo Tagawa, *Miracles et Évangile: la pensée personnelle de l'évangéliste Marc* (Études d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1966), pp. 118-19, argues circularly that one cannot be certain that dogs refers to non-Jews except by the context (noting in Mark that the woman is called a Greek specifically), because in Phil. 3:2 one sees it applied to Jewish Christians.

⁴⁹ The variations between Mark and Matthew, or the probable textual histories of either, do not require discussion for the matters under review here.

⁵⁰ Cf. Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996). On the other hand, many Judeans had settled in the northern areas during the Hasmonean period, so the dynamics of the intra-communal tensions are not clear; see Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee: The Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

than a Jewish/non-Jewish (or Judean/non-Judean) one. Jesus is specifically concerned with the lost sheep *of the house of Israel*, which may well refer to members of the Northern tribes. They had been deported or intermixed with other peoples by the Assyrians in the eighth century, and might be expected to populate the area to which Jesus is depicted here as withdrawing, regardless of how indistinguishable from other people in the area they might be after these many centuries. The question is, is she entitled to reap what Jesus intends to sow among the lost Northern tribes?

Jesus' response would seem to suggest an opening for her approach rather than rejection, although expressed indirectly. It perhaps plays to the chance that she is a descendent of those from the Northern tribes who suffered deportation, or descended from intermarriage with those the Assyrians sent to repopulate the area some 700+ years earlier! Rhetorical polemic toward those from the Northern tribal areas (or toward those who in various ways claimed to be the true Israelites or Judahides, depending upon the context) has a long history (see Ezra-Nehemiah). So too do appeals to legitimate ancestry for members of the "lost" tribes (Tobit). Intra-Jewish rhetoric even takes place between Judeans who accuse the other party of being like Ephraim (i.e., the "rebellious" Northern tribes). Apparently, the Dead Sea Scrolls sectarians referred to the Pharisees as Ephraim because of their "false teachings" (4QpNah. 3-4 ii 8).⁵¹ These are just the kinds of tensions with which interpreters expect the authors of the Gospels to have been concerned in their post-Temple context.

The Canaanite woman insists on Jesus' help, kneeling and pleading with him. Jesus responds (although it is not clear if it is to her directly, or to the disciples within her hearing) with a metaphor (unattested before this case):⁵² "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Her rejoinder cleverly accepts the insult to being metaphorically categorized as a dog,⁵³ to make the point that "even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table," which gains Jesus' approval.⁵⁴

⁵¹ See Stephen Goranson, "Others and Intra-Jewish Polemic as Reflected in Qumran Texts," in Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1999), pp. 534-51 (542-43).

⁵² From Euripides, *Phoenician Women* (Euripides, *Phoenissae* [E. P. Coleridge (ed.)] line 1650): "Creon: Isn't it right for that other to be given to the dogs?" (3.10); note that the context concerns Phoenician women!

⁵³ In the early twentieth-century Israel Abrahams, a Jewish interpreter, disputed the Gospel commentary tradition's continued assertion, when explaining this verse, "that the Jews habitually called the heathens

Her reply accepts that she does not have equal status, but appeals for treatment as a welcome guest. Jesus' challenge appears to be based on a zero-sum game, that is, if the food is fed to the dogs, there will not be enough to feed the children (and likely, with echoes of giving set-apart [priestly] food to those who are not priests; cf. Matt. 7:6). If we stay within the shepherd metaphor—since diminutive *κυνάρια* is used, implying pet dogs rather than wild, threatening dogs—then perhaps the idea of the family's shepherd dogs is involved.⁵⁵ They are fed, but not the food intended for the family. Her rejoinder evokes the generous feeling the family would have nevertheless toward their dogs in the event that they hung around the table and scavenged some scraps. Might this imply that the woman counts herself (or Jesus, or the Gospel writer see her) in some way to be within the orbit of Israel's (and thus Judah's) self-concern? The message Matthew seeks to communicate may be that the nations who turn to Israel's God are to recognize that they do so as those who are under the reign of Israel's king (or is it more salient that it is Judah's king?) as ruler of the world. Perhaps she is alluding to the Israelite concept of leaving a portion of the field available for the alien (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut 24:19-22; Ruth 2). This non-Israelite woman could serve as a type: she is represented as specifically interrupting Jesus' ministry to the lost from among the Northern tribes, being one who lived in the area that should instead belong to these

'dogs,'" and he discussed some of the texts to which appeal has been made (*Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels. First and Second Series* [Library of Biblical Studies; New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1967], 2.195); cf. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary: 8--20* (trans. Wilhelm C. Linss; Hermeneia--A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; ed. Helmut Koester; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), p. 341 n. 62.

⁵⁴ Dogs eating from the table scraps is attested as a literary trope, although not the twist that she puts on it regarding children; see Luz, *Matthew 8--20*, p. 340 n. 59, and the references listed there, although above I take issue with his reading of the rabbinic examples he includes from Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 1.724-26, which do not predate this case anyway. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 1.19, scoffs at one who has gathered sayings from his teacher as reminding him "of dogs who pick up and eat the fragments which fall from a feast"; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 3.96f-97a: "'it is the custom to throw the remnants [λείψαν] to the dogs [κυσίν];' as Euripides has said in *The Women of Crete*."

⁵⁵ Also in Mk. 7:27, the diminutive *κυνάρια* is used. Luz, *Matthew 8--20*, p. 340, observes that this refers to household pet dogs, but some have disputed that this can be inferred from the usage of diminutives by this period. Differently, the idea of shepherd dogs, which Daniel Stramara, Jr., raised in conversation, is more in keeping with the metaphorical language. *M. Hallah* 1.8, indicates that there is a dough associated with shepherd-dogs.

Israelites, nevertheless seeking mercy from one whom she recognized as the awaited king from the house of David, who should be expected to be concerned for others within Israel's social world.

By way of this metaphor the Canaanite woman accepts either the lower standing of being one of the "lost" children of the Northern tribes of Israel, albeit one without a provable claim to that identity, or perhaps even lower standing, that she is not of the house of Israel at all. Rather, she is a despised Canaanite to whom Jesus has not in any way sought to come, one who wrongfully lives in the land that is not rightfully hers, and thus depletes the resources that should belong to Israelites.⁵⁶ Might she be appealing to a Judean manifest destiny in order to challenge Northern Israelite aspirations that confront her where she lives? Canaanites are in the land that Israel claims for herself (here as represented by the Jesus-believing author of the Gospel), perhaps in the context of a rivalry within the land of Northern Israel over who has the right to the blessings of the awaited Davidic king's rule.⁵⁷ In a different direction, might her reply be an appeal to be regarded as a *ger* or "stranger within the gates," thereby entitled to the blessings of being a part of the family of Israel in a kind of guest status?

What I hope to have demonstrated is that it is not clear that Gentiles per se are analogized with dogs in this metaphor. She is a Canaanite, a perhaps affectionately appreciated, or alternatively, especially despised neighbor who looks to a future Davidic dynasty, and also one who is a woman.⁵⁸ The context of this language appears to be political and specific.⁵⁹ It does not likely represent a generalized degradation of

⁵⁶ Somewhat similarly, Gerald F. Downing, "The Woman from Syrophenicia, and her Doggedness: Mark 7:24-31 (Matthew 15:21-28)," in George J. Brooke (ed.), *Women in the Biblical Tradition* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), pp. 129-49 (138), observes that this may be the connection between a request for exorcism and a reply about food.

⁵⁷ Similarly, see chapter 8 in Joel Willitts, "Matthew's Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of 'The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel'" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2006).

⁵⁸ That the choice of metaphor depends instead on her being a woman cannot be dismissed either: Sir. 26:25 derisively states: "A headstrong wife is regarded as a dog, but one who has a sense of shame will fear the Lord."

⁵⁹ In sympathy with the suggestion of Cynics for Paul's usage below, see the proposal for a Cynic *topos* here, in Downing, "The Woman from Syrophenicia," pp. 140-49, who suggests that she is acting the part of a Cynic, and that Chrysostom's comments indicate that he was aware of this at play (pp. 145-46;

Gentiles per se as dogs,⁶⁰ which further undermines the commentary traditions' legitimation of Paul calling Jews dogs as a reversal of a common Jewish prejudice expressed toward Gentiles by Jesus—by pointing to this text.

If I am judged nevertheless to be mistaken, and this text is determined to be a case in which the epithet dogs is used by a Jew (Jesus) to negatively value a non-Jew, and by extension, non-Jews in general, then should it not also be recognized that it is the first attested case, likely post-dates Paul's letter, and expresses the viewpoint of a writer from a specific Jewish group, the early Christ-believers?⁶¹ And should not there follow a fair play observation that it is not on just any Jewish lips, but from Jesus alone (by way of the Gospel writers) that "dogs" is used in this derogatory manner toward this non-Jew, or perhaps better, non-Israelite, or potential descendant of the so-called lost Northern tribes?⁶²

Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 52 [PG LVIII, 521-22]; 23 [PG LVII, 306-8]). The reputation of Cynics for hanging around symposia for food is suggestive (see Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 3.96-97; 6.246).

⁶⁰ Interpreting this to indicate Gentiles in general is attested since Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 4.7.5; *De Fuga* 6.3; Pseudo-Clementine, *Homilies* 2.19-20 (PG XI, 87-88); *Recognitions* 7.32; *Ibid.*, 144-46.

⁶¹ If this represents a later addition, as some exegetes argue it to be, then it may express the projection of a "Christian" negative caricature of Jewish views developed to demonstrate "Christian" superiority. It is notable that at the end of his essay on "dogs," Michel wants to clarify that Jesus and the NT authors' use of this kind of language for reproach "differs plainly from later Jewish usage" (*TDNT* 3.1104), although it is not clear to me on what basis he claims this, in view of the rabbinic material discussed above.

⁶² The Jewishness of Jesus' identity and its nationalism (particularism) is often clearly recognized for commentators in this case, while, in other cases, when Jesus is depicted to be generous, his behavior is interpreted to be specifically representative of superior "Christian" values, such as universalism. Supposed universalism is even imported here, by way of the exception Jesus is understood to make, adumbrating that Gentiles will believe after the Jews reject him. This trend is evident from early commentators, e.g., in Epiphanius, *Interpretation of the Gospels* 58, when commenting on the Canaanite woman's reply: "you came to the Jews and manifested yourself to them, and they didn't want you to make exceptions. What they rejected, give to us who are asking for it" (from Manlio Simonetti [ed.], *Matthew 14-28* [Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament 1b; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002], p. 29. See also T. A. Burkill, "The Historical Development of the Story of the Syrophenician Woman [Mark vii: 24-31]," *Novum Testamentum* 9 [1967], pp. 161-77).

The way that this is often interpreted suggests that Jews (including Christ-believing Jews) operate from an exclusivistic framework that negatively values non-Jews metaphorically as dogs, while suggesting that Christian inclusiveness would not be guilty of this kind of prejudice, except to turn the rhetoric upside-down in self-defense, or by *Jewish*-Christians, who are regularly maligned for failing to

Alternative Interpretations for Paul's Epithet "Dogs"

Efforts to offer alternatives for Paul's reference to dogs have not been made to date, since interpreters have universally understood Paul to have been engaged in a reversal of specifically Jewish rhetoric, combined with prevailing idea that Paul denounced the value of Jewish identity and behavior in the verses that follow.⁶³ The extent of this tendency is witnessed by the fact that the *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* does not list any suggestions for salient primary texts to consult for parallels to the language or message of 3:2, that is, for "dogs," "evil workers," or "the mutilation," or for the various referents that arise in vv. 18-19 either.⁶⁴ In this essay I can only point to some of the relevant options that are the subject of my current research.

The possibilities for the referents for Paul's epithet dogs (and the other referents throughout chapter 3) in Philippi are several. They include various cult figures such as Silvanus, Diana, Cerberus, Hekate, and Cybele, gods and goddesses associated with dogs, and variously with some of the other attributes that Paul negatively characterizes. For example, Silvanus and Diana were portrayed accompanied by dogs in the reliefs carved into the hills overlooking Philippi.⁶⁵ Hekate, a goddess involved in conducting the dead to Hades, in helping or alternately hindering successful child-bearing and rearing, and often invoked in the practice of magic—an "evil worker" par excellence—was often pictured not only accompanied by dogs, but she (or one of her three heads, or

dismiss the value of Jewishness, thus, betraying such lingering negative characteristics in their portrayals of Jesus. For my discussion of the unintended failure of intra-Christian scenarios to avoid implicit negative valuations of Judaism in the way NT interpreters often suppose, see Nanos, "How Inter-Christian Approaches to Paul's Rhetoric," pp. 255-69.

⁶³ The few who take exception to the referent for dogs as Jews per se are listed above.

⁶⁴ M. Eugene Boring, et al. (eds.), *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), e.g., a useful volume, which "might be thought of as a 'Hellenistic Strack-Billerbeck'" (p. 12). For the mutilated as other than Jews, an alternative is offered by Ulonska, "Gesetz und Beschneidung." It is common for commentators to explore options for vv. 18-19, wherein libertines, Gnostics, and others are the subject of various studies.

⁶⁵ Valerie A. Abrahamsen, *Women and Worship at Philippi: Diana/Artemis and Other Cults in the Early Christian Era* (Portland, Maine: Astarte Shell Press, 1995), pp. 25-26; Peter F. Dorsey, *The Cult of Silvanus: A Study in Roman Folk Religion* (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 20; Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1992), pp. 67, 91.

feet) was sometimes portrayed as a dog, and dog-meat was an important ingredient in the "Suppers" offered to her. The cult of Cybele was notorious for its orgiastic rituals and the mutilation of its initiates, who castrated themselves, behaving shamefully, like dogs, from Paul's cultural point of view, so that not only would reference to "evil workers" be salient, but especially so would be his negative reference to "the mutilation."

In a different direction, philosophical groups often call each other dogs. Most importantly, the Cynics were philosophers who were literally called "Dogs [κύων; ὁ Κυνικός]," and who aspired to the highest level of doggishness as a matter of honor!⁶⁶ The connection was made explicit by Philo:

For instance, the name of dog is beyond all question a homonymy, inasmuch as it comprehends many dissimilar things which are signified by that appellation. For there is a terrestrial barking animal called a dog; there is also a marine monster with the same name: there is also the star in heaven, which the poets call the autumnal star, because it rises at the beginning of autumn, for the sake of ripening the fruits and bringing them to perfection. *Moreover, there were the philosophers who came from the cynic school. Aristippus and Diogenes; and other [sic] too who chose to practise the same mode of life, an incalculable number of men.*⁶⁷

In the second century CE, the Church Father Clement of Alexandria observed that when debating pagans it was necessary to define terms, for example, to clarify "Whether a dog were an animal? For I might have rightly said, Of what dog do you speak? For I shall speak of the land dog and the sea dog, and the constellation in heaven, and of Diogenes too, and all the other dogs in order."⁶⁸

There are many relevant reasons to suppose that Paul has in view Cynics throughout chapter 3. Although we cannot explore the topic here in any detail, this would have implications for the entire letter, and for general studies of Paul as well.

⁶⁶ Cf. Philo, *Planter* 151; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6 (passim); Lucian, *Demonax* 21; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 3.96-99; Clement, *Strom.* 8.12.4-7.

⁶⁷ *Planter* 151; transl. Yonge (emphasis added).

⁶⁸ Clement, *Strom.* 8.4 (transl. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [eds.], *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. [American reprint of the Edinburgh ed.; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], vol. 2, p. 561).

Just as the Cynics exemplified "boldness of speech [παρρησία]," that is, freedom to speak one's mind (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, 6.69), exemplified by freedom to act accordingly,⁶⁹ Paul claims the same for his own choice to live and speak "with all boldness [παρρησία]" (Phil. 1:14, 20), and certainly exemplifies that style in his argument in chapter 3. Was Paul perhaps imitating the Cynics and their ideals in the harsh, abusive, and even crass street-language (note the use of "crap" in v. 8), when seeking to express prophetic critique of the cultural alternatives, and pressure to conform therewith? Paul's emphasis on endurance, including appeal to the athletic imagery of training to succeed in order to make the case (vv. 12-16), parallels the common Cynic emphasis on discipline or practice in training (ἄσκησις), which was often made in metaphorical athletic terms, encouraging persistence in the face of constant resistance and discouragement.⁷⁰ Likewise, Paul's emphasis on self-denial in order to succeed (vv. 7-21; 4:5-13), is similar to the concerns of the Cynics to gain self-mastery, the exercise of which will fly in the face of conventional measures of success.⁷¹ And note that Paul's claim that "our citizenship is in heaven" rather than in this world (3:19-20), is intriguingly contextualized if juxtaposed with the Cynic's claim to be "citizen[s] of the world [κοσμοπολίται]" (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.63).

Moreover, as we can see from the Biblical examples as well as common usage in other Greek and Latin texts, references to dogs and dog-like behavior can be used in a general derogatory way: it need not denote a specific group per se, but the out-group, in

⁶⁹ Cf. Leif E. Vaage, "Like Dogs Barking: Cynic Parrêsia and Shameless Asceticism," *Semeia* 57 (1992), pp. 25-39.

⁷⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.49, 70-71; Crates, *Ep.* 16, 20, 21, 33; Diogenes, *Ep.* 31; Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.22.51-52.

⁷¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.27-30, 45, represent examples of the critique, e.g., of the need for one to be better trained than a Spartan warrior, to be master of one's self more than of another man, to do more to uphold the laws than do the rulers themselves; cf. *Lives* 6.23, 31-34, 59; Crates, *Ep.* 11, 12; Diogenes, *Ep.* 12; 14; Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.22.51-52; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 6.8-9; cf. A. A. Long, "The Socratic Tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic Ethics," in Robert Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé (eds.), *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and its Legacy* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 23; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 28-46.

order to make the point that the author's own group's identity and behavior are different and superior.⁷²

It should also be noted that Paul's language choices for name-calling here may be shaped more by intertextuality than has been realized.⁷³ In the Tanakh, references to *dogs* as well as to *mutilation* and to *evil workers* as prophets, all arise in 1 Kings 18—22:40, in the story of Elijah and the rival prophets who advised Ahab to follow Baal. In Kings, *evil working false prophets* (18:19—19:1) *mutilate themselves* (18:28: κατετέμνοντο: a verbal form of the word Paul uses in Philippians 3:2 to refer to the "mutilation"), in order to evoke God's action—i.e., they put confidence in the flesh—but to no effect. Moreover, the house of Ahab and Jezebel were condemned to be devoured by *dogs* (21:22-29; cf. 2 Kgs. 9:33-37; 10:11, 17). The parallels are tantalizing.

Acts 16:12-40, especially vv. 16-21, should also be probed for relevance to the situation in Philippi. This text purports to describe Paul's experiences in Philippi. Luke depicts a fortune-telling slave woman with a spirit of *python* (πύθωνα: divination, "belly-talking," speaking in a strange voice), a ventriloquist in the sense of having a demon in the stomach which speaks through the subject's mouth, following Paul, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." After several days of this, Paul was annoyed and exorcised the demon, provoking local opposition to his influence, for she had represented a profitable enterprise. In view of these intertextual clues, a possible rivalry with prophets and competing truth claims could be profitably examined for the context of the rhetoric of Philippians.

Whatever the particular referent(s), Paul's language is probably intended to evoke a general negative stereotyping of options outside of Judaism, and outside of his Christ-believing coalition within Judaism in particular. In other words, Paul is expressing opposition to "pagan" alternatives and any associations that might be drawn

⁷² Similarly noted, but to different conclusions, see David E. Garland, "The Composition and Unity of Philippians," pp. 141-73; DeSilva, "No Confidence in the Flesh," pp. 27-54.

⁷³ Most commentators do not note this; one who does, Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians, and to Philemon* (transl. J. C. Moore and William P. Dickson; H. A. W. Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament; 6th ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1983), p. 122, is adamantly opposed to the idea: "A description of *idolatry* with allusion to Lev. xxi.5, 1 Kings xviii.28, *et al.*... is quite foreign to the context."

by his audience or others seeking to understand them, or to be pursued by his addressees in their effort to not only understand who they are in the world, but to whom they should look as models and for instruction going forward. Paul will have none of that. They are to look to Judaism in general: "we are the circumcision"—as well as to Paul, and to Jesus Christ, to whom Paul himself looks, and, in his view, to whom all those who are set apart to God should look.

Note that Paul does not write what commentators universally read, that is, he does not write that "we are the *true* circumcision, "the circumcision *of the heart*," "the *spiritual* circumcision," or some such thing. By writing "we are the *circumcision*," he emphasizes the contrast between circumcision identity and identity associated with other kinds of cuts in the flesh.

The pun on the similarity of sounds for the Greek endings of mutilation...circumcision (*tomên... tomê*), along with the shared lexical element of being cut (τομή), are used to punctuate the fact that in spite of these common elements, which make for a dramatic turn of phrase, the two identities these words signify are anything but the same! Jewish identity and behavior are upheld as positive referents in v. 3: being the circumcision means being those who are "worshiping God in spirit, boasting in Christ Jesus, and not trusting in the flesh." That identity and lifestyle is contrasted to the negative "pagan" referents of v. 2, stereotyped as dogs, evil-workers, and the mutilation.⁷⁴ These two ways of being in the world are as different as day and night, (males) being cut around (περι-τομή) to be set apart to the God of Israel, as commanded in Scripture, versus being cut into (κατα-τομή) in order to invoke the gods, as supposed to be effective by the rest of the nations. The contrast is with the *uncircumcised*, the "pagan" world of the addressees, about which Paul is expressing a specifically Jewish—i.e., *circumcision-oriented*—point of view.

Rather than warning his audience to beware of Jews or the values of Judaism, the opposite is the case: Paul is warning his audience to eschew the "pagan" options to which they might be expected to be drawn, or from which they are encountering

⁷⁴ Philo, *Cherubim* 91-100, offers many parallels, including a contrast of the pious soul with the festive assemblies of Greeks and barbarians, which are polemically portrayed to involve many of the same characteristics that Paul mentions in Phil 3:2, 18-19, including animal-like behavior, evil works, and mutilation.

opposition.⁷⁵ He seeks to enculturate his audience into Judaism, but of a particular subgroup, one that believes the end of the ages has dawned in Jesus Christ. Even if many if not most of them are not themselves circumcised, being non-Jews, they are to understand themselves to be no longer members of the larger "pagan" world of their natural birth—"for *we* are the circumcision." The values of circumcised, Jewish identity are not portrayed as carnal, but quite the opposite, they are defined in terms of the ideals at the heart of Christ-faith, just as they are in Jewish groups generally, and must not be compromised by turning them into the seeking of rank as measured in Greco-Roman "pagan" cultural terms.⁷⁶

At the same time, because they are now identified into Judaism, Paul apparently recognizes that in his absence the temptation for these former "pagans" will be to seek to enhance their honor rating among their new peers in Christ-faith based Judaism by applying the norms of the "pagan" cultural heritage from which they have come, in the midst of which they still live, to their new communal situation within this Jewish subgroup (vv. 3, 17-20). Because it is Judaism to which they are called, it is only from

⁷⁵ It is unclear whether βλέπετε here means "to beware of," as in issuing a warning, meaning "watch out for," or alternatively "to behold," meaning "to consider" or "reflect upon." It is not of significance for this essay to decide. George D. Kilpatrick, "ΒΛΕΠΕΤΕ, Philippians 3.2," in M. Black and G. Fohrer (eds.), *In Memoriam Paul Kahle* (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1968), pp. 146-48, makes the case that when followed by an accusative, as it is here, it always means "to look at, consider," rather than "to beware." To mean "to beware" in the sense of watch out for, this verb must be followed by μή and the aorist subjunctive, or by ἀπό, which is not the case here. Jeffrey T. Reed, *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity* (JSNTSupS 136.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 244-46, makes the case that words must be defined semantically as well as syntactically, providing examples that undermine the universality of definition Kilpatrick claims. Thus, he concludes, the context of usage here "gives it a 'cautionary' tone." In either case it probably means "to avoid," based on the negative characterizations posed in the epithets.

⁷⁶ Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 227, notes a similar way of portraying the Jewish values in contrast to those of others: "Philo refers frequently to Greek and barbarians by contrast with Jews who fall under neither heading—and whose practices are decidedly preferable to both. Jews shun the love of luxury, the concern with physical beauty, the revelries, the imperialist ambitions and rivalries, the mutual distrusts, and the internecine warfare that mark the experience of Greeks and barbarians alike. The Jewish philosopher unhesitatingly employed Hellenic categories and endorsed the traditional differentiation dear to the Greeks. The advantage, however, went to his own nation."

mistakenly seeking advantage within Judaism from which they need to be specifically dissociated (*to count to be loss*). Thus Paul communicates the relative devaluation of his own advantages specific to Jewish group identity, because, although they are probably not Jews and thus cannot do so, Paul could boast as a natural born and accomplished Jew, if so inclined (vv. 4—4:1; in fact, his argument appeals to this implicit boast). But the reader risks missing the point of the relativizing of all things to Christ-faith within this Judaism, including any advantage such as Paul's claim to apostleship otherwise represents for him (vv. 13-16; cf. Gal 1:1; 1 Cor 9), if overlooking Paul's dissociation from "everything"—relativizing *every* claim to enhanced honor rating among one's peers in the present age as but dog waste—to the degree that *anything* compromises upholding Christ's honor alone (v. 8, 20).

Conclusion

Interpreters of Philippians have been calling Jews "dogs" in Paul's name since at least Chrysostom, doggedly justifying this behavior based on reversing a supposed tradition of Jews calling Gentiles dogs, in spite of the fact that there is *no* such tradition evident in Jewish literature before Paul, or after him either. Jews do not call Gentiles, or Christians, dogs. Unfortunately, that argument cannot be made in reverse. In addition, although there are a number of strong candidates for otherwise defining Paul's referents, alternative interpretations have not been explored.

On the one hand, it is notable that commentators to date who claim this is a reversal, fail to observe that *even so*, that would not thereby make repeating this kind of malicious language toward Jews—or anyone else, for that matter—appropriate. Should not Christian interpreters instead express regret at Paul's derogatory aims and language, and suggest that the reader seek to distance themselves from repeating such invective toward those who do not share the same viewpoint as the interpreter and his or her presumed reader? Should he or she not repudiate this dog-eat-dog based approach to legitimation; for if it was a reversal, is evil to be returned for evil, or suffered instead, *pace* Paul (Phil 4:5, *passim!*; cf. Rom. 12:17-21, drawing on Prov. 20:22; 25:21-22), not to mention Jesus (Matt. 5:21-22, 38-48, drawing on Lev. 19:18, 33-34; 7:1-5)?

On the other hand, if an interpreter accepts that this is not a reversal, but nevertheless maintains on other grounds that Paul referred to Jews as dogs (or evil

workers or the mutilation, for that matter)— and thereby degraded the continued practice of Jewish identity and behavior, or of any Jewish impulse to communicate their faith in positive terms to Christ-believers—would that justify perpetuating this rhetoric today? Should not interpreters who believe that is what Paul meant judge unacceptable this kind of assessment and language about "the other," and especially the Jewish other, who has suffered so much for centuries from just this kind of Christian polemic and associated policies? Should he or she not at least raise the awareness of their reader that it is not a viewpoint which should be internalized as appropriate, shape Christian conceptions of, language about, or relationships with any other person or group? In addition, should he or she not point out that the tradition of a supposed reversal has been constructed on erroneous suppositions? Should it not also be explained that Paul apparently invented this essentializing, ethnically-oriented, polemical trope?

I trust that this study will serve as a reminder to all of us that we need to evaluate not only our interested points of view, especially when repeating a familiar refrain, but—"like a dog with a bone"— that we must persistently check our sources too. You might say, we should seek as far as possible to avoid allowing our ideological tales to wag our exegetical dogs.

ABSTRACT

The commentary tradition on Philippians 3:2 (and on Matt. 15 and Mark 7 too) has been claiming at least since Chrysostom that Jews commonly called Gentiles dogs, thereby legitimating a pattern of calling Jews dogs. Contemporary commentaries indicate no awareness of the harmful legacy or the continued implications of the polemic to which it contributes when perpetuating this invective. Moreover, evidence of this supposed common prejudice is often not provided, and when it is, usually consists of sayings attributed to Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician or Canaanite woman—thus available to us only in documents that post-date Paul, representing early "Christian" polemic. In addition to being anachronistic and not likely known to Paul's audience in Philippi, upon examination, it is also not clear that these Gospel sayings provide the proof supposed. Sometimes appeal is made to Psalm 22 and other Jewish texts, but under examination, none of these substantiate the claim. Likewise, the many supposed cases in rabbinic literature—which could only provide anachronistic evidence at best—do not in fact substantiate that Jews ever called Gentiles dogs, much less that Jews commonly

did so, even long after Christians habitually called Jews dogs. This essay examines the texts and challenges the interpretive tradition's claims, as well as its failure to exhibit hermeneutical distance when repeating this supposed invective against Jews and Judaism. Having exposed this ideological tale, several exegetical options worth exploring are noted.