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Discussion on formative years of Earliest Christianity: How Jesus conflicted with the Pharisees, and five virtues originally taught by Jesus the Messiah

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ABSTRAK:

Diketahui bahwa terdapat dinamika yang kompleks dalam gerakan Kekristenan paling awal pada abad ke-1 dan ke-2 Masehi, yang telah dibahas dalam berbagai buku dan kajian. Misalnya, frasa yang digunakan James Dunn tentang "kesatuan dalam keberagaman" merangkum berbagai peristiwa tersebut dalam prinsip penting ini, seperti yang telah penulis bahas dalam artikel sebelumnya di IJT (Christianto, IJT, 2014).¹ Data-data tersebut menunjukkan bahwa gereja-gereja dapat bersatu sekalipun beragam dalam ungkapan pengalaman religius, selama gereja tersebut didasarkan pada komitmen yang teguh terhadap Injil dan kemauan untuk terlibat dalam dialog yang penuh rasa hormat. Jika menilik dekade-dekade awal tersebut di masa lalu, ke masa pelayanan-Nya sebelum kenaikan-Nya, terdapat semacam konsensus di antara para peneliti Gereja mula-mula bahwa terdapat suatu konflik yang kian menguat khususnya antara Yesus dan orang-orang Farisi, misalnya yang tercatat dalam Injil Yohanes, dalam pernyataan lugas Yesus: “*Sebelum Abraham ada, Aku ada.*” Kami juga membahas sedikit tentang penafsiran ulang yang masuk akal dari gagasan F.C. Baur tentang Kekristenan Petrine yang diduga berkonflik dengan Kekristenan Gentile dalam hipotesisnya tentang kemungkinan perkembangan historis dialektis dalam Kekristenan abad pertama. Namun demikian, penulis tidak sependapat bahwa sepeninggal Yesus Kristus, terdapat konflik antara *Petrine Christianity* dan *Pauline Christianity*, sebaliknya yang dihadapi oleh para murid Yesus boleh dikatakan persis sama dengan tekanan-tekanan yang dialami Yesus sendiri dari orang-orang Farisi, sekalipun sebagian di antara mereka telah menjadi Kristen, yang

Kata kunci:

Keristenan paling awal,
Kekristenan Petrine,
Gereja Antiokhia, Konsili
Jerusalem.

¹ cf. Victor Christianto. Kesatuan dan perbedaan dalam Gereja Perdana. *Indonesian Journal of Theology* vol. 2 No. 2 (Desember 2014).

dimulai dari peristiwa yang terjadi pada gereja Antiokhia yang kemudian mengarah pada Konsili pertama di Yerusalem sebagaimana dapat kita baca dalam Kisah Para Rasul 15. Sebagai suatu studi kasus, penulis menyajikan lima kaidah utama yang diajarkan Yesus, termasuk pengajaran tentang *forgiveness* yang dikontraskan dengan salah satu pengajaran dari Taurat Musa.

ABSTRACT:

It is known that there were complex dynamics in the earliest Christian movements in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, which have been discussed in various books and studies. For example, James Dunn's phrase "*unity in diversity*" summarizes these events in this important principle, as I have discussed in a previous article in IJT (Christianto, IJT, 2014). These data show that churches can be united despite their diversity in the expression of religious experience, as long as they are based on a firm commitment to the Gospel and a willingness to engage in respectful dialogue. Looking back over those early decades, to the time of His ministry before His ascension, there is a consensus among scholars of the early Church that there was a growing conflict especially between Jesus and the Pharisees, as recorded in the Gospel of John, in Jesus' blunt statement: "*Before Abraham was, I am.*" We also discuss a little about a reasonable reinterpretation of F.C. Baur on Petrine Christianity which allegedly conflicted with Gentile Christianity in his hypothesis about the possibility of dialectical historical development in first century Christianity. In contrast, the author does not agree that after the death of Jesus Christ, there was a conflict between Petrine Christianity and Pauline Christianity, on the contrary what was faced by Jesus' disciples could be said to be exactly the same as the pressures experienced by Jesus himself from the Pharisees, even though some of them had become Christians, which began with the events that occurred in the church of Antioch which then led to the first Council in Jerusalem as we can read in Acts 15. As a case study, the author presents five main rules taught by Jesus, including the teaching on forgiveness which is contrasted with one of the teachings of the Law of Moses.

Keywords:
Earliest Christianity,
Petrine Christianity,
Antioch Church, Council
of Jerusalem

Introduction

It is known, that following the ascension of Jesus Christ, the early Christian community was faced with the challenge of navigating a new era without their

charismatic leader at the helm. In the absence of a formal hierarchical structure at the time, informal leaders emerged to guide and inspire the burgeoning movement. Among these influential figures were the Twelve Apostles, including St. Peter and St. James, who had been personally chosen by Jesus and played a pivotal role in the early Jesus movement until around 70 AD.

The early Christian movement was deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. Jesus himself was a Jew, and his disciples, including Peter, John and James, were also Jewish. This Jewish heritage had a profound impact on the development of early Christianity, shaping its beliefs, practices, and social structures.

The Jewish disciples, who had been formed by Jesus' teachings and example, brought their understanding of Jewish law, prophecy, and tradition to the early church. This Jewish foundation provided a solid framework for the development of Christian theology and practice. However, as Christianity spread beyond its Jewish roots, tensions arose between Jewish and Gentile converts, leading to debates about the extent to which Jewish law should be observed by non-Jews (cf. for instance Dunn, *The parting of the ways*, 1991, 2006).

St. Peter and St. James, as two of the most prominent disciples of Jesus, played a crucial role in the early church. They were instrumental in establishing the Christian community in Jerusalem and spreading the Gospel throughout the region. Their leadership was based on their personal relationship with Jesus and their deep understanding of his teachings.

In this article, this writer would like to explore an alternative perspective compared to what was known as Tuebingen school, along with a deeper look at five virtues as originally taught by Jesus, a commentary on synoptic problem, and also a case study on lex talionis as one of Judaism teaching known since the time of Torah.

First of all, allow us to discuss research question and also a hypothesis concerning Biblical data suggesting that there was ramped up conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees.

Research question: Persistent Debate Over Pauline and Petrine Christianity

The question of whether there were distinct "Pauline" and "Petrine" forms of Christianity in the first century has been a subject of scholarly debate for centuries. Ferdinand C. Baur, a nineteenth-century German theologian, argued that there were two opposing factions within early Christianity: a Jewish faction led by Peter and a Gentile faction led by Paul. According to Baur, these two factions eventually merged to form the Catholic Church.

However, more recent scholarship has challenged Baur's thesis. Many scholars now believe that the early Christian movement was more diverse and complex than Baur suggested. There were likely a variety of different perspectives and practices within the early church, and it is difficult to neatly categorize these into distinct "Pauline" and "Petrine" traditions.

A hypothesis concerning Biblical data suggesting that there was ramped up conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees

The New Testament, particularly the Gospels, provides ample data of tensions between Jesus and the Pharisees, a prominent Jewish sect during his time. These conflicts were rooted in differing interpretations of religious law and practices, as well as fundamental disagreements about the nature of God and salvation.

One of the most notable instances of these conflicts is Jesus' declaration, "*Before Abraham was, I am*" (John 8:58). This statement, made during a debate with the Pharisees, is a profound claim about Jesus' divine nature and preexistence. By equating himself with the divine name revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:14), Jesus asserts a level of authority and identity that challenges the Pharisees' understanding of God and their role as religious leaders.

This claim, along with other teachings and actions of Jesus, provoked strong reactions from the Pharisees. They accused him of blasphemy, a serious offense punishable by death. The Pharisees were deeply committed to the Mosaic Law and the verbal traditions that had developed around it. They saw Jesus' teachings as a threat to their authority and a deviation from the established religious practices.

Outline of arguments to be presented

As we noted above, the New Testament, particularly the Gospels, provides ample data of tensions between Jesus and the Pharisees, a prominent Jewish sect during

his time. While a comprehensive verse-by-verse analysis would be extensive, we can highlight key passages that illustrate the tensions between Jesus and the Pharisees across the Gospels and Galatians.

Matthew's Gospel

- Matthew 5:20: Jesus raises the bar for righteousness, surpassing the Pharisees' legalistic approach.
- Matthew 6:5-8: Jesus critiques the Pharisees' ostentatious prayer practices, emphasizing sincerity over show.
- Matthew 7:1-5: Jesus condemns hypocritical judgment, a common Pharisaic trait.
- Matthew 12:1-14: Jesus defends healing on the Sabbath, challenging the Pharisees' rigid interpretation of the law.
- Matthew 15:1-20: Jesus exposes the Pharisees' hypocrisy in their adherence to traditions over God's commandments.
- Matthew 23: A scathing denunciation of the Pharisees' hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and pursuit of honor from men.

Mark's Gospel

- Mark 2:23-28: Jesus challenges the Pharisees' strict Sabbath laws, emphasizing the importance of compassion and mercy.

- Mark 7:1-23: Jesus criticizes the Pharisees' emphasis on external purity over internal righteousness.
- Mark 12:13-17: Jesus exposes the Pharisees' hypocrisy in their question about paying taxes to Caesar.

Luke's Gospel

- Luke 5:30-39: Jesus defends his disciples' lifestyle and challenges the Pharisees' rigid fasting practices.
- Luke 6:1-5: Jesus challenges the Pharisees' narrow interpretation of Sabbath laws.
- Luke 11:37-54: Jesus criticizes the Pharisees' outward appearance and inner corruption.
- Luke 16:14-15: Jesus condemns the Pharisees' love of money and their pursuit of worldly approval.

John's Gospel

- John 3:1-21: Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus highlights the Pharisees' spiritual blindness and legalism.
- John 5:1-18: Jesus heals on the Sabbath, provoking the Pharisees' anger and condemnation.

- John 8:1-11: Jesus confronts the Pharisees' hypocrisy and legalism in their attempt to stone an adulterous woman.
- John 9:1-41: Jesus heals a man born blind, leading to a dispute with the Pharisees about the origin of his healing.

Galatians (the tensions were still haunting the ministry of Apostles):

- Galatians 1:6-9: Paul condemns those who preach a different gospel, which may allude to the Pharisees' legalistic approach.
- Galatians 2:11-14: Paul confronts Peter for his hypocrisy in withdrawing from Gentile believers, a behavior reminiscent of the Pharisees' exclusivity.
- Galatians 3:5: Paul emphasizes salvation by grace through faith, contrasting it with the Pharisees' reliance on works of the law.

Key Themes of Tension:

- Legalism vs. Grace: The Pharisees emphasized strict adherence to the Law, while Jesus preached a message of grace and forgiveness.
- Hypocrisy vs. Authenticity: The Pharisees often prioritized outward appearance and public approval over genuine inner transformation.
- Tradition vs. Truth: The Pharisees clung to their traditions, even when they contradicted the spirit of the Law.

- Exclusivity vs. Inclusivity: The Pharisees tended to exclude outsiders, while Jesus embraced all people, regardless of their social status or religious background.

By understanding these tensions, we can gain a deeper appreciation for Jesus' message and his challenge to the religious establishment of his time.

The Gospels also highlight other instances of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees including clashes over issues such as Sabbath observance, purity laws, and the forgiveness of sins. Jesus challenged the Pharisees' rigid interpretation of the Law, emphasizing its spirit over its letter. Moreover, Jesus, in his teachings and actions, presented a outright departure from the traditional Jewish understanding of forgiveness and salvation. Under the Old Testament, forgiveness was primarily obtained through sacrificial offerings and adherence to strict religious laws. However, *Jesus introduced a new paradigm, emphasizing faith in Him as the Son of God as the primary means of receiving forgiveness and eternal life.*

One of the most striking examples of this shift is found in the Gospels, where Jesus repeatedly forgave sins simply based on a person's faith in Him. In the story of the paralytic man, Jesus declared, "*Your sins are forgiven,*" before healing the man physically. This act not only demonstrated Jesus' authority to forgive sins but also highlighted that forgiveness was not dependent on human merit or religious rituals.

Furthermore, Jesus' teachings on the Sermon on the Mount challenged the traditional Jewish understanding of righteousness. He emphasized inner purity and love for one's enemies, rather than outward conformity to religious laws. This radical approach to forgiveness and righteousness was met with resistance from the religious leaders of the time, who were accustomed to a more legalistic interpretation of the Scriptures.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, further expounded on this theme of salvation by grace through faith. He argued that the Jewish law could not provide justification or forgiveness of sins, and that true righteousness came only through faith in Christ. This emphasis on faith alone, apart from works of the law, was a concept that challenged the traditional understanding of salvation.

In conclusion, Jesus' emphasis on forgiveness of sins based on faith in Him as the Son of God was a departure from the traditional teachings of the Old Testament. This new paradigm, which emphasized grace, mercy, and inner transformation, has had a profound impact on Christianity and continues to shape the lives of believers today.

The escalating tensions between Jesus and the Pharisees ultimately led to His crucifixion. The Pharisees, along with the chief priests and the Roman authorities, conspired to have Jesus arrested and executed. His death on the cross was the culmination of the conflict between His message of love, forgiveness, and divine authority and the established religious order of His time.

Results

Implications to following path of formative years of Earliest Christianity

The escalating tensions between Jesus and the Pharisees, as detailed in the Gospels, had profound implications for the formative years of early Christianity. The crucifixion of Jesus, a direct consequence of these conflicts, marked a pivotal moment in history, shaping the trajectory of both Judaism and Christianity.

Despite the conversion of some Pharisees, such as Saul of Tarsus (later known as the Apostle Paul), the majority of Jewish leaders remained hostile to the nascent Christian movement. The crucifixion of Jesus, seen as a blasphemous act by many Jews, deepened the divide between the two groups. The early Christians, who claimed Jesus as the Messiah, were often persecuted and marginalized by their Jewish counterparts.

The New Testament provides numerous accounts of this ongoing conflict. Acts of the Apostles, for example, details the stoning of Stephen, one of the early Christian leaders, and the persecution of the early church by Jewish authorities. This hostility between Jews and Christians continued for centuries, leading to various forms of discrimination and violence.

The Emergence of a Distinct Christian Identity: Beyond Petrine and Pauline Divisions

The conflict with the Pharisees also contributed to the development of a distinct Christian identity. As the early church sought to differentiate itself from Judaism, it emphasized the unique aspects of Jesus' teachings and the importance of faith in Christ for salvation. This led to the formulation of Christian doctrines and practices that diverged from traditional Jewish beliefs and rituals.

The crucifixion of Jesus became a central theme in Christian theology, symbolizing both divine sacrifice and human redemption. The resurrection of Jesus, another deep Christian belief, further solidified the distinct identity of the early church.

Ferdinand Baur's theory of the conflict between the Petrine and Pauline groups, while influential, oversimplifies the complex dynamics of early Christianity. While these two figures and their theological perspectives played significant roles, the deeper divisions within the early church were rooted in the ongoing conflict with Judaism.

The Jewish rejection of Jesus and Christianity continued to shape the identity and mission of the early church. It led to debates about circumcision, dietary laws, and other Jewish customs, which caused significant tension within the Christian community. The Book of Acts, for example, records the Council of Jerusalem, where the apostles and elders gathered to discuss these issues.

The conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees were not merely historical events; they had lasting implications for the development of both Judaism and Christianity. The Jewish rejection of Jesus and the subsequent persecution of Christians created a deep divide between the two groups, which continues to impact interfaith relations to this day.

Rethinking F.C. Baur's Hypothesis on Earliest Christianity

Moreover, we'd like to discuss a little bit on a plausible reinterpretation of F.C. Baur's notion of Jewish or Petrine Christianity in his hypothesis on dialectical historical process in the first century Christianity. It is known that Baur's hypothesis, which posited a synthesis between Jewish and Pauline Christianity, has long been a cornerstone of New Testament studies. However, a closer examination of the evidence, particularly in texts like the letters to Timothy and the Book of Revelation (cf. Jesus's letters to seven churches at the time), suggests a more complex and multifaceted narrative. Rather than a simple synthesis, we tend to come up with another hypothesis, that the early Christian movement underwent a *branching process*, originating from the Antioch church case and culminating in the First Council in Jerusalem as we can read in the Acts chapter 15.

Baur's thesis, while influential, often overlooks the nuanced interplay between various Christian factions within the first century. His emphasis on the opposition between Jewish and Pauline Christianity, while not entirely inaccurate, fails to

capture the full spectrum of theological diversity and ecclesiological practices that characterized the early church. The letters to Timothy, for instance, reveal a tension between different theological perspectives within the Pauline tradition itself. The author, likely a close associate of Paul, expresses concern about certain false teachings and deviant practices that threaten the purity of the gospel. These internal debates suggest a more complex and dynamic landscape than Baur's binary framework.

The Book of Revelation, with its apocalyptic imagery and prophetic vision, offers further evidence of the branching process. The text depicts a diverse Christian community facing persecution and tribulation, but also envisions a future triumph over evil. This portrayal suggests a plurality of Christian groups, each with its own distinctive identity and theological outlook. The Revelation's emphasis on the "*faithful remnant*" and the "*overcomers*" implies a process of selection and refinement, rather than a simple synthesis.

In our re-reading, The First Council in Jerusalem, as recounted in Acts chapter 15, provides a crucial turning point in the development of early Christianity. While the council's decision regarding circumcision and dietary laws was significant, it also highlights the diversity of opinions and practices within the church. The council's resolution, while seeking to maintain unity, does not necessarily imply a complete harmonization of theological views. Instead, it may be seen as a temporary compromise that allowed for the coexistence of different Christian traditions.

In conclusion, F.C. Baur's hypothesis, while valuable, requires a more nuanced understanding of the early Christian movement. The evidence from texts like the letters to Timothy and the Book of Revelation suggests a branching process rather than a simple synthesis. The Antioch church case and the First Council in Jerusalem mark significant moments in this development, revealing a complex and multifaceted landscape of theological diversity and ecclesiological practices. By recognizing the richness and complexity of early Christianity, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the dynamic and evolving nature of the faith.

The development of early Christianity, as we have argued, can be understood as a branching process, originating from the Antioch church case and culminating in the seven churches and beyond as told in the book of Revelation. This perspective, however, can be further enriched by viewing it through the lens of nonlinear dynamics. In the context of early Christianity, this could be interpreted as a moment when a seemingly minor event or decision, such as the Antioch church case, triggered a significant shift in the trajectory of the movement. However, the branching process was not solely driven by internal dynamics. External factors, such as persecution, geographical spreading, and the influence of informal leaders, also played a crucial role. These factors, in conjunction with the internal tensions and debates, created a complex and interconnected system.

The concept of informal leadership, often overlooked in traditional historical narratives, is particularly relevant in this context. While formal leaders like St. Peter,

St. James, and St. Paul were undoubtedly influential, informal leaders, such as Irenaeus and other disciples of the Apostles (the Church fathers), carried out essential tasks, including teaching young believers and preserving the verbal tradition. These informal leaders, operating outside the established hierarchy, contributed to the diversity and dynamism of the early Christian movement.

In this sense, the development of early Christianity can be likened to Borges's "*Garden of Forking Paths*," where multiple paths diverge and converge, creating a labyrinth and unpredictable narrative. The branching process, driven by both internal and external factors, led to a multitude of Christian communities, each with its own distinctive identity and theological outlook.

From nonlinear dynamics perspective, combined with the insights from Borges's fiction, offers a richer and more nuanced understanding of the early Christian movement. By recognizing the complexity and interconnectedness of the various factors at play, we can appreciate the dynamic and unpredictable nature of the faith's development. The branching process, with its reliance on both formal and informal leadership, provides a compelling framework for understanding the early Church's journey toward the second century AD.

Dialogue

A. Finding Balance towards Unity in diversity, Several Lessons from the Early Church for Contemporary Christianity

The concept of *branching*,² as we explored in our analysis of early Christianity, offers a valuable lens through which to understand the complex and multifaceted nature of the contemporary church. The diversity of denominations, leadership styles, and geographical settings, combined with the challenges posed by the 21st century, creates a landscape that is both rich and fraught with potential conflict.

The early church, despite its own internal tensions and external pressures, provides valuable lessons for navigating these challenges. The Apostles, with their diverse backgrounds and experiences, demonstrated a remarkable ability to balance unity with diversity. They recognized the importance of maintaining a common core of beliefs and practices, while also respecting the unique expressions of faith that emerged in different contexts.

James Dunn's concept of "*unity in diversity*" captures this essential principle, as we discussed in an earlier article in IJT (Christianto, IJT, 2014). It suggests that the church can be both united and diverse, as long as it is grounded in a shared

² See for instance: Schulz *et al.*, *Science* 366, 707 (2019) 8 November 2019; Wei Yu *et al.*, *Cell Systems* 9, September 25, 2019 ^a 2019 Elsevier Inc., Paheli Desai-Chowdry *et al.*, *Scientific Reports* | (2022) 12:20810; and also the story of underground church, Eugene Bach & Brother Zhu. *The underground church*. (Jakarta: Light Publishing, 2019).

commitment to the gospel and a willingness to engage in respectful dialogue. This approach is particularly relevant in today's world, where globalization and technological advancements have made it easier for people from different cultures and backgrounds to connect with one another.

The Church Fathers, who followed in the footsteps of the Apostles, continued to develop and refine the concept of unity in diversity. They wrestled with theological questions, addressed pastoral concerns, and sought to preserve the apostolic tradition while adapting it to the changing circumstances of their time. Their writings offer a wealth of insights and guidance for contemporary Christians.

In the 21st century, the church faces a multitude of challenges, including secularization, religious pluralism, and social inequality. These challenges require a renewed commitment to the principles of unity in diversity. By learning from the example of the early church, contemporary Christians can strive to build inclusive and welcoming communities that are grounded in the gospel while also respecting the diversity of human experience.

The branching process, while acknowledging the potential for division, also highlights the opportunities for growth and innovation. By embracing diversity and engaging in respectful dialogue, the church can become a more vibrant and effective witness to the gospel in the world today. The lessons of the early church, with their emphasis on unity in diversity, provide a valuable roadmap for navigating

the complexities of the 21st century and building a more harmonious and just future.

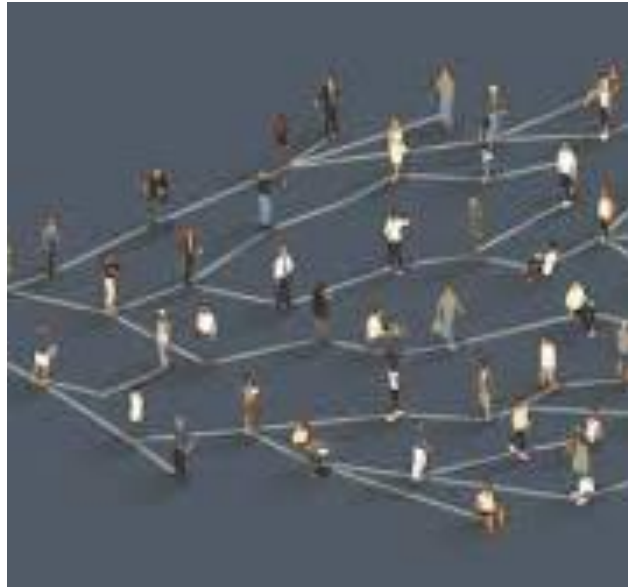


Diagram 1. Example of branching effect in a social network (illustration only)

The Role of Formal Churches

While informal leadership can be a powerful force for good, it is important to recognize that it should not be seen as a substitute for formal church structures. Formal churches provide essential services, such as teaching, worship, and sacraments. They also offer a sense of belonging and community that can be difficult to find elsewhere.

The 21st century presents unique challenges and opportunities for the Church. While formal institutions must remain relevant, they must also be willing to adapt to the changing needs of the times. This means embracing a more flexible and

decentralized approach to leadership, allowing for greater interdependence between formal and informal leaders. As the Letter to the Ephesians (4:11-16) reminds us, the Church is a body composed of many different members, each with their own unique gifts and talents.

To thrive in this new era, churches must strike a delicate balance between branching out and fostering unity. While it's essential to reach new people and communities, it's equally important to maintain a sense of belonging and connection within the congregation. This can be achieved by implementing strategies that encourage both growth and intimacy.

Branching Out: Reaching New Horizons

- **Decentralized Leadership:** Empowering local leaders to make decisions and respond to the specific needs of their communities.
- **Innovative Outreach:** Utilizing technology and social media to connect with a wider audience.
- **Diverse Worship Styles:** Offering a variety of worship experiences to cater to different preferences.
- **Community Partnerships:** Collaborating with other organizations to address social issues and build relationships.

Fostering Unity: Nurturing a Sense of Belonging

- Cell Groups: Small groups that meet regularly to study the Bible, pray, and support one another.
- Community Engagement: Organizing events and activities that bring people together.
- Mentorship Programs: Pairing experienced members with newcomers to provide guidance and support.
- Shared Experiences: Creating opportunities for members to serve together and build relationships.

By embracing both branching out and fostering unity, churches can effectively address the diverse needs of their congregations. By doing so, they can continue to be a source of hope, love, and transformation in the 21st century.

To emphasize, formal churches shall be more willing to adapt to the changing needs of the 21st century. This could mean embracing a more flexible and decentralized approach to leadership, and allowing for greater interdependence between formal and informal leaders. As the Letter to the Ephesians (4:11-16) reminds us, the church is a body composed of many different members, each with their own unique gifts and talents.

B. Five virtues taught originally by Jesus, and their plausible

Christological origin

Even if the original concept that we live in Jesus and Jesus inside us came from Jesus Himself, deep within the tapestry of St. Paul's letters, woven with threads of faith and hope, shines a radiant motif: the notion of being "*in Christ*." [4,6] This phrase, echoing across his epistles, carries a profound Christocentric implication – that through faith, we become intimately interwoven with the Divine, not as separate strands, but as integral parts of a breathtaking whole. But how does this concept, nestled in the folds of Ancient Koine Greek, resonate with the echoes of the "*Eternal in man*" as voiced by the philosopher Max Scheler? And more importantly, how does this divine tapestry compel us towards forgiveness and other virtues taught by Jesus Himself, instead of the dark threads of hatred and revenge?

Let us begin by unraveling the meaning of "*en-theos*," a term having significant meaning in understanding St. Paul's message. Translated as "God within," it speaks of the Holy Spirit dwelling not in some distant celestial realm, but within the very fabric of our lives. This indwelling is not passive; it is an active embrace, a transformative weaving of grace that colours our thoughts, actions, and very being. As Max Scheler, with piercing insight, spoke of the "Eternal" residing within, St. Paul echoes this truth, describing us as "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Within this tapestry of grace, woven with the divine "*en-theos*," emerges a startling imperative: the call to complete forgiveness. If *Christ dwells within us, and we within Him*, then how can we turn away from our fellow humans, who are also threads in this magnificent divine fabric? To harbour revenge towards our brothers and sisters

would be akin to tearing at the very tapestry of God's presence within us. It would be a rejection of the love that binds us together, not simply as individuals, but as a living, breathing communion in Christ.

St. Paul, with fiery eloquence, urges us to "not repay evil with evil," but to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Forgiveness, in this context, becomes not merely a moral code, but a sacred act of recognizing the divine spark within our transgressor. It is an acknowledgment that the tapestry of humanity, despite its knots and stains, is woven with the golden thread of God's presence. To forgive is to mend the torn threads, and to restore the radiant image of Christ within each other.

This path of forgiveness, though it may seem counterintuitive, is the very fibre of Christocentric faith. It flows from the realization that in Christ, we are not isolated threads, but integral parts of a divine tapestry. When we injure others, we wound not just them, but the entire fabric of God's presence within the human community. Forgiveness, then, becomes an act of radical love, a stitch of healing that reaffirms the unity woven by the Holy Spirit's dwelling within us all.

Thus, we stand before the breathtaking tapestry of St. Paul's message, where the threads of ancient Greek meet the echoes of modern philosophy, woven together by the golden thread of Christocentric faith [cf. 4-6]. In this luminous fabric, we see not individuals, but a single, magnificent humanity bound by the indwelling presence of God.

Summarizing, while readers may opine that the following five virtues taught by Jesus are discussed here rather arbitrarily, as we shall see that these can be considered as part of elements of continuity and discontinuity in Jesus's teaching compared to what Old Testament teachings taught. Moreover, we shall offer short commentary on the so-called Synoptic Problem.

1. Humility

Humility, often misunderstood as weakness, is actually a cornerstone of Christian teaching, exemplified by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (cf. letter to Philippians). It is a virtue that transcends religious boundaries, resonating with individuals across diverse cultures and beliefs. Humility, in its essence, is the recognition of one's limitations and the willingness to acknowledge the contributions and worth of others. It is the antithesis of arrogance and pride, fostering an attitude of openness, receptivity, and genuine care for others.

Jesus Christ, the embodiment of divine love and compassion, demonstrated humility in countless ways throughout his earthly ministry. From his humble birth in a manger to his sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus continually humbled himself for the sake of humanity. He washed the feet of his disciples, a task typically performed by servants, symbolizing his willingness to serve others, regardless of their social status. He embraced the marginalized and outcast, demonstrating that true worth lies not in external

achievements or social standing, but in the inherent dignity of every human being.

Humility, as taught by Jesus, is not a passive virtue but an active force that empowers individuals to live lives of service and compassion. It enables us to recognize our interdependence on others and to appreciate the unique gifts and talents that each person brings to the world. By cultivating humility, we can overcome our egotism and self-centeredness, fostering genuine relationships built on trust, respect, and empathy. Humility also allows us to learn from our mistakes, to seek forgiveness, and to grow in wisdom and understanding.

In a world often characterized by competition, self-promotion, and a relentless pursuit of success, humility offers a refreshing alternative. It invites us to embrace our limitations, to acknowledge our dependence on a higher power, and to live lives of gratitude and service. By following the example of Jesus Christ, we can cultivate humility as a guiding principle in our lives, transforming our relationships, our communities, and ultimately, the world.

Humility, as taught by Jesus Christ, is a timeless virtue that continues to inspire and challenge us. It is a virtue that is essential for personal growth, spiritual development, and the building of a more just and compassionate society. By embracing humility, we can live lives of authenticity, integrity, and love, making a positive impact on the world around us.

2. Obedience (out of true faith)

The Greek word "pistis," often translated as "faith," carries a deeper connotation that extends beyond mere belief. It encapsulates a profound trust and reliance on God, leading to a life of obedient action. Jesus Christ, the embodiment of divine love, exemplified this virtue throughout his life and teachings. His unwavering obedience to the Father's will, rooted in a deep and abiding faith, serves as an inspiring model for believers.

Jesus's obedience was not a forced compliance but a joyful response to the Father's love. He willingly embraced the challenges and sufferings of his earthly ministry, knowing that his ultimate purpose was to fulfill God's plan of redemption. His obedience was not merely a passive acceptance of God's commands but an active participation in God's work of salvation. He lived a life of selfless service, demonstrating that true faith is expressed through obedient action.

The obedience that flows from true faith is characterized by a willingness to surrender one's own desires and ambitions to the will of God. It involves trusting in God's providence, even when circumstances seem uncertain or unfavorable. It requires a steadfast commitment to God's Word, even when it contradicts popular opinion or personal preferences. Jesus's obedience to the Father's will, even in the face of immense suffering, serves as a powerful testament to the transformative power of faith.

Obedience out of true faith is not a burden but a privilege. It is an opportunity to participate in God's divine plan and to experience the fullness of God's love. By choosing to obey God's commands, we align ourselves with the ultimate source of goodness and truth. We experience the peace that surpasses all understanding and the joy that comes from knowing that we are living according to God's perfect will.

As we strive to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, let us cultivate the virtue of obedience out of true faith. Let us trust in God's promises, submit to His will, and live lives that honor Him. By doing so, we will not only experience the blessings of God's grace but also become a beacon of hope and inspiration to others.

3. Righteousness

The Hebrew word *tsedeq* (צדק), often translated as "righteousness," is a central concept in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. It signifies a moral and ethical uprightness, a commitment to justice and fairness. Jesus Christ, the embodiment of divine righteousness, exemplified this virtue throughout his life and teachings. His unwavering pursuit of justice and compassion serves as an inspiring model for believers (cf. book of Micah chapter 5 etc).

Righteousness, as understood in the Hebrew tradition, is not merely a matter of personal piety but a social and communal responsibility. It involves actively

working to promote justice and equity in the world. Jesus's teachings emphasize the importance of caring for the poor and marginalized, defending the oppressed, and seeking reconciliation with enemies. He challenged the religious leaders of his time for their hypocrisy and self-righteousness, calling them to a deeper understanding of God's law.

Righteousness, as taught by Jesus, is rooted in a love for God and neighbor. It is a love that motivates individuals to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. It is a love that transcends cultural and religious boundaries, embracing all people as children of God. By living a life of righteousness, believers can become agents of positive change, transforming their communities and the world.

The pursuit of righteousness is a lifelong journey that requires constant vigilance and effort. It involves resisting temptation, practicing self-discipline, and seeking God's guidance through prayer and meditation. It is a journey that may be challenging at times, but it is ultimately a rewarding one. By striving for righteousness, we align ourselves with God's perfect will and experience the fullness of His love and grace.

As we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, let us embrace the virtue of righteousness as an integral part of our faith. Let us strive to live lives that honor God and reflect His love for all humanity. By doing so, we can become beacons of hope and inspiration, making a positive impact on the world around us.

4. Love

The concept of love, a universal human experience, has been explored and defined in various cultures and philosophical traditions. In the Christian tradition, Jesus Christ, through his life and teachings, offers a profound understanding of love that transcends the conventional categories. While the Greek language provides four primary terms for love—*philia* (brotherly love), *agape* (unconditional love), *eros* (romantic love), and *storge* (familial love)—the Hebrew Bible introduces two additional dimensions of love: *chesed* (loving-kindness) and *raham* (compassion).

Chesed is a multifaceted term that encompasses steadfast love, loyalty, and kindness. It is a covenant love, a bond that endures beyond circumstances. God's *chesed* is often described as unwavering and unconditional, a love that sustains and redeems. Jesus's life and ministry exemplify *chesed* in its fullness. He demonstrated unwavering love for humanity, even in the face of rejection and persecution. His compassion for the marginalized, the sick, and the oppressed was a tangible expression of *chesed*.

Racham, often translated as "compassion," denotes a deep, visceral empathy that moves one to act on behalf of another. It is a love that is tender, protective, and nurturing. *Racham* is frequently associated with maternal love, but it can also be expressed in deep male-to-male relationships (such as in the case of relation between Jesus and His most-beloved disciple). In the

Hebrew Bible, God is often described as a compassionate father who cares for his children. Jesus's relationship with his disciples, particularly with John, is characterized by a profound *raham*. This deep, intimate bond, often described as "beloved disciple," goes beyond mere friendship or familial love. It is a love that is tender, protective, and deeply personal.

The concept of *raham* offers a fifth dimension of love that transcends the traditional Greek categories. It is a love that is both passionate and compassionate, a love that is expressed through acts of service, sacrifice, and self-giving. By recognizing *raham* as a distinct form of love, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of human relationships. Therefore, the expression of *raham* goes beyond ordinary male-to-male attraction that we in modern society would interpret as homosexual pattern. That seems to be the deficiencies of four-types or expressions of love in the depiction by Nygren.

In conclusion, the Hebrew concepts of *chesed* and *raham* offer profound insights into the nature of love. By embracing these dimensions of love, we can cultivate deeper, more meaningful relationships with others. As we follow the example of Jesus Christ, let us strive to love others with *chesed* and *raham*, expressing a love that is both steadfast and compassionate, both sacrificial and intimate.

5. Forgiveness

Forgiveness, as a cornerstone of Christian ethics, is a virtue profoundly emphasized by Jesus Christ in both his teachings and his life. Central to this virtue is the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus instructs his followers to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." This plea for divine forgiveness is intrinsically linked to our own capacity to forgive others.

Jesus's life was a living embodiment of forgiveness. Despite enduring immense suffering, including betrayal, mockery, and crucifixion, he expressed forgiveness for his tormentors. On the cross, he uttered the words, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." This act of radical forgiveness, in the face of extreme injustice, sets an unparalleled example for humanity.

The virtue of forgiveness is not merely a passive acceptance of wrongdoing but an active choice to release resentment and bitterness. It requires a deliberate effort to let go of past hurts and to embrace a spirit of reconciliation. By forgiving others, we liberate ourselves from the chains of anger and hatred, allowing healing and restoration to take place.

Forgiveness is not synonymous with condoning wrongdoing. It does not mean ignoring injustice or minimizing the harm caused by others. Rather, it is a choice to respond to wrongdoing with compassion and understanding, rather than retaliation or revenge. By forgiving others, we demonstrate the transformative power of love, which can heal even the deepest wounds.

As we strive to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, let us cultivate the virtue of forgiveness. By practicing forgiveness in our daily lives, we can experience greater peace, joy, and freedom.

Let us extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us, remembering that we too are forgiven by God's grace. In doing so, we can become agents of reconciliation and healing, making a positive impact on the world around us.

Elements of continuity and discontinuity in Jesus's teaching

Jesus' teachings, though rooted in the Old Testament, often diverged significantly from the interpretations and practices of the Pharisees. While both Jesus and the Pharisees sought to uphold the Law of Moses, they approached it with distinct perspectives. Let's examine the elements of continuity and discontinuity in their teachings, focusing on the five virtues highlighted in our previous discussion: humility, righteousness, obedience out of true faith, forgiveness, and love.

Continuity

1. Shared Moral Foundation: Both Jesus and the Pharisees acknowledged the moral authority of the Old Testament. They shared a common foundation in the Ten Commandments, which provided a basic moral framework.
2. Emphasis on Righteousness: Both groups emphasized the importance of righteous living. However, they often differed in their understanding of what constitutes righteousness.

3. Obedience to God's Law: Both Jesus and the Pharisees stressed the importance of obedience to God's Law. However, Jesus often challenged the Pharisees' narrow and legalistic interpretation of the Law.

Discontinuity

1. Humility: Jesus emphasized humility, often contrasting it with the pride and self-righteousness of the Pharisees. He taught his disciples to be humble and to serve others, rather than seeking recognition and honor.
2. Forgiveness: Jesus' teachings on forgiveness were radical, particularly in contrast to the Pharisees' legalistic approach. He emphasized the importance of forgiving others, even those who have wronged us.
3. Love: Jesus' teachings on love were revolutionary. He called his followers to love their enemies and to love one another as he had loved them. This radical love ethic challenged the Pharisees' more exclusive and particularistic understanding of love.
4. Obedience Out of True Faith: Jesus' understanding of obedience was rooted in a heart-centered faith, rather than mere outward compliance with the Law. He emphasized the importance of inner transformation and a genuine love for God.

In conclusion, while Jesus and the Pharisees shared a common foundation in the Old Testament, their interpretations and practices diverged significantly. Jesus' teachings, particularly on humility, forgiveness, and love, challenged the Pharisees'

legalistic and self-righteous approach. By emphasizing inner transformation and a heart-centered faith, Jesus offered a more inclusive vision of the kingdom of God. In fact, as we shall see in the case study on lex talionis teaching, Jesus taught forgiveness in a completely new way, by breaking the bondage of wetiko, the so-called spiritual disease

C. Case study: how forgiveness/vengeance in Judaism teaching shall be contrasted to Jesus's teaching and implications to present day situation

The phrase "*revenge*" has become synonymous with a harsh brand of justice: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But where did this concept originate, and how did it shape ancient legal systems?

Ancient Roots: The Code of Hammurabi, one of the first written legal codes, dating back to 1750 BC, explicitly enshrined this principle of revenge. This ensured a degree of fairness and prevented excessive retribution.

Echoes in the Torah: While not explicitly stated, similar principles find expression in the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible. Passages like Exodus 21:23-25 ("*eye for an eye, tooth for tooth...*") reflect the same logic of proportionate punishment. Notably, these passages also introduce limitations and interpretations, emphasizing the role of judges in ensuring fair application and preventing excessive retaliation.

Beyond Literal Retribution: Rabbinic interpretations in Judaism emphasized the importance of mercy and reconciliation. Monetary compensation or alternative punishments often replaced literal bodily harm. The focus was on regulating justice, deterring future transgressions, and ensuring proportionality, not enacting brutal vengeance.

Legacy: Roman law incorporated aspects of the principle, though with modifications and emphasis on judicial discretion. While modern legal systems have largely moved away from such direct proportionality in punishment, the underlying principle of fairness and the concept of just deserts still resonate in our understanding of justice.

Despite its historical significance, the notion of proportional revenge remains a controversial concept. Critics argue that it is overly harsh and fails to consider the complexities of human motivation and circumstance. Some see it as incompatible with notions of restorative justice and forgiveness. Proponents, however, emphasize its role in deterring crime and ensuring a sense of fairness and balance in the face of harm.

How Jesus Bridges the Gap between Torah teaching of revenge and Forgiveness

The tension between "an eye for an eye," and Jesus' call for forgiveness lies at the heart of a centuries-old debate. On one hand, Jewish tradition holds firm to the lex

talionis, a principle seemingly enshrined in Mosaic law. On the other hand, Jesus, proclaiming himself a fulfillment of the Torah, advocates for non-retaliation and boundless forgiveness. Can these seemingly contradictory positions be reconciled?

Jesus, didn't simply advocate for a more nuanced application of the proportional revenge. He challenged its very foundation – the cycle of retributive justice. His revolutionary teachings, enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount, urged followers to "*turn the other cheek,*" "*love their enemies,*" and "*forgive seventy times seven*" (Matthew 5:39-42; 18:22). This seemingly radical departure wasn't a rejection of the Torah, but its fulfillment on a deeper, spiritual level.

Here's the key: Jesus shifted the focus from external consequences to internal transformation. While the lex talionis focused on balancing external scales of justice, Jesus aimed at healing the internal wounds of anger and resentment. Forgiveness, at its core, isn't about condoning the offense. It's about releasing oneself from the shackles of bitterness and choosing self-love and inner peace. It's an act of liberation, not submission.

Moreover, Jesus' call for forgiveness isn't about denying justice or letting transgressors escape due consequences. It's about trusting in a higher form of justice – *divine justice*. By letting go of the need for personal vengeance, we entrust judgment to God, who possesses perfect wisdom and compassion. We acknowledge that true justice transcends our flawed human attempts at balancing the scales.

Furthermore, Jesus' emphasis on forgiveness aligns with the Torah's core principle of *chesed*, or loving-kindness. While the *lex talionis* might appear at odds with *chesed*, it was intended to serve as a stopgap measure in a brutal world. Jesus, however, ushered in a new era where divine love, not retributive justice, becomes the guiding principle. This doesn't negate the need for legal systems or appropriate consequences for wrongdoing. It simply offers a more profound path, one rooted in empathy, compassion, and a belief in the transformative power of love.

In conclusion, while the *lex talionis* and Jesus' call for forgiveness might seem like opposing poles, they can be understood as two sides of the same coin – seeking justice at different levels. His message doesn't negate human efforts towards justice, but instead, offers a more potent and ultimately more fulfilling path – one woven not with threads of retribution, but with the golden thread of God's boundless love.

Keeping hatred or dispelling wetiko

The principle of "an eye for an eye," is a concept that has been ingrained in human societies for millennia. While it may seem like a just form of retribution, its psychological and spiritual consequences can be devastating. The cultivation of hatred and the desire for revenge can lead individuals down a path of self-destruction and spiritual darkness.

Psychologist and spiritual teacher Paul Levy has explored the concept of *wetiko*, a term derived from Indigenous North American cultures. He describes *wetiko* as a "spiritual disease" that manifests as a voracious, insatiable hunger for power, control, and domination. Those afflicted by *wetiko* often become consumed by their own greed and ego, leading to destructive behaviors and a loss of empathy.

Levy suggests that the pursuit of *revenge* can be a symptom of *wetiko*. When individuals become fixated on revenge, they are essentially allowing their anger and hatred to consume them. This can lead to a loss of self-awareness, a distorted perception of reality, and a descent into a state of spiritual darkness.

The psychological and emotional toll of harboring hatred can be significant. It can lead to:

- Stress and anxiety: Constant rumination on negative experiences can contribute to feelings of stress and anxiety.
- Depression: Hatred can isolate individuals from others and contribute to feelings of hopelessness and despair.
- Physical health problems: Chronic stress and anxiety can have a negative impact on physical health, leading to a variety of ailments.

Moreover, the pursuit of revenge can often backfire. It can create cycles of violence and retribution, leading to further suffering for all involved.

*Dispelling Wetiko: A Path to Healing*³

To break free from the grip of wetiko and the destructive cycle of *lex talionis*, individuals must confront their anger and hatred. This can be a challenging process, but it is essential for spiritual and emotional healing. Here are some strategies that can help:

- Mindfulness, prayer and meditation: Practicing mindfulness and meditation can help individuals become more aware of their thoughts and emotions, allowing them to identify and challenge negative patterns.
- Compassion and forgiveness: Cultivating compassion and forgiveness can help individuals let go of anger and resentment.
- Seeking support: Talking to a therapist or counselor can provide a safe space to explore emotions and develop coping strategies.

By addressing the underlying causes of hatred and embracing a more compassionate and forgiving approach to life, individuals can break free from the destructive cycle of *revenge* and embark on a journey toward spiritual healing.

³ Paul Levy, *Dispelling wetiko*, can be found at: [www.penguinrandomhouse.com > books > 221127](http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/221127)

A short commentary on the so-called Synoptic Problem⁴

The Synoptic Problem is a longstanding debate among biblical scholars concerning the literary relationship between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The problem seems to arise from the significant overlap in content and narrative structure among these three Gospels, leading to questions about their authorship, sources, and the order in which they were written.

1. The Traditional View: Markan Priority

One of the most widely accepted theories is the Markan Priority hypothesis, which suggests that Mark was the earliest Gospel and that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source, along with other sources such as the Q source (a hypothetical document containing sayings of Jesus) and their own unique sources. (cf. for instance W.R. Telford).

2. The Denial of the Synoptic Problem: Eta Linnemann's Perspective

However, some scholars, such as Eta Linnemann, have challenged the existence of the Synoptic Problem itself. Linnemann argues that the similarities between the Gospels can be explained by the shared experiences of the eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and ministry. She suggests that the different perspectives and emphases found

⁴ cf. Victor Christianto, A preliminary stylometric analysis of the Four Gospels in order to prove literary independence instead of the Synoptic Problem, *Jurnal Amreta*, vol. 8 no. 1 (2024) <http://jurnal.sttsati.ac.id>

in the Gospels reflect the diverse experiences and understandings of these eyewitnesses.

3. A New Perspective: Exceeding the Torah's Requirements

We propose a different perspective that combines elements of both traditional and alternative views. While acknowledging the similarities and differences between the Synoptic Gospels, we suggest that the multiple accounts may reflect a deliberate effort to provide abundant testimony to the life and teachings of Jesus.

In Jewish law, two witnesses are generally required to establish a matter. However, in the case of the Gospels, we have four distinct accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. This overabundance of testimony could be seen as a deliberate path chosen by God Himself to emphasize the reliability and truthfulness of the Gospel message by Jesus Christ.

Moreover, Jesus' teachings often **exceeded the requirements** of the Torah. He called his disciples to love their enemies, forgive their adversaries, and go the extra mile in their service to others. These teachings, while rooted in the Torah, represent a radical departure from the traditional understanding of Jewish law.

By providing multiple, overlapping accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, the Gospel writers may be signaling that the Gospel message is not merely a fulfillment of the Torah but a radical new revelation that surpasses the Law. This interpretation aligns with Jesus' own claims to be greater than the temple, the Sabbath, and the Torah.

In conclusion, the Synoptic Problem remains a complex and fascinating issue. While traditional theories offer valuable insights, it is important to consider alternative perspectives that may shed new light on the relationship between the Gospels. By exploring the possibility of multiple, independent eyewitness accounts and the thorough nature of Jesus' teachings, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the richness and diversity of the Gospel tradition.

Concluding remark

The conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees were not merely historical events; they had lasting implications for the development of both Judaism and Christianity. The Jewish rejection of Jesus and the subsequent persecution of Christians created a deep divide between the two groups, which continues to impact interfaith relations to this day. Understanding the historical context of these conflicts can help us appreciate the complex dynamics of early Christianity and the enduring significance of the Jewish-Christian relationship, beyond what Baur purported to show in his Tuebingen school.

In conclusion, the biblical data suggests that there were significant and escalating conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees. These conflicts were rooted in fundamental theological differences and differing interpretations of religious law and practice. Jesus' bold claims about his divine nature and his challenge to the Pharisees' authority ultimately led to his crucifixion.

While the debate over Jewish and Petrine Christianity continues, it is clear that the early Christian movement was a complex and diverse phenomenon. While the Jewish roots of early Christianity were undeniable, the movement was also influenced by a variety of other factors, including the personalities and visions of individual leaders.

The earliest Christian movement was also characterized by the rise of informal leadership, particularly among the Twelve Apostles. St. Peter and St. James, as two of the most prominent disciples of Jesus, played a crucial role in shaping the early church. Their Jewish heritage and their personal relationship with Jesus provided a foundation for their leadership.

Among other things, we also discuss five virtues as originally taught by Jesus in contrast with, for instance, *lex talionis* teaching as we can find in Judaism teaching for instance since the days of Torah.

What we study above seems also to imply that in the 21st century, the Christian Churches shall be willing to embrace a more diverse and inclusive approach to leadership. This includes recognizing the informal leaders and fostering greater interdependence between formal and informal structures, while maintaining adherence and faithfulness to what Jesus taught in the past, instead of legalized interpretations of Scriptures which often made people felt rather distanced from the power of Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is too often that tradition governs what should and should not do in the Churches, and leaders are not encouraged to

practice "*unity in diversity*." By doing so, it is likely the church can better address the challenges of our time and grow towards spiritual maturity.

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