



2. Reception History of Leviticus 11: Dietary Laws in Early Christianity¹

Historia de la recepción de Levítico 11: Leyes dietéticas en el cristianismo primitivo

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Abstract

Early Christianity attitude to biblical dietary laws is a puzzling issue. On one hand, they considered as binding the dietary laws in Leviticus 17,10-14 and then reissued in the apostolic decree. On the other hand, they considered as non-binding the dietary laws of Leviticus 11. Why did they reject the dietary laws of Leviticus 11? This article contends that the rejection of these laws was driven by the desire to distance Christianity from Judaism and not by theological reasons. This is evident in the study of the reception history of Leviticus 11 dietary laws, along with the reception history of common used text to support the non-validity of Leviticus 11 dietary laws and the role played by the food as an identity marker. When these approaches are taken together, a picture appears: the rejection of Leviticus 11 dietary laws is based on the Jewishness of these laws not the theology behind them.

Keywords

Reception history – Leviticus 11 – Dietary Laws – Early Christianity – Identity

Resumen

La actitud del cristianismo primitivo hacia las leyes dietéticas bíblicas es un tema desconcertante. Por un lado, consideraron como vinculantes las leyes dietéticas en Levítico 17,10-14 y luego las volvieron a publicar en el decreto apostólico. Por otro lado, consideraron como no vinculantes las leyes dietéticas de Levítico 11. ¿Por qué rechazaron las leyes dietéticas de Levítico 11? Este artículo sostiene que el rechazo de estas leyes fue impulsado por el deseo de distanciar el cristianismo del judaísmo, y no por razones teológicas. Esto

¹ Reception history, history of interpretation and *Wirkungsgeschichte* are interrelated terms that are used almost interchangeably. However, distinctions should be made between them. I retain reception history because it is more focused on how the interpreters received and understood the text while history of interpretation and *Wirkungsgeschichte* focus on the interpretation of the text in a specific corpus of literature and on the effects on the text upon a reader or community respectively [Ian Boxall, *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse*, Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6-9].

es evidente en el estudio de la historia de la recepción de las leyes dietéticas de Levítico 11, junto con la historia de la recepción del texto utilizado comúnmente para respaldar la no validez de Levítico 11, las leyes dietéticas y el papel desempeñado por la comida como una señal de identidad. Cuando se toman juntos estos enfoques, aparece una imagen: el rechazo de las leyes dietéticas de Levítico 11 se basa en el judaísmo de estas leyes, no en la teología detrás de ellas.

Palabras claves

Historia de la recepción — Levítico 11 — Leyes dietéticas — Cristianismo primitivo — Identidad

Introduction

Biblical purity discourse is a vexing issue which has attracted many scholars from ranging disciplines in the last couple of years.² Among the most controversial and difficult issues are the dietary laws. Biblical dietary laws are comprised of two sets: laws regarding the distinction between clean and unclean animals (e.g., Lev 11) and laws regarding food offered to idols (e.g., Lev 17), consumption of blood and strangled animals (e.g., Lev 17,10-14). The dietary laws contained in Leviticus 11 are usually considered as related to ceremonial impurity; hence, non-binding for Christians, while the laws contained in Leviticus 17 are related to moral impurity; hence, as binding for Christians. Nonetheless, the laws of Leviticus 11 are not related to ceremonial impurity nor moral impurity.³ They stand as laws instituted for the respect of the creator and their impurity predates and differentiates itself from the Levitical system.⁴ Despite of the aforementioned, the status of the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and their applicability upon Christians is still a matter of debate among

² Wil Rogan, "Purity in Early Judaism: Current Issues and Questions", *Currents in Biblical Research* 16, n.º 3 (2018): 309-339.

³ Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31-32.

⁴ Jiri Moskala, "The Validity of the Levitical Food Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals: A Case Study of Biblical Hermeneutics", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, n.º 2 (2011): 14-18.

scholars.⁵ On the other hand, the laws contained in Leviticus 17, as they relate to moral impurity are considered as binding for Christians since they were included in the so-called apostolic decree. Therefore, within the New Testament there is tension regarding the nature and applicability of the dietary laws to Christians.

Moreover, early Christian attitudes to dietary laws are even more puzzling.⁶ On one hand, early church fathers interpreted the laws regarding the distinction between clean and unclean animals as non-binding, arguing that Christians should not keep them since were abolished by Christ.⁷ Some church fathers used Mark 7, Matthew 15, Acts 10, Romans 14 among others as support for their claims.⁸ It seems that some church

⁵ The consensus among scholars is that the dietary laws of Lev 11 are non-binding for Christians. However, see *ibid.*, 25-30.

⁶ To my knowledge, few studies have been devoted to the study of early Christian views on dietary laws. Four works stand out: Moshe Blidstein, *Purity, Community, and Ritual in Early Christian Literature*, Oxford Studies in the Abrahamic Religions (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2017); Moshe Blidstein, "Between Ritual and Moral Purity: Early Christian Views on Dietary Laws", in *Authoritative Texts and Reception History: Aspects and Approaches*, ed. Dan Batovici and Kristin de Troyer, Biblical Interpretation Series 151 (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2016), 243-259; Jordan Rosenblum, *The Jewish Dietary Laws in the Ancient World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 140-157; S. Stein, "The Dietary Laws in Rabbinic and Patristic Literature", *SP 2* (1957): 141-54.

⁷ "When we read in Leviticus and Deuteronomy about clean and unclean foods—things the carnal Jews and the Ebionites who differ little from them accuse us of violating—we should not think that Scripture means their obvious sense. For if *what comes into the mouth does not render one impure, but what comes out of one's mouth* (Matt 15,11)—most of all since in Mark, the Saviour says this *declaring all foods to be clean* (Mark 7,19)—it is clear that we are not made impure if we eat what the Jews who slavishly want to observe the letter of the Law call impure" [origin quoted in Peter J. Tomson, "Jewish Food Laws in Early Christian Community Discourse", *Semeia* 86 (1999): 200].

⁸ Currently, modern interpreters consider that the N. T. does not abolish the food laws. Instead, Jesus, Paul and other apostles are considered to be in line with common Judaism. Therefore, they are conceived as food law keepers. Cf. Cecilia Wassen, "The Jewishness of Jesus and Ritual Purity", *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 27 (2016): 11-36; Eike Mueller, "Cleansing the Common: Narrative-Intertextual Study of Mark 7:1-23" (doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Maryland, 2015); Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012); Thomas Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhab: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?*, Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series 38 (Stockholm, SE: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2002); Chris A. Miller, "Did Peter's Vision in Acts 10 Pertain to Men or the Menu?", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, n.º 635 (2002): 302-17; Colin House, "Defilement by Association: Some Insights from the Usage of Κοινός/Κοινωνία", *Andrews University Seminary*

fathers interpreted these texts as referring to the abolition of the dietary laws of Leviticus 11. However, when their interpretations are examined carefully, these church fathers mixed in their understanding dietary and purity laws altogether disregarding the biblical distinction between them.⁹ This would be a misrepresentation of the biblical account on purity and food discourse, and when boundary discourse and identity theories are taken into account, the church fathers rejected the dietary laws contained in Leviticus 11 probably based on historical and social motivations rather than theological.¹⁰

On the other hand, although church fathers rejected the dietary laws contained in Leviticus 11, some dietary restrictions remained in early Christianity. These restrictions are related to the dietary laws associated with moral impurity (*cf.* Lev 17,10-14). The most common was the abstention of food offered to idols. For instance, in the Didache 6.3 is recorded: “Now concerning food, bear what you are able, but in any case keep strictly away from meat sacrificed to idols, for it involves the worship of dead gods.”¹¹ Also, there are restrictions against the consumption of blood. Minucius Felix writes: “To us it is not lawful either to see or to hear of homicide; and so much do we shrink from human blood, that we do not use the blood even of eatable animals in our food.”¹² Thus, early church fathers embraced and promoted these laws as binding. Freidenreich writes: “Early Christian authorities are uniform in their

Studies 21, n.º 2 (1983): 143-53; Clinton Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision and Conflicting Definitions of Purity”, *New Testament Studies* 51, n.º 4 (2005): 505-18.

⁹ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 31-32; Moskala, “Validity of the Levitical Food”; Jiri Moskala, “The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals of Leviticus 11 : Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (an Intertextual Study)” (doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Maryland, 1998).

¹⁰ “Clearly, it is not the *contents* of Jewish food and purity laws which makes the Church Fathers condemn them, but their being labelled as *Jewish*. For similar practices observed in their own gentile Christian communities are labelled positively. In the terms used earlier, the community discourse of the Church Fathers is *closed* and emphasizes *antithesis* to Judaism. It must perforce confuse “Jewish” food laws in a blanket condemnation since, in contradistinction to “Christian” food laws, they do not constitute Christian community” (Tomson, “Jewish Food Laws”, 247).

¹¹ Also, Aristides, *Apology*, 15.4; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 38.4.

¹² Min. Felix, *Octavius*, 30.

condemnation of food offered to idols; indeed, they frequently describe abstention from *eidolothuton* as constituting a decisive difference between “Christians” and “Greeks”.¹³

Now, these contradictory tendencies are perplexing and deserve careful consideration. Why did early Christians reject some dietary laws (*cf.* Lev 11) but keep others (Lev 17)? What arguments were posed for the rejection of some and the acceptance of others? David Freidenreich has suggested that Christians rejected Leviticus 11 dietary laws “as a means of highlighting the distinction between Christians and Jews” but obeyed the apostolic decree because “Abstention from *eidolothuton* in particular constituted one of the most important markers of Christian identity in the centuries immediately following Jesus’ death”.¹⁴ Consequently, there were not theological arguments posed for the rejection and/or acceptance of the dietary laws but what was essential for the acceptance/rejection of dietary laws was social aspects concerning identity.

If the rejection or acceptance of biblical dietary laws depended not on theological grounds but on identity elements, how did early church fathers understand Leviticus 11? How did they read it along New Testament texts that seems to support their non-validity (*cf.* Mark 7; Acts 10; Rom 14)? What theological arguments did they elaborate from the text? How Jewish-Christian polemic and rhetoric are evident in the early church fathers treatment of the text?

It is the purpose of this article to address these issues tracing the reception history¹⁵ of the dietary laws contained in Leviticus 11 in early

¹³ David M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 103.

¹⁴ Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food*, 102. Also, Blidstein, *Purity, Community, and Rituals*, 72-77.

¹⁵ Reception history has been catalogued as “the next big thing in New Testament studies”. Among their sub-categories, is a traditional approach to the history of reception which “look at the views of the major theologians. How did famous theologians such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, or Barth interpret this or that passage? This, in fact, is not particularly new and in many ways is what the discipline of historical theology is all about: how theologians and believers have interpreted scripture” [James G. Crossley, *Reading the New Testament: Contemporary Approaches*, Reading Religious Texts Series (London: Routledge, 2010), 141; William John Lyons, “Hope for a Troubled Discipline? Contributions to New Testament Studies from

Christianity.¹⁶ Also, attention is placed on how historical circumstances shaped the biblical exegesis of the church fathers such as the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians and Jewish wars with Rome.¹⁷ To accomplish this: first, the reception history of Leviticus 11 will be traced as the reception history of Mark 7, Acts 10 and Romans 14. Second, a section will be devoted to the analysis of the rejection of Leviticus 11 dietary laws. Finally, some conclusions will be provided.

Reception History”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, n.º 2 (2010): 217]. The methodology of reception history approach is currently a matter of construction by scholars (for good reflection on reception history’s methodology, see, Boxall, *Patmos in the Reception History*, 9-11; Jennifer R. Strawbridge, *The Pauline Effect: The Use of the Pauline Epistles by Early Christian Writers* (Berlin, DE: De Gruyter, 2017), 12-18. Notwithstanding, some steps are recurrent: identification of the material, organization, classification, and analysis. Usually, material is identified using ancient index and organized according to time, place and genre. The classification of the material depends on the purpose of the study. However, the categories are still blurry (for instance, Blackwell Bible Commentaries have designed a set of criteria for categorizing the material). In analyzing the material, it is important to highlight that the frequency of use is not the only indicative regarding the status of a text in the interpretative community. Also, close attention to the context, genre, and historical situation is necessary for a good interpretation of the reception history of a particular text. My method consisted in identifying the material, organizing it by chronology (restricted to second century CE), and analyzing it placing attention to context and hermeneutical method used. In this I keep contact with generally used methodology but also stressing factors useful for this article.

¹⁶ Because of the scope and space of this article, I will limit the investigation to the second century of the Christian era. For this reason, I will trace the history of the reception of Lv 11 through the quotations and allusions listed in J. Allenbach et al., *Biblia Patristica: Index Des Citations et Allusions Bibliques Dans La Literature Patristique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975). By early Christianity I refer to what is commonly known as “Apostolic Fathers” and also as the “Church Fathers”. I use the category of “Church Fathers” to refer to both groups because this category is broader than “Apostolic Fathers”.

¹⁷ Both historical circumstances are held to be influential in church fathers exegesis since they were trying to identify themselves via vis Judaism. Cf. Charles Freeman, *A New History of Early Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 88-92; Emily J. Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century: The Case of Tatian* (London: Routledge, 2003), 5-11.

Reception History of Old Testament Dietary Laws

Leviticus 11

The *Epistle of Barnabas* is one of the least studied writings of the apostolic fathers.¹⁸ However, it offers the earliest reception of Leviticus 11 in early Christianity.¹⁹ The anonymous author of the letter seeks the perfect knowledge of the community (*Ep. Bar.* 1.5) and to impart the three basic doctrines of the Lord (*Ep. Bar.* 1.7). Rooted in the second doctrine, the doctrine of righteousness, the author discusses how ancient symbols and laws belonging to Judaism might be understood by Christians. There, he dedicates a whole chapter to explore the true meaning of the levitical food laws.²⁰

The author of the epistle interprets the food laws as allegorical. He says: “Therefore it is not God’s commandment that they should not eat; rather Moses spoke spiritually (ἐν πνεύματι ἐλάλησεν).”²¹ Thereby, the commands against swine flesh is understood as command against people who behave like pigs. These are those who forget the Lord when everything goes right and acknowledge him when they are in need.²² The command against eating the eagle, hawk, kite and crow is understood as against people who resemble the characteristics of these animals. These creatures characterizes themselves as “birds alone do not provide food for themselves but sit idle and look for ways to eat the flesh of others.”²³ In

¹⁸ Clare K. Rothschild, “Down the Rabbit Hole with Barnabas: Rewriting Moses in Barnabas 10”, *New Testament Studies* 64, n.º 3 (2018): 410.

¹⁹ This depends on the date assigned to the work. Three dates are the most popular: 70-79 A.D.; 96-100 A. D.; 132-135 A.D. Since evidence is inconclusive, the safest is to opt for the second option placing the document by the end of the first century, cf. Clayton N. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: A Student’s Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 8.

²⁰ *Ep. Bar.* 10.

²¹ *Ep. Bar.* 10.2.

²² Just as pigs “when it has eaten, does not recognize its master; but when hungry it cries out, and on receiving food is quiet again” (ibid., 10.3).

²³ Ibid., 10.4.

this way, they represent “men who do not know how to provide food for themselves by labor and sweat but lawlessly plunder other people’s property”.²⁴

Along these lines, the author of the Epistle of Barnabas continues his allegorical interpretation of Leviticus 11, where the octopus, sea eel and cuttlefish represent “men who are utterly wicked and are already condemned to death”.²⁵ The hare represents people who corrupt children.²⁶ The hyena represents adulterers or seducers²⁷ and the weasel represents those who do immoral things with their mouth.²⁸ The command to eat anything that has a divided hoof and chews the cud is understood as referring to associate with those who fear the Lord, with those who meditate in their heart on the special significance of the word which they have received, with those who proclaim and obey the Lord’s commandments, with those who know that meditation is a labor of joy and who ruminate on the word of the Lord. But why does he mention “the divided hoof”? Because the righteous person not only lives in this world but also looks forward to the holy age to come²⁹.

The author of Barnabas not only offers an allegorical interpretation of Leviticus 11 but assures that his interpretation is the right one. He affirms Moses intended these laws to be understood spiritually (*ἐν πνεύματι ἐλάλησεν*) but the Jews because of (on the ground of | *κατά* + accusative | *κατ’ ἐπιθυμίαν*) their fleshly desires understood them as literal laws.³⁰ Nonetheless, due to the circumcision of ears and hearts, the author of the epistle and his addresses, rightly understood the commands and now

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 10.5.

²⁶ Ibid., 10.6; Rothschild, “Down the Rabbit Hole with Barnabas”.

²⁷ *Ep. Bar.* 10.7.

²⁸ Ibid., 10.8.

²⁹ *Ep. Bar.* 10.11.

³⁰ Ibid., 10.9.

explain them in the proper way.³¹ Accordingly, the author of the epistle proposes his interpretation as the only possible interpretation of Leviticus 11 and characterizes as erroneous any literal understanding of these laws.³²

Doing so, the author of the epistle distances Christianity from Judaism and also takes traditional Jewish scriptures and Christianize them. Allegorical interpretations of Leviticus 11 were not an innovation of Christianity but were present in the milieu of Hellenistic Judaism a while ago (Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 4.110-118; *Ep. Arist.* 142-146). However, these allegorical interpretations were additions to the literal meaning of the laws not a replacement. When the author of Barnabas discards the literal meaning of Leviticus 11 and replaces with an allegorical one, he presents them as non-binding and breaks a fundamental pillar of Judaic identity.³³ Since food law keeping was one of the many identity markers of Jews in antiquity, the rejection of this practice constitute a deliberate attempt to distinguish the nascent movement of Christianity from Judaism.³⁴

Also, the rejection of the literal meaning and interpretation of Leviticus 11 by the author of Barnabas, sent to the Jews the message that Old Testament is not their scripture any longer but belongs to the church.³⁵ Scripture is not only scripture but a vehicle for expressing and delimiting identity. Therefore, by taking the sacred scriptures of the Jews for themselves and redefining it, Christians started to erase Judaic traits in their

³¹ Ibid., 10.12; in this way, Christians are the true heirs of the covenant. Cf. S. Lowy, "The Confutation of Judaism in the Epistle of Barnabas", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 11, n.ºs 1-2 (1960): 32.

³² This is a concern for the author throughout the letter, cf. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, 10.

³³ "Barnabé fait la transition entre le spiritualisme de plusieurs milieux juifs qui ajoutent une interprétation symbolique à l'acception matérielle des commandements rituels, et l'antijudaïsme de plusieurs écrivains du christianisme primitif." [Pierre Prigent, *Épître de Barnabé*, Sources Chrétiennes 172 (Paris: Les Éditions du cerf, 1971), 159].

³⁴ Jordan Rosenblum, "Why Do You Refuse to Eat Pork? Jews, Food, and Identity in Roman Palestine", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 100, n.º 1 (2010): 95-110. Regarding Barnabas's intention of distancing Christianity from Judaism, see, David Rankin, *From Clement to Origen: The Social and Historical Context of the Church Fathers* (Aldershot, GB: Ashgate Pub, 2006), 117.

³⁵ Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 172-73.

identity and started to create and identity of their own (an oxymoron indeed).³⁶ In this sense, the epistle of Barnabas is a characteristic document of the first two centuries of early Christianity.³⁷

This line of reasoning is followed by Clement of Alexandria. He also interprets Leviticus 11 in an allegorical manner adducing the non-binding status of these laws, but at the same time affirming their importance for ethical behavior.³⁸ For instance, Clement wrote that Christian should associate with the righteous because this is the true meaning of Leviticus 11,3.³⁹ The animals who chew the cud represents those who chew the spiritual food (the logos), who first enters the body through catechesis and then remains as a rational memory.⁴⁰ The animals who have a divided

³⁶ Since the literal interpretation of the O. T. characterizes and was the basis of the entire religion of Judaism, the only way for Christianity to appropriate the Jewish scriptures but at the same time distinguish themselves from Judaism was to assign a new meaning to symbols and rituals in Judaism and interpret them through the lens of the new reality brought by Christ. The allegorical method was handy for the work. Cf. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, 11-12. This was done by the author of the epistle of Barnabas constantly (*Ep. Bar.* 7.6-11; 8.1-7; 9.7-9).

³⁷ Although the purpose of the epistle of Barnabas is still a current a debate, its anti-Jewish tone is out of the question (cf. Lowy, "The Confutation of Judaism"). Clearly, the epistle is written to differentiate Christianity from Judaism whether the problem is Christians converted to Judaism, imminent rebuilding of the temple or a generalized situation. Regardless of the event that prompted the writing of the epistle, it is clear that was something that impelled Christians to differentiate. Rankin notes: "His only immediate and direct concern is that of the Christian community and of their relationship, or in his view non-relationship, to the then dominant Jewish community. His purpose is polemical exegesis. His purpose is not to see only limited value in Jewish opinion and practice but no value at all. The Jewish dispensation is neither provisional nor preparatory for the Christian. It is nonexistent and even demonic. For Barnabas the Old Testament has only one meaning and that coincides entirely with the Christian" (Rankin, *From Clement to Origen*, 117)

³⁸ Clement discussed dietary laws in the context of food but he does not read them as bidding. Rather, he sees in them an admonition against pleasure in food. Cf. Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.17.1. Also, he considers the Levitical food law as characteristic of Jews. He argues that Jews do not eat swine because it destroys the fruits. However, Clement seems to approve the eating of swine (*Strom.* 7.33).

³⁹ Clement, *Paedagogus* 3.76.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.76. 1. In similar manner, Clement argues in *Strom* 7.109 that those who chew the cud and divide the hoof are those who approach God through father and son ruminating the word of God. Also, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.8.4.

hoof are those men who are righteous and whose righteousness sanctify them now and in the life to come.⁴¹

In similarity with Barnabas, Clement interprets the command against eating hare and hyena as a command against pederasty and fornication.⁴² Elaborating on the anatomy of the hare, Clement adds: “Así pues, esta enigmática prohibición nos brinda el consejo de abstenernos de deseos fogosos, de coitos continuos, de cópulas con mujeres encinta, de la homosexualidad, de la pederastía, de la fornicación y de la lascivia”.⁴³ He also reads the prohibition against swine and eagle as allegorical. For Clement, swine represents those who enjoy the pleasures of the body and luxury, and the eagle represents those who earned their lives through rapine.⁴⁴

Tertullian differs from Barnabas and Clement since he did not read allegorically Leviticus 11. However, Tertullian thought God have removed the restriction against impure Levitical food and considers them as non-binding. He does so in a context where he is rebating marcion’s arguments and tried to establish and continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament God. He writes:

Just as if we did not ourselves allow that the burdensome ordinances of the law were abrogated—but by Him who imposed them, who also promised the new condition of things. The same, therefore, who prohibited meats, also restored the use of them, just as He had indeed allowed them from the beginning.⁴⁵

Tertullian in accordance with Clement also read Leviticus 11 as useful for ascetic reasons (*cf.* Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.17.1). In a context where he is seeking to prove the usefulness of the Old Testament law, he comments regarding food laws the following:

⁴¹ Clement, *Paedagogus* 3.76.2.

⁴² Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.83. As in the *Ep. Bar.* the ethical teaching is based on anatomical characteristics of the animals.

⁴³ Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.88.3 (Sariol). Translations in Spanish are taken from Clemente de Alejandría, *El Pedagogos*, trans. Joan Sariol, Biblioteca Clásica Gredos 118 (Madrid, ES: Gredos, 1988).

⁴⁴ Clement, *Paedagogus* 3.75.3. Also, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.8.4.

⁴⁵ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.7.

When, again, the law took somewhat away from men's food, by pronouncing unclean certain animals which were once blessed, you should understand this to be a measure for encouraging continence, and recognise in it a bridle imposed on that appetite which, while eating angels' food, craved after the cucumbers and melons of the Egyptians.⁴⁶

Lastly, but not least important, Justin Martyr received Leviticus 11 in a literal, historical and temporal manner, but still considers them as non-binding. In his dialogue with Trypho, he affirms: "... you were commanded to abstain from certain kinds of food, in order that you might keep God before your eyes while you ate and drank, seeing that you were prone and very ready to depart from His knowledge".⁴⁷

Justin Martyr rejects the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 because they were given to the Jews ("you were commanded") not to the Christians. Therefore, although these laws were meant to be literal (*cf. Ep. Barnabas* and *Clement of Alexandria*) they were meant for Jews. Justin's rejection of these laws is related not to their content but their being Jewish. Doing so, he identifies a boundary between Judaism and Christianity.⁴⁸ He constructs a gentile Christian identity (*via-á-vis* pagans and Jewish customs) which is proposed as radically opposed to Judaism.⁴⁹ Since observance of food laws was considered Jewish, the rejection of them is a natural consequence of the anti-Jewish identity of Christianity in Justin thought. Nonetheless, Justin was willing to accept Jewish-Christians who believing in Jesus would still keep their former lifestyle that include full Torah observance.⁵⁰ Again, this suggests that it is not the content of the laws of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 2.18.

⁴⁷ Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 20.1.

⁴⁸ His knowledge of Judaism allowed him to establish firm boundaries between Christianity and Judaism. Since he knew well what characterizes the Jews, he could find the way out to consider as non-binding these particular characteristics of the Jews. *Cf.* L. W. Barnard, "The Old Testament and Judaism in the Writings of Justin Martyr", *Vetus Testamentum* 14, n.º 4 (1964): 395-496.

⁴⁹ Terence L. Donaldson, "'We Gentiles': Ethnicity and Identity in Justin Martyr", *Early Christianity* 4, n.º 2 (2013): 216-241.

⁵⁰ Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 47.1-2.

Leviticus 11 that were a threat to early Christianity but the association of them with Judaism.

In summary, the laws of Leviticus 11 were received in three different ways in early Christianity (second century) but in all of them they were considered as non-binding for Christians.⁵¹ First, Leviticus 11 was received allegorically. The laws prescribed in Leviticus 11 were just an illustration of behavior and persons to be shunned by Christians (Clement, Irenaeus and Barnabas).⁵² Some authors even argued that this was the original meaning of the laws without even having a literal meaning for Israel (Barnabas). Second, Leviticus 11 was received as a set of laws against appetite. In this way, these laws functioned as an invitation to temperance and asceticism (Clement, Tertullian). Third, Leviticus 11 was received as a set of laws of importance only to Jews. Therefore, it was non-binding for Christians (Tertullian, Justin Martyr).

It is striking that no theological case is advanced in support of the rejection of the laws of Leviticus 11.⁵³ In the case of Clement and Irenaeus, they just present the allegorical reading of the text without arguing why the literal reading should be discarded. Tertullian just argued that God abolished these laws without giving any proof text or making an additional comment. Finally, Barnabas argued that the literal reading was not original and it was a result of fleshly Jewish desires. Justin Martyr rejected these laws because they were given to the Jews not Christians. Thus, it seems that the rejection of these laws by the second century church

⁵¹ There is a four reception, the demonological. However, this was advanced by Origen and who is out of the time period considered in this article. For comments in this position and for the development of these three ways of reception of Lev 11 in later centuries, see, Blidstein, "Between Ritual and Moral Purity", 247-249.

⁵² This way of reading Lv 11 continues in early Christianity up to fifth century CE. See, Rosenblum, *The Jewish Dietary Laws*, 146-153.

⁵³ Theological explanations began to articulate in the early third century with Origen. However, in the second century, no theological explanation was available. The reasons put forward by Origen were two. First, the O. T. should be read spiritually not according to the letter. Second, the only purpose of the law is moral instruction or prefiguration of Christianity. Therefore, since food laws were fleshly and Christianity is spiritual, these must be rejected. Cf. Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 9.42.8; *Homilies in Leviticus* 7.4-5. Also, Blidstein, "Between Ritual and Moral Purity", 245; Rosenblum, *The Jewish Dietary Laws Ancient*, 141-143.

fathers is not based on theological grounds but on the Jewishness of the laws. Since, Leviticus 11 laws were associated with Judaism, they must be disregarded.⁵⁴

The fact that no theological reason was the ground of the rejection of Leviticus 11 laws but sociological ones are further corroborated with second century interpretation of passages usually understood as abolishing food laws. To this, we turn our attention.

Mark 7

Mark 7 is usually understood as the key text where Jesus abolishes dietary laws. Verses 15 and 19 are usually used in support of this conclusion. A slight reading of the text can lead to such conclusions. However, several reasons argue against this proposal such as the absence of any reference to Old Testament dietary laws in the context, the anti-pharisaic polemic tone of the text, Jesus as a Torah observant Jew portrait of the gospel among others.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, early Christian authors interpret this text as an abolition of Old Testament dietary laws. For instance, Clement discussing food offered to idols use the text as support of New Testament teaching that food does not make a person better before God because nothing outside the man can defile him.⁵⁶ However, at the same time, Clement uphold the abstention of food offered to idols. Similarly, Clement claims that food is of no importance for the Christian but temperance. In support of this claim, He uses Mark 7,15.⁵⁷ Also, Tertullian, discussing scrupulousness with food, discard them because Jesus taught of them as non-important since nothing defile a man entering his mouth.⁵⁸ Although Mark 7 is not

⁵⁴ Tomson, "Jewish Food Laws", 247.

⁵⁵ Mueller, "Cleansing the Common: Narrative-Intertextual Study of Mark 7:1-23"; Yair Furstenberg, "Defilement Penetrating the Body: A New Understanding of Contamination in Mark 7.15", *New Testament Studies* 54, n.º 2 (2008): 176-200.

⁵⁶ Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.8.4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.16.3.

⁵⁸ Tertullian, *On Fasting* 2.

used as evidence for the abolition of Old Testament dietary laws specifically, it is used as evidence against any type of food taboo.

Moreover, Mark 7 is usually received as an ethical teaching. Due to the content of Mark 7,15 (“what comes out of a man defiles him”), the passage is understood by the early Christian authors as an ethical admonishing against improper words. This is the case of Tertullian, who writing on patience admonishes Christians to not answer guided by impatience lest they say something improper and not following Jesus’s command in Mark 7.⁵⁹ In this case, words as they come out from the inside of man, defiles him.⁶⁰ In similar fashion, Clement says Christians must abstain from improper conversations since the vulgar, the pagan, and the rude defile a man.⁶¹ In support of his comment, Clements uses Mark 7,15.

To sum up, Mark 7,15 is used as support of the abolition of all kinds of food taboo (except food offered to idols and blood) in addition of its use as an ethical warning against improper words since these defile a man.

Acts 10

Acts 10 have been usually understood as a *loci* where God abolished the dietary laws. Mainly, Acts 10,15 (“What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy”) is used as support for this contention. However, the reception history of this text in early Christianity presents an alternative picture.

⁵⁹ Tertullian, *Patience* 8.5.

⁶⁰ Tertullian uses the text in a similar way writing about theater. For Tertullian, this place is improper for Christians and they should not attend to these events since they will see and hear what they must not speak or do. If what comes out of a man defiles him, the same things defile him when they come in through eyes and ears since these are the immediate attendants of the spirit. Cf. Tertullian, *The Shows* 17. Also, Tertullian writes “If, then, we keep throat and belly free from such defilements, how much more do we withhold our nobler parts, our ears and eyes, from the idolatrous and funereal enjoyments, which are not passed through the body, but are digested in the very spirit and soul, whose purity, much more than that of our bodily organs, God has a right to claim from us” (*The Shows* 13).

⁶¹ Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.49.1.

Irenaeus, in the context of refuting Gnosticism's doctrine of two gods, analyzes Act's account of Peter and Cornelius.⁶² He intends to prove that Peter did not preach another God.⁶³ Instead, Peter's preaching was about God (Old Testament God) and his son. In this context, commenting on the vision, he says:

But when Peter saw the vision, in which the voice from heaven said to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common," this happened [to teach him] that the God who had, through the law, distinguished between clean and unclean, *was He who had purified the Gentiles through the blood of His Son*—He whom also Cornelius worshipped.⁶⁴

Irenaeus reception of Acts 10,15 is in line with Luke's interpretation of the vision of Peter (Acts 10,28-29). The vision was about people not menu.⁶⁵ Then, it follows that God did not wanted to abolish Old Testament dietary restrictions in the vision but to abolish the Jewish conception of gentile impurity that was hindering the Jerusalem church of engaging in gentile mission.

Irenaeus repeats this idea when he writes: "For even Peter, although he had been sent to instruct them, and *had been constrained by a vision to that effect ...* indicating by these words, that he would not have come to them unless he had been commanded (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.12.15)".⁶⁶ Irenaeus clearly interprets that the purpose of the vision is to instruct Peter to go to Cornelius's house. Nowhere, Irenaeus

⁶² For Irenaeus literary work and Gnosticism, see Bryan M. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 61-80.

⁶³ "The apostles, therefore, did preach the Son of God, of whom men were ignorant; and His advent, to those who had been already instructed as to God; but they did not bring in another god. For if Peter had known any such thing, he would have preached freely to the Gentiles, that the God of the Jews was indeed one, but the God of the Christians another; and all of them, doubtless, being awe-struck because of the vision of the angel, would have believed whatever he told them" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.12.7).

⁶⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.12.7. Italic is mine.

⁶⁵ Miller, "Did Peter's Vision in Acts 10 Pertain to Men or the Menu?", 10; Wahlen, "Peter's Vision and Conflicting Definitions of Purity".

⁶⁶ Italic is mine.

understood Acts 10 as related to the abolition of Old Testament dietary restrictions. Quite the opposite, for Irenaeus, Peter along with other apostle kept the Mosaic Law scrupulously. Therefore, he says:

But they themselves, while knowing the same God, continued in the ancient observances; so that even Peter, fearing also lest he might incur their reproof, although formerly eating with the Gentiles, because of the vision, and of the Spirit who had rested upon them, yet, when certain persons came from James, withdrew himself, and did not eat with them. And Paul said that Barnabas likewise did the same thing. Thus did the apostles, whom the Lord made witnesses of every action and of every doctrine—for upon all occasions do we find Peter, and James, and John present with Him—scrupulously act according to the dispensation of the Mosaic law.⁶⁷

Along with Irenaeus, Tertullian also understood the passage as referring to people, not food. He comments: “Peter, on the day on which he experienced the vision of *Universal Community* (exhibited) in that small vessel”.⁶⁸ For Tertullian, the vision was about a community, not food.

The only author who interprets Acts 10 as abolishing Old Testament dietary laws is Clement of Alexandria. The context of the declaration is about the eating habits of the apostles where Clement highlights that Peter did not eat swine. However, Peter received a vision (Acts 10) and it is implicit that from that moment on, Peter started to eat swine. Based on this, Clement concludes that it is indifferent the use of food for Christians but what really matters is temperance.⁶⁹ Even when this should not be understood as Jewish anti-rhetoric,⁷⁰ certainly Clement did not want Christianity to be associated with Judaism but with Hellenistic philosophy instead.⁷¹ Probably, this influenced his exegesis of everything with a Jewish character.

⁶⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.12.15.

⁶⁸ Tertullian, *On prayer* 25.2.

⁶⁹ Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.16.

⁷⁰ Rankin, *From Clement to Origen* 131.

⁷¹ Rankin, *From Clement to Origen* 125-31.

In conclusion, except for Clement of Alexandria, early Christianity in the second century never used Acts 10 to build a theological argument in favor of the abolition of Old Testament dietary laws.

Romans 14

Romans 14 is another text usually used for the support of the abolition of Old Testament dietary laws. Especially Romans 14,14 is used as a classical *loci* to argue against the observance of dietary laws. Nonetheless, it is quite interesting that there is no a single quotation, allusion or echo of Romans 14,14 in early Christian literature of the second century.⁷² Also, the most extensive commentary on the passage is made by Tertullian but he does not use Romans 14 to build a theological argument against the Old Testament dietary laws. Instead, Tertullian uses Romans 14 in his discussion of fasting.⁷³ Tertullian's use of Romans 14 is restricted to the theme of abstinence since he wants to condemn the perpetual abstinence of food by persons like Marcion, Tatian or the Pythagorean. Tertullian wants to advance the argument that Christians abstain from food but for a limited period of time.

Clement also uses Romans 14 but he does so in an ascetic and ethical way. He discusses temperance and modesty in eating, and advises to be moderate in the eating of flesh of hunting.⁷⁴ Also, not to eat in excess or take the tongue to the plate because he will hear the reprove from God.⁷⁵

In summary, neither Clement nor Tertullian made use of Romans 14 to advance a theological argument against the Old Testament dietary laws.

⁷² Allenbach et al., *Biblia Patristica*, 1:443. Also, none appears at BiblIndex (available at <https://www.biblindex.info/>).

⁷³ Tertullian, *On Fasting* 15.

⁷⁴ Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.11.1.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Christianity, Judaism and the Parting of the Ways

So far, we have argued that Leviticus 11 dietary laws were received by early Christianity as an allegory, ethical admonition and as set of laws only intended for Judaism. The reception of Leviticus 11 dietary laws indicates that early Christianity considered them non-binding but no theological arguments were posed for their rejection as it is seen in the reception of Mark 7, Acts 10 and Romans 14. In the analysis of the evidence, is clear that the rejection of Leviticus 11 dietary laws is related to sociological aspects, Christianity wanted to create an identity which was “neither Jew nor Greek” and in pursue of this intention one of the best ways to do it was to reject dietary laws. But why did Christianity want to separate from Judaism in the first place?

The answer to this question is complex and it is not the purpose of this article.⁷⁶ However, it is necessary to examine the broader context of the relation between Judaism and Christianity in the second century in order to understand the rejection of the Leviticus 11 dietary laws. The process of separation between Judaism and Christianity was not monolithic. The roots of this process are already found before 70 C.E., accelerated by the destruction of the temple and consummated with Bar Khoba’s rebellion.⁷⁷ A significant number of factors influenced the process of separation between Judaism and Christianity: there was the increasing number of gentiles in the Christian community, the Christian attitude towards the four pillars of Judaism (God, temple, covenant and land), the Jewish revolts, *Fiscus Judaicus*, destruction of the temple, persecution of

⁷⁶ One of the main discussions is the theoretical model used to analyze the evidence. Currently, the “parting of the ways” model is the predominant championed by James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2006). However, this model has not gone without criticism, see Judith Lieu, “‘The Parting of the Ways’: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17, n.º 56 (1995): 101-119.

⁷⁷ I mean Bar Khoba’s rebellion was a landmark in the process. Nonetheless, the process of the differentiation was to be continued up to the middle ages. See, Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

Christians by Jews, the development of rabbinic Judaism, among others.⁷⁸

Regardless the weight given to any particular factor in the process of separation between Judaism and Christianity, it is a fact that in the early second century, Christianity and Judaism wanted to be perceived as different entities. For instance, the epistle to Diognetus is a clear example of second century Christian documents where Judaism is perceived as the other and where the author of the epistle wants to demonstrate Christian worship is different from both pagan and Jewish counterparts.⁷⁹ Also, Ignatius writing to the Magnesians explicitly pose Christianity as a religious movement antagonistic to Judaism.⁸⁰ In the second century, Jews also consider Christians as something different from them as it is evident in the curses on the *Minim*.

In this context, the rejection of Leviticus 11 dietary laws is understandable. Food was an identity marker and by way of food a community can define itself *via-à-vis* its environment.⁸¹ When a community decided not to eat food of a foreigner, they were stating that they were not them. Also, when they decided to eat something foreigners did not eat, they were reaffirming through food they were different.

Food was clearly an identity marker for Jews in antiquity. Particularly, the abstention of eating pork was recognized by non-Jewish authors to be

⁷⁸ A good explanation and review of this issues can be found in Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*; James D. G. Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135: The Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism (Durham, September 1989)* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999); Craig Evans, "Christianity and Judaism: Parting of the Ways", in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Development*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Davids (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000); Richard Bauckham, *The Jewish World around the New Testament: Collected Essays I*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 233 (Tübingen, DE: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 175-192; Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Divinations (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁷⁹ *Ep. Diognetus* 3.1.

⁸⁰ Ignatius, *Ep. Magnesians* 8.1-10.3.

⁸¹ Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food*.

a key element in Jewish identity.⁸² Rosenblum mentions: “Alongside circumcision and Sabbath observance, the prohibition against pork is considered one of the clearest identifiers of what a Jew does and, as such, who is a Jew”.⁸³ The mention by non-Jewish authors of abstention of pork should not be understood as if pork was the only non-kosher food Jews did not eat. Instead, swine flesh conceptualizes and encompasses all the non-kosher meats. Therefore, abstention of pork means abstention from non-kosher food and the abstention of non-kosher food is the way Judaism conceptualizes who they are and who they are not. Non-Jews eat pork, Jews do not.⁸⁴

By eating what Jews do not eat, Christianity unhinged from Judaism because from a Jewish-stand point Christians were the others. They were no longer a part of Judaism. They were off the boundaries. This movement was calculated along the intention of Christianity to be recognized as movement that is not Jew.⁸⁵ The same principle lies behind the decision of Christianity to observe dietary laws related with moral impurity (Lev 17,10-14; Acts 15,29). By observing these laws, they construct their identity as a movement that is not “Greek”. Consequently, by means of dietary laws, Christianity was able to construct a different identity, a properly Christian identity. This was the force behind the rejection of Leviticus 11 dietary laws. It was the imperative of disassociation with Judaism that drove early Christianity to reject these laws not calculated theological efforts.

⁸² Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.137; Plutarch, *Quaestiones Convivales* 5.1-2; Tacitus, *Historiae* 5.4.1-2. Also, Menaḥem Shtern, ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem, IL: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1984), 140.

⁸³ Rosenblum, “Jews, Food, and Identity”, 98. Also, Jordan Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 35–102.

⁸⁴ Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 81.

⁸⁵ Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 142–46.

Conclusion

Early church fathers from the second century C. E. rejected the literal meaning of the dietary laws contained in Leviticus 11. As such, they had to reinterpret the meaning of these laws. Three main reinterpretations appear: allegorical, ethical and ascetical. In their reinterpretation of Leviticus 11 laws is evident that no theological argument is behind their rejection but a desire to differentiate themselves from Judaism. The climate in the second century led Christianity and Judaism to be radically opposed movements. Since Leviticus 11 dietary laws were a boundary marker for Judaism, Christianity rejected these laws in order to construct an identity *via-á-vis* Judaism. By eating what Jews do not eat, Christianity found one powerful way to distance themselves from their roots and break with their past.

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